

## The Comparative Method: Canon and the Interpretive Context

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### *Religious Canons and Exegesis in the University*

Context, implied or explicit, has ever a pervasive influence on our understanding and interpretation of biblical texts. This was clearly brought home to me when I joined the faculty in Copenhagen some twelve years ago, coming as I did from a faculty of Catholic theology, with its far more expansive canon derived from the *Vulgata*. The influence of historical criticism on Catholic exegesis, however, had its influence and this Catholic university tacitly accepted a mixed canon. Its Hebrew Bible was Elliger's *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* and its Greek was Rahlfs' *Septuaginta* and Nestle's *Novum Testamentum*. This hyper-canon betrays the solidly protestant establishment of modern biblical studies, with its Catholicism limited to its schematic similarity to *Codex Vaticanus*' canon – a hardly insignificant aspect within a conservative Catholic faculty. Nevertheless, from the perspective of literary history, the pedagogically easy transition from the Books of Maccabees to Matthew still supported a continuous reflection on the Jewish intellectual development of the Bible.

Adapting to Copenhagen's Lutheran canon of a *Biblia Hebraica* and a *Novum Testamentum* returned me to a classic protestant dichotomy between the "Old" and "New" Testaments and Christian-supersessionist Salvation History, a dichotomy with which I had become familiar in Tübingen. As in Tübingen, the biblical texts from Matthew to Revelation were effectively severed from their theological roots and presented themselves anachronistically as introduction to church history. My own understanding of the Bible as theology's intellectual foundation was turned topsy-turvy. The publication of Mogens' *Kirkens Første Bibel* shortly after my arrival in Copenhagen, therefore, was most welcome (Müller 1994). Not that I cared much for the book's subtitle, supporting as it did but a different perspective on the same Semitic-Greek alienation I find so foreign. Nevertheless, I would have been quite won over to Mogens' canon, had it not been for my uneasy wonder at the assumed historicity of a *Septuaginta* in antiquity, to say nothing of Aristeas' legend.

I have lived with a longstanding but mostly tacit disapproval of this Protestant canon's theologically motivated reductions. It is impossible, however, to con-

tinue tacitly to ignore its anachronistic influence on exegesis. A serious commitment to the methods of comparative literature, moreover, and especially its interest in inter-textual discourse is at odds with a too restrictive canon. A canon – though immensely beneficial in the transmission and survival of the tradition – intrudes on comparative analysis, as it bears with it unwonted and substantial historical and theological distortion. The integrity of every analysis of a text's thematic elements, their functions, rhetorical patterns and forms, is compromised.

In pursuing an historical exegesis of individual episodes or segments of the chain narratives, which have formed most of the prose literature of the Bible (Thompson 1987:155-158), two interpretive matrices need to be engaged. The first is implicit and formed by the particular segment's literary context or implicit canon; namely, the greater narrative, constructed and collated within interacting tales creating a whole. Brought into relationship to each other, such narrative chains form a pedagogically motivated, parabolic discourse. The significance and interpretation of such theologically rooted discussion is dependent on both the individual literary work within which a narrative segment has been placed and the greater tradition, which transmits it in all of its often competing versions. The second significant matrix of narrative interpretation is the discourse essential to a critical, historical interpretation, created by a stream of reiterative narrative (Hjelm 2004:254-293; Thompson 2005:223-284) within the great ancient sea of interrelated literature from Sumer and Egypt to Greece and Rome. This sea is the greater canon of ancient literature developed by scribes and the schools in which they were trained. It is governed by the flow of a never-ending spring of tale types, stock episodes and narrative tropes, themes and motifs (similarly Hallo 1980).

The historical context of biblical and related literature is marked by the conscious literary production of texts, written primarily in Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek by Samaritans, Jews and Christians since the Persian period, collecting and transmitting a far older and broader, intellectual tradition that is at home with much of the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean literatures. This context is largely implicit, anonymous and often unconscious. Our ability to recognize it is essential to critical interpretation. Sensitivity to this ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean intellectual world can be enhanced by the comparative method's implicit use of literary spectra of tropes, reflecting a literary world capable of competing with the anachronistic implications of the received text a scholar engages. While my recent *Messiah Myth* (Thompson 2005) has attempted to integrate some of this literature, dealing with themes related to royal

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ideology, in this paper I will deal with three interrelated tropes, which allow me to engage a small part of the extra-canonical discourse of biblical texts. I particularly wish to highlight the implications of the frequent intrusion of blind motifs in biblical tales. Also problems with the coherence of the surface narrative will be used to explore implicit compositional assumptions reflecting the implied reader's awareness of variant tales from a broad stream of reiterated narrative (Thompson 1994).

