

## CREATING THE PAST BIBLICAL NARRATIVE AS INTERPRETIVE DISCOURSE

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The thesis I wish to propose for today's discussion<sup>1</sup> has developed considerably from the mere dissatisfaction with reading the bible as literature that I had expressed in this forum some four years ago,<sup>2</sup> and again in Sweden on the occasion of Uppsala's annual biblical forum in the autumn of 1995.<sup>3</sup> Methodologically, it takes its point of departure from my paper for the Qumran colloquium that we held at Schäfergaard in the summer of 1995, in which I first outlined my understanding of a method to recapture some sense of the bible's literary context.<sup>4</sup> While it was with my Uppsala paper that I became first convinced of the particular genre of "discourse" as an implicit characteristic of the bible's "collected traditions," the nature of which I had become accustomed to understand as having developed the major works of the bible since my much earlier *Origin Tradition* study,<sup>5</sup> it was not until my research report for last year's collegium biblicum, that I became convinced of a specific function of discourse on tradition as a formative model of biblical texts.<sup>6</sup>

My paper today not only offers further illustration of the bible's discourse as a functional motive in the creation of tradition, it also attempts to validate three working assumptions that have developed: a) that the biblical collections offer an essentially theologically motivated critique of the traditions they collect; b) that they form a relatively contemporary field of discourse, with substantial adherents from texts that we find among the Old Testament canon, the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament canons; and c) that the discourse itself is a prime factor in the specific form and character of the traditions collected.

### 1. Commenting on II Kings: Isaiah, Jonah and Elijah

This thesis — that biblical narrative in its presentation as Israel's tradition is not historiographical as such, either in function or in intention, can be supported when we consider the developing tradition's understanding of a work like II Kings. This tradition is certainly the central backbone of all historicist readings of the bible. The use of II Kings' narratives — or close variants of them — has been long recognized as having played a central role in the composition of such prophetic works as the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Jonah. Indeed, the ideology of the II King's traditions of

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1. The thesis and examples for this paper are drawn from my forthcoming book to be published shortly, *The Bible in History: How Writers Create A Past*, London 1999.
  2. See my "Some Exegetical and Theological Implications of Understanding Exodus as a Collected Tradition," *Fra Dybet, festskrift til John Strange*, København 1994, pp. 233-242.
  3. "The Bible as Literature: A Misdirection in Recent Old Testament Exegesis," to appear in *Changing Perspectives: From Ancient Israel to Biblical Israel, vol. 1; CIS*, ed. by Th. L. Thompson (Sheffield Academic Press, forthcoming).
  4. "4Q Testimonia og bibelens affatelse," ed. by N. Hyldahl and Th. L. Thompson, *Dødehavsteksterne og Bibelen, Forum for bibelsk eksegese 8*, København 1996.
  5. *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel I*, Sheffield 1987.
  6. "Tematisk diskurs, vedrørende Davids salmer: Historificering og Teologisering," *Collegium Biblicum, Årsskrift 1997*. This forms part of a larger project on the bible's myth of King David, now in progress.

Jeremiah is so close that few Old Testament scholars have avoided speculation about the close authorial interrelationship of these books, and the Isaiah text is usually assumed to be citing directly from II Kings.

Isaiah's composition can be discussed as a product of three different kinds of material: a) a paraphrastic heading opening chapter 1 and chapters 36-39 which offer a context in the life of Isaiah who is one of the prophets with stories about them in II Kings; b) an original "proto-Isaiah" in chapters 1-36, representing visions and prophecies of doom about old Israel; and c) various expansions of songs with an anonymous voice set at the time of Israel's imminent return from exile interpreting first Isaiah. Expansive variants of this interpretive perspective have long led to the assertion of originally independent texts of a deutero- or "Second Isaiah" and even of a Trito- or "Third Isaiah". Chapters 36-39 of the book of Isaiah share a story about Isaiah and King Hezekiya with chapters 18-20 of II Kings, replete with some prophecies.<sup>7</sup> The historicizing function of the paraphrastic summary in the opening verse of Isaiah, likewise drawn from the tradition of II Kings, creates an historicizing context for "proto-Isaiah".

The association between Isaiah and II Kings here is quite comparable to psalm 18's relationship to the book of II Samuels. The poems of Isaiah are related to tradition past, and particularly the tradition about Yahweh's rejection of old Israel, expanding and filling out the intimate and ambivalent role of Yahweh's presence in human affairs. At the same time, the prophet's introduction of Yahweh's interpretive voice at the close of II Kings raises the Assyrian threat against Jerusalem out of the historical and into the world of theology and myth. This is quite clear as the Assyrians are placed into the same role as the builders of Babylon's tower. They mock Yahweh when they lift their eyes and ambitions to heaven. In trying to bring destruction to Egypt, they oppose Yahweh, Egypt's creator.

This interpretive voice, this *pesher or commentary* of the prophet, belongs to a scholarly discourse which we also find in the introductory heading of Isaiah 1: "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jothan, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Jerusalem." The editor is addressing his composition from the perspective of his entire book, including the sections which refer to the return of Israel from Babylon in the time of the Persians. However this context referring to II Kings prophet belongs to the collections of songs and poems in Isaiah 1-39. It offers a commentary to the life story of Isaiah of II Kings.

Beginning already with the opening song of his collection, in chapter 1, the editor reads the Isaiah tradition mythologically and theologically. It is a history known only from the perspective of salvation, a history known and determined by the merciful god. The book's heading which first connects us to the traditions of II Kings makes it quite clear that the tradition of kings is already known and understood by the Book of Isaiah's audience. He understands the II Kings he refers to as a story about "old Israel," the lost Israel. It is an Israel that neither knows nor understands what Yahweh and his audience do: "Israel does not know me, my people understands nothing."

It is the use of the II King's tradition which identify Isaiah 1-39 as Isaianic poetry within a context of ancient Israel's history, not something intrinsic to the poetry, which has rather common cause with the Book of Psalms. The awareness of this undermines fatally the reading of First Isaiah as the product of the Iron Age. Isaiah's Isaiah is a product of the Isaianic redaction itself, of the *peshering* tradition of its transmission and of this tradition's theological reading of II Kings.

The collection of poetry following chapter 39 to the end of the book are sung with a voice from within the same "new Israel" context of the editorial commentary that attributes chapter 1-36 to II King's Isaiah. Recurrently, throughout these "Isaiah" songs condemning Israel one hears echoes of the implicit saving voice of chapter 40: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your god. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, her iniquity is pardoned." Implicit in all the songs of wrath, is a song of hope; for it is in the return, in the understanding of the "new Israel" that

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7. So II Kings 19,21-34.

the story of old Israel's destruction first makes sense. The meaning of the books prophecies of doom collected in chapters 1-36 is specifically interpreted immediately following the opening words of comfort of chapter 40 just cited. "A voice cries, make ready Yahweh's way in the wilderness; in the desert, make "straight" the path to your "god". Every valley will be lifted; every mountain and peak will be levelled; the cliffs will be leveled and the hills be made into the plain. Yahweh's glory will be revealed and all humanity will see it. Yahweh himself has spoken." It is in exile, in the suffering in the wilderness, that the theology of the way is finally made right.

The metaphors here in Isaiah chapter 40 echo Jeremiah 4 and the creation story's formless wilderness from which creation and new life spring. It is in suffering that one creates the way of life straight. First Isaiah is not of the past but about the past. It is written as the introduction to this ecstatic expression of pietism's goal: the revelation of Yahweh's glory. The prophecies of doom, indeed the entire complex of narrative and song in II Kings and Isaiah first has its meaning here, where Isaiah offers us a doublet or variant of the story in Exodus 24 of all the people of Israel, having come through the purifying sufferings of the wilderness, finally seeing the glory of Yahweh revealed on Mount Sinai. We are not dealing with an account of the past so much as we are dealing with an interpretation of a past as lost.

