Fasting as a Penitential Rite: A Biblical Phenomenon?*

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In the opening decades of the twentieth century, several ethnologists became interested in the phenomenon of fasting. They found, in the words of one study, that "the custom of fasting is wide-spread among peoples at very different stages of civilization, and is practiced for a variety of purposes."[1] The impulse to order such multifarious data led later scholars to construct systems of classification. One such attempt describes the motivations for fasting as follows: "it may be an act of penitence or of propitiation; a preparatory rite before some act of sacramental eating or an initiation; a mourning ceremony; one of a series of purification rites; a means of inducing dreams and visions; a method of adding force to magical rites."[2]

The ethnologists' classifications offered a ready tool to those who wished to analyze the nature of fasting within specific religious traditions.[3] Scholarship on

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[1]Edward Westermarck, "The Principles of Fasting," *Folklore* 18 (1907) 391. Edward B. Tylor (*Primitive Culture* [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958] 2:496–502), had previously emphasized a single motivation as "important and perhaps original" (p. 502), namely the use of fasting to produce visions. Westermarck recognizes the multiplicity of motivations and moves away from the search for origins.

[2]John A. MacCulloch, "Fasting," *ERE* (1912) 5:759. MacCulloch proceeds to sort an extensive collection of samples from around the world into these categories (5:759–65). The same distinctions prevail even in recent treatments, which tend to draw heavily upon MacCulloch's article. See Rosemary Rader, "Fasting," *ER* (1987) 5:286–90.

[3]This tool saw much use. K. Wagtendonk introduces his *Fasting in the Koran* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) with a classification apparently based on MacCulloch's; the same is true of S. Lowy's "The

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fasting in the Hebrew Bible made especial use of such classificatory schemes, settling upon four basic categories: 1) fasting as an act of mourning the dead, 2) fasting as an act of penitence, 3) fasting as an auxiliary to prayer, and 4) fasting as a preparation for encountering the divine.[4] While the danger of imposing unity upon diverse phenomena is often noted, the opposite danger—seeing diversity when in fact a unified core is present—looms when classifications taken from comparative research are used in the study of a particular culture.[5] Equally problematic is the assumption that the context of a fast (for example, mourning for the dead or preparation for encountering the divine) determines its very nature.[6] Thus, there are thought to be four fundamentally different types of fasting. But does the nature of fasting really vary according to its context? A better starting assumption might be that fasting has a fixed meaning that can be deployed in a variety of appropriate ritual contexts.

Indeed, a thorough reexamination of fasting in the Hebrew Bible will reveal that there is little evidence for the category of the penitential fast,[7] whether as an

Motivation of Fasting in Talmudic Literature," *JJS* 9 (1958) 19. See also Rudolf Arbesmann, "Fasting and Prophecy in Pagan and Christian Antiquity," *Traditio* 7 (1949) 1–71. On fasting in early Christianity, in addition to Arbesmann, see Herbert Musurillo, "The Problem of Ascetical Fasting in the Greek Patristic Writers," *Traditio* 12 (1950) 1–64, and Caroline W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 31–69.

[4]Examples include Hendrik A. Brongers, "Fasting in Israel in Biblical and Post-Biblical Times," in *Instruction and Interpretation* (ed. H. A. Brongers et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1977) 1–21; John Muddiman, "Fasting," *ABD* 2:773–74; Jacob Milgrom, "Fasting and Fast Days," *EncJud* 6:1190; and Harvey Guthrie, Jr., "Fast, Fasting," *IDB* 2:241–43. A Hebrew encyclopedia article acknowledges the evidence for diversity of motivations in the world at large but sees a greater unity in Hebrew Bible sources (Jacob Licht, "Fasting," *Encyclopedia Miqra'it* [Jerusalem: Bialik, 1971] 6:691–92). Thomas Podella (*Ṣom-Fasten: Kollektive Trauer um den verborgenen Gott im Alten Testament* [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989] 117–223) also develops a classification according to the various contexts of fasting; it too includes penitence.

[5]Indeed, each of the articles noted above begins its treatment of the subject by reviewing the ethnographic evidence.

[6]Part of the impetus for this view comes from the tendency of modern biblical scholarship to view "emotional experience" as "prior to any behavioral expression." (See Gary A. Anderson, "Introduction: The Expression of Emotion in Cross-Cultural Perspective," in *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* [University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991] 1–18.) Thus, the overall and subjective purpose of the one who fasts is deemed more significant in determining meaning than an independent analysis of external, objective behavior.

[7]The evidence for seeing fasting as preparation for encountering the divine also fails to convince, as it depends upon particular interpretations of ambiguous passages—namely Moses' forty days of not eating on the mountain (Exod 34:28 and Deut 9:9) and Saul's not eating before consulting the dead Samuel (1 Sam 28:20). Other motivations suggest themselves. Eating on the mountain in the presence of God could have been considered profane and, in the absence of the rites that usually attend fasting, refraining from eating in this context should perhaps not be considered fasting per se. Saul may have refrained from food on account of grief over his impending doom. Examples

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act of atonement for sin or even as an external sign of internal contrition.[8] Rather, fasting and its accompanying rites of weeping, rending clothes, donning sackcloth, and applying ashes function as a physical manifestation and communicative expression of anguish and affliction.[9] "See," the one fasting declares, "how awful is my state!" Such extreme expression is employed in mourning the dead,[10] but even more frequently—and here we arrive at the central point that has yet to be appreciated fully—in the context of prayer.[11] In fact, with the exception of mourning the dead, fasting hardly ever occurs without prayer. What are we to make of this close connection? The answer is surprisingly straightforward: petitionary prayer in the Hebrew Bible usually arises from a state of affliction or crisis.[12] Voicing that affliction, prayer captures the attention of YHWH[13] and rouses him, as a God of

of fasting for the sake of supernatural communication are clearly found, however, in postbiblical Judaism; see the collection of sources in Lowy, "The Motivation of Fasting in Talmudic Literature," 30–38. If the association between fasting and supernatural communication is indeed late, it may have developed through Hellenistic influence, since fasting for prophecy was quite common in Greece; see Arbesmann, "Fasting and Prophecy."

[8]Indeed it is hard even to make sense of these penitential options in the context of biblical thought generally. The view suggested below, on the other hand, fits well with familiar biblical concepts, such as the notion of "crying out" to God.

[9]Mayer I. Gruber (*Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* [2 vols.; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980] 2:401–79) discusses these "gestures and postures," though he mistakenly, according to the argument developed here, leaves out fasting, probably because it has come to be viewed more as an internal process than as a gesture.

[10]On mourning in general, see Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance*; and David P. Wright, *Ritual In Narrative: The Dynamics of Feasting, Mourning, and Retaliation Rites in the Ugaritic Tale of Aqhat* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2001) 139–97.

[11]Patrick D. Miller (*They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994] 52–54) takes an important step in recognizing the connection between fasting and prayer, though he associates these rites with "contrition and humility." While, the present study considers the penitential term "contrition" to be inaccurate, the term "humility" deserves consideration, though "affliction" is preferred below. While "humility" describes the manner in which creatures approach their Creator, "affliction" denotes the expression of anguish to elicit divine attention. See n. 16, below.

[12]Miller (*They Cried to the Lord*, 55–134) appropriately stresses the centrality of affliction in the biblical experience of prayer. Compare the position of Moshe Greenberg (*Biblical Prose Prayer: as a Window to the Popular Religion of Ancient Israel* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983] 48–51), who stresses the importance of the moral status of the speaker and his or her sincerity as the major determinants in the effectiveness of prayer.

[13]James L. Kugel (*The God of Old* [New York: Free Press, 2003] 55) makes the important point that the one seeking divine help does not so much have the task in prayer of "finding God," who is not unreachable, but the subtly different task of attracting his attention. It might be possible to extend Michael Carasik's discussion of the limits of divine omniscience ("The Limits of Omniscience," *JBL* 119 [2000] 221–32) to include the example of prayer and, as we shall see, fasting. God can perceive the affliction of his subjects but he does not do so automatically; like a human king he must have his attention—and mercy—trained on the problem.

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mercy, to pity and hence action.[14] While prayer constitutes a verbal articulation of the distress, fasting provides an equally expressive—indeed, given the difficulty of rendering pain in words,[15] perhaps an even more expressive—physical manifestation. It therefore shares in the dialogical nature of prayer.[16] The process described above should not be seen as mechanistic, magically producing a change in the deity. Fasting is more preparatory than directly efficacious; it sets the stage for the central moment of appeal to God.

Scholars have failed to recognize the essentially nonpenitential nature of biblical fasting, in part, because of misplaced dependence upon the standard classificatory schemes and, in part, because of the pervasive use of fasting as penitence in the subsequent history of both Judaism and Christianity.[17] Of course, the biblical evidence itself suggests, at first glance, an association between fasting and peni-

[14]On the close connection between prayer and affliction and their connection to divine mercy, see the chapter entitled "The Cry of the Victim" in Kugel, *The God of Old*, 109–36; Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 43; and Richard N. Boyce, *The Cry to God in the Old Testament* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

[15]See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 3–11.

[16]Note Othmar Keel's interpretation of the stance associated with petitionary prayer: "lying on the ground is not an expression of creaturely feeling. . . . Its purpose is rather to manifest distress in order to establish a request" (*The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* [trans. T. J. Hallett; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997] 319–20).

[17]In addition to scholars who have written about fasting in the Hebrew Bible, commentators on the biblical passages studied below consistently err in viewing fasting as penitential. I will discuss the views of select commentators; it seems unnecessary to provide a long record of such mistaken interpretations. This interpretive bias affects all modern Western interpreters, not merely biblical scholars. It is perhaps worth looking at an instructive example from the field of anthropology. Victor Turner (*The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1968] 22) writes: "In the idiom of the rituals of affliction it is *as though* the Ndembu said: 'It is only when a person is reduced to misery by misfortune, and repents of the acts that caused him to be afflicted, that ritual expressing an underlying unity in diverse things may fittingly be enacted for him.' For the patient in rituals of affliction must sit, clad only in a waistcloth, in an attitude of penitent shame. . . . This is not to imply that Ndembu paganism is on an ethical or epistemological parity with the great world religions, but there is some satisfaction from a humanistic standpoint in finding similarities between men's modes of worship the world over [italics mine]." It should be noted that Turner neither here nor anywhere else adduces any evidence that the Ndembu actually viewed their so-called "rites of affliction" as designed to produce "penitent shame." Whether Turner's claim is accurate or not, though I have my doubts, it is noteworthy how quickly this noted anthropologist assumes that self-affliction constitutes penitence. His immediate association of this view with the "great world religions" does not argue in his favor. The contrast with the personal testimony of another anthropologist aware of her bias is interesting in this regard: "As an Irish Catholic, I was taught that fasting is a form of self-mortification meant to show repentance for one's sins, and I came to Vanga prepared to find in Ramadhad a similar penitential spirit. . . . So I was puzzled at the way in which the people of Vanga observed their month of fasting . . . the overall impression was closer to Mardi Gras than to Lent" (E. Farrell, "The Poetics of Renunciation: Form and Content in Ritual Fasting," *The Journal of Psychoanalytic Anthropology* 8 [1985] 253).

