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Summary

This thesis, Force and Dialogue: God's Relationships with Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, explores the four call narratives contained in those prophetic books.

The research is based on Abraham J. Heschel's The Prophets: An Introduction and The Prophets: Volume II, and on scholarly books and articles. I also prepared an annotated translation of each call narrative, included as appendices.

My goal upon embarking on my research was to investigate the nature of the God-prophet relationship based on those prophets' call narratives. In particular, I focused on whether those relationships are characterized by force (i.e., God's coercion of the prophet) or by dialogue (i.e., God and prophet existing as partners). I was also eager to read and analyze Heschel. I found that Heschel captures the nuanced dynamic between God and the prophets but overemphasizes the dialogic aspect of the relationship. God's coercive power is the most salient component of the God-prophet relationship.

The thesis consists of eight chapters: an introduction in which I describe the contents of the thesis; an analysis of Heschel's views concerning the God-prophet relationship; four separate analyses of the call narratives; a further analysis of Heschel's thesis based on those narratives; and a conclusion in which I discuss my interest in this topic and what I have learned from the project.

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Force and Dialogue:
God's Relationships with Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel

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Chapter One
Introduction

A friend once told me she envied the biblical prophets because they were overwhelmed by the spirit of God. She likened the prophet's experiences to her own feelings of being "carried away" by a spiritual presence. The prophets, though, do not describe their experiences that way. Their prophetic careers, according to Shalom Paul, are characterized by "anguish, fear, rejection, ridicule, and even imprisonment"[1] – a far cry from my friend's impression of a gentle call to the prophet. This thesis seeks to examine the nature of the prophets' direct experience of the divine. Stripped of idealized notions of what it must be like to be so close to God, I set out to read and analyze first-hand the words of the biblical prophets, with the help of scholars. This exploration of the prophetic call seeks to clarify how the God of the Bible relates to the prophets, casting aside contemporary notions of "spirituality" that only serve to trivialize. I hope to come away from this project with a refined notion of the biblical understanding of God, the prophets, and God's interaction with individuals.

Background of Prophecy

The most common word for "prophet" in the Hebrew Bible, נביא, probably relates to the Mesopotamian root *nabu*, "to name" or "to call." Its precise meaning is unclear, but it likely refers to one who calls out to the people or who is called by God.[2] There are two types of prophets in the Hebrew Bible. The pre-classical prophets preach primarily to rulers, perform miracles, often possess a following, and do not make extensive use of

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[1] Shalom M. Paul, "Prophets and Prophecy," Encyclopaedia Judaica, Volume 13 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972) 1166.
[2] Marc Z. Brettler, How to Read the Bible (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2005) 142.

poetry. This thesis concerns their successors, the classical prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets. The classical prophets preach primarily to the people, often in poetic form. They convey dire warnings concerning the people's lack of fidelity to God and failure to live according to the moral dictates of Torah. The also exhort the people to repent and occasionally offer messages of consolation.

The Divine Call

Prophets describe the divine call as intense and overwhelming experiences wherein the prophet often converses with and sometimes sees God. Some Bible scholars believe these direct experiences of the divine are the *sine qua non* of biblical prophecy. David L. Petersen refers to Hermann Gunkel who "maintained that the prophets had distinctive, usually private experiences in which the deity was revealed to them."[3] Petersen also quotes Johannes Lindblom, who writes that the prophet is "a person who, because he is conscious of having been specially chosen and called, feels forced to perform actions and proclaim ideas which, in a mental state of intense inspiration or real ecstasy, have been indicated to him in the form of divine relations."[4]

Petersen proffers other typologies for what might define prophecy.[5] My thesis, however, does not seek to pinpoint the essential element of prophecy. Rather, I hope to explore the nature of the call from the prophets' perspectives. I am interested in how

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[3] David L. Petersen, "Defining Prophecy and Prophetic Literature," in Prophecy in Its Ancient Near East Context (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962) 34.
[4] Petersen, quoting Lindblom, 34.
[5] I.e., the charismatic nature of the prophet, which results in a following, articulated by Weber (Petersen, 36); the poetic style of communicating God's word and the poetic spirit of the prophet, articulated by Herder (Petersen, 34); the prophetic function as a messenger between God and people, articulated by Ross and Muilenberg (Petersen 37); and the prophet's theological message of ethical monotheism, articulated by Wellhausen, et al (Petersen, 38).

they feel when they find themselves face to face with God, suddenly aware that their lives have taken a cosmic turn. What is the nature of the God-prophet relationship? I am particularly intrigued, as Petersen writes, of the prophet's feeling "forced to perform actions." Does this mean the God-prophet relationship is primarily characterized by coercion? Moreover, does the "mental state of intense inspiration" imply that the prophet experiences joy, or something akin to it? Do the classical prophets experience ecstasy like the pre-classical prophets?[6]

My Research

Petersen observes that the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos are unique in that they offer "overt reports" about what it feels like to be called by God. Each prophet self-consciously reports on "the sense of the call."[7] In order to understand that "sense," I studied the research of a number of modern biblical scholars. I focus in particular on Joseph Blenkinsopp's commentary on Isaiah 1-39, Shalom Paul's commentary on Amos, Jack Lundbom's commentary on Jeremiah, Moshe Greenberg's commentary on Ezekiel, as well as others. To frame the thesis, I closely read Abraham J.

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[6] Sheldon H. Blank, Understanding the Prophets (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1969) 36-37. These features by and large apply to Moses's call at the burning bush as well. See Exodus 3:1 – 4:20. Although Moses may be the "paragon of the prophets," (Shalom M. Paul, "Prophets and Prophecy," Encyclopaedia Judaica, Volume 13 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972) 1170), he does not belong to the same tradition as the classical prophets, and so he is not a focus of this paper. There are four features to the call of the prophet, according to Sheldon Blank. These features are particularly apparent in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, but they are in part observable in Amos and elsewhere too. The first feature is the prophet's becoming aware of his mission, "that he is being sent; that God tells him to go." The second feature is that the prophet "must overcome a natural sense of inadequacy or unwillingness." The third feature is that the prophet learns he must be God's spokesperson, that he must "say what God wants said." And the fourth feature is the prophet's realization of the magnitude and difficulty of the task.

[7] Petersen, 40.

Heschel's The Prophets: An Introduction and The Prophets: Volume II. Heschel's work is particularly relevant, for both books – particularly the second volume – offer extended discussions of the nature on the call to prophecy and the God-prophet relationship. I seek to evaluate how Heschel's analysis of the prophets stands up to a close reading of these biblical texts. Reading the prophetic call narratives through the prism of Heschel's thinking goes to my core concern in this thesis: What is the nature of the God-prophet relationship: coercion or dialogue? Subjugation or partnership?

Overview of the Thesis

Chapter two presents an analysis of Heschel's views of prophecy, examining the tension of coercion versus dialogue inherent in the God-prophet relationship. Chapters three through six analyze the call narratives in Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Chapter seven returns to Heschel in order to determine whether his views about prophecy in general and of each particular prophet are accurate. In chapter eight, I reflect on what I have learned from this rabbinic thesis, particularly as I embark on a career in the rabbinate.

Chapter Two
Heschel's The Prophets: The Prophet Attuned to God

God initiates a relationship with the biblical prophet, according to Abraham Joshua Heschel in his two-volume work, The Prophets. God develops this relationship to attune the individual to God's feelings concerning the people Israel. In Heschel's nomenclature, God seeks to engender the prophet's "sympathy" for "divine pathos."

Sympathy for Divine Pathos

Sympathy for divine pathos is the prophet's capacity for feeling what God feels. God's feelings in relation to the people Israel include love, disappointment and anger, and compassion. Divine pathos, then, changes depending on the situation. Heschel writes, "Pathos is a relative state; it is a reaction to what happens within the life of humanity."[8] The prophet's sympathy for divine pathos is "an emotional identification of the human person with God."[9] This identification is intense. "The prophet is guided, not by what he feels, but rather by what God feels."[10] This sympathy is also intimate. The prophet "feel[s] the divine pathos as one feels one's own state of the soul." The prophet "experiences God as his own being."[11]

Put another way, Heschel writes, "Fellowship with the feelings of God" is "the fundamental experience of the prophet."[12] Once that fellowship is established, after

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[8] Abraham J. Heschel, The Prophets: Vol. II (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 101.
[9] The Prophets: Vol. II, 98.
[10] The Prophets: Vol. II, 94.
[11] The Prophets: Vol. II, 99.
[12] Heschel, The Prophets: An Introduction (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 26.

divine pathos is instilled in the prophet, the prophet's task is to reflect it in words and actions. The prophet himself becomes an "approximation to the pathos of God."[13]

Teasing out from Heschel's prose a single idea concerning the creation of prophetic sympathy for divine pathos and the manner in which it is instilled in the prophet is not easy. Heschel describes a complicated process that is subtle and at times contradictory. In some passages Heschel describes the forceful imposition of God's will on the prophet.[14] Elsewhere he focuses on the prophet's innate sensitivity and on the dialogic nature of the relationship.[15] Sometimes Heschel describes the individual as losing himself in the process of becoming a prophet.[16] At other times he stresses that the prophet maintains his individual identity throughout his prophetic career.[17]

Coercion by God

Divine force is certainly part of the prophet-forging process. No emotion, Heschel writes, arises via mild encounters.[18] The encounters between God and prophet, and the experiences the prophet must endure, cause the prophet personal pain. Heschel points to Hosea, commanded by God to marry a chronically unfaithful wife and then to give their children names that reflect the fractured relationship between God and Israel. Hosea's

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[13] The Prophets, Vol. II. 103.
[14] See The Prophets: An Introduction, 114.
[15] See The Prophets: An Introduction, 25-26; Vol. II, 132.
[16] See The Prophets: Vol. II, 99.
[17] See The Prophet:, An Introduction, x; Vol. II, 137.
[18] The prophets often bemoan the overwhelming power of God in their lives. But John Donne in the seventeenth century, expressed the opposite desire: that the Holy Spirit would – with brutal power – overwhelm him. "Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you/As yet but knock, breathe shine and seek to mend./That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me and bend/Your force to break, blow, burn and make me new" (Holy Sonnet 14).

marriage to Gomer "stirred and shocked the life of Hosea."[19] Prophets also complain of their broken hearts,[20] they pray for death,[21] and bemoan their woe,[22] all because of God's "holy word." There are other examples of God's aggressive tactics vis a vis the prophet. Jeremiah must hide a garment between rocks, and then wear it, full of holes.[23] Isaiah must walk around naked for three years.[24] Ezekiel must eat a scroll.[25]

Heschel also describes the emotional toll the prophet must endure for being so intimately connected to God. "Prophetic sympathy," he writes, "is no delight...[It is] a state of tension, consternation and dismay."[26] It is "a challenge, an incessant demand."[27] The prophets testify to this struggle. God's power haunts the prophet Habakuk: "I heard and my bowels quaked,/My lips quivered at the sound./Rot entered my bones,/I trembled where I stood."[28] Moreover, the prophet suffers loneliness. He is part of the people and yet separate from them; he loves them and must rebuke them. Heschel observes, "A man whose message is doom for the people he loves not only forfeits his own capacity for joy, but also provokes the hostility and outrage of his contemporaries."[29] Being overtaken by God makes the prophet miserable.

God does not merely toy with the poor prophet, though. There is a point to the suffering God inflicts: to evoke sympathy for God's feelings in the prophet. Concerning

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[19] The Prophets: An Introduction, 56.
[20] Jeremiah 23:9.
[21] Jeremiah 20:14-18.
[22] Isaiah 6; Micah 7:1-7; Habakuk 3:16.
[23] Jeremiah 13:1-7.
[24] Isaiah 20:1-4.
[25] Ezekiel 2:8-3:2.
[26] The Prophets: Volume II, 89.
[27] The Prophets: An Introduction, 16.
[28] Habakuk 3:16.
[29] The Prophets: An Introduction, 114.

Hosea, Heschel writes, "As time went by, Hosea becomes aware of the fact that his personal fate is a mirror of the divine pathos, that his sorrow echoed the sorrow of God."[30] The way to create competent spokespeople is to create in them "an inner identification" with God; this is done by imposing upon them experiences which enable them to feel what God feels.[31] All such situations, according to Heschel, are part of God's plan – God's hope – to create spokespeople who adequately understand God's feelings for the people. The prophet's pain has a pay-off. Heschel explains, "The pathos of God is upon him. It moves him. It breaks out in him like a storm in the soul, overwhelming his inner life, his thoughts, feelings, wishes and hopes. It takes possession of his heart and mind, giving him the courage to act against the world."[32]

Sensitivity to God's Feelings

For Heschel, though, equally important as God's overwhelming power is the prophet's sensitivity to God's feelings. Coercion is sometimes necessary, but it does not create in the prophet sympathy for the divine. "Fear does not give birth to prophetic sensitivity." Rather, the force that "lends such sublime intensity to what he utters"[33] already exists within the prophet; it is some facet of his personality. The prophet – or the person God chooses to become a prophet – possesses "temperament, concern, character, and individuality."

Both forces – God's aggressive power and the prophet's own personality – influence the prophet. Heschel notes, "As there is no resisting the impact of divine

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[30] The Prophets: An Introduction, 114.
[31] The Prophets: An Introduction. 52.
[32] The Prophets: Vol. II, 88.
[33] The Prophets, Vol. II, 92.

inspiration, so at times there is no resisting the vortex of his own temperament."[34] God, then, does not choose just anyone to be a prophet and then, by "sheer compulsion," turns that person into a prophet. Rather, God chooses the person to be a prophet because of who and what he already is. The prophet possesses a prophetic personality even before he is called to the prophetic mission.

The prophet, Heschel stresses, never relinquishes his personality as a result of his association with God. "He is a person, not a microphone." He stands before God in relationship. The prophet is able to – and is expected to – participate in a dialogue with God. The prophet reacts to and responds to God. Responding to the claim that the prophet is a vessel, passively receptive, Heschel asks, "Is the prophet a person whose consciousness, in consequence of divine influence, utterly dissolves...?" The answer is no. The prophet, he writes, is not "an instrument, but a partner, an associate of God."[35]

The God-prophet "partnership" is most apparent in the prophet's intercessions on behalf of the people. The prophet frequently defends the people from God's wrath. "When the secret revealed is one of woe, the prophet does not hesitate to challenge the intention of the Lord."[36] Heschel's proof text is Amos 7:2, discussed below, where Amos successfully invokes God's attribute of compassion by beseeching God to forgive the wayward people: "How can Jacob stand? He is so small."

Despite these arguments, Heschel also acknowledges that the prophet's association with God leads to the erasing of the prophet's own identity. Shortly before writing that the prophet is God's partner, Heschel writes that the relationship is so God-

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[34] The Prophets: An Introduction, x.
[35] The Prophets: An Introduction, 25.
[36] The Prophets: An Introduction, 22.

oriented that the personal expressions by the prophet are rare. "The prophet is endowed with an insight that enables him to say, not I love or I condemn, but God loves or God condemns."[37] Shortly after asserting the prophet's individuality in the discussion on intercessionism, Heschel claims, "A person to whom the spirit of God comes, becomes radically transformed, he is turned into another man."[38] Heschel cannot escape the fact that the call to prophecy is transformative as well as overwhelming. As Hosea testifies, "My heart is turned within me."[39]

The relationship between God and prophet is indeed complicated and paradoxical. It is also true, though, that Heschel's writing style makes his views difficult to assay. At times, for instance, he writes that the prophet's innate character is the primary factor qualifying him for prophecy. Later, he writes, it is a combination of character and divine coercion. Heschel writes that the prophet maintains his character after being called by God, but also claims the individual's character is subsumed. Heschel correctly notes, "There is no explanation for that which is a divine secret,"[40] and biblical texts indeed do promote a mix of ideas. Yet, in many chapters of The Prophets, Heschel's style is more evocative and affective than lucid and straightforward.

Prophecy and Ecstasy

It is possible, though, to achieve a better grasp of Heschel's ideas concerning the interplay between God and prophet in his long discussion on ecstasy in The Prophets: Volume II. He devotes three chapters to distinguishing ecstasy from prophecy. In these chapters he demonstrates that whereas ecstasy is a full overtaking of the individual and an

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[37] The Prophets: An Introduction, 24.
[38] The Prophets: An Introduction. 22.
[39] Hosea 11:8.
[40] The Prophets: Vol. II, 91.

erasing of the individual's identity, biblical prophecy presents the opposite: the individual is primarily in dialogue with God and secondarily overwhelmed; and the prophet's personality is by and large maintained.

Ecstasy is an out of body experience, according to Heschel. Whether via frenzy or ingestion (drugs or alcohol) or contemplation, the ecstatic wants to escape the present situation and achieve unity with God.[41] Her soul must first open, Heschel explains, in an "attempt to become materially filled" with the divine. Once she becomes possessed – or "enthused" – by God, the soul is loosed from the body. It achieves unity with God and the individual's identity disappears. "In order to make room for the entrance of the higher force, the person must forfeit the power of the self."[42]

Heschel contends this process is antithetical to biblical prophecy. Still, he generously outlines the views of thinkers disagree with his position that the prophets were not in the thrall of ecstasy. Philo, borrowing from Hellenistic ideas about the soul, considers ecstasy – complete possession of the prophet by God –the essential mark of biblical prophecy. Philo points out that תרדמה, the "deep sleep" of Abraham at the covenant of the pieces,[43] is translated in the Septuagint as "ecstasy" and that it describes the same sort of "divine possession or frenzy to which the prophets as a class are subject."[44]

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[41] The Prophets: Vol. II. 106.
[42] The Prophets: Vol. II. 107.
[43] Genesis 15:12.
[44] The Prophets: Vol. II. 116.

Heschel writes that most rabbis disagree with Philo, maintaining that the absence of ecstasy "is the mark that distinguished the Hebrew prophets from all other prophets."[45] Maimonides writes that the prophet's experience ecstasy, with the exception of Moses. In The Guide of the Perplexed, Maimonides states that at the moment of being called by God, the prophet's senses are suspended to allow the Active Intellect to enter, interrupt rational faculties, and usher in prophetic activity. Heschel describes Maimonides's view but adds that Maimonides, "emphasized...the role of the intellectual capacity of the prophet."[46]

Heschel finally presents the views of twentieth century scholars. Many are keen to demonstrate similarities between biblical religion and other ancient religious traditions.[47] Heschel notes that such scholars argue that the prophet attains supernatural visions "through the temporary excitation of his own mental powers in such a way as to give rise to a vision."[48] Heschel finds in these modern views a mere attempt "to reduce the experience of the prophet to a mental aberration, typical of ecstatics all over the world."[49] Other mid-twentieth century scholars, he notes, demurred, opposing the idea that the era of ecstatic prophesy is the basis of the age of the later prophets.[50]

Heschel contends that to understand biblical prophecy through the prism of ecstasy trivializes – or at least minimizes – the relationship of prophet to God. The hallmark of the prophetic personality, Heschel claims, is the ability not only to withstand

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[45] The Prophets: Vol. II. 119. Heschel presents in a footnote an opposing rabbinic view that the prophets are not always fully conscious of what they were prophesying.
[46] The Prophets: Vol. II. 120, quoting Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, 2:41.
[47] The Prophets: Vol. II. 124.
[48] The Prophets: Vol. II. 125.
[49] The Prophets: Vol. II. 133.
[50] The Prophets: Vol. II. 130.

the divine call, which is overwhelming, but also to *thrive* under it – to remain fully conscious. Heschel then goes a step further: the prophet does not only remain conscious; he also responds, engaging in a relationship with the divine. This is something the ecstatic cannot do. Far from being present enough to respond, the ecstatic is out of the moment, out of body, and in another place.

An example of the critical difference between the ecstatic and the biblical prophet, Heschel writes, is speech. Those overcome by ecstasy babble; they "speak in ecstasy."[51] The prophet is eloquent. He has something to impart. Thus, the loss of consciousness renders the ecstatic irrelevant. The prophet's message, on the other hand, is "relevant to the contemporary situation and capable of changing the minds of those who held the power to change the situation."[52]

An additional difference between ecstasy and classical prophecy is the distinction between unity with and sympathy with God. Whereas the ecstatic seeks union with God, the prophetic mission depends on separateness. The prophet may dialogue with God only by remaining separate from God. Sympathy for divine pathos entails an ability to feel what God feels, but not to be indistinguishable from God. Heschel explains, "The prophet encounters real otherness, else there would be no mission."[53]

Conclusion

Heschel's salient views on prophecy are well-illuminated by the differences between the ecstatic experience and prophecy. Intent on promoting the dialogic nature between God and the mortal, Heschel contends that the individual is not completely

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[51] See Numbers 11:25.
[52] The Prophets: Vol. II, 140.
[53] The Prophets: Vol. II, 143.

overwhelmed by the call to prophecy. The prophet is not lost in prophecy; he remains present and maintains his individuality. This present-ness enables the prophet to respond to and engage in dialogue with God. This dialogic relationship allows for a worldly relevance that the ecstatic does not strive for and will not achieve.

