ISRAEL V. THE NATIONS:

In Search of an Ethical Approach to Land, Covenant and Ethnicity in the Bible

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DIGEST

This thesis explores reading strategies for approaching difficult issues in the Jewish canon. The paper focuses on the Israelites' annihilation of other nations and related motifs. A relevant premise is the assumption that how liberal Jews read and discuss ethically problematic issues affects the character of liberal Jewish religious life.

"Towards a Land: Israelite Ethnic Identity," the first chapter, introduces the ethical issues of the Israelites' destruction of other nations. E. Theodore Mullen, Jr. provides the basis for approaching the Bible as a document reflecting the formation of Israelite ethnic identity.

The second chapter, "Reading with Intent: Ethical Criticism and Theory," summarizes ideas of four scholars: Wayne C. Booth, Martha Nussbaum, Richard Rorty and Seyla Benhabib. These scholars provide strategies that empower readers to ask questions of the text and to make aesthetic and value judgments about it.

Chapter Three, entitled "Land, Covenant and Israelite Ethnicity in the Bible," examines four biblical motifs: the promise of the land, the theme of a land of milk and honey, the Israelite displacement of other nations and the concept of sacred altars in the land. The chapter provides a reading of these motifs which is informed by the theorists discussed in Chapter Two.

"Understanding Israelite Destruction Today," the fourth chapter, discusses the implications of the issues raised in Chapters Two and Three. It integrates the

two chapters and addresses conclusions about how liberal Jews can read the Bible and discuss it responsibly.

The fifth chapter, "A Letter to the Future," is a more personal conclusion. It is in the form of a letter to the author's future descendents. This chapter considers the practical and personal implications of the research, writing and conclusions of this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

Genocide still happens. In the past century alone, genocide was perpetrated against the Jews, the Darfuris, the Armenians, the Tutsis, the Cambodians, the Bosnians and more. What does and does not constitute genocide is a matter of public debate. Just this fall, Congress voted to designate the killings of Armenians in Turkey during World War I genocide, sparking controversy in the White House and with the Turkish government. It took lobbyists and legislators years of work for Congress to designate the situation in Darfur genocide. Yet, genocide is not a twentieth and twenty-first century phenomenon. While technology of mass killing has changed drastically in the last centuries, the concept of destroying entire nations or peoples is nothing new.

What constitutes genocide? According to the United Nations' first definition in 1948, genocide is the systematic attempt to exterminate a national, racial, ethnic or religious group. Modern examples of genocide are characterized by mass violence, made ever easier by technological advances which make killing more efficient and less personal. Philip Gourevitch, a journalist who reported on the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsis in Rwanda, considers the concept of genocide: "We imagine it's a greater crime to kill ten then one, or ten thousand than one thousand. Is it? . . . The death toll may grow, and with it our horror, but the crime doesn't grow proportionally" (201). One can understand genocide as many murders. As such, genocide becomes a crime of magnitude. At the same time, genocide is more than simply killing on a large scale. As Gourevitch suggests, "What distinguishes genocide from murder . . . is the intent. The crime

is wanting to make a people extinct. The idea is the crime. To [picture it] you must accept the principle of the exterminator and see not people but *a people*" (201-202). For Gourevitch, the mindset of annihilation sets genocide apart from other crimes.

In the Bible, the Israelites decimate seven nations so that they will have plenty of wide open space in their promised land. In different parts of the Bible, from Genesis to Deuteronomy to Joshua to Nehemiah, this destruction is mentioned. There are so many passages that one cannot discount the prose as an anomaly, odd insertion or mistaken addition to the canon. Such prose was intentional. There is the unfortunate reality that the annihilation of peoples occurs in the most sacred of Jewish texts. Not only is it intentional, but it is related to such meta-themes as land, covenant and ethnicity in the Bible. To talk about annihilation is to talk about these other themes, too.

As modern Jews, shocked and horrified to the core by genocide, how are we to respond to such events in our own texts? Do they constitute genocide, as we understand it today? We would not want to teach our children that our own Bible supported just what we reject in the modern world. As liberal Jews who want to critique the canon without losing religious commitment, how are we to read these texts? How do we talk about them in our holy places? Talking about the Bible is more than studying some text because it is interesting. Because of the Bible's place in world religions and in Judaism itself, a conversation about genocide in the Bible quickly becomes a conversation about how to think about Judaism's oldest text and how to read religious texts in general.

Through my years of schooling in both the secular academy and in rabbinical school, I have come to believe that what we read and how we read affects how we choose to live. For Jews, no text has more thoroughly influenced the religion than the Bible has. How we choose to read and interpret the Bible affects how we practice Judaism. The goal of this project is to explore how to read about genocide (and by implication, how to read the Bible in general); in other words, our task is to explore an ethics of reading Jewishly.

TOWARDS A LAND: ISRAELITE ETHNIC IDENTITY

The Bible teems with stories and themes about the Israelites' relationship to their promised land. Land is a central focus of the Bible, though this focus manifests itself in varied ways in different parts of the Bible. In Genesis and Exodus, for example, the authors present possession of the land as a promise. The land is the haven promised to the Israelites after generations of wandering and slavery. In Deuteronomy and Joshua, the land is finally attainable, though given to the Israelites only with the condition that they will follow a complex system of civil and religious laws. In prophetic literature, the loss of land is threatened and mourned. The theme of land has three primary aspects: the land as promised, the land as conditional, the land as gone.

The concept of land and land ownership in the Bible is fraught with moral problems. Particularly in the Deuteronomic corpus, the Israelites' relationship with the land brings hope but is mired in the problem of the other resident nations.[1] In order to enter and take possession of the land, a host of other nations is to be annihilated. Who does the annihilating varies: sometimes God, sometimes the Israelites.

As first steps, the biblical writers detail how the people should act upon entering a new land, how they should set up their settlements, and how they should maintain their ethnic identity while trying to adapt to life in a new land. Beyond that, repeatedly, the writers create an entrance requirement for the

[1] Ironically, or perhaps unexpectedly, it is in these books that the Israelites "dwell" in the land. True to life, the farther the Israelites are from land ownership (i.e. in an older story or with the land as a recent memory), the simpler the relationship becomes.

promised land: the other nations must first be annihilated or banished. In order to make room for the Israelites and to give them authority over the land, the biblical writers describe the necessity of and directions for eradication of other ethnic groups.

As liberal Jews, how are we to react to such texts? What are we to do when we read our classic text, and we read about genocide and ethnic cleansing? Many of us make an assumption that the Bible is something that links us to our tradition and is valuable. How, then, do we reconcile this messy dilemma of finding abhorrent material in our most sacred of texts? Discomfort with texts is not contingent on religious commitment: struggling with the complexities of our canon is not just a task for rabbis and Jewish scholars. It is a task for all who are heirs to a tradition, who inherit a textual corpus and who live in a society where individuals are part of biblically-based religions. Commitment only depends on whether or not a reader can find value in an ethically problematic text. Sadly, if no positive value can be found, then why not simply discard the text? My premise here is that our canon, and the Torah specifically, have positive and redeeming value.

Aside from blindly accepting the text, historically there have been two primary ways of handling ethically problematic material in our canon. We might skip over such verses, so as to ignore the affronting brutality. If we act like the verses are not there, then we can pretend they do not exist. Or, we might give a quick pause, only long enough to say, "Well, those people lived in a different time. Their values were not as well-developed as our own." We cast off the biblical writers as inferior to us moderns. Yet, if we want our Judaism to be

infused with the benefits of modernity and post-modernity, then we will agree that both of these approaches fall short. Neither addresses the ethical, moral, and religious issues of land and ethnicity within our inherited tradition.

We can create an approach to reading the Bible that gives us a framework to discuss difficult issues within our texts. Such an approach also keeps us from getting so mired in these issues that we think about little else. The goal is not to become consumed in a cycle where we can think of only the challenging parts of our tradition, not retaining energy to focus on the rest. The way we talk about our texts informs the way we talk about our traditions, which informs the rituals in which we choose to participate and pass on to later generations. How we talk about the Bible, its writers, and the worlds in which the text was written informs how we view Jewish history and how we approach religion in general. Do we have the authority to challenge our canon and make change? Is our collection of sacred texts closed, or do we have an ongoing duty to mold and form it with our ethics and creativity?

How we approach our canon also affects our actions. How we view those who wrote long ago mirrors how we form relationships with others who lived in cultures distant from our own. How we talk about ethics in different eras also reflects if and to what extent we feel comfortable making ethical judgments today. Striving to create a method for discussing the ethics of the Bible influences how we understand our religion both inside and outside of our synagogue walls. Our path towards an ethics of reading the difficult stories in our Bible must begin with the text itself.

An Overview of Mullen's Thesis About the Israelites' Land and Ethnic Formation

E. Theodore Mullen Jr. reads the Deuteronomic corpus as invented or revisionist history. These texts' purpose was to create Israelite ethnic identity. Mullen's work allows us to study the context of the text and attempt to understand it. What could prompt the Deuteronomists to write about genocide? Did they have ethical problems with it? In order to consider these questions, we must go to the text itself, using Mullen's scholarship as our starting point.

The Israelites' relationship with land, ethnicity and covenant is consistently tied to the annihilation of other nations. The premise of the covenant is that God will give the land to the Israelites, a land free of other peoples and obstacles. In return, the Israelites must follow all of God's commandments, including allowing and participating in the destruction of other peoples. This conditional covenant is described in the Deuteronomic books.[2]

Mullen argues that the Deuteronomic corpus' primary goal is the formation of Israelite ethnic identity. Mullen suggests that the Deuteronomic books were written to advocate a concept of historically-based ethnic identity that would provide a way for the Israelites to maintain their distinctiveness in the Babylonian exile. Mullen seeks to analyze the text "as it might have functioned with respect to the formation of the community whose identity as an ethnic group was threatened by exile with complete assimilation and ethnic dissolution" (Narrative 5).

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[2] The Deuteronomic books include Deuteronomy, Joshua, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings. This thesis focuses on passages in Deuteronomy and Joshua.

Mullen uses contemporary research in identity formation and ethnic studies to create a model of group building with which he can analyze Deuteronomic texts. Using A.D. Smith's The Ethnic Origins of Nations and other scholarly works as a basis, Mullen suggests that "ethnic groups are built upon shared memories of a common history that binds members together and separates them from others" (Narrative 15). In addition to investigating ethnic groups, Mullen defines a function of religion as the "development and maintenance of ethnic groups" (Narrative 37). Religious rituals and belief systems can create group identity, meaning and purpose for and within the group. The sense of belonging to a group develops meaning, in addition to the other meanings that the group asserts for its members. The construction of common history, symbols and rituals constructs group sentiment and identity. In order to create group identity, each ethnic group must also determine boundaries. There are limits as to what a group member can do and still remain part of the group. For the Deuteronomists, group membership meant understanding the reciprocity in covenant and then following God's commandments. Moreover, the Deuteronomists attempted to create clarity of group boundaries by demonizing other ethnic groups and limiting relations with them.

Based on the concept that one way to create ethnic group identity is by sharing stories and concepts of history, Mullen posits that the Israelites needed a shared series of stories in order to succeed as a group. He writes, "Ethnic groups are built upon shared memories of a common history as a creation whose purpose was to provide a set of boundaries for the community for which it was produced" (Narrative 14). A lack of common history and fear of deteriorating ethnic identity

might prompt the creation of new stories and merging of those and existing stories and merging into a larger history; the goals are both to maintain and create group identity and authority within a group.

Mullen's argument demonstrates that the Israelite conception of land ownership and covenant is intricately tied to the development of Israelite identity. The covenant, as laid out in Deuteronomy, centers upon a reciprocal relationship between God and the Israelites. God will give the Israelites the land and protect them in return for the Israelites scrupulously following God's commandments. If the Israelites fail to follow the commandments then their ability to live peacefully in the land becomes jeopardized.

The Deuteronomic writers were able to succeed in the goal of creating ethnic boundaries through the creation of a "historical" text detailing the purpose of the Israelite people, a meta-understanding of their role in the world order and how they are to live. There is success in this effort: the historical narrative created was not too radical to be accepted by the Israelite population and yet radical enough to propose a solution to current problems. The Deuteronomists' solution was a new understanding of Israelite history and purpose. They created, or re-created, a "narrative form of 'social dramas' . . . a common myth of descent, a history that could be shared by the group facing the tragedies of exile" (Narrative 10).

Mullen names issues that likely plagued the Israelites in exile: a time of crisis and chaos and a change in authority as the Israelite monarchical dynasty was destroyed. Yet, the legacy of the priesthood could be adapted to a new locale by re-envisioning the concept of priesthood and sacred space. In exile, without the

Temple, the priests would have no duties and thus no role. This high class of individuals transformed their roles to be independent of the Temple site, for there was no central worship site in the Diaspora. While during the monarchy the priests performed the ritual sacrifices, in the exile the priests became the instigators and arbitrators of proper ritual practice.

Mullen suggests that the Israelites also began to assimilate into Babylonian society and experienced a loss of identifying factors. In response to the issues arising during Babylonian exile, Mullen explains that a section of the Israelites in exile joined together to create the Deuteronomic school. The purpose of this coalition was to renew Israelite ethnic identity "on the basis of land, leader and focus" (Narrative 9). Mullen is careful to note that these writers and visionaries did not work to create this ethnicity out of nothing. Israelite identity existed prior to the exile. Instead, Mullen argues that "it became necessary to redefine and recreate what would become 'Israelite' . . . ethnicity" (Narrative 9n. 24).

Mullen takes the concept of ethnic identity formation and proceeds to use it to help him understand the authorship and dating of the Deuteronomic corpus. We can investigate questions of authorship, because determining who wrote a text can lend valuable insights into the goals of the text, how much authority it had, and how it was received and understood. Mullen begins with the conclusion that the Deuteronomic authors wrote in Babylonian exile, a chaotic time when group identity markers would not be clear. Mullen suggests that the earliest date that the Deuteronomic history could have been completed between 561 and 550 B.C.E., though proto-versions probably existed before these dates. In inferring dates of composition, Mullen is careful to remark that it is unlikely that the

history was completely invented in this short period. Rather, "there is every reason that various traditions and materials, some of which may have been in written form, composed a base from which an account of Israel and Judah, from its entry into Canaan to its exile in Babylon could be created" (Narrative 9). Beyond this discussion of Deuteronomic dating, Mullen does not make an effort to specifically date the works, saying instead that precise dating is a matter of great scholarly debate and that he prefers to concentrate on the cultural background and the reasons for the composition rather than on the dating.