*1. Good King Josiah, Divine Justice and 1 Esdras*

The theological evaluation of Josiah's life in much traditional scholarship rests heavily on the strength of 2 Kings' good king/ bad king thematic progression. It is essential to the historical context proposed for a so-called "Deuteronomistic History". Not only is this context dependent on stereotyped rhetorical lines (2 K 22,2; 23,25 and 2 Chr 34,2), the historicizing of a good King Josiah's cultic reforms also ignores a number of value-laden inconsistencies which should concern the historian. 1 Kings' literarily dominant and relentless rhetoric of rejection is hardly satisfied with the lame "too little-too late" prevarication supporting salvation history's historicism (1 K 22,19-20). Even in less historically committed interpretations, 2 Chronicles' alternative understanding of Josiah's death as punishment for not listening to Pharaoh Neco, Yahweh's prophet (2 Chr 35,21-23), and the setting given Jeremiah's prophecies of doom over a faithless, covenant-breaking Jerusalem already from the 13<sup>th</sup> year of Josiah's reign (Jer 1,2), is hardly irrelevant to our understanding of Kings. Certainly Jeremiah does not imply the figure of Good King Josiah presented us in Kings. Other glowingly positive evaluations of Josiah and his reign stumble awkwardly on such tropes of divine judgment, especially when they find support in Josiah's faithfulness to Yahweh "from his youth" – already in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (2 Chr 34,1-3). Equally at odds with such judgment is the setting of his "reform" as early as his 12<sup>th</sup> year (2 Chr 34,3) and, with both land and temple purified, its intensification after a once-lost Torah is found in Josiah's 18<sup>th</sup> year (1 K 22,3; 2 Chr 34,8). While historicizing readings of traditional scholarship's Josiah are swayed by "the myth of the good king" (Thompson 2005:139-170), the tradition's implied reception suggests that our texts bear a more complex perspective.

Josiah's goodness in the narratives of both Kings and Chronicles is unequivocal. He is described as a king "who did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh and walked in all the ways of Yahweh and in all the ways of David, his father, and did not turn aside either to the right or to the left" (2 K 22,2; cf. the three-fold reiteration in 2 Chr 29,2; 30,26; 34,2). In 2 Kings, Josiah's goodness is such

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that he fulfils the demand of Moses' *Torah* for purity of heart (Deut 6,5; 10,12; Josh 22,5). Josiah is described – as Hezekiah had been earlier (2 K 18,5) – as one before whom "there was no king like him, who turned to Yahweh with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, according to all the laws of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him" (2 K 23,25). In the Chronicler's reiteration of the Hezekiah story, not only is his own version of this *Torah* epitome presented (2 Chr 31,20-21), it is used to cap an extensive illustration of virtue through the account of Hezekiah creating purity throughout Judah and Israel (2 Chr 29,2-31,19).

Kings' story of Hezekiah offers an expanded reiteration of Isaiah (Hjelm 2004:93-168) and closes on Isaiah's summary judgment of Hezekiah's trust in the messengers from the king of Babylon, determining Jerusalem's tragic fate (2 K 20,12-19). The chronicler's closure, however, limits this critical episode to a single motif and presents Babylon's messengers as tourists, curious about Yahweh's miracle when Hezekiah had been tested (2 Chr 32,31). Kings' story of Hezekiah's sin and forgiveness, moreover, is reiterated in Chronicles with the humility and repentance of Ahab in 1 King's narrative (cf. 1 K 21,27-29), allowing Chronicles to close with a highly stereotyped summary evaluation of the king: "His heart was proud. Therefore, wrath came down on him, Judah and Jerusalem. Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that Yahweh's wrath not come over them in the days of Hezekiah" (2 Chr 32,24-26).

In the story of Josiah's death, 2 Kings turns laconic, as the sword hanging over David's House claims yet another victim (Thompson 2005:261-267). A motif from Hezekiah's story, of delaying Yahweh's wrath by turning Ahaz's sun-clock backwards (1 K 20,9-11), finds a variation that Josiah might also escape seeing the coming destruction. The dye of Jerusalem's fate having already been cast, the reigns of Manasseh and Amon do nothing to change her destiny. 2 Kings uses prophetic metaphors of judgment: Jerusalem is filled to the rim with innocent blood and needs to be washed clean like a bowl, turned upside down (2 K 21,10-15). At the outset of Josiah's reign, one already waits for the destruction. Neither Josiah's virtue nor the lack of it changes anything; it is Yahweh's choice of blessing or curse which determines everything. The story is governed from its beginning by the principle that judgment falls on the guilty one alone (1 K 8,32). Just as surely, another principle of Solomon declares that "no man is without sin" (1 K 8,46); no man can survive divine justice. Having built the case that the entire city be emptied and its people deported, the narrative of Kings is little interested in what Josiah's virtuous reform might produce for the greater

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story. True repentance awaits the exile, when the people in their smelting oven, will turn to Yahweh with the whole of their hearts and souls (1 K 8,48; cf. Gen 15,17). By the time the Josiah story opens, the greater narrative already hurries to meet its conclusion. Good King Josiah's role is but a competitive variant of Jeremiah's vision (Jer 5,1). A single virtuous man cannot be found and 2 Kings places Jerusalem in the role of her sister, Sodom (Gen 18,23-24; cf. Lot in Gen 19,15-16). To end Josiah's goodness and reform takes but a single line: "King Josiah went up against him (Pharaoh Necco) and he killed him (Josiah) when he saw him" (2 K 23,29). Fulfilling the words of the prophetess Huldah, Josiah is gathered to his grave in peace as Josiah's eyes are spared the sight of the evil which Yahweh brings over this place (2 K 22,20, Thompson 2005:267).

