Ulrich Berges

Justice and Righteousness in the Old Testament

Dependency and Slavery Studies

Edited by
Jeannine Bischoff and Stephan Conermann

Volume 20

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Justice and Righteousness in the Old Testament

Reflecting on Slavery in the Hebrew Bible

Translated from the German manuscript by
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DE GRUYTER

Gefördert durch die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) im Rahmen der Exzellenzstrategie des Bundes und der Länder – Exzellenzcluster Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) EXC 2036/1-2020, Projektnummer: 390683433

Funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany's Excellence Strategy – Cluster of Excellence Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) EXC 2036/1-2020, Project No.: 390683433

ISBN 978-3-11-914721-7
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-220678-2
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-220696-6
ISSN 2701-1127
DOI https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025933551

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

Cover image: t-lorien/iStock/Getty Images Plus (bottom); kyoshino/iStock/Getty Images Plus (top).
Typesetting: Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.
Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

www.degruyterbrill.com
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productsafety@degruyterbrill.com

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Foreword

As one of the principal investigators at the *Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies* (BCDSS), I had the opportunity to work intensively on questions of slavery and other asymmetrical dependencies within a large university research network. Within this framework I was assigned to Research Area C, which deals with institutions, norms, and practices. As a Fellow of the Heinz Heinen Fellowship Program, I was granted two semesters' research leave, which enabled the composition of this monograph. The funding also supported an international workshop, *Divine and Human Dependencies in the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament*, which was enabled by my Chair in Old Testament Studies in collaboration with Dr. Kirsten M. Schäfers. At the conference titled *Freedom and Liberation in Mediterranean Antiquity* and organized by my colleague, Prof. Dr. Hermut Löhr from Bonn, I presented some of the findings of my research. I was also given the opportunity to present my findings at a series of lectures on *Control, Coercion, and Constraint* organized by Prof. Dr. Wolfram Kinzig as part of the Center for Religion and Society (ZERG) at the University of Bonn. A conference on *The Role of Religion in Overcoming and Creating Structures of Dependency* provided me with a chance to present a lecture on the relevant texts from the Book of Isaiah.

The original research idea of my involvement in the BCDSS was *Beyond Slavery and Freedom in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible*. Over the years, it became increasingly clear that the question of slavery and asymmetrical dependencies in the writings of ancient Israel cannot be adequately dealt with without the discourses on the justice of God and man conducted there. Only in this way does the position of the slaves in their uniqueness become clear, because they fall almost completely out of the moral demand for justice that otherwise applies to the poor, widows, orphans and strangers. Their status as property, which only in exceptional cases allows them to be considered as subjects with personal rights, dominates the discourse. On a theological level, the phenomenon of slavery also had an impact on the Old Testament image of God, as YHWH himself becomes the owner of his people.

I would like to thank Jeannine Bischoff and Prof. Dr. Stephan Conermann for including this work in the *Dependency and Slavery Studies* series as well as Dr. Janico Albrecht, who supervised the final stage of the book as publication manager. I would also like to thank the translators of the German manuscript, Dr. Jason M. Miskuly in the United States and Dr. Petra Bauer in the United Kingdom.

I would particularly like to emphasize the support I received from my Chair in Old Testament Studies under the secretarial management of Ms. Sylvia Sokolowksi. Student assistants Olaf Pakosch, Niklas Wichmann, Julia Saal, and Martin Wachter provided me with invaluable assistance. The greatest support, as with all my other publications in recent years, came from Dr. Kirsten M. Schäfers, who, as my assistant, is second to none in terms of perfection.

October 2024 Ulrich Berges

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782-203

1 Introduction

No one is free who is not the master of himself.[1]

This publication combines two closely related research interests that have not yet received sufficient recognition. Work at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies offered the author the opportunity to investigate the phenomenon of asymmetrical dependencies, which has found only marginal attention from an exegetical perspective. It is impossible to separate the question of justice from this phenomenon, which particularly affects the relationship with God. Examining the discourses on justice in the Hebrew Bible from the perspective of asymmetrical dependency makes this work so appealing and novel.[2]

We speak of "asymmetrical dependency" when one actor controls the actions of other actors in a way that can grant or deny them access to vital resources. Asymmetrical dependency is also institutionally secured so that the dependent party cannot escape from it by fleeing or protesting.[3] Even if the Bonn Cluster of Excellence focuses on asymmetrical dependencies between human actors, it does not per se exclude non-human, that is divine, actors, which are found particularly in the ideas of ancient peoples.[4] Of course, actions attributed to gods are not subject to empirical verifiability, but this should not deny them the ability to act,[5] because they were and are regarded as highly active in the beliefs of ancient and modern people. Thus, one can assume that human actors on the worldly level adopt dependency structures attributed to divine beings and that are therefore socially relevant. It is here that linguistic expressions, such as those found in stories, songs, legal stipulations, and so on are of particular importance. They can confirm the dominant worldview ("orthodox") or

1 Matthias Claudius, *Asmus omnia sua Secum portans, oder Sämtliche Werke des Wandsbecker Bothen 8* (Altona: Hammerich und Heineking, 1812): 121.

2 This monograph limits itself to the Hebrew Bible and leaves out the books written or transmitted in Greek—the deuterocanonical or pseudoepigraphical scriptures.

3 Julia Winnebeck et al., "On Asymmetrical Dependency," *Concept Paper* 1, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (2021), https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/en/publications/bcdsss-publishing-series/bcdsss-publishing-series [accessed 08.02.2024]: 2–3; Julia Winnebeck et al., "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency," *Journal of Global Slavery* 8, no. 1 (2023): 7–8.

4 Winnebeck et al., "Analytical Concept": 3: "[. . .] we consider not only relations between people but also those between people and non-human entities, such as material artefacts, animals, gods, and spirits." See also p. 7, 15, 23, and 25–26.

5 For a different view, see Christoph Antweiler, "On Dependence, Dependency, and a Dependency Turn: An Essay with Systematic Intent," *Discussion Paper* 1, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (2022), https://www.dependency.uni bonn.de/images/pdf files/antweiler_on dependence dependency and a dependency turn.pdf [accessed 08.02.2024]: 4: "Non-human causal agents or actants are excluded here, as I consider them to be behaving but not acting."

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782-001

call it into question ("heterodox").[6] When speaking of asymmetrical dependencies, the relationship between slaves and free persons (the Roman *servus* vs. *liber*) is only the most extreme form. This relationship is important as far as the following considerations deal with slave laws in the Old Testament and consider the omnipresent dependency on YHWH. The distinction between "dependency" and "dependences" helps differentiate between structural dependency and its individual manifestations.[7] Within such dependencies, one can observe options for action on the part of the dependent that not only manifest themselves in open revolt or flight but can also be much more subtle.[8]

A search for "dependency" in the Old Testament or general biblical publications results in a hit rate close to zero.[9] The search reveals no trace of any discussion of asymmetrical dependency and its consequences, which would stem from of the monotheistic concept of God in the Old and New Testaments. This situation is even more astonishing because the biblical metaphors that attempt to put the divine into words largely imply precisely this asymmetrical dependency: Father or parent vs. children, shepherd vs. flock, king vs. people, creator vs. creation, potter vs. vessel, judge vs. the accused, master vs. slave, and so on. These are exactly the linguistic images of the divine master and his slaves or servants and handmaidens that run through the books of both testaments, which one can describe as "doulology" (from the Greek *doulos* for slave or servant).[10] In reality, this entails far more than a mere lexical, semantic matrix. It concerns the thought structure or, in modern terms, the DNA of the Jewish, Christian,[11]

6 Winnebeck et al., "Analytical Concept": 17.

7 Christoph Antweiler, "On Dependence, Dependency": 2: "Dependency. . .is conceived of as a system or structural form of practice of several and/or time-continuous dependences as systemic unities."

8 Winnebeck et al., "Analytical Concept": 21: "[. . .] in light of recent criticism of the notion of agency, we understand the concept not merely in terms of (violent) opposition or resistance but rather as the opportunity to act within relations of asymmetrical dependency."

9 See, among others, the short article by Karel A. Deurloo, "תשוקה 'dependency', Gen 4,7," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 99, no. 3 (1987): 405–6; Edward J. Bridge, "Loyalty, Dependency and Status with YHWH: The Use of 'bd in the Psalms," *Vetus Testamentum* 59, no. 3 (2009): 360–78; Terence E. Fretheim, "Divine Dependence upon the Human: An Old Testament Perspective," in *What Kind of God?: Collected Essays of Terence E. Fretheim*, ed. Michael J. Chan and Brent A. Strawn, Siphrut 14 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015): 25–39.

10 This term goes back to Chris L. De Wet, *The Unbound God. Slavery and the Formation of Early Christian Thought*, Routledge Studies in the Early Christian World (London: Routledge, 2018): 8: "Doulology refers to that enunciative process in which slavery and mastery operate together as a concept 'to think/communicate with'—in this process, knowledge and behaviors are produced, reproduced, structured, and distributed in such a way as to establish subjects in/and positions of authority and subjugation, agency and compulsion, ownership and worth, honor and humiliation, discipline and reward/punishment, and captivity and freedom."

11 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der Christliche Glaube: Nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhang*, ed. Martin Redeker, 7th ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960): 14, defines piety as the "feeling of utter dependence," which speaks to the core of the matter.

and Islamic religion. The irreversible divide, the asymmetry between the divine Lord and the human subjects, characterizes the Hebrew Bible as the founding document of Judaism and Christianity in such a powerful way that it is surprising that scholars have so far paid only little attention to this phenomenon. Radical dependency on YHWH, which applies to every individual human being as well as to all peoples of all times and places, cannot just be categorized as a "relationship."[12] It is equally pointless to speak of YHWH only as the one who stands between the actors and their asymmetrical relationship of dependency and mediates it,[13] because his position of dominance is too dominant for this. YHWH not only mediates between the actors but is himself the ultimate actor. He is not only the liberator of his people from the house of slavery of Egypt, from Pharaoh's domain, but he also becomes the owner of the liberated, who are now *his* slaves (Lev 25:42).

The Bonn Cluster of Excellence has set itself the goal of overcoming the binary opposition of slavery vs. freedom for two reasons. First, because it stems from the Eurocentric view of ancient Roman-Greek conditions and the slave trade of the colonial powers. Second, because this opposition ignores the different degrees of asymmetrical dependencies. Looking at the texts of the Hebrew Bible shows that it is precisely in the slave laws that a category of people emerges who, in the context of the ancient Near Eastern world, one can describe as "semifree." Individual freedom is undoubtedly a phenomenon of the European Enlightenment, but release from debt slavery has its roots thousands of years earlier. The fact that liberation does not lead to freedom, but to a new form of asymmetrical dependency on the divine liberator, is one of the findings of this study of the Old Testament. The monotheistic concept of God, first elaborated in radical form in ancient Israel in the sixth to fifth century BC,[14] is the intellectual horizon that conceived liberation, not freedom,[15] resulting in a fundamental demand for obedience. "The relationship between God and man is a relationship of dependency, indeed of obedience, of submission. To doubt that the religious relationship is liberating—pre-

12 Terence E. Fretheim, "Divine Dependence upon the Human": 25: "No specific biblical vocabulary for dependence, independence, and interdependence seems to be available. To speak clearly about the human, it is necessary to speak clearly about God and the relationship that God has established with human beings and the world."

13 Winnebeck et al., "Analytical Concept": 25, who take a positive view of this "mediating role."

14 Thomas Römer, *Die Erfindung Gottes: Eine Reise zu den Quellen des Monotheismus* (Darmstadt: wbg Academic, 2018): 228–30. See chapter 12: "From the *one* God to the *only* God. The origins of biblical monotheism in Persian times."

15 There is no Hebrew word for "freedom" in the OT. In 2 Mac 1,27 one finds for the first time the verb ἐλευθερόω ("to set free") for the gathering of the exiles who are living as slaves among the nations in order to bring them back home (ἐλευθέρωσον τοὺς δουλεύοντας ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν); cf. 1 Mac 2,11 on the destruction of Jerusalem: "Instead of a free woman she became a female slave" (ἀντὶ ἐλευθέρας ἐγένετο εἰς δούλην). The Hebrew noun *ḥerût* ("freedom") stems from Roman times, thus Wolfgang Oswald, "Freiheit und Befreiung," in *Handbuch Alttestamentlicher Anthropologie*, ed. Jan Dietrich et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024): 332.

cisely because of this, i.e. in truth—is based on this question: How can submission be liberating?"[16] From the perspective of the Old Testament and the Bible as a whole, one can submit to YHWH and his demand for obedience only if and insofar as he is not a despot, but a God of justice.

The present work engages with an area that the Cluster has up to now deliberately excluded, because the concept of justice does not merely serve to describe social situations, but always subjects them to an ethical and moral evaluation.[17] In contrast to "dependency/dependences," for which there are no biblical terms, justice is a very prominent Old Testament term with a view of the world and humanity that reaches back to the beginnings of ancient oriental cultures in Egypt and Mesopotamia. In the empire on the Nile, the pharaoh is the embodiment of justice (*Ma'at*), without which the world order would not endure but would inevitably fall into chaos.[18] In the empires on the Euphrates and Tigris, the kings perform the duty assigned to them by the gods. They exercise their rule to protect the socially weak from the strong. The guiding principle here is the idea of saving justice, an idea which does not aim to dismantle the social stratification into free, semifree, and slaves, but, on the contrary, consolidates it permanently. "The religious obedience to the gods, the implementation of the political ideal of rulership and the stabilization of social conditions through the protection of the socially weak appear [. . .] as synchronous, mutually interrelated dimensions of justice in the ancient Near East."[19] What applies to the kings of the ancient eastern Mediterranean must also apply to YHWH as the sole Lord of all lords. Nothing makes this clearer than Abraham's admonition to the God of Israel before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: "Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25). The God upon whom all life depends has bound himself to the requirement of justice through his covenants with creation, humanity, Abraham as the father of many nations, and Moses as the mediator of the law for Israel. If he were free of this bond, he would not be a ruler for salvation, but a despot and tyrant. This is precisely what Job accuses him of because he no longer perceives justice as a result that corresponds to action, but states the opposite: "The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; he covers the eyes of its judges—if it is not he, who then is it?" (Job 9:24). Justice as *the* category that is relevant to rule in the ancient Near Eastern and

16 Christoph Menke, *Theorie der Befreiung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2022): 356. See the whole of chapter 4: "Befreiung als Gehorsam: Exodus." All quotations originally in languages other than English have been translated into English by the author throughout this publication.

17 Winnebeck et al., "Analytical Concept": 46: "Another crucial point that requires further reflection is the (ultimately ethical and political) question of how to steer clear of an ontological understanding of asymmetrical dependency and, thus, make conceivable a society without such relations."

18 Jan Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil: Politische Theologie in Altägypten, Israel und Europa* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2000): 33.

19 Guido Pfeifer, "Gerechtigkeit aus der Perspektive der altorientalischen Rechtsgeschichte," in *Gerechtigkeit*, ed. Markus Witte, Themen der Theologie 6 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012): 28.

Old Testament worldview also binds the God of Israel. He must adhere to saving justice. If he does not do so, he forfeits his divinity like the other deities whom he reproaches for bending the law and for not snatching the poor and lowly from the power of the wicked (Ps 82:2–4). According to Jewish tradition, the commandment for humans to develop a legal framework for themselves is the highest of the Noachide commandments. People are bound to law and justice because God himself is bound to it:

> The validity of law against the violence of the despot is at the same time the precondition of the "political." The law appears in the Bible as God's commandment to humankind. But it also restrains God's despotic power and obliges him to consider things justly, to exercise the law leniently.[20]

The God of the Bible is not above the act-consequence relationship but is its promoter and guarantor. God's saving intervention does not override this order of deeds and consequences but stabilizes it precisely at the point when it threatens to break apart. If YHWH did not come to the aid of the impoverished widow and the destitute orphan, the injustice of the oppressors would pay off and pervert the act-consequence relationship. In the Old Testament (OT), the cosmic context takes care of the punishment of evildoers on its own (see Ezek 10:8; Ps 7:16; 9:16; Prov 26:27), while the salvation of the righteous usually requires divine intervention (Ps 37:39).

Conspicuously, slaves are not noted when mentioning YHWH's justice, which comes to the aid of widows, orphans, and strangers—particularly in their distress. They have no place in the triad of *personae miserae*. The care of the poor does not apply to them because they are the property of their owners, who look after them for their own benefit but can also harm "their own property" (Exod 21:21). The *imago dei* concept that every human being, as a creature of God, is created in his image (Gen 1:27) plays no role in the assessment of the asymmetrical relationship between masters and slaves in the OT. Only Job 31:13–15 mentions the common creatureliness. However, this is not used as an argument for any equality or equal treatment, but rather as a motivation for humane treatment of these dependents.[21] Not only here, but also in law and especially in the proverbs, the asymmetrical dependency of slaves on their masters is cemented and they do not become objects of YHWH's saving justice.

None of this denies the humanizing tendencies derived from the Exodus experience, but they affect only debt slaves and female slaves of their own people, not those from abroad. Because slaves, regardless of their gender and origin, do not act inde-

20 Elisa Klapheck, *Zur politischen Theologie des Judentums* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2022): 35.

21 For a different view, see Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East: A Comparative Study of Slavery in Babylonia, Assyria, Syria, and Palestine from the Middle of the Third Millenium to the End of the First Millenium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949): 123: "The first man in the Ancient Near East who raised his voice in a sweeping condemnation of slavery as a cruel and inhuman institution, irrespective of nationality and race, was the philosopher Job. His was a condemnation based on the moral concept of the inherent brotherhood of man [. . .]."

pendently but can behave only in accordance with the orders of their owners, they are not subject to the cosmic connection between action and fate. One can express this reality not only for ancient Egypt, but also for ancient Israel in the phrase "whoever acts is acted for."[22] Action presupposes personality, individual freedom of choice to act or to refrain from acting. *By definition,* slaves cannot have this freedom of action, because if they did, they would no longer be the property of their masters. Even by fleeing, one cannot escape this asymmetrical dependency, because it does not make one free, but only an escaped slave. In relation to YHWH, escape is excluded from the outset, because freedom only exists towards him and not away from him.

22 "The reward of a doer lies in the fact that action is taken on his behalf. God considers this to be maat" (Stele of Neferhotep, thirteenth Dynasty); see Jan Assmann, *Ma'at: Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten*, Beck'sche Reihe 1403 (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001): 65.

2 Foundations of the Concept of Justice in Near Eastern Antiquity and the Old Testament

The concept of "justice/righteousness" (*ṣᵉdāqāh*) is not just one of many that play a role in a theology of the Old Testament, but, as Gerhard von Rad stated in his influential monograph, it must be considered the most central:

> In the Old Testament, there is no concept of such central importance for all human relationships as that of צְדָקָה. It is the standard not only for man's relationship with God, but also for the relationship between people, even in the most trivial quarrels, and even for man's relationship with animals and his natural environment. צְדָקָה can easily be described as the highest value of life, as that on which all life, when it is in order, rests.[1]

As with so many other ideas, biblical Israel and its writings participate in the worldview of the ancient Near East, where all reality is based on a principle of order. It connects heaven and earth, gods and humans, and animals and nature with and among each other, and state rule must safeguard the principle for society to endure.[2] For life to succeed today and tomorrow, in this world and the hereafter, the network of relationships that integrates everything and everyone must be recognized, protected, and strengthened. The guiding principle here is not *iustitia commutativa*, in which goods and services are exchanged according to demands and expectations, or *iustitia distributiva, in* which goods, services and resources are distributed fairly among the members of a society by responsible authorities.[3] Rather, it is *iustitia connectiva*. In the Egyptian concept of the world, it is embodied by the goddess Ma'at, who is the daughter of Ra and, as such, the sister of the ruling pharaoh:

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1 Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, vol. 1, *Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels*, 5th ed. (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1966): 382; see Walter Dietrich, "Der rote Faden im Alten Testament," *Evangelische Theologie* 49, no. 3 (1989): 236; Bernd Janowski, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit," in *Handbuch Alttestamentlicher Anthropologie*, ed. Jan Dietrich et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024): 336; Herbert Niehr, "Rechtswesen," in *Handbuch Alttestamentlicher Anthropologie*, ed. Jan Dietrich et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024): 341–42; and Ulrich Berges, "Gerechtigkeit und Rettung in Recht und Prophetie," in *'Dein Wort ist meinem Fuß eine Leuchte': Festschrift für Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger*, ed. Georg Braulik et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 2022): 53–56.

2 Heinz Barta, "Recht, Religion und Gerechtigkeit in frühen Gesellschaften: Zur Bedeutung von Herrschaft und Staat für diese Gesellschaftsphänomene," in *Recht und Religion: Menschliche und göttliche Gerechtigkeitsvorstellungen in den antiken Welten* ed. Robert Rollinger, Heinz Barta and Martin Lang, Philippika 24 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008): 23: "Early concepts of justice thus serve essentially to *legitimize rule* and at the same time act as a normative *guideline for the exercise of rule*, primarily through law and religion."

3 Elisabeth Holzleithner, *Gerechtigkeit*, UTB Profile 3238 (Vienna: Facultas, 2009): 13: "What is at stake here, for example, is under what conditions and according to what criteria the allocation or acquisition of goods is fair. In the case of distribution, this could be need or merit; in the case of exchange, equivalence of value—or the willingness to pay a certain price on the market."

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782-002

> Justice, in the Egyptian sense, is first and foremost humanity, *iustitia connectica* ('connective justice'), which connects people with each other by creating responsibility and trust. Those trained under the principle of *ma'at* know that they are responsible for their actions and words. They are therefore worthy of the trust of others.[4]

What is at stake here is not a prescriptive norm, but the principle of life and order that pervades all of reality:

> In a nutshell, it is the order and the right measure that underlies the world, the desirable, the perfect state of things as it corresponds to the intention of the creator god. This state is disturbed again and again, and tireless effort is needed to restore it to its original purity [. . .]. Thus, the Egyptians can see *ma'at* as a substance, a material element on which the world lives, as substance for the living and the dead, for gods and men.[5]

Ma'at not only arises when people act in solidarity with one another, but also precedes every righteous deed. It is the primal cause of all community-promoting behavior, which contrasts with *isfet*, the disastrous deed.[6] When the pharaoh, the representative of the human world, offers the *ma'at*, as documented in countless depictions, he offers to the world of the gods the visible sign "[. . .] that the human world, that all the vulnerable, fragile relationships and bonds on which it lives, are in order, just as they were at the moment of creation."[7] In Egyptian depictions, the throne of the pharaoh often stands on a pedestal bearing the hieroglyph for *ma'at*. Similarly, the throne of the king in Israel is secured only upon the basis of justice and righteousness (see Isa 9:6; 16:5; Prov 20:28; 25:5; 29:14).[8] A "vertical solidarity" that reaches all members of the community hierarchically from the top of the state via the civil service must curb the existing inequality between the poor and the rich and between the strong and the weak.[9]

The inherent constant here is the connection between deeds and their outcome—that the wrongful act falls back on the perpetrator just as much as the good deed falls back on the one who has behaved in a manner beneficial to gods and humans. A disrup-

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4 Jan Assmann, *Ma'at*: 91; Jan Assmann, *Ägypten: Eine Sinngeschichte* (Munich: Hanser Verlag, 1996): 146; see also Richard H. Wilkinson, *Die Welt der Götter im alten Ägypten: Glaube, Macht, Mythologie* (Stuttgart: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003): 150–52.

5 Erik Hornung, *Der Eine und die Vielen: Altägyptische Götterwelt*, 6th ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005): 227.

6 Klaus Koch, "Ṣädaq und Ma'at: Konnektive Gerechtigkeit in Israel und Ägypten?" in *Gerechtigkeit: Richten und Retten in der abendländischen Tradition und ihren altorientalischen Ursprüngen*, ed. Jan Assmann, Bernd Janowski and Michael Welker (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1998): 44; Klaus Bieberstein and Lukas Bormann, "Gerechtigkeit/Recht," in *Sozialgeschichtliches Wörterbuch zur Bibel*, ed. Frank Crüsemann et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2009): 197–98: "It is the network of all social interrelationships that holds the world together [. . .]."

7 Hornung, *Der Eine*: 229; see Silvia Schroer, *Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israels und der Alte Orient: Eine Religionsgeschichte in Bildern*, vol. 3, *Die Spätbronzezeit* (Fribourg: Schwabe Verlag, 2011): 46–47.

8 Hellmut Brunner, "Gerechtigkeit als Fundament des Thrones," *Vetus Testamentum* 8, no. 4 (1958): 426–28.

9 Assmann, *Ägypten*: 177.

tion or suspension of this nexus threatens and endangers the cosmic order to the core: "The world is 'out of joint' when connective justice no longer functions, when evil goes unpunished, and good deeds are no longer worthwhile."[10] Because this connection is often absent within the world, the Egyptian Court of the Dead guarantees it with absolute certainty in the afterlife. The Court contributed significantly to the stabilization of this concept of justice in the kingdom of the pharaohs, which lasted for thousands of years. Anubis accompanies the dead "into the Hall of Complete Truth,"[11] where the heart of the deceased is placed on a scale in the middle of the Hall. The heart represents the sum of all a person's deeds, and a feather symbolizes the goddess Maat.[12] Thoth, the scribe god, notes down the result of the test in front of the enthroned Osis, the god of judgement of the underworld, who is surrounded by 42 assessors. If the heart sinks, weighed down by transgressions, it is devoured by a demonic hybrid creature. However, if a person's earthly life meets the requirements of Maat, of connective justice, the dead person as a righteous person is admitted to the eternal life of the world of the gods. On the one hand, chapter 125 of the *Book of the Dead* represents the quintessence of the civic morality of the New Kingdom (eigtheenth–twentieth Dynasties or 1550–1070 BC). Yet, on the other hand, according to Klaus Koch, it provides no proof that:

> [. . .] morality had become the center of the Egyptian religion. The text is intended to be used as a form of magic and does not provoke a subjective examination of conscience. The exuberantly positive statements made about the past course of life are intended to erase a past that may have taken a different course.[13]

In contrast, Jan Assmann does not dispute the magical character of this text and Egyptian coffin liturgies, but he does dispute the idea that the ancient Egyptians simply "flanked" morality with magic in their conception of the judgment of the dead. According to Assmann, there can be no question about it because the Egyptians supplemented

10 Jan Assmann, Bernd Janowski and Michael Welker. "Richten und Retten: Zur Aktualität der altorientalischen und biblischen Gerechtigkeitskonzeption," in *Gerechtigkeit: Richten und Retten in der abendländischen Tradition und ihren altorientalischen Ursprüngen*, ed. Jan Assmann, Bernd Janowski and Michael Welker (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1998): 9; Rolf Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method, and Cases. Essays* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995): 89: "Reality itself, a dynamic organic process, is just"; and Bernd Janowski, "Leiblichkeit, Konnektivität, Mitgeschöpflichkeit: Zentrale Themen der alttestamentlichen Ethik," *Verkündigung und Forschung* 69, no. 1 (2024): 28: "Where the power of acting for one another diminishes or even dries up, the bond of justice also breaks."

11 Translation of chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead by Boyo Ockinga (see Christel Butterweck et al., *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments*, vol. 2, *Religiöse Texte: Grab-, Sarg-, Votiv- und Bauinschriften* [Gütersloh: Gütersoher Verlagshaus, 1988]: 511–12): "I have not sinned against men, I have not made people poor; I have done no evil in the place of truth [. . .]; I have caused no suffering; I have caused no tears; I have not killed, nor commanded to kill [. . .]; I have not diminished the meat offerings in the temple; I have not touched the sacrificial bread of the gods [. . .]."

12 See Karen Gloy, *Die Frage nach der Gerechtigkeit* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2017): 16–17.

13 Klaus Koch, *Geschichte der ägyptischen Religion: Von den Pyramiden bis zu den Mysterien der Isis* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993): 324.

morality with magic in the same way they supplemented the art of medicine. According to him from Ancient Egypt right up to the middle of the eighteenth century AD, with the refoundation of morality through Kant's categorical imperative, the judgment of the dead and the immortality of the soul provided the two pillars for the ultimate justification of moral action.[14]

According to the Egyptian concept of *ma'at*, righteous action always means acting for one another, as summarized in the inscription of Neferhotep, a king of the thirteenth dynasty around 1700 BC: "The reward of a doer lies in the fact that action is taken through him. God considers this to be *ma'at*.'[15] Constant remembrance is required to ensure that this network of acting for one another is not torn apart but repeatedly strengthened: "To act is to remember. To forget is not to act. The inactive person loses sight of yesterday and of the demands it places on today."[16] The final test and maintenance of connective justice, of acting for one another, takes place in the judgment of the dead:

> The acquittal confirms the acceptance into a sphere where the Ma'at reigns unchallenged, while on earth it must be enforced over and over against a tendency to decay, forgetting and destruction inherent to the mortal world.[17]

In the Babylonian imagination, Šamaš, the sun god, guarantees the order of creation, having received an order from Marduk to curb murder and violence on earth.[18] Thus Šamaš is also "the one who leads rightly," given that the basic meaning of the Akkadian verb *ešēru(m)* can be rendered as "to be in order" and be translated causatively as "to bring order, create justice, and help bring about justice."[19] The gods instructed kings to establish justice.[20] In an exemplary manner, Hammurabi reveals this in the middle of the eighteenth century BC in the prologue to his famous Stele of Law, stating that he was appointed as a pious prince and worshipper of the gods to:

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14 Assmann, Janowski and M. Welker, "Richten und Retten": 18.

15 Assmann, *Ma'at*: 65; Gloy, *Gerechtigkeit*: 21.

16 Assmann, *Ma'at*: 64.

17 Assmann, *Ma'at*: 135.

18 Enuma Elish, V, Z. 2 (*TWAT* III/4, 588; transl. W.G. Lambert).

19 See Wolfram von Sodon, "ešēru(m)," in *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965): 254–56.

20 Hans Neumann, "Göttliche Gerechtigkeit und menschliche Verantwortung im alten Mesopotamien im Spannungsfeld von Norm(durch)setzung und narrativer Formulierung," in *Recht und Religion: Menschliche und göttliche Gerechtigkeitsvorstellungen in den antiken Welten*, ed. Robert Rolling, Heinz Barta and Martin Lang, Philippika 24 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008): 40: "The special role of the ruler in the legal system, especially in law-making and jurisdiction, meant that the king himself was only subject to divine jurisdiction, which was represented in particular by the sun god Šamaš [. . .], the guardian of the law."

> [. . .] make justice visible in the land, to destroy the wicked and the bad, not to let the weak be harmed by the strong, to rise like the sun god to the 'black-headed' [the people] and to enlighten the land [. . .].[21]

The word pair essentially embodying this mission and claim is *kittu* and *mīšaru*, "law and justice."[22] The first noun, derived from the root *kânu*, "to be firm, true, and lasting," refers to the correct order to be maintained. The second term, which goes back to the lexeme *ešēru*, "to be in order or to put in order," refers to the legal acts that restore or protect this order.[23]

> "Law and justice" in the sense of a political-social order, which it is the task of the king to maintain and restore. They are possible only if they are in harmony with the order of the cosmos as it was established in the act of creation [. . .]. If the gods are angry with the king, who is responsible for the welfare of the country, they turn away from the king and give free rein to the forces of chaos.[24]

The regulatory function to be exercised by the king[25] is particularly evident in the *mīšarum edicts* issued at irregular intervals during the Old Babylonian period and at regular intervals during the Neo-Assyrian period when a new king took office. These *mīšarum edicts* intended to soften hardships in society through offering debt relief

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21 The Codex Hammurabi, transl. Rykle Borger (see Rykle Borger et al., *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments*, vol. 1, *Rechts- und Wirtschaftsurkungen Historisch-chronologische Texte* [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1982]: 40). The same applies, for example, over a thousand years later to the Persian Darius (522–486 BC) and the Achaemenids in general: see Josef Wiesehöfer, "Gerechtigkeit und Recht im achaimenidischen Iran," in *Recht und Religion: Menschliche und göttliche Gerechtigkeitsvorstellungen in den antiken Welten*, ed. Robert Rollinger, Heinz Barta and Martin Lang, Philippika 24 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008): 201: "The Achaemenid kings saw themselves—in the manner of the ancient Near East—as defenders and promoters of law and justice."

22 See Pfeifer, "Gerechtigkeit": 17; for the Northwest Semitic area Herbert Niehr, "The Constitutive Principles for Establishing Justice and Order in Northwest Semitic Societies with Special Reference to Ancient Israel and Judah," in *Patronage in Ancient Palestine and in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Emanuel Pfoh, The Social World of Biblical Antiquity. Second Series 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2022): 150–57.

23 Martin Lang, "Zum Begriff von menschlicher und göttlicher Gerechtigkeit in den Prologen der altorientalischen Codices," in *Recht und Religion: Menschliche und göttliche Gerechtigkeitsvorstellungen in den antiken Welten*, ed. Heinz Barta, Philippika 24 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008): 53: "The terms *kittum* and *mīšarum* thus capture a static and a dynamic [. . .] dimension of justice [. . .]"; in detail Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995): 75–96 in chapter 4: Proclamations of "Freedom" in Mesopotamia and Their Reflections in Ancient Israel.

24 Stefan Maul, "Der assyrische König—Hüter der Weltordnung," in *Gerechtigkeit: Richten und Retten in der abendländischen Tradition und ihren altorientalischen Ursprüngen*, ed. Jan Assmann, Bernd Janowski and Michael Welker (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1998): 67.

25 Pamela Barmash, *The Laws of Hammurabi: At the Confluence of Royal and Scribal Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020): 280, emphasizes the interaction of royal and legal traditions: "[. . .] royal propaganda and legal reasoning are the two traditions melded in the Laws of Hammurabi."

and thus repeatedly protected the social cohesion from collapse: "Just as the sun god repeatedly 'guided the cosmos right' by keeping to his orbit, the king assumed this regulatory function for the political-social structure."[26] This task reveals a paradox in the relationship between law and justice. Royal edicts were always needed to correct the consequences caused by the established legal order and thus maintain the social order in the first place.[27] The claim to enforce justice to protect the weak against the strong could not assert itself in the legal collections themselves, but remained a *topos* in royal ideological frameworks.[28] The hiatus between the ideal of justice and the concrete legal and contractual provisions could not persist in the long term. That is the reason why both the royal ideological frameworks and the mīšarum *edicts ceased to exist* after the Codex Hammurabi.[29] The Neo-Assyrian *andurāru(m)* institution, which freed debt slaves by royal decree, can only in parts be compared to the mīšarum *edicts*, because contractual defense clauses could undermine these release decrees, so that such acts of justice served only as royal propaganda.[30] The Akkadian term *andurāru(m)* refers to the liberation from burdens and duties so that liberated persons can go their own way without hindrance: "Social justice and equity are bound up with personal freedom, and liberating a man means allowing him to follow his own path without stopping him or binding him."[31]

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26 Maul, "*Der assyrische König*": 70; Eckart Otto, "Recht und Ethos in der ost- und westmediterranen Antike: Entwurf eines Gesamtbildes," in *Gott und Mensch im Dialog: Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Markus Witte, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 345/1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004): 94, points out that these edicts are not aimed at an egalitarian society, but they want to prevent "[. . .] families from falling out of their ancestral social class through expropriation as a result of debt."

27 Eckart Otto, "Gerechtigkeit und Erbarmen im Recht des Alten Testaments und seiner christlichen Rezeption," in *Gerechtigkeit: Richten und Retten in der abendländischen Tradition und ihren altorientalischen Ursprüngen*, ed. Jan Assmann, Bernd Janowski and Michael Welker (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1998): 84; see Guido Pfeifer, "Gerechtigkeit": 27.

28 Eckart Otto, *Deuteronomium 12,1–23,15*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2016): 1343: "In this tense juxtaposition of legal corpus and royal theological framing, the difference between law and justice is reflected." Lang, "Gerechtigkeit": 49, warns against seeing the assertion of law and justice in the prologues merely as "flowery metaphors of oriental provenance," as does Karlheinz Kessler, "Gott—König—Tempel: Menschliches Recht und göttliche Gerechtigkeit in neu- und spätbabylonischer Zeit," in *Recht und Religion: Menschliche und göttliche Gerechtigkeitsvorstellungen in den antiken Welten*, ed. Heinz Barta, Philippika 24 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008): 73: "[. . .] the demands of the gods on the king were far more than hollow phrases."

29 Eckart Otto, "'Um Gerechtigkeit im Land sichtbar werden zu lassen. . .': Zur Vermittlung von Recht und Gerechtigkeit im Alten Orient, in der Hebräischen Bibel und in der Moderne," in *Recht—Macht—Gerechtigkeit*, ed. Joachim Mehlhausen, Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 14 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998): 122.

30 Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 12:1–23:15: 1349: "The aspect of social justice thus fell by the wayside."

31 Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 33; he points out that Greek *ἐλευθερία* also has the basic meaning of going/leaving (fut. *ἐλεύσομαι* from *ἔρχομαι*).

As was the case in Egypt and Mesopotamia, justice in ancient Israel is not, at least originally, a norm to be fulfilled or a standard according to which goods and services would be distributed, but an effective force that sustains all life and underlies every act of solidarity.[32] For this reason, the translation of the Hebrew *ṣᵉdāqāh* as "community loyalty" is a step in the right direction. However, it breaks with the nomistic constriction of the Latin *ius/iustitia* yet it falls short as purely inner-worldly behavior.[33] The reorientation initiated by H.H. Schmid with his habilitation thesis *Justice as a World Order* continues to have an impact today. He places the root צדק and the Old Testament concept into the overall concept of order in the Ancient Near East and concludes:

> Just as this order unites cosmic, political, religious, social and ethical aspects and is substantiated above all in the areas of law, wisdom, nature, war, worship and—encompassing these areas—kingship, so צדק or צדקה can be applied to these six contexts in a correspondingly broad sense.[34]

However, justice in this sense acts not only as the meaningful reason and meaningful goal of all world order, but also as the generator of history:

> What the Egyptian sees as the afterlife and immortality, the Mesopotamian sees as history: A horizon of fulfillment. In Mesopotamia, however, this idea is only just beginning to develop. This concept of history came to full articulation only in Israel.[35]

32 See K.H.J. Fahlgren, *ṣᵉdāḳā, nahestehende und entgegengesetzte Begriffe im Alten Testament* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1932): 82: "Sedaka as the norm of community relations is the constructive and cohesive force in society. It binds the individuals into a whole and organizes them into an order that is most conducive to the whole."

33 Thus Koch, "Sädaq und Ma'at": 51–55; critically Hermann Spieckermann, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit im Alten Testament: Politische Wirklichkeit und metaphorischer Anspruch," in *Recht—Macht—Gerechtigkeit*, ed. Joachim Mehlhausen, Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 14 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998): 255, who considers "faithfulness to community" to be a too one-sided translation of *ṣᵉdāqāh*.

34 Hans H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte des alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffs*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 40 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1968): 166; the criticism of Jože Krašovec, *La justice (ṢDQ) de Dieu dans la bible hébraïque et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne*, Orbis biblicus et orientalis 76 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988): 15, is inaccurate: "Nowhere in either non-biblical or biblical texts does the conclusion reached by the author appear obvious"; in contrast, Bernd Janowski, "Die rettende Gerechtigkeit: Zum Gerechtigkeitsdiskurs in den Psalmen," in *"Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben" (Gen 18,19): Studien zur altorientalischen und biblischen Rechtsgeschichte, zur Religionsgeschichte Israels und zur Religionssoziologie*; *Festschrift für Eckart Otto zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Reinhard Achenbach, Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte / Beihefte 13 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009): 363: "Justice is a central concept of legal, economic, and political-social life."

35 Jan Assmann, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit als Generatoren von Geschichte," in *Die Weltgeschichte—das Weltgericht?*, ed. Rüdiger Bubner and Walter Mesch (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001): 303.

Like no other god in ancient Near Eastern antiquity, YHWH binds himself to a people through a covenant with contractual obligations under the threat of destructive wrath or the promise of beneficial grace:

> Israel is the first society to reverse the relationship of domination between cyclical and linear, mythical and historical, and renewal and responsible time. Here, for the first time, special emphasis is placed on the time of responsibility [. . .] God is thus involved much more intensively in events than was usually the case. History is thus fundamentally restructured: From a field of possible blessing and punishing interventions on the part of the gods to a coherent context of action that we call salvation history, or *historia sacra*.[36]

The participation in the Old Testament concept of justice as a cosmic order,[37] which permeates all areas of this world and the hereafter, derives in part from YHWH's roots in the religious history of the ancient Oriental world of gods.[38] A growing consensus in Old Testament research indicates the origin of this deity toward the end of the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BC) in the area south-east of the rift valley between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. "The Late Bronze Age Araba probably represents the original home of YHWH, who can be profiled more closely as a solitary weather god offering protection and support."[39] Egyptian temple inscriptions referring to "YHW(H) in the land of the Shasu" point in this direction, as does the first non-biblical mention of Israel on the stele of Pharaoh Merenptah from 1209 BC in the mortuary temple of Thebes. It seems reasonable to assume that Shasu nomads in the border region of Egypt and the far south of Palestine transmitted the worship of YHWH. That assumption is consistent with the Moses-Midian tradition (see Exod 2–4; 18) and with the coming of the God of Israel from the south (see Deut 33:2; Jdg 5:4; Hab 3:3; and Ps 68:9). "Overall, the material on Moses and Midian confirms the indications that point to a southern origin of Yhwh and a pos-

36 Assmann, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit": 307.

37 Hugh G.M. Williamson, *He Has Shown You What Is Good: Old Testament Justice Then and Now*; *The Trinity Lectures, Singapore, 2011* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2012): 56: "[. . .] the fundamental basis for human behavior becomes a fitting in to the established order of the universe"; detailed in Markus Saur, "*ṣædæq* oder von der Ordnung der Welt," in *Menschsein in Weisheit und Freiheit: Festschrift für Thomas Krüger*, ed. Veronika Bachmann, Annette Schellenberg and Frank Ueberschaer, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 296 (Leuven: Peeters, 2022): 379–81.

38 See Jan Dietrich, "'Sollte der Richter der ganzen Erde nicht Recht üben?' (Gen 18,25): Über moralischen Realismus im Alten Testament," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 116, no. 3 (2019): 251–53.

39 Martin Leuenberger, *Gott in Bewegung: Religions- und theologiegeschichtliche Beiträge zu Gottesvorstellungen im alten Israel*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 76 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011): 8. See also Römer, *Die Erfindung Gottes*: 52–54; and Ulrich Berges, *Die dunklen Seiten des guten Gottes: Zu Ambiguitäten im Gottesbild JHWHs aus religions- und theologiegeschichtlicher Perspektive*, Vorträge / Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Künste 443 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013): 17–19.

sible connection to the Shashu, those semi-nomadic tribes which amongst others also include the Midianites and the Kenites."[40]

YHWH's connection to the ancient oriental theme of justice gains in significance when the originally southern Palestinian storm and weather deity moves into the Jebusite Jerusalem where he encounters the local deity Šalem and takes on some of his characteristics. In this context, Jerusalem does not mean "city of peace" as the Bible would have us believe (see Jer 4:10; and Ezek 13:16), but "foundation of Šalem." Shalem, known in Ugarit as the evening star (KTU 1.23), forms a divine pair with Shaḥar, the morning star (see Isa 14:12), thus guaranteeing the perpetual cosmic order of morning and evening.[41] Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek, the king of Salem, which refers to Jerusalem (Gen 14:18; and Ps 76:3), is a sign of the close relationship between this city and the god Šalem, as might the names of David's sons, Absalom and Solomon. In Ugaritic mythology, the divine pair of Šalem and Šaḥar are associated with the sun god (KTU 1.100; 107), who is regarded as the guarantor of justice, as it was customary in the ancient Near Eastern. The fact that Jerusalem is referred to as the city of justice (Isa 1:21, 26) has its religious-historical roots in the city's connection to the deity Ṣedek, as evidenced by the names of the pre-Israelite kings Melchi- Ṣedek (Gen 14:18) and Adoni- Ṣedek (Josh 10:1, 3).[42] Traces of this deity, whose name, "righteousness," indicates jurisdiction over the all-encompassing order, are attested to several times in the Old Testament. Whether or not the authors had been aware of this connection is irrelevant. In Ps 84:12, YHWH is presented *expressis verbis* as the "sun and shield" (שמש ומגן). When "justice" (צֶדֶק) looks down from heaven (Ps 85:12) and walks before YHWH (Ps 85:14), it stands by his side as the supreme God.[43] If justice and peace kiss each other according to Ps 85:11, then the deities Ṣedek and Šalem are originally concealed behind this figure of speech. Just as *ma'at* is the foundation of Pharaoh's throne, so does justice also supports the throne that is the reign of the king in Israel (Ps 89:15; 97:2; and Prov 16:12).[44] Traces of deified righteousness can still be seen in the supplication of the

40 Römer, *Die Erfindung Gottes*: 82; also Manfred Görg, "Jahwe" in *Neues Bibel-Lexikon*, vol. 2, ed. Manfred Görg and Bernhard Lang (Zürich: Benzinger Verlag, 1995): col. 65: "The bearers of J. worship can be sought within the Shasu formations, to which the Kenites and Midianites in particular seem to correspond within the Bible."

41 Herbert B. Huffmon, "Shalem שלם," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1995): col. 1428–31.

42 Bernard F. Batto, "Zedeq צדק," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1995): col. 1750–58; Jože Krašovec, *God's Righteousness and Justice in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2022): 31–33.

43 Saur, "ṣædæq": 383: "Like a leader, a messenger or a herald, *ṣædæq* leads the way and assembles the steps of Jhwh into a path."

44 See also Rainer Kessler, "Ideologies of Kingship and the Sacred in the Ancient Near East," in *Economics and Empire in the Ancient Near East. Guide to the Bible and Economics*, vol. 1, ed. Matthew J.M. Coomber (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2023): 205–7.

praying man in Ps 17:1, when translated as: "Hear YHWH, Ṣedek heed my cry."[45] When Jerusalem is called the "city of righteousness" (עיר הצדק) in Isa 1:26, which was filled with justice and in which righteousness stays overnight, i.e. where righteousness rules even at night (Isa 1:21), this too refers to the deity Ṣedek.[46] Through David's conquest of Jebusite Jerusalem, YHWH also assumed the functions of the god of justice, who thus established the dynasty of the royal house, lead its wars to victory, and ensured the enforcement of justice to save the oppressed. As stated at the end of the Psalm of Kings (Ps 101:8): "Morning by morning I will destroy all the wicked in the land, cutting off all evildoers from the city of the YHWH." YHWH's function as the sun god is also evident in Zeph 3:5, when he again and again stands up for justice: "Every morning he renders his judgment, each dawn without fail."

According to Othmar Keel, the east-west orientation of the Jerusalem temple (see 1 Kings 7:39; 8:16; Ezek 43:1–2), which runs counter to the north-south axis of the Temple Mount, bears testimony to this profile extension of YHWH as a sun deity, whose core competence was to guarantee cosmic order and whose social realization the king had to ensure in his name:

> The rocky promontory on which the temple stood runs from north to south. The east-west orientation of the temple meant that any extension, especially to the west, was impossible because of the steep slope towards the city valley (formerly: Tyropoion). In terms of urban planning, one would expect the front of the temple to face the main residential area of the time to the south, the palace and the City of David, from which one could ascend to the temple. Instead, the front of the temple faced the uninhabited Mount of Olives.[47]

With the solarization of YHWH in the Jerusalem of the Davidic kings, his profile expanded beyond that of the combative storm and weather god and became a complex but extremely successful deity who is worshipped in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to this day.[48] YHWH's proximity to the sun deity, who is intrinsically linked to the theme of justice, can be seen in many other passages in the Old Testament, which do not always (Mic 7:9; and Hos 10:12; Mal 3:19–20), but often, relate to Jerusalem and the temple as his earthly dwelling (Jer 31:23; and 33:16).[49] This does not mean that a deity from one Parthenon is transferred to that of another. Instead, YHWH absorbs different deities and appropriates

45 Schmid, *Weltordnung*: 76.

46 This continues in the post-exilic prophecy when it says in Isa 60:17 that YHWH will make peace Jerusalem's rulers and justice its government, according to Schmid, *Weltordnung*: 77.

47 Othmar Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus*, vol. 1, Orte und Landschaften der Bibel 4,1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007): 277.

48 Keel, *Geschichte Jerusalems*: 286: "With the traditions of the sun god and the storm and battle god YHWH, which can only be reconstructed in outline, Jerusalem participated intensively in *both* major religious symbol systems of the Near East simultaneously at the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age."

49 Cf. Bernd Janowski, *Rettungsgewissheit und Epiphanie des Heils: Das Motiv der Hilfe Gottes "am Morgen" im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament*, vol. 1, *Alter Orient*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum

their characteristics and powers.[50] The fact that political defensive movements could also play a role here is seen in the Josiah's reform at the end of the seventh century BC, when he destroyed the sun chariots set up by Manasseh in the Jerusalem sanctuary (2 Kings 23:11; see Deut 4:19). The passages in which he is the subject of the verb "to rise" (זרח) (Deut 33:2; Isa 60:1; and Hos 6:3) also supports the solarization of YHWH. Names which combine forms of YHWH with the verb "to rise" (cf. זרחיה Serahiah [YHWH has risen] in 1 Chr 5:32; and 6:36; Ezr 7:4) as well as with terms such as "dawn" (cf. אחישחר Achishachar [my brother is the dawn] in 1 Chr 7:10 and שחריה Shechariah [YHWH is the dawn] in 1 Chr 8:26) and נריה Neriah [YHWH is light] in Jer 36:14; 32; Jer 43:6 point in the same direction.[51] The adoption of the characteristics of the sun god also serves as the background when the Psalms speak of the shining of the divine face (see Num 6:25; Ps 4:7; 31:17; 34:6; 67:2; 80:4, 8, 20; 89:16; 90:8).[52] According to the ancient oriental concept, this characteristic also radiates from the king, who also appears as a sun that creates salvation. Thus, the last words of David:

> The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: "One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.

Here, the Davidic king represents the sun's power of order, which also encompasses the fertility of nature. The same can be found in the petitions of Psalm 72:5–6:

> May he live while the sun endures and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

The king reigning on David's throne in Jerusalem "[. . .] is justice personified—in that he acts in accordance with the justice and law given to him by YHWH, the 'actual' king. Thus, he is the mediator of 'salvation' (שלום) and life for his land and his people."[53]

Alten und Neuen Testament 59 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989): 190: "A basic text such as Mal 3:20 [. . .] can only be adequately understood against the background of the ancient Near East."

50 Mark Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 57 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008): 183: "[. . .] there is absorption of divinity (Yahweh as the repository of all positive divine character) as well as counter-construction (Yahweh powerful beyond the empire gods who are in fact powerless)."

51 See the chapter "Yahweh and the Sun" in Mark Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and Other Deities in Anciet Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990): 148–59 (here: 149).

52 Mark Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and Other Deities in Anciet Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990): 153; Niehr, "Justice and Order": 161: "Because YHWH has taken over this role of the sun-god more and more [. . .], it is he who gives justice like light."

53 Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger. *Psalmen 51–100*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2000): 322.

Ruling and judging are two sides of the same coin, which places both the Davidic king and YHWH, the King of the World, under obligation.[54]

What conclusion can be drawn from these introductory considerations? The discourses on justice in the Old Testament can only be adequately assessed when seen in the context of the ancient oriental idea of a cosmic order in which action and fate are intrinsically linked.[55] If that is no longer the case, the world falls apart at the seams and social chaos ensues. As Psalm 11:3 says, "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" The guarantee of cosmic order is the responsibility of the gods, who represent justice in various forms (including *Maat*, *Šamaš*, and *Ṣedeq*). In ancient Israel, YHWH assumes this function, first in a monolatrous ("no gods beside me"), then in a monotheistic conception ("I and no one else"). The question of whether he enacts and possibly accelerates the act-consequence relationship (Klaus Koch) or whether the social interconnectedness of the perpetrator and the consequences of his actions should be given greater weight (Bernd Janowski) is not of decisive importance.[56] However, it is more important, that the monotheism of the Bible did not invent the idea of justice, but made it a matter for God.[57] Solidarity with one's fellow human beings, especially the socially weak, becomes the all-important criterion for a relationship with God:

54 Hermann Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 14,1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023): 168: "The combination of ruling and judging as aspects of the office of king is based on a tradition widely attested in the ancient Near East and Old Testament (Prov 16:12; 25:5; 29:14), which was also valid for the Davidic dynasty for centuries (2 Sam 7:13, 16; 1 Kings 2:12, 24, 45; Isa 9:6; 16:5; Ps 89:5; cf. 1 Chr 17:12, 14; 22:1)."

55 Klaus Koch, "Sdq im Alten Testament: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung" (PhD diss., Universität Heidelberg, 1953): 99: "It is not the freedom of God that falls through the synthetic view of life. The synthetic context of human life would not be at all without the act of Yahweh." See critically Krašovec, *Righteousness*: 231: "The Hebrew Bible attributes many more roles to God than solely that of releasing or holding back an organic process of causality."

56 Bernd Janowski, "Die Tat kehrt zum Täter zurück: Offene Fragen im Umkreis des 'Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhangs'," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 91, no. 3 (1994): 269: "God's action thus follows the same principle of reciprocity as that on which the model of action of social interaction is based—with the decisive difference that his intervention is expectable but remains unavailable, i.e. is an act of 'grace', as it were." See the reply by Klaus Koch, "Ṣädaq und Ma'at": 57, note 34: "Janowski's concern apparently amounts to keeping the Old Testament God as far away as possible from ties to the world, including moral ties, and saving God's grace and freedom—for both of which, as we know, there is no real Hebrew equivalent—for our theology."

57 Jan Assmann, "Gerechtigkeit und Monotheismus," in *Freiheit und Recht*: *Festschrift für Frank Crüsemann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Christof Hardmeier (Gütersloh: Kaiser Verlag, 2003): 87; see also Jan Dietrich, "Über die Denkbarkeit des moralischen Realismus im Alten Testament: Entstehungsbedingungen und Kennzeichen einer kritischen Idee," in *Hebräisches Denken: Denkgeschichte und Denkweisen des Alten Testaments*, Biblisch-Theologische Studien 191 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022): 167–69.

> For the first time, the original social norms of communal life are elevated to religious norms of a life pleasing to God. We are not only dealing here with an ethicization of religion, but above all, conversely, with a sacralization or theologization of ethics."[58]

The actual reason for this development lies in the fact that in ancient Israel it was not the king who dictates the law[59]—after being given the necessary authority by the gods—but that YHWH not only acted as judge like some ancient oriental gods, but also as lawgiver. That removes legislating from the king's and the state's political sphere. It can no longer be used for the propaganda of power. Ultimately, YHWH replaces the state with its king at the head because his law becomes the sole and unchanging norm for action.[60] This process of the theologization of law and the ethicization of religion finds its clearest expression in the divine gift of the Torah at Sinai: It is not a king, but Moses, who mediates the law. The delivery at Sinai/Horeb, a place removed from any human access, underlines the authority of revelation as the only source of law: "In the Torah of the Old Testament, the law is removed from functionalization by the political powers by transferring its origin as divine revelation to a mountain of God in the desert."[61] However, theologization of the law also means that YHWH, as the guarantor of justice, is no longer released from his responsibility to enforce it. Human justice as obeying the divine will and divine justice as maintaining this order by rewarding the pious and punishing the wicked become two sides of the same coin.[62]

A royal "I" in the prologues and epilogues of ancient oriental codices is unthinkable in the legal collections of the OT, because the king in Israel is not above the law, but he too is subject to divine law (cf. 2 Sam 11–12; 1 Kings 21). The leadership regulations in Deut 17–18, formulated in retrospect to the exile catastrophe, therefore state that the king, sitting on his throne, should read the words of the law daily to follow them and not exalt himself above his fellow citizens, his brothers (Deut 17:18–20).

Another special feature of the law of the Old Testament should also be noted. Care for the weak was incorporated into regular legislation, independent of state propaganda or fitting in. Herein it differs from the *mīšarum* edicts of Mesopotamian provenance, which were intended to temporarily cushion the greatest social hardships, especially when new rulers ascended to the throne, to maintain life within society at all. Although the laws of the Old Testament do not abolish hierarchical social structures,[63] they do

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58 Assmann, "Gerechtigkeit und Monotheismus": 88.

59 Pfeifer, "Gerechtigkeit": 24: "The king thus sees himself as an intermediary between gods and men."

60 Assmann, "Gerechtigkeit und Monotheismus": 89: "In Egypt and Mesopotamia, the judging God represents and supports the state, whereas in Israel the law-giving God takes the place of the state."

61 Otto, "Recht und Ethos": 106.

62 Fahlgren, *ṣedāḳā*: 97: "When community faithfulness becomes obedience to Yahweh per se and its fruit becomes a reward from God, *ṣedāḳā* splits, so to speak. On the one hand, it becomes something that man owes to Yahweh, and on the other, something that Yahweh owes to man."

63 See Pfeifer, "Gerechtigkeit": 27: "[. . .] an influence on the social order as such, however, is not recognizable. Rather, the measures mentioned leave the fundamental hierarchical structure of ancient

strengthen the personal rights of the socially weak in relation to the property rights of the strong, which is remarkable in the ancient Near East.

In conclusion, of the three levels on which justice operates in the ancient Near Eastern world, the religious level, with its stabilization of the order of creation through the act-consequence relationship, is most consistent with the concept of the OT.[64] In contrast, the political level, in which legislating serves to legitimize royal rule, is completely absent. During the post-state period it becomes virulent in the form of a Davidic-messianic expectation (cf. Isa 11), which, however, no longer has any political implications.[65] On the social level, as will be shown later, the law *corpora* of the Old Testament have a humanizing tendency that goes beyond the facilitations found in the surrounding world, in the debt and credit law, for example. The prophetic ethos and the idea of a people of God consisting of brothers and sisters have substantially penetrated the legal texts and their reformulations. Hereby it is irrelevant whether these laws have ever been applied in this way, because in terms of the history of ideas, they have advanced beyond the Judeo-Christian scriptures into the discourses on law and justice in the modern age.[66]

oriental societies, which differentiated between free, semi-free and slaves as different status groups, untouched."

64 Mark A. O'Brien, *Restoring the Right Relationship: The Bible on Divine Righteousness* (Hindmarsh: ATF Press, 2014): 7: "The course of a society or individual's life, both in Israel and the larger Ancient Near East, was interpreted largely based on the 'act-consequence' connection."

65 Ian D. Wilson, "Isaiah 1–12: Presentation of a (Davidic?) Politics," in *Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof: Poetry, Prophecy, and Justice in Hebrew Scripture. Essays in Honor of Francis Landy on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, ed. Andrew Gow and Peter Sabo, Biblical Interpretation Series 157 (Leiden: Brill, 2018): 64 draws attention to the polyphony in the book of Isaiah regarding a Davidic expectation: "[. . .] what precisely Davidic kingship might mean going forward is not clearly delineated in the book."

66 See the anthology Dominik Markl, ed., *The Decalogue and Its Cultural Influence*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 58 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013); and his "The Decalogue: An Icon of Ethical Discourse," in *Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, ed. Carly Crouch (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2021): 19–21.

3 Justice as a Central Category of Old Testament Literary History and Theology

A look at statistics on the use of specific words may serve as an introduction here.[1] The substantive משפט ("law") occurs 421 times in the Hebrew Bible, which results in a quotient of 14 per 10,000 words.[2] Of these, 84 entries are in the Pentateuch, with Deuteronomy standing out with 37 occurrences and a quotient of 26 (Gen 3x; Exod 11x; Lev 14x; and Num 19x). In the prophets, the Book of Isaiah leads with 42 entries [25], but clearly lags behind the entries from the Ketuvim (Ps 65x [33]; Job 23x [28]; and Prov 20x [29]).

The following picture emerges for the other two nouns, צדק and צדקה ("justice"). צדקה has 158 entries in the OT [5], with only a few occurrences in the Torah (Gen 3x; Ex+Lev+Num 0x; Deut 6x), but considerably more in Isaiah (36x [21]), Psalms (34x [17]), and Proverbs (18x [26]). The situation is very similar for the noun צדק ("justice/salvation"), which occurs 119 times [4], 12 of them in the Torah (Gen+Ex+Num 0; Lev 5x; and Deut 7x). Again, the most occurrences appear in Isaiah (25x [15]), Psalms (49x [25], and Proverbs (9x [13]). The substantive adjective צדיק ("righteous/just") occurs a total of 206 times [7], 17x in the Torah (Gen 10x; Exod 3x; Lev+Num 0x; and Deut 4x), 14 times [8] in Isaiah, and 16 times [9] in Ezekiel. Many entries appear in the Psalms 52x [27], but the book of Proverbs clearly tops the list (66x [95]). In contrast, the verb צדק ("to be righteous") occurs only a few times in the entire OT with 22 entries [1], and Job clearly dominates with 14 entries [17] (Gen 1x; Isa 3x; Ezek 1x; Ps 3x).

Compared to terms such as ברית ("covenant) (OT 284x [9]), חסד ("faithfulness") (OT 245x [8]), כבוד ("glory") (OT 200 [7]), שלום ("peace") (OT 241x [8]), and תורה ("Torah") (OT 220x [7]), the terms relevant to this study are found at equal or greater numbers, as in the case of משפט ("law.").[3] The hendiadys משפט וצדקה ("law and justice"), which is to be understood as "social justice" according to Weinfeld, dominates in scriptural prophecy, especially in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.[4] However, these findings must be qualified because the word pair has more of a "theoretical force" in some places and then comes close to the concept of the cosmic world order.[5]

1 According to Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes, *The Vocabulary of the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1992).

2 The figures in the square brackets indicate the quotient per 10,000 words.

3 Cf. Spieckermann, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit": 253–55.

4 Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 36: "[. . .] social justice and equity, which is bound up with kindness and mercy"; Isa 9:6; 32:26; 33:5; 59:14; Jer 4:2; 9:23; 22:3, 15; 33:15; Ezek 18:5, 19, 21, 27; 33:14, 16, 19; 45:9; Am 5:7, 24; Ps 33:5; 99:4; 1 Chr 18:14; 2 Chr 9:8. In the Pentateuch, this hendiadys is only found in Gen 18:19, in a narrative, a non-legal context.

5 Thus John Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014): 99; see, among others, Am 5:7, 24 and Isa 32:16. According to Matthias Hopf, "משפט und חקה / חק revisited: Neue rechtsanthropologische Impulse für ein altes Unterscheidungsproblem," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche*

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782-003

Several decades ago, Karl Fahlgren summed up the basic tenor of the root צדק with its various derivatives as follows:

> The root *ṣdḳ* indicates the relationship of balance and community in the world. The nouns *ṣᵉdāḳā* and *ṣædæḳ* express its norm and what corresponds to it, the adjective *ṣaddīḳ* denotes the one (or that) who (or what) occupies the right position in relation to people as well as to God, and the verb *ṣādaḳ* means to keep the right measure from the point of view of togetherness.[6]

In his habilitation thesis of 1965, Diethelm Michel differentiates between the collective noun צֶדֶק, which is actually an abstractive describing a predicate and, which he translates as "the state of doing justice" or "the state of showing oneself as righteous" and the corresponding *nomen actionis,* צְדָקָה, which he renders as "act of righteousness" or "doing justice."[7] Dynamic action characterizes the adjectival verb on which the root is based, so he proposes the translations "to stand as righteous" or "to prove oneself righteous." He is aware of these "dreadful word monstrosities," but they are the only way to ensure that "the verbal sound that also resonates in Hebrew" is perceived and taken seriously.[8] In the same year, Alfred Jepsen came to similar conclusions in a small commemorative article. He also assumes that neither Hebrew nor any other language produces two terms with completely identical meanings, especially because *ṣædæḳ* and *ṣᵉ*dāḳā are used differently. Only the noun *ṣædæḳ* is often used as a "characterizing genitive" (*genitivus qualitatis*) for weights and measures and then means the correct measure (cf. Lev 19:36; Ezek 45:10; Job 31:6; and Deut 25:15). The same applies to זבחי צדק ("right sacrifices") that correspond to the norm and are therefore in order (Deut 33:19; and Ps 4:6; 51:21), the מעגלי צדק ("right paths") (Ps 23:3) on which God leads the worshipper, the משפטי צדק ("right judgments") (Deut 16:18; Isa 58:2; Ps 119:75), and the דבר צדק ("right speech") (see Isa 45:19; 59:4; Ps 52:5; 58:2; Prov 8:8; 12:17; 16:13). Alfred Jepsen concludes, "Thus צדק seems to be used first of all when it is a matter of correctness and order, i.e. a state that is as it should or must be."[9] This is also the reason why only צדק

Wissenschaft 132, no. 4 (2020): 635, "law and justice" denotes "[. . .] the just world and legal order, i.e. how decisions are to be made *ideally* and customarily above all legally, but ultimately also politically."

6 Fahlgren, *ṣᵉdāḳā*: 78.

7 Diethelm Michel, "Begriffsuntersuchung über sädäq–sᵉdaqa und 'ämät–'ämuna" (Habilitation thesis, Universität Heidelberg 1965): 17–18, 30, 110–11; cf. Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 34.

8 Michel, "Begriffsuntersuchung": 18.

9 Alfred Jepsen, "צדק und צדקה im Alten Testament," in *Gottes Wort und Gottes Land: Hans-Wilhelm Hertzberg zum 70. Geburtstag am 16. Januar 1965 dargebracht von Kollegen, Freunden und Schülern*, ed. Henning Reventlow (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965): 79; cf. Bo Johnson, "צדק," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 6, ed. Heinz-Josef Fabry and Helmer Ringgren (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1989): col. 910: "The masculine substantive *ṣæḏæq* (119 occurrences) indicates the ordered, divine principle, but also shows itself as an active intervention."

can be used in a personalized way ("my/your/his righteousness") and then indicates, for example, YHWH's nature, his *habitus*, and his nature (Ps 85:10–12; 89:15; 97:2).[10]

In contrast, *ṣᵉdāḳā* usually refers to action, to the concrete deed that corresponds to correctness and to order. Therefore, the term is often used in conjunction with the verb עשה ("to do") (e.g Deut 33:21; and 1 Sam 12:7; Isa 56:1; 58:2; Ezek 3:20; 18:22, 24; Ps 103:6; 106:3). Like חסד ("faithfulness"), צדק is also a personal term that refers to the coexistence of people with one another and with God: "This should correspond to צדק, in צֶדֶק."[11] When YHWH does deeds that correspond to the right order in creation and history, they are his צדקות ("deeds of justice, righteousness, or deeds of salvation") (cf. Jdg 5:11; 1 Sam 12:7; Isa 45:24; Ps 11:7; 103:6; and Dan 9:16). Even if this does not apply to every example, the distinction between *ṣœdœḳ* as a collective noun and *ṣᵉ*dāḳā as a *nomen unitatis* must be maintained.[12]

3.1 Law and Justice in the Collections of Laws of the Old Testament

The Torah of Moses contains three collections of laws that build on each other and are of fundamental importance for the discourse on justice in the OT.[13] In canonical order, they are the Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:22–23:33), the Holiness Code (Lev 17–26), and Deuteronomy.[14] The origins of the Book of the Covenant (ספר הברית in Exod 24:7) date back to the eighth century BC, whereby its oldest casuistic legal clauses contain clearly defined statements of facts and the respective legal consequences.[15] This collection originates from the ancient Israelite scribal schools, which were part of a common ancient Near Eastern tradition on the one hand and specifically incorporated Israel's

10 The prepositional use בצדק ("in righteousness") is also derived from this (cf. Ps 9:9; 65:6; 96:13; 98:9; Isa 42:6; 45:13; Hos 2:21; Prov 8:8).

11 Jepsen, "צדק und צדקה im Alten Testament": 81.

12 Not so Klaus Koch, "צדק ṣdq gemeinschaftstreu/heilvoll sein," in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Ernst Jenni (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1976): col. 508, who considers a differentiation unnecessary: "In the nominal derivatives, the nouns *sœ́dœq* (masc.) and *ṣᵉdāqā* (fem.) seem to have the same meaning, so that they are treated together in the following."

13 See, among others, Ulrich Berges, "Die Sklavengesetze im Pentateuch: Befreiung oder gesetztes Unrecht?" in *Vor allen Dingen: Das Alte Testament. Festschrift für Christoph Dohmen*, ed. Barbara Schmitz et al., Herders Biblische Studien 100 (Freiburg: Herder, 2023): 120–30.

14 Christine Hayes, *What's Divine about Divine Law? Early Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015): 21: "The postbiblical claim that Yahweh's revealed divine law is fixed and immutable is not consistent with the Pentateuchal evidence."

15 Klaus Koch, "Gesetz I. Altes Testament," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 13, ed. Gerhard Müller (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984): 44: "They [=mishpatim] regulate cases of conflict within the agrarian local community and only indirectly touch on the relationship with God."

prophetic ethos on the other.[16] A later theological redaction is clearly discernible. It is first characterized by a *sacral* framing at the beginning (Exod 20:23: prohibition of images; Exod 20:24–26: altar law and place of worship) and at the end (Exod 23:13: prohibition of foreign gods; Exod 23:14–19: festival calendar/cult time). The second characterization is a *social* framing according to the 6/7 scheme (Exod 21:2–11: release of slaves; Exod 23:10–12: fallow year). The rhythm of seven is known in the ancient Near East only in Israel, both in the weekly and annual cycle. The Sabbath as a day of rest after a six-day working week corresponds to the fallow period, the "not tilling" (שמט) of the fields every seventh year (Exod 23:10–11; Lev 25:3–7) so that the poor can feed themselves from natural growth. The institution of the "year of remission" (שמטה), was developed from this old agrarian rule, which did not require any theological motivation and included a fallow period for debts—the remission of loans in the seventh year (Deut 15:1–2; Neh 10:32). From a purely economic point of view, such a rule is ruinous because it paralyzes the flow of credit and leads to economic paralysis. To circumvent the negative consequences of the divine provision, Hillel the Elder corrected it in post-biblical times through a *takkana*, an improvement, namely through the *prosbul* (abbreviation of πρὸς βουλῇ βουλευτῶν ["before the council of councilors"], the abolition of debt forgiveness in the seventh year: "Hillel introduced the *prosbul* because of *Tikkun ha-Olam"* (MGittin 4:3).[17]

The heart of the Book of the Covenant contains legal provisions on offenses such as murder, manslaughter, assault, theft, and damage to property. The care for the *personae miserae*—strangers, widows, and orphans—is of great significance (Exod 22:20–26; 23:9). Even in the rural set-up of small farmers with their animals, fields, and crops where priests or urban merchants play no role, the poor and impoverished need special legal protection. Instead of the royal-ideological prologue in some ancient oriental codices, the Book of the Covenant opens with the liberation from Egypt through the intervention of YHWH on behalf of his people Israel. It is the hermeneutical key that enables an appropriate understanding of the collection of laws.[18] It is therefore no

16 Christian Frevel, ed., *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 9th ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016): 226; Konrad Schmid, *Literaturgeschichte des Alten Testaments: Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008): 104, with reference to the seizure of the poor man's cloak in Am 2:6–8 and Exod 22:24–26.

17 Klapheck, *Theologie des Judentums*: 133: "For the sake of the messianic orientation, life in this world must be adjusted with the secular instrument of legislation. What is secular about this is that God does not really rule—rather, people can only implement his presumed will by correcting it."

18 Annette Soete, *Ethos der Rettung—Ethos der Gerechtigkeit: Studien zur Struktur von Normbegründung und Urteilsfindung im Alten Testament und ihre Relevanz für die ethische Diskussion der Gegenwart* (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1987): 104: "Thus the Decalogue, and with it all YHWH law, shows itself to be a *law out of salvation*"; Dominik Markl, "The Ten Words Revealed and Revised. The Origins of Law and Legal Hermeneutics in the Pentateuch," in *The Decalogue and Its Cultural Influence*, ed. Dominik Markl, Hebrew Bible Monographs 58 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013): 15: "Since God rescued Israel from Egypt, all further divine law is meant to preserve their freedom"; Rainer Kessler, "'Recht und Güte

coincidence that the provisions on debt slavery were placed first. The liberated people are to learn from their own liberation from the slave house of Egypt ways in which to deal with this well-known practice.[19] It will become apparent that the memory of the liberation from Egypt did not lead to the abolition or outlawing of slavery, but to some humanizing tendencies at best. From the middle of the eighth century BC onward, the credit system became an increasingly decisive factor, through which once-free peasants lost their independence, thereby accelerating social disintegration: "*The credit system is the decisive moving force of ancient peasant societies towards class societies*."[20] The development of interest rates serves as the background here. In Mesopotamia, for example, the interest rates stood at 33% for short-term loans and 20% for long-term loans.[21] If, in egalitarian agrarian societies, solidarity compensates for individual emergencies caused by illness, death, or crop failure by lending seed, for example, the situation changes when those affected can no longer find a way out of the emergency and are permanently unable to repay the borrowed money. They first lose their home and farm, then their family, and finally are no longer in control over their own labor.[22] As the criticism by the prophets from the eighth century indicates, this existential threat that could affect any small Hebrew farmer clarifies the significance of the prohibition in the Book of the Covenant not to deprive a Hebrew who has fallen into debt slavery

lieben. . .' (Micha 6,8): Ethos und Recht im Alten Testament," in *Recht und Religion*, ed. Konrad Schmid and Michael Welker, Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie 37 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023): 87: "The God who gives these laws guarantees the real freedom in the first place, which is the precondition of moral action."