The texts are bound by the fact that they are all written documents, a simple observation but one with important implications. Deuteronomic writers were literate, meaning they were of the elite and had the funds and time to write. Only a small segment of individuals was taught to read and write, and they were taught for practical purposes, rather than as a component of general education for upper classes. Some of these needs include: monarchical historians, scribes, and others associated with the priestly caste. Even those individuals who read and wrote to earn a living did not have the time to spend writing for pleasure. People funded writing for a purpose. Eventually, the Deuteronomists' telling of Israelite history became the dominant choice, evidenced by its prominence in the Bible. One sees the prominence of the Deuteronomists in the legacy of Deuteronomic perspectives of land, covenant, and the Israelites relationship with God.

Although the Deuteronomic writers attempted to use literature to form "an ideally visioned ethnic group called 'Israel'" (Narrative, 12), the Deuteronomists were likely not the only ideologues trying to fill the vacuum created by the changing nature of Israelite culture in the exile. Mullen urges readers to see the

Deuteronomist as a single voice "among competing visionaries" (Narrative 13). As such, the Deuteronomic corpus, like the entire Bible, reflects the evolution of Israelite identity. Yet overall, the Deuteronomic message is clear: "The Deuteronomic history serves as a narrative realization of the special nature of this people Israel and an exposition of the ethnic descriptors that should be applied to them, and serves to produce a prophetically program of this 'holy people' in the land that Yahweh had promised their fathers" (Narrative 18).

The Israelites used the Bible to create ethnic identity. The notion of writing prose to create group solidarity may be an Israelite invention. Mullen's argument introduces the concept that a function of the biblical text may be different than what it actually says. The literal meaning of the text may diverge from its function. Mullen's analysis of the context behind this dichotomy provides us with the background to read the Bible. Based on Mullen's work, one can understand the Bible as a document teeming with ideology, whose main purpose is to create Israelite ethnic identity (though there are competing claims within the Bible as to the nature of that identity). With this meta-understanding of the Bible as a backdrop, it is time to consider our strategies of reading.

READING WITH INTENT: ETHICAL CRITICISM AND THEORY

Ideally, what one reads affects how one chooses to live. Reading has the power to transform: to alter conceptions, visions and action. When done with intent, reading has the power to influence how to respond to the world and how to understand history. Yet, reading does not always function so romantically. Often it is possible to read thoughtlessly—an article here, a book there—with little or no impact. It would be foolish to ignore the many people for whom reading has no emotional or intellectual effect, those who read rarely and do not pause to consider the implications of reading. It is also important to remember that just because reading can affect living, reading does not always affect living positively. Sadly, it is all too easy to think of individuals who have begun campaigns of murder, terror, and havoc due to being "inspired" by reading. Reading is not always the impetus for beneficial transformation.

I recognize that reading does not always galvanize thoughtfulness as I might hope it would, but I also realize that there remains a speech community of readers committed to reading critically. This thesis is for those who are committed to reading with intention and for those who want to learn. Reading responsibly means considering the implications of how we use and share what we read. As responsible readers, we can evaluate the ethics of texts. In addition to arriving at ethical judgments, we can consider how we reach our conclusions and how we determine how responsible our methodology is. In this section, I present four contemporary scholars whose works help create a responsible reading

strategy that has room for discussions about unpalatable aspects of the Jewish canon. Taken together these scholars can provide a way to read our canon.

BOOTH AND NUSSBAUM: WHAT TO READ AND HOW TO READ?

Ethical criticism, as Wayne C. Booth and as Martha Nussbaum understand it, assumes that what we read can affect our thoughts and actions; therefore, we must take care in choosing, evaluating and transmitting what we read.[3] Both individuals take it upon themselves to consider the ways in which we can determine what we want to read and how we think about what we have already read.

Ethical criticism relies upon the reader's careful and thoughtful analysis, basing itself on our understandings of our community and culture at a particular moment in time (Booth 488). Booth leaves open the possibility that our ethical readings might change over time, but he does suggest that some analyses will remain more constant. Booth acknowledges categories of literature that can be considered ethically acceptable and ethically problematic by the majority. Yet, he is more concerned with how we approach the more ambiguous middle category of classical works with ethically problematic aspects. Booth accepts that how we react ethically might change moderately over time and simply advocates self-awareness when looking for literature to be part of our canon (ibid).

Ethical criticism does not make any false claims to impartiality (Booth 24). Rather, it relies on readers' subjective impressions and analyses. Unlike deconstructionism, which proposes interpretations *ad infinitum*, ethical criticism

[3] Despite both Booth and Nussbaum's endorsement of ethical criticism, they do not shy away from noting its pitfalls, especially when used without nuance.

allows readers to embrace the ability to take a stand regarding the quality of a text. It also opens the door for a reader's ethics to enter into dialogue with the impressions of other readers rather than stand in opposition to other readings.

For Booth and Nussbaum, ethical criticism focuses not only on the relationship of the reader to the text but on a more complex system of symbioses between reader and text. Booth identifies three different voices to whom every reader—no matter how naïve—is always reacting: "That of the immediate teller, or narrator who takes the whole tale straight and who expects the listener to do the same; that of the implied author, who knows that the telling is in one sense an artificial construct but who takes responsibility for it . . . ; and the inferable voice of the flesh-and-blood person for whom this telling is only one concentrated moment selected from the infinite complexities of 'real' life" (Booth 125). This triad of authorial voices allows for more nuance in the discussion of what (if any) responsibility an author has to his or her audience. In addition to the three authorial voices, Booth denotes a reader's three voices: "That of the immediate believer, who pretends that this story is happening . . . ; that of the one who 'knows' even if only unconsciously, that he or she is dwelling in a selected, concentrated and hence in some sense 'unreal' or 'artificial' world; and that of the flesh-and-blood person whose extra-narrative life, though perhaps forgotten for the duration of the listening, impinges on it in myriad untraceable ways" (ibid). Booth suggests that ethical criticism deals with the relationship between the implied author and the actual reader. The author has a responsibility in creating the implied author, just as the reader has a responsibility in choosing what to read and in how to interact with that text (Booth 125). No matter how old a text is or

how many have previously read it, each reader interacts with a text when reading critically, by asking questions of the text and challenging it.

Booth and Nussbaum are careful not to suggest ethical criticism as the only possible reading for a text or to insist that there cannot be a spectrum of ethics in a single work (Linder 11). Furthermore, Booth suggests that as readers we must acknowledge "that all statements of truth are partial . . . and [embrace] the very plurality that from other perspectives may seem threatening. We not only recognize that there are many true narratives; we celebrate the multiplicity, recognizing that to be bound to any one story would be to surrender most of what we care for" (Booth 345). This partiality allows for a tradition of multiculturalism and multivocality.

In cultures that have bodies of literature, each and every generation participates in the creation and maintenance of its canon(s). As such, as readers, each of us has a responsibility to choose what we read and how we read. As Nussbaum notes, we are judged (and can judge ourselves) by the company we keep, and by the texts we choose to influence our lives and the messages we pass on to later generations (Nussbaum 234). Booth and Nussbaum recognize that as texts affect us, they come to make significant changes in the lives of their readers. As readers, we take on the role of the intermediary between the text and how it is manifest in the world. Booth and Nussbaum implore us to take this responsibility seriously.

Booth's considerations of ethical criticism began with an incident with a colleague at the University of Chicago in the late 1960s. Paul Moses, an African-American professor, felt uncomfortable teaching Huckleberry Finn due to racism

in Mark Twain's portrayal of Jim. Moses' colleagues, including Booth, could not believe Moses would not want to teach such a classic piece of literature. Booth began the thought process which eventually led to the book The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction, with the assumption that "teachers should concern themselves with what a novel might *do* to a student" (Booth 4).

Based on Booth's experience with Paul Moses, Booth became determined to examine his own canon, to see how the literature in it might affect him and others. As modern, liberal Jews, we can use Booth's approach to examine our own canon, including our biblical literature. As Jews, we are heirs to centuries of written tradition, some of which is astonishingly beautiful and relevant and some of which is contrary to our modern, liberal ethics. What do we do when our canon introduces themes like divinely-ordered genocide? Do we ignore it? Do we, in the vein of Paul Moses, decide to stop teaching it at all? Booth's concept of ethical criticism provides us with an alternative route for reading and evaluating aspects of the Bible.

RORTY: SOLIDARITY BASED ON CONTINGENCY

Philosopher Richard Rorty's triad of contingency, irony and solidarity is a non-foundationalist, non-relativistic theory of approaching philosophy and the world. He believes that the apparent paradox of avoiding both foundationalism and relativism is not actually a paradox. Moreover, he proposes a new way of ordering the world and our relationships in it. Although Rorty counters the common assumption that essential or universal truth exists, he does not leave us

to flounder in attempts to cling to vestiges of meaning. Rorty creates an alternative, constructed way to find meaning while rejecting essentialism.

In contrast to Rorty's ideas, a culturally dominant notion is that truth exists independent of people. For example, many religionists believe that religion is the revealed word of God, or more specifically, that the Bible is the revealed word of God. This foundational belief becomes the basis for a host of other beliefs and actions, such as what the purpose of humanity is, how to act on a daily basis, or how to regard each word of the biblical text. Such a belief is essentialist, because it creates a premise that becomes the basis for how one relates to the world. Rorty opposes essentialist notions of truth, instead creating a constructivist approach beginning with his concept of contingency. Rorty defines contingency as the reality that "there is nothing 'beneath' socialization or prior to history which is definatory of the human" (xiii). Nothing can exist in a vacuum: no person, event, or philosophical outlook. If nothing can exist independently of the world around it, then there are no essential truths or universal ideas. For example, the concept that murder is wrong may be a good principle, but it is contingent on the societies and communities in which it exists. Although most human communities have laws preventing murder and many modern communities see all humans as equal, these ideas do not exist as absolute truths. Everything, from how we conceive of history to our religions to our relationships, is contingent on where we are born and how we live. Rorty further points out that even our use of language—the very tool that helps us to shape, explain and understand our reality—is contingent. Rorty suggests "that we try *not* to want something which stands beyond institutions and history" (189). We must look

into our own circumstances to find ways to create meaning. The realization that our beliefs are contingent could lead us to relativism, but Rorty chooses to take his argument in a different direction.

Conventionally, irony is the additional meaning that occur when a definition of a word includes something other than its literal meaning. Rorty devotes the second section of his argument to irony and modifies the definiton. Rorty calls an ironist "one who fulfills three conditions: (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses . . . (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself" (73). For Rorty, our reality is shaped by the vocabulary we have available to us, and therefore our thinking is also limited by our vocabulary. Thus, we are contingent upon our vocabulary, as our vocabulary shapes our thoughts and their limitations. Recognizing the limitations of vocabulary makes someone an ironist, for he or she realizes that there are multiple ways of understanding the world, based on the contingencies of language alone (let alone other contingencies). Last, just as an ironist recognizes that as each of us is contingent, so too are all of us contingent. We are *all* limited by our contingency on language, and we are united in this limitation.

The third section of Rorty's argument is his solution to the problems caused by our becoming ironists and realizing our contingency. If universal truth or absolute morality does not exist, then how do we go about creating meaning and relationships in our lives? Rorty's answer is his concept of solidarity. He

calls solidarity "something within each of us—our essential humanity—which resonates to the presence of this same thing in other human beings" (189). Rorty suggests that we can find solidarity by finding recognizable others, and by seeing aspects of ourselves in them. In identifying and relating to others our shared humanity can unite us. The concept of 'essential humanity' is foundationalist if one believes that the concept is inalienable or divinely bestowed.

Rorty, ever the ironist, recognizes the contingency of the idea of shared humanity and posits that we can all recognize the commonality of our shared contingencies. For Rorty, the concept of human solidarity does not arise out of a foundationalist concept of underlying humanity but out of the common recognition that we can all feel defeat, humiliation, loss and hope. Rorty suggests that "my position is *not* incompatible with urging that we try to extend our sense of 'we' to people whom we have previously thought of as 'they'" (192). Rorty's hope in solidarity is that the concept can be a constructivist approach to positive ends: creating compassion and decreasing cruelty.

Ultimately, Rorty's primary point is that "a belief can still regulate action . . . among people who are quite aware that belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance" (189). One can recognize that a belief is contingent and still choose to hold it, because the belief can lead to great good. We can identify with others who live in a far off country, living under alien, impoverished conditions. We can find that we have shared emotional experiences, not because these experiences are foundational to humanity but because at one point or another, we all happen to experience a breadth of emotional responses. Rorty's suggestion of accepting the concept of human solidarity, contingent as it

may be, can help us feel more connected with others who live far different lives than we do. The outcome of Rorty's argument, regulated by a careful thought process, can have beneficial consequences. One way to envision Rorty's concept of solidarity is to act *as if* we, as humans, share an essential humanity. We can be ironists, understanding that we are contingent, and yet also believe that compassion, attention, and education, all byproducts of the goal of solidarity, can make our world a gentler, more thoughtful and self-aware place.

BENHABIB: CONSIDERING OUR CULTURE AND OTHERS' CULTURES

Seyla Benhabib approaches culture as a constructivist, believing that there is no essential element in social entities. Based on her constructivist approach, Benhabib regards cultures as porous entities, which she explains in her book The Claims of Culture. Such an approach allows movement between cultures, identification with other cultures and the understanding that culture is contingent. This third idea is in line with Rorty. Benhabib's discussion of culture creates a framework in which to view the Israelite goals of creating and sustaining culture and ethnicity through the Deuteronomic corpus and to compare it to our own religious culture and approach to these same texts today.

The Western historical tradition has created a binary distinction between culture and civilization. Culture "represents the shared values, meanings, linguistic signs, symbols of a people, itself considered a unified and homogenous entity" (2). Culture, by this definition, creates identity and defines how individuals fit into a larger group. In contrast, civilization "refers to material values and practices that are shared with other peoples and do not reflect

individuality" (2). Civilization is the broader systems of laws and morals shared by people. Benhabib argues that separating the concepts of culture and civilization is detrimental.

The problem with approaching culture as a homogenous entity is that it is an essentialist concept of culture. The primary problem with a distinction between binary culture and civilization is that it has a poor epistemological premise: "(1) That cultures are clearly delineable wholes; (2) that cultures are congruent with population groups and that a noncontroverisal description of the culture of a human group is possible; and (3) even if cultures and groups do not stand in a one-to-one correspondence" (Benhabib 4). The idea that cultures are entities with precise borders and descriptions is problematic and foundationalist. Too simplistic concepts of cultures falsely suggest that culture is a static entity. Furthermore, the notion of a homogenous culture diminishes culture as the property of a specific group or race (ibid). Benhabib stresses that a different way of thinking about culture is necessary.

