

The Form and Significance of Last Words in Biblical Literature

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I dedicate this Dissertation with gratitude to Christ, my Savior and Lord, for grace and strength through this long meandering journey. This would never have been possible without Your strength, Lord; and I am forever grateful. I also dedicate this research to my beloved mother of blessed memory for her valuable role in instilling in me the love for God's Word from childhood, after the death of my father at an early age. Further dedication is to my cherished advisor, Prof. Ed Greenstein, a professor of many professors and doctors, who helped me from the choosing of the topic, with his constant guidance until the end. I count it a privilege to have you as my advisor. I am very grateful to all who played any role in what God is doing in my life.

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List of Abbreviations

AB Anchor Bible

ABRL Anchor Bible Reference Library

ANE Ancient Near East

ANET *The Ancient Near East Text In Pictures: Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard

AOTC Apollos Old Testament Commentary

AYB Anchor Yale Bible

BCE Before the Common Era

BDB Brown, Driver and Briggs *Hebrew Lexicon* (Peabody, MA, 1979).

BHK *Biblia Hebraica*, ed. R. Kittel

BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*

BI Biblical Interpretation

BJS Brown Judaic Studies

BTB Biblical Theology Bulletin

BTS Biblical and Theological Study

CBQ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

CBQMS Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series

ELH *English Literary History*

ESV English Standard Version

FOTL Forms of the Old Testament Literature

HALOT *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ludwig Koehler, and Walter Baumgartner

HAR *Hebrew Annual Review*

HSM *Harvard Semitic Monographs*

HCOT Historical Commentary on the Old Testament

HS *Hebrew Studies*

HUCA *Hebrew Union College Annual*
ICC The International Critical Commentary
Int *Interpretation*
ITC The International Theological Commentary on the Old Testament
JANES Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society
JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL Journal of Biblical Literature
JBQ *Jewish Bible Quarterly*
JJS Journal of Jewish Studies
JQR The Jewish Quarterly Review
JPS Jewish Publication Society
JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS Journal of Theological Studies
LHBOTS Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSAWS Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
LXX Septuagint
NAS New American Standard Bible (1977)
NAU New American Standard Bible (1995)
NCBC New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NET New English Translation
NICOT New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis.
NKJV New King James Version
NIV New International Version
NLT New Living Translation
OBT Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTE *Old Testament Essays*
OTL Old Testament Library
OTTL Old Testament Theological Library
SBL Society of Biblical Literature

SBLMS Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series

SBLWAW Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World

SBLSemSt Semeia Studies

SSN Studia Semitica Neerlandica

SupVT Vetus Testamentum Supplement

TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*

TOTC Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries

VT *Vetus Testamentum*

WBC World Biblical Commentary

Abstract

This study examines the forms of last words in the Hebrew Bible, their significance and the extent of their implementation or fulfillment where it applies.

Several biblical characters, both the prominent and the anonymous, speak in different modes of discourse before they die. The circumstances surrounding their deaths are different. Some perceive their time to die is drawing near and plan ahead, but others die unexpectedly, yet still speak at the time of death. The broad spectrum of the types of last words in the Hebrew Bible calls for attention and prudent study. Malul in his article “Death-Bed Depositions in the Hebrew Bible” carefully lists the instances where “old, well advanced in years” זְקֵנִים בְּאֵימֵם בְּיָמֵם (Gen 18:11) and variations of the phrase are used. He cites several occurrences where one is described as old and advanced in years. Malul also enumerates the terms used to indicate aging in Biblical Hebrew.

In this study we define last words by category—oaths, blessings, foretelling etc. This research aims at critically examining the last words in the Hebrew Bible, with the intention of establishing the various categories, forms, and patterns. How meaningful the last words are to the next generation, and how well they are implemented are essential aspects that call for in-depth study. The goal is to define the criteria of last words in the Hebrew Bible by examining each instance by those criteria. In addition, each discourse of last words will be examined in its literary context and background.

Twelve major categories of last words are critically examined with most having a number of subdivisions. The introductory section includes the purpose, the survey, methodology and an overview of the present study.

The purpose of the research is to highlight the features of last words in the Hebrew Bible. The forms and patterns are compared to other passages and ancient Near Eastern literature to examine how they relate. These last words include those of the aged and ready to die, as well as those taken under unprecedented circumstances. The circumstances under which last words are uttered in their literary context are examined; and they tend to influence the implementation of the last words. Important as last words are, the hearers and those charged to implement them are equally important. The impact that the last words are expected to have on the audience in their literary context is examined. Most of those who hear the last words take them seriously—although there are some who did not uphold them.

In the survey the form of last words in its contexts, significance, and implementation are examined in the Hebrew Bible. The research examines any possible relationships between the circumstances of death and the types of last words. The dual causality principle described by Yairah Amit among others is observed in many of the last words examined.

The second part of the research focuses on the various categories of last words. The twelve categories examined are: oaths, foretelling future events, blessing and prayer, opportunity to be blessed at departure, witness against Israel and admonition. The rest include recalling God's word, political house cleaning, calling for vengeance, suicide as reprisal, heroic suicide, acceptance of retribution, and women in agony. Most of the last words are unlikely to be the actual last words. They are a literary device, and only sometimes mimetic. The more mimetically characterized last words are uttered with the anticipation of getting ready before the inevitable takes place.

Under the oath category, two last words are examined. These are the last words of Jacob to Joseph (47:27–31) and Joseph to his brothers (50:25). These last words are all fulfilled. The oaths obliged those made to take them, to act on the oath in an ardent manner.

The second category of last words examined is foretelling future events. Four major instances are examined. These are Jacob to Joseph (48:21–22), the ethical will of Jacob to his sons (49:1–32), Joseph to the Israelites (50:24–26), and Moses to the Israelites and God (Deut 32:1–47). Under this aspect of last words, the future is foretold and almost all of what is foretold takes place. Jacob’s last words to Joseph in this unit express two important features. First, Jacob foresees God relocating all Israel to Canaan and promises Joseph a portion of land that Jacob decides to give to Joseph separately. The last words of Joseph to the Israelites also have to do with the exodus like the first part of Jacob’s last words to Joseph. He too foresees God relocating them from Egypt to Canaan. Further, Jacob foresees his sons in the Promised Land, and foretells specifics of where each tribe will be settled and what will befall them. Some are favorable last words, but some cannot be regarded as blessings. A major part of what Moses foretells is about the backsliding of Israel in the indictment that is his Song. These last words are fulfilled when the Israelites are settled in the Promised Land and forsake the LORD.

The next category of last words examined are a blessing and a prayer, which include Moses’ last words for the Israelites and a prayer (Deut 33:1–29), in addition to David’s prayer (1 Chron 29:10–20). This section exemplifies the intercessory function of some last words. Moses blesses the Israelites as he also intercedes on their behalf. Similarly, David intercedes for Solomon as the king, who takes over from him as David prepares to die.

An uncommon situation occurs at the separation between Elijah and Elisha. Last words are uttered by Elijah, but he does not die. Instead, he is taken away from Elisha and

translated to the heavens. Here we find an opportunity to bless at departure. Elijah questions what Elisha wants him to do for him before he is taken away and Elisha's request is granted (2 Kgs 2:9–10).

The category of witnessing against the Israelites and admonition is also examined. Here, Moses witnesses against Israelites (Deut 30:19–20; 31:20–22; 32:1–47) and Joshua does the same (Josh 23:1–24:29). The last words here are an indictment. Moses evokes the love of God for the Israelites and their unfaithfulness. Moses makes the responsibility of the Israelites clear to them. Obedience to the word of God will cause them to be blessed. Disobedience has severe consequences, and Moses counsels them to choose obedience and live rather than disobedience. Joshua for his part witnesses against the Israelites in a covenant renewal ceremony. Joshua establishes a covenant between God and the Israelites, as he declares his loyalty to God, and admonishes Israel to have reverence for the LORD and serve Him (vv. 14–15). These last words are fulfilled when Israel settles in the Promised Land.

David recalling and reflecting on God's word to him is the next unit of last words (2 Sam 23:1–7). In an unusual prophetic approach, David speaks as in an oracle declaring that it is the Spirit of God speaking through him. These last words are not addressed to anyone in particular, but David outlines what is expected of a leader. A leader is to be just, governing in a spirit of reverence toward God. That will result in fruitfulness, prosperity, and contentment. On the other hand, a rebellious ruler will not succeed. Sandwiched between the two, David indicates how unworthy he is, but God makes an everlasting covenant with him.

In a bid to politically clean house, David instructs Solomon on how to be secured in his reign in these last words of his (1 Kgs 2:1–9). David sees two people—Joab and Shimei—as dangerous and asks Solomon to use his wisdom to do away with them. In between the instruction

to eliminate the two, David brings up the need to reward Barzillai's sons. Barzillai helps David during the rebellion of Absalom and David does not forget that in his last words. Solomon fulfills these last words only partially. He eliminates Joab, sets a condition on Shimei to remain alive, which Shimei violates and is killed. On the other hand, there is no indication that Solomon rewards any son of Barzillai.

Zechariah calling for vengeance while being stoned is the next unit of last words discussed (2 Chron 24:19–22). These last words are uttered after the death of Jehoiada, the priest, Zechariah's father (vv.15–18). In obedience to God, Zechariah warns Judahites for forsaking God and engaging in idolatry, but he is murdered. He calls for justice by asking God to take notice of what is being done to him and avenge his blood. Joash, who commands that Zechariah be stoned, is wounded in battle, and his servants conspire and kill him. We are not informed of what happens to those who stoned him, but Zechariah's words are fulfilled when Joash, the instigator, is killed (2 Chron 24:24–25).

The category of suicide as reprisal (Judges 9) is examined through the last words of Abimelech and his assistant (vv. 50–57). Abimelech kills all his seventy brothers after the death of Gideon, his father, in order to be the king of Israel. Jotham, the only brother who remains, flees, and curses him in a long poetic speech. After Abimelech reigns for three years, God acts and effects Jotham's curse to bring justice. Abimelech and his company fight the people of Shechem and destroy each other. Abimelech is struck by an upper millstone dropped on him, and feels humiliated to die by the agency of a woman. Abimelech's death is markedly unheroic, in contrast to the deaths of Samson and Saul.

In the first of two heroic suicides examined, Samson dies with his enemies, the Philistines (Judg 16:25–30). Samson meddles with things he is not supposed to meddle with as a

Nazirite. He also goes after only Philistine women, who eventually cause him to gradually disclose his source of strength. After a career of fighting Philistines, Samson is captured and humiliated by his enemy. In a final bid to wreak vengeance, he asks God to restore his strength and enable him to topple the temple of the Philistine god Dagon. His last words—his prayer—are answered, and he dies among thousands of his enemies.

In the second instance of heroic suicide, Saul dies in a battle (1 Sam 31:1–7). However, this account of Saul’s death is one of two different narratives (1 Sam 31:1–13; 2 Sam 1:1–10). In the first account, Saul requests his aide to kill him after being wounded in battle with the Philistines. His assistant refuses, and Saul kills himself to deprive the Philistines of the credit for killing him. In the second account, which can be regarded as assisted suicide, an Amalekite claims Saul requested assistance from him to die and he killed him. In both accounts, Saul dies in a heroic suicide depriving his enemies of the joy of taking his life.

Adoni-Bezek acknowledges his fate as retribution from God in a short speech, admitting his guilt to Judahites (Judg 1:7). This is the first instance of an acceptance of retribution as part of the last words. The tribe of Judah goes with Simeon to fight to possess the allotted territory in Canaan. Adoni-Bezek flees, but they catch up with him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. He then confesses doing the same to seventy kings, which are also his last words. Poetic justice is served as a lesson in reprisal.

The second instance of acceptance of retribution is by Zebah and Zalmunna to Gideon (Judg 8:21). These are Midianite kings who are warriors, but Gideon defeats them with Divine support. They readily accept reprisal for their actions and ask Gideon to kill them himself, instead of delegating authority to his young son. They did not have an option not to die,

and so they accept their fate as the repercussion of their previous action of killing the brothers of Gideon.

The last category of last words treated is those of four women, who utter their last words in agony. This unit is subtitled “Women in Agony”. The matriarch Rachel and Phinehas’ wife utter their last words as they give birth, taking their last breath. Jezebel and Athaliah are queens, who die as they defy those who cause their death.

Rachel’s last words are uttered as she takes her last breath while giving birth (Gen 35:16–20). She is the first woman to die in birth. She yearns for children and ironically dies having her second born. Her last words in naming her son Ben-oni, which means “son of my sorrow” or “son of my iniquity,” reflect her agony. Phinehas’s wife, the second woman to die in childbirth, also names her son as she dies (1 Sam 4:1–22; 19–22). Her tragedy is not only birth pangs, but also symbolic of the national tragedy, as the Ark of God is captured, and all her husband’s family is killed in war with the Philistines. She names her son Ichabod which relates to the glory of God departing from Israel.

Jezebel is the first of the two women to die in defiance uttering their last words (2 Kgs 9:31), and they are the final last words discussed. Jezebel supervised the killing of prophets, and her death is foretold. She mocks Jehu, questioning if he is coming in peace, and these are her last words. She is thrown down by some of her eunuchs at the command of Jehu. Ironically, Athaliah utters her last words at Joash’s coronation (2 Kgs 11:1–14; 2 Chron 22:10–12). Athaliah tears her clothes, which is one of the signs of mourning (Gen 37:34; Judg 7:6; 11:35; 2 Sam 1:2, 11–12; 13:19, 31), as she utters her last words. Jehoiada, the priest, commands her to be taken outside with her followers to be executed.

The third section of the study is on the implementation, fulfillment, and significance of last words. Most last words uttered are implemented or fulfilled as expected. The circumstances under which the last words are uttered to a very large extent influence the implementation or fulfillment of the last words.

In conclusion several variations exist in the last words examined. They are uttered under diverse circumstances and fulfilled in different ways. Some last words that are related need no implementation or fulfillment.

Further, generally, last words of men are significantly different from those of women. Most men anticipate their time of death is near and prepare for it, after living a meaningful and fruitful life. This is apart from those who utter their last words in a war-related context. On the other hand, all the women examined die in agony, not foreseeing the pain, and utter their last words in relation to a sudden situation. In addition, some of the last words overlap. The last words of Jacob as a father to his sons overlap with those of Moses as a national leader to the Israelites. The recipients of last words take them seriously, and most of the last words that require implementation are fulfilled.

Finally, I have examined in the appendix the recorded last words of Abraham (Gen 24:2–9), Isaac (Gen 27:1–28:4), Samuel (1 Samuel 12) and Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11:1–40). Although several such recorded last words are evident in the Bible that are not necessarily parting words before death, these four are samples of prominent characters with lengthy narratives and worthy of examination.

Part I

Introduction

1. Purpose of the Research

Qohelet expresses what is well known of life as “a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted” (Ecc1 3:2). He further notes “and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (12:7). Death does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked; it is the same for all.¹ When the time draws near for individuals to die, they prepare for it, although some die unprepared, not knowing the time to die is near. The purpose of this study is to highlight the last words that those who are about to die in the Hebrew Bible say, whether well prepared beforehand or unprepared, speaking as they die. The study will examine the form of the last words in their contexts, their significance, implementation, and fulfillment in Biblical literature. The effect that the last words have on the hearers in their literary context will also be examined. An important aspect of this research is to investigate the types of circumstances in which last words are reported, the types of discourses or utterances that are made, and any possible connection between the circumstances of death and the types of speech that accompany them.

Last moments and words were very much valued by many people in the Biblical world. The words spoken just before death are the most significant words of a person’s lifetime in the collective imagination of the ancient world. The wise traditionally epitomize their wisdom at this time and share the secrets of their success. The righteous reveal what they had learned

¹ Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 10–12.

about their good life at this time.² Based on contemporary experience, one might expect precise forms of conveying one's last words. This could be a declaration of faith, a confession, a last will, or an intimate message to a loved one in a distant place. However, different forms can be observed in any group of last words with no specific form prevailing. It is evident in the Hebrew Bible that there is no common or ritualized form of final words. No formula can be identified in them; rather, they are diverse and particular to each text and situation. Some of the dying have issues that they consider to be prominent in their hearts and expect the next generation to take up and accomplish after they die. This occurs mostly when they are advanced in age and anticipating that their time to die is near.

The last words of someone dying in old age are not the same as one who dies on a battlefield, nor the same as one dying in the agony of execution or a woman in childbirth. Differences can be identified even among the last words of people classified as old or "old and well advanced in age" such as Jacob (47:29–31) and David (1 Kgs 2:1–9). And yet in most of these colorful episodes, clear declarations occur when a person is on the brink of death.³ Further, these last words vary significantly in Biblical literature with some being blessings and good wishes in the form of prayer, while others are vengeful. In addition, some final words are uttered in anguish.

The end of this life on earth occurs mostly through death. However, the Hebrew Bible records two different occasions, when this eternal separation does not take the form of death. In

² Steven Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative: The History of a Literary Convention in Ancient Israel*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 37.

³ Meir Malul, "Death-Bed Depositions in the Hebrew Bible" in *A Common Cultural Heritage: Studies on Mesopotamia and the Biblical World in Honor of Barry I. Eichler*, ed. Grant Frame, Erle Leichty, Karen Sonik, Jeffrey Tigay and Steve Tinney (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2011), 44–45.

Gen 5:18–24, God takes Enoch without death (v. 24). Not much is said about his life or last words. Therefore, this research focuses on the last words of Elijah, who also has no record of his death, but does impart significant last words to his disciple. He parts from Elisha, his assistant, as they walk together, and he is removed in a chariot of fire with horses of fire (2 Kgs 2:11). It is worth examining and comparing the influence of the last words of Elijah, who departs without physical death, with those who go through the natural course of death.

Critical examination of these last words identifies not just the different categories and forms in the Hebrew Bible, but also reveals different reasons for which they were uttered.

On the other hand, some individuals have records of parting words more than once. Jacob, Moses and David, for instance, have records of presumed last words at different times in different forms as we will examine later (Gen 47:27–31; Gen 48:21–22; 49:1–32; Deut 30:19–20; 31:20–22; 32:1–47; 32:1–47; 33:1–29; 2 Sam 23:1–7; 1 Kgs 2:1–9).

This study focuses specifically on the last words spoken by individuals, as well as parting words, as we have them in the MT. The sons of Jacob, for instance, give after his death Joseph a reported speech that is supposed to be from Jacob to Joseph before his death. Joseph's brothers were concerned for their security because of the evil they did to Joseph, which never ceased haunting them (Gen 42:21–24; 50:15–21). However, speech conveyed by another party are not considered in the present research. Four recorded last words that are not necessarily the last words of the said individual, because they live on several years or unspecified time after what is reported in the Bible, however, are examined in the appendix. Other words might have been uttered that are not recorded in the MT; but the focus is on what is on record in the MT as having been said without speculation on what might have been said.

Some of the poetic last words, such as those of Jacob in his ethical will to his sons (Gen 49:1–32), and the last words of Moses to the children of Israel (Deut 32:1–47) are more of a curse than what one would expect from a father parting from his children or a leader leaving those he governs. Jacob mentions each of the twelve sons by name with specific last words for that individual. Although he had said that the children of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) are his, like Reuben and Simeon, (Gen 48:5), he does not address them at all in his final words to his sons.⁴ Earlier, Jacob blessed them (Gen 48:8–22) before he brought his children together for his last words (Gen 49:1–32). On the other hand, in the blessing of Moses to the children of Israel, Simeon is not mentioned, but Joseph’s two sons are mentioned in the blessing to Joseph (Deut 33:1–29).

One may inquire about what effect the parting words have on the recipients. Is the next generation able to carry out specific instructions when they receive them? Are the predictions fulfilled? Do the blessings and prayers have any effect on the recipients? Why do the patriarchs and others, who anticipate their time to die is near, call those they deem to be able to carry on their desires, and give them specific instructions? How are these last words important to the next generation or those who hear them? This study will analyze all the last words in the Hebrew Bible to classify them and describe how they are fulfilled or not fulfilled.

The main purpose of this study, as said, is to critically examine the significance of last words in the Hebrew Bible and how they make an impact on their hearers. The study further aims at exploring the categories of last words to distinguish the differences in form and significance in the context in which each appears.

⁴ Jacob’s only daughter Dinah who is mentioned in Scripture (Gen 30:21, 34:1), is not included in his last words. Only the sons are identified, and each receives Jacob’s last words.

The research will be in four major parts. An introduction will present the general background of types of last words in literary works over the centuries and ancient Near Eastern background. It will also include examining any related materials that might be useful in the study and the methodology used as well as the contribution to scholarship. The second part will treat the various categories of last words in Biblical literature. The focus of this section will be to examine the different forms and categories of last words and any patterns that are evident in the Biblical text. Each discourse in its literary context will be critically and distinctly examined. Attention will be given to the conditions under which each last word discourse is uttered, considering the categorization whether they are oaths, instructions, blessings, prayer or poetic in form in its context as indicated in the table of contents.

The third section will highlight the performance of the last words by the generation left behind, where the last words were instructions. In cases in which final words were predictions, this section will discuss their fulfillment by those who come after them. Thus, the implementation, fulfillments and significance of the last words will be examined in this section. The final part will be a summary of the research. This will include recapitulating the forms, findings, and suggestions on the significance of last words in Biblical literature.

2. Survey of Literature

A. General Background of the Study

The people of ancient Israel used the period prior to death as a moment to teach their descendants insight, foretelling the future and dispensing wisdom as is evident in the lives of several Biblical characters such as Jacob, Moses, and Samuel. This is an important time

to instill in the next generation lessons from the past or revelation into their future.⁵ The last words of a person often include his last will, which is always considered paramount; thus, Jacob asks Joseph not to bury him in Egypt.⁶ The desire of Jacob was to be buried in the Promised Land, in order to lie with his fathers because that is vital to him. Jacob, therefore, entreats Joseph not to bury him in Egypt before he dies, with an oath. Nevertheless, as we will observe later, last words vary in considerable ways.

Great importance is attached to parting words between loved ones foreseeing an eternal separation. When the one dying, who might be a father, master or leader, envisions his inevitable death, he usually summons a son, servant or the nation, respectively, which is the generation he is leaving behind, and bestows blessings most often on them. As death approaches, the elderly “seek the fulfillment of the covenant with God and its application to the next generation”⁷ and are therefore mindful to convey their last words to their loved ones. However, several leave this life on earth with painful last words. A topic remaining to be investigated is the question of whether there is a pattern to the last words, be they pleasant or painful.

Weitzman observes, “Ancient Near Eastern last words are often introduced by prologues which describe the speaker and setting of the last words....” He notes that here, the “conventional characteristics of this literary tradition are most easily recognized.” Nevertheless, he acknowledges the fact that no single characteristic can be used as an identification marker for the “deathbed pronouncements, final testaments, and valedictory speeches found in the Bible and

⁵ Steven Weitzman, *Solomon: The Lure of Wisdom*, Jewish Lives (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 21–22.

⁶ Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 314–20.

⁷ Malul, "Death Bed Disposition", 36–37.

ancient Near Eastern literature.”⁸ Although Weitzman finds prologues to introduce ancient Near Eastern last words, which describe the setting and speaker,⁹ this is not the norm. The speaker can be either the person dying or the narrator recounting the story of the renowned leader. Prologues are not found in several of the last words of those on their last legs, as we will observe. Joseph for instance, did not have a prelude to his last words though he was well advanced in age and prepared to die (Gen 50:24–26). Joseph simply assured his brethren of God keeping His promise to take them to the land He swore to give to Abraham and his descendants. He then made them take an oath to carry his bones from Egypt.

Generally, those who die in war, those who die young, or in pain, who lack the necessary foreknowledge of their death, make no preparation. Samson, for example, took steps to end his life at a moment he did not foresee. He could not keep on living as a reproach or allow his enemies to kill him. Therefore, he decides to die a hero by killing more Philistines at his death than in his life. He planned at that moment and prayed for his death, but there is no preamble to his last words. Thus, diverse final words are represented under different circumstances and in relation to different types of individuals, depending on the circumstances of their departure, and the completion of the role they play as a leader.

B. Types of Last Words in Literary Works over the Centuries

It is no overstatement to say that Biblical literature has influenced literary works over the centuries. The examination of last words in some literary works outside the Bible provides perspective and suggests possible methods of categorization and analysis. The similarities and

⁸ Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative*, 38.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 38–39.

diversity that we find in both Biblical literature and literary works regarding last words require examination that will be useful in this study. As Fuss suggests, “Last words are, at base, a specifically literary problem.”¹⁰ Fuss surveys four main types of poetic last words that she names “the consoling last word, the defiant last word, the banal last word, and the new last word.” She further notes that the many disparities of the voice of the dying, in British and American poetry, indicates that last words that are poetic encompass “a dynamic literary convention evolving in tandem with changing cultural attitudes towards the deathbed.”¹¹ She observes that poetry is not the only genre that is intrigued by deathbed drama and the power of last words. Fuss acknowledges the varied nature of last words in Biblical literature.¹²

Guthke maintains that what is passed on from generation to generation over the years in last words is the idea of culture. That which is significant is remembered, and culture is memory. Thus, culture awareness and its confirmation are important to ensure the future.¹³ This idea is not far from what is evident in the Bible and some of the ancient Near East philosophy of last words, ensuring that tradition is passed on to the next generations. Guthke notes that the idea of last words being a sort of résumé of a life that confirms and reveals who the dying really is, is true—“the essence or the truth of a life, the ‘real’ self, emerges in death and only in death.” However, he asserts that the opposite is also true and that at the last moments, somebody can reveal a shape and meaning that is different from what is known about that individual and the

¹⁰ Diana Fuss, "Last Words," *ELH* 76/4 (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 877.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 877–79.

¹² *Ibid.*, 877.

¹³ Karl S Guthke, *Last Words: Variations on a Theme in Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 48–49.

real life could be hidden.¹⁴ According to Guthke, “Shakespeare reveals himself as a master of the last word by evoking a multiplicity of associations in the minds of an audience trained in the precepts of the ubiquitous *ars moriendi*” (the art of dying). He asserts that the most famous last words of Julius Caesar, “Et tu, Brute,” were probably invented by Shakespeare.¹⁵ Examination of the literary analysis of last words in general literature will, as was said, assist in establishing categories and features that might be looked for in Biblical literature.

Literary expressions of last words over the centuries indicate the same extent of variety that we find in Biblical literature. Nevertheless, these last words, outside the Bible, address different issues in some cases. For example, Fuss observes about last words, “whether written or oral, the question remains the same: what words are the right words for one's final conscious moments.”¹⁶ This idea of being mindful to use the right words at final moments, is yet to be explored in the Bible. Biblical literature varies in form and in features addressing issues that might be of paramount importance to them. Fuss presents another phenomenon to be tested in instances of last words in the Bible: the frequency of reading or recitation of a classic poem or prayer to the dying character.¹⁷

On the other hand, Guthke explains that there are some occurrences of last words where the one dying makes use of the last words so that he or she atones for the sins that they have committed in life. He notes that through the last word, there is “clearly the conviction underlying the *artes moriendi*, which endeavored to show the way to a manner of dying that

¹⁴ Ibid., 51–52.

¹⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹⁶ Fuss, “Last Words”, 877.

¹⁷ Ibid., 877–79.

would save the soul by achieving sinlessness through the last word, no matter how sinful a life might have been.”¹⁸ These kinds of last words cannot be identified in the Biblical literature.¹⁹

C. Last Words in Ancient Near Eastern Literature

It is generally recognized that “the Bible must be understood in its ancient Near East context.”²⁰ Sparks observes that four basic types of cultural diffusion (direct connection, mediated connection, common tradition and common source) are distinguishable between Israel and the ancient Near East.²¹ Some similarities have been found between last words in ancient Near Eastern literature and the Biblical text. In the *Instructions of Ptah-hotep*, for example, a series of prohibitions, admonitions and commands can be observed that have to do with expected behavior of an official in the service of the king and for a sage in general. “The instruction bears the authority of tradition, the king, the vizier, and the social order characterized by instructions in the Hebrew Bible (Proverbs 1–9; 22:17–24:22, and 31:1–9).”²²

Similarly, some of the instructions in the Hebrew Bible, especially in Proverbs, where a father gives instruction to his son (1–9; 22:17–24:22, and 31:1–9), parallel the exhortation of the Egyptian father to his heir. The final rite of passage is so important because it portrays the

¹⁸ Guthke, *Last Words: Variations on a Theme in Cultural History*, 52–53.

¹⁹ Rachel’s last words are Ben Oni, which can mean “Son of My Iniquity” as well as “Son of My Suffering.” This is a possible instance of acknowledging guilt at death. However, no statement of sinlessness is evident or achieved. For more on Rachel’s last words and death, see below “Childbirth” under “Women in Agony” in Part II of the study on pages 217–222.

²⁰ Cyrus H. Gordon, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York: Norton, 1997), 113–21.

²¹ Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 4–5.

²² Leo G. Perdue, “The Death of the Sage and Moral Exhortation: from Ancient Near Eastern Instructions to Graceo-Roman Paraenesis,” in *Paraenesis: Act and Form=Semeia* 50 (1990), 81–109 ed. idem and John G. Gammie.

way of life of the one dying. He gives instruction to the heir and his followers so that after his death, they can still reflect on his guidance. “The teacher thereby continues to live through the social group formed by his/her instruction and achieves a type of immortality.”²³

Further, *The Instruction for Merikare* resemble the last words of David to Solomon (1 Kgs 2:5–9), which deal with the royal rule where kingship is recognized as established by God to maintain social justice. Important aspects of *The Instruction for Merikare* includes, “cultivating proper speech that circumvents discord and strife, punishment of rebels, beneficent and just treatment of citizens, reward of loyal supporters, and honoring of the gods....” This helps the wellbeing of Egyptian society to be actualized.²⁴ This is the time when the ruler or older king gets ready to hand authority over to his son or the heir, and gives advice on the enactment of his duties, just as David instructs Solomon towards the end of his life. This is part of his last words to his son when he prepared to hand over the governing of the kingdom to him (1 Kgs 2:5–9).²⁵

In addition, in the *The Instruction of Amen-em-het*, Amenemhet exhorts his son about the need for “precautions against the possible treachery of disloyal servants and the necessity of a king's keeping open a watchful eye for sedition” and begins by asking him to pay attention to what he has to say to him in order that he will be successful. The main issue that he tries to imbue to his son is that blind trust and inadequate attentiveness can lead to his being taken unawares by enemies.²⁶ This counsel of Amenemhet is also very much like David’s instruction to Solomon in 1 Kgs 2:5–9.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 90.

²⁵ Ibid., 81–109.

²⁶ Ibid.

In the view of Rendsburg, the last words of David in 2 Sam 23:1–7 are of northern and northeastern Israelite origin. He bases his argument on some non-normative uses of אָנֹכִי in the BH in poem. He argues that אָנֹכִי is usually used when God speaks. The only other use in four cases with human speakers are Balaam (Num 24:3–4; 22:5) from Aram, Agur (Prov 30:1) from the Syrian Desert, an obscure use in Ps 36:1 and in 2 Sam 23:1.²⁷ He also suggests that מְלֵךְ in v.2 of 2 Samuel 23 is a non-Judahite word. However, Greenstein argues that the word is an Aramaism, not a Northernism.²⁸ Either way, it is obvious that the custom of uttering last words before death is common in all areas of Biblical Israel.

Further, a connection can be seen in the *Words of Ahiqar*, a collection of sayings, which is introduced by a narrative and said to be the teaching of Ahiqar, an Assyrian sage, to his heir, Nadan, just as the narratives in Deuteronomy 31 introduce the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. Similarities are evident between the two. In both, the central figure is getting ready to be replaced, there is betrayal of the benefactors, disowning of the heir—and both are closely related in transmission of the teachings in written and oral forms.²⁹ In addition, the *Instructions of Ptah-hotep*, the last teachings of an Egyptian officer to his son, give an indication “that in Egypt of the late third millennium B.C.E. the words of the dying were looked to for wisdom and practical advice about proper social behavior.”³⁰ Additional examples of last words

²⁷ Gary Rendsburg “The Northern Origin of the Last Words of David (2 Samuel 23:1-7),” *Biblica* 69/1 (1988), 113–21.

²⁸ Edward L. Greenstein, "Aramaism" in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Online), ed. Hans-Josef Klauck (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 1. 629–34.

²⁹ Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative*, 49–52.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

in ancient Near Eastern literature will be cited in the course of our discussions of the Biblical examples.

D. Diversity of Last Words

The diverse forms of last words make it essential to identify the literary context in which each final discourse was uttered to establish its significance. One of the main purposes of the Song of Moses is to serve as a witness against Israel when they turn away from God (31:20–22). The call of Moses to heaven and earth as witness to his words echoes both wisdom and prophecy (Isa 1:2). An address to an audience is found in both wisdom and prophetic literature. However, only in Isa 1:2, the heavens and earth are addressed, as in Deuteronomy 32. In relation to wisdom, various peoples are addressed (Ps 49:1–5), God’s people are addressed (78:1–3), and men of wisdom are addressed (Job 34:2)—in each case, calling for attention to the word of God.

This form of address also reflects the covenant form of Hittite, Aramaic, and Neo-Assyrian treaties, in which gods and other powerful natural forces such as “Heaven and Earth are invoked as witnesses.”³¹ Deuteronomy 32 is a poem of witness against Israel. Israel would violate the covenant and the Song, which is written and preserved, would confront them. It would testify against them as a witness that they deserve the ill they suffer and should have expected it.³² According to Wright, elements in nature poetically testify on God’s behalf, and

³¹ Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 62.

³² Isaac Rabinowitz, *A Witness Forever: Ancient Israel’s Perception of Literature and the Resultant Hebrew Bible*, Occasional Publications of the Department of Near Eastern Studies and the Program of Jewish Studies, Cornell University, eds. Ross Brann, and David I. Owen (Bethesda: CDL Press, 1993), 40–41.

this is one of the five divine lawsuits, which include this formula in the Hebrew Bible.³³ Aaron upholds the scholarly affirmation of natural elements testifying for God (Isa 1:2–3; Jer 2:12–13).³⁴ Mic 6:1–2, in the same manner, expresses the complaint of God against Israel and calls on hills to serve as witnesses. God elects Israel as His own people (Exod 19:5–8; Deut 26:16–19; 32:7–9), which is expressed in terms of “a suzerain administering a vast realm.” However, although God warns of punishments for disloyalty, He also assures the people of salvation in the end, which calls for praise.³⁵

Moses is speaking at the very end of his life at this particular time, and it is evident that in all sincerity, he is “speaking forth with the effective power of God issuing from his mouth.”³⁶ Evidently, prophecy, lawsuit and poetic forms are all imbedded in the Song of Moses.

Further, despite some similarities among final words instances, last words are also unique, depending on the circumstances at the time of the utterance. In analyzing the last events surrounding the deaths of Samson and Saul, for instance, both committed suicide while facing their enemies, the Philistines. However, comedy and tragedy can be observed at work by the circumstances surrounding their death in Judges 16 and 1 Samuel 31, respectively.³⁷ Tragic as the death of Samson was, he was on divine assignment without any knowledge of the “divine drama

³³ G. Ernest Wright, “The Lawsuit of God: A Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32,” in *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (London: SCM Press, 1962), 44.

³⁴ David H. Aaron, *Etched in Stone: The Emergence of the Decalogue* (New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2006), 126–27.

³⁵ Wright, “The Lawsuit of God,” 26–36.

³⁶ George Angus Fulton Knight, *The Song of Moses: A Theological Quarry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 9–10.

³⁷ Cheryl J. Exum and William Whedbee, “Isaac, Samson and Saul: Reflection on the Comic and Tragic Visions,” in *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism.*, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 2, ed. Paul R. House (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 286–92.

in which he has unwittingly played a part.”³⁸ This is very different in the narratives of Saul, who faces rejection and utter despair.

A divine plan, purpose and power are at work in Samson, and the blueprint of God is being accomplished, with neither Samson nor his parents knowing that the LORD was working through him, “seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines” (Judg 14:4). Nevertheless, Lichtenstein observes that Samson’s vengeance, like that of Ajax, a mythical strongman in a classical Greek legend, was neither tribal, nor ethnic, but personal. Samson prayed that God would empower him once more to take vengeance on the Philistines for the sake of his eyes by dying with his enemies; yet he was still accomplishing a divine plan.

He died a heroic death fulfilling his purpose. The Philistines that Samson “killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life” (v. 30b). Ajax, similarly, desired to die in revenge although his desires were not fulfilled.³⁹ On the other hand, the intention and motivation of Saul are ambiguous, and there is no restoration but rather uncompromising dreadfulness of misery at his death.⁴⁰ Saul was consulting a medium because God was not answering him the day before his death (1 Sam 28:3–25). In contrast, Samson still sought God’s help and received his desire at the time of his death: he died accomplishing the divine plan (Judg 14:4; 16:28–30).

³⁸ Murray H Lichtenstein, *How the Mighty Have Fallen: Reflection on the Death of Heroes in Classical Greece and Ancient Israel*, Anne Bass Schneider Lecture in Jewish Social Studies 16 (New York: Hunter College, 2002), 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Exum and Whedbee, "Isaac, Samson and Saul: Reflection on the Comic and Tragic Visions," 299–305.

E. Last Words in Biblical Literature

Biblical literature is known for its mixture of genres. For example, covenant forms, lawsuit formulations, and curses leave their mark on many types of Biblical compositions.⁴¹ Last words are embedded in Biblical literature within larger literary frameworks. Though the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, for instance, is embedded in a narrative context, looking at the book as whole, chapter 32 is part of a larger unit of chapters 31–34—the conclusion. These chapters are generically diverse, recalling historical events, foretelling future events, featuring blessings and prayers.

Generally, distinct small units can be discerned in the Song of Moses, with the poetic character prevalent throughout (1–4; 5–6; 7–9; 10–12; 13–14; 15–18; 19–22; 23–27; 28–33; 34–35; 36–42; 43; 44–47) with the death of Moses at the end (vv. 48–52). The very beginning of the song, with its parallelism and short phrases, indicates its poetic form

Give ear, O heavens and I will speak
And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth

הָאָזְנוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶדְבָרָה
וּתְשָׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי־פִי:

Synonymous parallelism is the poetic form evident here, but the point of reference is the mention of heaven and earth as the silent witnesses.⁴² The song recounts the faithfulness of God and His help for Israel but laments that Israel provokes God to jealousy by sacrificing to demons and not God. It is predicted that Israel will walk away from the covenant with the LORD. The Song expresses the continuous unfaithfulness of Israel and foretells how God will abandon them to their enemies but will rescue them so the enemies will not think it was their god that fought for

⁴¹ James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," in *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism*, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 2, ed. Paul R. House (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 49–69.

⁴² Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 376–77.

them to defeat Israel. Deuteronomy 32 underpins the predictions of Israel's apostasy in the previous narrative context (31:16–21, 26–29) by distinguishing Yahweh's loving deliverance and care for Israel with their unappreciative rebellion.⁴³ God specifically instructs Moses through whom He revealed Himself to the Israelites and established a covenant with them to write down the song for himself, teach it to the children of Israel, put it in their mouths so that the song will be a witness against them (v. 19) as his leadership over Israel comes to an end and he prepares to die.

Moses himself is a witness, but God desires permanent evidence that will remain after Moses is no more. Putting the song in writing permits previous experiences and relationships to continue in present and future significance.⁴⁴ Israel will have no excuse for not knowing what God requires of them because it will be a written document and, in their mouths, a part of the last words of Moses, the leader they cherish, who taught them before he died. Witness is an essential part of any proof, and especially of the lawsuit pattern that the Song echoes. The whole created order is the arena, in this case.⁴⁵ All that is in the heavens and the earth are involved as witnesses. This is not the same with Samson or Ajax and Heracles, who did not have knowledge of the divine plans concerning them. Thus, they act in ways that eventually result in their suicides.⁴⁶

Unlike Samson, David knows his time to die is near וַיִּקְרְבוּ יָמֵי־דָוִד לָמוּת (The days drew near for David to die) and makes sure that things are put in order ahead of time (1 Kgs 2:1).

⁴³ James W. Watts, *Psalm and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative*, JSOTSup (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 119.

⁴⁴ Rabinowitz, *A Witness Forever*, 40–48.

⁴⁵ J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Nottingham, UK: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 452–53.

⁴⁶ Lichtenstein, *How the Mighty Have Fallen*, 1.

The infinitive with לָ [on the verb “to die”] may express purpose.⁴⁷ The narrator informs us of the motive for the words of David to Solomon in verses 2–9. David sees the need to encourage Solomon to be strong and to keep the word of the LORD through Moses, so that he prospers and attains the promises of God to David. Keeping God’s word means securing the authority over Israel for his progeny forever. Solomon’s strength and tenacity are also needed to execute those David deemed worth eliminating. On the other hand, Samson did not know he is dying so that he could not prepare for it. In addition, and more importantly, Samson is not credited as having any children. His relationships with all the three Philistine women leave no offspring.

The similarity of the last words of David in 1 Kgs 2:3 to some of the words of Moses towards the end of his leadership in Deuteronomy is seen by some as Deuteronomistic. Cogan, for instance, suggests that the words “keep the mandate of YHWH your God” is Deuteronomistic writing since the phrase appears only in Deut 11:1 and in priestly texts referring to their responsibility (Num 1:53; Lev 8:35).⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the study is synchronic—it doesn’t affect the literary analysis if David’s last words are influenced or added by a Deuteronomist writer or redactor. For the purposes of this study, the noble portrait of David that we find in the present text is consistent with David’s earlier characterization as a man of God’s own heart, who was commanded to be the commander over Israel (1 Sam 13:14). David depends on the word of God transmitted through Moses and asks his son to observe it as he prepares to depart his life on earth. Knowing the word of God and passing it on is a command (Deut 6:4–11), and that is just what David did.

⁴⁷ Simon J. De Vries, *1 Kings*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 34–35.

⁴⁸ Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 10 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 25.

David had a personal relationship with God and depended on the judgement of God. When he spared the life of Saul, who sought to kill him, David sees God as the rightful judge to avenge him (1 Sam 24:12). David rightly refers to his instruction to his son, Solomon, as deriving from the Law of Moses, which he is expected to know as the next king of Israel, as the kings are commanded to do (Deut 17:14–20). Similarity exists not just between the last words of Moses and David, but also in the words of YHWH to Joshua when he is to replace Moses as the leader of Israel (Josh 1:6–9). Parallels are obvious in the last words of Joshua to Israel, (23:3, 6, 14–16), and the last words of David to Solomon (1 Kgs 2:1), in the introductory part by the narrator and in the last words of Jacob to Joseph (Gen 47:29).⁴⁹

Diversity can be seen in the final words of David in the books of Samuel and Kings with three distinct forms. The first is an ideal picture of royal rule, the second is the justification of the fall of the Southern Kingdom based on the moral failure of Solomon and his descendants, and the third is the final form including advice that justifies the actions Solomon is expected to take.⁵⁰ These are different from the account in 1 Chron 22:5–16, which looks back at past events and the covenant God made with David to establish a house for him and his descendants (1 Chronicles 17; 2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89). Whereas the narratives of David in the books of Samuel and Kings focus more on future events that are conditional depending on expected behavior, the emphasis in 1 Chronicles 17; 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89 are more of the promises of God and His eternal covenant to the house of David. In addition, poetic form can be identified in the last words of David in 2 Sam 23:1–7 whereas that of 1 Kgs 2:1–9 is more of a straightforward

⁴⁹ Ralph W. Klein, *1 Chronicles: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 81–97.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 87–89.

deathbed instruction.⁵¹ “Comparative analysis illumines the presentation of the promises to David” in 1 Chronicles 17 and also the possibility that one of David’s descendants might sin, but this does not affect the basic promise.⁵²

Further, some last words reflect a reprisal for one’s own actions. The words of Adoni-bezek, as related in the Hebrew Bible, are: “Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather under my table; as I have done so God has repaid me” (Judg 1:7). Adoni-bezek, sees his situation as justified retribution and acknowledges God as behind the verdict and not any person. Adoni-bezek sees himself as a sadistic tyrant and he is condemned out of his own mouth. His treatment is exactly as he deserved as directed by God.⁵³

The deathbed scene and last words of the classical rabbis, like those of other leaders, vary, and no one form predominates. They display no single purpose though many of them share a concern for “teaching, preserving, and passing on the tradition and authority”⁵⁴ Diverse forms and similarities among final words are not just characteristic of Biblical literature but also ancient Near Eastern and rabbinic literature.

3. Methodology

Different research methods will be employed to establish the forms and significance of last words in the Hebrew Bible. The specific passages in the Biblical literature, where last words are recorded as utterances of fathers, masters, and leaders to the next generation, will be examined

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 12-12A (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 672.

⁵³ Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 100–01.

⁵⁴ Anthony J. Saldarini “Last Words and Deathbed Scenes in Rabbinic Literature,” *JQR* 68 (1977), 30.

through form criticism and close literary reading, analyzing each instance of narrative, poem, rhetorical function, and circumstance within its particular context. Similar study will be done on the five passages in which women speak while dying in agony by examining any relationship that might exist among those specific texts. Related study will be done on other texts, where the leaders die speaking in their anguish.

Further, the study will seek to analyze any pattern in the various categories of last words through comparison of the precise words of individuals. The research will compare the last words from the Hebrew Bible to some from the ancient Near East to examine any similarities in form, style, content, and language in addition to the differences that exist in the last words of Israel and her neighbors. Some of the last words that are related to Akkadian, Ugaritic and other Semitic languages will be examined. The last words will also be examined by employing comparative philological method for interpreting each of the passages, guided by commentaries and specialized studies. This will help interpret the last words of the Hebrew Bible more accurately, exploring the forms, patterns, and significance for a more comprehensive understanding.

In addition, this study applies a literary method of close reading in order to examine how each example of last words is adapted to its immediate context. The works of Steven Weitzman, Meir Malul, Robert Alter, Meir Sternberg and similar literature serve as models in this study. The synchronic literary approach, which is a method developed in the past half century by scholars as Meir Sternberg⁵⁵ and Robert Alter⁵⁶ are patterns used.

⁵⁵ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Literary Biblical Series (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985), 1–41, 349ff.

⁵⁶ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 188ff.

In general, literary close reading will be combined with an analytical approach that looks for patterns in structure and rhetoric. As indicated above, each statement of last words will be studied with respect to its embedding in its context and with regard to whether, and how, it is followed up in the narrative.

This study focuses on the last words of the one dying. However, as in the study by Fuss, the research will also explore any instances, where those being left behind may be speaking to the one departing. In addition, Fuss's notion of being intentional with the choice of right last words in the final conscious moments of the one dying, will be explored in the Bible.⁵⁷ This study will also engage the idea of Guthke, who indicates instances of last words, in which the dying person makes use of his or her last words to atone for certain sins that he or she committed in life.⁵⁸ This function of last words will be explored in the Hebrew Bible in this research.

4. Overview and Contribution to Scholarship

The need for this study stems from the fact that there is a widespread phenomenon of last words in Biblical literature that has not been studied fully in its shared features and its diversity. People depart from this life speaking in diverse ways, and this calls for examination into the different instances of final words for any pattern. Some make those coming after them take an oath to carry out what they desire or wish they could have done but were not able to do. Regardless of the status of the one departing or circumstances under which last words are uttered, it is worthwhile investigating the purpose and effect of these final words and how this life situation is

⁵⁷ Fuss, "Last Words," 878.

⁵⁸ Guthke, *Last Words* 488–89.

conveyed in the Bible in its various forms. What are the forms of the last words and how do the final words affect the next generation?

This research will examine the instances of last words in the Hebrew Bible and outline the various categories of situations and the diversity of literary forms. Further, the study will explain how each expression of last words is adapted to its literary context. This will help find firsthand information on the forms and patterns in the last words of diverse people. It will be a broad-based study of final words regardless of the status of the individual. It will include unnamed individuals, women dying in distress, as well as fathers, leaders, prophets, judges, and kings.

Twelve categories of last words are examined and analyzed in the Biblical literature to determine the form and significance. These include oaths (Gen 47:27–31; 50:25), foretelling future events (48:21–22; 49:1–32; 50:24–26; Deut 32:1–47), blessing and prayer (Deut 33:1–29; 1 Chron 29:10–20), opportunity to bless at departure (2 Kgs 2:9–10), witness against Israel and admonition (Deut 30:19–20; 31:20–22; 32:1–47; (Josh 23:1– 24:29). The others are recalling God’s word (2 Sam 23:1–7), political house cleaning (1 Kgs 2:1–9), calling for vengeance (2 Chron 24:19–22), suicide as reprisal (Judg 9:50–57), heroic suicide (Judg 16:25–30; (1 Sam 31:1–7), acceptance of retribution (Judg 1:7; 8:21) and women in agony. The last words of women are in two segments—in childbirth (Gen 35:16–20; 1 Sam 4:1–22; 19–22) and in defiance (2 Kgs 9:31; 11:1–14; 2 Chron 22:10–12).

Part II

Categories of Last Words

1. Oaths:

- A. Jacob to Joseph (Gen 47:27–31)
- B. Joseph to Brothers (Gen 50:25)

The psalmist in Ps 39:4–5; 90:10–12 ponders the transience of his life. He sees the need to depend on God for a heart of wisdom as he reflects on the brevity of life. Whether verbalized or not, most people anticipate the end of life as the years pass by. Therefore, some plan towards it. People tend to become feeble as they age, so it is important to examine one's life while one can. Socrates is reported saying that the unexamined life is not worth living.⁵⁹ Many people take stock of their lives, especially as they near the end.

This chapter focuses on exploring the diverse forms and categories of what people say before they die as well as any relevant patterns in Biblical literature. All the aspects of last words in whichever form or category they appear in Scripture will be analytically and specifically examined in its literary context. Major categories that are under consideration in this chapter are, to mention but a few, oaths, foretelling, blessings, prayers, suicide and defiance. The various forms and categories under investigation are cited with their related passages. The circumstances surrounding the uttering of the last words or dialogue, no matter the category, will be examined.

The study starts with those final words that involve the taking of oaths. The oaths under examination are the one that Jacob's demand of Joseph (Gen 47:27–31), and the vow Joseph enforces on his brothers before he died (Gen 50:25). The oath demanded by Jacob of

⁵⁹ Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 201.

Joseph, is unlike the one demanded by Joseph from his brothers. Although both are promissory oaths, they differ in the mode of swearing. This is the narrative about Jacob’s demand on Joseph:

A. Jacob to Joseph (Gen 47:27–31)

²⁹ Now when Israel’s days drew near to death,
 he called his son Joseph and said to him,
 ‘Now if I have found favor in your eyes,
 please put your hand under my thigh,
 and deal kindly and truly with me.

I pray do not bury me in Egypt,
³⁰ ‘but let me lie with my fathers;
 you shall carry me out of Egypt
 and bury me in their burial place.’
 And he said, ‘I will do as you have said.’

³¹ Then he said, ‘Swear to me.’

And he swore to him.

So, Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed.

וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמוֹתוֹ
 וַיִּקְרָא לְבָנוֹ לְיוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ
 אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
 שְׂיִם־נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יְרֵכִי
 וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת
 אֶל־נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרָיִם:
 וְשָׁכַבְתִּי עִם־אֲבוֹתַי
 וַיְשָׂאתַנִּי מִמִּצְרָיִם
 וַיִּקְבְּרֵנִי בְּקִבְרֵתָם
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּדִבְרֶךָ:
 וַיֹּאמֶר הִשָּׁבְעָה לִּי
 וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ
 וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־רֹאשׁ הַמֶּטֶה:

On hearing of the ill health of Jacob, Joseph went with his two sons to his father. Jacob recounted his encounter with El Shaddai, who appeared to him at Luz in the land of Canaan, blessed him with a promise of many progenies, and promised the land to his descendants as an everlasting possession (Gen 48:1–4). Jacob further told Joseph that just as his first two children, Reuben and Simeon, are his, so will Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to him in Egypt, before his father and brothers with their family joined him, will be regarded as his (vv. 5–6). In other words, Joseph’s sons will have the status of the other tribal families. This narrative is in tension with the blessing of Jacob/Israel in Genesis 49, in which Joseph is a tribal family—not divided into Ephraim and Manasseh, as in Moses’ blessings (Deuteronomy 33). “Surely there was a notable blessing for Joseph and his sons and a

particular future for them in the providence of God. This was God’s word through Jacob, which had to be passed on faithfully before he died.”⁶⁰

Jacob lived seventeen years in Egypt (47:28) but did not fully fit into Egyptian society. He understood it is not his land, and desired to be buried in the land of promise with his fathers (vv. 29–30). God promised Jacob when he was en route to Egypt in Beersheba that He would make him a great nation in Egypt and bring him up from there, when Joseph sent for him to come to Egypt (46:1–4). Therefore, he asked Joseph to bury him where he belongs, with his fathers, which Joseph agreed to do. An emphatic nuance is observed in the words of Joseph to Jacob, his father, in response to his last words by his death bed.

Joseph said to his father, אֲנֹכִי אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּדַבְרֶךָ, literally, “I, I will do as you have said” (47:30). On the use of the personal pronoun אֲנֹכִי “I”, Muraoka observes that a possible reason for the use of a pronoun in a response or promise is psychological—in that at the time of making a promise the person’s self-consciousness is deepened.⁶¹ The use of the pronoun accentuates the solemn promise that Joseph is willing to do as his father requests.⁶² Joseph was capable and willing to accomplish the will of his father. Jacob felt the need to formalize the promise, so he instructed Joseph to put his hand under his thigh וְשִׂים יָדְךָ תַּחַת יְרֵכִי, please put your hand under my thigh (47:29). “This action, and the Old Testament phrase for progeny as being one that

⁶⁰ Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 200.

⁶¹ T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985), 54.

⁶² Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Subsidia Biblica (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991), 538–39.

springs from the hip (יִצְאֵי יָרְכוֹ Gen 46:26), suggest that the family line may be in mind.”⁶³ Jacob’s emphatic enforcement of the oath, clearly reflects the importance he attaches to being buried with his ancestors.

Here, three different ways of using נָא are evident. It comes after a request, between a request and a command and also after אַל and before future יִקְטֹל.⁶⁴ Jacob uses נָא these three times in his plea that Joseph not bury him in Egypt (47:29).

Now if I have found favor in your sight	אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
Please put your hand under my thigh	שִׁים־נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יָרְכִי
I pray do not bury me in Egypt	אֶל־נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרָיִם

נָא is translated as “now” or “please” and “I pray”, which are all featured in this passage. נָא is a particle that gives emphasis and is often linked with *maqeph* or *daghesh forte*, or both *maqeph* and *daghesh forte* are used.⁶⁵ In all the three uses, נָא is linked to a *maqeph* and emphasizes what Jacob wants to convey to Joseph.

To be sure that Joseph keeps his promise, Jacob goes further and asks Joseph to swear to him—and he does (וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ) (47:31). Jacob ensures all his children are aware of the obligation he has imposed upon Joseph to bury him with his ancestors. Therefore, after Jacob finishes blessing his children, he reiterates his command to the twelve to bury him with his fathers. This is at the cave in the field of Machpelah, in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial plot. Jacob gives details of the place of his burial, which is with his fathers (49:29–33). However, in the reported speech of Joseph to household of Pharaoh, he said “My father made me swear, saying, ‘Behold, I am dying; in my grave, which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan,

⁶³ David F. Pennant, "Genesis 32: Lighten our Darkness, LORD, We Pray," in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12-50*, 2nd ed., ed. Richard S. Hess, Philip E. Satterthwaite, and Gordon J. Wenham (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1994), 179.

⁶⁴ פסברג, מבוא לתחביר לשון המקרא, §291 125.

⁶⁵ HALOT, "נָא" 656–57.

there you shall bury me.’ Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back.” (50:5). Redford suggests that this could mean a place in the Land of Canaan that could be Shechem or Beersheba and not necessarily Machpelah.⁶⁶ However, in 47:30, Jacob is specific in saying “but let me lie with my fathers...” which is no other place than Machpelah.

The narrative of Gen 49:33–50:14 is about the death and burial of Jacob. His wish is fulfilled, and his last words accomplished beyond what he required of his children. The command is carried out, and a great number of people accompany Joseph and his brothers to carry out Jacob’s last words. “This emphasis on burial is reinforced in the account of Jacob’s extensive funeral. Militating against any hint of ascension, the narrator offers rich detail concerning his place of burial.”⁶⁷ “So, Joseph went to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt” (v. 7). “So, his sons did for him just as he had commanded them” (v. 12).

In the passage that entail שִׁים־נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יָרְכִי (please put your hand under my thigh) in oath-taking, as demanded by Jacob of Joseph, the Promised Land and family are the main focus and that which was at stake. After שִׁים־נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יָרְכִי a gentle negative command follows a request for the future—אֵל־נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרָיִם (47:29). Jacob uses אֵל, the negation of the jussive. Jacob is in a foreign land, and desires to be returned to the Promised Land, in order to be buried with his ancestors (family) and the oath is strictly fulfilled.

⁶⁶ Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 162–63. It is possible Jacob prepared a burial ground next to the tombs of the Patriarchs at Machpelah before going to Egypt and that would explain the Scriptures (47:28-31; 49: 29-33; 50:5).

⁶⁷ Regina M. Schwartz, "Joseph's Bones and the Resurrection of the Text: Remembering in the Bible," in *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory* ed. idem (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 45–46.

B. Joseph to His Brothers (Genesis 50:25)

The end of a matter is said to be better than the beginning (Eccl 7:8). The life of Joseph could be classified as a life well lived that ended well. Joseph in his childhood enjoyed a short time with his father, suffered the enmity of his brothers (Gen 37:1–11), and went through years of hard times that were permitted by the LORD (Ps 105:1–45). Joseph lived one hundred and ten years, seeing the third generation of the children of Ephraim and the grandchildren of Manasseh (Gen 50:22–26). 110 is an ideal age for Egypt.⁶⁸ The word of the LORD to Abraham in Gen 15:12–16 about his descendants being strangers in a land that is not theirs commenced with the story of Joseph, the third generation after Abraham. Despite challenges, Joseph had crowning moments in his life although the very meaning of his life was threatened many times. “The continued will to live, despite the vagaries of life, constitutes the ultimate good and the only way in which to appropriate meaning and consonance to life.”⁶⁹ Joseph’s life ends well despite the challenges at the early stages of his life. God’s promise to Abraham in Gen 15:13–16 is evident here, and Joseph helps to bring his father, brothers and all their families to Egypt.

Joseph lived to see the fulfillment of his dreams and believed the promise of God to establish the descendants of Abraham in their own land would become a reality. Joseph’s last words are to his brothers, the Israelites, while in Egypt.

So, Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying,
“When God has taken notice of you
you shall carry up my bones from here.” (Gen 50:25)

וַיִּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף אֶת־בָּנָיו שָׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר
פְּקֹד פְּקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם
וְהַעֲלִתֶם אֶת־עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה

⁶⁸ Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, & Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 415–17.

⁶⁹ Walter B. Crouch, *Death and Closure in Biblical Narrative* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 138–39.

The last words of Joseph are an assurance of the faithfulness of God to keep His promise. He is certain of God's deliverance, but also knows it is not yet time for Israel to leave Egypt. He imposes a duty on them under oath to convey his bones along with them to the Promised Land when God delivers them from Egypt (50:24–25). The last words of Joseph are very similar to the last words of their father, Jacob, to him. Just as Jacob makes Joseph swear under oath not to bury him in Egypt, Joseph makes his brothers swear under oath not to bury his bones permanently in Egypt. Unlike Joseph, who enjoyed political power in Egypt, they were not in the same kind of position to carry his body for burial in the Promised Land. Joseph does not require this from his brothers, and no special action is involved in the taking of the oath. Nevertheless, Joseph foresees a time when they would leave the land of Egypt perpetually.

Joseph refers to the promise of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in his last words (v. 24). The LORD had established a covenant with the patriarchs and promised to give them the land and take them back there (Gen 12:7; 24:7; 35:12; 48:4). Joseph reminds the people of Israel that Egypt is not their permanent home.⁷⁰ God fulfills the dreams Joseph had as a child and turns negative situations into good (Gen 37; 39–48; 50). Accordingly, he trusts the divine promise. The last words of Joseph are fulfilled with the conveyance of his bones from Egypt to Canaan. Moses carries the bones of Joseph out of Egypt at the exodus (Exod 13:19), and they are eventually buried in the Promised Land, in Shechem (Gen 33:18–19; Josh 24:32).⁷¹ After 430

⁷⁰ Joyce G. Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis 12--50* (Leicester, UK; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1986), 220.

⁷¹ This is on the inheritance of Joseph, the plot of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem (Josh 24:32).

years,⁷² Israel comes out of Egypt fulfilling the promise of God to Abraham (15:12–16; Exod 12:40–41). Further, this accomplishes the desires and last words of Joseph that God would care for Israel and take them out of Egypt to the Promised Land (Gen 50:24).

2. Foretelling Future Events:

- A. Jacob to Joseph (Gen 48:21–22)
- B. Ethical Will of Jacob to His Sons (Gen 49:1–32)
- C. Joseph to Brothers (Gen 50:24–26)
- D. Moses to Israelites and God (Deut 32:1–47)

Blessing rather than curse is that which anyone seeks to receive from a loved one when parting from each other, especially when it is death separating the two. Arnold notes, “the deathbed blessing, or testamental blessing, is of vital importance in Israelite culture. Such blessings pronounced when death was imminent, were more than simple wishes or prayers but were legally binding....”⁷³ To some extent, the future of the individual who receives those last words, is a reflection or memory of them, whether positive or negative. Most final words are more than parting blessings—they are prescient. Those dying progressively become sensitive to an eternal “continuum in which past, present, and future blend, and blur.” The soul (psyche) of the dying is less connected to the world of the living and more sensitive toward the eternal.⁷⁴

This unit focuses on four passages underlining the future that is foretold by Jacob to Joseph, and to all his children individually, Joseph to the children of Israel and Moses to the children of Israel. Jacob foretells Joseph about God’s deliverance to take the children of Israel to

⁷² In a promise to Abraham, God is emphatic about Abraham’s descendants living in a strange land for 400 years (Gen 15:12-16). However, Exod 12:40-41 has it that they stayed for 430 years.

⁷³ Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, NCBC (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 374–75.

⁷⁴ Theodor H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament: A Comparative Study with Chapters from Sir James G. Frazer’s Folklore in the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 214–15.

the land of their fathers and, individually, what will befall each of his children. Similarly, Joseph foretells the future of God's deliverance of the children of Israel while still in Egypt, and Moses foretells the future of Israel before they cross the Jordan to the land of Canaan without him (31:1–2). We begin with the last words of Jacob to Joseph alone.

A. Jacob to Joseph (Gen 48:21–22)

Jacob summons his family and blesses them, foretelling what lies in their future before he dies. Paramount in the foretelling of future events are Jacob's last words to Joseph independently and then later to him in the context of Jacob's ethical will, when he addresses each of his sons. The last words of Jacob to Joseph can be seen in three distinct forms. Apart from Jacob making Joseph swear an oath to him (Gen 47:27–31), Jacob foretells the future to Joseph (48:21–22); and while he makes known his ethical will to his sons, Joseph again is included (49:1–32). We will examine Jacob's last words to Joseph separately under the proper rubric. Jacob's last words to Joseph, foretell what he believes is imminent as well as remote future events (48:21–22). Jacob perceives he is at the point of his death and speaks only to Joseph as he deems fit. Jacob is at this point not asking God for anything but telling Joseph what God will be doing for him⁷⁵ and the gift he is giving him separately from his brothers.

Jacob's death and God's deliverance, on one hand, is the focus of Jacob. On the other hand, he makes known to Joseph what he plans to give him. Jacob's last words are passionate as

⁷⁵ Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 404.

he foresees the inevitable. Jacob makes use of a pun in the name of Shechem.⁷⁶ These are

Jacob's last words to Joseph:

Then Yisrael said to Yosef:

Here, I am dying,

But God will be with you,

He will have you return

to the land of your fathers.

And I, I give you

One portion over and above your brothers

Which I took away from the Amorite,

With my sword, with my bow.⁷⁷

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יְוֹסֵף

הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי מָת

וְהָיָה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם

וְהָשִׁיב אֶתְכֶם

אֶל־אֶרֶץ אַבְתֵּיכֶם

וְאָנֹכִי נֹתֵתִי לָךְ

אֶתְכֶם אֶתְדַע עַל־אֶרְצְךָ

אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְתִּי מִיַּד הָאֱמֹרִי

בְּחַרְבִּי וּבַקֶּשֶׁתִּי:

Joseph, a ruler in Egypt and next to Pharaoh, is the one taking care of Jacob and the rest of his family. Although Jacob speaks to Joseph alone, and the presence of all the children of Jacob is not evident, the plural is used in the Hebrew text **עִמָּכֶם וְהָשִׁיב אֶתְכֶם** “with you and bring you back”.

Hamilton observes that Jacob seems to speak to all his family, as he speaks to Joseph—and this might be the significance of the plural suffixes.⁷⁸ Jacob distinguishes the first part of his message, which affects all Israel, from the second part which has to do with the specific gift to Joseph. Jacob speaks only to Joseph regarding the promises of God and deliverance from the land of Egypt to the Promised Land, which he describes as ‘the land of your fathers’, but with the rest of the family in mind **וְהָיָה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם וְהָשִׁיב אֶתְכֶם אֶל־אֶרֶץ אַבְתֵּיכֶם**. When he speaks specifically to Joseph on what he is giving to him, the singular “I give to you” is used **נֹתֵתִי לָךְ**.

⁷⁶ Shechem will be examined later. The term for “portion” is “shoulder”, hill country, one notch up, and the name of the capital of the tribal territory of Ephraim—Shechem.

⁷⁷ Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 229–30.

⁷⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 642–43. Jacob sees the importance of having a personal time of closure with Joseph, who he loves so much but was literally cut off from him for many years. It is essential for him to have that last moment with him before their eternal separation.

During this significant meeting, Jacob breaks an important norm to set Joseph above his brothers. Jacob breaks the law of firstborn, where the firstborn gets two-thirds (according to the law) of the inheritance of his father (Gen 48:14, 18-19; 49:3; Deut 21:15–17) and unequivocally says he is giving Joseph one portion above his brothers (נְתַתִּי לְךָ שְׁכָם אֶחָד עַל־אֶחָיִךְ), which is a pun on the city of Shechem. Jacob indicates that it is that which he took from the Amorites by his sword and bow (Gen 48:22). The ordinary portion of the firstborn in Biblical law is two-third of the estate. פִּי שְׁנַיִם is used in few places in Scripture (Deut 17:6, 21:17; 2 Kgs 2:9; Zech 13:8). The use of פִּי שְׁנַיִם in Zech 13:8, supported by an Akkadian cognate, indicates that the meaning is “two-thirds” (of the estate) and not simply a “double portion,”⁷⁹ even though *BDB* has פִּי שְׁנַיִם translated as double portion.⁸⁰

The word שְׁכָם though translated as “portion” (NKJV, JPS, NAU, NLT, ERV, etc.) in Gen 48:22, is translated differently in different places in Scripture. It could be a noun as body part “shoulder” (Gen 9:23) or “back” (Ps 21:12/13), the name of a place (Gen 12:6; 33:18; 35:4; Josh 17:7; 20:7; 21:21; 24:32; Judg 9:2–57; 1Kgs 12:1–2,25; 1Chron 6:67; 2 Chron 10:1; Ps 60:6–8; 108:7–8) or the name of an individual (Gen 33:19; 34:1–26; Josh 17:2). שְׁכָם אֶחָד is also found in Zeph 3:9 as in our text in Gen 48:22 but translated as “one accord” (ESV, NKJV), “one consent” (JPS), “in unison” (NET), and “shoulder to shoulder”(NAS, NIV). In this context, שְׁכָם

⁷⁹ Hayim Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew: Etymological-Semantic and Idiomatic Equivalents with Supplement on Biblical Aramaic* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2009), 417.

⁸⁰ Francis Brown, S.R Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1979), 1040. § שְׁנַיִם 10170 [10171].

שֵׁכֶם is “one portion” as Fox translates it.⁸¹ Jacob informs Joseph, he is giving him one portion over and above his brothers.

Jacob knows exactly what he is saying—he is putting the beloved son of his old age above his brothers and giving him that which is due the first child. Waltke observes that Shechem here is a place; “the city is historically connected with Jacob and Joseph.”⁸² Jacob is specific in describing the portion which he is giving Joseph. Jacob is referring to his tribe’s conquest of the city of Shechem, a Canaanite (Amorite) town even though they were still in Egypt. Wenham suggests that the “one shoulder” here is more easily identified with 33:18–19.⁸³ Similarly, Gunkel links Shechem to a specific place as in Josh 24:1, Judg 9:1ff., I Kgs 12:1⁸⁴ as a portion of land.

It is suggested that just as Esau and Jacob are both the children of Isaac, but Jacob is the preferred one, so Joseph is unquestionably the preferred son by his father, Jacob, who eventually blesses Joseph’s son Ephraim with the firstborn blessing (48:1–22).⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Jacob is not Isaac’s preferred son as suggested but rather Esau. Jacob is rather preferred by their mother and the one chosen from the womb by God (25:19–23; Mal 1:2–3). The firstborn portion that should have gone to Reuben is given to Joseph (48:22) before Jacob brings all his sons

⁸¹ Fox, Everett. *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*. Schocken Bible 1. New York: Schocken Books, 1995, 230.

⁸² Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 601. Other meanings of Shechem as cited by Waltke are a ridge of land, one more portion, which depicts Shechem as a metonym for portion but suggests that the best meaning for Shechem is the place.

⁸³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis*, WBC 1-2 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 467.

⁸⁴ Hermann Gunkel and Walter Baumgartner, *Genesis*, 8. Aufl. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1969), 123–34.

⁸⁵ Desmond T. Alexander "Abraham Re-assessed Theologically: The Abraham Narrative and New Testament Understanding of Justification by Faith" in *He Swore and Oath*, eds. Hess, Satterthwaite, and Wenham, 20–21.

together to bless them (49:1–28). He did not fumble in his words in declaring to Joseph that he is to get an extra portion, in the absence of his brothers. Jacob is seeing beyond the life in Egypt where Joseph has more than enough and taking care of all of them. Jacob is seeing into the future, when each tribe is to be settled in the land given them by God in Canaan. Jacob loves Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph’s sons, as Reuben and Simeon and says they are his (48:5). He therefore makes provision for them.

That which Isaac foretells about Jacob and that which Jacob says about the future of Joseph are so significant that, “Genesis focuses on the blessings which others receive through Jacob and Joseph. They alone are presented as the ones who may impart blessings to others” as it is indicated in the narratives of Genesis that those who have power to bless are those who have received the firstborn blessing.⁸⁶ The children of Joseph eventually acquire property separately with portions for Ephraim and Manasseh. Manasseh is divided into two, and half of the tribe receives its portion of land before crossing the Jordan and the other half with Ephraim after the crossing of the Jordan (Num 32:33; Deut 29:7/8; Josh 1:12; 12:6; 22:7; 1 Chron 25:26).

Jacob’s last words to Joseph foretell the exodus of Israel and the future of Joseph (48:21–22). The fulfillment is seen when they settled in the Promised Land. The author of 1 Chronicles informs us that Joseph receives the birthright blessing of an extra portion in place of Reuben in accordance with the blessing of Jacob to Joseph (1 Chron 5:1). Arnold notes that the fact that the children of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, are given the status of the two sons of Jacob point to his doubt in such a close-knit kinship and tribal society. Thus, Jacob makes sure to set things right to elevate Ephraim and Manasseh to the status of children rather than

⁸⁶ Alexander, "Abraham Reassessed Theologically," 12–25.

grandchildren.⁸⁷ Similarly, the blessing of Jacob to Joseph is expressed in later times (Ezek 47:13). Joseph's bones are reburied in Shechem (Josh 24:32), in the land Jacob purchased from the Shechemites. Jacob and Joseph died in Egypt, and both are buried in Canaan.

The two oaths are promissory that are to be fulfilled in future. However, though the oath Jacob demands of Joseph Jacob to Joseph (Gen 47:27–31) is directly related to that which should be done at his death, which is inevitable, the oath Joseph imposes on his brothers (Gen 50:25) is to some extent a foretelling future events, which is similar to the last words of Jacob to Joseph (Gen 48:21–22), Ethical Will of Jacob to his Sons (Gen 49:1–32), Joseph to Israelites (Gen 50:24–26), and Moses to Israelites and God (Deut 32:1–47).

