

# **DIVINE ANGER AND WALTER BRUEGGEMANN'S BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**

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## ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to understand the biblical theology of divine anger via an engagement with the writings of Walter Brueggemann. Brueggemann's approach to divine anger is studied and tested through exegetical explorations of selected passages in the Old Testament, weighing Brueggemann's comments in light of other contributions in the field.

Brueggemann's approach can be summarised in five movements. First, divine anger is not simply an anthropomorphic projection but a feature of biblical realism, a claim that is explored in relation to Jer. 6:9-15. Secondly, God's 'slowness' to anger is articulated as part of Israel's core-testimony in the credo of adjectives in Exod. 34:6-7 and associated passages. Thirdly, divine anger is the result, for the most part, of ongoing violations of the Mosaic covenant, explored in the representative text of Jer. 7:1-20. Fourthly, the result of divine anger is exile, a time during which the conversation between God and Israel experiences a painful silence, as found particularly within Jer. 25:1-14. Finally, Brueggemann reveals that God is one who will not be angry forever, investigating Hosea 11:1-9 as a departure from the 'common theology of the ancient Near East'.

The implications of Brueggemann's theology of divine anger are significant, it is argued, in that students of biblical theology (whether inside or outside the church) are challenged not to present a reductionist view of the anger of God. While the biblical ideas of divine anger are confronting, they also propel us beyond merely contractual and punitive ideas of God's journey with Israel.

## **STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY**

I hereby certify that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and affirm that to the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Alysia who for 23 years has been everything to me. The debt I owe her for her love, prayers, patience, encouragement, forgiveness and for believing in me, especially on those occasions over the last 5 years when I was resigned to giving up on this project, can never be repaid. She's the greatest and I am truly a lucky man.

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*'I can do everything through him who gives me strength', Philippians 4:13.*

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## INTRODUCTION

There is much within the Bible that speaks of God's love, grace and mercy. Many have gained comfort from verses that depict God as a loving deity who is always ready to forgive and show compassion. Such passages are central to modern evangelical theology with its axiom of the love of God ultimately expressed through the ministry of Jesus Christ. The purpose of this thesis is not to dispute such a paradigm but to explore another dimension of God that is less attractive and somewhat controversial. One does not have to read too far to discover that juxtaposed with God's love and mercy are biblical passages that speak of a darker side of God: the anger of God. The anger of God presents a challenge for many today.

For some, the idea that a loving God can possess a "mean streak" presents a dichotomy too difficult to contemplate, so the topic is avoided. Alternatively, gross misinterpretations of scripture have led some to consider the Old Testament as the story of the anger of God and the New Testament as the story of the love of God. Moreover, how do we understand the anger of God which at times appears openly aggressive? The book of Isaiah, for example, records on four occasions the imagery of God's hand raised ready to strike in anger.<sup>1</sup> For those who were raised in an environment where physical punishment was the standard rule for discipline, the memories of an angry parent whose hand is raised ready to strike may invoke feelings of unease that could be projected onto one's relationship with God. Nonetheless the anger of God is not a characteristic that one can simply choose to ignore. A careful reading of the Bible clearly shows that the wrath of God is attested to in both the Old and New Testaments. Leon Morris succinctly reminds us of the following:

The wrath of God is a concept that is uncongenial to many modern students, and various devices are adopted to soften the expression or explain it away. This cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Isa. 5:25; 9:12, 17; 10:4.

be done, however, without doing great violence to many passages of scripture and without detracting from God's moral character.<sup>2</sup>

So too does John Sanders state a case for wrestling with divine anger:

It should be acknowledged that human wrath can be a dangerous emotion that has the power to undo us, and so reservations about ascribing it to God are understandable. But Scripture unashamedly does just that.<sup>3</sup>

So how can Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century understand and speak of the anger of God? Can we have a healthy and well-grounded theology of divine wrath, which allows for divine anger to take its rightful place as one of the acknowledged characteristics of God, along with love and mercy?

The anger of God is not just a confronting issue for Christians today; it has been a controversial subject throughout church history. For example, second century Alexandrian church father, Origen, defended the scriptures that referred to God's anger against the polemical Greek philosopher Celsus.<sup>4</sup> Augustine in his monumental apologetic work, *The City of God*, devoted a significant portion to exploring the anger of God and its consequences for humanity. Augustine suggested that "the anger of God is not a disturbing emotion of his mind, but a judgement by which punishment is inflicted upon sin."<sup>5</sup> Augustine appeared to have no problem juxtaposing the anger of God with the mercy of God, having arrived at the conclusion that God's anger "does not disturb his tranquillity" because God's anger is not from agitation but from divine judgment.<sup>6</sup> The reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century also wrote about the anger of God suggesting that it was punishment for rejecting God and his principles. Throughout the centuries, preachers and theologians' view on the anger of God can perhaps

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<sup>2</sup> See Leon Morris, *The Gospel of John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), p.220.

<sup>3</sup> John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove: IVP Academia, 2007), p.65.

<sup>4</sup> For an extrapolation of Origen's reply to Celsus see Henry Chadwick, trans., *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Press, 2003), p.13.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, p.642.

be summarized by three principles: firstly God is capable of anger, secondly that God's anger is aroused by sin, and thirdly sinners will eventually experience the outpouring of God's anger.

Church history also reveals that there have been a number of different interpretations of divine anger. To highlight the disparities within church history in regards to the struggle to understand the anger of God, we will concisely compare thoughts on divine wrath from three sources: the great awakening preacher of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Jonathan Edwards, 4<sup>th</sup> century church father Lactantius and finally 2<sup>nd</sup> century preacher, Marcion.

In July of 1841, Jonathan Edwards, who was one of the most influential American-born theologians of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, preached his most famous sermon at a church in Enfield Massachusetts. The title of his sermon was *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* and whilst Edwards had surely hoped to provoke a response from the congregation in Enfield, the effect of his sermon would have much larger repercussions upon the English speaking evangelical protestant movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bruce L. Shelley describes Edwards' sermon in question as "merciless" for it described a God who held people over the fires of Hell in the way one holds a spider over a candle.<sup>7</sup> Throughout his sermon which was based upon Deut. 32:35, Edwards refers to the wrath and anger of God 52 times and makes some disturbing claims about the character of God and his lack of compassion for those who were

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<sup>7</sup> See Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995), p.346. Edwards' brimstone and hellfire descriptions drove many to a state of trepidation in regards to their souls. Such emotional responses would become a key characteristic of the Great Awakening in America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that saw many within congregations weep for repentance, others shout for joy at being spared this diabolical fate and a few being so overwhelmed that they fainted. Shelley suggests that many who heard Edwards' sermon would sob and gasp to such an extent that Edwards had to pause or his voice would be drowned out. See also Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity Volume 2: The Reformation to the Present Day* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985), p.229.

yet to receive Christ, or rejected him. One such example is Edwards' declaration that there "are the black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over your heads."<sup>8</sup> Edwards later expands on how God will express his anger:

When you cry to God on that day, He will not pity you in your grief. He will not regard you in the least regard or favour. Instead of pity, He will only tread you underfoot. He will know that you cannot bear the weight of omnipotence treading on you, yet he will not have sympathy. He will crush you under his feet without mercy. He will crush out your blood, and make it pour. Your blood will be sprinkled on his garments, and will stain them. He will not only hate you, but he will hold you in contempt. No place will be fit for you but under his feet to be trampled on as mud in the streets.<sup>9</sup>

The God in Edwards' sermon is one who in divine wrath seemingly takes pleasure in sending people to Hell where they will be brutally tortured for all of eternity. Edwards' sermon is exegetically problematic given that Hell is not mentioned by the author of Deuteronomy. The reference to Sheol in Deut. 32:22, for example, speaks of the place where the dead abide, both righteous and evil.<sup>10</sup> Deuteronomy 32 refers to God punishing the wicked but in the Old Testament divine punishment was thought to occur in this life. Brueggemann describes Sheol as the "dark netherworld where discarded people are housed who no longer have power for life. Sheol is not a place of punishment but where the dead are kept in their impotence."<sup>11</sup>

By way of comparison, another extensive examination of the anger of God can be found in Lactantius' exposition from the 4<sup>th</sup> century titled, *A Treatise on the Anger of God*.

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Trigsted, *Jonathan Edwards: His Greatest Sermons* (Gainesville: Bridge-Logos, 2003), p.13.

<sup>9</sup> Trigsted, *Jonathan Edwards*, p.18.

<sup>10</sup> For more on Sheol and the afterlife in the Old Testament see: Phillip C Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002); Edward William Fudge & Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2000), pp.22-36; Robert C. Jones, *Heaven and Hell: In the Bible, Apocrypha and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Scotts Valley: CreateSpace Publishing, 2010), pp.68-69; Daniel I. Block, "The Old Testament on Hell," Christopher W. Morgan & Robert A. Peterson eds. *Hell Under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), pp.43-66. For a discussion that seeks to challenge the orthodox view that Sheol was the final destination for all who died, instead exploring and reshaping the concept of resurrection within the Old Testament see: Kevin J. Madigan & Jon Levenson, *Resurrection: the Power of God for Christians and Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp.127-128.

Lactantius' treatise on the anger of God was written in response to pagan and philosophical polemical teachings about God's omnipotence. The main antagonists were the Stoics and Epicureans who believed that God was devoid of emotions such as pleasure and anger.<sup>12</sup> This led to their argument against any future reward or punishment regardless of the benevolence or malevolence of humanity. In reply, Lactantius suggested that such beliefs were subversive to true religion and maintained in his treatise that God is indeed angry with the unrighteous, and kind to those who fear and worship him. Lactantius' concise response is summarised in chapter sixteen of his treatise:

But, on the contrary, others are daring and wicked, who pollute all things with their lusts, harass with slaughters, practise fraud, plunder, commit perjury, neither spare relatives nor parents, neglect the laws, and even God himself. Anger, therefore, has a befitting occasion in God.<sup>13</sup>

For Lactantius God was not only capable of anger but also willing to express it. Lactantius believed that if God has the ability to experience kindness so too does God experience anger. One emotion cannot go without the other. Anger should not be removed from the character of God because it was necessary for the correction of humanity. However he also suggested that God is not immediate in expressing his anger, but rather desiring to see the ungodly "have the opportunity of coming to a right mind," which would appease the divine wrath.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, for a most extreme explanation of divine anger within church history we turn to a young man from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century who proposed a radical interpretation of the anger of God:

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<sup>12</sup> The Stoics believed that God was benevolent through acts of kindness and grace but not subject to anger. The Epicureans believed that God was devoid of any emotion, kindness or anger, and as result was not able to have an impact upon humanity. See "The Works of Lactantius," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translation of the Writing of the Fathers down to AD 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871), p.x.

<sup>13</sup> Lactantius, "A Treatise on the Anger of God" in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1886), p.273.

<sup>14</sup> Roberts & Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, p.277.

Marcion. Marcion believed that there were two Gods: the God of the Old Testament; and the Father of Jesus who was the God of the New Testament. Marcion depicted a dichotomy: The God of the Old Testament was an evil, angry, vindictive and selective God who punished severely those who fell short of righteousness. The Father of Jesus, on the other hand, was a loving and forgiving God who replaced the “bloody cruelty of the Jewish God.”<sup>15</sup> Gonzalez suggests that “this God (the Father of Jesus) does not seek to be obeyed, but to be loved.”<sup>16</sup> Marcion’s theory was that the world was created by the first God who was inferior and incapable of controlling his creation. This God loved the Jews exclusively but expected moral perfection as laid down in his “law,” and anything short of perfection was punished in retaliatory fashion. The second God was superior, good and merciful who revealed himself in Jesus Christ in order to redeem humanity.<sup>17</sup> Marcion’s ideas were influenced by the Gnostic teacher Cerdo who proposed a two god theory believing that the Old Testament God was “full of wrath and the author of evil.”<sup>18</sup> Such a theory displays a profound struggle with God’s punishment and judgement that were the resultant manifestations of divine anger. Marcion perceived this punishment to be fearfully cruel and depicted God as possessing an evil streak. But Jesus, Paul and other New Testament writers testify to the fact that the Father of Jesus also experiences anger. In a point well made by R. V. G. Tasker, the anger of God is not just confined to the Old Testament as Marcion would have us believe, but rather, the “stories about sudden destruction overtaking, as a divine punishment, those who thwart the purposes of God or flout his mercy” are also found in the New Testament.<sup>19</sup> Similarly Ellen T. Cherry suggests that Marcion’s attempt to sever the body of Christ from the God of Israel

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<sup>15</sup> Hans Lietzmann, *A History of the Early Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1963), p.252.

<sup>16</sup> Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity Volume One: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1984), p.61.

<sup>17</sup> Marcion rejected the entire Old Testament and a number of Christian writings including Matthew, Mark, Acts, Hebrews and the Pastoral Epistles which he believed favoured Jewish readers. Such ideas caused Marcion to be excommunicated from the Church in 144CE.

<sup>18</sup> Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, p.63.

<sup>19</sup> R.V.G. Tasker, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1970), p.27.

is a constant temptation.<sup>20</sup> A healthy exegetical process, however, will clearly reveal that the Hebrew and Christian writings both bear witness to God's love and provision whilst also bearing witness to God's anger and judgment.

As the above brief summary has shown, understandings about the anger of God throughout history are varied, resulting in a range of opinions from different cultural contexts. Jonathan Edwards' motivation was evangelistic in that he attempted to use the anger of God as a tool to bring people of his day to repentance. Edwards' evangelism of terror that was based on an aggressive method of communicating divine wrath and judgment is similar to some current-day fundamentalism forms of evangelism where the anger of God is presented in a one dimensional hard-line way.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, Lanctantius' motivation was apologetic in that he does not speak of divine wrath in aggressive ways but highlights that the anger of God cannot simply be ignored. For Lanctantius the world experiences a false sense of security when continued rebellion against God is not perceived as a provocation to divine anger. Furthermore, God's love does not negate God's propensity for righteousness and justice. Finally, Marcion's attempt to neatly box divine wrath as a preoccupation of the Old Testament is perhaps similar to attempts today by some Christians to ignore the troublesome topic of God and anger. Although most would not go as far as Marcion, there is for some an all too familiar belief that the Old Testament is dominated by an "angry God."

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<sup>20</sup> Ellen T. Charry, "The Uniqueness of Christ in Relation to the Jewish People: The Eternal Crusade" in *Christ the One and Only: A Global Affirmation of the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), p.155.

<sup>21</sup> See the conclusion of this thesis for a more detailed analysis of the usage of the anger of God, evangelism and fundamentalism.

It is at this point that we introduce Walter Brueggemann into the fray, and with all of these things in mind, this thesis will be an exploration of whether Brueggemann's insight into the anger of God within the Hebrew Bible forms a more helpful framework for the topic. Brueggemann has been selected because it is my conviction that he is among the most constructive and engaging theologians for our cultural context. Terence E. Fretheim describes him as being tenacious in his attention to specific texts, relentless in his pursuit of theological issues, fresh in his use of language, voracious in his reading and committed to linking biblical thought with contemporary living.<sup>22</sup> Although he has authored many books and articles on a range of biblical and theological issues, Brueggemann has not to date featured the anger of God as the sole subject of a publication. Yet many of his publications touch on the topic and its complexities.

This thesis will explore how Brueggemann has wrestled with the anger of God over the years and how he has come to reconcile such a dark and controversial concept with his own understanding of God. Moreover, for Brueggemann, it has become an important aspect of the divine life and vital if we are to understand God holistically. Over the following chapters, Brueggemann's thoughts on the anger of God will be gleaned from his exegetical studies of a number of passages that refer to divine wrath, and these gleanings will be tested against the wider background of scholarship.

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<sup>22</sup> See Terence E. Fretheim, "Some Reflections on Brueggemann's God," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, eds. Tod Linafelt & Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p.24. Walter Brueggemann was born in Tilden Nebraska in 1933. He was the son of a United Church of Christ minister and was himself ordained in the same church. Brueggemann was professor Old Testament studies at Eden Theological Seminary from 1961 to 1986 including a period as Dean from 1968 to 1982. In 1986 he became the William Marcellus McPheeters professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary, where he retired in the early part of this decade. To date Brueggemann has authored nearly seventy books, including several biblical commentaries and a vast number of articles. For his personal reflection on his own church experience and the impact it has on his understanding of scripture see Walter Brueggemann, *The Book That Breathes New Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), pp.20-36. His biblical commentaries have covered Genesis, Exodus, Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Psalms, Isaiah and Jeremiah.

After exploring Brueggemann's theology in broad outline in chapter one, chapter two will show that Brueggemann is one who is convinced of the reality of the anger of God, particularly through a focus on the case study of Jeremiah 6:9-15. Chapter three will explore his idea that though there is a certainty to the anger of God there is also a divine propensity to be long-suffering or slow to become angry, reflecting in this case Exodus 34:7-8. Chapter four will explore a cause of God's anger in the example of Jeremiah 11:1-17. This will be followed by chapter five, which will examine the effects of how God's anger is realised and experienced by Israel. This chapter will focus on the case study of Jeremiah 25:1-14. Chapter six will emphasize that Yahweh is a God who is willing to move beyond wrath and not be angry forever, displayed through a study of Hosea 11:1-9. It is this characteristic that seems to distinguish the Yahweh of the Old Testament from other ancient Near Eastern deities. Finally, in chapter seven, the thesis will conclude with an attempt to apply Brueggemann's understanding of the anger of God within the Old Testament to contemporary church life.

I hasten to add at this point that this is an exploration of biblical theology that will be selective in regards to the potentially relevant biblical passages, but the texts are chosen as representative of Brueggemann's ideas about divine anger. It is equally important to acknowledge that the anger of God within this thesis will be explored mainly from a Mosaic covenantal perspective. For the church who inherits the story of Israel, it is particularly the Mosaic trajectory that needs careful exploration.<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that non-covenantal aspects of divine anger in the Bible are less important, as they too are significant in the quest

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<sup>23</sup> This is not a supersessionist claim but rather a theological claim about the understanding of the character of God through Israel's and the church's experience. For a study on the anger of God within the priestly tradition see Kari Latvus, *God, Anger and Ideology: The Anger of God in Joshua and Judges in Relation to Deuteronomy and the Priestly Writings* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

to understand divine wrath in all its complexity. Brueggemann, for example, notes that God is, on occasion, angry with other nations (cf. Isaiah 13-23; Jeremiah 46-51; Ezekiel 25-32; Amos 1-2 & Zephaniah 2).<sup>24</sup> He sees three main reasons for the anger of God against other nations: arrogance against God; mistreatment of Israel; and abuse of a third party that is not connected to Israel.<sup>25</sup> The third point relates to what Brueggemann describes as a kind of “international law” which ensured a common code of human standards, or put simply, a common expectation that all nations were to act humanely and justly towards each other.<sup>26</sup> What emerges is that non-covenantal divine anger is provoked not by breaches of particular contracts or even covenants, but by breaches of more basic conceptions of justice.

John Barton in his book *Amos' Oracles Against the Nations* accordingly suggests that:

There is not enough evidence to justify the view that Amos is appealing to actual international agreements, rather than to principles of conduct which he believes all nations *ought* to accept.<sup>27</sup>

Barton also proposes that God is passionate about the universal law of justice that is outside of Yahweh's covenant with Israel. He goes on to say:

The principles at stake in these oracles are essentially part of conventional morality, which God is assumed to back up with fiery sanctions, rather than actual laws supposed to be issued by him for all nations of the world to observe... Israel's neighbours are not denounced for sins which they could not have been expected to recognise as such (e.g., idolatry), but for offences against common humanity; not for disobedience to God, but for failing to follow the dictates of their own moral sense.<sup>28</sup>

Barton has highlighted the fairness of non-covenantal divine anger in that the other nations are not held to agreements they have no knowledge of, but rather, to natural laws that they

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<sup>24</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p.502.

<sup>25</sup> Clements' concise summary is that the anger of God was due to the hubris of the other nations in usurping the authority of God. Ronald E. Clements, “Prophecy, Ethics and the Divine Anger,” in Katherine Dell ed. *Ethical and Unethical in the Old Testament: God and Humans in Dialogue* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), p.89.

<sup>26</sup> Brueggemann includes an extensive study on the four superpowers, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia, and on the ‘little neighbours’ in chapter 16 of *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 492-527.

<sup>27</sup> John Barton, *Amos' Oracles Against the Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.59. See also A. Graeme Auld, *Amos* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), pp.41-49.

<sup>28</sup> Barton, *Amos' Oracles Against Nations*, p.43.

should have known simply by being human. Non-covenantal divine anger also reveals God as ruler over all the nations and world powers. Along with Brueggemann, Carly Crouch highlights this dimension of divine sovereignty: “it is Yahweh who acts as defender of the moral order by destroying those nations whose actions contradict that order.”<sup>29</sup>

Brueggemann also wrestles with the shadow side of non-covenantal divine anger in regards to the treatment of other nations in the book of Joshua.<sup>30</sup> In discussing this book, he journeys through the passages that often leave many readers uneasy. He acknowledges the “acute awkwardness” and the propensity to “explain away” such a characterisation of God,<sup>31</sup> yet he himself wants to argue that Israel’s violence went beyond divine revelation in some respects.<sup>32</sup> In particular, he draws attention to the different voices in Joshua 11 and distinguishes between the direct speech of Yahweh in v. 6 (limited to hamstringing horses and burning chariots) and the more comprehensive violence licenced by reference to Mosaic authority in vv. 12-15. Essentially he sees God as one who does allow for limited violence against the structures of oppressive regimes, as evident in Canaan. The direction of this argument seems to lead to a distinction between core and non-core revelation, which in my judgment is not fruitful.

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<sup>29</sup> Carly L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History* (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, 2009), p.100; see also Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), p.418.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Divine Presence Amid Violence: Contextualizing the Book of Joshua* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Brueggemann, *Divine Presence Amid Violence*, p.12. See also Barton who suggests that the dark side of God is often good reason for the average person to abandon the Old Testament altogether. See John Barton, “The Dark Side of God in the Old Testament,” in Katherine Dell (ed). *Ethical and Unethical in the Old Testament: God and Humans in Dialogue* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), pp.122-134.

<sup>32</sup> Brueggemann, *Divine Presence Amid Violence*, p.27.

One of the problems here is that Amos 1:3 condemns a foreign nation for killing pregnant women, yet this is exactly what is required by the law of Moses in Deut. 20:16-17. In this respect, there appears to be an inconsistency in which the covenantal law is allowed to override what might be considered natural law. Crouch sharply summarises this difficulty: “We have Yahweh engaged in war as a means of judgment and, more importantly, engaging in it in ways which are notably similar to those acts for which the nations are condemned.”<sup>33</sup> The implied natural ethic of Amos 1 & 2 would require: a general restraint in the conduct of war, not exiling the conquered, refraining from the killing of women and children and the defilement of the remains of enemy kings.<sup>34</sup> Here at the intersection of covenantal and non-covenantal ethics, Crouch has identified one of the reasons why biblical theology at times needs to be supplemented with the broader resources of Christian ethical reasoning in relation to just war, divine violence, war crimes etc., but contemplating these broader issues would require another thesis.<sup>35</sup>

In the end, the conviction lying behind this thesis is that Brueggemann’s reflections on covenantal divine anger are more helpful. In this area, his writings help us discover a deeper understanding of God that is particularly relevant for the life of the church today. The tension that we discover between divine sovereignty over all nations and the fidelity of God within the particularity of a divine covenant points to deep theological issues that have perhaps been better grasped in the history of Judaism than within Christianity. This is certainly Brueggemann’s conviction, and in this thesis we will explore some of the reasons

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<sup>33</sup> Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East*, p.103.

<sup>34</sup> See Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East*, pp.109-110.

<sup>35</sup> For a recent survey on warfare in the Old Testament see Charles Trimm, “Recent Research on Warfare in the Old Testament,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 10/2 (2012), pp.171-216. See also Deena Grant, who believes that war is a dominant literary expression of divine wrath throughout the Bible. Grant, “Divine Anger in Biblical Literature.” PhD Thesis, New York University, New York, 2009, pp.568-736. For a simple summary of Brueggemann’s view on God and war in the Old Testament see his, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002), pp.227-229.

why this conviction provides a valuable insight into the continuing relevance of Old Testament theology.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.459.

## 1. APPROACHING WALTER BRUEGGEMANN'S THEOLOGY

Brueggemann's passion for an engagement with scripture, while at the same time exploring how to engage the Christian community, is infectious to say the least. His style of writing refuses to accept a doctrinally abstract reading of the Old Testament scriptures. A key aspect of his theology, for example, is the rendering of God as a personal agent including anthropomorphic particularities such as anger provoked through the depths of relationship with Israel. This rendering of God requires an appropriate methodology that is capable of capturing such particularities, and not being diverted by historical reconstruction or generic abstractions applied to the literature.

Within his "magnum opus," *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, Brueggemann advocates for a rhetorical critical approach to understanding God within the Old Testament. He is adamant that what is known about God is revealed through Israel's words or speech: "I shall insist, as consistently as I can, that the God of Old Testament theology as such lives in, with and under the rhetorical enterprises of this text, and nowhere else and in no other way."<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere Brueggemann is slightly less emphatic where he proposes that "reality is dependent on speech."<sup>38</sup> Instead of stating that God does not exist apart from speech, in his more moderate formulation Brueggemann insists that God cannot be known apart from speech: "it is important to recognise that there is, outside speech, no objectively given world that stands as measuring rod of reality, whereby one can test to see if Israel is realistic."<sup>39</sup> His main point seems to be epistemological, rather than being perhaps an implicit statement of atheism.