Chapter Three
Isaiah 6:1-13: Sensory Assault in God's Throne Room

Isaiah 6:1-13 depicts the dynamic and layered nature of the relationship between God, the commander, and Isaiah, the commanded prophet. God first overwhelms the prophet with a sensory assault in Isaiah's vision in the Temple. Isaiah is thereby wrought with emotional anguish. A messenger of God then reaches out to Isaiah, acculturating him to his new status as a prophet. Finally a brief dialogue ensues, demonstrating the steeply imbalanced relationship between God and prophet.

Isaiah 1-39 presents the writings of an individual[54] in the latter half of the eighth century BCE. Isaiah is from Jerusalem and his career took place in Judea. He is concerned with the immorality of the people and the geopolitical allegiances of Judea's rulers in light of the growing aggression of Assyria. Isaiah was a scion of an established family. According to rabbinic tradition, his father, Amoz, was the brother of King Amaziah, who was the father of King Uzziah, the Judean ruler at the beginning of Isaiah's career.[55] Isaiah's connections enable him to call Uriah the priest and Zecharia to serve as witnesses for his scroll of prophecy in 8:1-2. Unlike Jeremiah, Freehof notes,

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[54] Many scholars maintain that chapters 1-33 were written at a later time by other authors. In addition, chapters 36-39 feature Isaiah but are taken from 2 Kings 18-20. Scholars nearly unanimously divide the entire book of Isaiah into two sections, with Deutero-Isaiah consisting of chapters 40-66. Some believe chapters 54-66 present the prophecies of a Trito-Isaiah, similar in style to Deutero-Isaiah. See H.L.G., "Isaiah," in Encyclopaedia Judaica, Volume 9, 49; Benjamin D. Sommer, "Isaiah," in The Jewish Study Bible, Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 782.

[55] Solomon B. Freehof, Isaiah: A Commentary, (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1972) 9, quoting BT Megillah.

Isaiah is never persecuted by the ruling authorities, despite his caustic criticisms of the ruling class and the rich.[56]

Questions arise as to why the theophany depicted in this passage appears in chapter six, after Isaiah's prophetic mission had begun. Some scholars believe this "throne room vision" is in fact the beginning of Isaiah's career, and that the events depicted in the book are achronological.[57] Medieval commentator Ibn Ezra states that Isaiah's response to God's call in verse eight, "Here I am; send me," proves that this is the beginning of his prophecy.[58] Some believe Isaiah 6:1-13 is not a call narrative at all. Others contend it is a call narrative but not to the beginning of Isaiah's career as a prophet, but rather to the beginning of a new stage of his prophecy.[59]

After this episode, Isaiah turns his attention to preparing King Ahaz for a pending Syrian-Samarian attack.[60] Others point out that this episode marks a dividing line between Isaiah's calls to repent, which appear in chapters one through five, and the end of such entreaties.[61]

The action in this passage occurs in a room occupied by an outsized throne upon which God sits. The text calls the setting a הֵיכָל, a temple. According to most commentators, it is the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Context makes this clear. Isaiah is a Judean prophet and much of his prophetic activity is set in Jerusalem. It makes sense, then, when encountering God in the הֵיכָל, this would refer to the Temple in Jerusalem. In

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[56] Freehof, 9.
[57] Sommer, 796.
[58] Freehof, 47.
[59] Sommer, 796.
[60] Joseph Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, (New York: Doubleday: The Anchor Bible, 2000) 223-224.
[61] Sommer, 796.

addition, throughout Isaiah 1-39, the prophet uses the phrase יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, which has a distinct Jerusalem association.[62]

Isaiah 6:1-4

The passage begins as a rich sensory experience. The abundant set of images in 6:1-4 is so vivid that the prophet may experience it as being too rich and more than he can handle. Isaiah is overwhelmed by this dramatic overabundance in the throne room. His encounter with the Divine was in fact deeper than merely sensory. In Isaiah 6:1, the prophet states that he "saw my Lord, sitting upon the throne." The verb ראה means "see" but frequently deserves a deeper meaning, like "perceive," or "understand." Isaiah 1-39 contains several examples. In Isaiah 6:10, the verb describes people "seeing" with their "minds." In Isaiah 29:18, the prophet speaks of the blind having the power of seeing even in darkness, i.e., understanding. Here, Isaiah not only sees; he also *comprehends*, understanding God in a way he previously had not.

Such a perception, though, must be understood in a plain sense as well. Isaiah, like few others, perceived God as corporeal; he *saw* God. To appreciate the high drama of the moment, it is useful to recall when Moses's requests to see God in Exodus 33:20: "Man may not see Me and live." God's admonition to Moses helps to convey the magnitude of Isaiah's experience. A vision of God is a dramatic, transformative, and even dangerous experience. The mortal's intimate encounter of the Divine, one may argue, can cause fear and desperation.

The throne upon which God sits in 6:1 is רָם וְנִשָּׂא, "high and raised up." This is the only time in the Tanakh that the throne of God is described with these two adjectives.

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[62] Psalm 48:9 refers to Jerusalem as "the city of the Lord of hosts." Isaiah 8:18 refers to "the Lord of hosts who dwells on Mount Zion."

One modifier – "high" *or* "raised up" – would convey the idea that God was seated higher than Isaiah. The two modifiers together depict a great disparity; God and the mortal are on an entirely different plane. In Isaiah 57:15, the two adjectives describe God as on a high plane of holiness. Blenkinsopp suggests the author of Isaiah 6:1-13 may have been influenced by depictions of Assyrian kings "of gigantic proportions compared to those of pygmy size who attended them."[63] One might imagine, then, a divine figure exponentially higher and more awesome than the statue of Abraham Lincoln seated on his throne at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC.

After describing the throne, the prophet focuses on God's robe in 6:11. The robe does not just hang there. Nor has it already filled up the room. The verb for "fill" – מלא – appears as a participle, an atemporal form suggesting "the durative, linear action of the verb."[64] Thus the robe is in the process of flowing and unfurling, filling up the Temple before Isaiah's eyes. Bernard S. Childs writes, "Very shortly just the tip of his robe envelops the entire temple."[65] Blenkinsopp states the robe "hyperbolically" fills up the entire room.[66] There is no evidence in the text for hyperbole, however. The striking description seems to reflect precisely what Isaiah saw. As Childs writes, "The author is not merely speaking metaphorically in consciously figurative language, but in a highly concrete fashion he reacts in an effort to render the reality whom he encountered."[67]

The appearance of מלא in 6:1 is the first of three attestations of the word in the passage. The repetition is important; it conveys the sense of fullness that characterizes

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[63] Blenkinsopp., 225.
[64] Allen P. Ross, Introducing Biblical Hebrew (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 126.
[65] Bernard S. Childs, Isaiah (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) 55.
[66] Blenkinsopp, 224.
[67] Childs, 55.

Isaiah's vision. An appreciation of the size of the images in Isaiah's vision is crucial to understanding the relationship between God and the prophet: God's greatness in relation to the human's smallness. This disproportional relationship explains Isaiah's gut-wrenching and awe-struck response to the vision.

The number of God's attendants, the seraphs, also contributes to the sense of volume.[68] How many there are is unclear. The fact that they call to each other, זֶה אֶל־זֶה, might indicate that there are two. זה is a singular pronoun and neither Koehler-Baumgartner's Lexicon Veteris Testamenti Libros[69] nor The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew[70] suggests זֶה אֶל־זֶה necessarily refer to more than two. Indeed, the translations by JPS – "one would call to the other" – and Blenkinsopp – "each cried out to the other" – imply two seraphs. And yet Blenkinsopp describes the scene as containing "an unspecified number of seraphs."[71] Brown-Driver-Briggs offers the possibility that the repetition of זֶה may imply an indefinite number. The NRSV opts for such ambiguity and translates the phrase as "one called to another." This preserves the possibility that there are several or many seraphs.

In 1 Kings 22 the prophet Micaiah, attempting to convince the king of Israel to do battle, describes a throne room with similar imagery. He too "saw" God sitting on a throne, "with all the host of heaven standing in attendance to the right and to the left of Him."[72] As the "host of heaven" speak, זֶה appears twice: "The one said thus and another

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[68] For a discussion of the seraphim, see annotated translation of this passage, Appendix A.
[69] L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, "Koehler-Baumgartner." s.v. "זֶה."
[70] The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, s.v. "זֶה."
[71] Blenkinsopp, 224.
[72] 1 Kings 22:19.

said thus, until a certain spirit came forward."[73] Here the repetition of זֶה suggests more than two. The word "host" also implies more than two.

The point here is not merely lexical. Commentators are eager to imagine a multitude of seraphs. This inclination reflects a desire to describe great volume which is critical to understanding Isaiah's throne room vision.

In 6:3, the seraphs proclaim, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts. The entire earth is filled with His glory." As the throne room is being filled up, they announce that even the earth is filled with God's holy presence. The repetition of מלא contributes to the sense of fullness.

In 6:4 the doorposts of the Temple shake and a cloud of smoke envelops the space. The verb for shaking, from the root נוע, adds new visual as well as aural elements to the sensory extravaganza. Visually, the word denotes movement. In Judges 9:9 and 9:11, the verb describes a mildly swaying tree. But it is often more dramatic. The tree imagery in Isaiah 7:2 depicts a more ominous swaying, wherein the hearts of anxious people are compared to the movement ("trembling," according to JPS 1985) of trees before a storm. In Isaiah 9:17, נוע describes the earth shaking in response to God's fury. God's presence provides a similar connotation to נוע here. It is more than swaying; it is a powerful trembling. Rashi comments that the trembling described here refers to an earthquake that occurred during King Uzziah reign, mentioned in Amos 1:1. As the doorposts shake, one can hear their rumbling as well. The chorus of the host of seraphs calling to one another is accompanied by the rumbling of heavy stone doorposts.

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[73] I Kings 22:20-21.

This final occurrence of מלא in the throne-room vision appears as a nifal, imperfect tense: "the House was filling with smoke." The imperfect tense may convey continuous action. JPS renders this line as, "The House kept filling with smoke." Blenkinsopp opts for something different: "The house began to fill with smoke." Both capture the critical idea: Isaiah stands there and watches the event as it unfolds. He is a real-time witness. This explains his shocked reaction. He sees it all happen, and reacts accordingly.

Smoke, while it sometimes has negative connotations in the Bible, is common in theophanies. In the covenant of the pieces, smoke emanates from an oven.[74] At Sinai, smoke covers the mountain.[75] Those theophanies occur outside. Isaiah's vision occurs in an enclosed space, accentuating the sense of volume. The smoke does not vanish in the air. Rather, one senses its volume as it fills the room.

The description in 6:1-4 depicts the throne room in grand terms, suggesting awesome power and great volume: a huge and elevated throne; a robe continually flowing, a crowd of winged seraphs, a rumbling, and a cloud of smoke increasing in density. Each aspect of the passage adds to the scene, a filled-to-overflowing vision of the Divine. The balance of the passage flows from this description. It shows an overwhelmed and desperate prophet. When he finally speaks, Isaiah is beset by a yawning feeling of inadequacy. When a seraph cures the inadequacy, the prophet is able to engage in a dialogue with God.

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[74] Genesis 15:17.
[75] Exodus 19:18.

Isaiah 6:5-7

Incapable of expressing himself intelligibly, Isaiah's first sound is אוֹי־לִי This interjection, "Woe is me!" expresses anguish. In Lamentations 5:16, with Jerusalem burning, the exclamation reflects deepest regret for the sinfulness that causes destruction: "Woe to us that we have sinned!" Ezekiel cries in 24:6, "Woe to the city of blood!" These cries of anguish come from those dreading punishments for their people. It can also express personal pain. For Jeremiah the word erupts in 10:19 as visceral accompaniment to his usual eloquence: "Woe to me for my hurt."

Isaiah continues with an elaboration of his feelings of inadequacy. He states, אוֹי־לִי כִּי־נִדְמֵיתִי. This is the first of three occurrences of כי in 6:5. Here it modifies נִדְמֵיתִי. The word כי often possesses a causal meaning. "Woe is me, *for* I am lost" is a common approach to this verse.[76] Such a translation would explain *why* Isaiah utters "Woe is me." But here it is more likely that כי is a demonstrative, similar to אוֹי־לִי which begins the verse. As a demonstrative, כי may remain untranslated. This is the approach of JPS 1985, Blenkinsopp and NRSV (i.e., "Woe is me; I am lost!"). Not translating it, though, deprives the reader of an additional opportunity to appreciate the dramatic impact of the experience on Isaiah. It could be incorporated into the verb it precedes. Modifying נִדְמֵיתִי with "utterly" contributes a justifiable emphasis.

This verb נִדְמֵיתִי, possesses the strongest of connotations. In Hosea 4:6, a furious God uses the verb to describe nothing less than God's plan to destroy the people. In Ezekiel 32:2, in a devastating prophecy, the prophet says of Egypt, "Great beast among the nations, you are doomed." In Obadia 1:5, the verb, rendered by JPS 1985 as

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[76] See, for example, Jewish Publication Society, The Holy Scriptures, 1917 translation, Isaiah 6:5.

"destroyed," is parallel to "ransacked" and "plundered." BDB offers "undone."[77] This definition is mild compared to its use in the situations cited above. Isaiah is too overwhelmed and perhaps hopeless to be merely "undone." "Destroyed" seems appropriate for a city, not an individual. Blenkinsopp, JPS, and NRSV translate it as "lost." With the added power of כִּי, the phrase may be rendered, "I am utterly lost."

After giving expression to his fear and shock, Isaiah explains the source of his pain. "For I am a man of impure lips, and I dwell among a people of impure lips." This second occurrence of כִּי in 6:5 may be understood causally; Isaiah explains why he feels utterly lost. But why is the state of his lips important at this moment? The answer is evident from what follows: "My eyes have beheld the king, Adonai of hosts!" Isaiah thus realizes his impurity, and there he stands – before God! Isaiah's use of טָמֵא is appropriate for this Temple vision; it is the commonly used word to describe ritual impurity in a cultic sense. But this is a peculiar situation; Isaiah not only stands in the Temple; he stands before God. This gives his state of ritual impurity immeasurably greater gravity. He is not only unclean for purposes of sacrifice; he is simply "not worthy to see God."[78] Childs writes, "He is awestruck, not because he is only a mortal before the infinite, but because he is a sinful human being, sharing the impurity of an entire nation."[79] Blenkinsopp suggests his unclean lips prevent Isaiah from participating in the seraphic liturgy; clean lips, he writes, indicate preparation for a specifically prophetic mission."[80]

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[77] The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, s.v. דמם.
[78] Sommer, 797.
[79] Childs, 55.
[80] Blenkinsopp, 226.

The third and final appearance of כי appears at the beginning of the statement, "My eyes have beheld the king, Adonai of hosts," in 6:5. It seems to be demonstrative, emphasizing the thrust of this passage: that being in the presence of God "undoes" the prophet; it makes him feel utterly lost.[81]

The approach reflected in the JPS 1985 offers another possibility. It translates this final כי in 6:5 as a disjunctive: "Yet my own eyes have beheld..." as if to say, "Even though I have impure lips, I am nonetheless having this vision." This reading suggests that Isaiah, amidst God and angels, feels self-possessed enough to analyze his situation in this detached manner, thus removing Isaiah from the intensity of the moment. Blenkinsopp's approach is better, treating כי once again as a demonstrative by adding an exclamation point at the end of the verse: "My eyes have looked on the king, Yahveh of the hosts!" Regardless of the various interpretations, the three-time repetition of כי following אוי in 6:5 adds a dramatic quality to the moment. The repetition of that single monosyllabic word creates an aural effect akin to a stutter; Isaiah may have been apoplectic from fear and awe.

Verses six and seven serve a critical function in this passage. They depict the cleansing of Isaiah's impure mouth when one of the seraphs touches a glowing coal to the prophet's mouth. As the glowing coal touches Isaiah's mouth the seraph tells him in 6:7, "Look, this has touched your lips. Now your iniquity has departed and your sin is forgiven." Sommer writes that the seraph is attempting to allay Isaiah's fears that he will

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[81] JPS 1917 incorrectly renders each כי in this verse causally: "Then said I: Woe is me! For I am undone;/Because I am a man of unclean lips,/And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; /For mine eyes have seen the King, /The Lord of hosts." It does not make sense to render this final כי causally. The prophet does not have impure lips *because* he sees God.

die because of his feeling of unworthiness in the presence of God. Such an interpretation acknowledges Isaiah's fear. But the seraph's interaction with Isaiah is more than reassurance. It represents a fundamental event in the God-prophet relationship. Blenkinsopp points out that the lip purification of Isaiah has been compared to the rinsing of the mouth by "Mesopotamian cult functionaries as preparation for public speaking."[82] But Isaiah's role is not as a cult functionary, as Blenkinsopp also writes: "Purification of the lips...indicates preparation for a specifically prophetic mission."[83] This act of purification enables the man to become a prophet. Prior to purification, Isaiah is unable to fulfill his prophetic role. This moment is radically transformative for Isaiah.

Isaiah 6:8-13

Now qualified for his mission, the prophet may speak with God. In 6:8 God asks, "Whom shall I send?" It seems like a rhetorical question. Isaiah is the only human present. Who else present would be qualified to preach to the people? The verb "send" – שלח – is often used by God and masters to send prophets and servants on missions. God "sends" Nathan to David in 2 Samuel 12:1; Jeremiah is "sent" to prophesy in Jeremiah 26:12; the king of Aram threatened to "send" his servants in 1 Kings 20:6. It is worth noting that the verb implies a power disparity. The sender controls the one who is sent. While the relationship between God and Isaiah may be characterized as a dialogue, it is nonetheless a dialogue between unequal partners.

Isaiah's use of אדני, "my lord," in the present verse and in verse one, also conveys this power disparity. King Saul is called אדנינו, our lord or master, in 1 Samuel 16:16. It can also be used as a simple honorific. Lot refers to his unknown visitors as אֲדֹנָי, "my

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[82] Blenkinsopp, 226, quoting Hurwitz.
[83] Blenkinsopp, 226.

lords," in Genesis 19:2. Yossi Leshem points to several instances in which such "language of humility" is used, including when the woman of Shunam addresses Elisha as "my lord, man of God."[84] Here, Isaiah's trembling posture in the throne room straightforwardly captures the mortal's subservient posture toward God and God's angels.

Isaiah eagerly responds to God's question with הִנֵּנִי שְׁלָחֵנִי, "Here I am! Send me!" Isaiah's enthusiasm is unusual. More typical are Moses and Jeremiah who repeatedly challenge God concerning their competence for their missions.[85] Isaiah's eagerness "diverge[s] from the more common form of commissioning...in which the emissary expostulates and has to be reassured and practically coerced to undertake the mission."[86] It may be argued, though, as Sommer suggests, that God already reassured Isaiah when the seraph purified Isaiah's lips. If that is the case, then perhaps Isaiah's eager attitude may be less anomalous.

In any event, Isaiah displays in 6:8 a measure of confidence which enables him to engage in a trace of dialogue with God, representing the highest level in the relationship between Isaiah and God. This dialogue is brief and quickly overshadowed by God's first instruction to the prophet in 6:9-10: "Go, say to this people, 'Yes, hear, but do not understand. And surely see, but do not know.'/Make dense the minds of this people. Make heavy their ears, blind their eyes!" Each verb in the passage appears as an imperative; God orders the prophet to prevent the people from hearing and understanding the divine message. God then explains this perverse command: "Lest they see with their

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[84] 2 Kings 4:16, quoted in Yossi Leshem, "Ama and Shifchah in Biblical Books during the Monarchy" in Beit Mikra, 1997. 327-331.
[85] See Exodus 3:11 and Jeremiah 1:6.
[86] Blenkinsopp, 226.

eyes and hear with their ears, and with their minds will understand and repent and heal themselves." Thus, God compels Isaiah to compel the people to ignore him. Freehof and Sommer offer the possibility that the imperatives in these verses can be read as predictions of the future as opposed to commands, that God is not ordering but predicting the people's obduracy.[87] This is grammatically hard to accept.

