Ritual, Rhetoric, and the Polemic against the Host of Heaven

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I, Cat Quine, declare that I have written this thesis, that it is entirely my own work, and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Date: _____10/09/19_____

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Abstract

This study is an exploration of the theological and rhetorical potential of perceptions and proclamations of ritual failure, undertaken with specific regard to the polemic against rituals for the Host of Heaven. The Host of Heaven are a rare phenomenon within the Hebrew Bible: they occupy an accepted place within Yahwism in some texts (e.g., 1 Kgs 22:19-23; Neh 9:6; Ps 148:1-4) but are the targets of sustained polemic in others (e.g., Deut 17:3; 2 Kgs 21:3, 5; 23:4, 5; Jer 8:1-2). I contend that this phenomenon is best explained through the lens of ritual theory, especially theories of ritual failure. The biblical polemic is not against the Host of Heaven directly, but rather against those who practice rituals for them. These ritual practices are presented as threats to the cosmic and social order that disrupt the YHWH-Israel relationship and cause the downfall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the deportation of the people. Ritual theory suggests that scrutiny of ritual is an inevitable and necessary consequence of these and other types of social upheaval; flawed and failed rituals must be identified and either corrected or discarded to re-stabilize the cosmic and social order. The Host of Heaven rituals were identified as flawed and failed rituals, responsible for causing social upheaval, and were polemicized against in response. The textualization of these polemics against the Host rituals resulted in the texts themselves becoming agents of ritual change, offering models of correct ritual practice. Once targets of ritual polemic, the Host became exemplary ritual practitioners — not worshipped themselves, but worshipping YHWH in the heavens (Pss 103:19-22; 148:1-4; Neh 9:6). This investigation offers ritual theory as an interpretive model for the study of these religious polemics in ancient Israel and Judah. In particular, it offers a conceptually coherent way of viewing developments in Israel's faith that led to the rise of monotheism. Perceived ritual failure offered an opportunity for theological transformation and polemic against failed rituals was an important step in the journey toward a new, monotheistic ritual programme.

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Abbreviations

According to *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (2nd ed.; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). Abbreviations not found there are left in full.

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte
AIAL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BBRSup	*Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplements*
Bib	*Biblica*
BHS	Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BHQ	Biblica Hebraica Quinta
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
BRLA	Brill Reference Library of Ancient Judaism
BSCH	Brill's Series in Church History
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblical: Old Testament Series
CSSA	Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology
DCH	Dictionary of Classical Hebrew
EASA	European Association of Social Anthropologists
DDD	Dictionary of Deities and Demons
EBR	Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature

FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur dea Alten und Neuen Testaments
HACL	History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant
HALOT	Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
Interpretation	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JHS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JRitSt	*Journal of Ritual Studies*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
MT	Masoretic Text
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDB	New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
OtSt	*Oudtestamentische Studiën*
RAS	Ranchi Anthropology Series

RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
RQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLRS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SOTSMS	Society of Old Testament Study Monograph Series
SEÅ	*Svensk exegetisk årsbok*
SHANE	Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
SJOT	Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament
UCOP	University of Cambridge Oriental Publications
UF	*Ugarit Forschungen*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Bible Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZABR	*Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZTK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

Introduction

At its conception, this study intended to answer questions about the nature and development of the biblical Host of Heaven. Yet, after two and a half years of dedicated study, I seemed to know less about the Host of Heaven than I did when I started. The realisation that traditional lines of enquiry fall short in the search for the elusive Host of Heaven prompted a new approach to the texts. This study is an exercise in the interpretation of the Host of Heaven texts within a different framework, namely, ritual theory.

One of the most striking aspects of the biblical portrait of the Host of Heaven is that they are portrayed both positively and negatively. These differences do not reflect a simple linear development. Earlier and later positive portrayals of the Host bookend the sustained polemics against them.[1] The following study seeks to explore why this is the case — why the Host are the targets of polemic in some texts but not others. When we examine the polemical texts, a clear focus on ritual is manifest. That is, the authors polemicize not against the Host themselves, but against the people who practiced rituals for them. Furthermore, the authors of these polemics state that these rituals were flawed or had failed. The authors point to destruction, death and deportation to argue that the rituals were ineffective or flawed — the Host could not or would not help their worshippers, while the worship offered to them provoked YHWH to anger.[2] The basis for the polemic against the Host is perceived ritual failure. The centrality of ritual in the formation of the polemic against the Host of Heaven forms the core focus of this study and provides the framework within which these texts are interpreted.

As will become clear, the corpus of texts utilized in this study is limited to the Hebrew Bible. This is not intended as a comment on the importance

[1] The polemics focused on in this study are Zeph 1:4-5; Jer 8:1-3; 19:13; 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3, 5; 23:4, 5; Deut 4:19 and 17:3. These texts are united in their polemic against Host of Heaven worship, rather than polemic against the Host themselves. Isaiah 24:21-23 and 34:4 provide examples of the latter but fall outside the purview of this study.

[2] I leave the tetragrammaton unvocalized but retain other scholars' usage when citing their works.

of the Hebrew Bible over and above all other ancient texts. Rather, it is a result of the limitations of a doctoral dissertation and of the complexity inherent in dealing with the Host of Heaven. If the Host cannot be adequately defined or delimited within the biblical corpus, then selecting extra-biblical texts for comparison is infinitely complicated. The same is true of archaeological data. As we will demonstrate, only four biblical texts explicitly, and three implicitly, connect the Host with the celestial bodies; to incorporate archaeological evidence of astral worship into the discussion of the Host of Heaven polemic risks prioritising the claims of these texts over other, non-astral Host references.[3] It also risks minimising the interpretive possibilities imagined of the authors' rhetoric. As we will demonstrate, the four texts that explicitly connect the Host with the celestial bodies do so in different ways and for different reasons. The relationship between deities and physical representations and manifestations of them is regularly questioned in other quarters. For example, the relationship between the goddess Asherah and biblical references to asherah as an object is regularly questioned and acknowledged to be fluid and thus uncertain.[4] It is time to open similar lines of enquiry with the Host of Heaven and the celestial bodies. Although archaeological evidence of astral worship is easily found, therefore, it is not included herein, lest it skew the results. Nor do I include iconographic archaeological materials potentially connected to divine beings. Given the multiplicity and multivalence of the biblical Host of Heaven, their iconographic depictions were probably manifold; at the very

[3] Explicit astral associations are found in Jer 8:1-3; 2 Kgs 23:5; Deut 4:19; 17:3. Implicit astral associations are found in Isa 40:26; 45:12; Jer 33:22.

[4] See, for example, J.M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess* (UCOP 57; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4-11, 59-63, 77-83; D.T. Sugimoto, "The Judean Pillar Figurines and the 'Queen of Heaven,'" in *Transformation of a Goddess: Ishtar - Astarte - Aphrodite* (ed. D.T. Sugimoto; OBO 263; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 141-67, 149-51; J.A. Emerton, "'Yahweh and His Asherah': The Goddess or Her Symbol?" *VT* 49 (1999): 315-37; S.J. Park, "The Cultic Identity of Asherah in Deuteronomistic Ideology of Israel," *ZAW* 123 (2011): 553-64. These studies highlight the fluidity and resulting historical uncertainty surrounding connections between deities and symbols. The polemical nature of many references to Asherah or her symbol complicate the picture even more. Given these difficulties with Asherah and the (object) asherah, we should perhaps treat connections between the Host of Heaven and the celestial bodies in the biblical texts — especially the polemical texts — with more caution than is usually the case.

least, they are impossible to determine from the texts available to us. This study is thus restricted to the Hebrew Bible as a result of limitations both practical and theoretical.

Limiting ourselves to the Hebrew Bible permits us to explore the biblical portrayals of the Host and the polemic against them in more detail. It also affords space for detailed discussion of the ritual framework that will be brought to bear on the texts. Such space is necessary, for our use of ritual is an interdisciplinary endeavour that is more in line with sociological and anthropological studies of ritual than it is with many traditional studies of ritual found in biblical studies. As such, the need for adequate contextualisation is heightened: not only is our use of ritual here different to how some others in biblical studies have used it, but our corpus of texts does not comprise texts traditionally considered to be ritual texts. This unconventional application of ritual to the polemical texts is not itself a polemic against traditional studies of biblical ritual, nor against the ways in which the polemical texts are usually approached. Nor is it a desperate attempt from a doctoral student to do something "new." Rather, it is the result of careful analysis of the polemical texts on their own terms and the realisation that these texts are *polemics against ritual*. The authors indict the people for practicing rituals to a variety of gods and seek to persuade them that the outcomes of such rituals will only be negative. These texts, therefore, promise useful insights into ritual as it was conceived in ancient Israel and Judah and as it was used in the formation of the biblical texts and thus, the development of Yahwism.

The first chapter contextualizes the study. It offers an analysis of the Host of Heaven in the Hebrew Bible and demonstrates the difficulties of dealing with such a multivalent entity. I consider the usual conceptions surrounding the Host of Heaven and demonstrate their shortcomings. Certain conceptions of the Host — such as their association with YHWH's divine army — cannot be textually supported, while others — such as their association with the celestial bodies — overread the claims of a few, polemical texts into all the others. I contend that the cause of these

misconceptions is the multivalent nature of the Host and the lack of concrete information offered about them in the Hebrew Bible. The lack of answers provided by the texts has resulted in modern attempts to create answers. I argue, however, that we should resist this temptation to categorize and define the Host of Heaven and accept the limits of our knowledge. Recognising that we may not know quite *what* or *who* the Host were allows us to ask different questions about *how they are presented* and *how they function* in biblical texts. Having demonstrated the multivalence of the Host, the chapter then moves to contextualize the corpus of polemical texts used herein and outlines the usual approaches to these specific texts in scholarly literature. These include studies of imperialism and religion, the Deuteronomistic History, and the development of cult in exile. All of these have bearing on this study, but none reflect the approach used here. Finally, the chapter outlines our framework for these texts, which draws on recent studies of polemic and ritual in the Hebrew Bible and in ritual studies more broadly.

Having introduced and contextualized our ritual framework, the following two chapters further elucidate important aspects of ritual. Chapter Two discusses connections between ritual and rhetoric that are widely acknowledged in biblical studies and ritual studies more broadly. In particular, it draws attention to the persuasive nature of ritual, the gap between texts and rituals and the dangers of ritual failure. Chapter Three then turns, more specifically, to a discussion of causes of polemic against ritual in the Hebrew Bible. We demonstrate that polemics against ritual are often caused by issues such as competing worldviews, social upheaval and dissatisfaction with ritual innovation. These three catalysts are by no means the only probable causes of polemic against ritual in ancient Israel, but they are particularly relevant for the polemics against the Host of Heaven.

In Part Two, Chapters Four, Five and Six move the discussion toward the analysis of the Host of Heaven polemics. Each chapter takes an aspect of ritual and analyses the Host of Heaven polemical texts through that lens, highlighting what the texts do and do not reveal about the ritual. Chapter

Four focuses on ritual *practices* undertaken for the Host — that is, the actions that the people of Israel are warned against doing. The verbs associated with worship of the Host and the objects connected with these rituals are considered in turn. Chapter Five studies the ritual *locations* associated with worship of the Host. Location is an important aspect of ritual: it may serve to define a ritual action as ritual and can also afford legitimacy or, conversely, illegitimacy to the actions conducted in it. Furthermore, ritual locations play an important role in ritual control; whoever controls the ritual space controls the rituals enacted therein. Destruction of ritual locations is also a powerful tool in imputing legitimacy or illegitimacy to ritual practices. Ritual locations, therefore, play an important role in the formation of polemic. Chapter Six focuses on the identification of ritual *practitioners* in these texts. Recent studies have drawn attention to the role of accusations of ritual failure in communal power struggles — raising questions about whom these texts identify as practitioners of failed rituals. The answers will impact discussions about the identity and agendas of our authors. The wide variety of ritual locations and practitioners identified indicates authorial trends in some texts but diversity of authorship among others. These chapters also draw attention to the ways in which the biblical authors abbreviate their reporting on these rituals to achieve their own ends. Often, the vague portrayal of a ritual broadens the scope of the polemic and allows a range of practices to be included in its prohibitions.

Part Three comprises Chapters Seven and Eight. Chapter Seven explores the phenomena identified as arising as a consequence of Host of Heaven ritual practices. The polemical texts claim that Host of Heaven rituals do not have positive outcomes, but negative ones — including destruction, death, deportation and redefinition of the people's identity. The outcomes these texts associate with Host of Heaven rituals would have been contrary to the ritual practitioners' expectations — yet, thanks to their textualization, they have come to dictate later perceptions of these ritual practices. The range of

outcomes indicates considerable ambiguity over the authors' theological interpretation of events and of their relationship to the Host rituals.

Chapter Eight concludes with a discussion of themes highlighted in the analysis of Chapters Four to Seven. The first section discusses ambiguity and negotiation of interpretation as a catalyst for polemic. The second returns to the persuasive nature of ritual, arguing that this is what made it an effective tool in the development of theological interpretations of and responses to social events. Ritual presented itself as both the cause and solution of problems in ancient Israel — and thus a vital element in the survival of Yahwism after crises. If flawed or failed rituals caused major upheavals in Israel's history and relationship with its god, then correct rituals could restore it. The third section of Chapter Eight focuses on the textualization of ritual, especially polemic against ritual. The relationship between texts and authority in antiquity is well established; here I contend that it should be taken into greater consideration when dealing with the biblical polemics. The *textualization* of the authors' polemic against ritual transformed it from mere opinion to authoritative message, capable of dictating the people's ritual practice. These polemics tell the people what (not) to do; in so doing, they effectively argue for a change in the ritual programme. As such, they are just as much ritual texts as are the detailed expositions of ritual conduct in the Pentateuch. They differ in form and function, but are still a form of ritual text.

Finally, the chapter considers the fundamental role of ritual failure in the development of the biblical texts. The impact of the fall of Jerusalem is widely acknowledged in these discussions, but thinking about these events in terms of ritual and ritual failure opens up intriguing avenues for further insights.

Part One

Part One of this study focuses on context, ritual and rhetoric in order to orient the study and demonstrate the relevance of ritual in studies of biblical polemics. Chapter One surveys the references to the Host of Heaven in the biblical texts and concludes that they are best defined as "multivalent." I also survey previous approaches to the polemical texts and outline the reasoning behind my use of ritual theory as a methodological lens. Chapter Two discusses ritual and rhetoric broadly, drawing particular attention to ritual's persuasive qualities, to the gap between text and ritual and to the dangers of ritual failure. The themes highlighted in Chapter Two are fundamental to the study of ritual in the Hebrew Bible and the analysis of subsequent chapters builds on the observations presented there. Chapter Three focuses on causes of polemic against ritual in the Hebrew Bible. This chapter serves to move the broad discussion in Chapter Two toward the Hebrew Bible specifically, considering recent frameworks for the interpretation of biblical polemical texts. In particular, Chapter Three observes the prevalence of polemic against ritual in the biblical texts, demonstrating that the texts analysed in this study are not unique, but sit within a long-established tradition of ritual critique in the Hebrew Bible. Chapter Three also draws attention to three major catalysts of ritual polemic: competing worldviews, social upheaval and ritual innovation. As demonstrated in later chapters, these catalysts underpin the polemics against the Host of Heaven.

Together, these chapters further contextualize the reasons for and benefits of our interpretation of the biblical polemics in light of ritual. Discussions of ritual failure, competing worldviews and social upheaval in particular enhance the interpretation of the polemics against the Host of Heaven, by offering insights into the circumstances underlying their composition. Consideration of the gap between rituals and texts is vital for close analysis of the portrayal of ritual activity in biblical polemics, while conversations

about the social role and authority of ritual texts offer insight into the motives underlying the biblical texts' composition.

1 Pervasive Yet Elusive: Content and Context

The Host of Heaven are pervasive yet elusive. They appear in a wide range of biblical texts, but rarely as the centre of the author's focus. They also appear in a diverse range of scholarly studies, including works on the divine council, monotheism, astral worship and the Deuteronomistic History — but again, rarely as the centre of the author's focus.[5] The most detailed treatments of the subject are found in dictionary and encyclopaedia entries, but even a glance at such entries demonstrates that, despite the authors' best efforts, they cannot effectively encapsulate the nature of the Host of Heaven but only highlight some of the range of themes connected with them. [6] Partly due to such entries and partly due to the nature of modern academic scholarship, which prefers focused studies over wider surveys, scholarly works dealing with the Host tend to champion or focus upon one theme relevant to them, usually that of the divine council or astral worship.[7]

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[5] M. Albani, *Der eine Gott und die himmlischen Heerscharen: Zur Begründung des Monotheismus bei Deuterojesaja im Horinzont der Astralisierung des Gottesverständnisses im Alten Orient* (ABG 1; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000) is the most pertinent example of a major study taking a specific interest in the host of heaven, yet even here the central focus is the development of monotheism, discussed via attention to the relationship between Deutero-Isaiah and Mesopotamian sources. The Host serve to demonstrate the impact of increasing astralization on biblical expressions of the Yahwistic cult, but as such they are merely a means to an end. With this astral focus the other roles of the Host, such as the divine council, are often neglected.

[6] Including the divine army, the divine council and astral worship. See, among others, E.T. Mullen Jr., "Hosts, Host of Heaven," *ABD* 3:301-04; B.W. Anderson, "Hosts, Host of Heaven," *NIDB* 2:655-56; H. Niehr, "Host of Heaven," *DDD* 428-30; A.E. Buster, "Hosts, Host of Heaven," *EBR* 12 (https://doi.org/10.1515/ebr.hostshostofheaven). Particularly problematic among these entries is the tendency to ignore the subtleties of dating, composition and even language in attempts to prove a thematic point. For example, Judg 5:20 refers to the stars (כוכבים) fighting from heaven and appears prominently in dictionary entries' assertions that the Host functioned as YHWH's divine army. Yet, the stars never "fight" anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible and neither Judg 5:20 nor the Book of Judges as a whole use Host of Heaven (צבא/צבא השׁמים) terminology. Judges 5 is also often assigned a considerably earlier date than any of the references to the Host of Heaven. Using a text so far removed in date and language to elucidate the phenomenon of the Host is hardly ideal and demonstrates the length to which authors must go in their attempts to systematize the Host of Heaven. Part of the problem, perhaps, is that dictionary entries are designed to offer answers to the reader — to define their subject — but, as we shall see, the Host of Heaven elude such definition.

[7] Although Handy's important study of the hierarchy and function of the pantheon is tantalizingly named, the Host only appear a few times therein; L.K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns,

Consequently, common understandings of the Host of Heaven are often based on one-dimensional portrayals of the Host that are pertinent to a number of texts, but do not adequately convey the diversity of their portrayals as evidenced in the broader corpus. The first part of this chapter (1.1), therefore, offers a brief survey of the Host of Heaven in the Hebrew Bible.[8] When the texts are surveyed, rather than systematized, it becomes clear that the Host of Heaven are definitively multivalent. They participate in YHWH's divine council, they sing YHWH's praises in the heavens, they can be associated with the stars and also with all the celestial bodies combined, they can represent gods of other nations — or they can be referred to vaguely, as the "Host of Heaven," with no defining aspects whatsoever. If any portrayal of them dominates in the biblical texts, it is that of the undefined Host — but this is really to say that the most prominent portrayals of the Host offer few answers as to their identity. Herein lies the necessity of adopting a different approach to some of these texts.

Having demonstrated the multivalence of the Host and the difficulties inherent in their interpretation, the second section of the chapter (1.2) turns to the contextualisation of the current work in the broader field of Hebrew Bible studies. In this section I outline the primary corpus of biblical texts used in this study and discuss the major approaches to them found in previous scholarship. As our corpus of Host of Heaven texts fall within the frame of Deuteronomistic texts, the major strands of scholarly discussion relating to them are that of imperialism and religion, the concept of the Deuteronomistic History and the continuation of cult during the exile. The discussion of previous works offered here is not exhaustive but is intended

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1994). White affords the Host a little more discussion, but as the Host only appear in one divine council text (1 Kgs 22:19-23), they cannot be the centre of her focus; E. White, *Yahweh's Council: Its Structure and Membership* (FAT 65; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 47-50. The Host tend to be more prominent in studies of astral worship, such as J.L. Cooley, *Poetic Astronomy in the Ancient Near East: The Reflexes of Celestial Science in Ancient Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, and Israelite Narrative* (HACL 5; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 233-34, 246-51, but such studies rarely address the other roles of the Host in YHWH's divine council (1 Kgs 22:19-23) and in a congregation of heavenly worshippers (Ps 103:19-22; 148:1-4; Neh 9:6).

[8] This content will be further explored in a number of articles that permit more discussion than the constraints of a doctoral dissertation allow.

to demonstrate how previous studies have dealt with our corpus of texts and with the Host of Heaven therein. It also clearly demonstrates the fluid nature of the topic at hand. All of the scholarly works discussed in this section have a bearing on the content of the current study, but this study does not fall directly into any one of these areas. Like the Host of Heaven, what follows is pervasive yet elusive; it is informed by and relevant to a number of works in various scholarly circles but is ultimately located in the grey areas between them rather than lying wholly within a single approach. This fluidity is a result of the focus on the Host of Heaven but also a result of the fluid nature of polemic and ritual, as the two primary areas of scholarly discussion that stand at the heart of this study. These subjects and their relevance to biblical studies and the Host of Heaven are outlined in the third and final section of the chapter (1.3). Both polemic and ritual are, like the Host of Heaven, pervasive yet elusive. Neither of these terms nor the scholarly works focusing on these subjects are easily definable; studies of polemic and ritual are found right across the biblical corpus, through both a range of texts and a range of time periods. Furthermore, polemic and ritual are by no means subjects limited to biblical studies; ritual, in particular, has long been a focus of sociology and anthropology; works in these fields have an important bearing on the content of this study.

To summarize, this chapter contextualizes our corpus of texts and the approach of this study within both biblical texts and the field of biblical studies. Neither is straightforward. Surveying the references to the Host of Heaven in the Hebrew Bible demonstrates that we know very little about them — the best "definition" I can offer here is that they are *multivalent*. Surveying previous approaches to our corpus of texts reveals a number of important themes and questions — all of which inform the current work, but none of which define it. Rather, the most prominent influences on the present study come from scholarly studies of polemic and ritual, both within and beyond the field of biblical studies. If nothing else in this chapter is simple, however, my reasons for focusing on polemic and ritual are. A new approach to these texts is called for because the Host of Heaven permeate,

transgress and elude the boundaries of traditional approaches. Moreover, the polemics which mention the Host of Heaven are, fundamentally, polemics against ritual, which seek to persuade the people of Israel not to engage in rituals for other gods. A study of these texts in light of polemic and ritual may not be traditional, but it does offer fresh insight into these texts.

1.1 The Multivalent Host of Heaven

1.1.1 The Host and the Divine Army

Our survey begins with the most common (mis)conception of the Host of Heaven, namely, their presumed association with YHWH's divine army. The view that the Host of Heaven were YHWH's army is widely propagated.[9] This connection largely stems from the observation that "host/hosts" (צבא/צבאות) often refers to a human army in the Hebrew Bible.[10] But Niehr's observation that very few examples of the military

[9] See for example, Mullen Jr., "Hosts"; Anderson, "Hosts"; F. Lelli, "Stars," *DDD* 809-15, 813; I. Zatelli, "Astrology and the Worship of the Stars in the Bible," *ZAW* 103 (1991): 86-99, 87. De Moor uses an epithet of Rešep —ršp ṣb' — found at Ugarit to argue that יהוה צבאות, "YHWH of Hosts" should be translated as "YHWH of armies"; J.C. De Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism* (BETL XCI; 2nd ed, revised; Leuven: University Press, 1997), 180-81. This has a knock-on effect which implies that the Host of Heaven should be translated the "armies of heaven." It is clear that Rešep was associated with war and did become part of Yahwistic tradition in some texts (e.g., Hab 3; Deut 32:24; Ps 78:48); see especially M.M. Münnich, *The God Resheph in the Ancient Near East* (Oriental Religions in Antiquity 11; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 215-37; S. Rudnig-Zelt, "JHWH und Rešep: zu JHWHs Umgang mit einem syrischen Pestgott" *VT* 65 (2015): 247-64, esp. 254-56. However, I am only aware of one extant reference to "Rešep of Hosts" and it stretches the bounds of plausibility to propose that this one reference explains the later biblical phenomenon of "YHWH of Hosts." Moreover, even if the Yahwistic usage was derived from Rešep's title, we cannot be sure that the connotations of the epithet stayed the same over the centuries. Rather than military connotations, Mettinger argues that "YHWH of Hosts" referred to YHWH enthroned in Jerusalem; T.N.D. Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (Trans. F.H. Cryer; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 123-57; see also J.P. Ross, "Yahweh Ṣeḇā'ôṯ in Samuel and Psalms," *VT* 17 (1967): 76-92. Differently, Crenshaw argues it was especially associated with creation in a probable polemic against Marduk; J.L. Crenshaw, "YHWH Ṣeḇā'ôṯ Šemô: A Form-Critical Analysis," *ZAW* 81 (1969): 156-75. Kreuzer, however, argues for more fluidity of the concept, acknowledging that different texts and traditions reflect different uses and presentations of the term יהוה צבאות; S. Kreuzer, "Zebaoth: Der Thronende," *VT* 56 (2006): 347-62. With little consensus in view, Kreuzer's observations remain the most persuasive.

[10] "צבא," *DCH* 7:64-68; "צבא," *HALOT* 3:994-95.

nature of the Host of Heaven have been preserved should be taken seriously.[11] Only two biblical texts locate a potentially divine "host" (צבא) anywhere near a military context (Isa 13:2-5; Josh 5:13-15).[12] Isaiah 13:2-5 refers to YHWH summoning his "consecrated ones" (למקדשׁי) and his "warriors" (גבורי), "mustering a host for war" (יהוה צבאות מפקד צבא מלחמה) to enact his judgement on the earth, especially on Babylon. This "host for war" come from "a distant land" and "the end of the heavens" and are reminiscent of the indefatigable army in Isa 5:26-29.[13] However, the only semi-divine attribute of the army in Isa 13 is its origin from the ends of the heavens. The warriors and consecrated ones with whom they appear are usually interpreted as ordinary humans.[14] The passage thus progresses from depicting YHWH's agents in human terms in 13:2-3 to portraying the army in increasingly cosmic and climactic terms in 13:4-5, but at no point is there an explicit change from human to divine agents. Rather, it seems that the

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[11] Niehr, "Host." Niehr only highlights two potential texts — Josh 5:13-15 and Dan 8:10-11. There are no explicit military overtones to the Host in Dan 8:10-11, however. There, Antiochus IV (who is usually identified as the "little horn") acts aggressively against the Host but they do not fight back; they are simply cast down to the earth.

[12] Isaiah 40:26 is sometimes interpreted as a reference to YHWH's divine army as it states that YHWH "brings out their Host and numbers them, calling to them all by name" (E.g., J. Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40-55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* [London: T&T Clark, 2005], 59-62). The verb המוציא (**יצא** "to bring forth," Hiphil) can refer to the going forth of an army (e.g., 1 Sam 8:20; 2 Sam 10:16; Deut 20:1; Ps 68:7[8]), but in this passage the emphasis is not military, but creative. YHWH's creative power is expressed through his ability to name and number all the stars and is thought to be a polemic against Marduk's creative power in *Enūma Eliš* (Albani, *Der eine Gott*, 183-252, 239-244). The other reference to the Host in Isa 40-55 (45:12) also occurs in a context of creation; YHWH's creation of the earth and humanity are paralleled by his stretching out of the heavens and his command of their Host. Military interpretations of the Host in Isa 40-55 are thus unlikely to be the primary meaning.

[13] The army of Isa 5:26-29 are often called "super-human" because they do not get weary, stumble or sleep (5:27). Gosse argues that 13:2-5 takes up the imagery of 5:26 and amplifies it; B. Gosse, *Isaïe 13,1-14,23 dans la tradition littéraire du livre d'Isaïe et dans la traditions des oracles contre les nations* (OBO 78; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 124.

[14] Clements identified them as the Babylonians who would wreak destruction on Judah before having events reversed upon themselves; R.E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (NCBC; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980), 132-33. Wildberger, however, interprets the warriors as the Medes who eventually ended Neo-Babylonian imperial rule; H. Wildberger, *Jesaja, Kapitel 13-27* (BKAT 10/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Nekirchener Verlag, 1978), 507. Watts draws attention to (human) warriors' purification rituals before battle as an explanation of the reference to consecration; J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC 24; Waco: Word Books, 1985), 196.

host YHWH summons is human, although their actions take on cosmic significance as they execute YHWH's wrath.

Joshua 5:13-15, meanwhile, refers to the "commander/leader of the host of YHWH" (שַׂר־צבא־יהוה) who appears to Joshua. The divine figure bears a drawn sword and commands Joshua to remove his sandals because he is standing on holy ground.[15] The divine figure is usually interpreted as part of YHWH's divine army for two reasons: his bearing a drawn sword and his title, "commander/leader of the host of YHWH" (שַׂר־צבא־יהוה). A divine figure bearing a drawn sword, however, does not always signify military activity (e.g., Num 22:23; 1 Chr 21:16) and the title "שַׂר" connotes most ranks of hierarchical authority in ancient Israel, including cultic and royal authority.[16] Potential connections with cultic leadership should not be dismissed too quickly here; the immediate context of Josh 5:13-15 is dominated by cultic concerns. The material preceding it (Josh 5:2-12) focuses on circumcision and the Passover, while the material following (Josh 6:1-21) deals with the conquest of Jericho, achieved via cultic rather than military, means. Furthermore, the only action attributed to the divine figure is not military, but a command to Joshua concerning holiness. It seems more likely, therefore, that the "host of YHWH" whom the divine figure was to lead was not the divine army, but the people of Israel, who formed a religious community and a fighting force under Joshua's leadership.[17] This interpretation also makes better sense in light of the

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[15] Parallels have been observed between this passage and ancient Near Eastern literature, which attests to the belief that a divine figure with a sword appearing before battle was a good omen. See especially T. Römer, "Joshua's Encounter with the Commander of YHWH's Army (Josh 5:13-15): Literary Construction or Reflection of Royal Ritual?" in *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (eds. B.E. Kelle, F.R. Ames and J.L. Wright; AIAL 18; Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 149-65. However, it could also act as an etiological element in some texts, where it served to legitimize a sanctuary or temple; M. Noth, *Das Buch Josua* (HAT I/7; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1971), 37-38.

[16] "שַׂר," *DCH* 7:64-68. The title שַׂר־צבא only occurs once more with reference to a divine figure in the biblical corpus, and there it refers to YHWH (Dan 8:11) and is almost universally translated "prince of the Host," which reflects the fluidity of the term.

[17] T.C. Butler, *Joshua* (WBC 7; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 61; R.G. Boling and G.E. Wright, *Joshua: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 6; London: Doubleday, 1982), 198.

complete absence of ranks or officers in all other descriptions of YHWH's divine army.[18]

As noted previously (n. 2), Judg 5:20 is commonly cited on the question of the Host of Heaven's function as YHWH's divine army, as it mentions the stars (כוכבים) fighting from heaven. Rather than this verse being used in support of military interpretations of the Host, however, its uniqueness should be emphasized: the stars never fight anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. In addition, that neither Judg 5:20 nor anywhere else in the Book of Judges use Host of Heaven (צבא/צבא השמים) terminology means that I am reluctant to use Judg 5:20 as a reliable reference point for the nature of the Host, let alone a starting point. Judges 5 is usually, albeit not universally, thought to have an early date (c. 10th/9th centuries); this considerably pre-dates biblical references to the Host of Heaven (c. late 7th century at the earliest).[19] The stars may fight in Judg 5:20, but they cannot be considered a reliable source of information about the Host of Heaven.

In contrast, biblical texts refer to YHWH's divine army using a wide array of other imagery, especially that of chariots, such as the "thousands upon thousands" (Ps 68:18 [ET 17]), "chariots of fire" (2 Kgs 6:17; cf. 2 Kgs 2:11; 7:6; 13:14), and "chariots of whirlwind" (Isa 66:15). Joel refers to YHWH's army as "warriors" or "mighty ones" (גבורך Joel 4:11), "strong

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[18] All other biblical depictions of YHWH's divine army simply portray YHWH at the head of a multiplicity of divine warriors, with no delineation of ranks or specification of particular roles. There were good reasons for this, as I demonstrate elsewhere in a forthcoming article; C. Quine, "The Threat of a General: Why YHWH's Divine Army Had No Ranks."

[19] The earliest canonical reference to the Host of Heaven is found in the divine council scene of 1 Kgs 22:19-23. However, numerous scholars argue that this scene is a later addition to the chapter (e.g., E. Würthwein, "Zur Komposition von I Reg 22, 1-38," in *Studien zum Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk* [BZAW 227; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994], 178-87, 184; E. Dafni, "רוח שקר und falsche Prophetie in I Reg 22," *ZAW* 112 [2000]: 365-85, 383). I view the divine council scene as an integral part of 1 Kgs 22 rather than a later addition (C. Quine, "Reading Micaiah's Heavenly Vision [1 Kgs 22:19-23] and 1 Kings 22 as Interpretive Keys," *ZAW* 130 [2018]: 204-16, 206-08), though this by no means precludes the possibility of a late date for the chapter as a whole. By contrast, Judg 5 is widely regarded as being amongst the oldest texts in the Hebrew Bible; e.g., P.C. Craigie, "The Song of Deborah and the Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta," *JBL* 88 (1969): 253-65; N. Na'aman, "Literary and Topographical Notes on the Battle of Kishon (Judg IV-V)," *VT* 40 (1990): 423-36; T.D. Mayfield, "The Accounts of Deborah (Judges 4-5) in Recent Research," *CBR* 7 (2009): 306-35.

ones," (חילו Joel 2:11a) and an "army" (מחנהו Joel 2:11b).[20] Job 25:3 refers to YHWH's "bands/troops" (גדודיו) and other texts refer to "holy ones" (קדשׁים) that accompany YHWH in a military manner (Deut 33:3; Zech 14:5). Habakkuk 3:5, uniquely, refers to individual deities that march in YHWH's retinue (Rešep and Deber). Psalm 78:49 refers to a "company of messengers of evil" (משׁלחת מלאכי רעים), which might be interpreted as having military overtones. Yet, although these references clearly demonstrate that YHWH was believed to command a divine army, not one of them refers to this divine army as the "Host/Host of Heaven" (צבא/צבא השׁמים). Furthermore, Ps 103:20-22 argues against such an association; there YHWH's messengers (מלאכיו) are described as "mighty ones/warriors (גבורי) who do his word" (Ps 103:20), while the Host are described as "ministers (משׁרתיו) who do his will" (Ps 103:21). "Mighty ones" (גבור) is a term used for YHWH's army elsewhere (e.g., Joel 4:11) but "ministers" (שׁרת) refers to royal, cultic or personal service, not to military service.[21] There is, in sum, no clear evidence that the Host of Heaven ever functioned as YHWH's divine army. On the contrary, the diversity of terminology employed in these texts suggests that there was no fixed terminology for or conception of YHWH's army — the authors simply used terminology that suited their contexts and agendas. This terminology did not include the term צבא, which was commonly used for the human armies of Israel and Judah that were comparatively small, weak and regularly defeated. Instead, the terms used for YHWH's army emphasize that the army being spoken of was different — it was YHWH's all-powerful, supernatural army.

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[20] This reading of Joel 4:11 preserves MT (הנחת יהוה גבורך), which the LXX rendered as "let the meek become a warrior" on the basis of Zeph 3:12 and Zech 9:9. As it stands, however, MT is intelligible — see J. Barker, *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence: A Rhetorical Reading of the Book of Joel* (Siphrut 11; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 240-41 — and MT's prayer for YHWH to bring his warriors *down* (v. 11) forms a nice parallel with the nations going *up* to the valley of Jehoshaphat (v. 12).

[21] "שׁרת," *HALOT* 2:1661-1662. For a non-military interpretation of the Host in Ps 103 see, for example, K. Seybold, *Die Psalmen* (HAT I/15; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1996), 405; E.S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, *and Lamentations* (FOTL XV; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 219; F.-L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101-150* (Trans. L.M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 37.

1.1.2 The Host and the Celestial Bodies

Just as there has been a tendency to (mis)understand the Host as YHWH's army, there has been a tendency to overread the explicit astral connotations of four texts (Deut 4:19; 17:3; Jer 8:1-2; 2 Kgs 23:5) into all other Host of Heaven texts.[22] That these four differ in their presentation of the relationship between the Host and celestial bodies is also not commonly acknowledged. Deuteronomy 4:19 views the Host as the sum total of all astral phenomena, which is unusual as the sun and moon are viewed as distinct from the Host elsewhere (e.g., Isa 40:26; 45:12; Jer 33:22). This text also presents the celestial bodies as gods, whom YHWH allotted to other nations to worship. Deuteronomy 17:3 also views the celestial bodies as divine but presents the Host as astral phenomena distinct from the sun and moon. By contrast, although Jer 8:1-2 also views the Host as non-lunar, non-solar astral phenomena, it portrays them as inanimate, powerless entities, who cannot save their worshippers. The reference to the Host in 2 Kgs 23:5, meanwhile, may well be a gloss intended to explain the *hapax legomena* מזלות, which seems to refer to celestial bodies other than the sun and moon.[23] That the celestial bodies were perceived to be divine in ancient Israel brooks no argument — and because of this the polemical nature of the texts associating the celestial bodies with the Host of Heaven goes unnoticed or is simply ignored. Attention should be paid to this polemical agenda, because the vast majority of Host of Heaven references in the Hebrew Bible *do not* connect the Host with the celestial bodies. Some texts even seem to argue against it. For example, Ps 148:2-4 lists realms and beings in hierarchical order, calling them all to praise YHWH.[24] A separation is envisaged

[22] Three other texts (Isa 40:26; 45:12; Jer 33:22) imply a connection between the Host and the stars but it is unclear whether the Host are conceived of as divine in these texts.
[23] See comments on מזלות in Cooley, *Poetic Astronomy*, 233-35 and comments on the redactional development of the verse in L.A.S. Monroe, *Josiah's Reform and the Dynamics of Defilement: Israelite Rites of Violence and the Making of A Biblical Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 91-93.
[24] Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 448, 451.

between the Host, who are paralleled with the messengers in 148:2, and the celestial bodies, who appear together in 148:3.[25]

1.1.3 The Host and the Divine Council

Notably, only a handful of texts associate the Host with the celestial bodies, while many others depict them very differently. 1 Kgs 22:19, for example, presents the Host as YHWH's divine council whom he consults from his heavenly throne, with no astral connotations in view. The Host are presented here as vague, subordinate, figures whose role was to carry out YHWH's decree without question or challenge, even though it entailed the execution of an Israelite king. Their total subordination to YHWH is vital to the effectiveness of the passage, as it nullifies the possibility that Ahab's death could be interpreted as the result of a divine defeat of or rebellion against YHWH.[26] It also emphasizes that YHWH's decree was supreme and incontestable. The lack of mention of the Host in other divine council scenes (e.g., Pss 82; 89) suggests that their presence in 1 Kgs 22 derives from the author's agenda rather than from widespread ideas about the Host and the divine council in ancient Israel. By referring to *all* the Host of Heaven (כל־צבא השׁמים) the author emphasizes YHWH's kingship and authority over all beings in heaven and on earth. The need to convey YHWH's supreme authority was necessary to legitimize the text's highly provocative message presenting Ahab's death as YHWH's will.[27] The Host in 1 Kgs 22, therefore, say more about YHWH than they do about themselves.

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[25] C.A. Briggs and E.G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Vol. II* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986 [repr. 1906]), 539; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 631, 635-36; J.L. Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 444; K. Schaefer, *Psalms* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001), 343; D. Warden, "All Things Praise Him (Psalm 148)," *RQ* 35 (1993): 101-08.

[26] Thanks to the close connections between kings and gods, in antiquity the death of a king could at times be interpreted as implying the defeat of his god; C.L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History* (BZAW 407; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 21-32.

[27] Quine, "Micaiah's Heavenly Vision," 207-08.