Benhabib proposes a constructivist model of culture. Instead of beginning with the idea that cultures are abstract and discrete entities, she suggests thinking of culture as a web which is constantly interacting with the webs of other cultures. Benhabib writes, "Any view of cultures as clearly delineable wholes is a view from the outside that generates coherences for the purposes of understanding and control . . . From within, a culture need not appear as a whole" (5). A culture can have subcultures within it; a single culture can have many different, sometimes contradictory descriptions; cultures' boundaries are porous; it is not clear how to demarcate where one culture ends and another begins.

The idea that a culture's boundaries are fluid can be difficult for those inside a culture to accept. It is easier for an outsider of a particular culture to describe the clear boundaries of that culture. Benhabib notes, "To possess the culture means to be an insider. Not to be acculturated in the appropriate way is to be an outsider. Hence the boundaries of cultures are always securely guarded, their narratives purified, their rituals carefully monitored. These boundaries circumscribe power in that they legitimize its use within the group" (7). The authority to define who is inside or outside of the group constitutes a kind of social power. Firm cultural boundaries can control how safe group members feel within a group and can indicate the degree of anxiety group members feel about interacting with other groups.

Based on her constructivist model, Benhabib only has three criteria for cultures today that generate the understanding that culture is not absolute and has permeable borders. These aspects are not essentialist, because they are not intrinsic to any culture; rather, they are created to allow access and for people to be treated well. Benhabib's criteria are egalitarian responsibility, voluntary self-ascription, and freedom of exit and association (19). These criteria allow cultures to lend themselves to living pluralistically around other cultures.

Benhabib views "human cultures as constant creations, recreations, and negotiations of imaginary boundaries between 'we' and the 'other(s)'" (8). Conceptualizing or identifying with the other, especially when that other seems particularly foreign, can be difficult. Benhabib suggests that cultures help us in the endeavor of relating to the other, because cultures can give us models of relationships within and beyond. By reminding us of the creation of culture,

Benhabib promotes the approach of viewing culture as a construction rather than as an absolute entity. If culture is a construction, then we all have the power to move beyond it, to relate to one another with respect and kindness. Benhabib's concept of interaction is similar to Rorty's concept of solidarity, as they are both constructivist with the goals of generating compassion and connectedness.

Towards A Reading Strategy

Booth, Nussbaum, Rorty and Benhabib advocate reading with purpose. As Benhabib argues, cultures and communities do not need to be viewed as monolithic entities but are accessible to all. This concept implies that one should not define culture by essentialist definitions, even though members of a given culture might find comfort in the ease of such definitions. As we learn through reading Mullen, the Israelites attempted to define their culture by essentialist boundary markers, preferring to have a clear prescription for identity and action.

The next chapter explores four interconnected biblical motifs regarding the nature of Israelite identity, using Mullen's work as a background for interpretation. It models critical reading, using approaches proposed by Booth, Nussbaum, Rorty and Benhabib.

LAND, COVENANT AND ISRAELITE ETHNICITY IN THE BIBLE

Having explored ethical criticism and how a strategy of reading can focus one's interpretation, this chapter uses the tools of ethical criticism to deal with the implications of ideology of land. Booth, Nussbaum, Rorty and Benhabib see the importance of creating communities based on values of compassion, hope, and solidarity. This chapter examines the extent to which four biblical motifs create communities based on these values. Reading and asking questions about the implications of this literature can take place with the lens of ethical criticism. This chapter investigates motival elements that, taken together, create a fuller picture of the relationship between the covenant, the land and Israelite ethnicity. Four motifs combine to demonstrate the development of Israelite peoplehood: the promise of the land, the concept of milk and honey, the displacement of other nations, and the concept of sacred spaces tied to the land through altars.

PROMISE OF THE LAND MOTIF

The biblical themes of land and ethnicity are not treated consistently throughout the Bible. In some places the Israelites are promised land, wealth and progeny unconditionally, while in other places the Israelites' ability to dwell in their land depends on their ability to follow God's commandments. Such different approaches to land and covenant (unconditional versus conditional) relate to the biblical authors' treatment of ethnicity and group boundaries.

The covenant between God and the Israelites that is the basis for a biblical narrative begins in Gen. 12:1-8 where God creates an unconditional covenant with

Abram. All that Abram must do to engender a large, famous nation is to follow God's directions regarding ritual practice. In addition, by following God Abram is guaranteed protection by God: he will be blessed and his enemies cursed. Last, through the covenant God will lead Abram to a land for his people, Canaan (12:5). Nothing in this passage suggests the notion that this land will one day be divinely-ordained for the Israelites, Abram's descendents.

Towards the end of the book of Genesis (48:20-22) Jacob blesses Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Menasseh, before Jacob's death. During the blessing, Jacob tells his son that God will continue to be with him and that eventually, God will bring Joseph back to "the land of [his] fathers" (48:21). This passage does not indicate anything about Joseph's descendents, but we can infer that if Joseph returns to Canaan, then so too will his family. This passage says nothing of time frame for this return. Furthermore, there is nothing conditional in this promise. Nothing must be done for God to return Joseph and his family to Canaan; it is simply an unconditional promise that will occur in the abstract future.

The covenant thus begins as an unconditional promise to Abram/Abraham. According to Moshe Weinfeld, the covenant with Abraham in Genesis is based on a grant treaty, in which the master obligates himself to his servant. In Genesis, God promises land, wealth and progeny to Abraham. The only obligation that Abraham has in return is that he must be faithful to God. The Deuteronomic authors shift the covenant model from a grant treaty to a vassal treaty, in which the vassal is obligated to serve the suzerain. For the Israelites, this means that the burden of action shifts from God to them, in the form of ritual commitment (Promise 74-81). Weinfeld writes, "Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic school

made both the grant of the Land and the promise of dynasty conditional on observance of the Law—in their view the most dominant and fateful factor in the history of Israel" (Deuteronomic School 81). As part of the conditional covenant, the gift of land becomes conditional. Maintaining and protecting the land and its borders comes to have utmost importance. The Torah uses the plot of the patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt and the journey in the wilderness to the promised land to anchor the shift from unconditional to conditional covenant. The events are framed historically and are meant to suggest that the move from unconditional to conditional covenant was not a change in Israelite ideology but rather the result of historical circumstance and Israelite action. The story of the Torah thus transforms the Israelite relationship to the land.

In the beginning of Exodus (6:1-8), God appears to Moses to explain the covenant. This explanation of covenant is tied more to plot than are the previous introductions to land and covenant. Because of Moses' commitment to the covenant, he will allow the covenant to become part of the national dialogue. Yet, the Israelites do not listen to Moses prompting God to appear to both Moses and Aaron. The plot could progress without this detail, but this passage serves to energize Moses (and to re-energize the reader) about the future and the concept of the covenant with God. God makes unconditional promises to Moses (and by extension, to the Israelites): a return to Canaan, now conceived of as their own land. God also adds the concept of freeing the Israelites from slavery, as this must happen to enable them to journey to the promised land. In return, the Israelites do not need to do anything; they can simply accept God's promises.

The dream of living in the land becomes feasible in Numbers, as the Israelites' wilderness journey brings them closer to the promise of a permanent destination. Numbers 34:1-15 describes a map of Israel's destination. This passage maps out the land, denoting what is promised to the Israelites and which land will go directly to whom. In the passage, Num. 34:2b-12 likely was once a single, cohesive document that the Torah's redactors added information to later (Levine Numbers 21-36 538). Different tribes are assigned different plots of land, which is counter-intuitive as Israel does not yet possess the land. Despite the minutiae of land allotments, at no point does God demand anything in return from the Israelites. According to this passage, this land will simply be given to the Israelites when they arrive. As presented in Num. 34, the land is just waiting for the Israelites. Though there will be battles, the outcome is predetermined by God.

At other times in the biblical literature, the covenant is not presented as such a simple gift from God to the Israelites. Genesis 17:1-14 begins the concept that the covenant is conditional upon the Israelites' willingness and ability to follow God's commandments. This passage lays out the covenant between God and Abraham more specifically than in Gen. 12. This entire passage is redactional overlay, which is used to link discrete narratives together. The redactional overlay is not tied directly to any plot developments in Genesis, except insofar as to change Abraham's name and to push the thematic development of covenant forward. The notice of Abraham's age in Gen. 17:1 serves to connect the stories of the patriarchs in Genesis; yet with a different opening line, the story could be supplanted into other parts of Abraham's life.

Genesis 14 explains the aspects of the covenant between God and Abraham. God will give Abraham progeny, spawn many nations and maintain the covenant forever. In return, males must be circumcised to show their commitment to the covenant at eight days old and must "walk in [God's] ways and be blameless" (17:1). Here, the concept of covenant is no longer entirely unconditional, nor are the conditions of the covenant entirely precise. Circumcision creates a particular ritual that denotes entry into the covenant. Yet, in contrast to the specific circumcision entrance ritual, the requirements for remaining in the covenant and maintaining it are vague. The verse establishes only the concept of conditionality without elucidating specific acts. The concept of covenantal conditionality is the Israelites' key to maintaining the covenant and remaining in the land.

Despite all of the promises (both conditional and unconditional) from God to the Israelites regarding their future in the land, it is not until the book of Joshua that this promise becomes actualized. Joshua 5:11-12 marks one of the fulfillments of the covenant. As a sign that the Israelites have reached the promised land the manna that has sustained them ceases, and the Israelites must now forage for food on their own. God does not have an active role in this passage; there is no dialogue. The Israelites are not asked to respond to the sign that they have arrived or to do anything for God, not even offer a sacrifice. This passage fits into the plot in Joshua, because stories referencing the collecting of food—of which aplenty has been promised by God—now make sense. The fulfillment of the covenant in Joshua places the responsibility of maintenance upon the Israelites: God's promise is actualized. Now, only the Israelites' actions

will determine the future of the covenant. In this theological framework, the Israelites must choose to follow the covenant or to accept the consequences.

LAND OF MILK AND HONEY MOTIF

The promised land is repeatedly refereened, even as the Israelites are in different stages of their growth as a people and in their journey to dwell in the land. The motif of the land referred to as "the land of milk and honey" first appears in Exodus. Exodus 3:8 is the first reference to the land described this way, defining it as a fertile land of promise. Soon, in Exod. 3:17, divine motivation appears as to why the Israelites go to Canaan. Even though the land is already inhabited by a list of six other nations, the fertility and abundance of the land will end the Israelites' misery. Thus as God's chosen people, they will become owners of a land that does not belong to them. The land as bountiful becomes even more of a real goal in Exod. 13:5, for it becomes a place for the Israelites to reenact the Passover rituals. That the land is inhabited by five other peoples is incidental to the Israelites' claim to the land. Exodus 33:33 connects the displacement of different peoples to the promise of bounty and fertility in the land. The connection between the bounty of the land and the notion that God will displace other peoples to allow the Israelites to live there emphasizes the magnitude of God's covenantal promise to the Israelites.

In Numbers, descriptions of the land's bounty become palpable, as the Israelites near their entrance to the land. Spies even enter the land so that they can report back to the rest of the Israelites. In Num. 13:27, the scouts inform the Israelites that the land is bountiful. According to Jacob Milgrom, the description

of a land of milk and honey is "the traditional phrase for the fruitfulness of the promised land" (104). The passage also mentions some of the peoples who live in the land, including the Amalakites and Anakites, who are not usually mentioned with lists of displaced nations. Only a few verses later, in Num. 14:8, the bounty of the land is mentioned in association with the conditionality of the covenant. The Israelites complain; Moses and Aaron are frustrated. Joshua reminds the Israelites of a series of conditions and their consequences: if the Israelites follow God's laws, then God will be pleased with them, and they will live in this land of plenty. The covenant is enticing, particularly because the land itself is so desirable.[4]

In Deuteronomy, the Israelites begin to receive more specific instructions regarding their relationship with the land and their imminent entrance into it. Deuteronomy 6:3 makes clear the Israelites' growing responsibility for the land. The Israelites' ability to live in this land of promise depends on their ability to follow God's commandments. This concept is laid out so clearly that the reverse also becomes clear: if the Israelites fail to follow God's commandments, then their ability to live in the promised land is jeopardized. In addition to the emphasis on conditionality, Deut. 11:8-12 adds that the land is divinely protected and maintained. In Egypt, the quality of the land was dependent on work put into it. In contrast, the promised land is maintained with God's help, as is the case

[4] The milk and honey motif appears one other time and is puzzling. Numbers 16:13 contrasts with every other passage in the Bible that regards the Promised Land as a land of bounty, for this verse refers to Egypt, not Canaan, as the land of bounty. Datan and Abiram, angry and rebelling, complain to Moses about the problems of desert wandering. They are so incensed to be wandering in the desert that they call Egypt the land of milk and honey. It is not clear if the use of this motif in reverse is a mistake or if it has another purpose. Milgrom suggests that Datan and Abiram contradict Moses, saying that the Israelites will perish in the wilderness and that life was better in Egypt (133).

with respect to the correct amount of rain. Thus, the ability to stay in the land depends on the covenant and God's continuing good will towards both the covenant and the Israelites. Every season of crops reflects the quality of the Israelites' relationship with God; the status of the land is a sign for the Israelites of how well they are following God's laws and to what extent they should change their ways. Deuteronomy 26:1-15 gives specific to the Israelites' first crops of the land's bounty. These instructions come before they enter the land, rather than for an immediate event. The first fruits belong to God, emphasizing who it is who makes the harvest possible and the reciprocity of the covenant. In addition to directives regarding the fertility of the land, the Israelites receive advice regarding how to enter the land, even though they had already received prescriptions regarding how to act once there is a harvest in the land. Deuteronomy 27:1-18 details what the Israelites should do immediately upon crossing the Jordan River. This passage also combines the conditionality of directions with the unconditional promises to the patriarchs in the third verse of the passage.

In book of Joshua the Israelites finally arrive in their long-promised land. Joshua 5:5-6 retells the history of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. It presents a different perspective on the wilderness sojourn and arrival into the land. This author suggests that God grows so angry with the Israelites that they should not enter the land, based on the Israelites' great disobedience. This passage seems to be separate from the verses which follow it, which chronicle the Israelites' finally arriving in the land, the conclusion of their survival on manna and the knowledge that they are on holy ground. While not meshing logically together, these two juxtaposed scenes describe a different vision of the land than is usually illustrated.

This dichotomy of God's anger in the detail of Israel's wilderness adventures and the Israelite conquest of their promised land exemplify differing biblical notions of Israelite history. While the Book of Joshua has the conquest of the land occur quickly, the Book of Judges details the conquest of the land in many small battles. Likewise, there are different approaches to the Israelites' wilderness sojourn: some detailed and others with little or no awareness of any considerable time spent in the wilderness. Within the larger biblical story of Israelite ethnic history are multiple, competing voices, each with different versions and visions of the people's story.

The Displacement of Other Nations Motif

The displacement motif consists of the biblical authors' treatment of other nations and the promised land. These other nations will be dispelled by either the Israelites or by God in order to make room for the Israelites to spread out through the land and to live there without any threats or interactions with other peoples.