19 Martin Leutzsch, "Verhindern, begrenzen und beenden: Der Umgang mit der Schuldsklaverei in der Bibel," *Welt und Umwelt der Bibel* 47, no. 1 (2008): 44–47; see also Jean-Luis Ska, "Ricchezza e povertà nell'esperienza e la legislazione dell'Esodo," in *Ricchezza e povertà nella bibbia*, ed. Vittorio. Liberti (Rome: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1991): 19–40; Rainer Kessler, "Das hebräische Schuldenwesen: Terminologie und Metaphorik," *Wort und Dienst* 20 (1989): 181–95; Rainer Kessler, "Der Gott der Befreiung und die Sklaverei," *Welt und Umwelt der Bibel* 108, no. 2 (2023): 8–10; Walter Dietrich, "Sklaverei (AT)," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 31, ed. Gerhard Müller (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000): 367–73.

20 Rainer Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte des alten Israel: Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006): 119 (italics in original); see also Isac L. Seeligmann, "Darlehen, Bürgschaft und Zins in Recht und Gedankenwelt der hebräischen Bibel," in *Gesammelte Studien zur Hebräischen Bibel mit einem Beitrag von Rudolf Smend*, ed. Erhard Blum, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 41 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004): 322–24.

21 Philippe Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis: Agrarian Finance in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Routledge, 2014): 248, warns against condemning the taking of interest in general as usury: "In spite of high interest rates, farmers were better protected against climatic and political uncertainties when merchants and patrons were present to offer loans than when they had to rely only on kinship solidarity."

22 Michael Zeuske, *Handbuch Geschichte der Sklaverei*, vol. 2, *Eine Globalgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020): 203, in a global perspective: "Thus, indebtedness always remained an important local source of internal slavery. In these debt slaveries, the peasant community and its ties to the land were preserved as an institution. The peasants themselves retained the opportunity to capitalize on people (usually their own children, relatives, or themselves)."

of his freedom for more than six years (Exod 21:2).[23] No lifelong enslavement among the members of the people liberated by YHWH is allowed to occur, for that would mean re-establishing the slave house of Egypt in Israel itself.[24] However, note that non-Israelites were by no means treated equally, but could be kept in slavery forever.[25] In contrast, the provision for an Israelite who is to "go out freely without payment" (יצא לחפשי חנם) in the seventh year is different. The term חפשי (*ḥŏpšî*) has led to many considerations that can be summarized here only in outline.[26] In Akkadian and Ugaritic, the corresponding terms denote a low social class, people who are sometimes regarded as "free proletarians."[27] Exod 21:2–6 attests to this idea as it also refers to a low social class from which people were transferred after being released from debt slavery. If we look for a term for the semi-free in the writings of ancient Israel, a category that existed everywhere in the ancient Near East, then *ḥŏpšî* probably comes closest in its original use.[28] Of the 17 occurrences in the OT, 14 cases exhibit a connection with the verbs יצא

23 According to Walter Dietrich, "'. . .den Armen das Evangelium zu verkünden': Vom befreienden Sinn biblischer Gesetze," in *Theopolitik: Studien zur Theologie und Ethik des Alten Testaments* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002): 186, "*Hebrew* slave" is not an ethnic but a social category (cf. chapiru-outlaw). However, in view of the provisions for non-Hebrew slaves, who never had to be freed, this is ruled out."

24 The view of Reform Judaism, as represented by David Farbstein, *Das Recht der unfreien und der freien Arbeiter nach jüdisch-talmudischem Recht verglichen mit dem antiken, speciell mit dem römischen Recht* (Frankfurt: Kauffmann, 1896): 9, among others, is historically untenable: "Only a non-Jew could be a slave; a Jew only a debtor."

25 Daniel C. Snell, "Slavery in the Ancient Near East," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 1, *The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 17: "Non-Hebrew slaves were ignored by law-givers and seem to have been treated as in the rest of the ancient Near East"; for Hector Avalos, *Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Ethics of Biblical Scholarship*, The Bible in the Modern World 38 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013): 74, the Exodus is also not a "manifesto for abolition in general" and is of the opinion, "In sum, the very idea that the Exodus is a model of any liberatory program is itself a product of ethnocentric and bibliolatrous scholarship" (p. 75).

26 See Norbert Lohfink, "חָפְשִׁי," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 3, ed. Gerhard J. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982): col. 123–28.; cf. Daniel C. Snell, *Flight and Freedom in the Ancient Near East*, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2001): 122–25.

27 Isaac Mendelsohn, "The Canaanite Term for 'Free Proletarian'," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 83 (1941): 36–39; see also Niels P. Lemche, "The Hebrew Slave, Comments on the Slave Law Ex xxi 2–11," *Vetus Testamentum* 25 (1975): 129–44; and Niels P. Lemche, "The Manumission of Slaves—The Fallow Year—The Sabbatical Year—The Jobel Year," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (1976): 38–59.

28 Cf. Stephanie Ernst, "Frei, Freiwillig, Freilassen—Begriffe für Freiheit im Alten Testament," in *'Ruft nicht die Weisheit. . .?' (Spr 8,1): Alttestamentliche und epigraphische Textinterpretationen. Symposion in* Skálholt *1.–3. Juni 2009*, ed. Kristinn Ólason, Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 94 (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2011): 31; Martin Ostwald, "Freedom and the Greeks," in *The Origins of Modern Freedom in the West*, ed. Richard W. Davis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 43: "[. . .] the difference between 'slave' and 'free' remained more blurred than in other cultures, particularly since the Hebrew language does not differentiate, either, between a free servant and a slave." Whether and to

Qal (“to go out” (Exod 21:2, 5) or שלח (“to send away”) (Exod 21:26, 27; Deut 15:12, 13, 18; Isa 58:6; Jer 34:9, 10, 11, 14, 16; and Job 39:5),[29] which supports this fact. Only Exod 21:2, 5 deals with the perspective of the slave who, as a freedman, moves from under the control of his debtor. In the other cases of the verb combination, it is the perspective of the one who releases or must release the debtor from debt slavery.[30] The late evidence in Job 3:19 clarifies that the *ḥŏpšî* is not a free citizen, one born in freedom, but a debt slave released from dependence, where the protagonist longs for death as he praises it as the great equalizer: “The small and the great are there, and the slaves are free from their masters” (עבד חפשי מאדניו). Ancient translations such as the LXX’s ἐλεύθερος and Vulgate’s *liber/libertas* obscure the reality that this is not a *restitutio ad integrum*, but a change to a lower degree of economic dependence. Modern translations, such as “free man” (e.g. Exod 21:2; Deut 15:12) also point in the wrong direction, as they insinuate a return to normal life before debt bondage. The release of all Hebrew male and female slaves proclaimed by King Zedekiah in Jer 34 during the siege of Jerusalem, which was later reversed by the upper class and all other slave owners, dramatically shows the precarious status in which such freedmen found themselves. It is only of secondary importance whether the report has a historical basis or was written as an after-the-fact teacher’s tale about the adherence of contracts.[31]

It may have been even better to remain in the status of a slave provided with food and clothing than to have to work as a day laborer over and over again.[32] Be that as it

what extent “patronage” was widespread in ancient Israel is disputed. See Ronald A. Simkins, “Patronage and the Political Economy of Ancient Israel,” in *Patronage in Ancient Palestine and in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Emanuel Pfoh, The Social World of Biblical Antiquity. Second Series 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2022): 205: “Although the biblical literature provides only a marginal description of the patronage system in monarchic Israel, the ideology of patronage is expressed throughout the biblical literature”; see Walter J. Houston, *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament*, Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies 428 (London: T & T Clark, 2006): 44–46.

29 In addition, 1 Sam 17:25 with עשׂה “[make] free” and nominally in Ps 88:6 and Job 3:19.

30 This also applies to Lev 19:20, the unlawful sexual intercourse with a female slave betrothed to another man, who was neither ransomed nor otherwise given “manumission” (*ḥupšāh*); only here does the LXX translate the Hebrew חפשה as *ἐλευθερία* “freedom.”

31 On Jer 34, see the excursus on slave manumission in Georg Fischer, *Jeremia 26–52*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2005): 252–53, and Adrian Schenker, “Die Freilassung der hebräischen Sklaven nach Dtn 15,12 und Jer 34,8–22,” in *Recht und Kultur im Alten Testament: Achtzehn Studien*, Orbis biblicus et Orientalis 172 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000): 150–57; see also Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 152–56.

32 See Zipporah G. Glass, “Land, Slave Labor and Law: Engaging Ancient Israel’s Economy,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 91 (2000): 27–39; Jürgen Kügler and Ute E. Eisen. “Arbeit/Lohnarbeit,” in *Sozialgeschichtliches Wörterbuch zur Bibel*, ed. Frank Crüsemann et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2009): 21.

may, a comparison of ancient and pre-modern collections of laws shows that the value of a slave was around a third of that of a freed slave and only half that of a free citizen.[33]

Together with land and working animals, slaves were part of one's property, but at the same time had personal characteristics.[34] Exodus 21:21 makes these constant changes from property and person clear: If an owner beats his slave so severely that he or she dies, he will be held accountable. But if they stay alive for another day or two, he goes unpunished "because it is his property" (כי כספו הוא). For today's sense of justice, this situation scandalously "[. . .] protects the right of slave owners to the slaves' bodies even in the case of severe and most serious mistreatment."[35]

The Book of the Covenant also shows that the liberation from Egypt does not fundamentally call into question the debt slavery of Israelites, because someone who has fallen into this dependency with his wife must be released together with her after six years.[36] However, if he has fallen into debt slavery unmarried and his owner has given him a wife during this time, with whom he has fathered children, these remain with the lord as property. Permission to procreate is therefore not given out of human benevolence, but solely to increase the pool of one's own household slaves.[37]

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33 James Lindgren, "Measuring the Value of Slaves and Free Persons in Ancient Law," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 71, no. 1 (1995): 212; cf. p. 203: "Freed slaves were typically dependent classes, expected to stay close to their former masters."

34 Carolyn J. Pressler, "The Construction of Gender Roles in the Book of the Covenant and in Deuteronomy," in *Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, ed. Carly Crouch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 55: "Enslaved males and females are both human beings and property."

35 Frank Crüsemann, *Die Tora: Theologie und Sozialgeschichte des alttestamentlichen Gesetzes* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1992): 182; he also refers to Prov 29:19, according to which a slave who does not allow himself to be instructed by words is also to be physically disciplined; see Rainer Kessler, *Der Weg zum Leben: Ethik des Alten Testaments* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2017): 519–21. Talmudic law restricted the rights of the owner compared to biblical law: A slave owner was exempt from punishment only if he had used an instrument that was not *per se* lethal for chastisement. Otherwise, he was subject to the death penalty, even if the slave died of his injuries only after a year, according to Farbstein, *Recht*: 20.

36 According to CH §117, release from debt bondage is to take place after just three years. Although this did not prevail in practice, this is one of the few cases in which a "social reformist intention" is recognizable in the legal provisions themselves, according to Otto, *Deuteronomium* 12,1–23,15: 1364, and Eckart Otto, "'Um Gerechtigkeit im Land sichtbar werden zu lassen. . .': Zur Vermittlung von Recht und Gerechtigkeit im Alten Orient, in der Hebräischen Bibel und in der Moderne," in *Recht—Macht—Gerechtigkeit*, ed. Joachim Mehlhausen, Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 14 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998): 115; Cf. John J. Collins, *What Are Biblical Values? What the Bible Says on Key Ethical Issues* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019): 130–31, with regard to CH §117: "[. . .] the biblical law is not especially lenient."

37 Bernard S. Jackson, "Biblical Laws of Slavery: A Comparative Approach," in *Slavery: And Other Forms of Unfree Labour*, ed. Leonie J. Archer (London: Routledge, 1988): 93–94: "It indicates that a male debt-slave may be used for sexual services—effectively to breed permanent slaves for his master—without interference with his status"; Catherine Hezser, "Slavery and the Jews," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 1, *The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 442, on the situation in Roman times: "Masters were obviously inter-

The slave can avert the threat of separation from his wife and children only by irreversibly handing himself and his family over to his master (Exod 21:5–6). The awl pulled through his ear at the owner's front gate, marks his eternal duty of obedience.[38] That's how the debt slave and his family become chattel slaves and play into the hands of their master's economic interests.[39] The provision in Exodus 21:7–9. according to which a female slave is not to be released in the seventh year, but is available to the owner forever as a worker and—probably also sexually—also serves this goal.[40] If the master loses his interest in her, he is not allowed to sell her. If he then passes her on to his son, the son must treat her as a concubine and may not deny her food, clothing, or marital intercourse. The ambiguity of this provision in the Torah is palpable.[41] If a prophet like Isaiah had been aware of these regulations, his criticism of the responsible scribes would be all the more understandable (Isa 10:1–2).[42] Furthermore, the sexual

ested in encouraging their female slaves to have children in order to increase the number of slaves born within their household (*vernae*), and these slaves were considered particularly reliable."

38 Jackson, "Biblical Laws of Slavery": 95: "The ear is the source of hearing and is thus thought of as the source of obedience. Shama ('to hear') is the standard term for 'to obey.' Similarly, in the Laws of Hammurabi (282), the punishment for a rebellious slave, one who rejects the authority of his master, is to have his ear cut off-a 'mirroring' punishment"; see Katharina Pyschny, "Eine Strategie zur Begrenzung der Schuldsklaverei in Israel: Die Verknüpfung von Sklavenfreilassungsgebot und Eherecht in Ex 21,2–11," in *Sexualität und Sklaverei*, ed. Irmtraud Fischer and Daniela Feichtinger, Alter Orient und Altes Testament 456 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2018): 185–87; regarding the self-enslavement in Ancient Roman Law, see Magnus Goffin, *Selbstversklavung im klassischen römischen Recht*, Dependency and Slavery Studies 12 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024).

39 See David P. Wright, "'She Shall Not Go Free as Male Slaves Do': Developing Views About Slavery and Gender in the Laws of the Hebrew Bible," in *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies*, ed. Bernadette J. Brooten, Black Religion, Womanist Thought, Social Justice (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 133; in contrast, Moses Mielziner, *Die Verhältnisse der Sklaven bei den alten Hebräern, nach biblischen und talmudischen Quellen dargestellt: Ein Beitrag zur hebräisch-jüdischen Alterthumskunde* (Kopenhagen: Philipsen, 1859): 50, who presents this self-binding as a quasinatural process, because the house-born slaves "[. . .] had grown up in the family and were familiar with all the conditions of the house, and one could therefore count more on their loyalty and attachment (Gen. 14:14)." Talmudic law aims to prevent permanent self-binding and interprets this as "forever" until the next Jobel year, according to Farbstein, *Recht*, 34–35.

40 The *'āmāh* can also be the wife of the free man, but she remains in the legal status of a slave woman, according to Rainer Kessler, "Die Sklavin als Ehefrau: Zur Stellung der *'āmāh*," in *Studien zur Sozialgeschichte Israels*, Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände 46 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009): 132; cf. Snell, "Slavery": 11: "The status of the slave woman in ancient Near Eastern law was sometimes dominated by owners' seeing her as property and sometimes as a marriageable woman."

41 Crüsemann, *Tora*: 186; cf. Wright, "Slavery and Gender": 133; Irmtraud Fischer, "Was kostet der Exodus? Monetäre Metaphern für die zentrale Rettungserfahrung Israels in einer Welt der Sklaverei," in *Gott und Geld*, ed. Michael Welker and Michael Wolter, Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie 21 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007): 31–33.

42 Crüsemann, *Tora*: 187; according to Hugh G.M. Williamson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 1–27*, vol. 2, *Commentary on Isaiah 6–12*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London: T & T Clark, 2018): 474, it is about people "[. . .] who

exploitation of female slaves can be seen in the fact that sexual intercourse between a free citizen and another man's betrothed slave does not result in the death penalty, but only the obligation to pay compensation to the person whose property rights have been violated (Lev 19:20).[43]

Deuteronomy, an update of the older Book of the Covenant,[44] intervenes here in a humanizing manner. The release after six years no longer applies only to male slaves, but also to Hebrew female slaves. They may also no longer be released without payment but should be released with goods (Deut 15:12–14). This provision is not a matter of law—it cannot be enforced in any local court—but compliance with it is the sole responsibility of the owner of the debt-slave, for whom the dependent should remain a "brother" (אח).[45] Only when the debt-slave binds himself forever to his creditor of his own free will does the brother become a full slave (Deut 15:16–17). The social program of Deuteronomy no longer applies to him because he has become the full property of his master, unless the slave later changes his mind and flees.[46] The ban on returning a runaway slave to his owner, that is, handing him over (Deut 23:16–17), is unique to ancient Near East and could never have been legal practice. It would have *ipso facto* meant the end of slavery in Israel.[47] Nevertheless, it is remarkable that such a provision was formulated at all, just like the prohibition of abduction in Exod 21:16, which surely brought the stolen person into slavery.

In contrast, the Exodus experience stored in Israel's collective memory encourages the release of its own debt-slaves (Deut 15:15). Just as the creditor himself was

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could just scrape a living together but who would be put in jeopardy by any misuse of the kind of patronage system on which he would have regularly depended to even out better and worse agricultural years."

43 Mendelsohn, *Slavery*: 55: "Infringement of her bridegroom's proprietary rights"; the slave here is a woman "to whom manumission is not given" (חפשה לא נתן לה), see Ernst, "Begriffe für Freiheit": 29–31.

44 Dominik Markl, *Gottes Volk im Deuteronomium*, Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte / Beihefte 18 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012): 298: "In the Pentateuch as a whole, the Book of the Covenant appears as a historicized law, while the Torah of Deut emphasizes its topicality and relevance to its addressees."

45 This was certainly nothing more than a jump-start, by no means a measure to prevent the slide into renewed debt bondage, as Albino Barrera, "Economics and the Law," in *Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, ed. Carly Crouch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 69.

46 Eckart Otto, "Rechtshermeneutik in der Hebräischen Bibel: Die innerbiblischen Ursprünge halachischer Bibelauslegung," in *Altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte: Gesammelte Studien*, Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte / Beihefte 8 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008): 475–76; and Eckart Otto, "Programme der sozialen Gerechtigkeit: Die neuassyrische (an-)duraru-Institution sozialen Ausgleichs und das deuteronomische Erlaßjahr in Dtn 15," *Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 3 (1997): 26–63; Hagar in Gen 16:1–16; 21:10–19 is the only enslaved person in the OT of whom the escape is reported in narrative form, see Snell, *Freedom*: 127 (the note of two escaped slaves differs in 1 Kings 2:39–40).

47 Snell, *Freedom*: 130, concludes from this, "[. . .] that this remained a moral admonition on which few, if any, were tempted to act"; Snell, "Slavery": 11, emphasizes that for the entire ancient Near East the temptation must have been very great not to return runaway slaves but to have them work for oneself.

once a slave in Egypt and was freed by YHWH, he should now release his debtor to freedom: "The memory of the liberation from the slavery of Egypt serves the internalization of the Exodus story as an analogy to the demand of the release commandment of Deuteronomy."[48] The economic loss that the creditor fears from the release of the debt slave in the seventh year is converted into a double gain by the authors of Deut 15:18: "Do not consider it a hardship when you send them out from you free persons [*ḥŏpšî*], because for six years they have given you services worth the wages of hired laborers." The double gain probably arises because the creditor owned the earnings from the debtor's work and did not have to pay him the "wages of a day laborer" (שכר שכיר) for six years.[49] The religious motivation of the exodus (v. 15) and the calculation of economic profit (v. 18) show how the dismissal after six years demanded in the Book of the Covenant required further intensive debate and ultimately remained merely admonitory.[50] Unlike in the Decalogue version of the Book of the Covenant, where God's rest on the seventh day of creation (Exod 20:9–11) justifies the Sabbath, which applies to the entire household including slaves, female slaves, and work animals, the day of rest is motivated by the liberation from Egypt in Deut 5:14–15.[51] The socio-ethical impetus that arises from the Sabbath rest for all is unique in the legal history of the ancient Near East, but the addressee of the Old Testament Decalogue is solely the free male citizen in a very unequal society.[52] Only the "free full citizen is addressed, but not other men, let alone women, children, slaves or foreigners."[53]

48 Otto, *Deuteronomium 12:1–23:15*: 1365.

49 Otto, *Deuteronomium 12:1–23:15*: 1368.

50 Cf. Reinhard Achenbach, "Überlegungen zur Rekonstruktion des Urdeuteronomiums," *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 24 (2018): 247: "It is clear that the centralization program must have encountered considerable mediation problems even in the post-exilic period, especially when it came to the recognition of its economic and socio-ethical goals."

51 Markl, "The Ten Words": 22: "[. . .] Moses' rendering in Deut. 5 underlines the social dimension of the Sabbath."

52 For example, Thomas Krüger, "Woran orientiert sich die Ethik des Dekalogs?" in *Das menschliche Herz und die Weisung Gottes: Studien zur alttestamentlichen Anthropologie und Ethik*, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 96 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009): 152: "The commandments to one's neighbor thus initially refer to the relationship between socially and economically (roughly) equal neighbors."

53 Barbara Schmitz, "Das 'Du' im Dekalog. Männer, Frauen, Gerechtigkeit?" *Welt und Umwelt der Bibel* 102, no. 4 (2021): 21; Cheryl B. Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies: The Need for Inclusive Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 45: "Basically, just as the Decalogue marginalizes non-Israelites and women, it also marginalizes the poor—those who are unable to own animals and slaves"; see also Pressler, "Gender Roles": 53; Christina van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament / Supplement Series 107 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991): 50; David J.A. Clines, "The Decalogue. The Scholarly Tradition Critiqued," in *The Decalogue and Its Cultural Influence*, ed. Dominik Markl, Hebrew Bible Monographs 58 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013): 337; Randall C. Bailey, "But It's in the Text!: Slavery, the Bible, and the African Diaspora," in *Black Theology, Slavery and Contemporary Christianity*, ed. Anthony G. Reddie (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010): 44–45.

Whilst in the Mesopotamian cuneiform scriptures, justice that favored the weak could assert itself against the law only through edicts of liberation, in the Old Testament, it does not oppose the law but stands alongside it as an ethical demand. Nevertheless, this was a significant step in the history of justice and law: "In the Old Testament, the social ethics of justice becomes the foundation of law [. . .]. Yet, the socio-ethical norms and program texts remain ethical guidelines and do not become pre-canonical law."[54] The many paraeneses with which YHWH emphasizes his support of the poor demonstrates that the ethos of saving justice made its way into the law without, however, becoming part of the sanctionable law. For example, he admonishes creditors who want to secure their loan not to keep the poor man's blanket as a pledge overnight, for it is his only protection from the cold: "In what else shall that person sleep? And when your neighbor cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate" (Exod 22:26b). The divine appeal serves as an ethical motivation aimed at the listener's discretion.[55] It also applies to the warning that bribery blinds the sighted and perverts the cause of the righteous (Exod 23:8). The prohibition of oppressing the stranger is again justified by recourse to Israel's own exodus experience: "You know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Exod 23:9b; cf. Deut 5:15; 24:13, 14–15, 17–18, 21–22).[56] Although solidarity with the impoverished members of one's own people is not enforceable within society, God is clearly on their side. The authors of Deut 24:13 make this clear beyond the model of Exod 22:26: Whoever returns the seized coat before nightfall will be blessed by the poor "and it will be *ṣᵉdāqāh* to you before YHWH your God."[57] However, anyone who does not lend to his poor brother because the year of remission is just around the corner will have sinned. He will have made himself guilty towards God, the poor and society, which is obliged to show solidarity (Deut 15:9).[58] That debt forgiveness applies only to the brother, the fellow citizen, but not to the "alien" (נכרי) (Deut 15:3), is not a sign of hostility towards foreigners, but arises because "[. . .] loans

54 Otto, "Vermittlung": 139; and Otto, *Deuteronomium 12,1–23,15*: 1350: "The institution of restitution no longer stands in opposition to contract law, but rather takes its place as an ethical appeal alongside law, which is bound not to the authority of the king but to YHWH"; in contrast, Kessler, "Recht und Ethos": 102, who sees the two areas as closely intertwined: "Without a preceding ethos, there can be no law; without ethos, law reaches its limits; without ethos, law cannot be implemented."

55 Barton, *Ethics*: 142: "Above all, the existence of the motive clauses presupposes that the hearers are *reasonable* and can be argued with on the basis of common sense [. . .]."

56 According to Williamson, *Justice*: 89, this special care for the stranger has no parallel in the ancient Near Eastern environment and is thus "characteristically Israelite or Judean."

57 Kåre Berge, "Ṣedaqa and the Community of the Scribes in Postexilic Deuteronomy: A Didactical Perspective," in *Ṣedaqa and Torah in Postexilic Discourse*, ed. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher and Maria Häusl, Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies 640 (London: Bloomsbury, 2017): 20; for him, the Deuteronomy text has no economic reality in mind: "Rather, it is a utopia, a dream for a better life. It is wishful thinking which is made up of social practices known from the small group of postexilic literati's own world" (26).

58 Kessler, *Ethos und Recht*: 97: "This is not only a religious argument, but also a social one."

to foreigners are not emergency loans, as with neighbors and brothers, but pure commercial loans to make a profit."[59] The admonishing tone is unmistakable—it regards debt relief within the solidarity of the community of God's people because debt relief depends solely on the lender. Its judicial enforcement is nowhere in sight, which does not defuse the divine demand for social justice. On the contrary, the call for justice is a constant challenge to the law and cannot be eradicated by a perverted administration of justice (cf. Exod 23:7b: "Do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty").[60] According to Frank Crüsemann, however, the ethical appeals are not only to be understood as an appeal to the conscience of the individual, but also as a fundamental standard to which the laws as a whole must be aligned: "They are a metanorm and a critical authority. The gap between law and justice is taken up here in the law itself—and by no means only in ethics that do not affect the law—and thus becomes the decisive principle of the Torah."[61]

The post-exilic Holiness Code (Lev 17–26), the last legal corpus in the OT, focuses on the central concern of its priestly authors: "You shall be holy, for I, YHWH, your God am holy" (Lev 19:2). Because God is close, they develop an ethic of imitation. Because YHWH is holy, holiness can and should become visible in Israel. Unlike in the basic priestly scriptures, in which the Exodus was seen as liberation from the slavery of Egypt,[62] it also marks the change to "becoming a slave under the rule of YHWH" in the Holiness Code.[63] Lev 25, which summarizes all the relevant social laws, clearly expresses this reality:

> If any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves.
>
> They shall remain with you as hired or bound laborers. They shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee.

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59 Rainer Kessler, "Das Erlassjahr Dtn 15,1–11: Ein Gebot und seine Umsetzung," in *Leben und Handeln in der Gesellschaft. Studien zur Sozialgeschichte Israels und Ethik des Alten Testaments*, Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände 73 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2021): 99.

60 Harold V. Bennett, *Injustice Made Legal: Deuteronomic Law and the Plight of Widows, Strangers, and Orphans in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002): 106, questions the provisions on the tithe, the pilgrim feasts and the gleaning (Deut 14:22–24; 16:9–11; 24:17–18, 19–21; 26:12–14), which in his view only served to further oppress the *personae miserae*: "[. . .] these codes exacerbated, not rectified, the plight of these types of persons"; so also Anderson, *Ancient Laws*: 40.

61 Crüsemann, *Tora*: 228.

62 See Exod 2:23–25; 6:2–6: עבדה here is more than "labor" (ElbÜ/NZü), but "slave labor" (NEüb; NRSV "slavery").

63 Frevel, *Einleitung*: 206; Walter J. Houston, "The Character of YHWH and the Ethics of the Old Testament: Is *Imitatio Dei* Appropriate?" in *Patronage in Ancient Palestine and in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Emanuel. Pfoh, The Social World of Biblical Antiquity. Second Series 12 (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2022): 429: "The exodus was a change of masters rather than the gift of autonomy"; according to Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 232–33, this is about the legal transfer from the existence of slaves under a human king to the yoke of the divine king.

> Then they and their children with them shall be free from your authority; they shall go back to their own family and return to their ancestral property.
>
> For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold (Lev 25:39–42).

Interestingly, despite the exodus connection, the word *ḥŏpšî* is not found here in connection with the classic verbs of divine liberation such as יצא (hifil, "to lead out" or גאל "to redeem." According to Norbert Lohfink, the explanation is obvious: "It has no place here, because the Israelite who sells himself because of his debts must not be made a real slave. He must be treated as *śāḵîr* and *tôšāḇ* (Lev 25:40). However, once again it is because all Israelites are slaves of YHWH."[64]

The impulse toward freedom that the Exodus narrative and its diverse receptions in the Old Testament undoubtedly continue,[65] hardly protected against the social death that slavery entailed or at least could entail in reality.[66] On the contrary, the Israelites are described in the Holiness Code (Lev 17–25) as those who cannot slip down to this level of the greatest possible asymmetrical dependence, even if someone has to be completely enslaved to another Israelite out of extreme financial need. The reason for this provision is theological. If all Israelites are slaves of YHWH, who has redeemed them from Pharaoh's control, they can no longer be slaves to anyone else. Those brought out of Egypt are therefore not liberated to freedom, but to total dependence on YHWH.[67] This insight leads Norbert Lohfink to the pointed statement: "Thus, on the one hand, the theology in Exodus leads to the dismantling of human slavery. But on the other hand, it does not achieve a theology of freedom, but a theology of slavery to God."[68] The libera-

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64 Lohfink, "חָפְשִׁי": col. 127; cf. Uwe Becker, "Zwischen Befreiung und Autonomie: Freiheitsvorstellungen im Alten Testament," in *Freiheit* ed. Martin Laube, Themen der Theologie 7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014): 22: "Perhaps the term was not soteriologically connectable enough due to its narrow social connotation."

65 Frank Crüsemann, "Freiheit durch Erzählen von Freiheit: Zur Geschichte des Exodus-Motivs," in *Kanon und Sozialgeschichte*: *Beiträge zum Alten Testament*, ed. Frank Crüsemann (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003): 193–209.

66 On slavery as "social death," see the great monograph by Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

67 Freedom as self-determination was unthinkable for the Ancient Orient; according to Manfried Dietrich, "Die Frage nach der persönlichen Freiheit im Alten Orient," in *Mesopotamica—Ugaritica—Biblica*: *Festschrift für Kurt Bergerhof zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres am 7. Mai 1992*, ed. Manfried Dietrich, Alter Orient und Altes Testament 232 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993): 57–58, personal freedom could exist only within the social order intended by the Creator God, any breach of which meant dangerous chaos.

68 Lohfink, "חָפְשִׁי": col. 127–28; also for Ostwald, "Freedom and the Greeks": 43, the Exodus is not really a freedom event, "[. . .] but rather an escape from slavery to Pharaoh to service (=slavery) to God"; likewise David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible*, All Souls Studies 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1963): 44; Marleen Reynders, *Exodus: De impact van een bijbelse migratie* (Gorredijk: Sterck & de Vreese, 2022): 288–89; Menke, *Befreiung*: 70: "This release from domination ends Israel's bondage, but it does not end its servant existence."

tion from the dominion of Egypt does not serve the self-empowerment of Israel, but has as its goal the servitude to the divine Lord.[69] Because YHWH is the owner of his people, he can also take them back to Egypt if they disobey and betray him. There the Israelites must offer themselves for sale as slaves (Deut 28:68).[70] A similar connection to the slave trade appears Jdg 3:8, where YHWH "sells" (מכר) the disobedient Israel into the hands of a foreign king, whom it then "serves" (מכר) for eight years. The sequence of both verbs is significant, as it is otherwise found only in the context of the slave trade (Lev 25:39; Deut 15:12; and Jer 34:14).

The ideal of an Israel of brothers and sisters, as propagated in Deuteronomy as a reaction to the increase in the urban population observed during the Neo-Assyrian period and the resulting dissolution of rural family structures, does not continue in the Holiness Code. Instead, it outlines a program of social compensation that seeks to cushion the worst upheavals.[71] In doing so, it partially falls behind Deuteronomy, because the debtor who does not manage to redeem his debt out of his own resources or those of his relatives remains under the control of his creditor not just for seven, but for seven times seven years (Lev 25:10, 13).[72] The theological idea of the Yobel or Jubilee year reduces the demand for justice to absurdity, because with a life expectancy of 50–60 years, this regulation *de facto* means lifelong dependence.[73] The priestly regulation, in which the old fallow ground in the seventh year (Exod 23:10–11) is to become an all-encompassing sabbatical year for YHWH (Lev 25:4), represents a similar regres-

69 Johannes P.J. Olivier, "חפשׁ," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 2, ed. William A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1997): 239: "This dual connotation regarding freedom, that is *freedom from* subjugation by foreigners or other forces that keep a person from serving God, and *freedom for* the service of God and one's fellows, characterizes the OT concept of liberty"; cf. the heading to Exod 21:2–11 in Georges Auzou, *De la servitude au service: Étude du livre de l'Exode*, Connaissance de la Bible 3 (Paris: Editions de l'Orante, 1961): 327: "*La liberté dans la servitude.*"

70 Fischer, "Exodus": 37, points out that the need is extremely increased because nobody wants to buy these slaves, so that they lack any basis for life.

71 Thomas Krüger, "Freiheit und Gesetz in der Hebräischen Bibel," in *Wege der Freiheit: Zur Entstehung und Theologie des Exodusbuches; die Beiträge eines Symposions [vom 10. bis 11. Mai 2013] zum 70. Geburtstag von Rainer Albertz*, ed. Reinhard Achenbach et al., Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 104 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2014): 115: "Should Lev 25 as a whole be seen as progress compared to Deut 15 or as a step backwards?"

72 According to Hans G. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung im antiken Judäa: Eine religionssoziologische Studie zum Verhältnis von Tradition und gesellschaftlicher Entwicklung*, Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments 14 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978): 34, the right to purchase lots within the kinship may even have promoted inequality among the agnates. This also applies to the sale of land to those entitled by kinship, which may have prevented a slide into foreign slavery, but may have created other, internal dependencies.

73 Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 443: "It is obvious that the biblical manumission laws concerning Hebrew slaves are diverse and contradictory [. . .] Whether these ideals were ever put into practice cannot be determined."

sion.[74] This rule is completely illusory from an agricultural point of view, for what is the entire population supposed to eat in the year when the fields and farmland are at rest? If an Israelite has to part with his land due to financial difficulties, the Holiness Code requires that he does not sell the land itself, but the income which is to be obtained from it. Because the buyer may use the land for himself only until the year of Yobel, the further away the year of remission, the higher the price to be paid. However, if someone gets into difficulties shortly before the Yobel year, this rule is of little use to them, as they will receive only a little money for their land or the income to be generated from it. In addition, no one will give him a loan, which is considered paid off in the Yobel year and expires.[75]

The seventh sabbatical year, which is opened on the Great Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) with the blowing of the ram's horn ("Yobel" cf. Exod 19:13; Josh 6:4–5, 8, 13), represents the climax of the theological concept[76] of *restitutio ad integrum*: "And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family" (Lev 25:10). The Hebrew word דרור/*dᵉrôr* ("release") used here (cf. Isa 61:1) is close to the Akkadian term for debt forgiveness *(an) durāru*. However, the relationship cannot hide the reality that Lev 25 did not mean an improvement in social hardship for many.[77] These provisions did not apply at all to foreigners or sojourners, because they could be sold and they and their descendants were available to creditors as inheritable property (Lev 25:44–46).[78] Moreover, in many cases it only allowed for an appeal, not a legal action. This situation can be seen not least in the divine admonition not to do wrong "in judgment" (במשפט), that is when measuring, weighing, and gauging, because he had led the addressees out of the land of Egypt (Lev 19:35–36; cf. Deut 25:13–15).

The expression "in court" does not refer to an activity in court, but rather to the way people conduct business with each other, which then as now also included lies and fraud. "Systematic fraud with falsified weights and measures insidiously destroys

74 Guillaume, *Land*: 193: "[. . .] the aim of the jubilee is to make sure that once every 49 years *all* running loans expired, not through cancellation but through the synchronization of their maximum term."

75 Thomas Hieke, *Levitikus 16–27*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2014): 1004–5.

76 Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 177: "[. . .] the ancient laws of remission and Jubilee were preserved in *theory*, even though they were not carried out in *practice."*

77 Matthew J.M. Coomber, "Poverty and Social Justice in Micah," in *Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, ed. Carly Crouch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 213: "[. . .] the Holiness Code's jubilee was designed to protect families' access to the main economic driver of any substance community: arable land."

78 Mark G. Brett, "Foreign Bodies: Reading the Holiness Material alongside Isaiah in the Persian Period," in *Isaiah and Intertextuality: Isaiah amid Israel's Scriptures*, ed. Wilson de Angelo Cunha and Andrew T. Abernethy, Forschungen zum Alten Testament / 2 148 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024): 37: "These people would forever remain cut off from their family of origin."

the basis of all interpersonal coexistence and cements structures of exploitation and oppression."[79] Justice is the foundation of a right that repeatedly threatens to fail because of this stipulation.

It remains an open question as to why the authors of the Holiness Code did not look to the idea of the divine likeness of all people in their own priestly tradition (cf. Gen 1:27; 9:6).[80] In contrast, the justification of law and justice from YHWH's history with Israel goes hand in hand with a limitation of the ethical call to the members of this people. Eckart Otto's conclusion is correct:

> The legitimation through God's revelation, however, does not unleash any resounding impulses to make this ethos universally valid beyond the borders of the people. Deuteronomy and the Holiness Code are witnesses to this particularism. In the theology of creation and particularly in the likeness of man to God, the possibility of a universalization of the ethos would have been available, but it has not been used consistently.[81]

Quite the opposite occurred in the cursing of Ham, the youngest son of Noah, who exposed his father's nakedness in his drunkenness. It aims at the lowest slave service of Canaan: "Cursed be Canaan; the lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers" (Gen 9:25). This curse, which in literary history marks the demarcation of Israel, itself under great pressure from its neighbors, has had the worst consequences from antiquity to modern times, as it has repeatedly served to legitimize slavery in Christianity.[82] Before the disappointment or even indignation of today's readers gets out of hand, note that even guaranteed general human rights are not enough as long as not even the right to daily food can be claimed in front of any court in the world.[83] Despite the criticism, however,

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79 Hieke, *Levitikus 16–27*: 757; see Fahlgren, *ṣ^{e}dāḳā*: 86.

80 Annette Schellenberg, "Humankind as the 'Image of God': On the Priestly Prediction (Gen 1:26–27; 5:1; 9:6) and Its Relationship to the Ancient Near Eastern Understanding of Images," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 65, no. 2 (2009): 97–115.

81 Eckart Otto, *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments*, Theologische Wissenschaft 3,2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994): 266–67; cf. Fischer, "Exodus": 31: "[. . .] the slavery of foreign people is obviously not limited by the ethos"; differently Wolfgang Oswald, "Sklaven und Freie," in *Handbuch Alttestamentlicher Anthropologie*, ed. Jan Dietrich et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024): 353: "The equality of human beings according to creation is not disturbed by slavery"; Jesus of Nazareth did not utter a critical word to the slave owners, thus Thomas Ruster, "Das Christentum, die Sklaven und die Tiere. Eine Ideengeschichte," in *Eine Welt—keine Sklaverei: Moderne Sklaverei weltweit*, ed. Klaus Vellguth, Theologie der Einen Welt 20 (Freiburg: Herder, 2022): 29–30.

82 See, among others, Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); David M. Whitford, *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justification for Slavery*, St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

83 Eckart Otto, "Menschenrechte im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament," in *Religion und Menschenrechte: Genese und Geltung*, ed. Gerhard Höver, Schriften des Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung 29 (Baden-Baden: Nomos-Verlag-Gesellschaft, 2001): 39; Traugott Koch, "Menschenwürde als

it remains true that religious roots also feed the principle of equality of all people—the foundation of the democratic constitutional state: "The principle of equality is rooted in the theological motif of man as a creature of God and is still protected by this motif of the religious bond between God and man."[84]

3.2 Law and Justice in the Book of Genesis

As shown, the topic of justice plays an important role in the legal codices of the Old Testament. However, while they predominantly focus on human justice under the guidance of YHWH's instructions, divine justice takes center stage in the stories of Genesis. This reality becomes particularly evident in post-exilic adaptations that address the issue of divine punishment raised in scriptural prophecy and when this punishment can also affect the innocent (cf. Ezek 14:12–20; 18; 33:10–20). For the sake of human and divine justice, individual responsibility is emphasized, but that leads to follow-up problems if the individual's fate cannot be reconciled with his actions. Overall, the catastrophe of the exile and its aftermath had a very strong influence on the Old Testament discourse on justice:

> The radical nature with which the question of God's justice arose for post-exilic Judaism was the price that had to be paid for the faith in the one and only God. The theology of the latter part of the Old Testament can be understood *cum grano salis* as a doctrine of justification, with the difference that whilst in the New Testament the justification of man stands in the foreground, in the Old Testament it is the justification of God.[85]

The first occurrence of the root צדק in the book of Genesis fits in with this theological problem, because it is Noah who saved himself and his people together with the animals from the flood as a "righteous man" (איש צדיק). The fact that he was "blameless" (תמים) among his contemporaries and walked with God shows him to be the perfect human

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das Menschenrecht: Zur Grundlegung eines theologischen Begriffs des Rechts," *Zeitschrift für evangelische Ethik* 35, no. 2 (1991): 105: "At present, an unimaginable amount would be achieved if even the lowest subsistence level, protection from starvation, could be guaranteed internationally for all."

84 Eckart Otto, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit: Die Bedeutung alttestamentlicher Rechtsbegründungen für eine wertplurale Moderne," in *Zion—Ort der Begegnung: Festschrift für Laurentius Klein zur Vollendung des 65. Lebensjahres*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn et al., Bonner Biblische Beiträge 90 (Bodenheim: Athenäum-Hain-Hanstein-Verlag-Gesellschaft 1993): 82; Eckart Otto, "'Wer wenig im Leben hat, soll viel im Recht haben': Die kulturhistorische Bedeutung der Hebräischen Bibel für eine moderne Sozialethik," in *Recht und Ethik im Alten Testament: Beiträge des Symposiums "Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne" anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads (1901–1971), Heidelberg, 18.–21. Oktober 2001*, ed. Bernard M. Levinson and Eckart Otto, Altes Testament und Moderne 13 (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004): 186–88.

85 Christoph Levin, "Altes Testament und Rechtfertigung," in *Fortschreibungen: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 316 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003): 15.

(Gen 6:9). The authors of the priestly writings were concerned about supplementing the version before them in terms of the theology of justice, as it previously simply stated that Noah had found favor in the eyes of YHWH (Gen 6:8). The narrative of the Babylonian flood already mentions that the favorite of the gods escapes the flood. The freshwater god Ea/Enki can save his favorite from the destructive intentions of the storm god Enlil by means of a trick. In the pre-priestly [Yahwistic] flood narrative, divine favor also ensured the flood hero's survival.[86] With Noah as the exemplary *ṣaddîq*, the Priestly writers intervene to correct this understanding in the post-exilic period. If Gen 6:9 speaks about the righteous Noah, he is the addressee of the divine justification in Gen 7:1: "Then the LORD said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation."[87] This verse makes it clear to everyone that it is not arbitrary favor that brings about salvation, but rather the righteousness lived out before God and man. YHWH's favor (Gen 6:8) and Noah's righteousness (Gen 6:9) are cleverly combined in Gen 7:1: "Thus both perspectives, the one seen from Noah's way of life and the one seen from God's goodness, come together in the final text."[88]

Gen 18:16b–33 is the next narrative in the first book of the Bible that deals succinctly with the problem of divine justice in the face of collective punishment.[89] It is not about Abraham's intercession on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, as is so often assumed, but about the clarification that the divine act on the corrupt cities and their inhabitants was justified and just.

> The problem that demands a solution at this point is clearly stated: Collective judgment brings with it the danger that the individual is not judged by his own deeds but must share the fate of the *massa perditionis* that provoked the catastrophe. In this case, there is no difference between the fate of the righteous and the fate of the wicked.[90]

These verses are thus part of the post-exilic discussion of Jer 31:19f.; Ezek 18, and, above all, Ezek 14:12–23. Looking back on the national catastrophe of the Babylonian exile,

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86 Christoph Levin, "Gerechtigkeit Gottes in der Genesis," in *Fortschreibungen: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 316 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003): 44; Jürgen Ebach, *Noah: Die Geschichte eines Überlebenden*, Biblische Gestalten 3 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001): 95–97.

87 Georg Fischer, *Genesis 1–11*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2018): "In any case, God himself now *communicates his praise directly to Noah.*"

88 Ebach, *Noah*: 79.

89 Ina Willi-Plein, *Das Buch Genesis*, vol. 2, *Kapitel 12–50*, Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar / Altes Testament 1,2 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2011): 86, speaks here, as in Gen 15, of an "imitated narrative" that serves to clarify theological questions; see also Ulrich Berges, "'Der Richter der ganzen Welt, sollte der nicht Recht üben?' (Gen 18,25): Zur Einhegung der göttlichen Gewalt durch Gerechtigkeit und Recht," in *Informationes Theologiae Europae. Internationales Ökumenisches Jahrbuch für Theologie. 19. Jahrgang 2015*, ed. Ulrich Nembach (Frankfurt: Lang, 2016): 20–22.

90 Levin, "Gerechtigkeit Gottes in der Genesis": 42; see Levin, "Altes Testament und Rechtfertigung": 19.

they state the maxim that from now on everyone is responsible for their own weal and woe.[91] From that point onwards, there should neither exist the collective liability for evil nor a pro-existence of the righteous for the evildoers. Even if they were exemplary righteous people like Noah, Daniel, and Job, they simply would be able save themselves, but not their children, from divine punishment.[92] It is obvious that the legend of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Am 4:11), from which only Abraham's grandson escaped, was suitable for this theme. The incongruity, according to which not only Lot but also his family escaped the judgment, is based on the old template. One unmistakable sign of the insertion of the justice debate is that lack of the word *mišpāṭ* (Gen 18:19, 25) anywhere else in Genesis.[93] In addition, God appears according to legend in the form of "the men" (האנשים) (Gen 18:16; 19:12, 16), but the tetragram appears in the inserted discussion. In the narrative time, Abraham speaks with YHWH. In the time of the discourse, Abraham serves as an example for the post-exilic question of divine justice.[94] If Abraham must instruct the people in God's ways so that they practice justice and righteousness to become a blessing for the nations, then YHWH, as the judge of the whole earth, must not punish the righteous and let them perish along with the wicked.[95] Knowledge of God and justice are two sides of the same coin. How could Israel make YHWH known among the nations if he is an unjust judge who disregards the basic principle of all justice? Abraham remaining standing before God (v. 22) is one of the *tiqqunē sopherim*, the scribes' corrections. If YHWH had originally stood before Abraham, it would have been considered offensive, because "standing before someone" can also mean servitude to someone, which is of course impossible for God. If YHWH originally stops in front of Abraham, then he does not want to serve him, but rather to challenge him to think critically. Abraham's question as to whether the Judge of all the earth does not want to abide by the law takes the exilic-post-exilic doubt about divine justice seriously. If it were otherwise, the "far be it from you" at the beginning of v. 25 would only be a rhetorical ornament without any factual reason. But the opposite is the case because nothing less than God's justice is at stake. Apart from Job, only Abraham, knowing that he is nothing but dust and ashes (Gen 18:27; Job 30:19; 42:6), dares to ques-

91 Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, 6th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1964): 205: "A similar spirit of abstraction confronts us in Jer 18 and Ez 14:12ff.18."

92 Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 57 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984): 404.

93 In Gen 40:13 משפט means "custom/habit," in Gen 14:7 it is part of the place name "En-Mishpat."

94 Ehud Ben Zvi, "The Dialogue Between Abraham and YHWH in Gen. 18.23–32: A Historical-Critical Analysis," *Journal for the study of the Old Testament* 17, no. 53 (1992): 30: "The theological issues discussed in the dialog included significant theological concerns of the community." Ben Zvi postulates two different audiences, teachers of wisdom for the discussion of justice and ordinary citizens for the narrative (p. 44).

95 Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, Biblischer Kommentar 1,2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981): 351: "We are thus clearly in the post-exilic period in the circles in which piety consisted in the preservation of 'right and justice,' for this is traced back to Abraham here."

tion the deity in such a critical way. This is a dangerous undertaking. Only those who recognize YHWH's absolute sovereignty can cross the boundary between themselves and him in the mode of questioning.[96] The God of Israel must not be a tyrant who acts arbitrarily but, as the judge of the whole earth, is bound to a justice that necessarily separates and distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked.[97] If YHWH does not comply with this equation, his divinity would be in danger: "Abraham's passion is to prevent YHWH from making himself impossible as God."[98]

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah can only be justified if—once Lot, his wife, and his two daughters have been brought to safety (Gen 19:16–18)—no righteous person is left there.[99] To discover that, Abraham must ask until the smallest unit for a collective is reached with ten (cf. Am 5:3). According to Jewish tradition, no service in a synagogue can be held without the "minyan," because if there are fewer than ten men present, it is not a prayer of the congregation, but a private prayer of individuals. When Abraham stops at ten, the lower limit for the representation of the righteous for the benefit of the wicked is reached: "Ten righteous people can therefore be the minimum to regard the whole community as represented by the righteous."[100] The Jewish exegete Benno Jacob explains:

> This Abraham's "bargaining" at the throne of the Most High to save places of culture as long as they could somehow still be held by the righteous is gripping, and the unshakeable patience of divine grace is sublime. We stop at ten, because this many, as the first full number, may be considered the smallest community capable of being organized. They can also lead the regiment or have the casting vote and, if necessary, represent the whole (מִנְיָן). However, if their numbers fell below ten, they were no longer allowed to remain in the village. If they are saved from destruction, there must be a special reason, as later with Lot.[101]

96 Jürgen Ebach, "'Eine Grenze hast du bestimmt, daß sie die nicht überschreiten': Über das Tun- und Lassen-Können," in *Theologische Reden*, vol. 4, *Weil das, was ist, nicht alles ist* (Bochum: SWI-Verlag, 1998): 27.

97 Christine Hayes, *What's Divine about Divine Law? Early Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015): 27: "Abraham does not seek to convince Yahweh to do justice; he *assumes* that Yahweh's ways are just."

98 Magdalene L. Frettlöh, "'Sollte, wer die ganze Erde richtet, nicht Recht üben?' (Gen 18,25): Theologisch-hermeneutische Notizen zum Theodizeediskurs in Gen 18, 22–33," in *Fragen wider die Antworten: Festschrift für Jürgen Ebach zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Kerstin Schniffner et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010): 149; cf. Krašovec, *Righteousness*: 348: "God is held to be just, to be the incarnation of justice, or else he would not be divine."

99 Thomas M. Bolin, "Exchange, Justice, and Mercy in Genesis 18–19," in *Patronage in Ancient Palestine and in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Emanuel Pfoh, The Social World of Biblical Antiquity. Second Series 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2022): 297: "There are not ten good people in Sodom; indeed, there is not a single good person in Sodom."

100 Willi-Plein, *Genesis 12–50*: 90.

101 Benno Jacob, *Das Buch Genesis: Herausgegeben in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Leo Baeck Institut* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 2000): 453; David Novak, "Divine Justice/Divine Command," in *Natural Law and Revealed Torah*, ed. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Aaron W. Hughes, Library of Contemporary Jewish

The separation of YHWH and Abraham in Gen 18:33 indicates that the theological discussion has come to an end because the problem has been brought to an appropriate solution.[102] The judgment of the two cities was justified because no small unit of righteous people were there to be found who could have left their mark on the whole. In addition to their original version, the authors emphasize that not a single righteous person was found in Sodom and Gomorrah. According to them, it was not only the men of Sodom who besieged the house with Lot's guests, but all the inhabitants, "from the young man to the old man, all the people from all ends [of the city]" (Gen 19:4). That's why not only the men at the entrance to the house were struck with blindness, but also "from small to great" (Gen 19:11). The reality that everyone had become guilty is also shown by the command that Lot should leave Sodom as quickly as possible so that he would not be "carried away" (ספה: see Gen 18:23–24) "because of the guilt of the city" (בעון העיר) (Gen 19,15). Until Lot has reached the city of Zoar, YHWH says that he cannot do anything about Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:22) because he is bound to justice, which separates the righteous from the wicked.[103] The rain of fire and sulfur destroys the two cities, the entire region, all vegetation and—according to the revisers—"all the inhabitants of the cities" (Gen 19:25).[104] Ultimately, YHWH has punished all the guilty and granted the righteous a safe haven, which identifies him as the righteous God of judgment of the whole earth. Israel is to present him as a blessing force in the world of nations by doing justice and righteousness (Gen 18:18). But the question remains as to why the editors insist that not a single person in Sodom and Gomorrah perished blamelessly? Were women and children also involved in the atrocious deed against Lot's guests? One cannot help but assume that no innocent person must have died, because this is the only way for the Judge God to keep his clean slate.[105]

The book Genesis addresses the question of justice for the third time in the story of Sara, whom Abraham presents to the Philistine Abimelech of Gerar as his sister, whereupon Abimelech takes her for himself (Gen 20). The following night, God appears to the pagan king and announces his death because he has taken a "married woman" (בעלת בעל). In the background is the provision of Deut 22:22, according to which a man

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Philosophers 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 28; cf. Josef Scharbert, *Genesis*, vol. 2, *12–50*, Die neue Echter-Bibel Kommentar zum Alten Testament mit der Einheitsübersetzung 16 (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1986): 151: "With the number ten, Abraham thinks he has reached the limit of his request. If there are fewer, the intercessor can then only leave the pious few to the mercy of God, who is also able to save individuals."

102 According to Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*: 356, the post-exilic theologians inserted the conversation to "[. . .] show irrefutably that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was a righteous act of God."

103 Levin, "Gerechtigkeit Gottes in der Genesis": 43: "Justice does not permit it."

104 According to Levin, "Gerechtigkeit Gottes in der Genesis": 43, it also applies to this addition that it "[. . .] once again emphasizes the exact correspondence between action and outcome."

105 Choon-Leong Seow, "Divine Justice in the Book of Job," in *Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, ed. Carly Crouch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 258: "Even if destruction is just retribution for the wicked, the corollary damage on the innocent is surely not. An undifferentiated destruction would be 'profanation' for God."

who has sexual relations with a married woman is to die with her. In the dream, Abimelech defends himself before God by saying that he had taken the woman in good faith because Abraham and Sara had assured him that they were brother and sister (Gen 20:5). God then confirms to the king that he indeed had acted in good faith. Moreover, he had prevented him from touching Sara and thus from sinning (Gen 20:6). Together with the information added in v. 4 that Abimelech had not approached Sara at all, this assertion removes any basis for the threat of death.[106] The reason for the incongruity lies in the old narrative with the motif of the "woman as sister"[107] (cf. Gen 12:10–20; 26:1–11), which has lost its logic due to the post-exilic question of divine justice. This debate finds its clearest expression in Abimelech's question: "Lord, will you destroy an innocent people?" (Gen 20:4). In the collective view, the king stands for the whole nation, so that it should perish with him, but both are without guilt, that is *ṣaddîq*.[108] Neither the logic of the narrative of the old story nor the Mosaic laws on adultery can justify collective punishment. It results solely the adopting the Sodom-Gomorrah theme. It also explains the proximity of Abimelech's question to that of Abraham in Gen 18:23, whether YHWH, as judge of the whole earth, wants to destroy the righteous with the wicked. If all are guilty, as the treatment of Gen 18 emphasizes, God's punitive action is justified. But where there is no offense, as in the case of Abimelech, there can and must be no punishment. The old story of Abraham's prophetic intercession for Abimelech, who must return his wife to him if he does not want to be condemned to death with all that he possesses (Gen 20:7), does not sit well with the post-exilic debate about divine justice.[109] A common denominator arises when one concludes that no innocent person has anything to fear from the judge of the whole earth. Where the fear of God prevails (Gen 20:11), God protects those who, in ignorance, set out to commit a sin that should be punished by death.[110]

The passage Gen 15:6, which is so important for the entirety of Pauline and Christian theology, does not rest on the level of God's justice, but on that of the believing human being. Recent research agrees that the entire chapter of Gen 15 represents a post-exilic composition that addresses the two problem areas of this time, descendants (vv. 1–5)

106 Levin, "Gerechtigkeit Gottes in der Genesis": 46: "This is inevitably at the expense of plausibility: the threat of death in v. 3 and the whole dispute now lack the occasion."

107 Willi-Plein, *Genesis 12–50*: 35–36, 102, rejects the common nomenclature "endangerment of the ancestress" because it is not the wife of the patriarchs but the promise to her that is presented as endangered.

108 This makes it unnecessary to translate הגוי ("the nation/the people") here as "people," according to Gunkel, *Genesis*: 222.

109 Cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis*, 9th ed., Das Alte Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1972): 182, who, although starting from different literary-historical premises, draws a similar conclusion: "One can ask whether this strongly reflective moment, which stimulates the reader to reflect, has only benefited the main concern of the narrative."

110 Levin, "Gerechtigkeit Gottes in der Genesis": 46: "The existential problem at this point is the alarming possibility of becoming objectively guilty despite subjective innocence."

and land ownership (vv. 7–21), with a view to the paradigmatic attitude of faith of the patriarch Abraham.[111] The very considerable reward promised by YHWH in v. 1b refers not only to the descendants as such, but also to those who live in the promised land. The keyword ירש ("inherit") (v. 3, 4; v. 7, 8) connects both parts, and the central v. 6 acts as a hinge. It does not continue the narrative, but interrupts it, as the verbal statement of Abraham's faith is not in *wa-yiqtol*, but in *we-qatal*. At this point, it cannot be meant to be frequentative-iterative or stative-durative, as if the Abraham had repeatedly or continuously trusted in God,[112] because in vv. 2–3 he is portrayed as a doubter. The *we-qatal* interrupts the sequence of events as background tempus and indicates the closer circumstances that accompany the promise. Specifically, this means that between the divine promise in v. 4 that states that a biological son will be his heir and the command in v. 5 to raise his eyes to the starry sky and marvel at the countless descendants that await him, the resigned archfather becomes the trusting archfather: "Abraham's trust appears in the syntactic connection as a circumstance that accompanies this promise: 'While he (Abraham) trusted in *Yhwh*, he said to him: So shall your descendants be'."[113] It is this act of faith that God imputes to the patriarch as *ṣᵉdāqāh*, as proof of righteousness (v. 6b). The unmarked change of the subject in the sentence is unproblematic at this point, especially because v. 6a ends with the tetragram and the following verse begins with an emphatic "I am YHWH." The ancient versions also agree that it is YHWH who imputes the patriarch with his act of faith as righteousness and that it is not Abram who imputes YHWH with his promise. The LXX leaves no doubt about this when inserting "Abraham" in v. 6a and rendering the active verb in v. 6b by the passive *divinum* ἐλογίσθη (see Vulgate "*reputatum est*"). Despite multiple attempts in Old Testament exegesis to make Abraham the subject of the imputation, it must be emphasized that no other text even remotely considers it possible for a person to impute something to God, that is, to qualitatively evaluate his actions in a declaratory act.[114] The same applies to Mal 3:16b, because those who fear YHWH revere his name and do not impute anything to him, just as the double accusative with the verb חשׁב is missing here compared to Gen

111 According to Matthias Köckert, "'Glaube' und 'Gerechtigkeit' in Gen 15,6," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 109, no. 4 (2012): 418, the tension with Gen 17:17, where the hundred-year-old Abraham laughs at the promise of a son, could not otherwise be explained: "It follows from all this: Gen 15 is probably one of the youngest pieces of the Abraham tradition in Genesis at all" (p. 419); cf. e.g. Thomas Römer, "Abraham and Moses. A (not so) Friendly Competition," in *And God Saw That It Was Good (Gen 1:12): The Concept of Quality in Archaeology, Philology and Theology*, ed. Filip Čapek and Petr Sláma, Beiträge zum Verstehen der Bibel 42 (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2020): 102.

112 Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*: 180: "[He believed several times" [. . .] the first time Abraham showed his faith when he left his homeland at God's command; now he has proven his faith."

113 Köckert, "Glaube": 434; ibid. 426: "Or one continues after v.5 with v.6 as the main clause: 'Thereby he believed in Yhwh;'" cf. Matthias Köckert, *Abraham: Ahnvater—Vorbild—Kultstifter*, Biblische Gestalten 31 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017): 100–101.

114 Köckert, "Glaube": 433; see also D.D. Sutherland, "Genesis 15:6: A Study in Ancient Jewish and Christian Interpretation" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982): 27–29, 70–72.

15:6.[115] The only passage that could be considered a parallel in the narrower sense is Ps 106:31, where the radical action against the apostasy of idolatry in Baal-Pegor is credited to Pinchas [by God] as righteousness (ותחשב לו לצדקה).[116] The early Jewish tradition, as reflected in 1 Macc 2:52, in the pseudo-Jubilee text of Qumran (4QpsJub[a] 2 I 8) and the Book of Jubilees (Jub 14:4–7; 17:16–18), allows only one conclusion: "The analyzed texts show that a uniform tradition of understanding can be found in ancient Jewish literature, according to which it was God who imputed Abraham's trust in him as righteousness."[117] The Hebrew verb in this passage does not denote a transfer from the priestly-cultic to the spiritual level of YHWH's imputation of Abraham's trust,[118] but rather the divine esteem of the act of faith. In contrast to Achaz and the Davidic royal house, who do not believe in the promise of divine salvation, who do not trust it (Isa 7:9), and unlike the people under Moses in Egypt, who do not believe without having seen the divine acts of power (Exod 4:31; 14:31), Abraham relies entirely on YHWH in his act of faith. Here and only here this results in the official recognition from the highest authority: "God himself acknowledges Abraham's trust in him as *ṣ[e]dāqāh*."[119] The relational term *ṣ[e]dāqāh* fits perfectly here, because YHWH uses it to qualify the patriarch's trust as the appropriate and meritorious response to the relationship with God,[120] which has paradigmatic significance for all times: "The only possible behavior of man towards the promise is that

115 Against Manfred Oeming, "Ist Genesis 15,6 ein Beleg für die Anrechnung des Glaubens zur Gerechtigkeit?" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95, no. 2 (1985): 192; see e.g. Rudolf Mosis, "'Glauben' und 'Gerechtigkeit'—zu Gen 15,6," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze Zum Alten Testament*, Forschung zur Bibel 93 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1999): 84.

116 Beate Ego and Armin Lange, "'Und es ward ihm zur Gerechtigkeit angerechnet' (4QpsJub[a] 2 I 8): Gen 15,6 im Pseudo-Jubiläentext von Qumran und in der antik-jüdischen Literatur," in *Der Mensch vor Gott: Forschungen zum Menschenbild in Bibel, antikem Judentum und Koran. Festschrift für Hermann Lichtenberger zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Ulrike Mittmann-Richert (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003): 183: "Ps 106:31 thus presupposes, as an understanding of Gen 15:6, that God credits Abraham's trust as righteousness."

117 Ego and Lange, "Gerechtigkeit": 190, with a critical view of Manfred Oeming, "Der Glaube Abrahams: Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte von Gen 15,6 in der Zeit des zweiten Tempels," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 110, no. 1 (1998): 16–33; the view of Mosis, "Glauben": 87, that Abraham did not count the promise as an act of salvation for God, but for himself, also has no support in the versions and the early Jewish tradition. This applies even more to the interpretation of Dirk U. Rottzoll, "Gen 15,6—Ein Beleg für den Glauben als Werkgerechtigkeit," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 106, no. 1 (1994): 25–26, that Abraham counted his faith as an act of righteousness.

118 Thus the extremely effective considerations of Gerhard von Rad, "Die Anrechnung des Glaubens zur Gerechtigkeit," in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, Theologische Bücherei 8 (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1961): 130–35, who starts from examples such as Lev 7:4, 18; 13:8, Num 18:27, and then states for Gen 15:6: "The process of 'imputation' has now shifted into the space of a free and very personal relationship of Yahweh to Abraham" (p. 133).

119 Köckert, "Glaube": 435–36.

120 Köckert, "Glaube": 444: "There can be no question of 'works righteousness' here. After all, it is God who imputes, and there is as little talk here of an accounting of deeds as of a heavenly bookkeeping"; see Köckert, *Abraham*: 102.

of faith, of acceptance, of acceptance of the promise."[121] God and the patriarch are in complete harmony with each other, their relationship is secured forever through the act of trust in YHWH and in his promise.[122] This unreserved trust, held in the highest esteem by God, is also the aim of Paul's argument in Romans 4:18–22. Such an existential act of faith is neither in contrast to works of mercy, nor does it want to or can it replace them.[123]

3.3 Law and Justice in the Prophetic Books

It is no coincidence that both the Book of the Covenant, the first collection of laws, and the oldest written prophets of the Hebrew Bible, Amos, Micah, and Isaiah, are dated at the end of the eighth century BC. All three respond to a social crisis[124] that, in contrast to the relatively homogeneous coexistence of the early royal period, which distinguished only between rulers and ruled, now affects an increasingly stratified society.[125] The emergence of the [silver] money economy is the decisive factor that leads to an ever-increasing gap between creditors and debtors, lenders and borrowers. It visibly divides society into rich and poor. The Hebrew term כסף initially refers to the material itself, "silver," and, then "money," as derived from it. This precious metal possesses the properties needed in order to recognize it as a means of payment: "[Its] homogeneity, divisibility, durability, and rarity enabled it to perform the basic functions of money—the *function of a means of calculation*, the *function of a store of value*, and the *function of a means of exchange*."[126] Before the introduction of coins, a certain amount of silver was weighed out according to need. This encouraged fraud through false scales (see. Lev

121 Hans H. Schmid, "Gerechtigkeit und Glaube: Genesis 15,1–6 und sein biblisch-theologischer Kontext," *Evangelische Theologie* 40, no. 2 (1980): 408.

122 Jacob, *Genesis*: 393, translates: "Then he relied on HIM and he counted it to him for good" and explains: "Abraham had said: 'I thank you, I believe you,' and God then thanks Abraham: 'I will not forget you'" (p. 394).

123 Köckert, *Abraham*: 102: "Thus in 15:1–6 faith is neither in opposition to works or deeds nor even in their place"; Sutherland, "Genesis 15:6": 245: "[. . .] faith and works are not opposites. Opposite to faith is disobedience."

124 By contrast, Hosea's prophecy, also from the end of the eighth century BC, is more critical of the cult.

125 Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte*: 123: "It is striking that biblical testimonies for the writing of law fall into the epoch in which the social crisis of society breaks out (Hos 8:12; Isa 10:1; Jer 8:8f.)." In contrast, Uwe Becker, "Sozialkritik in Jes 1–39 und im Amos-Buch," in *Isaiah and the Twelve: Parallels, Similarities and Differences*, ed. Richard J. Bautch, Joachim Eck and Burkard Zapff, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 527 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020): 39–40, argues that one cannot draw conclusions about a social crisis from the social criticism in Amos and Isaiah, but can only analyze the texts as such.

126 Johannes Bremer, *Wo Gott sich auf die Armen einlässt: Der sozio-ökonomische Hintergrund der achämenidischen Provinz Yehud und seine Implikationen für die Armentheologie des Psalters*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 174 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2016): 251 (italics in original); see in detail Wolfgang Ernst, "Geld: Ein Überblick aus historischer Sicht," in *Gott und Geld*, ed. Michael Welker, and

19:36; Jer 32:10; Ezek 45:10; Hos 12:7–8; Am 8:5; Mic 6:11 and Prov 11:1; 16:11; 20:23).[127] The shekel, derived from the verb שקל ("to weigh"), refers to a piece of silver that was carefully weighed and became a means of payment in Judea from the Persian period onwards.[128] The tax burden imposed by the Achaemenids on their provinces also led to a continuous monetary valuation of all goods, services, and labor in Judea. Because the inhabitants of Judea had no silver mines, they first had to generate an agricultural surplus, which could then be exchanged for silver money.

> In practical terms, this meant that they had to reduce the number of family members living off the yield and specialize in profitable products. Grain, olive products, wine and livestock were eligible for sale. However, there was hardly an abundance of grain in the Judean highlands. That left olive products and wine, the cultivation of which was quite profitable here.[129]

Creating a hierarchy of above and below that the money economy promoted shaped the entire society, analogous to the separation of laymen and priests: "And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the male slave, so with his master; as with the female slave, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor" (Isa 24:2). The main drivers of the social crisis at the end of the eighth century BC were over-indebtedness and the violation of the law. Debts between neighboring farmers had always existed, but under the aggravated conditions such as crop failure, loss of borrowed goods or animals, deaths, royal tax burden, it quickly became an asymmetrical dependency that could first lead to debt slavery and then to the irrevocable full slavery of the debtor and his entire family.[130] The curse of the credit system seems to have become proverbial over time when Jeremiah exclaims: "Woe is me, my mother, that you ever bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land! I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me." (Jer 15:10). The prophet Elisha saves the two sons

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Michael Wolter, Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie 21 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007): 3–21.

127 On the metrology of ancient Judah, see especially Raz Kletter, *Economic Keystones: The Weight System of the Kingdom of Judah*, Journal for the study of the Old Testament / Supplement series 276 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998): 93–107 (chapter 7: "The Judean Weights and the Old Testament").

128 Bremer, *Der sozio-ökonomische Hintergrund*: 254; see Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*: 49: "The spread of coinage distinguishes the period of Persian rule from the preceding epochs."

129 Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*: 53. The times in which "cattle" (מִקְנֶה) equaled "property" (מִקְנֶה) were therefore passé (see Latin *pecus* and *pecunia*).

130 Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte*: 119; Houston, *Justice*, 29: "The characteristic form of dependency for the native-born, referred to on many occasions in the Hebrew Bible, is not tenancy but debt bondage." According to Philippe Guillaume, "The Hidden Benefits of Patronage: Debt," in *Patronage in Ancient Palestine and in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Emanuel Pfoh, The Social World of Biblical Antiquity. Second Series 12 (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2022): 234, despite the inequality of creditors and debtors, the credit system contains a reciprocity that should not be underestimated: "Both sides kept the debt alive because both sides benefited."

of a widow whose husband had died being heavily in debt caused by being sold into debt slavery. He miraculously provides enough olive oil for the family to pay off their debts and allows them to continue to live quietly from the rest (2 Kings 4:1–3; cf. also 2 Kings 4:8–10; 8:1ff.).[131] One of the prophet's disciples drops a borrowed axe into the water while felling trees, a loss that would have forced him to go into debt bondage to make up for the loss if Elisha's intervention had not brought the iron axe back to the water's surface (2 Kings 6:1–8). Unlawfully, the creditor and his son have sexual intercourse with the house slave whose father had brought her into this total dependency in order to pay off his debts (Am 2:7; cf. Exod 21:7–9).[132] The money economy, which was especially spreading within the legal system through the imposition of compensatory fines, pushes the socially weak or the deliberately weakened ever further to the sidelines. The upper class, on the other hand, with the help of legal experts, lies back on pledged clothes and drinks to excess the wine acquired from "fines" (ענושים) (Am 2:8; cf. Am 4:1–3).[133] These shortcomings do not mean that the credit system had to lead to poverty *per se* because the time between sowing and harvest often had to be bridged by borrowing.[134]

The [still] free citizen is powerless against the bribes with which the rich amend for their wrongdoings in court, and anyone who dares to appear as a just witness becomes a victim of the rampant bending of the law (see Am 5:10–12). The Jerusalem prophet Isaiah, who unlike his colleague Amos himself came from the upper class, not only saw through this system, but also specifically named and shamed it with a woeful saying: "Woe! The writers of iniquitous laws and the scribes who write only torment to push the lowly away from the legal process and to rob the right of the wretched of my people, so that widows become their prey and they plunder orphans" (NRSV: Isa 10:1–2)." This prophetic accusation is aimed not only at dishonest contracts or deliberate miscarriages of justice, but much more fundamentally at the drawing up, literally the "carving" (חקק) of "legal sentences" (חקים) by scribes at the Jerusalem court.[135] Those scribes were familiar with the legal culture of their time and environment, as can be seen from the close

131 That this is about the recovery of the creditworthiness of the widow with her two sons, as Guillaume, *Land*: 168, believes, is not covered by the text.

