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# HOPE IN THE MOMENT OF CRISIS: A STUDY OF DIFFERENT MODELS OF CRISIS AND HOPE IN THE BIBLE

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***Abstract.*** Three models of crisis and hope are examined as representative paradigms of solutions to crisis in the Bible: the divine wrath and reconciliation model, the God of history model, and the prayer model. The elements of ritual, the role of God, and prayer are all necessary dimensions that allow hope to resolve crisis situations.

***Keywords:*** Hope, Crisis

The terms such as war, violence, and crisis on the one hand, and on the other hand, the terms hope, confidence, and faith occur often in the Bible.[1] They are not only worthy of linguistic study,

[1] See Miloš Lichner, *Is There Hope When the Temple in on Fire?*, vol.1 of *Theology East–West* (Wien: Lit, 2020), Daniel S. Diffey, "1 Kings: Power, Politics, and the Hope of the World," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 3 (2019); Stan van Hooft, *Hope, The Art of Living Series* (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011); June Hunt, *Hope, Hope for the Heart* (Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing, 2009); James Gordon McConville, "1 Kings 8:46-53 and the Deuteronomic Hope," in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. James Gordon McConville and Gary N. Knoppers (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000); Walter Brueggemann, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a*

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but the Bible also presents a comprehensive picture of these concepts and offers numerous illustrative examples of these terms that can serve as inspiration for modern readers as well.[2]

Indeed, the pages of the Bible are replete with examples of crises and hopes. The first creation narrative (Gen 1:1-2:4a) presents a tension between darkness and light, while the second creation narrative (Gen 2:4b-25) illustrates the tension between God and humanity. Genesis 4–6, in addition to presenting the violence, fratricide, and escalation of various forms of corruption, tension, intrigues, and other phenomena often labeled as sin, also provides insight into the roots of wounded humanity. In sum, the various types of crises constitute an inextricable element of the biblical narratives.

However, the Bible does not merely present illustrative examples of crises that pervaded various realms, including society, cosmos, and human hearts. Indeed, it provides numerous examples of how to address problems that afflict us.[3] The solutions presented in the Bible oscillate between punitive measures, such as the expulsion from the garden, and unconditional gestures of mercy, exemplified by the covenant after the flood. The history of exegesis demonstrates that

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*Post-Christian World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000); Charles R. Snyder, *The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get There from Here* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (London: SCM, 1992); Charles Francis Digby Moule, *The Meaning of Hope: A Biblical Exposition with Concordance* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970); Rudolf K. Bultmann, "Hope," in *Bible Key Words*, ed. Karl Heinrich Rengstorf and Gerhard Kittel, vol. 12 (London: A. and C. Black, 1963).

[2] Cf. for example, Jacques van Ruiten and Koert van Bekkum, *Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception, Oudtestamentische Studiën/Old Testament Studies*, vol. 79 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), http://oseegenius.biblico.it:81/pib/resource?uri=000000132759; Anthony P. SooHoo, "Violence in the Service of Order in Mesopotamian Myth, Ritual, and Historiography" (PhD diss., New York University, 2019); Marty A. Michelson, *Reconciling Violence and Kingship: A Study of Judges and 1 Samuel* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2011).

[3] Cf. John Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

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numerous preachers, scholars, and individuals have already treaded the terrain of hope and crisis from diverse perspectives.

This brief introduction illustrates that an exhaustive exploration of the various types of crises and potential solutions presented in the Bible would necessitate writing several monographs. Thus, this paper examines three distinct models of crisis and hope that exemplify, I believe, the paradigms of solutions to crises:

1. the Divine wrath and reconciliation model
2. the God of history model
3. the prayer model

It is my hope that this paper will serve as an exemplar of how one might engage (listen) with the Bible and draw inspiration from God's Word to offer hope to our world that is and, indeed, always has been in crisis, a wounded world.

