

Stromata

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Stromata

“A vehicle for scholarly expression”

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by John Medendorp



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Here I Am

Scott De Young

Then God said,
“Take your son, your only son, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah.”

Here I am?

No, not I.

(Do not both fire and water bring death?)

No, not I.

I am not Abraham:

I am too tired to rise early in the morning,

And I am too squeamish to kill even a ram with a knife.

Yet here I Am,

My son lying passively in my extended arms

As I offer him to the death of the water.

I know, I know...

The water brings promises and new life:

Think of Noah and the ark.

Think of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

Yes, but...

Think of every living thing on the face of the earth that was wiped out.

Think of the horse and the rider.

Yet here I Am,

My son lying passively in my extended arms

As I offer him to the death of the water

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

He is no longer my own,

But belongs body and soul to his faithful Savior, Jesus Christ;

He is ready now, if need be,

To hate his father and mother

And to let the dead bury their own dead.

Yet here I Am

With my new son in my arms,

Lent to me for a while.

A Brief Breviary of Sin

Dylan Pahman

In Cornelius Plantinga's *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, he goes to great length to outline the various causes and manifestations of human sin. All in all, I have no major complaints for Plantinga. His book is thorough, nuanced, insightful, biblical, and fairly orthodox. However, what I might be able to add to his contribution is a difference of emphasis. Though it may be a chicken-or-the-egg sort of quibble, I would argue that while Plantinga seeks to identify the sins that cause other sins, it is also important to identify the ultimate, metaphysical cause of sin in the world today: death. After setting the cause of sin in this light, I will attempt to show how sin manifests itself in our lives through passion.

My position can be summed up quite succinctly by St. Maximos Confessor, who writes,

Man's will, out of cowardice, tends away from suffering, and man, against his own will, remains utterly dominated by the fear of death, and, in his desire to live, clings to his slavery to pleasure.¹

For the rest of this essay, I will simply be elaborating upon this statement. Due to cowardice in the face of suffering (a little manifestation of death), we flee from it, allowing the fear of it, the fear of death, to shape our actions, driving us toward fleeting pleasures which slip like water through our hands, enslaving us to ever drink of it yet never satisfy our thirst. It is as the Epistle to the

¹St. Maximos the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 21 in Andrew Louth, ed., *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor*, trans., Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 112.

Hebrews says: “the devil... through the fear of death” has made human beings “all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15). Death and the fear of death have created a cyclical corruption of human action, a restlessness both tormenting and, yet, providential. As St. Augustine prayed, “[Y]ou made us for yourself and our hearts have no peace until they rest in you.”² God has created us in such a way that we will continue searching for something to alleviate our suffering, to give us life in the place of death, or die trying.

According to St. Paul, “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:56). Death, then, is prior to sin, like the stinger of a bee is prior to a bee-sting. Sin is death’s sting. The power of sin is the law: stingers sting by design; that is simply what they do by virtue of being stingers. Just as God created a good and ordered universe, a cosmos meant for *shalom* (to borrow from Plantinga), so also to violate that goodness with evil, that order with chaos, brings with it natural consequences by virtue of the law of nature. Indeed, as Plantinga notes, “shalom is God’s design for creation”³ and sin “is *culpable* disturbance of shalom.”⁴ It is not a thing in itself, but the corruption of something good due to the privation of that most wondrous and perfect of God’s creations: life.

And yet—and here is where it becomes a chicken-or-the-egg conundrum—St. Paul also writes that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). I believe, however, that this seeming contradiction can be harmonized, at least with regards to the post-lapsarian world. As Plantinga notes, diseased and dying trees produce rotten fruit which poison rather than nourish.⁵ Indeed, St. Paul remarks, “[W]hen you were slaves to sin, you were free with regards to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death” (Romans 6:20–21). We have seen above from the Epistle to the Hebrews that it is “through the fear of death” that we are enslaved in the first place (Hebrews 2:15). Thus, enslaved to sin through the fear of death, we produce that rotten fruit whose end is death rather than life.

²St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessioins* 1.1.1, R. S. Pine-Coffin, trans. (London: Penguin, 1961), 21.

³Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 16.

⁴Plantinga, 18.

⁵cf. *ibid.*, 53.

So, having argued that sin is caused by death—though not to the point of denying our free will or consent—how does sin manifest itself within us? I believe the answer can be found in an element underemphasized by Plantinga: passion. Plantinga speaks of many passions but never uses the word in its classical sense. According to St. Maximos, “[T]hrough the liability to passions that resulted from Adam’s sin, the evil powers... have hidden their activities clandestinely under the law of human nature in its current circumstance.”⁶ Many today use the term “passion” to refer to a good thing (for example: “I have a passion for ministry,” in which “passion” is used to refer to “ambition” or “enthusiasm”), but this was hardly the case in the ancient Church. While I could quote many Church fathers on this subject, it is sufficient to note that St. Paul speaks of “vile passions” (Romans 1:26), “sinful passions” (Romans 7:5), and “lustful passion” (1 Thessalonians 4:5), exhorting us to “put to death... passion” (Colossians 3:5), because “those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:25). Clearly, to St. Paul, passions stand as great obstacles in our spiritual lives and must be put to death. What, then, are passions?

Passion is a term that had a very nuanced meaning, both in Greek and Jewish usage, prior to the writing of the New Testament and afterward in patristic thought.⁷ To simplify: passion, though it could be understood in a neutral sense meaning “emotion,” in its technical, ethical sense typically denotes a willing assent to an impression regarding an incorrect judgment with regards to a good or evil. The only true (ethical) good is virtue, the only evil vice. So a particular food, for example, (presuming it is ethically produced and obtained) ought to be regarded as ethically indifferent; it only becomes evil if used for vice, such as gluttony. Its ethical value is derivative of its connection to either virtue or vice. To presume that eating pork, for example, is inherently evil is to misjudge what is evil; to presume that eating pork is an end in itself is to misjudge what is good. Both are passions. The first is an irrational fear. The second is gluttony, an irrational desire for food, which is not only a passion but also a vice—the sort of thing that we ought to avoid as being evil. Plantinga

⁶St. Maximos, *Ad Thalassium* 21.

⁷I actually delivered a paper on this subject on the 2009 Claremont Philosophy of Religion Conference (February 13–14, 2009), entitled “Emotions as Judgments: Toward a Stoic-Christian Philosophy of Emotion.” In light of this, I will not go into detail with regards to this research here.

demonstrates that he clearly understands this classic, Christian understanding of passion toward the end of his book in his section on amusement, even if he does not use same terminology or take the time to give a scholastic definition. “By its nature,” writes Plantinga, “amusement should not be taken seriously. Nothing comes of it. The winner of the World Series makes front page news, but, objectively speaking, who wins doesn't matter at all.”⁸

In light of this, let us look again at my summary quote from St. Maximus:

Man's will, out of cowardice, tends away from suffering, and man, against his own will, remains utterly dominated by the fear of death, and, in his desire to live, clings to his slavery to pleasure.⁹

Notice all of the passions involved in this quote? St. Maximus describes this cyclical corruption of human action as consisting of three passions (“fear of death,” “desire to live,” and “slavery to pleasure”) and one vice (“cowardice”). While human sin certainly consists of more vices and passions, I think that this is a fairly comprehensive starting point. Due to our own cowardice, we are driven by the fear of death to desire the very pleasure that enslaves us. We can complete the circle by adding one more passion: grief. St. John of Damascus asks, “Which delight in this life remaineth no party to grief?”¹⁰ Fear leads to desire, desire to pleasure, pleasure to grief. And grief is one of many forms of suffering in this life that we, in our cowardice, seek to avoid rather than endure, starting the cycle over once again. Indeed, there is a sense in which Plantinga's definition of addiction fits this pattern in every one of us: “a complex, progressive, injurious, and, often, disabling attachment to a substance... or behavior... in which a person compulsively seeks a change of mood.”¹¹ Perhaps it is not as outwardly damaging to us as addictions

⁸Plantinga, 190.

⁹St. Maximos the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 21.

¹⁰My source for this quote is actually an icon I own of St. John of Damascus.

The words are printed on a scroll he is holding in his hand, likely from one of his many, beautiful hymns (from the Orthodox funeral service, I believe):

“Which delight in this life remaineth no party to grief? What glory hath stood unchanging on earth?”

¹¹Plantinga, 190.

to alcohol, gambling, or sex, but through our own personal versions of this cycle, inwardly our souls are injured just the same.

Thus, the many manifestations of sin often come from seemingly innocent things, due to this complex interaction of passions to which we subject ourselves. Food is not evil, in fact we need it to live, but gluttony twists this desire to live into a pleasure that enslaves. Material comforts are not evil, in fact we need clothing and shelter to live, but avarice (or greed) twists this desire for life into slavery to pleasure. Indeed, Christ our God inquires of us, “Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25) True life, eternal life, is found in the kingdom of God and in virtue, as Christ himself commands: “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

While I agree with Plantinga that sin tends to progress in our lives from the lesser to the greater,¹² I actually disagree that traditionally pride ought to be considered first among seven deadly sins.¹³ St. John Cassian, at least, stands as a counterexample. To him, pride is the eighth of eight vices. It is not the least but the greatest of evil:

Our eighth struggle is against the demon of pride, a most sinister demon, fiercer than all that have been discussed up till now. He attacks the perfect above all and seeks to destroy those who have mounted almost to the heights of holiness. Just as a deadly plague destroys not just one member of the body, but the whole of it, so pride corrupts the whole soul, not just part of it.¹⁴

¹²Cf. Plantinga, 48: “unless arrested by the grace and disciplines of God, we tend to gather momentum in this program: sinners who lose spiritual purpose and control eventually descend into a spiral of increasingly grave assaults on civic and personal integrity.” Cf. also 130.

¹³Cf. *ibid.*, 81.

¹⁴St. John Cassian, *On the Eight Vices in The Philokalia*, vol. 1, trans. and eds., G. F. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kalistos Ware (London: Faber & Faber, 1983), 92. Notably, St. John Cassian also includes anger on his list, stating, “No matter what provokes it, anger blinds the soul's eyes, preventing it from seeing the Sun of righteousness. Leaves, whether of gold or lead, placed over the eyes, obstruct the sight equally, for the value of the gold does not affect the blindness it produces. Similarly, anger, whether reasonable or unreasonable, obstructs our spiritual vision” (83). Thus, he effectively denies Plantinga's statement that “righteous indignation” is “a virtue of the just” (Plantinga, 81). Personally, I agree with St. John Cassian on this point.

Pride is certainly the root of many sins in the world and produces all manner of vices, “corrupt[ing] the whole soul,” but sin, in general, begins with much smaller vices. Indeed, it is only once we first take in the little things that they work their way into our whole lives. “Do you not know,” St. Paul asks the Corinthians, “that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Corinthians 5:6)

What, then, are the little things that lead to worse things? This question is one to which Plantinga has no specific answer. He admits a progression of sin, but does not outline any hierarchy. Ancient Christians, however, prove far more insightful on this matter. According to Evagrius the Solitary, our most basic struggle is against three “frontline” demons: gluttony, avarice, and seeking the esteem of others. In this he echoes the words of St. John the Theologian, in which he sums up “all that is in the world” as “the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the boastfulness of [everyday] life;” these, according to him, are “not of the Father but... of the world” (1 John 2:16).¹⁵ According to Evagrius, these three are primary. “All the other demons,” he writes, “follow behind and in their turn attack those already wounded by the first three groups.”¹⁶ Why is it that people get angry with one another? What causes jealousy? What could lead a person, often not the sort one would expect, to commit adultery or solicit prostitution or fall into a pornography addiction? Anger, typically, comes from not getting our way, not being able to fulfill our desire for food, stuff, or praise. We get impatient when we are hungry; dejection and jealousy come from not getting the things we want; and when insulted, we rarely bear it as a blessing like Christ commands us,¹⁷ preferring to lash out in irritation. The people who are undisciplined with their stomachs—even if they do not have weight issues (which are sometimes just matters of metabolism and body type anyway)—often find themselves lacking restraint with other parts of their bodies. Existentially, I can say that this has, at least, been my own experience; these three demons lead legions more

¹⁵Ὅτι πᾶν τὸ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκός, καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν, καὶ ἡ ἀλαζονεία τοῦ βίου, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἐστίν.

¹⁶Evagrius the Solitary, “Texts on Discrimination in Respect of Passions and Thoughts,” 1 in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, trans. and eds., G. F. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kalistos Ware (London: Faber & Faber, 1983), 39.

¹⁷See Matthew 5:11–12, 44–45.

behind them.

Are we, then, simply stuck in this cyclical pattern of passions which leads from lesser to greater vices? How can we ever break free from the “captivity to the law of sin which is in [our] members” (Romans 7:23)? “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25). According to St. Maximos,

[T]he Lord *put off the principalities and powers* [Colossians 2:15] at the time of his first experience of temptation in the desert, thereby healing the whole of human nature of the passion connected with pleasure. Yet he despoiled them again at the time of his death, in that he likewise eliminated from our human nature the passion connected with pain. In his love for humanity, he accomplished this restoration for us as though he were himself liable; and what is more, in his goodness, he reckoned to us the glory of what he had restored.¹⁸

Not surprisingly, our salvation from passion comes to us in and through Jesus Christ. In the desert, he resisted temptation to pleasure. On the cross he conquered the fear of death and death itself. “O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55) Christ is risen. Death has been disarmed. For those of us who have been baptized into Christ's death, “sin shall not have dominion over [us], for [we] are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:14). Indeed, according to Plantinga, we need “the grace and disciplines of God” (prayer, fasting, almsgiving, etc.) to break the downward spiral of sin in our lives.¹⁹ Since, then, we have received such great grace as this, that even in death we should have nothing to fear, that the cycle of passions and sins that plague humanity can be broken in us, let us also practice discipline and “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

¹⁸St. Maximos the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 21 in Andrew Louth, ed., *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximos the Confessor*, trans., Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 113.

¹⁹Plantinga, 48.

The Prohibition of Sorcery in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Law

Daniel J. Vos

I. Tzvi Abusch has strongly influenced the study of witchcraft¹ in the ancient Near East, particularly in ancient Mesopotamia, since the early 1970's. He has focused on the *Maqlû* series of texts, which he describes as "the single most important, if also the most tendentious, member of that segment of cuneiform literature which records Mesopotamian magical and medical attempts to counteract witchcraft and its effects."² Abusch believes that *Maqlû* represent a complex ceremony performed by the ritual exorcist. Abusch argues further that the *Maqlû* series demonstrates the reworking of popular notions regarding witchcraft in order to promote the interests of the ritual exorcist, the *āšipū*.³ Abusch states that Mesopotamian attitudes

¹ I. Tzvi Abusch, "Witchcraft and the Anger of the Personal God," in *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature* (Groningen: Styx, 2002), 54-55 defines witchcraft and sorcery in nearly synonymous terms. I will use the terms witchcraft and sorcery as synonyms.

² Abusch, "Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Literature: Texts and Studies, Part I: The Nature of *Maqlû*: Its Character, Divisions, and Calendrical Setting" *JNES* 33 (1974): 251.

³ Abusch, "The Demonic Image of the Witch in Standard Babylonian Literature: The Reworking of Popular Conceptions by Learned Exorcists," in *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature* (Groningen: Styx, 2002), 4.

regarding witchcraft and magic were originally neutral.⁴ Over time, “The exclusion of other practitioners [of magic] led to the view of the witch as the destructive human mirror-image of the exorcist.”⁵ Abusch concludes, “The development of *Maqlû* attests to the transformation of an informal ritual and legal situation into a complex ceremonial and governmental system that encompasses diverse parts and consolidates their powers.”⁶ Abusch defines witchcraft as “behavior or acts by a human being believed to be endowed with a special mystical power and propensity for evil that results in harm to others.”⁷ Abusch believes that as Mesopotamian society became more complex, witchcraft was redefined, but that “originally...the witch was not primarily a doer of evil, and thus there was often no need for anyone to fight against her.”⁸ In summary, Abusch believes that Mesopotamian attitudes regarding magic and witchcraft developed over time, and that original, more popular notions of the witch as a neutral or even positive, typically female and rural practitioner of magic were gradually replaced with the idea of the witch as dangerous and destructive, a danger requiring professional attention from the ritual exorcist.

Ann Jeffers begins her study of magical practitioners in the Old Testament with a historical review. She argues that until the mid-nineteenth century, biblical scholars saw magic as a relic of paganism or a case of heresy. The study of anthropology reshaped the study of magic, initially seeing magic as a pseudo-science or a primitive form of religious thought, but gradually realizing that magic functions within a specific cultural mentality or worldview.⁹ Within the realm of biblical studies, the negative assessment of magic could be seen in Gerhard von Rad’s position that magic comes from an early stage of

⁴ Abusch, “Demonic Image,” 8-9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, “Witchcraft and the Anger,” 55.

⁸ Abusch, “Considerations When Killing a Witch,” in *Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature* (Groningen: Styx, 2002), 66.

⁹ Ann Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 8; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 4-7.

religious belief and was supplanted by Yahwism,¹⁰ or in the distinction made by H. Wheeler Robinson and J. Lindblom between prophecy and divination.¹¹ Another approach could be seen in A. Caquot and M. Leibovici, who explored divination in its ancient Near Eastern context and concluded that the diviner was a scientist seeking to gain understanding of the surrounding world.¹² Jeffers herself argues that the Bible cannot be taken out of ancient Near Eastern context; because it belongs to the ancient Near East, other ancient Near Eastern documents will illumine biblical terminology.¹³ Brian Schmidt argues that biblical legislation against magic is late; that Deuteronomy 18 proscribed behaviors that were originally compatible with Yahwism.¹⁴ Shawna Dolansky concludes that magic was not categorically illegal in ancient Israel and that the self-interest of the prophets and priests motivates proscriptions of sorcery in the Deuteronomic and Holiness Codes.¹⁵ Current scholarship on sorcery in the Old Testament tends to emphasize the similarity between ancient Israel and the ancient Near East, arguing that magic itself was not originally forbidden by the Old Testament, but that its practice was either forbidden in later texts or limited by later texts to serve the

¹⁰ Jeffers, *Magic and Divination*, 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16: “In the philological records, as opposed to the ideological/theological data provided by the Old Testament, we can expect to find Hebrew words and expressions connected with magic and divination. Sometimes they are of obvious foreign origin but they have nonetheless become part of Israelite culture. . . . other Northwest Semitic languages are likely to throw light on some difficult Hebrew words.”

¹⁴ Brian B. Schmidt, “Canaanite Magic vs. Israelite Religion: Deuteronomy 18 and the Taxonomy of Taboo,” in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer, eds; Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 141; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 253. Schmidt’s understanding that “sorcerers are depicted as relative late comers to Yahwistic religion, as foreign, namely Mesopotamian imports, and are therefore condemned” makes no reference to Exodus 22:17 or the description of the Egyptian magicians as sorcerers.

¹⁵ Shawna Dolansky, *Now You See It, Now You Don’t: Biblical Perspectives on the Relationship between Magic and Religion* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 99-100.

interests of its legitimized practitioners.

Careful scrutiny of the biblical material suggests that different conceptions of the divine, magic, and sorcery are found there when compared to the ancient Near Eastern material. A comparison between the biblical prohibitions of sorcery and ancient Near Eastern prohibitions of sorcery requires that both sets of data first be considered carefully in their own light. It also requires clarity of definitions and conceptions to minimize the risk of attempting illegitimate comparisons. This paper will first examine ancient Near Eastern prohibitions of sorcery in the context provided by ancient Near Eastern royal and ritual texts. It will then examine the biblical prohibitions of sorcery in the light of biblical narrative and prophecy. First, though, it is necessary to clearly define several key terms: magic, sorcery or witchcraft, and divination.

Dolansky argues that magic can be defined from an emic or an etic standpoint: an emic definition is derived from the inside, from the statements of its practitioners, while an etic definition is derived from outside observation. Dolansky attempts to have a balanced definition; however, the etic portion of her approach results in a conclusion that “‘magic’ of some sort is clearly practiced by genuine biblical heroes.”¹⁶ Dolansky defines magic in the Bible as: “*an act performed by a person (as opposed to theophany or direct acts of God), with or without attribution to God, that has no apparent physical causal connection to the (expected or actual) result.*”¹⁷ By contrast, Jeffers notes that “All we know [of ancient Israelite society] is what the texts tell us—complete with their ideological bias” and concludes that our “only option is to study magic and divination from the inside, from the clues given by the language, through the people’s own appraisal of their own practices, and through the world-view these practices suggest.”¹⁸ Daniel Miller states: “Israelite ritual specialists such as the priest in Numbers 5:11–31 were not understood by the biblical

¹⁶ Dolansky, *Now You See It*, 21, 39: “the Bible is replete with stories of legitimate divination and magical activities. Moses and Elijah perform amazing magical feats. Joseph’s rise to power in Egypt is occasioned by his divinatory activities as a dream interpreter. David repeatedly resorts to divination to determine Yahweh’s will.”

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁸ Jeffers, *Magic and Divination*, 7.

writers as ‘magicians.’”¹⁹ Thus, the validity of a definition of magic in the Old Testament that allows the classification of miracle or prophecy as magic when the text does not do so is questionable.

Walter Farber defines magic as “that whole area of religious behavior which tries to influence man’s success, well-being, health, and wealth by using methods based neither on rational experience nor solely on private or public worship of a deity.”²⁰ For the purposes of this study, magic will be understood as behavior which tries to influence success and well-being by using methods outside of normal human agency and prescribed acts of worship.