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tence. Crises in the Hebrew Bible often occur on account of sin. Does not fasting at a time of crisis communicate a contrite acknowledgment that one's affliction is a consequence of one's deed? Indeed, how can affliction cease if its cause is not removed? One would do well to recall first of all that, while crises often do occur on account of sin, there are multiple examples, as we shall soon see, of fasting and prayer occurring in the absence of any wrongdoing. More to the point, however, is that the expression of pain, the most immediate and obvious result of self-affliction, compels the observer to attempt its removal, quite independent of the particular story that stands behind it.[18] Fasting appeals to divine mercy, which in turn responds to the terrible plight of the afflicted even if they are themselves responsible for it. The afflicted may feel regret for initiating the crisis, but the expression of that regret hardly constitutes the main method of moving God, and hence the purpose of fasting. Indeed, countless passages allude to the mercy of God without reference to repentance;[19] it is not until later literature that mercy becomes more consistently predicated upon it.[20] When, in later literature, repentance is deemed necessary in evoking divine mercy and prayer takes a turn towards the penitential, the larger ritual context of the *fast day* evolves to include new requirements, but fasting itself

[18]In her recent book, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003), Susan Sontag discusses how photographs of anonymous victims of war can cause those who regard them to condemn *all* war, i.e., the source of the pain that they behold. The justice of the victim's cause becomes irrelevant in the face of this natural human response to suffering (pp. 3–17).

[19]Walter Brueggemann ("A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation," and "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II: Embrace of Pain," *CBQ* 47 [1985] 28–46 and 395–415) argues that, though there exists a "common theology" in the Old Testament that connects affliction to disobedience and allows for forgiveness only through repentance (p. 42), i.e., return to requisite obedience, there is also a "crucial minority voice" (p. 399) expressed particularly in the literature of lament that protests against this dominant view, seeking to move God but through "brinkmanship" rather than penitent acceptance. The space that Brueggemann creates for a nonpenitential demand of God for amelioration is essential. Whether the "revolt" model is entirely appropriate, however, requires further consideration. Brueggemann assumes the dominance of strict justice and repentance in the "common theology." However, the nonpenitential affliction expressed through prayer and fasting, rituals that were certainly part of the common religious life, seems to call upon an equally important component of the "common theology," namely the mercy of God. The condition of repentance, in fact, may not have been quite so common. Note that Claus Westermann (*Praise and Lament in the Psalms* [trans. K. R. Crim and R. N. Soulen; Atlanta: John Knox, 1981] 264) maintains that the lament form should not be considered transgressive but rather part of a normal relationship with God. The view espoused here receives additional impetus from the classic article of Klaus Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?" (trans. T. H. Trapp), in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. James L. Crenshaw; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 57–87. Koch maintains that in the Old Testament, deeds have their own inherent consequences that God does not directly determine. One implication of Koch's argument is that appeal to God for protection from the consequences of one's deeds need not constitute penitence, which would probably be ineffective since the decision is not simply his to adjudicate, but rather a plea for special intervention.

[20]This development is reflected, among other ways, in the addition of a repentance clause in many of the late reformulations of the divine attributes of mercy. Compare the well-known early formulation, "The LORD! the LORD! a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and

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remains bound up in prayer and there is little reason to assume that its basic nature and meaning have changed.[21] Furthermore, even repentance and confession are generally viewed as appealing to God's mercy,[22] not to a notion of justice whereby the penitent earns forgiveness by recanting improper deeds. Therefore, even in penitential contexts, fasting and prayer could continue to perform their standard function of appealing to God's mercy.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the relevant biblical passages—beginning with examples of personal fasts and working our way to communal fasts—it might be useful to draw an analogy between biblical fasting and the modern hunger strike, itself essentially a tactic for attracting attention to a cause. Though far from perfect, this comparison emphasizes the element of protest, rather than penitence, that can motivate fasting. Its frequent association with the lament, as we shall see below, does indeed suggest that fasting expresses an element of protest against a decree deemed unfair or simply unbearable.[23] Towards that aim, and again in this respect like the biblical lament, fasting is an extreme, stark[24] expression of one's affliction that tends towards overstatement or exaggeration of the desperation of the situation in order to arouse attention and elicit sympathy.[25] The refusal to eat, like the lamenter's refusal to fall silent, is in many ways the last recourse of protest for one otherwise powerless to change the course of events.

The Power of the Poor

One highly successful "hunger striker" was the biblical figure Hannah. Used in rabbinic literature as a source for laws relating to prayer because of its detailed

faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin" (Exod 34:6–7), with a later formulation: "for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful; He will not turn His face from you *if you return to Him*" (2 Chr 30:9). For a few of the many examples of the later formulation, see Joel 2:13; *4 Ezra* 7:133; Sir 5:6–7; and *Pr. Man.* 7. A good collection of passages that mention the attributes of mercy can be found in James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 721–27. See also Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) 335–50.

[21]Podella (*Ṣom-Fasten*, 265–89) focuses on fast days and maintains that there is a fundamental evolution from fasting as lament to fasting as penitence. Indeed, there is an important shift in the overall ritual complex of the fast day. The question though is whether the particular contribution made by the fasting component of the fast day has changed significantly with the addition of repentance to the overall context.

[22]See n. 20, above.

[23]On the protest element of the lament, see Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 270–71.

[24]For the use of this helpful word with regard to the biblical lament, see Patrick D. Miller, "Trouble and Woe: Interpreting the Biblical Laments," *Interpretation* 37 (1983) 34. For a general discussion of the role of "stark" language in the Hebrew Bible and elsewhere, see Kugel, *The God of Old*, 137–68.

[25]For the lament as an expression of human affliction and an appeal to God's compassion, see Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 264.

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description of prayer,[26] the Hannah narrative (1 Sam 1:1–28) can provide our discussion with an in-depth example of the relationship between affliction and prayer, and the refusal to eat. Great anguish over her barrenness and over the cumulative taunts of her rival wife leads Hannah to pray. Her anguish (עני) is fundamental to her ultimate success, and she directly alludes to it in her votive prayer: "O LORD of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering (עני) of Your maidservant and will remember me . . ." (1:11). Hannah's powerless and marginal social position as a woman[27] is compounded by her barrenness; and yet, because YHWH is a God who in his mercy "breaks all the rules," it paradoxically provides her with the nearly unstoppable power of the pathetic plea.[28] And indeed, Hannah's anguish is heeded, and she is remembered by God, who bestows upon her not just any child but a great leader.[29] The psalm that follows, long recognized as secondary in nature,[30] nevertheless fittingly picks up on the theme of the afflicted being exalted through the agency of God: "He raises the *poor* from the dust, / Lifts up the *needy* from the dunghill, / Setting them with nobles, / Granting them seats of honor" (2:8). Indeed, the psalmist never tires of emphasizing in his petitions the oppressed position in which he claims to find himself and frequently refers to himself as an עני, a "poor" or, perhaps better, an "afflicted" one: "Good and faithful as You are, save me. / For I am poor (עני) and needy" (Ps 109:21–22). The efficacy of prayer seems to be contingent upon God's perception of the petitioner's affliction: "Here was an impoverished man (עני) who called, / and the LORD listened, / and delivered him from all his troubles" (Ps 34:7). Consider also the following: "You shall not ill-treat (תענון) any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat (ענה תענה) them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me" (Exod 22:21–22). Hannah's plea can be regarded as an enactment of such verses.[31]

[26]*b. Ber.* 31a–31b.

[27]See Carol Meyers, "The Hannah Narrative in Feminist Perspective," in *"Go to the Land I Will Show You": Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young* (ed. Joseph E. Coleson and Victor H. Matthews; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996) 117–26.

[28]For the judgment that "God breaks all the rules" when responding to Sarah, see James Kugel, "Wisdom and the Anthological Temper," *Prooftexts* 17 (1997) 19. Anderson (*A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance*, passim) emphasizes the way in which rituals of grief do not simply give way to normalcy but are rather succeeded by the positive expression of joy. The same can be said for the shift from lament to praise that is frequently found in the Psalms; see Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 79–81; and Walter Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life," *Interpretation* 28 [1974] 8–19.

[29]Equity is not merely restored when the rules are broken; rather, greatness ensues. Thus the matriarchs—Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel—all suffered from barrenness, and the mighty Samson was born of a previously barren woman.

[30]See the brief comments and bibliography in Marc Brettler, "The Composition of 1 Samuel 1–2," *JBL* 116 (1997) 602–3.

[31]See Miller, "Trouble and Woe," for how biblical narratives can help shed light on the Psalms and vice versa.

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Hannah also "wept and would not eat" (1 Sam 1:6). Her refusal to eat, not presented here as a formal fast, represents a natural outpouring of her grief. One cannot very well weep and eat at the same time; the output of tears is inimical to the intake of food.[32] Hannah's refusal to eat also means rejecting the comfort of her elevated status as preferred wife, represented by her receipt of the honored portion of the sacrifice,[33] and assuming the persona of the afflicted person (עני).[34] These stark choices lead to and compound the pathos of the narrative's central dramatic moment, Hannah's outpouring of her grief to YHWH (1:11). Hannah's fast retains its own meaning as an expression of anguish; in the context of the larger narrative, however, it serves as preparation for the central act of prayer.

Since fasting can be a central component of the adoption of the persona of the afflicted person (עני), it should come as no surprise that there may in fact be a connection of sorts between the term for an afflicted person, עני, that figures so prominently in Hannah's prayer and the Psalms and one of the two terms commonly used to denote fasting. The phrase לְעַנּוֹת נַפְשׁ, generally understood as constituting or at least including fasting,[35] was probably understood reflexively as "to afflict oneself."[36] Some have viewed this term as inherently penitential, suggesting the translation, "to afflict one's soul."[37] There is, however, very little evidence for such a meaning. It is probably best to understand it (rather loosely) as "to engage in certain acts of

[32]*Lam. Rab.* 1:22.

[33]1 Sam 1:5 seems to suggest that Hannah receives a special portion, whatever מנה אחת אפים may mean, given that the gift of such a portion is then justified in the following clause: "because he favored Hannah," כי את חנה אהב. See also P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1980) 51–52. The LXX suggests a different reading, but the extensive differences between the LXX and the MT in these chapters have led scholars to suggest the existence of different recensions that should be read separately. See Stanley D. Walters, "Hannah and Anna: The Greek and Hebrew Texts of 1 Samuel 1," *JBL* 107 (1988) 385–412, esp. 390; and Emmanuel Tov, "Different Editions of the Song of Hannah and of Its Narrative Framework," in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997) 149–70.

[34]See Victor Turner, "Humility and Hierarchy: The Liminality of Status Elevation and Reversal," in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969) 166–203, for an anthropological discussion of the need for the privileged to engage in "status reversal," i.e., humiliation, at key religious junctures.

[35]That the phrase at least *includes* fasting is suggested in Isa 58:3, 5; Ps 35:13; Ezra 8:21; and Dan 10:12. The latter reference, in particular, suggests that other forms of self-affliction may have attended fasting. Other attestations in Lev 16:29, Lev 23:27, and Num 29:7 add little to what can be deduced from the former references. Rabbinic literature does indeed explain the phrase in these latter verses as a reference to fasting (see *Sifra* Aḥarê Mot 5:7, c); but the need for such exegesis points out the ambiguity of the phrase. The actual prescription in rabbinic law of multiple forms of affliction on the Day of Atonement (i.e., prohibitions against bathing, wearing shoes, etc.; see *m. Yoma* 8:1) points to a possible broader interpretation of the phrase.

[36]Hence the easy transition from the earlier Piel form, לְעַנּוֹת נַפְשׁ, to the later Hitpael form, לְהִתְעַנּוֹת, seen in Ezra 8:21 and Dan 10:12. Its original etymology is quite beside the point.

[37]Muddiman, "Fasting," 773.

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ritual affliction that render oneself afflicted"—that is, functionally equivalent to an עני. Fasting is precisely one of those kinds of acts.

