

ISRAEL'S WORST KING?
THE STORY OF AHAB
IN THE LIGHT OF ITS RELATIONSHIP
TO THE STORIES OF SAUL, DAVID AND SOLOMON

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i>
<i>ASV</i>	American Standard Version
<i>AV</i>	Authorized Version
<i>BDB</i>	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>BZAW</i>	Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>FRLANT</i>	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplemental Series
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
<i>MT</i>	Masoretic Text
<i>NASB</i>	New American Standard Bible
<i>NJB</i>	New Jerusalem Bible
<i>NRSV</i>	New Revised Standard Version
<i>PEGLMBS</i>	<i>Proceedings Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

SUMMARY

Israel's Worst King?

The Story of Ahab in the Light of Its Relationship to the Stories of Saul, David and Solomon

by Hank B. Slikker

In the story of King Ahab (1 Kgs 16.29-22.40), Ahab is declared to be the worst person in the Hebrew Bible (1 Kgs 21.25) seemingly because he repeats the infamous crimes of King Saul, King David and King Solomon. Because of the similarities in the behaviour of Ahab with his three predecessors, however, the story is a story about these three kings as well. As a result of the associations, Ahab's evil status is challenged.

Views of the character Ahab in other literary traditions lend credence to the suggestion that Ahab does not live up to his bad name, and a close reading of the text of the story supports the suggestion. Such a reading leads to seeing King Ahab as a character who is a composite of Saul, David and Solomon at their worst. These correspondences between the four kings lead to several results. Without saying that Ahab is not wicked, the correspondences (relatively) normalise the moral character of Ahab (in that Saul, David and Solomon may be considered 'normal'), while they diminish the moral character of the three kings by their association with Ahab. As a result, Ahab is viewed in a different and better light than what he is declared to be, while Saul, David and Solomon are viewed in a lesser light. The diminishing after-effect also leads to rereading the stories of Saul, David and Solomon in the light of the story of Ahab. Read from such a perspective, their stories become stained by the stigma of being associated with Ahab.

Israel's Worst King?

The Story of Ahab in the Light of Its Relationship to the Stories of Saul, David and Solomon

Introduction

This thesis aims to show that King Ahab does not deserve a reputation as the Bible's greatest evil-doer and, moreover, that the story of Ahab in 1 Kings should be viewed as more than just the account of Israel's most evil king. Instead, I will argue that the story of Ahab is also about Saul, David and Solomon as well. These four kings merge into a collage of criminal associations that irrevocably binds them together. These associations are created by recalling the most notorious crimes of the three kings through the criminal acts of King Ahab, creating an alliance that affects the re-reading of the crimes of Saul, David and Solomon since these three kings in turn have been allied with the arch-villain King Ahab.

In chapter one I present examples of the character Ahab from extra-biblical writings in which King Ahab is not deemed as villainous as the biblical account says that he is. My purpose in the chapter is to show a range of assessments of his character which offer support to my literary view of the character of Ahab that the biblical picture of Ahab has not convinced its readers of his evil status. The lack of agreement over the degree of Ahab's guilt facilitates a stronger literary connection between Ahab and his three predecessors Saul, David and Solomon, which I will establish later in the thesis.

In chapter two I present my own reading of the story of Ahab, paying particular attention to the introduction and to whether or not the text makes a convincing case against Ahab as the arch-villain. I suggest that it does not. Ahab is not presented as a king whose own evil deeds are unique, but as a king who repeats the crimes of Saul, David and Solomon. Thus, reading the story of Ahab is like re-reading the crimes of those three kings through the person of Ahab. This presentation raises the question to what extent can Ahab be the Bible's arch-villain if he is an incarnation of the three kings.

In chapter three I defend my reading of Ahab's close narrative association with his three predecessors showing the similarities between the accounts of his crimes and the accounts of their crimes. These associations have the effect of leaving Ahab looking like a king in the mould of his predecessors rather than as a king who merits a distinction as the incomparable evil-doer. But the association of the three kings brought about through the story of Ahab also has a negative affect on our perception of the characters of Saul, David and Solomon when we read their stories in the light of the story of Ahab. In chapter four I show how their character is diminished by their association with Ahab.

In presenting this study of the story of Ahab I will be focusing on the literary Ahab, but this will not be along rigid lines that exclude the historical Ahab. Often the distinction between them will be blurred because I engage scholars who employ historical parallels such as religious, military, social and political considerations in their attempts to get a clear understanding of the Ahab of the text. Thus, my discussion often deals with the Ahab who is presented as a contemporary of his historical-cultural milieu. Historical-critical studies often argue that the King Ahab of the MT is not the King Ahab of history. These studies ultimately show that it is not possible to determine the historical identity of the king in the narrative of the story of Ahab since the events contained in it are often parallel to events in the stories of other kings in the books of Kings.

My study is based on the final form of the MT, and translations of the Hebrew Bible are my own except where I have noted otherwise.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING ABOUT AHAB

Ahab in Early Literature

In this chapter I want to offer a sense of what others have said about Ahab in order to show that there is general agreement that Ahab is not necessarily viewed as the worst king Israel ever had. While all of the comments refer to the historical Ahab, I will not be engaging in debate about who the 'real' Ahab is in terms of history. I am including these views because they contribute to the picture that I present in the remainder of the thesis. In the early writings shown below, the LXX presents Ahab as being heavily influenced by his wife Jezebel; Josephus presents an Ahab who wears the virtues of a Roman-type hero; the Talmud presents a mixed critique of a king who is both condemned and praised, while early ecclesiastical literature presents Ahab as one worthy of being a good example for wayward saints. In the final portion of the chapter I briefly show some later modern historical-critical views of the biblical Ahab. These modern studies are significant in that they establish Ahab to be a later addition to the text and thus not guilty of the crimes assigned to him by the biblical editors.

The Septuagint

In the Septuagint, the story of Ahab has a different sequence than it does in the MT. The LXX transposes 1 Kings 20 and 21 so that Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kgs 21 MT) follows the story of Elijah's flight from Jezebel (1 Kgs 19 MT) and precedes the two chapters about Ahab's wars with Aram (1 Kgs 20 and 22 MT). The ordering in the LXX appears to draw a thematic relationship between the chapters by linking together the stories of Elijah (1 Kgs 17-19, 21 MT) and the stories of the Aramean wars (1 Kgs 20 and 22 MT). The MT, however, appears to draw a chronological-sequential relationship between the chapters suggesting that Ahab's death (1 Kgs 22) follows Naboth's murder (1 Kgs 21; see discussion below on 1 Kings 20).

Gooding suggests that the ordering of the LXX is an attempt to 'whitewash' Ahab, that is, to distance the king from his culpability in Naboth's murder.¹ The rendering in the LXX, he believes, reproduces a tradition based on the 'nature of a secondary Targum'.² He bases his conclusion (1) on three LXX textual additions in 18.45, 20.16 and 20.27, which present an emotionally sensitive Ahab, and (2) on a slight revision of verbal aspect in 20.25 which transfers guilt in the Naboth affair to Jezebel. The following comparisons show Gooding's observations:

LXX

and Ahab wept and went to Jezreel (18.45).

[Ahab] rent his garments and put on sackcloth (20.16)

and because of the word, Ahab was pierced with sorrow before the Lord, and he went weeping (20.27).

MT

and Ahab rode off and went to Jezreel (18.45).

and Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth (21.16).

and when Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth over his bare flesh; he fasted, lay in the sackcloth, and went about dejectedly (21.27).

The first LXX addition presents Ahab weeping following the announcement of the end of the drought; in the MT Ahab shows no emotion (18.45). The second LXX addition

¹ D.W. Gooding, 'Ahab according to the Septuagint', *ZAW* 76 (1964), p. 279.

follows the announcement to Ahab that Naboth was dead: Ahab ‘rent his garments, and put on sackcloth’ (20.16 LXX); in the MT he simply ‘rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth Jezreelite, to take possession of it’ (21.16). The third LXX addition follows Elijah’s judgement on Ahab following Naboth’s murder: ‘and because of the word, Ahab was pierced with sorrow before the Lord, and he went weeping’ (20.27); in the MT, however, he tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth, fasts, lays on sackcloth, and goes about ‘dejectedly’ (21.27).

With respect to the revisions in verbal aspect, Gooding notes that the LXX transfers blame for Naboth’s murder from Ahab to Jezebel in 20.25 by shifting from a deliberate reflexive, in that Ahab ‘sold himself’ (21.25 MT), to a ‘pathetic passive’ in which ‘he was sold’ to do evil by Jezebel:³

LXX

MT

But it was all in vain, as far as Ahab was concerned, that he was sold to do evil . . .

Indeed, there was no one like Ahab, who sold himself to do what was evil . . .

Gooding proposes that every alteration in the LXX is ‘calculated to emphasise Ahab’s repentance and, therefore, are all of a piece with the motive behind the LXX order of the four stories’.⁴ However, Gooding may be overstating his case. Like the LXX, the MT also includes Jezebel’s influence on Ahab in 21.25:

Surely there was no one like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil, whom Jezebel his wife incited.

Additionally, the end of the chapter also emphasises Ahab’s repentance. Yahweh was so impressed with Ahab’s remorse that he postponed his judgement on Ahab’s house until the time of his sons (1 Kgs 21.29). Upon observing Ahab’s repentance, Yahweh says to Elijah,

Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son’s days I will bring the disaster on his house.

² Gooding, p. 279.

³ Gooding, p. 279.

⁴ Gooding, p. 276-77.

In fact, Auld suggests that the editor of the books of Kings selects Ahab's repentance over Manasseh's repentance as 'an illustration of the surprising quality of the divine mercy'.⁵ For Auld, the editors selected the house of Ahab over the house of Manasseh to serve better the illustration of Yahweh's mercy, as well as to serve as a sign of Yahweh's displeasure with the Davidic kings of the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Josephus' Jewish Antiquities

In *Jewish Antiquities* (*Ant*), Ahab has been presented in a more positive light than in the LXX. As is known in scholarship, Josephus took significant narrative liberties in his presentation of biblical characters in his work *Jewish Antiquities*. Feldman reveals that Josephus employed various Hellenizations in his stories about famous biblical personalities in order to enhance them with heroic characteristics popular to the audience of his milieu.⁶ These enhancements helped offset contemporary scepticism about the Jewish people and their history. Some of Josephus' Hellenizations include adorning biblical heroes in the external and spiritual Hellenistic virtues of noble ancestry, physical appearance and spiritual piety.⁷ Bilde's assessment of *Jewish Antiquities* leads him to an identical conclusion: 'Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Saul, David, Solomon are portrayed in a Hellenistic light as great Greco-Roman intellectuals, lawgivers, wise men and generals'.⁸

In addition to hellenising his heroes, Josephus also altered the text of the stories of biblical heroes to enhance their presentation. However, his alterations of the biblical text were carried out carefully lest Josephus betray his stated intention of remaining

⁵ A. Graeme Auld, *Kings Without Privilege: David and Moses in the Story of the Bible's Kings* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), p. 170. Auld's point in context is to illustrate the 'unforgiving' nature of the books of Kings toward King David's line; hence, the distinction between Ahab and Manasseh is a distinction of favor for Israel over Judah.

⁶ Louis Feldman, 'Josephus', in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, ed., vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 981-98.

⁷ Feldman, 'Josephus', ABD, p. 998.

⁸ Per Bilde, *Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome: His Life, His Words and Their Importance*, (Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), p. 95.

entirely faithful to the biblical accounts (*Ant*, preface, section 3).⁹ Some of his modifications included omissions and alterations of questionable incidents and activities of certain biblical heroes that might cast them in embarrassing light,¹⁰ such as alterations in texts which lessen God's participation in events in order to highlight the hero's role, and less than straightforward representations of the political ramifications concerning God's kingdom in relation to those on earth (e.g., the Roman Empire).¹¹

Feldman notes that Josephus also disinfected the narratives of various biblical 'rogues' such as Ahab and Manasseh by 'going out of his way to restore respect for them, perhaps in part, out of sheer regard for the institution of kingship'.¹² Two of the ways that Josephus accomplishes this are: (1) by devoting additional narrative space to his heroes in order to enhance their status: 'He devotes 672 lines [in the Loeb Classical Library text] to his portrait [of Ahab] [*Ant.* 8, 316-392, 398-420] as against 340 lines in the Hebrew original [1 Kings 6,29-22,40] and 527 lines in the Septuagint version';¹³ and (2) by clothing his characters (especially kings) with the 'cardinal' virtues which all heroic leaders must possess, including wisdom, courage, temperance, justice and piety.¹⁴

Feldman points out several instances in Josephus's portrait of Ahab where political 'cleansing' has occurred. For example, Josephus suggests that Naboth is not entirely blameless in the events that bring about his murder because Naboth had been insubordinate and unreasonably disrespectful toward Ahab. Ahab's displeasure and sulking is related to Naboth's indignity toward royalty in refusing to acquiesce to

⁹ Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* (The Works of Flavius Josephus, William Whiston, trans.; London: Ward, Lock and Co., 1885). All of the following citations from *Antiquities* are taken from Whiston's translation.

¹⁰ Louis Feldman says, '*Antiquities* is an extended apology for the Jews, in which Josephus felt the need to defend the Jewish people against the charge that they had forfeited the protection of God through their heinous sins'; 'Josephus' Portrait of Ahab', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis* 68 (1992), p. 368.

¹¹ Feldman, 'Josephus's Portrait of Jehoram, King of Israel', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 76 (1994), pp. 4-5.

¹² Feldman, 'Portrait of Jehoram', pp. 3, 5.

¹³ Feldman, 'Portrait of Ahab', p. 369.

¹⁴ Feldman, 'Portrait of Jehoram', p. 7.

Ahab's humbling himself in asking Naboth to sell him his property.¹⁵ In the scene with Naboth, Ahab reveals unique sensitivity at being profoundly hurt, to the extent that 'the king was grieved as if he had received an injury, when he could not get another man's possession, and he would neither wash himself, nor take any food'.¹⁶ Josephus highlights Ahab's reaction to Naboth's harshness toward him: 'How when he had made use of gentle words to him and such as were beneath the royal authority, he had been affronted, and had not obtained what he desired'.¹⁷ Ahab thus becomes the offended one. In response, Josephus has Jezebel take measures 'to have Naboth punished' for his crime of dishonouring the king.¹⁸

In addition to Ahab's sensitivity toward Naboth, a virtue suggesting temperance, the king's character is further embellished when, during the siege of Samaria by Ben Hadad (cf. 1 Kings 20.1-12), Ahab makes the ultimate sacrifice by offering to give up his own family and possessions on behalf of his people: 'as knowing that I would not spare what is mine own for your sakes'.¹⁹ He then shows himself wise by seeking counsel and by heeding the advice given to him: 'however, I will do what you shall resolve is fit to be done'.²⁰ The biblical account shows him in a similar light, but it is never Ahab's intention to sacrifice his people. Ahab consults with the elders only about allowing Ben Hadad's troops to come into Samaria to plunder and take whatever 'is attractive in your [Ahab's] eyes', including Ahab's wives and houses (1 Kgs 20.6). However, the elders *and* the people advise him not to listen or to consent to Ben Hadad's intentions (1 Kgs 20.8). Also, the biblical account gives no hint that Ahab actually intends to give up his family and his possessions to Ben Hadad. Ahab merely accepts that he is defeated. In *Antiquities*, he acts explicitly out of concern for the welfare of his people.

¹⁵ Feldman, 'Portrait of Ahab', p. 373.

¹⁶ Josephus, 8, 13, 8.

¹⁷ Josephus, 8, 13, 8.

¹⁸ Josephus, 8, 13, 8.

¹⁹ Josephus, 8, 14, 1.

²⁰ Josephus, 8, 14, 1.

Josephus also enhances Ahab's military ability when Ahab is designated by an unidentified prophet to lead Israel's battle against Ben Hadad (1 Kgs 20). Whereas the MT gives no justification for Ahab's designation as the one to lead the battle, Josephus elevates Ahab by incorporating into the record the purpose behind his commission: 'by reason of your skilfulness [in war]'.²¹ Later, in the same chapter about the war with Ben Hadad, Josephus further elevates Ahab's character by showing the mercy that Ahab shows to his captured foe. In the MT, Ahab replies to Ben Hadad's plea for mercy (given by his servants) simply by saying 'Is he still alive? He is my brother' (1 Kgs 20.32). In *Antiquities*, Josephus paraphrases and expands Ahab's reply as given in the MT: 'Ahab replied, he was glad that he was alive, and not hurt in battle—and he further promised him the same honour and kindness that a man would show to his brother'.²²

While Josephus's portrayal of Ahab may overstate his positive qualities, it is easily accommodated by Ahab's presentation in the MT of 1 Kings 20 and 22. These chapters show him seeking counsel, listening to advice, offering clemency to a captured foe and listening to Yahweh through his prophets. In *Antiquities*, Josephus has merely to apply contextual dialogue where none exists, but which also is not far beyond the biblical presentation. On the other hand, the subtle shifts in Naboth's characterisation from innocence to guilt in an effort to distance Ahab from his culpability in the Ahab's most infamous crime, is deceitful, and violates Josephus's own stated intentions of not adding or subtracting from the MT: 'I shall accurately describe what is contained in our records, in the order of time that belongs to them . . . and this without adding anything to what is therein contained or taking away anything therefrom'.²³

²¹ Josephus, 8, 14, 2.

²² Josephus, 8, 14, 4.

²³ Josephus, preface, section 3.

Talmudic Literature

In an article about Ahab's depiction in the Talmud, Waldman isolates several features which the rabbis chose to include about Ahab that veer significantly from his biblical presentation.²⁴ These features include (1) highlighting the king's power and influence and (2) presenting a more balanced picture of his moral character, which, while acknowledging his idolatry, also stresses his positive nature.

With respect to Ahab's influence, his authority extended throughout all the earth; he joins Ahasuerus and Nebuchadnezzar in an elite grouping of three kings who attained universal sovereignty (*Megillah* 11a, p. 63).²⁵ The basis for his inclusion into this group is 1 Kings 18.10, where Obadiah tells Elijah: 'There is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to look for you'.²⁶

With respect to his moral character, Ahab is both wicked and acceptable at the same time. Ahab is totally wicked (*Berakoth* 61b, p. 385): he was a transgressor whose slightest sins were equal to the worst committed by Jeroboam, the 'exemplar of sin', against whom all kings were measured (*Sanhedrin* 102b, p.695); his 'Court of Justice' was one among seven which officially sanctioned idolatry (*Gittin* 88a, p. 427); and as a promoter of idol worship, 'there is no furrow in Palestine upon which Ahab did not plant an idol and worship it' (*Sanhedrin* 102b, p. 695). His passive regard for authentic religious procedure is seen to have brought about his death, since he was unable to discern true prophecy from false prophecy (*Sanhedrin* 89a, p. 592), and his completely unredeemable nature banned him from the world to come (*Hagigah* 15b, p. 99; *Sanhedrin* 90a, p. 603; 102 b, p. 695). In addition, Ahab also will not participate in any resurrection. He joins Jeroboam and Manasseh in another elite group of kings who 'have no portion in the *life* to come' (*Sanhedrin* 90a, p. 602; my emphasis).

²⁴ Nahum Waldman, 'Ahab in Bible and Talmud', *Judaism* 37 (1988), pp. 41-47.

²⁵ This reference and all of the following references to the Talmud are taken from *The Babylonian Talmud*, I. Epstein, trans. (London: The Soncino Press, 1935).

²⁶ See also Norman K. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth: Israelite Prophecy and International Relations in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 62, who highlights Ahab's international status through his ability to exact oaths from foreign officials during his search for Elijah. Gottwald suggests that Ahab's power to exact extradition clauses for fugitives (cf., 1 Kgs 18.10) indicates the extent of his sovereignty.

In contrast, however, Ahab also receives a sympathetic appraisal. The Talmud de-emphasises Ahab's culpability for his crimes against Naboth. Instead of being responsible for his actions, he is a victim of his wife's counsel. In a comment on 1 Kings 21.25, which declares Ahab to be the most evil person who ever lived, 'Ahab's downfall is ascribed to his action in allowing himself to be led astray by Jezebel' (*Baba Mezi'a* 59a, note 2, p. 351). In the Naboth incident, Ahab purportedly has a right to Naboth's vineyard because he was a relative of Naboth: 'He [Naboth] was his [the king's] cousin, and therefore he [Ahab] was his legitimate heir' (*Sanhedrin* 48b, p. 323). The vineyard was also his right because 'the property of those executed by the State belongs to the King' (*Sanhedrin* 48b, p. 323), indicating that Naboth had committed a capital crime. Also, the murder of Naboth's sons, attributed to Ahab (2 Kgs 9.26), has been reinterpreted to mean 'his potential sons', that is, those sons who would have issued from him (*Sanhedrin* 48b, p. 323), because a murderer is held guilty not only for his victim's death but also for the elimination of the lives of his potential descendants for all time. However, in other rabbis' views, 'Ahab did not slay his actual sons' (*Sanhedrin* 48b, note 9, p. 323).

Commentators in the Talmud also took liberties to present Ahab in a more positive light. For example, he is shown as one who reveres the Torah. In an ongoing exchange between Talmudic scholars, Rabbi Johanan asks, 'Why did Ahab merit royalty for twenty-two years?—Because he honoured the Torah, which was given in twenty-two letters' (*Sanhedrin* 102b, p.696). His virtue in relation to the Torah is further demonstrated in two exchanges that Ahab has with Ben Hadad during the siege of Samaria (1 Kgs 20.1-12). In the first exchange, he willingly accedes ownership of himself and his own family and possessions to Ben Hadad (1 Kgs 20.1-4), according to Ben Hadad's demands, but is unwilling in the second exchange to allow Ben Hadad's troops access into the city to take what is 'favourable in your [Ahab's] eyes' (1 Kgs 20.6). Non-rabbinic critics of this passage have puzzled over what Ahab was actually protecting from plunder, but certain rabbis identify the valued treasure as the Torah: 'Now what is meant by "whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes?"', the answer

given is, 'Surely the Scroll of the Torah!' (*Sanhedrin* 102b, p. 696). Ahab is honoured further in that he was 'generous with his money, and because he used to benefit scholars with his wealth, half his sins were forgiven' (*Sanhedrin* 102b, p. 697).

For some commentators in the Talmud, to look on Ahab's life is to see him as one 'equally balanced', meaning that he performed as many good deeds as evil (*Sanhedrin* 102b, p. 696). Because this was considered true, God had great difficulty recruiting a spirit who would lure Ahab into a trap that would lead to his death (see 1 Kgs 22.19-23); Ahab's equally good character meant that the chore required great effort (*Sanhedrin* 102b, p. 697). In commentary on the proceedings of the heavenly court that was discussing Ahab's punishment for killing Naboth, Jewish legend provides a recounting of the courtroom drama that preceded the commissioning of 'the spirit' (identified by the rabbis as the spirit of Naboth) who would be the active agent in leading Ahab to his death by means of lying to the king through the king's prophets: 'In the heavenly court of justice, at Ahab's trial, the accusing witnesses and his defenders exactly balanced each other in number and statements, until the spirit of Naboth appeared and turned the scale against Ahab' (cf. 1 Kgs 22.21).²⁷ But Naboth would pay an excessive penalty for his deeds on behalf of the divine court. According to the rabbis, Naboth, by choosing to deceive his murderer, forfeited his right to remain in the heavenly realm because 'he who takes his own revenge destroys his own house' (*Sanhedrin* 102b, p. 697; see also *Sanhedrin* 89a, p. 592; and *Shabbath* 149b, p. 761). Thus Naboth loses in both worlds.

Ahab is honoured even in death. The Talmud illustrates that he was an extremely popular king by recounting the mourning for Ahab at his funeral. Rabbi Joseph, commenting on Zechariah 12.11—which reads, 'In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the Valley of Megiddon'—quotes the Targum of that verse that adds a comparison of it to Ahab's

²⁷ Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982), p. 187.

funeral: 'In that time the mourning at Jerusalem will be as great as the lament over Ahab son of Omri whom Hadadrimmon son of Tabrimmon had slain' (*Mo'ed Katan* 18b, p. 188-89).²⁸ The Talmud also mentions that the mourning at Ahab's funeral was like the mourning demonstrated at the funeral of Hezekiah, when 'thirty-six thousand [warriors] marched with bare shoulders' (*Babba Kama* 17a, p. 75), but the Talmud gives no details of the funeral. Jewish legend, however, provides those details by using the Talmud's account of Hezekiah's funeral, when it is actually Ahab's funeral instead: 'The mourning for Ahab was so great that the memory of it reached posterity. The funeral procession was unusually impressive; no less than thirty-six thousand warriors their shoulders bared, marched before his bier'.²⁹ A note states that baring the shoulders is a 'sign of mourning for a righteous man and a scholar' (*Baba Kama* 17a, note 5, p. 75).

The foregoing survey of the character of Ahab as presented in the LXX, Josephus and the Talmud, reveals that Ahab comes away with a mixed review, pointing to a tradition unwilling to condemn the king in the same extent as the MT does.

Ahab in Early and Medieval Ecclesiastical Literature

Early Church Leaders

Little direct commentary has been written by early church leaders about Ahab. There are writings, however, that offer some understanding of how Ahab was viewed in the early church. In many of the cases where he is mentioned, Ahab is brought forward as an example for the saints, either for good or bad behaviour.

Athanasius (296-373 CE) was the first of the early church writers to use Ahab as an example of state leadership. As a prominent participant in the defeat of Arianism

²⁸ See also, *The Targum of the Minor Prophets* (The Aramaic Bible, vol. 14, Kevin J. Cathcart and Robert P. Gordon, trans.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), p. 219.

at the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE, he was one of the chief opponents of Constantius II, an heir of Constantine and an advocate of Arianism. Athanasius claimed that Constantius was 'worse than Saul, Ahab and Pilate'.³⁰ The relationship of Constantius II to these three is as the state's persecution of representatives and messengers of God. Athanasius says Ahab at least had a conscience and was sensitive to wrongdoing: 'Ahab himself did not act so cruelly towards the priests of God, as this man [Constantius] has acted toward the Bishops'.³¹

Ahab is also used in homilies and in calls for personal repentance. Chrysostom (347-407 C.E.) mentions Ahab as a good example of a ruler who recognised his errors and sought forgiveness through confession.³² Jerome (348-420 C.E.) mentions Ahab as a good example to follow in urging a man to change his ways for failing to keep a vow of continence.³³ In another plea for repentance in which he refers to Ahab, Jerome castigates the deacon Savinianus for committing adultery at Rome, and for attempting to seduce a nun at Bethlehem. He heaps collective guilt upon the deacon by claiming that the innocent victims of many biblical perpetrators of crime, including Ahab, cry out against him.

The Reformer Martin Luther

As in the literature of the early church leaders, in the writings of Luther Ahab appears mostly as an example of both good and bad behaviour, but he is seen more as an idolater and proponent of state influenced religion than as a social criminal.

Luther mentions the king mostly in commentary on various biblical books but also within contexts dealing with theological quarrels and church abuses. Luther

²⁹ Ginzberg, p. 188.

³⁰ Athanasius, *Select Works and Letters*, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, ed. Archibald Robertson, 2d series, vol. 4 (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1892), p. 295.

³¹ Athanasius, p. 295.

³² Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans* (The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 1st series, vol. 11; New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1889), p. 80.

highlights Ahab's and Jezebel's misuse of their governmental office in his commentary on Psalm 82.3, 4. In the psalm, God states the proper roles of leadership for those who sit in positions of judicial and social authority, and who have the means and the power to determine the welfare of social classes. For Luther, the 'gods' against whom God rails are like governmental leaders who employ the church for their own purposes. As in Luther's time, when the church was an arm of the state that advanced 'false and injurious teachers', so it was also in Ahab and Jezebel's time when they 'supported about eight hundred priests of Baal and drove out all of God's prophets . . .'³⁴ In a similar vein, Luther groups Ahab and Jezebel with theological extremists like the 'Arians', and governmental rulers like the 'Romans', and 'with the pope of our time'.³⁵ Ahab and Jezebel also provide examples of leaders possessing deceitful genius, fashioning a religion which lured in the unsuspecting. He says Ahab and Jezebel were 'both very wise according to the flesh', in contrast to his contemporary princes who, for Luther, were 'blockheads'.³⁶

Many of Luther's writings, other than commentary on biblical books, concerned abuses of the clergy. Writing on the misuse of the mass, he uses Ahab as a symbol of the Roman Church which had hired for itself a 'priesthood of Baal' with their vows: 'they make themselves the bride of God. . . . They also wish to be called nothing else than worthy fathers and brothers, that is in Hebrew, Ahabites'.³⁷

³³ St. Jerome, *Letters and Select Works* (The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, W. H. Fremantle, trans., 2d series, vol. 6; New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1893), p. 227.

³⁴ Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms*, Luther's Works, Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., vol. 13 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing Co., 1956), p. 59.

³⁵ Luther, *Isaiah*, in Luther's Works, Hilton C. Oswald, ed., vol. 17, p. 74.

³⁶ Luther, *The Minor Prophets*, in Works, Hilton C. Oswald, ed., vol. 18, p. 12.

³⁷ Luther, *Word and Sacrament II*, in Works, Abdel Ross Wentz, ed., vol. 36, p. 223.

Modern Commentary

In this section on modern commentary I want to offer a general summary of what historical critics have said about Ahab. The works that I have consulted have primarily been written in the last century and present views that I believe have the most severe effect on Ahab's characterisation. The views that are represented here are based primarily on the MT presentation of the king but sometimes include the LXX presentation of the same passages. Most critics, however, view the narrative to be untenable as an accurate historical reconstruction of the events and one in which Ahab rarely plays a part.

Characterising Ahab in the Story of Ahab in 1 Kings

One of the significant peculiarities of the story of Ahab concerns his mixed characterisation. Eissfeldt considers that the negative-positive mixture is the result of the inclusion of two portrayals of Ahab: (1) the wars with Syria (1 Kgs 20, 22) which depict Ahab 'with sympathy', showing him to be 'wise' (1 Kgs 20.4), loving honour (1 Kgs 20.7-9), magnanimous (1 Kgs 20.33) and bold (1 Kgs 22.35); and (2) the Elijah narratives 'which are in the strongest opposition to Ahab'.³⁸ Pfeiffer suggests the two characterisations reflect a combination of regional perspectives: a positive Northern source and a negative Southern source.³⁹ Skinner recognises Ahab's positive characterisation (in spite of the editor's stated negative view of Ahab) as an even-handed portrayal reflecting the editor's historiographical objectivity. This portrayal varies enough to include the badness of the good kings, and the goodness (relative) of the bad kings: 'the severe condemnation pronounced on Ahab has not led the compiler

³⁸ Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), p. 291.

³⁹ Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York, London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1941), p. 397. See also Oesterley (W. O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson, *Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament*, reprint [New York: Macmillan, 1958], pp. 77-78), who believes that the source of the positive depictions may come from an assumed 'Acts of Ahab'.

to suppress the testimony of older authorities to his great achievements or many noble traits in his character'.⁴⁰

An even more positive viewpoint of Ahab comes from Farrar, who blames Jezebel for the negative evaluation of Ahab. Farrar distances Ahab from Jezebel's contribution to Israel's demise even while holding him partially responsible. He says the text's blunt, terse announcement that Ahab 'worshipped Baal' eclipses Ahab's implied allegiance to Yahweh: 'It is certain that to his death Ahab continued to recognise Jehovah. He enshrined the name of Jehovah in the names of his children'.⁴¹ His marriage to Jezebel, according to Farrar, was not Ahab's doing but was probably negotiated by his father Omri as a political manoeuvre, 'when Ahab was too young to have much voice in the administration'; the fate of Ahab and his household came as a result of Jezebel's 'whoredoms and witchcrafts'.⁴²

These examples of source-oriented explanations for Ahab's positive characterisations offer compelling testimony that the portrait of Ahab leads to a more complex understanding of the story of Ahab.

Another significant aspect of historical-critical studies about the story of Ahab is that most of the critics view the narrative untenable as an historical reconstruction of a specific era, and one in which Ahab rarely plays a part. In the examples shown below, he is removed as a character in the text and replaced with another king, thus radically affecting the story of Ahab. If we adopt any of the scenarios drawn up by historical critics about what really happened, we are left with a confusion about who is who. Thus in attempts to present a record of events that happened sometime in the history of Israel, historical reconstructions destroy the integrity of the narrative as a story about King Ahab. It is as if the studies tell us, 'Ahab does not live here.'

⁴⁰ John Skinner, *Kings* (The Century Bible; Edinburgh: T.C. & E.C. Jack, Ltd., 1901), p. 17-18.

⁴¹ F. W. Farrar, *The First Book of Kings*, 3rd ed (The Expositor's Bible; London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1893), p. 350.

⁴² Farrar, p. 35.

Ahab vs. 'The King of Israel' in 1 Kings 20: Who's Who?

Various source-critical commentators have challenged the view that Ahab is actually the real historical subject in 1 Kings 20 because the king in the story is mostly referred to as 'the king of Israel'. Ahab's name is used only twice in the chapter (20. 2, 14). Burney believes the unnamed king is a sign of multiple authorship.⁴³ DeVries makes Joram the unidentified king, since Joram was active against a Ben Hadad in 2 Kings 8.⁴⁴ Miller suggests that Jehoahaz is the king in question.⁴⁵ Miller mentions the following parallels in passages which are taken from the Elisha Cycle to support his claim. Miller believes that three battles recorded in 1 Kings 20 and 22.1-38 (shown below in the left column) refer to Elisha's prediction to the 'king of Israel' in 2 Kings 13.14-19 that he would win three battles against Aram (shown in the right column):

1 Kings 20; 22:1-38 (NRSV)

Battle at Samaria (20.1-21)

Battle at Aphek (20.22-34)

Battle at Ramoth-Gilead (22.1-38)

2 Kings 13:14-19 (NRSV)

He continued, 'Take the arrows'; and he took them. He said to the king of Israel, 'Strike the ground with them'; he struck three times, and stopped. Then the man of God was angry with him, and said, 'You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck down Aram until you had made an end of it, but now you will strike down Aram only three times' (13.18-19).

In another proposed parallel (shown in the two columns below), Miller equates the 'king of Israel' with Jehoahaz. In 1 Kings 20.34, the captured Ben Hadad tells the 'king of Israel' (Jehoahaz, according to Miller) that he will restore the cities, that is, the cities listed in 2 Kings 10.32-33 that his father (Hazael) had taken from the father (Jehu) of 'the king of Israel' and would grant him (the king of Israel) trading quarters in Damascus.

1 Kings 20.34 (NRSV)

Ben-hadad said to him, 'I will restore the towns that my father took from your father; and you may establish bazaars for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria.' The king of Israel responded, 'I will let you go on those terms.' So he made a treaty with him and let him go.

2 Kings 10.32, 33 (NRSV)

In those days the LORD began to trim off parts of Israel. Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel: from the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the Wadi Arnon, that is, Gilead and Bashan.

⁴³ C. F. Burney, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Book of Kings* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1903), p. 213.

⁴⁴ Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 12; Waco: Word Books, 1985), p. 248.

⁴⁵ J. M. Miller, 'The Rest of the Acts of Jehoahaz (1 Kings 20 22 1-38)', *ZAW* 80 (1968).

Miller believes that the territory Ben Hadad refers to in 1 Kings 20.34 is the same territory reportedly won by Hazael. 2 Kings 10 presents Jehu as a failed king, and Hazael is recorded to have captured the territory on the eastern side of the Jordan (2 Kgs 10.32, 33). It was Jehoahaz, Jehu's son, who succeeded Jehu and received this territory from Ben Hadad.

Miller offers a third parallel to support his thesis that Jehoahaz is the 'king of Israel' in 1 Kings 20 based on the description of the sizes of the opposing fighting forces of Israel and Aram. He believes that in 2 Kings 13.7, Hazael had limited Israel's fighting force to a mere fifty cavalry, ten chariots, and ten thousand infantry. This reduction in the size of Israel's army, according to Miller, is reflected in the size of the small force described in 1 Kings 20.27, which according to the text resembles no better than a pair of 'two little flocks of goats'.

1 Kings 20:27 (NRSV)

After the Israelites had been mustered and provisioned, they went out to engage them; the people of Israel encamped opposite them like two little flocks of goats, while the Arameans filled the country.

2 Kings 13:7 (NRSV)

So Jehoahaz was left with an army of not more than fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Aram had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing.

Miller's final parallel (shown below) attempts to equate Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz (2 Kgs 13.10), with the son of the 'king of Israel' in 1 Kings 22.26, believing that the name Joash is the same as the name Jehoash.⁴⁶ The passage in 2 Kings (shown below) identifies Jehoash, son of Jehoahaz, as the successor to his father on Israel's throne, while in 1 Kings 22.26, Joash (Jehoash, according to Miller), the son of the 'king of Israel', is given custody of the troublesome prophet, Micaiah.

1 Kings 22.26 (NRSV)

The king of Israel then ordered, 'Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son'

2 Kings 13.10 (NRSV)

In the thirty-seventh year of King Joash of Judah, Jehoash son of Jehoahaz began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned sixteen years.

If Miller's historical reconstruction is accepted (it is difficult to determine its feasibility), then the events contained in the Elisha Cycle (2 Kings 10 and 13) must be attributed to the period of the Elijah Cycle (1 Kgs 17-19, 21; 2 Kgs 1-2). Additionally, in Miller's theory 1 Kings 22 would be a victory for the king of Israel, even though he dies in battle, since Elisha's prediction concerned three successive victorious battles (2 Kgs 13.18-19).

⁴⁶ Miller, p. 337.

In addition to shifting Israel's kings into different time periods, Miller's work also shifts foreign rulers into different time periods. If Hazael fought Omri and won cities from him, then Ben Hadad in 1 Kings 20 becomes the Ben Hadad of 2 Kings 13.4-5. His suggestions then remove the difficulty in identifying different rulers from different times who happen to have identical names:

Once the Elisha legends and the battle accounts of 1 Kings 20, 22:1-38 are removed from the Omride period, it is no longer necessary to assume that a Ben-hadad ruled Damascus during the last days of Ahab or at any time during Jehoram's reign. This leaves only Ben-hadad I, Baasha's contemporary, and Ben-hadad II, Hazael's son and Israel's adversary in the narratives under discussion.⁴⁷

Thus, if Miller's reconstruction is accepted, then Ahab was not the 'king of Israel' who fought a Ben Hadad at Samaria and Aphek (1 Kgs 20.1-34), or at Ramoth Gilead (1 Kgs 22.1-38). The effect this reconstruction has on Ahab's characterisation is extreme (if not unacceptable), since Miller removes Ahab as a military leader out of the story altogether.

Whitley comes to a similar conclusion about the identity of the 'king of Israel' in 1 Kings 20 but for different reasons. He relates the battle at Samaria (1 Kgs 20.1-21) to the historical situation of 2 Kings 13.1-9, where Jehoahaz is harassed by Hazael. He is of the opinion that Ahab would not have been a vassal to Ben Hadad (as suggested in 1 Kgs 20:1-34) so soon (chronologically) after Israel and Aram had allied themselves in beating back Assyria's advance at Qarqar in 853 BCE.⁴⁸ For this reason, Whitley sees Ahab's victory over Ben Hadad at Aphek (1 Kgs 20.22-34) as the victory of Jehoash, son of Jehoahaz, a battle described in 2 Kings 13.25.⁴⁹

Ahab in the Text

A major problem, of course, with the historical reconstructions surveyed above is the difficulty in determining their feasibility. Most of all, such reconstructions leave us with the question, 'What has become of Ahab?' Perhaps this is why Noth is of the

⁴⁷ Miller, p. 338, n. 9.

⁴⁸ C. F. Whitley, 'The Deuteronomistic Presentation of the House of Omri', *VT* 2 (1952), p. 144.

⁴⁹ Whitley, p. 145.

opinion that the editor of the narratives left things so wide open in terms of identifying the 'king of Israel': '[I]t is impossible to give a definite date to the narratives and provide them with a historical interpretation. All that can be gathered from them is something about the situation in general'.⁵⁰

However, it is clear that 1 Kings 16.29-22.40 is meant to be about Ahab by what the biblical editor says. His name is used forty-six times in the narrative. It is used in the first and last verse of the story and appears in every chapter (1 Kgs 16.29, 30, 33 [twice]; 17.1; 18.1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 12, 16 [twice], 17 [twice], 20, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46; 19.1; 20.2, 13, 14, 34; 21.2, 3, 4, 15, 16 [twice], 18, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27, 29; 22.20, 39, 40). If we can determine anything about the intention of the editor, it is that the narrative is meant to be a story about King Ahab who had a wife named Jezebel, who committed various sins and who was often confronted by the prophet Elijah.

But we have also seen that comment on the characterisation of Ahab has not been univocal in terms of his stated incomparability as the most wicked person who ever lived (1 Kgs 21.25). He has received a mixed review as someone who is both evil and admirable. Because of Ahab's mixed characterisation, we need to look more closely at the text.

⁵⁰ Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1958), p. 242.

2

HOW BAD IS AHAB?¹

Introduction

How bad is Ahab? This question emerges because the narrator begins and ends the introductory regnal summary of the story of King Ahab (1 Kgs 16.29-22.40) with an announcement of his evil character. The summary begins by saying 'Ahab did evil in the sight of Yahweh more than all who were before him' (1 Kgs 16.30). It goes on to elaborate briefly on some of what he did, and ends by saying, 'Ahab did more to provoke Yahweh the God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him' (16.33). Since narratives often indicate how their stories will develop, the leading announcement of Ahab's character opening the story of Ahab leads us to expect a story depicting his excessive badness.² But we will be disappointed if this is in fact what we believe will occur in the narrative that follows. For throughout the narrative we are confronted with depictions of the king that challenge the leading announcement. This is not to say that the marquee above the narrative has misled us, but only that it has set us on a path of expectation. Whether or not our expectations are fulfilled is another matter. Turner's study, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*,³ shows that variations in the expected outcomes of several announcements in the book

¹ I have borrowed the title for this chapter from Ephraim Stern's article on archaeology during the time of Ahab, 'How Bad Was Ahab?', *Biblical Archaeology Review* 19 (Mar-Apr, 1993), pp. 18-29.

² David J. A. Clines identifies the 'Headline', the 'Punchline' and the 'Announcement' among some of the ways that texts signal readers about what they can expect to happen in a story; *What Does Eve Do to Help?* (JSOTSup 94; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), p. 50.

³ Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (JSOTSup 96; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990).

of Genesis lead the reader to further questions about why they have not met expectations. He notes that readers should not be surprised by plotted narratives that end up unexpectedly since ‘surprise, mystery and complication . . . are essential elements in any plot worthy of the name’.⁴ Ahab’s introductory regnal summary, I believe, has such an effect; it leads us in a direction different than the one that is announced. I will suggest a possible direction at the end of this chapter, but before that, in view of an apparent dissonance between the introduction and the subsequent narrative, I will present a close reading of the text of the story of Ahab. Along the way I will explore the text’s characterisation of Ahab and compare it to the introduction in order to show that the narrator does not entirely fulfil the expectation of finding in the story the depiction of an excessively evil king.

1 Kings 16.29-34: Ahab's Introductory Regnal Summary

The statements about Ahab’s evil character in 1 Kings 16.30 and 33 serve as brackets around more detailed information. This information says that Ahab was an idolater who surpassed even Jeroboam in wickedness. The narrator even breaks the flow of the verbal sequence with a rhetorical question in order to express his surprise at Ahab’s evil:

30) And Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh more than all who were before him. 31) And it happened--was it a trifling thing, his walking in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat?-- that (and) he took for a wife, Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshipped him. 32) Then he erected an altar to Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. 33) Ahab also made an Asherah; thus Ahab did more to provoke Yahweh the God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

The question the narrator asks, ‘Was it a trifling thing, his walking in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat?’, suggests that Ahab was not content to follow only in Jeroboam’s sin, but went further. The extent of his wrongdoing is signalled in the resumption of the verbal sequence, which says that he married ‘Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians’ and served and worshipped her god. He then

⁴Turner, p. 15.

added to those sins by building an altar to Baal in Baal's temple (which he had built in Samaria), and by making an Asherah. The intrusive rhetorical question thus leads to labelling Ahab as one who exceeds Jeroboam's benchmark of sin by marrying a foreign princess, worshipping her gods and erecting worship sites for those gods in Israel. The significance of the introduction is that it is like Solomon's regnal summary (cf. 1 Kgs 11.1-10; I will demonstrate further the close relationship between Ahab's and Solomon's regnal summaries in the next chapter). It leaves the impression that Ahab is an idolater who has taken a path similar to Solomon's, leading to judgement. Judgement does, in fact, follow with a coming drought announced by the prophet Elijah, but before Elijah is introduced, the text further suggests Ahab's evil influence in a comment about his times:

In his day Hiel the Bethelite [re]built Jericho; with his first-born Abiram he founded it and with Segub his youngest son he set up its gates, according to the word of Yahweh which he spoke through Joshua the son of Nun' (16.33b-34).

Hiel's costly building project fulfils the ancient oracle by Joshua who foretold that anyone attempting to rebuild the city would pay for it with the lives of his oldest and youngest sons (Josh 6.26). Hiel's activity, 'in his [Ahab's] day', suggests that the socio-religious climate during the reign of Ahab is one which disregards the word of Yahweh.⁵ Long suggests the notice of the building activity lends an ironic tone for the coming story of Ahab: 'With irony, perhaps, normally praiseworthy building activity revives a dormant curse as a sort of omen for the regime'.⁶

⁵ Rather than seeing the notice of Hiel's building project as a sign of the times, Conroy draws a narrative analogy between Ahab and Hiel as 'builders' whose constructions 'are contrary to the will of the LORD' and as individuals who will pay for their sins with the deaths of their two sons. While Conroy presents a detailed linguistic and structural link between Ahab and Hiel, the temporal indicator 'in his day' provides the reader with a 'peek' into the times. It is a time in which the word of Yahweh is disregarded, as Hiel's activity demonstrates, but it is also a time in which Yahweh demonstrates his own activity in opposition to those who oppose his word. Hiel reaped the punishment announced by Joshua and validated by the narrator which is 'according to the word of Yahweh', just as Ahab will reap the punishment of his godless activity as announced by Elijah in the following verse (17.1) 'according to the word of Yahweh'. See, Charles Conroy, 'Hiel between Ahab and Elijah-Elisha: 1 Kgs 16,34 in Its Immediate Literary Context' *Biblica* (1996), p. 213; see also Auld, who notes an apparent parallel in Ahab's construction and Solomon's construction: 'One wonders how these notes relate to the hostile portrait of Solomon in 1 Kgs 11:1-8'; Auld, *Kings Without Privilege*, p. 156, n. 1.

⁶ Burke Long, *1 Kings: with an Introduction to Historical Literature* (The Forms of the Old Testament Literature 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), p. 174.

Thus, as we begin the story of Ahab, we are left with the impression that, in addition to his idolatrous activities, the king has influenced the nation away from Yahwism toward apostasy. It is this state of affairs that Elijah will attempt to correct in 1 Kings 18. However, the opening verses to the story of Ahab already show a weakness of effect in depicting Ahab as excessively evil by drawing so close an analogy to Solomon. While DeVries labels Ahab's sins listed here as 'unthinkable',⁷ and Long identifies Ahab symbolically as the 'centerpiece of perversion'⁸ in the record of the monarchy, their words come across as hyperbole, knowing what we know about Solomon from 1 Kings 11. Even though Ahab built a temple, an altar to Baal, and an Asherah, the activity is not something new, and thus, suggests that Ahab is not worse than all the kings before him.⁹

1 Kings 17: Prophet on the Run

In the following two chapters of the story of Ahab, 1 Kings 17-18, the text places Ahab in the background. As I noted in the previous chapter, critics often suggest that his disappearance from the foreground identifies these chapters as evidence for a body of material on Elijah known as the Elijah Cycle, and that some (e.g., DeVries) doubt that Ahab even plays a role in the section. But whereas Ahab may be in the background, the text also skilfully turns an oblique focus onto Jezebel, thereby suggesting that she, and not Ahab, is Elijah's worst threat.

The story of Ahab begins with the sudden appearance of Elijah the Tishbite before King Ahab with an announcement of judgement.¹⁰ He tells Ahab that there

⁷ DeVries, p. 204.

⁸ Long, p. 172.

⁹ Several critics note that the most significant threat that Ahab poses is the introduction of Baal worship; see e.g., James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Kings*, Henry Snyder Gehman, ed. (The International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1967) p. 285; Jerome T. Walsh, *1 Kings* (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), p. 218; and Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), p. 101.

¹⁰ Elijah's leading role in the first half of the story of Ahab becomes clearer as the story progresses; primarily he serves to offset Ahab's idolatrous influence on Israel.

will be neither dew nor rain 'except by my word' (1 Kgs 17.1), but he gives no reason for the drought. Elijah is then instructed by Yahweh to 'hide himself' in the wilderness at the wadi Cherith (v. 3). While there, the wadi provides him with water and he is supernaturally fed by ravens that bring him 'bread and meat' twice a day for his nourishment (vv. 4-6). When the wadi dries up, 'because there was no rain in the land' (v. 7), Yahweh sends Elijah to Zarephath in Sidon where he is tended to by a widow who gives him lodging in her house until the end of the drought (v. 8). Although the drought had diminished the widow's food supply to one last meal, her obedience to the prophet's instructions to care for him first resulted in the supernatural maintenance of food containers that never went empty (vv. 9-16). Elijah also brings about the resurrection of her son who died of illness during his stay (vv. 23).

The first question that emerges is how 1 Kings 17 contributes to Ahab's evil characterisation presented in the introduction. Ahab has not said a word and is not described as doing anything in the entire chapter. However, the text hints that he generates Elijah's flight. The command from Yahweh to Elijah, 'hide yourself' (v. 3), implies danger and suggests that Elijah is a man on the run from Ahab. It is not clear, however, if Ahab actually intends to harm him. This is suggested in the next chapter in the indirect indictment of Jezebel as Elijah's main adversary, when it is made known that she had carried out a wholesale slaughter of Yahweh's prophets (v. 4). Thus, the text hints that her pogrom is the reason that Elijah flees into the wilderness and to Zarephath.¹¹

1 Kings 17 emphasises the widespread effects of the drought which also contributes indirectly to the introductory negative characterisation of Ahab. These harsh conditions come as Yahweh's response to Ahab's idolatry, but the reader will not know this until 1 Kings 18.18 when Elijah tells Ahab that the drought is because he and his fathers have followed the Baals. The dried-up brook and the lack of food suffered by the widow also indicate an increase in the severity of the drought.

¹¹ See Long, who notes the similarity between chapters 17 and 19 in Elijah's flights from danger (pp. 175-77).

Elijah's journey to Sidon further indicts Ahab in that the drought has effected hardship in other lands. His stay with the widow suggests widespread devastation and death from the drought since she and her son were about to consume their final meal when they meet him (1 Kgs 17.12). There is irony (perhaps an allusion to Ahab) in Elijah's stay with a woman from Sidon. The widow connotes a comparison between herself and the other woman from Sidon, Jezebel.¹² Their religious leanings come to the fore in their actions. The widow unhesitatingly shows deference to Yahweh's prophet when he asks her to make food for him. Her action thus preserves Elijah's life while Jezebel is perhaps at that very moment seeking to take it. The miracles he performs, producing the ever-present flour and oil and resurrecting the widow's son, demonstrates Yahweh's power to sustain life and his power over death. Since these actions are directed to a woman from Sidon, it may reflect a polemic against Baalism in Jezebel's land and portends the upcoming contest on Carmel where Baal's impotence will be demonstrated. Her testimony following her realisation of Elijah's authentic credentials, 'Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of Yahweh in your mouth is truth' (17.24), hints that the widow may be sceptical about Elijah's identity. Her testimony also foreshadows Israel's recognition of Yahweh as God following Elijah's supernatural demonstrations of power on Mt. Carmel.

¹² See Jopie Siebert-Hommes, 'The Widow of Zarephath and the Great Woman of Shunem: A Comparative Analysis of Two Stories', *Samuel and Kings*, Athalya Brenner, ed., A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series), 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 98-114. Siebert-Hommes notes significant parallels between Jezebel and the widow of Zarephath: 'Like the widow, she [Jezebel] too gives nourishment to the prophets, that is, to the prophets of Baal and Asherah (1 Kgs 18.19), but she eradicates the prophets of YHWH (1 Kgs 18.4, 13). When confronted with the stories of the actions of Elijah, she does admit that Elijah is a man of God, but attempts to kill him (1 Kgs 19.1). Later on, the opposite to what happened to the widow of Zarephath befalls Jezebel: Jezebel's son. . . will die' (p. 104). Smelik suggests a literary link between the two women in the deaths of the sons of the widow of Zarephath and Jezebel. He says, 'The widow of Zarephath is a positive counterpart to Queen Jezebel. The story about the widow prepares the reader for the story about the queen. The widow and her son are protected by the Lord and the stay alive through the intervention of the prophet. The queen and her two sons are killed in order to fulfil the word of the Lord spoken by the same prophet. . . . The Lord is faithful and merciful to people who confess Him as their God, but He is implacably harsh in His judgment of His adversaries' (K.A.D. Smelik, 'The Literary Function of 1 Kings 17,8-24', in *Pentateuchal and Deuteronomistic Studies: Papers Read at the XIIIth IOSOT Congress Leuven 1989*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium XCIV; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990, pp. 242-43).

1 Kings 18: Ahab the Compliant King¹³

1 Kings 18 features the contest on Mt. Carmel between Elijah and Baal's prophets. The chapter can be divided into three main parts: 1) the prelude to the contest (vv. 1-19); 2) the contest (vv. 20-40); and 3) the aftermath of the contest (vv. 41-46). Part 1 contributes the most material in 1 Kings 18 for assessing Ahab's nature. His character is presented primarily through the perspective of Obadiah, the overseer of Ahab's house, in a section of the text that is primarily circumstantial information.

The section begins in the third year of the drought. Yahweh instructs Elijah to show himself to Ahab because he is going to send rain:

And there were many days. And the word of Yahweh came to Elijah after three years saying, 'Go, show yourself to Ahab, for I will give rain upon the face of the ground' (18.1).

As Elijah makes his way to find Ahab (v. 2a), the text notes the harshness of the drought: 'Now the famine was severe in Samaria' (v. 2b). These conditions serve to introduce the following scene involving Ahab and Obadiah. As they are about to divide up the land between them in order to search for food for the livestock (v. 6), the narrator stops the verbal sequence with a parenthetical statement (v. 3b-4) which informs the reader of the exemplary character of Ahab's overseer:

¹³ My characterisation of Ahab as a compliant king refers to only a small portion of the story and may, of course, be contrasted. Jobling's structural study of the relationship of story of the drought (chapter 17) to the story of the combat on Mt. Carmel (chapter 18) offers two views of Ahab's characterisation in this context. Although Ahab may play the role of the hero who gets back the rain (18.41-45) that Elijah the villain has stolen (17.1), these roles ultimately become reversed. Ahab may also be seen as the villain who caused the drought in the first place (18.17-18), while Elijah becomes the hero who actually brings the rain back. Then again, in learning that Ahab is the reason for the drought (18.18), it is Ahab who can restore the rain. Jobling writes, 'The purpose of the drought has been to induce Ahab, who has led the people astray, to lead them back to Yahweh. . . . Ahab has withdrawn his allegiance from Yahweh, so Yahweh has withdrawn rain from Ahab. And this sets up certain expectations of how the situation will be righted, by mutual restoration. Ahab will restore his allegiance to Yahweh, and Yahweh will restore rain to Ahab. . . . But our expectations are quite disappointed; having cooperated in setting the stage [18.19-20], Ahab completely disappears from the narrative while the real combat goes forward!'; David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Three Structural Analyses in the Old Testament (I Samuel 13-31, Numbers 11-12, I Kings 17-18)* (JSOTSup 7; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), p.70. Jobling's final analysis in his study of the relationship between chapters 17 and 18 and its depiction of Ahab, however, leaves Ahab with little esteem. He says, 'The true object [of the discourse between chapters 17 and 18] is the relationship between Ahab and the people of Israel, about which almost nothing is said directly! And the message is that the king is decidedly worse than useless; inferior to the people. . . , he leads them into apostasy and lags behind in repentance. . . .' (p. 81).

And Ahab summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of [over] the house. (Now Obadiah feared Yahweh greatly; for it happened when Jezebel was killing the prophets of Yahweh that Obadiah took one hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and provided them with bread and water [v. 3-4]).