132 Crüsemann, *Tora*: 186.

133 Bernhard Lang, "Peasant Poverty: Rent Capitalism in the Days of Amos," in *Patronage in Ancient Palestine and in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Emanuel Pfoh, The Social World of Biblical Antiquity. Second Series 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2022): 190: "As an indebted peasant or small tenant, the poor man is the landlord's bondsman and sometimes a kind of serf or even slave [. . .]"; Differently Guillaume, *Land*: 56–58 (chapter 3: "The Myth of the Helpless Peasant").

134 Guillaume, *Land*: 111–13 (chapter 5: "Agricultural Credit"); Rainer Kessler, "Schuld, Schulden," in *Handbuch Alttestamentlicher Anthropologie*, ed. Jan Dietrich et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024): 348.

135 Hopf, "Unterscheidungsproblem": 636–38, חקה/חק means the new, authoritative law, which according to Isa 10:1–2 contradicts the "[. . .] traditional *law (*משפט *and* דין*)*, which guarantees the *personae miserae* their rights" (p. 639).

proximity of the Book of the Covenant to the Code of Hammurabi, among other things.[136] The legal principles on which this first collection is based and which were included in the Book of the Covenant are not primarily oriented toward the protection of those in debt slavery—although this aspect also plays a role in the paraenetic admonitions—but towards the property claims of creditors. This becomes abundantly clear in the case of the destitute thief who is unable to pay for what he has stolen and is therefore sold as a debt slave (Exod 22:2): "Anyone who steals out of poverty is threatened with slavery. This regulation must have been a not insignificant source of slavery."[137] The Jerusalem prophet attacks a written and proclaimed law that falls far short of the demands of a justice that is supposed to protect the poor from the weak, and is even opposed to it:

> The *Mishpatim* are the only legal book known to us that may have something to do with the laws that are attacked in Isaiah 10 and which can be assumed to have a social effect that certainly suggests such an identification. After all, these are laws which, for example, make the fact of debt slavery the undisputed starting point of their legal regulations.[138]

The question of whether ancient Israel had its own royal law does not need to be discussed in detail here. The relevant expert opinion suffices that such a royal law, backed by trained experts from the court, could have been issued only in the capital city.[139] This in turn fits in with the Jerusalem coloring of the prophet Isaiah, whose proclamation can be dated to the last third of the eighth century BC. In general, the early scribal prophets understand that poverty and impoverishment are not a self-inflicted fate but are rooted in socio-economic structures that cement the dependence of the destitute on those with means in all directions.[140] The Judean highlands which was poor on resources experienced an increase in wealth, particularly through the expansion of land ownership. Over-indebtedness and bankruptcies of small farmers only benefited the creditors because these were able to seize the labor and earnings of the small farmers and force them into irreversible dependence. The prophet Amos from Tekoa in Judea, who as a mulberry farmer himself came from the agricultural sector, denounces the practices of grain merchants in Samaria who manipulate weights and measures (Am 8:4–6).[141] What they really want are the debtors and their families:

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136 Hans-Peter Mathys, "Zum Vergleich von Gesetzeskodizes: Einige allgemeine Überlegungen," in *Gesetzgebung in antiken Gesellschaften: Israel, Griechenland, Rom*, ed. Leonhard Burckhardt, Klaus Seybold and Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 247 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007): 70–72.

137 Crüsemann, *Tora*: 193 (italics in original).

138 Crüsemann, *Tora*: 196–97.

139 Otto, "Vermittlung": 125, note 109.

140 Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberg and Luise Schottroff. "Armut," in *Sozialgeschichtliches Wörterbuch zur Bibel*, ed. Frank Crüsemann et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2009): 23.

141 On this, see Gunther Fleischer, *Von Menschenverkäufern, Baschankühen und Rechtsverkehrern: Die Sozialkritik des Amosbuches in historisch-kritischer, sozialgeschichtlicher und archäologischer Perspektive*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 74 (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1989).

> Outwardly, the poor buy grain from the merchant, but in reality, the grain merchant buys his customers, that is, takes control of them. Because they cannot pay for the goods purchased as food or seed, they become debtors and ultimately end up in the dependency known as debt bondage.[142]

The possibility of ransom granted centuries later in the Holiness Code through relatives or assets acquired in the meantime (Lev 25:47–49) remains illusionary when it comes to impoverished people who have lost all family ties. The view that the destitute are themselves responsible for their plight through stubborn laziness, as the Proverbs advocate in some places (cf. Prov 10:4; 15:19; 19:15), is completely alien to the prophets.[143]

The pair of sandals for which the poor man is "acquired" (קנה) is not his purchase price, as if he were no longer worth his labor, but the amount still missing in order to completely pay off his debts (Am 2:6; 8:6). Ipso facto this means that even with only minimal arrears, the creditors are entitled to keep the debtor as a debt slave.[144] This right, which mocks all justice, is a thorn in Amos' side. According to Amos, the "righteous" (צדיק) falls into debt slavery because, even though he is ethically in the right, he must face the greedy creditors and stands helpless against the powerful who join forces with the judicature. His accusation therefore applies to all those "who turn justice into wormwood and trample righteousness to the ground" (Am 5:7; cf. Isa 5:23; Jer 5:28; Mic 3:1, 9; Hab 1:4). In his view, the perversion of law and justice tolerated and even promoted by the state is as stupid and as contrary to the world order as letting horses gallop over rocks or plowing the sea with oxen (Am 6:12): "What no animal or animal keeper would ever do, men do to their fellow men when they bribe judges, intimidate witnesses, or otherwise abuse power."[145] For the prophets, disregarding the poor in court, manipulating weights and measures, and exploiting those in debt slavery are not primarily a breach of prescriptive law, but a transgression of the moral order, which ultimately cannot remain without consequences.[146] The corrupt upper class deliberately drives the peasants deeper and deeper into dependence and poverty: "They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth." (Am 5:10).

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142 Bernhard Lang, "Sklaven und Unfreie im Buch Amos (II 6, VIII 6)," *Vetus Testamentum* 31, no. 4 (1981): 483; and Lang, "Peasant Poverty": 197; Rainer Kessler, "Die angeblichen Kornhändler von Amos VIII 4–7," *Vetus Testamentum* 39, no. 1 (1989): 13–22.

143 Collins, *Biblical Values*: 176: "The prophets see society organically, and that the balance of society is out of joint is what brings it to ruin."

144 Lang, "Peasant Poverty": 196: "As a result of exploitation, peasants overburdened with debts have to sell themselves into bondage to work off their liabilities"; see Ulrich Berges and Rudolf Hoppe, *Arm und reich*, Neue Echter Bibel Themen 10 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2009): 33–34.

145 Hans W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 2: Joel und Amos*, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament 14,2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969): 331; cf. Fahlgren, *ṣᵉdāḳā*: 138; similar animal and nature comparisons can be found in Isa 1:3; Jer 5:22–23; 8:7; 17:11; Jer 18:14–15.

146 Barton, *Ethics*: 102, 111: "[. . .] it is an outrage against the nature of things."

The prophet and his audience experience this manipulation first hand when they meet at the city gates, where plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses come together before the elders of the place.[147] According to a later disciple (Am 5:15), the possibility (אולי "perhaps") of divine mercy is linked to the clear decision in favor of justice in the gate (cf. Jer 5:1).[148] In essence, this has parallels to Isa 1:13–17, where the cult festivals celebrated with much sacrificial meat and loud singing are juxtaposed with the primacy of law and justice. The jussive speech and the imagery in Amos 5:24, "But let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream," focus on the restoration of the righteous order and show how little the prophetic preaching was able to change the concrete behavior of the upper class.

The situation in the southern kingdom was no better, as can be seen from Isaiah and Micah. Micah, who comes from Moresheth, a town about 30 kilometers southwest of Jerusalem, denounces the exploitation of the small farmers, who are unable to defend themselves against the loan sharks from the capital who seize houses and fields (Mic 2:1–3; 3:1–3): "A society that until the eighth century was based on the relative equality of landowners breaks apart and develops into a class society."[149] Due to the loss of the men, who have fallen into debt slavery or are lost through other strokes of fate, women are driven out of their homes and the children are robbed of their future, which also points to the sale into slavery (Mic 2:9).[150] The upper classes, with their prophets and soothsayers, who tell those pay them what they want to hear, as well as the corrupt elders and priests, are accused of disregarding the "right" (משפט) (Mic 3:1, 9). Micah stands up to them as an independent man of God with power, justice, and strength (Mic 3:8). As stated in Am 8:4–7, it is once again the fraudulent scales and weights that allow lenders acquire sacrilegious wealth (Mic 6:10–11). Their possessions are nothing other than "treasures of wickedness" (אצרות רשע), the result of the exploitation of those in need and that is against God's law and inhumane (cf. Jer 22:13: "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness [בלא צדק] and his upper rooms by injustice [בלא משפט], who makes his neighbors work for nothing and does not give them their wages"). The interplay between corrupt rulers, judges, and great men corrodes social solidarity and leads to everyone preying on everyone else like a trapper and trying to bring the other into dependence and debt slavery (Mic 7:2–3; cf. Jer 5:26; Ps 35:7–8.; 109:11; Prov 6:1–3.).[151] The perverted law leads to judicial murders,

147 Wolff, *Joel und Amos*: 268, 289–90.

148 Wolff, *Joel und Amos*: 295.

149 Rainer Kessler, *Micha*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 1999): 116; Coomber, "Poverty and Social Justice in Micah": 209: "As subsistence societies are absorbed into systems of centralized production and exchange, administrative elites employ debt schemes to refocus productive efforts from the needs of producers to the desires of administrators."

150 Kessler, *Micha*: 132–34.

151 Kessler, *Micha*: 289: "Mic 7,2 follows directly from the accusations in 6,10–12, which are also to be placed in the context of the debt system."

as expressed in Ezek 7:23 with the otherwise no longer used construct state משפט דמים ("blood judgment").[152]

The theme of law or rather lawbreaking also dominates Jer 5 to a large extent. Before its exile into Babylon in 586 BC, Judean society is portrayed as so depraved that there is no longer anyone who practices justice and seeks honesty (v. 1). Here too, the upper class is particularly guilty (v. 5, 28).[153] The demand for the truthful administration of justice is also one of the cornerstones of Old Testament ethics *post exilium* (cf. Zech 7:9–10; cf. 8:16).[154] These are joined by the calls to do justice and righteousness, to help the *personae miserae*, and to walk with God himself.[155] No text in the Hebrew Bible makes this clearer than Mic 6:8, which probably dates from the middle of the fifth century BC:[156] "He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" What is "good" (טוב) cannot be determined by rigid rules, but must be proven time and time again in concrete situations and be beneficial for the individual and the community. Only then do human actions meet God's standards. The demand to "do nothing but" (כי אם) "right" (עשה משפט) is not to be understood legalistically but must be understood as active deeds on behalf of the poor and oppressed. The failure to "do right" is one of the standard reproaches of pre-exilic prophecy, on which Mic 6:8 builds (e.g. Isa 5:7; 10:2; Jer 5:28; 22:13; Ezek 22:29). "All these passages show that they not only talk about the violation of the formal legal equality of all, but also the violation of the 'right of the poor' (so explicitly Jer 5:28; cf. also Isa 10:2) and the oppression of the weak by the powerful."[157] YHWH, who redeemed Israel from the slave house of Egypt (Mic 6:4), demands such liberating action. The demand not only must be experienced as an external call but also needs to be internalized. This is exactly what "loving kindness" (אהב חסד) means. Helping the oppressed to their due, not taking advantage of one's neighbor, and using the right measure and weight should become principles of life that no longer need any external prompting. The term *ḥæsæḏ* as the epitome of

152 Moshe Greenberg, *Ezechiel 1–20*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2001): 189.

153 Georg Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2005): 254–55.

154 The figura etymologica משפט אמת שפטו ("directs true justice"), which emphatically demands the reliable legal system, should be emphasized, according to Rüdiger Lux, *Sacharja 1–8*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2019): 584. According to Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 43, this is not specifically about the legal system, but about the establishment of social justice in general.

155 Hermann Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, 3rd ed. (Wiesbaden: Fourier, 1995): 166: "The prophet becomes an ethicist of practice, a politician and jurist, because he definitely wants to put an end to the suffering of the poor."

156 Rainer Albertz, *Zorn über das Unrecht: Vom Glauben, der verändern will* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1996): 47.

157 Kessler, *Micha*: 270.

solidary, community-promoting action thus becomes the guiding maxim of those who "walk prudently with God." The root צנע is not easy to grasp, but the evidence in Prov 11:2 (cf. Sir 31:22; 42:8) in particular identifies it the opposite to the arrogant, who do not rely on God-given wisdom but on their own self-confidence. Martin Luther's translation of *demütig* ("humble") comes close but remains too passive overall. The ideal image depicts a person who is prudent, insightful, and thoughtful in his life's journey or is ready to do so (LXX ἕτοιμον = "ready").[158] However, he does not do this "before" (לפני) (cf. Gen 17:1: Abraham), but "with" (עם) God. This is a unique statement in the Old Testament and can be compared only with the praise of Enoch, who also walked "with" (את) God (Gen 5:22, 24).[159] Whereas in Mic 6:4b, God said that he had sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam before the people of Israel, this is now superfluous, because the pious person who acts in solidarity with the poor and needy out of his innermost drive walks in step with his God. For all societies—including ancient Israel—such a person remains an ideal that is only ever achieved by individuals. If it were otherwise, the idea of a future divine judgment would be meaningless. Whilst in the view of Israel's theologians, the Babylonian exile had occurred, not least because of the disregard for social responsibility, in the late post-exilic period deeds of justice and righteousness are also regarded as the standard of divine judgment.

> Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow, and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts (Mal 3:5).

The eschatological hope that the difference "between the righteous and the wicked (בין צדיק לרשע) will be proven when the "sun of righteousness" (שמש צדקה) rises on those who fear his name (Mal 3:18, 20) remains unshakeable. The wicked will be burned, and the feet of the righteous, who will go about like calves set free (cf. Jer 50:11) will trample their ashes. This does not mean mere retribution, but that the righteous participate in the implementation of justice by YHWH Sabaoth himself.[160]

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158 Kessler, *Micha*: 271; and Kessler, *Ethik*: 425–27; see *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, 3rd ed., s.v. "צנע"; Helmer Ringgren, "צנע," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 6, ed. Heinz-Josef Fabry and Helmer Ringgren (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1989): col. 1079; Bob Becking, "That is Really Good: Remarks on Micah 6:8," in *Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof: Poetry, Prophecy, and Justice in Hebrew Scripture. Essays in Honor of Francis Landy on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, ed. Andrew Gow and Peter Sabo, Biblical Interpretation Series 157 (Leiden: Brill, 2018): 207: "What matters is the love of solidarity and community spirit."

159 Albertz, *Zorn über das Unrecht*: 63: "This man was so close to God that he was raptured by him!"

160 Rainer Kesser, *Maleachi*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2011): 294.

In the meantime Mal 3:22 applies. "Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel: "ordinances and judgments" (חקים ומשפטים).[161] The language and subject matter of these last verses of the book of Malachi have much in common with the central concerns of the Psalter, especially the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. Only if this is guaranteed, will God's justice and thus also the world order continue to exist. But unlike in the Psalter, where the hope of the righteous in the divine establishment of justice is both claimed and sung about, Mal 3 guarantees the separation of the righteous and the wicked through an authoritative word of God.[162]

161 The Greek translation of the LXX even places this verse at the very end; cf. Kessler, *Maleachi*: 302, who also points out that the conclusion of Malachi is only addressed to the righteous: "The divorce is a separation. What remains after the elimination of the perpetrators of violence is 'all Israel'" (p. 307).

162 Karl W. Weyde, "Malachi 3:13–21 and the Problem of God's Justice in the Time of the Second Temple," in *Sin, Suffering, and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Blaženka Scheuer and David Davage, Forschungen zum Alten Testament / 2 126 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021): 194: "Thus, the passage gives an eschatological answer to the frequently expressed doubt in YHWH's justice by transferring its implementation to the coming day of YHWH."

4 Law and Justice in the Book of Isaiah

Nowhere else in the books of the scribal prophets does the vocabulary of law and justice and its theological treatment appear as frequently as in the book of Isaiah.[1] Both aspects, human and divine justice, come into play.

James Barton's differentiation, which places the socially critical appeal for just action on the first level of ethical instruction in the book of Isaiah, serves as an introduction. According to Barton, the oppression of the poor, as seen in the appropriation of the land inherited from the forefathers (Isa 5:8–9) and in the violation of the law (Isa 1:23; 3:9; 5:23; 10:1–2; 29:21), forms part of the catalog of sins in the prophetic admonitions, as is also the case with Amos and Micah. However, Isaiah also focuses on the repeatedly formulated accusation that the upper class and the priestly elite are in the habit of continuous intoxication (Isa 5:11–13; 5:22; 28:1–3).[2] Basically, the Jerusalem prophet from the last third of the eighth century BC is a conservative thinker who urges the addressees to recognize YHWH's incomparable sovereignty and to take their own place in society responsibly.[3] For example, he polemicizes against women who rule the people (Isa 3:12). Their self-confident appearance and elegant clothing with the corresponding accessories are considered particularly reprehensible (Isa 3:16–18). These women form part of the upper class and even if they do not involve themselves directly in the exploitation of the poor like their husbands do (Isa 3:14–15), they are indirectly involved.

God will punish these women for their luxury, exposing their shameful behavior, when they will be shaven instead of having their elaborate hair style and girded with a linen sack instead of fancy clothes (Isa 3:24). This harsh punishment does not seem entirely appropriate to the offense itself. It results from the divine judgment that the entirety of the exile is inevitable and that it will affect every one of God's people.[4] If this is the case, then the question arises as to whether the innocent, the oppressed poor, will

1 A limitation solely to the concept of "justice" (משפט), as suggested by Thomas L. Leclerc, *Yahweh is Exalted in Justice: Solidarity and Conflict in Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001): 14–15, is not appropriate to the multilayered discourses of justice in the Book of Isaiah; see Francis Landy, *Poetry, Catastrophe, and Hope in the Vision of Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023): 36: "'Justice' and 'righteousness' are the key words through the book, through all the turns of history, and all their accumulations and transformations of meaning."

2 John Barton, "Ethics in the Book of Isaiah," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans, Vetus Testamentum Supplements 70/1 (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 69; on the second level lies human pride (Isa 2:12–14; 3:1–3; 22:15–17), on the third, the emphasis on divine supremacy: "The distinctively Isaianic approach to ethics involves tracing ethical obligation to its highest source, which lies in the supremacy of God [. . .]" (p. 77).

3 Barton, "Ethics in Ancient Israel": 116: "[. . .] that God should be given his proper place in the world, and that everyone else should observe theirs: he is a social conservative."

4 Barton, "Ethics in Ancient Israel": 249: "This is not so much an eye for an eye as an eye for an eyelash. The whole thing is grossly disproportionate."

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782-004

not also perish along with their exploiters in the catastrophe of the Babylonian exile. The post-exilic writers of the Book of Isaiah took up this problem and answered it in favor of the righteous with a view to Genesis 18–19 when they add in Isaiah 1:9: "If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we would have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah." It is therefore no coincidence that the wise saying in Isa 3:10–11, according to which the righteous will prosper and enjoy the fruit of their actions, but the wicked will fare badly and must suffer what they have done to others, directly follows the next mention of Sodom in Isa 3:9: "The look on their faces bears witness against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom, they do not hide it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves." In contrast to political events that affect the entire people of God, the clear differentiation of the fate of the righteous and the wicked from one another upholds the wisdom theorem.[5] Prophetic announcements of judgment and the idea of cosmic order, to which Isaiah is also committed, are intertwined: "The theme of the righteous and the wicked runs from here through the entire book of Isaiah."[6] Alongside the Book of Isaiah, it is the Psalter that deals with the question of justice and righteousness in equal measure. Hermann Spieckermann gets to the heart of the matter when he states, "If you listen to the dialogue between these two biblical books alongside each other, and sometimes with each other, you can justifiably hope to gain a decisive insight into the understanding of justice throughout the Old Testament."[7]

4.1 Law and Justice in Isa 1–4

The first four chapters represent the twofold preamble of the book of Isaiah (1:2–2:5; 2:6–4:6), which unfolds after the heading in Isaiah 1:1. It had taken more than four hundred years to complete this prophetic scroll. It therefore resembles a literary cathedral to which many anonymous authors contributed. The first chapter not only *de facto* stands at the beginning,[8] it also sets the decisive impulses for the discourses on justice

5 For Barton, "Ethics in Ancient Israel": 240, Isa 3:10–11 belongs to the "summaries," which contain the overarching concepts of "good" and "evil," but without linking them to concrete instructions for action (cf. Isa 5:20; Hos 4:1; Mic 3:2; 6:8; Tob 4:15).

6 Willem A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2003): 113; see "righteous" (צדיק) in Isa 5:23; 24:16; 26:2, 7; 53:11; 57:1; 60:21; "wicked" (רשע) in 5:23; 11:4; 13:11; 14:5; 26:10; 48:22; 53:9; 55:7; 57:20–21.

7 Hermann Spieckermann, "Gerechtigkeit zwischen Gott und Mensch im Alten Testament: Psalter und Jesajabuch im theologischen Austausch," in *Gerechtigkeit verstehen: Theologische, philosophische und hermeneutische Perspektiven*, ed. Christof Landmesser and Enno E. Popkes (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017): 17.

8 Ulrich Berges, "Das Buch Jesaja. Ein Buch wie eine Kathedrale," in *73 Ouvertüren: Die Buchanfänge der Bibel und ihre Botschaft*, ed. Egbert Ballhorn et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2018): 310–19.

that accompany the entire book.[9] The fact that both the oldest and the most recent material can be found in this chapter,[10] is not a disadvantage when researching the ideas of justice. It is rather an advantage because it bundles the different aspects as if in a lens.[11]

From a synchronic point of view, the text after the heading in v. 1 suggests a tripartite division.[12] The first segment, the divine accusation with the invocation of heaven and earth (vv. 2–3), leads to the prophetic cry of woe (vv. 4–9), which drastically presents the consequences of divine judgment. The country has become desolate, the cities have burned down, and not a single spot remains untouched on the entire body of the rebellious people who have abandoned YHWH and rejected the Holy One of Israel. The second part (v. 10–20) contains the prophetic accusation against the leaders and the people with the concluding instruction, which consists of a series of nine imperatives (v. 16–17). Here we also find the call to seek justice, which means to bring justice to the orphan and to fight the widow's cause (v. 17). The third segment (v. 21–31) starts with a prophetic lament over the city of God, which was once filled of justice, where righteousness dwelt, but which is now awash with of murderers (v. 21).

V. 23 again emphasizes the perversion of justice: The rulers of the people seek bribes and gifts. They do not provide justice for the orphan, and the widow's case does not even come before them. The second part of this segment contains a divine saying in the first-person singular, in which YHWH Sabaoth, the Mighty One of Israel, announces vengeance on his enemies and opponents (v. 24) and wants to stand up for the restoration of a just order. He wants to restore conscientious judges and counselors as at the beginning (v. 26a): "Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness (עיר הצדק), the faithful city (קריה נאמנה)." A further reflection (v. 27–31) follows, which now identifies Zion directly with this city of restored law and order. However, the result is now not attributed to direct divine intervention, but to the different fate of those who repent and those who remain in their apostasy and therefore perish (v. 28): "This segregation of sinners and devout worshippers of Yahweh introduces a distinction that is alien to v. 21–26. According to these verses, the judgment will not affect the whole city, but only the sinners, while the pious will be redeemed."[13] It is only from this distinction that the sentence in v. 27 takes on its true meaning: "Zion shall be redeemed through 'justice' (משפט) and those in her who repent by 'righteousness' (צדקה)." However, this

9 Cf. Bohdan Hrobon, "Religion and Ethics in Isaiah," in *Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, ed. Carly Crouch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 166, who, however, only analyzes Isa 1, Isa 43:22–28 and Isa 58.

10 Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*: 69.

11 Cf. Alphonso Groenewald, "Role and Function of Ṣedaqa and Torah in the Introduction to the Book of Isaiah (1.1–2.5)," in *Ṣedaqa and Torah in Postexilic Discourse*, ed. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher and Maria Häusl, Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies 640 (London: Bloomsbury International Clark, 2017): 71–85.

12 Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*: 68–69.

13 Klaus Koenen, *Heil den Gerechten—Unheil den Sündern! Ein Beitrag zur Theologie der Prophetenbücher*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 229 (Berlin: De Gryuter, 1994): 90.

does not mean that the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Zion can redeem themselves, but that YHWH responds to their strive for social justice with his saving intervention, with his divine justice.[14]

In diachronic exegesis, Isa 1:27 indisputably comes from Isa 35:10 [par. 51:11]. However, the pragmatics have changed significantly: "It is not the redeemed who will return to Zion, but those who return to Zion who will be redeemed. Repentance no longer means returning from exile, but turning to Yahweh."[15] This in turn has its parallel in Isa 59:20 ("And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the Lord.").[16] In the late post-exilic period, from which these passages originate,[17] Zion will only be able to become a city of righteousness if the sinners among God's people repent. It includes ritual and social righteousness in equal measure. The nations set out for this city of God on the mountain in order to receive the Torah from there (Mic 4:1–3).[18] While the mountain of God in the desert was the meeting place between YHWH and Israel, where Moses acted as mediator of the law and later decided the most important legal conflicts among the people, Zion is the meeting place between YHWH, Israel, *and* the nations, where God himself decides their legal disputes by acting as a judge between the nations. Then the nations will forge their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, for learning the craft of war has become obsolete (Isa 2:4). The nations will certainly not set out for the city of injustice, corruption, and oppression because they are all too familiar with these conditions in their own countries. Only when justice and righteousness prevail in Zion will the city of God become the goal of a worldwide movement.[19]

The vocabulary of justice continues in the second part of the overture (2:6–4:6). When Isa 3:14 states that YHWH will bring judgment on the elders and leaders of the people because they have grazed the vineyard to the ground and the belongings stolen from the poor are to be found in their houses, it aligns once again with the prophetic social criticism found in Amos and Micah. At the same time, the image of the plun-

14 Hugh M.A. Williamson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 1–27*, vol. 1, *Commentary on Isaiah 1–5*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London: T & T Clark, 2006): 158: "The fact that *justice* and *righteousness* refer primarily to their character and deeds is not to be separated from the active work of God in deliverance."

15 Koenen, *Heil den Gerechten*: 91.

16 Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 55–66*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2022): 310–11.

17 Cf. Odil H. Steck, *Studien zu Tritojesaja*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 203 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991): 190.

18 On the diachronic relationship between Isa 2:2–4 and Mic 4:1–3, see e.g. Williamson, *Isaiah 1–5*: 178–79.

19 Berges, "Ein Buch wie eine Kathedrale": 316: "Only if and insofar as Jerusalem is reshaped according to the requirements of law and justice can the city become a center of attraction for the nations." Non-Israelites also have their place in this kingdom of God, according to Brett, "Foreign Bodies": 39: "Within the divine empire, the foreigner is welcome to keep Yhwh's covenant and Sabbaths."

dered vineyard points forward to the vineyard song in Isa 5:1–7. The subsequent cries of woe make it clear that disregard for the social order ultimately leads to the loss of the vineyard—the common land. That the plunderers are mainly to be found among the upper classes had already been made clear by the announcement of punishment to the wealthy women in Jerusalem who indulge in luxury (Isa 3:16–24). While their husbands have fallen in battle, they too will stand helpless (Isa 3:25). The divine judgment manifests itself in a severe military defeat, through which the women of the upper class lose their husbands and thus their social protection. This defeat can only refer to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC, because in 701 BC the city of God had narrowly escaped catastrophe (cf. Isa 36–39; 2 Kings 18–20). The words of Amos criticizing the rich women of Samaria may have provided a model, according to which they will make their way into captivity through the breaches in the city walls of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom conquered by the Assyrians in 722/721 BC, "each one by herself" (אשה נגדה)—alone—without male company (Am 4:3). Isaiah's reception goes beyond penalty, for now the punishment by the enemy aggressor who brings down the rich women is explicitly linked to the theme of justice. Their luxurious accessories are nothing other than the signs of the exploitation of the poor and thus the visible sign of a lack of justice because it had been suspended. But YHWH, who brings judgment on the elite, will wash away the excrement of the daughters of Zion through the "spirit of judgment" (ברוח משפט) (Isa 4:4).[20] The pre-exile idea of divine punishment by the foreign superpower finds itself explicitly placed in the context of Jerusalem's theology of Zion. While Samaria has fallen and remains fallen, this can and must not apply to Zion/Jerusalem, for that would rob YHWH of his earthly presence in this city, on his holy mountain. To underpin this theological impossibility, the Exodus tradition appears in Isa 4:5–6, because after the cleansing judgment, YHWH will watch over the whole site of Zion and all its congregations as a cloud by day and as a flaming fire by night, protecting and accompanying them (cf. Exod 13:21–22; 40:46, Num 9:15–17; Ps 78:14; 105:39; Neh 9:19). Those who escape this purifying judgment because they have done no wrong belong to the holy remnant enrolled to live in Jerusalem (Isa 4:3). The answer to the question of whether one should understand this passage as predestination (cf. Ps 139:16) or judgment (cf. Exod 32:32; Ps 69:29) appears in the reading continuum of Isa 1–4 in the sense of the second option.[21] The reason for sparing them is not the consequence of the fact that the holy remnant is always already recorded in the book of life, but because the spirit of judgment and cleansing did not find anything reproachable among the righteous (cf. Jer 4:12). The temporary "if" (אם) at the beginning of Isa 4:4 leaves no doubt that entry "for life in Jerusalem" (לחיים בירושלם) will occur only after a positive outcome of judgment. Of course, this might well be a jab against the family and citizen lists that flourished in

20 Landy, *Poetry*: 284: "YHWH *washes* the excrement of the daughters of Zion with the spirit. What this means is uncertain, but it does suggest care and a wish to restore them to their pristine condition."
21 Otto Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kapitel 1–12*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960): 94, raises this question but deliberately leaves it open.

the post-exilic period (Ezra 2:62; Neh 7:5, 64; 12:22–23; cf. Jer 22:30; Ezek 13:9; Ps 87:6), through which the returnees from the Babylonian exile and the diaspora had to prove their legitimate Judean or priestly origins. According to Isa 4:4, a life of justice and righteousness rather than lineage serves as the decisive criterion.

The closest parallel to the judgment of purification appears in Isa 28:5–6, an editorial expansion of the original Isaianic oracle about the fate of Samaria. Because of the drunkenness that prevails in this city, including prophets and priests, only the uncompromising cry of woe remains, announcing the end. The redactors link the end of the proud crown of Ephraim—aimed at the downfall in 721 BC—with the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC in vv. 5–6. In doing so, they make it clear that their future exists only with YHWH Sabaoth, who becomes the glorious crown, the crown of victory for the rest of his people. At the same time, YHWH will become "the spirit of judgment to one who sits in judgment" (ולרוח משפט ליושב על המשפט). If the spirit of judgment in Isa 4:4 held responsibility for washing away all refuse so that the holy remnant could emerge, in Isa 28:6 it empowers the righteous administration of justice, which ensures that war, strife among one another, is pushed out the city gate. It is the presence of YHWH, the Lord of hosts, which will manifest itself "[. . .] among his people in the administration of justice and righteousness and in the defense of the city."[22]

The book of Isaiah itself does not mention the fulfillment of the administration of justice to protect the city and its population. This remains a future expectation (ביום ההוא "in that day").[23] In Isa 9:5–6 and 11:2–3 the promises of "spirit" (רוח), "strength" (גבורה) and "justice" (משפט/שפט) refer to the Davidic offspring.[24] This fits in well with Isa 28:6 because the divine spirit of judgment belongs to the one who sits in judgment—specifically the king.

In contrast, the prophet Micah presents himself in an editorial verse in clear contrast to the corrupt priests and prophets as someone who is filled with "power" (כח), "justice" (משפט), and "strength" (גבורה) to proclaim Jacob's transgressions and Israel's sins (Mic 3:8). The element of the "spirit of YHWH" (את רוח יהוה) inserted into this list with the *nota accusativi* shows that over time, the administration of justice became more strongly associated with divine empowerment. The same can be found in Isa 11, the first song of the servant of God in Isa 42, and Isa 61. The following interpretations confirm that the divine endowment of the spirit in these cases serves inextricably to link the respective claim to leadership to the enforcement of the law.

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22 Willem A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja 28–39*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2010): 61–62.

23 Otto Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kapitel 13–39*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 18 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973): 192–93, already sees a "proto-apocalyptic" at work here.

24 Williamson, *Isaiah 6–12*: 379: "[. . .] the emphasis is not on the king in his own right so much as on his provision by God to administer the kingdom according to the ideal standards of justice and righteousness"; Niehr, "Justice and Order": 163: "The hopes for the arrival of an ideal king in postexilic times were connected with a reign of *mšpṭ* and *ṣdqh*."

Looking back at the book's preamble in Isa 1:2–4:6, the following summarizes the various concepts of justice. The appeal to actively pursue justice by doing what is good and particularly to help orphans and widows obtain their rights in court (Isa 1:17) is part of the ancient prophetic ethos and appears in Amos and Micah alongside Isaiah. Isa 1:24–26 speaks of divine punitive justice with the action emanating entirely from YHWH (six verbs in the first-person singular). The corrupt judges and counselors are his personal enemies on whom he will take vengeance. These verses bear witness to the early post-exilic hope that Zion would be purified through the act of judgment and thus once again become a city of justice. In a late post-exilic *Fortschreibung*, direct divine intervention does not lead to justice—this can only be achieved when inhabitants repent. The personal decision either to return to YHWH and thus to justice and righteousness or to persist in sin and apostasy and perish (Isa 1:27–28) is the decisive factor.[25] The separation between the righteous and the wicked forms the major theme of the end of the book. The end of the apostates, whose corpses perish outside the gates of the city in eternally blazing fire (Isa 66:24), strongly link back to the fire at the end of the first chapter, the one which no one can extinguish (Isa 1:31). There are not only shifts in the concepts of justice in the book of Isaiah between the chapters,[26] but also within individual chapters and text passages. The following pays particular attention to this aspect. In addition, it is already apparent that one cannot speak of straightforward developments, but that different discourses on justice complement each other without resulting in a systematic sequence.

4.2 Law and Justice in Isa 5–12

The fresh start of Isa 5:1 after the double overture is marked by the syntactically completely unconnected "I will sing." The seven cries of woe (Isa 5:8–24; 10:1–4), which explicate the theme of the lack of justice in the vineyard song (Isa 5:1–7), and the poem of God's outstretched hand (5:25–30; 9:7–20), frame the Isaianic memoir (Isa 6:1–9:6).[27] The denunciations of punishment against Assyria (Isa 10:5–34) follows along with the continuation of the Davidic-Messianic hope in Isa 11, where the motifs of peace, justice,

25 ^{LXX}Isa 1:27 places the emphasis entirely on God's actions and replaces "justice" (משפט) with "judgment" (κρίμα) and "righteousness" (צדקה) with "mercy" (ἐλεημοσύνη), see Krašovec, *Righteousness*: 69–70.

26 Cf. Mark Gray, *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah*, Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies 432 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006): 19–21, who assumes a development from Isa 1:16–17 to Isa 58:6–10: "From Failed Rhetoric to the Hope of Justice."

27 Cf. Gerald T. Sheppard, "The Anti-Assyrian Redaction and the Canonical Context of Isaiah 1–39," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 2 (1985): 196.

and righteousness play a central role. Then the song of thanksgiving of the redeemed in Isa 12 concludes this compositional unit theologically focused on Zion.[28]

4.2.1 Law and Justice in the Song of the Vineyard and in the Isaianic Memoir

Contrary to popular belief, the vineyard song in Isa 5:1–7 is not a parable of judgment that accuses the whole people, but a prophetic criticism of the upper classes, who, with royal support, convert parts of the cultivation of the fields to lucrative but very investment-intensive viticulture. Rents, grain taxes, and terraced vineyards result from the growing prosperity during the last third of the eighth century BC, which, however, only makes the city dwellers richer and increasingly pushes the rural population into poverty (cf. Am 5:11). Thus, v. 2 does not simply list the necessary measures for planting a vineyard but serves as evidence of an economic escalation that knows only a few winners but many losers: "The vortex of a battle that convulsed Judahite and Israelite society."[29]

Not the people as a whole and certainly not the farmers threatened by debt slavery are the addressees of the parable of the vineyard (Isa 5:3, 7), but the elite, who know full well that they can earn a great deal of money through appropriate cultivation. Their vineyard does not produce the fruits of righteousness, but instead produces law-breaking instead of "judgment" (משפט) and cries of distress instead of "righteousness" (צדקה) (v. 7).[30] Isa 3:14 had already accused the elders and rulers of the people of having plundered the vineyard and seized what had been stolen from the poor. There is no tension with the vineyard song, as if the whole people were now accused.[31] The opposite is the case: "Those trapped into self-condemnation by the parable were the ruling elites

28 Ulrich Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja: Komposition und Endgestalt*, Herders Biblische Studien 16 (Freiburg: Herder, 1998): 87–89; Ulrich Berges and Willem A.M. Beuken. *Das Buch Jesaja: Eine Einführung*, UTB Theologie 4647 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016): 59–61.

29 Marvin L. Chaney, "Whose Sour Grapes? The Addressees of Isaiah 5:1–7 in the Light of Political Economy," in *The Social World of the Hebrew Bible: Twenty-Five Years of Social Sciences in the Academy*, ed. Ronald A. Simkins and Stephen L. Cook, Semeia 87 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999: 109; according to Hannes Olivier, "God as Friendly Patron: Reflections on Isaiah 5.1–7," in *Patronage in Ancient Palestine and in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Emanuel Pfoh, The Social World of Biblical Antiquity. Second Series 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2022): 331–41, YHWH, on the other hand, is the caring patron who does every conceivable good for his dependents, who repay him with injustice.

30 F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Isaiah's Love Song: A Reading of Isaiah 5:1–7," in *Biblical Poetry and the Art of Close Reading*, ed. J. Blake Couey and Elaine T. James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 165: "[. . .] the final upshot of the small poem is to point up the failure to maintain traditional norms of justice and right-ness in Israel and Judah [. . .]."

31 Thus Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja 1. Teilband Jesaja 1–12*, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament 10,1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972): 172: "The ambivalence between 3_{14} and 5_7 must be noted, however: there the leaders of the people are reproached for having grazed the vineyard, here the people themselves must confirm that they deserve to be given over to 'grazing.'"

of Judah and Israel, led by the two dynastic houses and their sitting dynasts, not the general populations of Jerusalem, Judah, and Israel."[32] The actual owner of the vineyard is YHWH himself, who sees his project of a community based on law and justice driven to ruin by the greed of the rulers.[33] The subsequent cries of woe (Isa 5:8–24; 10:1–4) clarify this understanding, where the complex of the motives of wine, vineyard, and excessive alcohol consumption continues (Isa 5:10–11, 22). The economic expropriation of house and farm and the drinking that begins in the morning and leads to deliberate false convictions in court, leave no doubt that the composition, which goes back to Isaiah's disciples (cf. Isa 8:16–18), sees the corrupt upper class under the prophetic accusation of having scandalously grazed the vineyard of YHWH. The series of seven originally ended with a woe against those who, in return for a bribe, "pronounce the wicked righteous" (מצדיקי רשע) and push "the righteousness of the righteous" (צדקת צדיקים) to the sidelines (Isa 5:23). Isa 10:1–4 adds another woe.[34] Now, the violation of the law is not only blamed on the judiciary, the local courts, but also on the legislature, the royal bureaucracy "who set the statutes of injustice" (החקקים חקקי און) and "the scribes who write down trouble" (ומכתבים עמל כתבו). The prophet and his disciples criticize a law that promotes and secures asymmetrical dependencies. Such a law is found in the *mîšpāṭîm*, which made its way into the Torah of Moses as the "Book of the Covenant" (Exod 24:7): "It [the Book of the Covenant, U.B.] quite clearly reflects the power relations within society from which it originates. It represents a law which, like almost all law, was pervertible and probably also used unilaterally and thus perverted. Isaiah 10:1f. probably gets to the heart of the problem."[35] The concept of justice that underlies this discourse rests on the knowledge that justice is just—it corresponds to the norm of justice—only if it protects the socially weak and vulnerable from the strong and exploiters.[36] Only the oppressed have YHWH at their side as their legal helper, according to the prophetic credo, which repeatedly fails in the face of reality but never falls silent.

Isa 5:15–16 is unanimously recognized as an insertion into the text and belongs to a different idea of justice, which literally adopts the vocabulary of the Isaianic proclama-

32 Chaney, "Whose Sour Grapes?": 117.

33 Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*: 140: "His care for Israel has not brought about a just coexistence. Thus, YHWH's accusation coincides with the cry for help from the oppressed"; Landy, *Poetry*: 219: "Isaiah 5.1–7 narrates God's disappointed love for Israel; the vineyard is the land or people, and its fruit is justice and righteousness."

34 Andrew H. Bartelt, *The Book Around Immanuel: Style and Structure in Isaiah 2–12*, Biblical and Judaic studies from the University of California, San Diego 4 (Winona Lake: Ind. Eisenbrauns,1996): 101–2; Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja*: 89.

35 Crüsemann, *Tora*: 198; cf. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008): 73: "The cause of the needy being deprived of *justice* and the poor of *their right* is that the laws are iniquitous and oppressive."

36 Kaiser, *Jesaja 1–12*: 109: "[. . .] in the background of this cry of woe is in any case the conviction that the deity is the legal helper of all those who cannot represent and enforce their cause themselves, cf. Prov 22:22f. and Ex 23:6."

tion against human hubris in Isa 2:9, 11. The added value compared to the original consists in the concretization of how YHWH will bring down arrogance, namely "through justice" (במשפט) and "through righteousness" (בצדקה). In this manner and only in this manner does "the holy God prove himself to be holy" (האל הקדוש נקדש). The point of reference for the addition lies in the motif of the underworld, which opens its jaws wide to swallow up the roaring crowd of the drunken upper-class forever (Isa 5:14). This is now interpreted as the destruction of all arrogance of "people" (v. 15: אדם/איש), a hubris brought down by YHWH's holiness, which manifests itself in his incorruptible justice. "Where the holy order, which is meant by צדק, is violated, YHWH must intervene, and then his acts of justice also include the punishment of the wicked. If this did not happen, the holy God would not maintain his holiness."[37] In contrast to the woe over the drunkards (cf. Prov 20:1; 21:17; 23:20–21; 29–31; 31:4–5) where the consequences of the actions—hunger and thirst—correspond to the denounced addiction to revelry, YHWH's intervention in the addition is motivated by his nature, which is characterized by holiness and justice. The borrowing from Ezekiel is unmistakable, but unlike there, the proof of divine holiness does not serve to ensure that the foreign nations correctly interpret YHWH's actions toward his people (Ezek 20:41; 28:22, 25; 36:23; 38:16; 39:27; cf. Lev 10:3; 22:32; Num 20:13), but now God's holiness is the reason for his intervention against the arrogant according to the standard of justice. "YHWH's ontological superiority consists precisely of the same moral integrity that he demands of Israel and which he will also bring about at the end of his intervention in the history of this people."[38] At the same time, this must not be understood that YHWH created justice as a norm of ethical action, but that it precedes him and is realized by him in a special way.[39] Both their realizations in Isa 5:16, "through justice" (במשפט) and "through righteousness" (בצדקה), use the formulations from Isa 1:27. However, in contrast to them they do not qualify the behavior of those returning to Zion, so that Jerusalem can once again become the city of justice and righteousness, but that they determine the holiness character of YHWH himself.[40] His holiness does not mean separation from the world of injustice, but implies a saving action toward the poor, which goes hand in hand with a condemnation of the unjust exploiters. Law and justice thus become the decisive basis for the visuali-

37 Wildberger, *Jesaja 1–12*: 192; cf. Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*: 151: "The judgment is indeed aimed at proving the majesty of YHWH, but always in order to reveal his actual, holy nature."

38 Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*: 151, with reference to Walter Moberly, "Whose Justice? Which Righteousness? The Interpretation of Isaiah V 16," *Vetus Testamentum* 51, no. 1 (2001): 55–68.

39 Cf. Jaco Gericke, *The Hebrew Bible and Philosophy of Religion*, Resources for Biblical Study 70 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012): 419: "The divine nature instantiates (but does not define) the property of goodness."

40 Williamson, *Isaiah 1–5*: 376: "God is seen to be exalted and his holiness to be moral and ethical"; Krašovec, *Righteousness*: 72: "Justice and judgment by which justice is vindicated belong to the very nature of God's being [. . .]."

zation of the holiness of the only Holy One.[41] In the book of Isaiah, God's holiness is not celebrated in ritual performance—in contrast to the priestly source and the priestly prophet Ezekiel—but in the concrete implementation of law and justice.[42] Isaiah 5:16 therefore represents the decisive template for the subsequent vision of God's absolute holiness in the Jerusalem temple (Isaiah 6:3: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts"). Judah and Jerusalem fell because of this holiness, which manifests itself in justice and righteousness and cannot be manipulated by ritual celebrations and sacrificial offerings (Isa 6:11–12). That the prophet in Isaiah 6:9–10 is given the task of hardening after the revelation of God's holiness and the purification of his lips is not proof of YHWH's incomprehensibility,[43] but is entirely aligned with a holiness that manifests itself in law and justice. Judgment has become inevitable wherever God's holiness faces injustice that no amount of preaching can remove (Isa 1–5). Any further preaching leads only to the hardening of the hearts of those who perish in and because of their lack of understanding.[44] In the end, only a small remnant will remain, like the rootstock after an oak tree has been felled: It is "holy seed" (זרע קדש). The reference to Isa 4:3, "Whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem," is obvious. Both passages reflect on the legitimacy of a divine punishment that seems to affect perpetrators and victims alike. What cannot be separated on the level of historical reality—war and expulsion take their toll from the ranks of the wicked *and* the good—must remain separate for the sake of YHWH's holiness. The idea of the holy remnant is thus a theological necessity which allows one to perceive YHWH's historical punitive action together with his justice. Similarly, the servant of God who has been crushed by God is promised a "descendant" (זרע) (53:10), who takes shape in the "oaks of righteousness" (אילי הצדק) (61:3) and is subsequently called a "holy people" (עם הקדש) (62:12).[45] In the diachronically very late insertion of Isa 10:21–23, the name of one of Isaiah's sons, Shear Yashub ("a remnant returns"), refers to the early Hellenistic situation of the pious. Even if the people of God were as numerous as the sand on the seashore (cf. Gen 22:17; 32:13; 1 Kings 4:20; Jer 33:22; Hos 2:1), only a remnant would turn back, because destruction has been determined, "flooding justice" (שוטף צדקה). In the book of Isaiah, the verb denotes both Assur's military might (Isa 8:8; 28:2, 15, 17, 18; other threats in Isa 43:2) and the overwhelming assertiveness of YHWH (Isa 30:28; 66:12). The authors of Isa 10:21–23 apply the woe of the drunkards of Ephraim, with the

41 Landy, *Poetry*: 81: "The hierarchy that should disseminate God's holiness through the ethical relation does not do so and has turned it into its opposite."

42 Leclerc, *Justice*: 62: "The exaltation and sanctification of God are accomplished through the enactment of a just social order, the precise remedy to the conditions described throughout 5:8–24."

43 Andrew Davies, *Double Standards in Isaiah: Re-Evaluating Prophetic Ethics and Divine Justice*, Biblical Interpretation Series 46 (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 198: "God, being God, is inexplicable, incomprehensible, unpredictable and inconsistent, and that is part of his nature."

44 Berges and Beuken, *Einführung*: 65.

45 Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja*: 103–4.

word of the cornerstone of justice and righteousness in Zion (Isa 28:17) at his center, to the destruction amid the entire earth, which can be called proto-apocalyptic (Isa 10:23 takes up Isa 28:22 literally). The symbolic name, "a remnant returns," thus refers to the holy remnant that divine justice will wash out of the floods of destruction. Even and especially the people of God will "[. . .] not remain unscathed in the forthcoming judgment but will be measured by God with the standard of justice and thus judged anew."[46] In addition to the legal connotation, *ṣ^{e}dāqāh* here also means a divine world order that begins with Israel but is not limited to the people of God. "It only begins there, on the condition that a remnant of Israel turns to YHWH."[47] This righteousness, which first manifests itself in and among the people of God, has a global reach. It builds on the historical-theological concept of a divine justice that originates from the early exilic period and can be described as a world saving governance. With this justice, which takes place in the salvation of Israel from all nations, YHWH manifests his exclusive, worldwide claim of divinity (cf. Isa 45:8, 23–24; 46:12–13; 48:1, 18; 51:6, 8; 54:14, 17; 59:9, 16–17; 61:11; 63:1).

4.2.2 Justice and Righteousness Through the Offspring of David in Isa 9–11

Following the memoir (Isa 6:1–8:18), the book of Isaiah developed two further ideas around the figure of Emmanuel, the Davidic successor to the throne in Isa 7:10–17, so that Isa 7–9–11 can now be described as a "messianic triptych."[48] In the continued reading, the announcement of the birth (Isa 7:14–16) is followed by rejoicing over the birth and enthronement (Isa 9:1–3) and joy over his salvific rule (Isa 11:1–3). From the perspective of the book of Isaiah, the house of David has gambled away its future with King Achaz, and even the more-godly Hezekiah was unable to turn the tide (Isa 39). Nevertheless, the hope of a future Davidic king remained, whose throne was secured by "justice" (במשפט) and "righteousness" (בצדקה) (Isa 9:6). The ideology of the ancient oriental ruler stands in the background, where the king is commissioned by the gods to enforce the just order, which is intended to protect the weak from the strong. In the Royal Psalms (e.g. Ps 72; 101), this concept of kingly justice is encountered again.

The diachronic classification of Isa 9 and 11 remains controversial amongst academics, but it is generally assumed that a basic Isaianic layer was expanded after the exile.[49] Composition in the time of King Josiah (640–609 BC) is also considered for Isa

46 Kaiser, *Jesaja 1–12*, 230; Ronald E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980): 115: "The phrase overflowing with righteousness appears ambivalent but must be understood in the sense of 'fully, and justly, deserved'" (bold in original.).

47 Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*: 291.

48 Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*: 187.

49 Thus, among others, Hugh G.M. Williamson, "Davidic Kingship in Isaiah," in *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020): 280–92.

9,[50] but his shameful death (2 Kings 23:29–30) does not necessarily speak in favor of a particular closeness to God. The chronicler agreed, and paints his end in even more lurid colors: Josiah fatally misjudged the will of God in his confrontation with Necho, king of Egypt (2 Chr 35:20–22).[51] Although Josiah is praised in Jer 22:15–16 for his government in accordance with justice and righteousness in favor of the poor, the statement that he fared "well" (טוב) falls far short of the positive expectations of royal action in Isa 9:5–6. Be that as it may, the first three titles, "Wonderful Counselor" (פלא יועץ) "Mighty God" (אל גבור), and "Eternal Father" (אביעד) are guided by YHWH himself. The fourth title "Prince of Peace" (שר שלום) is aimed more strongly at the human ruler: "It softens the overly divine character of the first three names and presents the bearer as a son of the lineage of David."[52] The first three titles are thus to be understood as functional indications that place the future ruler in direct proximity to God, which is then reflected in the perfect exercise of rule. It is fitting that the root מלך ("king, to be king, and to rule as king" is missing in this context (cf. Isa 7:1, 6; Isa 36–39) and is replaced by the nouns "prince" (שר) and "rule" (משרה). The reason could be that YHWH is the sole king in Israel after the failure of the Davidic monarchy (Isa 24:23; 32:1; 33:17, 22; 43:15; 44:6; 52:7). It is striking that the word "peace" (שלום) is used only now, although it could already have been expected in the context of Isa 2:1–5 or 4:1–6. As the epitome of the greatest possible social harmony, the term summarizes the result of just rule (cf. 1 Kings 2:33; Mic 5:4; Ps 72:3, 7; 1 Chr 22:9). When Hezekiah responds in Isa 39:8 to the announcement of the Babylonian exile that this word is good, because in his days there is still peace, then this is, as it were, the official confirmation of the imminent end of the Davidic monarchy on a political level.

The third tableau of the messianic triptych in Isa 11:1–9 seems to contradict this only at first glance, because the expectation formulated therein does not simply follow along the lines of a continuation of the house of David. The transition from Isa 10 to Isa 11 confirms that line of thought because the Davidic royal house is among the tall trees that YHWH Sabaoth has felled (Isa 10:33–34; cf. 6:13b).[53] That is the reason why the root does not sprout from the stump of David, but from that of his father Jesse. This *back to the roots* comes close to the idea of Isa 1:26–27, according to which Zion will

50 E.g. Jacques Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique: Isaïe, I–XXXV, miroir d'un demi-millénaire d'expérience religieuse en Israël*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gabalda, 1977): 245; Konrad Schmid, ed. *Prophetische Heils- und Herrschererwartungen*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 194 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2005): 71.

51 Sarah Japhet, *2 Chronik*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2003): 493, refers to the tragedy of this king: "Josiah cannot accept Necho's words at all, but their rejection is counted against him as a sin."

52 Berges and Beuken, *Einführung*: 73.

53 Erhard Blum, "Jesajas prophetisches Testament: Beobachtungen zu Jes 1–11 (Teil I)," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 108, no. 4 (1996): 562: "Among the cut down trees of Lebanon is also the trunk of the royal house, of which 11:1ff. deals."

be redeemed in righteousness only if YHWH provides judges and counselors as he had done at the beginning.

The division into two parts of the pericope on the expectation of rulership in Isa 11:1–9 is generally accepted. The spiritual endowment of the scion of Jesse in vv. 1–5 serves an incorruptible jurisdiction that does not rely on hearsay or appearances yet is also not biased in favor of the poor. It brings the guilty party, whoever it may be, to just punishment.[54] This *justitia* does not judge blindfolded but pays close attention to who is most in need of legal protection and saving justice—the "lowly" (דלים) and the "wretched of the land" (ענוי ארץ) (v. 4a). The sequence of the two verbs, שפט "to judge" and hifil יכח "to pass judgement" is found only in Isa 9:3–4 and Isa 2:4 [par. Mic 4:3] in all the OT, which suggests a parallel understanding. Just as YHWH will judge and pass judgment between the nations on the international stage so that they can forever end their wars, so will the future offspring of Jesse judge and pass judgment on the disputes among God's people to establish paradisiacal harmony (v. 6–9). The place where the international and national conflicts are resolved is also identical to the mountain of YHWH (Isa 2:2–3; 11:9). Just as no one learns how to wage war anymore, so the strong animals will no longer devour the weak, and the powerful men will no longer harm the powerless. This vision of universal peace is taken up literally at the end of the book of Isaiah, in Isa 65:25b, and supplemented with a sideways glance at the dust-eating serpent from Gen 3:14–15. However, the penultimate chapter of the book of Isaiah is not about a *David redivivus* either, but about the urgent hope of God's servants that YHWH will soon bring about the separation between them and their opponents.

All in all, the messianic triptych of Isa 7-9-11 increasingly separates the idea of a royally mediated justice that manifests itself in the protection of the poor and in an irreproachable jurisdiction from a real Davidic figure.[55] The inscription focused on Zion in Isa 16:1–5 confirms this impression: Even the hated Moab is admitted to the mountain of God, contrary to his exclusion in Deut 23:2–3.[56] Moab's fugitives will also find protection on Zion, in the place where a throne has been set up in faithfulness and where there will always be someone who judges, seeks justice, and strives for righteousness (v. 5). The lexeme "king" (מלך) is also missing here, and although "house" (בית) is not mentioned, the "tent of David" (אהל דוד) is. In addition, the usual guarantee of the dynastic promise עד עולם ("forever") is missing (cf. 2 Sam 7:13, 16; 2 Kings 2:45; Isa 9:6; Ps 89:5; Prov 29:14; 1 Chr 17:12, 14; 22:10). No more offspring from the house of David is expected, but the throne on which the judge sits is in the tent of David. On the one hand, this alludes to the time when the ark of God still lived in a tent, while David

54 Hugh G.M. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah*, The Didsbury Lectures (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998): 47: "[. . .] unprejudiced by the corruption which more privileged members of society might seek to introduce into the judicial process"; see Williamson, *Isaiah 6–12*: 651–53.

55 Williamson, *Davidic Kingship in Isaiah*: 286.

56 Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja*: 163–64; Isa 16,1–5 has no parallel in the Moab oracle in Jer 48.

already dwelt royally (2 Sam 7:2; cf. Ps 78:60; Ps 132:3). On the other hand, "tent" (אהל) often also stands for the sanctuary, especially in the context of protection and asylum (Isa 33:20–21; Ps 27:5; 61:5;), which fits well with the fugitives of Moab. The throne here does not serve as a symbol of rule but indicates that the person sitting on it is well versed in jurisdiction and justice. This knowledge does not simply fall to him, but he "studies" (דרש) the law, as is otherwise said only of Ezra in the OT: "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). The fact that the one on the throne is an expert in matters of law and justice, "well versed" (מהיר), is also affirmed only by Ezra (Ezra 7:6). The expression is so singular that the conclusion suggests itself that the expected person on the throne in the Tent of David, who is skilled in jurisprudence and justice, was deliberately portrayed as a scribe.[57]

4.3 Law and Justice in Isa 13–27

Recent exegesis of Isaiah has increasingly realized that the so-called apocalypse in Isa 24–27 is not a separate unit from the sayings of the nations in Isa 13–23, but in its composition is to be understood as their conclusion.[58] Just as Isa 12 concludes the first partial composition of the book of Isaiah, the following section also ends with songs and chants: "From the perspective of the canonical editors these chapters receive their interpretation in the oracles of chapters 24–27 in which one again hears the liturgy of the redeemed community."[59] Out of military conflicts, political upheavals, and social injustices, the community of the redeemed emerges and offers its songs of praise to YHWH, the only King of the world, on Mount Zion (Isa 24:23). Because God punishes the arrogance and superiority of the unrighteous and wicked worldwide (Isa 13:11; 14:5, 20–21; 17:14; 25:11–12; 26:5), the "we-community" of the saved hears the songs from everywhere: צבי לצדיק "Glory to the righteous!" (Isa 24:16). However, there is no consensus as to who is meant by the *ṣaddīḳ,* "righteous."[60] On the one hand, it is understood to mean those who act ethically, whether they are from Israel or from any other nation. Just as Noah escaped the flood because of his righteousness, the righteous need not fear the coming of YHWH when he calls all nations to account. On the contrary: The judgment becomes a reason for them to rejoice in their deliverance.[61] On the other hand, the righteous could also refer to YHWH himself (cf. Exod 9:27; Deut 32:4; Isa 45:21; Zeph 3:5;

57 Williamson, *Variations on a Theme*: 61: "There is therefore more than a hint here that this character is being presented in scribal guise."
58 Berges, *Buch Jesaja*: 139–41.
59 Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979): 332.
60 LXX disambiguates: "Hope for the 'pious' (εὐσεβής)."
61 Vermeylen, *Prophète*: 359–60: "The 'righteous person,' on the other hand, has nothing to fear; on the contrary, divine intervention will benefit him."

Ps 7:10, 12; 11:7; 116:5; 119:137; 129:4; 145:17; Lam 1:18; Dan 9:14; Ezra 9:15; Neh 9:8, 33; 2 Chr 12:6) as there is no more room for the wicked once he has established his righteous order. This is the true foundation for jubilation.[62] Be that as it may, YHWH and the righteous stand in the closest proximity to each other, as the relatively rare צבי "adornment/glory" makes clear. In Isa 4:2, the term "[. . .] refers to the God-fearing population that YHWH allows to grow up in the land together with their fruits."[63] In contrast, God himself becomes the glorious crown for the remnant of his people in Isa 28:5. This glory becomes visible in the God of righteousness and in his righteous people, in contrast to the withering adornment of all human pride (Isa 13:19; 23:9; 28:1, 4).

The vocabulary of justice appears again in the context of a song that the redeemed sing about the city protected by God: "We have a strong city; he sets up salvation like walls and bulwarks." (Isa 26:1). The fact that God sets up "salvation" (ישועה) for this city, which can only mean Jerusalem, has its parallel in the Zion chapters in Isa 60–62 (cf. Isa 60:18; 62:6).[64] The call to open her gates so that a "righteous people" (גוי צדיק) may enter (Isa 26:2) is similar to the entry liturgies of the Psalter (cf. Ps 15; 24; 118:19–20). In addition, it displays a subtle allusion to Noah. Just as the exemplary righteous man entered the ark and escaped worldwide judgment, so too the righteous people find protection and safety in Jerusalem from the final storm of cleansing destruction. In contrast to the masses who perished in the flood and whose "mind" (יצר) was evil through and through (Gen 6:5), the righteous people who enter the city of God have a "proven mind" (יצר סמוך) that is set only on peace (Isa 26:2–3). Just as Noah is to "seal" (סגר) the ark against the flood waters (Gen 7:16), so the righteous (עמי "my people") are to "shut" the door behind them for a short time until God's wrath has passed (Isa 26:20). While Noah planted a vineyard after being saved from the flood (Gen 9:20), a vineyard is once again the focus after the divine punishment (Isa 27:2–6). The borrowings from the flood narrative are palpable,[65] but what criteria decide who belongs to the "righteous people" (Isa 26:2) and who does not? The close literary context sheds light here. The inhabitants of the towering city, the arrogant and those who trust in themselves, do not belong. The wretched and lowly do (Isa 26:5–6). The righteous can be recognized because their path is "level" (ישר/מישרים) (v. 7). The fates of the righteous and the wicked must also be recognizably different, which demands a great deal of patience from the former. They remain on the paths of divine "rulings" (משפטים) and long for his judgments to be revealed (Isa 26:8). Only in this way will the inhabitants of the earth come to know

62 Willem A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2007): 330–31; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39. With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature 16 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1996): 329, who also refers to Isa 24:14: "In each case, YHWH is lauded by the inhabitants of the earth."

63 Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*: 126.

64 Cf. James T. Hibbard, *Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27: The Reuse and Evocation of Earlier Texts and Traditions*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament / 2 16 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006): 125.

65 Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja*: 190–91.

justice (Isa 26:9). That is why God must not temper justice with mercy—otherwise the wicked will not learn the true meaning of justice (Isa 26:10).[66] The meaning of "justice" (צדק) here cannot be derived from the Mosaic laws, because they are unknown to the inhabitants of the earth, but it is the salvific "[. . .] recognition of the world and human order, without which שלום cannot flourish [. . .]."[67] It refers back to the subject of the lamentation in Isa 24:5—the desecration of the earth, the transgression of the "instructions" (תורת), the violation of the "statutes (חק), and the breaking of the "everlasting covenant" (ברית עולם). The context, which concerns not only Israel but the whole world (see the banquet for all nations in Isa 25:6–8), as well as the Noahite background suggest here a likely scribal reference to Gen 9:16. The rainbow that God places in the clouds after the flood as a sign of the eternal covenant with all of humanity reminds him of the promised punishment and violence and serves as a warning to all flesh not to jeopardize the correct world order through wickedness and injustice. "The nations may not know Yahweh. His will is not simply hidden from them. Knowledge of the basic orders of existence, the disregard of which can only lead to being cursed, is inherent in human self-awareness. ברית עולם here obviously means precisely this order, which must not be violated with impunity."[68] From a literary-historical perspective, Isa 26, a chapter that belongs to the epilogue of the oracles of the nations (Isa 13–23), the segregation of God's servants and opponents (especially Isa 65–66) has been raised to a global level, specifically in relation to the contrast between the righteous and the wicked.[69]

Justice, the recognition of the order that sustains the world and the creation, is the basis of all wholesome relationships (Isa 26:3). Where this responsibility for the well-being of all is lived out, YHWH is there with his ישועה "salvation" (Isa 26:1). This *jᵉšûʾāh* cannot occur without personal responsibility on the human side, even if its ultimate enabling reason is and always remains YHWH (cf. Isa 12:2–3; 25:9; 26:1, 18; 33:2, 6). No other text sums this up as clearly as Isa 56:1: "Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed." Without preempting an analysis, it should be emphasized that salvation as a divine gift and justice as an ethical responsibility here already go hand in hand—and not only in Isa 56. The coexistence of both variables is already present on a synchronic level in Isa 26, even if this chapter

66 Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja: 2. Teilband Jesaja 13–27*, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament 10,2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978): 990: "The thought is consistently thought through to the end: Mercy would stand in the way of the educational intention so that God must therefore refrain from tempering justice with mercy."

67 Wildberger, *Jesaja 13–27*: 989; cf. Hibbard, *Intertextuality*: 139: "[. . .] YHWH's ethical and moral requirements (משפטים) regardless of nationality [. . .]."

68 Wildberger, *Jesaja 13–27*: 922, who sees at this point a merging of the Noahic and Sinai covenants (cf. Exod 31:16); cf. the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:7, 13, 19; Ps 105:10; 1 Chr 16:17) and the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 23:5; Isa 55:3; Isa 61:8); according to Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27*: 323, this is a bundling of all "eternal covenants."

69 Hibbard, *Intertextuality*: 139: "A dichotomization of the community in Third Isaiah is redeployed in Isaiah 26 to characterize the entire world."

and the whole of Isa 24–27 can be classified diachronically later than the so-called Trito-Isaianic corpus.

4.4 Law and Justice in Isa 28–33

The vocabulary of justice also characterizes the following chapters (Isa 28–33). Only the presence of a population in Jerusalem that meets the requirements of justice and righteousness enables YHWH to reign in it as king.[70] YHWH Sabaoth will become a radiant king to this remnant of God's people on that day, a glorious crown and a splendid garland (Isa 28:5). The crown in question here is neither a concrete or imagined city, nor any other place, "[. . .] but God himself, or rather, God himself fulfills its function."[71] Just as YHWH's kingship introduces this group of chapters, the voices of a group of people confessing him stands at the end: "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our ruler, the Lord is our king; he will save us." (Isa 33:22; cf. 33:17).

The root פאר "to be glorious" (Isa 28:5) is quite prominent in Isa 60 (Isa 60:7, 9, 13, 19, 21; cf. 61:3) and, together with the "rest" (שאר), refers to Isa 4:2–5. This intratextual reference becomes irrefutable if one considers the construction "spirit of justice" (רוח משפט), which occurs only in these two passages in the entire OT. In Isa 4:4, YHWH purifies Jerusalem through the spirit of justice and YHWH is the spirit of justice for the one who sits in judgment and heroic strength for those who turn back the battle at the gate in Isa 28:6. Similar to the offspring from the root of Jesse, whom God empowers through the gift of his spirit to enforce justice in an incorruptible manner, the holy remnant, the congregation of the pious, is also endowed with the spirit of justice.[72] The parallelization of singular (יושב "who sits") and plural (משיבים "who push back") points to a collective understanding of the one who watches over the righteous judgment in all matters of dispute.[73] He pushes the "war" (מלחמה), the social struggles, back towards the "[city] gate" (שער), precisely where legal matters are decided. The paronomasia and final position of the nouns *šᵉ'ar* "remnant" in v. 5 and *ša'ar* "gate" in v. 6 are hardly coincidental, but confirm that it is this remnant that God equips with the gift of his spirit so that they are able to judge in righteousness, and he thus brings about salvation from the

70 See Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–4*, 63: "With the corrupt leaders removed, YHWH will be able to establish His kingship in the newly cleansed city."

71 Willem A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja 28–39*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2010): 60.

72 Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja*: 223.

73 Seen differently in Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000): 390: "The one who sits in judgment is, no doubt, the righteous king reigning in a restored Jerusalem [. . .]."

śa'ar "storm" (v. 2).[74] Once again, the expectation of a city of God, which is to arise after the exilic catastrophe, is directly linked to the hope of righteous judges (cf. Isa 1:26–27).

Isa 28:16–17 contains one of the most central sentences on the theme of justice in the book of Isaiah: God's pronouncement that he has laid a foundation stone, a rock-solid cornerstone in Zion, is followed by the promise that he will use "justice" (משפט) as a guideline and "righteousness" (צדקה) as a plumb line.[75] This post-exilic reflection has been inserted into the ancient masonry of the Isaianic accusation against Jerusalem's drunken priests and prophets (vv. 7–22), which only makes the contrast more stark.[76] It is precisely in the city of Jerusalem that YHWH has built upon a solid foundation that such scandalous scenes occur—those staggering and slurring men of God pretending to announce the Almighty's decisions. Thus, the hope of rest for the exhausted people who seek safety on Zion is reduced to absurdity (v. 12). Together with the almost identical statement in Isa 14:32 that "YHWH has firmly founded Zion" (יהוה יסד ציון), the pragmatics become clear: Zion is so securely established by YHWH that no power, no matter how strong, can jeopardize this place. Those who trust in it will not have to flee away (cf. Ps 55:9).[77] With the future tense ושמתי "and I will establish," God's speech carries on in v. 17a, also continuing with the building metaphor from v. 16. Like an expert builder, YHWH first provides a solid foundation and places the cornerstone, according to which everything else is aligned. He will then use a measuring line and a plumb line to check that everything is level. For the drunken leadership, it is surely unavoidable that this check will be negative: Anyone who can only slur "*zaw la zaw, qaw la qaw*" (v. 10, 13) has pronounced judgment on himself. The image of the measuring line and plumb line is also used to settle score with Manasseh's government (2 Kings 21:13), just like in the prophet Amos' criticism of the northern kingdom (Am 7:7–8; cf. Isa 34:11; Lam 2:8; the measuring line in a positive light: Isa 34:17; Jer 31:38–39; Zech 1:16). However, the explicit connection of this building-control metaphor with the theme of justice is found only in Isa 28:17a. Only that which corresponds to justice and righteousness will withstand the onslaught of judgment.[78] The first term refers to the right order (cf. Isa 28:26) and the righteous judgments, and the second to concrete

74 Landy, *Poetry*: 109: "The 'storm', *śa'ar*, a simile for the invasion which will wash away the drunkards of Ephraim and those who make a covenant with death, is rebuffed at the 'gate', *šā'ar*, by the 'remnant', *šĕ'ar*."

75 Williamson, *Justice*: 67: "[. . .] social justice will be at the very foundation of the society or community that God plans to rebuild in Zion."

76 Beuken, *Jesaja 28–39*: 49: "Against the background of chapters 24–27, the wicked administrators of Jerusalem appear as rebels who oppose YHWH's rule."

77 Jaap Dekker, *Zion's Rock-Solid Foundations: An Exegetical Study of the Zion Text in Isaiah 28:16*, Oudtestamentische studiën 54 (Leiden: Brill, 2007): 140: "Zion thus functions as a symbol of God's presence and thereby as synonymous with the temple."

78 Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001): 209: "[. . .] God is in the process of laying a new foundation stone that is unmovable before the overwhelming scourge of coming judgment."

acts of justice.[79] However, those who rely on lies and deceit—on behavior that destroys every community—will be swept away by hail and washed away by heavy rain (v. 17b). The assonance of the Hebrew verbs שפט "to judge" and שטף "to flood" is unmistakable, whereby Isa 10:22b may have served as the backdrop: "Destruction is decreed, *flooding with justice"* (שוטף צדקה).