If fasting constitutes the adoption of the persona of the afflicted, then the higher the status of the one fasting, the more dramatic his or her descent. The following account of David's entreaty to save the fruit of his illicit union with Bathsheba provides us with what is, for the Hebrew Bible, an unusually clear programmatic statement of a religious phenomenon's function:

> David entreated God for the boy; David fasted, and he went in and spent the night lying on the ground. The senior servants of his household tried to induce him to get up from the ground; but he refused, nor would he partake of food with them. On the seventh day the child died. . . . Thereupon David rose from the ground; he bathed and anointed himself, and he changed his clothes. . . . Then he went home and asked for food, which they set before him, and he ate. His courtiers asked him, "Why have you acted in this manner? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but now that the child is dead, you rise and take food?" He replied, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept because I thought: 'Who knows? The LORD may have pity on me, and the child may live.' But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will never come back to me." (2 Sam 12:16–23)

Indeed, the passage as a whole seems to constitute something of a polemic against the practice of fasting as a component of mourning for the dead; fasting is so thoroughly associated with entreaty that its use in mourning rites has become problematic. This passage thereby gives us direct insight into how ancient Israelites conceived of the purpose of fasting, namely as a component of prayer, which, in this instance, is offered on behalf of the sick: "I fasted and wept because I thought: 'Who knows? The LORD may have pity on me (וחנני), and the child may live.'" David has indeed sinned; but by fasting and weeping, he is looking for pity—note the choice of verb—not forgiveness. His concern is not with an eradication of his own sinfulness but with the salvation of the infant.[38]

The Unseemliness of Affliction

There is one apparently minor detail in the above account that, when subjected to careful analysis, actually offers us great insight into the social dynamics of fast-

[38]Those who maintain that David's fast is penitential are therefore mistaken. (See, for instance, Fritz Stolz, "צום," *TLOT* 2:1066, and the awkward narrative reading adopted in Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance*, 83, that ends up assuming that David is not speaking forthrightly to his courtiers.) Furthermore, David in the preceding passage had confessed his sin and already had it commuted (12:13). The problem is that, as the fruit of an illicit union, the infant continues to constitute an affront to God and must be eradicated (12:14). One could surmise that, if not for the infant's inherent flaw, David's moving performance would have succeeded. God is, as it were, powerless to overturn this decree.

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ing and hence into its very nature: "The senior servants of his household tried to induce him to get up from the ground; but he refused, nor would he partake of food with them." By assuming the persona of an afflicted person, David has cut himself off from his normal society, and his servants are disquieted. They attempt to persuade him to join them in their customary repast, to shed his mourner's garb and the extreme stance that he has adopted. They withhold from him word of his son's death lest he extend this position in unimaginable new ways. Later on, they even question the king's behavior. Why do they exhibit so little understanding of David's comportment?

In this regard, it may be useful to return for a moment to an odd part of the Hannah narrative. Elkanah, Hannah's husband, questions Hannah's behavior: "Hannah, why are you crying and why aren't you eating? Why are you so sad? Am I not more devoted to you than ten sons?" (1 Sam 1:8). Elkanah undoubtedly feels slighted, not by Hannah's desire for children per se, but by its particular manifestation: "Why are you crying and why aren't you eating? Why are you so sad?" He protests because she, through her extreme expression of affliction, has effectively removed herself from participation in the feast and therefore from his society. By assuming the persona of the עני, an afflicted one, she has chosen to descend into a position of isolated grief that bestows upon her a potency with regard to the merciful God. But for those left behind in the world of joyous festivities, like Elkanah, or everyday affairs, like David's servants, there is an unseemliness in the affliction manifested by these individuals with their private griefs. Indeed fasting with its accompanying rites produce results that are grotesque: dirty, bedraggled bodies. The natural human impulse is either to withdraw from them or to force them to clean themselves up. The same dynamic explains an additional, otherwise obscure passage in the book of Esther. Esther becomes "greatly agitated" upon discovering that Mordecai has been fasting and wearing sackcloth (4:4). She cannot bear the thought, and, not even inquiring at first into the cause of his distress, she attempts to force him out of his assumed stance by sending him proper clothing. Thus we find several examples in biblical narratives of the surrounding social network, usually close relatives or friends, resisting the attempt of individuals to descend into the persona of the עני through engaging in fasting and its concomitant rites, despite the fact that it is precisely from the assumption of such a stance that success is attained. Society, to maintain its own integrity, has a stake in preventing individuals from slipping into the stark and horrid.

The unseemliness of affliction also appears as a factor in the Psalms. Before discussing this aspect of the Psalms' portrayal of fasting however, it should be pointed out that the Psalms, like the narrative passages, reveal a connection between fasting and prayer: "My knees give way from fasting; / my flesh is lean, has lost its fat. / I am the object of their scorn (חרפה); / when they see me, they shake their head. / Help me, O LORD, my God; / save me in accord with Your faithfulness"

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(Ps 109:24–26).[39] Accounts of fasting found in narratives can foster the impression that fasting is merely preparation for prayer: "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept because I thought: 'Who knows? The LORD may have pity on me, and the child may live.'" The Psalms, however, tend to present fasting as a heartfelt expression of grief and therefore not to make its connection to prayer explicit. Where there is fasting in the Psalms, however, prayer is never far off, and the narrative accounts indicate that this connection is no mere coincidence. The collective evidence thus leaves one with the impression that fasting must be seen as an autonomous expression of affliction, but one that flows naturally and quickly into petition, like the lament psalms themselves, resulting in both complaint and supplication.[40]

Returning to the question of societal resistance to fasting, as experienced by David, Hannah, and Mordecai, one notes that two of the three references to fasting in the Psalms explicitly connect fasting to חרפה, a word that refers to both the taunts of an enemy and the subsequent shame. These references seem to suggest that the enemies' taunts occur as a result of the psalmist's fast. In addition to the passage quoted above, consider the following: "When I wept and fasted, / I was reviled for it (ותהי לחרפות לי). / I made sackcloth my garment; / I became a byword among them" (Ps 69:11–12). Why should the psalmist be reviled for fasting?[41] Extreme fasting has so altered the psalmist's appearance that others experience disgust at the sight of him: "When they see me, they shake their head."[42] In the narratives, those who fast encounter resistance from their surrounding social networks. In the more exaggerated and interior

[39]See Ps 69:11, 14, quoted, in part, below, and Ps 35:13, which, like the David narrative, connects fasting to prayer for the sick: "Yet, when they were ill, / my dress was sackcloth, / I kept a fast— / may what I prayed for happen to me!"

[40]Scholars have longed debated the relative weight of complaint, on the one hand, and supplication, on the other, in the lament literature. See Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 9. Of course, supplication without complaint is not genuine, and complaint without supplication is useless.

[41]Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich (*Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* [trans. J. D. Nogalski; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998] 149) have suggested that, due to a belief in the doctrine of retribution, ancient Israelites would have viewed any sickness as a sign of sin, a judgment which would constitute an insult to the one afflicted. They would probably apply the same argument to fasting, which also involves an individual in desperate straits. Their suggestion stems from the pervasive spiritualizing tendency that insists upon always connecting affliction to sin, with negative repercussions for the interpretation of fasting, as we have seen. A close reading of the passages suggests that the source of repulsion is more physical than spiritual.

[42]Gunkel and Begrich (*Introduction to Psalms*, 148–49) reject a similar interpretation, which explains the experience of disgust in the face of disease as deriving from a primitive belief that demons cause disease. They rightly point out that the Psalms by and large do not reflect such a belief. The argument here, however, is that human beings naturally and universally experience a certain degree of repulsion (and not merely just "moral" repulsion) in the face of affliction that has little to do with a belief in demons.

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language of the Psalms, such resistance is experienced as scorn, little different from the scorn that those who are permanently poor and afflicted suffer.[43]

Aside from the element of realism, why do both biblical narratives and the Psalms emphasize societal disgust? In part, its portrayal sharpens the individual's fasting-induced affliction by adding an element of isolation. More fundamentally, though, it provides a mirror through which the horror and starkness of the individual's assumed stance can be viewed. (In fact, this stance is not merely viewed but described, since this mirror is in truth a talking mirror: Each one of the narrative passages, and quite possibly the scorn [חרפה] of the Psalms as well, is marked by some sort of verbal exchange.)[44] What is wretched to humanity, and hence subject to suppression, is pitiable to God. Thus, the portrayal of the negative societal response becomes a powerful tool for both narrator and lamenter, who would each emphasize the depth of affliction experienced and underscore the need for divine intervention. Use of this tool helps point to the true nature of fasting, a manifestation of the horror of affliction, and to its expressive function, since it must be mitigated through human reaction. It may also suggest an alternative identification of the elusive "enemies" in the lament psalms: the extent of affliction can only be experienced fully through the negative reaction of the afflicted's social network.[45]

Until now, we have only examined passages that explicitly mention fasting. But the role of fasting in the lament psalms—as an expression of affliction heightened and defined by scorn and ultimately designed to induce divine pity—places it squarely within the domain of a broader range of expression in the lament psalms, namely the personal lament component, thus enabling us to define its exact function yet more closely.[46] One finds throughout such psalms an extensive emphasis

[43]Transformation into a state of joyous revelry, the opposite of the lament, can also lead to scorn. See 2 Sam 6:16.

[44]Westermann (*Praise and Lament*, 189–90) discusses how the lament psalms focus on what the enemies *say*. Indeed throughout the HB, one finds that what people say is essential in defining states of joy and mourning. See, for instance, Ruth 1:19–21 and 4:14–17.

[45]The close but uncertain connection between affliction and enemies has long been recognized. In fact, it led Sigmund Mowinckel (*The Psalms In Israel's Worship* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1962] 2–4, 6–8) to maintain that the affliction of the psalmist had been brought about through the sorcery of enemies, a farfetched claim but one driven by this difficulty. But the very experience of affliction might only be able to occur in opposition to others, hence the need for the close connection between affliction and enemies. Note in this regard the enemy-like status of the friends of Job and the strange animosity that arises between Sarah and Rachel and their husbands over their barrenness (Gen 16:5; 30:1–2), as perhaps also occurred between Hannah and her husband. Westermann (*Praise and Lament*, 193) notes that the enemies generally appear to remain within the community of the lamenter. This is not to say that the Psalms do not allow, at times, for the possibility that the enemies themselves are the source of the affliction. See the criticism of Mowinckel already found in Gunkel and Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms*, 145–48. Their own answer revolves around a belief in the sinfulness of the afflicted, for criticism of which see n. 42, above.

[46]Westermann (*Praise and Lament*, 169) presents a threefold division of the objects of complaint: 1) God; 2) the state of the one who laments; and 3) the enemy. Expression of affliction constitutes

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on the dissolution of the psalmist's body.[47] Consider the following passage: "I am poured out like water: / all my bones are disjointed; / my heart is like wax, melting within me; / my vigor dries up like a shard; / my tongue cleaves to my palate; / You commit me to the dust of earth" (Ps 22:15). This extreme language is designed to move God to take pity and heed the desperate cry of the one reciting the psalm. Scholars have generally maintained that the extensive use of such language tells us something about the *Sitz im Leben* of the lament psalms, namely that they were recited by those who were ill.[48] There is undoubtedly some truth to this claim. Yet the fine line between the undesired dissolution of the body wrought by illness and the purposeful dissolution of the body wrought by fasting—they function the same way formally in lament literature, namely to draw attention to the psalmist's distress—suggests another possibility. Affliction, in the lament psalms, is very much a stance adopted by the supplicant. Though the distress be genuine, its expression is subject to orchestration, because verbal and physical expression were essential to the ancient Israelite experience of emotion.[49] While the lament itself constitutes the verbal component of this orchestration, there were undoubtedly a variety of means to express the physical component.[50] In those cases in which distress was not caused by natural illness—and there must have been many, to judge from the great variety of situations other than illness that occasion prayer in the Hebrew Bible—manifestations of illness could be induced.[51] As an obvious method of simulating such a state, and given what has been labeled as the "open and metaphorical" language of the Psalms,[52] fasting may very well have had a broader role in the lament ritual

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the second component. For discussion of the lament over personal suffering, see ibid., 186–88. For the expression of affliction in the personal lament as designed to induce divine pity, see Gunkel and Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms*, 155–56 and 169–70.

[47]Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 80.

