THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE *MIDBĀR* & THE "NOMADIC IDEAL" HYPOTHESIS

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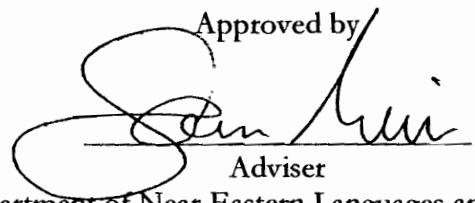

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about the imagery and ideology of the desert in the Hebrew Bible. It is an investigation of how the biblical authors conceptualized the desert as a place and as a period in Israel's history. A necessary part of the investigation into the biblical ideology of the desert is the discussion of the "nomadic ideal," an hypothesis proposed at the turn of the century. This hypothesis, though it has been largely dismissed, is an important milestone in the discussion of the ideology of the desert and the nomad in the Bible that cannot be ignored. The hypothesis claimed that the biblical prophets idealized the desert as the home of Yahweh and the original homeland of Israel, to which the prophets wished to return. The premise of this paper is to summarize the main arguments and to define the state of the field of research on the biblical ideology of the desert.

This investigation has included the discussion of the "nomadic ideal" and its implications. A review has been conducted of four key works: those of two proponents of the "nomadic ideal," K. Budde and J. W. Flight, and those of two opponents of the "nomadic ideal," P. Riemann and S. Talmon. Each work has been reviewed on its own and critiqued. Special attention has been given to two passages in the Bible that have become standard in the discussion: Hos 2:16-17 and Jer 2:2ff. Language materials in Hebrew, Akkadian and Ugaritic have been used to establish a contextual understanding of

the biblical ideology of the desert. An investigation has been conducted into Mesopotamian ideologies of the desert and the city in order to suggest possible cultural contexts for the Israelite perspective on both. Various ancient near eastern texts have been cited as evidence of a common ideology of the desert.

The conclusion reached in this paper is that the biblical authors held a negative perspective on the desert. The desert was chaos, the home of demons, a place of destruction, and the realization of divine punishment. There is no idealization of the desert or the nomadic life in the prophets. The positive value found in Hos 2:16-17 and Jer 2:2 is not associated with the desert. It is the result of other themes in each passage that implicate Yahweh as the source of positive value. Even in these passages, the desert does not lose its negative connotation. Rather, a negative connotation of the desert is necessary to the function of many of the relevant passages.

It is hoped that the reader will gain an adequate knowledge of all the key issues in the discussion. Further, it is hoped that this analysis will function both as a tool for advancing research in the area of ancient Israelite and ancient near eastern ideologies of space and as a corrective measure for other scholars, in light of the fact that the "nomadic ideal" hypothesis has unjustifiably survived in the works of recent scholars, such as B. Levine (1993), B. Bandstra (1999), and M. Homan (2002).

Dedicated to my wife Anne and my daughter Eleanor,

Whose love and laughter is an oasis in the deserts of life.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANE Anthology 1, 2	*The Ancient Near East, vols. 1 & 2: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (J. B. Pritchard, ed.). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958 (v.1) & 1975 (v.2)
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BI	*Biblical Interpretation*
Borger, *LAKA*	Borger, R. *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	A. L. Oppenheim, ed.*The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
COS 1,2,3	Hallo, W. W. and Younger, J. L. Jr.. *The Context of Scripture.* 1. *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World.* (1996) 2. *Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World* (2000) 3. *Archival Documents from the Biblical World* (2002). Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns; 1996f.
DBI	*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
(Josephus,) *Ant.*	Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*
(Josephus,) *Wars*	Josephus, *The Jewish Wars*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement
KTU	Dietrich, M., Loretz, O., Sanmartín, J., eds. *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places (Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, second, enlarged edition).* Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995
MDOG	*Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin*
NRSV	Metzger, B. & Murphy, R., eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1991
RHPR	*Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire des religions*
SAA	*State Archives of Assyria*
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
TSS 1	Gibson, John C. L. *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions, Volume I: Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.
VT Supplement	*Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this present work is to engage in a discussion of the role of the desert and nomadism in the biblical text and world. This discussion has deep roots in the scholarly community, not being primarily the product of a recently discovered inscription, nor of a newly recovered language or literature, but of the work and insight of scholars from the 19th century to the 21st century CE. In the process of the discussion, works will be critiqued, assumptions will be challenged, and it is the hope of the author that a better understanding of the desert in biblical perspective will develop as a consequence of the analysis of texts and methods.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century CE, modern biblical scholarship stood at a turning point. The discovery and decipherment of Akkadian lay in the recent past and a host of discoveries like Ugarit was only decades away. In spite of the Mesopotamian sources, however, most scholars of the Bible preferred to work with Arabic sources for comparison.[1] There are multiple reasons for this. At the time, central

[1] "There was a long standing tradition for the use of Arabic materials. Indeed, the first scientific study of Hebrew, upon which all modern Old Testament scholarship is predicated, came about as a result of the introduction of Arabic studies into medieval Europe, and for many centuries thereafter Arabic sources provided the chief supplement to classical sources, and thus the only major Semitic source, for Old Testament research" (Riemann 1964:40-41).

Arabia was considered the Semitic *Urheimat*,[2] putting Arabic in a chief position. Aside from Hebrew and Aramaic, Arabic and Akkadian were the only Semitic languages available to scholars, but Akkadian materials were relatively inaccessible. Beyond this, there was a strong reaction among some biblical scholars at this time to what has been termed the Pan-Babylonian school, a group of scholars that suggested exclusive Mesopotamian origins for the Bible and its culture. Thus, there was a growing suspicion of the Mesopotamian sources and the scholars that worked with them. Consequently, a reluctance to use Akkadian sources arose and strong parallels were sought between biblical and Arabic culture (Riemann 1964:40-42).

This period also saw the development of a scholarly idea relevant to our discussion called the Kenite Hypothesis. This hypothesis, first popularized by Budde (1899), suggested that the roots of Israelite Yahwism lay in Israel's interactions with the nomadic tribe of the Kenites (*qênīm*) from whom Israel adopted Yahweh as its own god. This development was thought to be represented in the story of Moses, who fled from punishment in Egypt into the wilderness, where he encountered the Midianites, a group connected with the Kenites.[3] It was while living with this shepherding tribe that Moses encountered Yahweh in the fire in the bush (Ex 3:1-15). Tradition and scholarly hypothesis associated Yahweh with the desert, and the hypothesis suggested that Yahweh was originally a nomad's god, who dwelled in the mountains of the desert.

As a result of the comparison with Arab culture, some scholars began to formulate parallels between the nomadic Bedouin and the biblical Patriarchs and the early Israelites,

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[2] But as Riemann has pointed out, a central Arabian *Urheimat* does not fit with the early domestication of asses rather than camels, only the latter belonging to the harsher climes of the central Arabian area (Riemann 1964:45). Nevertheless, an Arabian Semitic *Urheimat* in some form is the preferred hypothesis at present.

[3] Cf. Ex 2:21, 3:1 and Judg 1:16.

who seem to be frequently described in nomadic terms. Desert origins for early Israelite practices were explored as a counter-argument to the Pan-Babylonian school. However, the comparison did not end with the question of origins. Attention turned to the role that the Bedouin played in Arab culture according to Arabic sources.

From the 5th century CE onward, Arabic sources offered an idealistic picture of the Bedouin. They were portrayed as the true Arabs. Adults would send their children out to these nomads on the fringe of settlement to learn an Arabic that was thought to be closer to that of the Qur'ān.[4] The Bedouin were idealized as the living ancestors of the citizens of Arab villages and cities.[5] Some biblical scholars, thinking to extend the perceived parallelism between these Arabs and the Israelite Patriarchs, searched for an idealization of the nomadic life and nomads in biblical literature.

The result of such investigations was termed the "nomadic ideal" by Karl Budde in 1895 in an article appearing in *The New World* 4, "The Nomadic Ideal in the Old Testament." While certainly not the first to hypothesize connections between the Bedouin and the Patriarchs and the early Israelites, Budde was the first to suggest that the prophets of Israel believed that the desert lay not only in the past, but also in the hopeful future. Budde argued that the biblical prophets, following the model of a "nomadic idealist" group called the Rechabites, envisioned a return to the wilderness life of the ancestors. It would be a return

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[4] "It was fashionable among caliphs and noble families to send their sons into the desert, not only to learn how to shoot and hunt, but also to practise speaking pure Arabic. Other reports come from professional grammarians who stayed for some time with a Bedouin tribe and studied their speech because it was more correct (*faṣīḥ*) than that of the towns and the cities" (Versteegh 1996:50; cf. also Dostal 1989:43). Khazanov (1983:277) also points out that some sedentary Arabian rulers stressed their Bedouin descent as a mark of prestige and nobility.

[5] But this idealization is only partial. While the Bedouin are revered as the ideal Arabs (Versteegh 1996:37), they have also been feared and scorned by those near whom the Bedouin set up camp. The Qur'ān also indicates a negative view of the Bedouin as "the worst in disbelief and hypocrisy" (Sura 9:97; cf. Versteegh 1996:37). The relationship between the Desert and the Sown is much more complicated, with mutual aspects of interaction and tension.

to a simpler life and a return to Yahweh, who had been abandoned by the Israelites in favor of Canaanite gods. Budde's article was followed by similar work from P. Humbert, A. Causse, J. W. Flight, E. Meyer, and S. Nyström,[6] among others. The "nomadic ideal" hypothesis reached its zenith in the 1923 work of J. W. Flight, "The Nomadic Ideal and Ideal in the Old Testament," (*JBL* 42). Because of their representative places in the development of the "nomadic ideal" hypothesis, the works of Budde and Flight will be reviewed and critiqued in the following chapter.

Several scholars offered counter-arguments, suggesting that the work of Budde and his successors had failed to produce a legitimate view of the desert in the Bible. These scholars, better informed by cuneiform sources and the various textual and archaeological discoveries of the early and mid-20th century, argued that the desert and desert life were viewed with disdain, distaste, and even fear. The Arabic sources, because of the question of their reliability for testimony on life and culture a thousand years removed, while not completely discounted, were relegated to the outer limits of the discussion.

Among a wide group of scholars from the middle of the 20th century who challenged the previously held views and methods of scholars, the works of P. Riemann (1964), S. Talmon (1966), and M. V. Fox (1973) are noteworthy in regard to the issue of the biblical perspective of the desert/wilderness. Because the work of Fox is primarily a corrective commentary on the work of Talmon, and adds only a few details to the discussion, this present work will seek to summarize and critique only the works of Riemann and Talmon in

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[6] P. Humbert, "Osée le prophète bédouin," *RHPR* 1 (1921) 97-118; "La logique de la perspective nomade chez Osée et l'unité d'Osée 2, 4-22," *Vom Alten Testament: Festschrift für Karl Marti* (BZAW 41; ed. K. Budde; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1925) 158-166; A. Causse, "La legislation sociale d'israel et l'ideal patriarchal," *Revue de theologie et de philosophie* 7 (1919) p237ff; J. W. Flight, "The nomadic idea and ideal in the Old Testament," *JBL* 42 (1923) 158-226; E. Meyer and B. Luther, *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme* (Halle, 1906); S. Nyström, *Beduinentum und Jahwismus* (Lund, 1946).

the third chapter (though Fox's article will be referenced in the critique of Talmon). Their work will serve as a response to the works of Budde and Flight, reviewed in chapter two.

Although these competent scholars have already entered into discussion about the so-called "nomadic ideal" and have successfully called into question some of the evidence adduced and methods used, there is clearly need for further discussion on the issue. Note the words of Roland de Vaux in 1958, who, though he soberly deflected the idea of a positive evaluation of the desert in the Bible, was convinced that the biblical prophets saw "salvation in a return, at some future date, to the life of the desert, envisioned as a golden age" (de Vaux 1961:14). Although de Vaux did not benefit from the contributions of Riemann and Talmon, and cannot be judged as if he had, his own thought here runs counter to the argument that he presented earlier in his work. Further evidence of the need for the reawakening of this discussion can be found in more recent work. Consider this statement by B. Bandstra in his *Reading the Old Testament* (1999): "There was a tradition in Israel that a patriarchal, semi-nomadic, and unurbanized lifestyle kept one closest to God" (Bandstra 1999:72). The "nomadic ideal" has made reappearance as well in the works of B. Levine (1993)[7] and M. Homan (2003).[8] Is this because the arguments of Riemann and Talmon are in error? Are there sources and perspectives that were not considered in their work? These questions provide the main thrust of this paper. In the concluding fourth chapter, an application of the conclusions will be suggested.

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[7] E.g., "In defining holiness in terms of abstinence from products of the vine, the biblical traditions were endorsing a traditional, perhaps nostalgic respect for the nomadic past of the Israelite people in the presettlement period" (Levine 1993:235).

[8] E.g., "Later Israelite and Judahite prophets romanticize and idealize their tent heritage, even praising nomadic contemporaries who forgo urban trappings" (Homan 2002:1, cf. also 36).

CHAPTER 2

PROPONENTS OF THE "NOMADIC IDEAL"

The concern of this chapter is the work of Budde and Flight, both of whom were key figures in the development of the "nomadic ideal" hypothesis. While Budde represents the earliest formulations of the "ideal," Flight represents the "ideal" at its zenith. Taken together, one can obtain an idea of the native elements of the hypothesis and the ways in which the "nomadic ideal" evolved. A critique of these scholars will reveal the weaknesses of the arguments involved, and will expose the assumptions and methods of the scholarly proponents of the "nomadic ideal."

2.1—K. Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal in the Old Testament," *The New World* 4 (1895) pp. 235-279.

Karl Budde, in his 1895 article, "The Nomadic Ideal in the Old Testament" (*The New World 4*), first coined the term "nomadic ideal," though his idea was in reality only the result of a particular field of scholarship in his day. Within Budde's work were the seeds of all other discussions, so it is to his argument that the investigation turns first.

2.1.1—Summary

A. Jonadab and the Rechabites

The foundation of Budde's work is the narrative account of the coup of Jehu in 2 Kings 9-10. The mysterious figure of J(eh)onadab ben Rechab, passing through the story "like a meteor" (Budde 1895:726), was the taproot of Budde's argument, of which the

"nomadic ideal" was the outgrowth. This man, Budde claimed, was the paragon of the "nomadic ideal." Jonadab was a Yahwist, as evidenced by his name, which means "Yahweh has impelled [him]," and he was an ally of Jehu, or at least a sympathizer (2 Kings 10:15). To Budde, the laconic reference to this Jonadab ben Rechab signaled the notoriety of the man and his name. The audience needed no further explanation (Budde 1895:727). According to Budde, Jonadab would have remained obscured in the depths of history but for "the traces which this notable man left behind him" (Budde 1895:727). In Jeremiah 35, a narrative account of Jeremiah's visit to the House (i.e., extended family) of the Rechabites,[9] Yahweh commands Jeremiah to go to the Rechabites to test their resolve in obeying the commands of their ancestor Jonadab. The prophet finds a noble example for the people of Israel in the Rechabites' steadfast adherence to the dictums of Jonadab ben Rechab, to avoid drinking wine, building houses, owning fields, and sowing seed. The only positive command given is that they should live in tents. The reason for the laconic description of Jonadab was that he was "the founder of a remarkable sect" (Budde 1895:727) and was well known. Jonadab, and his followers, insisted Budde, believed that faithfulness to Yahweh was connected with the nomadic life (Budde 1895:727). The denial of wine, house, field, and agriculture, taken together, indicated for Budde a nomadic existence. Why would Jonadab and his followers live such a life?

The answer, Budde suggested, was to be found in 1 Chron 2:55. Here, a genealogical list connects "the house of Rechab" to a group called *haqqīnīm* "the Qinites/Kinites." He

[9] The designations of this group are interesting: they are variously referred to as "the house of the Rechabites," (Jer 35:2,3,18) "the sons of the house of the Rechabites," (35:5) and "the sons of Jonadab ben Rechab" (35:16). There are references that imply descent from Jonadab (Jer 35:6,8,10,14,16,18), but the reason for the circumlocution, "(sons of) the house of the *rēkābīm*," is unclear from the passage. Are the Rechabites the physical descendants of Jonadab ben Rechab, or are they merely his followers, as implied by the designation *rēkābīm* as opposed to *bənê rēkāb* (cf. *bənê yiśrā'ēl* vs. *yiśrā'ēlīm*, the latter never appearing)?

understood *qînîm* "Kinites" as a reference to the *qênim* "Kenites" and thus a link was established between the "house of Rechab" and the Kenites. According to the Kenite Hypothesis (mentioned above, p. 2), Kenite nomads of the Sinai introduced Israel to Yahwism. This group includes such notables as Jethro, Moses' father-in-law (Ex 3:1; called Hobab in Ju 1:16), and Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite (Ju 4:17; 5:24). The most relevant feature of the Kenite Hypothesis is that Yahweh was originally a god of the desert, worshipped by nomads.[10] That these Yahwistic nomads should be connected to the Rechabites brought Budde's argument even further. Jonadab and the Rechabites were preserving the Kenite way of life, and faith, as nomads.

Yet, Budde noted that the rules of the House of the Rechabites were not endorsed by Jeremiah as binding on all of Israel (Budde 1895:728). They were only for the descendants of the Kenites through Jonadab ben Rechab. Though it is clear that Jeremiah was not convinced of the need for all to maintain a nomadic way of life, Budde argued that some prophets were persuaded of this need. Budde took the Rechabites' rejection of agriculture (esp. viticulture) and houses as a rejection of agricultural produce, and thus the gods of the land, who were responsible for the gifts of agriculture. In the mind of Jonadab and the Rechabites, the land and its gods were in complete opposition to Yahweh. Thus, the nomadic Rechabite way of life was a rejection of the worship of Baal and the other Canaanite deities (Budde 1895:730, 732). Budde argued his case from the notion[11] that early Israel, the Kenites, and the Rechabites were territorial henotheists, believing that while only Yahweh was their god, other gods existed, and all were bound to their special realms. To

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[10] This view of the origins of Yahwistic Israel was transported into the popular sphere in the first part of the 20th century (CE) by Cecile B. DeMille's famous film *The Ten Commandments.*

[11] A notion presented in several places, cf. Budde 1895:730-733.

Israel and the Kenites/Rechabites, Yahweh was only the "god of the steppe and roaming nomads" (Budde 1895:730), having nothing to do with a settled life in the land of Canaan. Accordingly, the observance of a nomadic life in honor of Yahweh and the rejection of the gifts offered by the Canaanite gods, i.e., the "nomadic ideal," was readily adopted (and transformed) by some of the earlier prophets, who were faced with the troubling syncretism of the cult of Yahweh with the cult of the gods of Canaan.