While Kings has used its story of Josiah's death within the theme of delaying Jerusalem's destruction in order to illustrate the epithet of Yahweh as "merciful and slow to anger" (Ex 34,6; Ps 103,8; Joel 2,13; Jon 4,2), 2 Chronicles' story turns once again to the Ahab narratives of 1 Kings to cast its story of Josiah's death (2 Chr 35,20-27; cf. 1 K 22,10-37). In Ahab's story, the king will hear only good news from his 400 prophets, a promise of victory in his war against Ramoth in Gilead. The king's messenger instructs Micaiah to make his prophecy like theirs, and he does. When, however, the king demands to hear the truth, the author – like Matthew after him – has Micaiah cite Moses (1 K 22,17; cf. Num 27,17; Matt 9,36): that Israel will be scattered across the mountain top, to be like sheep without a shepherd. Micaiah explains that Yahweh had sent a lying spirit to tempt Ahab that he might fall in battle. Imprisoning Micaiah, Ahab prepares for battle as the theme of lies hiding true prophecy turns to living parable. The king of Israel disguises himself, while Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, wears his royal robes openly. Intensifying the deception, the Aramean king instructs his 32 captains to attack only the king of Israel. At first, Ahab's ruse works as the enemy pursue Judah's king until they discover their error. Haphazardly, a man shoots an arrow which, bringing divine justice, strikes Ahab through the small opening between his scale-armour and breastplate (1 K 22,34). He dies in his chariot that the blood might be collected and carried back to Samaria, there to fulfil the prophecy that closed the story of Naboth's vineyard (1 K 22,35; cf. 1 K 21,19; 22,38). In rhetorical imitation, Micaiah's prophecy is fulfilled as a cry disperses an army left like sheep without their shepherd (1 K 22,36; cf. 1 K 22,17).

This is the story the Chronicler reiterates in telling his version of Josiah's sin and death. Pharaoh Neco is on his way to the Euphrates and Josiah goes out to stop him. Sending the king a message, Pharaoh describes himself as sent by God

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and orders Josiah not to oppose him. Josiah "would not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God" (2 Chr 35,20-22). Instead, he disguises himself and joins battle at Megiddo. Ignoring the story's motifs of disguise and divinely guided arrows, the archers shoot him and he too is carried from the battle in his chariot. That Chronicles draws from the story in 1 Kings is particularly convincing because of its blind, unused motifs.

Much as Kings has drawn its story of Josiah's death as a link in the story of Jerusalem's predetermined fate expressed through Huldah's prophecy (2 Kings 20,16-18; 21,10-16; 23,26; 24,4; Jer 22,13-16; Thompson 2005:261-283), Chronicles has no hesitation in closing Josiah's story with strong echoes of Ahab's tale of disgrace and shame, suggesting that this early reception of the Josiah story understood Josiah within the theme of ever-recurrent failure of the sons of David, rather than as reflecting an idealized figure of the good king. Whether we can also conclude that the Book of Jeremiah's setting of Yahweh's rejection and curse of Jerusalem in the time of Josiah's reign might imply a similar reception is as uncertain as it is attractive. The Chronicler seems aware of such a setting and explicitly places Jeremiah together with Josiah (2 Chr 35,25; Jer 9,1-10). Certainly a reading of Jeremiah's negative evaluation of Josiah's Jerusalem is implicit in Chronicles' reception.

Just such a distressed reading is confirmed by the opening of 1 Esdras, in which Josiah's goodness and Jerusalem's wickedness are united for the sake of the future. In a supersessionist effort to present Josiah, Zerubbabel and Ezra in a threefold chain of reform, creating at last a New Jerusalem with a purified people, 1 Esdras begins its story with Josiah celebrating Passover and bringing the ark back into the temple. The virtue of Josiah is stressed: "The deeds of Josiah were upright in the sight of his Lord, for his heart was full of godliness" (1 Esd 1,1-23). Having set his succession of heroes as figures of great virtue, the text pauses to comment upon itself. The events of Josiah's reign have been written about: an account defined as a story about those who sinned and acted wickedly: a Jerusalem more wicked than any other people or kingdom (1 Esd 1, 24). Unlike either Kings or Chronicles, 1 Esdras exploits the discord between the themes of a good king and a bad city. Josiah's fate at the hands of Pharaoh is justified in 1 Esdras with a paraphrastic reiteration of the story in Chronicles. However, the author of 1 Esdras, with a harmonizing reader's perception, chooses Jeremiah rather than Pharaoh as the prophet Josiah fatally disobeys. In this author's closure, Jeremiah's tears of grief – a motif which struggles against its story in Chronicles – have become consonant with 1 Esdras' tragic story of failed good-

ness. This sets the stage for a purified New Jerusalem's future success under Zerubbabel and Ezra.