Prophets' messages often go unheeded. Jeremiah states in 6:10, "Their ears are blocked/And they cannot listen./See, the word of the Lord has become for them/An object of scorn." Micah complains in 2:6 that the people demanded that he stop preaching. Isaiah in 28:9-12 laments that he felt he was speaking to babies who simply refuse to listen. The people's failure to heed Isaiah in 6:9-10, though, presents an entirely different sort of situation. Here, *God* imposes obtuseness on the people. It is part of God's own plan. As elated as Isaiah may feel after his lips were purified, one wonders how he feels about his mission and relationship with God upon receiving *this* instruction. Not only does the dialogue begin with a series of imperatives to the prophet, but the imperatives reveal in starkest fashion the futility of the prophetic task. No matter what the prophet may say or do, the people are being manipulated not to heed him.

Isaiah only musters a brief response: עַד־מָתַי? "Until when?" Isaiah's question may have been an attempt to avert a punishment of the people that seems certain. But it may also be an expression of despair, anger, or frustration. In Numbers 14:27, God says, עַד־מָתַי? דש. God rails against the ungrateful Israelites in the desert: "How much longer shall that wicked community keep muttering against Me?" In Jeremiah 23:26, God angrily uses the phrase, wondering how much longer false prophets will continue. For

[87] See Freehof, 48; Sommer, 797.

Habakuk in 2:6, the phrase expresses exasperation at those who continue to suffer from an excess of arrogance. Thus, the brief dialogue between God and prophet in this passage is capped by a note of prophetic despair.

The balance of the passage responds to Isaiah's question. God plans a thorough destruction. Even after a first destruction, God vows to continue, saying in 6:13: "Now if there is still one-tenth of it, it will again be consumed." While God concludes on a more hopeful note – that a holy seed will remain to revive the people after the destruction[88] – the ultimate effect of the prophecy is pessimistic.

Conclusion

Isaiah's throne room vision in 6:1-13 presents a rollercoaster of experiences for the newly-commissioned prophet. It begins with shock and awe, as Isaiah confronts the overwhelming fullness of God's presence. The encounter continues with a moment of reassurance, when Isaiah gained pure lips. This reassurance is followed by a burst of enthusiasm. But this enthusiasm almost immediately gives way to a dark and fatalistic message that is ominous both for the prophet and the people. The prophet is transformed and some sort of dialogue occurs. And yet in the end Isaiah is as speechless as he is at the commencement of this divine encounter.

[88] Freehof, citing Krauss, notes that this hopeful conclusion to the passage may be a later addition. Freehof at 49.

Chapter Four
Amos: Judean Farmer, Prophet in Israel

Amos 7:1 – 8:3 provides a prism through which to understand the God-prophet relationship. It begins and ends with prophetic visions that record dialogues between God and Amos. These dialogues reveal how the prophet is capable of confronting God while remaining the weaker party in the relationship. Sandwiched between these visions is a longer exchange between Amos and Amaziah, an Israelite priest. Amos in that dialogue offers a glimpse into his experience of being commissioned to prophecy. He describes how God removed him from his previous occupation as a farmer and inducted him into prophetic service. The prophet also describes in that exchange the challenges prophets must endure to fulfill the divine mandate. The entire passage demonstrates the ambiguous nature of the God-prophet relationship, how it is dialogic with an indisputable power imbalance.

Amos lived during the mid-eighth century BCE. He is one of the earliest classical, literary prophets. He was from Judah, but his prophetic mission was set in Israel, the northern kingdom. This era in Israel is marked by the great wealth of the few and the poverty of the many. Much of the text of Amos is poetic. The prophet describes with disgust the opulence of the rich and rails against them for neglecting ethical imperatives.

Amos 7:1-9

The opening sequence of 7:1-9 contains divine visions in which God and the prophet speak. God reveals to Amos three ways in which the people Israel will suffer. The first two visions concern an assault on their fields, first by locusts and then by

supernatural fire. In the third vision, God announces an attack on Israel's illicit cultic places and political leadership.

Amos's responses to these impending disasters reveal the multivalenced nature of the prophet's relationship with God. When God announces a "struggle of fire ...that will consume the fields," Amos intercedes: "My Lord YHWH, please cease! How can Jacob stand it? He is so small." God retracts the threat: "It shall not come to pass."[89] The same dynamic adheres in Amos 7:1-3, where God revokes the threat of locusts.

These intercessions demonstrate that the prophet possesses persuasive power over the divine. The called sways the caller. While the text provides no insight into what God was thinking at that moment, Jennifer M. Dines writes, "Amos's reasoning suffices" to affect a "change of heart" in the divine.[90] But the prophet's capacity to persuade God is limited. In the face of the threat of locusts, Amos entreats, "My Lord, YHWH, please grant forgiveness."[91] The verb for "grant forgiveness" is סלח. Shalom Paul notes that סלח indicates "an absolute and total pardon of sin."[92] Paul refers in particular to Exodus 34:9 and Numbers 14:9. In the former passage, Moses's plea to God reflects his concern for a long-term pardon. He states, "Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and provide us with Your inheritance."

The aim of attaining God's inheritance may suggest a pardon in perpetuity. Paul continues that God does not grant a sweeping pardon. Rather, God *relents* on *this* punishment in 7:3 – נִחַם יְהוָה עַל־זֹאת. The verb נחם appears in Jeremiah 18:8, where

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[89] Amos 7:4-6.
[90] Jennifer M. Dines, "Amos," in The Oxford Bible Commentary, John Barton and John Muddiman, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 587.
[91] Amos 7:2.
[92] Shalom Paul, Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991) 228.

God via the prophet tells the people that if they repent, God will not carry out an intended punishment. In Joel 2:13, the same verb describes God's promise not to inflict a devastating military attack upon Judah if the people return to God. In both cases, a particular calamity is averted, but God does not entirely absolve the people of their sin. So Amos's plea for intercession succeeds, in a qualified fashion. The prophet seeks a complete pardon; he achieves a reprieve. In the second vision, Amos has learned the limits of his influence. He does not request a pardon. Using the verb חדל, he entreats God to "cease." Paul writes, "Because his first appeal for complete pardon was not granted, Amos can only attempt now to rely upon God's attribute of mercy and kindness."[93]

In the verses that follow, 7:7-9, the prophet does not attempt to alter God's violent intentions at all. It may be that this third vision produces a more dramatic effect on the prophet. It is certainly more vivid. While in the first two visions, Amos hears and speaks to God, in this third vision he *sees* God standing on a city wall. Moreover, in this vision, God addresses Amos: "What do you see, Amos?"[94] It is a more palpable and direct experience of the divine. Amos answers God that he sees an אנך. This word, which only appears in these verses in the Bible, is perplexing. Many translations, including JPS and NRSV, opt for "plumbline," a cord with an attached weight used to determine verticality or depth, pointing to the center of the earth. A plumbline may be understood as an instrument of penetrating destructive power, presumably with the capacity to destroy the foundation of a structure. God states, "The altars of Isaac will be desolated. The holy

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[93] Paul, 233.
[94] Amos 7:8.

places of Israel will be laid waste." The plumbline will also pulverize the political establishment: "I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."[95]

Other commentators understand אנך differently, noting it is likely a Mesopotamian loanword meaning "tin." Dines writes that tin was used in the production of bronze weaponry, suggesting here "the military capability of an invader."[96] If אנך represents military strength, the biblical writer limns a striking image of God grasping a metal weapon and standing upon a metal-plated wall, indicated by the construct phrase אֲנַךְ חוֹמַת.[97] Combined with God's doomsday threat, we witness here a daunting image of ruthless and impregnable power.

Paul, on the other hand, notes that tin is a weak metal that must be alloyed with other metals to produce weapons-grade material. He compares this metal wall with other metal wall images in the Bible and elsewhere in Near Eastern literature. Jeremiah offers an instructive contrast. God fortifies Jeremiah by making him a חוֹמַת נְחֹשֶׁת,[98] a "wall of bronze," representing strength. In contrast, Amos sees a אֲנַךְ חוֹמַת, a tin wall, representing vulnerability. "If, then, walls of iron and bronze symbolize strong, fortified walls, a wall of tin would be the very opposite."[99] The verse that follows supports this idea: the standing institutions of Israel are vulnerable and will be destroyed.[100]

Each of these interpretations conveys a daunting moment for the prophet. Amos sees God towering above him, lording over a doomed civilization. He hears God's threat; God plainly informs him there is no chance of reversing it. One may be reminded of

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[95] Amos 7:9.
[96] Dines, 587.
[97] Amos 7:7.
[98] Jeremiah 1:18.
[99] Paul, 235.
[100] Most commentators concede there may be more to this vision than commentators have discovered.

Isaiah's throne room vision in Isaiah 6. In both situations, God projects images of overwhelming power that petrify the prophet. Isaiah babbles. Amos is now speechless. After allowing Amos twice to intercede, Dines writes, "YHWH resumes control."[101]

This third vision contains dialogue, but it is clear that Amos's one-word response is a mere foil for God's threat against the people. It is more a set-up than a conversation. Awed by the vision or by the extremity of the threat, Amos falls silent. He has little opportunity to intercede. Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman write,

> In view of the dramatic impact of the prophet's intercession in the first two visions, in which the effect is immediate and drastic...it looks as though the second pair of visions is structured so as to prevent even the possibility of another reversal. In other words, Amos is so carefully and tightly restricted that he has no opportunity to voice an opinion or to intervene in the matters of substance....The prophet was effectively silenced...controlled or dismissed to perform his real mission as messenger and no longer to be seen as interlocutor and intercessor. The interview was ended abruptly.[102]

Amos 7:10-17

Following the threat against the religious and political power structures in Israel, the priest Amaziah, a symbol of that power structure, challenges Amos. His challenge and Amos's response reveal basic challenges of being a prophet. First, we learn that Amos is sharply and dangerously at odds with the ruling powers in Israel. In 7:10 Amaziah sends word to King Jeroboam that Amos is "conspiring" against the king and

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[101] Dines, 587.

[102] Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman. Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New York: Doubleday: The Anchor Bible, 1989) 615. Alternatively, Amos may not intercede here as he did previously because this divine threat is against the powerful, against whom Amos preaches, whereas the first two threats would have injured all the people. Paul notes that the earlier plagues would have been devastating. In fact, Paul explains concerning the locust plague at the time of the "late-grown crops," "For the nation the effect would be devastating and crippling" (Paul, 237).

that the prophet's activities will destabilize the kingdom. Amaziah's words are threatening. He states, "The land cannot endure his words" and then orders Amos to "flee."[103]

Amos's predicament is not anomalous. Prophets are often at odds with the ruling elite. Jeremiah's unwelcome advice brought him imprisonment and threats to his life.[104] In Numbers the Moabite prophet Balaam provides his king, Balak, with favorable prophecies of the Israelites. An enraged Balak, like Amaziah, demands that the prophet "flee back to your own place."[105] Both Amaziah and Balak employ the imperative form of ברח, followed by the preposition אל. A command to flee implies that a threat exists. This is certainly the case in Genesis 27:43, when Rebecca warns Jacob to flee.[106] There, the threat comes from Esau, Jacob's stronger brother.

Several scholars note that Amaziah and the power structure he represents possess legitimate concerns. Paul writes that prophets sometimes find themselves at the center of dangerous political transitions and movements.[107] The prophet Ahijah, railing against Solomon in Judah, legitimizes Jeroboam's establishment of Israel.[108] Elijah must flee from Jezebel after he vanquishes her state-sponsored prophets.[109] Similarly, Amos's actions challenge the stability of the nation and its supporters.[110]

During his exchange with Amaziah, Amos refers to the coercion involved in pressing an individual into divine service. After Amaziah instructs Amos to "prophesy"

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[103] Amos 7:12.
[104] See Jeremiah 18:18; 37:12-16; 38:4.
[105] Numbers 24:10.
[106] Genesis 27:43.
[107] Paul, 239.
[108] 1 Kings 11:29-39.
[109] 1 Kings 19:3. Elijah did flee, although the Hebrew word ברח is not used. Rather, וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־נַפְשׁוֹ, "He arose and went/left for his life."
[110] Paul, 240.

in Judah, not in Israel,[111] Amos offers a perplexing response: "I am not a prophet and I am not a disciple of a prophet. Rather, I am a herdsman and a tender of fig-trees. And Adonai took me from following after the flock and Adonai said to me, 'Go. Prophesy to My people Israel"[112] Why does Amos disavow his identity as a prophet or disciple of a prophet? In the next verse, after all, Amos reports that God instructed him to "prophesy," using the nifal form of the root נבא.

Some suggest Amos is responding to Amaziah's insinuation in 7:12 that he was a for-profit prophet. Amaziah's instruction to prophesy and "eat your bread" in Judah may be a zinger aimed at Amos – a suggestion that Amos's "bread," his livelihood, came from prophesying.[113] Paul similarly notes that Amos follows his denial of being a prophet with the statement that he earns his livelihood as a herdsman and farmer, thus implying that he does not depend on prophecy for money.[114]

Andersen and Freedman offer a more intriguing explanation for Amos's retort in 7:14. They suggest that Amos distances himself from prophecy in order to emphasize that his true identity is herdsman and tender of sycamore trees. They write, "Amos was...a rancher and a farmer, a man of the country, in other words, like anyone else."[115] According to some scholars, this rejection of his prophetic identity indicates an existential crisis. Paul quotes Hoffman, who states that Amos's "ambiguous feelings regarding his own identity" illustrate "a very serious inner conflict."[116] Andersen and

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[111] Amos 7:12.
[112] Amos 7:14-15.
[113] See *Appendix B.*
[114] Paul, 245.
[115] Andersen and Freedman, 790.
[116] Paul, 245, quoting Hoffman, "Amos," 212.

Freedman observe that, when Amos distances himself from prophetic guilds, he presents himself as "a lone figure."[117]

God, of course, provokes the painful "inner conflict." Andersen and Freedman write, "He is only a prophet because Yahweh took him and ordered him to prophesy."[118] The fact that God causes this disruption reflects Amos's earlier statement concerning his powerlessness in relation to God: "The lion has roared; who is not frightened? My Lord YHWH has spoken; who could not prophesy?"[119] Thus, regardless of how the relationship might develop, and regardless of the prophet's ability to confront God, coercion is the foundational element in the relationship between God and prophet. The prophet could not help but respond to God's call; it was as if he encountered a roaring lion.

Moreover, one wonders whether Amos's statement in 1:2 -- "the pastures of the shepherds wither" -- is a subtle acknowledgement of how he feels about the loss of his own pastures. Did he experience some sort of psychological withering when he was called by God to become a prophet? Is that what happens when the lion roars? Amos goes on to explain, God "took me from following after the flock, and Adonai said to me, 'Go. Prophesy.'"[120] What is the nature of this "taking"? Sometimes, לקח implies only choosing or selecting. In Deuteronomy 7:6 Moses warns the people not to worship idols like other peoples because God *selected* them as God's people.[121] The verb לקח

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[117] Andersen and Freedman, 790.
[118] Andersen and Freedman., 778.
[119] Amos 3:8.
[120] Amos 7:15.
[121] Deuteronomy 7:6.

possesses such a meaning when the prophet Ahizah informs Jeroboam that God has chosen him to lead the people after Solomon dies.[122] In addition, God "takes" – that is, appoints – the Levites to be Temple functionaries.[123]

But in the present passage, לקח conveys a stronger action than *selected*. Paul notes in a footnote that Ibn Ezra and Kimchi have argued that the use of לקח may mean a forceful taking. The taking of David by God offers an instructive parallel. The same verb and verb form describe how God takes David from following after *his flock*, just as Amos is taken from following after his flock.[124] God removes both individuals from their natural bucolic environments. In the conscription of David in Psalm 78, the words בכר – "choose" – and לקח – "take" – appear in parallel, translated by JPS 1985 as "He chose David, His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds."[125] While the verbs are in a parallel structure, the לקח elaborates upon the first. David was not merely chosen; he was taken, compelled to serve.

Andersen and Freedman note that sometimes the verb לקח possesses a most dramatic connotation. In Job 1:21 it means to usher someone into death; in Genesis 5:24 God "took" Hanoch, meaning he died. Speaking of Amos's "taking," William Rainey Harper notes this was "a message which he could not refuse to obey, a command."[126] Paul describes the moment of taking as a "radical metamorphosis in [Amos's] life."[127]

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[122] 1 Kings 11:37.
[123] Numbers 18:6.
[124] 2 Samuel 7:8.
[125] Psalm 78:70; also see 2 Samuel 7-8 and 1 Chronicles 17:7.
[126] William Rainey Harper, The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905) 172.
[127] Paul, 249.

Paul helpfully compares Amos's commissioning to the call of Elisha.[128] There, the word לקח is not used, but the sudden rift between one's former life and one's prophetic life is poignantly clear: Elisha asks his master Elijah to permit him to kiss his parents good-bye. The launching of Elisha's prophetic mission, like the taking of Amos, when read carefully and with sensitivity, illuminates the challenge of the call. The call to be a prophet entails a break – abrupt and dramatic – with one's former life.

Amos 8:1-3

In Amos 8:1-3, after the exchange between Amos and Amaziah, a final oracle occurs. Scholars debate the attribution of this message. Some attribute parts of it to Amos. It seems more plausible to attribute it entirely to God because the structure of the dialogue is strikingly similar to the one in vision three in Amos 7:7-9. Like the earlier vision, God shows Amos something and then asks him, "What do you see, Amos?" God uses Amos's brief reply to convey a message of doom, which includes a promise not to pardon the people. God states in 8:2-3, "The end is coming for My people Israel. I cannot continue to pardon them. The singing women at the Temple will howl on that day, declares my Lord YHWH. Abundant corpses everywhere. Silence!"

Some translators understand "declares my Lord YHWH" to mark the end of God's part of the dialogue, but this need not be the case. In Jeremiah 1, the same phrase appears twice, in the middle of God's monologues, not at the end of them.[129] It makes particular sense to attribute these lines to God here, as NRSV and JPS 1985 do, because of the final word, הס. While הס is usually uttered by humans in the Bible,[130] including in

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[128] 1 Kings 19:19-21.
[129] Jeremiah 1:15, 19.
[130] See Judges 3:19, Zephania 1:7.

Amos 6:10, here it seems to be *God's* admonishment to Amos. It may represent God's insistence that Amos, once again, keep silent. God is quashing any renewed attempt by the prophet to intercede on behalf of the people. Such a preemptive admonishment by God would again illustrate the limited nature of the prophet's leverage with the divine.

But God's order of "Silence!" to Amos may also indicate something more. It may hint at a further wrinkle in the ambiguous God-prophet relationship. If God were entirely confident of divine power over the prophet, perhaps God would not care one way or the other if the prophet were to attempt another intercession or not. Perhaps God's silencing of the prophet further demonstrates the complexity of the relationship. Andersen and Freedman note, "The divine insistence on silence is rather an admission that God might still be influenced by his messenger."[131]

Conclusion

In conclusion, Amos 7:1-8:3 illustrates the nuanced relationship between God and the prophet. Amos evinces a level of autonomy and persuasion as he carries out his prophetic obligations. But in the end God does what God will do in regard to Amos's life, in regard to his dialogic engagement with Amos, and in regard to the people Israel. The prophet has power and God knows it; but God, being God, may assert absolute control.

[131] Andersen and Freedman, 616.

Chapter Five
Jeremiah: In God's Thrall

God's call of the prophet Jeremiah is startling and swift. The prophet is braced by fear as God methodically gains complete control over him. At the first moment of the call in 1:5, Jeremiah learns that God marked him as a prophet before his birth, and perhaps he was biologically conceived. The frightening news prompts a demurral, which God quickly overrides in 1:7-8 with an instruction to follow orders. To secure God's control of the prophet, God implants the divine word into the prophet's mouth in 1:9. Thus infused with God's word, Jeremiah learns of impending trauma for the people. The call narrative ends with a further transformation in which God strengthens the prophet, turning him into a fortified city, to steel him against the attacks of the people. This is a lot to handle for a teenage prophet.