This motif begins in Gen. 15:1-21, a textual insertion which foreshadows the rest of the Torah. In this passage, God speaks to Abraham and details the covenant with him. Before the conversation, God requires Abraham to gather a series of animals and make a sacrifice to God. Abraham thus already acts to honor God and to obey God. God reiterates the concept of the gift of land as the culmination of the covenant. Yet, Gen. 15 differs from all other passages about the covenant in Genesis, for it notes that the fulfillment of the covenant will be delayed. Genesis 15:13 mentions a four hundred year enslavement in Egypt

before the Israelites will come to the land. This passage was clearly added later and is not intrinsic to any plot in Genesis; if anything, it runs counter to the plot development. Abraham never tells any of his descendents about this aspect of the covenant. One would expect that if any of the patriarchs had known of a four hundred year enslavement, they might have tried to avoid going to Egypt or at least attempted to prepare their people for slavery.

The second unique aspect of this passage is that God mentions Israel's eventual displacement of ten nations: "The Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites" (Gen 15:19-21). The list of ten nations is the longest list of displaced nations mentioned in the Bible. There are seventeen lists of nations, most with slight variations of nations and with between six and ten nations per list. According to commentator Nahum Sarna, "The Kenites, Kenizites, Kadmonites and Rephaim appear on no other list, while the Hivites who are featured everywhere else are not included here" (Genesis 115). This passage does not state how these nations will be displaced but assumes that it will happen. Abraham has no reaction to either the statement of delayed fulfillment or to the displacement of the nations. Biblical scholars' commentaries on this passage focus only on the presumed origins, etymology and geographical locations of these ten listed nations (Sarna Genesis 115; Etz Hayim 85; Plaut 110).

The covenant and the themes of land acquisition and displacement of other nations continue in Exod 3:1-10, as God creates a relationship with Moses at the burning bush. Moses' introduction to the covenant differs from Abraham's introduction. God begins by noting a connection to the patriarchs, even though

Moses has ostensibly never heard of them, having not yet discovered the depths of his Israelite roots. In contrast to the Genesis themes, God explains to Moses only the land aspect of the covenant, with no mention of the wealth and progeny promised to Abraham. The text explains God's appearance to Moses as God finally notes Moses and the Israelites' suffering. There is no mention of a covenantal promise to protect the Israelites, as was promised to Abraham in Gen. 12. The writers of this passage appear to have no knowledge of the idea that Israel's enemies are God's enemies. God has decided that the time has arrived for brining come the Israelites to their promised land—a land flowing with milk and honey, which is also home to six nations: "the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites" (Exod. 3:8). This grouping of nations is different from that mentioned in Gen. 15, though the meaning of the passages are the same: both passages simply note nations that will be displaced so that the Israelites can live in a land of plenty. Yet, this passage makes no mention of how these nations will be displaced or who will do the displacing. Mainstream contemporary scholars who comment on this do not note any ethical issues at play here; rather, they focus on the geography and diversity of ancient Israel and the origins of some of the nations (Sarna Exodus 16; Etz Hayim 329; Plaut 399). Only Sarna alludes to implied issues of Israelite settlement: that for most of Israel's history, the land was ruled by a diversity of powers, rather than by a single power (Exodus 16).[5]

Once the Israelites are wandering in the desert, God instructs them via Moses regarding a panoply of laws and ritual observances. Exodus 23:20-33 is a

[5] Two notable exceptions to this statement are the Second Jewish Commonwealth and the modern State of Israel.

violent description of God's promises to the Israelites for covenantal protection while they wander through the wilderness and into the promised land. The passage is initiated with the concept of an angel, sent by God, who must consistently be obeyed. In return, God will attack the Israelites' enemies and protect them. This annihilation of other nations follows similar wording from Gen 12, but the concept is different here: there is a greater emphasis on conditionality, as the Israelites' actions play a larger role in determining how God (or the angel) will protect them. In addition to protection against enemies, God promises the Israelites fertility with a slew of other promises that seem almost too good to be true.

Once the Israelites are ready to arrive in the land, God pledges to displace the "Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites" (Exod. 23:23). In contrast to other passages where God promises the Israelites that they will be protected and their success will be guaranteed as they fight other nations, this passage promises that God will defeat the nations. In a repetition of the plague motif, the Canaanites, the Hittites and the Hivites will all be driven out via plagues from God. According to Weinfeld, the arguments for displacing the nations is couched in religious language as to make them part of the covenant and therefore palatable. Furthermore, this passage's introductions of blessings and curses with regard to Israel and its enemies are used as an entry point for a larger discussion on the following commandments (Weinfeld, Deut. 1-11 80).

With regard to the displacement of other nations mentioned in these verses, both the Etz Hayim, the Conservative Movement's Torah commentary,

and Gunther Plaut, author of the Reform Movement's Torah commentary, take note. Plaut avoids the ethical issues altogether, commenting only that the list of nations in Exod. 23 happens to match the list of displaced nations in Exod. 3:8 (589). Etz Hayim gives a reason to the words "You [Israel] will drive them [the nations] out" (Exod. 23:31), by commenting that "[Israel], the young nation, still struggling to form its identity as God's covenanted people, remained too vulnerable to the temptation of paganism" (475). The Conservative movement thus creates a theological response to this textual issue and justifies the displacement. Israel is not perceived as a perpetrator, because Israel is justified in the actions that Israel takes in order to build and maintain its identity. Weinfeld, in contrast to Etz Hayim, only notes the religious associations behind the displacement, writing, "All laws concerning the dispossession of the Canaanites are combined with warnings against worshiping idols, and these warnings are even used as points of departure for the commandments for dispossession" (Promise 80).

The theme of annihilation by God is repeated in Exod. 33:1-3 when God reiterates the concept that the other nations will soon be destroyed as the Israelites enter the land. In this case, the nations that will be destroyed are the same list as earlier in Exodus: "Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites" (Exod. 33:2), though the order of naming the nations is different. God also reiterates the beginnings of the covenant with the patriarchs and the promise of land to their descendents as the motive for bringing the Israelites to the Promised Land through the wilderness. Yet, this God is angrier than is the God in similar passages. Here, God seems to

be warning the Israelites that even though they are not making God happy, God will maintain the covenant out of respect for their ancestors.

Despite the poor behavior of the Israelites in the desert, particularly in the incident with the Golden Calf, God sustains the covenant with the Israelites. Again, God speaks to Moses on Mount Sinai and gives Moses a variety of requirements for the Israelites to obey. In return for obeisance, God will "work such wonders as have not been wrought on all the earth or in any nation" (Exod. 34:10). Such is the basis of the covenant here. The example of displacement of six other nations is God's symbol of power and protection for the Israelites. Weinfeld notes that God's displacement of the six nations and the prohibition against the Israelites create a covenant with any of the peoples in Canaan functions to prohibit social contact with other peoples (Weinfeld, Deut. 1-11 181). The fear of contact with the other nations stems from the worry that if the Israelites have contact with other peoples, then they might be easily persuaded to begin worshipping different nations' gods and betray their covenant with God from Mount Sinai. Israel will not need to have contact or fight with these nations; God will annihilate these nations on behalf of the Israelites. The idea and responsibility for the action lies with God alone, though the benefit is to Israel.

In Leviticus, in the midst of chapters of laws, there is a passage describing the land as alive (Lev. 20:22-24). God warns the Israelites that if they do not obey God, the land will "spew [them] out" (Lev. 20:22). The concept here is that the beauty of the land fits the beauty of the Israelite people, set apart and chosen by God. In this passage, in contrast to other passages, the emphasis is on God's

abhorrence of the displaced peoples. In the other passages, it is not clear how God regards the displaced nations; if anything, the emotion seems to be cold distance. Emphasized here is the idea that the Israelites are entitled to receive the land because they have been *chosen* by God, not based on the quality of their past deeds or behaviors. They are chosen because, unlike the other peoples, the Israelites have not done anything detestable. The implication is that the other peoples are not deserving of such an abundant land.

The Book of Deuteronomy teems with passages regarding the displacement and annihilation of other peoples upon the Israelites' entrance to their promised land. Perhaps because the entrance to the land becomes ever closer in Deuteronomy, increasing time is spent on how the Israelites are to dwell in the land and on the connection between the Israelites' ability to live in the land and their covenant with God, exemplified by God's displacement of the other nations. The book begins with a superscription before Moses' first address to the Israelites (Deut. 1:1-5). According to Weinfeld, the long introduction needed for Moses' speech here indicates the compositional nature of the book (Deut. 1-11 129). This passage further serves to create a geographic orientation and to reiterate the successes of past battles, won with the direction and help of God. Presumably, the ease of these battles foreshadows the ease of the upcoming battles of the land for the Israelites.

Moses' first Deuteronomic speech begins with a historical survey of the Israelites, as they encamp just outside of the land (1:6-3:29). Deuteronomy 1:8 connects the unconditional covenant in Genesis to the entrance to the land: the Israelites must travel to take the land, but they need not fear, because this process

is part of the covenant. Yet, just a few verses later (1:12), Moses makes comments about the Israelites' bickering. One moment there is great hope and optimism for the future; the next moment there is annoyance and anger at the failings of the Israelites, a dichotomy perhaps mirrored in the emotions regarding living in exile.

The beginning of Deut. 2 makes a special distinction for the people of Seir, identified as Esau's descendants and the Moabites. The passage makes clear that this land is not part of the covenantal promise to the Israelites and that this land is not for their taking. One possibility is that the people of Seir and Moab are prominent peoples, and the Israelites do not want to alienate them. Such a theory creates a contrast with the different lists of displaced nations, who were either weak or did not actually exist. Moses' story attempts to convince the Israelites of God's power, dedication to the covenant and promise of land to them. Yet, the Deuteronomist depicts a "generation of unbelievers who do not trust in God's promise" (Weinfeld, Deut. 1-11 144). Distrust continues as a theme and also provides a motivation as to why the Israelites do not follow God's laws once in the land, foreshadowing the exile. According to Weinfeld, the support for the Israelites in their battles is a popular theme in Ancient Near Eastern stories of land acquisition (Deut. 1-11 189). The theme of battles begins with the implicit inheritance of the land in the battle of Sihon and continues through Deuteronomy and Joshua (Weinfeld, Deut. 1-11 176).

At the end of Deut. 3, the Deuteronomist confirms that Moses will not enter the land with the Israelites. This passage is a repetition of Num. 27:12-23, but a theological change occurs. In the Numbers passage, Moses is not allowed to

enter the land, because of his failure to follow God's directives in the rock and water incident. In the Deuteronomy passage, however, Moses is not allowed to enter the land, not because of his own sins but because of the sins of the entire people (Weinfeld, Deut. 1-11 192). This move from individual punishment to group punishment for individual sins reflects the Deuteronomist's ideology and provides a prototype for the Isrealites' exile.

Deuteronomy 4:1-40 is an example of God acting against the Israelites who are idolatrous, meant to warn the Israelites of the gravity of keeping the covenant. Those Israelites who worship at Baal-peor are not only no longer part of the Israelite people but are killed. This event is brought up to emphasize that Israelites who accept the covenant and then do not follow it will be punished. This part of Moses' speech changes from his earlier words in Deut. 1-3. Rather than recount details of history here, the majority of Moses' words focus on God's grand acts of salvation and instruct the people of their religious ideology. The Deuteronomist may be using this passage to emphasize how one should approach religion and the importance of following it, which would make sense at a time when adherence to religion may not have been a priority to Israelites trying to find their way in the Diaspora. The passage also raises the issues of governance and motivation: who will fill these roles after Moses dies (Weinfeld, Deut. 1-11 115 and 121).

The introduction to and beginning of the Decalogue, Deut. 5:1-10 accentuates the importance of every generation of Israelites pledging to observe the covenant. Deuteronomy 5:3 emphasizes that God does not make the covenant with any ancestors but rather with the contemporary generation of

Israelites. The implication is that these Israelites then become responsible for accepting and maintaining the covenant, not only as a people but with their new conditional ownership of the land. This is a brilliant move by the Deuteronomist, for it insinuates that there is no escaping the Israelites' responsibility for their deeds. The Israelites' acceptance of a covenant with God emphasizes that they must not have relationships with any other peoples or their religious practices. The covenant represents an exclusive relationship. The Deuteronomist stresses that any violation of God's covenant will lead to anger and destruction of the people (Mullen, Narrative 66). Such pointed prominence of actions and their effects foreshadows the eventual expulsion from the land. As a document written in exile, these words present a theological and historical way to understand the exile.

Repeatedly in Deuteronomy, the text stresses the importance of individual allegiance to the covenant. Deuteronomy 6:4-25, better known liturgically as the *Shema* and *V'ahavta*, stresses the concepts of reward-punishment theology and of individual responsibility for the collective, conditional covenant. There is no halfway here: allegiance demands following every aspect of these commandments precisely. Although this document emphasizes the power of individuals rather than the power of the priestly class, the nuance of following the letter of the law is essential as it is in priestly documents. Conversely, if individuals fail to maintain the covenant, they can negatively affect the entire community. The Deut. 5 Decalogue and the displacement of the nations assume the propensity for idol worship.

Deuteronomy 7:1-26 is one of the most extended and explicit passages in the Torah regarding the displacement of other nations. This passage marks the Israelites' responsibilities regarding the defeat of these nations: they must be careful not only to destroy them, but also not to intermarry or tear down their religious sites. These directions are more specific than are other passages regarding annihilation and displacement. The dictates to stay far from intermarriage and idolatry are not the exclusive purview of the Deuteronomist. These values were also important to Israelite priests, who advocated the formation of Israelite ethnic identity, based on ritual practice centered on the Temple cult. The Decalogue in Exod. 34 provides a priestly example of the claims to avoid idolatry and mixing with other ethnic groups. According to David H. Aaron, "The Decalogue of Exod. 34 begins with a commandment against religious assimilation that is mired in acts of destruction meant to bring about cultural and religious differentiation. . . . The Exod. 34 Decalogue is establishing a cultural, cultic and theological loyalty on the basis of ideas for which objects are metonyms" (Etched 296). By looking at the Exod. 34 Decalogue in the context of Deut. 7, it becomes clear that the Torah was composed by individuals of different, yet simultaneous ideological schools, who were united by their mutual goal of the creation of Israelite peoplehood.