When the action continues, Obadiah and Ahab split up, with the narrator following Obadiah (18.6).

Along the way, Obadiah runs into Elijah. The text reads, 'And look! Elijah met him' (18.7). When he meets Elijah, the overseer 'fell on his face' before the prophet and said incredulously, 'Is this you, my lord Elijah?' (v. 7). Elijah instructs Obadiah to report to Ahab that he has found the prophet. In a prolonged protest (v. 8-14; see my comments below), Obadiah pleads to be released from this commission fearing it would cost him his life. Three times he says Ahab 'will kill me' (vv. 10, 12, 14). Following Obadiah's protest, however, and Elijah's oath to appear before Ahab that same day, Obadiah went and called Ahab (vv. 15-16).

Obadiah's protest to Elijah unquestionably influences the reader's opinion about Ahab. Obadiah's characterisation of Ahab in this extended protest implies that Ahab is truly a dangerous man: 'What have I sinned that you are giving your servant into the hand of Ahab to kill me?' (v.9). He fears Ahab will kill him because Ahab's patience is used up, having searched throughout the world without success for Elijah (vv. 9-11), and that any more disappointments in finding Elijah would send him into a murderous rage. This is based on his fears that if he goes to fetch Ahab, Elijah will disappear when they part company and 'the spirit of Yahweh will bear you up to where I do not know. . . and he will kill me' (v. 12). Additionally, Obadiah appeals to his personal righteousness as grounds for being released of his commission to report to Ahab. He does this by recalling his courageous acts in saving the prophets from Jezebel's religious pogrom (vv. 13-14; these verses are a repetition Obadiah's moral character reported earlier in the introductory parenthesis by the narrator [vv. 3-4]). He appeals for mercy from Elijah as if he is pleading with a judge. Apparently, Obadiah fears that Elijah does not care much about his life either, and he wants to make sure that the prophet knows he is not dealing with an ordinary person who has compromised his religious allegiance by being the overseer of Ahab's house. Thus,

Obadiah leaves no doubt that he feels he faces a serious threat to his life from Ahab, but his fear of death from Ahab is equally matched by his fear that Elijah also is not concerned about his life. The effect on the reader is that it makes it difficult to get a clear picture of Ahab's true character, seeing that Elijah has as little concern about his life as Ahab does.

When Ahab meets the prophet, however, the king simply says, 'Is this you, O troubler of Israel?' (v. 17), leading to the question of whether Ahab has been searching for Elijah to kill him, or if he has been searching for him in order to get him to stop withholding rain. Elijah retorts, 'I have not troubled Israel but you and the house of your fathers, because you (pl.) have forsaken the commandments of Yahweh, and you (sing.) have gone after the Baals' (v. 18). Without any protest or reaction from Ahab, Elijah then instructs him to gather 'all Israel' on Mt. Carmel along with '450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table' (v. 19). Ahab, again without any word, complies and gathers 'all the sons of Israel and the prophets' on Carmel (v. 20).

In light of his announced depravity, Ahab's characterisation in this passage leading up to the contest on Carmel is shown to be ambiguous. I disagree with Nelson's assessment of Ahab's character in the passage of vv. 17-20 of which he says that 'any ambiguity' about his character is 'cleared up':

The reader is not sure until this point where Ahab stands. He has been seeking Elijah for some unspoken purpose. The anti-prophet violence has been blamed on Jezebel, not Ahab. Yet Ahab's priorities are clearly askewed (horses and mules instead of Yahweh's prophets). Elijah's counter accusation finally reveals that Ahab is a villain, although he remains a passive one throughout the narrative.¹⁴

But Ahab's villainy is surely suspect. We may expect a villain, but Ahab shows up out in the wilderness searching for food for livestock, and when he does meet Elijah, he complies without a word. When he is introduced in the scene scavenging the land for fodder (vv. 3-6), Ahab appears as a diligent king going about his business as a monarch concerned for the economic welfare of his nation. Then,

¹⁴ Nelson, p. 116.

in his appearance with Obadiah, who is overseer of Ahab's house and 'feared Yahweh exceedingly' (v. 3), the text suggests that Ahab is tolerant of Yahwism by employing a Yahwist. On the other hand, Nelson's view of Ahab's character may have some merit in view of the pronounced juxtaposition of Ahab and Obadiah. The contrast may point to moral differences between the two: Ahab is shown to have concern for the welfare of starving animals, while Obadiah is shown to have concern for the lives of endangered prophets.¹⁵

The parenthetical statement about Obadiah's righteousness (vv. 3c-4), however, resists any *definitive* moral analysis of Ahab. The narrator removes the king from blame (if the reader applies any to him after reading about Elijah's flight in 1 Kings 17) in persecuting prophets by way of the background information that it was *Jezebel* who had been killing the 'prophets of Yahweh' (v. 4). The text does not mention that Ahab participated in harming prophets. In addition, the parenthesis allows for a sympathetic view of the king by the activities going on in his house. The emphasis on the contrasting activities of Jezebel and Obadiah highlights an irony in that while a seemingly official pogrom is carried out against the prophets from Ahab's house by Ahab's wife, an undercover action aimed at thwarting her slaughter is also being carried out from Ahab's house by Ahab's overseer.

Obadiah's actions on behalf of the prophets also need not be an undercover affair. Obadiah's name means 'servant of Yah[weh]', and we are told that he was 'over the house' (v.3) of Ahab. Yadin notes that Obadiah's station in the house (that, in his view, is officially a house in which Yahweh is revered, as noted by the Yahwist names of Ahab's children) is that of 'prime minister'.¹⁶ Thus, Jezebel could

¹⁵ Nelson, p. 116; Hauser says, 'Ahab. . . who as king of Israel ought to have been seeking assistance for his hungry people, is instead concerned primarily about his own animals' (Alan J. Hauser and Russell Gregory, *From Carmel to Horeb: Elijah in Crisis* [JSOTSup 85; Bible and Literature Series 19; Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1990], p. 29). But then, as Auld suggests, the text does not necessarily make a clear moral distinction about Ahab's priorities; 'We have to make up our mind whether the problem of fodder for the royal horses was simply top of Ahab's agenda that day, or whether his stables took precedence over his people'; A. Graeme Auld, *I & II Kings* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p. 113.

¹⁶ Yigael Yadin, 'The "House of Ba'al" of Ahab and Jezebel in Samaria, and that of Athalia in Judah', in *Archaeology in the Levant: Essays for Kathleen Kenyon*, M. Roger and A. Oorey, eds. (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1978), p. 128; also see J. Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 391.

have married into a situation in which Obadiah was already in place as overseer of a Yahwist state, and, as his name suggests and the story bears out, who is also a devout Yahwist. When Jezebel initiated her pogrom to eliminate the prophets of Yahweh, Obadiah need not have had to help them apart from Ahab's knowledge, for, as 1 Kings 18 shows, Ahab does not appear to be a devout Baalist. He willingly agrees to bring the prophets of Baal to the contest, and the slaughter of the same prophets must have been carried out with his tacit approval.¹⁷ The overall resulting effect of the presence of a daring Yahweh-fearer in Ahab's house and the background information about *Jezebel's* murderous pogrom against the prophets raises questions about the extent of Ahab's evil character.

In contrast to Obadiah's negative characterisation of the king, however, when Ahab finally meets Elijah, he is not the hostile-tempered killer that Obadiah has made him out to be.¹⁸ Ahab's introductory remark 'Is this you, O troubler of Israel?' illustrates disrespect for the prophet in blaming him for the nations ills, but his silence following Elijah's immediate retort and then his unexpected compliance to his command shows the king's reluctance to harm the prophet, and perhaps even shows respect.¹⁹ Furthermore, Elijah's command to gather the prophets of Baal and Asherah, 'who eat at Jezebel's table', disassociates Ahab from fraternity with these ministers, suggesting that Ahab is not completely involved with the more official matters of the clergy of Baal in Israel.

As a result, the overall characterisation of Ahab in 1 Kings 18.1-20 leading up to the contest on Carmel, both direct and indirect, is unexpected when compared with the introduction to him. Ahab emerges relatively innocent, even in light of

¹⁷ Yadin, p. 127.

¹⁸ Montgomery suggests that the danger Obadiah says he fears from Ahab is an exaggeration meant to protect the prophet from Ahab: 'Obadiah deprecated the prophet's commission to him: "Go, tell thy lord: Here is Elijah!" Elijah's volatility, his sudden appearances and vanishings were known to all; upon himself the king would take revenge, if Elijah escaped summary arrest. But the plea may have been only a generous excuse; Obadiah was thinking of the prophet's safety' (p. 299).

¹⁹ Hauser notes that Ahab's unhesitating compliance to Elijah's command offers an ironic contrast to the protests to Elijah's commands given by the widow in 17.12, and by Obadiah in 18.9-14 (p. 33). It also marks a clear reversal in the dominance of the theme of death up to this point in the story beginning in chapter 17, signalling Yahweh's defeat of death through Elijah's victory on the mountain (p. 33).

Obadiah's protestation. What is also unexpected is that Jezebel fulfils the 'evil' appellation more than Ahab does. The notice that she had been killing the prophets of Yahweh and that she maintains close fellowship with the prophets of foreign religion in Israel is information that we would expect to hear about Ahab. However, by explicitly naming Jezebel as the perpetrator of anti-Yahwist activity, and by not naming Ahab in consort with her, the narrator distances the king, at the very least, from direct complicity in religious persecution or in any involvement in the official propagation of idolatry. Thus, leading up to the events on Carmel, Ahab's evil character remains to be seen.²⁰

The second part of the chapter (1 Kgs 18.21-40) presents the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal and Asherah. The event is held in order to prove to Israel who the true god is. The contest on Carmel does not directly characterise Ahab although he receives indirect negative characterisation in that *all* Israel is summoned to the event. The inclusiveness of the audience suggests the extent of Ahab's idolatrous influence on the nation. However, Baalism or Yahwism does not have deep roots. This is made clear in Elijah's challenge to Israel about vacillating between two convictions, that is, two deities. He says, 'How long will you limp (פסחים) between two opinions (שתי הסעפים)? If Yahweh is God, then go after him; but if Baal, then go after him' (v. 21). The contest is therefore an evangelistic event intended to win Israel back to Yahweh (cf. v. 37). It ends successfully enough for Elijah with the people falling 'on their faces' and shouting 'Yahweh is God! Yahweh is God!' (v. 39). Baal's prophets, however, do not fare as well. Following Israel's (re)conversion, Elijah immediately instructs the people to seize the foreign

²⁰ Some attribute moral baseness to Ahab's indifference to what is going on around him. Nelson says, 'As a paradigm of apostasy (16:30), Ahab turns out to be more of a bystander than an instigator. He remains essentially passive throughout [chap. 18], making no decisions, blandly accepting Elijah's suggestions (vv. 20, 42, 44b) just as he does Jezebel's. . . His villainy seems to rest in his refusal to make choices of any kind' (p. 121). Savran has a similar opinion; 'The counterpoint to Ahab's submissiveness to God and prophet is to be found in the king's willing capitulation to *whoever* confronts him, regardless of politics or moral standards'; George Savran, '1 and 2 Kings', *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 151; his italics.

prophets, and then has them brought down to the brook Kishon where he slaughters them (v. 40).

The aftermath of the contest (vv. 41-46) brings with it the rain that Yahweh promised, but the conclusion of the event on the mountain leaves a mysterious depiction of King Ahab. Following the slaughter at the brook, Elijah, strangely, instructs Ahab, ‘*Go up*, eat and drink, for I hear the roaring sound of rain’ (v. 41, emphasis added). The question that emerges is, go up from where? Ever since Elijah gave instructions to Ahab to assemble Israel and the prophets of Baal for the contest (v. 19), Ahab has neither spoken nor has he been mentioned as being anywhere in the vicinity of Carmel. However, since Elijah tells him to ‘*Go up*, eat and drink’, he must have been part of the audience observing the contest *and* among ‘the people’ (vv. 39-40) who, on Elijah’s orders, brought the prophets *down* to the brook for execution:

And Elijah said to them, ‘Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape’. And they took them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slaughtered them there (18.40).

For in order for Ahab to *go up* from anywhere, he must have been *down* at the brook with Elijah at the massacre. Jones says, ‘*Go up* in this verse would suggest that Ahab too was down at the Kishon, and is now commanded to return to Carmel’.²¹ This then leads to another question: what was he doing down at the brook? At the very least, he may have been watching the event. Although it is uncertain what he did there, the text makes it clear that Ahab was at least present at Kishon and also in good stead with Elijah, since Elijah commands the king to eat and drink, giving an impression of celebration and unity over the victory over Baal. Ahab obeys, while Elijah goes to the top of Carmel to pray for rain (v. 42). Once the rain comes, Ahab and Elijah both depart for cover, with Elijah running before Ahab’s chariot all the way to Jezreel (v. 46).

²¹ Gwilym H. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings, Volume 2: 1 Kings 17:1-2 Kings 25:30* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 325 (his emphasis). But see Gray, who suggests that the imperative, ‘Go up!’, ‘need not imply that Ahab, anymore than Elijah, had been down at the Kishon witnessing the massacre. The call of Elijah to Ahab to eat and drink may indicate that until then a fast had been observed, such as was customary on the occasion of intercession in drought (Joel 1.14) or some such other public calamity’ (p. 403).

This strange ending to the contest between Baal's prophets and Elijah brings us no closer to finding in this narrative a firm depiction of an 'evil' Ahab. It leaves us instead with two unexplained symbolic actions that point to an apparent harmonious relationship between prophet and king. This seems to be the only likely implication behind the meal on the mountain and their running together to Jezreel. The text leaves unanswered questions about whether or not the meal was a celebration of Yahweh's victory over Baal and Ahab's and Israel's conversion.

Walsh sees the story of the contest on Carmel as having a strong parallel with the story of the covenant ceremony on Mt. Sinai between Israel and Yahweh in Exodus 24. As such, the story of the meal takes on the significance of unification between Yahweh and his people. As Walsh says, 'The parallel with Exodus 24 makes it clear that the meal to which Ahab is bidden is also a covenant meal; Elijah expects the leader of the people to confirm the people's decision. . . Ahab is invited to renew the covenant with Yahweh, but whether he actually partakes of God's bounty is left unsaid.'²² Gray says: 'The meal again might symbolize the renewed communion between Ahab, Elijah, and Yahweh'.²³

The story also does not answer why Elijah runs ahead of Ahab to Jezreel. The symbolism of the two leaving together in apparent peace contrasts significantly from their meeting prior to the contest and strongly suggests that all Israel, including Ahab, is once again reunited with Yahweh.²⁴ Cohn concurs with this assessment:

²² Walsh, p. 286; so also Cohn: 'Ahab, the chief apostate, having witnessed offstage Baal's demise and Yahweh's power, submits to the prophet's order to ascend the mountain and to eat and drink. These motifs again appear to allude to the ancient covenant making treaty on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:4-11). . . . The author here suggests that through his silent compliance the apostate king participates in the ratification of the covenant renewal. The final image, of the prophet racing on foot before the king on his chariot, symbolizes the restoration of the proper order in Israel: king follows prophet' (Robert L. Cohn, 'The Literary Logic of 1 Kings 17-19', *JBL* 101 [1982], p. 341). Hauser offers a similar view: 'Given Ahab's passivity before Elijah in vv. 41-44, one might easily conclude that Ahab will accept the verdict of the contest and henceforth worship Yahweh. He did not make any attempt to stop Elijah during the contest. He did not chastise him for mocking the prophets of Baal, he did not make fun of Elijah's preparations for the contest, and he made no effort to stop Elijah from slaying the prophets of Baal. Furthermore, he allows Elijah to run before his chariot all the way to Jezreel, thereby giving the appearance that Elijah now has royal sanction' (p. 59). But Wiseman offers an opposing view: 'Ahab is urged to be satisfied now that the drought is coming to an end, and this act between Ahab and Elijah need bear no sense of renewed fellowship' (D.J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993; p. 171).

²³ Gray, p. 403

²⁴ Montgomery notes the symbolism of Elijah as herald: 'Elijah assumes this office of herald because he had to all appearance won the king and all the people over to the cause of the nation's God, a proud

The sequel to chap. 18 suggests the transformation of Ahab as well. Though he remains offstage during the demonstration on Carmel, he returns at its conclusion. By depicting him silently complying with Elijah's order to ascend the mountain and to 'eat and drink', the author implies his renewal in two ways. First, the author reiterates in Ahab's movements the ascent-descent pattern in which the resuscitation of the boy was framed. Elijah orders Ahab to go up ('*aleh*, v 41) before the rain and to go down (*red*, v 44) when it begins. The repetition of the pattern suggest that as the ascent and descent of the child effected his transformation from death to life, so too, the similar movement of Ahab brings about his renewal. Indeed, that he tells Jezebel 'all that Elijah has done' (19:1) suggests that he has become the prophet's advocate (cf. 2 Kgs 8:4). Second, the author employs the sustenance motif to express Ahab's subordination to the prophet and his God. Yahweh is the one who gives food and drink to Elijah, to the widow and her son, and to the prophets. Now Ahab too submits. His search for grass was fruitless, but instead he found Elijah who brings rain and new life.²⁵

If we return to the introduction of the narrative where it is stated that Ahab had outdone his predecessors in evil and provoked Yahweh more than any of them and compare it to what follows, we find that the text has led us in an unexpected direction. Where we have expected to find the story of a king of excessive immoral nature, and perhaps even the story of God's wrath and Ahab's final judgement, we find instead that Ahab has not proved to be as sinister as we had expected, and that Yahweh has sent one of his most powerful emissaries since Moses not to punish Ahab or Israel, but to win them back.²⁶ He does this by first bringing hardship with a drought and then with an effective demonstration of power on Carmel. Ahab has not, apparently, reached the nadir of his badness, and Yahweh, in turn, has not reached the limits of his patience. This comes as a surprise, since the story of the Book of Kings has up to this point recounted a progressive digression in the moral state of Israel's monarchs beginning with the demise of Solomon. In the Northern Kingdom, each king has supplanted the one before him in following in the footsteps of Jeroboam, who had followed in the steps of his predecessor Solomon, who first

moment, to be followed by bitter disappointment' (p. 307). Contrary to Montgomery, Ap-Thomas believes that while Elijah acts symbolically, the symbolism is meteorological rather than politico-religious, and also is not symbolically favourable toward Ahab: 'It seems much more likely that in running the 17-18 miles from Mt. Carmel to Jezreel, Elijah is in fact not honouring Ahab, so much as continuing to act in his symbolic capacity of rain-cloud, and is bringing the rain from the coast to the parched plain of Esdraelon' (D.R. Ap-Thomas, 'Elijah on Mount Carmel', *PEQ* 92 [1960], p. 155).

²⁵ Cohn, p. 348.

²⁶ Tromp says the narrative of the contest 'undoubtedly was another call to conversion . . .' (Nicolas J. Tromp, 'Water and Fire on Mt. Carmel: A Conciliatory Suggestion', *Biblica* 56 [1975], p. 502).

led the entire nation (during the monarchy) into idolatry. When, then, the narrator emphasises that Ahab 'did more to provoke Yahweh, the God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him' (16.33), it comes as a surprise that he should begin a major conversion of Israel with the worst individual ever. The story up to this point, then, suggests that Ahab, in spite of inciting Yahweh with his wickedness, is redeemable, and that Yahweh has made him the object of a demonstration of divine power in order to convince him that 'Yahweh is God'. These demonstrations of power on Ahab's behalf will continue in 1 Kings 20 .

1 Kings 19: Prophet on the Run, Part 2

At the end of 1 Kings 18, Ahab and Elijah descend Carmel and head off to Jezreel. 1 Kings 19 begins with Ahab returning home and reporting to Jezebel 'all that Elijah did, that he killed all the prophets with the sword' (v. 1).²⁷ This verse is the only place that Ahab appears in this chapter.²⁸ What is not clear about his report to Jezebel is his demeanour, which is a relevant question since the event on Carmel ends with Ahab shown symbolically united with the prophet both in the eating and in the descent to Ahab's hometown.

Ahab is clearly not hostile towards the prophet, so it remains a question whether or not his retelling of the events at the slaughter at the brook Kishon is sinister. Long suggests that Ahab has 'simply' related information about the dead prophets of Baal, but Jezebel takes the report as a '*major* consequence'.²⁹ If his demeanour is sinister, then Ahab's character is diminished since it shows he has no nerve to do away with the prophet himself, and Jezebel has to do it. If not, and the following chapter seems to bear this out, Ahab has no injurious intentions toward

²⁷ Montgomery notes that the exchange between Ahab and Jezebel offers the sense of 'an intimate touch' (p. 312). His observation leads to the realisation that the only other time they speak together is also at home and also involves her intention of taking another man's life (see 1 Kgs 21.5-7).

²⁸ For those who contest Ahab's presence in the chapter, Jezebel's presence automatically recalls Ahab in the fact that he is married to the queen who continues her mission to kill the prophets of Yahweh. It is her 'hypothetical instigation of Ahab's apostasy' that influences the link (Jobling, pp. 85-86).

²⁹ Long, p. 198; his emphasis.

Elijah, he is solely relating the afternoon's activities.³⁰ Jezebel reacts to his report by sending out a death warrant for Elijah: 'Thus may the gods do to me, and even more, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life as the life of one of them (i. e., Baal's prophets; v. 2). Like his state of being in response to Elijah following the prophet's command to him to assemble the priests of Baal and Asherah on Carmel, Ahab remains passively silent in response to Jezebel's threat against Elijah. The same kind of depiction is found in 1 Kings 21 when Jezebel plots to get Naboth's vineyard; Ahab will say nothing.

If we compare the beginning of the story of Ahab, we notice that 1 Kings 19 is much like 1 Kings 17, with Elijah again in hiding from the hostile Jezebel and being supernaturally tended to in the wilderness by a messenger of Yahweh. The extent of Ahab's involvement in all this must again be surmised since the text leaves it open to the reader to determine whether his motives in telling Jezebel about the events on Carmel were intended to harm Elijah. Like in the preceding chapters, what we expect to hear about Ahab is muted; he is in the background, and it is Jezebel who forces Elijah's flights.

1 Kings 20: Ahab, Ben Hadad, and the Aramean Wars

1 Kings 17-19 presents the events between Elijah, Ahab and Jezebel primarily from Elijah's perspective (with the exception of the opening scene in chapter 18 between Ahab, Obadiah and Elijah) by following the prophet in his journeys and activities. 1 Kings 20 and the remainder of the story of Ahab turns its focus on the king and his activities. This shift in perspective, from Ahab being in the background to being in the foreground, serves also as a transition in the characterisation of King Ahab. The majority of 1 Kings 20 affirms a suspicion that began when Ahab first entered the narrative prior to the contest on Carmel, that is, that Ahab, in relation to the

³⁰ Yet by Ahab's lack of response to Jezebel's threats, the depiction of Ahab here shows his passivity by his silence to Jezebel's activism in the killing of the prophets of Yahweh (cf., 18.4). Cohn says Ahab's passivity 'exposes the real power behind the throne' (p. 341).

introduction to him, is not as bad as we were led to believe. In fact, in most of this chapter, he actually serves as a model for all kings.

With respect to the characterisation of Ahab up to this point in the story, a brief summary of my responses to the text shows how these suspicions of Ahab's negative character have led to my conclusion. 1 Kings 17 encouraged a suspicion that Ahab, following Elijah's announcement of the drought, had caused Elijah's flight into the wilderness and to Zarephath. The opening of 1 Kings 18, however, suggests that Elijah's flight was instead due to Jezebel since she had been conducting a pogrom against Yahweh's prophets (18.4). The suspicion about Ahab's evil character then re-emerged by Obadiah's advance announcement (just prior to Ahab's first appearance in the narrative) that Ahab has a vicious demeanour, but in fact, he turns out to be rather harmless when he confronts Elijah. Ahab's obeisance, and perhaps respect, shown towards the prophet suggests a certain unity between the two, symbolised in the meal on Carmel and in their descent from the mountain together. 1 Kings 19, however, begins with Ahab recounting the events on Carmel to Jezebel, who then quickly calls for Elijah's head. This in turn sends the prophet back into hiding. The narrator's silence about Ahab's motives for telling Jezebel raised the question of whether he was tattling on Elijah and perhaps wanted her help in punishing him, or whether he was simply recounting the day's events. Jezebel's reaction in declaring a warrant for his life, combined with Elijah's feeling of failure about Israel's insincere conversion (in his eyes) on the mountain, seemed to resurrect an impression that perhaps the king is not so benign after all. In 1 Kings 20, however, Ahab is brought into the forefront of the story. The chapter begins with the pendulum of Ahab's character swinging far away from his announced evil, but it ends mysteriously with it swinging back in the opposite direction.

1 Kings 20, the story about Ahab's wars with Ben Hadad, his Aramean counterpart, may be divided into three parts: 1) the battle at Samaria (vv. 1-21); 2) the battle at Aphek (vv. 22-34); and 3) Ahab's war crime (vv. 35-43). Parts 1 and 2

depict the king in a most positive way, while part 3 indicts him as a criminal, surprising both the king and the reader.

Part 1 of 1 Kings 20 begins with Ben Hadad gathering all of his army, thirty-two other kings, and cavalry and chariots to fight against Samaria (v. 1). When he had gained control of the battle and sealed off the city, he sent messengers to Ahab saying, 'Your silver, your gold, and the fairest of your wives and your sons are mine' (vv. 2-3). Ahab, acknowledging his defeat, accepted Ben Hadad's claim to the rights of ownership to his property and sent him a message saying, 'According to your word, my lord the king, I and all that is mine belongs to you' (20.4).

Ben Hadad then follows up Ahab's message of submission with a second message:

I sent to you saying 'Your silver, your gold, your wives and your sons you will give to me', Thus, by this time tomorrow, I will send my servants to you and they will seize your house and the houses of your servants; and it will be that all that is desirable in your eyes they will place in their hands and take it' (vv. 5-6).

This second message from Ben Hadad is unacceptable to Ahab, but he is not sure what to do about it, so he calls all 'the elders of the land' to an assembly and, apparently, seeks their advice. He says:

'Know, and see this evil that this one is seeking! For he sent to me for my wives and my sons and my silver and my gold and I did not refuse him.' And all the elders and all the people said to him, 'Do not listen and do not consent' (vv. 7-8).

The text does not state what question Ahab presents to the assembly, or what he should not comply with, but he apparently wants to know what he should do. His desire for counsel is made clear by the response of the elders and the people, who tell him, 'Do not listen, and do not consent'. Ahab then sends Ben Hadad's couriers back to him with a message:

And he said to the messengers of Ben Hadad,
'Say to my lord the king,
"All that you sent to your servant the first time I will do, but this [second] matter I am not able to do"' (v. 9)

ויאמר למלאכי בן-הדד
אמרו לאדני המלך
כל אשר-שלחת אל-עבדך בראשונה אעשה
והדבר הזה לא אוכל לעשות

What is confusing in this exchange is that Ahab readily agrees to give in to Ben Hadad's first demand—namely, that his wives, sons, silver and gold belong to Ben Hadad—but then refused to permit the Arameans to come into the city to take his house, the houses of his servants, and 'all that is desirable' in his (Ahab's) eyes (v. 6). The exchange begs the question, why would Ahab consent to giving his opponent what he claimed in the first message and not consent to the second message to what appear to be lesser demands (unless there was something more valuable than these possessions; see argument below)?

A closer look at the two demands, however, shows that Ahab agrees to cede only the rights of his property to Ben Hadad (by virtue of his military victory) in his response to his opponent's first message:

20.4

And the king of Israel answered,
and he said,
'According to your word, my lord
the king;
I and all that is mine [belongs] to
you'.

20.4

ויען מלך-ישראל
ויאמר
כדברך אדני המלך
לך אני וכל-אשר-לי

Ahab's refusal to agree to the second demand is due to a new decree, that he is ordered to 'give' (נתן) Ben Hadad what he had previously claimed *belonged* to him. Ben Hadad's first message never demanded that Ahab *give* him anything; he only made a claim that what was Ahab's was now his, a claim to which Ahab consented, even adding to it by ceding *all* of his property, *including* himself, and *not* just his wives, his sons and his money (vv. 2-3).

A rereading of the two messages supports my explanation of Ahab's puzzling consent and refusal. It shows that the Aramean king, in his second message, *misstates* the contents of his first message (v. 5).³¹ This subtle distinction in the two messages suggests that Ben Hadad had forgotten or misstated what he had originally said in his first message (perhaps because he had been drinking; see vv. 12 and 16):

³¹ Meek notes this is indeed what Ben Hadad says, but he sees the discrepancy as a basis for reinterpreting the past perfect, 'I sent' (שלחתי; 20.5), into a 'perfect of instantaneous action' ('I send'). This means that Ben Hadad speaks *certainly*, as opposed to *mistakenly*, about what he said in the first message (Theophile J. Meek, 'Critical Notes: 1 Kings 20 1-10', *JBL* 78 [1959], p. 73).

Message 1

כספך וזהבך לִי־הוא
ונשיך ובניך הטובים לִי־הם

Your silver and your gold, it belongs to me; and the fairest of your wives and your sons, to me they belong (20.3).

Ahab's Response to Message 1

כדברך אדני המלך
לך אני וכל־אשר־לי

According to your word, my lord the king, I and all that belongs to me, belongs to you.

Message 2

כִּי־שלחתי אליך לאמר
כספך וזהבך ונשיך ובניך לִי תתן

I sent to you saying, 'Your silver and your gold and your wives and your sons, to me you will give'.

Ahab's Response to Message 2

כל אשר־שלחת אל־עבדך בראשונה
אעשה
והדבר הזה לא אוכל לעשות

'All which you sent to your servant at the first, I will do; but this [second] thing, I am not able to do'.

Ben Hadad's second message misstates the demands of the first message. Verse 3 shows that Ben Hadad never demanded that Ahab *give* him anything in the first message except to acknowledge that the claimed spoils belonged to him as the victor of a siege. Walsh notes the discrepancy as Ben Hadad's mistake, or lie:

The first part of Ben-hadad's message cites his earlier demand with one significant change. Originally he only required Ahab's assent to his declaration of rights over Ahab's wealth and household ('they are mine,' v. 3). Now he claims that he told Ahab to 'deliver' wealth and household to him. The claim is false, of course. . .³²

Ahab consents to what Ben Hadad claimed as his rightful possession in the first message. When Ben Hadad decided to send his men into Samaria to loot Ahab's house and his servants' houses and 'all that is desirable' in Ahab's eyes, Ahab refused. Thus Ahab is willing to live as a vassal, but he is not willing to allow his 'lord' to plunder Samaria. His first submission shows that is being practical, limiting the damage of the battle. He is not afraid to fight against Ben Hadad and his forces; as is apparent in the sequence, he wishes only to prevent his suzerain from taking whatever he wants. As a result, Ahab demonstrates wisdom by yielding to the most

³² Walsh, p. 296.

acceptable solution: living as a vassal but only to a point; Ben Hadad may own it, but he cannot have it, too.³³

One problem in this passage that challenges my interpretation of Ahab's actions is Ahab's seeming admission in v. 7 that Ben Hadad *had* 'sent for' what he had first claimed, and that Ahab had given them up. This is seen in Ahab's address to the elders in recounting what Ben Hadad had demanded:

'Know and see what evil this one is seeking. For he sent to me for my wives and my sons and my silver and my gold, and I did not refuse him' (v. 7).

The question this verse raises is whether or not Ahab had actually handed over the claimed spoil *behind* the (text) scenes in that he says, 'I did not refuse him'. If he had *not* yet given the spoils over, then his admission, 'I did not refuse him', most likely refers to his acquiescence to Ben Hadad's first claim. Ahab's admission in v. 7 is essentially a restatement of the demands of Ben Hadad's first message and of Ahab's consent to it. If he *had* given over the spoils claimed in the first message (which the text does not include), then the spoils that Ben Hadad's looters would take, namely, houses and 'whatever is valuable your (Ahab's) eyes' (v. 6)—which Ahab refused to give them access to—amounted to something more valuable to Ahab than his wives, sons, and money, whatever that might be. My argument, however, is that Ahab's wives, sons, and money, which Ben Hadad claims to be his rightful spoil in the first message (v. 3), is the same as the spoils designated 'what is valuable in your (Ahab's) eyes' in the second message (v. 6). The difference in Ahab's stance, from being willing to yield in the first instance to being unwilling to yield in the second instance, is the difference between yielding ownership and yielding to confiscation. My reasoning is that, regardless of Ahab's assumed character, it is difficult to imagine that if Ahab was going to stand and fight at all, he would fight to retain something other than himself, his family, his money, and even all of his

³³ Wiseman notes, "'all I have are yours'" (v.4) were normally the words used by a subordinate and were employed by Ahab formally to avoid the plundering of his capital' (p. 176); similarly, DeVries adds, 'In v 3 the Syrian makes his rude and peremptory demand, claiming ownership over monetary wealth and over precious souls. The Israelite immediately agrees, but takes this interchange as a mere formality. The Syrian answers that a formal subservience is not enough; he demands the liberty to test it by sending his servants' (p. 248); see also Gray, p. 422.

possessions (v. 4). The spoil claimed by Ben Hadad in his first message should, by any reasoning, amount to Ahab's most valuable assets. It would seem unlikely that a conquering king would claim for himself anything less from his defeated foe. It seems most likely therefore that Ahab consents to his conqueror's demands that he surrender dominion of his most valuable possessions, and then refused to allow Ben Hadad's ransacking troops into Samaria to gain access to them.

How one interprets this incident makes a difference in the way the king is portrayed. If Ahab is willing to sacrifice his wives, sons and treasure for some other unknown treasure, he loses all respectability. But if he merely assents to having lost a military contest (without having actually lost Samaria) and agrees to the terms set by the conqueror without having to part with either the city or his most valued treasures, whether individuals or material, and then decides to fight to retain them when they are actually threatened, Ahab gains credibility as a king with moral backbone. Walsh notes that the delaying effect on the plot development by the narrative's focus on the deliberations between Ahab and all of his counsellors is a positive characterisation of Ahab:

Ahab is the kind of king who is aware of his subjects and attentive to their voice. Contrast Ben-hadad, who never consults but only commands . . . There is a further touching characterisation of Ahab. In his demands, Ben-hadad places wealth before people. When Ahab recounts those demands to the elders, he cites his family before his silver and gold. The difference implies much about the respective value systems of the two kings.³⁴

The story continues with Ben Hadad's response to Ahab's refusal to allow him access into Samaria. He says, 'Thus may the gods do to me and even more if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for the handfuls of all the people who follow me' (lit. who with my feet [אֲשֶׁר בְּרַגְלֵי], v. 10). What he means by this figurative saying is that he has more soldiers than Samaria has dust and that he wishes a curse upon himself if he cannot handle taking the city.³⁵ Ahab responds in like form: 'Let him who girds the belt not boast like him who takes it off' (v. 11). Ahab's quick riposte

³⁴ Walsh, p. 297.

³⁵ Jones interprets the saying as meaning 'Samaria is threatened with total destruction, for Benhadad's army is so numerous that it will be able to carry away the dust of Samaria in handfuls' (p. 341).

incites Ben Hadad to action, although it is an action fuelled by alcohol. The narrator interrupts the story with a circumstantial clause to let us know that Ben Hadad and the thirty-two kings were celebrating when he received Ahab's brief reply: 'And it happened when he heard this word (now he and the kings were drinking in booths) that he said to his servants "Set!"; And they set against the city' (v. 12).

Returning to the emphasis on Ahab's characterisation, the foregoing depiction of Ahab leaves little doubt that he is a wise leader. He knows when he is beat and he is humble enough to seek advice of 'the elders of the land' to help him make a difficult decision. After he has made up his mind and is threatened with hostile force, however, he displays courage and further wisdom (with wit) in provoking his opponent into action. Although wisdom and wickedness are not necessarily mutually exclusive virtues, this admirable picture of Ahab will enhance the admirable depictions of him in the following passages. Nelson says of the first portion of 1 Kings 20:

In a few verses the narrative has been able to reverse the reader's sympathies away from the antipathy for Ahab inherited from the previous chapters to a positive identification with him. Ahab's actions in the coming battle, in contrast with Ben-hadad's, continue to attract the reader's sympathies.³⁶

Following Ben Hadad's orders to his army to prepare for battle, the narrative introduces a 'certain prophet' who approaches Ahab with an announcement of victory. He says, 'Thus says Yahweh, "Do you see all this great tumult? Behold, I am giving it into your hand today, and you will know that I am Yahweh"' (v. 13). The surprise supporting announcement comes without any solicitation and recalls Yahweh's display on Mt. Carmel on behalf of Israel. But here, Yahweh's announcement of support is given only for Ahab's benefit. Ahab continues the conversation with the prophet, and, by it, reveals himself to be one who seeks counsel from God about the essential military details of the ensuing battle with respect to how it would be won (v. 14). After he gets his orders, Ahab musters his troops (232 'young men of the princes of the provinces' and 7,000 Israelites),

³⁶Nelson, p. 133.

according to the prophet's instructions, and prepares for the battle, which ends in victory for Ahab (vv. 15-21).

What is striking about Yahweh's unsolicited involvement with Ahab is that he shows that he cares about him. Two questions that immediately arise in view of his involvement with Ahab are: (1) if Ahab is so evil, as the introduction to his story declares, why does Yahweh bother to help him at all?; and (2) if Yahweh says that the purpose of his help is 'that you may know that I am Yahweh',³⁷ then a second question is, does the king really want to know? Prior to the prophet's emergence in the story Ahab is not shown fretting or praying or performing any religious act in order to obtain divine help against the Arameans (cf. Saul in 1 Sam 15; 28). I suggest two possible answers: the king is either in some kind of harmony with Yahweh, who may be seeking to reinforce the relationship (which appears possible in light of the aftermath on Mt. Carmel), or Yahweh uses further displays of his power in order to win his allegiance. In any event, Yahweh's activity on behalf of Ahab hardly corresponds with the text's previous witness to their relationship, that no prior king 'provoked' Yahweh more than Ahab did (1 Kings 16.33). The reversal of Ahab's fortune (from Yahweh's punishment for idolatry brought in the drought, to Yahweh's favour) demonstrated by Yahweh's activity here in 1 Kings 20 gives a strong impression that the king participated in Israel's unified confession on Carmel, 'Yahweh is God, Yahweh is God' (1 Kgs 18.39). So far in 1 Kings 20, Ahab is by no means depicted as the arch-idolater.

Immediately following Ahab's victory over the Arameans, 'the prophet' approaches Ahab again. He instructs him to prepare himself for Ben Hadad's counterattack, which will come 'at the turn of the year' (v. 22). The narrative then

³⁷ DeVries labels this announcement as an 'historical demonstration formula' that is tied to holy war tradition in which Yahweh demonstrates his identity in his acts (p. 249), but he does not relate the announcement to the context. Again, why does Yahweh want to demonstrate to Ahab who he is? Rice, I believe, correctly draws the relationship, that is, Yahweh continued his attempt that he began at Carmel to win Ahab's allegiance. He writes, 'That the victories at Samaria and Aphek are given explicitly that Ahab might know the true nature of the LORD is a final appeal to the king' (Gene Rice, *1 Kings*, [International Theological Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990], p. 174). The phrase is used in Exodus 10.2 and 31.13 in contexts of displays of power but is also found in Ezekiel, mostly in contexts of judgement: 13.9; 20.20; cf. 'and you will know that I am Yahweh' Ezek. 6.7; 13.14, 21; 20.42; 22.16; 37.6).

takes the reader to Ben Hadad's camp where the king is in conference with his military advisors. They provide him with a theological reason for the defeat, and a strategy for a counterattack: 'Their god is a god of the mountains, therefore they were stronger than we [were]. . . Let us fight them in the plain; surely we will be stronger than they' (v. 23). In preparation for the forthcoming battle, his advisors also suggest personnel reassignments in accordance with their strategy, advising him to muster a force like the force he just lost (vv. 24-25). Ben Hadad agrees to their counsel, and at the turn of the year they gather themselves against Israel at Aphek (vv. 25-26). Israel in turn musters itself and goes out to meet them, setting up camp opposite the Arameans. In a simile, the text graphically describes Israel's numerical disadvantage: they appeared 'as of a pair of little flocks of goats' encamped against a force that 'filled the land' (v. 27).

Again the narrator interrupts the story with the intervention of yet another prophet. This time it is a 'man of God' who comes unsolicited just prior to battle (v. 28). He approaches Ahab and promises victory for him 'by the word of Yahweh', but this time the demonstration will be on behalf of Ahab *and* Israel, 'and you (pl) will know I am Yahweh' (v. 28; emphasis added). His action also has another reason, 'Because Aram said "Yahweh is a god of the mountains and he is not a god of the valleys"' (v. 28). The story then returns to the battlefield at Aphek, where the ensuing battle recalls Joshua's battle at Jericho. Ahab has become Joshua *redividus*. Israel camped in front of Aram seven days before the attack. Then on the seventh day, 'The battle commenced and the sons of Israel killed 100,000 soldiers in one day', with the remaining 7,000 troops escaping into Aphek, where the city walls fall upon them. Ben Hadad, however, finds refuge in an 'inner chamber of the city' (v. 29-30).

Like the aftermath of the battle at Samaria, the text again focuses on the enemy king. He has barely escaped the onslaught and is shown in hiding, deliberating with his advisors about his predicament. This time, however, the discussion is not about another battle strategy, but about saving his life.

Surprisingly, the advisors recall a distinction about Israelite kings which they intend to exploit:

הנה־נא שמענו כי מלכי בית ישראל
כי־מלכי חסד הם

‘Behold, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel, that kings of mercy, they [are]’ (v. 31).³⁸

With this knowledge about Israel’s kings they appeal to Ahab, approaching him in appropriate humility, donning sackcloth for clothing and tying cords around their heads. When the servants address Ahab they say, ‘Your servant Ben Hadad says, “Please let me live”’ (v. 32). Ahab responds with compassion, ‘Is he still alive? He is my brother’ (v. 32). Surprisingly, Ahab decides to let bygones be bygones, sending the servants off to bring the enemy king to him. When they return, Ahab takes him up into his chariot as a sign of peace (v. 33). In response, Ben Hadad makes a covenant with Ahab saying, ‘The cities which my father took from your father I will return, and you shall establish streets for yourself in Damascus like those my father established in Samaria’ (v. 34). They part and go their separate ways.

The circumstances surrounding the battle at Aphek, like those of the battle at Samaria, depict Ahab in a similar fashion: Ahab is an obedient king who listens to and interacts with the messages from God given to him by the prophets. The prophets appear with him in roles similar to the counsellors attending Ben Hadad by providing Ahab with their strategies for war and their announcements of victory. These scenes in 1 Kings 20, therefore, suggest a radical change in the relationship between the throne and Yahweh’s prophets when compared to 1 Kings 17-19. Instead of being depicted as threatened with execution, hiding in caves and in the wilderness, the prophets appear to have freedom of movement and unrestricted access to the king.

Adding to this benign portrayal of Ahab’s relationship with the prophets is the suggestion of his inclusion in a noble group of Israel’s ‘kings of mercy’³⁹. This

³⁸ I have translated the Hebrew word for word in the final clause to show that the personal pronoun ‘they’ (הם) stands as emphatic. Walsh translates, ‘the kings of the house of Israel are *indeed* merciful kings’ (p. 307; his emphasis).

unexpected appellation to Ahab either completely contradicts the king's introductory evil status or, if such a noble status lends substance to his evil epithet, it establishes a standard of moral measurement that has no bearing on individual virtue and, as such, is foreign to readers. The only context where mercy is out of place is in battle, where moral squeamishness becomes a liability, and where common entitlements to leniency are nullified by the more pressing urgency of eradicating an immediate threat to life that comes in an enemy who seeks either elimination or enslavement of his prey. This is not the same as saying that mercy has no place in battle, for there is a time for taking prisoners, as Ahab did. Surprisingly, however, Ahab, without knowing it, has erred grossly in this regard, and his crime needs only to be exposed to him by yet another prophet. This moral eye-opening task concerns the remainder of 1 Kings 20.

Following Ben Hadad's release, the narrative turns its focus on the appearance and activity of 'a certain man from the sons of the prophets' (v. 35). This prophet initiates a scheme to trap Ahab into indicting himself for releasing a king whom Yahweh apparently had dedicated to the ban, a crime which will not be known to the reader or the king until the end of the story (v. 42). The crime Ahab has committed is identical to Saul's crime of sparing Agag, but the major difference is that unlike Saul (see my study on Saul and Ahab in the next chapter), Ahab was never told that Ben Hadad had been marked for the ban (see below).

The scheme adopted by the prophet is to trick Ahab by means of a juridical parable. It is the same kind of parable used by Nathan when he confronted David for his crimes against Uriah and Bathsheba.³⁹ However, there are two major differences between the two accounts. One is that this prophet disguises himself in order to get Ahab to implicate himself; the other is that it occurs without any explanation offered to the reader for the prophet's activity. Nathan's action comes because 'the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of Yahweh', who then sent him to David (2 Sam 11.27, 12.1). There is no such rationale given for the activity of this 'certain

³⁹ I will present a study of this appellation in the next chapter.

⁴⁰ DeVries labels this sort of parable as a 'regal self-judgement narrative' (p. 251).

man from the sons of the prophets'. As a result, the reader knows nothing of the purpose of his plan or his unusual tactics until he reveals it to the unsuspecting king.

The prophet goes to surprising lengths in order to disguise himself. He does this by finding someone to injure him in the face, 'striking and wounding' the prophet (v. 37). The prophet then stations himself at a place in the road where the king was certain to pass, disguising 'himself by placing a bandage over his eye' (v. 38) and waited for Ahab. When Ahab came along, the prophet shouted out to him to get his attention (v. 38) and told him a story:

Your servant went out into the midst of the battle, and behold, a man turned aside and brought to me a man; and he said to me 'Guard this man. If he escapes, then it will be your life for his life, or you shall pay a talent of silver.' And it happened that your servant was doing thus and thus, and behold, he was gone! (vv. 39-40a).

Ahab's response to the story comes unsolicited. The prophet does not ask for any kind of ruling, but Ahab offers one anyway. He says quickly, 'Thus is your judgement; you have decided it' (40b). Clearly, Ahab's judgement of the disguised prophet is linked to the sentencing attached to losing custody of a prisoner designated by the soldier in the story. The disguised prophet, realising that Ahab had just fallen into his trap, 'hurried and removed the bandage from his eyes' (v. 41a). The text then focuses on Ahab's response when the prophet reveals himself: 'And the king of Israel recognised him, that he was from the prophets' (v. 41b). The text then quickly returns its focus to the prophet, who declares Ahab's sentence, revealing both to the reader and to Ahab that the king has committed the crime established in the parable: 'Thus says Yahweh, "Because you have set free the man of my ban, it will be your life for his life and your people for his people"' (v. 42). Without any word, Ahab goes home 'sullen and vexed' (v. 43).

The story the prophet tells is supposed to represent the behaviour of Ahab and his release of Ben Hadad. The bandaged prophet, whom Ahab believes to be the soldier who lost his prisoner in the story, represents Ahab, so that when Ahab decides his case he condemns himself. If we assume that Yahweh represents the man

on the battlefield who placed the prisoner into Ahab's charge, then it makes sense that in v. 42, when Yahweh sentences Ahab, he speaks about the man of 'my ban'.

Ahab has skilfully been placed in the position of judging the guilt of his own crime when he has not been asked to do so, much like King David did. The prophet's cunning is thus demonstrated by his skill in setting and springing the trap by offering attractive bait. The force of the demonstrative adverb, 'thus' (v. 40b) coupled with Ahab's interruption of the prophet's discourse suggests both that the prophet had Ahab's complete attention and that Ahab's unhesitating response to play the role of mediator and judge is a role he readily accepts. He has done just that in acting as judge with Ben Hadad by deciding his fate in the immediate aftermath of battle. Ben Hadad and his men had surrendered and appealed and won release from execution. In this instance, Ahab was unwilling to show mercy to one of his own (assumed) soldiers. Ahab either betrays his previously announced merciful character as a king of 'mercy' with his cool unhesitating judgement, or he acts honourably by upholding the punishment named by the attending officer in the parable (which he did not know was a parable) that loss of the prisoner meant an appropriate payment. As a result, the king has hastily and unknowingly indicted himself.

As mentioned above, apart from the parable and Yahweh's sentence, Ahab's crime has not been spelled out, leaving us to wonder if his act was premeditated. If we are going to find any suggestion if Ahab knew he was committing a crime when he spared Ben Hadad, then we will have to search the story carefully for anything that hints to or resembles criminal activity. Looking back, we can discern that the text twice vaguely links Ahab with criminal activity. The first link is the combination of an allusion to Jericho by the battle at Aphek with the supposed violation of the ban by Ahab. Taken together, Ahab at Aphek recalls the theft of spoils by Achan at Jericho (cf. Josh 7.1-26). But this is a retrospective conclusion. This allusion, however, may draw together Saul, Ahab and Achan into a special group of the only three individuals to have violated the ban on war spoils. However, the allusion to Jericho precedes the crime and seems simply to colour the narrative

with supernatural involvement, while the link with Achan is achieved only by looking back from the end of the chapter after Ahab has been sentenced. A second possible link that suggests that Ahab intentionally violated the ban comes from the parable told by the disguised prophet. In it, the individual ('a man') who commissions the soldier with custody of the prisoner designated fines for the loss of the prisoner:

'Guard this man. If he escapes, then it will be your life for his life, or you shall pay a talent of silver' (v. 39).

Since the soldier was told of a penalty of either death or a fine for an escaped prisoner ('it will be your life for his life, or you shall pay a talent of silver'), then the two penalties may point to the existence of a battlefield law, suggesting, perhaps, that the severity of the sentence for losing a prisoner depended on the rank or the value of the prisoner. If the prisoner were an ordinary foot soldier, for example, then the one in charge might have to pay a fine; but if the prisoner were a general, or even a king, then he must pay with his life. If this is the case, the parable may serve metaphorically as a re-enactment or a restatement of a previous event when Ahab was informed of Ben Hadad's status. This in turn informs the reader that Ahab, represented by the soldier in the parable, may have been told of his responsibilities concerning the prisoner, and thus, that he had committed a crime. This scenario, however, is an attempt to fill a textual gap. The text never states that Ahab had instructions either to kill Ben Hadad or to hold him as prisoner.

From beginning to end the movement of the story in 1 Kings 20 displays a surprising twist in fortunes. Moving through two crises, in which underdog Israel triumphs, Ahab appears the model king through whom Yahweh works his wonders.⁴¹ The story begins without any indication or announcement that Ahab's ample administrative and intellectual skills enhanced a working relationship with God. This understanding emerges gradually and most unexpectedly because of the leading announcements and the ambiguous character portrayal of Ahab in the foregoing

⁴¹ Long says of Ahab's behaviour, 'This Israelite king is dignified and courageous, even pious' (p. 219).

chapters. However, Ahab's pious kingly characterisation is entirely overturned and confused with his sentencing at the end. It is as if Ahab is just as much a victim as Ben Hadad. If anything, his surprise crime elicits sympathy, especially in light of his noble gesture in sparing Ben Hadad.⁴² Thus, this complex portrayal of Ahab, compared with his status as the unrivalled apostate announced in 1 Kings 16. 29-34, leaves us no closer to an unclouded depiction of the king's evil nature. Here again, the text does not seem to follow through.

The outcome of the chapter leaves us in doubt about Ahab's guilt and about his character; it is left up to us to pass judgement. Ahab's fall from favour with Yahweh and the prophets has been accomplished by surprise, both for the reader and for Ahab. The stunning effect it has on Ahab is reflected in his silence following his sentence, which seems quite extreme in that Ahab *and* his people must pay for his crime (v. 42).⁴³ He seems nonplussed. He does not protest his innocence; he simply goes home 'sullen and vexed' (v. 43).

⁴² Auld, however, notes a contradiction between Ahab's judgement and the apparent **חסד** he has just exercised with respect to Ben Hadad: 'The final judgment on Ahab (v.42) indicates some irony in the earlier talk of "loyalty" (v.31) as characteristic of kings of Israel. The Hebrew word *hesed* is frequently used of the loyalty God both shows and requires. Ahab's *hesed* may not be in doubt – except for its orientation!' (*I and II Kings*, p. 134).

⁴³ Stern's study on the *herem* demonstrates that the *herem* in this story appears out of place. He notes that even if the battles between Ahab and Ben Hadad were considered as Holy War, they did not require the ban, including the general rules for war given in Deuteronomy 20.16-18, meaning that Ahab's punishment appears severe. When this understanding is coupled with the fact that Ahab was never instructed to carry out the ban, the severity of the penalty suggests great anger on the part of Yahweh, perhaps because Yahweh had delivered Ahab and Israel as he said he would, but Ahab then allows Ben Hadad to go free. Stern says, 'By not taking the opportunity to bind the enemy king, who was **גִּלְחָדָד** (war) personified, Ahab defied YHWH's will and received condemnation of 1 Kgs 20,42' (Philip D. Stern, 'The *herem* in 1 Kgs 20,42 as an Exegetical Problem', *Biblica* 71 [1990], p. 46). Stern also suggests that the author stretched the requirements of the ban in 1 Kings 20 in order to link Ahab to Saul. He says, 'The writer did his best to raise the ghost of Saul by using the word **חֵרֶם** even though the two situations were radically different. Without pretending to read the writer's mind, the reason he did this seems to have been out of a desire to emphasize the absolute quality of YHWH's rejection of Ahab, which extended also to his dynasty, as in the case of Saul (although in neither case did the dynasty expire immediately)' (p. 46). Please see chapter 3 of this thesis for a more detailed study of the links between Ahab and Saul in relation to their violation of the ban.

1 Kings 21: Ahab and the Murder of Naboth

The story of the murder of Naboth represents the low point of Ahab's characterisation. The story is similar to David's crime against Bathsheba and Uriah in its structure, in its sequence of actions, and in the motive for the crime: Ahab's coveting leads to murder.⁴⁴ The major difference in Ahab's crime, however, is Jezebel's participation. Ahab appears to play only a passive role in the murder, but he is held responsible. Like in the violation of the ban, Ahab's participation in the crime is clouded. The story gives the impression that Ahab's callous seizure of the coveted property immediately following Naboth's murder implicates him in the deed, but the extent of his involvement is left open to conjecture. Also, in spite of Elijah's scathing judgement on Ahab and his house following the crime, the conclusion of the story again challenges Ahab's identification as the most wicked person in the Hebrew Bible.

The story of the murder of Naboth begins following Ahab's wars with Ben Hadad: 'After these things, there was a vineyard that belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite, which was in Jezreel next to the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria' (1 Kgs 21.1).⁴⁵ Naboth's vineyard is the object of Ahab's desire so he goes to Naboth and tries to get him to trade for another vineyard or to sell it to him. He says, 'Give me your vineyard that it may be a vegetable garden for me, for it is right next to my house; and I will give you another vineyard better than it, or if it is good in your eyes, I will give you money for the price of it' (v. 2). Naboth, however, claims that he cannot sell his vineyard because it is a family possession. He is adamant about not selling it, saying in an oath, 'Far be it from me from Yahweh [or, 'God forbid'] that I should sell you the inheritance of my fathers!' (v. 3). Ahab has a difficult time accepting the rejection and goes home in the same manner that he left following his sentencing for

⁴⁴ I will present a study of the similarities between David and Ahab and their crimes in the next chapter.

⁴⁵ Wiseman notes that in following the story of the release of Ben Hadad, 'Ahab's clemency, publicly shown to the Arameans, is now contrasted with his despotic behaviour to one of his own citizens' (p. 181).

violating the ban: ‘sullen and vexed’ (v. 4a; cf. 20.43)). The narrator then allows us to know why Ahab is feeling so low: ‘because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite spoke to him , that he said, “I will not give to you the inheritance of my fathers”’ (v. 4b).⁴⁶ In fact, Ahab is so affected by Naboth’s rejection that he went to his bedroom, ‘he lay down on his bed and turned his face and did not eat bread’ (v. 4c).