B. Ethical Will of Jacob to his Sons (Gen 49:1–32)

The last words of Jacob to his sons are to some extent linked to Gen 29:31–30:24, where the children are named by their mothers at birth (Leah and Rachel) and also to the blessing of Moses for each of the tribes of Israel (Deuteronomy 33). Jacob's last words end the deathbed oracles of Genesis, which are a sustained piece of Hebrew poetry. A general characteristic of the Pentateuch is long narrative unit that ends with an extended section of poetry.⁸⁸ Joseph's narrative presumes Jacob is near death (37:35; 42:39; 43:27–28; 44:22–29, 31; 45:9, 13, 28; 46:30).⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Arnold, *Genesis*, 234.

⁸⁸ Bill T. Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, Encountering Biblical Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 162.

⁸⁹ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle. Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 445. After a long separation when Jacob hears of Joseph being alive, his spirit is revived, and he says he will go and see him before he dies. When he meets Joseph in Egypt, his first words to Joseph are

In this literary work, we connect as well as distinguish among related but “different words, statements, actions, characters, relations and situations.”⁹⁰ This lengthy catalogue of the tribes of Israel, in which each receives a blessing or a curse, in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, is like Judges 5 in the Song of Deborah⁹¹ although distinct in presentation. Generally, the last words of Jacob are titled the Testament of Jacob since they contain both curses and blessings.⁹² Jacob’s last words (Gen 49:1–27) also parallel those of Noah, which begin with a curse on Ham because of his past conduct (Gen 9:25–27) and end with blessings on the other sons.⁹³ Jacob’s last words shift from negative (49:3–7) to positive (vv. 8–27), from individual sons (vv. 1–2) to tribes (v. 28), and the focus is from immediate to the future.⁹⁴

Nonetheless, others including the narrator refer to Jacob’s last words as blessing (49:18). Though these last words are called Jacob’s blessings, as also the narrator indicates three times in a verse in v. 28, von Rad rightly expresses the fact that “the aphorisms have no generally common feature at all. Some are prophecies of the future, some contain censure or curse regarding what has happened, some describe current affairs.”⁹⁵ On the other hand, Towner notes that the last words of Jacob are “neither blessings nor bequest but evocations of the sons’

“now let me die, since I have seen your face, because you are still alive.” To Jacob, seeing Joseph alive is enough for him to die since he has not been thinking of meeting Joseph again and now having more than his heart desires.

⁹⁰ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 188.

⁹¹ Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative*, 31.

⁹² Wenham, *Genesis*, 468–69.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 468–69.

⁹⁴ Brodie, *Genesis*, 406–7.

⁹⁵ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks. Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1972), 421.

destinies.”⁹⁶ The relative clause, *אֵת אֲשֶׁר-יִקְרָא אֲתֶכֶם* literally, “what will happen to you” introduces the main message of Jacob to his children. The interchange of the root of *יִקְרָא* Q-R-’ and Q-R-Y here is one of several instances in which the verb QR’ is used instead of QRY, “to occur”, which lies at the root of the term *miqreh* (fate), denoting the destiny and fate in this context.

Towner begins his commentary on the last words of Jacob, indicating how difficult they are to understand.⁹⁷ This is the last moment of Jacob with his sons. Jacob summons them together to tell them about their future. Jacob prepares to join his ancestors as he declares to his sons what he foresees, what they should expect to happen and to possess in the future. Jacob wraps up his life by addressing each of his sons individually but starts with a general preamble to all the twelve in verses 1–2.

וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶל-בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הֲאִסְפוּ וְאֶגִּידָה לָּכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר-יִקְרָא אֲתֶכֶם בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים:

And Jacob called his sons and said, “Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come....”

The poetry of Genesis 49 is a glimpse of Israel as a nation in the future, but in germinal, embryonic form. Jacob prophetically describes the future tribes of Israel and gives “Judah and Joseph tribes pride of place (in the south and north, respectively), which is in fact, what happened in later Israel.”⁹⁸ Jacob’s last words delineate the later situation of the tribes in the Land of Israel, after the Israelites are settled in Canaan. Throughout Jacob’s declaration of his last words to his sons, there is no dialogue, only unbroken monologue without any of the

⁹⁶ W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 278–79. Jacob foretells the destinies of the sons, but it is obvious that some are blessings but that of Reuben for example, is more of a curse.

⁹⁷ Towner, *Genesis*, 280. He notes the combination of different forms of literature in the last words of Jacob including poetry, prose, prophetic oracles, and some genealogy.

⁹⁸ Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, 162.

children soliciting a blessing in contrast to the role Jacob plays to obtain the blessing of his father (Genesis 27).⁹⁹

The focus of the last words of Jacob here is בְּאַחֲרַיִת הַיָּמִים, “in the future days, or days to come”. The phrase is usually used by the prophets when predicting what is ahead of Israel (Num 24:14; Deut 4:30; 31:29; Isa 2:2; Jer 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek 38:8, 16; Dan 2:28; 8:19; 10:14; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1). The idea of the dying being granted prophetic powers is common in Egypt, the ancient Mediterranean, in Greece, and especially in Israel as evident in the last words of Jacob (Genesis 49), Joseph (50:24) and also in early Jewish and Christian testamentary literature.¹⁰⁰ Though Jacob is not generally regarded as a prophet, here, his eyes are opened into the future and he tells his children what they should expect to happen to them when he is gone—the dying sometimes take on clairvoyant aspects. The final address of Jacob to his sons is more than a parting blessing. It is similar to the prediction of Moses of the future of the tribes of Israel and affirms the common belief that those who are dying are prescient.¹⁰¹ “Gradually relinquishing the limitations of mortality, they become increasingly detached from the punctual and momentary and increasingly sensitive to that eternal continuum in which past, present and future blend and blur. Consequently, that which is yet to come is as immediate to them as that which now is, and they are able to describe it.”¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 646.

¹⁰⁰ Weitzman, *Song and Story*, 41.

¹⁰¹ Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*, 214.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים is ordinarily used in prophetic and eschatological contexts. The term Jacob uses, אַחֲרַיִת, is a West Semitic word that has cognate in both Aramaic and Ugaritic.¹⁰³ In response to King Nebuchadnezzar in Aramaic, for instance, Daniel uses similar word מָה דִּי לְהָרָא בְּאַחֲרֵי יוֹמֵיָא, about what will be in later days (Dan 2:28). It is used mostly for the future with different nuances. בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים is used as prove of a future event (Isa 41:22), the end, which indicates future life (Prov 23:18; Isa 46:10) and in a specialized usage as final end of days, when God will fulfill¹⁰⁴ the prophecies of restoration of Israel (Ezek 38:16; Dan 2:28; 10:14).¹⁰⁵ However, Gunkel observes that the terminology is eschatological. “בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים ist ein Terminus der prophetischen Eschatologie”¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, the context here is foretelling of future events and not necessarily eschatological. Wenham notes that בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים is a phrase that appears only in prophetic contexts, although with eschatological sense in such passages such as Isa 2:2.¹⁰⁷ Von Rad does well to question whether the use of בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים in Jacob’s last words should be understood in the sense of an eschatological end to history.¹⁰⁸ In this context, Jacob is obviously alluding to the days after he is dead. “The expression is a rather ordinary temporal designation”¹⁰⁹ belonging to a different genre. Though Jacob foresees what is ahead and declares it, he is not dealing with

¹⁰³ Andrew E. Hill, “אַחֲרַיִת” in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1997), 1:361–62.

¹⁰⁴ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Hill, “אַחֲרַיִת,” 1:362.

¹⁰⁶ Gunkel and Baumgartner, *Genesis*, 478–79.

¹⁰⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, WBC 2 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1994), 471.

¹⁰⁸ Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 442.

¹⁰⁹ Ernst Jenni, “אַחֲרַיִת ‘hr after’” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* ed. idem and Claus Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 83–88.

eschatological things but foretelling the future of Israel. He also blesses and curses as he recapitulates some past events, which stand in contrast to בְּאַחֲרַיִת הַיָּמִים, in the future days, which is the main purpose for which Jacob calls his sons together. Unlike Moses, there is no indication that the word of the LORD came to Jacob to speak to his sons. The emphasis of Jacob is to the time when the tribes are settled in the Promised Land. The use of בְּאַחֲרַיִת הַיָּמִים in Gen 49:1 is similar to its use in Deut 31:24–29 where the command is to assemble Israel and for them to pay attention to what Moses is going to say and that is in regard to the coming days.¹¹⁰

Jacob begins his last words to all the sons from the firstborn until the last born, though he switches the position of some of them (Gen 49:3–28). The order of the last words of Jacob concerning the first four and last two is according to the order of their birth. However, Zebulun who is the tenth born is fifth in order of receiving blessings, before Issachar his elder brother of the same mother with no explanation. Dan, who is the fifth born, is the seventh to receive the last words of their father, and then Gad and Asher who are of the same mother. Naphtali is the tenth to receive last words of his father though he is the sixth born—and then Joseph and Benjamin. Jacob follows a strict order of birth in his last words to the sons of Leah and the sons of Rachel but is not so strict regarding the other sons. It is suggested that the order of Jacob’s last words to the children “reflects their place of settlement from south to north.”¹¹¹ The Chronicler also lists the names of the sons of Jacob without adhering to the birth order (1Chron 2:1–2). It is generally acknowledged that Jacob’s last words to each one of his twelve sons, describe a future situation when Israel is settled in Canaan (49:28).

¹¹⁰ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 646.

¹¹¹ Wenham, *Genesis*, 468–69.

Jacob to Reuben (Gen 49:3–4)

Jacob knows and understands the importance of the blessings of a firstborn and the consequences of receiving or being denied blessings. With the help of his mother, he takes the blessing due to his brother, Esau, by deceiving his blind father (Gen 27:1–40). Though it is destined for Jacob to take the blessing (25:19:26), the importance of a father’s last words to his children before he dies cannot be overemphasized. Jacob recalls being blessed when he returns to the land of his birth after more than twenty years (31:41).

Jacob commences his last words in Genesis 49 by addressing Reuben, in verses 3–4.

He acknowledges who Reuben is to him, that is, his firstborn.

Reuben, you are my firstborn,
My might and the best of my strength,
excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.
Unstable as water, you shall not excel,
Because you went up to your father's bed;
Thereupon you defiled my couch on which you went up

ראובן בְּכָרִי אֶתָּה
כֹּחִי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי
יִתֵּר שְׂאֵת וַיִּתֵּר עָז:
פָּחַז כְּמַיִם אֶל־תּוֹמֵר
כִּי עָלִיתָ מִשְׁכְּבִי אֲבִיךָ
אָז חִלַּלְתָּ יְצוּעֵי עַלְתָּה

Jacob uses direct speech to address Reuben, which is not the way he addresses any of his other sons. He confronts Reuben directly concerning his past and what will befall him in the future.

The right of firstborn is to be sustained even if he is the son of an unloved wife (Deut 21:17).

Jacob says of Reuben, יִתֵּר שְׂאֵת וַיִּתֵּר עָז literally, exceeding in honor and exceeding in power. The word “*yeter*” is an adjective, cognate to (*w*)*atru* in Akkadian as in the name of the flood hero, Atrahasis “Exceeding Wise.”¹¹² This phrase is mostly translated as the preeminence or excellence of dignity and preeminence or excellence of power (JPS, NRSV, NKJV, NAS, ESV). In this case, the phrase יִתֵּר שְׂאֵת וַיִּתֵּר עָז can be translated as “best of strength, and the best of power.” Although Reuben is surpassing in strength, and born to high position, he will not remain

¹¹² Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew*, 152.

so because of his misconduct with his father's wife. However, Jacob violates the norm expressed in the law of Deut 21:17 in his last words to Reuben.

The last words of Jacob to Reuben are not blessings as the narrator depicts them at the end of Jacob's speech (Gen 49:28). Jacob initiates his last words to Reuben with an accolade of strength and then immediately degrades him.¹¹³ Although Jacob did not specifically mention the name of Bilhah, he says "...because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it..." Jacob recounts the incident of Gen 35:21–22 when Reuben "lay with Bilhah his father's concubine...." According to Lev 20:11, Reuben and Bilhah should have been put to death. Nevertheless, although Jacob says nothing at the time, he did not forgive Reuben. Therefore, instead of blessings in his last words to his firstborn, Jacob reviews his past actions and assigns him a position of inferiority. One of the stipulations of the curses in Deut 27:16, 20, demands that someone who treats parents with contempt be cursed and so is someone who lies with the father's wife (Exod 20:12; Lev 18:8, 19:3, 20:9,11; Deut 5:16; 21:18–21, 22:30). Reuben falls under both stipulations.¹¹⁴

Reuben is cited among the tribes that are to stand on Mount Ebal. Mounts Gerizim and Ebal are designated by God for recitation of blessing or curse in obedience or disobedience to His laws, respectively (Deut 11:26–30). Associating Reuben with proclaiming the curses on Mount Ebal could be attributed to the above-mentioned incident. Those who are to pronounce blessings on Mount Gerizim are Simeon, Levi, Judah, and Issachar who are the second, third, fourth and fifth sons of Leah, respectively. In addition are Joseph and Benjamin who are the sons

¹¹³ S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 12th ed., Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen, 1926), 381–82.

¹¹⁴ Steiner, "Poetic Forms," 213–18. It is important to acknowledge the poetic language in Genesis 49, which will not always be the same as in narrative. The phrase עָלַי עָלָה refers to Reuben in the third person and is therefore emended by many. However, there is no consensus on how to read this text.

of Rachel, Jacob's preferred wife. All are the sons of the wives of Jacob and not those of his concubines. Those who are to pronounce the curses on Mount Ebal are Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. All are children of Bilhah and Zilpah except for Reuben the firstborn and Zebulun, the last born of Leah (Deut 27:12–13).¹¹⁵ 1 Chronicles recounts the status change of the sons of Reuben because of his past conduct and the penalty for it (Gen 48:1–6; 1 Chron 5:1).

There is a Biblical trend in which the firstborn position goes to the younger (Gen 4:1–5; 16:1–15; 21:8–14; 25:19–34). Abel, the second born is killed and then Seth is the choice instead of Cain; Isaac is the chosen son instead of Ishmael, Jacob instead of Esau, and the choice or decision is made by God, sometimes even before birth (Gen 25:19–34; Mal 1:2–3). The older sibling is always shunt aside in favor of a younger one. Ishmael, Esau and Reuben are associated with concubines, and this threatens the call and blessing of Abraham. According to Syrén, the blessing of Reuben is meant to disassociate him from the blessed.¹¹⁶ When Jacob adopts the sons of Joseph to the rank of his own sons, he also reverses the order and puts Ephraim ahead of Manasseh¹¹⁷ (Gen 41:50–51; 48:20).

The last words of Jacob for Reuben are fulfilled, and not much is known about the tribe of Reuben. Reuben is not only denied the birthright of firstborn, which is the larger portion of the inheritance, but did not also receive the right to establish the Kingdom of Israel. This right is given to Judah, who becomes associated with leadership and particularly the Davidic

¹¹⁵ Reuben is associated with the sons of the concubines because of the stain of having slept with his father's concubine. It is worth mentioning that Simeon and Levi, who were also cursed by Jacob, are associated with the pronouncers of the blessings.

¹¹⁶ Roger Syrén, *The Forsaken First-Born: A Study of a Recurrent Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives*, JSOTSup 133 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 141.

¹¹⁷ Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 405.

Dynasty.¹¹⁸ Reuben did not excel; Jacob’s relegation of Reuben to an inferior position in his last words affected him. Reuben and Gad settled in the Transjordan, while Reuben’s northern boundary is distinctly south of the Jezreel Valley.¹¹⁹

Jacob to Simeon and Levi (Gen 49:5–7)

Jacob moves on from his last words to Reuben to Simeon and Levi together, who are his second-born and third-born respectively. The last words of Jacob to Simeon and Levi are, as in the case of Reuben, not what one expects as a blessing from a dying father to his children. It can generally be assumed that Jacob harks back to his anger for what Simeon and Levi did at Shechem many years before that time (Gen 34:1–31) and invokes it at this important moment.

These are the last words of Jacob to Simeon and Levi:

Simeon and Levi are brothers;
 Their knives are tools of violence.¹²⁰
 Let not my soul enter their council;
 Let me [my liver]¹²¹ not be united to their assembly;
 For in their anger, they slew a man,
 And in their self-will, they hamstrung an ox
 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce;
 and their wrath, for it is cruel!
 I will divide them in Jacob
 and scatter them in Israel.

שִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֶחָיִם
 כָּלִי חֶמְסִים מְכַרְתֵּיהֶם:
 בְּסוֹדָם אֶל־תִּבְאֵנִי נַפְשִׁי
 בְּקִהְלָם אֶל־תִּתְּדוּ כְּבִדִּי
 כִּי בְאַפָּם הָרְגוּ אִישׁ
 וּבְרָצוֹנָם עָקְרוּ־שׁוֹר:
 אָרוּר אַפָּם כִּי עָזוּ:
 וְעִבְרָתָם כִּי קָשָׁתָהּ
 אַחְלָקֶם בְּיַעֲקֹב
 וְאַפִּיצֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

Jacob disparages Simeon and Levi for implementing weapons in a cruel act. The meaning of מְכַרְתֵּיהֶם is not very clear and for that matter the overall sense of the statement. Some

¹¹⁸ Isaac Kalimi, *The Retelling of Chronicles in Jewish Tradition and Literature: A Historical Journey* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 246.

¹¹⁹ Reuben is associated with the sons of the concubines because of the stain of having slept with his father’s concubine. It is worth mentioning that Simeon and Levi, who were also cursed by Jacob, are associated with the pronouncers of the blessings.

¹²⁰ M[ichael Patrick] O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 170–71.

¹²¹ HALOT, כְּבִדִּי 255–58.

suggest that Jacob curses the sword of the sons with a word, which occurs only here and resembles the Greek *μάχαιρα*, which might have found its way into the Hebrew, in the 11th century B.C.E.; but this is highly improbable. Others relate it to digging.¹²² This can be explained as cruel machinations. Jacob goes on to declare his desire that he will have nothing to do with Simeon and Levi's assembly. Weinfeld suggests Simeon and Levi are portrayed as being addicted to violence. The word *כְּבִדִי* in the sense of "myself" and as a feminine noun must be read *כְּבִדִי*, literally, "my liver." Compare Akkadian *kabattu*, which is used in a similar way.¹²³ 'Let not my soul enter their council' is parallel to 'let me [my liver] not be united to their assembly' which is synonymous parallelism. A double polysemy is suggested here—where two parallel terms have two meanings each.¹²⁴

It is generally presumed that the event Jacob is describing here is that of Shechem (Gen 34:1–31), where Simeon and Levi took revenge on Shechem, the son of Hamor, and killed him and all the males of the city of Shechem, for his raping Dinah, their sister (vv. 25–31). However, Jacob says nothing about that incident in this text. He does not mention Shechem or his father or anything else linked to it. Jacob says in his last words that they killed a man (49:6) *וַיְהִיגֵי כָּל־זָכָר*,¹²⁵ but in the narrative, all the males of Shechem are reportedly killed (34:25). One can argue that this is another incident altogether, because in the narrative the fear that Jacob expresses concerns his security and not the morality of Simeon and Levi (v. 30).

¹²² Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 383.

¹²³ Moshe Weinfeld, *ספר בראשית: עם פרוש חדש* (Tel Aviv: Gordon Publishers, 1975), 302.

¹²⁴ Scott B. Noegel, *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2000), 148. Jacob's last words could thus mean, "do not enter", or with different vocalization, "do not desire".

¹²⁵ Perhaps *אִישׁ* is a collective, referring to all the menfolk of the town.

However, in the context of the Book of Genesis, despite some differences of detail, the berating of Simeon and Levi suits their strategy in slaying the men of Shechem.

Ironically, Jacob speaks about the anger of Simeon and Levi when (if he is referring to the incident of Shechem), he would still be holding their action against them in anger for many years. In Genesis 34 Jacob was too timid to react, although his sons violated his trust and jeopardized his peaceful relations with the local Canaanites. In fact, Jacob uses the word ‘curse’ (אָרֵר) though it was directed at their anger. It is important to note that Jacob did not remember just what Reuben did against him personally, but also what Simeon and Levi, his sons, did against people who are not part of Israel—assuming he is referring to the incident of rape and subsequent revenge.

Jacob’s pronouncement had an effect on the tribe of Simeon, who was left without a permanent territorial possession in Israel. Simeon is absorbed into Judah and is also overlooked in the blessings of Moses (Josh 15:26–32,42; 19:1–9; Judg 1:3,17). The tribe of Levi had no territory of its own. It functioned in shrines all over the land. They are expected to be in charge of the ark, but this is limited to particular families. A majority of the Levites are not cared for as expected (Judg 17:9–13; 18:1–31; Deut 12:12,18–19; 14:27–29; 18:1–8; 26:11–13).¹²⁶ The Levite and the resident alien among the Israelites are part of their household and are expected to be cared for.¹²⁷ The negative assessment of Jacob does not have an impact, on Levi.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Levi still did not have allotment as other tribes (Josh 14:3). He depends on the generosity of

¹²⁶ Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 383–85. The Levites are not supposed to have any inheritance of their own because God designated them to be in charge of priestly service, and that which is to be for God is to be given to them.

¹²⁷ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, WBC 6A (Waco, TX: Word, 1991), 638.

¹²⁸ Towner, *Genesis*, 280–81.

people from the other tribes, where they serve in sanctuaries, which may or may not be well supported.

Rebellion characterizes both Simeon and Levi in later years. A leader from the tribe of Simeon is depicted as parading his Midianite partner in front of Moses to challenge the leadership of Moses (Num.25:6, 14). Having relations with foreign women is forbidden. In a similar vein, Korah, a descendant of Levi, rebels against Moses with a cohort and is swallowed up with some others from the tribe of Reuben (Num16:1–3).¹²⁹ Thus, it could be concluded that the last words of Jacob to Simon and Levi had an effect on them.

Jacob to Judah (Gen 49:8–12)

It can be surmised that just as Jacob reflects on the past actions of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, he thinks of what Judah has done and blesses him. Judah stopped his brothers from killing Joseph. (37:26–17). In another incident, Judah had assured his father to go surety for Benjamin when Joseph demands they bring him with them to Egypt (43:1–14). Judah is the one Jacob sent to Joseph upon their arrival in Egypt, before Joseph went to meet Jacob (46:28). One can imagine that Joseph informed Jacob of the role Judah played to ensure Benjamin’s return with them to Jacob.

Judah wins the trust of Jacob, and he blesses him in his last words without any disparagement:

Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
your father's sons shall bow down before you.
Judah is a lion's cub;

יְהוּדָה אַתָּה יוֹדוּךָ אֶתְּיָךְ
יָדְךָ בְּעֶרֶף אֹיְבֶיךָ
יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְךָ בְּנֵי אָבִיךָ:
גֹּיִר אַרְיֵה יְהוּדָה

¹²⁹ Zvi Grumet, *Genesis: From Creation to Covenant*, Maggid Studies in Tanakh (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2017), 451–52.

from the prey, my son, you have gone up.
 He stooped down; he crouched as a lion
 and as a lion; who dares rouse him?
 The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
 nor the ruler's staff from between his legs,
 until tribute comes to him;
 and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.
 Binding his foal to the vine
 and his donkey's colt to the choice vine,
 he has washed his garments in wine
 and his vesture in the blood of grapes.
 His eyes are darker¹³⁰ than wine,
 and his teeth whiter¹³¹ than milk.

מִטְרַף בְּנֵי עֲלִיָּתָהּ
 פָּרַע רֶבֶץ פְּאַרְיָהּ
 וְקָלְבִיא מִי יִקְיָמוּנוּ :
 לֹא־יִסּוּר שֶׁבֶט מִיְהוּדָה
 וּמִחֶקֶק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו
 עַד כִּי־יָבֹא (שִׁילֹו) [שִׁילֹו]
 וְלֹו יִקְהַת עַמִּים :
 אֶסְרֵי לַגְּפֹן (עִירָה) [עִירָו]
 וְלִשְׂרָקָה בְּנֵי אֲתָנוּ
 כִּבְסֵי בִיזָן לִבְשׁוֹ
 וּבָדָם־עֲנָבִים (סוּתָה) [סוּתָו] :
 חֲקִילֵי עֵינָיִם מְגִינ
 וּלְבָר־שֵׁנִים מְחֻלָּב :

Judah, the fourth son of Jacob and Leah, is the first to receive what can be considered a real blessing from Jacob.

Jacob begins pronouncing his blessing of Judah with how his brothers will applaud and pay obeisance to him and how Judah will have an upper hand over his enemies. Jacob's last words to Judah reflect the name his mother gave him at birth. Leah explains, "Now I will praise/thank the LORD." So, Leah praises God in thanksgiving. Therefore, she called his name Judah" (29:35). Just as Leah had praised/thanked the LORD, Jacob foretells that Judah's brothers will praise him in his opening statement "Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise."

Further, Jacob blesses Judah with almost the same words as those that he himself had usurped from Isaac, his father (49.8; cf. 27:29).¹³² Jacob is to be master over his brothers, and his mother's sons are to bow down before him. In Gen 27:29 people are to serve Jacob; nations bow

¹³⁰ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 656. Cognate to Hebrew *haklîlî* is *ekêlu* 'to be dark' in Akkadian.

¹³¹ *BDB*, 525–26.

¹³² Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis, Readings, a New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 202.

to him, and his mother's sons are also to bow.¹³³ There is no text that indicates that Esau bows to Jacob. On the contrary, Jacob bows seven times to Esau, and all his wives and children bow to Esau (Gen 33:1–7). In this text (49:8), it is all the father's sons that are to bow not just his mother's sons.

The blessings start with reference to hands on the neck of his enemies and his brothers bowing (v. 8). Hands on the neck of someone's enemies is the image of a predator like a lion¹³⁴ grabbing its prey as the blessing of Jacob portrays in the proceeding blessing. The accolades for Judah represent the formidable strength Jacob foresees Judah to have without anyone being able to stand against him. Jacob continues his blessing as he foresees and places the ruler within the tribe of Judah and as one who will wield authority not only over his brothers but also over people from other nations, who will also come to pay him homage (v 10). Jacob then continues his blessing, with reference to hands and feet of Judah, and ends his blessings with eyes and teeth (v. 12).

Jacob associates several of his sons with animals, predicting metaphorically what he foresees the character of each to be. He compares Issachar to donkey (a beast of burden), Dan to a snake (dangerous but cunning), Naphtali to a deer and Benjamin to a wolf. Jacob calls Judah a lion's whelp (גִּיּוֹר אַרְיֵה) and a lion. He sees Judah as a young lion who has finished eating its pray (NLT). The image of a lion is portrayed in Scripture many times with strength (Judg 14: 10–18) and ancient Near East tradition. Judah is seen as one behaving like a lion, and it is better if he is

¹³³ Esau is the only brother of Jacob mentioned in Scripture.

¹³⁴ Brent A. Strawn, *What Is Stronger Than a Lion?: Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 212 (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005), 52. The lion image is portrayed here as a wicked enemy (Prov 28:15) or wicked ruler, who instead of shepherding his flock devours them (Zech 11:16).

not disturbed.¹³⁵ The blessing of Judah is a kaleidoscope of images—lions, donkeys, scepters, vines, wine, milk, that are not clearly related to each other.¹³⁶ Each of these metaphors represents what Jacob foresees for Judah, what he will be dealing with, or that which will become part of Judah's life.¹³⁷ Considering the lion images, Strawn associates the leonine metaphors with those of Num 23:24; 24:9.¹³⁸ Similarly, Wenham maintains that the likening of Judah to a fierce lion has similar imagery to that which applies to Israel (Num 23:24; 24:9) with the mention of lions over hundred times in the Hebrew Bible.¹³⁹ Judah is matured through experience and "This hard-won maturity lends authority to Judah's speeches to his father in ch. 43 and to Joseph in ch. 44. His offers to stand in for Benjamin are entirely credible."¹⁴⁰

Jacob's blessing for Judah draws attention to the blessings given in Genesis to the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which is important in the life of Israel. Despite the love of Jacob for Joseph and his giving him the blessing of the first born, Judah receives the blessing of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the royal blessings are given to him. Jacob's blessing for Judah points to the royalty that is to come from the tribe of Judah (49:8–12).¹⁴¹ David, descendants of Judah, became king of Israel centuries later (973 B.C.E.)—about seven hundred

¹³⁵ Ibid., 78.

¹³⁶ Wenham, *Genesis*, 475.

¹³⁷ Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 231: "The scepter shall not depart from Yehuda, nor the staff-of-command from between his legs, until they bring tribute—the obedience of people is his" (v. 10).

¹³⁸ Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion?*, 78.

¹³⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 476.

¹⁴⁰ Jan P. Fokkelman, "Genesis 37 and 38 at the Interface of Structural Analysis and Hermeneutics," in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Lenart Jacobus de Regt, Jan de Waard, and J. P. Fokkelman (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), 181.

¹⁴¹ Alexander, "Abraham Reassessed Theologically," 25.

years after Jacob’s death, in line with Jacob’s last words to Judah. According to Arnold, Jacob predicts the rise of Davidic dynasty and the establishment of the Israelite empire in his last words to Judah in one of the most hotly debated verses of the Bible. Jacob is very specific about the restoration of blessing of God in his deathbed pronouncements to Judah.¹⁴²

The second half of v. 10 [שילון] (שילה) עַד כִּי־יָבֹא (שילון) [שילון] has aroused a lot of debate. O’Connor translates [שילון] (שילה) עַד כִּי־יָבֹא as “as long as the tribute and obedience of peoples come to him.”¹⁴³

Further, Jacob foresees Judah to be involved in a form of viticulture, making use of donkey and the colt that are tied up in the vine (v. 11). Parallelism is evident in this statement about the donkey and vine as well as washing his clothing in wine and blood of grapes.

Binding his foal to the vine	אֶסְרֵי לְגֻפֹן (עיריה) [עירון]
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine	וְלִשְׂרָקָה בְּנֵי אֶתְנֹן
He has washed his garments in wine	כִּבְסֵם בַּיַּיִן לְבִשׁוֹ
And his vesture in the blood of grapes	וּבְדָם־עֲנָבִים (סותה) [סותון]:

Jacob’s reference to ‘blood of grapes’ is a metaphor for grape juice used for wine that has similar expressions in Ugaritic poetry as ‘blood of trees.’ The idea is that wine will be so plentiful that people will be able to bathe in it (as though it were water) referring to wine.¹⁴⁴ Moses also speaks of drinking wine, “the blood of grapes”, in his song (Deut 32:14). The last part of Jacob’s last

¹⁴² Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, 162.

¹⁴³ O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 172–73, 346–47. The parallelism here can be seen with the two sides of the sentence being verbless clause of three words. There are diverse readings of this text. See Steiner, “Poetic Forms,” 219–26, Weinfeld, *ספר בראשית*, 304–5, von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 419–27, Chien-Kuo Paul Lai *Jacob’s Blessing on Judah (Genesis 49:8-12)*, 1993, 78–79, 140–42, Benno Jacob, Ernest I. Jacob, and Walter Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis* (New York: Ktav, 1974), 331, and S. C. Daley, *The Textual Basis of English Translations of the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 65–70, for more on this blessing.

¹⁴⁴ Weinfeld, *ספר בראשית*, 306

words are *מְהֵלֵב מֵחֵלֶב מִיָּיִן וְלָבָן מִיָּיִן מִיָּיִן עֵינָיו* “His eyes are darker¹⁴⁵ than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk”. The parallelism here can be seen with the two sides of the sentence being verbless clauses of three words.¹⁴⁶ The eyes are supposed to be dark from drinking much wine and bright from drinking much milk.

Judah represents the central tribe of the south and the southern kingdom while the Joseph’s tribes are the central ones of the north, and the northern kingdom. Judah is special to God as His inheritance. “And the LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land and will again choose Jerusalem” (Deut 32:9; Zech 2:12; Heb 2:16).

In a different aspect, Psalm 78:9–11, 67–72 expresses the choice of Judah over Ephraim and the rejection of the tent¹⁴⁷ of Joseph as well as God’s love for Mount Zion and His sanctuary like the heights¹⁴⁸ and choosing David as His servant. Ephraim is rejected and Judah is the one chosen (v. 70) just as he is chosen to lead the children of Israel after the death of Joshua to fight against the Canaanites (Judg 1:2). Judah is again chosen to lead in a civil war against Benjamin, when the tribes inquired from the LORD, who should lead (20:18). He is chosen over Joseph though in the last words of Jacob, Joseph equally receives great blessings (Gen 49:22–26). The last words of Jacob to Judah are favorable and fulfilled positively affecting all sons of Jacob. Jacob has twelve children from four women, and he blesses Judah with a prediction that

¹⁴⁵ O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 173. Although this is translated by many as darker, O’Connor has it as “his eyes are brighter than wine”. Considering that the comparison is between wine and milk, it is better to stick to a rendering of *מִיָּיִן עֵינָיו מִיָּיִן* as darker than wine. See *BDB* §3031, 314. Prov 23:29.

¹⁴⁶ O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 172, 346.

¹⁴⁷ This is the sanctuary in Shiloh, which was in the territory of Ephraim.

¹⁴⁸ *רָמִים* (heights) could be an epithet for the heavens. God allowed Shiloh to be destroyed during the period of the Judges and transferred His cult to the Davidic-Solomonic sanctuary (Jer 7:11-12).

all his children, from all the women, are expected to submit to Judah as the leader of all the eleven sons.

Jacob to Zebulun (Gen 49:13)

Jacob’s last words to Zebulun are neutral, saying little about Zebulun himself. Jacob does not say anything really positive or negative, good or bad, blessing or curse. Jacob does not formulate his last words to Zebulun by recounting any event in Zebulun’s life. Though Issachar was born before Zebulun, and Zebulun is in fact Jacob’s tenth son¹⁴⁹ (29:31–31:20), in Jacob’s last words, he addresses Zebulun before Issachar. This is the same in Moses’ blessing to Israel—Zebulun comes just before Issachar in the blessing without any explanation (Deut 33:18–19). The major thing Jacob emphasizes is the dwelling place of Zebulun. These are Jacob’s last words to Zebulun:

Zebulun will settle by the seashore
and will be a harbor for ships;
his borders will extend to Sidon

זְבוּלֹן לְחֹרֶף יָמִים יִשְׁכֵּן
וְהוּא לְחֹרֶף אֲנָיֹת
וַיִּרְכָּתוּ עַל-צִידֹן:

Jacob’s last words to Zebulun are problematic because in later border descriptions (Josh 19:10–16) Zebulun is not on the coast. The blessing of Zebulun describes his abutting, the seashore, which implies a seafaring capability with maritime economic power. However, Isaiah later described Zebulun as by the coast (Isa 9:1; Matt 4:13–15).

Jacob mentions the environs of Zebulun three times. He says, “Zebulun shall dwell by the shore of the sea,” and then as if to give a description of what he said earlier, he goes on to say, “he shall become a shore for ships” and then defines the extent of the northern border as

¹⁴⁹ Zebulun is the sixth son of Leah; directly after Issachar, Leah’s fifth son. However, Zebulun is Jacob’s tenth born—only older than Joseph and Benjamin, Rachel’s sons. After Leah’s first four children, she paused having children. Jacob’s concubines had four children, and after that Leah had her last two children, Issachar and Zebulun.

adjoining Sidon. Looking at these words carefully, it shows Zebulun is to live near the sea, to be trading with a harbor of ships, and the boundaries of his place will connect to Sidon. The blessing implies a seafaring capability. שָׁכַן is used of dwelling (Gen 9:27; 16:12; 25:18) or the settling of the deity on the mountaintops (Exod 24:16; Isa 8:18). Thus, it could also mean a temporary dwelling rather than a long-term settlement, when each takes its territory in Canaan.¹⁵⁰ Further, Zebulun is credited as joining Issachar and Naphtali in helping to bring provisions to David in Hebron (1 Chron 12:40 Heb [41]).

Zebulun may not be located on the coast, but the place of dwelling Jacob foretells for him becomes the blessing. Zebulun is the third to receive his lot in the land of Canaan (Josh 19:10–16) with his territory around the Sea of Galilee (Isa 9:1) though not very close to the sea. Weinfeld links Zebulun to the Mediterranean Sea, where it was motivated to move in a different period.¹⁵¹ Wenham agrees that Zebulun settles by the Mediterranean Sea and claims that his territory is roughly east of Haifa and Akko.¹⁵² Although the allotted land to Zebulun (Josh 19:10–16) is not close to the coast, people of Zebulun began engaging in maritime trade. Thus, that which Jacob foresees is established many years later so that the dwelling of Zebulun is by a harbor.

¹⁵⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 479–80. For more on Jacob’s last words to Zebulun see Gunkel and Baumgartner, *Genesis*, 483, and Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 664. One may see a link to Judg 5:17 as Gunkel notes, but before the phrase Gunkel refers to in Judges, there is also a phrase about Dan remaining on ship in the same verse. Zebulun is described as those who bear the recruiter’s staff (v.14) and jeopardize their lives to the point of death (v18). The last words of Jacob to Zebulun do not say much, and it is better to limit the exegetical work to the text itself especially when we are dealing with a poem.

¹⁵¹ Moshe Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land: The Inheritance of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites*, Taubman Lectures in Jewish Studies 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 306.

¹⁵² Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 479.

Jacob to Issachar (Gen 49:14–15)

Similar to the last words of Jacob to Zebulun, Jacob’s last words to Issachar do not connect directly to any past event in his life. However, he mentions one of the animals from his last words to Judah. Jacob’s last words to Issachar are:

Issachar is a strong donkey,
Lying down between the hearths.¹⁵³
He saw that rest was good,
And that the land was bountiful;
He bowed his shoulder to carry a burden,
And became a corvée laborer.

יששכר חמור גרם
רבץ בין המושבות:
ברא מנוחה כי טוב
ואת־הארץ כי נעמה
גייט שכמו לסבל
ניהי למס־עבד:

Issachar is described both metaphorically and literally as an indispensable laborer. Jacob refers to Issachar as one who sees goodness in rest and the pleasantness of the land. Although a strong donkey, he lies down and curves his shoulder to bear (burdens). Held expresses a link of the phrase גייט שכמו לסבל to Exod 6:6; 1 Kgs 5:29 and Neh 4:11 and suggests that the correct reading should be rather *wyt škmh lesēbel* in synonymous parallelism with *mas 'obēd* rather than *wyt škmh lisbōl*.¹⁵⁴ Issachar understands when to rest but when he bows his shoulders to bear a burden, he turns out to become a forced laborer of the state. It is suggested that the masculine adjective or stative verb טוב in v. 15 be amended to טובה to correspond with the feminine noun מנוחה just as in the parallel feminine נעמה agrees with the feminine noun הארץ.¹⁵⁵ In two places in the book of Proverbs גרם is translated as strong boned ass in many versions (Prov 17:22; 25:15 JPS; NKJV, NET etc.) so some have חמור גרם translated as strong

¹⁵³ This refers to a place where the donkeys rest, a corral or barn.

¹⁵⁴ Moshe Held, “The Root ZBL/SBL in Akkadian, Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew,” *JAOS* 88 (1968): 94–95.

¹⁵⁵ Chaim Cohen, “Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew Lexicography and Its Ramifications for Textual Analysis,” in *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew*, Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic 8, ed. Cynthia L. Miller and Ziony Zevit, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 364. Though the emendation is important, it does not necessarily affect the meaning of the last words of Jacob to Issachar.

boned ass.¹⁵⁶ Jacob describes Issachar as strong, and he is depicted as a corvée laborer who relishes rest. Here also, Jacob plays on the meaning of the name of יִשָּׁכָר Issachar, which is (“a man of hire”), an explanation of the name Leah gives him (Gen 30:18).¹⁵⁷

The sons of Issachar are described as mighty warriors of their generations in the days of David twice, having troops ready for war with many wives and sons (1Chron 7:1–6). Part of the last words of Jacob to Issachar are וְאֵת־הָאָרֶץ כִּי נִעְמָה “And that the land was pleasant” Issachar is the fourth to receive his lot in Canaan (Josh 19:17–23), which is an important portion of the allotment—the Jezreel and some areas of the lower Galilee. These final words of Jacob to Issachar many years before Israel settled in the Promised Land are fulfilled with Issachar receiving one of the best allotments. Issachar’s land is beautiful, and he bears the burden of Israel (Judg 5:15; 1 Chron 12:32, 40 Heb [41]).

Jacob to Dan (Gen 49:16–18)

Turner notes that the blessing of Jacob on the children of the concubines (Bilhah and Zilpah), who are Dan, Gad, Asher and Naphtali, are appropriately brief, and the exact connotations are elusive.¹⁵⁸ However, the narrator informs us that Jacob blesses each of them according to his own blessing (v. 28). In addition, the blessings of Zebulun, Issachar and Benjamin are equally short even though they are the children of Leah and Rachel. In fact, the blessing of Dan is longer than that of Benjamin, who is the very last born and the son of his beloved wife.

¹⁵⁶ Benno Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible*, 332–33. Issachar is expected to be forced to work as a manual worker, which is contemptible in the eyes of an Israelite and the opposite of Zebulun, who is versatile and looks out over the sea.

¹⁵⁷ Issachar is described differently with two other tribes (1 Chron 12:41 Eng [40]). He also understands times to knowing what Israel ought to do (1 Chron 12:23, 32).

¹⁵⁸ Turner, *Genesis*, 203.

Jacob says to Dan:
 Dan shall judge his people
 as one of the tribes of Israel
 Dan shall be a serpent in the way,
 A viper by the path,
 That bites the horse's heels
 So that his rider falls backward

דָּן יִדְרֵן עַמּוֹ
 כְּאַחַד שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
 יְהִי־דָן נָחָשׁ עַל־יַד־דָּרַךְ
 שֶׁפִּיפֹן עַל־אֶרֶץ
 הַנֶּשֶׁף עַקְבֵי־סוּס
 וַיִּפֹּל רֹכְבוֹ אָחֹר:

Jacob does not refer to any historical event in the life of Dan. Rather he rehearses the meaning of the name Rachel gives to the first son of Bilhah, her maid, with the reason that “God has judged (advocated) her case” (30:6). In Jacob’s last words to Dan, he interprets the name Dan by relating it to the verb *dūn*, which means to “judge or advocate.” However, O’Connor has a different view of what דָּן יִדְרֵן עַמּוֹ means.¹⁵⁹ Jacob foresees Dan as one who will see to justice. Jacob engages in wordplay in using the name Dan. He puns on the name and sees him as one who fights to defend all Israel as if the tribes are one.¹⁶⁰ Further, taking ‘judge’ to mean “plead the cause or defend”, and not condemn, v. 16 should be read as a statement of praise directed at Dan.¹⁶¹

Jacob pictures Dan in the form of a snake, a serpent נָחָשׁ and specifically a horned viper שֶׁפִּיפֹן, hiding in the sand by the road that strikes a horse passing by and throws off its rider. This leaves an imagery of a small tribe that uses stealth tactics to overcome stronger enemies.¹⁶² On the other hand, Moses refers to Dan as a “lion’s whelp” playing on the meaning of the name “Laish”, which means “lion”—it is the former name of the town of Dan in the north after the

¹⁵⁹ O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 174–75. He translates דָּן יִדְרֵן עַמּוֹ “he governs his people Israel according to one judgment” and also כְּאַחַד שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל as “he rules his people Israel according to one judgment.” Accordingly, he explains that the subject is Yahweh and not Dan.

¹⁶⁰ Jacob, Jacob, and Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible*, 333.

¹⁶¹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 670.

¹⁶² John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, NIBC 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 389.

tribe of Dan moved from the south (Judg 18:7,14,27, 29). Moses says, וַיִּלְכְּדוּ אֹמֶר הָיוּ גֵיזֵר אֶרְיָהּ (Deut 33:22), which overlaps with the last words of Jacob to Judah גֵּיזֵר אֶרְיָהּ יְהוֹנָדָה (Gen 49:9).

Moberly observes that the last part of Jacob’s last words to Dan appear to be comments added to the text.¹⁶³ Although לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קִנִּיתִי יְהוָה, “I wait for your salvation, O LORD” does not fit well in the text, Turner suggests, Jacob’s statement portrays his awareness that neither he nor his sons and the blessing he had so hard contended for, brought actual blessing but rather more problems. He further notes that prior to this point it is only Judah that receives true commendation with the others receiving mostly a negative enigmatic attitude.¹⁶⁴ Jacob expresses his own emotions and the uncontainable sighing of his heart.¹⁶⁵ This is the only time Jacob interjects his last words to his sons to reflect on his own life. It is the last time the name of God “the LORD” is used in Genesis. Jacob expresses in this last speech his strong personal involvement.¹⁶⁶ The fulfillment of Jacob’s last words to Dan is seen by some in Samson, who defeats the Philistines, the enemies of Israel,¹⁶⁷ while Dan is still in the south.

Jacob to Gad (Gen 49:19)

Jacob’s last words to Gad, similar to those to Asher are exceptional in the sense that Jacob did not refer to them in the form of any specific animal or plant as in the case of the other sons. However, just as Jacob does with Judah and several others, he makes use of puns and the

¹⁶³ R. W. L. Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 66.

¹⁶⁴ Turner, *Genesis*, 203.

¹⁶⁵ Robert S. Candlish, *Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 755.

¹⁶⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 481.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 480–81. God saves Israel through Samson, a Danite, on different occasions, vindicating His people (Judges 13-16). Samson seems vulnerable but defeats his enemies; and the victory of the Danite benefits the whole nation of Israel.

explanation of the name Leah gives Gad at birth—‘a troop comes’, which is also interpreted as ‘a fortune comes’ (30:11). A text-critical issue is identified in Jacob’s last words to Gad.

Jacob says to Gad גַּד גִּדְוֹד יִגְדְּבוּ וְהָיָה גַּד עֲקֹב “Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels” (ESV). Another translation is “Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last” (NKJV). O’Connor translates this as “a troop trounces Gad, he tramples from behind.”¹⁶⁸ Emendation of the MT is suggested, to take the *mem* of the next word in v. 20 מֵאֲשֶׁר and append it to עֲקֹב and thus we have עֲקֹבָם “their heel” ending v. 19 instead of גַּד גִּדְוֹד יִגְדְּבוּ וְהָיָה גַּד עֲקֹב. The blessing of Gad will thus read גַּד גִּדְוֹד יִגְדְּבוּ וְהָיָה גַּד עֲקֹבָם “although a troop may attack Gad, he will trample their heel”—strike back, like a serpent. The blessing of Asher then will start with his name אֲשֶׁר without *mem* as in the other blessings. Jacob begins his blessings with the sons’ names, Reuben, the first son, through to Benjamin, the last, except for Joseph where Jacob begins his blessings with a description of Joseph. Thus, the emendation is recommended to maintain the rhetorical pattern.

Jacob reflects on the name of Gad with a negative beginning but ends with achievement at the end. In several renditions בְּגָד is rendered as fortune.¹⁷⁰ Gen 30:11; וַתֹּאמֶר לְאָה : וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ גַּד: [בְּגָד] [בָּא] [גַּד] וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ גַּד: “And Leah said, what a fortune so she called his name Gad.” According to Rendsburg the word גַּד “fortune” occurs only in this verse as a common noun in the

¹⁶⁸ O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 175.

¹⁶⁹ Wilhelm Rudolph et al., eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Editio Secunda Emendata opera (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983), 83.

¹⁷⁰ The LXX, Vulgate, Syriac, Qere, Kethib, etc. render בְּגָד as fortune. The last words of Jacob will imply a troop coming against Gad which is not a blessing but Jacob foreseeing the future that will eventually end well.

Bible, but it is a common word for fate or fortune in Aramaic.¹⁷¹ Thus, the blessing can be translated as a “fortune comes.” Jacob foresees Gad being trodden by enemies and how Gad will prevail against the enemies at the end. In one way or the other, Gad should expect enemies coming against him, but also to be assured of victory in ultimately triumphing over the enemy. Similar to Dan, Jacob uses wordplay in blessing Gad, and even more. Apart from אֶרְוֹא and עֶקֶב every word of the blessing has Gad (גָּד) embedded in it. Jacob, Jacob, and Jacob suggest Hebrew puns on the name Gad (raid) with the enemies raiding Gad in vain as he gains the upper hand over them.¹⁷² On the other hand, Gevirtz claims geo-political wordplay in the names of Gad and Manasseh, in a form of historiography.¹⁷³ Jacob’s last words to Gad anticipate Gad’s military prowess as Gad will be raided by raiders but he will raid at their heels.¹⁷⁴

Part of the fulfillment of Jacob’s last words to Gad is seen in the constant fight against the Ammonites and desert marauders (Judg 11:1–12:7).¹⁷⁵ Gad endured attacks not only by the Ammonites (Judg 10–12; Jer 49:1–6), Moabites, and Arameans (1Kgs 22:3; 2 Kgs 10:32–33), but also the Assyrians (2 Kgs 15:29) throughout the time it was settled in the vulnerable Transjordan.¹⁷⁶ Though Gad is a brave and warlike tribe, it was exposed to attacks yet always

¹⁷¹ Gary Rendsburg, *How the Bible Is Written* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019), 507. In Isa 65:11, Gad appears as the name of a foreign god.

¹⁷² Jacob, Jacob, and Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible*, 333.

¹⁷³ Stanley Gevirtz, “Of Patriarchs and Puns: Joseph at the Fountain, Jacob at the Ford,” *HUCA* 46 (1975): 53–54. See also Stanley Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel*, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 32 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 17.

¹⁷⁴ Arnold, *Genesis*, 382.

¹⁷⁵ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 672.

¹⁷⁶ Waltke, *Genesis*, 611.

maintaining its courageous personality.¹⁷⁷ The last words of Jacob to Gad are fulfilled not only in the life of Gad, but also in Israel as a nation.

Jacob to Asher (Gen 49:20)

Considering the emendation suggested above, Jacob's last words to Asher will begin with his name, Asher (אָשֶׁר) without *mem*.

Asher will dine on his rich foods
and produce food fit for kings

אָשֶׁר יִשְׂמְנָה לְחֶמֶן
וְהָיָא יִתְּן מִצְדֵי מַלְכֵי:

Asher is seen as one that pays tribute to the king. He is the son of Zilpah, Leah's maid servant, and the eighth son of Jacob. He is named by Leah amplifying her happiness אִשֶׁר and seeing herself being called blessed (30:13). Jacob's last words here are related to the joy Leah expresses at the birth of Asher and foresees Asher as being the source of king's delicacies. As skilled farmers, Asher grows a rich variety of delicious produce fit for king's table.¹⁷⁸ Driver suggests the articles of food that Asher is to export to the neighboring Phoenicians is what is referred to here.¹⁷⁹

Jacob's last words to Asher are words characterized by agricultural and culinary images that correspond to the situation of Asher in the coastal plains between Mount Carmel and Lebanon.¹⁸⁰ Asher engages in maritime enterprises that enable it to expand; and with its abundance it fulfills its responsibility of provision of food for the royal family. On the other

¹⁷⁷ Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 389. Israel as a nation has enemy as troops coming against her almost always from Biblical times, but Israel often prevails and triumphs over her enemies.

¹⁷⁸ Hartley, *Genesis*, 359.

¹⁷⁹ Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 390.

¹⁸⁰ Towner, *Genesis*, 283. He suggests the location of Asher even today is "one of the most fertile and lovely parts of Israel".

hand, Wenham remarks that though producing royal delicacies could be taken for a blessing, “it is not clear whether this remark is a compliment or a rebuke, or simply a comment on Asher’s affluence.”¹⁸¹ However, there is no reason to regard Jacob’s last words to Asher as a rebuke.

Later, Moses calls Asher most blessed of sons בְּרוּךְ מִבְּנֵי אֲשֵׁר (Deut 34:24), playing on the meaning of *asher* (blessed), and likening Asher’s name to בְּרוּךְ, “blessing” which is synonymous with אֲשֵׁר (e.g., Ps 1:1). There are no specifics on what kind of produce Jacob intends. It can be concluded that Jacob’s last words to Asher are fulfilled, and that Asher gets involved in producing rich foods fit for kings.

Jacob to Naphtali (Gen 49:21)

The four children of the two concubines receive Jacob’s last words one after the other, following his last words to the sons of Leah; and Naphtali is the last one. O’Connor translates Jacob’s last words to Naphtali as "Naphtali is a released hind, who bears beautiful fawns,"¹⁸² and Fox translates them as "Naftali, a hind let loose, he who gives forth lovely fawns."¹⁸³ The subject of the second line of the couplet is masculine—Naphtali, not the female hind. Accordingly, the second part could be translated as “who gives lovely sayings.” Jacob says of him:

Naphtali is a hind let loose;
he who gives forth lovely fawns.

נַפְתָּלִי אֵילָה שְׁלֻחָה
הַנֶּתֶן אִמְרֵי־שֵׁפָר

¹⁸¹ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 482.

¹⁸² O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 176.

¹⁸³ Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 232.

Weinfeld suggests both an Arabic and Akkadian influence in the words of Jacob to Naphtali.¹⁸⁴ Several other scholars have issues about the meaning of Jacob's last words to Naphtali with some suggesting some Ugaritic and Aramaic words.¹⁸⁵ It is suggested that the last words to Naphtali be translated to mean "born a free-running doe, who gives birth to fawns of the fold".¹⁸⁶ The diversity is also affirmed by Hamilton with no certainty of whether Jacob's last words to Naphtali are positive or negative.¹⁸⁷ However, the image of a freely running hind who produces lovely offspring—or speech—seems favorable. Westermann notes that the saying about Naphtali is one sentence in two parts, with the first being a comparative nominal sentence and "the second part states something about the subject of the first."¹⁸⁸

HALOT parses *הַשְׁלֵחָה* as a passive participle "to be let free, wandering free," an adjective describing the doe.¹⁸⁹ Naphtali means "meandering," "twisting," but in Rachel's naming the son of the handmaid Bilhah (30:3–8), she evokes the "struggles" between her and her sister-rival, Leah. Jacob's blessing to Naphtali depicts "meandering," "twisting," which conforms to the image of the wild deer. He "praises the mobility and/or love of freedom of the tribe of

¹⁸⁴ Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land*, 310.

¹⁸⁵ For more on the various scholarly views see Wenham, *Genesis*, 82–83; Turner, *Genesis*, 203.

¹⁸⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 483. Some take the phrase *אֶמְרֵי־שֹׁפָר* on the basis of Ugaritic and Akkadian as "lambs of the fold."

¹⁸⁷ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 676. The diversity of translations, including those of Speiser, Albright, Andersen, Barnes and Gevirtz most of which view the meaning as positive while others understand it as a dangerous force of impulse. For more on the variety of opinions on the translation and meaning of Jacob's last words to Naphtali see *ibid.*, 675–77.

¹⁸⁸ Westermann, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 236. He compares Ps 18:34 to this text where a hind's feet are used in a metaphor and the meaning depends on the pointing of the subject. The context of the text helps to leave it as is rendered in the MT: *אֵלֶּה*.

¹⁸⁹ Ludwig Koehler H. and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), "שֵׁלֵחָה" 2921.

Naphtali, which gains increase in the freedom of the mountains.”¹⁹⁰ It is suggested that “a freed doe” is symbolic of grace, agility, speed and shyness¹⁹¹ though some of the words seem to negate the other. The speed of a deer is advantageous just as beautiful words cannot be detrimental. Others read different meanings in Jacob’s last words to Naphtali.¹⁹²

The phrase אֲמָרַי יְשֵׁפֶר can also denote, as said, “lovely sayings.” Driver observes: “the second clause is supposed to refer to the eloquence, the poetical or oratorical gifts of the tribe though we have no other evidence” of this elsewhere than the Song of Deborah, which is ascribed to Barak.¹⁹³ However, there is other evidence of Naphtali’s eloquence. Hiram, from the tribe of Naphtali, is described as a man of wisdom and understanding (1 Kgs 7:13–14). Similarly, the woman of Abel of Beth Maachah, who is described as a wise woman, is from Naphtali (2 Sam 20:1–16; 1Kgs 15:20). One of the warriors of the tribe of Naphtali is Barak, who persuades Deborah to go with him to battle by his wisdom and declines to go without her (Judg 4:4–11).¹⁹⁴ Barak makes Deborah feel important and decides to go with him. Although the understanding of this verse is uncertain and has given rise to varieties of interpretations,¹⁹⁵ Jacob’s blessing seems appropriate, and appears to be realized in the unfolding Biblical narrative.

¹⁹⁰ Westermann, *Genesis*, 236.

¹⁹¹ Hartley, *Genesis*, 359.

¹⁹² The LXX translates this verse as “Nephtali is a spreading stem, bestowing beauty on its fruit”. (Νεφθαλι στέλεχος ἀνειμένον ἐπιδιδούς ἐν τῷ γενήματι κάλλος). This is more about plants than animals as we find in the MT.

¹⁹³ Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 390.

¹⁹⁴ Robert Alter, *Ancient Israel: The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2013), 127. “Barak’s hesitancy makes it evident that the male commander needs this woman behind him in order to go out to battle. Thus, he becomes a kind of proxy for Deborah, who is to all intents and purposes also a ‘judge’ in the military sense.”

¹⁹⁵ Wenham, *Genesis*, 481–82.

Jacob to Joseph (Gen 49:22–26)

Jacob's last words to Joseph are replete with blessings acknowledging the help of God. The blessings of Jacob to Joseph without doubt portray the blessing of a father to the beloved son of his old age who is denied his love for many years. Jacob says to Joseph

Young wild-ass, Yosef
young wild ass along the spring
Donkeys along a wall
Bitterly they shot at him,
The archers assailed him,

בן פרת יוסף
בן פרת עלי-עין
בנות צעדה עלי-שור
ונמררהו, ורבו
וישטמהו בעלי חצים:

Yet firm remained his bow,
And agile stayed his arms and hands—
By means of the hands of Yaakov's Champion, up there,
(Literally, the Stallion or Bull of Israel),

ונתשב באיתן קשתו
ויפזו זרעו ידיו
מיד יאביב יעקב

The Shepherd, the Stone of Yisrael.
From your father's God—
May He help you
And Shaddai, may He give you blessing:
Blessings of the heaven, from above
Blessings of Oceans crouching below,
Blessings of breasts and womb!
May the blessings of your father transcend the
blessing of the mountains eternal [age old mountains],¹⁹⁶
the bounds of hills without age.
May they fall upon the head of Yosef,
On the crown of the consecrated-one among his brothers.¹⁹⁷

משם רעה אבו ישראל:
מאל אביד
ויעזרוך
ונאת שדי ויברכך
ברכת שמים מעל
ברכת תהום רבצת תחת
ברכת שנים ורחם:
ברכת אביד
גברו על-ברכת הורי
עד-תאנות גבעות עולם
תהילן לראש יוסף
ולקדקד גייר אהיו:

Jacob's blessing for Joseph involves his heart more fully than the blessing for the rest of his sons.

“It is like the swan's fabled strain in dying. He pours it out with a richness and copiousness of

¹⁹⁶ The MT has *zāqēp* on הורי and that divides הורי and עד-. However, הורי עד-תאנות is a phrase and need not be divided. Alter translates the phrase הורי עד-תאנות as ‘the bounty of hills everlasting,’ or ‘timeless heights,’ following the LXX. See Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 289–90.

¹⁹⁷ Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 232.

expression, altogether unlike the summary conciseness with which he dispatches the others.”¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, several text-critical issues have been proposed with the notion that it is the longest blessing, most complex and most obscure of Jacob’s last words to his sons.¹⁹⁹

Jacob begins by describing Joseph as a foal of a wild donkey at a spring and on the ridge (v. 22). However, some see Jacob portraying Joseph as a fruitful tree just as a righteous man is likened to a tree planted by the river and flourishing (Ps 1:3; 92:13–15[12–14]; Jer 17:7–8).²⁰⁰ De Regt agrees with Wenham and translates בֶּן פֶּרֶת יוֹטָף as ‘Joseph is a fruitful bough’ . . .”²⁰¹ Jacob emphasizes בֶּן פֶּרֶת, repeating it with the name of Joseph in between— בֶּן פֶּרֶת יוֹטָף בֶּן פֶּרֶת. Some have suggested that the opening phrase בֶּן פֶּרֶת is dittography.²⁰² However, the form of these lines, where the second extends or expands the first, is well-attested in Biblical texts. “Expanded repetition involves the appearance of a given root twice or more within a parallel versets or verses or larger textual units.”²⁰³ Although the interpretation of בֶּן פֶּרֶת is contested, Hamilton points to Hos 8:9 in support of interpreting “wild ass.”²⁰⁴ O’Connor has the first part of

¹⁹⁸ Candlish, *Studies in Genesis*, 770–71.

¹⁹⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 484. More text-critical issues and the two ways of translating the last words of Jacob to Joseph are also outlined.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 484.

²⁰¹ Lénart J. de Regt, "Macrosyntactic Functions of Nominal Clauses Referring to Participants," in *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches*, Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic, ed. Cynthia L. Miller (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 293.

²⁰² *BHS*, 83.

²⁰³ Shamir Yona, "Exegetical and Stylistic Analysis of Aphorisms in Proverbs," in *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis Robert Magary (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 156.

²⁰⁴ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 678. See also O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 176.

v. 22 as ‘Joseph is a wild colt, a wild colt by the spring of Shur...’²⁰⁵ In this form, בֶּן פֶּרֶת is only found in this text. פֶּרֶת is taken as the feminine of פֶּרֶא (Gen 16:12; Job 6:5; 11:12; 39:5; Hos 8:9)—Joseph is the son of the פֶּרֶת.

In addition, Jacob recounts Joseph’s history as he does with Reuben, Simeon, and Levi—but in this case, in a positive vein. Jacob says of Joseph that the archers bitterly attacked him and shot at him with hatred, but he endures with his bow remaining strong by the help of the God of Jacob. Jacob is careful to mention the help of God, three times (Gen 49:24–26). Jacob acknowledges that what Joseph has become is a result of the help of his personal God. The success of Joseph as a warrior comes as his hands are strengthened by the hand of God.²⁰⁶ Jacob uses the word בְּרִכַּת (blessings of) and its nuances six times (vv. 25–26). The very last words of Jacob to Joseph are “They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.” These are repeated by Moses to Joseph “Let the blessing come on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers” (Deut 33:16).

The last words of Jacob to Joseph are fulfilled at the time of Joshua when the nation enters Canaan, and each tribe settles in its apportioned land (Josh 17:1–18). Moses permits half of the tribe of Manasseh to receive their land with the tribes of Reuben and Gad before crossing over the Jordan (Num 32:1–42; 34:14–15; Josh 1:12–18; 12:6; 18:7). Joshua specifically refers to the people of Ephraim and Manasseh as a great people (Josh 17:17). They continue to be valiant in the time of the Judges and help Gideon take the watering places in his fight against the Midianites (Judg 7:23–24). The northern kingdom is the most fertile field area in Israel, which is

²⁰⁵ O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 176.

²⁰⁶ Alter, *Genesis*, 292–99.

part of Joseph’s blessing. However, some claim that nothing indicates that Joseph rules over his brothers.²⁰⁷ Not only is Joshua, Moses’ immediate successor from Ephraim (Josh 24:30), representative of the northern kingdom, but also Ephraim was the dominant kingdom from the time of Jeroboam until the Assyrian takeover and deportations.

Jacob’s blessing to Joseph and Judah are exceptional. Jacob addresses each of the other sons in one strophe. But Judah and Joseph are “addressed with an entire stanza; vv. 8–12 (three strophes) comprise the eight-verse stanza for Judah, vv.22–26 the nine-line stanza for Joseph (again three strophes).”²⁰⁸ The last words of Jacob to his sons are declared many years before Joshua. However, what Jacob foresees is established centuries later (in Biblical time). Judah and Joseph become the leading sons of Jacob, who eventually become the principal tribes of the future nation of Israel.²⁰⁹ Joseph and Judah are given key positions in these blessings. The important role each plays in the future of Israel’s history reflects Jacob’s blessing to them.²¹⁰

Jacob to Benjamin (Gen 49:27)

Jacob’s last words to Benjamin are very short as he describes who Benjamin will be. It is at the birth of Benjamin that his mother, Jacob’s beloved wife, dies (35:18). In his last words, Jacob says to Benjamin:

Benjamin is a ravenous wolf,
 devouring his enemies in the morning
 and dividing his plunder in the evening.

בְּנִימִין זָאֵב יִטְרֹף
 בַּבֹּקֶר יֹאכַל עֵד
 וּלְעָרֵב יִסְלַק שָׁלָל:

²⁰⁷ Richard J. Clifford, “Joseph Story or Jacob Story?” in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen, SupVT 152 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 227.

²⁰⁸ Fokkelman, “Genesis 37 and 38 at the Interface of Structural Analysis and Hermeneutics”, 181.

²⁰⁹ Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, 144.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

Jacob uses ravenous wolf, which is a metaphor for raiding parties, for Benjamin. Jacob sums up his blessings for Benjamin in both his work of toiling to take hold of his victim in the morning and sharing the food from the hunt of his victory in the evening.

Towner suggests that a ‘ravenous wolf’ does not fit anything from the Jacob cycle and is thus more a reflection of a later era.²¹¹ However, Jacob compares several of his children to different kinds of animals. In Jacob’s last words to Dan, for instance, he refers to Dan as one that will be a serpent and a viper by the way (Gen 49:17). The character of the tribe of Benjamin is revealed in the book of Judges, where he goes to war with the rest of the tribes of Israel (Judg 19–21) with devastating consequences on both sides. Benjamin is not only the last of all Jacob’s children to receive the last words, but Benjamin is also the smallest of all the tribes (1 Sam 9:21). On the other hand, Driver observes that though Benjamin is a small tribe, it is martial and famous for its bowmen and slingers (Judg 20:16), always ready to fight and successful in wars it undertakes.²¹²

O’Connor sees coordination between the first half of the verse and the second, even though there is an *’atnah* that divides it and no *mem* that begins it. He translates the verse as “from morning to evening he eats booty,” “from morning to evening he divides spoil,” recognizing the *lamed* that is ignored in many translations.²¹³ Though \aleph here could be seen as ‘until’, it is best translated as prey or booty upon which one advances here.²¹⁴ Benjamin is

²¹¹ Towner, *Genesis*, 284.

²¹² Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 394.

²¹³ O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 178.

²¹⁴ *BDB*, \aleph § 6784, 723.

metaphorically referred to as a ravenous wolf that divides the spoil, יִחַלֵּק שָׁלַל. In the Servant Song, יִחַלֵּק שָׁלַל ‘divide plunder’ is used in the exact form as in Jacob’s last words (Isa 53:12).

Jacob describes the future of the tribes of Israel when they are at the embryonic stage in Egypt. He blesses Judah (vv. 8–12) and Joseph (vv. 22–26) at the greatest length, although some details cannot be fully explained. Jacob foretells what is ahead and also recounts the history of some of the children before pronouncing the last words. Some are blessings, but others are not.

The narrator breaks into the account of the last words of Jacob to inform us of Jacob’s final words to all his sons together. The very last words of Jacob are what we find in Gen 49:29–32, where he speaks of part of the land of Canaan and specifically about the land Abraham purchases that has become a family property. Jacob desires to be buried “in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought” (v. 30). This is a specific request to be buried in a cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, which was purchased by his grandfather for burial (vv. 29–30). It is an “ancestral necropolis” where the “inventory of tombs stands at five.”²¹⁵ With both his grandparents and parents buried there as well as his wife, Leah (v. 31), Jacob desires no other place to be buried than what has become the family cemetery—though his beloved wife, Rachel is buried elsewhere (48:7).

Jacob wants to be sure his sons understand his wishes, and so he repeats the description of the location of the cave and highlights the fact that Abraham bought it from the

²¹⁵ Towner, *Genesis*, 285. This includes Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah. Jacob being buried there will make it complete in having all three patriarchs and their wives buried together on the plot that is purchased for interment purpose.

Hittites.²¹⁶ The repetitious language is syntactically awkward—giving the impression of added-on glosses. On the other hand, rhetorically, Jacob wants to make sure his sons do not underestimate his desire to be buried with his ancestors in the Promised Land. This is the field Abraham purchased from Ephron the Hethite as burial property (Gen. 49:29–30). Jacob says “...and there I buried Leah” without the indication that she was his wife. Sternberg observes that Jacob could not bring himself to refer to Leah as his wife even at his deathbed.²¹⁷ Nevertheless, when Jacob speaks of Rachel to Joseph alone, he also refers to Rachel without referring to her as his wife (48:7). Jacob dies almost immediately after blessing his children (v. 33). This is unlike the reported last words of his grandfather, Abraham, and his father, Isaac (Gen 22:1–9; 25:1–10; 27:1–28:5). Thus, Jacob’s last words are presented as his very last words, giving a sense of finality to his story.

The last words of Jacob to Judah and Joseph, which are not only positive but also comprise a major part of his speech, are portrayed in the life of Israel as a nation when they settle in the Promised Land. When the nation is divided, the North, which is normally referred to as Israel, also takes the name Ephraim while Judah constitutes the South. God refers to Ephraim as His firstborn (Jer 31:9). Joseph is the central tribe of northern Israel, whose kingdom is both larger and more prosperous than Judah, the southern kingdom. Ephraim is mentioned as representing Joseph—the northern tribes (Gen 48:5,17–20; 1Kgs 12:25; Isa 7:5–9,17; 11:13; Ezek 37:16, 19) and the people of Judah and Benjamin together as in the south (1 Kgs 12:21–23; 2 Chron 11:1–3). The first king of Israel, Saul, is of the tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam 9:1–2, 15–10:1); and Saul is followed by David, who is from the tribe of Judah. Benjamin abuts Jerusalem,

²¹⁶ Susan A. Brayford, *Genesis*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 448.

²¹⁷ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 353.

which is made the capital of the Judean kingdom. Benjamin remains loyal to Judah during the divided kingdom (1 Kgs 12:21). During the Persian period the term “Jews” becomes synonymous with Judeans in particular, and Israel in general.

C. Joseph to the Israelites (Gen 50:24–26)

The life of Joseph is marked with ample foretelling from his youth until his death, and his last words are also marked with this divine endowment (Gen 37:5–11; 40:5–41:45; 50:24–25). Several Scriptures point to this heavenly gift that operates through (Gen 42:6; 43:26, 28; 44:14; 50:18). As Joseph is wont to do, he foretells the future of the children of Israel before he dies—when the climax of God’s promises will be fulfilled. He foresees God taking special note of them and sending help to bring them out of Egypt (Gen 50:24). He makes the children of Israel swear to take his bones along when leaving Egypt (v. 25b).

The last words of Joseph are very short, divided into two parts. The first foretells his death and promises that God will take care of them and lead them to the land He promised the patriarchs (50:24).

And Joseph said to his brethren,
 “I am dying;
 but God will surely take account of you,
 and bring you out of this land
 to the land of
 which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אֶחָיו
 אֲנִי מָת
 וְאֱלֹהִים פִּקְדוּ יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם
 וְהוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִן-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת
 אֶל-הָאָרֶץ
 אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלַיַּעֲקֹב:

The last words of Joseph mark the transition of the history of the patriarchs to the history of the exodus.²¹⁸ Joseph died at one hundred and ten years, assuring his brothers of the certainty of God bringing them out of the land of Egypt to Canaan (50:22–26). “Here the promises that constitute

²¹⁸ Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers*, 148.

the theme of Genesis are linked to the exodus²¹⁹ of the Israelites from Egypt. Joseph had come to the realization that a divine hand is behind the course of events that brought him and his family down to Egypt (Genesis 45). Because his dreams have been fulfilled, Joseph feels sure that God will take them out of Egypt. They rely on Joseph for their welfare, but it has come to a point where they must completely trust in the divine promises. Joseph's intention is to relay his burial request to the next generations of Israel—the Israelites. In his last moments, Joseph foresees and foretells the departure of all Israel from the land that has become temporarily their home for many years, and the beginning of the history of Israel. Joseph foretells that which will take place centuries hence (37:2; 50:26; Exod 12:40–41).