## The Divine Wrath and Reconciliation Model

Let us shortly summarize the basic concepts of this model.[4] According to the ancient Near Eastern (ANE) traditions, the Bible included, God(s) could get angry and turn their wrath against a king, a temple, a nation, or an entire country.[5] Gods' behavior and motivations were not always accessible to humans and, therefore, not fully foreseen. The gods may have been angered because of improperly conducted cultic activities in the temple, or if these activities were neglected, if covenants in which the gods acted as witnesses were broken, or if the king committed sins. Often, however, there was no clear reason why the gods became angry. Once the wrath of the gods was unleashed, the

[4] Peter Dubovský and Iveta Strenková, "Is There Hope When the Temple in on Fire?" in *Hope: Where Does Our Hope Lie?*, ed. Miloš Lichner, vol. 28 (Wien: Lit, 2020), 34–42.

[5] For a most complete study on divine wrath see Reinhard Gregor Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann, *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity, Forschungen zum Alten Testament. 2. Reihe* 33 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

consequences may have been cultic or political in nature. In the former case, the gods simply left the temple and found a new, more suitable location. In the latter case, the departure of the gods had an impact on the entire country, manifesting itself in the form of a hostile invasion, the plundering of the land, or as a natural disaster. The country, the city, and the king exposed to the divine wrath had to appease the deity, who, only then could return to his abode. Reconciliation between the world and the gods took place through rituals and sacrifices. The rituals alone were not enough, and if the reason for the divine wrath was the dilapidated condition of the sanctuary, then the sanctuary had to be rebuilt, or the sinful king replaced. The appeasement of the gods was practically manifested by the victory over the enemies who had devastated the earth. The invaders were driven out of the country, and a new king, according to the will of the gods, took the throne.

The epic of Erra offers a more detailed and nuanced reflection on this topic.[6] Marduk's wrath was directed against the entire world. The epic depicts the events from a variety of perspectives. The malevolent forces invaded the world. This state of affairs is mirrored in the disruption of social and cultic norms.[7] In terms of morality, the text describes a series of immoral actions, including murder, exploitation of the weak by the powerful, oppression and bribery, theft, public cursing of fathers by sons, and the subordination of male and female servants to their masters. Furthermore, these developments were reflected at the cultic level, with the introduction of taboo foods, the suspension of regular offerings, and the plotting of conspiracies. As a consequence of this deterioration of the situation, Marduk was incensed. The malevolent forces disrupted the cosmic balance, and the

[6] Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1991); Luigi Cagni, *Das Erra-Epos Keilschrifttext* (Rome: Päpstliches Bibelinstitut, 1970); Luigi Cagni, *L'epopea di Erra* (Rome: Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, Università degli Studi di Roma, 1969).

[7] Manfred Krebernik, "Wo Einer in Wut ist, kann kein anderer ihm raten: Zum Göttlichen Zorn im alten Orient," in *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity*, ed. Reinhard Gregor Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 52.

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orbits of the stars were altered. On Earth, the Arahtu Canal overflowed, resulting in a flood that devastated the city and swept away much of its infrastructure. The residences and temples were transformed into a wasteland, with the resulting swamp providing refuge for innumerable fish and fowl. The deities ascended to heaven in a manner analogous to that of birds. The populace was dispersed throughout foreign territories, either fleeing or taken captive.

The theme of the divine wrath is well known in the Bible as well.[8] In the book of Exodus, the theme of God's wrath becomes a central theme of the Golden Calf narrative in Ex 32.

וְעַתָּה הַנִּיחָה לִּי וְיִחַר־אַפִּי בָהֶם וַאֲכַלֵּם וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אוֹתְךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל׃

[10]Now, let Me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them, and make of you a great nation (Ex 32:10)

The expression וְיִחַר־אַפִּי בָהֶם literally means "the burning of one's nose". It is grounded in the ancient idea that emotions are connected with the bodily organs. In this case, the nose is the seat of anger, and its ignition depicts the nose's flaring or reddening.