Jeremiah is a sixth century BCE prophet. The major event in his life and the focus of his 40 year prophetic career is the impending defeat of Judah by Babylon and the exile to Babylon. His advice to Judah's rulers not to ally with Egypt, Babylon's enemy, went unheeded. Jeremiah's emotions are closely linked to the fate of Judah and its people. He expresses what it feels like to be called to prophecy more than any other prophet.[132]

Jeremiah 1:4-1:9

The earliest moment of the call reveals God's intimacy with and power over Jeremiah. In the first stiche of Jeremiah 1:5 two verbs, יצר and ידע, convey these dual aspects of the God-prophet relationship: "Before I formed you in the belly, I knew

[132] See Jeremiah 4:19; 8:18; 15:10-21; 20:14-18.

you."[133] Together these verbs indicate that before Jeremiah was even conceived, God selected him, formed him, and knew every aspect of him.

The verb יצר indicates that God is the undisputed creator of the prophet. It often includes the crafting of something from raw material. There are several attestations of יצר in which a potter crafts a pot[134] and an idol-maker makes idols.[135] Both these actions entail a rendering of raw material into a new form. They also demand aforethought, a planning sense on the part of the creator. Isaiah conveys this planning sense of יצר in relation to the prophet, saying, "He formed me in the womb to serve him."[136] Isaiah's fundamental purpose – "to serve him" – is intrinsic to God's creation of him. God similarly creates Jeremiah.

The verb ידע, parallel to יצר, points to this purpose. ידע in biblical Hebrew is multifaceted. The first entry in the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew for the qal form of ידע offers common meanings, such as "know," "realize," "be aware." It also notes that the word may imply "to choose." In Jeremiah 12:3, after Jeremiah complains that God allows the wicked to prosper, Jeremiah states, וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יְדַעְתָּנִי תִרְאֵנִי וּבָחַנְתָּ לִבִּי אִתָּךְ, "But You, the Eternal, have *known* me, You have seen me, and You have tested my heart with You." The use of ידע here clearly implies a deep knowledge and special relationship between God and prophet, one that others do not enjoy.

In Amos 3:2 the prophet speaks of the special God-Israel relationship: "You only have I *known* of all the families of the earth." This statement comes in a passage in which God reminds Israel that God rescued the people from slavery, and explains why

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[133] Jeremiah 1:5.
[134] See 2 Samuel 17:28; Isaiah 64:7; 1 Chronicles 4:23.
[135] See Habakuk 2:18.
[136] Isaiah 49:5.

Israel is held accountable for its behavior. "Knowing" here, then, strongly implies a special relationship, a selection. Applying this understanding of ידע to Jeremiah 1:5, it becomes clear that God forms the prophet at the moment of creation and that the prophet is destined for this special mission. God creates this special individual in order to be a prophet.

Jack R. Lundbom notes the repetition of "before" in 1:5: "Before I formed you in the belly, I knew you./And before you came out of the womb, I consecrated you." The repetition emphasizes that the mission is inevitable; it is established even before Jeremiah is formed in the womb. Lundbom writes, "Only Yahweh knows when the decision was made. It did not occur when Jeremiah was in the womb, much less at his time of birth." Lundbom refers to Vogelin's assertion that Jeremiah was ordained "from eternity."[137] In 20:14, in the midst of his last lament, he curses the day of his birth, and then in 20:17, wishes his mother had remained "eternally pregnant," suggesting that one would need to go back to his in utero existence to thwart the prophetic path of his life.

John Bright comments that the call narrative features an "awareness that [Jeremiah] had been predestined for the prophetic office since before his birth."[138] The text does not indicate that Jeremiah was aware of this destiny. It shows that he becomes aware of it; he discovers it via the call. The semantics make a difference, as a salient feature of the call is its sudden and unwelcome news.

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[137] Jack R. Lundbom, Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New York: Doubleday, The Anchor Bible, 1999) 231. Jeremiah's super-early designation is unusual in the context of Jewish and Christian literature. In ancient Near East literature kings are often designated for royalty in the womb or at birth; Jeremiah's designation apparently occurs even earlier.

[138] Bright, John., Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, (New York: Doubleday, The Anchor Bible, 1965) 231.

The use of the verbs יצר and ידע in Psalm 139 also illuminates the manner in which God's creation and knowledge of God together convey absolute divine control over an individual. In Psalm 139:15-16, the formation of the psalmist occurs before birth, perhaps before conception. JPS renders the verses, "My frame was not concealed from You / when I was *shaped* (יֻצַּרְתִּי) in a hidden place, / Knit together in the recesses of the earth. / Your eyes saw my unformed limbs, / they were all recorded in Your book. / In due time they were formed."[139] Mitchell Dahood notes that "secret place," "recesses of the earth" and similar terms in Psalm 139 refer to Sheol, suggesting that humans take shape in the netherworld, a state of "pre-existence," apparently before they take shape in the womb.[140] In addition, God "saw" the psalmist's unformed limbs prior to forming them, suggesting God's understanding of an individual not yet created.

The frequent use of ידע in Psalm 139 primarily expresses the perfect knowledge of the omniscient God. "O Lord, You have examined me and know me. / When I sit down or stand up You know it; / You discern my thoughts from afar....familiar with all my ways. / There is not a word on my tongue / but that You, O Lord, know it well."[141] Just as God formed the psalmist before the prophet is physically formed, so God knows everything there is to know about the psalmist. The same dynamics apply to God's relationship with Jeremiah. Jeremiah is conceived by God before God even forms him. God knows all there is to know about Jeremiah.

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[139] Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985) 1274.
[140] Mitchell Dahood, Psalms III, 101-150: Introduction, Translation, and Notes (New York: The Anchor Bible, 1970) 295.
[141] JPS 1985, Psalm 139:1-4.

It is also possible to understand the psalmist's use of ידע as "selected" or "noted," – "O Lord, You have examined me and noted me"[142] – which would make sense in the context of Jeremiah 1. Grammatically, the verb וַתֵּדָע is an imperfect consecutive, usually translated in simple past, particularly when it follows a perfect tense verb, as it does here.[143] Read in the simple past, Psalm 139:1 would read, "O Lord, You have examined me and selected me" or "noted me." The fact that a writer of psalms would understand herself or himself to be specially selected by God is plausible. So understood, Psalm 139 may also present a combination of "forming" and "selecting" that is present at the inception of Jeremiah's call. God's conception of these special individuals includes, in the same divine breath, their formation and designation to particular missions.

The verb root קדש in the second stiche of verse five supports the complex of meaning offered by יצר and ידע in the first stiche. קדש refers to something especially dedicated for divine use. It sometimes refers to God. The verb often occurs in cultic contexts, such as in Numbers 3:13, where God uses the verb הִקְדַּשְׁתִּי to state that God "consecrated" the first-born to God. It is important to note that in the prior verse, Numbers 3:12, God states, in JPS's rendering, "I hereby *take* (לָקַחְתִּי) the Levites from among the Israelites in place of all the first-born." A parallel is thus created between קדש and לקח, between "consecrating" and "taking." Inherent in "consecration" is the reality of being removed from the natural flow. The Levites, for instance, are not naturally ministers at the Temple. They are rather a tribe set apart by God to fulfill that Temple role. Ramifications of their consecration include ineligibility to obtain territory,

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[142] Psalm 139:1.

[143] Most Hebrew grammars would support such a simple past reading See Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, E. Kautzsch, ed. (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1909) 326.

unlike the other tribes. Jeremiah as a prophet similarly is set apart from the normal flow of social existence to serve God. Jeremiah 15:17 illustrates his unnatural social situation: "I sat not in the happy crowd and acted jolly, because of Your hand." To be consecrated connotes an aberrant status, socially and in relation to God.

To translate the verb as "set aside," though, is far from adequate. Such a translation does not capture the divine dimension of קדש. God does not appoint Jeremiah as a vendor of jugs; God appoints him as God's spokesperson, a prophet to the nations. Lundbom also explains that קדש suggests selection: "cleansing and election are also implied."[144] He points to the election of Israel[145] and the appointment of David,[146] as instances where קדש appears with בחר, to choose. The cleansing aspect of קדש, Lundbom also points out, is also present in the call narrative of Isaiah.[147] This understanding of קדש supports the understanding of ידע as "selected," discussed above.

The appearance of these verbs – יצר, ידע, and קדש – at the first moment of the call conveys the strictly circumscribed quality of the prophet's life. Before being biologically conceived, he was divinely conceived. He was specially selected for a divine mission, so there is nothing about him that is unknown to God; in God's setting him aside for holy work, he was removed from the company of others. An awareness of these narrow parameters helps to explain the prophet's expressions of intimacy with God, and his feelings of rebellion because of it.

Upon receiving the call, as if unconsciously aware of the challenges of prophecy even before his mission begins, Jeremiah expresses anxiety. He responds in 1:6 "Alas,

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[144] Lundbom, 232.
[145] Deuteronomy 7:6.
[146] 1 Samuel 16:5.
[147] Isaiah 6:1-7.

Lord God! Listen, I do not know how to speak. I am just a youth!" Lundbom notes that both אֲהָהּ, along with the exclamation הִנֵּה that follows, "express shock and alarm."[148] The shock and alarm of aha often precedes a challenge to God. In Joshua 7:7-9, the leader first yells אֲהָהּ in the face of impending military defeat and then poses a series of challenges concerning the wisdom of leading the people across the Jordan to face enemies and how the military defeat will affect his leadership and God's reputation.

Ezekiel exclaims אֲהָהּ when he challenges God's command that he engage in the symbolic act of cooking food using excrement as fuel, thereby violating purity laws,[149] and later, when he feels God has caused too much death.[150]

Jeremiah's use of the interjection illustrates an important aspect of his personality. Despite the inevitability of the mission, he does not accept it without challenging God. He demurs and sometimes rebels against the divine command. In the call narrative, he follows אֲהָהּ with a protestation of incompetence because of his young age. The word נַעַר is malleable. It can refer to a very young boy unable to care for himself, like Ishmael in the wilderness with his mother Hagar in Genesis 21:12. Or it can refer to helpers or servants, like the two who wait for him and Isaac to return from Mount Moriah in Genesis 22:5.

נַעַר may also refer to a male teenager. This is likely what Jeremiah means in his protestation to God in chapter one. This is demonstrated in Jeremiah 2:2 where a form of נַעַר appears in the following parallel construction: חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ אַהֲבַת כְּלוּלֹתָיִךְ "The

[148] Lundbom, 232.
[149] Ezekiel 4:14.
[150] Ezekiel 11:13.

devotion of your youth, your love as a bride."[151] This puts the נַעַר at a conventional marrying age. Solomon refers to himself as a נַעַר after he is already married.[152] In 2 Chronicles, the text refers to Josiah as a נַעַר at 16 years old.[153] Lundbom points out that one stops being a נער at 20, when adulthood began in ancient Israel. He estimates Jeremiah's age at the call to be early teens.[154]

Regardless of his age, Jeremiah's anxiety is clear. He feels inadequate for the task of prophecy. As Sheldon Blank states, the word נער"says more about his state of mind. It is his way of saying: I am not worthy."[155] His demurral recalls Moses at the burning bush, where Moses also expresses concern about his speaking ability. Jeremiah, according to some commentators, sought to cast himself as Moses's successor.[156] There is an important difference, evident from the demurrals. The dialogue between God and Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai in Exodus is extensive, covering chapter three and much of four. Jeremiah's dialogue with God is truncated. This may reflect God's

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[151] Jeremiah 2:2.
[152] 1 Kings 3:7.
[153] 2 Chronicles 34:3.
[154] Lundbom disagrees with "an older generation of scholars" who place Jeremiah's age between 18 and 25. Their mistake, he claims, is that they believe the prophetic ministry begins at the moment of the call. Lundbom probably is referring to Jeremiah 1:12, where God says to Jeremiah, "I am watchful upon my word to perform it." For Lundbom, this indicates the prophetic mission would not begin until later, in 15:16, when Jeremiah reports that he has "devoured" the scroll. That future moment, according to Lundbom, is the fulfillment of God's statement concerning the placing of God's word into Jeremiah's mouth, described in 1:9. It seems to me, though, that the grammar of 1:9 indicates fairly clearly that the description of God placing the word into the prophet's mouth occurs in the past tense. Those imperfect consecutives and one perfect tense verb are best read as completed action. John Bright agrees with that translation, and contends that God's claim that God is "watching over My word" refers to God's judgments, perhaps specifically to the vision that follows, and not to the later commissioning of Jeremiah (Bright, 7).
[155] Blank, 39.
[156] Jeremiah's vision before an almond tree (1:11-12) recalls Moses's vision at the burning bush (Exodus 3:2).

comment in Numbers 12:6-8 to Moses's siblings, Miriam and Aaron. With most prophets, God says, "I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream." With Moses, on the other hand, "I speak mouth to mouth."[157] Jeremiah may express his concern, but God's prompt rebuttal demonstrates again the narrow parameters of the relationship.

God's rebuttal to Jeremiah is direct. God says in 1:7, "Do not say, 'I am a youth." The fact that God does not deny the truth of the statement supports Jeremiah's claim. God's next statement indicates the inevitability of Jeremiah's task: "Everywhere I send you, you will go. Everything I command you, you will speak."[158] There is no room for argument. The word send – שלח– is common in prophetic literature. In Isaiah's throne room vision, God asks, "Whom shall I send?" And Isaiah answers, "Here I am! Send me!."[159] As discussed in the Isaiah chapter, implicit in the act of sending is a power disparity. It is noteworthy that in Isaiah's call, God asks whom to send. This may be a rhetorical question, but it may imply that Isaiah had a choice. God offers Jeremiah no such opportunity. God simply quashes Jeremiah's resistance. Lundbom writes, "Yahweh carries out the appointment with the same vigor that Jeremiah shows in opposing it."[160]

Lundbom notes that God similarly quickly "overrides" human intentions in the Tower of Babel episode. There, the humans make their plans to build a tower in Genesis 11:3-4: "Come, let us make bricks.../Come, let us build a tower." God answers in 11:7: "Come, let us go down and there confuse their language." God thus seeks to delimit

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[157] Numbers 12:6-8.
[158] Jeremiah 1:7.
[159] Isaiah 6:8.
[160] Lundbom, 229.

human aspirations to divinity. In Jeremiah's call narrative, God's action works in the opposite direction. The divine does not permit the human to relinquish a divine call.

Lundbom also sees a "kindly rebuke" in God's response to Jeremiah's demurral. Marvin A. Sweeney describes it as an "assurance."[161] These seem to be accurate descriptions, as God urges Jeremiah not to "be afraid" and promises him in 1:8, "I am with you, to protect you." Lundbom comments that God's promise to be with someone "is one of the great promises of the Bible."[162] God makes the same promise to Jacob,[163] to Moses,[164] and to Joshua.[165] As Lundbom notes, "Jeremiah is then assured in this very first communication from Yahweh that his life will be preserved, whatever else happens."[166] This is a particularly interesting observation, as Jeremiah's frequent response to his mission is to desire death: "Accursed be the day that I was born! / Let not the day be blessed / When my mother bore me!...Why did I ever issue from the womb, / To see misery and woe, / To spend all my days in shame."[167] At other junctures, Jeremiah attests to his depression: "O my suffering, my suffering....O the walls of my heart! / My heart moans within me."[168] These verses demonstrate that God's avuncular "assurance" does not remove the prophet's pain.

In 1:9, God inserts the divine word in Jeremiah's mouth. Similar scenes occur in the callings of Isaiah and Ezekiel 2. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah is passive at this moment.

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[161] Marvin Sweeney, "Jeremiah," in The Jewish Study Bible, A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 921.
[162] Lundbom, 234.
[163] Genesis 28:15.
[164] Exodus 3:12.
[165] Joshua 1:5.
[166] Lundbom, 234.
[167] Jeremiah 20:14-18. See also Jeremiah 15:10.
[168] Jeremiah 4:19. See also Jeremiah 8:18; 10:8.

Unlike Ezekiel, neither prophet opens his mouth in order to ingest God's words. This passivity may reflect the anxiety that each one expresses – Isaiah because of his unclean lips and Jeremiah because of his tender age. After the purification of Isaiah's lips, he is eager. Jeremiah, though, lets this transformative moment without comment.

Although Jeremiah does not comment at the moment God's words enter his mouth, he does refer to it later, in 15:16. He states, "When Your words were offered, I devoured them." Thus, at this later time, Jeremiah describes his active participation in the internalization of God's words. This act of consumption is joyful and devastating. Jeremiah tells God that it was a delight to be so intimately connected to God's name. But he also describes a life of social isolation and existential trauma. His description continues in 15:17, "I have sat lonely because of Your word on me, for You have filled me with gloom." The use of the verb מלא here recalls the continual process of filling that takes place in Isaiah's throne-room vision. There, the filling-up of the throne room causes Isaiah to panic. Here, the internal filling of Jeremiah produces gloom.

Jeremiah presents a recollection of his call in Jeremiah 20 during his last lament. JPS renders 20:7, "You enticed me, Lord, and I was enticed./You overpowered me and You prevailed." The pain of having been enticed and overpowered includes social ostracism for Jeremiah, as he explains in 20:8-9: "For the word of the Lord causes me / Constant disgrace and contempt." It also includes the difficulty of containing God's word, which is "like a raging fire in my heart, / Shut up in my bones."

According to some commentators, Jeremiah's recollection in 20:7 of his call in chapter one evokes the illicit seduction of a woman. The piel of פתה – "enticed" or "deceived" – in biblical literature often refers to seducing a woman into illicit intercourse,

according to Heschel.[169] Parallel to פִּתִּיתַנִי, in Jeremiah 20:7 appears the phrase חָזַקְתָּנִי וַתּוּכָל, "You overpowered me and You prevailed." The addition of these forceful words to "seduced" leads several scholars to conclude that Jeremiah likens the call to divine rape. Sweeney writes, "'You overpowered me and You prevailed,' suggest rape. Jeremiah continues to employ this metaphor when he describes the pain and humiliation caused him by the word of the Lord, i.e., although he does not want to be a prophet, he cannot resist God."[170] Heschel's translation also captures the violent nature of the call: "Thou has raped me / And I am overcome."[171]

Lundbom seems to *almost agree* with this interpretation of Jeremiah's harsh words in 20:7. He writes, "Deception or enticement in the present verse raises the question then whether Jeremiah may be addressing Yahweh in near-blasphemous language."[172] It is not clear if "near-blasphemous language" refers to rape or not. Yet Lundbom ultimately demurs at the suggestion of divine rape. He is happy enough to concede that God acted in a "heavy-handed" manner during the call of a young prophet. I wonder, though, if Lundbom is evading a difficult issue in the text. As shocking as the language is, it seems to me consistent with Jeremiah's dramatic and self-revealing nature for him to compare the call of God to rape.

This sense of the violence of the call is supported in the call itself, when God in 1:9 implants the divine word in Jeremiah's mouth. The text reads that God stretches forth God's hand and וַיִּגַּע עַל־פִּי. This verb, from the root נגע, entails physical contact.

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[169] Heschel, The Prophets: An Introduction, 113.
[170] Sweeney, 966; see also Heschel, The Prophets: An Introduction, 113. The verb פתה appears in Exodus 22:15 in the context of a man seducing and sleeping with a virgin.
[171] Heschel, The Prophets: An Introduction, 113.
[172] Lundbom, 855.

Sometimes, that contact is rough. In Isaiah 53:4, speaking of God's servant, the people describe him as נָגוּעַ מֻכֶּה...וּמְעֻנֶּה with נָגוּעַ, the passive form of the verb, translated by JPS as "plagued," and the following words as "smitten" and "afflicted." In Jeremiah itself, the same form of the verb describes a threatening sword.[173] Lundbom notes that violence of this experience is comparable to the cleansing of Isaiah's mouth with a burning coal and states, "Jeremiah may be receiving at minimum a stroke across the mouth."[174] He translates the word as "hit."

Lundbom points out that Jeremiah is a prophet to the world and not merely to Judah and his people.[175] This contrasts with the more limited purviews of prophets who precede Jeremiah. The fact that God instructs Amos to leave his home and to prophesy in Israel seems not so radical, considering Jeremiah's mission. While the text again makes no mention of the prophet's reaction, one may imagine how this reluctant prophet may have felt about this expansive mandate.