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<sup>37</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.66.

<sup>38</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.134.

<sup>39</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.723.

Brueggemann's approach to rhetorical criticism was influenced by the supervisor of his doctoral dissertation, James Muilenburg, who emphasized the particularities of persuasive biblical language rather than the generalities of form criticism.<sup>40</sup> James Muilenburg's work with Hebrew poetry focused attention on the literary qualities of the text and used analysis of the writer's styles to enhance appreciation and deepen understanding. His practice of close reading influenced a generation of scholars<sup>41</sup> with Brueggemann being one of them. Brueggemann suggests the following of his former supervisor:

Muilenburg almost single-handedly made credible the practice of close reading, whereby one notices the detail of the text, such as word patterns and arrangements, the use of key words in repetition, the careful placement of prepositions and conjunctions, and the reiteration of sounds of certain consonants.<sup>42</sup>

Norman Gottwald is full of praise for Brueggemann's rhetorical critique of the Old Testament:

By adopting a rhetorical strategy in analysing God-talk in the Hebrew bible, he offers a daringly original reading of the diverse, often sharply conflicted, Israelite and Jewish renderings of deity. In the process, he has capitalised on precisely the bewildering diversity of the views that has long hamstrung most efforts at doing a comprehensive Old Testament theology.<sup>43</sup>

Gottwald goes on to say that Brueggemann's rhetorical approach to the Old Testament allows the texts to speak for themselves, without the interruptions of premature questions and judgments from readers that stifle discovery.<sup>44</sup> Thus he confesses to "heartily approve of his

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<sup>40</sup> See James Muilenburg's classic essay, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969) p.1-18. For an introduction to rhetorical criticism see Phyllis Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method and the Book of Jonah*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1994). For a concise summary of rhetorical criticism and Brueggemann's theology see Gottwald's article, "Rhetorical, Historical and Ontological Counterpoints in doing Old Testament Theology," in Todd Linafelt & Timothy K. Beal (eds), *God in the Fray* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), pp.11-24.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Paul D Koptak, "Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: A Source for Preaching," *The Covenant Quarterly* Volume LIV No.3 (1996): 26-37.

<sup>42</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.55.

<sup>43</sup> Gottwald, "Rhetorical, Historical and Ontological Counterpoints," p.11.

<sup>44</sup> Gottwald, "Rhetorical, Historical and Ontological Counterpoints," p.13.

[Brueggemann's] decision to begin with rhetoric and to stay with rhetoric as far as it can be taken."<sup>45</sup>

Yet for all the high praise that Gottwald lavishes upon Brueggemann there is one key concern: Brueggemann's exclusion of history and ontology within the Old Testament discourse. His emphatic commitment to rhetorical criticism apparently requires no need for historical or ontological analysis:

Note well that in focusing on speech, we tend to bracket out all questions of historicity. We are not asking, "What happened?" but "What is said?" To inquire into the historicity of the text is a legitimate enterprise, but it does not, I suggest, belong to the work of Old Testament theology. In like manner, we bracket out all questions of ontology, which ask about the "really real." It may well be, in the end, that there is no historicity to Israel's faith claim, but that is not a position taken here. And it may well be that there is no "being" behind Israel's faith assertion, but that is not a claim made here. We have, however, few tools for recovering "what happened" and even fewer for recovering "what is," and therefore those issues must be held in abeyance, pending the credulity and persuasiveness of Israel's testimony on which everything depends.<sup>46</sup>

Gottwald responds by claiming that Brueggemann's decision to exclude history and ontology is futile given that both at times will naturally intersect with rhetorical exposition. According to Gottwald these should not be viewed as unwelcome intruders but rather as "commentators and interrogators invited into the discourse, even if on limited terms and for brief moments."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Gottwald, "Rhetorical, Historical and Ontological Counterpoints in doing Old Testament Theology," in Todd Linafelt & Timothy K. Beal (eds), *God in the Fray*, p.13.

<sup>46</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, p.118.

<sup>47</sup> Gottwald, "Rhetorical Historical and Ontological Counterpoints," p.15. For a discussion on the ontology of divine anger as expressed through philosophical and metaphorical discourse see Deena Grant, "Divine Anger in Biblical Literature," PhD Thesis, New York University, New York, 2009.

Brevard Childs is also critical of Brueggemann when it comes to rhetorical criticism, because it provides, “no ontological connection linking the two testaments...Any overarching meta-history such as Paul’s, or a trajectory of unfolding clarity in revelation, is rejected as unwarranted and offensive.”<sup>48</sup> Brueggemann’s postmodernism is therefore condemned as “a serious break with the entire Christian exegetical tradition.”<sup>49</sup>

In substantial agreement with the reservations expressed by Gottwald and Childs, this thesis distances itself from Brueggemann’s proposal that God within the Old Testament can only be known under the enterprise of rhetorical criticism. We recognize that the subject of the anger of God is bigger than and cannot be contained within a rhetorical method of reading, especially when it is reduced to Brueggemann’s overly narrow construal. Nevertheless, it will be the goal of this thesis to explore what can be understood about the anger of God from Brueggemann’s writings under a rhetorical critical paradigm. My conviction is that a sound and helpful theology of the anger of God can still be achieved through this approach if it does not exclude other approaches that may at times be necessary.

In fact, one could suggest that Brueggemann’s methodological reduction does not fit well with his wider intention to appeal to a broad audience. His refusal to side with either the conservative or liberal factions of the church reveal the challenging anomaly of his work in that he refuses to let anyone off the hook. It will not do to have Childs dismiss Brueggemann as a liberal. For example, Brueggemann’s challenge in *Finally Comes the Poet* is to speak of God in creative, even artistic, ways that prevent either conservatives or liberals hijacking

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<sup>48</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), p.294.

<sup>49</sup> Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*, pp.294-295.

scripture for their own purposes. Brueggemann challenges all sides to a new and exciting holistic expression of mission:

Let preaching be as conservative as it can possibly be about the self-giving of God who stops the poison. Let the preacher be as dangerous as she possibly can be about reparations in the family, in Central America, in all the enslavements and exploitations we practice. The preacher must be conserving of the grace of God and open to the pain and injustice of the world. Neither may be neglected. Both must be enacted.<sup>50</sup>

In *The Prophetic Imagination* Brueggemann critiques both theological extremes as being part of the problem within the American church:

The contemporary American church is so largely enculturated to the American ethos of consumerism that it has little power to believe or to act. This enculturation is in some way true across the spectrum of church life, both liberal and conservative.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, Linafelt and Beal suggest that Brueggemann's description of God would be seen as an "outlandish threat to any theology whether characteristically liberal or conservative."<sup>52</sup> His courageous biblical interpretation presents challenges to both ends of the theological spectrum.

Of particular relevance to this thesis is Brueggemann's preparedness to wrestle with texts that appear to render God as dysfunctional. Highlighting what he describes as Israel's "counter testimony," Brueggemann reveals a side of scripture that dares to speak and question God about divine inconsistencies.<sup>53</sup> In Israel's counter testimony, we find a God who is at times hidden, ambiguous, negative, unstable and even abusive. Brueggemann is willing to give voice to Israel's lived experience of God which at times appears contrary to the great affirming and transformative verbs of Israel's core testimony. Furthermore the tension

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<sup>50</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), p.39.

<sup>51</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p.11.

<sup>52</sup> Tod Linafelt & Timothy Beal, "In the Fray and at Risk," in Linafelt and Beal, *God in the Fray*, p.3.

<sup>53</sup> Brueggemann's use of testimony and trial within a court of law as a metaphor for how Israel speaks of God in the Old Testament will be summarised in ch. 3 of this thesis (pp. 41-42).

between core and counter testimony belongs to the very character and substance of the Old Testament. Brueggemann is critical of conventional Christian niceties that opt for the core testimony of faithful sovereignty and sovereign fidelity whilst choosing to ignore or eliminate the counter testimony of hiddenness, ambiguity, negativity and abusiveness. Though the Christian tradition has tended to live towards core testimony Brueggemann believes that a well-grounded and balanced faith constantly moves back and forth between the two. Such a depiction of God as, at times, dysfunctional would be a considerable challenge for some today, but not for Brueggemann.

Given that this thesis is to explore Brueggemann's understanding of the anger of God it will be necessary first to outline his idea of God more generally. Terence E. Fretheim suggests that understanding Brueggemann's conception of God is "not an easy task given that Brueggemann's theology and understanding are always on the move" and so we proceed with due caution.<sup>54</sup>

### *Sovereignty and Self-Regard*

To risk a generalization, we might say that Brueggemann sees God as the main character of the Old Testament, and all of creation is dependent upon and is affected by the main character's emotional circumstances at any given time. God can be loving, attentive, responsive, gracious, grieved and angry all of which have consequences for creation and

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<sup>54</sup> See Fretheim, "Some Reflections on Brueggemann's God," p.24.

humanity. It is however with the nation of Israel, that we witness this “theo-drama” unfold, with all its implications and intricacies.<sup>55</sup>

Throughout the covenantal drama, Israel is at times the recipient of blessings and fellowship with God, whilst at other times experiencing abandonment and wrath. To be sure, to be on the receiving end of God’s wrath, is to experience pain and exile. It is however Israel’s expression of pain which re-engages God within their covenantal relationship. Israel, Brueggemann suggests, seeks to move beyond the tight unforgiving structure of contractual theology, by urging God to consider a new way forward over and above the previous covenant.<sup>56</sup> As Fretheim highlights, the changes to the relationship between God and Israel is caused particularly by exiled Israel.<sup>57</sup> Israel’s confronting of God is characterised by what Brueggemann describes as their “embrace of pain”:

By embracing of pain is meant the full acknowledge of and experience of pain and the capacity and willingness to make that pain a substantive part of Israel’s faith-conversation with its God.<sup>58</sup>

From Israel’s side, the articulation of pain is found, particularly within Lamentations, the psalms of lament and the book of Job.

In Brueggemann’s view God creates an alternate community with two particular characteristics: (1) freedom, where God’s acts are liberated from any conventional social

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<sup>55</sup> Brueggemann suggests that a “dramatic mode for doing theology suggests that we deal with action that is plotted into scenes in which there is plot development, played by characters in whom development also occurs.” For more detail on the theo-drama and dramatic language within the Old Testament see, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory Volume 1-5* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988) and Walter Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation: the Bible and Post Modern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>56</sup> Chapter six of this thesis will explore contractual theology in more detail.

<sup>57</sup> Fretheim, “Some Reflections on Brueggemann’s God,” in *God in the Fray*, p.28.

<sup>58</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “A Shape for Old Testament Theology II: Embrace of Pain,” in Patrick D. Miller ed. *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme and Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p.25.

perception, unlike the gods of Egypt; and (2) social justice, which is encapsulated in the politics of human justice.<sup>59</sup> Yahweh will not be boxed or made to conform to any worldly power or monarchy. Furthermore, righteousness and justice for all is an inescapable characteristic of this alternative community. One created by God cannot seek to exist autonomously from God; one's own life is in the hands of the one who created life. Brueggemann suggests that: "being birthed into Yahweh's creation brings the human person under the rule of the Sovereign who creates."<sup>60</sup> Failed obedience results in the anger of God, which is not only unsettling for Israel but also for the other nations, including the super-powers of the day, and for all of creation. God will not be mocked, and Brueggemann believes that this divine anguished zeal is a reflection of divine justice despite it being at odds with the ways of the world.<sup>61</sup> Here is one aspect of Brueggemann's God, a God who acts with sovereignty and punishes out of self-regard. Yahweh's sovereignty is marked by justice and any compromise to this is responded to with divine affront, wrath and punishment. Within the texts of the Old Testament, Yahweh, moved by self-regard is able and justified in terminating the relationship with Israel. God's self-regard, articulated in divine holiness and glory, allows for acts of termination with the public acts of destruction in 722 and 587 BCE evidence of such divine judgment.

### *The Pathos and Fidelity of God*

For Brueggemann though, that is not the end of the drama. In fact, Israel's testimony points to another aspect of God's character that goes beyond sovereignty and self-regard: a divine fidelity to Israel, characterised by pathos. Brueggemann has found within Israel's testimony

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<sup>59</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, p.16.

<sup>60</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.456.

<sup>61</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), p.75.

something “odd and compelling” about the character of God: that the act of termination and abandonment is only for a time.

For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you, says the Lord your Redeemer (Isa. 54:7-8).<sup>62</sup>

Yahweh seeks to move beyond self-regard and remain committed to Israel. As a result, Israel’s rhetoric transforms the idea of covenant into a practice of divine pathos and passion. Therefore, Yahweh is displayed as one who is prepared to suffer with and suffer for Israel, and remain committed to Israel at the expense of Yahweh’s own self. Furthermore, God’s refusal to terminate the relationship with Israel is not the result of peer pressure from Israel, other nations or from pantheon harassment, but rather from Yahweh’s own sense of passion for Israel. Brueggemann goes on to say:

Yahweh refused to act in self-regard, because Yahweh found in Yahweh’s own internal life a depth of devotion to the well-being of Israel that was not, until that moment of crisis, available to Yahweh.<sup>63</sup>

As a result, Brueggemann’s God is prepared to enter into the fray and embrace pain seeking to reconcile with Israel. These aspects of God’s character resulted in Israel using metaphors that refer to the deepest of bonding relationships and fidelity, e.g., husband-wife and parent-child. Though having spoken and acted out of rejection, hurt and anger, God the judge-king also acts as a spouse/parent who, though hurt and suffering, offers to be reconciled. In the end, it is pathos that preserves the covenant after God’s sovereignty has been affronted.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Scripture quotations in this thesis will be from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

<sup>63</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.299.

<sup>64</sup> On the pathos of God see, especially Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp.296-305, and cf. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets Volume 2* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975), pp.1-11, and more recently John Saunders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

### *Pathos and Incarnation*

Brueggemann also explores whether Israel's testimony of divine pathos finds a new level of expression in the life of Jesus. Though careful to acknowledge that such an idea is a monumental leap for the Old Testament concept of divine pathos, he nonetheless states a case. Brueggemann's point is to highlight that the radical theology of the incarnation in the New Testament is already foreshadowed in the radical fidelity of Yahweh in the Old Testament. Brueggemann believes that the New Testament and the Christian tradition have moved beyond the Old Testament's testimony of divine pathos to affirm a complete identification of divine power and love. For Brueggemann there is no clearer identification of divine power and love than in the crucifixion of Jesus:

One specific ground for such a complete identification is found in the truth of the crucifixion of Jesus, wherein God's own life embraces the abandonment of broken covenant. In this theological claim Christian theology has extended the hints about God already voiced in the most pathos-driven witnesses of the Old Testament.<sup>65</sup>

The crucified God completely risks sovereignty for the sake of solidarity. This thesis will reveal, through Brueggemann's writings, that the pathos of God is an intricate part of Israel's testimony of Yahweh. Brueggemann calls for the Christian tradition to also embrace the pathos of God in light of the Easter story, while lamenting a contemporary propensity to view Easter as an easy victory. Easter, Brueggemann says, must "look full in the face at Friday and its terrible truth."<sup>66</sup> A Friday-denying triumphalism ignores the horror of the crucified God who risks all to be reconciled with the world.

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<sup>65</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.311. Also for further reading on the "cruciform" discernment of the character of God see Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>66</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.312.

In short, it is my belief that Brueggemann urges us to wrestle with the personhood of God and the topic of divine anger, particularly in the moments of sovereign self-regard, bearing in mind that this self-regard is ultimately balanced with fidelity and solidarity. This thesis will now begin to explore Brueggemann's theology of divine anger, in dialogue with a number of key biblical texts.

## 2. BRUEGGEMANN ON THE REALISM OF DIVINE ANGER IN JEREMIAH 6:9-15

For Brueggemann the reality of the anger of God cannot be denied, ignored or reduced to a superficial interpretation that fails to engage with the importance of this issue. Brueggemann confronts his audience with the idea that God is genuinely offended by our distorted ways of living and that the prophets spoke of the anger of God without apology.<sup>67</sup> One only needs to be slightly aware of the writings of Brueggemann to know that the anger of God is embraced for all its intensity, violence and redemption whilst also lamenting a reductionist view of divine wrath:

God's anger is conventionally reduced to mechanistic retributive principles of punishment, as though certain acts automatically produce reactions of punishment. What is missing in such a picture of reductionism is that this is our God, our progenitor, our hoper (sic) who is affronted. The very God who gives us unspeakable gifts is the affronted party. Because of such gifts abused, prophetic rage bespeaks the hurt that our waywardness on Earth evokes in heaven.<sup>68</sup>

Brueggemann asserts that the anger of God is not just a capricious anthropomorphic reaction, but rather, that the rebellion of humanity causes the very giver of life, the creator of all things, to be angry. It is the creator who has become disappointed and affronted with creation. Brueggemann highlights the seriousness of divine indignation and directly challenges the contemporary temptation of a reduced interpretation of the anger of God. Brueggemann's caution against a reductionist view of divine anger, particularly within the Old Testament, is well justified, as this thesis will discover. In this chapter we will explore Brueggemann's understanding of the realism of divine anger through his insights into Jer. 6:9-15. The following exegesis will demonstrate Brueggemann's belief in the reality of divine anger, which allows no room for reductionism or a simplistic ignoring of the anger of God.

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<sup>67</sup> Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, p.19.

<sup>68</sup> Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, pp. 19-20. See also Barton who proposes that: "we cannot have it both ways: if we want to believe in a God who is emotionally engaged, then we have to accept that this will mean a God who knows anger and vengeance as well as forgiveness and love." Barton, "The Dark Side of God in the Old Testament", in Dell ed. *Ethical and Unethical in the Old Testament*, p.126.

The prophetic calling of Jeremiah covered a decisive time in Judah's history. As Meyer puts it somewhat poetically, if the days of David and Solomon were compared to spring and summer in the history of the kingdom of Israel, it was late autumn when Jeremiah began to prophesy.<sup>69</sup> Although Isaiah suggested that Judah would withstand her attackers, Jeremiah, along with Micah, came to prophesy doom for Jerusalem. This ominous warning is attested to in Jer. 1:14: "From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land." Judah had not learnt the lessons of its northern counterpart Israel and had fallen into idolatry and social injustice. According to Jeremiah, the gravity of the situation was not being faced.

The anger of God, referred to 58 times in the book of Jeremiah, is provoked, in the main, by idolatry and injustice. The anger of God is referred to more times in the book of Jeremiah than in any other book of the Old Testament.<sup>70</sup> Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel informs us that the threats of destruction are found so frequently that Jeremiah is often referred as the "prophet of wrath."<sup>71</sup> Much is made of Judah's complacency in provoking God's anger. After the death of Josiah in 625BCE, Judah once again began to worship other gods led by Josiah's son Jehoiakim. This rise in worship of false deities provoked God to anger (Jer. 7:20, 8:19). Judah's idol worship was expressed in many ways, as Jeremiah details in his prophetic utterances. They set up false idols in the temple and sacrificed their children in cultic services:<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> F. B. Meyer, *Jeremiah: Priest and Prophet* (London: Lakeland, 1972), p.7.

<sup>70</sup> Of the 58 times divine anger is mentioned within the book of Jeremiah the Hebrew words: 'aph x 23 (translated as anger but its original meaning referred to nostril or nose); chemah x15 (heat, hot displeasure) and ka'ac x10 (to be provoked to anger) are used. Isaiah (52 times) and Ezekiel (57) also mention divine wrath nearly as many times. Within the rest of the Old Testament the anger of God is referred to in the following: Pentateuch (51), Former Prophets (79), Minor Prophets (41) and Wisdom Literature (105).

<sup>71</sup> Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets Volume 1* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), p.106.

<sup>72</sup> For details on the gods and goddesses of Canaan and their worship practices, including details of Israel's idolatry caused by the worship of Canaanite deities see John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) and idem., *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For a book that details the background of cultic

The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes declares the Lord. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and defiled it. They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire-something I did not command nor did it enter my mind (Jer. 7:30-31).

They also consulted the constellations: “They will be exposed to the sun and the moon and all the stars of the heavens, which they have followed and consulted and worshipped” (Jer. 8:2a).

For the most part Jeremiah’s prophetic utterances announce the wrath of God due to Judah’s idolatry and rebellion. Jeremiah’s warning to Judah is blunt: should Judah fail to heed this command it would experience God’s wrath breaking out and burning like fire (Jer. 21:12). Unfortunately, Judah failed to heed this warning and failed to see any wrong in their behaviour. Their protest of innocence together with their refusal to accept as true that God’s wrath was mounting, was a common belief: “you say, “I am innocent, he is not angry with me.”” But I will pass judgment on you because you say, “I have not sinned”” (Jer. 2:35). This is further exacerbated by the prophets and priests of Yahweh who preached peace rather than divine anger and by doing so covered over a multitude of sins (Jer. 8:10-11). Such an arrogant response to the anger of God sealed their fate, and the Babylonian empire led by Nebuchadnezzar became an instrument of divine wrath.

We can broadly summarize the likely historical details as follows. The Babylonian conquest came in three phases: in 598-597BCE Judah was first besieged by Nebuchadnezzar’s forces after Jehoiakim rebelled against being a vassal of the Babylonian empire. In 597BCE the Babylonian army marched into Jerusalem and exiled the king, the queen mother, the high

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child sacrifice in the ancient Near East and Old Testament see Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

officials and many of the leading citizens (Jer. 29:2). Just prior to this occurrence Jehoiakim died and his eighteen-year-old son Jehoiachin was placed upon the throne and reigned for only three months before he was exiled. Jehoiachin's uncle, Hezekiah, was installed as ruler and would become the last king of Judah.

The second phase of the conquest occurred in 587BCE when a large portion of the Judean population was exiled. This occurred after Judah continued to agitate the Babylonian empire even after its show of strength in 597BCE. This self-destructive component was juxtaposed with yet another false prophecy of peace by the exiled prophets from Judah, particularly Hananiah, predicting an early release from captivity (Jer. 28:1-4), something that Jeremiah strongly refuted: "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Build houses and settle down'" (Jer. 29:4-5a). By 587BCE the seditious nature of Judah's plans resulted in Nebuchadnezzar showing no mercy, and Jerusalem was put to the torch and the temple destroyed leaving the city uninhabitable (2 Kgs 25:8-12; Jer. 52:12-16).

A third deportation is reported to have taken place around 582BCE (Jer. 52:30). J. A. Thompson suggests that such a deportation may have been a reprisal for the assassination of Gedaliah who Nebuchadnezzar had placed in Judah as governor.<sup>73</sup> Many Judeans fled to Egypt before this deportation, because they feared the Babylonian army, and the prophet Jeremiah was one of these although it was against his will.

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<sup>73</sup> J.A.Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah: New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), p.27.

For Jeremiah these three events were more than just a political battle involving powerful empires vying for supremacy. These events were seen, purely and simply as the manifestation of the anger of God finally being executed on an idolatrous, rebellious and unjust nation, who had had their opportunities to repent, but had refused to do so. Yahweh, who had freed them from captivity, provided for them in the desert and brought them successfully into the land of Canaan, was burning hot with anger (Jer. 2; 7:20-29; 32:16-35). This is supported by Bernhard W. Anderson who believes, in light of the Mosaic covenant, that the catastrophe of the exile did not occur because of superior political power but instead due to people misusing their God-given covenant freedom.<sup>74</sup> In essence, the Mosaic covenant had long been compromised and the realisation of God's wrath would begin the process of restoration for God's people as promised by Jeremiah.<sup>75</sup>

Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the Babylonian invasion articulates what Brueggemann refers to as the connection between theological claim and public reality.<sup>76</sup> Such daring prophetic imagination serves to display God's sovereignty within the world, whereby Israel is punished for breaking the covenant, and Babylon becomes a vessel for the divine judgment. Theology and politics are therefore intrinsically related. Brueggemann is also keen to show that Israel's destruction is more than just the expansion of Babylonian imperialism. Rather, it is instigated by God, who having called Israel to live in covenant, now renders the covenant

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<sup>74</sup> Bernhard W. Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p.167.

<sup>75</sup> Jeremiah similarly to other prophets (Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah) believed political circumstances to be the outworking of divine providence or wrath. James Miller and John Hayes suggests that Jeremiah and others addressed the political situation of their day and sought to persuade compatriots of what they regarded as being the divine course of affairs. James Maxwell Miller & John Haralson Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2006), p.244. For other recent historical works on this period see Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2007), pp.182-199.

<sup>76</sup> Jeremiah first refers to Babylon as the "nation from the north" in 1:13-15. This pattern of alluding to Babylon but not naming them is continued in 3:12, 18; 4:5-9; 6:1, 22-26; 10:22. Jeremiah finally names the king of Babylon as Judah's invader in 20:4. Babylon is referred to in one way or other about 200 times in the book of Jeremiah. Poignantly though once Jeremiah reveals the identity of the nation from the north as being Babylon the name then appears 170 times between chapters 20-52. See F. B. Huey Jr, *Jeremiah—Lamentations: The New American Commentary Volume 16* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), p.191.

nullified. Therefore Jeremiah is confronted with two frightening realities: the sinfulness of Jerusalem in the rejection of the covenant by Jerusalem; the growing threat of ever expanding Babylon. Brueggemann suggests that though these events can be understood both politically and theologically, the biblical literature deliberately focuses on the theological point encapsulated within the judgement of Yahweh.<sup>77</sup> Brueggemann points out that the Babylonian jeopardy was grounded in the reality of God's wrath. Babylon was to be a tool of God's anger against Judah even though its cruelty led to its own fate being similarly sealed.<sup>78</sup>

As a prophet, Jeremiah personally experienced the utterances denoting God's wrath in ways that no other prophet experienced. This is evident in Jeremiah's exclamation, "But I am full of the wrath of the LORD" (Jer. 6:11a). The anger of God was something that was not external for Jeremiah but an inward, intensely emotional sensation that drove him to reveal the future judgment and distressing predictions that Judah would soon experience. Thompson suggests that it is as though Jeremiah found himself united with Yahweh, so that he experienced his wrath, and was unable to restrain his anger.<sup>79</sup> There is much to suggest that Jeremiah not only proclaimed and announced the anger of God, but that he also empathised with it, causing him to become a recluse: "I never sat in the company of revellers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation" (Jer. 15:17). The impact of God's anger and the prophetic utterances that he was called to deliver would have a major impact upon his safety. The book of Jeremiah recounts that he was imprisoned, beaten, thrown into a cistern with the intention of starving him to death, and threatened with execution.