The post-exilic adaptation of another Isaianic cry of woe against those who think they can keep their perverse plans hidden from God once again emphasizes the contrast between the fate of the wicked and the pious (Isa 29:15–16). Perpetrators of violence, mockers, and those who lie in wait for the misfortune of others for their own gain will be destroyed.[80] This group also includes those who corrupt the judiciary and bring down the "righteous" (צדיק) for trifling reasons (Isa 29:20–21). Similarly, Isa 30:18–26 contrasts the post-exilic prophecy of salvation for those faithful to YHWH with the Isaianic accusation and announcement of punishment for those who want nothing to do with the Holy Israel but follow their own plans (Isa 30:1–7, 8–17).[81] In contrast, God will show mercy on those who trust in his saving intervention, "for YHWH is a God of justice" (כי אלהי משפט יהוה) (Isa 30:18). "Justice" here refers to God's steering of history for his own ends. The idea of *mišpāṭ* characterizes the second part of the book of Isaiah (Isa 49:10, 13, 15; 54:8, 10; 55:7; 60:10) and has been editorially incorporated from there into the first part (cf. 14:1). The closest parallel is found in Mal 2:17, where the worshippers ask almost in desperation: איה אלהי המשפט "Where is the God of justice?" If YHWH is unable or unwilling to differentiate between the righteous and the wicked, he drives the pious into the greatest aporia.[82]

While post-exilic words of salvation repeatedly supplement the pre-exilic words of judgment in Isaiah 28–31, this was no longer sufficient for later authors. They entirely shaped Isa 32–33 according to their ideas of a community that YHWH armed against all external threats and internal injustices. "Freed from all haste and unrest, no longer at the mercy of being afraid of each other, people can realize what is happening around them and what is required of them [. . .]. The realm of justice is at the same time the realm of prudence and freedom."[83] According to this reading, this kingdom of justice is undoubtedly located on Zion, which has been liberated and protected by YHWH.[84] The

79 Dekker, *Zion's Rock-Solid Foundations*: 146; Beuken, *Isaiah 28–39*: 82.

80 Vermeylen, *Prophète*: 408: "The addition of vv. 19–21 marks a clear hardening of the conflict"; see also Koenen, *Heil den Gerechten*: 18–20.

81 Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja: 3. Teilband Kapitel 28–39; Das Buch, der Prophet und seine Botschaft*, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament 10,3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982): 1194–96; Beuken, *Jesaja 28–39*: 165–66.

82 Kessler, *Maleachi*: 227: "The questioners of Mal 2:17 do not want to know *whether* God is 'the God of justice.' They want to know *where* he is. They realize nothing about him."

83 Otto Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kapitel 13–39*, 3rd ed., Das Alte Testament Deutsch 18 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983): 257.

84 Wildberger, *Jesaja 28–39*: 1572: "The passages look forward to an ideal state of the 'people dwelling on Zion;' one is faced with a first eschatological transformation of the book of Isaiah."

opening verse in Isa 32:1 clarifies that such a salvific community requires leadership based on justice and righteousness: "See, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice." The particle הן, usually translated as "see," can occasionally be rendered with a conditional "if."[85] This could also apply to this passage, as the king in question and the grammatical use here without an article is truly a poor match for the emphatic attention marker "see." Be that as it may, YHWH is acclaimed as regent (Isa 33:17) at the end of this compositional unit: "Your eyes will see the king in his beauty" (תחזינה עיניך מלך ביפיו). To this question of his identity the answer is clearly: "For the Lord is our judge (שפטנו), the Lord is our ruler (מחקקנו), YHWH is our king (מלכנו), he will save us" (Isa 33:22). The sole reign of YHWH connects Isa 32–33 with the idea in Isa 40–52 of YHWH as the only מלך "king" (Isa 41:21; 43:15; 44:6), whom all the kings of the nations will serve (Isa 41:2; 45:1; 49:7, 23; 52:15; 60:3, 10–11; 62:2).

The "kingdom of justice"[86] anticipated in Isaiah 32–33, can only be imagined if a just authority ensures the enforcement of justice and righteousness. If and insofar as the social elite acts according to justice and righteousness, every single person will be able to offer shelter to the weak whom the economic storms threaten with destruction (Isa 32:2). This is not about a perfect world separated from earthly reality, but about "[. . .] a prophecy of the transformation of society in the pending time of salvation."[87] The preposition ל ("for," "to," or "towards"), which seems surprising at this point, indicates that law and justice are the normative guidelines to which the political leadership must align itself.[88] This creates an antithesis to the vineyard song, because only in Isa 5:7 is the preposition *lamed* also placed before these nouns: "He expected justice (למשפט) but saw bloodshed; righteousness (לצדקה) but heard a lament."[89] However, Isa 32:1 does not use *ṣᵉdāqāh* but *ṣædæḳ* because of the broader scope of meaning, which goes beyond the administration of justice and solidarity and refers to the state of salvation as a whole, which cannot be achieved without *mišpāṭ* and *ṣᵉdāqāh.* Zion/Jerusalem is the community that exemplifies this situation: *ṣædæḳ* is God's plan for his city, its leaders, and inhabitants (cf. Isa 1:21, 26; 11:4–5; 16:5; 26:9–10). This plan presupposes YHWH's power to assert himself and who redeems his people and leads them back from exile and dispersion. This historical power of salvation is his righteousness (cf. *ṣædæḳ* in Isa 41:2, 10; 42:6, 21; 45:8, 13, 19; 51:5; 61:3; 62:2).

In the kingdom of justice, which is guaranteed by a just authority (Isa 32:1), everyone finds protection and safety, all obduracy is removed (vv. 3–4; cf. 6:10), and the fool is no longer considered a noble person (v. 5). The reflection on wisdom that follows

85 *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, 3rd ed., s.v. "הֵן", refers to Hag 2:12–13; 2 Chr 7:13; Exod 4:1; 8:22; Jer 3:1; and Prov 11:31.

86 Cf. the heading of Kaiser, *Jesaja 13–39*: 254 on Isa 32:1–8: "In the kingdom of righteousness."

87 Kaiser, *Jesaja 13–39*: 255.

88 Williamson, *Justice*: 72.

89 Willem A.M. Beuken, *Jesaja 28–39*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2010): 227.

(vv. 6–8) explains that the fool and the scoundrel destroy social cohesion through deceit and a lack of solidarity.[90]

A further treatment, now no longer oriented on wisdom, but eschatologically oriented, once again addresses justice and righteousness (vv. 15–20). It is based on vv. 9–14 and limits the desolation of the city, which according to v. 14 is to last "forever" until "the Spirit from on high is poured out on us" (v. 15). This is the only place in the OT where *nifal* form of ערה [actually "uncover"] occurs and it is probably used by the scribal authors at this point to create a subtle connection to the unveiling of the women in v. 11 (ערר is a secondary form of ערה [HALAT 841]). The threatening word against the careless rich women of the upper class (Isa 32:9–14) takes Isaiah's announcement of punishment (Isa 3:16–4:1) and connects it with the post-exilic word of purification ברוח משפט "by the spirit of judgment" (Isa 4:4). The final vv. of Isa 32 can therefore be described as a midrash-like reflection on justice and righteousness at the expected time of salvation. The gift of the Spirit is no longer limited to a future David, as in Isa 11:1–3, but extends to the we-group of the pious and righteous.[91] Nowhere else in the OT is the idea of a collective gift of the spirit (cf. Isa 44:3; Ezek 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 3:1–2) so closely linked to the enforcement of law and justice as a precondition for a new society of peace. The spirit of God will descend on the farmland that has been rendered infertile through exploitation, lies, corruption, and the bending of the law, where only thistles and thorns still thrive. It is he who enables and promotes righteous action: "It is righteousness that men should do, but God gives them the opportunity to do it through the outpouring of his spirit."[92] When this happens, the desert becomes a garden filled with trees that in turn becomes a forest (Isa 32:15b). This comparison, which symbolizes the transformation into the positive, goes back to the almost identical formulation in Isa 29:17. However, the effect is heightened here, because unlike there, it is not Lebanon—particularly known for its cedars—that becomes a garden filled with trees, but now the desert becomes a wooded Carmel. The point of comparison lies in the tree density,[93] which, to put it casually, increases from zero (=desert) to a hundred (=forest). However, it is not about trees per se, but about a transformation that illustrates the reorganization of society when "justice dwells" (שכן משפט) and "righteousness settles" (צדקה תשב) (v. 16).[94] This pair of terms refers to a just legal system and to the solidarity of each individual, which leads to a wholesome coexistence for all. Law and justice will not be

90 Landy, *Poetry*: 267: "The malfeasance of the villain is thus the antithesis of the justice of the officials and the king in v.1 [. . .]."

91 Landy, *Poetry*: 304: "We glimpse the Davidic apotheosis, from the point of view of its evanescence."

92 Rolf Rendtorff, "Jesaja 56,1 als Schlüssel für die Komposition des Buches Jesaja," in *Kanon und Theologie: Vorarbeiten zu einer Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991): 178.

93 Wildberger, *Jesaja 28–39*: 1278; cf. Isa 51:3, where God turns Zion's desert into the Garden of Eden.

94 Landy, *Poetry*, 283: "Justice and righteousness emanate from the city and its hierarchy, to reside in the country."

onlookers but will permanently dwell in the transformed society.[95] Where this is the case, *šālôm*, peace as perfect salvation, is realized, as v. 17a formulates: "The effect of righteousness will be peace" (*opus iustitiae pax*). Peace and security will be the result of this exercise of justice as a behavior that builds up the community and respects the cosmic context of all life (v. 17b). Without such justice, which must be done again and again, there can be no peace. Justice and righteousness are neither a divine gift nor the result of human action alone, "They are gift and achievement in one."[96] On the level of both the Isaianic oracles and of editorial developments, Isaiah 33 occupies an important final position in the first part of the book, especially regarding the subject of justice and righteousness: "The Lord is exalted, he dwells on high; he filled Zion with justice and righteousness" (v. 5).[97] However, neither divine decree or miraculous providence create this situation, it arises from the separation of sinners and righteous. Only those who live in righteousness, literally those who "walk in righteousness" (הלך צדקות), who speak truth, who keep their hands off bribery, who close their ears and eyes to criminal machinations will dwell on safe heights—where YHWH also dwells (Isa 33:15–16).[98] Zion as a place of living justice, as a city of justice, is the great utopia of the Book of Isaiah, which will prevail against all internal and external dystopias.[99] However, despite all the hope for a just people who will live on Zion, it must be said that this utopia does not take slaves into account. As the property of their masters, they belong to the household and remain unnoticed in the design of the eschatological time of salvation.

4.5 Law and Justice in Isa 40–54

When the second part of the book of Isaiah (cf. Isa 40:14, 27; 41:1; 42:1, 3, 4; 50:8; 51:4) mentions משפט "justice," it is not about the claim of the poor to receive care and solidarity, which YHWH demands from the ruling class in particular (see Isa 1:17, 21; 3:14; 5:7; 9:6; 10:2; 28:6, 17; 32:7, 16; 33:5), but about the implementation of his historical guidance. Just as he is committed to the salvation of the afflicted among his people, he is also committed to the life of his people among the nations. YHWH's *mišpāṭ* here means nothing less than the righteous leadership of world history: "The way of the law, the right way, is the right way to act, not as regards to the leadership of the physical world, but the leadership of world history."[100] The Judeans faced an important question during

95 Wildberger, *Jesaja 28–39*: 1278.

96 Wildberger, *Jesaja 28–39*: 1279.

97 Beuken, *Jesaja 28–39*: 276, who refers to 1:21, 27; 5:7; 9:6; 16:6; 28:17; 32:1, 16.

98 This is overlooked by Krašovec, *Righteousness*: 76, when he describes justice in Isa 33 "as a pure divine gift from the abundance of God's saving righteousness."

99 Landy, *Poetry*: 309: "It is the world city, which nonetheless is rustic; it is the *axis mundi*, linking heaven and earth, and shifting between different domains; it is utopian and dystopian."

100 Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 5th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968): 294–95.

the Babylonian exile and particularly during the triumphal march of the Persian King Cyrus, who had conquered the despised Babylon. There he had not abolished the cult of Marduk but had instead restored it to its former glory.[101] Was YHWH still interested in his people at all or was he not rather playing politics with the rulers of the world at their expense? The theologians of the exile behind the so-called Deutero-Isaiah were the laughing third party in the inner-Babylonian dispute between the priests of Marduk and the followers of the moon god Sin, whom the last Neo-Babylonian king Nabonid had favored. They proclaimed YHWH as the unique and incomparable one who rules over creation and history alike: "None of the Babylonian gods can be granted this supreme power over creation and history, since their predictions of the future proved to be wrong, while in contrast YHWH alone correctly announced the victory parade of the Persian king."[102]

The term משפט "justice" plays a central role in the Jacob-Israel overture in Isa 40:12–31. It is found at the beginning (v. 14) and toward the end (v. 27) and forms a chiastic framework together with the parallel word דרך "way." The answer to the rhetorical question of who taught YHWH about the path of justice—who counseled him in guiding the world—can only be "no one" (v. 14). Because this is the case, Jacob's complaint is also dismissed: "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God" (v. 27b). Unlike in some Psalms (cf. Ps 35:23; 37:5–6; 140:13), the reference to God's advocacy of justice here does not lie in the context of a trusting plea, but in an appeal out of great need.[103] YHWH would not be himself (cf. tetragram in vv. 13 and 27) if he did not also stand by his own during life's dark moments. It is not the complaint itself that is rejected, but the underlying skepticism that YHWH would not care for his own. He reacts in a similar way to Job: "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?" (Job 40:8).[104] For the individual as well as for the people as a whole, YHWH—to use the words of the wise men of Babylon—holds the tablets of fate in his hand.

After Isa 40:12–31 raises the problem of who is the sole Lord over creation and history, Isa 41–48 deals with the concrete manner of world governance.[105] The proof of prophecy (Isa 41:22, 27; 42:8–9; 48:3, 6) becomes the decisive criterion for YHWH's

101 Matthias Albani, "Deuterojesajas Monotheismus und der babylonische Religionskonflikt unter Nabonid," in *Der eine Gott und die Götter: Polytheismus und Monotheismus im antiken Israel* ed. Manfred Oeming and Konrad Schmid (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2003): 179: "The decisive question in the years after 587 was: Who really determines the course of history—Marduk or YHWH?"

102 Albani, "Deuterojesajas Monotheismus": 200.

103 Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2008): 158: "It is not about an episodic crisis in the relationship, but about a fundamental break in the relationship!"

104 JiSeong J. Kwom, *Scribal Culture and Intertextuality. Literary and Historical Relationships between Job and Deutero-Isaiah*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament / 2 85 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016): 187–89 does not address this similarity.

105 Cf. Albani, "Deuterojesajas Monotheismus": 190.

divinity and the vanity of the foreign gods (cf. Isa 43:18–19; 44:10–17; 46:6–7). Thus, he calls on the nations to join him in למשפט "standing in judgment" (v. 1). Because it was he who awakened the Persian King Cyrus from the East and crushed the nations and their kings like dust with his military might, YHWH is the only true God. The gods of the nations with their idols, on the other hand, are nothing but wind and emptiness (Isa 41:29): "He who achieves nothing cannot be God [. . .]. Efficiency means existence, whereas ineffectiveness indicates non-existence."[106] In YHWH's historical plan, the Persian ruler is indeed his anointed one (Isa 44:28; 45:1), but only as a political instrument appointed by him (Isa 45: 3–4; 46:11; 48:15).

Cyrus does not bear the title *ʿœḇœḏ* ("slave/servant"), that belongs to Jacob/Israel, the part of the exiled people of God who are prepared to carry the testimony for YHWH and his *mišpāṭ* (Isa 42:1, 3, 4; 49:4; 51:4) into the world of nations. He has called him as his *ʿœḇœḏ* (Isa 41:9; 42:6; 43:1; 48:12; 49:1), who will return to him as a deliverer.[107] The term *ʿœḇœḏ* appears in the slave laws of the Pentateuch to indicate the greatest possible asymmetrical dependence on the respective master. Here it is used as a title of honor for the part of the exiled people of God that trusts entirely in YHWH who is the one who can redeem and liberate them from the power of Babylon.[108] Its role is to serve as a sign to the nations that only YHWH is the God who saves from bondage (Isa 43:10–11).[109] This divine plan places his people in exile and those scattered in the diaspora under an obligation. How are the nations to come to the realization of YHWH's power if he makes the exodus from Babylon possible, but then only a few make their way back to Judea and Jerusalem? Only those are *ʿœḇœḏ* who entrust themselves to the God who liberates them from political bondage, who surrender themselves to him like a slave to his master. This background is made explicit in Isa 44:5b, which states that some exiles would write, that is engrave, ליהוה "belonging to YHWH" on their hand. Other slaves have their hands visibly branded with the name of their owners, but exiled Israel bears the name of its divine owner and liberator.[110]

The triple evidence of *mišpāṭ* in the first Servant Song (Isa 42:1, 3, 4) indicates that only when the *ʿœḇœḏ* is ready to leave Babylon, the land of deportation and the cults of foreign gods, can he reveal to the nations the legal decision about YHWH's uniqueness.[111]

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106 Berges and Beuken, *Einführung*: 139.

107 Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 247: "The Servant who is redeemed returns to the one who redeems him—that is, to the bosom of his family."

108 Ulrich Berges, "The Semantics of Dependency in the Book of Isaiah and Beyond," in *Control, Coercion, and Constraint: The Role of Religion in Overcoming and Creating Structures of Dependency*, ed. Wolfram Kinzig and Barbara Loose, Dependency and Slavery Studies 14 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2025): 27–44.

109 Williamson, *Justice*: 100: "Among the nations [. . .] there is a crying need for justice of the sort that we have seen the king was encouraged to implement previously within Israel [. . .]."

110 Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*: 324; on slave markings from antiquity to modern times, Iris Därmann, *Undienlichkeit: Gewaltgeschichte und politische Philosophie*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2021): 37–57 (chapter II: "Unter die Haut: Eigentums- und Strafmarkierungen").

111 Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*: 229.

The breakthrough to monotheism has less to do with the reduction to a single deity than with the realization that only YHWH is "a righteous God and a Savior" (אל צדיק ומושיע) (Isa 45:21). His righteousness does not consist in the subjugation of foreign nations, but in the liberation of his people living in captivity and dispersion. Thus, the noun *ṣœdœḳ* in these chapters is often used in connection with YHWH's saving acts as mediated by the Persian king[112] and is to be witnessed by the servant Jacob/Israel (Isa 41:2, 10; 42:6; 45:8, 13, 19; 51:1, 5, 7). All of God's people who profess this saving righteousness "shall triumph in YHWH" (ביהוה יצדקו) (Isa 45:25). They are on the right side in the legal dispute about his uniqueness and do not have to fear any humiliation.[113] They are the ones who testify that only in him are "*righteousness* and strength" (צדקות ועז) (Isa 45:24). The plural of *ṣᵉdāqāh* here, as elsewhere, denotes God's acts of salvation (cf. Judg 5:11; 1 Sam 12:7; Mic 6:5; Ps 103:6; Dan 9:16), which he enforces with all his might (cf. Isa 51:9; 62:8; Ps 68:29, 35, 36; 77:15; 105:4; 140:8).[114]

Is there a difference, a shift in meaning, in the use of the two nouns צֶדֶק and צְדָקָה in Isa 40–42? The fact that both terms are used synonymously in Isa 45:8 and 51:5–6 speaks to the contrary. However, only צְדָקָה is used as a parallel word to שלום (Isa 48:18; 54:13–14), which possibly indicates that *ṣᵉdāqāh* is aimed more at the state of salvation as such (Isa 48:18; 51:6, 8; 54:14, 17; cf. 60:17; 61:10–11), while *ṣœdœḳ* rather contains the moment of intention and active bringing about (Isa 41:2, 10; 42:6, 21; 45:13, 19; 51:1, 5, 7).[115]

Whoever decides to bear witness to this righteous, saving God belongs to his *ʿœḇœḏ*. After the return from Babylon, Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and Zion will shine in new splendor. This promise for the future puts the servant of God, those who are prepared to trust in YHWH, under great pressure. Unless YHWH brings salvation quickly, the *ʿœḇœḏ* is in danger of succumbing to the skeptics among his own people and to the nations with their gods. The emphatic words of God in Isa 46:13 are intended to strengthen trust, as the deliverance is near: "I bring near my deliverance (צדקה), it is not far off, and my salvation (תשועה) will not tarry."[116]

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112 Friedrich V. Reiterer, *Gerechtigkeit als Heil:* צדק *bei Deuterojesaja. Aussage und Vergleich mit der alttestamentlichen Tradition* (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1976): 78: "צדק thus speaks of Yahweh's plan of salvation being realized in victory. Cyrus is called as an 'auxiliary tool' to carry out this intention of God"; Krašovec, *Righteousness*: 79: "The decision to free Israel and to bring about reconciliation and justice on earth is the result of God's *ṣedeq*."

113 See צדיק "just/right" in Isa 41:26a; see also Reiterer, *Gerechtigkeit*: 37: "צדיק is the one who, procedurally speaking, 'is right'" (cf. Isa 43:9, 26).

114 Fahlgren, *ṣᵉdāḳā*: 100: "Obviously, *ṣᵉdāḳōt* here primarily means saving deeds, i.e. the victory that Yahweh has now given Israel over its enemies"; cf. Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*: 438–39.

115 Thus with Reiterer, *Gerechtigkeit*: 116, who, however, qualifies that these nuances are not distinguishable in Isa 45:13 and 46:12–13.

116 Cf. Isa 50:8: "He who vindicates me (Hif. צדק) is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? (בעל משפטי) Let them confront me."

However, post-exilic developments did not bring about a massive return of exiled and dispersed people to the destroyed homeland. Zion/Jerusalem did not shine brightly at all but remained greatly reduced in size and population for many centuries. Those factors led to cognitive dissonance between positive expectation and negative reality, which the authors of the fourth Servant Song processed in literary form in Isa 52:13–53:12.[117] If the fourth Servant Song was deliberately inserted between the Zion chapters of Isa 52 and 54, then its significance must lie in the attempt to remove a serious obstacle to a common future for God's people after the catastrophic exile.

The "we" statements in the middle section confirm this perspective, because the majority of the people, who had initially seen the servant as beaten by God (53:1–3), have recognized that "he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed" (v. 5). This change of insight can only have taken place within God's people themselves[118] and do not include the nations, who would have recognized Israel's suffering as beneficial to their own salvation. Such an idea has no foundation in the book of Isaiah or in the entirely of the OT. If the servant outside the songs is the part of God's people that is ready to return from Babylon and thus testifies to YHWH's will and power to provide salvation before the eyes of the world, then the change of heart of the "we" refers to this *ʿæḇœḏ*, who had borne the burden of exile not for his own offenses, but for their guilt. The true servant of God is not a historical reality that has already been completed, but an ongoing process:

> Throughout the Deutero-Isaiah text, the *eved* Israel will not completely match with the (loyal) *eved*. Only the death of the *eved* will show to an anonymous We that the *eved* makes "the many" righteous. This will only happen through his suffering on their behalf. But it will happen. One could speak of a "perspectival identification" of *eved* and Israel.[119]

Verse 4 states that the servant was "crushed for our iniquities," that he took them on as a burden. A comparable statement can be found only in Lam 5,7: "Our ancestors sinned; they are no more, and we bear their iniquities." While Lam speaks of involuntarily bearing the guilt of others (cf. Ezek 18,19–20), Isa 53 refers to the liability for guilt by proxy, so that the chastisement of the servant leads to healing and peace for the many. This is the only way to the reconciliation with YHWH and with one another.

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117 Cf. Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 49–54*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2015): 208–78 (with further bibliography).

118 Bernd Janowski, *Stellvertretung: Alttestamentliche Studien zu einem theologischen Grundbegriff*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 165 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1997): 91: "The confession of guilt made in vv. 4–6 is the prerequisite for the future or salvation of Israel, because it brings with it not only an *Israel* freed from guilt, but an *Israel transformed by knowledge*" (italics in original).

119 Rainer Kessler, "Kyros und der eved bei Deuterojesaja: Gottes Handeln in Macht und Schwäche," in *Christus und seine Geschwister: Christologie im Umfeld der Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, ed. Marlene Crüsemann and Carsten Jochum-Bortfeld (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009): 150.

Only this manner prepares the way for a common future in Zion after the catastrophe: "By embracing the suffering of the servant as the suffering that the 'we'-group have deserved, and by the confession of the sins in Isa 53, the holy city can and will now be re-established."[120]

As the one who has been justified by God, the servant is the "righteous one" (*ṣaddīḳ*) who "makes the many righteous" (Hif. צדק) by bearing their guilt and insofar as the "we" as part of the "many" (רבים) recognize this as an atonement of guilt.[121] This reflection on the fate of the exile, which threatens to tear apart the people of God in their considerations on guilt and the atonement of guilt, comes to a conclusion unique in the OT:

> [. . .] that God himself has worked the fate of his servant and that the death on the behalf of his people does not only apply retroactively to a certain group, but that the servant will also bear the sins of the many in the future and will vicariously, namely as the righteous one who makes sinners righteous, bring about the atonement for their guilt (Is 53:11f.).[122]

According to Isa 53, the solution to the conflict is not that each generation bears its own burden of debt (cf. Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2), but that the servant, as the one slain by God, bears the guilt of the many and disposes of it forever.[123]

However, judging by the further course of the book of Isaiah, the acknowledgement of the atonement of guilt, as hoped for by the authors of Isaiah 53, did not occur. The following assessment can therefore be accepted:

> The literary success of the idea of atonement by proxy failed to materialize. Even where its reception and further development would have been closest, namely in the Trito-Isaianic layers, there is nothing to be found there but at best a reinterpretation or even implicit rejection of the idea of substitution.[124]

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120 Fredrik Hägglund, *Isaiah 53 in the Light of Homecoming after Exile*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament / 2 31 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008): 136.

121 Reiterer, *Gerechtigkeit*: 107–9; Cf. hifil "establish justice for" (2 Sam 15:4; Ps 82:3; Dan 12:3), "declare blameless" (Exod 23:7; Deut 25:1; 1 Kings 8:32; par. 2 Chr 6:23; Isa 5:23; Prov 17:15).

122 Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *Der Gott der Lebendigen: Eine biblische Gotteslehre*, Topoi Biblischer Theologie 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011): 375.

123 Randall Heskett, *Messianism within the Scriptual Scrolls of Isaiah*, Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies 456 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007): 189: "The suffering described here is strongly connected to guilt. The Servant is not merely suffering justly or unjustly with his people but is bearing the consequences of their wrongdoing in the same way that a sacrificial animal atones for the sins of the people."

124 Hermann Spieckermann, "Konzeption und Vorgeschichte des Stellvertretungsgedankens im Alten Testament," in *Gottes Liebe zu Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 33 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001): 153, with reference to Isa 59:16, where YHWH states disappointedly that no one is prepared to intercede (Hif. פגע). The difference between Hif. פגע "to intercede for" (Isa 53:12) and "to intervene against" (Isa 59:16) must also be considered, according to Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 55–66*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2022): 303.

The last part of the book of Isaiah shows no trace of a reconciled society, but, on the contrary, the ever-increasing confrontation between the *ʿāḇāḏîm* (plural of *ʿæḇæḏ*) and their opponents. It is therefore hardly coincidental that the word "righteousness" (*ṣᵉdāqāh*) re-appears precisely where the "slaves/servants" of God are mentioned (54:17; then 56:6; 63:17; 65:8, 9, 13[3x], 14, 15; 66:14).[125] They are the ones to whom YHWH assures his justice and support, as he did to the *ʿæḇæḏ* and the city of Zion described as a woman. Isa 54:14a states that she is firmly established through *ṣᵉdāqāh* and no longer needs to fear anyone. The same applies directly to the servants, the true descendants of the Servant and Zion: "No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, says the Lord" (Isa 54:17ab–b). This assurance by God is described here in a unique way as *naḥᵃlāh* "heritage," a term that is otherwise never used in parallel with "righteousness." Perhaps this is an allusion to Levitical circles, as they were not entitled to a share in the distribution of land because their inheritance was the priesthood (Josh 18:7). God's righteousness (מאתי "from me") protects his *ʿāḇāḏîm*. They can trust that they will not perish in the bitter dispute with their opponents.

4.6 Law and Justice in Isa 55–66

The final section is of particular importance for concepts of justice in the book of Isaiah. With unprecedented clarity, divine justice—God's salvific project for Israel and Zion amidst the world of nations—is linked with human justice, the personal commitment to acting in solidarity. This is set out at the beginning of Isa 56: "Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed." (v. 1). One of the first to recognize this dual value of *ṣᵉdāqāh* as YHWH's gift of salvation and an ethical mandate to human addressees was the Heidelberg Old Testament scholar Rolf Rendtorff.[126] The coupling of justice and salvation replaces the combination of righteousness and justice in proto-Isaiah (Isa 1:27; 5:7, 16; 9:6; 16:5; 26:9; 28:17; 32:1, 16; 33:5), whereby human solidarity and divine salvific action are directly related to one another.[127] The call in 56:1 to uphold justice and practice righteousness

125 The singular עֶבֶד "servant" then no longer occurs in the book of Isaiah (cf. 20:3 [Isaiah]; 22:20 [Eliakim]; 37:35 [David]; 41:8, 9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1–2, 21, 26; 45:4; 48:20 [Israel/Jacob]; within the Servant Songs in 49:3, 5, 6; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11).

126 Rendtorff, "Jesaja 56:1": 172–79 (esp. 174).

127 Judith Gärtner, "'Keep Justice!' (Isaiah 56.1): Thoughts Regarding the Concept and Redaction History of a Universal Understanding of Ṣedaqa," in *Ṣedaqa and Torah in Postexilic Discourse*, ed. Susanna Gillmayr-Bucher and Maria Häusl, Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies 640 (London: Bloomsbury International Clark, 2017): 89: "The request directed at human beings is complemented by the action of God [. . .]."

specifies the invitation to all who are striving to seek God and his salvific closeness in Isaiah 55:6.

> In terms of the history of tradition, two previously separate lines of *ṣedāqā's* speech are connected here: The demand of human *ṣedāqā* known from wisdom and prophecy with YHWH's *ṣedāqā* as an act of salvation experienced by the individual in worship and turned by Deutero-Isaiah into the eschatological and universal.[128]

Only through a life in righteousness will Zion/Jerusalem have a future of salvation as the center of post-exilic Israel.[129] For the post-exilic scribal prophets of the Book of Isaiah, the demand for active justice applies to every person (Isa 56:2), which at the same time implies an ethically, not ethnically, motivated admission to the Jerusalem cult of YHWH: "Each person, Israelite and non-Israelite, can be blessed by practicing justice. This is what it means to honor the Sabbath."[130]

The fact that God's closeness does not only mean encouragement, but also entitlement is exemplified in the criticism of a supposed righteousness that is in truth only an idolatrous aberration: "I will concede your righteousness and your works, but they will not help you" (Isa 57:12). This unmasking continues at the level of social behavior: "As if they were a nation that practiced righteousness (צדקה) and did not forsake the ordinance (משפט) of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments (משפטי צדק) they delight to draw near to God (קרבת אלהים)' (Isa 58:2b). In the absence of ethical obligations, the desire for closeness to God is nothing more than self-deception.[131] What the addressees really "desire" (חפץ) is their profit at the expense of the socially weak, which Isa 58:13 underlines with the double noun חֶפְצֶ֖ךָ "business." Those who go about their business on the Sabbath do not desire God's closeness, but to fill their own purse. According to the Old Testament, justice must be done (עשׂה) and demonstrated in concrete acts of

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128 Frank Crüsemann, "Jahwes Gerechtigkeit (ṣ^{e}dāqā / ṣädäq) im Alten Testament," *Evangelische Theologie* 36, no. 5 (1976): 447; Childs, *Isaiah*: 456: "The linkage between Israel's response and God's deliverance is not conditional but causal: do righteousness that deliverance will come."

129 Kenneth Ristau, "Recreating Jerusalem: Trito-Isaiah's Vision for the Reconstruction of the City," in *Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof: Poetry, Prophecy, and Justice in Hebrew Scripture. Essays in Honor of Francis Landy on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, ed. Andrew Gow and Peter Sabor, Biblical interpretation series 157 (Leiden: Brill, 2018): 75: "Trito-Isaiah places considerably more emphasis on the nature of the city and community, emphasizing its sacred status as a foundation for ethical exhortations. TI argues that a new city of faithful Yahwists can be or will be the progenitrix of a (restored) Israel."

130 Benedetta Rossi, "Tracking the Scribal Trails in the Book of Isaiah: The Sabbath Affair," in *Unity in the Book of Isaiah*, ed. Benedetta Rossi, Dominic S. Irudayaraj and Gina Hens-Piazza, The Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies 732 (London: Bloomsbury, 2024): 74; for Mark G. Brett, "Foreign Bodies": 39, בן אדם in Isa 56:2 refers to the image of God in Gen 1:27, but the expression does not occur there, and the close parallel in Isa 51:12 [with אנוש] also speaks against it.

131 Seizo Sekine, *Die Tritojesajanische Sammlung (Jes 56–66) redaktionskritisch untersucht*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 175 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989): 121: "Although Israel seeks Yahweh as if it were a people practicing justice, in reality it does not practice justice. Thus, its search for Yahweh is in vain."

solidarity. No search for God, no matter how intense, can replace this interpersonal solidarity.[132] The expression "rulings of justice" (משפטי צדק) is found only in the great Torah Psalm 119, where (v. 7, 62, 106, 164) "rulings of *your* justice" appears in four places. The people addressed in Isa 56–59 want God's affirmations that confirm their righteousness, their way of life. This is an illusion, indeed downright blasphemy, because this desire does not correspond with the corresponding social behavior. God is only close to those who do not keep their distance from one another.[133] In other words, those who keep their distance from fellow human beings in need also keep their distance from God.[134] This exhortation to justice is aimed at social solidarity, without which Israel cannot do YHWH's will.[135] It is confirmed by the prophetic instruction in Isa 58:3–5 about the correct way to fast, because this only pleases God if it helps the poor and the afflicted. Three basic needs—food, shelter, and clothing—must be guaranteed if life and survival are to succeed in the long term.[136] The release of the economically oppressed from debt slavery also plays an important role here, as Isa 58:6b spells out: they are "to be sent away/to be released" (שלח) as "freedmen" (חפשים).[137] Both lexemes, where they occur together in the Hebrew Bible, always denote release from debt slavery (Exod 21:26–27, Deut 15:12, 13, 18; Jer 34:9, 10, 11, 14, 16; cf. Job 39:5, release of a wild donkey).[138] If the addressees properly follow this Torah about fasting, the healing of each individual and the people will progress as quickly as the dawn replaces the darkness of the night (Isa 58:8a). Then "your vindicator shall go before you" and YHWH's glory will bring up the

132 Maria Häusl, "Searching for Forces of Group Cohesion in the Books of Nehemiah and Isaiah," in *Ṣedaqa and Torah in Postexilic Discourse*, ed. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher and Maria Häusl, Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies 640 (London: Bloomsbury International Clark, 2017): 64: "It is rather the orientation of all behavior to צדקה which draws them to God."

133 See Bohdan Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension of Cult in the Book of Isaiah*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 418 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010): 236–37; and Hrobon, "Religion and Ethics in Isaiah": 173–75.

134 Jan Koole, *Isaiah: Part 3*, *Isaiah 56–66*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Kampen: Kok, 2001): 116: "People must suffer from God's absence, when they are absent for each other. In this way demand and promise are connected."

135 Häusl, "Searching": 65: "In this text, צדקה can be understood as equivalent to 'force of group cohesion' or German '*Gemeinsinn*,' holding together a community. Doing צדקה is substantiated in the calls to work against deprivation of rights, exploitation and exclusion."

136 Houston, *Justice*: 87: "This exhortation is the only place in the prophets that asks for help the destitute as well as warning against the exploitation of those who have something to be seized, if only their labor: the poor are hungry, homeless and naked."

137 See Marco Settembrini, *Isaia in Egitto: Papiri tolemaici e vicende della comunità giudaica che legge Isaia 58,* Letteratura del Vicino Oriente antico 6 (Torino: Paideia 2018): 94–102, who cites a fragment (PCairZen I 59076) from the Zenon archive as background for ^{LXX}Isa 58,6. According to this, Tobiah, head of the Tobiad family and commander of a Ptolemaic military colony in Ammantis in eastern Jordan, sent Apollonius, the dioiketes of Ptolemy II, a eunuch together with four boys aged 7–10 as a gift or as merchandise. The four boys are described according to their appearance so that the recipient can identify them beyond doubt.

138 Berges, *Jesaja 55–66*: 249; cf. Ristau, "Recreating Jerusalem": 80–81.

rear (Isa 58:8b; cf. Exod 13:21; 14:19). The question of whether "your vindicator" (צדקך) refers to the *ṣædæq* of man or of God is the wrong one because the two are intertwined. Divine salvation can come about only when righteousness is done. The memory of the liberation from the slave house of Egypt should lead to an exodus from one's own selfishness and an entry into the will of God.[139]

The discourse on justice, which in Isa 58 focused on the observance of the Sabbath and the correct way of fasting, continues in Isa 59 in an even broader perspective. Based on the accusation in Isa 59:4 that no one appears before the court in truthfulness, *mišpāṭ* (v. 8, 9, 11, 14, 15) becomes the *leitmotif* of the entire chapter. Untruth, untruthfulness in court leads to unjust decisions, to acts of bloodshed, because innocent people are condemned to death. Those whose feet hasten to do evil and whose hands shed innocent blood do not know the path of peace (Isa 59:8; cf. 48:22; 57:21). The prophetic rebuke makes it clear that salvation for Zion and Jerusalem is delayed due to the culpable behavior of the addressees. This is followed by a collective confession of guilt (vv. 9–15a) and YHWH's reaction, which consists of him putting on his armor to enforce justice and righteousness (vv. 15b–20).

The text summarizes the social situation perfectly when the people addressed in v. 9 confess that *mišpāṭ* is far away and *ṣᵉdāqāh* does not reach them. It resembles the lament of the we-group in v. 11. Isa 46:12–13 is the donor text for both verses with the divine promise that his *ṣᵉdāqāh* is not far away and his *tᵉšûʿāh* ("salvation") is not delayed. If salvation and rescue are still pending, it is not because of YHWH's failures, but because of the guilt of the people and their leadership. If justice in Isa 40–42 stood for an order of salvation that YHWH was prepared to enforce to show that he favors his people before the eyes of the nations (cf. 40:14, 27; 42:1, 3, 4; 51:4), the vision extends the requirements that this order demands of the human actors after the return from exile (56:1; 58:2; 59:8). This demand for justice and righteousness is deeply rooted in preexilic prophecy (cf. Isa 1:17, 21; 5:7, 16; 10:2; Am 5:24; 6:12, Mic 3:1, 8–9; 6:8). Where there is a lack of solidarity with the weak, "truth" (אמת) stumbles and "uprightness" (נכחה) is left behind (Isa 59:14). A society that believes it can manage without these basic values will fail, or has already failed, because lies bring down all honesty.[140] Uprightness refers to an attitude based solely on justice and righteousness, even if it leads to social exclusion (cf. Isa 57:1–2). The following diagnosis can hardly be surpassed in terms of prophetic clarity: "Truth is lacking, and whoever turns from evil is despoiled" (Isa 59:15a). The expression סר מרע "depart from evil" is also found in Ps 34:15 and Ps 37:27, which contrasts the fate of the righteous with that of the wicked. In the wisdom literature, the expression is found in Job, who also shuns evil (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). In Prov-

139 Remi Lack, *La symbolique du livre d'Isaïe: Essai sur l'image littéraire come élément de structuration*, Analecta Biblica 59 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973): 134: "The memory of the liberation from the slave house of Egypt should lead to an exodus from one's own selfishness and an entry into the will of God."

140 Koole, *Isaiah 56–66*: 196: "Life has become too corrupted by lies."

erbs, this attitude characterizes the godly (Prov 3:7; 4:27; 13:19; 14:16; 16:6, 17). In Isa 59:15a, the saying illustrates how basic values have shifted, how lies and deceit have become acceptable. Those who swim against the tide consciously make themselves the prey of those who no longer know morality.[141] But YHWH cannot accept this, because if he did not stand up for justice and righteousness, he would make himself an accomplice of liars and oppressors. Thus, the absence of justice (אין משפט) compels him to act (Isa 59:15b). Where no one stands up for justice, YHWH relies on his own righteousness (Isa 59:16). Here it refers to his will of salvation, which he enforces against the wicked.[142] To achieve this, he puts on righteousness like armor and places the helmet of salvation on his head (Isa 59:17). In doing so, he protects his own and fights as a warrior against his enemies. That he puts on the garments of vengeance does not make him a god of vengeance, but a deity who demands responsibility for actions and omissions: "It is YHWH's overpowering intervention that is motivated by his concern for justice and his bond with his people [. . .]."[143] The separation of the righteous and the wicked urges its fulfillment at the end of Isa 56:9–59:21: Only those who renounce sin in Jacob belong to the true *ʿæḇæḏ* and to the *ʿāḇāḏîm*.

According to Isa 60–62, which paint the future salvation for Zion/Jerusalem in glorious colors, Isa 63:1–6 describes YHWH as someone who treads the winepress and who returns victorious from Edom with bloodstained garments (Isa 63:1–6). When the watchmen ask who is coming, he answers: "It is I, announcing vindication [אני מדבר בצדקה], mighty to save." (63:1b). With God, announcement and fulfillment are congruent, so that his speaking is done *in* righteousness. The fact that he comes from Edom has a metaphorical meaning, because Edom's patriarch is Esau, Jacob's twin brother (cf. Gen 36:1, 8). Edom stands here for all those in Jacob who unjustly bear the honorific title "Israel" (Isa 48:1) because they do not meet the requirements of this name.[144] YHWH's saving intervention in favor of the righteous is the content of his speaking in righteousness.

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141 Daniel Kendall, "The Use of Mispat in Isaiah 59," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 96, no. 3 (1984): 398: "Conditions are so bad that the one who avoid evil is even robbed of his or her rights."

142 Koole, *Isaiah 56–66*: 165: "[. . .] his justice supports him, for his sole purpose is to establish life-giving justice."

143 Beuken, *Jesaja 28–39*: 318 (on Isa 34:8); in contrast, Jože Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment and Forgiveness: The Thinking and Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek and Modern Views*, Vetus Testamentum / Supplements 78 (Leiden: Brill, 1999): 705, argues that retribution has nothing to do with the concept of justice in the biblical writings (different on p. 793).

144 Klaus Koenen, *Ethik und Eschatologie im Tritojesajabuch. Eine literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Studie*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 62 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990): 87; Claire R. Mathews, *Defending Zion: Edom's Desolation and Jacob's Restoration (Isaiah 34–35) in Context*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 236 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995): 167: "'Esau' is represented not by the inhabitants of Edom, but by a certain portion of the post-exilic community"; see also Bernd Obermayer, *Göttliche Gewalt im Buch Jesaja: Untersuchung zur Semantik und literarischen Funktion eines theologisch herausfordernden Aspekts im Gottesbild*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 170 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2014): 287–89.

This congruence of "justice" (צדקה) and "save/salvation" (ישע) is found only in the Psalter (Ps 24:5; 36:7; 40:11; 51:6, 8; 56:1; 59:16–17; 61:10; 63:1) apart from Isaiah (Isa 45:8; 46:13; 51:16; 71:2, 15; 98:2).

In the so-called light chapters, the theme of justice also plays an important role, starting with the passage 60:17–21 inserted by the editor. The external perspective with the peoples heading to Zion/Jerusalem laden with treasures (vv. 1–16) is supplemented by the internal perspective, according to which the future of the city of God is only secured based on a just order with a just population. Without justice within the city of God, the nations will not set forth to it.[145] YHWH himself initiates this inner transformation by providing the most important building blocks of a just order: "I will appoint Peace as your overseer and Righteousness as your taskmaster" (v. 17b). The parallelization of *šālôm* and *ṣᵉdāqāh* is surprisingly rare in the OT (Isa 9:6; 32:17; 48:18; 60:17; Ps 72:3; compare with *ṣœdœq* in Ps 35:27; 85:11). Unlike before (Isa 41:3; 45:7; 52:7; 54:10; 55:12), peace is no longer about the positive consequences of the global political reorganization by the Persians, but about the salutary social state that can only be achieved through the solidarity of all. A similar shift in meaning can be observed in the concept of justice. It no longer refers to the historical salvation that YHWH brings about through Cyrus for the exiled and dispersed Israel (cf. 45:8, 23–24, 46:12–13; 48:1; 51:6, 8), but to the ethical claim on the post-exilic people of God (cf. 56:1; 57:12; 58:2; 59:9, 14, 16–17; 60:21; 61:3, 10–11; 62:1–2).[146]

The hope that in the future the people would only consist of the righteous and possess land forever (Isa 60:21) proves to be illusory. The promise of land ownership suggests that the fair distribution of land in post-exilic Israel was not in good shape.[147] Nevertheless, the prophetic authors maintain that YHWH has not put on the armor of justice in vain (59:17), but truly stands up for the "righteous" (צדיקים). The term here

145 Andrea Spans, *Die Stadtfrau Zion im Zentrum der Welt. Exegese und Theologie von Jes 60–62*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 175 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2015): 149: "The group of the righteous in Zion creates a peace order in Zion, which justifies the expectation of a migration of nations to the city of God."

146 See Kathrin Liess, "Jerusalem als Stadt des Friedens: Zur Friedensthematik in ausgewählten Psalmen und Texten aus dem Jesajabuch," in *"Mit meinem Gott überspringe ich eine Mauer" / "By my God I can Leap Over a Wall": Interreligiöse Horizonte in den Psalmen und Psalmenstudien/Interreligious Horizons in Psalms and Psalms Studies*, ed. Christian Frevel, Herders biblische Studien 96 (Freiburg: Herder, 2020): 103–4.

147 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 19B (New York: Doubleday, 2003): 218: "[. . .] there is here an underlying issue of setting to right social wrongs in evidence at the time of writing, probably about the mid-fifth century B.C.E.: expropriations, enclosure of peasant land, and unjust taxation leading to forfeiture of the plot of land on which one's survival depended." The land problem in Ps 37 (see below) is comparable to this; in contrast, Guillaume, *Land*: 19: "[. . .] land ownership was and remains irrelevant for farming. What is crucial to farmers is access to land, land use, landhold and land tenure."

goes towards a term for a group (cf. Ps 68:4; 118:15), similar to the "pious" (חסידים) in the Psalter (cf. Ps 30:5; 31:24; 37:28; 97:10; 116:15; 132:9, 16; 145:10; 148:14; 149:1, 9).[148]

The gift of the Spirit to liberate the poor and the captives in Isa 61:1–3 follows seamlessly from the theme of justice in Isa 60:17–21 on the level of the final text. The identity of the Spirit bearer has always remained controversial. Thus, the Targum identifies the person in v. 1 as the prophet and makes Jerusalem the speaker in v. 10. The identification with Jesus of Nazareth in the Gospel of Luke is only one of the many different answers to the question of the identity of the one endowed with the Spirit of God (Luke 4:16–18). The fact that Isa 61:1 is formulated in the first person is just as miniscule evidence of an individual figure as is the case with the Servant Songs or Isa 59:21. There, the combination of the plural form—the covenant of God "with them" (אותם)—and the singular—the Spirit of God "upon you" (עליך)—points to a combination of collective and individual aspects: it is the group *ʿāḇāḏîm that* continues the prophetic mission to Israel and the nations in succession to *ʿæḇœḏ* and works towards the liberation of those who are economically bound. In v. 1, the term "release" (דרור), which means the release from debt liability or debt slavery (cf. Deut 15:12–14; Lev 25:8–10; Ezek 46:17; Jer 34:8, 15, 17), is programmatic for this. The Persian tax policy, which had been based on coinage since Darius I (522–486 BC), also led to an intensification of social contrasts in the province of Yehud, as all taxpayers were now forced to earn a surplus.[149] Neh 5, a text from the same period, describes the hardship in extremely dramatic terms: vineyards, fields and houses had to be mortgaged, sons and daughters were sold into debt slavery.[150] The spirit bearer is to put an end to all of this by proclaiming the release and thereby declaring that YHWH is overruling the jurisdiction of the Persians.[151] Zion's mourning will only end when those mourning because they have been gagged by their economic hardship find joy again (61:3). If the city of God was previously accused because of the oaks and gardens, that is because of its foreign cults (Isa 1:29–30), those liberated by YHWH are now given the honorary names "oaks of righteousness" (אילי הצדק) and "planting of YHWH" (מטע יהוה). YHWH's hope that the men of Judah would be "his pleasant planting" (Isa 5:7), which proved to be an illusion in the Song of the Vineyard, is redeemed with

148 John Goldingay, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 56–66*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London: Bloomsbury, 2014): 280: "they are the people who share in salvation."

149 See Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*: 51–52.

150 Nehemiah's measures will not have been permanent, Norman K. Gottwald, *Social Justice and the Hebrew Bible*, vol. 3 (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018): 42: "We are basically left with the wider biblical attestation that in spite of numerous measures to combat impoverishment through debt, none seems to have been effective over any great length of time"; Kessler, *Erlassjahr*: 110–11, draws attention to the fact that Neh 10:32 speaks, among other things, of a waiver of the debt claim, but not of a release of slaves after six years.

151 Mark G. Brett, "Imperial Imagination in Isaiah 56–66," in *Isaiah and Imperial Context: The Book of Isaiah in Times of Empire*, ed. Andrew Abernethy et al. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013): 180: "Contrary to imagination of the Achemenid administration, it is YHWH's empire that has jurisdiction in Yehud."

the "oaks of righteousness." YHWH wraps them, the congregation of the liberated righteous, in garments of salvation and in the mantle of righteousness (Isa 61:10; cf. Bar 5:2):

> Zion, wrapped in the mantle of righteousness (עטה) and her head covered with the priestly turban, personifies the group of former debt slaves, whose change of status is described as a priestly investiture, which becomes visible in the priestly turban (פאר) and the garment of praise (מעטה תהלה).[152]

This transformation of Israel, marked by bondage and debt slavery (61:1–3), into a place of righteousness and joy has a global reach and is compared to the growth of the seed: "For as the earth brings forth its seed and the garden makes its seed sprout, so the Lord YHWH makes righteousness sprout, righteousness and praise before all nations" (61:11). The authors used Isa 45:8b as a model for this poetic image: "Let the earth open, that salvation may spring up, and let it cause righteousness to sprout up." Just as God's plan with Cyrus and the Persians took place on a global level, the righteous order on Zion will also have consequences for all nations. The praise of the liberated is fed by the experience of saving justice and resounds from Zion/Jerusalem into the world of nations.[153]

When a first-person voice then declares, "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch" (62:1), it is YHWH himself who campaigns for the implementation of the righteous order in his city at the center of the world. The fact that he does this so emphatically underlines its necessity, because the state of Jerusalem in the post-exilic-Persian period remained disastrous and there was no sign of a flourishing landscape.[154] It is therefore hardly surprising that in the last two chapters of the book of Isaiah (Isa 65–66) there is no more mention of justice and righteousness. The biblical view in Isa 60–62, which presents post-exilic Jerusalem as the center of justice and prosperity, has one blind spot. It concerns the slaves who continued to be present, as can be seen from the lists of those returning home (Ezra 2:64–65; Neh 7:67–68). According to those texts, around one sixth of those who returned from Babylon belonged to

152 Spans, *Stadtfrau Zion*: 255.

153 Willem A.M. Beuken, "Servant and Herald of Good Tidings: Isaiah 61 as an Interpretation of Isaiah 40–55," in *The Book of Isaiah*, ed. Jacques Vermeylen, Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses / Bibliotheca 81 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989): 438: "When God 'will make righteousness shoot up,' this quality will become the habitat of the nations."

154 Cf. Carmen Diller, "Jerusalem—reale Stadt oder Hoffnungsvision? Das nachexilische Jerusalembild in Tritojesaja (Jes 56–66)," in *Vom Erzählen zum Verheißen: Beiträge eines alttestamentlichen Symposions*, ed. Hubert Irsigler, Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 97 (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2014): 145; on the development of the city and countryside, e.g. Christian Frevel, *Geschichte Israels* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2015): 304–5; Oded Lipschits, "Materialkultur, Verwaltung und Wirtschaft in Juda während der Perserzeit und die Rolle des Jerusalemer Tempels," in *Persische Reichspolitik und lokale Heiligtümer: Beiträge einer Tagung des Exzellenzclusters "Religion und Politik in Vormoderne und Moderne" vom 24.–26. Februar 2016 in Münster*, ed. Reinhard Achenbach, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte 25 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019): 185–208.

this class of those living in the strongest asymmetrical dependence—they were male and female slaves of the returnees. Even if the figures provided (7,337 out of a total of 42,360 people) do not correspond to the historical truth, they do reflect the approximate ratio of free and slaves in New Babylonian society, from which the exiles left and where quite a few had become wealthy. The slaves who left Babel with their Jewish owners are the forgotten ones of the literary-theologically staged post-exilic restoration.[155]

155 Snell, "Slavery": 18, comments: "The irony of a recreated Israel celebrating its freedom with the help of slaves was lost on the exiles."

5 Excursus: Prophetic Discourses on Justice in Tension Between Collective Liability and Individual Responsibility

As noted, the discourses on justice in the book of Isaiah operate on two levels. First, they apply on the level of social justice, to protect the weak from the strong. Second, they also apply on the level of divine justice, which consists of ensuring Israel's survival amid the hostility of the great powers, even though it had been guilty not meeting the requirements of the covenant. The catastrophe of the exile with the destruction of Jerusalem and a large part of Judea by the troops of Nebuchadnezzar, the subsequent deportation of the upper class to Babylon, and the dispersion among the neighboring peoples posed a huge challenge to Israel's theologians. Famines, epidemics, wars, and expulsions *ipso facto* always affect collectives and are therefore suffered by all those affected, regardless of their guilt or innocence.[1] But what sense does it make for individuals to abide by the law and justice if they must bear the guilt of their fathers and mothers regardless? *Expressis verbis*, the lament of the post-war generation, a group painfully aware that it is burdened with the consequences of the deeds of its ancestors, voices this question: "Our ancestors sinned; they are no more, and we bear their iniquities" (Lam 5:7).[2] The proverb, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2), which occurs twice, sums up the cross-generational liability. That parents eat sour grapes and their children's teeth become blunt is a realization that every generation makes and must make anew. In the OT, this concatenation is codified, as it were, by the idea of a divine covenant with Israel and its generations (cf. Exod 20:5; 34:6–7; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9; also Dan 9:16). The idea of collective guilt arises when we think in intergenerational contexts. It is a historical construct that attempts to explain unfortunate experiences as the consequences of the actions of previous generations, but plays no role in justiciable law and has no application: "The idea of cross-generational guilt was and is neither just nor legally tenable, but it seems to have emerged early on from corresponding experiences."[3] In contrast, responsibility for one's own actions and their consequences has its original place in the law, especially in criminal

1 See Rainer Kessler, "Das kollektive Schuldbekenntnis im Alten Testament," *Evangelische Theologie* 56, no. 1 (1996): 33; Konrad Schmid, "Kollektivschuld? Der Gedanke übergreifender Schuldzusammenhänge im Alten Testament und im Alten Orient," *Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 5 (1999): 213.

2 Ulrich Berges, *Klagelieder*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2002): 285–86.

3 Schmid, "Kollektivschuld": 220–21.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782-005

law, which only applies individually and may not be applied collectively (cf. Deut 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; Ezek 14:12).[4]

When the focus is placed on individual responsibility in Ezek 18, it occurs in the context of discussions about guilt and responsibility in the early post-exilic period. Both the justice of God and that of human beings are put to the test. Even without the ability to present a detailed redaction-critical analysis here, much speaks for the view that the passage Ezek 18:1–20 predates the following verses (21–31) because it is no longer about the sequence of righteous father (vv. 5–9), unrighteous son (vv. 10–13), and righteous grandson (vv. 14–20), but about the differentiation within *a* generation and the question of the possibility of repentance and its consequences for the righteous and the unrighteous.[5] The generation in question is the one after 587 BC, which must bear the guilt of the fathers given that the consequences of the Babylonian destruction will continue for a long time.[6] The traditional wisdom that children's teeth become dull because their parents have eaten sour berries is no longer to apply in Israel (v. 3).[7] The reason for the end of intergenerational guilt rests partly on the reality that the exile and its consequences were simply too great to fit into traditional thinking. In addition, the proverb blocked a new beginning for those born afterward because it explained the past and the resulting present but offered no perspective for the future.[8] In contrast, it brings individual responsibility to the fore: "The theologian responsible for 18:14–20 sets his concept of individual responsibility against the model of overarching guilt that explains the miserable reality."[9] Accordingly, everyone, in whatever generation, is responsible for their own actions (cf. vv. 5, 9, 17, 19), leading to the maxim: "The righteousness of the righteous shall be their own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be their own" (v. 20b).

But even this order was too rigid, because it did not consider either the unrighteous who turn from their wickedness or the righteous who turn from good. Therefore, these cases are played out in a reworking (v. 21–23, 24–25) whose result confirms the

4 Clifford S. Fishman, "Old Testament Justice: The Mirror of Justice Lecture," *Catholic University Law Review* 51 (2002): 412: "[. . .] the *Torah* is explicit in forbidding vicarious punishment of the innocent for the crimes of the guilty [. . .]."

5 Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Das Buch des Propheten Hesekiel (Ezechiel): Kapitel 1–19*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 22,1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996): 260–61.

6 Barton, *Ethics*: 223: "[. . .] the individual fathers and sons in his extended *exemplum* stand for the generation before and during the exile."

7 Adrian Schenker, "Saure Trauben ohne stumpfe Zähne: Bedeutung und Tragweite von Ez 18 und 33,10–20 oder ein Kapitel alttestamentlicher Moraltheologie," in *Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy: études bibliques offertes à l'occasion de son 60e anniversaire*, ed. Pierre Casetti, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 38 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981): 457: "[. . .] difficult and in need of explanation is the impunity of the sons of guilty fathers! The stop of the guilt is obviously incomprehensible."

8 Pohlmann, *Ezechiel 1–19*: 273: "What remained unresolved here, however, in view of the burden imposed by the fathers, was how a new perspective opening up a new future could be achieved."

9 Pohlmann, *Ezechiel 1–19*: 273.

initial situation in v. 20b: Everyone receives from YHWH according to his deeds. No one can rest on past good, no one needs to fear past evil: "The present attitude determines the relationship to the past and the future."[10] Human justice consists in doing good and rejecting evil, while divine justice consists in making the consequences of the act a reality for the perpetrator (v. 29–30a). God is not indifferent about granting death or life, but his preference is for life, which presupposes a conversion to goodness on the part of the addressees (v. 30b–32). Thus, transgressions should not automatically lead to destruction, but should be perceived as an "offense" (מכשול) to bring about a turnaround: "Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin" (v. 30b). As a last chance, God even enables the guilty to obtain a new heart and a new spirit (v. 31). This is a completely unique statement, because in Ezek 11:19; 36:26 it is YHWH who gives a new heart and a new spirit. This special feature of Ezek 18:31 underlines God's will to prevent the downfall of the wicked with all his might, but not bypassing his freedom.[11]

Ezek 3:17–21 includes the prophet in the divine will of salvation through his office as a watchman. He must warn both the unrighteous, who persist in their guilt, and the righteous, who threaten to stray from the right path, as urgently as if his own weal and woe were at stake. Any suspicion of an unjust decision by God is thus to be averted, for he and his prophet have done everything to dissuade the wicked from evil and the righteous from turning away from good. The term "offense" is used again (cf. Ezek 7:19; 14:3–4, 7; 18:30; 44:12) as the last action of God before man stumbles and falls: "The person who sins shall die (Ezek 3:20a)."[12]

Ezek 33:1–20, likely the most recent text compared to Ezek 18:21–29 and Ezek 3:17–21[13] highlights the righteous man's turn away from his right behavior[14] even more

10 Schenker, "Saure Trauben": 466; cf. Henning Reventlow, "Ezechiel 18,1–20: Eine mutmachende prophetische Botschaft für unsere Zeit," in *Recht und Ethos im Alten Testament: Gestalt und Wirkung; Festschrift für Horst Seebass zum 65. Geburtstag* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999): 16: "The decisive insight is the moral independence of each generation."

11 Cf. Greenberg, *Ezechiel 1–20*: 380; see also Markus Saur, "Verantwortung: Zum Verhältnis von Individuum und Kollektiv im Ezechielbuch," in *Individualität und Selbstreflexion in den Literaturen des Alten Testaments*, ed. Andreas Wagner and Jürgen van Oorschot, Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 48 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017): 205.

12 For the possible translations, see Annette Böckler, "Ist Gott schuldig, wenn der Gerechte stolpert? Zur Exegese von Ez. III 20," *Vetus Testamentum* 48, no. 4 (1998): 439–41, who ultimately arrives at a similar conclusion: "Man himself commits the violation of the law. God's involvement in the fate of the righteous, however, is that he sends him a watchman to admonish him—before he stumbles" (p. 452).

13 So according to Pohlmann, *Ezechiel 1–19*: 68–70; see Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Das Buch des Propheten Hesekiel (Ezechiel): Kapitel 20–48*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 22,2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001): 448–50; for a different view, see Saur, "Verantwortung": 201, who defines the line of growth as Ezek 33 → Ezek 18 → Ezek 3.

14 See עול "wrongdoing" in Ezek 3:20; 18:24, 26; 33:13, 15, 18 as a "general term for wrongdoing," according to Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 197.

intensively, insofar as he, having heard from God that he should live, trusts in his righteousness and believes that with such a credit before God he can calmly commit injustice (Ezek 33:13).[15] However, this calculation does not work out, because neither the evil done by the wicked when he repents nor the previous good done by the righteous when he turns away counts before God. The offences that the prophet Ezekiel has in mind in these statements about personal responsibility and liability are mainly at the level of correct social behavior, not to touch the wife of one's neighbor, not to oppress anyone, not to take pledge or interest, and not to rob anyone, but to feed the hungry and clothe the naked (cf. Ezek 18:5–7, 11–13, 15–17; 33:13–15).[16]

The book of Habakkuk reflects on these connections in a different way. If the basic form of this prophetic writing can be dated to the end of the seventh century BC and thus to the time of King Josiah's reforms, it sets a clear counter-accent to the praise of the Deuteronomists for this period directly before the Babylonian invasion and the end of statehood (2 Kings 22–23).[17] The central question in Habakkuk is how long the righteous can hold on to their uprightness in the face of threats from within and without. According to the heading (Hab 1:1), the prophet's lament in Hab 1:2–4 deals with the first level: Violence, oppression, and strife are so omnipresent that the Torah has become powerless, and righteous judgment is no longer passed. The wicked surround the righteous so perfidiously that "twisted justice" (משפט מעקל) is dispensed, which systematically destroys society. The level of world politics *sub specie Dei* comes into play in Hab 1:5–11, for YHWH has used the Chaldeans (v. 6) as an instrument of punishment against his own people.

However, this historical-theological statement, which emphasizes YHWH's power over the nations, has a flip side, because this fearsome empire does not enforce Mosaic law, but "its own law proceeds from it" (ממנו משפטו) (v. 7b). It is the law of the victors, which knows no mercy and sparing. This leads the prophet into an aporia because the Babylonians are the divine instrument of punishment and the righteous also perish because the enemy troops destroy everything and everyone. Can the eternal God simply resign himself to the fact that the righteous fear for their lives (לא נמות "we will not die" 1:12a)?[18] What is to be made of the statement or excuse that his eyes are too holy to look on injustice (1:13)? If YHWH stands idly by and watches the deeds of the transgressors,

15 Pohlmann, *Ezechiel 1–19*: 74–75; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezechiel 21–37*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2005): 3733: "Trusting in his past righteousness, he does not expect it to be overturned by current misconduct."

16 The assumption that there is a "scaling down of sin and virtue to the more domestic or individual" (Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*: 202; see also 212–13), because the addressees in Babylonian exile had only a limited radius of action and thus responsibility, is not compelling.

17 Heinz-Joseph Fabry, *Habakuk/Obadja*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2018): 196.

18 The passage belongs to the *Tiqqunē Sopherîm*, to the passages changed by the scribes for theological reasons. Originally it will have read לא תמות: "You [YHWH] will not die." For only a God who administers justice is immortal; if he does not, he is merely a mortal being (cf. Ps 82:7).

be they the wicked within or the enemies without, he makes himself an accomplice to injustice. God must respond to this "rebuke" (תוכחת) of the prophet (2:1; cf. Job 13:6; 23:4), because not only their future but also his credibility is at stake with the fate of the righteous. If the mighty evildoers put themselves in God's place and get away with it, YHWH has lost his claim to worship.

In the radical nature of this question to God's justice, Habakkuk must be regarded as a forerunner of Job.[19] The question of the fate of the righteous becomes the core question for him and for his God. The scene of the watchmen, which immediately follows the prophet's criticism (Hab 2:1–4), clarifies the fact that YHWH also understood this as an actor in the dramatic course of the book of Habakkuk. The similarities with the scene of the spies announcing the fall of Babel in Isa 21:6–8 cannot be dismissed.[20] However, it is not YHWH who calls for a watchman to be set up, but the prophet empowers himself. He is not waiting for the downfall of Babylon, but for the answer that God will give him to his rebuke (Hab 2:1). It is not long in coming and is only comparable in its significance to the revelation of the Mosaic Torah at Sinai. This is shown by the request that the prophet should write down on "tablets" (לוחות; cf. e.g. Exod 24:12; 31:18; 32:15–16) what he sees as a vision. He is to write it down "clearly" (באר; cf. Deut 27:8), because it is intended for a time that, even if delayed, will certainly come (cf. Isa 30:8). Its content is revealed in v. 4: "Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faithfulness." Without going into the difficult textual evidence,[21] the fate of *a* "righteous" [person] (צדיק without an article), that is every righteous person, at the end of God's appointed time differs from the fate of someone who has been "measured" (עפל only in Num 14:44) and has not remained upright. It is no coincidence that, unlike in Hab 1:4, 13, the opposite of righteous, "wicked" (רָשָׁע), is not used here, because the contrast is not the point. That the fate of the two must differ is part of Israel's standard knowledge, and there would have been no need for such a grand staging just to emphasize this point.

The content of the vision that the prophet is to write down clearly, is actually God's promise, placed alongside the Mosaic Torah, that the righteous will remain alive through their "faithfulness" (אמונה), in contrast to those who do not persevere in this uprightness of life due to presumption or weakness:

> Like the tablets of Moses, the tablets of Habakkuk—quite in the spirit of the Talmudic interpretation—aim to record the essence of the *articulus stantis et cadentis justi* [. . .] What is revealed is set down in writing so that it may remain in force for the future and be proven true in the future.[22]

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19 Fabry, *Habakuk/Obadja*: 236; 245; cf. Seow, "Divine Justice in the Book of Job": 258.

20 Lothar Perlitt, *Die Propheten Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 25,1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004): 62: "The entire word field of 2:1 is found in the parallel text Isa 21:1–10 about the fall of Babylon."

21 See also Fabry, *Habakuk/Obadja*: 231–33.

22 Antonius H.J. Gunneweg, "Habakuk und das Problem des leidenden צדיק," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 98, no. 3 (1986): 412; see on the early Jewish tradition bMakkot 23b–24a.

In Habakkuk-Pesher (1QpHab 8:1–3), the Qumran community referred to this faithfulness in the face of the sacking of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans (54 BC) and their time of probation.[23] In Hebrews (Heb 10:38), Hab 2:4 also refers to the perseverance of faithfulness, whereby the translation of אֱמוּנָה with πίστις "faith," which goes back to the LXX, must not be reduced to the observance of the divine commandments.[24] Paul bases his doctrine of justification twice on the Hebrew text in its Greek translation (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11). The righteousness of God is not proven by the righteous remaining alive because of his persevering faithfulness, but because he accepts the offer of salvation in Christ. In the book of Habakkuk, the prophecies of woe (Hab 2:5–20) emphasize the hardships that the righteous must struggle with. The prophet's concluding prayer clarifies how the righteous man proves himself (Hab 3). From the visualization of the divine victory march from the south (cf. Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4), he draws the certainty that YHWH will save his people, his anointed, by removing the protective roof from the house of the wicked, who with his accomplices is intent on devouring the wretched like a predator in its lair (Hab 3:13–14). At the end, there is jubilation over the "God of my salvation," which allows the worshipper to stride over heights full of strength (Hab 3:19; cf. Deut 32:13; Isa 58:14). The question of God's justice is posed in the book of Habakkuk precisely in view of the events of world history, which also affect the righteous. The answer lies in YHWH's promise that the righteous will remain alive through their steadfastness.[25] From here it is only a small step to the eschatological hope of a post-mortem survival of the righteous (cf. Dan 12:2–4).[26]

23 Heinz-Josef Fabry, "Ambakum Habakuk" in *Septuaginta Deutsch: Erläuterungen und Kommentare zum griechischen Alten Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Martin Karrer and Wolfgang Kraus (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2011): 2416–17.

24 Fabry, *Habakuk/Obadja*: 246: "A narrowing down to a possible Torah obedience, as is so often to be read in the commentaries, is neither explicitly nor implicitly indicated here."

25 Cf. Fabry, *Habakuk/Obadja*: 145: "The 'theodicy question' is played out several times in the Book of Habakkuk but is not brought to a consistent and convincing conclusion. This is also not to be expected, because the underlying model of the 'act-consequence relationship' leads to postulates about God that unduly draw him out of transcendence into immanence and attempt to seize him."

26 Horst Sebass, "Gerechtigkeit Gottes: Zum Dialog mit Peter Stuhlmacher," *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 1 (1986): 133, draws attention to the fact "[. . .] that in the Old and New Testaments the decisive experience of deficit in the world, which urges towards eschatology or, to an even greater extent, apocalypticism, is made and articulated in justice as the only order corresponding to God."

6 Law and Justice in the Psalms

The theme of justice and righteousness holds great importance in the Psalter, as evidenced by the high frequency of the various derivations of the root צדק. Compared to the other OT writings, the frequency of *ṣaddîq* "righteous/just" (52x) is striking and only the Book of Proverbs (66x) surpasses that number. The Psalter and the Book of Isaiah (צדק 25x/ צדקה 36x) are far ahead with the nouns *ṣœḏœq* (49x) and *ṣᵉdāqāh* (34x). If we add the Book of Ezekiel (צדיק 16x; צדק 4x; צדקה 20x), these four books contain two thirds of all references to the root in the OT, with the cultic context often taking center stage.[1] The decision and the judgment as to who is *ṣaddîq* and who is not originally come from the cult, as can be seen from the liturgies of admission (cf. Ps 15:2–4; 24:4–6) and the protestations of innocence in some psalms of lament and thanksgiving (e.g. Ps 7:4–6, 9; 17:3–5; 18:21–23; 26:1, 3–5; 44:18–20). These affirmations of innocence do not result from an exaggerated sense of self-worth or arrogant self-righteousness, but rather they are declarations of loyalty to YHWH and his will of salvation, which does not exclude but actually includes the awareness of one's own sinfulness.[2] Only the affirmation of the cultic and legal orders can assure worshippers of their status as *ṣaddîq* and open access to the cultic events that take place in the temple.[3] Over time, the literary representation of the righteous transcends the narrow framework of the cult events. This is particularly the case in psalm poetry belonging to wisdom literature: "Without question, these statements standardize. They rest on an existing archetype of the צַדִּיק, and the worshippers present themselves before Yahweh in this archetype."[4] According to Gerhard von Rad, this "sublime cult mysticism," in which the righteous know that they are protected by YHWH against all adversity, can be traced back to a "*special circle of spirituals*" who are found in the vicinity of the temple and its personnel.[5] Only those

1 Koch, צדק: 511.

2 Gert Kwakkel, *According to My Righteousness: Upright Behaviour as Grounds for Deliverance in Psalms 7, 17, 18, 26 and 44*, Oudtestamentische studiën 46 (Leiden: Brill, 2002): 297: "A claim to loyalty to YHWH, demonstrated by a way of life in accordance with his commandments, cannot be equated with a claim to absolute freedom from sin."

3 Gerhard von Rad, "'Gerechtigkeit' und 'Leben' in der Kultsprache der Psalmen," in *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet zum 80. Geburtstag: gewidmet von Kollegen und Freunden, Tübingen*, ed. Walter Baumgartner (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1950): 423: "Thus the predicate צַדִּיק was hardly awarded in ancient Israel in any other way than from the cult."