1.1.4 The Host and the Divine Congregation

The use of the Host to make a statement about YHWH is also seen in Pss 103:19-22; 148:1-4 and Neh 9:6. Both Pss 103 and 148 mention the Host amongst other phenomena in the heavens and earth that are called to praise YHWH. Psalm 103:19-22 associates the praise of the Host with a declaration of YHWH's divine kingship in heaven (Ps 103:19). Psalm 148 mainly focuses on YHWH's creative power, wherein all of creation acknowledges and praises its creator; it has also been argued to have connections to other kingship Psalms (esp. Pss 96, 96).[28] Nehemiah 9:6 also refers to YHWH's creation of the heavens, earth and sea and depicts the Host of Heaven worshipping YHWH in response. The language and imagery are similar to Gen 1:1-2:4 (esp. Gen 2:1).[29] Genesis, however, contains no reference to the Host of Heaven worshipping YHWH. Thus, it is likely that Neh 9:6 was influenced by ideas reflected in Ps 103:19-22 and Ps 148:1-4. The rest of the chapter alludes to a number of traditions found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, to the extent that Oeming concludes that it synthesizes these traditions in a creedal manner.[30] Unsurprisingly, this has led to Neh 9 appearing prominently in studies of identity formation.[31] The appearance of the Host in a text stating key theological beliefs as part of a declaration of Israelite identity deserves reflection, especially as Neh 9 is generally dated after texts polemicizing against the Host. Ironically, although the presence of the Host informs a statement about both Israel's identity and YHWH's identity, their own identity is left obscure. What matters is not their identity, but their actions; through their worship of YHWH, YHWH is recognizable as the supreme god, while their worship provides an example for Israel to follow. The portrayal of the Host as divine

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[28] Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 448.
[29] H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Waco: Word Books, 1985), 307, 312; J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1989), 303.
[30] M. Oeming, "'See, We Are Serving Today' (Nehemiah 9:36): Nehemiah 9 as a Theological Interpretation for the Persian Period," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (eds. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 571-88.
[31] E.g., K.E. Southwood, "'But Now…Do Not Let All This Hardship Seem Insignificant Before You': Ethnic History and Nehemiah 9," *SEÅ* 79 (2014): 1-23, 12-23.

worshippers is also found in Dan 8:10-14. There, YHWH is portrayed as the "prince of Host" (שַׂר־צבא; note common non-military interpretations of this title compared to military interpretations of the same title in Josh 5:13-15), and the divine Host of Heaven (צבא, v. 10) parallel the Jews on earth who are also called a "host" (צבא) in vv. 12-13. The actions of Antiochus IV (the "little horn") toward the human worshippers on earth mirror events in heaven; as Antiochus persecutes the human worshippers (צבא) he also casts down the divine worshippers (צבא). Thus, in contrast to other beings such as the messengers (מלאכים), whose name reflects their function, the term "Host of Heaven" in these texts is open to a range of interpretations. This rhetorical flexibility raises questions about whether the Host appear in these psalms as a result of terminological convenience. As the phrase "all the Host/Host of Heaven" could include all divine beings, it may not have indicated one specific group but been the most useful term available to the authors to depict all beings in heaven praising YHWH.

1.1.5 The Undefined Host

The lack of definition of the Host seen in the preceding section is emphasized in the many more texts which do not define them in any way. 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3, 5 (//2 Chron 33:3, 5); 23:4 all refer to worship or objects used in the worship of an undefined Host. King Manasseh's worship of the Host (2 Kgs 21:3, 5) is often assumed to be astral worship, due to the prominence of astral traditions in the seventh century.[32] The text, however, makes no mention of any astral characteristics — the Host themselves are undefined. In addition, 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3 and 23:4 all place worship of the Host of Heaven alongside that of Asherah and Ba'al. The triad "Baal,

[32] E.g., R.L. Cohn, *2 Kings* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 147; B.O. Long, *2 Kings* (FOTL 10; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 248; J.L. Cooley, "Astral Religion in Ugarit and Ancient Israel," *JNES* 70 (2012): 281-87, 284; A. Schoors, *The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BCE* (SBL Biblical Encyclopedia 5; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 108–110; O. Keel, *Goddesses and Trees, New Moon and Yahweh: Ancient Near Eastern Art and the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 261; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 102.

Asherah and all the Host of Heaven" is reminiscent of Ugaritic references to the upper levels of the Canaanite pantheon evoked in the triad El, Asherah/Athirat and the seventy sons of El.[33] In a similar manner to this Ugaritic triad, Ba'al, Asherah and the Host of Heaven combine a major male deity, a major female deity and a plurality of lesser deities. Whether or not the parallel is deliberate, it is suggestive. Binger interprets this triad, and the Host more specifically, as referring to the entire pantheon.[34] Similarly, Fritz observes that the triad forms "an unholy alliance that stands in for all and any foreign worship."[35] The triadic association of the ruling couple of a pantheon with the lesser deities under their control usually connotes a sense of order and authority. In 2 Kgs, however, the negative connotations of Ba'al, Asherah and the Host each contributes to the condemnation of the others. [36] The Host are polemicized against via association with the other two deities; in turn, the presence of the Host contributes to the polemic against the other two. The emphasis on totality should also be noted; all these verses refer to *all the Host of Heaven* (כל-צבא השמים, 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3, 5//2 Chron 33:3, 5; 2 Kgs 23:4). The term "Host of Heaven" inherently denotes plurality, so the addition of "all" to the phrase is intended to evoke comprehensiveness. In addition, the phrase "Host of Heaven" does not invoke any specific deity, in contrast to the individual figures of

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[33] See J. Day, "Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature," *JBL* 105 (1986): 386-408, 399-400 and further Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*, 65-95; E.T. Mullen Jr., *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Israelite Literature* (HSM 24; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1980), 15-22.

[34] T. Binger, *Asherah: Goddesses in Ugarit, Israel and the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 232; Copenhagen International Seminar 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 116; Gnuse and Anderson agree: R.K. Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel* (JSOTSup 241; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 200-01; J.S. Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal* (LHBOTS 617; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 24.

[35] V. Fritz, *1&2 Kings: A Continental Commentary* (Trans A.C. Hagedorn; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 406.

[36] That this is polemical is clear from the attitude toward Baal and Asherah displayed throughout 1-2 Kings, and from the fact that no other evidence corroborates a close association between Asherah and Baal, who had different consorts (El and 'Anat respectively); Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*, 74. Multiple scholars propose, therefore, that the association of Asherah with Ba'al in 1-2 Kings was a polemical move by the authors to discredit her cult; S.M. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (SBLMS 34; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 9-46; Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah*, 207.

Asherah and Ba'al.[37] It may well be, therefore, that the author's point was that the Israelites worshipped Asherah, Ba'al and *all* the host of heaven, i.e., all other deities.[38] These may have included astral deities but need not be limited to them.

Zephaniah 1:4-5 and Jer 19:13 refer to worship of the Host of Heaven taking place on rooftops. This has led to claims that the Host were astral deities.[39] Rooftop rituals cannot, however, be taken as unambiguous evidence of astral worship. Rooftops were a well-known location of cultic activity from at least the Late Bronze Age onwards, as attested by the oft-cited Ugaritic reference to King Keret offering sacrifice and prayer on a tower rooftop and the Merneptah relief depicting the siege of Ashkelon (c. 1209 BCE).[40] In addition, archaeological excavations have found a great many examples of terracotta tower-models, house shrines and architectural offering stands that associate offerings or incense with the top of the stands, that is, with the roof of the buildings modelled.[41] Given the lack of space in

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[37] M. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* (SBLMS 19; Missoula, MT.: Scholars Press, 1974), 84.

[38] Anthonioz notes that the Deuteronomistic texts display a tendency to collapse all other deities into one figure or phrase such as the "other gods" (אלהים אחרים); S. Anthonioz, "Astarte in the Bible and her Relation to Asherah," in *Transformation of a Goddess*, 137-39. Gnuse proposes that the "heavenly host" could incorporate a range of deities, including El, Ba'al, YHWH's consort, sun and moon gods and the god of the underworld; Gnuse, *No Other Gods*, 200-01.

[39] E.g., J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 453; P.C. Craigie, P.H. Kelley and J.F. Drinkard Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25* (WBC 26; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 262; H. Irsigler, *Zefanja: Übersetzt und ausgelegt* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 110-13; R.L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi* (WBC 32; Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 127; 157; K. Elliger, *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten II: Die Propheten Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja, Haggai, Sacharja, Maleachi: Übersetzt und Erklärt* (ATD 25; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 62.

[40] S. Gitin, "The Four-Horned Altar and Sacred Space," in *Sacred Time, Sacred Space: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (ed. B.M. Gittlen; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns 2002), 96-122, 96, 99; R.S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 263.

[41] These can be found in almost any major museum, but some examples and discussion may be found in W. Zwickel, "Clay and Stone Altars and a Piece of Mortar," in *Yavneh I: The Excavation of the 'Temple Hill' Repository Pit and the Cult Stands* (eds. R. Kletter, I. Ziffer and W. Zwickel; OBO 30; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 105-10; K. Nielsen, *Incense in Ancient Israel* (VTSup 38; Leiden: Brill, 1986), 43-49; O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Trans. T.H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 155-62. Zevit cites an excellent example of a two-story model tower from Syria featuring a human figure with an offering stand and two animals

many Iron Age cities and the probable lack of ventilation in many houses, the rooftop was an important part of a household.[42] It could be used for domestic activities, such as sleeping and storage (e.g., 1 Sam 9:25; 2 Kgs 4:9-11; Prov 21:9), as well as cultic activities (e.g., the rooftop altar from Ashkelon).[43] Moreover, due to the likelihood of animals being kept in the lower levels of houses, activities such as burning offerings (Jer 19:13) could possibly only be enacted on rooftops. Rooftop rituals need not, therefore, be limited to astral worship. This is also made explicit in Jer 19:13's reference to rooftop offerings being made to the Host *and* to libations being poured out for "other gods." As with the references in 2 Kgs//2 Chron, noted above, the Host in Zeph 1:4-5 and Jer 19:13 are undefined.

Two verses in Isaiah also refer to the undefined Host. Isaiah 24:21 states that "on that day YHWH will punish the Host of the height (על-צבא המרום) in the height and the kings of the earth upon the earth." In this verse and the following, the Host parallel the kings and are to be gathered together and punished alongside them (Isa 24:22). The plural reference to kings of the earth (על-מלכי האדמה) indicates that the Host are to be understood here as the gods of various nations, whose representatives were the kings of those nations – thus the punishment of the Host and the kings is intertwined.[44] Isaiah 34:4, meanwhile, refers to the Host of Heaven rotting away and to the heavens being rolled up like a scroll, with all the Host shrivelling like a dry

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on the roof; Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Paralletic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 552 n. 136.

[42] See E. Netzer, "Domestic Architecture in the Iron Age," in *The Architecture of Ancient Israel: From the Prehistoric to the Persian Periods* (eds. A. Kempinski and R. Reich; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992), 193-202.

[43] See, for example, L. Singer-Avitz, "Household Activities at Tel Beersheba," in *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond* (eds. A. Yasur-Landau, J.R. Ebeling and L.B. Mazow; CHANE 50; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 275-303, 288; A.J. Brody, "The Archaeology of the Extended Family: A Household Compound from Iron II Tel en-Nasbeh," in *Household Archaeology*, 237-55. An altar found in an Iron IIC (7th century BCE) rooftop collapse from Ashkelon was published in S. Gitin, "Stone Incense Altars," in *Ashkelon 3: The Seventh Century B.C.* (eds. L.E. Stager, D.M. Master and J.D. Schloen; The Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 581-91, and has been cited in many commentaries dealing with Zeph 1:5 and Jer 19:13 ever since.

[44] See Crouch, *War and Ethics*, 24-32.

leaf or fig.[45] Contextually, this occurs just after an oracle proclaiming YHWH's judgement against all the nations (Isa 34:1-4) and immediately prior to an oracle against Edom (Isa 34:5-17). In this passage, the Host are often interpreted as the stars, due perhaps to frequent translation of the rolled up השׁמים as "skies" (e.g., NRSV).[46] However, the first verse of the Edom oracle (34:5) refers to YHWH's sword having drunk its fill of blood in the heavens (השׁמים); "skies" would be an odd interpretation. The continuity between 34:1-4 and 34:5-17 suggests that השׁמים should be translated the same in both, referring to "heavens" rather than "skies" and thus broadening the interpretive possibilities of צבא. It is possible, therefore, that — in a similar manner to Isa 24:21-22 — the Host of Isa 34:4 parallel the nations of 34:2-3. Just as the nations will be slaughtered and their corpses rot and stench (34:3), so the Host will rot away and wither (34:4). Thus, the Host may function here as they did in Isa 24:21-23, as divine representatives of multiple nations.

Finally, Psalm 33:6 refers to the creation of the undefined Host. Contextually, the verse appears in a section of the psalm focused on the creation of the cosmos (heavens and host, v. 6; waters of the sea and the deeps, v. 7). Because of the emphasis on creation, the Host of v. 6 are often interpreted as the stars or celestial bodies more broadly.[47] While this is possible, it is not explicit. Additionally, the emphasis on creation via YHWH's word and breath (רוח) in Ps 33 is similar to that seen in Gen 1:1-2:4. There, the only occurrence of "Host" refers to the sum total of everything in the heavens and on earth: "and the heavens and the earth were

[45] The first reference to the Host of Heaven in MT (Isa 34:4a) is missing from LXX and may well be an addition, but we can still talk about the Host in 34:4b; W.A.M. Beuken, *Isaiah II, Volume 2: Isaiah 28-39* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 280-81.
[46] See also Beuken, *Isaiah II*, 292; O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1974), 351, 356-57; A.S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah 1-39* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 190-91.
[47] E.g., J.W. Rogerson and J.W. McKay, *Psalms 1-50* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 150; M. Dahood, *Psalms I:1-50 Introduction, Translation and Notes* (AB 16; London: Doubleday, 1966), 201.

finished and all their host" (ויכלו השמים והארץ וכל־צבאם, Gen 2:1).[48] The multivalence of the term and the lack of specificity in Ps 33:6 thus means that the "Host" could refer to the celestial bodies or to everything in heaven. If it refers to everything in heaven, then the celestial bodies may only be part of the referent, alongside other deities.

The lack of definition of the Host in these texts may be because the authors assumed their readers knew who or what was included in the term "Host of Heaven." Equally, however, it may be deliberate — a rhetorical move designed to bolster the argument of the authors in a similar manner to the use of the phrase "other gods." The vague and non-specific terminology of "Host of Heaven" meant that the phrase could encapsulate a whole array of different cultic traditions in a single statement of condemnation. Like the phrase "other gods," the "Host of Heaven" could refer to specific traditions (e.g., Jer 8:1-2; Zeph 1:4-5; 2 Kgs 23:5) or to a broader range of illegitimate activities (Jer 19:13; 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3, 5; 23:4). The Host did not need to be defined to be rhetorically and theologically useful.

The most appropriate description of the Host of Heaven in the Hebrew Bible, therefore, is *multivalent*. No one clear picture of the Host emerges from the biblical texts. They could be presented as the gods of foreign nations (Deut 4:19; 17:3; Isa 24:21 cf. Isa 34:4), as a range of celestial bodies (Deut 4:19; 17:3; Jer 8:1-2; 2 Kgs 23:5; cf. Isa 40:26; 45:12; Jer 33:22), as a conglomeration of beings evocative of a pantheon (2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3; 23:4), as YHWH's council (1 Kgs 22:19), as YHWH's heavenly worshippers (Ps 103:19-22; 148:2-4; Neh 9:6; Dan 8:10-14), or as completely undefined (Zeph 1:4-5; Jer 19:13; 2 Kgs 21:5; Isa 34:4; Ps 33:6). This range of functions should not surprise us; despite the tendency to translate it as "army", the term "Host" — צבא — is primarily a collective noun that refers to a large plurality of people or beings. Any role could be incorporated or enacted in such a collective. This possibility for variety

[48] E.A. Speiser, *Genesis: Translated with an Introduction and Notes* (AB 1; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 7; C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary* (Trans. J.J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 169.

means that the Host resist scholarly attempts to systematize them and those who seek to study them must find a different approach.

1.2 A Multivalent Corpus: Previous Approaches to the Polemics

Given the multivalence of the Host outlined in the preceding section, a study of this scope cannot hope to provide a full account of the Host of Heaven in the Hebrew Bible. What is needed, therefore, is an approach targeted towards a specific part of the corpus, which nevertheless permits a range of phenomena to be explored. The texts selected for study here are those unified by their polemic against worship of the Host: Zeph 1:4-5; Jer 8:1-2; 19:13; 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3, 5 (//2 Chr 33:3, 5); 23:4, 5; Deut 4:19 and 17:3. These texts will be familiar to many readers, for they regularly appear in studies of the Deuteronomistic History or Deuteronomistic editing, as well as in conversations about the development of monotheism and religious responses to imperialism. Under these three umbrellas many more specific discussions also occur, including debates about royal religious reforms in ancient Judah, the formation of Israelite and Judahite identity, and the composition and formation of prophetic texts. The Host of Heaven are significant to all of these studies but do not fall squarely into any one of them. Or, at least, they do not so clearly belong in one conversation as to render the others unnecessary. What follows in this section, therefore, is a brief overview of the three primary areas of scholarship which have previously dominated the study of these texts — namely, studies of imperialism and religion (1.2.1), the Deuteronomistic History (1.2.2) and Israelite cult in exile (1.2.3). The intention is not to be exhaustive, but to contextualize our study within previous scholarly work so that we may explore a new path. This should by no means be considered a summary of approaches to be rejected, but rather an overview of conversation partners whose work informs the study of the polemical texts, whatever the interpretive framework. Our focus on ritual and polemic in the current work

is not intended to replace these previous approaches but to complement them.

1.2.1 Imperialism and Religion

During the long seventh century (721–586 BCE) Judah was a vassal to the Neo-Assyrian, Egyptian and Neo-Babylonian powers. These events are recorded in a number of biblical texts and have been explored in many scholarly works. This historical context has a bearing on our study because, in contrast to the lack of polemic in earlier biblical texts, polemic against worship of the Host, especially in astral form, appears repeatedly in texts arising from and dealing with the long seventh century. Astral worship was undoubtedly prominent in the ancient Near East at this time, particularly within Assyria and Aram where the astral gods were dominant.[49] Yet, the extent of Assyrian influence on Judahite religion has long been debated.[50] The view that the Neo-Assyrians imposed their cults on Judah may be safely set aside, but the extent to which the Judahites may have voluntarily adopted

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[49] Ornan highlights the development from anthropomorphic depictions of deities to astral representations, demonstrating that this astralization was in line with earthly political needs; T. Ornan, *The Triumph of the Symbol: Pictorial Representation of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Ban* (OBO 213; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 151-78. Pongratz-Leisten concurs, noting that the solarization of high gods in the first millennium was a response to empire, wherein the imperial gods needed transcendent and powerful symbols to communicate their authority to vassals with different linguistic and iconographic traditions; B. Pongratz-Leisten, "Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods in Mesopotamia," in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism* (ed. B. Pongratz-Leisten; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 137-85. Mesopotamian astral imagery, in particular, lunar imagery, was primarily mediated via the Arameans under the Neo-Assyrian empire; e.g., Keel, *Goddesses and Trees*, 62-106.

[50] Cogan traces the discussion from the late nineteenth century, when Rawlinson (1875) proposed that the kings of Judah deferred to Assyrian impositions and Graetz (1891) argued for voluntary adoption of Assyrian traditions; Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 2-6. More recently, see S.W. Holloway *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (CHANE 10; Leiden: Brill, 2002) but cf. comments in K. Radner, "Review of S.W. Holloway, *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*," *JESHO* 46 (2003): 226-230; A. Berlejung, "The Assyrians in the West: Assyrianization, Colonialism, Indifference, or Development Policy?" in *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010* (ed. M. Nissinen; VTSup 148; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 21-60.

aspects of Assyrian cults is uncertain.[51] As Cooley and others have shown, Canaan had long-standing astral traditions that pre-dated Neo-Assyrian influence in the region and Judah's astral cults may have been influenced as much by Canaan as by the imperial powers.[52] In addition, the extent of Canaanite influence on the Judahite cult at this time is also unclear.[53] If the Host of Heaven could be identified as an Assyrian cult, or as an indigenous local cult made popular by the prominence of Assyrian astral worship, then the polemic against the Host could be understood politically, as a rejection of Assyrian power.[54] However, Ba'al, Asherah and the other cultic phenomena reformed by Josiah in 2 Kgs 23 are undoubtedly West Semitic, and the Host of Heaven are mentioned alongside Asherah and Ba'al in 2 Kgs 23:4 and 17:16; 21:3. In addition, as noted above, the Host are only explicitly connected with astral worship in a few texts. In the Books of Kings, this is only in 2 Kgs 23:5; other references to them leave them undefined. It is possible, therefore, that what is referred to as the "Host of

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[51] Cogan notes the absence of evidence for Assyrian imposition of cults on their vassals (Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 20-67) and McKay observes that Judah controlled other territories at various points in history and never imposed their cult on anyone else; J. McKay, *Religion in Judah under the Assyrians 732-609 B.C.* (SBT 26; London: SCM Press, 1973), 65, and see further 48-59. Differently, Flynn offers the framework of "cultural translation" to explain transference between Neo-Assyrian and Israelite conceptions of YHWH's kingship, wherein the ever-developing conceptions of the divine were affected by the changing cultural situation; S.W. Flynn, *YHWH is King: The Development of Divine Kingship in Ancient Israel* (VTSup 159; Leiden: Brill, 2014). Flynn argues that Judah reflected upon Assyrian presence and interpreted it as a religious presence, responding in kind and reformulating conceptions of YHWH to fit with the new situation (Flynn, *YHWH is King*, 148-69). This subtler process of adaptation and development seems more plausible than a straightforward paradigm of either adoption/rejection of foreign influences.

[52] Especially Cooley, "Astral Religion," 281-87; M.S. Smith, "Astral Religion and the Representation of Divinity: The Cases of Ugarit and Judah," in *Prayer, Magic and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World* (eds. S. Noegel; J. Walker and B. Wheeler; Magic in History Series; Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 187-207; J. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 151-64.

[53] As Cogan observes, even if Judah's astral traditions in the seventh century were primarily Canaanite, this does not account for their prevalence during the Neo-Assyrian period; Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 86-88.

[54] E.g., E. Eynikel, *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (*OtSt* 33; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 205-11; R. Lowry, *Reforming Kings: Cult and Society in First Temple Judah* (JSOTSup 120; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 203-16; C. Uehlinger, "Was There A Cult Reform Under Josiah? The Case for a Well-Grounded Minimum," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings: The Kingdom of Judah in the Seventh Century BCE* (ed. L.L. Grabbe; LHBOTS 393; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 279-317.

Heaven" in 2 Kgs 23:5 differs from what is referred to in 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3; 23:4.[55] Ongoing scholarly debates about Assyrian, Aramean, Canaanite and other influences on Judah's cult indicate that the situation is complex and unclear. Furthermore, even if we could identify the Host as influenced by the cultural diversity created by the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian empire, this does not explain the nature or acceptability of the Host in 1 Kgs 22:19-23 or in later biblical texts. If we view the polemic against the Host as sparked by the politics of the seventh century, this only solves half the problem; it leaves us with the task of explaining how Persian imperial politics affected the portrayal of the Host in texts such as Neh 9:6; Pss 103:19-22; 148:1-4.

Thus, scholarly works discussing the polemics against the Host in light of imperialism and religion can only take us so far. They are of vital importance in highlighting the cultural diversity of seventh century Judah and potential relationships between cult and politics, yet the Host of Heaven go beyond this period and so must we. Short of assuming a complete break between the polemical texts and those that came both earlier and later, we must look for answers that acknowledge the impact of politics on conceptions of the Host but are not limited to this model.

1.2.2 The Deuteronomistic History

Most of the polemics against the Host of Heaven are deemed "Deuteronomistic" and thus appear in studies of the Deuteronomistic

[55] This may also be reflected in the fact that 2 Kgs 23:5 connects worship of the astral Host with the כמרים — probably Aramean priests (see 6.3) — and uniquely locates their worship at the high places. In contrast, 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3; 23:4 associate the worship of the Host with Israelites and Judahites (i.e., not foreigners), and 2 Kgs 21:5; 23:4 locate this worship of the Host in the temple (see further Chapters Five and Six). Mastin notes that worship of Asherah in the Jerusalem temple mentioned in the Bible likely differed from that at desert sites such as Kuntillet 'Arjud; B.A. Mastin, "Yahweh's Asherah, Inclusive Monotheism and the Question of Dating," in *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Old Testament Seminar* (ed. J. Day; JSOTSup 406; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 326-52. Similarly, the Host of Heaven worshipped in the Jerusalem temple and by the כמרים at the high places may also have differed.

History or discussions about Deuteronomistic editorial activity.[56] These studies tend to focus on similar language and ideas found within these texts and explore them in order to elucidate the transmission of texts and the development of theological ideas in ancient Israel and Judah. The amount of literature produced on the topic of the Deuteronomistic History and the Deuteronomists is far too numerous to list.[57] Studies of Deuteronomistic literature, identity and ideology have morphed far beyond what Noth identified and include studies of, for example, redactions of various books, individual kings, the role of prophets and prophecy, factional politics, linguistic developments, the preservation and expansion of texts, and the formation of identities.[58] The concept is so vast that it has provoked re-evaluation of what is meant by the term "Deuteronomistic."[59] Discussions

[56] Most of our polemical corpus (Zeph 1:4-5; Jer 8:1-2; 19:13; 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3, 5; 23:4, 5; Deut 4:19; 17:3) fall into this category.

[57] Noth's study remains the departure point for modern work in this area, but Römer and De Pury's long essay provides a useful overview of more recent discussion. See M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981); T. Römer and A. De Pury, "Deuteronomistic History (DH): History of Research and Debated Issues," in *Israel Constructs its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (eds. A. De Pury, T. Römer and J.-D. Macchi; JSOTSup 306; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 24-144.

[58] See, for example, Eynikel, *King Josiah*; P.S.F. van Keulen, *Manasseh Through the Eyes of the Deuteronomists: The Manasseh Account (2 Kings 21:1-18) and the Final Chapters of the Deuteronomistic History* (*OtSt* 38; Leiden: Brill, 1996); Diana Edelman, "Court Prophets During the Monarchy and Literary Prophets in the So-Called Deuteronomistic History," in *Israelite Prophecy and the Deuteronomistic History: Portrait, Reality and the Formation of a History* (eds. M.R. Jacobs and R.F. Person Jr.; AIAL 14; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013), 51-75; P. Dutcher-Walls, "The Social Location of the Deuteronomists: A Sociological Study of Factional Politics in Late Pre-Exilic Judah," *JSOT* 52 (1991): 77-94; L. Stuhlman, *The Prose Sermons of the Book of Jeremiah: A Redescription of the Correspondences with the Deuteronomistic Literature in Light of Recent Text-Critical Research* (SBLDS 83; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); M. Leuchter, *Josiah's Reform and Jeremiah's Scroll: Historical Calamity and Prophetic Response* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006); E.T. Mullen Jr., *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries: The Deuteronomistic Historian and the Creation of Israelite National Identity* (Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993). In addition, many volumes of collected essays offer diverse scholarly approaches to the topic; e.g., *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History* (eds. G.N. Knoppers and J.G. McConville; Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 8; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000); *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism* (eds. L.S. Schearing and S.L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 268; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

[59] E.g., T. Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2007); C. Edenburg, "'Overwriting and

about Deuteronomistic activity have dramatically influenced the field of biblical studies, drawing attention to linguistic and theological similarities across a range of texts and raising questions about the creation and preservation of biblical books. Despite the elusiveness of the Deuteronomists, they remain, therefore, an attractive prospect for scholarly study, as evidenced by the ever-growing corpus of works on the subject. For our purposes, however, a Deuteronomistic line of enquiry proves problematic for a number of reasons. First, the Host are not limited to Deuteronomistic texts, nor is the polemic against them. Wöhrle persuasively argues that Zeph 1:4-6 reflects a concept opposed to the Deuteronomistic History, Deut 4:19 likely post-dates the Deuteronomists and, although we do not focus on it in this study, Isa 24:21-22 also polemicizes against the Host (and cf. Isa 34:4).[60] Second, as Chapters Four, Five and Six demonstrate, while various "Deuteronomistic" polemics against the Host may appear similar on the surface, when the polemics against the Host are analysed more closely in light of ritual they are seen to reflect diverse portrayals, perspectives and, probably, authorship. Different conversations about ritual are found in 2 Kgs 21 and 23, for example, than occur in the Books of Jeremiah and Deuteronomy. Third, our observation that these polemics are primarily polemics against ritual opens up different lines of inquiry, which may not — and perhaps ought not — be dominated by language of "Deuteronomists." What follows argues that many of these polemics are interested in controlling Israel and Judah's ritual practices. Although on one level their polemic might serve another purpose, such as explaining the downfall of the kingdoms, I contend that the textualization, preservation and editing of such polemics reflects an attempt to create a ritual text that dictated Israelite cultic practice. Using the more neutral terminology of "authors" rather than "Deuteronomists" may, therefore, permit us to ask different questions about the aims and purposes of these

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Overriding,' Or: What Is *Not* Deuteronomistic?" in *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010* (ed. M. Nissinen; VTSup 148; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 443-61.

[60] J. Wöhrle, "'No Future for the Proud, Exultant Ones': The Exilic Book of the Four Prophets (Hos., Am., Mic., Zeph.) as a Concept Opposed to the Deuteronomistic History," *VT* 58 (2008): 608-27.

texts. For, although court scribes produced many texts, the primary ritual controllers and preservers of ritual texts in the ancient Near East were priests. This observation opens up significant questions about the identity of the authors and editors of the biblical texts.

I avoid language of "Deuteronomistic/Deuteronomistic" in this study, therefore, to acknowledge that the object of my attention — the Host of Heaven — is a phenomenon that transcends discussions of Deuteronomism. Staying within the confines of that conversation and dealing with the vast amount of literature relating to it would limit our ability to discuss the Host of Heaven more broadly. Ritual and polemic are found in contexts further afield than the Deuteronomists and the polemical texts' focus on ritual, in particular, provokes questions that current studies of the Deuteronomistic History do not answer. Admittedly, our focus on the Host of Heaven risks detaching these verses from their wider Deuteronomistic context. The hope, however, is that focusing on the Host will help to correct the lack of scholarship pertaining to them, while shifting Deuteronomistic discussions out of the limelight will allow space for the ritual focus of these texts to be drawn out and explored. The Deuteronomistic paradigm is not rejected here but is set aside for future works that can analyse ritual and the Deuteronomists in more detail.

1.2.3 Cult and Exile

The downfall of Jerusalem and the deportation of its people in the sixth century has long been recognized as a defining period in the history of Israel and its religion.[61] Despite the efforts of the biblical authors to portray Judah as an empty land with no cultic activity, Middlemas and Ackerman clearly demonstrate that cult practices and textual composition continued

[61] The triad land-people-god that was so important in conceptions of national deities was called into question following Judah's downfall; D.I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology* (Evangelical Society Monographs 2; Mississippi: Evangelical Theological Society, 1988), 85-163.

throughout the sixth century.[62] It was once thought that monotheism emerged during the exile, but numerous scholars have shown that "monotheism" is not the best term to describe the changes to Judah's cultic expression.[63] In particular, the continued existence of the Host of Heaven and the divine council argue against speaking about "monotheism" during this period.[64] Whatever language is used, however, interest in theological responses to circumstances of exile remains paramount in biblical studies. The current work is no exception, though our interest is expressed broadly in terms of social upheaval, rather than exile specifically.[65]

The primary area of crossover between this study and works focusing on theological developments during the exile concerns responses to crisis. The biblical texts respond to the crisis of exile in a number of ways, reformulating Yahwistic beliefs and teachings in ways pertinent to new situations. In many cases these developments correlate with an interest in identity; the authors offer a range of views about who Israel is and what Israel should believe. The Deuteronomistic texts play an important role in this, as they offer a particular view of Israelite and Judahite history and identify people deemed to have blurred the boundaries of Israelite identity

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[62] J. Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); S. Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah* (HSM 46; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001 [repr. 1992]).

[63] See the discussion of "monotheism" in N. MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of 'Monotheism'* (2nd ed.; FAT 2/1; Tübingen; Mohr Siebeck, 2012); and M.S. Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature," (PhD Dissertation; University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004), 1-33. Page numbers for Heiser's thesis are based on my own pagination. Second Isaiah has been identified as having a monotheistic agenda (e.g., J. Kaminsky and A. Stewart, "God of All the World: Universalism and Developing Monotheism in Isaiah 40-66," *HTR* 99 [2006]: 139-63, 139-43; and see the survey in Heiser, "The Divine Council," 68-118), but in recent years scholars have moved away from that identification; e.g., J.J. Kwon, *Scribal Culture and Intertextuality: Literary and Historical Relationships between Job and Deutero-Isaiah* (FAT 2/85; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 52-55.

[64] So Heiser, "The Divine Council," although J.W. Cataldo, *Breaking Monotheism: Yehud and the Material Formation of Monotheistic Identity* (LHBOTS 565; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012) provides an example of a study using monotheism in a more specific and thus, more useful way to elucidate developments in Israelite cult.

[65] This breadth is necessary, as the exile was not the only event to affect re-evaluation of worship of the Host of Heaven (e.g., 2 Kgs 22-23). Furthermore, as my aim is not primarily to date the Host of Heaven polemics or reconstruct the redactional processes they underwent, it seems wise to leave questions of date somewhat open. The framework applied in this study does not depend on specific dates or events for its insights.

through cultic sin.[66] In addition, studies of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah 56-66 highlight the impact of exile on the formation of communal and cultic identity, which was often formed and expressed via polemic against other parties.[67] These prophetic texts indict the people of Israel for a range of cultic improprieties (e.g., Ezek 8; Jer 7:1-8:3; 44; Isa 57); their criticisms and identification of "others" provide the basis for their own portrayals of correct Israelite identity and cultic practice.[68] The polemics against the Host of Heaven do something similar. The Host demarcate identities: those who worship them are marked out as non-Israelite, while the Host's worship of YHWH marks him out as authoritative. Although expressed in different ways, in every polemical text the penalty for those accused of worshipping the Host of Heaven is removal from the Israelite community.

While not all of the Host of Heaven texts relate directly to exile, therefore, the relationship between social upheaval, theological development and identity formation that is highlighted in studies of the exilic texts is important for our purposes. Responses to the crisis of exile that manifest themselves in inter- and intra-communal polemic are of particular interest. Many of our polemical texts connect worship of the Host to social upheaval of various kinds and appear to be responses to those upheavals. In a useful article, Hoffman explores responses to national crisis, drawing attention especially to scribal activity focused on "retroactive interpretation" and "apparent anticipation of a crisis."[69] The former he explains as a "euphemistic mechanism which enables revolutionary adaptations in

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[66] E.g., J.R. Linville, *Israel in the Books of Kings: The Past as a Project of Social Identity* (JSOTSup 272; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

[67] E.g., C.A. Strine, *Sworn Enemies: The Divine Oath, The Book of Ezekiel and the Polemics of Exile* (BZAW 436; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013); D. Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts between the Exiles and the People Who Remained (6th-5th Centuries BCE)* (LHBOTS 543; London: T&T Clark, 2013); M. Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26-45* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[68] Berlin argues that in exile the charge of worshipping other gods was essentially a charge of abandoning one's Judahite identity; A. Berlin, "Did the Jews Worship Idols in Babylonia?' in *Homeland and Exile: Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Bustenay Oded* (eds. G. Galil; M. Geller and A. Millard; VTSup 130; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 323-34.

[69] Y. Hoffman, "Patterns of Religious Response to National Crisis in the Hebrew Bible, and Some Methodological Reflections," in *Religious Responses to Political Crisis* (eds. H.G. Reventlow and Y. Hoffman; LHBOTS 444; London: T&T Clark, 2008), 18-36.

religious concepts under the guise of conservatism."[70] The latter, meanwhile, refers to textual compositions seeking to explain events building up to a crisis, so that the crisis itself is explainable.[71] As we shall see further on, the polemics against the Host of Heaven fall into both categories, as both strategies are used to justify polemic against the Host and attempt to prevent the people from worshipping them. The Host are retroactively identified as a cause of social upheaval (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3), which justifies Josiah's reforms against them. They are also said to have contributed to conditions causing the exile, both explaining the exile and justifying the polemic against them. Observations such as these raise questions about the role of texts during the exile — what the authors who wrote them sought to achieve through the creation of textual documents, and how the role and function of those texts changed over time. For example, Fitzpatrick-McKinley explores the changing nature of texts, tracing the development of Torah from moral rules and advice to authoritative law codes.[72] Leuchter draws attention to the role of texts as material objects that replaced sanctuary spaces, becoming the model of revelation in the absence of temples.[73] Bell highlights the importance of texts as agents of ritual change in a time of conflict.[74]

Thus, although the Host of Heaven are not limited to exilic texts, a number of themes highlighted in scholarly works dealing with this period are of great importance for this study. In particular, the interlinking of polemic and formation of identity as a response to social and theological

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[70] Hoffman, "Patterns of Religious Response," 26.
[71] Hoffman, "Patterns of Religious Response," 27.
[72] A. Fitzpatrick-McKinley, *The Transformation of Torah from Scribal Advice to Law* (JSOTSup 287; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).
[73] M. Leuchter, "The Pen of Scribes: Writing, Textuality, and the Book of Jeremiah," in *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (eds. J.R. Lundbom, C.A. Evans and B.A. Anderson; VTSup 178; Leiden: Brill, 2018), 3-25; see also Leuchter, *Josiah's Reform*, and his discussion of the function of citations in Kings — references to texts within a text; M. Leuchter, "The Sociolinguistic and Rhetorical Functions of the Source Citations in Kings," in *Soundings in Kings: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship* (eds. M. Leuchter and K.-P. Adam; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 119-35.
[74] C. Bell, "The Ritualization of Texts and Textualization of Ritual in the Codification of Taoist Literature," *History of Religions* 27 (1988): 366-92.

upheaval offers useful insights into the circumstances underlying the composition of the Host of Heaven polemics. Additionally, studies exploring theological responses to crisis manifested in the production and transformation of texts also prove fruitful conversation partners.

1.2.4 The Crossroads

The preceding sections have briefly outlined the three major existing approaches to the corpus of polemical texts that form the focus of the following study. As noted, studies of the long seventh century tend to consider the prevalence of the Host of Heaven in light of increasing astral worship and the influence of foreign nations on Judah's cult. For some of our texts these discussions are relevant. Yet, the Host cannot be limited to them, because the Host appear in additional, different forms (i.e., non-astral) and in additional, different texts and contexts. The relationship between politics, cult, identity and polemic which are highlighted in these studies are, however, relevant to much of the following work. These themes are also prominent in studies of Israelite cult in exile, where concerns about the identity of Israel and its god come to the fore. Polemic was especially prevalent during this time and numerous cultic practices are identified by different authors as illegitimate and responsible for causing the upheaval of Judahite society. A number of our polemical texts probably date to the sixth century, although uncertainties about dating and the possibility that this corpus includes earlier texts means that, in most cases, we must speak more broadly in terms of social upheaval rather than exile specifically. As Deuteronomistic activity is identified in texts dealing with both the seventh and sixth centuries, these studies offer an interpretive path that incorporates a wide range of scholarly approaches to our texts. Nevertheless, this path is not the one this study takes. To combine the elusive Deuteronomists with the elusive Host of Heaven proves a task beyond the scope of this work. Thus, we set aside Deuteronomistic considerations in order to approach the Host of Heaven from another, provocative angle.

The methodology used herein is that of ritual theory. While the Host of Heaven pervade a wide range of biblical texts and scholarly studies, ritual pervades even more — though it is mentioned considerably less. The aforementioned works all refer to changes and developments in Judah's theological practices and beliefs, but generally explore these via terms like "cult" or "cultic practice," "sin," "cultic sin," "faith," "theology," "monolatry," or "monotheism." Ritual is conspicuously absent. Yet, ritual is fundamentally interlinked with all of these; cultic practice was ritualistic in ancient Israel and Judah and remains so today. Changes in cultic practice, identity and belief necessitated changes to rituals. Moreover, changes to rituals, to ritual locations or to ritual practitioners could necessitate theological changes. Ritual is also fundamentally interlinked with the formation and expression of identity; ritual theory demonstrates clearly that identity is formed and expressed via ritual. When the polemical texts are read from this perspective, it becomes clear that they are not polemics against the Host of Heaven, but polemics against rituals directed toward the Host of Heaven.

1.3 The Way Forward: Ritual and the Polemic Against the Host

A full history of the study of ritual in biblical texts goes well beyond what is possible here; the key point is that discussion of ritual have been traditionally confined to texts that provide technical details about ritual practice and to prophetic critiques of ritual.[75] However, some recent studies

[75] These are generally found among Priestly texts of the Hebrew Bible; e.g., J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Approach with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3; London: Doubleday, 1991); W.K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); P.P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992). Klingbeil proposes that continuing publication of archaeological textual finds has contributed to the prevalence of comparative studies of biblical and ancient Near Eastern rituals; G.A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible* (*BBRSup* 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 51. See further his useful chapter on "Ritual and Bible: The Genesis of a New Discipline," (*Bridging the Gap*, 45-69). Meanwhile, Bibb argues that the prevalence of studies on prophetic critiques of ritual has its roots in Christian worldviews that are themselves inspired by the prophetic rhetoric and distrust ritual as a

have begun to expand this focus. Olyan moves beyond the Priestly sphere in his study of biblical mourning, studying the impact of mourning on the social bonds between individuals, groups and political entities.[76] Feder discusses Lev 14 as polemic, while Leuchter studies politics and ritual rhetoric more broadly in Lev 1-16.[77] In *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, Janzen studies sacrifice in P, the Deuteronomistic History, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles and demonstrates the importance of context on the interpretation of ritual therein.[78] MacDonald's recent volume on *Ritual Innovation* opens up a range of perspectives on the changing nature of Israel's rituals and the texts they are recorded in.[79] This expansion of biblical ritual studies is partly driven by the increasing use of social science approaches in biblical scholarship, but also by the realisation that modern scholars do not have access to ancient Israelite rituals, only to texts describing such rituals.[80] In recent years, the emphasis on *reading ritual* in biblical studies has thus increased. Bergen highlights the textual form of Leviticus, exploring the impact of this textualization in both ancient and modern contexts.[81] Watts also draws attention to the role of rhetoric in Leviticus, emphasising the need to interrogate the intention behind its

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consequence; B.D. Bibb, "The Prophetic Critique of Ritual in Old Testament Theology," in *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets* (eds. L.L. Grabbe and A.O. Bellis; LHBOTS 408; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 31-43. Wider overviews of ritual in biblical studies can be found especially in Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 45-126; I. Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel* (BRLA 10; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1-39, and for an excellent overview of ritual theory in general see C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[76] S.M. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); see also S.M. Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[77] Y. Feder, "Behind the Scenes of a Priestly Polemic: Leviticus 14 and its Extra-Biblical Parallels," *JHS* 15 (2015): 1-26; M. Leuchter, "The Politics of Ritual Rhetoric: A Proposed Sociopolitical Context for the Redaction of Leviticus 1-16," *VT* 60 (2010): 345-65.