B. The "Nomadic Ideal" in the Prophets:

Budde turned first to the prophet Hosea in his search for evidence of the "nomadic ideal." He argued that Hosea proclaimed the land as Yahweh's faithless wife, and only the removal of his gifts to her (bread, water, wool, flax, oil, drink) and a return to the lifestyle of the ancestors of Israel would bring her back to Yahweh (Budde 1895:731-732). Though Yahweh was once regarded as the "unopposed lord of the land," no longer tied to the desert (Budde 1895:733), the people had become convinced of the notion that the gifts of the land were provided by the gods of the land, and so had forsaken Yahweh. Hosea announced that the gifts would be taken away, and Israel—or more precisely according to Budde, the land—would be reduced to a wilderness, and the people would be forced to return to a nomadic existence (Budde 1895:734-735). The key passage in this regard is Hosea 2:16-17, which Budde regarded as having a falsely pleasant sound:

> "Therefore will I allure her and will lead her into the steppe and there speak to her heart. And I will give her there her vineyards, and the barren ravines for fig orchards; there shall she be submissive, as in the days of her youth and as in the time when she came up out of the land of Egypt" (Hos 2:16-17; Budde 1895:734).[12]

[12] Budde's translation has been cited here to acquaint the reader with Budde's idea of the passage. A more traditional translation might read, "Therefore, I will allure her, and lead her [into/through] the wilderness, and I will speak tenderly to her. And I will give her vineyards to her from there, and I will make the Valley of Achor into a doorway of hope. Then she shall respond there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day she went up from the land of Egypt," (translation by the author).

Though this passage speaks of the renewal of the gifts of the land, Budde argued that Hosea spoke of divine discipline through a return to the desert life, only after which would he "give her vineyards to her from there" (Hos 2:17a; Budde 1895:734-735). He offers Hosea's reasoning for this form of discipline: "The prophet knows that it is easier to serve Yahweh exclusively and purely in the wilderness, and so he sees in the return to the nomadic life a means of discipline and improvement which Yahweh will apply at his pleasure" (Budde 1895:735). Only when Israel has repented would the wilderness itself become a habitable land again.

Budde's "nomadic ideal" found further expression in the prophet Isaiah. He argued that the inaugural oracle of Isaiah 6 represented an expression of the "nomadic ideal" because it spoke of a return to nomadic conditions (Budde 1895:736). Thus, when Yahweh charged Isaiah to proclaim his message, "until the cities are wasted, without inhabitants, and the houses are without people, and the soil is completely desolate," Budde saw a form of the "nomadic ideal" at work. Because of the sin of the people, the land would be reduced to a wilderness, and only a remnant of the people would be spared to live a nomadic existence (Budde 1895:736). This remnant, "a holy seed" would undergo the discipline of the life of the ancestors, which would bring them back to the simplicity of faith in Yahweh (Budde 1895:737). The story plays out further in the following chapter of Isaiah, the prophecy of the son named Immanuel.

According to Isaiah, the child Immanuel would be one of the remnant, of whom it is said, according to Budde's translation, "Butter and honey shall be his food, that he may learn to refuse the evil and choose the good" (Is 7:15; Budde 1895:738). The consolation of his name, "God is with us," will be for his generation and not the generation of King Ahaz (presumably the boy's father). The inheritance of this older generation is made clear in the

subsequent verses, in which the prophet declares that Yahweh will call down destruction upon Judah from Egypt and Assyria (Is 7:18-20). After this, the survivors, like Immanuel, will eat curds (Budde: butter) and honey for the abundance of milk (Is 7:21). The consumption of this food is by obligation and not choice, because the land and its inhabitants have been reduced to a nomadic state (Budde 1895:740-741). This is by no means ideal, but Budde contested that it is under these conditions that the child of the prophecy will learn "to refuse the evil and choose the good" (Is 7:15; Budde 1895:741). In other words, "The nomadic life has a moral-religious value; it educates to a disposition which is well pleasing to Yahweh" (Budde 1895:741). For Budde, Isaiah too represented the idealism of the nomadic life.

C. Budde's "Nomadic Ideal" as a Religious Principle

The "nomadic ideal" in Hosea was grounded primarily in a tradition that recalled the period of wilderness wandering as a time of love between Yahweh and Israel (cf. Hos 2:17b). For Isaiah, it was the natural life of the nomad, a return to the system of the ancestors, that would teach the people faithfulness to Yahweh, a counterbalance to the "dangerous over-culture" of the prophet's days (Budde 1895:741-742). For both, the "nomadic ideal" was connected to Israel's history in some fashion. Nevertheless, Budde argued, it was not the adherence to a desert way of life that was virtuous, but rather it was an internalization and spiritualization of the "ideal" exemplified in the life of Jesus that was highest in virtue. Thus, the spirit of the commission of Jonadab ben Rechab was evident in the Christian monastic "flight from the world" (Budde 1895:744). In ending, Budde expressed his own fear that only the destruction of modern culture by God would bring modern man back to his senses, but also the hope that he might, through the "assertion of the blessings of civilization obtained through the grace of God" (Budde 1895:745), come upon the true spirit of the

"nomadic ideal," holding on to essential faith in Yahweh in all situations (Budde 1895:744-745). It is apparent that what Budde had in mind was not just an ancient ideology, but also a religious principle. It remains to be seen whether Budde himself truly captured the spirit of all of the evidence he adduced and passages he referenced.

2.1.2—Critique of Budde

A. Jonadab and the Rechabites

Budde's argument for the existence of a "nomadic ideal" is based primarily on Jonadab ben Rechab and the Rechabites of Jeremiah 35. As such, it is to this claim that one must look first for the authentication or repudiation of his work. Budde suggested that Jonadab was a key figure in Israelite history and "the founder of a remarkable sect" (Budde 1895:727). Yet Budde's evidence concerning Jonadab is limited to a brief passage in 2 Kings 10, and an extrapolation of his personality from the later account of Jeremiah 35 about the "house of the Rechabites." Budde contends that Jonadab's notoriety was the reason for the author's laconic description of this character. This evidence, however, can be used to argue for precisely the opposite position. If the question should arise, "why does the author not give a more full introduction to Jonadab," one would be encouraged to recall the study of E. Auerbach in his *Mimesis* (1953). For there he offers the insight that biblical narratives are often laconic, "fraught with background," (Auerbach 1953:15) and the conclusion that many narratives in the Bible follow their plot lines tightly, skipping over detailed descriptions of non-central characters and places. Thus, in a manner similar to the mysterious Eliezar of Damascus in the story of Abraham (Gen 15:2-4), Jonadab enters and exits the scene without much character development.[13] Of course, Jonadab must have been a figure of some

[13] The author is aware, of course, that the narratives of Genesis are of a different nature than those of 2 Kings. But there can be no denying the literary quality of the historiography of the books of Kings. Thus, the possibility of elision due to narrative style does exist.

significance if he was remembered as the founder or ancestor of the Rechabites of Jeremiah's day. But it is equally possible that his place in the Dtr History is to be connected with the Rechabite sect, a back-formation of their recollection of Jonadab their forefather/founder. The point is that the biblical evidence is quite sparse, and the conclusions that Budde has drawn from it are somewhat speculative.

This is not only true of Budde's analysis of Jonadab, but also that of the Rechabites. He suggests that this group, under the command of their founder Jonadab, observed the practice of a nomadic life in the belief that Yahweh was a desert god, and thus could only be served by a desert life. Budde assumed that the Rechabites (and Israel) held a territorial-henotheistic world-view, in which Yahweh belonged in the desert (Budde 1895:730, 732). Doing so, he went beyond the evidence available, providing a truly speculative reconstruction of the religious tenets of an obscure sect in biblical Israel. Any argument based upon his reconstruction of the Rechabite's religious philosophy must be regarded in turn as speculative. There is another problem in the suggestion that the Rechabites observed a nomadic life in order to remain faithful to a god of the desert: they were not in a desert. Indeed, the expected result of obedience to Jonadab's commands is that the Rechabites "may live many days in the land" (Jer 35:7). At best, the Rechabites were attempting to re-enact a semi-nomadic life, but one that must have acknowledged the admissibility of life in the land in Yahweh's eyes. Budde's argument that the Rechabites were nomads is based upon two factors: their residence in tents, and the use of the verb *gār*, "sojourn" (participle form—*gêrīm*, Jer 35:7) to describe their presence in the land. These factors may indeed indicate a nomadic existence, but the verb may indicate a permanent existence in the land and not just a temporary one. The strongest argument against this point is the concomitant use of the verbs *ḥāyâ* and *yāšab* to describe the situation of the Rechabites, suggesting a

differentiation in the type of "living."[14] If the tents and "sojourning" were taken to indicate an "unsettled" existence, the Rechabites would still not be nomads in the truest sense of the word, for it appears that they were at least in part connected to the land, unlike true nomads.[15] Even this, though, remains obscure pending more information about the reasons for abstaining from wine, agriculture, and houses. In regard to the wine, Budde proclaims that viticulture is representative of a settled life, and that nomads thus had nothing to do with it. This assumption is typical of scholarship from this period (Frick 1971:284; Riemann 1964:47-48), but it is erroneous. Riemann (1964:56 n.14) in particular counters this assumption by pointing to the Tale of Sinuhe, an example of nomads that consume wine (among other things assumed as typical of a settled life; see below, pp. 30-31).

B. The "Land Ideal" and Negative Views of the Desert

Concerning the Rechabites' tenets, Budde is correct that the ascetic practices of this group were not to be imposed on all of Israel. Yet, he suggests that the early prophets saw "moral-religious value" and "righteousness" in the "teaching" of the Rechabites (Budde 1895:729, 741). According to Budde, the prophets applied a transformed version of this "nomadic ideal" to Israel's situation, declaring a future reduction/desolation of the nation, by which the people, or a remainder of them, would be "converted to Yahweh" under the conditions of a "nomadic existence" (Budde 1895:737). He argues further that Hosea and Isaiah, the two test cases, have different perspectives on the nomadic life. Hosea presents a

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[14] These distinctions are better represented in English by a compound phrase for *ḥāyâ*, "remain alive," and a clarification of *yāšab* as, "dwell," and *gār* as, "sojourn."

[15] Recent scholarship has produced a "nomadic-sedentary continuum" (cf. Dever 1998:224), in which nomadism is only one stage or combination of possibilities, including but not limited to transhumance and semi-nomadism (Matthews 1977:27-31). There is also a variety of economic structures in non-sedentary societies ranging from pastoralism to agriculture, as well as various urban-support roles such as hired labor and military service (Matthews 1977:143-162). In this case, one thinks to compare the Rechabites (if they were not sedentary) with other semi-nomadic leagues who have settled in some fashion, e.g., the Amorites at Mari (Dever 1992: 84; cf. Matthews 1977) and the modern Bedouin of the Negev (Khazanov 1983:150).

positive recollection of Israel's time in the wilderness, while Isaiah points to the disciplinary simplicity of a nomadic existence. Budde connects both perspectives to Israel's historical memory of earlier days in the wilderness. However, neither prophet seems to establish firmly a treatment of the wilderness and the nomadic life that reflects positive sentiments. Both prophets seem to proclaim the return to the wilderness as a punishment. Budde concurs with this, but suggests that the nomadic life is "a means of discipline and improvement" (Budde 1895:735), a decidedly positive view on what otherwise would appear to be oracles of threat and doom.

In several places, Budde refers to the nomadic life in positive terms, either in attempting to reflect what he perceives as the thoughts of the Rechabites, Kenites, or the prophets, or in an attempt to illustrate his own opinions on the issue. The discussion of the Rechabites' (and others') attitude toward a nomadic existence is indefensible in light of the scant evidence testifying to the perspectives of these groups. In the case of Israel, there is only a hint of a positive evaluation of the nomadic life in the stories of the Patriarchs, and perhaps in the survival of certain nomadic elements or symbols in later Israel (e.g., tents; Homan 2002:35-38). This positive evaluation, if there is one at all, must be weighed against the many negative evaluations of the nomadic life and nomads in the Bible. Only two explanations would vindicate completely the positive evaluation of the nomadic life: 1) If in the cultural diversity of early Israel, there were nomadic and settled elements, there might be separate views on the nomadic life represented in the biblical text, or 2) the positive evaluation of the nomadic life might belong to a section of the populace that wished to emphasize the nomadic elements of Israel's history or tradition, while another element, perhaps for political reasons, might wish to denigrate the nomadic life and its impact on later Israel. In either case, the idealization of the nomadic life would be explicable. But here any

argument must be presented with great caution, since one is addressing at this point a larger issue in biblical scholarship today, the problem of the settlement of Israel in Canaan.[16]

What can be said is that Budde failed to do justice to the negative aspects of Israel's nomadic traditions. For example, the larger of the two wilderness sojourns of the Israelites (the 38 years after Sinai) is presented in available narrative texts as a time of murmuring, a wandering enforced because of the people's disobedience at Sinai. Although the perspective presented in the Pentateuch may not be that of the earliest prophets, this is still something that should be reckoned in an argument about the idealism of the desert life. Budde tacitly ignored the repeated representations of the nomadic life as undesirable, or at least as a less desirable form of existence in comparison to a settled life in the land.[17] Budde did not seem to concede that settlement in the land was envisioned goal of the exodus tradition. Of course, the notion that the exodus tradition was connected to the land-giving tradition may not be sustainable with regard to the Pentateuch, given the partitioning of traditions according to Noth's *Überlieferungsgeschichte.* However, it is clear that the two traditions were connected in the prophets, or at the very least, in all of the prophets that Budde cited as examples. For example, Hosea connects the two traditions in 2:16-17, mentioning the exodus from Egypt and in the same breath referring to the conquest tradition, vis-à-vis. the Valley of Achor (Hos 2:17a). However, Budde remained uncommitted to the notion that the prophets believed this, thus remaining safe from criticism on this point. He offered only that the Kenites (connected by Budde with the Rechabites) conceived that Israel's

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[16] The debate is over the veracity of the biblical account of the Israel's appearance in Canaan. Was it a settlement process (violent or peaceful?), or was Israel always in the land? For a balanced introduction to this problem, see Meier 2005, a forthcoming article in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (Intervarsity, 2005).

[17] More will be said of negative representations of the nomadic life in the Bible in chapter 3.

corruption happened because "Israel has left tents and herds behind and turned to house and field" (Budde 1895:730). While this position is more tenable than if he were to argue such in the case of the prophets, again he reached further than the evidence will allow. It is also beyond the scope of the evidence to speak confidently of the Kenites as "the chosen guardians of the pure Yahweh worship" (Budde 1895:730).

C. The Kenites and the Rechabites

As mentioned immediately above, Budde connected the Rechabites with the Kenites. Through this connection, he utilized the idea of the Kenite Hypothesis to establish a nomadic background for the Rechabites, as well as to contend that they were "pure" Yahwists. He argued that as Kenites, the original Yahwists, they were concerned with the corruption of the cult of Israel through syncretism (Budde 1895:727-730). He even presented at one point the idea of a "message of a Jonadab ben Rechab," as if this figure, or one like him, had appealed to the people of Israel to return to the nomadic life (Budde 1895:735). His construction of the Rechabites as a Kenite clan of religious purists is based solely upon 1 Chronicles 2:55:

> *ūmišpəḥôt sôpərīm yôšəbê*[18] *yaʿbēṣ tirʿātīm šimʿātīm śūkātīm hēmmâ haqqīnīm habbāʾīm mēḥammat ʾābî bêt-rēkāb*
>
> "And the families of the scribes that lived at Jabez: the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, and the Sucathites. These are the Kenites who came from Hammath, father of the house of Rechab," (1 Chron 2:55, NRSV).

According to this verse, said Budde (and others), the descendants of Rechab are to be connected genealogically to the Kenites. However, Knights (1993) has argued convincingly that the phrase *bwʾ m(n)-* (underlined above) must be understood as denoting geographic origin, not genealogical origin. The verse above indicates that some group of the Kenites

[18] Here, the Qerê *yôšəbê* is preferred over the Ketib, *yāšəbū*, which is grammatically awkward.

came from a geographical area denoted as that of (i.e., land belonging to) Hammath, father of the house of Rechab (Knights 1993:14-15). This argument, especially combined with his suggestion that *bêt-rēkāb* refers to a place and not a people-group (Knights 1993:16-18), offers and effective alternative to the genealogical connection between the Rechabites and the Kenites. Any of Budde's argument that depends on this connection must be called into question.

D. The "Nomadic Ideal" and the Prophets

1. Hosea

Budde's treatment of Hosea also has its problems. His discussion of the "nomadic ideal" in Hosea is focused on, but is not limited to 2:16-17. This unique passage, which Riemann identified as a rare combination of the wilderness and hope (Riemann 1964:160), is central to Budde's conception of the "nomadic ideal." However, he achieved his reading of the passage by making crucial interpretive decisions. Budde chose to read the "she" or "her" character of chapter 2 as the land, since a real woman, or a people, cannot be turned into a desert. He further based his reading upon Hosea 1:2, where the prophet is commanded to marry an adulterous woman, "for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." Yet when Yahweh declares in 2:16 that he "will allure her, and lead her into the wilderness," one encounters a problem. The same argument that Budde applied to the problem of reading the woman as the people applies here as well, and one wonders how a land can be led into the wilderness. Budde argued that the prophet is speaking metaphorically, that he means the land will be turned into a wilderness. This explanation is not indefensible, but it is far from decisive. Additionally, Budde attempted to use Hos 2:5 as evidence that the woman is the land (Budde 1895:731 n.1), but he fails to distinguish the literal use from the metaphor, conveyed through the use of *k-*: *wəśamtîhā kammidbār*, "I will

make her *like* a wilderness" (Hos 2:5). Basing a subsequent argument upon his problematic reading would be somewhat speculative. It is enough to say that in the mind of the prophet, there seems to be little distinction between the people and the land.

A further problem in Budde's discussion of Hosea is the emendation of the text. Budde declared that many scholars, in light of the difficult nature of Hosea's text, have made emendations that are unnecessary, going too far to achieve a particular meaning. Yet Budde himself emended the text of 2:16-17 and 12:9 in several places. He read *ʿēmeq ʾākôr* not as a reference to a particular place, but instead as a general "lowlands of trouble." "Door of hope" became "fig orchards." He followed LXX in reading *wə ʿānətâ* as "and she will be submissive" instead of "and she will respond." While these reading choices are defensible, he must be held to the account of his own words: "Some, lately, have even made manifold changes of the text to render [a positive] understanding of [Hosea 2:16-17] in some degree acceptable. This is pains ill spent" (Budde 1895:734).

Budde contended that the "nomadic ideal" nature of Hosea's message was illustrated in the prophet's use of the nomadic life as a disciplinary measure, one which would reawaken Israel's faith in Yahweh, after which Yahweh would restore the gifts of culture and settlement which he took away prior to Israel's desolation. Yet Brueggemann has argued that the oracle of 2:16-17 indicates Yahweh's intention to act on Israel's behalf before she repents (Brueggemann 1968:78), a proposal all the more justifiable in light of the sequence of *waw*-consecutives which place Israel's "response" or "submission" (Hos 2:17b) after the giving of vineyards (Hos 2:17a).[19] The gift of the vineyards might then be meant to reveal

[19] There is a very real possibility that *wə ʿānətâ* actually means "and she will sing." Ibn Ezra connected this passage to *wataʿan* in Ex 15:21, suggesting the meaning "and she will sing" on the analogy of Miryam's joyous song. It is not necessary to resolve this issue here. It is sufficient to note that according to Budde's reading of the verb as "be submissive," Israel will only respond to Yahweh after He has returned the vineyards, which suggests that Israel has not repented in the wilderness.

the grace of Yahweh, who will give before receiving. According to this interpretation, the journey in the wilderness cannot have been intended as simple discipline and instruction, since the vineyards will be given back before Israel has completed her punishment. This would explain the strange use of *miššām*, "from there," which in the verse seems to indicate that Yahweh would give Israel vineyards in the wilderness. This problem would be further resolved if the wilderness is really the ruined land, which would be fructified again in the future.