I will turn now to some examples of discourse in the bible to two other prophets of II Kings, Jonah and Elijah. This discourse, implicit to the Book of Jonah, not only tells us much about the reception of this tradition within the world of Old Testament texts, but also about the understanding of II Kings, itself, of its own tradition's historicity.

Words such as irony and caricature are hardly foreign to discussion of the Book of Jonah, with its prophet playing the role of an "anti-prophet, the only one of all of the bible's prophets — beginning already with Moses and the murmuring traditions of Exodus — whose prophecies were listened to!" This observation, given the central role that the concept of prophecy has played in modern scholarship's creation of ancient Israel should lead to healthy self-criticism among scholars, if not deconstructive laughter.

In fact, this ironic understanding of prophecy is central to the tradition's view of prophecy. Prophets have not so much played the role of messengers of god's word in Israel's history, as they have played the roles of catalysts for old Israel's faithlessness and betrayal. Prophets provoke stories of Israel's disobedience and its rejection of the way of god's torah. As Isaiah has already stressed, the prophets present the proof that Israel neither knows nor understands anything. This is the role that Jonah's book unfolds in its well-known spoof on II Kings' prophet Jonah.

The Jonah of II Kings is the prophet, who, as the servant of Yahweh, had instructed the king in Samaria, Jeroboam ben Joash, to save Israel by destroying its enemies. Following Jonah's instruction, Jeroboam brings Israel to greatness, expanding its boundaries to the Dead Sea and southwards. Such a Jonah — this savior of Israel — is the kind of prophet that the prophet in Jonah's book implicitly imagines himself to be. He wants to bring down destruction on all of god's and Israel's enemies. He wants to save Israel in its great need. This is a prophet, unlike others. He is not disloyal and unpatriotic like Jeremiah; nor does he oppose Israel's great king Jeroboam, nor anyone who "walks in the way of Jeroboam." He stands with, not against Israel. However, the irony of his fate is that he can't be the Jonah of Kings. Hardly! This poor Jonah is ordered to bring Yahweh's word against Israel's enemies.

When this prophet receives the divine call to go to Nineveh to preach repentance, he runs; he wants none of it. "Knowing that Yahweh was a gracious and merciful god, slow to anger and, overflowing with faithful love, would repent of the evil" that he intended against Nineveh, Jonah ran. Jonah at heart was a prophet like the Elijah of the stories in I Kings chapters 17-19, a prophet of doom and wrath. He wants destruction and disaster on all of Yahweh's enemies: especially over the great Nineveh. Finally, when Jonah is caught in the belly of the great fish, he can no longer resist the divine importunities. This, after all, the story insists, is *Yahweh*, '*elohei shamayim*, the creator of both heaven and earth. Jonah submits and preaches to Nineveh.

Just as he predicted, Nineveh repents. Even the animals, fasting and covered in sackcloth and ashes, cry out to God. And Jonah: Jonah is angry. And in Jonah's anger, the author turns to the great Elijah: a prophet's prophet. It is strikingly instructive, however, that our text turns specifically to Elijah's words of I Kings 19,4: "he prays to god that he might die." Unlike Yahweh — slow to anger — Jonah is quick. Frustrated by Nineveh's repentance which he, himself, had been forced to preach, Jonah also wishes to die. Yahweh responds by asking Jonah if he does well to be angry, a motif that points to the story's central theme.

Jonah's implicit discussion with I Kings' story is an interesting one. I Kings 19 finds the great prophet Elijah, fresh from the slaughter of Baal's prophets, hunted by his enemies and running for his life. Then the scene turns comic. Again, we find the rough humor of Elijah's implicit author, the same who has Elijah call on a bear to eat the children who were calling him "baldy." Here the humor is deconstructive. It is turned against Elijah, to mock the great prophet the author himself created. Even the tale's setting is made wry fun of. Elijah takes a day's journey out into the desert, only to sit under a tree. Again a joke: in fear for his life he prays to die. The humor is laconic. Elijah then falls asleep and is saved, like Jesus after him, by angels who minister to him in the desert.

The Jonah story takes up the comic line which I Kings opened. Jonah too wishes to die, but he for his success, not like the prophet Elijah in despair and failure. Jonah then builds a shelter outside the city (in Elijah's desert?) and waits to see what will happen. The humor of I Kings sneaks into our Jonah story. Although Jonah is already sheltered from the hot sun, Yahweh causes a plant to grow up overnight to shade his head and Jonah is quite pleased by this. But the next day God causes a worm to kill the plant, and then increases the heat and the swelter to the point that Jonah wishes again for death. Yahweh repeats his question: "Do you do well to be angry (4,9)," didactically tying the shade tree story to that other cause of anger: Nineveh's impending salvation. The story centers attention on this reiterated echo of Genesis 4,6's same question by Yahweh to Cain: "Why are you angry?" In the context of wisdom's discourse the story finds itself in the question. Whether one, like Cain, is dealing with sacrifices offered to god, or, like Jonah, with trees one doesn't need growing one day and dying the next, or indeed with the life and death of a great city, one is always dealing with the will of god. All that happens are events to be accepted. Good is not as men see it, but rather that is good which god sees as good. That is the central message, while Jonah's story formally concludes with a moral about the virtue of pity.

The dominant theme of the Jonah story is the same as in the scene of Cain's sacrifice. This same theme is also given a dominating role in the Book of Job. The will of God is not what men will have it. It is a variation of the psalter's theology of the way's structural paradigm. The way of the goddess and the torah's path, the way of men and god's path are fundamental alternatives. One lives with choices without compromise. Decisions are the radical questions of an either/or. This theme is also a variant of the dominant theme we saw taken up with such force in I-II Samuels stories of Saul and David. As in the creation story: it is what Yahweh acknowledges that is good.

The deconstructive theme that God and his action in history is not what we expect is also taken up explicitly in a close variant of the same Elijah narrative that Jonah quoted from: in I Kings, chapter 18. Elijah, had just challenged the Ba'al prophets to a life and death contest of divine reality. The prophets of Ba'al had called upon their god: "O Ba'al answer us! Ba'al doesn't answer and the Ba'al prophets lose the challenge and are all slaughtered. As a result of this bloody slaughter, life becomes dangerous for Elijah and by chapter 19 he is hiding in a cave in fear of his life. A "word of Yahweh" asks him what he is doing there. Elijah answers — and this surely is the same Elijah Jonah admired — that he has been "filled with zealotry for Yahweh the God of war," destroying altars and killing prophets. Only he is left. The reference to this divine epithet, the "god of war" which is a particularly frequent favorite of the prophets of doom is hardly accidental here. It is to emphasize the bloody qualities of Elijah as a prophet as a preface to the following parable.

Yahweh's word then tells Elijah to stand on top of God's mountain (Mt. Horeb) before Yahweh. Yahweh passed by! However, first a great storm-wind that breaks rocks in pieces came, but Yahweh was not in the wind. After the wind an earthquake, but Yahweh was not in the

earthquake. After the earthquake a fire passed by, but Yahweh was not in the fire. And then after the fire *qol demamah daqqah*: “a voice of soft silence. . . .” All the expectations of the divine which Elijah and the prophets of doom and violent war embody are deconstructed in this little tale tucked away in the heart of a history, marked by the acts of Yahweh, the God of War. It is I think the thematic center of the Book of II Kings.

The use of these narratives in these prophetic works, especially in Isaiah but also in Jeremiah, clearly indicates an other than historical purpose: one more comparable to the much shorter theologizing commentaries on I-II Samuels’ stories about David that we find in the interpretive headings of some of the psalms. In this mode, these brief commentaries and glosses give theological and ontological significance to these traditions of the past, representing them as significant within a new context, within a mythical field of reference. While this has much to tell us about how II King’s was understood as history, it undermines totally any claim of history writing for Isaiah’s use of II Kings.