[78] D. Janzen, *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: A Study of Four Writings* (BZAW 344; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004).

[79] *Ritual Innovation in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism* (ed. N. MacDonald; BZAW 468; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

[80] Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 52; and see especially C. Frevel, "Practicing Rituals in a Textual World: Ritual *and* Innovation in the Book of Numbers," in *Ritual Innovation*, 129-50.

[81] W.J. Bergen, *Reading Ritual: Leviticus in Postmodern Culture* (JSOTSup 417; London: T&T Clark, 2005).

textualization of ritual and the impact of the text on the reader.[82] As Klingbeil observes, the gap between text and ritual presents numerous challenges, including the abbreviation or omission of details about the ritual or its meaning, the difficulty of dating a ritual text, and the agenda present in the textualization of the ritual.[83] Despite these difficulties, however, ritual still provides a useful framework for approaching these texts, because it allows a particular set of questions to be asked of the text. Watts offers five such questions, including why the authors wrote about these rituals specifically; what these rituals meant to the author; whether textual descriptions of ritual matched actual practice; what these rituals meant; and how these rituals would have functioned in ancient Israel.[84] Such questions bring us into the realm of ritual and rhetoric. Watts, Leuchter and, in particular, Janzen clearly demonstrate the interpretive potential of considering the relationship between ritual and rhetoric in the biblical texts. For Janzen, the rhetoric, morality, worldviews, theology and ideology bound up in ritual provide a depth of meaning that informs the study of sacrifice in different texts.[85] As these elements of ritual affect the narratives, these elements also affect and nuance the presentation of the rituals and the agenda behind their textualization.[86] Leuchter draws attention to the rhetorical agenda of ritual texts vis-à-vis other forms of text and Watts emphasizes the persuasive nature of Leviticus — the text does not simply instruct the people in their ritual practice, but persuades them that *it should be done this way*.[87]

The observations of these scholars raise interesting questions about the role of ritual and rhetoric in other biblical texts. Thus Klingbeil states that "ritual elements in narrative (not just legal) contexts does provide a possible

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[82] J.W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); see also Leuchter, "Politics of Ritual Rhetoric."
[83] Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 52-54.
[84] Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 27-36, 27-29.
[85] Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 9-66.
[86] Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 57-66.
[87] Leuchter emphasizes the difference between Deuteronomy's self-identification as a written text and Leviticus' focus on revelation via ritual activity and teachings; Leuchter, "Politics of Ritual Rhetoric," 347-51; Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 62, 203-15.

avenue for the discovery of religious realities and practice, though the literary strategy of the author(s) must be kept in mind."[88] The call to apply ritual theory to narrative more broadly is echoed by Gorman Jr., who argues that a reassessment of the relationship between narrative and ritual is needed.[89] Gorman Jr. offers three options for this reassessment; first, more attention must be paid to ritualizing qualities of storytelling, particularly in light of oral traditions in ancient Israel.[90] Second, more attention must be given to the possibilities that rituals have given rise to narratives. He views this both in terms of ritual structures serving as the basis of narratives and — because ritual is a means of locating the self in the world — in terms of narratives that arise in ritual contexts serving to locate a person or group in the world.[91] Third, attention must be given to the larger narrative context and the relationship between ritual and narrative texts — that is, whether ritual texts been placed in narrative contexts or narrative texts have been positioned around ritual texts.[92] Gorman Jr.'s second option is particularly pertinent to this study, insofar as it relates to identity formation. As we will demonstrate, the concept of ritual failure provides the basis for the polemics against the Host of Heaven and these polemics serve to locate the people of Israel in the world and define their identity. Wright also calls for the application of theoretical perspectives on ritual to "diverse biblical texts."[93] He cautions, however, that the diversity of genres and ideologies relating to ritual phenomena result in a speculative approach "seeking elucidation rather than definitive sociological analysis."[94] The Host of Heaven polemics are found across diverse texts — minor prophets, major prophets, "historical" texts dealing with individual kings, and Deuteronomy — and as such, this study is of the exploratory kind that Wright describes. We seek

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[88] Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 53-54.
[89] F.H. Gorman Jr., "Ritual Studies and Biblical Studies: Assessment of the Past, Prospects for the Future," *Semeia* 67 (1994): 13-36, 23.
[90] Gorman Jr., "Ritual Studies," 23.
[91] Gorman Jr., "Ritual Studies," 23.
[92] Gorman Jr., "Ritual Studies," 23.
[93] D.P. Wright, "Ritual Theory, Ritual Texts, and the Priestly-Holiness Writings of the Pentateuch," in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect* (ed. S.M. Olyan; SBLRS 71; Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 195-216, 199.
[94] Wright, "Ritual Theory, Ritual Texts," 199-200.

not a single, definitive explanation of these texts or the rituals therein, but a better elucidation of the relationship between the Host of Heaven polemics and ritual.

The following study continues with a deeper discussion of ritual, rhetoric and polemic in the Hebrew Bible in Part One (Chapters Two and Three) before progressing to an analysis of the Host of Heaven polemics in light of ritual in Part Two (Chapters Four-Six). Finally, Part Three considers the consequences of ritual failure in the polemical texts (Chapter Seven) and discusses the role of ritual failure in the development of the biblical texts more broadly Chapter Eight).

2 Ritual and Rhetoric: an Overview

Modern scholarship increasingly recognizes that ritual is multivalent. It cannot be defined by a single theory, because ritual is not a single thing.[95] Despite theories emphasizing, for example, the functional, structural, cognitive, performative, phenomenological, or cultural aspects of ritual, Lewis' comparison of "ritual" and "art" as two words with no single definition, nor an adequate lexical substitute, remains eloquently persuasive.[96] The depth of meaning inherent in the term "ritual" and the breadth of studies pertaining to it means that the purpose of this chapter must be specifically defined. Here, my aim is not to provide an overview of the meaning of ritual, nor of the history of ritual studies, but rather to discuss various rhetorical aspects of ritual. In this regard, the influence of Janzen's *The Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, particularly his chapter on "The Rhetorics of Ritual," must be acknowledged.[97] Following Janzen, I use the term "rhetoric" in a general sense, indicating the use of language to "persuade or influence" people.[98] This chapter, then, is centred around a discussion of what ritual seeks to influence, communicate, or persuade

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[95] McClymond terms it "polythetic," arguing that there is no single characteristic that defines ritual. Rather, rituals share "resemblances" — certain characteristics that crop up repeatedly, but no single one outweighs the others; K.T. McClymond, *Ritual Gone Wrong: What We Learn From Ritual Disruption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 4.
[96] G. Lewis, *Day of Shining Red: An Essay on Understanding Ritual* (CSSA 27; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 9-10. While Staal argues that the polyvalence of ritual means that it becomes essentially meaningless (F. Staal, "The Meaninglessness of Ritual," *Numen* 26 [1979]: 2-22), the comparison of "ritual" and "art" indicates that the pervasiveness of a quality or label does not necessarily render it meaningless. Though to some extent most things can be labelled as "art," that which hangs in art galleries around the world is socially constructed as having more desirable, or higher qualities than other forms of art; the same is true of ritual and of rhetoric. Although all texts are examples of rhetoric, the rhetoric preserved in highly ritualized and sacralized collections of literature such as the Bible is socially constructed as having more power and meaning than other forms of rhetoric. For our purposes, we need not be so concerned with the definition of "ritual"; most would readily agree that biblical references to making offerings or prostrating oneself to the Host constitutes a ritual act. For overviews of the various approaches and definitions of ritual see, especially, C. Bell, "Ritual," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion* (ed. R.A. Segal; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), 397-411; Bell, *Ritual*; Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 1-69.
[97] Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 9-35.
[98] Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 10.

people of. This is a particularly useful approach when dealing with the biblical texts, especially polemical texts, because — although some part of ritual itself may be innate, subconscious, or unrealized — there is always an active or conscious intent in the commitment of a ritual to writing. Ritual texts have a rhetorical purpose. Their creation attests to the author's desire to *achieve something* through their textualization of ritual.[99] From our modern perspective we cannot claim to fully understand ancient authorial intentions, but this chapter argues that by considering the polemics against ritual *as* ritual texts and by interpreting them within a ritual framework, we can push the boundaries of our knowledge further. In order to try to understand what our ritual texts seek to achieve, the following chapter particularly emphasizes the importance of context. Ritual not only expresses its participants' worldviews, but also creates, maintains, and legitimizes them.[100] Rituals present a particular understanding of the world and a moral structure to which its participants should adhere; the legitimacy of these worldviews is upheld each time the ritual is enacted. Thus, rituals simultaneously reflect and create their contexts, rendering the study of context inescapable for the study of ritual.[101] In this study, we do not focus

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[99] My use of "textualization" follows Bell, who defines textualization as "the generation of textual objects that structure social interactions around their use and transmission," though I would add "message" alongside "use and transmission"; Bell, "Ritualization of Texts," 390. Textualized rituals differ from enacted rituals in that the former structure social relations through rituals reflected *in the text*, while the latter structure social relations through the rituals themselves. Textualized rituals thus allow for the possibility of texts acting as "dynamic agents of change" (Bell, "Ritualization of Texts," 369), a point to which we shall return further on.

[100] F.H. Gorman Jr., *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology* (JSOTSup 91; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 14-17; Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 12-19. This is not limited to scholars of biblical ritual, however, nor to religious ritual. Moore and Myerhoff state that "[secular] Ritual may do much more than mirror existing social arrangements and existing modes of thought. It can act to reorganize them or even to help create them"; S.F. Moore and B.G. Myerhoff, "Introduction: Secular Ritual: Forms and Meanings," in *Secular Ritual* (eds. S.F. Moore and B.G. Myerhoff; Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977), 3-27, 5.

[101] Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 12-19. For our purposes, we must also acknowledge that the disjunction between rituals and ritual texts means that a ritual text may have a different context — and thus, a different worldview — than the ritual to which it relates; see comments in Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 29-35; C. Cox, "The Unbroken Treatise: Scripture and Argument in Early Buddhist Scholasticism," in *Innovation in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change* (eds. M.A. Williams, C. Cox and M.S. Jaffee; Religion and Society; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992), 143-

solely on historical contexts, but prioritize the theological context of these texts' composition.[102] In particular, we argue that one of the contexts of the Host of Heaven polemics was that of ambiguity and negotiation over responsibility for ritual failure. Ritual also has an inherently persuasive aspect which seeks to encourage its participants to enact it.[103] This is often connected to the worldviews and social structures that ritual communicates and that are created and maintained through ritual participation. Ritual presents itself as necessary to maintain such worldviews and social stability, contrasting its role in maintaining order with the disorder that would arise from non-participation. The consequences of non-participation in ritual (or participation in incorrect ritual) may be either implicit or explicit, but the association of ritual failure, disruption, or non-performance with chaos and disorder attests to the existential anxiety that often underlies ritual.[104]
This chapter thus seeks to explore in more depth the rhetorical nature of ritual. In the following, section 2.1 begins with a discussion of the contexts of ritual, followed by section 2.2 which focuses on the persuasive nature of ritual. Section 2.3 then discusses the distinction between rituals and ritual texts, before section 2.4 considers the dangers of ritual failure and strategies for negotiating it. Section 2.5 summarizes the previous sections and looks forward to the implications for scholars studying biblical polemical texts.

2.1 Ritual and Context

Though early theories of ritual did much to advance the field of ritual studies, many failed to grasp the plurality of ritual and ritual contexts that

89, 147-48; Frevel, "Practicing Rituals." This disjunction is of particular importance in the study of polemical texts, whose authors take an overtly different stance toward certain rituals than the participants of the rituals they address.

[102] I consider the biblical texts to have multiple contexts. They have a historical context out of which they emerged and were initially composed — which may or may not be the same context as the rituals recorded in the texts — and they may have multiple textual, redactional, or literary contexts and they have various contexts of reception. Here we are particularly interested in the theological context which led to their composition and textualization. This context was undoubtedly informed by the historical context, but our focus on ritual means that an emphasis on the theological context proves more fruitful.

[103] Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 25-30.

[104] See section 2.4.

make ritual so elusive.[105] The importance of considering ritual in a plural society is highlighted by Platvoet, who observes that in a pluralist society members of different group identities may understand messages expressed in ritual differently.[106] This may be due, for example, to different group identities having different core symbols, or it may be a result of viewing another group as a threat or competitor.[107] Smith also draws attention to the fact that multiple ritual systems often co-exist within the same culture; consequently, every rite can affect individuals or the collective in different ways.[108] In a plural society, the ritual expression of boundaries and group status becomes especially important when groups are engaged in competition, because ritual boundaries can be used to include members and to exclude non-members.[109] That is, ritual may function to reinforce one group's unity and identity, but in so doing may act against or undermine another group's identity. Baumann argues that rituals are thus performed, not only by congregations and communities, but also by "competing constituencies."[110] Describing the Christmas traditions of some Punjabi families in London, Baumann discusses how people of the same ethnic background and social group negotiate their identities differently and experience judgment by other members of the social group as a result of the rituals they choose to enact.[111] The enactment of Christmas rituals made the family insiders in one part of the social group but indicated their status as outsiders to another part.[112] For these families, insider or outsider status was defined by context.

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[105] See, for example the critique of Douglas and Durkheim in G. Baumann, "Ritual Implicates 'Others': Rereading Durkheim in a Plural Society," in *Understanding Rituals* (ed. D. De Coppet; EASA; London: Routledge, 1992), 97-117; J. Platvoet, "Ritual in Plural and Pluralist Societies," in *Pluralism and Identity: Studies in Ritual Behaviour* (eds. J. Platvoet and K. van der Toorn; SHR 67; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 25-51, 38-39, n. 75.
[106] Platvoet, "Ritual in Plural."
[107] Platvoet, "Ritual in Plural," 40.
[108] P. Smith, "Aspects of the Organization of Rites," in *Between Belief and Transgression: Structuralist Essays in Religion, History and Myth* (eds. M. Izard and P. Smith; Trans. J. Leavitt; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 103-28, 108.
[109] Platvoet, "Ritual in Plural," 40.
[110] Baumann, "Ritual Implicates 'Others.'"
[111] Baumann, "Ritual Implicates 'Others,'" 105-06.
[112] Baumann, "Ritual Implicates 'Others,'" 105.

Baumann also demonstrates that people do not have to be physically present for negotiation of identity to take place via ritual. Analysing a photograph of a Punjabi officer taking part in memorial rituals as part of the British army, Baumann argues that some rituals, especially public rituals, can be addressed to "others," regardless of whether these "others" are physically present or not.[113] In this case, the preserved image could facilitate the reformulation of cultural values and boundaries on multiple fronts, as different viewers of the image interpreted it differently from their own perspective. Whether or not the other is explicitly or implicitly addressed, however, can change the meaning of a ritual and the interpretation of its message. This is relevant for our study insofar as the polemical authors describe the worshippers' actions, creating them in an image of their own creation and identifying them as different from the author (and, implicitly, from the reader). These worshippers are also often denied a voice; dialogue between the Host worshippers and the author or other characters is rarely reported. This lack of dialogue permits the author greater freedom in their portrayal of the worshippers, as no dissenting voice is allowed to be raised.

The use of rituals to portray groups as good or bad is clearly demonstrated in Buc's *The Dangers of Ritual*, wherein he studies the relationship between textual portrayal of ritual and historical reality.[114] His discussion of Ottonian and Lombard rituals is particularly interesting; a number of medieval texts portray Ottonian rituals as "good rituals" and Lombard rituals as "bad rituals" in order to contrast their political dispensations.[115] Ottonian rule was characterized by the sacrality of orderly rituals, which were contrasted to the chaotic rituals of the Lombards; politically, this portrayal of ritual favoured the Ottonian over Lombard rule.[116] Herein lies the danger of ritual — without due attention to context, an interpreter may take these portrayals of rituals at face value. Yet, the

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[113] Baumann, "Ritual Implicates 'Others,'" 97-98, 99-112.
[114] P. Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Ritual* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2001).
[115] Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual*, 15-50.
[116] Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual*, 50.

context demonstrates the probable inaccuracy of these portrayals, propagated for political gain. Whether historians can uncover the context of a ritual enough to question the narrative the text presents them with varies from case to case.

As Gorman states, "The beginning point for the study of ritual must be the recognition that ritual is a social act which takes place in a specific socio-cultural context. This is true of all ritual acts, whether 'secular' or 'sacred', private or communal."[117] While the significance of this statement is clear, in the biblical case the matter is not straightforward — for, as he rightly notes, we do not have full access to the social or cultural context of ancient Israel. For Gorman, the solution is to turn to the wider world of meaning that gave rise to the rituals, which he terms the rituals' underlying "worldview."[118] He defines a worldview in three interrelated ways. First, it is a "body of knowledge" which serves to identify and categorize the world and cosmos into a systematic structure. Second, it is a set of meanings that serves to locate human existence in the cosmos and give meaning to it. Third, it is a system of praxis which directs appropriate actions within this world of meaning.[119] The interpreter should seek to understand the worldview that stands behind the ritual, which gave rise to the ritual and is enacted in the ritual. Klingbeil additionally notes that worldviews are dynamic.[120] The biblical interpreter must grapple with the changing nature of the worldviews underlying the biblical depictions of ritual, as well as with the meaning or social significance attached to ritual. These variables can only be studied through context. For our purposes, the primary context with which we are concerned is the Hebrew Bible, in which our ritual texts appear.[121] These texts will be analysed for insights into their portrayal of the Host of Heaven rituals, with particular attention to discerning the reasons

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[117] Gorman Jr., *Ideology of Ritual*, 14.
[118] Gorman Jr., *Ideology of Ritual*, 15-18. Gorman largely follows Turner's discussion of "Weltanschauung" (*Ideology of Ritual*, 16, n. 2; V. Turner, "The Anthropology of Performance," in *Process, Performance, and Pilgrimage: A Study in Comparative Symbology* [RAS 1; New Delhi: Concept, 1979], 76-85).
[119] Gorman Jr., *Ideology of Ritual*, 16-17.
[120] Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 12.
[121] So Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 18-19.

for the ultimate textualization of this polemic. An awareness of the importance of context, and of the ability of worldviews underlying a text or ritual to change, means that we must be careful to allow for the possibility that both attitudes to the Host and the texts expressing those attitudes may have developed over time.[122] To borrow Baumann's example, a London family singing a Christmas carol may seem completely normal in one context, but in a slightly different context may be construed as "other." So too, the Host of Heaven rituals may have been perceived normative in one context but perceived as "other" in a different one. A major question for our consideration is whether, as highlighted by Buc, these differences in the polemical portrayal of the Host rituals relate to political or other agendas.

2.2 The Persuasive Nature of Ritual

Ritual possesses a powerful ability to persuade its participants not only of the importance of the outcomes of the ritual, but also of the truth and necessity of ritual itself.[123] This persuasive nature of ritual is particularly important in the consideration of ritual as rhetoric. Lukes defines ritual as "rule-governed activity of a symbolic character"; in order to distinguish between ritual and other activities. He emphasizes its ultimate purpose, namely, that ritual draws attention to objects of thought or feeling which have special significance.[124] Even though the thing to which the ritual points already has its own significance, ritual provides the lens for the realisation of that significance and the means of acting on or actualizing that significance. Ritual thus acknowledges and confirms the importance of something beyond itself. In doing so, it simultaneously asserts its own necessity and legitimizes its own performance. Grimes states that, in

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[122] This is part of the reason for avoiding the Deuteronomistic paradigm herein; whilst not rejecting the likelihood of Deuteronomistic editorial activity, I wish to interpret the texts as far as possible in their immediate contexts, rather than within this overarching hermeneutical framework.

[123] Klingbeil terms this the "strategic dimension of ritual"; Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 225.

[124] S. Lukes, "Political Ritual and Social Integration," *Sociology* 9 (1975): 298-308.

ritualizing behaviour, "human beings discover, then embody and cultivate their world views, attitudes, and ethics. Rituals are not only about confirming views people already hold but also about divining ways to behave."[125] Ritual thus functions as a means of identifying what is important, but also as a means of continually affirming and responding to this importance. Olyan notes that rites shape reality for participants rather than merely reflecting it; ritual is thus both productive and reproductive.[126] Ritual places its participants in a continuous circle of explanation and legitimation, telling them what they do, why they do it, and, implicitly, why they should keep doing it. Often this continuation or legitimation of ritual practice can be connected to the human desire to maintain order. This order may be perceived as purely secular or may be related to a religious belief about the place of humanity in the cosmos. Either way, the pursuit of order and the disavowal of disorder is a key element in a functioning social order. Ritual plays a vital role in the maintenance and construction of this social order, for, as Moore and Myerhoff emphasize, there is a danger that lies beneath all ritual activity — namely, the danger that participants will realize that their culture and rituals are contrived, constructed and arbitrary.[127] For Moore and Myerhoff, ritual stands in a dialectical relationship between order and chaos and, by its very nature, is "a declaration of form *against* indeterminacy."[128] Ritual, therefore, stands against disorder, but it also veils disorder and discourages inquiry, because inquiry risks revealing that society or culture is a human construct.[129] Ritual thus asks questions of and offers answers to chaos and disorder *before* the participant is even aware that they pose a threat to their construction of reality. Bell highlights something similar when she speaks of the "strategic effectiveness" of ritualization, wherein ritualization can take a "contradiction" between the cultural order and the historical moment and provide a means to dominate

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[125] R.L. Grimes, "Ritual Theory and the Environment," *The Sociological Review* 51 (2003): 31-45, 34.
[126] Olyan, *Rites and Rank*, 4.
[127] Moore and Myerhoff, "Introduction," 17-18.
[128] Moore and Myerhoff, "Introduction," 17.
[129] Moore and Myerhoff, "Introduction," 18.

this contradiction — without ever explicitly acknowledging it.[130] Some rituals, or processes of ritualization may, in other words, be useful and persuasive on an implicit level, without ever needing to become explicit. They may persuade a participant of their usefulness either by drawing attention to their own necessity or by veiling disorder, such that reality and social order are intertwined with the ritual performance and render the latter indispensable.[131]

Rituals can, however, be far more explicit in their attempts to persuade a participant or audience of their message, necessity or legitimacy. This is most clearly seen in ritual's communicative and formal aspects.[132] In ritual, communication and formality go hand in hand; ritual formalizes communication and formal communication is often ritualized. Platvoet observes thirteen dimensions of ritual; a number of these —interaction, collective, customary, communicative, multi-media, performance, and strategic — may be classed as relating to communication and formality.[133] Parkin also highlights the formulaic spatiality of ritual as an indicator of its formality.[134] Tambiah views ritual as "a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication" which consists of ordered/patterned sequences of words and acts, "whose content and arrangement are characterized by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)."[135] Ritual may thus be thought of as a form of formalized social communication, which seeks to orchestrate interpersonal activity and social integration and continuity.[136]

Rhetoric is likewise characterized by formal communication, allowing little room for negotiation or response. In this way, ritual and rhetoric act in harmony, using formal communication in their efforts to persuade their

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[130] C. Bell, "The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 4 (1990): 299-314, 304, 310.
[131] D.I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 62.
[132] Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice,* 25-30.
[133] Platvoet, "Ritual in Plural," 27-37.
[134] D. Parkin, "Ritual as Spatial Direction and Bodily Division," in *Understanding Rituals*, 11-26.
[135] S.J. Tambiah, "A Performative Approach to Ritual," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1979): 113-69, 119, 127-28.
[136] Tambiah, "Performative Approach," 132-33.

audience of their perspective. Janzen observes that ritual is generally not open to negotiation; individuals are only given the option of performing a ritual or rebelling against it.[137] These limitations on permitted responses allow for the perpetuation and legitimation of rituals even if the participants are not in full agreement about the message, symbolism, or meaning of the ritual. Ritual thus has the potential to "facilitate[s] popular solidarity even where consensus is conspicuously absent."[138] This solidarity, as Kertzer observes, is produced by "people acting together, not by people thinking together."[139] The ability of ritual to transcend disunity of thought and to promote solidarity makes it a powerful tool in the negotiation of power and the construction and maintenance of social hierarchies.[140] Rituals locate individuals in a particular place in society and offer them only two options in response: acceptance or rebellion. By participating in the ritual processes of a society, individuals implicitly give their assent to both the necessity of ritual and the presentation of reality constructed by such ritual.[141]

Ritual is highly persuasive in the religious sphere because it is through ritual that beings, individuals, actions, objects and locations are identified as holy or sacred. For the biblical authors, it was vitally important to distinguish and maintain a separation between that which was holy/sacred and that which was profane/defiling.[142] Contact between holy and profane things was believed to threaten the right order of the cosmos and thus of society. The responsibility for devising mechanisms to maintain appropriate separations — and thus social and cosmic order — lay primarily in the hands of the Priestly ritual specialists who discerned, created, and enacted rituals to ensure that these distinctions were upheld. This worldview,

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[137] Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice,* 20-21.
[138] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, 152-53.
[139] Kertzer, *Ritual*, *Politics*, 76.
[140] Rhetoric likewise addresses and transcends disunity of thought and seeks to promote assent to its own goals.
[141] See Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice,* 21, with further literature.
[142] See especially Olyan, *Rites and Rank*, 15-62; J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 13-42.

enacted and maintained by numerous rituals, persuaded its participants of a number of things.[143]

Firstly, the conception that order could be threatened by transgression of cultic boundaries meant that ritual was perceived as necessary for society to function. The possibility of disorder and the subsequent privileging of order persuaded people of the necessity and validity of ritual. Ritual acknowledges the possibility of disorder while presenting itself as the solution, thus demonstrating its legitimacy.[144] Lewis links this legitimising function to ritual's formal characteristics: ritual's formality derives from the fact that its solutions are not merely regarded as solving technical problems but as having a certain validity in and of themselves.[145] It is this inherent validity which sustains belief in the rituals.

Secondly, this worldview persuaded people that rituals had power and could metaphysically affect the cosmos.[146] The people were persuaded that *their actions meant something* and that their choices to act or not act, according to various ritual scripts, would have implications beyond themselves. Janzen argues that, although ritual cannot ensure compliance with social morality, it can establish "an 'ought' by which the 'is' of an individual's behaviour may be judged by the social group."[147] By connecting ritual participation to the catastrophic consequences of disorder, people can be persuaded to act in accordance with a given ritual programme. Gruenwald also observes that by *not* acting in accordance with certain rituals the community may be perceived as bringing punitive consequences upon themselves.[148] As such, the "punitive" perception of these consequences contributes to the view that acting in accordance with the rituals is "correct" in some way.

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[143] As Gorman notes, "Ritual serves to make a declaration about the state of the created order"; Gorman Jr. *Ideology of Ritual*, 37-38.
[144] Moore and Myerhoff note that because religious rituals are built around cosmic explanations, they often entail supernatural danger in a way that a secular, social ceremony does not; Moore and Myerhoff, "Introduction," 12.
[145] Lewis, *Day of Shining Red*, 16-17.
[146] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 17-18, 22.
[147] Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 20-21 (drawing especially on Tambiah and Rappaport).
[148] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 18-22.

Thirdly, it is clear that in ancient Israelite society, some individuals possessed more ritual knowledge than others. Consequently, ritual specialists such as priests were deemed to have a necessary and important role in society. As the custodians of order, the ritual knowledge of these specialists created and legitimized their status and role in society. Olyan argues that control of the sanctuary and cultic sphere resulted in an exalted status for priests, communicated and realized by means of elite ritual action and by limiting non-Priestly individuals' access to restricted ritual/holy items, locations, and aspects of existence.[149] Ritual, social and cultic order reflected, structured and legitimized each other, while in turn reflecting and structuring the cosmic and social order.[150] For the Priestly writers in particular, ritual became the means by which humans could negotiate chaos and order and interact with YHWH, the creator and guarantor of the cosmos.[151] The reality of the ritual participants and the hierarchical structures within which they lived was, therefore, explained, confirmed and shaped through rituals. Those who directed these rituals — whether priests or other ritual specialists — may appropriately be termed "ritual controllers," as their role was to carry out or monitor ritual activities in accordance with authoritative, formulaic rules.[152]

Ritual thus has an inherently persuasive nature, even before factors such as the ideology of ritual controllers, the competing constituencies of ritual systems and groups, and the role of tradition, conflict, innovation and crisis are considered. Ritual *is* rhetorical; on a fundamental level it seeks to persuade its participants of things. It makes these declarations with little possibility for dialogue, while participation in ritual demonstrates assent to these declarations, on a performative level if not a cognitive one. When further factors such as ideology, competition and conflict — which all have their own rhetorical requirements — are added into the equation, ritual

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[149] Olyan, *Rites and Rank*, 115-117.
[150] Gorman Jr., *Ideology of Ritual*, 44.
[151] Gorman Jr., *Ideology of Ritual*, 231.
[152] Gane observes that ritual control begins when a paradigm can be applied as the standard against which activities are judged; R.E. Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2004), 69-70.

becomes an even more powerful tool, with the ability to create, maintain or change societal norms and hierarchies. In a society such as ancient Israel, therefore, ritual was power. It proclaimed its own ability to affect Israelite society and the wider cosmos, and ritual controllers were the gatekeepers of this power.

It is within this framework that we must consider the ritual rhetoric of the biblical texts. Ritual texts seek to mandate ritual practice; as such, they seek to control it. Texts describing rituals thus act in a ritualizing manner, persuading readers either to participate or not participate in certain rituals, along with the worldviews propagated therein. Biblical polemics against ritual must thus be considered in light of ritual and rhetoric. Given that the context of the rhetoric in view in this study is the Hebrew Bible — a highly ritualized, sacralized and traditionalized collection of texts — the persuasive (and thus, ritualizing) potential of their polemic is substantial.

2.3 Textualized Rituals and Ritualized Texts

Watts defines ritual texts as "texts that describe or mandate the performance of rituals."[153] As noted in Chapter One, the Priestly corpus has been the traditional focus of biblical scholars of ritual, while polemical texts have garnered attention in conversations about monotheism, polemic, cultic reforms and other gods but rarely in those dealing with ritual. This is in part due to their extremely abbreviated presentation, which renders them nearly useless for the historical reconstruction of rites that has often been the goal of biblical interpreters.[154] As Wright notes, "historical reconstruction is only as good as the documentation", and the Host of Heaven texts are not particularly amenable to historical reconstruction.[155] Their exclusion from the ritual conversation is likely due also in part to their polemical nature;

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[153] Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 2-3.

[154] Although, note Klingbeil's observation that abbreviation is a standard feature of ritual texts; G.A. Klingbeil, "Altars, Ritual and Theology — Preliminary Thoughts on the Importance of Cult and Ritual for a Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures," *VT* 54 (2004): 495-515, 507-08.

[155] D.P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (SBLDS 101; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 8.

their pejorative tone has led scholars to focus on their polemical aspects over their ritual aspects. However, as some recent studies have indicated, other ritual texts are not devoid of polemic and, according to Watts' definition, texts which polemicize against Host of Heaven rituals are ritual texts.[156] They describe the Host of Heaven rituals and their outcomes and, via their polemic, mandate alternative ritual practices that should be enacted instead. They are clearly different in form to the Priestly texts; most notably, they are more explicitly interested in *destructive* ritual practices than are the Priestly texts, which are more explicitly interested in the specification of *constructive* ritual practices.[157] Yet, they should still be designated and understood as ritual texts. Not only is ritual at the heart of their concerns, but through their rejection and identification of *destructive* rituals they exhort the reader to practice *constructive* rituals. Although their mode of expression differs from the Priestly texts, therefore, their efforts to mandate certain forms of ritual performance means that they may appropriately be considered a form of ritual text.

Worth note here is that, even if a text describes a ritual performance in great detail or lays out exact specifications for its successful completion, there still remains a gap between the text and the ritual that the reader cannot bridge.[158] This is true of all kinds of ritual texts. The gap may be accidental, a result of the author being unable to effectively convey the full impact of a ritual, or intentional, as a result of the text having an aim other than full disclosure of the effects of a rite.[159] It may also be due to the full

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[156] Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 2-3; Leuchter, "Politics of Ritual Rhetoric"; Feder, "Behind the Scenes"; Milgrom also argues that the Temple Scroll from Qumran contains a polemic against mainstream interpretation; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 558-563.

[157] I use "destructive" here to refer to rituals that are deemed to act destructively against the social and cosmic order; often those which require destructive action in order to correct them, whether the destruction of ritual locations, participants, or objects. In contrast, "constructive" denotes rituals deemed necessary to uphold the social and cosmic order that the people of Israel are exhorted to practice. Constructive ritual texts are more likely to offer details about how rituals should be (or were) practiced, whereas destructive ritual texts tend to emphasize the measures that should (or will) be taken *against* such rituals.

[158] E.g., Bergen, *Reading Ritual*, 1-7; Frevel, "Practicing Rituals," 132-37.

[159] Olyan cites the examples of numerous biblical texts speaking about transformation of rituals of mourning to joy, or vice versa, but few passages offer a detailed explanation of this ritual transition; the texts' point is that the transition will happen, not *how* it will happen; Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, 18.

effects of a ritual not being obvious to the author, particularly if they are subconscious or implicit. Or it may be that the reader does not possess the knowledge necessary to understand or successfully interpret the ritual as communicated in the text.[160]

We must also note that the textual presentation of a ritual is often the "official" or elite version of that ritual, "promulgated by members of the social and cultic elite and presented as authoritative and binding."[161] As this suggests, a text may invoke a ritual in order to express or propagate the claims of a particular group.[162] For example, in his discussion of the presentation of rituals in medieval court chronicles, Småberg demonstrates that the Medieval Swedish Chronicles reflect an attempt to legitimize and portray societal changes idealistically, via well-known rituals.[163] Through their focus on tournaments, for example, the authors enshrined their ideals about chivalry and courtly ideals in their descriptions of the rituals surrounding these well-known battles.[164] The behaviour of the knights in the chronicles was intended to engender similar behaviour in the present court.[165] Thus, although these texts contain some historical information about the ritual battles of the tournaments, they were not created to provide detailed insight into these rituals. Rather, they provide insights primarily into their own rhetorical arguments and worldviews. The rituals were included in the text not because they had happened in the exact manner reported, but to encourage adoption of these rituals in the authors' own time. In this and similar cases, the interpreter must be attentive to the rhetorical

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[160] Wheelock notes that ritual utterances or language often do not seek to provide explanations for the reader/audience, but, rather, tend to be brief and assume prior knowledge of the matter in question; W.T. Wheelock, "The Problem of Ritual Language: From Interpretation to Situation," *JAAR* 50 (1982): 49-71, 56. Given the gap between the contexts of an ancient text and modern scholars, the reconstruction and interpretation of ancient rituals is a difficult process. This study thus aims at elucidation of the role of ritual, rather than reconstruction of historical rites.

[161] Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 6.

[162] See especially Buc, *Dangers of Ritual*, 15-88.

[163] T. Småberg, "The Ritual Battle of Tournament: *Tornej, Dust* and *Bohord* in Medieval Sweden ca. 1250-1320," in *Devising Order: Socio-Religious Models, Rituals, and the Performativity of Practice* (eds. B. Boute and T. Småberg; BSCH 60; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 165-92.

[164] Småberg, "The Ritual Battle," 166-67, 177.

[165] Småberg, "The Ritual Battle," 167.

purpose of the ritual text, or else risk misunderstanding the text completely.[166]

The argument of the present work is that polemical references to the Host of Heaven rituals in the biblical texts function in a similar manner to Småberg's explanation of the Medieval Swedish Chronicles or Buc's illumination of the differing portrayals of Ottonian and Lombard rituals. That is, the aim of Host of Heaven polemical texts is not to explain the rites and processes of Host rituals in order to give a description of the ritual for the ritual's sake. Rather, these texts refer to the Host of Heaven rituals in order to express broader worldviews and ideologies. The rituals for the Host are presented as dangerous (Deut 4:19; 17:3), as ineffective or useless (Jer 8:1-3), as conducted by foreigners (Zeph 1:5; 2 Kgs 23:5) and, most importantly, as a contributing factor in Jerusalem's destruction (Jer 19:13; 2 Kgs 21:3, 5) and the exile of the people (2 Kgs 17:16; cf. 21:14-15; 23:26-27). With the exception of Deuteronomy, which takes a somewhat broader view, all of the polemical texts present the Host of Heaven rituals as a threat to the people of Judah and to Jerusalem. While the polemical texts are of one accord in their view of these rituals, the popularity of the rituals and the prevalence of such polemic indicates that negative views of their outcomes and intentions were not shared by everyone in ancient Israel and Judah.[167] Unfortunately, the lack of preserved arguments for these rituals' positive outcomes has rendered their reception rather one-sided. This one-dimensional presentation means that a historical reconstruction of the practices and beliefs associated with the Host is difficult to ascertain. This

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[166] This is the interpretive trap which Buc calls the "danger of ritual" — that is, if scholars are not aware of the agenda underlying the author's portrayal of rituals, then we risk misunderstanding or even inventing rituals where historically, none may have existed. His solution is that historians should use ritual as an indicator of conflict, denoting legitimacy and illegitimacy in various ways; Buc, *Dangers of Ritual*, 248-61, 261. That the references to ritual in the biblical polemics indicate conflict is obvious, but ritual's role in expressing and mediating these conflicts is worth further attention.

[167] Olyan's recent article usefully reminds readers to question who profits from biblical depictions of rituals; see S.M. Olyan, "Two Types of Ritual Innovation for Profit," in *Ritual Innovation*, 11-20. It is easy to see who does not profit from the polemic against the Host of Heaven ritual participants, but it is a rather more intriguing question to ask *who does profit* from these portrayals of Host rituals. To this we will return below.

difficulty in reconstructing the rituals suggests that we do better to ask not what the rituals were, or which deities they were directed towards, but rather *why* they were viewed as dangerous, *why* this presentation of them was deemed so important as to be written down, and *why* it emerged as authoritative.

At this point, it is worth observing the ability of texts to act as innovators or agents of change, whilst simultaneously attributing to themselves the power of tradition and authority.[168] Bell's discussion of Master Lu's codification of Taoist literature presents a useful exemplar of this phenomenon.[169] When various factors caused a socio-religious crisis in fifth century Taoism, Master Lu edited a set of scriptures that had supposedly been "revealed" some years earlier, appealing to a series of traditional frameworks to produce a new, authoritative version of the texts and thereby trying to solve some of the confusion and mediate some of the concerns that had arisen from the crisis.[170] This codification was not a straightforward or objective process of editing; Master Lu re-defined or discarded some rites as being non-orthodox, championed others as orthodox, and eventually produced a canon of "correct" Taoist rituals.[171] In doing so, "Master Lu ritualized scriptures and textualized ritual to produce texts of orthodox rites in which both the medium and the message inseparably functioned to produce a new form of authority."[172] Bell argues that Master Lu's textualization of these rituals was not simply a passive reflection of the

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[168] E.g., Levinson's comments on prophetic innovation of laws; B.M. Levinson, "The Human Voice in Divine Revelation: The Problem of Authority in Biblical Law," in *Innovation in Religious Traditions*, 35-71, 49-52.
[169] Bell, "Ritualization of Texts."
[170] Bell, "Ritualization of Texts." Although much has been written on the relationship between social crisis and religious change, Williams, Cox and Jaffee rightly observe that, while crisis may be a driving force in religious innovation, the modern perception of religious traditions as "stable" has often affected scholarly interpretation. Religious innovation is often viewed as the result of a shock to the social system which prompts change, rather than as an ongoing social phenomenon that does not require social upheaval as a prerequisite; M.A. Williams, C. Cox and M.S. Jaffee, "Religious Innovation: An Introductory Essay," in *Innovation in Religious*, 1-18, 11. While their observations are cogent, the biblical polemics' focus on danger and social upheaval suggests that at least some of these texts arose from a context of social crisis.
[171] Bell, "Ritualization of Texts," esp. 369-79.
[172] Bell, "Ritualization of Texts," 392.

rituals of his times; rather, "these polemics were part of an active process of culture formation."[173] Master Lu created his version of the texts with the conscious intention of affecting people's lives and practices; his texts did not aim to record historical rituals, but to provide an authoritative text which would dictate Taoist practices thereafter. By virtue of being texts whose message predated the current context, however, Master Lu's work could claim the authority of (revealed) tradition. Moreover, by virtue of being textualized, his work outlasted its author, affording it an afterlife long beyond a mortal lifespan. Biblical scholars will readily note the parallels with the biblical canon, wherein editors and authors took up older texts and traditions and edited them to address contemporary concerns. Like Master Lu, the biblical editors did not seek to provide a history of ritual, or simply to reflect the beliefs of their own time, but rather to change both current and future practice.[174] This textualization of ritual produced ritualized texts, whose authority was initially created by their authors but subsequently fully localized in the texts themselves. The texts became the standard by which ritual practice could be judged and remained so even after the death of their authors.[175] Furthermore, in a society where literacy was confined to an elite class, the association of written texts with elites perpetuated both the authority of the text — as an elite document, handled by high-ranking persons — and the authority of those who could read it, whose authority was confirmed by their understanding of its contents and their role in

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[173] Bell, "Ritualization of Texts," 392.