2. Isaiah

Budde looked to Isaiah 7, the Immanuel oracle, for more evidence of the "nomadic ideal" in the prophets. He focused upon the life that Immanuel and his contemporaries would lead in the future, after a desolating attack from Assyria and Egypt. Here the prophet indicates that at this time Immanuel will eat "curds and honey" (Is 7:15a), following this phrase with a more awkward one, *ləda'tô mā'ôs bərā' ūbāḥôr bāṭṭôb* (Is 7:15b). This phrase has been understood either as a result clause, "in order that he may learn to refuse the evil and choose the good" (e.g., Peshitta, Vulgate), or a temporal condition, "until the time when he will learn to refuse the evil and choose the good" (e.g., LXX, Targum). Budde argued for the former, suggesting that the nomadic life is of such instructive worth that it will enable this child to successfully choose the moral good. However, this does not speak of the nomadic life as worthy in itself, for the worth is in the result.

Beyond this, Budde used the phrase "curds and honey" to argue that a return to a nomadic life must be envisioned, for this is the food of the nomad. While he is correct in establishing the wilderness provenience of these foodstuffs, it should be noted that milk and honey were not exclusively used by nomads. These two items, or parallels to them, are found in urban settings in Ugarit (*KTU* 1.6 III, 12-13; Wyatt 2003:137) and Mesopotamia

(see below, pp. 29-30). Rice (1977:365) has understood the milk and honey in this passage as an ironic use. Milk and honey in this case are not the sparse fare of the wanderer, but a sign of abundance. Immanuel and his generation will taste luxuriant prosperity, their herds and flocks will have more pastureland, but only because most of the land is desolate and most of the populace has vanished.

2.2—J. W. Flight, "The Nomadic Idea and Ideal in the Old Testament," *JBL* 42 (1923) pp. 158-226.

In his article appearing in JBL 42 (1923), J.W. Flight argued in favor of the so-called "nomadic ideal." His platform was that in any culture, there remains at least a trace of any event of importance in the history of the people concerned (Flight 1923:158). In the case of Israel, Flight suggested, this deposit was that of the nomadic past of the Israelites. In his article, he sought to establish the nomadic nature of the life of early Israel by noting the presence of "nomadic" trends in later periods. By this strategy, Flight meant to address the role of the Pan-Babylonian school in the reconstruction of biblical Israel, arguing that the "early nomadic life of the fathers of the Hebrews" had an equal impact on the later development of Israel (Flight 1923:159). Thus, Flight's aim was not simply to argue in favor of the "nomadic ideal" of Budde, but to offer it as a counter-argument in hopes of establishing early Israel apart from its Babylonian borrowings and shared literary motifs. In this way, Flight was part of a greater discussion on the origins of Israel in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Nevertheless, since the greatest content of Flight's work pertains to the establishment of the "nomadic ideal," though he sought to use it as a foothold in the larger dialogue, he became a key figure in the discussion of the role of the desert in pre-exilic Israel and the prophets. A reappraisal of his argument is thus essential to the resolution of this particular issue in biblical scholarship.

2.2.1—Summary

A. Nomadism in Israel's History

Flight insisted strongly on the existence of nomadic material in the Hebrew Bible, even suggesting that were other sources on nomadic life unavailable,[20] "we should be able to reconstruct it from the Old Testament down to almost the last detail" (Flight 1923:159). To present this material, Flight began with the stories of the Patriarchs, highlighting conventions of the Patriarchal period that convey a nomadic quality, such as mobile life, tent-dwelling, and pastoral careers. He pointed out the occasions in the Patriarchal narrative of famine and the consequent movements of Isaac and Jacob to lands less affected by the uncontrollable situation. Flight underlined the nomadic identity of the Patriarchs with their identification as shepherds and with the cult creed of Deut 26:5: "My father was a wandering Aramean" (Flight 1923:160).

Concerning the period of the exodus, Flight pointed to the animal husbandry of the Israelites and the desert journey undertaken as evidence of their nomadic nature. The leadership of the elders appointed by Moses he connected to the role of sheikhs in the Bedouin social structure. The law of Sinai and the religion of Israel are peripheral evidence of nomadic life, since both are suited to such an existence (Flight 1923:160). Flight further argued that Yahweh was originally a god of the desert, a nomad's god, and that this idea is evident in the enslaved Israelites' need to travel into the desert for the cult festival (Ex 3:18; 5:3; 9:1).[21] Flight concluded that the importance of the wilderness wandering is due to the central role of Yahwism, a desert religion which those tribes participating in the exodus

[20] E.g., the works of Burckhardt (*Notes on Bedouins and Wahabis* [1830]), Doughty (*Travels in Arabia Deserta* [1888]), and Zwemer (*Arabia the Cradle of Islam*), all listed in Flight's bibliography.

[21] Cp. the opinion of Assmann (1997:61-63), discussed below, pp.38-39.

brought with them out of the desert[22] (Flight 1923:161). Israel's nomadic character was further evinced, he argued, by the tribal organization of the nation during the wandering and the conquest, an organization that retained its form beyond the entrance into Canaan.

In all these matters, Flight sought to construct an idea of Israel that was solidly nomadic in its earliest forms. However, since the goal of his argument is to propose an origin of Israelite culture that was different from that set forth by the Pan-Babylonian school, he needed not only to provide an alternative *Urform* of Israel but also to establish that this *Urform* had an indelible impact on the later culture. In essence, he needed to prove that echoes of this early history were active in Israel during the period which was otherwise claimed by the Pan-Babylonian scholars. Flight found an effective model for his suggestion in the work of Budde: the "nomadic ideal." Just as Budde had done, Flight proposed that the prophets of pre-exilic Israel were responsible for the promotion and promulgation of the goodness of Israel's formative years as wanderers with Yahweh. Flight suggested that these prophets took hold of the traditions of Israel's nomadic ancestry (which he termed "the nomadic idea") and transformed them into the "nomadic ideal" (Flight 1923:162). These prophets did not invent the "ideal," argued Flight. Instead, he attributed the origin of the ideal to small sects within Israel who preserved nomadic ways of life.[23] The prophets were responsible only for the growth and spread of the idealization of nomadic life.

Flight used the body of his article to discuss the various survivals of nomadic life in later biblical Israel, highlighting nomadic reflexes in later occupations, food, clothing, shelter, social organization, and cult (Flight 1923:163-208). By doing this, he hoped to establish

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[22] Flight acknowledges a view of the exodus in which only a portion of later Israel actually made the journey from Egypt (usually the "Joseph tribes", cf. Budde 1895:729-730 n.1). This view is illustrated in the biblical text, when the authors identify several non-native components to Israel (Ex 12:38; Num 11:4; Deut 29:11[10 MT]; Judg 1:16; 5:14).

beyond any doubt that biblical Israel's culture was deeply rooted in the nomadic past of its ancestors. Every appearance of anything possibly connected to a nomadic existence was another link in the chain of his argument. Since the aim of this present work is to deal with the "nomadic ideal," much of Flight's arguments for nomadic survivals in Israel will be laid aside, with only occasional references to this material that bear primarily upon the issue of the perspective on the desert and nomadic life in Israel.

B. Flight and the "Nomadic Ideal"

Flight drew his work to a close with a discussion of the "nomadic ideal," but it is here that this present discussion becomes most active. Much of Flight's argument on this point was framed by the idea that Israel's religion was based in territorial henotheism[24] (also called "polydemonism" [Flight 1923:197]), the selective worship of one god among many, all bound to their own regions/realms (Flight 1923:197).[25] In Flight's mind, and in the mind of many of his colleagues, "Yahweh was a nomads' God" and the desert was his original, proper realm (Flight 1923:197-198). When the people entered the land of Canaan, he argued, they forsook Yahweh in preference of the land gods, since they were in their "jurisdiction" so-to-speak. This effective betrayal of Yahwism, posited Flight, led the Israelite prophets of the 8th-7th centuries BCE to seek a return to the "golden age" of Israel, the days of the wilderness wandering with its inherent simplicity. For Flight, the return to simplicity was what the prophets envisioned in their oracles of destruction: a revolution that would "sweep away the temptations of Canaan that had drawn away the heart of the nation

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[23] The chief example would be the Rechabites, cf. Jeremiah 35.

[24] This is one of the main assumptions of the "nomadic ideal" hypothesis (Riemann 1964:3).

[25] The reason that the "nomadic ideal" and polydemonism are connected is explained clearly by Riemann: "On such a supposition the desert would be a much simpler environment than the fertile land...its very desolate nature would make the competing *numena* less numerous and an elaborate cultus impossible to maintain" (Riemann 1964:44).

from Yahweh" (Flight 1923:209). After this catastrophic time, a remnant of the people would return to a pure faith in Yahweh, whom they could then appropriately appreciate as the god of both land and desert.

Flight expounded on this return to simplicity, suggesting that Yahweh's faithful in Israel conceived "it would be easier to give exclusive worship to Yahweh in the simple life of the desert" (Flight 1923:210). Thus, he argued, the "nomadic" experience of Israel with Yahweh in past was set up as the ideal for the future. The "nomadic ideal," taken originally from Budde, was expanded by Flight, who suggested that Israel's past was conceptualized by the prophets as a "golden age" (Flight 1923:212). According to Flight, the prophets of the 8^{th}-7^{th} centuries looked to this "golden age" in their quest for a restoration of pure Yahwism. Flight found evidence of the conservativism of the "nomadic ideal" in the prophet Nathan's rebuke of David and his plan to build a house for Yahweh (2 Samuel 7), in the actions of Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kings 11), and in the life and ministry of Elijah. Beyond these individuals, Flight argued that the Yahwist (J) and Elohist (E) sources of the Pentateuch represented historians who depicted the nomadic life of the ancestors of Israel as glorious and ideal (Flight 1923:213).

C. <u>The Rechabites</u>

Nevertheless, Flight looked to the Rechabites for the true beginning of this idealism. As did Budde, Flight was convinced of the presence of the Rechabites as early as the 9^{th} century BCE, based on 2 Kings 10:15ff. This passage about the revolution of Jehu against the house of Ahab, introduces "J(eh)onadab ben Rechab" who accompanies Jehu on his campaign. The same Jonadab is mentioned in Jeremiah 35, where the prophet holds a meeting with a curious sect called the *rēkābim*, "Rechabites," who call Jonadab their ancestor. As did Budde, Flight understood the Rechabites to be a religious sect to which Jonadab

himself belonged. According to Flight, the nomadic ideal was already at work in the 9th century BCE.

D. The "Nomadic Ideal" in the Prophets

Pursuing his argument through the prophets, Flight pointed out references to the former days of Israel (particularly the wilderness wandering tradition), prophetic opposition to sacrifice and ritual, and the employment of nomadic speech by the prophets as examples of "nomadic idealism" (Flight 1923:215). The first category of references, according to Flight, depicts the early history of Israel as a "time of felicity and high endeavor" (Flight 1923:216), a time of purity and simplicity, "old nomadic days" when "Israel was loyal to Yahweh" (Flight 1923:217). This is the "golden age" which the prophets have idealized, a return to which can only now come about through desolation.

References in the prophets of opposition to "formalism in religion, to sacrifice and ritual, and to the evils that come in the wake of civilization" (Flight 1923:218) Flight understood as the prophetic opinion that "things were better in the desert" in terms of purity of religion. The chief line of his argument was that sacrifice was not explicitly commanded in the desert, and that sacrifice provided an opportunity for the people to go astray (Flight 1923:218-219). Thus, explained Flight, the prophets denounced the sacrifices and services of the people, because they were "foreign to pure Yahwism" (Flight 1923:219).[26] These sacrifices and rituals, along with the prosperity of the land, Flight argued, were representative of the corrupting influence of the land of Canaan. The sacrifices must stop and the gifts must be taken away (Flight 1923:220).

[26] If this were true, it would make Yahwism a unique religion. Claiming that the original cult of Yahweh did not involve sacrifice removes it from comparative perspective with other religions. The burden of proof laid upon anyone offering such a claim would be immense in the face of the repeated references to sacrifices of various kinds commanded in the Bible and the physical evidence from archaeology.

Flight suggested that the prophets occasionally employed figures of speech that had a nomadic quality, phrases which, appearing frequently in context with oracles of future redemption, express "a longing that things may again be as they once were" (Flight 1923:220). This future redemption was connected in speech to a return to desert life, albeit temporary. References to the wilderness, tents, shepherds, flocks, and nomadic fare were targeted as the "nomadic ideal" at work in the prophets (Flight 1923:221-222).

Flight was convinced that the prophets believed in a return to nomadic conditions which would arouse a loyalty to Yahweh like that of Israel's early days in the wilderness. The nomadic life was the discipline required to bring Israel back to God. When this program of restoration proved ineffective, suggested Flight, the prophets saw redemption only through the destruction and exile of the people. Nevertheless, claimed Flight, the prophets clung to the "nomadic ideal" but in a broader sense. The idealism of the "golden age" of Israel was reapplied as a hope that Israel would one day "be brought back to the simple and uncorrupted faith of the fathers," this time on a deeper level (Flight 1923:222-223).

Like Budde, Flight ultimately suggested that it was Jesus who completed this internalization of the "nomadic ideal," living and promoting simplicity of life and faith. Flight ended his work with the suggestion that a return to such simplicity was necessary for Christianity in his day (Flight 1923:223-224). In the following section, a critique of Flight's argument will be presented, in which it will be appropriate to ask precisely who it is that is idealizing Israel's nomadic heritage.

2.2.2—Critique of Flight

Since Flight drew so heavily upon the work of Budde, a critique of his work necessarily will note many of the same pitfalls as are present in Budde's work. What follows

is an attempt to comment on those elements of Flight's work that are unique to him, or at least excluded from Budde's discussion.

A. Methodological Problems

The first and most foundational criticism to be offered is on methodological grounds. Flight frequently adduced biblical passages as evidence in support of his thesis, but disappointingly, too many of these references offer little or nothing in the way of solid evidence. The majority of the verses in question can only be taken as evidence for Flight's argument if one presupposes another part of his argument. In short, their value is not self-evident and at times, the support seems to be a fiction fabricated by Flight. For example, Flight argued that the permanent Nazirite vow against shaving was, "rooted manifestly in a desire to preserve an old custom of desert life" (Flight 1923:177).[27] In a footnote on this statement, he cited four passages: Ju 13:5, 1 Sam 1:11, Lev 19:27, and 21:5. Though one expects that these passages are adduced as evidence in support of Flight's claim, the first two only tell the reader of Samson and Samuel, how they were both Nazirites from birth, while the second two are part of the priestly code and seem connected with issues relating to death and mourning. A further example: in another place, Flight asserted "some of the east Jordanian tribes...continued to be tent-dwellers in the steppe" (Flight 1923:180). Here he offered five passages, one of which is Exodus 32:1f, a passage that seems neither appropriate nor relevant. The other four (Ju 5:16; 1 Sam 25:2f; 2 Kgs 3:4; Am 1:1) refer only to shepherds and shepherding, and none of them contains a word about tents. He assumed, of course, that all shepherds live in tents, thus every mention of shepherds in the Bible is a

[27] Interestingly, Flight is not alone in the attempt to connect the Nazirite vow with a nomadic existence (cf. Harper 1936:li-lii). There is a school of thought that presupposes that avoidance of wine is a staple feature of nomadic life, but see below, pp. 30-31. The other parts of the Nazirite vow, the proscriptions against the cutting of hair (dealt with here) and touching corpses, have no apparent connection with a nomadic life.

mention of life in tents. Flight could have been correct in his estimation of the Trans-Jordanian tribes, but the verses he cited as evidence do not provide any support for his claims. One cannot help but wonder about many of the other references that Flight cited.

B. Territorial Henotheism

Flight also assumed that the early Israelites were territorial henotheists, asserting this throughout his work. The many references to Yahweh as a nomad's god, or a desert god (not to mention his treatment of Canaanite deities) fall under the same criticism offered above (p.14) on Budde's work: he has gone beyond the evidence available, providing a speculative reconstruction of the religious tenets of biblical Israel. The present author does not oppose the notion of early Israelite monolatry.[28] The problem lies with the idea that the early Israelites conceived of their god as localized to the desert and this to such a degree that it was improper to worship him in the land. It seems far better to think that a god might be bound to a particular people-group instead of a geographical domain. This fits the biblical picture of Yahweh better than the notion of Yahweh as a territorial spirit.

C. Milk, Honey, and Wine

A final note on Flight's replication of Budde's mistakes deals with the categorization of milk and honey as common nomadic foodstuffs, and wine as the fare of only agriculturalists. Flight contended that milk (or curds) and honey was "the common fare of the desert" (Flight 1923:170). According to Flight, the promised consumption of "butter and honey" (Is 7:15) in the Immanuel prophecy was an indication that the inhabitants of the land would be reduced "to the conditions of nomadic life" (Flight 1923:222), meaning to Flight that the populace would live in the Spartan simplicity of the nomadic life. However, G. Rice has offered a more convincing interpretation of the curds and honey of Isaiah 7:15.

[28] I.e., the exclusive worship of one god while acknowledging the existence of other gods.

Rice has argued that these foodstuffs should be understood as a sign of blessing and plenty (Rice 1977:365). This would explain why the land of Canaan was described as, "a land flowing with milk and honey,"[29] a promising description for a promised land. This was a problem for Flight, who could offer no solution, declaring that "a 'land flowing with milk and honey' can hardly have been an ideal of the nomads," to whom "the common fare of the desert" would hardly "be a special glory" (Flight 1923:170).[30] Instead, "milk and honey" or "curds and honey" should be understood as a special food, ideal for feeding honored guests (Gen 18:8; Judg 5:25[31]; 2 Sam 17:27-29), giving an ironic tone to the Isaiah passage. Because of the desolation of the land and the reduction of its population, there will be much pastureland and an abundance of the best foods, but all at great human expense (Rice 1977:365). Further evidence can be adduced that shows milk and honey do not belong only to the nomadic sphere.[32]

On the issue of wine, the Tale of Sinuhe (11:80-90; ANE Anthology 1:5) offers some insight. Sinuhe speaks of the bountiful provision of his nomadic host, who supplied him

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[29] This phrase is found in the Pentateuch in Ex 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev 20:24; Num 13:27; 14:8; 16:13, 14; Deut 6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20; and outside of the Pentateuch in Josh 5:6; Jer 11:5; 32:22; Ezek 20:6, 15.

[30] Ironically, if Flight were correct in his assessment of "butter and honey" as common fare for nomads, then Israel's favorable description of the promised land as "a land flowing with milk and honey" would suggest that Israel was not a nomadic group at the time.

[31] Flight cites this passage as evidence that milk was drunk instead of water because it was of lesser value (Flight 1923:170). This reading of the passage does not make sense in the context, where it is otherwise clear that Jael is rendering great hospitality to Sisera (cf. 5:25b, "lordly bowl," and the fact that Sisera is lulled into a false sense of security by her actions of honor).