According to the Book of Exodus, God's wrath could be kindled against an individual (Moses in Ex. 4:14) or against an entire nation (Ex 22:23; 32:10.11.22). The reason why God's anger flares up is cultic in the case of the story of the golden calf or disobedience to God's command (Ex 22:23) or to God's call (Ex 4:14). Using this theme, the author justifies not only the killing of the 3,000 Israelites but also the subsequent problems in Israel.

[8] Deena E. Grant, *Divine Anger in the Hebrew Bible, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series* 52 (Washington, D.C: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2014); Samantha Joo, *Provocation and Punishment: The Anger of God in the Book of Jeremiah and Deuteronomistic Theology, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 360 (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2006); Kari Latvus, *God, Anger and Ideology: The Anger of God in Joshua and Judges in Relation to Deuteronomy and the Priestly Writings, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 279 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1998).

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To illustrate the literary form of this model, let us present the case of judge Othniel in (Judg 3:7-11).[9]

> REASON: [7]The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, forgetting the Lord their God, and worshiping the Baals and the Asherahs.
>
> ANGER: [8]Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel,
>
> RESULTS: and he sold them into the hand of King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim; and the Israelites served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.
>
> REACTION: [9]But when the Israelites cried out to the Lord,
>
> SALVATION: The Lord raised up a deliverer for the Israelites, who delivered them, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. [10]The spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel; he went out to war, and the Lord gave King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.
>
> [11]So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel, son of Kenaz, died.
>
> RELAPSE: [12]The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord strengthened King Eglon of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

This model not only interprets the ups and downs in the Israelite history in the pre-monarchic period, but it also constitutes the literary framework of the Book of Judges.10 There is a recognizable redactional effort to create a theological frame for major judges (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson).

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[9] Jörg Jeremias, "Konzeptionen des Göttichen Zorns im Dtrg," in *Geschichte Israels und Deuteronomistisches Geschichtsdenken: Festschrift Zum 70. Geburtstag Von Winfried Thiel,* ed. Winfried Thiel, Peter Mommer, and Andreas Scherer, 135-51 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010).

[10] Cf. Jack M. Sasson, *Judges 1–12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Bible* 6D (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 20–120.

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## *Is there hope?*

No divine wrath came without warning. According to the ANE beliefs, divine wrath was manifested in the forms of portents, dreams, oracles, and visions sent as premonitions.[11] It was necessary to pay attention to these signs and correctly interpret them. Identifying incoming danger and punishment could save the king and the country from disaster. The king needed specialists who were trained in more than one branch of Mesopotamian scholarship to interpret the divine signs.[12]

The interpretation of divine signs intended as communication with the gods could have been initiated by humans or by gods. If initiated by the former, the communication was achieved by means of special inquiry techniques such as sacrifices, casting lots, etc. With time, some of the techniques within this group acquired higher scientific and social status, such as *extispicy,* and others fell out of use, such as *omina* derived from observation of smoke patterns or oil-pool shapes. The scholarly recognition gained especially by the second group—the unprovoked *omina*. To this group belonged *omina* derived from the observation of astronomical phenomena, the human body, prophetic ecstasies, etc.

To stop the misfortune, it was necessary to find the real cause of the misfortune and apply an appropriate ritual *namburbu*. The whole process was often divided into several parts, and various experts participated in it.[13]

## *Implications*

The divine wrath and reconciliation model was a well-known theological pattern that was widely used in the ancient Near East during

[11] Cf. Stefan M. Maul, *Die Wahrsagekunst im Alten Orient: Zeichen des Himmels und der Erde* (Munich: Beck, 2013).

[12] *State Archives of Assyria* X, xvii.

[13] Stefan M. Maul, "Divination Culture and the Handling of the Future," in *The Babylonian World,* ed. Gwendolyn Leick (New York; London: Routledge, 2007).