Deuteronomy 7 is one of the only passages in the Bible that mentions a full list of seven displaced nations and addresses the Canaanites separately. Most other lists in the Bible list six nations, usually (but not always) eliminating the Girgashites. The two other places with a list of seven nations are in Josh 3:10 and 24:11 (Weinfeld, Deut. 1-11 362). As for the Canaanites, Weinfeld notes that the

Canaanites are to be "exterminated, not expelled" (Deut. 1-11 382). Weinfeld points out the extermination of the Canaanites as an example of symbolic writing: despite such language, the Israelites never exterminated the Canaanites, who we know actually existed. Yet, the emphasis on annihilating the Canaanites is based on twofold reasoning: they will sin, and they will inspire the Israelites to sin (Weinfeld, Deut. 1-11 384). Although none of the other nations is presented as parallel to the Canaanites or are often mentioned with them, often the implication is that they could tempt the Israelites to further sin and prevent them from abiding by the full panoply of laws.

The concept of displacement here is that God will deliver the nations to the Israelites who will then fight and annihilate them without difficulty. In this situation, the Israelites have active roles in displacing the nations. God is involved, and so are the Israelites. The last verses of the chapter reiterate these sentiments: God will make the Israelites' destruction not only possible but a "positive" action. If the Israelites continue the covenant beyond the displacement, then the laws they have been hearing about really go into effect, as do their implications. God reiterates promises of fertility, which were abundant in Genesis, suggesting that if the Israelites follow the laws, everybody will be fertile, and nobody will be sick (Deut. 7:14-15). These verses give an optimistic, if unattainable, picture of life in a promised land.

The statements about the displaced nations are so extreme and prominent in Deut. 7 that modern biblical commentators cannot avoid taking notice. Jeffrey Tigay provides the most comprehensive analysis. Although he does not explicitly write of ethical problems, the existence of his excursus entitled "The Proscription

of the Canaanites" suggests that he sees this as a larger issue to be addressed. He suggests that the Deuteronomist writes of the annihilation of the Canaanites in order to keep the Israelites from marrying them and to keep the Israelites from idolatry (85). Tigay uses Judg. 3:5-6 as evidence that the Israelites did not murder all of the Canaanites and did intermarry and worship their gods; he further notes that this model is Jewish exegetes' and scholars' primary way of dealing with Deut. 7 (85 and 470). He also writes that the rabbis of the Rabbinic Period reinterpreted these biblical verses, for "they regarded this understanding of the law as implausible because it is so harsh and inconsistent with other values . . . they used interpretation to modify and soften the law in deference to other, overriding principles" (472). In contrast to Tigay's direct look at the problems of Deut. 7, Etz Hayim rationalizes the Israelites' actions, because "the exclusive worship of YHVH was the fundamental condition for Israel's survival; leaving the Canaanites alive who might entice the Israelites into idolatry was a matter of life and death" (1030). It appears that the writers of Etz Hayim choose not to acknowledge any degree of ethical difficulty in the Torah. Plaut recognizes the ethical issues in Deut. 7 and attempts to address them. He writes, "These provisions [the directions for displacement and occupation] have to be seen and understood in their own context and must not be judged by the need and experience of a later age. The clash of cultures is a problem in contemporary Israel, and so is the frequent occurrence of mixed marriage in the Diaspora . . . this subject raises questions about the God whom the Torah depicts as commanding 'show them no mercy'" (1376). Plaut, Tigay and Weinfeld attempt to contexualize proscription and annihilation by noting that such treatment of enemy

groups may have been an Ancient Near Eastern custom, as evidenced in particular by the Greeks and Romans and on the Mesha Stone (Plaut 1376; Tigay 471; Weinfeld, Promise 88).

These verses in Deut. 7 also provide a picture of how the Deuteronomist sees the construction of Israelite group identity. As the Deuteronomist describes Israel's duties to destroy other nations and to avoid their rituals, it becomes evident that Israelite identity is constructed in opposition to other groups (Mullen, Narrative 63). The creation of a boundary between the Israelites and the other is a major goal of the Deuteronomist in these verses. This emphasis on boundaries and identity creates a nationalistic attitude on the part of the Israelites that is based on their relationship with God (Mullen, Narrative 63).

Deuteronomy 9:1-29 addresses the Anakite people, who are treated separately from the list of other nations to be annihilated. Here, Moses instructs the Israelites to cross the Jordan and defeat the Anakites. The Anakites are identified as a strong people (surrounded by high walls), who seem ominous. Yet, the Deuteronomist emphasizes that the Israelites have nothing to fear, for God will insure the Israelites' victory. According to this passage, the Israelites must first defeat the Anakites after they cross the Jordan River, though the Anakites are not part of the trope list of six or seven nations. In fact, they are only mentioned with regard to defeat in the land in Num. 13:27, not in any of the other displacement passages. Deuteronomy 9:4 provides an unusual explanation for displacement. In this case, the displacement is not part of the covenant, given as a hope for the Israelites' to obey God's laws. Rather, the displacement is justified, because of the evil of the other nations. This passage creates a different

kind of ethical dilemma: it is not the fault or choice of the Israelites to displace any nations. Displacement happens as a punishment, based on the relationship between these peoples and God. Paradoxically, the Deuteronomist reminds the reader that the Israelites have made God angry too. The example cited is the molten image created by the Israelites when Moses was on Mount Horeb. Yet, for some reason—Moses suggests it is because God thought of the patriarchs rather than the Israelites—God continues the covenant with the Israelites. The concept of salvation for the Israelites is that they are "God's own people" (Deut. 9:29), and God will forgive and maintain the covenant. This sets up a precedent for exile—for both the Israelites and God to maintain the covenant in times of peril.

In the Book of Joshua, the Israelites finally enter the land and become responsible for enacting their part of the covenant: obeying God's laws. Joshua 1:1-11 describes the dramatic continuation of the Israelite people following Moses' death. Joshua becomes Moses' successor, as God speaks through him to the Israelites. Joshua gives the Israelites a pep talk before they cross the Jordan River into the land. This passage reiterates that the land is a divine gift: "Every spot on which your foot treads I give to you, as I promised Moses" (Josh. 1:3). Because the land is a gift, the Israelites should be grateful for the gift and follow the rules of the covenant (Boling and Wright 12).

The land's boundaries (Josh. 1:4) are described as Hittite country. None of the other nations that is mentioned in other passages as to-be-displaced is mentioned here as land-owners. This inconsistency accentuates that the historiography of Canaan's inhabitants is not necessarily accurate in the Bible. God also reassures Israel of God's existential role in the future, suggesting that

the covenantal relationship will continue. In return, the Israelites must follow God's laws and keep "this Book of Teaching" (Josh. 1:8) available and well-used. The concept of relying upon the book and the law strengthens the power structure in which there is dependence on the book and the law. Furthermore, this passage begins a theme in the book of Joshua dealing with the Israelites struggling to understand how to live independently as Israel (Boling and Wright 136). Joshua also begins with an exhortatory timeline that the Israelites have three days to prepare to cross the Jordan and take ownership of the land. Joshua's timeline qua inspirational speech creates the concept that "the ritual crossing of the river will demonstrate the presence of the 'loving god' in the midst of the people and the assurance that he would indeed dispossess the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites from before them" (Mullen, Ethnic 108).

Joshua 3:1-17 details the Israelites' entrance into the land. This chapter is a quiet climax to the Torah: the Israelites follow God's directions (via Joshua) and cross the Jordan River into their promised land. In Josh. 3:6, the passage implies that the priests are the leaders of the people, though they are not its warriors: when going into the river, the Israelites will follow behind the priests and behind the Ark of the Covenant. The presence of the priests' leadership and the Israelites' most prized possession assumes a confidence about the Israelites' ease of entrance into the land. If war were imminent, then it would make more sense to send warriors or spies first and to protect the ark within the bulk of the people, rather than to use the ark as protection. The order of the procession thus emphasizes that it really is God who will guarantee dispossession of the other

nations and that the Israelites will not need to battle in their entrance to the land. In this passage, God also promises to displace seven nations, the "Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites" (Josh. 3:10).

The Israelites' journey across the Jordan River to safety recalls an image from Exodus: that of controlling moving water. While in the Book of Exodus Moses parts the Reed Sea so that the Israelites can walk between walls of water, in Joshua it is not the charismatic leader but the presence of the ark and the priests that commands the waters to stop flowing and to allow the Israelites to easily cross the river (Boling and Wright 179). Michael Fishbane calls the river crossing in Joshua "an excellent example of the retrojective mode of typology, where one historical event serves as the prototype for the descriptive shaping of another" (358). According to the Robert Boling and Ernest Wright, the goal of this imagery is to emphasize the celebration of reaching the land. With regard to dating the material, the concept of crossing the Jordan River into the land implies an understanding of the land in a post-Solomonic kingdom, for the Israelites' land does not extend east of the Jordan River (Boling and Wright 179). Consequently, these verses in no way detail history but describe ideology or imagery.

According to Mullen, the Deuteronomic authors attempt to create a consistent chronology for Israel's history, particularly in its entrance to the land. The authors "have failed to recognize that the fivefold repetition of this 'three day period' [preparing to enter the land] collapses the temporality of the narrated events into a contemporaneous whole that is, then, by virtue of the structure of the storied events, presented as a series of unrelated vignettes" (Narrative 108).[6]

[6] According to Mullen, the three day period is mentioned in Josh. 1:11, 2:16, 2:22, and 3:2.

Such collapsing of time makes the preparations for crossing the Jordan River occur at the same time as the spies' exploration of Jericho, which creates a chronology which is not intuitive and demonstrates the process of multiple authorship and of editing the document.

Soon after the Israelites cross the river into the land, the different tribes are assigned land based on divine divisions in Josh. 13:1-33. Each tribe's portion is detailed with geographical boundaries. The passage begins with an injunction from God: the Israelites do not inhabit all of the land yet, and they should take it upon themselves to broaden their settlements under Joshua's leadership (Josh. 13:1). The land that remains for the Israelites to settle belongs to nations not mentioned in the lists of displaced nations, such as the Philistines and the Geshurites. If these are nations that will eventually be displaced, why not mention them with the other nations to be displaced? Such a discrepancy emphasizes the unlikelihood that those writing these words were contemporaneous to the situation, suggesting that such details are typologies. Joshua 13 also confirms and accentuates the special status of the Levites, who own no land, thus attempting to historicize the religious hierarchy. This assignment of the land is not mentioned for the first time in Josh. 13. It is rather a recap of a division of land under Moses' command in Num. 34, especially the concept about the Levites' special treatment (Boling and Wright 347). In both passages, the Levites' special relationship to God is emphasized, creating the only exception to the Israelite classless society (ibid).

Joshua shows knowledge of the patriarchs and the history of the covenant, based on Josh. 21:41-43. This passage reminds the Israelites that the eventual

ownership of the land began with the covenant with their ancestors, established long ago (though the text does not mention the patriarchs). The Deuteronomist also reminds the reader that God has maintained the covenantal promise: not only do the Israelites dwell in the land, but they live in it peacefully, without fear of attack. Thus, when the Israelites fail to follow the laws, it is all the more clear that it is only the Israelites who sinned. It is also important to recognize that this history is repeated briefly, demonstrating how familiar this story is. Mullen affirms this conception of history: "Despite the fact that there is little to indicate that any 'ideal' peace or possession of Canaan ever occurred in historical terms, the Deuteronomic writer was nonetheless able to summarize the conquest of the land" (Narrative 92).

The last two chapters of Joshua begin with Joshua's speech to the Israelites. Joshua's speech does not channel God; rather, Joshua appears to speak with the consent of God but not in God's own voice. This distinction creates ambiguity in Joshua's words, "See, I have allotted to you, by your tribes, the territory of these nations that still remain, and that of all the nations that I have destroyed, from the Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea in the west" (Josh. 23:4). Perhaps this is an example of a textual insertion, where the sentence was once God's words but, transposed here with sloppy editing, it appears as Joshua's words. Alternatively, the writers of this passage present a perspective of destroying the other nations by the hand of one Israelite, rather than by the Israelite people or by God. Joshua's exhortatory speech sends a negative message, that Israel's future is in peril (Boling and Wright 526). Such a speech makes sense if the words are interpreted as written in exile, when the sense of Israel's failure

to maintain the covenant is clear. According to Boling and Wright, "For existence in the time of exile there could perhaps be no more forceful way of underscoring the need for covenantal living than to hear Joshua as an old man speaking on the subject of the divine prerogative to dismantle a nation-state should it get in the way of abundant life for each and all" (526).

Immediately after this discussion of destruction, Joshua reiterates the concept of displacement of other nations (facilitated by God), asking Israel not to forget God's actions and that possession of the land hinges on inhabiting the land as instructed by God (Josh. 23:5). Verses 23:9-10 reiterate the concept that God displaces other peoples for the benefit of Israel, God's chosen people. These erses emphasize the power of the displaced nations, suggesting that it is due to God's great power and might that the nations were driven astray.

The last two verses of Josh. 23 (15-16) detail the concept of covenant fulfillment as evidence of the truth of God's word. The first aspect of the passage reminds the Israelites that just as God fulfilled great promises for the Israelites, so too can God return and cause suffering for the Israelites. Here, we see the connection between the concepts of land and idolatry: the Israelites' ownership and ability to live peacefully in the land depends on their loyalty to God and to God alone.

In Josh. 24, we read a historical retrospective of the Israelites' journey to the land. In this telling, God does not only displace the Amorites but also annihilates them for the Israelites. The destruction of the Amorite kingdom is followed by a list of seven nations (including the Amorites) which are driven out via a divinely sent plague. The concept of death by plague echoes Exod. 23:23, as

well as the more prominent defeat of the Egyptians by plagues. In this case, rather than a display of God's many powers, there seems to only be one plague which suffices for this purpose.

The final chapter of Joshua sees the Israelites affirming their commitment to God and to the covenant. If the Israelites turn to idolatry fail to follow God's laws, then the covenant between God and the Israelites is jeopardized. Despite this sense of lurking danger of the failure of the covenant, the book ends with an image of covenantal fulfillment and land tied together. Joshua dies and is buried in his own land, and then the Israelites bury Joseph's bones, which they have been carrying around since the beginning of slavery in Egypt, in Shechem. This image fulfills the promise made in Gen. 50:25 that the Israelites will carry Joseph's bones until God "takes notice," meaning fulfilling the covenant. When Joseph's bones are buried in the land, the image is that Israel has arrived, ending the tale of pilgrimage that began in Genesis. Boling and Wright write, "The book thus originates and culminates with a revolution that is also a mutation in religion; the community of believers puts at the center of all decision-making the value of the individual, the quality of responsible life as response to a gracious gift, and the willingness of the individual to be governed by ethic. It is an exercise of sovereignty which transforms into everlasting relativity all forms of coercive power: political, economic, ecclesiastical" (544). Now, the Israelites truly bear the responsibility of maintaining the covenant, as God's promises are now complete. The people has formed and is intact; now all they must do is follow God's laws and God's laws alone (Mullen, Narrative 116).

