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An Invincible Army?:  
Reading 1 Samuel 4-6 and 2 Samuel 6 as a  
Deuteronomistic Corrective to Exilic Misconceptions of  
the Ark

Logan Thomas Walker

ABSTRACT

The surprising nature of the events which surround the ark in 1 Samuel 4-6 and 2 Samuel 6 raises significant questions about the conflicting concepts of this central Israelite object. This study will consider these narratives in light of their wider contexts, silhouetting the presentation of the ark in these chapters against the understanding of the ark in the Deuteronomistic History and of divine statues in the ancient Near East. It will argue that the Deuteronomistic author used the events within these narratives as a means of dispelling and correcting the views surrounding the ark and the temple which were held by both the people of Israel and their enemies during the time of the Babylonian exile. The narratives of the ark offer a microcosm of the exile, providing both an explanation for Israel's fate and a hope for their return.



Durham  
University

DEPARTMENT OF  
THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

# An Invincible Army?

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Reading 1 Samuel 4-6 and 2 Samuel 6 as a  
Deuteronomistic Corrective to Exilic  
Misconceptions of the Ark

**Logan Thomas Walker**

MA by Research  
**2019**

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# INTRODUCTION

Set during the lead up to the Second World War, *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* follows the quest of the titular hero as he races against fanatic members of the Nazi party to secure possession of the long lost Ark of the Covenant. He is given this mission by agents from the U.S. Army Intelligence who fear that the ark could be used as a weapon in the wrong hands. When meeting with these officials, Jones' colleague, Marcus Brody, sheds light on the significance of the ark, explaining that 'the Bible speaks of the ark leveling mountains and laying waste to entire regions. An army which carries the ark before it is invincible.' Rather than simply exhibiting a healthy historical interest, the Nazis' haste to find this mysterious object suggests that they share a similar notion of the ark's destructive capability. In the closing scenes, all seems lost as the Nazis take possession of the ark and form a procession to a ceremony by which they mean to open it and harness the power inside.

In a remarkable turn of events, however, lightning appears from within the ark and utterly destroys the surrounding soldiers and leaders who intended to manipulate this very force, leaving Jones and his companion to bring the ark back to U.S. soil where it is safely stored inside a government warehouse.<sup>1</sup> Events of a similar magnitude featuring this very same ark took place on several occasions in the biblical narratives of Samuel, specifically within 1 Sam 4-6 and 2 Sam 6. Just as the ending of *Indiana Jones* served to surprise viewers and characters alike and convey the message about how the ark should not be manipulated, so these narratives in Samuel feature events which would have held immense shock value. This study intends to survey these narratives and discuss the ways in which the events within served to correct suppositions about the ark which were held by the Israelites, Philistines and King David, contrary to the views of the narrator. Through this investigation, we will further consider how the narratives

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<sup>1</sup> Jones and his colleague Brody are less than supportive of this decision to store the ark away, arguing that 'the ark is a source of unspeakable power and it has to be researched.' The present author would agree with the latter statement.

within their context as a whole served as both an explanation for the audience's exilic situation and a hope for their eventual return.

In order to do this, we will first survey the context in which these narratives are embedded, that of the Deuteronomistic History. The first chapter will make the case for the existence of an independent history under the authorship of the exilic Deuteronomist as proposed by Martin Noth, considering counter-proposals by those who disparage both the notion of an independent history, and Noth's particular conception of it. After establishing this literary context, we will then survey the major themes which make up the ideology of the history, focusing on those of law and covenant, possession of the land, centralized and exclusive worship, and the impact of leadership. Building on this foundation, the second chapter will then survey how the ark interacts with each of these themes and functions as a vehicle by which the ideology of the Deuteronomist may be expressed. At the end of the first two chapters, we will have established and argued for a normative theology of the Deuteronomistic History, the way in which the ark is conceptualized as an entity in relation to Yahweh, and therefore how it is to function in the life of Israel.

In the third chapter we will then look beyond the biblical material in order to consider evidence from the ancient Near East. We will first examine the concepts regarding divine statues which were prevalent at the time of the Babylonian exile, and how these may have influenced Israel's beliefs surrounding the ark and the temple. Following this, we will initially consider the ways in which biblical authors directly repudiated the Mesopotamian notions and then propose a more balanced view which takes into account the similarities and differences between the ark and a divine statue. In this regard, we will also investigate the function of divine images within warfare, and the surrounding concepts of divine abandonment which were also employed by biblical authors such as the prophet Ezekiel.

Finally, the fourth chapter will home in on the narratives which feature the ark within Samuel, exploring the ways in which the concepts surrounding the ark and Yahweh

reflect both those established throughout the rest of the history and those which were held by Israel's neighbours; ultimately, the Deuteronomist upholds the former whilst using the events of the narrative to discredit the latter. Within this chapter we will consider the events from the perspective of the Israelites, the Philistines and King David in turn, unpacking their understanding of the ark and its function, and drawing parallels between these views and those held by Israel and their captors in exile. From each of the characters' perspectives, we will discover the ways in which the shocking events of the narrative served to correct their convictions surrounding the ark and bring them in line with the wider ideology of the Deuteronomistic History. Alongside this, we will seek to understand how these amendments to the characters' beliefs – with an emphasis on keeping Yahweh's covenant and submitting to his sovereignty – would have provided the Israelites in exile with an understanding as to the reason behind their captivity and provide a hope that this was not the end of their story.



# Chapter 1: THE DEUTERONOMISTIC HISTORY

## A. The Composition of the Deuteronomistic History

### *1. Martin Noth's Theory*

We begin our study by considering the wider narrative in which the accounts of the ark in Samuel are to be found in order to provide a solid literary context to the passages on which we intend to focus. Throughout the history of biblical scholarship, various discussions of a redactional and literary-critical nature have threatened to persist without any sign of ultimate agreement. Debates continue to grow over the increasingly diminutive details of which larger textual reconstructions are made up, with the hope of an overall consensus appearing less likely, even if certain foundational elements are able to receive more widespread approval. This has perhaps been most typical of debates surrounding the sources and composition of the Pentateuch, yet the present study is interested not in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, but rather in that which follows canonically; the Deuteronomistic History (from here Dtr refers both to text and authorship).

Current theories surrounding Dtr find their primary basis in Martin Noth's 1943 study. Within his study, Noth's primary argument is for the unity of the books of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings under the work of a single author. The author of this unified work is referred to as the Deuteronomist because of the similarity of language and thought between Dtr and Deuteronomy.<sup>1</sup> Noth places great emphasis on the term 'author' over editor, arguing that Dtr did not only compile various sources, but his own insertions 'play a part in transforming elements totally diverse in form, scope and content, into a single literary unit.'<sup>2</sup> Despite this unity, he nonetheless concedes the 'disunited and heterogeneous' nature of the separate elements, explaining that Dtr had

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<sup>1</sup> Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 4. Regarding the similar language, see Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 320-365 for an extensive list of Deuteronomistic phraseology found in both Deuteronomy and Dtr as a whole, and a discussion around the ways in which some words and phrases are used outside of Dtr.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 77. Cf. *Ibid.*, 10.

drawn from disparate traditions and sources of varying length,<sup>3</sup> and so the extent of his work in compilation and contribution would necessarily have varied throughout the process.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, his confidence in the overall unity of the work and its distinction from the rest of the Hebrew Bible are evident to the degree that he is able to claim, ‘our attempt to look at Dtr.’s work as the core of Deuteronomy-Kings, to trace its structure and extract its central ideas needs no defence.’<sup>5</sup>

Noth deals with the structure of Dtr earlier in his work, observing that the major periods in Israel’s history are broken up through speeches given by the pertinent characters within, which ‘interpret the course of events, and [draw] relevant conclusions about what people should do.’<sup>6</sup> In addition to these summary speeches, other sections within Dtr – in particular Judges and Kings – are given their own chronological framework which fits into the sequential unity of the whole.<sup>7</sup> The themes and ideas which Noth and others find within Dtr will be elaborated on in the second half of this chapter; the fundamental element which provides the foundation to each of the themes is Noth’s view that Dtr was composed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., shortly after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and during Judah’s exile in Babylon. Dtr was thus designed to interpret the nation’s history in light of these events and so ‘contribute to an understanding of the situation in [the author’s] own time,’<sup>8</sup> and in this sense it is decidedly pessimistic.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Noth points to the dual traditions of heroic stories and detailed lists of minor judges which make up the book of Judges, (Ibid., 42, 117f.), and the pre-Dtr accounts of ‘the story of the rise of David’ and ‘the story of the Davidic succession’ from which large sections of Samuel are derived, though much of this source identification is owed to Leonhard Rost, (Ibid., 54, 124f.).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 5. Noth identifies the major speeches as Josh 1 and 23, 1 Sam 12, and 1 Kgs 8:14ff. He further considers Josh 12, Jdg 2:11ff and 2 Kgs 17:7ff to be narrative reflections by Dtr, (Ibid., 6).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 18-25.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>9</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 26. Joyce Baldwin here argues that several scholars have moved away from this pessimistic view of Dtr and regard other elements of the text to have a more optimistic slant.

## 2. *Criticism of the Unity of the Deuteronomistic History*

Noth's theory initially received 'considerable approval,'<sup>10</sup> which has continued to the extent that despite further redactional theories, Noth's detractors are left to wrestle with the fact that his 'basic idea has become a consensus within the guild of Hebrew biblical scholarship,'<sup>11</sup> and the existence of Dtr has often been taken for granted among commentators. Nevertheless, this positive response is not beyond dispute, and over the course of time since its publication, Noth's Deuteronomistic proposal has faced criticism which generally falls into two camps: firstly, those who dispute the existence of Dtr as a unified whole; and secondly, those who hold to its basic unity yet propose that this was reached through multiple discernible redactions. We will briefly consider these criticisms in the order stated, though it should be borne in mind that they are not entirely distinct, for propositions of multiple redactions are often held on account of perceived internal disunity, and how many redactions must be proposed before the overall unity is in question?

K. L. Noll is a prime scholar who does not hold to the unity of Dtr, and we will therefore take him as a representative of this view. Noll's approach has been to expose the weakness of certain arguments which favour the unity of Dtr, for example, contending that some of the supposed summary speeches 'resemble the buildup of grime on a windowpane, not the careful plan of an editor.'<sup>12</sup> He draws attention also to the disparity between the chronological structures of Judges and Kings, neither of which is adhered to by Joshua or Samuel.<sup>13</sup> These critiques are a useful caution for the adherents of Dtr to acknowledge that, even if unified, the work is not necessarily to be treated as inflexibly uniform. Noth appears to have anticipated such concerns, however, arguing that Josh 14:10 and 1 Kgs 6:1 provide evidence of a chronology which unifies the whole work even if it does not provide a homogeneous structure.<sup>14</sup> Explaining the disparate chronological framework, Noth observes that 'larger sequences of material'

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<sup>10</sup> Vermeulen, "Book of Samuel," 67.

<sup>11</sup> Noll, "Deuteronomistic History," 312. However, Noll is among his own proclaimed minority of those who do not find Noth's theory compelling.

<sup>12</sup> Noll, "Deuteronomistic History," 312.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 313f.

<sup>14</sup> Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 25. See also, Nelson, "Double Redaction," 321.

drawn upon such as those in Joshua and Samuel would have already had their own structure to which the author was faithful, and Dtr may have used the existing system from ‘the books of the Chronicles’ to arranging the chronology of the monarchy.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the arrangement of Judges would have featured the ‘largest amount of original work’ by Dtr,<sup>16</sup> and thus the disparity in the range and extent of sources over the history required that ‘Dtr was confronted with different tasks at different times; and the parts inevitably look different.’<sup>17</sup> This response does not calm all fears, as further questions may be raised such as to why a similarly structured framework to ‘the books of the Chronicles’ was not also employed by Dtr for his convenience when he composed Judges, or why even the longer strands of original material could not have been reworked into a consistent system. Yet, questions such as these may be holding Dtr to a standard beyond that which was feasible whilst remaining faithful to the original material.

A similar defence can be made in the face of criticisms regarding the transitional monologues. Noll briefly lists a number of discrepancies present within the speeches,<sup>18</sup> and yet these inconsistencies appear minor in the face of the consistent strands which run throughout, several of which we will discuss in the second half of this chapter. Noth contends that amongst the themes found in the monologues, the most prevalent is that of obedience to God, ‘which manifests itself by making specific demands upon human conduct.’<sup>19</sup> Richard Nelson agrees, further observing that these speeches ‘promote the very same theme of obedience to the law in the context of divine promise that culminates in the reform of Josiah.’<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the motif of obedience is to be found in all of the Dtr reflections proposed by Noth whether as a present command or reminiscence.<sup>21</sup> Thomas Römer has consequently placed the burden of proof with Noll,

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Noll, “Deuteronomistic History,” 312, n. 6. There is not time here to discuss each of his observations individually, yet his belief that Josh 12 is of a Priestly origin does appear to contain truth, and therefore Noth’s inclusion of it among the speeches is questionable.

<sup>19</sup> Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Nelson, “Double Redaction,” 320.

<sup>21</sup> Josh 1:13; 23:6; Jdg 2:17; 1 Sam 12:14; 1 Kgs 8:58, 61; 2 Kgs 17:13. The notable exception is Josh 12, on which see the note above. Cross finds it odd that ‘Noth ignores the oracle of Nathan and the Prayer of

and others who dispute Dtr's unity, as to why such thematically unified summaries occur in the different books as outlined by Noth.<sup>22</sup>

### *3. Redaction within the Deuteronomistic History*

In addition to those who dispute the fundamental existence of Dtr, others since Noth have agreed with him in principle, yet proposed emendations to his theory. The two major schools of thought in this area are those of Frank Moore Cross and of Rudolf Smend. According to Cross, the first edition of Dtr was 'written in the era of Josiah as a programmatic document of his reform and of his revival of the Davidic state,' which was then brought up to date and adapted for its exilic audience through the second edition composed in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E.<sup>23</sup> Cross ultimately saw the need for the two-edition hypothesis due to the 'thematic dissonance'<sup>24</sup> present within Dtr, and in particular the prominence given to the theme of the Davidic dynasty which seemed out of place within an exilic work.<sup>25</sup> Nelson also argues that the Deuteronomistic input into the final few chapters of Kings are substantially different to the rest of Dtr in a number of ways.<sup>26</sup> Nelson's argument offers a persuasive challenge to what appears on the surface to be a difficult part of the text, but as David Janzen explains, none of the elements within these chapters 'are actually contradictory,'<sup>27</sup> and further, 'these arguments for redaction often overlook a complexity of thought that can be ascribed to a single author.'<sup>28</sup> Therefore, positing an alternative redactional layer may be a literary-critical overreaching within the bounds of what is actually necessary in the exegetical task.

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David' when listing Dtr's summary speeches (Cross, "Book of Kings," 275), yet the explicit motifs of obedience and law are not to be found in this section as with the others, even if others of Dtr's themes are present.

<sup>22</sup> Römer, "Invention of History," 261.

<sup>23</sup> Cross, "Book of Kings," 287.

<sup>24</sup> See Nelson, "Double Redaction," 319 for this phrase. Nelson is a strong advocate of Cross' position.

<sup>25</sup> Cross, "Book of Kings," 276-278. We will argue in the final chapter that such emphasis on the Davidic Monarchy is in fact due to an exilic hope of a return under Davidic leadership.

<sup>26</sup> Nelson, "Double Redaction," 327ff.

<sup>27</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 8. Janzen argues that Nelson may have changed his target from 'contradictions' to 'thematic dissonance' in recognition of this fact.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Expanding this notion of thematic dissonance, Smend and later those from his school propose not two, but three redactional layers. Smend grounds his theory on the exilic work as set out by Noth (DtrH),<sup>29</sup> yet on account of supposed variations in motif among specific verses of the text (e.g. Josh 1:7-9; 13:1bβ-6) he posits a later redaction which he refers to as DtrN due to its ‘legal or nomistic scope’,<sup>30</sup> allowing that redactional work likely took place even beyond this.<sup>31</sup> Smend’s theory was then expanded and clarified by sympathetic authors who identified an anti-monarchical prophetic redaction composed between the former two editions known as DtrP, which ‘makes an explicit link between religious deterioration and political decline,’ with all three above redactions placed during the exile.<sup>32</sup>

As noted in the comments on Cross’ theory, however, one may wonder whether the fact that variety exists within the scope of the work warrants the conclusion of manifold redactions. Could not one author have had more than a single narrow agenda for their work? The proposal of a separate nomistic strand is particularly difficult to justify in the light of the heavy emphasis on law in Deuteronomy which grounds the history. Robert Polzin argues, ‘such literary-historical moves are, in my opinion, premature,’ claiming instead that, ‘the way in which Deuteronomic language... interacts with its various literary contexts needs serious consideration on the level of discourse, before such sweeping source-oriented theories can be entertained.’<sup>33</sup> This criticism was originally leveled against Cross’ predisposition towards attributing exilic references to a second edition, yet it is also relevant against Smend’s school of thought, and reveals how both theories fall at a similar hurdle, if to a different extent; the greater the number of layers proposed, the more hypothetical and tenuous the theory becomes. In the light of these difficulties surrounding multiple redactions, Nelson suggests that, ‘Noth’s original proposal proved to be so convincing precisely because it was simple and accounted for internal conflicts (by appealing to sources).’<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Smend, “Law and the Nations,” 96ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>32</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 13. See also, Klein, *1 Samuel*, xxix; Vermeylen, “Book of Samuel,” 71f.

<sup>33</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 77.

<sup>34</sup> Nelson, “Double Redaction,” 333.

Despite their claims of dissonance *within* the work, the fact that those from the school of Cross and Smend consider Dtr to be a distinct unit against the surrounding books reveals that there is at least general agreement over a broad understanding of its unity, even if conflict continues over its redactional history and thematic tension. Further, it should be acknowledged that the major theories considered above place at least one major layer of the composition during the period of the exile, no doubt due in part to this being where the narrative concludes chronologically. For example, Römer, who holds contentions with elements of Noth's proposal, nonetheless concedes that his theory that Dtr 'can be explained as a reaction to the crisis of 587 B.C.E. still remains an illuminating explanation of the beginnings of Jewish historiography.' Therefore, the issues which are most pertinent to our study, namely, final exilic authorship of the history and themes which reflect this situation, hold broad agreement even if Noth's specific hypothesis is not unanimously adhered to within current scholarship.

Although the above considerations are in themselves satisfactory for our purposes, the present study nonetheless goes further in upholding the view of Dtr for the most part as originally argued by Noth. The main tenets of this view are summarized by Janzen, who agrees with Noth in regarding Dtr as 'a work that was composed by a single author' with the inclusion of well-integrated sources, affirming that it 'was written in the exilic period.'<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Steven McKenzie considers Noth's model as 'still the most useful' and makes a further point for a particular strength of his view being in his allowance 'for the presence of later additions, although he did not find sufficient coherence between the additions to indicate redactional levels.'<sup>36</sup> The one area in which we differ from Noth is his belief that Dtr's purpose in writing was solely negative, siding instead with Polzin and other scholars who view that 'its admixture of destruction and hope is an obvious and essential feature,'<sup>37</sup> and this duality will serve as a focus in the final chapter. Therefore, the emphasis on Dtr in this study will be on its exilic authorship and overall unity of theme which flows from this, while acknowledging that Dtr's use of

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<sup>35</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 25.

<sup>36</sup> McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings*, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 15.

various sources and the potential for later additions may at times lead to some disparity within the text.<sup>38</sup> The following discussion of Dtr's ideology and the themes of which it is comprised is built on this foundation.

## **B. The Ideology of the Deuteronomistic History**

### *1. Covenant Relationship and Adherence to the Law*

Having established the compositional unity of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings, we now turn to examine the main constituents of the ideology which lay behind this extensive work, and on this foundation we will be able to determine how the ark functions within such a framework. The first major feature of Dtr is the covenantal relationship which exists between Yahweh and his people, Israel. It is the first element to be considered here due to its primacy of place among all of the themes in Dtr; as will be seen throughout this study, the covenant between Yahweh and Israel formed the basis of all the other aspects of the history. Noth explains how Dtr views the history of Israel as a unique case, arguing that God's active involvement – particularly in divine retribution – is 'the great unifying factor in the course of events.'<sup>39</sup> Ian Wilson borrows Hayden White's terminology in describing this worldview of ancient Israel as 'liberally apocalyptic', which captures the belief in the sovereignty of Yahweh over the events of history, yet allows for the agency of humanity to play its more limited part.<sup>40</sup> Such a view of history is thus founded on the dynamic of covenant, as both parties take an active role in, and responsibility for, the events which take place.

The establishment of this covenant is integral to Deuteronomy, the first book of Dtr and the basis of the history.<sup>41</sup> At several points in the book, Moses calls to mind the events at Mount Horeb during which, 'Yahweh our God made a covenant with us.' (Deut 5:2). In the first mention of covenant in the preceding chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses explains to Israel that, '[Yahweh] declared to you his covenant which he commanded

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<sup>38</sup> Römer, "Invention of History," 261; McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 89.

<sup>40</sup> Wilson, "Conquest and Form," 318. Wilson discusses this worldview in the context of the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, revealing the covenant relationship to play a major part within warfare as will be considered later.

<sup>41</sup> Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 4.



you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and he wrote them on two tablets of stone.’ (Deut 4:13). Thus the observance of this decalogue is identified as Israel’s part of the treaty, and Gerhard von Rad further explains that, ‘in Deuteronomic circles the term “covenant”... became the technical expression for “decalogue”.’<sup>42</sup> In addition to the decalogue, Moses’ extensive speeches in the book of Deuteronomy as a whole and the laws within are also to be regarded as part of the covenant agreement. Deut 29:1 begins thus: ‘These are the words of the covenant which Yahweh commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which he had made with them at Horeb.’ There is debate as to whether ‘these’ is an anaphoric or cataphoric reference, but Jack Lundbom, among others, rightly follows the text of the Hebrew Bible by including it at the end of Chapter 28 as a reference to that which precedes it, and he therefore sees it as the end of an inclusio with 1:1-5.<sup>43</sup> Therefore the covenant agreement between Yahweh and Israel was disclosed through both the decalogue – and the surrounding events – at Horeb and Moses’ expounding of the wider law in Moab. Although references to the covenant occur more frequently in Deuteronomy than the other books of Dtr, this is in line with the fact that a general compression of themes can be found within this first book, perhaps owing to its hortatory nature.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, the intermittent frequency of the term ‘covenant’ throughout Dtr – though it does make several appearances<sup>45</sup> – pales into insignificance when it is acknowledged that its pages are nonetheless saturated with the worldview

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<sup>42</sup> Von Rad, “Tent and the Ark,” 106. This link can also be observed in the fact that Moses’ mention of the Horeb covenant in Deut 5:2 is followed by his recital of the decalogue. The connection is further established in the descriptive designation: ‘the tablets of the covenant which Yahweh had made with you,’ (Deut 9:9; cf. Deut 9:15) with the tablets referring to the decalogue. However, even if ‘covenant’ does at times refer to the decalogue, the following discussion reveals that it is not limited to this. We will also discuss in the following chapter the link between the decalogue, the covenant, and the ark.

<sup>43</sup> Lundbom, *Deuteronomy*, 798f. Samuel Driver similarly prefers the view that it refers backwards, arguing that Deuteronomy is ‘largely an extension’ of the covenant at Horeb, and ‘the two covenants are accordingly distinguished.’ (Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 319). Joachim Krause also recognizes that the Deuteronomistic edition of Deuteronomy refers to itself as ‘Torah,’ i.e., the law, in passages such as Deut 31.9-12 (Krause, “Book of the Torah,” 421f.).

<sup>44</sup> This is true of many, but not all of the themes. For example, the divine gift of the land is heavily emphasized in Deuteronomy and Joshua, yet themes surrounding poor leadership are more prominent within Kings at which point this becomes a greater issue.

<sup>45</sup> References to ‘covenant’ appear at several points of importance throughout the history: the beginning of the Judges cycle (Jdg 2:1, 20); the division of kingdoms (1 Kgs 11:11); the fall of Samaria (2 Kgs 17:15); and Josiah’s reforms (2 Kgs 23:3).

built on this relational human-divine dynamic, and the discussion of the other Deuteronomistic themes below should make this clear.

The fundamental nomistic requirement within the covenant is expressed through the frequent exhortations for Israel to keep the law throughout Deuteronomy,<sup>46</sup> which appear also in each of the books of Dtr with the sole exception of Judges.<sup>47</sup> Yahweh's conditional response is usually expressed in the latter half of the exhortation, for example: 'Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, *so that* you may live and go in and take possession of the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers, is giving you,' (Deut 4:1, emphasis mine). Among the rewards for keeping the law can be found prolonged days, welfare, and possession of the land (e.g. Deut 5:16, 33; 6:2-3; 8:1; 11:8). Yahweh's faithfulness to the covenant is affirmed on several occasions in Dtr,<sup>48</sup> however, Israel's failure is anticipated as early as Deut 4:25 and an extended list of curses for disobedience are set out in Deut 28:15ff. Nevertheless, Dtr provides the option of repentance and renewed obedience as a means of restoring the original covenant blessings, even if Israel has received the full extent of the curses (Deut 30:1-10).<sup>49</sup>

It has been argued that these curses in Deut 28 are based on those found in the *Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon*,<sup>50</sup> and also the *Sefire Treaty*.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Christopher Hays identifies a wider similarity between the covenantal agreement expressed in Deuteronomy and the political treaties of the ancient Near East, and he observes how within such a comparison, 'YHWH takes on the role of the human emperor.'<sup>52</sup> He

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<sup>46</sup> Between Deut 4-19, only chs. 9, 14 and 18 do not feature direct exhortations to keep the law.

<sup>47</sup> Yet, even within Judges, Israel are condemned for failing to adhere to the commandments (Jdg 2:17).

<sup>48</sup> Deut 4:31; 7:9-12; 8:18; Jdg 2:1; 1 Kgs 8:23; 2 Kgs 13:23.

<sup>49</sup> See Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 58.

<sup>50</sup> Levinson, "Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty," 337; Weinfeld, "Assyrian Treaty Formulae," 417. In addition to the curses, a curious similarity can be found in the regulations regarding treason; compare the texts from Deut 13:6ff: 'If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter... entice you secretly, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods"... so you shall stone him to death...' and 'So you shall purge the evil from among you' (v.5) with the following from VTE §12: 'If anyone should speak to you of rebellion and insurrection... or if you should hear it from the mouth of anyone... if you are able to seize them and put them to death, then you shall destroy their name and their seed from the land...'

<sup>51</sup> Ramos, "Northwest Semitic Curse Formula," 207.

<sup>52</sup> Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 184. Hays offers an outline for comparing Deuteronomy with VTE on p.179.

stresses that the biblical covenant, however, is an ‘adaptation’ rather than an ‘example’ of the ANE treaty, for although all of the elements are present, they vary in ‘order and weight’.<sup>53</sup> Kenton Sparks presents the possibility that Deuteronomy’s covenantal form is due in part to Israel’s experience as Assyria’s vassal later in their history, and therefore it makes ‘the religious point that Judah’s covenant relationship with Yahweh was older and more important than its treaty with Assyria.’<sup>54</sup> This conviction would presumably have also applied to the exilic situation of Dtr as a whole in which Israel’s declared allegiance was to Yahweh and not Nebuchadnezzar and his successors. The above comparison sheds light on the political nature of the covenant in Deuteronomy, that it functions as an agreement between the vassal state and its divine ‘suzerain’ to whom allegiance is owed.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, Leslie Hoppe considers the fundamental importance of the law within this covenant, arguing that, as written from an exilic perspective, Dtr presents several of Israel’s institutions – such as the temple or the monarchy – as powerless to prevent the exile, whilst ‘only obedience to the written, authoritative law could ensure the nation’s survival.’<sup>56</sup> One could turn Hoppe’s argument on its head, for the people’s disobedience revealed that the law by itself was also unable to save the nation of Israel any more than its institutions, and indeed these other factors such as strong leadership may be required to keep them in line, as we will discuss below. Yet the emphasis placed on the law in Deuteronomy suggests that she is correct in affirming the integral nature of obedience to the law in Israel’s covenant with Yahweh. And so from all that we have discussed above, it can be seen that this ‘liberally apocalyptic’ view of history which places

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 183. Kenton Sparks also provides certain differences between the two, including Deuteronomy’s longer historical prologue, the fact that such a prologue ‘recount[s] Israel’s deeds of rebellion,’ and Deuteronomy’s greater ‘breadth of its thematic concern.’ (Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 446).

<sup>54</sup> Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 466. This theory is based on the supposed publication of sections within Deuteronomy during the reign of Josiah.

<sup>55</sup> Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 180.

<sup>56</sup> Hoppe, “Deuteronomistic History,” 2f. Juha Pakkala similarly argues that, ‘the law had become the new backbone of Israel’s religion’ in the wake of the first Temple’s destruction (Pakkala, “Monotheism,” 171). Pakkala holds that these ‘nomistic’ parts of Dtr were written in a *post*-exilic situation, yet the logic of the argument would remain for exilic authorship.

causational responsibility on the actions of the two parties involved in the covenant is a foundational, governing factor of Dtr's ideology.<sup>57</sup>

## 2. *Centralized and Exclusive Worship of Yahweh*

Alongside Israel's obedience to the law, correct adherence to cultic practice, as manifested particularly in the centralized and exclusive worship of Yahweh, frequently makes an appearance on scholars' lists of themes found within Dtr.<sup>58</sup> Exploring first the centralization of worship, Deut 12 marks the first appearance of the motif in which Israel are to 'seek Yahweh at the place which Yahweh your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish his name there for his dwelling,' (v.5). This place is stated as the legitimate location for sacrificial activities (Deut 12:6), annual festivals (Deut 16:16), and even for judicial affairs (Deut 17:8). After Yahweh denies David's request to build a temple in 2 Samuel 7, the notion of 'a *house* for my name' (v.13, emphasis mine) nonetheless becomes integrated into the tradition,<sup>59</sup> and once the construction of the temple is completed under Solomon, the 'place which Yahweh has chosen' becomes identified with Jerusalem (1 Kgs 11:36).<sup>60</sup> This originally unknown location therefore becomes more specified and linked to the Jerusalem temple as the history plays out.