[174] Similarly, Buc argues that the early Medieval texts "were forces in the practice of power," and that via the creation of such texts, their authors sought to impact the present circumstances; Buc, *Dangers of Ritual*, 259.

[175] This location of authority in text was not limited to our polemics, but is found throughout the biblical texts, especially in the Pentateuch, Priestly texts and Ezekiel (so Leuchter, "Pen of Scribes," 6-9). As Leuchter notes, not all of these texts draw attention to their written form, although Deuteronomy does emphasize its textuality (Leuchter, "Pen of Scribes," 9; "Politics of Ritual"). In Jeremiah and 1-2 Kings scrolls and sources play an important role, drawing attention to their written form, although they do not proclaim their textuality as loudly as does Deuteronomy. Leuchter suggests that these differences stem from variances in the texts' relationship with revelation (Leuchter, "Pen of Scribes," 10-22). While Deuteronomy presents itself as revelation *now*, Jeremiah presents itself as ongoing revelation of prophetic material in textual form, and 1-2 Kings presents itself as revelation in history.

communicating it to others.[176] Thus, the written form of the message created and perpetuated its own elite status.[177] Like ritual, an authoritative text does not invite dialogue; its audience can either follow its message or reject it.[178] The textualization of polemic against certain rituals thus transforms it from being mere opinion into an authoritative message, designed to affect people's ritual practice and, in so doing, affect the cosmos. It innovates religious tradition — whilst claiming precisely the opposite. The textualization of the polemic against ritual thus develops a ritualizing function in its own right.

This is an issue to which we shall return. At this point, it is worth observing that novelty in ritual is often mistrusted.[179] Indeed, the validity of ritual is often related to its portrayal as traditional and unchanging, even when the ritual itself develops and changes.[180] Bell observes that, even when rituals do not explicitly claim to be time-honoured and unchanging, cultural dynamics often tend to take it for granted that rituals are old in some way; any suggestion that they are new can give rise to confusion.[181] Grimes notes two primary strategies of ritualists that thus seek to deny the "inventability" of ritual. The first is the claim that "it was always done this way," explaining present ritual practice a consequence of long-standing tradition.[182] The second is to claim that a rite was instituted by a divine figure, often "in the beginning" or "in the time before this time."[183] Both of

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[176] E.g., P.R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 17-19.
[177] Deuteronomy seems to invert this, emphasising that it should be read to the community and thus permitting all the people to have the knowledge of its precepts. Rather than the text emphasising the authority of the priests who teach its content, the text of Deuteronomy retains its own authority but emphasizes that all have a responsibility to follow it and pass on its message (Deut 6:6-9).
[178] As Levinson notes, "the intent of a canon is to perpetuate its own authority – and to preclude subsequent literary or doctrinal innovation"; Levinson, "The Human Voice," 35-36.
[179] E.T. Lawson and R.N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 50.
[180] Lewis, *Day of Shining Red*, 11.
[181] Bell, *Ritual*, 210.
[182] R.L. Grimes, *Reading, Writing, and Ritualizing: Ritual in Fictive, Liturgical and Public Places* (Washington DC: Pastoral Press, 1993), 7.
[183] Grimes, *Reading, Writing*, 7.

these strategies seek to place ritual beyond the reach of human creativity and thus beyond the reach of criticism.[184] A number of recent essays in MacDonald's volume on ritual innovation usefully explore the ways in which biblical authors innovated in similar fashion, by attributing changes to, or drawing on, established sources of authority, such as Moses, God, or objects like the Ark of the Covenant.[185] The polemics against the Host do the same, attributing their disapproval of the Host rituals to prophets (Zeph 1; Jer 8; 19), an ancient scroll (2 Kgs 22-23), and the words of Moses (Deut 4; 17). All these were inspired by divine revelation from YHWH, providing divine support for the authors claims and mediating the reception of their message.

To summarize: textualized rituals differ from rituals and thus present a gap between reader and ritual. This gap may be great or small, deliberate or accidental, depending on the aims of the author. Texts may misrepresent or polemicize against certain rituals in service of a variety of aims, including standardization, innovation, or preservation of ritual practice, or in the making of cultural or political claims. Particularly in the ancient world, texts were often elite documents, handled by elites. The presentation of ritual in these documents thus often presents an "elite" or "official" portrayal, which may or may not reflect the reality of ritual practices or their perception. Furthermore, texts have an ability to create and perpetuate their own authority through associations with powerful or divine figures, or through claiming an authority older than their own. Texts can, therefore, play a vital role in causing innovation in religious practice, while appearing (or even claiming) to do exactly the opposite. Finally, textualized rituals may, at times, be considered ritualized or ritualizing texts, wherein they do not merely describe rituals, but create, enact, and dictate ritual practices. The polemics against the Host should be considered in this light.

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[184] Grimes, *Reading, Writing*, 7.

[185] Especially, J.W. Watts, "From the Ark of the Covenant to Torah Scroll: Ritualizing Israel's Iconic Texts," in *Ritual Innovation*, 21-34; Nathan MacDonald, "Ritual Innovation and *Shavu'ot*," in *Ritual Innovation*, 55-78; Frevel, "Practicing Rituals."

2.4 The Dangers of Ritual Failure

So far, we have seen that rituals arise from specific contexts and that within these, they express, maintain, and legitimise their participants' worldviews. In doing so, their performance helps structure and create these worldviews. As such, ritual is both powerful and persuasive. It tells participants what to do and why they should do it. Serious problems arise, therefore, when incongruity arises between cultural expectations derived from ritual and actual cultural experience.[186] As Kertzer notes, because ritual is indistinguishable from the symbolic complexes of society, crises can threaten to discredit the entire symbolic complex.[187] After all, "ritual cannot sustain a particular worldview if the experiential world cannot support the worldview."[188] Symbols, worldviews, ideologies, beliefs, morality, and the cognitive constructions of society that people live by come under threat if ritualized action is called into question by various crises.[189] The dangers of ritual failure, therefore, can hardly be overstated. In an analysis of records from Mesopotamian temples, Kozuh demonstrates that the priests were so concerned with the possibility of ritual failure that they took pre-emptive steps to ensure that even simple things like a lack of supplies would not affect the priests' ability to make offerings and enact their rituals properly.[190] The concern surrounding ritual failure can also be seen throughout the biblical Priestly material, which promotes a heightened

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[186] Carroll refers to this as "cognitive dissonance," which arises when two cognitions are inconsistent with each other. Following Festinger, he argues that humans have a drive to avoid and resolve dissonance by bringing all elements of cognition into consistent relation with each other; R.P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 87-88. Explanations were needed, therefore, to explain social events that did not match the expected outcome of rituals. The concept of ritual failure was thus an important mechanism for explaining potential dissonance and offering a way forward.

[187] Kertzer, *Ritual*, *Politics*, 134.

[188] B.C. Alexander, "An Afterthought on Ritual in Biblical Studies," *Semeia* 67 (1994): 209-26, 210.

[189] In this respect, religious rituals are highly dangerous as their failure can call into question the entire faith system; e.g., Moore and Myerhoff, "Introduction," 12.

[190] M. Kozuh, "Ritual Failure in the Business Records of Mesopotamian Temples," in *Ritual Failure: Archaeological Perspectives* (eds. V.G. Koutrafouri and J. Sanders; Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2013), 51-62.

awareness of ritual (im)purity and prohibits ritual performances that could potentially go wrong, whether as a result of being practiced by an unclean person, or through the offering of illegitimate or inappropriate substances.[191] Indeed, Gilders notes that the Priestly texts are more concerned with the outcome of ritual actions than with explaining their meaning.[192]

The Priestly texts identify "correct" rituals through their positive outcome for the community and the stability of the social order, which reflected the relationship between YHWH and his people. The rarity of examples of these rituals failing reinforces priestly authority, as it implies both the legitimacy of the ritual system and the competency of the priests who enacted and controlled it. That the rituals rarely failed demonstrated that they were legitimate and worthy of practice, while the lack of examples of failure testified to the dedication and skill of the priests.[193] Although ritual failure is hardly ideal, McClymond observes that ritual disruptions or failures can be constructive, as they expose vulnerabilities in existing ritual systems which can then be corrected.[194] Some rituals survive and even thrive in response to disruption, while others may fade from view or be discarded. The cause of the ritual failure is often a factor in whether the ritual survives crisis or failure. Responsibility for ritual failure may be human — if, for example, it resulted from impurity or a lack of supplies — or it could be divine, if the gods refuse to communicate or to interrupt a ritual performance.[195] Uncertainty about who is responsible for failure may also result in ambiguity over the identification of preventable and

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[191] Klawans notes that the Priestly texts encourage the Israelites to be aware of their state of ritual purity at all times so that they would not risk endangering the community by polluting the sanctuary; Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 24-25.
[192] Gilders, *Blood Ritual*, 5.
[193] Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 97-98.
[194] McClymond, *Ritual Gone Wrong*, 179-82.
[195] Kozuh, "Ritual Failure"; C. Ambos, "Types of Ritual Failure and Mistakes in Ritual in Cuneiform Sources," in *When Rituals Go Wrong: Mistakes, Failure and the Dynamics of Ritual* (ed. U. Hüsken; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 25-47. Not all societies subscribe to the view that the divine may cause ritual failures, as Polit demonstrates with references to the Garhwali people. For the Garwahli, the responsibility for ritual failure lies with humans alone and various strategies must be employed to identify the culprit and make reparations for the failure; K. Polit, "Social Consequences of Ritual Failure: A Garhwali Case Study," in *When Rituals Go Wrong*, 199-208.

unpreventable ritual failures.[196] Thus, Kaulana observes that ritual dysfunction in early Confucianism could play a role in negotiating and strengthening the social status of some Confucians by relieving the burden of failure via "plausible deniability":

> Confucians could claim successful adaptations of ritual as the fruits of their own labors but deny that failures were their fault. In short, this ambiguity allowed the failure of ritual to be seen as no one's fault, the ritual agent's fault, or everyone's fault depending on the rhetorical need of the person making the claim as well as the rhetorical constraints of the situation.[197]

Similarly, in a study of communities in Bali, Hauser-Schaüblin observed that the boundary between ritual failure and mistakes could be blurred, as responsibility for actions considered to be failure-inducing, ineffective, or counter-productive to the ritual were negotiated by the ritual actors.[198] As a result, she found that accusations of ritual failure or mistakes were effective strategies employed in power relations.[199] The rituals lay at the heart of the Bali community's identity, so accusations of ritual failure served to negotiate and reorganize political and social power and identity.[200] Initial ambiguity over responsibility for ritual failure led to rhetorical strategies accusing others of causing the ritual failure and thereby accruing power for the accusers.

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[196] M.D. Kaulana, *The Dysfunction of Ritual in Early Confuciansim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 132.
[197] Kaulana, *Dysfunction of Ritual*, 132.
[198] B. Hauser-Schaüblin, "Rivalling Rituals, Challenged Identities: Accusations of Ritual Mistakes as an Expression of Power Struggles in Bali," in *When Rituals Go Wrong*, 245-71, 246.
[199] Hauser-Schaüblin, "Rivalling Rituals," 269-70. See also U. Hüsken, "Ritual Dynamics and Ritual Failure," in *When Rituals Go Wrong*, 337-66, 340.
[200] Hauser-Schaüblin, "Rivalling Rituals," 268-69.

The biblical texts abound with accusations of ritual failure.[201] In particular, the prophetic texts contain numerous references to flawed or failed rituals and warn of the consequences for those deemed responsible.[202] Bibb notes that prophets often made such statements — which would have shocked their audience — for rhetorical effect; this suggests that prophetic critiques of ritual do not necessarily imply a fault with *all* ritual practice.[203] On the contrary, implicit in these prophetic critiques of ritual is a vision of a true, positive cultic reality.[204] The polemical texts that are the focus of this study likewise identify a number of ritual practices that they deem to have failed, because they were illegitimate, ineffective, tainted by foreign association, or offensive to YHWH. A range of people — including individuals, specific groups, social classes and entire communities — are accused of having failed in their ritual practice, either by taking part in "illegitimate" rituals or by participation in syncretistic rituals that undermined "legitimate" ritual practices. The danger of these flawed and failed rituals is evident from their identification as threats to the social and cosmic order. This indicates that some kind of social crisis or upheaval underlies these accusations of ritual failure. As just noted, however, ascertaining who is at fault or what exactly has gone wrong in a case of ritual failure often involves considerable ambiguity and negotiation amongst

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[201] E.g., Lev 10; 1 Kgs 18; Jer 8:1-3. This is not just limited to the Hebrew Bible — see especially Smit's discussion of Paul's mis-framing of circumcision in Romans 6; P.-B. Smit, "Ritual Failure in Romans 6," *HTR* 72 (2016): 1-13.

[202] E.g., R.S. Hendel, "Prophets, Priests, and the Efficacy of Ritual," in *Pomegranates & Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (eds. D.P. Wright, D.N. Freedman and A. Hurvitz; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 185-98; M. Weiss, "Concerning Amos' Repudiation of the Cult," in *Pomegranates & Golden Bells*, 199-214; Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 70-77; A. Lange, "Gebotsobservanz statt Opferkult: Zur Kultpolemik in Jer 7,1–8,3," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel: Zur Substitutuiering und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentums* (ed. B. Ego et. al.; WUNT 118; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 19-35; E. Zenger, "Ritual and Criticism of Ritual in the Old Testament," in *Liturgy and Human Passage* (eds. D. Power and L. Maldonado; Concilium; New York: Seabury, 1979), 39-49. While Bibb studies biblical scholars' focus on ritual in light of Christian influences (Bibb, "The Prophetic Critique"), Hendel notes that, as the prophetic critique of ritual forms part of our modern conceptual lens and part of our doxa, the focus on prophetic critiques is unsurprising; R.S. Hendel, "Away from Ritual," in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion*, 59-80, 77.

[203] Bibb, "The Prophetic Critique," 34.

[204] Bibb, "The Prophetic Critique," 37.

ritual actors.[205] In what follows, we demonstrate that the period of ambiguity and negotiation that follows perceived ritual failure is the context out of which the biblical polemical texts arose and provides a lens through which to interpret their content.

2.5 Summary: Ritual, Rhetoric and the Polemical Texts

This chapter has focused on elements of ritual that attest to its rhetorical function. The rhetorical goals of ritual are heavily dependent on context, as different contexts affect the intent, interpretation, audience and content of ritual. Rituals may seek to define group identity, to maintain it, or to include or exclude others from a social group. Rituals may either present a view of reality as it is or as it should be, and their portrayal of social actors and symbols may change accordingly. It is for this reason that context is vital in any interpretation of ritual.[206] The rhetorical function of ritual can be seen in its persuasive nature; ritual persuades people that its goals are necessary or important in and of themselves and that the ritual performance is necessary to achieve these goals. By pointing to the importance of something beyond itself — that is, the outcome of the ritual — ritual justifies its existence and validates its relevance and its requirements for repetition. This relevance and need for repetition is often connected to worldviews about social and cosmic order. Societies function through order, and ritual provides a means of acknowledging the importance of order and of actions taken to maintain it. In doing so, ritual implicitly attests to the dangerous disorder that would arise as the consequence of non-participation in ritual. As a response to this possibility of disorder, ritual becomes an indispensable element in the construction and maintenance of society. The formality of ritual also means that it offers little room for negotiation or dialogue, underlining its rhetorical nature.[207] Participants are generally only offered two options when faced

[205] In this light, the wide range of culprits deemed to have participated in flawed or failed rituals in the polemical texts is worth noting (see Chapter Six).
[206] So Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 34.
[207] Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 33-35.

with ritual: participation, which signals assent to the social structure or worldview the ritual communicates, or rebellion, wherein the ritual and its message are rejected.

Though ritual offers little room for negotiation in and of itself, serious questions about the validity and efficacy of ritual can arise when lived experience does not match cultural expectations concerning the outcome of ritual. Such dissonance raises the spectre of ritual failure. Rituals may be perceived to have failed for a variety of reasons, including flawed practice, divine interruption, or because the ritual itself is deemed "illegitimate" in some way. The biblical polemics commonly correlate ritual failure with social upheaval, whether for the individual worshipper or the people more generally. The tendency for questions about the efficacy of ritual to arise from social crisis is logical, for if rituals uphold social order and the social order is thrown into chaos, then the rituals that maintain it should be called into question. Admittedly, social crisis provides a fertile ground for ritual questioning and innovation, although it is not the only possible catalyst for these things. Yet, in many of our biblical polemical texts, some form of social crisis likely stands in the background, as indicated by the texts' repeated reference to threats to Jerusalem, Judah, and the entire Yahwistic community.

We must, however, recognise that when dealing with the biblical texts about ritual we are dealing with texts, rather than with the rituals themselves. These texts present a gap between reader and ritual that cannot be fully bridged. These texts and their authors may have different contexts from the rituals they describe and may well have different audiences, worldviews and intentions. They may or may not fully represent all aspects of a ritual, either deliberately or accidentally. We must, therefore, be sensitive to the different contexts of these texts in our interpretation of their content. We must also be aware that texts can attribute to themselves, and to their message, a power and authority that is designed to affect the presentation and interpretation of their content. The ability of a text to appear authoritative and to self-legitimise its message must be considered

when dealing with an accusation of ritual failure. As Hauser-Schaüblin and Kaulana demonstrate, perceived ritual failure often leads to negotiation among ritual actors, who use various strategies to identify what went wrong and who is responsible for the failure.[208] A textualized accusation of ritual failure may prove a powerful tool in discussions about responsibility for ritual failures and in negotiation of power and authority, particularly if that text becomes ritualized or is ritualizing in and of itself.

In the following chapters, we take up themes identified in this discussion of ritual as rhetoric and seek to demonstrate that social crises in ancient Judah resulted in an awareness of a disjunction between lived experience and cultural expectations of ritual outcomes. This incongruity produced doubts about the efficacy of various rituals and led to the identification of certain rituals as having been flawed or as having failed in some way. Exactly what had gone wrong and who was responsible for the perceived failures was ambiguous, and this resulted in accusations of ritual failure and negotiation of responsibility for these failures amongst a variety of ritual actors. The following contends that the lens through which these polemical texts should be interpreted is this state of negotiation over responsibility for ritual failure in light of social crises.

[208] Hauser-Schaüblin, "Rivalling Rituals"; Kaulana, *Dysfunction of Ritual*.

3 Ritual and Polemic in the Hebrew Bible

Following the previous chapter's focus on ritual and rhetoric, this chapter discusses the relationship between ritual and biblical polemic more specifically. Although polemics can pertain to almost any facet of life, the biblical texts predominantly preserve polemic pertaining to theological and political issues. These polemics tend to focus on Israel's relationship with its leaders, people, land and YHWH.[209] As the latter was of central importance to the former three, religious ritual is often at the heart of the biblical polemics. The centrality of ritual *polemic* in the biblical texts arises from multiple factors. Firstly, on a fundamental level, ritual was believed to have the power to affect the cosmos and the divine – rituals could both please and anger the gods, who would respond accordingly. Secondly, much of the relationship between YHWH and Israel was enacted and expressed through ritual — thus problems in the relationship between YHWH and Israel were frequently attributed to ritual practice. Thirdly, ritual pervades social existence — rendering it unsurprising that ritual was connected to significant changes or threats to Israel and Judah's social existence. Finally, we should bear in mind the bias of our authors, who were educated writers with a clear interest in cultic matters.

"Religious polemic involves intentionality."[210] The underlying cause for many of these polemics was a desire to shape the identity and life of the community and to "realize in its way of life the new world of values and to continue the chain of ideological transmission."[211] In this way, the goal of the biblical ritual polemics is the same as that observed in the preceding chapter with regard to ritual and to ritual polemic more generally. Like ritual itself, the biblical polemics communicated statements about the social and

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[209] Y. Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative* (Trans. J. Chapman; BibInt 25; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 4.
[210] L.C. Jonker, "Religious Polemics in Exile: The Creator God of Genesis 1," in *Religious Polemics in Context: Papers Presented to the Second International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR) held at Leiden, 27-28 April 2000* (eds. T.L. Hettema and A. van der Kooij; Studies in Theology and Religion 11; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), 235-54, 235.
[211] Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, 4.

cosmic order in ancient Israel. They provided prescriptions by which this order could be affected and, ideally, upheld. If the message contained in the polemic was ignored or rejected, disorder would follow as a consequence. This is made explicit with reference to individuals such as kings: if a king did not engage in ritual practices approved of by the author, his reign is presented as leading to disaster and the disruption of the social order (e.g., Manasseh; 2 Kgs 21). It is also found in texts addressing entire communities, which teach that inappropriate ritual practices lead to disaster (e.g., Jer 7:1-8:3). As argued in the previous chapter, ritual is inherently rhetorical. Through its formal, communicative and persuasive aspects, it seeks to communicate, uphold and create the cosmic and social order. What will be explored in this chapter and those following are the ways in which, like ritual — and, indeed, through ritual — the biblical polemics against certain rituals sought to communicate, uphold, and create a particular cosmic and social order.

"Polemic" is understood here as an argument or stance taken in opposition to another.[212] Modern scholarship widely acknowledges the existence of polemic in the biblical texts, both explicit and implicit.[213] Amit

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[212] As Amit states, "polemic" originates from Greek, where it originally referred to warfare or military confrontation. These connotations of contest were preserved the metaphorization of the term, wherein it came to refer more abstractly to arguments or disputations; Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, 6-7.

[213] Amit observed that, once biblical literature is viewed from the perspective of the polemics and positions it contains, a very large number of polemics will be revealed; Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, 5. This is clearly seen in the ever-increasing amount of scholarship discussing polemics in a wide range of contexts; e.g., Strine, *Sworn Enemies*; Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile*; F. Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities* (BZAW 338; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004); Y. Amit, "Literature in the Service of Politics: Studies in Judges 19-21," in *Politics and Theopolitics in the Bible and Postbiblical Literature* (eds. H.G. Reventlow, Y. Hoffman and B. Uffenheimer; JSOTSup 171; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 28-41; Y. Amit, "Hidden Polemic in the Conquest of Dan: Judges XVII-XVIII," *VT* 40 (1990): 4-20; Y. Amit, "Epoch and Genre: The Sixth Century and the Growth of Hidden Polemics," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (eds. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 135-53; K.P. Hong, "The Deceptive Pen of Scribes: Judean Reworking of the Bethel Tradition as a Program of Assuming Israelite Identity," *Bib* 92 (2011): 427-41; O. Sergi, "Foreign Women and the Early Kings of Judah: Shedding Light on the Historiographic Perspective of the Author of Kings," *ZAW* 126 (2014): 193-207; O. Sergi, "Queenship in Judah Revisited: Athaliah and the Davidic Dynasty in Historical Perspective," in *Tabou et transgressions: Actes du colloque organise*

defines explicit or direct polemic as that which overtly identifies the subject of the polemic and makes its stance clear to the reader.[214] In explicit polemic, the "code" of the message is open and the reader does not have to search to decipher its meaning.[215] In contrast, implicit or indirect polemic is when "its subject is explicit, but the stance taken therein is expressed by indirect means alone."[216] An indirect polemic, therefore, is not explicitly stated, but can be understood or inferred from the text as a whole. The two may be related, as indirect polemic can support explicit polemic and serve to confirm the stance taken openly there.[217] Indirect polemic can also, at times, be more persuasive than its explicit counterpart, as it functions to draw the reader deeper into the worldview of the text and utilise their cognitive processes to internalize the stance of the author and affirm more strongly the author's position.[218] Polemic can also be of a "hidden" form, wherein its subject is not explicitly mentioned, or when it is not mentioned in the usual manner.[219] Instead the reader is provided with a trail of "signs" that create the impression that there is a double meaning within the text; the subject may not be stated explicitly, but an identifiable polemical sense remains. Caution is required when dealing with any form of polemic that is not explicit, to ensure that modern scholars do not read polemic into texts where it did not originally exist. In order to avoid this situation, Amit lays out four considerations that should govern identification of hidden polemics, including the existence of polemics against the target elsewhere.[220]

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par le Collége de France, Paris, 11-12 avril 2012 (eds. J.-M. Durand, M. Guichard and T. Römer; SGOA; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 99-112.

[214] See the detailed discussion in Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, 45-90, 56-58.

[215] Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, 57.

[216] Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, 57.

[217] Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, 57-58.

[218] Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, 57.

[219] Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, 93-94; see also Strine's comments on a "hidden transcript" in *Sworn Enemies*, 228-68, esp. 228-30.

[220] Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, 93-94. To counter the possibility that scholars could (mis-)identify hidden polemic everywhere, she provides four considerations to assist in governing identification of hidden polemics. Firstly, the text must refrain from explicitly mentioning the subject. Secondly, there must be other biblical texts regarding a polemic against the subject. Thirdly, there must be sufficient signs that the polemic is un-coverable, despite a lack of explicit mention of the subject. Finally, there must be reference to the hidden subject of the polemic in the exegetical tradition concerning the text in question.

Although Amit's distinctions between explicit, implicit and hidden polemics fruitfully direct scholars to ask more nuanced questions of biblical polemics, this model only takes us so far in terms of terminology and interpretation. The crucial point for Amit is whether a polemic is explicit or disguised in some way. For our purpose, however, this focus limits us to a conversation about the construction or presentation of polemic, with little room for pushing beyond the text and delving into the circumstances of composition. Terminologically, this focus on the mode of the polemic limits us from asking deeper questions about the effect of the polemic. As will be shown further on, many of the polemics against the Host of Heaven rituals have a ritualizing intention, which we cannot elucidate if we only speak of different types of polemic. Although Amit's work is useful in places, therefore, this study seeks to analyse both *what* the texts say about the Host rituals, and *why* it is being said — *why* these rituals in particular were identified as dangerous and *what* the authors sought to achieve through the creation of these polemical texts.

For these purposes, Brett and Strine offer more useful interpretive models than straightforward language of polemic. Brett uses language of "communicative intention" and "motive" — "communicative intention" being what an author is trying to say and "motive" being why it is said.[221] The communicative intention of the polemics against the Host of Heaven is clear — the authors present the Host rituals (amongst others) as flawed or failed and as illegitimate. Brett states that communicative intentions can be approached via elucidation of historical context and literary genre.[222] Identifying motive is more difficult, as motives extend behind a text and "may not come to explicit expression at all."[223] In addition, a single motive can give rise to a large number of communicative intentions.[224] I would also add that there may be multiple intentions underlying texts, some of which

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These considerations need not be of equal weight, but function as controls or checks on an ambiguous area of scholarship; Amit, *Hidden Polemics*, 95-97.

[221] M. Brett, "Motives and Intentions in Genesis 1," *JTS* 42 (1991): 1-16, 5.

[222] Brett, "Motives and Intentions," 5.

[223] Brett, "Motives and Intentions," 5.

[224] Brett, "Motives and Intentions," 9.

may be clearly stated or alluded to, while others remain hidden or left implicit. For example, as we shall see further on, 1-2 Kings purports to record a history of Israel and Judah's monarchy and cultic failures. The text presents itself as a historical document, explaining the past (or present); the motive for its composition appears to be the explanation of the downfall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in cultic terms. However, there may be other motives at play. Through their polemic against kings and (often implicitly) priests, the authors of 1-2 Kings set themselves up above these figures as the most authoritative voice on ritual practices in ancient Israel and Judah. This motive remains undeclared and implicit — 1-2 Kings does not identify its author, audience, or setting. Rather, it polemicizes against some kings and celebrates others in order to set out a ritual programme that the authors deemed correct. Yet, however difficult individual motives may be to identify, Brett's terminology is useful for our study of this polemic, as it allows us to clearly distinguish between *what* is being said and *why*.

Ultimately, however, both in terms of ritual and polemic Strine's model is more useful. Drawing on the work of James Scott, Strine discusses "hidden" and "public" transcripts in his study of Ezekiel.[225] To summarise these terms, a public transcript is the self-identifying discourse of dominant elites — a picture of themselves as they would like to be seen.[226] Public transcripts aim to affirm and naturalize the power of the dominant class and seek to compel acknowledgement and affirmation of this power from the subordinate class.[227] As such, they seek to hide evidence of the negative side of dominant rule.[228] Hidden transcripts, on the other hand, are found amongst the subordinate class and are a mode of expression of resistance against the dominant class.[229] The hidden transcript is not an explicit statement of resistance, but is hidden, providing safety to those who use it.[230] The hidden transcript develops and then ultimately emerges within the

[225] Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 26-39.
[226] Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 27.
[227] Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 29.
[228] Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 27.
[229] Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 29.
[230] Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 28-29.

public performance of a subaltern class.[231] This concept of "transcripts" proves useful for us, because these transcripts do not have to be textual, but can comprise performances and social interactions; this opens the door for discussions of ritual. In addition, speaking of transcripts offers insights into power relations and their discourses, which proves particularly useful when we come to the political aspects of accusations of ritual failure. For our purposes, the ritual arena of ancient Israel and Judah as it is presented in some biblical texts is our public transcript — promulgated by priests, perhaps kings, and other elites, usually with a focus on the importance of Jerusalem. Quite whether or how we may identify a hidden transcript in our polemics — if one even exists — is matter to which we will return.

Our approach to the Host of Heaven polemics thus combines the work of these three authors. Amit's observations of different types of polemic must be borne in mind, though Brett's language of communicative intentions and motives allows us to distinguish between product and agenda. Strine's identification of public and hidden transcripts in Ezekiel permits us to view ritual as a type, or a part, of public transcripts and to view the role of ritual in the construction of polemics with a view to the political relationships and negotiations of power that stand in the background. That there is more going on in our polemics than a straightforward dislike of the Host of Heaven is clear from the fact that these texts have survived the centuries and continued to have an important role in faith communities far beyond their original context and explicit subjects. In what follows I will argue that, through their targeting of the Host of Heaven rituals as subjects of explicit polemic, these texts propagate an implicit polemic that seeks to draw the reader into affirmation of and assent to the authors' worldviews. Differently put, the communicative intention of these polemics claims that the Host rituals and ritual practitioners have failed. The motive behind the polemic is a desire to change Israel's ritual practice and bring it under the paradigm propagated by the biblical authors. As such, these polemics have a ritualizing effect, using concepts and language from the public transcript to control and dictate

[231] Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 30.

Israel's ritual practice. The reader cannot engage in dialogue with the views presented in these texts, only accept or reject them (and act accordingly). Through acceptance of the explicit polemic, the reader assents to the implicit agenda and affirms the author as an authority in the ritual arena. The authors of the polemic are thus invested with the authority of ritual, with the knowledge to understand the requirements of the cosmic and social order and the power to dictate practice accordingly. By explicitly stating that others have failed in their ritual practices, the authors stake a claim to ritual authority and advertise the validity of their own ritual programme.

The following sections outline some of the causes and implicit effects of the biblical polemics against ritual. The first section (3.1) deals with polemic against ritual as a product of competing worldviews and systems. The second (3.2) focuses on polemic's relationship to social upheaval, while the third section (3.3) considers polemic against ritual innovation. These are by no means the only catalysts of the biblical polemics, but their prioritisation here is intended to preface themes encountered with reference to the Host of Heaven. It is also intended to draw attention to the prevalence of polemic *against ritual* in the Hebrew Bible and make a plea for the consideration of the *ritual* side of this phenomenon in addition to the usual focus on the polemic.

3.1 Polemic as a Product of Competing Worldviews

Polemic against ritual is especially prominent in the prophetic writings.[232] Bibb states that the prophetic critique of ritual is enacted in four main ways.[233] First, the rejection of the normative Israelite cult is tied to

[232] E.g., Am 4:4-5; Hos 8:4-6, 11-13; 9:4; Isa 1:10-16; Jer 6:19-20; Ezek 8; Zeph 1:4-6; Mic 5:12-14; 6:6-8. Amos and Isaiah, in particular, are often highlighted as prophets who contrasted ritual with ethical or moral behaviour, emphasizing that correct ritual did not excuse nor expunge moral failings; e.g., Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 70-77; Hendel, "Prophets, Priests." Other prophets argued that improper rituals had corrupted the temple irreversibly, meaning that no rituals would be able to save the people (e.g., Jer 7:1-8:3). Accusations that priests were acting illegitimately also contributed to the negative portrayal of certain rituals (e.g., Zeph 3:4; Jer 2:7-8).

[233] Bibb, "The Prophetic Critique," 35.

denunciations of idolatry and syncretism. Second, God's punishment for cultic sins is usually expressed in cultic imagery. Third, there is a strong focus on priests and other religious leaders who are held accountable for cultic sins. Finally, there is a vision of a true, positive cultic reality implicit in the prophetic critiques, which the current system has failed to live up to. As Weiss and Klingbeil note, this critique of ritual was not a complete rejection of all cultic practice, but a critique tied to specific contexts which were different for each prophet.[234] In different contexts, the moral attitudes, political activities, or theological beliefs of the people were highlighted by the prophets via reference to ritual. These critiques of the cult of Israel or Judah was part of a drive to reform religious practice and, rather than being pure innovation, seemed to be something of a regular or cyclical occurrence.[235] Klingbeil argues that these critiques were not criticisms of ritual in its entirety, but critiques of the view that Israel's covenant with YHWH provided such safety that it did not require a response by the people.[236] Hendel argues that prophetic critiques of ritual were often intertwined with critiques of society, though they cannot be fully reduced to mere social critique.[237] Similarly, Zenger states that prophetic criticism combines social and dogmatic aspects and, consequently, for the prophets, a rite can only be pleasing to YHWH when it promotes human co-existence.[238] At the heart of this understanding of the prophetic critiques of ritual is an emphasis on the social integrative aspect of ritual; Zenger focuses on rites in ancient Israel that had strong links with significant events in the individual and collective existence, such as marriage, circumcision, and death.[239] Though he does not refer to polemic as such, Zenger's focus on the integrative aspect of ritual is cogent because — as noted in the

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[234] Weiss, "Amos' Repudiation," 213-14; Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 77-78. Against those who have claimed that the prophets represent anti-ritualism or denounce all ritual, it is noteworthy that the prophetic critiques did not aim to introduce new practices, but reformed existing ones and sought to replace them with more effective rituals directed toward YHWH alone.
[235] Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 77.
[236] Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 77-78.
[237] Hendel, "Away from Ritual," 77-78.
[238] Zenger, "Ritual and Criticism," 39-49.
[239] Zenger, "Ritual, and Criticism" 44, 48.

previous chapter — ritual not only communicates and maintains order but through repetition, it also constructs order and shapes reality for its participants. Participation in ritual implicitly gives assent to the social structures and symbols perpetuated in ritual performance. By participating in rituals led by kings, priests and illegitimate prophets, sometimes at illegitimate locations, the people of Israel assented to the worldviews expressed and propagated in those rituals.[240] Although individual rituals come into view at times, prophetic critiques of ritual often warn the people against participating in (or tolerating) a broader ritual system that was deemed incorrect or illegitimate. These critiques seek to re-orient the people's worldview, directing it towards their particular view of Yahwism, expressed and upheld through "correct" ritual practice.

In a useful study, Waldman and Baum explore the role of prophets as agents of change.[241] For them, prophets are "oppositional figures who engage in privileging communication."[242] Oppositional figures are those who emerge from an institutionalized system and oppose it, usually involving the reformulation of familiar paradigms in order to transcend and rework them.[243] Privileged communication, meanwhile, is communication that is connected with privilege, although this privilege lies variously with the source, interpreter, carrier, audience or content of the message communicated.[244] Although many forms of social communication may be considered privileged, prophecy lays claim to one of the highest forms in that it derives from a non-human source and is beyond the reach of most people. As such, the recognisable "specialness" of prophecy plays a role in

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[240] This is particularly noticeable in texts such as Hos 4:15; 8:11; Am 4:4; 5:4-5, which warn the people not to participate in rituals at sanctuaries such as Bethel and Gilgal, for doing so would demonstrate their acceptance of those sanctuaries and thus their idolatry, resulting in the corruption of the people.

[241] M.R. Waldman and R.M. Baum, "Innovation as Renovation: The 'Prophet' as an Agent of Change," in *Innovation in Religious Traditions*, 241-84.

[242] Waldman and Baum, "The 'Prophet,'"245.

[243] Waldman and Baum, "The 'Prophet,'" 244. Carroll agrees, noting that "By reinterpreting older beliefs the prophet made clear his analysis of society and set up a dialectical relationship between the community's cognitive holdings and his own critique"; Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 120.

[244] Waldman and Baum, "The 'Prophet,'" 244.

the acquisition of authority and legitimacy of the prophet and the acquiescence of the audience that accepts their message.[245] By virtue of the prophet's institutional and social role as conveyor of privileged communication, therefore, prophetic polemic against ritual appears authoritative; its divine origin renders it difficult to disagree with. Indeed, disagreements about prophetic messages in the Hebrew Bible ultimately end up with the message of the prophet privileged over the voice of their detractors, no matter the status of the detractors. For example, prophets are raised above other privileged communicators such as royal and priestly figures, while non-privileged communicators such as the people of Israel are usually presented as the errant party, in need of (true/correct) prophetic direction. If this victory of prophecy is not achieved in its own time, the preservation of the message permits it to be verified as authoritative in a later time. The reader is implicitly characterised as subordinate to the authority of prophecy; they are not invited to engage in discussion about whether a prophet is correct; they are only permitted to witness the prophetic interpretation of events and accept the outcome as narrated by the author. As a result, the readers are presented with only two options; to accept the prophet's presentation of ritual and change their practice accordingly, or to reject it and, in so doing, identify themselves with the targets of the polemic and the judgement pronounced upon them.

The priestly texts also use privileged communication to critique ritual, albeit in different ways. The priestly texts often engage in one of two strategies. First, they may present a rare example of ritual failure as a warning against illegitimate rituals and against any challenges to priestly authority.[246] That this ritual failure is presented as rare or exceptional implicitly draws attention to the competency of the legitimate priests who never cause these ritual failures. Milgrom notes that the story about the ritual failure of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10) served to demonstrate that even the sons of Aaron – priests who ought to be legitimate – would be punished

[245] Waldman and Baum, "The 'Prophet,'" 244.
[246] As seen, for example, in 1 Sam 2; Lev 10; Olyan, "Two Types of Ritual Innovation"; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 628.

by YHWH if they overstepped the boundaries of correct ritual practice.[247] Milgrom (citing Wright) views this story as a response created by the priests to provide a correction to the people's ongoing offerings of illegitimate or "strange" incense.[248] The second strategy used by the priestly texts was to draw upon their authority, or their founder's authority, to authoritatively state the "correct" way of enacting rituals and, in doing so, implicitly declare that other alternatives are wrong or subordinate.[249] These polemics may arise from competition between Israelite and foreign practices, or they may address intra-Israelite competition and dialogue.[250] A good example of this is found in Lev 1-16, where Leuchter draws attention to the ways in which the content of the text is authorized.[251] These include the subordination of Moses to Aaron (Lev 10:16-20); the written form of the text, which "makes transparent the origin and nature of priestly royal authority"; and the claims that the priestly hierarchy and ritual activity was "authentically derived from Sinai."[252] The connection to Sinai, in particular, affirms the ritual agenda of the author as authentic, traditional and legitimate, and thus the text, as a written record of this "true" tradition, is affirmed as an authoritative ritual text, which could be used to dictate practice. The presentation of the priestly hierarchy and rituals as unchanging and repetitive permits it to convey a sense of normality to its practitioners; the rituals they are directed to participate in are those which have underlain their society since their ancestors. Thus, implicitly, to deviate from these rituals or from priestly authority would disrupt the normal social and cosmic order.[253] As Jenson notes, scholarly identification of the kerygma of the priestly texts largely depends on the date assigned to them.[254] The priestly texts can be viewed as an attempt to legitimise the contemporary cultic

[247] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 628-30.
[248] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 628-40, 630-31.
[249] See, for example, Feder, "Behind the Scenes"; Leuchter, "Politics of Ritual Rhetoric."
[250] Feder, "Behind the Scenes."
[251] Leuchter, "Politics of Ritual Rhetoric."
[252] Leuchter, "Politics of Ritual Rhetoric," 348-49.
[253] Janzen connects this phenomenon with the formality of ritual; Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 22-25.
[254] Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 26-27.

institutions and individuals, or can be viewed as programmatic, attempting to guide current and future cultic activity.[255] Different priestly texts afford authority to priests of later generations who stand within the hierarchies they narrate and enact the ritual processes the authors deemed correct, presenting them as guardians of the boundaries between human and divine and between Israel and chaos.[256] These ritual texts thus often identify "authentic" priests and "correct" ritual practices, whilst implicitly undermining the claims of any other ritual practitioners to control Israel's rituals. However, priestly polemics can also be explicit, as MacDonald's recent study of Ezek 44 demonstrates.[257] Ezekiel 44 explicitly polemicizes against the idea found in Isa 56 that foreigners could participate in Israel's temple cult, proclaiming the authority of the Levites and priests over temple matters. What is interesting for our purposes is the late date MacDonald claims for parts of this text; in contrast to previous scholarship, he argues that Ezek 44 is a late text responding to Isa 56's allowance of foreigners in the temple, rather than vice versa.[258] This renders the polemic of Ezek 44 a result of textual exegesis.[259] This ability of textual composition — to appear as though it responds to a historical situation when it actually responds to a textual situation — is partly why we do not seek here to identify the exact historical circumstances underlying the Host of Heaven — because some of the circumstances described by these texts may not be historical but rather theoretical.