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<sup>77</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p.1. See also, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.76-77.

<sup>78</sup> In chapter 5 of this thesis we will explore in more detail Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon's overstepping of their divine mandate and the consequences.

<sup>79</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p.257.

I have chosen to discuss Jer. 6:9-15 for a number of reasons. Firstly this passage is found within a robust section (4:5-6:30) that depicts God as having reached the limits of divine yearning and compassion by highlighting the reality of divine anger with judgment forthcoming. Also I have found Brueggemann's thoughts on this passage to be helpful in discerning his ideas about the reality of divine anger. Such ideas I believe can be helpful in assisting others in their endeavours to understand the certainty of the wrath of God. Furthermore the doom and judgement of this section is in contrast to the previous section (3:1-4:4) where God is portrayed as a wounded and betrayed spouse who longs for the return of an estranged loved one. Previously (3:12-25) Jeremiah had preached repentance in earnest, which had not taken place, resulting in the prophecy of a swift invasion "from the north" that would bring devastation.<sup>80</sup> The north was a symbol for dark powers and though these passages do not identify the enemy from the north it is generally considered to be a prophecy about the Babylonian army that besieged Judah in 597 and 587BCE.<sup>81</sup> Jer. 6:9-15 is also within the section that many scholars believe comprises of the authentic prophetic oracles of Jeremiah (chs. 1-25). In other words, these chapters can be seen as coming from Jeremiah himself as opposed to other sections which have traditionally been attributed especially to Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, or to the Deuteronomistic editing of the later chapters.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The transition between the two basic types of prophecy in Jeremiah, call to repentance and prediction, have been related to complex redactional theories, e.g., in Christopher Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1989), but these are not the focus of this chapter or thesis.

<sup>81</sup> Brueggemann highlights that the older scholarship identified the enemy from the north as the Scythians based on references from the ancient historian Herodotus. He is however keen to show that to read Jeremiah in light of history misses the point. Instead the book of Jeremiah is an act of poetic imagination that attempts to make the listening community aware of the coming massive assault due to their complacency and sin. They thought they were safe and secure, but they were wrong. See Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), pp.53-54.

<sup>82</sup> Holladay and Bright advocate for the historical Jeremiah being predominantly the source of the tradition, while conversely Carroll focuses on the Deuteronomic editing of the book of Jeremiah. Middle positions, which seem to me more persuasive, can be found in Childs and Leuchter. For a review of scholarship on the book of Jeremiah see Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, pp.7-11 and Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp.342-344. See also

The anger of God is mentioned seven times in Jeremiah prior to 6:9-15 but these are encapsulated with an opportunity for Judah to repent.<sup>83</sup> The anger of God within Jer. 6:9-15 seems to be suggesting that the chance to repent has gone as there is no-one who is prepared to even listen to Jeremiah. As a result the anger of God in this passage reveals for the first time, for Jeremiah and for Judah, that divine wrath is now set in motion and has become tangible and real. For Brueggemann it also serves to portray divine wrath as genuine for Judah in its day.

Jer. 6:9-15 is a dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh where the prophet in verse 9 is privy to the divine announcement that Babylon is to “glean” the remnant of Israel.<sup>84</sup> Although some scholars suggest that Jeremiah is the one to “glean,” most however are agreed that the responsibility is with Babylon.<sup>85</sup> “Gleaning” is not a positive rescue but a statement about the cold-harsh reality of the coming judgment for Judah, and it serves to highlight the comprehensive nature of the destruction. This is in contrast to Jer. 5:10 where the instruction is to “ravish” but not completely destroy. “Gleaning” is arguably more severe than harvesting.<sup>86</sup> The term “remnant of Israel” in v.9 appears problematic given that chapters 1-20 of Jeremiah are often considered to have been composed during a time before the first

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William Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: Heremia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); John Bright, *Jeremiah* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), pp.LV-LXXXV; Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: Old Testament Library* (London: SCM Press, 1986); Mark Leuchter, *Josiah's Reform and Jeremiah's Scroll* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006).

<sup>83</sup> Jer. 2:35; 3:5, 12x2; 4:4, 8 & 26.

<sup>84</sup> There is a suggestion among some scholars that there is a reasonable ground to believe that this passage was once part of a similar dialogue found in 5:1-9. It is possible, some believe, that it was part of a larger text in which a more comprehensive record of the dialogue was preserved. Both dialogues appearing to have the same structure would seem the reason for such a notion, although others do not even mention it. See Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley & Joel F. Drinkard Jr, *Jeremiah 1-25: Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books Publishers, 1991), p.102. See also Leslie Allan who highlights that there is a change in 6:9-15 where all of Judah is now in focus where previously only Jerusalem had been mentioned (6:1-8), see Leslie Allan, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p.84.

<sup>85</sup> For scholars who put forward that Jeremiah is the one who is to do the gleaning see William Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p.213 and Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p.257. For a scholar who is courageous enough to admit that he is unsure who is meant to do the gleaning despite a slight leaning towards Jeremiah see Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (London: SCM Press, 1986), p.195.

<sup>86</sup> Jack Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: The Anchor Bible Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), p.424.

Babylonian conquest of Judah in 597BCE. It is the opinion of Lundbom that it refers to what remains after the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom Israel and its campaign against Judah two decades later led by King Sennacherib.<sup>87</sup> Thompson however takes a less literal approach by suggesting that it may be understood in a metaphorical sense given that Jeremiah's prophetic ministry was a kind of grape harvesting, or gleaning of the vine of Israel.<sup>88</sup>

Verse 10 reveals the hopelessness experienced by Jeremiah, who in his reply, makes known his lament, that there is no-one who will listen. Jeremiah's role as a prophet who warns, who reveals impending divine judgment in the hope that people may repent, has been performed and no-one has taken notice. More to the point Jeremiah's prophetic word has been met with abject scorn. So who is left to warn? In this verse we discover the shocking truth that the answer is no-one and this realisation leads to Jeremiah's lament. The problem, Brueggemann suggests, is that the people are incapable of hearing. The NIV's rendering is that "their ears are closed."<sup>89</sup> Brueggemann however, unlike others, is not prepared to simply leave it there, for he goes on to say that Israel's sin is due to them becoming unresponsive as covenant

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<sup>87</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p.424.

<sup>88</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p.257.

<sup>89</sup> The KJV translates the Hebrew literally by rendering the same sentence as: "their ear is uncircumcised." The Hebrew word used in verse 10 is 'arel which is the word primarily used in the Old Testament to represent being uncircumcised (although 'orla, which literally refers to foreskin, is sometimes used also). Though it is used at times to speak of men who are literally uncircumcised it also is used figuratively to refer to someone, or indeed Israel, who are unclean or sinful. In Deut. 10:16 and Jer 4:4 Israel is urged to remove the "foreskin" ('orla) of their hearts in order to be acceptable to God. In 6:10 it serves to highlight that all the divine warnings spoken through Jeremiah have been in vain due to the hardened heart of Israel and their propensity to value evil of that which is holy. See R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah & Lamentations: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p.81 and also A. Hickcox, "Uncircumcised" in Geoffrey W. Bromiley general editor, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Volume Four Q-Z* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), p.944. The imagery of uncircumcised ears is only found elsewhere in Acts 7:51. Israel's deafness is not only alluded to in Jeremiah but it is also a metaphor for Isaiah (Isa. 6:10, 42:18, 43:8). It is usually part of the motif that Israel is not only deaf but also blind. The metaphors speak of Israel's heart being hardened due to a lack of repentance resulting in God's wrath and judgment being set in motion. See John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33: Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), p.75.

partners.<sup>90</sup> The Hebrew suggests that their ears are uncircumcised and, due to their sinfulness, the warnings of Jeremiah are not being heard and thus are not penetrating the hearts and minds of the people of Israel.<sup>91</sup>

As a result, verse 11 reveals that the wrath of God has filled Jeremiah to overflowing and he is unable to contain himself any longer. God's response is to command Jeremiah to release the pent up wrath and to hold it in no longer. We should note that the anger experienced by Jeremiah has its origins in God, so it is divine wrath flowing through Jeremiah and not the presence of human anger. Brueggemann emphasises this<sup>92</sup> and indeed, most scholars are agreed that Jeremiah's anger was the experience of divine anger and not his own.<sup>93</sup> As a result, divine wrath is to be released and no-one, not even children or the elderly, are excluded from the anger that burns within God.<sup>94</sup>

Verses 12-15 appear in variant form in 8:10-12, with both speaking of what will be lost due to divine judgement and the arrogance of Judah. Verses 12-15 describe how the anger of God will be manifested amongst Judah for their failure to heed the warnings God and for their arrogance in believing that judgment would never come. Verse 12 expands upon the previous verse's judgment to include possessions also (houses, fields and wives, cf. 8:10: wives,

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<sup>90</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming: A Commentary on Jeremiah*, p.71.

<sup>91</sup> See Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p.195 and Craigie, Kelley, Drinkard Jr, *Jeremiah 1-25*, p.103.

<sup>92</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.72

<sup>93</sup> See Craigie, Kelley, Drinkard Jr, *Jeremiah 1-25*, p.103. Lundbom suggests that it is divine wrath that Jeremiah is experiencing but he is weary and overflowing with divine wrath because he has not been preaching it. He goes on to say that whether divine or human one can only internalise anger for so long. Jeremiah can no longer hold back the anger of God; see Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p.425.

<sup>94</sup> Douglas Rawlinson Jones suggests that such descriptions are not callous remarks (cf. Ezek. 9:5-6), but rather they speak of the brutal reality of such indiscriminate judgments. Today we shrink back from attributing such judgments to God and seek more refined, less theologically challenging answers to these realities. See Douglas Rawlinson Jones, *Jeremiah: The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), p.135.

fields).<sup>95</sup> Jeremiah may well have Deut. 28:30 in mind where Israel was forewarned that the curses for disobedience would include losing the things they owned and loved. The image of God's hand stretched out in anger against Judah reveals that God is ready to destroy and no longer willing to relent.

Verse 13 reiterates verse 11 and speaks of the totality of God's anger and judgement. Regardless of social standing all are guilty, including the prophets and the priests who should be caring for God's community but instead they fallaciously prophesy and abuse their positions in ungodly ways.<sup>96</sup> Jeremiah was at great odds with the other prophets of his time. For the prophets of Yahweh, who cried, "peace, peace," when divine wrath and destruction was at hand, Jeremiah had only contempt and was uncompromising in his condemnation.<sup>97</sup> The prophets and priests acted deceitfully through lies and fraud, and Holladay suggests that this is a description of the destructive activity of the religious leadership within Judah at the time.<sup>98</sup> Verse 14 reveals the common message from these false prophets was in spite of the seriousness of Judah's sinfulness and the mounting anger of God: they preach that all is well. Even though the prophets and priests preach, "peace, peace," the wicked cannot expect to enjoy such peaceful times. The people of Judah have been given false hope by priests and prophets, who preached to appease the community with popular reassurances rather than

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<sup>95</sup> Lundbom suggests that in antiquity wives were deemed personal property in the tenth commandment (Exod. 20:17 & Deut. 5:21). As a result wives were often seen as spoils of war; see Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p.426. Carroll states that such seizures and sexual exploitation of women are the normal features of military invasions, a practice that continues today no doubt, see Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p.198.

<sup>96</sup> "Among the prophets of Samaria I saw this repulsive thing: They prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible. They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers so that no-one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah." (Jer. 23:13-14).

<sup>97</sup> For other mentioned condemnation of the prophets of Yahweh in the book of Jer. see: 2:8; 4:9; 5:30-31; 6:13-15; 8:10-12; 14:13-15; 18:18-23; 26:8, 11, 16 & 27-28. Cf. Isaiah 28:7-13, Ezekiel 13 & Micah 3:5-12.

<sup>98</sup> Holladay, *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah Chapters 1-25*, p.218.

preach the unpopular message of God's impending judgement.<sup>99</sup> It may well be the case that these priests and prophets are deriving their reassurances from religious foundations within the Davidic covenant in which God promised to "build a house" for David, providing eternal legitimacy for his dynasty's claim to the throne (2 Samuel 7).<sup>100</sup> Jeremiah on the other hand, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, attempts to refocus the people of Judah on the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant (cf. Jeremiah 11).<sup>101</sup> In the end, verse 15 is devastating in its announcement of judgement, and later in the book it is made clear in the image of the signet ring, this applies also to the Davidic king (Jer. 22:24). Judah is now sure to learn that the anger of God is real and something that cannot be simply dismissed.

When assessing this passage, Brueggemann willingly admits that for some, the reality of the anger of God is not an easy theology. Brueggemann however reminds his readers that the reality of divine wrath has its theological foundation in the metaphor of the betrayed father and abandoned husband.<sup>102</sup> Brueggemann challenges us with his interpretation of the anger of God, which goes beyond retributive wrath, by likening the experience of divine hurt to that of a parent's pain, when after years of love and provision the child rebelliously rejects parental authority and counsel.<sup>103</sup> Brueggemann highlights this theme elsewhere in Jeremiah:

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<sup>99</sup> Lundbom suggests that the Hebrew word used for wound in verse 14 is *sheber*. This word refers to a person who is badly injured or with a broken limb. It is a reference to a trifling injury. In light of this the priests and prophets are nothing more than worthless surgeons who refuse to examine properly the wounds of the people. Likewise their treatment is void of addressing the issue. See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p.430.

<sup>100</sup> The Davidic covenant within 2 Samuel 7 is God's great promise to David, and although the term covenant is not used in this chapter it is elsewhere (2 Samuel 23:5; Psalm 89:3, 28, 34, 39 & cf. Psalm 132:11-12). A. A. Anderson suggests that it has rightly been referred to as the ideological summit of Deuteronomistic history and the matrix of messianic expectations (cf. Hebrews 1:5). In essence the covenant authenticates the kingship of the Davidic dynasty. See A.A. Anderson, *2 Samuel: Word biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1989), pp.109-128.

<sup>101</sup> Be that as it may, the Davidic covenant still warns of wrath and punishment for any wrongdoing, however it is stated that this will never negate God's unconditional love for the Davidic dynasty. See, Anderson, *2 Samuel*, p.121.

<sup>102</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.72.

<sup>103</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp.244-248 & 298-302.

I thought to myself, "I would love to treat you as my own children!" I wanted nothing more than to give you this beautiful land--the finest possession in the world. I looked forward to your calling me "Father," and I wanted you never to turn from me. (Jer.3:19).

"Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him," declares the LORD. (Jer. 31:20).

For Brueggemann, the metaphor of God as a distressed parent who cannot turn loose a recalcitrant child displays the tragic reality of divine pathos. Kathleen O'Conner empathises with Brueggemann by pointing to Jeremiah ch. 9 for evidence of a crushed God who weeps: "Oh that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people" (Jer. 9:1).<sup>104</sup> This powerful image hardly allows for a reductionist view that might, for example, see divine wrath arising simply from the breaking of a contractual obligation. It also serves as a powerful counter-argument against those who view divine anger as being characteristic of a savage, cruel and abusing God.<sup>105</sup>

So while Brueggemann attests to the reality of divine wrath, he is also keen to show that it is a secondary emotion undergirded by the primary emotion of "wistful sadness" (Jer. 3:12, 14,

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<sup>104</sup> Kathleen O'Connor, "Tears of God and Divine Character in Jeremiah 2-9," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, Tod Linafelt & Timothy K. Beal eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p.180. See also Lee Roy Martin's study on the book of Judges, where he makes an interesting point about the conflict between divine anger and divine compassion. He suggests that "as soon as the Lord chooses to enter into the covenant, he submits to a position of personal risk". See Lee Roy Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God: A Pentecostal Reading of the Book of Judges* (Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2008), p.219.

<sup>105</sup> Three such authors come to mind: Carl Gustav Jung, Robert Charles Zaehner and David Blumenthal. Jung proposed that one cannot discard the dark side of God and suggested that "God is not only to be loved but also to be feared. He fills us with evil as well as good." For Jung the love and the anger of God were diametrically opposed and posed a split in the very nature of God that could not be reconciled. In other words God has a malevolent side (p.164). R. C. Zaehner proposed that God is a terrible God who maims and kills those he claims to love; he even goes as far as to suggest that those he loves rejoice to be killed at such a hand (p.242). David Blumenthal provocatively suggests: "We must begin, under the seal of truth, by admitting that Scripture does indeed portray God as an abusing person; that God, as agent in our sacred texts, does indeed act abusively; that God, as described in the Bible, acts like an abusing male: husband, father and lord" (p.242). Blumenthal argues that the Old Testament texts speak of a God who is sadistic and full of revenge whilst the New Testament speaks of God who cruelly remains passive as his own son is whipped and crucified. See Carl Gustav Jung, *Answer to Job* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954); Robert Charles Zaehner, *Our Savage God: The Perverse Use of Eastern Thought* (Glasgow: Collins, 1974) & David Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993).

22; 4:1-2).<sup>106</sup> Therefore Jer. 6:9-15 shows God as being grieved, wounded and yearning for reconciliation, and finally angry at the lack of response and love shown in return.

Brueggemann's following point is well made:

The poet is willing to let God respond fully to God's hurt. While such an outburst may not be congenial to popular theology, it is indeed congruent with the metaphor of hurt turned to vigorous rejection. The God whose outstretched arm saved now outstretches the same to terminate.<sup>107</sup>

In a related discussion, Barton also agrees by proposing that: "contrary to a strong tradition in both Western philosophy and Christian theology, God is capable of suffering." He goes on to suggest that this is a positive picture of God who is seen to be affected by what affects the people "on whom he sets his heart."<sup>108</sup> In linking the suffering of God with the anger of God

Barton suggests the following:

Yahweh in the Hebrew bible is often an offended deity who lashes out in understandable outrage. We might well prefer that, even at the cost of possible personal suffering, than to live under the icy decrees of an Unmoved Mover.<sup>109</sup>

In the end one can say that the harshness of the reality of divine anger arises not from cruelty but from the depths of relational hurt.

In summary, most scholars agree that the major theme of this passage is the reality of the anger of God. It is the release of divine wrath that causes severe devastation and judgment.<sup>110</sup>

In effect, divine wrath is poured out over the whole population of Judah and their covenant

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<sup>106</sup> Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*, p.84

<sup>107</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.72. Also on the pathos of God where divine sorrow and hurt is explored see Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) and John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*.

<sup>108</sup> Barton, "The Dark Side of God in the Old Testament," in Dell (ed), *Ethical and Unethical in the Old Testament: God and Humans in Dialogue*, p.130.

<sup>109</sup> Barton, "The Dark Side of God in the Old Testament," p.131.

<sup>110</sup> In addition to Brueggemann see Holladay, *Jeremiah*, p.217; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, pp.196-197; Craigie, Kelley & Drinkard Jr, *Jeremiah 1-25*, pp.110-112; Clement, *Jeremiah*, p.42-43 and Tremper Longman III, *Jeremiah-Lamentations: New International Bible Commentary* (Peabody: Henderson Publishers, 2008), p.65.

with God is “devastatingly ruined.”<sup>111</sup> The effects of divine wrath are more than just the cruelties of war and though one could interpret verse 11-12, with its description of death and confiscation, as just that,<sup>112</sup> Jeremiah highlights that these realities of war are in fact the judgment of God. The results are gravely serious, but so also was the breach of the covenantal relationship by Jerusalem. It is little wonder that Brueggemann daringly suggests that such infidelity evokes the anger of God and goes nearly “berserk in rage.”<sup>113</sup> God’s reprisal is extreme but so too was Israel’s antipathy with its sin, being not only basic wrongdoing but also a secondary development which saw Judah blatantly refuse to take correction and reconciliation seriously (Jer. 6:10).<sup>114</sup> Jeremiah being filled with divine anger is in contrast to Judah being filled with contempt for God’s covenant and their sinfulness. Jeremiah’s passion for God results in his being filled with divine anger which resonates with his own anger. He laments the fact that no-one is found who is willing to listen and heed the warnings of approaching judgement and the call of divine reconciliation (Jer. 6:10, cf. 5:1). God will not be mocked.

It is again at this point that this thesis challenges Brueggemann’s rhetorical preoccupation given that this chapter has surely displayed the ontology (realism) of divine wrath. Though he may be reluctant to admit it, what Brueggemann has demonstrated is the intersecting of ontology and rhetoric within the anger of God. As discussed in the previous chapter, Brueggemann’s determination to exclude ontology becomes an impossible task, as the

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<sup>111</sup> Holladay suggests that within 6:9-15 the covenant is broken and no-one cares. Jeremiah cannot find anyone who is prepared to listen to him. God’s wrath must come and be poured out on old and young alike. See Holladay, *Jeremiah*, p.217.

<sup>112</sup> See Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p.198.

<sup>113</sup> Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*, p.82.

<sup>114</sup> Clements suggests that when Judah refused to heed Jeremiah’s message the message itself became powerless to avert the coming disaster. It was too late for repentance as events had overtaken the prophetic message. See R. E Clements, *Jeremiah: Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), p.40.

historical destruction of Jerusalem occurs “outside the text.” To be clear, to speak of the realism of divine anger is to speak of the ontology of divine anger. What’s more, far from being a rhetorical force, the terms used for God’s response to sin are terms used for human emotions and behaviour. So what can be said is that within the rhetorical analysis, divine wrath is displayed by God who is personally involved and responds to the human condition. This rhetorical claim surely also discloses an ontological reality.

In conclusion, we might sum up Brueggemann’s view as follows: the anger of God arises not so much from anthropomorphic excess (cruelty or savage abuse) but from a deep ontological relationship captured by the metaphors of fatherhood and motherhood. Indeed, these metaphors provide an important link to the central topic of our next chapter, which is the long-suffering character of God.

### **3. ISRAEL'S CORE TESTIMONY TO GOD WHO IS "SLOW TO ANGER" IN EXODUS 34:6.**

The thesis to this point has shown Brueggemann's acknowledgment of the reality of divine wrath whilst also highlighting that the anger of God is not capricious but motivated by deep hurt and rejection. This chapter will now explore Brueggemann's claim that though the above is true, God's first inclination is to be exceedingly patient and for divine anger to be slow to manifest. In other words, Brueggemann points to a God who is long-suffering, and whose deepest affection is his love for Israel. To support such a claim Brueggemann points to Israel's core testimony regarding Yahweh and uses a "credo of adjectives" located within Exodus 34:6-7 as his axiom:

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation. (NRSV)

So, to begin with, what does Brueggemann mean by "core testimony"? For Brueggemann, any understanding of God within the Old Testament is at best limited. The Old Testament offers only fragments and hints about God, rendering Yahweh as elusive for any pre-conceived categories.<sup>115</sup> As this thesis has already noted, Brueggemann's theology is steeped in rhetorical criticism which explores the details of Israel's speech about God. For Brueggemann, what is real is discerned by hearing and testing what is said, and he provides a framework for this to be understood using the metaphor of testimony within a trial in a court of law. Using this framework, Israel's speech or testimony is heard and tested with the hearers determining, without any other historical data, what is real. Brueggemann uses the

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<sup>115</sup> See Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

understanding of testimony and trial within a court of law as a metaphor for how Israel speaks of God in the Old Testament. He suggests that it is on the basis of a number of testimonies that courts are able to ascertain what is real, enabling a verdict to be reached. In regards to Israel's theology of God, Brueggemann proposes four kinds of testimonies evident within the Old Testament: core testimony; counter testimony; unsolicited testimony; and embodied testimony. Israel's core testimony is filled with strong verbs of action, transformation and praises which highlight their foundational beliefs about God. Brueggemann also claims that the central testimony of Israel made a case that God was competently sovereign and utterly faithful.<sup>116</sup> In this mode of speech Israel also speaks of a God who acts on behalf of Israel for protection and provision. God is a God who creates, makes promises, is generous, delivers, commands and leads. Israel's counter testimony, on the other hand, refers to Israel's lived experience that at times appears contradictory to the expression of their core testimony. Therefore Israel's counter testimony explores God's hiddenness, ambiguity, negativity and instability. Israel's counter testimony is voiced in laments and prayers of pain. Israel's unsolicited testimony is testimony which indirectly speaks of their relationship with God. Finally Israel's embodied testimony describes the mediating presence of God through the Torah, through the kings, prophets, cults and sages.<sup>117</sup>

This chapter will explore one aspect of Israel's core testimony, delineating what it has to say about the anger of God, or more specifically, God's slowness in becoming angry. Though much could be written about other aspects of Israel's core testimony that speak of God as creator, one who is righteous, who makes promises, who delivers, who commands and who leads, this chapter will focus its attention on a "credo of adjectives" found within Exodus

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<sup>116</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.324.

