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Yahweh as Father: The Image in Ancient Israelite Context and Modern Appropriation

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YAHWEH AS FATHER: THE IMAGE IN ANCIENT ISRAELITE CONTEXT AND
MODERN APPROPRIATION

by

Joshua Wayne Lovelace

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
Gardner-Webb University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis was to appropriate the image of Yahweh as father for modern Christendom in light of feminist critiques of the image. The methods in accomplishing this task were as follows: defining feminism and feminist biblical interpretation, conveying the critiques of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Julia M. O'Brien who were scholarly dialogue partners, studying the social milieu of ancient Israel, using historical, literary, textual, and social criticism to exegete texts that mention Yahweh as father, comparing findings of exegesis with social milieu of ancient Israel, responding to critiques of Ruether and O'Brien, and lastly taking the findings of these methods and appropriating the image. It was discovered that if one takes the role of Yahweh as father in light of the Israel's social milieu in the OT, appropriation can occur in these four ways: a father raises his child with love by encouraging autonomy for the sake of community, seeing the image of Yahweh as father as a liberation motif, realizing the importance of the image of Yahweh as mother and father in light of Gen 1 and 2, which encourages androgynous wholeness, and understanding the power and inability of metaphors, yet reaching for their potential.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible Commentary
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
<i>BTF</i>	<i>Bangalore Theological Forum</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CC	Continental Commentary
<i>DTIB</i>	<i>Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible</i>
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
<i>G/LXX</i>	<i>Septuagint</i>
<i>HBSV</i>	<i>Handbook of Biblical Social Values</i>
J	Yahwistic source
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDB</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
P	Priestly source
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the image of God as father is under formidable critique. The origin of the critique began when ancient social structures changed after the French Revolution, American Independence, and the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century.¹ The metaphor's greatest challenge came in the 1970s and 80s when feminist scholars published the *Inclusive Language Lectionary*.²

Can this ancient metaphor be applied to Christendom today? We can appropriate this metaphor by studying the social milieu of ancient Israel and comparing our findings with the use of the metaphor in the Old Testament. Then we will be able to respond to feminist critique of the metaphor, realizing that for contemporary appropriation, we must comprehend the metaphor within its ancient social context. In order to accomplish this task, we will first define feminism, feminist biblical interpretation, and the critiques of the metaphor by feminist scholars Rosemary Radford Ruether and Julia M. O'Brien.³ Secondly, we will study the social milieu of ancient Israel, focusing on the ancient

¹ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Yahweh the Patriarch: Ancient Images of God and Feminist Theology* (trans. Frederick J. Gaiser; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), ix. Cf. *Ibid.*, ix, "New modes of thought and production touched the existence of the family and resulted in a transformation of all social structures and human relationships. Centuries-old understandings of roles, social orders, and behavioral norms began to change."

² Julia M. O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor: Theology and Ideology in the Prophets* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 77. Cf. Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 68, "The immediate cause for complaint is the growing number of women and men who find sex-exclusive language in the liturgy and, by extension, the tradition's almost exclusively male language for God alienating."

³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston, MS: Beacon Press, 1983); O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*. See also Nancy R. Bowen, "Feminist Interpretation," *NIDB* 2:448-49; Gerstenberger, *Yahweh the Patriarch*; Cherith Fee Nordling, "Feminist Biblical Interpretation," *DTIB* :228-30; Soskice, *The Kindness of God*.

family, the role of the father, and kinship.⁴ Thirdly, we will exegete the Old Testament texts that mention God as father and compare our findings with ancient Israel's social milieu. Lastly, we will respond to Ruether and O'Brien's critiques and suggest methods of appropriation.

According to Nancy R. Bowen, feminism is a political position that advocates the full humanity of women so that they can find equality with men and have the freedom to work in all levels of societal leadership. Feminism also critiques social structures that diminish the full humanity of women, which makes it a liberation movement.⁵

Feminist biblical interpretation entails a variety of approaches, ideologies, and methods of interpretation. Feminist biblical interpretation usually is based upon women's experience, but not always.⁶

Two major emphases of feminist biblical interpreters have been "recovery and challenge to patriarchy."⁷ Recovery primarily draws attention to the importance of women in Judeo-Christian history by giving emphasis to biblical texts that mention women and reconstructing the histories of ancient Israel and Christianity in order to place women within the center of those histories. Challenge to patriarchy occurs when feminist biblical interpreters confront certain biblical texts wherein patriarchy's influence might

⁴ Cf. Daniel I. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, (ed. Ken M. Campbell; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 33-34, who admits that the sources for the ancient Israelite family are few, namely the Old Testament and archaeology. It is difficult to determine family and marriage customs during ancient Israelite history because the sources provide an inconsistent picture. One must question whether descriptions of family and marriage customs were normative or a biblical author's rendition. Nevertheless, we can gain some insight about the ancient Israelite family in spite of these challenges. Our goal will not be to support patriarchy, but to find some redemptive qualities of the social structure.

⁵ Bowen, "Feminist Interpretation," *NIDB* 2:448.

⁶ Nordling, "Feminist Biblical Interpretation," *DTIB* :228.

⁷ Bowen, "Feminist Interpretation," *NIDB* 2:449.

be oppressive to women.⁸ Some feminist scholars choose to completely reject the Scriptures as authoritative.⁹ In the West, these options define three major approaches of feminist biblical interpreters: rejectionists, loyalists, and reformists.¹⁰

Rejectionists renounce the scriptures because of patriarchy's influence and pollution of them. Loyalists embrace the scriptures as authoritative; some uphold the traditional patriarchal system, while others advocate egalitarianism in every aspect of life. Reformists expose biblical texts that have been used for oppression and domination by "deconstruction, critical assessment, and reconstruction."¹¹ First, the reformists deconstruct a text in order to unveil any nuances of domination. Secondly, they question what group benefits from the text and if it can be used to benefit the marginalized. Lastly, if the text can be redeemed, reconstruction begins. If not, the text is considered as invalid.¹²

Ruether and O'Brien's biblical interpretation represents an amalgamation of these three categories. Ruether and O'Brien were chosen as dialogue partners concerning this metaphor because of their critiques. Ruether's major contribution is the critique of patriarchy, while O'Brien critiques the image of father in the Prophets.

Ruether sees that patriarchy, especially in the Old Testament, prohibits women from having any direct relationship with God because it supports a hierarchal structure

⁸ Bowen, "Feminist Interpretation," *NIDB* 2:449.

⁹ Nordling, "Feminist Biblical Interpretation," *DTIB* :229.

¹⁰ Nordling, "Feminist Biblical Interpretation," *DTIB* :229.

¹¹ Nordling, "Feminist Biblical Interpretation," *DTIB* :229.

¹² Nordling, "Feminist Biblical Interpretation," *DTIB* :229.

wherein women cannot connect with God except through a man.¹³ Patriarchy and its hierarchal structure, being divinely sanctioned, causes subordination in the family and throughout all society.¹⁴ The image of God as father becomes an issue because patriarchy uses it to stifle the autonomy and free will of those who want to mature spiritually from stereotypical male and female roles.¹⁵ For this reason, God should be viewed as Spirit and not solely as a male, so that equality can be a reality for all peoples.¹⁶ Ruether stresses that the patriarchal ideology of the Old and New Testaments “is to be denounced, not cleaned up or explained away.”¹⁷

O’Brien approaches the image of God as father through ideological criticism, which observes and analyzes what ideologies are behind certain metaphors and how they shape theology.¹⁸ Her approach is encapsulated in these questions: “What ‘rules’ of human relationship drive the metaphor, what understandings of proper authority and control?”¹⁹ O’Brien’s primary critique of God as father in the Old Testament is the way the prophets describe God’s method of punishment as Israel’s father.²⁰ In Isa 1:2-6, God the father beats Israel the son because of disobedience. In Mal 2:3, God as father shames

¹³ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 53.

¹⁴ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 61.

¹⁵ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 69.

¹⁶ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 67, 69. Ruether uses the word “Spirit” to refer to God in a gender-neutral manner.

¹⁷ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 23.

¹⁸ O’Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 60-61.

¹⁹ O’Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 61.

²⁰ O’Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 79-80.

the priests by throwing feces on their faces, like a child would be put to shame by his father (Num 12:14).²¹ Her concern is what the metaphor might mean for children.²²

How can we respond to these critiques by Ruether and O'Brien? In responding to Ruether, we recognize her acknowledgement that she comes from a Western viewpoint, which "seeks, in effect, to recapitulate from a feminist critical perspective this journey of Western consciousness."²³ What will be argued is that one cannot critique appropriately the ancient social concept of community from a Western autonomist perspective. It will also be argued that the purpose and function of patriarchy was not for subordination.

In the case of O'Brien's critique, we readily admit that seemingly abusive aspects of the image of God as father could endanger children, since the image might be used to endorse abusive fatherhood. Nevertheless, we will argue that punishment was not intended to destroy children, but was used for their sake and for the survival of the community. Lastly, we will argue that one must consider the usage of the image of God as father in the corpus of the Old Testament, and not limit it solely to the Prophets.

Before responding to Ruether and O'Brien, we will turn our attention to the social milieu of ancient Israel and put forth the biblical texts that mention God as father. Then we will exegete these specific texts so that we can respond to modern feminist critiques.²⁴

²¹ O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 82.

²² O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 82.

²³ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 45.

²⁴ From here on, God will be referred to as Yahweh, since it is the divine epithet in the Hebrew Bible.

SOCIAL MILIEU OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

In order to understand the image of Yahweh as father, we must begin by studying the social milieu of ancient Israel. Firstly, we will begin our study with the household of ancient Israel and draw attention to the Israelite's need and strategy for survival. Secondly, we will observe the role of the father within ancient Israelite culture. Thirdly, we will analyze the meaning of kinship. Lastly, we will define the origins of the image of Yahweh as father and mention the scriptures that refer to the metaphor.

The structure of the ancient Israelite family is different from the modern family, both in function and design. Ancient Israel “from the time of the exodus through the settlement period was based upon the extended family.”²⁵ The extended family was called the *בֵּית אָב*.²⁶ According to Lev 18:6-18, the *בֵּית אָב* consisted of four generations: “the father of the household and his brothers; his father and his uncles; his sons and his grandsons.”²⁷ The *בֵּית אָב* rarely exceeded fifteen members.²⁸ The *בֵּית אָב* was also “patrilineal (official lines of descent were traced through the father's line), patrilocal (married women joined the households of their husbands), and patriarchal (the father

²⁵ Victor H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, (rev. ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 67.

²⁶ Sometimes the extended family is known as a household.

²⁷ Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel: 1250-587 BCE* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 7. Cf. Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” 38, who also includes in the list “any unmarried male or female descendants (married female descendants were excluded, having left the household to live with the families of their husbands) and unrelated dependents; male and female hired servants and slaves, along with their families; resident laborers; and on occasion resident Levites (Judg 17:7-13).” Also cf. Edesio Sanchez, “Family in the Non-narrative Sections of the Pentateuch,” in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context*, (eds. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 36, who includes “resident aliens” and “war captives.”

²⁸ Sanchez, “Family in the Non-narrative Sections of the Pentateuch,” 36.

governed the household).”²⁹ However, patricentrism may be preferred in describing the structure of the *בֵּית אָב*, since the father was the center of the household.³⁰

According to Edesio Sanchez, life for the ancient Israelites during the settlement period (beginning of the Iron Age: 1200 BCE) was difficult. Most settlements were located in the hill country of Palestine, also known as Cisjordan. The people’s occupation was centered mostly on farming. The climate was harsh, which brought many difficulties that threatened daily existence, including the onslaught of plagues and diseases. The family’s survival in ancient Israel depended on the roles played by each household and its members within the social structure.³¹ For this reason, an individual male had no choice in what type of work he would fulfill. He was bound to the survival of the household, clan, and tribe. His work was determined by his family and its location. If his family were farmers in a certain region, then he was a farmer.³² As Gordon J. Wenham rightly notes, “You were who you were because of the family you were born into. Your family determined your career (e.g., farmer, priest, king), your land holding, where you lived, and where you died. Hence your genealogy was all-important.”³³ A man would also stay

²⁹ Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” 40.

³⁰ Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” 41. Being the center of the family seems to indicate that the father is the source of the family’s existence and support. Cf. Ibid., 41 concerning patriarchy: “In recent years feminist interpreters have performed a valuable service in pointing out the dark side of patriarchy reflected in many biblical narratives. However, such approaches tend to interpret obviously abusive male behavior as natural and normal expressions of patriarchy, despite the fact that in many instances the author cites such conduct deliberately to demonstrate the degeneracy of the times.” Also Cf. Ibid., 41, where Block blames the degeneration of the household on Canaanite influence over Israel.

³¹ Sanchez, “Family in the Non-narrative Sections of the Pentateuch,” 36.

³² Gordon J. Wenham, “Family in the Pentateuch,” in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context* (ed. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 21.

³³ Wenham, “Family in the Pentateuch,” 20.

near his father to receive an inheritance of land. The most important social obligation an individual had was to his parents.³⁴

A *beit av* was never in isolation, but gathered together with other households to create a village.³⁵ The size of the village was about “half an acre to an acre,” and had anywhere from 50 to 150 people.³⁶ As villages began to grow and add more households, laws and regulations were established to ensure the livelihood of the community.³⁷

The villages (*kfar*), also known as clans (*משפחה*), gathered together because of similar traditions (1 Sam 6:18), lineage, and the sharing of natural resources (Josh 13-19). The clan was important in educating the next generation concerning familial traditions, passing on the stories of ancestors such as Jacob, Leah, and Rachel. The primary role of these traditions was to teach the next generation the skills that their ancestors used to survive.³⁸

In order to ensure the survival of the villages from wars and natural disasters, a phratry, chiefdom, or tribe (*אלף; שבט*) was created. A tribe could consist of thousands of members. When natural catastrophes or wars occurred, the losses the tribe experienced would be less than a village, because in a tribe there were more people to bear the impact of these tragedies than a village. The tribe would issue a legal guardian (*יבם*) to a village when it could not feed itself, and a judge or chief (*נשיא*) when it could not protect itself.³⁹

³⁴ Wenham, “Family in the Pentateuch,” 18. Cf. Ibid., 18, the obligation to the parents is evident in “traditional societies.”

³⁵ Sanchez, “Family in the Non-narrative Sections of the Pentateuch,” 36.

³⁶ Sanchez, “Family in the Non-narrative Sections of the Pentateuch,” 36.

³⁷ Sanchez, “Family in the Non-narrative Sections of the Pentateuch,” 35-36.

³⁸ Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 9.

The social structure of Israel had its foundation and security in the **בֵּית אָב**, the clan, and the tribe. The **בֵּית אָב** was the smallest unit of Israel's familial structure (Josh 7; 1 Sam 10), and the source of existence for the other structures. Ancient Israel, in essence, consisted of households with extended families, the **בֵּית אִמָּה**, which formed into clans, **מִשְׁפָּחָה**, or villages in order to share natural resources. Tribes were formed by the combination of clans to ensure the survival of the **בֵּית אִמָּה**. Considering the close proximity of households within a village and the social structure of ancient Israel, the concept of community outweighed individualism, because without the community, the individual would not survive. It is through the community that one learned survival skills and found security.

The importance of the **בֵּית אָב** in the social milieu of ancient Israel cannot be over emphasized. As a social location, the **בֵּית אָב** unveiled the religious and non-religious aspects of daily life. Faith, inheritance, protection, and security were found in the realm of the **בֵּית אָב**. The role of the father in the **בֵּית אָב** demonstrates these concepts. His duties included the following:

- (1) personally modeling strict personal fidelity to Yahweh; (2) leading the family in the national festivals, thereby keeping alive the memory of Israel's salvation; (3) instructing the family in the traditions of the Exodus and the Torah; (4) managing the land in accordance with the regulations of the Torah to ensure the family's security with God; (5) providing the basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, rest; (6) defending the household against outside threats; (7) functioning as elder and representing the household in the gate, viz., the official assembly of the citizens; (8) maintaining the well-being of the individuals in the household and the harmonious operation of the family unit; (9) implementing decisions made at the level of the *mišpāḥā*, especially decisions involving the *gō' ēl*—blood vengeance, redemption of persons and property, and levirate marriage.⁴⁰

³⁹ Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 9.

⁴⁰ Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," 47.

The father played a major role in the life of his household and community. Yet, while the father had the power of life and death over his household, his authority was not absolute. His authority did not extend to his grandsons, siblings, grandfather, father, or uncles. Instead, he was responsible for his wives and their children.⁴¹ According to Sarah Dille, “His authority included the power and responsibility to arrange for the marriages of his children, to punish disobedience in his children, to sell his children into slavery, to divorce his wife, to adopt as his heir a relative or someone from outside the family, and to legitimize or not to legitimize his children by a slave woman.”⁴² The power of the father was supported by the commandment in Exod 20:12, which states that one must honor one’s father and mother. It also supports the tradition that he deserved respect (Prov 3:12).⁴³

Fathers also had responsibilities to their sons. Fathers named their sons, consecrated them to Yahweh if they were a firstborn son, circumcised them on the eighth day of their birth, showed compassion and loved them, modeled faithful commitment to Yahweh and Torah, were mindful of their lifestyle so that their sons would not be involved in their sin, instructed their sons in wisdom in order to develop their character and skills to take their father’s place in his vocation, disciplined their sons when they

⁴¹ Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 9. Cf. David T. Tsumura, “Family in the Historical Books,” in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context* (eds. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 72; “In Judg. 19:24, as in Gen. 19:8, a father is described to have had the authority even to sacrifice his daughter’s virginity.... However, these examples do not mean that fathers normally had the freedom to control their children’s life and death, even though children were considered part of the father’s property. An evil son could be put to death only if both parents took him to court, and then the whole community killed him (Deut. 21:18-21). It is certainly only God who has authority over human life and death (1 Sam. 2:6).”

⁴² Sarah J. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 30. Cf. Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 8, who includes recruiting warriors, workers, and hosting strangers to the list of the father’s responsibilities.

⁴³ Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, 68-69.

were disobedient, and when necessary brought them to the communal authorities to receive correction, distributed the inheritance, arranged marriages, and lastly blessed their sons before death.⁴⁴

One of the primary roles of the father was to protect the land for the sake of his household. If the family and community were alienated from their land, it would mean total annihilation (Lev 25:25-28; Num 36:7-9). The land could only be given to the children by their parents, and the oldest son received the greatest portion (Deut 21:15-17).⁴⁵ The land was not to be sold outside the family. Since the father was responsible for his entire household and most aspects of their life, children were to obey him so that they could live a long time in the land that Yahweh gave them.⁴⁶ Children were to respect their father because of the authority he had to carry out his responsibilities. The authority of the father was for the sake of his household. According to Daniel Block,

[T]he Old Testament pays relatively little attention to the power of the husband and father.... In healthy and functional households the male head was neither despot nor dictator. On the contrary, since the family members were perceived as extensions of the progenitor's own life, the head's own interests depended upon the well-being of the household. Rather than evoking images of "ruler" or "boss," the term *'āb* expressed confidence, trust and security. This emphasis on the responsibilities associated with headship over the household (as opposed to its privileges and power) is consistent with the overall tenor of the Old Testament, which views leadership in general to be a privilege granted to an individual in order to serve the interests of those who are led.⁴⁷

A father in ancient Israel had many roles to fulfill. He was the spiritual leader, provider, manager, protector, teacher, and corrector in his household. In certain

⁴⁴ Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," 53. Fathers also had responsibilities to their daughters as well, but this will not be explored because the metaphor of Yahweh as father does not occur with the image of Israel as daughter except twice, which will be explored in later sections.

⁴⁵ Sanchez, "Family in the Non-narrative Sections of the Pentateuch," 37. Cf. Judg 11:2.

⁴⁶ Tsumura, "Family in the Historical Books," 64, 65.

⁴⁷ Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," 43-44.

situations, he was a redeemer. His authority was for the sake of his household, so that the well-being of everyone under his “roof” would be maintained. His role was not to be dictator but sustainer of life.⁴⁸

Kinship terms such as father, mother, son, and daughter, would seem to indicate only blood relations. Victor H. Matthews broadens the definition of kinship terms in this manner:

Kinship: Every person has a network of associations based on blood relations, commercial ties, political alliances, or membership within a particular community. All of these can be defined in kinship terms, although the strongest are blood ties, and identifiable households (*bêt 'ābôt*) are the standard social unit. Each social tie is also associated with recognized social obligations that govern behavior. There may be some confusion in reading ancient literature because social labels such as *father* and *son* may refer to blood kinship, political status, or economic alliances.⁴⁹

Kinship in all its facets provided the means to quiet many disputes in local areas. An individual's main concern was not to bring shame to his or her household, clan, or tribe through reckless behavior during a dispute. In a relationship established outside blood relations, the same aspect of honor and shame was evident. The patron-client relationship was a social phenomenon that allowed two parties to benefit from each other in multiple ways. The patron, which was called “father,” had the same functions as the father of a בֵּית אָב, but he had more authority and the ability to manage and redistribute greater resources. The sons were no more than subordinates to the patron, as evident in 2 Kgs 2:12 with Elijah and Elisha. These subordinates worked, served in military roles, and

⁴⁸ Cf. Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” 53: “Under healthy circumstances fathers took their responsibilities toward children very seriously.” In addition, he emphasizes that the wife was not considered as a slave, because if she were, she would have been called a slave (p. 62). Finally, according to Block, “On the contrary, in keeping with the radical biblical ideal of servant leadership as a whole, husbands and fathers were to exercise authority with the well-being of their household in mind” (p. 65).

⁴⁹ Victor H. Matthews, *Studying the Ancient Israelites: A Guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 124.

showed respect to the patron in public. Their role provided the patron the ability to provide justice, food, employment, and protection. The patron gained honor in the community and the ability to gain more clients. The patron-client relationships were less formal than covenant agreements and were established between someone of meager means and someone of wealth and authority.⁵⁰

Matthews connotes that kinship and its importance in ancient Israel can be found in preserved genealogies: “Genealogies describe not only blood relationships, but also economic relationships, social status, financial worth, and the power which a household can exercise in the community as a whole.”⁵¹ Matthews also states that kinship was established by covenant:

Neither covenant nor blood kinship ever completely replaced one another.... Even when villages distributed power from parents to children and between brothers and sisters, this kinship was ratified by covenant. No blood relationship was taken for granted. And although members of households, clans, villages, and tribes in early Israel may have been physically related, the critical requirement for membership was not kinship but covenant.... The Hebrews were not just households with the same biological parents, but households with the same sociological experience and a shared legal commitment to one another. To be a Hebrew was to have passed from slavery to freedom; some through the waters of the Red Sea (Exod 5—18), some through the waters of the river Jordan (Josh 1—5), and some through the waters of the wadi Kishon (Judg 4—5).⁵²

We see that kinship goes beyond blood relations, which is demonstrated in genealogies. Genealogies preserved not only kinship established by blood relations, but kinship established by social experience and covenant. The ideas of honor and shame prevailed whether the relationship was between relatives or non-relatives, and the

⁵⁰ Matthews, *Studying the Ancient Israelites*, 153-54. Cf. the use of father and son language in 2 Kgs 16:7.

⁵¹ Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 8.

⁵² Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 8. It appears that Matthews is referring to the covenant of Mount Sinai, and the renewal of the covenant in Joshua.

expectations between individuals were the same. Honor and shame were expected in a patron-client relationship, which provided material means for the patron and client.

What we can take from the ancient understanding of kinship is that the **בֵּית אָב**, the foundation of the social structure of Israel, included blood relatives and non-relatives. From Matthews' understanding of kinship we learn that Israel is more than a biological entity. It is also a sociological entity. Israel consisted of people with blood and non-blood relations. It was formed through blood kinship, covenant, and from a social experience, namely, the exodus event.

How does the metaphor of Yahweh as father derive from the social milieu of ancient Israel? According to M. Daniel Carroll, the metaphor of Yahweh as father is derived from the household of ancient Israel: "The extended family was one of the most fruitful sources for metaphors in ancient Israel for communicating the nature of their relationship to Yahweh and the roles of each party in that relationship. In that culture the bonds of the family were particularly strong, so it was appropriate and significant that the (covenant) relationship between the deity and his chosen people was expressed in these terms."⁵³ That is why Yahweh is referred to as father in some passages. However, according to Helmer Ringgren, Yahweh is rarely called "father" (*ʾāb*) in the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁴ While this is a correct statement, the most blatant references to Yahweh as father

⁵³ M. Daniel Carroll, "Family in the Prophetic Literature," in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context* (eds. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 117.

⁵⁴ Helmer Ringgren, "אָב," *TDOT* 1:17. Cf. Paul Niskanen, "Father," *NIDB* 2:436: "The association of God with the figure of a father in Israel is further illustrated through the not infrequent usage of theophoric names containing *āb* (e.g., Abiel, Abijah, Eliab, Joab)." Also cf. Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canaan: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 6. He points out that the phrase "God of the fathers" was also used to connote the idea of divine fatherhood, saying, "In the religious sphere, the intimate relationship with the family god, the 'God of the Fathers,' was expressed in the only language available to members of a tribal society. Their god was the Divine Kinsman.

are worthy of exploration: Deut 1:31; 32:6; 2 Sam 7:14; Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:19; 31:9; Mal 1:6; 2:10; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; 29:10; Ps 68:5; 89:26; 103:13-14. In addition, one can say that other scriptures, while not mentioning Yahweh as father, have the metaphor in mind, thus expanding Ringgren's examination. These references fall under five categories: 1. Israel or Ephraim as Son: Exod 4:22-23; Deut 14:1-2; Hos 1:10; 11:1; Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9. 2. God as Creator: Mal 2:10; Deut 32:6; Isa 43:5-6; 45:9-13; 64:7[8]. 3. God as Father to the King: 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; 29:10; Psalm 2:7. 4. Sons of God: Pss 29:1; 82:6; 89:7; Job 1:6; 38:7; and 5. Characteristics of Yahweh as Father: Deut 1:31; 8:5; Mal 1:6; 2:15; Pss 68:5; 89:26; 103:13-14; Prov 3:12; Ezek 16:1-6; Isa 50:1-3; 63:16. In total, the references to Yahweh as father are still relatively few compared to other metaphors for God, such as king, in the Hebrew Bible.