This concern with competing groups, rituals or beliefs can be seen throughout the prophetic texts. It can also be seen in Deuteronomy and 1-2 Kings. Foreign rituals are claimed to have posed a threat to Israelite cultic existence by providing a distraction from YHWH and diluting "pure" forms of Yahwistic worship; this resulted in calls for the people to return to

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[255] Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 27.
[256] As Bergen observes, the textualization of these rituals enabled the formation of Israelite identity well beyond the circumstances of the texts' composition; Bergen, *Reading Ritual*, 78-79.
[257] N. MacDonald, *Priestly Rule: Polemic and Biblical Interpretation in Ezekiel 44* (BZAW 476; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).
[258] MacDonald, *Priestly Rule*, 111-14, 146-50.
[259] MacDonald, *Priestly Rule*, 146-48.

YHWH. Many nations — large and small, distant and neighbouring — have been identified by scholars as having posed a threat to Israel's worship, especially Assyria, Aram, and Canaan. Yet, the danger to Israel's faith was not posed by the existence of foreign ritual practices, but by the threat of Israel's participation in them. This seems to be linked to an awareness that ritual participation shaped reality; participation in foreign rituals could, therefore, change the people's worldviews and social structure. This can be seen particularly clearly in Deuteronomy, which explicitly connects ritual practice to social remembrance and identity formation. In Deuteronomy, the people of Israel are called to engage in specific ritual practices that recall their identity as YHWH's people and reject practices which threaten that identity.[260] Foreign worship represented a threat because, through participation in foreign ritual practice, Israelite conceptions of YHWH and of their own identity could change. Through foreign rituals elevating a different deity, YHWH's position as Israel's primary god could be challenged — as could the structure, hierarchy and order of Israelite society, if the cultic and social status of foreign ritual practitioners threatened to rise above that of Israelite practitioners. Rituals and ritual practitioners could challenge established hierarchies on earth and in heaven, and lead to social and political fragmentation. Polemic against foreign worship thus had an important social dimension, insofar as it presented the objects of the polemic as a threat to social and cosmic order. Implicitly, it also staked out the authors' claim to be guardians of Israelite social and cosmic order.

The concern for order that underlies much of the biblical polemic against foreign worship could be appropriated and applied to any form of worship — however traditional — that an author did not wish to encourage. Thus, traditional Israelite ritual locations such as Bethel, Gibeon and the high places became targets of polemic, as did various ritual practitioners.[261]

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[260] See especially, C.L. Crouch, *The Making of Israel: Cultural Diversity in the Southern Levant and the Formation of Ethnic Identity in Deuteronomy* (VTSup 162; Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[261] See, for example, S.M. Langston, *Cultic Sites in the Tribe of Benjamin: Benjaminite Prominence in the Religion of Israel* (American University Studies Series 7; Theology and Religion 200; New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 181-200; J.F. Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel*

Numerous cultic phenomena once deemed acceptable, such as the golden calves and the worship of Asherah, also became targets of polemic.[262] By presenting a ritual as "foreign" or "non-Israelite," an author could present it as a threat to the community. By association, the practitioners of a polemicized ritual could also be categorized as "foreigners" or "non-Israelites" and presented as a threat to the social order. The same is true in reverse; by presenting a ritual as a threat to the community or social order, a ritual could be identified as "foreign" or "non-Israelite." Polemic against rituals thus played a key role in the formation of identity, due to ritual's ability to delineate between different social groups.

That this is a textual process should be recalled. As Chapter Two demonstrated, there is a gap between the texts and the rituals they describe that cannot be completely bridged by modern interpreters. From our standpoint, therefore, we cannot necessarily know whether a ritual practice was foreign to Israel or whether it was identified as "foreign" by an author with a particular agenda, and whether the views or practices mentioned in the texts were mainstream or otherwise. In addition, we cannot necessarily know whether the practitioners of polemicized rituals were regarded as illegitimate or non-Israelite by the wider population, or if this judgement was peculiar to the author or an associated minority group. Indeed, in the absence of texts to the contrary, the presentation of certain rituals as "illegitimate," "non-Israelite," or the cause of social disintegration draws the reader into the worldview of the author. There are only two options: the rituals are presented by the author as either legitimate or illegitimate. No dialogue or negotiation is permitted; the reader must accept or reject the authors' view.

In sum, biblical polemics against ritual are often the product of competing worldviews and ritual systems. Some of this competition was

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and the Configuration of Israelite Identity (BZAW 368; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 14, 59, 71-76.

[262] E.g., Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah*, 54-83; Anthonioz, "Astarte in the Bible," 132-39; T. Binger, "Ashera in Israel," *SJOT* 9 (1995): 3-18; Y.H. Chung, *The Sin of the Calf: The Rise of the Bible's Negative Attitude Toward the Golden Calf* (LHBOTS 523; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 181-203.

internal to different Israelite traditions and practices, while some was between Israelite and non-Israelite practices. Inherent in the competition seems to be the awareness that ritual shapes reality for the participants; thus, participation in different rituals could change the Israelite social order and their perception of the cosmic order. While the threat posed by foreign ritual practice is obvious, the biblical authors also apply the same concept to Israelite traditions that they disagreed with and wished to eradicate.

3.2 Polemic against Ritual as a Response to Social Upheaval

Connections between ritual innovation and social upheaval are widely known.[263] Although recent ritual theorists have correctly cautioned that crisis as a catalyst should not be overstated as ritual systems are never static, a number of the polemical texts focused on here attest to the importance of social upheaval in their conceptions of ritual.[264] As ritual exists to create and maintain the social order, social disorder highlights the problems and dangers inherent in ritual.[265] Different forms of social disorder may suggest different ritually-reflected problems — whether a specific problem with a particular ritual process, or an issue with the broader worldview that the ritual communicated. This relationship between social upheaval and ritual is key to our analysis because the texts polemicizing against rituals for the Host of Heaven object to them due to the perceived connection between these practices and the upheaval of the social order. Deuteronomy 4:19 and

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[263] Major changes in ritual as a result of social crisis can even result in traditional rituals being replaced by newer traditions, or entirely new religions, which lay the foundation for ritual practice going forward (e.g., H.B. Earhart, "Toward a Theory of the Formation of the Japanese New Religions: A Case Study of Gedatsu-Kai," *History of Religions* 30 (1980): 175-97); alternatively, crisis may prompt canonisation of traditions (e.g., Bell, "The Ritualization of Texts").

[264] Williams, Cox and Jaffee emphasise that as ritual is constantly innovating itself and that crisis is not always the most pertinent, nor the only catalyst to which attention should be drawn. However, they also highlight the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple as a clear example of crisis causing innovation; Williams, Cox and Jaffee, "Religious Innovation," 8.

[265] See 2.4. Gruenwald argues that the conditions which give rise to rituals are those of crisis, because ritual's aim to maintain order presupposes the prevention of existing disorder and chaos; Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 26. If so, then the relationship is ongoing — crisis gives rise to ritual which keeps crisis at bay until crisis rises again and ritual finds a new answer.

17:3 present Host of Heaven worship as a danger to the entire community, while Zeph 1:5 and Jer 8:1-3; 19:13 associate this worship specifically with danger to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Similarly, 2 Kgs 17:16 (cf. 21:3, 5; 13-14; 23:26-27) associates Host of Heaven ritual practices with the downfall of a nation and the exile of its people. Here, Hoffman's observations about religious responses to national crisis are informative. Hoffman argues that some biblical authors employed the strategies of "retroactive interpretation" and "apparent anticipation of a crisis" to respond to a contemporary crisis.[266] He argues, for example, that Jer 7:1-8:3 arose in response to the destruction of Jerusalem and represents a case of both retroactive interpretation and anticipation of crisis.[267] For Hoffman, the views of the Deuteronomistic author have been retroactively projected onto the figure of Jeremiah and presented as though they were expressed in anticipation of 586, in order to provide a more authoritative interpretation of later events.[268] Carroll highlighted a similar phenomenon, arguing that the destruction of Jerusalem prompted the collection and editing of traditions in order to show how inevitable the destruction had been.[269] For him, this was an attempt to resolve the dissonance between prophetic expectation and reality. The same is also true of ritual. The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple — the heart of Judah's ritual practices — and the social and cosmic order represented in and upheld by the temple would have caused enormous dissonance between expectations of ritual outcomes and reality. Moreover, the cognitive dissonance caused by the downfall of Judah was not limited to just one ritual practice or tradition or belief but would have affected most rituals and ritual practitioners in sixth century Judah. Although the Jerusalem temple was the temple of YHWH, the downfall of Judah and the destruction of other cities and ritual locations would have raised questions about the failure of rituals directed to any deities that were supposed to ensure the protection

[266] Hoffman, "Patterns of Religious Response," 27-28.
[267] Hoffman, "Patterns of Religious Response," 27-29.
[268] Hoffman, "Patterns of Religious Response," 27-29.
[269] Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 145.

and safety of the practitioners. In the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem and the downfall of Judah, investigations into what went wrong in Judah's ritual practices would have been required. The present argument suggests that polemics against ritual would naturally have arisen at a time like this, as the upheaval to the social order would have suggested the likelihood of ritual failure. Failed rituals were known to be a risk to the cosmic order — hence the existence of a priesthood of trained ritual specialists. Disruption to the social order reflected disruption in the cosmic order, especially in the relationship between Israel and YHWH. Thus, the circumstances following the fall of Jerusalem presented a prime opportunity for the identification of failed rituals and the composition of polemical texts that (retrospectively) outlined the crisis provoked by their practice.

Though traumatic, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 was not the only major social upheaval that may have provoked polemic against ritual. Throughout the long seventh century (c. 721-586) Judah experienced a number of upheavals, including witnessing the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, narrowly escaping complete destruction in 701 and subsequently becoming a vassal to three different foreign nations.[270] One king was assassinated, another was killed by Pharaoh Necho II and no fewer than three kings were deported to foreign lands.[271] The people of Judah also suffered the economic consequences of defeat and vassalhood and experienced multiple forced deportations of Judahites to Babylon.[272]

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[270] The impact of the Assyrian King Sennacherib's campaign against Judah in 701 is well documented in scholarly literature; e.g., R.A. Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition* (VTSup 155; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 62-66 (with further literature); L.L. Grabbe, "The Kingdom of Judah from Sennacherib's Invasion to the Fall of Jerusalem: If We Had Only the Bible," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings: The Kingdom of Judah in the Seventh Century BCE* (ed. L.L. Grabbe; LHBOTS 393; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 78-123; N. Na'aman, "Population Changes in Palestine Following Assyrian Deportations," in *Ancient Israel and its Neighbors: Interaction and Counteraction – Collected Essays, Volume I* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 200-219.

[271] So 2 Kgs 21:23 (assassination of Amon) and see A. Malamat, "The Historical Background of the Assassination of Amon, King of Judah," *IEJ* 3 (1953): 26-29; 2 Kgs 23:29 (death of Josiah); 23:34 (deportation of Jehoahaz); 24:15 (deportation of Jehoiachin); 25:7 (deportation of Zedekiah).

[272] Judah's poor economic status after 701 is demonstrated by a tax record from Nineveh which states that Judah only paid ten minas of silver in tribute, whereas neighbouring Ammon and Moab paid considerably higher sums; Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 67.

Throughout the long seventh century a great many of Judah's temples and major cities were destroyed, eventually culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem.[273] There were, therefore, numerous events that could have acted as catalysts for the biblical polemics against the rituals for the Host of Heaven.

It is not the aim of this study to propose a redactional reconstruction of the so-called Deuteronomistic History, nor of the Books of Kings more specifically. However, it seems very likely that the texts polemicizing against the Host of Heaven, as part of or being closely related to these works, originated in Josiah's reign or later.[274] This being the case, it is notable that the polemic against the Host of Heaven and other rituals — particularly royal ones — coincided with an intense period of social upheaval, particularly within royal circles. Although Josiah's death has long been highlighted as a traumatic event for supporters of his reform, the deportation of his son and successor, Jehoahaz, may have been the more

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Although it seems that during the reigns of Manasseh and Josiah Judah began to recover economically from the devastation of 701 (e.g., I. Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the Days of Manasseh," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Arachaeology in Honor of Philip J. King* [eds. M.D. Coogan, J.C. Exum and L.E Stager; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994], 164-87; E.A. Knauf, "The Glorious Days of Manasseh," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, 164-89; N. Na'aman, "Josiah and the Kingdom of Judah," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, 189-248 [214-17]), partly thanks to its participation within the Neo-Assyrian trade network (e.g., A. Faust and E. Weiss, "Judah, Philistia and the Mediterranean World: Reconstructing the Economic System of the Seventh Century BCE," *BASOR* 338 [2005]: 71-92; Crouch, *Making of Israel*, 9-18), it was not long before they came under attack in the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 23:29-30, 33-35; 24:2). Debate continues regarding the number of people deported to Babylon in 597 and 586, but for an overview see J. Weinberg, "The Babylonian Conquest of Judah: Some Additional Remarks to a Scientific Consensus," *ZAW* 118 (2006): 597-610, and for a concise portrayal of the demographic and settlement changes in Judah in the seventh to fifth centuries see O. Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 258-72.

[273] The loss of Yahwistic sanctuaries, but especially the Jerusalem temple, would have been devastating, as it represented YHWH's rule over the world, his dwelling place among his people, and the legitimacy of the kings who ruled in Jerusalem; R.E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 67-77; B.C. Ollenburger, *Zion, the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult* (JSOTSup 41; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), esp. 54-156.

[274] 2 Kgs 23:4, 5 and Zeph 1:5 literarily date themselves to Josiah's reign and the polemic against Manasseh (2 Kgs 21) likely arose in Josiah's reign or later. Jeremiah 7:1-8:3 and 19:13 also appear to date after Josiah's reign. It is technically possible — albeit highly unlikely — that 2 Kgs 17:16 and Deut 17:1-3 date earlier, and Deut 4:19 is widely agreed to be a late composition.

devastating event.[275] The experience of a foreign king intervening in the Davidic succession and deporting a Judahite king to Egypt was unheard of and would have sent shockwaves through royal and cultic circles. The difficulties of having two Judahite kings alive and in different places is often recognised with regard to Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, but the deportation of Jehoahaz provided a precedent. Moreover, if Josiah did enact a reform, the deposition and deportation of his successor would have undermined his actions significantly. When considering these upheavals in royal circles during the tumultuous final years of the kingdom of Judah, it is worth specifically recalling that the kings were YHWH's representatives on earth. Their rule in Jerusalem was supposed to reflect the cosmic order and YHWH's reign in heaven. Disruption to the kingship, therefore, signalled disruption in the divine realm. It is thus not surprising that the rituals meant to uphold the social and cosmic order came under close scrutiny during these years of upheaval.

In addition to the deportation of Jehoahaz, the deportations of 597 should also be given more attention. Though often analysed in terms of royalty, the social impact of the upheavals of 597 on the elite classes in Jerusalem deserve more recognition than is usually the case. As noted above, Jehoahaz' deportation to Egypt had set a precedent for royal deportations that many people in Jerusalem — only twelve years later — would have remembered. By Jehoiachin's time, therefore, Judah had already survived a king being deported. What was new in 597 was the deportation of substantial numbers of elites from Jerusalem.[276] As elite administrative positions in the ancient Near East were often hereditary, the deportations of 597 would have opened the door for new administrative appointments and

[275] On the disappointment caused by Josiah's death see, for example, D. Janzen, "The Sins of Josiah and Hezekiah: A Synchronic Reading of the Final Chapters of Kings," *JSOT* 37 (2013): 349-70, 367; H.G.M. Williamson, "The Death of Josiah and the Continuing Development of the Deuteronomistic History," *VT* 32 (1982): 242-48; S.B. Frost, "The Death of Josiah: A Conspiracy of Silence?" *JBL* 87 (1968): 369-82.

[276] Lipschits notes that Nebuchadnezzar's tactics were carefully calculated; through deporting the king, his court and his priests and appointing his own choice of successor, he demonstrated his control over every aspect of Judahite kingship; Lipschits, *Fall and Rise*, 54-62.

— perhaps, though they are not mentioned specifically — new appointments of cultic officials. In this vein, it is worth note that, just as the kings mirrored YHWH's divine rule, the Judahite court was sometimes thought to mirror YHWH's divine court.[277] It would not be entirely surprising, therefore, if the disruption to the Judahite court and elite circles in 597 prompted conceptions of disruption in the divine realm, necessitating theological reflection and reconciliation. Given the Host of Heaven sometimes acted as YHWH's court and congregation in the heavens, upheavals to the royal court on earth may have affected their status specifically. The loss of the temple vessels — though not a completely new event — would also have contributed to changes in the ritual processes within the temple.[278] Ackroyd demonstrates that reports of the loss and eventual restoration of these vessels functions as a theme — from their loss in Kings, to their restoration with Ezra-Nehemiah — that allows the biblical authors to show continuity between the pre- and post-destruction Jerusalem cult.[279] He also highlights the vessels' role as a component of order in the temple cult; in their ritual use, the vessels functioned as part of the maintenance of order between the human and divine realms.[280] Their loss, therefore, signified a major disruption in the ritual maintenance of order in pre-586 Jerusalem.

For all these reasons, the polemic against the Host of Heaven rituals is at home in the context of social upheaval. The changes in Judah's kingship, elite circles and social order, together with their implications for conceptions of the divine, would have raised significant questions about the

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[277] D.A. Knight, "Political Rights and Powers in Monarchic Israel," *Semeia* 66 (1994): 93-119; see also Handy's observation of parallel human-divine bureaucracies in Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*.

[278] Sennacherib's wall reliefs recording his victory at Lachish depict cultic vessels being carried away by Assyrian soldiers (displayed in the British Museum: BM 124908), but the last recorded loss of the Jerusalem temple vessels was their capture by Jehoash, King of Israel in the eighth century (2 Kgs 14:14). A few previous kings had also reportedly used gold and silver from the temple to pay tribute to conquering enemies, which may or may not have included vessels (Asa 1 Kgs 15:18; Joash 2 Kgs 13:18; Ahaz 2 Kgs 16:8; Hezekiah 2 Kgs 18:15-16).

[279] P.R. Ackroyd, "The Temple Vessels: A Continuity Theme," in *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (eds. G.W. Anderson et al.; VTSup 23; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 166-81.

[280] Ackroyd, "Temple Vessels," 170-71.

rituals meant to uphold and protect this order. Although the destruction of Jerusalem and subsequent deportations to Babylon in 586 were seismic events that may well have acted as a catalyst for some of this ritual polemic, we cannot rule out the possibility that previous events — such as the deportations of Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin and the elite classes in 597 — may have already provoked this and other ritual-related polemic. Indeed, if events leading up to and including 597 provided a catalyst for polemic against certain rituals, the events of 586 may have provided confirmation of the legitimacy and accuracy of these polemics. The use of retroactive interpretation and anticipation of crisis offered a different form of confirmation. By presenting flawed and failed rituals as the underlying cause of the threats against Jerusalem and its people, any destruction or suffering of the people appeared to confirm the failure of the rituals identified as the cause of the problem. This retroactive interpretation was not merely an explanation of events, but an implicit warning to those that had survived to change their ritual practices.

3.3 Polemic against Ritual Innovation

The role of polemic in the negotiation of competing ritual systems and worldviews means that it naturally has an important role in politics. As Kertzer states, "Through ritual aspiring political leaders struggle to assert their right to rule, incumbent power holders seek to bolster their authority, and revolutionaries try to carve out a new basis of political allegiance."[281] Ritual is valuable in hierarchical societies because of its ability to legitimise the existence, maintenance or establishment of a hierarchy.[282] Ritual can, therefore, be a powerful way in which to communicate the legitimacy or illegitimacy of an individual's rule or a group's control of a hierarchical system, such as a priestly cult or governmental administration.[283] This is seen especially clearly in the books of 1-2 Kings, where numerous rulers are

[281] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, 1.
[282] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, 28-29.
[283] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, 39.

critiqued for their role in instigating or continuing various forms of cultic practice deemed illegitimate by the authors. Through their role as the symbolic figurehead of the kingdom, rulers were presented as responsible for the ritual practices that were enacted during their reign, even if they were not personally accused of participation.[284] Others, meanwhile, are presented as instigators, accused of establishing, encouraging, and actively participating in illegitimate ritual practice.[285] The kingship and the cult in ancient Israel and Judah were closely intertwined, so the mention of ritual actions in reports of a king's reign was logical.[286] However, the biblical Books of Kings prioritise ritual over all other aspects of the kings' reigns, including military, political and building activities. The presentation of ritual in these texts is specifically concerned with ritual innovation.

The two kings accused of being the biggest ritual innovators — Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 12-13) and Manasseh (2 Kgs 21) — are presented as the paradigms of cultic sin in the northern and southern kingdoms respectively. Manasseh is accused of a range of cultic practices. Some of these may have been an accepted part of Yahwism in his day, but his support of such practices is presented as encouragement of foreign rituals and as an innovation in previous royal ritual.[287] Jeroboam I is presented as engaging in ritual innovation in his establishment of Bethel and Dan and the creation of the golden calves.[288] The effects of the ritual innovations of these two kings

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[284] This is often seen in the statement that various rulers "did not remove the high places": for example, Jehoshaphat (1 Kgs 22:43), Jehoash (2 Kgs 12:3), Amaziah (2 Kgs 14:4), Azariah (2 Kgs 15:4), Jotham (2 Kgs 15:35).

[285] Especially Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 12-13) and Manasseh (2 Kgs 21) but also Solomon (2 Kgs 11:5-8) and Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:3-4, 10-18). Though some readers continue to take the reports in 1-2 Kings at face value, recent scholarship widely recognises the politicized nature of this ritual polemic; e.g., Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*. Knauf diagnoses the tendency to read the Books of Kings without due criticism as "Goodkingitis"; Knauf, "Glorious Days of Manasseh," 169 n. 16.

[286] G.W. Ahlström, *Royal Administration and National Religion in Ancient Palestine* (SHANE 1; Leiden: Brill, 1982); D. Launderville, *Piety and Politics: The Dynamics of Royal Authority in Homeric Greece, Biblical Israel, and Old Babylonian Mesopotamia* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003).

[287] Stavrakopoulou argues that, although the account is likely ahistorical, the cultic "crimes" Manasseh is accused of were probably part of normative Israelite tradition; Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*, 110-111.

[288] Pakkala argued that the golden bulls of Jeroboam are a late addition to the passage and Jeroboam's sin was initially limited to his construction of high places; J. Pakkala,

are presented as extending beyond their own rule and that of their immediate successors to their entire kingdoms, contributing fundamentally to the downfall of Israel and Judah (2 Kgs 17:22-23; 23:26-27; 24:3-4).[289] Other kings accused of participating in sinful ritual innovation include Solomon (2 Kgs 11:5-13) and Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:3-4, 10-18); the Judahite queen mother Maacah (1 Kgs 15:13) also deserves mention. Although Solomon's sin did not result in the downfall of Judah, his encouragement of foreign traditions is blamed for the loss of territory that resulted in Judah being smaller and less powerful than Israel (1 Kgs 11:9-13).[290] Maacah was deposed from her position for making an Asherah (1 Kgs 15:13), while Ahaz's Judah was attacked by Israel and Aram and lost territory to the Edomites (2 Kgs 16:4-9). A reader could be forgiven for thinking, therefore, that royal ritual innovation was a sinful enterprise that could only result in individual and national punishment.

Yet, not all royal ritual innovation is presented equally in 1-2 Kings. While the aforementioned perpetrators are presented negatively, ritual innovations by Hezekiah and Josiah are presented positively. The connections between politics, reform and textual composition in these two kings' reigns have received a great deal of scholarly attention over the years, which will not be repeated here.[291] Of primary interest for our purposes is

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"Jeroboam without Bulls," *ZAW* 120 (2008): 501-25. Differently, Toews argues that Jeroboam drew on archaic, traditional Canaanite-Israelite religious symbolism in establishing the calves. Consequently, he argues that nothing Jeroboam I did was innovative, though it later became presented as such; W.I. Toews, *Monarchy and Religious Institution under Jeroboam I* (SBLMS 47; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); see also Chung, *The Sin of the Calf*, 22-29. Bodner's observation that Jeroboam attempts to construct a new identity for the northern kingdom is also worth note in light of connections between ritual and constructions of political reality; K. Bodner, *Jeroboam's Royal Drama* (Biblical Refigurations; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 82; see also Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, esp. 77-101.

[289] On transgenerational punishment see J. Schipper, "Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Dynastic or Transgenerational Punishment," in *Soundings in Kings*, 81-109.

[290] Sweeney argues that Solomon is presented as a foil to Josiah, as Solomon's sins are specifically corrected by Josiah, who retakes territory lost by Solomon's son Rehoboam; M.A. Sweeney, "The Critique of Solomon in the Josianic Edition of the Deuteronomistic History," *JBL* 114 (1995): 607-22, 609.

[291] Works are too numerous to list in full; the following are representative and may be consulted for references to further literature: Eynikel, *King Josiah*; Young, *Hezekiah*; I.W. Provan, *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings: A Contribution to the Debate about the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (BZAW 172; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988);

the presentation of the innovations of Hezekiah and Josiah as "traditional" and "legitimate" in contrast to the "foreign" and "illegitimate" innovations of other kings. Hezekiah and Josiah's innovations are signalled as "legitimate" through a number of strategies, including reference to the ancestors Moses (2 Kgs 18:6; 23:25) and David (2 Kgs 18:3; 22:2), reference to an ancient text (2 Kgs 22:8-23:3) and prophetic legitimation (2 Kgs 22:14-20).[292] Compared to Josiah, Hezekiah's reform receives relatively little justification, but is still presented as the result of Hezekiah acting similarly to David (2 Kgs 18:3), trusting in YHWH (2 Kgs 18:5) and holding to the commandments of Moses (2 Kgs 18:6). By contrast, Josiah's reform is justified at every turn, via his comparison to and surpassing of David (2 Kgs 22:2; 23:25), his concern for the state of the Temple (2 Kgs 22:3-7), the discovery of the law book (22:8-23:3) and his penitential response (22:11), the confirming prophecy of Huldah (22:14-20), his forming a new covenant with the people (23:1-3), the contrast drawn between Josiah, Manasseh and Solomon (23:12-14) and Josiah's portrayal as keeper of the Passover (23:21-23). That the authors went to such lengths to legitimise Josiah's reform is indicative of its innovative nature. Notably, the impetus for Hezekiah's and Josiah's reforms are presented as a mixture of personal piety and external stimuli/actors. Both kings are characterized as having a pious disposition (compare Hezekiah's "trust in YHWH" and Josiah's concern for the Temple and penitential response to the lawbook), but neither is presented as acting entirely from their own initiative. Hezekiah's actions are connected to the commandments of Moses and

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Lowry, *Reforming Kings*; G.N. Knoppers, "Theories of the Redaction(s) of Kings," in *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception* (eds. A. Lemaire and B. Halpern; VTSup 129; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 69-89; N. Na'aman, "The King Leading Cult Reforms in his Kingdom: Josiah and Other Kings in the Ancient Near East," *ZABR* 12 (2006): 131-68; C. Levin, "Joschija im deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk," *ZAW* 96 (1984): 351-71; J. Rosenbaum, "Hezekiah's Reform and the Deuteronomistic Tradition," *HTR* 72 (1979): 23-43; G.E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History* (SBLDS 87; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); Römer and de Pury, "Deuteronomistic Historiography."

[292] E.g., N. Na'aman, "The 'Discovered Book' and the Legitimation of Josiah's Reform," *JBL* 130 (2011): 47-62; T. Römer, "Transformations in Deuteronomistic and Biblical Historiography: On 'Book Finding' and Other Literary Strategies," *ZAW* 109 (1997): 1-11; L.K. Handy, "The Role of Huldah in Josiah's Reform," *ZAW* 106 (1994): 40-53.

Josiah's are connected to a prophet and an ancient law book. By contrast, the innovations of Jeroboam I, Manasseh, Maacah and Ahaz are attributed either to the individuals alone or to a foreign ruler (Ahaz). They consequently lack the authority of tradition or external legitimation.

As Lawson and McCauley indicate, the repetition that makes ritual recognizable comes under threat whenever innovation is introduced.[293] They observe that a higher level of public innovation or deviation from traditional ritual correlates to a corresponding lack of tolerance from communities.[294] This observation fits well with the focus on ritual in the evaluations of biblical king's reigns, as their public roles as royal figureheads increases the impact of their ritual innovations. Despite the innovative properties of Hezekiah and Josiah's reforms, their actions are presented as "traditional," hearkening back to characters and traditions older than themselves. Such "traditionalizing" presentations of innovation are common in ritual, which seeks to deny or mask its invented character and thus put itself beyond the reach of criticism.[295] As Hüsken observes, new ritual rules are frequently created under the pretext of returning to previous, more conservative rules.[296] In reporting these "historical" ritual events, 1-2 Kings lays out a template of ideal kingship and a political construction of Israelite/Judahite society with ritual at its centre. Through the kings' roles as public figureheads, their actions provide a template for the people and the reader to follow.

This impact on the reader brings us back to our discussion of modes of polemic. By contrasting the individual innovations of the "bad kings" with the innovations of the "good kings," which apparently stood in line with Israel's cultic identity from the earliest times, the authors seek to cultivate an assenting response from the reader. This agenda is never explicitly stated; rather, the monarchical history of Israel and Judah is presented in such a way that the reader cannot escape the association between improper

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[293] Lawson and McCauley, *Rethinking Religion*, 82.
[294] Lawson and McCauley, *Rethinking Religion*, 82.
[295] E.g., Grimes, *Reading, Writing,* 7-9; Lewis, *Day of Shining Red*, 11; Bell, *Ritual*, 210-53, esp. 210-23.
[296] Hüsken, "Ritual Dynamics," 346-47.

ritual practice, the loss of territory and the downfall of nations. The authors direct the reader toward the conclusion that Josiah's style of Yahwistic worship was the correct one; the reader should, therefore, respond accordingly. In Brett's terms, the communicative intention of these texts is the narration of Israel and Judah's monarchical history with particular emphasis on ritual, and the (or a) motive is to persuade the reader of a specific view of ritual, presumably so that they would respond accordingly. This motive, or implicit agenda, is never declared— thus protecting it from dialogue and critique. In addition, the authors use the authority of ancient textual composition to attribute legitimacy to themselves. Through their knowledge of monarchical history, they assume the authority to critique the ritual actions of kings, who would have been of a higher social ranking than the authors. Through their knowledge of ritual practices and the Temple, they also presume the authority to determine correct ritual practice at any given moment in Israel's and Judah's monarchical history. Thus, while the explicit polemic focuses on good kings and bad kings, implicitly, the reader is presented with a claim to an authority above both kings and priests, ordinarily the highest ritual authorities in Israelite and Judahite society. Yet the author remains anonymous, which raises questions about whether the authority claimed in these texts was mirrored in reality. Unlike a prophetic or priestly text, whose content was authorised by its (claimed) authorship, the Books of Kings only claim to authority is the historical knowledge of its authors, evidenced by the repeated references to sources such as the "books of the kings of Israel and Judah". Access to these texts permits the authors to claim authority for their own text and set out a programme of ritual conduct that is then "verified" by historical events. The "history" of Israel and Judah in 1-2 Kings thus becomes an agent of ritual change. Through their presentation of "correct" ritual practices benefiting Judahite and Israelite society and their polemic against others that highlight the destructive nature of "incorrect" rituals, the authors create a programme for ritual conduct that is supported by historical interpretations. The implicit nature of this agenda and the anonymity of its authorship hinders critique of

its content. The reader can only accept the view of history and rituals they are presented with and, accordingly, accept the authority of the authors.

3.4 Summary: Polemic against Ritual and its Implications

In the preceding sections we have seen numerous possible provocations for the biblical polemic against various rituals. Ritual polemic arose as a product of competing worldviews between prophets and society, different groups of priests, and between Israelites and non-Israelites. The recognition that ritual affected both the social and cosmic order can be seen at the heart of these polemics. These authors — whether prophets, priests or scribes — polemicized against other ritual systems, practices and practitioners in an attempt to promote the legitimacy of their own worldview and to persuade their audiences to accept and assent to it. In addition to explicit polemic, implicit polemics and motives are also frequently found in these texts, directed toward the texts' reader or audience. The role of the prophets as privileged communicators, for example, implicitly subordinates the reader or audience to their authority. The reader cannot engage in dialogue but only accept or reject their views. If they reject the word of the prophet, they identify themselves with the (sinful) targets of the prophet's polemic. The priestly texts also contain both explicit and implicit polemic. Explicitly, they provide occasional examples of ritual failures that serve to underline the "correct" method of ritual practice (e.g., Lev 10). In addition, by identifying their authority and ritual practice as authentic, they implicitly deny authority to any other party or practice. As with the prophetic texts, the reader is not invited into a dialogue, but rather is presented with the "facts" of the chain of command of priestly authority and with the dangers of enacting rituals that deviate from the approved methods and practitioners.

We have also seen that the link between social order and ritual can prove a double-edged sword in times of disorder. Society is created, maintained and legitimised through ritual which means that, when the social order collapses or experiences upheaval, the power and legitimacy of its rituals

are called into question. It is, therefore, unsurprising to observe polemic against ritual arising as a result of social upheaval. The biblical polemics against the Host of Heaven rituals, to which we will attend in greater detail in Part Two, are repeatedly connected to the causes and consequences of social and cosmic disorder. This may have arisen at a number of points during the long seventh century or, indeed, after the fall of Jerusalem in 586. However, the circumstances surrounding the deportations of Jehoahaz and 597 are worth particular consideration as, in their own time, they represented the greatest social upheavals Jerusalem had ever experienced. The significance of these events has been overlooked by modern scholars in light of the events of 586. The destruction of Jerusalem and the second deportations to Babylon would surely, of course, have prompted polemic of their own, but we cannot rule out that some polemic may have originated earlier, only to be confirmed in light of later events. The characterisation of certain rituals as the cause of these upheavals would have presented a strong argument against their practice.

Finally, we have seen that ritual innovation could provoke polemic. This is logical; as rituals tend to present themselves as archaic, traditional and unchanging, novelty in ritual is often distrusted. What is less logical — or perhaps we should say, more political — is the vilification of certain forms of royal ritual innovation in 1-2 Kings alongside the celebration and legitimation of other forms of royal ritual innovation. The ritual innovations of Jeroboam I, Manasseh, Maacah and Ahaz (amongst others) are attributed to their own, or foreign, initiative and strongly opposed as a result. The ritual innovations of Hezekiah and Josiah, by contrast, are justified through references to their own piety and to external affirmations. The explicit polemic in 1-2 Kings is obvious; the flawed ritual innovations of certain rulers is demonstrated by the punishment of the kings, the loss of territory and the eventual downfall of their respective nations. These examples of flawed and failed rituals and their consequences serves to emphasise the correctness of the "legitimate" ritual innovations demonstrated through the survival of Jerusalem in 701 (Hezekiah) and Josiah's expansion of Judah's

borders. Less obvious, is the authors' implicit polemic. This is directed toward two parties; namely, ritual authorities and the reader. The ritual authorities of the kings and priests are not permitted a voice in 1-2 Kings — what matters is the authors' characterisation of events. The reader is expected to see the authors' workings out of the histories of Israel and Judah and to acknowledge that Hezekiah and Josiah's interpretation of the Yahwistic cult was the correct one. By acknowledging this, however, the reader implicitly assents to the authors' claim to ultimate authority; through their polemic against ritual practices of the kings and priests, the authors claim an authority above all others. By creating a ritual history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the authors implicitly present themselves as *the* authoritative voice on ancient Israelite ritual — and, thus, as the guardians of Israelite social and cosmic order. The implicit nature of this polemic makes it all the more persuasive. By critiquing others' ritual practice and ritual innovation, the authors present themselves as the authoritative voice on ritual and thus as the people capable of dictating ritual practice at the current or future times.

Part Two

Following the previous discussion of ritual and rhetoric, Part Two of this study explores the polemics against the Host of Heaven in light of three specific elements of ritual: ritual actions and vessels (Chapter Four), ritual locations (Chapter Five) and ritual participants (Chapter Six). Whereas constructive ritual texts (n. 157) are more likely to describe ritual locations, actions and vessels in detail, the polemical texts omit and abbreviate many ritual details for rhetorical gain. The Host rituals are only vaguely referenced, in verbs that connote ritual activity but do not adequately describe it. The opaqueness of these portrayals allows the polemic to have a broader scope, incorporating all ritual activity in its prohibitions. It also undermines the possibility of legitimacy of these ritual practices — without details, defence of a rite is rendered difficult. The same phenomenon occurs with regard to ritual locations. In contrast to descriptions of the temple and tabernacle that were comprised of carefully ordered and protected ritual space, the polemical texts make no mention of order or holiness with regard to the Host of Heaven ritual locations. As such, the rituals appear disordered and unimportant, rather than as ritual processes with social and cosmic significance. The variety of locations and the varying levels of interest in them suggests a diversity of authorship; while some texts single out very specific locations, others mention none at all. This diversity is also seen with reference to the practitioners identified. Some texts single out an individual or a specific group, while others polemicize against entire communities or nations. The range is such that, despite the specificity of some references, no single group of practitioners emerges as responsible for practicing Host rituals. This breadth probably indicates that the term “Host of Heaven” could encompass a range of ritual and cultic traditions.

While the polemics display clear differences in form and function, they share one characteristic, namely, that they viewed the Host of Heaven rituals as flawed or failed. Some texts deem the rituals themselves to have failed, while others view their practice as flawed because it broke the covenant,

causing legitimate Yahwistic rituals to become ineffective. The texts place responsibility for these failures firmly on the practitioners — it is not the Host of Heaven themselves that are targets of polemic, but those that worship them. This phenomenon is important for understanding how the Host appear in a positive light in later biblical texts: the Host are not a problem — the people's ritual conduct is. These chapters demonstrate the central role of ritual in the construction of these polemical texts and justify their analysis through a ritual framework.

4 Rituals for the Host of Heaven

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight what the texts do and do not say about ritual practices for the Host of Heaven. What follows seeks not to reconstruct the rites directed toward the Host but to explore what is included or omitted in the texts' presentation of such rites. It will become evident as the chapter progresses that the polemical texts do not include a great deal of detail about the Host of Heaven rituals. Yet, this does not mean that ritual theory is not a useful lens for interpreting the texts — that which is omitted is just as important as that which is included. Although the omission of important details means that we cannot reconstruct the rituals, the abbreviated presentation of the ritual processes illuminates the construction of the authors' polemic.

The following sections discuss all of the actions and ritual objects associated with the Host. We begin with the verbs that refer most clearly to a known practice: namely, "bowing down" (שׁחה/חוה, 4.1), and "making offerings" (קטר, 4.2). The penultimate section (4.3) considers verbs that imply ritual practice but do not explicate it, including "serving" (עבד), "following" or "walking after" (הלך) and "seeking" (דרשׁ). Section 4.4 then focuses on the ritual objects (altars and vessels) that are mentioned in connection with the Host of Heaven. Focusing on the ritual practices and objects mentioned in these texts demonstrates a greater diversity within the polemical texts' presentations. The texts are of one accord in their negative views of the rituals, but in places their presentations and descriptions of these rituals differ considerably.

4.1 Prostration (שׁחה/חוה)

The practice most commonly associated with Host of Heaven worship in the polemical texts is "bowing down," which likely refers to ritual prostration of some kind.[297] References to this prostration are found in Zeph 1:4-5; 2 Kgs

[297] Prostration was not just limited to religious ritual contexts in the Hebrew Bible (see especially A.C. Smith, "Furthering Prostration in the Hebrew Bible: A Non-Denotative

17:16; 21:3; Dt 4:19; 17:3 and Jer 8:1-3. Of the polemical texts, only Jer 19:13 and 2 Kgs 23 do not refer to this practice. Ritual prostration occurred in both Yahwistic worship (e.g., Exod 4:31; 34:8; 1 Sam 15:31; 2 Sam 12:20; Neh 9:3) and non-Yahwistic worship but is especially associated with polemic against the Host of Heaven.

Zephaniah 1:4-5 refers to "bowing down" to the Host of Heaven in a section predicting YHWH's impending purge of the earth (Zeph 1:2-6). While 1:2-3 speak in general terms about all of creation, 1:4-6 focus specifically on Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.[298] In Zeph 1:4-5, the wicked who will be cut off are the "remnant of Ba'al" and the "name of the כמרים" — all those who "bow down on rooftops to the Host of Heaven." Zephaniah 1:4-5 thus provides the reader with the location of the rituals (rooftops, see 5.1), and the ritual practitioners (כמרים, see 6.3). As rooftops were both public and private (see 5.1), lacking purity restrictions such as those found in the temple, the image is one of publicly visible, accessible ritual prostration to the Host, yet it is presented in such a manner that the meaning of the ritual is inaccessible to the reader. No ritual objects are mentioned, nor is any information provided about the direction or process of this prostration. If the process of prostration involved speech or other actions they are not preserved in the text, nor is the reader given any insight into why the practitioners enacted these rites or what they hoped to achieve

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Analysis of hištaḥăwah," *JSOT* 41 [2017]: 263-85), but the context here is clearly within the religious sphere. Though the verb המשתחוים and related forms are common enough in the Hebrew Bible, the origin and exact form of the verb remains debated. Some lexicons take it as a Hitpael form of the root שחה while more recent proposals read it as a Hištaphel form of the verb חוה (see "שחה," *HALOT* 4:1457; "חוה," *HALOT* 1:295–96). The grammatical form of the verb does not have a bearing on our interpretation but see comments in Smith, "Furthering Prostration," 268.