In the ninth chapter of Nehemiah there is a recap of the covenant. A few Levites detail Israelite history before the Israelite community. Included in this telling is God's creation of a relationship and covenant with Abraham. The crux of the covenant is the gift of the Canaanites' land to Abraham's people. This passage identifies the dwellers of the gifted land: a list of six nations, which is slightly different than the lists in the Torah. The Girgashite nations are not mentioned in any of the Toraitic lists, though they are mentioned in Joshua. This passage does not detail how these six nations picked up and left the land to the Israelites; the text's writers gloss over the details, suggesting that the writers did not see such details as important. The passage concludes by flattering God for keeping promises. This concept, as with the passage's concluding words, "For you are righteous" (Neh. 8:8), creates a contrast with the Israelites. The assumption is that unlike God, the Israelites have a hard time keeping promises (they fail to follow the laws of the covenant and thus are exiled) and are not righteous (because they cannot keep aforementioned promises). This passage thus emphasizes the difference between God and the Israelites and implicitly provides a reason for the exile.

Later in the chapter (Neh. 9:21-25), there is a telling of the Israelites' experience wandering in the desert and then entering their land. In particular, there is an emphasis on God's support of the Israelites as enabling their survival. It is God who gives the people fertility and who brings them to the land. In order to aid Israel's entrance into the land, God "subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites" (Neh. 9:24). While just a few verses earlier, we saw an emphasis on the variety of nations and where they lived, here, it is only the

Canaanites who must be driven from the land. These appear to be two different storytellers, who know different versions of the same story. What is essential to the story is not who is displaced, but that in order to make life easy for the Israelites and to guarantee them quick access to the land, God displaces other nations, whoever they might be. Another noteworthy aspect of this passage is that it is rarely mentioned that it is the Canaanites who are displaced. Usually, it is other, more obscure nations (i.e. the Girgashites), who are mentioned primarily regarding displacement. In contrast, the Canaanites are mentioned often in Genesis, particularly in regard to where they dwell in the land. Jacob Myers, the author of the Anchor Bible Commentary to Nehemiah, does not even mention the displacement of other nations in his commentary.

The displacement motif, though functioning in different ways exists in different parts of the Bible. Based on different authors' perspectives and goals, nuanced praxes of approaching land, covenant and displacement can become more evident.

Sacred Space and Altars as Connecting the Israelites to Their Land

Throughout the Bible, altars are created in order to consecrate the land. Standing stones create boundaries and act as signs of God's presence in the land. In Gen. 28:10-22, Jacob has a dream in which God gives the land where he sleeps to him and to his descendants. Upon awakening, Jacob renames the place Bethel (literally "house of God") and erects a stone to serve as God's house. This move places God in the land and becomes a sign of the covenant with God (Aaron, Biblical 179). When the Israelites are in exile, they will have to grapple with the

theological notion that God dwells in a particular land. What changes when God is land-bound and the people are no longer in the land? Perhaps it is time for a new or altered theology. In Gen. 35:1-7, Jacob returns to Bethel, as directed by God. Jacob will build an altar to God, because Bethel has become a place where Jacob can communicate with God. The stone creates a connection between land and deity.

In Exodus, among the giving of other laws, there are brief instructions for creating altars (20:21-23). These verses make the point that if built correctly, an altar can be a way to connect physical land and the abstract god. The principles developed in Exodus are applied later.

Deuteronomy 27:1-8 applies some of the guidelines developed in Genesis and Exodus. These verses instruct the Israelites to erect stones upon their entrance to their promised land. On this altar are "every word of this Teaching" (Deut. 27:8), self-referencing the Deuteronomic corpus (Mullen, Narrative 102-105). This altar stands as a sign of the Israelites' arrival in their land and as a reminder of all of the directions that they will follow once they are there.

The stones in Deut. 27 are a sign of the fulfillment of the covenant, as Deut. 27 adumbrates Joshua's crossing at Gilgal in Josh. 4 (Aaron, Biblical 163). In Josh. 4, the Israelites are given directions for crossing the Jordan River and what to do directly afterwards from God through Joshua. Twelve individuals—one representative from each tribe—are each to take a stone from the middle of the Jordan River, as a sign that God allowed the Israelites to cross over the river and into the land. Joshua also places twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan River, where the priests stand with the Ark of the Covenant. The stones here are

also used as symbols but not as altars. They serve as visual reminders of God's power and commitment to the Israelites. Despite the connection between Deut. 27 and Josh. 4, there are differences. In Deut. 27:8, the stones are unhewn and have the words of the Teaching written on them, which is not the case in Joshua (Aaron, Biblical 180n).

In Josh. 8:30-35, Joshua builds the altar on Mount Ebal as the ritual fulfillment of what is described in Deuteronomy (Mullen, Narrative 102). Not only does Joshua build the altar, but he also inscribes and reads the teaching that is on the stones, as instructed in Deuteronomy. The passage "does not recount a mechanistic fulfillment of the command. Rather, by way of a careful paraphrase, the Deuteronomistic author indicates that Joshua and all the components of Israel have kept the commission of Moses" (Mullen, Narrative 104). This faithfulness to Moses suggests that the Israelites begin their part of maintaining the covenant in good faith and with optimism for the future. It is only later that things begin to deteriorate.

At the end of the Book of Joshua (24:25-27), Joshua retells the history of covenant and sets a stone to be a witness of the covenant, a sign that the Israelites' preservation of the covenant is not assumed but will be noted and with consequences. This ritual is connected with the entrance to the land and the assumption of responsibility (Mullen, Narrative 110n). According to Mullen, "The stones stand as witnesses to the treaty promises and as a memorial to the consent of the people to follow Yahweh and Yahweh alone" (Narrative 118). The location of this text at Shechem is important. At Shechem, Jacob erected an altar, after reconciling with Esau in Gen. 33:18-20. Aaron writes that "the story's focus

on the site at the very end of the Jacob episodes constitutes an attempt by an author to adumbrate the Joshua scene. In other words, he situated Jacob at Shechem after returning to Canaan to demonstrate the antiquity of Israel's claims to that site, so that when Joshua finally arrived here, he would be seen as establishing the covenant at a place already sanctified by the very patriarch whose descendents spawned the tribes of Israel" (Etched 153). The stones in Josh. 24 have a special purpose: they are not just to commemorate a moment but to stand witness for the acceptance of the covenant by the Israelites. Aaron notes, "The stone, it is said, *hears* all the words that Yahweh speaks to the Israelites. Moreover, it is designed to act as an active witness against them, should they break faith with their God" (ibid 179). The commitment that the Israelites make to the covenant with these stones (and the unsaid consequences tied to them) foreshadows the eventual neglect of the covenant and of the reality of exile.

Understanding Israelite Destruction Today

The previous chapter discussed biblical motifs of the promise of the land, the concept of milk and honey, the displacement of other nations and the concept of sacred spaces tied to the land through alters. The challenge of discussing the motif of the Israelites' annihilation of other nations is that it is tied to motifs of land, ethnicity and covenant, thus creating a complex matrix of connected ideas. How is an ethical reader to examine such passages? If the goal is not simply to decide whether or not to keep these passages in our canon (after all, they are tied in to so many passages and stories), then the task becomes more complex. The goal is to read the text critically, yet to retain religious commitment. The conclusions that follow attempt to do just this: to consider these motifs in the biblical text in light of historical research and literary scholarship, namely ethical criticism.

The Bible as a Foundationalist Document

In reading biblical passages about land, ethnicity and covenant, it becomes increasingly clear the extent to which the Bible is a foundationalist document. The biblical writers constructed an ideology for a people based on the conception of a relationship between God and Israel. This ideology served as the underpinning for the entire model of covenant and its claim to land ownership. The idea that God gives the Israelites their own land is premised on the concept that God and Israel have a reciprocal covenant, which gives Israel a special designation, complete with responsibilities and a sovereign land. Biblical authors

constructed verses of promise (like the unconditional promises of covenant in Genesis) and of consequence (like the laws in Deuteronomy) to create a model to which the Israelites could adhere. These ideas and the relationships between them serve as the basis for a matrix of motifs throughout the Bible. The repeated references and stories about the Israelites' annihilation of other nations reveal an adherence to the understanding of a world in which a relationship with God makes the deaths of other humans palatable.

It is through interpretation of these biblical texts that the foundationalism becomes ever more pronounced. The Deuteronomic School's writers conveyed these words as divine truth, and indeed, their legacy in Israelite and Jewish communities is that these words are understood as God's will. Reading biblical verses as divine is just as much an act of interpretation as a reading which understands these verses as an intentional, hopeful construction of an ideal community. Yet, these two readings differ in that one is based on a foundationalist view of the world (clinging to ideas as truth), while the other is based on a constructivist view of the world (realizing that for the most part ideas are built, not inherent). The legacy of these two different modes of interpretation remains with the Jewish community even today.

GENRE

By reading parts of the Bible not sequentially but by motif enables literary devices and modes to be discerned more easily. The use and manipulation of genre is a major aspect of biblical literature as a whole and of the motifs discussed here. Different genres abound in the Bible: from mythic narrative to prayerful

poetry to anguished prophetic discourse to motivational battle calls, to name a few.

By engaging in critically reading the biblical text, it becomes possible to learn about the extent to which the Bible conforms to any genres. A fascinating aspect of the Bible is that the biblical writers manipulated the genres they knew in their own world for their own purposes. Understanding how the Bible and discrete passages in it fit into various genres creates a system in which to consider what has meaning and is innovative and what is not. It is possible to determine what is simply part of a pattern, perhaps written without awareness to implication and what has great intention and thus important meaning.

For example, in the motifs of covenant and ethnicity in the Hextateuch, there is a great possibility that the references to the annihilation of other nations conformed to a genre of ancient Near Eastern literature that aimed to create group identity and solidarity after important battles. The Mesha Stele, a ninth century B.C.E. Moabite inscription, provides an example of a genre of post-battle literature that details the destruction of other nations. The similarities in the construction of the Mesha Stele and the Israelite words detailing the destruction of the seven nations are striking (Plaut 1376; Tigay 471; Weinfeld, Promise 88). Perhaps the post-battle-annihilation-of-enemy-nations genre manifests itself in Israelite literature, particularly in Deuteronomy and Joshua.

Another way to understand the annihilation of other nations is to remember that, in contrast to the battles described on the Mesha Stele, the Israelite annihilation of seven nations probably never happened. The existence of these annihilated nations, in contrast to nations like the Moabites and Edomites,

is questionable at best. Regardless of the existence of the seven (or more) nations, there is little likelihood that wholesale annihilation of seven entire nations was a historical reality. In fact, the list of nations is not even consistent throughout the Bible. There is variation in the different lists of nations, suggesting that discrete ethnic groups destroyed by the Israelites may not have actually occurred, if the listed nations were nations at all. Furthermore, in some passages, God is the agent of displacement, and in other passages, it is the Israelites themselves who must do the dirty work.

Within the category of genre is the literary device of tropes. The use of tropes implies a less thoughtful approach to the actual content or meaning of the words, often based on genre constraints. When using a trope, the author adheres to common phrases or constructions, possibly without thinking through the implications of the words themselves. Tropes imply cultural literacy, for they make sense within a culture but do not necessarily make sense when the words themselves are understood rather than the construction as a whole. For example, the beginning of countless fairy tales begin with the words, "Once upon a time." For those within the culture of reading fairy tales, the words signify the beginning of a fantasy tale. Yet, for one who has never read or learned about fairy tales, these words might imply a historical account; that person would not be reading the trope correctly.

In the four motifs—promise of land, the concept of milk and honey, the displacement of other nations and the concept of sacred space tied to the land through altars—tropes abound. The most significant use of tropes is in the displacement motif. For example, the lists of nations and the picture of God or

the Israelites as destroyer may both be tropes. If these kinds of images are indeed tropes, then these words had a different meaning within the culture of biblical authorship than they do for the contemporary reader. What may be simply a sign of genre and was accepted as such by the ancient Israelites is today read directly as ethically abhorrent words about displacement and genocide.

Another way to look at the genre of displacement and annihilation is through M.M. Bakhtin's notion of "valorized time." Bakhtin writes about the genre of the epic and suggests that national epics use the concept of valorized time, which includes "a transferal of the world it describes to an absolute past of national beginnings and peak times" (15). This concept can be helpful in understanding the biblical narrative—from the stories of patriarchs to slavery in Egypt to wandering to the promised land—as part of a genre of national identity-building myths. More specifically, the destruction of the nations can be seen as a representation of great power and success and as a symbol of the strength of Israel's relationship with God.

Perhaps the Israelites based their writing on genres of post-battle documents, national epic narratives, a different genre altogether or on some combination of these possibilities. It is hard to have any sense of certainty about what is the best way to read the motif. Yet, by at least noting the existence of genre and tropes, it becomes possible to at least begin a conversation about the array of possible meaning—and lack of meaning—in the text. Thinking about genre helps frame biblical literature and reflect on where and why the biblical authors conformed to genres and when they chose to depart from them.

It becomes necessary to consider what to do with ethically problematic genres. This is a more pointed problem than the broader issue of ethically problematic literature, for there is the question: To what extent did the writers consider the ethics of their writing and to what extent did they simply conform to genre? It can be challenging to discuss genre when it is difficult to understand the meaning of the genre: how it was perceived, how it was used, how widely accepted it was. Yet, any scholarly study of Judaism's texts demands a consideration of genre, because without understanding genre, it is impossible to contextualize it.

A Multivocal Tradition

In addition to seeking out the genres present in the Bible, it is also possible to investigate the different voices within the Bible. The Bible was not written by one individual in a single sitting; rather, the Bible consists of many stories by many authors, all of which were significantly redacted in the creation of a single document. These different authors saw and interpreted the world differently. The biblical texts regarding land, ethnicity and covenant (and indeed, all biblical texts) were written by different schools of authors, with differing goals and voices. In short, the Bible is multivocal.

Mullen and Aaron remind us of the different traditions and power dynamics that are all present in the Bible. Ironically, the voices that have the greatest presence in the final document are the voices of the Deuteronomists, rather than the priestly voices which held great authority in ancient Israel. In analyzing issues of land, ethnicity and covenant with regard to the annihilation of other nations, it becomes clear that some were composed without awareness of

other versions, and yet somehow all eventually found their way into a single corpus. The Bible contains multiple layers of ideological myths from varying perspectives. In fact, the layering process of writing and redaction is so complex, that it is impossible to create any precise history of its development. The multivocality of the Bible is beautiful, for it preserves the history of Israelite tradition, and it also serves as a record of dialogue, growth and creativity. The multivocality of the biblical literature lends it great depth and meaning.