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the second and first millennia BC to explain, in particular, the political crises that occurred during that period.[14] The fundamental assumption of this model was the assertion that deities could become enraged with their land, city, temple, monarch, and populace. Once enraged, the deities would forsake their temples, and the populace would be delivered into the hands of their adversaries.

This model is grounded in a monolatric worldview. Each nation or land had its own deity, who was worshipped in a temple (typically the one located in the capital city). However, the behavior of the gods was not entirely predictable. They could become angry with their people for a variety of reasons.

In sum, how can we speak about hope in this theological and political framework? Following this model, the sole viable method for averting a crisis was to prevent it. It was, therefore, crucial to have a highly developed system of omen interpretation, as the gods conveyed their decisions in various forms, including the stars, the livers of animals, or through their seers, dreamers, and prophets. Once the gods became angry, it was necessary to appease them by performing the appropriate rituals and repentance. Consequently, the Deuteronomistic Historians demanded the removal of high places, the destruction of asheras, and even the murder of idolatrous priests. Therefore, Hezekiah's and Josiah's religious reforms were a means of appeasing the angry God.[15]

## God–The Lord of History Model

The second half of the 8th century. BCE gives witness to the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. O. Lipshitz calls this period the beginning

[14] Jörg Jeremias, *Der Zorn Gottes im Alten Testament : Das Biblische Israel zwischen Verwerfung und Erwählung, Biblisch-Theologische Studien* 104 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009).

[15] Lauren A. S. Monroe, *Josiah's Reform and the Dynamics of Defilement: Israelite Rites of Violence and the Making of a Biblical Text* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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of the era of empires.[16] Tiglath-pileser III and his successors, in a few decades, transformed a small kingdom around the city of Ashur into a full-fledged Empire. The Assyrian kings had at their disposal a superior army, a new state organization, secret services, diplomatic and political tools, science, art, literature, and religion. All these elements together allow the Assyrians to establish the first world Empire.[17]

The rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, however, brought to light new questions. How is it possible that the god of Israel and his land were under Assyrian dominance? Reading the Assyrian victories in the light of divine wrath theology, the defeats of the local kingdoms proved that the Assyrian gods were stronger than any other gods. Therefore, if the local gods were unable to protect their own people, city, and land, can there be any hope for the people living under a local god? In sum, the expanding Assyrian Empire made the collapse the foundation of hope grounded in the monolatric theological worldview. In other words, there was no hope for people trusting in their gods; the only option was to collaborate with the Assyrian gods and, thus, to compromise their own religion.

The geniality of prophet Isaiah showed the way out of this dilemma.[18] Isaiah devised a new theological model that laid a new

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[16] Oded Lipschits, *Age of Empires: The History and Administration of Judah in the 8th–2nd Centuries BCE in Light of the Storage-Jar Stamp Impressions, Mosaics. Studies on Ancient Israel* 2 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2021).

[17] Shawn Z. Aster, "An Assyrian Loyalty-Oath Imposed on Ashdod in the Reign of Tiglath-Pileser III?," Or 87 (2018); Davide Nadali, "Sieges and Similes of Sieges in the Royal Annals: The Conquest of Damascus by Tiglath-Pileser III," *Kaskal* 6 (2009); Dan'el Kahn, "Arpad and the Whole of Aram: The Policy of Arpad in 9th–8th Century B.C. Syria from the Time of Shalmaneser III (858 B.C.) to the Annexation of Arpad by Tiglath-Pileser III (740 B.C.)," *ANES* 44 (2007); Peter Dubovský, "Tiglath-Pileser III's Campaigns in 734–732 B.C.: Historical Background of Isa 7, 2 Kgs 15–16 and 2 Chr 27–28," *Biblica* 87 (2006).