Jezebel, noticing that Ahab did not eat, went to his room and asked him, ‘Why is your spirit so sullen that you are not eating?’ (v. 5). Ahab responds by recalling Naboth’s rejection, but he leaves out several details. He tells Jezebel that he had given Naboth an option of either selling his vineyard to him or of taking another vineyard in exchange, in that order (v. 6a). However, Ahab has reversed the order of the originally stated options. In his meeting with Naboth, he had first offered him a ‘better vineyard’ in exchange, and then offered to give him money for it. He also leaves out Naboth’s grounds for not bartering with his vineyard, that it was ‘the inheritance of my fathers’ (v. 3). Rice writes, ‘Ahab recounts his failure to obtain Naboth’s vineyard but does not tell the full story. He does not mention the reason for Naboth’s refusal but only quotes him as saying, “I will not give you my vineyard . . .”’⁴⁷ In addition, Ahab also changes Naboth’s response from I cannot ‘give to you the inheritance of my fathers’ (v. 3), to ‘I will not give you my vineyard’ (v. 6b). In a biting response to Ahab’s grumbling over Naboth’s refusal, Jezebel challenges his kingly status, ‘Do you indeed reign over Israel?’, and takes the matter into her own hands: ‘Arise, eat bread and let your heart be joyful; I will get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite’ (v. 7).

Part 1 of the story begins innocently enough with Ahab’s failure legally to procure a commoner’s property, but ends ominously with the matter being taken over

⁴⁶ Walsh translates verse 4b (‘I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers’) as what Ahab was actually ‘muttering’ to himself on his way home, rather than a note by the author of what Ahab was thinking, ‘that [Naboth] had said [to him], “I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers”’ (p. 319). But Walsh’s rendition challenges the more common verbal *Qal* of אָמַר with the waw used as an explicative, ‘that he said’. If the author wanted to say that this is what Ahab was saying to himself he could have used the *hithpael* of אָמַר.

⁴⁷ Rice, p. 176.

by the murderous Jezebel. Ahab's demeanour about Naboth's refusal matches his feelings following his sentencing for releasing Ben Hadad; he is 'sullen and vexed'. The repetition of the phrase in both venues, leaving the battlefield and leaving Naboth's vineyard, marks two simultaneous personal setbacks for the king which in turn contributes to his case of self pity. Ahab's demeanour illustrates defeat. He knows he can do nothing to obtain the coveted property apart from Naboth's permission or Naboth's death, so he allows himself to mourn the loss. As a result, Ahab comes across as a passive sulking king who cannot have his way, but, with Jezebel's entrance into the story, we sense that he will get his desire. The scene in the king's bedroom offers a rare intimate glimpse of the king and queen together. Jezebel appears as a concerned wife, seeking about Ahab's welfare for not eating, while Ahab appears as a child pouting on his bed with his face turned to the wall. Jezebel's cutting remark about his kingly status relates as much to his sulking as it does to his impotence in taking what he wants. She, however, displays no such hesitation of will or morals and enacts a plot to kill Naboth in order to allow Ahab to take it for himself.

In the next portion of the story, Jezebel uses her privileged position as queen to murder Naboth. She writes letters in Ahab's name and seals them with his seal and orders the 'elders and the nobles' of Jezreel to call a fast (v. 8).⁴⁸ After calling the fast she instructs them to put Naboth in front of the people, to bring in two lying witnesses ('sons of Belial') who testify that Naboth 'cursed God and the king' (lit., ברכת אלהים ומלך 'you blessed God and [the] king')⁴⁹ and then to take him out and stone him 'so that he dies' (vv. 9-10). The text goes to what seems unnecessary

⁴⁸ The fast that Jezebel calls has to do with a sort of national or local wrongdoing and was meant to allay the wrath of the deity. Gray notes, 'The occasion of the fast was no doubt some untoward circumstances locally, which, experienced or apprehended (cf. I Sam. 7.6), were alleged to be the result of some default of the community, which in this case was fixed by arrangement on Naboth' (p. 440).

⁴⁹ The clause is translated 'you cursed God and king' because it was assumed that by using the verb 'curse' with the object 'God' came too close to being regarded as blasphemy by the editors. Robinson writes, 'The usual explanation of this has been that the editors were so outraged and horrified by the blasphemy of cursing God that they could not even bring themselves to write the words. Instead they wrote the opposite, feeling that the reader would rightly understand the true nature of the charge made against Naboth, and their own pious scruples' (J. Robinson, *The First Book of Kings* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972], p. 237).

detail to implicate the ‘elders and the nobles’ in the scheme by making sure we know who they are and what they did:⁵⁰

And the men of his [Naboth’s] city, the elders and the nobles who dwelled in his city, did according to what Jezebel sent to them, according to what was written in the letters, which she sent to them (v. 11).

The text then records the event, which occurs just as it was ordered by Jezebel (word for word), ending with Naboth being taken out and stoned to death (vv. 12-13). The results of the execution are then reported to Jezebel, who then tells Ahab, ‘Rise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he was unwilling to give to you for money, for he is no longer alive, but dead’ (v. 14-15).

Jezebel’s emphasis on the vineyard as the vineyard *which he was unwilling to give to you for money* suggests the significance of Ahab’s previous misrepresentation to Jezebel of his failed attempt to obtain the vineyard. This misrepresentation implicates Ahab. As mentioned above, Ahab changed the order of the options he had given to Naboth for obtaining the vineyard. He originally made money the last option in the offer, whereas he reported it to Jezebel as being the first option in the offer:

For I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him ‘Give me your vineyard for money, or if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard’ (v. 6a).

Jezebel’s emphasis on Ahab’s rendition of his negotiations suggests that it supplied her with the incentive she needed to eliminate Naboth. Her emphasis on Ahab’s account of Naboth’s refusal also suggests that she interpreted Naboth’s resistance to Ahab as insubordination, since (Ahab’s) money was not good enough for him. This would somewhat explain the nature of the charges she ordered to be brought by the two ‘sons of Belial’, that Naboth ‘cursed God and the king’ (v. 10, 13). It is not far off to suggest that to Jezebel, Naboth’s refusal, in the terms given by Ahab, amounted to something like a curse. Her inclusion that he cursed God as well as the

⁵⁰ Rice questions if the relationship between the groups and the royal family is *quid pro quo*: ‘Could Jezebel count on the complicity of these groups because of a sense of indebtedness created by the favors and privileges granted by Omri and Ahab [and family ties]?’ (p. 177). Gray notes the probability of some relationship between Ahab and the nobles and the elders: ‘The fiction of communal justice is noteworthy. Jezebel’s reliance on the local elders and freeborn men of Jezreel suggests that Ahab was personally influential. This indicates perhaps that the persons in question had been long accustomed to follow the lead of the family of Ahab’ (p. 440).

king may suggest the idea that the king rules in God's place, and that insubordination to the king is the same as insubordination to God. Rice says, 'To curse God and the king, God's "son" (Ps. 2:7), was blasphemy and punishable by death according to Israel's legal tradition (Exod. 22:28; Lev. 24:10-16)'.⁵¹ Gray also notes the significance of the charge regarding the relationship between God and king. He says:

The conjunction of Yahweh and the king is interesting. In such psalms as Pss. 2 and 110 the same ideology and language is applied to the king as is applied to God as king in his triumph over the powers of Chaos. The king is God's visible guarantee of his cosmic sovereignty, and this relationship is expressed by the father-son relationship of God and king.⁵²

But in fact, Naboth's refusal was not based on the vineyard's monetary value but on its familial value. His refusal to sell to Ahab was: 'God forbid that I should give to you the inheritance of my fathers' (v. 3). Naboth did not consider his vineyard as a vineyard *per se*, but as an inheritance. This is important. That Ahab was affected by this strong emotional attachment is told to us by the narrator, who informs us that, on his way home, Ahab was depressed because of this *exact* barrier:

And Ahab went home sullen and vexed over the matter which Naboth the Jezreelite spoke to him, that he said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers' (v. 4a).

Naboth's strong emotional ties to his property contributed most to Ahab's depression by making it impossible for him to get the vineyard at all.⁵³ Because this fact is foremost in Ahab's mind, mulling over it as he went home, the text suggests that he purposely neglected to mention this important factor to Jezebel. It also suggests that Ahab predicted her response. In recounting to Jezebel Naboth's refusal, he mentioned nothing of the vineyard's familial valuation to Naboth, he simply said that

⁵¹ Rice, p. 177.

⁵² Gray, p. 441.

⁵³ Rice says, 'Naboth claimed the right to keep his vineyard because it was the inheritance (nahalah) of his ancestors. Land was not a private possession and commercial commodity in Israel but a gift and trust held from God, the real owner (Lev. 25:23), for the sake of the family (Num. 27:1-11; 36:1-12)' (p.176).

Naboth told him, 'I will not give you my vineyard' (v. 6). Ahab's involvement in Naboth's murder is thus more complicated than it appears on a first reading.⁵⁴

The final portion of the story begins with Yahweh's response to the crime. Yahweh does not hesitate to charge the king with murder. Immediately after 'Ahab rose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to possess it' (v. 16), Yahweh commands Elijah to meet him there to announce both the charges and the punishment:

Rise, go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, who is in Samaria. Behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to possess it. And you shall speak to him saying, 'Have you murdered, and also taken possession?' And you shall speak to him saying, 'In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, the dogs shall lick your blood, even yours' (vv. 18-19).

Astonishingly, when Ahab arrives, he hears none of this. Instead, Elijah calls down a curse associated more with his tenure as king of Israel than as Naboth's murderer. Ahab greets the prophet disdainfully, 'Have you found me, O my enemy?' (v. 20a). Elijah then responds with an all consuming curse on Ahab's house, including Jezebel:

I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of Yahweh. Behold, I am bringing evil upon you and I will consume [those] after you, and will cut off from Ahab those pissing against the wall, both bond and free in Israel; and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and Baasha son of Ahijah because of the provocation [with] which you have provoked and caused Israel to sin. And also [concerning] Jezebel, Yahweh spoke saying, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel.' The one belonging to Ahab dying in the city the dogs will eat; and the one dying in the field the birds of the air will eat (vv. 20b-24).

The curse that Elijah pronounces on Ahab and his house is not what Yahweh commanded him to say to Ahab, and it also says *nothing* specifically about Naboth's murder. Instead, it refers more generally to the 'evil' which he had 'sold' himself to do. In this sense the curse resembles more the general epithets and regnal summaries associated with the previous other kings who 'did evil in the eyes of Yahweh'. But more specifically, the curse associates Ahab with Jeroboam and Baasha in provoking Israel to sin. Jeroboam's curse comes on him because he had done 'more evil' than

⁵⁴ Gray suggests that Ahab may not have any idea of what Jezebel had done. He says, 'It may well be that Ahab did not know of the measures taken by Jezebel, as vv. 15f. suggest, and in fact may have been himself in Samaria when the tragedy was contrived at Jezreel' (p. 443).

those who preceded him, and because he had made for himself 'other gods and molten images to *provoke*' Yahweh to anger (1 Kgs 14.9; emphasis added). The curse announced on Jeroboam is given by the prophet Ahijah, who is speaking Yahweh's words, and is almost identical to that on Ahab in wording:

Thus, behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam and I will cut off from Jeroboam those pissing against the wall, both bond and free in Israel; I will consume by fire the house of Jeroboam as dung is burned until it is completely gone. The one belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city, the dogs will eat; and the one dying in the field the birds of the air will eat, according to the word of Yahweh (1 Kgs 14.10-11).

The curse announced on Baasha was given because 'of all the evil which he did in the eyes of Yahweh, *provoking* him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam, and because he struck it' (1 Kgs 16. 7; emphasis mine). The curse announced against Baasha, coming from Yahweh and given by the prophet Jehu, son of Hannani, is similar to the curses pronounced against Jeroboam and Ahab, but it leaves out the portion about those urinating on walls:

Behold I will consume Baasha and his house and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat. The one dying in the city the dogs shall eat; and the one dying in the field the birds of the air will eat (1 Kgs 16.3-4).

Like the curses pronounced against Jeroboam and Baasha, the curse pronounced on Ahab, which comes in the immediate aftermath of Naboth's murder, does not mean that it is tied explicitly to this crime. That it comes following the crime gives the sense that Naboth's murder is the last straw. It suggests that Yahweh's patience has been used up, and Ahab is given an *overall* summary sentence, assigned to the same destruction as Jeroboam and Baasha. This sense is supported by the following important evaluation by the narrator, who stops the action of the narrative and appears to sum up the life of Ahab by seemingly stamping an approval on Elijah's sentence by giving his own opinion:

Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of Yahweh whom Jezebel his wife incited. And he did exceedingly abominably by going after the Baals, according to all which the Amorites did whom Yahweh dispossessed in the sight of the sons of Israel (v. 26).

The narrator, by saying Ahab had 'sold himself' (הִרְמַכֵּר), repeats the words Elijah spoke to Ahab upon meeting him in the vineyard. They serve as the cause of Elijah's

curse: 'Because you have *sold yourself* to do evil . . .' (v. 20; emphasis added). The narrator, however, adds that it was Jezebel who had incited him to do it, suggesting that he had sold himself to her bidding, letting Ahab off the hook. What is very confusing is the reference to Ahab's idolatry, especially in light of the preceding narrative. If the narrator declares here that Ahab's major flaw was that he was an horrendous idolater in the manner of the Amorites, why did he not portray him as such? Instead, he includes only three other verses referring to his idolatry (see Conclusion below) found in the introduction (1 Kgs 16.31-33).

The narrator's evaluation of Ahab thus serves as a closing commentary on his life as recounted in the preceding vignettes. It goes one step beyond the opening evaluation—of marking Ahab as the worst king Israel ever had up to his time (1 Kgs 16.30, 33)—by establishing the king as the worst person *there ever was* with the words 'Surely there was no one like Ahab' (v. 26). But 1 Kings 21 again confuses our expectations by reversing this declaration of Ahab's wickedness. When the narrator resumes the story line, Ahab acts uncharacteristically by repenting for his life of crime after hearing Elijah's judgement on his family:

When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth, and he fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently (v. 27).

It is significant that Ahab does not necessarily act despondently about Naboth's murder, but about 'these words', that is, Elijah's judgement on his house. This is not to say that he felt no emotion about Naboth's murder but that the text does not *specifically* include it as the reason for his repentance. This is important because his actions serve as a response to *all* the wrong he had done, and not just for the wrong committed against Naboth. But his repentant behaviour is even more significant because he surprises Yahweh with his humility, who is so moved that he suspends his retribution on Ahab's house until after Ahab is dead. Yahweh says to Elijah:

Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his day, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his sons' days (v. 29).

Thus in the closing sentence of the story of the murder of Naboth, the text once again surprises us with an unexpected vision of the king behaving piously, and

it does so immediately after it unambiguously declares that Ahab is unsurpassed in wickedness. Walsh says:

The narrator has just told us that Ahab is guilty of evil unparalleled in the history of Israel (v. 25), yet now he shows us Ahab undertaking humble acts of grief and penance. This apparent discrepancy in the image of Ahab is difficult to resolve (and, in fact, the narrator will never clearly resolve it), but it opens the way for a variety of conjectures.⁵⁵

As if to make sure the reader knows that Ahab acts sincerely, the text shows that Yahweh finds enough redeeming quality in Ahab to change his mind about his judgement. His action perhaps reflects the narrator's own ambivalence about coming to a final damning verdict on Ahab's character.

1 Kings 22: The Death of Ahab

1 Kings 22.1-40 concludes the story of King Ahab with the account of his death at Ramoth Gilead fighting against Ben Hadad and the Arameans. This final section of the story of Ahab does not conflict significantly with the introduction of the story of Ahab in showing the king in opposition with God. His death fulfils an oracle given to him by the prophet Micaiah, which is a prophecy of doom that negates a previous oracle given by four hundred of Ahab's prophets that guarantees him success in the battle. Ahab is forced to choose between the two opposing prophecies, and his decision to heed his prophets' prediction rather than Micaiah's turns out to be the wrong choice. Since both prophecies originate in the divine council, Ahab, in falling prey to a lie, becomes Yahweh's victim, representing the nadir of their relationship. Ahab's negative status with Yahweh in 1 Kings 22 also is not helped by his conflict with Yahweh's prophet Micaiah, a conflict which serves as a major focus of the story and contributes the most to his negative characterisation.

The story of the death of Ahab concerns an attempt by Ahab to regain control of the city Ramoth Gilead from Ben Hadad, king of Aram. It is significant to note that Ahab is mostly designated in this chapter as 'the king of Israel'. He is named

⁵⁵ Walsh, p. 335.

only once in the story (v. 20), and once in the summary of his reign (v. 40), suggesting perhaps that the narrator left him unnamed in order to highlight a negative attitude toward the king.⁵⁶ On the other hand, the readers may already know who 'the king of Israel' is.⁵⁷ Auld proposes that the generic title, 'king of Israel', probably denotes an unbiased designation in historical chronicle.⁵⁸

The introduction of 1 Kings 22 shows Ahab and Jehoshaphat joining forces in a military alliance to take back the city of Ramoth Gilead from Ben Hadad and the Arameans. The opening verse states that it had been three years since the last conflict between the two kings (perhaps a reference to the siege of Samaria and the battle at Aphek in 1 Kings 20), and suggests that Ben Hadad reneged on his covenant to return the cities that his father had taken from Ahab's father Omri in return for Ahab's mercy in sparing Ben Hadad's life (see 1 Kgs 20. 33-34):

And there remained three years without war between Aram and between Israel. And it was in the third year that Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went down to the king of Israel. And the king of Israel said to his servants, 'Do you not know that Ramoth Gilead belongs to us and we have done nothing to take it from the king of Aram?' And he said to Jehoshaphat, 'Will you go with me to fight against Ramoth Gilead?' And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, 'As you, as me; as my people, as your people; as my horses, as your horses' (vv. 1-4).

That Ahab waited three years for Ben Hadad to fulfil his promise suggests his forbearance and expectation in waiting. That Ahab asks for assistance from Jehoshaphat suggests, perhaps, Israel's relative weakness in mounting an effective attack on its own. In response to Ahab's request 'Will you go with me to fight against Ramoth Gilead?' (4a), Jehoshaphat unhesitatingly allies himself and his resources to Ahab (4b) in almost cryptic language. His reply to Ahab is expressed in three nominal clauses: 'As you, as me; as my people, as your people; as my horses, as your horses' (כמוני כמוך כעמי כעמך כסוסי כסוסיד). Significantly, Ahab's and Jehoshaphat's military alliance reunites Israel for the first time since its division.

⁵⁶ Berlin notes that this may be a literary device that indicates an author's negative point of view. She says, 'Most characters have proper names, but it is possible to refer to character by some other locution besides, or in addition to, his name' (Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Bible and Literature Series; Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983; p. 59).

⁵⁷ Rice, p. 183.

⁵⁸ Auld's statement was made in a seminar attended by the author in the Department of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield.

Following Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab, Jehoshaphat suggests that they first call for an oracle from Yahweh to find out if the plan has his approval (v. 5). Ahab responds by gathering 'the prophets, about 400 men', and asks them, 'Shall I go up to fight against Ramoth Gilead or shall I desist?' (v. 6a). The prophets immediately reply: 'Go up!, for [the] Lord (אֱלֹהֵי) shall give it into the hand of the king' (v. 6b). Jehoshaphat, however, is not convinced by the unanimous reply and asks if there might still be a 'prophet of Yahweh (נְבִיא לַיהוָה), that we may inquire of him?' (v. 7).⁵⁹ Ahab replies, 'There is still one man to seek Yahweh, but I hate him because he never prophesies good concerning me but only evil, Micaiah son of Yimlah' (v. 8a). Jehoshaphat mildly rebukes the king for such an untoward remark about a prophet of Yahweh, saying, 'Let not the king say so' (v. 8b).

If we again compare Ahab's actions with his assigned evil appellation, Jehoshaphat's role in the story represents a significant aspect. His search for an oracle functions chiefly as a foil serving to highlight or contrast Ahab's actions. Jehoshaphat's call for an oracle contrasts with Ahab's neglect to call for one. In this way, the narrator foreshadows a negative element in Ahab's character that becomes more apparent as the story progresses, that is, that Ahab does not want to know what Yahweh has to say. His expressed hatred of Micaiah, because 'he never prophesies good of me', emphasises this point. Also, the fact that Jehoshaphat asks if there is still a 'prophet of Yahweh' gives the impression that Ahab's prophets are not necessarily *Yahweh's* prophets (the prophets are differentiated later in v. 22 as '*his* [Ahab's] prophets' and in v. 24 as '*your* [Ahab's] prophets'), but only echo Ahab's wishes. Jehoshaphat's challenge to the oracle's authenticity also injects suspense into the narrative in the form of a conflict between competing prophets. This issue

⁵⁹ Gray notes two representations in Israel and Judah of attitudes toward prophets and prophecy in Ahab's call for an oracle and in Jehoshaphat's call for a validating oracle from a 'prophet of Yahweh'. He says that Ahab 'employed prophets as agents of imitative magic in word and, in the case of Zedekiah, in symbolic action. . . . Jehoshaphat, at least by implication, regarded the prophet not as an agent of the community in its efforts to influence God by autosuggestion, but as the instrument of the revelation of the will of God to the community' (p. 399). This distinction becomes important later in the narrative when the 400 prophets are called 'his prophets' (by 'the spirit') and 'your prophets' (by Micaiah) as opposed to Micaiah, 'a prophet of Yahweh'. DeVries calls the two kinds of prophets 'well-sayers' and 'doom-sayers' (p. 272).

then carries the reader into the next scene which begins with Ahab ordering one of his officers to fetch Micaiah (v. 9).

In this next portion of the story (vv. 9-14), the narrator introduces the central antagonist, Micaiah. The action in the story slows considerably drawing the focus onto Micaiah and Ahab⁶⁰ and on an oracle from Yahweh. While we wait for Micaiah to be brought to the king, the narrator informs us what Ahab, Jehoshaphat and the prophets are doing in the meantime. It is a 'meanwhile' scene⁶¹ in which we are introduced to the physical surroundings which have remained obscure. The setting is a court ceremony with 'the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah sitting upon their thrones dressed in their robes at the opening of the gate of Samaria' (v. 10). The setting orients us to the official nature of the event and the context in which the kings and prophets are involved. While the kings sit on their thrones, the prophets engage in symbolic and verbal reinforcement of their prophecy (v. 6). Zedekiah ben Chenaanah, apparently the chief of Ahab's prophets, 'had made horns of iron' and declares, 'Thus says Yahweh, "With these you shall gore the Arameans until they are destroyed"' (v. 11). In response to Zedekiah's prediction, the rest of the prophets in unison repeat the previous refrain (v. 6), 'Go up to Ramoth Gilead and succeed, for Yahweh has given into the hand of the king!' (v.12).

The elaborate setting of the official proceedings at the gate of Samaria, the symbolic act by Zedekiah with the horns, and the repetition of the prophecy by four hundred unified voices in favour of Ahab all provide a backdrop for Micaiah's entry into the scene. When the messenger finds the prophet, rather than order Micaiah to present himself to the king, the messenger informs him about the unanimity of the prophets' oracle in favour of Ahab, 'Behold, the words of the prophets are uniformly favourable toward the king, let your word be as the word of one of them and speak favourably' (v. 13). Walsh notes that the messenger's urging for unanimity reflects badly on Ahab in that Micaiah is urged to harmonise his message to the royal will.

He writes:

⁶⁰Nelson, p. 147.

⁶¹Long, pp. 234-35; cf. Walsh, p. 348.

Yet the very fact that a royal messenger assumes that prophets tailor their message to the king's desires speaks volumes about the sort of prophets and prophecy Ahab's court was accustomed to.⁶²

The report serves to pressure Micaiah into aligning his message with that of his peers, but Micaiah will not be persuaded. Like a true prophet (and repeating the words of Balaam [Num 24.13]; cf. Num 22.38; 23.26), he will declare only what Yahweh tells him: 'As Yahweh lives, that which Yahweh speaks to me, that I will speak' (v. 14).

When Micaiah is brought before Ahab, Ahab repeats his request for guidance about fighting against the Arameans, but this time he changes the request from, 'Shall *I* go up' (v. 6), to 'Shall *we* go up to Ramoth Gilead to battle or shall we refrain?' (v. 15a; emphasis added).⁶³ In response, Micaiah mockingly repeats the prophets' oracle of success, 'Go up and succeed, for Yahweh will give it into the hand of the king' (v. 15b). Ahab sees through his mimicry, however, and rebukes him: 'How many times must I make you swear to me to speak to me nothing except the truth in the name of Yahweh?' (v. 16).⁶⁴ His ability to differentiate between Micaiah's obvious tongue-in-cheek reply with true prophecy indicates that Ahab can discern Yahweh's will on his own,⁶⁵ however, while Ahab's response may suggest that he might be willing to listen to Yahweh, Walsh suggests he may also just be wanting 'to prove his claim to Jehoshaphat that Micaiah always prophesies

⁶² Walsh, p. 348.

⁶³ Walsh suggests that Ahab changes his request to 'shall *we* go up' in order to obtain a more favourable oracle from Micaiah (p. 348).

⁶⁴ Long says, 'Micaiah's first word, then, is some sort of ironic transition. We expect truth ("What the Lord says to me, that I will speak," v.14) and something unflattering to the king ("he never prophesies good concerning me. . .," v.8). What we get is a word of encouragement – a lie, and Ahab knows it, to his credit' (p. 235). So also Walsh, who points out that some of the confusion surrounding true and false prophecy in the story is exacerbated by Micaiah's positive response to Ahab's first query: 'Or should we read between the lines to hear sarcastic intonations in Micaiah's words? The narrator does not tell us but leaves us with the paradoxical, almost titillating picture of a prophet who has just declared his absolute fidelity to Yahweh's words apparently prophesying falsely, and a king who has shown himself more interested in approval than in truth demanding truth instead of endorsement' (p. 349).

⁶⁵ Gray notes, 'It is to the credit of Ahab. . . that he did not remain satisfied with this response, but looked for something deeper in the name [i.e. with the authority] of Yahweh' (p. 401).

disaster!’⁶⁶ Micaiah then accommodates Ahab—who has accurately discerned that he has not heard the ‘whole truth’—with a vision announced in verse:

I saw all Israel
Scattered upon the mountains,
Like sheep which have no shepherd,
And Yahweh said, ‘These have no lords;
Let each man return to his house in peace’ (v. 17).

Upon hearing the report of the vision, Ahab, who is apparently piqued, repeats to Jehoshaphat an I-told-you-so⁶⁷ about Micaiah’s prophecies: ‘Did I not tell you that he never prophesies good concerning me but only evil?’ (v.18). Micaiah, picking up on Ahab’s lament to Jehoshaphat, affirms his lament by continuing to prophesy according to Ahab’s wishes, that he speak only truth from Yahweh: ‘Therefore,⁶⁸ hear the word of Yahweh . . .’ (19a). Micaiah then gives him another vision recounting the circumstances that brought about the conflicting prophecies:

I saw Yahweh sitting upon his throne and all the host of heaven standing upon his right and his left (19b). And Yahweh said, ‘Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth Gilead?’ And one said this and another said that (20). Then the spirit came out and stood before Yahweh and said, ‘I will entice him’. And Yahweh said to him, ‘How?’ (21). And he said, ‘I will go out and I will become a spirit of deception in the mouth of all his prophets’. And he [Yahweh] said, ‘You will entice and also succeed; Go, and do thus!’ (22). And now, behold, Yahweh has put a spirit of deception in the mouth of all these your prophets, and Yahweh has spoken against you evil (23).

Surprisingly, the first reaction to Micaiah’s visions does not come from Ahab but from Zedekiah, who ‘came up and struck Micaiah’ in the face and asked him ‘How did the Spirit of Yahweh pass from me to speak to you?’ (v. 24). Zedekiah’s reappearance in the story reorients us to the intense conflict between the two prophets that may not have been apparent before. Zedekiah’s physical abuse of

⁶⁶ Walsh, p. 350.

⁶⁷ Auld, *I & II Kings*, p. 144.

⁶⁸ DeVries questions the textual integrity of the passage by suggesting that the awkwardness of the adverb *therefore* (לכן) lends difficulty to the sense of the context in that it has no antecedent (*I Kings*, p. 265). However, *therefore* need not be inconclusive; as an adverb it may be used emphatically, connecting what follows with the previous clause. Ahab’s last word in v.18, ‘he never prophesies good concerning me but only *evil*’, is repeated as the last word in Micaiah’s second vision, ‘Yahweh has spoken against you *evil*’ (v.23). Waltke and O’Connor state that the emphatic adverb לכן bears the equivalent of the sense, ‘The foregoing being the case, [therefore]. . .’ (Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990], p. 666). Thus the sense behind *therefore* may be that Micaiah says, ‘[Since it is true that I only speak evil concerning you], therefore, hear the word of Yahweh’; or, ‘As you have said it, therefore you shall hear it’. Cf. the sense given to לכן by BDB: [*therefore*] in conversation, in reply to an objection, [is used] to state the ground upon which the answer is made. . .’ (p. 487).

Micaiah is the first reaction to the oracle because he felt the most sting from it. The vision makes him a liar. Micaiah, in response to Zedekiah's question, tells him that he will discover that Micaiah speaks truth when it is too late, 'when [coweringly] you enter an inner chamber to hide yourself' (v. 25). Ahab's response to the visions is even more severe than Zedekiah's. Ahab has Micaiah returned to Amon the governor to be put in prison and orders that he be given the minimum provisions, 'bread of affliction and water of affliction until I return in peace' (v. 26-27). As with Zedekiah, Micaiah gets in the last word on the matter, both to Ahab and to everyone in the audience, 'If you surely return in peace, Yahweh has not spoken by me. . . Hear all you people!' (v. 28).

The relationship between Ahab and Yahweh's prophet Micaiah shows a side of Ahab that has not been seen before. Although he referred to Elijah as the 'troubler of Israel' (1 Kgs 18.17) and as 'my enemy' (1 Kgs 21.20), Ahab has not been shown being openly hostile towards Yahweh's prophets, and in most cases, he has been just the opposite. Here, however, he clearly demonstrates that he no longer accepts Yahweh's guidance (even though he appears to recognise Yahweh's truth when he hears it [v.16] but then ignores it)⁶⁹ as he did against the Arameans at Samaria and Aphek. In ordering Micaiah to be 'returned' (השיבהו) to the governor Amon and to prison to be fed minimum provisions, the text gives the impression that Micaiah had been in prison when he was sent for.

The scene of the divine council bears a strong relationship to the immediate scene at the gate of Samaria, suggesting that there is a simultaneous activity—of monitoring events on earth—by the forces of heaven which mirror Ahab's activities on earth. As Walsh says:

The parallelism of the scenes reminds the reader that the monarchs of both Israel and Judah hold their thrones under the higher court of Yahweh and subject to God's will. Just as it evokes the subordination of Ahab and Jehoshaphat to Yahweh, so it also points up the inferiority of the human monarchs' advisers, four hundred raving prophets, to the heavenly ones.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Nelson says of Ahab's contradictory behaviour, '[he] wants to hear the lie, [but] still demands the truth. . . . Both lie and truth drive Ahab into battle. . .' (pp. 146-47).

⁷⁰ Walsh, p. 351.

Yahweh is seen sitting on his throne and attended by all the (military?) hosts of heaven, while Ahab and Jehoshaphat each sit on their thrones attended by their prophets (the event is similar to other council scenes in the Bible; cf. Isa 6; 40. 1-11; Job 1. 6-12; 2. 1-7; Zech 1. 8-13,17; 3. 1-7; 6. 1-8).

In this scene, however, Yahweh is not plotting how he can demonstrate his power on behalf of Ahab. Ahab is no longer a recipient of Yahweh's favour but his judgement, and, like Saul, he has become Yahweh's victim. Like the persecution of Saul through an evil spirit sent by Yahweh (1 Sam 16.14), Yahweh sends a lie to Ahab through 'the spirit' (1 Kgs 22.21), who gives Ahab's prophets the deceiving oracle. Yahweh's behaviour in the courtroom, of agreeing to put 'a spirit of deception in the mouth' of Ahab's prophets, ties in with the action in the courtroom of Jezreel in 1 Kings 21. In the courtroom in Jezreel, Jezebel's plot to obtain Naboth's vineyard by hiring two liars (1 Kgs 21.10, 13) to deceive the court is carried out. The lies tie the two courtroom scenes together: Naboth is killed because of a lie, and now Ahab will be killed because of one. Thus while the heavenly court partly mimics the formal action at the gate of Samaria, it also replays the action of the court in Jezreel, thus exacting punishment identical to the offence.

Ahab's statement in v. 27, ordering Micaiah to prison 'until I return in peace', reveals his intention to disregard Micaiah's prophecy and to heed Zedekiah's. In doing so he begins fulfilling the intentions of the divine council. But his actions in the following section (vv. 29-36) also reveal his hesitation to dismiss Micaiah's prophecy altogether. Gray says, 'However the king might ignore the oracle of Micaiah, he could not treat him with indifference'.⁷¹ He and Jehoshaphat both go to Ramoth Gilead, but Ahab disguises himself before going into battle, and he convinces Jehoshaphat to dress in his royal robes as a ploy to confuse the Arameans (vv. 29-30). The narrator then takes the reader into the camp of the Arameans where the Aramean king instructs his chariot commanders to focus their attention on getting Ahab. He says, 'Do not fight with small or with great but with the king of Israel

⁷¹ Gray, p. 404; cf. Nelson, p. 146-47.

only' (v. 31). His instructions are made more difficult by Ahab's plan to disguise himself, which in turn makes it hard on the reader to follow Ahab. The scene then shifts to the battlefield following the chariot commanders who spot Jehoshaphat saying, 'Surely it is the king of Israel!' (v. 32). However, they turn back when they find out it is not Ahab (v. 33). Ahab has apparently escaped.

The inclusion of this deception in the story reinforces the effectiveness of Ahab's plan to avoid recognition by Aram's chariot commanders and also to avoid his fate. At that moment, however, 'A certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the appendage (of the breastplate [?]) and between the body armour. . .' (v. 34). Ahab, realising his wound, instructs his chariot driver to take him out of the 'camp', when he is actually in battle. The Hebrew words for 'battle' (מִלְחָמָה) and 'camp' (מַחֲנֶה) are similar, and critics draw attention to the masoretic editor's note to compare 'camp' with the LXX 'battle'. However, the retention of the word 'camp' in Ahab's command to his chariot driver, 'Take me out of the camp!, for I am wounded', lends force, and reality, to the traumatic emotional impact that the arrow's strike had on Ahab. By using the word 'camp' when he is actually in battle, the editor transmits the effect that the arrow's strike had on Ahab. When he realised he was mortally wounded, he unintentionally erred in using 'camp' for 'battle'.⁷² However, once he regains his composure, he has himself 'propped up in the chariot in front of Aram' during the battle (v. 35a). Nevertheless, he dies in the evening, his blood having flowed 'into the bottom of the chariot' (v. 35). After he died, 'a cry passed through the camp about sundown, "Each man to his city and each man to his land!"' (v. 36), echoing Micaiah's first vision (v. 17), thus, substantiating Micaiah's status as a true prophet.

The epilogue (vv. 37-40) provides the closing statement about the circumstances attending Ahab's death, its relationship to Yahweh's declaration of doom on Ahab following Naboth's murder (vv. 37-38), and the closing summary of his kingship (vv. 39-40). Following his death, Ahab was brought to Samaria and

⁷² Walsh says, 'If we wish to make sense of the Hebrew text, perhaps we must think of Ahab as disoriented by the shock of his wound' (p. 356).

buried there (v. 37). His chariot was taken out and washed 'at the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked the blood. Now the harlots washed [there] according to the word of Yahweh which he spoke' (v. 38). The notice of the dogs licking the blood washed from Ahab's chariot relates the entire episode of Ahab's death to the incident of Naboth's death. Yahweh had told Elijah to declare to Ahab that his blood would be consumed by dogs 'in the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth . . .' (1 Kgs 21.19). There are some significant differences in the report, however. Naboth died in Jezreel, whereas Ahab's blood was consumed by the dogs in Samaria.

Also, harlots washed there, which was not a part of Yahweh's judgement. Nelson suggests that the notice about the harlots further denigrates Ahab: 'In any case, it is intended by the narrator as an insult to Ahab's dignity'.⁷³ Margalith offers a provocative study on the conjunction of the words *kelabim* and *zonot*, 'dogs' and 'harlots'. He notes that the only other place in the Hebrew Bible where the two words are used together is Deuteronomy 23.18-19, where the term *kelabim* refers to male hierodules. He writes, 'It must be asked whether the *kelabim* who licked the king's blood were dogs, or "temple-servants" who practised self-mutilation and mutilation of others culminating in the eating of raw flesh and the drinking of blood'.⁷⁴ Margalith refers to the spread of the Cybele-Dionysus cult in the period of Elijah and Ahab which Jezebel had attempted to introduce in Israel. Some of the practices of the cult are demonstrated on Mt. Carmel where the clergy is caught up in ecstatic dancing and self-mutilation. Thus in relation to the scene at the pool of Samaria, Margalith suggests, 'If we accept the view that the *kelabim* and the *zonot* were temple-servants, the hierodules licked the victim's blood and washed in it'.⁷⁵

The final summary of Ahab's record as king (vv. 39-40) appears to steer the reader away from his sins, directing us to a focus on his accomplishments and toward his apparent integrity in relation to his ancestors. The final notice that 'Ahab slept with his fathers' (v. 40) provides a literary burial of respect. DeVries, who uses the

⁷³ Nelson, p. 150.

⁷⁴ Othniel Margalith, 'The *Kelabim* of Ahab', *VT* 34 (1984), p. 230.

⁷⁵ Margalith, p. 231.

discordance between a 'mocking' reference to the harlots washing in Ahab's blood in v. 38 and the notice of Ahab's sleeping in peace in vv. 39-40 as reinforcing his argument for a composite historical two-source story (one of which has nothing to do with Ahab), says:

The important thing in this summary is the statement that 'Ahab slept with his fathers,' which has to mean that he died in peace and honor, and therefore cannot apply to the king of v 37. . . . The real Ahab died peacefully in Samaria, probably in ripe old age.⁷⁶

His summary is similar to several of the closing summaries of previous kings (cf. 1 Kgs 14.19-20 [the summary of Jeroboam] and 14.29-31 [the summary of Rehoboam]) which apparently overlook the weight of their sins:

Now the rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? And Ahab slept with his fathers, and Ahaziah, his son, ruled after him (vv. 39-40).

Like the foregoing chapters of the story of Ahab, this ending to Ahab's life in 1 Kings 22 leaves a continuing ambiguity about where Ahab stands with Yahweh. Walsh notes that the final notice on Ahab in vv. 39-40 suggests a 'balance' between a positive and negative depiction of the king:

In this way the narrator suggest two things: first, that Ahab's greater reputation is for his building projects; second, that the stories of Ahab's reign that the narrator has told are intended to balance that fame with an equally important, if less complimentary, picture.⁷⁷

This 'balance' is also reinforced, for example, in the scene of the divine council deliberating his fate. Yahweh as judge seeks the help of his attendants to bring Ahab to his grave. However, the scene of the divine council suggests that the council may have helped Ahab at Samaria and Aphek. This impression emerges from the close correlation of activities in heaven with those on earth. The council determined the fate of an individual and thus the outcome of battle. If it could determine Ahab's fate, it could surely determine Ben Hadad's fate (at least his capture) at Samaria and

⁷⁶DeVries, p. 269. Long also notes that Ahab is not portrayed as an unredeemable figure except that he did 'evil in the sight of Yahweh': 'Ahab, who after all is not treated as such a heinous figure in this story, is cast as a misguided opponent of Yahweh and therefore cannot but fail – even if it looks like fate or accident' (p. 239).

⁷⁷Walsh, p. 359.

Aphek. Its activity on behalf of Ahab in his death meant that the king had crossed the moral point of no return by his involvement in the murder of Naboth. It also suggests, however, that he had not yet reached or crossed that barrier before his battles at Samaria and Aphek when Yahweh's prophets announced that the defeat of the Arameans would demonstrate to the king Yahweh's power and that he 'would know that I am Yahweh' (1 Kgs 20.13). Thus in the end, Ahab had gone beyond the boundaries of moral acceptability, but he had not yet done so when the narrative began, when it made us think that we were about to read the story of the worst man that ever lived. The end result is the impression that, although he committed crimes, Ahab was not bad enough for God not to want to work on his behalf. The text has led us in an unexpected direction, encouraging us to rethink or to reread the story.

Conclusion

If we go back and reread the entire story of Ahab, looking for instances where the text appears to mislead us about Ahab's evil characterisation, we find almost immediately that in the beginning we are led to believe that the story of Ahab will concern his idolatry. For example, the regnal summary that introduces the story of Ahab informs us,

And he (Ahab) went and served Baal and bowed down (worshipped) to him. And he built an altar to Baal in the temple of Baal which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made the Asherah . . . (1 Kgs 16.31b-33a).

As I have stated above, this is the extent of the description of Ahab's idolatrous activity. The narrative that immediately follows does not present more information highlighting the king's evil idolatrous ways, but it recounts God's response to them in sending Elijah to correct the ways of both the king and Israel. The following three chapters (1 Kgs 17-19) then focuses on the activities of the prophet, and not specifically on the activities of Ahab.

The only other statement about Ahab and his idolatry besides 1 Kgs 16.31-33 comes following Elijah's curse on Ahab's house in the aftermath of Naboth's murder:

Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of Yahweh whom Jezebel his wife incited. And he did exceedingly abominably going after the Baals, according to all that the Amorites did whom Yahweh dispossessed from before the sons of Israel (1 Kgs 21.25-26).

This second reference to Ahab's idolatry appears almost to serve as a closing bracket to the evaluation of Ahab which introduced the narrative. But in between the two references there is nothing concerning Ahab's idolatry save, perhaps, for the effects of it as brought in the drought.

However, the story of Naboth's vineyard may be related to idolatry metaphorically. Except for a brief suggestion by Walsh that the story of Naboth's 'vineyard' may be symbolic of 'Israel' and that Ahab's idolatry 'is metaphorically an expropriation of Yahweh's vineyard [Israel]',⁷⁸ Poulssen is perhaps the only critic who explicitly ties the story of Naboth's Vineyard to the context of idolatry seen in the duel between Yahweh and Baal that took place in 1 Kings 17-19.⁷⁹ Based on a semantic 'colour spectrum', Poulssen establishes two worlds symbolised in the terms 'vineyard' and 'garden' used in 1 Kings 21.2.⁸⁰ The vineyard represents Yahwism, while the garden represents Baalism. Naboth's unwillingness to barter with Ahab for the vineyard is based in the orthodoxy of Yahwism, emphasised in his oath of refusal, 'Far be it from me by Yahweh, that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers!', and in the ancient symbolism that ties the vineyard to Yahweh's grace.⁸¹ Baalism is expressed in the expansionist plan of Ahab and Jezebel to turn the vineyard into a garden, which Poulssen ties to ancient symbolism that references humankind's entrepreneurial schemes independently of God.⁸² As such, the 'vineyard and the garden . . . is an allegory . . . a mirroring of the duel on Mt.

⁷⁸ Walsh, p. 365.

⁷⁹ Nick Poulssen, 'Wijngaard en Tuin: Twee Sporen in 1 Kon. 21,1-29', Corrie Young, trans., *Bijdragen, tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie* 52 (1991), pp. 405-27.

⁸⁰ Poulssen, p. 406.

⁸¹ Poulssen, p. 409.

⁸² Poulssen, p. 409.

Carmel'.⁸³ Poulssen's study offers a creative answer to the question of the relationship of the story of Naboth's vineyard to Ahab's idolatry, and coveting and murder bear a distant relationship to idolatry in that the desire for Yahweh has been replaced by a desire for personal advantage and pleasure. However, in light of the lack of specific representations of explicit idolatry (e.g., building a temple and an altar to Baal, worshipping Baal, and building an Asherah pole [1 Kgs 16.31-33]), it is difficult to accept his conclusions without any explicit indication that the story is a representation of idolatry.

The closing account of Ahab's death in 1 Kings 22 also does not provide any explicit clues about Ahab's idolatry, unless we can identify Ahab's 400 attending prophets as anything other than Yahwistic. But even this is difficult to do because the prophets attending Ahab are those who seek Yahweh's guidance. Thus, if from the beginning announcement in the story of Ahab we assume that the narrative will be about Ahab's idolatry, or, if looking back from the reference following Naboth's death (1 Kgs 21.25), we search for the substance of the narrator's superlative announcement that Ahab's idolatry surpasses even the Amorites, we will be disappointed. The story of Ahab is not explicitly about his idolatry.

I disagree with Walsh's assessment of the entire story of the reign of Ahab (1 Kgs 16.29-22.40) as being singularly unified as a theme of 'the struggle between Yahweh and Baal for the loyalties of Israel and its royal house'.⁸⁴ While Walsh is able to support his view with chapters 17-19, the remainder of the narrative, which he labels the 'Ahab story', is not so easily absorbed into his thesis. Ahab appears as an adherent of Yahwism in 1 Kings 20 rather than an apostate, as Yahweh declares twice (vv. 13, 28) that he intends to prove his identity to Ahab and Israel by further demonstrations of his power. In the story of Naboth, Walsh draws upon what he calls a 'deeper dimension', a symbolism of the vineyard as Israel, in order to maintain his theme of a competition between Yahweh and Baal for cultic

⁸³ Poulssen, pp. 420-21.

⁸⁴ Walsh, p. 364.

allegiance.⁸⁵ But on the surface, like the story of David's murder of Uriah and theft of his property (Bathsheba), the story of Naboth is a story of a social crime in which the king steals a man's property by device. David's crime is never considered as a story about a lapse into idolatry, and, while it is possible, it is difficult to accept Ahab's crime as being a lapse into idolatry.

Additionally, the story of Ahab's death is not a story in which Ahab is offered a choice to choose Yahweh over Baal (according to Walsh's thesis);⁸⁶ it is the story of the exactment of punishment. This is pointed out in the scene of the divine council in which Yahweh seeks a volunteer to 'entice Ahab so that he go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead' (1 Kgs 22.20), meaning that Yahweh's decision to kill Ahab had been made before Ahab had consulted his prophets about retaking Ramoth Gilead. Thus, Walsh's statement, 'Ahab fails to make a decisive choice between Yahweh and other deities [in choosing to ignore Micaiah's prophecy and vision]',⁸⁷ is not contextual. Ahab is not given any choice about avoiding his death.

The understanding that the story of Ahab is not singularly about idolatry leads us in another direction. In rereading the story of Ahab it becomes apparent that it comprises a narrative of offences. Ahab is guilty of the crime of idolatry, but he is also guilty of violating the ban on war spoils and of coveting Naboth's vineyard and killing him in order to take it. Ahab's crime of idolatry is met with a correcting judgement of drought, which is intended to steer the nation and its king back to Yahweh, but his crimes of sparing Ben Hadad and of murdering Naboth are met with announcements of death. If we now reassess the opening negative evaluation of Ahab by assigning it duty as an indicting label on *all* his criminal behaviour clearly outlined in the narrative, and not just his idolatry, then Ahab is the worst person that ever lived because he committed *these specific crimes*. But if this is the case then the text has still not satisfied our expectations of finding in the narrative evidence of the activities of an excessively evil king.

⁸⁵ Walsh, p. 365.

⁸⁶ Walsh, p. 365.

⁸⁷ Walsh, p. 365.

One of the main reasons the text resists the all-encompassing evil appellation given to Ahab is that his crimes have been committed before by his predecessors Solomon, Saul and David. Ahab repeats their sins. They, however, did not receive such an emphatic designation as being evil because of their offences. They did receive notice that what they had done was 'evil in the eyes of Yahweh', but that was as far as it went. Now that Ahab has committed the same crimes as Saul, David and Solomon, we feel less inclined to make his crimes more infamous than theirs. Although their crimes cost them dearly, they do not lead to their being characterised, like Ahab, as arch-evildoers.

If, in fact, the text labels Ahab as the most wicked man there ever was because he committed the same infamous crimes committed by Solomon, Saul and David, then the text invites a rereading of these crimes now re-labelled as the qualifying marks of the most evil person ever. Rereading the accounts of these crimes from an understanding of their allusive presence in the story of Ahab will alter our view of Saul, David and Solomon. I will do this further on in this thesis, but before we view them again in the light of the story of Ahab, in order to warrant such a rereading, I will first demonstrate the close similarities that exist between Ahab and Saul, David and Solomon.

**PARTNERS IN CRIME:
THE STORY OF AHAB IN RELATION TO THE
INFAMOUS CRIMES OF SAUL, DAVID, AND
SOLOMON**

Introduction

In the previous chapter I asked the question, 'How bad is Ahab?' I asked this question in response to the introduction of the story of Ahab (1 Kgs 16.29-34), which labels him as Israel's worst king up to his day (v. 30) and as the king who provoked Yahweh more than any king before him (v. 33). We saw that in the light of what is written about him in the subsequent narrative (1 Kgs 17.1-22.40), Ahab does not live up to his advance billing as Israel's arch evil-doer. The main reason for this is that we have seen his behaviour before. Ahab merely repeats the infamous crimes that Solomon, Saul and David committed before him (the crimes are presented in this order), making his biblical portrait a casting of a king that is a recasting of his three predecessors at their worst.

Building upon the criminal similarities between Ahab, Solomon, Saul and David, that we found in the preceding chapter, in this chapter I will demonstrate more closely the correspondences that exist between these kings. I will also raise the question of the effects of these correspondences on the story of Ahab. In what follows, I will discuss the similarities between Ahab and each of these other kings in the same sequence in which we encounter them in the text of the story of Ahab, beginning with the ties to Solomon.

Ahab and Solomon: Kings and their Queens

A good way of introducing the similarities between Ahab and Solomon is to indicate the prominence of the two kings in the book of 1 Kings. In terms of narrative space, Ahab and Solomon are the featured kings in the book, sharing the majority of the text. According to a word count of the text of the *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, the presentation of Solomon covers 53% of the book if we include chapters 1 and 2 dealing with his father David's final days, Solomon's accession to the throne, and his consolidation of the kingdom. Most of the narrative of Solomon (1 Kgs 1-11) concerns the particularities of the building of the temple, its dedication, and the glories of his wisdom, while 1 Kings 11 deals with his failures, the judgement on him, and the announcement of his death. The narrative space devoted to Ahab (1 Kgs 16.29-22.40) averages out to approximately 27% of the book. Half of the story concerns Elijah's struggles with Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kgs 17-19) and focuses on Elijah. The other half treats two of Ahab's crimes (violation of the ban [1 Kgs 20]; coveting and murder [1 Kgs 21]) and provides an account of his death (1 Kgs 22.1-40). These percentages suggest that the book seeks to showcase the reigns of Solomon and Ahab.¹

¹ This ratio is in keeping with the major focus in 1-2 Kings on the history of the northern kingdom and its emphasis on the house of Omri, which, as noted by Auld (*Kings without Privilege*, p. 154-55), takes up the greatest portion of the two books from 1 Kgs 16.16-2 Kgs 11.21. Long offers a point on the amount of material focused on Ahab as compared with Solomon: 'The exilic author-editor brought together selected traditions having to do with the reign of Ahab and placed them at an appropriate point. The Ahab material is extensive, second only to Solomon' (p. 172). Walsh notes the showcasing effect on Ahab by the quick succession of the reigns of the kings beyond Jeroboam and its abrupt halt at Ahab: 'When the rapid recital of reigns suddenly stops and we spend the next six chapters on events of Ahab's reign, those stories too become supercharged with significance' (p. 220).

Similarities in the Summary Accounts of the Reigns of Ahab and Solomon

In the middle of Ahab's regnal summary (1 Kings 16.29-34), Ahab is said to have outdone Jeroboam in doing evil by marrying Jezebel, serving and worshipping Baal, building an altar to Baal, and making an Asherah. Ahab's activity links him to Solomon, who also married (a) foreign princess(es), venerated their gods and built worship sites for their gods (1 Kgs 11.1-8). The following charts of the regnal summaries of Ahab and Solomon demonstrates these similarities. I have included the Hebrew of the links in the first chart, highlighting the terms that provide some of the closer ties between the two summaries, and I have translated the entire summaries in the second chart on the following page.

Solomon (1 Kgs 11.1, 5, 7)	Ahab (1 Kgs 16.29-33)
11.1 והמלך שלמה אהב נשיכם נכריות רבות את בת פרעה מואביות עבניות אדמית צדנית התיית	16.31a ויהי הנקל לכתו בהטאות ירבעם בן נבט ויקח אשה את איזבל בת אחבעל מלך צידנים
5_וילך שלמה אחרי עשתרת אלהי צדנים ואחרי גלכם שקן עמנים	31b_וילך ויעבד את הבעל וישתחו לו
7 אז יבנה שלמה במה לכמוש שקן מואב בהר אשר על פני ירושלים ולמלך שקן בני עמון	32 ויקם מזבח לבעל בית הבעל אשר בנה בשמרון 33a ויעש אהאב את האשרה

Solomon (1 Kgs 11.1-10)	Ahab (1 Kgs 16.29-33)
	<p>16.29 Now Ahab son of Omri became king over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of Asa, king of Judah. And Ahab son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years.</p> <p>16.30 And Ahab did evil in the eyes of Yahweh more than all who were before him</p>
<p>11.1 Now Solomon the king loved many foreign women (along) with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite,</p> <p>11.2 from the nations which Yahweh said to the sons of Israel, 'You shall not go into them and they shall not go into you lest they turn your heart after their gods; unto these Solomon clung in love.</p> <p>11.3 And he had 700 princess wives and 300 concubines; and his wives turned his heart.</p>	<p>16.31a And it happened--was it a small thing, his walking in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat? -- that he took for a wife, Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians. . .</p>
<p>11.4 And it happened when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not completely with Yahweh his God as the heart of his father David</p>	
<p>11.5 And Solomon went after Ashtoreth god of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites</p>	<p>16.31b and he went, and he served Baal, and he worshipped him</p>
<p>11.6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of Yahweh and was not fully after Yahweh as David his father</p>	<p>(16.30 And Ahab did evil in the sight of Yahweh more than all who were before him)</p>
<p>11.7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the detestable idol of Moab, on the face of Jerusalem, and to Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon</p>	<p>16.32 And he erected an altar to Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria</p> <p>16.33a And Ahab made an Asherah. . .</p>
<p>11.8 Thus he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods</p>	
<p>11.9 And Yahweh was angered with Solomon because his heart turned from Yahweh the God of Israel, the one who appeared to him twice</p>	<p>16.33b And Ahab did more to provoke Yahweh the God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him</p>
<p>11.10 and commanded him concerning this matter to not go (walk) after other gods; but he did not keep the commandment of Yahweh</p>	

The similar activities of Ahab and Solomon given in the two summaries above link the two kings together. The summaries are alike in itemising a list of criminal actions by Solomon and Ahab that proceed in an identical sequence: of marriage to a foreign princess or foreign princesses,² followed by adoration of their gods, followed by the erection of worship sites for those gods. Also, both kings are said to have done 'evil in the sight of Yahweh'.³

In addition to these links, Ahab and Solomon are linked narratively by means of regnal resumes followed by narratives of judgement (Solomon is confronted by Yahweh and Ahab is confronted by Elijah) which are related to several types of prophetic discourse (see below). In noting the similarities of genre I am not arguing for an authorial link to the two passages. I am instead drawing them out because of the effect that they may have on the reader. For example, the summary of Solomon foreshadows the summary of Ahab by the similar content.

In themselves, the summaries shown above have enough similarities in form to include them loosely within the genre identified by Burke Long as *regnal resume*.⁴ The regnal resume appears regularly in the contexts of the accounts of many kings in the books of Kings. Long notes that the two major identifying marks of the genre introducing Israel's kings (as opposed to Judah's kings) include the king's accession date and a theological appraisal of his tenure.⁵ Long identifies Ahab's introductory summary as belonging to this genre. He regards Solomon's resume (as I will designate it) as a kind of summary review (11.1-13) and not formally as a regnal resume even though he says that its 'basic structure has close parallels in portions of the DH regnal resume.'⁶ Solomon's review does not meet the traits characteristic of the formal regnal resume in his opinion, 'because the text develops a theme which is only a *part* of the typical resume. We have here basically a text which reviews, states

² David married the foreign princess Maacah, daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur, but he is not cited as having violated the Deuteronomic code (2 Sam 3.3).

³ 1 Kings 11.6 and 1 Kings 16.30 both match but are not in the same sequence.

⁴ See Long, p. 160-61.

⁵ Long, p. 160-61.