The verb *פקד* normally has God as the subject, and the verb is used with a negative connotation (Exod 32:34; Amos 3:14; Prov 19:23; Isa 23:17; 24:21; 27:1, 3), or positively. Here Joseph sees God as going to fulfill His promise, and this positive divine attention means God will take note of them and acts accordingly, for blessing.²²⁰ Joseph uses *פקד* emphatically *פקֹדֶנָּה* *פקֹדֶנִּי* in both the first part and second part of his last words to his brothers. The form of emphatic use of *פקד* here is used in the same way in Exod 13:19 in the reported speech of Joseph by the narrator.

Joseph reviews how God worked in the past in v. 20 before turning to the prophetic mode, telling of the nation that will arise from the sons of Israel in the future.²²¹ The land is a promise of God to Abraham and his descendants (12:1–3, 7; 15:18–21; 17:8; 26:3 28:13; Exod 23:31) and is not contingent. This is very much like the promise in Deut 6:10–11 but unlike other

²¹⁹ Wenham, *Genesis*, 491.

²²⁰ Tyler F. Williams, *פקד* in *NIDOTTE*, vol. 3, ed. Willem Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 657–63.

²²¹ Rad, *Genesis*, 433.

sections of Deuteronomy (6:18; 12:28) where the acquisition of the land is contingent on Israel's obedience.²²²

The first part of the last words of Joseph to his brothers recalls the last words of Jacob to Joseph in 48:21. Jacob says to Joseph:

Then Israel said to Joseph,
“Behold, I am dying,
but God will be with you
and bring you back
to the land of your fathers” (48:21).

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יֹסֵף
הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מֹת
וַהֲיֵה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם
וְהָשִׁיב אֶתְכֶם
אֶל-אֲרֶץ אֲבֹתֵיכֶם

Both Jacob and Joseph are conscious that the time to die is near and say “I am dying” *וַהֲיֵה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם*. They both speak of God's commitment to take the Israelites to the Promised Land. Jacob says *וַהֲיֵה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם וְהָשִׁיב אֶתְכֶם אֶל-אֲרֶץ אֲבֹתֵיכֶם*, God will be with them to take them back to the land of their fathers, and Joseph foresees God paying attention to them to take them out of Egypt *וַהֲיֵה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם וְהָשִׁיב אֶתְכֶם אֶל-אֲרֶץ אֲבֹתֵיכֶם*. Both are driving at the same point of deliverance from Egypt to the Promised Land using only slightly different wording. Similar to Jacob's last words, Joseph, in his parting words, requests that the children of Israel take his bones with them from Egypt to the land of Canaan (50:24–25). Lunn compares the last words of Jacob (49:29–33) and Joseph and (50:24–26a) and delineates several similarities between them. He notes that the focus is on the land God promised Abraham originally and repeated to his descendants. This promise forms a major theme through the Genesis narratives (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:7; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3; 28:13; 35:12; 48:4). Thus, Jacob's dying words reflect his faith in God to fulfill His promise.²²³

²²² Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 711.

²²³ Nicholas P. Lunn, “The Last Words of Jacob and Joseph: A Rhetorico-Structural Analysis of Genesis 49:29-33 and 50:24-26.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 59 (2008): 163–69. The people of Israel are tied to the Promised Land, and all the patriarchs as well as Joseph speak of it. Their identity as a nation is grounded in the land of Canaan.

The second part of Joseph’s last words have to do with the conveyance of his bones with them.

Joseph says to his brothers:

“God will surely visit you,
and you shall carry up my bones from here” (50:25b).

פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם
וְהֵעֲלֵתֶם אֶת־עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה:

Just as the children of Israel going to the Promised Land is important to Joseph, the moving of his bones to be buried in Canaan is of prime importance to him—so much so that he repeats the certainty of God’s deliverance, and he makes them take an oath to oblige them to honor his request. In both cases where Joseph alludes to the land of Egypt, he does not specifically mention the name Egypt in his last words. In the first case he refers to Egypt as מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת (from this land) and then with regards to his bones being taken from Egypt he says וְהֵעֲלֵתֶם אֶת־עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה: “and you shall carry up my bones from here”. The omission of “Egypt” is significant. Egypt is not his real home, although for many years he lived there both as a slave and the second in authority. It is the narrator that informs us about Joseph making his brothers take an oath.

Although Joseph and his brothers have been together for many years, Hamilton suggests it is perhaps because of lingering suspicions Joseph has about the reliability of his brothers that he makes them take an oath.²²⁴ The specific act is not indicated—unlike the oath Jacob demands from Joseph, swearing with his hand under his thigh (47:27–31).²²⁵ It is possible he makes them affirm by word without any action since he is dealing with not only one person but a group of older brothers and/or their children representing them. We have no record of Joseph leaving any blessings or final words to his own two sons just as there is no record of their

²²⁴ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 711.

²²⁵ For more on swearing with hand under the thigh of the one demanding the oath, see “oaths” A on pages 27–33.

direct interactions or conversation in any way with him. This is similar to having no record of Moses' interaction with his own sons or any final words or blessing for them. The children of Joseph are blessed by Jacob and have become virtually like one of his brothers (48:5). Accordingly, it can be assumed that Joseph is contented with the blessings and sees no need to have any last moments with his sons (vv. 8–20).

Joseph's request, though similar to that of Jacob, is different in the sense that Jacob requests to be sent to Canaan and buried while his sons still live in Egypt, while Joseph requests that his bones be carried with them when they leave Egypt together as a nation (50:24–25). The brothers are not to go and bury Joseph in Canaan and then return to Egypt. Joseph's bones form a material as well as moral link between the Hebrews' sojourn in Egypt and their settlement in the Land of Canaan. Joseph is sure a day is coming when the promises to the patriarchs will be fulfilled, and all Israel departs from Egypt to the Promised Land. That is when Joseph expects Israel to carry his bones along with them. It is important for the Israelites to keep Joseph's bones and take them along to Canaan. The promises to the patriarchs are partially fulfilled, but the future of Israel is in Canaan and not Egypt.²²⁶

Moses fulfills the oath, which Joseph made the children of Israel take before he died, when the people of Israel leave Egypt (Exod 13:19). It is not certain whether Joshua is part of the burial ceremony of Joseph's bones. Moses conveys the bones from Egypt (Exod 13:19) and the Israelites bury them in Shechem (Josh 24:32) to fulfill the demands of the oath—although not with the ancestors at Machpelah. This is a territory Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem that has become an inheritance of the children of Joseph (Gen 33:19; Josh 24:32). The last words of Joseph are in accordance with the promise of God to Abraham (Gen

²²⁶ Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, 161.

15:13–16). Four generations of Abraham are to be in a land not theirs, but they are to return to the Promised Land. The final words of Joseph to his family and the last words of Jacob to his sons, which include Joseph, involve the foretelling of future events.

D. Moses to Israelites and God (Deut 32:1–47)

Beginning with chapter 30 of Deuteronomy through the end of chapter 33, various speeches of Moses could be considered as his final words in the form of witnessing against Israel and admonishing them (Deut 30:19–20; 31:20–22; 32:1–47), appealing to acts of God, indictment, foretelling the future events, (Deut 32:1–47) and blessing and prayer for Israel (Deut 33:1–29). Words were assumed to be embedded with power, and the Hebrew Bible often demonstrates the dynamic powers attributed to words in ancient Israel.²²⁷ Thus, all these last words of Moses are meant to have an effect on the Israelites positively or negatively. Wright observes that the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32) and the Blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 33) are appendices to chapters 31–34 that are set within the narrative traditions on the final acts of Moses. This is distinct from chapters 5–29, where Moses explains the meaning of the covenant to Israel. The poet's primary form in Deuteronomy 32 is a legal one, which is an indictment, and the primary structure is a covenant lawsuit.²²⁸ Moses ends his long message to the people of Israel with how blessed Israel is, and the upper hand God has given them over their enemies (Deut 33:29).

Outstanding in the leadership of Moses is his love for the people of Israel. At the time of the last words of Moses, he had two sons, Gershom (Exod 2:22; 18:3) and Eliezer (Exod

²²⁷ Rabinowitz, *A Witness Forever*, 19–22.

²²⁸ Wright, "The Lawsuit of God," 26.

18:4); but he blesses not his biological children and presumed heirs but the tribes of Israel.²²⁹ Moses did not consider any of his children in his prayer, blessings, on future events or put them in any positions in all these speeches of his last words—unlike other leaders of Israel (e.g. 1 Sam 2:12; 8:1–3). Moses did not see his calling as that which must be passed on as an inheritance. He is called out of the obscurity of herding sheep for a specific task, to deliver Israel from Egypt—which he accomplishes. The shepherd is a widespread ancient Middle Eastern metaphor for leader, be they divine or human. The shepherd takes the sheep to pasture, provides, and protects the flock (Gen 29:7–8; 37:12–14; 1 Sam 17:34; 2 Sam 5:2; Jer 3:15).²³⁰ This is also expressed several times in the Bible in condemnation of unrighteous Israelite leaders for leading the flock astray (Ezekiel 34, Zechariah 13). The Persian king Cyrus is referred to as a shepherd, and Mesopotamian kings often refer to themselves as shepherds (Isa 44:28).²³¹ Moses faithfully shepherds Israel until God decides it is time for him to die (Deut 34:1–4). Moses gets upset at Israel, loses self-control, and strikes the rock instead of speaking to it as instructed. He fails to revere God who brought water out of the rock, rather than Moses, and he is denied entry of the Promised Land (Numb 20:1–13).

In this unit we are considering only chapter 32 of Deuteronomy, which is generally regarded as the Song of Moses. The structure and meaning of Deuteronomy 32 have received a great deal of attention through the years from the ancient scribes until modern day critical

²²⁹ Andrea L. Weiss, "Blessings of the Tribes," in *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (New York: Women of Reform Judaism, URJ Press, 2008), 1275.

²³⁰ Benjamin A. Foreman, *Animal Metaphors and the People of Israel in the Book of Jeremiah*, *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 238 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 94–95.

²³¹ Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 49–50.

scholars.²³² The main goal of this poem is to affirm the rectitude and faithfulness of God as manifested in His dealing with a corrupt and ungrateful nation.²³³ The Song serves as a testimony and a confrontation against Israel, who predictably breaks the covenant. Since it is to be preserved in writing, the Song will remain a witness that the ills Israel suffers are consequences they deserve and should have expected.²³⁴

According to Driver, “heaven and earth are invoked, not as witnesses but as forming an audience whose attention may be claimed on account of the solemnity and importance of the truths which the poet has to declare.”²³⁵ However, after the discovery of treaties in the ancient Near East, the invocation of heaven and earth has generally been understood as a monotheistic replacement of an invocation of “the great gods of heaven and earth.” Neo-Assyrian treaties call gods as witness for both contracting parties. Astral gods were visible at the time the treaties were concluded.²³⁶ Weinfeld for instance, observes that there is a direct influence of ancient Near Eastern treaties on the content and structure of Deuteronomy. However, he distinguishes the mode of application between the ancient Near Eastern treaties and Deuteronomy. The invocation of heaven and earth as witnesses is found at the beginning or end of the ancient Near Eastern treaties but appear at the prologue and epilogue of Deuteronomy.²³⁷

²³² Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 785.

²³³ S.R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed. ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 344.

²³⁴ Rabinowitz, *A Witness Forever*, 43.

²³⁵ Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 348–49.

²³⁶ Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, State Archives of Assyria 2 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988), 37.

²³⁷ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 146–47.

Though it might not seem conventional to call on elements of nature to pay attention to what one says, Moses earlier in Deut 4:26 did so, and as said, treaties in the surrounding areas call as witnesses the great gods of heaven and earth.²³⁸ Monotheistic Deuteronomy, following the pattern of the treaties, calls on heaven and earth. Asaph (Ps 50:4) as well as Jeremiah (Jer 6:19) all call on heaven and earth to pay attention in one way or the other. Further, Isaiah calls on the coastland to listen at a different time (49:1).

In secular treaties witnesses, who are usually gods and goddesses, are appealed to act if either side breaches the treaty.²³⁹ Moses calls on heaven and earth as silent witnesses to the covenant renewal, which involves the teaching of the Song, so that as they sing it, they invoke the physical and created world to witness their commitment.²⁴⁰ Though the text may not be explicit on the specific role of the witnesses, calling on them as part of the audience implicitly makes them witnesses since the message is not against them. Moses is not just to write the song but also to teach the children of Israel the same day (31:16–22). Calling on heaven and earth as witnesses is not unique to Moses. We find the initial words of the oracles of Isaiah (Isa 1:2) like that of Moses (Deut 32:1). The metaphorical role of heaven and earth (Deut 4:26, 30:19, 31:28) is summons for the impeachment of Israel (Ps 50:1–4; Isa 1:2; Mic 6:1f).²⁴¹ Wright suggests that the Song of Moses is a “broken” *rib* lawsuit that is probably adapted and expanded from a specific cultic. However, the Song has a mixture of elements that makes form-critical analysis

²³⁸ Alexander Rofé, *Deuteronomy: Issues and Interpretation*, Old Testament Studies (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2002), 228.

²³⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, NIBC 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 298.

²⁴⁰ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 376.

²⁴¹ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 298.

more complex.²⁴² Several forms genre can be identified in the Song. Moses proclaims the name of the LORD and ascribes greatness to God as the Rock who is perfect in His work (Deut 32:1–4) emphasizing the virtues of God (vv. 3–4) in his introduction.

The poem involves declarative statements in some of which Moses is addressing Israel, and in others of which the first-person pronoun “I” is used to indicate God Himself speaking (vv. 21–27). Moses sets a preamble to the teaching of the Song as he assembles all the leaders of the tribes and the officers and calls on heaven and earth as witnesses for God and against Israel (31:19, 28; 32:1). He is also told to teach the Son to the Israelites, so they learn it by heart. Moses begins the song (Deut 32:1–4) as follows:

“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak;
 And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.
 Let my teaching drop as the rain,
 my speech distill as the dew,
 as raindrops on the tender herb,
 and as showers on the grass.
 For I proclaim the name of the LORD:
 Ascribe greatness to our God.
 He is the Rock, His work is perfect;
 for all His ways are justice,
 A God of truth and without injustice;
 Righteous and upright is He”

הָאָזְנוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאִדְבְּרָה
 וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי־פִי:
 יֵעָרֵף כַּמָּטָר לִקְחֵי
 תִּגְלַל כַּטֶּל אִמְרֵתִי
 כַּשֵּׁעִירִים עַל־יְדֵי־שָׂא
 וְכַרְבִּיבִים עַל־יַעֲשׂוּב
 כִּי יִשֶׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא
 הִבּוּ גִדְל לְאֵלֵהֶינּוּ:
 הַצִּיּוֹר תִּמְיָם פָּעֵלוּ :
 כִּי כָל־דַּרְכָּיו מִשְׁפָּט
 אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאִין עֲוֹל
 צַדִּיק וְיָשָׁר הוּא:

G.E. Wright divides this song into several units—a call to the witnesses to give ear to the proceedings (Deut 32:1), introductory statement of the case by Divine Judge and Prosecutor or by his earthly official (vv. 4–6), recital of the benevolent acts of the Suzerain (vv.7–14), the indictment (vv. 15–18) and the sentence (vv. 19–29).²⁴³ Christensen taking a different tack, begins with the recounting of the blessing and faithfulness of God in past (vv. 1–14), the

²⁴² Wright, “The Lawsuit of God,” 40–41.

²⁴³ Ibid., 53–53.

provocation of God by the sin of Israel (vv. 15–29), the punishment of God and His salvation (vv. 30–43) and the final charge of Moses to all Israel (vv. 44–47).²⁴⁴ On the overall outlook of the poem, Fokkelman remarks on its extreme complexity.²⁴⁵ Weitzman defines vv. 8–14 as a thanksgiving hymn with gratefulness and praise of refugees to a nurturing deity, before it turns into bitter accusation against Israel (vv. 15–19).²⁴⁶ Nevertheless, division into topics is not rigid since in the first unit, for instance, we still have allusions to the unruly character of Israel (vv. 5–6). Wright observes, “Just as verses 7–14 expand the benevolence of God in verse 4, so verses 15–18 now expand the basic charge made against Israel in verse 5, with verse 18 also echoing verse 6.”²⁴⁷ Skehan analyzes the poem into three big units (vv. 1–14, 15–29, 30–43) with each unit subdivided.²⁴⁸ Thus, thematically the sections of the poem are fluid. The last part of the chapter reflects God’s instruction to Moses to observe the Land, without having the privilege of entering it (vv. 48–52).

The cohortative with which Moses begins וְאָדַבְרָה (and let me speak) is often used at the beginning of a poem (Isa 5:1). This indicates a treaty-like admonition (if you violate our covenant, then expect consequences) as he speaks to all the assembly of Israel (31:30). The teaching and speech are likened to rain, falling on grass, which might suggest blessings, but heaven and earth are witnesses to stand against Israel (32:1–4; cf. 4:26). The contrast between

²⁴⁴ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, WBC 6B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 788–824.

²⁴⁵ Jan P. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible at the Interface of Hermeneutics and Structural Analysis*, *Studia Semitica Neerlandica* 37, 47 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1998), 58–61. The poem is made up of 227 words of Moses and 228 words of God.

²⁴⁶ Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative*, 83–84.

²⁴⁷ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 300.

²⁴⁸ Patrick W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly. Monograph Series 1 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1971), 157–60.

the gentle characterization of his speech and the more formal character of the invocation of heaven and earth, lend the discourse a somewhat caustic tenor.

Moses goes on to extol God and immediately moves to how the people of Israel have corrupted themselves and are consequently not God’s people. Craigie notes the sharp contrast between the perfection of God (v. 4) and the imperfection of His people (v. 5).²⁴⁹ In like manner, Tigay remarks on the contrast between God who is “true and upright” (v. 4), and Israel who is ‘perverse and crooked’ וּפְתִילֵתָל (v. 5).²⁵⁰ It is suggested that the interrogative particle הֲ לִיהוּהָ (v. 6) has to do with the deplorable way Israel is dealing with God and it stands as a separated word to “heighten the shock expressed by the rhetorical question”.²⁵¹ Despite calling Israel initially as not the children of God, and unwise people, Moses refers to God as their Father who made and established Israel (vv. 5–7). It is important to note that in the Hebrew, Moses uses the singular pronoun, even though addressing Israel as a people הוּא עֲשָׂה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל (vv. 6–7). Moses wavers in the use of singular and plural suffix (vv.16ff.) For instance, in v. 38b, Moses addresses the same audience with the plural: וַיִּקְוּמוּ וַיַּעֲזְרוּכֶם יְהִי עֲלֵיכֶם סִתְרָה, Let those gods arise and help you; Let them provide you with shelter!

O’Connor translates v. 6c and 6d as

Is he not your parent who created you?
Is he not your maker who shaped you?

הֲלוֹא־הוּא אָבִיךָ קִנֵּךְ
הוּא עֲשָׂה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

²⁴⁹ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 378.

²⁵⁰ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1996), 301.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 301–2. Text-critical issues are evident in this text. Multiple manuscripts have הֲלִיהוּהָ or הֲלִיהוּהָ some manuscripts with only הֲ without ל.

After Moses refers to God as their Father, he switches immediately to refer to the biological father, and elders (vv. 6–7). Although Israel denies its ultimate “father,” it should learn of God’s role in their lives from their more accessible fathers. Thus, Israel is to make inquiries from the biological father about the faithfulness of God. The theme of God’s faithfulness is developed through a historical review of recent events that are both positive (vv. 7–14) and negative (vv. 15–18).²⁵²

Moses then reviews how God chose Israel for Himself as His inheritance (vv. 7–10). God is involved with all of humanity at large in a universal providential way of understanding Him in relation to the nations (v. 8), as well as in a particular way with Israel with regards to an elective-redemptive relationship (v. 9).²⁵³ There are text-critical issues in vv. 8–9 that will be addressed only glancingly here. For example, in v. 8 לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “according to the number of children of Israel,” modifies the first phrase, “He sets boundaries of the peoples.” This makes no sense. Instead, we read “according to the number of sons of gods,” לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים, Rofé observes that this phrase is found in the Qumran and Septuagint versions.²⁵⁴ The LXX has *κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ* for לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.²⁵⁵ Rabinowitz notes the cognate verb *sāphar*, to count” or “to tally”. The noun, also refers to counting.²⁵⁶

²⁵² Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 371.

²⁵³ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 300.

²⁵⁴ Rofé, *Deuteronomy: Issues and Interpretation*, 8–9.

²⁵⁵ BHS, 345.

²⁵⁶ Rabinowitz, *A Witness Forever*, 37–38.

God grants a privilege that He gives to no other nation by taking Israel for Himself.²⁵⁷ The election of Israel is in “primeval times,” when in a “mythical setting” God chooses Israel to be in affiliation to Him.²⁵⁸ Judah is affirmed as God’s inheritance in the Holy Land in later years (Zech 2:12). Moses relates how God finds Israel in the desert and describes the election process with the image of an eagle and its young. The young eagle is safe with the mother eagle and no predators are able to attack it. Metaphorically, Israel is chosen and kept safe as the apple of God’s eye and as a young eagle under its mother’s care (vv. 10–11). Craigie draws out the meaning of the image:

The eagle taught its young to fly by throwing one out of the nest, and then swooping down and allowing the young bird to alight on its mother’s wings. The poetry illustrates vividly God’s dealing with his people, casting them from security to the fierce wilderness, but remaining beneath them to give them strength for the fearful experience, and gradually teaching them to ‘fly’ on their own.²⁵⁹

The image of the bird (in the masculine) caring for its young reinforces the metaphor of YHWH as Israel’s progenitor and parent. Because YHWH has been so devoted a parent, it is all the more distressing to find Israel behaving like a rebellious child. The use of the verbs *yalad* and *holel* (צוֹר יִלְדֶה תִּשִׂי וְתִשְׁבֵּחַ אֶל מְהֻלְלָהּ:) in v. 18 may have been chosen to suggest the image of a mother.²⁶⁰ However, *yalad* in the Qal is sometimes used of a father begetting a child (Gen 4:18; 10:8; Prov 23:22), and *holel* is also masculine. *Yalad* is also used metaphorically in Scripture (Ps 2:7; 7:14[15]). So grammatically, and contextually, God is called Israel’s father—He fathered

²⁵⁷ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 303.

²⁵⁸ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 371.

²⁵⁹ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 381.

²⁶⁰ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 307.

Israel. Israel is prospering but deserts its creator and God. The indictment of Israel (vv. 15–18) “casts in pithy poetic form the fundamental sins that earlier chapters of Deuteronomy warned against in familiar rhetorical prose.”²⁶¹

Though the song is a lawsuit in form, with the central content as an indictment of Israel, the purpose is didactic (v. 2).²⁶² Here Yahweh or His representative is depicted as Suzerain leading a covenant-renewal ceremony and recites His benevolent act to Israel, the vassal.²⁶³ Further, Moses vividly describes how God takes care of Israel in many different ways (vv. 12–13). Thus, he sums up the faithfulness of God through divine election, providence, and the gift of the bountiful land.²⁶⁴ Moses focuses at this point on blessings of the LORD. He enumerates several of God’s provisions including honey and oil from the rock, curds from cattle, milk of the flock, fat of lambs, rams, goats, wheat, wine (vv. 13–14).

The subject is again changed to an indictment of Israel for their disloyalty (vv. 15–18)²⁶⁵ with a change of the name of Israel to Jeshurun, as he enumerates the sins of Israel (vv. 15–18). Jeshurun is a poetic title of Israel and points allusively to יִשְׂרָאֵל (*yisra’el*), but it is derived from יָשָׁר (*yashar*) ‘upright.’²⁶⁶ Jeshurun is also used in 33:5, 26 but with a more positive

²⁶¹ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 300.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 298.

²⁶³ Wright “The Lawsuit of God,” 49.

²⁶⁴ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 371.

²⁶⁵ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 805–8.

²⁶⁶ Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 361. See also Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 306

connotation to Israel.²⁶⁷ Israel is Yeshurun, upright, which is the ideal, but the reality is sometimes different. However, God uses the name as He affirms His love and choice of Israel. Craigie observes that it is a ‘pet-name’ that serves to emphasize the ingratitude of Israel²⁶⁸ as they provoke God to jealousy with their idolatry (v. 16). Moses, in his last words, addresses Israel with a name that has never been used for Jacob with negative undertone. The use of Yeshurun by Moses in Deuteronomy 32 is ironic since the whole poem is an indictment.

The indignation of God because of the sin of Israel and punishment He has decided to inflict on them in the future are spelt out (vv. 19–42). However, God is careful not to wipe out the memory of Israel, so as not to allow the adversaries of Israel to boast of afflicting Israel by their own power (vv. 26–27). God limits the punishment of Israel to save it from total destruction because of His concern that the enemy He sends will take credit.²⁶⁹ God is concerned with His reputation. Earlier in the relationship between God and Israel, Moses draws God’s attention to the taunt of the enemies in the event that He wipes out Israel as He threatens to do (Num 14:26; Deut 9:25–29). In order not to give His enemies *schadenfreude* (joy for the misfortune of Israel), God relents in His decision. God feels rejected as a parent and decides to reject His perverse offspring. “The pain turns to bitter irony in the sarcastic wordplay of verse 21; ‘They have made me jealous by a *no-god*...; I will make them jealous by a *no-people*...’ There is anger in verses 19f. but also pain. The God who sees (v. 19) cannot bear to see and so hides God’s face (v.

²⁶⁷ In an address to Jacob, God says He made and formed Israel from the womb and will help him as He calls him Yeshurun and affirms that He has chosen him (Isa 44:2).

²⁶⁸ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 382.

²⁶⁹ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 309.

20).”²⁷⁰ Nelson observes that though God abandoned the plan of total destruction (vv. 26, 36) His indictment still stands because of Israel’s apostasy.²⁷¹

That which is bound to happen to Israel is divinely ordained (Deut 32:26–27):

I would have said: I will cleave-them-in-pieces,
I will make their memory cease from mortals,
Except that I feared the vexation from the enemy,

אֲמַרְתִּי אֶפְאַיֶּהֶם
אֲשַׁבֵּי־תָהּ מֵאֲנוּשׁ זְכָרָם:
לִּי לִפְעֵם אוֹיֵב אֲגֹר

Lest their foes misconstrue: deny
Lest they say: our hand is raised-high
not YHWH wrought all this!²⁷²

פֶּן־יִגְבְּרוּ צָרֵימֹו
פֶּן־יֹאמְרוּ יַדֵּינוּ רְוָה
וְלֹא יְהוָה פָּעַל כָּל־זֹאת

“Life, health and victory are a result of God’s blessing” and so are “death, disease, and defeat...equally a part of His dealing with His people.”²⁷³ The actions of the enemies of Israel will be permitted by God. Thus, it is made clear that the enemies of the people of God could be instrumental in the execution of God’s judgment.²⁷⁴ Christensen suggests that the corruption of Israel is described in the metaphor of a vineyard that yields ‘grapes of poison’—characterizing their iniquity as one that surpasses that of Sodom and Gomorrah.²⁷⁵ However, this metaphor is an allusion to Israel’s enemies and not the sins of Israel.

But the rock of our enemies is not like our Rock,
and our enemies themselves judge.
Their vine grows from the vine of Sodom,
from the vineyards of Gomorrah.
Their grapes are poison,
and their clusters are bitter (Deut. 32:31–32).

כִּי לֹא כְצוּרֵנוּ צוּרָם
וְאֵיבֵינוּ פְּלִילִים
כִּי־מִגֶּפֶן סֹדֶם גִּפְנָם
וּמִשְׂדֵּמֶת עֲמֹרָה
עֲנַבֵּימֹו עֲנַבֵּי־רוּשׁ
אֲשַׁכֵּלֶת מְרֵרֶת לָמוֹ:

²⁷⁰ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 301.

²⁷¹ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 376–77.

²⁷² Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 1004.

²⁷³ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 388–89.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 386.

²⁷⁵ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 820.

Moses refers to ‘their rock’ not being like the Rock of Israel— ‘our Rock’ (v. 31). The ability and character of those in which Israel puts its trust is referred to metaphorically as those whose vine produces bitter clusters of grape and poisonous wine (vv. 32–33). The victory of Israel’s enemies is God’s doing and not a matter of moral superiority because the enemies are as corrupt as Sodom and Gomorrah.²⁷⁶

God will have compassion on Israel even though He judges them. When He sees how powerless they become, when they are completely helpless (vv. 35–36), God reaches out to Israel with a grace that is suffused with pity. God sees the utter destitution of His people (v. 36), rebukes them and reminds them of the futility of idols (v. 37).²⁷⁷ Von Rad asserts that the synonymous parallelism of ‘vindicate’ and ‘have compassion’ in v. 36 has to do with the covenantal act of God, where God delivers them, but also punishes them for their idolatry.²⁷⁸

God is unequivocal about His sovereignty in declaring that He is without equal in holding life and death in His hands (v. 39). Whether God is dealing with Israel or the enemies of Israel, He has power over them all. Moses portrays God raising His hand in an oath to take vengeance on the enemies of Israel that He uses as an instrument of judgment on Israel (vv. 40–42). God allows affliction of His people but also punishes those who afflict them (Gen 15:13–14). It is also consistent with the Later Prophets, where the nations God uses to judge Israel, also face their own judgment (e.g., Isa 10:5–19, 24–27; 47; Jer 25:12–14; 50–51).²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 302.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 303.

²⁷⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM Press, 1966), 199.

²⁷⁹ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 303.

There is a change of the discourse again in verse 43 as Moses brings this unit almost to an end. The nations are summoned to join the people of God in rejoicing because of the vindication of God. It is paradoxical to call on the nations to rejoice since the victory of Israel means their defeat.²⁸⁰ Christensen observes that the typical translation, ‘Praise his people, O you nations,’ is in tension with the context and not justified in light of the textual evidence of DSS and LXX.²⁸¹ Another important text-critical issue concerns the translation of וְיִכָּפֵר אֶדְמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ. JPS translates the phrase as “wipe away his people’s tears,” and Fox has it as “effecting-atonement for the soil of his people!” However, Fox notes the difficulty in translating the Hebrew.²⁸² Despite the text-critical issues, some scholars maintain the impeccability of the text.²⁸³ The text-critical issues do not change the interpretation of the thrust of the poem in this research.²⁸⁴

The narrator informs us that Moses speaks this song in the presence of Joshua, his assistant, to the people of Israel (v. 44). This is very significant as Moses prepares to hand the leadership over to Joshua, his successor, who should be aware of what is ahead. The conclusion of Moses’ last words in this section sums up to a very large extent that which God requires of Israel and His promise to them if they obey His instructions. The chapter ends with a prose framework (vv.44–46a, 48–52) unlike the beginning. These are Moses’ last words in this unit:

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 304.

²⁸¹ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 820.

²⁸² Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 1007.

²⁸³ Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible*, 62. Regarding Deuteronomy 32, he claims “The text itself is extremely sound, there is not a single word to be deleted or inserted. The consonant text is nearly impeccable; I myself see only three instances where minor surgery might be necessary, no more than revocalising a syllable.” However, the DSS fragments for instance, agree to some extent with the LXX, which is εὐφράνθητε ἔθνη μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐνισχυσάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ. This includes an addition of καὶ ἐνισχυσάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ.

²⁸⁴ For more on text-critical issues in Deut 32:43, see *BHS*, 348.

Set your hearts
on all the words
which I call as witness against you today,
which you shall command your children
to be careful to observe
all the words of this law.
For it is not a futile thing for you,
because it is your life,
and by this word you shall prolong your days
in the land
which you cross over
the Jordan to possess (32:46b–47).

שְׁיָמוּ לְבַבְכֶם
לְכָל־הַדְּבָרִים
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְעִיד בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם
אֲשֶׁר תִּצְוֶם אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם
לְשָׁמֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת
אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת:
כִּי לֹא־דָבָר רֵק הוּא מִכֶּם
כִּי־הוּא חַיֵּיכֶם
וּבְדִבְרֵי הַזֶּה תִּאָּרְכוּ יָמִים
עַל־הָאָדָמָה
אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים
אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:

Christensen suggests that the use of “all these words” in v. 45 refers to all the book of Deuteronomy as a whole.²⁸⁵ However, the next verse alludes to what Moses is saying that very day אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְעִיד בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם as well as the law as a whole: אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת. Thus, “the words” in 46a could be either the words of the Song or the words of the law (46b), as Craigie notes.²⁸⁶ Sonnet writes “the incriminating power of the Song is (still) its *raison d’être*, as God made clear in the revelation in the Tent of Meeting (31:19).”²⁸⁷ Thus, “all these words” in v. 45, are references to the laws—which almost close Moses’ extremely long series of discourses, which comprise almost all of Deuteronomy. Moses reminds Israel of the need to set their hearts on all the words of God and to command their children to observe the law, which he describes as not futile but the very life of Israel (30:20; 32:46–47). Prolonged life and the people’s prosperity in the Promised Land are dependent on their obedience to all that God has commanded them and their children to do; thus, they have a conditional promise. Adherence to the laws means a long and good life, and noncompliance has adverse consequences for Israel. The instruction of the

²⁸⁵ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 823.

²⁸⁶ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 390.

²⁸⁷ Jean-Pierre Sonnet, *The Book within the Book: Writing in Deuteronomy*, BI 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 178–79.

next generation is an important theme that is found throughout Deuteronomy (4:9; 6:7; 11:19; 31:13).²⁸⁸ Moses speaks the Law (31:1), completes writing the words of the Law (24), concludes speaking all the words of the Song to all the people of Israel (32:44–45), writes it and teaches them the poem the same day (31:22).

The last words of God to Moses are not what Moses wanted to hear. God instructs Moses to go up Mount Nebo to have a look at the Promised Land from a distance and then die (32:48–52; 34:4). The information we have in 32:48–52 and 34:1–5 is that God instructs Moses, and he obeys without uttering a word (34:1–7). Moses quietly obeys the instruction of God. The narrator inserts between 32:48–52 and 34:1–5 with the very last words of Moses to Israel, his blessings, in chapter 33. This blessing is discussed under a different rubric. The last two discourses of Moses—one a cautionary prophecy (Deuteronomy 32), the other a blessing (Deuteronomy 33), are paramount and play significant roles in the lives of the Israelites in later years. Moses speaks of the greatness of God as a refuge for Israel and how good He has been to Israel. Moses is then instructed to ascend the mountain (32:48–52). He does not go up immediately; only after he blesses Israel. However, the irony of this part of Moses' last words is that they ricochet back at him (32:48–52). By the device of the reported word of God and on account of its precise fulfillment against Moses, God decides that Moses should die in Moab without entering Canaan as punishment for his sin in the wilderness of Zin.²⁸⁹ He must relinquish the reward of prolonged life in the Land.

²⁸⁸ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 823.

²⁸⁹ Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (New York: Seabury, 1980), 71. Moses leads Israel to defeat the enemies but is deprived of entering the land he leads Israel to possess because he sinned against God (Num 20:12; Deut 32:51–52) just as those he originally brought out of Egypt, could not enter the Promised Land.

The last words of Moses in this unit are an indictment in the form of a poem and a song, which foretells the future of Israel and the defeat of enemies in the Land. The Song is a mixture of forms—wisdom, prophetic sermon, meditation on history.²⁹⁰ Moses' last words (vv. 44–50) are fulfilled when God causes Israel to go into exile and Judah a century and half later.

The category of last words that foretells the future is substantial. All these last words foresee and foretell Israel's future (Gen 48:21–22; 49:1–32; 50:24–26; Deut 32:1–47). The gist is the exodus of Israel from Egypt to settle in the Promised Land. God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob about giving them and their descendants the land of Canaan is the focus of these last words. All the last words are foretold in Egypt except that which Moses foretells in the wilderness.

Jacob's last words to Joseph (Gen 48:21–22), are very much like those of Joseph to his brothers (Gen 50:24–26).—There will come a time when God intervenes and take them completely, as a nation, out of Egypt to the Promised Land. The ethical will of Jacob to his sons (Gen 49:1–32) is his final address to them regarding their future in Canaan. Moses' address is also to the children of Israel (Deut 32:1–47), although Moses does not call each individual's name out, in this part of his last words, as Jacob does. Similarly, Joseph's last words are directed to all the children of Israel. Moses' last words in this category are an indictment unlike all the others, which are mostly blessings, except for Jacob's last words, where he relates to each of his sons, some favorably and some unfavorably. Moses' indicts the entire people, sparing none of them. Generally, it can be concluded that these last words are fulfilled,²⁹¹ during the exodus of

²⁹⁰ Wright, "The Lawsuit of God," 41.

²⁹¹ See more on the fulfillment of these last words under the implementation of last words in Part III, pages 238 ff.

Israel from Egypt, and when they settle in the individual portions of the Promised Land allotted to them.

3. Blessing and Prayer

A. Moses to Israelites and God (Deut 33:1–29)

B. David to God in Prayer (1 Chron 29:10–20)

A. Moses to Israelites and God (Deut 33:1–29)

The author of this text presents us with a preamble explaining what the passage is about: וְנֹאֵת הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַךְ מֹשֶׁה אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ “Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death.” However, we can infer from the words of Moses in chapter 31, where Moses laments the end of his leadership (31:1–2), that what is presented there as Moses’ last words to the Israelites are not actually his last words. Nevertheless, these are Moses’ last blessings to Israel, and they are presented by the narrator as Moses’ final last words, in what turns out to be a series of last words.

Moses made a series of last-word discourses towards the end of his life as did Jacob and David—two of the other most storied personalities in biblical narrative. It can be surmised that several addresses are presented as last words when they are not necessarily the actual last words. Towards the end of his life, Moses calls heaven and earth as witnesses against Israel saying that he has set before them life and death, blessing and curse, and encourages them to choose life so that both they and their descendants will live (30:19). In this unit, we explore the blessing and prayer of Moses, which point to the conquest of the Promised Land where there will be abundance, security and gallantry (33:1–29).²⁹²

²⁹² Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 386.

Cyrus the Persian, like Moses, is informed that his time to die is near; “Cyrus, prepare thyself, for thou art now going to the gods!” He calls his sons, his friends and the magistrates of Persia and addresses them just as Moses summons the Israelites and addresses them. Cyrus says: “My children, and all of you, my friends, who are present, the termination of my life is now at hand, as I certainly know from many indications. It behooves you, when I am dead, to speak and act with reference to me, in every way.”²⁹³

Deut 33:1–5 and 26–29 serve as the final introduction and conclusion, respectively, of the very last words of Moses to the children of Israel. The beginning of the poem (vv. 1–5) and the end (vv. 26–29) make up the outline of the blessing (vv. 6–25), which “reflects a rare tranquility and sustained optimism” that is in sharp contrast with the preceding chapters (Deuteronomy 31–32).²⁹⁴ On the other hand, Childs observes that chapters 32 and 33 were inserted here and notes that both were independent for a long time before their present status in the book of Deuteronomy.²⁹⁵ Von Rad makes the same point but notes that Moses, who is regarded as a man of God, a prophet, in context contemplates his imminent death and utters predictions with reference to the future of each tribe.²⁹⁶ Rendtorff, too, regards Deuteronomy 33 as secondary, seeing them as a collection of tribal sayings that were once independent.²⁹⁷ Similarly, Nelson observes that the blessings were originally an independent hymn inserted

²⁹³ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. Walter Miller (London: Heinemann, 1914): 265–77.

²⁹⁴ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 829–61.

²⁹⁵ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 220–21.

²⁹⁶ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 202–8.

²⁹⁷ Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*. (London: SCM Press, 1985), 154–55.

between the framing verses (vv. 2–5 and 26–29).²⁹⁸ However, in their present context, the blessings comprise the third discourse in a series of Moses' last words.²⁹⁹

Apart from v. 1 of the preamble, where the author informs us of what to expect, 33:2–5 also form an introductory part of the main blessings where Moses introduces the poetic form even before the main blessings. Parts of the structure and content of the blessing of Moses here resemble some parts of Jacob's last words to his sons (Gen 49:1–27). His words carry the authority of God even though he is denied entry into the Promised Land.³⁰⁰ The blessing of Moses in this chapter, like the Song in the preceding chapter, is poetic. Mount Zion is heir to the legacy of Mount Sinai, where Moses received the laws presented in Exodus. Zion is the place of God's continuing availability.³⁰¹ Mounts Sinai, Seir, and Paran, are all mentioned in v. 2 as the sites in the South from which the deity sets out: "Yahweh is a storm/warrior god with many of the features seen in Aramean Hadad and Ugaritic Ba'lu (Hebrew Ba'al)." ³⁰² Four times the preposition מ is used in v. 2. Ahituv suggests reading מַרְבֵּת קָדֵשׁ as מִמְרִיבֵת קָדֵשׁ, which is another southern locale. He notes that Deut 33:2–5 describes the Mount Sinai theophany, while the theophany in the Song of Deborah glorifies God's deliverance of Israel.³⁰³ Levenson attributes broad meaning to Mount Sinai as YHWH's home, and suggests that to mention Sinai implies a

²⁹⁸ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 386–87.

²⁹⁹ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21*, 836.

³⁰⁰ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 390–91.

³⁰¹ Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985), 187–88.

³⁰² Theodore J. Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God: Ancient Israelite Religion Through the Lens of Divinity* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 427–28.

³⁰³ Shmuel Ahituv, "Theophany in the Psalm of Habbakuk," in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Chaim Cohen et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 226–27.

connection to God and more than only a place of revelation. He refers to Ps 68:8–9, 16–19 where the psalmist describes YHWH as “the One of Sinai”.³⁰⁴ Deut 33:2 reads:

He says “The LORD came from Sinai
 And dawned from Seir upon us;
 He shone forth from Mount Paran;
 And he came with a multitude of holy ones
 From his right hand flashing lightning for them.”³⁰⁵

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה מְסִינֵי בָּא
 וַזָּרַח מִשְׁעִיר לְמוֹ
 הוֹפִיעַ מִקֵּר פָּאֲרָן
 וָאֵתָה מֵרַבְּבֹת קִדְּשׁ
 מִיְמִינֹ (אֲשֶׁדֶת) [אֶשׁ] [דָּת] לְמוֹ:

Weinfeld links Deut 33:2 to where God leaves His holy place to battle on Israel’s behalf where Israel lives untroubled and secured (v. 28).³⁰⁶

The uncertainty of the meaning of the introduction is reflected in the translations. For example, verse 3, אַף חָבַב עַמִּים כָּל־קִדְּשָׁיו בְּיָדְךָ וְהֵם תָּכֵן לְרַגְלֶךָ יֵשָׂא מִדְּבַר־תִּיךָ, has been translated as follows by different versions.

Yea, He loveth the peoples, all His holy ones—they are in Thy hand; and they sit down at Thy feet, receiving of Thy words (JPS).

Lover, indeed, of the people, their hallowed are all in Your hand. They followed in Your steps, Accepting Your pronouncements (Tanakh).

Indeed, O favorite among peoples, all his holy ones were in your charge; they marched at your heels, accepted direction from you (NRSV).

Indeed, lover of the peoples, all the holy ones are at your side; They follow at your heels, carry out your decisions (NAB)

Though he has affection-for the peoples,
 and his holy-ones (are) in your hand,
 they place themselves at your feet
 bearing your words.³⁰⁷

אַף חָבַב עַמִּים
 כָּל־קִדְּשָׁיו בְּיָדְךָ
 וְהֵם תָּכֵן לְרַגְלֶךָ
 יֵשָׂא מִדְּבַר־תִּיךָ

³⁰⁴ Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 19–23.

³⁰⁵ The meaning of this phrase is uncertain in Hebrew. This can mean myriads of holy ones with flaming fire at his right hand or from the south, from his mountain slopes (NLT, NIV). Fox translates it as “at his right-hand, a fiery stream for them,” *The Five Books of Moses*, 1008.

³⁰⁶ Moshe Weinfeld, "The Day of the LORD: Aspirations for the Kingdom of God in the Bible and Jewish Liturgy," in *Studies in Bible*, 1986, ed. Sara Japhet, Scripta Hierosolymitana 31 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), 360.

It is suggested that the meaning of this verse cannot be determined because the text may have been damaged due to the inconsistency in grammar and verbs.³⁰⁸ The present study will adhere to the more literal renderings as much possible.

In Moses' blessing and prayer, he acknowledges his human limitation as his days come to an end and sees the need for God to help Israel even more than before, as he leaves them. "Intercessory prayer requests God to work in and through humans and creation to accomplish what humans alone cannot do."³⁰⁹ The blessing has generated scholarly debate. Moses' blessing to Israel is directed not toward the people of Israel but toward YHWH. He describes the deity from where he is making the request before indicating the blessing.

Moses begins with the blessing of Reuben the firstborn of Jacob and Leah. His request for Reuben is: וַיְהִי רְאוּבֵן וְאֶל־יָמָת וַיְהִי מְתִיּוֹ מְסָפֵר. There is uncertainty over whether this is a wish, "Let Reuben live, and not die, but let his men be few" or a description, "though his numbers are small." The scholarly debate has to do with the real meaning of the phrase מְתִיּוֹ מְסָפֵר. The LXX has *καὶ ἔστω πολὺς ἐν ἀριθμῶ*, "and let him be many in number."³¹⁰ O'Connor adopts the LXX interpretation and accordingly translates וַיְהִי מְתִיּוֹ מְסָפֵר as "may his men be beyond counting."³¹¹ Christensen compares the traditional meaning of the phrase, which is 'few in number' (Gen 34:30; Deut 4:27; Jer 44:28; Ps 105:12) in this text to Ps 40:6 (Eng.5) but

³⁰⁷ Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 1008.

³⁰⁸ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 320.

³⁰⁹ Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy, and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 160.

³¹⁰ See further information on the phrase מְתִיּוֹ מְסָפֵר in Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 848.

³¹¹ O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 210.

translates it as “let him be many in number,” which does not conform to the attested meaning of few.³¹² However, this phrase can be interpreted in more than one way—“though his men be few” or as Craigie has it “but let him be few in number.” He notes that by the end of the eleventh century B.C.E. very little is heard of Reuben.³¹³ In like manner, Nelson suggests that the blessing of Moses for Reuben takes a form of wish that reflects his early reduction in population and endangered future.³¹⁴ However, Tigay claims that the tribe of Reuben is not remarkably small in censuses (Numbers 1 and 26) and that, although its firstborn status is lost, it continued as a tribe after the Judges.³¹⁵ Generally, Moses did not curse any of the tribes and the phrase could mean ‘he must not die’ although his numbers (men) will be small.

Moses does not continue his blessing according to the order of birth. He begins with Reuben, moves on to Judah, the fourth born, and then to Levi, the third born. Simeon, the second born, is absorbed into Judah, and therefore not mentioned at all in this final blessing and prayer of Moses (vv. 6–25).

Moses’ blessing for Judah anticipates a time of war for the tribe and he prays for God’s assistance.³¹⁶

And this to Yehuda, he said:
Hearken, O YHWH, to the voice of Yehuda,
to his kinspeople bring him.
his hands’-strength great for him.
A help against his foes may you be!³¹⁷

וְנָאֵת לַיהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר
שְׁמַע יְהוָה קוֹל יְהוּדָה
וְאַל-עֲמוּ תְבִיאֵנּוּ
יָדָיו רַב לּוֹ
וְעֲזַר מִצָּרָיו תִּהְיֶה:

³¹² Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 848.

³¹³ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 394.

³¹⁴ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 389.

³¹⁵ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 322–23.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 323.

³¹⁷ Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 1009

Unlike Jacob's last words to Judah, which are lengthy, the last words of Moses to Judah are short, although equally favorable. Moses' last words to Judah are an intercessory prayer asking God to hear Judah's voice. The prayer includes not only God hearing Judah but also supporting him in battle giving him the upper hand against his enemies.

Moses' blessing to Levi is very long and distinct from all others. This major departure from Genesis 49 shows that the interest of this poem is to promote the tribe of Levi (Moses' tribe). The last words to Levi are longer than those for every brother except for Joseph. However, unlike Moses' blessing on Joseph, which is directly on Joseph as Moses' blessing to the rest of the tribes, Moses' blessing on Levi is more work related. The blessing to Levi is related to Israel as a whole. A major part of the blessing has to do with the role Levi plays for all Israel, while the last part is aimed at the enemies of Levi.

To Levi he said:
 Your Tummim, and your Urim for your loyal man,
 whom you tested at Massa/Testing,
 you quarreled with him by the waters of Meriva/Quarreling.³¹⁸
 who said of his father and mother, 'I regard them not'
 he disowned his brothers
 and ignored his children.
 For they observed your word
 and kept your covenant.
 They shall teach Jacob your rules
 and Israel your law;
 they shall put incense before you
 and whole burnt offerings on your altar
 Bless, O YHWH, his wherewithal,
 and the work of his hands, accept -with-favor;
 smash the lions of those rising up against him,
 those hating him, from rising up!³¹⁹ (vv. 8-11)

וּלְלֵוִי אָמַר
 תְּמִיִּם וְאוּרִים לְאִישׁ חֲסִידֶךָ
 אֲשֶׁר נִסִּיתוֹ בְּמִסָּה
 תְּרִיבָהוּ עַל־מַי מְרִיבָה:
 הָאָמַר לְאָבִיו וּלְאִמּוֹ לֹא רָאִיתִיו
 וְאֶת־אֶחָיו לֹא הִכִּיר
 וְאֶת־בָּנָיו (בְּנָיו) לֹא יָדַע
 כִּי שָׁמְרוּ אֶמְרֹתֶיךָ
 וּבְרִיתֶיךָ יִנְצְרוּ:
 יוֹרֵנוּ מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ לִיַּעֲקֹב
 וְתוֹרֹתֶיךָ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל
 יִשְׂמוּ קְטוֹרֶה בְּאַפֶּיךָ
 וְכִלְיֵי עֹל־מִזְבְּחֶךָ
 בְּרַךְ הַיְהוָה חֵילוֹ:
 וּפְעַל יָדָיו תִּרְצֶה
 מִחַץ מְתַנְּגִים קָמְיוֹ
 וּמִשְׂנָאָיו מִד־יְקוּמוּן:

³¹⁸ Ibid., 1009.

³¹⁹ Ibid. Several text-critical issues are evident in this verse. See *BHS*, 350.

Moses' prayer for Levi has to do with Levi serving from a privileged position as Israel's priest, and Moses asks God to protect and prosper them.³²⁰ He first relates to the official responsibility of Levi as the one who is set apart to handle the Thummim and Urim. Urim and Thummim are normally written with Urim first (Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8; Ezra 2:65; Neh 7:65). They are one of the means by which the divine will is ascertained.³²¹ The Urim and Thummim seem to have binary traits, especially when a yes or no answer is expected. It could be a positive or negative answer to a question posed, or no answer at all.³²²

Moses then recounts some history and in particular, the rebellion and contention of Israel as a nation at the waters of Meribah (Exod 17:6–7). Moses addresses Levi's fidelity to God (vv. 8–9), and Levi's action during the Golden Calf incident (Exod 32:25–29), which is laudable. Moses mainly asks God to reward Levi for his obedience with the opportunity of serving as priest and conveying God's teaching, as well as presiding at the altar of sacrifice.³²³ Levi is regarded in positive terms "for they observed your word and kept your covenant" (v.9b).

Moses again talks about the work-related role of Levi and offering incense and sacrifice at the altar (v. 10). O'Connor translates Deut 33:10b and 10c as follows:

"They put the smoke of a holocaust in your nostrils"
 "They put the smoke of a holocaust on your altar"³²⁴

יְשִׁימוּ קְטוֹרֶתָהּ בְּאַפֶּיךָ
 וְקָלִיל עֹל־מִזְבְּחֶיךָ

³²⁰ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 323.

³²¹ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 470–71.

³²² Wayne Horowitz and Victor A. Hurowitz, "Urim and Thummim in Light of a Psephomancy Ritual from Assur (LKA 137)," *JANES* 21 (1992): 95–96, 107–8.

³²³ Weiss, "Blessings of the Tribes," 1276. In the same vein, Craigie, among others, interprets the reference in the most sensible way: that the incident Moses is referring to in this text is the execution of God's judgment on their own family, neighbors and companions (Exod 32:27). For more, see Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 396.

³²⁴ O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 211.

Thus, O'Connor reads *qetora* and *kalil* as the breakup of a stereotyped phrase as Melamed calls it—in his analysis, *qetorat kalil*, smoke/incense of a completely burned offering is the full phrase. He refers to קטורה as ‘smoke of a holocaust’ which is usually translated as incense. As indicated by Melamed, Hebrew Bible poets sometimes break up “compound linguistic stereotypes and distributing their component elements between the first and second members of the verse....” He affirms that they are better understood when the two parallel sentences formed, are the rewriting of a prose sentence.³²⁵ Avishur demonstrates that many phrases are broken up in forming a parallelism in Akkadian, Aramaic, Hebrew, and Ugaritic texts. The affinity between cola is expressed not only in word pairs but also in parallels.³²⁶ On the other hand, Fox translates it as

Putting smoking-incense in your nostrils
And complete-offerings on your slaughter-site.³²⁷

יְשִׁימוּ קְטוֹרֶה בְּאַפֶּיךָ
וּכְלִיל עֲלֵי־מִזְבְּחֶךָ

Levi is expected to be burning incense and the smoke going up to YHWH as a sweet-smelling sacrifice in His nostrils from the altar, as understood by Fox and many others. Moses’ prayer turns from blessing to curse as he requests that God strike the loins of Levi’s adversaries and prevent those who hate Levi from ever being able to rise again, מְחַץ מְתַנְּיִם קָמְיוֹ וּמְשַׁנְּאוֹ מוֹרֵי, מְחַץ מְתַנְּיִם קָמְיוֹ וּמְשַׁנְּאוֹ מוֹרֵי. Several text-critical issues are identified in v. 11.³²⁸ An example is the *mem* in the construct chain מְתַנְּיִם קָמְיוֹ that should have dropped. The function of a *mem* at the end of a word is not well

³²⁵ Ezra Z. Melamed, "Break- up of Stereotype Phrases as an Artistic Device in Biblical Poetry," in *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 8, ed. Chaim Rabin (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 115.

³²⁶ Yitzhak Avishur, *Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs in Biblical and Ancient Semitic Literatures*, Alter Orient und Altes Testament 210 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1984), 64–67.

³²⁷ Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 1009.

³²⁸ For more on text-critical issues, see *BHS*, 350

known. Ordinarily a masculine plural noun in construct drops the *mem* of the plural. However, Emerton concludes that enclitic *mem* was used in the Hebrew Bible especially in the early Hebrew poetry. The argument is based on an addition of *mem* at the end of some words in Ugaritic, especially nouns in the construct state, which are found in Mari names, and also used in Amarna and Epigraphic South Arabian.³²⁹ Therefore, it is conceivable to have enclitic *mem* in early Hebrew text. Tigay explains that Moses' appeal to God to defend Levi is because unlike other tribes, the Levites who are a clerical tribe are defenseless against military attacks.³³⁰

However, Christensen interprets this last part of Moses' last words to Levi to "the story of Levi and Simeon and the violence perpetrated against the men of Shechem (v. 11; cf. Gen 34:25–31)." In order to support this rendering, Christensen takes בָּרַךְ in v. 11 in its euphemistic sense of 'curse'.³³¹ This view cannot be justified in this context. The text is a prayer asking God to bless Levi and to bless his substance and accept the work of his hands. Moses prays rather against the enemies of Levi, asking God to strike the enemies of Levi. It has nothing to do with Simeon. Simeon is mentioned together with his brother Levi in the last words of Jacob, their father, in what is more of a curse than a blessing (Gen 49:5–7), but not in Moses' blessing to Levi.

The last part of Moses' blessing to Levi is:

Bless, O Lord, his substance,
and accept the work of his hands;
crush the loins of his adversaries,
of those who hate him, that they rise not again.

בָּרַךְ יְהוָה חֵילוֹ
וּפְעַל יָדָיו תִּרְצֶה
מֵחֵץ מְתָנִים קָמְיוֹ
וּמִשְׁנֹאֵיו מוֹדֵיקוֹמוֹן

³²⁹ J. A. Emerton "Are there Examples of Enclitic Mem?" in *Studies on the Language and Literature of the Bible: Selected Works of J.A. Emerton*, ed. J. A. Emerton, Graham Davies, and R. P. Gordon, SupVT 165 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 117–18.

³³⁰ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 325.

³³¹ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 847.

The first part of this verse is a prayer of blessing for Levi. The conjunctive *waw* ‘and’ on וּפְעַל makes the second phrase parallel to the first part of the phrase.

Bless his substance, O LORD,
And accept the work of his hands.

בְּרַךְ יְהוָה חֵילוֹ
וּפְעַל יָדָיו תִּרְצֶה

The wish תִּרְצֶה³³² is a prayer for blessing that parallels בְּרַךְ, which therefore cannot be anything but a blessing. The main work of Levi is intercessory between Israel, and God and it is very important that this is accepted before God.

Benjamin who is the last child of Jacob is the next Moses blesses. His blessings come before his elder brother, Joseph. Like Jacob’s last words to Benjamin, Moses’ are short. Nonetheless, they are favorable words of God’s perpetually securing Benjamin.

Of Benjamin he said,
The beloved of the LORD
dwells in safety.
The High God surrounds him all day long,
and dwells between his shoulders.

לְבִנְיָמִן אָמַר
יְדִיד יְהוָה
יִשְׁכֵּן לְבֵטַח עָלָיו
חִפָּף עָלָיו כָּל־הַיּוֹם
וּבֵין כְּתֵפָיו שָׁכַן:

Several text-critical issues are evident in this verse, and the position of Benjamin in the text is not very clear. The question is whether Benjamin is dwelling on the shoulders of God or God sitting on the shoulders of Benjamin. In the figures below, the Egyptian King Khafre on the left is seated comfortably with a hawk—his god, (fig. 377 falcon-Horus) perching on his shoulders protecting him. Similarly, King Pepi I, the second ruler of the sixth dynasty of ancient Egypt, is seen in his festival costume (fig. 379) with a bird on his shoulder, possibly depicting his god.³³³ Avishur submits a combination of the shadow of His wings and under the wings.³³⁴

³³² In cultic context, רָצָה *ratsah* means the acceptance with favor of an offering—or prayer. To be pleased, determined. See רָצָה in *BDB*, 953.

³³³ James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures: Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: University Press, 1969), xi, 133. Deities are represented in the form of animals and human form.

Avishur notes the scholarly debate on the blessing of Benjamin and suggests an Arabic influence. He quotes the Samaritan Hebrew in which the servant stands between the master's hand, which will agree with Benjamin standing on the shoulder of God. On the other hand, Avishur observes that the subject of the text is God, and the interpretation is supported by the illustration of the ancient Egyptian art.³³⁵



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Fig. 1, King Khafre on the left is seated with his god, perching on his shoulders protecting him.

Fig. 2, King Pepi I is in his festival costume with his god also on his shoulder.

Both are represented with their deity at their shoulders protecting them. See figure 1 and 2.

However, it is Benjamin who dwells securely on God, and it is God who surrounds Benjamin.

Therefore, it can be assumed that like the baby eagle on the shoulders of the mother eagle so is

³³⁴ אבישור, יצחק. ראשית ישראל באור הברכות לשבטים והשירה הקדומה עד לימי דוד. תל-אביב: פרסומי מרכז ארכיאולוגי, תשע"ח. 148 n20, (2017).

³³⁵ Yitzhak Avishur, *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ugaritic Languages and Literatures* (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center Publication, 2007), 22–24.

Benjamin on the shoulders of God and thus secured. Benjamin's blessing is a description of his secured position in his territory.³³⁶ See figure 3.

Fig. 3³³⁷



Fig. 3 Benjamin is positioned like a baby eagle between the shoulders of God.

Christensen sees a connection of Moses' blessing to Benjamin to the past events of Genesis 42–43, when Jacob presumes Joseph is dead, but Joseph in Egypt demands Benjamin is brought to him and Jacob hesitates in doing so.³³⁸ However, Craigie suggests Benjamin's military prowess is the emphasis here.³³⁹ Alternatively, Tigay claims parts of the blessing of Benjamin may be based on his name, which means 'son of my right-hand,' a sign of favor or

³³⁶ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 390.

³³⁷ The image is from the internet. <https://www.bing.com/images/blob?bcid=RKtc.i4PG1wDBbr-KiRRneOswyyp.....-g>.

³³⁸ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 850.

³³⁹ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 397.

protection, quoting Ps 110:1 to back his stand.³⁴⁰ In addition, the south of Benjamin is the southernmost Joseph tribe. Scholars speculate on the meaning of Moses’ blessing on Benjamin with divergent meanings. However, what is obvious is the security God gives Benjamin, which comes with having subdued or intimidated surrounding enemies. Similar to Moses’ blessing to Judah (v.7), an element of protection is evident in both with God helping them. However, unlike Moses’ blessing on Judah, which has Judah himself involved in the warfare and God strengthening him, Moses’ blessing on Benjamin depicts more passive position in safety with God’s help (v.12).

The last words of Moses to Joseph are the longest, but their reference is unclear (vv.13-17).

¹³And of Joseph he said,
 “Blessed by the LORD be his land,
 with the choicest gifts of heaven above,
 and of the deep that crouches beneath,
¹⁴ with the choicest fruits of the sun
 and the rich yield of the moons,
¹⁵ with the finest produce of the ancient mountains
 and the abundance of the primeval hills,
¹⁶ with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness
 and the favor of Him who dwells in the bush.
 may it come on the head of Joseph,
 on the pate of him who is prince among his brothers.
¹⁷A firstborn bull— he has majesty,
 and his horns are the horns of a wild ox; ³⁴¹
 with them he shall gore the peoples, all of them,
 to the ends of the earth;

וּלְיוֹסֵף אָמַר
 מְבֹרָכֶת יְהוָה אֶרְצוֹ
 מִמַּגְדַּ שְׁמַיִם מִטֹּל
 וּמִתְהוֹם רִבְצָת תַּחַת:
 וּמִמַּגְדַּ תְּבוֹאֹת שָׁמַשׁ
 וּמִמַּגְדַּ גְּרֵשׁ יְרֻחִים:
 וּמִרְאֵשׁ הַרְרֵי־קָדָם
 וּמִמַּגְדַּ גְּבְעוֹת עוֹלָם:
 וּמִמַּגְדַּ אֶרֶץ וּמִלְאָה
 יְרֻצוֹן שְׂכֵנֵי סָגָה
 תְּבוֹאֹתָהּ לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף
 וּלְקַדְקֹד נָגִיר אֶחָיו:
 בְּכוֹר שׁוֹרוֹ הַקָּדָר לוֹ
 וְקַרְנָי רֹאשׁ קַרְנָיו
 בָּהֶם עַמִּים יִנְגַח יַחְדָּו
 אֶפְסֵי־אֶרֶץ

³⁴⁰ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 326.

³⁴¹ Margit L. Stüring, *Horn-Motifs in the Hebrew Bible and Related Ancient Near Eastern Literature and Iconography* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1980), 105, 223–24, 230, 351, 369. This is a sign of military prowess used metaphorically as a symbol of exuberance of strength (105). Seleucid kings of later years are depicted with horns. Alexander the Great, for instance, is depicted with ram’s horns, as a wild ruler (223–24). At Ugarit Ras Shamra, wearing a helmet with horns is an emblem of the gods, (230). Though the horn conveys a figure of brutal strength of goring ox, it also expresses “the inner strength that a right attitude of mind brings” (369).

they are the ten thousands of Ephraim,
and they are the thousands of Manasseh.

וְהֵם רִבְבוֹת אֶפְרַיִם
וְהֵם אֲלָפֵי מְנַשֶּׁה:

In the last words of Moses to Joseph, he uses מִמְּגֵד five times, which *HALOT* translates as the harvest of fruits, precious, or noble, choice things for food,³⁴² and Fox renders as excellency³⁴³ all five times. Significantly, Moses blesses Joseph to be fruitful in every area, with all elements of heaven and earth and God favoring Joseph. Moses expresses his great desire for the well-being and blessing on Joseph.

It is noteworthy that Moses uses several of the same words Jacob uses in his last words to Joseph. It can be surmised that from historical perspective, ancient poets drew on the same corpus of lines and motifs. Literarily, Moses is alluding to, and quotes from, Jacob-Israel's blessing of Joseph, but expands upon it. Craigie affirms the resemblance of the words of Jacob's blessing to Joseph to that of Moses with several similarities of the blessings (Gen 49:22–26).³⁴⁴ Nelson likewise, sees a similarity between the two blessings of Joseph as being close to the counterpart in Gen 49:22–26 expressing that the theme of fertility in vv. 13–16 overlaps with Gen 49:25–26, while that of political position in v. 17 corresponding with Gen 49:22–24 with the designation of Joseph as 'prince' (v. 16) appearing in Gen 49:25–26.³⁴⁵ For example, Moses says of Joseph, לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף וּלְקַדְקֹד גְּנִיר אֶחָיו (v. 16) using the exact phraseology Jacob applied to Joseph לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף וּלְקַדְקֹד גְּנִיר אֶחָיו (Gen 49:26).

³⁴² *HALOT*, "מגד," 543.

³⁴³ Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 1010.

³⁴⁴ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 398.

³⁴⁵ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 390. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 213, compares Deut 33:16d with Gen 49:26e and sees same blessings from Jacob to Joseph as Moses to Joseph.

Scholars differ in the translation of נָזִיר. Some have it as “prince and others foremost”³⁴⁶ though it could be translated as “separated”. Tigay suggests that *nazir*, which normally means ‘nazirite’, is unsuitable here. The translation ‘elect’ assumes that the underlying root *n-z-r* means ‘separate’. Nazirite can also mean single out but here *nazir* means ‘prince,’ literally, ‘the crowned one,’ and could be one who wears the *nēzer*, ‘diadem’.³⁴⁷ However, the form is passive participle, as in the attested noun *nāzīr*. That is, someone who has vowed a *neder*— ‘vow’ to sacred service. For Joseph to be the *nazir* of the brothers is like Israel being the priest among nations (Exodus 19).

The blessing of Joseph emphasizes the productivity of its territory and prominence.³⁴⁸ Generally, Moses desires the best of everything for Joseph and points to the source of natural wealth³⁴⁹—the Deity, whom he names as the One who dwells in the bush (Deut 33:16) recounting an epithet of YHWH, from His famous encounter with Moses (Exodus 3–4). Moses like Jacob puts Ephraim before Manasseh. He ascribes ten thousands to Ephraim, but only thousands to Manasseh (v. 17). The last words of Moses to Joseph are a description of blessings that Moses desires for Joseph and his abilities to defeat the enemies.

Moses combines his last words to Zebulun and Issachar as Jacob had combined his last words to Simeon and Levi. Nevertheless, the last words of Moses to Zebulun and Issachar are blessings, and though combined, Moses still has a distinct message for each. In this distinction Moses’ blessings are both to each as well as combined. By contrast, Jacob’s last

³⁴⁶ Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 405. See also Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*,³⁹⁷, as well as ESV, NLT.

³⁴⁷ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 328–29.

³⁴⁸ Weiss, “Blessing of the Tribes,” in *The Torah*, ed. Eskenazi and Weiss, 1277.

³⁴⁹ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 398.

words to Simeon and Levi together seem to evoke an infamous act that they perpetrated together (Gen 49:5–7). However, Moses’ last words to the two are blessings and not a curse.

Moses begins with a blessing on each individual (Deut 33:18) before blessing them together.

And of Zebulun he said,
 Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out,
 and Issachar, in your tents
 They shall call peoples to their mountain;
 there they offer right sacrifices;
 for they draw from the abundance of the seas
 and the hidden treasures of the sand.

וּלְזְבוּלֹן אָמַר
 שִׂמְחָה זְבוּלֹן בְּצֵאתָהּ
 וְיִשָּׂשכָר בְּאֶהְלֵיהֶם:
 עַמִּים הֲרִי־קִרְאוּ
 לָשֵׁם יִזְבְּחוּ זִבְחֵי־צֶדֶק
 כִּי יִשְׁפַע מֵימֵם יַיִן וְיִקְוּ
 וּשְׁפוּגֵי טָמוּנֵי הָאֵדָם

Moses mentions Zebulun who appears to be the seafaring maritime trader before landlocked Issachar laboring in its own territory. Zebulun comes before Issachar although in the order of birth, Issachar comes first (Gen 30:18–20; 49:13–14). Tigay suggests “the two are generally listed in order of birth, but here the geographical order of the blessings dictates that Zebulun comes first.”³⁵⁰ However, an important separation is seen in Deut 27:12–13. Issachar is one of those who pronounce blessings on Mount Gerizim, while Zebulun is one of those who pronounce curses on Mount Ebal, according to the instruction of Moses.

Moses blesses Zebulun and Issachar to have enjoyment whether going out or at home and שִׂמְחָה ‘rejoice’ applies to both. Generally, a couplet permits a short, compressed dialectic between an idea and its restatement, which represents the intellectual process of wisdom.³⁵¹ Both tribes are expected to invite others to their mountain as they offer the proper, correct, sacrifices. The idea is that these tribes will make sufficient offerings to the Deity in appreciation of their

³⁵⁰ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 329; cf. Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 391.

³⁵¹ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB 18B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 493.

economic successes. According to Tigay, the reference to sacrifices on the mountain suggests a sanctuary that could be on Mount Tabor at the meeting place of the territories of Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali—or on Mount Carmel.³⁵² Lundbom suggests the text emphasizes the coast as the source of abundance for Zebulun and Issachar.³⁵³

The last part of Moses' blessing to Zebulun and Issachar is:

for they draw from the abundance of the seas
and the hidden treasures of the sand.

כִּי נִשְׁפַּע מִיַּם יַיִן וְיָקוּר
וּשְׁפוּגֵי טָמוּנֵי הַחֹל

Later in Second Isaiah, the author alludes to treasures of darkness (Isa 45:3) that is assumed to be alluding to the blessing of Moses in several words used in Deutero-Isaiah.³⁵⁴ Jacob's last words to Zebulun are also linked to the sea (Gen 49:13). Both last words are poetic and imprecise; thus difficult to fully comprehend. It can be inferred that they are meant to be general and not wedded to a specific event or situation.

Moses moves on from the blessing of Zebulun and Issachar to Gad. The words are positive; nonetheless, it is hard to completely comprehend what exactly Moses means.

And of Gad he said,
Blessed be he who enlarges Gad!
He crouches like a lion;
He tears off arm and scalp.
He chose the best of the land for himself,
for there a commander's portion was reserved;
and he came with the heads of the people,
He executed the justice of the LORD,
and his judgments for Israel (vv. 20–21).

וּלְגַד אָמַר
בְּרִוּהַ מְרַחֵב גֹּד
כְּלִבְיָא שֹׁכֵן
וְטָרַף זְרוּעַ אֲרִי־קַדְקָד:
בִּיָּרָא רֵאשִׁית לֹו:
כִּי־נָשָׂם חֲלָקֶת מִחֶלֶק סָפוּן
וַיִּתְּאֵר אֲשֵׁי עֵם
צְדָקֹת יְהוָה עָשָׂה
וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו עִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל:

³⁵² Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 330.

³⁵³ Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 934.

³⁵⁴ Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66*, *Contraversions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 134–40.

Moses begins his blessing on Gad as “Blessed be he who enlarges Gad!” Although it is not clear whether Moses is referring to God or any individual who blesses Gad, it is suggested that Moses might be referring to Omri’s expansion and fortification of the land of Israel when he conquered Moab, humbled, and occupied the land of Medeba.³⁵⁵ However, it is most likely that Moses is referring to God because military expansion is made successful by the support of the Deity. Christensen suggests ‘he who enlarges Gad’ refers to the increase in population rather than territorial expansion and that Gad’s blessing is the only blessing of God that is a result of helping the tribe.³⁵⁶ This interpretation is very improbable because רָחַב refers to space.³⁵⁷

Gad crouching like a lion is a metaphor for a king or warrior, as in the Balaam oracles (Numbers 23–24). The lion metaphor is used in Moses’ blessings for both Gad and Dan. Gad is expected to play an important victorious role in the battle for God with victory.³⁵⁸ In v. 20, he is likened to a lion and in v. 21 he would receive the lion’s share. Gad is to live like a lion that fears no other (Deut 33:20). Similar to Jacob’s last words to Judah (Gen 49:9), Moses likened Gad to a lion (v. 20)—in both cases in a lying position. Moses’ blessings to Gad (Deut 33:20-21) have some words that are common to Jacob’s last words to Judah (Gen 49:9-10) Some of the similar words are מְטַרְרֵי, וּכְלָבִיא, וּמְחַתְקֵק. Related expressions of fortitude and prowess as a warrior are

³⁵⁵ J. Andrew Dearman, *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*, Archaeology and Biblical Studies 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 159.