In dealing with the strongly interpretive narratives of Jonah and of Elijah in II Kings, even a mere surface attribution of history to II Kings must be given up. It is not only that stories from II Kings are thrown into the role of a purely literary polarity of ironic caricature by the book of Jonah, but the same kind of discourse within II Kings itself, indicates that we are dealing with a didactic function. We are dealing with stories for the purpose of teaching. That this is so thoroughly within the transmission of the tradition undermines scholarly assumptions about II Kings function as a history. Just such a didactic function, as that which finds its voice so explicitly in the Elijah-Elisha tales, has long been recognized as central to both the chronological and thematic coherence of the extended narrative of the books of Samuels and Kings. Therefore, this function can not be dismissed as extraneous to the functions and goals of II Kings simply because of its affinity to such fairy-tale motifs found in this same narrative chain as the child-eating bear. In fact, we should concentrate on just such didactic and philosophical motifs, because it is these motifs, belonging to fairy tales even as they do, that is central to the purpose of this book.

I think the conclusion inescapable. II Kings does not involve us in an historicist’s presentation of past events. Whatever historical this tale tradition might involve, is but an accident of the narrative’s unknown sources and — here I am thinking of the synchronic royal successions of the houses of Omri and David — of the chronological framework chosen by the narrator. Rather in reading II Kings, we — like II Kings’ commentators within the Old Testament’s own intertextual discourse — are engaged in a discourse about the philosophical principles and truths which have been dramatically illustrated by stories of old Israel. Human knowledge is never secure. We do not know god directly. God’s will is supreme. It is of the essence of being human to accept that it is God who does what is good. A human being in contrast finds the good in doing god’s will. It is such pedagogical truths which form the crux of biblical tradition building.

## 2. Genesis and Jubilees in Debate

While the stories about old Israel are stories about the dark side of human history, these narratives are recurrently punctuated by closures and responses about mercy and hope. Few stories are as dark as the garden story’s mate: the tale of Cain, and few are touched more by a motif of divine grace. This story is also about “humanity” and, together with the garden story forms a paired thematic introduction between creation and the opening of the book with its title in chapter 5: “This is the book of humanity’s “development.” It is a very important bridge as it intensifies the dominant narrative theme.

In the story’s opening, all of our characters bear “cue” names. There is “the human” of the garden story and Eve, his wife, whose name is understood to mean “the mother of all living.” Adam has sex with his wife, who bears a child whom she names “Cain.” Adam’s involvement, as far as the story is concerned, is not terribly important and provides only the occasion for Eve’s pregnancy. Eve tells the audience: “I have made a man with Yahweh!” that Eve creates her children! Eve is here

the mother of all living making men. Her child "Cain," whose name puns with Eve's word "made" is the eponymous "creature." Our hapless Adam does little. This plot motif is the same as we find in the first chapter of Luke. Human life is born of god and woman. The author of the gospel tells us that "the child who will be born will be called 'holy': the 'son of god'." The same metaphor is engaged in the Cain story and forms its point of departure.

Abel has also a cue name, which reflects the frailty of all human life as "momentary" or "fleeting": but a "breath,"<sup>8</sup> an intensely compassionate name to attach to the life of a murder victim. Both Cain and Abel are from their births, like their father Adam, "everyman." When we watch them, we watch ourselves, even as sons of God, for all that. Their experience is our experience, and their understanding our own. The two brothers of our story, however, do double duty in the roles they play. Cain plays also the Canaanites, whose sacrifices go unaccepted, as Abel plays the role of Canaan's brother, the fleeting role of the nation god chose.

And, so too, is Cain's question our question! However, we get ahead of our story. As the story opens, Cain does what is proper for a farmer; he does nothing wrong. He offers his crops as sacrifice and pays respect to his god. But Yahweh does not recognize or accept Cain and his offering. This is the story's plot and problem. The plot opening can be compared to story of Jonah, and to the scene in which Jonah's shade tree grows overnight to provide him comfort from the sun. Yahweh causes it, however, just as quickly to wither. The reasons that Yahweh does what he does is hidden. Just so, the reason that Yahweh does not accept Cain and his sacrifice is unknown and closed to the reader. Cain's behavior and sacrifice is every bit as good as Abel's. The theme, like that in the Jonah story, emphasizes divine freedom: both our inability to know god's purposes and his freedom to do what we least expect. The story's crisis is in its essence an intellectual debate and conflict. On one hand, the theological demand, even definition of divine freedom, is that it be complete and untrammelled. On the other hand, the assumptions of religious traditions assume that we know something of the divine. Our stories engage this issue on the side of divine freedom. Like Cain's, the expectations of all who offer worship to god are that he will accept them and their offering. The story gives the lie to this as but a human conceit. The story is both sympathetic and compassionate in its presentation of Cain's reaction. This theme is a well-travelled road in world literature. It is reflected in one of the central motifs of Bizet's *Carmen*: hatred born of unrequited love.

In Genesis, it is Cain's love for god that goes unacknowledged and unaccepted. The tragedy of our story has nothing to do with a lack of piety in Cain. The story is rather about our — that is, humanity's — needing (and needing absolutely) freely conceived acceptance. And it is also about the nature of love as freely given. How can such a demand be met except gratuitously: by grace. And so our story is also about the graceful quality of acceptance and love.

Like Jonah, who is scolded for being angry and depressed at the loss of his shade, Cain is called upon to abandon his anger. "Why should you be angry?" At this point of the exchange, Yahweh's expressed lack of sympathy for Cain's perspective, brings Cain's frustration to the center of the stage, and exposes it to ridicule in its human frailty? Of course, Yahweh, as pedant, is correct: If one "does what is right," that is enough for self-respect. Yet, the pedantry also opens to view the vulnerability and implicit ambivalence of our all too human virtue of self-respect. After all, this is not why humans do "what is right." We need ulterior motives for "self-respect". We need acknowledgement and recognition "to hold our heads up high." This we all know; and this lies at the root of Cain's anger. It is this bad faith that Yahweh's cold logic exposes.

But at this point, Yahweh's script writer complicates the story by forgetting the plot-line. In doing so, Yahweh momentarily becomes not the debating pedant, but the absent-minded professor, losing himself in a footnote's excursion into a complex variable of scholarly proverbs. He has just told Cain that "if you do what is right, you can hold your head up high." This obviously brings to

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8. Psalm 39,12 uses the Hebrew word for Abel's name, *hebel*, to express just such transience of human life: "For I am your *passing* guest, a migrant like all my fathers," and psalm 94,11 captures another nuance of human fragility that Abel's story mirrors: "human thoughts, that are but a *breath*."

mind the alternative: “if you don’t do what is right, what then?” This is the way a scholar’s mind works, not a story. It is hardly an issue that involves any story’s plot. It is an aside, and causes yet another pedantic citation of the well-known variant of the first. “If you *don’t* do what is right, sin will crouch at your door, and it will want to have you. Yet you must master it!” All thoughts of sacrifice: even of unrequited love are long gone. The professor is lost inside of one of his many parentheses. We have not gone back into the story but are involved in a moral sermon of a wholly different context. Up to this point, we had been given good old-fashioned theology of grace. Divine acceptance is not something earned. We can not expect it. Nor can we demand it. It is a god’s free gift. Therefore, in practice, people should behave as is proper, without reference to what they might gain from their good behavior. The sermon story was clear to that point. But now, suddenly, we find ourselves well outside of the Cain/Abel sacrifice story and are wandering somewhere within chapters 11, 14 and 29 of the Book of Proverbs! We are now trying to find our way through some of the finer distinctions separating the “path of righteousness” and the “way of all mankind.” Even Cain is momentarily forgotten as we try to wrestle with our teacher’s question about the perennial choice between wisdom and folly.

This momentary visitation of other worlds intimates some of the issues that our text has at stake in its progress. We find ourselves wrapped in three different metaphors simultaneously evoked by Yahweh’s speech about *not* doing what is right: threat, temptation and conquest. The temptation is, indeed, to murder. This, our author has interpreted as “desire.” In fact, the text has turned itself into a commentary and the author an exegete. Conquest is tentatively interpreted as self-conquest, as the narration engages the scholarly riddle.