⁶ Long, p. 123.

offences, and evaluates – even announces punishment’ (his emphasis).⁷ Long considers Solomon’s summary a ‘theological review’, which comprises a ‘summary of offences against Yahweh heavily laced with evaluative statements which measure the king according to his religious orthodoxy’.⁸ While Long may be correct in identifying ingredients that form a conventional category of genre, his strict labelling and criteria would not necessarily limit the effect of the similarities between these two summaries on a reader. For the reader, regardless of the rough fit of Solomon’s summary into the formal category of *regnal resume*, the parallelism between the summary of his regnal activity and the introduction to the story of Ahab make them appear alike in substance and suggest a close connection between the kings. Auld notes this effect in a footnote about the ‘skilfully crafted’ summary that introduces the story of Ahab and its relationship to the summary of Solomon’s reign: ‘One wonders how these notes relate to the hostile portrait of Solomon in 1 Kgs 11:1-8’.⁹

These summaries and the judgements that follow them proceed in a cause-effect sequence in which crime is followed by an announcement of judgement. This sequence resembles a formal pattern that scholars have also identified as a distinct genre.¹⁰ Westermann has identified the structure of this genre and labels the announcement of judgement as ‘The Prophetic Judgment-Speech to Individuals’ that follows a reported transgression.¹¹ Patrick and Scult have labelled a similar grouping of such accounts as ‘narratives of offenses’.¹² For Patrick and Scult, these narratives

⁷ Long, p. 124.

⁸ Long, p. 120, 124. Solomon’s actual regnal resume is given in 11.41-43, but it includes no mention of any wrongdoing (Long, p. 130).

⁹ Auld, *Kings without Privilege*, p. 156, n. 1. Cf. Walsh’s observation on 1 Kgs 16.29-34, noting the thematic link of foreign marriage between the two kings: ‘Ahab’s first crime is marriage to the daughter of the king of Sidon. Foreign marriages, as we saw in the Solomon story, are always considered dangerous’ (p. 218). See also Montgomery, who points to 1 Kings 11.1 (the daughter of Pharoah) and 15.13 (Maachah, the mother of Asa) as setting negative ‘precedents for marriage with a foreign princess and the influence exerted by such queens on politics and religion in the ancient world’ (p. 285).

¹⁰ E.g., Long relates Solomon’s regnal review to those reviews incorporating a common additional announcement of judgement: ‘A review will often incorporate oracles from the prophets as messengers of judgment, warning, or salvation’ (pp. 124, 125).

¹¹ Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, Hugh C. White, trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), p. 129-136.

¹² Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*, (JSOTSup 82; Bible and Literature Series 26 [Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990], p. 65).

serve a rhetorical function that seeks to persuade the reader both of the guilt or innocence and of the justification of punishment (if guilty) for certain persons involved in high crimes (normally persons of high rank like David, Saul and Ahab). The signifying marks of this genre identified by Westermann, Patrick and Scult is that the announcement of judgement is always made by a prophet, and, for Patrick and Scult, it is always preceded by a *story* of the crime. The accounts of crime and the subsequent announcements of judgement in stories about Ahab and Solomon, however, diverge slightly from these patterns in two ways: (1) the announcements of judgement against Ahab and Solomon follow a *summarial statement* of their crimes rather than a *narrative account* of the crime, and (2) Solomon's judgement is not announced by a prophet but by Yahweh himself.¹³ The textual pattern displayed by a *summary* followed by an *announcement of judgement* fits better into the more general generic category of 'wrong—wrong punished'. This pattern is offered by Culley in an essay treating punishment stories. Culley says,

The two elements 'wrong' and 'wrong punished' are not separate, independent elements but must be defined in terms of each other. From the point of view of narrative structure, a wrong is identified as a wrong because it is subsequently punished.¹⁴

My purpose in noting the similarities between the regnal summaries and their ties to announcements of judgement following them has been to demonstrate that the stories of Ahab and Solomon share these common elements. While these similarities may not adhere precisely to formal categories of genre, *generally* they do. It is questionable whether slight variations in genre makes any difference for the reader in establishing correlations between the two texts. Generally speaking, Ahab and

¹³ Cf. Nelson, who sees the entirety of 1 Kgs 11 patterned after Westermann's suggested form of prophetic speech but with Yahweh's announcement of judgement taking the place of the prophet's: 'Although the material in this chapter is of varied character and origin, the overwhelming presence of Deuteronomistic condemnation, by the narrator and by God, holds it together in a structure that moves from Solomon's sin through God's anger to prophetic announcement. . . . God addresses Solomon with the equivalent of a prophetic judgment speech' (p. 69-70). Cf. also Long, who notes a looser structure as simply a 'move from offense (vv. 1-8) to punishment (vv. 9-13)' (p. 122).

¹⁴ Robert Culley, 'Punishment Stories in the Legends of the Prophets', in *Orientation by Disorientation*, Richard A. Spencer, ed. (Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series 35 [Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1980], p. 168).

Solomon are linked as kings who ignored the ancient injunction against foreign marriage, became followers of their wives' gods, and suffered harsh consequences.

Similarities in the Sins of Ahab and Solomon

The wrongful acts that Ahab and Solomon have in common as reported in their summaries include, in sequence, marriages to foreign princesses, veneration for their wives' gods and construction of shrines for their wives' gods. I will follow this sequence in the following discussion. Since the story of Solomon precedes the story of Ahab in the book of Kings, and since his story influences the way I read Ahab's story, I will begin with him.

Solomon's Marriages to Foreign Women Are His Primary Failure

The first parallel between Ahab and Solomon shown in the chart above is that they both married foreign princesses. Solomon's offence is given in 1 Kings 11.1-3 and is set in contrast to Yahweh's commandment to not take foreign wives (Deut 7.3-4). The text says he 'loved many foreign women' (v. 1). Solomon's extensive harem of 700 wives shows he gave no thought to this commandment (v. 3). As a result, the outcome of his behaviour is that 'his wives turned his heart' (v. 3), echoing the outcome of the warning of Deuteronomy:

And you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods (Deut 7.3-4).

1 Kings 11.2 also indicates that Solomon's extensive harem is more than just good foreign policy, as some commentators want to suggest. For example, Bronner says, 'Solomon entered into marital alliances with women from other countries . . . Marrying foreign wives was politically expedient but not spiritually.'¹⁵ Bronner leaves the impression that Solomon's 'alliances' were more of a political

¹⁵ Leah Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha*, Pretoria Oriental Series 6 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), p. 8.

convenience than personal attachment. But the text presents a different emphasis. The clause at the end of v. 2 states that ‘Solomon clung’ to his wives ‘in love’:

... בהם דבק שלמה לאהב

Syntactically, the Hebrew emphasises Solomon’s wives as the objects of his clinging by beginning this final clause in the verse with the object בהם (‘unto them’),¹⁶ while the verb דבק (to cling), combined with and governed by the prepositional phrase לאהב (‘in love’), suggests the manner of his clinging¹⁷ as intimate union: ‘unto them Solomon clung in love’.¹⁸ The verb דבק is prominent in similar texts which admonish Israel to make Yahweh the object of its *clinging* (Deut 10.20; 11.22; 13.4; 30.20; Josh 22.5; 23.8; 23.12). Like the outcome that results from ignoring the warning presented in v. 2, Solomon has left off clinging to Yahweh and clings instead to his wives ‘in love’. Solomon’s turning away from Yahweh to his wives is made even more emphatic by an inclusio:¹⁹

Now Solomon *loved* Yahweh (3.3)

ויאהב שלמה את יהוה

Now King Solomon *loved* many foreign women (11.1).

והמלך שלמה אהב נשים נכריות רבות

¹⁶ Strangely, Keil designates the foreign nations as antecedents of the plural pronoun in בהם: ‘In the last clause בהם is used with peculiar emphasis: Solomon clave to these nations, of which God has said such things, i.e. to enter into the relation of love or into the marriage relation, with them’ (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 3 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], p. 169).

¹⁷ Lamedh expressing manner or mode, being equivalent to an adverbial accusative of manner; cf. Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 49.

¹⁸ Patterson and Austel note that Solomon’s clinging to his wives ‘in love’, ‘speaks of strong emotional attachment. . .’ (Richard D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, *1, 2 Kings*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 4 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988], p. 107).

¹⁹ Nelson believes 1 Kgs 3.1-3 provides a foreshadowing of the negative depiction of Solomon’s reign by tying 3.3 together with 11.1: ‘His “love” for Yahweh in 3:3 finds its darker side in 11:1, “Solomon loved many foreign women”’ (p. 34). Walsh contends that 3.1-3 forms a thematic preview which threads its way through the account of Solomon’s entire reign, forecasting the issues of his foreign marriages, his building projects and his idolatry. These themes are then recounted in 11.1-8 (p. 69, 70, 71). Long notes that 3.1-3 offers ‘interpretive parameters for the material to follow’ (p. 62).

Ahab's Marriage to a Foreign Woman Is His Primary Failure

Compared to Solomon's regnal summary, Ahab's summary reveals less in its details about his marriages. We saw in the last chapter that Ahab has other wives (cf. 1 Kgs 20.3, 5, 7), but his regnal summary says nothing about them. Thus we do not know whether his wives (other than Jezebel) were foreign or if they influenced him to adopt foreign religion. What the summary does (and herein lies the similarity to Solomon's summary), however, is emphasise his marriage to Jezebel as the one act that leads to his idolatry. It is this one act that propels him beyond Jeroboam—the Northern Kingdom's reference point for evil—in badness. In what follows I want to show how the summary highlights this act as his chief failure, thus, creating an association of Ahab with Solomon that is stronger than his association with Jeroboam.

Following the statement of the duration of his reign (1 Kgs 16.29), Ahab is labelled as the worst king Israel ever had up to his time: he 'did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh more than all who were before him' (16.30). This indictment is similar to the indictments of the Northern kings who preceded Ahab. The indictment normally continues with a declarative statement of the king's offences in relation to Jeroboam, but in Ahab's summary the pattern is changed, emphasising that Ahab *exceeded* Jeroboam in evil by marrying a foreign princess. A sequential review of these indictments of Israel's kings, beginning with Nadab, Jeroboam's son, and ending with Ahab shows the effect of the break in the normal pattern.

In the regnal summaries of Ahab's predecessors, every king receives an indictment of offence that is always qualified as a Jeroboamic kind of offence, namely, as having 'walked in the way of Jeroboam and in the sins which he caused Israel to sin'. Jeroboam's son Nadab 'did what was evil' and walked in 'the way of his father and in the sins which he caused Israel to sin' (1 Kgs 15.26); his successor Baasha 'did what was evil' and 'walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin which he caused Israel to sin' (1 Kgs 15.34); Baasha's son Elah fell under the curse announced on Baasha's house (1 Kgs 16.2) and was doomed because of the

Jeroboamic sins ‘which they [Baasha and Elah] sinned and which they caused Israel to sin’ (1 Kgs 16.13); Elah’s successor Zimri committed suicide because he did ‘evil’ and walked ‘in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin which he did to cause Israel to sin’ (1Kgs 16.19); and Omri, Zimri’s successor and Ahab’s father, ‘did what was evil’ and ‘walked in all the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat and in his sin which he caused Israel to sin’ (1Kgs 16.25, 26). When we get to Ahab (1 Kgs 16.29-34), this reportorial pattern is broken by the appearance of a rhetorical question in mid-sentence. The question breaks in immediately after the waw consecutive that begins v. 31, interrupting the start of the verbal sequence:

30 ויעש אחאב בן־עמרי הרע בעיני יהוה מכל אשר לפניו
 31 ויהי
 הנקל לכתו בחטאות ירבעם בן־נבט
 ויקח אשה את איזבל בת־אתבעל מלך צידנים
 וילך
 ויעבד את־הבעל
 וישתחו לו

30 And Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh more than all who were before him.

31 And it happened—

was it a small thing, his walking in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat?— that he took for a wife, Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and he served Baal, and he bowed down to him.

With the rhetorical question the narrator stops the verbal sequence to express (as if he is speaking directly to us), his outrage at the extent of Ahab’s wrongdoing.²⁰ This device serves to foreground the fact that Ahab is worse than Jeroboam in one thing: taking the foreign bride Jezebel. Paraphrased, the verse would read something like, ‘And as if it was a small thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, he took Jezebel for his wife! And he went. . .’²¹ Like every northern king before him Ahab walked in Jeroboam’s steps except this one, and it is this offence that leads to his notoriety – of doing evil more than all before him or after him (1 Kgs 16.30; 21.25). Thus, in this

²⁰ As noted by Burney, this narrative device is used only here and in Ezekiel 8.17 (p. 206).

²¹ This paraphrase is modelled after the *RV*, as noted by Burney (p. 206).

one act, Ahab is less identified as an offender in Jeroboam's mould and more as an offender in Solomon's. Ahab's marriage to Jezebel leads to his 'foreign' brand of idolatry, an idolatry unlike Jeroboam's 'domestic' brand ('domestic' in the sense that it was not provoked by foreign wives or foreign gods).²² This distinction, that Ahab follows Solomon's idolatrous pattern, is borne out further in the summaries by the parallel sequence of actions that follow their marriages to foreign princesses: Solomon and Ahab both demonstrate adoration for their wives' gods, and both erect worship sites for those gods.

Solomon Goes after Other Gods

Following his multiple marriages to foreign princesses, Solomon slides into idolatry by abandoning Yahweh for his wives' gods:

When Solomon became old his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not completely with [שֵׁלֶם עִם] Yahweh his God as [was] the heart of David his father. And Solomon went [וַיֵּלֶךְ] after Ashtoreth god of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. And Solomon did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh and did not wholly follow [בְּלֹא אַחֲרָיִ] Yahweh as David his father (1 Kgs 11.4-6).

The warning recalled in 1 Kings 11.2, that marriage to foreigners would lead to idolatry, is realised in Solomon: his wives 'turned his heart' (vv. 3, 4). This leads to the second step in his moral slide: 'and Solomon went after [וַיֵּלֶךְ . . . אַחֲרַי] Ashtoreth . . . and after Milcom'(v. 5).²³ This report of Solomon's defection to idols is further accentuated by being situated between two parallel remarks about David's fidelity to Yahweh, thereby contrasting him with his father. Solomon is unlike his father in two ways: 1) in his affections, 'his heart was not completely [שֵׁלֶם]with Yahweh his God

²² Cf. Nelson's comment on the types of royal apostasy introduced by Solomon as compared with Jeroboam: 'One stream of apostasy was the non-centralized worship of Yahweh at the rural high places of Judah and the shrines of Jeroboam. . . . Chapter 11 introduces a different type of apostasy, the worship of foreign gods' (p. 74). Nelson also notes that Ahab surpassed his immediate predecessors except Solomon: 'Ahab goes further, reflecting Solomon's apostasy by building an altar for Baal for his infidel queen'(p. 101).

²³ Long observes a shift in verb forms from descriptive 'simple perfect verbs' in vv. 1-2 to 'more direct reportorial style' imperfect forms 'to state the results of Solomon's loving' (p. 122).

as the heart of David his father' (v. 4); and 2) in his actions, 'he did not wholly [גלל] follow²⁴ Yahweh as David his father' (v. 6b).

Ahab Goes after Other Gods

Like Solomon, Ahab also goes after foreign gods, although his idolatry is expressed in more descriptive terms: Ahab 'served Baal and worshipped him' (1 Kgs 16.31), whereas Solomon 'went after' Ashtoreth and Milcom. As with Solomon, Ahab's marriage to a foreign woman leads to his action of movement toward idols. His movement towards idols begins with the same verb (הלך) that expressed Solomon's departure: 'And he went' (והלך), followed by two verbs expressing the end result of his going: 'And he served Baal and worshipped him'. With Ahab there is no suggestion that his idolatry occurred because his wife 'turned' his heart towards her god Baal, but the text leaves no doubt of a progression from one to the other, from his union with Jezebel to his union with Baal. I will show below that even though the author says that Solomon's heart was turned when he was old, he also suggests that this was his inclination all along (see the discussion in part 2 of this chapter below).

Solomon Builds Shrines for His Wives' Gods

After Solomon and Ahab adopt their wives' gods for themselves, they both increase their involvement in idolatry by erecting shrines for their wives' gods in important geographical locations of their kingdoms. Solomon, the builder of Yahweh's temple, now builds shrines for his wives' foreign gods on the 'face' of Jerusalem:

Then [אז] Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abominable idol of Moab, on the face [of the mountain east] of Jerusalem, and to Molek the abominable idol of the sons of Ammon. And thus he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods (1 Kgs 11.7-8).

Solomon's continuing slide into idolatry is marked by the adverb 'then' (אז), indicating a logical sequence of the preceding action, of 'going after' idols,

²⁴ A special use of גלל followed by אהר (BDB, p. 570).

suggesting an incremental progression of involvement with foreign gods. Here the MT implicates Solomon for erecting worship sites for the particular foreign gods of his Moabite and Ammonite wives and hints at his own involvement in worship by the repetition of two participles found in 1 Kings 3.3 (מזבח, 'sacrificing'; and מקטיר, 'burning incense'; see below). The gods specifically mentioned, Chemosh and Molek (v. 7), are the gods of the first two nations of the list of the foreign nations from which Solomon took wives: 'Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian (and) Hittite' (v. 1). That he did the same 'for all his wives' (v. 8a) leaves an impression that a full accounting for whom he built shrines is cut short (i.e., listing the names of the gods of his Edomite, Sidonian and Hittite wives).

1 Kings 11.8 also gives the impression that a detailed accounting of Solomon's personal idolatry is cut short. The activity of Solomon's wives at the shrines, 'who burned incense [מקטירות] and sacrificed [מזבחות] to their gods' (v. 8b), repeats Solomon's religious activity early in his kingship when he 'sacrificed [מזבח] and burned incense [מקטיר] on the high places' (v. 3). By employing the same terms for the religious activities of both Solomon and his wives on 'high places' (1 Kgs 11.7; 3.3), the text subtly fuses their activities, leading to questions about Solomon's personal involvement with his wives' idols. Lucian's text of 1 Kings 11.8 is an example of the influential effect of the reduplication of those participles, presenting *Solomon* as the worshipper in v. 8 by replacing the participles of the MT in v. 8 with those of 1 Kings 3.3, stating that '*he* burned incense and *he* sacrificed to their gods' (v. 8). Although I do not advocate emending the MT, I mention this variant reading because it provides an answer to a question the text implicitly raises: to what extent did Solomon actually go in his personal veneration of idols?

Solomon Worships His Wives' Gods

Although the text says that Solomon '*went after Ashtoreth. . . and after Milcom*' (1 Kgs 11.5), and 'then' (אז) that he built shrines to Chemosh and Molek near Jerusalem (v. 7), it does not actually state that he 'worshipped' these gods. Further in 1 Kings

11, however, the MT comes as close as it ever will to declaring that Solomon ‘worshipped’ foreign idols, but here again it tell us indirectly—although forcefully—by means of a parallel situation in 1 Kings 11.31-33. In what follows, I want to show how Yahweh’s judgement announced against Solomon (1 Kgs 11.9-11), coupled with the prophet Ahijah’s similar announcement of judgement against Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11.31-33), implicates Solomon in actually worshipping foreign gods.

And Yahweh was angered with Solomon, that his heart was turned away from Yahweh the God of Israel, the one who had appeared to him twice and commanded him concerning this matter, to not go after other gods; but he did not keep what Yahweh commanded. And Yahweh said to Solomon, ‘Because this has been your mind [יען אשר היה-זאת עמך]²⁵ and you have not kept my covenant or my statutes which I commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant’ (1 Kgs 11.9-11).

Here again the text is vague in providing any *detailed* reasons for God’s judgement of Solomon, choosing the generic phrase ‘to go after other gods’ as the only reason for his punishment. Solomon’s kingdom, like Saul’s, will be torn away from him and given to his ‘servant’ (whom the text later identifies as Jeroboam). Later in the chapter, when the prophet Ahijah conscripts Jeroboam for the throne, he tells Jeroboam essentially the same thing that Yahweh told Solomon in 1 Kings 11.11, that Yahweh will ‘tear’ the kingdom ‘from the hand of Solomon’ and will give the largest part of it to Jeroboam. But in recounting Yahweh’s reasons for giving the kingdom to Jeroboam, the text effectually confuses the grammar of Ahijah’s declaration in order to implicate Solomon in idol worship:

31) And he [Ahijah] said to Jeroboam. . . ‘Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, “Behold I am tearing the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and I will give to you ten tribes; 32) but the one tribe will be for him because of my servant David, and because of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen over all the tribes of Israel; 33) because *they* have forsaken me [עזבוני] and *they* have worshipped [וישתהו] Ashtoreth . . . Chemosh . . . and Milcom . . . and *they* have not walked [הלכו] in my way to do what is right in my eyes or [walked in] my statutes or my judgements as David *his* father”’ [אביו] (1 Kgs 11.31-33).

²⁵ RSV: ‘since this has been your mind’.

The confusing shift in the subjects of the verbs ‘forsaken’ and ‘worshipped’ from the obvious antecedent singular subject ‘Solomon’ to a supposed plural antecedent ‘tribes’ is facilitated by the relative clause that ends v. 32:

32) but one tribe will be for him [Solomon] because [לְמַעַן] of my servant David and because [לְמַעַן] of Jerusalem, the city *which I have chosen over all the tribes of Israel*; 33) because [עַי] they have forsaken me and they have worshipped. . . and they have not walked. . . as David *his father*’ (1 Kgs 11.32-33)

Syntactically, however, the subject of those verbs ought to be Solomon.²⁶

Verse 32 serves as a parenthetical clause that specifies why Jeroboam will not receive all the territory of Israel proper. The causal preposition עַי, ‘because’, then continues the discourse concerning Solomon’s punishment by introducing the reasons for the ‘tearing’ away of the kingdom from Solomon. This preposition עַי is distinct from the two preceding prepositions (לְמַעַן) and does not introduce another reason for withholding one tribe from Jeroboam. Logically speaking, it follows that the kingdom will be torn from Solomon ‘because *he* has forsaken me, and *he* has worshipped. . . , and *he* has not walked. . .’ (v. 33). If the text is read this way then the final prepositional phrase ‘as David *his father*’ (אָבִיו) can only make sense as it is written. The possessive pronoun ‘his’ of ‘his father’ (אָבִיו) cannot refer to the collective ‘tribes’ (even though a collective noun can utilise a singular pronoun referent). Only Jacob can be the father of the tribes, unless David, as king, is figuratively referred to here as a ‘father’ of the ‘tribes’. My suggested altered reading is obviously the most desired reading, and is found in this form in the LXX, the Syriac, the Vulgate, and other modern translations. For, if the MT stands as it is, then Solomon will be removed from the throne because of the idolatry of the ‘tribes of Israel’, or conversely, the tribes will receive a new king because they abandoned Yahweh for idols. Perhaps the author was politically impelled to take ungrammatical liberties in order to obscure Solomon’s participation in the public or private worship of foreign gods, or wished to make his point figuratively. If we read the MT as it

²⁶ Long dismisses the subject-verb disagreement as a problem of ‘internal consistency’: ‘the pronominal suffixes in v. 33 are inconsistently applied’ (p. 128).

stands, the dissonance created by the subject-verb disagreement creates a fusion of both subjects (Solomon and the tribes) with the plural verbs ‘forsaken’, ‘worshipped’, and ‘walked’. As a result, the implication is that Solomon will lose his crown because he has worshipped foreign gods and has led the entire nation to doing the same, since the gods Ashtoreth and Milcom (whom Solomon ‘went after’ [1 Kgs 11.5]) and the god Chemosh (for whom Solomon built a shrine [1 Kgs 11.7]) have become the gods of the ‘tribes of Israel’.²⁷

Ahab Builds Shrines for His Wife’s Gods

Like Solomon’s summary, the report of Ahab’s building activity on behalf of Jezebel’s gods concludes with the report that he also worshipped his wife’s gods:

And he erected an altar to Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria.

And Ahab made an Asherah (1 Kgs 16.32-33a).

Like Solomon, Ahab also built a temple in the most important location in his kingdom, but the report of its construction is secondary to the report that Ahab erected an altar to Baal in Baal’s house (1 Kgs 16.32). The emphasis on Ahab’s construction of this altar over his construction of Baal’s temple suggests, perhaps, Ahab’s intention to initiate religious rites at the shrine.²⁸ The effect of the word order is as if the construction of Baal’s temple is an afterthought. As in Solomon’s summary, the text identifies the geographical location of the altar and the temple.²⁹ The establishment of the shrine in Samaria, Ahab’s capital city (founded by his father Omri; cf. 1 Kgs 16.24, 29), endorses Baal as the kingdom’s patron god. Ahab’s construction of an Asherah then completes the report of his idolatrous building activities. In contrast to Solomon, Ahab’s construction of shrines to foreign deities is

²⁷ Walsh finds a similar literary effect created by means of the verbal shift in number: ‘The NRSV follows the ancient translations in verse 33 and puts the verbs “has forsaken, worshipped, and has not walked” in the singular. In the Hebrew text all are plural, implying that the people have followed Solomon’s lead into idolatry’ (p. 144).

²⁸ I regret that this observation originates from a source which I have misplaced.

²⁹ Gray notes the parallel activities of Ahab and Solomon: ‘In the domain of Samaria Ahab was free to build the temple of Baal for Jezebel, as Solomon provided shrines for his foreign wives in Jerusalem (11.7)’ (pp. 333-34).

not mentioned as work done for his wife's sake, and we also are not told that Baal and Asherah are Jezebel's gods. In this case it is hardly necessary, as Jezebel's relationship to these gods is well known from the subsequent narrative. Moreover, Jezebel's relationship to Baal is implicit in her father's name—Ethbaal, which may mean 'with him is Baal'—or even in her own name (1 Kgs 16.31).³⁰ Her official association, however, is brought to our attention later by Elijah, who, in preparation for the contest on Mt. Carmel, instructs Ahab to gather together 'the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah *who eat at Jezebel's table*' (1 Kgs 18.19; emphasis added).

The Idolatry of Ahab and Solomon Angers God

Yahweh's reaction with anger toward Ahab and Solomon for their marriage-induced idolatry concludes both summaries.

And Yahweh was angered [וַיִּרְאֵהוּ] with Solomon because his heart was turned away from Yahweh the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and commanded him concerning this matter, to not go after other gods; but he did not keep the commandment of Yahweh' (1 Kgs 11.9-10).

Yahweh's reaction to Solomon's idolatry is set against details that Yahweh had appeared to him twice in order to warn him 'to not go after other gods' (1 Kgs 11.10). These two times occur at key points in the story of Solomon; Yahweh appeared to him at the beginning (1 Kgs 3.5-14) and towards the end (1 Kgs 9.2-9) of his reign. The king, however, ignored both warnings (1 Kgs 11.10). When Yahweh makes his first appearance to Solomon at Gibeon, the account of the theophany does not include a specific warning against idolatry even though 1 Kings 11.10 suggests that it took place then. The account of this first meeting only reaffirms Yahweh's

³⁰ Long, p. 173; Montgomery, p. 291. Walsh argues that the text subtly introduces Baal through the names of Ahab's father-in-law and his wife: 'Ethbaal, Ahab's father in law, is named for the Canaanite god Baal. . . . Here, the first time the god's name appears in 1 Kings, it sneaks into the text under cover of Ahab's foreign marriage. Furthermore, Ahab's wife, Jezebel ('yzbl), is also named for Baal. The element zbl means "Prince" and was one of the divine titles of Baal. Both names, therefore, foreshadow the entry of Baal onto the stage of Israel's religious life and the ensuing struggle between Yahweh and Baal for dominance' (pp. 218-19).

covenant to Solomon and his sons, and it does so on the condition that they remain true to his statutes and his commandments (1 Kgs 3.5-14). Yahweh's second appearance to Solomon follows the dedication of the temple and concludes with an ultimatum:

If you or your sons surely turn away from me, and you do not keep my commandments [or] my statutes which I have put before you, and you go and you serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the face of the land which I gave them. . . (1 Kgs 9.6-7a).

The report of Yahweh's appearance to Solomon at Gibeon leaves no doubt that the king's fidelity to Yahweh is questionable from the very beginning of the story. In fact, the text offers two early hints that Solomon lacked total devotion to Yahweh even before the theophany at Gibeon, in the statements, 'Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh' (1 Kgs 3.1), and, 'Solomon loved Yahweh, only he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places' (1 Kgs 3.3). With the knowledge that Solomon had been warned at Gibeon to 'not go after other gods', as recorded in 1 Kings 11.10, we suspect that Solomon began his reign as Ahab did, with an inclination toward idols.³¹

Ahab's idolatry appears to incite Yahweh to anger more than Solomon's does but the text does not include any more information about Yahweh's anger:

And Ahab did more to provoke [לְהַכְעִיִם] Yahweh the God of Israel than all the kings of Israel which were before him (1 Kgs 16.33b).

The term 'provoke' (כָּעַס) used in the announcement is used often in 1 Kings. It is included in most of the statements of final judgement against Ahab's predecessors in association with their idolatry, or in statements of Yahweh's anger against them in their regnal summaries (cf. 1 Kgs 15.30; 16.7, 13, 26). I emphasise the term in order to contrast it with the less caustic notation that Yahweh was 'angry' with Solomon (1 Kgs 11.9), even though Yahweh's 'anger' with Solomon results in far greater punishment in comparison to Ahab, suggesting, again, that the author is constrained from being too harsh with Solomon openly (see below).

³¹ See below; in the next chapter I will approach the story of Solomon with this understanding.

Conclusion

As I noted previously, Solomon's and Ahab's regnal summaries fit loosely within a general form of announcement that begins with a listing of crimes that is followed by a proclamation of judgement. In comparing the judgements pronounced upon both kings, it is worth noting that Yahweh's patience with Solomon reaches its final point with an announcement that the king, like Saul, will have his kingdom 'torn' from him (1 Kgs 11.11), while Yahweh's 'provocation' by Ahab *inaugurates* an effort through Elijah, by means of a drought, to pull the nation out of its idolatry. The effect of this comparison initiated by the similarities in the summaries (of marriage to foreign wives, of building shrines for their gods, and of worshipping those gods) and the differing judgements (one of doom, and one of restoration) leads to several concluding observations. When we consider the coming of Elijah to confront Ahab, we realise that Solomon had been a king left alone. No prophet ever opposed him. His tenure as king is conspicuous (and not just *vis-à-vis* Ahab) as one without human supervision. Saul had Samuel, David had Nathan, but Solomon is a type of the Adam of the garden where everyone lives in peace and prosperity (1 Kgs 4.24, 25), he is the wisest man in the world (1 Kgs 4.31), ruler of a kingdom to whom all the nations of the earth come for wisdom (1 Kgs 4.34), but where the ruler turns against his God. Elijah's confrontation with Ahab leads to a further realisation that the experiment in establishing a golden age in Israel with the son of David had been an utter failure in that no prophet had been dispatched to revive the nation. Scholars repeatedly cite Ahab's establishment of Baalism in Israel as bringing down upon him the full wrath of Yahweh—as if Ahab had no rival in corrupting the nation by establishing this particular foreign god as Yahweh's chief rival—while they overlook the *total* corruption of Israel by Solomon with his establishment of multiple foreign idols (1 Kgs 11.31-33). On the contrary, Elijah's arrival signals Yahweh's intention to initiate a new beginning with Ahab at the helm, and to put an end to what Solomon had started.

Ahab and Saul: Kings of Mercy

Ahab's relationship to Saul is seen in their crime of releasing enemy kings who had been designated as under the ban.³² Although the accounts of their crimes differ in significant ways, they intersect when Saul spares King Agag of Amalek and Ahab spares King Ben-Hadad of Aram.

Ahab and Saul are the only biblical kings to violate the ban. Since these two stories are the only narratives in the Hebrew Bible about Israelite kings sparing enemy kings under the ban, they invite a further study of their relationship. While the stories play themselves out in a similar manner with associated plots (e.g., contexts of war; prophet-sanctioned activity; disobedient kings) and identical outcomes (judgements against each king for violating the ban), they have distinctly different emphases. The story of Ahab sparing Ben-Hadad is primarily positive, emphasising Ahab's prowess as a warrior-king, while the story of Saul sparing Agag is primarily negative, emphasising Saul's lack of kingly character. The result of the comparison of the readings does not so much provide a dramatic parallel as it does to provide two dissonant contexts which often interact with each other by virtue of the identical crimes.

³² See Stern, 'The *herem* in 1 Kgs 20,42', pp. 43-47; and '1 Samuel 15: Towards an Ancient View of the War-Herem', *Ugarit-Forschungen* 21 (1989), pp. 413-420; Fabrizio Foresti, *The Rejection of Saul in the Perspective of the Deuteronomistic School: A Study of 1 Sam 15 and Related Texts*, *Studia Theologica Teresianum* 5 (Rome: Edizioni Del Teresianum, 1984), esp. pp. 120-130; and *ABD*, pp. 178-179.

The Ban

The ban (חרם) may be defined as a sacred restriction placed on war spoils designated by Yahweh as objects marked for destruction for either sacrifice or justice (see below), whether human, animal or material. The verb may be translated 'to exterminate' or 'utterly destroy'. The ban has a religious purpose that is most clearly expressed in the general rules for war cited in Deut 20.10-18. Whole peoples and cities within the borders of the promised land (e.g., Jericho [Jos 6.17]) are to be destroyed 'in order that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominations which they do for their gods, and you sin against Yahweh your God' (Deut 20.18). Niditch says, 'The basis of the distinction between the ways in which enemies are to be treated is geographic'.³³ Cities and peoples outside the borders of the promised land are not always conjoined to a ban. Of those 'outside' cities who do not make peace with Israel, only the males are to be killed; women, children, animals and other spoil are to be confiscated (Deut 20.12-15). Sometimes, however, an 'outside' city and its people are marked for a total ban (e.g., 'the 'city of Amalek' [1 Sam 15.3, 5]) where nothing is to be spared; and sometimes kingdoms and their cities outside the promised territory or cities within the promised territory are placed under a partial ban, where every human is destroyed but livestock and other spoil is spared and confiscated (e.g., Heshbon and Bashan [Deut 2.34-35; 3.6-7]; and Ai [Jos 8.26-27]). Those who violate the ban by seizing spoil or sparing individuals marked for the ban (e.g., Achan, Saul and Ahab) receive a sentence of death, as well as others related to them (e.g., Achan's family, Saul's family and his army, and Ahab's family and his army).

Niditch's study on war in the Hebrew Bible offers clarification of the ban with respect to its meaning. She says that the ban may be defined as both sacrificial and judicial.³⁴ These two distinctions have a direct bearing on Ahab's and Saul's

³³ Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 67.

³⁴ Niditch, pp. 28-77 (chapters 1 and 2).

violations of the ban. The ban on Ben-Hadad is considered a sacrificial ban, the king being regarded by Yahweh as the ‘man of my ban’ (1 Kgs 20.42).³⁵ Niditch writes, ‘No clearer description of the ban as sacrifice exists. The banned king is the Lord’s *herem*: if he is found missing, compensation must be provided in the form of the Israelite king’s own life.’³⁶ Niditch’s study of the ban as sacrifice is based in Leviticus 27.28 which states that in a non-war context, whatever anyone devotes (הֲרָמָה) to God (such as humans, animals, material, and land) ‘cannot be purchased or redeemed’; it is to be given up for God’s use or for God’s priests.³⁷ In a war context, however, whatever God designates as a devoted thing (including people), or even whatever a person vows to give to God (including people) as a devoted thing (e.g., in return for a favour [cf. Jephthah’s daughter]), belongs to him alone and must be compensated for if it is lost or if a person reneges on the vow: ‘If God has been denied his due, the short-fall must be replaced, even by a life’, Niditch says.³⁸ She continues, ‘The banned person is a sort of human sacrifice that cannot be redeemed, but if someone should dare to withhold God’s *herem*, he himself may become the unwilling substitute. . .’³⁹

The ban against Amalek (and its king, Agag) is primarily a judicial ban in that Amalek is being paid back for what it did to Israel when Israel was making its way to the promised land (1 Sam 15.2; cf. Deut 25.17), but in some respects the event also displays aspects of the ban as sacrifice.⁴⁰ Yahweh says he will punish Amalek by annihilating everything, instructing Saul, ‘you shall not spare anything’ (1 Sam 15.3). Saul gets into trouble by sparing the king and the best of the livestock but destroying the rest of the people and the worst of the livestock—what Yahweh had devoted to destruction. In doing so he has violated a central tenet of the ban by ‘redeeming’ what is not redeemable.⁴¹ But according to Niditch, he has also violated

³⁵ Niditch, p. 35.

³⁶ Niditch, pp. 36-37.

³⁷ Niditch, p. 29.

³⁸ Niditch, p. 32.

³⁹ Niditch, p. 46.

⁴⁰ Niditch, pp. 61-62.

⁴¹ See Niditch, p. 29.

a central tenet of the ban as sacrifice by mixing in the worthless of the livestock with 'the best sacrifice, the biggest sacrifice', 'the human life'.⁴²

While human sacrifice is not overtly advocated in the Hebrew Bible, Niditch shows that it is still something that pleases the deity. She notes that human beings who are condemned to die under the regulations of the ban are not to be redeemed but are an acceptable sacrifice according to Leviticus 27.29.⁴³ The text states that a banned human being destined for *herem* shall 'surely die' (v. 29). She shows that the tragic account of Jephthah's daughter is related to *herem* in that it offers a clear example of God's acceptance of an individual offered as a sacrifice by means of a non retractable vow made in a context of war.⁴⁴ That Jephthah's daughter is an acceptable sacrifice is implicitly supported by the narrator's neutrality, whose silence 'in Judges 11:29-40 is fascinating and shocking.'⁴⁵ Exum's study of the story of Jephthah's daughter as tragedy supports Niditch's argument with respect to the deity's approval of human sacrifice, suggesting that Jephthah's vow is made under the influence of the spirit of Yahweh.⁴⁶ Her study underscores the tragic absence and silence of Yahweh by his failing to respond to Jephthah's plight for making a foolish vow, suggesting, like Niditch, that while God does not require human sacrifice, he does not reject it either.⁴⁷ She says, 'There is a sinister play of words and silence in the text. Most disquieting, there is no word from the deity; no "Do not put forth your hand against the child or do anything to her" (cf. Gen. 22:10)'.⁴⁸ While the story makes no direct reference to the ban, Jephthah's vow for success in battle is a vow that, like a devoted thing, cannot be redeemed.⁴⁹ Thus, with respect to Saul's violation of the ban, he is not merely guilty of violating the tenets of the ban as God's justice, but also of violating sacrificial regulations by combining the best form

⁴² Niditch, p. 35.

⁴³ Niditch, p. 30.

⁴⁴ Niditch, pp. 33-34.

⁴⁵ Niditch, p. 33.

⁴⁶ J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 49.

⁴⁷ Exum, p. 60.

⁴⁸ Exum, pp. 63-64.

⁴⁹ Niditch, p. 33.

of sacrifice with the worst. Niditch says, ‘To mix humans, the highest of God’s breathing creations, with sickly or less valuable animals is to break the whole concept of the ban as sacrifice.’⁵⁰

Kings of Mercy

The presence of the term **רַחֲמִים** (‘lovingkindness’, ‘mercy’) in the story of Ahab’s release of Ben Hadad serves as a cross-reference to the similar behaviour of Saul and his sparing of Agag. The term also appears in the story of Saul, offering a lexical link between the two stories of the crimes of Ahab and Saul. The noun **רַחֲמִים** pertains to the kings’ acts of mercy toward their enemy counterparts. The term is used by the servants of the beleaguered Aramean king in describing Israel’s kings to Ben Hadad as ‘kings of mercy’ (1 Kgs 20.31), and it is used by Saul just prior to his assault on Amalek in describing the past behaviour of the Kenites toward Israel (1 Sam 15.6).

Ahab Spares Ben Hadad

As mentioned above, the account of Ahab’s release of Ben Hadad is detailed in the present tense, providing an incremental account of Ahab’s display of **רַחֲמִים** toward Ben Hadad. As fugitives and sole survivors of their disastrous battle against Israel at Aphek, Ben Hadad and his servants find refuge in the innermost part of the city by hiding themselves in ‘a chamber in a chamber’ (or, an ‘innermost room’) in the city (1 Kgs 20.30). In assessing their dilemma, Ben Hadad’s servants suggest to their king that he might escape with his life by appealing to Ahab for mercy. Their strategy is based on a byword about Israel’s kings. The servants tell the king, ‘We have heard that the kings of the house of Israel, that they are kings of mercy (**רַחֲמִים מַלְכֵי** [v. 31]).⁵¹ With this rumour of Israel’s kings in mind, Ben Hadad’s servants propose to go to ‘the king of Israel’ dressed in the attire of humility and subjection⁵²

⁵⁰ Niditch, p. 61; I will discuss Saul’s guilt in sparing what is banned in the next chapter.

⁵¹ I use the term ‘mercy’ here as a translation of **רַחֲמִים** because I believe the context demands it as opposed to ‘loyalty’ or ‘loyal love’ (see discussion of **רַחֲמִים** below).

⁵² BDB, pp. 286 and 974.

to appeal for their king's life. They tell Ben Hadad, 'Perhaps he will let your soul live' (נפשך) (v. 31). The servants then don sackcloth on their bodies and cords around their heads and go out to Ahab and appeal to him saying, 'Your servant, Ben Hadad, asks, "Please let live my soul"' (v. 32a). In a compassionate response, Ahab is surprised⁵³ that the king has survived the battle: 'Is he still alive?' (v. 32b). He then extends clemency to the defeated king by way of an encrypted statement: 'He is my brother' (v. 32c). Although at first they are confused over Ahab's coded extension of mercy (i.e., answering, 'He is my brother' instead of, perhaps, 'Yes, I will let him live'), Ben Hadad's servants quickly grasp its meaning: 'And the men divined (תחשו), and they hurried (וימהרו), and they caught (ויחלפו) [the word] from him',⁵⁴ accepting Ahab's offer of mercy in reciprocal coded terminology, saying, 'Your brother, Ben Hadad' (v. 33). After Ahab orders the Aramean servants to retrieve and escort Ben Hadad back to him, he warmly receives the enemy king into his chariot. Ben Hadad then responds to Ahab's אהב with אהב of his own. He returns to Ahab control of the cities which Ben Hadad's father had taken from Ahab's father in some previous conflict(s), presents Ahab with economic concessions in Damascus like those Ben Hadad's father had previously had in Samaria, and he offers to cut a covenant with him, presumably to guarantee the concessions:

And he [Ben Hadad] said to him, 'The cities which my father took from your father, I will return; and bazaars you will set up for yourself in Damascus like [the bazaars] which my father set up in Samaria; and I, I will send you [away] with a covenant.' And he cut for him a covenant, and he sent him [away] (v. 34).

The MT is unclear concerning which king offers to cut the covenant, if Ben Hadad sends away Ahab with a covenant, or vice-versa. The discussion over the identity of the covenant maker is important because it reflects the characterisation of Ahab as to whether his mercy is simple mercy or if it is good statescraft.⁵⁵ If it is Ben Hadad, then he may be seeking to secure his release. But if it is Ahab, then his mercy has

⁵³ What is surprising about Ahab's surprise of his counterpart's survival is that Ahab has not specifically searched for him as if he has been marked for the ban.

⁵⁴The translation 'caught the word' is taken from BDB, p. 319.

⁵⁵ See the discussion below.

another motivation. Almost every modern translation understands Ahab as the one who initiates making the covenant (e.g., ASV: ‘And I, said Ahab’; KJV: ‘Then said Ahab’; NRSV: ‘The king of Israel responded’; NASB: ‘Ahab said’), while the MT suggests that it is Ben Hadad. When Ahab receives Ben Hadad into his chariot, it is Ben Hadad who speaks to Ahab about returning cities to him and establishing bazaars in Damascus like the bazaars in Samaria (v. 34a). The difficulty in determining the speaker lies in the transition from the offering of these concessions to the declaration/offer that the concessions be sealed with a covenant, since there is no clear grammatical reference (such as a waw consecutive [e.g., וַיֹּאמֶר]) concerning the identity of the king who emphatically offers to cut the covenant. The confusion over the identity of the king offering the covenant occurs in the first of the final three clauses of v. 34. It begins with a waw disjunctive (וַיֹּאמֶר) spoken by one of the kings, while the last two clauses are spoken by the narrator:

And he [Ben Hadad] said to him, ‘The cities which my father took from your father, I will return; and bazaars you will set up for yourself in Damascus like [the bazaars] which my father set up in Samaria(v. 34a);

And I[!], with a covenant, I will send you [away]’ (34b)

And he cut for him a covenant (34c)

And he sent him [away] (34d).

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ . . .

וַאֲנִי בְּבְרִית אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָ (34b)

וַיַּכְרַתְלֹו בְרִית (34c)

וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ (34d)

In v. 34b, the personal pronoun ‘I’ (אֲנִי) is emphatic. If Ben Hadad is the one speaking, then he ends his offer by guaranteeing the concessions with a covenant. Ahab says nothing in response to Ben Hadad’s offer, but his agreement to accept is communicated by the narrator’s notation that the deal had been struck, ‘And he [Ben Hadad] cut for him [Ahab] a covenant’. Such an interpretation presents somewhat of an abnormality in that it makes Ben Hadad the one sending Ahab away—as if the victim was giving orders to the victor: ‘And he [Ben Hadad] sent him [away]’ (v. 34d). However, with the deal secured, Ben Hadad dispatches Ahab to procure the spoils of the war.

If Ahab is the one speaking, then he is the one to offer the covenant. Such an interpretation suggests that Ahab is surprised that Ben Hadad would offer such a great deal, and that he needs to quickly secure it with a covenant, breaking into Ben Hadad's speech without waiting: 'And I!, with a covenant, I will send you [away]' (v. 34b). Such a rendition, however, veers from the norms of the battlefield. Ahab has just reversed his fortunes from victim to victor, making Ben Hadad essentially eat his words that he would totally destroy Samaria (v. 10). As the victor, Ahab does not need to do any talking in order to increase his lot (if it is his intention).⁵⁶ Having destroyed Aram's vast army (the enormous size of the army is described in the text in the words that it 'filled the land' [v. 27]) and captured its king, Ahab could take whatever he wants. Such a version of the exchange is also in keeping with the overall tenor of the chapter which presents Ahab as a model king. For by sparing Ben Hadad, and by not having sought for concessions of war, Ahab further demonstrates his uprightness by being truly a 'merciful king'.

Saul Spares Agag

The account of Saul's sparing of Agag is not nearly so detailed as the account between Ahab and Ben Hadad. Whereas the dialogue between Ahab and Ben Hadad makes clear that Ben Hadad had to beg for his life, the reader must surmise whether or not Agag had to do the same. We also are not 'encouraged' ahead of time to view Saul as a 'king of mercy' in the same way as Ahab was. However, 1 Samuel 15 actually does display Saul as a king of mercy, even employing the term רחם in the context (cf. רחם, 'to spare', 'to have compassion' [15.3, 9, 15]), although the stated recipient of his kindness is a group of people. Saul's merciful character is first established by means of his רחם toward the Kenites who lived among the Amalekites in the city of the Amalekites. His mercy to them, however, is subsequently extended to King Agag of the Amalekites.

⁵⁶ Cf. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, who says Ahab probably could not have secured his winnings if he had killed Ben Hadad (*Faithfulness in Action* [Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], p. 24).

The text introduces the theme of 'mercy' by Saul's warning to the Kenites to leave the city before he destroys it:

ויאמר שאול אל־הקניזי
לכו
סרו
רדו מתוך עמלקי
פן־אספך עמו
ואתה עשיתָ חסד עם־כל־בני ישראל בעלותם ממצרים
ויסר קניזי מתוך עמלק

And Saul said to the Kenites,
'Go!
Depart!
Go down from among the Amalekites,
lest you be destroyed with him,
because you did kindness with all the sons of Israel when they came up from
Egypt.'
And the Kenites departed from the midst of Amalek (1 Sam 15.6).

In v. 6, Saul's warning to the Kenites is a repayment to them for the חסד they had shown to Israel during the exodus. The term חסד in this context thus concerns an act of charity shown to the 'sons of Israel' by the Kenites in time past, and Saul's present act of charity may be construed as an act of reciprocal חסד.⁵⁷

Some scholars consider the account of the sparing of the Kenites as intrusive to the context. Fokkelman, seeing an apparent interruption in the contextual flow, looks for a purpose for the inclusion of the warning to the Kenites. He suggests that Saul's treatment of the Kenites is meant 'to create an objectionable Saul': 'Had he [the narrator] created an obedient Saul, there would have been no mention of the Kenites in the text and we would have been completely unaware of any problem regarding the treatment they deserve.'⁵⁸ According to Fokkelman, Saul's kindness to the Kenites is Saul's way of playing God and 'is here a form of self-elevation'. He says, 'His oh so good intentions betray highhandedness and no matter how commendable their effect towards the Kenites, as a characteristic of Saul they are

⁵⁷ Alfred Jepsen describes Saul's benevolent treatment of the Kenites as חסד: 'The Kenites had shown Israel *Chesed*; now they receive the same' ('Gnade und Barmherzigkeit im Alten Testament', *Kerygma und Dogma* 7 [1961], pp. 261-71; p. 266).

⁵⁸ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the books of Samuel, vol. 2: The Crossing Fates (I Sam. 13-31 & II Sam. 1)* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), p. 91.

irritating'.⁵⁹ I can agree with Fokkelman that the inclusion of the Kenite affair in this chapter creates questions about its literary function, but I cannot agree that it is meant to discredit Saul. On the contrary, Saul's warning to the Kenites may function to elevate Saul's kingly character. Since his warning follows immediately after the narrator reports that Saul and his army approached the 'city of Amalek and lay in wait in a wady' (suggesting reconnaissance; [15.5]), Saul here demonstrates his military prudence in sparing innocent life by isolating his target. Such an explanation serves the context adequately, if not better than Fokkelman's, since it elicits the audiences' approval and makes Saul's fall – in sparing Agag – that much more severe. As Sternberg says:

It is precisely what looks like a divergence from the letter of the divine command that proves so encouraging, since it manifests a remarkable grasp of the spirit informing that command. God having sent him on his mission armed with a reason as well as a sword, Saul wisely infers that those who showed Israel kindness 'when they came up from Egypt' must not perish with those who stabbed Israel in the back 'when he came up from Egypt.'⁶⁰

The inclusion of the account of the sparing of the Kenites that immediately precedes the destruction of the Amalekites accomplishes two things. First, it sets off the contrasting fates of two peoples, the Kenites and the Amalekites, and establishes a (theological?) point that foreigners, like Amalek, who mistreat Israel will be destroyed for their behaviour, while those who treat Israel kindly, like the Kenites, will be spared from harm. Second, it sets off a concomitant realisation that anyone spared (like King Agag) from the holocaust of the city of Amalek is also like the fortunate Kenites. Thus when the narrator reports two verses later that 'Saul seized Agag, king of Amalek, alive, but all the people he utterly destroyed with the edge of the sword' (v. 8), and that 'Saul . . . spared Agag' (אָגָג; v. 9a), Agag becomes like the company of the Kenites who have received good for doing good, even though he has not done good. Thus like the Kenites, Agag becomes a survivor of Saul's חַרְמָה and a recipient of Saul's חַסְדָּה.

⁵⁹ Fokkelman, p. 91.

⁶⁰ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Literary Biblical Series (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 487.

Ahab's חסד

The attributive genitive מלכי חסד ('kings of mercy') in reference to Israel's kings in 1 Kings 20.31 is unique in the Hebrew Bible, and the similarity with Saul—although dependent on the reader's familiarity with 1 Sam 15—is established through the acts of חסד on the part of both kings. The strength of this link, however, depends on whether Ahab's act of חסד connotes unconditional kindness rather than calculation, that is, whether Ahab's kindness to Ben Hadad is as unqualified as Saul's kindness to Agag. חסד is a term whose meaning many scholars find difficult to determine.⁶¹ A brief discussion of its meaning in relation to Ahab and Ben Hadad will lend support to my argument that Ahab's and Saul's acts of mercy toward their captives may be seen to be parallel in terms of their spontaneity.

Scholarship and חסד

Most commentators confine חסד to behaviour between two or more people who exist in a mutual *covenantal* relationship in which loyalty (חסד) is obligatory reciprocal behaviour. This controlling sense of the noun חסד of covenantal relationship was first offered by Nelson Glueck⁶² and has been adopted by a majority of scholars.⁶³ In its secular meaning (חסד between two or more people) Glueck states that חסד

⁶¹ As Walsh says, 'the word *hesed* is a quintessentially untranslatable word' (p. 307).

⁶² *Das Wort hesed im alttestamentlichen Sprachgebrauche als menschliche und göttliche gemeinschaftsgemässe Verhaltensweise*, BZAW 47 (1927); English translation: *HESED in the Bible*, Alfred Gottschalk, trans. (Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1967).

⁶³ See, e.g., Walther Eichrodt (*Theology of the Old Testament*, translated by J. A. Baker, Vol. 1, The Old Testament Library [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961]) who quotes Glueck in establishing his point that the primary link between parties of a covenant is based on *hesed*: 'The possibility of the establishment and maintenance of a covenant rests on the presence of *hesed*' (p. 232); and Norman H. Snaith (*The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946]): 'The etymological origin of the word established "keenness, eagerness" as the core of the meaning of the word, but in Hebrew the main factor is that it is used definitely in connection with the idea of covenant. The root means "eagerness, steadfastness" and then "mercy, loving-kindness," but all within the covenant. It never meant "kindness" in general to all and sundry. Unless this close and inalienable connection with the idea of the covenant is realized, the true meaning of *chesed* can never be understood' (p. 124). See also, Gerald A. Larue ('Recent Studies in *Hesed*', in *HESED in the Bible*, pp. 1-34) for an overview of arguments since Glueck's study appeared; and more recent works by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978); Gordon R. Clark, 'חסד – A Study of a Lexical Field', *Abr-Nahrain* 30 (1992), pp. 34-54; Gordon R. Clark, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup 157 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); and Robin Routledge, 'HESED As Obligation: A Re-Examination', *Tyndale Bulletin* 46 (1995), pp. 179-96.

can be practised only between persons who share an ethically binding relationship. . . . that only those who stood in a relationship of rights and duties to one another received and practiced *hesed*. This is borne out by the interpretation of *hesed* as mutuality or reciprocal conduct (*gemeinschaftgemassen Verhaltungsweise*).⁶⁴

H. J. Stoebe,⁶⁵ along with others,⁶⁶ takes an opposing view of the noun, that חסד describes behaviour that is generated from outside some socially accommodating norm. He argues that חסד between humans depicts a special mutual behaviour that goes beyond what is expected, 'that with *haesad* something special is meant in mutual behaviour, something that goes beyond what is actually obvious [i.e., what is expected].'⁶⁷ Stoebe's view of God's *hesed* in relation to humanity is similar to his view of *hesed* between humans in that God *unconditionally* bestows favour on humankind in order to commune with them.⁶⁸

Ahab's חסד and Scholarship

The two opposite meanings mentioned above provide significant contrasting views concerning the motive behind Ahab's behaviour toward Ben Hadad. Those who see his charity as a conditional act import a kind of *post hoc* sense into the text of 1 Kings 20.31-34. In their view, because Ben Hadad strikes a covenant with Ahab following Ahab's display of mercy, Ahab's חסד supposedly is closely bound to a system of obligations and rights between rulers and their subjects.⁶⁹ Glueck uses 1 Kings 20.31 to establish that חסד is exactly this kind of behaviour, that is, behaviour that is expected of a king towards a subject who submits to him:

The Israelite kings had the reputation of being kings who practiced *hesed* toward those who had a claim upon it. They were known for their readiness to show *hesed* to those who created and fulfilled the basic requirements for establishing such a *hesed*-relationship. . . . This reputation . . . was known to the officers of Benhadad. . . . They relied upon this trait as the only escape

⁶⁴ *HESED in the Bible*, p. 37.

⁶⁵ 'חסד *haesad* Gute', *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, Ernst Jenni, ed., Vol. 1 (München: Kaiser Verlag; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1971), pp. 600-21.

⁶⁶ E.g., Jepsen, 'Gnade und Barmherzigkeit im Alten Testament'; Gillis Gerleman, 'Das Übervolle Mass: Ein Versuch mit *haesad*', *VT* 28 (1978), pp. 151-64; and H. J. Zobel, 'חסד *hesed*', *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., Vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), pp. 44-64.

⁶⁷ Stoebe, 'חסד *haesad* Gute', columns 600-607.