Sorcery is a subset of magic. Sorcery is often defined as “black” or harmful magic by contrast to “white” or defensive magic. T. Witton Davies argued in his late nineteenth century that black magic was “traffic with evil spirits, particularly when the purpose was to injure others,” while white magic was “intercourse with well-disposed spirits.”²¹ Davies distinguishes between black and white magic by intent and by the supernatural beings addressed. Yitschak Sefati and Jacob Klein distinguish black magic from white magic by intent²² and practitioner: “in Mesopotamia there was a clear distinction between two types of magic: ‘White magic,’ which was usually practiced by a diviner (such as the *bārû*) or exorcist (such as the *āšipu* and the *mašmaššu*), on the one hand; and ‘black magic,’ which was usually attributed to a sorcerer (*kaššāpu* or *kaššāptu*), on the other hand.”²³

¹⁹ Daniel Miller, “Another Look at the Magical Ritual for a Suspected Adulteress in Numbers 5:11–31,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 5 (2010), 16.

²⁰ Walter Farber, “Witchcraft, Magic and Divination in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *CANE* 3:1896.

²¹ T. Witton Davies, *Magic, Divination, and Demonology Among the Hebrews and their Neighbours*. (New York: Ktav, 1969), 3-4.

²² “As is well known, all ancient Near Eastern cultures surrounding Israel distinguished between black, or maliciously antisocial, performed by a sorcerer or sorceress, and white, or defensive, magic performed by legitimate practitioners, on the other hand.” Yitschak Sefati and Jacob Klein, “The Law of the Sorceress (Exodus 22:17[18]) in the Light of Biblical and Mesopotamian Parallels” in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume* (Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, and Shalom M. Paul, eds.; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 175.

²³ Sefati and Klein, “The Law of the Sorceress,” 178-179.

Other scholars, however, reject the distinction between black magic and white magic. Robert Ritner argues that Egyptian society had a single category for magic.²⁴ Farber argues that the same is true of Mesopotamia: “black magic as a category never existed in Mesopotamia; sorcerers used exactly the same techniques and spells for their illegitimate purposes that the victims might use to defend themselves legitimately.”²⁵ Abusch comes close to acknowledging this point when he argues that the *āšipu* and the sorcerer or sorceress used the same techniques.²⁶ Farber’s statement is useful because it focuses attention on the intent rather than the practice or practitioner; the evidence will need to legitimate the definition.

Because of its close ties to magic in the Old Testament, divination must also be defined. Malcolm Horsnell notes: “Mantic or divination was widespread in the ANE. Mantic/divination attempted to tell the future or bring to light hidden knowledge through various means, including the interpretation of signs or omens, communication with the dead, or the use of magical powers.”²⁷ For the purposes of this paper, divination is understood as a subset of magic concerned with obtaining knowledge that cannot be gathered by normal human agency.

In this paper, I will argue that while the biblical prohibitions of sorcery make use of language and terms found in ancient Near Eastern sources regarding sorcery, they make use of a different conception of sorcery than does the ancient Near Eastern data.

²⁴ Robert K. Ritner. “The Religious, Social, and Legal Parameters of Traditional Egyptian Magic,” in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*. (Marvin Meye and Paul Mirecki, eds.; Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 129; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 52.

²⁵ Farber, “Witchcraft in Mesopotamia,” *CANE* 3:1898.

²⁶ “Although witch and *āšipu* are opponents, they nonetheless are almost mirror-images of each other insofar as they use many of the same techniques, though presumably in the service of conflicting social goals and norms.” Abusch, “Demonic Image,” 7.

²⁷ Malcolm Horsnell, “מסמ,” *NIDOTTE* 3:945. He also notes the close relationship between magic and divination: “The latter shows that divination was not completely distinct from magic; this is shown in the OT in passages where magic is spoken of along with mantic, indicating the interrelatedness of both practices (Exod 7:11; Lev 19:26; Deut 18:10–14; 2 Kgs 21:6 = 2 Chron 33:6; Isa 2:6 [reading *miqšām* for *miqqedem*]; 47:9, 12; Dan 2:2).”

Ancient Near Eastern law collections ban harmful or antisocial magical practices as sorcery, often with the root *kšp*, but the Bible intends to forbid all magical practices, not simply those perceived to be harmful. I will argue that this divergence is best understood in the light of the religious, covenantal grounding of biblical law—ancient Near Eastern law is primarily concerned with promoting social order; biblical law is concerned with maintaining the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and his people.

ANE Prohibitions of Sorcery in Their Cultural Context

When comparisons are made between the Bible and the ancient Near East, the ancient Near Eastern law collections²⁸ have chronological priority. The earliest law collections from the ancient Near East do not clearly mention sorcery;²⁹ the earliest clear reference to sorcery in the law collections is in LH §2, which requires the River Ordeal in the case of an unsubstantiated accusation of witchcraft.³⁰ Three Hittite laws prohibit acts of sorcery: the disposal of remains from a ritual purification in another person's house (§44b), forming a clay image for magical purposes (§111), and killing a snake and speaking another person's name (§170). According to Ahmet Ünal:

Hittite laws define the practices of black magic: It is black magic when one does not burn the refuse after a cultic purification but places it in the field or house of another person instead. It is

²⁸ The following abbreviations will be used for the law collections: LH = Laws of Hammurabi, LE = Laws of Eshnunna, HL = Hittite Laws, MAL = Middle Assyrian Laws, and NBL = Neo-Babylonian Laws.

²⁹ Sorcery is addressed in the Laws of Hammurabi, the Hittite Laws, Middle Assyrian Laws and Neo-Babylonian Laws. Raymond Westbrook, "Neo-Sumerian Period (Ur III)" in *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law* (ed. Raymond Westbrook; HdO 71; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 196, claims that the LU §13 and §14 "mention the river ordeal in connection with accusations of witchcraft and adultery," however §13 is damaged at a critical point. Martha Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1995), 18 leaves the word untranslated.

³⁰ Stanley Walters considers LH §2 to properly concern the accusation of sorcery: "This seems to imply that at some point in OB (or neo-Sumerian) life, accusations of sorcery had become at least as troublesome to society as sorcery itself—perhaps more so." Stanley Walters, "The Sorceress and Her Apprentice: A Case Study of an Accusation," *JCS* 23 (1970): 28.

likewise black magic when one kills a snake and recites the name of another person according to a magical formula (presumably in the form: “as this snake dies, so may he also die”). A practice of the same sort using clay is also mentioned in a fragmentary context.³¹

MAL A §47 also forbids sorcery: “If either a man or a woman should be discovered practicing witchcraft, and should they prove the charges against them and find them guilty, they shall kill the practitioner of witchcraft.” NBL §7 forbids a woman to perform magical acts or ritual purifications against the property or house of another; the penalties range from fines to death. The laws in its immediate context also concern women—NBL §6 concerns the selling of a slave woman, NBL §8-12 concern dowries.

In addition to the law collections, royal documents and ritual texts help to determine cultural attitudes toward magic and sorcery and the practitioners of sorcery. Documents from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Hittite empire will be considered.

Despite the absence of legal collections from Egypt, two sources address sorcery: the records of a harem conspiracy against pharaoh that involved the use of magic and a letter from Amonhotep II to his viceroy. The conspiracy trial implicated over thirty people, most of whom were executed for their crimes.³² Sorcery was involved: “He began to make writings of magic for exorcizing and for disturbing, and he began to make some gods of wax and some potions for laming the limbs of people. They were placed in the hand of Paibakemon, whom Pre did not allow to be chamberlain, and the other great enemies, saying ‘Let them approach,’ and they let them approach.”³³ Robert Ritner argues that the trial really concerns treason, not

³¹ Ahmet Ünal. “The Role of Magic in the Ancient Anatolian Religions According to the Cuneiform Texts from Bogazköy-Hattusa.” *Bulletin of the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan* 3 (1988) 65.

³² “The Turin Judicial Papyrus,” translated by Robert K. Ritner, (COS 3.8: 27-30).

³³ “Papyri Rollin and Lee: Magic in the Harem Conspiracy against Ramses III,” translated by Robert K. Ritner, (COS 3.9: 30-31), 30.

witchcraft.³⁴ Even if this is so, it suggests that magic used for antisocial purposes is considered criminal.

Part of a letter from Amenhotep II to his viceroy reads: “A further communication to the viceroy: Don’t be at all lenient with Nubians! Beware of their people and their sorcerers!”³⁵ This letter suggests that the pharaoh was aware of magical practices that might be hostile to the interests of the pharaoh and his viceroy.

Robert Ritner argues that there is no distinction between negative, harmful “black magic” and positive, beneficial or protective “white magic” in ancient Egypt, but that there was only a single system of magic: “a *single system* for gods, men, and ‘devils,’ cultural ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ (both ‘us’ and ‘them’).”³⁶ However, the harem trial suggests that when magic was used in antisocial ways, its practice was not considered amoral but was subject to condemnation.

A variety of Mesopotamian sources regarding sorcery can be found outside of the law codes. Most of the historical documents are royal letters, but Stanley Walters reviews a series of Old Babylonian letters that mention a charge of witchcraft against a certain farmer’s daughter-in-law and her mother. The central issue in the documents is originally a quantity of grain that the farmer feels is owed him by his son. The farmer loses his case when his son produces witnesses. The charge of sorcery, Walters argues, is more likely the result of family dysfunction than any actual magic.³⁷ Other data can be found in royal

³⁴ “Only when this weapon was directed against King Ramses III in a harem conspiracy (12th century BCE) do we have what has been called a ‘trial for sorcery,’ but this was not a trial against sorcery *per se*, but a trial for treason.” Ritner, “Egyptian Magic,” 54.

³⁵ *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, (Trans. Edward F. Wente; Edmund S. Meltzer, ed.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 28. The rest of the letter is difficult to translate, and the interpretation of “sorcerers” has been challenged by Scott Morschauer, “Approbation or Disapproval? The Conclusion of the Letter of Amenophis II to User-Satet, Viceroy of Kush (Urk. IV, 1344.10-20)” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur*, 24 (1997), 208-9, who argues that the political tone of the letter suggests something more like smooth rhetoric instead of magic. However, Morschauer’s argument that political advice and intrigue belong to the realm of “secular” and “rational” thought assumes a bifurcation between secular and religious thought that may not have been operative.

³⁶ Ritner, “Egyptian Magic,” 52.

³⁷ Walters, “The Sorceress and Her Apprentice,” 37.

sources. Neo-Assyrian letters from the Sargonid Period include a number of references to magic and magical rituals: a letter commanding the retrieval of amulets and magical tablets, including anything to ward off the evil eye,³⁸ another that investigated whether a curse was written on an object,³⁹ and another that includes the following report:

I (have performed the ceremony) of ‘the destruction’ (?); we shall officiate (with) Arad-Ea before Enlil. We shall go into the qirsu (of the temple). I have performed the ceremony for the month of Elul (along) with the (other) ceremony: I have offered a burnt offering. We shall perform an expiation. I have put in charge (of it) the magician who is here (and) the conjurer who is with him. I have given him instruction as follows, ‘Six days shall you wait, (then) you shall perform this powerful expiation.’⁴⁰

This letter and several others⁴¹ refer to an expiation ritual (*takpirtu*) performed by the king’s priests or magicians. Another letter responds to the king’s questions regarding the performance of rituals:

Concerning the ceremonies of which the king my lord wrote us, ... ‘The epidemic (and) the plague shall not come near the palace,’ we performed in the month of Kislev. ... ‘Disease and fever shall not come near the house of a man’ and numerous releasing incantations we have performed. In the month of Shebat, prayers purifications against evil, magical rites and (ceremonies) against (the appearance) of fever and epidemic were performed.⁴²

In this letter, sorcery (*kišpu*) is mentioned twice.⁴³ These letters as a whole present a picture of the preservation of the king’s well-being

³⁸ Letter 256, Robert H. Pfeiffer, *State Letters of Assyria: A Transliteration and Translation of 355 Official Assyrian Letters Dating from the Sargonid Period (722-625 B.C.)*, (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1935), 179-180.

³⁹ Letter 260, Pfeiffer, 183.

⁴⁰ Letter 272, Pfeiffer, 191.

⁴¹ Letter 267 and Letter 280. Pfeiffer, 188, 196.

⁴² Letter 277, Pfeiffer, 194.

⁴³ Letter 277, Pfeiffer, 193-4. Line 15 reads *u kišpu Búr.Ru.Da^{pl}* and line 18 reads *Nam.Búr.Bi limutti kišpi*.

through magical means.

Strikingly, the term used for expiation (*takpirtu*) in several of these letters is an activity that is proscribed in NBL §7. The woman concerned may not perform a magic act (*nēpešu*) or expiation (*takpirtu*) against a person's property.⁴⁴ The intent of the act causes it to be judged differently—if the act is performed on behalf of another person it is acceptable, but if it is performed against another person it is punishable by law.

Hittite royal documents also shed light on sorcery in the ancient Near East. Telipinu's edict ends with the command to keep cleaning up all cases of sorcery in the land, including within the royal family,⁴⁵ suggesting that cases of sorcery were an ongoing concern. Two other documents, the exculpatory prayer of Muršili II and the apology of Ḫattušili, also describe sorcery troubling the royal family.⁴⁶ Muršili II claims that his stepmother, the queen mother, cursed his family before the gods and caused the death of his wife as a result.⁴⁷ Ḫattušili reports that an official, Armadattas (or Arma-Tarhunta), and his family worked against him through sorcery.⁴⁸ Ḫattušili wins a legal case against Armadattas and receives his estate; he later returns half of the estate to Armadattas.⁴⁹ Several Hittite letters discuss aspects of magic in Hittite culture: one, to the king from a diviner named Šarla-LAMMA, documents the difficulty of divining an answer for the

⁴⁴ Roth, *Law Collections*, 145-146. The penalty is a fine unless done against the door of a person's house, in which case the penalty is death.

⁴⁵ "The Proclamation of Telipinu" translated by Th. P. van den Hout, (*COS* 1.76:194-198), 198.

⁴⁶ Gabriella Frantz-Szabo. "Hittite Witchcraft, Magic and Divination," *CANE* 3:2008, refers to several further examples.

⁴⁷ "Mursili's Accusations against Tawannanna (CTH 70)," translated by Itamar Singer, *Hittite Prayers* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 76.

⁴⁸ Edgar Sturtevant and George Bechtel, *A Hittite Chrestomathy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1935): 73.

⁴⁹ Sturtevant and Bechtel, *Hittite Chrestomathy*, 75.

king,⁵⁰ another describes the aftermath of an act of sacrilege and the need to perform a purification ritual.⁵¹ The act of sacrilege involved a “Man-of-the-Storm-God” and an “Old Woman.” “Old Women” were known magical practitioners, according to David Engelhard.⁵² No details concerning the nature of the act of sacrilege are given, but there are specific instructions concerning the purification ritual: it must not be done in the river at Ḫanziwa. Harry Hoffner argues that the river may have flowed to the king’s temporary residence at Šapinuwa, so there may have been concern about secondary pollution. Hoffner considers the situation to be somewhat analogous to the situation in HL §44b, in which improper disposal of the remains of a purification ritual constitute sorcery.⁵³

Ritual documents concerning magic and sorcery are relatively plentiful in the ancient Near East. Abusch’s statement about the significance of *Maqlû* has already been noted. The key figure in Mesopotamian magical rituals, the *āšipu*, also plays a role in the Middle Assyrian prohibition of sorcery. A witness who has recanted testimony concerning sorcery must make a declaration before the *āšipu* when they make a purification and the *āšipu* binds him to keep the oath sworn before the king.⁵⁴

Maqlû represents one of many incantation texts. Edwin Good argues, “Mesopotamian incantation literature is full of spells for the exorcism of demons and spirits causing illness, and these may well have been assumed to be counterspells against witchcraft.”⁵⁵ Thus,

⁵⁰ Letter 50 (HKM 47) “To the King from Šarla-LAMMA,” translated by Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., *Letters from the Hittite Kingdom*, Gary M. Beckman, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 180. The difficulty encountered by this diviner was that “the birds were refusing to give us an answer.” After three attempts, each in different locations, the birds returned a favorable answer.

⁵¹ Letter 90 (HHCTO 1), translated by Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., *Letters from the Hittite Kingdom*, Gary M. Beckman, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 259-260.

⁵² David Engelhard, “Hittite Magical Practices: An Analysis.” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis, 1970), 6.

⁵³ Hoffner, *Letters*, 261.

⁵⁴ Roth, *Law Collections*, 172.

⁵⁵ Edwin Good, “Capital Punishment and Its Alternatives in Ancient near Eastern Law,” *Stanford Law Review* 19 (1967): 956.

legal prohibition is not the only action a person might take against sorcery. An incantation text from Ugarit, RIH 78/20, addresses a sorcerer⁵⁶ who has afflicted a young man. The incantation is performed by an incantation priest⁵⁷ and calls on Horon and Galmu to drive away the sorcerer from the afflicted one.⁵⁸ Mark Smith, noting that vocabulary describing the god Kothar-wa-Ḥasis in KTU 1.6.vi.49-50 is also used for the sorcerer in RIH 78/20 proposes that Kothar is a spell-caster and knower of ghosts and spirits.⁵⁹ That is, Smith argues that Kothar uses magic in the same way that human sorcerers would.⁶⁰

While there are many available sources regarding magic and sorcery in the ancient Near East, there is also a problem of sources. Ritner notes that about 1% of the ancient Egyptian population was literate,⁶¹ thus, our access to the common cultural beliefs regarding sorcery are quite limited. Simon B. Parker argues that in Canaan only a select few could produce and read literary productions.⁶² So while Abusch has suggested that *Maqlû* represents the reworking of popular

⁵⁶ J. N. Ford notes the consistent use of the second person masculine singular to address the sorcerer. J. N. Ford, "The Ugaritic incantation against sorcery RIH 78/20 (KTU[2] 1.169)" *Ugarit-Forschungen* 34 (2002), 154.

⁵⁷"An Ugaritic Incantation Against Sorcery" translated by Daniel Fleming, (*COS* 1.96:301-2), 301: "So, you shall depart before the voice of the incantation priest."

⁵⁸*COS* 1.96:302: "Then (Horon) shall expel the sorcerer-accuser / Horon, the magician, / And Galmu, the familiar."

⁵⁹ Mark S. Smith, "The Magic of Kothar in KTU 1.6 VI 49-50," *Revue Biblique* 91 (1984), 379.

⁶⁰ The implications of this argument are that magic at Ugarit might thus be more comparable to Ritner's contention regarding Egypt, that there was only one system of magic that included gods and people.

⁶¹ Ritner, "Egyptian Magic," 52: "With literacy restricted to 1% of the population, only the scribally-trained priesthood could compose and use the complex magical texts."

⁶² Simon B. Parker, "The Literatures of Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Phoenicia: An Overview," *CANE* 4:2399: "The production and appreciation of written literature in the ancient Near East was a luxury limited almost exclusively to scribes of palace and temple."

beliefs about witchcraft by learned exorcists, there is little evidence to be had of those popular beliefs except through the historical reconstruction he makes from the *Maqlû* texts themselves.⁶³ The existing data tend to emphasize the concerns of the literate classes as recorded by professional scribes.

Several tentative conclusions can be drawn from this survey of ancient Near Eastern sources. First, contrary to the conventional division of magic into categories of harmful, “black” magic and defensive, “white” magic, the ancient Near Eastern data suggests that sorcery consists of antisocial magic as determined by its intent. Walter Farber and Robert Ritner reject outright the idea of “black” and “white” magic. Mark Smith’s interpretation of KTU 1.6.vi.49-50 in the light of RIH 78/20 suggests that the god Koṭar uses the same techniques as human sorcerers. Second, the sources present a fairly wide variety of sorcerers: male and female, and including the upper levels of society. Third, existing ancient Near Eastern sources regarding sorcery tend to represent the concerns of the literate upper classes. It is unclear whether sources representing a genuinely popular view of sorcery in the ancient Near East can be found.

Biblical Prohibitions of Sorcery in Their Literary Context

Turning now to the biblical data, a somewhat analogous problem of sources should be acknowledged. The ancient Near Eastern documents surveyed represent a relatively broad array of texts from a variety of times and places and are part of the archaeological record of ancient civilizations. The Old Testament represents a literary creation, shaped for a particular purpose—to describe the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people. As Jeffers notes, “All we know is what the texts tell us—complete with their ideological

⁶³ See, for instance, Abusch, “Some Reflections on Mesopotamian Witchcraft,” in *Religion and Politics in the Ancient Near East*. (Adele Berlin, ed; Bethesda, Md: University Press of Maryland, 1996), 22-23: “It is informative to realize that the work of the last thirty years has revealed for Europe that ‘Behind the diabolical witchcraft of the witch-hunters has been discovered a more traditional, neighborly witchcraft. Behind this in turn we are seeing glimpses of a still more archaic, shamanistic witchcraft.’ I have found that a similar developmental scheme is discernible also in ancient Mesopotamia and have already identified several stages in Mesopotamian witchcraft. Thus, for example, I have reconstructed for Mesopotamia an early stage of ‘popular’ witchcraft comparable to the aforementioned archaic stage.”

bias.”⁶⁴ What Jeffers sees as ideological bias is in fact a religious perspective that shapes the text. It is possible to identify sources or voices that contribute to the biblical text, as Yehezkel Kaufmann attempts to do with the Covenant Code, Deuteronomy, and the Priestly Code as the sources for the “Law of Moses.”⁶⁵ It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to recover a neutral history behind the text. The text did not intend to present a neutral history.