[18] Peter Dubovský, "Inverting Assyrian Propaganda in Isaiah's Historiography: Writing the Hezekiah-Sennacherib Conflict in the Light of the Ashurbanipal-Teumman War," in *The History of Isaiah: The Formation of the Book and Its Presentation of the Past,* ed. Jacob Stromberg and J. Todd Hibbard (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,

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foundation of hope for his people living under the Assyrian yoke. First, Isa 10:5-6 interprets the Assyrian expansion as a part of God's project. According to Isaiah, it was in fact the God of Israel who called Assyria into existence and gave her a precise task—to punish rebellious nations, among them, Israel. In the second step, Isa 10:7–19 presents Assyria from a different viewpoint. What the Assyrians considered the divine blessing, namely their victorious campaigns and their annihilation of nations, Isaiah interpreted as the Assyrians overstepping boundaries. The Assyrians did not consider themselves a tool in God's hands, but revolted against the one who missioned them. In the light of Isaiah's interpretation of history, the Assyrians will be equally punished after they have finished their task. The prophecies related to the future punishment of Assyria assumed various nuances, but the bottom line is that the Lord will use another people or nation to bring down the Assyrian hubris.

This theological model laid a new foundation for the Israelites' hope. Their God was not one among many other gods, but rather the Lord of history. The Israelite God is above all nations, in whose hands are the reins of history. The Israelites were not in the hands of the merciless Assyrians, who could do with them whatever they wanted, but rather both the Israelites and the Assyrians were in the hands

2021); Reinhard Gregor Kratz and Joachim Schaper, *Imperial Visions: The Prophet and the Book of Isaiah in an Age of Empires, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 277 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020); Shawn Zelig Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology, Ancient near East Monographs* 19 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017); Peter Machinist, ""Ah, Assyria..." (Isaiah 10:5ff.): Isaiah's Assyrian Polemic Revisited," in *Not Only History: Proceedings of the Conference in Honor of Mario Liverani Held in Sapienza-Università di Roma, Dipartimento di Scienze dell'antichità, 20–21 April 2009*, ed. Gilda Bartoloni, Maria Giovanna Biga, and Armando Bramanti (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016); Michael D. Press, "'Where Are the Gods of Hamath?' (2 Kings 18.34 // Isaiah 36.19): The Use of Foreign Deities in the Rabshakeh's Speech," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 40, no. 2 (2015); Göran Eidevall, "Propagandistic Constructions of Empires in the Book of Isaiah," in *Divination, Politics, and Ancient Near Eastern Empires* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014); Mary Katherine Y. H. Hom, *The Characterization of the Assyrians in Isaiah: Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives* (New York; London: T & T Clark, 2012).

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of the Lord, the Lord of history. Isaiah's theological foundation of hope remained valid for centuries, and the model was applied to the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans and its reminiscences can be noticed even in many current theological explanations. This proves that this model could be considered a solid foundation of hope for any oppressed nation.

### *Implications*

Isaiah and his response can be compared to those of Thomas Aquinas or Karl Rahner. Isaiah and the scribes editing the Book of Isaiah established a novel theological framework for addressing crises. This new theological framework enables the Israelites to respond to the question of why this has occurred. Was our fate truly merited? One might inquire as to the location of God amid these circumstances. The response is straightforward: The notion that God is the driving force of history. God is the architect of a superior divine plan, which encompasses all events, both good and bad. It is noteworthy that Isaiah employs the religious patterns of Assyrian scholars to construct his new framework, effectively reversing their original intent. However, Isaiah's solution is not solely an intellectual exercise. The poetic style of chapter ten imbues his solution with a contemplative quality, inviting readers and listeners to reflect on and contemplate YHWH as the Lord of History, discerning his role in the complex tapestry of human history.