1 Esdras' seemingly coherent rendering of the Josiah story can be attributed to the benefits of an effective harmonization of 2 Chronicles and Jeremiah. However, the failure to name his Pharaoh as Chronicles has, the implicit ignorance of 2 Chronicles' story of Hezekiah's Passover (1 Esdras 1,20-21) and the independent story line and function hardly support an assumption that 1 Esdras' version of the story is directly dependent on 2 Chronicles and has harmonized its tale with Jeremiah's in an effort to cast a New Jerusalem story on the theme of resurrection. The story's successful coherence in one narrative segment has created discord in another. A single example serves to support the text's implicit demand that we seek a larger context of reception in order to hear the resonance of our story's reiteration. Within the very segment of 1 Esdras that presents the good Josiah bringing the Passover back to Israel (1 Esd 1,1-23) – a segment, which, as we have seen, is set in contrast to the theme of the uniquely wicked people of Jerusalem, giving rise to Yahweh's wrath (1 Esd 1,24) – the people are presented as one with Josiah. In this segment with Josiah, they are just as uniquely good as they are wicked in verse 24: "None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah *and the priests and the Levites and the men of Judah and all of Israel who were dwelling in Jerusalem*" (1 Esd 1,21). One must certainly ask whether the discourse implied by such opposing tropes is not implied in the process of composition, not merely of 1 Esdras' story as we have it, but also of the stories in 1 Kings, Chronicles and Jeremiah as well (Thompson 1998).

## 2. Retribution, Innocence and Racial Purity in Jubilees

With Jubilees, punishment functions in support of a black and white morality, driven by the logic of retribution (Thompson 2005:116-117). In Genesis, moral perceptions are more critically diverse. Not only is the integrity of Yahweh himself questioned – whether his wrath and retribution are worthy of the God of righteousness and compassion – but a variety of perspectives and voices is maintained. Already in the Cain story, Jubilees presents the story of the punishment of Cain as condemning him to a death comparable to the one he dealt his brother. The mark of Cain is a curse and brings shame. In Jubilees this motif stands in striking contrast to its presentation in Genesis, where the "mark of Cain" is a protective sign: an answer to his prayer. The representative of mankind as murderer is met by a compassionate Yahweh, who serves as one who watches over Cain. Yahweh is the "keeper", a role Cain ironically rejects (*hahshomer* = a cue name evoking a theme of compassion associated with the *ha-*

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*shomronim*, "the Samaritans"; cf. Jub 4,4-5.31-32 and Gen 4,9.15; Thompson 1999:328-337).

The differences between Jubilees and Genesis are also striking in the Abraham stories. In Jubilees 13, for example, Abram and Sarai go down to Egypt and live there 5 years. Then, Sarai is "torn away" from Abram and "seized by Pharaoh." In punishment, Yahweh sends great plagues "because of Sarai". In this story, Abram is described – independently of Pharaoh and the rape and plague theme – as gloriously rich as is also Lot. The story episode closes as Sarai is returned to Abraham and he is sent away from the land of Egypt (Jub 13, 11-15). In spite of obvious parallels to the story of Abram and Sarai in Egypt in Genesis 12,10-20 (with its clear echo of the theme of "despoiling the Egyptians" developed in Exodus 3,21-22; 12,36; Coats 1976) as well as in Genesis 20's parallel tale of Abraham and Sarah in Gerar (with its plague of Gerar's closed wombs, echoing Isa 37,3; cf. Gen 20,17-18), Jubilee's tale maintains an innocent Abram and a Sarai mistreated by an evil foreign king. A peaceful sojourn in Egypt to avoid a famine closes in violence. Pharaoh steals Abram's wife and forces Sarai. Yahweh takes the role of avenger of adultery and rape.

The author of Genesis presents a manipulating Abram and an innocent Pharaoh. Without cause and before they reach Egypt, Abram assumes that the Egyptians will kill him to steal his beautiful wife (Gen 12,11-12). He asks Sarai to present herself as his sister both in order to gain wealth for himself and that he not be killed. Abram's plot succeeds. Sarai is brought to the palace and Abram is made rich as a result. Yahweh's role, however, is the same as in Jubilees. He sends a plague against Egypt because of Sarai. Underlining what in this version of the story is an injustice done to him by both Yahweh and Abram, Pharaoh complains. He returns Sarai to her husband and has his men send Abram, now rich with his plunder, away.