[48]See Gunkel and Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms*, 135; and Klaus Seybold and Ulrich B. Mueller, *Sickness and Healing* (trans. D. W. Stott; Nashville: Abingdon, 1981) 43–56.

[49]Again, see Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, A Time To Dance*. Also consider the example of 2 Sam 13:19, where Tamar, after pleading with Amnon not to rape and thereby shame her, proceeds to enact her shame by publicly engaging in mourning practices. (It is Absalom who must tell her to discontinue her behavior [v. 20].) In ancient Israel, emotion could hardly be experienced without spilling over into public expression. The assumption of her new status as a shamed individual necessitated her actions. Of course, Tamar's behavior here is not without its petitionary implications, a fact not lost on Absalom, who eventually avenges her.

[50]See Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communications*, 1:347–2:479.

[51]Miller (*Interpreting the Psalms*, 59) points out the potential for a loose interpretation of sickness: "Sickness is a universal and vivid image to describe situations of extreme distress. The actual circumstances of sickness may not be present at all, but deliverance from distress is a healing." The basic point is similar but I would suggest that where the circumstances of actual sickness were lacking there may have been an attempt to induce an equivalent state.

[52]See the discussion by Miller (*Interpreting the Psalms*, 49–52). Gunkel and Begrich (*Introduction to the Psalms*, 134) already make a similar point; construed as symptoms, the enumerated afflic-

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than its three explicit attestations in Psalms alone would seem to suggest.[53] (Indeed, could not Ps 22:15, quoted above, apply just as well to fasting?)[54] Since we now only possess the script, as it were, of the laments and not their stage directions, the frequency with which fasting attended the personal lament cannot be readily determined. The limited evidence, however, does allow us to recognize that fasting functions in the lament psalms in much the same way as "sickness," namely as a state of affliction on account of which the lamenter demands attention and ultimately salvation. As such, it can be said to share in the essentially nonpenitential spirit of this component of the lament and of the lament in general;[55] it expresses despondency and affliction, not contrition and sinfulness.

Afflicting Oneself for Revelation?

Unseemly before fellow human beings, fasting is nevertheless potent in its ability to reverse the fortunes of the afflicted. A connection between self-mortification and spiritual attainment is well known in the history of religions,[56] and it is perhaps tempting to view fasting in the Hebrew Bible as an analogous practice. If so, one could argue that fasting should be understood through other models, such as purification, that assume it to possess an automatic effect, something somewhat closer to penitence. A late text—also describing the fast of an individual—that may perhaps approach a

tions do not match up well with specific known diseases. Gunkel and Begrich suggest that unity can only be sought in an underlying spiritual condition. It is worth considering, though, whether the language of "metaphor" and "spiritual condition" is apt terminology. If there is, nevertheless, a physical expression of affliction, the language of sickness perhaps should be labeled as "emblematic" rather than "metaphorical."

[53]Gunkel and Begrich (*Introduction to Psalms*, 126) indeed see fasting and its concomitant rites as pervasive in the "individual complaint songs." They miss its basic connection to the experience of affliction in these psalms, however, and therefore tend to view the rites as taking on a penitential tinge, a direction in which Mowinckel (*The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 4) continues.

[54]Consider also Ps 102:5.

[55]See Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 273–74. Mowinckel (*The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 12) recognizes that "the note of penitence is not very strong in the psalms of lamentation," but then tends to see it implicitly everywhere. Gunkel and Begrich (*Introduction to Psalms*, 187) present "songs of confessions" as an entirely distinct sub-category of the lament psalms. As they note, complaints are in general lacking in these psalms. A particularly strong insistence upon the distinction between lament and confession can be found in Fredrik Lindström, *Suffering and Sin: Interpretation of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms* (trans. M. McLamb; Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell International, 1994). See also Samuel E. Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 50–56. Though an argument from silence, it is worth mentioning that, in the main examples of penitential psalms, Psalms 51 and 130, there is no mention of fasting. In keeping with the general lack of emphasis on affliction, there is also no need in these psalms for mention of enemies as highlighting that affliction or otherwise.

[56]See, for example, Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (trans. W. R. Trask, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) 33–66; and n. 7, above.

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view of fasting as automatically effective is nevertheless illustrative of the weakness of this model when applied to fasting in the Hebrew Bible: "At that time, I, Daniel, kept three full weeks of mourning. I ate no tasty food, nor did any meat or wine enter my mouth. I did not anoint myself until the three weeks were over" (Dan 10: 2–3). Following upon this extreme self-affliction,[57] Daniel is vouchsafed a marvelous vision of an angel. Scholars have struggled in their interpretation of the fast in this passage because of their dependence upon the standard classificatory schemes discussed above and have generally concluded that its nature is overdetermined. On one hand, vision follows closely upon fasting. On the other hand, Daniel's actions are characterized as mourning, which suggests penitence more than vision-inducement.[58] In fact, the angel's own words to Daniel focus on the importance of prayer: "Have no fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to get understanding, afflicting yourself before your God (ולהתענות לפני אלוהיך), your prayer was heard, and I have come because of your prayer" (Dan 10:12). While the description of Daniel's fast includes no explicit mention of prayer, evidently here (and, as we shall see, elsewhere)[59] fasting constitutes something of a synecdoche for prayer; mere mention of fasting implies the presence of prayer as well. Evidently, even when employing fasting in the larger context of seeking vision, the ancient Israelite continued to view and experience self-affliction[60] as deeply bound up in prayer and appeal to the mercy of God.[61] Hannah and Daniel only differed in the objects of their desire, not in their basic method of attaining them.

[57]In Second Temple times, fasting, in certain contexts (e.g., mourning for the dead), changes from complete denial of food to refraining from meat and wine. See, for instance, *b. Mo'ed Qat.* 23b.

[58]See John J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 372 n. 24; and David Satran, "Daniel: Seer, Philosopher, Holy Man," in *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism: Profiles and Paradigms* (ed. J. J. Collins and G. W. E. Nickelsburg; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1980) 35–36. R. H. Charles (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1929] 255) sees it as just vision-inducement; Alexander A. Di Lella (AB; *Daniel* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978] 151) as penitence. For a discussion of the use of fasting in apocalyptic visions, in general, that tends to assume a penitential purpose but acknowledges complexity, see Michael E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 114, 118–19.

[59]Deut 9:18 and Jer 14:12.

[60]For the idea that behavior described in apocalyptic visions is reflective of actual practice, see most recently Michael E. Stone, "A Reconsideration of Apocalyptic Visions," *HTR* 96 (2003) 167–80.

[61]Even in texts such as *4 Ezra* 5:13, prayer remains associated with fasting. It is easy to see, however, how fasting could come to be seen as directly effective in the production of visions quite apart from prayer. One such example is *2 Bar.* 20:5–6: "Therefore, go away and sanctify yourself for seven days and do not eat bread and do not drink water and do not speak to anybody. And after this time come to this place, and I shall reveal myself to you" (A. F. J. Klijn, "2 [Syriac Apocalypse of] Baruch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* [ed. James H. Charlesworth; 2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1983] 1:627).

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The Fasting King

Before turning to examples of fasting as a response to community-wide affliction, it is necessary to discuss one last unusual case of a personal fast that has generally been cited as a penitential fast, Ahab's response to Elijah's prophecy of his doom:[62]

> When Ahab heard these words, he rent his clothes and put sackcloth on his body. He fasted and lay in sackcloth and walked about subdued. Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself (נכנע) before Me, I will not bring the disaster in his lifetime; I will bring the disaster upon his house in his son's time. (1 Kgs 21:27–29)

Some have asked why so great a villain as Ahab should have been portrayed as repenting of having wronged Naboth.[63] But, in fact, the language of repentance, shame, or confession[64] is absent from this passage. Rather we find that Ahab "humbled himself," נכנע, which, in the context of the passage does not refer to an inner penitential state off the text's plane of representation but rather to the concrete acts of humiliation that Ahab undergoes: expression of grief through fasting and hence the assumption of the persona of a defeated, or thoroughly afflicted, supplicant.[65] In much the same way, a defeated king is forced to prostrate himself and acknowledge the superiority of the victor.[66] Current abasement, not future obedience, constitutes the central thrust of such an act. To call Ahab's response repentance is to ignore a subtle distinction underscored by the text's own terminology.

"Great and Small Alike"

It has long been recognized that communal laments, a genre found throughout the Hebrew Bible, must have been recited often in the context of public fast days.[67] As I argued with regard to personal fasts, the importance of communal fasts in ancient Israel might surpass that suggested by the number of attested cases, though

[62]See, for example, Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings* (New York: Doubleday, 2001) 483; and John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (2d rev. ed.; London: SCM Press, 1970) 443. This interpretation can already be found in rabbinic midrash; see *Pesiqta de-Rab Kahana* 24:10.

[63]J. Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, 443.

[64]David's response to Nathan's proclamation of the divine decree against him in 2 Sam 12:13 take the typical form of a confession: "I have sinned against the LORD."

[65]It is conceivable that, as in the example in the preceding note, Ahab implicitly prays as well.

[66]The verb נכנע is indeed generally used to represent the state of one defeated in war, e.g., Judg 3:30, as well as the position of a king who is forced to accept the rule of YHWH, e.g., 2 Kgs 22:19.

[67]Gunkel and Begrich (*Introduction to Psalms*, 83–85) appropriately begin their discussion of the communal laments with a detailed treatment of the physical actions that accompany them. In their words: "One must therefore visualize the prominently portrayed practices of the lament festival if one wants to understand this poetry" (p. 85). Subsequent discussions of the laments, however, tend to give less attention to the accompanying rites.

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they too are many. While scholars have tended to view the rites of the fast day as penitential[68] and its purpose as restoration of the moral order, accounts of the public fast day in the Hebrew Bible frequently fail to mention confession or repentance. Prayer, on the other hand, always figures prominently and generally constitutes the climactic culmination of the day's mourning rites.[69]

The close connection between communal lament and public fast day is best exemplified in the following evocative passage from Joel:[70]

> Lament—like a maiden girt with sackcloth / For the husband of her youth! / Offering and libation have ceased / From the House of the LORD; / The priests must mourn / Who minister to the LORD. / The country is ravaged, / The ground must mourn; / For the new grain is ravaged, / The new wine is dried up, / The new oil has failed. / Farmers are dismayed / And vine dressers wail / Over wheat and barley; / For the crops of the field are lost. / The vine has dried up, / the fig tree withers, / Pomegranate, palm, and apple— / All the trees of the field are sear. / And joy has dried up among men. / Gird yourselves and lament, O priests, / Wail, O ministers of the altar; / Come, spend the night in sackcloth, / O ministers of my God. / For offering and libation are withheld / From the House of your God. / Solemnize a fast, / Proclaim an assembly; / Gather the elders—all the inhabitants of the land— / In the House of the LORD your God, / And cry out to the LORD. (1:8–14)

The passage has been quoted in full to emphasize the repetitive and utterly despondent quality of the call to lament. Absent from it is any evidence of penitence.[71] The expression of pain and the inexorable movement from mourning to fasting and, finally, crying out to the LORD are presented as natural and undoubtedly deemed

[68]See, for example, Mowinckel (*The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 193), who seems to misconstrue Gunkel on this point, since Gunkel does not identify fasting and its concomitant rites as predominantly penitential.

[69]Prayer is seen as the key moment of the fast day in rabbinic law, as well; see *m. Ta'an.* 2:2.

[70]Note also the juxtaposition of fasting and lamenting (כפד) in Zech 7:5.