The necessary task at hand will be to compare the passages where Yahweh is described or defined as father to the social milieu of the household of ancient Israel, as well as to consider each passages' historical, literary, and social contexts. Each text will have a different historical context. It should be noted, however, that while social changes did occur during Israel's history, patriarchy and its ideology remained the same.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the goal will be to discover the function of the metaphor of Yahweh as father within each of the categories listed above, and synthesize those findings as a whole, beginning with the category of Israel/Ephraim as son.

We are dealing here obviously with a sociomorphism. The notion of the Divine Kinsman is especially vivid in the West Semitic onomasticon, in theophorous names. Especially common in Amorite, Canaanite, and Hebrew names is the element *'āb*, 'father'. It is used both as a theophorous element and as a divine epithet."

⁵⁵ Alice L. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 8, 151.

ISRAEL/EPHRAIM AS SON

In the passages that relate to Israel or Ephraim as the son of Yahweh (Exod 4:22-23; Deut 14:1-2; Hos 1:10; 11:1; Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9), the language of firstborn, land, and covenant arise. In order to elaborate on the meaning of Israel and Ephraim as the son of Yahweh, we must describe what it meant to be a son or a firstborn son in ancient Israel, the role of land, and the function of covenant. Only then can we understand the relationship between Yahweh as father and Israel/Ephraim as son described in these passages.

One major role of a son or firstborn son in ancient Israel was to continue the life of the parents, especially the father, since the son would be the one to keep his name alive (Gen 4:1ff., 15:2; 2 Sam 18:18). H. Haag mentions the importance of the birth of the son to the parents: “Consequently, the promise (Gen. 16:11; 17:16, 19; 18:10;...) and birth (Gen. 16:15; 21:2; 41:50-52, ...) of a son are the most important events in the life of a man and his wife.”⁵⁶ A son was required to obey his father and mother so that he could have long life on the land that Yahweh had given them (Exod 20:12; 21:15, 17; Deut 21:18-21; 27:16; Prov *passim*).⁵⁷

According to O’Brien, the Israelites had the conception of monogenesis—that children came biologically from the father only. The fathers owned the children since the children came from his seed, and the mother was the receptacle and incubator of that seed. Therefore, the sons and daughters were the property of the father, and obedience was non-negotiable.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ H. Haag, “בן,” *TDOT* 2:154.

⁵⁷ Tsumura, “Family in the Historical Books,” 65, 72.

⁵⁸ O’Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 81.

The relationship between a son and his father differed from the relationship between a father and his daughter, since the son was trained to take the father's place to be the patriarch of the family. The son would learn obedience so that he could demand it from others when he became the patriarch. The father had the right to punish his son for disobedience, and it is found throughout scripture that he could be struck with a rod.⁵⁹

While the reality of children being the father's property seemed harsh, Christopher J. H. Wright proposes a more optimistic picture:

Our conclusion must therefore be that while children were certainly subject to the authority of parents, under severe penalty, and while they did count legally as part of the father's property, the social reality was not as harsh as is sometimes depicted. On the contrary, there is much in the OT to indicate that love, joy, care, and honor were to be found in the Israelite home.⁶⁰

Bruce J. Malina mentions that the importance of obedience is found in the ancient concept of community and family. The individual's role is to participate within his family and community. An individual's participation in the community was centered on three parts: honor/shame, tradition, and land. Malina describes honor and shame as follows: "Social standing, i.e., worth in the community, is of inestimable value in cultural contexts where the well-being of the collective is of paramount importance. The idea of the autonomy of the individual, a development of the modern West, is entirely absent from the societies and cultures reflected in the Bible or those known to its authors ... the family *is the* center."⁶¹ The importance of obedience can be found in the component of tradition: "The honor paid to father and mother by their children is their due not only because they have given them life (Sir 7:27-28) but because they convey the tradition to

⁵⁹ O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 81.

⁶⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, "Family," *ABD* 2:767-68.

⁶¹ Bruce J. Malina, "Family Centeredness," *HBSV* :75.

them. Tradition here refers to the handing down of established and time-tested communal wisdom, a wisdom which simultaneously grounds and encompasses identification with the culture (e.g., Exod 10:2; 12:26; 13:8; Deut 4:9; 6:7, 20-25; 32:7, 46).⁶² Lastly, land is where honor/shame and tradition were meshed together in daily life.⁶³

Obedience from a son was derived from the necessity of survival, being the property of his father, receiving the traditions of wisdom, and for the sake of inheritance.⁶⁴ As mentioned in Exod 20:12, obedience brought long life *in* the land.

The firstborn son had a special inheritance in the ANE and ancient Israel. He received an extra portion of desirable land in addition to the land already allotted to him at the time of his father's death.⁶⁵ In ancient Israel there was a great emphasis placed upon the firstborn concerning inheritance. The father had to give the firstborn the extra portion of land even if the firstborn was not his favorite son (Deut 21:15-17). Such a privilege was known as the "right of the firstborn."⁶⁶ There are debates concerning the size of the extra portion allotted to the firstborn, but it seems miniscule to the greater picture, because the "right of the firstborn" acknowledged the importance of having a firstborn son in ancient Israel.⁶⁷

⁶² Malina, "Family Centeredness," *HBSV*:76.

⁶³ Malina, "Family Centeredness," *HBSV*:76-79.

⁶⁴ We may propose that being property meant belonging to someone's care. As property, everyone was under the care of the father, because he was responsible for their well-being.

⁶⁵ M. Tsevat, "בכור; בכר; בכרה; בכורים," *TDOT* 2:123-24.

⁶⁶ Tsevat, "בכור; בכר; בכרה; בכורים," *TDOT* 2:125. Cf. E. Lipiński, "נחלה; נחל," *TDOT* 9:323. He mentions that in other ancient Near Eastern cultures, an adopted son could receive the portion of a firstborn through a contract. A firstborn son in ancient Israel could lose his inheritance through transgression. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn son, is a prime example. It is not mentioned that he received his extra portion.

⁶⁷ Tsevat, "בכור; בכר; בכרה; בכורים," *TDOT* 2:126.

The firstborn had even more significance in the religious milieu of ancient Israel. It was believed that the best and first belonged to Yahweh. For this reason, a man was to give Yahweh the first and best portion of his children, livestock, and first fruits of the field and garden. There was a method, however, used to avoid sacrificing the child:

The firstborn of man and beast and the firstfruits of field and garden (see also Lev. 19:23-25) are given to God as his portion by sacral consecration, and therefore can be set free for secular use only by redemption (usually *pādāh*), i.e., substitution or ransom (Ex. 13:13, 15; 34:20; Lev. 27:26ff.; Nu. 3:44-51; 18:15-17; Dt. 14:23-26). The firstborn of non-sacrificial animals and the firstborn of man must be redeemed.⁶⁸

The significance of the tradition of redemption for the firstborn arose out of the exodus and the death of the firstborn in Egypt. While Yahweh spared the Israelites, Yahweh did not relinquish his claim on their firstborn children.⁶⁹

The importance of children, especially sons, is evident in ancient Israel. Sons were to carry on the name of their father after he died. They were also required to be obedient to their father, so that they could receive certain traditions of survival and a portion of land. The firstborn, unlike the others, had a greater advantage in the line of inheritance concerning land. He was trained to take his father's place. The social reality for children in ancient Israel may seem harsh, but we must emphasize that love was present in the household, and that everything was done not only for their survival, but for the community as well. Their roles later in life would mean the continuance of the community and their household. We can surmise that obedience, authority, honor, and shame were cultural norms set in place for the sake of the community, the household, and children.

⁶⁸ Tsevat, “בכור; בכר; בכרה; בכורים,” *TDOT* 2:126.

⁶⁹ Tsevat, “בכור; בכר; בכרה; בכורים,” *TDOT* 2:126-27.

Inheritance and its implications were of vital importance in the ancient Near East and Israel. In order to understand the implications of inheritance, we must observe what the concept of land meant to the ancient Israelites, which in turn will reveal Israel's relationship with Yahweh as a son.

Land played an important role in the daily life of the ancient Israelites as well as the ancient Near East. "In earlier societies, including the ancient (though already highly civilized) world at the time of Old Testament Israel, wealth was even more directly linked to land and to land ownership. For a nation of arable and pastoral farmers like Israel, land was the only permanent possession."⁷⁰ Concerning the land of the ancient Israelites, Yahweh was the one who owned it, the territories of which were from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates, including the land of the Canaanites (Exod 3:17; Num 34:2), the land of the Amorites (Deut 1:7), and the territory east of the Jordan (Num 32:1ff.; Deut 2:24ff.; Josh 13:8-33; 22; Pss 135:11f.; 136:19-22).⁷¹ Magnus Ottosson says about the land of Israel: "It is called 'his heritage' (1 S. 26:19; 2 S. 14:16; Jer. 2:7; 16:18; 50:11; Ps. 68:10[9]; 79:1), and once *'adhamath yhvh*, "land of Yahweh" (Isa. 14:2)... In Lev 25:23, this divine claim of possession is emphasized so strongly that the Israelites are regarded as strangers and foreigners."⁷² The regulations of the Sabbath year and the year of Jubilee were based on the idea of Yahweh owning the Israelite territories. If a person wanted to live on Yahweh's land, he or she was required to fulfill Yahweh's requirements as tenants, which were to obey his laws. Disobedience to Yahweh's

⁷⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 3.

⁷¹ Magnus Ottosson, "אֶרֶץ," *TDOT* 1:401.

⁷² Ottosson, "אֶרֶץ," *TDOT* 1:401.

commands would result in polluting the sacredness of the land.⁷³ Ottosson summarizes the connection between Yahweh, the ancient Israelites, land, and obedience as follows:

The concept of Canaan as the land of Yahweh makes Yahweh a God of the land. Just as Chemosh rules over the land of Moab, Yahweh rules over his territory.... Yahweh lives in the land, in the midst of the people (Nu. 35:34)—thus land, people, and God belong together.... The land is defiled by heathen cults, and “vomits out its inhabitants” (Lev. 18:25). This is what happened to the Canaanites; but if Israel keeps away from foreign cults, she will not be vomited out of the land (8:28; 20:22). The OT emphasizes that Israel did not obtain the land because of her own merit, but received it as a gift from God (Dt. 1:36; etc.). Because of their wickedness Yahweh drove out the former inhabitants, and gave the land to the Israelites (1:8, etc.). As Yahweh’s inheritance, the land is given exuberant epithets.⁷⁴

Therefore, in order to inherit the land that Yahweh had given his family (בֵּית אָב), a son/firstborn son had to be obedient to his parents and the laws of Yahweh. If he were a firstborn son, he received an extra portion of land and was consecrated to Yahweh as a symbol of the next generation continuing the covenant with Yahweh.⁷⁵

The importance of the בֵּית אָב, especially the role of the father, becomes clear.

The household, with its landed property, stood as the basic unit at the center of several spheres of Israel’s life. *Socially*, it was the fundamental cell of the kinship structure of the nation, greater in social and practical relevance than the larger groups—the “clan” and tribe. *Economically*, it was the smallest, viably self-sufficient unit within Israel’s system of land division and tenure; and since that system had a strong religious rationale, the household was an integral part of Israel’s “land theology”. Thus, also *religiously*, the household had a crucial role in maintaining the covenant relationship between the nation and God and in preserving its traditions throughout succeeding generations.⁷⁶

⁷³ Ottosson, “אֶרֶץ,” *TDOT* 1:402.

⁷⁴ Ottosson, “אֶרֶץ,” *TDOT* 1:402.

⁷⁵ Wright, “Family,” *ABD* 2:765.

⁷⁶ Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land*, 1-2.

Before exploring the scriptures where Israel or Ephraim is mentioned as the son or firstborn son of Yahweh, we must understand the role of covenant in the social milieu of ancient Israel and the term “adoption.”

What is covenant? According to Moshe Weinfeld,

The original meaning of the Heb. *berith* ... is not “agreement or settlement between two parties,” as is commonly argued. [*B*]erith implies first and foremost the notion of “imposition,” “liability,” or “obligation,” as might be learned from the “bond” etymology.... Thus we find that the *berith* is commanded ..., which certainly cannot be said about a mutual agreement.... [*B*]erith is synonymous with law and commandment (cf., e.g., Dt. 4:13; 33:9; Isa. 24:5; Ps. 50:16; 103:18), and the covenant at Sinai in Ex. 24 is in its essence an imposition of laws and obligations upon the people (vv. 3-8).⁷⁷

Scott W. Hahn, however, sees covenant as an agreement between two parties. He describes three types of covenants. The first covenant is the kinship, or “parity” covenant. The obligations of this covenant are usually distributed equally between the two parties. These two parties do not necessarily have to be of equal status. The second covenant is the treaty covenant. In the treaty covenant, the inferior party must fulfill the obligations of the superior party. The treaty type covenant is seen in ancient vassal-treaty covenants between a vassal and a king. Lastly, the third type of covenant is the grant covenant. The superior party fulfills the obligations of the covenant in response to the inferior party’s faithfulness. The superior party is also responsible for initiating the grant covenant. While these three covenants may differ, they all involve creating kinship bonds.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ M. Weinfeld, “ברית,” *TDOT* 2:255. Cf. *Ibid.*, 256-57: “The term for ‘covenant’ in the ancient Near East ... are distributed according to two semantic fields: *oath and commitment* on the one hand, *love and friendship* on the other.... [T]he basic terms for ‘covenant’ in Heb. (*’alah*, ‘oath,’ *berith*, ‘covenant’) ... express pledge and commitment, which actually create the covenant. On the other hand, any settlement between two parties is conditioned by good will or some kind of mutual understanding which enables the conclusion of an agreement, and this is why covenantal relations were expressed by the terms like ‘grace,’ ‘brotherhood,’ ‘peace,’ ‘love,’ ‘friendship,’ etc.”

⁷⁸ Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 29. Cf. *Ibid.*, 31: “The objective key to distinguish

It would seem best to assume that covenant is an agreement between two parties with obligations included. We can determine from our findings concerning the social milieu of ancient Israel and Hahn's analysis that kinship and covenant are not easily separated. Each one entails requirements to be fulfilled by both parties, and that the ancient honor and shame code helped to reinforce both covenant and kinship responsibility.

We see the merging of kinship and covenant ideas within the kinship covenant that Hahn describes. It was a mutual commitment between two parties that was sometimes used to draw in people who were enemies and make them allies, or to strengthen familial ties. The covenant was completed when a meal was shared, an oath was declared, and terms such as "peace," "love," and "loyalty" were used as confirmation of the oath.⁷⁹ Evidence of the kinship covenant between Yahweh and Israel can be found in Exod 24: "Kinship solidarity of Israel with Yahweh is sealed by covenant sacrifice and oath-swearing. The oath conveys both sides of Israel's covenant: consecration to Yahweh and renunciation of Egypt's gods. Sacrifice and blood-sprinkling constitute the preparatory means for establishing covenant kinship and fellowship between Israel and Yahweh."⁸⁰ Therefore, since Yahweh and Israel accepted the sign of the oath, the sprinkled blood, Sinai became the initiation for Israel to become part of Yahweh's family, which is described in a father-son relationship (Exod 4:22).⁸¹

between the kinship, treaty, and grant-type covenant forms is to observe carefully *by whom the covenant oath is sworn.*"

⁷⁹ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 37.

⁸⁰ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 47.

⁸¹ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 48.

If Hahn is correct, then the covenant meal in Exod 24 created the familial relationship between Yahweh and Israel, which is depicted in a father-son relationship. Kinship is created not only by blood relations but by covenant as well, demonstrated by the kinship covenant. A certain procedure had to occur in order to make the covenant and kinship relationship official.

Could the kinship covenant be defined by the term adoption, or does it entail something else? Christopher J. H. Wright does not see that the covenant at Mount Sinai was an act of adoption, but a creative act or a new birth. His conclusion is derived from his analysis of the relationship between the people, land, and Yahweh, wherein he struggles with the coexistence of the tension between Yahweh's unconditional grace and Israel's requirement to obey Yahweh. He sees the answer to his struggle in the father-son relationship described in passages such as Deut 32. Israel's sonship with Yahweh according to Wright is on two levels: national and individual.⁸²

Israel as a nation is described as Yahweh's son, in the singular, or Yahweh is spoken of as the father of the people as a whole.... The point here is that Israel owes its national existence to the creative or "procreative" action of Yahweh. In this respect, the use of the adoption analogy is somewhat suspect, since the texts speak rather of sonship by birth.... What is clear is that it was not by Israel's choice or action that they are Yahweh's son, nor does the status and privilege involved derive in any sense from Israel's own action or merits. In this respect, Israel's sonship is a *datum* which corresponds entirely with the unconditional, indicative *datum* of their election. Israel is the firstborn son of Yahweh for no other reason than that Yahweh brought them as a nation into existence, just as they are the people of Yahweh for no other reason than that he "set his love upon" them and chose them for himself (Deut. 7:6-7).⁸³

⁸² Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 15-16.

⁸³ Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 16-18.

Wright's understanding of Israel's sonship on a national level depends on the understanding of election. Yahweh chose to bring Israel into existence. On the individual level, as a son, Israel (plural) was required to obey Yahweh:

This second aspect of Israel's sonship, therefore, clearly involves an imperative, in the demand for filial obedience upon all individual members of the nation. Thus we find within one and the same relationship that both poles of the promise-obedience duality are to be found in the natural, inherent tension arising from the givenness of the filial relationship (the indicative) and the demands it imposes (the imperative).⁸⁴

Haag comments that adoption was not present in ancient Israel.⁸⁵ Matthews, on the other hand, would disagree: "In the world of the Bible, life began not with a viable birth, but only with adoption. Regardless of the status of the newborn at the moment of delivery, without adoption it was considered stillborn. If the father did not adopt the child, the midwife took it from the birthing room and left it in an open field to declare it eligible for adoption by another household (Ezek 16:3-5)."⁸⁶

There is no apparent consensus concerning adoption and covenant. We can, however, draw some conclusions. First, adoption, while rare, can be found in the Old Testament. Secondly, the covenant seems to be a way to verify Israel's sonship demonstrated in Exod 24. Thirdly, "adoption" might coincide with "election" if we conclude that all peoples are the children of Yahweh, since Yahweh is creator.⁸⁷ Israel's sonship or title of firstborn declares Yahweh's special interest and election of Israel out

⁸⁴ Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 18.

⁸⁵ Haag, "בן," *TDOT* 2:155.

⁸⁶ Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 10-11. Cf. Meir Malul, "Adoption of Foundlings in the Bible and Mesopotamian Documents: A Study of Some Legal Metaphors in Ezekiel 16:1-7," *JSOT* 46:97-126. Malul provides a convincing argument for adoption being present in the Old Testament.

⁸⁷ We will explore this idea in the section "God as Creator."

of all the nations. The only way to verify this assumption is to study how Yahweh, as creator, relates to Israel in the father/son relationship, which will be in the next section. Fourthly, Israel can be considered as being created through the saving act and covenant of Yahweh in the exodus.⁸⁸ Lastly, in describing Israel and sonship, adoption and creation may correspond with one another. We can consider adoption as the act of creating a new identity for an already present individual. We must question, however, if Exod 4:22-23 considers Israel as a present entity.

What we have learned so far is that being a son in ancient Israel meant inheriting land, being obedient to parents, and carrying on the name of the father. A son's life was lived in the context of the community and the household, wherein honor, shame, obedience, and authority as cultural norms became the foundation of relationships. A firstborn son received an extra portion of land, and was considered the symbol of Israel's continuing relationship with Yahweh. The land the Israelites and their sons lived upon was Yahweh's. Living upon the land meant keeping the covenant with Yahweh and fulfilling certain obligations so that the land would not become defiled. Lastly, covenant and kinship are entwined social realities that create relationships between two parties. Obligations and responsibilities are involved when a covenant is made, and it creates kinship between non-blood relatives.

⁸⁸ Cf. Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 8; Tsevat, "בכור; בכר; בכרה; בכורים," *TDOT* 2:126-27. It would seem that if the people of ancient Israel became part of a kinship group because of the exodus, and that the redemption of the firstborn was dependent on Yahweh's saving act in Israel by destroying Egypt's firstborn, then Yahweh through his act solidified Israel's sonship. Sociologically and religiously, the event created a new people, whose identity (seen in Exod 4:22-23) was clarified by covenant.

Sonship, land, and covenant not only defined the social realities of ancient Israel, but were used to describe the relationship between Israel and Yahweh as father and son in these passages: Exod 4:22-23; Deut 14:1-2; Hos 1:10; 11:1; Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9.

Exod 4:22-23

²²And you will say to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, my son, my firstborn, is Israel,” ²³and I say to you, “Set my son free so that he can serve me. If you refuse to set him free, behold, I will slay your son, your firstborn.”⁸⁹

An important aspect of Yahweh as father is demonstrated in this verse through rescuing his firstborn son Israel. Yahweh’s proclamation to Pharaoh that Israel is his firstborn can be considered as foreshadowing the solidification of a new identity for Israel. If we consider Hahn’s analysis of covenant, we can conclude that the relationship of Yahweh and Israel as father and firstborn son becomes official when Yahweh and Israel partake of the covenant ceremony in Exod 24.⁹⁰ William H. C. Propp further comments on Yahweh’s fatherhood:

On another level, 4:22 suggests that Yahweh is bound by kinship duty to rescue or ransom his enslaved son (Gen 14:12-16; Lev 25:39-43; Neh 5:8).... On a third level, the verse implies that Pharaoh, by conscripting Israel, has violated the law that all firstborn are Yahweh’s (13:2, 11-15).... [I]f Israel is Yahweh’s *firstborn*, all creatures must be God’s other children. Exod 4:22 is crucial to the Elohist’s understanding of the plague of the firstborn. Yahweh kills the Egyptian firstborn but redeems his own firstborn, the entire nation of Israel.⁹¹

Yahweh demonstrates his fatherhood through the acknowledgment of Israel, but his kingship through his speech to Pharaoh: “Yahweh does not politely suggest Israel’s

⁸⁹ This is the author’s translation of the text. If another translation is used, it will be noted.

⁹⁰ Contra R. Alan Culpepper, “Children of God,” *NIDB* 1:590: “God gave birth to the nation through God’s saving act, thereby establishing the father-child relationship with Israel (Deut 32:6, 18).”

⁹¹ William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, (AB 2; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 217.

release, nor does he offer any compensation. He addresses Pharaoh as a great king commanding a lesser ruler.”⁹²

Exodus 4:22-23 shows us that Yahweh was with the Israelites as a father and king before the exodus event. Yahweh would deliver them from the Pharaoh, and was preparing them to receive the fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham, especially concerning land.⁹³ Ancient Israel may have understood itself to be the firstborn of Yahweh above all other creation, as previously mentioned. Nevertheless, the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as father and son foreshadows the inheritance of land, and the obligations expected of them as they lived in it. Deuteronomy 14:1-2 demonstrates one of those obligations.

Deut 14:1-2

¹You are sons to the Lord your God. You will not cut yourselves or place a bald spot between your eyes for the dead. ²For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has *chosen* concerning you to be to him a people of *treasured possession* from all the people who are upon the face of the ground.

Israel’s sonship in Deut 14:1-2 is defined by an admonition to avoid ceremonies of the dead and the terms “chosen” and “treasured possession.” Cutting one’s self or making bald spots were actions that demonstrated strong emotions of grief. Such rituals are

⁹² Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 218. Cf. Ibid., 217, where Propp mentions that Exod 4:22-23 is more likely akin to 2 Kgs 16:7, which demonstrates king-vassal language. Also cf. Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, (OTL; Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1974), 102: “The conflict is over paternal power, and in the claim of the first-born the God of Israel and the king of Egypt have clashed in a head-on encounter.”

⁹³ Cf. Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land*, 4: “The anticipation of the promised land in Deuteronomy, however, is but the culmination of a major theme running through the whole Pentateuch. The promise of land is a constituent part of God’s covenant with Abraham; the Exodus is presented as God’s first act in preparing to fulfill that promise; the law and covenant are given with a view to life in the land; the wilderness wanderings are ‘abnormal’—a punishment for cowardly failure to enter the land at the first opportunity. Beyond the Pentateuch, the land remains a primary theme.”

mentioned in other biblical texts (Amos 8:10; Isa 15:2; 22:12; Jer 16:5-6; 41:5; 47:5; Ezek 7:18). These practices were used to honor dead ancestors or keep their spirits away. The people were to avoid such practices because they committed themselves to a life of holiness unto Yahweh (Lev 19:27-28).⁹⁴ Richard D. Nelson further comments:

Israel considered the sphere of the dead to be an unclean realm incompatible with holiness, under the sway of powers outside the area of Yahweh's rule. What is more, mourning activities were part of the cult of other gods (Baal: 1 Kgs 18:28; Hos 7:14; Tammuz: Ezek 8:14). Motivating this prohibition on the basis of Israel's "sonship" is especially appropriate for a custom so profoundly involved with kinship concerns.⁹⁵

Deuteronomy's concept of holiness demanded that Israel be a holy people by refusing to participate in other nation's rituals:

In contrast to the theology of the Priestly Writer or the Holiness Code, in Deuteronomy Israel is already a holy people by virtue of divine election. It does not have to achieve holy status by obedience or effort. Holiness is not to be accomplished but protected.... As a holy people Israel avoids what is repugnant and unclean, in contrast to the behavior of other nations. By forbidding these customs and foods, Deuteronomy seeks to distinguish Israel from other peoples, defining chosen peoplehood in terms of cultural behavior.⁹⁶

In this passage, obedience is overly emphasized. Israel is now Yahweh's son, and should no longer participate in any practice that would demean the kinship established between them. They are a holy people, set apart as Yahweh's own.