<sup>117</sup> See Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp.117-704.

34:6 (and in several similar passages): “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”

The text is found towards the end of the book of Exodus in the Sinai narratives.<sup>118</sup> This part follows the section detailing the short-lived first covenant made between God and Israel. Brueggemann highlights the anomaly of chs 32-34 which he believes are a “very different kind of narrative” to that of the chapters that precede it in the Sinai narratives (25-31) and to the chapters that follow in this section (35-40).<sup>119</sup> It is Brevard Childs’ view that ch. 34 specifically is one of the most difficult chapters in Exodus to analyse, and this is compounded by the varied opinions of interpretation.<sup>120</sup> In recent years there has been much discussion about the origin and use of the lists of characteristics revealed in Exod. 34:6 spanning from the writings of Robert C. Denton to Thomas Dozeman. In 1963 Denton concluded that this verse, along with vv.7-8, were produced by Israel’s sages and inserted into the Exodus narrative by them in their redaction of the Pentateuch.<sup>121</sup> In 2009 Dozeman suggested that the “motifs of the tablets and the thematic structure of sin and forgiveness indicate that chapters 32-34 have been fashioned into an overarching story.”<sup>122</sup> For Dozeman the issue of authorship is complex given the dislocation in the flow of events which points to a composite

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<sup>118</sup> Brueggemann divides the book of Exodus into three sections: the exodus narratives, the sojourn narratives and the Sinai narratives; see Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), pp.53-66.

<sup>119</sup> Chs 25-31 are a command to build a suitable habitat for the divine presence of God and chs 35-40 are the report of implementation of the command. See Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.64.

<sup>120</sup> Childs goes on to explain that the issue turns on the relation of the Decalogue in Ex. 20 with the laws of ch. 34. Analysing the various viewpoints over the years Childs hold that although the classic Wellhausen theory (the Elohist ethical Decalogue of Exodus 20 and the Deuteronomist ritual Decalogue of Exodus 34) has been generally abandoned, no recent attempt has been able to gather widespread support among scholars. Only in methodology is there agreement that a “solution will have to take account of a development on both the literary and traditio-historical levels.” Childs own position is that Wellhausen’s initial insight seems to be sound. See Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: Old Testament Library* (London: SCM Press, 1974), pp.604-610.

<sup>121</sup> Denton suggests that the Old Testament would “speak with far less appealing tones to modern man if the almost fanatical intensity of much of this literature were not somewhat modified by the calm, rational and generous spirit manifest in the orthodox Wisdom literature, and particularly in Ex. 34:6f.” See Robert C. Denton, “The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f”, *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963), pp.34-51.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas Dozeman, *Exodus: Eerdmans Critical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), p.688.

text of many authors. Dozeman goes on to say that chs 32-34 follow the three-part structure of Deut. 9:7-10:11: (1) the destruction of the tablets (Exod. 24:12-32:35; Deut. 9:7-17); (2) the intercession of Moses (Exodus. 33; Deut. 9:18-29) and (3) the reissuing of new tablets (Exodus 34; Deut. 10:1-11). Dozeman's conclusion is that this comparison indicates that Exodus 32-34 is an expansion and a reinterpretation of Deut. 9:7-10:11.<sup>123</sup> Fretheim however would disagree, arguing that "there is no reason to suppose that it is not at least pre-Deuteronomic."<sup>124</sup> In between Denton and Dozeman there have been a number of scholars who, based upon intensive analysis, have concluded that chs 32-34 are a "complex of fragmentary and conflicting traditions whose present combination makes little attempt to conceal their diversity."<sup>125</sup> John Durham, though somewhat conservative, also holds that the variety of interpretation affirms the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of any detailed allocation of chs 32-34 to the sources that have contributed to its layers. He suggests that one is on far surer ground if these chapters are considered a layered composite, carefully integrated into the larger body of which it is now a part.<sup>126</sup>

Chapters 32-34 constitute a dramatic voicing of one defining aspect of Israel's faith which would lead to God's self-disclosure in 34:6 of promising to cool divine anger. The setting for

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<sup>123</sup> Dozeman, *Exodus*, pp.697-698.

<sup>124</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), p.302.

<sup>125</sup> R.W.L Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), p.12. For example see Noth: "The state of the sources is certainly extremely confused in this complex", Martin Noth, *Exodus: Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), p.243. Terrien describes chapters 32-34 as a "chaotic cluster of material dealing with the breaking of the first set of stones and the granting of the second set," Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, p.158. Gottwald: "The two periodised sets of historicized cultic action (Ex. 19-24, 32-34) are not internally coherent. The resultant hodgepodge strikes the reader as an ill-digested compendium of very imperfectly historicized liturgical speeches and rubrics....Supremely within the body of the early Israelite traditions strikes us as a compromise formation." Norman Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050BCE* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), p.113.

<sup>126</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, p.451. For a view that is somewhat anomalous in interpretation one should explore the views of Douglas Stuart who holds emphatically to Mosaic authorship of Exodus 32-34 and indeed the whole of the book of Exodus. See Douglas, *Exodus*, pp.28-34.

the text is Mount Sinai and it is immediately preceded by the golden calf incident and Moses' mediation (Exodus 32-33). This forms the foundation for the text we are to exegete in this chapter. Even prior to the golden calf episode God's propensity to become angry had already been witnessed by Israel (cf. Exod. 14:11-12). Durham believes that the books of Exodus and Numbers display a self-doubting Israel whose insecurity was transposed onto their relationship with God. The Israelites were fearful people who were constantly anxious about God, their plight, neighbouring people and personal necessities such as food and shelter. What is even more bemusing is that Israel's faith in God did not take long to be challenged after they had been rescued from Egyptian oppression. The evidence that this consistent lack of faith caused God to become angry can be seen in the many incidents that moved God to make plans to destroy the Israelites.

The golden calf misdemeanour in Exodus 32 is probably the most infamous, leading Brueggemann to declare that Yahweh's self-disclosure in Exod. 34:6 is at a crucial moment within Israel and God's relationship.<sup>127</sup> Here God becomes so angry with the Israelites that he commands Moses to leave his presence so that his anger could "burn" against them and ultimately destroy them for their idolatrous behaviour (Exod. 32:10). This passage indicates that God's anger was one of absolute fury that not only burned within but also provoked a response that Brueggemann describes as "destructive rage".<sup>128</sup> It is only due to Moses' intercession that Israel is saved from the full judgement of God's fury in an episode that

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<sup>127</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.215. J. Carl Laney describes it as "one of the spiritual low points in Israel's history", see J. Carl Laney, "God's Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8", in *Bibliotheca Sacra (January-March 2001)*: 36-51 (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001), p.37.

<sup>128</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.215.

possesses all the hall marks of Abraham's earlier effort in Genesis to reason with God's anger.<sup>129</sup>

In Exodus 33 God decides not to journey with the Israelites because, "...you are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you..." (Exod. 33:5b). Upon reading this narrative, one could arrive at the conclusion that God is experiencing concern over his own ability to control his anger, and pursuing this anthropomorphism, we may even ask whether God is able to control his anger when pushed too far. But Brueggemann gives us another possible way forward for understanding divine wrath in the golden calf incident: he juxtaposes God's response to the golden calf episode with the "credo of adjectives" within Exod. 34:6-7.

After the golden calf episode, God's self-disclosure and subsequent covenantal pledge with Israel reveals divine graciousness and a preparedness to be long-suffering and forgiving which serves, within Israel's core testimony at least, to counter any propensity to consider God's anger as malevolent. This concern for how God's anger is to be seen is the basis for Moses' bargaining with God in Exod. 32:11-14 and 33:12-16. In these passages Moses challenges God to not destroy or abandon Israel: "Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth?'" (Exod. 32:12). "Then Moses said to him, 'If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here'" (Exod. 33:15). Moses' risky endeavour of placating God appears to work, with Yahweh declaring that Moses' wish will be adhered to and Israel is saved (Exod. 33:17).

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<sup>129</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, p.429 (cf. Gen. 18:17-33).

Just when one expects that this is where Moses' daring interaction with God ends, he raises the stakes by asking to see Yahweh's glory (Exod.33:18). God refuses this request because one cannot see God's face and live, but instead offers to show Moses "my back" whilst also allowing all divine goodness to pass before Moses (Exod. 33:19-23). The scene is now set for this majestic encounter and Moses is instructed to chisel out two new tablets like the first ones and then present himself on top of Mount Sinai alone (34:1-3). Moses does as he is commanded and arrives on the mountain early in the morning, and as God passes in front of Moses Yahweh proclaims the divine name and characteristics that would become a reminder to Israel of the very nature of God. Far from seeing divine anger as unforgiving, it is God who, in revealing himself to Moses, dissipates any notion of divine anger that is malevolent and arbitrary.

Yahweh's self-disclosure of verse 6 is summed up in the term found in the middle of the verse: slow to anger. The verse is chiasmic in form in that God being slow to anger is at the very heart of divine character:

The LORD, the LORD, the merciful and

gracious God,

*slow to anger*

abounding in steadfast love

and faithfulness.

Brueggemann highlights that in a time where the golden calf incident remains fresh in the minds of all involved, the above adjectives reveal a positive tone. Firstly, God is "merciful"

and the Hebrew word for merciful, *rhm*, is intimately connected to the word “womb.” Thus Brueggemann suggests that God is one who has the quality of a loving mother.<sup>130</sup> Dozeman focuses on this fact also by suggesting that: “the role of the womb in birthing gives rise to a metaphorical use, signifying God’s intimate attachment and strong emotion towards the Israelites.”<sup>131</sup> Phyllis Trible has explored the contours of the journey with the word *rhm* with its semantic movement from the wombs of women to the mercy of God. Trible believes that such a metaphor reveals new dimensions about God whose first response is to be loving and merciful.<sup>132</sup> Laney highlights that God’s compassion is linked to divine faithfulness.<sup>133</sup> This is highlighted elsewhere within the Old Testament: “For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath” (Deut. 4:31). The mercy of God is evident in Yahweh’s readiness to forgive which is also attested to in the Old Testament: “But He, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them” (Ps. 78:38a NRSV). Such a description of God reveals the relational nature of Yahweh whose maternal character is personally attached to Israel through a compassionate disposition. Yahweh is a God who in spite of Israel’s sinfulness, not the least of which is the recent golden calf event, wishes to be merciful rather than hard-hearted. God has a strong familial bond with the people of Israel and is prepared to see beyond human frailty.

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<sup>130</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.216.

<sup>131</sup> Dozeman, *Exodus*, p.738. See also Stuart, who holds that God genuinely cares about humans and holds toward them a tender attitude of concern. J. Gerald Janzen too refers to the “feeling a mother has for children whom she carries and feels in her womb, she carries in her arms and nurses at her breast, and afterward continues in faithful compassion toward them.” Laney suggests *rhm* describes a deep love that is rooted in a natural bond. Stuart, *Exodus*, p.715; J. Gerald Janzen, *Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p.252 and Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8,” p.43.

<sup>132</sup> Trible goes on to propose the following: “the Hebrew noun *rahamim* in its singular form means womb or uterus. In its plural form this concrete meaning expands to the abstractions of compassion, mercy and love. Further, these abstractions occur in a verb, *rhm*, “to show mercy”. Therefore this metaphor suggests the meaning of love as selfless participation in life and yields its treasure in order that wholeness and well-being may happen. See Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), pp.31-59.

<sup>133</sup> Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8,” p.44.

God is also “gracious” which suggests that Yahweh acts gratuitously without thought of compensation.<sup>134</sup> The Hebrew word used to denote gracious in Exod. 34:6 is *hanun* and it usually refers to one who yearns or longs to be favourably inclined. This word appears 13 times in the Old Testament with 11 of those times being in combination with *rahm* (merciful), and all of the occurrences refer to God.<sup>135</sup> Laney refers to the notion that the graciousness of God is to be seen in light of Yahweh’s love and altruism. In other words God has no ulterior motives but is simply loving and gracious.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, because God is gracious the cries of the poor are heard (Exod. 22:27). Furthermore, Laney suggests that *hanun* also has the sense of a stronger person coming to the aid of one who is weaker and has no claim to favourable treatment.<sup>137</sup> Within the immediate context of Exod. 34:6 this understanding is found 6 times (33:12, 13, 13, 16, 17; 34:9).<sup>138</sup> This is further expanded upon by Cournelis Houtman who believes that this adjective brings God’s character clearly into the open in that all of Yahweh’s actions are marked by extraordinary dedication, zeal and love.<sup>139</sup> In light of the golden calf episode God reveals that graciousness still abounds even though Israel committed a dreadful sin. Though Israel deserved God’s wrath and judgment, what this term reveals is that within the divine character is a desire to look favourably upon Israel, even though they did not deserve such graciousness.

The centre or axiom of the verse is that God is “slow to anger.” The King James Version renders “has long nostrils” (*rk ‘ppym*) as “long-suffering”. Brueggemann proposes that

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<sup>134</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 216.

<sup>135</sup> Yamauchi Edwin, “*hannun*”, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr & Bruce K. Waltke (eds) in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), pp.303-304.

<sup>136</sup> Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8”, p.45.

<sup>137</sup> Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8”, p.44. See also Stuart who suggests “gracious” in Exod. 34:6 means that God does things for people who are underserving and goes beyond what might be expected. Stuart, *Exodus*, p.715.

<sup>138</sup> Gerald J. Janzen, *Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p.254.

<sup>139</sup> Cournelis Houtman, *Exodus: Historical Commentary of the Old Testament* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), p.709.

Yahweh's long nose permits divine rage and anger to cool off before Israel is threatened. Brueggemann believes that such a notion might be significant given Yahweh's tendency to "burn hot" against Israel (32:10, 11; cf. v19).<sup>140</sup> The "long nostrils" embody a desire to be faithful regardless of how difficult the relationship becomes, which is highlighted in the other adjectives listed above: "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (NRSV). It doesn't mean that God's anger is to be taken lightly or believed to be non-existent. Janzen puts it succinctly with the following:

This is not to say that God never becomes angry, but the anger is held in check and comes into play only as needed for the sake of moral quality of the covenant community. Especially in the context of the idolatry of the calf, there is a certain wisdom in giving this reassurance up front.<sup>141</sup>

God is "steadfast in love," which is to say, faithful and loyal. Stuart reveals that a thorough study of the Hebrew word *hesed*, translated as "loyal" or "steadfast love," demonstrates that it connotes a long-term, reliable loyalty.<sup>142</sup> Though the Israelites are fickle and unreliable, God is nothing of the sort and this divine promise of steadfast love towards them displays Yahweh's true self. Katherine Sakenfeld suggests that fidelity in love is unyielding in nature. Sakenfeld suggests that *hesed* is so great in faithfulness that God is willing to forgive a breach of the relationship.<sup>143</sup> Sakenfeld goes on to say: "The greatness of his *hesed* consists of his refusal, even in the face of rejection, to give up on his people."<sup>144</sup> Gordon Clark agrees and includes the idea that *hesed* reveals God's propensity to go the extra mile which is born

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<sup>140</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.217. See Janzen who puts forward that God's anger "does not burn on a short fuse." Janzen, *Exodus*, p.255. See also Dozeman who suggests: "Yahweh will not act immediately and automatically with emotional rage of an offended lover, often indicated in Hebrew as hot breath, especially through one's nostrils, as in the case of divine response to the golden calf." Dozeman, *Exodus*, p.737.

<sup>141</sup> Janzen, *Exodus*, p.255.

<sup>142</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, p.716.

<sup>143</sup> Karen Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), p.119.

<sup>144</sup> Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, p.120. See also Karen Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action: Loyalty in Biblical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p.98 where Sakenfeld puts forward that, "God's loyalty is indeed offered in support of the faithful, but that loyalty so abounds that those who have fallen away can yet dare to hope that they will not be cast away from God's presence."

out divine zeal for the Israelites: “Yahweh’s tenacious commitment to Israel even in the face of their blatant and persistent rebellion demonstrates that *hesed* is an enduring quality of God.”<sup>145</sup> God is also “faithful,” and “true” which together with *hesed*, reveals that Yahweh is utterly trustworthy and reliable.<sup>146</sup> Brueggemann, Moberly and Laney all point to overlapping meanings of *hesed* and *emeth*.<sup>147</sup>

We find here, in effect a new covenant within which God promises to be slow to anger in his commitment to Israel. Brueggemann puts forward the following:

In a characteristic *non sequitur*, as Yahweh “passed before him” (Exod. 34:6), nothing is said about Moses seeing Yahweh, either front or back. Instead, 34:6-7 makes an announcement about the character of Yahweh, out of which comes Yahweh’s resolve to continue the life of Israel by means of a new covenant arrangement (34:10). Thus vv. 6-7 are a self-disclosure on the part of Yahweh, which provides the grounds for the continued life of Israel, after the unparalleled affront to Yahweh in the golden calf.<sup>148</sup>

Brueggemann views the remaking of the covenant as the beginning of the drama of faith that would be a long-term pattern in the Old Testament. This drama of faith would witness God’s covenant with Israel repeatedly broken and remade: broken in recalcitrance on the part of Israel; and remade due to God’s compassion and patience. Thus Brueggemann states chs 32-34 are a template for the life of Israel with God and it is only so because God is willing to be slow to anger.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Gordon R. Clark, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p.267.

<sup>146</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.217.

<sup>147</sup> R.W.L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, p.87; Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8,” p.47.

<sup>148</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.216.

<sup>149</sup> See Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.65. See also Dozeman who also highlights that the revelation of divine mercy in Exod. 34:6 is followed by the announcement of the covenant. Dozeman, *Exodus*, p.741.

Brueggemann highlights the importance of this “creed” throughout Israel’s history. The proclamation of divine patience in these verses became a classic expression that was frequently recalled elsewhere in the Old Testament – eight times in all.<sup>150</sup> In other words Exod. 34:6 became a major part of Israel’s core testimony. Moreover throughout Israel’s history they were at times propelled to remind themselves, and indeed God, of Yahweh’s own self-disclosure.<sup>151</sup> Laney believes that the biblical writers unmistakably regarded Exod. 34:6-7 as a foundational proclamation about God,<sup>152</sup> and Carol Meyers similarly proposes that it is likely to have served as a creedal statement even before the time of the exile.<sup>153</sup> For Brueggemann this text appears at a point where the entire future of Israel appears to pivot. This thesis will now briefly explore four uses of the creed in order to illustrate its significance.

In one of its “hymns of praise,” Israel speaks of God in the third person as the one who Israel believes to be utterly reliable and life-giving:<sup>154</sup> “The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made” (Ps. 145:8 NRSV). As Brueggemann suggests, in this poetic doxology the fidelity of God is not just for Israel but for creation.<sup>155</sup> This speaks of God

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<sup>150</sup> Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah. 1:3. Some scholars suggest echoes of this self-revelation also appear in Deut. 5:9-10; 1 Kgs. 3:6; Lam. 3:32 and Dan. 9:4.

<sup>151</sup> See Durham, *Exodus*, pp.453-454 and Brevard Childs, *Exodus*, p.612.

<sup>152</sup> Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6-8,” p.36. Laney also goes on to express his bemusement that Ex.34:6-7 has received so little attention from among systematic theologians naming such conservative evangelical scholars such as Millard Erickson and Wayne Grudem as two of the offenders. Such a thing appears strange to him given the importance of these verses which is evidenced by the fact that they are repeated many times in the Old Testament. See also Moberly who suggests that it is curious that Exodus 32-34 have been comparatively neglected. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, p.11.

<sup>153</sup> Carol Meyers, *Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.264. Meyers also puts forward that in the rabbinic period, if not before, they were incorporated into Jewish liturgy, where their prominence in penitential prayers suggests a belief that punishment for sin might be tempered by genuine contrition.

<sup>154</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.218.

<sup>155</sup> Including all of creation radically reframes this creed in more Priestly terms as opposed to Deuteronomistic. Brueggemann, in his point, however appears totally unconcerned by this.

goodness and generosity and it makes an unqualified affirmation of exuberant trust.<sup>156</sup> For Brueggemann, Psalm 145 is nestled in what he calls the psalms of “orientation” enjoying a “serene location” of Israel’s life. Lacking the tension of laments, the psalms of orientation promote a sense of orderliness, goodness and reliability of life whilst also affirming divine providential care.<sup>157</sup>

By contrast, in a “prayer of complaint,” Israel addresses God directly in the second person and reminds Yahweh that there is an expectation that God will be gracious, faithful and slow to anger: “For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you...But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding I steadfast love and faithfulness...” (Ps. 86:5, 15 NRSV). Brueggemann highlights that the credo is used here for motivational purposes designed to move God into action.<sup>158</sup> This psalm is a prayer petitioning God to come to the rescue of one who is experiencing a fierce onslaught from a hostile world. Verse 15 echoes Exod. 34:6-7 in that it appeals to God’s altruistic character to save him. Brueggemann suggests:

Against the description of hostility in the world is juxtaposed the character of God, who is in every way unlike those insolent ones who “seek my life”. God does not seek my life but instead guarantees it. On the basis of that creed redefined and reasserted, there comes a powerful petition asking God to do what God’s own character requires.<sup>159</sup>

In this psalm God is reminded of who God is meant to be. Yahweh is reminded of Yahweh’s own self-disclosure of being slow to anger. Israel expects God to actually be long-suffering in the face of hostilities. As Brueggemann puts it:

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<sup>156</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.218.

<sup>157</sup> See Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp.10-11.

<sup>158</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.219.

<sup>159</sup> Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, p.48.

The prayer proceeds as if the disclosure of Exodus 34:6-7a were an agreed-upon baseline that mutually accepted by Yahweh and Israel, but from which Yahweh has departed and to which Yahweh now needs urgently to return.<sup>160</sup>

Thirdly, there is the daring appeal made by Moses found in Numbers 14. Here God is provoked by Israel due to their endless complaints about their treatment at the hand of Yahweh. It appears in this chapter that God is at “wits end” and weary, not to mention angry, at Israel’s constant stubbornness. God confides in Moses of a desire to destroy Israel and start over with only Moses (v.12). At this point Moses begins his daring appeal by attempting to persuade God to “not to act in rage.”<sup>161</sup> Brueggemann suggests two ways in which Moses attempts to calm God: first of all, Moses makes an appeal to God’s pride, shaming Yahweh in the eyes of the Egyptians and in the eyes of the inhabitants of Canaan (vv.13-16); secondly, Moses makes an appeal to God’s compassion and mercy and asks that Israel be forgiven, to which the basis of this appeal is a direct and complete quotation of Exod. 34:6-7. In other words, not unlike Psalm 86, Moses daringly proposes that God should act in accordance with the divine self-disclosure at the centre of which is the commitment to be slow to anger. Through daring, Moses’ appeal persuaded God to return to the “baseline of the relationship” (v. 20).<sup>162</sup>

Lastly and paradoxically, Brueggemann shows how Israel must struggle with God’s readiness to be slow to anger towards their enemies, particularly Nineveh. In the book of Jonah, Jonah is sent to Nineveh to preach judgment which results in the city repenting of their sins. God responds by being merciful and forgiving, deciding not to bring about the impending

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<sup>160</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.219. See also Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, pp.43-49.

<sup>161</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.219.

<sup>162</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.220.

destruction of the city. As Brueggemann puts it Jonah is less than pleased about this turn of events: “O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing (Jon. 4:2 NRSV).” God is slow to anger, and although Jonah wishes it were otherwise, the book of Jonah shows that such divine attributes are not for Israel alone.<sup>163</sup> The writer of Jonah seems to have borrowed language that is pertinent to Israel’s own relationship with Yahweh and deliberately shocked the audience by applying it more broadly.

What Brueggemann has shown in Exod. 34:6 is a creed that Israel would return to over the course of their history in profound trust, even providing the grounds for debate with God and within Israel itself. Brueggemann concisely suggests that: “Israel not only treasures this characterization of Yahweh and relies heavily on it, but also argues with Yahweh about it.”<sup>164</sup> Thus we find it in the hymns of praise, the psalms of compliant and the daring appeals. It can be counted upon, contended with and commanded. Nevertheless God’s patience is what Israel came to expect from God as their relationship unfolded.

In conclusion, what Brueggemann and others have uncovered in Exod. 34:6 provides a template for Israel’s understanding of God and indeed an understanding in regards to their relationship with Yahweh. The five adjectives reveal a God who champions Israel and is prepared to endure their moments of madness, due to the deep divine love and compassion Yahweh has for them. Yahweh is willing to move beyond divine affront and act in loving care of Israel even when they don’t deserve to be treated so. Central to this understanding of

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<sup>163</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.220.

<sup>164</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.221.

God is the divine disposition to be slow to anger. This understanding of God would be revisited by Israel over the years during many different circumstances as a way of praising, reminding and calling to account what Yahweh revealed about himself.

As a segue to the next chapter, we briefly turn our attention to a significant feature of Exod.

34:7b:

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished, he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation. (NRSV)

What verse 7b reveals is that though God's patience is a truism, it is not the case that God will forever turn a blind eye to rebellion and breaches of the covenant. God being slow to anger does not remove the conviction that divine wrath will eventually be expressed in judgment should rebellion become perpetual. Divine patience is to be valued and received with gratitude and not to be taken for granted. A belligerent response will see the anger and judgement of God released, and the following chapters of this thesis will now explore what Brueggemann believes this implies within the Old Testament.