⁶⁸ 'Die Bedeutung des Wortes *Häsäd* im Alten Testament', *VT* 2 (1952), p. 254.

⁶⁹ Glueck makes this one of his major points in his study (p.50).

from their otherwise desperate situation They well understood that the mutually obligatory *hesed*-relationship of rights and duties extended to the relationship between servant and master. . . . The usual procedure would have been to have Benhadad slain and this was what was expected by the zealots in Ahab's camp. But the king generously granted the plea and with political astuteness declared his readiness to establish a *hesed*-relationship by answering them: 'Does he still live? He is my *brother*.' Humanitarian considerations alone would scarcely have prompted Ahab to save Benhadad from death. Since the latter had submitted himself to him, Ahab was in the position to show him *hesed*. He concluded a pact with him and gave him conditional freedom.⁷⁰

DeVries follows Glueck's understanding of חֶסֶד by interpreting מְלָכֵי חֶסֶד as 'kings who honor treaties'.⁷¹ He argues that this meaning is in line with the 'traditional meaning for the word חֶסֶד '.⁷² By adopting this sense of the term he interprets the passage of 1 Kings 20.31-34 much the same way as Glueck, but he goes even further, taking an exegetical liberty to state that the Arameans and Ahab were already under some formal covenantal political agreement:

Syria and Israel have been bound in a treaty, involving the oath of brotherhood, so the hope of Ben-Hadad's counselors is that the Israelite king may give some weight to it in spite of the present hostilities.⁷³

DeVries bases what he calls an 'oath of brotherhood' on a presumption that Israel and Aram have 'been bound in a treaty'. He does not justify how he can claim this from the text.

Clark comes close to adopting Glueck's core meaning of חֶסֶד as behaviour confined to individuals within some binding social relationship⁷⁴ but suggests that its use in 1 Kings 20.31 has no bearing on the correct meaning of the term. Somehow he finds the freedom to say that Ben Hadad's men are not much clearer on the meaning of חֶסֶד than moderns are, but he comments on the passage primarily to

⁷⁰ Glueck, pp. 51-52.

⁷¹ DeVries, p. 250.

⁷² By 'traditional' he means Glueck's formulation; DeVries, p. 250.

⁷³ DeVries, p. 250.

⁷⁴ Clark's study of חֶסֶד is based on its relationship to other terms in a 'lexical field'. He confirms the elusive meaning of the term in the summary of his study by saying, ' חֶסֶד cannot be adequately translated in many languages, including English', but like Glueck, he also confines it to behaviour between individuals within a close relationship. He writes, ' חֶסֶד is not merely an attitude or an emotion; it is an emotion that leads to an activity beneficial to the recipient. The relative status of the participants is never a feature of the חֶסֶד act, which may be described as a beneficent action performed, *in the context of a deep and enduring commitment between two persons or parties*, by one who is able to render assistance to the needy party who in the circumstances is unable to help him- or herself' (*The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 267; emphasis added).

criticise Glueck's and others' use of 1 Kings 20.31 in support of their covenantal formulas for חסד:

On another occasion, Syrians – also foreigners – use the word חסד with, apparently, only a vague idea of its meaning. . . . Ben-hadad, fearing for his life, takes refuge in the city where his servants convince him that Ahab may be persuaded to spare his life, reminding him that the kings of Israel have a reputation as מלכי חסד. The narrator, who clearly disapproves of Ahab's subsequent actions (vv. 35-42), is not concerned with the Syrians' idea of חסד. . . . Even if there had been a previous covenant between Ahab and Ben-hadad, the interchanges between the two kings recorded in the earlier portion of 1 Kings 20 refute the idea that they have any commitment with respect to each other's welfare; nor is there such a commitment subsequent to their meeting. The Syrians who used the term were unaware of its true meaning, and it is unwise to interpret Ahab's treatment of Ben-hadad as an example of חסד – especially as there is no evidence to suggest he knows the basis of Ben-hadad's approach, which is the belief that Ahab may be a מלך חסד.⁷⁵

Clark's caution in accepting Ahab's treatment of Ben-Hadad as an example of חסד is directed at those who adopt Glueck's technical covenantal sense of the term. Although Clark may also be taking liberties with the text concerning what the servants of Ben Hadad did or did not know about the meaning of חסד, he is correct to suggest that the text cannot support Glueck's (or DeVries') contention that Ahab is aware of Ben Hadad's intention of appealing to some kind of covenantal behavioural standard contained within the meaning of חסד in his servants' reference to Ahab as a מלכי חסד. I agree with Clark that in deliberating Ben Hadad's plight (1 Kgs 20.31), the king's servants speak to him only about *how he might save his life*. There is no hint of treaty-making:

ויאמרו אליו עבדיו
הנה־נא
שמענו כי מלכי בית ישראל כי־מלכי חסד הם
נשימה נא שקים במתנינו וחבלים בראשנו
תצא אל־מלך ישראל
אולי יחיה את־נפשך

And they (the servants) said to him,
'Look now,
we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel,
that they are מלכי חסד;
let us put sackcloth on our bodies and cords upon our heads,
and we will go out to the king of Israel.
Perhaps he will let your soul live' (1 Kgs 20.31).

⁷⁵ Clark, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 174.

Ben Hadad's servants say nothing to Ben Hadad about appealing to Ahab in order to strike a covenant with him but only about the fact that he might spare their king's life: 'Perhaps he will let your soul live'. If anything, the servants' discussion and their decision to appeal to Ahab dressed in a way that symbolises their complete acknowledgement of defeat and their total subjection to him is their way of waving a white flag (v. 32a). When they meet Ahab, they repeat verbatim the same suggestion they had just made to Ben Hadad:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ
עַבְדְּךָ בֶן־חֲדָד אָמַר
תְּחַיֵּנָה נַפְשִׁי

And they said [to Ahab],
'Your servant Ben Hadad says [asks],
"Please let my soul live"' (v. 32b).

In addition, as I have mentioned above, in the subsequent exchange with Ahab (vv. 32c-33a), the servants display consternation upon hearing Ahab's answer to their plea, suggesting that they never anticipated any kind of covenantal reciprocal kindness from Ahab in return for their submission to him as compliant servants ('Your *servant* Ben Hadad')⁷⁶ or prisoners of war. The text makes it sufficiently clear that the servants were caught off guard in trying to respond correctly to Ahab's coded message of mercy:

And he [Ahab] said,
'Is he still alive?
He is my brother' (32c).

And the men divined (תִּחְשְׁוּ);
and they hurried (וַיִּמְהָרוּ);
and they caught (וַיִּחַלְטוּ) [the word] from him;
and they said,
'Your brother, Ben Hadad' (33a).

Glueck's statement on this exchange, 'Humanitarian considerations alone would scarcely have prompted Ahab to save Benhadad from death',⁷⁷ seems to be an

⁷⁶ Walsh notes that the servants' reference to their king as 'your servant, Ben Hadad', suggests that Ben Hadad offers himself to Ahab as a vassal, but that Ahab's response in referring to him as 'my brother' is a refusal to treat him as such: 'He (Ahab) declines Ben-hadad's concession of vassalage ("your servant") and offers to treat him as an equal ("my brother")' (p. 308).

⁷⁷ Glueck, p. 52.

assumption about Ahab's character that must be read into the text. On the contrary, Ahab's charity seems to be nothing except humanitarian, especially when it is viewed in relation to Ben Hadad's harsh ultimatum in the beginning of the chapter that he would turn Samaria into dust (20.10). It seems to go unnoticed by Glueck (and others), that Ahab has not initiated any treaty or covenant making. He says nothing about striking a covenant with the defeated king. It is Ben Hadad who does all the talking (according to the MT suggested above). Perhaps Glueck has been influenced by the introductory regnal resume and regards Ahab negatively. However, up to this point, 1 Kings 20 has been sympathetic to Ahab, and his charity towards Ben Hadad furthers that image. Ahab responds to Ben Hadad's servants with words that connote compassion rather than co-operation with some unstated covenantal code of conduct: 'Is he still alive? He is my brother' (v. 32c).⁷⁸ I agree with Stoebe, who says of חסד in this passage, 'Here *hesed* is incontestably the unexpected on which one cannot actually count. It probably makes possible the realisation of a treaty, but [it] is not the point and condition of the present treaty'.⁷⁹ Gerleman's interpretation of מלכי חסד as 'extravagant kings' is appropriate in this context.⁸⁰ His sense of the term is based on his belief that חסד is ethically neutral,⁸¹ whose lexical content is rooted in 'measure' rather than 'duty', and that it carries a superlative import 'that goes beyond measure and surpasses a usual or accepted norm'.⁸² He says of the Israelite kings' reputation as demonstrated through Ahab's charity: 'they have established themselves as "extravagant"'.⁸³

A final point that sheds light on the question whether Ahab's חסד is conditionally or unconditionally motivated concerns the unexpected ending of the

⁷⁸ DeVries equates Ahab's statement 'He is my brother' as an 'invitation to parley'; that is, to bargain, p. 250.

⁷⁹ 'חסד *haesaed* Gute', column 607.

⁸⁰ Gerleman, p. 153.

⁸¹ Gerleman, p.154, 158. For Gerleman, חסד's ethical neutrality is based on its use as being a term descriptive of impure behaviour in Leviticus 20.17: 'And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness; it is a חסד; and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people' (AV); and in Proverbs 14.34: 'Righteousness exalts a nation; but sin is חסד (reproach) to any people' (p. 156).

⁸² Gerleman, , p. 153.

⁸³ Gerleman, p. 158. See DeVries' response to this interpretation by Gerleman: 'A Reply to G. Gerleman on *MALKE HESED* in 1 Kings xx 31', *VT* 29 (1979), pp. 359-362.

story in which both Ahab *and* the audience are surprised that he has committed a crime. This dramatic surprise ending depends almost entirely upon Ahab's unconditional magnanimous behaviour shown in his treatment of Ben Hadad. Up to the point in the account of Ben Hadad's release, the narrator has shown Ahab in a way that belies his introductory labelling (1 Kgs 16.29-34) as the worst king in Israel's history. Ahab has played the role of a model king, allowing prophets to come in and out of his court without harm, accepting and following unsolicited advice from Yahweh through prophets, being Yahweh's object of favour, and showing himself magnanimous and merciful to a foe who has just sworn to annihilate him and his people. But then a prophet appears, revealing by way of surprise that Ahab has committed a crime so serious that it will cost him both his life and the lives of his people (vv. 35-42).⁸⁴ Long says of this unexpected turn in the plot,

The point offers an ironic twist to the story in 20:1-34. The hero of Samaria and the plains of Aphek. . . . turns out to be, surprisingly, a transgressor. He knew nothing of God's prohibition on preserving enemy life, nor did we as readers. The author has exposed a hidden counterpoint to the otherwise sympathetic view of Ahab. But the king is doubly duped. Just as a prophet chose disguise to make plain the truth [of the crime of Ben Hadad's release], so the story of triumph proves to be Yahweh's ruse: a situation, after the fact, revealed as offensive to God.⁸⁵

According to Long, the unexpected ending works in favour of the author's purpose to show why Ahab merits an introduction as Israel's worst king. The literary surprise places maximum emphasis on the detailed account of Ahab's release of Ben Hadad by the 'ironic twist' declaring it to be a crime.⁸⁶ Nelson suggests that the surprise ending serves a didactic purpose for an exilic community 'in which accommodation to the surrounding culture was a fact of life'.⁸⁷ The reversal of fortune for Ahab and Israel in Ahab's judgement is meant to emphasise the point to the reader, 'who has come to sympathise with Ahab, now characterised as a "king of mercy"',⁸⁸ that he had violated the Deuteronomic code. With respect to the lesson, Nelson writes, 'Its

⁸⁴ Many textual critics explain the sudden shift from a sympathetic view of Ahab (20.1-34) to a hostile view (20.35-42) as the work of a redactor whose material came from a different source. For a discussion of this source matter see, e.g., Gray, pp. 414-31; and DeVries, pp. 250-51.

⁸⁵ Long, p. 222.

⁸⁶ Long, p. 222.

⁸⁷ Nelson, p. 137.

⁸⁸ Nelson, p. 135.

special effectiveness results from the twisting reversal in its plot. The text begins by heroizing Ahab, selling the reader on his cool response to crisis . . . , his scrupulous adherence to holy war procedure . . . , his magnanimous mercy to a defeated foe. Then the narrative takes a twist and turns against king and reader'.⁸⁹ The effect of the surprise ending, however, depends largely on the perspective that one takes of Ahab's **כחן**. If he is behaving within some social covenantal framework that demands mercy for a submissive defeated foe, Ahab is less a hero than if he shows mercy simply because he is moved to compassion. If Ahab acts unexpectedly in releasing Ben Hadad simply for mercy, then he heightens our opinion of him a virtuous king, and his fall becomes that much greater.

Two Prisoners Speak

In addition to the lexical parallels that provide the setting for Yahweh's involvement, and the correspondent actions of releasing an enemy king designated under the ban, a third similarity between the crimes of Ahab and Saul is to be found in the dialogues of the two captive kings, Agag and Ben Hadad. Due to the scanty details of Saul's sparing of Agag, the detailed account of Ahab's release of Ben Hadad offers readers supporting fill-in-the-blank material, particularly in relation to the attitudes of the enemy kings in the face of impending death.

Because of a key textual ambiguity concerning Agag's speech in his appearance before Samuel (1 Sam 15.32-33), Ben Hadad's servile posturing before Ahab offers suggestions to the reader in determining Agag's disposition before Samuel immediately prior to his death (see below). Depending upon how a reader translates the text, Agag may be asking for his life to be spared, or he may be expecting to be released. Some scholars have noted the similarity of the two stories and use one account to supplement the other in order to help clarify the text.⁹⁰ I will

⁸⁹ Nelson, p. 135.

⁹⁰ Dominique Barthelemy uses Ben Hadad's attitude before Ahab to help determine Agag's disposition before Samuel (*Critique Textuelle De L'Ancien Testament*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 50/1 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982] p. 188). Fokkelman finds textual support from 1

adopt the same procedure in order to demonstrate the similarities between the two accounts.

Agag's Temperament before Samuel

The scene in question occurs immediately after Saul's confession before Samuel (1 Sam 15.32-33). Saul and Samuel have just gone their separate ways when Samuel gives orders to have Agag brought to him (v. 32a). The reader does not yet know the purpose for Samuel's command, but judging by what Agag says to Samuel when they meet, Agag apparently senses that death awaits him, and (as I argue below) he appears to make some kind of an attempt at staying Samuel's intentions. However, the term describing the manner in which Agag appears before Samuel is ambiguous and leaves the reception of his words equally ambiguous:

ויאמר שמואל
הגישו אלי את־אגג מלך עמלק
וילך אליו אגג מעִרְנָה
ויאמר אגג
אכן סר מ־הַמּוֹת

And Samuel said,
'Bring to me Agag, king of Amalek.
And Agag came to him [מעִרְנָה];
And Agag said,
'Surely, the bitterness of death is past' (1 Sam 15.32).

Agag's statement to Samuel, 'Surely the bitterness of death is past', is clear, but the adverbial accusative, מעִרְנָה, which describes *in what manner* or *in what state* the king approached Samuel, is not. Based on the meaning we accept, Agag may appear haughty and confident about being released, or like Ben Hadad, he may appear humble and subservient. The tenor of his statement and his state of being is therefore dependent on how we translate this term, which has links to two roots. מעִרְנָה may be derived from a feminine plural noun form with a transposed spelling derived from the root עִנָּה, with metathesis of the letters *nun* and *daleth* (to bind around, upon), meaning 'bonds', or 'bands'; or it may be derived from a feminine plural noun form

Kings 20 in determining his own view of the ambiguity surrounding Agag's state of being before Samuel (*The Crossing Fates*, p. 108, n. 37). See the discussion below.

derived from the root of the denominative verb (hithpael) עָרַן (to luxuriate) meaning either ‘delightfully’ or ‘cheerfully’ (cf. Neh 9.25 where the root occurs as hithpael meaning ‘they lived luxuriously’).⁹¹ It may also be the adjective מְעַרְרָן from the same root meaning ‘voluptuously’. Some critics opt for a repointed noun form of the verb מַעַר (from מְעַרְנָתָה to מְעַרְרָתָה, with the possible meanings ‘slip’, ‘slide’, ‘totter’, ‘shake’) giving the sense of ‘totteringly’ or ‘shakily’.⁹²

Only one of the options above describes the king’s *external* state—‘in bonds’—while the others describe the king’s *internal* state as either an optimistic or a cautious frame of mind. The LXX, which uses ‘trembling’; Aquila and Symmachus, which use either ‘delicately’ or ‘cheerful’ (from ‘luxurious’ [עָרַן]); Targum, which uses ‘imperiously’ (מְפַקֵּחָא); and Vulgate, which uses ‘sleek’ or ‘sleek and trembling’ (*pinguissimus* or *pinguissimus + tremens*), influence most modern translations. These appear equally conjecturing: ‘delicately’ (AV, KJV) from Aquila and Symmachus; ‘unsteadily’ (NJB) ‘haltingly’ (NRSV) from LXX; and ‘cheerfully’ (ASV, NASB) from Aquila and Symmachus. Only the Jewish Publication Society⁹³ and the NASB margin translate the term ‘in chains’ or ‘in bonds’ following the usage of the word in Job 38.31: הֲתִקְשֵׁר מְעַרְוֹתַי כִּימָה (Piel): ‘Can you bind together the bands of Pleiades?’

Based on the indeterminate nature of מְעַרְנָתָה, any characterisation of Agag is likewise indeterminate, and depending on the translation of this adverbial accusative, Agag’s statement to Samuel, ‘Surely, the bitterness of death is past’, may signal either an appeal for leniency, or it signals an overly optimistic assessment of his situation.

⁹¹ Henry P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1932), p. 142.

⁹² See discussions of the various options by S. Talmon, ‘1 Sam. XV 32b – A Case of Conflated Readings?’ *VT* 11 (1961), pp. 456-57; Robert G. Bratcher, ‘How Did Agag Meet Samuel?’ *BT* 22 (1971), pp. 167-68; Smith, *The Books of Samuel*, pp. 141-42; S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913), pp. 129-30; and S. Goldman, *Samuel: Hebrew Text and English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Soncino Books of the Bible; London: The Soncino Press, 1951), p. 92.

⁹³ Used by Goldman in *Samuel: Hebrew Text and Commentary*, p. 92.

Agag's Temperament and Ben Hadad

I take the term to have the same meaning as it has in Job 38.31, and understand 1 Samuel 15.32 to mean that Agag came to Samuel tied up like a prisoner 'in bonds' because it is more in keeping with battlefield behaviour. This reading is suggested by 1 Samuel 15.8, which says that Saul *seized* (שָׁבַח) Agag alive. The word שָׁבַח bears the sense of laying hold of an adversary and keeping him under one's control (cf. Josh 8.23, of having seized the king of Ai; 1 Kgs 18.40, of having seized the prophets of Baal; and 1 Kgs 20.18, of seizing Ahab's troops). Under such circumstances, Agag's statement then suggests a demeanour much like the cautious sense of timidity or humility given in some of the modern translations shown above. The image of Agag as a prisoner of war in 'bonds' in Saul's custody parallels the image of Ben Hadad who is portrayed as the prisoner put into Ahab's custody in the prophet's parable that symbolises Ahab's crime (1 Kgs 20.39). The parallel to Ben Hadad also suggests that Agag could have come in a similar demeanour, pleading for his life. However, the image of Agag in bonds also raises questions about what Saul intended to do with him, and if perhaps he meant to kill him at a more appropriate time in order to display Agag's corpse publicly as some kind of trophy (cf. Josh 8.29), or as Gunn appears to suggest, to offer him and the best of the spoils as a sacrifice at Gilgal.⁹⁴

Like the reading above, Barthelemy also appeals to 1 Kings 20.33 (citing only the *release* of Ben Hadad) in order to determine Agag's state of being before Samuel. However, Barthelemy suggests that Agag is 'relaxed' and optimistic. Agag's optimism, he says, is based on the precedent set by Ahab and Ben Hadad:

⁹⁴ Gunn does not say that Agag is reserved for 'sacrifice', although he leaves that impression; he uses the word 'execute' in a context of sacrificial slaying: 'Thus the issue between Saul and Samuel on the matter of Agag may be viewed as similar to that on the matter of the spoil. Was it *technically* in defiance of the rules of *hinnam* to bring the defeated king to Gilgal in order to slay him at the sanctuary? Should Agag have been lined up on the field of battle, or in his palace (or wherever), no doubt along with others who had survived the battle, and there executed? Saul apparently sees no problem in delaying the execution. . . .' (David Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* [JSOTSup 14; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980], p. 51; his emphasis). Exum, like Gunn, suggests that Saul's presence at Gilgal argues for his sincerity in offering the spoil as a sacrifice, but she does not clearly say that the sacrifice includes Agag, or that he is considered as spoil: 'With regard to the sparing of Agag, I doubt we can second-guess Saul's intention' (*Tragedy*, p. 28, n. 37).

‘Indeed, when a sovereign makes another captive sovereign come [to him], that can mean, as in 1 R 20, 33, the coming release of this latter [one]’.⁹⁵

Similarly, Fokkelman adopts a reading that has Agag in bonds before Samuel, but it is a reading that has Agag enter in a spirit of gaiety. His reading of Agag’s optimistic demeanour is imported entirely from outside the immediate context. He says,

What he [Agag] does know is that he himself was spared, taken from the battlefield and has now been brought forth. It makes him grasp the straw that he will come out of this hell alive. After having seen death all around him and tasted its bitterness, he probably expects pardon and says in cheerful tones ‘*aken* . . .’⁹⁶

Fokkelman bases his belief that Agag speaks ‘in cheerful tones’ and ‘expects pardon’ by appealing to the successful outcome of the negotiations between Ben Hadad and Ahab for Ben Hadad’s release in 1 Kings 20. However, he suggests that Ahab’s extension of mercy is linked to a reference of the presence of the word pair *חי + תפוש* in 1 Samuel 15.8 and 1 Kings 20.18.⁹⁷ In a footnote he says of Agag’s expected pardon,

This interpretation which respects the text is supported by I Kings 20:31-33, where *tfs + hay* (v.18), to spare and bring to the fore, also occur in connection with a defeated king.⁹⁸

Fokkelman links the word pair of ‘seize’ and ‘alive’ in the statement, Saul ‘seized Agag, king of Amalek, alive’ (*חי + ותפוש*; 1 Sam 15.8), with the same word pair in Ben Hadad’s order to his troops to ‘seize alive’ (*תפשו חיים*; 1 Kgs 20.18) Ahab’s troops, as the basis of his argument that Agag expected release. Fokkelman argues that Agag knew; that because he was ‘seized alive’, he expected pardon when he was brought ‘to the fore’ (before Samuel).

⁹⁵ Barthelemy, p. 188; this reference to Barthelemy is cited by Fokkelman in his notes on the Hebrew text (*The Crossing Fates*, p. 724).

⁹⁶ Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, p.108.

⁹⁷ Fokkelman writes of Agag’s expected pardon, ‘This interpretation which respects the text is supported by 1 Kings 20:30-31 (Ben Hadad’s appeal to Ahab for mercy). . .’ (*The Crossing Fates*, p. 108, note 37).

⁹⁸ Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, p. 108, note 37.

Barthelemy's and Fokkelman's readings heighten the force of an irony when Agag's expectations come undone. Instead of finding mercy from Samuel, as he expects, Agag is chopped into pieces (15.33). Fokkelman says of the surprise:

How different though the outcome, v.33! It is accordingly the main *raison d'être* of 32d that by allowing the hopeful Agag to speak it imparts the effect of a surprise to v.33 and creates a sharp contrast.⁹⁹

That Agag is 'in bonds' does not mean, as Fokkelman suggests, that he cannot approach Samuel in a spirit of brash confidence. However, an image of Agag who approaches Samuel tied up in fetters significantly diminishes the likelihood that he would be cheerful or flippant before his executioner. Smith, following the LXX, suggests Agag came in a state of fear, because it 'would be in accordance with the mind of this writer, to whom Samuel was the imposing and even terrible embodiment of the divine will'.¹⁰⁰ Driver comments that any interpretation that has Agag entering in an optimistic frame of mind challenges the context.¹⁰¹ There is also nothing in the text to suggest that Agag ever expresses any positive demeanour whatsoever, and I read Agag's statement as a hopeful plea, much like Ben Hadad's.

However, in order to read his plea in this manner, the asseverative adverb 'surely' (אֲנִי), which normally precedes a strong assertion of confidence or certainty, requires less assertive force. A precedent for such a use of the adverb אֲנִי may be found in 1 Kings 11.2, which paraphrases a portion of Deuteronomy 7.3-4, by substituting the asseverative adverb אֲנִי in the place of the conjunction וְ in Deuteronomy 7.3-4:

And you shall not intermarry with them. . . . For (וְ) he (they?) will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods . . . (Deut 7.3-4).

This passage is then paraphrased in 1 Kings 11.2, replacing the conjunction וְ with the adverb אֲנִי:

Now Solomon loved many foreign women . . . from the nations which Yahweh said to the sons of Israel, 'You shall not marry them and they shall not marry you, surely (אֲנִי) they will turn your heart after their gods.' (1 Kgs 11.1-2).

⁹⁹ Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, p. 108.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, p. 142.

¹⁰¹ Driver, p. 130.

It is not necessary that כִּי in 1 Kings 11.2 be reduced from a strong asseverative to something like the force of a normal conjunction in order to make sense of its use, but interestingly, the LXX reads 1 Kgs 11.2 in such a manner. It reads 1 Kings 11.2 more like Deuteronomy 7.4 by using the adverb $\mu\eta$ (= Heb. כִּי), expressing the precaution, lest:

οὐκ εἰσελεύσεσθε εἰς αὐτούς καὶ αὐτοὶ οὐκ εἰσελεύσονται εἰς ὑμᾶς $\mu\eta$ ἐκκλίνωσιν τὰς καρδίας (1 Kings 11.2)

לֹא־תִבְאוּ בָהֶם וְהֵם לֹא־יָבֹאוּ בָכֶם
 כִּי יִשׁוּ אֶת־לִבְבְּכֶם

You shall not marry them and they shall not marry you,
 lest they turn your hearts.

When the force of the asseverative adverb כִּי in 1 Samuel 15.32 is reduced to something like the suggested reduced force of $\mu\eta$ in the LXX version of 1 Kings 11.2, Agag's address to Samuel, 'Surely (כִּי) the bitterness of death is past', can be read as an appeal. Thus with the adverbial accusative מֵעֲדָנָי referring to Agag's external state, being brought to Samuel in bonds, Agag's statement may be read as appealing for his life, thereby drawing a parallel with Ben Hadad. But unlike Ben Hadad, whose appeal is granted, Agag's appeal is denied, and he is summarily executed by Samuel.

Confrontation and Judgement

Following their offence, Ahab and Saul are both confronted by prophets about what they have done.¹⁰² Although the confrontations between prophet and king display certain differences, they are alike in three ways: in each confrontation with a prophet (1) the king's guilt needs to be exposed by a prophet; (2) the king is sentenced to

¹⁰² Long, commenting on the confrontation between an unnamed prophet and Ahab, notes the similarity of genre with the confrontations between David and Nathan and Saul and Samuel: 'When read as part of the redacted unity in ch. 20, . . . this report of of a prophecy of punishment recalls a thematic structure evident in the final redacted form of the David and Saul traditions These canonical patterns help us see clearly that this storylike report of prophecy of punishment (whatever its ultimate source may have been) is no independent genre, but a scene in the larger redacted context of ch. 20' (p. 222).

die;¹⁰³ and (3) the king's army is sentenced to destruction. There is also a further similarity of delayed punishment that is unrelated to the prophets' announcements of doom. Ahab and Saul do not suffer their final judgements immediately. Saul is allowed to live for an extended period of time, although as Yahweh's victim both of torture by an evil spirit, and of blind jealousy by David's rise in influence and power (brought about by Yahweh). Ahab is allowed to live for at least three more years (cf. 1 Kgs 22.1), but he too becomes Yahweh's victim by a spirit of deceit sent by Yahweh.

The element of exposing the king's guilt is not unique to the cases of Ahab and Saul but is also a key element in Nathan's confrontation with David (cf. 2 Sam 12.1-6). In Ahab's confrontation with the unidentified prophet masquerading as a wounded soldier (1 Kgs 20.31-42), he falls victim to a juridical parable. Like Nathan tricking David into sentencing himself with his parable of the ewe lamb, the prophet tricks Ahab into sentencing himself with a parable portraying a case of military oversight. In his confrontation with Samuel, who engages Saul in a cross-examination type dialogue,¹⁰⁴ Saul slides deeper and deeper into guilt by repeated denials until he finally acknowledges his sin. The differences between the two confrontations are significant in that it takes Samuel a significant amount of time to convince Saul that he has no excuse. His violation of Yahweh's order to annihilate Amalek completely cannot be excused for any reason, and Saul is made to look more and more foolish with each denial until he confesses.¹⁰⁵ In contrast to Saul, Ahab is rendered speechless by the prophet's cunning, and he simply goes home in a bad mood. While Ahab is not brought to any formal confession as Saul is, his complete silence, and his departure in apparent defeat ('sullen and vexed' [1 Kgs 20.43]) following the prophet's sentence ('it will be your life for his life, and your people for

¹⁰³ Samuel's judgement, 'Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from your hand today and has given it to your neighbor who is better than you' (1 Sam 15.28), was not understood by Saul to imply his death, his son's death and the death of many in his army until the day before his death (1 Sam 28.17). See discussion below:

¹⁰⁴ The description of Samuel's questioning of Saul as a 'cross-examination' is taken from B. C. Birch, *The Rise of the Israelite Monarchy: The Growth and Development of I Samuel 7-15* (SBL Dissertation Series 27; Missoula, Montana: Scholar's Press, 1976), p. 100.

¹⁰⁵ I will discuss Saul's guilt in this matter in chapter 4 below.

his people' [1 Kgs 20.42]) suggests a tacit 'confession' by his acceptance, although in resignation, of the prophet's judgement. In what follows I will discuss the similarities between the judgements that each king receives as set out in the following charts.

Judgement on Ahab (1 Kings 20)	Judgement on Saul (1 Samuel 15, 28)
20.42a ויאמר אליו כה אמר יהוה	15.22a ויאמר שמואל...
	15.23b יען מאסת את דבר יהוה וימאסך במלך
	15.28 ויאמר אליו שמואל קרע יהוה את ממלכות מעליך היום...
	28.17 ויקרע יהוה את הממלכה מידך...
42b יען שלחת את איש חרמי מיד	28.18a כאשר לא שמעת בקול יהוה ולא עשית חרון אפו בעמלק
42c והיתה נפשך תחת נפשו ועמך תחת עמו	28.19 ויתן יהוה גם את ישראל עמך ביד פלשתים ומחר אתה ובניך עמי גם את מחנה ישראל יתן יהוה ביד פלשתים

Judgement on Ahab	Judgement on Saul
20.42a And he said to him, 'Thus says Yahweh ...'	15.22a And Samuel said ...
	15.23b Because you have rejected the word of Yahweh, he has rejected you from being king.
	15.28 Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day ...
	28.17 Yahweh has torn the kingdom from your hand ...
42b Because you have sent out the man of my ban	28.18a because you did not obey the voice of Yahweh and you did not execute his fierce wrath on Amalek ...
42c it will be your life for his life and your people for his people.	28.19 And Yahweh will also give Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Indeed, the camp of Israel Yahweh will give into the hand of the Philistines

Judgement on Ahab and Saul and Their Armies

The judgement pronounced against Ahab that he and his 'people' will die because Ahab released Ben Hadad is similar to the judgement pronounced by the ghost of Samuel against Saul on the day before Saul's death that he and 'the camp of Israel' would die because he had not exacted Yahweh's fierce anger on Amalek (1 Sam

28.18). Viewing the accounts of their crimes side by side reveals an asymmetry between the ending of the two stories of their violations of the ban, however. While there is judgement announced immediately upon Ahab and his army, following Samuel's confrontation with the king in 1 Samuel 15, there is no judgement announced immediately upon Saul and his army that they would pay with their lives for their crimes, or Saul's. The judgement upon Saul for violating the ban is announced to him by Samuel, 'Yahweh has torn the kingdom from your hand today' (v. 28). Saul's desperate grasping and accidental tearing of Samuel's robe is used symbolically by Samuel to describe Saul's judgement. The full meaning of this symbol is not realised until 1 Samuel 28. 1 Samuel 28.17-19 connects the 'tearing the kingdom' from Saul's hand to a death sentence on Saul and his sons *and* his people.

When Saul first heard the sentence, 'Yahweh has torn the kingdom from your hand today' (1 Sam 15.28), he did not know that the 'tearing of the kingdom' would, in the end, amount to a death sentence on him, his sons and his army. As he hears these words again from Samuel's ghost, he learns—perhaps for the first time, as does the reader—that he will forfeit his kingship by death, and that his sons and many of his troops will die along with him—all because of violating the ban in 1 Samuel 15.

An important difference between the judgements upon Saul and Ahab is that Saul's dynasty is eradicated for his violation of the ban, while Ahab's dynasty is not (Ahab's dynasty is eradicated for his crime against Naboth). This difference draws attention to the severity of Saul's punishment and to questions about Yahweh's fairness.¹⁰⁶

Delayed Punishment

A further similarity exists between the two kings in the matter of their sentencing: the judgements announced against both Ahab (1 Kgs 20.42) and Saul (1 Sam 15.28) do not take immediate effect. Saul's death does not occur until long after his

¹⁰⁶ I will discuss the issue of Yahweh's fairness in chapter 4.

violation of the ban, and Ahab's death occurs long after he heard the judgement upon him from the unidentified prophet. In fact, 1 Kings 22.37-38 makes it very clear in that Ahab did not die because of what he did not do to Ben Hadad but because of what he did to Naboth.

Technically speaking, both sentences carried in them a stay of execution. Although Samuel tells Saul that Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from your hand *today* (1 Sam 15.28), he retains the throne until the actual tearing of the kingdom from his hand is accomplished at his death (1 Sam 31). 1 Samuel 15 does not tell us why Saul remains king, but it offers a signal to the reader that Yahweh may have given him a reprieve. This is shown in three ways: by Saul's request for a pardon from Samuel ('I pray, please pardon my sin . . .' [v. 25]); by his double confession ('I have sinned' [vv. 24, 30]); and by Samuel's decision to grant Saul's request 'to honour' him before the people by publicly returning with Saul (vv. 30-31). Foresti believes that Saul's confession is the first of a series regnal confessions (i.e. David [2 Sam 12.13; 2 Sam 24.10], Ahab [1 Kgs 21.27] and Josiah [2 Kgs 22.11, 18-20]) that form a 'Motif of the Repentant King' developed by the prophetic redactor of the Deuteronomistic History (DtrP). Foresti's comment helps explain the postponement of judgement upon Saul:

Towards the end of 1 Sm 15, in vv. 30f. the scene of the repentance of Saul is briefly dealt with: the king confesses his sin, v. 30aa and induces Samuel to follow him while he makes an act of adoration to Yahweh. The presence of Samuel by the side of Saul, during the public act of cult (cf. v. 30ab), signifies an official recognition of Saul as king. It implies that the sentence of deposition pronounced by Samuel shortly before, v. 23b, is momentarily suspended and delayed because of the repentance of Saul. For DtrP, an act of repentance has the power to retard, if not to commute, the divine punishment.¹⁰⁷

This unknowing of the particulars of the sentencing (i.e., the time when Saul will lose the throne) that is itself part of the sentence provides an element of suspense. The fact that Saul does not lose the kingdom 'today' is significant. What is said does not happen (as 'in the day you eat of the fruit you shall die' in Genesis). Not knowing when he will lose the kingdom tortures Saul (as does an evil spirit from

¹⁰⁷ Foresti, p. 136-37.

Yahweh [1 Sam 16.14-15]). The reader might also wonder when Saul will meet his end. In his pronouncement of judgement, Samuel told Saul the kingdom would be given to 'your neighbour who is better than you' (1 Sam 15.28), but this neighbour's identity is not given. Because of this, for Saul every day would carry with it the promise of overthrow. Although Saul deduced later that David was 'the neighbour'—'Behold, I know that you surely will be king' (1 Sam 24.21)—he did not know if he would be overthrown by coup, or by death, until he had a medium conjure up the ghost of Samuel at Endor. Gunn suggests that Saul's erratic behaviour toward David throughout his kingship relates to his not knowing the particulars about losing the throne. He writes:

Saul knows that he and his house are rejected. He 'knows', however, nothing else concerning either his designated successor or the appointed manner of his removal from office. He knows everything yet he knows nothing! He certainly does not 'know' that David is the neighbour who is better than he. David himself is made aware of his role by Samuel; Jonathan is blessed . . . with a sure insight into the identity of the successor; Saul is left with little but his suspicions. Why—to repeat our question—does Saul refuse to surrender his kingdom gracefully? One simple answer, therefore, would be that he does not know when, and to whom, and how, he should surrender it! ¹⁰⁸

Saul's problems as king reveal him to be like the tragic protagonist who is forced to manoeuvre between the opposing spheres of divine determinism and human responsibility.¹⁰⁹ His untimely sacrifice, which initiates Yahweh's judgement, appears to involve both spheres: he acts irresponsibly, but he appears to have been forced to do so by Samuel's failure to show up. Then when he violates the ban, he begs for forgiveness, but is refused. From that moment on, Saul becomes a victim of the deity by an evil spirit from above, but we wonder if Saul had been determined beforehand to be the scapegoat to suffer for Israel's demand for a king.¹¹⁰

In contrast to Saul, Ahab is told clearly that he would die for his crime (1 Kgs 20.42). However, Ahab's life also is prolonged, even though there is no hint that he might have been repentant for having released Ben Hadad. In fact, the opposite is true. Following his sentencing by the prophet for having violated the ban, Ahab

¹⁰⁸ Gunn, p. 121.

¹⁰⁹ See Exum, who sees Saul's trials as king as representative of what she calls the 'tragic vision'; pp. 16-44 (chapter on Saul).

¹¹⁰ See Exum on Saul as a tragic protagonist; pp. 16-44 (chapter on Saul).

heads home to Samaria in a foul mood, 'sullen and vexed', but there is little evidence that he, like Saul, behaves as if there is dark cloud of judgement hanging over him, or even that Yahweh has forsaken him. Ahab repents (and, unlike Saul, Yahweh does treat him with favour), but it is not for violating the ban; he repents for the murder of Naboth. His repentance wins him a temporary reprieve, but in the end, Ahab and his sons end up like Saul and his sons. The sentence he received for releasing Ben Hadad is not mentioned again in the story, but perhaps it is because this sentence is superseded by the death sentence pronounced upon Ahab and his house for the murder of Naboth.

Set(ting)

A final similarity between the stories of the crimes of Ahab and Saul is a lexical similarity that provides a unique context within the stories of the ban. 1 Kings 20.12 and 1 Samuel 15.2 both contain the technical verb $\square\psi$ (to set)—used only in these two stories—which may establish the reason for Yahweh's actions through Ahab and Saul.

Each king's crime has its setting in war, but the military circumstances in each story are different. Ahab's story concerns two battles that he has with the Arameans (1 Kgs 20) in which he twice escapes annihilation when Yahweh intervenes, while Saul's story concerns his battle with the Amalekites (1 Kgs 15) which is commanded by Yahweh and designated as retaliation for the Amalekite's treatment of Israel during its journey from Egypt to the promised land. However, a closer reading reveals a significant link by a technical use of the verb $\square\psi$ ('to set') used only in these two stories within the DH (cf. Ezek 23.24). The verb represents an action by Israel's enemies against Israel that initiates Yahweh's official military response through Ahab and Saul. Yahweh commissions Saul via Samuel to annihilate the Amalekites for what they did to Israel 'when he (the Amalekites) *set* against him (Israel) in the way' ($\square\psi$ לו בדרך [1 Sam 15.2]), while his

involvement with Ahab (initiated through ‘a certain prophet’ [1 Kgs 20.13]) against Aram follows immediately after Ben Hadad orders his troops to ‘set’ against the already besieged Samaria: ‘And he (Ben Hadad) said to his servants, “Set!” And they set against the city’ (ויאמר אל עבדיו שימו וישמו על העיר) [20.12]). In military terms, Yahweh’s action against the Arameans via Ahab is primarily defensive, while his action against the Amalekites via Saul is a retaliatory offensive attack. The link between the two stories by the verb שים is shown below.

1 Samuel 15.2	1 Kings 20.12
פקדתי את אשר עשה עמלק לישראל אשר שם לו בדרך בעלתו ממצרים	ויהי כשמוע את הדבר הזה ויאמר אל עבדיו שימו וישמו על העיר
I will attend to what Amalek did to Israel, when he <u>set</u> against him in the way when he came up from Egypt.	And it was when he heard this word, he said to his servants, ‘ <u>Set!</u> ’ And they <u>set</u> against the city.

Several scholars have compared the two verses as they relate to the use of שים. As noted by Foresti in his study on 1 Samuel 15, the lexical connection of שים in the two verses shown above has been treated by various scholars regarding its priority and its semantic root.¹¹¹ 1 Samuel 15.2 is partly a paraphrase of Deuteronomy 25.17-18, which uses קרה instead of שים to describe Amalek’s action against Israel:

17 זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים
18 אשר קרב בדרך

17 Remember what Amalek did to you when you came up from Egypt ;
18 when he met you (קרב) in the way. . .

Foresti believes that in referencing Deuteronomy 25. 17-18a, the composer of 1 Samuel 15 borrowed the term שים from 1 Kings 20.12, since שים in 1 Kings 20.12 more clearly defines Amalek’s action against Israel given in Deuteronomy 25. 17-18a. Foresti retains the term שים in 1 Samuel 15.2 because, in his words, it serves

¹¹¹ See Foresti, pp. 93-95.

best as a *lectio deficiior* substituting the more generic term קרה uttered by Moses in Deuteronomy 25.17-18a.¹¹²

McCarter takes an opposing view, even changing the MT of 1 Samuel 15.2 from שם to קרה, in order to reflect the sense of Deuteronomy 25.18a. He believes that שם in the MT is a transitive verb requiring an object which has somehow been overlooked or disappeared in textual transmission: ‘MT has . . . “when he placed [שם]. . . against him on the road,” as if something has fallen out of the text.’¹¹³ McCarter also disagrees with those who retain the verb in its present context in 1 Samuel 15.2 based on its technical use in 1 Kgs 20.12,¹¹⁴ where, as in 1 Sam 15.2, it stands as an intransitive . He says:

Attempts to recover an obscure military usage of *sym*, “place,” by reference to the highly corrupt text of I Kings 20:12 fail completely. . . MT remains unexplained.¹¹⁵

McCarter’s argument over the suitability of שם in the story of Saul’s sparing of King Agag highlights a debate between historical critics that cannot be resolved, but I have included it here in order to underscore an important contribution to the thematic echoes between the stories of Ahab and Saul. The use of שם establishes a lexical-thematic connection with the story of Ahab’s sparing of King Ben Hadad in that the verb signals an action by foreign enemies against Israel against which Yahweh personally retaliates. The verbs serve to link the stories of similar crimes committed by two of Israel’s most (in)famous kings by establishing a unique context for the crimes. My argument is supported by Foresti, who, arguing for the priority of 1 Kings 20 over 1 Samuel 15 based on this verbal link between the two stories, adds additional support by appealing to the *thematic* similarity between the two stories:

It follows [i.e., the link between the two chapters based on the verb שם] that 1 Kgs 20 was well known to the DtrP, who could have taken from 1 Kgs 20 the expression we find in 1 Sm 15:2ba [אשר שם לו בדרך]. This becomes all the more probable in view of a certain analogy which exists between the two

¹¹² Foresti, p. 95.

¹¹³ P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes & Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), p. 260.

¹¹⁴ E.g., McCarter disagrees with Wellhausen (p. 96) and Driver (p. 122), who both designate שם to be a technical military term.

¹¹⁵ McCarter, p. 260.

accounts, insofar as the king of Israel spared the life of Ben-Hadad, king of Aram (vv. 34-43), who was part of the *herem* to be devoted to Yahweh.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Foresti, p. 95.

Ahab and David: Opposites Meet

In the preceding sections highlighting the similarities between Ahab and Solomon and Ahab and Saul, we saw that Ahab's ties with Solomon are foreshadowed primarily by a close similarity of their regnal summaries. The summaries were shown to diverge from a pattern of the summaries of every other king of Israel by singling them out as the only kings to violate the commandment against foreign marriages, leading them and their nation into worshipping foreign idols. In the section highlighting the similarities between Ahab and Saul, we saw that Ahab's similarity to Saul lies in their violation of the ban and extending mercy to enemy kings. In the following section, the similarities between Ahab and David are found in the story of Naboth's Vineyard. It mirrors almost exactly the story of David and Bathsheba—drawing the two kings together in a criminal relationship through stories of coveting and murder, resulting in the theft of property belonging to a commoner.

The close similarity between the story of Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kgs 21) and the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 11-12), and their relationship to each other, has been noted by Soggin¹¹⁷ and White¹¹⁸, but only White has demonstrated these relationships in some detail. White believes the story of David and Bathsheba is 'borrowed' by 'a supporter of King Jehu' and used as a narrative template in order to create the present story of Naboth's Vineyard in 1 Kings 21 as an expansion upon Ahab's crime against Naboth reported in 2 Kings 9.25-26.¹¹⁹

The brief account of Ahab's crime against Naboth in 2 Kings 9.25-26 differs in some significant ways from the story of Naboth's Vineyard in 1 Kings 21. The

¹¹⁷ *A History of Ancient Israel from the Beginnings to the Bar Kochba Revolt, A.D. 135* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), p. 207.

¹¹⁸ 'Naboth's Vineyard and Jehu's Coup: The Legitimation of a Dynastic Extermination', *VT* 64 (1994), pp. 66-76.

¹¹⁹ White, p. 76.

account in 2 Kings briefly recalls the murder of Naboth *and* his sons. In addition, it omits all of the following: the mention of a vineyard, a theft of property, the judicial murder of Naboth as contrived by Jezebel, Elijah's confrontation with Ahab, and any sweeping announcement of judgement against Ahab's house. In the light of the differences, many historical critics, including White, regard the account of Naboth's Vineyard in 1 Kings 21 suspect in providing an account of an historical event. For White, the evidence against the story of Naboth's Vineyard as the original version is bolstered further by its very close resemblance to the story of David and Bathsheba.

Apart from any historical merit White's argument may have, her observations about Davidic borrowings help demonstrate the significant literary similarities that accrue between David and Ahab for any reader familiar with David's crime. Since the account of Naboth's Vineyard recalls David's crime step by step, it must be asked what effect this has on the reader's evaluation of both Ahab and David. The vineyard story invites a comparison between David and Ahab and the consequences of nearly identical crimes committed by the leaders of Israel's two most powerful dynasties. In what follows I will examine the parallels between Ahab and David in the stories of David and Bathsheba and Naboth's Vineyard, highlight significant features in their relationship, and conclude with a discussion of some possible purposes for the Davidic parallel in the context of the story of Ahab. The following chart of the similarities between David and Ahab are based primarily upon White's study. I have included the Hebrew where the parallels are identical in terms of the language used or where the links between the two stories are most important in terms of parallel actions.

<p align="center">David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12)</p>	<p align="center">Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21.1-22.40)</p>
<p align="center"><i>Coveting</i></p> <p>David covets another man's property (Bathsheba) adjacent to the king's palace (vv.2-3).</p>	<p align="center"><i>Coveting</i></p> <p>Ahab covets another man's property (vineyard) adjacent to the king's palace (vv. 1-2).</p>
<p align="center"><i>Conspiracy</i></p> <p>A royal letter is sent by David to Joab with orders to have Uriah murdered (vv. 14-15).</p> <p align="center">ויכתב דוד ספר . . . וישלח 'And David wrote a letter. . . and he sent. . .' ויכתב בספר לאמר. . . ומת 'And he wrote in the letter saying. . . "so that he dies." A message is sent back to David of the deed done (v. 18)</p> <p align="center">וישלח יואב . . . לדוד 'And Joab sent to David. . .'</p>	<p align="center"><i>Conspiracy</i></p> <p>A royal letter is sent by Jezebel/Ahab to the elders and nobles of Jezreel with orders to have Naboth murdered (vv. 9-10).</p> <p align="center">ותכתב ספרים . . . ותשלח 'And she wrote letters. . . and she sent. . .' ותכתב בספרים לאמר. . . ומת 'And she wrote in the letters saying. . . "so that he will die." A message is sent back to Jezebel of the deed done (v. 14)</p> <p align="center">וישלחו אל-איזבל 'And they sent to Jezebel. . .'</p>
<p align="center"><i>Threefold Report of Murder</i></p> <p>Uriah's murder is carried out and reported by the narrator (v. 17).</p> <p align="center">וימת גם אוריה החתי 'And Uriah the Hittite also died.'</p>	<p align="center"><i>Threefold Report of Murder</i></p> <p>Naboth's murder is carried out and reported by the narrator (v. 13).</p> <p align="center">ויסקלוהו באבנים וימת 'And they stoned him with stones and he died.'</p>
<p>A report of Uriah's murder is sent to David (v. 21).</p> <p align="center">ואמרת גם עבדך אוריה החתי מת 'And you [the messenger] shall say, "Also your servant Uriah the Hittite died." '</p>	<p>A report of Naboth's murder is sent to Jezebel (v. 14).</p> <p align="center">וישלחו אל-איזבל לאמר סקל נבות וימת 'And they sent to Jezebel saying, "Naboth was stoned and he died." '</p>
<p>The report of Uriah's murder is received by David (vv. 23-24).</p> <p align="center">ויאמר. . . וגם עבדך אוריה החתי מת 'And he said [to David], "And also your servant Uriah the Hittite died." '</p>	<p>The report of Naboth's murder is received by Jezebel and Ahab (vv. 15, 16).</p> <p align="center">ויהי כשמע איזבל כי-סקל נבות וימת 'And it was when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned and that he died. . .' ויהי כשמע אחאב כי מת נבות 'And it was when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead. . .'</p>
<p align="center"><i>Theft</i></p> <p>David takes possession of the coveted property as soon as he was able following the report of Uriah's murder (v. 27).</p> <p align="center">וישלח דוד ויאספה אל-ביתו ותהי-לו לאשה 'And David sent and he gathered her (Bathsheba) to his house, and she became his wife.'</p>	<p align="center"><i>Theft</i></p> <p>Ahab takes possession of the coveted property immediately following the report of Naboth's murder (v. 16).</p> <p align="center">ויקם אחאב לרדת אל-כרם נבות הזרעאלי לרשתו 'And Ahab rose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to possess it.'</p>
<p align="center"><i>Prophetic Confrontation</i></p> <p>The prophet Nathan confronts David concerning his crime (1 Sam 12.1-14).</p>	<p align="center"><i>Prophetic Confrontation</i></p> <p>The prophet Elijah confronts Ahab concerning his crime (vv. 17-24).</p>

<p><i>Sentencing & Arraignment</i> David is sentenced to death (vv. 5, 7). David is indicted for murder and theft (v. 9). את אוריה החתי הכית בחרב ואת-אשתו לקחת לך לאשה ‘Uriah the Hittite you have killed with the sword, and his wife you have taken for your wife.’</p>	<p><i>Arraignment & Sentencing</i> Ahab is indicted for murder and theft (v. 19a). הרצחת וגם-ירשת ‘Have you murdered and also taken possession?’ Ahab is sentenced to death (v. 19b).</p>
<p><i>Dynastic Punishment</i> David’s house is cursed with internal strife (vv. 11-12).</p>	<p><i>Dynastic Punishment</i> Ahab’s house is cursed with extermination (vv. 21-24).</p>
<p><i>Regnal Contrition</i> David repents (v. 13a).</p>	<p><i>Regnal Contrition</i> Ahab repents (v. 27).</p>
<p><i>Divine Leniency</i> Deferral of David’s punishment due to repentance (vv. 13-14).</p>	<p><i>Divine Leniency</i> Stay of punishment on Ahab’s house due to repentance (vv. 28-29a).</p>
<p><i>Judgement</i> Exactment of David’s punishment on David’s son (v. 18). Exactment of punishment on David’s house (rape of Tamar, murder of Amnon, rape of David’s wives, murder of Absalom [2 Sam 13.1-19.43])</p>	<p><i>Judgement</i> Exactment of punishment on Ahab (1 Kgs 22.1-40). Exactment of punishment on Ahab’s house (21.29b; 2 Kgs 9-10).</p>

Comparison of Crimes

Coveting

The stories of David and Bathsheba and Naboth's Vineyard both begin with a king coveting another man's property in immediate proximity to his palace. From the roof of his house David sees Bathsheba bathing, and after determining her identity as 'the wife of Uriah the Hittite', he 'sent messengers; and he took her, and she came to him; and he lay with her' (2 Sam 11.2-4). David's adultery is then complicated by Bathsheba's pregnancy and he attempts (without success) to cover his crime by recalling Uriah from the battlefield in order to have him spend the night with his wife. However, Uriah refuses to go home, stating his refusal by means of an oath: 'By your life and by the life of your soul I will not do this thing' (v. 11).

Ahab, too, covets another man's property, in his case, the vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite which is situated 'right next to his house' (1 Kgs 21.2).¹²⁰ Ahab wants it so that he can turn it into a vegetable garden, and he offers Naboth in return either a replacement vineyard better than it or money (v. 2). Like Uriah, Naboth refuses with an oath: 'Far be it from me by Yahweh that I should give to you the inheritance of my fathers' (v. 3). Thus in both stories, each victim seals his fate with an oath, refusing to yield to their king's wishes. The oaths of refusal by both victims are also the last words they speak.

Conspiracy

At this point in both stories David and Jezebel write and send letters calling for the murders of Uriah and Naboth, employing individuals of the highest rank to carry out the deeds in the name of the king, and choosing public arenas to dispose of their

¹²⁰ Y. Zakovitch ('The Tale of Naboth's Vineyard: 1 Kings 21', in Meir Weiss, *The Bible from Within: The Method of Total Interpretation* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984], pp. 379-405) suggests that the use of the term for 'palace', *הבית*, which is used in the Hebrew Bible 'almost exclusively to denote the sanctuary of the LORD' may be 'intended to point up the magnificence of Ahab's palace – so grand it can only be referred to in terms befitting the Divine abode – and thus convey the idea that the king's wealth is so great that he lacks nothing, and surely has no need of Naboth's property' (p. 384). Cf. also, Rofé ('The Vineyard of Naboth: The Origin and Message of the Story', *VT* 38 [1988], pp. 89-104) on the difference between the king and Naboth effected by the adjacency of their property: 'This is the contrast between bare necessity and luxury, lying at the basis of the plot' (p. 90).

victims to make the murders less suspicious. The chart below illustrates the close correspondence of the parallel language used in the narratives and helps underscore the parallels between the actions of David and Jezebel.

<i>Conspiracy</i>	<i>Conspiracy</i>
A royal letter is sent by David to Joab with orders to have Uriah murdered (2 Sam 11.14-15).	A royal letter is sent by Jezebel to the elders and nobles of Jezreel with orders to have Naboth murdered (1 Kgs 21.9-10).
ויכתב דוד ספר . . . וישלח	ותכתב ספרים . . . ותשלח
‘And David wrote a letter. . . and he sent. . .’	‘And she wrote letters. . . and she sent. . .’
ויכתב בספר לאמר . . . ומת	ותכתב בספרים לאמר . . . ומת
‘And he wrote in the letter saying. . . “so that he dies.”’	‘And she wrote in the letters saying. . . “so that he will die.”’
A message is sent back to David of the murder done (v. 18)	A message is sent back to Jezebel of the murder done (v. 14)
וישלח יואב . . . לדוד	וישלחו אל-איזבל
‘And Joab sent to David. . .’	‘And they sent to Jezebel. . .’

David takes direct action to kill Uriah because he is unable to cover his crime of adultery, not because he wants to steal his wife.¹²¹ But with Uriah’s refusal to go home to Bathsheba, David’s only recourse to hide his crime is to take her as his wife, which means killing Uriah. With Naboth’s refusal to give his vineyard to Ahab, the king goes home, ‘sullen and vexed’ (1 Kgs 21.4). His mood leads to Naboth’s death, although indirectly. It is not Ahab’s *expressed* intention to kill Naboth, but Jezebel’s. When she finds out that Ahab is distraught because Naboth refused to give him his vineyard, she plots Naboth’s death.