[298] Connections between the first part of the passage (Zeph 1:2-3) and the flood story (Gen 6:7; 7:4; 8:8) have been observed; e.g., M. De Roche, "Zephaniah I 2-3: The Sweeping of Creation," *VT* 30 (1980): 104-09, although Holladay notes connections between Zephaniah's creation language and that of Jeremiah (esp. Jer 8:13; 12:4) — of which he argues that Hos 4:3 is the antecedent of both; W.L. Holladay, "Reading Zephaniah with a Concordance: Suggestions for a Redaction History," *JBL* 120 (2001): 671-84, 672-73. Connections between the second part of the passage (Zeph 1:4-6) and Josiah's reform account (2 Kgs 23:4-20) are commonly found in scholarship although it is unclear which way (if any) the dependence lies; see especially the discussion in Wöhrle, "'No Future," 619-20; E. Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah* (BZAW 198; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991), 274-351.

through these rituals. Even the identity and form of the Host of Heaven is left vague.[299] Given the abbreviated nature of the prostration in Zeph 1:4-5, we cannot reconstruct the rites. Although ritual prostration is not portrayed in the Hebrew Bible as illegitimate in and of itself, the abbreviated presentation of the rituals here works in service of the author's agenda. Without further information, the reader has no choice but to view the rituals in light of other contextual information provided by the author — namely, the identification of the ritual practitioners, the location of the rituals, and the implications of the rituals for Yahwism. We will explore these aspects in the following chapters, but for now we note that the author's agenda dictates the presentation of the rituals. No information is offered that might support viewing the practices as legitimate, but enough information is provided for the reader to be persuaded that the rituals were wrong. The reader is not permitted to reflect on the meaning of the rituals for the participants; rather, the author's interest lay in identifying this prostration to the Host as illegitimate and in opposition to correct Yahwism.

A similar situation is found in many of the other passages referring to "bowing down" to the Host. 2 Kings 17:16 states that the inhabitants of the northern kingdom of Israel bowed down to the Host of Heaven and 2 Kgs 21:3 says the same about Manasseh. In 2 Kgs 17:16 the presentation of the rituals is even more vague than that of Zeph 1:4-5; no ritual locations are mentioned, and an entire nation is accused of participation in the practices. The reader cannot reconstruct anything about the actual worship of the Host from 2 Kgs 17:16. The evaluation of these rituals is only made clear through contextual factors, such as their association with the downfall of the northern kingdom and with other illegitimate worship polemicized against in 1-2 Kings. The author's intention in 2 Kgs 17:16 was evidently not to inform the reader about the details of the Host of Heaven rituals, but rather to inform them about their outcomes. 2 Kings 21:3, meanwhile, states that

[299] As noted previously, the Host in Zephaniah are undefined (see 1.1.5). The rooftop locale of the rituals enacted on their behalf does not necessitate astral interpretations. Astral worship undoubtedly took place on rooftops, but so did many other kinds of worship (cf. Jer 19:13).

Manasseh engaged in prostration (שׁחה/חוה) for the Host and served them (עבד, see 4.3). Again, no information is given about the actual process of this prostration. That this is unusual should be emphasised. Kings rarely prostrated themselves to anyone; if they did, it would have been a highly significant act, not done lightly. Yet, the author does not explain any process, ceremony, or meaning behind the reference. The Host of Heaven remain obscure and the prostration directed toward them is portrayed negatively thanks to its context, where it is placed alongside worship of Asherah and Ba'al and the other cultic misdemeanours of Manasseh.

Both Host of Heaven references in Deuteronomy (4:19; 17:3) combine "bowing down" with "serving" (עבד); Deut 17:3 also adds "walking after" (הלך) the Host. As with the examples discussed above, neither verse in Deuteronomy gives any specific details about this prostration. In Deut 4:19 a contrast is created between the "lifting up" of the people's eyes and their "bowing down" to the Host. This prostration is presented as the result of being "led astray" (נדח), a term which appears elsewhere with reference to non-Yahwistic worship or poor leadership. It occurs in Deuteronomy only here and in 13:13 and 30:17, each time with reference to bowing down and serving other gods. Given the late date of the chapter, Deut 4:19 may well have been influenced by these other passages, which serve to highlight that to "bow down" and "serve" the Host was to worship gods other than YHWH.[300] Deuteronomy 17:13 warns the people against "walking after and serving other gods and bowing down to them and to the sun or the moon or to all the Host of Heaven, which I did not command." Christensen notes that the clause "that I did not command" appears in Jer 7:31; 19:5 and 32:35 in

[300] In terms of authorship, Deut 4:1-40 is often separated from Deut 1-3 as 4:1-40 is a self-contained unit which differs from the preceding chapters; e.g., A.D.H. Mayes, *The Story of Israel between Settlement and Exile: A Redactional Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 22-27; A. Rofé, *Deuteronomy: Issues and Interpretation* (OTS; London: T&T Clark, 2002), 21-22. Von Rad separated 1:1-4:43 from 4:44-30:20; G. Von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1966), 12. Deuteronomy 4:1-40 functions as a bridge between Deut 1-3 and the declaration of the laws in Deut 5:1 and is widely thought to date to the exilic period or later; e.g., R.D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (OTL; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 61; E. Nicholson, "Reconsidering the Provenance of Deuteronomy," *ZAW* 124 (2012): 528-40, 532-33.

contexts dealing with idolatry and does not appear again in Deuteronomy.[301] The phrase serves to explicitly contradict any claims that YHWH had commanded the worship of other gods.[302] The parallels with Jeremiah add further weight to suspicions that this verse, or part of the verse, is a later addition.[303] As noted already, prostration could occur in both secular and religious ritual contexts; context usually dictates how the act was understood. Here, we are given no context and no reason as to why the individuals may have chosen to bow down to the Host. Rather, Deut 4:19 emphasises that worship of the Host was incompatible with Yahwism, while Deut 17:2-7 is concerned with explicating legal processes which were to take place when accusations of non-Yahwistic worship had been made within the community.[304] Deuteronomy 17:2-7 is not interested in reporting the details of the rituals, but in reporting how to respond to their practice. In both Deuteronomy references, therefore, the abbreviation of the rituals works in the service of the authors' agenda; the specifics are omitted in favour of granting priority to the authors' message.

The sense is easily gained that Jer 8:1-3 is more comprehensive in its descriptions of Host rituals and ritual practitioners than it is accurate. The ritual practitioners are identified as everyone in Jerusalem — the elite classes of Judah especially. These practitioners are accused of having "loved" (אהב), "served" (עבד), "walked after" (הלך), "inquired of" (דרשׁ),

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[301] D.L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9* (WBC 6a; Revised Edition; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 369.

[302] Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, 369; Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 220.

[303] Von Rad argues that the celestial bodies in 17:3b may be a later addition as they fit awkwardly in their context and, in contrast to being referred to in the third person elsewhere in the passage, YHWH speaks in the first person in the final phrase; so Von Rad, *Deuteronomy,* 117. The awkwardness in Deut 17:3b comes primarily from MT's unnecessary ו on ולשׁמשׁ, which is not paralleled in the versions and which the *masorah parva* indicates is unique. As it stands, the ו makes it seem like the list of celestial bodies was an addition to the verse. This may also be supported by the observation that, while the "other gods" appear nineteen times in Deuteronomy, prohibitions of astral worship appear only twice (4:19; 17:3), of which Deut 4:19 is universally agreed to be late.

[304] Levinson argues that Deut 17:2-7 is a later reworking of Deut 13:2-19 that innovates legal practice by requiring that two witnesses be present in judicial decisions regarding accusations of apostasy. He dates 17:2-7 as later than the Josianic period on the basis that 13:2-19 reflects an earlier literary form using Assyrian state treaties to mandate exclusive allegiance to YHWH; B.M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 102-35.

and "bowed down to" (שׁחה/חוה) the sun, moon and all the Host of Heaven. This is the longest list of practices enacted for the Host in the entire Hebrew Bible, but for all its comprehensiveness, it offers little concrete information. Prostration is a ritual act and some of the other terms in the list imply ritual practice, but without further information the process and meaning of the ritual is not recoverable. The verbs used in Jer 8:2 seem designed to include all ritual practices for the Host within the scope of the polemic. The author seems to have been more interested in issuing a blanket statement emphasising YHWH's judgement on those who enacted rituals (in any form) for the Host of Heaven than in communicating any details about the rituals involved.

Many of the texts considered above thus condemn those who "bow down" to the Host, while offering little insight into the process and meaning of this prostration. The audience or reader does not know if the worshippers of the Host are prostrating themselves out of fear, gratitude, supplication or respect, all of which are attested reasons for prostration in other ritual contexts in the Hebrew Bible.[305] Prostration is thus multivalent; it could signify or embody a range of meanings, differing depending on context. It is also a highly ritualized act, whatever the context; the spatial movement embodied in the lowering of oneself to another makes a formal statement about the relationship between the parties. Prostration is also an easily repeated ritual that does not require much, if any, technical training. In comparison to rituals such as animal sacrifice, which required particular implements and practitioners trained in the ritual sequence, almost anyone could engage in prostration. As such, it may have been more accessible and more prevalent than other rituals, which necessitated training or certain levels of purity. Equally, it is quite possible that the term "to bow down" was chosen by the authors specifically because of its multivalence. To "bow down" denotes a lowered status, without requiring further explanation — those that "bow down" are subordinate, while those bowed to are superior. The multivalence of the term may have rendered it rhetorically useful to the

[305] Smith, "Furthering Prostration," 269-70.

authors. By polemicizing against "bowing down," the authors did not need to append an entire list of ritual practices, whose specificity may have led to disagreements amongst readers. Rather, "bowing down" to the Host could refer to a specific ritual act in some places (probably Zeph 1:4-5, see 6.3) or could refer to a broader range of practices in others (e.g., Deut 4:19; 17:3 Jer 8:2). What the term reflects is the people subordinating themselves to the Host rather than to YHWH. Specifics that may have proved to be points of contention are omitted in favour of a term that generically signals ritual acts that afford status to deities other than YHWH.

4.2 Making Offerings (קטר)

Only two of the polemical texts refer to offerings being made (קטר) to the Host of Heaven — Jer 19:13 and 2 Kgs 23:5. The verb appears in the Piel stem in both texts and literally means "to send up in smoke." This has led to it being translated as "to burn incense."[306] Although incense offerings were common in ancient Israel and Judah, as Edelman demonstrates, there is no explicit evidence for identifying קטר offerings as incense offerings.[307] Rather, קטר offerings could have referred to burnt meal, grain, or incense offerings.[308] As קטר could be used of offerings made to YHWH (e.g. Exod 29:13; Lev 1:13-17), the mode of offering was not idolatrous or illegitimate in and of itself. There may be a literary distinction signalled in the authors' choice of verb stem, however, as the Piel form of קטר tends to appear in relation to either illegitimate offerings for YHWH or offerings made to other deities, while the Hiphil form is used for legitimate Yahwistic

[306] So Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25*, 262; T.R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (WBC 13; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 216; B. Halpern and D.S. Vanderhooft, "The Editions of Kings in the 7th-6th Centuries BCE," *HUCA* 62 (1991): 179-224, 207-08; C. Hardmeier, "King Josiah in the Climax of the Deuteronomistic History (2 Kings 22-23) and the Pre-Deuteronomic Document of A Cult Reform at the Place of Residence (23.4-15): Criticism of Sources, Reconstruction of Literary Pre-Stages and the Theology of History in 2 Kings 22-23," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, 123-64, 149.
[307] D. Edelman, "The Meaning of Qiṭṭēr," *VT* 35 (1985): 395-404. On the widespread use of incense see especially Nielsen, *Incense in Ancient Israel*.
[308] Edelman, "Qiṭṭēr,"398-401.

offerings.[309] Edelman disputes this, arguing that usage patterns indicate that the Piel form was a grammatical, rather than stylistic, choice and that it should not be taken to indicate idolatrous worship.[310] This may be correct elsewhere, but given that both Jer 19:13 and 2 Kgs 23:5 polemicize against the קטר offerings, these authors likely intended that these offerings were to be understood as illegitimate.

Jeremiah 19:13 proclaims judgement against the houses of Jerusalem — all those upon whose rooftops offerings were made (קטר) for the Host of Heaven and libations were poured out for other gods (אלהים אחרים). The passage does not state explicitly who the practitioners of such rituals were, but the reference to "houses of Jerusalem" indicates that the inhabitants of the capital — who were, in all likelihood, elites — were the targets of the polemic.[311] 2 Kings 23:5, on the other hand, states that a group of priests called הכמרים were appointed by the kings of Judah to conduct the קטר offerings to the Host of Heaven at the high places. [312] Through the reference to the rooftops of the house of Jerusalem (Jer 19:13) and the high places (2 Kgs 23:5), both texts associate these קטר rituals with public locations or space (see 5.1; 5.3).

In some ways, referring to sending an offering up in smoke provides more detail about such rituals than do the vague references to "bowing down" discussed above. However, it does not offer *much* more information. Rather, it serves to highlight what is missing from the portrayal of these rituals, namely, any reference to the ritual objects that would have been required in the making of a burnt offering, such as altars or censers, firepans, or the content of the material to be burnt. In addition, neither text mentions the roles of the participants, such as who brought the materials or who lit the fire to burn the offerings. Nor is there any mention of the time of

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[309] See, for example, Eynikel, *King Josiah*, 221-22.
[310] Edelman, "Qiṭṭēr," 404.
[311] Furthermore, the chapter as a whole is directed initially toward some of the elders and priests (19:1) and subsequently toward the people of Jerusalem more broadly (19:3, 7, 9, 12, 14).
[312] Fried notes that these high places were *in* the cities of Judah, rather than *at* them, as numerous scholars translate; L.S. Fried, "The High Places (Bāmôt) and the Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah: An Archaeological Investigation," *JAOS* 122 (2002): 437-65, 440.

day or night at which these offerings would have been made. In terms of discussions about the identity of the Host this especially is worth consideration, as night time offerings would have been more appropriate for the stars, whereas if the Host were non-astral divine beings then the time of day has less impact on the efficacy of the ritual.

Much like "bowing down," therefore, the "sending up in smoke" in Jer 19:13 and 2 Kgs 23:5 gives enough information to identify the basic type of ritual action but does not provide enough detail to allow the rite to be reconstructed. By not specifying details about the content, objects or process of burning these offerings, the scope of the polemic is broadened. Rather than — for example — excluding incense but permitting grain offerings, the lack of detail means that all such types of offering are included in the polemic. The lack of information deflects the readers' attention away from the content of the offerings or the ritual processes — that is, away from potential disagreements about what may or may not have been allowed — and directs it toward the outcome of the rituals and the illegitimacy of the overall practice.

4.3 Serving (עבד), Following (הלך), Seeking (דרש), and Loving (אהב)

The verbs עבד "to serve," הלך "to walk (after)/follow," and דרש "to seek/inquire of" are found in a range of Host of Heaven passages; אהב "to love" only occurs in Jer 8:1-2. References to serving (עבד) the Host of Heaven are found in Deut 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kgs 21:3 and Jer 8:1-2; to serve a deity implies participation in ritual practice. For example, Deut 10:12-13 declares to the hearer that YHWH requires that his people walk in his ways, love him and serve him (עבד) with their heart and soul (10:12), which entailed keeping his commandments and statutes (10:13). As keeping YHWH's commandments inherently entailed ritual practice (observing purity laws, making sacrifices and so on), to "serve" YHWH was to enact the rituals that he commanded. This concern over correct service can also be seen in Josh 24:14, wherein the people are exhorted to serve (עבד) Yahweh

faithfully, putting away the gods whom their ancestors served (עבד) and serving (עבד) YHWH instead. The triple reference to service and the inclusio exhorting the listener to serve Yahweh emphasise the author's point. References to service, therefore, should be understood as having ritual connotations. Moreover, service does not merely denote a single ritual action but rather denotes ongoing action.[313] These references to people "serving" the Host of Heaven thus clearly entail ritual practice, but tell the reader little about what practices are in view. In addition, like "bowing down," "serving" denotes states — those who serve others are subordinate, whilst those served are superior. Thus, to polemicize against "serving" a deity was to polemicize against any ritual action that placed Israel in servitude to said deity — in this case, the Host of Heaven.[314] Once more, the breadth of the verb is rhetorically and theologically useful, as it allowed the authors to prohibit various forms of ritual practice without having to provide further details.

Only two texts refer to people "walking after" the Host of Heaven, namely, Jer 8:1-2 and Deut 17:3. These two texts provide the longest descriptions of Host of Heaven practices in the Hebrew Bible and both incorporate "walking after" (הלך) amongst a range of other verbs.[315] "Walking after" a deity is similar to "serving" one, in that both terms denote continuous action and ritual participation, whilst remaining opaque as to the details. In both texts, the combination of "walking after" with other verbs suggests two things: firstly, that "walking after" a deity was a vague term

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[313] Van Keulen notes the statement that Manasseh served the Host of Heaven in 2 Kgs 21:3 is a durative, continuous state of action, whereas his construction of altars was a single action (though it would have functioned to permit further durative action); van Keulen, *Manasseh*, 84.

[314] Moreover, as a person's actions convey, define, construct and even change the perception of their identity, it is unsurprising that the biblical texts were often concerned with correct ritual practice. Ritual practices signalled which deity the people worshipped and thus, signalled their identity (or not) as the people of YHWH. Syncretistic or "illegitimate" practices could, therefore, obscure their association with YHWH and thus, change their identity.

[315] Deuteronomy 17:3 warns the people against "walking after (הלך) and serving (עבד) other gods and bowing down to them (שׁחה/חוה) and to the sun or the moon or to all the Host of Heaven, which I did not command." Jeremiah 8:1-2, meanwhile, accuses the people of having "loved" (אהב), "served" (עבד), "walked after" (הלך), "inquired of" (דרשׁ), and "bowed down to" (שׁחה/חוה) the sun, moon, and all the Host of Heaven.

that required more contextual information to explicate the point being made and, secondly, that both texts are attempting to be comprehensive. This is particularly evident with Jer 8:1-2, which provides a comprehensive — if impenetrable and opaque — list of practices. "Walking after" or "serving" deities would entail different rituals for each and thus, the vagueness of the terms עבד and הלך may have been a consequence of cultic pluralism. In addition, "walking after" signals the status of the one being followed. Thus, any practice that could constitute "walking after" the Host of Heaven was included in the polemic, regardless of the specifics of the actual rituals involved. The breadth of the verb הלך — much like שׁחה/חוה and עבד — covered all ritual practices.

Jeremiah 8:1-2 also mentions "loving" (אהב) and "seeking/inquiring of" (דרשׁ) the Host of Heaven. We cannot uncover what ritual practices may have been referred to as "loving" the Host, but the use of the verb was probably intended to add emphasis to the list of actions. In addition, it may have been included to emphasise that the people had broken the covenant, as by loving the Host they had not loved YHWH (alone). דרשׁ refers to divination, but Jer 8:1-2 does not provide any more information about the specific practices involved.[316] Although we cannot recover the process of this ritual inquiry, the fact that דרשׁ clearly denotes ritual action provides support for analysing the polemic in light of ritual. In addition, much like "serving" and "walking after," "inquiring of" the Host implies ongoing ritual action. The breadth of the term could include a wide range of traditions. Jeremiah's warning against "inquiring of" the Host prohibited any divinatory actions that could fall under the term דרשׁ. The lack of specificity permitted the application of the polemic to a wide range of practices.

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[316] Cooley argues that ancient Israel and Judah did not have specific and developed traditions of celestial divination in the way that Mesopotamia did; J.L. Cooley, "Celestial Divination in Ugarit and Ancient Israel: A Reappraisal," *JNES* 71 (2012): 21-30. The lack of evidence from ancient Israel (especially compared to Mesopotamia) renders comparison difficult, however, and although ancient Israel may not have had developed, scientific traditions of celestial divination, local divinatory traditions probably existed.

4.4 Ritual Objects: Altars and Vessels

The only two references to ritual objects used in the worship of the Host of Heaven appear in 2 Kings: 2 Kgs 21:5 refers to altars that King Manasseh built for all the Host, while 2 Kgs 23:4 mentions vessels made for Ba'al, Asherah and all the Host. In contrast to 2 Kgs 21:3, which states that Manasseh "bowed down to" (שׁחה/חוה) the Host and "served" (עבד) them, 21:5 does not mention worship enacted by Manasseh, but states that he constructed these altars. Thus, whereas 21:3 refers to durative action, 21:5 focuses on a single action that permits durative action to take place.[317] In addition, 21:3 refers to worship of Asherah, Ba'al and the Host together, while 21:5 only focuses on the Host of Heaven. There are, therefore, clear differences between the two Host references in 2 Kgs 21, which is probably reflected in the final form of the passage, wherein the two are separated by 21:4 which also refers to altar-building. Yet, although the purpose of an altar is to make offerings, no such offerings are mentioned in relation to this altar — neither in this chapter nor in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. The altars appear here, being constructed, and again in 2 Kgs 23:12, where they are destroyed. No details are provided about how the altars were constructed — we do not know what they were made of, what design they had, or how long the process took. Klingbeil demonstrates that this lack of details is typical of altar-building accounts in the Pentateuch where, "instead of the process, the result is presented."[318] The same is true of 2 Kgs 21:5: the result is presented with no elucidation of the process. The emphasis on Manasseh building the altars himself is also noteworthy. Across the ancient Near East, royal intervention and innovation in temple cults was a celebrated prerogative of the kings, often reported in glowing terms in royal inscriptions.[319] In the

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[317] So van Keulen, *Manasseh*, 84.
[318] Klingbeil, "Altars, Ritual," 511.
[319] See, for example, Sennacherib I 36 as enumerated in A.K. Grayson and J. Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC), Part 1* (RINAP 3/1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 233–35. The inscription describes Sennacherib's renovations of the temples of Sîn, Ningal, Šamaš, Aya and Ištar. The report of the renovations and building work is written in the first person and only mentions Sennacherib acting on behalf of the gods rather than any builders or cultic officials.

Books of Kings, however, such personal involvement in the temple cult with no external legitimation is a symptom of "bad kings," much maligned by the authors (see 3.3). The authors omit any potentially legitimizing factors from Manasseh's regnal summary, such as, for example, oracles or texts calling for renovation of Judah's cultic practices (cf. 2 Kgs 18:6; 22:8-20) or the need for new altars in the temple courts. Hezekiah and Josiah's innovations are presented as the will of YHWH and as necessary, whereas Manasseh's actions are presented throughout 2 Kgs 21 as his own will.

The fact that Manasseh built multiple altars (מזבחות) should also be noted. This multiplicity may add weight to the suggestion that "all the Host of Heaven" was collective nomenclature for multiple distinct deities, requiring multiple altars. Alternatively, if multiple altars were required for different people to use according to holiness or social status, the multiple altars for the Host may point to a more complex picture of the cult of the Host in the Jerusalem temple. This latter option may be supported by the location of the altars in the "two courts" of the temple, if the multiple locations indicate restrictions on usage in temple areas. Furthermore, 2 Kgs 23:12 does not state which deities Manasseh's altars were for. In contrast to 2 Kgs 23:13, which specifically lists the foreign cults for which Solomon built high places (Astarte of Sidon, Chemosh of Moab, and Milcom of Ammon), 23:12 only states that Josiah destroyed Manasseh's altars in the temple courts alongside those on the roof of the chamber of Ahaz that the kings of Judah made. No deities are named in connection with any of these altars, yet the placement of the verse — after 23:11's reference to the "horses and chariots of the sun" and before 23:13's list of Solomon's foreign cults — implies that they are to be understood as foreign.[320] In 2 Kgs 23:12, therefore, although the Host do not feature explicitly, the location of the verse and the destructive actions of Josiah communicates to the reader that Manasseh's altars were illegitimate. Context plays a similar

[320] The "horses and chariots of the sun" (2 Kgs 23:11) are sometimes argued to reflect Assyrian beliefs; e.g., Lowry, *Reforming Kings*, 205; Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 86; Uehlinger, "Was There a Cult Reform," 300-302. But note the objections of Koch, who argues that the chariot of the sun was the chariot of YHWH; I. Koch, "The 'Chariots of the Sun' (2 Kings 23:11)," *Semitica* 54 (2012): 211-19.

role in 2 Kgs 21 where, in the context of 21:2-6, Manasseh's altars are understood negatively. As Binger notes, without 21:2 and 21:6 the passage could be read as a positive evaluation of a king encouraging traditional ritual practices.[321] The references to "abominations of the nations" (כתועבת הגוים, 21:2) and "did evil in the eyes of YHWH to provoke him to anger" (לעשׂות הרע בעיני יהוה להכעיס, 21:6), however, encourage the reader to understand Manasseh's actions in a negative light. If, however, Manasseh's altars for the Host of Heaven were such a provocation to YHWH, one wonders why the Hebrew Bible does not reflect more polemic against them — neither Zephaniah nor Jeremiah mention them, even though both focus on Host of Heaven worship in Jerusalem.

We will return to the destruction of these altars in Chapter Seven. For now, we note that the mention of these altars differs in numerous ways from the other references to Host of Heaven ritual practices encountered thus far in this chapter. Whereas the other references are to verbs denoting ongoing actions, 2 Kgs 21:5 focuses on one action that allowed further ritual practices to take place. The account of Manasseh's altar-building is highly abbreviated and, although this is in keeping with the abbreviation of altar-building narratives elsewhere, it clearly highlights the gap between ritual, text and reader. Building an altar was a highly ritualized, sacred act whose purpose was to permit further ritual practice to take place. Yet, our author does not inform the reader about the ritual process of constructing these altars. We learn nothing, for example, about the efforts to create or maintain the purity of the altar during construction, the first offering made on it, or any words spoken over it. In this case, the abbreviation of the ritual actions strips the altars and their creator of any legitimacy, while the context further adds to the impression of wrongdoing.

While 2 Kgs 21:5 speaks of altars, 2 Kgs 23:4 states that Josiah commanded a range of cultic officials to bring out of the temple the vessels

[321] Binger, *Asherah*, 115; and especially Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice*, 110-112.

for Ba'al, Asherah and the Host so that they could be destroyed.[322] The priests bringing out the vessels implies that they were situated in parts of the temple that only the priests could access. The existence of vessels for the Host is logical; any cultic action that involved the making of burnt offerings (e.g., 2 Kgs 23:5; Jer 19:13) would have required items such as offering stands or altars. That only one verse in the Hebrew Bible mentions such vessels is surprising. Quite what is intended by the term "vessels" (כל־הכלים) is also left to the reader's imagination, though they evidently included items that could be removed and burned (23:4), in contrast to larger altars that had to be torn down (23:12). The manner of this ritual destruction of the vessels will be returned to in 7.1. Here we note that the reference to the vessels for the Host tells us more about their destruction than their existence. The text does not state, for example, who created these vessels, what they looked like, how they functioned, or who used them — what is important is who destroyed them. In addition, that no other polemic against the vessels exists and that no other Host of Heaven polemic located their worship in the temple suggests one of two things. Either the cult of the Host was accepted in the Jerusalem temple and thus not a target of polemic until Josiah's time, or, alternatively, references to the Host of Heaven in the temple in 2 Kgs 21 and 23 are part of a specific dialogue concerning royal ritual innovations in the temple. These observations serve to highlight the gap between ritual, text and reader, for they indicate that there is a significant amount of information about ritual practices for the Host of Heaven that is no longer preserved in the texts. By mentioning vessels and altars for the Host in the temple, 2 Kgs 21:5 and 23:4 (cf. 23:12) highlight just how much information is omitted about these ritual practices.

[322] The historical accuracy of 2 Kgs 23:4 has been questioned; most agree that the reference to the list of priests in v. 4a is a redactional insertion that ties v. 4ff. to the material preceding it in 2 Kgs 22. See, for example, Levin, "Joschija," 355, 361-62; Eynikel, *King Josiah*, 353; Hardmeier, "King Josiah," 148. Although 23:4a may be an addition, it is worth note that 23:4b deals with items in the temple, as does 23:6. This makes 21:5 appear out of sequence rather than 23:4b.

4.5 Summary

The preceding discussion sought to explore the ritual practices associated with the Host of Heaven in the biblical texts. Five verbs are associated with the Host in more than one text — namely, "bowing down" (שחה/חוה), "making offerings" (קטר), "serving" (עבד), "walking after" (הלך), and "seeking/inquiring of" (דרש). "To love" (אהב) only occurs in Jer 8:1-2. In addition, two types of ritual objects are mentioned — altars (מזבחות) and vessels (כלים). All of these verbs and objects connote ritual practice, explicitly or implicitly, but the reader is never provided with the full details of the rituals referred to. Consequently, our knowledge of the Host and their cult(s?) is one-dimensional and incomplete.

Although we cannot uncover the full details or process of these rituals, what these texts omit is just as important for our purposes as that which they include. The terminology clearly indicates that ritual is at the heart of the polemics, yet the authors downplay the role of actual ritual processes in their polemics against these rituals. That is, the authors polemicize against the rituals for the Host by withholding or abbreviating details of the rites that may have afforded legitimacy to their practice. The abbreviation of ritual in these polemics has a threefold effect. First, it undermines the possibility of legitimacy in the Host of Heaven practices. By not disclosing the full details of a rite, the authors present them as unsanctioned and illegitimate and the reader has little room for disagreement. Second, abbreviation of the ritual processes means that the emphasis is on their outcomes. As we will demonstrate in Chapter Seven the negative outcomes that are attributed to these rituals is a vital part of the polemic against them. Finally, the vague references to ritual practices allow the scope of the polemics to expand more widely than they would have done otherwise.

In the polemics against "bowing down" to the Host, the reader is not informed about the meaning of this prostration, the movements involved, or any speech or song included in the process. Similarly, in the polemics against "making offerings" to the Host, the reader is not told what substance

was being offered, what vessels or ritual objects were involved, or what the rituals hoped to achieve. The references to "serving," "walking after," "inquiring of," and "loving" the Host are even more vague; the terms denote durative action that would have entailed a variety of rituals, but no rituals are actually specified. Many of the verbs do signal the status of the practitioner and the deity: "bowing down," "serving," "following," and "inquiring of" all highlight the subordinate status of the practitioners and the authoritative status of the one(s) to whom such actions were directed. By using verbs with such a broad range of meaning, the authors prohibit any (and all) practices that emphasised the authority and superiority of the Host of Heaven.[323] The polemics against Host of Heaven ritual practices are thus very broad — practically any ritual practice was incorporated in the polemic, even without the authors specifying a list of prohibited rituals. By omitting all but the very basic details of the rituals in view, the authors expand the scope of their polemic to include all rituals; less was very much more.

[323] The problem with the Host of Heaven rituals was not really the actions directed towards them, as all of these verbs occur with reference to YHWH. Rather, the problem was the implications of directing this worship toward the Host; rituals that should have marked Israel out as subordinate to YHWH were marking them out as subordinate to other deities. The issue at stake is authority and identity of YHWH and the identity and responsibilities of his people; see comments in 1.2.

5 Ritual Locations of Host of Heaven Worship

Following the preceding chapter's focus on ritual actions and objects, the current chapter turns the focus to ritual locations. The locations in which rituals are performed affect the perception of their performance.[324] The separation of ritual space from secular space can serve to protect the purity of the ritual space and also to define certain actions as ritual or sacred, distinguishing them from profane or non-ritual behaviour. In the Priestly texts, the careful ordering and maintenance of ritual space mirrors the careful ordering of the cosmos; it is of central importance that the holiness of ritual space is not profaned, nor the order disrupted.[325] The rituals performed in this holy location were designed to ensure the safety of the community, its continued relationship with its god, and the maintenance of the cosmos in which the community was located. Ritual space also played a fundamental role in Israel's history; the Hebrew Bible explains the destruction of Jerusalem as a consequence of pollution of the temple and city (e.g., Jer 7:1-8:3). The pollution of the temple and city blurred the boundaries between holy and profane and thus disrupted the balance of the cosmic order. The inability of the temple and its priests to restore the cosmic order resulted in the destruction of the ritual space (see Chapter Seven). In addition, many texts attest to an ongoing debate about which ritual spaces were considered legitimate in ancient Israel. Locations such as Bethel, Dan, Shiloh, Gibeon, the high places, the Tophet and all sanctuaries outside Jerusalem were identified as illegitimate at various points, while Jerusalem was championed as the legitimate cult centre. Where the biblical texts locate Host of Heaven rituals is, therefore, vitally important, because the location of these rituals contributes to the perception of their legitimacy and efficacy. The importance of ritual space for the perception of the rituals in question also means that ritual space plays a significant role in power struggles;

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[324] Gorman Jr., *Ideology of Ritual*, 32; S.C. Russell, "Religious Space and Structures," in *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion* (ed. J. Barton; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 356-77.
[325] Gorman, *Ideology of Ritual*, 43-45.

whoever controls a ritual space dictates how it is used and who has access to it. Control of a ritual space can attribute legitimacy and authority to those who control it and to the rituals enacted in it; conversely, destruction of a ritual space can indicate a loss of control and a loss of legitimacy for those in control of the space and for the rituals enacted therein.

The biblical texts associate the Host of Heaven rituals with a variety of ritual locations. The following discusses each in turn. Section 4.1 focuses on the rooftops of the houses of Jerusalem (Zeph 1:4-5; Jer 19:13), while section 4.2 discusses the temple of Jerusalem, where Manasseh's altars were constructed and the vessels for the Host were kept (2 Kgs 21:5; 23:4). The following discussion, in section 4.3, considers the association of the Host rituals with the high places (2 Kgs 23:5), before section 4.4 turns to texts which do not provide a location for the rituals (2 Kgs 17:16; Jer 8:1-2). The penultimate section (4.5) then focuses on the references to "in your gates" and "when you look up" (Deut 4:19; 17:3).

In each case, very few details about the ritual locations are offered by the authors. The lack of information about how the ritual locations were ordered, used, maintained and controlled, creates an impression of randomness and disorder. In contrast to the great pains taken by biblical authors to inform the reader about the details of the temple and tabernacle, the ritual locations for the Host of Heaven appear completely unimportant, stripped of detail and thus, of legitimacy and authority. The ritual locations remain important in the texts, however, insofar as their one-dimensional portrayal permits them to serve as a vehicle for the authors' message. Thus, the movement of Host-related ritual objects in and out of the temple in 2 Kgs mirrors the change in their status, while the identification of Host-related ritual locations as "in your midst" and "in your gates" in Deut 17:2-7 brings the reader deeper into the text. The following demonstrates that in many ways these texts are very different, directing their message toward different ritual locations and audiences. In one way, however, they are quite similar — all abbreviate or omit details about the ritual locations of Host of Heaven worship, in keeping with their own agendas.

5.1 The Rooftops of Jerusalem

As noted previously (1.1), rooftops were a common location of cultic activity in the ancient Near East. The architecture and planning of Israelite cities meant that most houses had flat roofs which were a useful domestic space that could be used for cultic as well as domestic activities.[326] Spatially, rooftops blurred the boundaries between public and private space. On the one hand, the rooftop was part of the house and so a domestic location whose cultic practices may have been limited to the occupants of the household.[327] Domestic ritual activity is rarely singled out for polemic in the biblical texts, though parts of Jeremiah take a closer interest in it than others.[328] On the other hand, rooftops may well have been visible to a range of onlookers, giving them a public dimension which may have attracted the biblical authors' attention.[329]

Although many commentators have viewed the rooftop location of Host of Heaven rituals as evidence that the Host were astral deities, this interpretation is not required either by the texts or by the rooftop locale.[330] The two texts which mention rooftop rituals for the Host (Zeph 1:5; Jer 19:13) do not explicitly state what the Host were, and the texts that do explicitly associate the Host with the celestial bodies do not mention rooftops (Deut 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kgs 23:5; Jer 8:1-2). Moreover, although a

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[326] See especially, Netzer, "Domestic Architecture," 196-97.
[327] E.g., 1 Sam 9:25-26; 2 Sam 11:2; 2 Kgs 4:9-11.
[328] For example, Jer 7:17-18 is concerned with different familial ritual roles in the worship of the Queen of Heaven (see also Jer 44:15-23 cf. 32:29). Myers observes that the biblical texts tend to take a "top-down" approach to cultic and ritual activity even though the majority of popular cultic practice would have taken place in the household; C. Myers, "Household Religion," in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (eds. F. Stavrakopoulou and J. Barton; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 118-35, 130.
[329] E.g., Judg 16:27; Josh 2:6; Isa 15:3; 22:1; Jer 48:38. Baumann notes that public ritual can be a claim to public attention, public space and public recognition for symbolic messages; Baumann, "Ritual Implicates 'Others,'" 100-101. As such, it may be that the prophets single out rooftop worship because its public aspect offered an opportunity to gain recognition for their rituals and for others to potentially be led astray.
[330] For example, Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard Jr. view the rooftop as the location for the Host rituals because it allowed the worshippers to get as close to the celestial bodies as possible; Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25*, 262. Albertz views the rooftop location as connected to "the astralized symbolic world" of the late 8th-7th centuries; R. Albertz, "Personal Piety," in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah*, 135-49, 143.

rooftop was a logical location for astral veneration, this does not preclude the worship of non-astral deities on rooftops. This is made especially clear in Jer 19:13, which states that worship for the Host and for "other gods" (אלהים אחרים) took place on the rooftops, and in Neh 8:13-16, which reports that the Israelites made booths on their rooftops for the festival of Succoth.

It is unclear whether the rooftops of Zeph 1:5 refer to the temple or to the houses of Jerusalem more broadly. They could potentially refer to the rooftops of the temple if v. 5 is read as a continuation of v. 4, which states that YHWH will cut off "from this place" (מן־המקום הזה) those engaging in Host of Heaven worship. The phrase "cut off from this place" is usually applied to the Jerusalem temple; on this basis, Sweeney suggests that this creates an image of cultic purification, wherein the idolatrous elements are cut off from the temple.[331] However, the rooftops could also be those of the houses of Jerusalem or Judah on the basis of v. 3, which refers to YHWH stretching out his hand against Judah and against all the people of Jerusalem. Support for the latter interpretation is forthcoming from Jer 19:13 (cf. 32:29), which refers to rooftop worship in Jerusalem for the Host. However, the specificity of Zeph 1:4-5 may be worth note. Jeremiah 19:13 is aimed at the people in general, whereas Zephaniah's כמרים are a more specific group. The specific practitioners may indicate that a more specific location is in view, whether the temple or select houses within Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 19 refers to the profanation of "this place" (19:4), as well as the high places of Baal (19:5), the Tophet (19:6, 10-12), and the houses of Jerusalem and of the kings of Judah (19:13). The text declares YHWH's judgement on these ritual locations and prophesies their destruction as a result of the ritual pollution they have caused. In Jer 19:13, the ritual location of Tophet becomes a model for the destruction of the houses of Jerusalem.[332] As the Tophet would become defiled by corpses (19:6-7, 11)

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[331] M.A. Sweeney, *Zephaniah: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 58.

[332] L.C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 225, 227; W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1. Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25*, (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 541.

so the houses would become defiled like Tophet (19:13).[333] In Jer 19:13 the ritual activity defines the space and determines its fate. Judgement is pronounced on the houses of Jerusalem because they have become ritual locations that enable illegitimate worship. Rather than housing the people of YHWH, the houses of Jerusalem house ritual participants for other gods. As such, they represent the corruption of the people of YHWH from the inside and, accordingly, are to be destroyed. Whereas in Zeph 1:5 the rooftops were the location of the rituals but judgement was only pronounced on the participants, in Jer 19 there is a greater emphasis on the destruction and defilement of ritual locations.

We will return to the destruction and defilement of ritual space in Chapter Seven, but for the moment it is notable that the authors of the polemic in both Zeph 1:4-5 and Jer 19:13 provide few details about these ritual locations. It is unclear whether the rituals enacted on the rooftops were public or private, domestic or official. In Zeph 1 it is even unclear whether the rooftops were those of the temple or of the private houses of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. No details are given in either text about the layout of the ritual space or any efforts to maintain purity on the rooftop (if purity were a concern). Whereas the Priestly texts carefully mandate and describe the ordering, division and control of ritual space in the temple and tabernacle, the lack of specificity in Zeph 1:4-5 and Jer 19:13 undermines the legitimacy of the rituals being presented. These references to rooftops do not associate carefully ordered and controlled ritual space with the Host rituals. Rather, the rituals are presented as enacted in non-specific, non-special locations that do not carry connotations of legitimacy or holiness. As a result, they appear unofficial and unsanctified; the lack of order, control and holiness reflects a lack of legitimacy and authority.

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[333] Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard Jr. (*Jeremiah 1-25*, 261) note that the burying of bodies in v. 11 contrasts with the exposure of the corpses in v. 7, but both have a defiling effect.