There is debate surrounding what exactly is understood by Yahweh's association with this temple, particularly with regards to it being a location for his name, and this will be addressed in the following chapters, but the *functional* importance of the temple is conveyed in its dedication in 1 Kgs 8. As the place linked in a particular manner with Yahweh, Solomon expresses his hope that Yahweh's 'eyes may be open toward this

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<sup>57</sup> See Römer, "Invention of History," 266: 'The positive or negative outcome of history depends on the adherence or non-adherence to the commandments, as is made clear in the concluding announcements of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy.'

<sup>58</sup> Hutzli, "Samuel Narrative Tradition," 171; Römer, "Invention of History," 266; Harvey, "Deuteronomistic History," 237.

<sup>59</sup> 1 Kgs 3:2; 5:3, 5; 8:16. We shall consider in the final chapter how the construction of the temple was therefore part of Yahweh's original intention.

<sup>60</sup> Frederick Greenspahn argues that Deuteronomy, whilst limiting the places for worship, did not have only one place – let alone Jerusalem – specifically in mind, and thus was not aiming for a complete centralization (Greenspahn, "Deuteronomy and Centralization," 234). Whilst such an argument could be made of the more ambiguous passages of Deuteronomy when the book is taken in isolation (See Von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, 38), within the context of Dtr as a whole, the trajectory and similar vocabulary clearly indicate that in the Deuteronomist's mind, the legislations which began with Deuteronomy were ultimately referring to the reality of the Jerusalem temple.

house night and day,' (1 Kgs 8:29), and therefore Dtr presents a particular facet of the temple in it being the location of Yahweh's attention upon Israel. On the reverse side of the coin, Gary Knoppers draws attention to the presentation of the temple in this chapter as the place for Israel's supplication and sacrifice, rendering it 'the focal point of Israelite life.'<sup>61</sup> Therefore, the Jerusalem temple in Dtr is identified as the one legitimate place of worship, serving as a central location of importance for both the human and divine parties, where human supplication is met with divine attention.<sup>62</sup>

Alongside regarding the temple as the one legitimate place of worship, Dtr also places emphasis on Yahweh as worship's one true object. Yahweh's sovereignty and uniqueness are affirmed on eleven occasions throughout Dtr,<sup>63</sup> and these are usually embedded within situations which focus on Yahweh's covenantal acts towards his people and their need to adhere to his commandments.<sup>64</sup> In addition, these affirmations appear also in contexts which forbid the worship of other gods; after the Shema statement of Deut 6:4, Moses commands in v.13-14, 'You shall fear only Yahweh your God; and you shall worship him and swear by his name. You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the people who surround you.'<sup>65</sup> The worship of other gods and images is frequently condemned throughout Deuteronomy, and this cultic prohibition is evidently a central requirement of Israel's covenant with Yahweh alongside general adherence to his law.<sup>66</sup> Janzen observes this link between Israel's nomistic and cultic fidelity to Yahweh, arguing that 'the narrative uses right worship of and sacrifice to YHWH to the exclusion of any other god to signal Israel's assent to the validity of the

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<sup>61</sup> Knoppers, "Prayer and Propaganda," 231.

<sup>62</sup> Gray, *I & II Kings*, 205.

<sup>63</sup> Deut 4:35-39; 5:7; 6:4; 32:39; 2 Sam 7:22; 22:32; 1 Kgs 8:23, 60; 18:37-39; 2 Kgs 5:15; 19:15-19.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. Deut 5:7 is a part of the Decalogue, which begins by recalling Israel's deliverance from Egypt; Deut 32:29 is a part of Moses' song recounting Yahweh's faithfulness and deliverance from enemies; 1 Kgs 8:60 concludes Solomon's dedication of the temple where he calls for Yahweh to be with his people and for them to follow his commands.

<sup>65</sup> In a more dramatic narrative fashion, 1 Kgs 18:37-39 attests to Yahweh's supremacy in the context of a contest with the prophets of Baal.

<sup>66</sup> Noth draws attention to the Deuteronomist's essentially negative approach to worship, arguing that, 'he is interested not so much in the development of possible forms of worship of God as in the various possible forms of deviation from this worship which could be construed as apostasy and how these were realized in history.' (Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 92). This is one respect in which Dtr may be contrasted with P, which gives focus to various forms of acceptable worship, e.g. Lev 1-7.

entire law.<sup>67</sup> The assertions of Yahweh's sovereignty and uniqueness were therefore not simply part of a philosophical enterprise, but rather they expressed a practical reality for Israel which necessitated the response of covenantal loyalty. This response would have proven to be a great challenge for the audience of Dtr, a people captive in Babylon, surrounded by the worship of other gods and located far from the legitimate place of his worship. And yet to this they were called.

### *3. Possession of the Promised Land*

Within the covenantal framework which pervades Dtr, it has been seen how both adherence to the law and cultic loyalty to Yahweh are the primary tenets required of Israel. In return, one of the most prominent rewards promised is perpetual possession of the land of Canaan.<sup>68</sup> The repeated phrase, 'the land which Yahweh your God is giving to you,' used throughout Deuteronomy and Joshua leaves in no doubt who the true owner of the land is; in the former book the promise is reiterated, and in the latter it is fulfilled.<sup>69</sup> Due to the conditional nature of the covenant, however, though Israel's obedience secures possession of the land, disobedience and apostasy ensure their removal from it. The exilic setting of Dtr provides insight into why the acquisition and retention of the land would be a major concern within the work; Römer observes how most of the specifically Deuteronomistic insertions into the history 'allude to the possible or imminent loss of the land (Josh 23:13, 16; 1 Sam 12:15, 25; 1 Kgs 8:46-49; 2 Kgs 17:7-20) and thus prepare the addressees for the impending end.'<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 50.

<sup>68</sup> A large number of the rewards for obedience feature the land, whether simply possession of the land (Deut 4:1; 6:18; 19:8), welfare and longevity in the land (Deut 4:40; 5:16; 6:3), or agricultural blessings (Deut 11:13-15; 28:12; 30:9).

<sup>69</sup> There is debate as to what extent the promise of land is fulfilled in Joshua, for whilst Joshua in the most part seems to indicate a complete conquest, Judges consequently depicts Israel failing to capture their allotted land. Yair Hoffman sees this as a discrepancy which evidences redactional layers (Hoffman, "Deuteronomistic Concept of Herem," 202f.). On the other hand, Gordon Wenham denies a direct contradiction, arguing that 'the Deuteronomistic editor probably understood the taking of the land to mean the gaining of control without eliminating all the opposition.' (Wenham, "Book of Joshua," 143).

<sup>70</sup> Römer, "Invention of History," 266. Cross argues to the contrary that 'little or no hint of inevitable disaster is found in the Deuteronomistic historian's framework and transitional passages in Joshua, Judges, and Samuel,' as he believes a *later* exilic writer provided a more negative redaction (Cross, "Book of Kings," 288). In support of Römer, Krause finds in Joshua 23 the hinge of Israel's history, which simultaneously looks back on the conquest and warns ahead to the exile, (Krause, "Book of the Torah," 412). The exilic situation of the readers would no doubt have enabled them to pick up on even the more subtle warnings present in the text.

The warfare activities of Israel are then to be seen in the light of this promise; as part of the dual human-divine agency, Israel must remain obedient to Yahweh but also actively go in and possess the land which he gave to them. This is explicitly presented in the regulations governing warfare set out in Deut 20; those to whom Israel must offer ‘terms of peace’ (v.11) are ‘the cities that are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations nearby,’ (v.15),<sup>71</sup> however, ‘in the cities of these peoples that Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes,’ (v.16). The contrast between these regulations are based upon the nations’ specific location in Canaan and reveals that warfare was not simply a matter of Israel expanding their political dominance, but rather the foundational reason was ‘to take possession... of the land which Yahweh promised to the patriarchs.’<sup>72</sup> This ideology then served as the foundation to the conquest in Joshua, and once inside the land, there was a further need to retain this control; Walter Brueggemann describes the motive behind Israel’s war with the Philistines as being ‘in order to maintain its distinctive identity as YHWH’s people in the land.’<sup>73</sup> Covenant is thus the governing factor in warfare, those who are not a party to this agreement are to be removed from Yahweh’s land and replaced by those who are.

As the divine benefactor of Israel’s conquest, Yahweh himself is said on numerous occasions throughout Dtr to be fighting on their behalf,<sup>74</sup> and this motif is most commonly expressed through the common phrase in which Yahweh gives Israel’s enemies ‘into their hands’.<sup>75</sup> Because of Yahweh’s direct involvement in the warfare, Ian Wilson argues that, ‘the success of the conquest... ultimately hinges on the people’s connection with the all-powerful deity...’<sup>76</sup> For this reason, Israel must wait on the

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<sup>71</sup> Hoffman views this qualification as a Deuteronomistic addition which retrojects its ideology (Hoffman, “Deuteronomistic Concept of Herem,” 201).

<sup>72</sup> Wenham, “Book of Joshua,” 142. Further evidence for this ideology is present in Deut 2 in which Israel is forbidden to provoke the nations whose land Yahweh has not allotted to them.

<sup>73</sup> Brueggemann, *Ichabod Toward Home*, 4. Brueggemann is commenting here on the warfare at the opening of 1 Sam 4 which will be given considerable attention later.

<sup>74</sup> E.g. Deut 1:30; 9:3; 20:4; Josh 10:14; 23:3; Jdg 4:14; 1 Sam 7:10; 2 Sam 5:20; 7:9.

<sup>75</sup> E.g. Deut 2:30; 7:2; 20:13; Josh 6:2; 10:8; 21:44; Jdg 1:2; 8:3; 12:3; 1 Sam 14:10; 23:4; 30:23; 2 Sam 3:18; 8:6; 18:28; 1 Kgs 5:3; 20:13; 2 Kgs 3:18.

<sup>76</sup> Wilson, “Conquest and Form,” 317.

initiative and command of Yahweh in order to guarantee success in battle.<sup>77</sup> A prime example of an occasion in which this did *not* happen takes place in Joshua 7; Joshua sends three thousand men against the city of Ai to what should have been an easy military victory, however, in a surprising turn of events they are instead routed before the enemy (v.5). This would be a surprise to the audience were it not for the exposition at the opening of the chapter which declares Israel's unfaithfulness (v.1), and Yahweh himself clarifies later in the narrative that, 'Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them,' (v.11).<sup>78</sup> Breaking the covenant not only leads to divine absence, but may also cause Yahweh to fight *against* Israel on their enemies' behalf, a matter threatened in Deut 28:25 and fulfilled on various occasions throughout the history.<sup>79</sup> From this it can be seen that divine aid should not be assumed in battle, but is reliant on Israel's keeping of the covenant through nomistic and cultic faithfulness.

#### *4. The Appointment and Influence of Leadership*

A final major motif within Dtr is the leadership of the nation. This is not an isolated phenomenon but rather something which impinges on what has been discussed so far; Jacques Vermeylen summarizes the relationship as so: 'the secure possession of the promised land is dependent on the decisions of Joshua, the judge, or the king.'<sup>80</sup> True to the conditional nature of the dynamic covenant relationship, this dependency has either a positive or negative outcome depending on the nature of the leader, and whilst Joshua's headship proved to have an overall good influence in the conquest,<sup>81</sup> the remainder of the history witnesses a notable decline. Joshua's management of Israel was followed directly by the period of the judges, the extent of whose influence over the

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<sup>77</sup> Wenham, "Book of Joshua," 141. Wenham also points here to the 'commander of the LORD' vision in Josh 5:13-15 as a further illustration of Yahweh's involvement in war.

<sup>78</sup> Wenham notes that the lack of divine command and initiative here also suggest that a victory was not on the cards, citing the case of the Gibeonite deception as another instance of Israel's failure to consult Yahweh (Wenham, "Book of Joshua," 142).

<sup>79</sup> E.g. Jdg 3:8, 12; 13:1; 1 Sam 12:9; 28:19; 2 Sam 16:8; 1 Kgs 8:46; 11:14; 2 Kgs 10:32; 15:27; 21:14.

<sup>80</sup> Vermeylen, "Book of Samuel," 75.

<sup>81</sup> David George argues that in spite of the people's occasional disobedience, Joshua's exemplary obedience ensured their welfare (George, "Yahweh's Speech," 364). This can be seen in the recurring motif of Joshua 'causing Israel to inherit the land'; Deut 1:38; 3:28; 31:7, 23; Josh 1:6; 11:23; 12:7; 13:6-7.



people is expressed in the summary statement that, ‘when the judge died, [the people] would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers,’ (Jdg 2:19);<sup>82</sup> the lack of stable leadership in this period meant that such corruption was frequent. Chaos breaks out in the final chapters of Judges as the tribes engage in civil war with devastating aftermath, and the last verse of the book offers a commentary on the situation: ‘In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.’ (Jdg 21:25). Barry Webb rightly extrapolates from this verse the two major causes of Israel’s troubles as being both ‘extreme individualism’ and ‘the absence of a stable, central authority (*king*) capable of maintaining order.’<sup>83</sup>

The monarchy does not emerge until 1 Sam 8 in which a king is demanded by the people on account of the dishonesty of Samuel’s sons who were appointed as judges (1 Kgs 8:3-5). Although the career of Israel’s first monarch ended in failure, his successor, David, proved to be a more faithful and a positive influence. However, the negative trajectory of the judges reemerged from the apostasy of David’s son, Solomon (1 Kgs 11:1-8). This problem persisted throughout the monarchy in the book of Kings, finding a notable initial reference point in Jeroboam’s erection of two golden calves which was done in order to prevent Israel from travelling down to Judah and defecting (1 Kgs 12:28-33), an act which ultimately led Israel into apostasy. Revealing the continuous influence of leadership among the people, the later kings of the Northern Kingdom are described as walking in the way of Jeroboam ‘and in his sin which he made Israel sin.’<sup>84</sup> Jeroboam’s causative sin is therefore a prime example of corrupt leadership in the history, but we have seen that it is far from the only one, and Janzen further argues that,

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<sup>82</sup> George Moore considers the tension which exists between this verse and 2:17 in which the people ‘did not listen to their judges’. However, 2:19 at least ‘implied that [Israel’s] propensity to heathenism was held in check during the life of the judge...’ (Moore, *Commentary on Judges*, 72).

<sup>83</sup> Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 508 (emphasis original).

<sup>84</sup> 1 Kgs 15:26, 30; 16:2, 13, 19, 26; 21:22; 22:52; 2 Kgs 3:3; 10:29, 31; 13:2, 6, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:21. Cross regards this as one of the two major themes in Dtr, describing Jeroboam’s sin as, ‘the crucial event in the history of the Northern Kingdom,’ (Cross, “Book of Kings,” 279).

‘the failures of Israel’s leaders are more numerous than often recognized,’<sup>85</sup> as he considers the errors of leaders such as Moses, Joshua and Samuel.<sup>86</sup>

The importance of leadership requires that it receives divine initiative and sanction in order to grant it due authority, and one way in which this is made clear is through Yahweh’s presence in the passing on and inheritance of the leadership role. In the infancy of Joshua’s leadership, Yahweh promises that, ‘just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you,’ (Josh 1:5), a promise that is fulfilled shortly afterwards in Josh 4:14. This idea recurs later in Jonathan’s stated desire to David that, ‘may Yahweh be with you as he has been with my Father,’ (1 Sam 20:13), and afterwards in Benaiah’s wish that, ‘as Yahweh has been with my lord [, David] the king, so may he be with Solomon,’ (1 Kgs 1:37). Perhaps the most pronounced sign of divine endorsement over a leader is to be found in Yahweh’s dynastic covenant with David. This is established in 2 Samuel 7 when Yahweh promises David that, ‘your house and your kingdom shall endure before me forever; your throne shall be forever,’ (v.16), a promise which consequently forms the basis of the monarchy in the Southern Kingdom until its eventual exile.<sup>87</sup> However, no matter how faithful David or any of the other leaders of Israel were, a unique position in the history was nonetheless held by Moses; Krause considers Moses’ mediation of Yahweh’s will to be an exclusive authority which was not transmitted and thus necessitated the creation of the written Torah after his death.<sup>88</sup> The mediated origin of the law through Moses is just one further illustration of the relationship between leadership and covenant, and the general interrelated nature of the themes discussed in the study so far.

As we arrive at the conclusion of this chapter, it would be beneficial to summarize the ideology of Dtr which we have discussed. The covenant which Yahweh formed with the

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<sup>85</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 52.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-76, 92-103, 146-152. However, the failures of these leaders – though not unimportant – are generally not considered as blatant by the narrator of Dtr than those of Saul, Solomon and others of the Kings.

<sup>87</sup> See e.g. 1 Kgs 15:4 and 2 Kgs 8:19 in which Yahweh allows the continuation of the Davidic dynasty for the sake of the eternal covenant. Cross views the faithfulness of David and as the second major theme of Dtr, a counterpart to Jeroboam’s sin (Cross, “Book of Kings,” 281f.).

<sup>88</sup> Krause, “Book of the Torah,” 421.

people of Israel through Moses provides the basis for understanding the events of history as seen from an exilic standpoint; Israel are rewarded for their obedience to the law and their adherence to the legitimately established cult in which Yahweh alone is to be worshipped at the central location of the temple. Obedience is rewarded by Israel's continued possession of the land of Canaan and their welfare within it, whilst disobedience in essence reverses this. The leaders of the people are set in place by divine initiative, and the people's obedience is influenced greatly by their leadership, with the faithfulness of the leader often dictating the fate of the nation.

## **Chapter 2:** **THE DEUTERONOMISTIC ARK**

The first chapter of this study established an overall ideology of the Deuteronomistic History and identified the major themes which it presents; those of law and covenant, centralized and exclusive worship, possession of the land, and the influence of leadership. We are therefore now in a position to consider how the ark functions within such a framework, and even expresses and reflects these important motifs of the history. Once this has been explored, and after a discussion of ancient Near Eastern sources in the following chapter, the final chapter will narrow the focus and pay specific attention to the biblical narratives found in 1 Sam 4-6 and 2 Sam 6. These not only confer a major place in the text to the ark, but the characters within these pages express views about the ark contrary to those found elsewhere in Dtr regarding its relationship to Yahweh and its subsequent function, and events take place which serve to challenge their theology. For this reason, the exceptional cases of 1 Sam 4-6 and 2 Sam 6 will not greatly feature in this chapter which aims not to explore the outliers but rather to determine the normative ideology of the ark within Dtr against which these narratives in Samuel can be held up.

Two particular threads which run throughout the following discussion of the ark's relationship to Yahweh and its subsequent function are those of covenant and presence; each of the themes of Dtr when considered in tandem with the ark are seen to hinge on both of these motifs to differing extents. A large portion of this study has already been given over to providing a foundational understanding of 'covenant' in Dtr, yet 'presence' proves to be a more elusive term – especially when used in relation to a transcendent deity – and different authors may emphasize different concepts within its semantic range. We avoid offering any specific definitions at this early stage, for the way in which the ark could be understood as an object of presence will be explored throughout this chapter, and a prior definition of the word may only serve as a

restrictive framework.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it will be seen that even within individual chapters of text, there is not necessarily one uniform way of understanding the presence of Yahweh. Instead, the dialogue between ‘presence’ and the different themes of Dtr should serve to build up an idea of how Yahweh interacts and is associated with this cult object.

## A. The Ark and the Tablets

The first and most foundational Deuteronomistic concept surrounding the ark is its direct relationship to the covenant and the law. This association manifests itself most obviously in the very term, ‘ark of the covenant’ which is used to designate the object twenty-seven times throughout Dtr; six times on its own, and twenty-one with qualifiers. The meaning of this construct relationship is explicated in Solomon’s address after the ark is processed to the most holy place within the temple: ‘There I have set a place for the ark, *in which* is the covenant of Yahweh, which he made with our fathers when he brought them from the land of Egypt.’ (1 Kgs 8:21, emphasis mine). Thus it is the ark’s function as the container for the tablets of the covenant from which the name and relationship are derived.<sup>2</sup> ‘Ark of the covenant’ also occurs fifteen times outside of Dtr, though of these instances twelve are from the books of Chronicles, which is no great surprise due to their likely use of Dtr as source material.<sup>3</sup> Of the remaining three

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<sup>1</sup> Although no definition will be offered, three approaches to understanding presence may help to ground the conversation. Picture a person sat on a bench in the park reading a particularly immersive novel. In one sense, you may say that the person is physically present or ‘manifest’ at the bench as they may be interacted with on the basis of the five human senses. On the other hand, if a passer-by may have trouble communicating with them as their attention is fixed on the book. In this manner, they may be said to be absent from the bench or the conversation and present elsewhere, such as Hogwarts or the land of Mordor. Finally, if this area of the park happened to be under video surveillance, the subject may also be considered present in the CCTV monitor in the security office, as it is from this screen that the security guard is aware of the person’s actions (similarly, by our first and second understandings, the security guard may be considered present both within the office and at the park bench where his attention is focused). In the first case, presence is to do with a person’s physical location, in the second it is the location of their attention, and in the third, the person’s representation. These are just some initial ways of thinking about presence.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson notes how this is usually the view proposed by scholars (Wilson, “Merely a Container?,” 213). It is often pointed out that the word ארון itself literally means container (Davies, “Ark of the Covenant,” 42f; Nielsen, “History of the Ark,” 62; Zobel, ‘אַרֹן’ 365).

<sup>3</sup> On Chronicles’ use of Dtr, see Giffone, “Cult Centralization,” 433-435, 445f; Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 1f; Seow, “Ark of the Covenant,” 392. Nevertheless, it should be noted that most of the occurrences of this phrase in Chronicles are either in material unique to the book or is otherwise an adaptation of the original designation ‘ark of God’ in Samuel. The two occurrences of direct correspondence are to be found in 2 Chr 5 which evidently borrows heavily from 1 Kgs 8. However, the Chronicler may have simply been making explicit and uniform what was already present in the text of

occurrences, Jer 3:16 is a unique appearance within the book and so due to its later authorship likely drew from the tradition of Dtr, and both Num 10:33 and 14:44 will be considered later in this chapter.

From the discussion above, it seems fair to conclude that ‘ark of the covenant’ is essentially a Deuteronomistic term. Significantly, P commonly uses the term עֲדוּת rather than בְּרִית to refer to the ark and the tablets within.<sup>4</sup> Whilst traditionally translated ‘testimony’, עֲדוּת is often considered synonymous with בְּרִית,<sup>5</sup> though a comparison of the words is fairly speculative and would not aid us here. The significance of this priestly designation is the fact that both P and Dtr derive the title of the ark from its function as a container of the tablets, and as P is generally considered a later source, this association may be derived from Dtr.

The etiology of this function in Dtr is found in Deut 10 in which Moses is commanded to ‘make an ark of wood’ (v.1), and after completing the task, Moses deposits the tablets on which Yahweh inscribed the decalogue, declaring, ‘and there they are, as Yahweh commanded me,’ (v.5, cf. Ex 25:21).<sup>6</sup> Later on in the book, after the Moab covenant has been committed to writing, this also is given to the Levites and placed beside the ark (Deut 31:24-26), further establishing the connection between the written covenant and the ark. Many have considered this to be a demythologization of the ark, in which other roles it may previously have enjoyed were stripped away to render it simply a container.<sup>7</sup> However, such a reading both isolates Deuteronomy, failing to take its

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Samuel, for although the phrase ‘ark of the Yahweh/God’ is prevalent throughout 1 Sam 4-6 and 2 Sam 6, the object is nevertheless introduced at the start of both narratives as the ‘ark of the covenant’.

<sup>4</sup> עֲדוּת occurs fifteen times with the ark in P. Its sole occurrence in Josh 4:16 would seem to be the exception which proves the rule.

<sup>5</sup> Seow considers that עֲדוּת is a ‘concretization’ of the covenant in the tablets which allows them to be destroyed whilst the בְּרִית remains intact (Seow, “Designation of the Ark,” 194). William Propp believes that the term is favoured in P due to its ‘resonance to other theme words,’ (Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 385). Whilst both theories are well thought out and plausible, the discrepancy between them is evidence towards the speculative nature of the discussion.

<sup>6</sup> J. McConville argues that ‘the closure achieved in [these] words... shows that a foundation has been laid on which the covenant might now be firmly established.’ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 188.

<sup>7</sup> This view is most famously proposed by Von Rad: ‘... he strips away from the ark every trace of magical belief, and it becomes what it had certainly never been before – a receptacle for the tables of the Law.’ (Von Rad, “Tent and the Ark,” 106f. see also Von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, 40). Choon-leong

context within the history into account, and also ignores certain contextual and linguistic matters within Deuteronomy itself which will be addressed below, wherein a more complex understanding of the ark is displayed. Nevertheless, that fact that both the first (Deut 10:3-5) and last (1 Kgs 8:21) appearances of the ark in Dtr both place particular emphasis on the ark's role as container for the covenant does signify that this relationship is a framing element in a Deuteronomistic understanding of the ark, even as it is not reducible to this.

In order to draw out the significance of the connection between with the ark and the tablets, a number of scholars have noted ancient Near Eastern treaties and other important documents were sometimes placed within the footstool of the deity.<sup>8</sup> The wider biblical instances in which the ark appears to be described as a 'footstool' would suggest that this association could have been known in Israel,<sup>9</sup> and Yehoshua Grintz therefore suggests that this ANE custom may be the reason for depositing the tablets into the ark.<sup>10</sup> He then draws out an implication of this by describing the god under which the treaty is placed as, 'the guardian of treaties and documents, who supervised their implementation,'<sup>11</sup> and Edward Woods similarly speaks of placing the treaty under the 'all-seeing eye of the deities.'<sup>12</sup> The close association between the god and the treaty in its role as overseer is further intensified with regard to the Horeb covenant due to the fact that Yahweh is himself one of the covenant parties. In the light of this ANE practice, it would appear that the Deuteronomistic view of the ark as the container of the

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Seow further argues that 'the ark does not appear anywhere in Deuteronomy in connection with the enthronement of YHWH. It is neither a war palladium, nor is it associated with the presence of God.' (Seow, "Ark of the Covenant," 391).

<sup>8</sup> Seow provides an example: 'A copy of the treaty between Rameses II (Egyptian) and Hattusilis III (a Hittite) was placed at the feet of the images of Re and Teshub respectively.' (Seow, "Ark of the Covenant," 389). See also Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 199; Fretheim, "The Ark in Deuteronomy," 12; Wilson, "Merely a Container?," 237.

<sup>9</sup> Mettinger, "YHWH SABAOTH," 116. The two verses cited (1 Chr 28:2 and Psa 132:7) are not part of Dtr, yet the association of ark and footstall is nonetheless telling.

<sup>10</sup> Grintz, "Ark of the Covenant," 459.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Grintz follows this by considering the ark as 'the place of the manifestation... of God's will to His elect,' (Ibid.,463).

<sup>12</sup> Woods, *Deuteronomy*, 168. Pekka Pitkänen similarly recalls the act of placing 'treaties in the divine presence in sanctuaries,' arguing that, 'with this in mind, it would be most natural to have the tablets in the divine presence by putting them in the ark,' as, whilst unstated, the connection between the ark and Yahweh's presence was likely 'self-evident for the writer.' (Pitkänen, *Joshua*, 145).

covenant tablets implied a particular connection between it and the presence of Yahweh which emphasized the ark as an object of divine attention.

Reaching a similar conclusion, certain scholars have opposed the ‘demythologization’ view of the ark on the basis of different arguments; Gwynne Davies contends that the context of Deut 10 ‘take[s] us back to Sinai and emphasise[s] and retain[s] those numinous elements wrongly supposed to have been removed in the new Deuteronomic evaluation of the ark.’<sup>13</sup> Ian Wilson further identifies a hint of divine presence in the oft neglected verse of Deut 10:8, in which the Levites are said ‘to carry the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, to stand before Yahweh to serve him...’ arguing that this latter phrase refers both to the ark and to standing in Yahweh’s presence, as ‘it would seem highly unlikely that the presence before whom the Levites stand would be unconnected with the ark which they also carry.’<sup>14</sup> These arguments based on the context and phrasing of Deut 10 in addition to the ANE considerations certainly allow for some concept of Yahweh’s presence with the ark which would dispute notions of demythologization.

In light of the above discussion, we are able to perceive how in Deuteronomistic theology, both covenant and the presence of Yahweh are inseparably bound in connection with the ark.<sup>15</sup> Woods argues that, ‘already the point of meeting God through his word has been vividly emphasized at [Deut] 4:9-14 and 5:22-33. This is no less spectacularly important than to meet him in a cloud or sitting between Cherubim.’<sup>16</sup> In these passages to which Woods refers, Moses recalls the theophany of Yahweh at Horeb in which he declared his covenant to Israel, a theophany featuring certain sensory stimulations and visible signs;<sup>17</sup> even the audible voice of Yahweh is emphasized (Deut 4:12; 5:24-25). Although Yahweh’s audible voice and accompanying wonders are not

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<sup>13</sup> Davies, “Ark of the Covenant,” 43.

<sup>14</sup> Wilson, “Merely a Container?,” 214.

<sup>15</sup> Nielsen, taking into account what he considers the be two traditions from which Dtr drew, puts it so: ‘to the Deuteronomists, the presence of the Lord is to some extent equal to the presence of His covenant, namely, the two stone tablets, which Moses put into the Ark.’ (Nielsen, “History of the Ark,” 69).

<sup>16</sup> Woods, *Deuteronomy*, 168.

<sup>17</sup> For example, the fire, darkness, cloud and thick gloom (4:11 cf. 5:23) and also the people’s declaration that, ‘Yahweh our God has shown us his glory and his greatness,’ (5:24).



explicitly encountered at the ark in Dtr,<sup>18</sup> this initial experience in connection with the revelation of the covenant would surely have left an impact on the people of Israel, such that the container of the covenant tablets would have evoked the collective memory of Yahweh's very evident presence. As this experience at Horeb was for the purpose that Yahweh's will would be made known in the covenant stipulations in order for Israel to 'perform them in the land' (Deut 4:14), so the presence of the covenant in the ark similarly renders it the location of Yahweh's revelation, that his will may be known and even heard not only in memory, but in Israel's ongoing life in the land.