#### 4. THE PROVOCATION OF DIVINE ANGER IN JEREMIAH 7:1-20.

Having explored the reality of divine wrath, and Israel's core testimony that illustrates within that reality a God who is slow to anger, we will now begin to explore what Brueggemann sees as the principal cause of divine anger. Baloiian suggests that in general terms God's anger within the Old Testament arises from offences to justice<sup>165</sup> and this is also fundamental for Brueggemann. But in this chapter we will explore a central aspect of injustice: the violation of the Mosaic covenant, particularly in relation to Jeremiah 7:1-20 as an exegetical example.

Brueggemann suggests that Israel's covenantal relationship with God can be defined as a partnership constituted by both promises and responsibility. That Israel's special relationship with God brought with it enormous responsibility is something of an understatement:

Therefore this relationship, marked by awe and gratitude for its inexplicable generosity, brings with it the expectations and requirements of the sovereign who initiates it. The common rubric for this sovereign expectation is covenant. Yahweh designates Israel as Yahweh's covenant partner, so that Israel is, from the outset, obligated to respond to and meet Yahweh's expectations. As covenant partner of Yahweh, Israel is a people defined by obedience.<sup>166</sup>

At this point, a concise understanding of the term "covenant" and its usage within the Old Testament may be helpful. The Hebrew term *b'erit* was used of a broad range of promises and agreements, whether between God and humanity or between humans themselves. Delbert R. Hillers suggests that "just as a man may be joined with another man by a sworn agreement, so too God is joined to Israel."<sup>167</sup> He also proposes that the covenant is more than just a legal agreement, as the book of Hosea makes clear. For Hosea, Israel's breaking of the covenant

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<sup>165</sup>Baloiian, *Anger in the Old Testament*, p.71. Baloiian believes it is necessary to know why God is wrathful so as to know how to escape the consequences. This predictability was crucial for the encouragement of moral order and warding off despair and disillusionment. He goes on to highlight that the motive clauses are detailed into two main categories: injustice (the wickedness of human beings in their behaviour towards others) and idolatry (direct rebellion towards God). See Baloiian, *Anger in the Old Testament*, pp.71, 73.

<sup>166</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.417.

<sup>167</sup> Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1969), p.4.

was likened to that of an adulterous wife.<sup>168</sup> Jeremiah also uses the analogy of God as Israel's husband as he laments the waywardness of Judah and recalls the days of the wilderness where as a young bride Israel followed her husband with devotion.<sup>169</sup>

There are four main covenants initiated by God in Genesis and Exodus: the first covenant is found within the flood narrative with Noah and symbolizes God's promise to never again destroy humanity and the earth (Gen. 8:21-22, 9:9-17). The second covenant is with Abram in Genesis 15, and the third is with Abraham in Genesis 17, where his change of name is indicative of the new covenant theology in this context. The fourth covenant concerns the nation of Israel and was given to Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20) and it is this covenant tradition that seems to be the most important one for our purposes here. Yahweh officially became Israel's God with promises of blessings and protection, but with conditions attached, the consequences of which are fully revealed in the book of Deuteronomy.<sup>170</sup>

In the Old Testament, the Mosaic covenant is characterised by two things: promises (as in the case of Noah and Abraham) but also commands. This conditional dimension should not, however, overshadow the promises and relationship that underpin the covenant. God promises fidelity to Israel by committing to be their God, in that they would be Yahweh's chosen people in the world. Thomas McComiskey suggests that the promise given to Abraham and reiterated to his descendants are among the most foundational aspects of all Old

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<sup>168</sup> See Hosea 1-2.

<sup>169</sup> Other passages where God is described as Israel's husband: Jeremiah 3:14; 31:32; Isaiah: 54:5 & Hosea 2:16. For a detailed study on marriage and covenant terminology, see especially Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1994).

<sup>170</sup> Although the above four covenants have been mentioned in this chapter, this thesis also acknowledges that within the diversity of the Pentateuch there is also the holiness covenant of Leviticus 26 and the priestly covenant of Numbers 25.

Testament theology, which is still touching lives today.<sup>171</sup> Brueggemann, similarly, risks a poetic generalization about Yahweh whose promises have the power to transform:

Israel's testimony to Yahweh as a promise-maker presents Yahweh as both powerful and reliable enough to turn life in the world, for Israel and for all peoples beyond present circumstances to new life-giving possibility.<sup>172</sup>

The Mosaic covenant however, is not only reflective of God's promises, since Israel is also called to pledge fidelity to God through her obedience to the covenantal directives. Terrien suggests that the covenant was conditional upon national behaviour in that its validity was dependent upon cultic and ethical obedience of the people as they moved through history.<sup>173</sup>

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds Israel of their agreement with God, proclaiming that adherence to the covenant would bring blessings in all areas of their lives (Deut. 28:1-14) but also curses for disobedience (Deut. 28:15-68). Throughout his sermon Moses reminds Israel of the previous generation's sins and the anger that it evoked from God and the punishments that served as divine judgement. Deuteronomy nevertheless also looks to the future and challenges Israel to remain faithful to the covenant with God or suffer future outpouring of God's anger. As Israel begins the next phase in their lives as the people of God they must remain loyal to God and to the conditions of the covenant. Adherence to the covenant would bring Israel the blessings of God, while reneging on the covenant would bring divine anger and punishments referred to as curses.

Brueggemann describes the covenant as "utterly giving and utterly demanding."<sup>174</sup> God hears Israel's cries as slaves in Egypt and releases them from captivity, but this special

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<sup>171</sup> Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), p.15.

<sup>172</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.164.

<sup>173</sup> Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, p.24.

<sup>174</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.419.

relationship called for responsibility on Israel's part in that they were to have no other gods and they were to live righteous and just lives. Israel's relationship with God is also precariously positioned given that disobedience results in God's wrath and judgement in a similar fashion to the other gods in the common contractual theologies of the ancient Near East.<sup>175</sup> Brueggemann acknowledges that along with love and care there is also holiness, wrath and rage leading to Israel's understanding that "there is a dimension of the unsettled in Yahweh, making a relationship with Yahweh endlessly demanding and restless."<sup>176</sup> As we have seen, Israel's disobedience to the Mosaic covenant directives results in an angered God, an exiled community and a loss of speech which Brueggemann describes as characteristic of alienation.<sup>177</sup>

In drawing attention to Israel's responsibilities as a covenanted partner, Brueggemann highlights the recalcitrance of Israel. Brueggemann states that Israel failed to be just and did not respond to God's goodness adequately. Israel's refusal to listen, which resulted in provoking God to anger, can be defined essentially in two ways: injustice and idolatry. Israel, Brueggemann believes, have uncircumcised ears and have not paid attention and in doing so have made a mockery of God. They are "unresponsive as covenant partners"<sup>178</sup> and it is within Jer. 7:1-20 that we see a clear connection between the provocation of the anger of God and Israel's violation of the covenant through the acts of injustice and idolatry. Though there are other passages within Jeremiah that speak of Judah's violation of the covenant, I have chosen to exegete Jer. 7:1-20 because it focuses on both idolatry and injustice as the reasons for the breach of the covenant.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Chapter six of this thesis will explore in more detail the contractual common theologies of the Ancient Near East and will especially refer to Morton Smith's classic work on the subject.

<sup>176</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.227.

<sup>177</sup> Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, p.49.

<sup>178</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.71.

<sup>179</sup> Jer. 11:1-17, for example, refers to the covenant being broken but only mentions idolatry as the cause.

Jer. 7:1-20 is commonly referred to as the “temple sermon” (7:1-8:3).<sup>180</sup> Within this section Jeremiah announces the grim news to Judah, that due to their constant violation of the covenant through idolatry and injustice, the anger of God has been provoked and consequences will be forthcoming. Brueggemann suggests that the temple sermon of Jeremiah may well provide the “clearest and most formidable statement we have of the basic themes of the Jeremiah tradition.”<sup>181</sup> Mark Leuchter agrees suggesting that this passage “represents the pivotal moment in Jeremiah’s career.”<sup>182</sup> There is a connection between Jeremiah’s temple sermon in ch. 7 and the temple sermon within ch. 26. In the latter Jeremiah delivers his sermon in the temple courtyard whilst in chapter seven he is at the gate or entrance of the temple. Connections between the two include the violation of the Mosaic Law (covenant), not listening to God, or the prophets, and the mention of the destroyed northern town of Shiloh.<sup>183</sup> We are informed in ch. 26 that Jeremiah’s mention of Shiloh’s fate so enraged people that they were determined to put him to death (Jer. 26:8-9).

The temple sermon within Jeremiah 7 is the first major block of prose material in Jeremiah which is often referred to as “Type C,” written in prose rather than poetic form, and possessing a distinctive literary style.<sup>184</sup> This may well be where Jeremiah 7 and 26 deviate from each other, as many class ch. 26 as being Type B.<sup>185</sup> Type C is characterised by its

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<sup>180</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.77.

<sup>181</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.77.

<sup>182</sup> Mark Leuchter, *Josiah’s Reform and Jeremiah’s Scroll: Historical Calamity and Prophetic Response* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), p.111.

<sup>183</sup> A tabernacle may have been functioning in Shiloh for up to 300 years. Jones suggests that it is consistent with the evidence of both 1 Samuel and of archaeology to assume that Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines about 1050BCE after capturing the ark of the covenant (1 Samuel 4). See Jones, *Jeremiah*, p.149. For reading on the city of Shiloh see Donald G. Schley, *Shiloh: A Biblical City in Tradition and History* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989).

<sup>184</sup> “Type A” refers to Jeremiah’s oracles recorded in poetic form and “Type B” refers to prose narratives that are historical and biographical in character with Jeremiah mentioned in the third person. See Craigie, Kelley & Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, p.xxxii & 168. See also Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*, p.26; & Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p.615.

<sup>185</sup> Lundbom suggests that the temple sermon in ch. 26 is biographical (Type B) whilst the account in ch. 7 is sermonic (Type C). He also goes on to say that the difference between the two types has become less clear. See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p.454. See also Thompson, *Jeremiah*, pp.33-50.

close relationship between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy. Louis Stulman makes the point that the change from poetry to prose in Jeremiah is not a disjointed or chaotic transition. He goes on to explain his point by suggesting that “prose discourse is a response to and a commentary on poetry.”<sup>186</sup>

In terms of the date of this passage, Brueggemann notes that for some scholars this sermon is dated as being 609BCE during the early reign of Jehoiakim (cf. Jer. 26:1),<sup>187</sup> whilst other scholars propose an exilic date for the composition, with the purpose of rationalizing the destruction of the temple.<sup>188</sup> McKane holds the view that the temple sermon as we have it within the Septuagint is the original version, with the MT being a composite of secondary additions.<sup>189</sup> Brueggemann proposes that “in either case, this text seems decisive for understanding the tradition of Jeremiah and for discerning the social context, tensions and possibilities that belong to this theological tradition.”<sup>190</sup>

In regards to the historical unity of the temple sermon, Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard suggests that 7:1-8:3 is a composite unit. This view also shared by Thompson, who proposes that the section was originally several independent prose passages apart from the poetic piece in v.29.<sup>191</sup> Holladay proposes that the temple sermon served “to close off the first scroll which Jeremiah dictated to Baruch.”<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Louis Stulman, *Jeremiah: Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), p.89.

<sup>187</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.77. See also for example, Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p.455 and Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p.274.

<sup>188</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.77.

<sup>189</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah Volume 1*, p.158. See also Carroll, *Jeremiah*, pp.206-207.

<sup>190</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.77.

<sup>191</sup> See Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, p.116 & Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p.272. See also Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, pp.454-455.

<sup>192</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p.236.

As is the case for all “Type C” passages, much of the expression and style within Jer. 7:1-20 is classified as Deuteronomistic.<sup>193</sup> The following list of textual features is suggested by Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard, and it serves to highlight the common-ground:

- i) “Other (pagan) gods” (vv. 6, 18): the expression is common in both Jeremiah’s prose narratives and in D language (“D language is used to describe both Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic language).
- ii) “so that things may go well for you” (7:23): three other occurrences in Jeremiah and nine in D language.
- iii) “my servants, the prophets” (7:25): six examples in Jeremiah-prose, four in D language.
- iv) “to you and to your fathers” (7:14): twelve examples in Jeremiah-prose, six in D language.
- v) “forefathers came out from the land of Egypt” (7:25): nine examples in Jeremiah-prose, and very common in D language.
- vi) “have done evil in my sight” (7:30); variations of this expression occur eight times in Jeremiah-prose and are extremely common in D language.
- vii) “Which is called by my name”: (7:10): seven examples in Jeremiah’s prose and two in D language.<sup>194</sup>

Holladay, however, argues for Jeremiah authorship, believing that there is no reason why the historical Jeremiah could not have known key elements of the book of Deuteronomy. Indeed,

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<sup>193</sup> Thompson explains “Deuteronomistic” as referring to the “large block of literature from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings” and also to “a body of Deuteronomic editors and authors who drew on authentic sources to present Israel’s history against the theological background of the book of Deuteronomy.” See Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, p.273.

<sup>194</sup> Craigie, Kelley & Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, p.117. For others who also argue for a Deuteronomistic source of Jer. 7:1-20 see for example Clements, *Jeremiah*, p.44; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, pp.207-212. & E. K Holt, “Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon and the Deuteronomists: An Investigation of the Redactional Relationship between Jeremiah 7 and 26,” *JSOT* 36, (1986), pp.73-87.

he believes that one should not invoke a Deuteronomistic redactor too hastily.<sup>195</sup> Instead he suggests that many of the phrases within the temple sermon are not specifically Deuteronomistic, but “make up a carefully wrought discourse with distinctive diction having a close relation to the poetry of Jeremiah.”<sup>196</sup> Leuchter, on the other hand, believes that it is the overlap that demands our attention. He goes on to clarify why: “for it creates continuity with Jeremiah’s utterance here and the larger Mosaic exhortation of the Deuteronomic Torah.”<sup>197</sup> Carroll is more diplomatic in his assessment of the composition and redaction of this passage, and Jeremiah as a whole. He acknowledges the shared linguistic features that are in common with the Deuteronomistic corpus but clarifies that the problems within this area are unlikely to be solved in favour of one all-encompassing theory.<sup>198</sup> He goes on to draw the key conclusion for our purposes: the Deuteronomist is essentially shaped around a regulative principle that the covenant determines Israel’s history and the community.<sup>199</sup>

Brueggemann appears to agree with this point, even if his statement in his commentary of Jeremiah seems somewhat vague: “In its present form the words of Jeremiah are cast in prose that may suggest a Deuteronomistic redaction.”<sup>200</sup> Brueggemann is more emphatic in regards to the connection between Jeremiah’s prose material and the tradition of Deuteronomy in his book on the theology of Jeremiah: “It has long been known that the prose sections of Jeremiah have much in common with rhetoric and theological assumptions of the tradition of

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<sup>195</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p.240. See also Lundbom who also attributes authorship to Jeremiah. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p.455.

<sup>196</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p.240.

<sup>197</sup> Leuchter, *Josiah’s Reform and Jeremiah’s Scroll*, p.112.

<sup>198</sup> Carroll, *Jeremiah*, pp.41 & 50.

<sup>199</sup> Robert P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Uses of Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1981), p.96.

<sup>200</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.77.

Deuteronomy.”<sup>201</sup> A further indication of Brueggemann’s view one can be found in one of his journal articles:

It is most plausible that the editorial hand that shaped the whole is that of the “Deuteronomists.” This term, now much used in the field, refers (according to hypothesis) to a powerful body of interpreters that persisted over several generations and was informed by the covenantal-theological accents of the book of Deuteronomy. They continued in their imaginative interpretation in order to extrapolate from Deuteronomy for the sake of the ongoing life and faith of the community of faith in and through the exile. The proposal that the “Deuteronomists” shaped the book of Jeremiah suggests that they took up the remembered poems of “historical Jeremiah”—a character now lost to us—and shaped, arranged, and interpreted these materials, inserting among them their own work in prose in order to create a pattern of interpretation.<sup>202</sup>

This chapter, however, will not focus on the scholarly disputes about the redaction of the temple sermon, given that Brueggemann seems to have little to say about it, but will begin with Brueggemann’s more thematic, literary approach.

Brueggemann divides the temple sermon into five parts: 7:1-15, 16-20, 21-28, 29-34 & 8:1-3.<sup>203</sup> The temple sermon overwhelmingly shows that Jeremiah was in conflict with the prevailing temple ideology of his day, which offered a false sense of security. This was undergirded by the belief that Jerusalem, now rooted in the royal Davidic claims, was immune to God’s wrath and judgment due to unconditional promises. Brueggemann succinctly sums up the problem before Jeremiah:

This ideology claimed that the unconditional promises carried by the temple establishment limited God’s judgement in response to Israel’s action. In such a view, obedience is not a crucial dimension of faith. In the text of ch.7 Jeremiah frontally attacks such a claim as “organised religion”, and insists that God’s way with Jerusalem is fundamentally concerned for obedience.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Brueggemann goes on to highlight that “this is evident in particular rhetoric cadences but it is also unmistakable in the larger claims of covenantal theology as is made clear, for example, in Jeremiah 11:1-17 with its advocacy of “covenant” (v.2) and preoccupation with the burden of listening and obeying (vv.4, 8). It is thus plausible to suggest that the prose material in Jeremiah to no small degree reflects Deuteronomic theology.” See Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*, pp.139-140.

<sup>202</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Meditation on the Abyss: The Book of Jeremiah,” *Word and World* 22/4 (2002), p. 343.

<sup>203</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, pp.78-85. See also Craigie, Kelley & Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, pp.120-127 & Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, pp.272-296.

<sup>204</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.78. See also Stulman who highlights that “the smugness exuded by Judah in the earlier poetry derives in part from its confidence in the temple. Indeed, the prose homily suggests

Within the temple sermon of ch. 7, Jeremiah is seen as the “covenant mediator” in that he reminds his audience of the covenant obligations and urges them to again live by the covenant stipulations.<sup>205</sup> Holladay also proposes that “one must understand that it is parenthesis based upon covenant formulations, so that perhaps “covenant speech” is the most accurate term.”<sup>206</sup> Brueggemann holds to this also, by claiming that the list of disobedience is a clear-cut reference to the Ten Commandments whereby “Judah regularly violates the main claims of its covenant with Yahweh.”<sup>207</sup>

The first section of verses 1-15 serves as the main proclamation of Jeremiah 7.<sup>208</sup> Jeremiah is instructed to stand at the temple gates and reveal God’s indictments against the people of Judah.<sup>209</sup> Initially God offers an opportunity to repent and turn from their rebellious living, which will enable them to remain in the land. Jeremiah also exposes the false sense of security that has been invested in the temple as deceptive and without basis. Brueggemann claims that Jeremiah’s key word here is “false” in that the prophet is not rejecting the temple claims in principle but rather the ideology that is in contrast with the covenant.<sup>210</sup> In other words, the liturgy within the temple is not the issue; the issue is the practice of the people, and their arrogance of thinking temple liturgy would placate Yahweh. As Brueggemann puts it, Jeremiah dismisses the repetitious and banal worship as ineffective.<sup>211</sup> In short their lives

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that the people of Judah flee to the temple in order to escape the devastating indictments pronounced in chapters 2-6.” Stulman concludes that the temple sermon reveals just how absurd this hope is. Stulman, *Jeremiah*, p.89.

<sup>205</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p.239.

<sup>206</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p.239.

<sup>207</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.79. Jer. 7 lists murder, adultery, false witness and idolatry as the cause of the breach of the ten commandments and indeed the covenant (cf. Exod. 20 & Deut. 5).

<sup>208</sup> Structurally, Holladay suggests that vv. 13-15 is an appendix which was added for the second scroll (Jer. 36:31). Holladay has come to this conclusion by comparing vocabulary in vv. 13-15 with other that of other material elsewhere.

<sup>209</sup> Terence Fretheim highlights that the time of the sermon may have coincided with a festival, possibility the feast of Tabernacles, where people made pilgrimage from various parts of the southern kingdom to worship at the temple. Therefore God commissions Jeremiah to deliver this sermon in a very public place and at a very busy time. See Terence Fretheim, *Jeremiah: Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), p.133.

<sup>210</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.78.

<sup>211</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.78.

have failed to live up to the divine expectation to be obedient to the covenant. Leuchter agrees with Brueggemann, proposing that “The Temple itself is not an object of derision in the prophet’s view, but its validity is completely contingent upon the supremacy of the law and the nation’s adherence to it.”<sup>212</sup>

Within verse 5 there is another expression of hope should Judah be willing to repent from their defiant ways. There must be, however, tangible changes in how Judah lives and Jeremiah reveals the list of changes that are required: deal with each other justly; do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow; do not shed innocent blood; and do not worship other gods. Here, it is Judah’s idolatry and lack of justice that has breached the covenant and these two aspects of Judah’s life must be removed for them to remain within the land. Therefore the promise of land is conditional upon Judah’s commitment to the covenant. What is clear in this verse is that injustice is just as important as the worship of Yahweh. Mark Leuchter suggests that “if these social conditions are met—if Judah submits to the principles of Deuteronomic law rather than Davidic/nationalistic theologies—life will continue in Judah under the covenant and the people will dwell in the land through their actions.”<sup>213</sup> Leuchter suggests that this is a “transformative dimension” and goes on to say:

In contradistinction to the futile words and ideas voiced in v. 4, v. 5 presents the counterpoint that would indeed allow for the “betterment of ways” that will sustain the covenant—that they must engage in the legal provisions of social justice and communal responsibility (“rules [of conduct] between man and his neighbour”).<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Mark Leuchter, “The Temple Sermon and the term *maqom* in the Jeremianic corpus,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30 (2005), pp.101-102.

<sup>213</sup> Leuchter, “The Temple Sermon,” p.100.

<sup>214</sup> Leuchter, “The Temple Sermon,” p.99.

Leuchter also highlights that, though within the Deuteronomic law, the cultic and social laws were in separate sections, Jeremiah has brought them together under one constituted law. Therefore the cultic concerns are now incorporated within social matters.<sup>215</sup>

While acknowledging Israel's cultic responsibilities, Brueggemann's covenantal emphasis is also on justice, suggesting that Israel was obligated to listen to the commands of God and respond in obedience to the divine call for justice.<sup>216</sup> Brueggemann highlights the importance of the command for Israel to listen: "To listen, means to be addressed and called into being by another who retains initiative. Not to listen is to deny God's rule."<sup>217</sup> Brueggemann suggests that while the commands to listen are many and varied, predominately Israel is a community put into the world for the sake of justice and this was its "principle obligation."<sup>218</sup> This justice was to be seen primarily in a response to those within the community who were considered underprivileged such as the poor, the weak, the sick, the elderly, children, women, and aliens. Israel was to be an egalitarian community who held to the principles of equity within the community:

The intention of Mosaic justice is to redistribute social goods and social power; thus it is distributive justice. This justice recognizes that social goods and social power are unequally and destructively in Israel's world (and derivatively in any social context), and that the well-being of community requires that social goods and power to some extent be given up by those who have too much, for the sake of those who have not enough.<sup>219</sup>

This notion of justice includes also a command to love the stranger, which arises from the very character of God:

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribes, who executes justice for the

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<sup>215</sup> Leuchter, "The Temple Sermon," p.99. See also Fretheim who proposes the following: "The relationship with God is the central issue, but not in isolation from life. This relationship cannot be fostered through, say; religious rituals while the needs of the neighbour go unattended." Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, p.135.

<sup>216</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.421.

<sup>217</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Second Kings* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p.65.

<sup>218</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.421.

<sup>219</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp.736-737.

orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. (Deut. 10:17-18, NRSV).

Because this is at the heart of the character of God, Israel were also to be altruistic in their response to strangers, “you shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Deut. 10:19, NRSV).” Brueggemann is emphatic about this and sees that Israel’s most characteristic and theologically intentional practice is to attend to the needs of those who are too weak to protect themselves. This meant that Israel was to display empathy to the weaker neighbour whilst also being prepared to examine their own advantage over other nations. Brueggemann declares that this was not charity or “romantic do-goodism” but rather a “mandate to order public policy, public practice and public institutions for common good and in resistance to the kind of greedy initiatives that damages the community.”<sup>220</sup> Moreover Brueggemann suggests that the “elect people bear witness to an *all-inclusive* providence.”<sup>221</sup>

This is an important feature for Brueggemann who believes that the practice of justice aligns the text with the Mosaic tradition (cf. Exod. 19:5) and distances it from the unconditional promises claimed for David (2 Sam. 7:14-16).<sup>222</sup> For Brueggemann, torah/covenant obedience is explicit in that Judah will not protect itself from the anger and judgement of God by simply claiming an inherent right to the land through temple liturgy, but rather only by living a life of justice and devotion to Yahweh.<sup>223</sup>

Verses 9-11 reveal what Brueggemann refers to as the, “two stages of Judah’s obedience.”<sup>224</sup>

Firstly, Judah’s idolatry and injustice are highlighted by the further indictments listed against

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<sup>220</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.423.

<sup>221</sup> Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms*, p.60.

<sup>222</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.79.

<sup>223</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.79.