The terms "chosen" and "treasured possession" demonstrate how Yahweh values Israel as a son. The first word, *bāḥar*, "choose," is a term used for choosing a group out of the whole for the service of the whole. Israel was chosen to be Yahweh's witness to

⁹⁴ Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 179.

⁹⁵ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 179.

⁹⁶ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 176.

the nations, even though it is not stated until Deutero-Isaiah.⁹⁷ In Israel's obedience to Yahweh, honor is brought to him as a father. The second word, סגלה, "treasured," is a term that depicts a personal possession that is highly valued.⁹⁸

In these verses alone, we see the aspects of Yahweh as father and king unfold. As Israel's father and king, Yahweh had expectations of his people. Yahweh's election or covenant was to make Israel a witness for Yahweh. Israel, as a child of Yahweh was to bring honor to Yahweh's name through obedience, and to be separate from outside cultural practices to emulate Yahweh's holiness. Yahweh chose Israel for such a task, and through covenant, elevated this chosen people like a father did the firstborn. Also evident is the treaty-type language between a vassal and a king. Deuteronomy still acknowledges the father/son relationship of Israel from the exodus event, which defined this metaphor for Israel's relationship with Yahweh. However, the relationship did not change, but began to emphasize servitude. The reason for such emphasis was the expectation for Israel to rebel, especially due to the warning signs already given by Israel's behavior. The curses in the treaty type covenant of Deuteronomy became a warning for Israel.⁹⁹ The overall picture for the purpose of Israel's sonship in Deuteronomy can be concluded as follows:

⁹⁷ Horst Seebass, "בחר," *TDOT* 2:82-83. Chronology is a difficult issue, and it could be that some passages in Deutero-Isaiah are earlier than some passages of the Pentateuch. The present author appreciates Dr. Gerald Keown making this point. Concerning Israel being Yahweh's witness, cf. *Ibid.*, 84: "If Israel does not take an inflexible stand against this religion she can never be the people of Yahweh, because he can never be understood as he really is as long as Canaanitism is connected with him. But in this case *bhr* means that in her struggle against the Canaanite spirit Israel is the people chosen with reference to all peoples, in that all religions have to take their stand in the struggle Israel undertakes paradigmatically and in the final analysis inflexibly.... Israel is smaller than all peoples; her God is not that of national power, and the viewpoint of her election is not determined by the number of people that occupy the land.... But it is crucial that the choice of Israel is to be understood not in terms of national might, but of the love with which Yahweh loves his people."

⁹⁸ Lipiński, "סגלה," *TDOT* 10:148.

⁹⁹ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 82-83.

As a result of the Deuteronomic covenant Israel discovers the divine purpose for its existence as a nation. Israel's identity and mission can be defined in terms of divine sonship.... Although the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel is divinely commanded and unilaterally determined in an unconditional way, it must still be freely accepted and faithfully maintained by Israel—in a bilateral sense according to its conditional terms. This is the covenant pattern of a father-son relationship.... This relational dynamic reappears at another critical point in the Deuteronomistic History: God's covenant with David and with David's dynastic heir as divine son.¹⁰⁰

We see more warnings to Israel about rebellion in the Prophets. However, there are messages of redemption as well. Hosea 1:10 and 11:1 are primary examples.

Hos 1:10; 11:1

^{1:10[2:1]} And the number of the children of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured and cannot be numbered. And it will be in the place where it will be said to them, "You are not my people," it will be said to them, "Sons of the living God."

^{11:1} For when Israel was a youth I loved him, and from Egypt I called for my son.

Hosea describes the time of Jereboam II in the eighth century. It was a time of great prosperity founded upon injustice. Hosea focused on Israel's covenant relationship with God, its demands, and Israel's dependence on God's mercy. The important warning of Hosea is that God could and would dissolve the nation and people he created.¹⁰¹ Hosea's

¹⁰⁰ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 91. Cf. Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 18-20, concerning how land is connected to Israel's sonship: "For in describing the land as Israel's *inheritance*, Deuteronomy must regard Israel as *Yahweh's son*. In the light of the prominence of the gift of the land in Deuteronomy, the sonship of Israel consequently has a much more central place in the theology of this book than one might deduce from the sole direct reference (Deut. 14:1) and the more figurative references (1:31; 8:5). Furthermore, this Deuteronomic usage corresponds precisely with the unconditional givens of Israel's sonship, for that is exactly what Deuteronomy stresses again and again as regards the gift of the land to Israel. It emerges, therefore, that the gift of the land, as a historical indicative which owes nothing to the action or merit of Israel, is directly related to the same unconditional feature of Israel's sonship; it is because Israel is Yahweh's firstborn son that the land is given as an inheritance. The bond between Israel's land theology and the status of the people's unique relationship with Yahweh is here seen at its closest—the one being, as it were, the tangible manifestation of the other."

¹⁰¹ Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea* (AB 24; New York: Doubleday, 1980), 33, 42-43.

warning is seen in chapter one where Hosea symbolically named his children according to Yahweh's judgment of the people, serving as the context for Hos 1:10 [2:1].

We will be able to understand Israel's sonship in Hos 1:10 by identifying who the children of Israel are, and by analyzing the allusion to sand, the meaning of "place" and the phrase "Sons of the living God." Israel's sonship will also be defined by understanding the allusion to Egypt in Hos 11:1.

The sons of Israel in Hos 1:10 refer to both Judah and Israel. The language of sand alludes to the promise Yahweh gave to Abraham (Gen 22:17; 16:10; 32:1). In the context of judgment, there would come a time of redemption for Judah and Israel.¹⁰²

Therefore, redemption is the purpose and meaning of "place" in Hos 1:10:

The place where the name was originally given may be the place where the name is changed; the place of renunciation may be the place of reinstatement: "the land" (1:2 and 2:25) as the "house of Yahweh" (cf. 9:3-4). Hosea has a doctrine of redemption by recapitulation. God will take Israel back into the desert, and begin all over again (2:5, 16). There can be no doubt that Hosea has in mind the tradition that during the Exodus it was first said to Israel, "You are offspring for Yahweh your God" (Deut 14:1). This passage has in parallel another covenant title, "holy people," and a warning about following heathen practices. While *māqôm* can simply be a location, such as the desert, it is also used in a technical sense for a recognized sacral assembly place such as an open-air shrine. Even though there was also divine anger and rejection of Israel in the wilderness, there was also effective intercession and renewed if reluctant acceptance of the errant people. The paradox emerged early in the covenant that Yahweh had committed himself to have a people, and even their worst sins could not dissolve the relationship.¹⁰³

With the phrase "Sons (children) of the living God," Hosea emphasized Israel's non-biological creation by Yahweh in order to "protect Yahweh from any suggestion of

¹⁰² Anderson and Freedman, *Hosea*, 200, 202-4.

¹⁰³ Anderson and Freedman, *Hosea*, 203.

sexuality. At the same time Hosea must insist that all children are the gift and creation of Yahweh, not Baal.”¹⁰⁴

Hosea 1:10 demonstrates Yahweh as father by fulfilling the promise of land given to Abraham and his descendants. It could be that Abraham is also a son of Yahweh, since only a father could give land (inheritance) to a son. Nevertheless, Israel, as a son, has been disobedient. The time for judgment was at hand, but not for total destruction. Judgment was wrought for the sake of the covenant, to renew the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. While at this point in Israel’s history rebellion was the norm, there would come a time for repentance and reception of the promise of land. Such an understanding of Israel was especially in the mind of the prophets. The idea of Yahweh creating Israel in a non-sexual manner also seems to be part of the identity of Israel’s sonship.

Hosea 11:1 serves to define and affirm that Israel’s sonship began in Egypt. The first historical recognition of Israel being the primary heir of Yahweh is supported by Exod 4:22 and by Amos 3:2.¹⁰⁵ “While the adoption of Israel as son and heir precedes the Exodus in the prose tradition (cf. Exod 4:22), the creation of Israel as a social entity took place in the wilderness, and this passage may identify the moment of adoption with the latter event.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Anderson and Freedman, *Hosea*, 205, 206. Cf. *Ibid.*, 206. They believe that the language of Israel’s sonship in Hosea is adoption language.

¹⁰⁵ Anderson and Freedman, *Hosea*, 206, 576.

¹⁰⁶ Anderson and Freedman, *Hosea*, 577.

Like Hosea, Jer 3:4, 19, and 31:9 depict judgment, but also a time of restoration. Both Jeremiah and Hosea emphasize a new beginning for Israel, and the need for a new exodus experience.

Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9

^{3:4}Even now, did you not call to me, “My father, you are a dear friend of my youth.”

^{3:19}And I said, “How can I set you among the sons, and I give you a land of desire, a portion of the beauty of beauties of the nations.” And I said, “You will call to me, ‘My father,’ and you would not turn from following after me.”

^{31:9}With weeping they will come, and with supplication for favor I will lead them. I will make you walk by torrent-valleys of water, in a straight path they shall not stumble in it, for I certainly am a father to Israel, and Ephraim, he is my firstborn.

We will begin our study with Jer 3:4 by identifying textual problems with the passage, defining the term “friend” and its implications concerning fatherhood, and describing the context of Jer 3:4. Concerning Jer 3:19, we will explore how to interpret Israel as a daughter inheriting land, and its connection with Jer 3:4. Lastly, we will explore the context of Jer 31:9, the terms “weeping,” “straight path,” the phrase “torrent-valleys of water,” and Ephraim as Yahweh’s firstborn. Our goal will be to understand Yahweh’s fatherhood, Israel’s sonship, and Ephraim as Yahweh’s firstborn.

The text of Jer 3:4 is difficult to interpret because the term “father” does not seem to fit the context of the passage. William L. Holladay sees the word “father” in 3:4 as a gloss from 3:19. He believes that the main metaphor in 3:4 and 3:19 is that of a husband and wife. His argument is that a wife does not call her husband “father” and a husband never refers to his children as a “companion of his youth,” because it is language used in

Prov 2:17 between a husband and a wife.¹⁰⁷ However, J. A. Thompson observes that “The term used for *friend* (‘*allûp*) has a variety of meanings—tame animal, ox, friend, companion, husband, head of family or tribe. It may have been chosen advisedly by Jeremiah, for it conveyed the wide range of functions that Yahweh had served since Israel’s youth (ne‘ûrîm).”¹⁰⁸ Therefore, Jer 3:4 combines the metaphor for husband and father.

In the social context of Jer 3:4, Yahweh has withheld rain from the land because of the people’s fertility practices. They were trying to convince Baal to give rain so that the fertility of the land could be continued. They did not recognize that Yahweh was in control of nature also, not just the covenant. The people desired to have both Baal’s fertility and Yahweh’s covenant, and had the audacity to address Yahweh as father.¹⁰⁹ If Yahweh was the friend of Israel from its youth, and the term friend could mean “head of the family,” it could refer back to the exodus. Yahweh was a father and friend in the early life of Israel’s youth (cf. Hos 11:1). Evidently, this passage shows Yahweh’s disgust with Israel’s actions, behaving as if they were truly obedient to the covenant.

Jeremiah 3:19 broadens the picture of Yahweh as father in light of land, obedience, and repentance. Out of all the scriptures that mention Yahweh as father, Jer 3:19 is one of two verses where Israel is personified as a daughter.¹¹⁰ Ironically, identifying Israel as daughter causes some interpretation issues, since sons were the only

¹⁰⁷ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 58, 115.

¹⁰⁸ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 192.

¹⁰⁹ Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25* (WBC 26; Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 51-52.

¹¹⁰ The other text is Ezek 16.

ones who inherited land. Jack R. Lundbom explains the verse in this manner, connecting it with Deuteronomy:

Yahweh is saying that he wanted to give Israel—here designated his daughter (suffixes and affixes in this verse are feminine singular)—along with other sons an inheritance of land (Deut 32:8). It was unusual in ancient Israel for daughters to receive an inheritance, but it did happen (Num 27:1-8; 36:1-12; Job 42:15). The “sons/children” receiving an inheritance are the nations (Deut 32:8).... The entire book of Deuteronomy, actually, is concerned about the gift of land.... Yahweh decided that Israel’s heritage was to be the best.¹¹¹

Thompson provides another explanation:

It was ever Yahweh’s intention that his people should live in obedience to him and within the bounds of their covenant obligations. That way lay the promise of blessing (Deut. 20:1-6; 30:9-10, 19-20, etc.). It is an important theme in the OT that God would be a father to his son Israel (Hos. 11:1).... It may not therefore be a question of a daughter being given the status of a son but rather of a favorite son being raised above the other sons.... Israel is the firstborn, not because she is superior to Judah but because Yahweh will renew with her the same fatherly love he displayed in centuries past.¹¹²

One could also interpret the passage considering the impact of describing Israel as Yahweh’s daughter. It was rare for a girl to receive an inheritance of land from her father, especially if she had brothers. If we consider the other nations as Israel’s “brothers,” then we can conclude that Yahweh chose the insignificant nation of Israel to inherit the land that belonged to him, like a father choosing a daughter to inherit land over his sons. Israel as a daughter in this verse can be seen as the firstborn, since Yahweh wanted to give Israel the best land. Peter Craigie gives a great summation of 3:4 and 3:19:

Both metaphors, that of God as parent and God as husband, reveal different dimensions of the covenant faith. The notion of God as father is the dominant one in Deuteronomy.... It is that notion of father and son that is developed in v 19, but the sadness is mixed with irony. While God had hoped to be addressed lovingly by his people as “My father,” the reality of history had been that the expression was only used in hypocrisy, in times of temporary trial (cf. 3:3). The reflective

¹¹¹ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20* (AB 21A; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 318.

¹¹² Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 206, 570.

nature of these verses illuminates the warmth and love that lie permanently in the heart of God. He is disappointed at failure but still loves and still desires repentance (3:22).¹¹³

The context of Jer 31:9 (30:1-31:40) reflects “Josiah’s program of political and cultic reunion between the north and the south—directed the core of this material to the north (31:6!), reshaping it for Judah at the end of his career, in the context of the fall of Jerusalem and consequent exile.”¹¹⁴

In order to understand Ephraim as Yahweh’s firstborn, the terms “weeping,” “straight path,” and “torrent valleys of water” need to be explored. Elsewhere, the phrase “torrent valleys of water” is only found in Deut 8:7 and 10:7. Jeremiah uses the phrase to paint a lovely picture of Canaan. The term “straight path” more than likely comes from Ps 107:7, where Yahweh leads his people to a city where they can reside. It is likely that Jeremiah combined these two verses to describe a new exodus. The imagery of father/son more than likely came from Deut 32.¹¹⁵ “Weeping” represents repentance.¹¹⁶

Concerning Ephraim’s identification as Yahweh’s firstborn, a viable explanation exists:

The declaration of Israel as Yahweh’s “firstborn”... has roots in the Exodus tradition (Exod 4:22), but here in the present verse the firstborn is Ephraim.... [I]t seems, rather, that reference here is only to Northern Israel..., as in Jeremiah elsewhere (7:15; 31:9, 18, 20) and all through the book of Hosea.... Ephraim as Yahweh’s “firstborn” finds biblical support in 1 Chr 5:1-3, where Reuben’s birthright is given to the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, and in Gen 48:8-

¹¹³ Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25*, 64. Cf. John Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB 21; New York: Doubleday, 1965), 26, who makes a connection with Jer 3:4, 19 and Deuteronomy. Jeremiah 3 is “very ‘Deuteronomic’ in its concern, even taking its start from a point of law which, though assuredly more ancient, is stated in the Deuteronomic Code.”

¹¹⁴ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 156. Cf. Bright, *Jeremiah*, 284, who places Jeremiah 31 in the Book of Consolation.

¹¹⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 185.

¹¹⁶ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36* (AB 21B; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 424.

20, where Ephraim is placed ahead of Manasseh by a grandfather (Jacob) who himself supplanted an older twin.¹¹⁷

Holladay further elaborates:

Hos 11:1-3 and Exod 4:22 are open to the possibility that Israel is Yahweh's only son. On the other hand Deut 32:6-9 suggests that Israel is preeminent among the nations (compare Jer 31:7), so that that understanding is primary for the recension of the present material for the south, and perhaps for the recension for the north as well. But the text of *G* for 2 Sam 19:44, followed by most commentators and translations, suggests that there were those among the northern tribes who could call themselves "first-born" over against Judah (so explicitly 1 Chr 5:1-2, and compare Ezek 16:46; 23:4), and this nuance would be appropriate to the passage in the recension to the north.¹¹⁸

The picture of Jer 31:9 is clear. Yahweh would bring back the exiles to the land of Canaan, because of being a father to Israel and Ephraim, i.e. the southern and northern tribes. Being a son of Yahweh meant the inheritance of land, and after the repentance of Israel as a whole, they could return to the land of promise. Yahweh was bringing them into a new exodus and symbolically renewing the covenant from Mount Sinai.

Exodus 4:22-23, Deut 14:1, Hos 1:10; 11:1, and Jer 3:4, 19, and 31:9 have many correlations with sonship, land, covenant, and kinship discussed earlier. Israel is declared by Yahweh as his firstborn, but Israel's identity as firstborn becomes concrete with the kinship covenant and its ritual in Ex 24. Exodus 4:22-23 foreshadows Israel as a son inheriting the land of Yahweh the father. Deuteronomy 14:1 demonstrates one of the obligations Israel must fulfill as they live in the land and how they are valued by Yahweh. Obedience is stressed because of their identity as Yahweh's son. Hosea 1:10 and 11:1 are placed in the context of warning so that Israel will realize the reality of judgment but the grace of restoration. An allusion to the promise of Abraham and the

¹¹⁷ Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, 425-26.

¹¹⁸ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 185.

exodus is given, as a reminder for them to remember their covenant with Yahweh and that Israel had broken the covenant. Jeremiah 3:4, 19, and 31:9 imply the message of Hosea with images of a new exodus, and depictions of Israel's rebellion, and the longing of Yahweh to be a father to his people, Israel and Ephraim. Israel is described as a daughter inheriting Yahweh's land, further demonstrating her value and rarity. It could be concluded that Yahweh's relationship with Israel as father was to give them, as an oppressed people, an identity, and to give them land, which was the source of livelihood. If we combine these texts, we see Yahweh's unconditional election with Israel's conditional response. It is in the tension of the relationship that we see Israel's history: proclamation of identity, creation or new birth, obligation to holiness, warning, rebellion, new exodus, and redemption.

The relationship of Yahweh as father and Israel/Ephraim as son is defined in the terms of ancient Israel's family structure through covenant, and the values present within those family structures determined the relationship between Israel/Ephraim and Yahweh. Yahweh's relationship with Israel and Ephraim as a metaphor explains the expectations of Yahweh for Israel/Ephraim, and that relationships have certain rules and consequences to breaking those rules. The metaphor also shows another side of Yahweh as father: one who is creator.

GOD AS CREATOR

In this section, our main objective is to discover the correlation between the image of Yahweh as father and creator, and how it affects our understanding of Israel's sonship. First, we will complete our objective by starting with the relevance of creation myths in

the ancient Near East. Secondly, we will compare our findings with the scriptures using the metaphors of Yahweh being creator and father, i.e. Deut 32:6; Isa 43:5-6; 45:9-13; 64:8; Mal 2:10. Thirdly, we will explore potential connections between creation myths in the ancient Near East, the verses above, and the creation accounts of Gen 1 and 2. Lastly, we will determine the connection between Israel's sonship and Yahweh as father and creator of all humankind.

Richard J. Clifford describes the importance of ancient creation myths in the ancient Near East: "Ancient cosmogonies were primarily interested in the emergence of a particular society, organized by means of patron gods and worship systems, a divinely appointed king (or some other kind of leader), and kinship systems."¹¹⁹ There were many different modes of creation, which will not be discussed here.¹²⁰ Our focus will be on creation myths that concern humans being made from the dust of the earth, which will make an impact on the interpretation of Yahweh as father and creator.

One example of creating from the dust of the earth can be found in ancient Sumerian texts that describe the god Ea. Ea was the main source of creation, and the description of his method has important sociological implications. "Ea brings the earth to life by inundating (or inseminating) it with the underground waters via rivers and canals. Human beings are created by *formatio*: Ea forms the clay supplied by earth. This motif originated among agricultural folk for whom canals rather than rain were essential for life."¹²¹ Elements of fatherhood and creation can be seen in Ea's insemination of the

¹¹⁹ Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994), 8-9.

¹²⁰ Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 13-133, goes into more detail concerning each reference of creation in the ancient Near East, and the different methods of creation.

¹²¹ Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 16.

ground and his creation of humankind from the ground he inseminated. Another important story occurs in the Mesopotamian text *Atrahasis*: “The most remarkable aspect of creation in *Atrahasis* is the creation of humans (I.iv-v). It continues the Sumerian tradition of *formatio* from moistened clay, adding to the material the blood and ‘ghost’ of a god.”¹²² In these creation motifs we see the comparison of the deity as father and creator.¹²³

The creation myths in the ancient Near East described the beginnings of society and kinship. In specific texts and narratives, such as narratives concerning Ea and the Mesopotamian text *Atrahasis*, humanity was formed by the gods, either by combining different materials or through sexual acts. The essential component of creation was the dust of the earth. We can see that creation sometimes originated with male deities.

Deities were not the only entities that were described as father or creator. We also see texts where humans are also celebrated in the image of the creator: “Egypt celebrated its pharaoh as the image of the Creator.”¹²⁴ Like the pharaoh in Egypt was viewed in the image of the creator, a father in ancient Israel could be likened to Yahweh the creator. “When the father exercised his authority to determine how the household would farm and herd, he was the image of the Creator feeding and protecting (Gen 1:16; 9:6; Ps 8...).”¹²⁵ There were safeguards, however, concerning the equation of an Israelite father with the image of Yahweh the creator:

But despite their use of the image of the Creator tradition to describe the father of a household, the Hebrews carefully distinguished the power of the father from the

¹²² Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 79.

¹²³ Fatherhood, of course, goes far beyond procreation.

¹²⁴ Matthews, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 10.

¹²⁵ Matthews, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 10.

power of Yahweh over the children and the land. Fathers covered their genitals during worship (Exod 28:42), and removed their sandals upon entering the sanctuary (Exod 3:5). Genitals symbolized power over children and sandals denoted power over land. No signs of reproductive ability or land ownership were displayed before Yahweh.¹²⁶

What we have discovered thus far is that deities in the ancient Near East could be described both as father and creator, and the method of creation sometimes involved a sexual act, using the dust of the earth, and the essence of the deity, i.e. blood and “ghost.” Even certain humans, such as the Pharaoh and an Israelite father, were envisioned in the image of the creator. For the Israelites, however, they understood the difference between the power of Yahweh and the Israelite father. Their respect for the power of Yahweh was demonstrated by their worship rituals.

Now we will seek to understand the difference between Yahweh and ancient Near Eastern deities by exploring the language used to describe his method of creation. Our study will begin with Deut 32:6.

Deut 32:6

⁶In regard to the Lord will you repay in this manner, foolish people and not wise? Is he not your father? He created (קנה) you, made (עשה) you, and established (כין) you.

In order to understand Yahweh as father and creator in this text, we will first outline its literary framework, analyze the terms “created,” “made,” and “established,” and seek for other social realities that might explain this verse. The literary framework of Deut 32:6, i.e. 32:1-6, discusses “God’s loyalty and Israel’s disloyalty.”¹²⁷ In verses 1 and 6 of Deut

¹²⁶ Matthews, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 10.

32:1-6, Yahweh is proclaimed as the creator of the heavens, the earth, and Israel.¹²⁸

Deuteronomy 32:1-6 begins with the creation of the heavens and the earth like Gen 1:1, and then moves toward the praise of Yahweh in creation and history, the hope that Moses' teaching would be received, and the rebuke of Yahweh's children for being corrupt. The focus of this text is on Yahweh who is a rock, signifying his faithfulness and truthfulness.¹²⁹ The implication of Yahweh as father and creator can be found in analyzing the terms קנה, עשה, and כון.

There are a few explanations of the meaning of קנה, "create." Some would suggest the meaning of the word is "to beget." According to E. Lipiński, the meaning of "beget" only occurs in four verses of the Old Testament (Deut 32:6; Ps 139:13; Prov 8:22; Gen 4:1b). Deuteronomy 32:6 describes Yahweh as father "begetting" Israel. Such a connection might have come from a similar statement concerning a mother goddess.¹³⁰ Others would suggest "this verb, which occurs more than eighty times in the OT, most often refers to acquiring by effort or payment, as through commercial transaction of some kind."¹³¹ However, it seems the best summation of the meaning of קנה in this passage is "that קנה means not 'create,' in the sense of 'form,' but 'beget,' 'become parent of'."¹³² There is an obvious connection between קנה, עשה, and כון.

¹²⁷ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12* (WBC 6B; Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 792. Ibid., 792: "The poem begins with what Tigay calls an 'exordium' (vv 1-6), in the form of a summons to heaven and earth to pay attention to 'the words of my mouth' (v 1)."

¹²⁸ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, 793.

¹²⁹ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, 793.

¹³⁰ E. Lipiński, "קנה; מקנה; מקנה; קנין," *TDOT* 13:61.

¹³¹ John I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC 3; Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 208.

¹³² Durham, *Exodus*, 208.