Clifford McCormick's study based around the idea of the ark as a 'verbal icon' speaks well to this, for he argues that Dtr 'imagines YHWH as present in the covenant requirements and as approachable through the proper channels of the covenant,' as 'they placed the text of the covenant as the primary indicator of divine relationship and presence,' and thus the ark becomes an iconic focal point.<sup>19</sup> Pushing this idea a little further, the ark's role as a focal point of the divine-human relationship could be seen in two ways: firstly, the people may approach Yahweh and discern his will from this location (whether audibly or otherwise), and we will survey instances in which this happens below; secondly, Yahweh may also be considered present in overseeing the people and serving as witness to their endeavor to live within the covenant requirements as alluded to in the ANE practice above.

That may be the limit to what can be drawn in these matters from this section of Dtr without losing a firm grounding in the text, but it is worth observing how what has been outlined above recurs in a couple of later passages. In Deut 31, the book of the law is twice given into the care of the Levites (vv.9, 25-26). This first time it is followed by a

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<sup>18</sup> With the possible exception of the ark's installation at the temple (1 Kgs 8:9-10). Regarding Yahweh's audible voice, in the scenarios which we will discuss later e.g. Josh 7:10-15, the way in which Yahweh speaks to his people is not explicitly stated, and so an audible voice should not be automatically discounted.

<sup>19</sup> McCormick, "From Box to Throne," 183. However, McCormick's distinction between the literary and phenomenological approach to the text, whilst instructive, is one which the current study cannot fully subscribe to. For though there is an element in which although the original phenomena can never be truly known through the text, and nor is this a historically motivated study, the Deuteronomistic author presumably believed that the text was at least testifying to some form of historical reality, and this fact should be taken into account when discussing his theology.

command for the law to be read aloud every seven years (vv.10-13), the second time it is described as a witness against Israel (v.26). McConville neatly summarises from this the dual purpose of the law, ‘communication’ and ‘witness’;<sup>20</sup> both themes that we identified with Yahweh’s presence at the ark. The importance of the law as an accusatory witness is evidenced by its place within Moses’ ominous speech,<sup>21</sup> for it is designated as such in the centre of two warnings in which Israel’s apostasy is anticipated (vv.16-18; 27-29). When Israel inevitably fail to retain their fidelity in the future, they cannot claim ignorance of Yahweh’s revelation, for it is placed right beside the ark, and therefore, the presence of the ark among the people could be considered a divine, ‘I told you so!’ and further reminds Israel that Yahweh is aware of their apostasy. The ark is then featured in the renewal of the covenant ceremony in Josh 8:30-35 as originally prescribed in Deut 27:1-8. The theme of communication is reiterated as the law is read aloud (vv 34-35), and though unstated, the ark’s location at the centre of the gathered people implicitly fulfills its role as witness, testifying forebodingly to the impending failure of Israel, suggesting that ‘the curse’ from the book of the law in v.34 should be highlighted.<sup>22</sup>

## **B. The Ark and Warfare**

When discussing the ark, scholars have often brought to the surface its apparent function as a palladium in war, leading to confident assertions such as Grintz’s that, ‘when great battles were fought, it was time and again brought... to the front,’ providing as evidence the example of 1 Sam 4.<sup>23</sup> This chapter of Samuel’s narrative has also been cited by others as confirmation of the activities of the ark in war.<sup>24</sup> As we shall argue in greater detail in the final chapter, however, this use of the ark appeared to contravene its legitimate function within Dtr and therefore is an unorthodox foundation

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<sup>20</sup> McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 441.

<sup>21</sup> Woods highlights the legal need for three witnesses, identified here as the song of Moses, the book of the law, and heaven and earth (Woods, *Deuteronomy*, 306).

<sup>22</sup> Trent Butler, however, argues that as the blessing is mentioned first, the text draws attention to how ‘the people who respond properly to the call of Yahweh to worship and to renewal of the covenant are accepted and blessed by him.’ (Butler, *Joshua 1-12*, 426). Perhaps both the blessing and the curse should be recognised as part of the dual-focus of Dtr as a whole, whereby the curse was received in the exile yet there remains a future hope for Yahweh’s blessing.

<sup>23</sup> Grintz, “Ark of the Covenant,” 463.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 254; Seow, “Ark of the Covenant,” 388; Matthews, “Physical Space,” 16.

on which to build an understanding of Israel's practice.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the opening chapters of Joshua feature the ark prominently in what on the surface are settings of warfare, and so this section will begin by considering how the ark is used here before discussing the divinatory use of the ark in war, and finally surveying the remaining texts throughout the history. The following survey will reveal that the ark continues to function as a sign of the divine covenant, and any associations with Yahweh's presence are to do with the communication of his will rather than a guarantee of safety by its proximity.

### *1. Cultic Warfare in Joshua*

In wrestling with the significance of the ark in Joshua, two particular facets should be taken into account and underpin a reading of the narratives, the first of which is the continuity between Joshua and Deuteronomy which precedes it. Due to the unified nature of Dtr, a continuity of sorts is evident between all of the books from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings, and yet Wenham has drawn attention to the particular way in which 'Joshua forms a perfect sequel to Deuteronomy; the program of the holy way of conquest set out in Deuteronomy is successfully carried out in Joshua.'<sup>26</sup> Deut 31 provides a striking example of the continuity in this regard which also reveals something of the nature of Yahweh's relationship to the ark. In this chapter which has already been seen to contain motifs of the ark and the covenant, Moses relays the promise in v.3 that, 'it is Yahweh your God who will cross ahead of you,' with the express purpose that, 'he will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them.' In a notably parallel way, Josh 3:11 provides the fulfillment of this promise, announcing that, 'the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over ahead of you into the Jordan,' which to Joshua demonstrates that, 'the living God is among you, and that he will assuredly dispossess from before you the Canaanite...' etc. (v.10).

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<sup>25</sup> Rudolf Smend similarly argues that, 'little can be gained from 1 Samuel 4:3ff. as an absolute invulnerable argument for the character of the Ark as a palladium of war,' (Smend, *Yahweh War*, 77), preferring himself to seek evidence from other sources (Ibid., 77ff.).

<sup>26</sup> Wenham, "Book of Joshua," 140. The importance of this continuity in regards to leadership will be drawn out in the following section.

The similar phrasing between these texts would seem to support Marten Woudstra's claim that, 'to speak of the ark is tantamount to speaking of the Lord whose ark it is,' yet to derive this equation from a concept of Yahweh's 'indwelling' as Woudstra does, is to miss the main emphasis of the concept in Joshua.<sup>27</sup> Rather, the context of the conquest and its continuity with Deuteronomy lends itself to a view of the ark as a symbol of Yahweh's promise of military presence and deliverance which he upholds as his side of the covenantal agreement contained within,<sup>28</sup> keeping in line with the view presented above of the ark as a focal point for this relationship. The text in Joshua cannot be used to deny a concept of Yahweh 'indwelling' the ark (i.e. a physical presence within, as a person may indwell a house), yet neither does it limit Yahweh's promise of presence to this form of 'manifestation', but rather this presence is expressed through Yahweh's historical intervention in fighting for his people and is therefore evidenced primarily in Israel's miraculous victories.

In addition to the continuity between Deuteronomy and Joshua, and thus the covenantal significance of the ark, the second feature by which the Joshua narratives should be understood is the cultic nature of the events taking place; true of both the crossing of the Jordan in chs.3-4 and the capture of Jericho in ch.6.<sup>29</sup> A superficial reading may regard these narratives as distinct types of historical event – the former a miraculous crossing of the river, the latter Israel's typical engagement in warfare – yet, both are steeped in ritual and are rightly viewed together as cultic acts. For example, in addition to the more

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<sup>27</sup> Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 85.

<sup>28</sup> Maria Metzler, in trying to determine the form of the ark in Joshua, argues for a certain discontinuity from its form in Deuteronomy, particularly as there is no expected mention of the tablets inside the ark (Metzler, "Ark of the Covenant," 108). However, the general continuity between the two books and in particular the chronological intimacy between Deut 31 and Josh 3-4 should warn against separating the form and function of the ark presented in the two books. Of special importance is the designation of the ark as 'the ark of the covenant of Yahweh *your* God' [emphasis mine], a phrase connoting the covenant relationship between Israel and their God. This particular phrase is found only in Deut 31:26 and Joshua 3:3, perhaps used by the Deuteronomist to express that the narrative of the ark is picking up where it left off. Metzler does at least acknowledge the theme of the covenant prevalent in Joshua (Ibid., 108).

<sup>29</sup> George Coats argues for the ritual nature of both the narrative in Josh 3-4: 'This account of Israel's crossing the Jordan depicts a cultic event, the entry of Israel into the land of Canaan effected by execution of a ritual,' (Coats, "Ark of the Covenant," 138) and Josh 6: 'The description of the event defined by these instructions is not a description of military strategy... to the contrary, the instructions call for a cultic event, a ritual that when properly executed will effect the entry,' (Ibid., 147f.). See also Gray, *Joshua*, 76; Nielsen, "History of the Ark," 62; Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 92f.

obvious cultic features present in the crossing of the Jordan,<sup>30</sup> and also in the conquest of Jericho,<sup>31</sup> the ‘warfare’ in this latter event is described as an act of *herem* in which both people and property are devoted to Yahweh (Josh 6:17-19), an act frequently occurring in cultic contexts, which lends to the ‘ritualistic nature of the conquest’.<sup>32</sup> Maria Metzler captures this thematic tie between the two Joshua narratives in regarding them both as border-crossing events in which the ark plays a central role amidst processions.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, as the conquest of Canaan begins, Yahweh is presented as having power to overcome both natural and man-made boundaries through his initiative and agency in order to deliver on his promise of providing the land. The miraculous events are thus ‘to be viewed as an expression of covenant fidelity’ on Yahweh’s part,<sup>34</sup> in response to Israel’s obedience to the prescribed ritual acts which provide evidence of their fidelity.

In light of these two considerations, there is little that Josh 3-4 and 6 reveals specifically about warfare and the role of the ark within Israel’s later military campaigns, for the narratives relay *cultic* acts – of entry into the land and conquest respectively – and instill the covenantal principles set out in the previous chapter, in that Yahweh graciously bestows the land upon Israel, fulfilling his side of the covenant. The ark itself is not the direct cause of the miraculous signs, as though Yahweh’s agency were restricted by proximity, but rather as the icon of his covenant it is a visible sign of the promise that Yahweh will intervene, the evidence for which is to be found in the mighty works and military victories themselves (Josh 3:5, 10; 6:2, 16). Yahweh throughout issues the specific directions for the ark’s use, and Israel acts in obedience to these commands. In the previous chapter we discussed the narrative of Israel failing to capture Ai (Josh 7) which follows the capture of Jericho, and we will also address this

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<sup>30</sup> Including such indicators as Israel’s need to consecrate themselves (Josh 3:5), the establishment of the memorial stones (4:4-7), the central role of the priests, and the general prescribed nature of the event.

<sup>31</sup> Similarly to Josh 3-4, key roles given here to the priests, also the number ‘seven’ is granted significance (number of priests, rams’ horns, circuits of the city), and the act of procession rather than military siege is vital to the conquest.

<sup>32</sup> Wilson, “Conquest and Form,” 326.

<sup>33</sup> Metzler, “Ark of the Covenant,” 117.

<sup>34</sup> Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 91. He argues this specifically of the river-crossing, but the same is true also of the miraculous collapse of Jericho’s walls.

text momentarily when considering the divinatory use of the ark. It is also relevant for the present discussion, however, in that it presents Israel's defeat on account of their covenantal infidelity and thus further serves to underline the conditional nature of Yahweh's promise to intervene on Israel's behalf in capturing the land.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, Josh 3-4 and 6 describe occasions in which Israel was obedient and lived up to covenant requirements, as a result of which they were granted victory over Jericho and the Jordan River.

## 2. *Divination*

Within the first section of this chapter, we laid the foundation that the primary significance of the ark in Dtr is drawn from its association with the covenant on account of the tablets of the decalogue stored within it. Rather than 'demythologize' the ark and empty it of all other significance, this grounds Israel's encounters with Yahweh at the ark on this covenantal relationship and the accompanying conditions. The ark is presented in a similar manner at the beginning of Joshua; in these chapters it is the sign of Yahweh's presence with his people Israel which is made known through his promised historic intervention. Several other passages in Dtr feature the ark in a setting of warfare, and yet in these scenarios it is not sent to the front line or brought forward to assure victory (with the exception of 1 Sam 4 which will be addressed in the final chapter). As we will see, it is instead used as a means of consulting with Yahweh in regard to the circumstances and outcome of battles. Dtr never explicitly states this divinatory function as being intrinsic to the ark, in contrast with P in which Yahweh affirms, 'there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give to you in commandment for the sons of Israel.' (Ex 25:22, cf. Num 7:89).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The brief pericope of the Commander of Yahweh's army in Josh 5:13-15 which precedes the conquest of Jericho also provides an explicit reference to Yahweh's military activity, and the commander's refusal to state whether he is for Joshua or for his adversaries is telling as to the conditional nature and importance of covenantal fidelity.

<sup>36</sup> In this context it is significant that Yahweh specifies that he will meet Israel above the mercy seat (or cover) of the ark between the Cherubim. Zobel argues that the *kapporeth* (cover) is an invention of P, originally independent of the ark (Zobel, אֲרֹן 365). Von Rad takes a similar line and argues that, partially on account of its function as a meeting place, 'it is actually of greater significance than the ark itself,' (Von Rad, "Tent and the Ark," 104). The absence of any mention of a cover for the ark in Dtr may account also for the lack of explicit reference to Yahweh speaking from the ark; though there are

Nevertheless, a survey of such passages may provide an idea which is not too dissimilar to that given in P.<sup>37</sup>

Returning once again to the narrative of Josh 7, we see that Israel have just been defeated before the people of Ai due to Achan's transgression of the covenant in taking the *herem* items. As this cause for defeat was at the time unknown to Israel, however, 'Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of Yahweh until the evening, both he and the elders of Israel,'<sup>38</sup> (Josh 7:6), and, lamenting their situation, Joshua enquires as to the reason for what he rightly perceives to be Yahweh's action (vv.7-9). Yahweh then provides a lengthy response, informing Joshua of the breach of covenant, directing him as to how he should rectify the situation (vv.10-15).<sup>39</sup> This scenario is a clear demonstration of the leaders of the people appearing before the ark in order to consult Yahweh on a matter of warfare, receiving an answer which they were seeking. It is significant also that the covenant is central to the dialogue, first in Joshua's interrogation of Yahweh regarding the questionable faithfulness of his actions, and then in Yahweh's enlightening response in which it is revealed that Israel is the guilty party.<sup>40</sup> Though grounded in the covenant, the matter involved discerning situational information which was unknown to Joshua and the elders, and so evidently

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mentions of Yahweh enthroned above the cherubim (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2), no functional communicative element is explicitly drawn out of this.

<sup>37</sup> Again, the later priestly source may be making explicit and developing that which is found to be implicit in Dtr.

<sup>38</sup> Soggin, *Joshua*, 93: "The ark" is missing in LXX<sup>B</sup>, which simply read 'before *yhwh*'. The absence of the ark from an early manuscript may raise doubts as to the legitimacy of the present text. However, this cannot be conclusively determined either way. What is of interest is that the phrases 'before the ark of Yahweh' and 'before Yahweh' are in a sense interchangeable in the mind of the scribe, and thus strengthens the idea that in the present context, the ark may function as a meeting place with the divine.

<sup>39</sup> The fact that Yahweh responds with, 'rise up!' (vv.10, 13) after Joshua has earlier fallen before the ark (v.6) implies that it is before the ark that this dialogue takes place. It is less certain where the tribes are to draw near to in order to be taken by lot (v.14), though Coats seems right in suggesting that it 'occurs before the ark, just as Joshua's lament does,' rendering the ark 'the place for seeking an oracle from God, the place to "enquire of the Lord".' (Coats, "Ark of the Covenant," 151).

<sup>40</sup> Soggin argues that, 'The dialogue emphasizes that the people have no guarantee. The fact that they are conducting, or believe that they are conducting, a holy war in the name of Yahweh does not imply any obligation on the part of God, as his reply in vv.10-15 makes clear' (Soggin, *Joshua*, 104). However, this does not seem to be the case at all. The strength of Joshua's lament reveals a clear confusion as to why Yahweh did not act as he promised that he would, and Yahweh's response, far from shirking off any obligation on his part, explains the cause of Israel's failure and what needed to be done in order for divine favour to return to Israel. This dialogue fits squarely into covenantal notions within with Yahweh is obligated – and frequently proclaimed to be faithful – to his side of the covenant so long as Israel maintain theirs (See Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 125).

more than simply consulting the written law was meant in this scene, though it is difficult to discern the exact mode of Yahweh's discourse to Joshua. Whatever the exact means of communication, a divinatory approach to the ark was taken, with the expectation that Yahweh would be able to make known his will in the contemporary matter.

A similar, though more elusive, scenario takes place in Jdg 20 in which Israel engage in civil war against the tribe of Benjamin because of their 'disgraceful acts' (vv.10-13).<sup>41</sup> Israel launches two unsuccessful attacks and is defeated before Benjamin despite being told by Yahweh to proceed (vv. 18, 23). On Israel's third enquiry of Yahweh at Bethel, a parenthetical note appears in the text which explains that 'the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, Aaron's son, stood before it to minister in those days,' (v.27) which seems to explain the reason for Bethel as the location of enquiry.<sup>42</sup> That Phinehas is explicitly said here to minister before the *ark* adds weight to Wilson's theory discussed in the previous chapter that the priestly edict 'to stand before Yahweh' in Deut 10:8 equates divine presence with the ark,<sup>43</sup> due to the similar phrasing and situation of the two references. Karel Van der Toorn and Cees Houtman neatly formulate the rule that, 'in passages where the ark plays a role, the expression "before Yahweh" is equivalent to "before the ark of Yahweh".'<sup>44</sup> They consequently view this situation in Judges as one in which the ark is used for divination and making an 'oracular enquiry'.<sup>45</sup> Thus, as in Josh 7:6, the ark is

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<sup>41</sup> The exact nature of these acts is relayed in Jdg 19.

<sup>42</sup> Moore considers this parenthetical phrase to be a late gloss (Moore, *Commentary on Judges*, 433f.). Though this is certainly a possibility, it would be unwise to discount the text's original legitimacy without greater evidence, and Arthur Cundall believes that the early date for this narrative means that 'such an excision is not really necessary,' (Cundall, *Judges*, 194). Alternatively, even if the mention of Phinehas were a later gloss, this need not extend also to the ark which could either have been original to the text or even an editorial comment from Dtr, and nonetheless fits within his theology of the ark.

<sup>43</sup> Wilson, "Merely a Container?," 214.

<sup>44</sup> Van der Toorn and Houtman, "David and the Ark," 216. On this basis, one could propose more tentatively that the ark is in view at certain occurrences of 'before Yahweh' when its presence is not mentioned, e.g. Josh 18:6-10; 1 Sam 2:18; 2 Kgs 19:14. However, it must be conceded that in the light of Josh 19:51 that other focal points such as the 'doorway of the tent of meeting' may be intended, and therefore these will not be drawn upon for evidence of the normative use of the ark.

<sup>45</sup> Van der Toorn and Houtman, "David and the Ark," 216f. Barry Webb comes to a similar conclusion and argues that this action should not be viewed negatively in light of the later events of the ark which were 'tinged with superstition' (Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 486). The condemnation of Israel's view and



presented as the location at which Yahweh's will may be discerned, although this time there is a less explicit connection with the covenant as the enquiry and response concern warfare within Israel's own tribes, a matter not directly addressed in Deuteronomy.

A third similar scenario is found in 1 Sam 14, and though its usefulness for our present investigation may be limited on account of textual difficulties, it is nonetheless worth considering. This chapter is set amidst Israel's warfare against the Philistines; during an arising confusion in the enemy camp, Saul instructs Ahijah to bring the ark to him, followed by a parenthetical note in the text that, 'the ark of God was at that time with the sons of Israel,' (v.18 cf. Jdg 20.17). The textual issues are based on an earlier line in v.3 in which Ahijah was said to bear the *ephod*, and so 'the mention of the ark in v.18 has commonly been seen as a mistake for the ephod, which is the reading of the LXX.'<sup>46</sup> However, several scholars have convincingly pushed the case that 'ark' should be retained as the original reading, particularly Philip Davies who argues both that an original mention of the ark's presence would be more warranted in the context than that of the ephod, and additionally that a conforming of the 'ark' to 'ephod' in the LXX would make a lot more sense than the inexplicable alternative.<sup>47</sup> The situation is further complicated by mentions of the ephod under similar circumstances in 1 Sam 23:9 and 30:7. In light of these, Davies argues for a 'systematic replacement of 'ark' by 'ephod'' throughout Samuel in which 'the MT of 1 Sam. xiv. 18 is the single exception, which must be regarded as accidental.'<sup>48</sup>

This in turn raises historical questions as to the reason for such a systematic alteration. Van der Toorn and Houtman attempt to explain this by advancing the theory that the supposedly original references to the ark are part of an older tradition in which multiple objects could function as the ark, particularly in a divinatory capacity.<sup>49</sup> This tradition was later suppressed by Dtr and replaced by the author's favoured tradition found in 1

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use of the ark in these later events will be considered in the final chapter on the narratives of the ark in Samuel.

<sup>46</sup> Ahlström, "Travels of the Ark," 145.

<sup>47</sup> Davies, "Ark or Ephod," 82f; cf. Van der Toorn and Houtman, "David and the Ark," 211.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>49</sup> Van der Toorn and Houtman, "David and the Ark," 211ff.

Sam 4-6 and 2 Sam 6,<sup>50</sup> a ‘theological censorship’ which supposedly took place on account of the incompatibility between the two, and particularly between the older tradition and the Deuteronomistic view regarding the uniqueness of the ark.<sup>51</sup> We have at this point landed firmly in the realm of speculation, and as would be expected with a theory regarding a partially-successful ancient textual cover up, there is simply not sufficient evidence.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, the questionable truth of that wider theory should not deter from the original possibility that the MT’s ‘ark’ is be regarded as the original form in 1 Sam 14:18 in light of its more immediate context.

Accordingly, on at least this instance it appears that the ark may once again be associated with divination and divine oracles, which is the likely unstated purpose of its summoning by Saul;<sup>53</sup> its use in a similar way on two other occasions is also a very real possibility.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, throughout the traditional warfare scenarios in Joshua, Judges and Samuel (bracketing the more cultic acts in Josh 3-4 and 6) the ark functions primarily as the means of communicating with Yahweh. This in turn is significant for the association of Yahweh and the ark. The concept of presence is less practically defined here than in P, in which Yahweh’s voice is heard from above the ark (Num 7:89). Nevertheless, the occurrences surveyed above have revealed that the ark is viewed as more than a mere receptacle in Dtr, and, grounded in its iconic representation of Yahweh and his covenant with Israel, it functions as a location at which the leaders of Israel are able to communicate with Yahweh.

### 3. *Other Warfare Scenarios*

So far, whenever the ark has featured in narratives concerned with warfare, its importance is founded in its representation of Yahweh’s covenant promises, and

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 219f; cf. Davies, “Ark or Ephod,” 84ff.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 228ff. This theory finds support from McCormick, though he is more hesitant to commend some of the reasoning by which the conclusion was reached (McCormick, “From Box to Throne,” 177-179).

<sup>52</sup> Davies concedes the speculative nature of this hypothesis which is ‘incapable of proof,’ though presses for its superior plausibility (Davies, “Ark or Ephod,” 87).

<sup>53</sup> See Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 164.

<sup>54</sup> Of course, it is to be conceded that if these latter scenarios were indeed suppressed (with 1 Sam 14:18 apparently overlooked) by Dtr in favour of the tradition presented in 1 Sam 4-6 and 2 Sam 6, they could not serve as evidence of Dtr’s normative theology of the ark, and therefore do not offer us a great help either way.

Yahweh's will is sought and discerned from this location. There are, however, two remaining passages in Dtr which recall the presence of the ark in situations of warfare, and two further passages from outside of the direct history which require consideration.

In 2 Sam 11:11, as David is persuading Uriah to return to his house in order to cover the tracks of his affair with Bathsheba, Uriah contests, 'The ark and Israel are staying in booths... shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?' That the description of the ark and Israel staying in booths refers to the military encampment may be drawn from a similar reference in 1 Kgs 20:12, 16 and from Uriah's involvement in the army within this chapter.<sup>55</sup> The mention of the ark here is brief and incidental, and although Smend is right in believing this to lend credibility to its appearance,<sup>56</sup> he is also right in implying that this is as an example of how the tradition 'does not portray the state of affairs for its own sake and therefore not in the fullness of detail and completeness in which one would like to see it described.'<sup>57</sup> Quite simply, there is not enough information in the text which would allow us to understand the function of the ark in warfare, as all that is given to us is the presence of the ark among the soldiers. Given what we have discussed above, we would do most justice to the evidence in presuming that the ark is in the camp in order that Yahweh may be consulted by it to discern the correct course of action in battle.

Henry Smith also regards 2 Sam 11:11 as being 'the only intimation that the Ark was carried in David's campaigns,' though he argues that it may be considered normal practice in light of 2 Sam 15:24-29.<sup>58</sup> This latter pericope, however, tells of how Zadok and Abiathar brought the ark from Jerusalem to accompany David as he fled Absalom's rebellion and as such does not relay a regular act of warfare but rather David's retreat from a rebellion which threatened his kingship. Even if this passage did allow us to conclude that the ark were regularly carried in David's campaigns – which would be a

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<sup>55</sup> Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 254. Gordon rightly supports this idea over alternative theories such as that Israel were celebrating the feast of booths.

<sup>56</sup> Eduard Nielsen also describes the mentioning of the ark in this context as 'the most natural thing in the world,' (Nielsen, "History of the Ark," 62).

<sup>57</sup> Smend, *Yahweh War*, 83.

<sup>58</sup> Smith, *Samuel*, 318f. So also Smend, *Yahweh War*, 83f.

considerable concession – it would not take us further in discerning its function within them. Viewed properly within the context of the narrative, Zadok and Abiathar’s act is most likely a means of validating David’s rightful leadership by bringing the ark which was associated with his dynasty that it may accompany him as a sign of Yahweh’s favour (v.25).<sup>59</sup> Therefore neither of these two appearances of the ark in Samuel provides any clarification as to its exact function in warfare, and the confident assertion that it serves regularly as a palladium in war finds no grounding here.

As a final port of call, there are two passages in Numbers in which the ark is referred to as the ‘ark of the covenant’ instead of the expected Priestly ‘testimony’ which leads to the possibility of Deuteronomistic influence.<sup>60</sup> Both of these passages occur in settings of potential warfare and so merit consideration alongside those within the history, however, this does not mean that they should be regarded with the same authority for determining Dtr’s ideology, and despite their value, they ultimately cannot be used decisively either way. The first pericope, Num 10:33-36, presents the ark as guiding Israel through the wilderness and culminates in a chant which begins, ‘Rise up, O Yahweh! And let your enemies be scattered...’ (v.35). Scholars generally consider this chant in vv.35-36 to be from an earlier source later incorporated into the text,<sup>61</sup> and Noth and Gray both argue for an origin of these verses within a situation of warfare and identify an association between Yahweh and the ark on account of the fact that Yahweh is addressed directly within these ‘ark sayings’.<sup>62</sup> The reference to Yahweh’s enemies adds weight to the military origin of these passages, and yet when set alongside v.33, the emphasis shifts to the concept of the ark’s guidance in the wilderness wandering, and as it is this verse in which the specific phrase ‘ark of the covenant’ appears, it is decisive in determining a possible Deuteronomistic understanding of the ark in this

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<sup>59</sup> The use of the ark as a symbol of David’s dynasty will be discussed in detail in the final chapter.

<sup>60</sup> Noth, alongside Eryl Davies, believes that this phrase betrays Dtr’s addition to originally Yahwistic passages (Noth, *Numbers*, 78, 111; cf. Davies, *Numbers*, 9, 148). If true – and the evidence allows for a conclusion along these lines – then Dtr may not only have been aware of these traditions but could also have helped to give shape to the passage, even if their final form was determined by P.

<sup>61</sup> See Davies, “Ark of the Covenant,” 33 and Coats, “Ark of the Covenant,” 137f.

<sup>62</sup> Noth, *Numbers*, 79; Gray, *Commentary on Numbers*, 96f. This point is underscored as George Gray observes how this phrase is quoted in Ps 138:8 but necessarily adapted to ‘distinguish the ark from Yahweh.’ (Gray, *Commentary on Numbers*, 96). For others scholars who affirm the original warfare setting of vv.35-36 see: Budd, *Numbers*, 114 and Zobel, ‘אַרֹן,’ 369.

pericope. The guiding role of the ark in these verses is to be found also in Joshua (Josh 3:4, 14), and yet the earlier military nuance is not directly associated with the ark in Dtr in quite the same way except, once again, for the exceptional case of 1 Sam 4, and the specific chant in vv.35-36 is never worked into the history despite its further appearances in the Psalms.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, if these passages are to be linked with the ideology of Dtr, the view which is presented here of the ark is one of divine guidance, not a palladium in war.

The second occurrence, found in Num 14, takes place just after Moses has announced the divine judgment on Israel for rebelling against Moses, namely that their generation will not enter the land (vv.28-35). Despite being warned by Moses that Yahweh is not in their midst, the people heedlessly advance against the Amalekites and are subsequently struck down (vv.39-45). The key verse for our purposes is the aside in v.44 that, ‘neither the ark of the covenant of Yahweh nor Moses left the camp.’ Metzler understands from this that Israel’s ‘first attempt to take over Canaan failed miserably because the Ark was not with them.’<sup>64</sup> Yet, one should not posit a direct correlation between these two factors and thus suggest that the narrative would have depicted a victory for Israel had the ark accompanied them, for their rebellion and the threat of Yahweh’s absence remained.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the fact that the people do not even attempt to take the ark with them to guarantee success makes a strong case against a view of it as a war palladium. Rather than a direct correlation between the presence of the ark and the outcome of the battle, Davies provides the more subtle approach in viewing the fact that the ark remained in the camp as ‘an ominous portent that the enterprise was doomed to failure,’<sup>66</sup> which had already been determined due to their breach of covenant. Again, we note that although the ark is presented in a context of warfare, there is not enough information given about its function to add anything to our understanding of the way in which the ark was employed in war, and the features of the passage discussed above point away from a notion of the ark a war palladium.

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<sup>63</sup> Ps 68:1; 138:8.

<sup>64</sup> Metzler, “Ark of the Covenant,” 107.