<sup>224</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.79.

them: stealing, murder, adultery, perjury and burning incense to Baal and other gods. Secondly, without a sense of shame, they continue to go into the temple and take part in temple worship as if their shameful ways have not been seen. Brueggemann proposes that the people of Judah attempt to hide their sins within the temple by means of a cover-up.<sup>225</sup> Verse 11b is an emphatic answer to such wanton violating of the covenant: “But I have been watching, declares the LORD.” Jones reveals that the part listing of the Ten Commandments (stealing, murder, adultery and perjury) served as a fundamental obligation for all members of the covenant community that also led to being a condition of entry for those wishing to enter the Temple court.<sup>226</sup>

There is a shift within verses 12-15, where once the possibility for repentance had been offered it is now gone after Judah has refused to listen. There is a good argument for suggesting that these verses are a later addition to the original sermon. The shift from warning to unrestrained judgment appears too swift, given that it would stand to reason that Judah would require significant time to move from injustice to justice, and we cannot expect that this shift would happen in the course of one sermon. Holladay suggests that these verses were appended at the time of the dictation of the second scroll.<sup>227</sup>

It is within these verses that Jeremiah draws his “shocking” parallel of Jerusalem with the northern town of Shiloh. Jones suggests that the fact that v.12 refers to Judah still being able to view the destruction of Shiloh is evidence that it was still in ruins during Jeremiah’s time.<sup>228</sup> The main point is unmistakable: as Shiloh was destroyed due to its disobedience to

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<sup>225</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.79.

<sup>226</sup> Jones, *Jeremiah*, p.148. Cf. Psalms 118:19-20.

<sup>227</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, p.236. Lundbom highlights that vv.13-15 were added to the second scroll after it had become apparent that God’s anger and judgement was irrevocable. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p.458. See also Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, pp.222-235.

<sup>228</sup> Jones, *Jeremiah*, p.149.

the covenant, so too will Jerusalem be destroyed. Their false sense of security is foolhardy as they are not immune to divine wrath. This section is closed with the shocking declaration of verse 15: “I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your brothers, the people of Ephraim.” Brueggemann’s point is well made:

Here, as everywhere in the tradition of Jeremiah, the torah demands of the Sinai covenant are held in confrontational tension with the confident guarantees of the royal covenant so cherished by the power elite in Jerusalem.<sup>229</sup>

Brueggemann’s theology of justice is also revealed at this point:

Everything depends on torah justice, which has been massively distorted and denied. Even Jerusalem must meet the same requirements as Shiloh. Yahweh will “cast out” even favoured Jerusalem. Exile is coming. At least in these verses this prospect will not be averted. Practitioners of injustice will lose the land and be displaced.<sup>230</sup>

Furthermore, Brueggemann states that Jeremiah and others from the prophetic tradition had witnessed religion compromised to “legitimate the dominant class” which was invariably at the expense of the downtrodden and weak.<sup>231</sup> Such religion, however, is still subject to God who is allied with the widow and orphan.<sup>232</sup> Religion that is contrary to the character of God cannot remain. Brueggemann also highlights that the Mosaic-Sinaitic claim is linked to the promise of land. Obedience to the Mosaic covenant is a mandatory condition for Judah keeping the land given to them by God as their inheritance.<sup>233</sup> McKane similarly notes that Judah’s occupation of the land is conditional upon them living in agreement with God’s stipulations (covenant), a theme, he proposes, that is common within the book of Deuteronomy (6:18f.; 7:12f.; 8:1; 11:8f.; 16:20; 19:8f.).<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, pp.109-110. See also, Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p.353; Jones, *Jeremiah*, p.182.

<sup>230</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.81.

<sup>231</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.81.

<sup>232</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.81.

<sup>233</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p111. For more from Brueggemann and Judah’s loss of land as a divine inheritance in relation to Jeremiah see, Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place of Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), pp.101-107.

<sup>234</sup> McKane, *Jeremiah Volume 1*, p.160. See also Lundbom who believes that the land is pivotal to the temple sermon, Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p.464.

The second section, verses 16-20, reflects a shift in divine attention from the people of Judah to Jeremiah. God's instruction to Jeremiah is to not intercede for them in any way. As if the state of Judah, as revealed within verses 1-15, are not bad enough, verses 16-20 highlight just how bad things have become when God implores Jeremiah to look more closely and see that even children are part of the idolatry (v. 17-18). The devotion to the "Queen of Heaven" has become a family practice.<sup>235</sup> As Brueggemann puts it "Yahweh is past listening" and divine patience has been exhausted, there is no turning back.<sup>236</sup> Indeed, divine patience has now given way to divine anger. Due to Judah's neglect of the covenant, God has been provoked to anger, with divine judgment now a *fait accompli*. It is here that God reveals to Jeremiah that such idolatry has been the provocation of divine anger of which is referred to twice (vv. 18-19).

What is also interesting about these verses is the Hebrew verb that has been used to describe the anger of God in v. 18-19: *ka'as*. The root meaning of *ka'as* is to vex, agitate, stir up or provoke the heart to a heated condition, which then leads to a specific action.<sup>237</sup> The use of the term *ka'as* implies that Israel's sinfulness and rejection of the covenant stipulations resulted in God experiencing pain and grief of great intensity. When the audaciousness of Judah's sin is juxtaposed with the intense grief and indignation reflected in the word *ka'as*, it is reasonable to conclude that the resultant divine judgement and punishment could not be appeased. Van Groningen suggests that "when God has been continuously and deeply provoked, vexed, grieved, much is required to quiet the heart of God."<sup>238</sup> Finally in v. 20

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<sup>235</sup> Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p.213. For a detailed discussion on the understanding of the "queen of heaven" and its background see Clements, *Jeremiah*, pp.45-46.

<sup>236</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.81.

<sup>237</sup> Gerard Van Groningen, "ka'as" R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr. & Bruce K. Waltke (eds) *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, p.451.

<sup>238</sup> Van Groningen, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, p.451. See also Carroll who describes Judah's actions as provoking God to "great anger." Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p.213.

Yahweh is emphatic: divine anger will be poured out and nothing can stop it. The wrath of God will also be holistic, in that not only will the people of Judah experience divine wrath but also animals and the fruit of the land will be affected. The anger of God is all consuming leaving nothing in its wake.

Fretheim suggests the following in regards to divine anger within the temple sermon:

This kind of language for divine anger is common in Jeremiah (8:19; 11:17; 25:6-7; 32:29-32; 44:3, 8; uniquely, NAB translates 7:18 “in order to hurt me”) and reveals several things about God. For one, God is affected, moved, by what the people do. For another, it reveals that anger is not an attribute of God, as if anger were no different than, say, love. Rather, God’s anger is contingent. If there were no sin, there would be no divine anger.<sup>239</sup>

Fretheim goes on to also highlight that within v. 20 where the anger of God is “poured out” there is another insight into divine wrath:

While there is a personal dimension to God’s anger, the divine wrath is also impersonally conceived in Jeremiah (and elsewhere, e.g. Numbers 1:53; 16:46). Wrath is not only “poured out” but it also “goes forth” because of people’s wickedness.<sup>240</sup>

What this chapter has been able to highlight in dialogue with Brueggemann, and through the exegesis of Jer. 7:1-20, is that Judah’s breach of the covenant is the central provocation of divine wrath. Moreover Judah’s breach of the covenant is characterised by two things: idolatry and injustice. Judah failed to realise that the special blessings that were bestowed by God within the Mosaic covenant required a response of the utmost fidelity, expressed both in cultic and ethical terms. Ironically, Judah’s failure to recognize this resulted in their greatest

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<sup>239</sup> Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, p.139.

<sup>240</sup> Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, p.139.

crisis and threat, precisely from Yahweh.<sup>241</sup> Jer. 7:1-20 speaks of the broken covenant that had provoked divine anger and would eventually cause destruction for the people of Judah. The people of Judah lived a false sense of security that was apparently founded on the Davidic promises and the Temple, an overly selective theology. This false hope in the Temple, whilst people otherwise lived idolatrous, unjust and immoral lives would not go unnoticed. Brueggemann poignantly summarises the situation by suggesting: “Religion cannot override the cost of covenant nullification.”<sup>242</sup> Leuchter also suggests that: “National life in its entirety, throughout the land, carries with it the demands of the covenant more than the forms and features of the Davidic and Temple establishment.”<sup>243</sup>

Though not expressed explicitly in Jeremiah 7, the destruction would be realised through the might of the Babylonian army, led by Nebuchadnezzar, who would cause destruction within Jerusalem and send the nation of Judah into exile. In the next chapter, we will explore Brueggemann’s thoughts on the result of the anger of God as expressed through the exile.

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<sup>241</sup> Baloian believes that “it was Israel’s fidelity or rather the lack of such that will be shown to from the largest part of the motivation for His (God’s) wrath.” Therefore Judah is now under threat by Yahweh himself. See Baloian, *Anger in the Old Testament*, p.66.

<sup>242</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.82.

<sup>243</sup> Leuchter, “The Temple Sermon and the Term *maqom* in the Jeremianic corpus.” p.103.

## 5. THE RESULT AND MEASURE OF DIVINE ANGER IN JEREMIAH 25:1-14.

Having discussed in the previous chapter Brueggemann's thoughts on the provocation of divine wrath, we will now explore what the result was for Israel after breaking the Mosaic covenant and thereby provoking God to anger. This will be achieved, in particular, through the exegesis of Jer. 25:1-14. This chapter identifies the effects of judgment upon Israel, in the reality of exile, but also it will be an ongoing reflection on the appropriate measure of divine anger.

In Jer. 25:1-14 Babylon is the instrument of divine wrath used for the purpose of executing the exile of Judah. Brueggemann describes how such an outrageous prophecy from Jeremiah (the coming invasion of Babylon) was met with denial on theological grounds, especially since it appears contrary to the old Zion theology. Sceptics like Hananiah viewed Babylon as a "flash in the pan that would not last." (Jer. 28:2-4).<sup>244</sup> Brueggemann highlights how daring Jeremiah's prophecy was when he courageously described the feared and despised Nebuchadnezzar as a servant of God (Jer. 25:9, 27:6). The exile of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem, including the temple, brought about a theological crisis which was indicative of the fractured relationship between God and Israel.

Not all scholars believe the exile to be as devastating as Brueggemann believes, and there has been some debate as to the severity of the exile upon the people of Judah.<sup>245</sup> James Maxwell

Miller and John Hayes suggest that it is easy to exaggerate the effects:

It is easy....to overemphasize the drastic and debilitating consequences of the fall of Jerusalem and the triumph of Babylonian forces. Various aspects of life certainly were greatly modified, but the Babylonian policy was not overly oppressive. The exiles were not forced to live in inhumane conditions.... (and) remained relatively

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<sup>244</sup> Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, p.16.

<sup>245</sup> See Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), pp.30-33.

free and certainly should not be understood as slaves. They would have been under no overt governmental pressure to assimilate and lose their identities.<sup>246</sup>

John Bright's position is somewhat confusing as he appears to express conflicting opinions on the severity of the exile in his book *A History of Israel*. On one hand he proposes: "Although we should not belittle the hardships and the humiliation that these exiles endured, their lot does not seem to have been unduly severe."<sup>247</sup> Curiously two pages later Bright's position appears to contradict the above quote: "When one considers the magnitude of the calamity that overtook her, one marvels that Israel was not sucked down into the vortex of history along with the other little nations of western Asia."<sup>248</sup>

A somewhat controversial view is that of Hans Barstad who questions the common belief, that Judah was completely depopulated and left in ruins.<sup>249</sup> Furthermore, he suggests that after the Babylonian conquest of Judah, life within this largely agricultural community soon went back to normal.<sup>250</sup> Smith-Christopher, on the other hand, distances himself from Barstad and others who appear ambiguous about the effects of the exile, and stands with Brueggemann by declaring that the exile was both catastrophic and transformative for Hebrew existence.<sup>251</sup> In a direct repudiation of Barstad's idea, he relies on cold hard facts:

The data continue to be damaging to Barstad's thesis. Eighty percent of the cities, towns and villages were abandoned or destroyed in the sixth century, and 42 percent of the towns and villages of the Persian period were on previously unsettled sites.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Miller & Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, pp.482, 493, 494.

<sup>247</sup> John Bright, *A History of Israel 4<sup>th</sup> Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), p.345.

<sup>248</sup> Bright, *A History of Israel*, p.347.

<sup>249</sup> Hans Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah during the "Exilic" Period* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996), p.20.

<sup>250</sup> Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty land*, p.43.

<sup>251</sup> Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, p.32.

<sup>252</sup> Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, p.47. For a recent extensive study on the Babylonian exile of Judah, including his own study on the myth of the "empty land" which was given credence by the historical "blackout" at the hands of the exiled elite, see Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005). For further reading see Eric H. Cline, *Jerusalem Besieged: From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), pp.36-66.

Rather than debate the living conditions of the exiled community, Brueggemann chooses instead to show how tragic the exile was for Judah using rhetorical criticism to support his claims theologically. In other words, Brueggemann's stance is based upon how Israel responded to and spoke of God during their exile. Such an approach reveals convincingly that the exile was theologically disastrous. Brueggemann's point is supported by Ralph W. Klein who writes:

To think of either group (exiled Judeans in Babylon and those left behind) as prisoners of war or to compare their situation with the concentration camps of our century (20<sup>th</sup> century) would be misleading if not wrong. Exilic Israel nevertheless was a defeated nation that had lost its independence, its land, its monarchy and its temple. There had been abundant pain and death and it is hard to imagine that the economy was not completely topsy-turvy. Exile meant a host of physical and socio-economic problems. But the theological challenges and problems strike us as much more severe.<sup>253</sup>

The significance of these theological challenges is revealed particularly in Jer. 25:1-14 to which we now turn. The passage is found within a section of the book of Jeremiah that Brueggemann describes as an "odd and unexpected unit in the Jeremiah tradition."<sup>254</sup> Brueggemann's reasoning is that the wider section (Jer. 25:1-38) is a sustained and relentless announcement of divine judgment. Brueggemann divides chapter 25 into three sections: vv. 1-14, 15-29 & 30-38.<sup>255</sup> He goes on to state that it is quite exceptional within Jeremiah, and standing at the centre of the canonical form of the book, it likely performs a peculiar and important function for the whole of the book.<sup>256</sup> In terms of its genre, the passage (Jer. 25:1-14) is poetic prose which Brueggemann believes is heavily influenced with the thought of the

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<sup>253</sup> Ralph W. Klein, *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p.3. See also Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgement and Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p.1. Raitt reminds us that prophetic faith interprets history from a theological perspective.

<sup>254</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.220.

<sup>255</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, pp.220-228. For others who also divide chapter 25 into three sections see for example Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), p.239, and Jones, *Jeremiah*, pp.321-336. For scholars who divide chapter 25 into two sections see for example Carroll, *Jeremiah*, pp.489-508 and Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, pp.170-178.

<sup>256</sup> Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*, p.110. See also Martin Kessler, "The Function of Chapters 25 and 50-51 in the Book of Jeremiah" in A.R. Pete Diamond, Kathleen O'Connor and Louis Stulman (eds), *Troubling Jeremiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp.64-72.

Deuteronomists.<sup>257</sup> Carroll however, believes only vv.1-7 to be Deuteronomistic reflecting a summary of Jeremiah's work from 627-605BCE. He then adds that vv.8-11 and 13 are a post-Deuteronomistic construction reflecting on the period of the Babylonian domination and finally vv.12 and 14 are an attack on Babylon.<sup>258</sup> Allen on the other hand proposes that it is "unacceptable" to attribute this chapter to a Deuteronomist of the postexilic era. He argues that major redactional work had been done already in the early stages of the Jeremiah tradition.<sup>259</sup> Instead he suggests that it belongs to the Jeremiah tradition and is to be attributed to Baruch or someone else in that tradition that was familiar with the words and the activity of Jeremiah.<sup>260</sup> We will return to this issue shortly.

Within Jer. 25:1-14, Judah's fate is sealed and they are reminded of the breach of the covenant and their failure to heed the warnings of the prophets. The result is graphically portrayed: invasion by a foreign power, oppression and exile. Longman highlights that many of the theological themes within the passage are found earlier in Jeremiah. He believes that Jer. 25:1-14 could well be a grand summary of what has been said previously. There is however a new twist that comes at the end, as we shall see.<sup>261</sup>

Verses 1-3 introduce the passage with clarification of two dates. Firstly the "fourth year of Jehoiakim" is mentioned as the setting of the following speech. Brueggemann notes that this year is a pivotal time in the geopolitics of Jeremiah's world. 605BCE was the year that Babylon, led by Nebuchadnezzar, emerged as the victor in the battle of Carchemish and

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<sup>257</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.220.

<sup>258</sup> Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p.490.

<sup>259</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah*, p.8.

<sup>260</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah*, p.322.

<sup>261</sup> Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, p.170.

became a primal power of world politics.<sup>262</sup> The second date is “the thirteenth year of Josiah” which Brueggemann and many scholars believe to be the beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry, although some believe it to be the year of Jeremiah’s birth, i.e. 626 BCE.<sup>263</sup>

Verses 4-7 present a view of the history of Judah that focuses, as 2 Kings 17:7-8 does, on cultic purity rather than highlighting the social justice concerns expressed in Jeremiah 7:

And though the LORD has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention. They said, “Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the LORD gave to you and your fathers for ever and ever. Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not provoke me to anger with what your hands have made. Then I will not harm you.” “But you did not listen to me,” declares the LORD, “and you have provoked me with what your hands have made, and you have brought harm to yourselves.”

Brueggemann summarises the points gleaned from the retrospective reflection:

- a) The prophets were sent by God
- b) The prophets called Judah to repent
- c) Judah refused in its stubbornness to turn.<sup>264</sup>

Allen offers the following:

Failure to maintain such standards (Torah) was serious but forgivable, and the prophetic message permitted a second chance. But rejection of that message was a different matter; it spelled only doom.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.220. Carchemesh represents Assyria’s third and final attempt to establish a capital city after their long-term capital city, Nineveh, and their subsequent second attempt, Harran, had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 612 and 610BCE. The Egyptians were allied with the Assyrians and together they attacked the advancing Babylonian army at Carchemesh only to be both soundly defeated. The defeat ended the Assyrian dynasty and its position as a power in the ancient Near East whilst Egypt’s defeat was also decisive (Jer. 46:1-12). This resulted in Babylon becoming a political power that would last for some 65 years until they were defeated by the Persian army led by Cyrus. See Miller & Hayes ed. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, p.403, and Philip J. King, *Jeremiah: An Archaeological Companion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), p.22.

<sup>263</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.221. Scholars who believe that the date refers to the beginning of Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry see for example Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p.243; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p.490; Craigie, Kelley & Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, p.364. For an example of thought that sees 626BCE as referring to Jeremiah’s birth see Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p.668.

<sup>264</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.221. See also Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*, p.110.

<sup>265</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah*, p.285. See also Craigie, Kelley & Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, pp.364-365, who believe the continued refusal to hear and repent is justification for the coming judgment.

Verses 8-11 reveal the verdict of the above continuous rebellion: exile. Judah is to be removed from the land that was her inheritance, and the temple is to be overrun by an enemy chosen to execute the divine judgment. Brueggemann states that though the dismal verdict is harsh, it is a summary of the anticipations that have been sounded in the tradition of Jeremiah.<sup>266</sup> After years of warnings that the end was at hand, Judah and the entire land will go into Babylonian rule. What is even more incredible is that Nebuchadnezzar is explicitly referred to by God as “my servant” in verse 9 (cf. Jer. 27:6). This leads Brueggemann to conclude that “even alien rulers are utilized to work out Yahweh’s purpose.”<sup>267</sup> These passages display that God’s sovereignty, which had previously cohered with Judah’s sovereignty, is now turned against them due to their breach of the covenant. The covenantal curses will now be applied (Jer.25:9; cf. Deut. 28:37). Where God had sent Judah one group of servants (the prophets) who had been ignored, now God is sending another group who cannot be ignored.<sup>268</sup>

Brueggemann also explores the tension between the exile being “forever” (v.9 RSV, NIV “everlasting”) against that of the exile being for seventy years (v.11). He begins by looking at the Hebrew word *'olam* which is translated “forever/everlasting.” In contrast to the modern English understanding of the concept of “forever” the Hebrew word does not necessarily mean an absolute, timeless future. Rather, it likely refers to all thinkable and foreseeable future.<sup>269</sup> Nevertheless, Brueggemann believes that the tension between “forever” and seventy years suggests redactional activity and highlights, in contrast to Allen,

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<sup>266</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.221.

<sup>267</sup> Lundbom reminds us, that though this is true one must keep in mind that Nebuchadnezzar was unaware of such a divine appointment and was trying to subjugate all nations in the west, not just Judah. The aim was to destroy all the nations of the former Assyrian Empire. See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p.246. See also Longman who also agrees with Lundbom that from what is known about Nebuchadnezzar he had no awareness that he was God’s servant when he conquered Judah. Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, p.171.

<sup>268</sup> Craigie, Kelley, Drinkard Jr, *Jeremiah 1-25*, p.366.

<sup>269</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.222.

that post-exilic redaction may well be the best way to account for the tension here. The possible reasons for the redaction process is summarised by the following:

The first statement about “forever” is probably a prophetic verdict, unencumbered by historical specificity. It means “for all foreseeable future.” The subsequent “correction” of seventy years may reflect the beginning of historical specificity. That is, either it intends to tone down the horror, or it means to keep the verdict in the realm of historical realism. It may also reflect the actual end of exile and the return of deportees to the homeland.<sup>270</sup>

Brueggemann’s own leaning in regards to the “seventy years” is to take it as post-exilic redaction as opposed to the historical prophecy of Jeremiah of “forever” in v.9. The seventy years is a later redactional correction that embodies a new reflection on the measure or extent of divine anger.

Holladay offers some additional possibilities for understanding the seventy years: firstly, the seventy years may be a rounded number to suggest a normal life span (cf. Ps. 90:10).<sup>271</sup> Secondly, he also highlights the idiom may have its source from Babylon itself where in the “Black Stone of Esarhaddon” the Babylonian god Marduk shows displeasure toward Babylon for seventy years. As a result Holladay suggests it may also reflect the patterned period of time an oriental city lies desolate.<sup>272</sup> Finally, in 2 Chron. 36:20-23, it refers to the period

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<sup>270</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.222. See also Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*, p.180, where Brueggemann attests that the number (seventy years - Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10) are symbolic and should not be taken literally. But there is also a case for seeing this number quite literally, in the early post-exilic period, even though Daniel 9 was later to interpret this theme. See Gary Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp.75-94.

<sup>271</sup> See McKane who highlights that “70” was used to possibly suggest that no-one alive during the time of exile would live to see the day of liberation, McKane, *Jeremiah*, p.627. Holladay’s thought would also cohere with Ezekiel’s idea of theodicy in chapter 18 where he argues against the idea that the sins of the father would be visited upon subsequent generations as put forward in Exod. 20:5, 34:7 & Deut. 5:9. As a result, the thought that the exile would be one lifetime (70 years) could be understood in this way.

<sup>272</sup> Anderson puts forward another possibility that describes Jeremiah borrowing this number from contemporary texts that were written in Assyria. As a result he believes, like Holladay, that from these texts we are able to put together that the number 70 as a usual period of destruction was common in the ancient Near East. See Anderson, *Sin: A History*, p.77. See also E. Boyd Whaley who also believes “70 years” was a conventional period of time used to determine divine disfavour and desolation within an Oriental city. E. Boyd Whaley, “Seventy Years,” Geoffrey W. Bromiley general editor, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia Volume Four: Q-Z* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), p.428.

from the fall of Jerusalem to the edict of Cyrus, King of Persia, in 538BCE.<sup>273</sup> Lundbom however proposes that the seventy years doesn't refer to the length of Judah's exile but rather to Babylon's tenure as a super power.<sup>274</sup> Furthermore, he concludes that the idea that Jerusalem and the temple lay in ruins for seventy years is postexilic and not implicit within Jeremiah's prophecies.<sup>275</sup>

There appears, among scholars, to be a lack of consensus as to the "when" and "why" of this figure. It may reflect a symbolic or traditional span, or it may have been used in an attempt to calculate the end of the exile in a more tangible way. If it is a more specific span, then there are still some difficulties when it comes to the dates of the seventy years.

As Gary Anderson notes, the literal number seventy is reflected in at least two biblical texts that interpret the end of the exile as being the return from Babylon (Zech. 1:12 and 2 Chron. 36:19-21). Later reinterpretations of the "70 years" can be found as well, notably in Daniel 9. Anderson highlights that biblical writers rarely cited one another directly, but this prediction is an exception.<sup>276</sup> Zechariah begins his prophetic work by expressing his anxiety over the delay of the restoration of Jerusalem. Zechariah records the angels questioning God about Jerusalem's pardon, which was promised after the seventy years of exile.

Then the angel of the LORD said, "LORD Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?" (Zech. 1:12).

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<sup>273</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, pp.668-669. See also Allen, *Jeremiah*, pp.326-327 and Anderson, *Sin: A History*, p.77.

<sup>274</sup> Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p.249.

<sup>275</sup> Moreover he proposes that the number 70 is stereotyped and therefore no more than an approximation. If it corresponds to anything, it is a conventional description of a full life-span (cf. Psalm 90:10). See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, p.249. On 70 as a number to indicate a full lifespan and the importance of the number of 70 in later Old Testament writings see Craigie, Kelley & Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, p.366 and Clements, *Jeremiah*, p.148.

<sup>276</sup> Anderson, *Sin: A History*, pp.77-78.

Anderson suggests this vision is used by Zechariah to provide some “punch to his complaints.”<sup>277</sup> Holladay proposes that within Zech. 1:12 (cf. Zech. 7:5) the seventy years seems to refer to the period from the destruction of the temple in 587BCE to the completion of the second temple in 516/515BCE,<sup>278</sup> and Klein’s thoughts point in a similar direction.<sup>279</sup>

2 Chron. 36:19-21 similarly refer to Jeremiah’s seventy years, but Anderson puts forward the additional proposal that the author of Chronicles has read the prophecy of Jeremiah through the lens of Leviticus 26.<sup>280</sup>

“The land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.” (2 Chron. 36:21).