5.2 The Jerusalem Temple

The Jerusalem temple is only associated with Host of Heaven worship in 2 Kgs 21:5 and 23:4. Both verses refer to ritual objects that were located in the temple — altars (21:5) and vessels (23:4) —rather than to active worship. It is unsurprising to see the Host of Heaven rituals connected with the Jerusalem temple, because a few texts refer to royal patronage of the cult (2 Kgs 21:5; 23:5; Jer 8:1-2). What is surprising is that only two biblical references make this association. This lack of references draws attention to the fact that the only kings named explicitly in connection with the Host — Manasseh and Josiah — are the kings who instigate and end rituals for the Host respectively.

2 Kings 21:5 states that Manasseh built altars for the Host in the two courts of the temple (בשׁתי חצרות בית־יהוה). This has led to proposals that the verse was composed in the exilic period or later, due to multiple temple courts being attested in Ezekiel and the Second Temple.[334] Jones, however, notes that 2 Kgs 21:5 might include the palace court which adjoined the temple court and could thus be retained in a pre-exilic version of 2 Kgs 21.[335] Depending on the extent to which the list of Manasseh's cultic crimes in 2 Kgs 21 relies on 2 Kgs 23, it is also possible that the reference to the two courts of the temple came from 2 Kgs 23:12, though this may still suggest the historicity of a pre-exilic reference.[336] The contrast between 2 Kgs 21:3 and 21:5 in terms of location is worth noting; 2 Kgs 21:5 gives a specific location for Manasseh's altars, whereas 21:3 only refers generally to Manasseh worshipping the Host — no location is specified. The specificity of 2 Kgs 21:5 is more expected of royal annals and thus seems more likely to reflect a historical reference.

While 2 Kgs 21 clearly identifies Manasseh as the instigator of Host of Heaven worship and as the builder of the altars for the Host, 2 Kgs 23:4

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[334] E.g., J. Gray, *I and II Kings* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1964), 643.
[335] G.H. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings, Volume II* (NCBC; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984), 597.
[336] J.A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1951), 519.

refers to the vessels for Ba'al, Asherah and all the Host of Heaven that were kept in the temple, with no mention of who made them or who put them there. The references to the vessels fulfils two roles in 2 Kgs 23. First, it suggests that, until Josiah's time, the Host were a normative part of Yahwism. Second, it draws attention to the fact that Josiah destroyed them. Furthermore, Manasseh is the only king of Judah connected with the triad Ba'al–Asherah–Host of Heaven; this might imply that Josiah's destruction of these vessels is aimed in Manasseh's direction, as part of the rhetoric concerning Josiah's reversal of Manasseh's sins. That said, Manasseh is never connected directly with the Host in 2 Kgs 23. Whereas 2 Kgs 21:5 states explicitly that Manasseh built altars for the Host, 2 Kgs 23:11 refers only to the altars, with no mention of the deities involved. Similarly, 23:4 and 23:5 refer to Host of Heaven vessels and worship of the Host without direct reference to Manasseh, even though he is explicitly mentioned in connection with these things in 2 Kgs 21. Regardless of which king(s) instigated or encouraged Host of Heaven worship, the lack of reference to the Host in 2 Kgs 24-25 seems intended to suggest that Josiah's reform ended all ritual practices for the Host in the Jerusalem temple. As no king after Josiah is stated to have rebuilt the altars for the Host or created new vessels, their worship in the temple was ended — on the literary level, at least — before the temple was destroyed in 586. This observation may explain the lack of judgement and destruction associated with the temple as a result of Host of Heaven worship. This should be compared with the destruction and defilement announced on the houses of Jerusalem in Jer 19:13. In Jer 19:13 the rooftops would be destroyed and defiled because of the rituals enacted on them. In 2 Kgs, however, no such judgement is made explicit, most likely because Josiah was supposed to have ended the ritual practices for the Host in the Jerusalem temple.

The mention of the Host of Heaven rituals in 2 Kgs 21 and 23 seems, therefore, to say more about Manasseh and Josiah than about the rituals themselves. Specifically, it says more about Josiah's reform than anything else — the altars which Manasseh built for the Host (2 Kgs 21:5) are torn

down by Josiah (2 Kgs 23:11) and the (previously unheard of) vessels which were housed in the temple were also destroyed by Josiah (2 Kgs 23:4). The contrast between construction permitting ritual practice (2 Kgs 21:5) and destruction ending ritual practice (2 Kgs 23:4, 11) may or may not be historically accurate vis-à-vis seventh century Judah. On a narrative level, however, the transition from instigation of ritual practice to the end of these practices plays out in the narrative space of the temple of YHWH.[337] This provides an ideological backdrop to the actions reported, as it connects Manasseh and Josiah's actions directly with YHWH. Josiah's removal of ritual objects for the Host from the temple makes clear that the status of these rituals had changed. The physical destruction and removal of ritual apparatus beyond the temple limits (2 Kgs 23:4, 11) mirrored the change in the status of the rituals, from legitimate to illegitimate. As objects enabling illegitimate ritual practice they had to be removed from the temple, so that they would not pollute the sanctuary and disrupt the order that was maintained there. By destroying the vessels and altars, Josiah reformulated the ritual space of the temple and, in doing so, reformed the social and cosmic order and the ritual requirements necessary to uphold it.

We do not learn much, therefore, about the Host of Heaven rituals from 2 Kgs 21:5 and 23:4. Yet, focusing on the ritual space associated with these Host of Heaven rituals tells us something about the worldviews underpinning the texts. The movement of Host of Heaven ritual objects from within the Jerusalem temple to outside of its boundaries reflects the change in status of the Host rituals from legitimate to illegitimate. As no

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[337] 2 Kings 11 uses the temple as a narrative backdrop in a similar way. In that chapter, the narrative of the coup against Queen Athaliah plays out against the backdrop of the palace and temple. Joash — the righteous king — is located within the temple of YHWH for most of the chapter, in contrast to Athaliah — the illegitimate queen — who is located in the palace and outside the temple at all times. Her exclusion from the temple and Joash's inclusion in it underlines the presentation of Athaliah as illegitimate and Joash as legitimate. Finally, the coup against Athaliah is enacted in the temple, where Joash replaces her as monarch of Judah. Implicitly, the use of the temple as the location of the coup affords it legitimacy; Athaliah was deposed as Queen and Joash crowned in the centre of social and cosmic order, before YHWH himself. See especially the analysis in P. Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric: The Case of Athaliah and Joash* (JSOTSup 209; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 34, 74, 159-61.

king after Josiah is reported to have reinstated Host of Heaven rituals, they are implicitly denied any regaining of their earlier, legitimate status. The narrative location of these changes within the temple of YHWH affords the demotion of Host rituals legitimacy and authority. Josiah's reformulation of the ritual arena takes place within the holy centre of cosmic order on earth, and the Host of Heaven ritual practices are placed decisively outside it.

5.3 The High Places

The high places are a constant source of comment throughout 1-2 Kings, but only in 2 Kgs 23:5 are they connected with the Host of Heaven. This association is not just unique for the Host; 1-2 Kings only rarely names the deities associated with the high places.[338] As the text stands, the high places where the Host were worshipped are in the cities of Judah and around Jerusalem (i.e., everywhere). Such a depiction of widespread Host of Heaven practices is reminiscent of Deut 4:19 and 17:3, but contrasts with the more specific references to the houses of Jerusalem (Zeph 1:4-5; Jer 19:13) and the temple (2 Kgs 21:5; 23:4). The reference to the high places in 2 Kgs 23:5, however, is not only unique but out of sequence; the temple is mentioned in both 23:4 and 23:6 while the high places are the focus of 23:8-11.[339] Furthermore, there are a number of unique elements in the verse, including the reference to the kings of Judah appointing the כמרים and the

[338] J. Pakkala, "Why the Cult Reforms in Judah Probably Did Not Happen," in *One God - One Cult - One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives* (eds. R. Kratz and H. Spieckermann; BZAW 405; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 201-39, 221-22.

[339] A number of scholars have raised suspicions about the originality of 2 Kgs 23:5 and the centrality of במת eradication to the passage; e.g., Hardmeier, "King Josiah," 148-49; see also R.G. Kratz, "The Idea of Cultic Centralization and Its Supposed Ancient Near Eastern Analogies," in *One God - One Cult - One Nation*, 121-45, 129. However, Cohn argues that, although they are not linked by location, 23:4-7 are connected by a thematic focus on the cults of other gods, while 23:8-11 is focused on the cult of YHWH; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 157. This assumes, however, that Asherah and the Host of Heaven were alien to Yahwism, which is not certain — much modern scholarship sees Asherah, in particular, as having once held a legitimate position in Yahwism which the biblical authors sought to counteract. See, for example, Day, "Asherah in the Hebrew Bible"; W.D. Whitt, "The Divorce of Yahweh and Asherah in Hos. 2,4-7,12," *SJOT* 6 (1992): 31-67; Binger, *Asherah*, 125-26. Ackerman has even argued that there may once have been an association between Asherah and the Queen Mother; S. Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," *JBL* 112 (1993): 385-401, 400-01.

hapax legomena מזלות. The list of celestial bodies — "the sun, moon, מזלות, and all the Host of Heaven — is unique in 1-2 Kings but seen elsewhere in Deut 4:19; 17:3 and Jer 8:1-2. Monroe observes that 1-2 Kings' polemic against the high places falls outside the purview of Deuteronomy and that Josiah's actions of defilement against various cultic locations — high places (2 Kgs 23:8); Tophet (23:10); high places east of Jerusalem (23:13); Bethel (23:16) — demonstrate the concern with ritual and ritual space that pervades the passage.[340] Monroe also argues that the high places are a concern found in Leviticus but not in Deuteronomy, concluding that the interest in the high places in 2 Kgs 23 represents a core interest of that text which differs from later Deuteronomistic themes of במת eradication.[341] Monroe further argues that the mention of the high places and the list of celestial bodies, including the Host of Heaven, was a probable addition to the original verse. She reconstructs the verse as והשׁבית את־הכמרים אשׁר נתנו מלכי יהודה לשׁמשׁ, "he deposed the כמרים whom the kings of Judah appointed to the [service of the] sun."[342] Monroe argues that the mention of the sun likely gave rise to the list of celestial bodies, added by later Deuteronomistic writers along with the reference to making offerings at the high places.[343] For Monroe, then, although the theme of במת eradication may have been a non-Deuteronomistic and original part of 2 Kgs 23, the association of the Host of Heaven with the high places was not; this association was the result of Deuteronomistic activity. For a number of reasons, I am inclined to agree. The Host are never connected with high places elsewhere and the list of celestial bodies is also unique in 1-2 Kings, although it is known in other texts often connected to the Deuteronomists (Jer 8:1-2; Deut 17:3). In addition, although destruction of the high places features in Leviticus, the Host of Heaven and astral worship do not, nor are they particularly prominent in Deuteronomy; they appear only in Deut 4:19 (widely agreed to be late) and Deut 17:3 (often identified as a later insertion). The odd

[340] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 32-33; see also Russell's comments on the commissioning and decommissioning of ritual spaces; Russell, "Religious Space," 368-69.
[341] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 85-86, 95-96, 130-133.
[342] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 88-98, 94-95.
[343] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 88-98.

conglomeration of Host-and-high-places thus seems likely to be a result of a combination of editors with different interests.[344]

It is unclear, therefore, whether the Host of Heaven were worshipped at high places in Judah and Jerusalem. The reference in 2 Kgs 23:5 is probably the result of redaction rather than reality, but if a range of deities could have been included in the term "Host of Heaven" then they may have been worshipped at the high places under another name. Fried argues that "high place" (במה) refers to "a sanctuary complex," complete with altars, and rooms for storage or dining and was a permanent structure located in cities.[345] If correct, her observations highlight how much is lacking from 2 Kgs 23:5 — we do not know who constructed these high places, who could use or enter them, what they looked like, or how they functioned. The reference to the kings of Judah appointing the כמרים may indicate that the sites had royal backing and were thus official in some way, but the text does not furnish us with details. It is also unclear whether the author views the rituals as negatively affecting the space (as they did in Jer 19:13, for example) or whether the space negatively affects the portrayal of the rituals — i.e., because the high places are viewed negatively throughout 1-2 Kings, the author connects them with the Host rituals in order to discredit the latter.[346] What is clear is that Josiah is the active party, ending the use of these ritual locations for astral worship by deposing their practitioners. The connection of the Host with the high places thus tells us more about Josiah and the author's view of his actions than it does about the rituals and their locations.

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[344] In C. Quine, "Zephaniah's Astral Priests in Josiah's (Deuteronomistic) Reform" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Antonio, Tx, 2016) I argue that the list of astral elements was probably added to 2 Kgs 23:5 in an attempt to illumine the rare term כמרים, which was associated with the Host of Heaven in Zeph 1:4-5. Rather than arguing that Zeph 1:4-5 depended on 2 Kgs 23, I thus argue for a two-way dependence: Zeph 1:4-5 may have drawn inspiration from 2 Kgs 23:5's כמרים, but over time Zeph 1:5's association of the Host of Heaven with the כמרים led to additions to 2 Kgs 23:5. Whereas the use of כמרים in Zeph 1:4 was elucidated by a gloss (עם־הכהנים), 2 Kgs 23:5 was elucidated with the insertion of a list of celestial bodies like those seen in Jer 8:1-2; Deut 17:3; 4:19.

[345] Fried, "The High Places," 441.

[346] This is not just limited to 1-2 Kings; Russell notes that "high places" were always portrayed negatively in the biblical texts; Russell "Religious Space," 363-64.

5.4 No Ritual Locations

In practice, all rituals take place somewhere. Yet, three biblical texts polemicize against Host of Heaven rituals without mentioning their location. These are all notable in their own ways: 2 Kgs 17:16 is unique in its accusation that the northern kingdom of Israel participated in Host of Heaven rituals. Jeremiah 8:1-2 lists groups in Jerusalem's elite circles that participated in Host of Heaven rituals but does not identify any location for those rituals; this contrasts with Jer 19:13, wherein Host rituals are located on the rooftops of the houses of Jerusalem. Finally, 2 Kgs 21:3 states that Manasseh bowed down to and served the Host of Heaven (as well as making an Asherah and building altars for Ba'al) but does not state where Manasseh engaged in this worship.[347] This contrasts with 2 Kgs 21:5, which specifically situates Manasseh's altars for the Host in the two courts of the temple of YHWH. Apart from these texts, all polemics against the Host of Heaven rituals specify their location — the rooftops of the houses of Jerusalem (Zeph 1:5; Jer 19:13), the Temple (2 Kgs 21:5; 23:4), the high places (2 Kgs 23:5), the gates/towns of Israel (Deut 17:3), or anywhere where the celestial bodies were visible (Deut 4:19).

2 Kings 17:16 is the only text which connects the Host of Heaven with the northern kingdom of Israel. As such, it appears to be an element that more accurately mirrors the experience of Judahite editor who composed the text than it does the history of (northern) Israel's cultic practice.[348] It is worth note that 2 Kgs 17:16 refers to the making of an Asherah, bowing down to the Host of Heaven and serving Ba'al. This bears clear resemblance to 2 Kgs 21:3, which refers to Manasseh making an Asherah, bowing down

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[347] 2 Kings 21:3 mentions Manasseh rebuilding the high places that Hezekiah destroyed (21:3a), but it is unclear whether the altars for Ba'al or the Asherah were located there (21:3b), or whether the worship of the Host took place there (21:3c). It is possible the rebuilding of the high places is intended to be another element in the list of cultic "crimes" rather than the location of the worship referred to. Scholars often note connections between the list of cultic 'crimes' that Manasseh is accused of and the list that appears in 2 Kgs 17; e.g., Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 235.

[348] So, for example, M. Brettler, "Ideology, History and Theology in 2 Kings XVII 7-23," *VT* 39 (1989): 268-82; Fritz, *1&2 Kings*, 390.

to and serving the Host of Heaven and erecting altars for Ba'al. These similarities, including their lack of ritual locations, seems unlikely to be a coincidence and is thus suggestive of editorial activity, perhaps in an attempt to align Manasseh with the actions of the northern kings.[349]

The lack of ritual location in Jer 8:1-2 makes it stand out in its current context. Jeremiah 8:1-2 is often associated with Jer 7:1-34 and Jer 19, but both of these texts single out multiple ritual locations in their polemics, including the temple (7:9-11, 30), the towns and streets of Jerusalem and Judah (7:17-20), the houses of Jerusalem (19:13), the Tophet (7:31-34; 19:6, 11-12) and the high places (19:5). In contrast, although Jer 8:1-2 provides a long list of Host of Heaven rituals and practitioners, it does not mention a location where these rituals took place. The judgement in Jer 8:1-2 is pronounced on the bones of the practitioners, not the ritual locations.

The lack of a ritual location makes these verses stand out from the Host of Heaven polemics that do name a specific location. Notably, the lack of ritual location in these verses adds to the portrayal of widespread ritual impropriety. The lack of identification of ritual locations of Host of Heaven worship in the northern kingdom permits the polemic of 2 Kgs 17:16 to be applicable to the entire nation. It is not restricted to those at a specific cult site, but extends to all of Israel. Similarly, although the lack of ritual location in 2 Kgs 21:3 contrasts with the reference to the two courts of the temple in 21:5, it adds to the depiction of Manasseh as a serial idolater who was not reliant on designated ritual locations to enact his idolatry. The widespread accusations against most of Judahite elite society in Jer 8:1-2, meanwhile, also benefit from a lack of ritual location. Specifying a location would have limited the author's polemic to those who worshipped at that location. Omitting the ritual locations, however, enables the boundaries of the polemic to stretch as wide as the readers' imagination allows. The lack of ritual locations in these texts probably, therefore, signals editorial activity rather than historical accuracy. It also likely indicates a rhetorical technique,

[349] See especially F. Stavrakopoulou, "The Blackballing of Manasseh," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, 248-64; Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice*, 31-73.

wherein deliberate omission of a specific — and important — element of ritual strengthens the author's polemic by broadening it beyond the boundaries of historical ritual locations.

5.5 In Your Gates and In Your Midst

Deuteronomy 17:2-3 identifies the ritual locations of Host worship as "in your midst" (בקרבך) and "in one of your gates" (באחד שׁעריך). The reference to "in your midst" is repeated again in 17:7, creating an inclusio to 17:2-7. Neither "in your midst" nor "in your gates" are specific ritual locations, but they indicate that the rituals were being performed among the people of Israel. City gates were often a location of ritual practice, but as Deuteronomy is aimed primarily at the people rather than at specific cities, it seems more likely that the gates here refer to the community which resided within them.[350] As no particular gate, city, or ritual location is specified, it seems that the reference was intended to be broad and applicable to all Israelite communities. The emphasis is laid on what was being done and by whom in the community, rather than where exactly it was being done. In Deut 17:2-7, it seems likely, therefore, that the vague reference to gates as a ritual location was intended to emphasise that Host rituals could take place amongst the people of Israel. As the celestial bodies could be seen from almost anywhere on earth, there were a great deal of potential sites for their worship. Their accessibility posed a problem for those who sought to control ritual practices directed toward them. By referring to "in your midst/in your gates" however, Deut 17:2-7 locates the rituals firmly within the community of Israel.

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[350] On the role of city gates as cult places and community boundaries see N.N. May, "City Gates and Their Functions in Mesopotamia and Ancient Israel," in *The Fabric of Cities: Aspects of Urbanism, Urban Topography and Society in Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome* (eds. N.N. May and U. Steinert; CHANE 68; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 77-121; Russell, "Religious Space," 362.

5.6 When You Look Up

Deuteronomy 4:19 does not specifically name any ritual locations. This is probably partially a result of the literary setting of the narrative and partially rhetorically deliberate. Deuteronomy 4 is written as though it addresses the Israelite community before they enter the land of Canaan, so any ritual locations relevant to the literary setting may not have been relevant in the author's own times. The passage warns against Israel being led astray when they look up to the sky; this temporal phrase, "when you look up," signals the ongoing temptation of astral veneration. Deuteronomy 4:19 thus cautions that whenever — and, implicitly, wherever — the people look up to the sky, they should not be tempted to worship the celestial bodies.[351] The condemnation of the worship of the Host of Heaven includes all such worship, wherever it takes place. Although similar to Deut 17:3's reference to Host of Heaven worship taking place "in your gates," 4:19 is even broader, for it prohibits astral veneration even if it took place outside an Israelite town. The lack of restrictions on ritual locations for Host of Heaven worship pose a particular problem for the author. The accessibility of the Host of Heaven, who could be worshipped anywhere, is contrasted to the exclusivity of the YHWH-Israel relationship and the programme of centralization, which located sacrificial worship of YHWH in one place.[352] The centralized sanctuary for Yahwistic rituals ensured that Israel's ritual practices could be controlled and maintained appropriately and also ensured that the sanctuary was central to Israel's communal identity. By contrast, the accessibility of the Host meant that their rituals could be enacted anywhere, detracting from Israel's focus on YHWH and emphasizing the need for a centralized sanctuary.

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[351] Nielsen notes that the temptation to astral veneration comes by itself, rather than from external pressures. Whereas in Deut 13 the temptation to idolatry came from other people – false prophets and diviners – here it comes from the very existence of the celestial bodies; E. Nielsen, *Deuteronomium* (HAT I/6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 60-61.

[352] A contrast is also drawn between the visible and invisible gods — Israel is warned not to be led astray by that which they can see (Deut 4:19) but to worship YHWH instead; the god who had no visible form at Horeb (Deut 4:15).

5.7 Summary

In their identification or lack thereof of ritual locations associations with worship of the Host, the differences amongst the Host of Heaven polemics are laid bare. Two prophetic texts (Zeph 1:4-5; Jer 19:13) address Host of Heaven rituals enacted on rooftops. Jeremiah 19:13 makes clear that these are the rooftops of the houses of Jerusalem, whereas Zeph 1:4-5 could refer to Jerusalem or the temple more specifically. In both, however, the claim that rooftops were a location for Host rituals is quite specific. Very differently, 2 Kgs 21:5 and 2 Kgs 23:4, 11 seem to be connected in an internal dialogue in 2 Kings which dealt with Josiah's reversal of previous kings' cultic policies and the reformulation of ritual space in the Jerusalem temple. Whereas Zeph 1:4-5 and Jer 19:13 are directed towards rituals enacted outside the temple, 2 Kgs 21:5 and 23:4, 11 concern those enacted within it. The texts in 2 Kgs that are concerned with the temple (2 Kgs 21:5; 23:4, 11) primarily focus on ritual objects rather than ritual practitioners. The movement of the objects, as they are placed within and removed from the temple, mirrors the change in the perception of their cult. While they were legitimate under Manasseh, they were illegitimate under Josiah. 2 Kings 23:5 is unique in its association of the Host of Heaven with the high places of Jerusalem and Judah. Differently again, Deut 17:2-3 identifies the location of Host of Heaven rituals as within Israel's gates and midst, emphasizing that these rituals could be enacted within the community. Deuteronomy 4:19 broadens this scope further to address the possibility of worship of the Host anywhere the celestial bodies were visible. Finally, 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3; and Jer 8:1-2 are united in their lack of specification of ritual locations.

It is not the purpose of this study to engage in a detailed redactional analysis of these texts. Nevertheless, focusing on ritual locations highlights that some of these texts are clearly different to others. The similar presentation of Host of Heaven ritual objects in the temple in 2 Kgs 21:5 and 23:4, 11, for example, suggests a dialogue between these texts that is

not shared by the others. In a similar vein, the omission of ritual location in 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3 and Jer 8:1-2 permits the rhetorical expansion of the author's polemic beyond a single historical location and is suggestive of an editorial technique common to these three texts but absent from the others. In addition, the emphasis on Host of Heaven worship in the Israelite community, broadly expressed, in Deut 17:2-3 and 4:19 is not paralleled in any of the other texts. Deuteronomy 4:19 is clearly later than 17:2-3. 2 Kings 23:5, meanwhile, is completely different to the others and may reflect the coming together of multiple scribal hands rather than historical circumstance. Zephaniah 1:4-5 and Jer 19:13 identify the same location but differ in their identification of the practitioners, their treatment of the ritual space and Jer 19's mention of other gods. By focusing purely on the ritual locations referred to in these texts, we can identify two strands of authorship in 2 Kings – that concerned with objects in the temple (21:5; 23:4, cf. 23:11) and that which does not refer to ritual locations at all (2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3 cf. Jer 8:1-2). Two further strands are present in Deuteronomy (17:2-7; 4:19) and Jeremiah (8:1-2; 19:13). Further work would be required in order to provide a reconstruction of redactional levels and the order of composition of these texts, but already our focus on the ritual locations present in these texts provides useful insights in this regard.

In all these texts, very little information is provided about the ritual locations. As a result, the locations become a vehicle for the author's message. Manasseh's establishment of altars for the Host in the temple and their removal from the temple under Josiah mirrors the change in their status that the author wished to communicate. The temple is identified as the ritual location and forms an authoritative narrative backdrop for the author's claims about the changing status of the rituals. Only impure or idolatrous objects would require destruction and removal from the temple; the removal of the objects from the temple thus adds another layer to the author's claim that they were illegitimate. A lack of ritual location may be equally rhetorically effective, insofar as it broadens the boundaries of the polemic beyond any one locale. By not mentioning a ritual location, 2 Kgs 17:16

creates an image of widespread Host of Heaven worship in the northern kingdom of Israel, 2 Kgs 21:3 depicts Manasseh as a serial idolater and Jer 8:1-2 can address all the elite classes of Jerusalem. The omission of ritual locations thus allows the authors to address communities in general, regardless of differences in ritual locations or specific ritual actions. The lack of information about the ritual locations deflects attention from where the rituals were enacted, redirecting readers' attention to the outcomes of these practices. By omitting vital details about the location, organisation, maintenance and control of these ritual spaces, the authors disconnect them from specific historical locations and communities and generalize them, transforming them into a literary phenomenon for a literary audience.

This lack of details about the ritual locations is reflected in all the polemical texts and stands in stark contrast to the lengthy descriptions of the temple and tabernacle in other texts. Whereas those ritual locations were characterized by carefully selected objects and personnel, expensive materials, careful construction and sanctified holy space, the locations where Host of Heaven rituals took place are denied any such comment. As Russell notes, the lengthy descriptions of the temple and tabernacle mirrored descriptions of the cosmos.[353] The careful ordering and division of the temple marked it out as the centre of the cosmos: the place where the divine and human realms coalesced.[354] By contrast, the Host of Heaven ritual locations appear almost irrelevant; the brevity of their mention creates an impression of illegitimacy, profanity and disorder which contributes to the negative portrayal of the rituals enacted therein. The temple and Yahwistic rituals were described in such detail that they could be recreated, depicted and remembered by later generations. In contrast, the Host ritual locations and their rituals are abbreviated to such an extent that they are alienated from the reader's experience. Readers cannot identify with them and certainly cannot recreate them. In this sense, textualization plays an

[353] Russell, "Religious Space," 369-71.
[354] S.L. Herring, *Divine Substitution: Humanity as the Manifestation of Deity in the Hebrew Bible and The Ancient Near East* (FRLANT 247; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 107.

important role in the reception of these rituals — whereas the Yahwistic rituals were recorded carefully so that they could be practiced, the Host rituals were only recorded as an example of what not to do, and in such a way that they could not be practiced in future.

Focusing on ritual locations in these texts thus highlights a probable diversity of authorship, but a similar tendency to abbreviate ritual details for rhetorical effect. The texts mention ritual locations (or not) in a variety of ways, for a variety of reasons — but not one of them provides any concrete detail that would be of use for a modern scholar wishing to reconstruct the rituals themselves. This suggests that the abbreviation of ritual for polemical reasons was a widely-known and widely-used phenomenon.

6 Ritual Practitioners of Host of Heaven Worship

Whereas the previous chapter focused on the locations of the Host of Heaven rituals, the current one turns to the identification of the errant ritual practioners. This is an important issue to assess, for when rituals fail the identification of those responsible for the failures can be a powerful tool in communal power struggles. It is, therefore, worth paying close attention to those whom the polemical texts identify as the practitioners of the flawed and failed Host rituals and thus bear responsibility for the outcome of the ritual failure. Focusing on the practitioners identified in these texts highlights two things. First, it clearly shows the diversity of audiences addressed in the texts. Second, considering who is and *is not* accused of participation in these rituals may shed light on the identity and agendas of the authors. In addition, focusing on who is blamed for the rituals provides insights into how different authors interpreted the events around them and determined who was responsible.

The following begins with a discussion of King Manasseh and the other kings of Judah (6.1) before turning to the claim in 2 Kgs 17:16 that the entire northern kingdom participated in Host rituals (6.2). Section 6.3 focuses on the כמרים — a term for a specific group whose identity is debated — before we discuss the wide range of Judahite elites targeted in Jer 8:1-2 (6.4). Section 6.5 focuses on "all the people of Israel" addressed in Deuteronomy before Section 6.6 turns to implied practitioners — where the practitioner is not explicitly named, but may be inferred from the ritual location mentioned. The range of ritual practitioners identified in these texts highlights a diversity in these polemics that has sometimes been obscured by studies emphasising the similarities in other aspects of their language. While similarities exist in places, the texts reflect a lack of clear consensus about who was to blame for participation in and the consequences of these flawed and failed rituals. I contend that recognising this state of ambiguity over the identification of failed practices and their practitioners is vital to understanding these polemical texts. The texts are of one accord in

identifying *what* went wrong — namely, the Host of Heaven rituals (amongst other issues) — but the question of *who* was responsible for these cultic and ritual failings provoked different answers.

6.1 King Manasseh and the Other Kings of Judah

King Manasseh is the only individual singled out and accused of worshipping the Host of Heaven; all other texts refer to people or groups, plural.[355] Although a focus on individual rulers' cultic practices is evident throughout 1-2 Kings, only a few monarchs' practices merit such extensive discussion.[356] Most kings are simply referred to with a brief notice that they did or did not remove the high places or did what was good or evil in the eyes of YHWH. Modern scholarship widely accepts that the accusations levelled at Manasseh have more to do with the author's agenda than with the historical Manasseh.[357] Equally, however, there is little reason to doubt that during Manasseh's long reign cultic practices of various kinds flourished, in part due to the cultural diversity that resulted from Neo-Assyrian rule.[358] The possibility of cultic pluralism is not in doubt; only the one-sided, negative presentation of it in the biblical texts. Inscriptions demonstrate that Manasseh was a loyal Assyrian vassal; this undoubtedly helped with Judah's recovery post-701. Yet, it is not his political policies that receive blame in 2 Kgs 21, but his cultic ones. The cultic practices associated with Manasseh in 2 Kgs 21 are not Assyrian, although it has been argued that Assyrian deities might be reflected in the Queen of Heaven or the Iron Age sun cults mentioned in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.[359] Manasseh may have been

[355] Zephaniah 1:4-5 and 2 Kgs 23:5 refer to the כמרים, 2 Kgs 17:16 refers to the people of Israel, Jer 8:1-3 lists most groups in the Judahite elite circles while Jer 19:13 implicitly indicts the inhabitants of Jerusalem as worshippers of the Host. 2 Kings 23:4 might implicitly signal the Jerusalem priests as practitioners, though it does not explicitly state that this was the case. Deuteronomy 4:19 and 17:3 warn against the dangers of Host worship but do not accuse any individuals directly.

[356] Examples include Solomon, Jeroboam, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah.

[357] Especially Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice*; Knauf, "The Glorious Days."

[358] Crouch, *The Making of Israel*, 8-82.

[359] It has been suggested that the Queen of Heaven (Jer 7:17-18; 44:15-23) may have been either Ištar (e.g., Keel, *Goddesses and Trees*, 103), or a syncretised goddess figure

singled out for censure in 2 Kings because of his northern name, which may have contributed to comparisons with northern kings such as Ahab.[360] Van Keulen proposes that the connections between Manasseh and the northern kings are drawn in order to emphasise that the downfall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were parallel events.[361] If so, this may also explain the presence of the Host in 2 Kgs 17:16 — both kingdoms fell because they engaged in the same illegitimate practices. Manasseh is the first (and only) king mentioned explicitly as worshipping the Host; as such, his actions appear the result of his own invention, unsupported by tradition. Whereas Hezekiah and Josiah are compared to Moses and David ("good" ancestors) and justify their innovations via trust in YHWH or textual and prophetic legitimation, Manasseh's actions are comparable to Ahab (2 Kgs 21:3, 13) and foreign nations (2 Kgs 21:2, 9, 11) and appear without reference to any form of divine legitimation. David and Solomon are mentioned in 2 Kgs 21:7 and Moses in 2 Kgs 21:8-9, but only to demonstrate that Manasseh's actions were contrary to expectation. Authorial appeals to historical figures thus serve to undermine Manasseh whereas they uphold the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah.

Although Manasseh is the only individual singled out as a Host ritual practitioner, 2 Kgs 23:5 and Jer 8:1-2 both mention the kings of Judah (plural) in connection with Host rituals.[362] 2 Kings 23:5 states that the kings

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incorporating aspects of the various goddesses including Ištar and Astarte (e.g., Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree*, 8-35; M. Weinfeld, "The Worship of Molech and the Queen of Heaven and its Background," *UF* [1972], 33-54). Meanwhile the importance of the sun in the ancient Near East in the Iron IIC has been linked to the rise of Aššur as an imperial deity (so Pongratz-Leisten, "Divine Agency") and may have contributed to the perception of YHWH as a sun-god when solarized high gods became the recognisable standard of divine kingship. Differently, Flynn argues that interaction with Assyrian ideas may have affected the portrayal and understanding of YHWH vis-à-vis the Assyrian deities, even if these are not expressed directly in polemic; see Flynn, *YHWH is King*.

[360] Stavrakopoulou, "The Blackballing of Manasseh." A list of parallels between Manasseh and Ahab can be found in van Keulen, *Manasseh*, 146-47.

[361] Van Keulen, *Manasseh*, 93-156, 193, 204.

[362] Holladay observes that the reference to the "kings of Judah" is unexpected in Jer 19:13 but might make sense in the context of an accusation of shedding innocent blood (Jer 19:4) as Manasseh was accused of shedding blood (2 Kgs 21:16; 24:4) and Manasseh and Ahaz were accused of participating in child sacrifice (2 Kgs 16:3; 21:6); Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 540; cf. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 44849; Allen, *Jeremiah*, 225.

of Judah appointed the כמרים to make offerings to the Host at the high places of Judah and Jerusalem, while Jer 8:1-2 names the kings of Judah among a list of elites accused of participation in the Host rituals. Jeremiah 19:13 also declares judgement on "the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah" as a consequence of the worship of the Host of Heaven and other gods on their rooftops. Interestingly, when the kings of Judah are mentioned in these three texts (2 Kgs 23:5; Jer 8:1-2; 19:13), the ritual location specified is not the Jerusalem temple. Given the close connections between the kings and the Jerusalem temple cult, we would expect that a Host of Heaven cult with royal patronage would have affected the Jerusalem temple.[363] Yet, Manasseh is the only king stated to have enacted or encouraged Host of Heaven rituals in the temple (2 Kgs 21:5). This raises questions as to whether references to other kings enacting Host rituals in the Jerusalem temple have been omitted in order to emphasise Manasseh's sin, or whether 2 Kgs 23:5; Jer 8:1-2 and Jer 19:13 include the kings of Judah to further a different agenda. The latter option seems the more likely. Jeremiah 8:1-2 lists a range of groups within Judahite elite circles that was probably intended to incorporate everyone in Jerusalem in the prophet's judgement. Similarly, 2 Kgs 23:5 refers to plural kings appointing the כמרים at the high places throughout "the cities of Judah and Jerusalem" — i.e., everywhere. Even if this phrase was an addition (see 5.3 above) it still reflects an attempt to be comprehensive in its scope. The plural "kings" also suggests ongoing practices. Finally, the judgement pronounced on all the houses of Jerusalem and the reference to the houses of the kings in Jer 19:13 may be intended to emphasise not the practitioners as such, but rather, that no ritual *locations* — regardless of status — would escape the coming disaster. Thus, from the texts at our disposal, it is ultimately unclear whether or not the Judahite kings actually engaged in ritual practices for the Host of Heaven. A more literary reading of 2 Kgs 23:5; Jer 8:1-2; 19:13 might suggest that the kings of Judah are included in

[363] Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 68.

these polemics to emphasise that the consequences of participation in these rituals would fall on everyone in Judah, regardless of their status in society. This emphasis on corporate participation contrasts with the polemic that singles out Manasseh alone as an instigator of Host ritual practices. While Manasseh is targeted specifically, the accusations levelled at the other kings show a lack of specificity. Host of Heaven rituals were apparently something that some kings encouraged, yet the identity of these individuals is unclear. In addition, the focus on plural kings is at odds with much of 1-2 Kings, which primarily focuses on the righteous or sinful actions of individual monarchs. As such, it seems likely to come from a different hand than the Manasseh-alone polemic and much of the 1-2 Kings material.

6.2 The Northern Kingdom of Israel

Given the focus on monarchs in the Books of Kings, it is notable that 2 Kgs 17:7-23 indicts the people of Israel for their cultic sins, rather than a king. The only king that appears in the passage is Jeroboam I, who is blamed for instigating the people's apostasy in 17:21-23. In its current form the reference to Jeroboam looks like a harmonizing afterthought, attempting to tie 17:7-20 in with other polemic against Jeroboam in the Books of Kings.[364] Notably, the only other texts to associate "Israel" with the worship of the Host of Heaven are Deut 4:19 and 17:3, although both Deuteronomy texts refer to "Israel" as the whole Yahwistic community; in 2 Kgs 17 "Israel" refers to the northern kingdom.[365]

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[364] Brettler identifies multiple editorial hands at work in the Jeroboam verses; he views 17:23 as the earliest of the verses, forming part of the chapter's overall secondary "B" layer, with 17:21-22 a later addition from a tertiary "C" hand which was subsequently integrated with the latest "D" layer 17:18b-21. As he states, the chapter likely reflects multiple scribes attempting to explain why Israel was exiled; Brettler, "Ideology, History," 281-82.

[365] Levinson observes that the focus on Israel as a nation causing exile through apostasy is seen in the framework of Deuteronomy but not, he argues, in the Deuteronomistic History, which assigns primary responsibility to the kings; B.M. Levinson, "The Reconceptualization of Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History's Transformation of Torah," *VT* 51 (2001): 511-34, 530.

The broad accusation that all Israel participated in worship of the Host — and indeed, in all the other cults listed in 2 Kgs 17 — notably conflates all offices and groups within Israelite society into one, easily addressed by the author. This ties the people of Israel together and emphasizes that they were all responsible for the downfall of the kingdom, regardless of their role or status in society. The logic works both ways: the people's sin caused the fall of the kingdom, while the fall of the kingdom indicated that all the people had sinned. The text is clearly intended to be didactic, as seen from the parallelism of Israel and Judah's actions and contrasting fates, and its message functions on two levels. First, it explains why the northern kingdom fell, in a way that upholds YHWH's authority. Second, it strongly implies that if Judah did not heed the warning of Israel's fall, then Judah would fall likewise. The breadth of the reference to all the people contributing to the ritual failures of the kingdom broadens the rhetorical horizons of the text and invites comparison with the later events of the downfall of Judah. In contrast to texts singling out Manasseh or elite groups, 2 Kgs 17 democratizes the blame, claiming that all the people bore responsibility for the ritual failings and their consequences.

6.3 The כמרים

The כמרים appear three times in the Hebrew Bible, all with negative connotations (Hos 10:5; 2 Kgs 23:5; Zeph 1:5).[366] Most translations render the English as "idolatrous priests," "idol priests," "priestlings," or leave it untranslated.[367] As the usual Hebrew term for a priest – כהן – is the most common term used to denote illegitimate or idolatrous priests in the Hebrew

[366] The material in this section was presented as part of a paper in the "Book of the Twelve" session at the Society of Biblical Literature, San Antonio, 2016. I am grateful to the session chairs and attendees for their helpful comments.

[367] J. Radine, "The 'Idolatrous' Priests in the Book of Zephaniah," in *Priests and Cults in the Book of the Twelve* (ed. L.-S. Tiemeyer; ANEM 14; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 131-48, 132. Commentaries usually note the Aramaic origins of the term, whereby the Hebrew כמרים was derived from the Aramaic *kmr*, meaning "priest"; e.g., Long, *2 Kings*, 274. Despite this awareness, however, there has been a reluctance to view the כמרים as Aramean priests; most prefer to see the Aramean connotations as an insulting reference — indicating illegitimacy — to an Israelite priest.

Bible, it seems likely that כמרים refers to something more specific. Pietsch demonstrates that the term *kmr* clearly refers to a priest from the geographical area of Aram.[368] Samuel refined this observation further, noting that, when *kmr* and *khn* in Hebrew and Aramaic texts are compared, *khn* refers to priests from the "southwestern or Canaanite realm" whereas *kmr* is connected to the "north-eastern, Assyrian-Aramaic world."[369] It thus appears that, rather than denoting an idolatrous priest in general, the biblical כמרים should be associated with Aramean practices.