<sup>65</sup> Hence the result of their act in 1 Sam 4, to be discussed in detail in the final chapter.

<sup>66</sup> Davies, *Numbers*, 148. However, Davies arrives at this conclusion in a different manner, by perceiving the ark’s regular role as leading the people into war.

From what we have seen in this section, the ark's use in warfare is far from consistent enough to warrant doctrinal certainty: it has appeared in the cultic setting of Joshua as the symbol of the covenant and thus Yahweh's promise to fight for his people; it has served as the location for communicating with Yahweh with regard to battle affairs; and throughout the remainder of Dtr, even allowing for the traditions found in Numbers, the ark has been in proximity to the fighting people of Israel, but nowhere is it explicitly brought out into the midst of battle. Therefore, the notion of the ark serving as a war palladium is without clear grounding in Dtr, in which its main role within battle is as a representative of Yahweh's covenantal promises or a means of discerning his will. Furthermore, allusions to Yahweh's presence with the ark are not to be explained as a divine manifestation which is limited to the ark's proximity in order to be harnessed for direct protection. Instead, concepts of divine presence are viewed in association with Yahweh's powerful acts in intervening on Israel's behalf which take place above and beyond the ark, while divine presence more closely linked with the ark's proximity are related to Yahweh's communication with the leaders of his people.

### **C. The Ark and Leadership**

#### *1. Joshua and the Conquest*

Before moving on from the passages in Numbers considered above which Deuteronomistic terminology, it is worth considering what they reveal about the significance of the ark for authenticating leadership. The ark's appearance in Num 10:33 takes place after Moses entreats his father-in-law, Hobab, to accompany Israel and act as their guide (vv.29-32). Hobab's response is not given, but Davies rightly notes that the presence of the ark in v.33b 'rendered unnecessary the human guidance provided by Hobab,' and therefore may explain the omission.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the ark 'journeying in front of [the people] for the three days, to seek out a resting place for them,' (v.33) would directly displace any need for Hobab's guidance. Therefore, this

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<sup>67</sup> Davies, *Numbers*, 96. See also Noth, *Numbers*, 79. By contrast, Philip Budd takes v.33a to suggest that Hobab *did* accompany Israel, even if the divine guidance is emphasized (Budd, *Numbers*, 114).

tradition which may have been known to Dtr or even written under his influence,<sup>68</sup> insists on the preeminence of divine leadership, presented as the guidance of the ark through the wilderness. In the other passage from Numbers, after Israel advance against the Ammonites in spite of Moses' warning, it is explained that both Moses and the ark remained in the camp (14:44). The mention of both Moses and the ark together speaks somewhat to the co-existence of human and divine leadership, and in this case, the refusal of both to accompany Israel in their rebellion.<sup>69</sup>

Returning to Dtr proper, Deuteronomy does not give much of an indication to the role of the ark as a symbol of leadership until its closing chapters. The centrality of Moses' leadership is self-evident throughout the book, and his fashioning of the ark at Yahweh's command (Deut 10:1-5) could serve to connect them, particularly taking into account the role of Moses as the mediator of the very law which is deposited within and alongside the ark. Nevertheless, no direct link between Moses' leadership and the ark is provided concrete expression within the book, and so any association remains indirect. This is not true of Joshua, however, and the function of the ark in supporting his leadership begins at the climax of Deuteronomy. We have previously established how the phrase, 'it is Yahweh your God who will cross ahead of you,' in Deut 31:3 referred, through similar language, to the crossing of the ark in Josh 3:11. Curiously, later in the same verse of Deuteronomy, the phrase is repeated almost verbatim, but with Joshua as the subject: 'Joshua is the one who will cross ahead of you.' This is an even stronger image of the dual human-divine leadership than that in Num 14:44, and McConville clarifies from the chiasmic structure of these phrases with vv.7-8 that the stress is placed on the 'primacy of Yahweh's leadership.'<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Though this cannot be known with certainty, see n.60.

<sup>69</sup> Scholars have noted how the parallel passage in Deuteronomy does not mention the ark (Metzler, "Ark of the Covenant," 107; Gray, *Commentary on Numbers*, 166). This is not too problematic however, as the ark is only mentioned in passing in Num 14:44, and as Deut 1:41-46 does not even explain that Moses remained in the camp, it does not appear that the ark was deliberately excluded. In fact, the mention of Israel returning to weep before Yahweh (v.45) recalls the language of Jdg 20:23, and to an extent Josh 7:6, suggesting the presence of the ark.

<sup>70</sup> McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 438. Woods observes this too, although he ends the chiasm at v.6b (Woods, *Deuteronomy*, 301); the precise end point of the chiasm is not vital to its interpretation here.

The following paragraph which concerns the ark and the reading of the law (vv.9-13) is accordingly sandwiched between this first public commissioning of Joshua and also a private commission for which Yahweh summons Joshua to the tent of meeting (v.14).<sup>71</sup> Although the text does not lay it out explicitly, the structure of this chapter in Deuteronomy could be seen to present not only Joshua's commissioning, but also that of the ark for the role it is to play in the conquest alongside him; the further mention of the law and ark directly following the commission of Joshua in v.23 lends support to this view. The themes of dual-leadership are carried through to the opening chapter of Joshua as the titular character is charged with the taking of the Promised Land. In particular, in Josh 1:8, Yahweh instructs Joshua, 'This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night...' Due to the Mosaic mediation of the law, Woudstra is right in seeing here the 'connection between Joshua and Moses,'<sup>72</sup> yet what is perhaps less immediately obvious is the way in which this further links Joshua with the ark. As the book of the law is given into the care of the Levites carrying the ark in order to be placed alongside it (Deut 31.9, 26), Joshua's dependence on the law is, by extension, his dependence on the ark, therefore providing additional emphasis on the covenantal significance of the ark and Joshua's subordination to Yahweh's leadership expressed through his meditation on and obedience to the law.

These themes introduced here are explicated in Josh 3-4. Yahweh promises Joshua in 3:3 that, 'This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you,' a promise fulfilled in 4:14. The continuity with Moses' leadership is here made explicit, and commentators have drawn attention to a similar statement spoken about Moses in Ex 14.31 after the crossing of the Red Sea.<sup>73</sup> Such a comparison causes Coats to consider the ark and the Levites as 'symbols of Joshua's exaltation', analogous to Moses' rod, due to the similar roles that

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<sup>71</sup> Woods and McConville both describe the commission of Joshua in the Tent of Meeting as the 'high point' of the section (Woods, *Deuteronomy*, 303; McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 439).

<sup>72</sup> Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 63.

<sup>73</sup> See Butler, *Joshua*, 309 and Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 82, 94. The reference to the crossing of the Red Sea in Josh 4:23 adds strength to this comparison.



they play in the different narratives.<sup>74</sup> However, Coats is careful to avoid reducing Joshua's authority simply to his association with the ark, arguing instead that, 'the comparison with Moses... rests on a more ambiguous statement about God's presence with Moses.'<sup>75</sup> We argued above that Yahweh's covenantal presence with Israel is evidenced in his fighting on their behalf and acting to their benefit, and as such it is the crossing of the sea itself which demonstrates Yahweh's presence. Joshua's agency in leading the crossing then exhibits Yahweh's presence with him to validate his leadership. Whilst the ark provides a visible symbol of Yahweh's favour on Joshua, his presence and power is not reducible to this object, for if Yahweh had not stopped the flow of water in the Jordan River after the ark entered, the ark would have appeared impotent, and so Joshua. As such, it is fitting that after the mention of Joshua's exaltation in 4:14, the narrative ends by underlining the greatness of Yahweh.<sup>76</sup>

## 2. *The Monarchy*

The leadership function of the ark is not adopted in the following narratives of the Judges, in fact, the ark as a whole is conspicuously absent from the book.<sup>77</sup> Despite this, given how prevalent the theme of leadership appears in Joshua, it is not surprising that it does eventually reappear in the history. There are some who believe that the ark may have been historically adopted as a dynastic symbol by Saul, whether due to its location in Gibeah affiliated with Saul,<sup>78</sup> or because of the 'suppressed' ark narrative in which he had possession of it.<sup>79</sup> However, there is not enough evidence in the text of Dtr as it

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<sup>74</sup> Coats, "Ark of the Covenant," 139f. Metzler similarly argues that it is the 'border-crossing' event which legitimates Joshua's leadership 'with the help of Yhwh, whose powers are manifest in the form of the Ark.' (Metzler, "Ark of the Covenant," 105). Metzler here is drawing comparisons between the border-crossing of Joshua and Nergal, yet surely the comparison may also be broadened to Moses' use of the rod in crossing of the Red Sea, perhaps the most significant border-crossing in Israel's history.

<sup>75</sup> Coats, "Ark of the Covenant," 139. This is seen also in Josh 1.16-18, as Soggin explains, 'we have an interesting account of the Deuteronomic conception of human authority: the necessary condition for obedience to be accorded to it is that Yahweh should be with the person who exercises authority,' (Soggin, *Joshua*, 34).

<sup>76</sup> Butler, *Joshua*, 309.

<sup>77</sup> Daniel Fleming attributes the absence of the ark in Judges to the little interest it shows in the religious tradition of Jerusalem (Fleming, "David and the Ark," 77f.). Given Dtr's reliance on and faithfulness to source material, this could well be true.

<sup>78</sup> Coats, "Ark of the Covenant," 155.

<sup>79</sup> Van der Toorn and Houtman, "David and the Ark," 228f. Cf. Matthews, "Physical Space," 17.

stands to determine any substantial link between the ark and Israel's first monarch.<sup>80</sup> It is not until the reign of David and the narrative in which he brings the ark to Jerusalem in 2 Sam 6 that the ark is again used as a means of validating leadership. The legitimacy of this use is put to question, however, and as the final chapter will feature a detailed discussion on this narrative, we will satisfy ourselves here by simply noting that the ark is associated with leadership beyond the book of Joshua. When unpacking the significance of 2 Sam 6 later, the themes of leadership in Joshua explored above will therefore serve as an ideological foundation, and in particular the human leader's obedient submission to Yahweh's ultimate authority.

## **D. The Ark and the Cult**

### *1. Journey to the Temple*

We have so far considered several ways in which the ark interacts with the major themes of Dtr, including law and covenant, warfare in the land, and leadership. Throughout this we have also given consideration to the way in which associations of Yahweh's presence with the ark are ultimately founded on the covenant between Yahweh and Israel; the ark is a focal point for this divine-human relationship and the means by which Yahweh's will may be discerned. The presence of the ark with a leader, accompanied by miraculous signs, also serves to symbolize Yahweh's presence with and favour upon them. In this final section of the chapter we will further explore these notions of presence and covenant by surveying the relationship of the ark to the Jerusalem temple.

For the majority of its history, the ark is presented as a mobile object without a fixed home. Van der Toorn and Houtman record the temporary residing of the ark successively at 'Gilgal (Joshua 3-5; 5:10-15; 22; 1 Samuel 12), Shechem (Josh 8:30-35), Bethel (Judg 20:27), and Shiloh (1 Sam 3:3; cf. Judg 18:31).<sup>81</sup> Despite this nomadic presentation, it would seem that Dtr understands the ark's eventual goal as residency in

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<sup>80</sup> The only mention of Saul together with the ark is in 1 Sam 14:18, and this problematic passage was considered in the earlier section on divination.

<sup>81</sup> Van der Toorn and Houtman, "David and the Ark," 230. Van der Toorn and Houtman believe this to be part of the Deuteronomistic cover-up whereby multiple objects functioned as the ark within multiple sanctuaries.

the Jerusalem temple. This long term plan is first apparent in Deut 31, which ‘for the first time brings the topics of the ark of the Covenant and the Book of the Law together with that of the ‘place [the LORD] chooses.’<sup>82</sup> Deut 31:9-13 commands the regular reading of the law at the place which Yahweh will choose, and Wilson argues convincingly from similar biblical edicts that due to the association of the ark and the book of the law – as we considered above with regard to Joshua’s dependence upon it – the ark is envisaged as being present at the place of the law’s reading, that is, the Jerusalem temple.<sup>83</sup> As this is established as early as Deuteronomy, the ark’s appearances at various centres of worship are to be regarded as temporary and thus only a precursor to its final habitation. Within Van der Toorn and Houtman’s theory of a Deuteronomistic cover-up, the singularity of the ark – as opposed to multiple similarly-functioning objects – was part of the ideology of Dtr in which there was a single legitimate ark and temple to reflect Yahweh as the one legitimate God, and so ‘ark and temple had been connected from the beginning.’<sup>84</sup> Bracketing questions of an alternative tradition, this view holds true of Dtr’s monolatrous theology and exhibits the ideological link between monolatry and cultic centralization. Due to the emphasis on the ark’s uniqueness in association with the temple, it will benefit us here to consider the way in which sacrifice, a primary cultic expression, is presented in relation to them both.

When considering acts of sacrifice throughout Dtr, it is important to bear in mind the Deuteronomic legislation that the only lawful place to offer sacrifices is in ‘the place which Yahweh chooses’ (Deut 12:13-14). Therefore, pre-temple sacrifices in the presence of the ark could be said to testify to the legitimacy of the ark as a forerunner of the temple. One such occasion of sacrifice before the ark takes place in Jdg 20. After Israel’s second unsuccessful attack in their civil war against Benjamin, they enquire of Yahweh at the ark. It is not until this third occasion that they precede their enquiry with

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<sup>82</sup> McCormick, *Deuteronomy*, 438.

<sup>83</sup> Wilson, “Merely a Container?,” 234-236.

<sup>84</sup> Van der Toorn and Houtman, “David and the Ark,” 227 cf. Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 350.

weeping, fasting, and offering ‘burnt offerings and peace offerings before Yahweh,’<sup>85</sup> (v.26), for previously the extent of their contrition was limited to weeping (v.23). Arthur Cundall sees in the dual nature of the sacrifices offered the twofold purposes of both the people’s ‘repentance and their desire for reconciliation which would restore their communion with God.’<sup>86</sup> The emphasis on communion is picked up also by John Gray, who argues that this passage ‘probably reflects the reintegration of community and God through communion-offerings proper to that occasion.’<sup>87</sup> Israel’s desire for communion and right-standing before Yahweh is central to their covenantal relationship and the sacrifices are therefore appropriately offered before the container of the covenant tablets, or considered through another lens, the penitence occurs in the very presence of the one with whom they wish to commune. The following victory may imply Yahweh’s agency and acceptance of the sacrifices, yet the repetition of this offering in the following chapter casts doubt over the longevity of this communion and the extent to which it was re-established (21:4).<sup>88</sup>

Returning from the expression afforded by the sacrifice to the notion of the ark’s legitimacy, it may be observed how sacrifice takes place in many locations throughout the history where the ark is not mentioned, often without any note of condemnation. This observation undermines the way in which Jdg 20:26 could be used to demonstrate the unique legitimacy of the ark’s location, and it therefore may even be regarded as the exception rather than the rule. Yet how can this be reconciled with the key centralization ideology of Dtr? Benjamin Giffone believes that the answer may lie in the relative freedom afforded with regard to cult centralization *before* the ark arrived in the

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<sup>85</sup> Following Van der Toorn and Houtman’s rule (see above), the sacrifices were most likely offered before the ark.

<sup>86</sup> Cundall, *Judges*, 194. Cundall appears to base this view on the exposition of sacrifices in P; whilst arguable anachronistic, his observations here are nonetheless true to the text. Moore also notes the frequency of these sacrifices being offered in tandem (Moore, *Commentary on Judges*, 433), which may potentially detract from the significance of the individual purposes in favour of a more general offering dependent on context. However, as several of the passages in which they are offered would also require a response of repentance and desire for communion (e.g. Jdg 21:4; 2 Sam 6:17; 24:25), such a purpose can remain true here.

<sup>87</sup> Gray, *Judges*, 385. Gray also sees a similar purpose through the sacrifices offered in Josh 8:30-35, of note is that the ark is also present here whilst covenant community is re-established, though it is not as explicitly stated as here that the sacrifices are offered before it.

<sup>88</sup> The extent of Yahweh’s active intervention in the final chapters of Judges is a complex discussion and need not detain us here.

temple,<sup>89</sup> and this is possibly conveyed through 1 Kgs 3. The narrator begins the chapter by explaining that, ‘the people were still sacrificing on the high places, because there was no house built for the name of Yahweh until those days,’ (v.2) and goes on to explain how even Solomon ‘sacrificed and burned incense on the high places,’ (v.3) followed by an account of his sacrificing in the ‘great high place’ of Gibeon (v.4). Simon DeVries believes that this action by the king would have been ‘distasteful’ to the ideology of Dtr, yet it was conceded in order to make use of this source.<sup>90</sup> In contrast, Solomon standing before the ark in order to offer sacrifices in v.15 was precisely the ideology of Dtr,<sup>91</sup> and therefore his traverse from Gibeon to Jerusalem to undertake this after his vision from Yahweh further intimates the ark’s link to legitimate worship in the temple. It also anticipates what will follow in 1 Kgs 8 where the ark is accompanied by sacrifice during its procession to ‘its place’ in the temple (vv.5-6).

## 2. *The Ark in the Temple*

The dedication of the temple is the last episode in Dtr in which the ark is featured,<sup>92</sup> though the phrase ‘last but not least’ is appropriate here; a place is prepared for the ark in the inner sanctuary (1 Kgs 6:19) and it is brought to this central focal point with great celebration (1 Kgs 8:4-6). McCormick rightly grasps the significance of this pericope when he explains that, ‘in this concluding event... the historian identifies the purpose and point of its long journey, as well as the function of the ark in Deuteronomistic theology.’<sup>93</sup> Gary Knoppers also regards this as a ‘unique event, consummating one era and inaugurating another.’<sup>94</sup> In doing so, however, he argues for the ‘subordination’ of the ark to the temple,<sup>95</sup> which is true to the extent that the temple serves as the ark’s permanent residence, yet this should not be pushed too far and essentially deny the ongoing significance of this central object within the structure. The worth and function

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<sup>89</sup> Giffone, “Cult Centralization,” 446.

<sup>90</sup> DeVries, *1 Kings*, 51.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>92</sup> The Chronicler only mentions it twice after this event: 2 Chr 8:11 is an aside noting the holiness of the ark and its presence in the temple; 2 Chr 35:3 is less straight forward, and Fretheim suggests that it may allude to the use of the ark in cultic procession after its housing in the temple (Fretheim, “The Ark in Deuteronomy,” 10f.).

<sup>93</sup> McCormick, “From Box to Throne,” 181.

<sup>94</sup> Knoppers, “Prayer and Propaganda,” 242.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

which Dtr ascribes to the temple on account of the ark once again concerns the presence and covenant of Yahweh.

The relationship of Yahweh's presence to his temple is given considerable – if conflicting – attention in 1 Kgs 8. This is witnessed particularly when Solomon, the 'mouthpiece' of Dtr's theology,<sup>96</sup> declares in his dedicatory speech directed at Yahweh that, 'Heaven and earth cannot contain you, how much less this house which I have built,' (v.27), a statement which on face value would seem to contradict descriptions of Yahweh's presence and dwelling earlier in the chapter.<sup>97</sup> Roger Tames addresses this, acknowledging that whilst Dtr questions whether 'the temple can truly be said to be Yahweh's dwelling... he is quite content to include an ancient dedication, which plainly states that it is.'<sup>98</sup> He then argues that the author's inclusion of the seemingly contradictory view reflects his recognition that 'there is a spectrum of ways in which Yahweh's relationship to the temple can be understood.'<sup>99</sup> The notion of a spectrum is a constructive way to acknowledge the present tension and yet refuse a reductionist approach and put Yahweh in a box.

Indeed, at the heart of it, Dtr seems concerned not so much with the precise mode of Yahweh's manifestation, but rather he argues against his *limitation*; Dtr expresses through Solomon in 1 Kgs 8:27 that Yahweh's cannot be *contained* within the

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<sup>96</sup> DeVries, *1 Kings*, 121.

<sup>97</sup> 1 Kgs 8:10-11 describes a cloud filling the temple, signifying the 'glory of Yahweh', followed by a reference in vv.12-13 to Yahweh dwelling 'in thick cloud' and the temple as 'a place for your dwelling forever.' Descriptions of Yahweh's dwelling are applied to the temple here in a way not previously associated with the ark throughout Dtr (although Deut 5:22-27 admittedly references Yahweh speaking from the midst of thick gloom and darkness) and such bold claims at odds with the general ideology have led to the usual scholarly views of divergent traditions, with such references attributed to either a pre-Dtr source or Priestly revision. For example, McCormick views vv.11-12 as a supplement of P due to this episode's similarity to the cloud filling the Tabernacle in Ex 40:34-35 (McCormick, "From Box to Throne," 182) and other scholars have considered vv.12-13 to be an 'ancient hymn of dedication' (DeVries, *1 Kings*, 122; cf. Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 106). However, the current study is primarily interested in the text as it stands, and even if one were to concede the strength of the argument that vv.10-11 is a Priestly supplement, they would still need to come to terms with the similar ideology present in the earlier source which Dtr deliberately chose to include.

<sup>98</sup> Tames, "Holy and Beautiful House," 38.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 39. Brueggemann also addressed this tension, though he does not make an attempt at reconciliation, instead conceding, 'Israel is determined to remember that the issue of presence is deeply disputed and endlessly problematic. Yahweh's presence among his people is much desired, but never easy, never obvious, always a problem.' (Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 107).

temple.<sup>100</sup> This is also what we have argued regarding the ark in the conquest; Yahweh manifested his power by means of his intervention in historical events where the ark was present, yet he was not limited to this proximity. Dtr makes clear through the inclusion of the dedication hymn and the remainder of Solomon's speech that Yahweh – or his name – is somehow present in the temple, with the result that Yahweh is attentive to Israel's prayers at that location (v.29), yet his presence is not bound within or limited to this space.

At this point we land again at the covenantal relationship which underpins all conceptions of the ark and, by extension, the temple. The prayers which Solomon is particularly anxious for Yahweh to hear are the confessions of Israel due to future breaches of covenant, in order that he may forgive them (v.30), and his dedicatory speech is largely made up of potential scenarios in which this is the case.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, the culmination of the speech expresses a desire for Yahweh's continued presence among his people, the result of and requirement of which is covenantal fidelity (vv.57-61). Whatever the metaphysical understanding of Yahweh's presence and dwelling, it can only be secured by obedience. This is what we had discovered with the regards to the ark, and now it has become the focus of the temple in which the ark is placed. Just as Deuteronomy founded the significance of the ark on the placement of the covenant tablets within it, so this is reaffirmed and emphasized in this final account (vv. 9, 21) which extends the associative implications to the temple. With the ark established in its place at the centre of the temple, so the temple takes on its Deuteronomistic role as 'the guardian of, and witness to, the law.'<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> We will consider in the final chapter the way in which this limitation is avoided through the language of Yahweh's 'name'.

<sup>101</sup> A scenario of particular interest is that of Israel's defeat in warfare due to their sin (vv.33-34) and the hope that confession will result in a restoration to the land. This reflects themes already noted with the ark as a location of enquiry and repentance in warfare, and also points to the exilic setting of Dtr in which this becomes the primary national concern.

<sup>102</sup> Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 118. In addition to the ways in which this role has been explored in relation to the ark and also Solomon's speech, it is further evidenced towards the end of the history as the 'book of the law' is rediscovered within the temple (2 Kgs 22:8) and forms the basis of Josiah's renewed covenant and cult reforms as described in 2 Kgs 23.

At the conclusion of the previous chapter we summarized the ideology of Dtr which had been surveyed, and so here we are now able to summarize the manner in which the ark interacts with and embodies these themes, with particular consideration to the running threads of covenant and presence. The ark primarily gains its significance in Dtr from containing of the tablets of the decalogue which represent the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Although the ark is not reducible to a mere container, all of its functions are founded on this association, particularly Yahweh's perceived presence in witnessing his people's fidelity – or lack of – to the covenant stipulations. The ark therefore acts as a covenantal icon in the conquest; a symbol and reminder to Israel that Yahweh fights for them if they remain obedient, and it consequently functions as the focal point for Yahweh's action in crossing the Jordan and bringing down the walls of Jericho. Although the ark is associated with the presence and power of Yahweh, his intervention is not limited to its proximity.

In other warfare scenarios, the ark is primarily used as the location at which Yahweh may be consulted with regard to his will and the action which Israel should take in battle, at variance with the popularized notion of the ark as a war palladium by which its very proximity would guarantee victory. Because of the use of the ark as an icon of the covenant and the associated acts of presence and power, it is also used to validate the leadership of Joshua as he leads the conquest through obedience to the Torah, and relays Yahweh's commands concerning the ritual use of the ark by the priests. This unique ark is ultimately linked with the one Jerusalem temple as both represent the one true God of Israel, and this location serves as the final destination of the ark. Once there, the focal point of Yahweh's covenantal presence and attention – and the relationship between Yahweh and Israel – finds its permanent home and bestows its significance upon the larger structure.



## **Chapter 3:**

# **DIVINE IMAGES AND DIVINE ABANDONMENT IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST**

In the previous chapter we surveyed the biblical evidence which provided us with an understanding of the ark's function and its relationship to Yahweh within the Deuteronomistic History. We discussed its fundamental association with the tablets of the covenant, and also the way in which it served as a focal point for the divine presence, particularly as a location of Yahweh's attention, communication and acts of power. Before narrowing our focus onto the narratives in Samuel, we will first consider evidence from Israel's neighbours in Mesopotamia regarding the way in which they viewed cult statues and their relationship to the divine; first in a wider sense, and then with a particular focus on their function in warfare. These views will then be juxtaposed with the – often polemical – responses to divine statues found in biblical texts contemporaneous with Dtr. By doing this we will be able to discern the ways in which the Deuteronomistic ark coheres with the theology of Mesopotamian images, and equally the ways in which they differ, finally providing a more nuanced understanding of the significance of the ark and its association with the presence of Yahweh. In the final chapter, it will be seen how the Samuel narratives which feature the ark show awareness of these ancient Near Eastern views in dialogue with the orthodox Deuteronomistic theology.

### **A. The Divine Image**

#### *1. The Mīs Pī Ritual and Images in the Ancient Near East*

In order to understand the function of divine images in Mesopotamia and their relationship to the divine, the texts which describe the *Mīs Pī* or 'Mouth-washing' ritual provide significant insight, outlining the incantations and rites performed on statues of deities in order for them to function in the cult.<sup>1</sup> Victor Hurowitz identifies the purpose

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<sup>1</sup> Levtow, *Images of Others*, 91. Sources for the ritual are found primarily in the first-millennium B.C.E. and one of the primary texts is from sixth-century Babylon and is thus contemporaneous with the

of the ritual as, ‘assimilating the finite, physical image to the transcendent intangible god and transforming the humanly manufactured icon into a living deity.’<sup>2</sup> This mammoth task is achieved in a twofold manner which Michael Hundley divides into purification of the statue and the activation of its faculties.<sup>3</sup> The two-day ritual involves a procession of the image from the workshop to the river, the orchard, and finally to the temple, accompanied by various ritual actions, sacrifices and incantations.<sup>4</sup> Particularly relevant and significant elements of the ritual will be considered in the discussion below.

One of the primary emphases of the *Mīs Pī* is the insistence on the divine origin of the statue; this is evident in the repeated incantations, ‘born in heaven by your own power,’ (BR 3, 42) and ‘statue born in a pure place... statue born in heaven,’ (BR 54). Significantly, on the second day the hands of the craftsmen who made the statue are bound and ritually cut off as they claim, ‘I did not make him (the statue), Ninagal (who is) Ea (god) of the smith made him,’ (BR 81). Thorkild Jacobsen argues that ‘the meaning of what is done here is of course clear: The fact that the statue is the work of human hands is ritually denied and thus magically made nonexistent, nullified.’<sup>5</sup> Despite this, certain incantations ensure that the earthly role in the ritual is not denied entirely: ‘The statue is the creation of (both) god and human!’ (*STT 200* 19). Commenting on this phenomenon, Christopher Walker and Michael Dick argue that, even though human hands formed the statue, ‘the relevant gods inspired every aspect of their work and the workmanship is ascribed to the gods themselves.’<sup>6</sup> Therefore the god within the ritual is considered to be born in heaven, and even the human work on the statue is ultimately of divine origin.

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authorial setting of Dtr (Ibid., 90). For a translation of the ritual and incantation texts, see Walker and Dick, “Induction,” 72-115. Babylon Recension (BR): pp.72-83; Nineveh Recension (NR): pp.84-97; Incantation Tablet (*STT 200*): pp.98-100.

<sup>2</sup> Hurowitz, “The Mesopotamian God Image,” 147.

<sup>3</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 276. Levtow also describes the intended effects as purification and vivification, though adds a third, enthronement, which will be considered below (Levtow, *Images of Others*, 95).

<sup>4</sup> For a summary and then more detailed outline of the ritual, see Berlejung, “Washing the Mouth,” 49-68.

<sup>5</sup> Jacobsen, “The Graven Image,” 23f.

<sup>6</sup> Walker and Dick, “Induction,” 97.

After the successful participation of the statue in the ritual, what, if anything, may be said of its own divinity? At the outset this is evidently a complex and nuanced question, and Mark Smith aptly acknowledges the diverse ways in which scholars formulate the divine-statuary relationship in the secondary literature.<sup>7</sup> He nonetheless lands on and seems most content with Jacobsen's, 'the god *is* and at the same time *is not* the statue,'<sup>8</sup> which Jacobsen arrived at through evaluating the contradictory literature which seems to espouse both views.<sup>9</sup> For example, some texts which he takes into account refer to the statue of the god by the deity's name, such as: 'He... took Marduk by the hand and led him to Assur,' which would imply an equality of identity.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, however, other texts speak of how 'deities such as the sun-god Shamash and Ishtar the goddess of the morning and evening star were also seen as present in their respective heavenly bodies,' suggesting a distinction between the god and their statue.<sup>11</sup>

Jacobsen attempts to ease the tension of the statue's divine identity through explaining the difference between ancient and modern worldviews, in which the former's concept of reality did not involve the sharp dualist distinctions of the latter.<sup>12</sup> Space limitations do not afford us a detailed exploration into ancient and modern worldviews; it should perhaps be conceded that we can never fully step into the mindset of the original participants and the way in which they understood the identity of the statues, and we must necessarily translate ancient notions into a language comprehensible to our modern understanding of reality.<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Sommer rises to the challenge and presents the view of the gods as having 'fluid' or 'fragmented' identities which essentially blur the boundaries between both a particular god's localized identities and also between those of the different gods themselves.<sup>14</sup> He makes use of Barbara Porter's

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<sup>7</sup> For a few examples of such formulations see Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 183.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 183 citing Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," 18 (emphasis original).