The verb קנה, “to create,” here, also with the same meaning in the other Song of Moses (Exod 15:16), goes with the verbs עשה, “to make,” and כּוּן, “to bring into existence.” As Tigay shows ([1996] 402 n. 38), “the meaning of *konen* is clear from Ps 119:73, where it is used alongside ‘make,’ and from Ugaritic, which uses *k-n-n* in parallelism with both ‘father’ and *k-n-h* (*q-n-h*), ‘creator’” (UT 51, iv,47–48; 76, iii,6–7).¹³³

There are other ways of understanding כּוּן as well. “Strictly speaking, *hekîn* does not denote an act of creation as such but the shaping and establishing of an entity already present.... Like the fruitful earth, Yahweh first made (‘*śh*’) Israel and then established (*kwn* hiphil) it as his own people (Dt. 32:6; 2 S. 7:24); the same usage describes his establishment of Zion as the site of his cultic presence upon earth.”¹³⁴

If we take Exod 4:22-23 into account, we can say that Israel, from the language of this verse, was a present entity. Yahweh became Israel’s parent by “begetting” them, or creating their identity through the exodus experience (Deut 32:7-18). Therefore, this passage possibly describes adoption with creation language. As Israel’s father, Yahweh has created them through adoption, and then made and established them into existence through the fires of the exodus.¹³⁵ In connection with Exod 15:16, “Yahweh is celebrated as seeing through a dangerous passage the people whom he has made his own people—he had ‘created’ them, ‘conceived’ them, they are Israel, whom he calls ‘my son, my firstborn.’”¹³⁶

¹³³ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, 796.

¹³⁴ K. Koch, “כּוּן; כּוּן; מכוּן; מכּוּנָה; תכוּנָה,” *TDOT* 7:97, 98.

¹³⁵ As mentioned previously, adoption language can be equated with creation if one considers that adoption deals with creating a new identity for an existing entity. One cannot adopt someone who does not exist. Cf. Culpepper, “Children of God,” *NIDB* 1:590: “In the exodus God claimed Israel as ‘my firstborn son’ (Gen [Exod] 4:22-23), became ‘a father to Israel’ (Jer 31:9), and called ‘my son’ out of Egypt (Hos 11:1). The covenant relationship was solemnized by the sprinkling of blood (Exod 24:5-8) and the eating of a communal meal (Exod 24:11), which made the two parties one family.”

¹³⁶ Durham, *Exodus*, 208.

A potential social reality that might parallel Deut 32:6 can be found in the patron-client relationship of the ancient Near East:

The patron-client relationship is a social, institutional arrangement by means of which economic, political, or religious institutional relationships are outfitted with an overarching quality of kinship or family feeling.... In the Bible, anytime anyone is called a “father” who is not a biological father, the title refers to the role and status of a patron.... The patron is like a father, and clients are like loving and grateful children, no matter what their age. The client relates to his patron according to the social norms of child relations to actual parents, while the patron is expected to relate to clients as a parent would to his (more rarely, her) actual children.¹³⁷

Considering the patron-client relationship of the ancient Near East and Deut 32:3, one can conclude that Yahweh, as a non-biological father, becomes patron of Israel, and the relationship they have together is founded upon the social norms of the ancient family.

Considering Deut 32:6 and its literary framework, it is evident why Deut 32:6 is part of the rebuke of Israel. Yahweh is Israel’s patron, adopter, creator, and father. Yahweh wearied of Israel’s corruption and questions if they remember what he did for them as his son in the exodus event. Yahweh took them as a present entity with no identity except as slaves, and used the exodus to make them a nation. The next passage, Isa 43:5-6, does not include any creation language. Its context does, however, describe Yahweh, creation, and the redemption of Israel.

Isa 43:5-6

⁵ You will not fear, for I am with you. I am bringing your seed from the East and I am gathering you together from the West. ⁶ I will say to the North, “Give up,” and to the South, “You will not withhold.” Bring me my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth.

¹³⁷ Bruce J. Malina, “Patronage,” *HBSV* :151, 152.

The context of Isa 43:5-6 provides a connection between Yahweh as father and creator. We will explore this connection by studying the historical context and the literary framework of Isa 43:5-6, i.e. 43:1-7, and the language of creation and redemption within Isa 43:1-7 and Isa 43:5-6.

The historical context of Isa 43:1-7 is intertwined with the correlation between the language of creation and redemption: “A major feature of chaps. 40–66 is the combining of words describing creation with words describing salvation to picture YHWH’s role and action toward Israel and Jerusalem in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E.”¹³⁸

John D. W. Watts notes that the literary structure of Isa 43:1-7 begins with Yahweh as the one who created and shaped Israel.¹³⁹ Isaiah 43:1-2 describes Yahweh as the one who created Jacob and formed Israel. “בראך, ‘your creator,’ usually applies to the original creation of matter or humankind, but here it is used parallel to יצרך, ‘your shaper,’ to describe God’s relation to Israel. Israel owes her origin and character, her *raison d’être*, to YHWH.”¹⁴⁰ In verse 2, Yahweh claims Israel because he formed it and redeemed it. The phrase “passing through the waters” in verse 2 refers to Exod 14-15, where the Israelites were brought through the Red Sea.¹⁴¹ The allusion to the exodus in Isaiah “functions proleptically, as a promise of the restoration to come. He ‘called [Israel’s] name’: perhaps God’s address to Israel at Sinai/Horeb is evoked here. These show that Israel belongs to YHWH.”¹⁴² The importance of redemption for this passage comes to light:

¹³⁸ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 640.

¹³⁹ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, (rev. ed.; WBC 25; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2005), 670. Cf. *Ibid.*, 670: “Isa 43:1–7 is usually called an oracle of salvation.”

¹⁴⁰ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 675.

¹⁴¹ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 675.

According to L. Köhler, לָאָה is “a term of family law.” It means “to lay claim to a person, to something > to demand him, to redeem.” We can reconstruct a sociomorpheme of “redemption” that looks roughly as follows: a master has a slave who serves him; since the master is no longer satisfied with this slave because of some culpable failure, he sells him; the slave thereby becomes entirely a “commodity,” also losing any such rights as he still possesses; he finds that with his new master conditions are considerably worse; remorsefully he turns to his old master again; this master is prepared to buy the slave back—to redeem or ransom him.¹⁴³

We can understand from Isa 43:1-7 that a new exodus is being described to give hope to the exiled. Encouragement to the exiled begins in Isa 43:5-6: “[D]o not be afraid, for I am with you,” enunciates an important promise to God’s people. It echoes YHWH’s promise of support to the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 1:8, 19; 15:20), but also to the exiles (Jer 30:11; 46:28). The promise of divine presence was especially important to the exiles, deprived of land and temple, the visible symbols of God’s presence and support.”¹⁴⁴ In Isa 43:5-6, redemption is extended to all that have been dispersed, not just those in Babylonian exile. The return of the dispersed is typified as the beginning of the salvation epoch.¹⁴⁵ Israel is not described as an outcast or servant, but in familial terms:

At this stage in the interpretation, too, the concept of the “*servant* Israel/Jacob” is abandoned. The word now used is “seed.” This can still refer to Israel/Jacob as progenitor. The new community will correspond to the beginning. “My sons . . . my daughters” (v. 6): the relationship to God is thus directly described in family categories. The declaration implies that God is not merely the “lord” or “master” of a “servant”; he is also the “father” of “sons *and* daughters.” So the whole of God’s people is now embraced.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 675.

¹⁴³ Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah* (ed. Peter Machinist; trans. Margaret Kohl; Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 158.

¹⁴⁴ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 676.

¹⁴⁵ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 160.

¹⁴⁶ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 160.

It would seem that Yahweh's redemptive plan stretches farther than Israel, which will be discussed at a later point.

If we correlate our findings of Deut 32:6 and Isa 43:5-6, we can see the dichotomy of Israel as servant/son. Israel is Yahweh's servant, who was "ransomed" out of Egypt. Israel's identity became solidified through the exodus as Yahweh's son. Israel was to serve Yahweh, the patron who delivered them. However, through rebellion, it appears that Israel went to serve another master, only to be "re-purchased" by Yahweh. Yahweh's relationship with Israel as father did not change, as evidenced by the familial language. A new exodus was about to take place, therefore creating a new hope for the dispersed. A new day was beginning to shine, with their land and Yahweh beckoning them home.

The connection between Yahweh as father and creator in Isa 43:5-6 is implicit. In Isa 45:9-13, however, the connection is more explicit.

Isa 45:9-13

⁹ Woe to the one who is striving with the one who had formed him a pot among pots of the ground! Does the clay say to the one who forms it, "What are you making?" and his work, "Are there no hands for it?" ¹⁰ Woe to the one who says to a father, "What are you begetting?" or to a woman, "What are you in labor with?" ¹¹ Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, that is, the one who formed him, "Ask me of the things that are coming. Concerning my sons and concerning the work of my hands, will you command me?" ¹² I made the earth and I created man on it. I, my hands, stretched out the heavens and I commanded the hosts. ¹³ I have stirred him in righteousness, and I will make his ways straight. He will build my city and he will set my exiles free not for a price and not for a bribe," says the Lord of hosts.

We will discover the connection between Yahweh as creator and father in Isa 45:9-13 by studying its literary context, Isa 44:24-45:13, and analyzing the words **יצר** and **ברא**.

In Isa 44:24-45:13 Yahweh introduces and validates King Cyrus.¹⁴⁷ The scene of Isa 44:24-45:13 takes place in the heavenly court of Yahweh. Yahweh's counselors are speaking in Isa 45:9-10, while Yahweh speaks in 45:11-13.¹⁴⁸ In Isa 45:8-13, the literary structure begins with Yahweh as creator.¹⁴⁹

In Isa 45:9, the potter and the clay metaphors are used in the context of Isa 45:8-13 to emphasize Yahweh as creator. As the clay has no right to question the potter, so it is with Israel trying to question Yahweh.¹⁵⁰ Baltzer further notes, "This gives the play on the words 'earth' (אֲדָמָה ^a*dāmāh*, v. 9) and 'human being' (אָדָם *ādām*, v. 12) its point. But the statement is in fact simply an echo of the tradition of Gen 2–3. According to this view, it is nonsense for human beings to quarrel with the one who has made them."¹⁵¹ Concerning the latter part of 45:9, the clay cannot question or counsel Yahweh concerning his creation. Yahweh, as potter, decides to form the clay, for it is his work: "The underlying conviction is the unity of creation. What can be said of clay can be said of human beings too.... The clay as raw material cannot form itself. It needs the hands of the potter. It is in this way that Yahweh forms human beings for the task given to them. In the way he does it he is free."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 689, 696. Cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55* (AB 19A; New York: Doubleday, 2002), 93 for the historical context of Isa 40-55: "The allusions to Cyrus in Isa 40-48 indicate that the last decade of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (ca. 550-539) was when the core of this section of the book was composed."

¹⁴⁸ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 233.

¹⁴⁹ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 696. Cf. *Ibid.*, 696, where the structure of 44:24-45:13 repeats the theme of Yahweh as creator in 44:24 and 45:8.

¹⁵⁰ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 233-34.

¹⁵¹ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 234.

¹⁵² Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 234.

Isaiah 45:10 seems awkward because it condemns a person who would ask a father or mother the gender of their child. Two prevalent themes, however, help to clear the ambiguity. One theme is the inability of a father or mother to understand what his or her child will be like.¹⁵³ The second theme reiterates verse 9, in that Yahweh is sovereign, as the potter is over the clay:

But these verdicts about both the “father” and the “woman” must again be understood against the background of the context. God is the true father. He alone knows what kind of child is engendered and born. He also determines the birth. Everyday experience makes God’s sovereignty over human beings clear. Anyone who calls it in question puts him- or herself outside the coherent warp and woof of this life; he becomes subject to the “woe!” (הוי).¹⁵⁴

Isaiah 45:11 illustrates God’s nearness to Israel and sovereignty through the title “Holy One of Israel” and “Israel’s former.”¹⁵⁵ The imperative שאלוני, the participle with the article האתיות, and the imperfect verb תצוני, create textual difficulties. The verbs do not complement one another in the meaning of the verse as a whole; neither do they connect with the flow of verses 9 and 10. Baltzer suggests reading the article as an interrogative pronoun and changing the imperative to an imperfect to continue the thought flow of the passage, which would make it a deliberation. With this adjustment, the meaning of the text becomes clear: Yahweh is the only one who has the right to control his sons, his work, and future events.¹⁵⁶

Yahweh’s proclamation of his deeds in Isa 45:12 shows that Yahweh is the creator of all humanity, not just Israel. It is reminiscent of Gen 1, and more than likely a combination of the creation traditions of P and J. Nevertheless, it also purports that

¹⁵³ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 234.

¹⁵⁴ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 235.

¹⁵⁵ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 235.

¹⁵⁶ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 235-36.

Yahweh is the creator of the whole world as well, and that he is in control of those in heaven with him, his council or “hosts.”¹⁵⁷

Isaiah 45:13 concludes with Yahweh’s endorsement of Cyrus, who is implied in this verse. Cyrus would accomplish Yahweh’s will by setting the exiles free. The exiles will not have to buy their freedom, because Yahweh has chosen their deliverer without any consideration of their opinion. Yahweh does as Yahweh sees fit.¹⁵⁸

One of the verbs in this passage that iterates the theme of creation is יצר. The word is usually used in a theological context concerning the formation of something. That is why the verb alone could refer to the creation of the human race. It is mainly used and developed in the prophets more fully. Since Isa 45:9-13 describes Yahweh as the creator of the whole world and Israel, a connection lies between Isa 29:16, in which Yahweh is described as the creator of the human race and Jer 18, wherein Yahweh is mentioned as the creator of Israel. In Deutero-Isaiah this verb appears almost exclusively in passages that deal with Israel and promises of salvation.¹⁵⁹ Creation in Deutero-Isaiah is the foundation for Israel’s salvation.

The next word of importance in this passage is ברא:

In Deutero-Isaiah in particular, *bara’* also takes historical powers and events as its objects. Theologically, this extension of the use of this verb is very significant, because it is based on the view that Yahweh’s activity in history obtains the quality of the nonpareil work of the Creator God.... [D]eutero-Isaiah does not connect his theology of creation with a general theology of history, but with the old theology of election. Thus, indeed, mankind as a whole is the creation of God (Isa 45:12); and yet, among the nations that have arisen during the course of history, Israel alone is said to have been created by Yahweh (43:1, 7, 15).... By being connected with the theology of election, the historically oriented *bara’* in

¹⁵⁷ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 236-37.

¹⁵⁸ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 237.

¹⁵⁹ B. Otzen, “יצר; יצר; צור; ציר; צורה,” *TDOT* 6:259-63.

Deutero-Isaiah takes on a soteriological character. *bara'* no longer denotes an act of Yahweh merely in remote primitive time, but also in the immediately imminent future. Thus, the change of fortune for the exiles is interpreted as a new creative act of Yahweh.¹⁶⁰

Isaiah 45:9-13 combines themes of redemption, fatherhood, and creation. The fatherhood of Yahweh is demonstrated by the affirmation of being the maker and former of Israel. While different theological terms are used, Isa 45:9-13 and Deut 32:6 share the notion that Yahweh as father created Israel, referring back to the exodus. Isaiah 43:5-6 and 45:9-13, unlike Deut 32:6 use the same theological terms of creation from Gen 1 and 2 to describe a new exodus, which was required in order to define a new experience based on redemption needed for a new era. We also see the notion that Yahweh is the creator of all humankind. The last passage in Isaiah that connects the metaphors of Yahweh as father and creator is Isa 64:7[8].

Isa 64:7[8]

⁷ But now, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you are the one who formed us. We are all the work of your hand.

We will explore the connection between Yahweh as father and creator in Isa 64:7[8] by mentioning its historical and literary contexts, and explaining the connection between Yahweh as father and creator in this verse. Clifford comments about the context of Trito-Isaiah: “Trito-Isaiah, an anonymous prophet probably of the late sixth or early fifth century, the author of chapters 56-66, develops the concept of new creation. New creation refers to the act by which God will remove injustice from the holy city and bring about a

¹⁶⁰ Jan Bergman, Helmer Ringgren, Karl-Heinz Bernhardt, and G. Johannes Botterweck, “ברא,” *TDOT* 2:247.

truly just and peaceful society, e.g. 65:17-19.”¹⁶¹ Isaiah 64:7[8] occurs in the section of Trito-Isaiah that consists of sermons and prayers (Isa 63:7-64:11).¹⁶² In the context of Isa 63:7-64:11, the sermons and prayers are a response to Yahweh’s allegations, which not only submit complaints about Yahweh, but the plea for Yahweh to recognize that Israel is still his people and to restore them.¹⁶³ There are many genres in this passage, but “the controlling genre is that of the sermon-prayer that is well known from Deuteronomy and Chronicles. It appears prominently in 63:7–14 and 64:3 (4)–8(9).”¹⁶⁴

Evidently Isa 64:7[8] is a plea to Yahweh. We question, however, the purpose of the author’s attribution of the metaphors of creator and father to Yahweh. First, we recognize that the author uses the image of Yahweh as father and creator to remind Yahweh that he was the one responsible for the creation of Israel. Israel’s plea here in this verse is not with Yahweh as the universal creator from Isa 45:9-12, but with Yahweh their personal creator. Secondly, as a father, Israel reminds Yahweh that he has obligations to them, yet as the clay, Israel has no right to demand anything of Yahweh as creator.¹⁶⁵ As mentioned in the previous section, Israel’s identity as a child of Yahweh came through the exodus event.¹⁶⁶ Thirdly, Isa 64:7[8] evidently connects back to the

¹⁶¹ Richard J. Clifford, “The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation,” *TS* 46, no. 3 (1985): 519.

¹⁶² Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 892.

¹⁶³ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 897.

¹⁶⁴ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 897.

¹⁶⁵ Paul Niskanen, “Yhwh as Father, Redeemer, and Potter in Isaiah 63:7-64:11,” *CBQ* 68, no. 3 (2006): 399-401, 404-6.

¹⁶⁶ Niskanen, “Yhwh as Father, Redeemer, and Potter,” 406. Cf. *Ibid.*, 406: “It is in the redemption from slavery in Egypt and the forging of a covenant that Israel is made a people and is constituted in a special father-son relationship with Yhwh. This specific understanding of God as creator and father to Israel is clearly seen also in Deut 32:5-9.”

covenant meal in Ex 24. The author is describing a new exodus, a new creation of Israel, which can only occur with the forgiveness of Yahweh for all Israel. Yahweh had not ceased to be the creator and father of Israel, but it was evident that the relationship was broken, and only Yahweh could redeem it.¹⁶⁷

In Isa 64: 7[8], the title of Yahweh as father harkens back to Israel becoming the son of Yahweh through the exodus, which also made Yahweh Israel's creator. These metaphors are used to describe a forthcoming event for the exiles, that like the exodus event of old, they would experience a new creation of identity. Paul Niskanen concludes, "It is a very specific and particular fatherhood that goes beyond that of general creation. It does not deny a more general and universal fatherhood (see Isa 45:12), but to a people dispossessed and searching for a new identity in the post-exilic world, it tells them: although all the peoples of the earth are mine, you are especially so (see Exod 19:5)."¹⁶⁸

Our last text that mentions Yahweh as father and creator is Mal 2:10.¹⁶⁹

Mal 2:10

¹⁰ Is there not one father for all of us? Is there not one God who created us? Why then are we dealing treacherously, a man against his brother, in order to defile the covenant of our fathers?

¹⁶⁷ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 897-900.

¹⁶⁸ Niskanen, "Yhwh as Father, Redeemer, and Potter," 407.

¹⁶⁹ Niskanen, "Yhwh as Father, Redeemer, and Potter," 399, demonstrates that a connection lies between Isa 64:7 and Mal 2:10 because of their description of Yahweh as creator: "Isaiah 64:7 speaks of God as both father and potter, an image of the one who creates. This closely parallels the double interrogative of Mal 2:10.... Divine fatherhood is another way of speaking about the divine role as creator in both Malachi and Trito-Isaiah. Although it is tempting to see such references to a divine father who creates and protects as universal in scope, a closer examination of the context of each of these passages reveals that this is not their intention."

We will begin our study with the historical and literary contexts of Mal 2:10. Then we will explore the meaning of father and creator, “dealing treacherously,” and the phrase “covenant of our fathers.” Our approach will help us to understand the importance of attributing the metaphors of creator and father to Yahweh.

Andrew Hill believes that Malachi was written during the reign of Darius I, the ruler of the Persian empire (515 BCE-458 BCE).¹⁷⁰ If he is correct, then this period was a difficult time for the Israelites:

[T]he social ills confronted by Malachi were not so much the by-product of baalism, as sheer pragmatism on the part of the Jewish restoration community in response to the depressed local economy. Intermarriage with resident alien population, neglect of the deprived and disadvantaged, and renegeing on the tithe are but symptoms of the severe economic pressures faced by the province of Yehud (caused in part by a shortfall in the imperial budget and stingy satrapy treasurers...). Other factors, however, were responsible for the adverse conditions, too, including natural disaster (Hag 1:6, 10), heavy taxation (Neh 5:15), and a local economy controlled by corrupt officials and nobles in league with the resident alien population (Neh 5:3, 7-8, 15).¹⁷¹

It is no surprise that these struggles caused apathy among the people. The socio-economic struggles and the unfulfilled prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah concerning the temple caused the defilement of the sacrificial system and the tithe.¹⁷²

Malachi 2:10-16 is a prophetic dispute about the treachery of the people and the priests concerning the tithe and sacrificial system.¹⁷³ The disputants in this case appear to be the people of Israel including the priests.

Who is the “father” in Mal 2:10? It may be tempting to say that “father” in this verse refers to Abraham or to Jacob. Since Yahweh has been referred to as father in Mal

¹⁷⁰ Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi*, (AB 25D; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 51, 82.

¹⁷¹ Hill, *Malachi*, 75.

¹⁷² Hill, *Malachi*, 75.

¹⁷³ Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC 32; Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 318, 320.

1:6 and is the only one named creator and father, it is more than likely that “father” refers to Yahweh.¹⁷⁴ Yahweh is described as the father and creator of Israel in order to encourage the Israelites to act as one. David L. Petersen explains, “The logic of the motif seems to be this: Since Yahweh is one and since he is the father of these children, they too should be one, that is to say, a people who keep covenantal faith with one another and who venerate one deity. Because Yahweh had created a social unit, Israel, the writer could have the people ask the central—and not rhetorical—question: Why do ‘we’ act in such a way.”¹⁷⁵

Petersen also explains the meaning of the phrase “dealing treacherously”: “*bgd*” means to act negatively toward one another in the present, which has an effect on one’s relationship to past members of the family.”¹⁷⁶ How does Yahweh as father and creator connect to the phrase “covenant of our fathers?” The author of Malachi does not connect his identity as father and creator from the exodus, but with the covenant of the patriarchs. Terence E. Fretheim comments,

The covenant at Sinai with its accompanying laws is concerned most fundamentally with Israel’s vocation in the world in the service of life. The Sinai covenant does not establish God’s relationship with Israel; the Israelites are “my people” early in the book of Exodus (e.g., 3:7-10). These people are the inheritors of the promises given to their ancestors (Exod 3:15-17; 6:4, 8), a covenant that God remembers (2:24; 6:4-5) as given to the ancestors and to their “descendants” (Gen 17:7). . . . The Sinai covenant is a matter of Israel’s vocation, not its status. . . . In most respects, Sinai is simply a regiving of the law implicitly or explicitly commanded in creation or made evident in common life experience (within Israel

¹⁷⁴ Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 321. Cf. Hill, *Malachi*, 224.

¹⁷⁵ David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 196. Cf. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 320: “We all (Israel) have one father; one God created us; we should be one happy family. But, the truth is every man was dealing treacherously with the other, and profaning the covenant of the fathers.”

¹⁷⁶ Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, 196.

and without). . . . To obey the law is to live in harmony with God's intentions for the creation.¹⁷⁷

Fretheim argues that God purposes that all creation, humanity and non-humans alike, would be blessed. Choosing Abraham/Israel is a "divine strategy" to accomplish this feat.¹⁷⁸ The phrase, "the covenant of the fathers" in Malachi emphasizes the importance of the patriarchal covenant concerning Israel's identity as Yahweh's child. We must also consider the date of Malachi and the location of the Israelites to understand "the covenant of the fathers." The appeal to the ancient patriarchs and their covenant with Yahweh is more relevant than an overt allusion to the exodus, since the Israelites are in their homeland.¹⁷⁹ However, Hill would disagree. He sees Mal 2:10 as referring to the covenant of Mount Sinai, since Deut 4:31 uses the same language as Malachi concerning "the covenant of our fathers."¹⁸⁰

Nevertheless, it seems that Yahweh as creator and father in this passage could be supported by both the patriarchal and Mount Sinai covenant. Since Yahweh is both creator and father of the ancient Israelites from the covenants of Abraham and Mount Sinai, and since Yahweh still holds to the identity of father and creator of Israel, the people should not "deal treacherously" with one another. Such treatment of one another makes the covenant of their ancestors reprobate.

¹⁷⁷ Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 146.

¹⁷⁸ Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 103.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, (AB 19B; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 260, where he emphasizes that Isaiah 63:7-64:11[12] describes the tradition of the exodus from Egypt deriving from a Deuteronomistic formulation. In essence, an allusion to the exodus is described in this passage.

¹⁸⁰ Hill, *Malachi*, 227.

When we observe creation myths of the ancient Near East, the language and terms used for creation in Deut 32:6; Isa 43:5-6; 45:9-13; 64:8; Mal 2:10, and the language and terms for creation used in Gen 1 and 2, we can see how Yahweh as father and creator parallels and diverges from its ancient context.