However, just as we, the reader, intimate so much, our author takes his interpretation of the wisdom saying in yet another direction. Cain must overcome not the temptation so much as its threat to himself. This is no conquest over himself. Certainly it does not deal with a conquest over sin. That issue plays no role at all in Genesis’ account of the story. The story turns to focus once again on Cain, on his anger and on his depression. Cain up and murders Abel! Not because of Yahweh’s not accepting Cain, but rather because of Cain’s — everyman’s — passion for murder. No motives are involved, but sin: crouching like a lion at his door: murder endangers the murderer. Abel’s death opens a new plot-line, announced by the last part of the proverb cited. Cain’s murder of his brother is now the point of departure. What is to happen now that the choice has been made, the temptation followed: “What if one does evil?” Well, it has been done, what now? Cain has killed Abel. What now? A teacher’s direct challenge to the proverb.

“And Yahweh asked Cain, ‘where is your brother Abel?’ and Cain answered: ‘I have no idea. Am I the watcher of my brother?’” The emphasis is not on Cain’s answer and protest, but has been placed on the interrogative: “Who is the watcher, the caretaker?” Having placed this question in the forefront, the author then turns to Yahweh determining Cain’s destiny for him. Cain, like Adam, is now the first farmer, and so his fate is the farmer’s hard lot. The ground itself shouts out its distaste of man’s preference for blood-soaked earth. It is not Yahweh who curses Cain here. This is not the garden story. It is the earth’s anger itself which curses Cain. Yahweh only delivers the message and waits to play another role. As the story’s opening dealt with the theme of divine freedom, its closure turns to the question of human responsibility.

With the earth’s curse on him, Cain is no longer the farmer in contrast to Abel’s shepherd. Cain becomes now the fugitive: without land and without protection, helpless and afraid. The story now presses its pivotal question: not so much the direct question of who is Abel’s brother—but who is Cain’s caretaker? In this, Cain, here, is us: everyman. In the story, we ask, who cares for us? Faced with this question, the narrator can not play Yahweh in the role that he played in the garden story. He can not be here the one to curse humanity with all of its tragic alienation. Yahweh has a different role to play.

Confronted with the earth’s curse, Cain complains. His punishment is too much to bear. Cain’s terror is palpable. He does not ask for forgiveness. He is beyond that. Cain has done evil in large measure. For him the issue is one of survival. Everyone in his eyes — even god himself — is against

him. The story turns back to Cain's question: Who cares about Cain? And if god's love and recognition is not to be measured as Yahweh taught at the story's opening, who now cares for any of us? For, if there is now no one to care for Cain, for whom is there anyone to care? Can one now abandon Cain the murderer and still hold to the divine demand of freedom that the story set out with equal logic against innocent Cain? The intellectual rigor of the story's question is inescapable. The story's answer is unflinching. Yahweh is mankind's keeper, he is our keeper, and accepts his role as Cain's protector. The story is pacifist. The mark of Cain, the murderer, is the mark of one who is protected by god, even he. And so, we are all under divine protection.

It would hardly be surprising if anyone were to protest against this reading of the story of Cain. We have already a tradition of what the story of Cain and Abel is about, and "know" what the story says. What I have presented of Genesis' story, isn't that. One might have a similar reaction in reading the Hebrew bible's garden story and looking for paradise there. One would as well look for original sin there, or for the devil in vain. With the garden story, we are familiar with other traditions and other interpretations. With their help we have learned about our paradise story and about our story of temptation and fall, which tells us what Genesis means to say. Ezekiel, Ben Sira and Jubilees all have had a part in developing our understanding. Most important have been Paul's *Letter to the Romans*. And Augustine, especially in his song, *Te Deum*, which praises Adam's fall as a "happy fault." Without it, Christian salvation — and its joy — would be unnecessary. What forms our conviction of a right reading of tradition is a complex story. With the bible's tale of Cain, we need merely to point to the apocryphal book of Jubilees. In its story of Cain we can read the tale which long ago supplanted the less imposing and more subtle tale of Genesis.

In Jubilees' version of the story, the theme is historicized. The narration recounts an event as of the past. The murder of Cain is central and Yahweh takes up his expected role as judge. In this version of the story, the "Mark of Cain" is no mark of divine protection. It is synonymous with "the curse of Cain." It is a terrible branding, marking not only him but his descendants as cursed:

And in the third week in the second Jubilee, she bore Cain. And in the fourth, she bore Abel. And in the fifth she bore 'Awan his daughter. And at the beginning of the third jubilee, Cain killed Abel because the sacrifice of Abel was accepted but the offering of Cain was not accepted. And he killed him in the field, and his blood cried out from the earth to heaven, making accusation because he killed him. And Yahweh rebuked Cain on account of Abel because he killed him. And he made him a fugitive on the earth because of the blood of his brother. And he cursed him upon the earth. And therefore it is written in the heavenly tablets, "Cursed is one who strikes his fellow with malice. And all who have seen and heard shall say, 'so be it.' And the man who saw and did not report it, shall be cursed like him. Therefore when we come before Yahweh our God we will make known all of the sins which occur in heaven and earth and which are in the light or in the darkness or in any place.

It is particularly interesting that Jubilees, like Genesis, also cites texts; namely, "the heavenly tablets," in support of its interpretation. The text referred to by Jubilees: "Cursed be one who strikes his fellow with malice," is very close to one of the proverbs collected in the Book of Deuteronomy's chapter 27: "Cursed be one who kills his enemy in secret." Similar proverbs show up in Exodus 21: "Whoever strikes one that he dies, will be put to death," and again in Leviticus, chapter 24: "He who kills a man will be put to death." Very generally speaking, these proverbs are all variations of one of the ten commandments we find in Exodus 20 and again in Deuteronomy 5; namely, "Thou shall not kill." Jubilees' interpretation of the Cain story is, I think, particularly strong in the Christian tradition because of its closeness to the discussion about these proverbs cited in chapter 5 of Matthew's gospel. "You have heard that it was said to the men of old: 'you shall not kill, and whoever does kill will be liable to the court.'" The writer of Matthew, very much like both the authors of Genesis and Jubilees, while perfectly willing to cite authority, has no difficulty in standing by his own interpretation: "But I tell you that anyone who is even angry with his brother should be liable to the court." The use of the motif of a "brother's" anger suggests that the story is implicitly

aware of Cain's story. In fact, when we look at the way each of our texts deal with this subject, it becomes clear that they are involved in a literary discussion: adding comments, suggesting corrections, disagreeing and affirming the other.

It is, however, in the small collection of texts centering on this discussion that we find in chapter 35 of the Book of Numbers that we really first see the context of our stories clearly. Let us begin with the proverb discussing the difference between murder and manslaughter. "And if he struck him down with a stone... etc. While here we have the "stone" motif, that shows up in the story of Jubilees, Numbers also has the variant murder weapon, an "iron tool." Numbers 35,20–22 then offers a further three variable contexts and means which would lead to a judgement of murder: stabbing someone one hates, lying in wait and hurling something, and striking someone with one's hand out of hatred. Here quite clearly, the principle of premeditation is at the forefront of the discussion. Clarifying the principles further, the text offers three comparable alternatives of killing which would not be judged to be murder: stabbing suddenly without hatred, throwing something but without the premeditation of an ambush, and innocently throwing a stone without seeing a man who happens to be killed by it. One finds yet other variants in other collections. In Exodus 20,12 we find listed variables relating to seeking refuge from blood revenge. In verse 18 of the same chapter, the text takes up attempted murder. Verse 20 deals with the killing of a slave and verse 22 with the killing of a fetus. This chapter of Exodus is dealing with material relating to the same intellectual discussion with which both Jubilees and Genesis are involved. It is a world which stories such as that of Cain set out to illustrate.