<sup>9</sup> Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," 16-18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-20.

<sup>13</sup> Zainab Bahrani captures this difficulty facing the modern interpreter, 'we are dealing with a system of thought, a worldview that existed long before ours, yet we have no means of approaching it from outside our own ontological system.' (Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 122).

<sup>14</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 12ff.

summary in which she describes the Mesopotamian view of a god (*ilu*) as, ‘a set of related but not completely congruent phenomena and qualities, only one of which was imagined as a divine person.’<sup>15</sup> Because of this multifaceted divine nature, Sommer concludes that, ‘the statue was identical with the god, but it did not encompass the entirety of the god... the *šalmu* [image] was a body of the god, but it did not exhaust that god’s being.’<sup>16</sup> The statue was one of the elements, a part of the total system of which the god was constructed, and yet the god could not be reduced to this element alone.

A couple of consequential observations can be drawn from this conclusion and provide further insight. Firstly, the above discussion explains why there may be multiple statues of the same god.<sup>17</sup> If the fluid identity of the deity is viewed as the totality of various elements rather than an exclusive, self-contained unit, there would be little reason in limiting the number of images, and thus elements, of which it is constituted. Hundley observes from the different names given to statues of Marduk that ‘a deity may accumulate aspects by accumulating names,’<sup>18</sup> and therefore ‘by giving the various statues... different names and different functions, the Mesopotamians increased the range and prominence of their deities.’<sup>19</sup> Secondly, whilst they are a part of the total god-system, the statues retain a certain level of independence.<sup>20</sup> This is evidenced in the capture and possible destruction of the sun-god Shamash’s statue in Sippar; Jacobsen argues that despite the damage to the statue, ‘it is abundantly clear that the god was in no way annihilated,’<sup>21</sup> and Dick describes this relationship as being ‘not coterminous.’<sup>22</sup> Evidently the statue was in a certain sense dispensable to the well-being of the deity as a

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 18 citing Porter, “The Anxiety of Multiplicity,” 247. Hundley also writes on this concept, describing the god as a ‘constellation of aspects,’ (Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 210).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 22, 24. In Hundley’s words, ‘while fully the god, the statue is not the fullness of the god,’ (Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 279).

<sup>17</sup> Dick, “Prophetic Parodies,” 34; Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 19.

<sup>18</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 280. Hundley notes that a new name was likely given to the statue during the *Mīs Pī* ritual.

<sup>19</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 280f. The Babylonian creation epic, *Enuma Elish* ends by recounting the 50 names of Marduk (VI:121-VII:144), and this may be reflected in the different names given also to Marduk’s statues (George, “Cult of the Gods,” 66).

<sup>20</sup> Bahrani speaks of the image ‘becoming an entity in its own right, a being rather than a copy of a being,’ (Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 122).

<sup>21</sup> Jacobsen, “The Graven Image,” 22.

<sup>22</sup> Dick, “Image and the Deity,” 112. Hundley argues that the destruction of the statue would nonetheless ‘affect the deity by shrinking its sphere of influence,’ (Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 279).

whole.<sup>23</sup> In support of both the different functions of the multiple statues and their independence, Hundley cites an occasion on which Marduk's statue was captured, and as this statue was the one 'used in the *akītu* festival from Babylon, the festival could not be performed even though there were multiple other statues of Marduk in the Esagil temple of Babylon.'<sup>24</sup> This scenario suggests that the statues were not interchangeable and the cultic functions were specific to the statue.

This, however, did not result in the creation of statues as a free enterprise in which they could be factory-produced at the whim of the craftsmen; the situation at Sippar reveals the requirement of divine initiative in order for a new cult-statue to be formed. Sommer explains that in the absence of the Shamash statue, an image of the sun was formed which 'was not regarded as a physical manifestation of the god's presence... [it] was not subject to the *mīs pī* and thus merely represented the god.'<sup>25</sup> It was not until much later when a clay image of Shamash was discovered by the Euphrates and was taken as a sign of the god's favour that a true statue was able to be formed using the likeness of the clay image.<sup>26</sup> There was thus a requirement that the image must be made upon the initiative of the god, and it was required to be of a certain likeness of the god which Karel Van der Toorn describes as a 'canonical prototype of divine origin.'<sup>27</sup> Even if it was not the fullness of the deity, to be considered truly divine, these conditions had to be met.<sup>28</sup>

The above discussion outlines the Mesopotamian view of how their cult statues could be considered divine. Before moving on to biblical critiques of this concept, we shall briefly consider a few aspects of the statue's function within the cult. Hundley neatly

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<sup>23</sup> This could be contrasted with some older Christmas-tree lights in which the way they are wired together ensures that damage to one bulb results in the breakdown of the entire system.

<sup>24</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 280.

<sup>25</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Van der Toorn, "The Iconic Book," 236.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>28</sup> Berlejung explains how the date and timing of the ritual was the decision of the gods (Berlejung, "Washing the Mouth," 50f.) and Walker and Dick state that the gods are also in control over the workers, location and the 'birth' (Walker and Dick, "Induction," 115).

captures the Mesopotamian thought process which led to the lay behind the creation of the images:

Mesopotamians presumably felt a need to bring heaven to earth, to bring the deity to the heart of human community in a form that could be accessed, cared for, and influenced, so that the otherwise distant deity could be present and persuaded to act on the people's behalf. The cult image situated in the temple provided that form.<sup>29</sup>

These needs were addressed at the culmination of the *Mīs Pī* ceremony at which point the statue was enthroned in the temple,<sup>30</sup> and once there, the vivification of the statue's senses through the ritual enabled it to take part in offerings, even to the point of reliance upon them.<sup>31</sup> W. G. Lambert suggests that the ideology behind the provision of food for the gods can be found in several mythological texts, and particularly in *Enuma Elish*.<sup>32</sup> Within this epic, the necessity for divine shrines is established: 'shrines for all the gods need provisioning, that you may be established where their sanctuaries are,' (IV:11-12) and humans were established as the gods' servants: '...(Ea) created mankind, on whom he imposed the service of the gods, and set the gods free,' (VI:33-34).<sup>33</sup> If this service was done in the proper manner, it would consequently ensure and maintain the 'blessing and benefit' which came from the gods.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, Smith speaks of the statue in the temple as 'a mechanism for divine communion with humans; hearing and seeing the deity, being seen and heard by the

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<sup>29</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 211. Also Sparks: 'A chief function of humanity was to care for these gods... consequently, the gods were regularly bathed and clothed, provided with food and drink, taken on trips by land and river, and even granted sexual liaisons with their divine spouses.' (Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 147). One ritual text in Pritchard, *Texts*, 338-339 (*ANET*) outlines instructions for the priest in undertaking the cultic duties during two days in the month, including: 'He shall serve the evening meal to Anu, Antu, and all the gods without interruption... He shall offer the meal to all the deities dwelling in the court.' See also pp.343-345 for a more detailed list of daily offerings.

<sup>30</sup> Levtow, *Images of Others*, 92.

<sup>31</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 276. Also Van der Toorn: 'There, in the secrecy of his private quarters, the god enjoyed all the trappings of a daily cult.' (Van der Toorn, "The Iconic Book," 233).

<sup>32</sup> Lambert, "Food and Drink," 197f.

<sup>33</sup> These segments were identified as relevant by Lambert (Lambert, "Food and Drink," 198), and the translations are from Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 48, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Curtis, "Images in Mesopotamia," 44. Marc Linssen describes the nature of this blessing as 'individual and communal prosperity and well-being.' (Linssen, *Uruk and Babylon*, 12).

deity.<sup>35</sup> One way in which this communication took place was through the divinatory interpretation of the Babylonian New Year festival; Van der Toorn describes the way in which omens would be received based on the appearance of the statue in the procession, and as such, a good omen may be determined by proper care of the image.<sup>36</sup> In these matters of care and sacrifice in exchange for receiving good omens and blessings, the interdependent nature of the human-divine relationship is revealed;<sup>37</sup> both parties required one another for their wellbeing.

There is still one final aspect of the divine images which merits our attention. Hendel notes the historic similarity between the divine images and the image of the king, to the point where, ‘the divine statue signified the earthly king as the legitimate representation of god on earth.’<sup>38</sup> The rarity with which the primary cult statue was seen, together with the fact that it was led by the king during its annual procession, provides a sense of how the two could become associated.<sup>39</sup> On this line of thought, Levtow argues that the enthronement of the deity in the temple at the culmination of the *Mīs Pî* ritual ‘suggests that it is a ritual of royalty linked to the security of Mesopotamian society’s political structures.’<sup>40</sup> The exact mode in which the images supported the monarchy is more difficult to tie down to a unified concept due to the variety of views throughout Mesopotamian history, but the significance lies in the fact that in some manner, the image served as royal validation. This imperial aspect of the images in addition to the other concepts surveyed above will bear importance as we turn to the biblical response.

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<sup>35</sup> Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 186. For example, ‘prayers were deposited before the statue,’ (Curtis, “Images in Mesopotamia,” 40).

<sup>36</sup> Van der Toorn, “The Iconic Book,” 234f. See Schaudig, “Bēl Bows, Nabû Stoops!,” 557ff. for a more detailed discussion of these New Year processional omens. An Egyptian parallel can be seen in the sacred bark, which after being consulted ‘would respond yes or no by bowing fore or aft,’ (Noegel, “Egyptian Origin,” 228). Other types of omen were also received based on outwards appearances of natural phenomena, including those of the heavenly bodies or the entrails of sacrificial animals (Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 217); however, omens took on various forms and were not limited to these (Ibid., 216ff.).

<sup>37</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 211. See also, Linssen, *Uruk and Babylon*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Hendel, “Aniconism and Anthropomorphism,” 225.

<sup>39</sup> Van der Toorn, “The Iconic Book,” 233.

<sup>40</sup> Levtow, *Images of Others*, 99.

## 2. Icon Parodies in Deutero-Isaiah

The prophetic books in the Hebrew Bible contain a number of responses to the Mesopotamian concept of images as outlined above.<sup>41</sup> We will focus here on the ‘icon parodies’ found in Deutero-Isaiah, as they were most likely composed in Babylon during the exilic period and are therefore from around the same period as both Dtr and the *Mīs Pī* ritual.<sup>42</sup> In particular, we will examine the text of Isa 44:9-20 in which the author depicts the creation of an idol in a satirical manner with a more explicit note of condemnation – or perhaps exasperation – towards the end. Not only is this passage ‘the most extensive parody on the manufacturing of a cult image in the Hebrew Bible,’<sup>43</sup> but Dick also makes the convincing suggestion that the reverse order of the crafting of the idol in Isaiah shows awareness of the *Mīs Pī* ritual and may be ‘mocking its apparently unnatural sequence.’<sup>44</sup> Making a similar connection, Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft take this passage as a ‘counterpoint’ to the divine claims of the *Mīs Pī*, as ‘the prophet gleefully insisted, in order to discredit the Mesopotamian cult-object, on the fact of its human manufacture.’<sup>45</sup> This natural fact of its origin thus renders, in the mind of the prophet, a purely natural object, and he attributes to a deceived mind the fact that the idol worshipper cannot understand how he ‘[falls] down before a block of wood!’ (v19). As a natural object, it is unable to respond to the cries of deliverance from the supplicant (vv. 17), indeed, the prophet seems to imply that the incidental

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<sup>41</sup> See Dick, “Prophetic Parodies,” 16ff. for a full treatment. Such passages include: Jer 10:3-15; Isaiah 40:18-20; 41:6-7; 44:9-22; Hos 8:4-6; 13:2-3; Mic 5:12-13; Hab 2:18-19.

<sup>42</sup> Dick, “Prophetic Parodies,” 36; Levto, *Images of Others*, 90f. There has been much written on the ‘aniconism’ of Israel throughout its history, and the possibility that there may have been a statue depicting Yahweh, though it appears that no compelling evidence has been found to date (for various discussions in this area, see Hallo, “Cult Statue,” 1-4; Dick, “Prophetic Parodies,” 4-16; Hendel, “Aniconism and Anthropomorphism,” 212-24; Miller, *Religion of Ancient Israel*, 15-22). Whilst there is no major consensus regarding Israel’s earlier period, Tyggve Mettinger has identified a later ‘programmatic aniconism’ or iconoclasm which was more vehemently opposed to the use of images rather than an earlier ‘*de facto* aniconism’ which he argues was largely cultural (Mettinger, *No Graven Image?*, 195-197. Van der Toorn also writes of Israel’s iconoclastic tendencies which began with the Deuteronomists, see Van der Toorn, “The Iconic Book,” 240). It is this programmatic opposition to cult images which can be found in the parodies of Deutero-Isaiah.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Ellenbogen and Tugendhaft, *Idol Anxiety*, 1. Smith also argues for this emphasis on human agency within the other Isaiah idol parodies due to the technical vocabulary used for the image construction (Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 187).



activities which make use of the surplus wood serve the craftsman better than the god which he created (vv.15-16).

In a slightly circular manner, however, the *Mīs Pī* ritual contains a response to such criticisms laid down by the prophet. Sommer argues that the Mesopotamians also ‘recognized the impossibility of a man creating a god. Rather than desisting from the attempt, however, they claimed that they were not making a god in the first place, but the gods themselves were.’<sup>46</sup> Our survey of the ritual above paid attention to its primary emphasis on the divine origin of the image; the human craftsmanship itself was diminished through the rituals and incantations. Following this line, Dick argues that the Deuteronomistic criticism against the images having no senses in Deut 4:28 – and present in a sense in Isaiah with its implicit assertion that the image cannot save – was clearly anticipated in the *Mīs Pī* ritual itself with the claim that, ‘this statue without its mouth opened cannot smell incense, cannot eat food, nor drink water,’ (*STT 200* 43-44).<sup>47</sup> Although the object of the prophet’s criticism, the ritual of mouth opening also provided the answer.

The earthly nature of the images serves as the target of the prophet’s ridicule, however, this factor does not reach the core foundation of and motivation for the parodies. Dick goes straight to the heart of the methodological fault which lies behind the polemic of Deutero-Isaiah, in that it contrasts ‘a phenomenological description of the Mesopotamian practice with a theological portrayal of Yahwism.’<sup>48</sup> By focusing on the physical construction of the image and disregarding the theology which lay behind the ritual, the prophet would leave himself open to a Mesopotamian parody which ‘could just as easily have parodied an obscure desert god who liked to live in an acacia

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<sup>46</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 23. Quoted sometimes in regard to the divine origin of the images is Esarhaddon’s prayer directed at the gods which implores their help due to the incapability of human craftsmanship: ‘With whom, o Great Gods, do you order me to fashion gods...?... With (the help of) deaf and blind humans who ignore their own nature and whose future is undecided? The creation of gods and goddesses is your business.’ (Van der Toorn, “The Iconic Book,” 235).

<sup>47</sup> Dick, “Prophetic Parodies,” 26.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

box...'<sup>49</sup> We will attempt a more nuanced comparison of the ark and divine images in the following section, but it should nonetheless be noted here that both Israel and Mesopotamia fall at similar hurdles if only the phenomena of their worship is taken into account. As such, it is more likely that the deeper foundation of the idol parody is the variance in worldview and deity concept which separates the two cultures. The parody is embedded within a courtroom scene in which witnesses are called upon to testify to Yahweh's deliverance;<sup>50</sup> and therefore the real emphasis is not so much on the images themselves, but rather they are used as a foil to point to the general impotence of the Mesopotamian gods. The participants in this polemic battle should not then be identified as 'God vs. Image' but 'Yahweh vs Marduk'.<sup>51</sup>

The exilic setting for these criticisms of Mesopotamian images and gods explains the need for polemic in place of a more detached theological discussion; the gods of Babylon posed a threat to Israel.<sup>52</sup> This factor can be seen in another text of Deutero-Isaiah: 'Bel has stooped down, Nebo stoops over... they stooped over, they have bowed down together; they could not rescue the burden, but have themselves gone into captivity,' (Isa 46:1-2). Hanspeter Schaudig argues that this text, which is itself a parody of the Babylonian New Year festival, is 'directed towards Judean fellow-deportees, to prevent them from being overwhelmed by the glory of a Babylonian *pompa*.'<sup>53</sup> Imagining and predicting the same fate for their captors as they themselves had experienced must have proved a comforting remedy for the inevitable hopelessness which surrounded those in exile. Given the link between the deities and the kings outlined in the previous section, the target of the parodies was not the gods alone, but the human powers also. Nathaniel Levtow thus sees the icon parodies as 'culturally

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. There is something particularly ironic about the Isaiah parody mocking the Mesopotamian for '[falling] down before a block of wood,' (Isa 44:19) when this is precisely what Joshua does before the ark in Dtr (Josh 7:6). This irony seems also lost on some confessional scholars who would argue that 'it is folly to believe that supreme power resides in a block of wood,' (Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 175f.) which could just as easily be used as a criticism against the ark if the more nuanced theology is not taken into account.

<sup>50</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 174; Dick, "Prophetic Parodies," 24.

<sup>51</sup> Or indeed, Yahweh vs. any or all members of the Babylonian pantheon.

<sup>52</sup> Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," 28.

<sup>53</sup> Schaudig, "Bēl Bows, Nabû Stoops!," 561.

oriented responses to the sociopolitical challenges of Israel's exile in Babylonia.<sup>54</sup> We see, therefore, that although the polemic of Deutero-Isaiah is targeted at Mesopotamian images, its faulty methodology and the exilic setting in which the parodies were written suggests that the differences in concept may not be quite so extreme.

## **B. The Deuteronomistic Ark as a Divine Image**

We have considered above how the protests of Deutero-Isaiah against Mesopotamian concepts of deity and image were rooted more in the political situation of Israel than in their theological differences. In addition, by reading the material which outlined the ANE understanding of images in the first section of this chapter and replacing words such as 'deity' and 'statue' with 'Yahweh' and 'ark', it may be seen that on a superficial level at least, there is a certain resonance between the Mesopotamian and biblical concepts. However, though the root of the icon parodies may have been founded in politics, the choice of images as the object of the mockery makes clear that Israel had certainly not adopted this iconic concept wholesale. Therefore we will now consider the similarities and differences between the Deuteronomistic ark and the Mesopotamian concepts of deity and image, in order to reach a more nuanced understanding of how Dtr viewed this central cult object. We will refrain from relying too much here on material from 1 Sam 4-6 or 2 Sam 6, for, as will be argued in the final chapter, these passages seem to play on a concept of the ark held by Israel at variance with Deuteronomistic theology, and so they warrant a more detailed discussion. Nonetheless, these are valuable sources for understanding the ark as a divine image and so we should acknowledge that this present section should ultimately be supplemented by the final chapter in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the concept in Dtr.

### *1. Ontology*

We begin by laying a more ontological foundation of the ark before proceeding with the functional comparison, and as the significance of an image has to do with the concept of the corresponding deity, we will first address Dtr's view regarding the locative nature of Yahweh. We considered above how Sommer argues for the fluidity model as a way of

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<sup>54</sup> Levtow, *Images of Others*, 90.

understanding Mesopotamian deities, yet he claims that this notion is rejected by Dtr.<sup>55</sup> He points to the use of ‘oneness’ in the Shema of Deut 6:4 as chief evidence for Dtr’s view of divine selfhood: ‘the Shema... does not so much address God’s number as it explores God’s nature: Yhwh’s self is not fluid.’<sup>56</sup> Sommer also addresses the way that Yahweh’s non-fluid self is presented in 1 Kgs 8, arguing that Dtr emphasizes Yahweh’s heavenly dwelling, whilst his *shem* (name) in the temple is ‘a token of divine attention,’ rather than any sort of extension of self.<sup>57</sup> Other commentators nevertheless hold a different view of what is meant by Yahweh’s *shem* in this scenario, offering definitions such as ‘hypostasis’<sup>58</sup> or indeed an ‘extension’ of Yahweh, implying a closer relationship between the deity and his name.<sup>59</sup> In line with this latter view, Noth affirms that the language regarding Yahweh’s *shem* refers to ‘the location of the invisible divine presence.’<sup>60</sup>

The multiplicity of scholarly views and definitions regarding Yahweh’s *shem* reflects in a way the discrepancy between understandings of Yahweh’s relationship to the temple within the text of 1 Kgs 8 which we considered in the previous chapter, and may be due to the fact that the term is never explicitly defined or explained within the text of Dtr itself and can only be understood through its various contexts.<sup>61</sup> This ambiguity should

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<sup>55</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 58.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 67. Other commentators recognise the aspect of Yahweh’s unity as well as uniqueness reflected in this verse, though do not reach quite the ontological conclusions of Sommer. See e.g. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 169 and McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 141 who relate it to Yahweh’s omnipotence, and Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 63 who is closer to Sommer in viewing it as a confession ‘in face of the multiplicity of divergent traditions and sanctuaries of Yahweh.’ We discussed in the first chapter that the practical context of the Shema and other monolatrous texts showed more of a concern for obedience and right worship than metaphysical discussions of Yahweh’s being. However, if translated into this ontological line of thought, the uniqueness of Yahweh among the gods and his sovereignty over creation would suggest a belief in his unity of being.

<sup>57</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 63 (emphasis original).

<sup>58</sup> ‘Hypostasis’ (from the Gk. ὑπόστασις) is presumably understood by these authors as ‘the essential or basic structure/nature of an entity’ (Bauer *et al.*, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1040), or in this case, the essential nature of Yahweh.

<sup>59</sup> DeVries, *1 Kings*, 125; Gray, *I & II Kings*, 205; Bahrani, *The Graven Image*, 134.

<sup>60</sup> Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 94. One particular reason for this discrepancy of views is perhaps due to Sommer understanding Dtr’s *shem* theology as a rejection of the term’s connotations in earlier biblical literature (Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 59, 62), whereas this discontinuity may not be recognised or emphasized to the same extent by other scholars.

<sup>61</sup> Within Dtr, outside of its connection with the specific location, Yahweh’s name is used to swear by (Deut 6:13; 10:20; 1 Sam 20:42), to bless (Deut 10:8; 21:5; 2 Sam 6:18), to minister by (Deut 18:5, 7), to speak by (Deut 18:22), it is to be feared (Deut 28:58), it is proclaimed (Deut 32:3), magnified (2 Sam

in turn serve as a caution against holding steadfast to any strict understanding of how Dtr viewed Yahweh's presence.<sup>62</sup> Further, Dtr seems concerned in 1 Kgs 8 not so much with metaphysical concepts of Yahweh's presence, but rather with his action and intervention in Israel's present and future life. If, however, these more pragmatic views are interpreted into a metaphysical framework, the repetition of Yahweh 'hearing' Israel's supplication from *heaven* (e.g. 1 Kgs 8:30, 34, 36) rather than from the temple does seem to imply a certain conceptual disassociation between Yahweh and any specific earthly location,<sup>63</sup> which in turn would suggest that Yahweh's name in the temple is not to be fully identified with Yahweh himself.<sup>64</sup> This is in line with what we have argued in the previous chapter in which Yahweh is not limited to the proximity of the ark, nor that of the temple, but rather he acts from above and beyond it. These considerations serve to support the more 'unified' understanding of Yahweh in Dtr and in turn prohibits a direct equation of the ark and Yahweh in Dtr's understanding with a Mesopotamian concept of the divine image and their 'fluid' or 'fragmented' gods, in which the presence of the god in the statue is identified with the god themselves.

Therefore, when scholars make claims such as, 'the biblical ark is... a box identified with the divine presence as would be a sacred statue or other "image.",'<sup>65</sup> qualification is needed. Primarily, although the ark is associated with divine presence as an icon which points to the reality of Yahweh, and the location at which his attention is fixed – and as we have seen particularly in Joshua, a focal point of his action – it is nevertheless *not* Yahweh. A significant additional qualification and difference is the unique nature of the presence associated with the ark. Sommer makes the case that Yahweh's *shem* itself reflects Yahweh's body in its non-fragmentation and so is only legitimately in one

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7:26), called upon (1 Kgs 18:24; 2 Kgs 5:11), and associated with Yahweh's reputation (Josh 9:9; 1 Sam 12:22) and authority (1 Sam 17:45). Throughout the history we therefore see a close connection between Yahweh's name and his attributes and character, though it is not directly equated with Yahweh himself.

<sup>62</sup> So Brueggemann: 'Yahweh's presence among Yahweh's people is much desired, but never easy, never obvious, always a problem.' (Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 107).

<sup>63</sup> Such disassociation likely emerged from the exilic setting of the work and thus the need to process the destruction of the temple, see Pakkala, "Monotheism," 173.

<sup>64</sup> Von Rad similarly distinguishes between the two when he argues that, 'it is not Jahveh himself who is present at the shrine, but only his name and his guarantee of his will to save.' (Von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, 38f.).

<sup>65</sup> Fleming, "David and the Ark," 75.

location, hence the centralization of worship at the temple,<sup>66</sup> and by retrospective extension, also the ark. This notion fits within Dtr's monolatrous worldview and goes some way towards explaining his opposition towards the worship of images; for an element of Sommer's fluidity concept explored above was the fractured boundaries not only within the deity's own identity, but also between the different deities themselves. As Yahweh's selfhood is non-fragmented *and* unique, the worship of images would suggest either a false understanding of Yahweh, or the worship of other gods.<sup>67</sup>

Before moving on to consider more functional elements of the distinct cult objects, there is one important feature of the ark's very nature to be discussed, namely, its divine origin. We observed above that a divine image would need to be made by divine initiative and instruction in order for it to be regarded as legitimate. Metzler considers this to be the case with the ark also, as 'the Ark might have been physically constructed by Bezalel (Exodus 37) or Moses (Deuteronomy 10), but the blueprint for this special piece of cultic furniture comes from the deity. In some sense, then, the Ark may be regarded as having been built by Yhwh himself.'<sup>68</sup> Whilst this could be true of ark in Deut 10, the brevity of the instruction to 'make an ark of wood for yourself' (v.1) does not place great emphasis on any notion of divine origin or template, even if the initiative is Yahweh's. However, the idea of divine origin comes across in a stronger sense in P's account of the ark's construction. Exodus 25 goes into great detail regarding the materials and measurements for the ark and its cover; the coating of the wood in gold is particularly reminiscent of a divine statue, even if it lacks precious stones.<sup>69</sup> A further similarity in P is the endowment of the tabernacle and furniture craftsmen with skill: 'I have filled [Bezalel] with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship... and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you,' (Ex 31:3, 6). This bears great similarity to Esarhaddon's request that the gods would aid the statue craftsmen: 'The

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<sup>66</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 67. Von Rad also regards that *shem* in Deuteronomy 'may be established in a particular place, the conception is definite and within fixed limits,' (Von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, 38).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. Pakkala believes that this opposition to idols may have been a precursor to later monotheistic beliefs (Pakkala, "Monotheism," 174).

<sup>68</sup> Metzler, "Ark of the Covenant," 168.

<sup>69</sup> Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," 15; Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 213.

expert craftsmen whom you have appointed for this work – endow them with a superb intelligence, comparable to the god Ea, their creator. Teach them skills! May they, at your lofty command, make all their handiwork succeed through the craft of Niššiku.’<sup>70</sup>

The lack of these ideas in Deut 10 regarding the ark is telling, and yet, there is a strong association of divine origin with the tablets themselves; the creation account of the ark in Dtr insists that Yahweh himself wrote on the tablets of the Decalogue which were then deposited into the ark (vv. 2, 4). Van der Toorn particularly stresses the importance of the tablets in his argument that the ark previously contained an image of Yahweh, and ‘when [the ark] became a shrine for the revealed Word of God, its new function did not diminish its holiness; the written law had, in effect, taken the place of the image.’<sup>71</sup> This is part of Van der Toorn’s wider argument that the Torah effectively replaced the function of the divine icon in Israel’s history during the Deuteronomistic reform.<sup>72</sup> He observes the similarities between the Torah and divine statues, including their divine origin, and he draws particular attention to the similar miraculous find of a divine template from ages past, such as the Mesopotamian image of Shamash by the Euphrates and the biblical Torah in the temple; ‘it is telling that a Babylonian king applies the topos of chance discovery to an image, and the Deuteronomists to a book.’<sup>73</sup> If the divine origin can be argued of the Torah as a whole, how much more so the Decalogue which was written by Yahweh himself. As such, when we draw comparisons between the ark and the ANE images, it is not the box alone which we are considering, but also that which it contains. To elucidate this further, we should consider certain functions that the ark – and thus the covenant within it – has in common with divine images within the cult.

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<sup>70</sup> Van der Toorn, “The Iconic Book,” 235f. Sommer makes a similar point about the second half of Exodus serving as a form of *Mīs Pī* ritual on account of the heavenly prototype and divine spirit with the workmen (Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 74f.).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 242. This then reverses the notion that the ark as a container for the tablets leads to demythologization (*Ibid.*, 241).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 239ff.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

## 2. Cultic Function

A major cultic similarity shared between with ark and the divine image is their ultimate destination in the temple: ‘the king leads a procession into the Temple and the Ark of the Covenant is placed in the primary point of focus, exactly where one would expect to find the divine image in a temple of the ancient world.’<sup>74</sup> Just as the *Mīs Pî* ritual would culminate in the procession and installation of the divine image in the temple, so 1 Kgs 8 presents this happening in the case of the ark. In light of the above discussions, an immediate difference presents itself however: the uniqueness of the ark in the temple. There were many temples in the ancient Near East which contained images,<sup>75</sup> but for Dtr, the Jerusalem temple was a unique location associated with the one true God.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, once the ark had been deposited in the temple, Dtr presents this as the place at which it remained. Fretheim argues that the mention of the ark in 2 Chr 35:3 alludes to its continued use in procession during the monarchic period,<sup>77</sup> but this is a more hypothetical argument based on historical reconstruction.<sup>78</sup> With regards to what Dtr actually provides us with, 1 Kgs 8 certainly presents a sense of finality, as this is the last mention of the ark in the history. This is in contrast to the use of images in Mesopotamia, for example, during the annual procession of Marduk in the New Year festival;<sup>79</sup> though the temple may serve as the primary destination for Marduk, his statue is not a permanent fixture. There is therefore a unique factor to the placement of the ark in the temple which is not paralleled in Mesopotamia.