While Jubilees episode bears a blind motif of Abraham and Lot's great wealth – a motif which in Genesis causes Lot and Abram to divide the land, but which plays no role in Jubilees – Genesis has its trouble with the motif of the plague. While entirely appropriate in the clear light of Jubilees' tale of crime and punishment, the plague clashes with Genesis' version of the tale. Having stressed the injustice done the Pharaoh through Abram and Sarai's deception, a plague sent for Sarai's sake raises serious questions about Yahweh and justice. Even if one were to allow – given the ambiguous sexual relationship between Pharaoh and Sarai – that Pharaoh has externally or objectively offended the marriage bond, the problem of a Yahweh who does not judge by what is in men's hearts remains to distress its reader. This problem also preoccupies the author.

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Unlike Jubilees, which has only the Abram-Pharaoh version of this tale, Genesis presents a further variant of this episode that involves Abraham and Sarah with Abimelek of Gerar and yet another, involving Isaac and Rebecca with Abimelek (Gen 20,1-18; cf. 26,1-11; see Van Seters 1975:167-191; Thompson 1987:51-59; Whybray 1987:23). Although neither of these tales have a clear counterpart in Jubilees, both reiterate a motif of a lying, manipulating patriarch and an innocent foreign king. The story in Genesis 20, in particular, stresses the great injustice of Abraham and Sarah's lie. It also takes great pains to exonerate the king from both objective and personal guilt. After the king has sent for Sarah, at night, God threatens to kill the king because he has taken a woman who has a husband (Gen 20,3). The narrator tells his audience that the king had not had intercourse with Sarah while he makes explicit a question that both builds on and intensifies Abraham's debate over Sodom, presented when Yahweh would "destroy the righteous with the unrighteous" (Gen 18,23). In Genesis 20, Abimelek takes up Abraham's role to ask, "Do you really kill the innocent" (Gen 20,4)? Speaking to a God who sees into men's hearts, Abimelek declares that not only his hands but his heart as well have been pure. Not only had Abraham told him that Sarah was his sister but she, herself, affirmed this. Genesis' good king could not be farther from Jubilees' evil Pharaoh. Nor is his patriarch as virtuous! While the question of theodicy has increased its critical intensity, the relationship between the patriarchs and the good king is far from ideal. While a discordant tension builds between the author and his audience as God asserts against the claim of the text that it was he who prevented Gerar's good king from sinning (Gen 20,7), the audience shares Abimelek's protest as Yahweh persists in his threat to kill both the king and his people, should he not return Sarah (Gen 20,8)! Piety, however, prevents both Abimelek and the audience supporting him from persisting in a cross-examination of the divine. The king instead turns to upbraid Abraham with a threefold, reiterating vigor (Gen 20,9-11). Abraham responds to Abimelek's justifiable rebuke with heightened xenophobic assumptions about this god-fearing king and resorts finally to pedantry in his effort to explain away his lie: "she really is my sister" (Gen 20,12). Our innocent king not only makes Abraham rich with cattle and slaves, he pays Abraham 1000 shekels of silver to exonerate Sarah and prevent Abraham from making future claims against her (Gen 20,16). The story closes most interestingly with God healing Abimelek, his wife and female slaves by opening the wombs of the house of Abimelek (Gen 20,18).

This unusual motif's close parallel to Isaiah's child of a New Jerusalem – unable to be born in the reign of a pre-exilic Hezekiah for lack of strength (Isa

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37,3; Hjelm 2004, 142-147) – encourages us to read the immediately following verse in Genesis as a result of our tale's divine compassion. Sarah's womb too is now opened: "Yahweh visited Sarah as he had said and Yahweh did to Sarah as he had promised (Gen 21,1). While the story of Jubilees with its evil Pharaoh and pious patriarchs can be seen as motivated by xenophobia, Genesis' tale is dominated by the greater chain-narrative and not least by the universalism implicit in the theme of reciprocity. This is presented through a chain of promise stories, beginning in the story of Abraham's call: "I will bless those who bless you and him who curses you I will curse and in you will all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen 12,3; 18,18; 22,18; 26,4; 28,14).

The themes of a righteous God and the fate of the innocent persist as central elements throughout this chain of narrative. Although Genesis 20 presents the theme in perhaps its most polemic form, the simpler tale of Isaac's sacrifice, in which the role of the innocent is given to a child, while the righteousness of the divine is intellectually protected from direct criticism by the story's self-description as a test of a Job-like Abraham. Abraham is asked to sacrifice his beloved son and, with that son, the promise of the covenant itself (Gen 22,1-2). The abstraction which the story gains from wisdom's genre of tests and riddles allows the story to complete the thematic oppositions which had been opened by the narratives of Genesis 18 and 20. The God of righteousness will test Abraham's righteousness by sending him to kill the epitome of innocence (Thompson 2005:67-106)! The dilemma's apparent resolution through Abraham's faithful answer to his child's question about the sacrifice that Abraham, in his faith, assures him "God will provide" (Gen 22, 8), threatens to redefine human righteousness – echoing so boldly as it does Yahweh's declaration in 1 Samuel of an Isaiah-like preference for "obedience over sacrifice" (1 Sam 15,22). But even that story is not satisfied with obedience alone, for Saul must close his story with a three-fold repentance, closing in tears. He must become like a child and be humble before he is allowed to worship Yahweh (1 Sam 15,24-31).