Yahweh as creator and father parallels with creation myths in the ancient Near East with terms used to describe his creative method, i.e. “forming,” and “making.” Yahweh also uses breath/spirit and clay/dust to create humanity in Gen 2. Isaiah 45:9-13 and 64:8 appear to use the potter and clay imagery to allude to the method of creation in Gen 2. As evidenced by the verses that refer to Yahweh as father and creator, however, Yahweh does not create through a sexual act. Genesis 1 shows Yahweh as the creator through divine word, and Gen 2 shows Yahweh comparable to a potter, creating something new with existing material.

We see the allusion to creation in Gen 1 and 2 in the passages that we have studied through the terms *ברא*, *יצר*, and *עשה*. The passages, however, focus mostly on Israel and its distinction from other nations, and the terms serve not only as a reminder of how they came into being, but how they were going to be made anew.¹⁸¹ We can postulate that these passages demonstrate that Yahweh is father and creator through a social experience, namely the exodus. We also see that Yahweh is the creator of all humankind (Isa 45:9-13), which has an effect on our understanding of Israel’s sonship.

Israel’s sonship is connected to the image of Yahweh as father and creator through the exodus event and the patriarchal covenant. While Israel’s sonship to Yahweh

¹⁸¹ Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 170-71: “From Second-Isaiah’s rhetorical perspective, Israel in Babylon found itself in a position like that of the Hebrews in Egypt. Away from its rightful, divinely given land, the people had ceased in any true sense to be Yahweh’s people. To become fully alive again, they needed to embark on a new exodus-land taking, a new cosmogony.” We can say that Yahweh’s identity as father comes not only from creation but as one who creates a people through times of turmoil.

is continually identified as being special, Yahweh also had other “sons” and “daughters.” Fretheim makes a few observations about the connection between Yahweh, Israel, and the nations. The oracles against the nations demonstrate Yahweh as one who shows no favoritism in judgment. All nations would receive judgment for their actions, Israel included. However, this does not mean that Yahweh was not working salvifically in those nations (Jer 3:17; 12:14-16; 16:19-21; cf. 18:7-10; Amos 9:7; Isa 45:14).¹⁸²

The oracles against the nations in Jeremiah calls other nations Yahweh’s “daughter” (Jer 46:11, 19, 24; 48:18; 49:4; 50:42; cf. Isa 23:12; 47:1). These nations, such as Egypt, are also called by Yahweh “my people” (Isa 19:20-25; cf. Jer 46:26; 48:47; 49:6, 39; Ezek 29:13-14). Therefore, Yahweh is also concerned for other nations, and is the father and creator of all people, which makes all people Yahweh’s children. Israel is chosen for the sake of all peoples.¹⁸³ In essence,

God is the Creator God, the “God of all flesh” (Jer 32:27; see 25:31; 45:5), who works out the divine purposes for the entire creation in and through the movements of nations and peoples. God is interested in these nations for who they are in themselves, not simply in their relationship to Israel. At the same time, *the particularity of God’s work in and through Israel remains intact amid the universality of God’s work among the nations.*¹⁸⁴

Yahweh is both creator and father to Israel and all the nations. Yahweh’s fatherhood, however, also stretches toward a specific individual in the Israelite community: the king.

¹⁸² Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 166-67.

¹⁸³ Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 168.

¹⁸⁴ Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 168. It may be that Jeremiah and other authors who illustrate the kinship ties between Yahweh and the nations can be traced back to the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3) and the table of nations in Genesis 10. Allen P. Ross, “Studies in the book of Genesis, pt 2: The Table of the Nations in Genesis 10: Its Structure,” *BSac* 137, no. 548 (1980): 350, points out that “This Table of Nations, then, traces affiliation of tribes to show relationships, based on some original physical connections. Showing such kinship was necessary for confederations, intermarriage, habitations, possession of lands, and holy war.” In essence, the blessing of the nations through Abraham is depicted in Gen 10 through the table of the nations and their connections. Cf. *Ibid.*, 350: “Charts that register blood ties reflect the social and political relationships necessary for defense and offense. Thus in the ancient world a kindred group was more than a family grown large.”

GOD AS FATHER TO THE KING

The metaphor of Yahweh as father does not only expand to Israel and the nations, but to the king of Israel as well. In order to understand the relationship between Yahweh as father and the king of Israel, first we will briefly mention the ancient Near Eastern background concerning kingship. Secondly, we will discuss concepts of Israelite kingship. Thirdly, we will describe Yahweh's kingship. Fourthly, we will exegete the texts which mention this relationship (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; 29:10; Ps 2:7), and lastly describe other potential connections between kingship and fatherhood.

Kingship in the ancient Near East was typified by a relationship with the gods, keeping order, being just, caring for the people in some manner, acting as a judge and commander of the armies, and finally functioning as an intermediary between the gods and the people.¹⁸⁵ Ancient Israelite kingship also shared some of these values and functions.

The Israelites understood that Yahweh chose the king of Israel. Anointing the king was a religious activity used to signify Yahweh's choosing of him to rule over the people and to connect Yahweh's rule with the king's rule.¹⁸⁶ However, if catastrophes were to take place, or the people were not prospering, then the king was to blame (2 Sam 24). Kingship was considered as the main source of blessings and curses for the people of Israel, because if the king was not righteous, then the people would suffer (Prov 20:28;

¹⁸⁵ Marc Zvi Brettler, "King, Kingship," *NIDB* 3:505-7. Cf. William W. Hallo and William Kelly Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 197), 175, who describe the Mesopotamian king as playing the role of commanding the army and being the greatest judge.

¹⁸⁶ Carol Meyers, "Kinship and Kingship: The Early Monarchy," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (ed. Michael D. Coogan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 197-98.

29:4). The Law was founded on Yahweh as being the source of life and prosperity for the people, and it was the king's duty to enforce and embody it.¹⁸⁷ The king could not do this alone: "What is more, it is clear from the outset that the king is both dependent upon and responsible to Yahweh for the right exercise of his power; for his subjects, whatever their status in society, are one and all Yahweh's people."¹⁸⁸

For Israelite kingship, it was important that the king showed the righteousness of Yahweh, for the king was Yahweh's messiah, the one whom Yahweh's Spirit was upon to govern the people. While the king, like the people, had a covenant with Yahweh, he had a different responsibility: to rule the people with the very character of Yahweh.¹⁸⁹

Yahweh's kingship was the foundation of the Israelite king. One of Yahweh's functions as king was to keep order in the cosmos. Order was not always guaranteed, since chaos was always prevalent in the form of famine, flood, pestilence, or the attack of an enemy. Yahweh, with justice, guaranteed order because he was ruler.¹⁹⁰

Ideology concerning Yahweh as king can be found in the Psalms:

He is to rule over the earth as the universal King; and, what is more, the achievement of justice and righteousness amongst His own chosen people is to be the guarantee of His actual presence as a King who is resolved that His rule shall be just and equitable.... In other words, the divine King is not only worshipped as the Creator; He is also revered as a Judge, who demands that those who would

¹⁸⁷ Aubrey R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), 1-7.

¹⁸⁸ Johnson, *Sacral Kingship*, 8.

¹⁸⁹ Johnson, *Sacral Kingship*, 15-16; E. O. James, *The Ancient Gods: The History and Diffusion of Religion in the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1960), 125.

¹⁹⁰ Keith W. Whitlam, "Israelite Kingship: The Royal Ideology and Its Opponents," in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological, and Political Perspectives* (ed. R. E. Clements; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 129.

rely upon Him must be able to plead their innocence in both thought and deed and their freedom from all taint of insincerity.¹⁹¹

Yahweh as king also battled chaos (Ps 74:12-17, 89:9-10) and created from the chaos (Ps 29:10).¹⁹² Yahweh as king in this manner kept order in the cosmos.

Yahweh is also seen as the high God, the one ruling over all the other gods and the nations (Ps 82).¹⁹³ In the ancient Near East, a universal rule by a high god over other deities was prevalently understood. The worshippers of the high God had a covenant with the high God, and if it was broken, the people would suffer the consequences. Obedience meant blessings, while disobedience meant curses.¹⁹⁴ In considering Yahweh's universal rule, Yahweh could use whatever means necessary to keep order, and punish his people if necessary for good reason:

Thus, when the gods and their respective nations ignore justice and righteousness and allow the wicked to oppress the poor, it is not just human society that suffers; indeed, the very structure of reality is threatened.... An Israel that perverted justice and oppressed the poor was just as much a threat to the stability of the created order as any other sinful nation; and thus Israel was just as much a potential object of divine judgment as any other nation.¹⁹⁵

Israelite kingship was validated by Yahweh's kingship. The Israelite king was to embody the character of Yahweh in order for the people to prosper. Yahweh as king was

¹⁹¹ Johnson, *Sacral Kingship*, 72, 74. Whitlam, "Israelite Kingship," 129, gives a list of the Psalms that talk about the kingship of Yahweh. Some of the Psalms are called Enthronement Psalms, which are as follows: 47:6-8; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1; 93:3-4; 74:12-14; 89:10-11; 47:3-4, 8-9; 48:3-4; 68:30; 97:3, 7, 9; 98:2; 99:1-2.

¹⁹² Rudolf Ficker, "Kingship of God in the Psalms," *BTF* 12 (1980): 64-65. Cf. J. J. M. Roberts, "The Enthronement of Yhwh and David: the Abiding Theological Significance of the Kingship Language of the Psalms," *CBQ* 64, no. 4 (2002): 679-80. Descriptions of Yahweh battling and creating from chaos are similar to the accounts in the *Enuma Elish*.

¹⁹³ Ficker, "Kingship of God," 65. Cf. Roberts, "The Enthronement of Yhwh and David," 676.

¹⁹⁴ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 BCE* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 670, 677.

¹⁹⁵ Roberts, "The Enthronement of Yhwh and David," 681. Cf. Ps 82:5.

the high god, who ruled and kept order by battling the chaos and creating from it. Israelite kingship was to reflect the kingship of Yahweh.¹⁹⁶ Israelite kingship and Yahweh's kingship were validated in familial language. The texts that describe the familial relationship between Yahweh and the Israelite king can be found in 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; 29:10; Ps 2:7.¹⁹⁷

2 Sam 7:14

¹⁴I will be to him a father, and he will be to me a son, that whenever he commits iniquity, then I will correct him with the rod of men and with the wounds of the sons of humankind.

In order to understand the familial language in 2 Sam 7:14, we will mention the setting of the passage and comment on the nature of the familial relationship between Yahweh and the king. The setting of this passage occurs in Nathan's oracle to David concerning his connection with Yahweh.¹⁹⁸ According to A. A. Anderson, David's sonship with Yahweh is not based upon a literal understanding of fatherhood, but upon "adoption, covenant, and royal grant."¹⁹⁹ Anderson continues, "The father-son terminology could be used in respect of the partners of all three legal transactions."²⁰⁰ Covenant may not be mentioned,

¹⁹⁶ Whitlam, "Israelite Kingship," 128-30. Cf. *Ibid.*, 128-30, where it is mentioned that the concept of the king mirroring the character of his deity is characteristic in the ANE. It was understood in the ANE that society could not survive without a king, who was to protect his kingdom as warrior, be righteous as judge, and kept the correct order of worship as priest. The king could take any means necessary against those who would go against the law to keep order in the kingdom and the cosmos.

¹⁹⁷ It seems that two traditions exist concerning Israelite kingship. One can see the negative reactions to kingship in Judg 8:23, where Gideon refuses to be king and 1 Sam 8, where Samuel tells the elders of Israel that having a king would go against the rule of Yahweh.

¹⁹⁸ P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *II Samuel* (AB 9; New York: Doubleday, 1984), 190. Cf. *Ibid.*, 6, 7, where McCarter mentions that the dating of 2 Samuel is around the pre-exilic period, preferably around the "late seventh century" B.C.E. during the time of King Josiah.

¹⁹⁹ A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11; Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 122.

but it can be alluded to by דסח “good-will,” “covenant loyalty,” etc. in verse 15.²⁰¹ He further comments about adoption and the royal grant:

Extra-family adoption does not seem to be attested in the OT (except, perhaps, for Gen 15:3); nevertheless, “I shall be his father, and he shall be my son” (v 14a) may be an adoption formula but not exclusively linked with adoption as such, since sonship could be established also by covenant (cf. 2 Kgs 16:7) and royal grants.... Moreover, our passage is dealing with “divine adoption” and not with an ordinary legal procedure.²⁰²

One noticeable aspect of Yahweh’s fatherhood with David as king is that Yahweh would punish David if he was disobedient (cf. Jer 46:28). However, it would not be as detrimental as Saul’s punishment. David’s punishment would be more “transitory” in nature (cf. 1 Kgs 11:39; 2 Chr 21:7).²⁰³

McCarter explains the importance of David’s connection with Yahweh as father concerning the royal land grant between a king and his vassal:

Such grants were made patrimonial, and thus permanent, by means of the legal adoption of the vassal as the son of the lord. Here the establishment of a “house” for David is legitimated in the same way. Israel becomes, in effect, the patrimonial estate of David’s family.... [D]ivine grants of ruling offspring were commonly associated with the provision of temples for gods by kings, and it seems likely that in the earliest form of our passage the promise was given in response to David’s expression of an intention to build a temple.²⁰⁴

What can be gathered from this text is that Yahweh, as king, gives permission to David to rule as his representative, so long as he is obedient to Yahweh’s commands. Yahweh, as

²⁰⁰ Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 122.

²⁰¹ Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 122.

²⁰² Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 122.

²⁰³ Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 122. Cf. Ibid., 122: “This half-verse is omitted by the Chronicler who tends to see Nathan’s oracle in the light of the ideal king.”

²⁰⁴ McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 207.

father, blesses David with the covenant of Israel and its land in order to build a temple.

This connection between David and Yahweh is also found within 1 Chronicles.

1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; 29:10

^{17:13} I will be to him a father and he will be to me a son, and my loving kindness I will not remove from him as I removed from the one who was before you.

^{22:10} He will build a house for my name, and he will be to me a son and I to him a father, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.

^{28:6} And he said to me, “Solomon, your son, he will build my house and my courtyards, for I have chosen him for me as a son, and I will be to him a father.

^{29:10} And David blessed Yahweh before the eyes of the assembly. Then David said, “Be blessed, O Yahweh God of Israel our father, forever and ever.”

The familial relationship between David and Yahweh in 2 Samuel will be defined differently in Chronicles. To understand this relationship, we will look at the understanding of Israel’s history from the Chronicler’s perspective, the dating of Chronicles, the perspective of kingship in Chronicles, the narrative structure of the passages that concern Yahweh as father and David as son, and lastly exegete those passages: 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; 29:10.

In comparing these verses with 2 Samuel, it is evident that 1 Chronicles does share similar thoughts about Davidic kingship. According to Sara Japhet, Chronicles has much in common with the Deuteronomistic history. Chronicles, however, “deviates from its predecessor in its theological purpose and general understanding of the history of Israel. Chronicles is not a limited theodicy for a specific crisis, but an attempt to find the general principles which govern the history of Israel.”²⁰⁵ Chronicles has been dated from

²⁰⁵ Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 4. Cf. Ibid., 4-5: “‘History’, according to Chronicles, is a series of concrete expressions of the Lord’s rule

the first half of the sixth century along with Ezekiel to the second century during the time of the Maccabeans. Chronicles' language is that of late biblical Hebrew during the post-exilic era. Japhet, using the language of Chronicles as a starting point, dates Chronicles to the end of the fourth century BCE.²⁰⁶ Such a late dating may take into account Chronicles' theological intent. For Chronicles,

“History” being the concrete expression of God’s and Israel’s interrelationship, the book is centred upon two topics: the God of Israel and the people of Israel, each seen on its own, and in their interaction.... The Chronicler displays a peculiar view of Israel’s election.... The special relationship between the people and their God is viewed not as a “new” creation, the result of a particular historical act at a given historical moment, like the covenant with Abraham or the Exodus from Egypt; rather, it is a “given”; its origins do not lie in the sphere of history but are embedded in the very creation of the world itself. This is, then, an absolute relationship; it is not defined in terms of “covenant” and its validity is akin to that between God and the universe. God’s rule of his people is expressed by his constant, direct and immediate intervention in their history.²⁰⁷

Yahweh’s rule is evident in the Davidic kingship:

The history of Israel also reflects their social and political existence, in which the most prominent feature is the institution of kingship. For the Chronicler, “kingship” is a self-evident political order, but since the kingship of Israel is basically the Lord’s, in the practical administration of the state “the kingdom of the Lord” (*mamleket yhwh* II [2] Chron. 13.8) is entrusted to the hands of David and his dynasty; the Davidic king, chosen by the Lord, sits “on the throne of the Lord” (I [1] Chron. 29.23).²⁰⁸

The description of Yahweh as father occurs in the verses that focus on the Davidic monarchy. The structure in which these verses occur is, according to Japhet, as follows:

I Chron. 10-II Chron. 9: the history of Israel under David and Solomon;
(a) I Chron. 10-12: David becomes king over all Israel;

of the world, determined by his divine attributes.” In essence, this ideology will play a major role in the goals of Chronicles and how the connection is made between Yahweh and David.

²⁰⁶ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 24, 25, 27-28.

²⁰⁷ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 44.

²⁰⁸ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 47.

- (b) I Chron. 13-17: David's initiative to establish the Lord's worship in Jerusalem
- (c) I Chron. 18-20: David's wars;
- (d) I Chron. 21-29: David's steps toward internal organization and stabilization: preparing for the building of the Temple, administrative organization of the state, securing his succession.²⁰⁹

First Chronicles 17:13 is an evident parallel to 2 Sam 7:14 with a few modifications. One is the omission of Yahweh's promise to punish David if he sins.²¹⁰ However, Chronicles emphasizes that "the promise to David is not conditional on his son's behaviour. It is an act of grace towards David himself, for he is 'God's servant' and God is 'with him'; the possibility that David himself might sin does not even come to mind.... By omitting this clause the Chronicler avoids all its corollaries."²¹¹ Those corollaries are the sins of Solomon, the tension between David and Saul, and the emphasis on a conditional promise: "While the conditions themselves are not specified in this context but elsewhere (1 Chron 22.12; 28.7, etc.), the basic premise is also evident here. The Chronicler deviates from the central premise of II [2] Sam. 7 and approaches more closely the Deuteronomistic redaction of I [1] Kings, which does see God's promise as conditional."²¹² Japhet sees the formula, "I will be his father and he will be my son" as an adoption formula.²¹³

First Chronicles 22:10 is the next verse that mentions the connection between Yahweh and David in a father/son relationship. First Chronicles 22-29 focuses on David's actions that prepare for his death and the continuance of the monarchy. These

²⁰⁹ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 8, 10.

²¹⁰ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 333.

²¹¹ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 334.

²¹² Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 334.

²¹³ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 334.

actions are concerned with the ascension of David's son to the throne and building Yahweh a temple. The language of 1 Chr 17 is also apparent in 1 Chr 22:10.²¹⁴ According to 1 Chron 22:10, "David transmits to Solomon the words of the Lord."²¹⁵ First Chronicles 22:10 nearly quotes every word of 2 Sam 7:13-14. It conveys how the temple will be built from a theological perspective—from a man of rest, not a man of war like David.²¹⁶

1 Chronicles 28:6 occurs in David's speech to the people of Israel concerning Solomon's enthronement. One of the most important aspects of this verse concerns the word "chosen": "this change has two aspects: the intensive use of the root *bhr*, 'choose', in order to emphasize Solomon's election, and the further distancing of the adoption formula."²¹⁷

Lastly, 1 Chr 29:10 is a part of David's prayer.²¹⁸ Japhet believes that the phrase "our father" should not be attributed to Yahweh. "To the title 'the God of Israel' is added 'our Father,' thus defining 'Israel' not as the people in general, but as their common forefather Jacob/Israel. This allusion brings to mind the more personal relationship between God and the people's forefathers, thus setting the tone for the blessing and supplication on the people's behalf, culminating in v. 18."²¹⁹ However, grammatically it

²¹⁴ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 392.

²¹⁵ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 396

²¹⁶ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 396-98.

²¹⁷ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 490.

²¹⁸ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 503.

²¹⁹ Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 509. Cf. Ibid., 503: "Verses 10-19 constitute the great prayer of David, an appropriate conclusion to the series of David's addresses. It is defined as 'benediction' and opens with the address 'Blessed art thou, Lord God of our father Israel', which recurs (with some variations) as a fixed formula at the end of the collections of Psalms: 41.13; 72.18; 89.52 [MT 53]; 106.48."

seems that the phrase “our father” can be attributed to Yahweh, since the phrase “God of Israel” is a genitival construction. Nevertheless, the only support Japhet’s conclusion might have is that in Chronicles it appears that Yahweh is not depicted as the father of the people. However, it could be that this title is an affirmation of Yahweh’s rule over the people. If King David is blessing Yahweh as father, then it could be postulated in consideration with the Chronicler’s perspective of history that Yahweh is responsible for the origin of Israel. That does not mean, however, the passage is concerned with the origin of the people.

In the Chronicler’s view, Yahweh’s role as father is connected with the Davidic monarchy. This connection is important in the understanding of history for Chronicles. Yahweh’s rule is over the people, and by divine grace Yahweh chooses David and his descendants to rule over Israel. The father/son relationship may be adoption language, but there is an alternative explanation. Gary N. Knoppers believes that the metaphor of a deity being a father to the king could include international diplomacy, therefore making adoption language seem as a bizarre interpretation of the relationship.²²⁰ The metaphor could represent the

high ideology of the royal court. The employment of metaphorical imagery accentuates the establishment of a close bond between a deity and his human client.... [T]he Chronicler does not use the father-son analogy to describe the relationship between God and Israel. His use of the sonship metaphor is, therefore, significant. He highlights the intimate relationship between God and king as instrumental to implementing critical divine initiatives within Israelite history.²²¹

The relationship between Yahweh and the Davidic monarchy, namely David and Solomon, as father and son in Chronicles harkens back to the social arena of the patron-

²²⁰ Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10-29* (AB 12A; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 670.

²²¹ Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10-29*, 671.

client relationship. David's kingship is unconditional and guaranteed by Yahweh. It must be noted, however, that Yahweh is the true king of Israel, and uses David and Solomon's kingship as a tool to rule over the people. Psalm 2:7 also connects Davidic kingship with Yahweh in a father/son relationship.

Ps 2:7

⁷ I shall declare concerning the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my son. Today I have begotten you."

In order to understand the familial relationship between Yahweh and the king in this passage, we will first mention the social setting of the Psalm. Then we will analyze the term "decree" and the statement "I have begotten you."

The dating of this psalm is debated, and no consensus has been reached.²²² Artur Weiser believes that the social setting of the psalm describes a time when a new king was about to take the throne after the death of the previous king. During this time, he had to quell any potential rebellion, anarchy, or coup so that order could be restored and the monarchy preserved.²²³ Considering this ancient social phenomenon, Ps 2 is a declaration of a king's right to his kingship.

²²² Cf. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50* (AB 16; New York: Doubleday, 1965), xxix, who dates Ps 2 to the 10th century B.C.E.; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part I* (FOTL 14; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 48-49, who believes that Ps 2 is a Messianic Hymn that speaks to the exilic and post-exilic community; Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (OTL; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 109, who says, "We know neither the poet nor the Israelite king into whose mouth this psalm is put as a proclamation of some sort.... [T]he whole psalm can easily be understood as having been uttered by the king alone. The psalm was composed for the occasion of the enthronement of a king of Judah at Jerusalem in the time after David. Its author...is probably to be thought of as belonging to the circle of the court-poets of the king."

²²³ Weiser, *The Psalms*, 109. Cf. Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms* (BERIT OLAM; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 8-9: "The king issues the ultimatum that insurgent rulers and territories must either submit to the new authority or be annihilated (vv. 10-12a)."

In spite of the issue with dating the psalm, there seems to be greater consensus about the interpretation of Ps 2:7. One issue would be concerning the word “decree,” or קֶהַל: “קֶהַל is a term from sacral royal law. It denotes the document of legitimacy, the royal protocol that was written down at the enthronement and thereafter identified the legitimate ruler.”²²⁴ Craigie further explains, “The ‘decree’ is a document, given to the king during the coronation ceremony (cf. 2 Kgs 11:12); it is his personal covenant document, renewing God’s covenant commitment to the dynasty of David. The content of the decree establishes the nature and authority of the newly crowned king.”²²⁵ This decree is supported by the divine speech of Yahweh, that the king was Yahweh’s son from the completion of the coronation ceremony.²²⁶ The authority of this coronation is founded upon the Davidic covenant: “The ascent to the throne hearkens back to David’s election and is equivalent to adoption.”²²⁷ Craigie goes further and concludes that there is a connection with the Sinai covenant:

At the heart of the covenant is the concept of *sonship*; the human partner in the covenant is *son* of the covenant God, who is *father*. This covenant principle of sonship is a part of the Sinai Covenant between God and Israel. The covenant God cares for Israel as a father cares for his son (Deut 1:31) and God disciplines Israel as a father disciplines a son (Deut 8:5). The focus of the Sinai covenant is the relationship between God and nation; in the covenant with the house of David, the focus is narrowed to a relationship between God and the king, but the concept of sonship is still integral to this covenant.²²⁸

²²⁴ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59* (CC; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 129-30.

²²⁵ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (2nd ed.; WBC 19; Nashville, TN: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004), 67.

²²⁶ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 9-10. Cf. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 67, where he emphasizes the renewal of the covenant between Yahweh and the “house of David” being enacted on the coronation day and through Yahweh’s recognition of the king as his son.

²²⁷ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 9.

²²⁸ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 67.