Jeremiah 1:10-16

After God informs Jeremiah of the wide scope of his mission in 1:10 – that he is being appointed "over the nations and over rulers to uproot out, to break down, to destroy, to overthrow, to build, and to plant" –the narrative continues with two visions in 1:11-16. These verses reveal a hint of a dialogue. Similar to the visions of Amos,[176] Jeremiah's participation in this exchange is but an utterance, brief responses to God's questions. His answers serve as a foil to allow God to level a devastating threat. The

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[173] Jeremiah 4:10.
[174] Lundbom, 235.
[175] Lundbom, 235.
[176] Amos 7:1-9.

prophet's contribution is so brief, one should be reluctant to even refer to it as dialogue, although commentators do so.[177]

Jeremiah 1:17-19

Verse 17 seems to pick up on the call narrative, which is interrupted by the visions in 1:11-16. In 1:17 God again seeks to steel the prophet for the challenge that lies ahead. Here, God does not seem avuncular. Rather, God threatens to "break" Jeremiah if he is not prepared for the challenge. The verb, אֲחַתֶּךָּ, from חתת, is understood as "dismayed" or, much stronger, "shattered." The latter definition makes more sense in this context. In Isaiah 9:3 the word describes the physical breaking of chains of servitude.

Even in a non-physical, emotional sense, "shattered" is the best option. In Job 31:34, Job uses this verb to describe his feelings about being a social outcast. JPS 1985 and NRSV appropriate describe his anguish in that verse as "shattered" and "terrified." To speak of Job as feeling merely "dismayed" is to risk dramatic understatement. God thus admonishes Jeremiah that the consequences of not standing strong before the people are dire. Most translations reflect the sternness of God's warning. JPS, NRSV, and Lundbom opt for "break." Bright translates it as the shattering of Jeremiah's nerves. This understanding of God's admonishment challenges the portrayal as God as being "kindly" disposed toward the prophet.

And yet, God seems to reassure the prophet that he will be fortified against the attacks of the people in 1:18: "I have appointed you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and bronze walls over the entire land, to the kings of Judah, to her inhabitants, to her priests and to the people of the land." This encouragement is an embellishment of God's promise to be "with" Jeremiah in 1:8, and repeated in 1:19. At

[177] See Lundbom, 238; Bright, 7.

times, indeed, this divine reassurance provides some comfort. In 20:11, for instance, Jeremiah seems to evoke these words when he says, "But the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior; / Therefore my persecutors shall stumble." But three verses later in 20:14 Jeremiah continues lamenting: "Accursed be the day / That I was born."

The transformation of Jeremiah into a fortified city illuminates a critical aspect of the God-prophet relationship. God has made Jeremiah something greater – fortified by heavy metal – but Jeremiah also has lost a great deal over the course of this call. He has become in the thrall of a domineering God and there is no possibility of escape. Throughout his life, he becomes a physical symbol for God's purposes, as when God forbids Jeremiah from marrying or having children[178] and compels him to wear "bars of a yoke" around his neck, first of wood, then of iron.[179] Jeremiah may have God on his side, but he has had to sacrifice basic personal prerogatives. Other prophets suffer a similar bridling of their actions.[180]

Conclusion

While there is some evidence of dialogue in Jeremiah's call narrative, the prophet's experience of being called was one of compulsion. He learns in a flash that he has been, since his conception or before, in the thrall of God. His attempt during the call to assert himself is handily dismissed. God inserts the divine word in his mouth. He is emotionally reconstituted into a hardened wall. The call demonstrates that God is overwhelmingly in control. What is most incredible, given the daunting quality of the call experience, is that Jeremiah nonetheless insists on expressing the woe of the

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[178] Jeremiah 16.
[179] Jeremiah 27:2-28:12.
[180] See Isaiah 20; Ezekiel 4; Hosea 1; Micah 1:8.

experience throughout his prophetic career. He does not and cannot shrink from his mission. But he can still express his personal anguish over the pain of prophecy.

Chapter Six
Ezekiel: Moved Around and Force-Fed by the Spirit

Ezekiel's inaugural vision in chapter one is remarkable and phantasmagoric. Overwhelmed, he falls prostrate before the divine vision. In chapter two God addresses Ezekiel. Throughout his call to prophecy in 2:1 to 3:16, Ezekiel is bodily manipulated and forced to eat a scroll. He learns that his prophetic mission will entail great hardship because the people will ignore his message. God emotionally reconstitutes Ezekiel to withstand the people's incorrigible rebelliousness. During his call and throughout his prophetic career, Ezekiel must relinquish his autonomy. Yet despite the unimaginable demands placed on him, Ezekiel maintains his individuality via the evincing of personal emotions and small protests.

Ezekiel preaches to the exilic community in Babylonia during the sixth century BCE. He is a member of a priestly family. Like many elites, he is deported to Babylonia in 597 BCE, a decade before the destruction of the Temple. Much of his prophecy focuses on the meaning of the loss of the Temple, which he preaches is divine punishment for the people's disloyalty. He seeks to encourage the people by predicting a restoration to Zion. Much of the imagery Ezekiel uses, from the wild images of chapter one to the long narrative of the restored Temple in the latter part of the book, reflect his priestly background.

The long call narrative contains four sections: 1) the establishment of the prophet's subservience; 2) the forced eating of the scroll; 3) an elaboration of God's control over the prophet and of the prophet's relationship with the people; and 4) the bewildered prophet's departure from the call via a divine wind.

Ezekiel 2:1-7

In chapter one, God reveals extraordinary power while Ezekiel watches. At the beginning of the call narrative in 2:1-7, Ezekiel moves from spectator to player as God's spirit enters and physically manipulates him in order to impart a daunting message about the onerous hardships he must face.

In God's first direct address to Ezekiel in 2:1, God calls him בן-אדם.[181] This appellation indicates the gulf between God and Ezekiel, and the power of the former over the latter. בן-אדם, literally "son of man," sometimes refers to a specific individual, as when God speaks to Ezekiel in this verse and when a divine being addresses Daniel.[182] The expression also may refer to a generalized individual, as in Isaiah 56:2: "Happy is ... the *man* who holds fast to it." The expression is used in that fashion by the prophet Balaam in Numbers 23:19, which JPS renders, "God is not man to be capricious, / Or *mortal* to change His mind." Balaam here notes the distinction between humans and God, helping to clarify its use by God in the present verse. Moshe Greenberg in the Ezekiel volume of the Anchor Bible Commentary, writes, "Ezekiel is called [בן-אדם] in order to single him out from the divine beings that fill this scene."[183]

It is important to note, though, that the use of בן-אדם is not limited to scenes populated by mortals with a host of divine beings. God calls Ezekiel בן-אדם scores of times throughout the book, even when Ezekiel is alone. God thus emphasizes the prophet's mortal nature continually, not only to distinguish him from divine beings, but also to highlight the gulf and inherent power disparity between God and prophet.

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[181] Ezekiel 2:1-2.
[182] Daniel 8:17
[183] Moshe Greenberg, Ezekiel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, (New York: Doubleday, The Anchor Bible, 1983), 62.

Also in 2:1 God orders Ezekiel to "stand upon your feet so I may speak to you." God seems to want the prophet to stand in order to receive God word. For Greenberg, God's insistence that Ezekiel stand shows that "the biblical visionary must be in possession of himself in order to receive the divine word." Greenberg thus believes that the spirit, רוח, that enters Ezekiel and takes control of him is different from the רוח אלוהים that possesses ecstatic prophets in pre-classical prophetic literature. Greenberg is keen to emphasize that Ezekiel is not in an ecstatic trance, that his consciousness is not "obliterated" by the spirit. [184]

Greenberg portrays the רוח as little more than a burst of confidence. He cites BDB's suggestion that the רוח in this verse is akin to "vigor or even courage," an emotional force "infused into the prophet by the address of God."[185] Ezekiel, writes Greenberg, is "invigorated."[186] The problem with this interpretation, though, is that the רוח actually *acts upon* the prophet: וַתַּעֲמִדֵנִי עַל־רַגְלָי. The spirit *causes* the prophet to stand. The use of the hiphil, a causative form, of עמד, suggests the spirit possesses a quality independent of the prophet.[187]

The phrase וַתָּבֹא בִּי, "entered into me," promotes the independent and physical nature of the רוח. It also suggests divine control of the prophet. The preposition ב following the verb root בוא often implies the entering into something new. In Jeremiah 34:10 and Ezekiel 16:8, God enters into a covenant with Israel; בוא and preposition ב are

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[184] Greenberg, 62.
[185] Greenberg, 62.
[186] Greenberg., 72.
[187] Walther Zimmerli notes ambiguity concerning how much of the רוח "is [Ezekiel's] own vital power" and how much of it is the spirit of God "acting under the divine command." See Walther Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 132. This gentler possibility does not capture the drama of the experience.

used in both cases. A new set of obligations is implied. The same situation obtains in the present verse where Ezekiel assumes new obligations as a prophet. This verb-preposition combination, interestingly, occurs when a biblical character "comes into [his] days," meaning, has become old and is near death. This also suggests a changed personal status. The spirit that enters into Ezekiel, whatever its form, changes him.

In 2:3-4, the onerous scope of the mission becomes clear. Ezekiel reports,

> He said to me, 'I am the one who is sending you forth
> to the children of Israel, to the rebellious people who
> have rebelled against Me. They and their fathers
> have transgressed against me even until this day.
> And the children – hard of face and stubborn of heart
> – I am sending you to them.' Thus says the Lord
> YHWH.

The use of the participle "sending," from the root שלח, is common in prophetic narratives. It often refers to God's commissioning of a prophet to speak to the people, or of an envoy to attack an enemy.[188] Here, one may begin to feel some pity for Ezekiel as he learns he is being sent to a people who are rebellious and whose progenitors were rebellious. Ezekiel's audience is *genetically* rebellious.

God uses body idioms -- קְשֵׁי פָנִים וְחִזְקֵי־לֵב, "hard of face and stubborn of heart" – to describe the people's implacable stubbornness. In Exodus the root חזק describes God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart[189] and the hearts of the pursuing Egyptians.[190] The God-induced obduracy of the Egyptians suggests an impenetrable stubbornness it would have been futile to attempt to penetrate. The use of קשה may be even more disheartening. The phrase in 2 Kings 17:14 – וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ וַיַּקְשׁוּ אֶת־עָרְפָּם, "they did not

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[188] Jeremiah 49:14, Judges 6:14 regarding Gideon's commissioning.
[189] See Exodus 9:12, 10:20.
[190] Exodus 14:17.

listen and stiffened their necks"[191] – describes people who refuse to heed the words of prophets – a sobering omen for this new prophet. Greenberg points out that the body idiom concerning the face – as opposed to the more common "stiff-necked" – offers "a nuance of impudence."[192] Writes Greenberg, the people are "incapable of receiving impressions." At this moment of realization Ezekiel may be overwhelmed by a creeping sense of futility. God continues in verse five with a similar sentiment: "Now they, whether they would listen and stop or not – for they are a house of rebellion –would know a prophet was among them." It is not clear to Ezekiel – or apparently even to God – whether the prophet's words will be efficacious. The people may or may not heed the prophet's admonitions.

In 2:6 the prophet learns the people may be not only stubborn but also dangerous. Employing daunting physical metaphors, God states, "Now you, Mortal, do not be afraid of them and do not fear their words, although they are nettles and thorns to you, and you will sit upon scorpions. Of their words do not be afraid. And do not be shattered by them, for they are a house of rebellion." Despite such danger – and it is unclear whether the danger consists only of "their words" or "of them" generally – God encourages the prophet, saying, "And do not be shattered by them, for they are a house of rebellion." The hiphil form חתת, "shattered," frequently appears as "dismayed," but here it deserves a stronger and more physical translation. In Isaiah 9:3 חתת refers to the violent breaking of the yoke of servitude. A piel form of חתת in Jeremiah 51:56 refers to the snapping of the enemies' bows. In the present context, God employs startling physical metaphors to describe how the people might injure the prophet: nettles, thorns, scorpions. חתת appears

[191] 2 Kings 17:14.
[192] Greenberg, 64.

again in 3:9, also in a passage of concrete images – the prophet with a face of hard stone must withstand the hard-hearted people. A forceful rendering of חזק is appropriate in the context of such imagery. It promotes the difficulty of the task. One may be "dismayed" at mildly bad situations. One is "shattered" in arduous circumstances.

This section closes in 2:7 as God repeats the command to embark on this seemingly impossible mission: "Speak My words to them, whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious."

Ezekiel 2:8 - 3:3

In the next section, God's control of the prophet becomes clearer as Ezekiel is forced to eat a scroll of papyrus. This is a test of the prophet's submission to God's power and a graphic illustration of the extent to which God can and will enter into the prophet. And yet in this section the prophet begins to put up some resistance.

In 2:8 God says to Ezekiel, "Now you, mortal, hear what I am saying to you. You must not be rebellious like the house of rebellion. Open your mouth and eat what I am handing you." The prophet describes what he sees: "And I saw, and look, a hand was extended toward me and there, in it, a scroll! And He spread it out before me. It had writing on it, on the front and the back, and written upon it were dirges and sighs and wailing."[193] The verb ראה, in addition to visual perception, often implies a deeper sense of seeing, that is, understanding. In Isaiah 6:10, God wants the people not to comprehend God's words "lest they *see* with their eyes." In Ezekiel 12:2, the people have "eyes to see but *see* not," meaning they do not understand.

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[193] Ezekiel 2:9-10.

The present verse may be so understood. Ezekiel does see something – God's hand reaching out to him and holding the scroll. But at this critical juncture in his theophany, he also comprehends his mission more fully. God commands him "not to be rebellious" and thereupon immediately commands him to open his mouth and eat the scroll. No matter how unlikely the command, God expects obeisance. The words אֵת אֲשֶׁר appear in three consecutive commands – in the present verse and then in 3:1. It can mean "what" or "that which," as in "Open your mouth and eat *what* I am handing you." But Greenberg translates אֵת אֲשֶׁר as "whatever." In other words, Ezekiel must eat *whatever* God wants him to eat. Greenberg writes, "In these commands the object [of what the prophet must eat] is left vague in order to stress the unconditional submission of the prophet to the divine will, whatever it should entail."[194] He takes the scroll-eating episode to be the paradigm of "absolute subjection of the prophet to the will of God."[195]

The consumption of the scroll is consistent with the infusion of God's רוח into the prophet. God aims to fill Ezekiel entirely, first by the spirit and now by the word. Greenberg quotes David Kimchi that the command to Ezekiel to fill his belly[196] implies an insistence that the prophet not vomit out the scroll.[197] God will tolerate no purging of the divine word. Zimmerli writes, "The inside of the prophet must be ready to receive the

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[194] Greenberg, 66.
[195] Greenberg, 78.
[196] God penetrates the prophet to his deepest core. JPS translates בטן in Proverbs 18:8 as "inmost parts" and in Habakuk 3:16 as "bowels." But in the present verse, Ezekiel is told to eat the scroll, so "stomach" and "belly" are appropriate on every level to describe the situation. Perhaps the best parallel is Jonah 2:3, where the prophet describes his place in the big fish as "the belly of Sheol," meaning the deepest spot of the netherworld.
[197] Greenberg, 68.

word of Yahweh." It requires "deepest inward involvement," symbolized by the consumed scroll.[198]

But doubt hovers over Ezekiel's actions. Greenberg makes a key observation concerning the prophet's reaction to God's instruction to eat the scroll. In 3:1, Greenberg notes, God twice commands the prophet – in addition to the command in 2:8 – to eat: "And He said to me, "Mortal, eat what you see here. Eat this scroll and go, speak to the House of Israel."[199] This succession of imperatives, asserts Greenberg, "implies the prophet's hesitation to ... eat the inedible object." Ezekiel is reluctant "to down the indigestible mass of papyrus."[200] This reluctance hints at resistance to God's power over the prophet, a feeling also evident at the end of the call narrative.

Despite the trace of resistance, the prophet begins eating. God commands the prophet to become full with God's words: בִּטְנְךָ תַאֲכֵל וּמֵעֶיךָ תְמַלֵּא, "Feed your stomach and fill your belly."[201] God thus uses the scroll as a means of invasion, penetrating the prophet to his deepest core. The fact that it tastes like honey is a stroke of luck for the prophet. Given God's persistence, Ezekiel must consume the scroll regardless of its taste.

Ezekiel 3:4 – 3:11

This third section of the call elaborates on the nature of God's control over the prophet and on the challenges the stubborn people will present to him. The prophet learns God will control his speech and then alter his character as a means of strengthening him for this arduous task.

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[198] Zimmerli, 92.
[199] Ezekiel 3:1.
[200] Greenberg, 67.
[201] Ezekiel 3:2.

In 3:4 God instructs Ezekiel, וְדִבַּרְתָּ בִּדְבָרַי אֲלֵיהֶם. When the preposition ב follows the piel form of דבר, there are various translating options. In Psalm 119:46, the psalmist promises to speak *of* or *about* God's laws. That fits the present context. God wants the prophet to speak only what God wants him to speak, presumably the contents of the scroll he has eaten. Greenberg sees in this phrase "an aspect of absolute obedience" as God commands the prophet to "speak...in my words."[202] Ezekiel therefore possesses little latitude concerning the content of the message. He must speak precisely what God tells him to speak. Greenberg writes, "The prophet's task is reduced to the conveyance of God's message; he has no further responsibility toward his audience and is answerable only to God."[203]

With God's word and spirit infused in the prophet, a kinship develops between them. With the relationship established, God employs an additional tack of encouragement, which advances Ezekiel's metamorphosis to becoming a prophet. After

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[202] Greenberg, 68.

[203] Greenberg, 77. Zimmerli adds that this verbal construction conveys "the conception of speaking Yahweh's word 'in a prophetic commission, officially'" (Zimmerli, 93). God similarly circumscribes Ezekiel's actions throughout the book. In 4:1-9, God commands him to create a crude model of Jerusalem and to lie on his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 days. God restricts his food and drink intake during this long period. In chapter 21 God provides Ezekiel with an detailed script which includes not only dialogue but also a sigh: "And you, O mortal, sigh; with tottering limbs and bitter grief, sigh before their eyes. And when they ask you, 'Why do you sigh?" answer, 'Because of the tidings that have come'" (Ezekiel 21:11-12). Later God's control over the prophet becomes even more overwhelming. In Ezekiel 24:15-27, God causes Ezekiel's wife to die and then commands the prophet not to mourn or cry. Ezekiel says, "In the evening my wife died, and in the morning, I did as I was commanded." God deprives the prophet of the most basic and visceral emotional response. The passage continues that Ezekiel is "a portent" for the people; he is reduced to a symbol. On the other hand, one must recall Ezekiel's streak of independence. In Ezekiel 4, God orders Ezekiel to prepare his bread by using human excrement for fuel. Ezekiel demurs on grounds of ritual purity. God relents to this protest and allows the prophet to use cow dung instead. As tightly regimented as the prophet's words and actions are, he seeks to maintain some independence.

another warning regarding the people's stubbornness, God says, "Look, I will make your face hard, just like theirs, and your forehead hard, just like theirs."[204] The hardening of Ezekiel's face and forehead is a response to the people's hard heads and stubborn hearts, and is meant to steel him for their resistance. This is a common development for prophets. Greenberg writes, "The resistance of the intended audience is usually mentioned in the commissioning speech by way of steeling the prophet for his task and forestalling his despair at its failure."[205] God warns Moses and Jeremiah the people will resist.[206] Isaiah is told he, perversely, is to augment the people's obtuseness.[207] Greenberg describes the fortification of Ezekiel as "counter-adamancy,"[208] an apt term for Ezekiel whose face is being made hard, like adamant, a legendary and impenetrable stone. Ezekiel becomes a reflection of the people in order to resist them.

This hardening of Ezekiel represents his prophetic essence. The root word חזק, which repeats three times, likely explains the name Ezekiel, יְחֶזְקֵאל. The root חזק is embedded in the name, which means "God strengthens." If this is the case, then the prophet personifies this moment of transformation, as God, manipulating him once again, makes him hard as stone.

Ezekiel 3:12 - 16

As Ezekiel departs from the scene of the call, he experiences some of the tectonic drama he witnesses in chapter one. As he departs, he offers a window into his emotions, which reflect his pain over the entire experience.

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[204] Amos 3:8.
[205] Greenberg, 75.
[206] See Exodus 4:8, Jeremiah 1:8, 1:17.
[207] Isaiah 6:9-10.
[208] Greenberg, 69.