There are two laws making use of the root שָׁרַף ⁶⁶ that forbid sorcery: Exodus 22:17 [22:18, English Versions] and Deuteronomy 18:10–11. Exod 22:17 reads: “A sorceress (מְכַשְׁפָּה), feminine singular Piel participle) you must not allow to live (לֹא תִחְיֶה , negation + second person masculine singular Piel YQTL).” The prohibition in Deuteronomy is more expansive: “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead” (Deut 18:10–11 TNIV). This is a jussive statement “Let no one be found...” followed by a number of proscribed practices, including sorcery (מְכַשְׁף , masculine singular Piel participle).

The form of Exod 22:17 must briefly be addressed. Sefati and Klein state that “While the formulation of the law of the sorceress is strictly apodictic, the two following laws exhibit the intermediary form, opening with active participles.”⁶⁷ This is a curious distinction, since Exod 22:17 also begins with an active participle. David P. Wright describes these three verses as participial laws of a casuistic origin: “These laws have a form and a prescription of capital

⁶⁴ Jeffers, *Magic and Divination*, 7.

⁶⁵ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *History of the Religion of Israel: From the Babylonian Captivity to the End of Prophecy*, 392-3.

⁶⁶ Malcolm Horsnell, NIDOTTE 2:736, argues that this is the general Hebrew term for magic.

⁶⁷ Sefati and Klein, “The Law of the Sorceress,” 172.

punishment similar to the participial laws in 21:12, 15–17.”⁶⁸ Donald Bretherton considers the penalty to be highly unusual in form and rather weak as a death penalty.⁶⁹ However, the form *לֹא תִהְיֶה* is exactly paralleled in Deut 20:16, where it requires the total destruction of all the nations that must be driven out of Canaan. Zech 13:3 contains a negation and a Qal 3ms YQTL of *יִהְיֶה* in which a false prophet is condemned by the statement “*לֹא תִהְיֶה*.”⁷⁰ The form of Exod 22:17 does not present any real difficulty.

The meaning of sorcery in Exod 22:17 is not clarified by context. The previous law addresses the seduction of a virgin and the following laws address lying with an animal and sacrificing to other gods. Context does provide some insight into the structure of the laws—both of the laws that follow also begin with participles and call for the death of the perpetrator of the offense. In Deut 18:10–11, context is more helpful. The prohibition begins with a negative jussive, “Let no one be found among you...,” which is followed by a series of eight participles. The first practice is “sacrificing their son or daughter in the fire” (*מִמְעַבְרִי בְנוֹ-וּבָתוֹ בְּאֵשׁ*), which seems to more properly be a matter of idolatry than sorcery.⁷¹ The next seven

⁶⁸ David P. Wright, *Inventing God's Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 49. He states further: “because the basic form of the law is close to the other participial laws and verse 17 is contiguous to the participial laws in verses 18–19, we may assume that it is to be associated with the participial legal form in CC.” (Wright 200)

⁶⁹ Donald Bretherton. “An Invitation to Murder? A Re-interpretation of Exodus 22:18 'You Shall Not Suffer a Witch to Live',” *Expository Times* 116 (2005), 147.

⁷⁰ Additionally, LE §28 ends with the phrase, “she will die, she will not live;” LE §§12-13 have a similar construction in the masculine, “he will die, he will not live.” In these laws, no agency is expressed but execution is clearly implied.

⁷¹ However, Peter C. Craigie argues that the context suggests that the sacrifice was intended “for the particular purpose of determining or discerning the course of events” in *Deuteronomy*, NICOT, 260. Michael J. Williams, *The Prophet and His Message* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2003), 19, suggests instead that it is likely “a way to persuade the god to grant one’s wishes.” As such, it fits well with the other proscribed practices in Deuteronomy 18, which sought to manipulate divine power or knowledge for human advantage.

participles list practices of divination and sorcery. Thus, Deut 18 proscribes a broad range of magical practices—not merely sorcery, but also divination.

Dolansky includes Leviticus 19–20 alongside of Deut 18 as a key source for Old Testament proscriptions of magic.⁷² The root כִּשַׁף is not used in Lev 19–20, but divination is addressed repeatedly. Horsnell emphasizes the relationship between magic and divination, arguing that the Old Testament treats them as interrelated actions: “In the OT magic is often spoken of along with mantic practices, indicating the interrelatedness of both practices.”⁷³

Dolansky argues that the Old Testament has a “surprisingly rich vocabulary” regarding magic, but that there is little information to allow the precise definition of the variously proscribed magical behaviors.⁷⁴ This is certainly true of the proscriptions in the law collections. A brief survey of narrative and prophecy reveals a few examples that shed some light on the law collections. Dolansky argues that there are four narrative passages that depict magical practices: Num 22–24, the Balaam narrative; 1 Sam 6, the returning of the Ark of the Covenant from Philistia; 1 Sam 28, the account of Saul and the medium; and Ezek 21, which describes the king of Babylon using divination.⁷⁵ Three of these examples depict foreigners practicing magic.

These examples suggest what the various proscribed magical practices looked like. Balaam is hired with “the fee for divination” (וְקִסְמִים) to curse Israel. This suggests, as Horsnell notes, that the line between divination and magic is blurred.⁷⁶ However, despite his reputation and Balak’s money, he is not able to manipulate Yahweh or speak something other than what Yahweh allows. In 1

⁷² Dolansky, *Now You See It*, 37.

⁷³ Horsnell, “כִּשַׁף,” NIDOTTE 2:735.

⁷⁴ Dolansky, *Now You See It*, 37. She also argues that the Old Testament is “far more concerned with prohibiting access to supernatural sources of information – i.e., *divination* – than to the practical application of supernatural powers to defy physical laws of cause and effect that we would label magic.” (37)

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 38: “With only four exceptions, there is no connection between the major magical events described in the Bible and the Bible’s extensive vocabulary for describing such events.”

⁷⁶ Malcolm Horsnell, “קִסַּם,” NIDOTTE 3:945.

Sam 6, the priests and diviners of Philistia are consulted in regard to the problem of the Ark; the diviners functioned as advisors to the leaders of Philistia. Similarly, in Ezek 21, the king of Babylon is portrayed as making use of divination in order to determine his proper course; the result of which will be the destruction of Jerusalem. The other example Dolansky notes, 1 Sam 28, the account of Saul and the medium, does not use the term “sorcery.” The woman is a “בַּעֲלַת-אֹיֵב,” a “mistress of necromancy.”⁷⁷ All of the legitimate means of inquiry that Saul pursues do not give him an answer because Yahweh has rejected him. So Saul seeks out a medium, although he had previously banned them, to provide him with an answer. Saul’s ban of mediums is consistent with biblical law, particularly Lev 19–20.⁷⁸

Several other narrative passages should be considered because they place magicians in foreign courts. In Exod 7:11, Pharaoh’s wise men, sorcerers, and magicians mimic the signs performed by Moses and Aaron.⁷⁹ In Dan 2, sorcerers, magicians (חֲרָטְמִים), and *āššipîm* (אֲשִׁפִּים), are among the officials summoned by Nebuchadnezzar to interpret his dream. In Dan 4:4, sorcerers are included in a list of functionaries that is expanded to include two classes of diviners. The behavior of these foreign functionaries is depicted as ineffective: Moses and Daniel do by the power of God what these foreign experts

⁷⁷ The meaning of אֹיֵב is somewhat uncertain.

⁷⁸ Rifat Sonsino argues that Biblical kings, unlike their ANE counterparts, were not lawmakers: “For, in ancient Israel, God was not only the sole source of law, but was also considered the formulator of all legal prescriptions.... The law was considered supreme. It governed every person, including the highest official in the realm, the king.” Rifat Sonsino, “Characteristics of Biblical Law,” *Judaism* 33 (1984): 203.

⁷⁹ The Hebrew text notes that Pharaoh’s men accomplished their actions by their magic arts:

וַיִּקְרָא גַם-פַּרְעֹה לְחֹכְמָיו וְלַמְכַשְׁפִּים וַיַּעֲשׂוּ גַם-הֵם חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם בְּלַהֲטֵיהֶם כֹּן:

ultimately cannot. Both Dolansky⁸⁰ and Brian Schmidt⁸¹ note that sorcery is often connected by the Old Testament to foreign practices. The examples of magical practices that describe the actions or terms condemned in the Old Testament typically come from descriptions of the behavior of non-Israelites.

In 2 Kgs 9:22, Jehu condemns the idolatries and sorceries of Jezebel. Jezebel is a foreigner by birth; her behavior remains foreign despite her marriage to Ahab. The Old Testament does not describe any sorceries she committed. By contrast, Manasseh's evil deeds are described in 2 Chr 33:6: "He sacrificed his children in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced divination and witchcraft, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists."

In prophetic literature, the root כִּשַׁף is used relatively infrequently. Jer 27:9 warns against listening to (false) prophets, diviners, interpreters of dreams and sorcerers; Isa 47 taunts Babylon, who will fall despite her sorceries, spells, and the efforts of her diviners; Nah 3:4 calls Nineveh the "mistress of sorceries" who enslaved people by her sorcery; Mic 5:11 pictures Jerusalem being destroyed and having its sorcery and spells removed; Mal 3:5 promises that Yahweh will draw near to testify against sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers.

Why does the Old Testament condemn magical practices? Schmidt argues that it didn't always do so, claiming that some of the practices proscribed by Deut 18:10–11 were originally compatible

⁸⁰ Dolansky, *Now You See It*, 21: "The prohibitions in Deut 18:10–11 list forbidden activities and practitioners in the context of foreign influences that cannot be tolerated by Israel religion and society."

⁸¹ Although Schmidt sees this not as an authentic characterization but rather as a polemic against other practitioners of Yahwism. Schmidt "Taxonomy of Taboo," 256: "The dtr 'Canaanizing' of the various rituals or performers listed is clearly a rhetorical strategy designed to polemicize against formerly acceptable cults now competing with the contemporary dtr brand of Yahwism."

with Yahwism.⁸² Jeffers also argues that sorcerers were mischaracterized: “That practitioners in all ages have abused their knowledge and that these practices were also found in the neighbouring countries effectively helped the writers of the various OT texts concerned to stigmatize their practices. All these texts are polemic and therefore depict only a one-sided picture of these practitioners, i.e. the bad side.”⁸³ Schmidt and Dolansky both assert that the prohibitions are at least partially motivated by a desire to limit unofficial competition.⁸⁴

A more compelling reason for the prohibition of sorcery in the Old Testament can be found. Sorcery and all kinds of magic stand outside the proper covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people. Within the covenant relationship, Yahweh will provide for his people; they need no other supernatural power.⁸⁵ Divination is forbidden because Yahweh has given proper means for seeking his will and its revelation, as seen in prophecy, lots, Urim and

⁸² Schmidt, “Taxonomy of Taboo,” 253: “In sum, none of the practices listed in Deuteronomy 18 were condemned in pre-exilic prophetic traditions. Neither Hosea nor Amos, nor, for that matter, the Elijah-Elisha school stood in opposition to them. Two of the practices, human sacrifice and augury, were compatible with earlier Yahwistic religion and only later condemned in dtr circles. The remaining four, soothsaying, sorcery, divining, and charming, were not attested in pre-exilic texts. This might indicate that while these professions were compatible with earlier forms of Yahwism (admittedly the texts are silent on this point), they came to pose a threat to dtr ideology only by the exilic period or thereafter. When they do show up in later dtr texts or texts influenced by dtr ideology, they are depicted as illicit practices and outlawed.”

⁸³ Jeffers, *Magic and Divination*, 69-70.

⁸⁴ Dolansky, *Now You See It*, 100; see also Schmidt, “Taxonomy of Taboo,” 256-257.

⁸⁵ Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. (Trans. by Timothy J. Hallett; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 85, argues: “Magic is forbidden to the Israelite in his strife against his enemies. He consequently turns to Yahweh with the entire burden of his need.”

Thummim.⁸⁶ Elements of supernatural power are found within Israel's experience because Yahweh would grant such power to his servants. In the Old Testament, these are gifts for Yahweh to grant through his Spirit. Foreign magic introduced something foreign into Israel's relationship with Yahweh. Magical terms in the Old Testament are flat⁸⁷ for a reason: rather than sift through the various nuances of what is allowed or forbidden, the Old Testament does not intend that any magical practice be allowed. In a sense, every kind of magic is sorcery—from the perspective of the Old Testament, it undermines the social good.

Comparison of the ANE and Biblical Prohibitions of Sorcery

Meir Malul states that two basic types of comparison are possible when comparing cultures. Comparison on the grand scale is made by way of typology. This kind of comparison does not need to propose the existence of historical connections, but instead compares apparent similarities between cultures on the basis of common humanity.

Comparison can also be made at the historical level. At this level, proof of actual historical connections between cultures are sought in order to demonstrate the influence one culture exerted upon another. A plausible connection must be proposed; time and geographical distance typically make a connection less likely.⁸⁸ Care must be taken to ensure that the proposed connection is genuine rather than coincidental; Jeffrey Tigay argues that a literary comparison requires

⁸⁶ Williams, *The Prophet and His Message*, 24-25: "All of these cultic and mantic practices are forbidden because they spring from a conception that is entirely at odds with biblical faith. They proceed on the fundamentally flawed notion that their practitioners are able somehow to obtain for themselves some measure of the divine power or knowledge, or are able to manipulate the deity in some way for their own ends."

⁸⁷ Dolansky, 37. Cf. also Jeff S. Anderson, "The Social Functions of Curses in the Hebrew Bible," *ZAW* 110 (1998), 225: "The Institution of witchcraft in ancient Israel has been so suppressed by the literature of the HB that it is difficult to tell exactly how the Institution might actually have functioned."

⁸⁸ Meir Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Studies* (AOAT 227. Neukirchen-Vluyn Verlag, 1990), 13-14.

some indication of complexity to demonstrate the relationship.⁸⁹ Without a direct historical connection, a typological connection may still be proposed but the reason for the apparent similarities remains unknown.

The Old Testament belongs to the historical stream of the ancient Near East, but it is a broad stream—both in its temporal sweep and in the cultures that comprised it. The Old Testament narrative claims early and ongoing cultural contact with Mesopotamia and Egypt. The Hebrew word for the magicians of Egypt (מַכְשֵׁפִים) is generally considered to be related to the Egyptian (*hry-tp*), “magician.” Daniel uses the term מַכְשֵׁפִים to describe some functionaries of the Babylonian royal court. The fact that Daniel uses the term when earlier Old Testament books did not do so suggests that the author of the book of Daniel had in some way become familiar with Babylonian functionaries. At the same time, the fact that Daniel also places מַכְשֵׁפִים in the Babylonian court suggests an intentional literary decision by the author of Daniel to use a term from earlier biblical narrative.

While the Old Testament belongs in the historical stream of the ancient Near East, it is less clear that biblical laws regarding magic are directly influenced by ancient Near Eastern law. Evidence of direct literary connections are lacking—the presence of the root כִּשַׁף by itself is insufficient. It is intriguing that NBL §7 and Exod 22:17 are both concerned with women as magical practitioners, however, they do not share any other clear literary similarities. NBL §7 does not mention כִּשַׁף, it specifies several locations or objects that the sorcery might be directed against, and it includes fines as punishment. Exod 22:17 lacks the corresponding details.

Similarly, while MAL A §47 and Lev 20:27 both begin with a man or a woman, MAL A §47 addresses sorcery while Lev 20:27 addresses mediums and spiritists. Lev 20:27 specifies death by stoning; no particular method of execution is mentioned in MAL A §47. A lack of complexity in shared details makes it unlikely that there is a direct literary connection.

⁸⁹ Jeffrey H. Tigay “On Evaluating Claims of Literary Borrowing,” in *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, ed. Mark E. Cohen, et. al., (Bethesda, Md: CDL Press, 1993), 250-255. Tigay cites Albright that “it is not safe to assume original relationship or borrowing except where the motif is complex, forming a pattern” (251). Tigay argues that complexity of similarities can balance contextual dissimilarity, although fewer differences make a parallel more likely (255).

So what comparisons can be made, and what conclusions can be drawn from them? I will consider four areas: The legitimate practice of magic, legitimate practitioners of magic, women and sorcery, and magic and social disruption.

Legitimate Practice of Magic

In ancient Mesopotamia, magic could be legitimately practiced. Individuals could wear amulets or have incantations performed on their behalf. Figures like the *āšipu* are expected to perform magical acts. Sorcery is forbidden because of its disruptive and antisocial potential. Hittite attitudes toward magic appear to have been generally similar. In ancient Egypt, magic is only forbidden or warned against when it poses a risk to crucial social institutions.

In the Old Testament, there is no legitimate practice of magic. Magical acts performed by foreigners are treated with suspicion or disapproval. Apparently magical acts performed by members of the Israelite community are not described as magical acts. Divination is forbidden, because it seeks to manipulate God into responding. But God has ordained other ways by which he will communicate. Legitimate inquiries can be made of him by the means he has ordained.

Legitimate Practitioners of Magic

Mesopotamian and Hittite ritual texts give evidence of legitimate practitioners of magic. On the surface, this appears to be true of Israel as well—as Dolansky argues, prophets are the legitimate practitioners of divination and priests are the legitimate practitioners of ritual.⁹⁰ But this is true only on the surface. Prophets and priests are not depicted with magical terminology. When Joseph and Daniel interpret dreams, they explain that the ability to do so does not depend on human skill but upon divine empowerment. The Old Testament narratives take care to distance the extraordinary acts of Yahweh's servants from magical practices.

Women and Sorcery

Both NBL §7 and Exod 22:17 address the practice of sorcery by women. Women clearly could practice sorcery. But it is not clear that sorcery was generally considered a female practice. Ḫattušili wins a case against Armadattas, his wife, and sons. Most of the individuals accused in the harem trial were men. They may not all have practiced

⁹⁰ Dolansky, *Now You See It*, 100.

sorcery, since the list of the accused and the papyri describing the magical acts are separate documents. However, the list of the accused does include several priests, scribes and magicians, and the papyrus describing the magical act names the chamberlain Paibakemon directly and at least some of the other “great enemies.” The incantations which Abusch cites to argue that witches were typically female address both male and female sorcerers at various times. RIH 78/20, from Ugarit, consistently addresses an unknown male sorcerer.⁹¹

Sefati and Klein argue that the feminine form of Exod 22:17 reflects, in the earliest stratum of biblical law, the Mesopotamian view that women were more likely than men to practice sorcery.⁹² They argue that biblical narrative and prophecy connect sorcery to women whenever sorcery is not included in a list of proscribed behaviors.⁹³ Further support is marshaled from the account of Saul and the witch at Endor (1 Sam 28) and the false prophetesses condemned by Ezek 13.⁹⁴ They discount the counterevidence that male sorcerers, such as the sorcerers in Pharaoh’s court and among the wise men of Babylon, are described in the Old Testament because these individuals are foreigners. While these sorcerers are foreigners, so is Jezebel—Sefati and Klein’s key narrative example.⁹⁵ It is not unambiguously clear that the feminine participle indicates a general cultural belief connecting women and sorcery. The data does not support a simple contention that sorcery was predominantly the realm of women.

Magic and Social Order

According to Moshe Greenberg, cuneiform law collections were

⁹¹ J. N. Ford, “RIH 78/20,” 154, notes, “the perpetrator of the sorcery... is addressed in the second person masculine singular throughout the entire extant portion of the incantation.”

⁹² Sefati and Klein, “The Law of the Sorceress,” 188.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 177-178

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

concerned with promoting just and orderly societies.⁹⁶ Social disruption is the great concern for ancient Near Eastern law. The apologetic prologues to the laws of Ur-Nammu, Lipit-Ishtar, and Hammurabi note the role that the king played in restoring and promoting economic justice and social order. Telipinu's edict is similar in this regard: It describes reforms necessitated by past abuses and establishes procedures that will avoid future disruption. Telipinu's edict includes rules for succession, limiting violence to establish kingship, the proper storing of grain, and procedure regarding murder and sorcery, all of which represented a concern for social order. Good argues that "it is clear that sorcery and black magic were considered throughout the ancient Near East to be dangerous and destructive of social harmony."⁹⁷ Magical practices in the ancient Near East did not require sanction until they caused harm or social disruption. Sorcery is forbidden because it causes harm or social disruption.

The Old Testament is also concerned with social order. Biblical law includes provisions to protect the poor and needy and to maintain a person's social standing. Schmidt argues that a concern for social coherence may undergird the deuteronomistic prohibition of magic⁹⁸ as other ancient Near Eastern laws did. However, biblical law has a clear religious root. Good states,

One finds in Israel a religious ethic that is sometimes explicitly adduced in explanation of legislation, whereas Babylonian ethics would seem to be based entirely upon social or utilitarian considerations. The religious rationale for Israelite ethics may, to be sure, have been overlaid upon a previously existent social structure. But the penetration of religion puts a face on the details of Israelite law different from the one presented by the religiously neutral Babylonian legal formulations.⁹⁹

This is true of the prohibitions of magic. In Lev 19–20, the religious

⁹⁶ Moshe Greenberg, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law," in *Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 28.

⁹⁷ Good, "Capital Punishment," 956.

⁹⁸ Schmidt, "Taxonomy of Taboo," 258.