Furthermore, the very nature of the presence of the ark in the temple differs to that of the Mesopotamian statues. As we discussed above, the care for the image in the sanctuary in return for divine favour revealed the co-dependent nature of the human-deity relationship. Such cultic coercion, however, is not found in the Jerusalem temple.

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<sup>74</sup> McCormick, “From Box to Throne,” 182f. See also Dick, “Prophetic Parodies,” 9.

<sup>75</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 234; George, “Cult of the Gods,” 66.

<sup>76</sup> Dtr’s stress on this uniqueness may be highlighted by the historical possibility of multiple objects functioning as arks which we discussed previously (Van der Toorn and Houtman, “David and the Ark,” 230).

<sup>77</sup> Fretheim, “The Ark in Deuteronomy,” 10.

<sup>78</sup> Although referencing Fretheim, Seow is more cautious in arguing that, ‘beyond the processions under David and Solomon, it is difficult to speak with certainty about cultic processions of the ark in the monarchic period,’ (Seow, “Ark of the Covenant,” 390).

<sup>79</sup> Schaudig, “Bēl Bows, Nabû Stoops!,” 557f.



The emphasis is placed on the covenantal significance of the ark; Yahweh does not require feeding or care, but rather he demands cultic and nomistic fidelity in order for the blessings of the covenant to continue and be made manifest.<sup>80</sup> This fits within Dtr's wider understanding of Yahweh's sovereignty. Hundley argues that, 'without statues the gods cannot function on earth,'<sup>81</sup> hence the need to make images in order for the deity to be active among the people.<sup>82</sup> We argued in the second chapter that this is not the case with Yahweh, and although the ark provided a reminder of Yahweh's covenantal promises and focal point for divine action, the absence of the ark did not render Yahweh impotent.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, in contrast to the Mesopotamian view, Yahweh's prominence is not established through the creation of additional arks and temples, but rather in the declaration that he is restrained to no single location. Solomon's rhetorical question and answer in 1 Kgs 8:28 sheds further light on this notion: 'But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house which I have built!' Solomon appears to show incredulity here to the idea that Yahweh may be brought to earth in order to be coaxed into giving blessings,<sup>84</sup> and the remainder of his prayer makes clear that the temple is 'but the meeting place of god and man, from where and to where man can address his prayers to the divine presence...'<sup>85</sup> Thus the placement of the ark in the temple is not accompanied by the connotation of limitation which may be understood from the Mesopotamian view of their images.

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<sup>80</sup> This is particularly seen in the subordination of sacrifice to obedience in the case of Saul (1 Sam 15:22).

<sup>81</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 278. Hundley derives this from the purported ghost-like nature of the Elamite gods which resulted from the destruction of their statues (Ibid., 277). The need for statues in order for the gods to be established is also to be drawn from the excerpts from *Enuma Elish* considered above.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>83</sup> The obviousness of this statement is evidenced by the countless examples of Yahweh's intervention in Israel's history in Dtr where the ark is not present. For a widespread example, the frequent use of the idiom 'Yahweh has given them into the hands of Israel' (and similar variations) reveals the implied agency of Yahweh in warfare, and the ark is only present on a handful of occasions which we have already addressed.

<sup>84</sup> Gray here argues that this verse may be parenthetical, as it implies a 'consciousness that the building of the Temple suggested a limitation of the Deity,' (Gray, *I & II Kings*, 205). Wiseman thus argues from the nature of Solomon's prayer that 'God's temple will not limit or localize his activity,' (Wiseman, *I and 2 Kings*, 129).

<sup>85</sup> Gray, *I & II Kings*, 205.

The temple's function as a meeting place and location for prayer also speaks to the different cultures' views on how one communicates with the deity via the image. The requirement for the deity's manifestation in their earthly statue in order to be active naturally leads to the belief that an image 'was the only point at which a god could be reached.'<sup>86</sup> As such, Van der Toorn explains how people would try to show devotion through physical contact with the image during its procession in order to receive various favours.<sup>87</sup> However, no such physical contact was required – or even permitted – with the cult image in Israel; we have seen in the previous chapter how leaders would often approach the ark to communicate with Yahweh, and yet the following chapter will reveal the grave consequences of direct contact. In a similar line, the receiving of omens also occurred in a different manner. We discussed above how prophecies for the future could be drawn from the appearance of the cult image, yet for Israel, communication was not about appearance but *word*. In Josh 7:10-15 and Jdg 20:28, Dtr presents Yahweh as responding to the enquiries of the leaders through verbal communication; the appearance of the ark was not taken into account.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, as we argued in the previous chapter, sacrifice before the ark could serve as an expression of repentance with the desire to re-establish covenantal relationship,<sup>89</sup> differing from the Mesopotamian view of sacrifice as something upon which the deity is dependent.

A final consideration regarding the ark is its non-anthropomorphic nature. This by itself would not make it any less valid as a divine image in the mind of a Mesopotamian, as Hendel argues that divine 'emblems provide an aniconic alternative' to anthropomorphic images.<sup>90</sup> However, even with this reasoning, could a non-anthropomorphic ark be designated as a divine emblem? In the broadest sense it would appear so, yet the concept requires some refining. We have previously discussed the idea of the ark as a footstool for the deity, and this becomes more apparent with its installation in the temple. In 1 Kgs 8, the ark is brought into 'the most holy place, under

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<sup>86</sup> Van der Toorn, "The Iconic Book," 235.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 233. See Mayer Gruber's comments on 'kissing the feet' as divine obeisance (Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication*, 273-77). See also Sasson, *From the Mari Archives*, 246.

<sup>88</sup> 1 Sam 3 may also be an example of Yahweh's verbal communication in association with the ark, see e.g. Faraoanu, "Symbol of Discernment," 103 and Klein, *1 Samuel*, 32.

<sup>89</sup> The following chapter will also consider the celebratory nature of sacrifice.

<sup>90</sup> Hendel, "Aniconism and Anthropomorphism," 210.

the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim made a covering over the ark ...' (vv.6-7). Several scholars – most notable Mettinger – regard the cherubim as forming a throne, 'but, for human eyes, the throne was empty. God was enthroned in invisible majesty above the meeting wings of the two cherubim.'<sup>91</sup> If the cherubim formed a throne, the ark placed underneath them would thus be rendered a footstool for the divinity,<sup>92</sup> and so it may be considered in some manner to be a 'non-anthropomorphic divine image,' or even, 'divine furniture.'<sup>93</sup> This in turn provides the conceptual background to what we considered in the previous chapter regarding the covenant being placed in the footstool of the deity in order that it may be watched over. Furthermore, the invisible nature of the 'presence' above the ark then has repercussions for the monarchy. We discussed above how the divine image may assist in validating the rule of the king, yet Hendel explains the consequence of the 'empty throne' of the cherubim, in that it 'exalts the celestial king while at the same time deleting the anthropomorphic image that mirrors and authorizes the political king.'<sup>94</sup> For Dtr, the ark is therefore not to be used by the monarchy in an attempt to secure their rule, as we shall see.

Therefore, we have approached the ways in which an understanding of the ark in Dtr may resonate with that of divine images in Mesopotamia. To summarize, the two concepts differ fundamentally due to the variant notions of deity; the fact that the ark could not fully embody Yahweh due to his heavenly dwelling and the unity of his identity would prohibit a full manifestation on earth. Rather, it appears that the ark as the footstool of the cherubim throne serves as an icon for Yahweh, in a manner representing his unique presence and attention on the place of the ark and later the temple, understood as the location of his *shem*. The placement of the covenant tablets written by Yahweh in the ark resonates with the Mesopotamian notion of images as requiring a divine origin and template, and therefore it is the tablets which give

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<sup>91</sup> Mettinger, "YHWH SABAOTH," 116. Such thrones are generally in evidence in the ancient Near East (Mettinger, "YHWH SABAOTH," 113-116; Seow, "Ark of the Covenant," 389).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.; Seow, "Ark of the Covenant," 389; Grintz, "Ark of the Covenant," 460.

<sup>93</sup> Metzler, "Ark of the Covenant," 170f. Metzler argues this in relation to the ark as a throne, yet it still applies to its use as a footstool.

<sup>94</sup> Hendel, "Aniconism and Anthropomorphism," 226.

significance to the box in which they are contained. As such, all communication and sacrifice in association with the ark find foundation in the covenant requirements rather than human coercion, and it is understood that Yahweh will respond in accordance with his covenant promises. The ark thus shares similarities with the divine image, but serves more as a representation than equation of identity, and it acknowledges Yahweh's sovereignty rather than placing limitations upon him.

## **C. Divine Abandonment**

### *1. Images in Warfare*

Having reached an understanding of the limits in a comparison of the ark and divine images, we will move on to consider a specific function of divine images which may then have repercussions for the ark; that is, their use in warfare. Metzler argues that 'it was not uncommon for ancient Near Eastern warriors to bring a statue of their god to the battlefield, with the expectation that the god's physical presence would help grant them victory.'<sup>95</sup> Cogan explains how the Assyrian gods would 'disrupt the enemy's plans' both 'on the field of battle' and 'behind the scenes,'<sup>96</sup> and so the action of taking the image into battle would correspond to the former situation, rendering it a type of war palladium.

The palladium was not always successful, however, and if defeated, the images of the vanquished society would often be taken captive by the victors, whether the images were present on the battlefield or otherwise.<sup>97</sup> Such actions were based on the view outlined above which equates the statue with the deity, and therefore using the theft of Shimigi's statue as an example, Ellenbogen and Tugendhaft explain that, 'to steal the cult-object Shimigi, on one level, is to steal Shimigi.'<sup>98</sup> This in turn led to robust theological explanations from both sides in the battle as to the reasoning behind the theft of the gods. On the side of the victor there were two main schools of thought; Miller and Roberts explain the first view that, 'the capture of the enemy's gods was

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<sup>95</sup> Metzler, "Ark of the Covenant," 166. Kathleen Peters also confirms this practice, writing that, 'the gods are present on the battlefield in their divine images,' (Peters, "Divine Images," 88).

<sup>96</sup> Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 9.

<sup>97</sup> A discussion of this phenomenon can be found in Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 22ff.

<sup>98</sup> Ellenbogen and Tugendhaft, *Idol Anxiety*, 7.

seen... as clear evidence for the superiority of the victor's gods,<sup>99</sup> displayed particularly through the victors' placing of the vanquished gods before their own victorious deity as booty.<sup>100</sup> However, Morton Cogan also explores the divergent view in which the gods of the defeated party essentially defected from their nation and joined the victors.<sup>101</sup> He finds evidence for this in the Assyrian king Sennacherib's sacking of Babylon, in which an apologia was written in an attempt 'to win back Babylonia to the camp of Assyria, by implying that the deeds of Sennacherib were undertaken at the command of Babylon's own god, Marduk.'<sup>102</sup> He argues that such a position was used politically in order to prevent the humiliation of the opponents' gods as it 'avoided depicting foreign gods as taking the field in defence of their adherents.'<sup>103</sup>

It is this latter view which was usually adopted by the vanquished, who saw their defeat as the result of willful divine abandonment. A notable example of this concept in action is found in *The Marduk Prophecy*, which was written as a response to the capture and return of Marduk's statue in the late second-Millennium BCE.<sup>104</sup> Within the prophecy, Marduk claims that, 'As I have gone away, I will come back—I have commanded it' (I:18'),<sup>105</sup> which makes clear that Marduk was in control and not at the behest of a greater power.<sup>106</sup> It is not made evident in the text as to why Marduk chose to abandon Babylon, as no direct reason is given.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, other texts with a similar theme make the causation of abandonment more explicit. Daniel Bodi explores this motif in the Neo-Babylonian text, *The Poem of Erra*, arguing that 'the gods are angered as a consequence of the improper worship. By negligence in the matters of cult and morals, the humans provoked the gods who left their shrines and caused the destruction of the

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<sup>99</sup> Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 14.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. See also Metzler, "Ark of the Covenant," 166; Ahlström, "Travels of the Ark," 143.

<sup>101</sup> Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 12ff.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 12. Cogan believes this to be a Neo-Assyrian initiative (p.21), although Miller and Roberts believe that certain evidence may provide it with an earlier origin (Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 15 n. 78).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>104</sup> Longman, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography*, 138. For a full translation see Ibid., 233-235.

<sup>105</sup> All excerpts of the Marduk Prophecy are taken from Tremper Longman III's translation which can be found in Longman, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography*, 233-235.

<sup>106</sup> Roberts, "Nebuchadnezzar I's Elamite Crisis," 85.

<sup>107</sup> Block, "Divine Abandonment," 23. Hays admits that the lack of explicit reason given for Marduk's abandonment may be do with the fact that 'the text is broken and thus difficult to interpret with certainty.' (Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 284).

country.<sup>108</sup> Similar motives for abandonment can be found in the Neo-Assyrian, *Esarhaddon's Rebuilding of Babylon*; Marduk's anger and destruction of the city is preceded by the description that, 'the people who dwelt in Babylon answered each other yes (when they meant) no, speaking lies all the time. They stretched out their hands for the property of Esagila, the temple of the gods, and gave away (its) gold, silver, and gems to Elam as payment,' (I:1-18).<sup>109</sup> Christopher Hays acknowledges that, among the Mesopotamian literature, 'a wide range of reasons are given for divine abandonment,'<sup>110</sup> and therefore these two texts by no means exhaust the explanatory scope for the gods leaving their cities. Nevertheless, the fact that the city's defeat and the capture of their gods were sometimes attributed to the moral and cultic failures of the people is in evidence here.

The manner of the deity's abandonment can be further adduced by the way in which the deity is related to its image. In the instance of the image's capture, the deity is thought to remain present within it: 'As long as it is practical and palatable, such a unity is assumed. The link remains even when a statue is deported.'<sup>111</sup> There reaches a point where this unity is longer palatable, however, and something worse than deportation may overtake the statue, such as its destruction. We discussed earlier that the deity is not coterminous with the image and thus such destruction of the statue did not equate to the destruction of the god. To the Mesopotamian, the god may then be separated from its statue, 'the statue-deity symbiosis is dissolved and its body, the statue, may be sacrificed...'<sup>112</sup> Hundley points to an example of this occurring in *Esarhaddon's Rebuilding of Babylon*; the text explains the destruction of the city as the result of the fact that 'the gods and goddesses who dwell in [Esagila] fled like birds and went up to heaven. The protective gods [...ran] off and withdrew.'<sup>113</sup> Therefore, just as the presence of the statue may be regarded as a sign of the gods' favour,<sup>114</sup> so its absence 'involved the inexorable disruption of the cult and the withdrawal of divine favours,'

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<sup>108</sup> Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 196f.

<sup>109</sup> Translation from Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 280.

<sup>110</sup> Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 282.

<sup>111</sup> Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 277. Hundley cites the Marduk prophecy as an example.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* citing Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 204.

<sup>114</sup> Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," 22.

which only returned with the statue's restoration.<sup>115</sup> With the statue deported or destroyed, the deity would either leave with the statue, or simply leave the statue. Either way, the result is the abandonment of the people by their gods, with disaster close behind.

## 2. *Divine Abandonment in Ezekiel*

Returning to the Hebrew Bible, similar themes may be found in the exilic work of Ezekiel, specifically in Yahweh's abandonment of his temple in chs.8-11.<sup>116</sup> This is conveyed through the movement of Yahweh's כבוד (glory) which Sommer associates with the body of God, especially in light of the vision in the first chapter of Ezekiel in which the four living creatures appear under the 'glory of Yahweh,' (1:28) one of which is later referred to as having been 'under the God of Israel' (10:20).<sup>117</sup> The first chapter is particularly critical for understanding the later divine abandonment motif; Bodi observes that it 'indicates immediately the relocation of Yahweh's כבוד among the exiles' which is then elaborated on retrospectively in chs.8-11.<sup>118</sup> Within these chapters, Yahweh's glory ascends from its place (9:3; 10:4), leaves the threshold to hover over the cherubim/living creatures (10:18-19) and departs to the east of the city (11:22-23).<sup>119</sup> This abandonment of the temple is what makes the anticipated destruction possible, as Yahweh's absence ensures that 'there is no room left for the suggestion that God will suffer a personal defeat by its overthrow.'<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Hallo, "Cult Statue," 13. Block describes the effects of the deity's abandonment of the city, including disorder in the cosmos, flooding and exile (Block, "Divine Abandonment," 28. See also Kruger, "World," 61f.).

<sup>116</sup> 'That Yahweh's abandonment of his temple is the central idea is clear, not only from the general drift of the narrative, but also from several explicit statements,' (Block, "Divine Abandonment," 35f.). Ezekiel is often associated with the Priestly literature and as such may post-date Dtr (Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 58; Tuell, "Divine Presence and Absence," 98). Nevertheless, the exilic setting of the work and the relatively close proximity in time means that Ezekiel's concept of divine abandonment is still relevant for an understanding of a similar motif in Dtr.

<sup>117</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 72f. Bodi regards the כבוד as a 'technical term in ancient priestly tradition for the mysterious manifestation of the divine presence in worship which came to be associated with the Jerusalem temple,' (Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 186).

<sup>118</sup> Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 186.

<sup>119</sup> Bodi posits that the living creatures and the wheels may correspond to the Priestly view of the ark as a throne, particularly in the wilderness wanderings (Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 187).

<sup>120</sup> Clements, *Ezekiel*, 41. Steven Tuell argues that this differs from ANE divine abandonment in that the departure of Yahweh is asserted *before* the temple's destruction and thus serves as a precondition and not a consequence of this event (Tuell, "Divine Presence and Absence," 102). However, certain ANE

The reasons for Yahweh's abandonment are presented in the first two chapters of the vision: 8:3-16 depicts the cultic failures taking place within the temple complex, and 8:17 and 9:9 also add moral wrongdoing, particularly violence, to the cause of Yahweh's departure.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, as with the ANE accounts of divine abandonment explored above, the deity leaves his residence due to the cultic and moral failures of the people. This is not a permanent abandonment, and the return of Yahweh's glory to his temple is described later in Ezek 43. Block notes a divergence from ANE tradition with regard to Yahweh's return, explaining that, contrary to the view that the deity returns due to a change of heart, Yahweh will instead *cause* a change of heart among his people (11:18-21), 'he will cleanse his subjects of their iniquity and give them a new heart so they will walk in his ways, and he may renew the covenant.'<sup>122</sup> Therefore, at its root, Yahweh's abandonment and subsequent return is a matter of covenant. Just as he departed due to cultic and nomistic failure, so a renewed fidelity in these areas are the requirement for his return; he gives the people a new heart 'so that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and do them. Then they will be my people and I shall be their God,' (11:20).

The importance of keeping covenant as part of Yahweh's residence among his people was swept to the side in a view which developed among Israel whereby the temple itself was a source of security. DeVries comments that the high walls of the temple 'encouraged those who saw them to rely more on the outward symbols of Yahweh's presence than on the pious performance of his commandments and the heartfelt loyalty to his covenant...'<sup>123</sup> a view which Clements describes as 'religious complacency'.<sup>124</sup> It is this complacency which becomes the target of Ezekiel's vision and prophecy. Block argues that Ezekiel employed the theme of divine abandonment to address this issue due to his location in Babylon in which such motifs were prevalent; as the exiled people

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accounts such as *Esarhaddon's Rebuilding of Babylon* described above also regard the divine abandonment as a precondition for destruction, and so this is not a clear-cut distinction.

<sup>121</sup> Block, "Divine Abandonment," 36f.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 39. However, he does also note that this involves Yahweh's change of disposition towards his people, and he acts in such a way out of a concern for his name (*Ibid.*, 39f.).

<sup>123</sup> DeVries, *1 Kings*, 97.

<sup>124</sup> Clements, *Ezekiel*, 42.



were subject to these notions, the prophet used them to convey his message, though without entirely affirming such Mesopotamian beliefs which were contrary to the Israelite ideology.<sup>125</sup> Yahweh's sovereignty is affirmed as he leaves the temple without being forced, due to the lack image by which he may be coerced,<sup>126</sup> 'he would leave of his own free will, under his own power, and for his own reasons.'<sup>127</sup>

The sovereignty of Yahweh and the covenantal foundations to the theme of divine abandonment are key ideas which we will elaborate on as we move into the final chapter. We have discussed above how the ark's function in Dtr may correspond in ways to that of a divine image, whilst lacking the exact Mesopotamian ontological associations. This will prove particularly apt within the narratives of 1 Sam 4-6 and 2 Sam 6 in which divine abandonment and the use of divine images are significant features, however, in these chapters the characters appear to move beyond the Deuteronomistic theology and hold a more extreme view of the ark as a divine image. Just as Ezekiel used the concept of divine abandonment to express the importance of covenantal fidelity, so Dtr uses the motif in his narratives to convey a similar message, centred on the travels of Yahweh's ark. The above discussion on presence and divine images should serve as a backdrop to the discussion in the following chapter in which the ark is captured by Israel's enemies in warfare, and is later processed to the temple by David in a display of power.

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<sup>125</sup> Block, "Divine Abandonment," 35.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

## **Chapter 4: THE ARK NARRATIVES**

### **A. Ark Narrative Scholarship**

The first two chapters of our discussion have served to establish the existence of an independent Deuteronomistic History and an understanding of how the ark rightly functions within it. Within the third chapter we examined the ancient Near Eastern understanding of images which were contemporary to the authorship of Dtr, revealing how certain functions of the ark – and the covenant which was bound to it – drew resemblances to a divine statue. Both of these areas of investigation will serve as conceptual foundations to this final chapter in which we examine the use of the ark in 1 Sam 4-6 and 2 Sam 6 and the ways in which it conforms to or differs from the established Deuteronomistic or Mesopotamian concepts. We will here argue that the narratives serve as a Deuteronomistic corrective to the understandings of the ark held by both the characters within and also the original audience, which were in practice closer to either those of the ancient Near East or a variant interpretation of Israel’s own history

Before beginning our closer analysis of the concepts found within the text, we must give consideration to the setting of the narratives and briefly survey some of the scholarship surrounding these chapters in Samuel. In 1926, Leonhard Rost argued that 1 Sam 4:1a-7:1 and 2 Sam 6:1-23 formed an independent ‘ark narrative’ which relayed the story of the ark’s journey from Shiloh to Jerusalem and was later worked into the text as it stands by the author of Samuel.<sup>1</sup> Since then, biblical scholarship has largely – but not exclusively – bought into the idea of the narrative’s original independence, though questions regarding the setting, purpose and extent of the text have formed the basis of vast disagreement.<sup>2</sup> The major rift concerns whether the ark narratives in 1 and

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<sup>1</sup> McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 23. See also Blenkinsopp, “Kiriath-Jearim and the Ark,” 148 and Stirrup, “Why Has Yahweh Defeated,” 81. For a translation of Rost’s original argument, see Rost, *Succession to the Throne*, 6-34.

<sup>2</sup> The questions of purpose and extent are highly bound up in each other, as Campbell rightly notes that ‘the theological interpretation is [dependent] on the delimiting of the extent of the text.’ (Campbell, “Yahweh and the Ark,” 33).

2 Samuel were originally unified or derive instead from two separate traditions. Antony Campbell holds to Rost's original inclusion of both parts within the same tradition as he argues that 1 Sam 6 does not provide the fitting end to the narrative which is ultimately found in 2 Sam 6.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, Miller and Roberts argue that in light of the difference in style and vocabulary between the two parts, as well as the problematic transition between them, 2 Sam 6 was a later addition, even if dependent on the earlier narrative.<sup>4</sup> Moving in an important direction, they also include sections featuring the Elides from 1 Sam 2 within the original tradition, arguing that the narrative which follows would not make proper sense without this introduction.<sup>5</sup> On Miller and Roberts' analysis, the original ark narrative would have been composed of 1 Sam 2:12-17, 22-25, 27-36; 4:1b-7:1, essentially providing an additional introduction rather than Rost's and Campbell's extended conclusion.<sup>6</sup>

John Willis takes a step beyond Miller and Roberts' proposal (though his argument in fact pre-dates theirs) in pursuing the overall unity of 1 Sam 1-7 as an account of the pre-monarchic crisis which faced Israel.<sup>7</sup> Miller and Roberts counter such a claim by arguing that 'such unity it now possesses is clearly redactional, not original,' though they concede that 'his analysis is suggestive for interpreting the present form of the text.'<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it is this concession which holds the key for interpretation, for whilst scholarship has been debating the various boundaries and purposes of an original ark tradition, the breadth and uncertainty of the conclusions should underscore the hypothetical nature of this particular task and the rocky foundations which lay beneath any of the dependent interpretations. We do not here deny that there may have been an original independent narrative featuring the ark, but rather recognise along with A. Stirrup that 'the only access we have to it is as it has been transmitted to us as an integral part of another document.'<sup>9</sup> Whatever the original purpose of a supposed ark

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<sup>3</sup> Campbell, "Yahweh and the Ark," 39, 41.

<sup>4</sup> Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 32-35.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-32. It is the inclusion of this earlier material which allows 1 Sam 7:1 to work as a more fitting ending (*Ibid.*, 35).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>7</sup> Willis, "Anti-Elide Narrative Tradition," 308.

<sup>8</sup> Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 28.

<sup>9</sup> Stirrup, "Why Has Yahweh Defeated," 85.

tradition may have been, it nonetheless takes on new meaning as part of the larger work of Dtr,<sup>10</sup> and as our focus here is on Dtr's particular theology of the ark, it is the final form of the text which here merits our attention. Therefore, when the present discussion refers to the ark narratives (AN), the reference is simply to these chapters of Dtr (1 Sam 4-6; 2 Sam 6) which tell the story of the ark, not to a hypothetical source tradition.

When reading AN within Dtr as a whole, the exilic setting of this larger work should then provide a key interpretive lens. We established in the first chapter that the history was composed and viewed from an exilic perspective with the particular aim of understanding the reason for the fall of Jerusalem and Judah's departure from the land, alongside providing a hope for the future. Polzin neatly clarifies the two sides of this coin, arguing that 'the author writes to describe the causes of exile and the conditions that will bring it to an end.'<sup>11</sup> This dual-purpose of Dtr, which was considered throughout the first chapter, is the foundation of the discussion to follow. Admittedly, just because this is the purpose behind the work as a whole does mean that we should expect this theme to be manifest within each of its chapters. Nevertheless, the scenarios of AN bear striking resemblance to those of the exile, and several intertextual features which will be highlighted throughout the chapter also reveal its particular affinity with Israel's situation at the time of Dtr's composition.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it should be expected that these few chapters, more so than others, would provide a microcosm of the exilic situation and therefore provide greater insight into the cause of and remedy for the exile.<sup>13</sup>

The remainder of this chapter will therefore focus on the perspective of the characters in AN; those of the Israelites, the Philistines, and David. We will consider how the

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<sup>10</sup> McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 26: '...we should not forget the [the ark narrative] has come down to us in a secondary setting that modifies its force significantly.' Klaas Smelik goes so far as to deny the existence of an original narrative, and thus it is most natural for him to 'investigate I Samuel iv-vi and II Samuel vi as an integral part of the Book of Samuel,' (Smelik, "Hidden Messages," 43).

<sup>11</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 72.

<sup>12</sup> So Smelik, "Hidden Messages," 55.

<sup>13</sup> Many scholars have noted the links between AN and the exile, though it is a particularly strong theme in the works of Klaas Smelik and Matthew Beach; see Smelik, "Hidden Messages," 35-58 and Beach, "Rereading the Ark Narrative," 78-91.

perspectives of the characters may be analogous to views held by a wider group either during the exile or closely preceding it. We will then examine how Dtr attempts to subvert these views via events that take place in the narrative, and afterwards provides a corrective by narrating the ways in which the characters subsequently act more in keeping with the ideology of Dtr.

## **B. The Israelite Perspective**

### *1. 'The Ark will Guarantee Victory'*

The opening of 1 Sam 4 presents a narrative scene typical to Dtr; Israel is lined up to fight with a national enemy, and the expectation is presumably that Yahweh would bestow victory upon Israel as part of his covenantal responsibility to protect his people and ensure that they retain control of the land which he had gifted them (e.g. Deut 3; Josh 10; Jdg 7). Yet a twist is presented at the very outset of the chapter as Israel is defeated by the Philistines, leaving four thousand Israelite men dead. In the face of such a loss which contravened expectations, the elders of Israel voice the question which must have been on everyone's lips, namely, 'Why has Yahweh defeated us today before the Philistines?' (v.3). In the mind of the elders, as Yahweh was expected to fight for Israel, their defeat must have been either permitted or directly enforced by him.<sup>14</sup> Stirrup draws attention to the importance of this question in that 'it introduces the 'quest' with which the story is concerned.'<sup>15</sup> Therefore it is a question which we also must consider before we continue.

As we assess the reason for Israel's defeat through Yahweh's agency, there are two factors from the narrative setting which provide necessary insight, and the first concerns Israel's covenantal status. Various scholars have argued that the first, pre-monarchic section of Samuel rightly belongs to the epoch of the Judges, and could therefore be

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<sup>14</sup> In addition to the elders' question which makes Yahweh's perceived agency clear, Stirrup also notes that the use of the niph'al form of  $\text{פָּגַע}$  in v.2 with the Philistines as the indirect object hints that 'the Philistines may not have been *entirely* responsible for the defeat,' (Stirrup, "Why Has Yahweh Defeated," 88 (emphasis original); see also Eslinger, *Kingship of God*, 163f.). The alternative, that Yahweh may in fact have been defeated, will be addressed in the section on the Philistines' perspective.