[71]Many scholars have considered fasting here to be penitential. (See, for instance, Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos* [trans. W. Janzen et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977] 29, 33; James L. Crenshaw, *Joel* [New York: Doubleday, 1995] 98, 101, 105; and Theodore Hiebert, "Joel, Book of," *ABD* 3:875, 877.) They receive impetus, in part, from Joel 2:12–14, an explicit call to repentance, discussed below. In its position and form, however, this call to repentance is quite separate from the call to lament. (See the review of scholarship on the call's formal aspects in Willem S. Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985] 52–53. See also Paul L. Redditt, "The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy," *CBQ* 48 [1986] 227–28, for the suggestion that a new redactional unit, albeit one authored by the same person as the previous, begins at 2:12. The gap between the call to repentance and the preceding passages is also remarked upon by James L. Crenshaw, "Who Knows What YHWH Will Do? The Character of God in the Book of Joel," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* [eds. Astrid B. Beck et al.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995] 185–86.) Most importantly, the call-to-lament passage appears as a coherent, independent unit in its own right, as does the call-to-lament passage that follows the call to repentance (Joel 2:15–17).

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effective. Like the personal fast, the communal fast physically expresses communal affliction, while the lament serves as its verbal garb; the physical component—that is, the very act of fasting—is no less dramatic and important than the verbal for being, in some sense, indescribable and hence simply alluded to in a single command ("Solemnize a fast").

As is the case with the personal fast, attention to the social dynamics of fasting sheds light on its basic nature. The above passage from Joel, as well as most other depictions of communal fasts, highlights two aspects of fast day proceedings: 1) the dominant involvement of leadership in both the proclamation of the fast and in the prayer and 2) the necessary inclusion of all members of the community.[72] These elements are highlighted even more clearly in another fast day proclamation found in Joel:

> Blow a horn in Zion, / Solemnize a fast, / Proclaim an assembly! / Gather the people, / Sanctify the congregation. / Bring together the old, / Gather the babes / And the sucklings at the breast; / Let the bridegroom come out of his chamber, / The bride from her canopied couch. / Between the portico and the altar, / Let the priests, the LORD's ministers, weep / And say: / "Oh, spare Your people, LORD! / Let not Your possession become a mockery, / To be taunted by nations! / Let not the peoples say, / 'Where is their God?'" (2:15–17)

Before discussing why biblical narratives that describe fast days construct a kind of elliptical theater of action with these dual albeit incongruous foci, it may be helpful to examine a few more examples of this phenomenon. Upon learning of the multitudes arrayed against him,

> Jehoshaphat was afraid; he decided to seek the LORD and proclaimed a fast for all Judah. Judah assembled to beseech the LORD. They also came from all the towns of Judah to seek the LORD. Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem in the House of the LORD at the front of the new court. He said, "LORD God of our fathers. . . ." All Judah stood before the LORD with their little ones, their womenfolk, and their children. (2 Chr 20:3–13)

First of all, it should be pointed out that the narrative contains no hint of repentance (and this despite the Chronicler's penchant for stressing repentance),[73] nor does the prayer, here abbreviated, contain any element of confession. Rather it is Jehoshaphat's request for protection through prayer that constitutes the climactic act of the day. Equally striking is the narrative's insistence on the central role of Jehoshaphat in both proclaiming the fast day and conducting the prayer, on the one hand, and the presence of *all* the people, women and children included, on the other, a fact that is repeated several times in this brief passage.

[72]The same holds true down to the time of rabbinic literature. See *m. Taʿan.* 2:1.

[73]See Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought* (trans. A. Barber; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1997) 176–91.

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Children are referred to in another fast recorded in Ezra 8:21, which provides further evidence for the close connection between fasting and prayer,[74] without a sign of repentance: "I proclaimed a fast there by the Ahava River to afflict ourselves before our God to beseech Him for a smooth journey for us and for our children and for all our possessions." What emerges despite the brevity of the passage is the dual emphasis on the leader who proclaims the fast and the inclusion of all parts of the community as the object of the prayer.

A similar dynamic probably underlies the account of Mordecai's fast:

> When Mordecai learned all that had happened, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes. He went through the city, crying out loudly and bitterly, until he came in front of the palace gate; for one could not enter the palace gate wearing sackcloth.—Also, in every province that the king's command and decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and everybody lay in sackcloth and ashes. (Esth 4:1–3)

Commentators have struggled to interpret the significance of fasting in this passage; given that fasting is usually presented as a religious practice in the Hebrew Bible, Mordechai's fast is an anomalous act in the context of a book that fails to mention God.[75] Penitence is naturally quite absent, though some have tried to see it here.[76] On the basis of the observations about fasting discussed above, it may be proposed that the author of Esther has presented the reader with a comic fast;[77] all of the key components of the communal fast are here but are presented in a disjointed and somewhat senseless fashion. Thus we find evidence of the dual foci of leader and people, but they are, incongruously, in different cities. Mordecai grieves over the decree of a mortal and eminently fallible king, not divinely-wrought afflictions. Just as a leader might approach God in prayer, Mordecai cries out and approaches the palace gate, but who is there to heed his lament? His actions nevertheless end up functioning as an effective petition since Esther's attention, though not God's, is roused by his disheveled appearance at the gate and, through their subsequent conversations, she is led to act. The author thus simulates standard elements of the communal fast in both form and ultimately effect, since, by leading Esther to act, the fast constitutes the turning point of the entire comedy, just as a religious

[74]Joseph Blenkinsopp (*Ezra-Nehemiah* [London: SCM Press, 1989] 168) also sees fasting here "as a reinforcement of prayer."

[75]See Jon D. Levenson, *Esther: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 78. The fast on behalf of Esther in 4:16 is usually thought of as an auxiliary to prayer that does not display clear theological elements.

[76]See one of the positions recorded in Carey A. Moore, *Esther* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971) 47.

[77]Skepticism is appropriate in the identification of humor in ancient texts. The slight perversion of an otherwise well-attested phenomenon is a feature that may indicate humorous intent, although certainty in such matters remains elusive.

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fast might prove to be a turning point in the history of a community. Through its exaggeration of, and yet fidelity to, formal features of the communal fast, this narrative helps to confirm that key features of fasting discussed above—fasting as a response to affliction, the connection between fasting and prayer, fasting as an act intended to evoke pity, and the power to effect change—were widely recognized and, indeed, even stereotyped characteristics of the biblical fast. In turn, understanding the formal features of fasting provides insight into the way in which the author of Esther reworks a well-known religious rite into a humorous turning point in the narrative.

However we interpret the above passage, it clearly constitutes one more example among many of the dual foci of the communal fast narratives. Why do such narratives stress both the central role of the leader and the required participation of all the people? Though the situation resembles the standard relationship between prayer leader(s) and congregation, and such a correspondence may help indeed to situate firmly the proceedings in the context of prayer, the fundamental need for such proceedings still must be explained. In fact, the narratives stress two different, but compatible, methods of arousing divine pity through the extreme expression of affliction. Because of their exalted status, the leadership's assumption of the persona of the afflicted through fasting and its concomitant rites is a highly significant, dramatic expression of community-wide affliction. Their lament is significant not just because of its representative quality[78] but also because their distress is most keenly felt, their fall having been greatest. The people on the whole, on the other hand, have a special power in their expression of affliction, since it sends the message that the entire community is endangered by the current calamity, including the most helpless and hence the most pitiable. The narrative emphasis placed upon the participation of great and small alike highlights the depth of the community's affliction, an achievement that is essential in successfully evoking divine pity.[79] Penitential interpretations of fasting simply do not account for such social dynamics nearly as well.[80]

There is but one example of fasting by a leader who, perhaps due to his great status, is presented as interceding alone on behalf of the people:[81]

> I threw myself down before the LORD—eating no bread and drinking no water forty days and forty nights, as before—because of the great wrong you had committed, doing what displeased the LORD and vexing Him. For I was in

[78]Gunkel and Begrich (*Introduction to Psalms*, 87) focus on this aspect.

[79]That both are deemed worthy of special pity may also tell us something about the hierarchical yet inclusive nature of Israelite society.

[80]Sin can hardly be attributed to infants, nor even particularly to the leadership, which is generally portrayed as righteous in these examples. It is also hard to view the leadership as performing rites that atone for the people, since they are generally portrayed as equally engaged in the same endeavor.

[81]Westermann (*Praise and Lament*, 275–76) also notes the rarity of the "lament of the mediator."

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> dread of the LORD's fierce anger against you, which moved Him to wipe you out. And that time, too, the LORD gave heed to me.—Moreover, the LORD was angry enough with Aaron to have destroyed him; so I also interceded for Aaron at that time. (Deut 9:18–20)

Does Moses' failure to eat constitute mourning over the people's sin or over their projected doom? Undoubtedly he regrets that the people sinned, but the central thrust of his action here is supplicatory, not penitential; dialogical, not internal.[82] Indeed, the phrase "I threw myself down before the LORD" is liturgical,[83] and the LORD responds by "giving heed to" (literally "hearing") Moses' plea. Moses' despondent posture is made all the more powerful by its duration and by the fact that Moses surrenders an exalted position to assume that posture.

Judges 20:26, which records the response of the Israelites to their defeat at the hands of the Benjaminites, is the rare passage that mentions universal participation, but not leadership:

> Then all the Israelites, all the army, went up and came to Bethel and they sat there, weeping before the LORD. They fasted that day until evening, and presented burnt offerings and offerings of well-being to the LORD. The Israelites inquired of the LORD. . . . "Shall we again take the field against our kinsmen the Benjaminites, or shall we not?"

Commentators have suggested numerous motives for this fast, including the display of penitence,[84] and preparation for seeking an oracle[85] or fighting a "holy war."[86] The tendency has been, as mentioned earlier, to define the nature of the fast based on an assessment of its (variably defined) context, rather than to recognize that

[82]Given the subsequent explanation "for I was in dread . . . ," the otherwise ambiguous initial phrase "because of the great wrong you had committed" should be understood as an explanation of why Moses found it necessary to pray, rather than as a reason for an internal emotion expressed by falling down and fasting. To put it another way, the subsequent explanation "for I was in dread . . ." reveals that it is primarily the disastrous implications of the sin rather than the sin itself that leads Moses to express his despair in these dramatic way. Jeffrey Tigay (*The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996] 101), in viewing Moses' fast as "an expression of grief over the people's sin and over the danger to their survival," preserves the typical view of fasting as an expression of contrition by splitting the two phrases and viewing them as expressing distinct meanings, a compromise of sorts. Deut 9:25, another description of Moses' supplicatory actions, also focuses on his concern for Israel's potential destruction, not his horror over what they have done.

[83]For parallels and references see Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 410–11.

[84]See R. J. Thompson, *Penitence and Sacrifice in Early Israel Outside the Levitical Law* (Leiden: Brill, 1963) 92–93; and Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975) 286.

[85]See Brongers, "Fasting in Israel," 8–9, and one of the possibilities raised in F. Stoltz, "צום," *TLOT*, 2:1067.

[86]See one of the possibilities raised in Stoltz, "צום," 2:1067.

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fasting, though a nonverbal expression, possesses, like its verbal equivalents, a rather stable meaning, employable in various contexts. With no transgression in evidence, the Israelites undoubtedly weep and fast because they are despondent on account of their military losses. That fasting as an expression of grief can be used to add urgency and hence power to inquiry hardly means that the Judges fast should be classified differently than the ones already discussed.