In 3:12 the רוח begins to transport him to the exiles in Tel Aviv. As he is lifted, Ezekiel reports, "I heard behind me a great rumbling sound -- 'Blessed is the glory of the Eternal in His place.' – and the sound of the creatures' wings beating against one another, and the sound of the wheels along with them – a great, roaring sound."[209] The great rumbling sound, קוֹל רַעַשׁ גָּדוֹל, suggests destruction on the scale of an earthquake. The qal form of רעש in Isaiah 24:18 describes the shaking of the earth's foundation in Isaiah 24:18 in the midst of a YHWH-induced cataclysm. Following that verse, the earth is described as "breaking, breaking;/The earth is crumbling, crumbling."[210] In Jeremiah 10:22 the noun רעש describes the ominous approach of enemies, which will lead to total desolation. When קול accompanies רעש, as it does here, it refers to "the rush or roar which accompanies an earthquake," according to The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.[211] Isaiah describes the devastation of Jerusalem with these phrases. Parallel to בְּרַעַשׁ וְקוֹל גָּדוֹל – translated in JPS as "roaring, and shaking, and deafening noise" – is סוּפָה וּסְעָרָה וְלַהַב אֵשׁ אוֹכֶלָה, "a storm and tempest and a blaze of consuming fire."[212] Ezekiel experiences this thunderous rumbling up close as the wind bodily transports him. He might feel like an ant walking through a car wash.

The noise and drama of Isaiah's throne room vision is a whisper compared to the ordeal Ezekiel endures. In the throne room, Isaiah expresses doubt about his adequacy for a prophetic career. Ezekiel reacts differently. As the wind carries him away in 3:14, he expresses shock – and perhaps dismay – saying נָאַלַךְ מַר בַּחֲמַת רוּחִי וְיַד־יְהוָה עָלַי חָזָקָה, "I went bitter, my spirit angry, with the hand of the Eternal heavy upon me." Some

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[209] Ezekiel 3:12-13.
[210] Isaiah 24:19.
[211] The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament., s.v., קוֹל.
[212] Isaiah 29:6.

translators believe מַר modifies Ezekiel's anger.[213] They argue Ezekiel's bitter wrath represents his identification with God, who is bitterly angry at the people.[214]

Greenberg notes the ambiguity, explaining the prophet may be bitter either because he is distressed at having to embark on this "dismal, thankless, and perhaps dangerous task imposed on him" or because he is reflecting God's anger towards Israel.[215] The text, however, does not seem ambiguous on this point. It links the prophet's bitterness to God's hand, described in the latter part of 3:14 as "heavy upon" the prophet or, in Greenberg's rendering, "overpowering." Ezekiel's bitterness is the result of God's power over him, of God's literal manipulation of him.

It moreover seems implausible that the prophet would equate his bitterness and God's strong hand to feelings of anger he *shares with* God. God's strong hand rather refers to the intensity of the long, exhausting, and overwhelming call to prophecy. Ezekiel is bitter because of God's encroachment on his life.

The narrative concludes with Ezekiel reaching the exiles in Tel Aviv. Before beginning his mission, he sits among the people for seven days in a fragile emotional state, מַשְׁמִים. The root, שמם, often describes inertness after a tragedy caused by disloyalty to God. The hiphil participle of ש-מ-מ appears in Ezekiel 20:26, where God reacts to the people's disloyalty by creating impurity among them to make them feel terrible – "desolate" or "devastated," according to some translations. In Leviticus 26:31-32, a furious God ruins the people's sanctuaries, rendering them useless. Again, in Hosea

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[213] See The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, Volume V, 472; Zimmerli, 94. Zimmerli also claim "bitterness" is an explanatory word added later (Zimmerli, 139).
[214] New International Version Study Bible, Kenneth L. Barker, ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985. 1249.
[215] Greenberg, 71.

2:14, God paints a picture of complete destruction because of the people's disloyalty and says that the vines of the field will be destroyed, adding, "I will turn them into brushwood."

The prophet, after this direct, extended contact with the divine, exhibits the same sort of inertness, causing him to sit for seven days. The experience renders him unable to do what he is called to do. Like a torn-up vine or a destroyed sanctuary, the prophet requires fixing before he can be useful again. Some translators render מְשֻׁמָּם as "desolate," which conveys loneliness as well as destruction. Most occurrences of שמם in hiphil do not suggest loneliness. Nor does the context of the present passage imply that Ezekiel is lonely. NRSV opts for "stunned." This is a better translation as it conveys a post-trauma inertness. The word מְשֻׁמָּם lends support to the idea that the prophet is traumatized, devastated – emotionally and perhaps physically – by God's call.

Conclusion

The text of Ezekiel's call to prophecy was considered by the sages to be so volatile that they imposed restrictions on who could read it.[216] If the written account of the experience is considered so dangerous, imagine the experience itself and how it might have affected Ezekiel.

And yet, through it all, the prophet remains himself. Ezekiel's reluctance to eat the scroll, his bitterness as he is swept away, and his self-imposed convalescence demonstrate a stubbornness that he not submit entirely. (Amos may evince a similar trait when he refers to himself as a tender of sycamore trees as opposed to a prophet.[217]) It is unclear how this taciturn prophet feels about the call and his prophetic career as it

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[216] See Marvin Sweeney's comments in The Jewish Study Bible, p. 1045.
[217] Amos 7:15.

unfolds. Ezekiel does present, though, a good example of a private struggle to endure, if nothing else, God's heavy hand.

Chapter Seven
Heschel's Analysis and the Call Narratives: Ambiguity Suits Reality

The Ezekiel call narrative concludes in 3:16 with the prophet convalescing in Babylon. One may imagine that, during his convalescence, Ezekiel may have wondered if he would ever be the same after his particularly overwhelming divine call, after God's heavy hand upon him was lifted. The impact of the call upon the prophet is at the heart of Heschel's thesis. In Chapter Two, I examined Heschel's views of the God-prophet relationship, based on The Prophets: An Introduction and Volume II. Here, I seek to discover whether that analysis is in fact supported by the four call narratives examined in the previous chapters.

Heschel's style does not lend itself to easy analysis. He offers multiple perspectives, which make it difficult to explain his ideas or fault him, for there is little that he does not say at one point or another in his two-volume work. Moreover, he offers fine distinctions that defy the reader to critique him. For example, he writes that Isaiah is overwhelmed and "shattered"[218] by his call, but he also steadfastly promotes the idea that the prophets maintain their individuality and do not surrender consciousness during their calls to prophecy. The distinction between these conditions is not always intuitive. Heschel writes that the prophet's inner identification with God is intense,[219] but also that the prophet stands apart from God in order to dialogue and challenge God.

Still, these subtle distinctions do justice to the complex relationships between God and prophets as depicted in the four call narratives examined in this paper. My primary objection, though, is that Heschel's eagerness to portray the prophet as God's partner

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[218] The Prophets, Vol. II, 196.
[219] The Prophets: An Introduction, 177.

causes him to overemphasize the dialogic aspect of the relationship and ignore instances that demonstrate overwhelming divine power over the prophet. He does discuss God's overwhelming power, but he also avers that the relationship between God and prophet is characterized by a "subject-subject structure."[220] This is a far-fetched characterization of the relationship. If one thing is clear from these four call narratives, it is that the relationship between God and prophet is primarily one of subject-object.

Isaiah

Isaiah's reaction to the throne room vision in Isaiah six is the best example of Heschel's thesis that a prophet can be overwhelmed without losing consciousness. Heschel notes that Isaiah "felt shattered by the overwhelming power of God's holiness" as experienced during the throne room vision in chapter six.[221] He writes,

> The glimpse at the majesty of the Lord of hosts that burst upon Isaiah in his great vision was felt by him to be a presumption and encroachment, and it stunned and frightened him....It is pain not joy, to behold the majesty of God. The contrast is shattering.[222]

Heschel also observes that God's command to Isaiah, "Go and say to this people..." in 6:9 is an example of coercion into service. He sees in Isaiah's question "How long?" in 6:11 an example of the prophet's ability and freedom to complain about God's actions.

Heschel's use of the word "shattering" shows an appreciation of the import of the phrase נִדְמֵיתִי, which I render as "utterly lost."[223] Yet Heschel also maintains that Isaiah is overwhelmed but not obliterated by the experience. Seeking to contrast Isaiah's call to prophecy to the consciousness-obliterating nature of prophetic ecstasy, Heschel

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[220] The Prophets, Vol. II, 146.
[221] The Prophets, Vol. II, 196.
[222] The Prophets, Vol. II, 137.
[223] Isaiah 6:5.

writes that Isaiah maintains presence of mind enough to engage in a dialogue with God. In particular, Heschel points to the prophet's ability to inform God of what he is feeling at this most intense moment. He is also conscious, writes Heschel, that his sin is wiped clean.[224]

Isaiah's autonomy is especially apparent in the prophet's last utterances in this call narrative. Isaiah first responds to God's question, "Whom shall I send?" by volunteering in 6:8, "Send me!" Later, when God describes the devastation that God may visit upon the people, Isaiah says, "Until when?"[225] These addresses to God are remarkable. In contrast to Ezekiel's stunned silence, to the stock responses of Amos to God's questions in his visions, and even to Jeremiah's responses to God's questions, Isaiah talks to God with evident eagerness, demonstrating self-possession despite the dramatic nature of the call. Isaiah is a good example of Heschel's thesis: The prophet remains lucid while being overwhelmed by the call vision.

Amos

Heschel's analysis of Amos reflects the ambiguous nature of the God-prophet relationship. During the call narrative in chapter seven, Amos does not explicitly reveal how the call by God felt to him. Heschel though illuminates Amos's feelings by citing other descriptions by the prophet of God's power. For instance, in Amos 3:7-8, the prophet compares the call to prophecy to a roaring lion. Heschel writes, "Amos, a prophet to whom the call of God came as a surprise and stayed on as dismay, is startled."[226] Heschel succeeds in presenting the coercive aspect of God's call of Amos.

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[224] The Prophets, Vol. II, 133.
[225] Isaiah 6:11.
[226] The Prophets: An Introduction, 34.

He also properly notes that the prophet stands apart from God when he intercedes on behalf of the people, whom God threatens to wipe out. Heschel writes, "For all the inner identification with God, the prophet is not always ready to accept divine judgment as final."[227] In the call narrative, this independence is clear from the first two visions of destruction, where Amos persuades God not to punish the people.[228] This intervention demonstrates the prophet's "strength" and his independence.[229] God's call neither obliterates him like an ecstatic prophet nor entirely consumes him. Heschel concludes, "The prophet regards himself as one who walks together with God."[230]

But Heschel's eagerness to emphasize inner identification and partnership between God and the prophet leads to an oversight at a key moment in the narrative. In the latter two visions in 7:7-9 and 8:1-3, God threatens devastating destructions of the people. Now, the prophet remains silent. Heschel does not comment on this conspicuous silence. The narrative itself suggests Amos is frightened into silence. This is particularly clear if one understands the imperative, "Silence" in 8:3 to be a command from God to the prophet.

Heschel's lack of attention to these verses demonstrates that he evades the clear reason for Amos's silence: fear and awe. Andersen and Freedman, in contrast, find much to comment on regarding that silence. They note the strict limitations God places on Amos's behavior which prevent him from interceding in the latter two visions. "The prophet was effectively silenced" by God, they write.[231]

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[227] The Prophets: An Introduction, 177.
[228] Amos 7:1-6.
[229] The Prophets, Vol. II, 132 – 133.
[230] The Prophets: An Introduction, 38.
[231] Andersen and Freedman, 615.

Heschel's silence on the silence feels conspicuous. He instead expounds on his general argument that intimacy and identification are the salient aspects of the prophet's relationship with God.[232] Heschel does not in general ignore the coercive aspects of the God-prophet relationship. Here, though, he misses an opportunity to acknowledge an important caveat to the prophet's autonomy: that God will quash dialogue when doing so suits God's purposes.

Jeremiah

Whereas Isaiah proves Heschel's contention thesis that the prophet can be overwhelmed without being entirely overtaken, Jeremiah is the paradigmatic example of Heschel's thesis that God creates within the prophet "sympathy for divine pathos." The inner identification of Jeremiah with God is particularly intense because of the sense of God's "forming," "knowing," and "selecting" him at a moment even before conception.[233] Several scholars agree. As discussed above in Chapter Five, Vogelin claims Jeremiah is ordained a prophet "from eternity."[234] Heschel may even not go far in understanding how Jeremiah supports his thesis of the prophet's deep inner identification with God. Citing Jeremiah 1:5, he writes only that God chooses Jeremiah before birth.[235] The idea that the ordination of the prophet occurs "from eternity" bolsters Heschel's thesis even further. It precludes any possibility that Jeremiah could ever have existed as anything but a prophet. There is no nanosecond of his physical existence during which he was not designated as a prophet. God's stamp is innately pressed upon him. Heschel

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[232] The Prophets: An Introduction, 38.
[233] Jeremiah 1:5.
[234] Lundbom, 231.
[235] The Prophets, Vol. II, 207.

properly cites Jeremiah as the best example of "the certainty of being inspired by God, of speaking in His name, of having been sent by Him to the people."[236]

Heschel also uses Jeremiah 1:6-14 as a prime example of the dialogic God-prophet relationship. But here Heschel overreaches. To prove a "subject-subject" relationship between God and prophet, the text must present a dialogue in which there is an exchange of ideas, in which the prophet demonstrates a measure of independence from God. A mere exchange of words is not sufficient. The snippets of conversation in 1:6-14 do not prove Heschel's point. When Jeremiah protests he is too young for the task, God summarily quashes his concern.[237] When God tells the prophet to describe what God shows him, Jeremiah's answers are perfunctory;[238] he demonstrates nothing but "passive receptivity."[239] The call narrative of Jeremiah demonstrates a power imbalance, not dialogue.

Heschel also discusses the change in Jeremiah's personality as a result of the prophetic call. In 1:17-18, God warns the prophet not to be too frightened by his detractors and then reconstitutes him into "a fortified city" and "pillar of iron." Heschel writes, "In order to be able to rise above dismay, to be able to persevere in the spirit of defiance, he was suddenly transformed into the stark opposite of his usual self."[240] I agree with Heschel that the prophet becomes something new as a result of the call by God, but I must note the irony in Heschel's acknowledgement of this development. While it is not remarkable that Heschel contradicts himself, this contradiction here is

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[236] The Prophets, Vol. II, 206.
[237] Jeremiah 1:6-8.
[238] Jeremiah 1:11-13.
[239] The Prophets, Vol. II, 197.
[240] The Prophets: An Introduction, 123.

particularly glaring. One of Heschel's central arguments is that the prophet may understand and communicate with God because he remains himself throughout the prophetic ordeal, and despite God's overwhelming treatment of him. Here, Heschel describes a "stark" transformation of personality for Jeremiah. It is difficult to understand how these views can co-exist.

Jeremiah's origins offer a good example of Heschel's understanding of the prophet's deep and ineluctable inner identification with God. Yet, as the call narrative unfolds, we learn that this inner identification does not make room for dialogue.

Ezekiel

Of the four call narratives examined here, God dominates Ezekiel the most. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, Heschel attempts to demonstrate that Ezekiel is not so overwhelmed by God as to lose his self in the process of the call. Heschel seizes on God's insistence that Ezekiel stand to receive God's message in 2:1. At the conclusion of chapter one, Ezekiel falls prostrate as a result of his vision of God and the chariot. Heschel writes,

> It is true that Ezekiel, when the vision of God was granted to him, was so struck by the glory that he fell down upon his face; yet it was not until he stood upon his feet that the world came upon him. Indeed, it was the power of the spirit which entered into him that raised him up again, and he then in full consciousness received the word.[241]

[241] The Prophets, Vol. II, 137.

Greenberg[242] and Zimmerli[243] agree that God raises the prophet in order to speak to him. For Heschel, it is of critical importance that the prophet is fully conscious. The prophet's wakefulness is a marker of the prophetic relationship with God.

There is a problem with this example, though. Compelling an individual to his feet does not demonstrate the prophet's self-possession; it demonstrates domination by God and passivity – or helplessness – by the prophet. By choosing to argue that Ezekiel is self-possessed at this early moment in his call, Heschel ignores the ramifications of God's physical, forceful manipulation of him.

At the end of Ezekiel's call, a divine wind transports him to the exilic community to begin his prophetic mission. His mood at this point, as I write in Chapter Seven, is "bitter," which reflects his reaction to God's forceful treatment of him.[244] Heschel's interpretation reflects an innate desire to cast the God-prophet relationship in positive terms. His understanding of 3:14 is that Ezekiel's spirit is not angry or bitter, but that his statement – "I went bitter, my spirit angry, with the hand of the Eternal heavy upon me" - - reflects "intense inner excitement.[245] But Heschel seems to present multiple interpretations of these words. Later in the same volume, he understands the verse to convey "urgency, pressure, and compulsion by which [the prophet] is stunned and overwhelmed."[246] Even this latter interpretation fails to consider the possibility that the prophet is bitterly angry *because of* God's heavy hand and coercive actions.

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[242] Greenberg, 62.
[243] Zimmerli, 132.
[244] Ezekiel 3:14. Some scholars do not see bitterness in the prophet, discussed above. They instead the bitterness relates to Ezekiel's anger, which reflects God's own anger.
[245] The Prophets, Vol. II, 96.
[246] The Prophets, Vol. II, 224.

Ezekiel's call narrative provides scant support for Heschel's notion that God and prophets enjoy a subject-subject relationship. More than anything else, God is overpowering and the prophet is overwhelmed. There is little possibility of interpreting this relationship as between two subjects. Ezekiel is an object of the first degree.

Conclusion

Heschel's theology, reflected in much of his writing, is that God and humans are in need of each other, and hence are involved in a complementary relationship.[247] The relationships he perceives in the call narratives of Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel reflect this theology. Heschel does not fail to see the compulsion with which God relates to the prophets. But he also finds more dialogue than the texts support. The relationship between God and the prophet is a subject-object relationship, not a subject-subject relationship. This is true even with regard to Isaiah, the most confident and self-possessed of the prophets. The intensity of these subject-object relationships explains the prophets' expressions of fear and bitterness. Heschel is right, though, in his insistence that the prophet, despite the anguish and pain of the experience, never succumbs; his consciousness is not erased by the call. This in itself is a powerful statement concerning the strength of the individual mortal in relation to God.

[247] See God in Search of Man; Man's Quest for God.

Chapter Eight
Conclusion

I am attracted to the call narratives of the biblical prophets because I feel called to a career as a rabbi. I hesitate to write "called." How can my "calling" compare to the "call" narratives of the prophets? It does not. On the other hand, I wonder sometimes if my early foundational religious experiences were, in a sense, calls – not to a clergy career necessarily, but to a religious life. Moreover, I wonder how I might experience God today – what sort of relationship I would have with God – if my fleeting moments of awesome clarity two to three decades ago were assiduously nurtured by someone trained to raise up religious people.

If someone were to challenge me to employ metaphors to describe my peak religious experiences, I would not describe God as sitting upon a high and exalted throne, winged creatures flitting all around. And I would not depict God standing menacingly on a wall of heavy metal. I might, though, imagine words being placed upon my lips and into my mouth. And I might describe God's hand resting upon my shoulder. More than two thousand five hundred years separate me from the biblical prophets, but their words feel fresh and intuitive, despite the outlandish imagery.

The prophets' intense experiences of the divine are models for religious behavior and experience, even today, even for run-of-the-mill rabbis. When my words fail to express some grand notion about God, I can place myself in the tradition of Isaiah and Jeremiah, who felt inadequate to convey God's message.[248] When I am hopping with excitement to teach our tradition, I can evoke the fire shut up in Jeremiah's bones. When

[248] Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 1:5.

market forces compel me to move from one part of the country to another for a rabbinic position, I can recall that God took Amos from Judah to prophesy in Israel. Millions of people today find relevance in the words and experiences of the prophets, not because those people are prophets too, but because the prophetic religious experiences are paradigmatic.

I also wanted to study these narratives because of the striking contrast they offer to everyday religious experiences. Religious life consists of steady rhythm, not peak moments. A regular structure of prayer and ritual is a regimen. The prophets' call narratives are not steady: they are volcanic peaks. Even reading them is a thrill. It opens the shades of daily regimen to reveal explosive revelation. This is exciting! Who does not yearn for it?