³⁵⁶ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 853.

³⁵⁷ See, e.g. *BDB*, 931, and *HALOT*, 883.

³⁵⁸ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 400–401.

used by Jacob to Judah and by Balaam’s oracle to all Israel (Gen 49:9; Num 23:24) with similar terminologies of resilience and capabilities.³⁵⁹

O’Connor translates כִּי־נִשְׁמַח חֶלְקָת as “he seeks the best for himself” and מִחֶלְקָת סָפֹן as “he pants after a share of a commander.”³⁶⁰ A text critical issue is identified in this text.³⁶¹ Thus the phrase כִּי־נִשְׁמַח חֶלְקָת מִחֶלְקָת סָפֹן should be translated as “for there a portion of a ruler was reserved.”³⁶² Moses likens Gad to a lion that tears off arm and scalp, meaning he decimates his adversary.

The allotment of Gad, Reuben and half tribe of Manasseh is made before crossing the Jordan, and it is possible Moses is referring to the land Gad chose for himself because it is a specific request that is granted (Num 32:1–33; Josh 13:12). Tigay notes that some parts of the blessing of Gad seem to refer to the request of the fertile Transjordan pastureland, but also sees a similarity of v. 21 to vv. 4–5.³⁶³ Moses’ last words to Gad represent it as a warring tribe that seizes and holds onto territory into which it has expanded. Gad fulfilled his responsibility in the military conquest of Canaan, by crossing the Jordan and helping the rest of the tribes (Josh 22:1–

³⁵⁹ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 331.

³⁶⁰ O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 215.

³⁶¹ BHS, 351. See Gary A. Rendsburg, “כִּי־נִשְׁמַח in Deuteronomy 33:21”, *HUCA* 81 (2010), 19–20, 38–40, for more on this issue. He elaborates on סָפֹן (a *hapax legomenon*), suggesting an original *śin* was replaced by a later scribe as a *samekh*, but the sound of סָפֹן *šāfūn* here, is like that of שָׁפֹן *sāfūn* (with a *śin*) in verse 19. This is with reference to the blessing of Zebulun and Issachar in v. 19, which has וְשָׁפֹן טְמוּנֵי הַדָּבָר ‘and hidden treasures of the sand’, but סָפֹן is used here as a regional dialect of ancient Hebrew in the sense of “esteemed, revered, honored.”

³⁶² Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 1011.

³⁶³ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 331.

4). Gad's blessing indicates he is to play a significant role in the battle, which results in the tribe deserving a *lion's share* of the conquest.³⁶⁴

Moses' last words to Dan are short, metaphorically reflecting on the might of Dan as a young lion that leaps from Bashan.

Moses says of Dan:

Dan is a lion's whelp;
He shall leap from Bashan.

וּלְדָן אֶמְרָהּ דָּן גִּיּוֹר אַרְיֵה
יִזְנֹק מִן־הַבָּשָׁן

Dan extends its control over the far north through attack from the Bashan which is on the northeast side of the Jordan Valley. Moses' blessing to Dan includes a little part of Jacob's last words to Judah (Gen 49:9a). Dan's blessing is a metaphoric aphorism; although his small size as a 'lion's cub' camouflages a surprising aggressiveness.³⁶⁵ Tigay posits that 'lion's whelp' does not mean something weaker than a lion, relating it to the same use for Judah in Gen 49:9.³⁶⁶ Similar to Judah (Gen 49:9), Dan is described as a lion's cub that leaps from Bashan (Deut 33:22) although the meanings of the verb יִזְנֹק and the location בָּשָׁן are debated.³⁶⁷ Moses refers to both Gad and Dan as lions (vv. 20, 22)—both fight to expand their territories. Moses' last words

³⁶⁴ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 400.

³⁶⁵ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 392.

³⁶⁶ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 332.

³⁶⁷ Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion?*, 78–79. Alternatively, O'Connor relates Bashan (*bšn*) to a cognate of Ugarit and Arabic *bṭn* meaning serpent or viper and translates this verse as "Dan is a lion cub. He springs away from the serpent." See O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 215, for more on this issue. However, the Hebrew cognate of *bṭn* is not בָּשָׁן but בָּתָן.

to Dan express an attack in which Dan pounces on the northern Galilee from a staging ground in the Bashan (Judg 18:1–31).³⁶⁸

Moses’s last words to Naphtali are brief but not as brief as those regarding Dan.

And of Naphtali he said,
O Naphtali, sated with favor,
and full of the blessing of the LORD,
possessing the sea and the south.³⁶⁹

וּלְנַפְתָּלִי אָמַר
נַפְתָּלִי שָׂבַע רִצּוֹן
וּמְלֵא בְרַכַּת יְהוָה
גַם וְדָרוֹם יִרְשָׁה:

Moses depicts Naphtali as enjoying an abundance of divine favor. He possesses the sea, which is the Kinneret and the territory to its south (Josh 21:32; 2 Kgs 15:29). So, Naphtali could take possession of the west of the sea as well.³⁷⁰ Naphtali’s lot would be a divine blessing in the Promised Land.³⁷¹ Moses’ blessing to Naphtali seems to relate to territorial expansion.

The last of the tribes to receive Moses’ blessing before his death is Asher. The blessings are that which anyone would desire although there are no clear historical references.

And of Asher he said,
Most blessed of sons be Asher;
let him be the favorite of his brothers,
and let him dip his foot in oil.
Your bars shall be iron and bronze,
and as your days, so shall your strength be.

וּלְאַשֶׁר אָמַר
בְּרוּךְ מִבְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר
יְהִי רִצּוֹן אֵתָיו
וְטָבַל בַּשֶּׁמֶן רַגְלוֹ:
בָּרְזֶל וּנְחָשֶׁת מִנְעֻלָּיו
וּכְגִמְיָו דְּבִיאָה:

³⁶⁸ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 401. Craigie, like O’Connor portrays Dan’s blessing as a metaphor that implies timidity of youthfulness, but with great strength in the future at a time when Dan grows to its full strength. He translates the blessings as “Dan, a lion’s whelp, shies away from the viper.”

³⁶⁹ The blessing of Naphtali has several text-critical issues. For example the last part has ימה instead of ים (v.23). Therefore, some scholars translate it as “the sea and the south” but other “the west and the south.” גַם וְדָרוֹם יִרְשָׁה could be a hendiadys, meaning “the sea to the south,” assuming that Naphtali expands itself southward from a point in the far North.

³⁷⁰ O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 216. Similarly, Craigie translates the last part of Naphtali’s blessing as “The west and the south he will inherit. See Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 401. He reads the text according to the rendering of LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate.

³⁷¹ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 401.

Craigie links the blessing of Asher to an exposition of his name which means ‘happy, blessed’. He suggests the tribe of Asher is the most satisfied among the tribes of Israel (Gen 30:13).³⁷² Nelson observes about vv. 24–24: “These verses comprise a wish for prosperity and security. Like Joseph (v. 16b, ‘prince among his brothers’), Asher’s situation is compared with that of other tribes. He is the most blessed of the sons and most popular of the brothers.”³⁷³ Asher is content to have fertile land and access to the coast, where it can engage in trade. Asher receives fertile land on the Mediterranean coast, north of the Carmel. Jacob’s blessing to Asher is that his nourishment is rich and produces royal dainties.³⁷⁴ Jacob’s blessing, like that of Moses, is favorable.

After comparing one tribe to the other, Moses concludes this iteration of his last words by comparing the entire people of Israel to other nations (vv. 26–28). These last words focus on how blessed Israel is among the nations.

There is none like the God of Jeshurun,
 who rides through the heavens to your help,
 through the skies in his majesty.
 The eternal God is your dwelling place
 [The sky is the dwelling of the primordial God]
 and underneath are the everlasting arms.
 And he thrust out the enemy before you
 and said, ‘Destroy.’
 So Israel lived in safety,
 Jacob lived in security,
 in a land of grain and wine,
 whose heavens drop down dew.

אין כאל ישורון
 רכב שמים בעזרו
 ובגאותו שתקים:
 מענה אלהי קדם
 ומתחת זרעו עולם
 ויגרוש מפניו אויב
 ויאמר השמד:
 וישכן ישראל בטח
 כדל עין יעקב
 אל-ארץ דגן ותירוש
 אף-שמי יערפו טל:

³⁷² Ibid., 401. Cf. Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 855.

³⁷³ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 392. The focus of Asher’s blessing is inspired by his name at birth ‘good fortune’ in Gen 30:13, See Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 333.

³⁷⁴ Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 232.

In turning to the people of Israel as a whole, Moses picks up the theme by which he introduced this discourse. He focuses again on Jeshurun, last mentioned in v. 5. The incomparability of Israel's God, and His protection as their refuge are described.³⁷⁵ Israel's army is not victorious because of military genius but because God fights for Jeshurun.³⁷⁶ A theophany of the LORD and His heavenly army beaming and shining forth in a conflict or battle between gods is evident.³⁷⁷ The very arm of God that protects Israel is active in war against Israel's enemies.³⁷⁸ According to Christensen, no adequate words can express the superiority of the God of Jeshurun and the blessing and privileges of his people. He takes up the battle and defeats the enemy of Israel, in order to secure Israel in "a fertile land, whose 'skies drip moisture' (v 28)."³⁷⁹

Moses' blessing and prayer are an act of acknowledging his human limitation as his days come to an end and he sees the need for God to help Israel even more than He has ever done, after he dies. "Intercessory prayer requests God to work in and through humans and creation to accomplish what humans alone cannot do."³⁸⁰ Weiss reads the text in sequence from a literary point of view. Accordingly, she attributes all the speeches of Moses to the same assembly of all the Israelites that is described in Deuteronomy 31—including "... men, women, and children, everyone from the leaders of the tribes to those who chop wood and draw water." The final words of Moses in Deuteronomy 33 are positive with assurance and praise unlike the

³⁷⁵ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 335.

³⁷⁶ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 403–4.

³⁷⁷ Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 75–77.

³⁷⁸ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 403.

³⁷⁹ Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 860–61.

³⁸⁰ Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses*, 161.

reproach in chapter 32. Here Moses is looking ahead to when the Israelites will live in prosperity and security.³⁸¹ Contrasting Deuteronomy 32, where indictment is the major theme and the anger of God is portrayed, Deuteronomy 33 is full of accolades and blessings of what Israel is to become, neutralizing the negative forecast about Israel’s future.

The very last words of Moses are about how Israel is fortunate to be in a privileged position with God. Earlier he had related the blessings of the tribes in the third person, attributing them to the Deity. Here Moses addresses Israel, expressing his own pleasure over Israel’s being blessed. Israel’s enemies are disadvantaged with Israel triumphing over them.

Happy are you, O Israel!
 Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD,
 the shield of your help,
 and the sword of your triumph!
 Your enemies shall come fawning to you,
 and you shall tread upon their backs.

אֲשֶׁר־יְיָ יִשְׂרָאֵל
 מִי כָמוֹךָ עַם נוֹשָׁע בְּיַהוָה
 מִגִּן עֲזָרְךָ
 וְאֶשֶׁר־תִּתֵּן לְךָ גְּאוֹן
 וַיִּכְתְּשׁוּ אֹיְבֹיֶיךָ לְךָ
 וְאַתָּה עַל־בְּמוֹתֵימָו תִּדְרֹךְ:

The enemies cringe before Israel as Israel marches on their backs.³⁸² “Placing one’s foot on the back of a defeated foe, a ceremonial gesture of triumph, is mentioned in the Bible and ancient Near Eastern literature and illustrated in ancient Near Eastern art.”³⁸³ The motif of storm gods whose power is associated with warfare is also manifest in Babylonian and Canaanite literature.³⁸⁴ The Baal Stela from Ugarit is an example of victory over the enemy with the storm-god standing victorious on the sea god; see Figure 4.

³⁸¹ Weiss, “Blessing of the Tribes,” 1273–82.

³⁸² O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 218.

³⁸³ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 335.

³⁸⁴ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 334.



Fig.4.³⁸⁵

Moses rejoices as he declares these last words about Israel and invokes a blessing for them before God separates them by death without giving anyone the privilege of seeing the event. In Moses' praise of Israel at the end, he blesses the Israelites, not necessarily addressing them (Deut 33:1). Moses expresses the incomparability of Israel as he had just expressed the incomparability of YHWH. Moses' last words are mostly fulfilled in the lives of the Israelites when they settle in Canaan. In the most obvious case, the very last words of Moses are played out many times in the life of Israel as a nation. Enemies always come against them but almost always, Israel comes out in triumph³⁸⁶ (Exodus 7–14; Numbers 22–24; Joshua 6–12; Judg 4:1–8:28; 1 Samuel 5–7; 11:17; 2 Samuel 10; 1 Kgs 20:1–22; 2 Kings 3; 6–7; 18:9–9:37).

³⁸⁵ Marguerite Yon, *The City of Ugarit at Tell Ras Shamra* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 134.

³⁸⁶ This run of "triumph" seems to end with the destruction of the northern kingdom and the destruction and partial exile of the southern kingdom. With the destruction of the North by Assyria, the tribal entities essentially come to an end.

Moses' last words in this unit are blessings as the narrator observes in his prelude (Deut 33:1). Moses' ends this series of last words discourses with blessings. The three different last words discourses examined are admonition (Deut 30:19–20; 31:20–22; 32:1–47), foretelling future events (Deut 32:1–47), and blessings and prayers for the Israelites (Deut 33:1–29). Moses speaks though with the voice of God and proclaims who God is in relation to Israel. He recounts some history, predicts the disaster that is ahead of Israel, as a result of their provoking God to jealousy. The psalmist also recounts this history (Psalm 105 and 106). However, God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, His love for them, and His concern for His name restrains Him from eradicating Israel as a nation. Accordingly, Moses' last words move from harsh warning to prediction of disaster to blessings in the end.

Similarly, Jacob made several addresses that could be considered as last words at different times (Gen 47:27–31; 48:8–21; 49:2–32), and David does the same (2 Sam 23:1–7; 1Kgs 2:1–9; 1 Chron 22:2–19, 28:1–21, 29:1–20). It can be surmised that although Moses is not going to be with the people of Israel, his blessing reflects his expectation that God will settle Israel securely in the Promised Land. These last words portray Moses's as one who understands his mission and remains firm in his faith.

B. David to God in Prayer (1 Chron 29:10–20)

The account of David's last words in 1 Chron 29:10–20 takes the form of a prayer, in contrast to the prophetic-type voice that David assumes in 2 Sam 23:1–7. It parallels his politically minded instructions to Solomon to secure his reign (1Kgs 2:1–9). In the prayer David exalts God and thanks Him (1 Chron 29:10–13). He then switches the pronouns to first person plural, interceding

for all Israel in his prayer, directly to God (vv. 13–16). David acknowledges the frailty of humanity and their dependence on the LORD for everything (vv. 14–16). David blends three major types of psalms—hymns (v. 12), thanksgiving (v. 13) and petition with some lament (14–20), in the form of in his prayer.³⁸⁷

David’s last words reflect the Chronicler’s theology and interest in the Temple cult. David is presented as a prayerful person, pious, and a leader who designs plans according to divine purposes, for the perpetuation of his dynasty.³⁸⁸ Kalimi observes that David’s prayer here is distinct in its style, and the content is without parallel in any other biblical book.³⁸⁹ The thoughts and emphases—building the temple and devotion to God—which are close to the heart of the Chronicler, are woven together in this prayer.³⁹⁰ David also speaks of the free will offering he and the people are giving to God with uprightness of heart (vv. 17). He prays for the whole nation (v. 18) and Solomon specifically (v. 19). David ends his prayers with an instruction to all Israel.

David acknowledges God as the “LORD of Abraham, Isaac and Israel,” their forefathers, with whom God established a covenant, which is lasting until David’s own time. His desire is that the commitment of next generation will be maintained perpetually and prays that God will help them attain such devotion (1 Chron 29:18).³⁹¹ Braun calls these last words of David “David’s blessing”. As Braun reminds us, this is the last in a series of four speeches that David

³⁸⁷ Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles.*, WBC 14 (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 282–83.

³⁸⁸ Simon J. De Vries, *1 and 2 Chronicles.*, FOTL 11 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 155.

³⁸⁹ Kalimi, *The Retelling of Chronicles in Jewish Tradition and Literature*, 179, 316–19. This text appears in selections of Jewish prayers in the post-biblical times.

³⁹⁰ Braun, *1 Chronicles.*, 286.

³⁹¹ Ralph W. Klein, *1 Chronicles*, 539.

makes—David’s first speech (22:2–19), David’s second speech (28:1–21), and David’s third speech (29:1–9).³⁹²

In the first speech, David speaks of the preparations he has made for the temple and recounts what God has told him to Solomon. David encourages him to work and commands the leaders of Israel to help Solomon build the temple. In his second speech, David assembles the people and repeats some of what he says in the first speech about the preparations to build and God’s choice of David and Solomon to build the temple. The speech also reflects on the need for devotion to God in order to prosper and the list of the preparations made—both human and material resources. David in the third speech again treats the preparations for the temple—the precious stones he has prepared in abundance together with much gold and silver. He calls out for those who are willing to help in building the house of God as a voluntary offering. According to the Chronicler all the speeches are made towards the end of David’s reign. These final last words are presented as David’s truly last words.

This last speech parallels David’s last words in Kings—giving instructions to Solomon. However, here David has already given his instructions to Solomon, and is now praying on Solomon’s behalf, for the success of his heir. David prays (1 Chron 29:19):

Grant to Solomon my son a whole heart	וְלִשְׁלֹמֹה בְּנִי תֵן לֵבָב אֶשְׁלֵם
that he may keep your commandments,	לְשִׁמּוֹר מִצְוֹתַיָּךְ
your laws and your statutes	עֲדוּתַיָּךְ וְחֻקֶּיךָ
and performing all,	וְלַעֲשׂוֹת הַכֹּל
and that he may build the palace for which I have made provision	וְלִבְנוֹת הַבַּיִתָּה אֲשֶׁר־הֵכֵנִי וְתִי:

The first part of David’s prayer is a supplication for Solomon to keep the covenantal laws. In this text as in David’s last words in 1Kgs 2:3, David’s desire is that Solomon keep the word of the LORD. However, the difference is that in this text David prays for God to help Solomon, but in

³⁹² Braun, *1 Chronicles.*, 281–82.

1Kings 2:3 he directly instructs Solomon to obey the law of Moses in order to prosper. In both instances of last words, the purpose David focuses on, is for Solomon to succeed and for God to fulfill His word to David. The plea is for Solomon to succeed, and the instruction is equally for his success. Solomon in the following years offers a long prayer after undertaking this project (1 Kgs 8:22–60), which is not only the passion of David, but also the satisfaction of God’s will. Solomon specifically refers to God’s promise to David. Part of Solomon’s prayer points to God’s promise, which is fulfilled (vv. 24–26).

David knows the consequences of disobeying God, but also believes that wholehearted devotion to God emanates from God Himself. The heart of the king as well as the steps he takes are in the hands of the LORD. God directs the heart and the conduct of humanity as He wishes (cf. Prov 16:1, 9, 33; 20:24; 21:1; Jer 10:23). Success in building the Temple depends on the fulfillment of three conditions that are interrelated—observing God’s commandments, steadfastness, and God’s assistance.³⁹³ Building the temple is central in David’s prayer, which reflects the theme and agenda of the Chronicler, who sees Jerusalem as the center of national life and the seat of the Davidic monarchy as well as the Temple’s site.³⁹⁴ David plans for the Temple and Solomon builds it. David has an understanding that God’s beneficence, which is God’s promise to him (2 Samuel 7), has enabled him and his people to prepare for the temple.

David’s final petition has to do with Solomon keeping of the law, in order that he be able to build the temple.³⁹⁵ The narrators of both Samuel and Chronicles have it that God denies David the privilege of building the temple. God does not consent to David’s appeal, even though

³⁹³ Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 399.

³⁹⁴ Isaac Kalimi, *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 21–22.

³⁹⁵ Braun, *I Chronicles.*, 286.

the prophet Nathan initially supported David’s idea (2 Sam 7:1–13; 1Chron 17:1–12). According to Dirksen, the main concern of the story of David and Solomon is that David’s duties as king and preparations for building the temple have come to an end, and that which is left is for David to pray for Solomon to build it.³⁹⁶

Earlier in 1 Chronicles 22 the narrator informs us of the great preparations David makes, in both human and material resources, for building the temple. The narrator sandwiches a form of David’s prayer of encouragement and instruction to Solomon to keep the Law of Moses (vv. 11–13) between two narrations. The first relates to the preparation done for the temple, recounting some history, including the foretelling of the birth of Solomon, who is to build the temple (v. 9), and encouraging all Israel (vv. 1–10, 14–19). The last words of David here thus echo parts of chapter 22. The prayer for Solomon, building the temple and address to all Israel are all features of chapter 22. Kingship and the kingdom are Yahweh’s and not that of the House of David—something that David affirms (29:11–12).³⁹⁷ While the first part of David’s last words is a prayer that has to do with building the Temple, the second part is to the nation as a whole. David tells the assembly to bless the LORD, and they do (1 Chron. 29:20).

David said to all the assembly,
Bless the LORD your God.

And all the assembly blessed the LORD, the God of their fathers,
and bowed down and prostrated themselves to the LORD and to the king

וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד לְכָל־הַקְּהָל
בְּרַכּוּ־נָא אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
וַיִּבְרְכוּ כָל־הַקְּהָל לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם
וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לַיהוָה וְלַמֶּלֶךְ׃

The ל prefix of לַיהוָה is an indicator of the direct object, which is in this case, YHWH.³⁹⁸ Thus, using the preposition *lamed* together with the verb ‘bless’ the narrator connects the blessing or

³⁹⁶ P. B. Dirksen, *1 Chronicles*, HCOT (Leuven; Peeters, 2005), 350.

³⁹⁷ William Riley, *King and Cultus in Chronicles: Worship and the Reinterpretation of History*, JSOTSup 160 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 74–75.

praise with the prostration that follows, which is also construed with the preposition *lamed*. Japhet indicates that “a completely parallel structure is found in the two parts of the verse, and thus ‘the LORD your God’ must be parallel to ‘the LORD, the God of your fathers.’”³⁹⁹ De Vries observes that we are dealing with a two day ritual blessing of the people worshipping the LORD, and offering animal sacrifice and drink offerings the next day.⁴⁰⁰ David refers to God as “their God”, which is to say those before him are assumed to acknowledge YHWH as their God.

David’s last words here, although framed as a prayer to God, end with this instruction to the assembly. “Bless the LORD your God” are the very last words of David here. The blessing takes place in response to David’s instruction.⁴⁰¹ The assembly obeys immediately and prostrates itself before the LORD and the king. However, Klein claims that the prostration of the people before the king is unexpected.⁴⁰² Although the king is not God, since God is not physically present, prostrating before the LORD will look more like prostrating before the king in whose presence they are standing. It does not mean they see the king as God but are simply bowing in reverence to the king. The king is here representing the Deity as well.

David’s prayer regarding Solomon is fulfilled at the initial stages of Solomon’s reign. Solomon reigns in peace, builds the first temple and seeks God for wisdom for his reign (1 Kings 3; 2 Chron 1:7–12). David’s last words, according to Chronicles, deal not in politics but in building a relationship with God. David’s last words involve the engagement of the people to

³⁹⁸ BDB 510 ḡ 4729/ 4730.

³⁹⁹ Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought*, 2nd rev. ed., Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1997), 16.

⁴⁰⁰ De Vries, *1 and 2 Chronicles.*, 223.

⁴⁰¹ Klein, *1 Chronicles*, 540.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

establish a relationship with God as he has done. The narrator seeks to confirm the efficacy of David's instruction. The fact that the people immediately obey David's last words suggests that they will continue to support his theological agenda.

4. Opportunity to Bless at Departure

Elijah to Elisha (2 Kgs 2:9–10)

Elijah to Elisha (2 Kgs 2:9–10)

The circumstances leading to Elijah's last words to Elisha are unlike any other event in the Bible. The content is also unlike that of the prophetic books with prophetic oracles beginning 'thus says the LORD'. Rather these are narratives about episodes in the lives of the prophets, which are highlighted in the book of Kings.⁴⁰³ Although we do not know much about the circumstances surrounding the last moments of Enoch, who like Elijah did not die but was taken by God (Gen 5:21–24), we know a good deal about Elijah's last moments. Elijah persistently discourages his protégé, Elisha, from following him at a time one might expect Elijah to want to have more time with Elisha.

The timing of Elijah's departure from the earth up to heaven is clear to both Elijah and Elisha. The scene begins with both walking together on a journey that they know has eternal significance. There are three scenes of dialogue between Elijah and Elisha, literary devices that build suspense.⁴⁰⁴ The narrator begins 2 Kings 2 by informing us that it is towards the end of Elijah's life on earth.

Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up
to heaven by a whirlwind,

וַיְהִי בְהֵעָלוֹת יְהוָה אֶת־אֵלֵיָּהוּ
בַּסַּעֲרָה הַשָּׁמַיִם

⁴⁰³ David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-Prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible*, Brown Judaic Studies 301 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 93.

⁴⁰⁴ Burke O. Long, 1 *Kings*, FOTL 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1984), 25.

Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal.

וַיֵּלֶךְ אֵלִיָּהוּ וְאֵלִישָׁע מִן־הַגִּלְגָּל:

Elijah and Elisha walk together but the singular is used. It is common in the Hebrew Bible when a dominant figure is leading and accompanied by a less important or common person to have a singular verb *וילך* used instead of *וילכו* (Gen 31:23; Exod 15:1; 2 Sam 20:10; Ruth 1:6, 7, 22).⁴⁰⁵ This farewell tour is very significant because this is the only time Elijah and Elisha are seen together, walking and talking, in Scripture. This is apart from a brief time when Elijah first meets Elisha by God's instruction and Elijah passes by Elisha and throws his mantle on him (1 Kgs 19:16–20). The focus is the Biblical rendition of Elijah's last words to Elisha and the significance of Elisha's persistence to follow Elijah even though he insistently dissuades Elisha from following him. Nonetheless, Elisha disregards Elijah and follows him until the end.

God specifically instructs Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor, so he is aware that when he is taken away, Elisha is to be a prophet like him, serving Israel (1 Kgs 19:15–17). Knowing that it is time to depart, the norm would have been for Elijah to guide Elisha on how to take over successfully (Gen 27:1–28:4; 47:27–31; 48:21–22; 49:1–32; 50:24–26; Deut 32:1–47; 33:1–29; 2 Sam 23:1–7; 1 Kgs 2:1–9). However, unlike Moses, who seeks God for the one to replace him to take care of Israel, and God elects Joshua to replace him (Num 27:15–23), Elijah is told by God to anoint Elisha to succeed him. But Elijah rather dissuades Elisha from following him until the end (1 Kgs 19:20; 2 Kgs 2:2–6). It would have been expected of Elijah to counsel him step by step on the way forward before he is removed from him, since they are aware of the timing of events ahead of them. The sons of the prophets, who are not known to be following Elijah, are also aware of the pending event (2 Kgs 2:1–5). However, for no explicit reason, Elijah

⁴⁰⁵ Moshe Garsiel, *From Earth to Heaven: A Literary Study of Elijah Stories in the Book of Kings* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2014), 163.

rather deters Elisha from following him. It is worth mentioning that, at their very first encounter, Elijah tells Elisha to ‘go back’ when Elisha requests to go and inform his parents of his new assignment before coming to follow him (1 Kgs 19:19–21).

The narrator leaves the reader in suspense for an unspecified period during which Elisha follows Elijah, without much information on what goes on between them—until Elijah is about to be taken away and they are seen together. It is obvious to Elisha that something dramatic is about to happen in his life and what God has called him to do. He has left his rich farming business with a farewell party to follow Elijah (1 Kgs 19:15–21). Although uncertain of what lies ahead, he knows his master is going to be removed from him. Further, his fears are aggravated by his prophetic colleagues, but he silences them all and does not allow them to magnify his fears (2 Kgs 2:3–7).

However, Garsiel claims the question the sons of the prophets ask Elisha—whether he knows God is taking away his master (vv.3, 5), is in solidarity with their comrade. The sons of the prophets are happy that God is at last taking Elijah away in order that Elisha can succeed him.⁴⁰⁶ According to Coote, the stories of Elijah and Elisha are incorporated into a cycle of written legends supporting Jehu’s uprising with grass roots support, since the prophets were champions of the lower classes.⁴⁰⁷ Although *הַיְדִיעָתָּ כִּי הַיּוֹם יְהוָה לֹקֵחַ אֶת-אֱלֹהֶיךָ מֵעַל רֹאשְׁךָ*, “do you know that today the LORD is taking your master from over your head” (2:2, 4, 6), literally could indicate that the young prophets are expressing elation and loyalty to Elisha, when Elisha returns alone, they offer to go and search for Elijah. Elisha does not initially give his assent, since he knows it will be fruitless; but they persist, and he permits the search without success (vv. 16–18).

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 165.

⁴⁰⁷ Robert B. Coote, *Elijah and Elisha in Socioliterary Perspective*, SBLSemSt (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 77.

The narrator begins the story of Elijah and Elisha by summing up that which is about to take place (2 Kgs 2:1, 11). A dramatic event caused by YHWH in Elijah's ascension opens the plot with a storm or whirlwind, סערה, a term generally associated with a theophany (Isa 40:24; 41:16; Jer 23:19; 25:32; 30:23; Ezek 1:4; Amos 1:14; Hab 3:14; Zech 7:14; Ps 107:25,29; 148:8; Job 38:1; 40:6), as the instrument of Elijah's ascent to heaven.⁴⁰⁸ At the onset of the departure tour of Elijah, on three different occasions, he unbelievably⁴⁰⁹ persuades Elisha to remain as they walk together from Gilgal towards Bethel, then from Bethel to Jericho, and from Jericho to Jordan (2 Kgs 2:1–9). A sense of firmness in Elisha is obvious here as he is not taking orders from his master Elijah. Elisha is not willing to go into sentimental mourning over his disappearance because he is certain of what he is about to do.⁴¹⁰ Cohn imagines a conflict between the prophets as both invoke the name of YHWH. Elijah commands Elisha to stay behind as he goes to Bethel by the LORD's directive and Elisha shows he can also invoke the name of the LORD.⁴¹¹ However, Garsiel sees Elijah's petition that Elisha stay behind as a considerate suggestion to spare Elisha the trouble of a long and exhausting journey.⁴¹² Similarly, Cohn questions if Elijah's aim is to spare Elisha the anguish of seeing him disappear, since Elisha decides to cleave to Elijah until the end.⁴¹³ Elisha turns to an oath formula all three times, הֲיָיִךְ אֲמַלְאֵזְבֵּךְ “as surely as the LORD lives and as you yourself live I will never leave

⁴⁰⁸ Robert L. Cohn, *2 Kings*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 11.

⁴⁰⁹ Elijah is relentless in coaxing Elisha not to follow him, even though he knows the importance of Elisha following him until the end.

⁴¹⁰ Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, "Elijah and Elisha," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*. ed. idem, James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 184–85.

⁴¹¹ Cohn, *2 Kings*, 11–12.

⁴¹² Garsiel, *From Earth to Heaven*, 168.

⁴¹³ Cohn, *2 Kings*, 12.

you” (2 Kgs. 2:2, 4, 6) objecting to Elijah’s instruction and indicating unequivocally that he is not going to obey his master in this instance. A desperate woman from Shunem, whose child died, employs the same words when refusing to leave Elisha until he follows her home (4:30). It can be surmised that this phrase is used in desperation when something serious is at stake. Elijah stops up urging Elisha not to follow him, and they cross the Jordan together.

This is what ensued in the last moments of Elijah and Elisha walking together after crossing the river.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha,
 Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you.
 And Elisha said,
 Please let there be two-thirds ⁴¹⁴ of your spirit on me.
 And he said, “You have asked a hard thing;
 yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you,
 it shall be so for you,
 but if you do not see me, it shall not be so.”
 And as they still went on and talked,
 behold, chariot of fire and horses of fire
 separated the two of them.
 And Elijah went up
 by a whirlwind into heaven

וַיְהִי כְּעָבְרָם וְאֵלֵיָּהוּ אָמַר אֶל-אֵלִישָׁע
 שְׂאֵל־מָה אֲעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ בְּטָרַם אֶלְקַח מֵעַמְּךָ
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלִישָׁע
 וַיְהִי-גַא פִּי-שְׁנַיִם בְּרוּחֶךָ אֵלַי
 וַיֹּאמֶר הַקְּשִׁית לְשֹׂאֵל
 אִם-תִּרְאֶה אֹתִי לְקַח מֵאֲתָךְ
 יְהִי-לְךָ כֹּן
 וְאִם-אִין לֹא יִהְיֶה
 וַיְהִי תְמָה הַלְּכִים הַלּוּךְ וַדְּבָר
 וַהֲגַה רָכֹב-אֵשׁ וְסוּסֵי אֵשׁ
 וַיִּפְרְדּוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵיהֶם
 וַיַּעַל אֵלֵיָּהוּ
 בְּסַעֲרַה הַשָּׁמַיִם:

Elijah and Elisha are separated after crossing the Jordan River (2:1–9). Elijah’s last words to Elisha before they are separated are in two parts. The first is an instruction for Elisha to ask what he desires that he, Elijah, will do for him before he departs from Elisha שְׂאֵל־מָה אֲעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ בְּטָרַם אֶלְקַח מֵעַמְּךָ. Elijah is aware that Elisha is to succeed him and feels obligated to reward him before he is taken away from his successor after exhibiting such a strong perseverance to follow him despite his dissuasion. A detailed account of a prophet succeeding another is unique to the

⁴¹⁴ See Zech 13:8 where פִּי-שְׁנַיִם is used and means two-thirds. Most translations render it as a double portion. See TNK, ESV, NKJV, JPS, NAS, NET (Deut 17:6; 21:17; 1 Sam 1:5).

narrative of Elisha taking over from Elijah.⁴¹⁵ Conferring prophetic authority by anointing is not attested anywhere else.⁴¹⁶ Although Moses is a prophet (Deut 18:18) and God instructs him to anoint Joshua to succeed him as the leader of Israel (Num 27:18–23), Joshua is nowhere said to be a prophet. There are some signs that Joshua succeeds Moses in his prophetic role—e.g., the encounter with the angel (Joshua 5). There is no specific record of any prophet asking his successor what he might do for him anywhere in the Bible.

Elisha's request is sandwiched between the first and second parts of Elijah's last words. Elisha's entreaty, וַיִּהְיֶינָא פִּי־שְׁנַיִם בְּרוּחֵהָ אֵלֵי, when literally translated, is a request for two-thirds of the spirit of Elijah. Gray suggests that Elisha desires to be recognized and prepared as the true heir of Elijah, according to the Hebrew law of inheritance of the eldest son (Deut 21:17).⁴¹⁷ Hobbs agrees with Gray that Elisha is seeking the status of rightful successor to the prophetic leader's role and that the reference to "two-thirds" of "the spirit of Elijah" alludes to Deut 21:17 with the motive of rightful succession.⁴¹⁸ Cogan and Tadmor likewise link the text to Deut 21:17 and suggest that Elisha's wish has to do with the patrimony he is to receive.⁴¹⁹ This view is also upheld by Shemesh asserting that metaphorically, Elisha is asking for the portion of the firstborn of Elijah but also links it up to two portions of Elijah's prophetic spirit.⁴²⁰ However, it is important to note that there is no specific physical inheritance in this text. Cogan and

⁴¹⁵ T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, WBC 13 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 27.

⁴¹⁶ John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, 2nd ed., OTL (London: SCM, 1970), 366.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 425.

⁴¹⁸ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 21.

⁴¹⁹ Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation*, AB 11 (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 32.

⁴²⁰ יעל שמש, *אבלות במקרא: דרכי התמודדות עם אבדן בספרות המקראית*, ספריית "היילל בן חיים", ספרי יסוד, מחקר והגות במדעי היהדות (תל אביב: הקיבוץ המאוחד, 2015), 26–125.

Tadmor explain ‘your spirit’ in this context as a transferable spirit that is enjoyed by those, like Moses, who are in a special relationship with YHWH.⁴²¹ Elisha left all his rich farming business to follow Elijah (1 Kgs 19:19–21) and does not seek any material inheritance.

Elisha is seeking the capacity to function as he takes over from his mentor, but Elijah tells Elisha that he has asked a hard thing. Gros Louis observe that Elisha’s request is not humble, although it is not in the context of pride.⁴²² Elisha seeks a spiritual endowment that will help improve his leadership and provide better rapport with the king and the people.⁴²³ Just as God appoints Joshua to succeed Moses, God appoints Elisha to succeed Elijah. Moses’ mentorship of Joshua shaped his career and enabled him to perform similar miracles. Joshua’s theophany of the commander of the LORD’s army (Josh 5:13–15) recalls Moses’ encounter in the burning bush (Exod 31–6). Just as Moses split the Sea of Reeds (Exod 14:21–22), Joshua splits the Jordan River (Josh 3:9–17). The image of Moses’ arms lifted until Amalek is defeated (Exod 17:12) is similar to that of Joshua stretching out his spear until Ai is taken (Josh 8:26), to mention but a few.⁴²⁴

The succession of Moses by Joshua, whose career is marked by several parallels to Moses, is comparable to that of Elijah and Elisha. However, Moses and Joshua had a developing relationship in contrast to that of Elijah and Elisha. Joshua accomplishes similar acts to those of

⁴²¹ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 32.

⁴²² Gros Louis, "Elijah and Elisha, 185.

⁴²³ Garsiel, *From Earth to Heaven*, 168.

⁴²⁴ Edward L. Greenstein, "Joshua," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 8. 118–19.

Moses' just as Elisha performs similar actions to those of Elijah.⁴²⁵ It is important to note the similarity in the meaning of the names of Joshua and Elisha, which is 'the LORD saves' and 'God saves' respectively,⁴²⁶ although Joshua can also mean "YHWH is Noble". Like Provan, Noth analyzes the name as "El saves" and notes that in the Samarian ostraca—North Israelite, in the 8th century—the name is written with a *yod*, meaning it was pronounced as 'ēl yāšā'.⁴²⁷

Alter observes that Elijah himself is not completely sure that Elisha deserves what he is requesting. It is dependent on God giving Elisha the opportunity to see the miraculous ascension of Elijah, which will serve as proof that Elisha is worthy.⁴²⁸ Although the power for acquiring Elijah's spirit is from God, Elijah asks what Elisha wants him to do for him after his constant persistence, which helps Elisha attain his desires. Elijah's perfectionist propensity leads him to respond skeptically, as he expresses doubt about Elisha being granted such a desire or achieving such a goal.⁴²⁹ Even though Elijah is skeptical, it is possible that when Elisha sees him being taken up to heaven, that will enhance his understanding of the prophet and the people. It will also deepen Elisha's epistemological understanding and thus enable him to achieve greater accomplishments in his didactic and spiritual work among the people of Israel.⁴³⁰ The conduct of Elisha is unlike a classic case in the narrative of a young prophet who obeys an older prophet by

⁴²⁵ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 27.

⁴²⁶ Iain W. Provan, *1 & 2 Kings*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997), 174.

⁴²⁷ Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1966), 36, 171.

⁴²⁸ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 736–37.

⁴²⁹ Garsiel, *From Earth to Heaven*, 168.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

following him rather than God's specific instructions to him. Such behavior leads to his death (1 Kgs 13:1–32).

Elisha is supposed to be Elijah's assistant, presumably for some time. The sons of the prophets refer to Elijah as 'your master' when they speak to Elisha (2 Kgs 2:3, 5). Elijah is not necessarily their master; else they would have said 'our master'. It is thus obvious that Elisha is the closest prophet to Elijah. No other prophet is directly linked to Elijah in this manner, although there is an unnamed servant that Elijah left in Beersheba when he fled from Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:1–3). Nevertheless, Elijah and Elisha did not have a mentor and disciple relationship and are not seen working together as master and servant from the time Elijah anoints Elisha until Elijah's last moments. Elijah comes to terms with the fact that nothing will deter Elisha from following him. When it is time to say goodbye, Elijah responds to Elisha's request by giving him the opportunity to be blessed at his departure. Elijah permits this blessing even though he strives to deny it to Elisha at the onset.

The second part of Elijah's last words assures Elisha about obtaining what he desires on condition of his continuous steadfastness until he sees Elijah taken from him; but if not, he will not have it אַם-תִּרְאֶה אֹתִי לְקַח מֵאִתְּךָ יְהִי-לְךָ כֹּן וְאִם-אֵין לֹא יִהְיֶה. Elisha's right to succession depends on witnessing the departure of Elijah.⁴³¹ The conditional assurance is received almost immediately after Elijah's last words are uttered. Although we are not aware of the length of time they walked together before they are separated, it is the next event that takes place. Sweeney suggests that the condition points to Elisha becoming a visionary prophet without

⁴³¹ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 21.

which he will not be able to become Elijah’s successor.⁴³² After Elijah’s speech comes the separation of the two as they walk together talking.

Behold, chariot of fire and horses of fire
separated the two of them
and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven

וַהֲגָה רֶכֶב־אֵשׁ וְסוּסֵי אֵשׁ
וַיִּפְרְדּוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵיהֶם
וַיַּעֲלֶה אֱלֹהִים וּבִסְעָרָה הַשָּׁמַיִם

The narrator omits what they continue to talk about after Elijah’s reported last words. Elisha looks on and sees Elijah being taken away. Elisha cries out “My father, my father! The chariot of Israel and its horsemen!” A similar cry is made by King Joash when he visits Elisha at the time Elisha is sick and close to death (2 Kgs 13:14). Elisha’s words during his last moments with Elijah are reiterated to him not only when the Shunammite woman’s son dies and, in her desperation, expects Elisha to follow her to revive her son (2 Kgs 4:30), but also in the words of King Joash. Elijah is “taken up” without explanation of what happens to him. Provan submits that hints of Elijah’s death are evident in vv. 9–10 and especially in v. 12 when Elisha tears his clothes; but he notes that לקח, which is used in vv. 3, 5, 9 and 10 is “language that guards the mystery at the heart of the event and does not allow us easy answers.”⁴³³ The text is silent on the death of Elijah just as it is on the death of Enoch, and this research does not explore that issue. The focus here is Elijah’s last words; any discussion of Elisha’s parting words is also omitted.

When Elisha sees his master being taken away, he cries out and sees him no more.

And Elisha kept watching and crying out,
"Father, Father! Chariot of Israel and its horseman!"
And he saw him no longer,
and he grasped his clothes
and tore them into two tears.

וַאֲלֵי־שָׁע רָאָה וְהוּא מֵצַעֵק
אָבִיו אָבִי רֶכֶב יִשְׂרָאֵל וַפָּרָשָׁיו
וְלֹא רָאָהוּ עוֹד
וַיִּחַזַק בְּבִגְדָיו
וַיִּקְרַעֵם לִשְׁנַיִם קָרְעִים:

⁴³² Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 273.

⁴³³ Provan, *I & 2 Kings*, 174.

Elisha's words make the atmosphere around Elijah's translation more mysterious.⁴³⁴ Elisha then takes hold of his own clothes and tears them. The tearing of one's own clothes is featured in many passages in the Bible; it generally signifies mourning (Gen 37:29, 34; Judg 11:35; 1 Kgs 21:27–29; 2 Kgs 5:7; 6:30; 19:1; 22:11; 2 Chron 34:19; Est 4:1; Isa 37:1). Shemesh notes the grief of Elisha in the tearing of his clothes when Elijah is taken from him.⁴³⁵ Elisha's tearing of his clothes, though, has a double purpose. He is not only mourning his master leaving him, but he also needs to remove his own clothes to be able to put on those of Elijah. Elisha then dons the mantle that had fallen off Elijah and succeeds Elijah as ordained by God. It is important to note that at the very first encounter of Elijah and Elisha, Elijah's cloak or mantle *תרת* is thrown on Elisha (1 Kgs 19:19) and that Elisha's ministry begins with the same mantle (1 Kgs 2:13). We are not told of any other mantle. Elisha is initiated with the mantle to be Elijah's personal servant (1 Kgs 19:19) and assumes office with the same mantle.⁴³⁶

Elisha witnesses the translation of Elijah and thereby fulfills the stipulation for his request to be fulfilled. Elisha's ability to perform miracles shows that he has in fact received his request of Elijah's divine charisma. Elijah is believed to have performed eight miracles and Elisha sixteen. The miracles Elijah performs are as follows:

1. Calling for drought (1 Kgs 17:1)
2. Multiplying the food of a widow (1 Kgs 17:14–16)
3. Bringing back to life the son of a widow (1 Kgs 17:17–24)
4. Summoning fire from heaven in a contest (1 Kgs 18:25–38)
5. Ends drought (1 Kgs 18:41–45)

⁴³⁴ Cohn, *2 Kings*, 14.

⁴³⁵ 126 שמש, אבלות במקרא.

⁴³⁶ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 34.

6. Calls for fire to destroy an army (2 Kgs 1:9–10)
7. Calls for fire to destroy a second group of an army of 51 (2 Kgs 1:9–12)
8. He parts the Jordan River (2 Kgs 2:8).⁴³⁷

These are the miracles Elisha performs

1. Parting the Jordan River (2:12–14)⁴³⁸
2. Purifies the spring at Jericho (2:19–22)
3. Invokes a curse on the boys at Bethel (2:23–24)⁴³⁹
4. Prediction of Israelite victory over Moabites who see water as blood (3:13–25)
5. Multiplies the widow’s oil (4:1–7)
6. Predicts a son for the Shunammite woman (4:11–17)
7. Brings back to life the son of the Shunammite (4:18–37)
8. Purifies harmful food (4:38–41)
9. Multiplies 20 loaves of bread for 100 prophets with some left over (4:42–44)
10. Heals Naaman (5:1–19)
11. Curses Gehazi with skin infection (5:1–25–27)
12. Recovers an axe head from the Jordan River (6:1–7)
13. Blinds Aramean soldiers and redirects them (6:8–23)
14. Predicts relief from famine caused by siege of Samaria by Syria (6:24–7:20)
15. Prophesies the death of Ben–Hadad and the rise of Hazael (8:7–19)
16. His bones after death are so powerful that they raise the dead (13:20–21).

⁴³⁷ James Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings*, ed. Henry Snyder Gehman. ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 354. Parting the Jordan for them to cross over is similar to the miracles of Moses at the Red Sea (Exod 14:21–22) and Joshua at the Jordan (Josh 3: 9–17), which is also how Elisha begins his succession (2 Kgs 2:12–14). Although unlike Moses stretching out his hand, and Elijah and Elisha operating using a mantle, Joshua instructs the priest carrying the ark of the LORD to step into the water.

⁴³⁸ Elisha starts his ministry where Elijah left off by parting the Jordan River, which is the last miracle of Elijah and the first of Elisha (2 Kgs 2:8–14).

⁴³⁹ Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 60. The boys are presumed to be comparing Elisha sarcastically to his master, Elijah, who is known to be hairy (2 Kgs 1:8) when they mock Elisha as being baldheaded.

When Elijah complains that he is the only prophet left, God draws his attention to the fact that He has seven thousand other prophets (1 Kgs 18:22; 19:10, 14, 18). That is to say, even though other prophets are around, Elijah did not know them, let alone work with them. When Elijah flees from Jezebel, he abandons his unnamed servant at Beersheba before meeting Elisha the first time (19:3, 16–19). Other prophets worked with the leading prophets as Samuel did in his prophetic role. These disciples that appear in Elisha’s story are called the sons of the prophets although they are not called by that name in Samuel’s story (1 Sam 10:9–11; 19:18–24). They are described in Elisha’s story mainly as groups of loosely organized disciples who are bound to Elisha as their prophetic master.⁴⁴⁰ Similarly, Rofé portrays them as “impoverished, defenseless, simple people, in need of the Man of God to provide protection and their basic necessities (2 Kgs 4:1, 38–41; 5:22....).”⁴⁴¹ However, Elijah is isolated and does not deal with the sons of the prophets. Samuel’s dealing with the sons of the prophets should have been an example for him to follow. However, Elijah emerges on the scene without a mentor (1 Kgs 17:1) and in the same manner, he does not have many acolytes. During Elijah’s farewell tour, none of the sons of the prophets at Bethel, Jericho or the Jordan relates to Elijah, but rather to Elisha. Elisha is seen interacting with the sons of the prophets and as their leader on several instances. Nevertheless, Elisha does not give them the opportunity to discourage him and silences them (2 Kgs 2:3, 5, 15–18; 4:1, 38–41; 6:1–7; 9:1–3).

On his return, Elisha invokes the name of YHWH, questioning the whereabouts of the God of Elijah (2:14), when he strikes the Jordan River. This confirms to the reader that Elisha

⁴⁴⁰ Cohn, *2 Kings*, 12–13.

⁴⁴¹ Alexander Rofé, *The Prophetic Stories: The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, Their Literary Types and History* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 45.

has inherited Elijah's power.⁴⁴² According to Cogan and Tadmor, Elisha succeeds Elijah in his ability to split the Jordan by inheriting his master's qualities and becoming the father of the sons of the prophets.⁴⁴³ The narrator leaves us with no elaboration or clue, and in suspense as to what about Elijah's departure will bring about Elisha's radical change, to obtain the qualities of his perfectionist master that he requests.⁴⁴⁴ Elijah ends his mission with the parting of the Jordan River and Elisha begins with the parting of the Jordan River. This juxtaposition conveys the notion of a successful succession. Elijah's last words to Elisha are then fulfilled.

5. Witness against Israel and Admonition

- A. Moses to Israelites (Deut 30:19–20)
- B. Moses to Israelites (Deut 31:20–22)
- C. Joshua to Israelites (Josh 23:1– 24:29)

A. Moses to Israelites (Deut 30:19–20)

This address is the first of the series of Moses' last words, in which he calls on heaven and earth to witness against Israel as he also admonishes them to cleave to the LORD and His word. In Deuteronomy 32, Moses in an indictment foretells the conduct of the Israelites when they settle in the Promised Land, and in chapter 33, he blesses and prays for them.⁴⁴⁵ Moses addresses Israel in a rhetorical form, encouraging and exhorting them to choose the way that will help them as they ready themselves to enter the Promised Land without him. He also cautions Israel on the

⁴⁴² Cohn, *2 Kings*, 15.

⁴⁴³ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 34

⁴⁴⁴ Garsiel, *From Earth to Heaven*, 169.

⁴⁴⁵ See Moses' other last words in this chapter under "Foretelling Future Events" (pages 82–97) and "Blessing and Prayer" (pages 98–124).

consequences of the choice they make, whether for good or for bad. These are Moses's last words in this unit:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today,
 that I have set before you life and death,
 blessing and curse.
 Therefore, choose life
 that you and your offspring may live,
 loving the LORD your God,
 obeying His voice and holding fast to Him,
 for He is your life and length of days,
 that you may dwell in the land
 that the LORD swore to your fathers,
 to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob
 to give them.

הַעִידְתִּי בְכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ
 הַחַיִּים וְהַמָּוֹת נִתְּנִי לְפָנֶיךָ
 הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה
 וּבַחֲרֹתְךָ בְּחַיִּים
 לִמְעַן תַּחַיֶּה אֶתְּךָ וְיִרְעֶה:
 לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 לְשָׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹלֹ וּלְדַבְּרָה־בּוֹ
 כִּי הוּא חַיֵּיךָ וְאַרְךָ יָמֶיךָ
 לְשֵׁבֶת עַל־הָאָדָמָה
 אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְרָהָם
 לְיִצְחָק וְלִיַּעֲקֹב
 לָתֵת לָהֶם:

This unit of Moses' last words falls within the climax of the whole book of Deuteronomy.⁴⁴⁶

Moses begins by calling on the heavens and earth to bear witness as he encourages Israel to choose life and blessings instead of death and curses. The tone with which this unit starts, calling on heaven and earth as witnesses, reflects the lawsuit against Israel as in 4:26; 31:28; Mic 1:2. However, in this text, Moses urges Israel to choose blessing and life. Later in Deut 32:1, Moses calls on heaven and earth to hear the words of his mouth. Von Rad refers to this text as the end of the Deuteronomistic text and a Moab-covenant tradition with the appeal to the heavens and earth. This stands in for the gods of heaven and earth in the comparable Neo-Assyrian treaties. The witnesses indicate that the covenant has been made.⁴⁴⁷ That is to say, the treaty is completed, and it is a done deal. As Tigay explains, in ancient Near East covenants, the gods of heaven and earth and other deities are called as witnesses for punishment to those who violate the covenant just as these passages (11:17; 28:23; 30:19; 31:28; 32:1) warn against

⁴⁴⁶ Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Int (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 213.

⁴⁴⁷ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 184–85.

covenant violation.⁴⁴⁸ Although corresponding to the ancient Near East genre of treaty, the polytheism of calling gods as witnesses is replaced by a rhetorical address of the sky and earth, and an appeal is made to choose life and make a decision to be faithful to the covenant.⁴⁴⁹

Moses places the responsibility on Israel to make the right decision as they progress in their relationship with God. It is not just a matter of affirmation but a way of right living. This involves the readiness of Israel to love and obey God. “Love” in this context means covenant loyalty. In Deuteronomy, love is that which can be commanded and intimately related to reverence and fear. It is expressed in loyalty, service, and absolute obedience to the demands of the Law.⁴⁵⁰ Obedience is to serve as a catalyst for God to accomplish His promise to the fathers, which will lead to increase in numbers and prosperity in the Promised Land.

In contrast, if Israel makes the wrong decision of choosing the way of death and ruin, it means abrogating God’s promise.⁴⁵¹ God is saying He is giving Israel the choice between material well-being and misfortune. The two options are explicitly illustrated in Deuteronomy 28.⁴⁵² Choosing life means loving the LORD their God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to Him because God is the life of Israel (30:20). According to Nelson, ‘today’ is emphasized (vv. 15–19) to indicate that now is the time for resolution, and making the right choice is simple. The choice

⁴⁴⁸ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 52.

⁴⁴⁹ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 431.

⁴⁵⁰ William L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *CBQ* 25 (1963), 78.

⁴⁵¹ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 366.

⁴⁵² Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 116.

of life against death, prosperity opposed to calamity, blessing instead of curse, and length of days in opposition to short life is their choice to make.⁴⁵³

In the Hebrew text, except for the beginning, בְּכֶם, “against you”, the singular is used throughout these last words of Moses to Israel. All these words take the singular suffix

before you	לְפָנֶיךָ
you and your offspring	אֶתְּךָ וְאֶתְּלָדֶיךָ
your God	אֱלֹהֶיךָ
your life and length of days	חַיֵּיךָ וְאֶתְּלָדֶיךָ יְמֵיךָ
your fathers	לְאֲבוֹתֶיךָ

Although Israel as a nation is being addressed, the individual role each plays has significance for the well-being of all of them. It is paramount that each of them observe the word of God as given. God is depicted here as the very life and length of days of Israel. Generally, חַיֵּיךָ is used with יְמֵיךָ as חַיֵּיךָ יְמֵיךָ (Gen 3:14,17; Deut 4:9; 6:2; 16:3; 30:6,20; Josh 1:5; Ps 128:5). In

Prov 4:13 חַיֵּיךָ חַיֵּיךָ is used having a feminine pronoun, referring to wisdom. Thus, wisdom here is the life of the one who takes hold of her (חַיֵּיךָ חַיֵּיךָ). In our text, הוּא refers to the LORD on whom according to Moses, both life and length of days of Israel depend (כִּי הוּא חַיֵּיךָ וְאֶתְּלָדֶיךָ יְמֵיךָ).

Obedience to the LORD is a prevalent theme in all of Moses’ last words, and it is also the emphasis in this text.

...loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

The tension that is expressed between human irresponsibility and divine favor cannot be overlooked.⁴⁵⁴ For Israel to live long and prosper in the Promised Land sworn to their fathers,

⁴⁵³ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 350.

they must fulfill a condition — keeping the word of God. Unlike Exod 19:3–9 and Joshua 24, at the end of Moses’ speech in this text, the people do not respond or make any commitment to indicate any action taken or accomplished. The last words of Moses are fulfilled conditionally as Moses’ last words indicate. As is well-known, the consequences of Israel’s covenantal choice are exemplified in the Former Prophets, especially in the book of Judges.

B. Moses to the Israelites (Deut 31:19–22)

Many interrupted and scattered reported utterances are observed in Moses’ words (31:7a, 9, 14b–15, 22–23a, 24–25, 30; 32:44–45, 48; 33:1) towards the end of Deuteronomy.⁴⁵⁵ However, unlike 30:19–20 where Moses is speaking on behalf of God, here God is speaking directly to Moses about how Israel will behave and how He will respond. The narrator begins v. 16 with, “And the LORD said to Moses....” God continues to speak until the end of v. 21. A reported speech is again seen in vv. 22–26. Several reported speeches are expressed in the last section of Moses’ words. The narrator’s words function in situating Moses’ words in time and space. This helps to determine when, where and the circumstances under which Moses speaks.⁴⁵⁶

The gist of this unit of Moses’ last words is an indictment. God knows what Israel is prone to doing and wants Moses to write down a poem and teach it to them so that it will be a witness for God when Israel predictably turns to other gods. God knows that with time, Israel will go astray, and the song will be the evidence of the fact that they were warned. Therefore, any punishment that is imposed will have been deserved or justified. God announces that from

⁴⁵⁴ Thomas W. Mann, *Deuteronomy*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 155.

⁴⁵⁵ Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 70–71.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

generation to generation the poem will indeed be uttered and by this articulation confront Israel when they turn away to other gods.⁴⁵⁷ This prophetic poem will serve to justify the deity's punishment of a rebellious Israel in the future. God shows care and concern for Israel in contrast to the ungrateful or forgetful conduct of Israel.

He surrounded him, he paid-him-regard,
 He guarded him like the pupil of His eye;
 Like an eagle protecting its nest,
 Over its young-birds hovering,
 He spread out his wings, he took him,
 Bearing him on his pinions.⁴⁵⁸

סְבָבָהוּ יְבַנְּהוּ
 יִצְרְנֵהוּ כְּאֵישׁוֹן עֵינָיו:
 כְּנֶשֶׁר יְעִיר קִנּוֹ
 עַל־גּוֹזְלָיו יִרְתֹּף
 יִפְרֹשׂ כַּנְּפָיו יִקְטְלֵהוּ
 יִשָּׂאֵהוּ עַל־אֲבָרְתָיו:

Therefore, God's justice and kindness are exhibited as He abandons them because of their betrayal as He rebuts Israel's charges.⁴⁵⁹

Wright observes that from the beginning to the end, Deuteronomy is an exposition of the covenant theology that warns to listen, obey, love, and cleave unto Yahweh. The issue at stake is about life and death. The admonition of punishment is to warn Israel to have prolonged days in the land.⁴⁶⁰ As Rabinowitz asserts, the main purpose of putting the Song into writing is for it to serve as testimony in the future.⁴⁶¹ Writing down of the Song is commanded to Moses thus:

But now, write yourself down this song
 teach it to the children of Israel,
 In order that this song may be for you as a
 witness against the children of Israel.
 when I bring them to the soil

וְעַתָּה כְּתוּבוּ לְכֶם אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת
 וְלַמָּדָה אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁירָה בְּפִיָּה
 לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה־לִּי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת
 לְעֵד בְּבִגְדֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
 כִּי־אָבִיאֲנִי אֵלֶיְהוֹדְמָהוּ

⁴⁵⁷ Sonnet, *The Book within the Book*, 150–51.

⁴⁵⁸ Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 1002–3.

⁴⁵⁹ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 295.

⁴⁶⁰ Wright, "The Lawsuit of God," 60.

⁴⁶¹ Rabinowitz, *A Witness Forever*, 42–43.

about which I swore to their fathers,
 a land flowing with milk and honey,
 and they eat, and are satisfied, and grow fat
 and they face-about to other gods, and serve them
 spurning me and violating my covenant:
 it will be,
 when there befall them
 many and troubling ills
 this song will speak up before their presence as a witness
 for it will not be forgotten from the mouth of their seed
 indeed, I know the plans
 that they are making today,
 (even) before I bring them
 into the land about which I swore!⁴⁶²

אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְתָּיו זֶבֶת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ
 זֶבֶת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ
 וְאָכְלוּ וְשָׂבְעוּ וְדָגְשׁוּ
 וּפְנֵיהֶם אֶל־אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וַעֲבָדוּם
 וְנִאֲצוּנִי וְהִפְרֹ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי:
 וְהָיָה
 כִּי־תִמְצָאנָן אֹתוֹ
 רַעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְעָנִוָה
 הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לִפְנֵי לְעַד
 כִּי לֹא תִשְׁכַּח מִפִּי וְרַעוּ
 כִּי תִדְעֵמִי אֶת־יָצְרוֹ
 אֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹשֶׂה הַיּוֹם
 בְּטָרָם אֲבִיאֵנּוּ
 אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי:

Though some have suggested that Deuteronomy 31 is “characterized by doublets, inconsistencies, interruptions, and variations in vocabulary and concepts” and some scholars take these as evidence of different literary sources,⁴⁶³ this chapter is very consistent concerning the writing of Moses. A structure of small units can be observed in several places in Deuteronomy. For example, chapter 4 is subdivided to several units (vv. 1–8; 9–14; 15–24; 25–31; 32–40; 41–43; 44–49) and chapter 31 is part of a larger unit of chapters 31–34, which scholars designate as the conclusion of Deuteronomy and the Torah as a whole.⁴⁶⁴ Israel’s welfare depends on compliance with the word of God. The themes can be traced through Deuteronomy (6:17–18).

God established a covenant with Israel three months after taking Israel out of Egypt to be His special people above all people of the earth. Moses the mediator between God and His people

⁴⁶² Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 999–1001.

⁴⁶³ Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 502.

⁴⁶⁴ Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 995. See also Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 71. Deuteronomy 32 is regarded as a pre-existing poem/song. For instance, Greenstein refers to *yāšār* יָשָׁר upright, in Deut 32:4 as an epithet of YHWH and proposes that Moses’ Song is the poem that gave the entire collection of the Book of Yashar (Josh 10:12-13; 2 Sam 1:17-18) its name. The fact that it is referred to as a book means it is a written document, he posits. See Edward L. Greenstein, “What Was the Book of Yashar?” *Maarav* 21 (2014), 30-35. God is referred to as the one who is “upright” in Deut 32:4. Therefore, the Book of Yashar means the Book of God (the book of the upright). It can thus be inferred that Deuteronomy 32 is older than the rest of Deuteronomy and that the prose writers of the earlier chapters could have made use of it.

brings the word to Israel and Israel says *לְכֹל אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה* “All that the LORD has spoken we will do” (Exod 19:1–9). Thus, God expects Israel to respond in submission as He plays His role of bringing them to the Promised Land. There is coherence in the arrangement of the passages into a chronological sequence, in the composition of Deut 31:1–33:29 as Moses’ final arrangements before his death.⁴⁶⁵ This is a conditional promise. God tells Moses to write the song down for “yourselves” *כְּתֹבוּ לָכֶם אֶת-הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת* (31:19) here, implying Moses and Joshua.

Von Rad claims the language is awkward in v. 21 where in God’s speech, the people are referred to in both singular and plural terms.⁴⁶⁶ The plural command requires both Moses and Joshua to write the song, which will follow in chapter 32. The chain of command turns to the singular, and Moses alone is credited for writing the song (19–23; 32:44).⁴⁶⁷ It is common to have singular pronouns instead of plural in the Hebrew Bible when a leading figure is going along with a less significant or common person (e.g., Gen 31:23; Exod 15:1; 2 Sam 20:10; Ruth 1:6, 7, 22).⁴⁶⁸ They are expected to teach the song to the children of Israel. Although this text alludes to the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32), the language used is for teaching a song by heart—it is to be memorized.

God begins by telling Moses about Israel forsaking Him and breaking the covenant and how He will be angered and forsake them. Israel will eventually acknowledge the fact that God is not among them because series of disasters will come upon them when God forsakes

⁴⁶⁵ C. J. Labuschagne, “The Tribes in the Blessing of Moses,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990), 97.

⁴⁶⁶ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 190.

⁴⁶⁷ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 440.

⁴⁶⁸ Garsiel, *From Earth to Heaven*, 163.

them as a result of their idolatry (vv. 16–18). Some aspects of that which God says earlier are repeated here as well; especially turning to other gods (vv. 16, 20) with its repercussions.

The future that God foresees is stated as a fact. God’s speech in 31:16–22 sums up the gist of the Song, but is presented before the Song, so that it appears to foreshadow it in prose in Moses’s Song.⁴⁶⁹ God not only gets angry, but also goes through pain when Israel rejects Him, and invite catastrophe by their sinful ways.⁴⁷⁰ Israel is expected to know the word of God and teach their children always (6:6–9; 11:19–21). In reciting the Song, they will need to acknowledge their guilt of neglecting the law and hearing their own condemnation, in the words of Moses’ Song. Weitzman observes that although none of the Egyptian, Greek, or biblical texts shed light on why the Song of Moses is to function both as a teaching as well as a witness against Israel, the Aramaic *Words of Ahiqar* are similar and help in providing an explanation. His last words are said to be like Deuteronomy 31, with a literary relationship between the two texts in both didactic and legal language.⁴⁷¹

Singing the Song for educational purposes “convicts as it instructs”, and “it instructs as it convicts.” Just as the “law is to be written, taught, and put in the mouths of the people” (v. 19) so also the Song, when “sung repeatedly will be not only be a witness,” but also serves as a caution.⁴⁷² The Deuteronomistic history relates the punishment Israel suffers for violating the covenant, where even when God’s merciful acts are not denied, they are put in perspective of His

⁴⁶⁹ Mann, *Deuteronomy*, 165.

⁴⁷⁰ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 383.

⁴⁷¹ Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative*, 45. *Ahiqar* is believed to be an Assyrian sage. See *ibid.*, 45–55, for more on the similarity between the two. The *Wisdom of Ahiqar* is mainly a proverb collection—instructions, advice, from a sage to his son or pupil with a narrative frame. See also Augustinus Gianto, “A New Edition of Aramaic Texts from Egypt,” *Biblica* 76 (1995), 85-86.

⁴⁷² Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 225.

justice.⁴⁷³ God's love for Israel, as a parental discipline, causes Him not to disregard their irreverence and disobedience (vv. 19–22).

C. Joshua to Israelites (Josh 23:1–24:29)

Joshua's last words are uttered at Shechem after Israel makes a covenant with God to obey Him (Josh 24:1–26). Joshua's ideology of the covenant he initiates with Israel is based on God's first agreement with the Israelites to revere the LORD. Through the Patriarchal promises, Moses' historical role in the exodus, and the covenant of Sinai, Joshua attributes the conclusion at Shechem to God's initial engagement with the children of Israel.⁴⁷⁴ The context of Joshua 24 is debated by scholars especially from the perspective of its sources and redaction.⁴⁷⁵ Similar to Moses' last words (Deut 31:19–24), Joshua writes down what he speaks to Israel in the Book of the Law (24:26). However, unlike the case of Moses, there is no indication that God instructs Joshua to write down the words.

Towards the end of Moses' life, he instructs the people to whitewash large stones with lime, set them up and write the words of the law on them—an instruction that Joshua fulfills (Deut 27:1–4, 8; Josh 8:31–32). The purpose of the covenantal law is to serve as instruction and admonition. These stones contain the word of God that Israel is commanded to utter בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָהּ day and night, and to obey in order to prosper and succeed (Josh 1:8). Joshua works with the leaders of Israel (Josh 7:6; 8:10; 24:1) just as Moses works with them (Lev 9:1; Num 11:16, 30; 16:25;

⁴⁷³ Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 68.

⁴⁷⁴ Moshe Anbar, *Josue et l'alliance de Sichem: Josue 24:1-28*, *Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie* 25 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1992), 142–43.

⁴⁷⁵ Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, 2nd ed., WBC 7AB (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 301–7. See also S. David Sperling, *The Original Torah: The Political Intent of the Bible's Writers* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 61–74, on Yahweh's covenant.

Deut 27:1; 31:9). Joshua recounts the history of Israel from Genesis through Deuteronomy and establishes a covenant between God and Israel just before his last words (Josh 24:1–25). The motif of Joshua erecting the stone by the shrine of Yahweh is apparently etiological; to preserve an ancient tradition—an existing stone structure. This reflects a newer Israelite that concludes the covenant.⁴⁷⁶

The erection of a stone is often part of ceremonies in the Hebrew Bible world (Gen 28:18; 1 Sam 7:12).⁴⁷⁷ Commemorative stones are often erected in the ancient Near East in religious encounters, for cultic usage and as monuments (Gen 28:11–19; Deut 27:1–6; Josh 4:1–9, 19–20; 2 Sam 18:17).⁴⁷⁸ For instance, God instructs Joshua to command twelve leaders of the tribes of Israel to set up memorial stones at the place they will lodge after the crossing of the Jordan (Josh 4:1–9, 20–21). When Jacob escapes from Laban and later pursues and catches up with Jacob, Laban calls for a covenant between them (Gen 31:44) and Jacob complies. They gathered stones as witness (vv. 45–50). Jacob and Laban use stones as witness between them, but Joshua uses a stone as a witness not between him and Israel but between Israel and God.

And Joshua said to all the people,
Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us,
for it has heard all the words of the LORD
that he spoke to us
Therefore, it shall be a witness against you,
lest you deal falsely with your God (24:27)

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶל-כָּל-הָעַם
הִנֵּה הָאֶבֶן הַזֹּאת תְּהִיָּה-לָנוּ לְעֵדוּת
כִּי-הָיָא שָׁמָעָה אֵת כָּל-אֲמָרֵי יְהוָה
אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עִמָּנוּ
וְהִיָּתָה בְּכֶם לְעֵדוּת
כְּלוֹ-תִכְחַשׁוּן בְּאֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

According to the text, Joshua personifies the stone, as though it were an actual witness to the covenant. The stone, like the heavens and earth in Moses' Song, stand in place of the gods, who

⁴⁷⁶ Hartmut N. Rösel, *Joshua*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 374–75.

⁴⁷⁷ Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 357.

⁴⁷⁸ Joel F. Drinkard, "Stone," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 5, ed. Katharine D. Sakenfeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 381.

served as witnesses to ancient Near Eastern treaties and agreements outside of Israel. In contrast, Koopmans claim that Josh 24:25–27 contains terminologies that are out of place, such as the stone ‘hearing’ and serving as ‘witness’. Whereas some have overemphasized the Near East background, we cannot disregard its significance in understanding the text.⁴⁷⁹ At the conclusion of the formal procedure, Joshua explains the significance to Israel.

The history is reviewed before the stone is erected (vv. 1–13, 26). The stone is witnessing divine decrees that are the historical summary (vv. 2–13)⁴⁸⁰ of all that God has done for Israel from the time of Terah, Abraham’s father (v. 2), until that moment, when God has given them things they did not work for (v. 13). The stone is set up as a witness, but the events to which it witnesses are not written on it but rather in a separate document—the Book of the Law (24:26). וַיִּכְתֹּב יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרַת אֱלֹהִים. “and Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the instruction of God.” There is no inscription on the stone itself. After the people become witnesses to the renewal of the covenant, Joshua has a stone erected as an everlasting witness. The people will die, but the stone will remain for generations. Israel is witness to their self-imposed obligation in the relationship (v. 22).⁴⁸¹ The LORD sets the stage for the covenant ceremony through Joshua. The emphasis here is on what the LORD says, rather than on what the people say, with a summary of God’s great deliverance.⁴⁸²

This text does not indicate that God instructs Joshua to establish a covenant between Him and the Israelites. Joshua in a negative tone admonishes Israel to fear the LORD and serve

⁴⁷⁹ William T. Koopmans, *Joshua 24 as Poetic Narrative*, JSOTSup 93 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 132.

⁴⁸⁰ Butler, *Joshua*, 278.

⁴⁸¹ Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 276.

⁴⁸² Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 358.