<sup>15</sup> Stirrup, "Why Has Yahweh Defeated," 88.

seen as the last in the many salvation cycles of this period.<sup>16</sup> The Judges cycles were characterized by repeated apostasy, invasion by foreign nations, Israel's cry for deliverance, and salvation at the hands of a divinely appointed leader;<sup>17</sup> so in Samuel, 'the domination of the Philistines... was, as far as [Dtr] was concerned, to be depicted analogously with the previous cases of foreign domination throughout the period of the "judges"'.<sup>18</sup> While the text at the beginning of Samuel does not explicitly describe Israel as being in a state of apostasy and idolatry, neither does it narrate repentance and restoration on Israel's part for the morally and cultically dubious events which took place in Jdg 17-21,<sup>19</sup> and Samuel's call to repentance in 1 Sam 7 confirms that such a response was required.<sup>20</sup> This view behind Israel's defeat is supported by the similar narrative in which Israel is defeated before the people of Ai, on this occasion clearly stated to be on account of Achan's transgression of the covenant (Josh 7). Therefore, one reason behind Israel's loss against the Philistines is that it fulfills the divine punishment for Israel's covenantal failure as a nation.<sup>21</sup>

The second factor cannot be fully separated from the first, having to do with the leadership of Israel in the opening chapters of Samuel. 1 Sam 2 describes the failures of the sons of Eli and their abuses of power in their role as priests. On account of this, judgment is prescribed for the house of Eli on not one, but two occasions; firstly through an unnamed 'man of God' (1 Sam 2:27-36) and then through a young Samuel (1 Sam 3:11-14). The blame and punishment falls not on Eli's sons alone, but Eli

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<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Klein, *1 Samuel*, xxv and Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 73 who argue that the Judges period encompasses 1 Sam 1-7; others such as Römer, "Invention of History," 267 and Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 42 extend it to 1 Sam 12 due to Samuel's framing Deuteronomistic speech.

<sup>17</sup> Vermeylen, "Book of Samuel," 73.

<sup>18</sup> Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 47. The Philistines had also been depicted as the agents of Yahweh's judgment throughout Judges (e.g. Jdg 3:31; 10:7; 13:1)

<sup>19</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 147.

<sup>20</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 73.

<sup>21</sup> A further consideration raised by a particular reading of 1 Sam 4:1 is that Israel's action and initiative in fighting the Philistines contravened the usual approach in Dtr in which Israel are to wait for Yahweh's command; by breaching Dtr's warfare code, Israel lost Yahweh's support (Smelik, "Hidden Messages," 45.) or at least, they did not have an opportunity to learn about their breach of covenant. Smelik also makes the tempting suggestion that Israel's initiative in the war reflects the 'Judean rising against Babylon, which led to the destruction of the temple' (Ibid.,57) and thus would serve as a particular framing link between AN and the exilic situation.

himself is also held responsible for their misdemeanors.<sup>22</sup> We considered above how a significant factor in the debate surrounding the extent of a hypothetical source material concerned whether certain parts of 1 Sam 2 should be included in the tradition. Whilst the case can be made that it is not *required* as an introduction,<sup>23</sup> the exclusion of those sections would render a very different reading of what follows, and as the text now stands, 1 Sam 4 must be interpreted in light of the circumstances and particularly the prophecies which precede it. Therefore, in addition to Israel's general breach of covenant, their defeat before the Philistines should also be seen as part of Yahweh's specific punishment upon the Elides, though this is not fully enacted until the second defeat and the events which follow it.<sup>24</sup>

These causes of the Philistine victory were evidently not known explicitly among the people, however, and thus the elders ask the question of v.3 and subsequently summon the ark. According to what we have witnessed throughout Dtr so far – particularly in Josh 7:6-9 and Jdg 20:26-28 – the people would have followed the Deuteronomistic pattern by humbling themselves before the ark and seeking an oracle from Yahweh. We would then expect Yahweh to reveal the sins of Israel and their leaders as the cause for the defeat, allowing the people to repent and gain victory. This is not what happens; at least, not yet. Instead, the Israelite elders summon the ark, in their words: 'That it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies,' (1 Sam 4:3).<sup>25</sup> Janzen rightly perceives in such a move Israel's belief that 'YHWH will grant them victory merely because the ark is in the vicinity,' and thus is it used as a means to 'control

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<sup>22</sup> Willis, "Anti-Elide Narrative Tradition," 292.

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Stirrup, "Why Has Yahweh Defeated," 86 and Campbell, "Yahweh and the Ark," 35f.

<sup>24</sup> That both causes must be held in tandem can be seen through Campbell's reservation that the punishment on Israel was 'a steep price to pay for the punishment of two or three errant priests,' (Campbell, "Yahweh and the Ark," 35), for if the punishment of the Elides were the only cause, Campbell's argument would hold greater weight. Nonetheless, the role of the Elides reveals the importance of leadership for the fate of the nation, and in this connection, Eric Eynikel argues that 'personal sins can have consequences that exceed their personal effects,' (Eynikel, "Eli Narratives," 103).

<sup>25</sup> The ambiguity of the personal pronoun allows for debate as to whether it is Yahweh or the ark which is expected to deliver the people (see e.g. Metzler, "Ark of the Covenant," 150 and Eslinger, *Kingship of God*, 167). However, whilst the grammatical subject cannot be identified with certainty, the people are here limiting Yahweh's deliverance to the proximity of the ark, and so a translation to capture the subject by this sense may read: '...that the ark's presence may bring our deliverance...'

divine power.’<sup>26</sup> Curtis therefore argues that due to Israel’s belief in the link between the ark and this mode of divine presence, ‘in this instance the ark was the functional equivalent of the divine image,’<sup>27</sup> and was taken into battle much as was done in the ancient Near East, which we considered in the previous chapter. Therefore, Israel did not see the ark as the place at which to communicate with Yahweh in accordance with the covenant, but instead as the equivalent of Yahweh’s divine image which would secure victory by its proximity.<sup>28</sup>

An alternative interpretation of events has been proposed whereby Israel acknowledged the covenantal significance of the ark, and thus summoned it in order to ‘remind Yahweh of his covenant commitments to his people Israel... to ensure *their* victory in holy war,’ rather than supposing to bring Yahweh to the battle.<sup>29</sup> This view takes into account the fact that the elders’ question in v.3 supposes Yahweh’s prior agency in the battle and thus summoning the ark as a symbol of his presence would be a redundant gesture.<sup>30</sup> However, the characters’ awareness of covenantal responsibility does not appear anywhere else throughout the chapter, rather, Israel – along with the Philistines – shows more concern in the consequences of the deity’s presence and absence, and so this alternative interpretation fits awkwardly within the narrative’s overall focus. In answering the issue of Yahweh’s prior agency which was raised by the elders’ question, we discussed in the previous chapter how the presence and treatment of the deity’s statue was linked with obtaining the favour of the god.<sup>31</sup> In that light, Israel may allow for some form of Yahweh’s involvement in the first battle, and yet remain hopeful that the arrival of the ark, functioning as the concrete (or wooden) form of divine presence,

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<sup>26</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 161. See also Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 44.

<sup>27</sup> Curtis, “Images in Mesopotamia,” 47.

<sup>28</sup> This view which equated the ark with Yahweh’s presence is further found in the reaction of Phinehas’ wife to its subsequent capture, as Metzler explains that ‘the wife of Phinehas understands the departure of the Ark from Israel as tantamount to the loss of their God.’ (Metzler, “Ark of the Covenant,” 154, cf. Smelik, “Hidden Messages,” 55).

<sup>29</sup> Stirrup, “Why Has Yahweh Defeated,” 89 (emphasis original). See also, Eslinger, *Kingship of God*, 166.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 88f. In such a case, Israel would hold still a distorted view of the ark and the covenant, for instead of seeking Yahweh’s will and directive, they assume their own innocence and Yahweh’s guilt, seeking to correct him.

<sup>31</sup> We also discussed in the second chapter how the ark’s presence revealed Yahweh’s favour on Joshua’s leadership, though this was directly linked to his obedience.



would either coerce Yahweh into helping them, or otherwise bring his favour in such a way that was not the case before. However, while a Mesopotamian divine image may be equated with the deity and therefore bring favour upon those who come into contact with it, we have discussed how the ark does not share this quality, but rather takes on the role as the deity's footstool – a designation perhaps implicit in 1 Sam 4:4 which describes Yahweh sitting above the cherubim<sup>32</sup> – which specifically denotes his presence in overseeing the covenant. The irony rests further in the ark's function as a witness against Israel as outlined in Deut 31:26 and discussed in the second chapter; Israel hoped to bring the ark in order to restore Yahweh's presence and favour, but instead they have broken covenant and summoned the prosecution.

## 2. *Loss of the Ark*

With this insight, the events which follow should not come as a great surprise to the informed reader, even though they would certainly have shocked the characters within the narrative. In 1 Sam 4:5-9, the ark receives a thunderous reception into the camp as Israel rejoice and the Philistines cower in fear, this latter response due to a view which mirrors that of Israel by equating the ark with Yahweh, as we will consider below. When the battle comes together for the second time, however, Israel is defeated once more, contrary to expectations. The body count of thirty thousand on this occasion far exceeds the first battle, and worse still, the ark is captured by the Philistines. A primary concern throughout this chapter is to note the fulfillment of the judgment oracles against the Elides; not only do the sons of Eli die in battle beside the ark (v.11), but both Eli and his daughter in law also breathe their last when they receive the news (vv.18, 20).<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the issue of weak and corrupt leadership is initially dealt with as the house of Eli is all but destroyed.<sup>34</sup> A suitable leadership is yet to take its place, however, and Israel's covenantal failure remains at large; neither issue is fully remedied until ch.7.

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<sup>32</sup> Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 350.

<sup>33</sup> Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 50.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Kgs 2:26-27 records Solomon's dismissal of Abiathar (of the house of Eli) as fulfillment of the judgment on Eli's house.

The loss of the ark would have been painfully felt over and above the military defeat, as this central cult object which was believed to guarantee Yahweh's aid in warfare was now in the hands of Israel's enemies. It is with regard to this that we see the importance of the narrative's exilic setting and the parallel between the ark and the temple. Sommer draws the connection, explaining the view that, 'just as the presence of Yhwh... would one day protect Jerusalem according to the doctrine of Zion's inviolability, so too in the eyes of the elders Yhwh's presence in or on the ark guarantees victory. But the narrative goes on to eviscerate this theology.'<sup>35</sup> We discussed in the previous chapter the manner in which Ezekiel addressed this issue, and how Yahweh's presence was seen to leave the temple in order to leave it vulnerable to attack.<sup>36</sup> Another prophetic parallel can be found in Jeremiah when the author warns the people that the temple will serve as no use to them if they act wickedly (Jer 7:1-15). Smelik believes that this passage may have served as an inspiration for AN which thus acted as its narrative counterpart,<sup>37</sup> the message of both being that 'YHWH is prepared to have his sanctuary destroyed by Israel's enemies, if the people do not mend their ways.'<sup>38</sup> Whether there is a direct dependent relationship between the texts remains up for debate, but the affinity of theme is clear, and it drives home the message that the primary issue is covenant. Yahweh will act out his covenantal responsibility only so long as Israel remain faithful to theirs; the failure on Israel's part results in Yahweh's apparent abandonment, seen here in the loss of the ark and later in the destruction of the temple.

The importance of a right covenantal standing when dealing with the ark is once again evidenced in the events which close 1 Sam 6. After the ark brought the Philistines nothing but misfortune, their leaders decide to return it to Israel, and 1 Sam 6:13 describes how, on its return, the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh 'raised their eyes and saw the ark and were glad to see it.' However, Polzin rightly considers this to be 'ill-advised

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<sup>35</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 105f.

<sup>36</sup> A similarity can be found in the use of 'glory', for just as the glory of Yahweh left the temple in Ezekiel, so in 1 Sam 4:22, Eli's daughter in law, the wife of his son Phinehas, exclaims that, 'The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God was taken.'

<sup>37</sup> Smelik, "Hidden Messages," 55f.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

rejoicing' similar to that of the Israelites welcoming the ark into the camp in 1 Sam 4,<sup>39</sup> for only a few verses later Yahweh strikes down a great number of the people for looking into the ark (v.19). Despite textual uncertainty regarding the exact number of deaths and the reason for the destruction,<sup>40</sup> the question in v.20: 'Who is able to stand before Yahweh, this holy God? And to whom shall he go up from us?' makes clear that the short-lived celebration on account of the ark's return culminated ultimately in great anxiety. Scholars often point to the similarity between the Israelites' tragedy here and the disastrous events among the Philistines in ch. 5,<sup>41</sup> and so it would seem that anyone in breach of the covenant is in danger when its very container is among them. That this is not a joyful conclusion to the narrative is confirmed by 1 Sam 7:2 where 'all the house of Israel lamented after Yahweh' for the twenty years in which the ark was housed at Kiriath-jearim; the presence of the ark served Israel little better on its return than it did just prior to its departure. Fortunately, a new leadership was on hand to bring about Israel's much needed return from apostasy.

### *3. Israel's Confession and Return*

1 Sam 7 serves as a remedy to the events which precede it through both a change in leadership and large-scale repentance. Looking firstly at the leadership, 1 Sam 7:3 reintroduces the character of Samuel who was last seen in 1 Sam 3 when his prophetic status was made known among all of Israel (vv.19-21). Samuel's absence from the events of chs. 4-6 may seem conspicuous, especially in light of his prominence in the narrative up to that point, and it has led some to posit disunity between the sections.<sup>42</sup> Smith acknowledges this difficulty, but argues that Samuel's absence was in fact to make a theological point, emphasizing 'that without Samuel Israel's situation was becoming worse and worse under the Elide priesthood,'<sup>43</sup> This also builds on the

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<sup>39</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 65.

<sup>40</sup> Miller and Roberts note the extensive corruption to this verse, and argue for a reconstruction based around the LXX in which the destruction of only seventy men is due to their not joining in the celebrations (Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 77, see also McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 131 and Klein, *1 Samuel*, 59f.).

<sup>41</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 162; Smelik, "Hidden Messages," 50; Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 65.

<sup>42</sup> See e.g. Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 46f. and Smith, *Samuel*, 31, 34.

<sup>43</sup> Willis, "Anti-Elide Narrative Tradition," 299. See also Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 60 and Smelik, "Hidden Messages," 44.

contrast between Samuel and Eli's sons throughout 1 Sam 2.<sup>44</sup> When Samuel returns, it is under *his* leadership that Israel returns to Yahweh and consequently defeats the Philistines.

The importance of Samuel's role as leader lay in his influence over Israel, causing them to return to Yahweh. In 1 Sam 7:3, he commands Israel to 'remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to Yahweh and serve him alone; and he will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.' As we noted above, Samuel's call for repentance without explicit reference to a prior apostasy reveals that Israel was still in the situation of covenantal infidelity from the period of the Judges which was a major factor behind the defeat of 1 Sam 4. However, we see through ch.7 that, 'when Israel repented, Yahweh reversed the situation which had existed when she was steeped in sin.'<sup>45</sup> Thus, after Israel fast and confess their sins (v.6) and Samuel offers sacrifices, entreating Yahweh on Israel's behalf (vv.8-10), Yahweh causes confusion among the approaching Philistines and brings about a victory for Israel (vv.10-11). This is a prime display of the leadership theme of Dtr discussed in the first chapter, whereby the influence of a leader is vital in determining the fate of a nation; a divinely appointed ruler is supposed to lead people rightly in the ways of the covenant as Samuel does.<sup>46</sup>

The ark itself is absent in the text beyond v.2, and this serves to highlight the central point of the narrative, namely that, 'it is not by carrying the ark into the battlefield but by confessing its sins that Israel is saved from its enemies.'<sup>47</sup> Had Israel sought Yahweh after their initial defeat, then it is probable that the disaster which followed could have been averted. Nevertheless, this repentance is at last brought to effect, and under

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 299f.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>46</sup> Samuel's leadership here is seen in the threefold manner of prophet, judge, and priest (Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 60, cf. Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 353). His prophetic role is confirmed in 1 Sam 4:19-21, the priestly duties which he undertook in 1 Sam 2-3 outwork here in his sacrifices before Yahweh (7:9-10), and we have already discussed how this section bring the period of the Judges to an end, and thus, 'one cannot fail to see that Samuel is being presented as the last of the victorious judges who was able to subdue the enemy and bring peace to the Israelites during his period of office.' (Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 353).

<sup>47</sup> Smelik, "Hidden Messages," 44. So also Janzen: 'In 1 Sam 4-6, merely moving the ark to the site of the battle with the Philistines does not result in an Israelite victory; only the repentance and right sacrifice of 1 Sam 7 accomplish that.' (Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 162).

Samuel's leadership the Philistines are no longer a threat to Israel. This sends a crucial message to the people in exile; though the destruction of the temple may have incurred loss of hope, it was never the temple which gave Israel security in the first place, but Yahweh himself. The ideology of Dtr as a whole stresses the need for nomistic and cultic fidelity in order for Yahweh to fight for his people, and Israel's renewed situation in AN plays that out in a way with which the exiles could identify. The need to repent and confess their sins is of utmost importance if Yahweh is to bring his people back to their land and defeat their enemies.

### **C. The Philistine Perspective**

#### *1. 'Yahweh has been Subordinated to Dagon'*

For this next section we are turning the perspective around and viewing events from the standpoint of Israel's enemy, the Philistines, or from an exilic standpoint, the Babylonians. When the Philistines heard the shout of the Israelites and realized that the ark had entered the camp of Israel, we are told that 'the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp".' (1 Sam 4:7). Evidently the Philistines' theology of the ark shared the same erroneous view of Israel's; 'they felt that Yahweh was so inseparably bound to the ark that wherever it went, some supernatural magical power accompanied it,'<sup>48</sup> and as a result, Metzler explains that they may have viewed 'Yhwh and his Ark as coterminous.'<sup>49</sup> We argued in the previous chapter that even divine images were not necessarily considered to be coterminous with the deity, yet they nevertheless shared much closer boundaries than did the ark and Yahweh in Dtr. Therefore, the Philistine concept of the ark would have closely resembled that of a divine image, which subsequently explains their interaction with it both on the battlefield and in the aftermath.<sup>50</sup> In fact, the reference to 'idols' in the later warfare

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<sup>48</sup> Willis, "Anti-Elide Narrative Tradition," 301.

<sup>49</sup> Metzler, "Ark of the Covenant," 153.

<sup>50</sup> This is the view of Curtis as considered in the previous section: 'It seems likely that in this instance [that is, the Israelite's use of the ark in 1 Sam 4] the ark was the functional equivalent of the divine image and the subsequent treatment of the ark by the Philistines tends to confirm this interpretation of the function of the ark.' (Curtis, "Images in Mesopotamia," 47).

narrative in 2 Sam 5:21 may suggest that it was also Philistine practice to carry images of their own deities into battle.<sup>51</sup>

After realizing that the ark had entered the camp, the Philistines ask in desperation, ‘Who shall deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness.’ (v.8). The nature of this question suggests that the outcome of the battle depends on the relative power of the gods. In addition, scholars are quick to note that there are certain errors in the Philistine monologue above, primarily the reference to Israel’s *gods*, and the claim that such gods struck the Egyptians *in the wilderness*, when the events in fact took place in Egypt.<sup>52</sup> Polzin explains that these errors ‘must have struck the Deuteronomist’s reader with some force,’<sup>53</sup> and Sommer draws out the significance, arguing that such erroneous comments provides further reason to discredit the Philistine theology of the ark.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, just as the Israelites’ catastrophic experience with the ark challenged their false views regarding a limitation of Yahweh’s presence and favour to the ark’s proximity, so at the beginning of the Philistine viewpoint, similar views are contested. The Philistines’ reference to the Exodus is also significant as it is the first of several intertextual elements which invoke the similarity between the events in 1 Sam 4-6 and those which took place in Egypt.<sup>55</sup>

In the twist which we had previously encountered from the Israelite viewpoint, the Philistines win the battle despite the presence of Israel’s powerful ‘gods’ on the battlefield. At the beginning of 1 Sam 5, we read that, ‘the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon.’ (v.2). In the previous

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<sup>51</sup> Van der Toorn, “The Iconic Book,” 241.

<sup>52</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 58; Metzler, “Ark of the Covenant,” 153; Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 104; Smelik, “Hidden Messages,” 46.

<sup>53</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 58. Polzin further suggests that the reference to Israel’s *gods* was ironically picked up on in 1 Sam 7 in which Samuel instructs Israel to turn from their false gods, and it is these gods to whom ‘the Philistines were made to refer, but of whom they were unjustifiably afraid.’ (Ibid., 59). This is a clever idea which foreshadows the reversal of 1 Sam 7, but it is doubtful whether it should be considered the primary thrust of the Philistines’s speech. In particular, their reference to the works of these gods is the Exodus events which took place centuries earlier.

<sup>54</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 104.

<sup>55</sup> Garsiel, *First Book of Samuel*, 51.

chapter we considered that an army's act of capturing the vanquished enemy's god was a way of displaying the greater power of their own deity, and to reiterate Miller and Roberts' example, 'this is suggested by the common practice of dedicating the captured gods as booty to one's own gods... and it raises the issue to the level of a confrontation between the gods.'<sup>56</sup> Alternatively, we also explored the view whereby the god of the vanquished army had apparently abandoned his people and joined forces with the victors, a stance adopted by both conquerors and conquered. Willis suggests that after Israel's loss in battle, Israel themselves may have 'concluded that Yahweh had failed them or was not as powerful as Dagon (who had apparently defeated him) and other gods.'<sup>57</sup> Although we examined how the people of Israel eventually learn of their sin which had been the cause of defeat, grief-stricken thoughts of either a vanquished Yahweh or a defecting deity must have been prevalent in the intervening period.

The central event of the exile in Israel's history would have caused a similar dichotomous set of questions, and the function of Dtr in attempting to provide the true reason behind the exile makes this evident. Römer gives voice to the typical antithesis which would have faced exilic Israel, namely: 'Had [Yahweh] become angry with his people and abandoned them, or had the Babylonians and their gods proven to be stronger than Yahweh?'<sup>58</sup> The text of AN does not indicate with certainty – as with many parts of this narrative – which stance the Philistines took; was Yahweh was placed beside Dagon as a dedication to the stronger deity, or as means of being counted with him in the pantheon?<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the following events prove to destroy either notion that Yahweh could be contained within a Philistine temple, and consequently give hope to those in exile that Yahweh had not defected nor been vanquished by the powers of Babylon, but rather, he would return to his people.

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<sup>56</sup> Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 14f.

<sup>57</sup> Willis, "Anti-Elide Narrative Tradition," 303.

<sup>58</sup> Römer, "Invention of History," 263.

<sup>59</sup> Though their haste to remove Yahweh from Dagon's house after he caused Dagon's mutilation suggests the former, otherwise they may have had a different reaction to Yahweh's apparent victory.

## 2. Humiliation of Dagon and the Philistines

The defeat of Israel and capture of the ark served as a positive surprise for the Philistines, but less encouraging was the surprise which they would be faced with upon return to the house of Dagon in Ashdod the following morning: ‘Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of Yahweh.’ (1 Sam 5:4). Perhaps there had been a strong wind? After restoring Dagon to his place, they returned the following day to find that Dagon had once again fallen before the ark, except this time, ‘the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off on the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.’ (v.4).<sup>60</sup> No wind is quite as strong as that. *This* is the true war of the gods, not the earlier events on the battlefield; Stirrup concludes that ‘image and Ark are brought together but the confrontation which takes place is between Dagon and Yahweh.’<sup>61</sup> While in the view of the narrator, Yahweh is not coterminous with the ark and nor is Dagon necessarily a real deity, the event in the temple of Ashdod nevertheless appears to be a show for the benefit of the Philistines, taking place within their own conceptual world much as Ezekiel used the faulty Israelite understanding of divine abandonment to teach the exiles a true message. The message of this show for the Philistines is evidently, ‘Yahweh is victorious’;<sup>62</sup> Yahweh was neither defeated by Dagon in the battle of 1 Sam 4, nor is he content to share his place in the temple.

With Dagon now subdued, Yahweh leaves no further room for questioning whether he has defected to the Philistines. After the events in Dagon’s house, ‘the hand of Yahweh was heavy on the Ashdodites, and he ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories.’ (v.6).<sup>63</sup> Consequently, the people decide to move the ark away from Ashdod to Gath, but Yahweh deals with his new neighbours in a similar manner (vv.8-9), and when it is suggested that the ark be moved to Ekron, the locals

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<sup>60</sup> Dick views this as another example of the confusion of identity between a god and their statue, for ‘Dagon himself (and not his statue) is said to fall before the Ark of Yahweh.’ (Dick, “Prophetic Parodies,” 31).

<sup>61</sup> Stirrup, “Why Has Yahweh Defeated,” 93.

<sup>62</sup> Smelik explains the symbolism of ‘hands’ and ‘power’ (Smelik, “Hidden Messages,” 48f.), and Matthews also likens Dagon’s fate to that of defeated kings, or even the ‘raped and abused Levite’s concubine in Judges 19:17,’ (Matthews, “Physical Space,” 16f.).

<sup>63</sup> The phrase, ‘the hand of Yahweh’ is used numerous times throughout AN, and it is discussed by Miller and Roberts in great detail in their work, in which they describe it as the ‘invisible manifestation of that same power’ which is visible in the ark (Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 86).



react with fear, crying out that, ‘they have brought the Ark of the God of Israel around to us, to kill us and our people.’ (v.10). Yahweh’s treatment of the citizens of the Philistine cities is one of the key non-verbal features of the narrative which call to mind the events of the exodus.<sup>64</sup> Just then as here, Yahweh unleashed plagues to reveal his power to a people who took captive that which belonged to him.

An extra-biblical parallel can be found in the Marduk Prophecy which we referenced in the previous chapter. In this text written from Marduk’s perspective, the god embarks on several trips to other lands by his own command. Regarding his trip to Ḫatti, Marduk explains, ‘I set up the throne of my Anu-power in its midst... I established [the tr]ade of the citizens of Babylon [in] its midst. I oversaw its... goods, and its valuables...’ (I:13). Recalling a later trip to Aššur (that is, Assyria),<sup>65</sup> he also makes the claim that, ‘[I blessed Aššur]... I gave it strong approval... I went home.’ (I:1’). Roberts comments that such claims by Marduk emphasize that ‘he was in charge of the situation,’<sup>66</sup> and Marduk’s control over the peaceful visits which were due to the removal of his statue ‘prepares the stage for the god’s interpretation of a more recent disaster, one apparently still too disquieting to be easily dismissed as a business trip – the Elamite conquest of Babylon and plunder of Marduk’s statue.’<sup>67</sup> During this final trip, Marduk’s disposition changed towards his own land as he recalled, ‘Širis made the midst of the land sick. The corpses of the people block the gates. Brother consumes brother... Evil lies across the land.’ (II:1).

This text is instructive for our understanding of the situation of Yahweh in Philistia, for it similarly reiterates the notion of divine control over the circumstances; Yahweh, as Marduk, chose to leave his own people after his disposition changed, with dire consequences. However, there are also telling differences. Whereas the reason for

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<sup>64</sup> Smelik, “Hidden Messages,” 49; Garsiel, *First Book of Samuel*, 51f.; Klein, *1 Samuel*, xxxv. Miller and Roberts also make the connection between Yahweh’s hand in this narrative and in the Exodus, such as at Exod 9:3 (Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 63).

<sup>65</sup> Roberts, *Nebuchadnezzar I’s Elamite Crisis*, 85.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Marduk's change in disposition is not stated and left unclear,<sup>68</sup> we have discussed in the previous section that Yahweh's abandonment was due to corrupt leadership and Israelite unfaithfulness to his covenant. In another curious departure, though the Marduk Prophecy describes the disaster which befell Babylon in Marduk's absence, 1 Sam 5 describes the fate visited upon the Philistines – and later those of Beth-shemesh – in Yahweh's *presence*. An attempt to wrest power from Yahweh by both Israel and Philistia invites disaster upon both parties.<sup>69</sup> Janzen explains that the plagues in 1 Sam 5 demonstrate how 'YHWH's power can be manifest where the ark is present,' and yet in the overall scheme, 'YHWH's absolute power in history cannot be controlled by any human...'<sup>70</sup> Therefore, neither the ark's presence nor absence guarantees power or security, on the contrary, any interaction with the ark by those outside of covenant fidelity forfeits them both.

### 3. *The Ark Returned with Gifts*

In 1 Sam 6, the Philistines display a greater grasp of this message. Realizing that the ark must be returned to Israel for their own safety, the people of Philistia enquire of the priests and diviners regarding the manner in which this must be done (v.2). The spiritual elite explain that the ark is to be returned along with a guilt offering consisting of 'five golden tumors and five golden mice' in order for the Philistines' healing (vv.3-5). In the final verbal allusion to Exodus in the narrative, the diviners ask, 'why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When he had dealt severely with them, did they not allow the people to go, and they departed?' (v.6). The people are exhorted to learn from the mistakes of those who previously opposed Israel before their own situation worsens. Not only does this dialogue itself call back to the events of the Israel's exodus, but the act of sending the ark back with golden

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<sup>68</sup> Block, "Divine Abandonment," 23. A similar ANE text in which the change in disposition and abandonment of the deity is unclear can be found in *The Cursing of Akkadê* (Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once...*, 359-374)

<sup>69</sup> Curtis draws out the importance of this for both sides: 'Yahweh is... the sovereign Lord, even when he is in exile in Philistine territory. This story [AN] would also affirm to the Israelites that Yahweh is sovereign and that he cannot be manipulated into giving victory to his disobedient people.' (Curtis, "Images in Mesopotamia," 47).

<sup>70</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 162.

artifacts also ‘reminds the reader of the booty the Hebrews took with them when leaving Egypt.’<sup>71</sup>

By means of a divinatory test, *just in case* this was all a big coincidence, the ark returns directly towards Israel along with the gifts on a cart, contrary to the expectation that the cows which led it would return for their calves.<sup>72</sup> The ark has here experienced its exodus from Philistia. In directing the ark towards Israel, we see that though Yahweh has punished his people he will not abandon them entirely, but returns to offer them an opportunity to turn back to him. From an exilic perspective, the hope of Israel is just that of a second exodus; in the same way that Yahweh worked wonders and compelled the Egyptians and the Philistines to return his possession, so he will do to the Babylonians to bring about the return of the exiles. In this regard, Matthew Beach argues that the ark in fact symbolizes the ‘people of God who have been taken into captivity and await divine redemption.’<sup>73</sup> We should be wary about pushing this analogy too far, and it should not be taken as the central understanding of the ark in these passages, but with regard to the exilic hope it is indeed a crucial image. In the previous section we considered the reason for Israel’s exile and the obedience required for their return, here we have discussed Yahweh’s sovereignty, power, and desire to bring about the second exodus, and in the final section we shall consider through similar elements the nature of the leadership under which it may take place.

## **D. The Davidic Perspective**

### *1. ‘Bringing the Ark to Jerusalem will Secure my Dynasty’*

The significance of the narrative in 1 Sam 4-6 which we have unpacked above is encountered once more in 2 Sam 6. The characters have changed and the events take place after the passage of twenty years, yet we find in this latter narrative a similar

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<sup>71</sup> Smelik, “Hidden Messages,” 50. See also Garsiel, *First Book of Samuel*, 53 and McCarter, *I Samuel*, 132.