⁹⁹ Good, "Capital Punishment," 977.

nature of the prohibitions of divination is suggested by the phrase “I am Yahweh” in Lev 19:31 and the promise that Yahweh himself will set his face against those who turn to mediums and spiritists in Lev 20:6. In Deut 18, the prohibition of sorcery and divination is placed within a religious context. Verse 9 speaks of entering the land the Yahweh is giving them, reflecting back on their history with him. Verses 12–13 describe the magical practices in 10–11 as detestable to Yahweh and call for the people to be blameless before Yahweh. Exod 22:17 is not as closely connected to a directly religious grounding, but Kaufmann argues that the Covenant Code includes the Ten Commandments.¹⁰⁰ Exod 20:1 grounds the Covenant Code as a whole, in Yahweh’s acts of salvation.

Conclusion

In this paper, I set out to compare the prohibitions of sorcery found in the ancient Near East law collections with the prohibitions found in the Old Testament. After examining the ancient Near East law collections in their context, I argue that the ancient Near East understood sorcery as harmful or socially disruptive magic, that sorcery was practiced by a relatively wide range of individuals, although the ancient Near East data are largely limited to the concerns of the literate classes. After examining the biblical laws concerning sorcery, I contend that the Old Testament proscribes all magic as incompatible with the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people. In seeking to compare the ancient Near Eastern and biblical prohibitions of sorcery, I argue that while the Old Testament shows some awareness of magical terminology and practices from the ancient Near East, it does not directly adapt any of the ancient Near Eastern laws concerning sorcery. Comparing the ancient Near Eastern and biblical data regarding sorcery, I find that neither set of data clearly confirms the stereotype of the female sorceress, and that the biblical prohibition of sorcery includes all practices and practitioners of magic while the ancient Near East prohibitions do not. Finally, this paper argued that the difference between the ancient Near Eastern and biblical prohibitions was religious in nature and due to the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people.

I did not consider the relationship of the prohibitions and texts concerning magic to other historical magical artifacts. Such artifacts

¹⁰⁰ Kaufmann, *History*, 392, states that Moses’ book of the covenant “is the archaic code which is transmitted seriatim in Exod. chapters 20-23.”

might offer insight into the way that magic was practiced. That remains an area that could be profitably studied in the future.

**Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in a ‘Sea of Gospels’:
An Apologetic for the Four Canonical Gospels**
Mark VanderWerf

Dan Brown’s wildly popular *The Da Vinci Code* is an exception to the rule that truth is stranger than fiction. Brown’s view of the biblical canonization process is illustrated through a conversation between Teabing, an expert in early Christian origins, and a truth-inquiring character named Sophie. To Sophie’s astonishment, Teabing describes the origins of the gospels:

“More than *eighty* gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them.”
“Who chose which gospels to include?” Sophie asked.
“Aha!” Teabing burst in with enthusiasm. “The fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great.”¹

The novel’s egregious claims about the beginnings of Christianity and the formation of the Bible are far-fetched and have repeatedly been shown to be false.² However, what Brown states in popular fiction some prestigious scholars of early Christianity advocate in academia. Elaine Pagels (Princeton University), Karen King (Harvard Divinity School), and Bart Ehrman (University of North Carolina) all, in various fashions, argue that the four canonical gospels do not adequately represent the diversity of Christian belief in the first

¹ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 231.

² See for example Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel Code* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004).

centuries of the church. In fact, the four canonical gospels were imposed upon the broader church in a theological and political power play.

Pagels, author of *The Gnostic Gospels* and *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*, tells of her intellectual and spiritual crisis while studying in Harvard's doctoral program in early Christianity. In her attempt to find "real Christianity" she soon discovered that the four canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) were not the only gospels circulated in the early church but were only four among many. Such an epiphany, she writes, set her studies and career in the direction of answering particular questions: "Why had the church decided that these [gnostic] texts were 'heretical' and that only the canonical gospels were 'orthodox'?" Who made those decisions, and under what conditions?"³ Pagels concludes that the selection of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John came relatively late and was driven by "political concerns."⁴

Likewise, Karen King argues that people typically study the early church backwards through the lens of the Christological creeds and Biblical canons of the fourth and fifth centuries. She suggests that if Christian development were studied chronologically, the formation of the four-fold gospel would clearly be perceived to have arisen "through experimentation, compromise, and very often conflict."⁵ She concludes that the earliest Christians held diverse theological views and were far more tolerant of these views than today's orthodox Christianity.

Bart Ehrman argues in a similar fashion. According to Ehrman, the modern diversity of Christian belief – from Roman Catholics to Kentucky snake-handlers, and from Eastern Orthodox priests to television faith healers – pales in comparison to the religious diversity of the first three centuries of the Christian era. This diversity, however, was, to use Ehrman's words, "stamped out" by the church.⁶

³ Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003), 32-33.

⁴ Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 33.

⁵ Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary Magdala* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2003), 157 quoted in Ben Witherington, *The Gospel Code* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 118.

⁶ Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

He concludes that the triumph of the Biblical canon over against their competitors was politically advantageous. He writes, “It is conceivable that if the form of Christianity that established itself as dominant had not done so, Christianity would never have become a major religion within the Roman Empire. Had that happened, the empire might never have adopted Christianity as its official religion.”⁷

Pagels, King, and Ehrman represent a growing movement of historical revisionism of the early church that seeks to question the origins of the Christian gospels and to present a new understanding of the early church. Considered together, their basic argument is essentially this:

- Premise One: In the earliest forms of Christianity, many equally acceptable and potentially valid gospels were in wide circulation in addition to the canonical gospels.
- Premise Two: The four-canonical gospels were chosen to be part of the authoritative canon relatively late in Christian development (4th and 5th century).
- Premise Three: The inclusion of the four gospels and the exclusion of the others stemmed largely from a motive for political power.
- Conclusion: Therefore, what we now know as the four canonical gospels arose out of oppression and does not represent the diversity of belief of the earliest Christians.

The significance of the argument is manifold. If their argumentation were true, the Christian Scriptures would need revision and likely need to be re-opened; Christian orthodoxy would need to be redefined.⁸ However, examination of each of the three premises will demonstrate that they are skeptical, exaggerated, or entirely fabricated. Thus, this essay will demonstrate that the four canonical gospels are the earliest and most reliable, and that they alone were considered the authoritative gospels of early Christianity.

⁷ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 6.

⁸ See for example Elaine Pagels, “The Secret Gospel of Thomas,” *Fresh Air*, NPR, 4 June 2003. Pagels outlines what needs revision in Christianity based upon her claims.

Examination of Premise One

Historical revisionists like Pagels, King, and Ehrman have suggested that the earliest forms of Christianity knew many more gospels than the four that have been passed down to us. However, a careful examination of the evidence will demonstrate that such claims are grossly overstated and lack substantiating evidence. This will become evident by looking at the dating of the manuscripts; secondly, by investigating the number of “gospels” in circulation; and third, by showing that the alternative gospels were not equally acceptable or valid as the revisionists claim.

First, critics of the four-fold gospel argue that the canonization of these four was a late development and occurred in the late fourth century and early fifth century. Therefore, we ought to strive for an earlier form of Christianity that pre-dates this canonization. However, what these critics fail to recognize is that in striving for a primitive Christianity they are caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, they want an earlier version of Christianity that pre-dates the fourth century’s official recognition of the canon, but on the other hand they refuse to accept as authoritative the earliest documents that the earliest church offers – the four gospels.

While the exact dating of the four gospels is still debated, most scholars agree that the four had been written and were being circulated in their present forms by the end of the first century with John being the last to be written. Adolf von Harnack argues for an early dating of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) due to the shocking silence in them of the destruction of Jerusalem.⁹ Even William Petersen, a scholar sympathetic to Pagels, King, and Ehrman, suggests the following dates for the gospels: Mark (c. 70), Matthew (c. 85), Luke (90), and John (90).¹⁰ In contrast, the earliest non-canonical gospels are dated, even by those sympathetic to them, to no earlier than 125 AD. But even then, the vast majority of these non-canonical gospels are dated to the mid-second century or later. By all accounts, the earliest forms of the gospels which shaped the earliest Christian church are the four canonical gospels and pre-date the alternatives by half a century or more. Thus, it is the historical revisionists who are advocating for a later, less primitive version of

⁹ F.F. Bruce, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 16.

¹⁰ Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels?*, 9.

the gospel narratives.¹¹

A second assumption laden within Premise One is that there were *many* alternative gospels in circulation in the first few centuries of Christianity. While the revisionists are correct to state that there were more gospels than just the four canonical ones being circulated, it is a misleading overstatement to state that there were *many* such gospels. Pagels, for instance, cites her shocking discovery that her professor, Helmut Koester, “had file cabinets filled with ‘gospels’ and ‘apocrypha’ written during the first centuries” as evidence of the great multitude of early gospels.¹² William Petersen similarly claims that there existed in the early church “a sea of multiple gospels.”¹³ Upon more careful observation, however, these claims to a “sea of multiple gospels” turn out to be misleading. C.E. Hill examines Petersen’s claim, but finds that his “sea” of gospels consisted of only nine non-canonical gospels circulating before 175 AD.

More ambitiously than Petersen, Ehrman lists sixteen alternative gospels but includes in his list gospels dated as late as the fifth century. Additionally, Ehrman includes among these sixteen gospels some that are highly questionable. He includes the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* which stretches the genre of “gospel” to its limits, and also includes the *Secret Gospel of Mark* which Ehrman himself admits might be an eighteenth or twentieth century forgery.¹⁴ It seems clear from both Ehrman and Petersen that the “sea of gospels” to which they are referring does not include hundreds or even dozens of gospels, but only a handful. Nonetheless, their claim to the multiplicity of gospels in circulation is significant, but were they circulated and used widely as they suggest?

It is virtually impossible to demonstrate how widely a work was read in the ancient world but there are helpful indicators. Archaeological discoveries of early manuscripts and papyri provide snapshots of what texts were in existence and can give clues to their popularity and circulation. Admittedly, archaeology can only give

¹¹ It is possible that some might argue that the later gospels (i.e. *The Gospel of Thomas*) originated from an oral tradition that dated back to the first century, but this would be a speculative conjecture that seems to lack any known textual evidence.

¹² Pagels, *Beyond Belief*, 32-33.

¹³ Quoted in Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels?*, 2.

¹⁴ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, xi-xii.

suggestions about these things because each new discovery has the potential of overturning previously held assumptions. However, rather than reversing the traditional understanding of the origins of the gospels, recent archaeological discoveries continue to lend support to the authority and widespread use of the four-fold gospel.

The last two centuries have been a major watershed in manuscript discoveries. The nineteenth-century garbage dump discovery at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt unearthed 500,000 papyrus fragments and is the single most significant archaeological cache of Scriptures to be found. Scholars have identified seven fragments of canonical gospels that date to the second-century. In contrast, scholars have found two fragments of non-canonical gospels. The findings at Oxyrhynchus, not just the ones dating to the second century, have caused many scholars to conclude that the ratio of canonical to non-canonical gospel findings at Oxyrhynchus is 36 to 10.¹⁵ This ratio takes on more weight, when one understands the nature of these non-canonical gospels and the geographic area of Oxyrhynchus, Egypt.

The non-canonical gospels that Pagels, King, Ehrman, and others claim rivaled the canonical gospels are typically labeled as “gnostic” gospels. The terms “gnostic” and “gnosticism” will be discussed later, but for now it is sufficient to point out that gnostic beliefs were most concentrated in the second and third centuries in Egypt. Thus it is significant, that in the Egyptian Oxyrhynchus discovery, the canonical gospels still significantly outnumber the gnostic texts. While this certainly does not disprove the claim that there were many gospels widely circulated alongside the canonical ones, it ought to cause suspicion of those who boldly assert it as fact.

The third assertion within Premise One is that the non-canonical gospels were as equally acceptable and valid as the ones that eventually made their way into the Christian canon. But as we have noted above, the dating of these non-canonical writings is generally assumed to be no less than fifty years after the canonical writings. Their later dating would have put them at an immediate disadvantage.

Even more important than a text’s date was its authorship. Because Jesus was understood to be the founder of this new religion, its adherents wanted its sacred texts to be directly connected to him and his teachings. Thus, one of the key considerations for acknowledging a text as authoritative was its connection to Jesus’ apostles. Even though the four canonical gospels lack autographs, the church acknowledged the apostolic authority of the authors within

¹⁵ Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels?*, 13-18.

living memory of the gospels' writing.

One of the earliest attestations to the apostolic authorship of the gospels comes from Papias, in the early second century (perhaps as early as 100-110 AD)¹⁶. Although his actual writings have been lost to history, fragments have been preserved in the writings of the fourth century church historian Eusebius. Eusebius quotes Papias' early second century work to discuss the authorship of the gospels Mark and Matthew: "Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord's sayings and doings" and "Matthew compiled the *Sayings* in the Aramaic language..."¹⁷ Papias' words carry even greater weight if Irenaeus' words (c. 180 AD) about him are true, for Irenaeus claimed that Papias knew John, the disciple of Jesus.¹⁸ Just as Mark was not an original disciple of Jesus but of Peter, Luke was not one of the original disciples but was a companion to the Apostle Paul as can be seen in his use of "we" throughout the Gospel of Luke's counterpart, Acts. C.E. Hill also notes a repeated pattern throughout the second and third centuries of various church fathers referring to the four gospels as being "handed down from the Apostles."¹⁹

New Testament scholar and historian, F.F. Bruce makes an apt point contrasting the anonymity of the canonical gospels and the claims of apostolic authorship by the later non-canonical gospels. "It is noteworthy that, while the four canonical Gospels could afford to be published anonymously, the apocryphal Gospels which began to appear from the mid-second century onwards claimed (falsely) to be written by apostles or other persons associated with the Lord."²⁰ The non-canonical gospels were seeking to gain an audience by claiming apostolic connection, even though their late dating made it virtually

¹⁶ Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels?*, 211.

¹⁷ Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, trans. G.A. Williamson (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 3.39.15.

¹⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V.33.4, quoted in Eusebius, 3.39.2.

¹⁹ He cites Irenaeus, the Muratorian Fragment, Serapion, and Clement of Alexandria as using the "handed down from the apostles" formula in connection with the four canonical gospels.

²⁰ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Basingstoke: Pickering & Inglis, 1983), p.1 quoted in D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p.138.

impossible that they were actually authored by any of the apostles or those directly connected to them.

Finally, those who claim that the non-canonical gospels were equally viable options fail to recognize the inherent contradiction of such a statement. It is axiomatic that the earliest gospel traditions (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and the even earlier Pauline corpus present the earliest Christians (following the lead of Jesus) as accepting the Hebrew Scriptures as authoritative, seeing themselves as a continuation of Judaism. The earliest Christians affirmed traditional Jewish beliefs of monotheism and the goodness of the physical creation. Yet even a cursory reading of the non-canonical gospels reveals a very different belief system, one that would be incompatible with the former.

The non-canonical gospels that began to arise in the mid-second century are generally categorized with the umbrella term, “gnostic.” In reality, gnosticism differed greatly depending on the time and place. There was no one unified gnostic group, but many gnostic sects each with slightly different theological beliefs. Yet historian Frank Roberts, in order to illustrate the basic teachings of gnosticism, condenses the core gnostic beliefs into an imaginary creedal statement mirroring the Apostles’ Creed. A gnostic confession of faith might have looked like the following:

“I believe in an evil, Old Testament God of war and retribution, creator of this evil world.
I believe in a good, New Testament God of spirit and light.
And I believe in Jesus Christ, emanation from the good God, who appeared on earth as a phantom to reveal – to those people capable of understanding them – the secrets of how a human soul can escape the material world and be united with the good God.
I believe in the good spirit imprisoned in the evil body of each person.
I believe that sex and marriage are wrong because they cause more souls to be imprisoned.
And I believe in no resurrection of the body.”²¹

According to Roberts, the major tenets of gnosticism directly contradict the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures about monotheism

²¹ Frank Roberts, *To All Generations: A Study of Church History* (Grand Rapids: Bible Way, 1981), p32-33.

and the inherent goodness of the physical creation. Additionally, gnostics denied the very core teaching of the earliest Christians – the bodily resurrection. It becomes clear from this that the gnostic gospels could not be accepted as Scripture because the earliest Christians had already accepted the Hebrew Scriptures as authoritative (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16) and because they contradicted their most basic beliefs. To accept the gnostic texts would be self-contradictory.

Thus the premise that the earliest forms of Christianity knew and used many equally acceptable gospels besides the four canonical gospels has been proven to be doubtful, if not entirely false. The *earliest* gospels, by all accounts, are the canonical gospels that pre-date the competitors by fifty years or more. The claim that they were widely known, used, and circulated lacks solid archaeological evidence. Finally, it has been shown that because the second and third-century gnostic texts contradicted the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures, they would not have been seen as possible candidates for inclusion in the Christian canon.

Examination of Premise Two

The second premise of the historical revisionists suggests that the inclusion of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John into the canon and the exclusion of the other gospels was a relatively late development in the history of Christianity. However, a careful look at the historical record suggests that the four canonical gospels were seen to be “canonical” quite early – at least by the mid-second century. Before we consider this, however, it is necessary to briefly look at the term “canon” and its possible usages.

The term “canon” seems to have been borrowed from the construction world and simply means “measuring stick.” Therefore a canon is something by which other things are measured. In terms of the Scriptures, a book was included in the “canon” if it met certain criteria: agreement to the apostolic faith as handed down by the apostles (the “rule of faith”), apostolic authorship, and catholic or universal usage.²² Additionally, Bruce Metzger identifies two ways that the word canon can be used. A canon can be seen as either a “collection of authoritative books” or an “authoritative collection of

²² Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its origin, development, and significance*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 251-254.

books.”²³ The distinction is important in understanding the revisionists claim that the four gospels were canonized relatively late. Using the latter definition of the canon as an authoritative collection of books, the revisionists would be correct to say that such a list occurred relatively late. The church did not officially make an authoritative list of any of its books until the synods of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 and 419 AD).²⁴ As will be seen, however, the church, using the former understanding of canon, saw the four gospels as part of a collection of authoritative books already in the second century.

It was not until the Council of Carthage that the church unequivocally declared: “Besides the canonical Scriptures, nothing shall be read in church under the name of the divine Scriptures.”²⁵ However, there is a long tradition from the fourth century dating all the way back to the second century of recognizing the four gospels as authoritative and thus canonical in the sense of being a collection of authoritative texts.²⁶ Athanasius’ Festal Letter (367 AD), thirty years before the Synod of Carthage’s declaration, was the first listing of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as they are now recognized. In his letter he includes the four canonical gospels and no others. Earlier in the fourth century, Eusebius listed the accepted Scriptural writings in his *Ecclesiastical History*. Paramount among the New Testament writings, says Eusebius was the “holy quartet of the gospels” – clearly referring to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.²⁷

Eusebius’ “holy quartet of the gospels” was recognized far earlier than the fourth century; in fact, it can be traced as early as the second century. One of the most significant sources for identifying this four-fold gospel comes from the *Muratorian Fragment*, named after its discoverer, Lodovico Muratori. While the exact dating of the fragment has not been resolved, the best evidence suggests that it

²³ Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 1.

²⁴ Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 238.

²⁵ Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 238.

²⁶ I will be hereafter using “canon” and “canonical” in this sense of a “collection of authoritative texts.”

²⁷ Eusebius. *The History of the Church*, 3.25.1.

originates no later than 200 AD.²⁸ The opening lines of the fragment are missing, and so the document begins "...the third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke. ... The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples." No serious scholar disputes that the first two missing gospels are Matthew and Mark. Therefore, by the end of the second century there is a fairly clear recognition of the four gospels, without mention of other gospels.

Irenaeus, writing at about 180 AD, makes the earliest and most compelling case for the four canonical gospels in his work, *Against Heresies*. He writes:

For as there are four quarters of the world in which we are, and four universal winds, and as the Church is dispersed over all the earth, and the Gospel is the pillar and base of the Church and the breath of life, so it is natural that it should have four pillars, breathing immortality from every quarter and kindling the life of men anew. Whence it is manifest that the Word, the architect of all things, who sits upon the cherubim and holds all things together, having been manifested to men, has given us the Gospel in fourfold form, but held together by one Spirit.²⁹

Irenaeus' strong defense of the four canonical gospels cause many scholars to conclude that Irenaeus was merely summarizing what was already assumed by most Christians. Critics like Pagels and Ehrman, however, are not convinced. They see Irenaeus as an innovator of a brand new canon that was not widely accepted before him.

In response to the critics, it seems doubtful that Irenaeus' polemical work written in Lyons, France, would have had such an influence so quickly and so widely. C.E. Hill cites a number of other early Christian authors in diverse parts of the Roman Empire who, relatively soon after Irenaeus' work, argue in similar fashion for the four gospels – Hippolytus of Rome (c. 202 AD), Tertullian of Carthage (c. 207-212 AD), and Origen of Alexandria (c. 226 AD). It seems improbable that Irenaeus would have so much influence in such diverse geographic areas so quickly. It seems more likely that Irenaeus was in fact setting forth succinctly what the majority of the Christian church already held as authoritative apostolic tradition.

Therefore, while it is true that the four gospels were not

²⁸ Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 194.

²⁹ Quoted in F.F. Bruce, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 28.

recognized by an official council until the late fourth century, it is not true to assert that it took that long to recognize the four gospels as authoritative. In contrast to the claims made by the historical revisionists, the evidence shows that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (and no others) were recognized as the four-fold gospel no later than 180 AD.