Him because he and his family are ready to be devoted to the LORD (vv. 14–15). It is important to note that Joshua assumes that without a tangible expression of an object as a witness, Israel will go astray. He changes his speech from God’s unmerited blessing (vv. 12–13) to an interpretive warning of merited blessing (vv. 19–20).⁴⁸³ Joshua includes himself as one of those for whom the stone will be a witness against at the initial part of his last words: *הָאָבֶן הַזֶּה תְּהִיָּה-לְבָנִי לְעֵדָה*. However, at the end of his last words, Joshua excludes himself in a way that reflects the fact that Joshua is using these instructions as last words—that he is parting with the Israelites, expecting to die. Joshua says, “and it shall be a witness against you” *וְהָיְתָה בְּכֶם לְעֵדָה* so as not to deal falsely with God. Earlier, Joshua expresses to Israel that they are witnesses against themselves that they have chosen to serve God (vv. 21–22). The stone is a silent witness of the words spoken to Israel.

The covenant ceremony is done, and Israel is encouraged to show true covenant loyalty because of the great acts of God’s deliverance. When the stone witnesses against Israel, it will be tantamount to God’s redeeming acts witnessing against them.⁴⁸⁴ Boling suggests that the inscribed stone is to be a reminder to the community to serve as a witness to pilgrims, worshipers, and to Israelites who are themselves witnesses (v. 22).⁴⁸⁵ It could be speculated that an official agreement among the tribes to become a single organization for political power and management is what Josh 24:1–28 is about.⁴⁸⁶ However, although the purpose of the covenant

⁴⁸³ Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 142–43.

⁴⁸⁴ Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 358.

⁴⁸⁵ Robert G. Boling *Joshua*, AB 6 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 540–41.

⁴⁸⁶ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Politics of Ancient Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 35–36.

renewal is not constitutive, it can be assumed that the renewal helps the nation remain committed to God and serve Him after Joshua (24:31).

Joshua's last words end with a negative perception of Israel. The focus of the whole verse hangs on the phrase *לִפְנֵי-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם* "lest you deal falsely with your God". *פֶּן* is used many times in Scriptures "implying always that some precaution has been taken to avert the dreaded contingency."⁴⁸⁷ According to Butler, Joshua 24 is an appropriate ending to Joshua's activity and describes him as more than a pious, compliant champion of faith, more than a victorious hero of war, more than a just intermediary in legal disputes.⁴⁸⁸ Joshua is a courageous religious leader with his family as an example for Israel to follow.⁴⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Joshua is concerned—and therefore severe in his admonitions as he threatens Israel on the choice to make. As Israel gets settled, the covenants that the LORD establishes with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to bring them to the Promised Land are now established with their descendants. Although the patriarchal covenant promises are unconditional, the Shechem covenant is conditional as the covenant in Deuteronomy reenacted. Joshua turns God's words of mercy to a covenant and prophecy of doom (vv. 19–20).⁴⁹⁰

Joshua perceives Israel as incapable of serving the LORD after his death (24:19, 31), and Joshua dies without seeking a new leader for Israel. This is unlike Moses, who asks God to choose a leader for His people so that "the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd" (Num 27:17). Joshua is never seen interceding for Israel like Moses.

⁴⁸⁷ *BDB*, *פֶּן* 814.

⁴⁸⁸ Butler, *Joshua*, 332.

⁴⁸⁹ Not much is said about the family of Joshua. There is no mention of his wife or children in Scripture although he declares that he and his family will serve the Lord.

⁴⁹⁰ Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 143.

Israel must then turn to God to seek a new leader after the death of Joshua (Judg 1:1). Israel serves the LORD not only in the days of Joshua, but also after his death—the elders who live after Joshua, who are witnesses themselves to the acts of the LORD for Israel, serve God (v. 31).

It can be concluded that the words of Joshua, which function as a witness against Israel, are not immediately fulfilled. The covenantal threats do not need to be realized during Joshua's lifetime. All the people of Israel that Joshua addresses serve God as expected, but Joshua's last words are not fulfilled. The book of Judges, which immediately follows Joshua, describes a series of covenant violations that lead God to bring defeat to Israel, prior to raising new leaders in the form of tribal judges.

6. Recalling God's Word

David Reflects on God's Word to Him (2 Sam 23:1–7)

The last words of David will be examined under two categories. First, David recapitulates and reflects on God's word in an oracle (2 Sam 23:1–7). Later in 1 Kings 2, David will be ascribed a different type of last words dealing with political house cleaning, where David ensures that Solomon, who succeeds him as king, has his dynasty secured.

David did not seem to be very significant in his family as a young man. He is not present when the LORD sent the prophet Samuel to the home of Jesse, to anoint one of his sons as the next king (1 Sam 16:1–6). His father describes him as the youngest⁴⁹¹ who was keeping sheep

⁴⁹¹ It would have been expected that the youngest would rather be cherished and kept at home with his father, so as not to leave him alone in care of the flock, while the others were home (Gen 42:2, 13, 32, 38; 44:20-34). However, David is seen as not only keeping sheep, but also goes back and forth from Saul to shepherd his father's flock. The three older brothers accompany Saul to battle, but the whereabouts of the other four sons of Jesse are not known (1 Sam 17:12-15). Later, David plays the role of an errand boy to take food to the brothers. He is despised by his eldest brother (vv.17-18, 28-29), but a hero who kills a lion, a bear, and Goliath (vv.34-37; 48-51), and a musician, who plays to relieve Saul of the evil spirit, God sent to torment him (18:10).

when God rejects all the sons of Jesse that were present, and Samuel inquires if all Jesse's sons were present (v. 11). It is important to note that "shepherd" is a metaphor for kings and leaders in the Bible and in the ancient Near East.⁴⁹² Joseph, Moses and David were all shepherds before becoming leaders (Gen 37:2, Exod 3:1; 1 Sam 16:11).

Although David seems to be insignificant; nevertheless, he is characteristically God's choice. God always chooses a younger son or daughter. This shows that what counts is divine election, not selection based on social conventions or law. "Repeatedly the younger son overpowers, overshadows, or is simply more blessed than his older brother."⁴⁹³ In the greater part of Israelite history, those that are presented as inadequate in Scripture, turn out to be God's initial choices.⁴⁹⁴ The motif of choosing the youngest child rather than the oldest, is found elsewhere with Jacob over Esau (Gen 25:23) and Ephraim over Manasseh (48:8–22).⁴⁹⁵ God makes a choice that runs counter to natural or social priorities that humanity finds arbitrary, if not unfair.⁴⁹⁶ This is similar to the Mesopotamian tradition where younger siblings turn out to be prominent figures such as the Assyrian king Esarhaddon, Alalakh's King Idrimi, and the Hittite ruler Hattusilis.⁴⁹⁷ God exalts David mightily and makes him a great name (2 Sam 7:9).

The word of God is very important in the life of David, and he almost always David seeks the LORD for the next step (1 Sam 22:10; 23:1–4, 9–12; 30:8). However, towards the end

⁴⁹² David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 422.

⁴⁹³ Greenstein, *Essays on Biblical Method and Translation*, 44, 47.

⁴⁹⁴ Frederick E. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 157.

⁴⁹⁵ Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 421.

⁴⁹⁶ Sternberg, "Time and Space in Biblical History Telling: The Grand Chronology," 126–27.

⁴⁹⁷ Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 84–85.

of his life, David reflects on the word of God to him in a very unusual manner. 2 Sam 23:1 opens with what is branded as the last words of David. “And these are the last words of David” (וְאֵלֶּה דְּבַרֵי דָּוִד הָאֲחֵרִים). One may assume that the narrator or chronicler is aware of when David died but maintains that he did not and does not say much after these words. The present research will elucidate this matter.

Although David makes several inquiries of the LORD (1 Sam 23:2, 4, 9–12; 30:8), in 2 Sam 23:1–7, it is the Spirit of the LORD that speaks through David (vv. 1–2). This recalls Num 24:3–4, where the Spirit of the LORD takes over Balaam to declare the intentions of God. Considering the content, Anderson suggests it is better to render 2 Sam 23:1–7 as “Yahweh’s oracle to David’, reminiscent of the oracle of Balaam.”⁴⁹⁸ This comparison is affirmed by McCarter because the same formula is used in Balaam’s oracles in Num 24:3, 15 and also links it to the sayings of Agur, son of Jakeh, in Prov 30:1.⁴⁹⁹

וְאֵלֶּה דְּבַרֵי דָּוִד בְּיָמָיו וַיִּגְבֹּר הַגִּבּוֹר תִּקְּם לְעַל (1 Sam 23:3)

The utterance of David the son of Jesse, the utterance of the man who was lifted on high,

וְאֵלֶּה בְּלַעַם בְּנֵו בְעֵר וַיִּגְאֵם הַגִּבּוֹר שְׁתַּם הָעֵינָן (Num 24:15)

The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, And the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened;

This form of utterance is also found in verses 4 and 16 as Balaam’s oracles.

The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, And the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened,

וְאֵלֶּה בְּלַעַם בְּנֵו בְעֵר וַיִּגְאֵם הַגִּבּוֹר שְׁתַּם הָעֵינָן: (v. 4)

(v. 16) The utterance of him who hears the words of God,

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמַע אֶמְרֵי-אֵל

⁴⁹⁸ A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, WBC 11 (Dallas: Word, 1989), 266–67. Similar forms of utterances are those of Agur in Prov 30:1 and in 31:1, the words of King Lemuel, the utterance that he was taught by his mother.

⁴⁹⁹ P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, AB 9 (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 479.

David in two short phrases uses the נֹאֵם utterance, thus says, twice.

Thus says David the son of Jesse;
and thus says the man raised up on high

נֹאֵם דָּוִד בֶּן־יֵשׁוּעַ
וְנֹאֵם הַגִּבּוֹר הַקָּמָה עָלַי

נֹאֵם יְהוָה ‘Thus says the LORD’ is usually used when a prophet has a message from God to people. It is used several hundred times in the Hebrew Bible, in association with the prophets, but in only a few places, such as Ps 36:2; Prov 30:1; Jer 23:31, where it is unconnected to prophecy. נֹאֵם אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה Thus says the Lord GOD, is used mostly in Ezekiel and few times in Isaiah.

David makes a distinction between when he is speaking and when God is speaking through him. In verse 1, David describes himself as the son of Jesse, the man lifted up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel who is speaking. David at this point in his life acts with a prophetic tone in using נֹאֵם. He expresses four times in his poem that he is not speaking by himself, but is being used by the LORD (vv. 2–3).

The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me,
and His word was on my tongue.
The God of Israel said,
The Rock of Israel spoke to me (vv. 2–3).

רוּחַ יְהוָה דִּבְרָר־בִּי
וּמִלְתּוֹ עַל־לְשׁוֹנִי:
אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
לִי דָבַר צוּר יִשְׂרָאֵל

David makes this clear before he reports what the Spirit brings him to say. Brueggemann suggests that this poem is linked to 2 Sam 22:1–51, and together with the song of Hannah in 1 Sam 2:1–10, “serves as lyrical-theological affirmations that bracket the entire story of David and kingship.....The poems at beginning and end articulate God’s resolve to use the anointed one to bring well-being, and God’s power to raise up a king congenial to God’s purpose (1 Sam 2:10; 2 Sam 23:1).”⁵⁰⁰ We find in the song of Hannah: וַיִּתְּנוּ־עֹז לְמַלְכּוֹ וַיְרַם קַרְנוֹ מִשִּׁיחָיו “He will give strength

⁵⁰⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Int (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 345–46. The song of Hannah expresses the fact that God gives strength but in the last words of David in 2 Sam 23:1-7, he does not say anything

to His king and exalt the horn of His anointed.” This does not conform well with the story of David and his kingship, as Brueggemann observes above. On the other hand, Polzin suggests that these last words (23:1–7) and David’s song in the previous chapter (22:1–51) arouse recollections of Jacob’s poem at the end of Genesis (Gen 49:1–27), as well as the song of Moses and blessing at the end of Deuteronomy (32:1–43; 33:1–29).⁵⁰¹ “The last words of David follow the royal psalm just as the blessing of Moses follows the song of Moses....the presentation of 23:1–7, like the blessing of Moses, as ‘last words’, or last will’ of a dying man has always been respected....”⁵⁰²

Nothing indicates whom David is addressing, but he expresses what God expects of leaders. McCarter claims that it is evident that David asserts that God regards his house as the one that will provide the rule appropriate to God’s perpetual covenant.⁵⁰³ However, David does not say God regards him and his house as those to perpetuate the eternal covenant anywhere in this oracle. On the contrary, David sees himself as unqualified (2 Sam 23:5). In describing the leadership qualities expected, David makes use of similes. He likens such a person to the light of the morning when the sun rises, as bright as sunrise without clouds after rain, and tender grass out of earth: וּבְקֹרֶן יִזְרַח־שֶׁמֶשׁ בְּקֹרֶן יִבְאֹרֶן בְּקֹרֶן לֹא עֲבוֹת מִנְּגֵה מִמָּטָר דְּשֵׁא מֵאֲרָץ (v. 4). Such a person is guaranteed success.

David recounts the promise of God to him through the prophet Nathan, as an everlasting covenant (2 Samuel 7). God says He is making a house (dynasty) for David, but that

about the strength of God but rather the attributes that one who rules needs to have. In addition, 2 Samuel 22 is a song of deliverance, which is paralleled in Psalm 18, in celebration of salvation from Saul and the enemies of David.

⁵⁰¹ Robert Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist: 2 Samuel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 202–3.

⁵⁰² Hans W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 398–99.

⁵⁰³ McCarter, *II Samuel*, 483.

David would not be building a house (temple) for Him (vv. 11–13). His son is to build a house for God later, after he is dead (vv. 11–17).⁵⁰⁴ David offers a passionate prayer when Nathan informs him of the promise of God and ends it as follows:

Now therefore, let it please You to bless the house of Your servant,	וְעַתָּה הוֹאֵל וְבָרַךְ אֶת־בַּיִת עֲבָדְךָ
that it may continue forever before You;	לְהִנָּחֵת לְעוֹלָם לְפָנֶיךָ
for You, O Lord GOD, have spoken it,	כִּי־אָמְרָה אֲדַבֵּר יְהוָה דְּבָרְךָ
and with Your blessing	וּמִבְרַכְתְּךָ
let the house of Your servant be blessed forever	יְבָרַךְ בַּיִת־עֲבָדְךָ לְעוֹלָם:

(2 Sam 7:29; 1 Chron 17:26–27).

In these last words, David is relating to this promise of God, and prays convinced of having the word of God fulfilled. He expresses it as an everlasting covenant with God that is secured (v. 5). David ends this unit of his last words on the disastrous fate of those who are rebellious (vv. 6–7) in contrast to the prosperous end of those who govern in a God-fearing way. Although David does not credit the loyalty required for success to himself but to God, McCarter writes, “Those who are not loyal to David are like thorny weeds.”⁵⁰⁵ This is a conditional but eternal promise from God that is based on the obedience of David’s descendants (2 Sam 7:13–16; 2 Sam 23:3–6; 1 Kgs 2:3–4). David’s last words in this unit are poetic in form, like an oracle or prophecy (2 Sam 23:1–7). These last words do not only open with the prophetic term **וְנָאֵם**, but also some form of synonymous parallelism. David defines who he is at the beginning (v. 1):

Thus says David the son of Jesse;	נָאֵם דָּוִד בֶּן־יִשָּׁי
Thus says the man raised up on high	וְנָאֵם הַגָּבֹר הַקָּמַם לְעַל
The anointed of the God of Jacob	מִשִּׁיחַ אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב
And the sweet psalmist of Israel	וְנִנְעִים זִמְרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל

⁵⁰⁴ The message of God through Samuel to David is specifically to take place after his days are fulfilled and he rests with his fathers. Since we are informed these were the last words of David or David perceived that the time of the promise is near, he recalls the eternal covenant in his last words.

⁵⁰⁵ McCarter, *II Samuel*, 484.

David operates in prophetic mode here (vv. 2–3).⁵⁰⁶

The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me,
and His word was on my tongue.
The God of Israel said,
The Rock of Israel spoke to me... (vv. 2–3)

רוּחַ יְהוָה דִּבְרָה בִּי
וּמִלְתּוֹ עַל־לְשׁוֹנִי:
אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִי
דִבְרָ צוּר יִשְׂרָאֵל

David expresses the expectation of a leader (v. 3b).

He who rules over men must be just
Ruling in the fear of God

מוֹשֵׁל בְּאָדָם צָדִיק
מוֹשֵׁל יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים

The result of obedience (v. 4):

And like the light of the morning
When the sun rises
A morning without clouds
By clear shining after rain
Tender grass springing out of the earth

וּבְקָוֶה בֹקֵר
יִזְרַח־שֶׁמֶשׁ
בֹקֵר לֹא עָבֹת
מִנְגִיעַ מִמָּטָר
דִּנְשָׂא מֵאֲרֶז

The result of disobedience (vv. 6–7):

As thorns thrust away (...)
Utterly burned with fire in their place.⁵⁰⁷

בְּקוֹז מִנֵּד כִלְהֵם
שָׂרוּף יִשְׂרְפוּ בַשָּׂבֶת

David contrasts the righteous ruler with the ungodly ruler. The righteous ruler is like lush grass and brings prosperity to the subjects while the ungodly or wicked ruler is like thorns and brings suffering. Just as a rain-drenched lawn resists fire, admirable and comfortable, and thorns are quickly consumed, hard, painful, and require careful handling to avoid injury so are the godly as compared with the ungodly. “This imagery echoes the wisdom of Psalm 1: the person who delights in the law of the Lord is like a tree planted by water, while the wicked are

⁵⁰⁶ Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 204.

⁵⁰⁷ *BHK*, 497. The word בַּשָּׂבֶת does not make sense in its context and there might be a scribal error. Kittel deletes the word suggesting scribal contamination. However, *BDB*, 444, translates it as “they are burned in the (same) place i.e., on the spot”.

like chaff in the wind.” David’s last words here also echo Samuel’s last address to the Israelites (1 Samuel 12).⁵⁰⁸

These last words are fulfilled in the life of Solomon who inherits the kingship from David even though there is no indication David is addressing Solomon in this text. When Solomon reveres God and seeks Him, God prospers him (1 Kings 3–10) as David foretells in this poem before Solomon becomes king (2 Sam 23:2–4). When Solomon engages in what an imperial king does without being mindful of God’s word, which both Moses (Deut 17:14–20) and the prophet Nathan (2 Sam 7:14) forewarn, or David’s counsel, and consorts with many foreign women (1 Kgs 11:1–5), it does not go well with him as we find in the last part of David’s poem (2 Sam 23:6–7). Solomon does evil in the sight of God (1 Kgs 11:6) and does not live up to expectations, so the LORD removes part of the kingdom from him. However, for the sake of David and Jerusalem, the city God has chosen for Himself, God keeps Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, on the throne of Judah (1 Kgs 11:29–36). God raises three different opponents against Solomon (11:14, 23, 26–32). In sum, David’s last words in this unit, are both positive and negative, and are all fulfilled in Solomon.

7. Political House Cleaning

David to Solomon (1 Kgs 2:1–9)

Similar to the beginning of the last words of David in 2 Sam 23:1–7, the narrator informs us the words are spoken towards the end of David’s life (1 Kgs 2:1). However, these last words are detailed instructions to Solomon on how to be secure in his reign. The last words here can be

⁵⁰⁸ Craig E. Morrison, *2 Samuel*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 299–300.

subdivided into five segments. Along with the introduction, where we are informed of the time David speaks these words, and the person he addresses. These last words include:

1. David's reflection on his pending death and the need for Solomon to be physically strong (v. 2).
2. The necessity to obey the word of God in order to prosper and see the divine promises fulfilled (vv. 3–4).
3. Counsel concerning Joab the son of Zeruiah (vv. 5–6).
4. Counsel regarding Barzillai the Gileadite (v. 7).
5. Counsel about Shimei the Benjaminite (vv. 8–9).

The last words of David to Solomon are solemn and very important to both David and Solomon. They are expressed at a time of conscious consideration of the life David has led and what will happen after his death. The events of David's life are lessons that have given him rich experiences by which to advise Solomon on how to keep his kingdom safe when he is gone. Death is a journey everyone must take, and the time is near for David to prepare Solomon before handing him the throne. Unlike when David reviews and reflects upon God's word to him (2 Sam 23:1–7), the narrator makes us aware that these words are addressed specifically to Solomon.

Now the days of David drew near that he should die,
and he charged Solomon his son, saying:
'I go the way of all the earth;
be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man....' (vv. 1–2).

וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי־דָוִד לָמוּת
וַיִּצְוֵנוּ אֶת־שְׁלֹמֹה בְּנוֹ לֵאמֹר:
אֲנֹכִי הֹלֵךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ
וְתִזְקַתְּ וְהִגִּיתָ לְאִישׁ:

In this segment, David begins his address to Solomon in his last words with "I go the way of all the earth...." As Mulder indicates, the person who is on the verge of death announces his impending death as "going the way of all the earth."⁵⁰⁹ David is motivated by his awareness that he is dying: אֲנֹכִי הֹלֵךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ (I go the way of all the earth). It is very likely that this

⁵⁰⁹ M. J. Mulder, *I Kings*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 87.

occurred when David was in his late sixties or when he was turning 70, since he died at about 70 years (2 Sam 5:4; 1 Kgs 2:11).

David is depicted as old and ailing at the beginning of 1 Kings 1. Thus, David ensures things are placed in order before he dies, since no one knows exactly when the inevitable will occur, and he wants to make sure Solomon's reign is peaceful, devoid of major conflicts. The focus of the whole story is on what happens after David's death. Like David, Cyrus expected those left behind to speak and act well. He called his children and friends to instruct them on important things to him before the inevitable. Some of his last words are: "Submit then to this arrangement, as I speak according to what is ancient, customary, and legal. You, therefore, Cambyses, possess the throne, for the gods give it you, and I, as far as is in my power. You Tanaoxares I appoint to be satrap of the Medes, Armenians, and Cadusians; and in giving this office to you, I think that while I leave to your elder brother the greater power and the title of king, I allot to you a station of greater happiness."⁵¹⁰

With the experiences David had from his anointing until his old age, he sees the need to direct the heir to his throne on how to succeed. David has witnessed a series of variegated capital crimes revolving around royal succession. He has seen an Amalekite who claims to have killed Saul (2 Sam 1:8, 13), a Benjaminite kill a Benjaminite (2 Samuel 4); and his own son, Absalom, seeks to kill him (2 Sam 16:11).⁵¹¹

David's decision to inform Solomon about his last will and testament is not simply about preparing him as his successor. It is also a political move against the conspiracy of Adonijah, his oldest son to enthrone himself. Nathan hears the plan of Adonijah and counsels

⁵¹⁰ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 267–77.

⁵¹¹ Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 52–53.

Bathsheba to thwart Adonijah’s plan and the plan of Nathan and Bathsheba works out well (1Kings 1). Thus, the last words of 1 Kgs 2:1–9 are based on the preceding. According to DeVries, the ל on the לָמוּת ‘to die’ in לָמוּת לְמִי־דָוִד וְיִקְרָבוּ, expresses purpose (1 Kgs 2:1). He notes that in Hebrew the approach to dying often occurs steadily, and the sickness or weakness that precedes it symbolizes the closing days of one’s life.⁵¹² David perceives it is the right time to put plans ahead for his heir to have peace so he will not have to fight battles as he did.

The initial part of the last words of David to Solomon are:

I am going
the way of all the earth.
Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man.

אֲנֹכִי הֹלֵךְ
בְּדֶרֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ
וְתִזְקַת וְהִיָּיתָ לְאִישׁ:

It has to do with the need to have inner strength to function as the next king of Israel. Determination is essential for Solomon to succeed as Israel’s king. The first thing he needs is to be strong and valiant in executing his duty as the one in authority. David informs Solomon about how events will swiftly test him and the need for resolve and decisiveness. Solomon must exercise force and violence and must grow up-quickly. It is essential for him to have the strength and the maturity of adulthood.⁵¹³ David remembers his own several confrontations before his enthronement. He lived a life of fleeing from Saul, the anointed king. After David defeats Goliath, winning the people’s praise (1 Samuel 18), he finds solace in the camp of the Philistines (chapter 27). Saul resents David until his death (chapter 31). David had to trust God for deliverance always, and for his sake many people are killed (22:9–19). David’s enemies are not only from outside but also from within his family and inner circle (2 Samuel 15–18). For

⁵¹² Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, WBC 12 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 34–35.

⁵¹³ Alex Israel, *1 Kings: Torn in Two*, Maggid Studies in Tanakh (Jerusalem: Koren, 2013), 30–31.

Solomon to succeed as the king of Israel, he will need the will power to tackle anything that might confront him. Knowing his days are drawing near, David sees the need to leave Solomon with these important last words.

David charges Solomon to be courageous **חִזְקָה** (1 Kg 2:2). Strength is a virtue that is required of leaders, the importance of which, cannot be over-emphasized, especially when David knows God's promise to him is on the verge of being fulfilled in Solomon (2 Sam 7:12–13). Bold steps not only physical, but also spiritual, are needed to lead the nation. The last words of David echo the sentiments and the final exhortation by Moses to Joshua to be strong and of good courage (Deut 31:23), which is a divine command to Joshua (Josh 1:6, 7, 9).⁵¹⁴ This is also an encouragement from the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half tribe of Manasseh to Joshua in Josh 1:18. Hartmut suggests **חִזְקָה וְאַמָּץ** is a hendiadys that appears in the Hebrew Bible as a formula originally used in a military context.⁵¹⁵ Both phrases are elliptical with **לֵב** as object and so it is (**חִזְקָה לֵב** and **וְאַמָּץ לֵב**). However, **וְאַמָּץ** is not used here, but rather **וְהִתְיַחַשׁ לְאִישׁ**, to prove himself to be man. This is a command that has been used as far back as the Mari correspondence in the 18th century B.C.E. For instance, Yasmah-Addu reports on the letter his father wrote him questioning if he is still a child: “How much longer will you not take charge of your house?”⁵¹⁶

David is unambiguously commanding Solomon to exhibit a quality that is typically masculine (to be man) such as strength, influence, courage (1 Sam 4:9; 26:15; Gen 44:15; Judg 8:21). David expects greatness from Solomon, which demands conducting himself in a manner

⁵¹⁴ John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM Press, 1964), 97–105. It is a command to be strong and courageous (**חִזְקָה וְאַמָּץ**) according to Josh 1:9. From vv. 6-9, the intensity increases, from ‘be strong and courageous’ to ‘be strong and very courageous’.

⁵¹⁵ Hartmut N. Rosel, *Joshua*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 28–39.

⁵¹⁶ Jack M. Sasson, *From the Mari Archives: An Anthology of Old Babylonian Letters* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 12.

that exhibits strength, unlike the condition of a woman or a child. The word **שיץ** here is used to stress the qualities of manliness, such as bravery (1 Sam 4:9).⁵¹⁷ With rare exceptions, fighting is done in the Bible by able-bodied men. Therefore, David encourages Solomon to be strong as he takes over the reign and to be brave in the task ahead of him.

However, David also knows that his success as king of Israel is not by his own strength alone, but with the powers given him by God. The command that God gave Joshua after the death of Moses in Josh 1:8 is about depending on the word of God, which is echoed in the second part of David’s last words to Solomon.⁵¹⁸ The success of Solomon depends directly on being courageous *and* obeying the word of God (1 Kgs 2:3–4; 8:25–26).

David’s instruction to Solomon resonates in Proverbs, where a father calls on his sons to listen to the instructions he received from his father, when he was young (Prov 4:1–9). The desire of the father is that his son fit into society well, live a ‘normal’ life, succeed materially, and preserve his integrity and legacy of the family property.⁵¹⁹ David’s strength and dependence on God are already evident in his defeat of Goliath (1 Sam 17:37, 45–51). He therefore instructs Solomon:

And keep the charge of the LORD your God:

וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת־מִשְׁמַרְתּוֹ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
לְלֶכֶת בְּדַרְכּוֹ לְשָׁמֵר חֻקָּיו מִצְוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְעֲדוּתָיו

to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His covenants⁵²⁰.

⁵¹⁷ J. Kühlewein, **שיץ**, in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 98–104.

⁵¹⁸ In both cases, those departing and those being left to carry on the promises are chosen by God.

⁵¹⁹ Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "The Wisdom of Šūpê-amēlī —A Deathbed Debate between a Father and a Son," in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. Richard Clifford (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature), 2007), 42.

⁵²⁰ Generally, **עדות** is translated to mean “testimony” *BDB*, *HALOT*, and Holladay. However, Weinfeld explains that **ברית** is identical in meaning to the term **עדות**. See Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 65 and 111.

as it is written in the Law of Moses,
that you may prosper in all that you do
and wherever you turn (1 Kgs 2:3).

כְּכַתוּב בְּתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה
לְמַעַן תִּשְׁפִּיל אֶת כָּל-אַשְׁרֵךְ תַּעֲשֶׂה
וְאֶת כָּל-אַשְׁרֵךְ תִּפְגַּח שָׁם:

Obedience to God is paramount for the success of Solomon with negative consequences for disobedience. David instructs Solomon to be faithful to God's demands and gives him specific charges to fulfill.⁵²¹ The same root שמר is used for the verb ושמרת 'keep' and the noun משמרת 'charge' when David instructs Solomon to keep the charge of the LORD. David knows the story of his predecessor, Saul, whose disobedience in carrying out the instructions of the LORD to annihilate the Amalekites leads to fatal consequences (1 Sam 15:1–23). David remembers his own affliction after doing evil in the Lord's sight (2 Sam 12:9–10). Thus, in one verse, David uses four different words referring to the word of God that Solomon is to keep as: *statutes, commandments, judgments, and covenants* (לשמר חקתי מצותי ומשפטי ועדותי) as God's norms as represented in the Torah. Wénin suggests, in the Book of Joshua "tout en insistant sur le rôle crucial de l'obéissance à la Loi pour la réussite de l'entreprise."⁵²²

Similarly, towards the end of their lives, Moses and Joshua recount the history of their journey with God, reminding the people of Israel of the importance of keeping the word of God, the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 31–33; Joshua 24). The historical context of David's last words is important, but the originality or secondary nature of this passage belongs to literary or

Similarly, Greenstein demonstrates עדות only means 'covenant' and never means 'testimony'. For more on עדות, see Edward L. Greenstein, "Methodological Principles in Determining that the So-called Jehoash Inscription is Inauthentic," in *Puzzling Out the Past: Studies in Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures in Honor of Bruce Zuckerman*, ed. Marilyn J. Lundberg, Steven Fine and Wayne Pitard (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 91.

⁵²¹ Walter Harrelson "The Significance of 'Last Words' for Intertestamental Ethics," in *Essays in Old Testament Ethics: J. Philip Hyatt, in Memoriam*, ed. James L. Crenshaw and John T. Willis (New York: Ktav, 1974), 205–13.

⁵²² André Wénin, "Josué 1-12 comme récit", *The Book of Joshua*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 250 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 134–35. As Solomon, keeps the law, as the king, he also employs the sword against evildoers. "The Edenic associations of 'succeed' indicate that by coercively elimination the violent from his kingdom, Solomon is acting as a true Adam..." See Peter J. Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 37.

compositional history. However, this study analyzes the phenomenon of last words in the received text. Scholars suggest vv. 3–4 are the interpolation of a Deuteronomistic editor.⁵²³ Leithart observes, “the transition from 1 Kgs 2:4 to 2:5 occasions consternation among commentators, and many opt for the theory that 2:1–4 was interpolated to balance the negative portrayal of David in 2:5–9.”⁵²⁴

However, David’s instructions to Solomon are in accord with the instructions of fathers to their sons in general in Mesopotamian culture, such as in the “Instructions of Shuruppak,” where a father, Ubartutu, instructs his son, Ziusudra, to observe his instructions. Ubartutu is reported as saying, “instruction I offer thee, take my instruction, Ziusudra, a word I would speak to thee, give ear to my word, my instruction do not neglect, my spoken word do not transgress.”⁵²⁵ An important difference is that Ubartutu insists on obedience to his word while Solomon is told by David to keep God’s word as a guarantee of success. The Egyptian instruction of Ptah-hotep is also an instruction of a father to a son that stresses the glory of obedience and the shame of transgression before the main instructions were given. He begins the address to his son about how the end of his life is at hand, and old age has descended on him with feebleness,⁵²⁶ just as David is reported to do. The fear of God and paying attention to a father’s instructions in order to be wise, are very common themes in the book of Proverbs (1:8–

⁵²³ E. g. Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: Norton, 1999), 374–75. He suggests involvement of a Deuteronomistic editor because of the relatively long verses and the “verbal formulas are distinctive of the Book of Deuteronomy and its satellite literature.”

⁵²⁴ Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings*, 37. 1 Kgs 2:1–4 focuses on specific instruction of David to Solomon and his relationship with God in order to succeed. On the other hand, vv.5–9 gives attention to other people that are significant in the view of David to punish or reward.

⁵²⁵ W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), 92–93.

⁵²⁶ L. Cranmer-Byng and S. A. Kapadia, *Instructions of Ptah-hotep* (London: John Murray, 2016), 40–42.

9; 2:1; 3:1–2; 4:1–4). The necessity to seek wisdom is a religious and prudential demand since wisdom engenders the fear of God.⁵²⁷

David charges Solomon to keep the ways of the LORD his God and refers him to the Law of Moses, that by keeping them, he will prosper (תִּשְׁפִּיל) in all he does and wherever he goes (1 Kgs 2:3). This form of the verb תִּשְׁפִּיל is also used in Josh 1:7 and 8. The *hiphil* imperfect in this context means to “cause to prosper”. It is similar to סָכַל in Aramaic, ‘know, be intelligent, cause to understand’.⁵²⁸ שָׂכַל in the *hiphil*, denotes an ‘insightful’ person, who acts cleverly and intelligently and becomes successful.⁵²⁹

1 Kgs 2:4 is conditional and dependent on the preceding verse (v. 3a). When the instructions of the first part of verse 3 are fulfilled, then the promise will be fulfilled.

...that the LORD may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, “If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in faithfulness, with all their heart and with all their soul, He said, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel” (v. 4).

לְמַעַן יִקִּים יְהוָה אֶת-דְּבָרֹו
אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עָלַי לֵאמֹר
אִם-יִשְׁמְרוּ בְּנֵיךָ אֶת-דִּרְכֹּם
לְלַכֵּת לִפְנֵי בְּאֵמֶת
בְּכָל-לִבְבָם וּבְכָל-נַפְשָׁם:
לֵאמֹר לֹא-יִכָּרֵת לְךָ אִישׁ
מֵעַל כִּסֵּא יִשְׂרָאֵל

1 Kgs 2:4 starts with לְמַעַן, which literally means “in order that”. It is linked to that which needs to be done in order that Solomon prosper. It also introduces a phrase that refers to the promise God gave to David in 2 Sam 7:12–13, 25. In this text, David uses the plural “your sons” in speaking of the promise even though he is addressing Solomon alone. When Nathan tells David

⁵²⁷ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB 18B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 939–42.

⁵²⁸ *BDB*, שָׂכַל § 9444, 968. Cf. Butler, *Joshua*, 2–14.

⁵²⁹ Magne Sæbø, “שָׂכַל” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, eds. Jenni and Westermann, 3. 1270 Cf. Butler, *Joshua*, 2–14.

God's promise, it is in the singular: "I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom." (וְהָקִימְתִי אֶת־יִרְעֶךָ אַחֲרָיִךְ אֱשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֶּעֶיךָ וְהָכִינֹתִי אֶת־מַמְלַכְתּוֹ). However, Cogan claims that the promise of God to David through Nathan is unconditional (2 Sam 7:11–16). There is a continuation of the eternal dynasty without any form of destruction but with chastisement and anticipated penalty for those who go astray.⁵³⁰

Further, David's last words to Solomon are to enhance the security of Solomon and his kingdom when David dies. David makes sure that politically, not only Solomon, but his entire dynasty is safe. It is in line with ancient Near East culture to make sure the throne is secured. Šamši-Addu, for instance, instructs his son: "About the members of the Ya'ilanum tribes that are with you. I had told you to keep them under guard.... I am ordering their seizure. Order that each member of the Ya'ilanum, as many as are with you, should die during the same night...."⁵³¹ The security of the throne is vital and those who are potential threats are stopped, while well-meaning ones are rewarded and taken care. Rulers in Mesopotamian culture take caution to protect their constituencies without neglecting the outpost with instructions such as we observe here from a governor. "You must not neglect to guard the district and (to block) the road of the enemy. As to the nomad Yaḥzib-El (in charge of outposts) as well as his troops, supply them fairly with grain, so as to strengthen the district. The outposts must keep on the

⁵³⁰ Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 10 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 172–73. Considering 2 Sam 7:12–17, the promise to David could be considered as an unconditional. However, in this text David portrays the promise as conditional. He himself experienced the wrath of God when he sinned. Though the dynasty was not taken from him completely, at a point, his own son was reigning as he fled (2 Sam 15–16).

⁵³¹ Sasson, *From the Mari Archives*, 337.

move so as not to permit the enemy to cross within the territory (Upper Habur).’ This is what my lord⁵³² instructed Zikri-Addu through me.”⁵³³

David anticipates the danger that Joab, who is the commander of his army (2 Sam 2:13; 10:17; 11:1; 8:16; 19:13; 20:23; 1 Kgs 11:15; 1 Chron 27:34), and Shimei (2 Sam 16:5–13) could pose to Solomon and his kingdom were he to die without instructing Solomon, the chosen heir to the throne, on what to do. In practical political terms, Joab who became a supporter of Adonijah, and Shimei, the disgruntled Benjaminite, might threaten Solomon’s hold on power. Hence the need for them to be eliminated.⁵³⁴ In a similar manner, Sasson observes in the Mari letters a king, Šamši-Addu, giving instruction to his son Yasmah-Addu regarding the security of his kingdom. He advises him to wipe out the enemy who devises tricks and maneuvers against him.⁵³⁵ David sees the need to eliminate anyone who might be a cause of concern for Solomon. Where somebody poses as a threat to a kingdom, God permits the person to be killed. When Ahab spares the life of Ben-Hadad, a Syrian king, a threat to Israel, the prophet denounces his actions and tells him that his life will be exchanged for that of Ben –Hadad (1 Kgs 20:35–42). On the other hand, Cogan portrays the actions of Solomon as the elimination of his rivals under dubious circumstances to stay in power. For Cogan 1 Kings 2 has more to do with power politics that is thinly disguised as a moral tale than the security of the kingdom of Solomon.⁵³⁶ When one

⁵³² The reference to ‘my lord’ is most likely to the king.

⁵³³ Sasson, *From the Mari Archives*, 203.

⁵³⁴ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 15–16.

⁵³⁵ Sasson, *From the Mari Archives*, 204.

⁵³⁶ Cogan, *1 Kings*, 180–81.

takes the context of this text and ancient Near Eastern culture into consideration, Cogan's interpretation makes sense.

Joab and Shimei are those David knows he should have killed, but for one reason or another he did not; but now he underlines the need for it (1 Kgs 2:5–6, 8–9). David vowed to Shimei that he would not kill him (2 Sam 19:18–23). However, David foresees Shimei's presence around Solomon as a threat. David recounts the incidents of Joab and Shimei in v. 5 and v. 8, respectively. In v. 6 and v. 9 he affirms the wisdom of Solomon but does not leave it at that. David becomes specific in case Solomon misses his point about eliminating them.

Therefore do according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to the grave in peace.....Now therefore, do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man and know what you ought to do to him; but bring his gray hair down to the grave with blood (vv. 6, 9).

The main accusation of David against Joab is that he shed the blood of war in time of peace and put the blood of war on his belt (v. 5). Abner came to make peace with David when Joab was away on a raid. When Joab was informed, he questioned why David let him alone and sent messengers after him without David's knowledge. Joab deceitfully killed Abner, which the narrator had informed us was because of the blood of Joab's brother, Asahel (2 Sam 3:22–27). Likewise, Joab killed Amasa through guile, calling him "brother" with a kiss (20:9–10). The last words of Joab to Amasa before he killed him were הַשָּׁלוֹם אִתָּהּ אָהִי "Are you well my brother...?"⁵³⁷ Although David's actions and counsel are politically motivated, he is the king of a

⁵³⁷ Alter, *The David Story*, 375. Joab pretended to be friendly but killed Amasa and left him in his blood in the middle of the road, which David described as Joab putting blood on his belt and his sandals.

nation under God, and crime is to be punished. Since David did not kill Joab, he transfers the requisite power to Solomon.⁵³⁸

Joab was not only David's commander but also a nephew. He was the son of his sister Zeruah (2 Sam 17:25; 1 Chron 2:13–16), who was with David from the onset of the kingship until the end of his reign as king (2 Sam 2:14–32; 3:24–31; 10:7–14; 11:1–27; 12:26–27; 14:1–3, 19–33; 17:25; 18:2–5, 11–29; 19:6,14; 20:7–22; 23:18, 24, 37; 24:2–9; 1 Kgs 1:7, 19, 41; 2:5, 28; 1 Chron 11:6, 26; 19:8–15; 20:1; 21:2–6; 27:24, 34). Joab led the men of David from the very beginning in Hebron and fought against Abner, who led those who were in support of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, to be king instead of David after the death of Saul (2 Samuel 2–3). Though David cursed Joab (3:22–30) at the early stages of his leadership as the commander, when Joab killed Abner, he remained faithful to David and stood with him always, seeking David's security. In fact, David used Joab to try to cover up his sin with Bathsheba by putting Uriah, her husband, in a vulnerable place in battle so that he would be killed (2 Samuel 11).

Joab fought and took Rabbah and its source of water and the royal city from the people of Ammon, but threatened David with naming the city after himself if David would not comply with his counsel (2 Sam 12:26–31). Although the motivation for which Joab coaxed David to bring Absalom back is not clear, Joab planned with a wise woman from Tekoa to bring Absalom back from exile, when he perceived that David was yearning for him (2 Sam 14:1–33). David put Joab, his brother Abishai and Ittai in charge of his three groups of armies that fought against Absalom, but also instructed them to deal gently with Absalom for his sake (2 Sam 18:1–5). However, Joab disregards the instruction and kills Absalom (vv. 9–15). Anderson observes that it is ironic that Joab, who brought Absalom from Geshur, is the cause of his death. "It is

⁵³⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, 3. 29.

doubtful that Joab acted solely in the interest of the state; it is more likely that he seized this opportunity to settle a personal grudge against his cousin Absalom who may have spoiled some of Joab's cherished schemes."⁵³⁹

David fears Joab and is convinced his presence would endanger Solomon. At the early stages of his reign as a king, when Joab killed Abner (2 Sam 3:27), David said, "And I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too harsh for me...." (וְאֶנֶכִי הַיּוֹם רַךְ וּמְשׁוֹחַ מֶלֶךְ וְהָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי צְרוּיָה קָשִׁים מִמֶּנִּי) v. 39). David sees himself as disadvantaged. He uses רַךְ 'tender, timid, weak,' which is also used to describe the posture of the heart of King Josiah (2 Kgs 22:19), in contrast with the nature of the sons of Zeruiah who are too 'severe' or 'hard' קָשִׁים for him. When David mourns for Absalom, his son, who rose up against him and was killed in his attempt to take the kingdom from his father, Joab was angry, literally ordering David to stop mourning and go comfort those who stood with him against Absalom. David complied because Joab not only threatened him but also swore that David would have more trouble than he had ever had if he refuses to comply. Joab did not mince his words concerning what he would do if his advice were not heeded (18:33–19:8). When Joab joined the camp of Adonijah, David recalled what he was capable of doing (1 Kgs 1:7). Gray writes, "Strong men like Joab who have laid the royal house under obligation are notoriously embarrassing in the infancy of a dynasty.... The present passage has a perfect analogy....of the Umayyad dynasty, Mu'awiyah, laid upon his son Yazid, which concerned political enemies."⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁹ Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 227. The text is clear that there was war between those who followed Absalom to try to depose David and those who were loyal to David. David perceived the death of Absalom and pleaded that they be lenient to him (2 Sam 18:5-33). Nothing in the text indicates Joab ever had a confrontation with Absalom except with regard to David's dynasty.

⁵⁴⁰ Gray, *I & II Kings*, 96–97.

Having shown himself to be independent-minded, Joab might pose a threat to Solomon, and thus, David's last words to Solomon are very important.

When Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite (20:1), rebelled against David, Joab led an army to pursue him until a wise woman stepped in to advise Joab. Joab explained that his pursuit is against Sheba, who “raised his hand against the king, against David” (v. 21). She agreed—and the head of Sheba was thrown down to Joab to end the siege on Abel of Beth Maachah. Although Joab remained faithful to David during the rebellion of Absalom, David took an oath to make Amasa the permanent commander of his army instead of Joab after Absalom was killed (19:13). During the rebellion of Sheba, Joab killed Amasa, one of David's prominent leaders (20:1–23). Amasa was a nephew of David as well as Joab according to 2 Sam 17:25; 19:13; 1 Chron 2:17. Joab possibly saw Amasa as a threat and killed him.

The LXX and Syriac versions of 1 Kgs 2:5 read וַאֲשֶׁר for the second אֲשֶׁר and, Mulder suggests that it is probable that the ׀ in the LXX and other Hebrew MSS before the second אֲשֶׁר is a “*waw epexegeticu*; i.e. David experienced what Joab did to Abner and Amasa as an attack on him personally.”⁵⁴¹ The two acts of Joab both concern David—that David is distressed by Joab's murder of Abner and Amasa. Abner was in the process of helping to bring all the subjects under David, but Joab did not see it that way (1 Sam 3:12–27). Amasa was still in the service of David when Joab killed him, even though he defected to the side of Absalom during his rebellion against David (2 Sam 17:25; 20:4–13). David describes Abner and Amasa as the two commanders of the armies of Israel (לְשֹׁנֵי-שָׂרֵי צְבָאוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל). Although David knew they had opposed him, he also respected them. Although Joab killed Absalom, which caused David the greatest grief, David does not mention it to Solomon; but it is clear that David never forgave

⁵⁴¹ Mulder, *1 Kings*, 87–102.

him.⁵⁴² Similarly, though David did not avenge the death of Amasa, whom Joab had killed during the rebellion of Sheba, he never forgave him (20:9–10).⁵⁴³

The instructions of David to Solomon were carried out. Joab heard about the death of Adonijah and, fearing for his own life, fled to the tabernacle and took hold of the horns of the altar (1 Kings 2:25–35). Although Solomon initially instructs that Joab be killed by the altar, Benaiah gives Joab an opportunity to come out of the tabernacle. However, he objects, saying “No but I will die here.” In response to Joab’s plea, Solomon asks Benaiah to kill him, and he does (vv. 31–34). Solomon fulfilled his father’s last words, thereby enjoying relative peace during his reign.

However, David’s last words are not only negative retribution. They are also positive in rewarding some people. Sandwiched between the two instructions of political house cleaning, David is careful to remember Barzillai, the Gileadite. He is one of three (Shobi, Machir and Barzillai), who helped David with sustenance during the revolt of Absalom (2 Sam 17:27–29; 1 Kgs 2:7). David and his company found refuge with Barzillai, who goes the extra mile by escorting the king across the Jordan and provisioning him while they are at Mahanaim (2 Sam 19:31–32). David asks Barzillai to follow him to Jerusalem when Absalom is killed, and the dynasty is restored to him. However, Barzillai objects to going to Jerusalem because of his advanced age and requests that Chimham⁵⁴⁴ follow David as he returns to his city (vv. 35–40). David does not mention the name of Chimham in his last words, but rather the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite.

⁵⁴² Alter, *The David Story*, 374–75.

⁵⁴³ Cogan, *1 Kings*, 173.

⁵⁴⁴ Chimham’s identity is not well known. He is only identified as a servant (v. 37–40). See Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2. 47, for more on the identity of Chimham.

וּלְבָנֵי בַרזַיִל הַגִּלְעָדִי תַעֲשֶׂה-חֶסֶד וְהָיוּ בְּאֶמְלִי שְׁלֹחֶיךָ כִּי-כֹל קָרְבוּ אֵלַי בְּבָרְחִי מִפְּנֵי אַבְשָׁלוֹם אָחִיךָ:

“But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite and let them be among those who eat at your table, for so they came to me when I fled from Absalom your brother” (1 Kgs 2:7).

It is not clear who specifically these sons of Barzillai are. The word used here to denote kindness is חֶסֶד. חֶסֶד usually refers to ‘loyalty, devotion,’ as in a treaty or covenant. *BDB* defines חֶסֶד as ‘goodness, kindness, kindness of men towards men, in doing favors and benefits’.⁵⁴⁵ *HALOT* has it as ‘faithfulness, goodness, graciousness, joint obligation between relatives, friends, host and guest, master and servant; closeness, solidarity, lasting loyalty’.⁵⁴⁶ Gray asserts that the word is pregnant with meaning and defies translation.⁵⁴⁷ In Aramaic and late Hebrew, חָסַד is a completely different word meaning ‘to be white’ or ‘to be put to shame’; see e.g. Prov 25:9–10.⁵⁴⁸ חָסַד is used in Proverbs 14 as a noun twice with different meaning. It is used positively in verse 22 and negatively in verse 34 as in Lev 20:17. Thus, חֶסֶד can be regarded as ‘shame’ or ‘reproach’ in the context of Prov 14:34: צְדָקָה תְרוֹמֵם-גּוֹי וְחָסֶד לְאֻמִּים תִּטְאֵת: “righteousness is said to exalt a nation and sin is a reproach.”⁵⁴⁹ In our context, it can be deduced that David is requesting Solomon to show kindness and loyalty towards the sons of Barzillai. Apart from Chimham, Barzillai did not ask that any other person follow David to Jerusalem (2

⁵⁴⁵ *BDB*, "חֶסֶד," 338.

⁵⁴⁶ *HALOT*, "חֶסֶד," 335.

⁵⁴⁷ Gray, *I & II Kings*, 100.

⁵⁴⁸ Edward L. Greenstein, “The Language of Job and Its Poetic Function,” *JBL* 122 (2003): 665–66.

⁵⁴⁹ חֶסֶד in Lev 20:17 should be translated ‘shameful’ or ‘wicked’. In Prov 14:34, though, a text critical issue is evident. The LXX and Syriac versions have ἐλασσονοῦσι δὲ (diminish). *BHS*, 1292.

Sam 19:34–37). It is suggested that the sons of Barzillai here could be referring to his family (REB).⁵⁵⁰ The text does not indicate that Solomon shows kindness to the sons of Barzillai.

Shimei, a relative of Saul, cursed David and threw stones at him when he fled from Absalom. He called him a “man of bloodshed and worthless” אִישׁ דְּמַיִם אֶתֶּה וְאִישׁ הַבְּלִיעַל (2 Sam 16:5–13). Abishai, Joab’s brother, one of David’s commanders, was with him and sought to kill Shimei, but David opposed it, explaining that God might be allowing Shimei to curse him (vv. 9–11). David had the blood of Uriah on his hands, and Nathan warned him of the consequences ahead (2 Sam 12:7–15).⁵⁵¹ “The oracle in vv. 7b–12, with its forecast of trouble for David, is an essential component of the story in chaps. 10–12, and this is especially true of vv. 11–12.”⁵⁵² Shimei believed that all the blood of the house of Saul is on the hands of David. However, McCarter observes that there is uncertainty over what Shimei means by “all the blood of the house of Saul”, and of what he is accusing David; because it is unclear whether he is cursing David for the execution of Saul’s seven sons (21:1–14) or the death of Abiner and Ishbaal (3:22–30; 4:1–8), for which David’s enemies hold him accountable.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵⁰ Roger L. Omanson and John Ellington, *A Handbook on 1-2 Kings* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2008), 69–70.

⁵⁵¹ In 2 Sam 12:11-12, Nathan informs David of God raising an adversity against him from his own house who will publicly lie with his wives. The rebellion of Absalom and his sexual relation with the ten concubines of David is a fulfillment of the word of the LORD through Nathan (16:20-23; 20:3).

⁵⁵² McCarter, *II Samuel*, 300–1.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 373. Abiner is usually written as Abner (1 Chron 8:33; 9:39), and Ishbaa is Ishbosheth (2 Sam 2:8 and several other places). It could be concluded that Shimei is referring to both or even more bloodshed, since he said אֵל כָּל דְּמַיִם בֵּית־שָׂאוּל “The LORD has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul” (2 Sam 16:8). כָּל דְּמַיִם ‘all the blood’ means more than the blood of only one person.

David recalls what Shimei did to him and has not forgotten or forgiven him.⁵⁵⁴ He swore by the LORD to Shimei on his return to Jerusalem not to put him to death and called Abishai, who called for the death of Shimei again, as ‘adversaries’ to him (16:9–10; 19:18–23). However, David decided that he should not be held guiltless. David is certain that leaving Shimei alive could be dangerous to Solomon, and so in his last words, David instructs Solomon to do according to his wisdom. וְהוֹרֵדְתָּ אֶת־שֵׂיבֹתוֹ בְּדָם שָׂאֹל “...bring his gray hair down to the grave in blood,” affirming that Solomon, a wise man, would know what to do (vv. 8–9). Alter describes David as “...an implacable seeker of vengeance against the same Shimei whom he had forgiven after the defeat of Absalom’s insurrection.”⁵⁵⁵ On the other hand, it is suggested that the instruction to Solomon to kill Shimei is not personal revenge but, because Shimei’s crime is high treason against the anointed of the LORD, the LORD Himself was insulted. Because he is a blasphemer, punishing Shimei is the duty of any theocratic leader.⁵⁵⁶

Solomon restricts Shimei to Jerusalem. He is free to build and live in Jerusalem; but Shimei violates the restriction and goes to Gath (1 Kgs 2:36–46). Solomon is emphatic that Shimei not leave Jerusalem and spells out the consequences of disobedience: “know for certain you shall surely die.” Both verbs are repeated in Hebrew יָדַע תָּדַע כִּי מוֹת תִּמָּוֶת . Shimei might have thought that despite his fierce opposition to David, he has been spared, and so violating Solomon’s instructions has no repercussions. Shimei left Jerusalem to Gath to pursue two runaway slaves, which is a violation of the law (Deut 23:15–16). This insolence toward the oath he

⁵⁵⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2, 47–48, suggest that David shows a sign of weakness by the favor shown Shimei and not executing him (2 Sam 19:22-23). Accordingly, David suggests that Solomon execute him.

⁵⁵⁵ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 127.

⁵⁵⁶ Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3, 30.

took in the name of the LORD, and his agreement with Solomon cost him his life (vv. 36–46). Solomon followed David’s instruction. He did not simply put him to death but allowed Shimei to decide when he wanted to die. When Shimei disregards the oath and agreement, Solomon commands Benaiah to kill him.

However, Cogan observes a “lack of symmetry within the narrative between the charge given in David’s testament and its execution by Solomon.” He notes that Solomon did not uphold the last words of David to reward the sons of Barzillai, nor was the action of Solomon in banishing Abiathar from Jerusalem part of David’s last words.⁵⁵⁷ The removal of Abiathar, nonetheless, is in fulfillment of Scripture concerning the house of Eli (1 Kgs 2:27).⁵⁵⁸ Though David did not give Solomon any instructions regarding Abiathar, Solomon could not have restricted his actions throughout his reign to only what David told him in his last words. Solomon basically carried out David’s last words, to make sure his reign would be politically secured.

8. Calling for Vengeance

Zechariah while being Stoned (2 Chron 24:19–22)

Shed human blood speaks and the souls of the dead seek blood vengeance without atonement—except, in some cases, the blood of a murderer (Gen 4:10; 9:5; Num 35:33; Deut 21:1–9; cf. Rev 6:9–10). Zechariah is the son of Jehoiada, the priest, who helped protect Joash, when Athaliah

⁵⁵⁷ Cogan, *1 Kings*, 180–81.

⁵⁵⁸ An unidentified man of God informed Eli that there shall not be an old man in his house. This was said three times in three verses (1 Sam 2:31–36), and a sign that this would happen was given in v.34. Abiathar was the descendant of Eli and when King Saul asked Doeg to kill Ahimelech (and all the priests of Nob) for inquiring from the LORD for David, Abiathar fled to David in Keilah (22:16–23:6). Though he was not killed, and he stayed loyal to David, he and Joab joined the conspiracy of Adonijah to take the throne after David (1 Kgs 1:7).

killed the royal heirs. Jehoiada is very instrumental in Joash’s coronation as king and supportive of his reign until Jehoiada’s death (2 Chron 22:10–24:16). Zechariah is presented as a prophet on assignment from God, to denounce the transgressing of the LORD’s commandments by Judah, when he is murdered. Zechariah is the only one in the Hebrew Bible who calls for vengeance against enemies as he dies (2 Chron 24:21–22). Samson, too, calls for vengeance, but he dies not by the hands of his enemies but by a heroic suicide (Judg 16:28–30).⁵⁵⁹ Zechariah’s last words are uttered as he dies, calling on God to avenge his blood (2 Chron 24:19–21). Events around the death of Zechariah and his curse can directly be attributed to the command of King Joash. The narrator informs us:

So they conspired against him,
and at the command of the king, they stoned him with stones
in the court of the house of the LORD.
Thus, Joash the king did not remember the kindness
which Jehoiada his father had done to him,
but killed his son;
and as he died, he said,
“The LORD look on it and repay”! (vv. 21–22).

וַיִּקְשְׁרוּ עָלָיו
וַיִּרְגְּמוּהוּ אֲבָן בְּמִצְוַת הַמֶּלֶךְ
בְּחֶצֶר בַּיִת יְהוָה:
וְלֹא-זָכַר יוֹאָשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ הַחֲסֵד
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוֹיָדָע אָבִיו עִמּוֹ
וַיַּהַרְגֵם אֶת-בְּנוֹ
וּכְמוֹתוֹ אָמַר
יְרֵא יְהוָה וַיִּדְרֹשׁ

It is important to note that although there are several parallel narratives of the Books of Samuel-Kings and Chronicles, this story does not appear anywhere else. “Chronicles is an integral work in its own right and worthy of careful scrutiny”.⁵⁶⁰ Japhet suggests that Zechariah’s intervention and his fate should be seen in historical and political context, which is broader than the relationship between Jehoiada and Joash. She observes that the short note about the killing of

⁵⁵⁹ Lichtenstein, *How the Mighty Have Fallen*, 8–10.

⁵⁶⁰ Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9*, AB 12 (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 67.

Zechariah raises questions, especially the lack of proportion between the admonition of Zechariah and his execution.⁵⁶¹

Zechariah dies in the court of the temple when he is stoned at the command of King Joash. Joash, who is cared for by Zechariah's father, shows that he is not mindful of the care given him (v. 22a).⁵⁶² "Joash will have none of the continued dependence on the tradition of Jehoiada and of continuing influence from his family. It is he himself who gives the order for conspiracy against Zechariah."⁵⁶³ Two major sins were committed when they stoned Zechariah in the temple court: murder and the desecration of the Temple. Without calling for vengeance from the LORD, God Himself has said He will require the blood of those who kill another man (Gen 9:5).⁵⁶⁴ Schniedewind suggests that the Chronicle's narratives are organized around the theme of vengeance theology, which speaks to the passions of the post-exilic returnees.⁵⁶⁵

God did not prevent those who murdered Zechariah from conspiring against him, and Zechariah is stoned. Zechariah calls on God to observe the situation and judge them as he dies. The final words of Zechariah are *יְהוָה יִדְרֹךְ*, (The LORD look on it, and demand retribution! *Ἰδοὶ κύριος καὶ κρινάτω*). Literally, Zechariah asks God to take note of what they were doing to him

⁵⁶¹ Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 849.

⁵⁶² Christopher T. Begg, "Joash of Judah According to Josephus," in *The Chronicler as Historian*, JSOTSup 238, ed. M. Patrick Graham, Kenneth G. Hoglund and Steven L. McKenzie (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 312–13.

⁵⁶³ William Johnstone, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, JSOTSup., 253-254 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 146. Jehoiada conspires to bring Joash to the throne and crown him as king avoiding bloodshed and pollution in the Temple, so that Athaliah dies outside the Temple. However, Joash orders the son of the chief priest who helped him to the throne, to be stoned inside the sanctuary.

⁵⁶⁴ I. W. Slotki, ed., *Chronicles* (London: Soncino Press, 1952), 273.

⁵⁶⁵ William M. Schniedewind, "Prophets and Prophecy in the Books of Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Historian*, JSOTSup 238, ed. M. Patrick Graham, Kenneth G. Hoglund and Steven L. McKenzie (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 223.

and demand their lives as his.⁵⁶⁶ The verb שׂרשׁ, which is generally translated ‘to seek’ in this context, is translated as ‘ask for, require or demand’ (Gen 9:5; Deut 18:19; Ezek 20:20; 33:6; 34:10; Mic 6:8).⁵⁶⁷ A similar curse is issued by the officials of Israel against Moses and Aaron, whom they saw as the cause of an increase in their oppression in Egypt. When Moses and Aaron demanded that Pharaoh lighten their workload, he did the opposite. The officials bid “the LORD see and judge” גִּרָא יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם וַיִּשְׁפֹּט (Exod 5:21). When a curse is pronounced without a cause for it, it does not do any harm (Prov 26:3b). On the other hand, Zechariah’s curse has a cause, and his last words are chronicled as a curse that is established (2 Chron 24:20–21). The end of Joash mirrors the fate of his own victims (v. 25); his servants conspire against him and kill him⁵⁶⁸ just as he conspires and kills the servant of God. The authors of both the books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles affirm the fact that Joash dies of stoning by his own servants (2 Kgs 12:20; 2 Chron 24:25). Chronicles goes further to give the reason for his death. The cause of the death of King Joash is attributed to the blood of the sons⁵⁶⁹ of Jehoiada the priest. Just a few years before the murder of Zechariah, his father helps to bring deliverance from the machinations of Athaliah and her minions, and Joash’s coronation as king takes place in the very temple in which Zechariah is murdered.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁶ Joash did the opposite of that which God requires of him. Instead of learning to do good, seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, and plead for the widow (Isa 1:17), he did not listen to the prophet, Zechariah, who is an orphan, and sent by God (2 Chron 24:17-22). He becomes the oppressor.

⁵⁶⁷ *BDB*, 205., §1875 שׂרשׁ.

⁵⁶⁸ Johnstone, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 148–49.

⁵⁶⁹ LXX has son (ἐν αἵμασιν υἱοῦ Ἰωδαε τοῦ ἱερέως) and not sons as in MT in v 25. In the text Zechariah alone is mentioned as the son of the priest, though other prophets were sent to bring Judah back to the LORD (v. 19). The blood of the son of Jehoiada is preferred in this context to the blood of the sons.

⁵⁷⁰ Jacob M. Myers, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, AB 12-13 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 134. Isaac Kalimi, *An Ancient Israelite Historian: Studies in the Chronicler, His Time, Place and Writing*, *Studia Semitica Neerlandica*, 46

It can be concluded that God hears Zechariah's prayer, which is his last words, and that his blood is avenged. There is no record of what happens to the people Joash commands to stone Zechariah, but God delivers the army of Judah to a small company of Syrians and Joash is wounded. Then his servants conspire against him and kill him because he is the instigator of the death of Zechariah. In the full canonical context, Zechariah's last words are fulfilled (2 Chron 24:24–25). Although Zechariah's last words are not found in the book of Kings, the book of Chronicles relates some matters that do not appear in the earlier historical books.

Several stories such as Jabez's prayer (1 Chron 4:9–10) and Hezekiah's tunnel, corroborated with archaeological evidence today (2 Chron 32:30), are featured in the book of Chronicles, but not in Kings. One of the narratives absent in Kings is the story of Zechariah, which is our focus. The role of the priest and Levites is paramount in the book of Chronicles especially with Israel's relationship with God and worship (2 Chron 11:13–17). Thus, the murder of a priest's son, who is sent by God, could not be overlooked. His last words are fulfilled in the murder of Joash.

9. Suicide as Reprisal

Abimelech to his Armor Bearer (Judg 9:50–57)

Reprisal is featured in the Hebrew Bible several times, and God allows retaliation and punishment for intentional offenses (Exod 21:23–25; Levi 24:17–21) because the blood of the

(Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2005), 28, 225. Jesus refers to this story reported by both Matthew and Luke (Matt 23:35, Luke 11:50-51). This is in reference to the first and the last homicides in the Hebrew Scriptures being Abel (Gen 4:8-16), and Zechariah (2 Chron 24:20-22) respectively. Kalimi explains the positioning of the narratives, as an inclusion with Genesis, where the murder of Abel is reported.

victim pollutes the land (Num 35:33–34).⁵⁷¹ From the blood of Abel, the first homicide, and throughout Scripture blood cries out for vengeance (Gen 4:10–15; Deut 21:1–9; Ezek 24:6–16; Rev 6:9–11). The source of pollution can be external or internal, and Judg 9:50–57 deals with an internal source of pollution, which emanates not from the environment but in the constitution of the human being.⁵⁷² On the other hand, blood is used for sacrificial purification of contamination, which is sometimes atonement (Lev 16:14–19). Blood is the main substance used for purifying that which has been ritually polluted. Because blood symbolizes life, it cannot be ignored when spilled or discharged.⁵⁷³ When blood is shed intentionally, it taints—loss of blood pollutes, while the application of blood purifies (2Kgs 24:4; Ps 106:38). When innocent blood is shed, atonement is achieved only by the blood of the one who sheds it (Num 35:33–34).

In two different ways, Abimelech's last words are like those of Saul in the initial report of Saul's death. In the same way that Saul calls on his armor bearer to kill him (1 Sam 31:4), Abimelech requests his personal aide to kill him (Judg 9:54). However, Saul's request is denied, while that of Abimelech is granted. Secondly, Saul's death is predicted by Samuel's spirit when Saul consults the witch of En Dor to know his destiny. Similarly, Abimelech's death is predicted as a reprisal for his actions against his seventy brothers, whom he killed (Judg 9:1–57)—he is cursed, and he is doomed to die. In another narrative, Adoni-Bezek acknowledges his death as a reprisal and faces it readily (1:7).

Abimelech's death is orchestrated by God and attributed to the pronouncement of Jotham after Abimelech kills his seventy brothers (vv. 56–57). Boling claims an allusion to word

⁵⁷¹ Pamela Barmash, *Homicide in the Biblical World* (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge University Press, 2005), 94–95.

⁵⁷² Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), 190.

⁵⁷³ Edward L. Greenstein "Biblical Law," in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, ed. Barry W. Holtz (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 92–93.

play on the name Jotham in Hebrew—*yātôm* ‘orphan’—while Abimelech interprets his own name as ‘my father is king’.⁵⁷⁴ One of Abimelech’s brothers, Jotham, flees and is not killed. When he hears of what Abimelech has done with the help of his mother’s relatives from Shechem, Jotham issues a curse against Shechem, Beth Millo, and Abimelech after a long proverbial speech (vv. 7–20).

Jotham’s poetic speech, his fable (Judg 9:7–20), is set within a prose narrative framework.⁵⁷⁵ He calls on Abimelech and his factions to rejoice with each other if their action has been done in truth and sincerity to the house of Gideon, their father. On the other hand, they are to destroy each other (vv. 19–20). Curses uttered are dynamic and powerful, and they are often fulfilled in Scripture. They are only effective if they are backed up by the Deity (Josh 6:26; 1Kgs 16:34). Jotham waits three years after his curse, before God acts and brings justice. The anathema had a full effect, and Abimelech and his accomplices reciprocally destroy each other, leading to mutual extinction. In the same way that Abimelech and his coconspirators eradicate the house of Jerubbaal, Jotham by his malediction seeks the destruction of all of them.⁵⁷⁶ Words uttered have consequences and “death and life are in the power of language” (Prov 18:21). Even when words are not meant to be a curse, some individuals feel obliged to stand by their words (Gen 31:30–33; 35:16–20; Judg 11:30–40). Abimelech’s death comes as a reprisal in fulfillment of a curse uttered by Jotham because of Abimelech’s action in murdering his brothers.

Just as the relatives of Abimelech and leaders of Shechem helped Abimelech to hire a band of insignificant people to help kill his brothers (9:1–6), Gaal is described as the son of

⁵⁷⁴ Robert G. Boling, *Judges*, AB 6A. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 171.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵⁷⁶ Anne Marie Kitz, *Cursed Are You!: The Phenomenology of Cursing in Cuneiform and Hebrew Texts* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 158–59, 359.

Ebed,⁵⁷⁷ in whom the men of Shechem put their confidence (vv. 26–31). Gaal’s relatives and leaders of Shechem helped him to revile and revolt against Abimelech (vv. 28, 31). Gaal reminds the Shechemites of their ancient noble stock, and the fact that they are without any obligation to submit to Abimelech, Gideon’s son.⁵⁷⁸ The group of people who follow Abimelech is a band looking for fortune, who are all disgruntled (11:1–3).⁵⁷⁹

The phrase אֲנָשִׁים רִיקִים ‘empty men’, ‘worthless people’, ‘reckless fellows’ or ‘trouble makers’ or ‘men with nothing’ may be those lacking sturdy affinity attachments who for one reason or the other are estranged from society and form gangs as a pseudo—family (Judg 9:4; 11:3). Those classified as אֲנָשִׁים רִיקִים have each other to depend on, although they lack prestige and a sound economic basis.⁵⁸⁰ When Zebul, the officer of Abimelech and ruler of the city, informs Abimelech of Gaal and his relatives’ plan, Abimelech forms four companies (vv. 28–34). As the fight progresses, without any explanation, he turns them into three groups (v. 43). It is possible that he loses one company or some of his followers and decides to reduce them to three companies instead of four. Abimelech and his team defeats Gaal and his relatives, and Gaal is driven out of Shechem (v. 41). Mayes explains that a monarchy founded on murder will collapse and bring down with it all those who helped establish it.⁵⁸¹ Similarly, Gray asserts that

⁵⁷⁷ Son of Ebed (Eved) in Hebrew בֶּן־עֶבֶד could mean that he is a son of a slave.

⁵⁷⁸ J. Alberto Soggin, *When the Judges Ruled*, World Christian Books, 3rd ser., no. 54 (New York: Association Press, 1965), 50.

⁵⁷⁹ Jack M. Sasson, *Judges 1-12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB 6D (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 392.

⁵⁸⁰ Gregory Mobley, *The Empty Men: The Heroic Tradition of Ancient Israel*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 36–37.

⁵⁸¹ A. D. H. Mayes, *Judges*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 26.

the compiler emphasizes the principle of retribution against Abimelech. He notes that it could be a Deuteronomist who associates Jotham’s story with the reign and death of Abimelech.⁵⁸²

Abimelech fights the town of Shechem, kills many and ruins the land with salt. The leaders of Shechem try to secure themselves and enter its tower. Abimelech burns the tower and kills over a thousand of the people of Shechem (vv. 39–40). He then continues to Thebez, captures it, and draws near the door of the tower to burn it as he did in Shechem—but that leads to his doom (vv. 42–52). When he draws near, an unnamed woman from the tower throws an upper millstone on Abimelech’s head and crushes his skull. At this point, Abimelech utters his last words by calling for help to end his life.

Then he called quickly to the young man
 his armor-bearer
 and said to him,
 “Draw your sword and kill me,
 lest they say of me,
 ‘A woman killed him.’”
 And his young man thrust him through, and he died.

וַיִּקְרָא מְהֵרָה אֶל־הַנָּעַר
 נֹשֵׂא כַלְיוֹ
 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ
 שְׁלַף חֶרֶבְךָ וּמֹותְךָנִי
 פֹדֵי־נַפְשִׁי לִי
 אֲשֶׁה הַרְגָתְהוּ
 וַיִּדְקְרְהוּ נָעָרוֹ וַיָּמָת:

Abimelech’s last words are “Draw your sword and kill me, lest they say of me, ‘A woman killed him.’” Abimelech assumes it is a woman who throws the stone at him since we are not informed who cast the stone. It is the task of women real or personified to grind grain (Exod 11:5; Isa 47:1–2); thus, Abimelech concludes it is a woman.⁵⁸³ Foreseeing his apparent demise, and not wanting to be mortified by having been slain by a woman, Abimelech calls on his aide to end his life. It is extremely difficult for Abimelech to accept the fact that he dies by the hand of a woman. He has killed many men, including his seventy brothers, and set fire to the tower of Shechem and killed about a thousand people (v. 49). As a warrior, defeat by a woman would be a

⁵⁸² John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, rev. ed. NCB (London: Oliphants, 1977), 248–49.