## The Prayer Model

The last model presented in this paper shifts the focus to prayer.[19] In this model, the solution to a crisis is initiated through a dialogue with God. In contrast to previous models, this approach does not rely on rituals to resolve crises. Instead, it involves direct communication with God through prayer. Therefore, the resolution of situations involving

[19] Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher and Maria Häusl, *Prayers and the Construction of Israelite Identity*, vol. 35 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019); Walter Brueggemann, *Great Prayers of the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

war, violence, and other types of crises is achieved through the act of prayer. The act of prayer compels the deity to intervene on behalf of the petitioner.

Even though the prayer was a well-known aspect of Israelite religious practices, an examination of the biblical narratives that contain prayers reveals that the revisions of these texts made in the Second Temple period imbued the prayers with a new dimension. The prayer and personal dialogue with God, rather than rituals and sacrifices, became the most powerful tool for resolving crises in the period when the role of the Jerusalem temple assumed a new dimension. It served the nation and the priests who had no king. The Manasseh story in the Books of Kings and in the Books of Chronicles can be taken as an illustrative example.[20] A comparison of these two narratives reveals that the new element added to the Books of Chronicles concerns the prayer of Manasseh. According to the Chronicler, the evil king Manasseh was deported to Babylonia, where he repented:

> [10]The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they gave no heed. [11]Therefore, the Lord brought against them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh captive in manacles, bound him with fetters, and brought him to Babylon. [12]While he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. [13]He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord indeed was God. (2 Chr 33:10–13, NRSV)

[20] Peter Machinist, "Manasseh of Judah: A Case Study in Biblical Historiography," in *Stones, Tablets, and Scrolls: Periods of the Formation of the Bible*, ed. Peter Dubovský and Federico Giuntoli, ARCB (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020); Michael D. Matlock, "The Prayer of Manasseh: A Pithy Penitential Text Recasting Scripture through a Vast Intertextual Repertoire," in *Intertextual Explorations in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature*, ed. Geoffrey David Miller and Jeremy Corley, *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyeter, 2019); Andrew T. Ohm, "Manasseh and the Punishment Narrative," *Tyndale Bulletin* 61, no. 2 (2010).

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וַיְדַבֵּר יהוה אֶל־מְנַשֶּׁה וְאֶל־עַמּוֹ וְלֹא הִקְשִׁיבוּ׃

וַיָּבֵא יהוה עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת־שָׂרֵי הַצָּבָא אֲשֶׁר לְמֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר וַיִּלְכְּדוּ אֶת־מְנַשֶּׁה בַּחֹחִים וַיַּאַסְרֵהוּ בַּנְחֻשְׁתַּיִם וַיּוֹלִיכֵהוּ בָּבֶלָה׃

וּכְהָצֵר לוֹ חִלָּה אֶת־פְּנֵי יהוה אֱלֹהָיו

וַיִּכָּנַע מְאֹד מִלִּפְנֵי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתָיו׃

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֵלָיו

וַיֵּעָתֶר לוֹ

וַיִּשְׁמַע תְּחִנָּתוֹ וַיְשִׁיבֵהוּ יְרוּשָׁלַ͏ִם לְמַלְכוּתוֹ וַיֵּדַע מְנַשֶּׁה כִּי יהוה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים׃

The Chronicler not only adds verses missing in the Books of Kings but also demonstrates the manner in which one should engage in prayer during a period of crisis. The act of prayer (וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל) must be accompanied by specific inner attitudes and a particular approach to God. The verbs employed (highlighted in grey) indicate that the prayer was not merely a recitation, but rather the whole human heart, body, and mind are directed towards God. We can observe similar additions in the Books of Chronicles in the case of Asa (2 Chr 14:9–12) and Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:1–12).

Besides the Books of Chronicles, a comparable interweaving of the inner repentance and external gestures we can find in the LXX, such as in the Greek elaboration of Ahab's conversion in 1 Kgs 21:27/3 Kgdms 20:27.[21]

[21] Adrian Schenker, *Älteste Textgeschichte der Königsbücher: Die Hebräische Vorlage der ursprünglichen Septuaginta als älteste Textform der Königsbücher, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 199 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 97–98.