[32] Cf. E. Dhorme, "Le Sacrifice akkadien," *RHR*, 107 (1933), pp.107-25, esp. p108: "Les formules *ḫimêtum û dišpum*...qui se rencontrent dans les plus anciens textes assyriens, ont leur réplique exacte dans *ḫêm ʾâh û-debaš* d'Isaïe, VII, 15, 22." One will find a very urban use of butter and honey in the story of Gudea (COS 2:408), who makes the first brick of a temple by "hoe[ing] in honey [and] butter," as well as in an inscription of Šamši-Addu (COS 2:110), who declares, "Honey and ghee [butter] I mixed in the mortar." For more occurances of "butter and honey," see *CAD* D *dišpu* 190 and Ḫ *ḫimētu* 161-163. Note also the appearance of honey and oil in Ugaritic texts (*KTU* 1.6 III, 12-13; *KTU* 1.87:22; *KTU* 1.41:20-21; cf. Stern 1992:554-557)

with "wine as a daily provision."[33] Apparently, nomads do partake of wine. The belief that abstinence from wine defines a group as nomadic is one of several persistent yet erroneous assumptions in biblical scholarship (Riemann 1964:47-48, 56 n14; Frick 1971: 284). Riding on this assumption, some scholars (e.g., Harper 1936:li-lii; Pope IDB:16, col. 1) have tentatively suggested nomadic origins or sentiments for the Nazirites, who also abstained from wine. Flight also seems to have been working with this assumption, as he attempted to draw another connection between the Nazirite vow and the desert life (Flight 1923:177, referenced above). The notion that the Nazirites were "nomadic idealists," however, is not so likely. It is equally possible to view the injunction against wine (Num 6:3) as an avoidance of decay and putrefaction during a period of consecration. This fits quite well in the context of the other injunctions for priestly service (Lev 10:9; 21:1,5,10-11),[34] all of which could be reflexes of the general impurity of the dead in the Hebrew Bible.[35]

D. Nomads

It might seem puzzling that Sinuhe speaks of wine-imbibing nomads when one expects that nomads would not practice viticulture (though how can one be sure?). Although nomads live in isolated places, many nomadic communities in the ancient and modern world did and do conduct business with settled peoples. The Amorite tribes at Mari, though typical semi-nomadic pastoralists, also held urban-support roles such as military service, hired labor, or even herding contracts (Matthews 1977:143-162). Some

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[33] "'Apiru are known to have served as vintagers in the northeastern Delta in the early fifteenth century B.C." (Riemann 1964:54 n.14).

[34] For an overview of similar interpretations, see Diamond 1997.

[35] The rule against wine (for the Nazirite, all grape products) could be connected to the ban on leaven in cult service, and may represent a cultic disapproval of all things fermented, a sign of decay/death (Lev 2:11; but for priests, this may be connected to a need for sobriety when performing ritual and instruction, cf. Lev 10:9-10). The rule against cutting the hair may have a parallel in the command to refrain from shaving parts of the head and beard in mourning for the dead (Lev 21:1-6). The rule against contact with a corpse is obvious.

accoutrements of settled life are bound to find their way into nomadic hands. The mercantile activities of nomads is important to consider against the claims of Budde and Flight, who suggested that nomadism was ideal because nomads were free of the distractions and involvements of settled culture. This could hardly be true if these nomads were to interact as traders with these other cultures (Albertz 1994:71; Janzen 1994:371-372). Perhaps he ignored this aspect in the attempt to put the nomadic life forward as an ideal of simplicity. More likely is that Flight was working with an incomplete sense of nomadism, one that did not take into account the necessary interaction between nomads and sedentaries (Khazanov 1983:3). This can be further deduced based upon the use of the term "nomad" to refer to a wide variety of life-styles, including, for example, but not limited to nomadism, semi-nomadism, and pastoralism (cf. Riemann 1964:25; Dever 1998:224). Flight's understanding of nomadism was insufficient for a proper analysis of the social situation of early Israel.

E. Flight's Putative "Golden Age"

Another problem is Flight's use of the phrase "golden age" as a cover-all term for Israel's nomadic life, from the Patriarchs to the exodus.[36] Though one might be tempted to use this phrase to refer to any period which might be evaluated as positive by later generations, the phrase "golden age" comes with the baggage of another time and place altogether. This phrase, laden with the perspectives of Classical sources, does not do justice to the biblical perspective on Israel's early history. Some events in Israel's history were idealized in later periods and proved to be sources of hope and direction in the life of the nation, but this does not make for a "golden age." Instead of looking back at the ancestors and their time as a "golden age," the Bible speaks of a promise given but not fulfilled, a group of nomadic people landless and at the mercy of the tides of nature. These famine-

[36] The phrase "golden age" appears in Flight's work multiple times, e.g., pp. 212, 213, 215, 223.

plagued times hardly seem to be represented as a "golden age." Nor does time reveal a purely degenerative cycle of events. The idea of Israel's history as portrayed in the Bible is one with many ups and downs, times of positive movement punctuated with periods of dissolution and disobedience. Abraham received a promise, but his descendants went into captivity. They escaped from Egypt and were made the covenant people of God at Sinai, only to fall in the desert because of disobedience, while the next generation went forward to inherit the land. The positive value of Israel's history rests on the glorious events of divine intervention in Israel's history, which were surety of Yahweh's divine aid in the future, if the people kept the covenant. The prophets were not trying to escape to an idealization of the past. They were casting dueling visions of providence and destruction based upon the nation's previous experience with Yahweh. The only way in which things would return to the way they were "as in the beginning" (Flight 1923:209) is that the people would once again come into covenant with Yahweh.

F. A "Wandering Aramean"?

In another attempt to argue for Israel's nomadic past, Flight cited a passage referring to the nomadic life of the fathers, "A wandering Aramean was my father" (Deut 26:5; Flight 1923:160), a text that is valuable for this present discussion. This time of "wandering" is that to which Flight pointed as "the 'golden age' when simplicity of faith in Yahweh was easy under the ideal conditions of nomadic life" (Flight 1923:215). However, a reevaluation of this passage results in a new understanding of Deut 26:5-9. The first phrase of 26:5b in particular is important for a proper reading:

ʾărammî ʾôbēd ʾābî

"A wandering Aramean was my ancestor" (NRSV)

The word that enabled Flight to read this as a statement of Israel's nomadic origins contains within it a more important perspective on Israel's early history. The word *ʾôbēd*, translated by many as "wandering," is better understood as having a meaning closer to its verbal root *ʾ-b-d*, which in the Qal carries the meaning of "perish." Janzen has made a convincing argument for reading "my father was an Aramean about to perish," or more artfully, "A starving Syrian was my sire" (Janzen 1994:375). Thus, the whole tone of the passage is changed. Instead of being simply a reflection on the nomadic life of Jacob[37] before his journey to Egypt, Deut 26:5 sets the stage for the following verses. The passage as a whole is about the offering of the first fruits, a rite inextricably tied to the land. By reciting this credo, the worshipper recalled the mighty acts of Yahweh and his deliverance of Israel from Egypt to a land "flowing with milk and honey" (26:9). It is in this context that the new reading must be understood. The phrase *ʾărammî ʾôbēd ʾābî* is a statement of how troubled and despairing life was for the Patriarchs. The life that Jacob lived, especially during times of famine, was a tenuous existence characterized by want and not abundance. This part of the credo heightens the greatness of the gift of the land dramatically, while simultaneously testifying to the perspective of the author on the nomadic life. On this point, the nomadic life seems far from ideal; rather, the land is the ideal.

G. Problematic Comparisons with Bedouin

Like many of his contemporaries and predecessors, Flight was preoccupied with comparisons between Israel and the Bedouin (see above, pp. 2-3). However, the accuracy of the comparison is doubtful considering the time separating the two cultures and the serious

[37] It is clear that this is who is meant by "father," since Jacob is the Aramean ancestor (from Padan-Aram; Gen 28:5) in whose generation the Patriarchs went to sojourn in Egypt (cf. Janzen 1994). Abraham also traveled to Egypt, but according to the tradition in Genesis, he did not remain there, unlike Jacob.

differences in context. These were not simply isolated communities which were unaffected by the developments around them.

Though Flight did not directly refer to the conquest of Canaan, it falls under the category of the "brutal aggressiveness" (Flight 1923:166) of the Israelites. Flight likened the actions of Israel fighting against its enemies to nomadic raids on settlements, even at one point using the word *ḥērem* to describe these "raids." *Ḥērem* is a very specialized term in the Bible, indicating the devotional actions of Israel in holy war against certain groups and places in the settlement narratives. The comparison between Israel's holy war practices and nomadic razzias is a grave error, for nomadic raids did not typically have destruction as a goal. Nomads raided settlements for wealth, horses, and food (and perhaps women). Destroying the settlements that were targeted for raiding would be counter-productive for the nomads, who would count on these settlements to be replenished in time for another profitable assault. The killing of all of the inhabitants of a settlement (cf. Josh 6:17, 21) and the forbidding of the acquisition of any material goods from that settlement on the part of any tribesman (cf. Josh 6:18, 24; 7:11) also does not fit the scenario of a nomadic raid. But this is exactly what is meant when the term *ḥērem* is employed (e.g., Jericho, Josh 6:17-24). *Ḥērem* is a term for holy war, not the sporadic raiding of nomadic tribes.[38]

H. Biblical "Proofs" for the "Nomadic Ideal"

1. Cain and Abel

Beyond the discussion of general nomadic practices, Flight also delved into the biblical text looking for episodes that represent nomadic sentiments and the idealization of the nomadic life. Flight suggested that the story of Cain and Abel indicated a preference for

[38] Cf. the discussion of the *ḥērem* in Weinfeld 1993:84-98.

nomadic life, pointing to the struggle between the brothers, Abel the pastoralist and Cain the farmer, as evidence. Because Yahweh received Abel's offering and rejected that of Cain, Flight suggested that this revealed a preference for pastoralism, the standard career of the Patriarchs (Flight 1923:164). Further, he cited the divine preference for the animal sacrifice as evidence of Yahweh's nomadic/pastoralist nature (Flight 1923:173). Finally, he held Cain to be an example of the evils of civilization: "The building of the first cities and the invention of the first arts are attributed [by J] to the cursed race of Cain" (Flight 1923:213). There are several problems with these assertions.

If Abel were taken to represent the nomadic way of life and Cain the way of civilization and settlement, immediately there would arise a difficulty. Cain, originally a farmer, became a wanderer because of the murder of Abel (Gen 4:12); he was a nomad by punishment. However, Cain subsequently founded a city named Enoch (4:17). Another turn of the story reveals that Cain is the ancestor of the first nomad, Jabal (4:20). Flight understood the invention of the arts by Jubal, another descendant of Cain, as a sign of civilization (Flight 1923:213), but other scholars see a connection between these instruments and nomadic communities (Westermann 1972:37; von Rad 1972:107). Another descendant, Tubal-Cain, is identified with the origin of smith-work in bronze and iron, a trade that many scholars have identified with nomadic groups (e.g., Frick 1971).[39] There are sound reasons for considering "cursed Cain" as the ancestor of all sorts of nomadic groups, even though he is credited with the building of a city.

While the story of the offerings of Cain and Abel may legitimately be a reference to the struggle between pastoralist and farmer over the mutual need of land, this does not mean

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[39] The Beni-Ḥasan tomb painting from Egypt (c.1890 BCE) seems to indicate the existence of traveling Asiatic metalworkers (ANE Anthology 1:285, illus. 2; Albright 1956:98-99). Thus, Tubal-Cain's career might suggest that he was regarded as a nomad.

that the entire narrative is intended to denigrate all civilization. If anything, the story of Cain's wandering might be intended to reflect a periodic dissolution of settlements followed by a return to nomadic, semi-nomadic, or simply rural forms.[40] Flight is clearly in error when he attempts to offer the story of Cain and Abel, and on a wider scale the J document, as a biblical statement of preference for nomads and nomadic life.[41]

2. The Flood

As another putative "proof" of a biblical anti-urban ideal, Flight suggested that the motive behind the Flood was "the destruction of the proud works of civilization in order that man may start again in simplicity to live a life of complete trust in Yahweh" (Flight 1923:213-214). This is nothing more than an attempt to figure J as a document in favor of nomadism, with an anti-urban bent. Yet there is no evidence available in the Flood narratives that would allow for such a reading. Limited to the text alone, the motivation for the Flood remains obscure, reduced to the non-descript phrases "the wickedness of humankind" (Gen 6:5) and "the earth was corrupt" (6:11). What may be learned from extra-biblical sources seems to indicate that the short vignette of Gen 6:1-4 holds the key. According to early interpretations which may attest to an old tradition, it is the appearance of the *nəpîlim* that prompts the divine response of destruction.[42] There is no message of the perils and corruption of complex civilization inherent in the story.

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[40] In this regard, cf. Dever 2003, where Dever discusses the oscillation between nomadism and sedentarism from EB IV to MB I. See also Dever 1992, where he gives factors that might prompt deurbanization.

[41] Flight is not alone in the attempt to characterize J as sympathetic to nomads. B. Luther ("Die Israelitischen Stämme," *ZAW* 22 (1901) 1-76; with E. Meyer, *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbartämme*, Halle: Darmstadt, 1967 [reprinting]) was the first to put forth the theory that the "nomadic ideal" of Budde would explain J's fixation on the pastoralist patriarchs (Riemann 1964:14).

[42] This point was shared with me by Dr. Sam Meier in a personal communication. Meier is expected to present his work on this issue at the 2005 SBL conference in Philadelphia, subsequently publishing his findings.

J. Yahweh as a "Desert God"

Finally, there are two notes to make in regard to the presumed "desert nature" of Yahweh in Flight's work. Flight argued that Yahweh was understood to be a god of the desert from his command that Israel should come out to worship him in the wilderness (Ex 3:18, 23; 5:3; Flight 1923:161). Although Yahweh commands Israel to come to him in the wilderness, this need not indicate that the wilderness was Yahweh's only home. Why then does Yahweh call Israel out to the wilderness? A very important possibility is that which was recognized by Pharaoh in the story. Permitting the Israelite slaves to travel into the wilderness would likely be only the first stage in a grand escape. It suffices here to state that there are other possible reasons for the journey into the wilderness.

Yet another possibility has been proposed by Jan Assmann, who has suggested that the journey into the wilderness should be connected with the celebration of the pre-exodus Passover and the cult of the Egyptian god Khnum (Assmann 1997:61-63). Assmann has explained the need for departure into the wilderness by drawing from the Elephantine papyri and their portrayal of the Jewish community there, and from Maimonides' comments on Ex 8:26 and its interpretation by Onqelos[43] (Assmann 1997:61). He has suggested that the Jewish Temple at the fortress of Yeb (Elephantine) was destroyed because the followers of Khnum were incensed with the Jews and their sacrifice during the Passover of an animal sacred to them (Assmann 1997:63).[44] Assmann has taken this hypothetical situation and applied it to the earlier command to worship Yahweh in the wilderness, suggesting that the

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[43] *Guide for the Perplexed* 3:46: "Scripture tells us, according to the Version of Onkelos, that the Egyptians worshipped Aries, and therefore abstained from killing sheep, and held shepherds in contempt. Comp. 'Behold we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians,' etc. (Exod. viii. 26); 'For every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians' (Gen. xlvi. 34)" (p. 359 in Friedländer's translation).

[44] Assmann notes Jedaniah's request for permission from Bagohi to rebuild the temple and to resume sacrifices. In reply, Bagohi permits the rebuilding of the temple and the offering of meal and incense, but does not permit the sacrifice of the holocaust offering (*ʿôlâ*; Assmann 1997:63).

Israelites were trying to avoid a similar incident with either the followers of Khnum or Amun, to both of whom the ram was sacred (Assmann 1997:61). The command to travel into the wilderness does not necessarily implicate Yahweh as a desert god. Rather, there is good reason to prefer Assmann's explanation to Flight's.

The second and final note is in regard to Flight's use of the Tabernacle. Flight pointed to the prophet Nathan's rebuke of David in 2 Samuel 7 regarding the construction of a temple for Yahweh. Flight argued that Yahweh did not want a temple because "it would have been a departure from the old simplicity" (Flight 1923:212). Flight saw this simplicity as pure Yahwism reflected in the nomadic way of life. The simplicity of the Tabernacle was connected to the idea of Yahweh as a nomadic god who does not want all the rites and worship of a settled culture. This, however, is a misunderstanding of a key issue in the passage. While there may be some truth to the idea that the Tabernacle reflects a time when Yahweh wandered with Israel (Homan 2002:34-35), one is not to conclude that this is the only element involved. Simplicity is not what Yahweh seeks to preserve by forbidding the construction of a temple. Rather, the issue was whether Yahweh belonged in a permanent place, bound to one location instead of having the ability to move and be identified in many locations, in the land and out of it. The message seems to be: "Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house" (1 Kgs 8:27). This is only one option for understanding the statement of Nathan to David, but it is an answer that is just as satisfying (and perhaps more so) as the idea of a preservation of nomadic simplicity.

CHAPTER 3

OPPONENTS OF THE "NOMADIC IDEAL" HYPOTHESIS

Consideration has been given in the preceding chapter to scholars who proposed the existence of an idealized view of the desert and the nomadic life in the Bible. A critique of their work has revealed unsupported assumptions and has pointed out the inadequacies of the hypothetical "nomadic ideal." The appropriate next step is to investigate the works of the scholars who challenged the "nomadic ideal" hypothesis. Since criticism is solely negative work, it is important to consider the positive argument. If there was no idealization of the desert and the nomadic life in the Bible, then what was the Israelite attitude toward each of these? The next two works that will be reviewed, those of Riemann and Talmon, will reaffirm the notion that the "nomadic ideal" is an unsatisfying explanation of the biblical ideology of the desert. Going a step further, their work will move the discussion in positive directions, establishing a foundation upon which one can construct a more complete understanding of the ancient Israelite attitude toward the desert and the nomadic life. As is fitting, the work of these scholars will also be challenged at the end of the chapter. This critique will help to establish the current state of the field.

3.1—P. A. Riemann, *Desert and Return to Desert in the Pre-Exilic Prophets.* (Harvard Dissertation, 1964)

In his doctoral dissertation at Harvard University, Paul A. Riemann approached the issue of the "nomadic ideal" from the opposite side of the discussion, offering a counter-opinion regarding the role of the desert and desert imagery in the life of Israel, with special emphasis on the pre-exilic prophets. His work amounts to a strong argument against the "nomadic ideal" hypothesis. Riemann corralled a wide array of material available on the subject, reviewing and critiquing the works, pointing out assumptions and errors where clear, offering alternative hypotheses where doubt is reasonable, but not resolvable. Riemann's work is extremely valuable to the discussion, taking into account both older scholarship and new sources of information to produce a balanced analysis of the Israelite attitude toward the desert and the desert life.

3.1.1—Summary: Riemann

As expected, a fair portion of the beginning of Riemann's work is devoted to reviewing the points of the "nomadic ideal" argument and offering a challenge. Since this has already been done to some degree thus far in this paper, is would be senseless to repeat the standard arguments. Instead, only a brief overview of Riemann's argument will be given, after which the discussion will center on Riemann's advancement of the thesis that "for the average Israelite, the desert was an evil place, a region of terror, a land under curse" (Riemann 1964:24). This sets the tone for Riemann's analysis, prognosticating the direction and conclusion of his investigation.