While others have mentioned that adoption took place at the coronation ceremony, Craigie mentions the limitations of such an interpretation: “‘I have begotten you’ is metaphorical language; it means more than simply adoption, which has legal overtones, and implies that a ‘new birth’ of a divine nature took place during the coronation. It is important to stress, nevertheless, that the Davidic king, as son of God, was a *human being*, not a divine being, as was held in certain Near Eastern concepts of kingship.”²²⁹

Psalms 2:7, in its context, demonstrates that the relationship between the king and Yahweh not only refers to the Davidic covenant, but reaches far into the history of Israel and the Sinai covenant. The sonship of the king is supported by Yahweh’s decree. It is not a relationship of adoption, but of transformation. The king has a higher status than the people of Israel because he is the mediator of Yahweh to the people. Yahweh is his patron, and he is the human representative of Israel to Yahweh and Yahweh to Israel. He was to embody Yahweh’s character. Through Yahweh’s character “a king symbolizes for his people and bestows upon them life, unity, and prosperity.”²³⁰

What can be gathered thus far concerning these passages is that the relationship between Yahweh and the Israelite king, in some cases David, is described in varying ways. For 2 Samuel, David has a conditional covenant, which is solidified with an adoption statement, covenant, and royal grant for land. In 1 Chronicles the covenant is portrayed as unconditional, because Yahweh’s rule over Israel is a given, and kingship is only a tool of Yahweh’s rule. In Ps 2:7, kingship is founded upon the Davidic and Sinai

²²⁹ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 67. Cf. Schaefer, *Psalms*, 10; Weiser, *The Psalms*, 113. Also cf. Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 131: “The prophetic address, ‘You are my son, I myself have begotten you!’ reveals itself as a creative word, one that originates a new existence. The chosen king is drawn to the side of God, he becomes the heir and representative of his rule.”

²³⁰ Carroll Stuhlmueller, “Yahweh-King and Deutero-Isaiah,” *BR* 15 (1970): 33.

covenant, forged by the decree of Yahweh's blessing, thereby transforming the identity of the king to Yahweh's son. While these differences exist, the general thread concerning Yahweh as father to the king in these passages is that Yahweh makes a certain statement to identify the king as his son. Whether through adoption or "a new birth," the king becomes Yahweh's son in a metaphorical sense through Yahweh's declaration. The king is to represent Yahweh to the people and rule over them according to the character of Yahweh. The Israelite king has no kingship without Yahweh.

The connection between Yahweh as father and the Israelite king as son is the validation of Israelite kingship from Yahweh and the responsibility inherent in that position. From our study so far, we can postulate that there are possible parallels between the image of Yahweh as king and father, to which we now turn.

The first parallel between the images of Yahweh as king and that of father is that Yahweh is the source of life, guidance, protection, and security for the people of Israel.²³¹ As mentioned previously, the king was the source of blessing for the kingdom as well as the father for his household. It can be postulated that Yahweh as king and father guides and protects Israel as the source of blessing and life for the people. Observing suzerain treaties helps to reveal the connection between Yahweh as father and king. Suzerain treaties, which were between a king and his vassal, usually were described in terms of "father" and "son" (2 Kgs 16:7). This language signified obedience and loyalty to the authority of the relationship. "Love" is a term that is also used in such language to signify obedience and loyalty. Two examples can be found in 1 Sam 18:3 and 18:16, wherein love is used to indicate political loyalties to David.²³² Considering suzerain treaties, we

²³¹ Gerstenberger, *Yahweh the Patriarch*, 6.

could say that the Sinai and Davidic covenant make the people and the king vassals and sons of Yahweh, who is king and father to them.²³³

The second parallel between the images of Yahweh as king and that of father is that Yahweh is the main authority much like the king is to his kingdom and the father to his family (Mal 1).²³⁴ The authority of Yahweh can be seen in a redemptive sense. As king, Yahweh was the source of blessing by keeping order in the midst of prevailing chaos. As father, Yahweh was the source of blessing for his “sons” and “daughters” by calling them to return from exile and re-inherit the land that Yahweh had promised their ancestors.²³⁵

The last parallel between Yahweh as father and king can be found in punishing those out of order. As mentioned previously, Yahweh could take whatever means necessary to punish the people of Israel to keep order. This entails the kingly duty of Yahweh. However, since it has been established that Yahweh also sees Israel as his children, the act of punishment becomes more personal. This is evident in Prov 3:12, which illustrates how Yahweh corrects those whom he loves.

²³² Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 33; Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, “Love in the OT,” *NIDB* 3:718-19. Cf. William L. Moran, “Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *CBQ* 25, no. 1 (1963): 79, who cites some Egyptian literature where a vassal uses the term “love” towards the Pharaoh. After studying the passages concerning Yahweh as father to the king, we may be able to conclude that these passages also describe a patron-client relationship as well.

²³³ Roland de Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, trans. by Damian McHugh (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), 159; John Goldingay, “Covenant, OT and NT,” *NIDB* 1:770, 778.

²³⁴ Cf. Gerstenberger, *Yahweh the Patriarch*, 7-9, who explains that in the postexilic period, there seems to be a return to naming Yahweh as father more than likely because of the fall of Judah. Such language as father would seem to help the people relate to Yahweh, even though there was some bitterness towards Yahweh. Even though sources do not elaborate on the use of Yahweh referring to himself as king, an explanation could be that Yahweh is reminding the people of the Sinai covenant, which seemed to allow Yahweh to be king and father to the people. Cf. Mal 1:14, wherein Yahweh names himself as a great king.

²³⁵ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 31. Cf. Isa 43:1-6. It could be said that the father is responsible for the order of his family world much as the king is responsible for the order of the kingdom. However, the king is responsible for order in a larger perspective because order in the kingdom would have an effect on the cosmos as a whole, as mentioned earlier.

The purpose of using the metaphor of Yahweh's fatherhood to the king is to validate Israelite kingship. While the descriptions of the relationship and requirements vary, the king is to embody the character of Yahweh for the sake of the nation. The relationship is founded upon a decree from Yahweh, which either makes the king the adopted son of Yahweh, or the king experiences "a new birth," an identity created by Yahweh through proclamation, much like Exod 4:22-23 with Israel. Israelite kingship is also founded upon Yahweh's decree to David.

The images of Yahweh as king and father also share similarities. Yahweh is the source of life for the people. Yahweh as the source of life for the people works in a redemptive manner: keeping order in the midst of chaos and bringing the people from exile. Yahweh as the source of life also works in a punitive manner, for all of reality depends on order. The punitive aspect of Yahweh, however, was not without love or concern.²³⁶ Considering what has been discussed about fatherhood and kingship so far, the care for the people or family seems to be an intricate part of both kingship and fatherhood.

In light of all that has been discussed, Norman K. Gottwald shows that such descriptions of the gods, including Yahweh, are shaped by the experience of the people, which comes from viewing nature.²³⁷ Even though Morton Smith gives a general idea of the ancient Near Eastern gods and how they acted as father and king, it seems appropriate to connect it with Yahweh:

²³⁶ Cf. Ps 82 concerning the punishment of the powers/gods of other nations, their injustice, and its effect on the cosmos. There also seems to be a connection with kingship and fatherhood in light of land, since the king did inherit land like a son would from a father.

²³⁷ Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, 677.

He is the father and king of his people, his child, whom he especially favors. The human king is his son, servant, or favorite, whom he especially protects. But he also protects ordinary men, cures diseases and grants other material favors, cleanses sin, and comforts the afflicted. In short, the god described by prayer is everywhere the god who will do the things which are most prayed for by the people who have most cause to pray. But as father and king, the god of worship is just as well as merciful, an object—not to say an objectification—of fear as well as love.²³⁸

Israel and its king were not the only ones who were called Yahweh's sons. There is another group that is mentioned in the Old Testament: "the sons of God."

SONS OF GOD

In the Old Testament, a few texts contain an interesting phrase: the "sons of God." Who are these "sons of God"? How do they contribute to the understanding of Yahweh as father? In order to understand the identity of the sons of God and their relationship to Yahweh, we will exegete the passages that mention them, i.e. Job 1:6; 38:7; and Ps 29:1; 82:6; 89:7 in order to understand their relationship to Yahweh as father, and potentially as creator and king as well.²³⁹

Job 1:6; 38:7

^{1:6} And it occurred during those days when the sons of God came to stand before the Lord. Then the satan came also in their midst.

^{38:7} When the stars of the morning gave a ringing cry together, and all the sons of God raised a shout?

²³⁸ Morton Smith, *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh, Volume 1: Studies in Historical Method, Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism* (ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen; New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), 21-22.

²³⁹ Gen 6:2, 4 and Deut 32:8 (LXX) will not be included in this portion. Due to the complexities of these passages, addressing them will go beyond the scope of this thesis. See Sven Fockner, "Reopening the Discussion: Another Contextual Look at the Sons of God," *JSOT* 32, no. 4 (2008): 435-56; David E. Stevens, "Does Deuteronomy 32:8 Refer to 'Sons of God' or to 'Sons of Israel'?" *BSac* 154 no. 614 (1997): 131-41; and Michael S. Heiser, "Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God," *BSac* 158 no. 629 (2001): 52-74 concerning the issues surrounding these verses.

Before exploring the connection between Yahweh and the sons of God in Job, we will first mention the issue of dating the book of Job, the literary context of Job 1:6; 38:7, and search for possible connections between the metaphors of Yahweh as father, king, and creator.²⁴⁰

The book of Job has been dated from anywhere between the tenth to the fourth centuries BCE because of linguistic evidence and lack of historical allusions.²⁴¹ Norman Habel, while admitting the difficulties of dating the book of Job, concludes with a theological outlook: “Thus, while the cumulative evidence may tend to suggest a postexilic era, the book’s literary integrity, paradoxical themes, heroic setting, and uncomfortable challenge are pertinent for students of wisdom and life in any era and far more important than the precise date of this ancient literary work.”²⁴² Despite the difficulties, the “sons of God” illustrate important aspects of Yahweh’s fatherhood.

Job 1:6 demonstrates that Yahweh is among the “sons of God” in a kingly fashion:

The members of the council assembly are the “sons of God” (*b^enē hā’^elōhīm*), the host of the celestial court who surround Yahweh, their King (1 Kings 22:19ff.; Pss. 29:1; 82:1; 89:6-9 [5-8E]; Dan 7:9-10) and who were once part of the primordial scene (38:7; Gen. 6:2, 4).... The “sons of God” first “present

²⁴⁰ Since the book of Job is difficult to locate historically, discussing the issue of its dating is important, because most of the other passages that mention Yahweh as father have a historical context.

²⁴¹ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (OTL; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 40. Cf. Ibid., 41, “The absence of any prior reference to a particular word or root in earlier biblical texts is no proof that such a word did not exist, as the recent findings from Ugarit have demonstrated.... Another approach is to identify a particular period when the issues or problems addressed in the book of Job were current in Israel. The difficulty here is that the polarities and theological conflicts of the book are so diverse and the resolutions considered so paradoxical, that the identification of a particular audience is almost impossible.” Also cf. Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (AB 15; New York: Doubleday, 1973), xl, xli, who also comes to the same conclusion that the author is hard to determine as well as the date.

²⁴² Habel, *The Book of Job*, 42. Cf. John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 18-20, who believes that Job should be dated to the 7th century B.C.E.

themselves” before Yahweh, thereby accentuating their role as royal attendants duly subservient to their divine monarch (as in Zech. 6:5; Prov. 22:29; cf. 1 Sam. 16:21).²⁴³

This passage makes the connection between Yahweh as father and king concerning the “sons of God.” As “sons” and “vassals,” they have no choice but to obey Yahweh, as they present themselves as servants. As “sons,” they have the right to be claimed by Yahweh. As “vassals,” they have the right to serve king Yahweh. It must be noted, however, that the term “son” concerning these divine beings relates to their nature: “In Canaanite religion the sons of God (El) are envisaged as his physical descendants; but the term ‘sons of’ could also be used in Hebrew for members of a group belonging or adhering to, or in some way participating in the nature of, their ‘father’ (e.g., ‘sons of the prophets’).”²⁴⁴ Even the satan is one of Yahweh’s servants, not to mention “sons.”²⁴⁵

In Job, we also find another connection between the “sons of God” and the fatherhood of Yahweh. Job 38:7 combines the creation motif and fatherhood in connection with the “sons of God.”

Job 38 depicts “Yahweh’s defense of his cosmic design.”²⁴⁶ Yahweh challenges Job about his wisdom concerning the creation of the world.²⁴⁷ The “sons of God” are equated with “the morning stars.”²⁴⁸ The praise that comes forth from the “sons of God”

²⁴³ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 89. Cf. Pope, *Job*, 9, who notes that these are lesser beings, and compares them to the Ugaritic pantheon.

²⁴⁴ David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20* (WBC 17; Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 19.

²⁴⁵ Pope, *Job*, 9.

²⁴⁶ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 517.

²⁴⁷ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 537.

²⁴⁸ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 538. Ibid., 538, also mentions how this verse connects with creation in Genesis: “The allusion to the stars, however, may have its roots in astral mythology. The worship of astral deities was common in the ancient Near East and persisted in Israel for centuries (Deut. 4:19; II Kings

is not surprising. The connection of the building of the earth can be made with the construction of the temple: “Celebration apparently accompanied various stages of building construction. When the foundation of the Second Temple was laid it was acclaimed with music and song (Ezra 3:10-12) and shouting accompanied the raising of its capstone (Zech. 4:7). The sons of God who celebrate the construction of earth are presumably the entire entourage of the divine court.”²⁴⁹ In essence, we can conclude that “If Job had been present at this festive occasion, he would know the answer to God’s questions about the blueprints and building of earth.”²⁵⁰

In Job, the fatherhood of Yahweh is related to kingship and creation. Yahweh as king and father relates to the “sons of God” not only as their king who commands them, but as their father, the one who created them. In the beginning when God was establishing the foundation of the earth, the “sons of God” were with him, and shouted with praise. Even though the text does not identify when the “sons of God” were created, it is evident, according to Job, that they were present at the creation of heaven and earth. The kingship motif in connection with Yahweh as father and the “sons of God” is most prominent in the Psalms, i.e. Ps 29:1, 82:6, and 89:7.

17:16; 21:3...). Here, however, the polemical aspect is suppressed and the focus lies on the participation of the celestial court in the celebration of earth’s creation in a manner similar to its participation in the divine decision to create human beings (Gen. 1:26).” Also cf. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 495 n. 21: “In various Near Eastern religions the morning stars were venerated as gods and goddesses. Many of them had an important role in the pantheon, esp. Venus. In this reference they are identified among the sons of God, or angels, who were created by God for special service. In Gen. 1 the stars were created on the fourth day, but here they existed at the initial stages of creation. This apparent discrepancy indicates that ‘the morning stars’ in this context is primarily a term that forms a synonymous parallelism with ‘the sons of God,’ who, it is assumed, existed prior to the creation of the earth. It is, therefore, used metaphorically to refer to these heavenly creatures independent of the existence of the physical stars.”

²⁴⁹ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 538.

²⁵⁰ Habel, *The Book of Job*, 538.

Ps 29:1; 82:6; 89:7

^{29:1} A Psalm for David: Ascribe to Yahweh, sons of God (אֱלֹהִים). Ascribe to Yahweh glory and might!

^{82:6} I said, “You are gods, and all of you are sons of the Most High (עֲלִיּוֹן).”

^{89:7} For who in the sky can be compared to Yahweh? Who can resemble Yahweh among the sons of God (אֱלֹהִים)?

We will explore the connection between Yahweh and the sons of God in these passages by studying the literary context of the passages, the difference of the phrases “sons of God” and “sons of the Most High,” and other possible connections between the metaphors of Yahweh as father, king, and creator.²⁵¹

The main theme of Ps 29 speaks to the power of Yahweh: “Psalm 29 is a hymn to God’s majesty and power. The three movements comprise an invitation to praise (vv. 1-2), a description of the theophany (vv. 3-9), and a concluding acclamation (vv. 10-11). . . . The initial summons is addressed to supernatural rather than human beings, the heavenly court (cf. Ps 89:5-7).”²⁵² It seems that the psalm might have been used as a victory song to Yahweh. “The military connotations of this initial call to praise emerge primarily in the use of the word ‘strength’ (v 1). The Lord’s strength is to be praised in that it has been

²⁵¹ We will only mention briefly the possible dating of Ps 29 and 89. Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part I*, 132, comments that Psalm 29 has been dated to the postexilic era. Concerning the date of Psalm 89 being located in the exilic era, cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 404: “Both the hymn and the central divine discourse, understood as an oracle of salvation, were integrated into the community lament from exilic feasts of community lamentation.” Also cf. Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 203: “In summary, we may venture to say that for individual sections of the psalm (especially vv. 6–15) the extreme antiquity assumed by Albright may be accepted and that individual traditions and that the David traditions that go back to 2 Sam 7 may be dated in the time of the kings, but that the real terminus a quo of the dating of the whole text seems to be given with the death of King Josiah. The terminus ad quem could likely be the exile.”

²⁵² Schaefer, *Psalms*, 71.

demonstrated in the victory following the battle.”²⁵³ Therefore, the “sons of God” were also expected to join the celebration. “Thus, in Ps 29:1–2, the congregation who are singing the psalm call upon the members of the divine council, or heavenly court, to join with them in the praise of God.”²⁵⁴ There is also an evident connection with Yahweh as king: “either originally or in its later usage, the psalm was used in conjunction with the so-called enthronement psalms.”²⁵⁵ Therefore, Ps 29:1 connects with the enthronement psalms by demonstrating that Yahweh is a victorious king in battle. The admonishment of the singers is for the divine beings to worship Yahweh with them as warrior and king.

The main issue that stands out in 29:1 is the phrase “sons of God.” They are not the sons of אלהים but אלים. אלים might be considered as “a singular with enclitic, a plural applied to a single God, or as a plural of the appellative.... The balance of evidence suggests that *’elim* of the two Hebrew passages [29:1; 89:7] was the proper name *’el* plus the enclitic, a usage long dead in Hebrew when the apocalyptists revived the use of *’el* and *’elim*, taking the latter as an appellative plural.”²⁵⁶ Therefore, the author of Ps 29 and 89 most likely used this form as a reference to Yahweh.

Psalms 82 can be classified as “The downfall of unjust Gods.”²⁵⁷ Yahweh as “The Most High” judges these deities for their failure to maintain social order. “The ‘divine council’ or ‘gods’ (v.1b) are judges or governors who share God’s responsibility to

²⁵³ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 246.

²⁵⁴ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 246.

²⁵⁵ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 245.

²⁵⁶ Frank M. Cross, “אל,” *TDOT* 1:255.

²⁵⁷ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 201.

administer justice and protect the rights of the downtrodden and defenseless (cf. Exod 21:6; 22:8; 2 Chr 19:5-6).”²⁵⁸

Because of their failure, they will die like ordinary human beings, and the psalm ends with the desire for Yahweh to establish order.²⁵⁹ The injustice of the divine beings spreads to all creation. More than likely there is a connection with Gen 6: “The connection between injustice and the physical world is expressed also in Pss 75:2-3; 96:10; Isa 24:1-6; Hos 4:1-3. This is like the effects of the first sin in Genesis, where the consequences fan out to every level of relation, including the human with the environment.”²⁶⁰

Psalm 82 appears “to provide an answer to the question of how the injustice prevailing on earth can be reconciled with belief in the reality of the righteous God (cf. Ps. 58.1ff.). This could come about the more easily as the idea of dethroned gods, who in the Yahweh religion were regarded as being subject to God and constituted the household of Yahweh, is also otherwise not unfamiliar to the Old Testament (cf., e.g., Pss. 7.7; 89.6f.; 1 Kings 22.19; Job 1.6ff.; 2:1; 15:8).”²⁶¹

It can be postulated that Ps 82 could be understood as an answer to theodicy. The “sons of God” did not obey the will of Yahweh “the father,” and they were punished because it affected the whole cosmos.²⁶² Therefore, Ps 82 demonstrates the kingship and fatherhood of Yahweh over the divine beings and the whole cosmos as his household.²⁶³

²⁵⁸ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 201.

²⁵⁹ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 202.

²⁶⁰ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 202.

²⁶¹ Weiser, *The Psalms*, 557.

In Ps 89, the “sons of the God” appear in a hymn: “(1) Vv. 1–18: a hymn on the *הסדי יהוה* which have become evident in God’s work of creation (battle against chaos) and in the election of the dynasty of David.”²⁶⁴ That is why a connection can be made with Ps 89 and Ps 2, because of the connection with David in the royal psalms: “Finally, Psalm 89 has a special relationship to the royal psalms 2, 72, 110, and 132: on the one hand it extends a bridge backward to Psalms 2 and 72, while on the other hand it points forward to Psalms 110 and 132.”²⁶⁵ The “sons of God” in this passage are to elevate the sovereignty of Yahweh. “The metaphorical content of vv 6–9 is drawn from the concept of a heavenly assembly around a great kingly God, who rules as a respected, even dreaded, sovereign.”²⁶⁶ Yahweh’s sovereignty as king over the “sons of God” could be the possible connection between Ps 89 and Ps 82: “Yahweh is without comparison in his glory and loftiness (vv. 6–8). The conceptions let us recognize that divine powers (*בני אלים*) were stripped of their might by Yahweh. The God of Israel now is enthroned among them as the *עליון*. The pantheon of gods suffered a loss of power. Yahweh appears as ‘king of the gods.’”²⁶⁷

²⁶² Cf. Schaefer, *Psalms*, 202: “The powers that control a society where the rights of the defenseless are violated or neglected are unmasked as failures. Darkness is their residence and serves as a metaphor for social disorder (Ps 11:2; Isa 59:9). This social disturbance tilts the cosmic balance (‘all the foundations of the earth are shaken,’ v.5), engenders darkness, is akin to a regression to chaos.”

²⁶³ There is another interpretation of this psalm concerning the divine beings. The term that is used is “*בני עליון*.” H. –J. Zobel, “*עליון*,” *TDOT* 11:128-29, says that Yahweh and Elyon are differing beings in Deut 32:8-9 and Ps 82:1-8. In Deut, Elyon is the one who assigns Israel to Yahweh. In Ps 82, Yahweh seems to be part of the pantheon of El. He condemns the sons of Elyon and proves that he is the Most High, like in Deut 32. In the end, Zobel says that Yahweh replaces Elyon in the Israelite faith.

²⁶⁴ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150* (CC; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 202.

²⁶⁵ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100* (ed. Klaus Baltzer; trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 402.

²⁶⁶ Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (WBC 20; Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 420.

Psalm 89 combines both aspects of Ps 29 and 82: the praise of Yahweh and the description of his position among the “sons of God.” In the psalms, the “sons of God” appear to serve as proof of Yahweh’s sovereignty. Yahweh as king in these psalms is illustrated in the context surrounding the verses that mention the “sons of God.” Yahweh as father is demonstrated by the phrase “sons of God.” Yahweh as king is sovereign, and he rules the cosmos and the divine beings as a father rules his house, with justice and care.

In sum, the “sons of God” are strategically placed in these passages. They are seen at the time of creation, at their own judgment before the throne of Yahweh, and given charge of the nations. These aspects evidently speak to Yahweh as creator and king. However, Yahweh as father is an image not ignored.²⁶⁷ The “sons of God” are used as a reminder of Yahweh’s fatherhood, even though the image of king, creator, and judge are used at the forefront. Yahweh, nevertheless, fulfills his fatherly duties through creative acts and keeping the cosmos, his household, in order.

The next role that the “sons of God” play in attributing fatherhood to Yahweh is to show that Yahweh is a social entity:

²⁶⁷ Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 205-06. Cf. Ibid., 206, where Kraus describes 89:9-14 as the description of Yahweh’s proof of kingship because of conquering chaos.

²⁶⁸ There may be a possible parallel between Yahweh and El concerning the metaphors of father, king, and creator. Cf. Cross, “לך,” *TDOT* 1:253: “The one image of El that seems to tie all his myths together is that of the patriarch. He is the primordial father of gods and men, sometimes stern, often compassionate, always wise in judgment. While he has taken on royal prerogatives and epithets, he stands closer to the patriarchal judge ruling over the council of the gods. He is at once father of the family of gods and ruler, functions brought together in the human sphere only in those societies which are organized in tribal leagues or in kingdoms where kinship survives as an organizing power in the society.... El is creator, the ancient one, whose extraordinary procreative powers have populated heaven and earth, and there is little evidence that his vigor flagged.... In Akkadian and Amorite religion, as also in Canaanite, he frequently plays the role of ‘god of the father,’ the ‘social’ deity who governs the tribe or league, leading it in its migrations, directing its wars, establishing its justice, often bound to league or king with kinship or covenant bounds.”

Such realities as the divine council, the sons of God, and the heavenly messengers witness that Israel's God is by nature a social being, functioning within a divine community (e.g., Gen 1:26; 6:1-4; Isa 6:8; Jer 23:18-23; Prov 8:22-31)....These and other passages witness to the richness and complexity of the divine realm. God is not in heaven alone but is engaged in a relationship of mutuality within that realm and chooses to share, say, the creative process with other divine beings (Gen. 1:26).²⁶⁹

While these divine beings remain nameless, they are shown to play a role in Yahweh's creation. Their origins are not specified, but it is evident that Yahweh is father to them as well as to Israel and all nations. Yahweh as father is a social being, in relationship with Israel and with these divine beings. In this manner, the image of father becomes a haven of identity, and has the power to create a unity between deity and deity, and between deity and humanity.

Considering that Yahweh is a social being, especially in the fatherhood role, a question comes to mind: "What are the characteristics of Yahweh as father?" We now turn to the next section to answer this question.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD AS FATHER

We have previously discussed the character and responsibilities of a father in ancient Israel. While the descriptions of a father's character and responsibilities were many, only a few are applied to Yahweh as father, such as compassion, rebuke, correction, and redemption. We will explore the characteristics of Yahweh as father by exegeting the following passages: Deut 1:31; 8:5; Mal 1:6; 2:15; Pss 68:5; 89:26; 103:13-14; Prov 3:12; Ezek 16:1-6; Isa 50:1-3; 63:16.