In the motifs of the closing scene of blessing and promise after Yahweh's angel has displaced Isaac with the cult's sacrificial ram, the story returns delicately to Genesis 20 and the theme of the foreigner: "By your descendents all the nations of the earth will bless themselves, *because you have obeyed my voice*" (Gen 22,18). Genesis 20's presentation of the righteous Abimelek, protesting the abusive treatment of both Abraham and his God, stands to contradict such a patron's demand for obedience. This theme is itself radically undermined by the Pentateuch's pivotal theme of obedience's impossible terms. As sacrifice is superseded by obedience, obedience must give way to humility (Deut 31,29; Josh

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24,19; Nielsen 1997:120-124; Hjelm 2004:89.91; Thompson 2005:38-42.256-258). The doubt that Abraham has cast over the justice of Yahweh's wrath against even a flood story's noise reaching him from Sodom, which is underlined by the purity of good King Abimelek's heart in the following story, is not to be displaced by obedience's impossible claim to righteousness. Obedience's pride has not yet learned humility. The *Torah* of a perfect God is impossible to men. The education of Israel is yet to come in the course of the greater story, which but slowly makes its way towards Solomon's universal truth that "no man is without sin" (1 K 8,46), within what becomes a never-ending story of human failure (Thompson 2002a; 2002b; 2005:267-269).

In considering the reciprocity of the role that Abimelek plays with Abraham in the story of Genesis 20, the holy-war theme of Israel's displacement of the nations of Canaan deepens the narrative ambivalence regarding the theme of obedience as righteousness. Such ambivalence seems ever the more present in the critical reiteration of motifs of xenophobia in Genesis because of the contrast we see with Jubilees' consistent rejection of all that is foreign. In Jubilees, for example, Isaac's legitimacy as Abraham's son is proven beyond a doubt as Sarah conceives long after she has left Egypt. With precision, Sara's pregnancy is dated from the 6<sup>th</sup> month of the year and Isaac is born in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month with his legitimacy intact (Cf. Lk 1,36.56 and Jub 16,10-13; Thompson 2005:34-37). Moreover, Isaac is not to be reckoned with the gentiles, even though, in Jubilees, all other sons of Abraham are (Jub 16,14-31). In Jubilees, Sarah is good and does not abuse Hagar. Nor does she oppose her husband in favor of Yahweh's plan as she does in Genesis (Gen 16,6; 21,9-12). Nor does Abraham raise a father's objection to the loss of Ishmael or give the slightest protest. Ishmael, the foreigner, is rejected (Jub 17,1-18). The theme of legitimacy takes a central place in Jubilees and is reiterated not only in this story of Sara and Hagar's conflict but also in Isaac and Ishmael's story. When Sara dies in Jubilees, Abraham has good relations with Heth not for the sake of peaceful relations or the universalism of a divine promise, as in the peace Abraham and Isaac both establish with Abimelek in Genesis (Gen 21,22-34; par. Gen 26,26-33; Thompson 1978), but only for his own sake: because he needs a grave for Sara (Jub 19,4-9; cf. Gen 23,1-20). Similarly, in Jubilees' version of the Jacob and Esau conflict story, Rebecca takes up the role of protecting the purity of the land and is given a far more positive role than she plays in Genesis. In Genesis 26,34, the small motif of Isaac's bitterness over Esau's wives – in contrast to Rebecca who is engaged on Jacob's behalf – is blind and contradicted by the motif of Isaac's preference for Esau in Gen 25,28. This blind motif reflects far more the dominant anti-Esau theme of

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Jubilees' version of the story. Moreover, in the Jubilees story, Rebecca is inspired by a prophetic dream, through which her support of Jacob's cause receives the divine sanction it lacks in Genesis. There Rebecca's behavior is set in the context of competitive favoritism for Jacob and unmotivated bitterness towards Esau's Hittite wives. In Jubilees, not only Rebecca but also Isaac warns his son not to marry such women (Jub 27,1-18; cf. Gen 26,34; 27,46).

Far more than Genesis, the story of racial purity and evil wives within Jubilees' story of the rejected Esau offers a fitting etiological foundation for the prophets' curse and holy war ban on Edom, subjecting as it does a Lucifer-like Esau to Yahweh's eternal hatred (Isa 34,1-17; Jer 49,7-27; Ob 1-21; Mal 1,2-5; also Rom 9,12-13; Thompson 1979). Genesis' story, with its quite limited reference to a stereotypical reiteration of the principle of retribution (Gen 27,29) and its closure on a theme of lasting peace and brotherhood, is motivated by a more universal ideology that seems directed against just such ethnic hatred as we find expressed in Jubilees. It seems to be the story of Esau in Genesis that provides the aetiology for the positive view of the Edomites in Deuteronomy, contrasting so strikingly with Lot's descendents, the Moabites and Ammonites, who are not to be allowed into Yahweh's assembly – even to the 10<sup>th</sup> generation (Deut 23,8-9; cf. Deut 23,4-7).