In addition to their inspirational quality, these call narratives challenge me. They demand that I consider how a religious calling may – and perhaps should – alter one's identity. A reporter for Time magazine recently wrote that Pope Benedict XVI "understands the pious truism that taking the papal office can involve a subsuming, sometimes almost an erasure, of the man he thought he was before."[249] Heschel acknowledges that at times the prophet becomes "another man," but he also avers that the prophet remains the person he or she was before the call. Indeed, some prophets appear to bridle against the change of the call. Amos seems proud to claim he was a herder and tender of sycamore trees before God "takes" him to become a prophet.[250] Jeremiah is forlorn about how the call by God defines who he is.[251]

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[249] David Van Biema, Time Magazine, December 25, 2006.
[250] Amos 7:14.
[251] Jeremiah 15:10-21.

Pope Benedict XVI relinquished some doctrinaire positions that marked his Vatican career before becoming pope. What about rabbinical students? What do we give up? And how do we feel about it? A provocative sermon by one rabbinic student questioned the propriety of continuing to wear the same wardrobe she wore prior to rabbinical school. When I walk the halls of a synagogue now, I am vigilant of how I speak and how I look. I wonder what I should be called, and why?

When a strong wind transports Ezekiel to his first assignment, he feels bitter. Not having been pummeled by God, I have no reason to feel bitter. And yet, I feel the tension, as many of us do, regarding how much of me is "rabbi" and how much is just me.

Finally, one of Heschel's most striking ideas is that "sympathy for divine pathos" is instilled by God into the prophet. But one need not be a prophet to try to develop an internal "sympathy" with God. Heschel could not have expressed such a sublime idea if he himself did not feel it. But it's hard to do. I often feel alienated from – and sometimes indifferent to – God. I think about this now, as I prepare to enter the rabbinate. Some members of the clergy do not exude a whiff of a relationship with God. I do not want to be that kind of rabbi. I would like my congregants to see – through my words, deeds, and general affect – that I have a relationship with God, or at least that developing one is important to me.

The prophets' struggles with God can prove salutary to Reform Judaism. Our movement is enamored with vague spirituality, but we do not much consider important factors like subtlety and force in our relationships with God. Reform clergy strum upon spiritual-emotional heart strings to evoke responses in congregants, and congregants

respond. But I wonder whether the experiences they are responding to are authentically Jewish and whether they are reflected in our sacred texts. To understand what Jews believe about God, one cannot ignore the prophets, who were bewildered, invaded, shaken, and compelled by their nearness to the divine. The knowledge and insight I have gained from this thesis project will help me speak more maturely about the God-prophet dynamic. I pray that my teaching in the years ahead will inspire some of my own congregants to realize that there is something in their own hearts – and perhaps also in their own religious experiences – that resonates to the utterances of our prophets.

Appendix A: Isaiah 6:1-3 annotated translation

1/ In the year of the death of King Uzziah, I saw my Lord sitting upon a high and raised up throne. The skirts of his robe were filling the Temple.

2/ Seraphs[252] were stationed around him – six wings, six wings for each one. With two each covered his face, with two each covered his feet, and with two each one would fly.

3/ And one would call out to another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts.[253] The entire earth is filled with His glory!"

4/ And the doorposts[254] of the threshold trembled from the voice of the one who called out. And the house was filling with smoke.[255]

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[252] The verb שרף occurs in relation to burning with fire in various situations – sometimes for the sake of destruction (see Isaiah 1:7; 2 Kings 23:11), sometimes as a punishment (see Joshua 7:15) and often in relation to sacrifice, such as the burning of the heifer (see Numbers 19). The word appears in the plural in Numbers and Deuteronomy in construct form with serpent. The "fiery serpents" are dangerous creatures whose bite afflicted the Israelites in the desert (Numbers 21:6, Deuteronomy 8:15). They are likewise unpleasant when modified with the word עפה elsewhere in Isaiah 14:29, where they are associated with snakes and asps and in Isaiah 30:6, where they are associated with vipers. Moses, after the episode in Numbers 21:6, fashions a seraph and places it on a staff, where it serves as an apotropaic device. In Isaiah 6, where the word is unmodified, שרפים are benevolent. The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon suggests they are related to "guardian griffins" of a similar name in Egyptian mythology. The seraphs in Isaiah 6 seem to have a similar function to the cherubim in the Ezekiel 1, where they guard the chariot. (See Encyclopaedia Judaica, Volume 14, s.v., "seraph.")

[253] "Adonai of hosts." יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת is probably a construct form. Biblically, "hosts" often refer to troops, armies, often earthly but sometimes celestial. In Psalm 59:6, the poet invokes God's power, using the long form of the expression: יְהוָה־אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת, to seek vengeance against earthly enemies. יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת functions similarly in Psalm 48, where enemies flee from יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת. In that situation, יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת is connected to Jerusalem, and to the Temple in particular. A couple of verses after Isaiah 6, the prophet recounts the throne room experience by invoking the "Adonai of Hosts" who "dwells on Mount Zion" (Is. 8:18). The term often refers to God as the head of an earthly army, as in Psalms 48 and 59. "Adonai of Hosts" takes on an additional meaning in Isaiah 8 which illuminates its use in Isaiah 6. Isaiah recounts his vision: "For this is what the Lord said to me, when He took me by the hand and charged me not to walk in the path of that people: You must not call conspiracy/All that the people call conspiracy, Nor revere what it reveres, / Nor hold it in awe./None but the Lord of Hosts/Shall you account holy;...He shall be for a sanctuary,/A stone men strike against:/A rock men stumble over" (Isaiah 8:11-14). This indicates that the prophet depends upon a powerful image of God as a bulwark against his own people.

[254] Unclear what אמות means. Blenkinsopp suggests it is related to cubits, although he notes it is not used elsewhere to describe architecture (Blenkinsopp 223).

5/ And I said, "Woe is me.[256] I am utterly lost! For I am a man of impure lips, and I dwell among a people of impure lips[257]. My eyes have beheld the king, Adonai of hosts!"

6/ Then one of the seraphim flew to me and in his hand was a glowing stone that he took from the altar with tongs.

7/ And he touched it to my mouth and said, "Look, this has touched your lips. Now your iniquity[258] has departed and your sin is forgiven."[259]

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[255] "was filling with smoke" Nifal imperfect מלא. The filling of smoke has both positive and negative connotations in the Bible. In Proverbs 10:26, it is negative, as smoke fills the eyes. Job 41:12 describes smoke coming out of the nostrils of a beast. Yet, the image commonly occurs during theophanies, as in the covenant of the pieces in Genesis 15:17. See Chapter Three in analysis for full discussion on the implication of מלא in this passage.

[256] "Woe is me." See analysis for complete discussion of this phrase.

[257] "impure lips" JPS, RSV and Blenkinsopp translate טמא as "unclean." Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1961) defines "unclean" firstly as simple foulness or filth, which is not apt here. It then defines it as ceremonially impure and morally impure, both of which are apt. That dictionary's primary definition of "impure" is "not pure" as in "obscene language." It then goes on to define "impure" as ceremonially and ritually impure. The association of impure with language makes it an appropriate definition of טמא here, given Isaiah's anxiety concerning his lips and speech. Blenkinsopp notes that Isaiah's concern is that he needs "purification of the lips" to engage in his mission. Indeed, his lips had to be redeemed before speaking with God and before being commissioned.

[258] "your iniquity" עון can mean a transgression or sin or guilt, terms that are often used interchangeably. Less frequently, עון refers to the punishment that follows a transgression. 2 Samuel 22:24 contains a psalm-like confession by David in which he thanks God for protection and proclaims his righteousness and faithfulness to God. David claims he has kept God's commandments and has been wholehearted in his dedication to God's commandments. He states he has guarded himself מעוני, against "sinning," according to JPS. Koehler-Baumgartener notes the many occurrences in which it is used in parallel with חטא, as in the present verse. It is thus possible to read these terms as synonyms. For this verse, Blenkinsopp and NRSV translate עון as "iniquity" and חטא as sin, while JPS translates עון as "guilt" and חטא as "sin." Elsewhere, though, JPS renders עון as "guilt," as in Exodus 28:43, referring to priests who do not cover themselves when performing sacrifices. Both terms can refer to offenses of a moral nature (see Hosea 7:1 in which עון is used in parallel with רע, wickedness) and of a ritual nature (see Exodus 28:43). Both senses are appropriate here, as Isaiah is concerned about the words of his and his people utter, which is a moral concern, and about his impurity and uncleanness as he is about to be addressed by God.

[259] "forgiven" The verb תְּכֻפַּר – pual imperfect 3 feminine singular כפר – can mean "passed over," "forgiven," "purified," and "covered over." This theophany occurs in a cultic context – a shrine or the Temple. The word then conveys a sense of expiation, as it is impossible to engage in cultic functions in a state of impurity. Blenkinsopp notes this,

8/ Then I heard the voice of my lord[260] saying, "Whom shall I send?[261] Now who will go for us?" And I said, "Here I am![262] Send me!"

9/ Then he said, "Go, say to this people, "Yes, hear, but do not understand. And surely see, but do not know.

10/ Make dense the minds of this people. Make heavy their ears, blind their eyes! Lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and with their minds will understand and repent and heal themselves."

11/ Then I said, "Until when, my Lord?"[263] And he said, "Until cities have become ruined, void of inhabitants. And houses without a soul. And the ground is ruined, desolate.

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stating that Isaiah's basic attitude here is that he cannot participate in the "seraphic liturgy" in a state of impurity. He notes that this moment "has been compared with the rinsing of the mouth by Mesopotamian cultic functionaries as a preparation for public speaking" (Blenkinsopp, 226). Translating תְּכֻפַּר as "covered over" does not accomplish this; something that is covered over does not disappear. In Isaiah's case, his impurity does disappear. In Ezekiel 43:20, כפר in piel form is rendered as "perform purification" by JPS and "make atonement" by NRSV. Both renderings convey expiation. It is awkward English, however, to say that sin is purified; that may hint at a purer form of sin. "Your sin will be atoned for" is also awkward. The verb in piel form is often rendered as "expiated" (JPS in Lev. 16:6, Numbers 35:33). In Isaiah 22:14, iniquity is simply "forgiven," which is less cumbersome that "expiated."

[260] "my lord" See Chapter Four for a discussion on how "my lord" indicates a power imbalance.

[261] "Whom shall I send?" See Chapter Four for a discussion on the meaning of being sent in the Bible.

[262] "Here I am" הִנֵּנִי is rendered prosaically as "I am," as the JPS rendering of Jeremiah 26:14: "As for me, I am in your hands." NRSV, on the other hand, translates the line as, "As for me, here I am in your hands." Similarly, in 1 Samuel 22:12, David speaks to his king. JPS again translates it prosaically as "Yes, my lord," while NRSV opts for "Here I am, my lord." "Here I am" conveys readiness to serve; the prophet is eager to fulfill the mission even when, in Jeremiah's case, he was indicating readiness for punishment. Isaiah is clearly eager to serve. Thus in the present verse, הִנֵּנִי is rendered as "Here I am."

[263] "Until when?" See Chapter Four for a discussion on this phrase.

12/ And YHWH sends away each individual. And upon the land, great is the desolation.

13/ Now if there is still one-tenth of it, it will again be consumed.

Appendix B: Amos 7:1-17 annotated translation

1/ This my Lord YHWH showed me: Now, look! He created[264] a swarm of locusts at the beginning of the springing up of the late-sown crops of the late-rains, that is, the late-sown crops that came after the king's reaping.[265]

2/ When it had finished[266] consuming the land's crops, I said, "My Lord YHWH, please, grant forgiveness![267] How can Jacob stand it?[268] He is so small!"

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[264] The participle יוצר here, as in the participle קורא in verse four, has no accompanying subject. A similar use of יוצר occurs in 4:13, where there is no subject but context makes it clear that God is the actor. Here, since Amos already defined this as a single event that occurred at a particular time of the growing season, the participle should reflect a moment in time – created – as opposed to "was creating." JPS 1985 opts for this past tense option – "He formed" – but others including Paul, offer "was creating."

[265] This Hebrew is difficult. The point is to establish a time of season during which this first vision occurred. Andersen and Freedman in their Anchor Bible commentary offer a simple, idiomatic translation: "just when the latter growth was beginning to appear, that is, the latter growth after the king's mowings."

[266] This construction – with the perfect consecutive היה plus אם followed by a verb in perfect tense usually suggests something that happened, i.e., "when it finished." Such a translation is confusing here. At the end of each snippet of dialogue, Amos seems to convince God to revoke the punishment. How can the punishment be revoked if it already happened? Andersen and Freedman favorably note the Septuagint's understanding: "When it would have completely eaten the vegetation." They translate it as "when they were about to devour the vegetation." The plain reading of such a grammatical construction, though, is past, which is supported by JPS and NRSV. It is possible, as Andersen and Freedman themselves suggest, that these verses describe only visions, as opposed to actual reality. In this case, the simple past works. In a vision, it does not matter if God promises to relent on a punishment that already occurred. It is possible that God created the vision in order to allow the prophet the opportunity to speak with God and intercede on behalf of the people. Amos does so in this verse and then in verse five. Ultimately, however, God will do what God wants. At the end of this short section, God makes it clear that no amount of pleading by the prophet will interfere with God's decision to punish the people for their disloyalty.

[267] Shalom Paul notes that the verb סלח only occurs when God is involved, and that it implies absolute pardon. Given God's final threat at the beginning of chapter eight, a complete pardon was not in the offing, despite God's promise to relent this one time. See Chapter Four for a discussion of this verb.

[268] This verb, קום, generally means "rise" or "arise." It also may mean "to maintain oneself." In Nahum 1:6 the prophet discusses the overwhelming power of the angry God and asks, "Who can *stand* before His wrath? Who can resist His fury?" Similarly in Lamentations 1:14, God's vengeance upon a sinful Jerusalem is more than the city can bear: "The Lord has delivered me into the hands of those I cannot *withstand*." In Psalm 1:5, the wicked will be able to endure God's judgment. In those cases, as here, God is exacting a stern punishment on a sinful people.

3/ YHWH relented concerning this. "It shall not come to pass," said YHWH.

4/ This my Lord YHWH showed me: And, look! My Lord YHWH announced a struggle of fire; it had consumed the great deep, and will consume the fields.

5/ I said, "My Lord YHWH, please cease! How can Jacob stand it? He is so small."

6/ YHWH relented concerning this as well. "It shall not come to pass," said my Lord YHWH.

7/ This He showed me: And, look! He was standing upon a wall checked with a plumb line. And in His hand, a plumb line.

8/ And my Lord YHWH said to me, "What do you see, Amos?" And I said, "A plumb line." And My Lord said, "Look, I am putting a plumb line[269] toward My people Israel. I will never again forgive them.

9/ The altars of Isaac will be desolate. The holy places of Israel will be laid wasted. I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

10/ Amaziah, priest of Beth-El, sent Jeroboam, king of Israel, a message, saying, "Amos is conspiring against you[270] in the midst of the House of Israel[271]. The land cannot endure[272] his words,

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[269] See Chapter Four for a discussion on conflicting views on how this phrase should be translated and understood.

[270] קשר, translated here as 'conspiring.' According to Koehler-Baumgartener, this verb followed by preposition על, means "conspiring" or "in league together." BDB offers the same meanings. In 2 Kings 10:9, Jehu uses the word in a speech to the people. The word appears with "killed": "I conspired against my master and killed him" (2 Kings 10:9). The actions of conspiracy and being "in league with" require multiple actors. In 2 Kings, Jehu acted in league with Zimri against Ahab. Saul, in a paranoid rant, uses the word while accusing his attendants of conspiring with David against him (1 Samuel 22:8, 13). Amaziah's concern is not only with the words of Amos's prophecy. He seems concerned as well that Amos, a Judean interloping in Israel, has attracted a following that may threaten the stability of the ruling power in Israel. This would include both the king and temple, both mentioned by Amaziah below.

[271] בית-ישראל often means the entire people. It is used in this way in Isaiah 5:7, Ezekiel 3:5 and 4:3, Leviticus 10:6 and Psalms 98:3. בית-ישראל is used in close proximity to עמי ישראל
in Ezekiel 11:9, with no discernible difference in meaning. In most cases, בית-ישראל, like עמ ישראל, seems to refer to the entire covenanted people. In the present case, however, בית-ישראל may deserve a more localized connotation. Amaziah is concerned specifically with the Northern Kingdom. His use of the phrase "house of Israel" probably indicates that geo-political entity. Andersen and Freedman suggest as an option that

11/ for "Thus said Amos": "By the sword Jeroboam will die and Israel will surely go into exile[273]."

12/ Seer,[274] go. Flee[275] to the land of Judah. Eat bread there[276] and there may you prophesy.

ישראל -בית may "be understood literally as a designation of the temple at Bethel" (Andersen and Freedman, 635).

[272] The root כלי (hiphil-infinitive construct with prefix ל) is a verbal derivative of the noun כלי, vessel or container. Thus, in the hiphil verbal form, it means to contain or hold in. In Jeremiah 6:11, the prophet speaks of his inability to hold in the wrath of God. He cannot bear keeping his words bottled up inside. The NRSV translates: "I am weary of *holding it in*." "Holding in" here conveys a near overflow. In Ezekiel 23:32, the prophet uses an analogy of the overwhelming contents of iniquity in one's cup. Like the present verse, the issue in Ezekiel's image is of an abundance of something unwelcome, too much of something. JPS renders it as "You shall drink of your sister's cup, so deep and wide....It holds so much." There is too much sin in the cup. In Jeremiah 10:10, the prophet describes the nations as being unable to "endure" (JPS 1985) God's rage. The word "endure" captures the sense of the present situation, in which Amaziah is expressing concern about the Northern Kingdom's ability to hold something unwelcome. He anticipates, like in Jeremiah 6:11, a bursting forth. Shalom Paul writes of this verse that Amaziah is describing to King Jeroboam that "the limit of tolerance [for Amos's activity and its impact] has passed, for the state of the nation is at stake." Endure captures the sense that the land – "pictured as one grand receptacle," according to Paul (p. 241) is stretched to the limit in its ability to contain Amos's unwelcome – from the priest's perspective – activity.

[273] The verb root גלי, exile, appears here in qal imperfect and infinitive absolute forms. It occurs several other times in Amos. In the prophet's statements of doom, he states, according to Andersen and Freedman, "The Aramean people will go into exile" (Amos 1:5). In 5:5, the word carries the same meaning in reference to Gilgal. Sometimes a threat of exile follows a people's bad behavior, as in Lamentations 1:3, where Judah has "gone into exile" due to its inhabitants' "many transgressions" (Lamentations 1:7). In Proverbs 27:25, the verb applies to grass which "vanishes" (JPS 1985) or "is gone" (NRSV). Such a rendering may illustrate the dire nature of Amos's prediction, and Amaziah's alarm. The people's existence in their land may vanish.

[274] Amaziah calls Amos חוזה. Andersen and Freedman in the Anchor Bible Commentary wonder whether the use of this word, as opposed to נביא, may be derogatory. They conclude that it is unclear, but note that Amaziah acknowledges that Amos is capable of prophecy, only that he should not engage in it in Israel. חוזה is frequently used to identify a legitimate prophet. The narrator of Amos uses the verb in qal perfect form to describe Amos's activities: "prophesied," according to JPS and NRSV. In 2 Samuel 24:11, it refers to Gad, David's "seer." It is suggested in Koehler-Baumgartener, on the other hand, that the participle may be "used disdainfully;" it offers only this verse as an example. Heschel notes in the The Prophets, Volume II, that by the eighth century B.C.E. the distinction between חוזה and נביא had "more or les disappeared." (The

13/ But here at Beth-El, you must never again prophesy[277], for it is a sanctuary of a king and a royal house."[278]

14/ Amos answered, saying to Amaziah, "I am not a prophet and I am not a disciple of a prophet[279]. Rather I am a herdsman and a tender of fig-trees."

15/ And Adonai took me[280] from following after the flock and Adonai said to me, 'Go. Prophesy to My people Israel.'

16/ But now, hear the word of Adonai. You are saying, 'Do not prophesy concerning Israel and do not preach[281] about the House of Isaac.'

Prophets: Volume II, 127). Paul provides numerous examples of the "interchangeability" of the words "seer' and "prophet" (Paul, 241).

[275] See Chapter Four for how the implications of the command to "flee."