D. Problems with the "Nomadic Ideal" Hypothesis

Riemann rejected the "nomadic ideal" hypothesis on several grounds. Against the preference for Arabic materials, he pointed out that subsequent epigraphic discoveries provide a more appropriate context than the Arabic sources, all of which are from a later period, well after the time of the pre-exilic prophets. Another contributing factor, the belief in a central Arabian Semitic *Urheimat*, which placed Arabic in the center of the historical linguistic view, he challenged on anthropological grounds (Riemann 1964:45). Along similar lines, Riemann pointed out the dangers of comparing Israel to the Bedouin, familiar from the work of Flight (above, pp. 34-35; Riemann 1964:39). Riemann also dismissed many of the claims about the Rechabites,[45] arguing that such interpretations lacked supporting evidence.[46] Riemann even offered alternative interpretations of the Rechabites to show "the uncertainty of the situation, and...why caution is required" (Riemann 1964:53).[47] Riemann refuted the turn-of-the-century assumption of Israelite polydemonism[48] or territorial henotheism, arguing that as early as the 8th century BCE, Yahweh was not limited to one area (Riemann 1964:43).[49] Riemann also challenged the notion that the prophets were the first

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[45] Examples are the idea of the Rechabites as an example of the "nomadic ideal" (Budde 1895; Flight 1923) or of the Rechabites as pastoralists (Pope IDB 4:15). On the second, Riemann pointed out that pastoralists typically escaped invading armies by retreating to the drift with their flocks (where an army could not find enough water to sustain a pursuit), whereas the Rechabites came within the city walls, probably a sign that they had no flocks (Riemann 1964:51-52).

[46] There is not even definitive evidence that the Rechabite oath was related to a nomadic life (Riemann 1964:51).

[47] Riemann suggested the possibility that they were cultic personnel, which would explain why Jehu invited Jonadab ben Rechab to accompany him to the slaughter of the Baal-worshippers (2 Kgs 10:15ff), or a military force, esp. for holy war (Riemann 1964:53). If the Rechabites were a militia-group, activities such as living in tents, rejecting wine, and refusing to raise crops might be taken as a gesture of preparedness, recalling the biblical laws regarding qualification for military service (Deut 20:5-9).

[48] Polydemonism can be defined as the belief in localized divinities/powers (*numena*) which is more distinct than animism, yet less than polytheism. "According to this view, *numena* were believed to inhabit natural phenomena, particularly living things, springs, rivers, and so on" (Riemann 1964:44).

exponents of ethical religion, who idealized the desert as a location of simplicity and moral purity disassociated from the "crude" naturalism of the Canaanite cult (Riemann 1964:17).[50]

E. Israel's social Urform

Much of the argument for a "nomadic ideal" is based upon a specific notion of the history and social situation of early Israel (especially evident in Flight's work). The social structure touted by "nomadic ideal" scholars was often one in which earliest Israel was a nomadic league, even after coming into the land. In some cases, the claim follows that Israel destroyed the urban culture of Canaan in revulsion of city-life, and that urban civilization did not resume again until the monarchy. The idea here is that Israel considered the repudiation of urbanization an act of faithfulness to Yahweh, but the rise of the monarchy corrupted Israel's value system. Yet, according to the Bible, at least in the eyes of the Deuteronomist, it was the divine intention to give Israel "large cities that you did not build, houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant" (Deut 6:10-11). Riemann also argued that urban settlements in Canaan continued from the pre-Israelite period up to the monarchic period in Israel, showing that there was no break in civilization that would represent anti-urbanism in

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[49] The 8th century BCE inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud, discovered by Z. Meshel in 1978, may attest to local manifestations of Yahweh (McCarter 1978:138). The existence of belief in a Yahweh of Samaria (*yhwh šmrn*) and a Yahweh of Teman (*yhwh tmn/tymn*) reveals that Yahweh was worshipped in various locations at the beginning of the 8th century. These inscriptions are not, however, evidence of polydemonism. Consider the Aramaic inscription from Tell Fakhariyah, in which the Aramean god Haddad is called "Hadad of Sikan," "strictly a local deity, who...at the same time...is unambiguously the great cosmic Hadad 'who gives pasture and water-sources to all lands' (lines 2-3)" (McCarter 1978:140).

[50] Riemann pointed out that the ideal of moral purity and simplicity in the desert does not fit in the context of a nomadic life, which often involved thievery and raids. Riemann also dismissed the attempts of scholars of the "nomadic ideal" to view the acts of Jehu in 2 Kings 9-10 as a triumph of ethics. Jehu's revolt was not viewed positively by Hosea, at least. In Hos 1:4, Yahweh promises to "punish the house of Jehu" for the wholesale slaughter of the house of Ahab, especially the killing of Ahaziah king of Judah (2 Kgs 9:27), whose death was not necessary for Jehu's ascent to the throne of Israel (though one might see Jehu's actions as an attempt to wrest power not only from the northern monarchy, but also the southern as well). Considering this, it is inappropriate to qualify Jehu's action as an ethical triumph.

early Israel. "No one would grant today that Palestinian urbanism had been wiped out during the conquest" (Riemann 1964:17).[51] It is quite likely, rather, that the earliest Israelites (whatever part of them was non-sedentary), like many pastoral nomads, were in contact with city-dwellers and probably played a support role in urban culture.[52] Of course, this brings to mind another problem with the social reconstruction of the "nomadic ideal"-hypothesis: was all of early Israel nomadic?

The assumption is sometimes made that all of Israel was of one *Urform*, pastoral nomadism. However, scholars now recognize that ancient Israel was comprised of many different people-groups, thus, "a uniform (semi-)nomadic heritage cannot be posited for Israel" (Riemann 1964:50) a reality that has already been indicated in the biblical text, "The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth...a mixed crowd also went up with them" (Ex 12:38).[53] Additionally, the supposition that the prophets were the first to offer social legislation and ethics has been trumped with the acknowledgment that, "the prophets were appealing to laws and customs which were ancient in Israel" (Riemann 1964:17). Further, many of these laws assumed an agricultural base for Israelite society, and as such could have had little to do with any sort of nomadic ethical sentiment. As Riemann said, "Israel lived in a world already ancient, of high culture and considerable sophistication," thus, "analogies drawn from primitive societies must be used with caution" (Riemann 1964:39). This also

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[51] Nor is the destruction of all Canaanite cities the real situation according to the biblical text, cf. Meier 2005.
[52] An example of this interaction is available from Mari. V.H. Matthews has done a detailed study of the interaction between the urban culture of Mari and the Amorite (semi-)nomads, where the nomadic pastoralists would sometimes engage in labor-for-hire, herding contracts, and military service on behalf of the urban community (Matthews 1977:144-161). However, it must be said that this relationship was complicated, and sometimes resulted in attempts at political manipulation and uprising (Matthews 1977:207, 242-245).

[53] Other texts that indicate the diversity of Israel's origins are, Gen 41:45, 50-52; Num 11:4; Deut 29:11[10]; Judg 1:16; 5:14. On this point, Meier says, "Consequently, the notion that Israel ultimately derives from a variegated and ethnically diverse background...both from elements within Canaan as well as without, is hardly masked by biblical texts although sometimes obscured by selective misreadings" (Meier 2005).

feeds into the argument against the typical Bedouin comparisons of the "nomadic ideal" scholars. Especially concerning the idea of teetotalism, Riemann argued that, "scholars have been misled by the Bedouin analogy and Islamic influences" (Riemann 1964:48). Beyond this, it is no longer appropriate to speak of the strict delineation between the desert and the sown, between the nomad and the citizen, since "accumulating evidence has...shown that there were many shades of semi-nomadic and semi-sedentary cultures which blur the line of demarcation" (Riemann 1964:49-50). Accordingly, "it is now known that semi-nomads drank wine and worshipped gods of the land, both contrary to the expectation of older scholars" (Riemann 1964:50). Erroneous reconstructions of Israel's early forms must be attributed to a lack of evidence and proper methodology. Hence, an informed view that is the product of more research and better evidence is required.

F. The meaning of *midbār*

Riemann founded his study on a proper understanding of the terminology used in references to the desert in the pre-exilic prophets. Of the four terms used for the desert in pre-exilic prophecy imagery, *midbār*, *ʿărābâ*, *negeb*, and *ṣāyôn*, the word used most often to describe the desert is *midbār*[54] (Riemann 1964:67-69). Consequently, it is essential to the argument to establish the meaning of this word in the pre-exilic prophets. On this there has been some scholarly debate, with some arguing that *midbār* is properly understood as "desert," while others have argued insistently that *midbār* is a term for "steppe/pastureland" (Schwartzenbach 1954). The real meaning of *midbār* can have a profound effect on interpretation. If the meaning is "pastureland," then a return to the *midbār* works quite well

[54] *Midbār* is used 30 times out of a total of 39 references to the desert in pre-exilic prophecy (Riemann 1964:68). Otherwise, *negeb* is used six times (Is 21:1; 30:6; Jer 13:19; 17:26; 32:44; 33:13), *ʿărābâ* appears twice (Am 6:14; Jer 5:6), and *ṣāyôn* is used once (Is 32:2).

with a nomadic existence. But if the meaning is strictly "desert," there is another set of associated images altogether.

Riemann suggested that "steppe/pastureland" was too narrow a meaning to attribute to *midbār* (Riemann 1964:87-88). He, perhaps unlike those before him, recognized that *midbār* was "somewhat less discrete and technical than other desert terms" (Riemann 1964:91). *Midbār* is a broader term that encapsulates both pastureland and the actual desert.[55] Like most word-studies, the significance of the term is to be sought primarily in its use in context. What did the prophets have in mind when they used this word? What image did they intend to invoke in their audience?

According to Riemann, the major flaw of Schwartzenbach's study was that he ignored chronology[56] and connotation (Riemann 1964:75). Riemann grappled with this, seeking for the connotation and denotation of the word *midbār* in the pre-exilic prophets. He concluded that, although *midbār* can denote "pastureland," when the pre-exilic prophets used it, they were denoting the desert. The *midbār* was "a region relatively desiccated, relatively uninhabited, relatively impassable, and relatively uncultivated," including, but not characterized by areas that were "used seasonally for pasture" (Riemann 1964:89).[57] Further, Riemann argued that by narrowing the definition of *midbār* to "steppe/pastureland," scholars

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[55] This is evident as well in the Akkadian use of *madbaru* (a loan word from west Semitic; the native Akkadian equivalent to *midbār* is *ṣēru*), which stands for "desert, field, pasture land, steppe," cf. *CAD* M/1 *madbaru* 11-12.

[56] Chronology is important because a proper study must place *midbār* in its proper context in time. It is possible that late ideas about the *midbār*, from other cultures perhaps, might influence perceptions and cause the meaning to mutate.

[57] The pastoral use, even if seasonal, might explain the origin of the term. Occasionally thought to be related to the Hebrew root *d-b-r*, meaning "speak," E. Lipiński (1998) suggests that the word is related to the Aramaic root *d-b-r*, meaning "lead." Thus, the *midbār* is the place to which one leads one's herd. This may be likened to Arabic *'anjada* "to travel to the *najd*," a highland pasture area (Lipiński 1998:509).

gave the word, "a decidedly pleasant tone which does not correspond at all with actual biblical usage" (Riemann 1964:87).

As for the connotation of *midbār*, that is, the associated imagery of the word, Riemann concluded that the prophets intended to convey "barrenness, desolation, terror, chaos, and curse" (Riemann 1964:89). In addition to the plain appearance of this word, it is used in simile to mean naked, devastated, and impassable (Riemann 1964:84-85). Beyond *midbār* (and the other associated words), Riemann lists a category of desert "clichés," phrases that intimate the idea of the desert: *ʾereṣ ṣiyyâ* "land of drought" (Hos 2:5), *ʾereṣ talʾubôt* "land of drought" (Hos 13:5), *ʾereṣ nôrāʾâ* "land of terror" (Is 21:1), *ʾereṣ lōʾ zəruʿâ* "land unsown" (Jer 2:2), *ʾereṣ maʾpēlyâ* "land of darkness" (Jer 2:31), *ʾereṣ ʿărābâ wəšûḥâ* "land of desert and pit" (Jer 2:6), *ʾereṣ ṣiyyâ wəṣalmāwet* "land of drought and darkness" (Jer 2:6), *ʾereṣ lōʾ-ʿābar bāh ʾīš* "land which no one traverses" (Jer 2:6), (*ʾereṣ*) *lōʾ-yāšab ʾādām šām* "land in which no one lives" (Jer 2:6)" (Riemann 1964:80). These "clichés" help to reconstruct the connotation of the desert in pre-exilic prophetic speech, revealing that the *midbār* was viewed as, "desiccated, uninhabited, impassable, fearful, [and] uncultivated...hardly [the image] of pastureland" (Riemann 1964:80). Associated features of the *midbār* are also indicators of quality: the *midbār* was the source of the sirocco, the hot, dry, devastating wind (Hos 13:15; Jer 4:11; 13:24),[58] it was the home of fugitives (Jer 31:2; 48:6), where one might die of thirst (Hos 2:5). "The very emphasis upon 'leading' (Am 2:10; Jer 2:6), 'following' (Jer 2:2) and 'wandering' (Am 5:25) indicates that the desert was regarded as a trackless waste in which one quickly looses his way (cf. the expression *tōhû lōʾ-derek*, 'trackless waste,' Ps 107:40)" (Riemann 1964:115). Additionally, descriptions of streams of water (Is 32:2) and grapes (Hos 9:10) as

luxuries and delights can only be understood against their shared backdrop, "in the wilderness" (Is 32:2bβ; Hos 9:10aβ), "in both cases it is the desert which sets off the images, like white against black" (Riemann 1964:119). One must place any reference to pastureland (e.g., Jer 9:9; 23:10) beside this picture of the *midbār*. By doing this, one can see that the pastoral image of *midbār* is not nearly as prevalent in the pre-exilic prophets as is the image of a real desert with its negative tones.

G. Uses of desert imagery in the Bible

Going beyond the definition of *midbār*, its denotation and connotation, it is important to examine how the associated imagery is used. Of all the uses of desert imagery, Riemann suggested that the most difficult is that which is the primary concern of this study, the motif of a return to the desert (Riemann 1964:62). Within this category of use, and other categories as well, it is important to distinguish types of usage. References to the desert may be literal, but they can also be similes,[59] metaphors, and even proverbs (Riemann 1964:70). When scholars do not recognize these different uses, problems arise in interpretation. An example of this misreading appears in Budde's work, where he argued that the "woman" of Hosea 2 must be understood as the land, because 1) Hos 1:2 indicates that Hosea's unfaithful wife is a parallel to the land, and 2) Hos 2:5 indicates that the woman will be turned into a wilderness, something that cannot happen to a person (Budde 1895:733-735). This reading of the text ignores the clear use of simile in *wəśāmtîhā kammidbār*, "And I will

[58] This wind is also probably alluded to in Isaiah 40:7, where it is called the 'breath of Yahweh," a wind that makes grass and flowers wither.

[59] According to Riemann, the use of desert in simile can appear without *k-*, "like, as," cf. Jer 2:31; 4:26; 12:10; 22:6b (Riemann 1964:71).

make her like a wilderness" (Hos 2:5b).[60] Beyond simile, Riemann suggested that some "return to desert" references could be explained as proverbs. If one were to read Jeremiah 9:1 [MT], taking it at face value, one might think that the prophet thought of the desert as a place of freedom or hope: "O that I had in the desert a traveler's lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them" (NRSV). Yet, according to Riemann, this is nothing more than a proverb, which he compares to Prov 21:19, "It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and fretful wife" (NRSV; Riemann 1964:72-73).

There are many other uses for *midbār* beyond simile and proverb.[61] One of the most common uses is the reduction to desert in prophetic oracles (Riemann 1964:144). This reduction can come at the hand of humans (Is 14:16b-17a; Jer 12:10-11) or as a divine act (Jer 22:6; Zeph 2:13-14; Riemann 1964:145). It is clear that the reduction to desert is a feature of oracles of doom (Is 1:1-2; Zeph 2:5-6; Jer 49:33), a figure that was intended to "emphasize both the completeness of the destruction and the utter desolation which follows" (Riemann 1964:146-147).[62] The return to desert could be a divine judgment, the transformation of civilized areas to desolate wilderness, sometimes signaling irredeemable loss. This usage of *midbār*, along with its associated imagery, shows that the "return to the desert" was viewed as punishment and misfortune. It was not exile to the desert (Riemann 1964:164), nor was it a true "return" to some earlier life. In fact, the transition to desert and desert life was never described with the word *šûb*, "return" (Riemann 1964:165). The only time the pre-exilic prophets speak of a journey into the desert (aside from the proverbial use

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[60] Compare this to the reading of Freedman and Anderson, who suggest that this is a reference to the wilderness wandering, "Lest I treat her as in the wilderness" (Freedman & Anderson 214, 226).

[61] According to Riemann, only two passages do not conform completely to the categories listed below: Hosea 2:16-17 and Jeremiah 31:2. For Jer 31:2, see pp. 53-54 below. For Hos 2:16-17, see pp. 9, 53-54, 63-64, 73.

in Jeremiah 9:1) involves flight from harm (Jer 31:2[63]; 48:6, 28;[64] 49:30, and possibly 49:8). In this regard, the *midbār* was a typical location of refuge for criminals and exiles (e.g., Cain, David), a place to escape from persecution, but only as a "*pis aller*," a last resort (Riemann 1964:117-118).

Some uses of *midbār* have little or nothing to do with oracles of doom. These are references to a specific *midbār*, the *midbār* of the wilderness wandering tradition. If any reference to the desert can be said to have a positive connotation, it belongs to this category. It was the time when Yahweh guided Israel, when he cared for the people (Hos 13:5; Am 2:10; Jer 2:6). This should not be taken as a sign that the desert or the desert life was ideal. Rather, Yahweh's presence is what gives the *midbār* a positive connotation here. In fact, Riemann has suggested that the desert was understood as a test of Yahweh's power, by which the Israelites would know his greatness. For this to work out so, "a pejorative view of the desert is required" (Riemann 1964:116-117). Again, it is the essential negativity of the *midbār* that allows for the positive value of whatever is set against it.[65] In this case, the greatness of Yahweh is illustrated in his ability to provide food and water in a place of

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[62] The reduction to desert is employed in various ancient near eastern treaties as a standard formula (e.g., in the treaty between Mati'ilu of Arpad and Ashurnirari V of Assyria, Ashurnirari invokes curses upon Mati'ilu if he should break the covenant: "[May] his land altogether [turn] into wasteland" [ANE Anthology 2:49]).

[63] Regarding references to flight into the desert in the pre-exilic prophets, "Jer. 31:2 [is] a passage with an entirely different mood: 'A people, survivors of the sword, found grace in the desert (*midbār*).' Here the flight is presumed to have taken place, and the emphasis is upon theophany, covenant, and the restoration of the blessings of agriculture" (Riemann 1964:143). Riemann likens this portrayal of the desert to Hos 2:16-17.

[64] "Leave the towns, and live on the rock, O inhabitants of Moab. Be like the dove that nests on the sides of the mouth of a gorge" (NRSV). The reference to the dove brings to mind Psalm 55:6-7, "O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; truly, I would flee far away; I would lodge in the wilderness" (NRSV). This passage also speaks of a flight from persecution into the wilderness.

[65] See the discussion of streams and grapes in the desert above pp. 47-48.

barrenness and thirst, and guidance in a trackless waste.[66] But even here, the desert essentially ceases to be a desert by virtue of the guidance and aid.