### 3. *The Corruption of the Land and Foreign Wives in 1 Esdras and Jubilees*

As with the stories of Cain and Esau, the story of Sodom's destruction and the survival of Lot and his daughters we know from Jubilees is implied by the story's early reception. Genesis provides us with a substantially different story. Deuteronomy's exclusion of the Ammonites and Moabites from Yahweh's assembly seems to be rooted in the story of Lot and his daughters, as their exclusion in Deuteronomy is keyed to the immediately preceding rejection of any "bastard" (*mamzer*) from the assembly – even to the 10<sup>th</sup> generation (Deut 23,3; see also Zech 9,6).

In both Jubilees and Genesis, the origin of the Ammonites and Moabites is expressed through an etiological tale of Lot and his daughters at the close of the story of Sodom's destruction. In both traditions this story finds its context within thematic reiterations of sin or corruption related to the flood story. In Jubilees, this context begins already in the scene of Yahweh clothing Adam: "the only one of all the beasts and cattle to cover his shame." An echo of Deuteronomy defines such divinely supported modesty as distinguishing those who know the law from "the Gentiles" (Jub 3,30-31). The theme is also taken up in the story of the drunken Noah sleeping naked in his tent, much as it is in a shorter version in

Genesis. Jubilees, however, offers an explanatory context. Ham's exposure of his father's shame and Shem and Japheth's care for his modesty leads in both stories to the curse of Canaan, Ham's youngest son, and the reciprocal blessing of Shem and Japheth (Jub 7,1-12; cf. Gen 9,18-27). While Genesis marks no clear continuity between this scene and the genealogies of Noah's sons, Jubilees' more detailed and expansive tale goes on to recount that Ham, with his four sons, separates himself from his father and builds a city, a deed which Japheth then imitates out of envy. A more virtuous Shem stays with his father, yet also builds his city (Jub 7,13-17). Jubilees uses these three cities as a point of departure from his flood story. The towns are named after the three wives of Noah's sons in order to introduce abbreviated genealogies to populate the three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe (Jub 7,18-19; cf. Gen 10,1-32). Jubilees, then, has Noah exhort his sons to be righteous and to cover their shame. The competitive building of cities is defined as the "path of destruction". As his sons have taken this path, Noah fears that it will lead them once again to bloodshed and destruction (Jub 7,20-32). Within Jubilees ethical system, the uncovering of nakedness leads to violence, while modesty brings one to righteousness and prosperity (Jub 7,33-39), while Genesis uses it to give context to the Pentateuch's expanding theme of holy war against Canaan (Thompson 2005:231-238).

It is within the development of the theme of immorality vs. righteousness that Jubilees tells his story of Sodom's destruction. With but a brief summary of the story at the oak of Mamre, bringing Sara the promise of her child Isaac, but without Genesis' debate story about a righteous God and the death of the innocent, Jubilees explains that the people of Sodom had defiled themselves, committed fornication and worked uncleanness on the earth (Jub 16,5) as an example for those who imitate the uncleanness of the Sodomites. Lot was saved because God remembered Abraham, but – nevertheless – "Lot and his daughters committed sin on the earth such as had not been seen since the days of Adam – for he lay with his daughters". Because of this sin, Jubilees explains, Lot's descendents were destined to be entirely destroyed (Jub 16,8-9). While one might well see the association between Jubilees account and Deuteronomy 23's holy-war rejection of the Ammonites and Moabites, which, with the prophets, rejects them thoroughly because of their Israel-foreign immorality (cf. also Ps 83,8; Isa 11,14; Jer 49,1-6; Ezek 21,33-37; 25,1-7; Am 1,13-15), Genesis' treatment of these aetiological stories transforms both prophetic and Deuteronomy's curses. The author protects Lot's virtue consistently. With that virtue intact, the Moabites and Ammonites of Sodom are protected from total rejection. In this, Genesis is open to a future, bearing a saving reversal of the destruction of Sodom – the sister city of

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Jerusalem and Samaria. It too is to be restored in a new covenant (Jer 12,14-17; Ez 16,44-63 interpreting Deut 30,1-10)! The destruction of Sodom, like that of Samaria and Jerusalem of the future, has its holy-war's ultimate goal in repentance and return.