<sup>72</sup> McCarter, *I Samuel*, 134. Klein explains how ‘the divination contest, of course, provided another opportunity for Yahweh to show his superiority and power.’ (Klein, *I Samuel*, 58).

<sup>73</sup> Beach, “Rereading the Ark Narrative,” 85f. Ahlström similarly writes of the psychological comfort which AN would bring to the exiles, for, ‘as Yahweh had once been imprisoned by the hostile Philistines and... had journeyed back to Jerusalem in triumph, so the people of the exile would, presumably, journey back too...’ (Ahlström, “Travels of the Ark,” 143f.).

warning against attempting to control Yahweh, and a similar hope for a return from captivity. Just as Dtr thought it necessary to make use of both events within the larger work to convey his message, so we shall use this final section to examine the complementary ways in which he does so. At this point in the history, David had been recently anointed king over all Israel at Hebron (2 Sam 5:1-5) and had captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites in order to set up residence there (vv.6-9). Just prior to the reemergence of the ark, Israel were once again faced with war against the Philistines; however, on this occasion David enquired of Yahweh, was given divine approval for his military action (v.19), and consequently went on to victory (vv.20-25).<sup>74</sup>

With the Philistine situation under control and a new centre of operations in place, 2 Sam 6 begins with David taking a host to Baale-judah in order to bring the ark from there to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:1-2).<sup>75</sup> The text does not provide us with David's motivation for moving the ark, and so scholars and commentators have spilt much ink in discerning what it may be. A significant underlying factor within the discussions is a concept of the ark as a 'dynastic symbol'.<sup>76</sup> Some have suggested that the significance of David's actions lay in how he appropriated a cult object associated with his predecessor, and therefore he 'projected his kingship as the legitimate continuation of Saul's'.<sup>77</sup> This reasoning is drawn more from historical traditions behind the text than from what Dtr presents to us, for the ark is only once mentioned in relation to Saul in the problematic text of 1 Sam 14:18.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, though the ark may exhibit dynastic

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<sup>74</sup> Smelik places great importance on the events surrounding 2 Sam 6 for its interpretation, listing the similar themes found throughout. We take a similar view and shall consider 2 Sam 7 below (Smelik, "Hidden Messages," 51).

<sup>75</sup> There is a certain confusion surrounding the designation of 'Baale-judah' and the priests found there, which differs from the designations found in 1 Sam 7:1. For discussion, see Stirrup, "Why Has Yahweh Defeated," 87; Blenkinsopp, "Kiriath-Jearim and the Ark," 148ff.; Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 278f., usually based around the continuation of the hypothetical original source. Polzin concludes well: 'Whatever one is to do with the urban discrepancy... it is clear that each account in its present narrative shape and location is patterned to reflect the other in striking correlations – all orchestrated in a manner that serves the Deuteronomist's larger ideological purposes.' (Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 68).

<sup>76</sup> Fretheim, "The Ark in Deuteronomy," 11; Matthews, "Physical Space," 16f.

<sup>77</sup> Van der Toorn and Houtman, "David and the Ark," 229. Matthews plausibly suggests that David's acquisition of the ark was in order to *prevent* any descendants of Saul using it in this way (Matthews, "Physical Space," 17). Seow writes of David using the ark to 'ally himself with the Shilonite confederacy' in a way which Saul failed to do (Seow, "Ark of the Covenant," 390), but again, this theory is grounded in historical considerations outside of Dtr.

<sup>78</sup> See the discussion above in the second chapter.

significance, this appears to be something which Dtr presents as originating with David, rather than a continuation from the previously deposed monarch.<sup>79</sup>

In viewing 2 Sam 6 through the lens of Dtr, a more likely leadership precursor to David is that of Joshua, within whose narrative the ark held great significance. Coats claims that this connection was formed on the basis of ‘land control’, arguing that ‘the issue is not to place the new king in line with the tradition of Joshua’s leadership, at least in the first order. It is to establish a legitimate claim for control of the land.’<sup>80</sup> Coats rightly sees the connection between the ark and the land which is a prominent theme throughout the book of Joshua, but he is less justified in separating this out from Joshua’s leadership, for the issues of covenant, land and leadership in Dtr are all interconnected, as we established in the first chapter. The land was acquired under the leadership of Joshua through his obedience to Yahweh’s commands; the ark served as a means of validating Joshua’s leadership on account of its association with Yahweh’s acts of power. Therefore, whatever the more localized historical traditions may convey, it is probably the ark’s association with Joshua’s leadership and Yahweh’s power which Dtr presented David appropriating for himself and his future dynasty,<sup>81</sup> with control of the land as an ideological consequence.

Unlike in the Joshua narratives, however, there is no mention in the text of Yahweh instructing David to move the ark, and so it would seem to be David’s initiative in doing so.<sup>82</sup> Brueggemann neatly captures the duality of thought behind David’s action, observing that ‘while this move may have been an act of good faith, it is also a nervy act of calculation.’<sup>83</sup> David did not necessarily believe that his actions were out of line with Yahweh’s will, yet he did not enquire as to whether this was the case, and seemed

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<sup>79</sup> Matthews, “Physical Space,” 17: ‘Once inside Jerusalem, the ark becomes associated with the Davidic Monarchy.’ See also, Blenkinsopp, “Kiriath-Jearim and the Ark,” 48 and Metzler, “Ark of the Covenant,” 207.

<sup>80</sup> Coats, “Ark of the Covenant,” 155.

<sup>81</sup> Matthews, “Physical Space,” 16. Holding a similar view, Matthews traces this Dtr leadership tradition back to Moses.

<sup>82</sup> Donald Murray rightly sees a discrepancy between David consulting Yahweh in the previous narrative and the ‘absence of such consultation’ here (Murray, *Divine Prerogative*, 129 n. 58).

<sup>83</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 248.

to be more concerned with establishing his own power base than with obedience to Yahweh.<sup>84</sup> As such, scholars rightly argue for the element of control which David was taking upon himself, even regarding his action as ‘an attempt to gain power at God’s expense.’<sup>85</sup> Thus a parallel may be drawn between the present text and those considered above in which the ark was used as a means of controlling Yahweh, in 1 Sam 4 with the purpose of winning a military victory, and in 2 Sam 6 for securing David’s rule.<sup>86</sup>

Therefore, as this narrative opens we see David seeking control by forcing Yahweh’s hand, yet we will discuss at the end of this section the way in which Yahweh ultimately *did* affirm David’s dynasty in 2 Sam 7 without any need for arm-twisting. Ahlström rightly notes the link between the ark and David’s dynasty: ‘With Yahweh “enthroned” in Jerusalem, the religious basis for David’s rule is present.’<sup>87</sup> This interconnection of divine validation continues throughout the line of David’s dynasty, and Solomon’s construction of the temple in which the ark is later kept serves as a further means of establishing this relationship.<sup>88</sup> Throughout the remainder of the history, David’s descendants continue to rule from Jerusalem in succession, in contrast to the multiple dynasties and stand-alone kings of the North, and thus the presence of the ark in the

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<sup>84</sup> Smith notes the ‘considerable changes in the opening section’ to this narrative made by the author of Chronicles in their adaptation (Smith, *Samuel*, 291). For our purposes we note that 1 Chr 13 records David summoning the ark ‘if it seems good to [the assembly of Israel] and if it is from Yahweh our God’, yet the presence of David’s concern for Yahweh’s will in Chronicles makes its absence all the more stark in Samuel.

<sup>85</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 160. See also Matthews, “Physical Space,” 17f. Metzler also regards David’s act as a means of controlling Yahweh (Metzler, “Ark of the Covenant,” 206f.) though she holds a variant view of the ark by which it is akin to a ‘partially domesticated wild animal’ which requires taming (Ibid., 201ff.).

<sup>86</sup> In fact, on account of both 1 Sam 4-6 and also the war with the Philistines in 2 Sam 5 which directly precedes this narrative, Murray regards David’s summoning of the ark as part of a display of victory over the Philistines and their prior abduction of the ark, ‘yet the reader might note that the ark, whose freedom from Philistine control is here being publicly celebrated, thereby passes under the control of its liberator.’ (Murray, *Divine Prerogative*, 122).

<sup>87</sup> Ahlström, “Travels of the Ark,” 148.

<sup>88</sup> In light of Yahweh’s dynastic promises in 2 Sam 7, DeVries argues that for Dtr, ‘the security of the Davidic succession remains ever the prerequisite for the establishment of the temple.’ (DeVries, *1 Kings*, 125). Mettinger also considers how the additional construction of Solomon’s palace alongside the temple ‘suggests an ideological link between the heavenly sovereign on the temple’s throne of cherubim and the Davidic king in the palace,’ (Mettinger, “YHWH SABAOTH,” 136).

temple continued in appearance to validate the legitimacy of this dynasty.<sup>89</sup> This would in turn have been tied in with the view of the temple's immutability, for if the temple was – contrary to Dtr – held up by Israel as a sign of Yahweh's protection, surely it also guaranteed the continuation of the Davidic dynasty.<sup>90</sup> In that light, its destruction would have caused serious questions for the exiles regarding the future not only of the nation, but particularly of its leadership. This apparent divine validation of the dynasty was precisely what David was taking into his own hands by his own initiative.

## 2. *Yahweh Bursts Out against Uzzah*

When Israel attempted to use the ark to force Yahweh's hand against the Philistines they experienced a devastating defeat in battle, similarly, the Philistines' belief that they had overpowered and captured Yahweh was followed by the humiliation of their god and the horrors of the plague; therefore, David's attempt to use the ark in securing his rule did not bode well. Amidst the procession in which the ark was transported to Jerusalem, the oxen which drove the cart stumbled, so that 'Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it,' (2 Sam 6:6) and he was consequently struck down by Yahweh and 'died there by the ark of God,' (v.7). The text is not clear surrounding the reason for Uzzah's death, and the explanatory Hebrew term *הָשֵׁה* provided by the author is in itself contentious and unlikely to provide a firm answer.<sup>91</sup> The discussion among commentators is often controlled by the holiness regulations in P which prevent contact with holy objects (Num 4:15; cf. Lev 16:2),<sup>92</sup> and this is supported by the parallel account in 1 Chr 13, 15 in which the enactment of cultic practice is a central factor. Such ritualistic concerns are present at times in Dtr and therefore cannot be

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<sup>89</sup> Fretheim argues that the way in which 'the ark had become so intimately bound up with the claims of the monarchy,' is the reason for a 'de-emphasizing' (or perhaps, demythologizing) of them both in Deuteronomy, (Fretheim, "The Ark in Deuteronomy," 12).

<sup>90</sup> In this manner Gitay holds that 'the king and temple are inseparable.' (Gitay, "Samuel Narrative," 225). Indeed, Solomon begins the dedication of the temple by recalling Yahweh's promise of the Davidic dynasty (1 Kgs 8:23-26).

<sup>91</sup> The term is usually translated either 'for his error' or 'for his irreverence' in the mainstream English translations, both of which only raise further questions. For discussion, see Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 224; Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 103; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 165.

<sup>92</sup> See e.g. Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 279: '...disregarding the usual precautions taken when serving the ark'; Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 208: '...committed sacrilege and was killed by the contact with God's holiness'; Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 249: 'To touch the ark is to impinge on God's holiness.'

entirely disregarded,<sup>93</sup> but neither can the fact that no cultic reason is given in the present text be ignored, and a further explanation should be sought.<sup>94</sup>

A. Anderson moves in the right direction when he suggests that Uzzah's fate was due to his failure to recognise that 'the falling of the ark was really a *sign*, namely, Yahweh's way of stopping the procession,' and so in attempting to catch the ark, Uzzah disregarded Yahweh's will, even if unintentionally.<sup>95</sup> Anderson's suggestion is important because it does not ignore the regulations surrounding the ark but acknowledges them as an 'important factor,'<sup>96</sup> and thus they may contribute to the cause Uzzah's death whilst allowing for the broader explanation as to why the ark fell in the first place. David's attempt to use the ark for his own benefit already anticipated some form of retribution, and so Uzzah's fate – even if viewed through the lens of cultic prohibitions – should be seen within the wider scheme of Yahweh's judgment for David's initiative. Matthews thus takes note of David's disregard for proper protocol and yet further argues, 'it is not surprising then that a tragedy occurs to remind David and the people involved in this triumphal procession... which is designed more to demonstrate David's power than the ark, that they cannot manipulate this power without consequences.'<sup>97</sup> Therefore the death of Uzzah should be seen as the result of David and the cohort's general illegitimate attempt to control Yahweh through the ark; David's failure to adhere to cultic regulations may then be the means by which Yahweh brought about the end of the ceremony.

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<sup>93</sup> E.g. the ark is entrusted to and carried by the Levites (Deut 10:8; 31:9; Josh 3:3; 2 Sam 15:24) and the cultic character of the ark's use in Joshua discussed in the second chapter.

<sup>94</sup> Baldwin argues that the phrase 'those who bore the ark' in 2 Sam 6:13 suggests that 'this time men carried the ark in the prescribed way.' (Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 209). This is an astute observation, nevertheless, this is an action inferred from the text and not an explicit reason provided by the narrator; the greater care to abide by the regulations in the second procession does not limit the cause for Uzzah's fate to a breach in cultic practice alone.

<sup>95</sup> Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 104 (emphasis original). Just as the Babylonians read the 'moving, swaying, and turning of the statues – or even worse accidents occurring during the procession – as good or bad portents' during the New Year festival (Schaudig, "Bēl Bows, Nabû Stoops!," 566) surely the ark falling to the ground would have served as a divine sign to those watching the procession, rather than just an unfortunate accident.

<sup>96</sup> Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 104.

<sup>97</sup> Matthews, "Physical Space," 17. Also Janzen: 'Israel cannot control God's power through manipulating the ark; their attempts to do so are met with destruction.' (Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 163).



Yahweh's warning produced its desired outcome, for Uzzah's death caused a halt to the procession due to the fear and anger which it instilled in David, who asked, 'How can the ark of Yahweh come to me?' (2 Sam 6:9).<sup>98</sup> Brueggemann likens this 'awestruck question' to that which was voiced in 1 Sam 6:20 after the deaths at Beth-shemesh.<sup>99</sup> In both scenarios, awareness was raised of Yahweh's sovereignty and power, producing an uncertainty about the action which should be taken. David therefore decided for the meantime to leave the ark in the care of Obed-edom the Gittite, with whom it remained for three months (vv.10-11).<sup>100</sup> This state of uncertainty after the tragic event may reflect the limbo in which the exiles found themselves, unclear about what their future held and whether a journey to Jerusalem would ever be possible in light of the recent catastrophe.

### 3. *Sacrifice and Submission*

After the three months had passed, David receives the news that, 'Yahweh has blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, on account of the ark of God.' (2 Sam 6:12). After all the chaos and death that had surrounded the ark, it came about that proximity to this sacred object had brought about blessing. Some scholars have read this blessing as a sign that the ark should have been left in its present location,<sup>101</sup> but whilst this is a possible reading, the way in which this news motivated David to resume the procession 'with gladness' (v.12) despite his previous fear, together with the fact that the ark arrives at Jerusalem without incident on this journey (v.17) would suggest that Yahweh was here indicating his favour upon David.<sup>102</sup> For if David were not only disregarding the divine will but in fact blatantly *contradicting* it as in the former reading, surely an even worse event than Uzzah's death would be expected, as Yahweh would certainly not allow this transgression to go without correction. At the least, David

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<sup>98</sup> Smith rightly sees in this question not a matter of travel methodology, but rather whether 'to have [the ark] come at all.' (Smith, *Samuel*, 293).

<sup>99</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 249.

<sup>100</sup> Anderson suggests that this location simply 'may have been the nearest dwelling place.' (Anderson, 2 *Samuel*, 104).

<sup>101</sup> See e.g. Murray, *Divine Prerogative*, 132 and Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 163.

<sup>102</sup> So Anderson, 2 *Samuel*, 105; Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 250; Hertzberg, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 279.

is here showing more of a concern for Yahweh's initiative, even if he has not yet arrived at the level of obedience and submission which we shall observe later.

As part of this second procession, David implements some specific changes which display his reverence for Yahweh. The most notable of these is the offering of sacrifices, both after six paces (v.13) and at the culmination of the journey (v.17). Janzen argues that these sacrifices 'signal cultic loyalty,' and as this is 'the first time in the narrative that we see David sacrifice... perhaps this sign of loyalty reassures God.'<sup>103</sup> We saw a similar offering of sacrifices before the ark in Jdg 20:26, and so perhaps these offerings also signal David's desire for communion along with his renewed loyalty. However, as they are accompanied by music and dance (vv.14-15) rather than the weeping and fasting of Judges, it would seem that a more celebratory situation of thanksgiving was in view.<sup>104</sup> David Wright dedicated an article to studying the differences between the music and dance in the former and latter processions,<sup>105</sup> and though not all of his observations fully convince, he rightly observes that the actions of David and Israel 'reveal a greater emotional involvement in the ceremony and, implicitly, a greater reverence for the deity. This compliments the other reforms in the procession that are markers of greater intensity, piety, and ritual care,' referring here to the sacrifices offered and the bearers of the ark carrying it on their shoulders.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, after the incident with Uzzah, David made some deliberate changes in the procession in order to reflect his loyalty and reverence for Yahweh after he interpreted the blessing of Obed-edom as a sign of Yahweh's initiative to continue.

A changed attitude can be seen on David's part, yet the reason for Yahweh's apparent change of heart is left a mystery. Why did he decide that the procession could continue after David's attempt to wrestle control? The chapter which follows these events may prove enlightening. At the beginning of 2 Sam 7 David enacts a slight backsliding after

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<sup>103</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 163.

<sup>104</sup> Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 209f.; Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 250; Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 233.

<sup>105</sup> Wright, *Music and Dance*, 201ff.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 215. Wright refers in this quote specifically to the musical element, but applied this also to the dancing (*Ibid.*, 223).

having seemed to learn his lesson about attempting to take control, and he suggests building a house for Yahweh (vv.2-3), a request which is promptly rejected (vv.4-7).<sup>107</sup> However, the surprising element is that this discourse is immediately followed by Yahweh's promise to bless Israel (vv.9-10) and establish an everlasting dynasty for David (vv.11-16). In other words, Yahweh appears to reward David for what may be considered another power-grab attempt.<sup>108</sup> The first question we may raise is the reason for Yahweh rejecting David's offer, and the answer seems to lie in the same area that we have discussed with regards to the ark: initiative. David Firth considers how Yahweh cannot have rejected the notion of a temple indefinitely, as Solomon is later tasked with building it in 1 Kgs 5,<sup>109</sup> but rather, 'the point is that temple-building cannot be humanly initiated... Yahweh's authority and freedom mean that a temple can be constructed only by his nominee.'<sup>110</sup> That Yahweh promises the building of the temple later in this very chapter (2 Sam 7:13) would indeed indicate that the temple itself is not the issue, but from where the initiative came.

The concern for divine initiative is also key to understanding David's subsequent reward of an eternal dynasty. Brueggemann comments on how Yahweh's speech regarding David's past and future (vv.8-11) is framed by first-person verbs, i.e. 'I took you... I have been with you... I will make you...' and therefore, 'David is given no credit and assigned no merit in this recital.'<sup>111</sup> Just as Yahweh has been in control of David's past, so he is sovereign over his future. In this regard, Yahweh's promise to David is not out of obligation but is rather 'a free and uninduced divine gift,'<sup>112</sup> and McCarter observes how Yahweh's promise is a contrast to and reversal of David's

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<sup>107</sup> Eslinger comments on not only David's suspect motives for building the temple, but also the consequences: 'A single move both obliges and potentially puts the deity at the king's disposal.' (Eslinger, *House of God*, 24). Brueggemann takes a more diplomatic approach, allowing that, 'Temple building is undoubtedly a mixed act of genuine piety and self-serving legitimation.' (Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 254). Evidently David's request was not entirely out of a concern to provide Yahweh with a proper shelter but rather was tied into his political aspirations.

<sup>108</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 164.

<sup>109</sup> Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 384.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. Eslinger highlights that Yahweh's initiative is particularly crucial as the matter is that of covenant, indicated by the language used by Yahweh, and thus, 'Yahweh alone may initiate any action that bears upon the state of covenantal relations.' (Eslinger, *House of God*, 27).

<sup>111</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 255.

<sup>112</sup> McCarter, *II Samuel*, 229.

initial offer, essentially rendering his speech: ‘*You* will not build a house for me. *I* shall build a house for you!’<sup>113</sup> The history up to this point had made Yahweh’s election of David clear (1 Sam 16:12-13; 2 Sam 5:2, 10), and so it seems that the main danger to David’s leadership was his own desire for power.

This in turn helps us to comprehend why Yahweh displayed an apparent change of heart regarding the ark’s trip to Jerusalem; Yahweh may not have had any particular grievance about the ark’s new destination, but rather he opposed this move on the grounds that David took the initiative for his own power. We considered in the previous chapter how Mesopotamian images could be used to validate kingship and how the aniconic nature of ark subverts this, and here Dtr further wishes to avoid any such connection which places emphasis on the power of the ark itself to grant validation to David’s rule which could then be manipulated at will. As long as it was made clear that David’s authority was granted by Yahweh himself and thus the ark’s movement was ultimately under divine initiative, the plan could go forward.

This promise to David is wider in scope than 2 Sam 6-7 alone, continuing as a major theme throughout Dtr.<sup>114</sup> All subsequent kings of Judah come from David’s line, and on several occasions this is specifically stated to be on account of Yahweh’s original promise to David (1 Kgs 11:38-39; 1 Kgs 15:4; 2 Kgs 8:19). As Janzen notes, however, this promise ‘puts no limit on how severely the dynasty can be punished,’<sup>115</sup> and Yahweh’s reiteration of the promise to Solomon reveals the obedience which is required (1 Kgs 9:4-5). Once again, the covenantal stipulations and the requirement of obedience to Yahweh hold together all parts of Israel’s life and history.<sup>116</sup> Only two chapters later, Solomon’s disobedience is shown to bring about the anticipated punishment in the form

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid. McCarter’s conclusion and rendering is supported by the fact that both of the pronouns in Yahweh’s rhetorical question in v.5 are emphatic, along with the first-person pronoun which begins the speech in v.8 (Ibid., 226). See also Eslinger, *House of God*, 39.

<sup>114</sup> Cross, “Book of Kings,” 281; Harvey, “Deuteronomistic History,” 255f.

<sup>115</sup> Janzen, *The Violent Gift*, 164.

<sup>116</sup> Eslinger, *House of God*, 41.

of the division of kingdoms (1 Kgs 11:11-13), and yet, on account of Yahweh's promise to David, the dynasty continues.<sup>117</sup>

The theme of this Davidic dynasty comes to a head in the very final verses of Dtr in which the exiled Judahite king Jehoiachin is released from prison, given an elevated status, and regularly invited to dine with the king of Babylon (2 Kgs 25:27-30). There is considerable scholarly discussion as to whether this narrative indicates an exilic hope for a continuation of the Davidic dynasty or whether that interpretation makes too much of the passage.<sup>118</sup> Without wading deeply into the discussion for which space does not allow, it would seem that Dtr is here remaining 'intentionally ambiguous' regarding the future, as at the exilic time of writing, it was simply unknown.<sup>119</sup> Had Dtr wished to express a definite hope that the return *would* happen, then more may be expected of this finale; conversely, the ending as it stands does not cohere with a view devoid of redemption. We have considered all along how the worldview of Dtr is founded on the sovereignty of Yahweh and the covenantal response of his people, and therefore while Yahweh may initiate a return under a Davidic leader, it was dependent on his timing and the faithfulness of Israel.

One final demonstration of this ideology in our study occurs in 2 Sam 15:24-29 as David flees Jerusalem on account of the rebellion of his son, Absalom. As David is leaving the city, he is met by priests and Levites who bear the ark and urge David to take it with him. This event could potentially have led to a repeat of what has been witnessed throughout AN if David were to remove the ark from its place as a means of legitimizing his leadership against the usurper. In evidence that David had truly learned from his previous mistake, however, he instead instructs for the ark to be returned, reasoning that, 'If I find favour in the sight of Yahweh, then he will bring me back again and show me both [the ark] and his holy habitation. But if he should say thus: "I

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<sup>117</sup> Janzen, "An Ambiguous Ending," 51.

<sup>118</sup> For discussion, see Begg, "Jehoiachin's Release," 49ff.; Murray, "Of all the Years," 245ff.' Hoppe, "Deuteronomistic History," 13f.; Cross, "Book of Kings," 276f. The debates tend to find foundation in the original disagreement between Noth's pessimism and Von Rad's optimism for Dtr's view of the future, yet they seem for a middle ground between these extremes.

<sup>119</sup> Janzen, "An Ambiguous Ending," 58.

have no delight in you,” behold, here I am, let him do to me as seems good to him.’ (vv.25-26).<sup>120</sup> In this speech, David reflects the central message of Dtr to the exiles, that a potential return is dependent neither on the ark nor the temple, but on obedience and submission to the sovereign will of Yahweh. We argued in the second chapter that the ark’s journey to the temple in Jerusalem was a central facet of its overall narrative; we see Yahweh bring the ark into Canaan in Josh 3-4, return from Philistia in 1 Sam 6, enter Jerusalem in 2 Sam 6 and find it’s lodging in the temple in 1 Kgs 8. Yahweh throughout Dtr has sent his ark on a trajectory towards Jerusalem, and indeed, David was also brought back from his own exile on account of the uprising and restored to his place in the capital as per his hope (2 Sam 19). In light of all that had gone before them, the exiled people of Israel were to remain in obedient submission to Yahweh with hope for a similar trajectory in the future.

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<sup>120</sup> Gordon notes the similarity with Eli’s response in 1 Sam 3:18 (Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 274).

## CONCLUSION

The antagonists of *Indiana Jones* never had a chance to learn from their mistakes and the distorted beliefs which they held surrounding the ark; the dangerous artifact remained under U.S. control and the few people from the Nazi party who had any dealings with it were blown into oblivion, taking their dreams of manipulating its power with them. The same was not true for Israel, however. Although there was no subsequent historical occurrence of the ark beyond the fall of Jerusalem, its memory along with that of the temple remained alive, and the meta-narrative of the Deuteronomistic History served to provide the exiles with a correct retrospective understanding of their significance. Therefore, whilst the situation of exile and captivity was dire, a clearer view of their past offered hope for the future.

Our study began by arguing for the independence and integrity of Dtr, surveying the ideology which it propagated, and the correct way in which the ark was to function within such a framework. We then looked further afield to relevant ancient Near Eastern concepts of divine statues and abandonment by the deity, balancing out the biblical response to these ideas in order to understand the affinity between the Deuteronomistic ark and cult images, and also the influence which they may have had on those held captive in Babylon. On the basis of both the biblical and the extra-biblical ideologies and concepts, we narrowed our focus to the narratives centred on the ark in Samuel, and how the conflicting worldviews were presented within it. On this basis we were able to unpack the message which the author intended to communicate to his audience by means of the circumstances and surprising events which surrounded the ark, how this cult object was related to Yahweh, and how this all fit into the wider Deuteronomistic understanding of the exile. The realignment of Israel's views surrounding the ark was consequently seen in tandem with Israel's poor leadership and covenantal infidelity which led to their exile and also the possible hope of their return. In the final chapter we explored this message from the perspectives of Israel, the Philistines, and David.

The Israelite encounter with the ark in 1 Sam 4-6 emphasized the ultimate importance of covenant. Through poor leadership and a disregard for the covenantal significance of the ark, viewing it instead as a divine image to be controlled, the Israelites brought judgment upon themselves, experiencing defeat in battle against the Philistines and the loss of their central cult object. This scenario would have resonated with the pre-exilic view of temple's inviolability, which was shattered through the experience of Jerusalem's desolation. The Israelite situation in AN was only remedied through later confession and repentance which took place under the authority of the faithful, divinely-appointed leader, Samuel. Through these shocking events and their aftermath, captive Israel could grasp the true reason for the disaster which befell the nation and their temple, understanding that their return to Jerusalem would only take place if they first return to Yahweh and faithfully adhere to the stipulations of his covenant. But what if despite Israel's faithfulness, Yahweh did not desire to take them back or was simply not strong enough to bring about their return?

These questions were addressed through the viewpoint of the Philistines. The enemies of Israel held a similar view regarding the ark, believing that in its capture, Yahweh had either succumbed to the greater power of Dagon or else joined the Philistine cause. Such notions were short lived, as Yahweh's humiliation of Dagon and the plagues which he sent among the people revealed that he was neither impotent nor a defector. Babylon had not yet experienced any such attack on its deity or its civilians, yet the interactions of the ark and the Philistines revealed an Israelite hope that this would take place in the future. Just as Yahweh brought about the exodus of his people from Egypt and a similar exodus of his ark from Philistia, those captive in Babylon could remain assured that he both desired to return them to their land, and had the power to do so.

Any doubts which remained in the minds of Dtr's audience were addressed by the events surrounding David's procession of the ark to Jerusalem. Despite Yahweh's previous confirmation of David as ruler, the king still desired to bring the object previously associated with leadership and power into his capital in order to secure his rule. The tragic death of Uzzah caused a halt to the procession, however, which was



only resumed after Yahweh made clear that David's rule and the movement of the ark were under his own initiative and authority. Although David's alterations to the second half of the procession suggested an initial change of attitude, he most clearly showed evidence that he had learned this experience when he instructed that the ark be left in Jerusalem after fleeing from the uprising, in the hope that Yahweh would bring about his return despite the absence of this important symbol, and his hope was not disappointed. Yahweh had established the Davidic monarchy by his own initiative, just as he had chosen his people Israel, and if they remained faithful he would ensure the longevity of both.

By presenting these encounters with the ark through the various perspectives, Dtr provided his exilic readers with the key to interpreting their past and understanding their present situation. Israel were to remain confident in the knowledge that Yahweh's will was to bring about a return to the land which he had promised them, and neither the capture of the ark nor the destruction of the temple placed any limits on his power. In the meantime, the people of Israel were to remain faithful to Yahweh and his covenant by following the commandments set out within it and worshipping him alone. Even though the situation seemed bleak, Israel could hold on to the hope that they would one day return to their land under the divinely-appointed leadership of a Davidic king.

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