When Fasting Fails

An important parallel from a similarly martial context can be found in the acts of mourning observed by Joshua and the elders upon the defeat of the Israelites by the men of Ai (Josh 7:6). Here the tone taken by Joshua is decidedly non-penitential: "'Ah, LORD GOD!' cried Joshua. 'Why did You lead this people across the Jordan only to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites, to be destroyed by them?" (7:7–9). God's response to Joshua's lament is striking, and its significance has generally been overlooked: "But the LORD answered Joshua: 'Arise! Why do you lie prostrate? Israel has sinned!'" (7:10–11). What an odd response! If Israel has sinned, then why should Joshua not strike a penitential pose? YHWH's response implies that the mourning rites observed by Joshua did not constitute penitence but rather protest designed to induce mercy. Since in this instance there was an actual sin wrought by Achan that needed to be expunged, no amount of supplication on the part of Joshua would prove effective, just as David's prayers proved incapable of saving the fruit of his illicit union with Bathsheba. Lament fails in the face of transgression. YHWH, rendered an enemy of Israel on account of their sin, cannot readily experience pity without the removal of that sin.[87] He therefore rebukes Joshua, in much the same way as Elkanah pleads with Hannah, in order to bring him out of his inappropriate, assumed state. This narrative thus points to the distinction or even opposition to be drawn between the rites of lament and rites connected to the removal of sin. Nevertheless, the passage also shows how supplication can segue, though not merge, into a process of removing sin, when serious transgression is deemed responsible for affliction. In the case of the passage from Judges, the narrative does not go beyond the supplicatory mode; sin is not deemed to be the source of the military defeat, and hence no penitential process is necessary.

One case of communal fasting in the Hebrew Bible that is generally assumed to be penitential can now be more appropriately understood according to this model of a transition or segue from supplication to removal of sin.[88] In 1 Kgs 21:11–13, it is written:

[87]In this regard, see the discussion by Sontag (*Regarding the Pain of Others*, 10–11) of how combatants respond to images of their enemies' pain. Enemies are generally held to be responsible, in one way or another, for their own affliction even when it was clearly caused by the other side.

[88]See Milgrom, "Fasting and Fast Days," 6:1190; and Guthrie, "Fast, Fasting," 2:243.

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> His townsmen—the elders and nobles who lived in his town—did as Jezebel had instructed them. . . . They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the assembly. Then the two scoundrels came and sat down opposite him; and the scoundrels testified against Naboth publicly as follows: "Naboth has reviled God and king." Then they took him outside the town and stoned him to death.

Commentators have struggled to explain the relationship between fasting and the prosecution of Naboth, since fast days are not designed to be trials or even generally associated with them.[89] Why did Jezebel pursue her aim by proclaiming a fast? One possibility is simply that public attendance was required for the court proceedings and the proclamation of a fast day was a convenient way of obtaining it.[90] Given, however, the ease of transition from lament to trial in the Joshua passage, it seems best to conclude that fast days prepared the people to anticipate the possibility that hidden transgression was responsible for their affliction.[91] But there is no reason to assume, based on this example, that the people believed that hidden transgression was responsible in all cases for their affliction and that their fasting and prayer aimed at attaining forgiveness for their transgression. On the contrary, as the Joshua passage demonstrates, fasting and lament are ineffective against serious transgression, which must be rooted out and destroyed, a difficulty exemplified in the narrative of Jonah and the sailors. Only after fervent entreaty to their gods fails do the sailors identify Jonah as the cause of their impending doom and, on his urging, throw him overboard in order to calm the sea.[92] Jonah, knowing that his transgression is responsible for the storm, recognizes that prayer would be futile and refuses to participate in it in the first place (1:5).

That serious transgression renders fasting and prayer powerless is also reflected in the following passage:

> Thus said the LORD concerning the people: "Truly, they love to stray, they have not restrained their feet; so the LORD has no pleasure in them. Now He will recall their iniquity and punish their sin." And the LORD said to me, "Do not pray for the benefit of this people. When they fast, I will not listen to their outcry; and when they present burnt offering and meal offering, I will not accept them. I will exterminate them by war, famine, and disease." (Jer 14:10–12)

Note that here again fasting is used as a synecdoche for prayer: "when they *fast*, I will not listen to their *outcry*." YHWH informs Jeremiah that, like Jonah, he should recognize that fasting is useless given the current sinfulness of the people. The

[89]It is important to note that Naboth's position at the head of the assembly was assigned on the basis of his honor and leadership, and not as the seat of the accused; see Gray, *I & II Kings*, 440.

[90]So Francis I. Andersen, "The Socio-Juridical Background of the Naboth Incident," *JBL* 85 (1966) 56.

[91]See Gray, *I & II Kings*, 441; and Cogan, *1 Kings*, 479.

[92]See Jonah 1:4–16. Alexander Rofé ("The Vineyard of Naboth: The Origin and Message of the Story," *VT* 38 [1988] 92) points to the similarity between the Joshua, Naboth, and Jonah accounts.

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suggestion is not that the people have not fasted with proper sincerity. They have simply gone too far in their sinfulness, and God's responsiveness to fasting, a natural component of a normal relationship, has ceased.[93] That the passage presumes fasting to be a general way of moving God rather than a specific penitential response to their current condemnation is fully demonstrated by the subsequent mention of "burnt offering and meal offering," which are part of the regular sacrificial cult and not special penitential measures.

"And Let Everyone Turn Back From His Evil Ways"

If apostasy interferes with the efficacy of fasting, then repentance, in cases of apostasy, would be seen naturally as a precondition for a successful fast. That indeed appears to be the case in the following passage:

> But you [Baruch] go and read aloud the words of the LORD from the scroll which you wrote at my dictation, to all the people in the House of the LORD on a fast day. . . . Perhaps their entreaty will be accepted by the LORD, if they turn back from their wicked ways. For great is the anger and wrath with which the LORD has threatened this people. (Jer 36:6–7)

Repentance, in this passage, has not yet necessarily become a permanent component of the fast day, and the basic fasting-entreaty dynamic need not have changed. Given the sins of Israel recorded on the scroll given to Baruch, however, the acceptance of their prayer has become conditional upon their initial repentance. It is easy to see how repentance could develop from a precondition, as it is in this passage, to permanent requirement of fast days, alongside fasting and prayer. Is there not always the need for improvement in a community?

One example of the development of a new requirement for fast day proceedings can be found in Isa 58:1b–9a:

> Declare to My people their transgression, / To the House of Jacob their sin. / To be sure, they seek Me daily, / Eager to learn My ways. / Like a nation that does what is right, / That has not abandoned the laws of its God, / They ask Me for the right way, / They are eager for the nearness of God: / "Why, when we fasted, did You not see? / When we starved our bodies, did You pay no heed?" / Because on your fast day / You see to your business and oppress all your laborers! / Because you fast in strife and contention, / And you strike with a wicked fist! / Your fasting today is not such / As to make your voice heard on high. / Is such the fast I desire, / A day for men to starve their bodies? / Is it bowing the head like a bulrush / And lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, / A day when the LORD is favorable? No, this is the

[93]Note also the example of 2 Sam 21:14. After David avenges and hence effectively removes the sin committed by Saul against the Gibeonites by executing a number of Saul's descendants, God heeds Israel's supplications. Supplication is necessary, but it is effective only when sin does not interfere.

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> fast I desire: / To unlock fetters of wickedness, / And untie the cords of the yoke / To let the oppressed go free; / To break off every yoke. / It is to share your bread with the hungry, / And to take the wretched poor into your home; / When you see the naked, to clothe him, / And not to ignore your own kin. / . . . Then, when you call, the LORD will answer; / When you cry, He will say: Here I am.

Though couched in the strong language of reproach, the passage never actually attacks the sincerity of Israel's fasting,[94] but rather argues forcefully for a new requirement for fast days: cessation from the pursuit of one's own welfare[95] and an active concern to promote the welfare of the afflicted *on that day*. Prayer for relief from affliction, not penitence, is still the purpose of the fast day, but now it must be ensured through a special practice of righteousness.[96] This new fast day injunction is not entirely alien to the older, more limited way of looking at fasting; it does after all direct attention toward the afflicted. Ceasing from pursuit of one's own welfare and giving to the afflicted creates a sense of identification with them and results in the leveling of the status of the rich closer to that of the afflicted,[97] a fast "such as to make your voice heard on high."

Repentance as a fast day requirement is clearly reflected in two similar, famous passages, one from Jonah and one from Joel. The importance of these passages and of a certain (mis)interpretation of the above passage from Isaiah—as a rebuke for insincere, that is, not truly contrite, fasting—to the development of the notion of a "penitential fast" should not be underestimated.[98] The application of this notion to passages that do not mention repentance is obviously problematic, but even in Jonah and Joel there is room to question whether fasting, though not fast days, has truly become penitential. In fact, fasting and prayer continue to be closely associated with one another in the text's formulation and are often set off from the new requirement of repentance, which, as the passage from Jeremiah makes clear, probably originally emerged as a precondition to the successful fast rather than as a fundamental component of it. Consider the following passage:

[94]Contrast Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 335–36.

[95]Fishbane (*Biblical Interpretation*, 304–5) views the development of this new requirement as a product of "aggadic exegesis."

[96]Brevard S. Childs (*Isaiah* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001] 478) quite appropriately writes: "The ritual of fasting is not rejected out of hand, but redefined by enlarging its parameters."

[97]On the role of rites of affliction in leveling the status of the elite at various moments in the year, see Turner, "Humility and Hierarchy," 166–203.

[98]For the case of Jonah, see Uriel Simon, *Jonah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999) 30; James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1993) 80; Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) 244–45, 255, 257; Brongers, "Fasting In Israel in Biblical and Post-Biblical Times," 12; and Guthrie, "Fast, Fasting," 2:243.

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> Jonah . . . proclaimed: "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" . . . They proclaimed a fast, and great and small alike put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he had the word cried through Nineveh: "By decree of the king and his nobles: No man or beast—of flock or herd—shall taste anything! They shall not graze, and they shall not drink water! And they shall be covered with sackcloth—man and beast—and shall cry mightily to God. And let everyone turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice of which he is guilty. . . ." God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And God renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out. (Jon 3:4–10)

Note that, as in the proclamations of a fast day in Joel discussed above, the call to fasting and its concomitant rites culminates in a command to "cry mightily to God." It is only subsequent to the presentation of this now-familiar sequence that the command to repent is given. To argue that fasting here is a component of repentance is to ignore the intervening presence of prayer. Scholars have been puzzled by the inclusion of animals in penitential activities.[99] When these activities, however, are properly understood as designed to induce divine mercy rather than to express contrition, their participation seems quite appropriate—divine mercy extending to the animal kingdom as well (see Jon 4:11)—and to be an expression of the trope commonly found in accounts of fast days of total communal participation.[100]

Once one realizes that fast days are not inherently penitential, it is possible to recognize an important point of polemic in this passage, the elevation of repentance to the most important component of the fast day. The rabbis in *Mishnah Ta'anit* 2:1 are quite attuned to this point: "My brothers, it does not say with regard to Nineveh, 'God saw their sackcloth and their fasting,' but rather, 'God saw their deeds, that they were turning away from their evil path.'"[101] The biblical passage specifies that God responds to their "turning away from their evil path" rather than to their "sackcloth and fasting" and thereby privileges repentance over the other forms of theurgy also mentioned in the passage. In so doing, it must recognize the distinction between them. If sackcloth and fasting were components of repentance or signs of it, why elevate repentance at their expense? It is true that one could argue that fasting and sackcloth represent outer, ritual expressions of repentance, whereas this passage privileges its inner manifestation, but to do so is to accept a dichotomy that is based on an antiritual bias and is probably quite alien to the Hebrew Bible.[102] Moreover, the king's proclamation simply does not suggest this relationship between the various components of the fast day. Finally, passages such

[99]Sasson, *Jonah*, 255.

[100]See Joel 1:18 for the role of groaning beasts on fast days. The "possessions" mentioned in Ezra 8:21 may very well refer to livestock. See also Jdt 4:10.

[101]Simon (*Jonah*, 33–34) discusses the merits of the Mishnah's reading.

[102]Again, see Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance*.

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as Jer 36:6–7, discussed above, represent an intermediate stage in the introduction of repentance into the fast day proceedings and therefore suggest an historical reconstruction whereby repentance came to function as an additional requirement of the proceedings, not an inwardly-directed reinterpretation of them. Thus, the book of Jonah is best interpreted as privileging the new requirement of repentance at the expense of older methods of attaining divine mercy, rather than as presenting an inner-directed interpretation of them.