⁵⁸³ Sasson, *Judges 1-12*, 400.

terrible humiliation to him. Webb observes that in the warrior culture of the times, it is honorable to die fighting a superior or someone of equal rank. Abimelech knows that to be killed by an unnamed woman is to be completely undone.⁵⁸⁴ Nevertheless, women play a significant role in the book of Judges despite the fact that the subject of the book is marginalization;⁵⁸⁵ and in this episode women die as a result of Abimelech's actions.⁵⁸⁶ Significant to mention is Jael, who also kills a military leader, Sisera (Judg 4:17–22), and Delilah, who weakened Samson and turned him over to the Philistine enemy.⁵⁸⁷

Abimelech is killed at Thebez, a site that is mentioned again in Scripture only when Joab sends an emissary to David after David's plot to kill Uriah, and Joab imagines and plans how to break the news of Uriah's death to David. Joab recounts the story of how Abimelech is killed, imagining what David would ask and how to respond (2 Sam 11:20–21). Stone observes the irony that, although Abimelech desires to avoid the shameful remembrance of being killed by a woman, as most ancient men would, that attempt is futile because the only biblical reference to him apart from the book of Judges is in association with his death by the hand of a woman.⁵⁸⁸ Abimelech's reign and death are associated with the incident and utterance of Jotham, and retribution is emphasized.⁵⁸⁹ Abimelech's last words are said in desperation, desiring to die as a

⁵⁸⁴ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 293.

⁵⁸⁵ M. O'Connor, "The Women in the Book of Judges," *HAR* 10 (1986), 277–78.

⁵⁸⁶ Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 148–49.

⁵⁸⁷ Other women worth noting in the book of Judges are Deborah (4-5), Jephthah's daughter (11:34-40), the women in the life of Samson (13-16), Micah's mother (17), the Levite's concubine (19) and the wives for the Benjaminites (21).

⁵⁸⁸ Ken Stone, "Gender Criticism: The Un-Manning of Abimelech," in *Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed., ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 196–97.

⁵⁸⁹ John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, Century Bible. New Series (London: Nelson, 1967), 326–27.

hero. However, it is possible he was reflecting on the words of Jotham. Abimelech has been cursed, and God enacts vengeance, causing Abimelech to die as a result of Jotham’s curse (vv. 56–57). The narrator informs us of the consequences of Abimelech’s action to him and also the men of Shechem who assisted him (vv. 56–57).

Thus God returned the evil of Abimelech,
 which he committed against his father
 in killing his seventy brothers.
 And God also made all the evil of the men of Shechem
 return on their heads,
 and upon them came
 the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

נִשְׁבַּ אֱלֹהִים אֶת רַעַת אַבִּימֶלֶךְ
 אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְאָבִיו
 לְהָרֹג אֶת־שִׁבְעֵים אָחָיו:
 וְאֵת כָּל־רַעַת אַנְשֵׁי שֵׁכֶם
 הֵשִׁיב אֱלֹהִים בְּרֹאשָׁם
 וּמָבֹא אֲלֵיהֶם
 קָלַל־תּוֹתָם בְּיַד־רַב־עֵל:

The death of Abimelech is requital from God for the blood of his seventy brothers and the curse of Jotham, which came into effect on Abimelech and the men of Shechem. As Sasson rightly observes, the battle between Abimelech and the people of Shechem is no contest at all because God has already marked them out as losers to fulfill Jotham’s fable, exacting his revenge on them.⁵⁹⁰ Abimelech’s death is an ignoble one—being bested by a woman, as was Sisera (Judg 4:11–24), and remembered as an unmanly hero.⁵⁹¹ Ackerman suggests the unnamed woman who kills Abimelech should be remembered as “most blessed of women” because she secures victory against one of Israel’s most odious enemies in battle.⁵⁹² Israel goes home after Abimelech is killed (v. 55). Sasson observes an inconsistency in Israel’s disbanding its force and going home because of the local nature of the battle between Abimelech and his previous

⁵⁹⁰ Sasson, *Judges 1-12*, 250.

⁵⁹¹ Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 118.

⁵⁹² Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 48.

allies.⁵⁹³ Abimelech uses the intensive form of the verb מוֹת, which is *Polel* imperfect masculine singular, with the first person common singular suffix וַיְמַוְתֵנִי, in his request to his aide to kill him. Gray explains that it is better understood as ‘dispatch me’.⁵⁹⁴ The last part of the story, which relates the repercussions of the actions of Abimelech (v. 24), is connected to the first part, which emphasizes the principle of an eye for an eye.⁵⁹⁵

Abimelech reigns for three years and, in accord with Jotham’s curse, God sends an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, so they deal treacherously with Abimelech (v. 23). God becomes the architect of the estrangement between the Shechem’s leaders and Abimelech.⁵⁹⁶ Although the idea of God sending an evil spirit could be theologically difficult to accept, the deity’s use of supernatural powers, such as spirits and demons, is normal to the ancient Hebrews who see it as an expression of the deity’s absolute sovereignty and not regarded as an infringement on God’s sole authority. This phenomenon is seen in several places in Scripture. For example, God sends evil spirits to work in the life of Saul (1 Sam 16:14–15; 18:10; 19:9). In a rare case, a presumably lying spirit takes over the prophets leading to the downfall of King Ahab (1 Kgs 22:19–23).⁵⁹⁷ The narrator informs us that the action of the Shechemites against Abimelech is to avenge the blood of his brothers. The people of Shechem aided Abimelech by strengthening his hands to kill his brothers; consequently, God does not leave them untouched but avenges the brothers’ blood.

⁵⁹³ Sasson, *Judges 1-12*, 400.

⁵⁹⁴ Gray, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, 248. See *BDB* מוֹת 559, for more analysis.

⁵⁹⁵ 180–179, (תל אביב: עם עובד, הוצאת ספרים ע"ש י"ל מאגנס 1999), *יאירה אמית, שופטים: עם מבוא ופירוש*.

⁵⁹⁶ Boling, *Judges*, 175–76.

⁵⁹⁷ J. Gordon Harris, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, NICOT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson; Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2000), 214–15.

Jotham's curse of fire rolls out of Abimelech to destroy not only Shechem but also Abimelech himself.⁵⁹⁸ The tower of Shechem and Thebez are in ruins, and had Abimelech returned from his campaigns safe, there would have been little for him to govern since a large part of his population is destroyed.⁵⁹⁹ "Yahweh won that war (declared by his diplomat Jotham) after Abimelech had made himself lord of the covenant and went around making the breaking agreements and implementing curses."⁶⁰⁰ Whether political institutions are capable of enforcing fidelity and punishing the faithless, it was perceived that the deity witnessed every covenant, defending those without social standing—widows, orphans, strangers and "prosecuting, in time, those who did not meet obligations".⁶⁰¹

Abimelech's life ends without any positive attributes. His story depicts evil, degeneration, disjunction, and disorder.⁶⁰² In contrast to his father Gideon, nothing is said about Abimelech having a wife or children even though he died an adult and a militant ruler.⁶⁰³ Just as Abimelech kills seventy of his brothers on one stone, he is metonymically undone by "one stone". He is killed with a single stone by a woman.⁶⁰⁴ —This shows the measure for measure

⁵⁹⁸ Butler, *Judges*, 118.

⁵⁹⁹ J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 194.

⁶⁰⁰ Boling, *Judges*, 185.

⁶⁰¹ Mobley, *The Empty Men*, 149.

⁶⁰² Jacobus Marais, *Representation in Old Testament Narrative Texts*, BI 36 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 115.

⁶⁰³ Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, 400.

⁶⁰⁴ Mieke Bal, *Death & Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 217.

nature of the punishment. As Jacobs notes well, *זיקה מקשרת בין המעשה ובין* "נראה לי שהאבן יוצרת זיקה מקשרת בין המעשה ובין", *גמולו* "it seems to me that the stone creates a link between the act and its requital."⁶⁰⁵

The story ends on a sad note with no winners. God carries out His retributive justice in an impressive way (v. 56). There is nothing to celebrate about Abimelech's three-year experiment with kingship, and it ends in an absolute disaster.⁶⁰⁶ The desire for kingship in Israel failed with the death of Abimelech until the time of Samuel, which proves that an army is not sufficient to establish kingship in Israel.⁶⁰⁷ The narrative expresses utter disdain for Abimelech. If the blood of Cain calls for vengeance, then the seventy brothers' blood will all the more so be calling for vengeance, in addition to the curse. The end of Abimelech is the fulfillment of Jotham's curse and Abimelech's last words are accomplished as God executes Jotham's curse, providing the setting for Abimelech's last words.

10. Heroic Suicide

- A. Samson Dying with Enemies (Judg 16:25–30)
- B. Saul in Battle (1 Sam 31:1–7)

Suicide is a widespread phenomenon in the world. Ancient Near Eastern texts have such stories. In an Egyptian didactic tale translated by John A. Wilson, for instance, we see a dispute over suicide, where a man finds life unbearable and contemplates suicide. He argues with his soul as he speaks of his soul drawing him toward death.⁶⁰⁸ The deaths of Samson and Saul could be

⁶⁰⁵ 92 יהונתן יעקבס, "מידה כנגד מידה כאמצעי ספרותי ואידאולוגי בסיפור המקראי" (מוציא לאור לא ידוע, 2002), 92. See also Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* vol. 2 (London, 1967), 424–28. Cf. "David Marcus, David the Deceiver and David the Dupe," *Prooftexts* 6 (1986), pp. 163–83.

⁶⁰⁶ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 293.

⁶⁰⁷ 180–179 אמית, שופטים,

⁶⁰⁸ ANET, 404–5.

considered defeat before the perpetual enemies of Israel, the Philistines (Judg 16:30–31; 1 Sam 31:5–7), and a disgrace to them both. However, a more critical look at the narratives can alter one’s mindset, especially of the predestined purpose of the life of Samson.

One must keep in mind that the Deity has the power to realize His plans. Jeremiah expresses his frustration in knowing that an individual cannot decide his own destiny. Humanity lacks the ability to direct its own steps and must depend on the LORD (Jer 10:23). Similarly, the author of Proverbs several times conveys the necessity to depend on God as people make their plans because though the heart may map out strategies, it is only the counsel of the LORD that stands (16:1, 9, 33; 19:21). Accordingly, the lives of Samson and Saul are played out as ordained and directed by God to accomplish His purposes. Samson fulfills God’s purpose, but Saul disappoints God in his relationship with Him.

A. Samson Dying with Enemies (Judg 16:25–30)

The last words of Samson are “Let me die with the Philistines!” It is a prayer of desperation before his enemies. He knows at that point that he is at the verge of death but does not want to die alone without wreaking vengeance on those tormenting his life.

Then Samson said,
 ‘Let me die with the Philistines!’
 And he pushed with all his might,
 and the temple fell on the lords
 and all the people who were in it.
 So the dead that he killed at his death
 were more than he had killed in his life (16:30).

וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁמְשׁוֹן
 תָּמוּת נַפְשִׁי עִם־פְּלִשְׁתִּים
 וַיִּט בְּכַח
 וַיִּפֹּל הַבַּיִת עַל־הַסְּרֻזִּים
 וְעַל־כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ
 וַיְהִיו הַמֵּתִים אֲשֶׁר הָמִית בְּמוֹתָו
 רַבִּים מֵאֲשֶׁר הָמִית בְּחַיָּו

Samson fulfilled the purpose of God for his life even though he ends his life in a tragic way, praying for personal vengeance as he kills himself along with the Philistines, who were tormenting him (16:28–30). An angel of the LORD visits Samson’s mother and informs her

of the divine plan and purpose ordained for Samson before Samson was conceived (Judg 13:2–5). Samson is to be a deliverer of Israel from the oppression of the Philistines. This divine purpose is accomplished despite Samson’s catastrophic end. Samson gets involved with only Philistine women. As Laferrière observes, “Par ailleurs, Samson se distingue par un appétit sexuel incontrôlable, qui l’attire exclusivement vers des femmes de Philistins et lui fait perdre tout jugement.”⁶⁰⁹ He does not know that his deviance from the path his parents set him on is a divine stratagem. God’s intention is hidden from Samson and his parents (14:4).

Samson’s parents are aware of the uniqueness of their child, and know of his calling, but have little knowledge of his full destiny. The pre-ordained plan for Samson is the salvation of Israel from the Philistines as the angel of the LORD informed his mother before conception (13:5). In line with that purpose, Samson only desires Philistine women, who he claims please him well (14:1–7; 16:1–5). “What they did not know was that his present, erratic behavior was *from* [caused by] *Yahweh* (v. 4)”⁶¹⁰ Samson himself is not aware of the unseen power that is controlling his life.

On the one hand, Samson always acts impulsively doing that which is contrary to a Nazirite. Samson is a Nazirite to God from the womb and no razor is supposed to come on his head, and he is not to eat anything unclean. On several occasions Samson violates the stipulations of being a Nazirite (13:4–5). The very prohibitions the angel gives his mother before he is conceived. Samson eats ritually tainted food from the corpse, organizes a party, a “drink feast” (מִשְׁתֵּה) in Hebrew at his wedding banquet, and later he reveals the secret of not shaving his

⁶⁰⁹ Armand Laferrère, *La liberté des hommes: lecture politique de la Bible* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2012), 100–1.

⁶¹⁰ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 366–67. Samson’s actions can be considered as those done by an inaccessible controller. No one could understand Samson, and it did not make sense when Samson was endangering himself.

hair (16:6–17), allows his head to be shaved, which eventually leads to his death (14:5–10, 17; 16:18–31). On the other hand, Samson’s actions are spurred on by the hidden Spirit of God, that causes him to love Philistine women and results in the destruction of the Philistines. “Events occur through dual causality, i.e., through both natural causes and divine guidance which determines a purpose for the events.”⁶¹¹

In each of his relationships, Samson ends up slaughtering the Philistines, who plot against him, but end up falling into their own traps (14:19–20; 15:14–15; 16:30). This is a combination of two systems with mutual relations between the terrestrial and celestial worlds.⁶¹²

The last words of Samson are a cry for revenge for personal reasons although the theological purpose lies in the background. Thus, Samson’s personal character, as well as God’s purpose, are identified in Samson’s story. The two levels are brought together, however, in Greenstein’s interpretation: “God is characteristically patient, and it is only when the violation of the covenant grows deep and complete that God hands over the Israelites to their enemies” (Judg. 2:14), as in the case of Samson to the Philistines.⁶¹³

It is also “the ultimate fulfillment of a long-standing divine plan for national liberation.”⁶¹⁴ The suicide of Samson serves as the commencement of liberation, as he brings low Dagon, the dominating god of the Philistine, and implicitly manifests the power of the

⁶¹¹ Yairah Amit “The Dual Causality Principle and its Effects on Biblical Literature,” *VT* 37 (1987):388–90. Amit ascribes the development of the idea of dual causality to Yehezkel Kaufmann and I. L. Seeligmann.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, 391–92.

⁶¹³ Greenstein, “The Riddle of Samson,” *Prooftexts* 1 (1981): 252.

⁶¹⁴ Lichtenstein, *How the Mighty Have Fallen*, 9.

deliverance of the God of Israel (16:28–30).⁶¹⁵ Samson never knew the contents of that communication. However, according to Webb, the use of להושיע in Judg 13:5 is an allusion to Joshua אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ in Josh 1:1—“the same term [is] used of Moses” in Josh 1:1.⁶¹⁶ What is used in Josh 1:1 is אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, when the narrator tells of the LORD speaking to Joshua after the death of Moses. Webb’s claim cannot be substantiated because the angel speaks to Samson’s mother, before Samson is conceived. In addition, אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ is used many times in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Exod 17:9; Jos 2:23,24; 3:7; 4:1,8; 5:2,9; 20:1; 21:1; 24:21,24; Hag 1:1; 2:2 etc.).

Samson prays in Judg 16:30, “Let me die with the Philistines!” תָּמוּת נַפְשִׁי עִם־פְּלִשְׁתִּים. The last words are a prayer, which is instantly answered, and he dies with his enemies (vv. 28–30). Dagon’s festival became the LORD’s victory, where “the comic or classic vision can embrace pain and death in the larger context of restoration.”⁶¹⁷ God used Samson against the Philistines. In the final words before destroying the temple of Dagon, and the thousands of worshippers there, Samson calls for vengeance only for his eyes, which have been gouged out by the Philistines.⁶¹⁸ Samson’s life was intricately tied to that of the Philistines and his assignment in life has to do with the Philistines. “He has loved them, clashed with them, killed them, and been

⁶¹⁵ D. M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 68–69.

⁶¹⁶ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 389. In fact, אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ is a reference “to Joshua”. It can be inferred that Samson acknowledges being used of the LORD to bring deliverance because the text indicates so (Judg.15:18). However, the term used has nothing to do with Joshua 1:1. The angel informed Samson’s mother that the child she will conceive will begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines (Judg.13:5).

⁶¹⁷ J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 34.

⁶¹⁸ Lichtenstein *How the Mighty Have Fallen*, 6–7.

blinded and tormented by them. Paradoxically, the only way he will ever be free of them is by dying with them” (Judg 13:5; 14:1–19; 16:1–4, 25–30).⁶¹⁹

Although the text informs us that his desire for Philistine women is intended by the LORD to come against the Philistines, who were ruling Israel at that time (14:1–4), Samson’s actions of eating from carcass, drinking parties, and revelation of a major secret in his life, indicate that he does not take his Nazirite vow seriously. Samson’s craving for Philistine women and for vengeance cost him his life. Nevertheless, he killed many Philistines, and began the process of deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines who had dominion over them at the time he was conceived. The measure of Samson’s achievements is in the number of Philistines he killed. Unlike the norm where heights are reached while alive, he killed more on his dying day.⁶²⁰

When Samson senses danger, he calls on the LORD for help, as he does at Ramath Lehi when he thirsts, and God sends help (15:17–19). In the same way, Samson calls on God for help in his last moments. Although Samson’s last words are a cry for vengeance, they are also a prayer that he utters in distress. He utters the prayer as he acts physically to bring down all who were part of his anguish, even the boy who serves as his aide. Webb notes the irony in the boy leading Samson, when in actual fact, it is Samson leading the boy to his death.⁶²¹

Samson prays twice— first for God to remember him, when he pleads for strength (16:28), and secondly, at the very last minute, to die with the Philistines (v. 30). That which God

⁶¹⁹ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 414. “It was not Samson’s finest hour in a moral or spiritual sense; ...but it was certainly his greatest achievement.”

⁶²⁰ Greenstein, “The Riddle of Samson,” 246.

⁶²¹ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 412–13. The young man assists Samson touch the pillars of the temple without idea of what Samson is about to do.

intended for Samson is accomplished (13:5; 14:4); “only in death does Samson fulfill his destiny, to begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines.”⁶²² He dies a hero even though it is in one sense a tragic suicide; he died an accomplished man with a comedic ending. Whedbee explains that the Hebrew Bible tradition is an “interplay between tragedy and comedy with comedy typically having the last word.”⁶²³ The Philistines are gathered for Samson to entertain them, but in a dramatic manner the situation has changed, and they die. Although Samson is in a devastating state, entertaining his enemies, Samson kills thousands of them as a hero and God accomplishes His purpose. Samson’s last words are critical.

B. Saul in Battle (1 Sam 31:1–7)

This is a second instance of last words accompanying suicide in the Hebrew Bible. Samson is the first story of suicide. Though both Saul and Samson commit suicide, and each die in the company of an aide, the deaths are different in several ways. The last words of Saul and Samson are different in how they are accomplished. Although they are similar in expressing a wish to die—each carries his wish out differently. Samson seeks help from God in prayer, and from a youth who has no knowledge of what Samson intends to do. Samson receives assistance from both God and the lad who dies with him (31:4–7).

By contrast, Saul seeks help from God and his armor bearer but gets help from neither of them. God does not answer, and his armor bearer refuses to help him—so Saul kills himself and then, the armor bearer does the same (28:6, 15; 31:4–5). “Saul encounters God’s dark side in a way that Samson never experiences it. Even though Samson endures divine abandonment, God

⁶²² Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 43.

⁶²³ J. William Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 285–86.

responds to Samson’s prayer in his hour of need.” However, Saul experiences the absence of God.⁶²⁴

Then Saul said to his armor bearer,
 "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it,
 lest these uncircumcised men come
 and thrust me through and abuse me.
 But his armor bearer would not,
 for he was greatly afraid.
 Therefore, Saul took a sword and fell on it.
 And when his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead,
 he also fell on his sword, and died with him.
 So Saul, his three sons, his armor bearer,
 and all his men died together that same day (1 Sam. 31:4–6).

וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂאוּל לְנִשְׂא כְלָיו שְׁלַח
 חֶרֶבְךָ וְדַקְרְנֵי כָּהֵן
 כְּפִי יָבֹאוּ הָעֲרָלִים הָאֵלֶּה
 וְדַקְרְנֵי וְהִתְעַלְלוּ-בִּי
 וְלֹא אָבָה נִשְׂא כְלָיו
 כִּי יָרָא מְאֹד
 וַיִּקַּח שָׂאוּל אֶת-הַחֶרֶב וַיִּפֹּל עָלֶיהָ:
 וַיֵּרָא נִשְׂא-כְלָיו כִּי מֵת שָׂאוּל
 וַיִּפֹּל גַּם-הוּא עַל-חֶרְבּוֹ וַיָּמָת עִמּוֹ:
 וַיָּמָת שָׂאוּל וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת בָּנָיו וְנִשְׂא כְלָיו:
 גַּם כָּל-אֲנָשָׁיו בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יָחָדוּ:

Saul is helpless and could not countenance his enemies, the uncircumcised Philistines, taking his life, so he ends it himself more as a champion than a victim. Saul gives instructions, but they not carried out. Saul’s last request to die a dignified death is refused, so Saul acts typically, taking matters into his hands, by killing himself.⁶²⁵

The choice of Saul as king by Samuel was directed by God. He is also chosen by lot in a public assembly and immediately acclaimed king (1 Sam 8:4–22; 9:1–10:1–24).⁶²⁶ Saul leads Israel to defeat the Ammonites in his first brave step as the leader of Israel demonstrating his military prowess against the Ammonites (1 Sam 11:1–14), but God rejects Saul almost as soon as he is enthroned as the first king of Israel. This rejection occurs early in his reign, though he ruled for a long time, considering the length of time he pursued David, and all the events

⁶²⁴ Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 40.

⁶²⁵ D. M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of Biblical Story*, JSOTSup 14 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 111.

⁶²⁶ Gottwald, *The Politics of Ancient Israel*, 47.

involved (1 Sam 13:5–15; 14:36–37; 15–16; 18:8–24:22; 26:1–25; 31:1–13).⁶²⁷ This rejection of Saul could be traced to Deut 25:17–19, where a command is given to blot out the remembrance of Amalek, and not to forget what Amalekites did to Israel on the way to the Promised Land—

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לָּהּ עַמְלֵק בְּדָרָד בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם: ¹⁸ אֲשֶׁר קָרָד בְּדָרָד וַיִּזְנֹב בְּהַפְלִיחַתְּכֶם אֶת-יְהוָה וַיִּגְעַע וְלֹא נָרָא אֱלֹהִים: ¹⁹ וְהָיָה בְּהַנִּיחַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ לְךָ מִפְּלִיאֵיכֶם מִסְּבִיב בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה-אֱלֹהֵיךָ נָתַן לָּךְ נַחֲלָה לְרֵשִׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת-יִגְדְּךָ עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח:

Saul failed to obey this command and spares Agag, the Amalekite king (1 Sam 15:1–23). Though Saul succeeds in defeating Moab, Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, the Philistines and the Amalekites to establish his reign over Israel (1 Sam 14:47–48), he dies not by the hand of any of the enemies, but by a heroic act of suicide (1 Sam 31:1–7).

When God rejects him, Saul decides to consult a medium to seek the spirit of the dead Samuel.⁶²⁸ Saul seeks a woman at En Dor to raise the ghost of Samuel. Samuel speaks from the grave and informs Saul about an impending defeat. God intends to deliver Israel into the hands of the Philistines, and Saul and his sons are going to be with Samuel the next day (28:3–24). The conversation between Saul and the spirit of Samuel intensifies his fears, on the day before his death (1 Sam 28:3–25). Paradoxically, the woman who is usually referred to as the witch of En Dor shows compassion to Saul, but the prophet Samuel pronounces a fatal verdict on him.⁶²⁹ The narrator does not inform us about how the last war with the Philistines starts. We are told they

⁶²⁷ Textual-critical issues on the age at which Saul starts his reign and how old he was at his death are not clear. However, one can assume from 1 Sam 13:1 and several other passages until his death as recorded in 31: 1-6 that he reigned for a long time.

⁶²⁸ Necromancy is an abomination that is forbidden among the Israelites. It is listed as one of the reasons God drove away the inhabitants of the land to establish Israel (Deut 18:9-12).

⁶²⁹ Uriel Simon, *Reading Prophetic Narratives*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 73. One would expect the prophet to be compassionate and the witch unkind towards Saul but incongruously, the words of Samuel paralyze Saul with fear, but the generosity of the witch and her words encourage Saul and revive his spirit.

fought Israel and killed many of them on Mount Gilboa, including Saul and three of his sons (31:1–2).

Fokkelman observes that Saul is defeated by an enemy who is officially David's friend, but David's reputation is not marred. In the battle that leads to God's final rejection of Saul, David defeats the Amalekites, the very same enemies. "The synchronism shows conclusively that the conjunction in time is also a conjunction of theme, a conjunction of Providence."⁶³⁰ Whether David ought to bear responsibility for the death of Saul is debated among some scholars. For instance, Polzin disagrees with Fokkelman on the idea that David's reputation was not tarnished because David offered to go with the Philistines to fight Israel, though the lords of the Philistines objected. Polzin claims, "David bears the responsibility for Saul's death as surely as Saul would have for David's, had David died at the hands of the Philistines in chapter 18." The Deuteronomist's idea is that David shared the spoil with those who were left behind in his fight with the Amalekites and that therefore, he shares in the death of Saul though he was left behind by the Philistines. "Far from exculpating David from any part in the death of Saul and the defeat of the Israelites, the stories in 29–31 do not shrink from placing responsibility for the death of Saul and the defeat of Israel upon the shoulders of David himself: apparently willing to go down (29:4) or up (29:9) in battle against Saul and his own people...."⁶³¹

The account of Saul's death is twofold, with different narratives on how his life ends (1 Sam 31:1–13; 2 Sam 1:1–10). In the first narrative, Saul is severely wounded in battle,

⁶³⁰ J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 38–39.

⁶³¹ Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: 1 Samuel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 222–23. The fact that David had two hundred men who were exhausted and could not participate in war but shared the spoil (30:16–25), does not justify associating the death of Saul with David. David was not necessarily part of the Philistine army. He was desperate and went to the camp of the enemy for refuge when Saul sought him to kill him. We can only speculate what David would have done; had he been allowed to fight for the Philistines against Israel.

requests that his armor bearer kill him, which he refuses; so Saul commits suicide. This first account of Saul's death with his sons agrees with the narratives of 1 Chronicles 10. In the second account, an Amalekite claims he assisted Saul to die at Saul's request after he was wounded. It is not possible to reconcile the discrepancy of the two narratives, in order to know Saul's last words. The two narratives have conflicting viewpoints that may vie for validation, since each is logical in its own way.⁶³²

The text is clear that David orders the Amalekite, who brought the news about the death of Saul to be executed. The Amalekite knows how much Saul has sought to kill David and thought he stands to benefit in telling David he killed Saul (2 Sam 1:13–16). On the contrary, David ordered him to be killed. David composed a song of lamentation over the death of Saul and Jonathan (vv. 17–27). The threat Saul posed to David was known to all, and David is not under any obligation to take revenge on the Amalekite, who claims to have killed Saul—but he did and also mourns the death of Saul and Jonathan publicly, expressing his grief.

Nonetheless, the final phase of Saul's death could be regarded as gallant as he faces unimaginable humiliation. Saul died in a heroic suicide, deciding to end his life himself rather than being killed by an enemy (1 Sam 31:1–4; 2 Sam 1:1–10). That which Saul feared was facing him—losing the support of God. Nevertheless, he did not show any sign of cowardice in the fight. He fought until he was critically wounded by the Philistine archers and all Israel fled. Though Saul had more failures than high points, he died pursuing his calling of delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam 9:16; 31:4–7).⁶³³ Saul's last words are said in

⁶³² Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Bible and Literature Series 9 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 79–82. Two sources are suggested with some speculating that the Amalekite lied.

⁶³³ Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 133–35.

desperation to his armor bearer. Unlike Abimelech, whose armor bearer obeyed and helped him end his life (Judg 9:50–55), assuming Saul’s last words are those of the first account, his wish is denied. However, the Philistines are equally denied the opportunity of killing him since, according to 1 Sam 31:4 Saul committed suicide.

On the other hand, although the Amalekite’s narrative (2 Sam 1:1) is generally regarded as false, it is worth examining his words. According to this account, the Amalekite killed Saul at his request and reported it to David with the crown and armlet of Saul as evidence.

And he said to me, 'Who are you?'
 I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.'
 And he said to me, 'Stand beside me and kill me,
 for anguish has seized me,
 and yet my life still lingers.'
 So I stood beside him and killed him,
 because I was sure
 that he could not live after he had fallen.
 And I took the crown that was on his head
 and the armlet that was on his arm,
 I have brought them here to my lord' (2 Sam 1:8–10).

וַיֹּאמֶר לִי מִי־אַתָּה
 וַיֹּאמֶר [וַיֹּאמֶר] אֵלָיו עַמְלֵקִי אֶנְכִּי:
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו עַמְד־נָא עִלַּי וּמָתְנִי
 כִּי אֶחְזָגִי הַשֶּׁבֶץ
 כִּי־כָל־עוֹד נַפְשִׁי בִּי:
 וְאֶעֱמָד עָלָיו וְאֶמָּתְתֵהוּ
 כִּי יָדַעְתִּי
 כִּי לֹא יִחְיֶה אַחֲרַי נִפְלֹו
 וְאֶלַח הַגִּזְרוֹ אֲשֶׁר עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ
 וְאֶצְעָדָה אֲשֶׁר עַל־זְרְעוֹ
 וְאָבִיָּאֵם אֶל־אֲדֹנָי הַנָּה:

According to this story, the last words of Saul would be like those of Abimelech, who requests his armor bearer to kill him, and he did. However, there is no record of the Amalekite being directly involved with Saul before his death. This makes the episode surrounding the death of Saul unclear. As Berlin suggests, the material has been reworked into an integrated account and must be understood as it stands now.⁶³⁴ Did Saul fall on his sword and die, or did the Amalekite help him die by killing him? The Amalekite produces evidence: “I took the crown that was on his head, and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord” (v. 10b). Considering 2 Sam 4:9–10, where David confirms the Amalekite’s story and adds the

⁶³⁴ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 81. Most scholars share the view that the Amalekite is lying.

reward he gives him, one may be more prone to affirm the story of the Amalekite and conclude that Saul, in fact, died not by directly killing himself but by asking the Amalekite to do so.

Saul's last words according to the narrative of the Amalekite are: "Please stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers" עֲמַד-נָא עָלַי וּמָתְתֵנִי כִּי אֶתְהַוֵּי (2 Sam 1:9). In this case, the death of Saul could be considered as assisted suicide, which still remains heroic, since he does not want the Philistines to take credit for killing him, and he takes his own life.

Saul was on a mission to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines when he ends his life, and three of his sons and his armor bearer die with him the same day. Samuel told Saul of what is ahead, and one might have thought that Saul would have refrained from going out to fight. However, one can only speculate on the reason for which both Samson and Saul press on towards the enemy. The text is silent on the motives behind their actions, facing such significant danger. Saul is forewarned, but he still goes to war against the Philistines. Saul and Samson are described as deliverers of Israel from the hands of the Philistines. Exum claims that both failed in the task and are portrayed as dying humiliating deaths.⁶³⁵ However, this claim can be challenged since Samson chose when and how to die, sacrificing his own life in order to wreak vengeance on his enemies (Judg 14:4; 16:28–30).

The last moment of Saul is like that of Samson because he too dies a heroic death to avoid the taunts of the enemy. However, the final words of Saul come out of desperation because he has lost his relationship with God; whereas Samson turns to God in the end, although he violated all of his vows. Samson seeks God's help in a prayer that is answered at the time of his death and dies achieving the divine plan and purpose of his life (Judg 14:4; 16:28–30). Saul on

⁶³⁵ Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 18.

the other hand, is abandoned by God, and his army flees in defeat (1 Sam 14:37; 28:6; 31:1–7). Saul’s main apprehension is not about dying, but the abuse of the Philistines in taking credit for killing him. Saul dies knowing that it is ultimately not the enemy that kills him. He is not an object of ridicule for the Philistines.

Saul prefers to die as a hero in taking his life, when his request to his armor bearer, purportedly his last words in the first account, fail (1 Sam 31:1–4). But his last words, in the second account, to the Amalekite, are accomplished, and he dies as he desires—as a hero (2 Sam 1:1–10). The two accounts are related in the sense that the Israelites flee before the Philistines, and many die—including Saul and Jonathan. However, in some important details they are different. The Amalekite does not mention the death of Saul’s other sons, or his armor-bearer. The Amalekite speaks of the Philistine’s chariots and horsemen closing in on Saul as he leans on his spear, unlike 1 Sam 31:4, where Saul falls on his sword.⁶³⁶

What the spirit of Samuel foretells Saul is accomplished exactly as foretold, in Saul’s death. Considering each account of Saul’s death, Saul is a tragic hero, in the sense that his failures seem to have been predetermined by God. The reign of Saul turned out to be something God rejected at an early stage (1 Sam 11; 13:13–14). As Gunn observes, “From the moment of his anointing the future is loaded against him ...and from his establishment as king in chapter 11 it is as though fate has become his active antagonist, thwarting and twisting his every move.... The mainspring of Saul’s failure, then, is depicted as the outworking of fate—fate which is in some hidden way the reflection of the will of Yahweh.”⁶³⁷

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 32–33.

⁶³⁷ Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, 115–16.

Though Samuel interceded for Saul, God did not accept even the plea of the prophet who mourned for Saul (16:1). However, according to Polzin, Saul is involved in illicit sorcery and divination. He expounds on several issues in which Saul is portrayed negatively. Saul hides in ritual baggage when he was chosen to be the king of Israel and God tells Israel where he is (10:21–23). He also put Israel under oath of fasting, where nobody is expected to take any food until evening. Those who violate it were expected to be cursed (14:24). Further, Saul grows impatient in his effort to inquire of the LORD (14:37) and casts lots to seize a culprit (14:38–42). He preferred to do things at night in his effort to succeed in his enterprises (28:8).

Nonetheless, Polzin observes that the very things for which Saul was rejected were done by David and were accepted.⁶³⁸ It is important to note that Saul engaged in illicit sorcery and divination when he was in distress, not knowing what to do, when God failed to answer him (1 Sam 13:5–15; 14:36–37; 28:5–7). Divine rule supersedes the natural and governs the lives of both Samson and Saul. From the conception of Samson until his death and from the appointment of Saul as king of Israel (9:15–17) until his death, the governance of God is portrayed. Thus, the Deity grants the wish of Samson, who called on Him in desperation, and of Saul to die a gallant death.

11. Acceptance of Retribution

- A. Adoni–Bezek to Himself (Judg 1:7)
- B. Zebah and Zalmunna to Gideon (Judg 8:21)

The actions we take have consequences whether good or bad. Whatever one sows is what one reaps. Adoni-Bezek, a Canaanite king (Judg 1:7), as well as Zebah and Zalmunna, two kings of

⁶³⁸ Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 217–18. When David flees from Saul, God protects him (1 Sam 19:18-24; 26:12). When David sins and God raises adversaries against him, God still allows those who opposed David to die (2 Samuel 12-18).

Midian (8:5, 12), all accept their lot before death as reaping what they have sown and interpret it as retribution from God.

A. Adoni-Bezek to Himself (Judg 1:7)

Adoni-Bezek admits to maltreating other kings. His conscience is not clear until his death, acknowledging that the divine hand is working against him.

And Adoni-Bezek said,
“Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off
used to gather scraps under my table;
as I have done, so God has repaid me.”
Then they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנֵי-בֶזֶק
שִׁבְעִים מְלָכִים בָּהֲנוֹת יָדֵיהֶם וְרַגְלֵיהֶם מִקְצָצִים
הָיוּ מְלַקְטִים תַּחַת שְׁלֻחָנִי
כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּנֹשְׁלָם-לִי אֱלֹהִים
וַיְבִיאוּהוּ יְרוּשָׁלַם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא

After the death of Joshua, at the request of the tribe of Judah, the tribe of Simeon goes with him to fight and defeat Adoni-Bezek, and to take the land the LORD has given them. They defeat the Canaanites and Perizites, killing ten thousand at Bezek (Judg 1:1–4). Soggin translates אֲדֹנֵי-בֶזֶק as “the Lord of Bezek,”⁶³⁹ although most versions render Adoni-Bezek (NKJV, JPS, NSB, ESV). Adoni-Bezek is not addressing anyone in particular. His past actions haunt him, and he interprets his predicament as retribution for his misdeeds, which he confesses voluntarily. He attributes the depredations of Judah and Simeon to the punishment of God for what he had done to seventy kings. Adoni-Bezek in his last words says: “Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me.” According to Sasson, Adoni-Bezek once had control of his world and the kings lost their authority to him making them fed like dogs. Either by spiritual illumination or in a way of

⁶³⁹ Soggin, *Judges*, 18.

soliciting sympathy from his captors, Adoni-Bezek, confers on the Hebrews' God the power to balance justice.⁶⁴⁰

Adoni-Bezek had handicapped seventy kings, whose identity is not made explicit. Seventy is a round number, and "enemy kings and their minions are scorned and satirized."⁶⁴¹ Adoni-Bezek reflects on his past, proud not only for mocking kings, but also for the humiliation he perpetrated on them. The practice of cutting thumbs and big toes is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, but it might have been a common practice. However, Boling observes, "similar practices involving decapitated bodies are mentioned in the Mari texts and in classical sources and are widespread among preliterate and semiliterate cultures."⁶⁴² Mutilation is humiliation and a means of perpetually preventing the apprehended leader from any combat again because he would be disabled from handling weapons of war or run off the battlefield.⁶⁴³

Similarly, Lemos, in her article "Shaming and Mutilation of Enemies in the Hebrew Bible," explains that the main motive behind the phenomenon of decapitation is to shame and weaken the opponent. Citing 1 Sam 11:1–2, she discusses Nahash's terms of covenant to the people of Jabesh Gilead. Nahash's sole motive of desiring to gouge out the right eye of the people of Gad and Reuben is to bring shame on them. Disfiguring Jabesh-Gileadites is meant to bring shame on all of Israel.⁶⁴⁴ What Adoni-Bezek did to seventy kings is done to him without any evidence of Judah and Simeon having had any prior knowledge of his act of cruelty.

⁶⁴⁰ Sasson, *Judges 1-12*, 132–33.

⁶⁴¹ Gottwald, *The Politics of Ancient Israel*, 43.

⁶⁴² Boling *Judges*, 55.

⁶⁴³ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 112–13.

⁶⁴⁴ T. M. Lemos, "Shame and Mutilation of Enemies in the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 125 (2006): 229–30.

The concept of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Exod 21:23–25) is reflected here, even though Adoni-Bezek is not an Israelite. According to a Bedouin proverb, “the most intransigent camels can be trained.” That is to say, “no power can stand in the way of justice forever, just as all camels can ultimately be trained.” Eventually, justice prevails over any other contemplation or power.⁶⁴⁵ Adoni-Bezek considers his treatment as fair. The notion of retribution is also found in the stories of Zebah and Zalmunna in connection with Gideon (Judg 8:18–21), as well as when God repays Abimelech for his wickedness (Judg 9:56–57). “It was an ethical maxim extensively accepted among ancient nations that men must suffer the same magnitude of pain they inflict on others.”⁶⁴⁶

Adoni-Bezek’s short speech is an admission of guilt. As Webb remarks, “The enemy general is condemned out of his own mouth as a sadistic tyrant, who has been treated exactly as he deserved (strict retributive justice), and his punishment is attributed directly to God”.⁶⁴⁷ Not much is said about Adoni-Bezek again, but we can imagine that he is not at peace when he utters his last words. Nevertheless, although he understands the justice of his fate, there is no indication that he is remorseful over his past actions before he dies.

B. Zebah and Zalmunna to Gideon (Judg 8:21)

Zebah and Zalmunna are Midianite kings (8:5, 12), who flee from Gideon when God empowers him to destroy the Midianites. Even though they are mighty warriors, who rule with a

⁶⁴⁵ Clinton Bailey, *Bedouin Culture in the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 243. It does not matter how long it takes for vengeance to take place; it is regarded as legitimate.

⁶⁴⁶ Peter J. Lange, *Lange’s Commentary on the Holy Scripture, Volume 1: Genesis to Ruth*, trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1875), 30.

⁶⁴⁷ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 100–1.

massive army mounted on camels, they know when it is time to flee (vv. 10–11). The Midianites rule over Israel for seven years as punishment, before God raises up Gideon to deliver Israel (6:1–8:5). Gideon leads the war with the support of God behind the scenes. He advances against Zebah and Zalmunna, and their strategy is to leave the war front. However, Gideon pursues and catches up with them (Judg 7:12; 8:5). Although Zebah and Zalmunna initially take to flight, they exhibit boldness in their last words as they confront death.

So Zebah and Zalmunna said,
 “Rise yourself, and kill us;
 for as a man is, so is his strength.”

So, Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna,
 and took the crescent ornaments
 that were on their camels' necks.

וַיֹּאמֶר זְבַח וְזַלְמוּנָע
 קוּם אֶתְּהָ וּפְגַע־בָּנוּ
 כִּי כַאֲשֶׁר גְּבוּרָתוֹ
 וַיִּקָּם גִּדְעוֹן וַיַּהַרְגֵם אֶת־זְבַח וְאֶת־זַלְמוּנָע
 וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַשְּׁהָרָהִים
 אֲשֶׁר בְּצוּאָרֵי גְמְלֵיהֶם

Zebah and Zalmunna flee but when Gideon catches up with them, he questions them about the men they killed at Tabor. They inform him that the men are like Gideon and that they resemble the son of a king (8:18). Gideon claims those whom Zebah and Zalmunna killed are his brothers, though not much is known about his siblings. Gideon says he would have spared them had they not killed his brothers. Gideon orders his firstborn, Jether, to kill them, but Jether does not for fear that he is too young (v. 20). It is at this point that Zebah and Zalmunna ask Gideon to kill them himself. Their last words are, “Rise yourself, and kill us; for as a man is, so is his strength” (v. 21).

Zebah and Zalmunna are also mentioned in Ps 83:1–18, the prayer of Asaph, in which a confederacy of many nations and groups opposed Israel. The Midianites join the fight and Asaph considers it a coalition against God Himself. Asaph recounts previous victories and prays that current enemies be rendered as the enemies of old including Oreb and Zeeb, who were princes of Midian (Judg 7:25), and Zebah and Zalmunna (Ps 83:11).

Gideon is certain that God will give him victory over Zebah and Zalmunna with his 300 men (Judg 7:6–8, 16–22; 8:4), even though the Midianites are described as being as numerous as locusts (7:12). After a huge number is killed, the armies of Zebah and Zalmunna are left at only around 15,000 (8:10). The people of Succoth and Penuel could not foresee how Gideon could defeat Midian and refuse to assist him, but the LORD gives him the victory as promised, and Gideon punishes the 70 elders of Succoth, tears down the tower of Penuel and kills the men (7:1–7; 8:14–17).

Zebah and Zalmunna admit to their action, and their last words to Gideon are more taunt than regret.⁶⁴⁸ Their admission of guilt and decision not to plead for mercy, but to ask that Gideon kill them, means they are ready to accept reprisal for their actions. They describe Gideon using the phrase *גְּבוּרָתוֹ*. Their expectation is that Gideon’s “prowess” will not be passed on to his son. The decision to kill the kings is Gideon’s and not that of the kings. Gideon has already decided the fate of Zebah and Zalmunna; hence, their last words may be regarded as irrelevant. Though they project a readiness to die, they do not have the option of killing themselves or of dying in a heroic manner. Rather, they die at the hands of their enemy as captives. Gideon fulfills the last words of Zebah and Zalmunna and seizes all they had on them and on their camels as plunder (Judg 8:21, 26). The last words of Zebah and Zalmunna as well as that of Adoni-Bezek show no remorse. They understand their death as fitting retribution.

⁶⁴⁸ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 260–61. Strength is the measure of a man; and that which makes a man a man, is his strength. The fact that Gideon asked his son rather to kill them means he was not up to the task and a sign of weakness. They were ready to die and expect Gideon to carry it out. On the other hand, Gideon might have seen killing the kings as an easy thing for his son to do, humiliating the kings rather than killing them himself.

12. Women in Agony:

A. Childbirth

I. Rachel Giving Birth (Gen 35:16–20)

II. Phinehas' Wife Giving Birth (1 Sam 4:1–22; 19–22)

B. In Defiance

I. Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:31)

II. Athaliah (2 Kgs 11:1–14; 2 Chron 22:10–12)

In this chapter, the study examines the last words of four biblical women. Two of the four die during childbirth, while fulfilling the traditional maternal role. As Rachel dies, she names her son Ben-oni, which means “son of my sin, son of my sorrow, or son of my suffering.” The naming is ironical given the joy she had envisaged in having children. Similarly, Phinehas’s wife dies while giving birth and names her son Ichabod (1 Sam 4:21a) —literally “Where Is the Honor”?⁶⁴⁹

While the loss of the Ark of the LORD means the loss of Israel’s glory, God reveals His glory in exile among the Philistines.⁶⁵⁰ The glory of God is manifested negatively, among the Philistines, until the ark is returned to Israel (1 Sam 5:1–12). The other two women utter their final words in defiance to men. One dies when she is thrown down and the other by stoning. By contrast, most men utter their final words while dying as heroes or in preparation for a natural death under diverse circumstances. The motif of final words tends to express an androcentric and/or patriarchal ethos, where men are heroes, but women are victims.

A. Childbirth

I. Rachel Giving Birth (Gen 35:16–20)

II. Phinehas' Wife Giving Birth (1 Sam 4:1–22; 19–22)

⁶⁴⁹ Joel S. Burnett, *Where Is God? Divine Absence in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 35.

⁶⁵⁰ Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 200.

It is a command from God to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28; 9:1); and children are a reward from the LORD to those who have them, who are said to be blessed (Ps 127:3–5). However, when humanity disobeyed God, He said to the woman, “...I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16). The consequence of the woman’s disobedience is still felt today. Complications in childbearing and the pain associated with it are the result of disobedience and an enduring phenomenon. Some women die during childbirth, as in the cases of Rachel and the wife of Phinehas.

I. Rachel Giving Birth (Gen 35:16–20)

It is a general phenomenon in the Bible that women named their children, as Pardes notes. It is often the mother or the surrogate mother who names the child.⁶⁵¹ However, about seventeen times in the Bible, the name giver is a male.⁶⁵² Mostly, the mother names the child by relating to the circumstance she is going through, before or at the time of birth. This begins with the first woman, Eve, in Genesis (4:1, 25). Leah, for example, names her first son, Reuben, with an explanation that the LORD has seen her affliction (רְאוּבֵן בְּיָמֵי אֶמְרָתָהּ כִּי רָאָה יְהוָה בְּעִנְיָי). The narrator also affirms Leah’s crediting the LORD for her fruitfulness as “when the LORD saw that Leah is unloved, He opened her womb....” Leah names him literally, ‘Behold a son’ (29:32). The wives of Jacob name their sons depending on the circumstances around their conception (Gen 29:32–35; 30:1–24; 35:18). In her anguish, Hannah prays with a vow for a son and God answers, so she

⁶⁵¹ Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 40–41.

⁶⁵² Ilana Pardes, “Beyond Genesis 3: the Politics of Maternal Naming,” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, The Feminist Companion to the Bible, 2nd series, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 174–75.

names him Samuel (שמואל) because, as she explains, she ‘asked’ him of God ותקרא את־שמוֹ שְׁמוּאֵל (1 Sam 1:20). Rachel names the first child of her maid as Dan, explaining that God has ‘judged’ her case, and the second Naphtali which has to do with her ‘struggle’ with her sister to have children (30:4–8). Pharaoh’s daughter calls Moses by that name because she ‘draws’ him out of water: ותקרא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה וְתֹאמַר כִּי מִן־הַמַּיִם מָשִׁיתָהוּ (Exod 2:5–10). The mother of Jabez is not different; she names her son with regard to her pain, without explanation, and the Bible is silent on the specifics of her pain; except that she had him in ‘pain’ וְאִמּוֹ קָרְאָהוּ שְׁמוֹ יַעֲבֵז (1 Chron 4:9–10). However, there is a change in the situation of Jabez with an answered prayer: לֹא־מָרָא כִּי יִלְדֵתִי בְעֶצֶב (1 Chron 4:9–10). God uses the single child of the barren wife to bring about Israel’s deliverance more than the many children of the fertile wife, as in the case of Joseph, Rachel’s first son, and Hannah’s only child.⁶⁵³

Rachel is the first woman in Scripture to die in childbirth. Sarah and Rebekah, the matriarchs before Rachel, were both barren for many years and yearned for children as did Rachel (11:29–30; 16:1–4; 17:15–21; 18:9–15; 21:1–8; 25:19–21). God remembers each of them with a son, but neither dies during delivery. Sarah and Rebekah have only one birth each. The story of Rachel is different since she dies during her second birth, as she names the child. Rachel craves children to the point of desiring death without one. She told her husband to give her children, or she would die before the birth of her first child (Gen 30:1–2). God remembers Rachel with a son. In naming him Joseph, she expresses her desire for a second son, ותקרא את־שְׁמוֹ יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר יְוָסֵף לַיהוָה לֵי בֶן־אֶחָי, and she called his name Joseph saying, “may the LORD add to

⁶⁵³ Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 147.

me another son” (Gen 30:24). The last words Rachel hears before she dies are from the midwife about having another son:

Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor,
that the midwife said to her,
‘Do not fear; you will have this son also.’
And so, it was, as her soul was departing (for she died),
that she called his name Ben-Oni;
but his father called him Benjamin

וַיְהִי בְהַקְשֹׁתָהּ בְּלִדְתָּהּ
וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמִּיּוֹלֶדֶת
אֶל־תִּירְאִי, כִּי־גַם־יֵלְדָה לָּךְ בֶּן:
וַיְהִי בְצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ כִּי מָתָה
וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶן־אוֹנִי
וְאָבִיו קָרָא־לוֹ בְנִימִין:

Rachel’s last words are uttered when she was giving birth to her second son, Benjamin. While she dies, she names her child, Benoni, (בֶּן־אוֹנִי) ‘son of my sorrow’ or ‘son of my sin’. *HALOT* translates the word as ‘lament’ or ‘mourning’.⁶⁵⁴ The word און has a double meaning—negatively expressed in the text. The very cravings of her heart took her to her grave. The joy she expects turns out to be sorrow. The desires of Rachel are fulfilled. She gives birth to an additional son but does not live to see him. Her last words are linked to the child she longs for.

A third, positive, meaning is found in Gen 49:3. There Jacob uses the same word און, but there it denotes strength, ‘manly vigor and wealth’.⁶⁵⁵ און/ און is a homonym—sin, suffering, or strength. As a polysemous word, און can be translated positively or negatively or both, depending on the context. It is translated as ‘strength’ in several passages.⁶⁵⁶ Sarna supports the idea of translating Ben-Oni as “son of my vigor,” instead of “son of my debility.”⁶⁵⁷ In this context, Benjamin is both the son of Jacob’s sorrow— he lost his beloved wife, and the son of

⁶⁵⁴ *HALOT* "און," §242–46, 22–25.

⁶⁵⁵ *BDB*, און, § 250/2, 20.

⁶⁵⁶ See Deut 21:17, 49:3; Ps 78:51, 105:36; Job 18:7, 12 in NKJ; JPS; NAS; ESV.

⁶⁵⁷ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 243.

his strength—a son of his old age, showing his enduring virility. On the other hand, with Rachel in focus, though *אוֹנִי* can be translated as ‘strength’, the context here rather reflects Rachel’s dying in ‘sorrow’ rather than in ‘strength’. This explains why Jacob sees the need to change the name. Rachel does not anticipate having a child and then dying, leaving him a half-orphan at birth.

Although no specific mention of the remote cause of Rachel’s death is evident, Dolansky suggests, “Rachel’s demise may implicitly be connected to her former barrenness and desperate attempt to have a child.”⁶⁵⁸ It can also be understood that the death of Rachel is linked to the utterance of her husband, when Jacob tried to affirm his innocence and that of his family to Laban, Rachel’s father. Laban accuses Jacob of stealing his gods, and Jacob tells Laban (31:30–32), *עַם אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא אֶת־אֱלֹהֵיָ לֹא יִהְיֶה* “With whomever you find your gods, he will not live” Jacob has no idea what Rachel has done and is very sure of not having the gods of Laban with him or anyone else. Therefore, Jacob makes bold declaration to Laban that whoever took his gods should not live (v. 32), in protest for the sake of his integrity. Exum questions upon whom Laban’s pronouncement could fall, if not on Rachel? She then asserts that strictly speaking, Rachel’s death could not be a result of Jacob’s declaration since Laban did not find his gods.⁶⁵⁹ However, the utterance of her husband is put in motion, and Rachel and God knew she has the gods. A curse cannot be nullified just as a blessing cannot be taken back. “Blessing and curse share with magic the characteristic of unqualified and irrevocable execution, e.g., the blessing

⁶⁵⁸ Shawna Dolansky and Risa Levitt Kohn in *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*, ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (New York: Women of Reform Judaism, URJ Press, 2008), 197–201.

⁶⁵⁹ J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 106–7.

which Jacob extorts by guile remains his nonetheless (Gen 27:35).”⁶⁶⁰ Jacob utters words that he did not know would go against his very heart to declare his innocence. “With whomever you find your gods, that person shall not live” proves to have been fateful, like the verbal slip of a ruler that is binding.⁶⁶¹ Lapsley observes that the curse is the means by which the narrative crushes Rachel.⁶⁶² However, it is important to note that Jacob is clearly not aware the gods are with Rachel when he utters the curse.

Taking into consideration the background to the interpretation of אֱלֹהִים, Jacob does not go to Bethel (where God first met him, and Jacob makes a vow, 28:19–22; 31:13) on his own initiative. Jacob follows an instruction from God. Jacob commands his entire household to do away with any foreign gods with the sole purpose of going to build an altar in Bethel. We are informed that they gave Jacob all the foreign gods (35:1–4). Jacob’s intent here is for his household to be pure, free from any foreign gods so he can worship his God without any blemish. Rachel stole her father’s gods when Laban was away shearing his sheep (31:19), and they were certainly in her possession when God appears to Jacob to renew his covenant with him (35:6–15).

God calls Jacob back to where they first established a covenant. God detests idolatry and cannot overlook an idol within Jacob’s household. However, the narrator portrays God as silent about it, mentioning nothing in relation to the idols in Rachel’s possession. However, it is interesting to note that Rachel dies immediately after God’s meeting with Jacob at Bethel, as

⁶⁶⁰ Herbert Chanan Brichto, *The Problem of “Curse” in the Hebrew Bible*, SBLMS 13 (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1963), 5.

⁶⁶¹ Yair Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch*, Jewish Lives (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 136–37.

⁶⁶² Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women’s Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005., 2005), 31.

they journey to Bethlehem (vv. 9–20). Rachel’s keeping the idols when God meets them would seem to be the effective cause of her death. Jacob does not forget this incident until his death. He recalls it in his last words to Joseph over 30 years later (Gen 35:16–19; 37:2; 47:28; 48:7). Jacob says to Joseph:

But as for me, when I came from Padan,
 Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way,
 when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath;
 and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath
 (that is, Bethlehem).

וּאֲנִי כִּבְאֵי מִפְּדָן
 מָתָה עָלַי רָחֵל בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בְּדֶרֶךְ
 בְּעוֹד כְּבָרַת-אֶרֶץ לְבָא אֶפְרָתָה
 וְאֶקְבְּרָהּ שָׁם בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרָת
 הִוא בַּיִת לְחָם:

The last words of Rachel are simply בְּנֵי-אֹנִי Ben-Oni, which is a statement rather than a desire to be fulfilled. When we take into consideration the polysemy of אֹנִי, the name becomes complex and meaningful. Though Benjamin lives on for many years, his name mainly signifies the sense of the altered name Jacob gives him, which generally means “son of my right hand”. The right hand signifies strength as well as upper hand. For instance, when Jacob blesses the children of Joseph, he sets Ephraim before Manasseh by placing his right hand on Ephraim though he is the younger one, noting that Ephraim will be greater than Manasseh (48:17–20). Rachel’s last words, Ben-Oni, are remembered by scholars, who research the name. The changed name, Benjamin, is what is well known. Nevertheless, the last moment of Rachel lives on in Jacob, and resurfaces as part of his last words to Joseph (48:7).

II. Wife of Phinehas in Labor (1 Samuel 4:1–22; 19–22)

Similar to the last words of Rachel, the unnamed wife of Phinehas names her son as she takes her last breath. An unprecedented tragedy that has never occurred in the history of Israel takes place, with the loss of the Ark of the LORD, her husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law. She did not expect to have the child under such unforeseen and mysterious circumstances (1 Sam 4:19). War

was not uncommon between Israel and the Philistines, but never were there as many catastrophes at the same time. Accordingly, the name of the newborn child encapsulated the ill-fated events.

The multiple deaths of immediate family members and complications that the wife of Phinehas faced at such a critical time, served as a catalyst to her immediate birth pangs and her final words. She delivered upon hearing the bad news of multiple deaths (vv. 19–21). The last words she hears are from the women (v. 20)—very likely the midwives, who attended to her. They say, “Do not fear, for you have borne a son,” but she does not answer or pay any attention to what the women are saying to her. However, she uses her last strength to name her child Ichabod or “where is the glory?” seeing Israel as a nation bereft of the divine aura (v. 21) and Ichabod left without any of his immediate family.⁶⁶³

Unlike Rachel, Phinehas’ wife recognizes not only her pain, but also that of all Israel as it faces national disaster. The unfolding story of the battlefield and of Phineas’ wife giving birth leaves her without much strength to live on. Nonetheless, she feels obliged to give her child an appropriate name. Like many women of the Bible, for example, Jacob’s wives (Gen 29:32–35; 30:1–24; 35:18), Pharaoh’s daughter (Exod 2:5–10), Hannah (1 Sam 1:20), and the mother of Jabez (1 Chron 4:9–10), to mention but a few, all name their children in relation to the circumstances.⁶⁶⁴ The narrator informs us about the last moments of Phinehas’ wife as she takes her last breath.

Then she named the child Ichabod, saying,
“The glory has departed from Israel!”

וַתִּקְרָא לְנֶעֱר אִי־כָבוֹד לְאִמֹּר
גָּלָה כְבוֹד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

⁶⁶³ McCarter, *I Samuel*, 115. Saul’s chaplain is Ahijah, who is the son of Ahitub, and Ichabod’s brother. Thus, Phinehas has another son, other than Ichabod. Since Phinehas died the same day with the wife, the assumption is that they had Ahitub before Ichabod or in their debauched life (1 Sam 2:22; 3:13), Ahitub could have been a son of Phinehas (14: 3), but with another woman.

⁶⁶⁴ See the subsection “Rachel Giving Birth (Gen 35:16-20)”— under “Women in Agony,” above.

because the Ark of God had been captured
and because of her father-in-law and her husband (1Sam 4:21).

אֶל־הַלְקָחַ אֲרוֹן הַקְּדוֹשִׁים
וְאֶל־חַמֵּיהָ וְאִישָׁהּ:

The name “Ichabod” questions where the divine presence has gone. Thus, she inscribes the national catastrophe in the name of her son as she dies (1 Sam 4:21).⁶⁶⁵ She gives a theological explanation: the glory of God has departed from Israel. Her pain is more than the physical labor pain, but also emotional —with the capture of the Ark of God, the death of her father-in-law, her husband, and brother in-law. She believes that Israel’s God has abandoned them.⁶⁶⁶ She is concerned with what her son’s life is going to be with his mother dead, the Ark of the LORD captured, and the death of his father, grandfather, and uncle on the same day. Thus, the name reflects who Phinehas’ wife foresees her son to be, as she dies leaving him as a full orphan. The Ark of the LORD and a priest are essential for the success of Israel, and as both are no more, the name she thinks most apt for her son indicates the departure of God’s presence.

According to McCarter, despite the negative connotations of the element ’ṭ, “none,” in Ethiopic and Phoenician, the element in the name is ’ē, “where,” so that the meaning is: “Where is Glory” or ’ē “alas,” “Alas Glory!” For him, the most instructive comparison is with Ugaritic ’iy, “where is?” or “alas!”⁶⁶⁷ Most renderings translate אֶ as “where,” although in Job 22:30 and Eccl 10:16 אֶ is often rendered “alas”. Thus, Ichabod may be translated with McCarter to mean “Where is the Glory”. Burnett supports the claim of McCarter, explaining that the deity’s absence in the loss of the Ark and the departure of the deity’s glory in the story, makes it

⁶⁶⁵ Alter, *The David Story*, 25–26.

⁶⁶⁶ Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 32.

⁶⁶⁷ McCarter, *I Samuel*, 115–16.

equally fitting.⁶⁶⁸ Thus, in her despair, pondering the major catastrophe, she asks, what has happened to the glory, that is, to the Deity?

The text gives a reason for the name that the wife of Phinehas gives her son. The first and second parts of her last words are similar, saying

“The glory has departed from Israel...”
And she said “The glory has departed from Israel...”

גְּלוֹהַ כְּבוֹד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל ...
וַתֹּאמֶר גְּלוֹהַ כְּבוֹד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל ...

She literally repeats what she says in naming the child. Thus v. 21 and v. 22 are very much alike.

וַתֹּאמֶר גְּלוֹהַ כְּבוֹד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל כִּי נִלְקַח אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים

Apart from *וַתִּקְרָא לְנֶעֱר אֵי-כְבוֹד... וְאֶל-חַמִּיהָ וְאִישָׁהּ* in v. 21, all the words of v. 22 are embedded in v. 21. Although there is a slight difference in the two verses, where the first aspect of her last words, she thinks of both the Ark and the men who died (v. 21), and in the second, she focuses on only the Ark, which emphasizes the loss of the Deity’s presence, literally the “glory”. The “glory” here refers to the Ark and not necessarily to the Deity.

The text explains itself by indicating the circumstances leading to the birth of Ichabod and the reason for his name. The narrator explicitly informs us in the same verse with further clarification that it is “because the Ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband.” The glory that signifies the presence of the Ark of God has departed from Israel.⁶⁶⁹ This may be an indirect reference to the absence of the Deity and a direct reference to the Deity’s throne, the Ark, among the people. In a different dimension, the departure of the glory of God among His people is also featured in few places (Ezek 10:18; Hos 10:5). Klein links this text to the post-exilic period and notes, “In this context, the name Ichabod may take on

⁶⁶⁸ Burnett, *Where Is God?*, 34–35.

⁶⁶⁹ Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 2nd ed., WBC 10 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 44–45.

new contemporary meaning. The glory of Yahweh had again departed from Israel in 587, as Ezekiel made clear (10:18).”⁶⁷⁰

The unknown man of God’s prediction of the fall of the house of Eli, because he failed to honor the LORD, is fulfilled (1 Sam 2:27–34). However, that prompts the birth of Ichabod in an exceptional manner and leaving him in a devastating state. The last words of Phinehas’s wife are linked to the prediction of the unnamed man of God in 1 Sam 2:27–34. He is unambiguous about Eli honoring his sons more than God (וַתִּכְבֹּד אֶת־בָּנָיָהּ מִיְהוָה; v. 29). The man of God informs Eli that God honors those who honor Him and disparages those who despise Him (כִּי־מִכְבֹּדִי אֶכְבֹּד וּבְנֵי יִקְלֹוּ (v. 34). The root כבד, “honor, glory” is used in both verses and in the last words of Ichabod’s mother in naming him. The shared theme is honor and dishonor. Though the wife of Phinehas might not have knowledge of what was told Eli, her words affirm what the LORD is doing in Israel. The naming of Ichabod is a sign in itself of the fulfillment of the word of the LORD to Eli through the unnamed man of God.⁶⁷¹ Ichabod’s mother literally perceives the glory of God is no longer with Israel and names that perception as she takes her last breath. She did not see the glory of God operating again in Israel; rather, all the events that prompt her birth pangs point to her conclusion that the glory has departed.

Unlike Jacob changing the name of Ben-Oni to Benjamin, there is no father to change the name of Ichabod. Further, Ichabod reflects the state of the nation into which he is born, and the mention of his name echoes that situation. The circumstances surrounding the birth of

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 46. Similar to the departure of the glory of the LORD and the manifestation of His glory later, the exilic writers did expect the glory that departs to return in the future (Ezek 43:1-5; Isa 43:18-21).

⁶⁷¹ Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 46–47: “The issue of progeny remains central to plot motivation in chapters 4-6. Eli’s two sons, and everything they stand for, accompany the loss of the ark. In fact, wherever Hophni and Phinehas are mentioned in chapter 4, the ark is also mentioned (4:4, 11, 17); Eli’s sons are inseparable from the idea of the lost ark.”

Ichabod are all we know about him. We have no information on what Ichabod grows up to be or anything else about his life; but we can surmise that the last words of Phinehas' wife are fulfilled with the devastation of Israel.

B. In Defiance

I. Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:31)

II. Athaliah (2 Kgs 11:1–14; 2 Chron 22:10–12)

Jezebel and Athaliah are a mother and daughter surrounded by monarchs with Athaliah ruling as a monarch herself. Jezebel is the daughter of the Sidonian king Ethbaal, who set up an altar for Baal in Samaria. She is also the wife of Ahab, who is king of Israel (1 Kgs 16:29–33). Athaliah, like her mother, has deep roots in royalty from both parents (2 Kgs 8:16–18, 26). Both women utter their last words in defiance.

I. Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:30–31)

The last words of Jezebel are very brief, but the mention of her name arouses the attention of much Biblical scholarship as an infamous woman. The main narrative about her is found in 1 Kgs 21:5–15. In that narrative, she causes Naboth to be stoned to death for refusing to sell his ancestral land in Jezreel to her husband, Ahab, who covets it.

Jezebel not only orchestrates the death of God's prophets, but also has Naboth executed. Jezebel is well-known for killing YHWH's prophets. This is reported by both the narrator of this story and that of Obadiah (1Kgs 18:4, 13). She threatens Elijah who flees for his life after his outstanding triumph over the prophets of Baal, to the extent that Elijah wants to die (18:20–40; 19:1–4). Ahab, Jezebel's husband, felt humiliated by the refusal of Naboth to sell him the land of his ancestors and Ahab refused to eat (1 Kgs 21:1–6). Jezebel did not understand why

the king should not obtain what he desires, and she said to him, “You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite” (v. 7). She succeeds in her venture, but God does not take it lightly when Ahab follows suit to possess the land. God sends Elijah to Ahab to declare doom to him and his family. The narrator informs us that Ahab’s actions are instigated by Jezebel (vv. 16–25). Jezebel is power drunk, but her end has already been determined by God to avenge the blood of the servants of the LORD and of Naboth (1 Kgs 21:19–24; 2 Kgs 9:7). “Death, and implicitly Sheol, is the great leveler of all, small or great, slave or free (Job 3:13–19).”⁶⁷²

In fulfillment of Elijah’s words, Ahab dies in battle (22:34–35), but, paradoxically, Jezebel becomes rather emboldened. She hears of Jehu, Ahab’s general, coming to Jezreel, and she prepares by painting her eyes, adorning her head, and peering through a window (2 Kgs 9:30)—a typical Canaanite pose. The image of a woman at the window portrays female deities who use their power to taunt or punish men.⁶⁷³ On the other hand, Seeman observes that women watchers are elite persons who are members of a ruling house, and their gaze is always deployed in contexts in which danger threatens. He claims that unlike the male watchers, the females “are inevitably the victims of disruption that cannot be avoided. The female watcher’s gazes serve to focalize the downfall of despised regimes or kin groups, and the inability of those kin groups to act decisively in self-defense.”⁶⁷⁴ Jezebel’s gaze at this point does not matter because her regime is despised and the time for her downfall has come. Fritz suggests that Jezebel greets Jehu from

⁶⁷² Philip Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 79.

⁶⁷³ Nehama Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 14–15.

⁶⁷⁴ Don Seeman, “The Watcher at the Window: Cultural Poetics of a Biblical Motif,” *Prooftexts* 24 (2004):15.

the window because that is the only point of contact for a woman in the male-dominated public space, but she misjudges the new power relations.⁶⁷⁵ The motif of women looking through the window is also featured in the stories of the mother of Sisera (Judg 5:28), Michal the wife of David, Saul's daughter (2 Sam 6:16; 1 Chron 15:29), and to some extent, Rahab, who helps the two spies Joshua sent through the window (Josh 2:15)—although, she does not look out of the window as a pose.

Cogan and Tadmor liken Jezebel to the woman who lures, calling through her window in Prov 7:6–23 to an unwise passerby hoping to ensnare him. They question if Jezebel thought she could “use her womanly charm to extricate her from certain death.”⁶⁷⁶ On the other hand, Omanson and Ellington observe that though some ancient commentators allude to Jezebel desiring to entice Jehu, not to kill her but rather take her for a wife, her verbal attack in the verse that follows hardly points to someone seeking reconciliation.⁶⁷⁷ Similarly, Sweeney disagrees with the notion of many male scholars that Jezebel intends to seduce Jehu, contending that she is old enough to be the mother of two adult kings and, as the queen mother, prepares for an official reception.⁶⁷⁸ However, Jezebel's attitude towards Jehu does not reflect preparation for an official event, or detachment from reality, but rather readiness for confrontation and feeling secure in her palace.

The last words of Jezebel are הַשְׁלוֹם זִמְרִי הֲרַג אֲדֹנָי “Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of his master?” (2 Kgs 9:31, NRSV, ESV, NKJV). This could also be translated as “Is it well?”

⁶⁷⁵ Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 286–87.

⁶⁷⁶ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 111–12.

⁶⁷⁷ Omanson and Ellington, *A Handbook on 1-2 Kings*, 932.

⁶⁷⁸ Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 334–35. Jehu uses the central issue of loyalty against Jezebel and calls for her eunuchs to throw her down (vv.32-33).

(NAU), “Are you well?” or “How is it with you?” or “Have you come in peace, you murderer? You're just like Zimri, who murdered his master!” (NLT). The question of Jezebel, הַשְׁלוֹם is significant in this story considering how frequent it has been used earlier. This question is found five times in 2 Kings 9 (vv. 17, 18, 19, 22, 31). The son of Jezebel, Joram, uses it four times to the same man, Jehu, before Jehu kills him (2 Kgs 9:17–21) and Jezebel uses it in her last words (v. 31). In both cases, they are foreseeing a danger ahead of them that needs to be confronted.

In addition, Jezebel refers to Jehu as Zimri, murderer of his master, which is “in every sense an insulting reference—Jezebel continued to display her self-assurance and courage.”⁶⁷⁹ Zimri is the servant of Elah, who, as the commander of half of his chariots, conspires against Elah and kills him. He becomes king for only seven days and commits suicide by setting himself on fire at the palace when Omri, the father-in-law of Jezebel, and all Israel besieged Tirzah (1 Kgs 16:8–19). Jezebel sarcastically calls Jehu “Zimri”, as Isaiah sarcastically calls Judah “Sodom and Gomorrah” (Isa 1:10–11). Sweeney observes that Jezebel’s question “suggests that Jehu is a flash-in-the pan who will meet a similar fate”⁶⁸⁰.

Nevertheless, since Zimri murdered his master, and Jehu also kills Joram and Ahaziah, the two kings of Israel and Judah, respectively (2 Kgs 9:14–27; 10:1–4), before heading to Jezreel, she could be referring to King Joram, as Jehu’s master. Just as Zimri killed his master, Jehu does the same to his master.⁶⁸¹ According to Sweeney, Jezebel knows the purpose of Jehu and that is why she refers to him as Zimri, killer of his master.⁶⁸² Jezebel mocks Jehu as she looks

⁶⁷⁹ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 112.