Yet not all texts present the arguments as obviously driven by logic or a particular perspective on the issues. Often the text seems to be driven by a collector's motives and texts are linked together in a very free floating association of words, images and ideas. Such freely associated collages are often much influenced by associations with our stories. For example, the scribe collecting the traditions of Genesis has brought together variant stories of the flood. In Genesis 9,4-7, the text, which begins within the flood story where god is instructing Noah about what he can and cannot eat, turns to broader intellectual issues, and we find the collector introducing a thesis concerning the food taboo against eating meat with its blood and then, drawing conclusions regarding blood revenge, and citing both the Cain and the flood narratives in the process. The text brings together known proverbs from different sources and about different issues, stringing together pieces of tradition related more by language than by logic. The citation of the proverb: "You shall not eat flesh with its life; that is, with its blood," leads to what seems to be a confluence of this citation regarding a food taboo with an anti-murder saying with an aetiology for animal sacrifice: "For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning, of every beast I will require it, and of every man." The citation of the proverb related to punishment required for killing is then expanded with what I think is an implicit reference to the Cain story, offering perhaps an alternative answer to Cain's question about whether he was responsible for his brother. Certainly, it seems to support the blood revenge that Cain feared would be raised against him: "Of every man's brother I will require the life of man." The text then cites yet another reference and yet another argument, now with reference to the creation story. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man will his blood be shed, for god made man in his own image." This argument — seemingly supporting capital punishment — is one that directly disagrees with Genesis' pacifist rendering of the Cain story, and is much more in line with the story as told in Jubilees. At this point the text returns to the flood story and cites once again the blessing of the creation story: "be fruitful and multiply" which so marks the closure of the flood story as a new creation and a new beginning. This citation echoes verse 9,1's citation of the same blessing. Together the double rendering of this blessing marks off the citations of proverbs about life and blood as a separate discussion. This much abbreviated collection of different perspectives and even different discussions surrounding the association of the motifs of life and blood has nothing to do with the plot of the flood story. The flood story rather offers what is obviously understood as a good context for this collage of loosely related proverbs, because the blessing concerns life and fertility, and the discourse the value of life. Having said this much, however, we then must conclude that the motivations for

writing this texts, go a long way from recounting any discussion about food taboos or the death penalty, and even further from telling a story about the flood. Even the interests of an implied reader seem to be ignored in this assemblage of citations. The motives of the text seem much closer to that of a librarian concerned about where different aspects of a tradition might be organized and kept.

It is very important for our discussion of history to notice that neither Genesis nor Jubilees seem interested in recounting events. Nor are they engaged in telling stories original to them. Both share in a common discussion of the Cain story. Each supports an understanding with an interpretation of the story. Or perhaps it might be better put, each projects and reconstructs a story in support of his interpretation of certain moral values, arguments and principles. The tale is not used as anecdotal evidence. It is too freely manipulated and openly appropriated. It rather serves as an illustrative example. Jubilees presents his story as an etiology for capital punishment while Genesis offers instead an etiology of a divine protection that is such as even to protect a murderer.

Jubilees' account of the Cain story is more helpful than the tale in Genesis for giving us some insight into the way the story is used to illustrate the author's philosophical principles. In Jubilees' closure of its account of the garden story, in recounting that the tree of wisdom has brought death to Adam, Jubilees argues how this death was appropriate. He then tries also to show how Cain's death was governed by an equally appropriate fate.

And at the end of the nineteenth Jubilee in the seventh week, in the sixth year, Adam died. And all of his children buried him in the land of his creation. And he was the first who was buried in the earth. And he lacked seventy years from one thousand years, for a thousand years are like one day in the testimony of heaven and therefore it was written concerning the tree of knowledge, 'In the day you eat from it you will die,' therefore he did not complete the years of this day because he died in it. "At the end of that Jubilee Cain was killed one year after him. And his house fell upon him. And he died in the midst of his house. And he was killed by its stones because he killed Abel with a stone, and so with a stone was he killed by righteous judgement. Therefore it is ordained in the heavenly tablets: 'With the weapons with which a man kills his fellow he shall be killed. Just as he wounded him. Thus shall they do to him.'

It is highly significant that in Jubilees' own account of the story of Cain, Cain does not kill his brother with a stone, but rather with "malice," with "hatred." We have already learned that both enmity and stones belong to the bible's larger discussion about murder and capital punishment. Jubilees' argument appears then to make quite good sense as an argument built not only on the tale but also on the related discussion in the greater world of scholarship implied. Jubilees seals its discussion with a poem. The point is to mark the text as fitting and traditional. Jubilees' rationalization proceeds on the basis of logic, authority and — most importantly of all — balance. Genesis does the same in its version. It gives the story; interprets the issues of the story with citation of proverbs of authority, and seals the a song, marking the whole with a sense of balance and propriety. Genesis closes its argument with the song chapter 4,23—24, just at the end of the etiologies relating to Cain's sons:

Lamech said to his wives: Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say: I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged seven-fold, truly Lamech seventy-seven-fold!

The argument in Genesis is also oriented towards the collection of tradition. The presentation of Genesis' values are often designed to surprise the reader. In presenting as Genesis does a "lost and forgotten" tradition, representing the divine foundations of the community, the collector take as a cardinal principle the thesis that ordinary human understanding is both in error and undependable. Hence, truth, to be convincing, needs to be surprising. Or at least, this seems to be the author's inclination.

When we compare Genesis with Jubilees as we have, it becomes clear that the murder story and the proverb cited are a given of the narrative that the two accounts have in common. The same story is used by both. Both also use proverbs as the central focus of their exegesis, and both use songs to close their arguments! The structure of this three part argument is a common tool of both commentaries. The tales give the framework, the proverbs the interpretive focus, and the songs close and support conviction. The common ground between Jubilees and Genesis is impressive. We have a common ideological perspective in the three narratives, the same mixture of genres: tale, proverb, and song, common techniques of both argument and presentation; and, just as importantly, the same expectation of rationalizing satisfaction! Their are also other characteristics held in common. The stories and their plots are recurrently destroyed in both accounts by the narrators' erudition as well as by their strong grasp of the tradition. The obvious conclusion, is that in both Jubilees and in Genesis, the story as such does not hold the author's attention. That lies elsewhere in the discourse and scholarly commentary on tradition, not on the traditions themselves. Finally Jubilees and Genesis must also be seen as sharing in a common intellectual world.

### **3. Yahweh as Lord of History:**

#### **Husbands and their Wives in Hosea, Ezekiel and Isaiah**

When the Book of Hosea is read apart from efforts to create an historical prophet as part of ancient Israel's history, the book of the prophet Hosea is a striking composition with two parts. The first (chapters 1-3) is presented as autobiographical parable. It presents the prophet's marriage with a prostitute as a parody of god's relationship to Israel. Israel's fate is determined through the names of Hosea's children. The second part of the book (chapters 4-14) is a series of implicitly interpretive poems which offer commentary to the prose narrative. The theme is a call to repentance: "Turn, O Israel, to Yahweh your god; you have stumbled in your wrongs. Speak up; turn to Yahweh and say to him: 'you who forgive all fault, accept what we offer (14,2-3).'" The audience, the implied reader, is the student of philosophy, the pious adherent of the theology of the way of the Book of Psalms. The implied author, taking the role of divine teacher, addresses the audience directly in closing this work: "I am like the evergreen cypress. From me comes your fruit. Who is wise enough to understand this? - so discerning, that he might know it? The paths of Yahweh are straight. The righteous walk in it, while wrongdoers stumble (14,9-10)." The story does not address an ancient Israel of pre-exilic times, but rather the pious student of philosophy. Hosea is not a man of the eighth century, scarred by a parody of a marriage. That is a role in a tale filled with ironic undertone. He parodies god's role of faithful husband to a faithless people. It is a romance: a tale of long-suffering patience, ending in grace.

It is also a story, self-consciously structured on a collection of tale variants, whose interaction constructs a single coherent theme. Three successive stories, each variants of the others, are offered in the three opening chapters of the book. The names of the characters in these tales are all "cue names," strengthening their intrinsically symbolic functions. In the opening story, Yahweh tells "Deliverance;" that is, Hosea, to take a prostitute for a wife and have children by her. The audience is not left in doubt for a moment about the reflective interpretation of these instructions as Yahweh explains to this saving prophet: "The land" (that is, Israel) "has prostituted itself by turning away from Yahweh."