Examination of Premise Three

The third major argument used by historical revisionists to cast doubt upon the standard four gospels is to claim that they were chosen for inclusion in the canon in order to gain political power in the Roman Empire. Since Constantine endorsed a version of Christianity that accepted Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and spurned their rival gnostic gospels, it was politically expedient for the church to officially recognize the gospels which the Emperor himself supported. Thus the inclusion of the four canonical gospels owes more to politics than to piety.

It has already been noted, however, that the four canonical gospels were seen as authoritative well before the fourth century and before the church could even dream of achieving any political power. N.T. Wright cuts through this argument and demonstrates the irony of those of who advocate it:

[T]he contemporary myth [referring to the revisionists' claims] gets things exactly the wrong way round. It isn't the case that the canonical New Testament is politically and socially quiescent, colluding with empire, while the Jesus whom we meet in the Nag Hammadi texts and similar documents is politically and socially subversive, so dangerous that they had to be suppressed. It's the other way round, and this may be among the most telling points we have to recognize for today. You may salve your own conscience by embracing Gnosticism, by telling yourself how very wicked the world is and how you are going to escape it once and for all by following the path of spiritual self-discovery and enlightenment. But if Caesar takes any notice at all, all he will do is sneer at you and go on his way to yet more triumphs of sheer power.³⁰

The irony, as Wright points out, is that the canonical gospels portray a

³⁰ Wright, N.T. "Decoding The DaVinci Code: The Challenge of Historic Christianity to Post-Modern Fantasy." *Response* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2005). <http://www.spu.edu/depts/uc/response/summer2k5/features/davincicode.asp>.

Jesus who claimed to be Lord and demanded absolute allegiance whereas the gnostic texts might be considered apolitical. If the power hungry Constantine did in fact have a say in the choosing of the gospels, it would seem more likely for him to choose gospels that would not have challenged his authority or compromised his subjects' allegiance to him.

Additionally, the historical revisionists overestimate the significance of the official endorsement of the four gospels by the Synods of Hippo and Carthage. Their official recognition of the four gospels did not impose them upon the church, but merely reflected what the church already had known. Bruce Metzger summarizes the point well:

Neither religious nor artistic works really gain anything by having an official stamp put on them. If, for example, all the academies of music in the world were to unite in declaring Bach and Beethoven to be great musicians, we should reply, 'Thank you for nothing; we knew that already.' And what the musical public can recognize unaided, those with spiritual discernment in the early Church were able to recognize in the case of their sacred writings through what Calvin called the interior witness of the Holy Spirit.³¹

Conclusion

Pagels, King, Ehrman and other like-minded revisionist historians seek to portray early Christianity as a gospel free-for-all. Gnostic gospels, dating to the second and third centuries but claiming apostolic authorship, they argue, were widely circulated and in many places rivaled the use of the four canonical gospels. They argue that the selection of the four gospels came late in Christian development and stemmed from a political power grab.

The evidence – historical, archaeological, and textual – suggests that such claims are ungrounded. The earliest Christianity knew four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – and they were circulated and seen to be authoritative by mid-second century. There is virtually no evidence to suggest that gnostic gospels rivaled the canonical gospels, even in the gnostic hotbed of Egypt. And finally, there is no reason to suppose that Constantine had any influence in selecting the Christian gospels, nor any reason to believe that he would have selected the canonical gospels as over the politically less threatening gnostic gospels.

³¹ Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 287-288.

Thus it seems that Pagels, King, and Ehrman are wishfully looking for a time in the first centuries of Christianity when *their* views of canonicity were acceptable. Ben Witherington's observations regarding Karen King become perhaps true for the other revisionists. "In King's view the earliest Christians modeled wide diversity, and we are called to 'emulate their struggles to make Christianity in our own day.' So the agenda is laid bare: it's our job not merely to rewrite the history of ancient Christianity but to remake modern Christianity."³² The historical revisionists' true motive, it seems, is not to do serious history but to remake Christianity in the image of themselves.

³² Ben Witherington, *The Gospel Code*, 119.

**John Calvin and the Authority of the Fathers:
An Interaction with A. N. S. Lane's Ancillary View**

Joshua C. Smith

John Calvin, as one of the major figures of the Reformation, is assumed by many to take a negative stance toward the authority of the church fathers. People accuse him of, in the spirit of the Reformation, lumping the church fathers together with all the other Catholics, taking them to task in order to get back to the Bible. Accordingly, they assign to him their own view: that the only proper tradition is no tradition.¹ They claim the Bible was Calvin's only authority, as per *sola scriptura*.

This entirely negative view is dispelled with even a cursory examination of the text of any of Calvin's works. His writings reveal a remarkable amount of dialogue with the fathers. More than simply citing them, at times Calvin uses their comments (especially Augustine's) to state his point, claiming their views as the proper interpretation of a passage or the correct view on a topic. Furthermore, a careful comparison of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with the writings of the fathers reveals that oftentimes Calvin's thinking is actually borrowed or inherited directly

¹ W. Stanford Reid, *The Present Significance of Calvin's View of Tradition* (Redhill, Surrey: Sovereign Grace Union, 1966), 2.

from the fathers even in the absence of a citation.² So, implicitly and explicitly, Calvin uses and largely approves of the fathers.

Yet, there is tension as well. Calvin does not always agree with the fathers and at times his criticism takes the form of unforgivably harsh rhetoric. While Calvin uses the fathers in his writing he is most certainly not uncritical. The nature of this tension between ascription and approval on the one hand and criticism and dismissal on the other, leads to the question: does Calvin hold the church fathers to be authoritative and, if so, in what sense?

State of the Question

Scholarship on John Calvin's view and usage of the church fathers has been steadily increasing since the middle of the 20th century. This is due largely to the advent of three major works identified by van Oort in his essay "John Calvin and the Church Fathers" which is itself notable.³ They are the two volume *Saint Augustin dans l'Oeuvre de Jean Calvin* by Luchesius Smits, *Het Kerk- en Dogmahistorisch Element in de Werken van Johannes Calvijn* by R. J. Mooj and *The Function of the Patristic Writings in the Thought of*

² This comment is based on the many instances which have been identified by editors (especially McNeil) and scholars (especially Lane, Smits, and Mooj in the works listed in note 4) where Calvin is borrowing or paraphrasing the work of one of the fathers. Not all of these conclusions are trustworthy, granted. But it does seem that many of them are legitimate. It is also helpful to note that the notion of intellectual property as it exists today did not exist in Calvin's day, thus his citations are of a different kind than modern citations.

³ Johannes van Oort, "John Calvin and the Church Fathers" in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Caolingians to the Maruists* ed. Irena Backus, 2:867-88, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997).

John Calvin by W. N. Todd.⁴ These three works were the first plows through the field of Calvin's sources. More recent is *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* by Anthony N. S. Lane.⁵ Lane's book is the current gold standard on this topic, responsibly dealing with the above works and parsing their weaknesses and strengths.

Lane's work is especially helpful in that it identifies, through an extended annotated bibliography, the vast array of commentary about Calvin's view of the church fathers scattered in various works on Calvin and his theology. Also helpful, Lane groups current scholarship on Calvin's use and view of the fathers into three categories.⁶ The first compares Calvin's theology with those whom he cites. The second focuses on Calvin's use and view of the fathers. In the last category are those studies which explore how Calvin was formed by his sources.⁷

As concerns the question of the authority of the church fathers for Calvin, Smits along with Mooj, Todd, and van Oort, all answer positively.⁸ Calvin did assign a degree of authority to the church fathers, although considered them to be subordinate to Scripture. The exact nature of this authority (beyond its subjugation) is largely left unstated. There are a number of lesser works, as previously

⁴ Luchsius Smits, *Saint Augustin dans l'Oeuvre de Jean Calvin* 2 vols. (Assen: van Gorcum, 1956). Due to language limitations, I have consulted Smit's article ("L'Autorité de Saint Augustin dans 'L'Institution Chrétienne' de Jean Calvin," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 45 (1950): 670-87.) in an effort to gain a window into Smits' opinions on the topic. Although the article was published several years before his two-volume set, Lane's assessment of Smits' larger work seems to coincide with the content of the article. R. J. Mooj, *Het Kerk-en Dogmahistorisch Element in de Werken van Johannes Calvijn* (Wageningen: H. Veenman, 1962). Again due to language limitations, Mooj's work has been consulted via an English summary of the work by the author attached to his work. William Newton Todd, *The Function of the Patristic Writings in the Thought of John Calvin* Th.D. Thesis, (New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1964).

⁵ A. N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999).

⁶ See Lane, *Student*, 15 for his assessment.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Mooj's position is based on my assumed understanding of his work, described in footnote 63 below.

mentioned, which oppose these heavy-weights, claiming that Calvin saw the fathers only as, at best, corroborating evidence rather than authorities.⁹

For those who assert that Calvin does assign authority to the fathers, the nature of that authority has been a discussion of categories. Heiko Oberman in his article “*Quo Vadis, Petre? Tradition from Irenaeus to Humani Generis*” gives one of the most influential accounts of these categories.¹⁰ His categories of Tradition I, II and III were tweaked and expanded by Lane in “Scripture, Tradition and Church: An Historical Survey.”¹¹ Lane opposes Oberman, claiming that the Reformers were using the fathers as ancillary authorities rather than the Tradition I, coincidental view Oberman supports.¹² However, this is a misreading of Oberman, whose Tradition I view allows for an authoritative tradition that is not simply coincidental to scripture as Lane paints it.¹³ Lane’s view could be seen as a subset of Oberman’s with a marginal improvement in the added specificity resulting from using the term ancillary.

⁹ More will be said concerning these later. For a token example see Wyndham Mason Southgate, *John Jewel and the Problem of Doctrinal Authority* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962).

¹⁰ Heiko Augustinus Oberman, “Quo vadis, Petre : The History of Tradition from Irenaeus to Humani Generis.” in *The Dawn of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 269-98. This is a work that has been republished. The content was originally given as the Dudleian Lecture for 1961-2 at Harvard University on May 3rd, 1962 and was subsequently first published with the current title but further subtitled “The Dudleian Lecture 1962” in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* 16, no. 3 (1963): 225-55. His work is dependent on Fr. George H. Tavard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church: The Crisis of the Protestant Reformation* (London: Burns and Oates, 1959). Ultimately, the discussion goes back to the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order per note 1 in A. N. S. Lane, “Scripture, Tradition and Church : An Historical Survey” *Vox Evangelica* 9 (1975): 37-55.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 42-45.

¹³ For Lane’s accusation: Ibid, 38. Footnote 6. For Oberman’s opinion see Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 53–65.

Purpose and Thesis

This essay will address Lane's second category of work, exploring Calvin's relationship to the fathers. I will accept Lane's position that Calvin hold to an Ancillary View of the fathers' authority and offer some basic evidences for it. I will examine Calvin's view of the fathers in four samples of his corpus: the Prefatory Address to King Francis, the discussion on free will in Chapter 2 of Book 2 of his *Institutes*, his statements against Pighius, and his statements at the Lausanne Disputation.¹⁴ This paper will conclude that an analysis of the aforementioned documents does lead one to understand Calvin's view the church fathers as authoritative in the sense of A.N.S. Lane's Ancillary View of authority.¹⁵ The analysis will take into account Calvin's explicit statements and his implicit understanding as represented in his patristic citation/commentary, correlating individual points with the secondary literature. Furthermore, observations will be made concerning what an "ancillary authority" looks like in the context of Calvin's work.

The Ancillary View

In order to give evidence for the Ancillary View it is first important to establish its definition. Lane traces its origin back to a medieval period premise that was carried over into the Reformation era.¹⁶ This idea claims that in some cases "ecclesiastical teaching actually contradicts Scripture."¹⁷ The translation of this premise to the Reformers led them to hold all such material as suspect and in need of evaluation compared to a standard of truth. They identified this standard as the scripture.

¹⁴ The section of the *Institutes* has been chosen due to the nature of its interesting interplay between Calvin and the fathers including distinct disagreement and even some verbal abuse of the fathers by Calvin. There will be references to passages outside of those sections due to their being in the relevant secondary literature.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 42-45.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 42. By this is meant the understanding of the fathers so named, not the label which that understanding was assigned. The ancillary view as such is a historical category only, no Reformer claimed, "I hold to the ancillary view."

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

It must be clarified that this is not meant to imply that Calvin, or any of the Reformers, advocated a wholesale rejection of tradition as such. What is at issue here is a very particular element of tradition—the Catholic Church’s extra-scriptural, ecclesiastical teaching—which the Reformers questioned.¹⁸ This does not mean they rejected the notion of extra-scriptural, ecclesiastical teaching tradition as such, but only that they rejected the Roman Church’s contemporary presentation of that tradition. Also, the reformers “did allow for an interpretive tradition not adding to Scripture but did not see either this tradition or ecclesiastical teaching as infallible.”¹⁹ Interpretive traditions are authoritative, but only “as a tool to be used to help the church understand [Scripture].” The Ancillary View, then, is not a dismissal of tradition in any form. Rather, it is a subjugation of tradition in all its forms to the measure of scripture.

In providing evidence for assigning this view to Calvin, several elements must be present in his teaching. First, a clear priority of the Scriptures over and against any other form of authority must be shown. This priority can be supported by demonstrating that Calvin critiqued the fathers on the ground that they did not follow scripture. Finally, it must be shown that the fathers were assigned a certain level of authority in Calvin’s thought. Once established, the nature of that authority may be investigated. From this vantage point, a reflection on the results will give us stronger support for Lane’s view.

The Authority of Scripture over the Fathers

First, the centrality of Calvin’s priority of Scripture over against tradition must be demonstrated. This can be seen most clearly in his verbal sparring with Pighius. There Calvin says, “Perhaps (Pighius) will retort that God is not to be heard in Scripture alone but through the tradition of the church. Nonsense!”²⁰ Calvin’s rhetoric here attempts to emphasize the authority of the Word of God over the

¹⁸ Ibid, 42.

¹⁹ Ibid, 43.

²⁰ John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defense of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius* ed. A. N. S. Lane, tr. G. I. Davies, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 55. Henceforth referred to as BLW.

words of humans.²¹ The authority of the church is derived from the authority of Scripture. The church is “the pillar and support of the truth ...because God has entrusted his word to her so that it might be handed on by her ministry.”²² Even the consensus of the fathers does not sway his assertion of the primacy of scriptures.²³ Indeed, he views consensus differently than the Roman Catholics: “The only consensus of the church is that which is throughout suitably and fittingly in agreement with the word of God.”²⁴ In Calvin’s mind, there is only one authority by which things should be judged: scripture.

It is proper that Scripture be accorded the honor of having everything tested by reference to it. Whatever is proved by its authority should not be questioned further; on the other hand, nothing should be accepted except what is in conformity with it. Whatever is divergent from it should be condemned, so that the whole body of definition of the faith may depend on it alone and be founded on it *alone*.²⁵

Based on his explicit comments, Calvin considers scripture the only place where God speaks. It is the final standard by which truth is measured, and the principium of the Church’s authority, more important even than church consensus. Calvin’s priority is clear.

To this explicit evidence is added the implicit evidence of the centrality of scripture in Calvin’s argumentation. In the passage under scrutiny from *Institutes* this is evident. In chapter 2 of book 2, Calvin begins by introducing patristic confusion on the topic of the will.²⁶ Calvin tells the reader in his introduction to a section on the semantic distinctions of will, “Let us, therefore, first investigate the force of this term; then let us determine from the simple testimony of

²¹ BLW, 173 and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* ed. John T. McNeil, tr. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 4.8.9. Henceforth referred to as *Institutes*.

²² BLW, 65-66 and 138.

²³ BLW, 203 and 137-38.

²⁴ BLW, 80.

²⁵ BLW, 64. Emphasis mine.

²⁶ *Institutes*, 2.2.1-4.

Scripture what promise man, of his own nature, has for good or ill.”²⁷ He puts forth his main argument via Augustine contra the other fathers. While the heavy lifting of the construction of his thesis has been done generally via non-biblical distinctions and explanations, the high point of the beginning of the chapter, the apex of piety (in a chapter of a self-described instruction manual on Christian piety), emerges from scripture alone.²⁸ Although the meat of the chapter might seem to rest heavily on extra-biblical reasoning, Calvin’s intention is to emphasize the centrality of scripture as the foundation of his reasoning. He leads into this high point saying, “Now I come to a simple explanation of the truth concerning the nature of man.”²⁹ Twice he points forward to scripture as the center of his discussion. Later, after having explained more of this view without Scriptural references, Calvin reasserts his point through direct reference to the Word.³⁰ This scriptural frame forms both the starting point and the evaluative conclusion of his discussion, indicating its priority.

Calvin’s priority of scripture over tradition is well-documented in the secondary literature. Mooj agrees with this general assessment of Calvin’s argumentation saying that “the historical arguments were for Calvin merely a strengthening of his case. He took his main arguments always from the message of Holy Scripture.”³¹ Wendel affirms that, to Calvin, “the scriptures alone have a normative value for faith, which cannot be claimed for the Fathers of the Church.”³² “Every human authority was unimportant (to Calvin) compared to the divine authority of the Word of God,” claims Mooj.³³ Calvin holds, in Reid’s opinion, that the “consensus of biblical teaching” is the “final authority. The authority even of the fathers must always subordinate

²⁷ Ibid, 2.2.4.

²⁸ Ibid, 2.2.10.

²⁹ Ibid, 2.2.9.

³⁰ Ibid, 2.2.17.

³¹ Mooj, *Het Kenk*, 359.

³² Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* tr. Philip Mairet, (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 125.

³³ Mooj, *Het Kenk*, 358.

to scripture.”³⁴ For Calvin, the Spirit’s work of illumination implies that the authoritative interpretation of the church is no longer needed next to the supernaturally confirmed Word of God.³⁵

Critique of the Fathers

Having demonstrated that Calvin has a clear prioritization of Scripture, to establish the validity of Lane’s Ancillary View it is next necessary to show the basis for Calvin’s critique of the fathers. The discussion on free will in *Institutes* gives us a great example as here Calvin clearly and explicitly departs from the consensus of the fathers. He begins with a strong critique of the Greek fathers, who support the notion of humans having free will.

A little later it will be quite evident that these opinions to which we have referred are utterly false. Further, even though the Greeks above the rest – and Chrysostom especially among them – extol the ability of the human will, yet all the ancients, save Augustine, so differ, waver, or speak confusedly on this subject, that almost nothing certain can be derived from their writings.³⁶

Here it is apparent that not only is Calvin willing to disagree with these authors, but he is willing to downplay them rhetorically. He makes light of them and picks on the diversity of their views. A little later he accuses them of trying to “harmonize the doctrine of Scripture half-way with the beliefs of the philosophers” whom he has earlier established as his opponents.³⁷ He goes on to accuse them further of “credit(ing) man with more zeal for virtue than he

³⁴ Reid, *Significance*, 12.

³⁵ W. Robert Godfrey, “‘Beyond the Sphere of Our Judgment’: Calvin and the Confirmation of Scripture” *Westminster Theological Journal* 58, no. 1 (March 1, 1996): 38. Calvin relied on the perspicuity of scripture and the Spirit’s work in concert with the consensus of the church to assure Christians they understood the Bible accurately. For more on the grounding of an authoritative understanding of scripture see Henk Van Den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Boston: Brill, 2008).

³⁶ *Institutes*, 2.2.4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

deserved.”³⁸ They “each sought praise for his own cleverness ... (and) one after another gradually fall from bad to worse.”³⁹ Later Calvin acknowledges the “great prejudice” which he might have brought on himself through these abuses.⁴⁰ But he claims to be merely attempting “to advise godly folk; for if they were to depend upon those men’s opinions in this matter they would always flounder in uncertainty.”⁴¹ Defending his comments in his debate with Pighius he asks, “Why should I not say that they speak obscurely and in confusion ?”⁴² Calvin clearly has no qualms about dismissing and even degrading the fathers here, as he sees their opinions as unscriptural.

Scholars have made this observation many times. Smits, speaking primarily about Augustine but also the other fathers, claims that on some issues

*Calvin rejette parfois, soit ouvertement, soit tacitement, l'autorité d'Augustin. Dans le premier cas, il n'omet pas d'indiquer le motif de sa façon d'agir c'est le principe biblique, qui vaut tout autant pour Augustin que pour les autres Pères et pour les conciles de l'antiquité, et qui interdit de retrancher un seul mot de la parole divine ou d'en faire l'objet de considérations subtiles.*⁴³

Not even Augustine, whom Calvin agrees with most, is free from his criticism.⁴⁴ Todd points out, “Calvin made it very plain that he could not claim the ancient church for this doctrine of the freedom of the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 2.2.9.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² BLW, 85.

⁴³ Smits, “L’Autorité,” 686-87. This quote is in the context of claiming Calvin’s generally following Augustine on primary matters where Calvin understand him as according with Scripture and disagreeing with him primarily on secondary issues. This will be seen in a later quote from Smits.

⁴⁴ Todd, *Function*, 190. On his favoring of Augustine see Todd, *Function*, 192-3 and Mooj, *Het Kenk*, 357.

will.”⁴⁵ He is willing to disagree with anyone and is unafraid of saying so. This is further shown through the list Southgate offers of various places where Calvin disagrees with the church fathers.⁴⁶ Lane affirms that Calvin “sometimes cites them in order to criticize them along with the Roman view. This is rare but it shows that he was not bound to their teaching and that he did not pretend that he never differed from them.”⁴⁷ Calvin’s willingness to critique the fathers is a view squarely in accord with scholarship. But, is the nature of his disagreement at odds with the Ancillary View?