Jezebel, rather than Ahab, takes direct action to kill Naboth so that her role in Naboth’s murder parallels David’s role in Uriah’s murder. Jezebel’s ability to carry out her plan suggests that she has significant political power as queen, but it need not suggest that Ahab is a weak ruler, as some have put forth.¹²² Brenner suggests that both ruled—Jezebel had her own authority, but she did not have sole authority.¹²³ She writes, ‘Jezebel was a real queen, assistant and partner in government to her husband

¹²¹ Exum writes: ‘David does not have Uriah killed out of desire to have Bathsheba for himself—for letting Uriah think the child his own would solve his problem—but because he has no other way to conceal his adultery with Bathsheba, since Uriah refuses to “go down to his house”’ (pp. 127-28).

¹²² E.g., Walsh suggests that Ahab is a passive king who yields to Jezebel’s more assertive character: ‘Ahab may hold kingship in Israel, but it is Jezebel who will act’ (p. 321).

¹²³ Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), pp. 20-21.

Ahab. . . . Her activities were limited to internal affairs; international and military matters were outside her sphere of influence'.¹²⁴ Her use of Ahab's name and Ahab's seal suggests their partnership (1 Kgs 21.8), but Jezebel's role becomes submerged in Ahab, since he alone is held accountable for Naboth's murder. Indeed, the text suggests Ahab's role in the murder by means of his restatement to Jezebel of his failed negotiations with Naboth.¹²⁵ In 1 Kings 21.6, Ahab misrepresents his negotiations with Naboth in response to his wife's queries about his depressed state. Naboth's stated refusal to grant Ahab the vineyard is based solely on its ancestral status as patrimony ('the inheritance of my fathers' [v. 3]). Ahab's restatement, however, first mentions that Naboth refused to sell it 'for money', and then, that he refused to accept a 'better' vineyard in exchange (v. 6). Thus, Jezebel bases her scheme on Ahab's distortion.¹²⁶ The chart below demonstrates Ahab's altered discourse with Naboth.

Ahab's Negotiations with Naboth (1 Kgs 21.2-3)	Ahab's Restatement to Jezebel (1 Kgs 21.6)
<i>Ahab:</i> 'Give me your vineyard. . . and I will give you a better one in return (v. 2a), or if it is good in your eyes, I will give you money for its price' (v. 2b).	<i>Ahab:</i> 'Give me your vineyard for money (v. 6a), or if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard' (v. 6b).
<i>Naboth:</i> 'Far be it from me by Yahweh that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers' (v. 3).	<i>Naboth:</i> 'I will not give you my vineyard' (v. 6c).

While it may be difficult to determine whether Ahab deliberately distorts Naboth's reply or subconsciously distorts it because he does not understand the emotional value of the vineyard, I suggest that it is deliberate based on Jezebel's statement following Naboth's death. When Jezebel informs Ahab of Naboth's death, she calls the vineyard 'the vineyard. . . which he refused to give to you for money' (v. 15, emphasis added), reproducing Ahab's account that put money first. Jezebel's rearticulation of Ahab's

¹²⁴ Brenner, pp. 20, 23.

¹²⁵ Walsh asks, 'Is the king merely passive or is he cleverly manipulating Jezebel into doing his dirty work?' (p. 321).

¹²⁶ Zakovitch writes, 'The king does not mention to his wife the deep emotional attachment of Naboth to his only piece of inherited property; to him Naboth's property is nothing but a vineyard which he wishes to turn into a vegetable garden, and he knows that this, at most, is what will interest Jezebel' (p. 388).

words suggests that they have been the impetus behind her murderous action, and thus, that Ahab calculated her response.¹²⁷

The subtle suggestion of Ahab's role in Naboth's murder provides the only clue supporting Yahweh's judgement against him that he alone is responsible for Naboth's murder ('Have you murdered and also taken possession?' 1 Kgs 21.19), unless Jezebel's use of Ahab's name and his seal on her letters presents a clue to a joint conspiracy. Nowhere is Naboth ever *designated* as Jezebel's victim. Even the story of her death omits any direct mention of Naboth (it may be that it is ultimately the king's responsibility about what his queen does). Yahweh commissions Jehu to carry out her execution 'for the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all the servants of Yahweh by the hand of Jezebel' (2 Kgs 9.7).¹²⁸ The text presents Ahab as solely responsible for Naboth's murder, making Ahab like David, who is held solely responsible for Uriah's murder (2 Sam 12.9).

The Report of Murder

In both stories the report of the murder is presented in identical ways:

<p><i>Threefold Report of Murder</i> Uriah's murder is carried out and reported by the narrator (v. 17).</p> <p>וימת גם אוריה החתי 'And Uriah the Hittite also died.'</p>	<p><i>Threefold Report of Murder</i> Naboth's murder is carried out and reported by the narrator (v. 13).</p> <p>ויסקלוהו באבנים וימת 'And they stoned him with stones and he died.'</p>
<p>A report of Uriah's murder is sent to David (v. 21).</p> <p>ואמרת גם עבדך אוריה החתי מת 'And you (the messenger) shall say, "Also your servant Uriah the Hittite died."'</p>	<p>A report of Naboth's murder is sent to Jezebel (v. 14).</p> <p>וישלחו אל-איזבל לאמר סקל נבות וימת 'And they sent to Jezebel saying, "Naboth was stoned and he died."'</p>

¹²⁷So also Zakovitch: 'The king knows his queen's scale of values; the correctness of his appraisal becomes evident in verse 15 when Jezebel herself reveals that money – and not land – is her highest priority. . . .' (p. 386). Cf. also Napier: 'Was it really Jezebel who did it? Ahab knew. Ahab knew' ('The Inheritance and the Problem of Adjacency: An Essay on I Kings 21', *Interpretation* 30 [1976], pp. 3-11; p. 10). Walsh writes, 'If anyone induces anyone, Ahab induces Jezebel by his petulant behavior and misleads her by misreporting Naboth's speech' (p. 333).

¹²⁸For historical critics, Ahab's sole responsibility for the crime represents a major problem in harmonising the crime with the punishment that follows. Rofé writes, 'The main critical problem of the whole chapter is the inconsistency of crime and punishment. The passive Ahab is castigated: the active criminals are not even mentioned, let alone denounced' (p. 95).

<p>The report of Uriah's murder is received by David (v. 23-24).</p> <p>וַיֹּאמֶר . . . וְגַם עַבְדְּךָ אֲוִרְיָה הַחִתִּי מֵת</p> <p>'And he said (to David), "And also your servant Uriah the Hittite died."'</p>	<p>The report of Naboth's murder is received by Jezebel and Ahab (v. 15, 16).</p> <p>וַיְהִי כַשְׁמֹעַ אִיזְבֵּל כִּי־סָקַל נָבוֹת וַיָּמָת</p> <p>'And it was when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned and that he died. . .'</p> <p>וַיְהִי כַשְׁמֹעַ אַחָאָב כִּי מָת נָבוֹת</p> <p>'And it was when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead. . .'</p>
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First, the narrator reports that the murder is carried out exactly according to the planned conspiracy (2 Sam 11.17; 1 Kgs 21.13). Second, the henchmen (Joab; the elders and nobles of Jezreel) send the report of death back to the perpetrators that the deed had been done (2 Sam 11.18, 21; 1 Kgs 21.14). Third, the report of the victim's death is heard and received by the perpetrators (David in 2 Sam 11.24; Jezebel and Ahab in 1 Kgs 21.15, 16).

Theft

In both stories, the kings take possession of the coveted property as soon as possible. Immediately following Bathsheba's time of mourning, 'David sent and gathered her to his house and she became his wife' (2 Sam 11.27a). The text uses the terms '*gathered* her to his house' (in contrast to 'he *took* her' in reference to his adultery), suggesting a collecting into his harem. Hertzberg comments, 'David has thus achieved his aim. Bathsheba makes the necessary lamentation and is then—probably very soon, as on an earlier occasion in the case of Abigail (I. 25)—brought by David to his house'.¹²⁹ Upon hearing that Naboth was dead, 'Ahab rose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to possess it' (1 Kgs 21.16b).

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Theft</i></p> <p>David takes possession of the coveted property as soon possible after the report of Uriah's murder (v. 27).</p> <p>וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד וַיֹּאסֶפֶה אֶל־בֵּיתָהּ וַתְּהִי־לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה</p> <p>'And David sent and he gathered her (Bathsheba) to his house, and she became his wife.'</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Theft</i></p> <p>Ahab takes possession of the coveted property as soon as possible after the report of Naboth's murder (v. 16).</p> <p>וַיָּקָם אַחָאָב לָרֶדֶת אֶל־כַּרְם נָבוֹת הַיִּזְרְעֵאלִי לְרִשְׁתּוֹ</p> <p>'And Ahab rose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to possess it.'</p>
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¹²⁹Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1964), p. 312.

In addition to the announcement that both kings took quick action to claim the coveted property, the narrator employs rhetorical means to accentuate further Ahab's and David's callousness with regard to their crimes. David's response to possess Bathsheba as soon as possible is coupled with his easy dismissal of Uriah's death. Joab orders to his messenger to expect that David will become irritated and scold him for a tactic that recalls Abimelek's folly (2 Sam 11.18-21). But the expected tirade from David never materialises.¹³⁰ The text leads us to expect that Joab will receive some kind of tongue-lashing from David for his inexcusable generalship in fighting so close to the walls of the city of Rabbah, a tactic which leads to the deaths of 'some of the servants of David' and Uriah (11.17). Fokkelman says, 'The king's fit of rage which Joab had anticipated does not occur. The whole speech . . . which is the rendering of David's [expected] rage, is a portrait of David which is refuted by reality.'¹³¹ Instead, David simply orders Joab's messenger to tell Joab, 'Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes, for the sword eats whomever it will. . . .' (v. 25), and by doing so, eases his own conscience that the end justifies the means.¹³² Fokkelman also suggests that Joab's reference to Abimelek's death by the hand of a woman may have been 'a flash of intuition on Joab's part', linking Abimelek with Uriah in that both died on account of a woman.¹³³ However, at the very least, Joab anticipated some gesture of remorse from David, but it never happened.¹³⁴ His 'estimate of David's reaction was inaccurate',¹³⁵ and therefore makes David's lack of response look like a lack of remorse.

Ahab's callousness with regard to Naboth's death is rhetorically emphasised by the repetition of Jezebel's imperatives, 'Rise! (קום) Possess! (שׂר) the vineyard of

¹³⁰ Hertzberg, however, changes the MT, making David the one who angrily brings up Abimelek's folly (p. 307).

¹³¹ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: Volume I: King David (II Samuel 9-20 & I Kings 1-2)*, (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), p. 67.

¹³² Fokkelman, *King David*, p. 63; Sternberg notes a hint of compliment in the words David sends to Joab: 'Hence the words purporting to bring comfort ("Don't take it to heart") show another face as understated congratulations ("Good!" or "Thanks!")' (p. 218).

¹³³ Fokkelman, *King David*, p. 69.

¹³⁴ That is unless Joab knows something about the matter of David and Bathsheba and, as Sternberg suggests, Joab's reference to Abimelek may be a 'concealed barb' (p. 222).

¹³⁵ Fokkelman, *King David*, p. 66; Sternberg draws a similar relationship between the two events but he draws the relationship between David and Abimelek (p. 221).

Naboth the Jezreelite' (1 Kgs 21.15), in the description of his action: 'And when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose (וַיִּקָּם) to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to possess it' (לְרִשְׁתּוֹ; v. 16).

Prophetic Confrontation, Arraignment and Sentencing

In both stories, the kings are immediately confronted by Yahweh's prophets following their confiscation of the coveted property. David is confronted by Nathan (2 Sam 12.1) and Ahab is confronted by Elijah (1 Kgs 21.17). It is important to note that David and Ahab are indicted for *identical* offences: murder and theft. The ordering of the arraignment and sentencing is different due to the fact that David sentences himself upon hearing Nathan's juridical parable. As Hertzberg notes, David is not accused of adultery:

The sin of which David is here accused is not adultery, but that he murdered a husband and then took the wife for himself. These offences are mentioned twice and both are described as 'despising the word of the Lord'.¹³⁶

David hears his indictment from Nathan: 'Uriah you have killed with the sword and his wife you have taken for your wife' (1 Sam 12.9). Yahweh instructs Elijah to say to Ahab, 'Have you murdered and also taken possession?' (1 Kgs 21.19). White comments on the similarity of the two indictments: 'Elijah's accusation of Ahab in 1 Kings xxi 19a, "Have you murdered and also taken possession?", would be equally relevant in Nathan's mouth.'¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Hertzberg, p. 314. Exum (pp. 128-29, and note 22, p.128) and Fokkelman (*King David*, pp. 83-86) divide the MT between 1 Samuel 12.10a and 10b in order to reflect more clearly the division of David's crime of murder and adultery into two corresponding categories of punishment for those two crimes. Their arguments highlight the text's lack of any specific charge of adultery against David. They believe the two oracles against David's 'house', (1) 'the sword shall not depart from your house forever' (10a)—which refers to the punishment for David's murder of Uriah—and (2) 'I am bringing evil upon you from your house' (11.b)—which refers to David's adultery—clears up a textual ambiguity that provides no clear-cut referential causal marker of adultery for the second oracle. It is plain that the second oracle of punishment, in which a future usurper will lie with David's wives in public, *reflects* David's adultery: 'you did it in secret, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun' (12.12), but its causal clause – 'because (כִּי עֲקַבְתָּ) you despised me and you took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to yourself for a wife' (10b), which is also a partial cause for the first oracle, 'because you despised the word of Yahweh. . . and his [Uriah] wife you have taken to yourself for a wife' (9c) – still lacks any direct reference to adultery. In fact, in both verses David's 'taking' is qualified as his intention of taking Bathsheba 'for a wife' rather than as his intention for committing adultery.

¹³⁷ White, p. 69, n. 6.

Sentencing & Arraignment	Arraignment & Sentencing
David is indicted for murder and theft (v. 9). את אוריה החתי הכית בחרב . . . ואת־אשתו לקחת לך לאשה	Ahab is indicted for murder and theft (v. 19). הרצחת וגם־ירשת
‘. . . Uriah the Hittite you have killed with the sword, and his wife you have taken for your wife.’	‘Have you murdered and also taken possession?’
David is sentenced to death (vv. 5, 7).	Ahab is sentenced to death (v. 19).

Both kings receive death sentences for their crimes. Although David has been tricked into sentencing himself with the words, ‘As Yahweh lives, the man who did this is a son of death’,¹³⁸ Nathan’s response to David’s outburst then *establishes* the sentence: ‘You are the man’ (1 Sam 12.7). Hertzberg writes,

Nathan’s ‘You are the man’, one of the ‘most apt’ sayings in the Bible, takes up the verdict spoken by David without having to state it explicitly: it is a death sentence. This is important if we are to understand what follows. For this sentence is only annulled on David’s acknowledgement of his guilt and not before. Until that point it stands, as otherwise it would not be necessary for it to be taken back *expressis verbis!*¹³⁹

Yahweh’s sentence on Ahab, spoken through Elijah, is talionic: ‘In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, the dogs will lick your blood, even yours’ (1 Kgs 21.19). The sentence on David is also talionic in that David’s son’s death is exacted for Uriah’s death.

Dynastic Punishment

Following the sentence on the individual kings, each king receives a sentence on his house. Nathan tells David,

The sword shall not depart from your house forever. . . . I [Yahweh] am placing upon you evil from your house (1 Sam 12.10a, 11b).

Elijah tells Ahab:

¹³⁸ A. Phillips’ brief article (‘The Interpretation of 2 Samuel xii 5-6’, *VT* 16 [1966], pp. 242-244) on the expression ‘son of death’ (used only in 1 Sam. 20.31 and 26.16 [in the plural]) shows that its usage is limited to offences which justify death yet lack legal basis for its implementation (Saul of David’s behaviour [1 Sam 30.31]; David of the behaviour of Abner and his men [1 Sam 26.16]; and David of the rich man in Nathan’s parable [2 Sam 12.5-6]). Thus Phillips says of David’s outburst (‘that man is a son of death’) against the rich man, ‘David describes the rich man as an arch villain who is morally guilty, but regretfully notes that the criminal law cannot touch him. The climax of the narrative is now reached with Nathan’s dramatic disclosure to David that he is the rich man of the parable. But he is not simply a בן־מוֹת, a man who deserves to die, but who can only be sued in tort: he is, by his murder of Uriah, an actual murderer who should suffer execution under Israel’s criminal law. It is only due to Yahweh’s direct pardon that David is to be spared (2 Sam. xii 13)’ (p. 244).

¹³⁹ Hertzberg, p. 313.

Behold I am bringing upon you evil and I will sweep you away; and I will kill of Ahab every male both bond and free in Israel, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha, son of Ahiah, because of the provocation which you have provoked and made Israel sin. And also Jezebel, Yahweh spoke saying, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the region of Jezreel'. The one belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs will eat and the one dying in the field, the birds of the air will eat (1 Kgs 21.21-24).

The serious nature of the crime calls for punishment upon the house. The major difference between these oracles is that David's house will continue (although it can be a kind of living death—the house continues but almost destroys itself), whereas Ahab's will not. The different judgements for the same crime may suggest that one crime is not as serious as the other, or that one man merited a pardon more than the other, but this is not the case. I will return to these points.

Regnal Contrition and Divine Leniency

Upon hearing the judgements on their houses, both kings repent. David says to Nathan, 'I have sinned against Yahweh' (1 Sam 12.13). Ahab says nothing, but he goes into mourning: 'He tore his clothes, he put on sackcloth, he fasted, he lay on his bed in sackcloth, and he went about despondently' (1 Kgs 21.27; David acts similarly by acting despondent when his son becomes ill, fasting and laying on the ground [2 Sam 12.15-17]). In view of their contrition, Yahweh acts with favour towards both kings. He pardons David and defers his death penalty to his son, at the same time issuing a horrible punishment for him and his family (2 Sam 12.10-12, 14). Ahab does not receive a pardon for his repentance, but his house receives a stay of execution (1 Kgs 21.29).¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Against White (pp. 71-74) and others (e.g., Zakovitch; J. M. Miller, 'The Fall of the House of Ahab', *VT* 17 [1967], pp. 307-324), who believe that Ahab, like David, received a complete pardon for his repentance. Most see Ahab's judgement as a Dtr interpolation due to its resemblance to the oracles against Jeroboam and Baasha for their idolatry (1 Kgs 14.10-11; 16.3-4). Zakovitch, like White, believes Ahab's death penalty was deferred to his son because he humbled himself: 'Twice God makes mention of Ahab's humbling himself, an act which merits him a commuted sentence. His sentence is transferred to his son' (p. 404). Zakovitch also notes the connection Ahab shares with David in this regard (n. 59, p. 404).

Judgement

Immediate punishment for David's crime is exacted upon his son following the reduced sentencing. Yahweh smites 'the child born to the wife of Uriah by David so that he became sick' and died (1 Sam 12.16, 18), and the judgement upon him and the rest of his house is the subject of the subsequent chapters. The curse of continual strife on David's house begins in the next chapter, beginning with the story of the rape of Tamar by her half-brother Amnon (2 Sam 13.1-19), followed by the murder of Amnon by his brother Absalom (2 Sam 13.20-39), followed by the public rape of David's wives by Absalom (2 Sam 16.21-22), and followed by the murder of Absalom by Joab (2 Sam 18.14-15). Ahab's sentence is carried out in 1 Kings 22, following the story of Naboth's Vineyard. He is killed in battle against the Aramean King Ben Hadad at Ramoth-Gilead.¹⁴¹ The dynastic annihilation occurs in the reign of Ahab's son Jehoram, at the hand of Jehu, as reported in 2 Kings 9-10.

Analysis

A 'Davidic' Ahab

The story of Naboth's Vineyard is almost a re-reading of David's crime, leaving Ahab looking like a criminal in the mould of David. In what follows I want to address the question of what purpose(s) may be served by this dual representation. My question is prompted by the fact that the account of Naboth's Vineyard has been selected for incorporation into the account of his reign over any of the other 'acts of Ahab. . . written in the books of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel' mentioned in the editorial note that ends the story of Ahab (1 Kgs 22.39). The Naboth incident thus takes on considerable significance in light of its close correspondence to the story of David and Bathsheba. However, before addressing the question of dual representation posed

¹⁴¹ The circumstances of the aftermath of his death fulfils the sentence announced by Elijah following Naboth's murder. Ahab bled to death in his chariot after being severely wounded by a chance arrow. Following his death, his chariot was taken to the pool of Samaria and washed; 'and the dogs licked up his blood, . . . according to the word of Elijah which he spoke' (1 Kgs 22.38).

above, I offer two further examples of correspondences that make a 'Davidic' reading of the story of Naboth's vineyard so compelling.

First, the story of Naboth's Vineyard is immediately preceded by a scene in 1 Kings 20 in which an unnamed prophet, employing a juridical parable, tricks Ahab into sentencing himself for releasing an enemy king.¹⁴² The trap mirrors Nathan's action in tricking David into sentencing himself for his crimes against Bathsheba and Uriah. This judicial scene between a prophet and a king conjures up David's crime, since he is the only other king to fall victim to a juridical parable after committing a capital crime. This literary preview serves to prepare the reader for the similar 'Davidic' type crime that follows.

Further support for a 'Davidic' reading of the story of Naboth's Vineyard relates to the non-idolatrous nature of the story in the context of the story of Ahab. By non-idolatrous I mean non-religious in a cultic sense. Out of the corpus of 'the acts of Ahab' (1 Kgs 22.39), the author chooses to depict Ahab more as a social criminal than as a religious apostate. This is in contrast to the marquee atop the beginning of the account of Ahab, which tells us to expect a story about the Bible's arch-idolater. However, as we have already seen above, Ahab fails to satisfy these expectations. The biblical portrait of Ahab links him to idolatry only in the introduction of the account of his reign (1 Kgs 16.29-34), which essentially depicts him as an idolater in the mould of Solomon (compare this with the scathing idolatrous description of Judah's arch-idolater, Manasseh).¹⁴³ This seems curious because we see hardly

¹⁴² The literary genre 'Juridical Parable' is taken from Uriel Simon ('The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb: An Example of a Juridical Parable', *Biblica* 48 [1967], pp. 207-242): 'The juridical parable constitutes a realistic story about a violation of the law, related to someone who had committed a similar offence with the purpose of leading the unsuspecting hearer to pass judgement on himself' (pp. 220-21).

¹⁴³ The harsh and detailed account of Manasseh's idolatrous ways in 2 Kings 21.1-10 is severe compared to Ahab, yet of Ahab the text says, 'Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil' (1 Kgs 21.25). Stuart Lasine notes the statement of comparison between Manasseh with Ahab in 2 Kings 21.3 and reflects on the unevenness of their depictions: 'One might argue that the narrator's explicit comparison between Manasseh and Ahab invites the audience to fill in the blanks left in Manasseh's portrait by going back to the presentation of Ahab's character in 1 Kings 16-22; after all, Ahab is the only sinful king to whom Manasseh is explicitly likened. Readers who accept this invitation may be surprised to find that the affinities between Ahab and Manasseh are rather limited' ('Manasseh as Villain and Scapegoat', *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, J. Cheryl Exum and David Clines, eds.; JSOTSup 143 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993], p.165).

anything of Ahab the arch-idolater. Instead, the story of Naboth's Vineyard leaves us looking at a king whose worst act makes him appear simply 'Davidic'.

In proposing that the story of Naboth's Vineyard is a re-reading of David's crime, I am not arguing, as White does, for the non-historicity of the story in 1 Kings 21 over the account of Ahab's crime as it is reported in 2 Kings 9, or of the priority of one over the other, or of the priority of 1 Samuel 11 over 1 Kings 21. The fact that the Vineyard story fails to mention the murder of Naboth's sons at the hands of Ahab as recorded in the account in 2 Kings suggests that the story of Naboth's Vineyard is another rendition of Ahab's crime. And, by leaving out the murders of Ahab and his sons, the story more easily resembles the story of David's crime. If the author meant to portray Ahab in the worst possible way, it would seem more appropriate to include the murders of Naboth's sons in a narrative about the worst person in the Hebrew Bible.

Ahab, David, and an Anti-monarchial Polemic

Why does the author leave Ahab looking like David? It is a significant argument in scholarly literature that the story of Naboth's Vineyard conveys an anti-monarchial polemic. While this is an historical argument, my literary analysis leads me to conclude that this is a major effect of the story.

The anti-monarchial polemic is based on the general effect of the story in relation to a genre that Patrick and Scult have labelled 'Narratives of Offenses'.¹⁴⁴ They identify these narratives (along with several others) in even more defined terms, calling them 'narratives of offences which end in a prophetic word of judgement against the offender'.¹⁴⁵ The criminal stories of David and Ahab belong to this genre because they are criminal deeds committed by high officials. The general effect of the story of Naboth's Vineyard is that Ahab is like David in that he commits crimes of coveting, murder and theft, violations of the tenth, sixth and eighth commandments respectively.

¹⁴⁴ Patrick and Scult, p. 65.

¹⁴⁵ Patrick and Scult, p. 65.

The anti-monarchial polemic is related to purposes that other scholars have offered for the story. These include the view that Naboth's Vineyard is a tale about a ruler's total responsibility for his actions.¹⁴⁶ It is also about the danger of kings marrying foreign women. In addition to his belief that the story presents a message of a ruler's total responsibility, Rofé believes 'It voices a complaint of the oppressed against the upper class, elsewhere vented by Nehemiah, Malachi and Trito-Isaiah as well as the protest against intermarriage as broached by Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah'.¹⁴⁷ Napier calls it a story about the abuses of monarchial privilege in taking coveted property belonging to a commoner.¹⁴⁸ Bronner claims the story is about the influence of idolatry on the crown, suggesting that if the king had not been an idolater, he would not have committed such a crime. She says:

It revealed the true character of the issues in Elijah's conflict against paganism. It showed that while Baalism went hand in hand with injustice and crime, the religion of the God of Israel was the bulwark of righteousness and justice. It is interesting to note that only after this nefarious act does the prophet proclaim doom against the house of Ahab and Jezebel.¹⁴⁹

However, could the same be said about David's religion? David shows us that one need not be an idolater to commit this kind of crime.

What is perhaps more significant in this polemical motif (though not necessarily a part of an historical issue) is that the story of Naboth's Vineyard symbolically merges Israel's two most powerful dynasties. It exposes the weakness of these dynasties by recalling the incident that ultimately led to their demise. By merging each dynasty's representative king, the story suggests that neither king was deserving of acquittal, and that when it comes to monarchial behaviour, the worst king is sometimes no worse than the best king.

¹⁴⁶ Rofé, p. 94; Zakovitch, pp. 398-99; cf. Napier (pp. 3-11) on the responsibility of government to the people.

¹⁴⁷ Rofé, p. 102.

¹⁴⁸ Napier, p. 11.

¹⁴⁹ Bronner, p.14.

Warring Houses

David's dynastic survival contrasts pointedly with the decree of dynastic extermination for Ahab. The resulting contrast between the fates of both dynasties establishes the primacy of David's house over Ahab's house. This contrast gains relevance later in 2 Kings 11 in the aftermath of Jehu's extermination of Ahab's house, when Athaliah, Ahab's daughter,¹⁵⁰ representing the sole Omridian survivor, reciprocates Jehu's extermination of her father's line by exterminating all she could find of the remaining royal descendants of the house of David, taking her place on his throne as queen over Judah. By her action, Athaliah establishes Ahab's house as the rightful heir of David's throne. The reader knows what Athaliah does not, that a lone Davidic infant-prince, Joash, has escaped her purge. Six years later, Jehoiada the priest initiates the coup that ends with Athaliah's assassination and returns the throne of David to Joash, the boy-king (2 Kgs 11.4-16). Although her action against David's royal line occurred in response to the report of her son Ahaziah's death at the hands of Jehu (2 Kgs 11.1), Athaliah's slaughter may symbolise an identical judgement for an identical crime: Jehu's extermination of Ahab's dynastic line for the crime against Naboth is immediately reciprocated by Athaliah's extermination of David's dynastic line, save for the infant-king, Joash.

Although it is difficult to assign a single meaning to the close relationship of David to Ahab in the story of Naboth's Vineyard, their convergence in crime prepares for the union of the two houses in the next chapter when Jehoshaphat goes 'down to the king of Israel' (1 Kgs 22.2). Jehoshaphat's friendliness towards Ahab leads to the re-union of Israel and Judah in a political-military alliance (1 Kgs 22.4), which leads further to a blood-bond between the two houses through the marriage of Ahab's daughter Athaliah to Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram (2 Kgs 8.18). But the fusion of the

¹⁵⁰ There is some disagreement concerning the actual parents of Athaliah since she is called both 'the daughter of Ahab' (2 Kgs 8.18; 2 Chron 21.6) and 'the daughter Omri' (2 Kgs 8.26; 2 Chron 22.2); see H. J. Katzenstein, 'Who Were the Parents of Athaliah?', *IEJ* 5 (1955), pp. 194-97. Also, the Hebrew Bible says nothing about Athaliah's mother. Jezebel was only one of Ahab's wives so it is speculative for S. W. Holloway ('Kings, Book of 1-2', *ABD*, vol. 4, [New York: Doubleday, 1992], pp. 69-83) to identify Jezebel as her mother: 'Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel and the only reigning queen of Judah . . .' (p. 78).

two houses was disagreeable to the narrator, whose assessment of Jehoshaphat's reign includes the negative comment that he 'made peace with Ahab' (Kgs 22.44), and whose negative assessments of Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, and grandson Ahaziah, kings of Judah, were due to their blood-association with 'the house of Ahab' (2 Kgs 8.18, 27). Jehoram is castigated for having 'walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab, for he had married the daughter of Ahab and did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh' (2 Kgs 8.18). Ahaziah's assessment is similar. He is remembered as the son of Athaliah, the (grand)daughter of Omri', also having walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, as did the house of Ahab, for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab' (2 Kgs 8,26, 27). If it had not been for the sake of David, Yahweh would have destroyed Judah because of what they did (2 Kgs 8.19).

Conclusion to Chapter 3

The foregoing discussion has revealed that Ahab is presented as a criminal in the mould of Israel's first three great kings. Ahab's associations with the infamous crimes of his predecessors results in a depiction of Ahab that is a collage, an entanglement of associations that makes reading Ahab like rereading the ruin of Solomon, Saul and David through the person of Ahab. The reader encounters a continual interference from these three kings throughout the narrative. They emerge in the text as an absent presence, creating an Ahab who cannot be defined apart from his association with them.

Ahab is declared to be the incomparable evil-doer in Israel (1 Kgs 16.30, 33; 21.25-26) and, at the same time, looks like a second coming of Solomon, Saul and David at their worst. Ahab's 'evil' identity is intertwined with the identities of his predecessors, and his predecessors' identities are intertwined with that of the 'evil' Ahab. The implication is that Ahab does not really live up to his bad name, since his crimes are no worse than the crimes of the three. Making Ahab bad by making him

look like these three kings is hindered by the fact that Saul, David and Solomon were also esteemed kings who happened to have moral failings. The only sense in which he is worse than the three others is that Ahab commits all of the sins of three. Perhaps this is how the editor wanted to make Ahab really bad.

However, while this indeed makes good sense, the greatest hindrance to making Ahab really bad by his repeating the crimes of the three kings is the depiction of Ahab that often includes showing a 'good' Ahab. As I have shown in chapter one, there is a tradition that regards Ahab as having redeemable behavioural qualities. Additionally, as I have shown in chapter two, the story of Ahab shows these qualities in his relationship with Elijah in the context of the contest on Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs 18), in his amiable relationship with various unnamed other prophets who have free and safe access to his court during his battles with Ben Hadad at Samaria and Aphek (1 Kgs 20), in his favourable relationship with Yahweh, who, without solicitation, grants victory to Ahab on the battlefield (1 Kgs 20) by means of the same miracles he performed for Joshua at Jericho, and in his repentance for the murder of Naboth, a repentance, as Auld has suggested,¹⁵¹ that serves as a model for upright behaviour.

Although the text states that Ahab is the most evil of anyone (1 Kgs 16.30; 21.25), the relative 'good' about Ahab creates an hesitation on the part of the reader to view him as such. This viewpoint is facilitated further by his association with Saul, David and Solomon. We have not come to regard their sins with great disgust (I am speaking generally) —disgust, surely, but not *great* disgust. This lack of abhorrence for their crimes is brought about primarily by the lack of *stated* disgust (except for the normal response, 'now the thing that he [Saul, David, or Solomon] did was evil in the sight of Yahweh') for their crimes to the same degree of aversion with which Ahab's crimes are foregrounded. Thus the message that Ahab is excessively 'evil' fails to impact the reader by his association with Saul, David and Solomon. I will develop this limiting factor of guilt by association in the next chapter by showing that these three kings have primarily been remembered positively in the text up until the story of Ahab.

¹⁵¹ Auld, *Kings without Privilege*, p.170.

Coupled with this positive remembrance, there occur two reversals in characterisation: Ahab's identity is relatively normalised in the sense that Saul, David and Solomon are considered 'normal', while the character of the three great kings is diminished. In saying this I am not saying that Ahab is not wicked, but rather that it is difficult to attach to him the label of arch-evildoer by making him a second coming of the three kings at their worst. In the following chapter I will examine the stories of Saul, David and Solomon in the light of their relationship to Ahab and the effects that the similarities between them have on the way we read the stories about them.

READING THE STORIES OF ISRAEL'S FIRST THREE KINGS IN THE LIGHT OF THE STORY OF AHAB

Introduction

In the previous chapter I demonstrated the links between the crimes of King Ahab and the accounts of the infamous sins committed by his predecessors Saul, David and Solomon. The effect of the similarities of the crimes is that the story of Ahab reads like a second rendition of the crimes of these three kings. In each of the studies I presented I often noted how Ahab is like each of the kings in relation to their crimes. One of the major effects of seeing the story of Ahab as a second rendition of the sins of the three kings is that Ahab becomes like them, and because of this identification, Saul, David and Solomon cast an influence over the reading of the story of Ahab that affects our view of Ahab as a character with his own singular identity. Ahab is not uniquely Ahab, but he is a construct of the three kings at their worst.

To illustrate how the allusive presence of Saul, David and Solomon affects the reading of the story of Ahab, we may ask what would happen if we read only the story of Ahab and not the stories of the crimes of the three kings. The questions raised above about the seriousness of Ahab's offences would be moot, and his offences would be considered as the marks of the worst individual in the Bible. So, depending on whether or not we take into account the stories of Saul, David and Solomon, two entirely different meanings become available: one in which Ahab lives and acts entirely

on his own, and one in which his acts are comparable to the acts of his three predecessors.

This literary interaction applies equally to the readings of the infamous sins of Saul, David and Solomon, now that they have been associated with the person of Ahab. What were once original readings that stood on their own as the unique acts of three kings who ruined their kingships through misbehaviour now stand as the stories of kings in association with Ahab, and they may no longer be reread apart from this association. The influence of Ahab hovers over their stories.

Riffaterre, in a discussion on intertextuality, offers an explanation of the influence of a story that has been read previously (a subtext/intertext) on a story being read, and vice-versa. The text being read (e.g., the story of Naboth's Vineyard), when it is recognised as a parallel to a previous text (e.g., the story of David and Bathsheba), obtains an altogether different meaning as a different version 'of the same episode or of the same description' than it would obtain if it is isolated or unrecognised as a parallel story and read entirely in its own context. The text being read then becomes, conversely, an intertext to the text recalled by the reader. Riffaterre writes:

Any subtext, or, more broadly still, any unit of significance that can be identified as the narrative unfolds, any segment of that narrative that can be isolated without cognitive loss, may serve as an intertext to some further such unit, if the latter has features in common with the former. Such features make it possible or necessary for the reader to see the two units as different versions of the same episode or of the same description, or two variants of the same structure. Components of the second will thus acquire a meaning other than what they convey in context because they will be perceived as referring also or primarily to their homologues in the first. On the other hand, the meaning of such a homologue may be retrospectively modified by our rethinking it in the light of the second version, in which case the latter now functions as the intertext of the first.¹

Returning again to the dialogue initiated between the stories of the crimes of the four kings, I would like to draw attention to the concluding statement of the story of Ahab in which the selection of source material for incorporation into the account of Ahab's reign appears to be deliberate. The choices of material suggest that the story of

¹ Michael Riffaterre, 'The Intertextual Unconscious', *Critical Inquiry* 3 (1987), p. 380.

Ahab is crafted to depict the king in the worst possible light. The postscript at the end of the story of Ahab reads:

Now the rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did, and the ivory house which he built, and all the cities which he built, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? (1 Kgs 22.39).

In alluding to 'the rest of the acts of Ahab', the notice implies that what is included in 1 Kings about King Ahab is only a portion of the totality of 'the acts of Ahab' recorded in the 'Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel'. This leaves an impression that certain material has been passed over in favour of other material for inclusion into the story of Ahab, and that 'the rest of the acts of Ahab' might be considered less damaging to Ahab's depiction. If Ahab really is the worst person in the Hebrew Bible, then it may be assumed that what is included in his story makes him that way.

Since the portrait of Ahab is filled out with a narrative of crimes practically identical to the crimes committed by Saul, David and Solomon, then the depiction of the acts of Ahab as a second reading of the crimes of the three kings has implications for the character of the three kings as well as for the character of Ahab. As Riffatere notes about intertextuality, the reader is automatically inclined to associate Ahab with the three kings (in that the story of Ahab is a second reading of their infamous crimes) thereby bringing about an entirely different response toward Ahab.

Thus in declaring Ahab to be the incomparable evil-doer in Israel, while at the same time presenting him as a second reading of the three kings at their worst, the text intertwines Ahab's evil identity with the dark side of his predecessors, and his predecessors' identities become intertwined with the dark Ahab. This effect of altering our perception of Ahab's predecessors comes through a rethinking and a rereading of their criminal narratives in relation to Ahab.

Because the results of the interaction of the similar accounts of the crimes creates a cross-referencing between the four kings, I am suggesting (as I have above) that Ahab loses some of his superlative wicked status, since his crimes individually are no worse than the crimes of his predecessors, and the characters of the great three

kings are retrospectively diminished. This effect occurs by a reciprocal transference of character traits from Ahab to the three kings and from the three kings to Ahab.

The association of the four kings is what primarily creates a kind of levelling of the moral field in terms of character. This levelling of moral character is brought about through an understanding of the *normality* of the character of the three kings prior to their reappearance (by allusion) in the story of Ahab. That is to say, with respect to normality, all three kings have traversed the textual distance between the end of the stories of their crimes and the beginning of the narrative of Ahab dressed in a mantle of respect (I will demonstrate this below). The normality of the character of Saul, David and Solomon rests partly in the fact that their crimes form only a small portion of their legendary account in the record of Israel's monarchy, but it rests mostly in the fact that they have not received further denunciation or condemnation for their crimes in the narrative of Samuel-Kings before their crimes are alluded to in the guise of Ahab.

In Part 1 below I discuss how the character of Ahab is normalised. This will involve demonstrating that Saul, David and Solomon have all maintained a level of respect in the text leading up to the story of Ahab. In Part 2, I will look at the accounts of the crimes of the three kings in the light of the story of King Ahab and show its diminishing effect on the character of the three kings.

Part 1:

Transference of Character from Saul, David and Solomon to Ahab

Respectability of King Saul

As Israel's first king, Saul retains a certain measure of respect, but a major difficulty in establishing his respectability after his crime is that he is also Israel's first rejected king. His selection as king comes in response to the people's demand for a king, and Yahweh reluctantly makes Saul Israel's first king. Although Saul was a valiant man of war, a king who fulfilled his role as 'deliverer' of Israel, Yahweh rejected him. He erred by offering an untimely sacrifice, in 'not keeping the commandment of Yahweh' to wait for Samuel to offer it (1 Sam 13.13-14), and he erred in failing to carry out the ban (1 Sam 15). The totality of his rejection is demonstrated in two ways: by the replacement of the empowering spirit of Yahweh with a tormenting evil spirit, and by Yahweh's absolute refusal to help or communicate with Saul. However, the text shows that, following his crime, Saul generally retains respect in the eyes of the narrator, and more specifically in the eyes of Samuel and David and the people following his crime.² Fokkelman notes that this is borne out by the reader's sympathy toward Saul that is evoked by the manner of his presentation:

The narrator takes the trouble to keep Saul's better self in view. He gives it voice in [1 Samuel] 24/26, when power has been transferred to the new anointed one and Saul gives David and his innocence all recognition; and he provides dignified stories of Saul's end. We can fully feel Saul's fear, despair and resistance to the inevitable in Ch. 28, his courage and tenacity on the Gilboa which can no longer avail him are heroic, and posthumously he receives a reward, not only from the Jabeshites, but also the narrator, in the form of a dignified burial in the trans-Jordan city still grateful to him, so that his soul can find final rest.³

² Thomas R. Preston ('The Heroism of Saul: Patterns of Meaning in the Narrative of the Early Kingship', *JSOT* 24 [1982], pp. 27-46) believes the stories of Samuel, Saul and David establish Saul's heroic status by the contrasts of their falls from power. The development of his argument is based on a narrative pattern of the exaltation of the lowly, what Preston calls, 'the rise of the lowly, fall of the mighty' (pp. 28-29). According to Preston, Saul's status as hero is strengthened by the text's presentation of him as 'farm boy - reluctant king', a theme that earns him a 'very sympathetic' reception in the eyes of the reader (p.32). Rather than detracting from his status, Saul's guilt in offering the sacrifice and in violating the ban only enhances his sympathetic presentation rather than to diminish it in the eyes of the reader (p. 33).

³ Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, pp. 690-91.

In what follows I show how the text promotes respect for Saul in a more specific way through his two main antagonists Samuel and David.

Respect for Saul through Samuel

First, through Samuel, the text conveys respect for King Saul by Samuel's decision to honour Saul following his sentencing for disobeying the ban (1 Sam 15.30-31). Even though Saul is formally rejected as king by Yahweh, his status as king is not immediately affected, nor is he removed from the throne. Saul's repentance before Samuel following his confession for violating the ban wins him a stay of immediate removal from the throne. Following Saul's second confession Samuel reluctantly agrees to Saul's request to honour him 'before the people', but by doing so he is showing public deference to Saul's kingship (v. 31). Initially, Samuel emphasised that Saul's rejection would begin immediately, 'Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you *today!*' (הִיָּוָה, v. 28). However, Saul's repentance and Samuel's response to honour him 'before the people' indicates that he retains his kingship and his honour 'before the people' until he dies. Foresti comments:

The fate of Saul, *per se*, is already decided in 1 Sm 15; the episode of Saul's repentance only suspends the execution of his rejection; the period of suspension is declared to be over by Samuel himself in 1 Sm 28.⁴

Second, the text conveys Samuel's respect for King Saul by his lamentation over the deposed king. 1 Samuel 15 ends with the narrator's announcement, 'Samuel grieved (hith. ptcp. מִתְאַבֵּל) over Saul' (v. 35). 1 Samuel 16 then begins with Yahweh addressing the mourning prophet, 'Up to how long will you grieve (מִתְאַבֵּל) over Saul, seeing that I have rejected him?' (v. 1). Besides these two occurrences, the term for 'grieve' is used five other times in the books of Samuel for mourning the dead (cf. the people of Beth-shemesh mourning 70 dead men [1 Sam 6.19]; Bathsheba mourning Uriah [2 Sam 11.27]; David mourning Absalom [2 Sam 19.2]; the woman of Tekoa masquerading as a mourner of the dead [2 Sam 14.2]); and David mourning

⁴ Foresti, p. 180.

for his son after Absalom murdered Amnon (2 Sam 13.37). In light of Samuel's emotional behaviour on behalf of Saul following his crime, Samuel's comportment may be taken as sympathetic, thereby connoting respect for the rejected king. Even though Preston sees Samuel as somewhat self-serving, he notes that Samuel's behaviour in both instances suggests great affection for Saul:

Samuel seemingly loves Saul: he remains to pray with Saul after the Amalekite fiasco, so that Saul will not be dishonored before the elders of Israel (1 Sam. 15:30); and he grieves over Saul after pronouncing Yahweh's sentence of doom (1 Sam. 15:35; 16:1).⁵

In a related scene, Samuel cries 'out to Yahweh all night' (קָוַעַ) because of what Saul has done (1 Sam 15.11). The text does not say why he 'cried out', but his lament ties in to other uses of this term in 1 Samuel that suggest intercession (cf. 1 Sam 7.8, 9; 12.8, 10). However, it is uncertain in this scene if the prophet intercedes for Saul or for Israel, or even for both, because of what Israel and Saul have done and for what Yahweh may intend to do with Israel and its king.

Respect for Saul through David

The text conveys David's respect for King Saul in at least two specific ways: he honours Saul by referring to him as 'Yahweh's anointed', and he honours Saul in verse in an elegy for the slain king. Saul became Yahweh's 'anointed' when Samuel anointed him 'as ruler (לְנִיבִי) over his [Yahweh's] possession' (1 Sam 10.1), with the spirit of Yahweh empowering him for his role as king. But Yahweh removes his spirit from Saul following his rejection for violating the ban, replacing his spirit with an evil spirit to torment him. However, while Yahweh punishes Saul, in David's eyes Saul remains 'Yahweh's anointed' until he dies, an expression used exclusively by David (1 Sam 26.11, 23; 2 Sam 1.14, 16). Twice David has the opportunity to kill Saul, but he refuses because Saul is 'Yahweh's anointed'. The two stories occur in 1 Samuel 24 and 26. They are part of a theme of parallel episodes that includes 1 Samuel 25 in

⁵ Preston, p. 33.

which David spares the lives of his enemies (Saul [chaps. 24, 26]; and Nabal [chap. 25]) so as not to hinder his future reign as king. It is David's restraint that is the primary issue in these chapters.⁶ Following the first occasion, David shows reverence for the king by bowing himself to the ground, calling him 'my father' (1 Sam 24.8, 11). Following the second occasion, he calls him 'my lord the king' (26.17,19).⁷ Thus the text advances the idea that David respects Saul, at least on the level of his public utterances.

Scholars have seen David's action as both genuine and self-serving. Preston notes that the narrator's use of the two scenes between Saul and David 'projects a sympathetic, even loving, portrait of Saul':

In the first scene . . . the narrator allows Saul a moment of sanity, portraying him as a loving father, and a father who knows his 'adopted' son David will have the throne The second scene . . . in essence recapitulates the first scene . . . with the genuine sincerity of Saul's confession: 'I have done wrong; return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day; behold, I have played the fool, and erred exceedingly'.⁸

But David's public declaration of Saul as Yahweh's anointed has also been questioned regarding its sincerity. Preston suggests that while the text portrays a sympathetic Saul, it portrays a self-serving David; Saul's sincerity is contrasted with David's suspect sincerity in making his goodness public before his own men and Saul's men.⁹

Rosenberg suggests that the two episodes present two themes; one is 'the declaration of the sacredness of the king's person as "YHWH's anointed"', and the other is 'a doctrine of the relation of the king to his aides'.¹⁰ According to Rosenberg, David is represented as teaching his subordinates the proper attitudes toward the king,

⁶ Miscall, p. 144; cf. Gunn, who suggests that Nabal may be seen as a thematic double of Saul; *The Fate of King Saul*, p. 96.

⁷ Gunn notes a shift in the tenor of the relationship between David and Saul by the change in address from 'my father' to 'my lord the king' (*The Fate of King Saul*, pp. 104-106); cf. Miscall, who develops a characterisation of David through 1 Samuel on a continuum that goes from a 'good David' to a 'bad David', suggests that chapters 24-25 show a more positive David in that he depends on Yahweh for justification of his innocence, whereas in chapter 26 he is calculating in his response to Saul as 'king' (p. 161).

⁸ Preston, pp. 35-36.

⁹ Preston, p. 36.

¹⁰ Joel Rosenberg, *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 136.

but it is not clear if David is showing himself to be a humble servant of Saul, or if he is helping his future kingship:

Though David seems to mean Saul when he speaks of 'YHWH's anointed,' the reader is aware that *David* knows (insofar as he can, in a composite text, *know*) that he himself has been anointed (by Samuel in I Sam. 16). With all of the obeisance David pays to Saul throughout the latter half of I Samuel, the reader can never escape the knowledge that David is defining his own kingship (*his italics*).¹¹

Polzin offers the same view of David's motives, suggesting that David's magnanimity is self-interested motivation, that he does not want to do anything that would 'provide a precedent for his own murder later'.¹² Polzin's suggested reading of David's character is based mostly on David's behaviour from 1 Samuel 24 until Saul's death, and what he sees as the craft of the DH in implicating David in Saul's death, while at the same time seeking 'to exonerate him from such a charge'.¹³ However, that David's merciful treatment of a humiliatingly vulnerable Saul, for one example, is seen as a political opportunity rather than as the behaviour of someone capable of compassion towards his tormentor may appear too one-sided.¹⁴

The tension between the reverence and sympathy shown to Saul by his foremost antagonists, Samuel and David, and between Yahweh's disapproval and rejection is most evident just before and after Saul's death. Yahweh's total abandonment of Saul before his death is contrasted by David, who honours the rejected slain king in an elegant elegy, ensuring that Saul is remembered in honour forever. The contrast illustrates that while Yahweh may have left Saul and refuses to help him, David lays him to rest in a symbolic grave of respect. The purpose of the lament is to praise Saul and Jonathan, and to encourage the 'sons of Judah to emulate the qualities of these skilful warriors'.¹⁵ The elegy glorifies Saul and Jonathan,

¹¹ Rosenberg, p. 138.

¹² Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History; Part Two: 1 Samuel* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 210.

¹³ Robert Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist, A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History; Part Three: 2 Samuel* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature: Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 4.

¹⁴ There is also a possibility that the narrator presents two views of David simultaneously; see below.

¹⁵ Terence Kleven, 'Reading Hebrew Poetry: David's Lament Over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:17-27)', *PEGLMBS* 11 (1991), p. 62.

presenting David's feelings about them, calling them Israel's 'glory' (v. 19).¹⁶ Saul is a courageous warrior who never 'turned back' from battle, whose skill and valour is compared to that of eagles and lions (v. 23). His role as provider for the nation is seen in the fact that he adorned the women of Israel in finery (v. 24). It honours him as a glorious monarch in keeping with the DH's vision of a true king – a provider and protector of his people. Kleven summarises David's regard for Saul in the elegy as being in keeping with his (David's) view of Saul as Yahweh's 'anointed':

David's valuation of Saul is not what we might first expect in the lament. David nourishes rather than diminishes respect for his 'enemy' Saul, and David even elevates this enemy as an example to the warriors of his tribe. Yet the poem is in agreement with the depiction in 2 Sam 1:1-16. David is depicted as conscious that Saul was anointed, and it is not for David to disrespect this anointing regardless of Saul's hatred toward him.¹⁷

But Kleven's valuation of David appears somewhat simplistic. Polzin proposes the elegy is like David's public announcements that Saul is Yahweh's anointed. The elegy may be another of David's public displays of honour rather than his true feelings for his former tormentor. Even though he notes that David 'literally glorifies' Saul,¹⁸ at the same time he sees David as a political opportunist who uses the event of Saul's death for his own selfish reasons, which are to establish standards of behaviour for the people in relation to their king:

David's magnanimity toward Saul in the lament, I would suggest, is as politically motivated as his magnanimity toward Saul was in cave (1 Samuel 24) and in camp (1 Samuel 26). There, David refused to raise his hand against the LORD's anointed (1 Sam. 24:7, 11; 26:9, 11, 16, 23); here he refuses to open his mouth against the same. In both cases David is portrayed as establishing a model of behaviour toward kingship that exemplifies the obligations of a nation toward its own royal house.¹⁹

However, Polzin also notes that the issue of David's sincerity may be taken two ways. He suggests that the narrator crafts David's character in the elegy in such a way that it offers the reader both a negative and positive depiction of the king. In the elegy David addresses Israel, while the narrator addresses the reader. Polzin notes that 2 Samuel 1 introduces David as someone who has profited from Saul's death and may have even

¹⁶ Whether or not David's feelings in the elegy can be taken at face value or as political propaganda has been argued by several critics. I will deal with this issue below.

¹⁷ Kleven, p. 61.

¹⁸ Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, p. 13.

contributed to it.²⁰ The narrator uses indirect means²¹ to accomplish this task by employing a character in the story to voice the narrator's true views about David.²² In this case, the narrator uses the Amalekite who brings the news of Saul's death (along with Saul's crown and armlet; 1 Sam 1.10) as David's double, showing him as duplicitous and profiting from Saul's death. Here, as elsewhere in the DH, Polzin suggests that the narrator may be under some political constraint to present David in a positive light in order to satisfy Davidic royalists while at the same time presenting an anti-royalist record of 'the disastrous history of monarchic Israel'.²³ Thus the elegy may be read in light of the presentation of the deceptive Amalekite.

Noll's reading of David's characterisation in the elegy for Saul shows David as one capable of setting aside differences even in the midst of a context that may suggest the opposite.²⁴ Similar to Polzin, Noll believes there may be two characterisations of David in the text, which are the product of two voices: one behind the text and one in the text, corresponding to the voices of the implied author and of the narrator, respectively. In the elegy, David's characterisation comes close to merging the two Davids into one harmonious depiction. Noll writes:

For the narrator, David is above all the representative king who stands as Yahweh's model for all that is good in Israel. As always, however, the implied author seems to balance all of these on a higher plane, seems to hold a humanistic interest in David the man, David the one whose own loyalties are never entirely certain even to himself. Be he a thug or a king or anything else, he is always the fallible and very complex man, David.²⁵

¹⁹ Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, pp. 13-14.

²⁰ Polzin suggests that the narrator may be using the Amalekite as David's double in order to get his message across about David's duplicitous involvement in Saul's demise: 'the narrator introduces the Amalekite as a Davidic double who represents a set of complex human factors surrounding the fall of Saul and of his house. On one hand, the narrator reliably stated that Saul committed suicide in 1 Samuel 31; on the other hand, the Amalekite's competing claim is close to the narrator's indirect suggestions in 1 Samuel that David somehow shares in the killing of Saul and in the deaths of his descendants and supporters – however distanced David appears to be from all this slaughter' (*David and the Deuteronomist*, p. 6).

²¹ With reference to the elegy, Polzin cites the Bakhtinian principle of 'speech interference' in which one message is the vehicle of two contradictory messages: 'two voices sounding within a single utterance, voices that are at profound odds with one another' (*David and the Deuteronomist*, p. 12).

²² Polzin writes, 'Whether the narrator's indirection in this regard is guided either by the clear and present danger accruing to one who would lay such responsibilities at David's feet or by other considerations no longer available to us, I cannot say' (*David and the Deuteronomist*, p. 6).

²³ Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, p. 10.

²⁴ K.L. Noll, *The Faces of David* (JSOTSup 242; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); see especially chapter 3, 'David's Lament, 2 Samuel 1.19-27'.

²⁵ Noll, p. 117.

Respectability of King David

In light of the complexity of David's characterisation within 1 and 2 Samuel and through 1 Kings 2, it is surprising that there is hardly any question about how he is presented after his death. As Jeroboam is the standard of evil for the kings of the Northern Kingdom, so David is the standard of right for the kings of Judah.²⁶ His respectability after his crime and repentance is taken for granted even though his troubles are seen in relation to his crimes against Bathsheba and Uriah. After his death, however, he is stated as having done wrong only once in all of the narrative to the end of Kings:

David did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite (רק בדבר אוריה החתי [1Kgs 15.5]).

Except for the one mention of his failure in 'the matter of Uriah', David is never cited as having strayed from doing right.²⁷ He is held up as 'an ideal against which later kings can be judged'.²⁸ The LXX leaves out the phrase about Uriah,²⁹ so that David's crime goes unmentioned in the LXX until its allusive representation in the story of Naboth's Vineyard. Thus David kept Yahweh's 'statutes and commandments' (1 Kgs 3.14); he followed 'Yahweh fully' (1 Kgs 11.6); he did what is right in the sight of

²⁶ Noll, p. 117.