Midbār is also used in the innovative theme of a second exodus, most obvious in Second Isaiah (an exilic work).[67] According to this theme, a repeat of the divine guidance in the exodus event will lead exiled Judah back to the land (cf. Isaiah 34-35, 40-55; Riemann 1964:127). But the journey through the wilderness in this second exodus does not give the desert a positive value. Rather, "it is evident here...the desert has ceased to be really a desert" (Riemann 1964:128). In the second exodus, as in the original wandering, the character of the desert will be transformed (though to a greater extent than before). The desert (*ʿărābâ*) will "blossom" (Is 35:1), the dry ground will burst with water, streams, pools, and springs (35:6-7), so much that the desert will become a swamp (35:7) and thirst will no longer threaten life. A "highway" (Is 35:8, *maslûl*; 40:3, *məsillâ*) will be laid in the trackless wilderness, and it will be free of the dangerous animals that inhabit the wilderness (Is 35:9). In short, the things that typify the desert (discussed above, pp. 46-48) are undone, and the desert is changed to a place of ideal travel for the return of the exiles (Riemann 1964:128).

The *midbār* also appeared in the theme of a new creation in exilic prophecy. Riemann looked to several passages in Isaiah (32:15-16; 35:1,5-7; 41:17-19; 51:3) and one in Ezekiel (47:1-12) that speak of a re-ordering of the world, especially the desert (Riemann 1964:124-125). According to this theme, the desolate qualities of the desert will be overturned in the new creation. The *midbār* will be turned into a *karmel*, "a garden land," and what was formerly a garden land (*karmel*) will be so full of growth that it will recognized as a

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[66] There may be a parallel here with royal ideologies from Mesopotamia, see below, pp. 56-58.

[67] But it has been suggested that the second exodus has roots in the pre-exilic prophets, especially Hosea (2:16-17; Cross 1973:109 n. 57).

forest (*ya'ar*; Is 32:15). All of the old characteristics of the *midbār*, like fruitlessness and dryness, will be reversed. The desert undergoes such radical change in the renewal of creation because it needs changing (Riemann 1964:125-126). This points to the perspective of the prophets regarding the desert, that it was a place of chaos, having negative associations, and the first place of reform. Riemann further addressed the issue of the desert in later messianic expectations:

> "If in late times the desert came to be involved in messianic speculations, this was not due to an idealization of the desert, or to its alleged role as the austere purifier and chastener, so much as to its connection by Second Isaiah with the new creation. It was the hope of a future radical trans-formation of the desert, and not an appreciation of the desert for what it was, which seems chiefly to have stirred the imagination" (Riemann 1964:134).

H. Israelite attitudes toward the desert:

Riemann concluded that the Israelites despised the desert as a place of chaos, evil, terror, and curse (Riemann 1964:24, 130-134). Not an isolated theme, the negativity of the desert must be placed against the idealism of the land since "the people were fully conscious of the benefits of life in the land and were anxious to have long life and prosperity there" (Riemann 1964:54). Both prophets and their audiences shared a pejorative view of the desert (Riemann 1964:60-61),[68] and that the prophets did not desire the return to the desert they announced, a return that did not "anticipate...a favorable outcome" (Riemann 1964:61). This negative view, he says, was constant, and the connotations indicated above were always the same (Riemann 1964:134).

[68] Though there is little (if any) evidence of the audience's views on the desert, one can deduce that they were negative quite easily. If the prophets were to draw upon desert imagery to describe doom and destruction in their public oracles, then in order for the message to be effective, the desert image must have been generally agreed to be one of negativity.

Pejorative treatments of desert wildlife and nomads (Jer 3:2[69]) were also a feature of the Israelite attitude toward the desert, and were probably one reason the prophets chose the desert to illustrate divine punishment (Riemann 1964:130-131). The desert was the proverbial vile, threatening, and desolate region (Riemann 1964:131-133). There was a "fundamental antipathy" toward the desert and desert life,[70] upon which was founded the prophetic theme of the return to desert as punishment (Riemann 1964:134). Riemann's study has made it clear that the claims of the "nomadic ideal" scholars do not stand up to a treatment of the whole issue, being founded on exceptions (e.g., Hos 2:16-17; Jer 31:2) rather than rules.

I. Two Exceptional Passages—Hos 2:16-17 and Jer 31:2

These two passages fall into a different category of desert references (Riemann 1964:73), since both draw upon the "return to desert" theme, but both connect this desert-return to some future good (Riemann 1964:160). But Riemann asserted correctly that the beatific future in both passages was based upon the restoration of agricultural blessings (Riemann 1964:123), not a return to the simplicity of a nomadic life. Nor does either passage portray the desert as positive. Hosea connects the *midbār* with seduction, using the word *məpattēhā*, from the root *p-t-h*, which in other similar contexts indicates a notion of "seduction to destruction" (1 Kgs 22:21; Jer 20:7; Ezek 14:9). The seduction will lead Israel out to the desert, a place to which she would not go without enticement, thus a place that she would not view positively. Jer 31:2 speaks of refugees who have fled from death in war,

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[69] Jer 3:2 is an excellent example of a negative view of nomads (*ʿărābî* "Arab," a word probably related to *ʿărābâ* "steppe, desert"). Here, the nomad is described as a prostitute in a simile on Israel's spiritual prostitution. This is a not-too-subtle hint that Jeremiah views desert people with some disgust.

[70] This antipathy is present in the narratives on the Patriarchs, even though there is much potential idealization of their time and life (cf. Deut 26:5 and discussion above in chapter 2, pp. 33-34).

šərîdê ḥāreb "survivors of the sword" who "found grace in the desert," which precedes a promise of agricultural renewal.

Though these two passages "have been regarded as the proper exemplar in terms of which all other references are to be described and interpreted" (Riemann 1964:159), Riemann argued that these passages brought new and unique features to the theme of a return to the desert, and were not to be taken as typical representations of the desert (Riemann 1964:160). The positive qualities present in these two passages actually necessitate a negative portrayal of the desert as "a region which the Israelites both despised and feared," a place of death and destruction (Riemann 1964:166). The "grace in the desert" of Jer 31:2 is worth mentioning because it was beyond expectation and hope. The promise of renewal[71] in Hos 2:16-17 is an especially positive but unexpected twist coming at the end of a string of punitive oracles and after the ominous statement of Israel's "I will seduce her and lead her into the desert" (Hos 2:16). In this regard, Hos 2:16-17 is quite remarkable, since here "the prophet has juxtaposed covenant curse with the divine saving acts of the covenant prologue, and by this has made the curse a foil to set off the marvelous redeeming grace of Yahweh" (Riemann 1964:181).[72] The covenant curse has become a harrowing country in which the continued presence of Yahweh shines the brighter, and Yahweh's glory is magnified in his mercy (Riemann 1964:182).

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[71] The renewal is not just agricultural; a renewal of the covenant is also intended (Riemann 1964:161). This explains the clear references in Hos 2:16-17 (as opposed to Jer 31:2) to the wilderness wandering tradition (cf. Dozeman 2000; Hoffman 1989).

[72] Yahweh could choose to show mercy where he would, since in the covenant situation "the suzerain was never without discretionary powers" (Riemann 1964:182).

3.1.2—Critique: Riemann

In comparison with the critiques of the other works reviewed to this point, the response to Riemann will be much briefer. The brevity of response results from the lucidity and quality of Riemann's work, a careful analysis that avoids making many assumptions.

J. The Desert and the Underworld

Riemann argued against Haldar's work on the notion of the desert in Semitic religion (Haldar 1950), a work that is frequently cited in this discussion, suggesting two problems: 1) contra Haldar's claim, there was no ritual exodus into the desert in Semitic religion and 2) the desert is not associated with the netherworld (Riemann 1964:25). Riemann argued that there is no evidence for either claim.

Upon closer inspection, Riemann has overstated what he claims is a lack of evidence connecting the desert and the underworld. In general, the desert had a spiritual quality as the home of various demons and ghosts (*CAD* Ṣ *ṣēru* A 145-146; Is 34:9-15; *DBI* 203).[73] The scribe of the underworld in Mesopotamia was called *bēlet ṣēri* "Lady of the steppe (Lipiński 1998:508). The Sumerian word *arali*, the term for the steppe between Uruk and Bad-tibira, was a secondary term for the underworld (Jacobsen 1983:194, 195; Pontgratz-Leisten 73).[74] At Ugarit, there is reference to the "steppe by the shore of death" (*šd šḫlmmt*[75] [// *arṣ dbr*], *KTU* 1.5 V, 18-19; cf. Wyatt 2003:124). The appetite of the god Mot is associated with that

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[73] In this regard, the desert seems to have been viewed as a place of "permeability" between the world of the living and the underworld (Pongratz-Leisten 1994:35).

[74] This meaning for *arali* probably developed on account of the repeated references to Dumuzi's death in the steppe according to the myths and rituals surrounding him (Jacobsen 1983:194, 195).

[75] The ambiguous phrase *šḫlmmt* is understood by some (Wyatt 2003:124 n. 48; cf. del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín 2003:2.812) as a conflation of two terms *šḫl* + *mmt*. In this regard, the meaning of "shore" for *šḫl* is obtained on analogy with Arab. *sāḥil*, "shore, coast."

of a "lion in the wasteland" (*lbim thw*; *KTU* 1.5 I, 14-15; cf. Wyatt 2003:116). Baal's seeming demise at the hand of Mot[76] occurs sometime after Baal makes love to a heifer in a place called [*arṣ*][77] *dbr*, described in parallel as "the steppe by the shore of death" (*šd šḫlmmt*, *KTU* 1.5 V, 18-19; *KTU* 1.5 VI, 6-7; Wyatt 2003:124-125). In light of this evidence, Riemann's claim that there is no evidence of a connection between the desert/steppe and the realm of the dead must be rejected.

Riemann's second argument against Haldar, that there was no ritual exodus into the desert, is countered by a very important part of the *akītu*-festival in Mesopotamia, in particular, the procession of the god or gods of the city. Beginning in the temple of the god, the procession passed through the city and out the city gate. Some deities would then be transported to a temple in the steppe, called the *bīt akīt ṣēri*[78] (Pongratz-Leisten 1994:71-72). At the end of the *akītu*-festival, the deities would be conducted back into the city, where they would be greeted with gifts (Pongratz-Leisten 1994:214-216). In order to express a positive move into the city, the gods must first journey out of the city.[79] Thus, such a "ritual exodus

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[76] The details of Baal's death are absent, presumably described in the missing text at the end of *KTU* 1.5 V and the beginning of *KTU* 1.5 VI(a gap of approximately 41 lines). There is the tantalizing suggestion that Baal's murder by Death himself (Mot) occurred because Baal came close to the home of his enemy (the desert), but this remains speculation (cp. Talmon, below, p. 64).

[77] The reading of *arṣ dbr* here for *dbr* has been suggested on analogy with *KTU* 1.5 VI 6.

[78] Or alternatively, *bīt akīt ša ṣēri*, *bīt akītu ša ṣēri*, or É.GAL.EDIN. The different labels apply to the *akītu*-houses of different gods. Gods who have an *akītu*-house in the steppe (*ṣēru*) are, Aššur, Ištar of Arbela, and Anu (Pontgratz-Leisten 1994:71-72).

[79] The reasoning for the journey out to the steppe and the return to the city is beyond the scope of this paper. Among possible explanations is the idea that the *akītu*-festival, as a new year celebration of renewal, could have involved a reversion of the city to a mythic chaos-state with the deity's exit and the rejuvenation and re-ordering of the city with the deity's passage inside of the city walls. The city walls provide a necessary break (Pongratz-Leisten 18, 25, 31), a liminality that encapsulates the order of the city, which was the sign of the presence of the patron god (e.g., Ishtar in the Curse of Agade; cf. Pezzoli-Olgiati 2000). Such an ideology does not concede any notion of a limited deity. The outside world is in chaos because the patron deity forgot or rejected it (cf. the region of Bazu, called "forgotten, godforsaken" [Borger, IAKA 56 IV 53; Tadmor 1999:58]) in preference of the city, an expression of the common "Us-Them" political theme/philosophy.

into the desert" (Riemann 1964:25) was necessary to the cult.[80] Even if the evidence at present is limited to Mesopotamia, this essential ritual use of the steppe/desert[81] cannot be overlooked in the discussion of desert ideologies.[82]

K. Assyrian Royal Inscriptions

Another problem in Riemann's work is a comparison he makes between the Bible and Assyrian royal inscriptions. He argued against the hypothesis that "there is a theological bias at work" in the wilderness wandering tradition "which seeks to make this particular *midbār* as vile a place as possible so as to magnify the grace and power of God" (Riemann 1964:82). His response is that references to the desert that "do not refer to the wandering are no less severe," a true statement, illustrated above in texts unrelated to the wandering them. He further claimed that "it is a common Semitic practice to take a geographical term and make it more vivid by the addition of periphrastic expressions," and that "this can be easily illustrated from Assyrian royal inscriptions" (Riemann 1964:82). This last statement proves to be a problem.

Riemann himself suggested that the negative connotation of the *midbār* provided a "significant test of Yahweh's power and favor" (Riemann 1964:117), though he had in mind the normal connotation of the desert rather than a special connotation.[83] However, his suggestion that the use of expressions to enhance a particular image in the Bible can be

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[80] Pongratz-Leisten has pointed out that the journey of the god(s) from the steppe to the city is a positive movement of the god(s) into the city (a triumphal entry) which necessitates that they first leave the city (Pongratz-Leisten 1994:5, 73).

[81] In addition to this ritual use of the desert, see *CAD* Ṣ *ṣēru* A 146 and Pongratz-Leisten (1994:73).

[82] This may not apply to the various cults of the west Semitic peoples, since (to the author's knowledge) there is no evidence of a similar festival or cultic activity.

[83] Riemann's statement that the extreme negative value assigned to the desert is simply "vivid" language is a bit naïve, since in the majority of texts, the "normal connotation" of the desert can be explained as an ideological expression, not just a turn of phrase. There would be factors motivating this, cf. Tadmor 1999, Wyatt 1998.

compared to Assyrian royal inscriptions is problematic. He did not acknowledge the possibility that these royal inscriptions are heightening the imagery for ideological reasons. According to Fales's study on Sargon's 8th Campaign against Urartu, a motif common to the narrative is the "harsh uncivilized landscape" (Fales 1991:139). This is combined with the motif of the "heroic suzerain," producing stories about the traversing of impossible terrains, the loss of many of the Assyrian troops due to the difficulty, and the ultimate "intervention of the super-human (i.e., divinely guided and strengthened) capacities of the king" (Fales 1991:139). In these passages, the terrain is given a heightened quality of harshness in its description (Fales 1991:139), in which case the vivid description is derived from an ideological bias.[84] Tadmor's study of Assyrian royal ideology has affirmed the presence of this motif in the inscriptions of other Sargonid kings (Tadmor 1999:56). Especially pertinent to the present discussion is the "heroic priority" of Esarhaddon, whose invasion of Bazu is described as a journey into "a remote district, godforsaken desert, the land of salt, place of thirst" (Tadmor 1999:58).[85] These descriptions extol the greatness of the king, who not only crossed the impossible landscape, but also went on to conquer. This is not necessarily the case in regard to the *midbār* of the wandering tradition, but the possibility is certainly an interesting one. Was the wilderness tradition intended as a royal glorification of the Divine Warrior, similar to the use of the wilderness in the inscription of Sargon II? The point here is that Riemann did not consider that the sources to which he turned might have an ideological bias.

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[84] This bias may not be only the exaltation of the king. The biased notion of "the other" and the political identification of foreign lands as chaotic—in need of order, which the Empire could provide—may also be responsible (Wyatt 1998; Tadmor 1999).

[85] Akk.: *kur nagû ša ašaršu rûqu mišīt nābali qaqqar ṭâbtì ašar ṣumâme* (Borger, *LAKA* 56 IV 53-54).

3.2—S. Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif' in the Bible and in Qumran Literature," *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966; 31-63

Following an approach similar to Riemann, S. Talmon authored an analysis of the desert as a literary image in the Bible and in the literature from the Dead Sea. While Riemann focused on the pre-exilic prophets alone, Talmon attempted a broader survey of the available literature. The goal was the same: to put to rest the notion of a "desert" or "nomadic ideal." To achieve this end, Talmon investigated the motif aspect of the desert and has applied this perspective to biblical passages that refer to the desert trek tradition.

3.2.1—Summary: Talmon

A. <u>"Nomadic Ideal" Hypothesis</u>

Talmon sought to address the "nomadic ideal" by reviewing the primary points of the hypothesis, of which only a cursory repetition is necessary here. These points are: the interpretation of Jonadab ben Rechab (2 Kings 10) as a nomadic idealist, the identification of the Rechabites (Jeremiah 35; 1 Chron 2:55) as a nomadic sect, the idea of territorial henotheism according to which Yahweh was a desert god, and the suggestion of nomadic nostalgia on the part of the prophets. Talmon's review included the work of K. Budde, P. Humbert, J. W. Flight, E. Meyer, and R. de Vaux. The first four of these scholars represent the waxing of the "nomadic ideal" hypothesis. De Vaux wrote about the hypothesis after it had largely been dismissed, though a form of the "nomadic ideal" persisted in his work. According to de Vaux, a prophetic nostalgia of the desert trek period and the nomadic history of Israel evolved into a "desert mystique" that influenced the Qumran sectarians and

the early Christians.[86] Talmon noted particularly that while the "nomadic ideal" began as "an analysis of one theme in Old Testament thought and literature," it was later elevated as "the expression of the quintessence of biblical religion" (Talmon 1966:33).

E. Criticism of the "Nomadic Ideal"

Talmon based his rejection of the "nomadic ideal" in all its forms on two principles: 1) the assumption of the existence of a desert reform movement such as the Rechabites or the prophets was "based on historical premises and on sociological comparisons which cannot be upheld without far-reaching qualifications" (Talmon 1966:34), and 2) the attempted representation of the desert life as a social ideal in the Bible has little support from the text itself (Talmon 1966:36). Talmon adduced several biblical references to support his contention, pointing to Ishmael and Cain as typological biblical nomads, the deeply ingrained appreciation of agriculture and civilization in many biblical narratives, and the function of the desert trek tradition of the Pentateuch as a necessary period of purification and preparation which moved Israel "from social and spiritual chaos to an integrated social and spiritual order" (Talmon 1966:36-37).[87] Talmon suggested that any positive value associated with the desert or the nomadic life is the result of "variational developments of the initial theme, by way of the infusion into it of other, originally unrelated, themes" (Talmon 1966:37).

1. Territorial Henotheism

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[86] The survival of the "nomadic ideal" hypothesis is not restricted to the 1964 work of R. de Vaux alone, as shown in Chapter 1, p. 5. The persistence of some form of the "nomadic ideal" has been helped by the fact that one of the major works in the discussion, the dissertation of P. Riemann, remains unpublished to this day.

[87] Talmon faces a serious problem here with the recognition that the Pentateuchal traditions of the exodus and the land-giving may be partitioned according to Noth's *Überlieferungsgeschichte*. This can be refuted with respect to the prophets (esp. Hosea, see above, chapter 2 p. 16), but Talmon does not offer any solution with respect to the Pentateuch.