⁶⁸⁰ Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 336.

⁶⁸¹ Jezebel’s link of Jehu to Zimri is not clear, although she refers to Zimri as Jehu’s master.

⁶⁸² Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 336.

out from a position of seeming power and authority. Jezebel did not see Jehu as a prophetically appointed executor, but as the murderer of his king.⁶⁸³

However, Jehu commanded that Jezebel be thrown down and her attendants—the eunuchs—obeyed (v. 31). The death of all the house of Ahab and Jezebel is foretold not only by the unnamed disciple of Elisha (2 Kgs 9:25–26, 30–37; 10:1–17), but also earlier by Elijah to the effect that dogs will eat up Jezebel in Jezreel (1 Kgs 21:17–24; 2 Kgs 9:1–10). Though the LORD commands Elijah to anoint Jehu to be king over Israel (1 Kgs 19:16), there is no account of Elijah performing that act. Elisha, who succeeds Elijah, is the one who sends one of the prophets’ acolytes to anoint Jehu and flee (2 Kgs 9:1–3). The acolyte says more than the instruction given him, by giving Jehu details of what he is to do; he says to Jehu:

You shall strike down the house of Ahab your master,
that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets,
and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of
Jezebel (v. 7).

וְהִכִּיתָהּ אֶת־בַּיִת אֶחָאָב אֲדֹגְיָךְ
וְנִקְמָתִי דָמַי עֲבָדֵי הַנְּבִיאִים
וְדָמַי כָּל־עֲבָדֵי יְהוָה מִיַּד אִיזָבֵל

Jehu does exactly what he is anointed to do by eliminating all the house of Ahab, his master.

Jezebel dies from the fall and is left unburied as Jehu feasts. When Jehu orders that she be buried, not much of her is left, so she has no place of burial (1 Kgs 21:23; 2 Kgs 9:34–37). Jehu’s murder of Jezebel fulfills the prophecy. According to Fritz, dying with one’s spirit wandering restlessly forever is the most severe punishment that is imaginable in the ancient Israel.⁶⁸⁴ However, it is important to note that Elijah prophesied about dogs eating Jezebel to Ahab (1 Kgs 21:23–25), and Elisha’s servant repeats Jezebel’s doom to Jehu (2 Kgs 9:7–10).

⁶⁸³ Seeman, “The Watcher at the Window: Cultural Poetics of a Biblical Motif,” 25–26.

⁶⁸⁴ Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 286–87.

After Jezebel is killed, Jehu recalls Elijah’s prophecy to the servants (vv. 34–37). Elisha never had direct contact with Jezebel.

Jezebel commands authority as the queen mother and influences her husband to act, as she makes demands with defiant actions that carry on until her death. The last words of Jezebel are in defiance of Jehu, whom she claims to be the murderer of his master.⁶⁸⁵ A step-by-step narration of the revenge against the Ahabites is related. Thus, associative ordering of the occurrences demands that after the assassination of Joram, the murder of Jezebel is to follow, to conclude the elimination of the rest of the royal line.⁶⁸⁶

Jezebel did not take account of her ways or what has been prophesied about her end. At the same time, she is in authority and can do what seems right to her at any time. Jezebel’s last words to Jehu, “Is it peace, Zimri, the murderer of his master” (v. 22), brings her anything but peace. Jehu causes her death as she correctly characterizes him in her last words—an assassin.

II. Athaliah (2 Kgs 11:1–16; 2 Chron 22:10–12)

Athaliah is the second of only two women to be queen over the people of Israel, and she dies in defiance just as her mother, Jezebel, did. Athaliah is the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and the wife of Jehoram, king of Judah (2 Kgs 8:16–18). She is identified as the granddaughter⁶⁸⁷ of

⁶⁸⁵ Jezebel could not imagine how easily she could be killed. Her own eunuchs help Jehu, now in power, and their loyalty turns to him rather than Jezebel.

⁶⁸⁶ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 118. However, Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, who is left as at the time of the death of Jezebel, is also executed. It is after she usurps power and kills all royals that she is killed after a six-year reign.

⁶⁸⁷ The MT denotes Athaliah as daughter of Omri, king of Israel עַתְלִיָּהּ בַּת־עֲמֹרִי מֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל and it is translated as such by JPS, KJV, ERV; but a majority of versions have it as granddaughter (NKJV, NLT, NET, NAS, NIV etc). The

Omri, king of Israel, and the mother of Ahaziah, who reigns as king for a year in Jerusalem (v. 26). She grew up in a royal environment, as her husband, son, father, grandfather, and father-in-law were all monarchs. The narrator does not tell us much about Athaliah except how she behaves when her son is killed (11:1).⁶⁸⁸ Her reign is not introduced or concluded as is usual in the accounts of other leaders since it is seen as usurpation—and the bloody nature of her reign speaks for itself.⁶⁸⁹

Like mother, like daughter. Athaliah takes revenge murdering the royal heirs (v. 1), when her son, Ahaziah, is killed and she becomes Queen of Judah. Jezebel, Athaliah's mother, is also involved in the mass killing of prophets (1 Kgs 18:4). Athaliah, an Israelite princess, like her mother, Jezebel, proved herself to be from the same autocratic mold, when her son is murdered by Jehu's riders and she seizes the throne in Jerusalem (11:1–3).⁶⁹⁰ Leithart describes Athaliah as the “antimother who destroys rather than nurtures the royal seed.”⁶⁹¹ Athaliah reigned for six years and during her seventh year, the high priest, Jehoiada, helped to coronate Joash.⁶⁹² Jehoiada hides Joash from being killed as a child, and makes a covenant with an oath with the captains and bodyguards, before ushering Joash into the temple (2 Kgs 11:4). It is suggested that the conspiracy to overthrow Athaliah becomes successful because public opinion is strongly

versions understand that sometimes a kinship reference skips a generation (Gen 29:5). Gray explains that בַּת־עֲמֹרִי (daughter of Omri) is to be understood as ‘female descendant’. See Gray, *I & II Kings*, 481–82.

⁶⁸⁸ Athaliah kills all the royal heirs. Earlier, Jehu who kills Joram, king of Israel, and Ahaziah, king of Judah (9:21–28), also kills 70 sons of Ahab and 42 brothers of Ahaziah (10:1–14).

⁶⁸⁹ Gray, *I & II Kings*, 23–24; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 133.

⁶⁹⁰ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 99.

⁶⁹¹ Leithart, *I & 2 Kings*, 225.

⁶⁹² Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 783. Jehosheba is wife of Jehoiada and aunt of Joash who hid Joash from Athaliah. She is believed to be “half-sister of Ahaziah, the daughter of Joram by another mother than Athaliah.” As the wife of the high priest, she is able to keep Joash safe in a house at the Temple until his coronation. See Gray, *I & II Kings*, 514; and Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 126.

opposed to the pro-Israelite policy of the ruling house of Athaliah and is greatly strengthened by Jehu’s earlier action in Israel.⁶⁹³

Leithart delineates the events leading to the death of Athaliah as parallel to the completion of the destruction of Ahab’s house as we find in 2 Kings 11–12 and chapters 9–10.

2 Kings 9–10	2 Kings 11–12
Jehu’s secretive coronation (9:1–10)	Joash’s secretive coronation (11:4–8)
Trumpets announce new king (9:13)	Trumpets announce new king (11:14)
Shouts of “Jehu is king” (9:13)	Shouts of “long live the king” (11:12)
A king cries “treason” (9:23)	A queen cries “treason” (11:14)
Jehu has Jezebel killed (9:30–37)	Jehoiada has Athaliah killed (11:15)
House of Baal destroyed (10:18–28)	House of Baal destroyed (11:18) ⁶⁹⁴

Jehoiada refers to Joash as “the king” even before the coronation, underscoring the royal status of Joash.⁶⁹⁵ It is during the official ceremony to enthrone Joash that Athaliah hears the noise of the participants in the coronation. She comes to the Temple and sees the king standing by a pillar. She cries out what turn out to be her last words (2 Kgs 11:14; 2 Chron 23:13):

When she looked, and behold,
the king standing by a pillar according to custom;
and the leaders and the trumpets were by the king.
All the people of the land were rejoicing
and blowing trumpets.
So Athaliah tore her clothes
and cried out, ‘Conspiracy! Conspiracy!’

וַתִּרְא וְהִנֵּה
הַמֶּלֶךְ עֹמֵד עַל-יְהוֹעָז כַּמִּשְׁפָּט
וְהַשָּׂרִים וְהַחֲצֹצְרוֹת אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְכָל-עַם הָאָרֶץ שִׂמְחִים
וְתֹקְעִים בַּחֲצֹצְרוֹת
וַתִּקְרַע עֲתֻלֶיהָ אֶת-בְּגָדֶיהָ
וַתִּקְרָא קוֹשֶׁר קוֹשֶׁר:

⁶⁹³ Gray, *I & II Kings*, 510–11. Jehu is the one who initiates the rebellion against the house of Ahab.

⁶⁹⁴ Leithart, *I & 2 Kings*, 228–29. Here we see not only the parallel, but also the contrast in Jehu killing all the royal seed of Ahab whereas God protects Joash when Athaliah tries to kill all the princes of the house of David. In real life, things do not happen symmetrically as these two events are shaped to fit the same pattern. The historian applies the same narrative template to both events.

⁶⁹⁵ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 784.

The last words of Athaliah are “Conspiracy! Conspiracy!” קִשָּׁר קִשָּׁר (2 Kgs 11:14). She sees herself as the authority, and the acts of Jehoiada, the escorts, and all the people as a subversion of that authority. The actions of the people led by Jehoiada to Athaliah, are a breach of faith. She did not expect any uprising after her purge of the royals. According to Gray, her cry is like that of her brother, Joram, when he flees from Jehu.⁶⁹⁶ Joram cries מִרְמָה (2 Kig 9:23), which is translated as deceit or “treachery” (ESV, JPS, NKJ). In fact, the last words of Athaliah are defiant and not uttered in defeat as were Joram’s. The word Athaliah uses indicates that she sees the action of the people as an insurrection against her, the rightful ruler of Judah. The same Hebrew stem is used in the stories of Absalom (2 Sam 15:12), Zimri (1 Kgs 16:20),⁶⁹⁷ and Shallum (2 Kgs 15:15); but the outcry of Athaliah, who names the affront that she sees before her, is unique.

The last words of Athaliah reflect her thinking; although she also tears her clothes, which is one of the signs of mourning generally in the Bible (Gen 37:34; Judg 7:6; 11:35; 2 Sam 1:2, 11–12; 13:19, 31). There can be one or more of the mourning rituals in a text. The mourning rites could be tearing of one’s garment, putting on sackcloth, tossing ashes or dust on the head, rolling in ashes or dust, sitting or lying on the ground, weeping, wailing, groaning, sighing, uttering dirges or mourning cries, avoiding anointing with oil, fasting, lacerating oneself, and manipulating head and beard hair by shaving or depilation.⁶⁹⁸ “There can only be one ruler in

⁶⁹⁶ Gray, *I & II Kings*, 523.

⁶⁹⁷ Omanson and Ellington, *A Handbook on 1-2 Kings*, 989.

⁶⁹⁸ Saul M. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29–30.

Jerusalem; thus Joash's enthronement has brought Athaliah's reign to an end."⁶⁹⁹ Her resolve to act as a queen and her tyrannical rule are over.

Athaliah's cry did not deter Jehoiada and the people. Jehoiada, the priest, then commands the captains and officers of the army, to take her outside under guard, for her and her followers to be executed. Jehoiada seems to be conscious of the cultic taboo of not shedding blood within the temple.⁷⁰⁰ Athaliah is killed at the entrance to the palace, but her very last words are not apparent. We have no information about what she says after she rends her clothes and decries the conspiracy against her. After the command in vv. 15 and 16 that she be seized and killed, the narrator depicts Athaliah as speechless through the stables of the palace as she is passively led to the site of her execution. In contrast to her mother Jezebel, Athaliah utters no last words or, more correctly, her last words are not obvious.

⁶⁹⁹ Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 298–99.

⁷⁰⁰ Alter, *Ancient Israel*, 785.

Part III

Implementation, Fulfillment and Significance of Last Words

This section focuses on the implementation, fulfillment, and significance of last words in Biblical literature as well as the effect that these words have on the hearers in their literary context. Are the instructions given in the last words implemented? How far are the prayers answered and prophecies fulfilled? Did the circumstances under which the last words were uttered affect its implementation? Did the circumstances of death affect the carrying out of the last words? The diversity of last words and the conditions under which the last words are uttered could generally be said to have some effect on their execution. In what follows, how each of the last words is fulfilled will be examined. The analysis starts with the oaths Jacob demand of Joseph and Joseph's obligation of his brothers.

The Promised Land and family are the main concerns with regard to the last words that have to do with oath taking. The last words of Jacob to Joseph (Gen 47:27–31), and Joseph to his brothers (Gen 50:25), have to do with the Promised Land and fortification of the family lineage. The promise of increase is a gradual growth that extends over generations in the context of blessing.⁷⁰¹

a. Jacob to Joseph (Gen 47:27–31)

The Promised Land and family are paramount in the oath Jacob demands of Joseph before he dies (Gen 47:27–31). Jacob makes Joseph swear not to bury him in Egypt. Jacob is precise on

⁷⁰¹ Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers: Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 127–29. The promise to Abraham of a son came with increase and blessing with promise of land. However, the promise of increase by itself does not occur with blessing, land, son, and presence. For more on the organization of the promise see Westermann, 124–61.

where he wants to be buried, and that is at Machpelah. Jacob’s demand on Joseph is made at a time when Joseph is in a very prominent position in Egypt. There is no doubt that Joseph knows how serious his father is when asked to swear, even after he promises to do his will. The circumstances under which Jacob makes Joseph take the oath to take him out of Egypt are very solemn, and it is clear to Joseph he cannot do otherwise (Gen 47:29–31).

When the time drew near that Israel must die,
 he called his son Joseph and said to him,
 “Now if I have found favor in your sight,
 please put your hand under my thigh,
 and deal kindly and truly with me.
 Please do not bury me in Egypt,
 but let me lie with my fathers;
 you shall carry me out of Egypt
 and bury me in their burial place.
 And he said, “I will do as you have said.”
 Then he said, “Swear to me.”
 And he swore to him.
 So Israel prostrated himself at the head of the bed.

וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמוּת׃
 וַיִּקְרָא לְבָנוֹ לְיוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ
 אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
 שִׂים־נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יָרְכִי
 וַעֲשֵׂתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְאֱמֻנָה
 אֲלֹנָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרָיִם׃
 וְשָׂכַבְתִּי עִם־אֲבוֹתַי
 וַיִּשְׂאֲתֵנִי מִמִּצְרָיִם
 וַיִּקְבְּרֵנִי בְּקִבְרֵתָם׃
 וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּדָבָרְךָ׃
 וַיֹּאמֶר הִשָּׁבְעָה לִּי
 וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ׃
 וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־רֹאשׁ הַמֶּטֶה׃

Jacob repeats his request to Joseph to be taken out of Egypt and be buried with his fathers, when he dies (vv. 29–30). Joseph respects his father’s deep desire and buries him as he was commanded (v. 12). Joseph asks Pharaoh to fulfill his vow to his father (vv. 4–12). Although there is no indication that Joseph would have disobeyed his father and buried him in Egypt, the demand Jacob imposed on Joseph played a major role in Jacob’s being buried in Canaan. Respecting Jacob’s mandate, Joseph asks the household of Pharaoh to do his father’s will, which is granted (Gen 50:4–5):

And when the days of weeping for him were past,
 Joseph spoke
 to the household of Pharaoh, saying,
 “If now I have found favor in your eyes,
 please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying,
 ‘My father made me swear, saying,

וַיַּעֲבֵרוּ יְמֵי כְבוֹתוֹ וַיִּעֲבְרוּ
 וַיִּדְבֹר יוֹסֵף
 אֶל־בֵּית פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר׃
 אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
 דַּבְּרוּ־נָא בְּאָזְנֵי פַרְעֹה לֵאמֹר
 אָבִי הִשָּׁבְעָנִי לֵאמֹר

‘I am about to die:
in my tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan,
there shall you bury me.’
Now therefore, let me please go up and bury my father.
Then I will return.’”
And Pharaoh answered,
“Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear.”

הִנֵּה אֲנִי מֵת
בְּקִבְרִי אֲשֶׁר פָּרִיתִי לִי בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן
שָׁמָּה תִקְבְּרֵנִי
וְעַתָּה אֵעֲלֶה-נָּא וְאֶקְבְּרָה אֶת-אָבִי
וְאָשׁוּבָה
וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה
עֲלֶה וּקְבֹר אֶת-אָבִיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר הִשְׁבִּיעֶךָ :

Joseph and Pharaoh talk about the oath Joseph made to his father at his demand. ‘My father made me swear...., (v. 5) ‘... as he made you swear’ (v. 6). Thus, the circumstances surrounding Jacob’s last words to Joseph are foremost in the fulfillment of Jacob’s last words to Joseph. It is not only the circumstances around Joseph that enable him to accomplish the demands of his father; it is clear that the oath plays a major role.

b. Joseph to Brothers (Gen 50:25)

Similar to the implementation of the oath of Jacob from Joseph, is that which Joseph imposes on his brothers before he dies (Gen 50:25). Although those who will execute the demand were not yet born at the time the oath is taken, the expectation is that the instruction will be passed on orally from generation to generation. Generations will die from the time of Joseph until the exodus. However, no other bones are known to have been carried along with Israel apart from those of Joseph. The only reason given for which Moses takes the bones of Joseph along with them is because Joseph made the sons of Israel swear to do so (Exod 13:19).

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him,
For he made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying,
‘God will surely take account of you,
and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.’

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ
כִּי הִשְׁבַּע הַשְּׂבִיעַ אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר
פָּקֹד וַיִּקְוֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם
וְהֵעֲלִיתֶם אֶת-עֲצָמֹתַי מִזֶּה אִתְּכֶם

After many years, at the time of exodus of Israel from Egypt, the oath Joseph imposes on the children of Israel is effectuated, and Joseph's bones are carried from Egypt for burial in Canaan (Gen 50:25; Exod 13:19). The implementation of Joseph's last words is explicitly fulfilled.

The oaths Jacob and Joseph impose greatly influence the implementation of their last words—they establish obligation. The imposition of an oath, therefore, is a successful strategy for seeing that one's last words are materialized.

2. Foretelling Future Events:

a. Jacob to Joseph (Gen 48:21–22)

Foretelling future events by Jacob to Joseph (Gen 48:21–22), Jacob to his sons (Gen 49:1–32), Joseph to the Israelites (Gen 50:24–26), and Moses to the Israelites (Deut 32:1–47) are events that are said to have taken place with intervals of many years between them. The last words foretell, and centuries later they are fulfilled. Jacob's foretelling the exodus of Israel from Egypt in his last words to Joseph is similar to Joseph's foretelling the exodus to the children of Israel. Likewise, Jacob's foretelling the future to his sons is similar to Moses' foretelling the future to the Israelites. The Israelites stay in Egypt for 430 years according to Exod 12:40–41, and then the exodus follows with another 40 years in the wilderness (Numb 32:13; Josh 5:6). Nevertheless, that which is foretold is accomplished when they leave Egypt and eventually get settled in the Promised Land. It is important to add that all these last words are reminiscent of God's promise to Abraham (Gen 15:13–21).

Similar to the focus of the oaths, where Jacob's request to Joseph has to do with the Promised Land and being buried with his fathers (47:29–31), Jacob foretells Joseph about God taking the Israelites back to the land of their fathers. The land is still the focus of Jacob's last words to Joseph in this unit (Gen 48:21).

Then Israel said to Joseph,
“Behold, I am dying,
but God will be with you
and bring you back to the land of your fathers.

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יְהוֹסֵף
הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מוֹת
וְהָיָה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּךְ
וְהָשִׁיב אֶתְּךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ

In addition, Jacob foretells Joseph he is giving him more than what his brothers are getting in the land when God takes them to the land of their fathers (v. 22).

Moreover, I have given to you
one portion [pun on Shechem]⁷⁰² above your brothers,
which I took from the hand of the Amorite
with my sword and my bow.

וְאֲנִי נָתַתִּי לְךָ
שָׂכָם אֶחָד עַל-אֶחָיו
אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְתִּי מִיַּד הָאֲמֹרִי
בְּחַרְבִּי וּבְקִשְׁתִּי:

This is the birthright blessing that should have been Reuben’s, but Jacob gives that blessing to Joseph (1 Chron 5:1, Ezek 47:13). Regarding the implementation of these last words, God indeed takes Israel from Egypt to the land of their fathers and Ephraim and Manasseh acquire separate territories just like each of Jacob’s own sons.

b. Ethical Will of Jacob to his Sons (Gen 49:1–32)

Jacob’s last words are spelled out in detail in Part II under “categories of last words”.

Jacob to Reuben (Gen 49:3–4)

Jacob’s last words to Reuben entail an indictment of dishonoring Jacob by sleeping with his concubine (35:21–22). In Genesis, firstborn positions tend to go to younger siblings (Gen 4:1–5; 16:1–15; 21:8–14; 25:19–34; 27:28–29; 41:50–51; 48:20). In addition, Reuben is the son of Leah, who is not as much loved as her younger sister Rachel. Reuben’s action leads to the condemnation he receives instead of blessing. Jacob’s last words to Reuben affect him so that Reuben does not excel among his brothers. Reuben forfeits the first-born blessing from his father

⁷⁰² See discussion on Shechem under Jacob’s last words to Joseph (Gen 48:21–22) under Part II, pages 32–37.

as well as incurring a curse. Thus, Jacob's last words to Reuben not only deprive him of his firstborn position, but also cause him to be insignificant.

Jacob to Simeon and Levi (Gen 49:5–7)

Exhibitions of rebellion are characteristic of the tribes of Simeon and Levi (Num 16:1–3; 25:6, 14). Simeon becomes part of Judah and is not mentioned in several places when other tribes are listed (Deuteronomy 33; Judges 5). It is without permanent territorial ownership in Israel because of its absorption into Judah (Josh 19:1–9). Priesthood in Israel belongs to the tribe of Levi (Deut 10:8–9; 14:27; 18:1–5; Josh 13:33). Therefore, Levi did not altogether directly experience the import of Jacob's last words—but they still were not allotted their own territory. Cities in other tribes are given to the Levites to live in with their flocks (Joshua 21). God is said to be their inheritance, and that which is supposed to go to God is theirs (Num 18:1–24; Deut 12:12, 18–19; 14:27–29; 18:1–8; 26:11–13; 2 Chron 31:2–19). However, most Levites are not cared for as anticipated, and they move around in search of provisions (Judg 17:9–13; 18:1–31; Neh 13:10). Accordingly, Jacob's last words to Simeon and Levi have some effect. It may be concluded that to some extent, the last words of Jacob are fulfilled in the life of Simon and Levi. The “blessing” of Jacob is that these tribes be dispersed. Simon is dispersed by being incorporated into Judah, and Levi is likewise dispersed by being located among other tribes.

Jacob to Judah (Gen 49:8–12)

Outstanding in Jacob's last words coming into fruition is Judah becoming the choice of God immediately after the death of Joshua, when Israel asks God who should lead them. God says He has delivered the land into the hands of Judah (Judg 1:1–3). Land has already been allotted to

each tribe, but they have not fully taken possession of it. Judah is to lead in that venture. Before Joshua's death, it is reported that the Israelites had possession of the land and were settled, which seems to contradict Judg 1:1–3. This is what Josh 21:43–45 says

Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land
 that he swore to give to their fathers
 And they took possession of it, and they settled there.
 And the LORD gave them rest on every side
 just as he had sworn to their fathers.
 Not one of all their enemies had withstood them,
 all their enemies
 the LORD gave into their hands.
 Not one word of all the good promises
 that the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed;
 all came to pass (Josh 21:43–45).

וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ
 אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לָתֵת לְאֲבוֹתָם
 וַיֵּשְׁבוּ וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ בָּהּ:
 וַיִּנַּח יְהוָה לָהֶם מִסָּבִיב
 כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּע לְאֲבוֹתָם
 וְלֹא־עָמַד אִישׁ בְּפָנֵיהֶם מִכָּל־אֹיְבֵיהֶם
 אֶת כָּל־אֹיְבֵיהֶם
 נָתַן יְהוָה בְּיָדָם:
 לֹא־נִפְּל דְבָר מִכָּל הַדְּבָר הַטּוֹב
 אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
 הַכֹּל בָּא:

However, this research will not discuss the seemingly contradictory passages where many years later, Israel is still portrayed as fighting for the Promised Land (Judg 1:20–35). Some have stressed the polyphonic nature of the book of Judges; see 1:21 for instance, which does not correspond at all with its content and placement.⁷⁰³ The fulfillment of Jacob's last words to Judah is the emphasis here. The leadership role God gives Judah, and which Judah undertakes, relates the fulfillment of some of Jacob's last words to Judah.

Jacob's last words to Judah, which include the blessing of the royal scepter not departing from Judah, are desirable and fulfilled many centuries later in the Davidic line of monarchy. Judah achieves hegemony among the tribes and becomes a leading tribe of all Israel. Judah's courage is metaphorically described as a lion, which is also the emblem of Jerusalem. The most important city in all Israel is the Jebusite city of Jerusalem, which was taken by David to form a capital between Judah and Benjamin. Although Jacob does not mention Jerusalem in

⁷⁰³ Greger Andersson, *The Book and Its Narratives: A Critical Examination of Some Synchronic Studies of the Book of Judges*, Orebro Studies in Literary History and Criticism 1 (Orebro: Universitetsbiblioteket, 2001), 192–97.

his last words to Judah, Jerusalem becomes associated with Judah as the city of David. David and Jerusalem are special to God out of all the tribes of Israel (1Kgs 11:32). Jerusalem is very special to all the tribes as the inheritance of God (Ps 48:2; 78:67–72; Zech 2:12). Just as Jerusalem is mentioned many times in the Bible, so is the lion mentioned several times. What Jacob foresees the posterity of Judah becoming, hundreds of years beforehand, is fulfilled. Judah is chosen above all the tribes—even above Joseph, Jacob’s beloved son (Judg 1:2; 20:18; Ps 78:70). Jacob’s last words to Judah are appropriate and rewarding from a dying father, and they are realized in what Judah becomes.

Jacob to Zebulun (Gen 49:13)

Jacob’s last words to Zebulun have to do with getting settled at the shore with ships but also with its borders. Although Zebulun is not located by the coast initially (Josh 19:10–16), it is blessed at its location in later years. Rainey suggests Zebulun could not gain a foothold in the Jezreel Valley but dispossessed the inhabitants of Kitron (Kattath, Josh 19:15) and Nahalal while Canaanites still lived in the territory of Zebulun. Ancient Nahalal is near a rich area with a good water supply.⁷⁰⁴ The brook and well are described in Josh 19:10–14; 1Kings 4. Zebulun’s borders encompass Kitron and Nahalal according to Judg 1:30, but Zebulun could not drive out the inhabitants. Although Zebulun is not directly on the coast, its territory is abutting the Sea of Galilee (Isa 9:1). Weinfeld describes Zebulun as one of the Galilean tribes that could not drive out the inhabitants. However, Zebulun settles around the Mediterranean Sea at a different time.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰⁴ Anson F. Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta’s Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 135.

⁷⁰⁵ Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land*, 306.

Thus, Zebulun becomes engaged in maritime trade and fulfills that which Jacob foresees many years ahead.

Jacob to Issachar (Gen 49:14–15)

Jacob's last words to Issachar are not very clear but are nevertheless significant. Issachar receives Jezreel and some areas of the lower Galilee in the Promised Land. This is one of the best allocations and fulfills part of Jacob's last words to Issachar, which has to do with pleasant land and some rest in the land (Josh 19:17–23). Issachar arrives early in the land and serves as corvée workers in Harosheth-hagoiim's agriculture, during years of crisis.⁷⁰⁶ This fulfills Jacob's last words to Issachar many years before Israel settled in the Land. Weinfeld observes that Issachar is not mentioned at all when the failure of the tribes is enumerated because it is enslaved by the Canaanites and "bends his shoulder" to be enslaved as a laborer.⁷⁰⁷ Nevertheless, receiving its allotment around Jezreel is a blessing fulfilled.

Jacob to Dan (Gen 49:16–18)

Jacob's last words to Dan are linked to the meaning of Dan that is given to him at birth. One of the important roles God plays in the life of all Israel is echoed in the name of Dan, where God 'judges' Israel when they go against His will, but also 'judges' in favor of Israel against Israel's enemies. Jacob exploits Dan's name as God 'judging' (30:6; 49:16).

A serpent by the way that bites the horse's heels, as said in the blessing to Dan, reflects the strength of Israel as a nation. This is a metaphor for guerrilla warfare, where Israel

⁷⁰⁶ Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge*, 177.

⁷⁰⁷ Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land*, 134.

lies in wait and strikes the enemy by surprise. Throughout the generations, Israel faces formidable enemies but comes out victorious. At the time of the Jacob's last words, Jacob and the entire family were living in Egypt, but Jacob anticipates the rescue of Israel from Egypt, which is eventually fulfilled after many years of servitude. It can be surmised that Jacob's last words to Dan as judging and being a serpent are fulfilled. Dan fights to survive and moves to the north. Israel's borders are defined with reference to Dan as from Dan to Beersheba (Judg 20:1; 1 Sam 3:20).

Jacob to Gad (Gen 49:19)

Jacob foresees Gad as triumphing over his enemies. Gad is targeted by adversaries launching troops against him, but Gad prevails in the end. Jacob reflects on the name of Gad beginning negatively but ending with Gad's achievement. Although Gad's location is east of the Jordan River, and Aram invaded it often (1 Sam 13:7; 1 Kgs 20:26–34), Weinfeld posits that the Promised Land does not include the eastern side of the Jordan.⁷⁰⁸ Several enemies attack Gad, but it ultimately gains the upper hand. Gad's enemies include the Ammonites, Moabites, Arameans, Assyrians, and other marauders (Judg 10–12; Jer 49:1–6; 1 Kgs 22:3; 2 Kgs 10:32–33; 2 Kgs 15:29). The last words to Gad relate not only to Gad, but to Israel as a nation: although troops come against it, Israel prevails almost always —unless the Deity decides to teach a lesson by supporting the enemy. Israel's triumphs over its enemies (Judg 10–12; 11:1–12:7; 1 Kgs 22:3; 2 Kgs 10:32–33; 15:29; Jer 49:1–6) fulfill Jacob's last words to Gad in particular, and to Israel in general.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 54, 60.

Jacob to Asher (Gen 49:20)

Jacob's last words to Asher describe his involvement in the food industry and prospering thereby. That which Jacob foresees and foretells is fulfilled in the tribe of Asher whose allotment is fertile. Asher's marine activities help provide food not only for itself, but also through trade for those around and the royals.⁷⁰⁹ Leah's joy at the birth of Asher and the last words of Jacob to Asher are reflected in the tribe's thriving in the Promised Land. Asher's adaptability and location are congenial to its agricultural trade. Therefore, Jacob's last words are very significant and are fulfilled as Asher becomes a major producer of foodstuffs. "Asher will dine on rich foods and produce food fit for kings."⁷¹⁰

Jacob to Naphtali (Gen 49:21)

Jacob's last words to Naphtali are much debated about what $\eta\eta\lambda\psi\ \eta\lambda\gamma$ mean. Is it a deer let loose (MEV, NKJV), a hind let loose (JPS), doe let loose (ESV), born a free-running doe (NLT), or a spreading stem (LXX)? These words are nevertheless meaningful. Naphtali is one of the few tribes that have both the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River as part of its borders, giving it fertile land. Naphtali's borders (Josh 19:32–34) have only one detailed description providing a general outline of the western and eastern boundaries without a northern boundary.⁷¹¹ Naphtali occupies the uplifted peaks of the Jabel Jarmaq (Mount Meiron).⁷¹² If the LXX version, "Naphtali is a spreading stem, bestowing beauty on its fruit" (Νεφθαλι στέλεχος άνειμένον επιδιδούς έν τῷ γενήματι κάλλος) is to be considered, they are very desirable last words. Barak's rhetorical ability to

⁷⁰⁹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 674. See also Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 390.

⁷¹⁰ New Living Translation expands on the richness of Asher's blessing from his father and his food supply to kings.

⁷¹¹ Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge*, 184.

⁷¹² *Ibid.*, 135.

persuade Deborah (Judg 4:4–11), the wisdom of the woman of Abel of Beth Maachah, (2 Sam 20:1–16; 1Kgs 15:20), combined with Hiram’s⁷¹³ wisdom and understanding (1 Kgs 7:13–14), are commendable virtues. All of them are from the tribe of Naphtali.

The first part of Jacob’s last words to Naphtali is unclear. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the fulfilment. However, although אֵילָה שְׁלֶחָה is not explicit in meaning, the translations do not indicate negative last words to Naphtali. However, Hamilton maintains that it is difficult to be sure whether Jacob’s last words to Naphtali are positive or negative.⁷¹⁴ Nonetheless, it can be surmised that the second part of Jacob’s last words to Naphtali is fulfilled. The wisdom and successful rhetoric the people of Naphtali use in handling significant challenges illustrate the second part of Jacob’s last words to Naphtali in using beautiful language נִפְתָּלִי אֵילָה (Gen 49:21): שְׁלֶחָה הַבְּתוּרָה אִמְרֵי-שָׁפָר:

Jacob to Joseph (49:22–26)

Jacob’s last words to Joseph are fulfilled in the life of Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, with a blessing of productive fields. The first part of Jacob’s last words is a recapitulation of the life of Joseph. Jacob talks of who Joseph is (v. 22) and what he has gone through (vv. 23–24). The second part of Jacob’s last words to Joseph foretells the blessings that will come upon Joseph (vv. 25–26). These blessings are seen fulfilled in the half tribe of Manasseh, which receives its allotment together with the tribes of Reuben and Gad before crossing the Jordan River under the leadership of Moses (Num 32:33–42). The other half tribe of Manasseh and Ephraim received their portion after crossing the Jordan River to the Promised Land with the rest

⁷¹³ Hiram’s mother is from Naphtali although his father is from Tyre.

⁷¹⁴ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 677.

of the Israelites under Joshua's leadership (Num 32:1–42; 34:14–15; Josh 1:12–18; 12:6; 17:1–18; 18:7). Joshua acknowledges Ephraim and Manasseh as great people whose bravery continues after the time of Joshua (Josh 17:17; Judg 7:23–24). Jacob's last words to Joseph are clearly fulfilled. When Israel is divided into two kingdoms—Israel and Judah—the northern tribes occupy a major part of the Promised Land and are often called Ephraim, while the South is called Judah.

Jacob to Benjamin (Gen 49:27)

The disposition of the tribe of Benjamin in going to war with the other tribes of Israel (Judges 19–21) can be considered as part of the fulfillment of Jacob's last words to Benjamin. Benjamin is a fighter who does not fear battle, no matter how massive the opponent; he fights and succeeds (Judg 20:14–16). Jacob's last words are clearly fulfilled in Benjamin. Jacob sees his last born as a voracious wolf, and his character in later years epitomizes Jacob's last words to him. Benjamin's character is commendable from a southern perspective as the only tribe that remains loyal to Judah. Benjamin, like his brother Joseph, becomes significant in Israel. Saul, Israel's first king, known for his military prowess, is from the tribe of Benjamin.

Jacob to the Twelve Sons Together (Gen 49:29–32)

Jacob's very last words are to the twelve sons together. Jacob is very precise about where he longs to be buried, and that is the land of Canaan, in the cave at Machpelah that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite. This is the place where all the patriarchs and matriarchs before Jacob are buried—apart from Rachel. The remains of Jacob's grandparents, parents, and one of his wives, Leah, are there, and he craves to be where they are (v. 31) and not in Egypt or anywhere

else. Jacob not only expresses his desire to be buried there but commands his sons to follow his instructions (v. 33). Jacob's last words to his sons are expressed in a poetic form and they foretell events that are generally fulfilled. The last part is in the form of a command to his sons (v. 33) that is carried out almost immediately. Jacob's remains are sent to Canaan and buried with his ancestors in Machpelah after the requisite process—embalming and placement in a casket (the only place in the Bible where a casket is used) as required in Egypt (50:1–12). The circumstances under which Jacob utters his last words to Joseph alone, as well as to all the sons, are significant in the materialization of Jacob's last words. The narrator notes וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנָיו לְוֹ בֶן כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה "his sons did for him as commanded" (v. 12). It is a command that they are obliged to obey, especially when these are their father's last words to them.

c. Joseph to Israelites (Gen 50:24–26)

Dreams and visions, which have to do with future events, pervade Joseph's life, and before he dies, he foretells the future of Israel (37:2; 50:26; Exod 12:40–41). He foresees God bringing Israel out of Egypt, their temporary home (Gen 50:24), although Israel continues to live in Egypt for years. Like his father, Joseph desires to be buried with the rest of the family in Canaan, the land God swore to his ancestors. Joseph has his brothers take an oath to carry his bones with them, though details of the oath are not known (v. 25b). The obligation Joseph put the children of Israel under serves as a catalyst to the fulfillment of his desire to be buried in Canaan. Thus, the conditions under which Joseph's last words are uttered influence their implementation. They carry out the stipulations of the oath when all Israel departs from the land of Egypt with Joseph's bones, under the leadership of Moses. The narrator makes it clear that they convey the bones on account of the oath (Exod 13:19). The bones are eventually buried in the Promised Land, in

Shechem (Josh 24:32). Joseph's last words involve foretelling what will take place many years after his death, and a request; and these are fulfilled.

d. Moses to Israelites and God (Deut 32:1–47)

This part of Moses' last words is a poem that foretells the future of Israel in a fashion similar to the last words of Jacob. However, this poem takes the form of a song written at the instruction of God—and it is fulfilled. God will allow His people to go through pain, but He will not render those who trouble His people innocent. They are equally punished for the role they play (Gen 15:13–14; Isa 10:5–19, 24–27; 47; Jer 25:12–14; 50–51). The events that will befall Israel in later years are indications that God has in His hands the power of life and death. Everything that will happen to Israel will take place under His governance.⁷¹⁵ This song is taught to Israel as a witness against their descendants.⁷¹⁶

God is a suzerain who demands exclusive love, and the threat to the covenant are other gods and Israel's temptation to worship them.⁷¹⁷ The song's focus is shifted to the future, when Israel will possess the land and experience the goodness of God, turning the infertile places to a rich area (32:13–14).⁷¹⁸ God threatens Israel with abandoning them because they will in their prosperity forsake Him, and provoke Him to jealousy (31:17–18; 32:15). There is an echo of

⁷¹⁵ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 388–89.

⁷¹⁶ Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative*, 56.

⁷¹⁷ Jon D. Levenson, *The Love of God: Divine Gift, Human Gratitude, and Mutual Faithfulness in Judaism*, Library of Jewish Ideas (Princeton: University Press, 2016), 15–16.

⁷¹⁸ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 381–82.

Israel being full and growing fat (31:20) and Jeshurun waxing fat (32:15)⁷¹⁹ in the future and dealing with God corruptly. However, Rofé claims, the context is historical exposition rather than setting forth “the conditions of the covenant.”⁷²⁰

Moses’ last words in this unit comprise of an indictment of Israel and the enduring love of God. These words affirm the compassion of God while portraying the ungratefulness of Israel. The conditional promise is emphasized, and Israel is implored to worship only YHWH and no other god. Although Moses’ last words here are mainly an indictment, he also admonishes them on the benefit of keeping God’s word (Deut 32:44–47). Disloyalty to YHWH has repercussions, and these preoccupy the poet. Loyalty means a long and good life and unfaithfulness goes with negative repercussion for Israel. When Israel turns against YHWH, YHWH turns against them. God’s reputation is important to Him, and God does not want His enemies to take credit when He disciplines Israel. Thus, even though He is angry, God’s anger is restrained, and Israel is not fully annihilated (vv. 19–42). Moses assiduously leads Israel until God ends his mission (Deut 34:1–4).

These words are fulfilled at different times when Israel defeats their enemies in the land. At the same time, the last words are fulfilled when Israel suffers defeats at the time of Joshua, and many times in the book of Judges as well as in later years when Israel goes to exile. These last words are fulfilled when Israel practices idolatry and provokes God to jealousy.

⁷¹⁹ Sonnet, *The Book within the Book*, 175.

⁷²⁰ Rofé, *Deuteronomy*, 228.

YHWH permits disaster on Israel until they return to God in repentance, and He provides deliverance.⁷²¹ Moses' last words in this unit are fulfilled both positively and negatively.

3. Blessing and Prayer

A. Moses to Israelites and God (Deut 33:1–29)

Moses blesses the tribes of Israel and celebrates the greatness of God, and the privilege He has accorded Israel as a nation, in this unit of his last words. These last words, which are blessings, are not defined by the text as a “song”, as was Deuteronomy 32. The blessings turn attention to the immediate future of Israel, with a militant voice, words of encouragement and anticipation of victories.⁷²² Craigie suggests Moses assumes the role of a father in his blessing of Israel as Jacob in Genesis 49, and his blessings are, as there, dominated by future thinking.⁷²³ However, Moses' blessings are not linked only to those of Jacob but also to those of the Transjordanian soothsayer Balaam. As Balaam indicates, anyone who blesses Israel is blessed and those who curse him are cursed (Num 24:9). Although his assignment is to curse, he is compelled by YHWH to proclaim blessings rather than curses.⁷²⁴

God's supremacy is evident throughout the life of Moses from the time God calls him to bring Israel out from Egypt until his mission ends. Moses rehearses God's greatness and Israel's advantaged position in these last words is an ongoing restatement of the relationship between God and Israel. When Israel settles in the land of Canaan, the power of God continues to be displayed through Israel as God almost always fights Israel's enemies in a unique way.

⁷²¹ A comprehensive examination of Deuteronomy 32 is done under “Foretelling Future Events” in Part II of the research, see pages 82–97.

⁷²² Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 390–91.

⁷²³ *Ibid.*, 393.

⁷²⁴ Sonnet, *The Book within the Book*, 217.

Moses' last words are fulfilled in the life of Israel as a nation, not only in Canaan, but also on the way to the Promised Land, after the death of Moses. Most enemies that come against Israel are defeated through God's help (Joshua 6–12; Judg 4:1–8:28; 1 Sam 5–7; 11; 17; 2 Samuel 10; 1 Kgs 20:1–22; 2 Kgs 3; 6–7; 18:9–9:37).⁷²⁵ A theme in Moses' last words in this unit is the proclamation of God's power—one that needs no fulfillment.

B. David to God in Prayer (1 Chron 29:10–20)

David's prayer exalts God, intercedes on behalf of Solomon for God to give him a loyal heart to keep the word of the LORD, and to build the temple. The Chronicler attributes to David matters that are not presented as his in the earlier narratives of Samuel. David also encourages the assembly to bless the LORD. The prayers are answered and Solomon reigns in peace. God blesses him with greatness like no other (1 Chron 29:25) and he builds the temple of God (2 Chronicles 2–4). Thus, Solomon's whole-hearted devotion to God and the building of the temple can be attributed to God's response to David's prayers (1 Chron 29:16–19). In Solomon's prayer of thanksgiving, which is related not here but in Kings, he acknowledges God's words to his father that has been fulfilled (2 Sam 7:12–17; 1 Kgs 8:12–26). In the same manner, the assembly's instantaneous response to David is the accomplishment of the final part of David's last words, which entails an instruction to bless the LORD their God. David's last words in this section are a prayer that is answered and an instruction that is carried out.

⁷²⁵ For details on Moses' blessings to the Israelites see "Blessing and Prayer" in Part II, pages 98–124.

4. Opportunity to Bless at Departure

Elijah to Elisha (2 Kgs 2:9–10).

Elijah's last words are an instruction to Elisha and a conditional statement for Elisha to be blessed. Elisha obeys the instruction and makes a request that leads to Elijah's conditional statement. Elisha realizes the stipulations of the statement and eventually the fulfillment of Elijah's last words. Elisha receives his request because he witnesses Elijah taken away, which is the condition Elijah attaches to his last words. Thus, Elijah's last words are fulfilled in Elisha.

5. Witness against Israel and Admonition

A. Moses to the Israelites (Deut 30:19–20; 31:20–22; 32:1–47)

In this unit, Moses uses his last words to Israel to underscore their responsibility to keep the word of God. A condition of obedience is necessary for Israel to thrive in the Promised Land. Israel prospers when it maintains a right relationship with God but falls into the hands of their antagonists when they break the covenant (Lev 26:40–42; Num 35:33; Deut 9:29; 32:9; Judg 2:12–18; 3:9; 6:7; 10:10; 2 Kgs 17:16; Ezra 9:9; Ezek 20:18). God shows compassion to Israel (Ps 106:39–46) because of His covenant and His desire not to give an opportunity to the enemy to rejoice over Israel, thinking their gods have the power to operate without God's permission (Deut 32:26–27). Several passages relate to the violation of the covenant and the subsequent fulfillment of Moses' last words (Lev 26:40–42; Num 35:33; Deut 9:29; 32:9; Judg 2:12–18; 3:9; 6:7; 10:10; 2 Kgs 17:16; Ezra 9:9; Ezek 20:18). A psalmist confirms the accuracy of this prophetic text by relating how Israel turns to other gods and God's wrath descends on them. However, in conformity with Deuteronomy 32, God's compassion to save Israel is also demonstrated at the end (Ps 106:39–46).

B. Joshua to Israelites (Josh 23:1–24:29)

Joshua's last words are a covenant renewal ceremony that Joshua performs between God and the Israelites, in Shechem. Joshua declares his loyalty to God and testifies against Israel that they are unable to be faithful to God. Although God does not call for covenant renewal, these words are the last words of Joshua to the Israelites, which are confrontational and a witness against Israel. However, the leaders of Israel from the time of Joshua, and Israel as a whole, serve God faithfully (Josh 24:31).

Nevertheless, Israel does not remain faithful during the successive periods at the time of the Judges. When the audience Joshua addresses is taken into consideration, it can be concluded that Joshua's words are not fulfilled since they all serve the LORD not only during the time of Joshua, but also throughout the time of the leaders who outlive Joshua (24:31). However, as noted earlier, following the death of Joshua a good part of the book of Judges describes the rebellion of Israel as routine. As Israel follows its own heart, God sends enemies against them. When the Israelites cry to God in repentance, God sends help; but when Israel is at ease, they go back to disobedience and the cycle continues for a long time. It can be concluded that Joshua's last words are fulfilled to some extent; especially, when considered in relation to Israel in later years.

6. Recalling God's Word (2 Sam 23:1–7)

David Reflects on God's Word to Him

David's last words in the book of Samuel are poetic, an oracle expressing the qualities expected of a leader. Blessings accompany rightful leadership and those who rule disobeying God have

consequences as well. They are not addressed to Solomon or anyone else directly. However, Solomon takes over from his father as king, God blesses him, and he succeeds when he obeys God (1 Kings 3–10). When Solomon violates the norms that are established in the Torah, especially for kings, in Deuteronomy 17, the consequences of his disobedience follow. Some of the requirements for a king are:

Only he must not acquire many horses for himself
 or cause the people to return to Egypt
 in order to acquire many horses,
 since the LORD has said to you,
 “You shall never return that way again.”
 And he shall not acquire many wives for himself,
 lest his heart turn away,
 nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold
 (Deut 17:16–17)

רָק לֹא-יִרְכֹּה-לּוֹ סוּסִים
 וְלֹא-יָשִׁיב אֶת-הָעָם מִצְרַיִם
 לְמַעַן הַרְבֹּת סוּס
 וַיְהִינָה אָמַר לָכֶם
 לֹא תִסְפֹּן לָשׁוּב בְּנֶגְדְךָ הַזֶּה עוֹד:
 וְלֹא יִרְכֹּה-לּוֹ נָשִׁים
 וְלֹא יִסְוֶה לְבָבוֹ
 וְיִקְסֶה וְזָהָב לֹא יִרְכֹּה-לּוֹ מְאֹד:

God raises adversaries against him (1 Kgs 11:1–5). God takes away a major part of the kingdom from Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, leading to the division of the kingdom. David’s last words (2 Samuel 23) express the blessedness of the one who rules fearing God and forewarns of the danger of drifting away from the fear of God in his poetic last words. Solomon’s reign, as well as the kingdoms following his, are a fulfillment of these last words.

7. Political House Cleaning

David to Solomon (1 Kgs 2:1–9)

Solomon fulfills his father’s last words, thereby having relative peace during his reign. Solomon carries out the last words of David by killing both Joab and Shimei, whom David perceives would be a threat to Solomon’s reign. David’s last words are not only meant to ensure that Solomon’s reign is rid of those that could pose a threat to him. They also entail an instruction to reward the sons of Barzillai, who stood with David in his time of need, until the rebellion of Absalom was over and David was restored as the king. However, there is no indication that

Solomon carried that out. David's last words to Solomon in this unit are instructions. Solomon performs the negative, political commands but neglects the positive instructions to be gracious.

8. Calling on Vengeance

Zechariah while being Stoned (2 Chron 24:19–22)

It can be surmised that Zechariah's last words, which are a prayer, are heard and answered by God and that his blood is avenged. Those King Joash commands to stone Zechariah are not mentioned as having any repercussions, but God permits a small company of the Syrian army to defeat the army of Judah, and Joash is wounded. His servants conspire and execute him because he had Zechariah killed. The narrator makes it clear that Joash's death is a vengeful one (2 Chron 24:24–25).

9. Suicide as Reprisal

Abimelech to his Armor Bearer (Judg 9:50–57)

Abimelech's death can be attributed to Jotham's curse, which God honors. Abimelech dies when he instructs his armor bearer to kill him, and he obeys. Abimelech's suicide is motivated by his own machoistic pride, not because he wants to die, or even wants to ward off the reproach of being killed by a woman. The entire scenario, like virtually all scenarios in early biblical narrative, is orchestrated by God in order to permit the curse of Jotham to be fulfilled. In this dually caused narrative, comprehensive retrospective observation and theological reasoning help identify the cause and effect.⁷²⁶ Thus, in accordance with the dual causation principle, both divine

⁷²⁶ Amit, "The Dual Causality Principle and its Effects on Biblical Literature," 394.

and human causes are working together toward the actualization of Jotham's curse. Abimelech's last words are suicidal and fulfilled.⁷²⁷

10. Heroic Suicide

A. Samson Dying with Enemies (Judg 16:25–30)

Samson's last moment is an occasion in which he acknowledges God and calls for help in his time of need. Samson prays in his anguish, and God helps him accomplish both his immediate wish and also the deliverance of Israel from the rule of the Philistines—what God planned before Samson was conceived (Judg 13:5). Samson's strength throughout his life is an endowment of God, although he does not necessarily acknowledge it. However, in his last moments, he specifically prays for God to remember him and restore his strength (16:28). His heroic manner of physically bringing down the Philistine temple and dying with the Philistines is in accordance with his last words—a prayer to die with his enemies (v. 30). Samson's last words are fulfilled as the deliverance of Israel begins and Samson kills more Philistines than he ever had before (13:5; 14:4; 16:30). His last words are a cry for vengeance that is immediately accomplished.

B. Saul in Battle (1 Sam 31:1–7)

The last words of Saul, whether considering the account in 1 Sam 31:1–7 or 2 Sam 1:9, are heroic last words. Saul's final words are uttered as he judiciously avoids humiliation and the affront of dying in the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam 31:1–4). Saul dies with his three sons and his armor-bearer, fighting for Israel. Taking into consideration the account of Saul's last words in 1 Sam 31:1–7, it could be concluded that Saul's last words are not fulfilled because his aide

⁷²⁷ Gericke, "Rethinking the 'Dual Causality Principle' in Old Testament Research – A Philosophical Perspective," 86.

refuses to kill him, and he commits suicide. On the other hand, if Saul's last words are considered from the second account (2 Sam 1:9), then they are fulfilled because an Amalekite claims to have killed Saul at his request (vv. 8–10). However, both narratives portray Saul as avoiding the embarrassment of dying in the hands of the Philistines and giving them the credit for killing him. Therefore, Saul dies as a hero with his desire to die fulfilled.

11. Acceptance of Retribution

A. Adoni-Bezek to Judah (Judg 1:7)

Adoni-Bezek's last words express his resignation to his fate. He recalls his wickedness to seventy kings and at the moment of his death, accepts what he is suffering as a divine act of retribution. He does not see the point of pleading for mercy so that he accepts the situation and dies feeling the consequence of his past actions. Adoni-Bezek's last words are not remorseful or a plea for mercy, but acceptance of vengeance as his destiny.

B. Zebah and Zalmunna to Gideon (Judg 8:21)

Zebah and Zalmunna accept reprisal for their actions. Their last words in which they accept retribution could be regarded as immaterial since the decision to kill them is already taken by Gideon in the instruction to his son. Gideon kills them according to their words, but it cannot be concluded that they are killed because they asked Gideon to do so. Adoni-Bezek's last words as well as those of Zebah and Zalmunna are devoid of repentance but manifestly an acceptance of their fate as is befitting under the circumstances.

12. Women in Agony:

A. Childbirth

I. Rachel while Giving Birth (Gen 35:16–20)

Rachel's last words בְּנֵי־אֹנִי Ben-Oni, are not instructions to be carried out, a prophecy to be fulfilled, or prayers to be answered but a statement made in pain. When the polysemous nature of אֹנִי is considered, and translated as 'strength' instead of 'sorrow', it may be concluded that Ben-Oni lived to reflect his name—a son of strength, fighting without fear. However, the sorrowful situation surrounding the death of Rachel makes the translation of אֹנִי more predisposed towards sorrow rather than strength. In that regard, Rachel's desire as envisaged did not live on after her death, and her last words are not remembered but changed by her husband to בְּנֵי־מִינִי "Benjamin" (Gen 35:18).

II. Phinehas' Wife while Giving Birth (1 Sam 4:1–22; 19–22)

The last words of Phinehas's wife, אִי־כָבוֹד Ichabod, reflect the unfortunate condition into which Ichabod is born. Phinehas's wife dies as the nation is devastated and all immediate family of Ichabod killed. Further, it can be conjectured that her last words are fulfilled with the disintegration of Israel, which reverberates the nation's state at the time of Ichabod's birth. The fulfillment of the last words of Phinehas's wife is evident in the fact that nothing else is known about the life of Ichabod.

B. In Defiance

I. Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:31)

Jezebel dies enduring the repercussions of her actions; but in defiance of Jehu, who takes over as the king of Israel. Jehu fulfills the words of Elisha's acolyte, whom Elisha sent to anoint him as king of Israel (2 Kgs 9:1–9). Elijah is the one God instructs to anoint Jehu as king (1 Kgs 19:15–17) but this is not accomplished until Elisha's time (2 Kgs 9:7).

You shall strike down the house of Ahab your master,
that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets,
and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of
Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:7).

וְהִכִּיתָהּ אֶת־בֵּית אֶחָזָב אֲדֹנָיךָ
וְנִקַּמְתִּי דַמְיוֹ עֲבָדֵי הַנְּבִיאִים
וְדַמֵּי כָּל־עַבְדֵי יְהוָה מִיַּד אִיזָבֵל

Jezebel's end fulfills the words of Elijah (1 Kgs 21:23; 2 Kgs 9:34–37), which makes it very significant in upholding the word of God spoken through His prophets. The words of Elijah could have been overturned or deferred if Jezebel had repented as her husband did. When God decides to punish people and they repent, He often forgives or defers the punishment to their children or to a later time (e.g., 1 Kgs 21:27–29; 2 Kgs 22:14–22). Jezebel's last words question whether Jehu is coming to her in peace in denial of her apparent end. Her last words express defiance, which can be categorized as heroic—like Abimelech's and Saul's suicides. However, it does not accomplish anything positive for her or bring any form of peace. Nothing about her last words is fulfilled and she is killed for her past actions.

II. Athaliah (2 Kgs 11:1–14; 2 Chron 22:10–12)

Athaliah's last words are not reported at the moment of her death. It is possible she did not say anything again after she becomes aware of the apparent danger. Prior to Jehoiada's command

that she be taken out to be stoned, she cries out in defiance just as Jezebel did. However, in addition to crying out, she tears apart her clothing—an action that signifies mourning. Athaliah applies two of the several mourning rituals that people perform in the Biblical text (Gen 37:34; Judg 11:35; 2 Sam 1:11–12; 13:19, 31; 1 Kgs 21:27) by crying out and rending her clothing (2 Kgs 11:14). These are her last moment's actions and words. Whether she says something and what she might have said before being killed is not evident in the text, but she dies in defiance. Her last known words are in the form of an outcry that contains nothing to be fulfilled.

One of the categories of last words of women in agony is fulfilled. The last words of Phinehas' wife are fulfilled. Rachel's last words are changed and not fulfilled unless her last words are considered polysemous. The last words of the two women in defiance entail one question, which does not accomplish anything, and a statement, which similarly does not achieve anything. But for the most part, last words are major literary category in the Hebrew Bible and are extensively fulfilled.

Part IV

Conclusions

This unit summarizes and discusses the conclusions of this study of last words in the Hebrew Bible. Instances of last words in the Hebrew Bible have been examined in their diversity of contexts, contents, and forms. Significantly, last words are uttered under varied conditions and in diverse forms, although some are similar. This section also explains how the last words are adapted to their literary contexts. In addition, the unit makes some comparisons between some of the characteristics of Biblical last words and last words as presented in other literatures.

Most last words are adapted to their literary contexts. Those that take the form of oath⁷²⁸ are all promissory oaths that demand that the oath-takers perform a future action. Promissory oaths are well known from vassal treaties from the Neo-Assyrian period. The subjects of the Assyrian king demonstrate their allegiance to him by taking an oath of loyalty.⁷²⁹ In the oaths taken as last words, those envisaging death demand loyalty of those taking the promissory oath as they anticipate their desires to be fulfilled when they are no more.

In each case of the promissory oath, the last words are based on the context of their background and what Jacob and Joseph believe and claim God has communicated to them. In

⁷²⁸ The oaths include that of Joseph's to Jacob (47:27–31) and Joseph's brothers to Joseph at the demand of Jacob and Joseph, respectively. In the Appendix, the recorded last words for Abraham have to do with an oath Abraham demands of his servant (Gen 24:1–9). This is similar in pattern to that of Jacob to Joseph (47:27–31), although these are not Abraham's very last words. A common pattern is identified in these two oaths, involves not only swearing but performing an action during the oath-taking process. The oath-taker puts his hand on the thigh of the one demanding the oath as he swears. This places emphasis on the obligation for the oath-taker to attach great importance to the oath and to act accordingly.

⁷²⁹ Bruce Wells, Rachel F. Magdalene, and Cornelia Wunsch "The Assertory Oaths in Neo-Babylonian and Persian Administrative Texts," in *Revue internationale des droits de l'antiquité*, 3^e Série, Tome LVII (Belguim: Bruxelles, 2010), 13–14. Future action is expected in the promissory oath, unlike assertory oaths, which are used to affirm acts that have already taken place in litigations with insufficient, problematic, or ambiguous evidence.

Joseph's oath to Jacob the land is not directly mentioned (47:29–31). However, the narrator informs us of God's promise to Jacob about the land. God promises to go with Jacob to Egypt, and to bring him back to Canaan (28:13–15; 31:3; 35:11–12; 46:1–4). Likewise, Joseph refers to God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when he demands an oath from his brothers (50:24).

Upon critical examination, similarities and differences can be observed in the last words that are oaths (Gen 47:27–31; 50:25). Although Jacob demands from Joseph an oath, the name of the LORD is not used in Jacob's request. Jacob demands an action but without referring to the LORD during the oath. In Joseph's demand of an oath from his brothers, he refers to God's deliverance, but similarly, the name of the LORD is not involved in the oath itself (50:24–25). A key difference in these two oaths is observed in the mode of imposing the oaths. Jacob demands that Joseph put his hand under his thigh in the process of taking the oath. However, Joseph's demand does not require any gesture in the process of taking the oath. No hand is placed on the thigh as Jacob demands of Joseph. Neither Jacob nor Joseph mentions the name of God in the demand of the oath or in the taking of the oath (47:27–31) respectively. However, Joseph refers to God as the enabler of the Israelites he is leaving behind, to accomplish the demand of the oath (50:24–25).

The oaths examined are in Genesis and relate to the establishment of the nation of Israel, the family, and the Promised Land with divine providence. The Deity is directly involved in the patriarchal/matriarchal stage in the Israelite narrative more than in later stages. Similarly, in ancient Mesopotamian religion, a personal god who is typically referred to by the name of his client, is involved in the lives of individuals. His degree of responsibility for his worshipper is

large.⁷³⁰ In Genesis the Deity is referred to as God of Abraham, God of Isaac, or God of Jacob (Gen 32:9; 50:24; Exod 3:15). Although the Deity is not completely absent in later eras, there seems to be less personal involvement.

The most significant features in each oath imposed are the Promised Land and family (Gen 47:27–31; 50:25). Jacob is in Egypt and yearns to be buried in the Promised Land with his family, just as Joseph is in Egypt and desires that his bones be carried along when God's promise is fulfilled, and they finally leave Egypt for the Promised Land.

The oaths imposed facilitate the fulfillment of the stipulations of the two instances examined, where oaths are involved in last words (47:27–31; 50:25). The oaths are similar in some contexts but different in other contexts. In the oaths of Jacob's demand on Joseph and Joseph on his brothers (37–41,48; 47:29–31; 50:5–6,12–14; 50:24–25; Exod 13:19), which are the instances of oaths, the oath is the main reason for which the demand expected is accomplished. Accordingly, oaths play a significant role in the fulfillment of some last words.

Last words are essentially monologues, and one does not find much dialogue in such scenes. However, to some extent, all monologue is dialogic in the sense that a speaker tailors the discourse to the desired reception by the addressee. Although Jacob's last words, for instance, are monologue, he tailors the discourse to the designated recipients, his sons.

Nevertheless, few last words are presented in a dialogue. Elijah's last words to Elisha (2 Kgs 2:9–10) are carefully weighed and are represented within a dialogue between the mentor and his disciple. Dialogue is evident in Adoni-Bezek's last words when he accepts retribution from Judah (Judg 1:7) as in the case of Zebah and Zalmunna with Gideon (Judg 8:21), in the situation in which they find themselves—submitting to the ordeal as their lot. Their last words

⁷³⁰ Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (London: Touchstone, 1995), 62–63.

are based on the fact that none of them envisions being set free to live; and they therefore surrender to their fate. A short dialogue is also seen in Abimelech's assisted suicide (Judg 9:50–57). Abimelech is with his aide in his last moments of life and requests his assistant to kill him. In response, the assistant obeys—although he utters no direct word and slays Abimelech.

In a different scenario, although similar to Abimelech's assisted suicide, is a short dialogue between Samson and a lad. Samson seeks help from a young Philistine and dies with him and his enemies (Judg 16:25–30). On the other hand, in the first account of Saul's death (1 Sam 31:1–7), Saul seeks help from his assistant to die, but when he is denied help, he takes his own life in battle. However, in the second account, Saul receives assistance to die (2 Sam 1:1–10) as did Samson. But Saul does not die with his aide, who lives to tell the story. Some form of dialogue is necessitated in these assisted suicides as the warriors seek to die with honor. Both die in heroic ventures that deprive their enemies of the credit of killing them in last minute dialogue. In Joshua's witness against Israel and admonition (Josh 23:1–24:29), the people respond at the end of a long address. This response, which is also in the form of a dialogue, is an affirmation to Joshua. It is an expression of obedience to stay loyal to God.

However, dialogues are crucially lacking in some of the major instances of last words. Despite the length of Jacob's blessings and instructions, there is no discussion (Gen 48:21–22; 49:1–32) or any form of conversation between Joseph and his brothers or Moses and the Israelites (50: 24–26; Deut 32:1–47). In each case, it can be surmised that the Israelites receive the words with solemnity, knowing that it is time for them to reflect on them rather than to respond. Those parting speak without the audience uttering any words at all. Similarly, dialogues are lacking in last words that take the form of blessing and prayer (Deut 33:1–29; 1 Chron 29:10–20). In Moses' witness against Israel and admonition (30:19–20; 31:20–22; 32:1–

47), in David's recalling God's word (2 Sam 23:1–7), and even in David's political house cleaning where he addresses Solomon (1 Kgs 2:1–9). It can be concluded that but for few exceptions in last words, no recorded response is evident. It is obvious to those being left behind that these last words are unlike any others they have received before that time. They are parting words that need to be pondered and acted upon accordingly. These last words are all directed to specific individuals or groups of individuals—thus, in essence monologues, in spite of their dialogic aspects.

Foretelling characterizes a large group of last words in the Hebrew Bible. All the instances examined are related to the Israelites living in the Promised Land. In three of the four examined, the Israelites are still living in Egypt, and the leaders foresee and foretell events of generations to come (Gen 48:21–22; 49:1–32; Gen 50:24–26). The fourth instance is in the wilderness on the way to Canaan (Deut 32:1–47). All the instances entail personal encounters with God concerning the Promised Land. The leaders, who are Jacob on two occasions (Gen 48:21–22; 49:1–32), Joseph (Gen 50:24–26), and Moses (Deut 32:1–47), respectively, foresee and foretell things that they foresee God accomplishing in the lives of the Israelites. Jacob's encounter with God, God's revelation of the future through dreams to Joseph, and the supernatural miracles God performs through Moses are all evidence of God fulfilling His word to them. The predictions of these ancestors of Israel—Jacob (Gen 48:21–22; 49:1–32), Joseph (Gen 50:24–26), and Moses (Deut 32:1–47)—are appropriate and help the Israelites as they see these predictions about Israel fulfilled. Some of the last words are favorable, but others are not. Most of what they foretell comes to pass when the Israelites are established in the Promised Land.

Last words that entail foretelling are a common phenomenon in the ancient Near East. The content of the Song of Moses “and its prologue actually adhere[....] to a conventional

literary logic reflected elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern last-words literature.” To the author of Deuteronomy 32 as well as to *Ptah-hotep* and Xenophon,⁷³¹ the end of life is a time not only for teaching but also prophecy.⁷³²

There are several instances of last words that belong to the category of foretelling (or mantic prophecy, prediction) in the Hebrew Bible. Apart from God Himself telling Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and others, what will take place in the future, several individuals foretell what is destined to happen. Although this research focuses on foretelling last words mainly in Genesis and Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, and most characters designated as prophets in the Hebrew Bible, also foretell events years before they take place.

Ecstasy and prophetic phenomena are not limited to specific peoples. They appear all over the world irrespective of origin, ethnicity, country, religion, or culture.⁷³³ There is evidence of foretelling events before they take place in several places in the Bible (1 Sam 9:6, 15–20; 1 Kgs 14:1–18; 22:13–37; 1 Kings 13; 2 Kgs 23:1–18; 20:12–20; 25:1–17). According to Lindblom, among the Ural-Altaic people, *shamans* who live in the Arctic practice shamanism (mediation between the spirits and the human world) with great accuracy.⁷³⁴ Deities of the

⁷³¹ For more on similarity of last words between Biblical literature and ancient Near Eastern last words, see Part II under “Blessings and Prayer, and “Political House Cleaning” on pages 98–129, 165–183, respectively.

⁷³² Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative*, 42–43.

⁷³³ Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 66–67.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

Egyptians, Akkadians, Hittites, Moabites and several ancient Near Eastern gods are acknowledged as helping their people to succeed.⁷³⁵

The last words of both Moses and David are divided into several units, and they are all examined under the appropriate sections. Last words in the form of blessings and prayers as in the case of Moses' to God on behalf of Israel (Deut 33:1–29), and David's blessing and prayers for Solomon (1 Chron 29:10–20), are very significant. In both instances, God hears and answers, and Israel is blessed. God fights against Israel's enemies (Josh 2:8–11; 6:1–27; 8:1–29; 10:1–12:24; 1 Kgs 20:13–30; 2 Kgs 3:13–25), especially when Israel is in a right relationship with God, and during Solomon's reign (4:20–34; 9:26–28; 10:11–29). Their success is mostly effected by the deity who steps in to fight for Israel when they face enemies. David's reflection on God's word to him (2 Sam 23:1–7) motivated his prayer and blessing for Solomon (1 Chron 29:10–20) for the divine promise to be fulfilled as his life comes to an end. David's God, like other gods of the ancient Near East, is understood to be responsible for divine blessings and curses. In a prayer of Tiglath-Pileser I (1100 B.C.E.) found in a cylinder inscription, the king asks for help for prosperity from two gods—Anu and Adad, after rebuilding their palace.⁷³⁶

Above, I examined some general characteristics of last words of the non-Biblically related literature and established that some are similar to those in Biblical literature. Guthke's idea of culture as memory and what is significant is what is remembered, for instance, is exemplified in some last words of Bible literature and in the thought of the ancient Near East. This is especially true for those who recognize that the time of their death draws near. The

⁷³⁵ Ibid., 324–25.

⁷³⁶ Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods: An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and in Israel*, Coniectanea biblica. Old Testament Series 1 (Lund: Gleerup, 1967), 21.

paramount intention of the last words of most of those who anticipate their death, is to ensure that what is important to them, and their traditions, are passed on to the next generations.⁷³⁷ These are instructions of father to son presented as last words. Similarly in the *Instructions of Šūpê-amēli*, (*Šimâ Milka*)—“Hear the Advice”, a father on his deathbed gives advice to the eldest son.⁷³⁸ Comparing the last words of the Hebrew Bible to those of the ancient Near East, some similarities in form, style, content, and language are evident. The *Words of Aḥiqar* and the *Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy* are closely related to Deut 31:19–30, a passage that directly precedes the Song of Moses.⁷³⁹ A shared motif of transmission of the teaching in Deuteronomy 31 and *Ahiqar*, is identified in both cases to be written and oral.⁷⁴⁰

On the other hand, there is a widespread contemporary genre of reciting poems or prayers to the dying.⁷⁴¹ However, this does not seem to have a Biblical precedent. It is rather the one who envisions his death who prays for the heir, or the generation being left behind (Deut 33:1–29; 1 Chron 29:10–20). Several characters refer to the word of God as part of their admonition to the next generation in their last words. Last words that are used by the dying to strive to attain sinlessness aimed at saving the soul or to atone for sins that have been committed in life, as Guthke postulates,⁷⁴² are not represented in the Biblical literature.

⁷³⁷ Karl S. Guthke, *Last Words: Variations on a Theme in Cultural History*, Course Book, Princeton Legacy Library 6 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 48–49. See also Saldarini, “Last Words,” 28–45.

⁷³⁸ Yoram Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, SBLWAW 29 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 81.

⁷³⁹ Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative*, 47–48.

⁷⁴⁰ A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 212, 220–21.

⁷⁴¹ Diana Fuss, *Dying Modern: A Meditation on Elegy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 877–78.

⁷⁴² Guthke, *Last Words*, 488–49.

However, some take actions that under normal circumstances they would not take. Samson for instance, prays to die with his enemies not because he desires death—but at that point in his life, that is the best option to avenge his blinding, and to die as a hero rather than a victim. Last words of the aged and those anticipating death are completely different from those whose lives end without the opportunity to prepare and are killed or take their own lives.

Last words between mentors and disciples or leaders and their successors constitute a category that shares certain features. Just as Joshua succeeds Moses as the leader of the Israelites, Solomon takes over from David as king, and Elisha succeeds Elijah as a prophet. God commands Joshua to be strong and diligent to achieve the task of taking the Israelites to the Promised Land. David's last words are conditional as are those of Elijah. They are conditional in the sense that Solomon's success depends on his obedience to the word of the LORD. Elijah's last words to Elisha are fulfilled based on Elisha fulfilling the condition Elijah stipulates. This is not obedience to the word of the LORD per se, but the condition is based on obedience to the word of Elijah. That requires diligence from Elisha just as diligence was required of Solomon to succeed. Elisha's success at the very beginning of his mission is dependent on his ability to fulfill some conditions. The stipulation expected is for him to watch Elijah being taken away, which he attains (2 Kgs 2:9–10), thus getting an opportunity to be blessed at the departure of Elijah, as Solomon gets blessed after David.