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| | MT | B | Ant. | A |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Introduction | וַיְהִי כִשְׁמֹעַ אַחְאָב אֶת־ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה | καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λόγου, | ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λόγου, | καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λόγου, |
| Inner movement | | ὡς κατενύγη Αχααβ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου | ὡς κατενύχθη Αχααβ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου | ὗο κατενύγη Αχααβ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου |
| Weeping | | καὶ ἐπορεύετο κλαίων | καὶ ἐπορεύετο κλαίων | καὶ ἐπορεύετο κλαίων |
| Tearing cloth | וַיִּקְרַע בְּגָדָיו | καὶ διέρρηξεν τὸν χιτῶνα αὐτοῦ | καὶ διέρρηξεν τὸν χιτῶνα αὐτοῦ | καὶ διέρρηξεν τὸν χιτῶνα αὐτοῦ |
| Putting on sackcloth | וַיָּשֶׂם שַׂק עַל בְּשָׂרוֹ | καὶ ἐζώσατο σάκκον ἐπὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ | καὶ ἔζωσατο σάκκον ἐπὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ | καὶ ἐζώσατο σάκκον ἐπὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ |
| Fasting | וַיָּצוֹם | καὶ ἐνήστευσεν | καὶ ἐνήστευσεν | καὶ ἐνήστευσεν |
| Wearing sackcloth | וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּשָּׂק | καὶ περιεβάλετο σάκκον ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ᾗ ἐπάταξεν Ναβουθαι τὸν Ισραηλείτην | καὶ περιεβάλετο σάκκον ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ᾗ ἐπάταξεν Ναβουθαι τὸν Ισραηλείτην καὶ τοῦ υἱὸν αὐτοῦ | καὶ περιεβάλετο σάκκον ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ᾗ ἐπάταξεν Ναβουθαι τὸν Ισραηλείτην |
| Living repentance | וַיְהַלֵּךְ אַט | | | καὶ ἐπορεύετο κεκλιμένος |
| | [27]*When Ahab heard these* words, he tore his cloths and *put* sackcloth on his body and fasted and *lay in* sackcloth and *went (about) dejectedly.* | [27]*And on account of the word when* Achaab was *deeply moved from before the Lord and he went (about) crying* and tore his tunic and *girded himself with* sackcloth on his body and fasted and *put on* sackcloth *in the day he smote Nabouthai, the Israeleiten,* and went (about in this way). | [27]*But on account of the word when* Achaab *has been deeply moved from before the Lord and he went (about) crying* and tore his tunic and *girded himself with* sackcloth on his body and fasted and *put on* sackcloth *in the day Iezabel smote Nabouthai, the Iezraeliten,* and *his son.* | [27]*And on account of the word by which* Achaab *was deeply moved from before the Lord and he went (about) crying* and tore his tunic and *girded himself with* sackcloth on his body and fasted and *put on* sackcloth *in the day he smote Nabouthai, the Iezraeliten,* and went (about) *bowed down.* |

In sum, the later Hellenistic reshaping of Ahab's narrative indicates that it was not sufficient only to pray in terms of reciting words, but the prayer in the moment of crisis must be accompanied by proper gestures and inner attitude.

This Ahab narrative is not a single case in the LXX. A comparison of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Book of Esther shows a similar addition. Greek addition C in Chapter 13 adds the prayers of Mordechai and Esther. Similarly, we can add to this list the Hezekiah narrative. The Judahite king facing the Assyrian invasion, according to an earlier version, paid the tribute (2 Kgs 18:13–16).[22] However, the later elaboration of the story adds the prayer as the decisive moment for resolving the crisis.[23] Hezekiah's prayer not only triggers the solution of the crisis but also defines the structure of the prayer in the case of crisis:

1. invocation,
2. praise,
3. the description of the crisis,
4. petition,
5. motivation.