²⁶⁹ Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, 16-17. Ibid., 18, where he also makes a profound statement concerning this social aspect of Yahweh. "God was in relationship to the world before there ever was an Israel, and so God's relationship with Israel must be understood as a subset within this more inclusive and comprehensive divine-world relationship."

Deut 1:31; 8:5

^{1:31} And in the wilderness where you saw the Lord your God who carried you like a man carries his son among every road you walked until you came unto this place.

^{8:5} Now continue to know in your heart that as a man will discipline his son, the Lord your God is the one who disciplines you.

In order to understand Yahweh's fatherhood in these passages, we will discuss the meaning of the terms "love" and "discipline," and how they play a role in the narrative setting of the passages they are located within.

Deuteronomy 1:31 and 8:5 indicate Yahweh as one who loves and disciplines his child. As emphasized previously, Deuteronomy emphasizes that the relationship between Israel and Yahweh is through covenant. Love is an aspect of that covenant. However, "love" as a covenant term should not be understood as legalistic: "The tendency to view the covenant as a legal contract automatically binding man to God had to be countered; the nature of the covenant, as an expression of a living relationship, demanded of man not a legalistic acquiescence, but a loving commitment to God."²⁷⁰ Love, in such a relationship, must be reciprocated by both parties. "Love must be a response toward God from man's heart; the command to love does not reduce the element of response, but recognizes that it is in the nature of man to forget and to be faithless."²⁷¹ Love in Deuteronomy is demonstrated by obedience to the commandments of Yahweh.²⁷² The context of Deut 1:31, which is Moses' speech in 1:29-33, encourages the people to fight

²⁷⁰ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 37.

²⁷¹ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 41.

²⁷² Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 42.

for Yahweh, since he delivered them in the exodus and carried them through the wilderness.²⁷³ The action of love is depicted by Yahweh who carries Israel through the wilderness, and this action is compared to a father carrying his son. “The father/son imagery is one of several ways in which the theme of the *love* of God is developed in Deuteronomy.... Although the theme of love reflects to some extent the treaty terminology, in this context it seems to be a more general use of language to elaborate on the protective care of a fatherly God.”²⁷⁴ Yahweh as a father in this passage is protective, caring, and loving towards Israel.²⁷⁵

While Deut 1:31 shows the love of Yahweh for Israel, and how it is portrayed in the wilderness, Deut 8:5 shows Yahweh as the one who disciplines Israel. Deuteronomy 8 demonstrates the concern with “dangers inherent in the land’s very goodness.... Prosperity might cause Israel to forget its dependence on Yahweh, and dangerous attitudes generated by affluence could result in a failure of loyalty and obedience. The text seeks to counter self-sufficient pride and the disobedience that would result from it by reinvigorating readers’ memory of Yahweh’s past favors and lessons.”²⁷⁶ The wilderness was not only a place wherein Yahweh showed the love of a father, but the discipline wrought by a father. Yahweh used the wilderness in the “tempering of national character and a test of faith and obedience.”²⁷⁷ It would appear that the wilderness

²⁷³ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 28.

²⁷⁴ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 103.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11* (AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 148, where the idea of “carrying” could indicate sustaining and providing (Isa 1:2; 23:4). The idea of Yahweh “carrying” Israel is a repeated theme (Deut 2:7; 8:3-4; 29:4).

²⁷⁶ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 107.

²⁷⁷ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 107.

journey would have been a terrible method used by Yahweh to bring about “character,” i.e. obedience. However, that might not be the case: “Just as human discipline takes place through punishment (Deut 21:18; 22:18), divine discipline also operates in terms of suffering, humbling, and testing, but in the end it is for Israel’s own good (vv. 2, 3, 16).”²⁷⁸

The verb used, “discipline” (יָסַר), means instruction, in the sense that knowledge was to be communicated “in order to shape specific conduct.”²⁷⁹ Instruction was important, especially for children, so that they could become outstanding members of the community.²⁸⁰ However, the verb can also indicate “correction,” or using punishment in order to instruct someone or a child of correct behavior. This too, was a part of parenting.²⁸¹ In light of Deut 8:5, Yahweh’s punishment was not meant to destroy the people: “God’s chastising influence is revealed in historical events; they can also point to even worse actions should the people reject instruction and chastisement. Chastisement (*yāsār*) can come through the tribulations of the wilderness (Dt. 8:5).... The consequences of God’s rigorous discipline can include preservation of life (Ps. 118:18) and the strengthening of the people (Hos 7:15).”²⁸² As Craigie rightly notes, the wilderness was a time to mature the adolescent Israel so that they could inherit the land.²⁸³ It can be postulated that Yahweh loved Israel as a father, but disciplined Israel within the

²⁷⁸ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 112.

²⁷⁹ R. D. Branson and G. J. Botterweck, “יָסַר; מוֹסֵר,” *TDOT* 6:129.

²⁸⁰ Branson and Botterweck, “יָסַר; מוֹסֵר,” *TDOT* 6:129: “Proverbial wisdom requires parents to fulfill this duty zealously to assure that the child will develop properly as a productive member of society (Prov 19:18; 29:17).”

²⁸¹ Branson and Botterweck, “יָסַר; מוֹסֵר,” *TDOT* 6:129.

²⁸² Branson and Botterweck, “יָסַר; מוֹסֵר,” *TDOT* 6:130.

²⁸³ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 186.

wilderness so that they would inherit the land and not abuse it or forget who gave it to them. In the same manner, discipline is not for the sake of the individual, but for the sake of the community.²⁸⁴

Mal 1:6; 2:15

^{1:6} “A son honors a father, and a servant his master. And if I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am Lord, where is my reverence,” says the Lord of hosts to you priests, who despise my name. Yet you say, “In what manner have we despised your name?”

^{2:15} Did the one not make him with a portion of spirit? Now what was the one seeking? Offspring of God (Godly offspring). Now be on guard with your spirit and do not deal treacherously with the wife of your youth.

In order to understand honor, fear, and the phrase “offspring of God” in these two passages, first we will discuss the context in which these verses appear. Secondly, we will discuss the meaning of honor, fear, and “offspring of God.” Lastly, we will see the application of these terms within Mal 1:6; 2:15.

Malachi 1:6-2:9 begins the section about honoring and fearing Yahweh.²⁸⁵ This section “is a dispute with the priests.... The passage begins with a statement of a premise that would have been considered universally true in the Ancient Near East. ‘A son honors (imperfect suggests repeated action) his father and a servant his lord’.”²⁸⁶ “Fear” and “honor” are parallel terms in this passage. “Bamberger says that the fear and love of God as motives for righteous conduct are absent in the biblical literature. He cites Ps 130:4

²⁸⁴ Cf. John J. Pilch, “Parenting,” *HBSV* :145: “This is a secondary value by which adults socialize their offspring in the core value of family, a kinship reality. It is intimately related to the core values of honor and shame, since kinship honor consists in loyalty to the family. Thus, the parenting process seeks to instill appropriate positive values in the offspring in order to strengthen group or family cohesion.”

²⁸⁵ Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC 32; Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 307.

²⁸⁶ Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 310.

and Exod 20:20 as examples of the term ‘fear’ not meaning terror. In Malachi 1:6 ‘fear’ is parallel to ‘honor,’ or ‘respect’ which should be demonstrated by keeping the law of sacrifice.”²⁸⁷

Pieter Verhoef defines honor as follows: “When a son honors his father he is acknowledging his ‘weight,’ his importance, his authority.”²⁸⁸ Considering the context, Yahweh is shown honor by correct sacrifice. There is a possible connection with the fifth commandment in Exod 20:12 and Deut 5:16, “Honor your mother and father,” since the same word for honor, כבוד, is used there, and Yahweh in this passage is called “father.”²⁸⁹ כבוד could also mean “glory.” “The word כָּבוֹד not only means ‘honor’ but it also means ‘glory.’ It is characteristic of priestly theology (Exod 14:4, 17–18; 24:16–17; 33:18; 40:34–35). Glory stands for the awe-inspiring presence of God.”²⁹⁰ Yahweh’s “name” is also important in this passage: “If ‘glory’ is a priestly word, ‘name’ is a Deuteronomic word. In Deuteronomy the name of God stands for his presence (Deut 12:5, 11, 21).”²⁹¹ In essence, “The glory of God must be acknowledged by his people, and in this sense it is his ‘honor.’ To give glory to the Lord (Jer. 13:16) is to honor him.”²⁹²

Malachi 1:6 reminds Israel of its past by reiterating the image of Yahweh as father, who is their Lord as well.²⁹³ It could be that Yahweh demands this honor because

²⁸⁷ Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 311.

²⁸⁸ Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 211.

²⁸⁹ Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 311.

²⁹⁰ Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 311.

²⁹¹ Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 311.

²⁹² Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 213.

he first showed love to Israel through the exodus, made a covenant with them, became their father, and gave them an inheritance of land. When they rebelled, they came under captivity. However, it would appear that Yahweh is indicating to them that he has not lost his status because of their exile, and that they are still in relationship with him: “In the old Semitic world, even to the human parent, honour was due before love.”²⁹⁴

Malachi 2:15 is part of the section in Malachi (2:10-16) that deals with both the people and the priests about faithfulness.²⁹⁵ Malachi 2:15 is a verse that is hard to exegete.²⁹⁶ One reason behind the difficulty in exegesis is defining the grammatical usage of אָחַד. Is it the subject or the object of עָשָׂה? If it is the subject, then it is God. If אָחַד is object, then it refers to God making the man and wife one. It could be that the word is functioning both as subject and object.²⁹⁷ Nevertheless,

Whatever the exact meaning of verse 15, the treachery and faithlessness of divorce as practiced in postexilic Yehud stand diametrically opposite to the legacy of covenantal “oneness” and “faithfulness” Israel received from Yahweh (cf. Jer 32:39; Ezek 37:17). The people are not “one” with each other; how can they then hope to be “one” with Yahweh and inherit the blessings of the covenant relationship incorporated into his charter with them?²⁹⁸

There are two questions that remain to be answered concerning this text: who are the “offspring of God?” In answering the first question, Hill comments: “Yahweh seeks ‘the seed of God,’ descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who love him, obey him,

²⁹³ Cf. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 212-13, wherein the relationship of Yahweh as father to Israel as being founded upon the exodus event and that it should be understood as a covenant. The fatherhood of Yahweh could also be understood as “an expression of his lordship.”

²⁹⁴ George Adam Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets, part II* (An Exposition of the Bible 4; Hartford, CT. The S.S. Scranton Co., 1907), 645.

²⁹⁵ Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 318, 320.

²⁹⁶ Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 324.

²⁹⁷ Hill, *Malachi*, 244.

²⁹⁸ Hill, *Malachi*, 244.

and hold fast to him (Deut 30:19-20) and those who love justice, hate wrongdoing, and act faithfully (Isa 61:8-9).”²⁹⁹ The second question is: how does the “offspring of God” apply to Yahweh as father? Rex Mason aids in answering this question by making an important connection with Yahweh as creator and father. Yahweh is the one who “begot” or “created” Israel during the exodus event and the covenant at Mount Sinai. Therefore, through these events, Yahweh became the founder/ancestor of the Israelites.³⁰⁰ It is no surprise that as a father, Yahweh wanted his “children” to live according to the commandments that he gave them, and to reciprocate his love. Yahweh desired offspring in his likeness, those who would emanate love and justice.

Ps 68:5[6]; 89:26; 103:13-14

^{68:5[6]} Father of the fatherless, and defender of the widows is God in the habitation of his holiness.

^{89:26[27]} He will cry to me, “You are my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.”

^{103:13} Just as a father has compassion upon sons, the Lord has compassion upon the ones who reverence him.

We will analyze the implication of Yahweh’s fatherhood in these passages by studying their context. Then we will observe how terms such as “rock” and “compassion” relate to Yahweh as father within their respective passages.

²⁹⁹ Hill, *Malachi*, 247.

³⁰⁰ Rex Mason, *Old Testament Pictures of God*, in *Regent Study Guides 2* (ed. Paul S. Fiddes; Oxford: Regent’s Park College, 1993), 59, 64.

Psalm 68 is a difficult psalm to interpret for many reasons.³⁰¹ The section in which Yahweh is mentioned as father, 68:5-7, presents a theology of the poor, in which Yahweh is praised for his care of the poor (v. 11).³⁰² One evident theme that can be seen in this psalm is that Yahweh is a God of social justice, and meets the needs of those who are oppressed.

Orphans, widows, and those without family were subject to oppression in the societies of the ancient world (as they still are). Repeated statements in the OT show Yahweh's special interest in these groups (e.g., Pss 10:13, 17; 145:13-20; 146:9; Isa 1:23; 10:2; Jer 49:11; Hos 14:3; Mal 3:5; Prov 15:25). He is the "father" of those who lack protection and a household (v. 7, see note 7.a.; cf. Ps 25:16; on the love of God for his child, see Hos 11:1-4, Ps 103:13; Prov 3:12).³⁰³

The people who are excluded from the fatherly care of Yahweh are rebels (Ps 68:7): "The term derives familiar connotations from Deut 21:18-21 (the case of the rebellious son), and these connotations enter here in the interest of the theology of the poor the passage presents."³⁰⁴

The context of Ps 68 does not only include Yahweh as father, but also as king: "This Yahweh appears as the bringer of salvation in his sanctuary (v. 5). He saves the forsaken and the imprisoned (v. 6). This reference to the salvific works of God is for the

³⁰¹ Cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 160: "The quantity of corrupted text is high; the hapax legomena are frequent; the number of odd expressions and seldom-seen syntactical constructions is far above the quantity to be expected in poetic texts. This basic set of facts is the primary reason for the wide differences in interpretation." Concerning the date of Ps 68, cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 163, who conclude that Ps 68 can be dated to preexilic times, but probably went through some redaction. Also cf. Ibid., 163: "The basic psalm is to be located roughly in the preexilic, perhaps the later royal period of the seventh and sixth centuries. The first Asaphite redaction, through addition of the outer ring (vv. 5-7, 33-36), is from the time of the exile; separate from that, the prelude is to be placed in the postexilic period."

³⁰² Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 163.

³⁰³ Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 176.

³⁰⁴ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 164.

moment still stated in very general terms. It corresponds to the typical ancient Near Eastern picture of an ideal king.”³⁰⁵

The only remaining issue with the psalm is to determine the meaning of the phrase “in/from his holy habitation.” According to Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, “God exercises his office as Father and Advocate for the poor from his ‘holy dwelling.’ The psalmist leaves open whether this refers to the earthly dwelling in the Temple (cf. vv. 17–19, 25, 36) or the heavenly dwelling (cf. Pss 2:4; 11:4). What is certain is that care for the poor is also situated within the cult.”³⁰⁶ It could be postulated that Yahweh from his heavenly habitation is also present within the earthly temple as well, and it is the responsibility of those in the cult to represent Yahweh as father and caregiver to the poor.

Psalms 68 ties together themes of Yahweh as father and king. The expression of care to the social outcasts should be reflected in the cult of Yahweh, since it is part of Yahweh’s character. Therefore, social justice is a part of the metaphor of Yahweh as father and king.

Psalms 89:26[27] also speaks of kingship, namely, David’s kingship. There are similarities between Ps 89:26[27], Ps 2:7, and 2 Sam 7:14. Psalms 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 appear to serve as the background to the psalm, since David is proclaimed to be Yahweh’s son.³⁰⁷ Interestingly enough, Yahweh in Ps 89:27[28] refers to David as his firstborn son, which was used for kings in the ancient Near East and also for Israel (Exod

³⁰⁵ Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 51.

³⁰⁶ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 164-65.

³⁰⁷ Cf. Pss 18:3, 47, and 95:1, wherein Yahweh is attributed to being a rock and the God of the king.

4:22; Jer 31:9). Therefore, the king had been placed with an honor first attributed to Israel (Deut 26:19; 28:1).³⁰⁸ The king had also been given the place as king over all the kingdoms of the earth: “The incomparability of Yahweh (vv. 6ff.) has as its counterpart the singular top position of his representative on earth. בכור is a polemical assault against claims to divine sonship and world dominion of other kings of the ancient Near Eastern kingdoms. That is also true of the title עליון, which in the Psalter is otherwise applied only to Yahweh.”³⁰⁹

The most powerful image of Yahweh in this passage is that he is the “rock of salvation,” a metaphor for stability: “The unshakable nature of the rock Yahweh becomes a metaphor for his righteousness and uprightness (73:26; 92:16[15]). One can trust in Yahweh; he is both rock and redeemer (19:15[14]; 78:35), and is our portion forever.”³¹⁰ It can be postulated that for the king, Yahweh’s righteousness and salvation are constant. As father to the king, Yahweh will be righteous, stable, and able to save.

The context of Ps 103 can be considered as a psalm of praise that incorporates the kingship of Yahweh: “At v. 6 the psalm develops into a communal hymn of praise, describing Yahweh’s self-revelation to Israel and using first plural pronominal suffixes at vv 10, 12, 14. Finally, vv 19–22 represent an imperatival hymn, a summons to all Yahweh’s creatures and subjects to praise God as king and a figure of authority.”³¹¹ What

³⁰⁸ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 410-11.

³⁰⁹ Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 209. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 424: “In Israelite society, the firstborn son received the paternal blessing (Gen 27) with succession to the authority of his father (Gen 27:1–4, 29, 35–37; 2 Kgs 2:9; cf. Gen 37:21–22; 43:33) and was entitled to inherit a double portion of the family estate (Deut 21:15–17; Isa 61:7). As the ‘firstborn’ of Yahweh, David is given an exalted status of privilege and power (cf. Heb 1:6); a status higher than that of any other king (v 28b), comparable to Yahweh’s own status among the divine beings of the heavenly realm (vv 7–9).”

³¹⁰ Heinz-Josef Fabrey, “צור; צר I; צר II,” *TDOT* 12:318.

is most impressive about 103:13-14 is the description of Yahweh as compassionate in the midst of judgment.

God's compassion or mercy (*rahm*), in relation to sin, checks divine anger and affords forgiveness (Pss 51:1; 77:9; 78:38; 102:13). A parent's anger at a child's failures does not last and compassion prevails.... *Hesed* endows the individual's life, the history of the people, even the cosmos with ultimate meaning. God's forgiveness purifies and sustains the people's response to the covenant and their following God's law (v. 18). *Hesed* is the basis of relationship with God and the motive for living in accord with the divine will.³¹²

The image of Yahweh as father is not one of continual wrath, but of correction and love: "Just as true fatherly love never deserts the child but guides him with a strong hand and does so even when the child does wrong, and just as his compassion proves itself to be the greatest in precisely this latter case, so is God's love for the man who fears him."³¹³

The word for "compassion," רחם, has interesting social roots: "In the Mediterranean biblical world, compassion is a value rooted primarily in kinship obligations, whether natural or fictive. The Hebrew word for compassion derives from the word for womb (*rahm*).... Compassion would thus be defined as the caring concern that ought to be felt and acted upon between real or fictive kin."³¹⁴ The idea of חסד and רחם refer to Yahweh's actions and being toward a community. "Like *hesed*, *rahm* is a term associated with actions in the social realm; only rarely is its object a single individual.... [*H*]esed expresses the fundamental goodness of God, *rahm* the special favor shown by

³¹¹ Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* (rev ed.; WBC 21; Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 27.

³¹² Schaefer, *Psalms*, 256.

³¹³ Weiser, *The Psalms*, 662.

³¹⁴ John J. Pilch, "Compassion," *HBSV* :30.

God in the face of a situation of sin and affliction.”³¹⁵ It is interesting that the image of father is used to embody these images of forgiveness and compassion.³¹⁶

Psalms 103 depicts a powerful image of a loving father, and uses *rahm*, a term that relates to the womb of a woman, to depict its power. The psalm seemingly provides a balance with justice and love for those who fear him.³¹⁷

What we can gather from the Psalms is the connection between Yahweh as father and king. Yahweh as father and king is the champion of the oppressed, the stability of salvation and righteousness for the king, and compassionate like a mother.

Prov 3:12

¹² For the Lord rebukes whom he loves, like a father who rebukes the son he favors.

In order to understand the fatherhood of Yahweh in this passage, we will describe the literary setting of this passage, the purpose of Proverbs, and the meaning of “rebuke.”

Proverbs 3:12 appears in the first section of Prov 1-9.³¹⁸ The purpose of Proverbs can be stated as follows: “It gives guidance in challenges we all face: how to get along with people, how to be a good and decent person, how to make the right choices in personal

³¹⁵ U. Dahmen, “רחמי; רחום; רחמים; רחמני,” *TDOT* 13:451, 452.

³¹⁶ Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 292: “These statements about goodness and forgiveness rise to their culmination in the image chosen in v. 13, where the *tertium comparationis* is the merciful love of a father.”

³¹⁷ Cf. H. F. Fuhs, “ירא; ירח; יראה; מורא,” *TDOT* 6:309, concerning those who “fear Yahweh.” The term in Ps 103:13 refers to devote worshippers. Also cf. Dahmen, “רחמי; רחום; רחמים; רחמני,” *TDOT* 13:447: “Nevertheless, vv. 17-18 appear to lay down a condition: those who would receive God’s steadfast love must fear and honor Yahweh, keep his covenant, and carry out the commandments.”

³¹⁸ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9* (AB 18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 6, mentions that the dating of Prov 1-9 is probably late: “The first part of the book, Prov 1-9, is later than the others because it serves as the introduction to the proverb collections. A Persian or early Hellenistic dating is likely for the latest strata of the book.”

and business affairs, how to win God's favor and avoid disaster—all issues of great importance, but still modest and prosaic ones."³¹⁹

Proverbs 3:11-12 mentions the instruction or rebuke of Yahweh, like Deut 8:5. The description of this instruction seems harsh. The idea of suffering for the sake of education seems atrocious. Nevertheless, "Suffering as well as good fortune can flow from God's love.... The author of Prov 3:11-12, unlike Elihu, is not rationalizing suffering; he is inculcating the right attitude toward it. One must accept suffering as an act of divine love, not repudiate it and rebel against one's condition."³²⁰ However, instruction may be best understood in light of Deut 8.

Deuteronomy 8 describes God educating Israel through the hardships of the wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan.... It is necessary to warn students that ease and security are not automatic results of divine favor. Ancient Near Eastern clients of a god were inclined to reckon their status with their god through their prosperity. The status of the client or disciple ("my son") of Yahweh, however, cannot be so easily reckoned, for the disciple enters into a teacher-disciple, or father-son, relationship with Yahweh, and that relationship just might entail suffering. The suffering, however, is purposeful education. The analogy grounds the discipline in God's love. Though this text gives no reason why discipline involves suffering, Proverbs elsewhere assumes that one cannot become wise on one's own or inherently; one must follow a teacher and give up preconceptions, hence "suffer." God is a pedagogue and works like a father.³²¹

We can better understand this text concerning "suffering" by analyzing the word יכח (rebuke; instruction). It is a word that concerns pedagogy.³²² There are two sides to instruction:

Although it is a mark of love and affection (Job 5:17; Prov. 3:12), it is devoid of pity. Its words are harsh (Prov 28:23)—no less so than the beatings designed to

³¹⁹ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 7. Cf. Ibid., 17. He mentions that Proverbs is a book considered to be part of the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament.

³²⁰ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 153.

³²¹ Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 53.

³²² Heinz-Josef Fabry, "יכח; תוכחה; תוכחה," *TDOT* 6:68.

reinforce them.... What provokes *ykh* is a mistake on the part of the learner, transgression of a commandment.... Although the mistake is specific, it is also typical, so that it must be prevented from becoming habitual.... The act of *ykh* itself reveals and specifies the mistake.... The disciplinary rigor that unmasks the transgressor is inescapable. But this is just one side of the situation. The other side is the resulting increase of *da'at*, knowledge and insight (Ps. 94:10; Prov. 19:25; Jer. 2:19) into the order that determines the course of the world and the connection between an act and its consequences.³²³

Instruction does not indicate that punishment is final. The word יכח is also used in terms as being a reproof for sin.³²⁴ In order to cope with the harshness, Yahweh as a father never intends destruction: “Parental discipline was seen as necessary out of love—never anger—to save a child from destruction, and could take a harsh, physical form supposedly suited to the children’s irrationality (Prov 13:24; 19:18). Children’s value was not merely instrumental but fundamental, based on their relationship to the Creator...(Ps 139:13-14). Children’s dependence on God was not to be outgrown ... (Ps 71:6).”³²⁵ The comparison between Yahweh as father and the ancient Israelite father can be understood. Punishment is for the sake of the child’s benefit. It is a demonstration that the child has found favor in the sight of the father, which shows the desire for them to mature in the right manner.

³²³ Fabry, “יכח; תוכחת; תוכה,” *TDOT* 6:69. We can question how discipline was executed in ancient Israel. This author questions the usage of “beatings.” Did the parents spank their children? How severe were the punishments? Cf. Prov 13:24; 19:18; 23:13-14. Prov 13:24 mentions correction with a rod. Also cf. Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 145 concerning Prov 19:18: “The prohibition not to cause death is startling, even in view of 23:13, which is a rather dry assurance that death will not occur. Physical death is meant, not just a premature death or spiritual insensitivity. But death was without doubt rare, if it happened at all. The legislation in Deut 21:18–21 sets definite limits to any lethal treatment of rebellious sons.” We can say that punishment was harsh, but can question to what end. Punishment was not meant to destroy the child. According to Ps 127:3-5, children were a blessing to a man. The more children a man had, the more joyful a man was to be.

³²⁴ Fabry, “יכח; תוכחת; תוכה,” *TDOT* 6:69.

³²⁵ Judith M. Gundry-Volf, “Children,” *NIDB* 1:588.