4 Rad, "Gerechtigkeit": 425.

5 Rad, "Gerechtigkeit": 432 (in italics, bracketed in the original) refers, among other things, to Ps 16:5–6; 42:6; cf. Friedhelm Hartenstein, "'Schaffe mir Recht, JHWH!' (Psalm 7,9): Zum theologischen und anthropologischen Profil der Teilkomposition Psalm 3–14," in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, ed. Erich Zenger, Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses / Bibliotheca 238 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010): 234: "The Psalter, even in its late formative stages, *can hardly be detached from the Jerusalem temple tradition*, to which it is still oriented, even if it often extends and transcends it in a scripturally learned way" (italics in the original).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782-006

who support the right, salvific order through acts of righteousness and live from it are *ṣaddîq* in the circle of *ṣaddiqîm* (cf. Ps 1:5–6, 32:11; 33:1; 34:16–17, 29, 39; 52:8; 69:29; 97:12; 118:15, 20; 125:3; 120:14; 142:8; 146:8). Gift and task—the coexistence of *ṣæḏœq* as divine salvation and *ṣᵉdāqāh* as human good deeds characterizes the Psalter like no other biblical book:

> Morality must be regularly reawakened. Intellectual instruction is not sufficient for this, but only an experience of the cultic overcoming of every alienation between man and man, between man and reality in general and thus between man and God, which encompasses the whole of existence. This alone awakens the will and the consciousness to live faithfully to the community, because one knows oneself to be secure in the sphere of divine communal salvation.[6]

In some passages, especially those with the preposition ב, the local meaning still shines through. In Ps 69:28, the worshipper asks YHWH that the wicked "not enter among the righteous." As the personification of the post-exilic people of God in Mic 7:9, Zion hopes that God will lead them out into the light, and "I shall see his vindication." Klaus Koch concludes from these and other passages that righteousness should be understood as a realm of being that one enters with the corresponding act of righteousness, from which one draws strength to live right: "*Sädäq/sedaqa* is a realm; to enter it through a deed means to expand it. To enter it is to experience its power of salvation."[7] The worshipper who turns to YHWH, his King and God, in the morning, prepares [the sacrifice] for him, and prostrates himself in his holy temple, asks for guidance "in your righteousness," for the smoothing of the divine path (Ps 5:9). The divine order, the harmony between heaven and earth, reaches its highest concentration in the temple. This imaginary space of *ṣæḏœq/ṣᵉdāqāh*, which originates from a specific location, is denied to the wicked forever. The psalmists are never unsure about whom to consider righteous and whom to consider wicked. The contrast is clearly marked: The wicked may not dwell with God; YHWH blesses only the righteous (Ps 5:5, 13). Only a righteous person may come to YHWH as the safe haven and secure fortress that rescues him from the hostility of the wicked. This occurs in God's righteousness, through his act of salvation, which keeps the worshipper in the shelter of his presence. This shelter is the temple in a special way, and there the worshipper sings of YHWH's saving action,[8] because his greatness is immeasurable (Ps 71:2–3, 15–16). The "gates of righteousness" (שערי צדק), which only the righteous may enter (Ps 118:19–20), mark this space of divine protection. Those at home there in the actual pilgrimage to the sanctuary or spiritually, in the memory

6 Koch, צדק: 520; cf. Koch, "Sdq im Alten Testament": 122: "This act of salvation and gift of salvation only becomes effective when a person takes it upon himself through his own communally faithful act towards God and man."

7 Koch, "Sdq im Alten Testament": 38; cf. inter alia Ps 5:9; 31:2; 119:40; 143:1, 11; for a different view, see Crüsemann, "Gerechtigkeit": 441, note 78.

8 Crüsemann, "Gerechtigkeit": 442–43: "Yahweh's *ṣᵉdāqā* in the Psalms is therefore the term for the salvation of the individual Israelite from distress [. . .]."

of their righteousness, receive strength and blessing: "A stay in the temple is useful because it enables Yahweh's way and *ṣᵉdāqāh* to become the determining force for one's own history."[9]

Following the canonical approach of Psalter exegesis advocated by Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger,[10] the focus is not on the individual evidence of the central lexemes, but on the itinerary of the Psalter, which is largely oriented towards the theme of justice.[11] However, the *lectio continua* must not be overburdened, as if a straightforward argument could always be derived from the succession of individual poems and partial compositions. The comparison with the "St. Petersburg hanging," in which individual paintings do not follow one another in an orderly line but instead stand close together in exuberant abundance in the world-famous Hermitage, leads Manfred Oeming to speak of a "Psalmistic hanging." "Although each prayer is a unique work of art in itself, the object of admiration is ultimately neither the individual prayer, nor the clear order, but the great richness of the works of art."[12] The theme of law and justice appears in so many of the one hundred and fifty psalms that it is worth reflecting on how they hang and allowing them to captive you.

6.1 Law and Justice in the Proem (Ps 1–2) and in the First Book of Psalms (Ps 3–41)

The worshipper enters the literary house, the "temple of words"[13] through the entrance hall of the proem in Ps 1–2. Both psalms are closely related to each other despite their formal and content-related peculiarities. Neither has a heading and they are linked through *Macarisms* (Ps 1:1; 2:12) and "meditating" (הגה) on the Torah on one side (Ps 1:2) and vain plans on the other (Ps 2:1). The futile ways of the wicked and the enemy

9 Koch, צדק*:* 521, with reference to Ps 5:9, 13; see also Koch, "Sdq im Alten Testament": 122.

10 See e.g. Erich Zenger, "Psalmenexegese und Psalterexegese: Eine Forschungsskizze," in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, ed. Erich Zenger, Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses / Bibliotheca 238 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010): 17–65.

11 It is surprising that "justice" is not specifically addressed in recent anthologies on the Psalter, see Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, eds., *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Erich Zenger, ed. *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses / Bibliotheca 238 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010); William P. Brown, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); otherwise Gottwald, *Social Justice:* 10: "The editing of the book of Psalms is itself a literary acknowledgment of the social drama of premised justice breached by gross injustice."

12 Manfred Oeming, "'Er ist der König der Ehre': Die Königsherrschaft Gottes als ein theologisches Leitbild im Buch der Psalmen," in *Die kleine Biblia: Beiträge zur Theologie der Psalmen und des Psalters*, ed. Markus Saur, Biblisch-theologische Studien 148 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2014): 90.

13 Bernd Janowski, "Ein Tempel aus Worten: Zur theologischen Architektur des Psalters," in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, ed. Erich Zenger, Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses / Bibliotheca 238 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010): 281.

kings correspond as well (Ps 1:6; 2:12). The prelude to the entire psalter is thus formed by the distinction between the fate of the righteous and the wicked on an individual level (Ps 1) and the staging of the messianic king on the world level, the king who successfully defends himself on Zion against the attacks of the nations and crushes them (Ps 2). The two psalms form the common prelude to the entire Psalter: "Living according to God's instructions is not a private matter, but literally concerns the whole world. The conflict within the congregation in Psalm 1 becomes a conflict between the world of nations and Israel in Psalm 2."[14] The end of the first book of Psalms (Ps 40:5; 41:2) takes up the two beatitudes at the beginning and end of the overture.[15] Although the blessed righteous person still faces a multitude of enemies, he is no longer alone, but proclaims YHWH's righteousness in a large congregation (Ps 41:10–11). According to the conception of the Psalter, the wicked and the righteous are clearly distinguishable. Those who mock and do not take YHWH's Torah seriously belong to the first group, and those who delight in the divine instruction, recite it day and night and know they are supported by it, belong to the second group—*tertium non datur*. Ambiguity, such as that resulting from the apostasy of the righteous and the repentance of the wicked (see Ezek 18; 31 above), does not appear or is consistently ignored. Zion in the Psalter has not become a place of injustice, as is the case at the beginning of the book of Isaiah (Isa 1:21–23).

Those who enter the Psalter, the sanctuary of the words of prayer, do not decide which side they stand on and live throughout the course of the one hundred and fifty psalms, but they have already made up their mind.[16] The Psalter is not used to decide, but to carry through with a decision that has already been made. This is also the reason why the Macarism "Blessed is the man" (אשרי האיש) appears at the beginning. It emphasizes the decision of the individual human being prior to entering the sanctuary of the Psalter. To ensure that the world in its cosmic constitution does not fall apart at the seams, the distinction between the wicked and the righteous must be proven again and again. Verse 5 underlines the categorical incompatibility of the two groups, for neither the wicked "in judgment" (במשפט) nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous will endure. The path, the way of life upon which one has decided, inevitably carries the goal within it. This does not require a divine judgment at the end of life or the end of time. The inner constitution of creation will bring forth its own, just as a tree bears fruit when it is planted by the water, or like chaff blown away by the wind. Yet YHWH is not passive but knows the way and the goal of the righteous, while the way of the wicked collapses. The final word in Ps 1:6 תאבד "the way of the wicked will perish" begins with

14 Egbert Ballhorn, "Das Buch der Psalmen: Labyrinth und Lebensbaum," in *73 Ouvertüren: Die Buchanfänge der Bibel und ihre Botschaft*, ed. Egbert Ballhorn (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2018): 255.
15 Janowski, "Tempel aus Worten": 283–85.
16 Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Die Psalmen I: Psalm 1–50*, Die neue Echter Bibel Kommentar zum Alten Testament mit der Einheitsübersetzung 29 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1993): 47: "This person has definitely made up his mind"; also Friedhelm Hartenstein and Bernd Janowski, *Psalmen*, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament 15/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2012): 24–25.

Tav, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, so that together with the Alef of the first word, the psalm includes everything. Everything from Aleph to Tav, from A to Z, about what holds the world together at its core is formulated in this psalm. Without the intervention of God, the wickedness of the wicked brings them down.[17] The fate of the righteous is different, for YHWH's knowledge of their way includes his caring actions.[18] In the course of the Psalter, the worshippers repeatedly come before God in lament and petition for recognition of their right path in life, as well as remembering and proclaiming his saving righteousness in praise and thanksgiving. Overall, the prayer path of the Psalter in the sequence of its five books and their sub-collections leads from individual (Ps 3–7) and social experiences of salvation (Ps 9–14; 78–83) via the worldwide expansion of the kingship of YHWH (Ps 96–99) to his glorious righteous rule, which is sung about by the pious from generation to generation (Ps 145:7, 10, 17).[19]

Psalm 2 serves as the prelude to the global political dimension of righteous rule alongside individual and congregational justice in the Psalter. The motif constellation of Zion as the holy mountain of the divine presence, the rebellious kings of the nations who must bow to the rule of YHWH and his anointed one, has its literary and theological location in Jerusalem's temple theology. This was by no means rendered obsolete by the catastrophe of the exile but was also very prominent in the post-exilic period. The fact that Psalm 2, which probably opened the messianic Psalter (Ps 2–89) around 300 BC[20] has no "le-David" superscription (לדוד) should be considered if one believes that the Davidization of the Psalter began with this Psalm. If it took place at all, it did so only indirectly.[21] The subject is not the anointed one *per se*—and certainly not a *David redivivus*—but YHWH's world kingship, which he exercises from Zion over all nations with the help of his anointed one. The psalm amounts to an exhortation to the kings and judges of the earth to submit to the rule of God, to "serve" YHWH (ʿāḇaḏ/עבד), for they would "perish" (ʿāḇaḏ/אבד) otherwise. The phonetic and scriptural similarity of the two verbs is hardly coincidental. It indicates a small but all-important step between serving and perishing, namely the recognition of YHWH as King of the World (cf. Isa 60:12, also in the context of nations and Zion). In addition, the parallel with the fate of the wicked in Ps 1:6, whose way perishes, is obvious.[22] What the mocking perpe-

17 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 103: "The wicked are prisoners of their own life choices. They have chosen a way of life that is not one"; see also Claudia Sticher, *Die Rettung der Guten durch Gott und die Selbstzerstörung der Bösen: Ein theologisches Denkmuster im Psalter*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 137 (Berlin: Philo, 2002): 63–65.

18 Hartenstein and Janowski, *Psalmen*: 43–44; Dieter Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2021): 74: "The way of the righteous endures and does not perish, because YHWH cares for it as actively as the man cares for the Torah of YHWH."

19 Janowski, "Rettende Gerechtigkeit": 375.

20 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 1–50*: 51; for a different view, see Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 106: "Is it really conceivable to open a collection with a question to the nations as to why they dare to rebel?"

21 Hartenstein and Janowski, *Psalmen*: 61.

22 [LXX]Ps 2:12 speaks of perishing through the [agreement] "from the righteous way" (ἐξ ὁδοῦ δικαίας).

trators of iniquity are on an individual level, the kings and judges of the earth are on a global political level. Just as the wicked do not stand "in judgment" (במשפט), so the "judges" (שופטים), those authorized to administer justice and leadership and in view of God's reign, should become reasonable and join the program of saving justice, not rebel against it. If they continue to show themselves lacking in understanding, YHWH will be able only to laugh at them, which, unlike the mockery of the wicked before, will have serious consequences. The divine laughter, which occurs twice more in the Psalter (Ps 37:13; 59:9), anticipates the downfall of the wicked who do not want to understand how futile their resistance to the order inherent in creation is.[23] Those who have entered the temple of words through the portal of Psalms 1–2, are released into the first part of the collection (Ps 3–14) with the following beatitude, which corresponds to that in Ps 1:1: "Happy are all who take refuge in him" (Ps 2:12). The verb חסה "to take refuge," is an important key word found frequently in the first two books of Psalms.[24] Just as Mount Zion is presented in prophecy as a place of refuge for the pious, the Psalter is the sanctuary in which everyone who entrusts themselves to these words finds protection by mumbling them day and night and ensuring that the eschatological hope in the God of the world who laughs at the evildoers is not extinguished.

6.1.1 Law and Justice in Psalms 3–14

The message of this sub-group of the first Psalter of David (Ps 3–41) that is grouped into two panels (Ps 3–7; 9;10–14) around the middle Psalm 8 is deeply influenced by the discourse on justice. "The main theme of the composition Ps 3–14 is YHWH as the *God of justice* (lexeme of the root צדק), who exercises the two active royal roles of *judge* (lexeme of the root שפט and semantically related) and of (warlike) *savior*, thus realizing "salvation" (lexeme of the root ישע)."[25] In terms of its origins, Psalms 3–7 probably represents the oldest compilation, dating to the pre-exilic period, while Psalm 8 and its central position come from the post-exilic period. Initially, the group of four (Psalms 11–14), served as the counterpart to Psalms 3–7, and the acrostic double Psalms 9–10 was added only in Hellenistic times.[26] While Psalms 3–7 are more about personal

23 Hartenstein and Janowski, *Psalmen*: 127: "The laughter of God has a liberating effect, because it reveals the true power relations and exposes the mockery of the oppressors towards the oppressed as inhuman"; cf. Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 85.

24 Ps 5:12; 7:2; 11:1; 16:1; 17:7; 18:3, 31; 25:20; 31:2, 20; 34:9, 23; 36:8; 37:40; 57:2; 61:5; 64:11; 71:1; then Ps 91:4; 118:8f; 141:8; 144:2; "to hide" has migrated from the Psalter into the prophecy about Zion (Isa 14:32; 30:2; 57:13; Nah 1:7; Zeph 3:12).

25 Hartenstein and Janowski, *Psalmen*: 130; cf. in more detail Friedhelm Hartenstein, "'Schaffe mir Recht, JHWH!' (Psalm 7,9): Zum theologischen und anthropologischen Profil der Teilkomposition Psalm 3-14," in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, ed. Erich Zenger, Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses / Bibliotheca 238 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010): 236–38.

26 Hartenstein, "Recht": 239; Hartenstein and Janowski, *Psalmen*: 134.

adversaries against whom YHWH is invoked for [legal] help, in Ps 9–14 the opposition between the righteous and the wicked becomes heightened to a fundamental level, concerning both their social behavior and their attitude towards God.[27]

Psalm 3 contains no explicit vocabulary of judgment, and it should not be read into the hypothesis of an institutionalized judgment of God at the temple.[28] However, at the level of composition, the text undoubtedly includes a setting to rights. The two instances of קום "stand up" refer to a decision-making situation in which the worshipper confronts the many who stand up against him (v. 2) and in which he turns to his only support: "Rise up, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God!" (v. 8). In the following psalms of this small group, YHWH's rise is explicitly linked to a legal decision (Ps 7:7; 9:20) or is at least obvious (Ps 10:12[, cf. v. 18]; 12:6 when revealing double-tongued speech). The defining theme of Psalm 3 is salvation, which the adversaries negate for the worshipper (Ps 3:2), but which he affirms with conviction: ליהוה הישועה "with YHWH is salvation" (Ps 3:9a). The discourse on justice in Psalms 3–14 comes under the motto of salvation realized when YHWH, as king over his people and the nations, makes decisions for his people and his worshippers from Zion, his holy mountain (Ps 2:6; 3:5).

The opening of Psalm 4 shows that its paramount theme is justice. The worshipper addresses the "God of my right" (אלהי צדקי) directly.[29] This expression is found only here in the OT, which emphasizes its importance in the Psalter and especially in the partial composition of Ps 3–14.[30] The worshipper is dragged into the mud by those who have the say, בני איש (cf. Ps 49:3; 62:10), and by their lying speech. His honor is violated (v. 3). The close connections between Ps 3 and 4 are obvious, for there too it is "many" (רב, Ps 3:2–3, 7; 4:7) who afflict the worshipper. The image of the worshipper who lies down and sleeps without a care (Ps 4:9) is taken almost literally from Ps 3:6. This carelessness amidst all hostility results from the knowledge that divine justice comes from the holy mountain (Ps 3:5). This is found primarily in the first Book of Psalms (Ps 2:6; 3:5; 15:1; 24:3; 43:3; also 48:2; 99:9) and then in the prophetic Jerusalem theology of Zion and the temple (Isa 11:9; 27:13; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11, 25; 66:20; Jer 31:23; Ezek 20:40; 28:14; Joel 2:1; 4:17; Obad 16–17; Zeph 3:11; 8:3). The significance of the reference at the beginning of the Psalter is that YHWH, who stands on the side of the pious worshippers as the God of justice, acts from Zion. Much suggests that Jerusalem temple theology was combined with personal piety, possibly through Levitical singing circles. Just as the fate of Zion demonstrates YHWH's saving justice in the Book of Isaiah, the fate of the righteous does so in the Psalter. Along with their honor, YHWH's reputation is also at stake if the

27 Hartenstein, "Recht": 240.

28 Hartenstein and Janowski, *Psalmen*: 140.

29 ^{LXX}Ps 4:2 favors a declarative sentence: "When I called, the God of my right listened to me," probably also with a view to the following perfect tense: "You gave me room."

30 Hartenstein and Janowski, *Psalmen*: 179, note 15, with reference to Ps 3:5–6; 4:9; 5:4, 9–11; 6:5; 7:7–12; 9:5, 9; 10:5, 18; 12:8–9; 13:4–5; 14:2.

mockers and the wicked are not to gain the upper hand.[31] The Psalter demonstrates divine justice in the mode of literary condensation and imagination. The pious worshipper, surrounded by overpowering opponents, can go to sleep in peace, because YHWH hears him when he calls out to him (Ps 4:4). His people, whose "salvation" (ישועה) and "blessing" (ברכה) he guarantees (Ps 3:9), do not include all who give offerings at the temple, but only those who offer "sacrifices of righteousness" (זבחי צדק) (Ps 4:6; cf. Deut 33:19; Ps 51:21). This not only refers to sacrifices that are *rite*, that meet the established standards, but also implies ethical behavior, far from lies and vain speech (Ps 4:3). The imperative "Trust in YHWH!" which parallels the offering of righteous sacrifices, points to this understanding.[32] Only the one who "shelters" (בטח) himself with YHWH (לבדד), him "alone" (לבטח) does YHWH let dwell "in security" (לבטח) (Ps 4:9). The fact that the exemplary worshipper stands in sharp contrast to the lying mighty needs no further explanation, but he also stands apart from the "many" (רבים). They ask, "O that we might see some good" (Ps 4:7a). In response, the plea for God to let the light of his face "shine upon us" (עלינו) (Ps 4:7b) echoes the Aaronite blessing (Num 6:25–26). The mention of "*their* grain and *their* wine" (דגנם ותירושם) may allude to the abundant gifts at the pilgrimage feasts. The personal suffix of the third-person plural most likely refers to the many at the beginning of v. 7 (cf. Ps 3:3), especially because the final verb in v. 8 takes up the root of the word "to be many/numerous" (רבה). The worshipper staged here whom YHWH refers to as his pious one is proof that it is neither the quantity of gifts nor the loud festive mood, but the quiet joy of the heart that signifies true security in God. The ultimate reason for this lies in the certainty of faith that YHWH is "the God of my righteousness," who must be met with "sacrifices of righteousness."[33] The pious person who knows he is secure in God aligns with the people whom YHWH has set apart above all other peoples (פלה; Ps 4:4; see Exod 33:16).[34]

The theme of justice continues in Ps 5, where the worshipper turns to YHWH as his God-King ("My King and my God," v. 3), so that he may pass judgment between him and the other party, that wicked and evil ones, the boasters, evildoers, liars, murderers, and deceivers.[35] According to ancient Oriental and Old Testament ideas, the morning is when the deity, like the rising sun, dispels the darkness: "This connection between divine legal action (overcoming injustice) and the cosmic significance of light (overcoming chaotic darkness) also justifies the hope of the worshipper in Psalm 5 that

31 Erich Zenger, "'Gib mir Antwort, Gott meiner Gerechtigkeit' (Ps 4,2): Zur Theologie des 4. Psalms," in *Die alttestamentliche Botschaft als Wegweisung: Festschrift für Heinz Reinelt*, ed. Josef Zmijewski (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1990): 390, speaks for Ps 4 of the "proof of 'God's righteousness' in the face of its absence which oppresses the worshipper."

32 Zenger, "Gib mir Antwort": 394; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 62.

33 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 125.

34 The fact that YHWH sets apart, that is makes a distinction (cf. Exod 9:4; 11:7), is also proven by the personal name "Elifelehu," the bearer of which is a doorkeeper in the temple and a Levite musician (1 Chr 15:18, 21).

35 See the seventh number of opponents in the singular-plural-singular alternation [2-3-2].

YHWH will help him to find justice against his enemies 'in the morning'."[36] However, the enemies on the side of injustice have not simply disappeared but remain a constant threat, just like the darkness that falls again and again. If it were otherwise, the supplicant's plea, "Lead me, O Lord, *in* your righteousness because of my enemies" (v. 9a), would lose its urgency. The local connotation is confirmed by the petition formulated in the *parallelism membrorum* "make your way straight before me" (v. 9b). When YHWH paves his way before the worshipper, he guides him into the realm of justice, righteousness, and uprightness. All those who also take refuge in God rejoice in this (cf. Ps 2:12), for only in this manner does it become evident that the *ṣaddîq* is under the blessing of YHWH (Ps 5:13a). The righteous worshipper is like a warrior who is not only protected from head to toe by the shield of divine favor, but whom YHWH even "crowns" with it (עטר Ps 5:13b; 8:6; 65:12; 103:4).

In Ps 6, the relationship between God and the worshipper enters a serious crisis due to a grave illness, which, according to the understanding of the time, is attributed to the wrath of the deity. If YHWH does not turn to the worshipper again quickly, his praise will fall silent, because the realm of the dead cannot feature any praise of God. Although this psalm displays no explicit vocabulary of justice in this psalm,[37] the theme is nevertheless present. The call to all "evildoers" (פעלי און) to turn back (v. 9) takes the term from Ps 5:6 (cf. Ps 14:4; 28:3; 36:13; 53:5; 59:3; 64:3; 92:8, 10; 94:4, 16; 101:8; 141:4, 9). Physical death is not the problem. Social death is—the reviling of the evildoers and enemies who cite his illness as an argument against him. However, their request does not work, because YHWH has listened to the prayer of the person praying and thus decided who is on the right side. The shaming of the opponents in the final verse confirms the judgmental character of divine salvation. The plea from the previous psalm, "Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me" (Ps 5:9), has thus gained in depth. If YHWH "turns" (שוב) from wrath to faithfulness (Ps 6:5), then the petitioner's enemies must also turn" (שוב), namely to shame and "disgrace" (2x בוש) (Ps 6:11). It is no coincidence, but poetic finesse, when the three radicals result in one or the other verb depending on the direction of reading.[38]

Psalm 7 is the climax of the discourse on justice in the small group of Psalms 3–7.[39] The relevant vocabulary is found in the doxological appeal to judgment in vv. 7–12[40]

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36 Hartenstein and Janowski, *Psalmen*: 207 with reference to Isa 51:4; Hos 6:5; Mic 7:9; Ps 37:6 (ibid. note 34).

37 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 136: "At the same time, it is striking that the justice that is important in Ps 4 and Ps 5 is missing in Ps 6. It only becomes the central theme again in Ps 7."

38 Cf. Tarah van de Wiele, "Justice and Retribution in the Psalms," in *Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, ed. Carly Crouch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 279: "the only justice for acts that cause shame is to shame the actor."

39 Hartenstein, "Recht": 237; see also Christoph Schroeder, *History, Justice, and the Agency of God: A Hermeneutical and Exegetical Investigation on Isaiah and Psalms*, Biblical Interpretation Series 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 110–12.

40 Hartenstein and Janowski, *Psalmen*: 257.

(3x שפט; 4x צדק; 1x דין), and there is further evidence of צדק in the final promise of praise (v. 18). If one assumes that v. 9aα from the YHWH-King-Psalms (cf. Ps 96:10b, 13; 98:9) has been used here to proclaim YHWH not only as the righteous Judge in the supplicant's conflict with his enemies, but also as Judge over all nations,[41] the seven references to the vocabulary of justice and the sevenfold designation of God balance each other out in v. 7–12 (3x יהוה ; 3x אלהים; 1x אל).[42] Not only the justice, the blamelessness of the one praying, is at stake, but also YHWH's justice, which must prove itself by saving him from his opponents who want to tear him apart like lions tear apart their defenseless prey (vv. 2–3, 4–6).[43] According to his actions and attitudes (כצדקי "according to *my* righteousness"), which God knows exactly as a tester of heart and kidneys and which prove the worshipper to be innocent (כתמי "according to *my* perfection/innocence"), a "legal decision" (משפט) must be made. His justice has an almost material quality, which the worshipper locates "on/above" (על) himself (v. 9b).[44] That may be what he refers to in v. 11a as "my shield on/above God" (מגני על אלהים). For the sake of his own righteousness, and for the sake of YHWH's righteousness, this shield must offer the worshipper secure protection from the unjust pursuits of enemies (cf. Ps 5:13).[45] The concluding promise of praise clarifies that the *iustificatio iusti* also means the *iustificatio Dei* because the worshipper commits himself to praise God "according to *his* [YHWH's] righteousness" (כצדקו), that is, as stated in divine law. It concerns not only him, but all the innocent, for YHWH is the Elyon (v. 18b), the supreme king of the gods, who has bound himself to justice and righteousness forever and for all.[46] But how does YHWH, the "righteous judge" (שופט צדיק) who can be a "wrathful El" (אל זעם) every day (v. 12), enforce this decision? Here the psalm aligns entirely with a concept of justice in which the wickedness of the wicked always carries its end within itself. Where this self-destruction, which no longer requires divine intervention, reaches its goal, he raises up the righteous (v. 10): "As a righteous judge, he makes the wicked man the author of his own destruction."[47] This can happen daily, but it can also fail to happen daily and it then becomes a theological problem if the evildoer does not fall into the pit that he has made for others

41 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 71; Hartenstein and Janowski, *Psalmen*: 258.

42 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 151.

43 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 144: "The Psalm has its own theological agenda, which focuses on the relationship between the justice of God and man."

44 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 75–76: "The righteousness and perfection of the person praying are presented here as a sphere, even as a weight above him."

45 Only in this way does the interpretation of Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 74, gain plausibility: "God stands beside the worshipper and holds the shield over himself and his protégé."

46 According to Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*, 76, this is another Jerusalem coloring, cf. Ps 18:14; 46:5; 47:3; 82:6.

47 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 146; Franz Backhaus, "'JHWH, mein Gott, rette mich!' Menschliche Gewalt und göttliche Gerechtigkeit in Psalm 7," *Bibel und Kirche* 66 (2011): 155: "[. . .] God *guarantees with his power* the act-consequence relationship, so that the wicked experiences his destructive violence punishingly on his own body" (italics in original).

(v. 16). Without a judgment of the dead as in Egypt or without a hope of resurrection, which arises only at the end of the literary development of the Old Testament, justice must necessarily prevail in the inner world if YHWH is to be recognized and praised as a righteous judge.[48] The worshippers can entrust themselves to him and seek refuge in him (see Ps 2:12; 7:2) only if he proves to be their savior from unjust persecution: "God is a righteous judge, in that he brings justice to the righteous in the forensic sense."[49] In other words: Their salvation is his righteousness.

In a sequential reading of Psalms 3–14, the hymn that is Psalm 8 also has special weight. Ps 9:2b fulfills the praying man's promise in Ps 7:18 that he will praise YHWH according to his righteousness and sing to his name. Ps 8 is placed in between, celebrating the incomparable greatness of the divine name. Imperial power does not measure his name and his glory, but paradoxically by the fact that the most defenseless, infants and children, are a bulwark that silences enemies and adversaries: "*YHWH's gaze is especially on the oppressed, the powerless people*. According to Psalm 8:3, it is against them that the human enemies of the order of justice must ultimately fail, *because they are YHWH's enemies due to the dignity of man.*"[50] Where YHWH restores the glory, the *kabod*, of the afflicted worshipper (cf. Ps 3:4; 4:3; 7:6). the dignity of the wounded man is restored, and he is crowned with *kabod* and majesty (Ps 8:6).[51] But how do children and infants consolidate divine power? Like all the defenseless, they have only their "mouth" (פה) that is not misused to spread lies and oppression (Ps 5:10; 10:7; cf. 17:3, 10; 18:9; 22:14; 35:21; 36:4), but with which they praise God after their salvation and glorify his power (e.g. Ps 34:2; 40:4; 51:17; 71:8, 15; 89:2; 138:4; 145:21).[52]

The discourse on justice continues intensely in the second series of individual laments (Ps 9–14), located after the first series (Ps 3–7) and after Ps 8. The links between the two series are manifold. Ps 9:2–3 explicitly takes up the promise of praise from 7:18, the call to God to "stand up" (קום) (Ps 7:7) is found twice (Ps 9:20; 10:12), and the image of the pit is also repeated (Ps 7:16; 9:16). Despite these parallels, something essential has been added because the perspective has been broadened to a global level and it has been deepened to a fundamental degree. Whereas the nations previously played only a subordinate role (Ps 7:8 [9a is an editorial expansion]), now it is about the world, about the nations (Ps 9:9, 12), over which YHWH sits enthroned as the royal God of judgement

48 Kwakkel, *Righteousness*: 304: "Instead of self-righteousness, Psalms 7, 17, 18, 26, and 44 bear witness to the firm belief that YHWH must show himself a righteous God."

49 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 76; Eleuterio R. Ruiz, "Rostros de Dios justo y misericordioso en el Salterio," *Estudios Bíblicos* 75, no. 1 (2017): 81: "Faced with the unjustified wrath of the oppressors, the prayerful one invokes the wrath of the just judge."

50 Hartenstein, "Recht": 248 (italics in original).

51 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 80: "In the context of Psalm 3–14, it is the 'poor' who—despite all adversities and persecutions—affirm their royal dignity."

52 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 154: "Rarely has the usual understanding of power been mocked as subtly and thoroughly as here."

and whose earthly dwelling place is Zion: "Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion. Declare his deeds among the peoples!" (Ps 9:12; cf. 9:15; 14:7).

Ps 8 emphasized that not only the king, but every *Enosh*, every *Ben-Adam*, possesses an extraordinary dignity that makes him a divine mandatary in the animal world, but not a ruler of fellow human beings. The occurrence of both terms again in the following Psalms 9–14 (אנוש in Ps 9:20; 10:18; בני אדם in Ps 11:4; 12:2, 9; 14:2) is decisive for the overall understanding. YHWH must intervene as a righteous judge where people exalt themselves over others, so that he does not "let mortals prevail" (אל יעז אנוש) (Ps 9:20). Terror is to fall upon the exploitative "goyim" (גוים) so that they may realize that they are only human (Ps 9:21).[53] Forgetting one's own transience and the oppression of fellow human beings are two sides of the same coin. If YHWH ends the "power" (עזז) of people over people, he consolidates his "power" (עז) from the mouths of children and infants (Ps 8:3). They represent the weakest members of society who rejoice in their salvation. If and insofar as God helps the oppressed to justice, no "man" (אנוש) spreads more terror (Ps 10:18).[54] In contrast to the diverse animal world on earth, in the air, and in the water (Ps 8:8–9), only one distinction exists among the "children of men" (בני אדם). Between the wicked (Ps 9:6, 17–18; 10:2–4, 13, 15; 11:2, 5–6; 12:9; cf. the foolish Ps 14:1; the evildoers Ps 14:4) and the righteous (Ps 11:3, 5; 14:5; cf. the upright [in heart] Ps 11:2, 7; the upright Ps 12:2). The praise of YHWH, who sits enthroned as a righteous judge over all nations to destroy the wicked (Ps 9:5–7), resounds in a situation in which violent people and deniers of God are still up to mischief (Ps 10).[55] The affirmation that YHWH, as the one enthroned in Zion, has not forgotten the cry of the poor (Ps 9:12–13) contradicts the reality that the wicked and exploiters continue to rob, despise people, and blaspheme God: Does he not punish because he is not interested in what happens on earth (Ps 10:3–5, 11–13)? The poets raise huge questions here and are not simply content to hope for justice.[56] These large questions include the tormenting superiority of the wicked because it leads to disregard for the poor and oppressed. It cannot be emphasized often enough that even in these contexts there is no mention of slaves and

53 ^{MT}Ps 9,21 מורה "fear/terror" in the sense of מורא; it is different in LXX νομοθέτην and the Vulgate, "*legislatorem*," see Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 188, 202.

54 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 172: "The terror of God—formulated here with *ʿrṣ*—will chase them all out of the land (*ʿereṣ*)."

55 Hartenstein, "Recht": 238: "The praise of the universal God of judgment in Ps 9 stands in contrast to the second half of the double Psalm (Ps 10) with the dark question of YHWH's lack of justice, which is unfolded in the form of a divine travesty of the wicked."

56 Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "'Warum hast du mich verlassen?': Die Klage um die Gerechtigkeit Gottes im Alten Testament," in *Erhard S. Gerstenberger: Die hebräische Bibel als Buch der Befreiung; Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, ed. Ute E. Eisen and Christl M. Meier (Gießen: Universitätsbibliothek, 2012): 371: "Justice is also needed in small coin, and according to the insights of Old Israel, God is prepared to grant it in this way, without far-reaching theories about his universal nature. And the suffering people at that time were prepared to accept this partial justice by asking and acting."

their fate. It can even be argued that the poor remain under the radar of divine justice when they have slipped into debt slavery or full slavery.

To further understand Ps 9–10, note the centrality of this acrostic double psalm that distinguishes between the "nations" (גוים) who align with the "wicked" (רשעים/רשע) (Ps 9:6, 16–17; 10:15–16) and the "peoples" (עמים/לאמים) (Ps 9:9, 12),[57] over whom YHWH also sits enthroned as royal judge—but not for their condemnation. It differs with the *goyim*, who are probably to be understood as Hellenistic occupiers, because they must disappear from the land as foreign rulers (10:16, 18). They oppress all those who rely on YHWH and trust in him as their stronghold (9:10–11).[58] More strongly than before (cf. Ps 3:3; 4:7), the enemies of man and God are now typified by their own words (Ps 10:4, 6, 11, 13; 11:1; 12:5; 13:5; 14:1). Behind these quotations are attitudes against which the pious worshippers must defend themselves. The path of prayer and meditation outlined in these psalms is intended to strengthen the pious so that they do not perish in the harsh social climate of the late post-exilic period (fifth–third century BC). The oppression of the poor is a fact, but they have a direct word from God on their side: עתה אקום "I will now rise up" (Ps 12,6). This word does not serve to instruct the wicked, but to maintain their own position, just like the mention of the divine test of the righteous and the wicked (Ps 11:4–5; 14:2). However, the rise take a long time to arrive, leading their opponents to make a foolish assumption: אין אלהים "There is no God" (Ps 14:1a).[59] The apparent absence of a God who intervenes on behalf of the righteous virtually drives the supplicants into the arms of the wicked: אין עשה טוב "there is no one who does good" (Ps 14:1b).[60] What else can we do in the face of the overwhelming power of the wicked, who are not only destroying society, but also bringing down the world edifice of law and justice? The righteous are not only blameless in the face of the flood of injustice that is destroying the social order, they are also powerless against it.[61] Yet there is *a* righteous *one* who is not helpless: "God is with the company of the righteous" (Ps 14:5a, 7a): He sees (v. 4), examines (v. 5a), and acts (v. 6).[62] Unlike the wicked, who love violence (v. 5b), YHWH, who is righteous, loves "righteousness deeds" (צדקות) (Ps 11:7a). The pious can stand up to injustice only with the indestructible confidence that YHWH is a God "[. . .] who is with the generation of the righteous" (אלהים בדור צדיק) (Ps 14:5). The evildoers, on the other hand, have no knowledge and do not want it. They devour the people like their daily bread (Ps 14:4). In a scribal manner, the psalmists refer to the flood,

57 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 167, note 31: "Both times *gôyīm* is deliberately not used, because in these two verses the peoples are on the one hand subject to Yhwh's world judgment in righteousness and on the other hand are the addressees of the proclamation of his great deeds."

58 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 194–95, 198, 202, 206, 208–9.

59 See also Ps 53 with the same wording.

60 Hartenstein, "Recht": 250: "The problem is *the (too) long absence of salvation*. For *disaster, the self-exaltation of the wicked, has taken over* and dominates the reality of experience" (italics in original).

61 According to Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 178, the question here is why YHWH "[. . .] so mercilessly abandons the righteous to the activities of the wicked."

62 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 220.

which YHWH brought upon the earth because all people "acted corruptly" (שחת Gen 6:12; Ps 14:1). Only Noah, to whom God said, "I have seen that you alone are righteous (צדיק) before me in this generation (בדור הזה) (Gen 7:1), saved himself from this catastrophe. This combination of words is found in the OT only once more in Ps 14:5, which is a strong argument for the specific allusion here. As with the flood, YHWH will now ensure that the righteous do not perish with the wicked, for otherwise he would betray his own nature, which is to be a God with the generation of the righteous.[63] Anyone who believes that he can remain unpunished by disregarding the poor is up against God.[64] When he intervenes to save Israel, he does so from Zion (Ps 14:7). The mention of Zion as the visible place of divine salvation forms a bracket to the confession in Ps 3:5 that YHWH has heard the prayer from his holy mountain. Zion not only indicates the geographical location of the Temple Mount, but as a theological *topos* it also stands for the terrain of saving righteousness. Only the righteous who trust in God and do no wrong may go to the mountain of God and dwell there (Ps 15:1; 24:3–4).

6.1.2 Law and Justice in Psalms 15–24

The parallel design of the entry liturgies in Ps 15 and 24 marks and identifies this partial composition, whereby a worshiper from the nations may also come into question for Ps 24: "In contrast to Ps 15, which is similar in form, Ps 24 deals with the question of what conditions a non-Israelite (a 'goy') must meet in order to be allowed to dwell with the Lord: He must renounce idolatry and inquire of Israel about the true God."[65]

The discourse on justice in Ps 15 is linked to the final petition of Ps 14:7, about who will bring salvation for Israel from Zion. It is obvious that this can only refer to YHWH, but it must not lead us to expect an automatic salvation that ignores the inhabitants of Zion and their concrete actions. The examination of who is allowed to dwell in God's tent on his holy mountain (Ps 15:1) is not aimed at cultic admission to the temple, but at personal closeness to God.[66] Only those are admitted whose conduct is blameless, who "do what is right" (פעל צדק) and speak the truth from the heart (Ps 15:2). The singular connection between the verb פעל "to do" and the noun צדק is significant, as it stands in sharp contrast to the פעלי און "evildoers" in Ps 14:4. According to Ps 14:1b, if there is no one who does good, then the righteous one is the one who observes the ethical rules of living together (Ps 15:5).[67] The fact that Ps 15:2 says *ṣæḏæq* and not *ṣᵉdāqāh* is

63 Cf. Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 198.

64 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 252: "You cannot eliminate YHWH if you take advantage of the wretched. There you will meet him whom you have not cared for."

65 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 458 (cf. ibid. 264); Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 202, argues against a compositional unity of Ps 15–24.

66 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 262.

67 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 205: "'He who does good' was not to be found in 14:3, but he exists."

probably because the framework of right action and upright conduct is defined first and then concretized (Ps 15:3–5). This is not about criminal acts such as murder and manslaughter, which quite obviously exclude one from being close to God, but about proving oneself in everyday life: No slander against one's neighbor, keeping vows (cf. Lev 27:10, 33), not lending money at interest (cf. Lev 25:37; Deut 23:20–21),[68] and not accepting bribes in court (cf. Exod 23:8; Deut 16:19; 27:25). Those who adhere to these requirements of the Torah will enjoy the protective closeness of God and will not waver in eternity (Ps 15:5; in contrast to the wicked in Ps 10:6; cf. 13:5).

The fulfillment of this promise is the subject of Ps 17, which directly followed Ps 15 before Ps 16 had been inserted.[69] The framing of the motto word *ṣædæq* in Ps 17:1, 15 demonstrates the centrality of the theme of justice. The worshipper described in Ps 15:2 as the one who does justice and is therefore entitled to divine protection precisely calls for this at the beginning of Ps 17: "Hear a just cause, O Lord" (שמעה יהוה צדק). The righteous cause at stake here and that YHWH is to perceive is nothing other than the worshipper in his innocent way of life. But it is not only he who is under scrutiny, but also YHWH himself. So that the feet of the worshipper do not stagger on the divine paths (Ps 17:5), YHWH must ensure that he stands firm before the enemies and does not waver for eternity (Ps 15:5): "The worshipper seeks no favor, but justice."[70] Unlike the greedy enemies, who live only for their fat belly and whose children still feast on what they have stolen, the psalmist places his hope for the future entirely in YHWH: "As for me, I shall behold your face in *ṣædæq*; when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness. (Ps 17:15).[71] His righteousness, his uprightness (Ps 17:2), is the guarantee for a closeness to God that means eternal satisfaction—not for the belly, but for the eyes: "Where righteousness is received, respected, cherished, and lived, God takes on form—not in the form of a collection of laws, but as a person whose face and form can be seen."[72]

In the following King's Psalm 18 (par. 2 Sam 22), the heading and postscript in v. 51 equate the prayer with David and his descendants, who are under the special protection of YHWH. That means that every pious worshipper shares in the fate of the anointed one saved by God. The great rescue narrative (vv. 5–20) with the broad description of the theophany (vv. 8–16) underlines the special nature of the event. The reason for the divine salvation does not lie in the election of the house of David over the Saulids (Ps

68 Sigurður Ö. Steingrimsson, *Tor der Gerechtigkeit: Eine literaturwissenschaftliche Untersuchung der sogenannten Einzugsliturgien im AT: Ps 15; 24,3–5 und Jes 33,14–16*, Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 22 (St. Ottilien: EOS-Verlag, 1984): 56: "Within the community, money lending was permitted only to help in emergency situations. The prohibition of interest was thus a direct community support."

69 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 114; Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 298.

70 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 292.

71 Kwakkel, *Righteousness*: 97: "[. . .] the psalmist will be fully satisfied if he may have such a personal meeting with YHWH that he will see his 'form.'"

72 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 225.

18:1) but solely in the righteousness of the worshipper, in his *ṣæḏæq*—in the totality of his irreproachable behavior—as vv. 21–25 emphasize: "The passage primarily justifies the worshipper and indirectly legitimizes YHWH's act of salvation. Salvation corresponds to the praying man's internal and external conduct (righteousness and purity of hands)."[73] Deuteronomistic language and ideas prevail here (v. 22–24). According to this approach, the personal righteousness of the royal worshipper consists in the resolute observance of all "laws" (משפטים) and "statutes" (חקות), which is not least probably an allusion to the royal law in Deut 17:14–20.[74]

The correspondence indicated by the preposition כ ("according to") in Ps 18:21, 25 underlines the praying man's confidence that YHWH will repay him according to his righteousness.[75] The *ṣæḏæq* of the righteous must correspond to YHWH's *ṣᵉdāqāh*, his proof of righteousness. This is also the aim of the last verse of Jesus' Psalm on the Cross when, after the salvation of the unjustly persecuted, it states that YHWH's *ṣᵉdāqāh* will be proclaimed to those who follow, for he has already done it (Ps 22:32): "God has proven his righteousness by listening to the cry of nearness and acting—and thus remaining true to himself: 'Yes, he has acted!'"[76]

The following Ps 23, the song of trust in YHWH as the good shepherd, takes up the keyword "justice." The psalmist is certain that God will guide him in right paths" (במעגלי צדק)—because of his name (Ps 23:3): "Only YHWH's righteousness and the presence of his name pave protected paths—especially where life is in danger of death."[77] The *nomen rectum*, *ṣæḏæq*, has an adjectival function in this connection, meaning "right paths,"[78] on which God guides the worshipper through the narrow and threatening valleys of his life. The verb נחה "to lead/guide" (cf. Exod 13:17, 21; 15:13; Exod 32:34; Deut 32:12; Isa 57:18; 58:11; Ps 31:4; 77:12; 78:53, 72) offers special evidence of the Exodus metaphor. But all this does not mean that the human side requires no more effort to walk in the paths of justice and righteousness. The opposite is the case,

73 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 119; cf. Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 234, 239–40.

74 In the sequential reading of the Psalter, Ps 19:10b also ties in well with this: "the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" (משפטי יהוה אמת צדקו יחד).

75 Wiele, "Justice": 276: "The psalms also draw on this tradition when they use the words *gml, šwb, ntn*, and *šlm*, exploring the implications of talionic principles both for those who preserve life and do no harm, and for their malevolent counterparts."

76 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 411; cf. Uwe Rechberger, "Zwischen individueller Klage und universalem Lob: Die Psalmen 22–24 als ein für den Psalter exemplarisches Itinerar eines Gebets-Pilgerweges," in *Zur Theologie des Psalters und der Psalmen: Beiträge in memoriam Frank-Lothar Hossfeld*, ed. Ulrich Berges, Johannes Bremer and Till Magnus Steiner, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 189 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019): 64.

77 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 284.

78 Böhler, *Psalmen* 1–50: 425, with reference to GK §128p; Andrew T. Abernethy, "'Right Paths' and/or 'Paths of Righteousness'? Examining Psalm 23.3b within the Psalter," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 39 (2015): 317: "Yahweh's people can be confident that they will experience his vindicating righteousness and moral guidance in route to his house."

as Ps 17:5 already emphasized: "My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped." Particularly in the wisdom tradition, part of everyone's task is to choose the right paths and avoid the crooked ones (Prov 2:9, 15, 18; 4:11, 26; 5:6, 21; cf. Isa 26:7; 59:8).

The entrance liturgy of Ps 24, which, along with that in Ps 15 frames the partial composition Psalms 15–24, continues this interweaving of human righteousness as the right way of life before God, fellow human beings, and divine righteousness as the certainty of salvation for the righteous. Only those who are blameless on the outside ("clean hands") and on the inside ("pure hearts") may go up to the mountain of YHWH and stand in his holy place (Ps 24:3–4). From him he will receive "blessing" (ברכה) and "vindication" (צדקה) from the God of his salvation (Ps 24:5). Once again, the divine *ṣᵉdāqāh* is the act of salvation with which YHWH rewards the praying person and all those who ask for him for right conduct.[79] Here, too, the worshipper does not stand for an individual person, but embodies the group of those who "seek" (דרש) God, who ask for him, and who make him the anchor of their lives (cf. Ps 9:11; 14:2; 22:27; 34:5; 53:3; 105:4; 111:2). When it states that they would seek the face of the God of Jacob (thus ^{LXX}Ps 23:6), the circle of those who seek YHWH then goes beyond Jacob and Israel. Where Zion is in view as the goal of those seeking God, it also includes those from the nations who have renounced foreign gods to serve YHWH.[80] Furthermore, a movement can be observed here that increasingly portrays the paradigmatic worshipper as part of a group that stands in contrast to the transgressors and evildoers. This collective bears many names, including the *saints* (Ps 16:3), *those who fear YHWH* (Ps 31:20; 66:16; 147:11), those who *seek [God]* (Ps 24:6; 40:17; 69:33; 70:5). The most frequent designations are the *righteous* (Ps 32:11; 33:1; 34:16, 18; 37:29, 39; 52:8; 68:4; 69:29; 97:12; 118:15, 20; 123:2; 125:3; 140:14; 142:8; 146:9), the *upright [of heart]* (Ps 7:11; 11:2; 32:11; 33:1; 36:11; 49:15; 64:11; 97:11; 107:42; 111:1; 112:2, 4; 125:4; 140:14), the *servants* (Ps 34:23; 69:37; 79:2, 10; 89:51; 90:13, 16; 102:15, 29; 105:25; 113:1; 123:2; 134:1; 135:1, 14 [cf. David as servant: Ps 143:2, 12; 144:10], and the *pious* (Ps 30:5; 31:24; 37:28; 50:5; 52:11; 79:2; 85:9; 89:20; 97:10; 116:15; 132:16; 145:10; 148:14; 149:1, 5).[81]

79 Steingrimsson, *Tor der Gerechtigkeit*: 89: "The pure way of life is the prerequisite for receiving the salvation goods of the temple."

80 According to ^{MT}Ps 24:6, the seekers of God from the nations first encounter Jacob: "they must seek out Israel if they want to find YHWH," according to Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 450.

81 On the "servants," see Ulrich Berges, "The Servant(s) in Isaiah," in *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020): 318–33; and Ulrich Berges, "Isaiah 55–66 and the Psalms: Shared Viewpoints, Literary Similarities, and Neighboring Authors," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 141, no. 2 (2022): 277–99.

6.1.3 Law and Justice in Psalms 25–34

The fact that these psalms, like Psalms 3–14 and Psalms 15–24 before them, form a partial composition can hardly be disputed given that the framing psalms are both arranged as alphabetical acrostics with a missing Tav strophe. This is even more evident considering that the final petition in Ps 25:22 ("Redeem Israel, O God, out of all its troubles"), which stands outside the acrostic, that is after the Tav strophe, is taken up in the final verse of Ps 34:23, "The Lord redeems the life [*nǽpǽš*] of his servants").[82] The beginning only hints at theme of justice, but it gains more and more weight at the end of the partial collection, even becoming a decisive factor. Ps 25:8a states "Good and upright is the Lord." His being "upright" (ישר) corresponds to his innermost nature to lead sinners, those who have strayed from the path, back to him through instruction.[83] The following verse supplements this idea because he lets the humble go "in what is right" (במשפט)—he teaches them to walk in his way (v. 9).[84] A socially critical note can no longer be heard here, but the "humble" (ענוים) are about the pious who do not trust in themselves, but completely in YHWH and expect protection and salvation from him.

In addition to collectivization, Psalms 25–34 shows how YHWH's faithfulness, goodness and truth, the qualities that characterize him, play an increasingly important role in the discourse on justice. In other words, God's goodness and justice move so close together that they merge. Unlike Psalm 24 with its entry liturgy and unlike Ps 26 with its direct reference to the temple (v. 8; cf. Ps 27:4–6; 28:2; 29:2; 30:8; 31:3), Ps 25 does not display this merge. The connection arises through the righteousness of the worshipper (Ps 24:4; 25:12; 26:1–3), whom YHWH guides on the path of "truth" (אמת) (Ps 25:5). His "mercy" (רחמים) and "steadfast love" (חסדים) are so great that they even make God forget the "transgressions" (פשע)—the former idolatry of the worshipper: God's "mercy" (חסד) and "steadfast love" (טוב) always prevail (Ps 25:6–7). Calling YHWH "good and upright" (טוב וישר) (Ps 25:8a) underlines his devotion[85] and his instruction for the humble and pious to walk in the way of godliness (Ps 25:12). These paths are "steadfast love and faithfulness" (חסד ואמת). Those who walk on them preserve God's covenant and its testimonies, which refers to the covenant made at Sinai (Ps 25:10; cf. Exod 34:6 [חסד ואמת]).[86] Finally, "integrity and uprightness" (תם וישר) function as two divine powers of salva-

82 Kathrin Liess, "'Und all sein Tun geschieht in Treue' (Ps 33,4): Zur Komposition der Teilsammlung Psalm 25–34," in *Intertextualität und die Entstehung des Psalters: Methodische Reflexionen—Theologiegeschichtliche Perspektiven*, ed. Alma Brodersen, Friederike Neumann and David Willgren, Forschungen zum Alten Testament / 2 114 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020): 185; cf. Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 298.

83 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 467: "Of all the things that could be said about YHWH's nature, he chooses 'uprightness' to reflect God's goodness."

84 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 165: "[God] gives man just and promising instructions for action."

85 See the motto word חנן "be gracious," Ps 4:2; 6:3; 9:14; 25:16; 26:11; 27:7; 30:9, 11; 31:10; 37:21, 26; 41:5, 11.

86 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 467.

tion,[87] which should accompany the worshippers and help them and their children to lead a successful life (Ps 25:13; cf. 23:6). The wisdom tradition and theology of the poor strongly influence the discourse on justice here: "A post-exilic redaction that pursues the theology of the poor has therefore deliberately placed Ps 25 between Ps 24 and Ps 26 to supplement the image of the righteous with its model of the thoughtful poor."[88]

If by apostasy the worshipper means his former idolatry, the acrostic that begins with the letter Alef and in which the Lamed stands in the middle of the psalm and the Pe opens the surplus final verse could be "[. . .] an *'ûlpān*, a teaching, a school of learning, in which one who has come from the nations wants to become literate in the faith of Israel."[89] This understanding would fit well with the servants (*'āḇāḏîm*) in Ps 34:23. They are also the ones who advocate the admission of non-Israelites to the worship of YHWH in the last part of the book of Isaiah (cf. Isa 56:1–3).[90]

In this partial composition, the path on which the worshippers are to remain has a great deal to do with the sanctuary: Only those who can demonstrate a righteous way of life are granted access to it.[91] The highest authority that decides on admission to this realm of closeness to God is none other than YHWH himself. In his initial petition שפטני יהוה (EÜ: "Make me right") in Psalm 26:1, the prayer is not about a legal decision, because there are no accusations against him, but about the assessment of his way of life: "Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity."[92] Not only the noun תם "integrity, innocence, faultlessness" frames the psalm (Ps 26:1, 11), the metathesis of מעד "to waver" and עמד "to stand" (Ps 26:1, 12) also does. Those who live their lives with integrity must be able to trust that YHWH will prevent them from wavering in the face of evildoers and violent people (v. 9): "The ideal state in the present is not endangered by false accusations (there is no mention of this here), but by the pull of the wicked."[93] The innocent worshipper has a right to the shelter of YHWH, the temple (Ps 27:4–6), to which he lifts his imploring hands (Ps 28:2). Here sits enthroned the world God who rules over chaos and in whose palace all praise his glory (Ps 29:9): "He is the place that unites all spheres, beings, and people over whom God rules as king."[94] It is hardly a coincidence that the following Psalm 30 is the only one to be titled "Temple Dedication

87 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 166: "like two protective genii."

88 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 163.

89 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 472 [אלף "learn/teach," U.B.].

90 Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 49–54*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2015): 330–31; Berges, *Jesaja 55–66*: 88–90, 134–36.

91 According to Thomas Hieke, "Psalm 26: Unerträgliche Selbstgerechtigkeit oder verzweifelter Glaube?" in *Studien zu Psalmen und Propheten: Festschrift für Hubert Irsigler*, ed. Carmen Diller et al., Herders Biblische Studien 64 (Freiburg: Herder, 2010): 76, admission into "[. . .] the spiritual community of life with YHWH, characterized by trust" also plays a role here.

92 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 476; cf. Hieke, "Psalm 26": 73.

93 Hieke, "Psalm 26": 74.

94 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 330.

Song." The mountain of God (Ps 30:8) by no means protects us from temptation and trials, but it is the place where the pious offer praise to God after their salvation.

The relevant vocabulary of justice is widely scattered in the last psalms (Ps 30–34) of the partial composition, Psalms 25–34. The opening petition of Ps 31, for example, says "in your righteousness deliver me" (v. 1c) (בצדקתך פלטני), which has its counterpart in v. 17b, "save me in your steadfast love" (הושיעני בחסדך). His way of life gives the worshipper the right to turn to YHWH so emphatically: "He does so in the awareness of being a *ṣaddîq* (v. 19b), who may live in God's *ṣedeq* 'righteousness' (v. 2c) and therefore in the certainty of salvation."[95] The worshipper is not alone, but knows that he is part of the company of the "righteous" (צדיקים) and "all upright in heart" (כל ישרי לב) who praise YHWH (Ps 32:11).

The beginning of Ps 33 takes up the theme of the righteous singing of their saving God. This psalm stands out because it is the only one in the first book of the Psalter (Ps 3–41) that has remained without a heading and was therefore probably deliberately appended to Ps 32. It is an alphabetizing song—it has as many lines as the Hebrew alphabet, but without respecting the sequence of letters. "Within the horizon of Ps 32, Ps 33 is a hymn 'of the righteous' about the goodness of YHWH revealed in the renewal of the covenant, which is programmatically echoed in Ps 25, the opening psalm of the composition 25–34."[96]

Apart from the Psalter (Ps 33:3; Ps 40:4; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1), only Isa 42:10 mentions the "new song" (שיר חדש). More important than the literary-historical dependency is the correspondence in terms of content: "Thematically, the 'new song' is about the work of YHWH on the stage of world history, through which he enforces his order of justice for his chosen people in such a way that he also changes the world of nations."[97] This order for Israel and the world of nations has a profound connection with the nature of YHWH, to whom the middle section (v. 4–19) of Ps 33 is dedicated. It is no coincidence that the praise of qualities and actions after the call to the righteous and upright (Ps 33:1) is justified by the fact that God's word is "upright" (ישר) (v. 4). This is immediately followed by the statement in v. 5a, formulated in the hymnic participial style, that God "loves righteousness and justice" (צדקה ומשפט אהב), followed by the parallel line in v. 5b, "the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord (חסד יהוה מלאה הארץ). The proximity to similar formulations in Ps 89:15; 97:2; 99:4 indicates that righteousness and justice

95 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 345.

96 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 207; cf. Liess, "Komposition": 185.

97 Erich Zenger, "'Es sei deine Liebe, JHWH, über uns!' Beobachtungen zu Aufbau und Theologie von Psalm 33," in *"Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben" (Gen 18,19): Studien zur altorientalischen und biblischen Rechtsgeschichte, zur Religionsgeschichte Israels und zur Religionssoziologie*; *Festschrift für Eckart Otto zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Reinhard Achenbach, Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte / Beihefte 13 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009): 356; cf. Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 360.

are also "God's companions"[98] here, who support his throne, his kingship, while his faithfulness is the life-sustaining principle by which the earth is filled and permeated. The borrowing from Isa 6:3 is obvious, but now it is not God's glory that fills the earth, but his faithfulness, which leads Erich Zenger to the well-founded view that "[. . .] the psalm presents the חסד of YHWH as the life principle of the universal order of justice of the world king YHWH."[99] This divine attention cannot be earned, but can only be longed for and hoped for as a God-fearing person (Psalm 33:18, 22): "The righteousness of the righteous is not accomplished by their actions, but by hoping for the gift of God's righteousness—in the form of the חסד of YHWH that saves from death."[100] This development is of crucial importance for the discourse on justice in the Psalter, because the core of divine justice lies in the gracious gift. Through YHWH's *ḥæsæḏ,* the worshipper becomes *ḥāsîḏ* in his righteous way of life.[101]

The following Ps 34 is an acrostic (without the Waw line), in which a further Pe line is added after the Tav line (v. 22) to reach the number of 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The last line of the verse with the confession of trust takes up the final petition of Ps 25 (Ps 25:22: "Redeem Israel, O God") and includes the servants in the plural for the first time (Ps 34:23: "The Lord redeems the life of his servants"). Together, this is an unmistakable sign of an editorial insertion (cf. Ps 69:37). The two acrostics Ps 25 and 34 (otherwise also Ps 9;10; 37; 111; 112; 119; 145) have so much in common in terms of vocabulary and program that they can justifiably be regarded as the framing psalms of the partial composition Ps 25–34.[102] The three references[103] to the "righteous" (Ps 34:16) or the "righteous one" (Ps 34:20, 22) are all found in the psalm's doctrine of God in v. 16–22: "YHWH's eyes and ears, all his attention is turned to the righteous, especially when they need him."[104] In the ongoing conflict between the righteous and the wicked,

98 Norbert Lohfink, "Die Bundesformel in Psalm 33," in *Der Gott Israels und die Völker: Untersuchungen zum Jesajabuch und zu den Psalmen*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 154 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1994): 101.

99 Zenger, "Liebe": 351; see also Hermann Spieckermann, "'Die ganze Erde ist seiner Herrlichkeit voll': Pantheismus im Alten Testament?" in *Gottes Liebe zu Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 33 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001): 73–74.

100 Zenger, "Liebe": 361; cf. Lohfink, "Bundesformel": 101: "Presumably those who, as the disadvantaged of the world, allow themselves to be given the חסד by God, that is his royal faithfulness and grace, are the true 'righteous.' We would have something like a doctrine of justification."

101 Krašovic, *God's Righteousness*: 56, points out that there is no such combination of God's *ḥæsæḏ* and *ṣedeq* in the book of Isaiah (unlike in Jer 9:23; Hos 2:21 and in the Psalter, Ps 33:5; 36:11; 40:11; 85:11; 88:12f.; 89:15; 145:17; cf. Ps 112:4; 116:5).

102 Erich Zenger, "Der Psalter als Buch: Beobachtungen zu seiner Entstehung, Komposition und Funktion," in *Der Psalter in Judentum und Christentum: Norbert Lohfink zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Erich Zenger, Herders Biblische Studien 18 (Freiburg: Herder, 1998): 21, refers to the identical line openings in Ps 25:12 and 34:13; 25:15 and 33:13; 25:16 and 34:17; 25:22 and 34:23.

103 ^{LXX}Ps 33:18 has "the righteous" (οἱ δίκαιοι) inserted specifically to clarify the subject of the cry for help.

104 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 616.

the former should not despair, "[. . .] because YHWH has made his fundamental choice for justice and must therefore support the struggle of the righteous and cannot ignore their cry for justice."[105]

6.1.4 Law and Justice in Psalms 35–41

The partial collection of Psalms 35–41 forms the conclusion of the first Psalter of David (Ps 3–41) where the theme of human and divine justice once again occupies a central place.[106] The authors of Ps 35 were almost certainly familiar with Ps 7: "Ps 35 can almost be read as a commentary on Ps 7, which aims to set new accents with regard to the theme of justice."[107] The only evidence in the Psalter of the מלאך יהוה "messenger of YHWH" (Ps 34:8; 35:5–6; cf. "his messengers" in Ps 78:49; 91:11; 103:20, 104:4; 148:2) shows that Ps 35 was not added to Ps 34 by chance. Further points of reference stand out. Whereas the end of Ps 34 states that YHWH is a redeemer of the life of "his servants" (v. 23a), Ps 35 concludes in the penultimate verse with the rejoicing of those who rejoice in the peace "his servant" has obtained from God (v. 27).[108] The worshipper speaks *in persona* David and can count on the same divine intervention in his favor.[109] It is YHWH who ensures that the enemies must fail in their malicious arrogance with which they want to devour the righteous ("Aha, we have our heart's desire," v. 25).

The threefold movement from lament to praise in Ps 35 (vv. 1–10, 11–18, and 19–28) clarifies that maintaining confidence in YHWH's salvation is by no means a matter of course but must be fought for again and again in prayer. That the vocabulary of justice and righteousness appears at the end of the third and final round of lamentation to praise (vv. 23–28) is certainly no coincidence but was intended by the poets of the psalm. If YHWH did not stand up for the right of his righteous one, but literally slept through his appeal (v. 23), his cause and his own would be lost.[110] That is why it does not say, as in the plea of Ps 7:9, "Judge me, O Lord, according to *my* righteousness (כצדקי), but "Vindicate me, O Lord, my God, according to *your* righteousness (כצדקך) (Ps 35:24).

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105 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 214.

106 Willem A.M. Beuken, *From Servant of YHWH to Being Considerate of the Wrechted: The Figure of David in the Reading Perspective of Psalms 35–41 MT*, Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses / Bibliotheca 305 (Leuven: Peeters, 2020): 83, suggests a parallel double structure: Supplication in Ps 35. 38–39; praise of divine justice in Ps 36. 40; instruction in Ps 37. 41.

107 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 374 with reference to Ps 7:9–18 and Ps 35:19–28 (ibid., note 24).

108 See the heading of Ps 36 "of the servant of YHWH, of David," which otherwise only occurs in Ps 18:1 (cf. Ps 89:4, 21).

109 Beuken, *Servant*: 85.

110 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 377: "The watchful and present God preserves his justice and thus the people to whom it applies"; cf. Hubertus Schönemann, *Der untreue Gott und sein treues Volk: Anklage Gottes angesichts unschuldigen Leidens nach Psalm 44*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 157 (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2009): 204–5.

Unlike the case in Ps 7, the worshipper who has been set right by YHWH and thus saved is portrayed as part of a group of praising like-minded people, "Let those who desire my vindication shout for joy and be glad" (חפצי צדקי) (Ps 35:27a). The *šālôm* of the servant is both the proof of his righteousness in receiving and of God's righteousness in granting (v. 27b): "'My righteousness' becomes 'your righteousness,' namely as a gift of God's salvation."[111] While the like-minded are to let the praise resound loudly, the praying person's final reaction is characterized by great inwardness: "Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all day long" (v. 28).[112]

This reciting meditation on divine justice contrasts the arrogance of the wicked person who does not want to know anything about God's reality and work but has devoted himself entirely to his own wickedness (Ps 36:1–5). While the wicked knows only himself and his selfishness,[113] the righteous man's gaze widens to the heights of God's goodness and faithfulness, to his righteousness, which stands firm like the mountains of God, and to his righteous judgments, which are as deep as the primeval flood (Ps 36:7).[114] In terms of content, this justice is nothing other than YHWH's "goodness" (חסד) and "faithfulness" (אמונה), under which, according to the Hebrew text, even "gods" (אלהים) are protected: "The union realized here of humans, animals, and divine beings, who all live equally in the shadow of YHWH's wings (v. 8c), is unique not only in the Psalms, but in the entire Old Testament."[115] However, this justice of God that sustains all creation and all reality must not only be hoped for, but must also be experienced. This is precisely the aim of the plea in v. 11: "O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart!" As long as this happens, as long as the faithful receive God's faithfulness and the righteous person his saving righteousness, the cosmic order is not in danger. However, there is more to the problem of theodicy behind this affirmation than is apparent at first glance. Ps 37 shows that this is the case

111 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 378.

112 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 641: "There is certainly occasional rejoicing (v 27) when justice triumphs. In conclusion, however, there remains silent meditation on God's actions ('your righteousness'), of which 'all day long your praise' consists."

113 Norbert Lohfink, "Das Böse im Herzen und Gottes Gerechtigkeit in der weiten Welt: Gedanken zu Ps 36," in *Gottes Nähe: Religiöse Erfahrung in Mystik und Offenbarung; Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Josef Sudbrack SJ*, ed. Paul Imhof (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1990): 329: "The sinner is a world caught up in itself."

114 This means that all areas of reality in the horizontal and vertical are encompassed by God's presence, see Bernd Janowski, "'Bis an den Himmel reicht deine Güte' (Ps 36,6): Zum Thema 'Gott und Raum' in den Psalmen," in *Zur Theologie des Psalters und der Psalmen: Beiträge in memoriam Frank-Lothar Hossfeld*, ed. Ulrich Berges, Johannes Bremer and Till Magnus Steiner, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 189 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019): 202–3.

115 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 383; ^{LXX}Ps 35:8 reads here the vocative ὁ θεός "O God."

with the burden of faith that the pious person must bear in the face of the obvious happiness of the wicked and the misfortune of the righteous.[116]

This acrostic with an additional line in each case, which allows the alphabetical passage to be given even more depth of content, is not a prayer in the proper sense, but a meditation by the pious supplicant who lives in a reality that constantly calls into question his trust in both his own righteousness and that of his God. The contrast is made via the group of "the righteous" (vv. 12, 16, 17, 21, 25, 29, 30, 32, 39), which also includes "the meek/poor" (vv. 11, 14), "those who wait for the Lord" (v. 9), "the blameless" (vv. 18, 37), "righteous" (v. 28), "those [whose] steps are made firm by the Lord" (vv. 14, 23) and "the peaceable" (v. 37). They are opposed by "the wicked" (vv. 1, 9, 12) and "the transgressors" (v. 38), in short, the whole group of "the wicked" (vv. 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 20, 28, 32, 34, 35, 38, 40). Both factions walk different paths (Ps 37:5, 7, 14, 23, 34) and have chosen different ways of life (cf. Ps 1). Repeated seven times, the key word "land" (vv. 3, 9, 11, 12, 27, 29, 34) should also be seen in this light, as it indicates whether the chosen path leads to the goal or not. The last reference in v. 34 makes this understanding clear: "Wait for the Lord, and keep to his *way*, and he will exalt you to inherit the *land*; you will look on the destruction of the wicked." This is a chiastic inclusion to v. 9, where land possession and extermination are in reverse order: "For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land." The reminiscence of the conquest narratives is unmistakable (see Lev 20:24; Num 33:53; Deut 1:8, 21; 2:12, 24, 31; Josh 1:11, 15). In addition, land and land ownership have become a "[. . .] far-reaching metaphor for salvation."[117] It is more strongly present here than anywhere else in the Psalter (Ps 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34) and is prepared by Ps 25:12–13, which states that YHWH shows the way to the godly and that his descendants will possess the land. It would be wrong to assume that this metaphor is a pure spiritualization that no longer has any real needs in mind. Land and land ownership denote a social reality in which saving justice must manifest itself:

> Owning the land, inheriting it, taking possession of it are not so much forms of expressing a juridical relationship—a title of possession—but rather an existential relationship, a way of relating to the land and God-given goods in such a way that it serves the life of all. In this way, the land actually becomes a space of encounter and community.[118]

116 For Beuken, *Servant*: 161, Ps 35–37 are "[. . .] a sort of theodicy, a guideline with regard to the vexing question of how and when God will deal with the prosperity of the wicked and the misfortune of the righteous."

117 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 390.

118 Eleuterio R. Ruiz, *Das Land ist für die Armen da: Psalm 37 und seine immer aktuelle Bedeutung*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 232 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2015): 52–53; on the reception history of Ps 37, see Susan E. Gillingham, "'The Righteous Shall Inherit the Land, and Live in it Forever' (Ps 37:29)," in *Zur Theologie des Psalters und der Psalmen: Beiträge in memoriam Frank-Lothar Hossfeld*, ed. Urich Berges, Johannes Bremer and Till Magnus Steiner, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 189 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019): 414–16.

The wisdom dictum that the righteousness of the righteous necessarily leads to future *shalom*, while the wickedness of the wicked leads to future destruction (see אחרית "future" in v. 37–38) is like the doctrine of Job's friends, as is the assertion that the worshipper has never seen a righteous person abandoned and his children begging for bread in his entire long life (v. 25). Behind this affirmation is the adherence to the act-consequence relationship to uphold both human and divine justice:

> The stereotype is intended to underline the validity of the promises with particular emphasis—but here too, the affirmative style reveals above all how questionable and challenging to the psalmists what they claim as valid truly is. For the degree of affirmation and perseverance in the defense of a position does not necessarily reveal only adherence to the principle of the advocate, but—read the other way round—also gives an idea of the intensity of counter-positions that oppose the advocated position from the other side.[119]

The opposing view of the wicked that there is no God who ensures the maintenance of the act-consequence relationship means the existential questioning of the righteous person's life decision. The worshipper must repeatedly immunize himself against this literally godless criticism, and he does this by falling back on wisdom and the Torah (vv. 30–31; cf. Deut 4:5–6).[120] Every experience of salvation in the congregation of the pious is a kind of *booster* against the virus that destroys the relationship with God. To prevent this from happening, we must hold on to the dictum considered forever valid, with which the psalm concludes towards the end in the form of two nominal clauses: "The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; he is their refuge in the time of trouble" (v. 39).