Calvin’s harsh critique of the church fathers appears to be what those who believe in the sole authority of scripture cite as proof that Calvin agrees with them. It is hard to image that Calvin would grant the fathers any authority if he so casually dismisses (and even libels!) them. Southgate is one who makes this argument. For him, “The freedom with which Calvin rejects patristic interpretations together with the cavalier manner he displays at times even toward Augustine makes it quite obvious that however useful patristic literature may be, it is not to be regarded as interpretative authority, even in a subsidiary sense.”⁴⁸

This objection should be answered in light of Calvin’s context. As a Reformer, Calvin lived in a highly polemical time for the church. Each side, Protestant and Catholic, was angrily and sometimes viciously attacking the other in attempt to gain ground intellectually and geographically. In this spirit, Calvin’s language frequently evidences a hyperbolically caustic tone towards those whom he disagrees with. Additionally, his rhetorical training as a humanist would lead him to focus on making his point without a great deal of regard for the image of his opponent. Sweeping negative statements about one’s adversary in a context where people disagreed was normal. Calvin’s degradation of the fathers makes sense in the context of polemical rhetoric for his time. In the same way, modern people dismiss authorities in particular matters without dismissing their overall authority. Thus, as a polemical humanist, Calvin’s disagreements do not dissuade one from the possibility of his viewing

⁴⁵ Todd, *Function*, 191.

⁴⁶ Southgate, *John Jewel*, 169-70.

⁴⁷ Lane, *Student*, 32.

⁴⁸ Southgate, *John Jewel*, 169.

the fathers as authoritative.

Authority of the Fathers

Having shown that Calvin subordinates the fathers to the authority of scripture, and critiques the fathers when they stray from scripture, it is now necessary to show that Calvin does indeed assign authority to the fathers. Altogether, Calvin's frequent citation of the fathers, his specific statements about their authority, his pursuit and assumed possession of their approval, and his charitable explanation for their mistakes present a compelling argument that he understood them as in some way authoritative.

It is abundantly clear that Calvin cites the fathers often and cites them in most cases positively.⁴⁹ He does not cite his contemporaries or the medievals in many contexts other than to disagree with them.⁵⁰ In this context, his frequent and approving citation of the fathers' work assumes a reason for doing so. They are useful to Calvin to establish the antiquity of his beliefs and to lend him weight for his view.⁵¹ Based on his frequent use of the fathers for historical support, it is clear that he held them, in some sense, authoritatively.⁵²

Calvin's direct statements about the fathers indicate that he thought of them as authoritative. Against Pighius he says, "I do not want what I am saying to be understood as though I leave no place for the agreement of the churches in *determining* questions about the faith. But it is proper that Scripture be accorded the honor of having everything tested by reference to it."⁵³ Here Calvin leaves room for a level of authority that the fathers possess not only in interpretation but in determining questions of the faith. This authority is still

⁴⁹ Lane, *Student*, 29-30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 30.

⁵¹ Lane, "Scripture," 43.

⁵² Southgate, *John Jewel*, 168-9 disagrees with this assessment. To him, Calvin's positive tone "indicate(s) the high opinion in which Calvin held Augustine. But they have nothing to do with interpretative authority, however effective they may be as rhetorical devices to reinforce the personal authority of the writer." This does not seem to make sense in light of the doting comments Calvin sometimes makes about Augustine especially.

⁵³ BLW, 64. Emphasis mine.

subordinate to Scripture but it does exist. He likewise in *Institutes* asserts their authority when he questions whether or not “the *authority* of the fathers has weight with us.”⁵⁴ Again, in the free will discussion with Pighius, Calvin says that he does not “allow (himself) to be tied and bound by their authority as to abandon the sure truth of scripture and assent to what (the scriptures) determined.”⁵⁵ In these quotes, Calvin is directly referencing the fathers as authorities, even if he examines that authority against scripture. It is true that he uses tradition partly because it is being used against him “to establish [his opponent’s] case by its authority.”⁵⁶ Yet even when it is being used against him, he does not argue against that authority but, as will be quoted shortly, claims their authority for himself.

In the context of the Lausanne Disputation Calvin gives some of the most direct explanation of his view of the fathers. He says, “We [Protestants] have always held [the fathers] to belong to the number of those to whom *such obedience* is not due, and whose authority we will not *so exalt*, as in any way to debase the dignity of the Word of our Lord, to which alone is due complete obedience in the church of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷ Clearly, the issue in question is the degree of authority conferred on the fathers, not whether or not they have authority. Indeed, their value is such that Calvin, on behalf of the Protestant delegation, claims to give them honor when he says, “We should not at all refuse to be judged by the whole world as not only audacious but beyond measure arrogant, if we held such servants of God in so great contempt, as you allege, as to deem them fools. If it be so, we should not at all take the trouble to read them and to use the help of their teaching when it serves and as occasion offers.”⁵⁸ The Protestants, he claims, do honor the fathers and do use their teaching in theology.

This understanding of Calvin’s statements is shared by various scholars. Lane affirms Calvin’s sense of patristic authority while

⁵⁴ *Institutes*, 2.2.8. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ BLW, 139.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 62.

⁵⁷ John Calvin, “Two Discourses on the Articles.” In *Calvin: Theological Treatises* ed. J. K. S. Reid, Library of Christian Classics vol. 22. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 38. Emphasis mine. Henceforth as LD.

⁵⁸ LD, 38.

asserting it is of a different kind than the Roman Catholics. He points out that behind the statements at the Lausanne Disputation lay “the truth that the fathers did not have the same authority for the Reformers as (theoretically) for the Roman Catholics.”⁵⁹ In a different context, Lane goes on to explain precisely what kind of authority he means, saying, “For Calvin, the fathers are subsidiary authorities to be cited, supporting his own doctrine and refuting Roman doctrine.”⁶⁰ Reid also confirms this point: “Calvin never rejected the Fathers, but rather acknowledged, under certain limitations, their authority as guides and teachers.”⁶¹ In his essay, van Oort echoes Lane on the point stating, “For Calvin, as for the other Reformers, the Church Fathers were only subsidiary authorities. The fact that he treated them as authorities might reflect his legal background, but certainly, he thus followed the established pattern of medieval and contemporary Roman theology.”⁶² There are a few naysayers amongst the scholarship on this, but most agree that Calvin does claim authority for the fathers.⁶³

By claiming agreement with the fathers, Calvin implies a pursuit of that agreement. This pursuit itself indicates that Calvin holds the fathers to be authoritative to a certain degree, as one does not pursue agreement with those with whom agreement means nothing. And Calvin claims to agree with them often. “Charge us no longer with contradicting the ancient doctors in the matter with whom we are in

⁵⁹ Lane, *Student*, 26. Parenthetical note is his.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 27.

⁶¹ Reid, *Significance*, 11.

⁶² van Oort, *Calvin*, 698-99.

⁶³ Most of the statements contrary to this point were found in sections of works where Calvin’s view was clearly a sidebar minor point of the discussion without much citation. As such, they are not cited here. Mooj, *Het Kerk*, 357 appears to be one such naysayer. Here Mooj asserts that Calvin “made it quite clear that the only authority by which he was guided was found in the Holy Scriptures.” From the short summary that I had access to it was unclear whether this was meant as a statement that related to a specific time period or the whole of Calvin’s view. It seems as though Mooj is making a statement of degree rather than exclusivity, as per his comment on page 359 that “historical arguments were for Calvin merely a strengthening of his case.” If they were strengthening, I assume Mooj must have recognized that they had to have some degree of authority to lend to the overall argument.

fact in such accord,” he tells the delegates at Lausanne.⁶⁴ There also he says, “we are able to take (the fathers) as defenders of our opinion.”⁶⁵ In Calvin’s appeal to King Francis he says the Romans “unjustly set the ancient fathers against us... If the context were to be determined by patristic authority, the tide of victory – to put it very modestly – would turn to our side.”⁶⁶ And further down, “I could with no trouble at all prove that the greater part of what we are saying today meets with their (the fathers’) approval.”⁶⁷ Much of *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, written against Pighius, claims Augustine for Calvin’s side.⁶⁸ Therein Calvin references himself as a “wretched little mite” being accused of assaulting “so many elephants of such size and that noble assembly of eagles, that is, all the saints of old. ... But I declare that I am not at war with the ancient fathers – only with Pighius.”⁶⁹ In these quotations, Calvin constantly claims to have the agreement of the fathers on his side, implicitly asserting their authoritative value.

It might be said that, in isolation, these ascriptions of patristic agreement do not hold too much water due to their Catholic context. Of course, Calvin would seek agreement with the fathers in front of the Catholics, using “their” material against them. This would be a valid objection if his use of their material was always in that context. This is not the case. As Smits points out, “*Le préférence pour Augustin se manifeste dans toute l’Institution, jusque dans ses passages les moins polémiques.*”⁷⁰ While Smits is talking specifically about Augustine, his assertion that Calvin does indeed have some non-polemical usages of the fathers asserts a purpose for reading them

⁶⁴ LD, 45.

⁶⁵ LD, 40.

⁶⁶ John Calvin, “Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France” in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* ed. John T. McNeil, tr. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 18.

⁶⁷ Calvin, “Prefatory Address,” 18.

⁶⁸ See BLW, 128-36 for a lengthy instance of Calvin claiming agreement with Augustine.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 143.

⁷⁰ Smits, “L’Autorité,” 671.

other than listing quotes against the Catholic.⁷¹ Now, Lane, following Mooj, does assert that the vast majority of Calvin's usage of the fathers is polemical against the Romans,⁷² but Lane also agrees with Smits in claiming that sometimes Calvin cites them when they say something succinctly with which he agrees.⁷³ If the only reason that Calvin would appeal to the fathers was to battle with the Catholics, then he would have no reason to read them other than to use them against the Catholics; and so it is apparent from his non-polemical quotation of the fathers that his use is not restricted to anti-Catholic purposes. Calvin's reading of the fathers for the sake of polemics is exactly not what Calvin himself said about his reading and use of the fathers at the Lausanne Disputation.⁷⁴ In light of these reasons, this objection is not convincing.

Finally, in addition to his explicit comments about authority as well as his frequent and positive use of the fathers, Calvin occasionally makes excuses for the fathers when he disagrees with them. This attempt to smooth over their lack of adherence to what Calvin claims as the biblical view begs for a reason why one would do such a thing. Calvin's hesitation to fully deconstruct their value again aligns with the Ancillary View, as can be seen in the free will section of *Institutes*. After the accusations of falsehood towards the Greek fathers, Calvin then attempts to excuse the fathers, claiming that they overemphasized human freedom "because they thought that they could not rouse our inborn sluggishness unless they argued that we sinned by it alone."⁷⁵ They were wrong, says Calvin, but with good reason, or at least good intentions. This attempt to seek an excuse for the error among the fathers recurs throughout that section. "When the church fathers are discussing free will, they first inquire, not into its importance for civil or external actions, but into what promotes obedience to the law."⁷⁶ Later he says, "It is not difficult to

⁷¹ The claim that Calvin read the fathers merely for ammunition is not supported in the literature. Given more time there would be citations here.

⁷² Lane, *Student*, 31-2.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 32.

⁷⁴ LD, 38.

⁷⁵ *Institutes*, 2.2.4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 2.2.5.

demonstrate that they, in the ambiguity of their teaching, held human virtue in no or very slight esteem, but ascribed all credit for every good thing to the Holy Spirit.” And, “However excessive they sometimes are in extoling free will, they have had this end in view – to teach man utterly to forsake confidence in his own virtue and to hold that all his strength rests in God alone.”⁷⁷ In the end they came out with the right idea generally, says Calvin, shoring up the fathers. Here we see the excuse making that leads us to understand Calvin means to maintain their value.

Not much has been said on this point in secondary literature. Backus alone makes mention of this concept when she says, “Having voiced all his doubts, he nonetheless rehabilitates the fathers in corpore as Christian thinkers. ... Even when defective and unsatisfactory the fathers are still, in Calvin’s view, Christian thinkers.”⁷⁸ Calvin’s not going back and reexamining the fathers to discover a solution to his discrepancy with them was

due partly to lack of time, partly to his deep seated conviction that orthodox fathers could not have said anything deeply heretical in matters of doctrine given that their object was, like Calvin’s own, to show men that they were entirely dependent on God. Any slips they may have made should be forgiven or at least given the benefit of the doubt.⁷⁹

She concludes from this section that “Calvin was not only unclear but also uneasy about patristic authority in matters of free will.”⁸⁰ However, while Calvin’s comments could be construed as Backus claims, equally as plausible is that Calvin is attempting to maintain the authority of the fathers, despite his disagreement with them. Either interpretation is compatible with an Ancillary View of the fathers’ authority.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Irena Backus, “Calvin and Greek Patristics” in *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation, 1378-1615*, (Boston: Brill, 2003), 116.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 117-18.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Nature of Authority

If Calvin held the fathers as authoritative, he would specify the basis for that authority. And this he does. Here many of the quotations listed above have already described the first point to be made. Calvin understood the fathers as authoritative in so far as they were tracked with the ultimate judge of truth, scripture. This is further evidenced by a quotation from his statement at Lausanne.

In fact, we do them such honour as may according to God be accorded to them, while we attend to them and to their ministry, to search the Word of God, in order that, having found it, we should with them listen to and observe it with all humility and reverence, reserving this honour for the Lord alone, who has opened his mouth in the Church only to speak with authority.⁸¹

Here his last phrase does not assert that there are no other authorities, but that, next to the word of God, the authority of humanity is slight. He does indeed still listen with them as his guides, but the guides are only good if they present a true view of scripture. Calvin's section on free will in the *Institutes* draws exclusively from the fathers.⁸² What he has taken from the fathers he then corroborates with scripture in the next section.⁸³ Here he measures the fathers against scripture and cites their consensus as valid in light of biblical evidence.

Calvin's use of the fathers when they are in accordance with scripture is well documented by various scholars and will therefore be dealt with briefly. Calvin's vast usage of Augustine is based off his seeing him "as a faithful interpreter of the scriptures" according to Wendel.⁸⁴ He claims Chrysostom's interpretation is the object of Calvin's predilection.⁸⁵ Calvin looks to the fathers when he makes interpretive decisions, using their evidence to corroborate his own position, according to Southgate.⁸⁶ In searching for Calvin's ground

⁸¹ LD, 39.

⁸² *Institutes*, 2.2.9.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 2.2.10.

⁸⁴ Wendel, *Calvin*, 124.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*.

⁸⁶ Southgate, *John Jewel*, 169.

for the fathers' authority that would naturally follow from his holding them as such, the first grounding is their agreement with scripture.

The authority of the fathers is also, to Calvin, based on another feature: they represent a "purer age" of the church. In a parenthetical statement from his address to King Francis, Calvin calls them "ancient writers of a better age of the church."⁸⁷ It is on the basis of their being "farther removed from antiquity" that he dismisses the sophists.⁸⁸ He does not intend to "undermine the whole history together with all the opinions of the saints ... but rather (to) seek only the restoration to their former condition of those things which have been spoiled and lost by the injurious effects of history."⁸⁹ To Calvin the fathers' value rests in part on their having lived in the age closer to the time of Christ and before time had had a chance to confuse things. The message of the Bible was still new and so nuances and half-truths evident in the scholastics, had not had a chance to bloom yet. As representatives of this pure age of proper church life and doctrine, the fathers speak from a place of authority, having been there themselves.

Many who have studied Calvin agree that he bases his authority of the fathers on their antiquity. "They were representatives of a purer age," the age that was "very close to the Source of all Truth and which was relatively free from adulterations, corruptions, and human innovations."⁹⁰ The church of antiquity "had known the disciples of the apostles, and therefore the contemporary church must listen to them carefully and humbly."⁹¹ The fathers were in an age that was "still faithful to the message of Holy Scripture."⁹² Not least of all, the humanistic culture in which Calvin existed assumed novelty was error and "authority lay with antiquity rather than modernity."⁹³ So with these secondary voices confirming, it is apparent that Calvin considers the fathers' antiquity to be another reason for their authority.

⁸⁷ Calvin, "Prefatory Address," 18.

⁸⁸ Institutes 2.2.6.

⁸⁹ BLW, 15.

⁹⁰ Todd, *Function*, 230.

⁹¹ Reid, *Significance*, 11.

⁹² Mooj, *Het Kenk*, 359.

⁹³ Lane, *Student*, 33.

They are representatives of a time closer to the Source.

Conclusion

Based on a limited study of his own work and an examination of the relevant secondary literature, we come to the conclusion that Calvin does in fact hold the church fathers as authoritative in a way that accords with A. N. S. Lane's Ancillary View. This has been demonstrated through observing Calvin's priority of the scriptures, and the subsequent tension in which he held the fathers. He exhibits this tension when he at times uses the fathers as authorities and at other times dismisses them. This conclusion is further supported by Calvin's generally positive quotation of the fathers (as opposed to his contemporaries), his pursuit and claim of patristic approval, and his excusal of their occasional failure to line up with scripture. The grounding that would naturally be needed for that authority if it existed has been identified: The fathers' authority is based both on their antiquity and their agreement with scripture. Thus, it is clear that the Ancillary View does in fact correspond to Calvin's use and commentary on the fathers, as represented in the specific documents under examination.

Upon reflection, it is possible to make a few observations about what a Calvinian Ancillary Authority looks like. Holding the fathers as subordinate authorities means that one uses them and frequently. This usage is applied to a variety of areas but is mainly utilized in the context of an authoritative, interpretive tradition. In the context of interpretation, citing the fathers is a way to come closer to the apostolic meaning. In Calvin's humanistic setting, this level of authority is not without consequences. The fathers are dismissed and even cajoled in their missing the point of scripture. But this is merely a rhetorical way of making one's point and is not to be read as grounds for their dismissal or debasement.

With these observations, the conclusion is reached. Calvin does indeed see the church fathers as authoritative, and such a view is best classified as the Ancillary View proposed by A. N. S. Lane. For the many who claim Calvin as an opponent of tradition's authority, it would be wise to read more than his rhetorically negative statements and see the many times the fathers prove to be a light from God in Calvin's work.

The Hardening of the Heart in the Conquest Narrative: Reconsidering the Identity of הצרעה in Joshua 24:12

Samyung Kang

The definition of the word צרעה, often translated “hornet,” is widely debated among Old Testament scholars. Proper identification of the word is important, because it is directly related to “vital information for understanding the Israelite conquest.”¹ However, the word is difficult to translate, largely due to the fact that it occurs only three times in the Old Testament: Exodus 23:28, Deuteronomy 7:20 and Joshua 24:12. All of these passages emphasize that the conquest of the Promised Land was not just a result of the Israelites’ labor; it was mainly the result of divine intervention. Each occurrence contains the basic idea that God sent the צרעה ahead of the Israelites, and thus expelled the Canaanites from the Promised Land. Consequently, the צרעה caused the land to pass into the Israelites’ possession as God promised to their ancestors. Although most contemporary scholars tend to agree that the word is a reference to the divine work of God, the identity of the word is still under debate.

The main purpose of this paper is to argue that the צרעה metaphorically signifies “the hardening of the enemies’ hearts.” The hornet was not only a vital divine promise for the conquest by the Israelites in both Exodus 23 and Deuteronomy 7, but also a fulfilled promise of God according to Joshua 24:12. These references, as well as related narratives, should be seriously reconsidered for identification of the צרעה. In order to justify this thesis, the paper will begin with a review of current scholarly discussions about the

¹ Oded Borowski, “The Identity of the Biblical *šir’â*,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Carol L Meyers, Michael Patrick O’Connor, and David Noel Freedman; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 315.

meaning of צרעה, and then evaluate them. After that, this paper will contend that the צרעה does not denote real insects, a symbol of Pharaoh, or a metaphor of panic, but rather God's action of hardening the enemies' hearts. This will be shown by analyzing the narratives' contexts, related linguistic characteristics, and related narratives.

Review of the Literature

Commentators and scholars have tried to identify the meaning of צרעה² from the very earliest exegesis of the Bible. Most ancient authorities consistently give the literal translation of a real hornet.³ Also, most of the medieval commentators tend to see the word as a real wasp or hornet “sent down from heaven, one of the series of miracles which had started in Egypt before the Exodus.”⁴ The interpretations of recent scholarship can be generally divided into

² HALOT suggest 2 options: (1) hornet or wasp, (2) i. terror or fear, ii. dejection or discouragement. See HALOT 3:1056. DCH provides 4 options: (1) hornets, (2) terror, (3) dejection, discouragement, (4) pestilence. See DCH 7:163.

³ Including the Targumin, Onkelos and the Jerusalem Targum, LXX, and rabbinic authorities: e.g. The LXX translates it each time with σφήκια, the Onkelos 'ar'ita, and the Vulgate *crabro*.

⁴ Borowski, “The Identity of the Biblical *šir'â*,” 315. For Augustine, see John R. Franke and Thomas C. Oden, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–2 Samuel* (ACCS Old Testament 4; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2005), 95. For John Calvin, he also regards it as real hornets. See John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Harmony of the Law: Calvin's Commentaries on the Four Last books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (electronic ed.; Logos Library System; Albany: Age software, 1998), Exod. 23:28.

three major positions:⁵ (1) real insects⁶ (or insect-borne disease),⁷ (2) a symbol of the power of Egypt's Pharaoh,⁸ and (3) a metaphor

⁵ David M. Howard, *Joshua* (NAC 5; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 432; Robert G. Boling and G. Ernest Wright, *Joshua* (AB 6; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 536; Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC 6; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), 334; William T. Koopmans, *Joshua 24 as Poetic Narrative* (JSOTSup 93; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 332.