Ezek 16:1-6

¹ The word of the LORD came to me: ² Mortal, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, ³ and say, Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: “Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite. ⁴ As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in cloths. ⁵ No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you out of compassion for you; but you were thrown out in the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born. ⁶ I passed by you, and saw you flailing about in your blood. As you lay in your blood, I said to you, ‘Live!’” (NRSV).

We will explore the social context of Ezekiel and the ancient process of adoption in order to understand the implications of Yahweh’s fatherhood in Ezek 16. Ezekiel’s time, i.e., during the exile, was that of great crisis, especially for those to whom he prophesied. “Ezekiel was born into a turbulent world. The major players on the ancient Near Eastern stage were switching roles and smaller nations were disappearing from the scene altogether.... Ezekiel’s primary audience was the community of Jews in Babylon. Mesopotamia had long been the benefactor of forced Israelite immigration.”³²⁶

This may be one of the texts in the Old Testament which demonstrates the act of adoption, especially by Yahweh. Verse four describes the procedure of handling a newborn baby. This process demonstrated that the parents were taking legal responsibility for the child. However, if the child was left out in an open field by the parents, they relinquished all rights to that child.³²⁷

In Ezek 16, Yahweh goes through the same process of ancient adoption in order to save the child in the field. “First, Yahweh saves the baby’s life and adopts her as his

³²⁶ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 1, 5.

³²⁷ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 475-76. Cf. Malul, “Adoption of Foundlings,” 97-126, in which he takes Ezek 16 and compares it with other ancient Near Eastern literature so as to indicate the adoption process. It is evident that a male adoptive father goes through the adoption process.

own daughter. It was the motion of the baby flailing about in her blood that captured the traveler's attention.... No human infant is viable in this condition. Abandoned in the open field, under the hot Palestinian sun, the foundling would have died within hours."³²⁸

When Yahweh tells the child to live, בְּדַמִּיךָ חַיִּי, it was a declaration of his adoption for this child Israel.³²⁹ Yahweh as father in this passage is the one who adopts through speech, a legal declaration that he is responsible for Israel.³³⁰

Isa 50:1-3; 63:16

^{50:1-3} Thus says the LORD: Where is your mother's bill of divorce, with which I put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? No, because of your sins you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away.
² Why was no one there when I came? Why did no one answer when I called? Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? By my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert; their fish stink for lack of water, and die of thirst. ³ I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering (NRSV).

^{63:16} For you are our father, because Abraham did not know us, and Israel will not acknowledge us. You, O Lord, are our father; our redeemer from antiquity is your name.

We will explore Yahweh's fatherhood as it pertains to his power as a father and as a redeemer. We will accomplish this task by studying the contexts of Isa 50:1-3 and 63:16.

³²⁸ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 480, 481.

³²⁹ Malul, "Adoption of Foundlings," 111.

³³⁰ There may be a potential parallel with this passage and Exod 4:22. Yahweh in Exod 4:22 declares Israel to be his first born son, thereby creating a new identity for them, much like Ezek 16, wherein Yahweh declares Israel to be his child and taking full custody and responsibility.

Isaiah 50:1-3 demonstrates the power of Yahweh as father to “divorce” and “sell” his son into slavery.³³¹ In ancient Israelite society, only a father could sell his children into slavery to pay a debt:

When the family was in dire financial straits, the father had the power to sell his children as debt slaves (Neh 5:1-5). He could sell his daughter as a concubine (Exod 21:7)... The ability to sell his children ironically highlights both a father’s power and his powerlessness. While he had the power to decide to sacrifice a child for the good of the rest of the family, the occasion for this would have been his inability to pay his debts.³³²

However, Yahweh owed no one, and the Israelites were not sold into slavery to pay a debt; neither was Zion put away for nothing. The sins of the people caused this situation to arise. “Thus the issue is not whether God is at fault for their situation; it is how can the iniquities and rebellions that they have committed be atoned for so that they can return to him? Instead of trying to fix the blame on God and resigning themselves to their hopeless situation, the people should be committing themselves to the power and grace of their Creator/Redeemer.”³³³

The interpretation of Isa 63:16 depends upon the speakers in this verse. If they are the “descendants of Abraham,” this verse speaks powerfully about the fatherhood of Yahweh: “Who brought these ‘children’ into existence? It was not *Abraham* or *Israel* (Jacob). These men are not the real ‘fathers’ of the people of God. It is God who fathered these people (cf. 64:7 [Eng. 8]; Deut. 32:6). This is a profound thought: Israel is not an

³³¹ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 30.

³³² Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 32.

³³³ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 318.

ethnic, or linguistic, or national entity, but a spiritual one. God is their *Father*.³³⁴ This produces a strong bond between these speakers and Yahweh.

God's relations with his own are deeper than the deepest we humans know, that between a parent and a child. Although an Abraham might deny his children, God cannot. This is why the prophet is so bold as to call on God to do what he should. But there is another basis for this appeal. Not only is God our Father but his *name*, his reputation, is inseparably tied to us. What is that name? *Our Redeemer from ancient times*.³³⁵

Another interpretation points to outcasts. The speaker(s) of the verse could be "the people of the land," those who were brought "to occupy sections of northern Israel under the empires (2 Kgs 17:24–28), who learned to worship at YHWH sanctuaries (cf. Zech 7:1–3),"³³⁶ and "who Ezra and Nehemiah also excluded from cooperation or marriage with Israelites (Zech 7:4–14; Ezra 4:1–3). The verse shows the diversity of persons seeking to work and worship in Jerusalem at this time. The Vision calls for openness toward them. Other leaders suspected them and refused cooperation."³³⁷

Yahweh's fatherhood is dependent on the speakers. If they are the original descendants of the Israelites from the exodus, then the speakers are acknowledging Yahweh as their father and redeemer from old. If this verse is concerned with the "people of the land," then the speakers are crying out to Yahweh as father. They base their confession on his name, or reputation, which is a redeemer from ancient times. It is

³³⁴ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, 612. Cf. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 903, who says that the speaker(s) are "A group of direct descendants of Israel from the exodus on claims YHWH as their 'redeemer, from that age.' They want God to recognize that he is their 'father,' perhaps implying that he is only theirs."

³³⁵ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, 613.

³³⁶ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 903.

³³⁷ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 903.

interesting that non-Israelites would use such a confession. It may be that if they are the non-Israelites, they are claiming an exodus experience for themselves in the present.³³⁸

The image of redeemer has appeared in both of these passages in Isaiah concerning Yahweh. However, we must consider what it means for Yahweh to be a redeemer, especially in Isa 50. In ancient Israelite culture “[t]he *gō’el* was still always the nearest adult male kinsman with the right and the ability of redemption.”³³⁹ In Isa 50:1-11, Yahweh will avenge and redeem Israel, who was taken into captivity. As previously mentioned, Yahweh does not owe anyone a debt, but decides to redeem Israel. According to Lev 25, a *לֹאָ* was to redeem a person in indentured slavery by paying off their debt. No animosity was demonstrated to the creditor by the *לֹאָ*. These two facts are contrary to Isa 50 concerning Yahweh as a redeemer. Yahweh does not function according to ancient Israel’s social application of the *לֹאָ*. Since it can be inferred that Isa 50 describes different circumstances than Lev 25, “the conditions of Leviticus 25 are not mirrored in the concept of redemption from Exile.”³⁴⁰ Therefore, the image of *לֹאָ* is being re-interpreted. As mentioned previously, the father functioned as a redeemer or *לֹאָ*. This social connection helps to present a familial connection between Yahweh and Israel. The re-interpretation of the metaphor in Isa 50 goes beyond the familial relationship. It speaks to people who need to experience redemption/salvation from the exile.³⁴¹

³³⁸ This could be a potential application of Ps 68:5[6] if the people are not the descendants of Abraham. They desire for Yahweh to be their father because they are fatherless.

³³⁹ Gary S. Shogren, “Redemption,” *ABD* 5:653.

³⁴⁰ Shogren, “Redemption,” *ABD* 5:653.

³⁴¹ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 641: “However, in Isa 40–66 they are so closely related to *ישׁע*, ‘save,’ that their meaning is drawn into the realistic political/social/religious world of Jewish survival in the Persian Empire. The people are geographically and physically separated from their land. Their social and political structures have been destroyed. Religious institutions, from festivals and shrines to temple and priesthood,

The characteristics of Yahweh as father is one whose love and discipline is founded upon covenant, expects honor and desires children to be just and faithful, cares for the outcasts of society, is the stable and righteous foundation of the king, shows compassion and judgment, punishes for the sake of maturity, educates through “suffering,” has the power to sell into slavery, and declares responsibility for Israel.

The most complicated characteristic of Yahweh as father concerns discipline. The description of discipline/punishment appears harsh, but we must remember that it is for the sake of the child. Discipline, or punishment, as we have studied thus far, is done in the context of community. The child is reared in order to be beneficial to the community and its survival. We can postulate that Yahweh expects Israel as his child to emulate his character, and this must be accomplished through instruction. It is for Israel’s good, not their demise.

We must emphasize that covenant is an important aspect of community. As mentioned in the section concerning the social milieu of ancient Israel, covenant creates familial relationships. Therefore, it appears that covenant creates community, and community is sustained by covenant. Yahweh’s relationship with Israel as father is bound by covenant, and breaking the covenant brings chaos to the relationship. This chaos must be remedied at all costs for the sake of the relationship. Yahweh shows forth the character of love and discipline to redeem the relationship.³⁴²

have been disrupted to an extent that they can no longer function as they had in the past. Families and clans have been scattered. Villagers now live in cities. Priests have neither temple nor altar. The kind of relief that is required is similar to that of the Egyptian bondage.”

³⁴² Cf. Bruce J. Malina, “Authoritarianism,” *HBSV* :14: “The point is that God essentially wields Power, and in the tradition of Israel everyone is subject to God’s Power.... His word of command is power. He speaks and it is done. He does not attempt to convince or argue; he does not offer promises or rewards apart from not employing his power negatively.... On the other hand, God also wields ‘steadfast love’ or ‘mercy’ toward those with whom he is in covenant.... ‘Steadfast love’ is a technical term referring to the

We now turn in response to feminist critiques of Yahweh as father, so that we can appropriate the image for a modern context.

APPROPRIATION

Before responding to Ruether and O'Brien, we will admit the validity of their critique concerning the potential and devastating problems with the image of Yahweh as father. The image of Yahweh as father grew out of a patriarchal society, in which authoritarianism was a part of the household, and the father was head of it.³⁴³ Also apparent in the social milieu of the ancient Near East was the honor/shame code, in which women were the model for "shame."³⁴⁴ The punishment of Yahweh administered to the Israelites does seem harsh to our modern sensibilities.

There is hope, however, for modern appropriation of the metaphor of Yahweh as father. In response to Ruether concerning patriarchy, we will reiterate the concept of community and discuss the function of patriarchy. We will respond to O'Brien's comments on Yahweh as father by reviewing the purpose of punishment and the image of Yahweh as father in the corpus of the Old Testament. Out of our response we hope to gain potential avenues of application for the image of Yahweh as father.

As mentioned in the introduction, Ruether sees that patriarchy is used to discourage feminine autonomy and maturity beyond stereotypical roles.³⁴⁵ She believes that patriarchy was used to bring about the subordination of all society to the power of

debt of interpersonal obligation one has due to having entered a covenant; it is a form of solidarity between covenant members."

³⁴³ See Malina, "Authoritarianism," *HBSV* :12-19.

³⁴⁴ See Joseph Plevnik, "Honor/Shame," *HBSV* :106-15.

³⁴⁵ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 69.

men.³⁴⁶ We will admit that patriarchy had roles for men, women, and children.³⁴⁷ In the section “social milieu of ancient Israel,” however, we studied the importance of community-mindedness. Stereotypical roles were for the sake of survival, not spiritual or personal malnourishment. In the community mindset, the individual lived for the sake of the community, because life was non-existent outside of it.

We also discussed the role of the father within the ancient household. The authority of the father was for the sake of his household, not to support vindictive or power-hungry vendettas for the sake of glorifying his name. Glory and honor were given because of his authority and its purpose: to take care of his family. As we discussed in the section “Israel/Ephraim as son,” honor, shame, authority, and obedience were social norms to keep the community together for survival. We can conclude, therefore, that the function of patriarchy was for the sake of survival. This does not mean, however, that patriarchy did not have flaws, and that subordination did not exist.³⁴⁸

We also discussed in the introduction that O’Brien looks negatively upon the image of Yahweh as father in the Prophets.³⁴⁹ She warns readers not to take this metaphor

³⁴⁶ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 61.

³⁴⁷ Cf. Warren Carter, “Household, Householder,” *NIDB* 2:904, who indicates, however, that “the survival of the household required flexibility in roles.”

³⁴⁸ Cf. André LaCocque, *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 5, 11, 15-16. He believes that the role of women and men developed greatly during the Late Bronze age. In that era, women were in short supply and had to be protected from the wars of violence. That is why women tended to the homes while the men hunted and fought. Israel was in fact an egalitarian society until the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, who were responsible for the degradation of women. Also cf. Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 47-71. LaCocque draws his conclusions from Meyers' research.

³⁴⁹ O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 82. She mentions scriptures such as Isa 1:2-6; Mal 2:3; Num 12:14 to prove her point. If we take a look at the context of Isa 1:2-6, it could be that Yahweh does not beat Israel. Cf. Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12* (CC; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 26-27. He believes that the term “beating” speaks of the war-tortured landscape of Israel. He also believes that the imagery of a person being covered from head to toe speaks of sores, not bruises. Concerning Mal 2:3,

in the Prophets lightly. One reason is that the Prophets focus more on “Yahweh’s intent to punish than on Yahweh’s intent to show mercy.”³⁵⁰ Secondly, she argues that “the Prophetic Books do not cast the love of the father as a *counterbalance* to his discipline but rather as a *justification* for it.... In the contemporary setting, while many parents prefer the term ‘discipline’ over ‘punish,’ they justify their own exercise of power with the rhetoric of care.”³⁵¹ The Prophets, in essence, are guilty of portraying Yahweh as the father who “shames, even destroys, his son, while the texts remain silent on maternal discipline.”³⁵² She also shows concern for what the metaphor might entail for children.³⁵³ O’Brien makes the following conclusion about the image of Yahweh as father: “When I approach biblical texts that describe God as father, I want to know how that father treats his children. I do not assume that because the father is male that he must be a bad parent; feminism does not require that of me. But I do come with the firm conviction that a threatening, belittling, obedience-requiring father—or mother—is a bad parent.”³⁵⁴

As we discussed in the section “characteristics of God as father,” we emphasized that punishment was done in the context of community. The purpose of punishment was

the term that is sometimes translated “dung” actually refers to offal, things removed from the animal during sacrifice. Cf. Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (electronic ed.; Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 831. If we consider that Malachi is speaking against corrupt sacrifice, then the meaning is clear. Yahweh is smearing the innards of the corrupt sacrifice on the faces of the priests. Concerning Num 12:14 and the mention of a father spitting on a child’s face, cf. Phillip J. Budd, *Numbers* (WBC 5; Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 137: “There is no attempt to establish a principle or precedent in the matter since the author fails to give all the guidance that would be necessary. The Yahwist’s real interest lies in the opposition to Moses and the divine response it receives.”

³⁵⁰ O’Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 92.

³⁵¹ O’Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 93.

³⁵² O’Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 95.

³⁵³ O’Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 82.

³⁵⁴ O’Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 84.

for the child and the community's survival. There were certain expectations of behavior for the child, so that he or she could take part in the community. Punishment was never intended to destroy the child. It was harsh so that the child would not repeat the same mistake.³⁵⁵ Nevertheless, O'Brien's critique has value because of her focus on the image of Yahweh as father in the Prophets. For sure, the image of Yahweh as father in the Prophets appears harsh at times. When we broaden our view of the image, however, both beyond and within the Prophets, a more complex and less threatening picture emerges.

In the section "Israel/Ephraim as son," we conveyed the importance of covenant, and how covenant created kinship bonds. Covenant also created familial ties, and in ancient Israelite culture, familial ties were especially strong. We mentioned that the covenant meal in Ex 24 and Yahweh's proclamation of Israel as his firstborn created an identity for a people who were in slavery (Ex 4:22-23). The term "firstborn," as we described, was a term of great status and importance. As depicted by the texts in Hosea and Jeremiah, Israel had broken the covenant, and Yahweh was going to use punishment to redeem the covenant and the relationship with Israel, not destroy them. A new exodus was depicted as a metaphor for renewal. Even though Israel was named Yahweh's firstborn, the exodus made that identity concrete. Israel was also described as a daughter, whom Yahweh wanted to inherit his land. What we can take from this section is that every relationship, especially covenant, has rules. We cannot take lightly the effect of a broken covenant in ancient Israel because of the honor/shame code. When a covenant was broken, consequences followed. Yahweh as father not only gave Israel an identity, but a place to call home, and used punishment to redeem the relationship.

³⁵⁵ We mentioned in footnote 320 the ambiguity of the punishment's intensity.

In the section “God as creator,” we discussed how Yahweh as father is also the creator of Israel. In this section most of the texts are prophetic, yet they show Yahweh as father redeeming Israel by bringing them through a new exodus. Yahweh as father and creator are metaphors used simultaneously to remind Israel of their origins from the original exodus, and that Yahweh was still in relationship with them, even though they broke the covenant. We also pointed out that Yahweh as father and creator is responsible for the origin of all peoples.

In the section “God as related to the king,” we described the importance of Yahweh’s kingship as the foundation for the Israelite king. The king became Yahweh’s son through a decree, therefore creating a new identity for the king, like Yahweh did with Israel in the exodus. As with Israel, Yahweh had expectations for the king. The king was to rule over the people with the righteousness of Yahweh. Yahweh as king and father was described as one who was the source of life and guidance, who used authority in a redemptive sense, and who used punishment if necessary to keep order, because if chaos was allowed to exist, reality was placed in jeopardy. We also pointed out that the underlying theme between kingship and fatherhood was care for the people.

In the section “Sons of God,” we discussed how the deities showed Yahweh to be a social entity. They also testify to the greatness of Yahweh in the heavenly court as king and the creator in the beginning. We also saw Yahweh, particularly in Ps 82, as the one who would bring justice by judging the “sons of God” who had failed to be righteous to those who were under their care.

Lastly, in the section “characteristics of God as father,” we saw that Yahweh’s discipline counterbalanced his judgment. In Ps 103, we saw how Yahweh’s fatherhood

and discipline were described using feminine terms. Yahweh's punishment was determined on the basis of his love, not anger. In Deut 1 and 8, we saw love and discipline as two sides of the same coin: Yahweh was the one who carried Israel out of the wilderness and also used it to mature them. We also saw Yahweh as a father of social justice in Ps 68, giving refuge to the fatherless and the widows. We also discussed how punishment was used to prepare the child to take part in the community.

We readily agree with O'Brien that the image of Yahweh as father in the Prophets can be a harsh image. First, however, we must take into account that those passages are in the context of a broken covenant and the consequences that followed. The passages also speak of hope, not total annihilation.

The image of Yahweh as father in the Prophets may be harsh because it parallels with Yahweh as sovereign. We saw descriptions of Yahweh as father and sovereign in the section "God as creator." Yahweh appeared abusive and daunting because he required obedience as sovereign. When we take into account what we discussed in the sections "social milieu of ancient Israel" and "Israel/Ephraim as son," obedience was a necessary social norm. How could a father take care of his children and train them to take part in the survival of the community if they did not listen? Obedience can also be understood in light of covenant. One respects what the covenant represents and abides by its requirements. Yahweh as father and sovereign was no different. Yahweh expected obedience to the covenant because he was in charge of Israel's care.

When we observe the Old Testament as a whole, the image of Yahweh as father is the one who cares, loves, protects, guides, and sustains Israel. Yahweh as father is also the one who punishes Israel, but only to redeem the covenant. Yahweh as father is a

metaphor intertwined with Yahweh as creator and king, which speaks to his ability to create identity and to maintain order and peace for all creation. Yahweh as father is also one of social justice. While the image is harsh in the Prophets, in the context of the entire corpus of the Old Testament, the image is balanced with love, and is founded upon the importance of covenant.

How can we appropriate the metaphor of Yahweh as father for today? In considering all that has been discussed, we must first begin with how the image of Yahweh as father should affect the family, particularly the father. A father should never use authority to abuse, neglect, or destroy his children. His responsibility is to raise them in love and correction if necessary. He is to nurture, protect, guide, and sustain them. He must raise his children in the light of community because his parenting will be a factor in how his child affects the community in which he or she will participate in the future. Since we do not live in a society dependent upon the success of patriarchal social roles, a father can raise his child to be autonomous and community minded, realizing that the child's particular gifts can be beneficial in helping others.³⁵⁶

Secondly, we must see Yahweh as father as a liberation motif. Yahweh as father in Ex 4:22-23 proclaimed an identity for a people who were slaves, and brought them through the exodus and made that identity concrete. The exodus can be seen as a time of creation born through crisis and the end result being liberation and order. Yahweh as father and creator accomplished this task for Israel, and it can parallel Gen 1 wherein

³⁵⁶ The present author also believes this is the responsibility of the mother as well. This conclusion is contra Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 69-70: "Parenting in patriarchal society also becomes the way of enculturating us to the stereotype male and female roles. The family becomes the nucleus and model of patriarchal relations in society. To that extent parenting language for God reinforces patriarchal power rather than liberating us from it."

Yahweh created from the chaos and brought order. Yahweh as father is one who liberates from crisis.³⁵⁷

Thirdly, we must appreciate and realize that the Old Testament provides images of Yahweh as mother. Yahweh as mother is the one who gives birth to the seas, clouds, darkness, ice (Job 38:8-11), conceives, births, and nurses Israel (Num 11:12; Deut 32:18; Isa 46:3-4; 66), and, as a divine warrior, cries out against Israel's enemies as a woman in labor (Isa 42:14).³⁵⁸ Like Yahweh as father is a liberator, so is Yahweh as mother, who bears the pain during the birthing process, a time of chaos and agony, until the child Israel is born. In Deut 32, Yahweh is both father and mother to Israel. We can conclude that both motherhood and fatherhood exist within Yahweh and are equally important, and we should appropriate both images together.

Lastly, we must come to terms with the power and inability of metaphors:

A second characteristic of metaphors is that they are open-ended. The analogy produced by a metaphor cannot be reduced to a set of equivalent literal expressions.... Thus the metaphor of God the father, for example, cannot be replaced by an exhaustive list of statements detailing how God is like a father. Rather it invites the reader to explore the various ways in which God resembles a father without predetermining the number and nature of those similarities.³⁵⁹

If we are to truly appropriate the image of Yahweh as father, we must realize that the image must not be limited to one set of descriptions, but can encompass many positive

³⁵⁷ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 70 says that "language for the Divine as redeemer, as liberator, as one who fosters full personhood and, in that context, speak of God/ess as creator, as source of being." If we throw away the image of Yahweh as father, we discard Yahweh as creator and redeemer as well.

³⁵⁸ Warren Carter, "God the Father," *NIDB* 2:619. Cf. *Ibid.*, 619: "God's sovereign ways are no more to be questioned than a woman in labor." He also mentions the word for compassion, *rahm* (Isa 49:15; 66:13).

³⁵⁹ Simkins, *Creator and Creation*, 44. I thank Dr. Robert Canoy for commenting that unidirectional language should be used verses bi-directional language concerning God. Cf. John J. Pilch- "Compassion," *HBSV* :31: "But since all theology is analogy, that is, everything said about God is based on human experience, the primary analogue for compassion is indeed the parent (Ps 103:3)."

possibilities, such as the connection between Yahweh as father and creator, who liberates and creates identity. We also cannot divorce the image of Yahweh as father from Yahweh as mother because androgynous wholeness can be found in them as one:

We can recognise that male-dominated talk of God in the Old Testament, without insisting that therefore exclusive maleness is of the essence of the Deity. Nor need we fly from sexual images altogether to claim that God is a kind of divine neuter. The Old Testament at least points the way to saying that God is both male and female, and as such offers wholeness to a humanity created in his image just because it was created male and female.³⁶⁰

CONCLUSION

The metaphor of Yahweh as father, properly understood and appropriated, can be a powerful image in Christendom. Because the image stems from a patriarchal society, there are some aspects of the image to shun; however, there are valuable aspects of the image to hold on to as well. A father's power in ancient Israel was for the sake of his family and their preservation. This principle is needful in a generation where fathers are lacking. The image of Yahweh as father is one who liberates, and gives the outcast a name to be proud of, his own child. The image also speaks to caring for the homeless, fatherless, and widows, those in society who have experienced great loss, and requires the believers to be the ones to carry out this task.

We also see the importance of covenant for the image, which we can apply to any relationship, realizing that what we do affects people all around us, both positively and negatively. In an autonomous-minded society, we forget that no one can survive alone, and that we need each other. Furthermore, our decisions against Yahweh break our relationship with him, and we experience consequences knowing that they are the result of our actions. We also take from the understanding of covenant that our relationship

³⁶⁰ Mason, *Old Testament Pictures of God*, 202.

with Yahweh should be mirrored in our relationship with others. We should care about the actions we take and how it will affect our relationships. If we are rebellious, selfish, and destructive, we reflect the negative aspects of the image of his fatherhood such as we might perceive it, even though it may not be true.

Yahweh as father is also mother, and without both images, we lose the potential of being whole as humans, created in Yahweh's image. Admitting the problems and issues of patriarchy, the history of using Yahweh as father in an abusive and subordinating manner, we must reach for the positives of this metaphor because it is connected to many concepts of importance in the Old Testament, such as creation. The power of a metaphor lies in its possibilities, and the image of Yahweh as father has positive possibilities if we allow ourselves to explore these less limiting aspects of it.

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