The theme of justice does not appear in the following two psalms. They are so strongly characterized by lament and petition that Ps 39 is even considered a Job Psalm.[121] The confidence of Ps 37 in God's saving righteousness for the righteous worshipper is not a matter of course but must repeatedly assert itself against the painful experience of God's remoteness. The psalm of thanksgiving and supplication, Psalm 40, which refers to Psalm 70 in vv. 14–18, testifies precisely to this experience of salvation (vv. 2–5), which culminates in the confession of hope in YHWH: "You are my help and my deliverer" (v. 18c). The "new song" (v. 4) is a hymn of praise to God's righteousness, which is expressed in *your* truth, *your* salvation, *your* faithfulness, *your* mercy and *your*

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119 Markus Saur, "Frevler und Gerechte: Überlegungen zum theologischen Ort von Psalm 37," in *Nächstenliebe und Gottesfurcht: Beiträge aus alttestamentlicher, semitistischer und altorientalistischer Wissenschaft für Hans-Peter Mathys*, ed. Hanna Jenni and Markus Saur, Alter Orient und Altes Testament 439 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2016): 386; cf. Hubert Irsigler, "Quest for Justice as Reconciliation of the Poor and the Righteous in Psalms 37, 49 and 73," *Skrif en Kerk* 19, no. 3 (1998): 591: "Ultimately paradoxes may not exist for Psalm 37."

120 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 390: "The explicit connection made here between wisdom and Torah, both of which are linked to law, is unique in the Psalter."

121 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 408; cf. Job 7:17–19; 14:1–6; 17:13–16; 19:10.

compassion (vv. 10–12: five personal suffixes in the second-person singular).[122] At the end of the first Psalter of David, there can be no clearer statement of what constitutes YHWH's righteousness: The reliable faithfulness with which he saves the pious righteous is God's *ṣædæq* and *ṣᵉdāqāh*.

6.2 Law and Justice in the Second Book of Psalms (Ps 42–72)

The Second Book of Psalms expands the theme of justice and righteousness. The responsibility of the king is emphasized at the beginning and at the end (Ps 45; 72), and divine justice is expanded both vertically (heaven and gods: Ps 50:6; 58:2; 71:19) and horizontally (the whole world: Ps 58:12; 65:6). The intersection where both levels meet is Zion and its sanctuary—the earthly dwelling place of the God of justice and righteousness for the whole world (Ps 48:11–12). Only righteous offerings have their place there (Ps 51:21), only the righteous will flourish in the house of God (Ps 52:8, 10), and those who have made a pilgrimage there will find a secure foothold (Ps 42:3; 43:1, 3–4; 55:15, 23). From there, YHWH responds with terrifying displays of power in righteousness (Ps 65:6), and there the righteous rejoice before his face (Ps 68:4). The enemies of God's servants, however, won't be allowed into his righteousness because of their own injustice. Instead, they will be blotted out of the book of life that records only the righteous (Ps 69:28–29).

Even this brief overview shows that the righteousness of the human king does not play the main role in the second book of the Psalter (Ps 42–49 Korah Psalms, Ps 50 Asaph Psalm, and Ps 51–72 Second Davidic Collection). Instead, they focus on God's justice, which YHWH exercises throughout the world from Zion, from his sanctuary. This is even truer as the hope for a righteous human king among God's people also seems to have come to an end by the end of the prayers of David, the son of Jesse (Ps 72:20). The beginning of the double Psalm 42–43 emphasizes the theocentric orientation. In his thirst for God, the worshipper longs for the satisfying encounter in the sanctuary (Ps 42:2–3). YHWH is supposed to be on the side of the supplicant, not on that of his opponents, whom he accuses of deceit and injustice: "Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people" (Ps 43:1; cf. Ps 35:1). This is not a matter of legal clarification, because there are no specific accusations against the supplicant, but of proof that YHWH is protecting the supplicant: "The supplicant wants to be vindicated against his oppressors by the God whose effectiveness they deny."[123]

This vindication of the one who prays lies in God's righteousness, which is shown in the "salvation" of the righteous (תשועה cf. Ps 37:39; 38:23; 40:11, 17; ישועה cf. Ps 3:9; 9:15; 14:7; 35, 3, 9; 42:6, 12; 43:5). But how can individual worshippers and God's people

122 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 739–40.
123 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 787.

trust in his saving righteousness if he, as the king, does not command Jacob's salvation (Ps 44:5) but delivers his own people to oppressors and plunderers (Ps 44:12, 23), even though they did nothing wrong (Ps 44:18–23)? Against all expectations, the God of Jacob has overridden the connection between righteous action and positive outcome: "YHWH has scattered his people among the nations, *even though they* had walked on his paths and had not deviated. In Ps 44, the realization of the connection between *the life of the Torah* and *life in the land is* shattered."[124] This negativity, which left the supplicants stunned and which opens an unbridgeable gap to the God of their fathers, causes all certainty in God to fade. God can not only save his people, but also sell them [into slavery] to the nations at a ridiculously low price (Ps 44:13). Asymmetrical dependence does not only have positive outcomes, i.e. salvation, but also negative ones as is seen when they are sold amongst the nations (cf. Deut 28:68; Isa 52:3). There is no question that the God of Jacob can save, but whether or why he does no longer wants to do so. This is an existential question for the poets of this post-exilic lament: "At this point in the Psalter, Ps 44 opens a chasm that basically throws all the metaphors and theses developed in the reading and meditating passage through the First Book of Psalms into an aporetic antithesis."[125] It therefore comes as no surprise that the core theological concepts such as justice, mercy, and truth do not appear in this psalm until the prayer ends in v. 27b with the plea: "Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love" (פדנו למען חסדך). The future of God's people hangs by a thread from the divine *ḥæsæḏ*, for which the three aspects of "action, community, and constancy" are constitutive.[126] Should the God of Jacob no longer demonstrate his solidarity, his people and his worshippers would be finished for good.

Why did the Korahites place this first psalm of popular lamentation *after* the lamentations of Ps 42–43 and *before* the song of the king in Ps 45? On the one hand, they emphasize divine justice against the background of the individual's (Ps 42–43) and the people's (Ps 44) experiences of loss.[127] On the other hand, they implicitly reject a Davidic ideology of kingship in the post-exilic period. They do so implicitly, because according to the understanding of the Ancient Near East and Old Testament the claim to rule needs to be legitimized by God to be able to enforce justice. The king needs to be able to mount the chariot humbly to fight for the "cause of truth" (דבר אמת) and "justice with meekness" (ענוה צדק) (Ps 45:5a).[128] Truth, justice, and humility (gentleness) are the pillars of

124 Schönemann, *Der untreue Gott*: 202 (italics in original).

125 Schönemann, *Der untreue Gott*: 218.

126 Kathrin Liess, "'Um deiner Güte willen' (Ps 44,27): Geschichtserinnerung und Geschichtserfahrung in Psalm 44 im Kontext der ersten Korachsammlung Ps 42–49," in *Zur Theologie des Psalters und der Psalmen: Beiträge in memoriam Frank-Lothar Hossfeld*, ed. Ulrich Berges, Johannes Bremer and Till Magnus Steiner, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 189 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019): 96.

127 Thus the noun לחץ "affliction" is found in the Psalter only in Ps 42:10; 43:2; and 44:25.

128 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 815–17; Buber/Rosenzweig translate: "*Reite für die Sache der Treue, der gebeugten Wahrhaftigkeit*."

his throne and the goalposts of his reign. It is possible that the fearsome deeds of the right hand in v. 5b were added at a later date in order to "[. . .] praise the presence of the eternally enthroned God and King beyond an earthly king and thereby rebalance the theological emphasis, which in the basic version was too one-sidedly focused on the king from a post-exilic perspective."[129] This is even more likely for the phrase "Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever" (Ps 45:7a). However one evaluates these verses in terms of literary and editorial history, the impression that the human king's role to establish justice and righteousness takes a back seat to YHWH's rule is undeniable.[130] After the failure of the Davidic monarchy, "Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity" (Ps 45:7b) can refer only to God's kingship over Israel and the nations of the world.

As important as kingship was for the time of statehood, it was unable to prevent the catastrophe of the exile. On the contrary, it was a driving factor. The God of Jacob did not prevent it because he was unable to do so, but rather because it was in accordance with his will. Although he has "rejected" (זנח) his people (Ps 44:10), he cannot hold on to this decision forever (Ps 44:24), because then he would permanently expose them to the mockery of the nations (Ps 44:14–15). Just as God proves his righteousness before the congregation of the pious through the salvation of the individual, he also proves it in the salvation of his people before the nations. His chosen ones can be led like sheep to the slaughter, but not forever, just as the righteous individual is also made to suffer, but not without the hope of God's ultimate faithfulness. But who is the gloriously adorned bride who also receives gifts from the nations (Ps 45:13–16)? In the post-exilic context, this can only be Zion as the bride of the royal God YHWH. According to Erich Zenger, these verses "[. . .] sing of the wedding procession of the magnificently adorned daughter Zion with her entourage (in front of the nations as servants of Zion/Jerusalem, cf. especially Isa 49^{23} 60^{16}) towards the king."[131] The praise by the nations in the Zion chapters of Isa 60–62 as well as YHWH's kingship in Ps 46–48, which radiates from Zion into the world of the nations, confirm this interpretation.[132]

Psalms 46–48 indisputably form a small unit. YHWH, the royal ruler, directs and guides the destinies of the world not only for his people, but for all nations from the holy Mount Zion, from his city and the temple: "God gives his people the Temple Mount. From the place of this living unity with the people, God wants to exercise his kingship over all nations and the whole earth."[133] As the "people of the God of Abraham" (Ps 47:10; cf. Gen 17), the nations are also invited to praise this God-King, but of course only

129 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 444.

130 Schönemann, *Der untreue Gott*: 220: "The anointed one becomes more and more blurred with God himself in the course of the psalm."

131 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalm 1–50*: 283; cf. Claudia Süssenbach, *Der elohistische Psalter: Untersuchungen zu Komposition und Theologie von Ps 42–83*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament / 2 7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005): 366–67.

132 Berges, *Jesaja 55–66*: 61–62, 360–63; Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 827–28, 833–34.

133 Spieckermann, *Psalm 1–49*: 450.

those who do not prepare to attack his city and seek to storm it (Ps 48:5–9). Such a plan is doomed to failure because God himself is a "refuge" for the city and its inhabitants (משגב Ps 46:8, 12; 48:4). The keywords of justice and judgment appear only in the last verses (Ps 48:10–12) of this composition, in which the worshippers turn directly to God. In their meditation on God's *ḥæsæḏ*, in the temple they confess, "Your right hand is filled with justice" (v. 11b). The goodness that manifests itself in divine justice is the Psalter's compositional response to the final petition of the people's lament in Ps 44:27.[134]

After the defense against enemy attacks, the *ṣæḏæq* can mean nothing other than that by saving Zion God enforces his legal order and his salvation all over the world.[135] Therefore, not only Mount Zion, but also the daughters (cities) of Judah should rejoice "because of your judgments (*mišpāṭîm*) (v. 12b; cf. Ps 97:8). Just as his judgment in favor of the righteous consists in saving them from the affliction of the adversaries (cf. Ps 33:5, 23; 35:23; 36:7; 37:6, 28), it is also made known to the nations worldwide through the salvation of Zion and the cities of Juda from the attacks of the enemy nations.[136]

In the final psalm of the first collection of Korah, Ps 49, the nations no longer oppose the people of God, but receive the instruction that a person cannot save himself from death through material wealth or through wisdom because wise and foolish alike will die (Ps 49:6–13). Just as only God is able to save from the conflicts of the nations, so it is he alone who delivers those who trust in him from the realm of the dead (Ps 49:16): "Only God can guarantee redemption from death for every human being."[137] The plea for "redemption" (פדה), which still referred to life and survival in the land in Ps 44:27, is transcended here and also placed in the context of God's justice.[138] What would be the use of an instruction not to rely on one's own strength if God did not deliver those who trust in him from Sheol? This suggests that salvation *from* death, not *before* death, becomes the ultimate touchstone of God's justice.[139]

The stand-alone Psalm of Asaph, Ps 50, opens the second Psalter of David (Ps 51–72), which ends with the only psalm "for/by Solomon" (לשלמה) and concludes the entirety of the second book of the Psalter (Ps 42–72). The very beginning emphasizes YHWH's comprehensive responsibility for justice and righteousness, when he rises as "*El Elohim*"

134 Liess, "Um deiner Güte willen": 104.

135 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 1–50*: 298.

136 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 872: "Because God creates justice for his own with his right hand, the fighting hand, and gives victory, his glory spreads."

137 Böhler, *Psalmen 1–50*: 876; cf. Till Magnus Steiner, "'Des Nachts singe ich deine Lieder' (Ps 42,9)," in *Zur Theologie des Psalters und der Psalmen: Beiträge in memoriam Frank-Lothar Hossfeld*, ed. Ulrich Berges, Johannes Bremer and Till Magnus Steiner, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 189 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019): 233–34.

138 Schönemann, *Der untreue Gott*: 226.

139 Johannes Schnocks, *Rettung und Neuschöpfung: Studien zur alttestamentlichen Grundlegung einer gesamtbiblischen Theologie der Auferstehung*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 158 (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2009): 143: "The psalmist hopes [. . .] for a salvation that obviously does not bypass dying, that does not mean a physical reception before death."

from Zion in radiant theophany like the sun and calls heaven and earth to bear witness to his righteous rule, to his just judgment: "The heavens declare his *ṣædæq*, for God himself is judge" (Ps 50:6). All power in heaven and on earth is subject to this leadership, and the fire of his coming devours everything that opposes it—the tempest of God (Ps 50:3) sweeps it away. It is precisely this justice, the salvific order that YHWH upholds through his unimpeachable judging and ruling (Ps 51:6), and which the worshipper praises in Ps 51:16.[140] This royal judge, God in Zion, corresponds to the זבחי צדק "right sacrifices" in the temple (Ps 51:21). It refers to offerings that are not only ritual sacrifices, but also stem from a pure heart and a steadfast spirit (cf. Ps 51:12): "Indeed, where sinners allow themselves to be recreated by YHWH, the people of God are renewed; when this happens on Zion or emanates from there, Jerusalem becomes a city of righteousness."[141] For this to happen, God must drag out of their tents those who love evil more than good, who lie more than speak "righteousness" (צדק)—or has right speech—and must be uprooted from the land of the living (Ps 52:5–7). When the "righteous" (צדיקים) see this, they will be afraid and laugh at the lying wicked (Ps 52:8). This laughter at the downfall of the one thus punished by God is not simple *Schadenfreude*, but a visible expression of "[. . .] satisfaction at the victory of God's righteousness (cf. Ps 58:11 and Job 22:19f.)."[142] Confidence in YHWH, who takes care of the pious worshipper against all odds, is also expressed in the affirmation that "he will never permit the righteous to falter and stumble" (Ps 55:23). One of the main reasons why the righteous might waver lies in the failure of justice. Ps 58:2, for example, is addressed to human judges, not to heavenly beings as in Ps 82:2: "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?"[143] Those responsible deliberately silence justice through their many words; their hearts and hands are completely focused on wickedness and injustice. There seems to be no hope of royal justice.[144] God himself shall knock the teeth out of the lying mouths of those who tear their prey apart like lions (Ps 58:7). The righteous do not rejoice in revenge, but in retribution, through which God restores the act-consequence relationship. This finds expression in the drastic image of the righteous man who bathes his steps[145] in the blood of the wicked (Ps 58:11). The global dimension of

140 Krašovec, *Righteousness*: 192: "The positive side of *špṭ*—that is, the recognition of the rights of the righteous—corresponds to the basic meaning of the word *ṣdq*: be righteous, have right, declare righteous, defend, and deliver."

141 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 56, with reference to Isa 54:11–13; 58:12; 60:10; 61:1–3; 62:7 (ibid. 55); cf. Süssenbach, *Der elohistische Psalter*: 95–96.

142 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 69.

143 Thus Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 131. On the difficult MT "silencing of the right you speak" (אלם צדק תדברון), see in detail Peter Krawczack, *"Es gibt einen Gott, der Richter ist auf Erden!": Ein exegetischer Beitrag zum Verständnis von Psalm 58*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 132 (Berlin: Philo, 2001): 64–65.

144 The evidence of מלך "king" in Ps 61:7; 63:12 does not change this, especially since it gives the impression of secondary expansions, see Süssenbach, *Der elohostische Psalter*: 187.

145 Different in LXX "his hands" τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ; also Vg. "manus suas."

this enforcement of law and justice is emphasized in the final verse, when the "man" who was previously the victim of corrupt legal proceedings (בני אדם in v. 2; אדם in v. 12), concludes, "surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth. (Ps 58:12).[146] Every human being now confesses what Ps 50:1–4 states that heaven and earth are to testify to, that God himself is judge: The universality of justice and God's uniqueness are directly related to one another.

Just as at the end of Ps 58:11, the righteous also rejoices that God repeatedly establishes the act-consequence relationship in Ps 64:11. God's deadly arrow pierces those who seek to ambush and strike the innocent with their arrows of lies and injustice. Thus the righteous can and should take refuge in God, to whom all men of upright hearts rejoice (cf. Ps 32:11). The expression כל ישרי לב refers to people who rely entirely on YHWH, who seek refuge in him alone, in contrast to those who bend the law, who look only to themselves with lying tongues and criminal machinations and who believe that no one, not even God, is interested in the victims of violence: "Who will see them?" (Ps 64:6). In contrast, the psalm aims to strengthen confidence in the maintenance of the cosmic order, without which no community can survive.

> The reaction mentioned regarding "all people" once again underlines the universal and cosmic dimension of the conflict described. Because the actions of the wicked mean the disruption of the world order as an order of life and arise from the lack of fear of God (cf. v. 5b), God's intervention is aimed at the fear of God as the fundamental attitude that perceives and praises the world as a life-supporting whole ("cosmos") which was created by God and is defended against the onslaught of chaos.[147]

The God on Zion hears the prayers of "all flesh" (כל בשר) that is aware of its sinfulness, and he answers the prayers by נוראות בצדק "awesome deeds with deliverance" (Ps 65:6a). This refers to his deeds that save the afflicted from their distress, which cause them to rejoice but the wicked to be horrified (cf. Ps 66:3). Only for the former he is the "God of our salvation" (אלהי ישענו) (Ps 65:6a). Once again, God's salvation is proof of his righteousness. In Ps 67, this should lead to the nations joyfully praising the God of Israel, the source of blessing, who judges in "equity" (מישור) (v. 5).[148] This is also the case in the likely secondary prelude of Ps 68:2–4, where the righteous rejoice over the downfall of the evildoers brought about by God, the Father of the fatherless and advo-

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146 Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, "Das göttliche Strafgericht in Feind- und Fluchpsalmen: Der Psalmenbeter zwischen eigener Ohnmacht und dem Schrei nach göttlicher Parteilichkeit," in *Krieg und Christentum: Religiöse Gewalttheorien in der Kriegserfahrung des Westens*, ed. Andreas Holzem, Krieg in der Geschichte 50 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009): 130: "V 12 states the goal of the prayer, the tangible worldwide establishment of the divine office of judgment and the confirmation of the act-consequence relationship."

147 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 210.

148 Ulrike Bail, "Gerechtigkeit in der Mitte des Segens: Psalm 67," *Bibel und Kirche* 58 (2003): 131: "By realizing that the God of Israel is a God of justice and peace, they surround this realization with praise."

cate of the widows (v. 6).[149] His righteousness cannot be proven without the righting of those who devote themselves completely to their God and allow themselves almost to be wounded by him in their perseverance (Ps 69:27).[150] God must clearly assign guilt and innocence, as the psalmist demands in Ps 69:28–29: "Add guilt to their guilt; may they have no acquittal from you. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous." The expression about coming into God's *ṣᵉdāqāh* confirms the observation already made several times that this is his saving justice's space of salvation, which is open only to the righteous—to the victims of violence saved by him—but not to the guilty perpetrators.[151] Regardless of whether the "book of the living" (ספר חיים) is intended here as a final judgment (cf. Exod 32:32; Mal 3:16; Ps 139:16; Dan 12:4) or as a list of citizens (cf. Isa 4:3; Jer 22:30; Ps 87:6), it is clear that God must distinguish between the truly righteous and those who only consider themselves to be such.[152] Without the justification of those who suffer for and in God, there can be no righteousness of God, and there won't be any entries in the book of the living and no one will enter its space of salvation.

For the sake of divine justice, the righteous shall not be covered with shame and disgrace (Ps 69:11, 20–21), in contrast to his opponents (Ps 70:1–4; 71:13). This motif links Psalms 69–71 and explicitly connects to divine justice at the beginning and end of Ps 71 in a chiastic reversal: Whilst the worshipper first turns to God, "let me never be *put to shame*" (v. 1b), and then asks him, "In your *ṣᵉdāqāh* deliver me and rescue me" (v. 2a), the conclusion reads, "All day long my tongue will talk of your *ṣᵉdāqāh*, for those who tried to do me harm have been put to *shame*, and disgraced" (v. 24). God's righteousness consists in the salvation of the righteous, they demonstrate his righteousness, those who have been saved sing about his great deeds and celebrate in the temple (Ps 71:15, 16, 19).[153]

In Ps 72, the conclusion of the second Psalter of David (Ps 51–72), the theme of justice and righteousness plays a decisive role, but now, according to the pattern of the ancient Near East, in relation to the earthly king who must act to protect the weak to guarantee blessing and fertility for the land. However, unlike the situation in the areas around Israel, God himself is now the author of "justice" (*mišpāṭ*) with his "decree"

149 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 249, with a view to the borrowings from Num 10:35; Ps 1:4, 6 and Ps 97:5.

150 The proximity to Jeremiah (cf. Jer 5:13; 14:19; 33:5), as well as to Deutero- (Isa 50:6–7; 53:3) and Trito-Isaiah (Isa 57:15, 17; 60:10) is obvious, according to Süssenbach, *Der elohistische Psalter*: 253; cf. Alphonso Groenewald, *Psalm 69: Its Structure, Redaction and Composition*, Altes Testament und Moderne 18 (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003): 212.

151 Cf. Rad, *Theologie*: 388.

152 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 278.

153 Kathrin Liess, "Von Gottes Gerechtigkeit erzählen: Zum Lob Gottes in Psalm 71," in *Ich will dir danken unter den Völkern: Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Gebetsliteratur. Festschrift für Bernd Janowski zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Alexandra Grund-Wittenberg et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2013): 223–37.

(*mišpāṭîm*) that he hands over to the king as his representative. They are intended to lead to decisions that correspond to God's *ṣᵉdāqāh*—his saving justice (v. 1). In *ṣæḏœq*, the care for the poor and those in need of protection is paramount in royal judgment and rule (v. 2). It is not the legal system *per se* that leads to justice, but only legal decisions that enable the wretched to live a new life.[154] Only then will the mountains bear *šālôm* for the people and the hills [*šālôm*] *through ṣᵉdāqāh*, through demonstrations of justice.[155] When this happens, the *ṣaddîq*[156] will blossom in the abundance of *šālôm* (v. 7). The rain shower that fertilizes the earth is a metaphor for the salvific work of such a king.[157] The promises of social salvation for the poor and a fertile landscape are repeated more intensely in the second half of this prayer of supplication (Ps 72:12–14, 16–17). However, neither here nor elsewhere in the writings of ancient Israel is a reorganization of society considered that abolishes social hierarchies and their inherent dependencies.[158]

The benediction and doxology to YHWH, the God of Israel, which were added to the psalm in the post-exilic period (vv. 18–19), as well as the editorial concluding note, "The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended" (v. 20), make it abundantly clear that the expectation of such a king of righteousness was ultimately never fulfilled in Israel but that—precisely for this reason—they provide a lasting impetus to messianic hope.[159]

6.3 Law and Justice in the Third Book of Psalms (Ps 73–89)

Whilst the second book of the Psalter begins with Psalms of Korah (Ps 42, 43–49) followed by a Psalm of Asaph (Ps 50), the third book opens with Psalms of Asaph (Ps 73–83) that are then replaced by Psalms of Korah (Ps 84–85, 87–88) to end with the song of Etan the Ezrahite (Ps 89). Psalm 86 occupies a special position as it is the only psalm in the third book that is not assigned to a singing guild but is entitled "Prayer of David."[160]

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154 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 320: "The 'saving' justice of the king must thus not only ensure that people are saved from injustice, but possibly even from justice."

155 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 304, does not omit the Hebrew preposition.

156 ^{MT}Ps 72:7 is unambiguous with צדיק and needs no correction; contrary to ancient versions that read the noun "righteousness" here.

157 Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 53.

158 Houston, *Justice*: 150: "The idea that justice might require a permanent change in relationships between classes or in the distribution of wealth is not apparent."

159 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 329–30; for Oswald Loretz, "Der anthologische Psalm 72: Messianische Interpretation amurritisch-kanaanäischer Traditionen in nachexilischer Zeit," in *Psalmstudien: Kolometrie, Strophik und Theologie ausgewählter Psalmen*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 309 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002): 205–7, Ps 72 was messianically oriented from the outset; likewise for Williamson, *Justice*: 90–92.

160 According to Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 547, Ps 86 summarizes the two Davidic collections, Ps 3–41 and 51–72.

Just like in Psalm 50:6 the Psalms of Asaph look at the theme of justice from the perspective of God as the righteous judge. His presence is not a cause for fear and worry for the worshippers, but an occasion for joyful affirmation of his miraculous deeds (Ps 75:2), especially as this follows directly on from their plea for God to arise and carry out his justice (Ps 74:22). God allows himself to be called upon, but not put under pressure, because only he decides when "I will judge with equity" (אני מישרים אשפט) (Ps 75:3). The wickedness of the arrogant evildoers could indeed endanger the world order (Ps 75:4; cf. 46:3; 60:4; 93:1–2; 96:10) but won't cause it to collapse because God prevents that from happening through the straightforwardness of his judgments. He is a judge who humbles one person and lifts the other (Ps 75:8):

> Without addressing one specific group the merism of humbling and exalting expresses God's absolute and sovereign power (1 Sam 2:7; Isa 10:33; Ezek 17:24; 21:31). However, in the Psalms this relates to the theme of the poor (exaltation of the lowly, poor, and bowed down and humiliation of the high, powerful, and rich in Ps 18:28; 138:6; 147:6; cf. 1 Sam 2:7).[161]

When the psalm ends with God's promise that he will cut off all the horns of the wicked but raise the horns of the *ṣaddîq* (Ps 75:11), the mighty's loss of power (cf. Jer 48:25; Ps 75:5–6; Lam 2:3;) and the empowerment of the powerless are sealed once and for all (cf. 1 Sam 2:1, 10; Ps 89:18, 25; 92:11; 112:9; 148:14).[162] The subsequent Asaphite Psalm 76 of Zion specifies God's kingship over the entire world from the Korahite collection of Ps 46–48 to the effect that his "judgment" (*dîn*) not only ends the conflict between the nations, but also promises the salvation of all the poor of the earth (Ps 76:9–10). "The God of Zion's actual 'proof that God exists' will be revealed only once the 'wars' against the poor of this earth cease; only then will YHWH have taken up his kingship in the midst of the earth."[163]

Ps 82 impressively demonstrates that the discussion about exclusive monotheism in the early exilic period was not only conducted in the arena of global political leadership (cf. Isa 41:1–5. 21–26; 43:8–13; 46:1–2) but also concerned the implementation of saving justice for the poor. As the penultimate psalm of the Asaph collection, it is the climax of the discourse on justice that characterizes the collection right from the start with its theophany of the God of justice who shines forth from Zion all over the world (cf. Ps 50:1–6). In a unique way, he appears "in the divine council" (בעדת אל), "in the midst of the gods" (בקרב אלהים), as accuser and judge (Ps 82:1). Indeed, they are only gods if they protect the oppressed from the arbitrariness of the wicked through their

161 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 379.

162 The references to 2 Sam 2:1–10 are so close that one gains the impression "[. . .] that Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving represents a theologically more advanced, more developed, younger stage of the Asaphite tradition," Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 381.

163 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 391.

saving judgment.[164] If they do not, they are nothing more than mortal beings who fall to the ground like human princes (Ps 82:6–7):

> 'Gods' and 'sons of the Most High' are not what they claim to be—namely, entities that guarantee justice and righteousness in the world of men and therein reveal the face of the true God. The correlation of God and justice is the basic theme of Ps 82, which therefore represents a decisive step in the history of the biblical concept of God.[165]

The one who rises to enforce saving justice for all the wretched and disenfranchised is the only true Elohim (Ps 82:8): "The psalm sees no other way out than for these gods to disappear from the heavenly and world stage and for YHWH, the God of Israel, to become the God *of all peoples*—as the savior of the exploited and impoverished masses."[166]

In Korah Psalm 85, YHWH is accompanied by his attributes hypostatized in mythical form (v. 11). Arranged in pairs, they are *ḥæsæḏ* (love/faithfulness/steadfast love) and *ʾᵉmæt* (truth), *ṣæḏæq* (justice), and *šālôm* (peace). The first pair places greater emphasis on an inner disposition towards goodness and truthfulness, and the second aims at a just and peaceful social order that can be realized in this way. The four divine genii "[. . .] are not sitting somewhere in a waiting position, but they have come together as pioneers and companions of God's coming into the world to make the salvation set as the primordial beginning a reality (v. 14)."[167] Of the four, it is justice alone that appears not only twice, but three times in the last verse (vv. 11–14). It goes hand in hand with God—like no other protective power. When YHWH makes his powerful appearance, justice paves the way for him.[168] When love and truth "meet" (פגש), it is not clear from the outset whether this happens in a friendly or neutral manner (cf. Gen 32:18; 33:8; Exod 4:27; Isa 34:14) or with hostile intent (cf. Exod 4:24; Hos 13:8). It is also questionable whether justice and peace "kiss" each other (I נשק) or meet "armed" with weapons (II נשק) (cf. Ps 78:9; 1 Chr 12:2; 2 Chr 17:17). The ambiguity may be intentional because it encourages us to reflect on the relationship between these fundamental values, which

164 Oswald Loretz, "Psalm 82: Gott als Richter über Götter und Engelsfürsten; Der Rechtsfall der Götterversammlung vor Jahwe," in *Psalmstudien: Kolometrie, Strophik und Theologie ausgewählter Psalmen*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 309 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002): 274: "The failure of the gods in the administration of justice leads to their becoming a legal case themselves and losing their divine status"; Walter Moberly, "Justice and the Recognition of the True God: A Reading of Psalm 82," *Revue Biblique* 127, no. 2 (2020): 234: "The deity who is God is the deity for whom justice is intrinsic."

165 Bernd Janowski, "Der göttliche Richter und seine Gerechtigkeit," in *Gerechtigkeit: Richten und Retten in der abendländischen Tradition und ihren altorientalischen Ursprüngen*, ed. Jan Assmann, Bernd Janowski and Michael Welker (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1998): 23; see also Hartenstein and Janowski, *Psalmen*: 276–78.

166 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 485; cf. Süssenbach, *Der elohistische Psalter*: 317–18.

167 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 51–100*: 533.

168 Saur, "ṣædæq": 383: "Like a leader, a messenger or a herald, *ṣædæq* leads the way and assembles the steps of Jhwh into a path."

are central not only to the biblical image of God, but also to every society. Don't love and truth, justice and peace sometimes clash so violently that the kiss is a long way off? This ambiguity of kiss or fight should not be resolved to one side or the other, but maintained as a necessary contest of values, because without it, all values ultimately fall by the wayside.[169]

After the Song of Zion in Psalm 87, which sings of the worldwide worship of YHWH, two psalms conclude the third book of the Psalter. They differ fundamentally, but nevertheless there is a good reason why they are placed alongside each other. The subject matter of the Psalm of Lament (Ps 88) singularly lacks the certainty of being heard and the promise of giving praise. It focusses less on the supplicant himself but rather on his God, so that one can rightly speak of a theodicy lament.[170] Can someone whose "soul" (נפש), whose whole personality, reaches out to the living God (Ps 42:2–3; 84:3) maintain this bond when he is drowning in suffering and when his life has touched Sheol? It is the antithesis of the self-confidence and trust in God of the paradigmatic David, who prays in Ps 86: "For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol" (v. 13). Especially in the central part of Ps 88, which mentions the divine attributes of miraculous power, love, truth, and justice (v. 11–13), the prayer does not mention the worshipper himself at all but asks whether these attributes still play a role in the realm of the dead. The denial is obvious and becomes an urgent appeal: "Let YHWH recognize that his self-interest should forbid him to banish the worshipper to Sheol at an early stage; he would thereby deprive himself of a worshipper and witness to his power."[171]

The aporia of the "God of my salvation" (אלהי ישועתי) (Ps 88:2), who leads the innocent worshipper to the edge of Sheol without even a trace of salvation in sight, poses the theological question that remains unanswered in the psalm itself. If YHWH as the God of salvation does not act as a savior, not only the worshipper but also God himself is lost: "In other words, the time that remains for the worshipper to lament is also the time for YHWH to intervene in order to save the supplicant and consequently reap God's praise from the saved."[172] If the saving justice, his *ṣ^{e}dāqāh*, fails to materialize, oblivion in darkness will have the final say, not God's praise and remembrance in the congregation.

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169 Jürgen Ebach, "'Gerechtigkeit und Frieden küssen sich' oder: 'Gerechtigkeit und Frieden kämpfen' (Psalm 85,11): Über eine biblische Grundwertdebatte," in *Gott an den Rändern: Sozialgeschichtliche Perspektiven auf die Bibel; Festschrift für Willy Schottroff zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ulrike Bail (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996): 50: "Encounter and conflict, kiss, or fight? [. . .] Sometimes conflict will predominate, and sometimes it will be friendlier forms of encounter. The point is that love and truth, justice and peace come *together*"; cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 533–34.

170 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 570.

171 Walter Groß, "Gott als Feind des einzelnen? Psalm 88," in *Studien zur Priesterschrift und zu alttestamentlichen Gottesbildern*, Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände 30 (Stuttgart: Verlag Kath. Bibelwerk, 1999): 164.

172 Ulrich Berges, *Schweigen ist Silber—Klagen ist Gold. Das Drama der Gottesbeziehung aus alttestamentlicher Sicht mit einer Auslegung zu Ps 88*, Salzburger Exegetisch-Theologische Vorträge 1 (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003): 47.

The following Psalm 89 also bears the name of the singing guild of the Ezrahites in its title and is also closely linked thematically to Psalm 88. The divine rejection that applies to the doomed worshipper on the one hand and to the Davidic king and his dynasty on the other (Ps 88:15; 89:39) links the two psalms. God hides his face from both (Ps 88:15; 89:47), and both are at the mercy of his wrath (Ps 88:7, 8; 89:39, 47). The question of the identity of the man who lives without ever seeing death (Ps 89:49) takes up the lament of the supplicant, a man devoid of strength, one whose life has already touched Sheol (Ps 88:4–5). The complaint that God does not remember those who rest in the realm of the dead (Ps 88:66) corresponds to the plea that he should remember the transience of the humans he created (Ps 89:48). It is no coincidence that the question arises precisely after this lament for transience: "Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David? "(Ps 89:50). The many references to YHWH's core attributes, his love and truth, in this psalm (Ps 89:2, 3, 25, 29, 34, 50) must be understood against the background of the question of whether his *ḥæsæḏ* and his *ʾᵉmûnāh* would also be proclaimed in Sheol (Ps 88:12). The same applies to the divine *ṣæḏæq*, which together with *mišpāṭ* provide the pillars of his throne (Ps 89:15a; cf. 85:11; 97:2). However, it no longer plays a role in Sheol, in the land of forgetfulness, since *ṣᵉdāqāh*, proof of God's justice cannot be found there (Ps 88:13). Despite these analogies, Ps 89 points to a way into the future[173] not seen in Ps 88. A future which does not consist of a restoration of the Davidic dynasty, but in the transfer of the post-exilic hope to the servants of God (v. 51). The contrast to Ps 72 at the end of the second book of the Psalter could not be greater, for there the Davidic kings were charged with caring for justice and righteousness, for the protection of the poor and for a salvific order of peace and fruitfulness (Ps 72:1–7, 12–14, 16–17). At the end of the third book of the Psalter, God's faithfulness and truthfulness, which he once swore to David, are shown when he remembers the reproach of his *ʿāḇāḏîm—and* turns it around (Ps 89:50–52).[174] This does not mean that the entirety of the exiled people are elevated to the function of the anointed one,[175] but only the group of those who, as in the third major part of the Book of Isaiah, devote themselves entirely to YHWH's leadership and his demands for justice and solidarity.[176]

173 Markus Saur, "Der gerechte König: Überlegungen zum Zusammenhang von Königspsalmen und JHWH-König-Psalmen," in *Intertextualität und die Entstehung des Psalters*: *Methodische Reflexionen—Theologiegeschichtliche Perspektiven*, ed. Alma Brodersen, Friederike Neumann and David Willgren, Forschungen zum Alten Testament / 2 114 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020): 129: "But in the lamented downfall of the Davidic dynasty, Ps 89 is sustained by trust in Yhwh's צדק und צדקה—even against all outward appearances."

174 Cf. Ps 74:18, 22; 79:12, but without mentioning the servants.

175 Michael Emmendörffer, *Der ferne Gott: Eine Untersuchung der alttestamentlichen Volksklagelieder vor dem Hintergrund der mesopotamischen Literatur*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 21 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998): 238–39.

176 Ulrich Berges, "Die Knechte im Psalter: Ein Beitrag zu seiner Kompositionsgeschichte,": *Biblica* 81, no. 2 (2000): 160–62; Berges, *Jesaja 55–66*: 108–10.

6.4 Law and Justice in the Fourth Book of Psalms (Ps 90–106)

The emphasis on gracious devotion as the essence of divine rule is not least the result of the exile experience with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the loss of land and statehood: "Now it becomes important that the power of YHWH no longer proves itself as כבוד, but above all as חסד (love and goodness)—also and especially on the world stage."[177] This becomes particularly clear in the Psalms (Ps 93–100) under the motto YHWH-as-king, which follow the Messianic Psalter (Ps 2–89), however, avoiding the reference to any earthly king. In exegetical research, Ps 90–145 are sometimes referred to as the "theocratic Psalter"[178] (Ps 90–145), even if it contains royal Psalms aimed at a human ruler (Ps 101; 110; 132; 144). The last psalm (Ps 145) before the final Hallel (Ps 146–150) speaks of YHWH's kingship in acrostic form, without any reference to a future earthly king.[179] Whilst some royal Psalms in the Messianic Psalter (cf. Ps 2; 18; 45) assume, that God's reign is accomplished with and through a future king on the throne of David, this does not apply in the same way to the conclusion of the Psalter.[180] Ps 110 in particular is characterized by the royal ideology of a reign over the nations which is bestowed by YHWH as a definitive liberation from foreign domination. However, the responsibility for the protection of the afflicted, captives, widows, and orphans (Ps 145:17; 146:7–9) fall strictly under YHWH's authority. The allocation of divine and human kingship in the post-exilic Psalms undoubtedly remains problematic. Nonetheless, YHWH, the king who is the savior and judge over Israel and the nations, is solely responsible for justice and righteousness.[181]

In a *lectio continua* of the fourth book of the Psalter, Ps 90 begins with the mortality of every human being. However, those who seek refuge under the wings of the Almighty (Ps 91:4)[182] need to fear no evil, for God will grant them a long life (Ps 91:16). Although all people are cut down like grass at the end of their lives (Ps 90:6), the righteous still flourish like the palm tree and grow like the cedar. He and his fellow righteous thrive in the courts of God and bear fruit even in old age, remaining lush and fresh (cf. Isa 65:20; Zech 8:4; Ps 92:13–15). Their task is to praise God: he is "upright (ישר); he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him" (Ps 92:16). This quote from the Song of Moses (Deut

177 Zenger, "Liebe": 359.

178 Martin Leuenberger, *Konzeptionen des Königtums Gottes im Psalter: Untersuchungen zu Komposition und Redaktion der theokratischen Bücher IV–V im Psalter*, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 83 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2004): 85–87, 391–93.

179 YHWH now provides justice and righteousness himself, see Gottwald, *Social Justice*: 19.

180 Cf. Saur, "König": 130: "The attribution of Davidic kingship on the one hand and the kingship of Yhwh on the other remains a defining problem even after the series of Yhwh-King Psalms, as the kingship Psalms Ps 110, Ps 132 and Ps 144 show alongside Ps 101."

181 Seen differently in Markus Saur, *Die Königspsalmen: Studien zur Entstehung und Theologie*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 340 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004): 333: "The hope for the reign of Yahweh and the hope for a future king of salvation are therefore two sides of the same coin."

182 This verse is also taken from the song of Moses in Deut 32:11.

32:4),[183] which the 120-year-old Moses (Deut 34:7) bestowed to his people on their way to the promised land on the day before his death, confirms from the highest authority that the righteous can rely on his God's promise of a long life, free from adversity. The God of the world, who bestows blessings from Zion and ensures justice is the epitome of life and consistency.[184]

Following the emphatic proclamation in Ps 93:1 that YHWH is king and guarantees the cosmic order of the world against all chaos powers (v. 1b–4), v. 5 adds that as far as Israel is concerned his testimonies, the entirety of his revelation of will, are very reliable. This is true not least because YHWH as the "God of vengeance" (אל נקמות) does not leave any disregard of his ethical regulations unpunished. It is not a vengeful God who is being spoken to here, but the "Judge of the earth" (שפט הארץ) who punishes the arrogant who offend against the *personae miserae*—the widows, orphans, and strangers. The psalm deliberately alternates between the perspective of Israel and that of the nations, because YHWH is the royal judge of the whole earth, who not only educates his people (cf. Ps 93:5), but also the nations, and teaches knowledge to humankind (Ps 94:10).[185] Under such a judge, *ṣæḏæq* returns to *mišpāṭ* (Ps 94:15a): Righteousness and justice are once again congruent, excluding any bending of the law by a corrupt judiciary once and for all.[186] Everybody with an honest heart follow this agreement between righteousness and justice (Ps 94:15b) because they know how painful it is when justice serves injustice instead of righteousness. Verse 20 follows along similar lines with the rhetorical question of whether the throne of destruction is allied with God, i.e. whether YHWH can make common cause with those who create mischief against the legal "order" *(ḥoq)*. The answer is of course negative: YHWH repays the wicked for their iniquity and destroys them in their own wickedness (v. 23).

In the manner of the composition of the YHWH-King psalms from the end of the fifth century BC, Ps 95 and Ps 99 correspond with their focus on the significance of divine kingship for Israel and the imperative hymns Ps 96 and Ps 98 ("Sing to the Lord") that address the relationship of the nations to YHWH in view of his actions toward Israel. The fact that he judges the nations in *mêšārîm*, in "uprightness" (Ps 96:10; 98:9),

183 O'Brien, *Restoring*: 23: "This text is the only one in the HBOT where *tsadiq* and *yashar* occur as a word-pair."

184 Cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 640; Erich Zenger, "Das Weltenkönigtum des Gottes Israels (Ps 90–106)," in *Der Gott Israels und die Völker. Untersuchungen zum Jesajabuch und zu den Psalmen*, ed. Norbert Lohfink and Erich Zenger, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 154 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1994): 151: "These Psalms [Ps 90–92; 93–100 U.B.] are the program for a world Shabbat, without which no kingdom of universal justice begins."

185 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 654: "The whole argument aims at the superiority of YHWH as a universal, all-seeing judge who is not transient like man."

186 Cf. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen: 2. Teilband*, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament 15/2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960): 657; Saur, "König": 131: "Justice and law are interrelated. Law turns to justice throughout; as an action, משפט moves within the horizon of an order that is established by צדק and within which act and consequence or action and outcome correspond."

demonstrates God's kingship over the entire world.[187] Through the salvation of his people, he has revealed his *ṣᵉdāqāh* to them, the proof of his "righteousness," and sets it to be the benchmark for his reign.

The conclusion of Ps 96, which announces the coming of YHWH to judgment in righteousness (v. 13), is the perfect model for Ps 97, which was probably inserted at this point only in Hellenistic times. It takes up many motifs from the surrounding Psalms and develops them further.[188] This is particularly true of the theme of justice and righteousness. The confidence that YHWH's kingship will assert itself during the peaceful times of the *pax persica*, is superseded by the prophesy of God's eschatological hope of his terrifying appearance:

> The expectation of a linear completion of the present, as we came to know it in the Persian period, gives way to the hope of YHWH's sudden, world-shaking intervention when God's justice will assert itself in such a way that the pagan, idolatrous powers are humiliated forever.[189]

In the theophany of vv. 1–6, YHWH emerges powerfully from his divine realm, from the clouds and the thick darkness (cf. Deut 4:11; Ezek 34:12; Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:15), as a royal judge whose throne is founded on justice and righteousness (Ps 97:2; cf. Ps 85:11; 89:15; 96:13; 98:2, 9; 99:4). The mythical substrate of the Canaanite god of thunderstorms, storms, and war still shines through in YHWH's worldwide appearance. He obtains his "justice" (*ṣœḏœq*) with irresistible power through righteous "judgment" (*mišpāṭ*): "YHWH enforces 'justice' in 'righteousness,' and accordingly his 'judgments' (v. 8c) as the realization of 'justice' are indeed cause for rejoicing."[190] Even more emphatic than in Ps 50:6, where the heavens also proclaim his righteousness, YHWH's *ṣœḏœq* in Ps 97:6 is the visible proof of his glory: "It is YHWH's glory, which does not only manifest itself in natural phenomena of any kind (v. 2–6 is a theophany metaphor!), but in the enforcement of his righteousness as an event that completes world history on the stage of the world of nations."[191] When this happens, all those who do not serve the God of justice but the images of vain אלילים "little gods" (Ps 97:7) will stand ashamed. Zion and the cities of Judah will be full of joy because YHWH as the God of the world has shown them that justice and salvation are two sides of the same coin. This joy can only be compared with that in Isa 60–62 about the new future made possible by YHWH for Zion and her surroundings (Isa 62:2; Ps 97:6), which in both cases appears as a phenomenon of light: "Only when Zion and Jerusalem's righteousness and salvation become visible

187 Krašovec, *Righteousness*: 135: "The double effect of God's judgement are dictated by God's righteousness and truth."

188 Zenger, "Weltenkönigtum": 160–62.

189 Jörg Jeremias, *Das Königtum Gottes in den Psalmen: Israels Begegnung mit dem kanaanäischen Mythos in den Jahwe-König-Psalmen*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 141 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1987): 136–37.

190 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 681.

191 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 682.

will splendor and glory shine forth throughout the world."[192] However, this cannot succeed without turning away from evil deeds, which is required of all those who want to belong to the "lovers of YHWH" (אהבי יהוה). To them he is the guardian of their life, rescuing them from the power of the wicked (Ps 97:10). The subsequent simile of the light sown to the righteous is unique and might be the reason why the ancient versions and some Hebrew manuscripts chose the more common זרח "to shine" instead of זרע "to sow" in this context (cf. Isa 58:10; 60:1). In Ps 112:4, a light shines on the "straight ones" (ישרים) in the darkness, which corresponds to the "straight ones of the heart" (ישרי לב) in Ps 97:11.[193] The Masoretic text might refer to the time between the seed that has already been sown and the harvest that has not yet been brought in: "The light, which refers to YHWH's saving and revitalizing nearness, can already be experienced by the individual righteous in the mode of 'being sown' as a seed that inexorably presses towards full development (cf. the corresponding New Testament parables of the coming of the kingdom of God)."[194] The righteous are already called to joyfully praise his holy remembrance, to praise and remind themselves that is righteousness which is saving the pious (Ps 97:12; cf. Ps 30:5). Their salvation preludes the eschatological revelation of his righteousness in the world of nations.[195] It is also the logical consequence of the praise of the nation's when they confess YHWH's holiness and can no longer close their minds to the realization that this King's power consists in his love of justice. He has established the *mêšārîm*, the "uprightness" of the world order (cf. Akkadian *mišaru*) and created *mišpāṭ* and *ṣᵉdāqāh* in Jacob (Ps 99:1–4):

> The correlation of the two statements about the 'world order' and about 'Israel's legal systems' must not be understood as a mere juxtaposition or succession. On the contrary, our psalm understands the legal systems of Israel as the 'revelation' of the hidden world order—and Zion as the 'place where we experience this King of justice.[196]

With Ps 100, the YHWH-King composition reaches its formal and theological apogee. Unlike any other psalm, this song is composed entirely in tricola, and only here the whole world is called upon to serve YHWH with joy—not with fear (Ps 2:11). The prerequisite is the recognition and confession that YHWH alone is God, the Creator of all humankind. And therefore everyone thus belongs to his people, to the flock of his pasture (v. 3). All differences are thereby abolished in the worldwide praise of the *one* God: "The universality of God's kingship, which all the Psalms of Yahweh the King praise and acknowledge, has found its ultimate climax in Ps 100, the universal congre-

192 Berges, *Jesaja 55–66*: 428.
193 Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary 20 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990): 517.
194 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 684.
195 Jeremias, *Königtum Gottes*: 142: "To put it bluntly: *God's present care for his righteous is proclaimed as a reason for hope for the consummation of the world*" (italics in original).
196 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*: 702.

gation of all the peoples of the world."[197] Compulsion and servile submission have no place here, for the worship of the whole world consists in praising YHWH, who is good, whose *ḥœsœḏ* lasts forever and whose *ʾᵉmûnāh* endures from generation to generation (Ps 100:5). The two core characteristics of YHWH, his love and his truth, were also the reason for the worldwide rejoicing in Ps 96:13; 98:3, but still in the context of his royal office as a judge (Ps 96:10, 13; 98:9; cf. 94:2, 20–23; 97:2, 6, 8; 99:4). This has become obsolete in Ps 100, because now there is nothing more to judge, no more disputes to settle, no more chaos to banish, and no more poor people to save.

The following six psalms, continuing to the end of the fourth book of the Psalter are arranged in pairs (Ps 101–102, 103–104, and 105–106). They elaborate on YHWH's global kingship and, together with Ps 90–92, form the framework around the YHWH-King psalms (Ps 93–100).[198] After the Psalm of Moses (Ps 90), a superscription now mentions David for the first time since Ps 86 (Ps 101:1). This sets the royal tone without the terms king or anointed one appearing in this strongly wisdom-oriented song (Ps 101:3–4, 6–7). The worshipper sings of YHWH's *ḥœsœḏ* and his *mišpāṭ*, his loving faithfulness, realized in the preservation of the legal order for the protection of the weak and needy. At first glance, the seemingly strange request, "When will you come to me?" (v. 2a), emphasizes that this royal prayer also depends entirely on YHWH. Every righteous person can follow in King David's footsteps by committing himself to enforcing justice in the city of God and the surrounding area.[199] In parallel, Ps 102:14, 17, 22, names Zion as the throne of the heavenly king, whom YHWH restores to honor before the eyes of all nations after the catastrophe of the exile. This restoration serves as the historical proof that YHWH hears the lamentations and petitions of his pious ones, who are his servants (Ps 102:15, 29). The King of the world, who sits on his throne forever (Ps 102:13, 28), heeds the sighs of the captives and saves those condemned to death so that they may sound his praise in Zion and Jerusalem (Ps 102:20–23) all over the world. YHWH's "demonstrations of justice" (*ṣᵉdāqôt*), his "rulings of justice" (*mišpāṭîm*) for all the afflicted (Ps 103:6) are the reason why the songs of the Psalms never fall silent.[200]

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197 Jörg Jeremias, "Psalm 100 als Auslegung von Ps 93–99," in *Studien zur Theologie des Alten Testaments*, ed. Friedhelm Hartenstein and Jutta Krispens, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 99 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015): 265.

198 Zenger, "Weltenkönigtum": 171.

199 Cf. Klaus Koenen, *Jahwe wird kommen, zu herrschen über die Erde: Ps 90–110 als Komposition*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 101 (Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1995): 79–80.

200 Zenger, "Weltenkönigtum": 173: "In connection with Ps 93–100, it is significant that in Psalm 103 the 'legal order' of the world-king YHWH is explicitly characterized as the salvation of the oppressed and despised (Ps 103:6)."

6.5 Law and Justice in the Fifth Book of Psalms (Ps 107–150)

Several partial compositions (Passover Hallel Ps 113–118; Psalms of Ascent Ps 120–134; Fifth Psalter of David Ps 138–145; Final Hallel Ps 146–150) characterize the fifth book of the Psalter, which, after the proclamation of YHWH's kingship of YHWH over the whole world in the fourth book, sing of "[. . .] the salvation, restoration and renewal of Zion/Israel on the stage of the world of nations—as proof of the kingship of YHWH."[201] The *hodû* formula ("Praise YHWH") at the start of Ps 107 (cf. Ps 105:1; 106:1) is repeated at the beginning of the last psalm in the Passover Hallel (Ps 118:1) and at the end of the Psalms of Ascent extended by Ps 135–136 (Ps 136:1). This indicates that both compositions complement and consolidate each other to form a liturgy of thanksgiving for the salvation of God's people and their restoration on Zion in the midst of the nations.[202] The salvation from the four paradigmatic dangers—desert, captivity, mortal illness, and the sea—at the end of Ps 107 lead to the wisdom-influenced call to the "straight ones" (*jᵉšārîm*) to witness it all and rejoice, while wickedness must stop its mouth (Ps 107:42). Only the wise can observe it, assess it correctly, and understand it as proof of YHWH's faithfulness (Ps 107:43). The further course of the fifth book of the Psalter repeatedly shows that divine justice becomes reality in concrete acts of salvation, which are cause for great joy for the upright, the pious, and the righteous (cf. Ps 111:3–4; 112:3–4; 116:4–5; 118:15–16; 140:13–14; 143:1–2, 11–12; 145:7; 146:6–8).

The small David trilogy (Ps 108–110) is characterized by the worshipper, following the royal singer, joyfully playing for his God, who saves his beloved ones from all dangers from within (Ps 109) and without (Ps 108; 110) out of faithfulness and truth. Their slander is one of the greatest threats to the righteous (Ps 109:7, 29, 31). Ps 109 can therefore be understood as a psalm of justice, in which the protagonist asks YHWH to save him from those who want to oust him from his social position with false allegations and even destroy him completely.[203] Ps 110 also features the theme of justice, where YHWH swears to the praying David: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (v. 4; cf. Gen 14:18). The name מלכי צדק means "my [heavenly] king [is] righteous" and refers to God as the king who judges and reigns in absolute righteousness.[204] Neither here nor elsewhere in the fourth and fifth books of the Psalter is מלך ("king, be king, or reign as king") used to refer to human kings in Israel or Judah. God

201 Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2008): 17.

202 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 157–76; Judith Gärtner, *Die Geschichtspsalmen: Eine Studie zu den Psalmen 78, 105, 106, 135 und 136 als hermeneutische Schlüsseltexte im Psalter*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 84 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012): 287, emphasizes that the boundary between Psalter Book IV and V is "correspondingly permeable" because of the close references of Ps 106 and Ps 107.

203 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 181.

204 Seen differently in Saur, *Königspsalmen*: 205, who does not see a personal name here, but a functional designation: "You are priest forever, for my sake king of righteousness!"

does not appoint the praying David as king, but as priest. No eschatological David will hold judgment among the nations (Ps 110:6). That is the responsibility of YHWH as the heavenly king of the world, who exercises his kingship from Zion.[205] Although it was impossible for post-exilic Israel to imagine David without a royal aura, the emphasis in the books of Psalms IV and V is clearly on YHWH as the king.[206]

The two wisdom-influenced acrostics, Ps 111–112 are to be read and understood as twin Psalms. They revolve around God's and human righteousness. The congregation of the *jᵉšārîm*, the upright and honest, pursues, explores, and praises YHWH's great deeds as proof of his *ṣᵉdāqāh* (Ps 111:1–3). This theme also influences the formula of grace ("gracious and merciful"; cf. Exod 34:6; Jonah 4:2) so that God's justice (v. 3) and faithfulness are close to each other (v. 4). This is emphasized again in v. 7–8 when the works of his hands are explained in terms of truth and justice, and his commandments in terms of reliability, truth, and uprightness. Only those who fear God, those who reckon with him and his righteous work, derive rich benefits from this knowledge and their praise of God will endure forever (Ps 111:10). This results in an inclusion to v. 3, because both God's righteous deeds and his praise from the mouth of the upright are eternal.[207]

The divine righteousness in Ps 111 is juxtaposed with human righteousness in Ps 112: "The speech about צדקה is obviously the conceptual core of both Psalms: Ps 111–112 sings about the enduring righteousness of God and man."[208] Whoever complies with the call to fear God (Ps 111:10) will be praised along with his descendants, his house will be filled with prosperity, and his righteousness will endure forever (Ps 112:3). Verse 4b must be regarded as a crucial statement because the divine attributes, "gracious and merciful and just" (חנון ורחום וצדיק), here refer to the righteous person who supports the poor and is prepared to lend money [interest-free].[209] Those who act in this way mirror the righteous God who saves his people from all hardship:

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205 Gerald H. Wilson, "King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, Vetus Testamentum, Supplements 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2005): 400: "Thus, once again in this Davidic psalm, it is ultimately Yahweh who assumes the role of conquering monarch while the Davidic scion is affirmed as 'priest forever;'" Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 214: "Even more than Ps 108, Ps 110 is consistently theocentric."

206 Wilson, "King": 404. In the LXX Psalter and even more so in 11QPs[a], a revaluation of the Davidic-messianic king can again be observed.

207 Markus Saur, "Beständige Gerechtigkeit: Zum Zusammenhang von Theologie, Anthropologie und Weisheit in Psalm 111–112," in *Ein Freund des Wortes: Festschrift Udo Rüterswörden*, ed. Sebastian Grätz, Axel Graupner and Jörg Lanckau (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019): 272: "The צדקה explains the תהילה of YHWH."

208 Saur, "Beständige Gerechtigkeit": 283; cf. Yaïr Zakovitch, "The Interpretative Significance of the Sequence of Psalms 111–112.113–118.119," in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, ed. Erich Zenger, Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses / Bibliotheca 238 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010): 216–18.

209 This becomes even clearer if one omits the waw ("and") before ṣaddîq with some Hebrew manuscripts: "Gracious and merciful is the Righteous One."

> Those who help others in need with such selfless and generous justice, to enable them to have a real chance to live in dignity and freedom, do indeed correspond to YHWH's behavior towards his people as depicted in Ps 111—and in doing so resemble YHWH as the 'light/sun of justice' (v. 4a).[210]

Ps 116, the song of thanksgiving, in which the supplicant presents himself as inexperienced and lowly, repeatedly refers to the formula of grace in Exod 34:6–7 (Ps 116:5; cf. Ps 78:38; 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8). As in Ps 112:4, this includes the attribute *ṣaddîq* ("righteous"), but now clearly directed at YHWH (Ps 116:5).[211] Once again, God's righteousness consists in his gracious acts towards the worshipper: "In his helplessness, he remains dependent on YHWH's protection and saving righteousness."[212] Those who have experienced it will raise the "cup of salvation" (כוס ישועות) and, as *ʿæḇæḏ* of God, son of his "slave" (אמה), will pay the vows of thanksgiving in the courts of the Jerusalem temple (Ps 116:13, 16, 18–19). As the son of the female slave, and not as one acquired on the slave market, the worshipper has been part of the household of the divine Lord since birth and knows himself to be in a particularly close relationship to his God.[213] Just as the saved worshipper deliver on their solemn vows amongst the circle of the pious, in the presence of all his people (Ps 116:14–15, 18), so the nations are then called upon to praise God worldwide, because YHWH's reliable love reigns forever "over us" (עלינו), over the worshippers from Israel and the God-fearing from the nations (Ps 117). This smallest of all psalms is placed between Ps 116 and Ps 118 to avoid any doubt that YHWH's worshippers from the nations may and will celebrate the great liturgy of thanksgiving in the sanctuary on Zion.[214] Recalling the salvation from their captivity in Egypt (Ps 118:14 → Exod 15:2 [cf. Isa 12:2]; Ps 118:16 → Exod 15:6, 11–12) and anticipating YHWH's final reign from Zion (Ps 118:19–20 → Isa 26:2; Ps 118:24 → Isa 25:9; Ps 118:28 → Isa 25:1), the Psalm creates a fictional, yet not fictitious liturgy of thanksgiving that gathers together all the experiences of the salvation of every single worshipper.

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210 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 241; Saur, "Beständige Gerechtigkeit": 283: "By acting justly, a man lives up to his divine image." Cf. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, "Der gnädige Gott und der arme Gerechte: Anthropologische Akzente in der Psalmengruppe 111–118," in *Kircheneinheit und Weltverantwortung: Festschrift für Peter Neuner*, ed. Christoph Böttigheimer and Hubert Filser (Regensburg: Pustet, 2006): 55; Judith Gärtner, "Eine Frage der Gerechtigkeit? Identität durch Transformation am Beispiel der Gnadenformel in den späten Psalmen," in *Tradition(en) im alten Israel: Konstruktion, Transmission und Transformation*, ed. Ruth Ebach and Martin Leuenberger, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019): 246–47.

211 Only in these two places in the OT is the grace formula supplemented with the attribute "just" (צדיק); see Ruth Scoralick, *Gottes Güte und Gottes Zorn: Die Gottesprädikationen in Ex 34,6f und ihre intertextuellen Beziehungen zum Zwölfprophetenbuch*, Herders Biblische Studien 33 (Freiburg: Herder, 2002): 47 and 218 [Chart, Table 1]; cf. Gärtner, "Frage der Gerechtigkeit": 237: "Like goodness, righteousness also characterizes divine action as a whole."

212 Hossfeld, "Der gnädige Gott und der arme Gerechte": 58; cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 297.

213 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 299.

214 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 308.

This "salvation" (*jᵉšûʿāh*) becomes a powerful song in the tents of the righteous who make their way to the sanctuary (Ps 118:14–15). Both, the gates to the inner and/or outer temple will only open to them for they are "gates of *ṣœḏœq*" through which only the *ṣaddiqîm* may enter (Ps 118:19–20). If YHWH had relinquished the individual worshipper or the people of God to death, those righteous who were saved by him would not be able to enter through the gates of righteousness. But then the sanctuary would lack the capstone, it would remain rejected, unheeded, and unused (Ps 118:22–23). The fact that the gates of the sanctuary are labelled by the noun *ṣœḏœq* and not by *ṣᵉdāqāh* highlights this difference in meaning with sporadic instances of evidence. By saving us from death God provides proof of his justice. He opens the way to the sanctuary of his justice and will receive never-ending thanksgiving across all times and nations: "For the worshipper, justice understood as a reciprocal process means that he has been made right again through YHWH's salvation."[215] The sanctuary on Zion is open to worshippers from Israel and the nations and is the place that points beyond its materiality to the imagined space of divine salvation.[216] Against this backdrop, the long Torah Psalm 119 seems to be in the wrong place, but the encounter with the God of salvation in the liturgy of thanksgiving in the sanctuary and the meditation of his Torah in everyday life complement each other perfectly:

> Since Ps 118 presents the entry of the saved righteous (be it an individual, be it the community of the righteous) as walking through 'the gates of justice' into the presence of the just and saving God, Ps 119 can be understood as a meditation on the encounter with the God of justice and on the salvation from death mediated by YHWH's Torah.[217]

It is not surprising that divine justice forms the main theme in the tsade stanza (v. 137–144), corresponding to the first letter of the word root צדק. The derivatives of this root occur five times in the verse (*ṣaddîq* v. 137; *ṣœḏœq* v. 138, 142, 144; *ṣᵉdāqāh* v. 142), always in connection with the Torah, for it is the proof that he is just and reliable: "YHWH's saving act of salvation (צדקה) corresponds to his eternally established and valid order of salvation (צדק) and thus keeps it going as "justice in faithfulness" (v. 142).[218]

At first glance, justice and righteousness do not seem to occupy a central position in the Psalter of Ascent (Ps 120–134) and the two attached hymns of history (Ps 135–136). However, Psalms 125 and 129, which open and end the second group of five of the fifteen "Songs of Ascent" (שיר המעלות), disabuse us of this notion. In both psalms, the terms "being righteous/the righteous" and "crooked/evildoer" are used in one and the same verse each (Ps 125:3; 129:4). In addition, "the scepter of wickedness" and "the cords of the wicked" correspond to each other in these same verses. Ps 125 (inherited

215 Gärtner, "Eine Frage der Gerechtigkeit": 241.
216 Cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 316: "Thus the psalm has a dual character: it is ritual *and* poetry."
217 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 389.
218 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 384.

land of the righteous) and Ps 129 (reapers and sheaf-binders) once again pick up the post-exilic theme about the land in the question of the just allotment of arable land that provides the basis for the divine blessing on one's own plot. The theme is continued in the intervening psalms of this middle group of five (Ps 126 sowing and harvesting, Ps 127 daily work for daily bread and blessing of children, and Ps 128 enjoyment of the produce amongst his family). The pilgrimage, whether real or imaginary, presupposes that the God of saving justice will send rich blessings from Zion onto those who fear and trust in him, onto the righteous, the good, and the upright. If the stability of Zion, which never wavers, is to be transferred to the pilgrims who enter the gates of righteousness, YHWH must protect the righteous just like the mountains that surround Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Ps 125:1–2). Therefore, God must also prevent the "scepter of wickedness" (שבט הרשע) from encumbering the "inheritance of the righteous" (גורל הצדיקים) because that would endanger the righteous themselves to be corrupted and stretch out their hands to do wrong (Ps 125:3).[219] Moreover, the "scepter of wickedness" calls into question the divine "scepter of righteousness," which is the "scepter of your kingship" (Ps 45:7). If injustice were to prevail, not only would his throne falter, but the sanctuary of righteousness, Zion, would also collapse. According to the ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament view, the architecture of reality is based on connective justice, on the nexus of action and consequence, which, although not always immediate, everyone must ultimately experience. The last two verses of Ps 125 (v. 4–5) call upon YHWH, as the guarantor of this cosmic order, to do good to the good, while the evildoers should perish [into nothingness]. The blessing at the end of verse 5, "peace be upon Israel" (שלום על ישראל), refers only to the righteous. They are not merely part of God's people but make up the whole people. In other words: Only the righteous are "his people" (עמו; Ps 125:2b).

The contrast to the end of Psalm 129 is palpable: the wicked are denied God's blessing because they will not benefit from oppressing their fellow human beings to reap any harvest by exploiting those who are economically defenseless. To quote the words of the psalmist they will wither like grass on the roofs that is plucked up; no reaper will fill their hands or binders of sheaves their arms (Psalm 129:6–7). Conjunctive justice, the act-consequence relationship, applies once again, but not without YHWH's involvement. This is emphasized in the indicative of v. 4: "The Lord is righteous; he has cut the cords of the wicked." This act of liberation with which God breaks the cords of the yoke that lies on the shoulders of the exploited identifies him as *ṣaddîq*.[220] He must undo the cords of injustice, otherwise "all who hate Zion" (Ps 129:5) would have triumphed—those who through their acts of injustice disavow Zion as the global center of peace and justice.

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219 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 495; Kraus; *Psalmen II*: 852, who rightly refers to the theme of land ownership in Isa 57:13; 60:21; 65:9; cf. also Corinna Körting, *Zion in den Psalmen*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006): 63.

220 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 564: "The main theme of Ps 129 is YHWH's justice, which liberates the victims of exploitation and oppression from the power of the perpetrators of violence by disempowering them and allowing them to fail and even perish because of their own wickedness."

The Psalms of Ascent reach their climax with Ps 132. On the one hand, this psalm refers to the founding of Zion as the center of God's people through the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant by David (vv. 1–10). On the other hand, it renews the dynastic promise to his house (vv. 11–18). Only as long as David's sons keep the covenant with God, will he secure the throne of the house of David. God's residence on Zion, however, is unconditional because YHWH has chosen it for himself. Even if David's descendants are promised a future, human kingship remains limited in its significance, for it is not they but the priests who clothe themselves with *ṣæḏæq* (v. 9). Verse 16 further intensifies this understanding, for now it is YHWH himself who clothes Zion's priests with "salvation" (*ješa'*).[221] What once had been one of the kings' own key tasks, to ensure justice and righteousness, has now become the responsibility of the priests. This is even more astonishing because according to the psalmists YHWH wants to sprout a horn and prepare a lamp for David but will clothe his enemies with disgrace (v. 17–18). This is no longer accompanied by a concrete social function, but rather "[. . .] an astonishing transformation process becomes apparent [. . .], essentially the pre-exilic ideas of kingship develops into a protomessianic hope for a resurrection of kingship in a new form."[222] It seems that according to this idea David's dynasty was responsible for external security, while the priests were responsible for internal social justice. However, here again it is important to note that it is YHWH himself who first personally promises that he will abundantly bless Zion's sustenance and provide bread for its poor (Ps 132:15).[223] Translated into today's language, this means that care for the poor is a top-level issue. It is probably no coincidence that the motif of clothing also plays a role in Isaiah 60–62: There YHWH clothes Zion, the congregation of the righteous, with garments of salvation and with the mantle of righteousness. They wear a priestly turban, and YHWH causes righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations (Isa 61:10–11).[224]

It is part of the tasks for the servants to incessantly proclaim praise to this righteous and saving God from the sanctuary on Zion—even at night (Psalm 134; cf. 149:5). Unlike in the book of Isaiah, the *'āḇāḏîm* in the Psalter does not refer to a specific group of pious people, but is the generic term under which Aaronite priests, Levites, and the God-fearing from the nations come together (Ps 135:19–20). Their praise emanates from Zion and is directed at YHWH, who sits on his throne in Jerusalem as king over all powers and authorities (Ps 135:21). The fact that the retrospective view on history in both Ps 135 and Ps 136 alike end with the divine gift of the inherited land to his people

221 Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, "König David im Wallfahrtspsalter," in *Ein Herz so weit wie der Sand am Ufer des Meeres: Festschrift für Georg Hentschel*, ed. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher et al., Erfurter Theologische Studien 90 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2006): 225: "The clothing of the priests is therefore about a socially relevant task that brings to mind jurisdiction and helpful leadership."

222 Saur, *Königspsalmen*: 245.

223 Wilson, "King": 397: "Yahweh himself is the one who fulfills the role of the monarch by providing abundantly, satisfying the poor with food, and clothing '[Zion's] priests with salvation' (132:15–16)."

224 Berges, *Jesaja 55–66*: 413.

(Ps 135:12; 136:21) underlines that all Israel, all his servants, live on and from the land whose sole owner is YHWH himself. Unlike the idols of the gods, he is active in creation and history and therefore his name endures from generation to generation (Ps 135:13). This verse is taken from God's word to Moses in Exod 3:15 and binds the post-exilic praise of God to the fundamental event of salvation from Egyptian bondage. When Ps 135:14 states that YHWH "vindicates" (דין) his people and "has compassion" (נחם) with his servants he quotes Deut 32:36. The two quotations from the beginning of the Book of Exodus and the end of Deuteronomy are not chosen at random, but emphasize "[. . .] that YHWH is faithful to his people, even in the case of Israel being unfaithful to him, because he has mercy on his people and above all that he has the power to enforce his legal order against all powers and authorities."[225]

The historical retrospective that leads to taking the land in both Ps 135 and Ps 136 continues in Ps 137 into the time of exile, which is essentially characterized by the loss of land and living far from Zion/Jerusalem: "How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Ps 137:4).[226] Before the Psalter will finally be able to sing about YHWH's reign as king he must remember the sons of Edom, who, as the psalmist wishes to remind us here, made common cause with the Babylonians in the destruction of Zion/Jerusalem. If YHWH "remembered us in our low estate" (Ps 136:23), then he must remember the enemies of the city of God, just as the worshippers in Babylon remembered Zion (Ps 137:1, 7).[227] The sons of Edom and their descendants, whom YHWH is to punish and remember, oppose the worldwide kingship from Zion. As Jacob's twin brother (Gen 25:24–26), Esau not only represents the foreign political opponent, but also the *proximate other,* the brother as the enemy who is particularly threatening to one's own identity.[228] It is therefore no coincidence that the song of the winepress against Edom in Isa 63:1–6 comes before the collective prayer of lament (Isa 63:7–9) and the separation between the servants of YHWH and their opponents (Isa 65–66):

> The brother nation, which goes back to Esau, the twin brother of Jacob, thus becomes a negative image for the hope of the enforcement of law and justice in post-exilic Israel. Edom thus embod-

225 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 669.

226 Egbert Ballhorn, *Zum Telos des Psalters: Der Textzusammenhang des Vierten und Fünften Psalmenbuches (Ps 90–150)*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 138 (Berlin: Philo Fine Arts, 2004): 260: "The Israelites cannot sing songs of Zion on foreign soil, but God can intervene in favor of Zion on foreign soil."

227 Ulrich Berges, "'Wie können wir singen das Lied JHWHs auf dem Boden der Fremde' (Ps 137,4): Zum Spannungsfeld von Gewalt und Gotteslob," in *Fragen wider die Antworten: Festschrift für Jürgen Ebach*, ed. Kerstin Schiffner et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010): 361–62.