““I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. Then the land will enjoy its Sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths.”” (Lev. 26:33-34).

Anderson highlights that, for the author of Chronicles, the land would lie abandoned until the missed Sabbaths had been observed and only then would Israel be free to return.<sup>281</sup> It would appear, then, that the exile was an appropriate time of purification for the land that the author of Chronicles understood in relation to the Holiness legislation of Leviticus.<sup>282</sup> Such a view reveals the author’s understanding that the anger of God was not just temporary but defined by a just measure.

It is clear that the author of Daniel also grapples with the interpretation of the seventy years prophesied by Jeremiah:

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<sup>277</sup> Anderson, *Sin: A History*, p.78.

<sup>278</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah*, p.669.

<sup>279</sup> George Klein, *Zechariah: The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), p.102.

<sup>280</sup> Anderson, *Sin: A History*, p.78.

<sup>281</sup> Anderson, *Sin: A History*, p.79.

<sup>282</sup> For further comments on the Sabbath and the 70 years in Chronicles see Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), pp.1075-1076.

“In the first year of his reign [Darius, Son of Xerxes], I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.” (Dan. 9:2).

The answer for Daniel comes via the angel Gabriel:

“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.” (Dan. 9:24)

Most scholars agree that the time span within Daniel is 490 years (70x7) but there is disagreement regarding the actual dating of the timespan.<sup>283</sup> The figure of 490 also suggests that the period of seventy years prophesied by Jeremiah is being interpreted sevenfold in accordance with Lev. 26:18.<sup>284</sup>

What can be gleaned, overall, from the biblical authors who have cited Jeremiah’s seventy years is that although the judgment is harsh, God offers a glimmer of hope for the future. In divine anger God has routed Judah, yet one can sense that Yahweh has left the door ajar for the possibility of the relationship to be reconciled in the future. Brueggemann also highlights this by saying that such a notion doesn’t diminish the harshness of divine anger and judgment, but rather it is a disclosure of another dimension of God who governs the historical process.<sup>285</sup>

Such a glimmer of hope, that suggests a returning of favour upon the people of God, is now unpacked a little more in Jer. 25:12-14. The focus of these verses is not Judah but Babylon,

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<sup>283</sup> For those who agree with the interpretation of 490 years see for example Anderson, *Sin: A History*, p.85; John E. Goldingay, *Daniel: Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1989), p.257; Louis F. Hartman & Alexander A. Di Lella, *Daniel: The Anchor Bible Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), p.250 and Donald Gowan, *Daniel: Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), p.132. For a summary of the different interpretations of the 490 years see Stephen B. Miller, *Daniel: The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), pp.253-257.

<sup>284</sup> Goldingay, *Daniel*, p.257 & Hartman & Di Lella, *Daniel*, p.250. See also Anderson who suggests that once the author of Chronicles had made Leviticus 26 part of the equation, the mathematical correlation of Jeremiah’s seventy years and the time required to make up the lost Sabbaths was open to new exploration. Anderson, *Sin: A History*, p.85.

<sup>285</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.223.

suggesting that at the conclusion of the seventy years God will turn against the Babylonians. Brueggemann suggests that the Babylonian hegemony “has its limits and its end point” (v.12; cf. Isaiah 47:6).<sup>286</sup> This is evident within Jeremiah 25 where there is the dichotomy of Babylon being firstly an ally of God and then an enemy of God (Jer. 25:1-11, 12-14 & 15-26).<sup>287</sup> Though Babylon was a tool of God’s anger against Judah it failed to be measured and constrained, instead being merciless and cruel. Brueggemann suggests that God and Nebuchadnezzar were allied with an “agreed policy” that was not without limit and restraint.<sup>288</sup> Brueggemann goes on to say:

Yahweh was angry, to be sure, but anger is not Yahweh’s final intention, Nebuchadnezzar was not told but he should have known. For failing to be aware of God’s boundaries in regards to divine anger the glory and grandeur that was Babylon was brought to an end.<sup>289</sup>

Brueggemann appears to be suggesting that Nebuchadnezzar was an active participant in God’s plan to punish Judah, although it is not clear how and what “he should have known.”

Nevertheless, Babylon has overstepped its directive, and vv. 13-14 details how they will be repaid according to their deeds that brought such harsh devastation upon the people of Judah. God reclaims divine sovereignty over and against the sovereignty of Babylon, and this agent of punishment is now to be punished for the sake of Judah’s future.<sup>290</sup> As a result of such a prediction, the flicker of hope revealed in v.11 gains momentum in the promise that, though angry, God is still concerned with Judah’s welfare. In other words there is hope in exile for the people of Judah that God’s solidarity and justice is still with them.

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<sup>286</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.223.

<sup>287</sup> For an extensive study on Babylon in Jeremiah 25 see John Hill, *Friend or Foe? The Figure of Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah MT* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp.89-126.

<sup>288</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.510.

<sup>289</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p.512. See also Allen, *Jeremiah*, p.287.

<sup>290</sup> Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, p.223. See also Jones who highlights that “the agent of judgement will himself become the object of judgment,” Jones, *Jeremiah*, p.328. See too Craigie, Kelley & Drinkard who colloquially suggest: “As the old saying goes, what goes around comes around.” Craigie, Kelley & Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, p.368. Joo describes Babylon’s judgment in Jer. 25:12-14 as having a boomerang effect. Joo, *Provocation and Punishment*, p.156.

In the end vv. 12-14 bring about a new way of understanding the Babylonian empire. Though Babylon is of immense importance geopolitically, when understood theologically it is a mere function of God's sovereignty.<sup>291</sup> The new understanding is not just about Babylon however, these verses also reveal something new about God.

The tension between v. 9 ("forever") and v. 11 (seventy years) suggests however that the flicker of hope was reshaped by a theodicy: divine anger could not last for the foreseeable future (*'olam*), but rather, seventy years was seen as the appropriate period of punishment. Yahweh is a God who chooses new possibilities and is prepared to move beyond anger, destruction and exile to a new second season with Israel. In the following chapter, we will explore another case study on the extent of divine wrath, in dialogue with Brueggemann's rendering of a God who is willing to move past anguish and risk reconciliation.

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<sup>291</sup> See Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*, pp.102-133.

## **6. GOD WHO IS WILLING TO MOVE BEYOND ANGER: CONTRACTUAL THEOLOGY AND HOSEA 11:1-9.**

Previous chapters of this thesis have shown that for Brueggemann the anger of God is very real and devastating when continually provoked. For Israel exile meant a loss of land and freedom, and in some respects, the loss of God. It appeared that Yahweh had turned against Israel and sided with enemy nations who ravaged the lands of Israel and Judah. There is however, as we also discovered in the last chapter, a hope for the future that arises from ongoing testimony to the appropriate measure of divine justice. This hope is detailed in a promise by God to move beyond anger and be reconciled with Israel. This new movement of God is the focus of this chapter as illuminated by way of an exegesis of Hosea 11:1-9.

For Brueggemann, the fact that Yahweh is a God who is prepared to move beyond anger is an astonishing characteristic, given that it would seem to be inconsistent with the representations of other gods within the ancient Near East, as we shall see.<sup>292</sup> To fully understand Yahweh's incongruity with the gods, one should be prepared to wrestle with the concept of common contractual theology. Where the other gods are bound by contractual arrangements, Yahweh wishes to break free from such theological confines. In his explanation of this comparative perspective, Brueggemann refers to the 1952 article by Morton Smith titled: "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East."<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> For a detailed study on the anger of other gods in antiquity see, Reinhard G. Kratz & Hermann Spieckermann ed, *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008). Spieckermann suggests that wrath of the gods are among the most significant features of any religion in antiquity. See Spieckermann, "Wrath and Mercy as Crucial Terms of Theological Hermeneutics," Kratz & Spieckermann ed, *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity*, pp.3-16.

<sup>293</sup> Smith at the time was a professor at Brown University in Providence Rhode Island. Smith is probably best remembered for what became known as the Mar Saba letter that he claimed to have found hidden in a library at Mar Saba (a monastery overlooking the Kidron Valley in the West Bank east of Bethlehem) in 1958. The epistle discovered was supposedly from Clement of Alexandria to his disciple Theodore congratulating him on his stance against the Carpocratians who were a heretical group proclaiming to have a secret gospel of Mark. The Mar Saba controversy perhaps detracted from the fact the Smith was also a strong contributor to Old Testament studies with his most known publication being: *Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1971). His social reading of the Old Testament undergirded by the use of form

Smith suggests that there is one overall pattern in how the ancient Near Eastern peoples, including Israel, relate to and experience their gods: common contractual theology.

Brueggemann summarizes Smith's proposition of a common contractual theology as follows:

- i) The god believed in is addressed in exaggerated and flattering prayer and praise and is claimed to be the only God, even if it is a minor god in the pantheon. This god is praised by the claim of being incomparable.
- ii) This god is regularly characterized as both just and merciful, as the object of both fear and love.
- iii) This god, in any culture, is one who punishes those who offend him or her and rewards those who please him or her: that is, it is a theology of strict retribution. Smith calls this "essentially contractual."
- iv) Prophets are important in such a system and are everywhere honoured because they know of the god's will and so can speak about the prospects for rewards and punishments. Indeed the prophets are human agents who know what actions can lead to life or death.<sup>294</sup>

The contractual agreement stipulates rules and regulations, with the gods rewarding those who please them by keeping these stipulations, whilst disobedience and rebellion are punished by in wrath. Smith claimed that the punishment delivered by the gods was usually effected by drought, flood, famine, pestilence, internal discord or defeat by an enemy. This is supported by John H. Walton who makes the following comment on the precariously poised relationship of those ancient humans and their gods:

But the relationship with the gods was a fragile symbiosis. Inadvertent actions by the individual could suddenly draw the wrath of the deity. Since a relationship with a personal god offered protection and prosperity, if the god withdrew in anger, sudden vulnerability resulted. Sickness, failure of crops and for that matter personal disaster of every sort was attributed to desertion of by the deity and the concomitant exposure to demons and evil from a variety of sources. The utmost priority in such circumstances became the appeasement of the deity.<sup>295</sup>

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criticism suggests Israel as originally being a polytheistic nation who would become solely focused on Yahweh after the monotheistic faction gained prominence in the post-exilic period.

<sup>294</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, pp.5-6.

<sup>295</sup> John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), p.144. See also P. Kyle McCarter, "When the Gods Lose Their Temper: Divine Rage in Ugaritic Myth and the Hypostasis of Anger in Iron Age Religion," in Kratz & Spieckermann, *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity*, pp.78-91.

Examples of contractual theology at work within the Old Testament may be found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.<sup>296</sup> In these chapters God's exhortation is for Israel to live within the commands of the covenant in order to be blessed, while to live contrary to the covenant will bring curses.

Gordon Wenham also confirms the widespread use of similar contractual ideas, suggesting that Leviticus 26 shares a pattern that occurs outside the Bible in literature spanning the first three millennia BCE. These include the laws of Ur-Nammu, Lipit-Ishtar, Hammurabi and Babylonian boundary stones, Aramean and Assyrian treaties with their blessings and curses.<sup>297</sup> Leviticus 26 is divided between three blessings (the gift of rain and good harvests [vs. 4-5], the gift of peace, no wild animals, defeats, or famine [vs. 6-10] and the gift of God's presence [vs. 11-13]) and five subsections of curses (general curses-illness-famine and defeat [vs. 14-17], drought and bad harvest [vs. 18-20], wild animals [vs. 21-22], war, leading to plague and famine [vs. 23-26], to cannibalism, devastation and deportation from land [vs. 27-39]). In each of the subsections of curses it appears that the anger of God increases until Israel is threatened with being seemingly abandoned or destroyed.

The concept of common contractual theology appears somewhat primitive and cold, as it presents angry gods able to discard their adherents and terminate relationships without care or compassion. For Brueggemann, the proposal offered by Smith in his article is an important

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<sup>296</sup> See Christophe Nihan's discussion of these two chapters, where although he too suggests that the blessings and curses imitate a widespread pattern in ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties, he also explores the incongruence between the two chapters. Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), pp.535-545. For further reading see also Nihan's article on the priestly covenant, including a study on Leviticus 26, in, Christophe Nihan, "The Priestly Covenant, Its Reinterpretations and the Composition of 'P,'" Sarah Shectman & Joel S. Baden (eds), *The Strata of Priestly Writings: Contemporary Debate and Future Directions* (Zurich: TVZ Theological Publisher, 2009), pp.87-134.

<sup>297</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), p.327.

one for it forces us to consider and recognize the expressions of ancient Near Eastern characteristics within the expression of faith in Israel. But Smith's idea about common contractual theology also provides a means to understand Yahweh post-anger, Israel post-divine anger and the covenant post-divine anger.

Common contractual theology within the Old Testament is part of what Brueggemann describes as "Structure Legitimation."<sup>298</sup> This refers to principles of organisation that one is able to see it at work especially within the Sinai traditions, in Deuteronomic theology and within the wisdom literature. Brueggemann however reveals that something else is at work when he suggests: "Old Testament theology fully partakes in the common theology of its world and yet struggles to be free of that same theology."<sup>299</sup> He goes on to write:

The God of Israel is thus presented variously as the God above the fray who appears like other ancient Near Eastern gods and as a God who is exposed in the fray, who appears unlike the gods of common theology, a God peculiarly available in Israel's historical experiences.<sup>300</sup>

God is revealed in what Brueggemann describes as a bipolar dialectic.<sup>301</sup> He suggests that the bipolar construct serves both to legitimate structure (God above the fray) and to embrace pain (God in the fray).<sup>302</sup> Yet in this dialectic, Israel experiences God as one who is different from

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<sup>298</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p1-21. For a more recent study on common theology, see Brueggemann, *An Unsettling God*, pp.1-18. Here he explores God as a dialogical character that though possesses similarities with the ancient Near East differentiates between Godself and God's actions in history.

<sup>299</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.4.

<sup>300</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.5.

<sup>301</sup> Brueggemann notes that a number of scholars using various vocabularies have suggested that Old Testament faith must be understood in a bipolar fashion: Claus Westermann on blessing and deliverance, Samuel Terrien on the aesthetic and ethical, Paul D. Hanson on cosmic and teleological, James A. Sanders on the constructive and critical and finally Rainer Albertz on *Grosskult* and *Kleinkult*.

<sup>302</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel appears to invert Brueggemann's usage and interpret Yahweh's place "above the fray" as theologically normative. Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), p.90. For a more detailed study that sees the Old Testament text in its present form shaped by being "in the fray" see Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 BCE*, pp.100-114. For Gottwald's assessment of Smith and Common Theology of the ancient Near East see pp.670-678. For further reading regarding Gottwald's thoughts on the critical sociology of the Old Testament see, "Social Matrix and Canonical Shape," *Theology Today* 42 (1985-86), pp.307-321 and "Recent Studies of the Social World of Pre-monarchic Israel," *Current in Research* 1(1993), pp.163-189. See also Brueggemann's critique of Gottwald in, "Theological Issues in The Tribes of Yahweh by N. K. Gottwald: Four Critical Reviews" in Norman K. Gottwald & Richard A. Horsley (editors), *The Bible and Liberation: Politics and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993),

the gods of the ancient Near East. Yahweh, and Israel for that matter, seeks to not be bound by the coldly contractual notions of obedience and blessing versus disobedience and wrath.

At the centre of this epic struggle to be emancipated from common theological suppositions is the character of God struggling to be free, wrestling with and deciding “how much to be defined by common theology and how much to break free of that common theology in order to be a God appropriate to the life and character of Israel.”<sup>303</sup> Israel’s mutation is named as the “embracing of pain” and is experienced by Israel as personal hurt, expressed especially in the lament prayers and psalms and in the public outcry that leads to deliverance. But the embracing of pain is not just an issue for Israel; God also must decide on what requires life outside of the contract.

In essence, Morton Smith’s article exposes the divine non-negotiable totalitarian form of governance that is characteristic in religions of the ancient Near East and foundational in the Old Testament. Brueggemann agrees arguing that this rigid arrangement is “structurally crucial for much of the faith of the Old Testament.”<sup>304</sup> In the Old Testament, however, this reality is in tension with a movement “in the fray” that attempts to break free of this restrictive truth. It is Brueggemann’s understanding that this tension set Israel apart from other religions of the ancient Near East:

Clearly, the Old Testament is not simply one more statement of common theology. There is something else going on here to which we must pay careful attention. As the Old Testament is statement of common theology, it also states the crisis in common theology. The crisis comes about because that theology does not square with Israel’s experience of life or Israel’s experience of faith, that it is Israel’s discernment of God.<sup>305</sup>

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pp.166-180. For an opposing view where the Old Testament text as we have it is above the fray see Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). For Brueggemann’s critique and attempt to theologically bridge the gap between the two see Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, pp.2-21.

<sup>303</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.9.

<sup>304</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.10.

<sup>305</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.23.

As Yahweh and Israel journey together there are two dynamics taking place. Firstly there is an intensification of God's anger and impatience. This appears to be in contrast to the earlier mentioned aspect of the anger of God as being slow to develop or being long of the nose.<sup>306</sup> Within common theology, as Israel's refusal to live within the covenant stipulations continues to become more brazen, the anger of God moves slowly to outrage. The eighth and seventh century prophets testify to this movement. God shattered his silence: whilst humans may remain callous God will not remain silent.<sup>307</sup> Brueggemann, in his bemused response to Israel's constant belligerent behaviour says, "This intensification of anger is not chagrin that the end has brutally come. It is, rather, amazing that the end is so long in coming."<sup>308</sup>

The "embracing of pain" in Brueggemann's theology is the key indication of the Old Testament breaking out from the constraints of common theology. For Yahweh and Israel common theology is not adequate, and nor is it the end of the matter. The anomaly of Yahweh and Israel's journey together is that they both refuse to allow common theology to have the final word. Brueggemann defines "embracing of pain" as: "the full acknowledgement of and experience of pain and the capacity and willingness to make that pain a substantive part of Israel's faith-conversation with its God."<sup>309</sup> Pain is determined and defined by any dysfunction in Israel's relationship with God.

Israel refuses to be cast aside into the annals of history because of the outworking of common theology. Instead, there is a human boldness that risks all, but also challenges the legitimating structures. The demand to be heard yields a paradigm shift within Israel's relationship with God. Brueggemann states that "the moment when Israel found the nerve

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<sup>306</sup> See chapter three of this thesis.

<sup>307</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets Volume One*, pp.29-30.

<sup>308</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.24.

<sup>309</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.25.

and the faith to risk an assault on the throne of God with a complaint was a decisive moment against legitimation.”<sup>310</sup> Brueggemann investigates examples of this in his publication, *The Message of the Psalms*, where he looks at the psalms of lament. Brueggemann describes these psalms as the following:

It is the cry of the believer whose life has gone awry, who desperately seeks contact with Yahweh, but who is unable to evoke a response from God. This is indeed “the dark night of the soul” when the troubled person must be and must stay in the darkness of abandonment, utterly alone.<sup>311</sup>

Erich Zenger supports Brueggemann’s view where he describes those who prayed the psalms as accusing their own God of being an enemy and one who terrorizes and oppresses them.<sup>312</sup> Truly these psalms are unpleasant, yet they must still be wrestled with in order to grow in our understanding of God and ourselves. One may ask the question in regards to the psalms of lament, as to whether they had forgotten that they were the victims of their own sinfulness and hubris. Perhaps so, but they began to feel that the punishment was going on too long and so mustered the courage to speak up.

Such an idea appears to be behind Carroll Saussy’s understanding of the “embrace of pain.” Saussy struggles with Brueggemann’s concept whilst not totally refuting it.<sup>313</sup> In her work *The Gift of Anger: A Call to Faithful Action*, Saussy offers a critique of Brueggemann’s link between the anger of God and common contractual theology.<sup>314</sup> Saussy suggests that the anger of God is fully reasoned and accepted by Brueggemann in the understanding of it being linked with common contractual theology. She also supports the suggestion that contractual theology must be seen in tension with the Hebrew protest against it. Saussy refers to the

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<sup>310</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.27.

<sup>311</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), p.78

<sup>312</sup> Erich Zenger, *A God of Vengeance? Understanding the Psalms of Divine Wrath* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p.vii

<sup>313</sup> Saussy is Professor of Pastoral Care and Counselling at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC. Saussy is also the author of *God Images and Self Esteem: Empowering Women in a Patriarchal Society* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991) which explores the effects that masculine images of God have on the esteem of Christian women who are told they are made in the image of God.

<sup>314</sup> See Carroll Saussy, *The Gift of Anger: A Call to Faithful Action* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), pp.74-77.

book of Job as an illustration of this tension. Job suffers a series of devastating losses which results in Job, a man who is blameless and upright, challenging God and the theology of disobedience and judgement. Saussy highlights that God's acceptance of Job's complaint displays a God who is willing to transcend the contractual theological suppositions. It also speaks of Job's willingness in the midst of his pain to develop a divine conversation of protest. Saussy contends that Brueggemann sees the embrace of pain, rightly, as an active facing of pain, refusing to submerge it and instead forcing it onto God's agenda.

Saussy's concern is that some may misinterpret this idea as implying that people should suffer, if not willingly, but patiently. She fears that "protest may be lost in the embrace."<sup>315</sup> Saussy proposes an alternative term, "pain resistance," suggesting that resisting the disorder of creation or society includes an articulation of pain. She goes on to offer an appropriation of Brueggemann's thoughts on the embracing of pain:

Resistance of pain means full acknowledge and experience of pain and the capacity and willingness to make that pain a substantive part of one's faith conversation with God. Such an act of resistance means to articulate the pain fully, to insist on God's reception of the speech and the pain, and to persist in resisting pain with the faith assurance that God is already in the struggle of resistance. Both restless agitating and hopeful expectation of God's resolution continue until one experiences concrete change.<sup>316</sup>

Brueggemann sees in the embracing of pain Israel petitioning God, who has become silent due to anger, whilst Saussy sees God as one who has not departed but remains with his people in the midst of their pain and working against it. Saussy's rearticulation is perhaps understandable, but she seems to be suggesting that Brueggemann sees God as not involved in the alienation and pain of the exiled Israelites. A wider reading of Brueggemann's work would suggest otherwise.

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<sup>315</sup> Saussy, *The Gift of Anger*, p.75

<sup>316</sup> Saussy, *The Gift of Anger*, p.76

In *Finally Comes the Poet*, he argues that whilst the Israelites are experiencing alienation and rage, it is not that God is not present, but rather, that the conversation between the two has come to an awkward silence. Brueggemann puts it like this: “such alienation and muted rage (for God and Israel) have a central characteristic in common: an absence of conversation, a loss of speech.”<sup>317</sup> So God is in the struggle, but there has been a breach of the contractual responsibilities and the result is hurt, anger, repercussions, exile and sadness for both God and Israel culminating in a breakdown in communication. After a time Israel begins to advocate for itself with bold speeches, notably in psalms of lament:

How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? (Ps. 13:1-2)

Verse three is even more poignant:

Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death (Ps. 13:3).

As daring as this speech may be, it evokes a response from God who is the other affected party of this tattered relationship. Ultimately, it could be possible to see the psalms of lament as a kind of articulate protest that dares to define the limits of God’s justifiable wrath and judgment. Furthermore, such laments are aired against a backdrop of a covenant relationship with its contractual elements.

Brueggemann suggests that God too wrestles with how far to be defined by common theology. The questions for Yahweh are: is there a compassionate step that goes beyond structure legitimation; is there within the intensification of divine anger scope to see beyond such wrath; and will divine rage be the final expression towards Israel or will there be an offer of reconciliation? Brueggemann suggests that there are some textual hints that God begins to feel increasingly uneasy about conventional forms and about standard

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<sup>317</sup> Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, p.49

characterisations of what makes a god a god.<sup>318</sup> God is just as restless about common theology as Israel, and to support this proposal we will now explore Hosea 11:1-9.

Brueggemann's exegesis of Hosea 11:1-9 establishes a God who is beginning to wrestle with divine wrath, resulting in a hesitance to execute judgment upon an obstinate Israel. During the 8th century BCE, Hosea's prophecy dealt with the northern kingdom of Israel, also referred to as Ephraim. Hosea lived through the tragic last days of the northern kingdom during which six kings reigned in twenty-five years (2 Kgs 15:8-17:41). The transience of these kings was seen as a manifestation of the anger of God: "So in my anger I gave you a king and in my wrath I took him away" (Hosea 13:11). While Amos declared that Israel would be overthrown by an unnamed enemy, Hosea identified this enemy more specifically as the nation of Assyria (7:11; 8:9; 10:6 & 11:11). Assyria was a powerhouse during Hosea's time, who dismembered Israel in 733BCE and finally exiled its population in 722-721BCE because of Israel's last king Hoshea's disloyalty.

The message of Hosea is clear: God's anger is provoked because of Israel's spiritual infidelity. Israel had immersed herself in Canaanite religion and the worshipping of idols rather than Yahweh:

"Samaria, throw out your calf idol! My anger burns against them" (Hosea 8:5).

But Ephraim has aroused his bitter anger; his Lord will leave on him the guilt of his bloodshed and will repay him for his contempt (Hosea 12:14).

Israel's spiritual infidelity was symbolised through Hosea's own marriage with his wife Gomer, whose unfaithfulness served as an analogy for Israel's relationship with God. The first three chapters of Hosea are devoted to this painful parallel where the scene is set dramatically at the low point in the relationship between an unfaithful wife and an "angry and

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<sup>318</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.34

heartbroken husband.”<sup>319</sup> The intimacy of the covenant relationship between God and Israel was illustrated by the metaphor of the husband-wife relationship. Disloyalty to God was spiritual adultery leaving God angry and heartbroken. As Douglas Stuart suggests, “Prostitution is Hosea’s most common metaphor for the covenant infidelity that provoked Yahweh’s wrath against Israel, and the term is used in that sense throughout the book.”<sup>320</sup> While Amos spoke against injustice, Hosea focused on Israel’s idolatry as direct provocation to God’s face, resulting in anger and judgment.