Hosea marries the prostitute "Destruction;" that is, Gomer, and she bears him a son. Yahweh names the son: Jezreel, which means "God-sows." This is the name of the great valley between the highlands and the Galilee. While this child's name explicitly expresses god's love for Israel in impregnating this fertile valley, the name's story role in the parable is a dramatic commentary on Israel's destruction. Why is Israel to be destroyed? Its kingdom come to an end? It is to punish Jehu for the blood he shed in the Jezreel (Hosea 1,4-5). At first, the reference seems to be to the story we find in II Kings 9 and 10 of the destruction of Ahab and Jezebel. However, there is a problem. Although the story-collector of Kings hardly approves of Jehu anymore than Hosea does (so II Kings

10,31), the story in the Book of Kings is entirely positive in its description of Jehu. In this story, it is Ahab and Jezebel who are bad, while Jehu fights side by side with Yahweh's prophet Elisha. Jehu is good. He functions as Yahweh's messiah in the story. He fights Yahweh's wars. He is ordered by Yahweh to kill the prophets of Ba'al in the Jezreel. He is told by god to destroy Ahab and his family. That he carries out Yahweh's will, is clearly emphatic in the story's closure. Yahweh tells him: "Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons to the fourth generation will sit on Israel's throne (II Kings 10,30)."

This is certainly not the story or the Jehu that the Book of Hosea knows and refers to! That Jehu, rather than being Yahweh's faithful servant and the enemy of Ba'al, had turned Israel away from Yahweh and, because of this, had brought about the destruction of the kingdom. This implicit variation of the story in Kings, points to a theological and to a philosophically oriented evaluation of the old testament narratives. It also implies a substantial indifference to any understanding of these episodes as we understand historical events.

While Hosea will briefly return to the story of this first child in chapter 3, the text moves more immediately to a variation of the tale. It is this variant that dominates the interest of what remains of the chapter. Gomer gives birth to two children. The first is a daughter named "does not find mercy." Israel will not find mercy or forgiveness. Gomer then bears a son, who is called "not my people." The story creates an emphatically echoing denial of Exodus 3,12's self-identification of the meaning of Yahweh's name as god's presence in old Israel ("I am with you"). Implicitly rejecting Israel's Exodus fate, Yahweh addresses the child: "You are not my people. I will not be with you" (Hosea 1,9). The message of the story is transparent. Each child's name ("does not find mercy" and "not my people") reiterates the other. Together, they determine Israel's fate. Also implicit, is an ongoing discussion which Hosea's implied author is having with the tradition of Exodus.

The mere presentation of the negative scene seems sufficient. The narrative moves on quickly to themes hopeful and promising. The narrative of chapter 1's closure is as quickly abandoned as the opening parable had been. The text turns abruptly to commentary. In three short verses, Hosea interprets his two opening tales coherently. This commentary on the tradition collected takes an historiographical perspective that is quite breathtaking. This Israel represented by the prostitute's children is "Israel past". To contrast this old Israel of rejection with a hope-filled present, Hosea calls on the Genesis promises to Abraham that we find in Genesis 13,16. The "new Israel" is an Israel that will be "as numerous as the sands of the sea. . . ." Where it once was said to them 'you are not my people,' they will now be called 'children of the living god.'"

Hosea reverses time. His new Israel reflects the image of the united kingdom. Yahweh's day of wrath and punishment becomes "a great day of the Jezreel." We suddenly find ourselves with a good Jehu against an evil Ahab. Hosea's boy can now be called: "You are my people," just as his sister can take the name: "You have found mercy." In these few strokes, Hosea gives a picture of Yahweh as master over history: reversing Israel's fate and making the past of promise, present. Quite clearly, the structure of our text, with the narrative of the first chapters given a commentary by the poetry of Hosea's second part, shows itself as theological discourse. the Book of Hosea's opening chapters are a discussion and an analysis of Yahweh's love-hate relationship with Israel. This is no prophet of doom. Emphasized, rather, is a divine mercy without restriction. God rejected old Israel. With equal freedom a new Israel is now accepted. God's mercy is divine, by virtue of being undeserved.

The rest of chapter 2 consists of two further variants responding to the discussion. The first of these, in 2,4 - 17, sets the theme of a second commentary to the story about Hosea or Yahweh and his wife. It presents a resounding echo of the classical Jewish divorce decree: "Say to your mother, declare: 'she is not my wife and I am not her husband.'" Yahweh as poet pleads with his wife that she put away her prostitution. He threatens to strip her naked. With considerable sensitivity to such a scene's implicit embarrassment to its participants, the poem presents Yahweh in a lover's-quarrel with his wife about her affairs with Ba'al and the other gods. The cuckold Yahweh complains of a

lack of appreciation. It had always been he, her husband (i.e., "her *ba'al*" ), a husband who had given her everything she had. Yet, she neglected and forgot him.

In the closing verses of this poetic parable, Yahweh confesses his enduring, yet unrequited, love to the implied reader: "I will seduce her; I will bring her out into the wilderness and talk to her heart." This reference to the wilderness holds an implicit citation to the traditions of Moses and Israel in the pentateuch. Again the poet transforms the past into a future harbinger of return to Yahweh. Jezreel's valley becomes the valley of Akor: interpreted as a gateway to hope! By this literary allusion, the author echoes the story of judgement and condemnation which can be found in the Book of Joshua, chapter 7, where Akor was described as the "valley of trouble." The past, the history of Israel's condemnation and rejection, has been transformed. Hosea's implicit commentator draws a message of hope from this tale of Yahweh's marriage to what was but a prostitute wife.

In Hosea 2,18-25, a third voice of commentary completes our discussion. Picking up the motif of the "great day of the Jezreel" from Hosea 2,2, this final interpretation offers three short poems which expand into a leitmotif. "On that day, says Yahweh, you will call me 'husband:' no longer 'my Ba'al.'" Once again, the poet reaches back into the past for the promise of god's eternal covenant to Israel, and describes it as renewed in the present. On that day, Yahweh establishes his covenant with Israel for ever. In the final "on that day," the poem turns back to Hosea's autobiographical tale: "On that day, I will show mercy to 'Does-not-find-mercy' and I will say to 'Not-my-people', 'you are my people,' and he will answer: 'you are my god.'" This double-story of Yahweh's three children, with its triple commentary, closes here on the well-known motif from psalm 8,2 of divine truth coming from the mouth of babes, as Hosea's child now "turns" in conversion, and finally recognizes his divine father.

It is not surprising, however, that yet another commentator adds yet another variant interpretation to our text by providing us, in a very short chapter 3, with a third tale about yet another unfaithful wife for Hosea. This story presents an ironic caricature of Israel. The comments, with all their brutal sexism, have, nevertheless, considerable comic merit. The woman, like Israel, had another lover and is, in the story's terms, an adulteress. So, the prophet buys her for half price. He then puts severe conditions on her. She can't have lovers any more. Nor will even her husband, Yahweh, have sex with her. The story closes with a brief commentary, giving us the story's meaning with reference to the saving motif of the exile's repentance. Israel will live for a long time without king or prince, without sacrifice or cult. They then "will turn and seek Yahweh their god and David their king." Here, again, in this last commentary on Hosea's parody, what we have often read as the history of the past is recast as future hope.

This basic theological tale of the prophet and his wife as a lightly veiled parable of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, with its interpretive commentaries and discussion, and its free play with the metaphors of history, is hardly confined to Hosea. It is a basic metaphor of prophetic discourse and central to our understanding of the books of the prophets. They are all collections of complex poetry, song and historiographical comment, put together in the guise of one or other great dead prophet's oracles and visions of god. The same story pattern shows itself twice in Ezekiel.