Indeed such an inwardly-directed interpretation is unattested with the exception, most scholars would argue, of the following passage from the book of Joel, which bears several similarities to the above passage from Jonah:[103]

> "Yet even now"—says the LORD— / "Turn back to Me with all your hearts (בכל לבבכם), / And with fasting, weeping, and lamenting (ובצום ובכי ובמספד)." / Rend your hearts / Rather than your garments/ And turn back to the LORD your God. (2:12–13)

The above English translation accurately represents the central ambiguity in this passage. Does the preposition "with" (ב) indicate the instrument with which "turning back" is accomplished, or the actions that accompany "turning back?" In other words, are "fasting, weeping, and lamenting" presented in this passage as components of repentance, or as parallel but independent rites? Indeed, the phrase "with all your hearts" indicates the instrument or manner with which "turning back" is done, but the separation of that phrase from the following by a conjunction leaves open the possibility that the meaning of "with" shifts and may even suggest the occurrence of such a shift. Most significantly, the two verses in this passage must clearly be read together. The second verse, "Rend your hearts/ Rather than your garments," or less literally perhaps, "Rend your hearts/ Not only your garments," indicates opposition or contrast between the process of rending the heart,—that is, repentance[104]—and the rending of garments, which invariably attends "fasting, weeping, and lamenting." Thus, it is almost impossible to read "fasting, weeping, and lamenting" as the instrument of "turning back," since it appears in opposition to it in the following verse.[105] Rather, the conjunction should probably be read as indicating accompaniment: "Turn back to Me with all your hearts, besides (or: in

[103]See Thomas B. Dozeman, "Inner-Biblical Interpretation of YHWH's Gracious and Compassionate Character," *JBL* (1989) 207–23. Note the words of Wolff (*Joel and Amos*, 49): "What was held up before the postexilic congregation in the guise of Nineveh in the book of Jonah, is proclaimed directly to Jerusalem in the book of Joel." *m. Ta'an*. 2:1 quotes both passages together.

[104]The phrase, "to rend the heart," a metaphor based on the rending of garments, is probably related to the command to "circumcise one's heart," found in Deut 10:16, which also functions as a demand for repentance.

[105]Indeed the phrase, "to return to God through fasting," despite the frequent injunction to return, is unattested.

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addition to) fasting, weeping, and lamenting."[106] Understood thus, the passage from Joel leaves us with a message remarkably close to the polemic found in the book of Jonah: one should perform all the normal rites of the fast day, but it is repentance that God most favors. Could Joel view "fasting, weeping, and lamenting" as external expressions of repentance, rituals that accompany repentance, and is he concerned therefore to stress the importance of the sincerity of remorse and the potential for empty ritual? Possibly, but there is no reason to assume so, as commentators have done.[107] There is no clear evidence elsewhere, as mentioned in the discussion of Jonah, that fasting constitutes an external expression of contrition or that the prophet Joel, as opposed to his modern commentators, is concerned with the potential for ritual to be empty. Indeed, Joel uses a stock phrase "fasting, weeping, and lamenting" that appears elsewhere as a coherent formal unit, a collection of fast day practices, quite independent of repentance.[108] As mentioned with regard to Jonah, given the gradual evolution of repentance's role in fast day proceedings, it is far more reasonable to maintain that Joel's aim is to advocate for the addition and centrality of repentance, rather than to insist upon the internal intention that ought to accompany external, supposedly penitential rites.

Fast Day Confessions

What about those passages in which confession figures prominently? We may do well to begin this discussion with an analysis of the most famous of all fasts, the fast of the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement. The proceedings of the Day of Atonement, as recounted in chapter 16 of Leviticus, can be divided into two parts: 1) a description of the purifications performed by the high priest including the confession of sin (16:1–28)[109] and 2) commandments given to the community at large concerning, among other things, self-affliction (16:29–31). In reading Leviticus 16, one notices a rather abrupt transition between the discussion of the rites performed by the high priest and the discussion of the responsibilities of the community; the nonpriestly community, totally absent from the first section, suddenly comes into focus. The result is that the latter section reads like an appendix, an impression confirmed by the transmission in Lev 23:26–32 and Num 29:7 of more or less the same material unaccompanied by the instructions

[106]Note that the NRSV translation must omit the conjunction in order to clarify the traditional understanding of "fasting, weeping, and lamenting" as instrumental: "return to me with all your heart, / with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."

[107]Crenshaw, "Who Knows What YHWH Will Do?," 190; Wolff, *Joel*, 49; Prinsloo, *The Theology of the Book of Joel*, 59; and almost all others.

[108]See Esth 4:3 and also Zech 7:5.

[109]Actually, the purifications can be further subdivided into two components: sin offerings and scapegoat ritual. See David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 16–21.

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directed to the priests. Scholars have therefore questioned whether the fast was originally connected to the purification rites.[110] While such questions take us beyond the scope of the current discussion, it is worthwhile exploring whether our findings can shed any light on the relationship of the various components of the Day of Atonement rituals. While some scholars have attempted to minimize the disparity between the priest-centered purification rites and the people-centered day of fasting, on the grounds that fasting can hardly be interpreted outside of a penitential context,[111] there is, on the contrary, a great deal of evidence to suggest a distinction between those two modes of worship. We have also seen, however, precedents for the integration, albeit somewhat loose, of these two components. Removal of sin, though separate from fasting, is often seen as an appropriate and, indeed, necessary component of fast days; entreaty cannot succeed when serious transgression interferes. Furthermore, the social dynamic that results from the union of priestly purifications and communal fasting can be said to be typical of fast day proceedings; the dual foci of leadership and entire community are familiar from the fasts led by Jehoshaphat and Mordecai, discussed above. Finally, the fasting of the community may be seen as an auxiliary to the purification rite that introduces an element of entreaty to a process of eliminating sin and impurity otherwise quite independent of divine assistance. These observations suggest that the transition between the priest-centered and the community-centered passages is rough but not incomprehensible; the two components are compatible and even mutually fructifying. Nevertheless, however well these two parts can be integrated, it would be a mistake, given their quite separate presentation and the general lack of basis for such an interpretation, to assume that the confession of the high priest indicates a penitential motivation for the communal fast. Rather, the connection proceeds along the lines of the above observations.

While removal of sin or its generalized equivalent, repentance, can constitute one requirement for successful entreaty, acknowledgment of past transgression, either as an active component of that removal process or simply as a stance to avoid denying responsibility and thereby angering God, can also serve as an essential auxiliary. Indeed, a number of passages mention confession or confessional prayer in close proximity to fasting.[112] Scholars have concluded on this basis that the fasting described in such passages is penitential. In so doing, however, they have missed one essential point: prayer remains the central, dynamic moment of

[110]See, for instance, the theory of Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 27–34.

[111]See, for instance, Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 1066.

[112]On the rise of penitential prayer in general, see most recently Rodney A. Werline, *Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998); and Mark J. Boda, *Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999).

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the fast day, and it ultimately aims at the alleviation of a very real, this-worldly crisis. The basic fasting-prayer dynamic has not ceased; fasting has not become simply the handmaiden of confession. Penitence has become an important component or mode of the fast day proceedings, but it need not be seen as dominating and thereby defining them.

Consider the following passage:

> Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." They assembled at Mizpah, and they drew water and poured it out before the LORD; they fasted that day, and there they confessed that they had sinned against the LORD. (1 Sam 7:5–6)

Given what has been observed concerning the social dynamics of fast days, namely the continual emphasis on the dual foci of leader and people, the actions of the various constituents of the fast day proceedings must be examined together as an integral whole. (Unlike the case of Leviticus 16, there is no textual reason to distinguish these components.) Thus, the people's fast and confession must be seen as complementing Samuel's prayer, not as constituting an independent, coherent act on behalf of themselves. Since Samuel's prayer appears to be directed against the very real threat of Philistine ascendancy, there is little reason to assume, as commentators have done,[113] that fasting here is a sign of penitence, rather than a performance of self-affliction to evoke divine mercy.

The final four biblical passages that need to be discussed are all from later books of the Hebrew Bible and all include confession, usually as a part of prayer. Let us begin with Dan 9:2–4:

> In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, consulted the books concerning the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD that had come to Jeremiah the prophet, were to be the term of Jerusalem's desolation—seventy years. I turned my face to the LORD God, devoting myself to prayer and supplication, in fasting, in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God, making confession thus . . .

The purpose of fasting in this passage is generally understood to be penitential, largely on the basis of the other passages that will be examined shortly.[114] Some have viewed it as preparatory to the reception of revelation.[115] None have adequately taken into account the close connection drawn here between supplication and fasting, a much closer and more obvious connection in this passage than that which exists between confession and fasting. Indeed, a clear consensus among

[113]See Hans W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1964) 67; and P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980) 144.

[114]See Collins, *Daniel*, 349; Louis F. Hartman, *Daniel* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978) 136; and Werline, *Penitential Prayer*, 68.

[115]Charles, *Daniel*, 226. See the earlier discussion of Daniel 10, above.

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scholars has emerged that the entire confessional prayer (Dan 9:4–20) is a later interpolation.[116] This suggestion makes sense, among other reasons, because of the lack of confessional elements and indeed of transgression in the narrative passage preceding the prayer.[117] Thus Daniel's activity here appears to be more of a prayer to attain illumination, as in the passage from Daniel 10 discussed above, than an act of penitence.

Let us now turn to another passage that exhibits a similar phenomenon, Neh 1:3–4:

> They said, "The survivors who have survived the captivity there in the province are in dire trouble and disgrace; Jerusalem's wall is full of breaches, and its gates have been destroyed by fire." When I heard that, I sat and wept, and was in mourning for days, fasting and praying to the God of Heaven.

Taken alone, this passage contains no element of transgression. Disaster leads Nehemiah to mourn and to pray to God for relief. Fasting appears in its normal function as a physical expression of grief that flows naturally into prayer. But here too, as in Daniel 9, a later editor has crafted what purports to be Nehemiah's actual prayer (1:5–11), despite the fact that his act of praying in the above verses seems to be a continual, not a discrete event.[118] And here too, as in Daniel 9, the added prayer is confessional in nature, and we sense the disparity between the original narrative passage, which contains no mention of sin, and the content of the purported prayer.

Nevertheless the decision to place confessional prayers in the context of fasting and mourning clearly expresses an association between these activities, an association found in the account of Samuel's fast, as well as in the following passage:

> On the twenty-fourth day of this month, the Israelites assembled, fasting, in sackcloth, and with earth upon them. Those of the stock of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. Standing in their places, they read from the scroll of the Teaching of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day, and for another fourth they confessed and prostrated themselves before the LORD their God. On the raised platform of the Levites stood Jeshua and Bani . . . and cried in a loud voice to the LORD their God. (Neh 9:1–4)

[116]See the bibliography and representation of the consensus view in Collins, *Daniel*, 347. The main arguments are that communal confession is not appropriate in this context and that there are duplications that indicate redactional seams at the beginning and end of the prayer. Thus, for instance, "I prayed to the LORD my God, making confession thus" duplicates the preceding verse.

[117]Furthermore, Dan 9:3 describes Daniel as engaged in a general process of prayer and supplication, which is made redundant by the specific prayer offered in Dan 9:4.

[118]See Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 208–9. For the phenomenon of prayers and other types of speech being placed in the mouths of historical figures, see Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 182.

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Unlike accounts of fast days examined so far, this passage suggests an independent conviction of having transgressed, not a fear or experience of actual affliction, as the primary impetus for the proclamation of the fast.[119] Does the increasingly penitential context of fasting indicate that fasting itself should now be seen as an expression of contrition? Perhaps, but again it is very hard to make that determination given the prominent position that continues to be accorded to prayer. Even as the people attempt to attain forgiveness for their covenantal infractions through repentance, to appeal to God's mercy through the expression of affliction could continue to be seen as effective. In basic form, the passage is remarkably close to 1 Samuel 7 examined above; the people engage in fasting and confession as auxiliary rites to the central act of the Levites' prayer. What has changed is not necessarily the nature of fasting but the centrality of confession.