²⁷ Gunn notes the difficulty in accepting without question the evaluation of David in the verse above, suggesting that irony may be embedded in the adverbial particle רק ('except'; 'only'): 'It is inviting to read thus the evaluations of David and Solomon in Kings, where the word "except" or "only" (רק) harbors tremendous subversive possibilities . . .' ('New Directions in the Study of Hebrew Narrative', *JSOT* 39 (1987), pp. 71-72; see also Gunn's discussion of the word רק in relation to the introduction to the story of Solomon (1 Kgs 3.3) in 'Reading Right: Reliable and Omniscient Narrator, Omniscient God, and Foolproof Composition in the Hebrew Bible', *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl and Stanley E. Porter, eds. (JSOTSup 87; JSOT Press, 1990), pp. 53-64; esp. p.56. Whitelam suggests that the phrase 'except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite' is a qualification in the 'Deuteronomistic idealization of David' that serves to uphold the objectivity of the story of David (1 Sam 9 - 2 Kgs 2) in an ongoing (historical) court defence of the legitimacy of the dynasty (Keith W. Whitelam, 'The Defence of David', *JSOT* 29 [1984], p. 70); cf. P. Kyle McCarter, 'The Apology of David', *JBL* 99 (1980), pp. 489-504.

²⁸ Noll, p. 81.

²⁹ As noted by Noll, p. 81, n. 20.

Yahweh, 'observing my statutes and ordinances' (1 Kgs 11.33; 14.8; 15.11); and he walked in Yahweh's ways, 'doing what is right in my sight and observing my statutes and my commandments' (1 Kgs 11.38; cf. 2 Kgs 18.3; 22.2). Only in 1 Kings 15.5 is it noted that David had done wrong before Yahweh.

The unambiguous declaration in the texts above of David's virtue and that David has only done wrong in the matter of Uriah, however, becomes problematic in relation to his characterisation throughout Samuel and 1 Kings 1-2. As Miscall says of David's characterisation after 1 Kings 2, 'This picture of David from 1 Kings 2 on is a decided change from the preceding portrayal'.³⁰ The preceding portrayal of David that Miscall speaks about is difficult to assess with any degree of certainty, as studies by various scholars have shown, making David's respectability uncertain in the eyes of the reader.

In chapter two of his volume *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation*, Gunn summarises the critical discussion of genre with respect to whether or not the story can be considered political propaganda that is anti-Davidic.³¹ Gunn notes that the discussion among critics fails to produce a tendency either for or against David because 'the direction of the [assumed] propaganda [in the text] is unclear'.³² For Gunn, the 'distanced' attitude towards the events in the narrative provides the story with a certain objectivity that contributes balance and a political perspective of neutrality.³³

Gunn says that a major dynamic of the story of David is 'giving and grasping', that is, David is most successful both politically and privately when he gains or bestows status by giving (e.g., the gift of the kingdom), but he loses status and comes to ruin by grasping (e.g., another man's wife).³⁴ However, when it comes to discovering the 'real' David, the text resists easy characterisation. Echoing Nabal (1

³⁰ Miscall, 'For David's Sake: A Response to David M. Gunn', *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus*, J. Cheryl Exum, ed., (SBL Semeia Studies; Decatur, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), p. 160.

³¹ David Gunn, (JSOTSup 6; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), pp. 21-26.

³² Gunn, *The Story of King David*, p. 26.

³³ Gunn, *The Story of King David*, p. 23.

³⁴ Gunn, *The Story of King David*, pp. 94-108.

Sam 25.10), in another publication Gunn asks the question, Who is David?, and offers three answers that are then countered by seemingly contradictory aspects of his character.³⁵ While David is the 'sweet psalmist of Israel', he is also, in Shimei's words, 'a man of blood, a man of belial' ('worthlessness', 2 Sam 16.6); while he is 'a man after God's own heart', by his wilful sin he is no better than Saul; and again, while he is a 'man of blood' for the bloodshed taken against the house of Saul (2 Sam 16.8), he is a destroyer of his own house as well.³⁶ Yet in spite of the contradictions, the narrative of the story of David also does not 'type' David within definable negative categories of human character.³⁷ As Gunn says, 'Despite the ambiguities of the narrative . . . the larger story does not allow him to crumble, to disappear in shades of gray. If we cannot grasp him, yet we can allow him the freedom to provoke us, enliven us, and challenge our securities.'³⁸

Exum offers a similar view of the ambiguous nature of the characterisation of David, although she measures him in reference to the 'hero' of tragedy.³⁹ While the story of David is truly tragic, she says, David 'does not measure up to the role of tragic hero.'⁴⁰ The tragic protagonist is someone who, like Saul, is involved in an heroic struggle against fate, and more than anything else, is 'gripped by forces beyond their control'.⁴¹ David, however, accepts his fate⁴² and is caught up in situations that, while tragic, are due to his own making. This is in contrast to Saul who is caught up in situations that stem for the most part from being rejected for having done what he thought was right in offering the sacrifice (1 Sam 13). But David does not 'do the wrong thing while trying to do the right thing.'⁴³ David purposely takes Bathsheba and kills her husband Uriah; he 'does wrong wilfully, almost as a matter of course,

³⁵ Gunn, 'In Security: The David of Biblical Narrative', in Exum, *Signs and Wonders*, pp. 133-51.

³⁶ Gunn, 'In Security', pp. 139-44.

³⁷ Gunn, 'In Security', p. 144.

³⁸ Gunn, 'In Security', p. 144.

³⁹ Exum, *Tragedy*, pp. 10-12

⁴⁰ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 121.

⁴¹ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 10.

⁴² Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 143.

⁴³ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 143.

seemingly impervious to God's laws and kingship's requirements.'⁴⁴ Thus David's tragic lot comes as a result of his own doing.

Regardless of how we have viewed David in relation to his rise to prominence, his crime forces us to look back and wonder about some of his previous actions, as to whether or not he has been genuine. Thus Exum notes that while David can appear 'pious, trusting, and faithful' as in his fight with Goliath, he can also appear 'calculating and manipulative' as when 'he inquires about the reward for slaying Goliath'; and while he may appear 'magnanimous as in his dealings with Jonathan's son Mephibosheth', it may be that he simply wants to keep an eye on the sole surviving Saulide.⁴⁵ Exum also notes that Yahweh distances himself from David both before and after his crime, suggesting that David had been gradually losing Yahweh's unqualified favour. This is reflected subtly at first when David is unable to bring the ark into Jerusalem, and then more directly by a sudden shift from his active involvement in David's rise, to his absence when David sins, and finally by his causing David to sin in taking the census (2 Sam 24).⁴⁶ Yahweh's annoyance with David is ultimately demonstrated in the exacting judgement that David receives for his crime. While Exum believes David suffers excessively, a representative feature of the lot of the tragic protagonist,⁴⁷ I believe it is a necessary punishment. By it, the text establishes the serious nature of David's crime, fixed by David himself in his impulsive response to the criminal in Nathan's parable that he must pay. By seeing David's punishment as the necessary penalty, it is easier to understand the text's unequivocal references to David as a positive character after he gives the kingdom to Solomon. By having exacted the necessary measure of punishment, Yahweh may be able to see David as someone who has paid fully for his sins, and as such, merits a renewed measure of approval.

Bruggeman's study of David in relation to his influence on the theological traditions of Israel suggests that its celebration of David owes itself to a revolutionary

⁴⁴ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 143.

⁴⁵ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 120.

⁴⁶ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 140.

change in the way David viewed his life: 'David is pictured as a fully responsible, fully free man, indeed, fully man and the reason for this is that he believed he had been fully trusted by God, or at least so his theologians have presented him'.⁴⁸ The difference in his life as compared to those before him is that David is not under law, 'he is trusted to live as he wills to live and is given great responsibilities which he cannot ignore'.⁴⁹ This new way of viewing life is brought on by Yahweh's eternal commitment to David expressed in his covenant in 2 Samuel 7.15, a promise which is not conditional, 'because there is no provision for nullification'.⁵⁰ It is a blank check for David to live as he saw fit to live. Nevertheless, he would be responsible for his actions and there would be punishment for disobedience, but there would be no rejection by Yahweh. Yahweh promises to keep his commitment no matter what: 'Yahweh has thrown in his lot with this moment and man in history and he has left himself no way out. He has trusted him!'⁵¹ Brueggemann notes, however, that Yahweh has entrusted himself to someone who is untrustworthy, but he also underscores that the emphasis in the text is upon 'the buoyancy of God's commitment' rather than on the failure of the one he has trusted: 'The narratives affirm and re-affirm that Yahweh continues to trust and is not prepared to abandon his oath to David'.⁵² Brueggemann offers a compelling view of the problem of David's characterisation, and it could be that his understanding of the theological tradition behind David is what supports the clear statements in Kings after his death that uphold David as a signpost of integrity.

⁴⁷ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 137.

⁴⁸ Walter Brueggemann, 'The Trusted Creature', *CBQ* 31 (1969), pp. 487-88.

⁴⁹ Brueggemann, p. 488.

⁵⁰ Brueggemann, p. 492.

⁵¹ Brueggemann, p. 493.

⁵² Brueggemann, p. 498.

Respectability of King Solomon

Solomon's post-crime respectability is conveyed by means of the silence of the text regarding his influence in leading all Israel into idolatry. His idolatrous influence on Israel, is obscured both in his and his son Rehoboam's regnal resumés (1 Kgs 11.31-33, 43; 14.21-24, 31), and by identifying Jeroboam instead of Solomon as the father of idolatry in Israel during the time of the monarchy.

Covering over Solomon's Past

Solomon's and Rehoboam's regnal resumés omit any direct reference to their idolatrous influence on the nations of Israel and Judah. As I have pointed out previously in chapter 3, Solomon's influence in leading Israel into worshipping these gods is communicated indirectly in his regnal resumé by means of a confusion of the grammar (1 Kgs 11.31-33; see the discussion of Solomon's resumé in the previous chapter). In like manner, Rehoboam's regnal resumé also appears to be sanitised by way of an identical confusion of the grammar, so that, like Solomon, Rehoboam's overt influence in corrupting his nation in idolatry is also obscured. The major effect of the obscuration of Rehoboam's resumé is that it hides Solomon's idolatrous influence on his son as well as on the next generation. Comparing Rehoboam's resumé with Solomon's resumé shows how Solomon's influence on Israel has been disguised.

<p style="text-align: center;">Solomon (1 Kgs 11.31-33,43)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14.21-24, 31)</p>
<p>31. And he (Ahijah) said to Jeroboam . . . 'Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, "Behold I am tearing the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and I will give you ten tribes; 32. but the one tribe will be for him (יְהוֹאָחָז לְוָי), because of my servant David, and because of Jerusalem, the city which I chose over all the tribes of Israel;</p>	<p>21. Now Rehoboam son of Solomon reigned in Judah; he was 41 years old when he began to reign; and 17 years he reigned (בְּלֵךְ) in Jerusalem, the city which Yahweh chose to establish his name there over all the tribes of Israel; and the name of his mother (נָמָה) was Naamah the Ammonite.</p>
<p>33. because they have forsaken me (עֲזָבוּנִי), and they have bowed down (וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ) to Ashtoreth goddess of Sidon, to Chemosh the god of Moab, and to Milcom the god of the sons of Ammon; and they have not walked (וּלְאֵלֵהֶם) in my ways to do what is righteous in my sight or by my statutes and my ordinances as David his father (אָבִיו)."</p>	<p>22. And Judah did (וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוּדָה) what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and they provoked him to jealousy (וַיִּקְנֵא אֵתוֹ) more than all which their fathers (אֲבוֹתָם) did in the sins which they sinned (חָטְאוּ). 23. And they also built (וַיִּבְנוּ) for themselves high places, and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every luxuriant tree. 24. And also, male temple prostitutes were in the land; they did (עָשׂוּ) according to all the abominations of the nations which Yahweh dispossessed before the sons of Israel.</p>
<p>43. And Solomon slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of his father David,</p>	<p>31. And Rehoboam slept with his fathers; and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David; And the name of his mother (נָמָה) was Naamah the Ammonite.</p>

In both resumé's there are subtle shifts in grammar from singular subjects (Solomon and Rehoboam) to plural subjects ('they' and 'Judah') in the same sentence. The transfer to the plural subjects changes the focus from Solomon and Rehoboam, making 'the tribes of Israel' and 'Judah' guilty of the apostasy that is detailed. However, Solomon and Rehoboam are the true subjects of the apostasy that is listed beginning in 1 Kings 15.33 and 14.22. The transfer of the grammatical subjects from Solomon and Rehoboam to the plural subjects is accomplished in both resumé's by non-restrictive relative clauses that emphasise Jerusalem's unique distinction over all of the other tribes of Israel ('Jerusalem . . . which I chose over all the tribes of Israel' [1 Kgs 11.32]; and 'which Yahweh chose . . . over all the tribes of Israel' [1 Kgs 14.21]). The clauses functionally carry the attention away from the singular subjects of Solomon and Rehoboam by transferring it to the collectives 'tribes of Israel' that end each clause, which then become the subjects of the verbs 'forsaken' (1 Kgs 11.33), and 'did evil' (1 Kgs 14.22) in the place of Solomon and Rehoboam.

Solomon (1 Kgs 11.31-33a)	Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14.21-22a)
<p>31. And he (Ahijah) said to Jeroboam 'Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, "Behold I am tearing the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and I will give you ten tribes; 32. but the one tribe will be for him, because of my servant David, and because of Jerusalem, the city which I chose over all the tribes of Israel;</p>	<p>21. Now Rehoboam son of Solomon reigned in Judah; he was 41 years old when he began to reign; and he reigned 17 years in Jerusalem, the city which Yahweh chose to establish his name there over all the tribes of Israel . . .</p>
<p>33. because they have forsaken me,</p>	<p>22. And Judah did what was evil . . .</p>

In Rehoboam's resumé, of the 'tribes of Israel', the tribe of Judah is singled out as having done 'what was evil' (v. 22); while in the resumé of Solomon, 'they', (i.e., the 'tribes of Israel') are singled out as having 'forsaken me. . . bowed down. . . and not

walked' (v. 33) Thus the sins of both kings are obscured by the subtle shifts in subjects, thereby transferring the guilt of apostasy to the tribes of each king's jurisdiction. Even while Solomon and Rehoboam are relegated to the background, they remain the true grammatical subjects of the verbs 'forsaken' (1 Kgs 11.31) and 'did evil' (1 Kgs 14.21) as indicated in the chart above by the underlined singular personal pronouns which retain the grammatical link to Solomon and Rehoboam.

This divergence from normal grammar created confusion for the ancient translators. The apparatus in the MT notes alterations of the MT in several of the ancient texts, which offer the substitution 'he' (i.e. Solomon) in the place of the collective subject 'they' (1 Kgs 11.33a; LXX, Syriac, Vulgate), and the singular subject 'Rehoboam' in the place of the collective subject 'Judah' (1 Kgs 14.22a; Graecus, Alexandrinus, Vaticanus). The following chart reflects the readings adopted by the ancient texts noted in the apparatus of the MT.

<p style="text-align: center;">Solomon (1 Kgs 11.31-33a)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14.21-22a)</p>
<p>31. And he (Ahijah) said to Jeroboam . . . 'Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, "Behold I am tearing the kingdom from the hand of <u>Solomon</u> and I will give you ten tribes; 32. but the one tribe will be for <u>him</u>, because of my servant David, and because of <u>Jerusalem</u>, the city which I chose over all the tribes of Israel;</p>	<p>21. Now <u>Rehoboam</u> son of Solomon reigned in Judah; <u>he</u> was 41 years old when he began to reign; and <u>he</u> reigned 17 years in Jerusalem, the city which Yahweh chose to establish his name there over all the tribes of Israel . . .</p>
<p>33. because <u>he</u> has forsaken me, and <u>he</u> has bowed down. . . and <u>he</u> has not walked in my ways. . .</p>	<p>22. And <u>Rehoboam</u> did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and <u>he</u> provoked him to jealousy more than all that <u>his</u> father did. . .</p>

In addition to the confusion in grammar that shields Solomon's idolatrous influence from the next generation, the double mention of Rehoboam's mother, Naamah of Ammon, has a similar effect. Appearing at the beginning and at the end of

his resumé (1 Kgs 14.21, 31), Naamah's name serves as an inclusio, sandwiching the sordid details of idolatry during Rehoboam's reign. While the name of the reigning king's mother in the resúmes of the kings of Judah is common in the books of Kings, the repetition of the maternal name in that same resumé is not. No other king's mother is listed twice in any of the resúmes of the kings of Judah. This double mention of her name, and the conspicuousness of its placement at the beginning and the end of Rehoboam's resumé, suggestively wraps Rehoboam in the influence of his mother, the foreign princess from Ammon (cf. 1Kgs 11.1). By identifying her as an Ammonite, the text recalls Solomon's marriages to princesses from Ammon (1 Kgs 11.1, 2) and their influence on him (1 Kgs 11.5-8, 33): like father, like son.

Solomon as the Father of Idolatry

A second way that the text conveys Solomon's post-crime respectability is by its silence concerning Solomon as the real father of idolatry during the time of Israel's monarchy. His disastrous influence on the nation by introducing idols and idol worship is not part of his legacy. Instead, that legacy belongs almost entirely to Jeroboam. The only reference that connects the two kings in relation to their establishment of idolatry in Jerusalem and Bethel is found in 2 Kings 23.13, 15, during Josiah's reform, long after the Northern Kingdom has been exiled. Among Josiah's reforms is the destruction of the idols and shrines set up by Solomon and Jeroboam (2 Kgs 23.13, 15). Thus the only time the text unites Solomon and Jeroboam with reference to their idolatry, it suggests that Solomon and Jeroboam represent the two-pronged origin of idolatry for both the Northern and Southern kingdoms.

As I have pointed out previously, in the divided monarchy each king in the North has a legacy of following in the steps of Jeroboam, who serves as the only reference point for the initiation of idolatry for the kings of Israel (North). While only the Northern Kingdom is the realm of Jeroboam's idolatrous influence, the idolatrous influence of Solomon on either kingdom after Israel's split is never stated directly.

Neither is there a person in Judah like Jeroboam, who serves as a lightning rod of Yahweh's condemnation for influencing every king that followed him in idolatry. Yet, just as Solomon's influence on his son Rehoboam remains unstated, Solomon's influence on Jeroboam also remains unstated. Indeed, the resumés of every 'evil' king in Judah following the split of the kingdom directly omits Solomon as being the origin of idolatry. Instead, the text uses the generic 'sins of his father(s)' until Ahab's bloodline is fused with David's. After the blood union of the Davidic line with the Ahabic line, the sins of Judah's kings will be attributed to Ahab (see below). For example, Abijam (Rehoboam's son), whose regnal resumé begins 1 Kings 15, is listed as having 'walked in all the sins of his father' (v. 3). However, as shown in Rehoboam's regnal resumé above (1 Kgs 14.21-24, 31), those sins are never listed; whatever sins he committed must be derived from the listing of the idolatry of 'Judah' in the same resumé (vv. 21-24). Abijam's son Asa puts an end to idolatry in Judah by putting away 'the male prostitutes from the land' and by removing 'all the idols which his fathers had made' (1 Kgs 15.12), but the 'fathers' that the text refers to are not named. However, if we trace Asa's lineage backwards, his immediate father is Abijam, his grandfather is Rehoboam, and his great-grandfather is Solomon. Thus, the idols which Asa put away were made by Abijam, Rehoboam, and Solomon:

Abijam. . .	walked in all the sins of his father [Rehoboam] (v. 3).
Asa. . .	put away all the idols which his fathers [Abijam, Rehoboam and Solomon] had made (v. 12b).

Following Asa, idolatry in Judah will be attributed to 'the house of Ahab' (2 Kgs 8.18,27) because David's great-great-great-great-grandson Jehoram unites the bloodline of the house of David with the house of Ahab by marrying Ahab's daughter Athaliah (2 Kgs 8.18, 26). The sins of Jehoram, king of Judah, will be described as walking in 'the sins of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab became his wife' (2 Kgs 8.18). Following Jehoram, his son Ahaziah, who reigned after him, 'walked in the sins of the house of Ahab' (2 Kgs 8.27). Following Ahaziah, Hezekiah's son Manasseh 'did . . . as Ahab king of Israel

had done' (2 Kgs 21.2, 3), turning the religion of the kingdom of Judah into the likeness of 'the abominations of the nations whom Yahweh dispossessed before the sons of Israel' (2 Kgs 21.2) and into the likeness of the 'nations whom Yahweh destroyed before the sons of Israel' (2 Kgs 21.9). Their judgement would be like the destruction of Samaria and like 'the house of Ahab' (2 Kgs 21.13). Manasseh's son Amon 'walked in all the way that his father [Manasseh] walked, and served the idols that his father [Manasseh] had served and worshipped them' (2 Kgs 21.22).

It is significant that while Solomon deserves the greatest blame for Israel's downfall, he is never mentioned as being at the root of its fate. Again, the only time his name is mentioned in relation to idolatry is in 2 Kings 23, long after the Northern Kingdom is exiled, when Josiah destroys the idols which Solomon had built and worshipped and led Israel to worship. Thus until Ahab appears on the scene in 1 Kings, Solomon's idolatrous influence on Israel has been obscured even though he is the undesignated cause of Israel's religious apostasy during the time of the monarchy.

Normalising Ahab

The discussion above has shown that Saul, David and Solomon are presented as retaining a significant measure of respectability after their crimes in most of the material in Samuel-Kings (1 Sam 15; 16; 24; 26; 2 Sam 1; 1 Kgs 13-16). Their crimes may be great, but they are not so great when viewed against their many accomplishments. However, when their crimes resurface in the story of and person of Ahab, they again take centre stage, with two simultaneous contrasting effects: they normalise the character of Ahab while they diminish the character of Saul, David and Solomon. They normalise the character of Ahab by virtue of the normality with which we view the three kings prior to reading Ahab — by associating him with kings who are not simply sinners but also important leaders of Israel — and they diminish the character of the three kings because now, in the story of Ahab, their crimes carry the added stigma of representing the identifying marks of the worst person ever.

This transference of a general positive characterisation from Saul, David and Solomon to Ahab is also aided by the fact that Ahab does not have a distinct identity. There is no *one* crime in the narrative of offences that makes up the story of Ahab that can be labelled an *Ahabic* crime. Ahab does not follow in the steps of Jeroboam as all of his immediate northern predecessors do, but he commits 'Solomon's crime', 'Saul's crime', and 'David's crime', in that order. He is the incomparable evil-doer, but he is also like these other kings.

Additionally, Ahab gains moral ground through his association with Saul, David and Solomon, since the crimes he commits have been committed by them and they have risen above them. Essentially, the others' crimes provide Ahab somewhat of a limiting moral boundary which confines him within its fence of acceptability. In the story of Ahab, all four kings inhabit a similar, if not identical, moral sphere (but not a normal one). Ahab lives with the others in this moral sphere, and, since they have not been totally condemned, there occurs a reciprocal levelling of the moral field. While the crimes had the effect of a major undoing of each king's previous characterisation and were considerable flaws in terms of character qualities, their crimes did not altogether bury each king in a grave of moral depravity. As a result, Ahab 'inherits' some of the leniency that has been granted to the three. Because they have not been completely censured for their crimes, it is difficult to censure Ahab completely for doing the same thing(s).

So far in Part 1 of this chapter I have been arguing that the story of Ahab brings about a characterisation of Ahab, Saul, David and Solomon that makes them all different than we had known them before. While one effect of the story of Ahab leaves him more suitable than what he is declared to be, the immediate effect of the story on the three kings is a further tarnishing of their record, so that all recollections or rereadings of their stories post-Ahab are tainted by the shadow of Ahab in their new association with him. Part 2 of this chapter will demonstrate that rereading the accounts of the infamous sins of Saul and David, and rereading the introduction to the

story of Solomon after reading the story of Ahab produces new perspectives on their crimes and new perspectives on the character of the three kings.

PART 2: REREADING THE STORIES OF SAUL, DAVID AND SOLOMON IN THE SHADOW OF AHAB

Rereading the Story of King Saul's Crime in the Shadow of Ahab

Saul and Ahab

Rereading the story of King Saul's crime of sparing Agag after reading the story of Ahab leaves Saul looking even more guilty. The following parallels in the lives of the two kings establish a unique relationship between the two kings, and help to serve as a backdrop against which Saul's crime is reread. First, both kings are tainted by their status in the history of the monarchy as failed kings: Ahab is declared the worst king and the worst individual (1 Kgs 16.30, 33; 21.25,26), while Saul, as Israel's first king, is also Israel's first rejected king (1 Sam 15.23).

Second, both kings have a two-sided relationship with Yahweh: both experience his favour and both experience his dark side. By this I mean that both kings at one time or another receive his support, but then later suffer as his victims. Yahweh selects Saul as Israel's first king, giving him a new heart and empowering him with his spirit (1 Sam 10.9, 10; 11.6), while Yahweh assists Ahab, making him the recipient of his miraculous power in spite of his evil status (1 Kgs 20.13-14, 22, 28). Following their failures, both kings are judged and consequently beset by spirits from Yahweh. For Saul, Yahweh replaces his spirit with an 'evil spirit' to plague him at different times throughout his reign, causing him extreme torment at times and at other times inciting him to rage (e.g., 1 Sam 16.14-23; 18.10). Ahab's death is brought about by a 'lying spirit' sent by Yahweh to influence Ahab's prophets with a false prophecy (1 Kgs 22.19-23). Besides Abimelech (Judges 9.23), whose kingship is viewed as illegitimate from the start, these are the only kings in the Hebrew Bible subjected to the influence of evil spirits from God.⁵³

⁵³ For a comparison of the parallels between Saul and Abimelech regarding the 'evil spirit' from Yahweh and other significant links between the two kings, see Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Israel: Rivivum Publishing House, 1985), especially pages 97-99.

Third, Saul and Ahab die in similar circumstances. Both die on the battlefield as a result of the judgement of Yahweh announced by prophets. In Endor, the ghost of Samuel informs Saul that he and his sons will die the following day in battle against the Philistines (1 Sam 28.19), and Micaiah declares to Ahab that he will not return alive from his battle against the Arameans (1 Kgs 22.17, 28). Both die after being mortally wounded by archers, and both die courageously. Ahab is hit by a 'chance' arrow in the only vulnerable portion of his armour. He orders his driver to prop him up in his chariot in the front of the battle to inspire his men until he dies (1 Kgs 22.34-35). Saul is hit by arrows from several archers (1 Sam 31.3). Severely wounded, he ends his life by falling on his sword in order to prevent his enemies from abusing him (v. 4).⁵⁴

How Much More . . .

Rereading Saul's crime in the light of Ahab's similar crime produces an *a fortiori* effect which further diminishes Saul's status as Israel's first rejected king. Compared to the story of Ahab's crime of violating the ban, the story Saul's disobedience in his violation of the ban creates an impression that Saul is more deserving of his punishment than Ahab is, for, unlike Saul, Ahab closely followed Yahweh's instructions. The comparison thus highlights Saul's disobedience. In what follows, I highlight the theme of obedience in the stories which produces this further diminishment of Saul's already stained character. The circumstance of obedience-disobedience is clear enough that, when compared to Ahab, Saul's behaviour lacks a standard that Ahab appears to set by closely following Yahweh's instructions in carrying out Yahweh's battles. Whereas it is clear that Ahab follows Yahweh's instructions closely, it is not so clear in Saul's case.

⁵⁴ Note, however, the other account of Saul's death told by the Amalekite to King David, wherein the Amalekite claims to have killed Saul (2 Sam 1.1-10).

Disobedience and Obedience

The major emphasis on obedience (or lack of obedience) in the account of Saul's crime is projected by the verb **שמע**, to obey, which is used often in various ways in 1 Samuel 15.⁵⁵ Samuel commands Saul to hear Yahweh's commission: 'And now, hear (**שמע**) the voice of the words of Yahweh!' (v. 1); Samuel demands Saul to answer why he failed to execute the ban: 'And why did you not obey (**שמעת**) the voice of Yahweh?' (v. 19); Saul responds to Samuel's question saying, 'I *have* obeyed (**שמעת**) the voice of Yahweh' (v. 20; my emphasis); Samuel asks a rhetorical question of Saul about religious fidelity and false piety and then answers it: 'Does Yahweh delight in holocausts and sacrifices as obeying (**כשמע**) the voice of Yahweh? Behold, to obey (**שמע**) is better than sacrifice . . .' (v. 22); and Saul finally confesses his sin, saying 'I listened (**ושמעתי**) to the voice of the people' rather than to Yahweh (v. 25). Exum notes that Samuel's admonition to the people in 1 Samuel 12 to obey the voice of Yahweh 'sets the stage for Saul's failure and consequent rejection when he obeys the people (15:24) rather than Yhwh (15:1, 19, 20, 22).'⁵⁶

The account of Saul's disobedience in 1 Samuel 15 begins when Yahweh commissions Saul through Samuel to annihilate the Amalekites for what they did to Israel 'when he came up from Egypt' (1 Sam 15.2; cf. Deut 25.17,19), and ends when Yahweh declares to Samuel that he repents for having anointed Saul as king because he disobeyed his order (vv. 10-11). Saul is ordered ('thus says Yahweh') to 'utterly destroy' (**חרם**) everything that lives belonging to the Amalekites, both human and animal, and not to 'spare' (**והחל**) anything belonging to them (v. 3). But Saul spares King Agag and the best of the livestock. Following the general battle notice that Saul 'struck Amalek', the text provides more detail about what happened to the Amalekites, stating, 'he (Saul) seized Agag, king of Amalek, alive, but all the people he utterly

⁵⁵ Robert Alter shows the words 'listen', 'voice', and 'word', as key terms carrying the theme of Saul's violation of the ban (*The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: Basic Books, 1981], p. 93). Sternberg says of the use of **שמע** in 1 Kings 15, 'This loaded verb, whose sense extends from hearing to obedience, resonates more than any other throughout the structure of repetition . . .' (p. 513). Exum notes the significance of the theme in the entire story of Saul: 'Obedience plays a central role in the tragedy of Saul' (*Tragedy*, p. 30).

⁵⁶ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 30.

destroyed with the edge of the sword' (v. 8). The next verse then repeats the information that Agag is captured alive, but it adds even more detail: Saul's action was a joint transgression to spare Agag and the spoils of battle, 'Saul *and* the people spared (וַיְחַמְּל) Agag' along with the best of the livestock (v. 9), thereby including the peoples' guilt along with Saul's. This suggests that the repetition of the verb 'spare' (חָמַל) in v. 9 underscores Saul's crime by recalling Yahweh's commission to Saul in v. 3 that he was to 'spare' nothing. I highlight the Hebrew:

3 עתה לך
והכיתה את עמלק
והחרמתם את כל אשר לו
ולא תחמל עליו. . . .
9 וַיְחַמְּל שָׂאוּל וְהָעָם עַל אַגַּג וְעַל מִיטְבַּ הַצֹּאן. . . .

3 Now, go!
and smite Amalek,
and you shall utterly destroy everything that belongs to him,
you shall not spare him;
9 And Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the flocks . . .

The order given to Saul not to 'spare' anything (v. 3) is clear, and it is against this order that Yahweh measures Saul's behaviour. The text does not state that Saul has not fulfilled his orders, but it shows the discrepancy between the order and Saul's non-compliance. Sternberg notes how the case against Saul is so meticulously crafted that outright censure is unnecessary: 'By the end of verse 9, then, the case for the prosecution becomes so formidable that it is hard to believe that the narrator has put it together without uttering so much as a single word of overt condemnation.'⁵⁷ Saul's disobedience is communicated by the account of the crime and then by Yahweh's response. Yahweh's repentance over having made Saul king comes in a cause-effect sequence, signaling to the reader that it is Saul's behaviour that causes Yahweh's repentance: Yahweh orders Saul (vv. 1-3), Saul fails to carry the order out (vv. 4-10), Yahweh repents of having made Saul king (v. 11).⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Sternberg, p. 492.

⁵⁸ Miscall, in one of his two readings of 1 Kings 15 (see discussion of his two readings below), questions whether Yahweh's repentance over Saul in verses 10-11 relates directly to the events in

The remainder of the 1 Samuel 15 deals with Samuel's confrontation with Saul after Yahweh informs Samuel that Saul has failed his mission (vv. 10-11), which forms the basis of Yahweh's formal indictment against Saul. After Samuel 'cried out to Yahweh all night' concerning Saul's failure, he goes off to find the king (v. 12). Saul's seemingly gleeful greeting upon meeting Samuel in Gilgal, 'Blessed are you of Yahweh', creates questions about his genuineness. Fokkelman says of Saul's greeting, 'In his choice of words I hear the rather too quick cheerfulness of someone with something to hide.'⁵⁹ Then his unequivocal announcement to Samuel, 'I have raised up the word of Yahweh' (v. 13), echoes and contradicts Yahweh's previous revelation to Samuel:

11b כי שב מאחרי
ואת דברי לא הקים . . .
13d ויאמר לו שאול
ברוך אתה ליהוה
הקימתי את דבר יהוה

11b for he [Saul] has turned from following after me,
and my words he has not raised up . . .
13d And Saul said to him [Samuel],
'Blessed are you of Yahweh,
I have raised up the word of Yahweh'.

Saul's bold announcement of obedience creates a momentary hesitation for the reader about Saul's genuineness. Gunn calls the effect of Saul's statement on the reader 'astonishing'.⁶⁰ This hesitation is brought about by Saul's *unsolicited* announcement of obedience coupled with Yahweh's response (v. 11) and Saul's account of his action against the Amalekites. Saul appears to anticipate that Samuel has come to ask him to account for his conduct in 'the city of Amalek' and perhaps seeks to counter Samuel's charges by getting in the first word. But Saul's unsolicited statement ('I have raised

verses 1-9, or if they represent a break in the text in order to introduce 'a new episode presenting Samuel's reaction' in relation to his encounter with Saul that follows (*1 Samuel*, p.103).

⁵⁹ Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, p. 95.

⁶⁰ Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, p. 47. Fokkelman notes a similar effect: 'A new effect of the inversion in v.11b shows us what is going on, for there is a chiasmus between 11b and 13d: "my commands / he has not carried out" as against "I have carried out / the Lord's command", which, as a radical inversion, places Saul's pretension diametrically opposite God's opinion and unmasks it as being in conflict with the facts' (*The Crossing Fates*, p. 95).

up the word of Yahweh') only fuels Samuel's piercing retort about the livestock: 'Then what is the sound of the sheep in my ears, and the sound of the cattle that I hear?' (v. 14). Sternberg labels Samuel's response 'oblique sarcasm'.⁶¹ Samuel knows that Saul is lying because of what Yahweh had told him the previous night, and because of this revelation, Samuel is unwilling to accept any of Saul's subsequent excuses throughout his ensuing cross-examination of Saul (vv. 15-23). Brueggemann observes:

Saul's defense . . . is not convincing to Samuel. Samuel spots the deep contradiction between Saul's 'facts' (vv. 13, 15) and Yahweh's disclosure (v. 10). Samuel takes as true the word of Yahweh, not the word of Saul, and rejects Saul's self-defense.⁶²

Saul's answer shifts the focus and the blame from himself to the people, explaining that *the people* had spared the best of the flocks and the best of the herds 'in order to sacrifice [them] to Yahweh your God', but that they had destroyed the remainder (v. 15; my emphasis). Samuel then cuts him off, 'Stop!' (פַּרְוֹ), and tells him that he will give him the explanation which 'Yahweh spoke to me in the night' (v. 16a). In response, Saul yields, saying 'Speak' (v. 16b).

Samuel intensifies his demand for an explanation of the king's breach of trust by reminding Saul that his unlikely rise to power was Yahweh's doing: 'Is it not [that] though you are little in your eyes, you are chief among the tribes of Israel, and that Yahweh anointed you as king over Israel?' (v. 17). He then re-emphasises the fact that Yahweh commanded Saul to destroy Amalek: 'And Yahweh sent (יִשְׁלַחֲךָ) you on a journey (יָרַד) and said, "Go and utterly destroy the sinners, Amalek, and fight against him until they are utterly consumed"' (v. 18). This is the second time that the order is stated in 1 Samuel 15, emphasising that Saul's disobedience is the issue. It will be repeated a third time by Saul (v. 20). Samuel then again demands an explanation for not carrying out his orders, 'Why did you not obey (שָׁמַעְתָּ) the voice of Yahweh but swoop to the spoil and do this evil in the sight of Yahweh?' (v. 19).

⁶¹ Sternberg, p. 506.

⁶² Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), p. 112.

Samuel's charge that Saul 'swooped to the spoil' is the second time he has brought up the matter of the spared livestock, but by calling it 'spoil', Samuel introduces Saul's motive. In reply, Saul reiterates that he has followed orders ('I did obey the voice of Yahweh') but disassociates himself from the charge of insubordination, strangely, by introducing his capture of Agag, as if this had been his original commission. Sternberg suggests that the best probable reason for Saul introducing Agag into the dialogue is that it is his means of gaining credit from Samuel for having done something positive.⁶³ Saul also continues to emphasise that it is the people who had seized the spoil, repeating the same terminology that Samuel has just used:

ויאמר שאול אל שמואל
 אשר שמעתי בקול יהוה
 ואלך בדרך
 אשר שלחני יהוה
 ואביא את אגג מלך עמלק
 ואת עמלק החרמתי
 ויקח העם מהשלל צאן ובקר ראשית החרם
 לזבח ליהוה אלהיך בגלגל

And Saul said to Samuel,
 'I did obey the voice of Yahweh,
 and I went on the journey
 which Yahweh sent me,
 and I brought back Agag king of Amalek,
 but Amalek I utterly destroyed.
 And the people took from the spoil flocks and herds, [the] best of the
 ban,
 in order to sacrifice to Yahweh your God at Gilgal' (vv. 20-21).

Saul's response leaves an impression that by bringing back Agag, he has been obedient in sparing the king and that mentioning his faithfulness in this matter is an attempt to deflect the force of Samuel's charge of unfaithfulness. Saul then shifts the blame to the people, thereby removing himself as far as possible from guilt. Exum draws a comparison with the weakness of Saul's defence here as compared to his defence before Samuel in 1 Samuel 13: 'But whereas Saul's earlier defense against the charge of disobedience seemed reasonable, here his justification of his behaviour is

⁶³ Sternberg, p. 509.

somewhat feeble'.⁶⁴ Samuel, however, is not persuaded by Saul's continued denials, so he finally cuts off the argument and moves to sentencing Saul, speaking to him in formal verse:

Because you have rejected the word of Yahweh,
Yahweh has rejected you from being king (15.23b).⁶⁵

Yahweh's prior disclosure to Samuel about Saul's disobedience carries the force in the judicial argument against him, an argument which Saul strengthens by degree, by shifting the blame for the violation of the ban to the people (vv. 13, 15, 20, 21), and by confessing his guilt (v. 24) when Samuel says that Yahweh is taking the kingship of Israel from him. This final decree also serves as a synopsis of Saul's crime. In refusing to carry out what Yahweh had ordered him to do, Saul forfeits the throne, and the law of the talon is applied: rejection for rejection.⁶⁶

The issue of Saul's disobedience, however, is challenged by several critics who argue for Saul's probity based, among other things, on the his initial claim of innocence for violating the ban. They argue that their arguments create a reading that makes Yahweh's and Samuel's judgement appear unfair. For example, Hertzberg believes that Saul's crime is not deliberate, but he also notes it is not a crime that can be overlooked:

The greeting with which Saul meets Samuel in Gilgal and the news that he has fulfilled his task are not signs of a guilty conscience; rather Saul – and at the same time the reader – is only convinced that he has done wrong during the course of his conversation with Samuel.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 28.

⁶⁵ Fokkelman underscores the significance of the shift in style as a major feature of the chapter: 'Saul has had two chances to react seriously to Samuel's criticism, and he has missed them. He is so blinkered that Samuel has now had enough and pronounces Saul's final rejection. The central importance of this to cap. 15 is marked by the transition to a different form of speech, the succinct style of verse' (*The Crossing Fates*, p. 98). So also Hertzberg, who says of the shift from prose to verse 'shows it to be the central point of the chapter' (p. 127).

⁶⁶ Sternberg says, 'the prophet formulates the relations between sin and punishment in the stark and lucid terms of *lex talionis*' (p. 496). Exum, however, suggests that Saul is rejected by Yahweh because Yahweh feels rejected by the people as their king: '[Verse 23] echoes Yahweh's bitter complaint of 8:7, "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." Yhwh selects Saul as Israel's first king, but at the same time views him as an unwelcome usurper of divine leadership' (*Tragedy*, p. 35). Gunn offers a similar view of Saul's rejection: 'Saul's rejection is not intrinsically and inevitably the outcome of his actions. Rather, God, given the opportunity (or perhaps better, having provided it for himself?), chooses to find Saul guilty. He is, so to speak, predisposed to reject him as king' (*Fate of King Saul*, p. 124).

⁶⁷ Hertzberg, pp. 126-27.

Hertzberg sees Saul's offence as a crime of oversight. Saul is rejected because he failed to carry out his orders, although he had acted in good faith and accepts his guilt. For Hertzberg, Saul is 'by no means a rebel against the Lord'.⁶⁸ Saul's excuse for the presence of the spoil at Gilgal, 'to offer sacrifice to Yahweh your God', may be plausible, but Saul, Hertzberg says, has misunderstood the difference between the ban (חרם) and sacrifice (זבח): 'the ban is complete destruction, the surrender of the whole, whereas sacrifice usually presupposes a portion for men as well.'⁶⁹ In addition, Hertzberg notes, sacrifice is carried out by humans, whereas in carrying out the ban, 'man is the instrument of a higher hand and thus lives completely in "obedience". Obedience is therefore, even from a theological point of view, more than the best fat of rams.'⁷⁰

While Hertzberg offers a sympathetic reading that is conceivable enough, its weakness is that it is unreasonable to assume that Saul, as king, is acting in ignorance. Mauchline agrees that Saul's not knowing stretches reality: 'The claim made by Saul to Samuel that he had fulfilled the commission was either a piece of bluster or bravado, or reveals a lack of awareness that he had done wrong which is well-nigh incredible'.⁷¹

Gunn notes Saul's innocence by also drawing a distinction between the ban and sacrifice, but he goes further than Hertzberg, suggesting that Saul is totally blameless: '. . . for here in chapter 15, as in chapter 13, there is essentially no failure on Saul's part to be accounted for, no failure, that is to say, for which he can be held seriously culpable.'⁷² Gunn says Saul's good intentions to honour Yahweh with a sacrifice at Gilgal do not constitute a crime because both the ban and the sacrifice honour Yahweh.⁷³ Gunn also follows Hertzberg in believing that Saul recognises his guilt only after Samuel persuades him that he has indeed disobeyed the commandment of Yahweh.⁷⁴ But instead of his crime being simple oversight, Gunn believes that

⁶⁸ Hertzberg, p. 128.

⁶⁹ Hertzberg, p. 127; cf. Niditch, pp. 60-61.

⁷⁰ Hertzberg, p. 128.

⁷¹ John Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1971), p. 124.

⁷² Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, p. 56.

⁷³ Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, pp. 52-55.

⁷⁴ Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, p. 53.

Samuel and Yahweh have decided beforehand to reject the king on a technicality,⁷⁵ that Saul has essentially been fated to fail.⁷⁶ For Gunn, their conspiracy explains why Samuel ignores all of Saul's explanations for his behaviour. Gunn comments on Samuel's complete disregard for Saul's report that he had spared and brought back Agag (for Gunn, the sparing of Agag is crucial for understanding Samuel's complete rejection of any more excuses):

But what is really important for our understanding of the story is that *Samuel* does not bother to question him on this one point where Saul's explanation seems most potentially vulnerable. Rather Samuel chooses to ignore the explanation altogether and to respond to the king's protestations merely with fine rhetoric (verse 22f.). Again (as in chapter 13), therefore, the real point of the scene can only be that in some way Saul is already doomed and that any detailed justification for his condemnation is essentially irrelevant (his emphasis).⁷⁷

Jobling presents a similar reading, but instead of Saul's rejection being a joint conspiracy, as Gunn suggests, Samuel works independently of Yahweh to displace Saul, while 'YHWH only belatedly ratifies what Samuel has effectively done.'⁷⁸ For Jobling, Samuel has his private desires to see Saul fail as king because the prophet is at pains to accept the new political order of the monarchy and the fact that he, as judge, as well as the institution of judgeship, has been replaced.⁷⁹ Jobling says this reading helps explain the ambiguity surrounding Saul's judgement in 1 Samuel 13 for failing to wait for Samuel to present the offering. Jobling implies that Samuel purposely delays his arrival in order to catch Saul in the act of taking cultic rites into his own hands.⁸⁰ Saul's unambiguous failure to carry out the letter of the law in 1 Samuel 15 then offers the prophet the opportunity to regain his authority as judge:

⁷⁵ Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, p. 56.

⁷⁶ Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, p. 71. I agree with Brueggemann that Gunn's view falls outside what is considered acceptable in terms of orthodoxy, that to be fated so is a solution that is 'theologically' incompatible (*First and Second Samuel*, p. 115).

⁷⁷ Gunn, *Fate of King Saul*, p. 56.

⁷⁸ David Jobling, *1 Samuel* (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry; Colledgeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), p. 86.

⁷⁹ Jobling, *1 Samuel*, p. 118.

⁸⁰ Jobling suggests that the (un)timely arrival of Samuel immediately following Saul's offering hints of a deliberate plan. He says: 'He offers the burnt offering, and instantly Samuel arrives. The reader suspects a setup here' (*1 Samuel*, p. 82). Jobling also suggests that Samuel's relationship with Saul was tutorial, helping explain Samuel's delay as a kind of test; 'Teachers set their pupils difficult and even unfair tests just to see what they will do. It is in this vein that Samuel arranges to be a bit late' (*1 Samuel*, p. 120).

He could not prevent kingship but he has achieved the next best thing – a king he can control, a king who is less than a king. Samuel has won his battle with Saul, so he wants to keep Saul as a figurehead who conforms to his (i.e., judgeship's) idea of what a national leader should be.⁸¹

Exum, who looks at the story of Saul in relation to the genre of tragedy, points out that it is clear that Saul does not do what he is told, but she questions whether Saul intentionally ignored Yahweh's ban. She says, 'Saul may well be acting in good faith' when he decides to spare the animals for a sacrifice at Gilgal.⁸² But in the end, his insistence on the innocence of his intentions does not really matter: 'whether his intentions are judged good or bad, they are irrelevant'.⁸³ Saul's real difficulty is that he will be made to pay for what he did no matter what, for the real question in the story 'is not why Saul is rejected The question is why there is no forgiveness.'⁸⁴ Thus, for Exum, the question the story poses has more to do with Yahweh than with Saul. She notes that the key to the tragedy of the story of Saul is his troublesome relationship with Yahweh as seen in 'the ambivalent role of the deity'.⁸⁵ The portrayal of Yahweh in his relationship with Saul is blurred due to the complexities involved in Saul's guilt and Yahweh's hostility in response to it. This is what Exum calls 'the Aeschylean paradox of human guilt and the wicked god'.⁸⁶ Thus, while Yahweh chooses Saul after he reluctantly yields to the demands of the people for a king (1 Sam 8.1-9), he rejects him hastily following Saul's untimely sacrifice (1 Sam 13). The seemingly easy dismissal of Saul, so soon after he had been anointed, keeps the question foregrounded concerning whether or not he has been rejected simply because Yahweh never accepted him. When Yahweh removes his spirit from Saul and sends an evil spirit to torment him, it signals an official abandonment by Yahweh (1 Sam 16.14). Although God's spirit comes upon Saul again, he renders Saul helpless and naked before Samuel (1 Sam 19.20-24). However, his abandonment of Saul is total when Samuel tells Saul, 'Yahweh has become your enemy' (1 Sam 28.16). While

⁸¹ Jobling, *1 Samuel*, p. 87.

⁸² Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 28.

⁸³ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 29.

⁸⁴ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 40.

⁸⁵ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 17.

⁸⁶ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 17.

Saul has sought Yahweh's counsel even to the end, Exum observes that 'he meets ultimately with divine silence and a crushing reiteration of rejection from the ghost of Samuel.'⁸⁷

While Gunn's, Jobling's and Exum's readings provide valuable new perspectives on the issue of Saul's innocence, I believe the case against Saul is clear. If anything, their perspectives on Saul's guilt and their attempts to exonerate him from guilt illustrates the rhetorical force of Saul's declaration of innocence and its relation to what appears to be excessively harsh punishment. But the drawback of their arguments lies in Saul's own defence. First, he claims total obedience to his orders ('I have raised up the word of Yahweh'; 1 Sam 15.13), while it is obvious (to Yahweh and the reader) that he has not. Second, when he comes to know that Samuel knows, he shifts the blame to the people (vv. 15, 21). Third, he confesses his crime (perhaps in hopes of retaining the throne), when he hears that Yahweh has rejected him from being king (vv. 24, 25). Edelman notes that the text underscores Saul's guilt even though it fails to present his motives. She says:

Nevertheless, it [the text] emphasizes his guilt alongside that of the people's, regardless of his motivations. Whether he was acting out of personal interest like the people, or out of extreme deference to Yahweh, he is equally guilty of not carrying out the spirit of the divine command, which was evident in light of the supporting quotation of historical motive.⁸⁸

Miscall develops two readings of Saul's crime, one he calls the 'retributive justice' view, and the other the 'power politics' view.⁸⁹ His two views demonstrate how easy it is to see both sides of Saul's behaviour. The retributive justice view establishes Saul's guilt, which Miscall says 'is supported by the text',⁹⁰ and the power politics view is one in which Saul loses his argument with Samuel over his behaviour regarding the ban, which concerns a political struggle over 'who can interpret this word of the Lord'.⁹¹ Miscall develops his power politics view from Polzin's work in

⁸⁷ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 42.

⁸⁸ Diana Vikander Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah*, (JSOTSup 121; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), p. 102.

⁸⁹ Miscall, *1 Samuel*, p. 100.

⁹⁰ Miscall, *1 Samuel*, p. 102.

⁹¹ Miscall, *1 Samuel*, p. 100.

Joshua – 2 Kings,⁹² a view in which Yahweh and individuals have the freedom to interpret the law of Moses, including the ban, in a non-literalist manner. Miscall uses Joshua as an example of someone who has freedom to interpret the ban:

Joshua can exempt Rahab from the ban on Jericho, and the Lord exempts the booty from Ai. The law of total ban is not applied in an unyielding manner without regard for the circumstances. Joshua can so interpret and apply the law on his own without divine sanction.⁹³

Miscall points out that Saul's sparing of the Kenites, who 'showed mercy with the sons of Israel when they went up from Egypt' (1 Sam 15.6), shows that Saul had the freedom to interpret the ban, just as Joshua interpreted the ban at Jericho by sparing Rahab for having shown mercy to the spies.⁹⁴ In addition, he notes that Joshua interpreted the ban for himself by sparing the king of Ai for public execution, serving as another precedent for Saul's sparing of Agag.⁹⁵

While Miscall offers a clear alternate view that Saul's behaviour is guiltless, there are some differences between Saul's behaviour in the 'city of Amalek' and Joshua's interpretation of the ban in his actions at Jericho and Ai that challenge his power politics view. According to Miscall, Saul is free to interpret the ban; however, Saul's mission against Amalek falls outside the normal law of the total ban (in distinction to the ban that exempts certain life from destruction). The normal law of the total ban concerns the destruction of the people of the land of Canaan, such as those living in Jericho and Ai, whereas certain restrictions apply to those peoples who live outside the land (such as the Amalekites) that do not apply to the total ban on indigenous peoples. These include sparing the women, the children and the animals of those cities outside the land (Deut 20.14-16). Yahweh has modified the normal procedures against an outside city to be *only similar* to the total ban. The normal restrictions placed on taking life in those cities outside the land helps explain Yahweh's

⁹² Miscall, *1 Samuel*, p. 100. Miscall refers to Polzin's, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History, Part One: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980); see especially pp. 73-84.

⁹³ Miscall, *1 Samuel*, p. 100.

⁹⁴ Miscall, *1 Samuel*, pp. 100-101.

⁹⁵ Miscall, *1 Samuel*, p. 101.

highly detailed instructions to Saul that *everything* – men, women, children and all livestock – is to be destroyed in the ban on Amalek (1 Sam 15.3).

In the light of the differences between the two types of ban, Miscall's analogy between the Kenites and Rahab (that is, that the sparing of Rahab, whom Joshua spared from the ban, serves as precedent for Saul in sparing the Kenites) must be addressed from a theological perspective. The purpose for the destruction of Amalek is *revenge* (Yahweh commissions Saul to carry out Moses' instructions to Israel to 'blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget' [Deut 25.19]),⁹⁶ whereas the purpose for Joshua's destruction of Ai and Jericho is *inheritance*. The destruction of Jericho and Ai initiates the fulfilment of Yahweh's promise to the patriarchs to give their posterity all the land of Canaan for an inheritance. Saul has not interpreted the ban for his own reasons by sparing the Kenites. The Kenites are spared because they are not Amalekites, as the command specifies, and because they 'showed mercy' (עֲשִׂיתָהּ חֶסֶד עִם־כָּל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) to Israel, as Saul points out (1 Sam 15.6). There is no need for Saul to include the Kenites as objects of Yahweh's revenge on the Amalekites. With respect to Joshua's sparing of Rahab, while she also 'showed mercy' (note the identical terminology, חֶסֶד עֲשִׂיתָ עִמָּכֶם) to Israel by hiding the spies, she is spared as the result of an oath that she made the spies take (Josh 2.14) to spare her and her family from the destruction of Jericho for helping them escape (vv. 12, 13, 17). Also, unlike the situation with Saul and the Kenites, the spies agreed to protect Rahab well before the attack came. Joshua had nothing to do with the oath the messengers made with Rahab, but he honoured it. There is no agreement of any kind between Saul and the Kenites. He spares them because Yahweh has not designated them as recipients of revenge.

While I am suggesting that the text sufficiently establishes its case against Saul, I am not suggesting that the arguments above by Gunn, Miscall and Exum that challenge Saul's guilt are neither weighty nor appealing. The text elicits a significant amount of sympathy for Saul (particularly in Samuel's softening toward Saul and in

⁹⁶ Cf. Niditch, chapter 2: 'The Ban as God's Justice', pp. 56-77.

David's elegant elegy for Saul), while at the same time, it pronounces upon him an irreversible sentence. His plight tugs at us, arousing our sympathy, causing us to look for explanations for his harsh punishment. But while Saul is by all means a sympathetic character (especially as Yahweh and Samuel appear to be unfairly harsh with Saul), he is also not innocent. Exum, while questioning Yahweh's unforgiving treatment of Saul, notes that Saul's presentation as a tragic character is as someone who is sympathetic and culpable at the same time: 'Saul's downfall is of his own making; and in more than one instance he has incurred the divine wrath. But whereas Saul is guilty, he is not really wicked.'⁹⁷

An Obedient Ahab

In contrast to Saul, Ahab appears as a king who obediently follows all of Yahweh's commands. This contrast is what gives the comparison between the two accounts of violations of the ban the *a fortiori* effect. As I have shown in the previous chapter, the story of Ahab's crime occurs in a context of war, wherein Ahab and Israel face annihilation by the Arameans. The story details the causes and the outcomes of two potentially disastrous battles between a besieged underdog Israel, led by Ahab, and the militarily superior Arameans, led by Ben Hadad and a coalition of thirty-two kings (1 Kgs 20.1-34). In 1 Kings 20, Ahab strangely finds favour with Yahweh, who rescues the besieged king, apparently seeking to make himself known to Ahab by miraculous intervention. Ahab never diverges from any of Yahweh's instructions given through the prophets, instructions which (with the exception of one) are introduced using the authoritative prophetic formula, 'thus says Yahweh' (1 Kgs 20.13,14, 28). Prior to his first battle against Aram at Samaria, Ahab is approached by a prophet who says to him, 'Thus says Yahweh, "Do you see all this great tumult (i.e., the Arameans amassed against Samaria), behold I am giving it into your hand today, and you will know that I am Yahweh"' (1 Kgs 20.13). When Ahab asks him how it will be accomplished, the prophet gives him his instructions, again using the

⁹⁷ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 40.

formula 'Thus says Yahweh' (1 Kgs 20.14), which Ahab carries out. Then following his victory, he is approached a second time by the same prophet who tells him that Ben Hadad will return the following year and that he should prepare for the battle (1 Kgs 20.22). Ahab listens and does what he is told. When he meets the Arameans at Aphek in a second battle, Ahab is approached a third time with an announcement of assurance ('Thus says Yahweh' [v. 28]) that Yahweh would give him the victory, presumably because Ahab has prepared himself (as the prophet had instructed him) and Israel to meet the Arameans in battle in spite of overwhelming odds against him (1 Kgs 20.27). In contrast to Saul, who is shown disobeying direct orders from Yahweh through Samuel, Ahab obeys every order given to him by Yahweh through his prophets who frequent Ahab's court. Unlike Saul, however, Ahab has no advance notice of a ban on either humans or animals in any of his battles until the end of 1 Kings 20, when Ahab finds out for the first time that he is sentenced to die for having released the enemy king who happens to be Yahweh's 'man of my ban' (vv. 35-43). The effect of rereading the account of Saul's crime after having read the account of Ahab's crime is that Saul looks worse than Ahab by virtue of Saul's disobedience and Ahab's obedience.