The thematic development in Genesis' narrative does not share Jubilees theme of sexual shame, but begins in the garden story's curse of the land, that it produce weeds and thistles for man's food (Gen 3,17-19). Adam is sent from the garden to serve the ground taken from there (Gen 3,23: *la'avod et-ha'adamah asher luqach misham*). The theme intensifies in Genesis 4 as Cain takes the role of the servant of the cursed ground and is himself cursed by it. In Genesis 6, the sons of god, created in their divine father's image (Gen 5,1-3) marry the daughters of *ha-adam[ah]* (Gen 6,1-2). The corruption of mankind by the surface of the ground from which they come – a soil that produces but weeds and chaff (Ps 1,5) – is finally summed up in the metaphor of an earth that is corrupt in God's sight and filled with violence, as God decides to make an end to all flesh (Gen 6,11-13). This theme of the earth's corruption and need of the flood to cleanse it finds reiteration in 1 Esdras 8,82-85 where Jerusalem's need for cleansing requires that it be cleansed of the people of the land and of its foreign wives and children (1 Esd 8,68-9,36). It also supports the ironic parody of Ezra 10, where the winter's bad weather reflects rather a flood story's cold and sorrow-laden rain, making widows and orphans of Jerusalem's wives and children (Thompson 2003).

With the theme of the land and its peoples' corruption in place, Genesis introduces the story of Sodom's destruction within the context of Abraham's debate with Yahweh: that the innocent not be destroyed with sinners (Gen 18,22-33). When the angels come to Sodom, they are met by Lot, who plays the role of the generous host, reiterating Abraham's role at the Oak of Mamre (Gen 18,1-8). This opening scene of peaceful hospitality is broken, however, when the men of Sodom – every last one – surround the house and demand to meet Lot's visitors: that they might "know them" (Gen 19,6: *nede'ah 'otam*). An ever-ambiguous Genesis plays with his audience by using the well-recognized potential euphemism of carnal knowledge rather than the less ambiguous *shakav* of the story's closing episode. In presenting its story, Genesis echoes in plot and language a parallel story about a Levite and his concubine from Judges 19.

The parallel in Judges begins with a Levite's final, reluctant refusal of his father-in-law's hospitality, pressed on him for a sixth day in Bethlehem. This righteous Levite travels on but refuses to spend the night in *Jebus* because it is "the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel". Instead, he

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goes on to Gibeah. There, however, no one will take him in and he – like the two angels at the gate of Sodom in the Lot story – sits down in the town square. An old man, an Ephraimite – like Lot a stranger in his town – opens his home to the Levite and satisfies his every need. So too here the men of the town besiege the house and demand to "know" the stranger. Like Lot, the old man addresses his "brothers" and, to protect his guests, offers them two women: his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine. Continuing to share the language of Genesis, the story – lacking the magic of the divine figures of Genesis – draws a considerably different closure. The concubine, in fact, is sent out to be raped and killed by the men of Benjamin, who show themselves to be far worse than the Sodomites.

In Genesis, Sodom's people want to meet the strangers: to "know them". Whether they are misunderstood by Lot, and their request heard in the light of Jubilees and Judges 19 is impossible to know. Rather than give up his guests to the demand of Sodom's people, Lot imitates the Levite and offers his two daughters, who have never "known" a man, to his "brothers". The daughters are saved at the last minute from the concubine's fate by the angels with the help of motifs drawn from the opening of Elisha's "love your enemy" story in 2 Kings 6 (Thompson 2005:281-282). The violence of the men's response to Lot's efforts to dissuade them from their attack echoes the disciple of Elisha's terror at the assault of the Aramean's cavalry. Neither Lot nor Elisha's disciple is aware of the divine forces that stand on his side against the assault. In both tales, the enemy is blinded and made helpless and the danger passes. Genesis' Sodom story, however, seems intent on having Lot and his descendents displace the people of Sodom – a role which echoes the future role of Israel in Canaan.

Whether Lot's wife and his sons-in-law are themselves Sodomites is not explicit in the story, though they perish with the town. The sons' fate is provoked by their lack of obedience and faith (Gen 19,12-14), while his wife plays Euridice to Lot's Orpheus (Gen 19,26) and is superseded by his daughters to allow the pure line of Lot and his daughters to survive. While Jubilees stresses a view of Sodomy's perversity and shame – a role which Genesis clouds with ambiguity and inter-textual doubt – the angels' protection of the daughters' virtue introduces a plot-line that is played out in a scene, reiterating Noah's drunkenness after the flood (Gen 19,30-38). The most striking element of this very simple tale is Genesis' silence and the absence of Jubilees' easy judgment of Lot and his daughters. Rather, exoneration seems to be Genesis' goal. The elder says to her younger sister: "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come into us after the manner of all the earth" (Gen 19,31). This striking echo of Ruth's story (cf. Naomi's speech to her two daughters in Ruth 1,11-15) is sup-

ported by the cosmic overtones of Sodom's destruction. Lot's personal role, regarding his exposure to and incest with his daughters, shares the innocence of Noah before him, protected by the blessed ignorance of a new wine's drunkenness (Thompson 2005:198-205). Unlike Jubilees' closure in shame, the story of Genesis ends on a note of new beginnings, pointing ahead to the new covenant of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

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