Last words that serve as a witness against those being left behind, are mostly fulfilled. Moses' last words become a witness against Israel when they settle in the Promised Land. Moses' calling on heaven and earth as witness reflects an ancient Near Eastern way of affirming treaties, where deities and elements of heaven and earth serve as witnesses. In a treaty, Esarhaddon, for instance, calls on elements of heaven and earth as follows: "The treaty of

Esarhaddon....(which he) confirmed, made and concluded in the presence of Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Mercury, Mars and Sirius; in the presence of Aššur, Anu, Ill[il], Ea, Sin, Šamaš, Adad, Marduk, Nabuû, Nusku, Uraš, Nergal, Mullissu, Šerua, Belet-ili, Ištar of Nineveh, Ištar of Arbela, *the gods dwelling in heaven and earth*, the gods of Assyria, the gods of Sumer and [Akka]d, all the gods of the lands.”⁷⁴³ Although initially Israel remains faithful after the death of Joshua, Joshua’s last words turn out to bear witness against Israel in the period of the Judges. Samuel’s last words are not known. However, the warnings of Samuel’s last address, which Israel disregards, become relevant later, when his negative predictions come to pass.

Further, other last words in Biblical literature have parallels or near-parallels in ancient Near Eastern literature. For instance, David sees it as essential for Solomon to eliminate Joab so that internal peace and security will prevail in his reign (1 Kgs 2:5–6). In addition, David perceives Shimei as diabolic and that keeping him alive will be dangerous to Solomon’s monarchy (vv. 8–9). Solomon carries out the instructions, which enables him to have a peaceful reign politically—until he turns from following God with wholehearted devotion (1 Kings 11). Similarly, the Assyrian king Šamsi-Addu’s instruction to his son about how to handle Ya’ilanum’s tribes⁷⁴⁴ corresponds to David’s political house cleaning instruction to Solomon.

Last words look “backward or forward” at the “threshold between the two worlds” of life and death.”⁷⁴⁵ David looks both backward to his experiences, and forward to years to come. Based on his experiences, he instructs Solomon to make sure that, politically, Solomon has a peaceful reign (1 Kgs 2:1–9) as he looks forward to the years ahead after his death. David sees

⁷⁴³ Parpola and Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, 28–29.

⁷⁴⁴ Sasson, *From the Mari Archives*, 337.

⁷⁴⁵ Fuss, *Dying Modern*, 12.

devotion to God as of paramount importance to Solomon's success (vv. 1–4). Devotion to God and obedience to His commands are guarantees for success. The idea of being blessed and successful for obedience to God and being punished for disobedience reflects a common ancient Near Eastern theology whereby a god would punish those who offend him and reward those who are obedient.⁷⁴⁶ Treaties of submission and broken treaties are rewarded and punished, respectively.⁷⁴⁷

The influence of the last words of Elijah, who departs without physical death, but in a chariot of fire (2 Kgs 2:11), as compared with the influence of last words of those who die, is not very different. However, the demonstration of divine power that Elisha exhibits is unparalleled in scenes of this type (2 Kgs 2:12–14, 19–24; 3:13–25; 4:1–7, 11–44; 5:1–19, 25–27; 6:1–7:20; 8:7–19; 13:20–21).

In addition, Jacob's last words to his sons (Gen 49:1–27) and Moses' last words to the Israelites (Deut 33:1–25) are not so much directed at the sons or tribes who are present, but rather to the descendants of the people and tribes in later generations. As noted earlier, even though Jacob's last words are labelled by the narrator as "blessings," they are not all blessings. On the other hand, the blessings of Moses, which form the last of his last words,⁷⁴⁸ are truly blessings. The narrator informs us these are blessings from Jacob and Moses to Israel (Gen 49:28; Deut 33:1). In these cases, "blessings" seems to function as a technical term for last words. Jacob's last words to his sons are introduced by the narrator as addressed to the twelve tribes (Gen 49: 28), and Moses' last words are addressed to the children of Israel as a people

⁷⁴⁶ Morton Smith, "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East," in *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh* (Leiden: Brill Press, 1995), 143–44.

⁷⁴⁷ For more on ANE treaties, see Parpola and Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, 21–37.

⁷⁴⁸ For more on Moses' Blessings, see Part II under "Blessing and Prayer" on pages 98–125.

(Deut 33:1). At the time of Jacob, they were not fully divided into tribes; but at the time of the departure of Moses they were in tribes. However, the narrator seems to use “tribes” and “sons of Israel” interchangeably.

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel
 This is what their father said to them as he blessed them,
 blessing each with the blessing suitable to him (Gen 49:28).

כָּל־אֵלֶּה שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שָׁגִים עִשָּׂר
 וְזֹאת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לָהֶם אָבִיהֶם וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם
 אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כִּבְרָכְתּוּ בְּרֶךְ אֹתָם:

The narrator’s introduction of Moses’ last words to Israel are:

This is the blessing that
 Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel
 before his death (Deut 33:1).

וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר
 בָּרַךְ מֹשֶׁה אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ:

Jacob’s last words are directed to each individual son (Gen 49:3–27) with a short address to all of them at the beginning (Gen 49:1b–2) and the end (vv. 29–32) just before his death. Similarly, Moses’ last words are addressed to each individual tribe (Deut 33:6–25). They are also sandwiched between two short addresses to all Israel at the beginning (vv. 2–5) and the end (vv. 26–29). These are also the very last words of Moses just before his death. Jacob’s last words are meant to be hundreds of years apart from Moses’ last words; but their mode of delivery is similar, and they are addressed to the same group of people—the Israelites. The nature of Jacob’s blessings and that of Moses’ are the same but in the time between Jacob and Moses, the sons of Israel become the tribes of the Israelites—a people. However, although the blessings are presented by Moses to one people, each tribe receives a different sort of blessing. The distinctions among the tribes, their locations, and even their economies, are acknowledged. Jacob’s last words carry future meaning. The words, which feature much punning, are more than a mere playing with words—they are meant to release hidden fates.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁹ Greenstein, "Wordplay, Hebrew," 971.

Comparing Moses' last words (Deuteronomy 32, 33) with David's last words (2 Samuel 22; 23:1–7), a similarity can be found in the analogous placement of the two songs (Deuteronomy 32 and 2 Samuel 22), right before the blessings (Deuteronomy 33 and 2 Samuel 23). The narrative sequence of the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32), which is presented shortly before his very last words (33), is parallel to the narrative sequence of David's song (2 Samuel 22), which is presented before his last words (23:1–7).⁷⁵⁰ These last words are lengthy, highly structured and authoritative speeches that are made by elderly leaders or patriarchs shortly before their deaths. Moses' song (Deuteronomy 32), and his blessings (33), as well as David's song (2 Samuel 22), and his last words (2 Samuel 23), are examples of such last words. In each case, the song precedes the blessings with striking similarities.⁷⁵¹ However, it is important to point out that Moses' Song and blessings are to a nation, while but David's song is a personal thanksgiving song after deliverance, and his last words are addressed to no one specifically. Moses, who is said to be a humble servant of God (Num 12:3), concerns himself with the well-being of the people, and never desires any personal inheritance. On the other hand, David draws power to himself, and even toward death, and shows himself to be self-centered. By contrast, David as a young man stood up against the enemies of Israel and fought for the nation, which led to his fame (1 Sam 17:20–18:16).

Moreover, last words are carefully calculated, as for instance, Jacob's last words to Joseph. Jacob is deliberate in choosing his last words. He does not simply rehearse past events but rather, in a calculating fashion, imposes an oath; then, once he has made his demands, he foretells what he is giving to Joseph ahead of going to the Promised Land (47:29–31; 48:20–22).

⁷⁵⁰ Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative*, 119.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

Jacob's prediction is fulfilled when Israel settles in Canaan and Ephraim is established in the North. In the same manner, Joseph is very deliberate in his last words to his brothers about carrying his bones along with them when they leave Egypt. The choice of right words, as Fuss asserts with regard to contemporary last words,⁷⁵² is obvious in a majority of the Biblical instances examined. The clear mindedness that is evident in almost every instance of last words in the Hebrew Bible indicates that it is an important feature of its literary character. Similarly, Saldarini observes that "farewell to friends, recalling of the past (reminder of personal example), exhortation to faithfulness (to the law, or to the teachings of the one dying), predictions, appointment of a successor, and a blessing or prayer for the listener" are essential to last words in the rabbinic tradition.⁷⁵³

Jacob's blessings for his sons regarding their geographical locations do not correlate with where some of the tribes are located. Dan, for instance, is described as a serpent by the way and a viper by the path (Gen 49:17) without a specific location. He is initially located in the South but moves to relocate in the North (Judg 18:2–31; Josh 19:47). Although Simeon is assimilated into Judah, and Levi is dispersed and located among other tribes, as Jacob foretells, it is only in a different geographical period that Zebulon settles around the Mediterranean Sea, as is suggested in the poem. Weinfeld suggests that the Israelites' acquisition of the Promised Land did not begin until their arrival at Gilgal, with the assistance of an angel (Josh 5:14).⁷⁵⁴

The category of last words in which somebody dying calls for vengeance is not extensive in the Biblical literature. The life of an individual is in the blood (Lev 17:11) and

⁷⁵² Fuss, *Dying Modern*, 15.

⁷⁵³ Saldarini, "Last Words," 28.

⁷⁵⁴ Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land*, 59.

generally, blood cries out for vengeance. When it is shed, the blood of the one who sheds it is required (Gen 4:9–12; 9:5–6; Lev 24:17). Calling for vengeance is a curse in the Biblical literature, and the phenomenon is first attested in Genesis, when Cain kills his brother and the blood of Abel cries for revenge (Gen 4:1–13). The narrative of Zechariah calling for vengeance while being stoned (2 Chron 24:19–22), and Abimelech requesting his armor bearer to kill him (Judg 9:50–57), are unique cases of Biblical last words, where curses are uttered and Scripture attests to the fulfillment of the curses. Zechariah calls on God to take notice of the action of those who stoned him at the court of the house of the LORD and requite them, as he dies for a righteous cause. On the other hand, Abimelech's last words are not the curse. His last words are propelled by the curse of Jotham, which results in his death. The last words of Samson are a prayer to avenge the loss of his eyes, and it is answered immediately. However, it could be considered a curse, in which his blood is shed, and he calls for vengeance.

The last words of women are a special class with certain shared features of recurrent events,⁷⁵⁵ even though the circumstances of the deaths are not all the same. In the present research it is revealed that women die in agony as they utter their last words. None of the women who provide last words live to be old and prepare to pass on any information or instruction to the next generation. Rachel's pain as she gives birth to Benjamin (Gen 35:16–20) parallels Phinehas' wife's pain in giving birth to Ichabod (1 Sam 4:1–22; 19–22). Each utters her last words in naming the child being born as she dies. The circumstances around each of them prompt the uttering of her last words. On the one hand, Rachel has a son, Joseph, before she dies when giving birth to Benjamin. Rachel's husband is alive and renames the son Rachel leaves behind

⁷⁵⁵ Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative*, Biblical Seminar; (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 87–88.

and nurtures him to adulthood. On the other hand, Phinehas' wife has no personal name as an individual. There is no information about her having any other children. Ichabod has no living immediate family to bring him up. Nothing is known about Ichabod after the tragedy surrounding his birth.

Jezebel and her daughter, Athaliah, die in defiance, as they suffer the repercussions of their actions (2 Kgs 9:30–33; 2 Kgs 11:1–14; 2 Chron 22:10–12). Jezebel's last words are known, but those of Athaliah are not obvious. Her last words could have been 'Conspiracy! Conspiracy!' which is on record or some additional words, on the way to be executed. Jezebel dies as Elijah predicts (1 Kgs 21:23; 2 Kgs 9:34–37). Although Athaliah also dies in consequence of her actions, according to Elijah's prediction, her name is not specifically mentioned as is Jezebel's. Jezebel is eaten up by dogs according to the words of Elijah (1 Kgs 21:21–24; 2 Kgs 9:34–37). Nothing is said about what becomes of Athaliah's body after she is slain, but the people rejoice (11:16, 20). In the death of both queens a (male) leader instructs, and action is taken.

The general trend of the biblical representations of last words stands out from the general situation. Although last words are widespread and in diverse forms, they are centered around God and His elected people—the Israelites. The characters involve the young and old, male and female, those old and waiting for death to take place, as well as those whose lives are cut short due to adverse circumstances.

In studying the various categories of last words in its context, it can be surmised that because few last words are similar in form, the patterns of last words in the majority of cases are diverse. Last words consist of formal orations or dialogue, proverbs, or sayings, specific to narrative context or connection to literary setting, written in prose or poetry with varying

contents and form.⁷⁵⁶ Some of the forms are only narratives while others are non-narrative, poetic discourse— and some are a combination of both. The diversity mostly depends on the context and circumstances under which the last words are uttered. The state of the dying, or that which is anticipated to take place after their deaths leads the majority to utter their last words. They vary depending on the individual, circumstance, gender, age, role, and status in life.

The study concludes that last words in the Hebrew Bible are very diverse in form and pattern. The circumstances under which the last words are uttered affect their form and their implementation. A majority of the last words are fulfilled, others are not, and some do not require fulfillment. Those who perceive their time to die draws near and they plan ahead, have their last words fulfilled. The oaths, foretelling future events, blessing and prayer, opportunity to be blessed at departure, witness against Israel and admonition, recalling God's word, political house cleaning, calling for vengeance, suicide as reprisal, acceptance of retribution, as last words are all fulfilled. One of heroic suicide is fulfilled i.e., Samson's last words. In the second, which concerns Saul and the two accounts of his last words, in the first account his last words are not fulfilled, but in the second they are.

⁷⁵⁶ Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative*, 98–99.

Appendix

Last Words Recorded

Numerous cases exist in the Hebrew Bible, in which a significant character provides a lengthy discourse as his or her last recorded speech, although it is not the parting words before death. These are not instances of "last words" as understood in the preceding chapters, but worth noting as the last recorded speeches made by these prominent characters. Significant among these recorded speeches worthy of examination are that of Abraham to his oldest servant (Gen 24:2–9), Isaac to Jacob (Gen 27:1–28:4), Samuel to the Israelites (1 Samuel 12) and Jephthah's daughter before being sacrificed (Judg 11:1–40). Although Abraham and Isaac, for instance, are classified as old or "old and well advanced in age" (Gen 24:1–9; 27:1), they die many years after their last words presented. Several other recorded last words are relevant but for lack of space and also because the focus is on last words before death, these four are the only ones discussed.

1. Oath: Abraham to Oldest Servant (Gen 24:2–9)

We begin with Abraham's recorded last words, which are made to his oldest servant. Although like Jacob to Joseph and Joseph to his brothers these words are uttered under oath, Abraham's speech to his servant is not parting words before his death. However, unlike the last words of Jacob to Joseph and Joseph to his brothers, which are uttered towards the end of their lives, and therefore have a greater claim on realism, Abraham's last words are not known.

Abraham's recorded last words are so regarded because after the death of his wife Sarah, Abraham married Keturah, had more children and lived to be one hundred and seventy-five years (Gen 25:1–11). Though there are no other words on record that are attributed to Abraham after Genesis 24, where he sent his servant for a wife for Isaac, it is obvious he spoke for many more years before he died. However, the last words under consideration here are those

that mattered to the narrator—the words he uttered while he wraps up his journey with the promised child, Isaac, and his oldest servant. Gen 24:1–9 represent the whole narrative on the last words of Abraham.

So, Abraham said
to the oldest servant of his house,
who ruled over all that he had,
'Please, put your hand under my thigh....' (v. 2)

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם
אֶל עַבְדּוֹ זָקֵן בֵּיתוֹ
הַמְשָׁל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ
שֵׁים נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יָרְכִי

So the servant put his hand
under the thigh of Abraham his master
and swore to him concerning this matter (v. 9).

וַיִּשֶׂם הָעֶבֶד אֶת יָדוֹ
תַּחַת יָרֵךְ אַבְרָהָם אֲדֹנָיו
וַיִּשָׁבַע לוֹ עַל הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה:

Abraham is resolute on his child not going back to where he came from—Mesopotamia. He arranges for Isaac to be established in the Promised Land, whether Abraham lives on or dies. Abraham is careful to see to it that God's promise is fulfilled. In his request to his servant, Abraham insists that Isaac not take a Canaanite wife because the line through which God's covenant is to be established should remain pure. Secondly, Isaac should not be repatriated to Mesopotamia because the covenant is bound to the Promise Land.⁷⁵⁷ The security of Isaac and the fulfillment of the promises of God were paramount to Abraham. He makes his oldest servant, who is trusted for his faithfulness over the years swear to him. Abraham begins his recorded last words as a request to his servant with an enclitic particle of urgency אָנֹכִי. אָנֹכִי is often added to the imperative, to make the request in a more courteous form.⁷⁵⁸ It comes between a request and a command.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁷ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 183.

⁷⁵⁸ Wilhelm Gesenius and Emil Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, Edited and Enlarged by E. Kautzsch*, trans. A. E. Cowley, 2d English ed. rev. in accordance with the twenty-eighth German ed. (1909) by A.E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 325. אָנֹכִי, is classified as part of epigraphic Hebrew (Hebrew language attested in extra-biblical texts, seals, and bullae), which is found as part of the Lachish letters in early sixth century B.C.E. See

The kind of oath that Abraham demanded from his servant, where one is made to swear by putting the hand under the thigh of the superior, is rare in the Bible. But a similar oath is made when Jacob requests from Joseph not to bury him in Egypt, when the time draws near for him to die (47:28–29). In an interpretation commonly held in recent years, Waltke explains, “This is a euphemism for genitalia (Gen 46:26; Exod 1:5; Judg 8:30). When facing death, the patriarchs secure their last will by an oath at the source of life (Gen 47:29).”⁷⁶⁰ The prepositional phrase used for “under the thigh” here is תַּחַת יָרֵךְ. This same phrase is used in Gen 47:29, which supports יָרֵךְ designating the genitalia (Gen 46:26; Judg 8:30). Kohler and Baumgartner translate יָרֵךְ as “the fleshy part of the upper thigh, of fatherhood (Gen 46:26; Exod 1:5), area of genitals, touched during uttering an oath” (Gen 24:2, 9; 47:29).⁷⁶¹

Abraham made the servant place his hand under his thigh to take a solemn oath because that is the area that “symbolized his virile strength.”⁷⁶² According to Malul, the purity and continuity of the family, which is considered a significant entity that exists throughout time, in life and death, are that which are at stake in the last request of the patriarch. The demand of oath is assurance that the principles would be maintained by touching the procreative organs. The promise to keep the cohesion of the family must have entailed the invoking of the ancestral

W. Randall Garr and Steven E. Fassberg, *A Handbook of Biblical Hebrew* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 40, 55 for more on אָרֶךְ.

⁷⁵⁹ שמואל פסברג, *מבוא לתהביר לשון המקרא*, ספריית האנציקלופדיה המקראית לו (ירושלים: מוסד ביאליק, 2019), 182.

⁷⁶⁰ Waltke, *Genesis*, 326–27. He suggests that though the reason for this gesture is uncertain, it might be because the oath involves the certainty of the posterity God promises.

⁷⁶¹ *HALOT*, 439.

⁷⁶² John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, NICOT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson; Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2000), 222–23.

spirits, who witness and make sure that the promise is kept or that the violator is penalized.⁷⁶³ The oath is a serious one that carries with it consequences in case it is not fulfilled, though no specific implication is mentioned, and no explanation is given for this demand from Abraham. An “oath that involved touching this vital part might entail the threat of sterility for the offender or the extinction of his offspring.”⁷⁶⁴ Abraham expresses both fear and caution, especially when the servant questions if he might take Isaac back to the land from which Abraham came, in case the woman is not released or willing to follow him to the Promised Land (vv. 5, 8). For that reason, Abraham makes him swear (vv. 3, 9).

The oath Abraham imposes on his servant is unlike the “dual oath formulation”—(חַי־יְהוָה וְחַי נַפְשְׁךָ, “as the LORD lives and your soul lives,”) where the LORD as well as the interlocutor or the other party is appealed to. The introduction חַי־יְהוָה or the expanded form with חַי נַפְשְׁךָ makes it obvious that it is an oath (1Sam 20:3; 25:26; 2 Sam 14:19; 2 Kgs 2:2, 4, 6; 2 Kgs 4:30).⁷⁶⁵ Ziegler observes that the oath formula appears to be a standard protocol in which an inferior takes an oath before someone of higher rank.⁷⁶⁶ In Gen 24:3 though, Abraham says he is going to make the servant swear to him by the LORD God of heaven and earth, וְאֶשְׁבְּעֶךָ בַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶלְהֵי הָאָרֶץ. After he requests him to put his hand under his thigh, חַי־יְהוָה is not used but rather the hiphil of שָׁבַע is used, “And I will make you swear” וְאֶשְׁבְּעֶךָ. An ancient Near Eastern text with an oath and a slave are involved in a marriage narrative⁷⁶⁷ but the rubrics are completely

⁷⁶³ Meir Malul, “More on Paḥad Yiṣḥāq (Genesis XXXI 42, 53) and the Oath by the Thigh,” *VT* 35 (1985), 192–200.

⁷⁶⁴ Speiser, *Genesis*, 178.

⁷⁶⁵ Yael Ziegler, *Promises to Keep: The Oath in Biblical Narrative*, SupVT 120 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 94–103.

⁷⁶⁶ Ziegler, *Promises*, 95–96.

⁷⁶⁷ *ANET*, 219–20.

different from Abraham engaging his servant to take an oath. However, it is important to note that as ancient Near Eastern texts, both have slaves involved in a paramount way and oaths employed to obligate individuals.

Speiser claims that Abraham is no longer alive when his servant comes back from his mission. There is no textual evidence that Abraham is no longer alive when the servant comes back as some claim, and it cannot be validated.⁷⁶⁸ It is important to Abraham that Isaac remain in the Promised Land without any disturbance from his half-brothers, whom Abraham fathered with his other women. Therefore, Abraham gives gifts to the sons of the other women and sends them away to the east away from Isaac (25:5–7). The narrator does not tell us of the last words of Abraham and his relationship between him and Isaac, Ishmael or the children of Keturah until the death of Abraham. It is important to note that there is an unclear relationship between Abraham and his first two sons until his death. The two, Isaac and Ishmael, together bury Abraham (25:8–10). The narrative finds special importance in emphasizing Abraham's legacy to Isaac, which is the subject of Abraham's last reported words.

Abraham's recorded last words in the Hebrew Bible are fulfilled by his obedient servant. Although Abraham's last words are not known, it is significant that the oath he imposed on his servant to have Isaac marry within the clan are his last words as related in the Abraham narratives. The tradition of marrying from the family lives on and it is passed on to the generations after him. Abraham's demand is the only expression of recorded last words in his

⁷⁶⁸ Speiser, *Genesis*, 183. This is an assumption based on the fact that the servant reports to Isaac after his mission is accomplished (v. 66). See also Westermann, *Genesis*, 391. The next event immediately after the oath, is the servant leaving for his assignment and they spent only a night with Rebekah's family and returned the next morning with Rebekah (24:10, 54–61). In addition, the deaths of all patriarchs and matriarchs are so important that Abraham's death could not be left out to be inserted later.

narrative and very significant to the fulfillment of God's promise to him. Although Abraham is blessed, he is yet to take root in the land with regards to offspring. Therefore, Isaac the promised child, must not leave the Promised Land for anywhere else. The context of Abraham's recorded last words⁷⁶⁹ to his servant relates to his call (Gen 12:1–3) and to God's covenant and promise to him (15:18). Abraham held onto his faith in God's promise to him for a son and the Promised Land, which is credited to him as righteousness (Gen 15:1–7).

The oath Abraham makes his servant take puts him under obligation to fulfill it. The servant is in charge of all Abraham's household and knows Abraham is serious about his request not to take a wife among the Canaanites for Isaac—especially when Abraham makes him place his hand under his thigh before taking the oath (24:2, 9). Abraham warned him not to take his son back there. הַשֵּׁמֶר לְךָ פְּרוֹתֶיךָ שֵׁיב אֶת־בְּנֵי שְׁמָה: (Gen. 24:6). The servant prays to the God of Abraham, and He answers by leading him to Abraham's family to get a wife for Isaac (vv. 12–28) as Abraham demands of him. Abraham's servant introduces himself to Rebekah's family by reiterating the blessings by which the LORD had blessed Abraham and stresses the fact that all the property is being left to Isaac, for whom he is seeking a wife.

Abraham imposed on his oldest servant an oath (Gen 24:2–9), that focuses on the Promised Land and their families. Abraham was already in the Promised Land and wants his son to remain there, but still seeks for him a wife from his family. The instruction under oath to get Isaac a wife from Abraham's family is implemented and the oath fulfilled. Although Abraham

⁷⁶⁹ In the discussion although Abraham does not say these words in dying, the narrator presents Abraham as aged, and these are the last recorded words attributed to Abraham in Genesis.

was not on his deathbed when he utters these words, he is careful in his choice of words to his servant in order to have his yearning fulfilled (Gen 24:1–9).

The circumstances under which Abraham’s recorded last words are articulated have an impact on the implementation. On account of the oath and the warning (vv. 5–6), the servant complies with the stipulation of the oath. Abraham’s request is very specific (24:4). God promised Abraham a son (v. 4) and a land to inherit (v. 7), which are fulfilled. Isaac, the promised son, is to remain in the Promised Land. Therefore, Abraham’s recorded last words are centered on God’s promise to him, which his faithful servant executes.

2. Command

Isaac to Jacob (Gen 27:1–28:4)

Isaac instructs Jacob to go to his mother’s family and take a wife (27:1–28:4). Jacob obeys and returns after being away for over 20 years with blessings that exceed expectations. Isaac’s last words are not known, like those of his father. Jacob returns to Canaan and contacts his brother Esau—and together they later bury Isaac (35:27–29).

The final recorded words of Isaac to Jacob can be seen in two aspects. The first blessing is conditional (27:1–4). Isaac expresses the uncertainty of his time of death to his beloved son, Esau, desiring to take care of any eventualities before he dies. In the second blessing, which will be examined below, Isaac blesses Jacob with the blessings of Abraham (Gen 28:1–4). Isaac blesses Jacob with the blessings of the firstborn (Gen 25:31–33; Deut 21:17), thinking he is blessing Esau. In addition, Isaac blesses Jacob, giving him specific instructions not to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan before sending him off (28:1–5). Isaac also blesses Esau, even though it is not the firstborn blessing (27:39–40).

Isaac had no example from his father, Abraham, or any deathbed blessing as a precedent. However, handing over a father's blessing from one generation to the next is an ancient idea⁷⁷⁰ (Gen 25:23; 48:13–20 and Deut 21:15–17). Generally, the oldest son is expected to receive the larger portion of his father's property. Greenstein claims that the older son leaves home while the younger grows with his father and ends up getting a greater portion than the first son. He attributes this to be a possible reason the “younger son achieves higher station than his older brother.”⁷⁷¹ Although this idea sounds meaningful, there is no explicit scriptural evidence for this assertion.

Esau is Isaac's favorite son, the first of a set of twins (25:20–28), who are the only children Isaac and Rebekah are said to have had. Unmistakably, when Jacob, the later born of the twins, collaborates with his mother to deceive his father, Isaac sensed that something fishy is going on but is not sure since he is blind. Five times Isaac inquires of the identity of Jacob in Genesis 27.

1. *Who are you, my son?* v. 18
2. *How is it you have arrived so quickly, my son?* v. 20
3. *Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not.* v. 21
4. *The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.* v. 22
5. *Then he said, "Are you really my son Esau?"* v. 24

Although blind, Isaac feels very uncomfortable in blessing Jacob with the blessing of the firstborn. All other senses are active and Isaac still enjoys powers of deduction. Rebekah takes the precaution of preparing for the final test (vv.11–12), by covering Jacob's arms in goat hair

⁷⁷⁰ Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 444.

⁷⁷¹ Edward L. Greenstein, *Essays on Biblical Method and Translation*, BJS 92 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 44. Greenstein is drawing on the work of Nathaniel Wander, "Structure, Contradiction and 'Resolution' in Mythology: Father's Brother's Daughter Marriage and Treatment of Women in Gen 11–50," *JANES* 13 (1981) 80 n. 22, 98–99 n. 57.

(vv.15–16). Rebekah’s scheme works even though Isaac discerns he is dealing with a confusing situation. She makes sure that what the LORD had promised her is fulfilled. The older is to serve the younger (Gen 25:23).⁷⁷² Jacob-Esau episodes, which started prior to their birth, is a continuing struggle between these brothers where Jacob is repeatedly victorious over Esau.⁷⁷³

The firstborn blessing of Isaac to Jacob in v. 28, and Isaac’s blessing to Esau later in v. 39 have similar words.

וַיְתֵן-לְךָ הָאֱלֹהִים מִטַּל הַשָּׁמַיִם וּמִשְׁמַן הָאָרֶץ וְרַב דָּגָן וְתִירֹשׁ v. 28
הִנֵּה מִשְׁמַן הָאָרֶץ יִהְיֶה מִזְשָׁבֶךְ וּמִטַּל הַשָּׁמַיִם מֵעַל v. 39

v. 28 May God give you the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth...

v. 39 Behold, from the fatness of the earth and the dew of heaven from above your dwelling shall be

In both blessings, Isaac speaks of the dew of heaven, and fatness of the earth for each of them.

Ironically—one to receive and one not to receive. On the other hand, in v. 29 Isaac puts Jacob above his mother’s sons and makes Esau the servant of his brother in v. 40. It is remarkable to note that the Bible does not contain any proof that preferred sons gain control over their fathers’ families. Ishmael’s departure prevented his falling under Isaac’s authority.⁷⁷⁴

In the second blessing, where Isaac blesses Jacob with the blessings of Abraham (Gen 28:1–4), the instruction of Isaac to Jacob is not to marry a Canaanite woman (28:1). This is similar to Abraham’s instruction to the oldest servant not to take a wife for Isaac from among the

⁷⁷² The contention between Jacob and Esau started in the womb when Rebekah was pregnant. God explains the struggle to mean that the older will serve the younger. When the time arrives for the blessing, she takes measures to see to it that what God promised her is fulfilled. Her faith in God is backed by her actions to secure the blessings for Jacob. She is informed of the plans of Esau to kill Jacob, though the narrator also informs us it was a plan in Esau’s heart and how she got to know about it is not explained. She puts pressure on Isaac to send Jacob away to her family in Padan Aram (27:41-28:5).

⁷⁷³ Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 55.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 126–27.

daughters of Canaan (24:3). However, unlike Abraham, who sent his servant to bring a wife to Isaac, Jacob had to leave the Promised Land, and to live with his maternal uncle, Laban. He lives in the land from which God had removed Abraham for years.

Isaac pronounces the blessing of Abraham on Jacob and his descendants and prays that they inherit the land. Although Isaac is sending Jacob away from the land, he is also hopeful that Jacob will come back to inherit the land that God gave Abraham. It is important to note that in the blessings of Isaac on Jacob, which are his recorded last words, he focuses on the promises of God to Abraham (12:1–3; 15:4–5; 17:1–8; 22:15–18; 26:1–5; 27:27–29; 39–40). The promise of many descendants is associated with blessing and increase in several passages in Genesis (17:16, 20; 22:17; 26:4, 24; 28:3–4; 32:12; 35:9–12; 48:3–4, 16).⁷⁷⁵ The blessing of Abraham that Isaac prays for Jacob to receive is specific, to inherit the land, which God gave to Abraham (v. 4). Isaac lived long enough for Jacob to come back to him after staying with Laban for at least twenty years (31:38) and visits his father before he dies (35:27). However, there is no further recorded conversation or blessing between them. Isaac lives to be 180 years, five years older than his father (Gen 25:7; 35:28).

Jacob is blessed with the blessing of the firstborn (27:27–29) and theoretically made the master over Esau and all his kinsmen (27:37). He is blessed working for his uncle Laban and acknowledges that God took from Laban and gave to him (31:9; 32:9–10). Paradoxically, Jacob calls himself the servant of Esau and addresses Esau as his lord several times at his return from Padan Aram (32:18–20; 33:1–18). Jacob inherits the land of Canaan in which his father lived, which is what Isaac promised in his recorded last words to Jacob before sending him to Padan Aram (28:4; 37:1).

⁷⁷⁵ Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers*, 19.

The blessing Isaac gives Esau, though not the blessing of the firstborn, may also be said to have been fulfilled (27:39–40; 33:9). Esau accumulates so much that he did not need to take anything from Jacob. Nonetheless, Jacob urges Esau to take gifts from him, and Esau accepts them (33:11). It can be concluded that both Jacob and Esau are blessed, but Jacob inherits the Promised Land, fulfilling the recorded last words of Isaac.

It is very important to Isaac that Jacob maintain the lineage and keep away from foreign women. Therefore, as part of Isaac’s recorded last words to Jacob, apart from blessing him, he commands him not to take a Canaanite wife (28:1).

Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him,
and commanded him, and said to him:

וַיִּקְרָא יִצְחָק אֶל-יַעֲקֹב וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ
וַיְצַוֵּהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר לּוֹ
לֹא-תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן

“You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.”

Before Jacob leaves his parents’ home for his uncle Laban, Isaac commands Jacob and gives directions for where not to take a wife, and where to find a wife—with his uncle, Laban. Isaac says to Jacob:

“Arise, go to Paddan-aram
to the house of Bethuel your mother's father,
and take as your wife from there
one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother.”

קוּם לֵךְ פָּדָן אַרָם
בֵּיתוֹהוּא בְּתוּאֵל אָבִי אִמֶּךָ
וְקַח-לְךָ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה
מִבְּנוֹת לְבָן אִמֶּךָ

Isaac gives two commands to Jacob in his recorded last instruction. One is a negative command not to take a wife from Canaanite women, and the other is a positive command on where to take a wife, using verbs in the imperative (vv. 1–2). Isaac could not take chances. Just as his wife is from his father’s family, he instructs Jacob to take a wife from the same family. Isaac expects Jacob to find there a wife, but he comes back with more than the stipulations of the command had called for. Instead of a wife (28:2), he returns with two wives, who are Laban’s daughters, and two concubines (29:15–30). It is significant to note that the two concubines are not from the

family (Gen 27:1–28:4; 29:21–30; 30:1–13; 32:10). Jacob receives both blessing and a command from his father. He is blessed and carries out the command (Gen 27:1–28:4). Isaac lives many more years until Jacob returns from Padan Aram (28:4; 37:1), at least twenty years later (31:38). Isaac’s recorded last words to Jacob are fulfilled.

When Isaac gives a command to Jacob, following the dialogue, in which Isaac tries to ascertain Jacob’s identity, there is no response from Jacob—no dialogue, although it is clear Isaac is addressing Jacob. The narrator informs us of what happens (27:27–29; 28:1–4). They part without any further dialogue being reported.

3. Affirming Innocence

Samuel to the Israelites (1 Samuel 12)

Prov 22:6 instructs, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” The children of Samuel, like those of Eli, his mentor, are not like their fathers in morals (1 Sam 2:12–17, 22–36; 3:10–14; 8:1–5). Towards the end of Samuel’s mission, this becomes more evident, when the people reject his decision to place his sons over Israel as judges (8:1–5) for their misdeeds. 1 Samuel 12 is unique in the Hebrew Bible, as a prophet seeks affirmation of his innocence from the nation of Israel. Nonetheless it is important to note that like Abraham and Isaac, these are Samuel’s recorded last words and not those just before his death.

Samuel reviews the history of God’s faithfulness and entreats Israel to not rebel against God. In recounting the history (vv. 6–12), several text critical issues are evident that will

not be the focus of this research, keeping basically to the MT.⁷⁷⁶ Samuel remains a prophet in Israel after anointing the first king, Saul. While Saul is still king, God rejects him and instructs Samuel to anoint David. Samuel's last words are not known since they are not conveyed in the text. However, we are informed that he died, and his spirit is said to have spoken to Saul, when he called for him, through a medium. Those last words through the medium are fulfilled, but outside the scope of the research.

In Egyptian myths, tales and mortuary texts, we find protestation of guiltlessness of the deceased, depicted as testifying to their innocence. Egyptians are portrayed as saying they have not committed evil against anyone, mistreating cattle, nor done violence to a poor man, nor done what the gods abominate, nor defamed a slave to the superior, nor made anyone sick or weep, nor killed or given an order to kill anybody, to mention but a few of his declarations of innocence.⁷⁷⁷ Samuel seeks to affirm his innocence as the deceased do in the Egyptian "Book of the Dead" although the reasons for the affirmations are different.

Israel wants to move from theocracy to monarchy. To Samuel, this illustrates the sinful nature of Israel and the righteousness of God.⁷⁷⁸ God agrees to their request, and Samuel obeys and anoints them a king. 1 Samuel 12 portrays Samuel's confrontation with Israel and the uncertainty of his future, his legacy, and the relationship of Israel as a whole with the LORD, who has been ruler over Israel (vv. 6–7).

Vannoy highlights these elements of covenant form in Samuel's address.

1. The appeal to antecedent history (12:6–12)

⁷⁷⁶ *BHS*, 462–63. The names of Bedan and Samuel in vv. 8 and 11, for instance, are problematic. See the Syriac, Targum and LXX.

⁷⁷⁷ *ANET*, 34–35.

⁷⁷⁸ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 112–13.

2. The challenge to the basic covenantal obligation of undivided allegiance to Yahweh (vv. 13a,14a, 15a, 20–21, 24)
3. Blessing and curse sanctions (vv. 14b, 15b, 25)
4. A theophany sign (vv. 16–22).⁷⁷⁹

Vannoy further notes that the address should be understood as a renewal of covenant. The ceremony is for the purpose of providing that the covenant continues at a time of transition in leadership and that it be restored after its abrogation.⁷⁸⁰ However, although some features of covenant can be identified, Samuel's speech portrays him feeling apprehensive toward the demand of Israel and feeling rejected (vv. 1–5). Samuel plays a waiting game until God intervenes from behind the scenes to announce the decisive action to grant the people's wish.⁷⁸¹

Samuel affirms that the decision for a king is neither his nor that of God but that of Israel. It is their voice that he has obeyed to make them a king—even though this is also in obedience to God, who asks Samuel to listen to their voice (8:7). The issue here is between Samuel and the people rather than between God and His people or Samuel and Saul, the king. Samuel here argues his case with the people before God.⁷⁸² Samuel complains about what he sees as 'the sin' of Israel in requesting a king (1 Sam 8:6–7, 19–21; 10:19). Nevertheless, he complies because the LORD asks him to (8:7). The appointment of Saul as king means a fundamental change of position. Though he remains spiritual leader, Samuel is no longer in

⁷⁷⁹ J. Robert Vannoy, *Covenant Renewal at Gilgal: A Study of I Samuel 11:14-12:25* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack, 1978), 178.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁷⁸¹ Meir Sternberg, "Time and Space in Biblical (Hi)story Telling: The Grand Chronology," in *The Book and the Text*, ed. Regina M. Schwartz (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 86–87.

⁷⁸² Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 315.

charge of national policies.⁷⁸³ McCarter suggests 1 Samuel 12 is the formal initiation of the new role of the prophet.⁷⁸⁴ Samuel has still not come to the point of accepting that Saul, not God, is the King of Israel.

Despite all his personal struggles, Samuel's major apprehension is Israel's obedience to God and the covenant. It is a conditional relationship so that their well-being depends on their obedience. Brueggemann explains, "Everything depends on Israel listening or not listening.... the double if-then clause is closely reflective of the blessing-curse formulation as found in Deuteronomy."⁷⁸⁵ The main accusation against King Saul is his disobedience, which eventually leads to his rejection (1 Sam 13:5–14; 15:1–24; 16:1).

Some parallels can be identified between Samuel's address and Moses' last words, when he handed power over to Joshua, as well as in Joshua's final speech (Deuteronomy 31; Joshua 23).⁷⁸⁶ Parts of the address of Samuel reflect the notion behind some of the words of Moses to the Israelites about the covenant God has with them in blessing them when they obey Him and punishing them when they disobey (Exod 19:3–8; Deut 28; 29:1, 9, 13–28; 30; 31:14–22). Samuel makes them aware of the conditional nature of the covenant (vv. 14, 24).

Elman suggests that "If you fear God" (vv. 14–15) echoes Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 17 although scholars differ in their translation.⁷⁸⁷ "The allusion to the fathers is very suitable here, because the people were looking to the king for the removal of all the

⁷⁸³ Mary J. Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 55.

⁷⁸⁴ P. Kyle McCarter, *1 Samuel*, AB 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 218.

⁷⁸⁵ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 92–93.

⁷⁸⁶ Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 55.

⁷⁸⁷ Elman, *The Living Nach, Early Prophets*, 213. The relationship of this text to Leviticus 26 could be somehow understood but Deuteronomy 17 does not have any relationship to the current text under examination.

calamities, which had fallen upon them from time immemorial.”⁷⁸⁸ Samuel says the people have chosen a king they desire, as well as saying God has set a king over them (v. 13), which seems to be a contradictory statement. McCarter suggests that there is an addition of the last two words in v. 13 to correct the contradiction in 10:24.⁷⁸⁹ There it is God who has chosen the king for Israel and not Israel making a choice. He further observes that vv. 6–15 represents the style of a Deuteronomistic composition.⁷⁹⁰ However, these observations on the hypothetical literary history of the passage, does not affect its function with regard to the subject of this study.

Samuel regards it as wrong not to pray for Israel and to teach them the proper path (1 Sam 12:21–24). Ironically, he has not been able to teach his own children good morals (8:1–5). However, Samuel also affirms the perpetual relationship of God with Israel when they ask Samuel to intercede for them as they acknowledge their sins (v. 19). Prophetic intercession is a major part of the Hebrew Bible, as Muffs explains with several examples.⁷⁹¹

The narrator informs us of Samuel’s old age (1 Sam 8:1) and Samuel confirms it (12:1). Knowing that Samuel has adult sons (8:2–3), scholars often identify 1 Samuel 12 as a farewell address (cf. Josh 23:1–2).⁷⁹² Tsumura notes that Samuel himself acknowledges the end of his role as leader by introducing the king, who now walks before them instead of Samuel, the

⁷⁸⁸ Karl Friedrich Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament: In Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 9. 119.

⁷⁸⁹ McCarter, *I Samuel*, 211. The choice of a king from 8:4-5 is Israel’s idea, but God is directly involved in sending Saul to Samuel (9:15-16) and asking Samuel to anoint Saul, as a ruler of His people to save Israel from the Philistines (10:24).

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁷⁹¹ Yochanan Muffs, *Love and Joy: Law, Language, and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 9–48.

⁷⁹² Klein, *I Samuel*, 114; Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 314.

judge.⁷⁹³ However, Samuel's address in 1 Samuel 12 is only his recorded last words, in which Samuel addresses Israel together as a nation. Samuel continues as a leader for a long time and on several occasions interacts with many people (1 Sam 13:11–14; 15:14–33; 16:2–12; 19:18–24). The narrator informs us of the Samuel's death, the lament of Israel, his burial, and the departure of David to the wilderness of Paran (25:1).

Finally, at the request of Saul, a woman who is a medium at En Dor invokes the spirit of Samuel. Though the final words of Samuel here could be said to be his last words, they are uttered by his spirit after his death. The focus of the present research is on the last words of characters before they die or otherwise depart, as in the case of Elijah. However, this is isolated case in which God permits the spirit of the dead to speak through a medium to Saul. There is no other such case in the Bible, and it is a poignant reversal of the ordinary pattern.

Generally speaking, 1 Samuel 12 can be regarded as Samuel's farewell speech to Israel as a nation. Samuel's recorded last words to the people, are וְאִם-הִרְעוּ תִרְעוּ גַם-אַתֶּם גַּם-מִלְכְּכֶם תִּסָּפוּ "But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king" (12:25). He admonishes them not to turn aside from following the LORD, but to serve Him with wholehearted devotion. Samuel is not retiring or transferring his former functions to Saul as the king. His main purpose is to establish the new theocratic order by the induction of Saul. That would serve as an example for the future relationship between the kings and prophets of Israel.

He calls the people to repent and to renew their allegiance to God, so that it will be well with them as a nation.⁷⁹⁴ Samuel's speech prepares his audience for the subsequent course of

⁷⁹³ Ibid., 314. That is to say that Samuel's work is coming to an end since he is no longer the one walking before Israel. It is now the turn of the king, who has assumed that duty.

⁷⁹⁴ Vannoy, "Covenant Renewal at Gilgal," 178–79.

the narrative where Saul is, in fact, rejected, and the nation is defeated for their disobedience.⁷⁹⁵ Samuel's recorded last words are a conditional statement and not a blessing, where he warns Israel of disaster ahead. In Samuel's affirmation of innocence to Israel (1 Samuel 12), the people respond at the end of a long address, which is in the form of dialogue and similar to the response of the Israelites to Joshua (24:24).

4. In Obedience

Jephthah's Daughter as Sacrifice (Judg 11:1–40)

Victory is almost always universally a cause for celebration, and that makes the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter dismaying, tragic, and ill-fated (Judg 11:1–40). "It was a woman's duty to welcome the fighters home and to glorify the outstanding heroes of the war."⁷⁹⁶ Women would sing victorious songs when the men would return from battle (Judg 11:34; 1 Sam 18:6–7).⁷⁹⁷ When Jephthah's daughter hears of the triumph of her father, "she comes forth to celebrate her father's victory. She moves freely, unaware that her joyful initiative seals her death."⁷⁹⁸ The daughter of Jephthah does exactly what is expected of her as a daughter of the victorious leader. It would have been counted as abnormal for her to see her father come home from a triumphant battle without a celebration. However, her victory song in dancing to meet her father leads to her being sacrificed because of the thoughtless vow Jephthah made.

⁷⁹⁵ Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 330.

⁷⁹⁶ S. D. Goitein, "Women as Creators of Biblical Genres," trans. Michael Carasik, *Prooftexts* 8 (1988): 5.

⁷⁹⁷ Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative*, 29. See also Goitein, "Women as Creators of Biblical Genres."

⁷⁹⁸ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Overtures to Biblical Theology 13 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 100–1.

Jephthah blames his daughter for meeting the conditions of his vow, which he made in an unforeseen way. He is distressed by her because he believes he is obliged to honor his vow (11:35). It has been suggested that in Iron Age Israel, child sacrifice, especially of the firstborn sons, was not uncommon.⁷⁹⁹

Passages such as Exod 13:2 and 22:28 are adduced as a basis.

Consecrate to Me all the firstborn,
whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel,
both of man and beast; it is Mine (Exod 13:2)

קִדְּשׁ־לִי כָּל־בְּכוֹר
פֶּטֶר כָּל־רֶחֶם בְּבִנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְבָאָדָם וּבְבֵהֵמָה לִי הוּא

You shall not delay your full produce;
The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me (22:28)

מִלְאֲתֶיךָ וְדַמְעֶיךָ לֹא תִאָּחַר
בְּכוֹר בְּנֶיךָ תִּתּוֹן־לִי:

Although God demands that all firstborn sons, both man and beast, be consecrated to him (13:2; 22:28[29]), in the same book, God commands that all firstborn sons are to be redeemed כָּל בְּכוֹר (13:13–15; 34:20). It is possible that Jephthah himself is a firstborn son, but not consecrated to God (Judg 11:1–2). His name means ‘He opens’ (Yahweh opens) with the likelihood of the womb implied.⁸⁰⁰

The vow Jephthah made was to offer to the LORD a burnt offering if He helps him have victory over the Ammonites (Judg 11:30–31), which he carried out (vv. 39–40). Jephthah’s daughter dies because her father made a vow that can be said to be impulsive and unreasonable.⁸⁰¹ Jephthah’s vow is vague and open to whatever meets him first at his door when he returns in victory, paying no mind to the consequences. Jephthah does not imagine his

⁷⁹⁹ Armin Lange, “‘They Burn Their Sons and Daughters. That Was No Command of Mine’ (Jer 7:31). Child Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible and in the Deuteronomistic Jeremiah Redaction,” in *Human Sacrifice in Jewish and Christian Tradition.*, ed. Karin Finsterbusch, Armin Lange, and Diethard Römheld, Numen Book 112 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 119–20.

⁸⁰⁰ Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, JSOTSup 68 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988), 91.

⁸⁰¹ David Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1986), 77.

daughter would be the first to meet him. One can only speculate what he thought about when he made his vow. Klein compares Samson and Jephthah as well as seeing them in contrast. They are both strong warriors, although Jephthah is uninformed and Samson unthinking.⁸⁰² Both Jephthah and Samson involve God in important parts of their lives. However, as Greenstein observes, Samson differs from Jephthah in significant way: “Jephthah famously keeps a vow, Samson breaks three.” Jephthah is an outcast, who makes a vow and keeps it. He is pious, while Samson, though elected, takes Yahweh for granted.⁸⁰³

Offspring of an illegitimate union, a *מזרם* *mamzer*, is not to be married to an Israelite, or be part of the Israelite assembly (Deut:23:3; Zech 9:6). To maintain the purity of the people of Israel, the *mamzerim* are eliminated from the community. Thus, because Jephthah is the son of a prostitute, he is a *mamzer* and so is his offspring. The sacrifice of Jephthah’s daughter ends the line of Jephthah. Similarly, if the suspected adulteress of Numbers 5 did get pregnant by a man not her husband, the terrible ritual she is put through will abort the fetus—and there will be no *mamzer* born.⁸⁰⁴

The most painful thing of all for Jephthah’s daughter is not dying, but dying young, unfulfilled and childless.⁸⁰⁵ The tragic end of the narrative about the daughter of Jephthah is such that “not even the narrator seems able to articulate the horrible nature of the event. For the narrator, that is the end of her tragic story.”⁸⁰⁶ Kramer questions whether anyone raises a voice to

⁸⁰² Ibid., 131.

⁸⁰³ Greenstein, “The Riddle of Samson,” 240.

⁸⁰⁴ Suggested to me by Prof. Greenstein, my advisor.

⁸⁰⁵ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 334.

⁸⁰⁶ Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 117.

help Jephthah's daughter, or they all deemed the execution of his vow as acceptable.⁸⁰⁷ After the request of the daughter of Jephthah is granted, we do not learn of any other thing she says or anything concerning the process of her sacrifice. The narrator only informs us of Jephthah fulfilling his vow. The request of Jephthah's daughter to mourn her virginity with friends for two months is the Biblical record of her last words. It is not unthinkable that the recorded last words could not realistically be her actual last words.

Jephthah's daughter is identified as the reason for a ritual, an annual four-day event, to lament the virginity of Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11:39–40).⁸⁰⁸ Her last words might have been connected to a request of her friends to keep her memories alive, and not to forget her pain and tragedy of dying young and childless. No other reason is given for why the four-day ritual of mourning started other than that the tradition is born as a result of the death and remembrance of Jephthah's daughter.

Unlike the other four women, the agony of Jephthah's daughter for the two months she requests to mourn her virginity can only be speculated. In contrast to the other four women who spoke as they die, she knows she is going to die but has to wait every day for two months with emotional trauma.

We do not know the conversation of Jephthah's daughter with her friends for the two months as she grieves (vv. 36–39). Neither do we know what she might have said to her father at the very moment of her nightmare. Her father unmistakably says he cannot go back on his vow, so she does not see any choice but to obey her father's will (v. 35). She dies knowing she did not

⁸⁰⁷ Kramer, "Jephthah's Daughter: A Thematic Approach to the Narrative as seen in Selected Rabbinic Exegesis and in Artwork," 88–89.

⁸⁰⁸ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 110–11.

stand in the way of her father fulfilling his vow to God. Jephthah's daughter exhibits loyalty, obedience, bravery, courage, and some independence—and she is loved by friends. This “makes her by far the most sympathetic character in the Jephthah narratives and possibly in the last half of the book of Judges.”⁸⁰⁹ The last words of Jephthah's daughter can only be imagined. Whatever her last words may be, they are uttered in pain in consequence of her father's vow. The last recorded words of Jephthah's daughter express submission to the insecurity and self-interest of Jephthah, which led to her sacrifice.⁸¹⁰ According to the narrative, it can be concluded that the recorded last words of Jephthah's virgin daughter are a request that is fulfilled (11:34).

Jephthah and his daughter conducted a dialogue before she is permitted to go and spend time with her friends ahead of her being sacrificed. She is conscious of her pending death, and although we do not know her actual last words, it is possible that just as she requests from her father to be with her friends (v. 37), she also requests of her friends to keep her memory, which becomes a tradition (vv. 39–40). In contrast to Rachel and Phinehas's wife, Jephthah's daughter dies very young, unmarried without any child. She did not go through childbirth, but it can be speculated that unlike any of the other women, she leaves an instruction for the next generation through her friends (Judg 11:38–40), as those who are old and advanced in years do, such as Jacob and David.

Just as the last words of Abraham, Isaac, and Samuel are not known, those of Jephthah's daughter are not known. The Biblical narrator informs us of the deaths of each of the men with recorded last words, but not of any incidents leading to the deaths or their very last words. However, with Jephthah's daughter we are informed that Jephthah carried out his vow

⁸⁰⁹ Butler, *Judges*, 292–93.

⁸¹⁰ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 342–43.

(Judg 11:39)—she dies as sacrifice in obedience, but her last words cannot be assessed, only the recorded last words.

It can be concluded that last words are of different kinds in the Bible. Some are made immediately before death, which is the focus of the research, others are made for unknown period of time before death, some are recorded last words, some to individuals and others to people as a group. Therefore, we need to distinguish different sorts of parting words in the Bible. These formal last words represent a rhetorical convention, as distinct from a person's actual last words.

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תקציר

מחקר זה עוסק בדברי פרידה שנושאות דמויות מקראיות לפני מותן, במשמעותן, ובדרך בה הם באו לידי יישום או הגשמה, בהתאם להקשר.

דמויות מקראיות רבות, מרכזיות כשוליות, מתבטאות בדפוסי לשון מגוונות לקראת מיתתן. נסיבות המוות הן שונות: חלק מהדמויות מבינות שזמן קרב, והן עורכות תוכניות לקראת העתיד, בעוד אחרות הולכות לעולמן באופן פתאומי, אך עדיין מדברות ברגעיהם האחרונים. המנעד הרחב של דברי פרידה במקרא מצדיק את המחקר הנוכחי. במאמרו "Death-Bed Depositions in the Hebrew Bible", מלול מונה את כל ההופעות במקרא של ביטויים בסגנון "זקנים באים בימים" (בר' יח 18). הוא גם מונה את המונחים השונים המשמשים לציון הזדקנות בעברית המקראית.

במחקר זה אנחנו מגדירים מילים אחרונות לפי קטגוריות: שבועות, ברכות, גילוי העתיד, וכיוצא באלה. מטרת המחקר היא לחקור לעומק את הסוגה הספרותית של מילים אחרונות במקרא, בכדי לקבוע קטגוריות, מבנים, ודגמים שונים. יש חשיבות בניתוח היבטים מרכזיים כגון המידה בה המילים האחרונות משמעותיות לדור הבא, וכן באיזו מידה הן יושמו. בחינת הקריטריונים המופיעים בכל אחת מההיקריות תוביל לגיבוש הקריטריונים להגדרת המושג "מילים אחרונות". בנוסף, כל היקרות של דברי פרידה תיבחן לאור הרקע וההקשר הספרותי בה היא מובאת.

נבחנות שתיים עשרה קטגוריות עיקריות של מילים אחרונות, כאשר לרובן יש גם חלוקות-משנה. חלק ה"מבוא" כולל את מטרת המחקר, סקירת הספרות, מתודולוגיה, וכן סקירה כללית של המחקר הנוכחי.

מטרת המחקר הינה לשפוך אור על המאפיינים של מילות הפרידה במקרא. אני משווה את המבנים והדפוסים של ההיקריות השונות של סוגה זו במקרא לטקסטים אחרים בספרות המזרח הקדום. ניתן למצוא מילות פרידה בפי זקנים העומדים למות, וכן בפי דמויות העומדות בפני נסיבות אחרות חסרי תקדים. אני בוחנת את ההקשרים בהם נאמרות מילות הפרידה, כאשר להקשרים יש השפעה על המידה ואופן היישום של הדברים לאחר מכן. מלבד החשיבות של המילים עצמן, יש חשיבות גם לשומעים אותן, ולאלה העתידים ליישם את הנאמר. אני בוחנת את הרושם שמילות הפרידה אמורות להשאיר על השומעים, בתוך הקשרם הספרותי. מרבית השומעים לוקחים את הדברים ברצינות – אולם ישנן גם דמויות אשר לא ממלאות אחר ציווי מילות הפרידה.

בסקירה, אני בוחנת את מבנה מילות הפרידה בתוך הקשרן, ושמה דגש גם על החשיבות המיוחדת למילים ומידת היישום שלהן. המחקר בוחן את הקשרים בין נסיבות המוות לבין סוג מילות הפרידה. עיקרון הסיבתיות הכפולה, המתוארת על-ידי יאירה אמית (ואחרים), נוכחת ברבים מבין ההיקריות.

חלקו השני של המחקר מתמקד בקטגוריות השונות של מילות הפרידה. שתיים עשרה קטגוריות שנבחנו הן: שבועות, הגדת העתיד, ברכה ותפילה, הזדמנות לקבל ברכה בעת פרידה, מתן עדות כנגד ישראל, ומילות תוכחה. השאר כולל איזכור דבר האל, ניקוי בית פוליטי, קריאה לנקמה, התאבדות כפעולת תגמול, התאבדות

הירואית, קבלת העונש, ונשים סובלות. מן הסתם, רוב המילים האחרונות שתועדו הן כנראה לא המילים האחרונות שנאמרו. הן משמשות ככלי ספרותי, ורק לעיתים משקפות את המציאות. ההיגדים המתוארים באופן מימטי יותר הם אלה שנאמרו תוך התכוננות לקראת הסוף הצפוי.

שני היגדים נבחנים בקטגוריית השבועה: המילים האחרונות של יעקב ליוסף (בר' מז 27-31), ודברי יוסף לאחיו (בר' נ 25). כל הנאמר בהיגדים הללו הגיע לידי יישום. השבועות חייבו את אלה שנאלצו להישבע למלא אחר השבועה באופן נחרץ.

הקטגוריה השנייה שנבחנת היא הגדת העתיד, הכוללת ארבע היקרויות עיקריות: דברי יעקב ליוסף (מח 21–22), הצוואה המוסרית של יעקב לבניו (מט 1–32), דברי יוסף לעם ישראל (נ 24–26), ודברי משה לעם ישראל ולאֵלֹהִים (דב' לב 1–47). העתיד מתגלה תחת האצטלה של מילות פרידה, וכמעט כל מה שנאמר אכן קורה בהמשך. מילותיו האחרונות של יעקב ליוסף ביחידה זו מביעות שני מאפיינים חשובים. ראשית, יעקב צופה שאלוהים יעביר את כל עם ישראל לכנען, ומבטיח ליוסף חלקת אדמה אשר יעקב מחליט לתת ליוסף באופן נפרד. מילותיו האחרונות של יוסף לעם ישראל קשורות ליציאת מצרים, בדומה לחלקו הראשון של נאום יעקב ליוסף. גם הוא צופה שאלוהים יעביר אותם ממצרים לארץ כנען. בהמשך, יעקב רואה את בניו בארץ המובטחת, וצופה את מקום נחלתם של כל השבטים ואת אשר יקרה להם באחרית הימים. חלק מהמילים האחרונות חיובי, אך לא ניתן לסווג את כולן כברכות. חלקו הארי של שירת האזינו, כתב האישום של משה, מתאר את ההדרדרות הצפויה של עם ישראל. מילות פרידה אלו מגיעות לידי מימוש כאשר עם ישראל נוחל את הארץ המובטחת, וזונח את אלוהיו.

הקטגוריה הבאה של מילות פרידה היא ברכות ותפילות. בקטגוריה זו נכללות מילותיו האחרונות של משה לבני ישראל (דב' לג 1–29) ותפילת דוד (דה"א כט 10–20). חלק זה מדגים כיצד מילות הפרידה לעיתים משמשות כמתווכות. משה מברך את עם ישראל, וגם מתפלל עבורם. בדומה לכך, מילותיו האחרונות של דוד מסייעות להמלכתו של שלמה, שעולה לכס המלכות בזמן שדוד מתכוון למות.

מצב מעניין עולה במעמד בו אליהו ואלישע נפרדים. אליהו אומר את מילותיו האחרונות, אולם הוא לא מת, אלא נפרד מאלישע ונלקח השמימה. כאן אנו עדים להזדמנות לברך לפני הפרידה: אליהו שואל מה אלישע מבקש ממנו בטרם ייפרדו, ואלישע מקבל את מבוקשו (מל"ב ב 9–10).

נבחנת גם הקטגוריה של מתן עדות כנגד ישראל ותוכחה. משה מעיד כנגד עם ישראל (דב' ל 19–20), לא 20–22, לב 1–47), וכך עושה גם יהושע (יה' א 24–29). מילות הפרידה כאן הן כתב אישום. משה מציין את אהבתו של האל לישראל, לעומת חוסר הנאמנות שלהם כלפי האל. משה מדגיש כי עם ישראל אחראי למעשיו, כאשר ציות לדבר האל יביא לידי ברכה, ואי-ציות יגרור השלכות חמורות. משה מאיץ בהם לבחור בציות ולחיות, ולא למרוד באל. יהושע מעיד כנגד עם ישראל בהקשר של מעמד חידוש הברית. הוא כורת ברית בין האל לבין עם ישראל, נשבע אמונים לאל, ומזהיר את העם לירוא ולעבוד את האל (פס' 14–15). מילות פרידה אלו מגיעות לידי מימוש כאשר העם נוחל את אדמתו בארץ המובטחת.

היחידה הבאה של מילות פרידה דנה בדוד, כאשר הלה נזכר ומהרהר בדבר האל אליו (שמ"ב כג 1–7). בגישה נבואית לא שגרתית, דוד מדבר כאורקל, ומצהיר שרוח האל מדבר דרכו. את המסר הזה דוד לא מפנה לאדם ספציפי, אלא משרטט באמצעותו את המצופה ממנהיג. על המנהיג לדבוק בצדק, ולהנהיג תוך יראת האל.

הנהגה כזו תביא לפיריון, לשגשוג, ולשביעות רצון. לעומת זאת, מנהיג מורד ייכשל. במרכז הדברים דוד מציין כי הוא אינו ראוי, אבל האל כורת עימו ברית עולם.

במאמץ לנקות את ביתו מבחינה פוליטית, במילותיו האחרונות דוד מורה לשלמה כיצד לשמור על כסאו (מל"א ב 1-9). דוד מציין שני אנשים – יואב ושמעי – כמסוכנים, ומבקש משלמה להשתמש בחכמתו כדי לסלק אותם. בין ההנחיה לטפול ביואב לבין ההנחיה לטפל בשמעי, דוד מעלה את הצורך לגמול טובה לבני ברזילי. ברזילי סייע לדוד בזמן מרד אבשלום, ודוד לא שכח זאת במילותיו האחרונות. שלמה מילא צוואה זו רק באופן חלקי. הוא מחסל את יואב, מציב תנאי להשארותו בחיים של שמעי, אולם שמעי מפר את התנאי ומוצא להורג. מאידך גיסא, אין זכר לכך ששלמה גמל טובה לבני ברזילי.

היחידה הבאה דנה במילותיו האחרונות של זכריה, כאשר הוא נסקל למוות וקורא לנקמה (דה"ב כד 19-22). מילים אלה נהגות לאחר מות יהוידע הכהן, אביו של זכריה (פס' 15-18). זכריה מציית לאל, ומזהיר את היהודאים לבל יעזבו את האל ויעסקו בעבודה זרה, אולם הוא נרצח. הוא קורא לצדק, ומבקש מהאל לראות את הנעשה לו ולנקום את דמו. יואש, אשר ציווה לסקול את זכריה, נפצע בקרב, ועבדיו קשרו קשר להרוג אותו. הטקסט לא מדווח מה עלה בגורלם של אלה שסקלו את זכריה, אולם מילותיו האחרונות מגיעות לידי מימוש כאשר יואש, שהסית אותם, נהרג (דה"ב כד 24-25).

הקטגוריה של אובדנות כפעולת תגמול נבחנת באמצעות מילותיו האחרונות של אבימלך ונושא כליו (שופ' ט 50-57). לאחר מות אביו, גדעון, אבימלך הורג את כל שבעים אחיו במטרה למלוך על ישראל. יותם, האח היחיד שנותר, בורח ומקלל אותו בנאום פואטי ארוך. לאחר שאבימלך מלך שלוש שנים, האל מביא את קללתו של יותם לידי מימוש, ובכך להביא לצדק. אבימלך ואנשיו נלחמים באנשי שכם והורגים אלו את אלו. אבימלך נפצע מפלח רכב שנזרק עליו, ומושפל מהעובדה שהוא עומד למות מידי אשה. מותו של אבימלך הוא לא-הרואי בעליל, בשונה ממותם של שמשון ושאול.

סיפור האובדנות ההירואי הראשון מבין השניים שנדונים במחקר מתאר כיצד שמשון מת במחיצת אויביו הפלישתים (שופ' טז 25-30). הוא מתערב בעניינים שכנזיר, היה אסור לו להיות מעורב בהם. הוא גם נוהר אחרי נשים פלישתיות, אשר במהלך הסיפור גורמות לו לגלות את מקור כוחו האדיר. שמשון נשבה לאחר שנים של מאבק בפלישתים, ומושפל בידו שוביו. בנסיון אחרון לבצע פעולת נקמה, הוא מבקש מהאל להשיב לו את כוחו ולסייע לו להפיל את מקדש האל הפלישתי דגון. מילותיו האחרונות – תפילתו – נענות, והוא מת יחד עם אלפים מאויביו.

הדוגמה השנייה של אובדנות הירואית היא מותו של שאול בקרב (שמ"א לא 1-7). אולם, תיאור זה של מותו של שאול הוא אחד משני גרסאות שונות (שמ"א לא 1-13, שמ"ב א 10-1). בגירסה הראשונה, שאול מבקש מנושא כליו להרוג אותו לאחר שנפצע בקרב מול הפלשתים. נושא הכלים מסרב, ושאול נופל על חרבו כדי שלא יאמר שהוא נהרג בידי הפלישתים. בגירסה השנייה, נער עמלקי טוען ששאול ביקש ממנו סיוע למות, והוא, העמלקי, הרג אותו. בשתי הגרסאות שאול מת מוות הרואי בעודו מונע מאויביו את הסיפוק הנובע מהריגת מלך ישראל.

אדוניבזק מכיר בכך שהאל חרף את גורלו, והוא מודה על אשמתו בפני אנשי שבט יהודה (שופ' א 7). זוהי הדוגמה הראשונה בה מילותיו האחרונות של דמות במקרא עוסקות בקבלת הגמול. שבט יהודה עולה עם

שמעון למלחמה, לרשת את נחלתם בארץ כנען. אדוניבזק נס, אולם הם משיגים אותו ומקצצים את בהונות ידיו ורגליו. בעקבות כך הוא מודה שכך היה עשה לשבעים מלכים, ואלו גם מילותיו האחרונות. העונש שהוא מקבל מוצג כמידה כנגד מידה, והוא שיעור במשפט צדק.

הדוגמה השנייה של קבלת העונש היא סיפור זבח וצלמנע (שופ' ח 21). אלו הם מלכים מדיינים לוחמים, אשר נוצחו על-ידי גדעון בסיועו של האל. זבח וצלמנע מקבלים מיד את הדין, ומבקשים מגדעון שהוא יהרוג אותם בעצמו, במקום למנות לכך את בנו הצעיר. לא היתה להם ברירה אלא למות, והם קיבלו את הדין כתגמול עבור הריגת אחיו של גדעון בעבר.

הקטגוריה האחרונה הנידונה היא סיפורן של ארבע נשים שהוגות את מילותיהן האחרונות מתוך סבל. ליחידה זו אני קוראת "נשים מוגות". רחל ואשת פנחס אומרות את מילותיהן האחרונות בשעת לידה, עם נשימתן האחרונה. איזבל ועתליה הן מלכות, ובמותן הן מתריסות כנגד אלה המוציאים אותן להורג.

מילות הפרידה של רחל נאמרות עם נשימתה האחרונה, תוך כדי לידה (בר' לה 16-20). רחל היא האשה הראשונה שמתה בשעת לידה. היא ציפתה לילדים, ובאופן אירוני, מתה עם לידת בנה השני. במילותיה האחרונות היא נותנת לבנה את השם בן-אוני, שפירושו "בן הצער שלי" או "בן החטא שלי", ובכך היא נותנת ביטוי לייסורים שלה. אשת פנחס, האשה השנייה שמתה בשעת לידה, גם היא נותנת שם לבנה בצאת נשמתה (שמ"א ד 1-22, 19-22). הצער שלה הוא לא רק צירי לידה: הטרגדיה האישית הפוקדת אותה מסמלת את הטרגדיה הלאומית, כאשר ארון ה' נשבה וכל משפחת בעלה נהרגו במלחמה מול פלישתים. היא קוראת לבנה אי-כבוד, שם המתייחס לגלות שכינת האל מישראל.

איזבל היא האשה הראשונה שמתה בהתרסה כאשר היא אומרת את מילותיה האחרונות (מל"ב ט 31), ואלה המילים האחרונות הנידונות. איזבל הורתה על הריגת נביאים, ומותה היה חזוי מראש. היא בזה ליהוא, כאשר היא שואלת אם הוא בא בשלום, ואלה הן מילותיה האחרונות. היא מושלכת מחלון ביתה על-ידי מספר סריסים, בפקודת יהוא. באופן אירוני, עתליה אומרת את מילותיה האחרונות בהכתרתו למלך של יואש (מל"ב יא 1-14, דה"ב כב 10-12). עתליה קורעת את בגדיה, דבר המבטא אבלות (בר' לז 34, שופ' ז 6, יא 3, שמ"ב א 2, 11-12, יג 19, 31). יהוידע הכהן מצווה על הוצאתה מן המקום, יחד עם אנשיה, ולהוציאה להורג.

החלק השלישי של המחקר דן ביישום, בביצוע, ובחשיבות של מילות פרידה. רובן של מילות הפרידה מיושמות או מבוצעות כצפוי. הנסיבות בהן המילים האחרונות נאמרות משפיעות במידה רבה על היישום או הביצוע של המילים הללו.

לסיכום, ישנה שונות בין מילות הפרידה שנבחנו. הן נאמרות בהקשרים שונים, ומבוצעות בדרכים שונות. תועדו גם מספר מילות פרידה שאינן זקוקות ליישום או לביצוע.

מילות הפרידה של גברים שונות בדרך-כלל ממילות הפרידה של נשים. רוב הגברים מכירים בכך שהם עומדים למות, ומתכווננים לקראת המוות, לאחר שחיו חיים מלאים ובעלי משמעות. זאת, מלבד הגברים שאומרים את מילותיהם האחרונות בהקשר של מלחמה. מצד שני, כל הנשים שנחקרו מתו מתוך סבל. הן לא ציפו לכך, והוגות את מילותיהן האחרונות בתגובה למצב פתאומי. בנוסף, ישנה חפיפה בין חלק ממילות הפרידה. המילים האחרונות של יעקב כאב לבניו חופפות את מילותיו האחרונות של משה כמנהיג עם ישראל. האנשים ששומעים את מילות הפרידה לוקחים אותן ברצינות, ורוב מילות הפרידה הזקוקות ליישום אכן מיושמות.

לבסוף, בנספחים אני בוחנת את מילותיו האחרונות שמדווחות של אברהם (בר' כד: ב-ט), יצחק (בר' כז: א-כח: ד), שמואל (שמו"א יב), ובת יפתח (שופ' יא: א-מ). למרות שהמקרא מדווח על מילים אחרונות של דמויות שהן לא בהכרח מילות פרידה לפני המוות, ארבע אלו מהווים דוגמאות של דמויות מרכזיות עם נרטיבים ממושכים, והם ראויים לחקירה.

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המחלקה לתנ"ך ע"ש זלמן שמיר
אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

העיצוב והמשמעות של מילות פרידה בספרות המקרא

חיבור לשם קבלת התואר "דוקטור לפילוסופיה"

מאת:

אוולין אליזבת דמלי

המחלקה לתנ"ך ע"ש זלמן שמיר

הוגש לסנט של אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

אייר, תשפ"ב

רמת גן