Talmon further argued that there was no "phenomenological relationship between Yahweh and the desert" (Talmon 1966:48). To Talmon, the idea of "regional determinism" (i.e., territorial henotheism) did not accurately describe the god of the prophets, whom he identified as "an omnipresent deity" (Talmon 1966:49). He argued that the occurrence of a desert theophany must be understood as "Yahweh accommodat[ing] Himself to the actual habitat of the recipients of this revelation" (Talmon 1966:49). Talmon thus explained the connection of Yahweh with the desert during the desert sojourn and he even tentatively proposes that the attachment of Yahweh to a mountain home can be explained as the product of Israelite religious experience during the conquest of the central mountains of Canaan (Talmon 1966:49). Equally, the image of Yahweh as the "royal ruler of an orderly universe" was the product of the establishment of the Israelite monarchy (Talmon 1966:49). The persistence of the desert theophany was only a fossil of a previous socio-religious mode in Israel.[88]

2. Hos 2:16-17 and Jer 2:2

Talmon pointed out as well that the interpretation of the desert sojourn as a period of particular purity and closeness in Israel's relationship with Yahweh is based primarily upon two passages, Hos 2:16-17 and Jer 2:2 (Talmon 1966:48). The notion of the desert as an ideal place for divine revelation[89] as argued by scholars of the "nomadic ideal" is also based on these passages, as noted above (pp. 9-11). Talmon argued that these passages are

[88] Talmon's idea of the evolution of Israelite religion is questionable on the grounds that little is known of the sociological evolution of Israel as far as it can be reconstructed from literary and archaeological sources. Particularly problematic is his proposal of the origin of a "Yahweh-mountain" connection, which depends on a specific interpretation of the settlement of Israel, cf. Meier 2005.

[89] Cf. also R. Kittel, *Gestalten und Gedanken in Israel* (Leipzig, 1926), p.42, where Kittel suggests that the desert is "geeignete Offenbarungsstätte des wahren Gottes," "an ideal place for the revelation of the true god."

isolated from the greater prophetic discourses that form their contexts (Talmon 1966:48), and are actually the result of a mixing of motifs.

B. The Meaning of *Midbār*

Talmon suggested that many biblical references to the desert are part of a greater "desert motif." He argued that the significance of this motif was a function of the meaning of the word *midbār*, which can refer to either a spatial reality (the physical, geographical reality of the *midbār*) or a temporal reality (the period in which Israel traversed the *midbār*). This distinction is essential in understanding the biblical notions of the *midbār*, since the temporal aspect is uniquely expressed in the Bible.

1. The spatial meaning of *midbār*

Talmon understood the word *midbār* more generally as "drift" or "wilderness" rather than the discrete pair of opposites "desert" and "pasture," both of which can be denoted by the word *midbār* (Talmon 1966:39-46). In the physical sense, Talmon offered *midbār* as a term for "agriculturally unexploited areas," viz. "steppe, drift" (e.g., Gen 36:24; 1 Sam 17:28; Talmon 1966:40), "comparatively thinly inhabited open spaces" on the outskirts of settlements (e.g., Gen 21:14; Josh 18:12; 1 Sam 24:1; 1 Kgs 19:15; 2 Chron 20:20; Num 24:1; Is 27:10; Talmon 1966:41), and the actual desert, the "wilderness," identified as "the arid zones beyond the borders of the cultivated land and the drift" (2 Sam 17:27-29; 2 Kgs 3:8-9; Talmon 1966:41). Talmon identifies the "wilderness" connotation of *midbār* as a place of desolation and drought, a pathless wild, the home of dangerous animals, outlaws, even having a mythological association with demons and the Ugaritic god Mot (Talmon 1966:42-43).[90]

[90] It is interesting to note that all of these connotations of the physical space in some way imply an untamed quality, cf. Pongratz-Leisten 1994:215-216; Wyatt 1998; Tadmor 1999.

2. The temporal meaning of *midbār*

The temporal use of *midbār* is a reference to the period of the desert sojourn of Israel following the exodus and preceding the conquest of Canaan, according to the Pentateuch, a period of 40 years divided into two spans of time by the Sinai theophany, 2 years before and 38 years after the event (Talmon 1966:46). The first period was characterized by covenant making, while the second period was characterized by Israel's sin and punishment. Talmon argued that the "sin and punishment" theme had a greater impact on the biblical tradition of the wandering (Talmon 1966:47-48). This is certainly the case in the Pentateuchal version of the entire period, if the disparity in the length of the two periods of the sojourn (2 good years vs. 38 bad years) is any indication. Talmon argued that the attempt to identify a "desert ideal" is the product of "an unwarranted isolation of the 'revelation in the desert' theme from the preponderant 'transgression and punishment' them, with which it is closely welded in the Pentateuchal account of the desert trek" (Talmon 1966:48).

C. Mixed Motifs

Talmon proposed several motifs which were blended with the original desert motif, to produce themes such as "divine grace" (encompassing the notions of "revelation" and of "guidance in the wilderness" [Talmon 1966:50]) and "sin and punishment." The mixing of motifs served the purpose of elevating one theme or the other for the purpose of the intended message. Talmon suggested that the theme of "divine grace" was emphasized by a combination of the desert with a "love on the drift" theme in Hos 2:16-17 (Talmon 1966:50-51).[91] By doing so, Hosea "created the quite uncommon motif combination 'love in the historical desert period'" (Talmon 1966:51). The trek became a rite of passage for Israel,

[91] Other motif-mixtures that Talmon suggested are: shepherd imagery (Ps 78:52), a "wilderness-desolation" theme (making the task of leading a greater challenge, thus a greater grace; Jer 2:6), an "eagle-egret" image (Ex 19:4; Deut 32:11) (Talmon 1966:50-51).

Yahweh's wife, which ultimately led her back to the land of Canaan with the assured blessing of agriculture (Talmon 1966:50). But Talmon pointed out that the "love on the drift" motif had no natural connection with the desert sojourn tradition (Talmon 1966:51).[92] Instead, Talmon looked for an outside source, pointing to the Song of Songs and Ugaritic literature.

Talmon suggested that the "love on the drift" motif was present in Song 3:2-6, where the beloved (Solomon) comes "up from the wilderness, like a column of smoke" (3:6a). He further pointed to Song 8:5, where the woman comes "up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved," as an indication that the desert was a particular place of romance (Talmon 1966:51). Talmon found a putative further example of the "love on the drift" theme in Ugaritic literature, in the epic poem of the Baal cycle (*KTU* 1.1-1.6). Talmon cited *KTU* 1.5 V, 18-22 as evidence of a theme of "divine love in the *midbār*" (Talmon 1966:51), a passage of which only part is especially relevant:

> *yuhb. ʿglt.bdbr.prt*
> *bšd.šḫlmmt.škb*
>
> "He loved a heifer in the pastureland,
> a cow in the steppe by the shore of death"
> (*KTU* 1.5 V, 18-19; Wyatt 2003:124).

Talmon linked the mating of Baal with the heifer in the *dbr* "pastureland" to Hosea's notion of a love encounter between Yahweh and Israel in the wilderness.

Talmon delved further into Ugaritic myth, arguing that the *midbār* "desert" was the home of the chthonic deity Mot and his creatures (Talmon 1966:51-52). He suggested that the love encounter in the desert between Yahweh and Israel in Hos 2:16-17 was a polemic against the Canaanite cult. Yahweh's presence with Israel in the wilderness was set the background plot of Yahweh's subjugation of the wilderness and Mot. Talmon suggested

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[92] However, one cannot overlook the use of marital imagery in Numbers 25, which would give the desert sojourn tradition a connection with Hosea's use of the marital analogy.

that this was a statement of Yahweh's superiority to Baal: "Where the Canaanite fertility god Baal failed because his power is limited to agricultural areas, Israel's God achieves unimpaired success" (Talmon 1966:52). Baal failed to subdue his enemy Mot, but Yahweh, unlike Baal, is not limited to a small realm concomitant with his powers. Instead, he moves freely through the boundary between land and wilderness, strong enough in the desert to support Israel, strong enough in the land to restore her agriculture (Hos 2:16-17; Talmon 1966:52). For Talmon, all of this builds to the conclusion that "Hosea does not give expression to a prophetic desert ideal" (Talmon 1966:52).

D. Jer 2:2 and the Desert Trek

Talmon suggested that a new development of the "love" motif of Hosea could be found in Jer 2:2. Whereas Hosea spoke of Yahweh's love for Israel even in a time of sin and punishment, Talmon claimed that Jeremiah innovatively "portrays Israel's affection for God in that remote historical setting" (Talmon 1966:53). Concerning the passage as a whole, Talmon argues that "it must be admitted that this employment of the desert motif by Jeremiah appears to reflect an appreciation of the desert period which deviates considerably from its estimation in the Pentateuchal traditions" (Talmon 1966:53), making Jer 2:2 an anomalous use of the desert motif. Nevertheless, Talmon did not think that this "appreciation of the desert period" revealed "an ideal toward the attainment of which [Jeremiah] wants to guide the nation" (Talmon 1966:53). Rather, "God's love for Israel, evoked by the memory of the nation's fidelity at the time of her youth, ultimately will express itself in a return from the *midbār* into a restituted, renascent land" (Talmon 1966:53), just as in Jer 31:2 (see above, pp. 53-54). As in Hosea, the ideal goal of Jeremiah is a reinvestment in the land after the turbulence of the times is over.

E. Jeremiah and the Pentateuch

While Jeremiah's treatment of the desert (esp. in Jer 2:2) deviates from the portrayal of the desert in the Pentateuch, Talmon pointed to the idea of a mixing of motifs in order to explain the deviation. According to Talmon, Jeremiah has taken the desert trek tradition (as presented in the Pentateuch) and infused into it a motif of "love on the drift" (Talmon 1966:53). The deviation does not show that Jeremiah was unaware of the Pentateuchal traditions, nor does it reveal "a conscious reworking of these traditions" (Talmon 1966:53). Talmon's point was that Jeremiah's perspective on the *midbār* did not depart meaningfully from the perspective present in the Pentateuch. Although Talmon's argument here is somewhat of an argument from silence, he is nonetheless correct in his (implied) assessment that Jeremiah does not clearly evince a perspective on the *midbār* that diverges meaningfully from that presented in the Pentateuch, deviating by presenting the "desert period as Israel's golden age, for whose return he nostalgically longed" (Talmon 1966:53).

F. The Desert in Deutero-Isaiah and the Second Exodus

Talmon looked to Deutero-Isaiah[93] as the last prophet who made use of the desert motif. By paralleling Israel's exile in Babylon with Israel's sojourn in Egypt, the prophet draws upon the tradition of the exodus to express a "hopeful expectation of a new Exodus and a new settlement in Canaan" (Talmon 1966:54). While the Deutero-Isaiah envisioned the desert trek as a transitional period, unlike the tradition, the prophet did not think of the desert trek as a time of purification from sin (Talmon 1966:54). The theme of "Divine grace" takes the primary place in the recasting of the historical tradition (*Urzeit*) in the later period (*Endzeit*). According to Talmon, the reason for this was that the people returning to

[93] Deutero-Isaiah, or Second Isaiah, is composed of Isaiah 40-66, or alternatively Isaiah 40-55 if one accepts a Third Isaiah responsible for Isaiah 56-66. For an introduction, see John L. McKenzie, S. J. *Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB). Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968.

the land would be the remnant, "the *ʿaśîrîyāh*, the 'holy seed' which Isaiah of Jerusalem had envisaged [Isaiah 6:13]" (Talmon 1966:54). The returnees would be the righteous whom the Divine justice and mercy had allowed to survive. "Thus the new trek through the desert could be freed from its purgatory qualities and concomitantly be invested with new images of promise and hope" (Talmon 1966:54).

Without the "sin and punishment" theme, this new depiction of the desert trek was fundamentally different from the tradition on which it drew, but it still was not an idealization of the desert.[94] As Riemann pointed out (above, pp. 50-51; Riemann 1964:128), the theme of a Second Exodus involves a grand transformation of the desert into a land capable of supporting the exiles on their way back to Zion. The Second Exodus hardly has the markings of a real desert venture.[95] Thus Talmon argues, "it is altogether futile to speculate on an imaginary prophetic desert ideal, and to present it as the expression of a typical Bedouin zest for freedom" (Talmon 54).[96]

3.2.2—Critique: Talmon

Talmon's arguments against a "nomadic ideal" are sound and convincing, enough so to establish firm grounds for denying any such idealization of the desert life. On several occasions, however, Talmon has left himself open to criticism.

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[94] It is worth noting that even without the negative associations of sin and punishment, the desert was still in need of transformation, a sign that the desert was viewed as having an inherent negative quality. In the Second Exodus theme, the negative quality of the desert is connected to its inability to sustain life as an environment.

[95] One might argue the same for the Pentateuchal account of the exodus. The miraculous aid and divine guidance that Israel received during this period kept the wilderness from exerting its full destructive potential.

[96] Talmon's work continues with a discussion of the desert in the texts from the Dead Sea and a discussion of the role of the desert in the community at Qumran and in early Christianity. However, this discussion is outside the purview of the present paper. For the sake of space, the author has chosen not to review this discussion here.

A. The "Unimportant" Desert Trek

Talmon suggested that the relative unimportance of the desert trek period in the formation of Israel could be deduced by the "ideological compression of the desert trek into one stereotyped (or schematic) generation, forty years" (Talmon 35). While his assessment that an ideological compression would indicate a depreciation of the formative value of the experience may be correct, it cannot be denied that in many other places the number "40" is representative of an ideologically *extended* period of time. The "40 days and nights" of the Flood narrative (Gen 7:4, 12), for example, seems to express the considerable length of the deluge.

It is also difficult to reconcile Talmon's opinion that the 40-year desert trek must have been of relative unimportance with his argument of the necessity of the trek for Israel's purification (Talmon 1966:54).[97] If the desert period were necessary for the preparation of the nation, how is it unimportant?[98]

B. The Desert Trek in the Pentateuch

Talmon further expounded upon the negativity of the desert trek tradition, arguing that the desert trek "lacks even the relieving moments of temporary repentance which ameliorate the biblical verdict on the times of the Judges" (Talmon 48). Yet later in his work, Talmon discussed the recount of the desert trek tradition in Ps 106:13-33, suggesting

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[97] Talmon would have been safer to suggest that the first period of the desert trek, i.e., the first two years' journey to and sojourn at Sinai, was of less relevance in the narrator's expression of the wilderness period. The first two years, which were positively connoted, are to be compared to the next ~38 years of the desert period, negatively connoted. Thus it would become clear that in the narrator's mind, the negative experience of the period was much greater than the comparatively diminutive period of positive evaluation.

[98] Also, Talmon does not seem to have considered the possibility that other traditions of the desert trek might exist that convey a different interpretation (cf. Dozeman 2000, Hoffman 1989, Wijngaards 1965). Unfortunately, much of the material available is in the form determined by the circles responsible for the redaction of the Pentateuch and the collection of other memoirs.

that the psalmist enhanced the negative quality of the tradition by removing "even the signs of temporary remorse which the Pentateuchal account has preserved" (Talmon 56). While the "temporary remorse" of the Pentateuchal account is not quite the "temporary repentance" of Israel in Judges, Talmon's statement that the Pentateuchal account of the trek is "an uninterrupted sequence of transgressions" (Talmon 48) does not agree with his contention that the Pentateuch has preserved some humility on the part of Israel. One of the two points must give way to the other.

C. Jeremiah's Relationship to the Pentateuch

Another stitch about to burst in Talmon's argument is his estimation of the desert trek tradition vis-à-vis Jeremiah. On the one hand, Talmon has suggested that Jer 2:2 does indeed represent "an appreciation of the desert period which deviates considerably from its estimation in the Pentateuchal traditions" (Talmon 53), but on the other hand, Talmon has argued against a desert ideal in Jeremiah on the grounds of similarity to the Pentateuchal account of the desert trek (Talmon 53). It is not the apparent contradiction that draws attention, since Talmon himself acknowledges it. The problem is to be found in the details.

D. Jer 2:2 as a Special Problem

Elaborating on the first point, Talmon suggested that Jer 2:2 "portrays Israel's affection for God" in the desert trek period. Israel's love and faithfulness translate into a positive evaluation of the desert trek. Yet according to Fox, Talmon's reading of the Jeremiah passage has unintentionally masked the real situation in Jer 2:2: "Talmon's refutation, though effective, remains incomplete, for he accepts the usual translation of Jer 2:2" (Fox 1973:442).

The problem lies in correctly interpreting Jeremiah's use of the words *ḥesed* and *ʾahăbâ* in Jer 2:2:

zākartî lāk ḥesed nə ʿūrayik
ʾahăbat kəlūlôtāyik
lektēk ʾaḥăray bammidbār

Fox has understood *zākar ḥesed* to mean, "to maintain kindness," especially in the sense of "giving salvation" (Fox 1973:445).[99] More recent scholarship has determined that *ḥesed* should not be translated "kindness," but rather it should be understood in terms of covenant (von Rad 2001:1.372; Hillers 1969:130), perhaps translated "covenant faithfulness" or "loyalty," a fact that boosts Fox's argument. Thus, the passage can be translated, "I have maintained for you the kindness [sic—loyalty] (of the time of your youth)" (Fox 1973:445). An appropriate question is how one partner in a covenant can maintain the faithfulness of the other. Should this passage be regarded as a theological gem indicating that Yahweh somehow takes responsibility for Israel's unfaithfulness? Rather, as Fox (among others[100]) has understood it and as can be adequately drawn from the translation given above, the *ḥesed* belongs to Yahweh, who promises to maintain his end of the covenant for Israel's sake. Thus, the phrase *ḥesed nə ʿūrayik* should be understood as an objective genitive expressing that the "loyalty of her youth" is Yahweh's loyalty to Israel in Israel's formative days.

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[99] Fox also discusses the interpretation of *zākar* as "maintain." If the verb has its standard meaning "remember, recall," then it would not be difficult to understand the verse as a reference to Yahweh's recollection of Israel's faithfulness in the wilderness. Given this interpretation, it would seem that Jeremiah was using a tradition wholly different from that represented in the Pentateuch. However, Fox points out the use of *zkr* in situations where a meaning of "maintain" is more appropriate than "remember" (Lev 26:45; Ps 98:3; Ps 106:45). Additionally, he has recalled the synonymy between *zkr* and *šmr* in the Sabbath commands of Ex 20:8 and Deut 5:12 as an indication of a meaning (perhaps especially in legal corpora) "keep, maintain" (Fox 1973:445). Thus, Yahweh is maintaining the kindness, not remembering it.

[100] The interpretation of *ḥesed* and *ʾahābâ* as belonging to Yahweh can also be found in the 18th century CE commentary Meşudat David, as well as the commentary N. H. Tur-Sinai (*Pəšūṭō šel miqrāʾ, vol. 3a.* Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1967; p.156).