The tale of Ezekiel 16 has some of the harshness of Hosea's sexist imagery. It is, however, more openly erotic in its intimate description of Yahweh's care for his young bride. The story opens. Jerusalem is presented as an abandoned child. Her father was an Amorite, her mother a Hittite. She was cast out in a field, her navel cord uncut. She was unwashed, unclothed. No compassion, only abhorrence when she was born. When Yahweh found this foundling lying in her blood, he said to her "You will live. I will make you many like the plants of the field (16,7)." The child grew up to be a woman. Yet, "still naked and bare."

When Yahweh passed by again, she was ready for love. And so, Yahweh "covered her" by taking her for his wife. He gave her a bath, washed off her blood and poured oil over her. The motifs from the variant scenes of the blood-flecked new-born baby and of the menstrual blood of the young virgin are, mythically, elided here as Yahweh accepts Jerusalem as his bride. Yahweh dresses her

and — here too we find an echo of the Exodus tradition — covers her with jewelry. Jerusalem becomes famous for the beauty and splendor which Yahweh gave her.

Then the narration shifts. The dramatic descriptions of the opening scenes are replaced with commentary and scolding judgement. The same patterns we find in the stories of Hosea, dominate. Jerusalem trusted not in Yahweh, but in her beauty as her own, and turned to prostitution. Inverting Genesis' account of the creation of man in god's image (Gen 1,26), Jerusalem takes her jewelry and makes of them gods in the image of men. It is with such gods that she prostitutes herself (Ezekiel 16,17). In this, she forgot his care for her when she was young.

Ezekiel goes quickly through a history of Jerusalem's prostitution: with the Egyptians, the Philistines and the Assyrians. Jerusalem prostituted herself from Canaan to Babylon. This is not the bible's primary narrative of Israel past. One might better describe this section of Ezekiel as a proposed fate: a possible history; a history which Yahweh threatens to decree for Jerusalem. Yahweh will strip her naked. He will leave her at the mercy of her "lovers." Yahweh compares Jerusalem to her "sisters," Samaria and Sodom. Then, much like the Yahweh of Hosea's stories, the Book of Ezekiel's Yahweh abruptly changes. He speaks to the audience of restoration. He will restore both Sodom and Samaria. He will restore Jerusalem. Again, as in Hosea, the story in Ezekiel closes with a contrast of temporary punishment and eternal covenant: when Yahweh forgives all that Jerusalem has done.

A variant of the motif of Jerusalem and her sisters is taken up in Ezekiel, chapter 23. In this story too, the introduction is offered with a rapid sketch of an Israel past. It is a quite different "history" than that we know from the pentateuch and elsewhere. It is as if the previous past that Yahweh had only threatened in chapter 16 is now being tried out in chapter 23. There are two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah. They were prostitutes in Egypt when they were young. Yahweh married them, and they bore him children. Oholah is Samaria and Oholibah, Jerusalem. Samaria was unfaithful. She took the Assyrians and their gods for her lovers. Because of this, Yahweh handed her over to her lovers who killed her and took her children. This could well be read as a substantial variant to II Kings' story of Samaria's destruction and of the deportation of its inhabitants, in which Samaria is destroyed because of its worship of the Canaanite god *Ba'al*. Oholibah saw her sister's punishment but ignored it. Jerusalem did not learn from Samaria's fate. She too took the Assyrians and their gods for her lovers. She is even accused of having "prepared a lover's bed" for the Babylonians. This too substantially departs from the narratives in the books of Kings and Chronicles. Yahweh declares that what was done to Samaria will also be done to Jerusalem. Her children will be killed. Her houses will be burnt. As in chapter 16 of Ezekiel, Jerusalem is threatened with a new past. The story closes on a note of condemnation and punishment. Echoing Hosea's chapter 3, however, the story ironically suggests that Jerusalem might yet learn "to recognize god". We are suddenly in the world of a "new Jerusalem", open to the salvation which understanding and repentance brings to the pious. The fire and brimstone treatment of Jerusalem — hardly prophetic historiography — takes on the interpretive pattern of a sermon.

Ezekiel's story of Oholah and Oholibah is followed by two expansive commentaries on Jerusalem's destruction. The first of these (24,1-14) develops the theme of Jerusalem's siege at the hands of the Babylonians. It mixes a metaphor for Jerusalem as a cooking pot, in which Jerusalem's best are boiled, their bones used for fuel. The second commentary (24,15-27), is a variant of the metaphor of Jerusalem as the prophet's wife and is itself a commentary on the story of the prostitute Oholibah as Yahweh's wife. The prophet Ezekiel's wife is to die. Ezekiel is instructed not to mourn her. This narrative "sign" draws the story of chapter 23 to its proper conclusion as a story decreeing the fate of Jerusalem past, much as it has been described in the narratives of II Kings. Yahweh's temple, "the delight of your eyes," will be destroyed. Jerusalem's population, Ezekiel's children, will be put to the sword. This destruction, is, however, no disaster. Nor is it a cause for mourning. For Ezekiel's author, the destruction of Jerusalem leads to "what is good in god's eyes". Eventually, "those who escape will return . . . and (like those who learn truth from the mouth of children as in the sermon exhortation that closed chapter 23) they will know that I (Yahweh) am god."

The discussion of Jerusalem's fall that we find in Ezekiel — like that in Hosea — is harsh and insensitive. It deals with the past brutally. As an evaluation of Jerusalem's history as we know it from II Kings or the Book of Chronicles, or of the kind of sufferings that are involved in any city's destruction, it is heartless. Yet, neither Hosea nor Ezekiel are centered on any city of the past. Nor is it at all clear that they know of that city with its real sufferings at the hands of the Babylonians. Such a Jerusalem is long in the past. Jerusalem's end, like Samaria's before it, has rather mythological overtones in the prophets. It is likened to the destruction of Sodom. It is a warning to their audiences. They create their present as a time of testing. The implied contrast of old Israel and its Jerusalem's destruction is to the Israel and to the Jerusalem that now turns towards Yahweh. This is understood as a new Israel and a new Jerusalem that chooses the past of the covenant and of hope. This Jerusalem is not one governed by harsh prophets of doom, but by the faithful recognition that Yahweh is god.

The stock story of Yahweh and his wives as it is played out by Hosea and Ezekiel is a rough and pointed parable, that deals with the divine presence in Samaria and Jerusalem. But this is only half the potential of this powerful metaphor in biblical literature. The Song of Songs and Isaiah take the parable in a quite different direction.

Isaiah first introduces the metaphor of Jerusalem as Yahweh's wife in a song in chapter 5,1-7, in a way that follows the pattern of Ezekiel so closely that the main outline and understanding of the parable are already clearly marked out for us. The song has two voices. The first is the voice of a psalmist who sings to Yahweh, addressing him with the epithet "my beloved." This divine epithet, *dwdy*, echoes the name of Jerusalem's legendary king David (*dwd*). This davidic Yahweh is closely linked to the temple on Mt. Zion and to the paradise image of Jerusalem as Yahweh's garden on earth. It is just such a metaphor which dominates our song in Isaiah:

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He fenced it, cleared it of stone, and he planted it with grapevines. He built a watchtower on it and carved out a press. He waited: expecting grapes from it, but it bore wild grapes.

The metaphor is again one of Yahweh with his prostitute and errant wife. This becomes explicit as the song of Isaiah 5 changes voice. It is Yahweh who sings his complaint to the people of Jerusalem. With all the confusion of the hapless cuckold, he asks the people itself to judge between him and his vineyard: "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done?" Yahweh goes on to describe his anger — vindictive, speculating on a potential past for his Eden turned unfaithful Jerusalem. The poet sings of his hatred much in the voice of Hosea and Ezekiel. He considers how he will remove the vineyard's protective wall and allow it to be destroyed. He will let weeds grow. He will forbid it to rain. In verse 7, we find Yahweh's own *peshering* commentary, interpreting the song for us much in the manner of Qumran's famous texts. The vineyard is the house of Israel. The grapevine is the people of Judah. This song with its reflective gloss is followed, in verses 8, 11, 13, 20 and 26 by a series of other learned voices — each commenting on the story in turn. These voices demonstrate for us how our biblical narrative grows from a context of discussion and debate about the tradition. It reflects a scholar's seminar. A history of the past is not separate from this discussion. It is itself created by it. Sometimes, as in v. 13, the interpretation sticks to the point of Jerusalem and its destruction. Other times, however, as in v.11, the discussion becomes almost modern, wandering as it does among concerns about the social evils of city life and the dangers of drink: each making their own effort at drawing the text into contemporary relevance. Quite impressive, are the "woes" that are added in verses 20-23 by one of the participants in this discussion. These woes turn the debate into a philosophical one of universal ethics. The discussion never does manage to get back to the vineyard or to the bitterness of its disappointed gardener.