228 Dominic S. Irudayaraj, *Violence, Otherness and Identity in Isaiah 63:1–6: The Trampling One Coming from Edom*, Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies 633 (London: Bloomsbury International Clark, 2017): 67: "For Israel, Edom was a *persisting* 'other' which rubbed shoulders with the former [Israel/Jacob, U.B.] on multiple levels. This signifies that the boundary between these two neighboring nations was anything but *impermeable*" (italics in original).

> ies all the external enemies of God's people as well as their internal opponents who, despite the prophetic accusations, do not want to let go of their social and cultic misdemeanors (Isa 56:9ff.).[229]

Compared to the last part of the book of Isaiah, the enemy brother in the fifth and last Psalter of David (Ps 138–145) poses a much stronger threat to the worshipper. It is tempting to eat of the delicacies offered by those who do wrong, to be drawn into the maelstrom of their words and actions (Ps 141:3–4). To prevent this from happening, a "righteous man" (*ṣaddîq*) may strike him calmly, for this *correctio fraterna* is like anointing oil on his head (Ps 141:5).[230] No ungodliness, no shadow of injustice should cloud his decision to follow YHWH, which he has made in his heart: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps 139:23–24).

In the last Psalter of David, the world's praise of God on Zion is consistently linked to the individual's examination of his conscience so that he does not become entangled in the snares of the wicked (Ps 140:6; 141:8–9; 142:4), but with YHWH's help (Ps 143:8) walks on the path of righteousness. The 'foreign' land (נכר), where no song of Zion is possible (Ps 137:4), points to the plea for salvation from the sons of the 'aliens' (Ps 144:7, 11). They are not enemies coming from outside, but slanderers and liars acting from within. The final psalm of the fifth Psalter of David clearly states the goal of this inner pilgrimage: The worshipper sings and makes music to his God and King, whose mercy in all his works is boundless and whose kingship extends over all people, all times, over all that lives (Ps 145:1, 13, 16). In view of YHWH's universal kingship, the Davidic kingship—if it is still being considered here at all—looks rather modest, especially since David also refers to his God as "the king" (המלך) (Ps 145:1).[231] The righteous and upright (140:14; 142:8; 146:9), YHWH's pious ones (Ps 145:10; 148:14; 149:1, 5, 9), stand alongside David, who as God's *ʿæḇœḏ* "servant/slave" (Ps 143:2, 12; 144:10) is a shining example to them.[232] It is they who let the "remembrance" (זכר) of YHWH's great goodness flow forth and acclaim his *ṣᵉdāqāh*, the proof of his saving deeds of justice (Ps 145:7). In the chet stanza of this acrostic psalm, the formula of grace from Exod 34:6–7 is quoted almost in its entirety, with the first two essential qualities interchanged: "The Lord is gracious and merciful" (חנון ורחום יהוה) (v. 8; cf. Ps 111:4; 112:4). This results in an inclusion with the last word of this line, which also begins with Chet: "and great in *ḥœsœḏ*"

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229 Berges, *Jesaja 55–66*: 472.

230 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 746: "Verses 5–7 indicate the prayer's ability to be seduced, how he remains dependent on the '*correctio fraterna*' by the righteous, so that he does not ally himself with the wicked and become unfaithful to his concept of life."

231 Ballhorn, "Telos": 292–93; Hermanus van Grol, "David and His Chasidim: Place and Function of Psalms 138–145," in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, ed. Erich Zenger, Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses / Bibliotheca 238 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010): 320: "[. . .] David has been transformed from a king into a role model for the fighting and praying servants of God."

232 The term "servants," so prominent at the end of the book of Isaiah, no longer occurs in Ps 138–145, 146–150, but is replaced by "pious ones" (חסידים), Berges, "Knechte im Psalter": 177.

(Ps 145:8b). Nothing other than his love, which manifests itself in the salvation of the righteous and pious, is the content of his justice.[233] He enforces the rights of the poor and frees them from their distress (Ps 140:13–14; 142:8; 143:1, 11). Again and again, he lifts up the downtrodden and fallen (Ps 145:14). It is hardly surprising that the Ṣade verse also begins here with the central word from the vocabulary of justice: "The Lord is faithful (*ṣaddîq)* in all his words, and gracious *(ḥāsîḏ)* in all his deeds." The faithful God and his "righteous" (*ṣaddiqîm*) and the faithful God and his "pious ones" (*ḥ^{a}sîḏîm*) form an inseparable unity. This applies beyond the borders of Israel to all God-fearing people who call upon YHWH in truth for his saving help (Ps 145:18–19). All people who sincerely seek his closeness will experience his attentiveness.

All five psalms of the final Hallel (Ps 146–150) begin with a "Hallelujah" (הללו יה) as a heading and end with it as a signature, resulting in a tenfold call to give praise. In addition, all five psalms begin with a word from the root הלל "praise" in the opening line. This is further intensified in Ps 150, where the praise of YHWH and his righteous, life-sustaining kingship reaches its climax and where the lexeme is found ten times.[234] The actants referred to in these five psalms vary. In Ps 146:5, praise is given to the worshipper who places his hope in YHWH, who, as the creator of heaven and earth, remains faithful to all his creatures—he keeps them alive. His special care is aimed at all those who cannot come into their own, the oppressed, the hungry, prisoners, the blind, the downtrodden, strangers, orphans, and widows. Surprisingly, this list of *personae miserae also includes* the "righteous" (*ṣaddiqîm*) whom YHWH loves (v. 8b). The reason lies in the fact that they, like the others in need, are completely dependent on God's loving faithfulness, without which they cannot survive to face the wicked.[235] The fact that YHWH bends the path of the evildoers but does not destroy them implies that they remain a constant threat to the righteous and the poor. The imperfect-modal verb form in the last verse, "May YHWH 'be king' (ימלך) forever" (v. 10a), also implies this, which clearly contrasts with the perfect מלך in the YHWH-king Psalms (Ps 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1). This does not cast doubt on God's assertiveness, but rather emphasizes the urgency for his life-sustaining kingship to be revealed worldwide and forever.[236]

To rebuild Jerusalem and to gather Israel from the diaspora can only succeed and consequently be celebrated if YHWH repeatedly shows himself to be the one who helps the poor and humbles the wicked (Ps 147:6). Just like in Isa 40:26–28 YHWH's incomparability is referred to. Not only all worldly powers but also all the heavenly bodies

233 Cf. Janowski, "Die rettende Gerechtigkeit": 375, who observes a shift from the theme of justice to that of mercy in the sequential reading of the Psalter.

234 The differing arrangement and form of Ps 146–150 in LXX and 11QPs^{a} can be ignored here, because MT offers the original form with great certainty, according to Ballhorn, "Telos": 303.

235 Ballhorn, "Telos": 307: "Among them [the *personae miserae*, U.B.] the righteous are ranked, who claim the same closeness to God for themselves." See also Kathrin Giess, "'JHWH hilft den Gebeugten auf' (Ps 147,6): Gottes Gerechtigkeit für die Armen," *Bibel und Kirche* 75, no. 4 (2020): 209.

236 Ballhorn, "Telos": 308; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 821.

obey him.[237] However, the God of Israel does not use his incomparable power to rule the world, but to protect the poor and the oppressed (Ps 147:6).[238] The congregation on Zion can and must respond with joyful music for "our God" (147:7). Jerusalem/Zion is called upon to praise God as the personification of the congregation of the poor, the pious and the righteous (147:12). In the same way as YHWH sends the natural phenomena of ice and frost and the wind that will thaw the frozen land, he also repeatedly sends his word to the earth, which has found its first addressee in Jacob/Israel (Ps 147:19–20). Unlike in Isaiah 55:10–11, however, the weather comparison here is not in the context of the fertility of the earth, but the frost sent by God points to the freezing of life and thus to his judging action, while the [warm] wind leading to a thaw indicates his renewed, gracious care.[239] Both sides of this action, judging and saving, are laid down in the legal decrees to Israel/Jacob. The binomial *ḥûqîm* and *mišpāṭîm* undoubtedly refers to the Mosaic Torah (cf. Exod 15:25; Lev 26:46; Deut 4:1, 8, 14, 45; 5:1, 31), but is not limited to it, as the term Torah is remarkably not used here.[240] The ethical-religious orders that YHWH has given to his people have their parallel in the following Ps 148 in the "bounds" (again *ḥoq*) with which God has placed the heavens, their inhabitants, and the heavenly bodies in their respective places (v. 6). The declaration of will to Israel and the cosmic order are therefore two sides of the same coin. When the final verse states that he has raised up a horn to his people, then this assurance of victorious power (cf. 1 Sam 2:10; Ps 75:6, 11; 112:9; 132:17; Lam 2:3, 17) applies only to the Israel of the pious, for they are the people who are close to God (Ps 148:14; cf. Deut 4:7). What are those to do who are thus strengthened does not consist of the exercise of dominion in whatever form, but the praise of God. With this editorial verse, the composers of the final verse create the transition to Ps 149, which is *the* song of praise of the "pious" (*ḥasidim*), who are named at the beginning, middle, and end of the psalm (v. 1, 5, 9), without a parallel term being placed alongside them.[241] They are probably among the final composers of the Psalter and later became a permanent group in post-exilic Judaism.[242] The שיר חדש "new song" (Ps 149:1; cf. 33:3;

237 Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*: 152.

238 Bernd Janowski, "Der barmherzige Richter: Zur Einheit von Gerechtigkeit und Barmherzigkeit im Gottesbild des Alten Orients und des Alten Testaments," in *Das Drama der Barmherzigkeit: Studien zur biblischen Gottesrede und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte in Judentum und Christentum*, ed. Ruth Scoralick, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 183 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000): 72: "It is the *vision of the universal kingship of YHWH*, who as the savior of the poor carries out the eschatological judgment (Ps 149:5–9) and thus brings the new heaven and the new earth (Ps 150)" (italics in original).

239 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 835; cf. Berges, *Jesaja 55–66*: 121–23.

240 Ballhorn, "Telos": 313: "In a meta-sense, the Psalter also becomes a book of the Torah in the extended sense that it teaches God's actions."

241 There is no further mention of the *ʿāḇāḏîm* "servants/slaves/servants" in the Psalter after Ps 135, whereas they appear in the book of Isaiah until the end.

242 1 Macc 2:42 קהל חסידים / συναγωγὴ Ασιδαίων "congregation of the pious," Christoph Levin, "Das Gebetbuch der Gerechten: Literaturgeschichtliche Beobachtungen am Psalter," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 90, no. 4 (1993): 355–81; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Beauty of Holiness: Re-Reading Isaiah in the*

96:1; 98:1; Isa 42:10) sings of YHWH's final intervention on behalf of his pious people. Those who still turn against God's people are literally bound and chained (Ps 149:8). The only weapons of the pious are their praises to YHWH, who enforces retribution and rebuke against the enemy nations (Ps 149:6–7). Whereas the singers previously sat by the rivers of Babylon and could not forget Zion, lest their tongues would have stuck to the roof of their mouths (Ps 137:5–6), now, as children of Zion, they tirelessly sing songs to YHWH, their king (Ps 149:5): "The faithful who were saved shall sing the praises of their king—and thereby contribute to the establishment of universal kingship (cf. Ps 8:3)."[243] If it is true that God crowns the poor with salvation (Ps 149:4), then he must execute judgment on the nations and their kings who oppose this project of providing justice for the oppressed. He owes this not only to them, but also to his own will, the "written judgment" (משפט כתוב) (Ps 149:9). Whether this expression refers to texts from the prophetic sayings of the nations is anyone's guess. It is more important that before the great cantata in Ps 150, unless the poor and oppressed are not yet crowned with YHWH's salvation and if retribution for the injustice committed against them is still outstanding, there can be no unrestricted praise of his universal kingship. It is precisely God's worldwide praise on Zion that must not blur the distinction between victims and perpetrators. This is particularly important for the Christian churches when they sing the Psalms of the Old Testament alongside Israel—not in its place.

Light of the Psalms (London: International Clark, 2019): 125, emphasizes the proximity of the "Hasidim" to temple music for Ps 149: "[. . .] language and activities associated with the temple singers is unmistakable [. . .]."

243 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150*: 866.

7 Law and Justice in the Book of Proverbs

The ancient Oriental wisdom tradition influences the concept of law and justice in the Book of Proverbs more strongly than any other biblical text. This is especially and clearly evident in the adoption of the Egyptian teaching of Amenemope from the twentieth dynasty (1189 BC to 1077 BC) in Prov 22:17–23:11. However, it also contains its own accents that are indebted to the YHWH tradition (cf. Prov 22:19, 23; 23:11).[1] Moreover, Mesopotamian wisdom exerted its influence on the wisdom of ancient Israel and its authors, leading Bernd Schipper to conclude that for the Book of Proverbs, "The 'wise man' was *de facto* a 'knower' who, as a *literatus*, was deeply rooted in the texts of the tradition and was able to create new texts and contextualizations based on this knowledge."[2] The seven headings in Prov 1:1; 10:1; 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; and 31:1 indicate that the book can be traced back to individual collections which form a composed work of art. In its final form, it is an educational book for beginners and advanced students, as the prologue in Prov 1:1–4, 5–7 reveals.[3] Just like the wisdom of the ancient orient, the Book of Proverbs is also about concrete life lessons ("educational knowledge") on the one hand, and knowledge that transcends the individual and society on the other ("cosmotheistic knowledge").[4] What is to be learned here requires not only attentive listening, but also one's own further reflection.[5] Unlike the case in large parts of the Torah and prophecy, the addressees are not merely listeners of the word, but are challenged to reflect intensively in order to draw the correct conclusions for their own lives from the complex experiences of reality. Once again, the act-consequence relationship plays a major role. It consists of the realization, confirmed by many generations, that one's own actions are not without consequences for one's personal life, one's integration into society, and one's relationship with God. Everyday observation, according to

1 See Irene Shirun-Grumach, "Die Lehre des Amenemope," in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments*, vol. 3, *Weisheitstexte, Mythen und Epen / Weisheitstexte II*, ed. Burkhard Günter (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1994): 222–50; Hans-Peter Mathys, "Sprüche," in *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2014): 525–28; Markus Saur, Einführung in die Weisheitsliteratur, Einführung Theologie (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2012): 15–30.

2 Bernd U. Schipper, *Sprüche (Proverbia): Proverbien 1–15*, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament 17,1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017): 39 (italics in original).

3 Schipper, *Sprüche*: 14; cf. Anne W. Stewart, "Teaching Complex Ethical Thinking with Proverbs," in *Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, ed. Carly Crouch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 241; Williamson, *Justice*: 49–50.

4 Schipper, *Sprüche*: 21.

5 Bernd U. Schipper, "Wisdom for Beginners and for the Advanced: The Prologue of the Book of Proverbs and the System of the Seven Superscriptions," in *Fromme und Frevler: Studien zu Psalmen und Weisheit; Festschrift für Hermann Spieckermann zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Corinna Körting and Reinhard G. Kratz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020): 469: "The book of Proverbs is presented as a wisdom book for both the unexperienced student and the advanced sage and is thus based on a two-tiered educational concept."

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782-007

which human actions prove to be *useful* or *harmful, is* classified as *wise* or *foolish* in the categories of wisdom-based thinking and as *just* or *wicked* in direct relation to God.[6]

7.1 Righteousness as Attitude and Meta-Virtue

The inclusion of different perspectives and its integration of the addressees—its discursive character—is of decisive importance for the question of justice in the Book of Proverbs. The Book thus understands that reality takes place on three levels: man in himself, man in his social constitution, and man before God. The Book of Proverbs closely interweaves the anthropological, sociological, and theological dimensions. The intended insights are not always openly revealed but require the readers to think for themselves. This is precisely what the students of wisdom are challenged to do, as it is a matter of forming a personality that should shape a whole life. The constant contrasting of *ṣaddîq* and *rāša'* urges the correct basic decision *coram Deo*:

> The Book of Proverbs is concerned not only with instructing man as regards to his own education and his behavior towards other people, but with man before God. This theological dimension, which is expressed in the Proverbial Wisdom in an elaborate network of different proverbs, manifests itself in the terms צַדִּיק ("righteous") and רָשָׁע ("wicked").[7]

Unlike what appears in the other writings of ancient Israel, the question of law and justice is not primarily answered from the viewpoint of the divine will to save the socially weak, but from that of the cosmic order that integrates everyone. Without this order and the associated act-consequence relationship, the existence of creation, society, and a successful life for the individual is unimaginable. While the Torah and prophecy emphasize *ṣᵉdāqāh* as a proof of justice in order to combat the social distortions that endanger the balance of creation and society, wisdom complements this with the aspect of virtue, the ethical attitude that must be learned from a young age.[8] In this context, justice is not only a concept of action, but also an abstract noun that judges the conduct of life of the individual in his social environment and in his relationship with God (cf. Prov 11:6, 18–19; 12:28; 13:6; 15:9; 16:8, 12, 31).[9] The instructors of wisdom

6 Schipper, *Sprüche*: 54: "A behavior is useful or harmful on a general life-world level (level 1), it is wise or foolish in the categories of wisdom (level 2), and righteous or sacrilegious before God in relation to man (level 3)."

7 Schipper, *Sprüche*: 43; on the diachronic development of this juxtaposition, see Jürgen van Oorschot, "Der Gerechte und die Frevler im Buch der Sprüche: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte des frühen Judentums," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 42, no. 2 (1998): 225–38.

8 Crüsemann, "Gerechtigkeit": 152: "But both salvation and responsibility for oneself are indispensable aspects of what we call justice from a biblical perspective."

9 Bruce K. Waltke, "Righteousness in Proverbs," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 2 (2008): 225: "Wisdom in Proverbs and its correlative term 'righteousness' is all about being rightly related to God, to other human beings, to all creatures, and to the environment."

were very aware that the right attitude leads to the right action, to the demonstration of justice, which establishes a relationship with God: "To do righteousness (*ṣᵉdāqāh*) and justice (*mišpāṭ*) is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (Prov 21:3).

In contrast, the noun *ṣæḏœq* in the Book of Proverbs has neither a pronounced social-ethical connotation nor does it, as is so often the case in the prophets, mean the state of salvation desired by God. Rather, it is linked to the theme of honest speech and to that of righteous judgment (Prov 1:3; 2:9; 8:8, 15; 12:17; 16:13; 31:9). The findings are very similar for the term *mišpāṭ* ("justice"), because in the proverbs it neither refers to a superior state of salvation nor to a predetermined law, but to an irreproachable way of life, far removed from lies, deceit, and any kind of violation of the law (Prov 1:3; 2:8–9; 8:20; 12:5; 13:23; 16:8, 10–11, 33; 17:23; 18:5; 19:28; 21:3, 7, 15; 24:23; 28:5; 29:4, 26).

Even though the theme of justice in Proverbs is not based solely on the evidence of *ṣᵉdāqāh*, the statistical findings provide the best starting point. Apart from Prov 8:18, 20, the noun is found only in the "Solomonic Collection" (Prov 10:1–22:16).[10] However, the contrast between "righteous" and "wicked" is found throughout the entire book (except in Prov 30–31). According to Ruth Scoralick's survey, both terms, whether in the singular or the plural and whether alone or in direct opposition, occur in forty-nine proverbs (7x7). In ten proverbs, *ṣaddîq/ṣaddiqîm* stands alone, and in combination with *rāša'/rᵉšā'îm* in an additional ten proverbs. In seven proverbs, both opposites occur in the singular and as well as in the plural in an additional seven proverbs. Two thirds of these cases are found in Prov 10–12, which indicates the strong focus on the theme of justice there. It is also noteworthy that the righteous are usually spoken of in the singular, whereas the wicked are often spoken of in the plural: "Perhaps this serves as a pedagogical device: the individual reader/listener in question is supposed to identify with the 'righteous' in contrast to the mass of 'wicked.'"[11]

Surprisingly, the terms *ṣᵉdāqāh* and *ṣaddîq/ṣaddiqîm* never appear together in the same verse in Proverbs, which is certainly the case in other books (1 Kings 8:32; Isa 5:23; Jer 23:5; Ezek 3:20; 18:5, 20, 24, 26; 33:12, 13, 18; Ps 11:7; 2 Chr 6:23). Even where it would be obvious, such as in Prov 11:5 ("The righteousness of the blameless keeps their ways straight, but the wicked fall by their own wickedness"), it is not the righteous but the "upright" (תמים) person who is spoken of.[12] The expression "the righteousness of the righteous" (cf. Isa 5:23) is nowhere to be found in the Proverbs. What might be even more astonishing is the fact the opposite term "unrighteous/wicked" is indeed found

10 Prov 10:2; 11:4, 5, 6, 18, 19; 12:28; 13:6; 14:34; 15:9; 16:8, 12, 31; 21:3, 21.

11 Ruth Scoralick, *Einzelspruch und Sammlung: Komposition im Buch der Sprichwörter Kapitel 10–15*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 232 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995): 64; William P. Brown, "Reading Psalms Sapientially in the Writings," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Donn F. Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019): 158, who points out that the wicked in the book of Proverbs are the object of contempt rather than a source of danger for the pious (cf. Prov 11:18; 12:3, 7, 21; 25:15f.).

12 Likewise, Prov 11:6: "The righteousness of the upright" (צדקת ישרים).

in combination with *ṣᵉdāqāh* in one verse (Prov 10:2; 11:5, 18; 15:9; 16:12). Why not say that righteousness eases the way for the righteous, when the opposite is explicitly stated, that the wicked falls because of his wickedness (Prov 11:5)? It seems as if a greater distinction is being made between righteousness and the righteous than is the case in Ezek 18 and 33, for example. This fits in with the fact that the noun *ṣᵉdāqāh* in the book of Proverbs rarely refers to the individual demonstration of justice. Where this is the case, however, the wording is more general, as in Proverbs 11:18: "The wicked man makes a deceitful gain, but he who sows righteousness reaps a constant reward." The "doing" (עשה) of the wicked is contrasted with the "sowing" (זרע) of righteousness, which brings with it not an illusory but a constant reward. This takes time, just as one cannot reap immediately after sowing.[13] *Sᵉdāqāh* in the proverbs undoubtedly requires righteous action that serves the community, but it is not simply identical to it. The evidence in Prov 12:5 and 15:9, which deal with the aim for and the pursuit of justice, confirms that it is about more than merely accomplishing something that is right: "Righteousness is thus expressed in terms of attitude and inclination as much as performance and achievement."[14] However, this should not lead us to shift the meaning of justice in the Book of Proverbs entirely to the interiority of the person devoted to wisdom. It is impossible to draw complete conclusions about what the wisdom teachers understand by *ṣᵉdāqāh* from the depiction of *ṣaddîq* or *ṣaddiqîm*. Righteousness is not a norm that simply needs to be fulfilled, but an attitude that determines the entire personality.[15] This meta-virtue has to prove itself in concrete actions in life, indeed it becomes visible only through such acts—in solidarity towards fellow human beings in need (Prov 29:7; cf. Prov 14:21, 31; 17:5) and in empathy towards domestic animals (Prov 12:10). Nevertheless, unlike in the Prophets and the Psalter, the soteriological aspect of *ṣᵉdāqāh* is not in the fore. Whereas justice brings about liberation and thus leads to joy in the Psalter, justice is downright the content of joy itself in Proverbs.[16]

7.2 Law and Justice in Prov 10–12 and 16

These two chapters are undoubtedly important to the discourse on justice in the book of Proverbs. This is emphasized by both the programmatic opening in Prov 10:1–5 and

13 Otto Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos (Proverbia)*, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament 17 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984): 140; Schipper, *Sprüche*: 684.

14 Sun M. Lyu, *Righteousness in the Book of Proverbs*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament / 2 55 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012): 61.

15 Lyu, *Righteousness*: 53: "[. . .] a meta-virtue that consolidates all other virtues and signifies the pervasive characteristics of a person."

16 Lyu, *Righteousness*: 132: "For the psalmist, righteousness *leads* to deliverance and happiness, whereas Proverbs maintains that righteousness *is* happiness."

the framing by the last proverb of this partial collection in Prov 12:28.[17] The fact that righteousness delivers from death (Prov 10:2) corresponds to the statement that the path of righteousness leads to life, yet that the shameful path leads to death (Prov 12:28). There are only two other instances in the entire Old Testament in which righteousness and death are mentioned together (Prov 11:4, 19). All in all, this results in the following sequence, which is unlikely to have arisen by chance:

- Proverbs 10:2: Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.
- Proverbs 11:4: Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.
- Proverbs 11:19: Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but whoever pursues evil will die.
- Proverbs 12:28: In the path of righteousness there is life, in walking its path there is no death.

The first half of Prov 10:2 and 11:4 contrasts useless wealth, which cannot save life, with righteousness, which is very much capable of doing so, noted in the second half. In contrast, the righteousness that leads to life is found in Prov 11:19 and 12:28 at the beginning, followed by the way of evil, which ends in death. In all four proverbs, *māwæṯ*, "death," forms the dark final chord. The proverbs about justice, wrongfully obtained wealth, life, and death run through these chapters and characterize the collection. Individual proverbs and their collection reflect two poles of an ellipse, where the constant alternation between the two leads to a deepening understanding.

The concentric structure shows that Proverbs 10:1–5 does not represent a mere compilation of individual proverbs, but rather a small, targeted composition. The statements on the prudent and foolish son (v. 1) and the wise and shameful son (v. 5) form the outer links. The two inner verses, 2 and 4, revolve around the theme of poverty/wealth, and the central v. 3 focuses on YHWH and his relationship to the righteous (singular) and the wicked (plural). If we divide these five verses into the above three categories, everyday worldly (useful vs. harmful), wisdom (prudent vs. foolish), and theological (righteous vs. evil) thinking, v. 4 belongs to the general experience of life. In contrast, vv. 1, 2, 5 are the result of wisdom-based reflection, and v. 3 stems from theological permeation. However, it should be added that v. 2b, with the proverb where justice deliver from death, already leads to the theological level, which is then completely defined by v. 3.[18] The starting point is the observation made from generation to generation that laziness leads to poverty, whereas diligence leads to wealth (v. 4). Once the students of wisdom have understood this, they have successfully completed the first step of instruction. If

17 Scoralick, *Einzelspruch und Sammlung*: 169–71.

18 Schipper, *Sprüche*: 620–21; Scoralick, *Einzelspruch und Sammlung*: 172 points to the chiastic arrangement of the lexemes רשע and צדק in vv 2–3.

that does not occur, only sorrow over the *ben kesil*, "the foolish son" (v. 1b) remains, the one who is contrasted by the *ben maskil*, "the wise son" (v. 5a). However, this sentence does not cover the opposite conclusion, according to which every poor person is lazy, and every rich person is industrious, because some treasures are not the result of industrious hands, but of wrongdoing.[19] This is why "treasures of wickedness" (אוצרות רשע) and "righteousness" (צדקה) are juxtaposed in v. 2. Here, *ṣᵉdāqāh* is not the highest virtue but qualifies wealth that conforms to justice if it has been acquired in accordance with obligations toward God and fellow human beings.

The reality that riches acquired through injustice (cf. LXX θησαυροὶ ἀνόμους) won't be of any use cannot be deduced from everyday experience, because then as now, their owners are very often well off, which serves as a problem and a temptation for the righteous. The transition from everyday knowledge to wisdom is already indicated by the verb יעל "to profit," which never occurs in profane but always in religious language (in writings of wisdom: Prov 10:2; 11:4; Job 15:3; 21:15; 30:13; 35:3; Sir 5:8; 38:21). The instructors of wisdom emphasize that unlawfully acquired wealth is apparently only of service to the owner but leads him into the realms of death from where there is no escape. This is illustrated by the only verse in the OT in which "treasures" (אוצרות) and "death" (מות) stand alongside each other again: "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death" (Prov 21:6). The goods obtained in this way offer no lasting protection, but are "[. . .] like vanity swept away, and those who seek it seek their own destruction."[20]

Prov 11:4 directly takes up Prov 10:2, although it no longer speaks of sacrilegious wealth but of treasures in general, the uselessness of which will be revealed "on the day of wrath" (ביום עברה). In this verse, the day of wrath does not refer to the judgment heralded by the prophets, and which affects nations, indeed the whole earth (cf. Isa 13:9; Ezek 7:19; Zeph 1:15, 18), but to the day of calamity that can affect any person and from which no wealth—no matter how honestly acquired—offers protection.[21] It is probably no coincidence that the LXX omits this verse. It is more likely because it is difficult to reconcile with the statement that righteousness delivers from death (Prov 10:2b; 11:4b). In both instances, the Targum assuages that justice saves from a "shameful death"

19 Axel Graupner, "'Die Welt ist in Verbrecherhand gegeben': Hiobs Anklage und Gottes Antwort," in *Die Welt ist in Verbrecherhand gegeben? Annäherungen an das Theodizeeproblem aus der Perspektive des Hiobbuches*, ed. Axel Graupner and Manfred Oeming, Biblisch-Theologische Studien 153 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2015): 10: "A sentence such as 'He who falls into a pit has dug it himself first' (cf. 26:27) is not found in the Book of Proverbs. This reverse conclusion is not ventured, but deliberately avoided."

20 Plöger, *Proverbia*: 245; see also Holger Delkurt, *Ethische Einsichten in der alttestamentlichen Spruchweisheit*, Biblisch-Theologische Studien 21 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993): 105.

21 The Mesopotamian wisdom and omen literature provides good parallels for this, according to Ruth Scoralick, "'Gerechtigkeit aber rettet vor dem Tode': Beobachtungen zu Spr 10,2," in *Ein Herz so weit wie der Sand am Ufer des Meeres: Festschrift für Georg Hentschel*, ed. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, Annett Giercke and Christina Nießen, Erfurter Theologische Studien 90 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2006): 371.

(ממותא בישׁא), which possibly refers to any kind of premature, violent, or illness-related death.[22] However, the question remains—are people who have acquired their possessions honestly truly better-protected from personal catastrophes than those who have become rich through fraud and deceit? Alternatively this might refer to a social death, of the social downfall that threatens those who have appropriated riches unjustly and cannot hope for support in the event of a sudden misfortune.[23] The verb נצל "to save," which in Hifil means "[. . .] to remove from the realm of affliction," would fit in well with this (cf. Prov 23:14; 24:11).[24] Justice, property acquired in righteousness, enables the owner to act in solidarity, and delivers him from death because it ensures a place in social memory. Those who throughout their lives have not shirked their responsibility for fellow human beings in need will be remembered fondly by posterity, whereas the name of the wicked will rot (Prov 10:7). For example, righteous behavior consists in a person returning the coat seized from a debtor before nightfall, which is considered *ṣᵉdāqāh* before God (Deut 24:13). In Ps 112:9, to distribute and give freely to the poor is seen as righteousness that endures forever. From this perspective, it is understandable that *ṣᵉdāqāh* is often translated as "mercy" (ἐλεημοσύνη) in the deuterocanonical and apocryphal writings and will deliver the donors from death (Tob 4:10; 12:9; cf. Sir 3:30; 29:12, Dan 4:24).[25]

The change from *ṣᵉdāqāh* to *ṣaddîq* closely links Prov 10:2–3. It is God who does not allow the *nœpœš* of the righteous person who has acquired lifesaving *ṣᵉdāqāh* to go hungry. *Nœpœš* means every human being's desire for life and survival (cf. Prov 12:10; 13:2; 27:7). YHWH guarantees this assurance to the righteous with his Word. Wealth is not promised to the *ṣaddîq*, only that they will always have enough, that they will be spared from becoming destitute. God protects those who have saved others from falling into poverty. The psalmist's statement illustrates this: "I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are ever giving liberally and lending, and their children become a blessing" (Ps 37:25–26; cf. Ps 34:11; 109:10). The fact that God "allows someone to go hungry" (Hif רעב) is found in the OT only in Deut 8:3, where God humiliated the people around Moses in the desert and allowed them to go hungry. This will not happen to the righteous man and his descendants, because his *ṣᵉdāqāh* cannot remain without consequences for

22 According to Franz-Josef Steiert, *Die Weisheit Israels—ein Fremdkörper im Alten Testament? Eine Untersuchung zum Buch der Sprüche auf dem Hintergrund der ägyptischen Weisheitslehren*, Freiburger Theologische Studien 143 (Freiburg: Herder, 1990): 86, the dictum of a justice that saves the righteous from death (Prov 10:2; 11:4, 6) "[. . .] represents, as it were, the guiding motto of the Book of Proverbs."

23 See the parable of the unfaithful steward in Luke 16:1–9 with the instruction to make friends with the help of "unrighteous mammon" (μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας) so that one may be received [by God and the poor] into the eternal dwellings.

24 U. Bergmann, "נצל *nṣl* hi. retten," in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Ernst Jenni (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1976): col. 97.

25 Franz Delitzsch, *Biblischer Commentar über die poetischen Bücher des Alten Testaments*, vol. 3, *Das Salomonische Spruchbuch* (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1873): 161.

the sake of God's righteousness. Practiced justice pays off through God's intervention, but he rejects the greed of the wicked, their wealth based on injustice (cf. Prov 11:6). The chiastic arrangement of Prov 10:2–3 underlines this statement: the uselessness of *wicked* wealth (v. 2a) corresponds to the divine casting away of the greed of the *wicked* (v. 3b). The *justice* that delivers from death (v. 2b) finds its counterpart in the fact that God does not let the *næpæš* of the *righteous* go hungry (v. 3a). If God pushes people or nations away, no matter how strong they are, their destiny is sealed (cf. Deut 9:4; Josh 23:5; Jer 46:15). YHWH's intervention at the center of Prov 10:1–5 coincides with the general tenor of the proverbs: "It is precisely at the point where wisdom addresses social issues that it introduces interventionist elements into the idea of the act-consequence relationship."[26] YHWH does not make the righteous rich but protects them from abject poverty while repelling the greed of the wicked rich. This, in turn, should not tempt us to live for the day without making any effort or provision of our own.[27] The warning against idleness in Prov 10:4 is thus part of the basics of the school of wisdom, the basic knowledge of its students (cf. 12:24; 13:4; 15:19; 19:15; 20:4, 13; 21:25). Those who are so lazy that they cannot even move their hand from the bowl to their mouth (Prov 19:24; 26:15; cf. 22:13; 26:13–14) cannot be helped by a righteous person, a just social order, or even God.[28] When it is said that the idle hand makes "poor" (ראש), a word from the repertoire of poverty terms is used (דל, אביון, עני, and ענו) that is never found in the Pentateuch or in the Prophets. There, it was probably deliberately avoided because it implies that the poor themselves are responsible for their precarious situation.[29] But were the instructors of wisdom truly so insensitive as to brand the poor, whom they encountered daily, as victims of their own negligence and stupidity? This should not be insinuated, because they knew very well that God is the maker of rich and poor (Prov 17:5; 22:2; 29:13) and that being rich and poor do not imply any moral value judgments (Prov 19:1, 22; 28:6). The warning against laziness and inactivity has the sole pedagogical purpose of urging students of wisdom to be diligent to prevent them from falling into the poverty trap. Poverty has no place on the path to a good and successful life, especially not self-inflicted poverty.[30] But heroic altruism cannot be based on the Book of Proverbs either; nowhere does it say that you should put yourself in economic danger by helping others.[31] Any form of extreme behavior, be it boundless laziness or

26 Kessler, *Ethik*: 503, who refers to Prov 15:25; 22:22; 23:10–11.

27 According to Timothy J. Sandoval, *The Discourse of Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs*, Biblical Interpretation Series 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2006): 69, this is the level of "social observation" on which the discourse of justice and the reflections on wisdom virtue are based.

28 See Berges and Hoppe, *Arm und reich*: 45–47.

29 Berges and Hoppe, *Arm und reich*: 11.

30 See Kessler, *Ethik*: 501: "*The ethics of the Book of Proverbs is structured as a eudaimonistic virtue ethics. The goal of ethical instruction is happiness, life, the good life*" (all italics in original).

31 Against Waltke, "Righteousness in Proverbs": 236: "The wicked advantage themselves by disadvantaging others, but the righteous disadvantage themselves to advantage others" (all bold in the original).

excessive greed, contradicts wisdom teachings.[32] Those who indulge in laziness against their better judgment (cf. Prov 12:24, 27; 19:15) must assume that it will sooner or later lead them to destitution. In contrast, there is a good chance that the hands, the diligence of the industrious, will ensure sufficiency. Apart from here the terms used here for "hand/palm" (כף/יד) are only used together in the Book of Proverbs in praise of the diligent housewife who works tirelessly without forgetting about the poor (Prov 31:19–20). However, diligence is not to be confused with haste, for only the former brings profit. The latter leads to deprivation through rash hastiness (Prov 21:5; cf. 28:20).[33] The fact that the hand of the diligent "makes rich" (Hif. עשר) is a statement worth considering, since the previous verse states that YHWH will not let the *næpæš* of the righteous go hungry. Together, this means that the acquisition and preservation of wealth must be taken care of by oneself, in the way of justice, cleverness, and prudence (cf. Prov 21:17; 23:4). YHWH will offer protection only from falling into destitution, because *ṣᵉdāqāh* saves the *ṣaddîq* from death.[34] Prov 10:22 provides an addition: "The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and one's own effort adds nothing to it." What at first glance seems to contradict Prov 10:4b is only the other side of the coin. For the religious conviction that no human activity can lead to lasting success without God's blessing is just as true as the everyday experience, according to which there is no prosperity without one's own actions.[35]

Verse 5 concludes the first reflection of Solomon's collection of proverbs, which confirms the inclusion of the contrast of the wise and foolish son from v. 1. However, it not only reiterates the previous statement but also alludes to the reality of creation by the concepts of summer and harvest. Man in search of wisdom for a successful life must behave "wisely" (שכל), he must align himself with the order that determines the whole of reality. This includes gathering the harvest in summer to be able to live off it until the next harvest (cf. Prov 6:8; 30:25). Anyone who does not want to fit into this cosmic order is a "shameful" (בוש) son who not only causes his parents grief (Prov 10:1) but is also superseded from the line of succession by the intelligent slave (Prov 17:2).

At this point, one can draw an initial conclusion from the opening in Prov 10:1–5, which is fundamental to the Solomonic collection of proverbs. The teachers of wisdom present the *ṣaddîq* as the one who fits in with the order of creation and society. The act-consequence relationship, which will sometimes work faster, sometimes slower, but

32 According to Kessler, *Ethik*: 495, "[. . .] finding the golden mean is a kind of meta-virtue."

33 Cf. Jutta Hausmann, *Studien zum Menschenbild der älteren Weisheit (Spr 10ff.),* Forschungen zum Alten Testament (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995): 99–100; Delkurt, *Einsichten*: 78–79: "So חרוץ probably also includes the ability to reflect thoroughly and to plan the work process effectively."

34 However, Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 61 is too short-sighted. In Prov 10:3, God is simply "[. . .] the giver of good to those who deserve it and punishment to the wicked." She also considers only Prov 10:1–3 to be a unit (ibid. 61).

35 Schipper, *Sprüche*: 642: "This does not mean that one level excludes the other, but rather that it is about relating two dimensions to each other: man in his living environment and man before God."

will always assert itself with certainty, underlies all of this. The three levels—everyday experience, wisdom-based reflection, and YHWH-oriented contemplation—are intertwined, and the students of wisdom must spell them out in an ongoing learning process. The everyday knowledge that laziness is detrimental to progress, whereas diligence is beneficial (v. 4), forms the basis for the admonition on wisdom with the reference to harvest time in summer (v. 5). In the hustle and bustle found in the natural context of sowing and harvesting, there is no place for the fruits of injustice. They only continue to exist because of a group of people, the *rᵉšāʿîm*, who do not gather and harvest wisely, but are driven to get more by greed.[36] Their riches stem from injustice and may impress in the short term, but they cannot save them from death in the long term. Such a death can befall the wicked and their treasures in the form of personal disasters that reveal the treasures' uselessness (cf. Prov 10:25; 12:3, 7; Mt 7:24–27). But what is YHWH's role on the theological level? He is not the great dispenser of reward and punishment but upholds the all-pervasive act-consequence relationship. This is especially true when it seems that the righteousness of the upright will fall behind the prosperity of the wicked. God does not reward the righteous with riches but protects them from going hungry (v. 3). Each student of wisdom must decide for themselves whether this is sufficient motivation for leading a virtuous life. But for those who have made progress on the path of *ṣᵉdāqāh*, who have already absorbed it into their personality and live by it, this question no longer arises, because they have already made up their mind.[37]

The discourse on justice is continued more intensively in Prov 11 than anywhere else in the Book of Proverbs. With five occurrences of the noun *ṣᵉdāqāh*, it accounts for a third of all occurrences in this book of the OT. The clustered occurrences in vv. 4, 5, 6 and vv. 18, 19 prove that the distribution is not arbitrary. The first three occurrences are at the center of the unit of interpretation in vv. 3–8, where the fate of the righteous and the wicked are contrasted once again based on the always presupposed act-consequence relationship. Repeatedly, the correlation between "arrogance" (*zāḏôn*) and "shame" (*qālôn*) proves to be valid.[38] There is a clear reference to Prov 10:1–5, as v. 11:4b repeats the dictum "righteousness delivers from death" (10:2b). But unlike the previous mention, there is now talk of the "day of wrath" (הרבע סוי), which brings in its wake YHWH's intervention in favor of the righteous and against the wicked. Now, however, it is no longer only the treasures of wickedness that cannot deliver from

36 See the famous words of Mahatma Gandhi, "The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not for everyone's greed."

37 This ability to learn is also emphasized in Proverbs 9:9; Saur, "ṣædæq": 389: "The wise man becomes wiser and wiser, the *ṣaddīq* accumulates more and more knowledge. Being wise and righteous is not a state, but a process."

38 Georg Freuling, *'Wer eine Grube gräbt. . .': Der Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang und sein Wandel in der alttestamentlichen Weisheitsliteratur*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 102 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2004): 39–40; see Schipper, *Sprüche*: 657, also ibid. 660.

death, but every kind of wealth. It is theologically self-evident that wealth based on injustice will not pass the acid test on the day of divine wrath, otherwise YHWH would side with the wicked. But what about "possession" as such? The term הון has a mostly positive connotation in Proverbs, with Prov 8:18 standing out: "Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity. "[39] Only possessions that are associated with *ṣᵉdāqāh* conform with God's will. What this means in concrete terms is shown in Prov 11:1, where loaded scales are considered an abomination to YHWH, but an accurate weight is pleasing to him (cf. Prov 16:11; 20:10, 23; Lev 19:35–36; Deut 25:13–16; Am 8:5–6; Hos 12:8). Only wealth that is rightly acquired and that enables us to demonstrate justice—to act in solidarity and protect the weak from the strong—delivers us from death. As in Prov 10:2b, this may refer to recognition in social memory, but it does not necessarily exclude the idea of a judgment of the dead. The assumption of a *ṣᵉdāqāh* that delivers from finale death would in any case have its counterpart in the function of the *ma'at* in the Egyptian Book of the Dead.[40]

According to the teachers of wisdom, possessions would only have any meaning in the face of misfortune and death in connection with a life lived responsibly. No one can escape the day of divine wrath, even the tried and tested war heroes are overcome with horror (cf. Zeph 1:14–15).[41] However, this does not silence the teachers of wisdom. They emphasize the righteousness of the righteous even more. The two mentions of *ṣᵉdāqāh*, each at the beginning of Prov 11:5, 6, take up the evidence in v. 4b and link it closely with the "blameless" (תמים) and the "straight" (ישרים) in the form of a construct state. In accordance with the act-consequence relationship, active righteousness makes the path of the blameless man straight, while the wicked falls by his wickedness. The verb in v. 5 "to make straight" (Piel ישר) leads directly to the straight ones in v. 6, who are saved by their righteousness. That the expression "from death" (ממות) is missing here—unlike in Prov 10:2b; 11:4b—is no coincidence, because the fate of death is only introduced in v. 7, and merely in relation to the "wicked man" (אדם רשע). It is the saving power of *ṣᵉdāqāh* that protects us from the traps which entangle the faithless in all their greed (cf. Prov 13:6). But what about the wrongdoer who seems to lead a life in splendor? At the latest, his hope is over when he dies, his expectation is "gone" (אבד). The twofold evidence may be a reference to the end of Ps 1, the wisdom introduction of the Psalter, "the way of the wicked will perish" (Ps 1:6b). The question remains: Why isn't the *ṣᵉdāqāh* directly linked to the *ṣaddîq*, unlike the wickedness that causes the wicked to fall (Prov 11:5b)? Once again, a distinction should be made between justice and righteousness. Although what righteousness is manifests itself in the righteous, it is not identical with the right-

39 Further positive use in Prov 3:9; 10:15; 12:27; 13:7, 11; 19:4; 24:4; negative use in Prov 1:13; 6:31; 18:11; 28:22.

40 Schipper, *Sprüche*: 667: but for a different opinion, see Plöger, *Proverbia*: 136: "It is therefore probably about protection from a premature or self-inflicted death."

41 Lyu, *Righteousness*: 82: "Wealth may be good to a certain extent, but the moment will come when its limitation becomes clear."

eous per se. Like the Egyptian *ma'at*, *ṣᵉdāqāh* always remains a quantity that differs from man.

Justice is mentioned again in Prov 11:18–19—on the one hand as a deed to be performed by man and on the other hand as a superior value that leads to [true] life. Just like before, the theme here is once again linked to the fact that wealth acquired by the wicked will prove to be elusive. Those who enrich themselves with deceit are deceived by their wealth because it is not permanent. The wicked person's process of "making" (עשה), the pursuit of quick gain, is contrasted with the process of the "sowing" (זרע) of righteousness. One should not be blinded by deceitful riches but understand that only the permanent sowing of justice—constantly acting in solidarity—provides a constant reward. The paronomasia of *šœqœr* ("lie") and *śœḵœr* ("reward") highlights the contrast perfectly. Just as the sower cannot reap straight away but must exercise patience until God allows the seed to sprout, so the one who constantly spreads his acts of righteousness cannot hope for an immediate reward. However, the student of wisdom can be sure that it will not fail to materialize.

The particle *ken* ("so") that introduces Prov 11:19 has a concluding character. The constant, lasting reward of righteousness is nothing less than life itself, while the one who pursues evil only hastens towards his own death: "The wicked who is out for quick gain will enter the sphere of death, while the one who turns to 'righteousness' as the guiding principle of his actions and has staying power will experience lasting life."[42]

The wisdom-based contrast between the wicked and the righteous also characterizes Prov 12 (vv. 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 21, 26), but the noun *ṣᵉdāqāh* appears only in the final verse: "In the path of righteousness there is life, in walking its path there is no death" (v. 28).[43] That the practice of righteousness leads to a successful life is found only in Prov 11:19, which makes a reference to the verse likely. This phrase is found in a heightened form in Prov 21:21: "Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honor." The act-consequence relationship shows here how truly profound it is and, far removed from any calculating *do ut des*. Those who make acting in solidarity with their life's principle, who pursue it (cf. Prov 15:9b), and who allow nothing and no one to dissuade them, will find life, justice, and honor on this path. On the one hand, this applies on an interpersonal level, "Whoever does *ṣedāqāh* will find *ṣedāqāh*. Because action and consequence are related and determine reality in a dynamic form, it is precisely the case that acts of justice are followed by further acts of justice—successively—but also reciprocally."[44] On the other hand, this also affects the relationship

42 Schipper, *Sprüche*: 685.

43 [MT]Prov 12:28 נתיבה "path" causes problems and is possibly a reading from תועבה "abomination"; cf. LXX μνησικάκων "[the path of those] who add evil." The following negation אל would then have to be vocalized as a preposition. However, the Hebrew text is not completely incomprehensible: "The way of [their] path [is] not death," i.e. the path of righteousness leads to life, not death; according to Hans F. Fuhs, *Sprichwörter*, Die Neue Echter Bibel 35 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2001): 92.

44 Saur, "saedaeq": 388.

with God, because the goal of "life" (חיים) is unthinkable without YHWH (cf. Prov 8:35). If the LXX omits "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη) in Prov 21:21b, the translators probably wanted to avoid the impression of a repetition from the A-colon. But there can be no question of a mere repetition, because the human proof of righteousness has its counterpart in the righteousness bestowed by God, which is the epitome of all heavenly gifts: "[B]lissful life, sound righteousness, true honor—life as it proceeds from God the Living One, righteousness as it is before God the Just and Justifying One, honor or glory as the God of Glory (Ps 29:3) bestows it (Ps 84:12)."[45] Like the Egyptian *ma'at*, the Hebrew *ṣedāqāh* is the Archimedean point at which divine and human action meet for the good of all creation.[46]

The three references to justice in Prov 16 (vv. 8, 12, 31) are all on the second level of discourse—reflection on wisdom. They appear in a chapter characterized by both YHWH proverbs (vv. 1–7, 9–11, 20, 33) and royal proverbs (vv. 12–15). The final verse of the sub-collection of Prov 10–15, which presents the fear of God as a disciplinarian prerequisite for the acquisition of wisdom (Prov 15:33; cf. 1:7; 9:10), provides a fitting transition.[47] It is no coincidence that the concept of righteousness links the proverbs of YHWH and the king. That is particularly noticeable in Prov 16:8, because the verse with the references to *ṣedāqāh* and *mišpāṭ* seems to have been deliberately inserted between the proverbs of YHWH in v. 7 and v. 9. Similarly, the royal proverbs in v. 10 and v. 12, which deal with the righteous administration of justice and the abhorrence of wicked deeds, are specifically outlined by using the image of the honest scales of "justice" (*mišpāṭ*).[48] Both for man in general and for the king in particular, justice is the measure of all things as a guiding principle of life. It is better to be righteous and possess less than much wealth that is based on "non-righteousness" (לא משפט) (Prov 16:8; cf. Prov 15:16). Such wealth not only results from injustice and deceit, but also represents an offense against God, for honest scales are YHWH's very own business. All weights are his work (Prov 16:11).[49] It is the king's responsibility to ensure just jurisdiction and honest weights and to abhor wicked deeds in the marketplaces, "for the throne is established [only] by righteousness" (16:12b; cf. 20:8, 28; 25:4–5; 29:14). It should be noted that the evaluative word "abomination" (תועבה), which is otherwise always associated

45 Delitzsch, *Spruchbuch*: 344, with references to Prov 8:18; Ps 24:5; Isa 45:8; 58:8; Rom 8:30.

46 Cf. Hornung, *Der Eine*: 229: "What came from the gods at creation, the Maat, returns to them from the hand of man—a symbol of the partnership between God and man, as realized in the Egyptian religion."

47 Schipper, *Sprüche*: 869: "In that v. 33 emphasizes the connection between the fear of YHWH, discipline toward wisdom and humility, not only is a theological résumé drawn, but also the basis from which Prov 16:1–22:16 is argued"; cf. Fuhs, *Sprichwörter*: 109.

48 Scoralick, *Einzelspruch und Sammlung*: 84.

49 Plöger, *Proverbia*: 191: "Falsification of merchant practices offends against Yahweh's justice"; Hermann Spieckermann, "Gott und Mensch am Markt: Krise des Glaubens und Sprache der Ökonomie in der Bibel," in *Gott, Geld und Gabe: Zur Geldförmigkeit des Denkens in Religion und Gesellschaft*, ed. Christof Gestrich, Berliner theologische Zeitschrift / Beiheft 21 (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag, 2004): 33: "The owner of the tools of trade is God himself."

with YHWH (e.g. Prov 3:32; 6:16; 8:7; 11:1, 20; 12:22; 13:9), here refers to kings, namely with "righteousness" (צדקה) and is used in the parallelism *membrorum*. The rejection of injustice on the part of kings is an absolute must, because only through justice can their God-ordained rule endure (cf. Isa 9:6; Ps 89:15), especially because justice and righteousness are also the pillars of the throne of YHWH himself (Ps 97:2). The hieroglyph for *ma'at*, which can be found depicted on the throne pedestal of the Egyptian pharaohs, points in the same direction. According to the ancient Oriental and Old Testament worldview, justice is the foundation of every state order, without which a political community cannot endure.[50]

But even on an individual base, only *ṣedāqāh* leads to a fulfilled life. It is what turns the gray hair in old age into a "glorious crown" (עטרת תפארת) (Prov 16:31; otherwise referring to the royal couple [Jer 13:18] and Jerusalem, Zion, and Samaria [Isa 62:3; Ezek 16:12; 23:42]). In Prov 4:9, wisdom bestows this crown on its disciples who are eager to learn. Here the crown is given to those who do not allow themselves to be led astray from the path of righteousness as the foundation and goal of their lives right up to old age. The pursuit of justice (cf. Prov 15:9; 21:21) as a generic term for righteousness, solidarity, sincerity, humility, and the fear of God reaches its goal only in old age and is rewarded with a royal crown.[51] This is a lifelong journey. The light of the righteous shines brighter and brighter on it (Prov 4:18). Those who stay on it gain more and more knowledge, allow themselves to be corrected, and remain capable of learning (Prov 9:9).[52]

To summarize, the combination of virtue and action characterizes the idea of *ṣedāqāh* in the Book of Proverbs. The wisdom teachers' instruction of a life that strengthens the individual and the community through honesty and helpfulness rests upon the act-consequence relationship, without which there is no meaningful explanation of the world in the ancient Near East and Old Testament. If lies and deceit were to triumph over righteousness and honesty, chaos would have conquered the cosmos. Wisdom-based thinking must adhere to the fact that actions and events are in a comprehensible relationship. Death is the final frontier where this truth must be vindicated. If the righteousness practiced throughout our lives did not protect us from the threat of personal extinction, the wicked would have chosen the better part forever with their wealth based on injustice. But then the idea of a God, as represented by YHWH's monotheism, would no longer be tenable. This is also the reason why YHWH sometimes actively intervenes in the Proverbs by not allowing the righteous to fall into poverty. Just as wisdom belongs to the domain of knowledge, so justice belongs to that of ethics. The two

50 Hausmann, *Studien*: 135.

51 Steiert, *Weisheit Israels*: 92: "This imperative aspect of pursuing justice and seeking it passionately is missing in Egypt."

52 Saur, "saedaeq": 389: "To be wise and just is not a state, but a process. He who is on the path as a righteous person takes something in, he lets something be said to him, he is positioned to develop [. . .]."

must come together, because it is unthinkable in the Book of Proverbs that a wise man is not also just at the same time.[53]

The noun "justice" is missing in the more recent wisdom of the Book of Proverbs, except for Prov 8:18, 20. This omission might be due to the fact that the thinking of order is no longer based on the act-consequence relationship, but on God himself: "Fear of God and wisdom become identical."[54] However, the question of justice cannot be ignored in the long term, because "[. . .] if wisdom emanates directly from YHWH, the righteous' innocent suffering and the failure of the ethos of wisdom must become an appeal to God and his justice."[55] If the idea of *ṣedāqāh* in the Solomonic collection of proverbs is intrinsically linked to the all-pervading act-consequence relationship, the question arises as to how the discourse on justice changes as soon as this cosmic connection is called into question. This opens the way for a look into the books of Job and Qohelet.[56]

53 Waltke, *Righteousness in Proverbs*: 233: "Outside Proverbs it is possible to be wise and wicked, but not in the book of Proverbs" (cf. Gen 3:1; Exod 7:11f.).

54 Eckart Otto, *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments*, Theologische Wissenschaft 3,2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994): 162.

55 Otto, *Ethik*: 167.

56 Freuling, *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*: 108.

8 Law and Justice in the Book of Job

This book of wisdom, including its narrative framework (1–2; 42:7–17) and discursive middle section,[1] was written between the fifth and third centuries BC.[2] It does not focus on the suffering of the innocent and the question of the origin of evil, but rather on the act-consequence relationship shared by all the protagonists as the starting point for their discussions.[3] The quintessence of wisdom teachings, particularly as found in the Book of Proverbs, is that a caring attitude towards one's fellow human beings and humility towards God is the basis for a successful life.

The central word root צדק ("just")[4] does not appear in the Hebrew version of the Job prologue, unlike in ^{LXX}Job 1:1, where the adjective δίκαιος was inserted into the fourfold, positive qualification of the protagonist.[5] The Greek translators thus blur an important distinction for the book as a whole. The wager between Satan and YHWH does not prove Job's righteousness, but his piety, his fear of God. In his praise of the protagonist, YHWH himself provides the key word (1:8), which the heavenly adversary takes up: "Is Job so 'God-fearing' (ירא אלהים) for nothing?" (1:9). Is there a religiosity that holds onto YHWH "for nothing" (חנם), without reason or intention? This is the first question in this wisdom treatise.[6] Here Job is not a historical person, and his suffering is not a biographical fate. He embodies a literary role in which a theological problem is played out and brought to a solution.[7] This makes the suffering of so many innocent people like Job no less dra-

1 Chapter 3–27: Job and the three friends; 28: Song of Wisdom; 29–31: Job's final speeches; 32–37: Elihu's speeches; 38:1–40:5. 40:6–42:6: two speeches of God with Job's short answers.

2 Markus Witte, "Von der Gerechtigkeit Gottes und des Menschen im Alten Testament," in *Gerechtigkeit*, ed. Markus Witte, Themen der Theologie 6 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012): 53; see also Konrad Schmid, *Hiob als biblisches und antikes Buch. Historische und intellektuelle Kontexte seiner Theologie*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 219 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2010): 8–10; Saur, *Einführung*: 74–76.

3 Kessler, *Ethik*: 468: "All human actors in the Book of Job assume that there must be a direct connection between man's moral actions and his fate in life, for the functioning of which God is responsible."

4 See the discussion of the evidence in Renate Egger-Wenzel, *Von der Freiheit Gottes, anders zu sein: Die zentrale Rolle der Kapitel 9 und 10 für das Ijobbuch*, Forschung zur Bibel 83 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1998): 29–31.

5 See, among others, Ulrich Berges, "Der Ijobrahmen (Ijob 1,1–2,10; 42,7–17): Theologische Versuche angesichts unschuldigen Leidens," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 39, no. 2 (1995): 225–45.

6 Rüdiger Lux, "Narratio—Disputatio—Acclamatio: Sprachformen des Leidens und seiner Überwindung im Hiobbuch," in *Ein Baum des Lebens: Studien zur Weisheit und Theologie im Alten Testament*, ed. Angelika Berlejung and Raik Heckl, Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017): 39: "It is thus a matter of the classical problem of whether the relationship between God and man can be reduced to a do-ut-des relationship. Does Job give God the glory for God's sake, or only for the sake of his own advantage and well-being as long as they last?"; see also Rüdiger Lux, *Hiob: Im Räderwerk des Bösen*, Biblische Gestalten 25 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012): 89.

7 Cf. the book figures Jonah, Ruth, Judith and Esther, who also come from the late post-exilic period.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782-008

matic and theologically no less challenging.[8] Analogously to the protagonists in ancient oriental texts with their accusations against the deity, Job is not simply portrayed as a "suffering loyalist." Instead, he embodies the ideal figure of the wise man. His illness and the way in which his life plunges into chaos, are "literary templates with which a conflict of wisdom is described."[9] The aim of this literary genre is not to remove the basis of wisdom teaching but, on the contrary, to make it more resilient to new challenges.[10] This must be kept in mind, especially regarding the epilogue and its function in the book as a whole. The emergence of the individual and his fate as opposed to the older idea of complete integration into the fate of the surrounding group or society forms the background of this burning issue. In times of crisis, such as the early exilic period in ancient Israel, the structures of government no longer offer any stability and make this problem more urgent.[11] Can an individual who faces God directly and without protection hold on to him when he allows chaos to befall the individual through no fault of their own?

But if piety is the central question, what role does the issue of justice play? It is important because, according to the Bible, a God-fearing person must also be *ṣaddîq*. That's why Job must not abandon or revoke his righteousness. If he were to do so, God would lose the bet against Satan, because Job's piety would no longer be unintentional. He would hope for divine forgiveness in return for his admission of guilt. The question of baseless and unintentional piety can be tested only on a protagonist who adheres to his righteousness towards God and mankind.[12] This results in the paradoxical situation that Job must hold on to his righteousness under all circumstances for God to win his bet: "YHWH [. . .] trusts that the web of blessings woven between him and Job is more than a business deal, that it is neither a barter nor a calculating game of haggling, but that is based on a deep trust, a trust that still endures even when faced with the depths of incomprehensible and inexplicable suffering."[13]

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8 See Ulrich Berges, "Hiob in Lateinamerika: Der leidende Mensch und der aussätzige Gott," in The *Book of Job*, ed. Willem Beuken, Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses / Bibliotheca 114 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994): 297–317.

9 Dorothea Sitzler, *Vorwurf gegen Gott. Ein religiöses Motiv im Alten Orient (Ägypten und Mesopotamien)*, Studies in Oriental Religions 32 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995): 231.

10 Sitzler, *Vorwurf gegen Gott*: 231: "They want to make the wise man and wisdom secure and firm again for a changed situation."

11 This applies to the "Job literature" of the ancient Near East as a whole, according to Wolfram von Soden, "Das Fragen nach der Gerechtigkeit Gottes im Alten Orient," in *Bibel und Alter Orient. Altorientalische Beiträge zum Alten Testament*, ed. Hans-Peter Müller, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 162 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985): 59: "God's justice, however, can become a problem only in certain individual cases [. . .]. However, such shifts, which open new possibilities for the individual, occur only in urban cultures, and even then only gradually and as a result of serious social upheavals."

12 Berges, "Ijobrahmen": 236: "Man and his religiosity become a problem and are put to the test. For this experiment, however, a truly righteous person is needed so that a relapse into the act-consequence relationship is ruled out from the outset."

13 Rüdiger Lux, "Der leidende Gerechte als Opfer und Opferherr in der Hiobnovelle," in *Ein Baum des Lebens: Studien zur Weisheit und Theologie im Alten Testament*, ed. Angelika Berlejung and Raik Heckl,

Once again it needs to be emphasized very clearly that neither Job's righteousness, which is established from the outset, nor the act-consequence relationship is to be proven, because the fact that Job *did not* deserve his harsh fate is part of the test setup.[14] What is put to the test is Job's piety, his unshakeable adherence to and against God: "The basic question, whether humans fear God without cause and objective [. . .], is answered by Job in an ideal manner. He remains steadfast in his piety; thus, Satan is refuted and proved to be wrong."[15] The pious person must also be righteous, but this in no way protects him from evil during his life. There is no causal relationship between morality and personal fate. In Job, the prologue excludes this link right from the outset.[16] In contrast, the connection between action and fate in both good and evil, as propagated by scholastic wisdom, is shared both by Job and his friends. For them, the loss of property, family, and health proves the sinfulness of their friend. For him, it is proof that a wicked God controls the destiny of mankind: "The earth is given into the hand of the *rāša'*; he covers the eyes of its judges—if it is not he, who then is it?" (Job 9:24).[17] Neither for Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zofar nor for Job in his lamentation is justice that breaks the act-consequence relationship conceivable. Even Elihu, who tries to interpret suffering as God's pedagogical measure,[18] remains stuck in the mindset of the act-consequence relationship—no one can think they are in the right and accuse the Almighty, the Inscrutable, who transcends all knowledge, of injustice (Job 32:2; 33:12; 34:5). All human actors move along the lines of traditional doctrine, which postulates an act-consequence relationship to ensure the stability of the structure of the world, which is intended and maintained by God.[19]

Whilst cracks in this cosmic framework of order are acknowledged, for example, when the righteous suffer and the wicked lead a good life, there are repeated attempts to explain and stabilize the model either by extending the act-consequence relationship

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Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017): 28; see also Rüdiger Lux, "Hat auch der Satan seine Zeit? Zur Niederlage des Widersachers JHWHs in Sacharja 3 und Hiob 1–2," in *Ein Baum des Lebens: Studien zur Weisheit und Theologie im Alten Testament*, ed. Angelika Berlejung and Raik Heckl, Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017): 58.

14 Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Malum: Theologische Hermeneutik des Bösen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008): 433: "The experiment of justice: Job."

15 Angelika Berlejung, "Sin and Punishment: The Ethics of Divine Justice and Retribution in Ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament Texts," *Interpretation* 69 (2015): 282.

16 Seow, "Divine Justice in the Book of Job": 264: "The scandal of divine antagonism against Job is the injustice of it, as the prologue makes clear, and Job insists."

17 Seen differently in Krašovec, *Righteousness*: 61: "In the Book of Job, neither Job nor his friends dare to reproach God for unrighteousness."

18 Soden, "Das Fragen nach der Gerechtigkeit": 73: "The Book of Job introduces as something quite new the idea of divine education through suffering, which we have not yet encountered in Babylonia" (with reference to Job 5:17–19; 33:14–16; 36:5–7).

19 This is especially true for Job's friends, according to Graupner, "Verbrecherhand": 6: "If one looks for a theodicy in the Book of Job, a justification of God in the face of suffering and evil, then one finds it in the speeches of the friends."

to descendants or to receiving justice after death. Increasing the gap between creator and creature also contributes to this stabilization. In this case, neither right nor wrong can affect God and prompt him to positive or negative reactions (Job 35:6–7; cf. 22:3). However, the gap must not become so great that he completely fails as the guarantor of a world order which is based on justice. At the end of his long speech, Elihu sums this up as follows: "The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power and justice, and abundant righteousness he will not violate" (37:23–24). However, God's unattainability only makes it easier for those who are [still] spared personal calamity to adhere to his righteous order (Job 16:2–5). For all those, whom Job paradigmatically represents as innocent sufferers, the question arises as to the benefits of their piety and righteousness, of a life that is blameless before God and man: "How am I better off than if I had sinned?" (Job 35:3b).

If we look at the references to צדק in the Book of Job, we notice that the lexeme does not occur in the prologue and epilogue (unlike the case in [LXX]Job 1:1, see above). It is also missing in the praise of wisdom in chapter 28 but runs through the dialog section like a *leitmotiv*.[20] The protagonist does not let go of his conviction that he is right (Job 13:18; 32:2; 34:5). However, he also knows that this is of no use to him in the eyes of the all-powerful God (Job 9:2, 15, 20; 10:15). The nouns *ṣᵉdāqāh* and *ṣœḏœq* are also used—for example when Job emphasizes that he continues to uphold his righteousness (Job 27:5–6). In his final speech, he affirms that he has shown himself to be the father of the poor throughout his life and that his justice and righteousness have been his cloak and turban (Job 29:14). May God weigh him "on the scales of justice" (במאזני צדק), in a just balance, and he will then recognize his righteousness (Job 31:6). To Job's friends, this attitude is pure blasphemy, for no man can stand upright before God (Job 15:14; 25:4). The relentlessness with which Job *presents* himself as *ṣaddîq* leads to the end of the dialog: "So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes" (Job 32:1). This in turn calls Elihu into action. He is furious with Job who considers himself to be in the right in God's eyes (Job 32:3 [Piel צדק]). In the prologue, it had already been confirmed that the protagonist has indeed lived and is living in righteousness, but this does not give him a legal right to a happy life. A blameless life before God and man remains a commandment, but it does not oblige God to anything.[21] Here Job is mistaken on behalf of all the righteous for whom life becomes a torment through illness, catastrophe, and death. But his friends are also mistaken if they regard such strokes of fate as proof of a secret guilt that should come to light and lead to repentance.[22] Even if Job were to receive the legal decision on his righteous

20 Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit Gottes*: 118.

21 Lux, *Hiob*: 94: "A God who is only trusted in happiness, during the fat years, who would allow himself to be degraded to a machine dispensing prosperity, would no longer be God, but a servant of men."

22 Rüdiger Bittner, "Hiob und Gerechtigkeit," in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.–19. August 2005*, ed. Konrad Schmid, Thomas Krüger and Manfred Oeming, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 88 (Zürich: Theologi-

conduct of life, which he constantly demands (Job 9:19, 32; 13:18; 14:3; 19:7; 23:4; 27:2) from the highest authority, it would not change his fate. The *mišpāṭ* as a legal decision on the ethical quality of a way of life and the *mišpāṭ* as divine guidance of the world cannot be set off against each other.[23] This is the decisive point that God addresses in the rhetorical question at the beginning of his second closing speech: "Do you want to break my 'right' (משפט), to 'declare me guilty' (Hif. רשע) so that you 'stand just' (Qal צדק)?" (Job 40:8).[24] Only when both meanings of *mišpāṭ* as a human claim to justice and as sovereign divine leadership of creation and history come into view does the divine reaction to Job's complaint and his reaction to God's speeches make sense. Job's *mišpāṭ* and his *ṣ^{e}dāqāh* do not make God a *rāša'*, a wicked one (Job 9:24; cf. 34:10, 18). His *mišpāṭ*, his royal rule of the world, transcends the permanently valid realm of morality: "The question of God's justice becomes the question of man's entitlement, which shows man his limits."[25] There is—and this is the decisive advance that the Book of Job brings to the canon of wisdom writings—no "ultimate agreement between moral demand and moral world order."[26] God's speeches reject the inference from one's own morality to a moral world order, which would be even rudimentarily bound to the act-consequence relationship. Animals such as the ibex, wild ass, ostrich, lion, and eagle (Job 39) as well as the chaotic animals Behemoth [hippopotamus] and Leviathan [crocodile] (Job 39) cannot be pressed into a moral order but belong to God's world of creation just like humans. There is a world beyond human morality that cannot be compared with it, but also does not relativize or even abolish it.[27] When Job, who not only takes on the role of the suffering righteous man, but also that of the exemplary wise man, recognizes this, he recants and comforts himself, finding peace in the dust and ashes (Job 42:6). He does not turn away from his moral integrity, but from his attack on a God who rules over a creation in which man, with the demand for morality placed on him, is only a part:

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scher Verlag Zürich, 2007): 464: "Job's friends are mistaken if they believe that God needs Job to sin to make Job justly unhappy. God, being omnipotent, needs nothing at all to be just."

23 Katharine J. Dell, "Does God behave ethically in the book of Job?" *Estudios bíblicos* 80, no. 2 (2022): 208: "Does God's control of the order of the world mean that he is obliged to act justly? Arguably on a natural law argument, just behavior from God does not necessarily follow and maybe this is where the book is coming from."

24 Sylvia Huberman Scholnick, "The Meaning of 'mišpaṭ' in the Book of Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982): 521: "Job and his friends draw their definitions from the sphere of the court, while God understands it as executive sovereignty, the prerogative of the ruler."

25 Graupner, "Verbrecherhand": 16.

26 Otto Kaiser, "Dike und Sedaqa: Zur Frage nach der sittlichen Weltordnung," in *Der Mensch unter dem Schicksal: Studien zur Geschichte, Theologie und Gegenwartsbedeutung der Weisheit*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 161 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985): 10.

27 In contrast, in the Babylonian theodicy, the disputation between a suffering sufferer and his friend, wild animals [onager and lion] are examples of the act-consequence relationship; they are killed with an arrow, trapped in a pit, just as the newly rich are suddenly struck by destruction (Willem H. Ph. Römer and Wolfram von Soden, *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments*, vol. 3, *Weisheitstexte, Mythen und Epen* [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1990]: 149–50 [German transl. W. von Soden]).

> Man, who in the knowledge of the mysteriously ruling God does not transcend the limits of his creatureliness, but fears him in obedience and humility, is confronted by the One, the Mighty, Shaddai, the All-Powerful. Not being able to understand the divine regime of the world does not entitle man to evade God's demand of him in the moral law that wants us to accept our neighbor in their need.[28]

In the biblical sense, the righteous person is not someone who only fulfills a given legal requirement, but someone who meets the demands that arise from his social interdependencies and is therefore to be considered righteous in the full sense. This is precisely what Job claims for himself: תם אני "righteous am I" (Job 9:20–21; cf. 27:5, 31:6). As a wealthy man, Job did not shirk his social obligations, but supported the poor and did not take advantage of his position in relation to his slaves (Job 31). It is no coincidence that this oath of purification comes at the end of his extensive replies to the three friends. The *disputatio* confirms what the *narratio* had already emphasized—Job's moral integrity. But it is no guarantee of a happy life, as scholastic wisdom used to teach.[29] Human justice by no means puts YHWH under pressure to make life turn out favorably. Moral action and personal fate have nothing to do with each other.[30] This truth, which is scandalous to religious ears and which both the friends as onlookers and Job as a victim tried to avoid, is the "punchline of the theory of justice"[31] in this book of wisdom. But what follows from this reality? Should we do good deeds less often or even do bad deeds more intensively because none of it has any consequences? The piety of the righteous, completely innocent and suffering Job transcends the connection of doing and being. If it were to be otherwise, Satan would have won the bet, because piety in a life lived in righteousness would be merely a transaction that binds God and man alike. In Job's case, YHWH not only suspends the act-consequence relationship, but also destroys it as the great formula for explaining the world.[32] Therefore it is incorrect to speak of a retribution in the epilogue. YHWH does not retroactively make up for the suspended act-consequence relationship with an additional incentive, but instead rewards Job's infinite and unintentional piety: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed

28 Otto Kaiser, "Leid und Gott: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Buches Hiob," in *Der Mensch unter dem Schicksal: Studien zur Geschichte, Theologie und Gegenwartsbedeutung der Weisheit*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 161 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985): 61, with reference to Job's oath of purification in chapter 31 as an exemplification of the moral demand that continues to apply, however chaotic the world and creation may appear.