Since it can be sufficiently shown that *ḥesed* refers to Yahweh's actions toward Israel, one can conclude that the *ʾahăbâ* "love" should also be attributed to Yahweh, since it stands in poetic parallelism with *ḥesed*. Fox argues further that the marital imagery indicated by the phrase *ʾahăbat kəlūlôtāyik*, "the love of your bridal days," should be regarded as a secondary theme in the message of Jeremiah, since the prophet has chosen to set it in second place to the notion of covenant faithfulness expressed through *ḥesed nəʿūrayik*. What remains to be explained is the second element of both constructs, *nəʿūrayik* "your youth" and *kəlūlôtāyik* "your bridal days," along with the phrase *lektēk ʾaḥăray bammidbār*, "your going-after-me in the wilderness." As already implied above, the references to Israel's early period serve to indicate "the period in which the *ḥesed* in question was shown" (Fox 1973:445). Fox has argued that this is true also of the phrase *lektēk ʾaḥăray bammidbār*, translating it temporally as, "when you went after me in the desert" (Fox 1973:445). A problem in rendering a temporal translation of the construct infinitive *lektēk* is the lack of the preposition *bə-*, a typical feature of temporal uses of the construct infinitive (e.g., Deut 6:7, *ūbəlektəkā* "and when you go out"). Because of this, it might be possible to argue for an understanding of the phrase that undoubtedly lies at the heart of a "nomadic ideal" interpretation of Jer 2:2. If Israel's journey into the wilderness were connected to the ideas of faithfulness and love, then it might be possible to suggest that the love and faithfulness was characterized by the trek it the wilderness. However, despite the potential problem of a lacking preposition (which need not be a problem at all), one must not fail to notice that the construct infinitive shares more in common with the phrases *nəʿūrayik* and *kəlūlôtāyik*, viz. the second person feminine suffix. Thus it is clear that *lektēk* is a parallel to "youth" and "bridal days," and is nothing

more than an elaboration on the identification of the period in which Yahweh proved his faithfulness to Israel, the period to which Jeremiah points as an example of Yahweh's treatment of Israel, thus eliciting the statement, "What fault did your fathers find in me that they have departed from me?" (Jer 2:5). The references to the period, which Flight has identified as a "golden age" (see above, pp. 24-27, 32-33), are intended only to recall to the prophet's audience all that Yahweh had done for Israel in that time. All of this considered together is an argument against Talmon's suggestion that Jeremiah spoke of Israel's love for God. Yet, still in consideration is the fact that the desert period was a time when Yahweh showed himself faithful, and as such, the time is not without its positive quality. Thus, a balanced view is offered, according to which the desert trek period positively exemplified Yahweh's faithfulness, but no word is offered by Jeremiah in regard to Israel's faithfulness.

As has been shown, Jer 2:2 does not speak of Israel's positive devotion to Yahweh, a fact that actually supports Talmon's hypothesis. Jer 2:2ff does resemble the Pentateuchal portrayal of the desert trek in which Yahweh shows grace to disobedient Israel. However, Talmon attempted to draw this connection closer, suggesting that Jeremiah was familiar with and faithful to the Pentateuchal account. Talmon has argued that Jeremiah's representation of the desert trek period as positive (a thesis proved false by Fox, as above) is the result of literary variation and not an intentional departure from the tradition set forth in the Pentateuch. His reasoning for this however amounts to an argument from silence when he suggests that "Jeremiah's presentation of the desert period does not evidence an unawareness of the Pentateuchal traditions on the part of the prophet, nor does it imply a conscious reworking of these traditions" (Talmon 53). In this, Talmon again reveals his patent interest in using the Pentateuchal tradition of the desert trek as the flagship of the tradition. As should be clear, just because Jeremiah does not show unawareness of the

Pentateuchal tradition does not mean that Jeremiah is aware of the tradition. At best, it can only be argued that Jeremiah seems to present a tradition that parallels that of the Pentateuch. This point leads into the next criticism.

E. A Different Tradition?

It is entirely possible that Jeremiah does not employ an unaltered form of the desert trek tradition. It is also possible that the trek tradition of the Pentateuch is an elaboration on an older tradition. Talmon has argued that any discussion of the desert trek tradition must incorporate the two basic themes of the Pentateuchal version, the themes of "revelation" and "punishment" (Talmon 48). He states that the idealization of the desert period "derives from an unwarranted isolation of the 'revelation in the desert' theme from the preponderant 'transgression and punishment' theme, with which it is closely welded in the Pentateuchal account of the desert trek" (Talmon 48). Yet, he does not take into account the possibility that the authors of the Pentateuch might be the first to put these two themes together. In this regard, the difficult passage Hos 2:16-17 is troubling, since the journey in the wilderness is not described in such negative terms.[101] Is this elision for the sake of brevity, or is Hosea is familiar with a tradition that differs from the Pentateuch (cf. Wijngaards 1965)? In either case, Talmon's treatment of the Pentateuchal account as if it were the definitive tradition of the desert trek ought to be seen as tenuous until further evidence can be adduced.

F. Marital Imagery in Hosea

Another important aspect of Talmon's treatment of the desert trek tradition in the Pentateuch involves the marriage theme that is present in Hosea. While Talmon seems to be

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[101] Unless one considers the phrase *ʾănôkî məpattēhā wəhôlaktîhā hammidbār* "I will seduce her and lead her [into] the desert" (Hos 2:16) as a threatening oracle. If this is the intent, it must be read as only a part of the whole oracle, in which the prophet actually subverts the fear of destruction and the desert by dramatically proclaiming *wədibbartî ʿal-libbāh wənatattî lâ ʾet-kərāmêhā miššām wə ʾet-ʿēmeq ʾākôr ləpetaḥ tiqwâ* "and I will speak tenderly to her, and give her vineyards to her from there, and I will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope" (Hos 2:17).

essentially correct in pointing out that the marital theme as employed by Hosea (and subsequently, perhaps dependently, by Jeremiah) "has no roots in the desert account" (Talmon 51), one hesitates to offer a complete disassociation of marital notions from the Pentateuchal account. For while Talmon is correct that there does not seem to be a discrete reference to Israel as a bride in the Pentateuch[102] itself, he seems to have overlooked the fact that the first interpreters may have offered such a theme on the premise of some detail similarity in the tradition they received.[103]

G. Problems with Ugaritic Literature and Religion

Talmon's use of Ugaritic literature and religion to elucidate the desert trek tradition in Hosea is also problematic, especially his suggestion that the return to the desert and the recollection of the ancient desert sojourn is a covert refutation of the Canaanite fertility cult (Talmon 52). Talmon based this suggestion upon the story of Baal's conflict with Mot (*KTU* 1.5-1.6) and the notion that "where the Canaanite fertility god Baal failed because his power is limited to agricultural areas, Israel's God achieves unimpaired success" (Talmon 52). One notices immediately that Talmon has rejected the idea of a territorial deity (in his words,

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[102] Talmon remarks that a marital image is attributed to the Sinai episode in the Midrash, but he notes that this was only a retrojection of a later interpretation (Talmon 1966:51). It is nevertheless possible that the lack of a discrete marital image in the Pentateuch may be more the product of a specific ideology, since it is quite possible that Hosea's material was available to the compilers of the later editions of the tradition history.

[103] One possibility lies in the story of the Israelite apostasy at Shittim in Moab (a tradition which Hosea may know [Hos 5:2; Morris 1996:121]). According to Numbers 25, upon settling in Moab, the Israelite men "began to commit harlotry" (*wayyaḥel hā ʿām lizənôt*) with the Moabite women, an event that leads the Israelites to worship the local god of the Moabites, Baal of Peor (Num 25:1-3). When the author of Num 25:1-3 speaks of Israel's "harlotry" *znh* with the Moabites, one may think of the manifold uses of this term and its cognates in Hosea to describe Israel's apostasy (Hos 1:2; 2:4, 6, 7; 3:3; 4:10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18; 5:3, 4; 6:10; 9:1). Beyond this, the passage suggests not only a merger of Israel with Moab, but also with the god Baal himself, as is obvious in the phrase *wayyiṣṣāmed yiśrāʾēl ləbaʿal pəʿôr*, "thus Israel was joined to Baal of Peor" (Num 25:3).

"regional determinism" [Talmon 49]) in the case of Yahweh (as a desert god; Talmon 49), but he has readily assumed it in the case of Baal (Talmon 52). This is a misleading assumption, for which Talmon does not even offer evidence. Now that the notion of Israelite/Canaanite territorial henotheism has been dismissed as speculation (as above) and the notion of Baal as a "dying and rising god" has been called into question (Smith 1994:69-73), Talmon's argument must be rejected as a measure for establishing Hosea's notion of the desert. Beyond this, the conflict between Baal and Mot cannot be employed as evidence of a "territorialism" since the relevant part of the myth in *KTU* 1.5-1.6 that deals with exactly how Baal disappears is missing, with no tablet or join discovered thus far that would fill in the large gap between *KTU* 1.5 V and VI.[104] What happened to Baal, whether he dies by Mot's hand or not, remains a mystery. Any argument based on this is speculative at best.

H. Small Details, Large Consequences

1. Cain and Abel (Again)

Talmon pointed to the story of Cain and Abel as one piece of evidence that the nomadic life was despised in Israel (Talmon 36). Like Flight, he saw the story as an expression of an essential conflict between the Desert and the Sown.[105] Yet unlike Flight (who saw the story as a condemnation of urbanism), Talmon offered this story as proof of a negative view of nomads. While some biblical passages do clearly indicate a pejorative view of nomads (e.g., Jer 3:2), this passage is anything but clear. One cannot forget the following points, enumerated briefly in light of their previous treatment (pp. 35-37): 1) Cain began as

[104] There are approximately 11 lines missing from the end of V and approximately 30 lines missing from the beginning of VI.

[105] This notion may have some truth to it. The point is not lost on Khazanov, who describes the modern disappearance of nomads with the increase of sedentary power, "Once again Cain killing Abel, slowly but surely" (Khazanov 1983:6)

an agriculturalist, usually a sedentary profession, while Abel was a pastoralist, usually the profession of semi-nomads, 2) although Cain was sent out wandering (*nād*<*nôd*; Gen 4:12), he was later credited with the building of the first city (4:17), 3) one of Cain's descendants was said to be the father of "all who live in tents," but another descendant, Tubal-Cain, was said to be a king in Nineveh and the builder of Babylon. The attempt to place Cain clearly in either category (based on his life and the lives of his descendants) ends in confusion. What is most interesting about Talmon's attempt at this categorization of Cain is that he previously argued that the story of Cain and Abel could not be used to support the notion of a patriarchal ideal of nomadic blood revenge (one point in the work of Flight) because it is set in "hoary antiquity" (Talmon 36). This did not stop him from attempting to use the story to prove his point about Israelite attitudes toward nomads and the nomadic life (Talmon 36).

2. Idealism in Terminology

Talmon also suggested that there are some biblical references that do present an ideal of some nomadic items, though they never constitute a "nomadic ideal," such as Is 33:20:

> "Look on Zion, the city of our appointed festivals! Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be pulled up, and none of whose ropes will be broken" (NRSV)

Talmon argued that the ecological image of a "well-anchored tent" is employed here to signify stability and security (Talmon 45). He has missed the point of the passage completely, if de Vaux's understanding of it is correct (de Vaux 1961:502). This is not a glorification of tent-life, but a message that the authority and majesty that was once invested in the tabernacle, the tent sanctuary, has been transferred to the permanent Temple in Jerusalem.[106]

[106] The stability of the Temple is an effective argument for the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem. This passage is a rhetorical aggrandizement of the cult of Jerusalem and a dismissal of the former practices.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

4.1—State of the Discussion

The seminal work of Budde on the "nomadic ideal" was an important exploration of the role of the desert in the Bible. He was the first to propose the idea that the prophets envisioned a positive return to the simplicity of the desert life, the life of Israel's ancestors. A key feature of Budde's analysis was the presentation of Jonadab and the Rechabites as nomadic purists who maintained the original religion of Yahweh the desert god. This feature proved to be a standard in the discussion, as did the use of Hos 2:16-17 as evidence of a prophetic ideal of the desert.

The work of Flight followed in the footsteps of Budde, searching further for evidence of nomadic elements in Israel's history. Though his work was largely an attempt to refute Pan-Babylonian claims that Israel owed its cultural identity to Mesopotamia, Flight added to the discussion of the "nomadic ideal." He suggested few new ideas, but he expanded the application of Budde's thesis. He found the "nomadic ideal" at work in prophetic repudiation of sacrifice, the use of "nomadic" language, in the prophetic vision of a hopeful future, and in many other places. In passages like Jer 2:2, Flight found the idea that the prophets looked back upon Israel's early years as a time when Israel was especially faithful to Yahweh, a time to which the prophets longed to return. Like Budde, Flight added

a touch of religious teaching to his work by suggesting that the simplicity of the nomadic life should be internalized as a feature in modern religion.

However, both of these analyses had major flaws, as has been shown. The various assumptions underlying the "nomadic ideal" hypothesis, viz. the assumption of Israelite belief in Yahweh as a desert god (territorial henotheism), the viability of Bedouin analogies, and the nomadic identity of Jonadab and the Rechabites, are all pure speculation. The quest to find a reason for the prophetic idealization of the nomadic life and the desert has been undermined by the realization that no such idealization is even evidenced in the biblical text. What were previously thought to be passages describing nostalgia for the nomadic life are now understood differently, some even proving to be denigrations of the desert and the nomadic life.

Although the "nomadic ideal" hypothesis had its detractors even early on, much of the work of refuting the hypothesis was accomplished later in the dissertation of Riemann and the article by Talmon. Riemann's work was produced, yet lamentably not published, at a time when many of the features of the "nomadic ideal" had been eclipsed. But the work was invaluable as a digestion of all that had been said in the discussion, and his thorough analysis of the "return to desert" theme in the Bible and his study of the word *midbār* have proved especially important. By bringing into the discussion various elements of sociological study and a corpus of relevant ancient near eastern texts, Riemann provided much-needed balance to the discussion. His sober analysis of the biblical texts typically used by "nomadic ideal" scholars has shown that there was an ideal at work in the biblical prophets: a land ideal.

Though Talmon followed Riemann chronologically, Talmon went his own direction in the discussion. He focused primarily upon an examination of the "nomadic ideal" in terms of literary motifs and ideologies. Like Riemann, Talmon investigated the meaning of

midbār, arriving at the conclusion that the term *midbār* could refer to either a geographic location or a specific period in Israel's history. Armed with this knowledge, Talmon addressed specifically two texts which have been standard in the discussion: Hos 2:16-17 and Jer 2:2. He argued that these texts did not attest to an idealization of the desert or the nomadic life and that such interpretation had misappropriated the texts and had ignored key pieces of information. Talmon suggested that the peculiar desert imagery of Hos 2:16-17 was the result of a mixing of motifs that produced a rare combination of the desert as the scene of love between Yahweh and Israel.

In the case of Jer 2:2, Talmon argued that the passage had been unnecessarily divorced from its context and from the "sin and punishment" theme that is common to the Pentateuchal conception of the desert trek tradition. The work of Fox on this point further clarified the issue. While Talmon had conceded that Jer 2:2 seems to offer a positive evaluation of the desert trek period, Fox's study on the language of the passage has given scholars good reason to think that there is no such positive evaluation. The love formerly attributed to Israel, a sign of her fidelity to Yahweh, seems rather to have been another sign of Yahweh's faithfulness to Israel. The negative descriptions of the desert in Jeremiah 2 reinforce this argument, heightening the theme of divine guidance through the wilderness. Ultimately, Talmon arrived at a conclusion similar to that of Riemann: the desert was not an ideal place to the Israelites. Theirs was an ideal of land and agriculture.

The analyses of Riemann and Talmon were extremely important correctives in the discussion of the role of the desert in Israelite ideology, but they were not above error. Although Riemann's errors were few, some were significant. On a minor note, he did not sufficiently examine the evidence that indicated an association between the desert and the underworld, a link that seems quite relevant to the image of the desert. On a major note,

Riemann did not consider the possibility that negative depictions of the desert could be undergirded by ideologies and political motivations. He was correct that the desert was viewed pejoratively in general, but as has been shown, the description of the desert (and other locales) can sometimes reveal a layer of ideology that is quite specific in purpose and message.

Talmon's chief problem lies in his overestimation of the value of the Pentateuch in reconstructing Israelite ideology. While the Pentateuch must certainly be consulted in the discussion of the Israelite view of the desert, one cannot assume the centrality of the Pentateuchal tradition simply by virtue of tradition. Talmon was overly dependant on the assumptions that the tradition of the desert trek preserved in the Pentateuch expresses the original ideological framework of Israel and that there are no other competing traditions to account for.

4.2—Conclusions

The "nomadic ideal" hypothesis, which has survived in a reduced form up to the present, must finally be discarded as an inadequate description of biblical ideology. Many of the assumptions that undergird of the hypothesis no longer stand up to scrutiny when isolated. The extent to which Israel's origins can be described as nomadic is also doubtful, since the issue is related to the archaeology of Israelite society in the earliest period, about which there is currently much contention. All that can be said in this regard is that which has been said elsewhere: the Bible does not claim a unified social origin for the first Israelite presence in Canaan. The attempt to identify *the* Israelite ideology of the desert must be changed to the attempt to discover *an* Israelite ideology of the desert. One must remember that the chief access to ancient Israelite thought is a collection of texts that, though written by many hands and having a tradition of change, is still representative of a specific set of

ideologies. One must not assume that one is getting the whole picture from one source. It may be that a section of Israelite culture, under-represented in the literature, held different views. Even further, it is quite likely that some Israelites who held pejorative views of the desert nevertheless saw some value in the desert. There is little room in good scholarship for absolutes that are not finely adjusted to reflect the intricacies and complexities of most issues. Such absolutism has led to errors on both sides of the "nomadic ideal" discussion, as well as in many other areas of scholarship.

In light of this, one can tentatively suggest that the *biblical* ideology of the desert is one that is generally negative, with the possibility that in some instances it could be more or less negative in the presence of other ideological strains. The notion of a biblical idealization of the desert is largely derived, apart from specious evidence, from an overvaluation of the role of the desert in a few passages, viz. Hos 2:16-17, Jer 2:2, and Jer 31:2. In each of these passages, the desert features as a setting where something positive happens. In Hosea 2, the desert is the scene of ideological "lovemaking" between Yahweh and Israel, a marital image tantamount to the renewal of the covenant. In Jeremiah 2, the desert is the historical scene of Yahweh's kindness to Israel and His guidance of her through the wasteland. In Jeremiah 31, the desert is the scene of the flight of the Israelite remnant from destruction, and the place they unexpectedly "find grace," an ambiguous phrase that nevertheless communicates a positive note. In none of these passages does the desert receive a positive evaluation; it is simply a setting.

But why choose the desert as a setting for such positive experiences? In the case of Hos 2:16-17, the prophet has drawn upon the image of Israel's exodus from Egypt to communicate his message of the need for covenant renewal. The prophet envisioned a replay of the most formative event in Israelite tradition: the journey from Egypt to the Land

of Canaan. Whether he actually intended Israel to leave the land or not is beyond the scope of the discussion. What matters is that the desert is the only scene he could have chosen to portray Israel's crisis but to keep an aspect of hope and anticipation.

In the case of Jer 2:2, the choice to have the desert as the stage is simply in keeping with the tradition of the original desert trek. Whether the prophet could have chosen another setting raises the question of the origin and development of the exodus and desert trek traditions, which, though worthy of further investigation, is outside the scope of this discussion. The choice of the desert as a scene in Jer 31:2 may depend on the real historical situation which the prophet is describing here. This aside, as has been noted previously, the desert was a standard place of retreat in desperate times; it is a sign that the people are in desperate need. It is a scene of utter dependence on divine favor, the perfect time for salvation. The desert does not yield this picture; it is only the setting.

What can be said is that to the best of our knowledge, the desert was generally viewed negatively and life in the desert was viewed as a degraded form of existence. On occasion, the desert is a necessary evil, a place of retreat, even playing a role in the functioning of the world and the cult. The desert is set against the land in biblical ideology.

Further research into these issues below will help to define the issue of the biblical or Israelite ideology of the desert:

- The Israelite ideology of the city.
- The effect of Israelite royal ideology on Israelite urbanism.
- The Israelite attitude toward nomads and semi-nomads.
- The role of desert imagery in covenant curses in the ancient Near East.
- The role of the desert in omina and rituals.
- The role of the desert in Jewish messianism in late antiquity.

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