[276] The qal imperative form of אכל with direct object לכם/bread seems usually to mean, simply, to eat bread, or have something to eat. That is the case in 1 Samuel 28:20 describing an exhausted Saul who had not, according to JPS, "eaten anything." In Genesis 43:32, this verb and direct object simply means to eat or dine. It possesses a similar understanding in Exodus 2:20, where Moses's future father-in-law wants to invite Moses to eat with his family. There seems to be no suggestion, according to Andersen and Freedman, that Amaziah is urging Amos to "earn his living" as a prophet in Judah, even though the phrase is followed by "and there you can prophesy." Rather, it seems simply to mean, settle and live out your days there.

[277] The root יסף may be understood as "to add" in a variety of senses. It can possess a literal, tangible sense, as in Deuteronomy 19:9, when Moses informs the people that if they behave well, God will add to their territory as a reward. It also suggests a sense of continuing action. When the verb is negated by לא and modified by the adverb עד as is the case with Amaziah's words, יסף often possesses a temporal sense, as in "no longer" or "never again." In Exodus 10:29, Moses affirms to Pharaoh, "I will *never* see you again." The temporal sense can exist as well without the benefit of עד. In 1 Chronicles 17:8, God, speaking through the prophet Nathan, seeks to inform David of the people's glorious future: translated in NRSV as "violent men shall waste them no more as formerly". The strong emphasis of "never again" here reflects the threatening nature of Amaziah's warning.

[278] While some understand Amaziah's command as a friendly bit of advice (see annotated translation), that would mean treating the command as dramatic understatement, akin to Don Corleone's "making him an offer he can't refuse."

[279] See Chapter Four for a discussion on the possible meanings of Amos's disavowal of prophecy.

[280] See Chapter Four for a discussion on what it means to "take" a prophet.

[281] נטף refers usually to dripping in both qal and hiphil forms. In Ezekiel 21:2, 7 the verb has a positive connotation and appears in parallel with "prophesy." In Micah 2:6 it refers to the preaching of false prophets who preach under the influence of wine. Here, the

17/ Therefore, thus said Adonai: 'Your wife will fornicate in the city. And your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. And your land will be measured and parceled out, while you will die upon the defiled land. And Israel will surely be exiled from upon its land.'"

8:1/ This my Lord YHWH showed me. There was a basket of summer fruits.

2/ He said, "What do you see, Amos?" I said, "A basket of summer fruit." And He said to me, "The end is coming for My people Israel. I cannot continue to pardon them.

3/ The singing women at the Temple will howl on that day," declares my Lord YHWH. "Abundant in corpses flung about everywhere. Silence!"[282]

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sense of its usage is unclear. Andersen and Freedman suggest as one possibility that Amaziah is comparing Amos's prophesying to the false prophets in Micah (779).

[282] Some believe Amos says, "Silence," and not God. See Chapter Four for discussion.

Appendix C: Jeremiah 1:5-19 annotated translation

5/"Before I formed you in the belly, I knew you.
And before you came out of the womb, I consecrated you.[283]
A prophet to the nations I have appointed you."

6/ And I said, "Alas, Lord God! Listen! I do not know how to speak, for I am a youth."

7/ And Adonai said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth.'[284] Rather, everywhere[285] I send you, you will go; everything I command you, you will speak.

8/ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you, to protect you,"[286] declared Adonai.

9/ Then Adonai extended his hand and touched my mouth. And Adonai said to me, "Look, I have put[287] my words into your mouth.

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[283] See Chapter Five for a discussion on the relationship between the verbs "formed," "knew," and "consecrated," as used in this verse.

[284] See Chapter Five for a discussion on נער.

[285] "Wherever" underscores God's ability to impose any sort of mission upon the prophet. The phrase אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר, literally "all that," evokes אֵת אֲשֶׁר in Ezekiel 2:8, where God instructs the prophet to eat "whatever" God gives him. Greenberg, quoted in Chapter Six, states the phrase suggests the prophet's absolute submission to God. Here, the addition of כָּל – "all" or "every" – underscores God's power. Lundbom writes, Jeremiah "will go on whatever missions Yahweh sends him and speak whatever Yahweh commands him" (Lundbom, 233).

[286] "to protect you" The verb is hiphil infinitive construct נצל with prefix ל and suffix 2 masculine singular. JPS, at various times, renders the verb as save and protect. The present context concerns God's protecting the prophet from potential enemies. Deuteronomy 23:15 also concerns enemies. JPS renders the verb in that verse as "protect you." NRSV translates it as "save you." The verb can be understood as rescue, as in Ezekiel 34:10, describing sheep, symbol of the people, being plucked by God out of the mouths of predators. At this early stage in Jeremiah's ministry, the writer was probably not anticipating rescue. The meaning is closer to protect, particularly as God is mollifying the concerns of an anxious young man.

[287] Lundbom understands the meaning of the perfect tense נָתַתִּי as future. He explains that biblical grammarians call this a "prophetic perfect," which is "the reckoning of a future event as if it were already past." Scholars who hold this view believe the fulfillment of God's promise occurs in 15:16, when Jeremiah says, "Your words were found so I ate them." 1:9 makes more sense, though, if Jeremiah receives God's words at that moment, and not later. After all, God stretches forth God's hand and touches Jeremiah's lips immediately before God says, נָתַתִּי. Why wouldn't God have actually given Jeremiah the words at that point? Furthermore, chapter 15 suggests Jeremiah is remembering a past event, i.e., when God gave him God's word in 1:9.

10/ See,[288] I am setting you up, on this day, over the nations and over rulers uproot out, to break down, to destroy, to overthrow, to build, and to plant."[289]

11/ And it was: the word of Adonai [came] to me, saying, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" and I said, "The rod of an almond tree I see."

12/ Adonai said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over[290] My word to perform it."

13/ And the word of Adonai came to me a second time, saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "A boiling pot I see and it faces north."

14/ And Adonai said to me, "From the north[291] evil will be opened[292] all the inhabitants of the Land.

15/ "Now, here I am, calling to all the families of the kingdoms of the north, declares Adonai, and they have came and appointed each man his throne at the gates of Jerusalem and upon every one of her surrounding walls and upon all the cities of Judah.

16/ "And I have spoken My judgments upon them for all of their evil that they have forsaken Me and have offered incense to other gods and bowed down to the works of their hands.

17/ "But you must hold up your loins so you may rise up and speak to them everything I command you. Do not be shattered[293] before them lest I confound you before them.

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[288] The qal imperative form of ראה functions similarly to the ראה in the previous line, translated here as "look." God is attempting to allay the young prophet's fears. He is cajoling him with the various ways in which Jeremiah could and should feel comfortable assuming the role of prophecy.

[289] Several commentators note that there are four verbs of destruction here and only two of building, which means that destruction in the predominant theme of the book of Jeremiah (See Sweeney, 922; Lundbom, 235.).

[290] The participle שקד is a play on shaked, almond tree, in the previous verse. Sweeney points out the almond tree blooms early in Israel, which may suggest that God's will soon fulfill the promise God has made. (Some suggest this refers to God's promise to put words into the prophet's mouth. Lundbom notes that this is the suggestion implied by the Septuagint.) It could have a more ominous meaning, suggested by Jeremiah 5:6 where the word describes God's anger like a tiger lying in wait to pounce on the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

[291] Lundbom notes that enemies often invaded Palestine and other locales from the north. (See Jeremiah 50:9; Ezekiel 38:15.)

[292] תִּפָּתַח is the imperfect second person singular feminine of פתח. The opening up of evil upon the land is a strange construction. The most helpful attestation may be Jeremiah 50:25, where God "opens" God's storehouse of weaponry in order to loose destruction upon Babylon. (See Lundbom, 242.)

18/ Now I am here; I have appointed you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and bronze walls[294] over the entire land, to the kings of Judah, to her inhabitants, to her priests and to the people of the land.

19/ "They will make war against you, but they will not prevail over you, for I am with you, declares Adonai, to rescue you."

[293] See Chapter Five for a discussion on "shattered."
[294] See Chapter Five for a discussion on the fortification of Jeremiah.

Appendix D: Ezekiel 2:1 – 3:16 annotated translation

1/ And He said to me, "Mortal,[295] stand upon your feet[296] so I may speak to you."

2/ A spirit[297] came into me[298] when He spoke to me and it caused me to stand on my feet. And I heard Him speaking to me.

3/ He said to me, "I am the one who is sending you forth to the children of Israel, to the rebellious people who have rebelled against Me.[299] They and their fathers have transgressed against me even until this day.

4/ And the children – hard of face and stubborn of heart[300] – I am sending you to them. Thus says the Lord YHWH.

5/ Now they, whether they would hear and cease – for they are a house of rebellion – they would know a prophet was among them!

6/ Now you, Mortal, do not be afraid of them and do not fear their words, although they are nettles and thorns[301] to you, and you will sit upon scorpions.[302] Of their words do not be afraid. And do not be shattered[303] by them, for they are a house of rebellion.

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[295] See Chapter Six for a discussion on "Mortal."

[296] See Chapter Six for a discussion on the implications of God's insistence that Ezekiel stand at this moment.

[297] It is noteworthy that the רוח here, as well as in 3:12 and 3:14, is unqualified; it is not in construct with Elohim or YHWH. Chapter Six contains a discussion on the nature of the "spirit."

[298] The verb בוא means "enter" or "come." See Chapter Six for a full discussion on the verb in this context.

[299] Greenberg writes that these two verbs, מרד and פשע, contribute to a double offense by the Israelites. מרד implies a political offense; the nation has not been faithful to or served God. Greenberg refers to Genesis 14:4, where one alliance of kings "served" (אבד) one king for twelve years, but rebelled (מרד) against him the next year. Similarly, in 2 Kings 18:7, concerning King Hezekiah of Israel,מרד is used in negative apposition with אבד: "He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him." In Joshua 22, the leader repeated uses the word מרד in his rebuke of the Reubenites, Gadites and half-tribe of Manasseh for what seems like their worship of foreign gods. In Daniel 9:9 and Numbers 14:9 the verb describes the same sort of rebuke. פשע, Greenberg explains, primarily conveys an ethical offense. The noun, פשע, often appears in parallel with חטא, an ethical misstep, as in Micah 1:5 and Amos 5:12, where פשעים refer to transgressions against the needy, etc. In the present context, it has less to do with moral offenses as it does with infidelity to God. The combination of these verbs reappears in Ezekiel 20:38, where God threatens to judge the people for sacrificing to idols despite God's acts of beneficence toward them.

[300] See Chapter Six for a discussion on these body idioms.

7/ Speak words to them so that they may hear and cease, for they are rebellious!

8/ Now you, mortal, hear what I am saying to you. You must not be rebellious like the house of rebellion. Open your mouth and eat what I am handing you."

9/ And I saw,[304] and look, a was hand extended[305] toward me and there, in it, a scroll!

10/ And He spread it out before me. It had writing on it, on the front and back, and written upon it were dirges and sighs and wailing.[306]

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[301] "Nettles and thorns." סָרְבִים is a hapax legomenom. סִלּוֹנִים is rare. In Ezekiel 28:24 a similar word, סִלּוֹן, meaning thorns, appears. This word pair's proximity to scorpions, leads most translators to opt for something like "nettles and thorns" (Greenberg), "thistles and thorns" (JPS 1985) or "briers and thorns" (NRSV).

[302] "Scorpions." There are few biblical attestations of עַקְרַבִּים.In 1 Kings 12:11 and 12:14, the word is used in the description of Rehoboam's extreme insensitivity to the people of the north, who are compelled into corvee labor and to pay burdensome taxes. The king threatens to treat the people more harshly than his father, Solomon. "My father flogged you with whips. I will flog you with scorpions." The JSB commentary posits that "scorpions" may refer to a thorny plant or some kind of whip. Either way, the use of the word in this verse helps the reader understand God's message concerning the people's reaction to the prophet: it will hurt more than most whips. The Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia notes that the preposition with יושב can be על instead of אל, suggesting that the prophet's interactions with the people would be like sitting *upon* scorpions, a particularly nasty image.

[303] See Chapter Six for a discussion on "shattered." Also, note its similar use in Jeremiah 1:17.

[304] "See." See Chapter Six for a discussion of this word.

[305] The verb root שלח is common and versatile. Here it appears in a qal passive form. It can mean "to send," as in when God sends forth a prophet to the people or an envoy to attack an enemy (i.e., Jeremiah 49:14, Judges 6:14 regarding Gideon's commissioning). It can also describe the sending of a message, as in 1 Kings 14:6. It can mean "grant," as when God promises new grain in Joel 2:19. In the present verse, it describes a hand. In 1 Samuel, 24:11, with the preposition bet following the verb, a hand is "raised against" another. In Ezekiel 8:17, one may understand שלח as "raise" or "extend toward" as the people bring a branch to their noses. In the present text, God brings a scroll to the prophet. "Raise" does not work because it is hard to imagine God *raising* anything up to the commanded mortal. BDB's suggestion, "extends," to describe hands works well here.

[306] קִנִים, the first word, is translated commonly as "dirges." It can also mean "lamentations," translated thus by NRSV in Amos 8:10. The third word, הִי, appears only here in the Bible. The Evan-Shoshan Concordance suggests הִי is similar to the word אבל, which often means "mourning." In Amos 8:10, אבל, translated as "mourning" by JPS and NRSV, is parallel to קִנִים, as in the present verse. The second word, הֶגֶה, suggests a wider variety of sounds, and has a wider variety of meanings, than the other two. In Job

3:1/ And He said to me, "Mortal, eat what you see here. Eat this scroll and go, speak to the House of Israel."[307]

2/ I opened my mouth and he fed me this scroll.

3/ And He said to me, "Mortal, feed your stomach and fill your belly[308] with this scroll that I am giving you." I ate it and it became sweet like honey in my mouth.[309]

4/ And He said to me, "Mortal, up and go to the House of Israel and speak in[310] My words to them.

5/ For not to a people of unintelligible speech[311] and difficult language[312] are you being sent, but to the House of Israel.

37:2 וְנַעַשׁ is translated by NRSV as "rumbling" and by JPS simply as "sound" which comes out of God's mouth. In Isaiah 59:13, JPS understands it as "uttering." In Psalm 90:9, the word is translated by JPS, NRSV and in BDB as "sigh." I opt for this latter translation. "Sigh" can imply sadness, which makes it consistent with "dirges" and "mourning." But "sigh" also adds a new sound, thus adding something new to the image. "Rumbling" too would add a new sound, but it does not suggest sadness like "sigh" does.

[307] See Chapter Six for a discussion of Ezekiel's attitude toward eating the scroll.

[308] Words besides "stomach" and "belly" can work. JPS translates בטן in Proverbs 18:8 as "inmost parts" and in Habakuk 3:16 as "bowels." But in the present verse, Ezekiel is told to eat the scroll, so "stomach" and "belly" are appropriate on every level to describe the situation. Perhaps the best parallel is Jonah 2:3, where the prophet describes his place in the big fish as "the belly of Sheol," meaning the deepest spot of the netherworld.

[309] The jussive of the root היה, followed by the ל with מָתוֹק leads to Greenberg's translation: "It turned sweet as honey

[310] See Chapter Six, footnote 208, for discussion of "speaking in" God's word.

[311] The word עמק is refers to a vale or valley, as in the parallel structure in Micah 1:4 juxtaposing הרים with עמקים, and the Valley of Shaveh in Genesis 14:17. It also possesses a figurative meaning. In verbal form, particularly in the causative, it can refer to the deepening of apostasy (Isaiah 31:6) and corruption (Hosea 9:9). A few attestations refer to a people's speech – here and Isaiah 33:19. It is spelled out clearly in the latter attestation, which elaborates on עַם עִמְקֵי שָׂפָה with נִלְעַג לָשׁוֹן אֵין בִּינָה, "stammering of tongue that they are not understood."

[312] Moses refers to himself as כְּבַד־פֶּה וּכְבֵד לָשׁוֹן. He was expressing concern that people would not understand his speech. Here, God informs the prophet that he would not be sent to a foreign people who speak some unfathomable language. Rather, he must preach to the House of Israel, who can readily understand the prophet's speech. God is noting the irony that, were Ezekiel to go to a foreign land, the people would listen to him, despite the language barrier. The people of Israel, on the other hand, will not listen to him, despite the shared language.

6/ Not to a great people of unintelligible speech or heaviness of tongue whose words you cannot understand. If I had sent you to them, they would listen to you.

7/ But the House of Israel, they will not listen to you, for they do not listen to me.[313] For the entire house of Israel, they are hard-headed[314] and stubborn of heart.[315]

8/ Look, I will make your face hard, just like theirs, and your forehead hard, just like theirs.[316]

9/ Like adamant, harder than flint,[317] I have made your forehead. Do not fear them and do not be shattered[318] by their faces, for they are a house of rebellion.

10/ And He said to me, "Mortal, all the words I speak to you, take into your heart, and into your ears, hear.[319]

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[313] God is illustrating the kinship of experience between God and prophet. It is stated as a given that the people will not heed the prophet, just as they do not heed God.

[314] The root, חזק, conveys a sense of fortifying or strengthening in a number of contexts. When it is associated with a body part, it sometimes carries a positive connotation. Eliphaz recounts Job's good deeds in Job 4:3 with "וְיָדַיִם רָפּוֹת תְּחַזֵּק," "you strengthened their weak hands." In Nehemia 2:18, the people feel encouraged to build the city walls by God's benevolence; the Hebrew reads, "וַיְחַזְּקוּ יְדֵיהֶם לַטּוֹבָה." Often, though, it carries negative connotations, as in the admonishment of bad prophets not to "strengthen the hands (i.e., "encourage") of the wicked" (Ezekiel 13:22); and God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 9:12, 10:20) and the hearts of all Egyptians as they pursue the Israelites (Exodus 14:17). A hardening of the heart implies in these verses obduracy. The same sense fits in the present verse, where the people have hardened foreheads. "Hard-headed" preserves the body idiom presented by מֵצַח, forehead.

[315] This root, קשה, associated with a body part usually means stubborn. In 2 Kings 17:14, the phrase וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ וַיַּקְשׁוּ אֶת־עָרְפָּם , "they did not listen and stiffened their necks," offers an apt comparison to the present verse. It refers to an obdurate people who would not heed the words of prophets. They were stubborn.

[316] See Chapter Six for a discussion.

[317] In Zecharia 7:12, this word refers to resistant hearts, again despite the prophet's warnings:
וְלִבָּם שָׂמוּ שָׁמִיר מִשְׁמוֹעַ אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה וְאֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת בְּרוּחוֹ בְּיַד הַנְּבִיאִים
"And they made their hearts like adamant against the hearing of the instruction and the words that the Lord of Hosts sent by His spirit by the hand of the prophets." The word, שמר, is not modified by a verb denoting hardness, but it is in Ezekiel 3:9. Given that in the previous verse, Ezekiel 3:8, God speaks of the stubbornness of the people, it seems clear that שמר here should refer to something hard as opposed to a thorn, which in Isaiah 5:6 seems to be the meaning.

[318] The hardening of the prophet to withstand the animosity of the people appears also in Jeremiah 1:19, where God tells the prophet, "I have appointed you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and bronze walls over the entire land, to the kings of Judah, to her inhabitants, to her priests and to the people of the land."

11/ Up, go to the exiled community, to your people, and speak to them. Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, whether they listen or not.'"

12/ Then a spirit lifted me and I heard behind me a great rumbling[320] sound: Blessed is the glory of the Eternal in His place."

13/ and the sound of the creatures' wings beating against one another, and the sound of the wheels along with them – a great, roaring sound.

14/ A spirit lifted me and took me, and I went, bitter, my spirit angry, with the hand of the Eternal heavy[321] upon me.

15/ Then I came to the exile community of Tel Aviv, the ones who dwell upon the river Chevar, which are they who have settled there. And I sat there seven days, desolate,[322] among them.

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[319] This is a chiasmus, lost in JPS's idiomatic translation: "Listen with your ears and receive into your mind." A לב refers often to the "inner man," according to BDB. Many translations prefer "mind" here. But a לב is also a physiological term for, well, the heart. And heart works well when describing the inner territory of an individual. And in the present verse, it works better than "mind" which conveys an intellectual orientation. Here, it seems, God instructs Ezekiel to fully absorb God's words, illustrated by the consuming of the scroll. Moreover, "take into your heart" complements "into your ears, here." The latter conveys understanding, intellectually. The former conveys absorbing into one's innermost parts.

[320] See Chapter Six for an analysis of the rumbling sound.

[321] See Chapter Six for an analysis of "bitter" and God's "heavy" hand in this verse.

[322] See Chapter Six for an analysis of Ezekiel's emotional state as he arrived in Babylon.

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