29 Lux, "Narratio": 45.

30 Dalferth, *Malum*: 445: "The decoupling of justice and happiness in life."

31 Dalferth, *Malum*: 439.

32 Cf. Hermann Spieckermann, "Hiob/Hiobbuch," in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, vol. 3, 4th ed., ed. Hans D. Betz et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001): 1777: "A God who arbitrarily suspends his own order of justice destroys any question about the approval of injustice by a God whose positive relationship to justice is the precondition of the question."

be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21b).[33] Anyone who maintains his grasp on this maxim despite all the strokes of fate that life can hold in store is a human being in the service of YHWH, a servant of God (Job 1:8; 2:3; 42:7, 8).[34] The story of Job redefines not only piety on a vertical level, but also justice on a horizontal level:

> The story of Job teaches us that justice only exists *without meaning and purpose*, it does not serve as a means to achieve something else with it, but one can only live it either for its own sake or not at all. Justice gives you *no right to anything, it is without purpose*, or it is not at all [. . .]. Justice has its meaning *only in itself*, and only when it is lived in this way, that is without regard to what it does or does not achieve with God or in life, is it actually lived.[35]

33 Seen differently in Markus Witte, *Hiobs viele Gesichter: Studien zur Komposition, Tradition und frühen Rezeption des Hiobbuches*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 267 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018): 128: "By noting the double restitution of Job's loss (Job 42:10), the book's editors emphasize the validity of the *theologumenon* of God's justice."
34 On the striking parallels to the Servant of God in Isa 53, see Berges, "Ijobrahmen": 244–45.
35 Dalferth, *Malum*: 440 (italics in original); cf. ibid. 442.

9 Law and Justice in the Book of Ecclesiastes

The Book of Job was completed towards the end of the Persian period, almost seamlessly followed by the Book of Ecclesiastes, which was probably written between around 250 and 190 BC. Of all the books of the Hebrew Bible, it is the work most strongly influenced by Hellenistic culture. Like the philosophical currents of the Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics, Qohelet, the teacher of wisdom who probably lived in Jerusalem also faced the question of how man can achieve a happy life.[1] How this search for happiness (*eudaimonia*) can succeed against the background of the Old Testament belief in God is the central theme of this "uncanny guest"[2] in the Hebrew canon. Uncanny in the sense of unusual because the book of Qohelet lacks any reference to Israel as God's people, which cannot even be compensated for by the later editorial attribution to the son of David, Solomon in the book's title (Eccl 1:1). The book contains no trace of Israel's history of salvation or calamity among the nations, nor does it refer to any divine intervention or care for the victims of injustice. It is apparent that the scriptural traditions of ancient Israel in the Pentateuch, prophecy, and wisdom speak a completely different language. Their authors might even have been appalled by Qohelet's instruction not to be overly righteous, as this would only lead to self-destruction (Eccl 7:16). To those past and present who use the psalms in their prayer, it must sound like mockery when Qohelet makes no distinction between the fate of humans and livestock, both of which are doomed to die (Eccl 3:21). You cannot call on such a God for help, you cannot orient your life on him. He can only be feared (Eccl 3:14)[3] because he distributes the joy of life without any recognizable rule (Eccl 5:17–19). The meaningfulness of the world and of creation must forever remain hidden from man. If everything is a "breath of wind" (*hæḇæl*) (Eccl 1:2, 14; 2:1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26, etc.), then this verdict also applies to the act-consequence relationship.

If such is the case, there is no longer any reason to complain to and accuse God. How and why should we turn to God if we can no longer demand justice from him: "God, who is neither just nor merciful, has ceased to be a dialog partner at whom a person at

1 Ludger, Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2004): 70–72; Hans-Peter Müller, "Plausibilitätsverlust herkömmlicher Religion bei Kohelet und den Vorsokratikern," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum*, ed. Beate Ego, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 118 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999): 104–6; Kessler, *Ethik*: 507–8.

2 According to Hans-Peter Müller, "Der unheimliche Gast: Zum Denken Kohelets," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 84, no. 4 (1987): 440–64.

3 Christoph Berner, "Der ferne Gott als Richter? Zur theologischen Deutung weltlicher Ungerechtigkeit im Koheletbuch," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 108, no. 3 (2011): 259: "In deliberate distinction from the common positive definitions of the fear of God in Wisdom, Qohelet emphasizes here that God's inscrutable actions serve the purpose of making man fear *him*" (italics in original).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782-009

prayer hurls his disenchantment with the world."[4] Since a bond between creator and creature no longer exists, God has become, in a way, a force of destiny. "The more transcendently God is conceived, the further he [= Qohelet, U.B.] pushed reality and the self apart. Reality is no longer God-like, and the self is no longer God-immediate."[5]

It is this perception that the Godhead is so unapproachable that forces Qohelet and his reflections to focus on the here and now. That which does not happen "under the sun" (תחת השמש in Eccl 1:3, 9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22; 3:16; 4:1, 3 and others) eludes the empirical approach of the wisdom teacher (ראיתי "I saw" in Eccl 1:14; 3:10, 16; 4:4, 15; 5:12; 6:1; 7:15; 8:10 etc.) and must be disregarded in the search for happiness. According to his view of the world, there is no divine *ṣᵉdāqāh*, which manifests itself in the salvation of the oppressed. Therefore, this *nomen actionis* is not found even once in this work. Significantly, the *nomen qualitatis ṣœḏœq* is used in all three passages in the negative context of the violation of justice (Eccl 3:16; 5:7) or in the obvious futility of the justice of the righteous (Eccl 7:15). The use of the substantive adjective *ṣaddîq* fits into this picture (Eccl 7:15–16, 20; 8:14; 9:1–2), for nowhere is there even a temporary advantage over the *rāša'* (Eccl 3:17; 7:15; 8:10, 13–14; 9:2), not to mention a persistent different fate.[6] It is therefore not surprising that hoping for an eschatological turnaround is not an option for the victims of violence and injustice, nor is shifting happiness to an afterlife inaccessible to humans.[7] A divine justice that rewards the righteous *post mortem* and punishes the wicked has no place in Qohelet's thought, indeed it would run counter to his entire approach.[8] Although viewing the afterlife might not be possible, Qohelet's take on the injustices in this world is all the more intense and clear-sighted. Towards the end of the first part of the book (Eccl 1:2–3:22), an initial reflection appears on the observed fact that "wickedness" (*rœša'*) has replaced "justice" (*mišpāṭ*),

4 Hans-Peter Müller, "Die Wirklichkeit und das Ich bei Kohelet angesichts des Ausbleibens göttlicher Gerechtigkeit und Barmherzigkeit," in *Das Drama der Barmherzigkeit Gottes: Studien zur biblischen Gottesrede und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte in Judentum und Christentum*, ed. Ruth Scoralick, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 183 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000): 132.

5 Müller, "Wirklichkeit": 138–39; and Müller, "Plausibilitätsverlust": 103: "Qohelet's God is almost throughout an abstract without form and name, also without an actual will; he is not a person to whom one could address a reproach, as Job does."

6 Tilmann Zimmer, *Zwischen Tod und Lebensglück: Eine Untersuchung zur Anthropologie Kohelets*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 286 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999): 153: "With ultimate inexorability, death confirms the fragility of the act-consequence relationship."

7 Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Qoheleth in the Writings," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Donn F. Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019): 257: "Remarkably so, Qohelet does not promote any apocalyptic speculations; the eschatological outlook is never voiced."

8 Contrary to Andreas Vonach, "Zeigt sich Gottes Gerechtigkeit schon im Diesseits oder erst im Jenseits? Zum Umgang mit der Theodizeefrage in den späten Weisheitsschriften des Alten Testaments," in *"Gott, der Gerechte!"? Leiderfahrungen als Anfrage an den Glauben*, ed. Claudia Paganini and Nikolaus Wandinger, Theologische Trends 23 (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2014): 27, on Eccl 8:13: "Qohelet does not say that the act-consequence relationship is not correct, but only that God's ultimate justice will not take place in this life, but afterwards or in death."

and "wickedness" (*rāšaʿ*) "righteousness" (*ṣæḏæq*) (Eccl 3:16). The verse is in line with his repeatedly expressed criticism of the exploitation of the poor, which the authorities do not stop but rather encourage it (Eccl 4:1–3; 5:7–8; 8:10–12). "The world is completely out of joint. With an almost prophetic attitude, Qohelet preaches a screaming contrast to the statement that God has made everything beautiful in his time."[9] He not only diagnoses the absence of justice in the form of righteous judgments, but also that injustice and the wicked have penetrated to "where *mišpāṭ* and *ṣæḏæq* should reside" (שמה). The perversion of justice reaches its climax where injustice takes on the mantle of justice.

For many reasons the following verse, in which God will judge the righteous and the wicked (Eccl 3:17), seems to be a later addition or at the least it does not reflect Qohelet's opinion, but has been added as a foreign quote. The opening formula, "I said in my heart," is almost certainly taken from v. 18, a verse that fits seamlessly into Qohelet's skeptical attitude. This is not the case for v. 17, especially since the verb "to judge" (שפט) is never used again in this scripture. And what does it mean that there is a time for every intention and a "there" (שם) for every deed?[10] A divine judgeship in the afterlife cannot be Qohelet's position, as that would completely contradict his empirical approach. But perhaps he reckons with a judging God who has set a specific time for every project under the sun, including the perversion of law by injustice: "On the basis of his own teaching about the right time, he has the well-founded hope that even the chaos of law on earth only ever has its hour to finally make way for the order of law again, a hope for which God himself stands as judge."[11] But what is the point of such divine time management of right and wrong if humans and animals do not differ in death (Eccl 3:18–20)?[12] Moreover, death as the great leveler of all living things also levels the difference between the righteous and the wicked. Whatever way you look at it, God's office as a judge does not fit into Qohelet's thinking, which suggests that v. 17 is a later addition:

> That the reference to divine judgment in Eccl 3:17 was added at a later date is shown quite clearly by the fact that it anticipates the identically introduced conclusion in 3:18, which draws an entirely different lesson from the observation of a corrupt judiciary, one that corresponds far better to

9 Melanie Köhlmoos, *Kohelet: Der Prediger Salomo*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 16,5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015): 127.

10 This is the literal translation by Köhlmoos, *Kohelet*: 125.

11 Rüdiger Lux, "'Denn es ist kein Mensch so gerecht auf Erden, dass er nur Gutes tue. . .': Recht und Gerechtigkeit aus der Sicht des Predigers Salomo," in *Ein Baum des Lebens: Studien zur Weisheit und Theologie im Alten Testament*, ed. Angelika Berlejung and Raik Heckl, Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017): 101; and Rüdiger Lux, "Tod und Gerechtigkeit im Buch Kohelet," in *Ein Baum des Lebens: Studien zur Weisheit und Theologie im Alten Testament*, ed. Angelika Berlejung and Raik Heckl, Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017): 124.

12 Lux, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit": 102: "Death thus calls into question everything that is experienced in life as a possible gain in law and justice. Master Death also sets a final limit to law and justice."

> Qohelet's thinking: 'I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals.'[13]

This clarifies the poignancy of his theology: God allows the law to be bent to show that humans, whom he has elevated above all other living beings in the order of creation, are only animals after all.[14]

This ethical pessimism is confirmed by a social reality in which oppression prevails, the oppressed weep without finding a comforter, and even the oppressors remain without comfort (Eccl 4:1–3).[15] The triple verb root עשק "oppress" indicates how ubiquitously the powerful exploit the powerless and how intensely Qohelet observes these abuses (cf. Isa 59:13; Jer 6:6; 22:17; Ezek 18:18; 22:7, 12, 29; Am 4:1; Mic 2:2; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5). The passive participle עשוקים "oppressions/oppressed" is reminiscent of Amos' prophetic social criticism (Am 3:9), who denounces the banquets of the exploitative upper class, including their wives.[16] But what is missing in Qohelet and must also be missing in his idea of God is any kind of intervention, be it as a threat of judgment (Am 4:2)[17] or as hope in YHWH, who provides justice for the oppressed (Ps 103:6; 146:7).

The next passage mentions neither God's intervention nor an inner-worldly retribution that would, if it did not abolish exploitation and exploiters, at least put them in their place. Qohelet remains true to his position as detached observer and admonishes his disciples: "If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and right, do not be amazed at the matter; for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. But all things considered, this is an advantage for a land: a king for a ploughed field" (Eccl 5:7–8). The term מדינה "province" (see esp. Esth 1:1, 3, 16, 22, etc.) refers to contemporary Ptolemaic administrative structures to which Judea was also subjected. The control of taxes was strictly regulated. Farmers did not work on their own land but were dependent tenants and subject to exploitation by the various intermediate bodies of the state administration. The growing monetary economy made it easier to collect taxes, increased the greed of the profiteers, and put more and more pressure on those who worked with their hands. It is therefore hardly coincidental that the verses above precisely focus on this greed for

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13 Berner, "Der ferne Gott als Richter": 262.

14 According to Thomas Krüger, *Kohelet (Prediger)*, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament 19 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2000): 167, the point is that "[. . .] God 'sets apart' human beings (from the animals), but they *themselves* behave like animals and treat *each other* like animals" (italics in original); see also Berner, "Der ferne Gott als Richter": 263.

15 Thomas Krüger, "'And They Have No Comforter': Job and Ecclesiastes in Dialogue," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies 587 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014): 95–96, sees a deliberate reference to Job 2:11 here.

16 Kessler, *Ethik*: 513–14.

17 Berner, "Der ferne Gott als Richter": 264: "His silence on balancing divine judgment resounds nowhere louder than here."

money: "The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain" (Eccl 5:9a).

The fact that Eccl 5:7 speaks of the *rāš* "poor" and not of the *dal* or *ʿānāw* underlines this distanced view, because the term covers the poor only in their economic situation, without the empathy for the needy that is characteristic of the other two terms. It is therefore not surprising that the term does not appear either in the Mosaic laws on combating poverty or in the accusations of the prophets of Scripture but is frequently found in Proverbs (Prov 10:4; 13:7, 8, 23; 14:20).[18] What makes the oppression in Eccl 5:7 so dangerous is its institutional protection, behind which all profiteers hide at their respective functions and level. Not only are the poor being robbed, which would be bad enough, but even worse, law and justice, for which the authorities should stand up to protect the weak, are "robbed" (גזל) in the name and for the benefit of Ptolemaic rule. In Prov 22:22–23, YHWH will wage his legal battle and take the life of the one who robs those in need, which justifies the warning not to rob the poor and not to oppress them. However here, Qohelet once again remains silent about divine intervention (cf. Mic 2:2–3).[19] He submits to the constraints of reality and warns his disciples not to be surprised at the regime of economic injustices, because it serves so many "high ones" (גבה) who control each other and profit from this system of legalized exploitation at their own respective level:

> In addition to the village authorities, one must reckon with officials of the Judean temple state, and with a directly royal officialdom, each of whom exercised various controls and collected taxes [. . .]. In addition, there were traveling military or administrative representatives of the king with special powers, who were free to pursue private business at the same time. All those mentioned above had a common interest at heart i.e. to extract as much as possible from the population in the countryside as quickly as possible.[20]

At first glance, Qohelet's further reaction causes astonishment, because he seems to defend the "Ptolemaic system of supervision"[21] when he believes it to be advantageous for the "land" (ארץ) if [every] cultivated field has a king (Eccl 5:8). Does he really take the view that it would be an "advantage/gain" (יתרון) for the land and its tax-paying tenants to convert the largest possible agricultural areas in the province of Judea into royal land ?[22] The semantics contradicts this, because Qohelet elsewhere uses the term exclusively in relation to people and their behavior—as an anthropological rather

18 Berges und Hoppe, *Arm und reich*: 11–12.

19 In contrast, Köhlmoos, *Kohelet*: 151, who is of the opinion that "[. . .] no general theological denominator can be named for this reaction of God."

20 Norbert Lohfink, *Kohelet*, Die Neue Echter Bibel (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1980): 42; cf. Krüger, *Kohelet*: 217–18.

21 Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*: 323.

22 Thus Lohfink, *Kohelet*: 42: "In the end, the tenants had to hand over up to two-thirds of their earnings. Nevertheless, Qohelet obviously saw more secure conditions here than in the old, completely degenerate system, in which the enslavement of most of the population was foreseeable in the long term."

than an economic term.[23] Moreover, there are no further indications that the teacher of wisdom would have signed up himself and his students to such a pro-rule position.[24] The critical attitude toward the oppression of people by people in Eccl 8:9 also points in a different direction. One would therefore not be wrong in assuming that Qohelet is satirizing Ptolemaic propaganda, which seeks to grab as much land as possible into the hands of the crown and advertise this as an advantage for those living on it and from it.[25] The irony may be even more subtle if he thought that it would be a real advantage for the country if every farmer on his land were to be his own king.[26] Be that as it may, Qohelet does not denounce the structural exploitation of the land as an outrage against God, but states it as a kind of an unavoidable fate. If the wise man is aware of this situation, it brings with it a certain detachment. Yet despite all the irony, Qohelet, like all teachers of wisdom, remains a stabilizing factor in the system of rule that feeds him too. He certainly did not belong to the class of dependent land tenants, but neither did he belong to the rich upper class. Intellectual skills of observation and linguistic interpretation distinguished the teachers of wisdom. On the one hand, they were economically so secure that they could rate their wisdom higher than great possessions and, on the other, they were not poor enough to suffer existentially from the consequences of rampant exploitation.[27]

In Eccl 7:15–20, following the relativization of the claim to justice or the requested acceptance of social injustice, the author disassociates himself from too rigid a claim to one's own right conduct. Once again, the starting point is our own observation, which provides the foundation for wisdom-based reflection. The legalized exploitation of the rural population is just as much a fact as the reality that a righteous man perishes "by/in spite of" (ב) his righteousness, while the wicked enjoys a long life "by/in spite of" (ב) his wickedness (Eccl 7:15).[28] Many psalms of lament sung by individuals bear witness to the fact that this not merely happens occasionally, but so frequently that it causes a

23 Thus Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*: 321, with a view to the evidence in Eccl 1:3; 2:11, 13; 3:9, 19; 5:15; 6:8, 11; 7:11, 16; 10:10–11.

24 Seen differently in Lux, *Recht und Gerechtigkeit*: 105: "Instead of being squeezed out by the greedy administrative hierarchy and deprived of all rights, to the point of debt slavery in extreme cases (v. 7), it was still a relative advantage to work a piece of royal land as a semi-free tenant."

25 Elisabeth Birnbaum and Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Das Buch Kohelet*, Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar / Altes Testament 14, 2 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2012): 140: "In a subtle way he criticizes the claimed advantage is for *the land*, but not for the people, at least not for the poor" (italics in original).

26 Berner, "Der ferne Gott als Richter": 261; Krüger, *Kohelet*: 220.

27 Mark Sneed, "The Social Setting of Wisdom Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, ed. Will Kynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021): 342: "The sages, thus, are comfortable enough to rank wisdom over wealth but not uncomfortable enough to avoid a certain naivety about the crushing reality of true poverty."

28 According to Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, vol. 1, *Die Präposition Beth* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992): 356, this is the "nominalization of an existential sentence." Whether the preposition ב is translated as "despite" or "in/at" is of secondary importance.

problem of trust for the supplicant.[29] Job also complains in this manner, and his friends counter it with the same vehemence, because both parties can think of an appropriate relationship with God based only on the act-consequence relationship. For Qohelet however, this concept of the world order, which forms the basis of God's justice for traditional wisdom, is no longer plausible. A route such as that taken in the Book of Job with the trial of the innocent sufferer to bring true piety to light is out of the question for him—that would make the incomprehensibility of God comprehensible. For him, the fear of God does not mean being frightened by the expected punishment that will sooner or later befall the wrongdoer, but rather being frightened by the incomprehensibility of the one who allows everything to happen in his *own* time and as *he* sees fit.[30] He rejects as false the traditional teaching that the days of the wicked are cut short because he has not feared God (Eccl 8:13), as reality does not attest to such a declaration. On the contrary, a wicked person does evil a hundred times and prospers, he lives a long life, while the righteous people are treated according to the conduct of the wicked (Eccl 8:14). Qohelet praises the fear of God as a kind of ultimate virtue, which refers to the fear of the unpredictability of God, who cannot be forced into a predictable action by any human action, neither by the righteous nor the wicked, and therefore cannot be subjected to any logic of action.[31] Only against this background does the initially surprising admonition make sense that we should not be overly just and show ourselves to be overly "wise" (hitp. חכם). And at the same time, we should also not act overly unfairly or foolishly, because we would not want to die before our time (Eccl 7:16–17). If one considers the changed circumstances in Hellenistic times to be decisive, the admonition aims to deal with the traditional teaching and adapt it as each situation requires.[32] Those who cling rigidly to it harm themselves, but those who believe they can throw all the old wisdom overboard will perish before their time:

> It is the excess of justice or iniquity that can ruin a person. The excessive righteousness of the—one might almost say—righteousness fanatic, who considers himself to be wise, and the excessive injustice of the wicked, who acts like a fool, both lead to self-destruction and premature death.[33]

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29 Köhlmoos, *Kohelet*: 176–77, with a view to, among others, Ps 10; 12; 36; 37; 53.

30 Cf. Franz J. Backhaus, *'Denn Zeit und Zufall trifft sie alle': Zu Komposition und Gottesbild im Buch Qohelet*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 83 (Frankfurt: Philo Fine Arts, 1993): 361, on Eccl 3:14.

31 See Job Jindo, "On the Biblical Notion of 'Fear of God' as a Condition for Human Existence," *Biblical Interpretation* 19, no. 4 (2012): 433–53; and Job Jindo, "The Divine Courtroom Motif in the Hebrew Bible: A Holistic Approach," in *The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Ari Mermelstein, Biblical Interpretation Series 132 (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 89–91; Zimmer, *Zwischen Tod und Lebensglück*: 212–14.

32 Lohfink, *Kohelet*: 55.

33 Lux, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit": 106; and Rüdiger Lux, "Der 'Lebenskompromiss'—ein Wesenszug im Denken Kohelets? Zur Auslegung von Koh 7,15–18," in *Ein Baum des Lebens: Studien zur Weisheit und Theologie im Alten Testament*, ed. Angelika Berlejung and Raik Heckl, Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017): 82: "The compromise of life therefore does not consist in an uncompromising break with the traditional teaching, but in the attempt to develop it into an instrument of ethically responsible behavior even in borderline experiences."

One might be tempted to think that Qohelet is a proponent of the golden medium. However, the fact that *ṣaddîq* and *rāša'* are basic ethical categories that do not allow nuances or *mediocritas* speaks against this view.[34] Interpreting Qohelet that one should turn a blind eye to injustice would not understand his otherwise profound reflection on wisdom. He recommends "[. . .] not simply an opportunistic 'golden medium' between wisdom and folly, justice and injustice, but a realistic understanding of man's possibilities and limits in behaving justly and wisely."[35] But what sets this limit for man? Is it his mortality or his creaturely brokenness that prevents him from acting with perfect justice always and everywhere? Qohelet points to the latter with his statement that no one is so righteous as to do good without ever sinning (Eccl 7:20; cf. Job 4:17–19; 14:4; 15:14–16; 25:4–6; Ps 143:2).[36] If this were the case the reader "[. . .] is challenged to extreme responsibility precisely because of man's tendency to excess and his susceptibility to evil."[37]

This view certainly makes perfect sense, but it does not adequately explain the admonition to fear God, which reads: Do not be too righteous and do not be too unjust, he who fears God escapes all, i.e. stands safely on the right side (see Eccl 7:18). It cannot be a fear of God that is based on the Torah or the traditional teaching of wisdom (as in the epilogue of Eccl 12:13; cf. 6:6b), because neither allows any compromise on the question of the correct conduct. The fear of God here therefore means taking God's inscrutability radically seriously. The righteous perish blamelessly and the wicked prolong their lives. There can be no explanation for this for man, even for the wisest among them (cf. Eccl 8:16–17).[38]

There is a debate as to where the next pericope begins, which deals with the topic of justice in view of the fates of the righteous and the wicked. The following views and discusses Eccl 8:9–15 as a unit.[39] The beginning with "all this" (את כל זה) indicates at least a relative new entry (cf. 7:15; 9:1, 11, 13, among others).[40] The starting point is Qohelet's observation that, among the countless deeds done under the sun, one person exercises authority over another to the other's hurt (Eccl 8:9). The verb שלט "to have

34 Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*: 384–86; and Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, "Order, Wisdom, Retribution, and Skepticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, ed. Will Kynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021): 96; Köhlmoos, *Kohelet*: 177: "In the Old Testament, justice is a superlative. There can be no more or less justice. Whoever is not sufficiently just is an evildoer."

35 Krüger, *Kohelet*: 256.

36 Krüger, *Kohelet*: 259.

37 Lux, "Lebenskompromiss": 82.

38 Berner, "Der ferne Gott als Richter": 260, draws the following conclusion: If God acts inscrutably, man must orientate himself accordingly and "[. . .] conform to the world order bent by God. In a world that is deliberately crooked and hostile to knowledge, traditional standards for right behavior must fail, but ultimately the criteria for divine judgment are also lost with them."

39 With Köhlmoos, *Kohelet*: 193, who gives this pericope the title "Righteous and Wicked."

40 Krüger, *Kohelet*: 273, nevertheless opts for Eccl 8:10–15; Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*: 422, argues for Eccl 8:10–14, 15; Lohfink, *Kohelet*: 60–62, divides into Eccl 8:5–12a.12b–15.

power over" (cf. Eccl 5:18; 6:2; Esth 9:1; Neh 5:15) refers "[. . .] ethically to the power of one person over another, including the possibility of harming the other."[41] God does not prevent people from forcefully oppressing their fellow human beings. On the contrary, he enables it by providing a predetermined "time" (עת). Grammatically, the harm can refer to both the perpetrator and to the victim, but everything indicates that what is meant here is the injustice inflicted on someone who is dominated by another, i.e. who is asymmetrically dependent on him. Once again, the situation in Judea and Jerusalem under Ptolemaic rule characterized by strong hierarchies forms the background here. It is this situation in which Qohelet observes the opposing fates of the wicked and the righteous. The rare connection with ובכן "and so/and then" (Eccl 8:10; Esth 4:16; Sir 13:7) indicates that something noted previously is undergoing further analysis—these are the structures that promote dependencies (see above on Eccl 5:7–8) and provide social prestige for the "unrighteous" (*rᵉšāʿîm*). This applies even after their death, for they will be buried with honor. But those who come from the holy place, the temple, and who have done right, will be forgotten in the city. If we look at the monumental tombs from the Hellenistic-Hasmonean period in Jerusalem, the contrast described here becomes completely clear. Those who have done the right thing are immediately consigned to oblivion and are therefore not only biologically but also socially dead, while the wicked buried in magnificent tombs enjoy a continued life in the collective memory. The motto, "This also is vanity" (Eccl 8:10b), probably does not refer to death as the great leveler, as it perpetuates unjust conditions, but rather to the wisdom that justice will be restored at death at the latest.[42]

However, the Masoretic text in Eccl 8:10 can also be interpreted in a different way if one applies the syntagma ובאו "and they came" to the wicked, considers the verb "bury" (קבר) to be a misspelled "approach" (קרב), and reads "boast" (שבח) instead of "forget" (שכח): "Thereupon I considered: wicked men 'approach' and enter—and from the holy place they go (away again?) and 'boast' in the city that they have done so. That too is absurd."[43] In this variant, which comes about only through conjecture, the deadly fate of the wicked and the righteous does not matter. It merely deals with the behavior of the *rᵉšāʿîm* who visit the temple without reverence and afterwards boast about their audacity in the city, in public.[44] What kind of God is this who obviously does not punish this

41 Magne Sæbø, "שלט," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 8, ed. Heinz-Josef Fabry and Helmer Ringgren (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1995): col. 81; cf. the noun *šallîṭ* "ruler" in Eccl 7:19; 8:8; 10:5.

42 Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*: 428: "There is no reason for excitement. Even the 'advantage' of the wicked is only a temporary phenomenon."

43 Diethelm Michel, *Untersuchungen zur Eigenart des Buches Qohelet*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 183 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989): 217; cf. Backhaus, *Zeit und Zufall*: 251–53; Pancratius Beentjes, "'Who is like the Wise?': Some Notes on Qohelet 8, 1–15," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. Antoon Schoors, Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses / Bibliotheca 136 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998): 311–13.

44 Michel, *Untersuchungen*: 220.

disregard for his holy place? What Qohelet refers to here as *hæḇæl* "vanity" (8:10b) is the downright scandalous collapse of the act-consequence relationship.[45] If the wicked are not afraid of visiting the sanctuary but abuse the holy place as a stage for their self-expression and all this remains without consequences, then injustice can draw ever wider circles in society.

Qohelet's further reflections in vv. 11–12a follow seamlessly. Because the judgment over wrongdoings is not swift, man is only further encouraged in his inclination towards evil. This is even more apparent when we see that a sinner does evil a hundred times and yet prolongs his years. The Persian loanword פתגם "decree" (Esth 1:20; Ezra 4:17; 5:7, 11; 6:11; Dan 3:16; 4:14; Sir 5:11; 8:9) not only reintroduces Hellenistic-Ptolemaic coloring into the scene, but also has a theological point: the lack of judgment for the evil deed can be blamed on both the political authorities and God himself.[46] This is not merely a matter of individual cases that problematize the act-consequence relationship, but a radical critique of this maxim of order. Qohelet's quotation of the wisdom teaching in v. 12b–13, which he introduces with "I also know" (כי גם יודע אני), proves that this is precisely the point. After that, it tells us that all will be well with those who fear God, but this won't be the case for the wicked who does not fear the face of God. He will not prolong his days but will pass away like a fleeting shadow. Of course, Qohelet is also aware that everybody's life is fleeting like a shadow (Eccl 6:12). Yet, here he is not referring to the general transience, but to the fact that, according to the wisdom taught by tradition, a notoriously wicked person cannot enjoy a long life.[47]

In v. 14, Qohelet states with unsurpassable clarity that the act-consequence relationship is *hæḇæl*, a "breath of wind" [vanity]. It is the only instance that this motto occurs at the beginning and end of a verse, which emphasizes its importance. The "existence" of righteous people (3x יש) who fare like the wicked and of wicked who fare like the righteous destroys once and for all the act-consequence relationship, this wisdom-based category of order. Of course, some righteous people also fare well, and some wicked people fare badly—no one would deny that. But those who want to base their lives on the relationship between action and consequence and hold God responsible for it are erring profoundly. Yet, how will we be able shape our lives and find happiness in such an uncertain situation?[48]

With v. 15, Qohelet draws his conclusion, which has no counterpart in traditional wisdom teaching. Unlike before, it is no longer the fear of God that he praises as the

45 Cf. Backhaus, *Zeit und Zufall*: 368.

46 Schwienhorst-Schönberger, "Order": 103: "The text does not reveal who is responsible for the delay in judgment and punishment. Ecclesiastes 8:9 speaks of bad human governance. But it may also be God who does not speedily execute the sentence against evil conduct."

47 Seen differently in Krüger, *Kohelet*: 289: "Even if the sinner or the wicked one 'lives long,' his life is 'short as a shadow.'"

48 Lux, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit": 111: "Can man live with such a windy and unpredictable fate? He must and he probably can."

principle of life (cf. Eccl 3:14; 5:6; 7:18), but the joy of all the good that the Creator God provides (cf. Eccl 3:22). Eating and drinking are not anesthetics which help us endure the injustices and absurdities of this world, but good companions in the troubles of life.[49] With this maxim, Qohelet abandons the distinction between just and wicked in the pursuit of happiness, because enjoying life's bounty applies to everyone, regardless of their moral integrity. No conclusions can be drawn about a person's moral status from their fate or from their enjoyment of life. Even pleasure, the enjoyment of food and drink, is not a divine reward for a righteous way of life.[50] If this were the case, the act-consequence relationship would be regained as an organizing principle and God as the giver of gifts would be bound to this very principle.

The topic of justice and righteousness takes center stage and is dealt with in depth in Eccl 9:1–10:

> This unit of text provides the impression that they bundle and compress all Qohelet's statements on the topic of justice and righteousness that have already been raised previously. Just like 3:16–22 and 8:10–15, it is divided into a discussion of the problem (9:1–6) and a subsequent encouragement to rejoice (9:7–10).[51]

Whilst in the first six verses Qohelet gives voice to positions of traditional wisdom and refutes them, he devotes the last three verses to his very own exhortation on reasons to rejoice. Based on his previous reflections, he turns to the examination of the doctrine that he quotes in v. 1aβ: "the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God." This dictum is not only aimed at the reality that the righteous and the wise are in God's [protective] hand, but also that they are actually aware of this. However, this statement stands in stark contrast to Qohelet's own opinion at the end of the previous pericope: "Even though those who are wise claim to know, they cannot find it [God's actions, U.B.] out" (Eccl 8:17b).[52] This explains the syntactical connection through the particle *kî* at the beginning of Eccl 9:1aα: "All this I laid to heart" to subject this realization to intensive scrutiny. Can there be any knowledge that the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in God's hand? The expression "in God's hand" (ביד האלהים) can only refer to the fact that God rewards the actions of the righteous and the wise in the context of the act-consequence relationship. Although the formulation itself is open to divine retribution in this world or in the hereafter, the latter is not a viable way of thinking for Qohelet, because no one is able to know for certain about what may or may not happen

49 Lux, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit": 111: "Here someone has preserved the knowledge that, alongside the painful riddles and obscurations of meaning, the injustices and absurdities, joy, not the lascivious enjoyment of life (!), remains a silent and reliable companion of a life given by God."

50 Berner, "Der ferne Gott als Richter": 258: "But this also invalidates the possibility of interpreting the gift of *joie de vivre* as a divine act of compensatory justice, and one involuntarily wonders what meaning just behavior can still have for Kohelet."

51 Lux, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit": 111.

52 Lohfink, *Kohelet*: 63–64: "The text sets, if you will, one epistemology against another."

under the sun. If such is the case, retribution for the righteous and wise must take place during their lifetime—but that is not always the case. Qohelet sums this up in 9:1bβ: "Whether it is love or hate one does not know. Everything that confronts them is vanity." Since the central message of this verse deals with the question of divine retribution, it is not primarily about the fact that even the righteous and wise have no absolute control over their actions, be it in the positive or the negative,[53] but about the reality that, like all other people, they have no insight into what God does or does not do. God assigns both positive ("love") and negative ("hate") things in this life, regardless of the act-consequence relationship. There can be no doubt that this is the case, because הכל לפניהם "everything that confronts them is vanity". According to the Hebrew worldview, the "future" (אחרית) is not "before" (לפני), but "behind" (אחרי) us humans. We are unable to see it, as it comes towards us from behind, as it were.[54] The prepositional phrase "confronts them" therefore refers to what is obvious in view of experience: anything can happen to anyone, regardless of any moral or religious action. The only thing that happens to everyone with absolute certainty is death: "The same fate comes to all" (Eccl 9:2aα). "No one can know whether a person experiences 'love or hate' in their life. Death is the only thing that is certain for the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the religious who sacrifice and the 'areligious' who do not sacrifice."[55] This places Qohelet in an obvious contrast to the concept of the Book of Sirach, according to which wisdom and justice are based on the observance of the Torah and the righteous can rely on God's mercy with certainty.[56]

The "evil" (רע) that leaves its mark on all activity under the sun is not death *per se*. On the one hand, death forever establishes the lack of distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who observe all the rituals and those who don't. On the other hand, as Eccl 8:11b already emphasized in the absence of judgment on the bad deed, it further fuels man's inclination towards evil (Eccl 9:3; cf. 6:5).[57]

Verse 4 contains another quotation from a third party, with which Qohelet allows his discussion partners to have their say again, because while he focusses on death and the fate of all humans, they do not give in by pointing out that for the one who is [still] "joined" with all the living (Qere: יחבר) "there is hope" (יש בטחון). However, this hope

53 Krüger, *Kohelet*: 302: "If man neither fully understands his own actions nor has complete control over them, the function of the 'act-consequence relationship' as a guiding concept for action becomes problematic."

54 Michel, *Untersuchungen*: 169: "For a Hebrew, according to the linguistic constructions, it is manifestly the 'obvious thing' to imagine his existence in such a way that his line of vision goes into the past as to that which 'lies before him.'"

55 Lux, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit": 112; ibid. 113: "Theologically speaking, Qohelet consistently preserves God's freedom with this act, who does not allow himself to be bound in his actions either by an ethic of justice or by the noeticism of the wise, and certainly not by the fides of the pious. The fact that death is the only certainty, regardless of the person and their achievements, is indeed an evil."

56 Köhlmoos, *Kohelet*: 202–3, with a view to Sir 2:16–18; 3:17–4:9; 15:11–17; 33:7–17; 39:27.

57 Krüger, *Kohelet*: 304; Köhlmoos, *Kohelet*: 204.

does not refer to life after death, but to the possibility of repentance, away from the inclination towards evil and towards God and his guidance. This is exactly what Zofar had advised Job to do, according to which those who set their hearts right before God can feel safe with him because there is still hope (Job 11:13–20). However, repentance presupposes that one is still alive, which is underpinned by the proverb that a dog that is alive is better than a dead lion. From the perspective of the Old Testament, there can hardly be a greater contrast in the animal world: The stray, scavenging dog that is not disgusted by returning to its vomit (Prov 26:11; 2 Pet 2:22) on one side and the lion, the king among beasts, feared by all (2 Sam 17:10; Prov 30:30) on the other.[58]

Qohelet's reply begins with an emphatic *kî,* which does not provide the living with any hope of an act-consequence relationship that might still come about. The only advantage of the living over the dead is that they know that they must die, while the dead know nothing at all, they have neither reward nor memory (Eccl 9:5). All of life's accomplishments, whether positive or negative, have vanquished in death: "Never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun" (Eccl 9:6b). However, knowledge of one's own death should not paralyze people, but rather spur them on to take life into their own hands, to enjoy the pleasures of life such as eating, drinking, and being with the woman they love (Eccl 9:7–10). Whether the righteous and the wise are in God's hands is uncertain (Eccl 9:1a), but it is clear that what is in one's own hands (Eccl 9:10a) is to be done with one's might, for in Sheol there is neither doing nor planning nor wisdom (Eccl 9:10b).[59]

With the two references to *mišpāṭ* "judgment/justice/verdict" in Eccl 11:9 and 12:14, the theme of law and justice in Qohelet reaches its conclusion. The close connection between the two passages is proven by the syntagm "bring into judgment" (Hif. בוא + במשפט), which otherwise occurs only in Job 14:3. However, the immediate context of both passages differs considerably. Qohelet's advice to the young man to enjoy the things and opportunities available to him in his youth, to use them with understanding and open eyes, fits in seamlessly with the previous calls to joy (Eccl 3:12–13, 22; 5:17–19; 8:15; 9:7–10). In clear contrast to Torah piety, the young man should follow the desires of his heart and what he can see with his own eyes and not feel reminded of the Mosaic laws by the fringe on his clothes, which should prevent him from giving in to the temptations of his heart and eyes (Num 15:39).[60] The fact that he is accountable for all his actions (Eccl 11:9b) is either an insertion by the author of the second epilogue in Eccl 12:12–14, who wants to make it clear that the call to joy must not be misunderstood as a blank check for excessive living,[61] Or it stems from Qohelet's pen, who points out to his

58 Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*: 448–49.

59 Köhlmoos, *Kohelet*: 207: "Qohelet's underworld is the definitive cessation of everything that characterizes life. This makes it all the more important to shape life consciously."

60 Krüger, *Kohelet*: 346–47.

61 Lohfink, *Kohelet*: 83: "The prose insertion probably comes from the author of the second epilogue ($12^{12–14}$) [. . .]. The addition is intended to protect the text from libertine interpretation. It is not entirely

disciples that they will be held accountable by God for all those wasted opportunities for happiness. These opportunities do not arise in the hereafter but need to be seized in this world as each individual moment is irretrievable. Anyone who does not take advantage of the opportunities for joy that life offers has already been brought before the court by God and found guilty.[62]

The last verse in Ecclesiastes reflects the traditional doctrine that God will bring every hidden action, whether good or evil, to judgment (Eccl 12:14). According to widely held beliefs, it is part of the second epilogue (12:13–14), which warns against writing and studying too many books and, by contrast, calls on us to God and keep the commandments (Eccl 12:13; cf. esp. Sir 1:26–28). Like Eccl 11:9b before it, this addendum also shows how radically Qohelet's understanding of the world, man and God differs from traditional wisdom teachings. Otherwise, there would have been no need for such addenda. Keeping the commandments, a religious-ethical way of life that in any way counts on a reward in this world or the hereafter, disregards God's inscrutability.[63] His absolute freedom, which does not bow to any act-consequence relationship, ultimately makes an existential relationship with God, as played out in the Book of Job or in the Psalms of lament, impossible. What remains is the call to joy and enjoyment of life. They are important tools against an escape into the afterlife that expects God to provide what was not achieved in this life, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. Anyone who has learned to recognize joy as a divine gift with Qohelet is not released from ethical action, but "[. . .]is set free from the compulsion to judge himself and others. He has experienced justice when he has shown mercy on himself and his neighbor."[64]

clear whether an otherworldly judgment of the dead is intended. It is rather unlikely." Thus also Köhlmoos, *Kohelet*: 239.

62 Krüger, *Kohelet*: 348, who refers to the Jewish reception in bNed 10a: "Man will have to give an account of all that he saw and did not enjoy."

63 Jesús Asurmendi, "Loi et justice: l'équilibre instable de la sagesse," in *Loi et justice dans la littérature du Proche-Orient ancien*, ed. Oliver Artus, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte 20 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013): 237: "Qoheleth's skepticism means that the question of the link between law and justice is no longer relevant."

64 Lux, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit": 115.

10 Conclusion

The study presented here, which is primarily based on the evidence of the Hebrew lexemes *mišpāṭ* "justice," *ṣᵉdāqāh* "righteousness," and their derivatives, confirms justice as a variable that, according to the view of the Old Testament, permeates the whole of reality. It orders and determines the relationship between God and human beings and the relationship among human beings themselves. Towards the end of the formative phase of the Hebrew Bible, this view is controversially discussed in the book of Job, but then clearly confirmed. The Book of Ecclesiastes departs from this orderly thinking because a personal image of God can no longer be provided. If the act-consequence relationship can no longer be maintained, the divine authority that is bound to it, guarantees it, and enforces it also becomes obsolete.

The semantic field could have been broadened in the present study, which would have made the result more wide-ranging, but not fundamentally different. The limitation, however, ensures conciseness, because the question of the justice that pervades all reality is raised every time the terms noted above and their derivatives appear, which often happens in clusters. Justice is of a transcendent quantity that precedes God and human beings alike. Without the relationship between act and consequence, which might be absent in this worldly life but must ultimately come about, the world order would plunge into chaos. This is the horizon in which YHWH's attitude toward his people and individual worshippers and in which the relationship among the members of God's people is described and evaluated. The discursive character is not usually indicated explicitly in the texts of the Old Testament, but it occurs in the Book of Job, in Abraham's questions before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16–33) and in the reflections on the legitimacy of divine punitive action in the face of individual responsibility (Jer 31:29–30; Ezek 14:12–20; 18:1–32; 33:10–22).

Ancient Israel dealt very intensively with the question of justice in its foundational texts, which were written by different groups between the eighth and third centuries BC. This polyphonic discourse has left its traces in all text genres—in legal texts, narratives, prophetic oracles, songs, proverbs, and treatises on the nature of wisdom. The nexus of act and consequence is constitutive: A life obedient to YHWH and in solidarity with one's fellow human beings cannot remain without recompensation in the long term. Nor can the evil deeds of the wicked go unpunished. Although act-consequence relationship can be extended in time, and even transcend beyond the death of an individual, be extended to descendants, or apply only to a postmortem existence, it must be protected. Where this cosmic nexus is no longer guaranteed, a personal concept of God can no longer be maintained, as can be seen in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Without the nexus of act and consequence—which may be interrupted but must not break—the world order collapses and, with it, the idea of YHWH as the just and saving God. In short: YHWH must guarantee the cosmic connection to remain God himself.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782-010

The initially monolatrous, and later monotheistic concept of YHWH as the one and only God intensifies, indeed radicalizes, the intertwining of religion and ethics, and of rituals and social behavior. Acting on behalf of the one who has acted himself puts pressure not only on the people, but also on YHWH as a deity who protects nations, groups and individuals. The theologization of law and the ethicization of religion are two sides of the same coin: Solidarity becomes a divine commandment, and only those who act positively in society are pleasing to YHWH and may approach him in a cultic manner. Unlike any other deity in the ancient Near East, the God of Israel is not only the guarantor of the act-consequence relationship, but also the sole lawgiver who conveys his laws to Moses in the form of the Torah. This means that, unlike in neighboring cultures, legislation is removed from the kings. They are not its originators but are subject to the divine law and bound by it. The Torah as God's law applies without exception to all levels of the social hierarchy and turns every single member of his people into brothers and sisters, as expressed in the Book of Deuteronomy. The promise of protection and blessing that accompanies the Torah establishes and enables the obligation to obey: "The experience of YHWH's saving justice establishes Israel's ability to obey the commandments and its subsequent well-being in the [promised] land."[1] Through the covenant, YHWH has bound himself not only to his people, but also to justice. What can be interpreted on the national level and its historical catastrophes as Israel's failure and collective punishment reaches its limit when it comes to the fate of the individual. The problem of theodicy, the question of God's justice, does not arise on a collective level in the Old Testament or in the ancient Near East, but on an individual level.

If this monograph on justice in the OT had not been written in the Bonn Cluster of Excellence *Dependency and Slavery Studies*, the following fact might not even have been noticed: Slaves play no role in the justice cycle of act and consequence. Although regulations that make living conditions more humane apply to slaves, any implementation of these regulations remains doubtful. Slaves are excluded from the act-consequence nexus because, as people dependent on their owners, they cannot act independently. They can carry out the will of their masters or defy them, but they cannot act of their own free will. Even escape does not change their status, because they do not become free, they simply become runaway slaves. The dictum that underlies the nexus of act and consequence, "He who acts is acted upon," cannot apply to this category of people who have very limited personal rights. This can be seen in many instances in the Pentateuch's rules and regulations on slaves, especially regarding people of foreign origin. It is made abundantly clear in the curse on Ham, who according to tradition becomes the progenitor of all people with black skin beyond Canaan. He is cursed by his father Noah, making him the lowest slave of his two brothers for all time (Gen 9:25). This biblical passage has led to the worst condemnations from antiquity to modern times.

1 Eckart Otto, "Rechtsanthropologie," in *Handbuch Alttestamentlicher Anthropologie*, ed. Jan Dietrich et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024): 640.

For foreigners and, in the post-biblical tradition, especially for black people, Israel's experience of the Exodus, the liberation from the slavery in Egypt, had no effect at all. They remain the property of their owners for life, have no right to a ransom, and are not part of the social program, the Deuteronomic ethic of brotherhood. They have no rights because they are not persons in the true sense of the word, but the property of their owners. Even for the Hebrew debt slaves, the liberation from Egypt in no way will set them free, but at best affords them a more humane treatment. The fact that circumcised slaves and foreigners are admitted to the Passover celebration (cf. Exod 12:43–45) has less to do with an extension of the experience of freedom to these people but rather with practical reasons. The same conditions for celebrating Passover should apply to natives and those who live permanently with Israelites (Exod 12:49).[2] To limit dependency in debt service for the lender to six years is by no means a particularly favorable regulation in the ancient Near Eastern context—the Code of Hammurabi had earlier prescribed their release after three years. Slaves have no place in the triad of the *personae miserae*, widows, orphans and strangers, regardless of their origin. Only in special cases are they are seen as persons, such as when a female slave becomes pregnant or when corporal punishment leads directly to the slave's death. If this is the case, the Talionic principle applies, and the perpetrator must fear for his own life.[3] However, if the slave does not die as a direct result of his master's blows, the latter remains blameless—he has only harmed his own property. An important peculiarity for the ancient Near Eastern world is the provision in Deut 23:16, according to which a runaway slave may not be returned to his owners. However, there is no evidence of this ruling ever to have been put into practice. If it were, all the regulations about slaves in the Torah would have been obsolete—every slave could have simply fled. The ethical claim expressed in the prohibition of extradition is not upheld in legal practice. The admonition not to oppress the runaway slave, who is allowed to choose a place of residence in Israel, underlines his precarious situation, just like that of foreigners, who were also exposed to exploitative despotism (cf. Exod 22:20).

It is no coincidence that the Hebrew used in the Bible knows several verbs for YHWH's liberating actions towards his people enslaved in Egypt, but no word for freedom. This does not mean that ancient Israel could not have imagined life without oppression. The opposite is the case. There are clear references in its writings to the rejection of permanent or even temporary enslavement of members of its own people,

2 Seen differently in Catherine Hezser, "Slavery and the Jews," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 1, *The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 452: "The shared meal of the Passover seder, even if more ideal than real, would celebrate liberation and autonomy and point to human beings' essential equality before God. In this sense it seems to have been unique in antiquity."

3 Otto, *Ethik*: 72–73; see also Sandra Jacobs, "The Talionic Principle and Its Calibrations," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, ed. Carly Crouch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 23–35.

but no rejection of the enslavement of foreigners.[4] Nevertheless, the semantic findings remain worth considering: The terms that come closest to the striving for freedom are חָפְשִׁי "freedman" (Exod 21:2, 5, 26–27, among others) and חֵפְשָׁה "release" (only in Lev 19:20). The focus here is not to gain freedom, but to be released from a stronger dependency into a weaker one. The status of the *ḥŏpšî* was most likely that of a semi-free person who, even if not *de iure*, continued to live *de facto* in dependency.[5] Precisely because this term was socially and ethically questionable, because it in no way indicated a social status to be aspired to, it is consistently avoided in the narratives about the liberation from the slavery in Egypt. The *ḥŏpšî* is not free (Latin *liber*), but a freed man (Latin *libertus*).[6] Even if the writings of the Old Testament are silent on the subject, it can be assumed that this refers to a group of semi-free people known throughout antiquity.

In the context of theology, liberation from the slavery of Egypt does not lead to freedom, but to permanent dependency on the liberating God. The concept of *ḥŏpšî* is inadequate for this never-ending asymmetrical relationship of dependency. Instead, only the unambiguous concept of slavery *ʿœḇœḏ* seems applicable. This makes YHWH, on the one hand, the liberator of his people from the tyranny of Pharaoh and, on the other, the owner of his slaves (*ʿāḇāḏîm*). In the holiness code from late-postexilic times, this is stated *expressis verbis* when, according to God's instructions, the Israelites are not to own slaves because they are all his slaves (Lev 25:42). The Exodus does not lead from Pharaoh's slavery to freedom, but to radical dependency, to slavery to God. This is by no means intended to downplay or even deny the humanizing tendencies in the slavery laws in the Pentateuch. For example, in remembrance of the liberation from Egypt, slaves are not to be sent away empty-handed (Deut 15:12–15). Nevertheless, it remains the case that the liberation from slavery in the land of Egypt leads to an indissoluble relationship of dependency on YHWH.[7] This dependency in turn leads to the paradox that the slave as the lowest status in society, which has no place even in the social program of Deuteronomy, is theologically elevated to a title of honor. The term

4 Snell, *Freedom*: 135, on the desire for freedom in Hellas and Israel: "[. . .] the seeds of love of liberty were present in both cultures, but the manifestation of how those seeds developed is not likely to have been similar in both places simply because of the different historical experiences of the bearers of the traditions. It does not seem likely to me that the ideas of modern liberty have persisted unchanged from these early times, but certain elements that constitute important hallmarks within modern liberty were found in the ancient world."

5 On ancient Greece, see Winfried Schmitz, "Dependent Rural Populations in Archaic and Classical Greece: Free, Slave, or Between Free and Slave?" in *Slavery and Other Forms of Strong Asymmetrical Dependencies: Semantics and Lexical Fields*, ed. Jeaninne Bischoff and Stephan Conermann, Dependency and Slavery Studies 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022): 99–126.

6 See Martin Schermaier, ed., *The Position of Roman Slaves: Social Realities and Legal Differences*, Dependency and Slavery Studies 6 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023).

7 Hezser, "Slavery and the Jews": 450: "Given the Hebrew Bible's emphasis on obedience to Divine laws and regulations revealed at Sinai (cf. Exod. 19–23), the slave metaphor stresses the need for Israelites' compliance to God and God's option to punish misdeeds."

ʿœḇœḏ implies unconditional obedience and willingness to serve the divine master. It therefore comes as no surprise that all the great personalities in the history of the biblical Israel bear this title. The downside of this honorific slave title is, of course, that the social phenomenon of slavery loses theological weight. In other words: Why shouldn't we own slaves if we are all God's slaves? Perhaps the theological adoption of the sociomorphic concept of master and his slaves has also meant that the creation narrative in Gen 1–3 bears no influence whatsoever on the legislation on slavery. There, people are distinguished solely by the category of male and female: Social, ethnic, and religious differentiations do not matter. In the theology of creation, there would have been a basis for a more critical view of slavery.[8]

However, radical dependency on YHWH also has a positive side, because the divine owner must protect the righteous. If this were not the case, YHWH would degenerate into a tyrant who acts arbitrarily. The demand for justice binds and obliges the divine sovereign. This is illustrated by relevant stories in the Book of Genesis. In catastrophes such as the flood (Gen 6–9) or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18), the righteous must not be harmed. Noah—and with him his clan and the animals entrusted to him—is saved as the epitome of a righteous man. In Sodom and Gomorrah, however, the absence of a single righteous person means that everything and everyone perishes. In their post-exilic adaptations, these theological narratives develop the question of God's justice, which is guaranteed only if he distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked in his punitive and judicial actions. Neither collective punishment nor a positive substitution of the righteous for the wicked are taken into consideration. If YHWH, as the judge over the whole world, does not himself abide by the law, he would be discredited as the divine sovereign, for then the guarantor of the world order would have become its destroyer.

The presentation of the topic of law and justice in the early prophets from the end of the eighth century BC has shown that it is no coincidence that their critical attitude toward society is linked to the emergence of the money and credit economy (cf. Isa 24:2; Jer 15:10). In this they *agree* with the Book of the Covenant as the oldest collection of laws and with the *mišpāṭîm* expressed therein. The increase of the social divide between rich and poor, driven by tax burdens and high interest on debts, made the question of law and justice increasingly problematic. In Israel, which is lacking natural resources, the only way to increase property was to increase the amount of agricultural land that could be cultivated. Independent farmers were driven off their inherited land by high interest rates, a development that the laws and regulations even supported.

8 The widespread opinion in German Reform Judaism in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries that ancient Judaism was more hostile to slavery than its environment from the outset is historically untenable, according to Hezser, "Slavery and the Jews": 438: "They wrote in a German-Jewish context in which Jews were eager to assimilate into a predominantly Christian society. In this context, they were eager to show that the moral values represented by Jewish traditions were equal or even superior to those of their Christian fellow-citizens."

The interplay between the economic interests of the upper class and the jurisprudents provoked the criticism found in Isaiah 10:1–2. This lack of justice led to free farmers becoming increasingly dependent, ending in debt slavery, which could quickly lead to life-long slavery. The prophets Isaiah, Micah, and Amos clarify that disregard for the impoverished population is primarily due to decline in the moral order. Amos sharply denounces the fact that both the lender and his son have sexual relations with their house slave—that they abuse her (Am 2:7; cf. Exod 21:7–9). Due to the small remaining debts that a farmer, plagued by crop failure, is unable to repay, he and his family risk falling into debt slavery (Am 2:6; 8:6; cf. Jer 5:26; Mic 2:9; 7:2–3). All of this cannot remain without consequences for the cohesion of the community and, theologically speaking, leads to YHWH's necessary punitive action against Israel and Judah.

After the catastrophe of the Babylonian exile (587–539 BC), acting in solidarity with the poor, the correct behavior towards one's neighbor, should become the guiding principle of the person "who walks humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8). Only a life lived in active *ḥæsæḏ* ("faithfulness" or "solidarity") can achieve a life in harmony with God and humans. However, this does not invalidate the hope of an eschatological distinction between the righteous and the wicked. On the contrary: The sun of righteousness will rise only on those who fear God's name (Mal 3:18, 20). Only the guarantee of a distinction between the righteous and the wicked will enable and endure God's justice and therefore also the world order. The book of Isaiah emphasized this at the beginning in a post-exilic addition. As always has been and always will be the case, disasters such as war, expulsion, and deportation affect all people, regardless of their moral integrity. However, in view of cosmic justice, to which YHWH is also bound, this cannot be the end. The problem of the Babylonian exile as Israel's collective punishment and the necessary differentiation between the righteous and the wicked on an individual level is solved in Isa 1:9 by the fact that YHWH has left a small remnant of the righteous who survive the catastrophe.

It is noteworthy to point out in the discourse on justice in the book of Isaiah that Zion/Jerusalem plays an important role as a social space, not merely as a topographical entity. Both injustices and acts of justice take place in this city. YHWH bestows his saving justice only to those who renounce injustice (Isa 1:27; 59:20). This has significant external consequences because the nations will set forth to the city of righteousness only to receive instructions from there for their own life together (Isa 2:2–4; Mic 4:1–3). However, according to the vineyard song, the city of God is far from being a city of righteousness (Isa 5:1–7). YHWH is disappointed to see how the greed of the upper classes has disavowed his project of a community based on justice and righteousness. The cries of woe in Isa 5:8–10 exemplify these grievances, whereby the woe added in Isa 10:1–4 adds another important aspect: The jurisprudents too are involved in this perversion because they implement statutes of injustice. In the book of Isaiah, however, justice and righteousness are not mere social categories, they concern the essence of YHWH—his holiness (Isa 5:16). If YHWH did not abide by justice and righteousness, he would forfeit his holiness and become a tyrannical God.

In no other prophetic book does the Hebrew word for the male slave *ʿæḇœḏ* enjoy such a theological career as it does in Isaiah. The semantic breadth of the term ranges from prisoner of war (Isa 14:2) and debtor slave (Isa 24:2) to a high ranking royal official (Isa 22:20; cf. Isa 36:9, 11; 37:5, 24) to a title of honor for Isaiah (Isa 20:3), David (Isa 37:35), and especially for God's people Jacob/Israel or the faithful remnant of the deportees (Isa 41:8, 9; 42:1, 19; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21; 44:26; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3, 5, 6, 7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11). The relationship of ownership, which implies an asymmetrical dependency on the divine Lord, becomes visible in Isa 44:5, which states that some exiled Judeans had engraved ליהוה "belonging to YHWH" on their hands. Tattoos of this kind are typical markings for slaves, a permanent branding by their owners. From Isa 54:17b onwards, only the plural *ʿāḇāḏîm* is used consistently, which refers to the post-exilic pious. They see themselves as the chosen holy remnant, separated, blessed and protected by God from, set apart from the body of the blasphemous and wicked (Isa 56:6; 63:17; 65:8, 9, 13[3x], 14, 15; 66:14). If YHWH is the owner of his slaves, who cares for them and rescues them from foreign powers, then debt slavery among them must cease. Thus, the post-exilic prophecy in Isa 58:6 calls for the bonds of injustice to be loosened and the oppressed to be sent away as freedmen *(ḥŏpšîm)*. The call to release [slaves] (*dᵉrôr*) in Isa 61:1 serves the same purpose (cf. Deut 15:12–14; Lev 25:8–10; Jer 34:8, 15, 17; Ezek 46:17). However, these texts should not obscure the reality that probably one sixth of those who returned to Jerusalem and Judea from the Babylonian exile belonged to the group of slaves (Ezra 2:64–65; Neh 7:67–68). Even if these figures are to be treated with caution, the ratio of the free to the slaves is in line with what is known from the Neo-Babylonian period. It has been proven that some descendants of the exiles had great economic success in Babylonia (Murashu archive) and it is therefore highly plausible that there were also a considerable number of slaves among the Judean returnees.

The Psalter of the Old Testament also investigates the saving righteousness of God and the man's righteousness before God. Only the Book of Proverbs contains more references to *ṣaddîq* "righteous/just" than the Book of Psalms. This certainly also has to do with the fact that many of these songs were used within the context of religious worship. Only the righteous who show solidarity with their fellow human beings—those who live and act in the community in a positive way—are granted access to the ritual encounter with YHWH in the temple (Ps 15; 24:3–6). The motif of justice also plays a major role in the post-exilic Psalms, which increasingly emancipated themselves from the temple cult and were recited in the coteries of the pious *(ḥᵃsîḏîm)*. Frequent emphasis on one's own righteousness are not signs of moral arrogance, but emphasize the loyalty to the divine Lord, whose righteousness manifests itself in his mercy and gracious devotion. The salvation of the poor and oppressed is of central concern of many psalms (see Ps 9–10), but slaves play no part. Once again, it is confirmed that they are not included in the triad of the *personae miserae*: Their fate is never mentioned in Israel's prayers. Only the collective lament in Ps 44:13 alludes to the sale of slaves, but there YHWH himself is the slave owner who offers his people far below the market price to the nations (cf. Deut 28:68; Isa 52:3). Asymmetrical dependency, the

most extreme form of which is slavery, serves to emphasize the sovereignty of the God of Israel. However, it is not absolute. It is bound to law and justice. As a transcendent, cosmic entity, it cannot be overridden or ignored by YHWH either. He in particular is bound to law and justice if he does not want to forfeit his unique position above all other gods (Ps 82). However, his saving justice does not reach the slaves. At no instance of the Psalter is there a reference to the liberation from the bondage in Egypt and the return from Babylonian captivity to these people deprived of their freedom. This criticism should not simply be dismissed as an anachronism, as a modern-day demand for human rights, but taken seriously as an indication of the limitations of the biblical concept of justice. This is especially true when biblical texts are placed in the public sphere and are intended to have an impact there.[9]

Like the book of Isaiah, the Psalter also contains the remarkable fact that the status designation "slave," which refers to the lowest social level, serves as an honorific title when used in the context of theology. Thus, in turning to YHWH, the worshipper calls himself "your slave" and "son of your slave" (Ps 116:16). This idea is rooted in the thinking that a person born into slavery and who has never known freedom is better suited to serve his master than someone who has been bought on the slave market. The linguistic image, which emphasizes the supplicant's undivided loyalty to YHWH, the gracious, just, and merciful God (Ps 116:5), is at the same time proof of the wholehearted acceptance of slavery, especially when it comes to people of foreign nationality and ethnicity. The situation is different when the exemplary worshipper, who takes on the role of the persecuted King David, asks YHWH for the act of justice (*ṣᵉdāqāh*) that will save him from his enemies (Ps 143:2, 11) and points out in the final colon that he is his slave (*ʿæḇæḏ*) (Ps 143:12; cf. 144:10). On a religious level, the slave status becomes the main argument for God's intervention on his behalf, which is demanded by the supplicant.

In the Book of Proverbs, which is strongly influenced by the tradition of ancient oriental wisdom, justice is propagated as a way of life that is appropriate to man before God and one's fellow human beings and that should be learned from a young age on. It is a kind of mega-virtue based on the fundamental conviction that the correlation between action and consequence prevails always and everywhere. For the teachers of wisdom, practicing righteousness and justice is more pleasing to God than sacrificial offerings (Prov 21:3). Anyone who chooses a life filled with lies, deceit, and selfishness are counted among the wicked (*rᵉšāʿîm*), not the righteous (*ṣaddiqîm*). Justice is not only a question of doing the right thing, but also of the right attitude before oneself, before God, and in society. The anthropological, theological, and sociological levels are closely intertwined and complement each other in the Proverbs' discourse on justice. When compared to the Prophets and the Psalter, justice as salvation plays a subordinate role. It is an attitude to life without which no one can be wise *(ḥāḵām*). Without it, one

9 Wright, "Slavery and Gender": 129: "[. . .] ethical criticism becomes appropriate for a reader when a text like the Bible is brought to bear on public policy and the life of modern religious communities."

cannot lead an orderly life and bring it to a good end. The righteous person (*ṣaddîq*) is not promised wealth because of his righteousness, which is virtue and action at the same time, but he is promised that he will not fall into poverty (cf. Prov 10:3; 11:6). The discourse on justice has shifted entirely to the side of the human. There is no direct mention of God's justice anywhere in Proverbs, only an indirect mention via the figure of personified wisdom (Prov 8:8, 18, 20).[10]

The frequent warning against carelessness and laziness (e.g. Prov 10:4; 12:24; 13:4; 15:19) once again is ultimately rooted in the act-consequence relationship: He who does not sow cannot hope to reap, and he who is too lazy to put his hand to his mouth cannot expect others to feed him (cf. Prov 19:24; 26:15). Such a person lacks the wisdom, which would provide them with good judgement. He also lacks common sense, which ultimately leads to personal disaster. Just as the Book of Proverbs locates justice at the level of ethics, it locates wisdom at the level of knowledge and understanding. Slaves do not appear in this biblical scripture as beneficiaries of acts of justice, but rather serve as a warning example of a misguided way of life that puts someone's entire existence at risk. In the case of severe financial hardship, this leads directly to debt slavery (Prov 22:7). Anyone who loses house and farm through lack of understanding enslaves himself to the one who manages his possessions wisely (Prov 11:29). Even modest prosperity requires a house slave (Ps 12:9). In the same way as ignorance can lead someone into [debt] slavery, so the intelligent actions of a slave can elevate him above a foolish son and heir (Prov 17:2; cf. 14:35). However, this would then be seen as a transgression that would dare to challenge the structure of society, which is characterized by strict hierarchies. Proverbs therefore warns against such a turn of the tables (Prov 19:10; 30:22–23), as well as against being too friendly with slaves, which only invites them to rebel (Prov 29:19, 21). Within the context of theology, the term *ʿæḇœḏ* occurs only at the end of the postscript (Prov. 30:10). There the poet warns his readers not to discredit him being a slave to his master, i.e. YHWH, because the slanderer would pay bitterly for this. The author thus emphasizes that he has collected, edited, and composed the proverbs entirely in the spirit of the divine Lord. Anyone who claims otherwise will be severely punished by God.[11]

In the prologue and epilogue of the book of Job (Job 1:8; 2:3; 42:7–8) YHWH refers to the main character with the honorific title "my slave." As the one who is dependent on God in every respect, the protagonist not only takes on the role of the innocent sufferer, but also that of the exemplary wise man. Job's right and righteousness are not put to the test, as is so often claimed, but are certain from the outset. What is put to the test, however, is his piety, his unswerving adherence to God, his unshakeable religiosity. The fate of Job's life shatters the act-consequence relationship, according to which ethical action pays off and actions lacking solidarity are punished. The book makes it radically

10 William P. Brown, "Reading Psalms Sapientially in the Writings": 157.
11 Fuhs, *Sprichwörter*: 180.

clear that the *mišpāṭ* as a legal decision based on the ethical behavior of a person and the *mišpāṭ* as divine sovereignty over the world cannot be offset against each other. In other words, if a pious person is leading a moral life, they are by no means guaranteed a harmonious life without mishaps. No one who must bear a difficult fate can conclude based on their own righteousness that God has broken the law and declare him guilty (Job 40:8). No one can control the forces of chaos that sometimes thwart life, make them dependent on him like a slave (Job 40:28). These powers exist, but they do not throw the world into chaos. They are proof that there is a reality of a world beyond human morality and where there is no act-consequence relationship. Only when the righteous and pious Job realizes this after God's speeches in chapters 38–41 does this wisdom allow him to find comfort and peace among the ruins of his life (Job 42:6). His reaction to the blows of fate in the prologue, "the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21b), now takes on its true theological meaning. Job's reaction is much more than a pious slogan that calls for perseverance in suffering, but the fruit of the realization that morality and happiness in life are not communicating variables. Only those who have understood this are true slaves (*ʿæḇæḏ*) of YHWH, who submit to his will not because they hope to be rewarded, but because God is the absolute sovereign. If the sufferer realizes this, they will not have to long for death either, only in death the slave will be a "freedman" *(ḥŏpšî)*, far from his master's harassment (Job 3:19; cf. 7:2). The sociological component of the concept of slavery also shines through in some parts of the book. For example, Job complains that he has descended on the social ladder right down to the lowest rung, where even his slave no longer listens to his call—on the contrary, he himself has to beg to be heard (Job 19:16). In his great protestation of innocence (chapter 31), Job emphasizes that he has not disregarded the legal claim (*mišpāṭ*) of his slave and his female slave but has granted them their rights in the knowledge of the incorruptibility of the divine judge (Job 31:13–14). This is followed by a statement that is unique in the Old Testament, in which the fact that master and slave are created equal is emphasized in a rhetorical question: "Did not he who made me in the womb make them? And did not one fashion us in the womb?" (Job 31:15; see the statement that all humans were created equal in relation to the poor in Prov 14:31; 17:5).

The Book of Ecclesiastes, written in the middle or end of the third century BC, further intensifies God's unpredictability. There is no trace of God caring for the poor and marginalized, as can often be observed in the Pentateuch, the prophets, and the Psalms, in this wisdom writing from the Hellenistic period. The meaningfulness of the world and the phenomena occurring in it remains forever hidden from the wise. If everything is "vanity" (*hæḇæl*) (Eccl 1:2, 14; 2:1, 11, 15, 17, etc.), then this also applies to the act-consequence relationship, which is the basis for the concept of justice in the worldview of the ancient Near East and the Old Testament. As in Egypt and Mesopotamia, such a worldview in ancient Israel does not succeed in justifying the ought from being: "No structures can be derived from empiricism that can ensure

success as norms of action and thus a successful life. The reality of experience is too complex to be reduced to recognizable structures."[12]

Unlike in the Book of Job, where God was available as the addressee for the protagonist's accusations and able to reply to them, Ecclesiastes displays no personal cooperation or opposition between human and deity. God is a radically transcendent entity to whom no demands for justice can be addressed. It is therefore not surprising that the term *ṣᵉdāqāh*, the act of justice, does not appear once, and *ṣœḏœq* as the normative term for what is right and just, occurs only in the negative contexts of the violation of justice (Eccl 3:16; 5:7). The actions of the righteous (*ṣaddîq*) remain without consequences (Eccl 7:15), as do those of the wicked (*rāšaʿ*). Ecclesiastes explicitly refutes the traditional wisdom teaching that the lives of the unrighteous are cut short. It has been proven that the wicked do not live shorter lives. On the contrary, they often live long comfortable lives filled, untroubled by misfortune. Thus, they fare as the righteous should (Eccl 8:13–14). Ecclesiastes propagates the fear of God as wisdom, which does not mean keeping the Mosaic commandments (according to a dissenting voice in the epilogue in Eccl 12:13; cf. Sir 1:11–13), but rather a deep fear of God's unpredictability (Eccl 3:14). A temporary, and certainly not permanent, advantage of doing the right thing over doing wrong is ruled out, because if there were such an advantage for the righteous, the relationship between act and consequence would be restored. The perversion of justice is almost intended by God, because it makes it clear that although he elevated human beings above the animal world, they are ultimately only like animals (Eccl 3:17–18). Ecclesiastes' maxim of joie de vivre, enjoying good food, drink, and love during their life, applies not only to the righteous, but to all people, regardless of their moral quality. Only the poor and the oppressed are excluded. Every day they must fight for their survival. Qohelet does not include these people nor the group of slaves. They belong as a matter of course to the possessions of the rich, such as King Solomon (Eccl 2:7). But the common man also has his household slaves, who can cause him trouble (Eccl 7:21). For the teacher of wisdom, it is a great evil when the social hierarchy is turned upside down, when slaves ride horses and princes must walk on foot like slaves (Eccl 10:7).

The discourse on justice in the Book of Ecclesiastes is the keystone of the intellectual engagement with this topic in the Hebrew Bible. When the personal understanding of YHWH as the gracious, merciful, and righteous God has been shattered, because the act-consequence relationship is no longer accepted as a valid formula for explaining the world, the discourse on justice comes to an end. Where the saving God no longer even has a place in religious utopia, thinking about justice and injustice also becomes vanity—*hœḇœl*—a "breath of wind."

12 Otto, *Ethik*: 151.

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https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112206782-012