ETHICAL CRITICISM AND DIFFERENT MODES OF INTERPRETATION

How one reads informs what one gains from reading. Indeed, there are many ways to read the Bible. The Bible can be read literally. It can be read allegorically. It can be read critically. The method with which one reads determines the yield. A reader cannot be afraid to interpret, for it is through interpretation that the text becomes meaningful and relevant.

In considering how to read, one begins by looking at how the text presents itself. In the case of the Bible, biblical texts present themselves as historical material. As Hayden White notes, all historical narratives have elements of interpretation in them, and some have more interpretation in them than others do (51). Moreover, White sees that historical narratives are "made sense of in the same way that the poet or novelist tries to make sense of it . . . It does not matter whether the world is conceived to be real or only imagined; the manner of making sense of it is the same" (98). White emphasizes the degree to which how we tell history is a product of ideology. Writing history conforms to genres and reflects the writer's understanding of time and identity.

White's insights are helpful in reading the Bible. White's writing about the nature of historical narrative creates a framework in which to think about the composition and product of the biblical corpus. It creates a system in which to think about the role ideology plays in the construction of an ideal, ethnic history. In considering the great and varied ideological content in the Bible, White's model of considering history helps to parse differing perspectives in order to better comprehend the depth of multiple voices and goals in the Bible.

White's work on how writers write and conceive of history lends depth to biblical interpretation. He teaches that interpretations will be different depending on the kinds of questions asked or the consideration of the function of the text. With regard to issues of land, covenant and ethnicity, it is possible to consider the text differently depending on if a reader approaches it as a constructed ideological document rather than as a statement of historical fact.

For example, in reading passages regarding Israelite annihilation of other nations, one naturally reads the passages differently depending on whether or not one believes the genocide actually happened. This can be seen as a parallel to reading contemporary fiction versus nonfiction. How a reader emotionally responds to the text is different depending on if he or she believes the work to be completely fictive or based to some degree in historical fact.[7] In the case of reading biblical motifs of land, ethnicity and covenant, how a reader thinks about ethically problematic biblical texts—in this case, genocide—is affected by his or her belief in the degree of the historical veracity of the text. One responds

[7] White has taught me that rather than thinking of fiction and nonfiction as a binary divide, I should think of them more as a continuum. For example, where would I place historical fiction? Or fiction based in the author's autobiography? Or nonfiction that inevitably teems with ideology?

differently if the Israelites committed genocide for its own sake or if they used genocide as a tool (albeit not the best one) for other purposes. A reader's goals and outcomes of interpretation are different depending on the approach to the text.

A simpler story with ethical problems than the motif of annihilation of other nations illustrates this concept. The story of David and Batsheva in 2 Sam. 11:12-24 has ethical issues within it and is self-contained, making it easier to discuss in this forum. A summary of the story: King David sends his officers out of Jerusalem for battle. In a quieter city, David sees Batsheva bathing and wants to meet her, even though she is married to Uriah, a soldier. David and Batsheva consummate their relationship when Batsheva is ritually pure. Batsheva becomes pregnant. David tries to convince Uriah to go to his own house to be with his wife under the guise of giving Uriah a gift. Yet, Uriah refuses to go home, insisting that his responsibilities lie in the battle. Upon hearing Uriah's response, David decides to have Uriah killed on the front. After Uriah is killed, Batsheva observes the mourning period before becoming David's wife and bearing a son. God becomes angry with David for his behavior and sends Nathan to him. Nathan convinces David of his wrongdoing, and God foretells a calamity falling upon David's house. Yet, when David takes responsibility for his guilt, Nathan tells David that God forgives his sin, and foretells that Batsheva's child will perish. The child dies at seven days. David's religiosity takes place primarily before the child's death, as he hopes to affect the child's fate. After the child dies, David comforts Batsheva, and she later bears him another son, David's heir, Solomon.

If, as contemporary interpreters, we are to see this story as recounting historical truth, then we might be interested in this sample of issues: Was David punished too harshly or not harshly enough? What does this story teach us about God's involvement in the world? What do we learn about a God who takes the life of a newborn child to punish his father? What are the implications of a king manipulating a battle for personal gain?

If, as contemporary interpreters, we are to see this story as an example of a genre of entertainment or as part of an ideological agenda or as some other kind of fiction, we might choose to ask different kinds of questions: Why would an author depict a king acting so immorally? How does the story set the stage for Solomon's reign? What kind of God is the author trying to illustrate? Why would this story have been written and included in the biblical canon?

While only a few questions are listed here, it is immediately clear that the two sets of questions are of very different natures. The resulting discussions will thus be varied, too. The examination of the ethics of the story will also be different. In one case, the reader confronts how to understand a king who is called the progenitor of the messiah as a lying, conniving and murdering individual. In the other case, the reader tries to understand how an author uses a character to suggest moral practice and ideological perspective, which may be palatable or not. In both cases, ethics are involved, but the precise issues vary.

So too it is with understanding more complex ethical issues. How a contemporary interpreter thinks about genocide is different if he or she believes the Israelites were perpetrators or allegorists or creative writers. The issues addressed become completely different. The analysis of the motifs of land,

ethnicity and covenant are examples of this interpretative distinction. In this study, I have openly approached the Bible as a document written by a variety of ideologically-charged writers. As such, many ways of interpreting the ethically disturbing annihilation are open: Does the text have any historical facts in it? If not, why would a writer choose to create such events? What are the advantages in creating a people whose God wipes out nations and gives them a land? What might the appeal to such literature be (i.e. why do people read it and canonize it)? In other words, one's approach to history and to text determines the scope of interpretation and the implications of that interpretation.

This study has approached the motifs of land, ethnicity and covenant with the method of ethical criticism. Ethical criticism is neither precise nor absolute. As Booth writes, "The logic we depend on as we arrive at our particular appraisals . . . is always the result of a direct sense that something now before us has yielded an experience we find comparably desirable, admirable, or, on the other hand, comparatively repugnant, contemptible or hateful" (Booth 71-2). Yet, the methodology of ethical criticism allows readers to ask moral questions of what they are reading: Does this text add meaning or enhance a community or an individual, or does it spur feelings of hatred and drive people apart? Ethical criticism allows the reader to move beyond the black and white distinctions of moral decision-making with regard to canonized texts and instead to view them as aesthetically complex, often as having both positive and negative ethical elements within them. Such is the case with the motifs of land, covenant and ethnicity. On one hand, these texts have their fill of morally repugnant issues, namely the much-discussed annihilation of other nations. On the other hand, these texts are most

likely fictive and serve to create a national identity based on literature. Because the texts themselves are ethically complex, how a reader approaches them needs to be nuanced and sensitive, too. Ethical criticism provides a model for such reading.

A Letter to the Future

To my dearest descendents:

I write this letter to you, knowing that you do not exist yet and that I am unable to fathom who you are and what you will bring to the world. I write this letter to you, months away from my rabbinical ordination. As ordination approaches, I have spent a lot of time thinking about what kind of rabbi I want to be and with what values I want to live my life. So much lies ahead: new communities, responsibilities, roles, dilemmas and opportunities. I write this letter to you as idealistic as I can be. These are my hopes for the Jewish community, for the religious community of which one day you will be a part.

The process of writing my rabbinical thesis has helped me to define dreams and hopes for both my rabbinate and the kind of Jewish community that I want to build. I commit myself to these visions for you and all that you represent: the future, the next generation and the endless excitement of possibility. I present some of the difficult issues of my day. Most, if not all, will most likely remain poignant in the future. These are issues that generations do not "solve" and that each generation may struggle with for itself. This will mean that you will have different tensions to balance. Other issues, I hope, will be new for your generation. Perhaps, some of the themes that I outline here will be resolved or better harmonized for your generation.

This is a letter about creating frameworks, principles and relationships, and the kinds of actions that are only deepened by great thought. My explicit aspiration is to live these principles, and this will only become clear with time. In

this letter, I want to share some of what I have learned in the past year thinking about my thesis and the contemporary, liberal rabbinate. I hope that my thoughts provide you with a perspective on my goals and dreams, remind you to consider your own beliefs and prod you to think.

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I want to begin with a concept that has influenced the way that I think about the rabbinate and relationships in general: Richard Rorty's concept of solidarity. For Rorty, solidarity is a deep, existential confrontation with our own aloneness that reminds us that all we have is what we each create. Rorty destroys the illusion of foundational truth. Yet, rather than floundering in the depths of relativism and meaninglessness, Rorty advocates construction, i.e. a conscious building of institutions, relationships and values based on intentional thought, with the ultimate goal of solidarity. Finding solidarity with another and with the 'Other' can help us create a more just and compassionate society, a society in which we interact both with those whom we seem to share much and with those whom we seem to share little. Pursuing solidarity can help to create a world where people look beyond themselves, identify with one another and act on that identification, rather than on a foundationalist ideal.

Humans are a species of relationships, and any relationship between two people is a most basic human form. Solidarity exists when people are in direct relationship. When we act compassionately, and we emphasize and concentrate on relationships, we avoid demonizing individuals and groups. Emmanuel Levinas' concept of otherness is the premise for his work conceptualizing relationships. According to Susan Handelman,

> Levinas tries in all his major works to articulate a philosophy of the other that is based not on war, even as a game, but on justice and peace—peace as that very moment of renunciation, welcome and vulnerable exposure to the other. Hence he formulates a philosophy in which the judgment of history . . . come through ethics, ethics as relation between *separated* beings in discourse, and not as an ecstatic fusion, a relation which is that of justification, appeal, command and obligation (191).

Levinas' idea of creating a connection of compassion with the other is similar to Rorty's concept of solidarity. For both philosophers, the process and subsequent goal of connection is one based on rationality and the understanding of shared humanity.

Reflecting on my own experiences, I wonder if Jewish communities sometimes suffer from an illusion of solidarity. Growing up, I recall the concept of *am Yisrael echad*, the people of Israel is one, as a slogan meant to inspire our help of impoverished Russian Jewish immigrants and our unities with Israeli Jews. The purpose was to imply allegiance to some vague ideology of peoplehood. The goal was a valid one, but its means—letter writing and fundraising, for example—were shallow. Deep rational discourse or emotional identification can come from relationships. The surface connectedness serves a purpose of laying the groundwork for future relationships, but it is not succeed in creating solidarity in and of itself.

I can spend my life helping others create moments of solidarity, near and far and maintaining a forum to discuss these deeply personal experiences. It can seem easier to stay protected by books or by the size and comfort of a group. Yet, solidarity with another is different than exposure to a culture. Solidarity is identification and relationship. That identification or relationship may lead to enhanced study and action, and ideally it will.

The potential of solidarity is great. Through solidarity, one can find escape from heavy loneliness. I can strive to create moments of solidarity in my rabbinate and use the high emotion from these moments to enact positive change. While seeking solidarity, I must remember to keep my humility, as it recalls the irony of my own contingency. It is easy to become immersed in personal struggles and to forget how little we each really know about the world and the people in it. When seeking solidarity through relationship, I can recognize that each of us is not alone in the world, though we may feel alone. Having humility reminds me that I am just one person, but individuals share so much, not least which is the experience of striving to find meaning in the world.

This year, I spent time building a community center in a village in Ghana alongside the residents of the town. I went to Africa while in the process of writing this thesis and spent time reflecting on Rorty's concept of solidarity. In my conversations with Ghanaians and with fellow rabbinical students, I found moments of compassion, empathy and understanding—of solidarity. Upon my return, I wrote:

> The trip was both humbling and empowering. . . . Humbling because the world is so big, and I have seen so little of it. Humbling because there is so much to be done, and the problems are so complex, interconnected and dire. But empowering because we are all just people, and it is our responsibility as humans, Jews and future rabbis to ensure that voices are heard and that our communities act striving to experience solidarity. Empowering because we can all bend down, start mixing cement and start making a difference ("Rabbinical Students").

I continue to struggle with how to go from the high points of moments of solidarity to more ordinary daily life. This, I think, is where congregations can be useful: they are communities where conversations about solidarity

can take place and where work can be done so that we strive for emotional highs as well as essential change in the world.

We can use the concept of contingency to help us understand the societal structures in which we live. Yet, Rorty's contingency fails to take into account the biological foundations of our behaviors, some aspects of which we are beginning to understand and other aspects of which continue to remain mysterious. For example, we can confront the issue of whether sociopaths are born or made, for we do not know if behavior is truly a choice or not. Rorty recognizes the limits of our contingency and suggests that solidarity is the best avenue to create meaningful existence. We can find solidarity based on shared emotions like fear and love, whether or not they have biological bases or not.

Solidarity exists in relationship and is thus dependent on reciprocity. Therefore, as a teacher and interpreter of Jewish tradition, I cannot create solidarity with a text, but texts can inspire me to create solidarity with those with whom I have relationships. What we read and how we read influence that elusive concept of understanding and identification with the other. As a future rabbi who will be an heir to centuries of textual tradition, my responsibility is to consider how to use the Jewish canon to inspire interest, creativity and meaningful relationships.

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As the concept of solidarity infiltrates all that I think a rabbi does, so too does the concept of multivocality, the notion that Jewish tradition is not (and should not) be monolithic. As an example of multivocality within Jewish tradition, we can look to the biblical authors. The tradition of multivocality

facilitated the composition and redaction of the Bible. In the Bible, there is a model of different (and sometimes competing) voices within a single text. Today, I can strive to shape a Jewish tradition that does not need to strive for a single stance on the issue of the day. There are few, if any, issues on which the breadth and vastness of our tradition have been unified either at once or throughout the ages.

Multivocality is not power-based. Cultures that allow for multivocality determine to give some of their power away, for the more voices in a discussion, the less consolidation of opinion or authority there is. As Benhabib urges, all individuals in a community have an equal say in it. Some opinions might be more educated than others, but all have the power and ability to speak. For her, the ability for individuals to have equal say in a community "involve[s] various dimensions—[as] moral beings, citizens, members of an ethical community" (147). In other words, a tradition of multivocality allows us to create a culture in which we enable ourselves to act with thought and responsibility.

In a Jewish tradition that embraces multivocality, there is not one way to interpret our religious heritage but rather a multitude of possibilities open for responsible discussion. A Jewish tradition that is multivocal means that Jews are not afraid of one another and of disagreement. It is a tradition that is not afraid to appeal to consensus or new ideas, rather than insisting on top-down leadership. It is a simple concept, but the practice of remaining open to new and sometimes subversive ideas can be challenging to identity and pride. If we find ourselves dependent on foundationalisms, then multivocality can produce anxiety and fear, which can lead us to be wary of new ideas and innovation. Despite any anxiety, a

dedication to creating and maintaining a multivocal tradition means that different voices are encouraged and embraced rather than simply tolerated. Multivocality is necessary for the future of this rich religious heritage. I want a tradition that grows and changes and develops as time passes so that each generation can create and alter traditions to make them most meaningful. A commitment to multivocality is a commitment to progress and to a bright future for Judaism. I want all of this for you.