Rereading the Story of David's Crime in the Shadow of Ahab

Introduction

The one lasting effect that emerges from a rereading of David's crime following a reading of Ahab's crime against Naboth is a suggestion that David's crime may be read as being similarly motivated. As White has already shown in her study of Nathan's Vineyard,⁹⁸ the stories of David and Ahab's crimes are closely related in terms of their structure and their subject: a king covets his neighbour's property and takes it by violence. This story of David's crime marks the end of his rise to prominence and the beginning of his downfall. As it stands, the story leaves some unanswered questions (which I will discuss below) about the crime and about David's motivation (e.g., why did he stay in Jerusalem when he should have been with his army in Rabbah?) that cannot be answered by going back for a second (or third, fourth, etc.) reading of 2 Samuel 11. But by rereading the story in the light of Ahab's crime against Naboth, several possible readings present themselves, resulting in an Ahabic representation of David.

Before discussing points of comparison between Ahab and David, a brief discussion of ambiguity in the story of David and Bathsheba is in order, since the story leaves many unanswered questions. Following this overview, I will cover the portion of both stories prior to the crimes, treating the initial scenes of David on the roof of the palace and his immediate response to seeing Bathsheba before he sends for her and the initial scenes of Ahab's failed negotiations with Naboth and its immediate effects on Ahab.

Ambiguity in the Story of David and Bathsheba

Sternberg discusses the story of David and Bathsheba in detail in terms of narrative ambiguity resulting from gaps, 'lack of information about the world—an event, motive, causal link, character trait, plot structure, law of probability—contrived by a

⁹⁸ White, pp. 66-76.

temporal displacement'.⁹⁹ Ambiguity from gaps leaves the reader without answers to questions which the story itself raises. For example, Sternberg asks why David stays in Jerusalem when he is supposed to be in the field with his men fighting a war,¹⁰⁰ what is David thinking¹⁰¹, why is Uriah recalled from the fighting in Rabbah,¹⁰² and does Uriah know about his wife and David?¹⁰³ For Sternberg, narrative gaps are a device that invite the reader to engage the text more closely by forcing him or her to focus on elements important to the story. Hypotheses about their solutions, he says, must be addressed from within the boundaries established by the text being read.¹⁰⁴ Sternberg postulates that norms of legitimate hypotheses must be considered 'natural' and/or 'probable'.¹⁰⁵ He goes on to say that the procedure of arriving at acceptable hypotheses is the work of a dialectic process between the reader and the text:

So whenever the work fails to provide an explicit answer to the reader's questions – that is, to the questions it itself raises – these struggle to form the mimetic basis for the adoption or rejection of hypotheses.¹⁰⁶

Sternberg sees violations of textual-cultural norms as a common backdrop for gaps.¹⁰⁷ For example, the first verse of the story of David and Bathsheba recalls for the reader a violation of a cultural norm that kings ought to lead the nation in battle (a custom that Samuel has already established [1 Sam 8.19]):

And it happened at the turning of the year, when kings go out [to battle], that David sent Joab, his servants with him, and all Israel, and they ravaged the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah; but David stayed in Jerusalem (2 Sam 11.1).

This cultural norm of a king's military participation is set in significant relief by the closing clause of the verse ('but David dwelled in Jerusalem'), presenting King David in stark contrast to what is expected of Israelite kings: when he is supposed to be out with his army, David stays home. This contrast obviously begs the question, 'What is David doing in Jerusalem?', and represents a gap in the flow of the plot which the

⁹⁹ Sternberg, pp. 186-263.

¹⁰⁰ Sternberg, p. 196.

¹⁰¹ Sternberg, p. 197.

¹⁰² Sternberg, p. 199.

¹⁰³ Sternberg, p. 201.

¹⁰⁴ Sternberg, p. 188.

¹⁰⁵ Sternberg, p. 189.

¹⁰⁶ Sternberg, p. 189.

reader automatically seeks to fill. Sternberg sees the story of David and Bathsheba as the best example in the Hebrew Bible of ambiguity in that it withholds answers to the most natural readerly questions. He says, 'Crafty and devious, he [the narrator] takes advantage of the fact that the reader himself will have to provide whatever has been left out'.¹⁰⁸ For Sternberg, however, if the filling of this gap is to be determined at all, it must be determined by the reader in consort with 'context-sensitive' clues.¹⁰⁹

Sternberg's solution to the gap-filling phenomenon in the story of David and Bathsheba is a multiple-hypothesis of possibilities that exist simultaneously.¹¹⁰ Closure is not necessarily the determination of a singular solution, but an acceptance of several solutions held in tension with each other.¹¹¹ This leads to a realisation that there is no final answer. Why did David stay in Jerusalem, what was David thinking, what did Uriah know, etc., are questions that remain indeterminate, requiring readers to choose for themselves. As Kermode says of the reader confronting 'Sternbergian gaps' in the story of David and Bathsheba, 'competent readers must go to work, each making sense of them in his or her own way'.¹¹²

Sternberg's study of the story of David and Bathsheba in relation to textual ambiguities borne by gaps offers 'provocative'¹¹³ suggestions about what may be some of the inner strategies of the biblical editor. Sternberg supports his thesis (that ambiguity is one of the biblical editor's narrative strategies) in part by appealing to modern authors who apply ambiguity as a strategy of their work (e.g., Sternberg's comparisons of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, Nikolai Gogol's 'The Overcoat', and A. Y. Agnon's 'Another Face').¹¹⁴ However, like Sternberg's hypotheses of the non-closure of major questions raised by gaps, their indeterminate endings (i.e., of James's, Gogol's and Agnon's stories), which are offered as

¹⁰⁷ Sternberg, p. 194.

¹⁰⁸ Sternberg, p. 192.

¹⁰⁹ Sternberg, p. 259.

¹¹⁰ Sternberg, p. 202.

¹¹¹ Sternberg, p. 228.

¹¹² Frank Kermode, *Narrative, Poetry, History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1990), p. 37.

¹¹³ This term is used by Robert Polzin in relation to Sternberg's hypotheses (*David and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronommic History, Part Three: 2 Samuel*, [Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993] p. 113).

acceptable options for closure, are confined within the boundaries of the story itself. It is possible, however, that readers can find acceptable solutions to questions raised by gaps in biblical stories within other biblical stories. Rosenberg recognises that meaning may change for readers depending on whether or not that story is related (by readers) to its placement in its larger surrounding context (both before and after the story):

Obviously, different readings of the King David story are possible, depending on whether we read it by itself (or through some smaller component of it), or as part of the book of II Samuel, the complex of I/II Samuel, the Septuagint's 'Book of Kingdoms' (comprising our I/II Samuel, I/II Kings), the alleged Deuteronomistic history . . . [etc.]. We should accept this as a fact of life, and recognize that the large corpora seem deliberately structured on a principle of open-ended textual interface: each seemingly self-contained intermediate member has both a prefatory and culminatory function. . . . In such a way, each major unit is both an addition to the whole and a microcosm of it.¹¹⁵

In what follows I will use Rosenberg's approach to help answer several of the questions drawn from the story of David and Bathsheba by taking them outside the boundaries of the story of David to the story of Naboth's Vineyard. Both of these stories represent a portion of the more immediate context of Samuel-Kings, and of the larger context of the DH. When we place these two stories in dialogue with each other, the story of Naboth's Vineyard negatively affects how we reread David's character in his crime against Bathsheba, suggesting several possible answers to the questions of why David stayed in Jerusalem and what he was thinking prior to sending for Bathsheba.

The Vineyard and the Palace

I begin by returning to the first scenes in the story of Naboth's Vineyard in order to establish the importance of the geographical location of the vineyard and its relation to the crime (1 Kgs 21.1-4). The narrator sets up the beginning of the story by establishing Naboth's vineyard and its location as the primary elements of the story:

21.1 ויהי אחר הדברים האלה
כרם היה לתבות הזרעאלי
אשר ביזרעאל אצל היכל אחאב בלך שמרון

¹¹⁴ Sternberg, pp. 222-29.

¹¹⁵ Rosenberg, pp. 110-11.

And it happened after these things,
[there was] a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite
which was in Jezreel near the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria.

While the narrator locates the vineyard as being 'near' Ahab's palace in Jezreel (v. 1),
Ahab identifies the vineyard as not being just 'near' his palace, but 'right next to' it:

21.2a וידבר אחאב אל נבוט לאמר
תנה לי את כרמך
ויהי לי לגן ירק
כי הוא קרוב אצל ביתי

21.2a And Ahab spoke to Naboth saying,
'Give to me your vineyard
that it may be for me a vegetable garden,
for it is right next to my house.'

By calling attention to the exact location of the vineyard, the text suggests its constant presence and its constant desirability in the eyes of Ahab. Furthermore, since Naboth refers to his vineyard as 'the inheritance of my fathers' (v. 3), the vineyard has always existed in its present location, meaning that Ahab's palace has always been adjacent to the vineyard, as suggested by its age as an inheritance.

The location of the vineyard is significant in its relation to the story of David and Bathsheba because it draws a parallel between the nearness of Ahab and David to the desired property.¹¹⁶ But unlike the location of the vineyard, which is adjacent to Ahab's palace, the reader must surmise the exact location of Bathsheba's house in relation to David's palace, whether it is 'near' or 'right next' to the palace, and whether or not he knows Bathsheba's identity. In the light of the story of Naboth's Vineyard and Ahab's awareness of the vineyard's presence, the question naturally arises if, perhaps, David knows of Bathsheba's presence so near to his house. Several clues in the text suggest that David does know.

2 Samuel 11.3 indicates that David knows Bathsheba's identity by the rhetorical question that he poses to his attendants. The verse begins the sequence of

¹¹⁶ White, p. 68.

David's actions following his observance of Bathsheba, presenting him answering his own question about her identity:

וישלח דוד
וידרש לאשה
ויאמר
הלוא זאת בת שבע בת אליעם אשת אוריה החתי

And David sent
and he inquired about the woman,
and he [David] said,
'Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah?'

My translation differs from most translations, which supply an unidentified indefinite subject of the waw consecutive **ויאמר** to read, 'And *one* said' (ASV, KJV, NASB).

In most translations the grammatical subject 'one' replaces the MT's more definite masculine singular subject pronoun 'he', 'And *he* said'. The consecutive verb continues the action begun by the two previous consecutive verbs **וישלח** ('and he sent'), and **וידרש** ('and he inquired'), whose subject is David.¹¹⁷ The answer to the rhetorical question, 'Is this not Bathsheba?', does not demand that an unidentified attendant be the subject of the verb **יאמר**.¹¹⁸ The MT does not make the distinction that someone other than David answered his request for an inquiry into Bathsheba's identity. Bailey supports the reading that identifies the subject as David:

¹¹⁷ Randall C. Bailey, *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10-12* (JSOTSup 75; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), p. 85.

¹¹⁸ Exum says, 'It is not clear who says these words' (*Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (JSOTSup 163; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993, p. 175). Alice Bach writes, 'The identity of the male speaker who identifies Bathsheba is not clear. It could be David' ('The Pleasure of Her Text', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 43 [1989]; p. 50, n. 30); see also Alter's note on the grammatical subject of the verb **ויאמר**: 'The Hebrew uses an unspecified "he said"', but Alter believes 'he' refers to one of David's attendants (*The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* [London and New York: W.W. Norton and Co. Inc., (1999), p. 250]). Rosenberg paraphrases the interrogative 'Is this not' (**הלוא זאת**) to say, 'Why, that's Bathsheba (*halo' zo't*)!' He says the expression *halo' zo't* is a 'style of exclamation suggesting. . . that someone [of the attendants] is guessing the woman's identity from the king's vantage point'. It is Rosenberg's suggested preference that instead of sending an attendant to find out Bathsheba's identity, the attendants on the roof answered the question (pp. 128, 29). Exum points out that David is not the only one watching Bathsheba clean herself. She questions the appropriateness of the narrator in describing the scene in such a way that makes Bathsheba particularly vulnerable to voyeurs like David. Since he notes that she was very

In v. 3 there are three verbs *wyslh+wydrs+wy'mr*, which function to further the plot by depicting David's interest in and speculation about the woman observed. It should be noted that generally this third verb is attributed to an anonymous speaker who 'answers' David's inquiry. The structure of 2 Sam 11.3, however, demonstrates that there is no other subject introduced in the verse. Similarly, there is no use of *l* to indicate David has become the indirect object of the verb. Thus, syntactically it appears that all three verbs have David as the subject It would appear, therefore, that the statement in v.3b is the inquiry (*drs*) of David in search of confirmation of the identity of the woman.¹¹⁹

David's answer to his own question, however, creates another question: why would he 'send' and 'inquire' about the identity of someone he already knew? My suggestion is that David is speculating out loud, or perhaps is amending a *faux pas*, namely, of allaying an embarrassing moment by suggesting, through his inquiry, that he did not know the identity of such a close neighbour when he actually did, especially the wife of one of his most valiant men. David's own answer then aborts the errand to find Bathsheba's identity. David's *faux pas* of letting on that he did not know the woman would require that his attendants be nearby at the moment of David's answer in order for them to hear him. Rosenberg notes this probability of the presence of David's attendants at the time of his walking about on the roof.

'David sent and inquired . . .' can, at least on initial appearance, admit of two interpretations: either he summoned someone to the rooftop to gaze at the woman with him and to tell him who she was; or he sent a messenger to the woman's house to ask for her name. Either way, the ease with which aides are ever present to the king's (and, for that matter, to David's) bidding is masked only by the minimal way in which this court background is represented: informers, spies, and gossipers abound in the palace milieu, but their faces and names are obliterated . . .¹²⁰

Bailey, however, does not answer the question as to 'why' David would answer his own question, but he proposes that the narrator's purpose in having David answer his own question in a speculative way is that the narrator wants to point out that David is not so much interested in sex as he is in politics. David's interest in politics, Bailey notes, is indicated by the order of the names of Bathsheba's family line that she is first 'the daughter of Eliam', and then second, 'the wife of Uriah'.¹²¹ He suggests

beautiful, and that she was 'purifying herself from her uncleanness', Exum says 'we can guess where she is touching' (*Fragmented Women*, p. 175).

¹¹⁹ Bailey, p. 85.

¹²⁰ Rosenberg, p. 128.

¹²¹ Bailey, p. 87.

that David knew Bathsheba and conspired together in a political liaison.¹²² He argues that David's political interest in Bathsheba is his need to shore up Southern political support¹²³ for his kingship, and that Bathsheba provided him this opportunity by allowing him to father a son by her.¹²⁴ Bailey argues that Bathsheba's lineage as a granddaughter of Ahithophel (the father of Eliam) indicates that she 'came from a politically influential family'. Her interest in the liaison¹²⁵ is to elevate her own status by raising David's successor to the throne, since she is also the family's sole survivor (in Bailey's chronology, Ahithophel's suicide comes before the story of David and Bathsheba).¹²⁶ Bailey's theory means that David intends all along to kill Uriah, either by getting him to violate a sacred taboo of abstaining from conjugal relations during holy war, or if that fails (as it does), to have him murdered in battle (as he does). Instead of seeing David's conspiracy against Uriah as an attempt to cover up his adultery, his plans are initially devised so that he could marry Bathsheba.¹²⁷

Bailey's reconstruction of the story's plot demands a significant overhaul of the DH as it stands. His purpose in the reconstruction is to demonstrate that 2 Samuel 10-12 is a major weakness in the Rost's Succession Narrative due to its composite nature.¹²⁸ Bailey's scenario, however, is unrealistic and untenable. While his work is creative, it depends too much on an enormous convergence of many disparate elements including grammar, semantics, supporting or contradictory themes, and significant

¹²² Bailey, p. 90.

¹²³ Bailey, p. 90.

¹²⁴ Bailey, p. 90.

¹²⁵ Bailey, p. 87.

¹²⁶ Bailey, p. 90. Curiously, Rosenberg implies some kind of mutual participation by Bathsheba with David in his paraphrase (?) of 1 Samuel 11.4, ויקחה ורחבוא אליו וישכב עמה ('and he took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her'), to read, 'and [he] summoned her and she came to him *and [she] lay with him*' (my emphasis), changing the masculine waw consecutive וישכב to an implied feminine, and the suffixed preposition עמה, 'with her', to read 'with him'. This makes David, and not Bathsheba, the object of the preposition, which is not possible by the MT (p. 128). Cf. a similar construction in a similar context of sexual violence in Genesis 34.2 in the rape of Dinah by Shechem in which Dinah is the object of the preposition, not Shechem: ויקח אתה וישכב אתה: 'and he took her, and he lay with her' (qere).

¹²⁷ Bailey, pp. 91-99.

¹²⁸ Bailey, pp. 33-34.

chronological reconstructions (such as placing the Ammonite wars and Absalom's rebellion prior to the story of David and Bathsheba).¹²⁹

In addition to the argument above that David answers his own question about the identity of Bathsheba, two other clues offer support to the suggestion that David knows her. First, Bathsheba's nearness to the palace is close enough for David to recognise her attractiveness (וְהָאִשָּׁה טוֹבַת מְרָאָה מְאֹד; 'and she was exceedingly beautiful' [v. 2]),¹³⁰ suggesting that he is also able to recognise her identity. Second, Bathsheba's identity as 'the wife of Uriah the Hittite' (v. 3), one of David's most valiant warriors, implies that he knows her through Uriah. Rosenberg suggests that Uriah is probably a prominent member of David's military elite based on the nearness of his house to David's house:

Uriah's position as one of David's *gibborim* ('strongmen' – see II Sam. 23:8ff., I Chron. 11:10ff) should cause us to modify somewhat our conventional picture of Uriah as a humble foot soldier, a conception that certain other details of the story and its framework encourage. One whose dwelling is located so near 'the king's house' is very likely an honored member of royal-military circles.¹³¹

Suggesting that David knows Bathsheba answers one major question raised by the story, namely, that David, like Ahab, knew about the 'vineyard' next door.¹³² Instead of his act being a sudden impulse to satisfy a moment's passion, it is likely that he has known about Bathsheba for as long as she has lived so close by. When the opportunity presented itself while the army was in the field, David succumbed to his impulses. Such a scenario seems more reasonable than one in which David loses complete control with just one look, but it is also one which calls for a convergence of other factors, which I will discuss below.

¹²⁹ Bailey, pp. 127, 129.

¹³⁰ Although it is the narrator who notes her beauty (11.2), David's impulse to have her indicates that he also recognises her alluring beauty.

¹³¹ Rosenberg, p. 129.

¹³² White notes that 'vineyard' (*kerem*) is used metaphorically 'as an image for the singer's lover' in Song of Songs 8.11-12 and can serve as an adequate analogue for Bathsheba's beauty in the relationship between the stories of Naboth's Vineyard and David and Bathsheba (p. 68, n, 5).

Kings in Bed

As I have suggested above, the story of David and Bathsheba affects David's character more negatively when it is read following a reading of Naboth's Vineyard than if it is read in isolation. The story of Naboth's Vineyard suggests answers to questions not answered by the story of David and Bathsheba about David's motivations for his crime. We saw above that the locations of the desired property in both stories drew a parallel between both kings, suggesting that David knew Bathsheba's identity, just as Ahab knew of the property next door, leading to a hypothesis (supported by several textual clues) that David's crime is not a chance occurrence. This reading can be reinforced by drawing another similarity with the story of Naboth's Vineyard which offers hints about what David might be thinking prior to taking Bathsheba. This suggestion is based on what Ahab is thinking prior to taking the vineyard. I will begin this section by noting a second similarity between the two stories that show both kings in bed and in states of psychological agitation in the time just prior to the initiation of their crimes.

In the first scene after Ahab's failed negotiations with Naboth (1 Kgs 21.4), the narrator reports that Ahab goes home upset:

21.4 ויבא אחאב אל ביתו סר וזעף
על הדבר אשר דבר אליו נבות היזרעאלי
ויאמר
לא אתן לך את נחלת אבותי
וישכב על משתי
ויסב את פניו
ולא אכל לחם

21.4 And Ahab went to his house sullen and vexed concerning the word which Naboth the Jezreelite spoke to him, that he said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers'. And he lay down on his bed, and he caused his face to turn, and he did not eat bread.

Ahab's psychological state is presented in two ways: in his emotional quandary over his failed negotiations and in his body language. The narrator says his mood is 'sullen

and vexed', and gives the exact reason for Ahab's bad mood: 'concerning (על) the word which Naboth the Jezreelite spoke to him, that he said, "I will not give to you the inheritance of my fathers"' (v. 4a). Having given us Ahab's exact thoughts, the narrator provides the reason for Ahab's extreme body language, namely, that 'he lay down on his bed, and he caused his face to turn' (hiph. causative סבב; [v. 4b]). By portraying Ahab as going to his bed in the day time and causing 'his face to turn', the text portrays Ahab as brooding excessively over the matter of Naboth property. But is Ahab simply upset that Naboth said 'no' or is there something else that torments him? I suggest that his psychological state and his body language do not reveal simply a bruised ego, but they also suggest that Ahab understands the ramifications of Naboth's vineyard being 'the inheritance of my fathers'. Because Naboth's vineyard is an ancestral inheritance, Naboth's 'no' is backed by the law, thereby closing off every possible means for Ahab to have what he wants.

When we look again at the story of David and Bathsheba in the light of Ahab's thoughts and behaviour just prior to his crime against Naboth, we get a new perspective on David's thoughts and behaviour just prior to his crime against Bathsheba. The opening scene in the story (2 Sam 11.2), just after the narrator establishes the setting, begins with David rising from his bed:

11.2 ויהי לעת הערב
 ויקם דוד מעל משכבו
 ויתהלך על גג בית המלך

11.2 And it happened at the time of the evening
 that David rose from upon his bed,
 and he was walking about on the roof of the house of the king.

Like Ahab, David has been in his bed in the daytime and gets up 'in the evening' after taking a nap. But unlike Ahab, we are not told why he is there or what he is thinking. The only clues about what he may be thinking is presented through his body language: he gets up from his bed, and he is 'walking about' (hith. reflexive-iterative הליך) on the roof of his palace. Since the final clause in 1 Samuel 11.1 tells us that David stayed

in Jerusalem at a time when he normally should be out with his army, we may also assume that he stays home for a specific reason.¹³³ While it is easy to think that the king is in some melancholy mood or suffering from mid-life crisis¹³⁴ and is in his bed because it has been a hot day, or because he is bored, it is just as easy to think that he has a lot on his mind, and perhaps he has stayed at home to deal with it. His 'walking about' may suggest boredom, but it may also suggest some sort of restlessness or irritation. By relating his behaviour to Ahab's behaviour in the story of Naboth's Vineyard, it may be that David, like Ahab, has another man's property on his mind. Getting up from his bed in the evening suggests that he probably has been there for some time,¹³⁵ and his getting up and 'walking about' may betray an internal struggle of some sort. Bailey suggests that David's restlessness seen in his 'walking about' foreshadows trouble, that something bad is about to happen. In a discussion about the three-verb complex which shows David rising (קם), walking about (ויהלך), and sending (וירשלם), Bailey writes:

[T]he use of *wythlk* is most interesting. Most instances of the usage of *hlk* in the *hithpa'el* refer to positive events. They refer to instances of either Yahweh traversing the scene or to others 'walking with Yahweh'. There are, however, three other instances where this verb is used in relation to David to describe his roaming the countryside with his 'band of men' during his conflicts with Saul. Unlike the above noted instances of *hlk* in the *hithpa'el*, which are all positive in connotation, these latter instances occur in contexts in which David runs a protection racket and thereby has problems with the local inhabitants of Judah. Given the events which take place in this unit, it would appear that *wythlk* in 2 Sam 11.2 functions to indicate to the reader that some questionable conduct is about to occur.¹³⁶

¹³³ Rosenberg suggests that David stays at home due to his own changes in official political procedures, which includes the king as one who has others do his work for him: 'David discovers that a king's success can be predicated on the deeds of others. If the king does not have to be everywhere, he does not have to be anywhere but his home base' (p.127).

¹³⁴ Cohen suggests that David is suffering from a severe case of sexual midlife crisis which is the cause of his adultery; 'David emerges as a man engaged in a life and death struggle with his waning years. A tragic figure who is allowed no alternative, he violates the taboo of adultery in a desperate effort to preserve the core of his being' (H. Hirsch Cohen, 'David and Bathsheba', *Journal of Bible and Religion* 33 [1965], p. 142).

¹³⁵ Alter writes, 'A siesta on a hot spring day would begin not long after noon, so this recumbent king has been in bed an inordinately long time' (*The David Story*, p. 250); so also Cohen, 'David and Bathsheba', p. 143.

¹³⁶ Bailey, p. 86; as noted by Bailey, the positive connotations of the *hithpa'el* יהלך used with Yahweh traversing the scene include Deut 23.15, and 2 Sam 7.6; those of 'walking with Yahweh' include Gen 5.22, 1 Sam 2.35, 12.2, and 2 Kgs 20.3. The negative uses related to David occur in 1 Sam 23.13, 25.15, and 30.31.

If one adopts this reading that taking Bathsheba is behind David's 'walking about', then certain other assumptions need to be made. First, David would have known about Bathsheba. This is not difficult to accept given her nearness to the palace and David's answer to his own question about her identity. Second, her appearance nearby at the same time that David is walking around on his roof needs to be explained as something other than coincidence since her appearance on the roof and the timing of the crime are co-ordinated in a cause-effect sequence.

Exum suggests that it may not be a coincidence and questions if David, like the first couple, is being tested by Yahweh.¹³⁷ Her question is posed in view of Yahweh's absence in the moment of David's most severe trial. Yahweh had intervened before in the matter with Nabal when he seems to have used Abigail to prevent David from committing murder (1 Sam 25).¹³⁸ She writes, 'Is it coincidence that Bathsheba is bathing—visible from the roof—when David takes his afternoon stroll, or is David, like the first couple, being tested? Even in the matter of Bathsheba's pregnancy, like Michal's childlessness, divine involvement cannot be ruled out'.¹³⁹ Brueggemann lends support to Exum's suggestion, showing that the story of temptation in the garden is patterned after the temptation of David: 'David is attracted to the one who is forbidden him. He desires her and takes her'.¹⁴⁰

However, in relation to the story of Naboth's Vineyard, another way of explaining Bathsheba's appearance just prior to the crime as not being a coincidence is that David may have seen her in the courtyard before, and he may anticipate seeing her again. Rosenberg notes the chances that David has seen Bathsheba before are quite probable due to the topographical nature of the city: 'One way or another, the visual trajectories formed by the precipitous inclines of the City of David make such an

¹³⁷ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 138.

¹³⁸ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 138.

¹³⁹ Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 138; cited from the 1996 paperback edition, where 'visible from the roof' replaces the error 'on the roof' in the 1992 edition.

¹⁴⁰ Brueggemann, 'David and His Theologian', *CBQ* 30 (1968), p. 160. Brueggemann argues for the literary priority of the story of the life of David to the story of the Garden of Eden: 'The J construction of Gn 2-11 is dependent upon the David story' (p. 158).

incident of spying something quite ordinary'.¹⁴¹ He could have been 'walking about' up on the roof in hopes of seeing her again and perhaps was struggling in his mind with the moral ramifications of taking another man's property. While such a reading may at first seem quite hypothetical, the story of Naboth's Vineyard has offered some possible parallels to David's actions and motivations prior to carrying out his violation of Bathsheba. At the very least, when the story of David and Bathsheba is read in view of the story of Naboth's Vineyard, a reading such as the one offered above further diminishes David's character.

¹⁴¹ Rosenberg, p. 128.

Rereading the Story of Solomon in the Shadow of Ahab

What Others Say about Reading Solomon

In a post-Ahab rereading of the story of Solomon, Solomon looks like a second Ahab. While the stories of the two kings share many similarities, no one correspondence plays a more important role in re-characterising King Solomon as a king who shares Ahab's characterisation than the formal introduction to the story of Solomon (1 Kgs 2.46b-3.3). A post-Ahab reading of this introduction initiates links to Ahab leading to a realisation that he resembles Ahab, thereby maintaining their association to the end of Solomon's reign.¹⁴² In what follows I will show how the introduction produces this effect, but I want to preface my exposition by drawing attention to some views of scholars about ambiguity in the story of Solomon's kingship.

Reading the story of Solomon has been a problem for many scholars due to the ambiguous presentation of his character. This ambivalence in the text about the 'real' Solomon, however, is the continuation of a feature of the larger previous context of the DH. McConville suggests that the books of Kings continue the thread of an inconsistent message—beginning in Deuteronomy and carried through Joshua, Judges, and the books of Samuel – of incongruities between what is stated and what is shown. McConville notes the nature of the message of these books:

[T]hey are not univocal, they are the voices neither of simple triumphalism nor of mere despair. Rather it is of the essence of their style to work with contrast, often through irony, to effect their meaning.¹⁴³

He notes that discrepancies between what is stated and what is shown may be seen in Israel's occupying the land in spite of its disobedience 'in the face of Deuteronomy's own indissoluble connection between land possession and obedience'; of Israel's residing in the land while, at the same time, 'it is suggested by various hints that she has forfeited her title to it'; and of the inharmonious portrayal of kingship shown

¹⁴² Lasine says of the indeterminate nature of Solomon's depiction: 'The blank spots in the narrative's portrait of Solomon invite the audience to engage in ventriloquism and mind-reading' (Stuart Lasine, 'The King of Desire: Indeterminacy, Audience, and the Solomon Narrative', *Semeia* 71 [1995], p. 88).

¹⁴³ J.G. McConville, 'Narrative and Meaning in the Books of Kings', *Biblica* 70 (1989), pp. 31-49; p. 32.

between ideal kings and their dramatic failures in the reigns of Saul and David.¹⁴⁴ He also says that the reader who approaches the books of Kings should bear in mind 'that a sensitive reading of Kings will have to expect that discrepancy between surface statement and underlying meaning'.¹⁴⁵ Thus, as we approach the story of King Solomon, it is appropriate to observe that his presentation carries with it a nature of contrasting messages and images similar to that of the books which precede it.¹⁴⁶

Scholars have presented differing views on how the text presents Solomon, whether positive and negative, or altogether negative. Most think that the text presents both a positive and a negative characterisation of Solomon.¹⁴⁷ These characterisations correlate roughly with the beginning and the ending of the story, with the beginning showing a positive Solomon and the end showing a negative Solomon.¹⁴⁸ Eslinger reads the entire story as a negative depiction of Solomon based on the ironic portrayals that emerge from a comparison of Solomon's words with his behaviour.¹⁴⁹

Whereas such views are tenable, given the ambiguous nature of the story of Solomon, Walsh offers the best alternative to Solomon's puzzling characterisation. He observes that the story of Solomon presents two Solomons simultaneously: one that is good and one that is not good. Solomon is portrayed on the 'surface' as a highly successful ruler, while at the same time, subtle hints in the text subvert a positive reading with a negative one. His view differs from the previous positive-negative views which identify a chronological development of Solomon's character from a good

¹⁴⁴ McConville, pp. 32-34.

¹⁴⁵ McConville, p. 34.

¹⁴⁶ McConville notes the complexity of the presentation of Solomon's character: 'Solomon represents, in a real sense, the peak of the monarchy's achievement. Nevertheless, there are clues from early in his story that this is not a simple picture' (p. 35).

¹⁴⁷ J.T. Walsh, 'The Characterization of Solomon in First Kings 1-5', *CBQ* 57 (1995), p. 472.

¹⁴⁸ E.g., see: Bezalel Porten, 'The Structure and Theme of the Solomon Narrative (1 Kings 3-11)', *HUCA* 88 (1967), pp. 93-126; Kim Ian Parker, 'Repetition as a Structuring Device in 1 Kings 1-11', *JSOT* 42 (1988), pp. 19-27; 'Solomon as Philosopher King? The Nexus of Law and Wisdom in 1 Kings 1-11', *JSOT* 53 (1992), pp. 75-91; Marc Brettler, 'The Structure of 1 Kings 1-11', *JSOT* 49 (1991), pp. 87-97; Amos Frisch, 'Structure and Its Significance: The Narrative of Solomon's Reign' (1 Kings 1-12.24)', *JSOT* 51 (1991), pp. 3-14; David Jobling, "'Forced Labor": Solomon's Golden Age and the Question of Literary Presentation', *Semeia* 54 (1991), pp. 57-76; Auld, *I and II Kings*, p. 22; Long, p. 58-60; Gray, pp. 114-15; Nelson, p. 34.

¹⁴⁹ Lyle Eslinger, *Into the Hands of the Living God* (JSOTSup 84; Bible and Literature Series 24; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), as noted by McConville, p. 472, n. 3. While I do not agree with

king in the beginning to a bad king in the end. He argues that several internal chronological inconsistencies suggest that Solomon's *character*, rather than chronology, is at the heart of the presentation:¹⁵⁰

Given the careful symmetric organization of the whole story, these [chronological] irregularities indicate that some factor other than chronology is also at work. That factor is the developing characterization of Solomon. We have seen that, prior to the condemnation of Solomon in chapter 11, the narrator uses a strategy of ambivalence. The overt characterization of Solomon is positive, but it conceals more negative elements.¹⁵¹

Walsh suggests that these underlying components of Solomon's negative characterisation are borne by subtle textual hints:

There is an unequivocal and easily perceived positive characterization of Solomon throughout these chapters [1-5]; there is also a definite pattern of gaps, ambiguities and verbal subtleties that consistently point to a more negative view.¹⁵²

Walsh goes on to say that the negatives in these textual nuances do not necessarily demand an alternative reading, but that they offer the possibility of a positive reading that is at the same time counterbalanced by a negative reading. He suggests that the textual subtleties impose restraints on the positive reading merely by their presence. The nuances in the text may not persuade the careful reader to adopt a negative reading, but they have an effect on the reading that cannot be erased. He writes, 'the very raising of the issue [of doubts about Solomon] makes it present to the reader's awareness, and its rejection does not remove it from memory. The effect of these *sotto voce* insinuations is cumulative'.¹⁵³

In the light of these textual anomalies, the resulting portrayal of Solomon essentially places him on the proverbial moral fence, teetering between a positive characterisation on the one side and a negative characterisation on the other. On whatever side Solomon finally lands depends on some outside influence that pushes

Eslinger's total negative reading, I believe that the text provides enough irony to make it possible to read the story in the way that he does.

¹⁵⁰ Walsh writes, 'Solomon exiles Abiathar in 2:26-27, but he is still listed as high priest in 4:4. The construction of the royal palace and of the house for Pharaoh's daughter interrupts the account of the construction of the Temple, even though the Temple is supposedly completed before the other projects are begun. The narrator does not reveal the existence of adversaries from before Solomon's reign until the very end of the story' (*1 Kings*, pp. 152-53).

¹⁵¹ Walsh, *1 Kings*, p. 153.

¹⁵² Walsh, 'The Characterization of Solomon', p. 472.

him that way. The story of Ahab and his evil reputation offers the reader such an influence. Reading the story of Solomon in the light of the story of Ahab suggestively fuses the Hebrew Bible's worst individual with its wisest, lending much irony to Solomon's presentation. In fact, it might be impossible ever to read Solomon positively again, that is, with a tendency to view him as one whose virtue matches his wisdom, whose weakness for foreign women was simply something minor that became major.

In what follows, I will focus on the formal introduction of the story of Solomon given in 1 Kings 2.46b-3.1-3 and compare it to the similar introduction of the story of Ahab. I will argue that a post-Ahab reading of Solomon's introduction provides the impetus for a reading which suggests that Solomon begins his reign somewhat similar to Ahab, with hints that he worships other gods. The subtle resemblances (marriage to a foreign princess, building temples, and idol-worship) dampen the anticipation that what follows will be a reading of the world's wisest king.

As McConville says:

The placing of these indicators *before* the story of his prayer for wisdom and the picture of his greatness prevents us from reading the whole story of Solomon as if it merely told of a potentially great king who, unfortunately and at a late stage, went into decline. The manner of the telling conveys the message that there could be no permanent salvation for Israel in a Solomon (his emphasis).¹⁵⁴

The introduction to the story of Solomon suggests that Solomon will not fulfil his father's final instructions to him to walk 'according to the law of Moses' (1 Kgs 2.3). Instead, the link to Ahab suggests that what follows is the story of a king who follows in the footsteps of Ahab. The chart below shows the introductions side by side (taking one verse [16.32] out of its numerical order) to demonstrate the similarities between them (shown in bold print).

¹⁵³ Walsh, 'The Characterization of Solomon', pp. 472-73.

¹⁵⁴ McConville, pp. 35-36.

Introductions to the Stories of Solomon and Ahab

Solomon (1 Kings 2.46b-3.3)	Ahab (1 Kings 16.29-34)
<p>46b. Now the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.</p> <p>1. And Solomon made himself a son-in-law of Pharoah king of Egypt, and he took the daughter of Pharoah, and he brought her to the city of David</p> <p>until he completed building his house, and the house of Yahweh, and the walls of Jerusalem round about</p> <p>2. Except the people were sacrificing on the high places; for a house to the name of Yahweh was not yet built until those days.</p> <p>3. Now Solomon loved Yahweh, walking in the statutes of David his father, except upon the high places he sacrificed and made burnt offerings.</p>	<p>29. Now Ahab son of Omri became king over Israel in the thirtieth-eighth year of Asa king of Judah;</p> <p>30. and Ahab son of Omri did evil in the eyes of Yahweh more than all who were before him</p> <p>31a. And it happened—that he took for a wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians;</p> <p>32. And he erected an altar to Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria.</p> <p>33. And Ahab made the Asherah; and Ahab did more, to provoke Yahweh the God of Israel more than all the kings of Israel who were before him</p> <p>34. In his day Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; by Abiram his firstborn he founded it, and by Sagib his youngest he established its gates, according to the word of Yahweh which he spoke by the hand of Joshua son of Nun.</p> <p>31b. and he (Ahab) went and he served Baal and he worshipped him.</p>

Introducing Solomon

In the previous chapter I compared the regnal summary of the story of Solomon (1 Kgs 11.1-11) with the introductory regnal resumé of the story of Ahab (1 Kgs 16.29-34). The introduction to Solomon, however, while containing similar elements, presents them thematically, as foreshadowings of things to come. They are realised retrospectively. While the summary of Solomon's failures listed at the end of his reign (1 Kgs 11.1-40) says that Solomon descended gradually into idolatry, and that Solomon did 'evil in the sight of Yahweh' (v. 6), a post-Ahab reading of the first three verses of Solomon's reign leads the reader to suspect that he reached this nadir because he started out like Ahab (1 Kgs 3.1-3). In the light of the story of Ahab, these three verses and the various hints within them (of marriage to Pharaoh's daughter and of religious dualism) now take on the force of an unmasking: Solomon was flawed all along. It might be questioned if this (i.e., a post-Ahab reading) is not the same effect of rereading the story of Solomon immediately after a first-time reading. Lasine suggests as much about the effect of a first time reading on the next reading:

[R]eaders may be 'provoked' into choosing between the seemingly positive portrait of Solomon given in chaps 4-10 and the retroactively negative view given in chap. 11. Readers who respond to chap. 11 in this fashion will review and reevaluate the portrait given in chaps. 4-10 with more cynical eyes. They will no longer read the earlier chapters as members of the 'ideal narrative audience', which accepts uncritically what the narrator has to say.¹⁵⁵

But there is a difference between a post-Ahab reading of the introduction of the story of Solomon as opposed to a reading without having read the story of Ahab. While a post-Solomon rereading of Solomon's introduction may encourage the reader to form a negative opinion of Solomon, it is not as forceful as a post-Ahab rereading. Rereading Solomon's introduction after reading through the entirety of the story provides only an accounting for his behaviour, as if to say, 'this is how it all started'. A post-Ahab rereading, however, lends evaluative force to Solomon's behaviour causing the reader to re-evaluate the moral presentation of Solomon in the light of Ahab.

¹⁵⁵ Lasine, 'King of Desire', p. 89.

Other similarities in the introductions bind the kings together. The formal introduction to the story of Solomon begins at 1 Kings 2.46b: 'Now the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon'. This statement is followed by thematic elements which parallel similar elements in the introduction to the story of Ahab. These elements include Solomon's marriage to a foreign king's daughter, his building activities on behalf of Yahweh, the religious climate at the commencement of his reign, and his worship on the high places.¹⁵⁶

Marriage to a Foreign Princess

By marrying the daughter of Pharaoh, Solomon's first recorded act as king foreshadows his downfall in his disregard for the 'law of Moses' by taking a foreign bride (1 Kgs 3.1; cf. 11.1-2). The parallel to Ahab is evident in that the introductions of both kings emphasise their foreign marriages: Solomon becomes a son-in-law to Pharaoh, while Ahab becomes a son-in-law to Ethbaal, king of Sidon. The formal introduction to the story of Solomon begins with a denominative hithpael verb derived from the noun חתן (daughter's husband) 'to make oneself a daughter's husband' or, 'to make oneself a son-in-law':

וַיִּתְחַתֵּן שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם

Now Solomon made himself a son-in-law
with Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

The phrase, 'with Pharaoh, king of Egypt', emphasises a union of Solomon with Pharaoh rather than a union of Solomon with the daughter of Pharaoh. Translations of this verse normally reveal this emphasis as highlighting Solomon's political opportunism in arranging a union with Egypt (cf. translations such as 'made affinity' [ASV; KJV], and 'made a marriage alliance' [NASB; NRSV]), as opposed to highlighting Solomon's desire for Pharaoh's daughter. But there is some indication that his marriage is not solely a political event. The summary of Solomon's reign

¹⁵⁶ Walsh breaks the introduction into three themes: marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, Solomon's building projects, and worship on the high places (*1 Kings*, pp. 70-72).

begins by suggesting that Solomon's affection for Pharaoh's daughter was more than political, since she is emphasised over all of his other wives ('Now Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh; ... to these he clung in love' [1 Kgs 11.1-2]). By highlighting her above all of his other foreign wives as the focus of Solomon's intimate affections (1 Kgs 11.1), the text corrects the impression that the marriage is simply political.

While the 'daughter of Pharaoh' evokes positive images of the daughter of Pharaoh in the story of Moses, the fact that an Israelite marries an Egyptian princess also recalls Yahweh's command forbidding intermarriage (cf. 1 Kgs 11.2). Prior to this passage, the verb *יָתַן* is used in Deut 7.3 Josh 23.12 in contexts that offer guiding principles of conduct for Israel upon inhabiting the land.¹⁵⁷ In these passages the verb may be rendered 'intermarry'. Thus Solomon's first act following the consolidation of his kingdom offers a negative surprise to the reader that the son of David begins his reign on the wrong foot by transgressing the 'law of Moses'.¹⁵⁸ Jobling suggests that the appearance of Pharaoh's daughter in the first verse of the introduction and the first verse of the summary emphasises her negative influence over Solomon from the beginning:

Pharaoh's daughter functions in chaps. 3-10 to establish that the cause of Solomon's eventual fall is already there when he is in his glory, simply waiting for the turn to the negative, when she will again be the very first person mentioned (11:1).¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Walsh says the use of the verb signals a flaw in Solomon's character, '. . . the same Hebrew verb, "to become [someone's] son-in-law," also carries negative connotations in all its other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. . . . In particular, the word appears in warnings against marriage between Israelite men and non-Israelite women (for example, Deut 7:3; Josh 23:12)' (*1 Kings*, p. 70); McConville writes, 'The marriage in itself breaches Deut 7,3, and aims a blow at the purity of Israel' (p. 35).

¹⁵⁸ Walsh says of Solomon becoming a son-in-law to Pharaoh in relation to Moses's law, and the negative connotation of intermarriage in the law of leading to idolatry, Solomon's marriage presages his idolatry; 'While it does describe the relationship as a purely political one not compromising the "love" that Solomon has for Yahweh, it already foreshadows the "foreign abominations" for which Solomon will eventually be condemned' ('Characterisation of Solomon', p. 486).

¹⁵⁹ Jobling, "Forced Labor", p. 64.

Parallels between Solomon's and Ahab's Building Activity

A second similarity to Ahab in the introduction of Solomon concerns his and Ahab's association in building temples for their gods. Solomon initiates building (בנה) 'the house of Yahweh' (1 Kgs 3. 2), while Ahab had built (בנה) 'the house of Baal' (1 Kgs 16.32). Significantly, the notice of Solomon's building activities comes in a temporal clause describing how long the queen dwelled in the city of David and is not introduced as Solomon's first priority.

3.1b ויקח את בת פרעה
ויביא אל עיר דוד
עד כלתו לבנותו ואת בית יהוה
ואת חומת ירושלים סביב

3.1b And he took the daughter of Pharaoh
and he brought her to the city of David
until he finished building his house
and the house of Yahweh
and the walls of Jerusalem round about

Although the temple project concerns the major portion of 1 Kings 3-10, v. 1 suggests that it is not Solomon's major focus of attention. 1 Kings 3.1b suggests an order of questionable priorities to Solomon's building projects. Eslinger writes of Solomon's surprising lack of propriety in marrying Pharaoh's daughter, bringing her into Jerusalem following their marriage, and then putting off the construction of Yahweh's temple until after he builds his own house:

And where does he bring her? To David's (not Yhwh's) royal city. And what is he doing there? Building, in order, his house, Yhwh's house, and the wall of Jerusalem – first self, then God, and last his subjects' needs.¹⁶⁰

While the building projects advance a positive characterisation of Solomon, it is simultaneously counterbalanced by this negative ordering of Solomon's priorities. I agree with Walsh:

[T]hese three particularly praiseworthy endeavors [serve] to highlight how Solomon's reign contributes to the national good. . . . At the same time, the

¹⁶⁰ Eslinger, pp. 129-30.

narrator lists the projects in a telling order. . . . as if to suggest that Solomon's house precedes Yahweh's on the king's list of priorities.¹⁶¹

The listing of Solomon's priorities makes the temple a secondary focus in the mind of the king even while the entire story of Solomon highlights the building of the temple. Thus the ordering of Solomon's building activities in the introduction hints at a lack of devotion to Yahweh. This hint will be reinforced in the following two verses.

Parallels in the Religious Climate during the Reigns of Solomon and Ahab

While Solomon's marriage demonstrates a clear disregard for Mosaic law, his delay in building Yahweh's temple foregrounds a negative character trait in contributing to a dualistic religious climate in his day. The text suggests that Solomon's delay in building Yahweh's temple is the cause behind the people's worshipping on the high places (1 Kgs 3.2). In relation to Ahab, the notice is similar to a statement of the negative religious climate in Samaria during Ahab's reign (1 Kings 16.34). The connection between the two kings in each introduction is strengthened by parallel temporal prepositional phrases in which the word 'day' (יוֹם) is used.

<p>3.2. Except (קִרְיָה) the people were sacrificing on the high places; for a house to the name of Yahweh was not yet built until (in) those days (עַד הַיָּמִים הָהֵם)</p>	<p>16.34. In his day (בַּיָּמָיו) Hiel the Bethelite rebuilt Jericho; by Abiram his firstborn he founded it, and by Sagib his youngest he established its gates, according to the word of Yahweh which he spoke by the hand of Joshua son of Nun.</p>
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The only other regnal introduction in the books of Kings in which a negative religious climate is described using a temporal prepositional phrase that includes the word יוֹם is in 2 Kings 18.4, where Hezekiah tears down the bronze serpent Nehushtan to whom the people burned incense: 'and he [Hezekiah] broke in pieces the bronze serpent which Moses had made; for until those days (עַד הַיָּמִים הָהֵם) the children of Israel

¹⁶¹ Walsh, *1 Kings*, p. 71. McConville writes about Solomon's behaviour in 3.1, 'The writer raises a further question about Solomon's priorities when, in a twist of the play on *bayith* in 2 Sam 7, he records the building of the king's own house before that of Yhwh (The hint is reinforced by the time-scales mentioned in 6,38; 7,1)' (p. 35).

burned incense to it'. The temporal indicators in all three regnal introductions bear witness to idolatrous activity by the people.

Immediately following the notice of Solomon's building projects, the text indicates a negative state of religious fidelity during Solomon's time. Verse 2 begins with the particle קִי which qualifies the preceding statement about Solomon's building projects:

Except (קִי)¹⁶² the people were sacrificing on the high places, because there was not yet built a house for the name of Yahweh until those days (v. 2).

The particle קִי , a restrictive adverb, serves here to introduce an element of clarification to what has just been said. When it is prefixed to clauses, 'the general restrictive sense is found in two settings: *raq* may introduce a summary . . . or a clarification of what precedes'.¹⁶³ This particle occurs twice in the introduction to Solomon's official reign; both times it offers clarifications of negative theological assessments of the people and of Solomon as being dualistic in their religious observances. Its first use in v. 2 concerns the people and their worship rites. The people were worshipping on the high places because Solomon had not yet built a house to the name of Yahweh. But their worship at those places cannot be excused completely as being worship to Yahweh alone because the altar before the tent of the meeting place that housed the ark of the covenant was in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Samuel 6.17). Solomon offered offerings at the tent *after* his worship on the 'great high place' in Gibeon (1 Kgs 3.4, 15). Later, at the dedication of the temple, the people 'offered sacrifice before the Lord' (1 Kgs 8.62). They observed fourteen days of feasting during that time. However, other than this notation, the only other reference to the people's religious activities is a reference to the high places on the 'face of Jerusalem' in association with foreign deities, deities for whom Solomon had built high places: they 'worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the

¹⁶² Lucian uses *kai* in the place of קִי ; as an adverb *kai* may introduce cause or result such as 'for this reason'.

¹⁶³ Bruce K Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 669 (sec. 39.3.5c).

Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the sons of Ammon ' (1 Kgs 11.33).

The religious climate in Israel during Ahab's reign is described in 1 Kings 16.34: 'In his [Ahab's] days', Hiel the Bethelite rebuilt Jericho at the cost of his oldest and youngest sons. This curse upon the one who rebuilds Jericho had been declared by Joshua the son of Nun (Josh 6.26). Long suggests the notice of the building activity lends an ironic tone for the coming story of Ahab: 'With irony, perhaps, normally praiseworthy building activity revives a dormant curse as a sort of omen for the regime'.¹⁶⁴

Similarities in Solomon's and Ahab's Religious Observances

A final similarity that comes to light when the stories of Ahab and Solomon are compared concerns their unorthodox worship practices: Ahab is seen bowing the knee to Baal (1 Kgs 16.31), while Solomon is seen 'sacrificing and burning incense on the high places' (1 Kgs 3.3). Ahab's behaviour is shown without ambiguity—he gives his devotion to an idol—while Solomon's behaviour is not as clear. A post-Ahab reading of Solomon's behaviour suggests, however, that he has dual religious affections as connoted by means of a second restrictive adverb רק:

Now Solomon loved Yahweh . . .
except on the high places (pl.)
he sacrificed
and burned incense(1 Kgs 3.3).

וַיֵּאָהֵב שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת יְהוָה . . .
רַק בַּבָּמֹת
הוּא הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וּמִקְטֹרֶת

Like the adverb רק in v.2, which dampens optimism about Israel's religious climate, its use here mitigates Solomon's orthodoxy with an apparent contradiction: Solomon loves Yahweh, but he also worships (other gods?) on the high places. It is significant that 'high places' is plural, suggesting that Solomon worshipped at a number of locations. In the light of the negative assessment of high places in the Hebrew Bible, Solomon appears to be riding the spiritual fence between Yahweh and pagan religion.

¹⁶⁴ Long, p. 174.

Positive assessments by scholars of Solomon's behaviour in this verse focus on the first clause, suggesting that worship on the high places was considered a small thing, or a normal thing in Israel during the period between the beginning of the monarchy and the construction of the temple.¹⁶⁵ Negative assessments, however, focus on the force of the adversative adverb **כִּי**. The adverb tarnishes Solomon's 'love for Yahweh';¹⁶⁶ it 'jars the sensibilities of the reader, who knows that God does not look favourably on such behaviour';¹⁶⁷ and 'it is right to read it as a mark against the king'.¹⁶⁸ The reader of the DH is given this portrait of a dual-hearted Solomon, suggesting his failure before he even begins his reign.

The arguments of scholars who view Solomon's behaviour positively are weakened almost entirely later in 1 Kings 3. Following Yahweh's appearance to Solomon in a dream at the great high place of Gibeon, Solomon offers sacrifices to Yahweh *in Jerusalem* on the altar before the tent that housed the ark of the covenant (v. 15). The question naturally arises as to why he had not worshipped at the tent all along. It is left to the reader to guess who or what he worshipped 'on the high places' (1 Kgs 3.3) and at the 'great high place' at Gibeon (3.4), but in the light of Ahab, Solomon may be seen as a kind of 'double' of Ahab, and as a result, his character is greatly diminished.

¹⁶⁵ E.g., Burney writes: 'Thus vv.2, 3 both exhibit the influence of Deuteronomy. It is obvious, however, that they cannot be assigned to one author. . . Verse 3 simply places two facts side by side without any attempt at correlation; —Solomon loved Yahwe, only he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places: v. 2 supplies and explanation; —The **במה** worship was a popular custom, due to the fact that the house of Yahwe was not yet built' (p. 28); cf. Nelson, who adds that the inconsistency of Solomon's behaviour is explained chronologically, that the worship sites had shifted from Gibeon to Jerusalem from the time of Solomon's worship on the high places and his worship at Jerusalem in v. 15. (pp. 32-33); Porten says, 'It was a light thing that Solomon sacrificed at the high places; he loved God' (p. 113).

¹⁶⁶ Walsh, *1 Kings*, p. 72.

¹⁶⁷ Eslinger, p. 131.

¹⁶⁸ McConville, p. 35.

Conclusion

My aim in this thesis has been to show that the story of Ahab is not only a story about Ahab, but it is a story about Saul, David and Solomon, as well. The crimes that the three kings commit, that proved to be their downfall, are committed again by Ahab, and because of this association, the identities of the four kings become merged. As a result, Ahab becomes like his three predecessors, and his three predecessors become like Ahab. In light of the similarities, I have argued that the story of Ahab can no longer be read apart from an association with the stories of Saul, David and Solomon, and, in turn, the stories of the three kings can no longer be read apart from their association with Ahab. I believe that showing this literary association of the four kings is what provides the greatest contribution of this thesis to other studies. While others have noted the parallels, no one has combined them into a study of the narratives of the four kings.

What is not entirely clear, however, is the effect that the association of the three kings with Ahab has on the characterisation of Ahab, whether it establishes the declaration that he is the most evil person in the Hebrew Bible, or whether it subverts it. For the various reasons shown above, I have argued that the associations subvert it, and has, instead, diminished the character of Saul, David and Solomon in that they are associated with the 'evil' Ahab. At the very least, in combining the declaration that Ahab is the greatest evildoer with the crimes of the three kings, the story, I believe, creates a hesitation on the part of the reader to come to a decisive judgement vis-à-vis Ahab's evil.

What is clear, I believe, is that the story of King Ahab resurrects the memory of Saul, David and Solomon by means of the repetition of the crimes committed by them and by Ahab. In view of this, and in view of the difficulty in establishing Ahab's badness, the reading that I have come to is only one of any number of possibilities. The association of the four kings can also lead in other directions. For example, by the

repetition of the crimes, the story could lead to a review of the failure of the monarchy through the re-enactment of the sins that led to its failure, and, by extension, could re-establish the serious nature of the offences. It could also lead to seeing Ahab's sins as reinterpretations of the sins of Saul, David and Solomon. These would, like the previous suggestion, have the same effect of re-establishing their serious nature. It is also possible that the story of Ahab could be viewed as the story of Ahab the Scapegoat, as 'the goat of sending out', upon whom are placed the sins of Saul, David and Solomon. As such, the story of Ahab would become the waste ground of the sins of the pillars of the failed monarchy. At the very least, I am hopeful that the similarities between the story of Ahab and the stories of Saul, David and Solomon will raise deeper questions about the associations, as well as stimulate more interpretations about the multifaceted representation of King Ahab.

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