⁶ Jeffrey Alan Lockwood, *Six-Legged Soldiers: Using Insects as Weapons of War* (Oxford, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15; E. Neufeld, "Insects as Warfare Agents in the Ancient Near East," *Or* 49 (1980): 30–57; Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 349. Jehuda Feliks, "Hornet," *EncJud* 9:527; Raymond F. Collins, "Forerunner," *ABD* 2:830; J. Philip Hyatt, *Commentary on Exodus* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1971), 252; John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus* (Auburn, Mass.: Evangelical Press, 2000), 128; W. W. Frerichs, "Hornet," *IBD* 2:645.

⁷ William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40* (AB 2A; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 290; Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus* (JPS Torah commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 149; Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus* (Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 557.

⁸ Borowski, "The Identity of the Biblical *šir 'â*," 315–18; John Garstang, *The Foundations of Bible History: Joshua, Judges* (London: Constable & Co., 1931), 258–60; Yigael Yadin, "The Transition from a Semi-Nomadic to a Sedentary Society in the Twelfth Century BCE," in *Symposia Celebrating the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the American Schools of Oriental Research (1900-1975)* (ed. Frank Moore Cross; Cambridge, Mass.: ASOR, 1979), 57–68; Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 118; H. L. Ellison, *Exodus* (DSBS; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 134; R. A. Cole, *Exodus; An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973), 183.

representing panic or terror.⁹ The first interpretation understands the word literally, while the second and the third propose a more figurative usage.¹⁰

Real Insects

As mentioned above, many traditional translations render the word צרעה literally, referring to “the hornet” or “hornets.” Some modern scholars have maintained this trend, arguing that the word was deliberately used in its literal sense to reveal the power of God in controlling small animals for his purposes. J. Feliks, for example, supposes that “it may also refer to the hornet *Vespa orientalis* which multiplies in time of war when fields are untilled, making its nest in burrows in uncultivated ground.”¹¹ Similarly, Edward Neufeld

⁹ John A. Emerton, “Review of Koehler-Baumgartner,” *VT* 34, (1984): 504; John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 2: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 83; A. Graeme Auld, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (Daily Study Bible Series; Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1984), 122; Koopmans, *Joshua 24 as Poetic Narrative*, 332; Hess, *Joshua*, 334; Robert G. Bratcher and Barclay M. Newman, *A Translator’s Handbook on The Book of Joshua* (London, N.Y.: United Bible Societies, 1983), 326; Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9* (WBC 6A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 164; David Merling, *The Book of Joshua: Its Theme and Role in Archaeological Discussions* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1997), 109; Peter Enns, *Exodus* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 472; Diana Edelman, “Are the Kings of the Amorites ‘Swept Away’ in Joshua 24:12?” *VT* 41, (1991): 283; James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.; Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), DBLH 7667, #2; J. Alberto Soggin suggests that it “is not the ‘wasp’ or ‘hornet’ ...but ‘dismay,’ a typical consequence of divine intervention in the course of holy war.” See J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1972), 235.

¹⁰ For reference, there are some different views: For pestilence, see Walter Brueggemann, “Exodus,” in *General & Old Testament Article; Genesis; Exodus; Leviticus* (ed. L. E. Keck et al.; vol. 1 of *NIB*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) 887; Waldemar Janzen, *Exodus* (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2000), 318. For a minor deity or messenger, see Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 290. For animal demons, see Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 275.

¹¹ Feliks, *Enc.Jud* 9:527.

contends that the word indicates real stinging hornets, which he claims must have been used for entomological warfare in ancient world (although he provides no historical evidence to substantiate this claim). He also assumes that the earlier translators might have been familiar with this practice of using small insects in warfare, thus translating צרעה as “hornet.”¹² In agreement with Neufeld, William H.C. Propp also asserts that צרעה could refer to an actual insect or insect-borne disease. He supports this view by relating the Rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic word (*‘ar ‘itā*), which means a stinging insect (although he does not provide proper evidence for the association of these two words). On the basis of the Septuagint and the Vulgate, Propp asserts that the word should be understood as collective, and goes on to claim that the author “envisions an actual swarm of biting or stinging insects.”¹³ Notably, Propp rests his assertion on the Wisdom of Solomon 12:8–10.¹⁴ After that, he reaches the conclusion that the word should be understood as an “analogy of the Plagues of Egypt” in Exodus 8:12–27; 10:3–19.¹⁵

This interpretation, however, is not valid. As revealed plainly, Propp lacks consistency in his assertion and conclusion. Oded Borowski criticizes others in this view, but the criticism can be raised against Propp as well. Borowski claims that the arguments of scholars who hold this interpretation are based mainly on “their predecessors”¹⁶ and a few biblical texts exclusively in the book of Exodus in which insect swarms appear.¹⁷ In addition, as for the traditional translations that he used as evidences for his assertion, the claim that those translations were aware of insect warfare in ancient time is impossible to substantiate. Rather, their translation shows that

¹² Neufeld, “Insects as Warfare Agents,” 34. According to him, “it may be confidently assumed that these texts give a strong impression of illustrating an authentic tradition of the use of insects as warfare agents.” He actually presents four texts for his argument: Exod. 23:28; Deut. 7:20; Josh. 24:12; Isa. 7:18–20. As for the last, note that he suggests that the זבוב in Isa. 7:18–20 refers to a hornet. See Neufeld, “Insects as Warfare Agents,” 37–38.

¹³ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 290.

¹⁴ Wis. 12 implies that the Canaanites seem to have the opportunity to repent.

¹⁵ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 290.

¹⁶ Borowski, “The Identity of the Biblical *šir ‘ā*,” 315.

¹⁷ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 290.

the translators are likely interpreting the word literally. The most crucial flaw in this view is that there is a general lack of evidence and direct information.¹⁸ There are no other authorities to substantiate any theories that insects were used for warfare in the ancient Near East. This contention is authenticated only in the ancient translations and commentaries. Neufeld must have been aware of the dearth of evidence for this position, as he attempts to fortify his assertion by appealing to recent scientific research about the behavior of insects.¹⁹ Other scholars criticize this lack of evidence as well.²⁰

Importantly, David Merling points out that not a single Old Testament battle narrative includes the presence of “the hornet;” the reference is only made in divine speeches.²¹ Therefore, “the hornet” (הצרעה) should not be regarded as literal, but as symbolic. Acknowledging that the צרעה is used figuratively still does not answer the question: how should צרעה be interpreted? Most scholars can be placed into one of two main camps: Egypt and panic. The former holds that the word metaphorically represents a military campaign of Egypt against the Canaanites. The latter interprets it as a metaphor representing panic or terror brought upon the Canaanites by God.

A Symbol of the Power of Egypt's Pharaoh

John Garstang asserts that the word צרעה implies a military campaign

¹⁸ Howard, *Joshua*, 432; Neufeld, “Insects as Warfare Agents,” 39. He states that no insects in archaeological context were discovered for any purpose except for food. He mentions that the present understanding of a great many Sumero-Akkadian and Hebrew names of insects is almost in its infancy. Linguistically many of them can be translated with reasonable confidence, but their entomological identity remains obscure. See Neufeld, “Insects as Warfare Agents,” 37; Mark Q. Sutton, “Archaeological Aspects of Insect Use,” *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 2, (1995): 280–81.

¹⁹ Neufeld, “Insects as Warfare Agents,” 34. Based on this, he argues that all three references of the word must have had scientific creditability.

²⁰ Borowski, “The Identity of the Biblical *šir’ā*,” 315; John A. Emerton, “Review of Koehler-Baumgartner,” *VT* 34, (1984): 504; Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 421. He points out that it is “hardly to be taken literally.”

²¹ Merling, *The Book of Joshua*, 109. Propp openly admits that “the narrative of Joshua does not explicitly describe any such pests.” See Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 334.

by the Egyptian Pharaohs. He claims that the Egyptian hieroglyph of a bee, which expressed the sovereignty of the Pharaoh, offers proof for his assertion.²² For him, the authors or redactors of the Old Testament made the role of Egypt symbolic for theological reasons. The Israelites “could not tolerate the notion that any power other than that of the God of Israel might influence their destinies.”²³ Therefore, he understood the historical context in this sense: not only did several Egyptian military campaigns pave the way for the conquest of Israel, but the breakdown of Pharaoh’s authority made the Israelites’ conquest of Canaan possible in the first place. F. S. Bodenheimer takes the same line, asserting that the bee hieroglyph was “the symbol of the ruler of Lower Egypt since the first dynasty.”²⁴ Recently, Borowski, whose influence has contributed strongly to this interpretation of the word, argues that the suggestion of Garstang, who identified the hornet with Egypt, should once again be seriously considered.²⁵ He supports this view with the phonological similarity between “the hornet” (הצרעה) and “Egypt” (מצרים).²⁶ This wordplay, in his opinion, implies the presence of Egyptian military campaigns in Canaan.²⁷ He claims this view is substantiated by the Merenptah

²² Garstang, *Joshua and Judges*, 258–60. He identifies the symbol of Lower Egypt with the hornet rather than the bee.

²³ Garstang, *Joshua and Judges*, 259.

²⁴ F. S. Bodenheimer, *Animal and Man in Bible Lands* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1960), 74; Yadin, “The Transition,” 68. For Isaac Harpaz, he insists that the specific king named Menes, who was the founder of the first dynasty, made the hornet as the symbol of the kingdom of Lower Egypt. See Isaac Harpaz, “Early Entomology in the Middle East,” in *History of Entomology* (ed. Ray F. Smith, Thomas E. Mittler, and Carrol N. Smith; California: Entomologica Society of America, 1973), 23.

²⁵ Yadin takes the same line. See Yadin, “The Transition,” 68.

²⁶ Borowski, “The Identity of the Biblical *šir ‘ā*,” 316.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, The reason for the concealment of its identity is that in this instance Egypt serves as the role of the help to Israel. His view is almost the same as Garstang’s.

stele.²⁸ This evidence, in his opinion, supports the Egyptian military presence in Canaan before the conquest of Israel in ca. 1220 B.C.E.²⁹

However, this view is generally denied “because it raises big problem of chronology.”³⁰ Though Borowski presents attractive evidence, he fails to take an objective view on the archaeological proof. As Bryant G. Wood asserts, some scholars claim that the Merenptah stele refers to Egyptian military activity in Canaan in the 15th century B.C.E., rather than 13th century.³¹ Borowski’s view is based on biased information. This tendency is also problematic for Garstang, who asserts theological motives on the part the author as the basis for his interpretation. Above all, not only do the related narratives not mention such an event,³² but also Exodus 23:28 argues against this view, according to Willem Hendrik Gispen.³³ Moreover, in Joshua 2:9–11, Rahab’s testimony clearly shows that the Egyptians were defeated by God.³⁴ Additionally, although it is well known that “a country or a people can be symbolized in the Bible by an animal or insect,”³⁵ there is no such case where Egypt is symbolized as a bee or hornet in the Old Testament: see Isaiah 7:18–19 (Egypt is likened to a fly); Ezekiel 29:3, 32:2 (Egypt is likened to a crocodile). Thus, it is unreasonable to insist on the use of צרעה as symbolizing Egyptian military campaigns that prepare Canaan for the Israelite conquest.

A Metaphor Representing the Panic or Terror

The present general tendency is to translate the צרעה as “panic.”

²⁸ The Merneptah Stele details an Egyptian campaign against Lybia, but its last two lines reference prior military campaigns in Canaan. It is dated 1213-1203.

²⁹ Ibid., 317.

³⁰ George Soper Cansdale, *All the Animals of the Bible Lands* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 247.

³¹ Bryant G. Wood, “The Biblical Date for the Exodus is 1446 BC: A Response to James Hoffmeier,” *JETS* 50, (2007): 254.

³² Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 334; Hess, *Joshua*, 334.

³³ Willem Hendrik Gispen, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 236.

³⁴ Gispen, *Exodus*, 236.

³⁵ Borowski, “The Identity of the Biblical *šir ‘ā*,” 316.

Umberto Cassuto contends that “the hornet is nothing but unreasoning dread, panic, synonymous word for terror.”³⁶ For him, the hornet is parallel to the terror (אִימָה) in Exodus 23:27–28. He understands this parallelism as “a repetition of the thought in different words,”³⁷ that is, synonymous parallelism.³⁸ John H. Walton and Richard S. Hess appeal to other texts to support their view that the word should be interpreted as “panic” from God (Exodus 15:14–16; Joshua 2:9–11, 24; 5:1; 6:27).³⁹ Scholars in this view find their reason in those texts,⁴⁰ which show that the enemies of Israel felt “great terror” when they heard a report of Israel’s invasion. The implication is that terror from God made Israel’s conquest of Canaan easy. John Gray supports this by claiming that the צרעה is related to the Arabic word *dara‘a* (“to submit”), “divinely inspired panic being a regular feature of the holy war.”⁴¹ In addition, Moshe Weinfeld proves that in other ancient Near Eastern literature, the significance of panic in warfare is pronounced.⁴²

However, there is no evidence to support the literary use of insects or animals as symbols representing panic. Weinfeld’s research reveals only the importance of panic as a theme in ancient Near Eastern accounts of warfare. With regard to the parallelism Cassuto asserts in Exodus 23:27–28, it can be understood as a staircase parallel. According to Eugene Carpenter and Michael A. Grisanti, this

³⁶ Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), 308.

³⁷ Cassuto, *Exodus*, 308; Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 290. He also presents the interpretation of “hornet” for the Arabs as evidence.

³⁸ Emerton emphasizes the Samaritan reading of the word as evidence for this view. See Emerton, “Review of Koehler-Baumgartner,” 504.

³⁹ Walton, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, 83; Hess, *Joshua*, 334. Howards appropriately points out that these texts speak of terror “using different terminology.” See Howard, *Joshua*, 432.

⁴⁰ Auld, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, 122.

⁴¹ John Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (The Century Bible; London: Nelson, 1967), 195.

⁴² Moshe Weinfeld, “Divine Intervention in War in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East,” in *History, Historiography and Interpretation* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), 135–137.

parallelism used here shows a development of the idea.⁴³ Moreover, the texts which most scholars with such perspective present as corroborative evidences cannot explain why Israel's enemies come out to fight them anyway, as in Joshua 9:1–2; 10:4; 11:1–5. In light of the conquest narratives, if the *צרעה* that God send upon the Canaanites is understood as panic, it is difficult to explain why the narrative accounts depict Israel's enemies as coming out to fight, rather than fleeing in terror.⁴⁴

In summary, there has been much debate among scholars about the identity of “the hornet” (*הצרעה*) in all three references where the word occurs (Exod. 23:28; Deut. 7:20; Josh. 24:12). Recent scholarship has not come to broad consensus, with scholars asserting that *צרעה* ought to be interpreted literally as actual insects, or figuratively as a symbol of the power of Egypt's pharaoh or as a metaphor representing panic. However, arguments for all three of these options lack sufficient evidence in the light of the contexts of all three references and the related conquest narratives. In the next section, this paper will argue that *הצרעה* ought to be interpreted as the hardening of the enemies' hearts. With this interpretation, God's promise to send *הצרעה* for the accomplishment of the conquest in Exodus 23:28 and Deuteronomy 7:20 is not contradicted by the narrative accounts. Similarly, the mention of “the hornet” in Joshua 24:12 as fulfilled promised can be understood properly. In order to demonstrate this, the paper will investigate all three references respectively to *הצרעה* in light of their own context, as well as linguistic features and related narratives.

Reconsidering the Meaning of *הצרעה*

There are three occurrences of *צרעה*⁴⁵ in the Old Testament: Exodus 23:28; Deuteronomy 7:20; and Joshua 24:12. Up to the present, the

⁴³ Eugene Carpenter and Michael A. Grisanti, “*צרעה*,” *NIDOTTE* 3:847. As for the general idea of parallelism, see Adele Berlin, “Parallelism,” *ABD* 5:155–62. For an explanation of staircase parallelism, see footnote 54 below.

⁴⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, 421. He explained that “the stings of alarm which followed this fear would completely drive them away.” See the reaction of Israel before the Philistine Goliath in 1 Sam. 17:11–24.

⁴⁵See Roland K. Harrison, “Hornet,” 2:758; Jesper Svartvik, “Hornet,” *EDB* 607.

scholarship concerning the word not only pretends to be indifferent to them, but also rests on assumptions that cannot legitimately be found in the texts. It is vital that the context of the three references be properly reconsidered to come to a proper understanding of the word צרעה. Therefore, this paper will first observe role of the hornet (Exod. 23: 28) in the context of Exodus 23:20–33, and then related linguistic aspects (including parallelism, poetic devices, and the definite article). After that, Joshua 11:16–20, a narrative account of Israel’s conquest, will be treated as the supporting evidence for the argument of the paper. Next, the dependency of Deuteronomy 7 on Exodus 23:20–33 will be shown. Finally, I will deal with the context of Joshua 24:12, which concerns itself with the fulfillment of the promise of God to send the hornet (referring to Exod. 23:28; Deut. 7:20). Analyzing the three occurrences צרעה in context will confirm an understanding of צרעה as the hardening of the enemies’ hearts.⁴⁶

The Context of Exodus 23:28

In order to reach a proper understanding of צרעה, it is necessary to consider the context of Exodus 23:28, which belongs to the narrative unit of Exodus 23:20–33.⁴⁷ This section will briefly deal with this unit in a broad sense, and then focus more closely on verses 27–31.

Given the context of Exodus 23:20–33, however הצרעה is interpreted, it should appear somewhere in the conquest narrative. In Exodus 23:20–33, as Walter Brueggemann points out, God promises to “send” (שלה) three things in preparation for the journey in the

⁴⁶ The hardening heart is considered as Holy War language. See Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, 52. For the subject in general, see Yehezkel Kaufmann, *Religion of Israel, From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (trans. M. Greenberg; University of Chicago Press, 1960), 75–76; Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1961), 2:177–80.

⁴⁷ Jacob, *Exodus*, 732. Exodus 23:20–33 is usually considered as one unit. Alexander Rofé, for instance, explains this part as “the conclusion of the book of the Covenant.” See Alexander Rofé, *Deuteronomy: Issues and Interpretations* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002), 9. Propp also asserts that “like the Book of Deuteronomy, which it resembles in style and content, [Exodus] 23:20–33 addresses the coming settlement in the land. It discloses the Covenant’s reward, an incentive to the ratification ceremony in chap. 24.” See Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 287. Durham also points out that Exodus 23:20–33 is considered as the conclusion or epilogue to the book of Covenant. See John I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC 3; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 334.

wildness and the conquest of the promised land by Israel:⁴⁸ “angel” or “messenger” (מלאך) in 23:20, 23 (twice)⁴⁹, “terror” (אימה)⁵⁰ in 23:27, and “the hornet” (הצרעה) in 23:28. Each of these three elements is the object of the verb “send” (שלח). All three are God’s agents, and should be revealed in concrete ways during the conquest narratives. Propp suggests that מלאך appears before Joshua as “Yahweh’s Army Captain” in Canaan (Josh. 5:14–15).⁵¹ This is likely to be correct because he comes into view in the context of a conquest account as it was promised. Second, the terror (or panic) in the mind of the Canaanites can be seen in several verses in Joshua: 2:9; 5:1, 9:24; 10:2.⁵² Given the appearance of the other two agents, it is reasonable to expect that הצרעה should be revealed somewhere in the conquest accounts as well. I believe it is the hardening of the enemies’ hearts, recounted in Joshua 11:16–20.

There are some linguistic aspects that shed light on the notion of the צרעה in Exodus 23:27–31. First, the parallelism here supports the argument of this paper. Even though many scholars consider that the

⁴⁸ Brueggemann, *NIB* 1:876. Noth regards the three elements as the main ideas in these verses. See Martin Noth, *Exodus; A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 190. For Dozeman, he considers both the terror and the hornet as two divine promises of God. See Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 557.

⁴⁹ For the transition of the role of the Messenger from 23:20 to 23:27, see Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 557.

⁵⁰ The terror is regarded as a holy war motif. See Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 557; Noth, *Exodus*, 191.

⁵¹ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 287, 597. He presents this view by giving midrashic sources. “Rashbam and Ramban also identify this Messenger with “Yahweh’s Army Captain,” who joins Israel after their entry into the land in Joshua 5:13-15.” On the contrary, H. Ausloos identified the angel in Exod. 23 with that in Judg. 2. See Hans Ausloos, “The ‘Angel of YHWH’ in Exod. xxiii 20-33 and Judg. ii 1-5: A Clue to the ‘Deuteronom(ist)ic’ Puzzle?” *VT* 58, (2008): 10–12. A few modern commentators argue that this angel is none other than Moses himself. See Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 435; Cole, *Exodus*, 181.

⁵² Most importantly, the word “fear” (אימה), used in Exod. 23:27, appears once more in Josh. 2:9, even though the suffixes of the word are different from each other.

צרעה is parallel to the terror in the verse 27,⁵³ the parallelism can be understood as showing the further development of an idea than that of the terror. In other word, it is a staircase parallelism.⁵⁴ Carpenter and Grisanti uphold this by arguing that “v. 28 could be a further (synthetic) development of v. 27, adding the means for the dread, terror.”⁵⁵ It is not illegitimate for the reader to expect something else in addition to the terror.