The metaphor of Jerusalem as Yahweh's spouse, with that of the temple as his garden, appears once again in the Song of Songs, in a brilliant variant of texts we have already seen in other contexts.

The metaphor in the Song of Songs, hardly a song of blood and thunder sermonizing, has every positive nuance. The love of god for Jerusalem is compared to the erotic love that a messianic Solomon has for his mistress. It is in the opening song of chapter 6, that the garden motif shows itself. The song sings of lovely Jerusalem's fretful longing for its god. "Where has your beloved gone, you most beautiful among woman? Where has your beloved taken himself, that we might seek him with you?" As the voice of the song shifts with verse 2's response, the singer is Jerusalem and Yahweh is her "beloved" (again, *dwd*). The response is filled with erotic innuendoes, evoking images of female genitalia: "My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies." This is the garden of 4,16 and 5,1's feminine receptiveness of the divine, as Jerusalem sings of the potency of its beloved god: "Arise, north wind, blow wind of the south, let your spirit into my garden that the balsam may flow. May my beloved enter his garden and feed on its delightful fruits." Yahweh responds: "I am come into my garden, my sister, my bride, I have gathered my myrrh and my balsam; I eat the honeycake with its honey; I drink wine with my milk." And then, calling to those discerning pious few, the cantor invites his audience to participate: "Eat friends, drink, be drunken you lovers."

It is such explicitly erotic, metaphorical play on the theme of god's presence in the new Jerusalem that offers a powerful counterpoint to the bible's literary world about old Jerusalem and the stories of its apostasy and destruction. While, unquestionably, Solomon's Song of Songs offers us the most intense of the bible's many variants on the theme of Yahweh's marriages, the collection of the three stories in Isaiah 7-9 is certainly the most theologically controlled interpretation of this metaphor.

This section of Isaiah presents a small collection of variant poems and stories. With them, are added interpretive comments and discussion. Both the poems and their glosses play variations on this common theme of the prophet or god who has Israel for his wife. Reading these poems and stories today is much like listening to an intense discussion, with the participants all talking at the same time. Themes overlap. Points are made in variant contexts. Above all, implicit voices know more about what is going on than we do. In the structural center of this collection of variants we have a double story of Isaiah's two children. Both children have cue names, positive and negative. His first child, already born, is called "repenting remnant." This is an obvious portent of promise. The song is sung about the new Jerusalem. Isaiah's second child is born by a prophetess. This child Yahweh gives the unhappy name: "quick-spoil-hurry-prey." The narrative interprets this awful name for the reader: before the child is old enough to say "mommy" and "daddy," Damascus and Samaria will fall to Assyria.

That the story invites its parable to be interpreted in terms of Israel's future is explicit in the story. Isaiah tells his reader: "I and the children Yahweh has given me are signs and portents in Israel (8,18)." Just so, the stories receive a series of interpretations and expansions, explaining just what these signs and portents mean. Dominant are the two variant Immanuel expansions that we find in chapter 7,11-25 and 8,5-10. Together, they nearly overwhelm the motif of contrasting children, with which the central narrative is structured. These interpretative expansions are both negative and brutally ironic. Each is centered in the metaphor of Immanuel, the cue name and sign that god will be with Israel. In the first, we are given a story of a child born. It is a variant of Isaiah's second child; for it too bears the same negative fate for Israel. This child is called Immanuel, "god with us." Before he is grown, his name warns, Israel will be destroyed. The opening prose part of the narrative closes in verse 17 with an intrusive comment or gloss on the narrative: "the king of Assyria." This is an interpretive commentary. Immanuel is the Assyrian king! This gloss isn't part of the narrative; nor is it intended to be part of the story. It is a theological comment, an interpretation of the story by its collector. It is not the child to be born who is the king of Assyria. The child is a sign of Immanuel. It is god's presence in Israel that is the king of Assyria. God's presence brings destruction. To this story, the editor adds a fourfold poem, each part beginning with "on that day." These expand and make explicit this divine presence of destruction at the hands of the Assyrians.

The poetic story and commentary is matched by a series of poems attached to Isaiah's second child (8,5-10). In this commentary, we are presented with a quite clear variation on Ezekiel's two sisters, Israel and Samaria, as brides of Yahweh. The first child, Immanuel, was Samaria. Yahweh's presence in Israel brought its destruction. As it too shared the "quick-destruction" motif of Isaiah's second child, now, that second child, sharing the Immanuel motif, becomes a sign of Yahweh's presence once again: in Judah. Destruction at the hands of the Assyrians is again pointed to as the poem's referent (8,8).

This double-barreled commentary is linked to yet a further expansive commentary on the tradition. It too is rooted in the theme of Yahweh's contrasting children. Now, however, we return to the positive nuances belonging to Isaiah's first child. We are offered a variant on "repentant remnant." The contrast rests on one who curses his king and god. Chapter 7 and 8's Immanuel theme remains dominant, and the editor offers positive reinterpretation of the whole, as a sign of god's saving presence in Israel. This collector's commentary on the tradition links (and identifies) the first-born "saving remnant," with the saving child born for David's throne in chapter 9. The text, itself, tells us how to read these chapters: "Bind the evidence together; put a seal on the instructions to the students." The hidden message — hidden in the stories of these children as "signs and portents" of Israel's fate — is one of hope. Here, from Isaiah 8,16 on, the teacher's interpretation is explicit. We are given poems of hope and promise. These, the commentator explains, belong to the birth story of Isaiah's first child, "repentant remnant!"

This interpretive story opens with a contrast between the old Israel of the Immanuel stories, represented by those who consult mediums and wizards rather than god, who, "cursing their king and their god," are "thrust into thick darkness (8,21-22)." This darkness and gloom is transformed into a metaphor of a woman in anguish: the motif refers to no one less than Isaiah's wife, the new Jerusalem in labor. Her darkness is no longer gloom, but a portent of transformation. The child, "repentant remnant," once the Immanuel of destruction, now takes on the form of a new birth. In this striking exegetical passage, themes of destruction are radically transformed into themes of hope: "The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness. On them has light shined. . . . Every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult, every garment rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for the fire."

War is transformed into hope. Yahweh and his spouse, the new Jerusalem, give birth to a wonderful child: the new Israel. The clear patterns of the mythology surrounding the metaphors of "son of god" and of "Yahweh's messiah" are transparent throughout. The central metaphors of Israel as Yahweh's first-born, of Samaria and Jerusalem as Yahweh's spouse, and of the people of god as an ideal of a "new Israel," are brought together here. Chapter 7 and 8's prophecies of doom about old Israel are reinterpreted and transformed by chapter 9's hope for the repentant remnant that remains. Isaiah interprets these child Immanuels, with their mythical echoes of the "son of god" and "messiah" traditions, very simply as god acting in this world. He defines this god as a god of mercy, a saving god. That is what Immanuel means: "god is with us." The child is god himself. The matrix of the old testament's theology about god's presence is captured by this powerful poem. It is sung by Isaiah's wife in labor, portending the new Israel, the repentant remnant's destiny. Yahweh returns to his people: the new Immanuel: god with us. He will be their god and they will be his people.

To us a child is born; to us a son is given; governance will be on his shoulders. His name will be wonderful counsellor, *mighty god*, *eternal father*, the master of peace.