## *Implications*

Pre-exilic Judaism revolved around some solid principles: the temple, kingship, and Davidic dynasty, promises, relation with God, Jerusalem as a chosen capital, etc. All these were put in crisis or question by the Babylonian invasion that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. The kings, the temple, and cultic activities connected with them were no longer in place. In the absence of the temple and

[22] Cf. Christian Frevel, *Geschichte Israels,* vol. 2, *Kohlhammer Studienbücher Theologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 213–63.

[23] Cf. Robb Andrew Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 155 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012).

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its cult, the void is filled with prayer and interior conversion. However, it seems that not any prayer was considered to be efficient to resolve a crisis. Some elements should be noticed:

*Who prayed?* The Second Temple revision of the biblical stories indicates that the prayer of the king, queen, or another important person had a special value. As a king could bring the whole nation to sin, thus, the king could voice the cry of the whole nation.

*How did they pray?* Not any prayer was an answer to crisis. Second temple Judaism designed a structure of prayer with fixed elements. Moreover, the inner attitude and external gestures of the king were not sufficient. The prayer should be accompanied with specific gestures; thus, the king tore his clothes, the queen was fasting, the orators cried and humbled themselves, their heart was pierced, etc.

*Where was it done?* The analysis of the space in the Bible indicates that the space in which the prayer took place played an important role (temple, courtyard, inner room, etc.)

## Conclusion

The reflections proposed above reveal three potential approaches to crisis resolution and, consequently, three bases for hope. The first model is that of divine wrath and reconciliation with God. In contrast with the concepts of wrathful deities prevalent in the ancient Near East, the Bible consistently emphasizes that it was human transgression that provoked divine anger and resulted in just retribution. The implementation of divine retribution was invariably preceded by divine warnings, conveyed through prophets or extraordinary phenomena. If the warnings were duly acknowledged and acted upon, the subsequent punishment could have been averted. If humans disregarded the warnings, divine wrath could have been mitigated through a suitable reconciliation with the divine, which typically involved appropriate rituals and a specific form of conversion similar to those done by Hezekiah and Josiah. It is significant to note that the aforementioned practices remain relevant to this day, including the celebration of

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the mass as a means of reconciliation with God, the conversion and repentance of individuals and nations, and the belief in God.

It is insufficient to merely perform rituals; the Bible underlines the necessity to comprehend the crises and the role of God in them. For Isaiah, the crisis served as an opportunity to re-examine the monolatric concept of God, ultimately paving the way for monotheism.[24] The fundamental tenets of this novel theological system were twofold. Firstly, God is identified as the Lord of History and the Supreme Creator of the Universe. Secondly, each crisis presents an opportunity to re-examine the human concept of God. The crisis prompts a transcendence of the frontiers that we would otherwise never contemplate. A crisis may sometimes demolish our human thoughts and force us to be open to new horizons.

Performing proper rituals to reconcile with God and understanding the role of God in crisis is a starting point. It is essential to live through the crisis. The crisis presents an invaluable opportunity to engage in a transformative dialogue with God and with oneself, which may not be possible if one remains within the confines of one's comfort zone. A crisis has the potential to profoundly impact our hearts through prayer. I believe that if we omit any of these three dimensions, we can hardly find hope in our crises.

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[24] Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Othmar Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus, Orte und Landschaften der Bibel* 4.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008); André Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism: The Rise and Disappearance of Yahwism* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2007).

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and patristic exegesis; religious reforms in the Old Testament; and living under the Assyrian Empire. He is an active member of various scientific organizations, including the Society of Biblical Literature, the European Association of Biblical Studies, the Catholic Biblical Association of America, and was also a part of the International Theological Commission. He is also a board member of various peer-reviewed scholarly journals and has written several books and journal articles. He serves as the present President of the Pontifical Biblical Institute (*Biblicum*) in Rome. He is currently writing a biblical commentary on the Book of Kings from the lens of reception history.

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