As I have discussed it so far, multivocality has been about religious dialogue and innovation. There is a second dimension to multivocality in religious tradition that is also relevant to rabbis: the concept of a multivocal approach to the texts in our canon. In interpreting the Bible, for example, despite our insistence on multivocality, we should not doom ourselves to believing that every reading is equally good. It makes sense that a scholar of ancient Israel's reading will be more insightful than one who opens the text for the first time. More educated readings are better than less educated ones. Yet, I do not want to be afraid to embrace different hermeneutical traditions, like the perspectives of the midrashist, the archaeologist or the literary theorist, to name a few. These different reading traditions necessarily ask different kinds of questions due to the demands of different disciplines. They thus lend themselves to new kinds of discussions and insights. Reading in isolation, we can learn new things, but by reading together, our ability to talk about the Bible becomes much greater.

So many Jews are exposed to text through the rabbi's eyes, as text is studied and taught through a synagogue, which gives rabbis great power and responsibility. As a rabbi who will interpret and teach Jewish tradition, it

becomes my responsibility to provide a variety of interpretative methodologies, all the while discussing their implications and historical contexts. I can give congregants the frameworks through which to understand and analyze our textual corpus, and doing this job responsibly means teaching a variety of reading strategies and having a discussion on what constitutes responsible reading practices.

A conversation about multivocality and reading practices is related to the subject of genre, characterization by form and content. In any discussion about genre, one can begin by differentiating between ancient and contemporary texts. Understanding genre in biblical literature can help us read more coherently and ask more insightful questions of the text. When a new student reads the Bible today, he or she has no way to determine what material adheres to genre constraints and what does not. Indeed, without studying Ancient Near Eastern literature and making internal comparisons within the Bible, it is difficult to know which aspects of the literature are genre-based.

The example of genre in biblical literature helps me consider issues of genre today. In contemporary Jewish culture, I wonder if rabbis sometimes take refuge in the ability to thoughtlessly conform to genre in making their own literary contributions. For example, I think of the genre of prooftexting in rabbis' sermons, bulletin articles and the Reform Movement's political positions. One example of such a structure is as follows: rabbis begin with a contemporary idea, relate it to a quotation in the Torah portion and then proceed on to share a message. It is a relatively easy way to write, for the genre is clearly established, one can learn to conform to it and create legitimacy. This structure can lend itself

to wonderfully inspired writing as well as insipid banality. One determining factor is the degree of thoughtfulness with which the rabbi writes the message. How much thought and creativity is the rabbi putting into the writing within the genre? Conforming to genre lends structure and creates a framework in which to think about an issue. When done sensitively, writing within a genre can be beautiful. Yet, mindless adherence to genre creates a greater possibility of careless, less thoughtful contributions.

I know well that rabbis' lives are hectic. Commitments arise at the last minute, and sometimes there is simply not much time to work on a sermon or article. It can be easier to plug a new textual citation or current event into an existing framework. Sometimes the result is still one of thoughtfulness and insight, but also likely is rote, unemotional, lackluster prose.

So much of what I will do as a rabbi revolves around the written word, and my writing will be perhaps my most tangible legacy. One aspect of writing responsibly is considering the context when using a prooftext. Jewish textual tradition is so large that one could find a quotation (especially if taken out of context) to support virtually any religio-political position. Responsibility means using a genre when it is helpful in expression and abandoning it when it is not. There is such great opportunity in the genres of using text when it is used conscientiously, as support rather than foundation for an argument. Yet, genre cannot be an excuse for taking ethically problematic positions, like defining religious commitment on the basis of sexual orientation. Genre cannot be an excuse for avoiding the messy work of thinking through our commitment to various issues. When one uses genre for advantage and benefit, one uses it as a

means of clarification: so that one can create a framework to present arguments and messages and so they can be more easily comprehended. Yet, using genre beneficially demands responsible thought.

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Even if I understand the genres and issues of history as interpretation at play in the biblical corpus, I still must confront the problem of what to do with ethically problematic material in our canon. There are two primary options: to keep the material within the canon and to figure out a way to deal with it or to excise it from the canon completely. This binary dilemma has been particularly difficult for me during my years of rabbinical school. I have gone back and forth many times debating what to do with material in the Torah that is affronting to our modern sensibilities. On one hand, I want to purge clearly ethically abhorrent material from our canon: some themes, like genocide, have no place in our attempts to create a tradition that encourages solidarity. If I pass on such material to the next generation, then I am handing them the same issues for them with which to grapple. Where is the progress in the tradition? On the other hand, I feel uncomfortable with altering the canon. I do not hope that different kinds of Jews create different canons; for the most part, canon is something Jews have in common. At this stage in my nascent rabbinate, I am not ready to put myself outside of the realm of Jewish canon. Furthermore, so much of Jewish tradition and literature is based upon the canonized Hebrew Bible; to alter the canon would also implicitly put centuries of midrash, law, prose, poetry and theology out of the canon, too. So I create a boundary for myself.

It is my hope that liberal Jews are making progress with regard to how we use and understand our canon. I wish that my struggles here provide insight for you. In every stage of my rabbinical education, my work has been based on scholars who have come before us, all of whom used previous generations of scholars to inform their work. Yet, I bring my own ideas and experiences to the table, too. For example, in reading the Bible, I may ask some questions that the early Reformers asked in the nineteenth century, but I may ask different questions, too. The issues of priestly ritual that were problematic for the first generations of Reform Jews are not as poignant to me today as are issues of violence against people. The issues that our generation of rabbis confronts and the tools that we use to confront them are constantly changing. I choose to see this as progress, and it is my hope that contemporary contributions will continue to move the process of continual interpretation and reinterpretation along. From this perspective, canon is always changing.

Based on the binary issue of maintaining or changing canon, I wonder if a middle ground might be a conception of our tradition as having multiple *canons*. Such an approach would allow for a different (albeit slightly amorphous) canon for the sanctuary and perhaps one for the classroom, which might have sentient differences. I have become convinced that certain parts of our canon have no place in a worship service, where discussion and sometimes even translation are not present. So, for example, when reading *Parashat Ekev*, one would never read the beginning of Deuteronomy 7 from the *bima*. Yet, one would deal with it as part of the host of issues that comes up with the portion in the classroom: in a weekly *parashat ha-shavuah* class, or perhaps in a class dealing with Deuteronomic

thought, biblical authorship, covenant, or land. That way, the group can discuss issues, and a conversation can ensue. This example demonstrates how dialogue could create a sincere and open approach to problematic material in our canon. Another way to look at the issue of canon is to think of a hierarchy of canons. Jewish tradition already has a concept of ranked canons. For example, the Torah is considered more sacred than the prophetic books, which are holier than rabbinic writings. In a similar vein, perhaps we create a hierarchy of canonical material based on its ethical content. Such an approach recognizes the diversity of ethics in our canon and also empowers us to make judgments about our texts. Envisioning different canons does not solve the issue of what to pass on to the next generation, but it does affect how to discuss and frame it.

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In addition to giving thought to the proper forum for ethically problematic aspects of the canon, I also need to consider how to read these texts critically. First and most important is considering *how* to read. In the discussion on multivocality, I mentioned how different readings of the same text could lend themselves to different insights. In a similar vein, being conscious of the tools and strategies that we bring to reading text only deepens our understandings of both the text and ourselves.

In reading text, it is possible to teach and learn for years by drawing upon the generations of Jewish interpretative tradition to read creative harmonies that fill in textual gaps. Yet, it would be a sad commentary on our short-sightedness if we were to limit our reading lenses to Jewish commentaries. A whole world of philosophy, linguistics, and literary theory exists that has investigated how we read

and what it is that we bring to our reading. When we apply yield from these fields to our readings of the Bible, we can gain exciting insights and broaden our perspectives. Judaism has a tradition of applying secular scholarship to the interpretation of our tradition. Indeed, such an approach has enabled Jewish creativity to continually gain not only from new ideas within the religion but from the wealth and breadth of thought in the Greco-Roman, Christian, Muslim and secular worlds.

Examples abound in Jewish history. For example, in the Talmud, rabbis integrated Greco-Roman concepts and words into their thought and arguments. Centuries later, Moses Maimonides drew great inspiration from Aristotle. Abraham ibn Ezra wrote that "if one desires to learn secular wisdom, let him learn it from the works of experts in these fields and let him examine their proofs and see if they are correct" (2) and drew upon the scientific world to read the Bible critically. Reform Judaism's early thinkers, like Abraham Geiger, Samuel Holdheim, Kaufman Kohler and Emil G. Hirsch, used the new ideas of the Enlightenment to reinterpret and re-conceive of Jewish thought, theology and practice. Indeed, the development of this religious tradition would not be so vibrant or advanced were it not for the integration of secular thought and culture with Judaism. I find it sad and ironic that I need to take the time to state this as I approach ordination in 2008, for these ideas should be an assumed part of our liberal tradition by now.

In constructing my own approach to reading and thinking about the Bible, I have chosen to dip into the well of contemporary scholarship to enhance my ability to think critically about this central religious text. In the context of my

rabbinic thesis, the primary sculptors of my reading strategy are Booth, Nussbaum, Rorty and Mullen, who write in the secular academy. Yet, their contributions are relevant to me. I feel fortunate to live at a time in history and a place in the world where I do not need to live in a Jewish ghetto. I have the benefit of an education that teaches me to engage contemporary scholarship widely. An important aspect of my rabbinate is integrating secular and Jewish studies and making them both exciting and relevant within synagogue and other Jewish settings. Among my goals for my rabbinate are maintaining and expanding my cultural literacy in fields of contemporary scholarship, so that, while not always deep, I will have the ability to hone the skills to keep applying the world of scholarship and current events to how I approach Judaism. As Booth and Nussbaum teach, if I choose our literature as I choose my friends, then just as a panoply of friends broadens my perspective, so too does a diversity of literary perspectives. Kaplan urges us to "interpret our tradition in the light of our modern world outlook" (Greater 505). He understands that it would be silly to try to recreate or long for the worldview of the biblical authors for our own day; such thinking would negate the myriad developments and growth in religious and secular culture. Moreover, Kaplan understands that Judaism benefits when exposed to a wider variety of thought; the more we are exposed to, the greater our insights and creative contributions can be.

As an interpreter of and contributor to Jewish tradition, a rabbi stands both as insider and outsider. Booth can critique parts of the Western literary canon like Huckleberry Finn and Lolita with the primary role of a critic. In contrast, when I as a future Reform rabbi critique the Torah, I do so both as a

modern critic, an heir to the modern and post-modern fields of literary criticism and also as someone still a part of the tradition. I am interested in passing on a vibrant Judaism; I have an intellectual and emotional commitment.

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If I am to commit myself (and my life) to religion, to Judaism, then I want it to be the best version of religion, the kind of religion that improves lives and brings people together rather than dividing them and inspiring violence. This commitment to the betterment of religion, the task of how to address the ethics of the textual canon is at the center of how Jews inherit our tradition and transmit it.

Mordechai Kaplan finds a balance between the roles of critic and commitment in his understanding of how to deal with the problem of genocide in the Bible:

> We must be prepared to find much in the life and thought of our ancestors that seems immature, irrational, and in the light of our present day standards, even unforgivable . . . *We should not feel called upon to apologize for the moral immaturity and spiritual insensitivity of our ancestors* (Greater 508).

Kaplan is not afraid to read the Bible critically, to question its ethics and to consider how we should understand it today. As such, Kaplan takes a more assertive approach to talking about ethical issues in the Bible than does a number of contemporary commentators. Kaplan's dual roles of unafraid critic and committed religious leader can serve as a model for the modern rabbinate, as rabbis are teachers and preachers based on the Jewish canon.

In addition to providing a model of religious negotiation, Kaplan's concept of creativity provides a model for religious responsibility. Creativity, for Kaplan, is the hope for Judaism's future, that the tradition is constantly evolving and

positively growing. He writes, "To achieve greatness Judaism has to be conceived as the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people . . . Judaism cannot afford to rest on the laurels of its past; it has to become creative" (Greater 451). Creativity keeps our religion and culture alive.

It is a rabbi's responsibility to push for creativity, to use education to encourage positive creativity. In those efforts, contemporary rabbis take part in a long tradition of creative Jewish thought. For example, the issues of ethnic identity formation in the Deuteronomic School provide a model of Jewish creativity. Israelites responded to the changes of Babylonian exile by creating a national historical narrative into which they wove their goals and conceptions of the world. That some parts of this narrative are less palatable than others at least two thousand years later does not deny the magnitude of the creative endeavor. The Deuteronomic School's creativity can be a model for approaching and confronting the problems of each generation's own era. Rather than become paralyzed by the myriad issues and conflicts facing the Jewish community at the beginning of the twenty-first century, rabbis can take part in an age-old Jewish tradition: use creativity to create solidarity.

In the rabbinic period, rabbis responded through the genre of midrash to understand the Torah and to make it morally palatable for them. In the Middle Ages, Maimonides used the concept of allegory to rethink aspects of the Bible that did not make sense to him. It is possible to have the same zeal for creativity today, breathing life and meaning into our tradition. It does not mean forgetting about the past or just overlaying new interpretations over old ones, but it does mean continuing to create, build and contribute. As Kaplan writes, "We should

not expect to find in Pentateuchal Torah the last word in philosophical, ethical, or religious truth" (Greater 507). Generations of creativity have moved our societies along and inspired the invention of new ideas. The Torah is a relevant word for us as Jews, since it begins the canon, but it is not the most authoritative word. Each one of us determines what to believe, and with that power comes great responsibility for compassion and intellectual honesty.

• • •

As I stand at this threshold with my rabbinate wide open before me, I want to articulate where I am. This year-long thesis project has enabled me to articulate how I want to read the Bible, and by extension, the Jewish canon. I have learned that my goals are not just abstract wishes but that with time and direction, I can read critically and insightfully and that I have the tools to engage our ancient texts. I have learned a host of things that I believe as I stand on the precipice of rabbinical ordination: I believe that humans, for the most part, are contingent upon our surrounding worlds. I believe that the primary goal of my rabbinate is creating relationships of solidarity in every possible way. I believe that how I read affects how I choose to live, and I pledge to continually consider what and how I read and therefore what and how I teach. I believe in thinking and writing responsibly. I believe in a creative, multivocal understanding of Judaism. I believe in using the breadth and wealth of religious and secular scholarship to enhance and embrace our understanding of Jewish tradition and thought. I believe in the possibility of the future, in my own power to live my ideals and in our collective power to enact positive change. I believe that we can work towards a better Judaism and a better world. I fervently hope that my

generation leaves you with a world more compassionate than we found it. I promise to do my part in this endeavor and look forward to reflecting on this journey with you.

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