Just as the fast day in Nehemiah is proclaimed in order to rid the people of sin, so too does Israel's sin provide the impetus for Ezra's rites of mourning:

> When this was over, the officers approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the land. . . . When I heard this, I rent my garment and robe, I tore hair out of my head and beard, and I sat desolate. . . . At the time of the evening offering I ended my self-affliction; still in my torn garment and robe, I got down on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God. (Ezra 9:1–5)

Ezra 10:6 identifies the process of self-affliction described here as including fasting: "he ate no bread and drank no water, for he was in mourning over the trespass of those who had returned from exile." The formulation of the latter verse suggests that Ezra primarily grieves over the people's sin, rather than over the danger of their punishment. Grief over sin could indeed be called contrition. Yet refraining from labeling Ezra's fast "penitential" still provides a useful nuance. Ezra's fast is neither a ritual expression of regret designed to appease God by admitting fault, nor is it intended to remove sin; sin is expunged not through weeping but through communal confession and the divorce of foreign wives (10:11), a process that, in this instance, is actually postponed to a later date due to the rainy season. What, then, does Ezra's expression of grief accomplish? As we have seen, there seems to exist a manner of worship, quite distinct from the removal of sin, in which an attempt is made to move God to pity through the expression of affliction.[120] It matters but little what the cause of

[119]It is possible that the same could be said for 1 Sam 7:5–6, which follows the account of Israel ridding themselves of idols in 1 Sam 7:4. The last phrase of 1 Sam 7:4, however, seems to conclude the preceding account; this literary closure suggests that 1 Sam 7:5–6 begins a new episode, and the prayer described in those verses seems to be seeking victory against the Philistines rather than forgiveness.

[120]That Ezra's expression of grief has the power to stir emotion is powerfully demonstrated by its ability to compel others to join him in weeping (10:1). His expression of grief constitutes, in some sense, a natural proclamation of a fast, since he never formally proclaims one for the others. For Ezra's public demonstration of grief as a performance designed to attract the sympathetic attention of others, see Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 178.

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that expression of affliction might be, plague or sin, as it wells up and ultimately culminates in prayer. Oddly enough, as we have seen in other passages,[121] when this effort is effective, there can be a subsequent transition to a process of removing sin that often involves punishment, as well as repentance and confession. It is almost as if the appeal to divine mercy paves the way for a process by which sin can effectively be removed; after divine mercy is aroused, wholesale destruction is no longer necessary. However these two modes of appeasement relate, it is clear that they operate according to their own rules—one appeals to mercy and the other to justice—and must consequently be understood separately. Thus, while Ezra's grief over Israel's sin could perhaps be labeled as contrition, such a label misrepresents the primary function of that grief: it is an expression of affliction in order to attract divine pity.

Late Second Temple Trajectories

Thus, while the fast day became increasingly associated with repentance and confession, compelling reasons remain to view fasting not as an outward ritual sign of contrition, but as a manifestation of the affliction that God, it is hoped, will remove from the afflicted out of pity. How and when did the nature of fasting change? Though a comprehensive answer to this question is not possible here, we may trace two conceivable trajectories of change. One is associated with the development of the persona of the penitent sinner in postbiblical Judaism. In the context of extensive and prolonged self-affliction, fasting can cease to be associated directly with prayer and rather become simply a method of indicating contrition. Consider the following passage from the *Testament of Reuben*: "And in the deliberate choice of my soul I repented before the Lord for seven years. Wine and strong drink I did not drink and meat did not enter into my mouth and I did not taste any pleasant food, mourning over my sin for it was great."[122] While it is likely that the process of "repenting before the Lord" involved prayer, appeal to God hardly dominates this description of Reuben's repentance, which is primarily concerned to show how he recognizes "in the deliberate choice of my soul" that what he has done is wrong—that is, to express Reuben's contrition.

[121]Consider also how Moses' entreaty, discussed above, segues into his destruction of the golden calf, the object that is at the root of their sin (Deut 9:21). So too Moses' entreaty in Num 14:13–19 is accepted but then segues into God's stipulating his condition for mercy, namely the destruction of the generations that sinned (14:21–23). Note also that in the Neh 9:1–4 passage, separation from foreign wives and confession are parallel activities that are mentioned separately from fasting.

[122]Translation from H. W. Hollander and M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1985) 88. Here, the author of *T. Reu.* seems to combine elements of Dan 10:2–3 with Ezra 10:6, quite transforming both. In the case of Dan 10:2–3, Daniel's mourning, accompanied by abstinence from wine and meat, was not "over sin." In the case of Ezra 10:6, the scribe mourned over the sin of Israel, not his own personal sin. On the sin and repentance of Reuben as presented in *T. Reu.*, see James Kugel, "Reuben's Sin with Bilhah in the *Testament of*

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The other trajectory is associated with a more dramatic and complex shift in the nature of religious rites in postbiblical Judaism. This shift can best be seen in the oft-discussed—though perhaps not fully understood—passage from the Sermon on the Mount:

> Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you. . . . And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues. . . . And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matt 6:1–18)

Scholars have tended to emphasize the criticism of ostentatious religious behavior contained in this paragraph.[123] Such an emphasis is not inaccurate, but it misses the most striking aspect of this passage, at least with regard to fasting. The whole point of fasting in the Hebrew Bible is to produce a physical, visible effect upon the visage of the afflicted, preferably in a communal context in order to evoke divine mercy. This passage, far from being merely an attack on the "hypocrites," constitutes a challenge, intended or not, to the very nature of fasting as expressed in the Hebrew Bible. What is the new nature of fasting, and how do we account for this shift? As scholars have recognized, this passage constitutes a unified discussion of three pious deeds: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.[124] The passage begins with a summary, introductory statement to the effect that there will be "no *reward*" for those who practice their piety publicly. So too, after the discussion of each individual pious deed, it is affirmed that "your Father who sees in secret will *reward* you" if the deed is performed in the prescribed manner. What has not been adequately recognized is that the passage placed immediately after the discussion of the three pious deeds also relates to the preceding discussion: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . ." (Matt 6: 19–20). Postbiblical Judaism, from which these parts of the Sermon on the Mount probably originally hail,[125] maintained that the reward for meritorious deeds was

Reuben," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. David P. Wright, David N. Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995) 525–54.

[123]Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 343–46.

[124]Ibid., 330, 349–51.

[125]Ibid., 348.

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stored up for the individual in heaven as treasure.[126] The "treasures" passage of the Sermon therefore appears, naturally enough, after a discussion of meritorious deeds.[127] And now we arrive at the main point: the notion that almsgiving, prayer, and fasting are meritorious deeds is unique to postbiblical Judaism; it is not to be found in the Hebrew Bible.[128] This notion emerges alongside a new type of individual eschatology that considers the individual's good deeds to be preserved in heaven, and to be ultimately weighed against his or her bad deeds at the time of judgment.[129] As we have seen, fasting in the Hebrew Bible is effective not because it is meritorious but because it produces an effect on the deity. God, in the Sermon on the Mount passage, "sees" the meritorious deed but he is not moved to action by it; he allows its appropriate reward to accrue. Fasting has ceased to be a dialogical act and has become an act that is privately and personally beneficial and, therefore, if performed in public, an ostentatious display of personal merit.

But how does the rise of the meritorious deed in postbiblical Judaism explain the prevalent view of fasting as an act of penitence? The answer has to do with the purpose of that stowed treasure; it is to be used at the time of judgment to counterbalance or pay off the debt incurred by bad deeds. Therefore, meritorious deeds, such as fasting, can be said to "atone" for sins. Consider the following passage from Ben Sira: "Those who honor their father atone for sins, and those who respect their mother are like those who lay up treasure" (3:3–4).[130] Note the

[126]See Tob 4:8–10 and Sir 3:3–4. For a collection of passages that use this formulation, see A. Marmorstein, "The Treasures in Heaven and upon Earth," *London Quarterly Review* 132 (1919) 216–28. See also Luke 12:33 and 1 Tim 6:17–19, and *m. Abot* 6:9.

[127]Most of the passages mentioned above also contrast earthly riches with the heavenly treasure accrued through meritorious deeds.

[128]The exception that proves the rule is the relatively late formulation found in Dan 4:24, according to the translation by Collins (*Daniel*, 212) that is to be preferred. Note also his comments about the polemic over this translation (p. 230). See also F. Rosenthal, "Sedaka, Charity" *HUCA* 23 (1950–1951) 411–30, esp. 427–28. Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting are commonly found together as three standard meritorious deeds. See the collection of sources in Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 335–38.

[129]See, for instance, *T. Ab.*, Recension A 12:11–18 and Recension B 9:8. E. P. Sanders (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* [London: SCM Press, 1977] 128–47) has challenged the extent to which the balance image should be assumed to be the basic view of personal eschatology in early Judaism. His criticisms of earlier scholarship are certainly apt, but it is important to recognize that the balance image was important even if it was modified in key ways to account for notions of divine mercy. This view of personal eschatology bears close resemblances to Zoroastrian eschatology, from which it *might* have been influenced. See the comments, in this regard, of Mary Boyce (*A History of Zoroastrianism* [3 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1975] 3:414 and n. 236) and David Winston ("The Iranian Component in the Bible, Apocrypha, and Qumran: A Review of the Evidence," *History of Religions* 5:2 [1966] 194).

[130]The immediate reason why Ben Sira views this particular commandment as atoning and hence life-sustaining is the way in which the fifth commandment is formulated in Deut 5:16: "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, so that your days may be long."

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parallelism between atoning for sin and laying up treasure; there is, in fact, little difference. The fact that there were precedents for the use of fasting in penitential contexts undoubtedly also contributed to the developing notion of the special atoning power of fasting.[131] And so we find in postbiblical Judaism such formulations as: "The righteous constantly searches his house, to remove his unintentional sins. He atones for (sins of) ignorance by fasting and humbling his soul" (*Pss. Sol.* 3: 7–8), a formulation that never would have made sense in the context of the Hebrew Bible.[132] Fasting as penance has arrived.

But these developments do not exclude the older view, which is reflected clearly in many places, including the account of Aseneth's fast in *Joseph and Aseneth*. Aseneth's seven days of fasting (chapter 10) culminate in dramatic prayer (chapters 11–13). Undoubtedly influenced by earlier biblical examples of fasting and the individual lament, Aseneth's prayer nevertheless contains fresh formulations that penetrate to the heart of the power and purpose of fasting. Here is a reflection on the unseemly nature of the individual's fasting-induced affliction: "And now, in this humiliation [i.e., fasting and its concomitant rites] of mine, all have (come to) hate me, and gloat over this affliction of mine" (11:6).[133] And the hope of the one fasting is still concentrated on God's mercy to the afflicted: "Who knows, (maybe) he will see my humiliation [i.e., fasting and its concomitant rites] and have mercy on me. Perhaps he will see this desolation of mine and have compassion on me, or see my orphanage and protect me, because he is the father of the orphans, and a protector of the persecuted, and of the afflicted a helper. I will take courage and cry to him" (11:12–14).

[131]Note that the treasure-house sources quoted above quite frequently mention almsgiving as another atoning activity.

[132]Translation from R. B. Wright, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:655. Note the comments of Brongers ("Fasting in Israel," 12–13): "In a much later time, when reflection on the profits and merits of fasting had just begun, the expiatory value of fasting was distinctly expressed in the Psalms of Solomon iii 8." There is clearly something new in the formulation found in the *Psalms of Solomon*, and it is doubtful that it was due to lack of reflection, as opposed to lack of coherence in the biblical context, that such a formulation did not occur already in the Hebrew Bible.

[133]According to the verse numbering found in C. Burchard, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:202–47.

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