There is nevertheless a desire within the book of Hosea to save Israel from such punishment and to announce upon a wicked nation the compassion and love of Yahweh who, like Hosea, is willing to forgive an adulterous people should they repent: “I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them” (Hosea 14:4). Brueggemann’s exegesis of Hosea 11:1-9 serves to highlight this proposal. Though Israel deserves judgement, God recoils from the promised destruction of verses 5-7 and instead promises to “not carry out my fierce anger” (v. 9). God is unable to do the warranted act, and apparently, is no longer willing or able to be the one-dimensional legitimator of structure.<sup>321</sup> This passage highlights God as being one who wishes to be free of the constraints and predictability of contractual theology and not be bound by anger.

Brueggemann points out that this chapter is best described as a “conventional judgment speech.”<sup>322</sup> Hans Walter Wolff declares it as a “homogeneous unit” in that it is clearly

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<sup>319</sup> Francis I. Andersen & David Noel Freedman, *Hosea* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1980), p.117.

<sup>320</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah: Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987), p.27.

<sup>321</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.40.

<sup>322</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.39. Brueggemann highlights that much of Hosea adheres to judgment speech conventions and is even more rigorous and harsh than in much of Amos. He goes on to emphatically emphasize this point by suggesting that: “stereotypes that treat Hosea as a “prophet of love”

separate from the previous and following sections.<sup>323</sup> Chapter 11 is often divided into two parts: vv.1- 4 and 5-11.<sup>324</sup> Brueggemann however divides the chapter into the following segments:

vv. 2-3: the indictment of Israel

vv. 4-7: the sentence of Israel

v. 8: the questions of hope for Israel

v. 9: the answer and not being bound by divine anger.<sup>325</sup>

For Brueggemann, Hosea 11:1-9 offers the most important example of God desiring to not be bound by common contractual theology.<sup>326</sup> Derek Kidner suggests something similar to Brueggemann as he believes this chapter is one of the boldest in the whole Bible in exposing us to the mind and heart of God.<sup>327</sup> These verses reveal good news for Israel in that God's love eventually overrides God's anger.

Verses 1-3 reveal God's graciousness and providence for Israel that is also interweaved with an indictment:

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realise it was I who healed them.”

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without further reflection miss the main point.” Also on the subject of judgment speeches in Hosea see also Stuart, *Hosea- Jonah*, pp.175-176.

<sup>323</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p.193.

<sup>324</sup> See for example Andersen & Freedman, *Hosea*, p.575. One should also see Stuart who divides Hosea 11:1-11 into three parts: vv. 1-4, vv. 5-7 & vv. 8-11, Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, p.176. H.D. Beeby on the other hand divides this passage into four sections: vv.1-4, 5-7, 8-9, and 10-11. See H.D. Beeby, *Grace Abounding: A Commentary on the Book of Hosea* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1989), pp.140-149. Finally see Ehud Ben Zvi who divides this passage into five sections: vv. 1-2, 3-4, 5-7, 8-9, and 10-11. See Ehud Ben Zvi, *Hosea: The Forms of the Old Testament Literature Volume XXIA/1* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), p.226.

<sup>325</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, pp.39-41. Brueggemann elsewhere has divided this passage into three sections: vv. 1-4, 5-7 & 8-9. See Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.218.

<sup>326</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.38. Brueggemann also believes that this passage is among the most remarkable oracles in the entire prophetic literature. It may also be one of the first examples of God moving beyond common contractual theology within the Old Testament. See Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.218.

<sup>327</sup> Derek Kidner, *The Message of Hosea: Love to the Loveless* (Leicester: Inver-Varsity Press, 1981), p.100. See also Birch who believes that this chapter is widely regarded as one of the most moving in all prophetic literature. Bruce Birch, *Hosea, Joel and Amos* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p.97.

Brueggemann proposes that idolatry was a forgetting of “who was God.”<sup>328</sup> MacIntosh believes that Israel’s rebellion is bound up with the people’s persistent idolatry, while in contrast God’s gracious actions towards Israel have been marked by consistency and love.<sup>329</sup> Having previously used the metaphor of a husband and wife to symbolise the relationship between God and Israel, Hosea now moves to a new metaphor: God as parent and Israel as child. God is depicted as a sorrowful indignant parent who after vigilant loving care during Israel’s early years has watched their child rebel and begin mixing with the wrong crowd. The result is a casting aside by Israel of the values and practices instilled in them by their parent Yahweh. Furthermore, the more God called after Israel, with warnings, the more they refused to listen, and became further estranged, particularly worshipping the Baals.<sup>330</sup>

Goran Eidevall, however, raises questions about the parent-child metaphor within these verses:

From v.2 on, it was not possible to discover any expressions that suggested a continuation of the parent-child metaphors. It is erroneous to look for a single metaphor which embraces the entire passage.<sup>331</sup>

Birch, on the other hand, highlights that these verses begin with a declaration of divine love for Israel as a child and form the basis of why Yahweh chose to adopt Israel as children of God. Birch goes on to suggest:

From its opening line, this chapter is established as a testimony to divine love – the love of parent to child, given freely long before the child can reciprocate with any understanding, and as we shall see, given continuously even when it is rejected.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.39.

<sup>329</sup> A. MacIntosh, *Hosea: International Critical Commentary* (Sheffield: T&T Clark International, 2000), p.437.

<sup>330</sup> Within the Old Testament the name Baal is mentioned 58 times in the singular and 19 times in the plural as is described above. Day has found that the plural form has two possibilities: firstly, Baal was the epithet, which became a personal name of the cosmic deity Hadad, and the term “the Baals” were simply local manifestations of this particular god. Secondly, it is also possible that on occasion the phrase was also a general term for Canaanite gods. See Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddess of Canaan*, p.68. See also Philip J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah – An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), p.95.

<sup>331</sup> Goran Eidevall, *Grapes in the Desert: Metaphors, Models and Themes in Hosea 4-14* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1996), p.174.

<sup>332</sup> Birch, *Hosea, Joel & Amos*, p.98.

For Brueggemann the metaphor of parent-child is alive with heart-wrenching reality as Yahweh, the snubbed parent, reflects on a history of recalcitrance and rejection and all this in spite of God's provision and protection.

Verses 4-7 reveal the anguished state of God who declares the impending judgment upon Israel: exile. Stuart proposes that the change from historical metaphors to coming judgment is sudden and blunt.<sup>333</sup> In Brueggemann's mind, this is common contractual theology in action. God's anger and Israel's forthcoming destruction is "flat and predictable" and that should be the end of the story between God and Israel.<sup>334</sup>

Verses 8-9 reveal that Yahweh becomes the anomaly. Where this should have been the end of the story, these verses display Yahweh as a God who wrestles with anger and desires to move beyond it. This desire and struggle is undergirded with the parental love that is felt for Israel. The theological transition within these verses cannot be understated and it is certainly not lost on Brueggemann:

The wonder is that the poet stays with the poem beyond this point (vv.1-7). The greater wonder is that God rendered in this poem focuses attention on the continuing question of Genesis 18:25 when one might have thought vv. 4-7 to be God's last thought on the question. It is, however, precisely where the end is expected and justified that the poem takes a new vitality.<sup>335</sup>

"Will not the judge of all the earth do what is just?" asks Gen. 18:25, but how is justice to be understood within a covenant relationship?

Verse 8 begins with God posing four rhetorical questions which Brueggemann suggests are introspective questions, to which the answer is not known ahead of time even to God:

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<sup>333</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, p.179.

<sup>334</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.39. See also MacIntosh who believes Israel's refusal to repent to God is decisive and Yahweh's patience is at an end. MacIntosh, *Hosea*, p.454.

<sup>335</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.40.

“How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim?”

He goes on to clarify: “this is not mere rhetoric, but a genuine probe.”<sup>336</sup> In other words God, not wanting to be bound by common theology, is searching for a new way of relating that moves beyond divine anger and the end to which v. 7 had brought things. Then there is the reference to Admah and Zeboiim, which brings the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to mind, against the urging of Abraham in Genesis 18.<sup>337</sup> God remembers the pain of these cities (situated outside the covenant) and appears to consider whether such destruction should be repeated. Brueggemann explains why this situation is so precarious: “All the old notions about what it means to be God come into play.”<sup>338</sup> The question is repeated four times and we find ourselves on the edge of our seats with anticipation about what the answer will be.

The second part of verse 8 highlights the internal upheaval God is experiencing, on which Brueggemann offers some extraordinary comments:

God is unable to do the warranted act precisely because God is no longer able to be a one dimensional legitimator of structure. Now God is transformed by the embrace of pain in God’s own person, which changes the calculus with reference to Israel.<sup>339</sup>

In the exploration of this turmoil of the embrace of pain, God discovers compassion that breaks all the rules within common theology. Wolff aptly puts it that “the God of Hosea is in conflict with himself over Israel.”<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.40.

<sup>337</sup> Stuart highlights that these cities were obliterated along with Sodom and Gomorrah in a sudden destruction of divine anger (cf. Gen. 19:24-25 and Deut. 29:23). See Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, p.181.

<sup>338</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.40.

<sup>339</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.40.

<sup>340</sup> Wolff, *Hosea*, p.181. See also Andersen and Freedman who refer to the agony of the mind of God as he searches for some way out of the response he has committed to in the covenant curses of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28. Andersen & Freedman, *Hosea*, pp.587-588. Furthermore see G. I. Davies who believes that we get a rare glimpse of the complex motives that operate within God’s character. He also suggests that vv. 8-9 act as a “pivot” or “turning point” for the book of Hosea in regards to understanding the change of heart of Yahweh. G. I. Davies, *Hosea* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), pp.260-261.

Verse 9 reveals the answer to the wrestling: God has moved beyond divine anger and now moves with compassion. Put simply God has a change of heart.<sup>341</sup> God will not react in retributive wrath because God has broken with the usual human notions of retribution (“I will not carry out my fierce anger,” v. 9a). Instead, God’s holiness will be understood in connection with divine compassion; in the moment of acute pain, when the hurt of Israel is taken into God’s own heart, the old contractual convention between earth and heaven is now nullified. God is one who could never finally “give up” or “hand over” Israel.<sup>342</sup> In one of Brueggemann’s earliest works, his study on the book of Hosea, he suggests that within this verse there is still an “overthrowing” but it has become internalised within the “heart of Yahweh,” so great is God’s fidelity toward Israel.<sup>343</sup> As a result there will be no destruction.

Verse 9, however also presents a problem. We know from the Old Testament and from history that the northern kingdom was not saved from destruction but rather was destroyed and exiled in 721 BCE by the Assyrian army.<sup>344</sup> Scholars suggest a number of possibilities to address this problematic verse.<sup>345</sup> Firstly, some suggest verse 9 is eschatological in focus. Stuart proposes that verse 9 is best understood as pointing towards a future hope.<sup>346</sup> This is symbolised by a refusal to destroy Israel completely and a promise of restoration.<sup>347</sup> Yahweh promises to bring the children of God back from exile in a full circle to a new patronage. Providing an idiosyncratic interpretation of the Hebrew text, Andersen and Freedman also

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<sup>341</sup> Wolff, *Hosea*, p.181.

<sup>342</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, p.181. See also Wolff who poetically suggests that Israel will not be “overturned” but there will be an “overturning” of God’s heart that will be against divine anger. Wolff, *Hosea*, p.201.

<sup>343</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis: A Study on Hosea* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1968), pp.29-30.

<sup>344</sup> See James Limburg who highlights that when chapter 11 was originally proclaimed that some of the Israelites were already in exile. This would refer to the 733BCE deportation (cf. 2Kings 15:29-31). James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah: Interpretation, a Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), p.38.

<sup>345</sup> Dearman states that a number of scholars agree on the redaction this verse (and vv.10-11) but disagree on the date. See J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), p.293.

<sup>346</sup> See also Dearman, *Hosea*, p.274 and Limburg, *Hosea-Micah*, p.40.

<sup>347</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, p.176.

argue for a later restoration but only after the requirements of divine anger and justice have been satisfied.<sup>348</sup> Another theory suggests that verse 9 is a post-exilic redaction.<sup>349</sup> This suggestion implies that the move beyond contractual theology is an insight that comes not from 8<sup>th</sup> century Hosea but from his followers and editors.

In regards to verse 9 and its redactional complexities, Brueggemann has provided no detailed explanations. In the little that he does say, however, he suggests that such a conclusion to this passage could indeed be redactional: “This conclusion may be an editorial achievement remote from the personal experience of the prophet.”<sup>350</sup> He goes on nevertheless to propose that the redactional move understood itself to be rooted in the intimate personal suffering of Hosea’s anguished state who received the mandate:

The Lord said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. (Hosea 3:1a)<sup>351</sup>

This expression of intimate reality moves instantly to become a new revelation of God:

Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.” (Hosea 3:1b).

The rhetoric of Hosea and its redaction makes it possible for God to remain in the midst of the infidelity that constitutes Israel’s life, yet proposing new life as in the re-marriage with Gomer in ch.3.

Ultimately, whatever the redactional intricacies may be, v.9 offers a radical overcoming of common contractual theology where God wrestles and attempts to move beyond divine

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<sup>348</sup> Andersen & Freedman, *Hosea*, p.590.

<sup>349</sup> See for example Gale A. Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hose* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), pp.153-156.

<sup>350</sup> Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.219.

<sup>351</sup> Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.219.

anger.<sup>352</sup> I would suggest that even though the northern tribes were eventually exiled this does not ultimately negate God's search for a way to move beyond anger.

At the conclusion of this dramatic passage common theology has been discarded as inappropriate by Yahweh, whose movement beyond anger reveals a desire to be relationally grounded in love for Israel. Moltmann puts it simply: "God takes back anger for the sake of love."<sup>353</sup> This has only come about after God is willing to embrace Israel's pain in Yahweh's own heart.

God's break with the common theology is not an easy step. It is a break wrought only in moving grief, only in solidarity with the grief of Israel. It is when God can grieve that there is a possibility of breaking out of such conventional categories.<sup>354</sup>

The pathos of God is quite different from that of the "capricious, envious and heroic divinities of the mythical sagas."<sup>355</sup> Indeed, that anger is not God's final intention is a conviction found some twenty-three times in the Old Testament.<sup>356</sup>

The cycle of divine anger is now complete, we might conclude. God is again a God who is slow to anger and is one who is prepared to stand with Israel in covenant relationship. There is, however, something new and unique to this relationship: God's willingness to embrace the pain of those whom Yahweh loves and move beyond anger. This is surely good news for Israel but it is also good news for the church today.

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<sup>352</sup> For a concise reflection on the history of discussions regarding the composition of the book of Hosea from the 19th century to the present see Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redaction Critical Investigation*, pp.1-25.

<sup>353</sup> Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p.272.

<sup>354</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p.41.

<sup>355</sup> Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p.270.

<sup>356</sup> Exodus 32:11-14; Deuteronomy 13:17; Joshua 7:26; Psalms 30:5; 85:5; 89:46; 103:9; Isaiah 10:25; 12:1; 26:20; 54:8, 9; 57:16; 60:10; 64:9; Jeremiah 3:5, 12; Ezekiel 5:13; 16:42; 24:13; Hosea 14:4; Micah 7:18 and Habakkuk 3:2.

## **7. A POSSIBLE LINK WITH PASTORAL THEOLOGY**

This thesis has displayed Brueggemann's understanding of divine anger that would appear to be cyclic within the Old Testament. Firstly, God does get angry, and this is not denied by Brueggemann but rather unwaveringly defended by him as a biblical truism. Secondly, though capable of anger, Yahweh is one who is slow to anger and long-suffering. Thirdly, God is provoked to anger by breaches of the covenant stipulations that shape Israel's understanding of divine justice and holiness. Fourthly, the result of divine anger for Israel is exile, but finally, the good news for Israel is that anger is not God's final word. In the last instance, Brueggemann has shown that God wrestles not to be bound by anger, wishing instead to be free of its constraints. The step that God initiates to move beyond anger provides something new within the ancient Near Eastern expression of divine wrath providing hope and reconciliation for Israel.

This thesis has also shown that Brueggemann is prepared to grapple with the texts that speak of divine wrath. What is evident within his theology of the anger of God is that to ignore such claims about divine wrath is to ignore a vast part of who God is. A willingness to explore divine anger is a beneficial process in that a better understanding of God is discovered. Furthermore, within the study of divine anger something new is discovered about God that is ironically reassuring and even appealing.

It is my hope that this thesis, assisted by Brueggemann's theology, might be an opportunity for people of faith, firstly, to encourage them to begin to explore divine anger, and, secondly for those who are willing to speak of divine anger to do so with a well-grounded theological understanding of this contentious subject. The motivation for this thesis lies within my

discomfort with the anger of God and its handling within the contemporary church, either in the propensity to ignore divine anger completely, or alternatively, within other sections of the church, communicating this theme in unhelpful, insensitive and even destructive ways.

As already noted at the beginning of this thesis, the anger of God is difficult for some within the church to consider. This is highlighted by C. S. Lewis' quote in regards to his own struggle to understand divine wrath: "God is the only comfort; He is also the supreme terror."<sup>357</sup> The problem however is that the anger of God is referred to over 400 times in the Old Testament and 29 times within the New Testament.<sup>358</sup> This fact makes it difficult for people to ignore or repudiate the idea that God gets angry. Campbell offers a critique of the church that refuses to deal with divine anger:

The gospel of niceness has had such an effect on Christian groups that anger is constantly evaded, denied and thereby exacerbated. Christians feel uneasy with an angry God, and with their angry selves, and so, like children seeing ghosts in bedtime shadows, their fear of that which they only half understand and are too frightened to look at grows and grows.<sup>359</sup>

Unfortunately for those who hold a reductionist view, divine anger will not disappear simply because they refuse to acknowledge it. This thesis has shown that Brueggemann, on the other hand, accepts anger as an authentic aspect of God and is willing to sit with the texts that speak of divine wrath. Following Brueggemann's lead, it would be constructive for those within the church who shy away from this issue to also sit with these texts for a better understanding. For some this may be a bold step, or as Campbell puts it, a "tortuous" step, but he also

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<sup>357</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, 1982), p.37.

<sup>358</sup> Alastair Campbell, *The Gospel of Anger* (London: SPCK, 1986), p.33.

<sup>359</sup> Campbell, *The Gospel of Anger*, p.14.

proposes it is a journey that is “full of surprises, as unexpected views are revealed when the road twists and turns.”<sup>360</sup>

Equally of concern are those within the church who emphasize the anger of God in unhelpful ways. I believe that this issue is of the utmost importance. In recent years, the anger of God has been linked to a number of circumstances around the world that have been detrimental to the church’s mandate to be salt and light within the world.<sup>361</sup> One example of the misuse of the anger of God is the actions of the small independent North American Baptist church known as Westboro Baptist Church whose public celebrations at the funerals of homosexual people and returned servicemen and women have been appalling. Their purpose is to announce God’s wrath and punishment upon the nation of America and take delight in doing so.<sup>362</sup> Australia also is not immune to such extreme fundamentalist misappropriation of the anger of God. After the Black Saturday bush fires in Victoria on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2009, Catch the Fire ministry leader Danny Nalliah announced the fires were the result of God removing divine protection upon Australia, particularly Victoria, in divine wrath due to the decriminalisation of the abortion bill passed in Victoria during the previous year.<sup>363</sup> Following the devastating Queensland floods of January of 2011, Nalliah suggested they were the manifestation of the anger of God due to Kevin Rudd, Minister of Foreign Affairs,

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<sup>360</sup> Campbell, *The Gospel of Anger*, p.15.

<sup>361</sup> For an article on recent worldly events that have caused or have been the expression of divine wrath see, Omar Sacirbey, “Is God’s Wrath at Work in Natural Disasters,” *The Washington Post*, Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2010. For a recent publication on God and natural disasters see Terence E. Fretheim, *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God and Natural Disasters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

<sup>362</sup> One of many examples of WBC’s rants involving the anger of God is the following: “Thank God for 9/11. Thank God that, five years ago, the wrath of God was poured out upon this evil nation.” Taken from a sermon by WBC pastor Fred Phelps “9/11: *The Wrath of God Revealed*,” see Westboro Baptist Church Video News 8<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>363</sup> Rick Feneley, “Pastor’s abortion dream inflames bushfire tragedy,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2009.

speaking against Israel.<sup>364</sup> Both examples are at extreme ends of the way the anger of God is being portrayed by some fundamentalist churches to unchurched people. It appears customary within some sections of fundamentalism to suggest that God is angry, harsh and arbitrary.

One movement that is proving to be popular, and polarising, not just within fundamentalist churches, but also among many conservative evangelical churches in the West today is the evangelistic group known as The Way of the Master. The Way of the Master is under the leadership of Ray Comfort and, though there are some aspects of Comfort's teachings that are helpful, many of his tracts and preaching refer to God seeing unchurched people as liars, adulterers and thieves with God's wrath waiting to devour them.<sup>365</sup> My concern is that such a method of evangelism, within which divine anger is misused, misrepresents God within the community. Moreover, it ironically depicts God as one of the gods of the ancient Near East who acts as a wounded despot and whose rage is fuelled by a desire to punish.

This "common theology" is contrary to what Brueggemann has shown to be distinctive about biblical theology. God's anger is undergirded by love and therefore by a desire to be in relationship. As this thesis has also displayed, behind divine anger is hurt and pain otherwise

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<sup>364</sup> Danny Nalliah, "Are the QLD floods the result of Kevin Rudd speaking against Israel," *Catch the Fire Ministries* 8<sup>th</sup> January 2011.

<sup>365</sup> One of WOTM's tracts goes like this: "Have you ever told a lie, stolen anything or used God's name in vain? Jesus said, 'Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.' Have you looked with lust? Will you be guilty on Judgment Day? **If you have done those things, God sees you as a lying, thieving, blasphemous, adulterer at heart.** The Bible warns that if you are guilty you will end up in Hell. That's not God's will. He sent His Son to suffer and die on the cross for you. You broke God's Law, but Jesus paid your fine. That means He can legally dismiss your case. He can commute your death sentence: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' Then He rose from the dead and defeated death. Please, repent (turn from sin) today and trust in Jesus alone, and God will grant you the gift of everlasting life. Then read your Bible daily and obey it." See [www.wayofthemaster.com](http://www.wayofthemaster.com) and Ray Comfort, *Hells Best Kept Secret* (New Kensington: Whitaker House, 1989) and *Way of the Master* (Alachua: Bridge-Logos, 2006).

referred to as the pathos of God. Any theology that does not portray God as holistic in this way is hermeneutically irresponsible. No wonder that people who are confronted with a bad-tempered and cold-hearted God are immediately turned off. The biblical truth is that God is heartbroken, and there is a sense of divine pain that is experienced on account of the world's sin. The following summary from Moltmann is broadly in agreement with the biblical theology discussed in this thesis:

What the Old Testament terms "the wrath of God" does not belong in the category of the anthropomorphic transference of lower human emotions to God, but in the category of the divine pathos. His wrath is injured love and therefore a mode of his reaction to men. Love is the source and the basis of the possibility of the wrath of God. As injured love, the wrath of God is not something that is inflicted, but a divine suffering of evil. It is a sorrow which goes through his opened heart. He suffers in his passion for his people.<sup>366</sup>

People who are given a simplistic interpretation of divine wrath are missing out on the opportunity to hear the depth of the biblical witness, and as we have seen in this thesis, Walter Brueggemann has provided a much more profound introduction to this difficult theme.

Finally, Brueggemann's writings have shown a link between divine anger and justice. This understanding should be the impetus for the church to live justly and to advocate for those who are oppressed and marginalised. The latter not only means that we should advocate for those who are unjustly treated but that the church should also feel a sense of anguish about such matters. Pedro Casaldaliga and Jose-Maria Vigil describe this as "ethical indignation," and they go on to say that when we engage in ethical indignation we are imitating the anger of God whose own ethical indignation is the catalyst for entering into the struggles for

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<sup>366</sup> Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p.272. cf. Dearman, *Hosea*, p.274.

liberation.<sup>367</sup> When it comes to injustice the church too should become angry and use such indignation as motivation for change: a righteous anger, for a righteous cause.

In the end, Brueggemann's writings and theology give us the courage to fully engage with the anger of God, to journey into the biblical wilderness, and not be overwhelmed by what we will discover. His work demands a reconsideration of divine wrath within the church. Our discoveries regarding the anger of God could also prove helpful in understanding and in expressing our own anger. Surely the goals of being slow to anger, to not be angry forever and to experience righteous anger towards injustices are worthy principles to strive for when it comes to human anger. Though Brueggemann's interpretation of the anger of God has had many twists and turns, ultimately he has left us more informed about who God is and how God is made known in relationship with us.

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<sup>367</sup> Pedro Casaldaliga & Jose-Maria Vigil, *Political Holiness: A Spirituality of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), p.26. See also Gustavo Gutierrez who believes that: "The Old Testament is clear regarding the close relationship between God and the neighbour. This relationship is a distinguishing characteristic of God of the Bible. To despise one's neighbour (Prov. 14:21), to exploit the humble and poor worker, and to delay the payment of wages, is to offend God." Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 2001), p.183.

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