If so, what is it? I propose it is God’s active hardening of the enemies’ hearts (cf. Joshua 11:16–20). The objection could be raised that, based on the literal appearance of the other two, הצרעה ought to be understood in a literal sense as well. However, as I have argued above, such a reading is not supported by the narrative accounts themselves, even though it could reasonably be expected in some sense. However, the word צרעה should be regarded figuratively, not literally, and there are stylistic reasons for regarding it as such in Exodus 23:28. As Cassuto explains, the diction in Exodus 23:20–33 becomes elevated and approximates “the style of poetry.” He claims that these verses “are marked by poetic rhythm, parallelism, phraseology and even grammatical forms.”⁵⁶ Similarly, Benno Jacob contends that Exodus 23:31 should be interpreted as poetic since the archaic suffix,⁵⁷ only occurring in poetic texts, appears here.⁵⁸ The

⁵³ Cassuto, *Exodus*, 308; Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 290.

⁵⁴ Verse 27 and 28 have the same subject, verb and adverbial phrase, but a new object is added in verse 28. Berlin gives the definition of a staircase parallelism as “a step like pattern in which some elements from the first line are repeated verbatim in the second and others are added to complete the thought.” See Berlin, “Parallelism,” *ABD* 5:155.

⁵⁵ Carpenter and Grisanti, *NIDOTTE* 3:847. They suggest that the hornet may be the messenger of the Lord. However, this view is not valid since the messenger appears already in previous verse 20 and 23.

⁵⁶ Cassuto, *Exodus*, 309.

⁵⁷ The suffix *-mō* is unexpected, even though the meaning is definite since “of its twenty-three occurrences, all are in poetry save this one instance.” As for the further explanation, see Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 291; Jacob, *Exodus*, 736.

⁵⁸ Jacob, *Exodus*, 736.

verb גרש also frequently appears in poetic texts.⁵⁹ These factors reveal the poetic style of the text. Therefore, it makes more possible to consider the צרעה figuratively rather than literally. Koopman makes the same assertion for Joshua 24:12, defending the possibility of understanding צרעה figuratively there as well.⁶⁰

As the second evidence, according to Exodus 23:28–31, the role of the hornet is explained: God will send the צרעה before Israel and then the צרעה will ‘drive out’ (גרש)⁶¹ their enemies. Notably, the subject of the verb גרש is changed from הצרעה, to God, to Israel as Exodus 23:28–31 progresses:

verb גרש	Subject	Object	prepositional phrase
23:28	הצרעה (the hornet)	the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites	before you
23:29,30 (twice)	God (lit. “I”)	them (same as above)	before you
23:31	Israel (lit. “you”)	them (same as above)	before you

The subject changes three times here whereas the verb גרש remains the same. What can be inferred from this phenomenon is that the idea of the צרעה is related to both the work of God and the work of Israel, which serves as a tool of God. The verb גרש unifies the work of God and the work of Israel. Jacob supports this view when he claims that “the combined action of both could be expressed through this word.”⁶² In light of this, the action of the hardening of the enemies’ hearts recalls the work of Israel in the accomplishment of the conquest as Joshua 11:16–20 (as a related narrative) reports in the summary of the conquest.

Before dealing with Joshua 11:16–20, one more literary device must be noted. The definite article ה is joined with צרעה in all three occurrences. The word הצרעה should be translated literally as “the

⁵⁹ Patrick D. Miller considers the גרש as a technical term for “Yahweh’s activity in the conquest (Ex. 23:28–31; 33:2; 34:11; Josh. 24:12, 18; Judg. 2:3; 6:9).” See Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 5; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1973), 85.

⁶⁰ Koopmans, *Joshua 24 as Poetic Narrative*, 165–76.

⁶¹ This verb is also used in Josh. 24:12, having the subject צרעה.

⁶² Jacob, *Exodus*, 736.

hornet.” Even though most scholars argue that this definite article should be read as a collective,⁶³ its common usage is basically definite.⁶⁴ The definite article refers to something already known to the listeners or readers. In that case, the definite article must signify that the readers or listeners must have experienced in the past. David M. Howard points out that הצרעה cannot mean real “hornets” since they are not mentioned in battle descriptions in Joshua 6–12. He also insists that the reference is to “the hornet,” not “hornets.”⁶⁵ Therefore, I think it is apparent that the definite article on הצרעה makes a reference to the Israelites’ past experience in Egypt, not the Egyptian campaigns in Canaan, which the listeners would not have known about. It could symbolize the hardening of the enemies’ hearts as God did to Pharaoh. This point will be developed more thoroughly in the next section. For the time being, the related narrative of Joshua 11:16–20 must be treated.

Joshua 11:16–20 is a summary of the conquest of Canaan by God and Israel.⁶⁶ While the text of Exodus 23:20–31 shows the divine promise for the conquest, the text of Joshua 11:16–20 displays the fulfillment of the promise.⁶⁷ A literal read of Joshua 11:20 clearly says that the Canaanites attacked Israel “because from YHWH was the hardening (of) their heart.”⁶⁸ Such thing happened because God wanted to use Israel to annihilate them. According to this text, the hardening of the enemies’ hearts is one of the most important elements for the conquest of the land by Israel. It recalls the work of

⁶³ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 290; Adolph L. Harstad, *Joshua* (Concordia Commentary; Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 2005), 762.

⁶⁴ See Joüon §35a, 102.

⁶⁵ Howard, *Joshua*, 433.

⁶⁶ Boling, *Joshua*, 314; Nelson, *Joshua*, 154. There are somewhat different views about the extent, but almost the same: Hess considers Joshua 11:12–23 as a summary of the whole conquest. Cf. Hess, *Joshua*, 237; For Woudstra and Creach, Joshua 11:16–23 is regarded as a summary concerning the conquest. Cf. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 193; Jerome F.D. Creach, *Joshua* (IBC; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 94.

⁶⁷ L. Daniel Hawk, *Joshua* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 271.

⁶⁸ Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 605.

Israel as connected to the work of God, revealed by the change in subjects of גרש in Exodus 23:28–31. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the proposition “from” (מין) in Joshua 11:20 is semantically connected with the verb “send” (שלה) in Exodus 23:28. The latter text claims that הצרעה would be sent by God. The former claims that the hardening of the enemies’ hearts was from God. Therefore, it can be deduced not only that the two narratives are closely connected, but also that it is essential to take the Joshua 11:16–20 into proper consideration when reading the other conquest narratives.⁶⁹

Recapitulating what has been said, the צרעה should be expected to be revealed as one of the fulfillments of the three divine promises in Exodus 23:20–33. Narrowing down to 23:27–31, all linguistic aspects belonging to the poetic context attest that the notion of the צרעה recalls the work of Israel as a tool of God. This is supported by the evidence of Joshua 11:16–21. All these evidences show that the hornet should be understood metaphorically as the hardening of the

⁶⁹ Other related battle narratives can be considered in the light of Joshua 11:16–20 related with הצרעה. As the first instance, Joshua 10:1–4 relates the story of the united army by King Adoni-Zedek of Jerusalem against Gibeon, which has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites. Verse 2 indicates that the king of Jerusalem feared greatly. However, he came to fight against Gibeon, actually in order to attack Israel. What makes him come up to fight against Israel even though he felt great terror? If the terror was “the hornet” that God promised in Exodus 23:28; Deuteronomy 7:20, it should drive him out without any battles. However, Israel confronted its enemies in battle. Therefore, I contend that God’s sending of the hornet refers to the hardening of the enemies’ hearts so that the united army would be defeated by Israel completely in the battle. It can be inferred in light of Joshua 11:16–20, even though the phrase does not occur. As the second example, in Joshua 11:1–5 the king of Hazor Jabin heard the report that Joshua struck the hill country, the Negeb, the lowland, the slopes, and all their kings. Nevertheless, he assembled the northern allied forces in order to fight against Israel. If he feared Israel, he should not have come into conflict with Israel (although the notion of “fear” does not occur here). Despite this, he did anyway. The same question should be raised: what makes him attack Israel? It can be only understood in the light of the hardening of the enemies’ hearts, once more based on Joshua 11:16–20. In the case of the two evidences it seems to be a somewhat presumptive assertion, but it will be upheld by more evidences as it is being studied. Moreover, Josh. 9:1–2 can be understood in this sense as well. Some criticize these passages as a different historical tradition, since the enemies engage Israel in battles rather than they are expelled by hornets. However, this is not a problem if הצרעה is understood as the hardening of the enemies’ hearts. Cf. Baruch Halpern, “Settlement of Canaan,” *ABD* 5:1123.

enemies' hearts. Especially focusing on the definite article as indicating the experience of Israel in Egypt, the following section will confirm that the literary use of צרעה reminds Israel of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart through the wordplay between צרעה and מצרים in Deuteronomy 7:18 and 7:20.

The Context of Deuteronomy 7:20

Many commentators recognize the dependency of Deuteronomy 7 on Exodus 23:20–23. Victor P. Hamilton asserts that Deuteronomy 7 seems to have been based on Exodus 23:20–33. The common elements shared by the two passages can be found in the following table:⁷⁰

Exodus 23:20–33		Deuteronomy 7	
23:23	Land of six Canaanite peoples	7:1	Land of seven Canaanite peoples
23:23	God will destroy these peoples	7:3	Israel will destroy them with God's help
23:24	A warning of apostasy	7:3-5	A warning of apostasy
23:24	break their altars, pillars, etc.	7:5	break their altars, pillars, etc.
23:25-26	God's promise to take sickness away	7:15	God's protecting Israel from all disease
23:27-28	God will send his terror and the hornet	7:20, 23	God will send the hornet and great confusion
23:29	The danger of wild animals	7:22	The danger of wild animals
23:30	God will drive out them little by little	7:22	God will drive out them little by little
23:32	No making covenant with them	7:2	No making covenant with them
23:33	Their gods as a potential snare to Israel	7:16	Their gods as a potential snare to Israel

As clearly noticed in the table, the author of Deuteronomy 7 seems dependent on Exodus 23:20–33, even though “he reworked it in accordance with his particular tendency.”⁷¹ Although the order of

⁷⁰ Hamilton, *Exodus*, 436; John Van Seters, “Terms Amorite and Hittite in the Old Testament,” *VT* 22, (1972): 69.

⁷¹ Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 379.

elements in Deuteronomy 7 is not as same as in Exodus 23:20–33, the same concept of הצרעה can be deduced in the view of the similarity between two texts. Weinfeld explains that “Similarly, in Exod 23:28 (cf. Josh 24:12), the hornet (*hšr ‘h*) is sent by God to drive Israel’s enemy out of the land, whereas the Deuteronomic author when using this idea states that God will send the hornet to destroy the hidden survivors (*nš ‘rym wnstryym*).”⁷² But how can the hidden enemies⁷³ be destroyed by God and Israel literally “from before your [the Israelites’] faces” (מִפְּנֵיךָ)? It can only happen when God makes their hearts to be hardened so that they would come out to fight against the Israelites. Then, God would defeat the hidden enemies through the work of Israel (cf. Exod. 23:28–31) as depicted in the Joshua 11:16–20.

Here it can be worth noting that phonetic aspects between Deuteronomy 7:18 and 7:20 could expose the meaning of צרעה. As noted above, Borowski asserts, based on the similarity of the words and the phonetic elements between the צרעה and מצרים, that צרעה symbolically portrays the power of Egypt:⁷⁴ the two words share the two same consonants צ and ר, and sound ‘a’ alike.⁷⁵ Borowski argues that the reason for the concealment of its identity is that in this case Egypt serves as a help to Israel, while the other nations do not need to be veiled since they are charged with punishment.⁷⁶ I am almost inclined to agree with his assertion with a few modifications: I do not think it should symbolize Egypt’s power, and I disagree with the reason for hiding the role of Egypt. What הצרעה implies can be interpreted in a different way. According to the context, it cannot signify the continued Egyptian military campaign into Canaan, as I have already shown. Rather, standing close to Deuteronomy 7:20, 7:18 reminds the hearers of God’s great works in Egypt. Deuteronomy 7:18 clearly indicates Egypt by name. There is no reason whatsoever to vaguely identify Egypt with the hornet two

⁷² Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 383.

⁷³ See 1 Sam. 17:11–24. Israel could not fight against the Philistine Goliath because of a terror.

⁷⁴ Borowski, “The Identity of the Biblical *šir ‘ā*,” 314–16.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

verses later.⁷⁷ Rather, it reminds the Israelites of their experience in Egypt—that what God has done is closely related to Pharaoh, who is also symbolized as a bee in Egypt.⁷⁸ There are many references that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh from the 10 plagues narrative in Exodus: 4:21; 5:2; 7:3, 4; 13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 35; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 13:15; 14:4, 8, 17. All the Israelites must have known this event. Therefore, the צרעה can be understood figuratively as God's actions against Pharaoh.⁷⁹

To sum up, the similarity of the context between Deuteronomy 7:20 and Exodus 23:28 supports the alternative view: the hardening of the enemies' hearts. In this context, it is understood that the "hidden enemies" would be driven out by God and Israel, mentioned in Deuteronomy 7:20. Furthermore, the phonetic resemblance of צרעה to מצרים in Deuteronomy 7:18–20 also implies that the word should be understood figuratively. The wordplay reminds Israel of God's action to harden the Pharaoh's heart in Exodus. In the following section, this paper will observe how Joshua understood the notion of "the hornet" in the context of the battle between king Sihon and Israel. This will show that the argument of this paper is reasonable.

⁷⁷ The adjacent verse 23 mentions the nations in Canaan by name. As Willem Hendrik Gispen points out well, Exodus 23:28 argues against this view as well: "the three nations mentioned there were still in Canaan when Israel arrived (cf. commentary on 3:8; Deut. 7:20). It is unlikely that the Egyptians would be called 'hornets,' while all other nations were identified by their usual names." See Willem Hendrik Gispen, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 236.

⁷⁸ Cole, *Exodus*, 191. This might illustrate the attack of the hornet against the honey bee.

⁷⁹ The use of the definite article also supports this view, as shown in the previous section.

The Context of Joshua 24:12

In Joshua 24, Joshua recounts how God gave Israel victory over her enemies, this speech contains the third occurrence of צרעה in scripture. The linguistic aspects of the text and the related narrative which Joshua's speech recounts confirm the meaning of צרעה as the hardening of the enemies' hearts. According to L. Daniel Hawk, צרעה demonstrates "the fulfillment of YHWH's promises in Exod. 23:28 and Deut. 7:20."⁸⁰ What is noticeable here is linguistically that we once more meet two crucial verbs "send" (שלה) and "drive out" (גרש), which appear in Exodus 23:28–31. These two words with the צרעה serve to remind the reader of Exodus 23:28–31 where the two words function in a crucial sense: the unified work of God and Israel.

Moreover, Joshua 24:12 is the only verse that conclusively states that the צרעה not only had been "sent" (שלה) but also had "driven out" (גרש) the enemies in front of Israel. The form of the two verbs can shed light on the meaning of צרעה. The *wayyiqtol* form of the verbs שלה and גרש indicates past action,⁸¹ whereas the other two occurrences depict צרעה as a future promise (see Exod. 23:28 and Deut. 7:20). Here the reference to הצרעה is concretely related to battles against the kings Sihon and Og, events which occurred in the past.⁸² Therefore, it is natural to analyze the battle against king Sihon⁸³ in Numbers 21:21–25 and Deuteronomy 2:26–30 as Joshua 24:12 indicates. Although most scholars tend to pass over this point, these related texts should be considered seriously.

The three texts can be compared in the following table, with important parts in bold:

⁸⁰ Hawk, *Joshua*, 271; Robert G. Boling, *Joshua*, 536.

⁸¹ Joüon §118c, 361.

⁸² Howard, *Joshua*, 433; Hawk, *Joshua*, 271. Hawk understands the problem of two kings on stylistic grounds rather than a chronological issue. As for more of the issue related with the two kings, see Edelman, "Are the kings of the Amorites 'swept away' in Joshua 24?" 279–286.

⁸³ I have chosen to focus on the battle against Sihon, because the biblical narrative concerning Og is very brief.

Numbers 21:21–25	Deuteronomy 2:26–30	Joshua 24:12
<p>²¹ Israel sent messengers to say to Sihon king of the Amorites:</p>	<p>²⁶ From the desert of Kedemoth I sent messengers to Sihon king</p>	<p>¹² I sent the hornet ahead of you,</p>
<p>²² “Let us pass through your country. We will not turn aside into any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king’s highway until we have passed through your territory.”</p>	<p>of Heshbon offering peace and saying, ²⁷ “Let us pass through your country. We will stay on the main road; we will not turn aside to the right or to the left. ²⁸ Sell us food to eat and water to drink for their price in silver.</p>	<p>which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and</p>
<p>²³ But Sihon would not let Israel pass through his territory. He mustered his entire army and marched out into the desert against Israel. When he reached Jahaz, he fought with Israel. ²⁴ Israel, however, put him to the sword and took over his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, but only as far as the Ammonites, because their border was fortified. ²⁵ Israel captured all the cities of the Amorites and occupied them, including Heshbon and all its surrounding settlements.</p>	<p>Only let us pass through on foot— ²⁹ as the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir, and the Moabites, who live in Ar, did for us—until we cross the Jordan into the land the LORD our God is giving us.” ³⁰ But Sihon king of Heshbon refused to let us pass through. For the LORD your God had made his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate in order to give him into your hands, as he has now done.</p>	<p>bow.</p>

According to Joshua 24:12, God has sent the צרעה before Israel to the two kings of the Amorites. It can be expected that the idea of the צרעה should appear in the related narratives. The first story of war mentioned against king Sihon is related in Numbers 21:21–25. The צרעה as real insects or plague, as C. J. Goslinga points out, does not appear in the narrative at all.⁸⁴ Even though Goslinga insists that the צרעה has to be understood as “panic” figuratively, the terror as the

⁸⁴ C. J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (BSC, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 174.

second promise in Exodus 23:20–31 even does not appear either.⁸⁵ Instead, king Sihon mustered his entire army and marched out into the desert against Israel. Given either of these two positions, Joshua 24:12 and Numbers 21:21–25 seem to contradict each other. Yet, fortunately Deuteronomy 2:26–30, where the event of the battle between Israel and king Sihon is recollected, explains the reason for Sihon’s actions. According to Deuteronomy 2:30, Sihon marches out to meet Israel because “God had made his spirit stubborn,” hardening his heart to fight with Israel,⁸⁶ like the Pharaoh of Egypt in the book of Exodus.⁸⁷ If this is the case, how are we to understand Joshua’s mention of הצרעה? Joshua firmly asserts that it was sent to king Sihon in Joshua 24:12. The meaning of הצרעה must have been closely connected to the hardening of the enemies’ hearts, based on a comparison of the related narratives.

If the “hornet” is regarded literally, it is impossible to understand the battles between the Israelites and the Canaanites. Contrary to the narrative accounts of Israel’s conquest, “one would have to conclude that the Israelites did not even have to put their weapons to use.”⁸⁸ As Goslinga contends, however, numerous passages confirm that the Israelites defeated their enemies by putting them to their swords.⁸⁹ But then what is the meaning of the end of verse 12? Literally it can be translated as “it was not by your sword or bow.” Clearly, this does not mean that the Israelites never fought; rather, it means that Israel’s victory was the direct result of God’s powerful assistance.⁹⁰

We can therefore deduce that when Moses recalled the battle between Israel and king Sihon, he apparently knew that God’s action

⁸⁵ Nevertheless, it can be assumed that he might feel the terror firstly before God’s doing to harden his heart.

⁸⁶ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (1st ed.; JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 32. He connects this verse with Josh. 11:19-20 as I suggest.

⁸⁷ Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 65. He also connects Deut. 2:30 with Josh. 11:20.

⁸⁸ Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 175.

⁸⁹ Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 175.

⁹⁰ Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 175. The pair of the sword and vow appears in Gen. 48:22. See Boling, *Joshua*, 537.

to harden the heart of Sihon played a crucial role in their victory (Deut. 2:26–30). Moses also knew that Sihon’s decision fight against Israel was God’s way of using Israel for the conquest, despite the fact that neither הצרעה nor any of its possible meanings appear in the text of Numbers 21:21–25.⁹¹ Later, when Joshua summarized Israel’s history of the conquest, he could clearly understand that the hardening of the enemies’ hearts was the fulfillment of God’s promise to send “the hornet” in Exodus 23:28. This is why he emphasizes הצרעה as he recounts the battle between Israel and Sihon in Joshua 24:12.

To sum up, the *wayyiqtol* form of the verbs גרש and שלה makes clear the notion that הצרעה was actually sent from God as a historical event. It was obviously sent to drive out the two kings, Sihon and Og, as the text of Joshua 24:12 makes clear. A comparison of Numbers 21: 21–25, Deuteronomy 2:26–30 and Joshua 24:12 helps to identify the meaning of צרעה as the hardening of the enemies’ hearts. Consequently, it is definite that God has sent הצרעה in the sense of the hardening of the enemies’ hearts to use Israel’s sword and bow for the conquest, even though their weapons did nothing more than harvest the fruits of God’s victory.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that the צרעה should be understood figuratively. A proper analysis of the context and literary features of the use of צרעה in scripture, as well as comparison with the conquest narrative reveals that צרעה ought to be understood as God’s act of hardening the enemies’ hearts. This understanding will help commentators to better recognize Israel’s conquest of promised land as an example of divine promise and fulfillment in the biblical narrative (cf. Exod. 23:20–33 and Josh. 24:12): the role of “the hornet” sent from God is to harden the hearts of Israel’s enemies, so that God can deliver them into Israel’s hands. Therefore, the words of Joshua 24:12 are correct: the conquest was completed not by their swords or their bows, but by God’s power.

⁹¹ Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy* (IBC; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 37. He believes that the account of the battle between king Sihon and Israel which is related here is affected by the Deuteronomic perspective.