The failure to recognise the specificity of the term until recent times is partly due to Hos 10:5, which mentions the כמרים in a passage polemicizing against Bethel and its priests. There the כמרים are depicted mourning over the "calf of Beth-Awen" which will be carried off to Assyria; this association has greatly contributed to translations of the term as "idolatrous/idol priests."[370] However, "Beth-Awen" in Hos 10:5 is a polemical corruption of the expected term "Bethel."[371] As such, it is likely that כמרים is a polemical corruption of the expected term כהנים. Thus, Bethel, the house of El, is depicted as Beth-Awen, the house of wickedness, and its priests, the כהנים, are depicted as foreign priests, the כמרים.[372] Furthermore, the Book of Hosea addresses the northern kingdom of Israel, which shared a border with Aram and whose alliance with the Arameans in the Syro-Ephraimite crisis partially informs the background to the book.

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[368] M. Pietsch, "Götztenpfaffen oder Astralkultpriester? Eine sprach- und religionsgeschichtliche Studie zu den alttestamentlichen *k^{e}marîm*," in *Israel zwischen den Mächten: Festschrift für Stefan Timm zum 65. Geburtstag* (eds. M. Pietsch and F. Hartenstein; Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2009), 225-55.

[369] H. Samuel, "Telling Terminology: *kmr* and *khn* in Hebrew and Aramaic Texts" (paper presented at the SBL Annual Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, 2013). Thanks are due to Dr. Samuel for providing me with a copy of his paper.

[370] Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 67-68; Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 68-69; A. Berlin, *Zephaniah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25A; London: Doubleday, 1994), 74.

[371] E.g., F. Landy, *Hosea* (2nd ed.; Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 146; H.W. Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 175; J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea* (ATD 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 130.

[372] See Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea*, 130; W.R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1910), 346-47; H. McKeating, *Amos, Hosea, Micah* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 133.

Hosea's audience would thus probably have understood the insulting (and rhetorical) use of the term כמרים to refer to Israelite priests. Whether this particular use of the term holds true for the much later Judahite texts of Zeph 1:5 and 2 Kgs 23:5 is not so certain. Given the significant temporal difference between Hosea and the other two books, as well as their different audiences, it seems reasonable to allow that the term may function differently in Hosea than in the other two books.

Zephaniah 1:5 states that YHWH will cut off the name of the remnant of Baal, "the *kmrym* with the priests" (את־שׁם הכמרים עם־הכהנים). The phrase "with the priests" (עם־הכהנים) is not attested in the Greek and is widely thought to be an explanatory gloss added to explain the rare term כמרים.[373] In Zeph 1 the כמרים are identified as those who prostrate themselves on the rooftops to the Host of Heaven, those "who bow down and swear to Yahweh by their king."[374] This is the only reference that mentions oaths to Yahweh in association with the Host of Heaven rituals. For those who translate כמרים as "idolatrous priests," these oaths merely represent a syncretistic combination of Yahwistic and idolatrous worship.[375] This explanation, however, fails to adequately explain what is meant by the mention of the people swearing to Yahweh by the king, or, indeed, why that would have been a problem. If the כמרים are understood as Aramean priests, however, then Zeph 1:5 refers to those who swear to Yahweh but also swear by *their king*, i.e., the Aramean king. The concept of Aramean priests engaging in Yahwistic rituals may be explained by royal diplomacy, as

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[373] *BHS*; see also the list of manuscript translations in Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 55.

[374] I translate מלכם in this verse as "their king." Although some emend MT to read "their Molek," I see no compelling textual reason to do so; translating "their king" makes far more sense in light of the probable diplomatic connections of the כמרים discussed above. In addition, Sweeney highlights the difference in the prepositions that results in the reading "swear *to* Yahweh *by* their king"; Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 70-71. Swearing "by their king" makes more sense than swearing "by their Molek."

[375] This syncretism is often connected with astral worship. For example, Uehlinger concludes that the prominence of astral worship in Aram and the presence of the biblical כמרים in connection with the Host of Heaven means that they should be understood as "astral cult priests"; C. Uehlinger, "Astralkultpriester und Fremdgekleidete, Kanaanvolk und Silberwäger: Zur Verknüpfung von Kult- und Sozialkritik in Zef 1," in *Der Tag wird kommen: ein interkontextuelles Gespräch über das Buch des Propheten Zefanja* (eds. W. Dietrich and M. Schwantes; SBS 170; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk GmbH, 1996), 49-83.

royal participation in foreign cults was often a mark of diplomatic relations (e.g., the cultic concessions for Solomon's wives; 1 Kgs 11:1–8).[376]

Interpreting Zephaniah's כמרים as Aramean priests active in Judah as a result of diplomatic relations also fits with the presentation of the כמרים in 2 Kgs 23:5. 2 Kings 23:5 states that the kings of Judah appointed the כמרים to make offerings to the sun, moon, מזלות, and all the Host of Heaven. The Judahite kings' appointment of these figures may reflect installation of foreign cult officials as part of diplomatic practices. This may also be reflected in the fact that Josiah only deposed the כמרים, whereas he defiled the high places of the כהנים (2 Kgs 23:8) and killed the כהנים of Bethel (2 Kgs 23:20). In comparison to the Israelite priests, the כמרים got off lightly in Josiah's reform, perhaps reflecting their privileged diplomatic status. In addition, the reference to מזלות may reflect foreign influence; מזלות is usually translated "constellations" or "planets," though it literally refers to "stations," i.e., the positions of the celestial bodies.[377] The term derives from Akkadian *mazzaltu*, but Cooley observes that in Akkadian the term never refers to an object of worship as it does in 2 Kgs 23:5.[378] He suggests, therefore, that the use of the term מזלות implies foreign influence on the native celestial traditions of Judah.[379] For Cooley, this influence was not a replacement of native traditions, but a foreign veneer affecting the presentation of the rituals but not the concepts beneath.

The locations the כמרים are connected with tell us little about the individuals themselves. Zephaniah locates them on rooftops in Jerusalem whereas 2 Kgs 23 places them at the high places of Jerusalem and Judah. Both these locations are specific enough to provoke the reader's imagination, yet neither really provides much information. A ritual location

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[376] Radine argues that the כמרים were Judahite priests who participated in Aramean rituals in order to maintain diplomatic relations; "'Idolatrous Priests,'" 135-38. Given that *kmr* refers to Aramean priests, however, it seems more likely that this is the meaning of the term in Zeph 1:4-5 and 2 Kgs 23:5. Rather than Judahite priests engaging in Aramean rituals, therefore, I argue that the כמרים were Aramean priests who practiced their own ritual traditions, as well as syncretistically swearing to YHWH by their king.
[377] Cooley, *Poetic Astronomy*, 232-35.
[378] Cooley, *Poetic Astronomy*, 235.
[379] Cooley, *Poetic Astronomy*, 235.

is mentioned that ties the practitioners and the rituals to historical locations in Judah or to the memory of such places, yet no identifying details are proffered. Similarly, the term כמרים is a specific one, yet none of the texts that use it give much information about the people referred to using that term. The involvement of the kings with their appointment and deposition in 2 Kgs 23:5 and the swearing of oaths in Zeph 1:4-5 suggest royal associations, perhaps as a result of diplomatic relations, but further evidence is lacking. Given the rarity of the term in the Hebrew Bible, it is quite possible that the authors of Zeph 1:4-5 and 2 Kgs 23:5 originally expected their audiences to understand the term. This may be supported by the fact that both texts contain glosses explaining the meaning for later audiences, indicating that the term was once understood but passed out of the cultural memory later on.[380] Notably, neither text associates worship of the Host of Heaven with the people of Judah — rather, they connect ritual practices for the Host with a group of people who are most likely Aramean priests.

6.4 The Elites of Jerusalem

Jeremiah 8:1 accuses — in hierarchical order — the kings of Judah, the officials, the priests, the prophets and the inhabitants of Jerusalem of having participated in the rituals for the Host.[381] The text emphasises that all of Jerusalem, especially the elite classes, were included in and deserving of the judgement that was to come upon them as a result.[382] This passage is the only one in the Hebrew Bible which connects the worship of the Host

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[380] עם־הכהנים in Zeph 1:4-5 and perhaps the reference to the Host of Heaven in 2 Kgs 23:5 (see further 5.3 n. 21).

[381] J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21a; London: Doubleday, 1999), 500, notes that the same list of groups appear with minor differences elsewhere in Jeremiah: without the prophets (1:18); without the people (4:9); and without the officials (13:13). Clements notes that the elite classes are those upon whom the greatest blame rested for the destruction of Jerusalem as they misled the people; R.E. Clements, *Jeremiah* (Interpretation; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 50.

[382] Jackson and Isbell propose that the reference to the inhabitants of Jerusalem worshipping the Host in 8:1-2 may be a reversal of 7:2, where the people of Jerusalem came to worship YHWH of Hosts; M. Jackson and C.D. Isbell, "Rhetorical Criticism and Jeremiah vii 1-viii 3," *VT* 30 (1980): 20-26, 23.

explicitly with (כהנים) priests, officials and prophets.[383] Notably, the rest of 7:1-34 only names the people of Judah as practitioners of illegitimate rituals. The kings, officials, priests and prophets are unique to 8:1-3, which suggests that this passage was an addition to the chapter. Following on from 7:1-34, Jer 8:1-3 may be understood in one of two ways. The list of ritual participants may serve to make the judgement on all the people even more explicit, emphasising that all are guilty, regardless of status. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as limiting the judgement on the people in general and applying it to elite groups in Jerusalem whom the author held responsible for the nation's failings. As with the list of ritual practices in Jer 8:2, the list of ritual practitioners in 8:1 connotes totality at the expense of specificity. No details are offered about where or how these groups went about their worship of the Host. Rather, the emphasis is that they bore responsibility for their failings and would suffer the consequences of their actions.

It is worth note that, although the prophets are (uniquely) accused of participation in the Host rituals here, the character of Jeremiah is implicitly exempt from the critique. Because Jeremiah stands outside the rituals he can critique them and, as the proponent of the critique, Jeremiah is presumably not counted among the idolatrous prophets. This is an important point for our wider study, as it draws attention to the role and identity of accuser and accused in the context of ritual failure. Through their polemical identification of the guilty parties, the author sets themselves apart from these condemned groups and locates themselves outside the boundaries of responsibility for the ritual failures. The critique of ritual serves to undermine the authority of those identified as practitioners and implicitly bolsters the authority of the author, who assumes the authority to criticise others' practices.[384] By identifying the rituals for the Host and their

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[383] As noted above, most scholars take the phrase עם־הכהנים in Zeph 1:4 to be a later explanatory gloss on the term הכמרים.

[384] A number of studies highlight the relationship between ritual and power (e.g., Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 171-223). More useful for our purposes, however, are studies which draw attention to the role that accusations of ritual failure play in communal power struggles. For example, Hauser-Schaüblin demonstrates that rituals lie at the heart of identity concerns and that, when identities clash or compete, accusations of ritual failure play an important role in establishing identities and power relations; Hauser-Schaüblin, "Rivalling Rituals."

practitioners as to blame for provoking YHWH's anger, the author implicitly absolves themselves of responsibility whilst attributing to themselves the authority to identify faults in others. Waldman and Baum draw attention to the role of prophets as "oppositional figures," namely, individuals who can step outside the status quo and oppose it.[385] Jeremiah 8:1-3 uses the oppositional nature of prophecy to good effect; the author claims that most, if not all, of the elite classes in Jerusalem had participated in illegitimate rituals and would suffer the ignominious fate of disinterment as a result. This would almost certainly have been an unpopular prophecy in certain circles, yet, through its opposition of those who held positions of power and authority, the author claims for themselves a different form of authority; created by rhetoric and preserved in a written text.

6.5 All the People of Israel

Deuteronomy 4:19 and 17:3 identify ritual practitioners for the Host — or perhaps we should say, *potential* practitioners — as anyone in Israel. The two passages differ slightly in their presentation of all Israel but share the same broad outlook: any Israelite could potentially be a Host of Heaven worshipper. Deuteronomy 4:19 is addressed to the entire community of the people of Israel. Literarily, these are the generation whom Moses led to the border of Canaan — but thanks to the second person address, which draws the reader into the world of the text, the content is applicable to anyone who identified him- or herself as part of "Israel." In Deut 4 the Host of Heaven are mentioned within a passage dealing with the second commandment that specifically prohibits Israelites from making an idol in the form of any living thing or bowing down to the celestial bodies.[386] The logic

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In the same volume, Polit shows how different power relations within families and communities played a role in identifying culprits of ritual failure; Polit, "Social Consequences."

[385] Waldman and Baum, "Innovation as Renovation."

[386] See especially K. Holter, *Deuteronomy and the Second Commandment* (Studies in Biblical Literature 60; Berlin: Peter Lang, 2003), 2-23, 71-84; M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 5; London: Doubleday, 1991), 205. The switch from second person plural to second person singular in 4:19 may

underpinning the prohibition is rooted in the theophany at Horeb; as YHWH's presence was not visible, no idol or statue the people created would capture his likeness appropriately and thus they should abstain from making one.[387] The prohibition against astral veneration is placed within this commentary due to its ability to circumvent it. The visibility of the celestial bodies meant that no idols were required for their worship; the author included this prohibition specifically to make clear that such worship was nevertheless not acceptable.[388] Deuteronomy 4:19 seems to have been written in response to uncertainty about the scope of the second commandment, with theological ambiguity prompting a statement about the Host of Heaven.

The address to all the people in Deut 4:19 contrasts with the more specific identifications of some of the other polemics which, as noted above, identify the ritual practitioners as the כמרים (Zeph 1:4-5; 2 Kgs 23:5), the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Jer 8:1-2), the Northern Kingdom (2 Kgs 17:16) or King Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:3, 5). While many of these other texts address those identified as ritual practitioners, Deut 4:19 uses the second person form to address the reader or hearer of the text. Rather than accusing a group of having already participated in Host of Heaven worship, Deut 4:19 warns against the possibility of such worship. The reader is drawn into the message delivered to the people of Israel, as the boundaries between the literary context and that of the reader are blurred. This intertwining of ancient and current audiences imputes a sense of authority and unchanging status to the message contained in the text. The warning against Host of Heaven worship is presented as though it was just as relevant — and just as true — for the current Israelite community as it was for those who came before them.

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indicate that 4:19 is a secondary addition to the chapter; so Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 49; Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 61; A.C. Welch, *Deuteronomy: The Framework to the Code* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 43. Even if the verse is a secondary addition, however, it does not affect our analysis here.

[387] I. Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire: Divine Presence in Deuteronomy* (SBLDS 151; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 63-64.

[388] Welch, *Deuteronomy*, 44; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 204.

While Deut 17:3 also addresses the reader in the second person, it writes about the Host ritual practitioners in the third person.[389] The reader is not warned about their own practices but warned about the danger to the community posed by Host of Heaven ritual practitioners in their midst. This verse is the only explicit mention of women worshipping the Host in the Hebrew Bible. Notably, "man or woman" (איש או־אשה, Deut 17:2) does not denote any particular social class or group; everyone in the Israelite community was a potential apostate. The perception of danger within is often associated with identity concerns. "Bad insiders" — those who were part of the Israelite community but acted like non-Israelites — were perceived to disrupt the social cohesion of the community and blur the boundaries of its identity.[390] Ritual was integrally connected to these identity concerns, as ritual maintained the social and cosmic order and proclaimed Israel's identity as YHWH's people. Engaging in non-Israelite or illegitimate rituals within the Israelite community risked undermining the YHWH-Israel relationship which stood at the heart of the social and cosmic order and blurring the boundaries of the community with outsiders such that Israel was not recognisable as "Israel." To counteract this threat, Deuteronomy mandates a strict code of conduct, wherein those who do not enact correct social or ritual practice are to be destroyed to ensure the safety of the community.[391]

Deuteronomy's code of conduct is at times very specific, laying out detailed rules governing how Israelites are supposed to behave with YHWH

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[389] Although the reader is addressed in the second person, the potential practitioners could be any man or a woman; e.g.,כי־ימצא בקרבך באחד שׁעריך אשׁר־יהוה אלהיך נתן לך איׁש או־ אשׁה יעשׂה את־הרע בעיני יהוה־אלהיך לעבר בריתו (Deut 17:2).

[390] R. Barrett, *Disloyalty and Destruction: Religion and Politics in Deuteronomy and the Modern World* (LHBOTS 511; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2009), 29-30, 150-51, 249-50; L. Stuhlman, "Encroachment in Deuteronomy: An Analysis of the Social World of the D Code," *JBL* 109 (1990): 613-32; Crouch, *The Making of Israel*, 105-230; C.A. Reeder, *The Enemy in the Household: Family Violence in Deuteronomy and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); Nicholson, "Reconsidering the Provenance," 534.

[391] See especially Reeder, *Enemy in the Household*, 40-56. Reeder argues that households were the primary weapon used in Deuteronomy to punish "bad insiders," as the household was the epicentre of Israelite identity and the place where the covenant was instituted and taught. Thus households — the heart of Israel's identity — would exterminate the threats that came against them from within (*Enemy in the Household*, 15-22).

and with each other. Yet, in Deut 17:3 the ritual practices for the Host and for the "other gods" (אלהים אחרים) are lumped together and referred to generically. Non-Yahwistic worship is forbidden, but no deities are named individually, nor are particular ritual locations or practices identified explicitly. This lack of specificity broadens the scope of the polemic. Any deity or cult tradition could be included in the prohibition against worshipping the Host of Heaven and "other gods." Furthermore, while proper Yahwistic practice in Deuteronomy was controlled by the priests (trained specialists), the rituals for the Host and "other gods" in Deut 17:3 could be undertaken by any man or woman. The generic terminology denies the rituals any association with trained specialists; any Israelite could become an idolater. In the process, it creates as implicit contrast between correct Yahwistic practice, which was carefully controlled and enacted, and illegitimate practices which could be practiced by anyone, including and especially those who not included among Deuteronomy's specially sanctioned ritual controllers.

The manner in which Host of Heaven worshippers are dealt with in Deut 17 is worth note: elsewhere the kings of Judah reform these practices, the prophets pronounce judgement on them, and in places YHWH himself will act to end them. In Deut 17, however, the responsibility of preventing these practices lies with the reader of the text and the people of Israel. Israel's correct ritual practices were determined by the priests and the text of Deuteronomy, but the text charges the audience to take responsibility for upholding these standards.

6.6 Implied Practitioners: Priests and Households

While most texts identify the practitioners of Host rituals, neither Jer 19:13 nor 2 Kgs 23:4 does so. To some extent, however, the practitioners can be inferred from the ritual locations. Jeremiah 19:13 pronounces judgement on the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah. The scope of this pronouncement is difficult to ascertain. One the one hand, the rooftops

of the houses may represent the entire city. On the other hand, they may just denote the rooftops where the rituals were practiced. McKane favours the latter option, arguing that the grammatically awkward הטמאים functions as a limitation, emphasising that not all the houses will be destroyed, but only those polluted by idolatry.[392] For him, this limitation may reflect an awareness that not all the houses in Jerusalem had been destroyed.[393] Yet, although Jer 19:13 is not explicit in its identification of ritual practitioners, 19:4 refers to the idolatrous practices of "the people," 19:7 refers to the judgement visited upon "Judah and Jerusalem," and 19:10 refers to YHWH breaking "this people," while 19:12 and 19:14 refer to the inhabitants of the city without limitation. The context suggests, therefore, that the houses represent the inhabitants of Jerusalem in general.

2 Kings 23:4 also omits explicit mention of the ritual practitioners involved in Host worship; the vessels for Asherah, Ba'al and all the Host of Heaven are simply brought out of the temple and destroyed. The presence of the vessels in the temple, however, strongly implies their usage in ritual practices; furthermore, we note that those who bring the vessels out from the temple are priests and cultic officials. That the vessels were handled by the priests may suggest that the vessels were stored in parts of the temple that only the priests could access. It is possible that those who used the vessels are not named because the emphasis was on the destruction of the ritual objects. Equally, they may not be named because the implication is obvious — cultic vessels in the temple would naturally have been used by the priests. A combination of both seems the most plausible answer; much of 2 Kgs 23 is focused on the destruction or defilement of objects (23:4, 6, 7, 8b, 11, 12, 15-16) and locations (23:5, 8a, 10, 13-14, 19-20) rather than the people who used the objects. Nevertheless, the vessels for the Host of Heaven were located in the temple and were ritually destroyed; this strongly suggests that they would have been used in the temple cult. We can

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[392] He observes that if הטמאים is an attributive of בתי ירושלם then we would expect it to be positioned after יהודה and thus it is better understood as a limitation; W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah, Volume I: Jeremiah I-XXV* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 447.
[393] McKane, *Jeremiah I-XXV*, 447.

probably presume, therefore, that 2 Kgs 23:4 identifies the Jerusalem priests as Host of Heaven ritual practitioners, even if the text is more interested in Josiah's actions vis-à-vis ritual objects and locations.

6.7 Summary

By focusing on the ritual practitioners identified in these texts, we observe a diversity in these polemics that obscured if they are conflated into "Deuteronomistic" texts. Most striking is that, apart from Zeph 1:4-5 and 2 Kgs 23:5, every text identifies a different set of ritual practitioners. What emerges is a debate about who is responsible for the Host of Heaven rituals and who will suffer their consequences. 2 Kings alone seems to contain four lines of inquiry. First, 2 Kgs 21 and 23 are clearly engaged in a dialogue about the instigation and reversal of rituals by Manasseh and Josiah, respectively. No other individual kings are named in connection with the Host rituals, though kings (plural) are mentioned in 2 Kgs 23:5. This suggests that these authors particularly wanted to draw attention to Manasseh and Josiah. Second, 2 Kgs 23:4 implies that the priests were involved in Host rituals, although it does not state this explicitly. Third, 2 Kgs 17 contends that Host rituals caused the downfall of the northern kingdom of Israel, foreshadowing a partial parallel to the downfall of Judah. However, 2 Kgs 17 identifies the ritual practitioners as the people of Israel, rather than particular kings. Finally, 2 Kgs 23:5 refers to the כמרים, who are also seen in Zeph 1:4-5. The rarity of the term may indicate some measure of textual dependence between these two texts. In any case, 2 Kings 17, 21 and 23 identify no fewer than four different parties as Host of Heaven worshippers.

Jeremiah 8:1-2 and 19:13 are similar in identifying the inhabitants of Jerusalem as the guilty parties, though the manner in which they present these conclusions is very different. Jeremiah 8:1-2 addresses a comprehensive list of elite groups in Judah, whilst Jer 19:13 does not identify the practitioners explicitly and could be interpreted as indicting all

of Jerusalem or select houses within Jerusalem. Similarly, Deut 4:19 and 17:3 are of the slightly broader opinion that potential practitioners can be found in Israel, but these persons are not limited to a specific city; the two texts also differ in their involvement with the reader. Deuteronomy 17:3 assumes the reader is not a Host of Heaven ritual practitioner and instructs them on what to do with such a person. Deuteronomy 4:19 warns the reader against ritual participation for the Host.

We are thus presented with six options: the practitioners of these rituals are identified as King Manasseh, the other kings of Judah, the כמרים, the inhabitants of Jerusalem (variously expressed), the inhabitants of the northern kingdom of Israel, the people of the community of Israel (variously expressed) and (implicitly) the priests of the Jerusalem temple.

We can also observe differences in how practitioners will or should be treated. This will be explored further in Chapter Seven. Here, we note that Zeph 1:4-5; Jer 8:1-2; 19:13 all agree that YHWH will bring his judgement upon Jerusalem, although this is variously expressed by the three texts. 2 Kings, meanwhile, mostly assigns responsibility to the kings of Judah, who are expected to set the standard of ritual practice for the kingdom, while 2 Kgs 17 describes the divinely-instituted outcome if the correct standard of ritual practice is not met. Deuteronomy 17:2-7 puts the responsibility on the reader to enact justice on practitioners of Host rituals and execute them. Slightly differently, Deut 4:19 assigns responsibility to each individual to regulate their own cultic practice and not be tempted into idolatry.

This diversity, both in the identification of practitioners and in terms of what should or will happen to these practitioners, is highly suggestive of ambiguity over who was responsible for the ritual failures associated with the Host rituals and what the consequences of these failures would be. All the texts concur that Host of Heaven ritual practices and their practitioners were the cause of problems, yet they identify and deal with these practitioners differently. This ambiguity could well be the result of the multivalence of the Host — as the "Host of Heaven" is a collective plural term whose scope is never defined, the authors may have been using it to

refer to different deities and cultic traditions in each case. It is possible, for example, that Manasseh's altars for the Host of Heaven could have been for different deities than the Host of Heaven worshipped by the כמרים. A lack of overriding theological consensus over the nature and definition of the term "Host of Heaven," combined with different contexts of composition might, therefore, explain the range of practitioners identified with the Host. Alternately, the different identifications of ritual practitioners could be the result of didacticism — that is, the result of a variety of authors all attempting to explain events in light of ritual failures. While in some authors' worldviews the kings were responsible for safeguarding Israel's ritual practices (e.g., 2 Kgs 21, 23), others viewed the people in general (e.g., 2 Kgs 17; Deut 17), foreign cult officials (Zeph 1; 2 Kgs 23:5), or the people of Jerusalem (Jer 8; 19) as responsible. Different theologies or worldviews surrounding ritual efficacy could, therefore, explain the diversity in the texts.

Alternatively — or perhaps, additionally — we could consider the role of accusations of ritual failure in communal power-struggles. As noted above (6.4), the identity of the persons whom the texts identify as practitioners of failed rituals is equally as important as *who they do not identify*. Although Jer 8:1-3 names a list of elite groups — including prophets — that will suffer YHWH's judgement as a consequence of Host worship, the author is implicitly excluded from the group of guilty parties, despite also being a prophet. By accusing other elites of engaging in flawed and failed rituals for the Host, the author of Jer 8:1-3 implicitly absolves themselves of blame, setting themselves apart from both the accusation of ritual impropriety and the judgement that is its consequence. The authority of the author is thus increased by two things: the oppositional stance toward groups usually identified with authority in ancient Judah, and the survival of the polemical texts — their word against the word of those whose witness has now disappeared.

The polemical texts indict a variety of people, groups and communities for their ritual practices for the Host of Heaven. As we have seen, the reasons

for this diversity of identification may differ from text to text and author to author. This diversity highlights how studying these polemics in light of the practitioners they identify with Host of Heaven rituals is an enlightening endeavour — perhaps not for any attempt at reconstructing a Host of Heaven ritual, but in terms of interrogating the polemical texts and their purposes. Considering who the texts do or do not identify as having practiced Host of Heaven worship leads us to reflect on the role of theological ambiguity and of the power of accusations of ritual failure in the formation of polemical texts.

Part Three

Following the preceding three chapters focus on individual aspects of ritual, this section considers more broadly the consequences of perceived ritual failure. Chapter Seven explores this with specific reference to the Host of Heaven, analysing the outcomes that the polemical texts associate with participation in these ritual practices. In contrast to the worshippers' hopes, the authors claim that the outcomes of Host of Heaven rituals are all negative, entailing the destruction, deportation, death and the redefinition of identity of the ritual practitioners. Frequent connections are drawn between social upheaval and ritual practice and in every case the penalty for Host worship is removal from the community. The texts express the consequences differently but betray the same worldview, namely, that "bad rituals" were a fundamental cause of social and cosmic upheaval and must be prevented in order to protect the community.

Chapter Eight widens the discussion to consider the impact of perceived ritual failure in relation to the composition of the polemical texts. When social upheavals resulted in a state of ambiguity, the ritual arena became a battleground in the search for the identification of its causes. The identification of flawed and failed ritual practices entailed identification of those who had encouraged and practiced these "bad rituals"; as such, debates over ritual efficacy and legitimacy had significant ramifications for intra-communal power relations and identity formation. The textualization of polemic against ritual shifted this battleground into the textual sphere, where authors could gain more authority for their views, preserve their message for future generations and, perhaps, disseminate their message more widely in their own time. These textualized ritual polemics were not simply a means of gaining a rhetorical upper hand, but were often an attempt at ritual control. The authors wrote their texts with the aim of persuading the reader of the validity of their ritual programme and, implicitly, of their authority in the ritual arena. This ritualizing tendency renders it unsurprising that these texts eventually became ritual texts with the power to control, dictate, and explain ritual practice. They were

preserved and became agents of ritual change because they were created for that very purpose.

7 The Consequences of Failed Host of Heaven Rituals

Although we cannot uncover what the people of Israel thought the outcomes of Host of Heaven rituals would or should be, it is likely that they thought the outcomes would be beneficial, whether spiritually, communally, economically, or militarily. The polemical texts, however, invert any notion of positive expectations and present the outcomes of these rituals as disastrous — leading to destruction, death, defilement and deportation. Rather than upholding the social and cosmic order — as ritual generally seeks to do — the polemical texts present the Host of Heaven rituals as disrupting and undermining the social and cosmic order. The biblical texts were well aware of the dangers of ritual failure and contain narratives emphasising the need for correct practice to avoid the consequences of such failures (e.g., Lev 10). Moreover, in the context of an exclusive covenant with YHWH, the dangers were increased exponentially: the rituals could not only fail on their own terms, but could violate the covenant and anger YHWH, even if carried out successfully. Thus, even a "successful" Host of Heaven ritual could ultimately prove flawed if it provoked YHWH's anger or caused the Yahwistic rituals to fail. The biblical authors highlight both of these dangers in their polemics. Some texts focus on the failure of the rituals themselves (e.g., Jer 8:1-2), while others focus on the impact their practice had on the covenant with YHWH (e.g., Deut 17:3; 2 Kgs 17:16). All of the polemical texts view the Host rituals as flawed or failed and thus as dangerous in some way, though these dangers are differently expressed. Some claim that the rituals would lead to the defilement and destruction of Jerusalem (e.g., Jer 19:13); others emphasise the danger for the practitioners who could be deposed (2 Kgs 23:5; Zeph 1:4-5), executed (Deut 17:3), deported (2 Kgs 17:16), defined as non-Israelite (Deut 4:19) or disinterred from their graves (Jer 8:1-2). The different emphases are worth note; the texts concur that Host of Heaven rituals would lead to negative results, but they differ in their presentation of the outcomes.

Although the polemics are of one accord in emphasising the danger of these rituals, those who practiced the rituals clearly had different expectations concerning their outcomes. This chapter seeks, therefore, to explore the portrayal of the outcomes of Host of Heaven rituals in detail, examining the ways in which the authors identified negative events as consequences of the Host of Heaven rituals, in order to persuade their audiences that these rituals should not be practiced. The first section (7.1) focuses on destruction of ritual objects, as a necessary act in the eradication of cult objects. In particular, we note that 2 Kgs 23:4 narrates Josiah's destruction of ritual objects for the Host in a manner which bears resemblance to parts of the Holiness code. This account is instructive insofar as it shows the importance of total eradication and removal of ritual objects deemed illegitimate or impure. The necessity of destruction or removal beyond community boundaries is also seen in other texts dealing with ritual practitioners (esp. Deut 17:3). The second section (7.2) turns to the destruction or defilement of ritual locations as the result of Host of Heaven ritual performances. The third section (7.3) then focuses on the consequences of these ritual practices for specific groups or individuals (7.3.1) and for entire nations or communities (7.3.2). The vast majority of these polemics are concerned with the consequences of the rituals for the people, whether the practitioners or the wider community. This anthropocentric view likely reflects the persuasive agenda of the texts — they focus on the negative outcomes for the people because they aim to persuade the people to change their ritual practices. Only one text (Jer 8:1-2) claims that the rituals failed because of the weakness or lack of divinity of the deities involved. All other texts place the responsibility for the failures on the human participants; whether or not the Host of Heaven accepted the rituals, the actions of the practitioners angered YHWH and it is they who suffer the consequences.[394]

[394] Given scholarly discussions about the development of monotheism, the lack of focus on the ineffectiveness or powerlessness of the Host should be noted. Only Jer 8:1-2 claims the Host were ineffective deities — the other texts view the ritual practices of the people as the issue, rather than the gods to whom the rituals were offered.

7.1 Destruction of Ritual Objects

2 Kings 23:4 (cf. 21:5; 23:12) focuses on the destruction of ritual objects for the Host of Heaven.[395] In a recent monograph, Monroe clearly demonstrates that the language of destruction used in 2 Kgs 23 is that of ritual destruction.[396] She highlights, in particular, the use of terms such as טמא ("to defile), שׂרף ("to burn"), דקק לעפר ("to beat to dust") and השׁליך ("to cast" [hiphil]) throughout 2 Kgs 23.[397] These terms are regularly found in the Holiness Code and sometimes in Ezekiel to refer to acts of ritual destruction or defilement.[398] Other parallels between 2 Kgs 23 and these priestly or holiness texts include the concern with high places (Lev 26:30; Ezek 6:3, 6), reference to *mlk* sacrifices (Lev 18:21; 20:2, 3, 4, 5) and the use of bones to defile a high place (Ezek 6:3-5). None of these concerns are found in the Book of Deuteronomy.[399] Deuteronomistic redaction in 2 Kgs 23 is thus likely a later revision of an earlier text which was originally closer to the Holiness material.[400] In 2 Kgs 23:4, Josiah commands that the vessels for Ba'al, Asherah and the Host be brought out of the temple and burned (שׂרף) outside Jerusalem, with their ashes (את־עפרם) removed beyond the boundaries of the city (23:4). The destruction of the vessels outside the city and the removal of their ashes even further afield is reminiscent of rites regarding the disposal of impurities in Num 19 and Lev 14.[401] Josiah also tore down Manasseh's altars (2 Kgs 23:12 cf. 21:4, 5) and cast their dust (וירץ משׁם והשׁליך את־עפרם) into the Wadi Kidron, leaving them irreparable

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[395] Quite what is intended by the term "vessels" (כל־הכלים) in 2 Kgs 23:4 is left to the reader's imagination, though this cultic paraphernalia clearly indicated items that could be removed and burned, in contrast to larger altars that had to be torn down (2 Kgs 23:12).
[396] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 24-76.
[397] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform* 9-11.
[398] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 32-40.
[399] As such, Monroe thus persuasively argues that there are close conceptual connections between 2 Kgs 23 and material found in the Holiness Code and Ezekiel; Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 24-32.
[400] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 77-107.
[401] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 27-29. Ambos notes that it was common for ritual mistakes to be corrected or their impact neutralised, by a ritual against ritual failure; Ambos, "Types of Ritual Failure," 34-36. Josiah's ritual destruction of ritual vessels and personnel would fall into this category, as an example of ritual destruction as a form of corrective ritual.

and removing their pieces from the temple and community.[402] In so doing, the superior status of the priests in controlling the ritual sphere of the temple passes to Josiah, as he acts to remove impurity from the temple and the land.[403] Manipulation of rituals often provides a useful way for individuals and groups to increase and publicise their power.[404] Josiah's control of the ritual space presents him as powerful and authoritative, in contrast to the priests, who permitted the ritual traditions that Josiah destroys. That the vessels for the Host are ritually destroyed implies that the rituals for the Host were creating impurity within the temple and the land. As such, they had to be destroyed, in order to protect the community and the land from impurity.

As Monroe observes, 2 Kgs 23 is overwhelmingly focused on ritual, including ritual destruction (2 Kgs 23:4, 6, 11, 12), ritual defilement (2 Kgs 23:8, 10, 14, 16), deposition or execution of ritual practitioners (2 Kgs 23:5, 8-9, 20) and reinstatement of select ritual practices (2 Kgs 23:3, 21-23).[405] The use of ritual destruction in this passage backs up the claim that the rituals destroyed were idolatrous or impure. As the Host of Heaven vessels had apparently been in use in the temple for some time, they were clearly not previously thought to be impure. The manner of their ritual destruction, however, has the final word in the matter, indicating to the reader that they were destroyed because of impurity. 2 Kings 23 is thus not merely concerned with the end of certain ritual practices, but that they were ended according to correct procedures. As noted in Chapter Two, 1-2 Kings is very concerned about ritual innovation. While certain kings (e.g., Ahaz, Jeroboam, Manasseh) are singled out and condemned for introducing ritual innovations, others engage in "legitimate" ritual innovations, presented as a return to traditional norms. The "legitimate" innovations instigated by Hezekiah and Josiah are justified by reference to external stimuli (e.g., trust

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[402] The Wadi Kidron seems to have been an accepted disposal site for, amongst other things, destroyed cultic paraphernalia, sacrificial blood, and burials; Wright, *Disposal of Impurity*, 285-86.
[403] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 29-30; Olyan, *Rites and Rank*, 117.
[404] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, 28-29.
[405] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 3-44.

in YHWH [2 Kgs 18:5]; following the commandments of Moses [2 Kgs 18:6]; following the lawbook [2 Kgs 23:2]; appeal to prophecy [2 Kgs 22:4-20]), while the innovations of "bad kings" are presented as the result of their own actions with no external factors (e.g., Jeroboam I [1 Kgs 12:25-33]; Manasseh [2 Kgs 21:1-18]). Given the authors' concern for legitimation of the innovations of the "good kings," we might question whether the focus on procedure in the destruction of other cults and cult objects in Josiah's reform was part of this attempt to legitimise his ritual innovations. That is, 2 Kgs 23 may use language of ritual destruction, evocative of priestly procedures, in order to emphasise that Josiah's reform was justified and "correct."[406] Earlier, we observed that the formal nature of ritual contributes to its persuasiveness, making it seem authoritative and rendering it difficult to disagree with.[407] The ritual language of destruction and defilement in 2 Kgs 23 echoes formal instructions found in Holiness texts about how to deal with impurity. The formality of this language may thus be deliberate, attempting to impute legitimacy and persuasiveness to Josiah's actions.[408] Although not everyone would have agreed with the agenda or outcome of Josiah's actions, the formality of the manner in which it was reported may have been intended to overcome this potential disunity.[409] Platvoet refers to this as the "symbolic dimension" of ritual, wherein ritual expression and

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[406] As Kertzer observes, rituals have "both a conservatory bias and innovatory potential. Paradoxically, it is the very conservatism of ritual forms that can make ritual a potent force in political change"; Kertzer *Ritual, Politics*, 12. The use of "correct procedure" in Josiah's ritual destructions may, therefore, have enabled his innovatory actions.

[407] See Chapter Two, section 2.3; also Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 22-25.

[408] Lemos and Olyan note that Israel did not just have one purity system maintaining and explaining purity and disposal of impurities, but rather it had many different systems, which developed in line with Israel's developing rituals. Josiah's actions may therefore be described in recognisably Priestly/Holiness language to communicate its official nature. See T.M. Lemos, "Where There Is Dirt, Is There System? Revisiting Biblical Purity Constructions," *JSOT* 38 (2013): 265-94; Olyan, *Rites and Rank*, 40.

[409] This is the case not least because the methods of ritual destruction Josiah utilises assume prior knowledge of their symbolic importance. 2 Kings 23 does not explain why Josiah had the vessels burnt and their ashes removed, but assumes the audience would recognise the referent of the language used, understand that the cults being reformed were impure and, thus, that Josiah's actions were necessary. This abbreviation of explanation and assumption of knowledge is typical of ritual language (e.g., Wheelock, "Ritual Language," 56). In this case, this likely indicates that the referent or the implication of Josiah's ritual destruction would have been known to the people.

communication are achieved through symbolic actions, using core symbols which present key aspects of a whole system of culture and belief.[410]

The nature of our evidence means that we do not know what caused Josiah's reform, or even whether it happened at all.[411] Nevertheless, 2 Kings 23 still provides insights into the conception of ritual and its potential use in biblical rhetoric. That the ritual reform enacted by Josiah was apparently mandated by an ancient text is significant for this study. The attribution of the negative interpretation of the rituals to a lawbook, rather than to Josiah's imagination or to societal or political events, adds to the legitimacy of Josiah's actions and gives the reform a transcendent character, freed from historical circumstances. As Watts notes, ancient ritual texts provided a means of validating or invalidating ritual performances in antiquity, as the presence of an ancient text buttressed the claims that those who used them were acting in line with an ancient, long-established tradition.[412] Following an ancient text could thus put the actions of an individual beyond the reach of criticism.[413] The existence of the ancient scroll makes Josiah's actions what Hüsken would call a "legitimate deviation from the normative," marking the ritual agent (and his actions) out as having superior authority.[414] In other words, 2 Kgs 22-23 implies that, if the scroll had been known to more people, they too would have followed Josiah's example and deviated from what was then practiced as normative rituals in the temple. The fact that Josiah *followed the content of the scroll and acted upon it* (after receiving validation of its contents) is also important, as it enshrines the power of these ritual texts in another ritual text, thus making a claim for the

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[410] Platvoet, "Ritual in Plural," 32.
[411] Politics, the economy, the Book of Deuteronomy, the presence of officials influenced by "Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic" views and individual piety have all been suggested as catalysts of underlying Josiah's innovations. See, for example, the range of views espoused in the literature cited in Na'aman, "The King Leading Cult Reforms," 131-142. Some scholars, however, argue that such a reform may never have happened; e.g., Pakkala, "Why the Cult Reforms in Judah Probably Did Not Happen," 201-39. Whether or not Josiah's reform happened as reported in 2 Kgs 23, the text can still provide us with insights into how ancient authors conceived of ritual and processes of ritual change.
[412] Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 199-215; Na'aman, "The 'Discovered Book.'"
[413] Grimes, *Reading, Writing*, 7.
[414] Hüsken, "Ritual Dynamics," 344-345.

legitimacy of ritual texts as agents of ritual change — the contents of that scroll were so important that the king remodelled the ritual practices of the entire kingdom. This is important when we consider the motivations behind the textualization of 2 Kgs 23. Although the reader does not now have Josiah's scroll, they have the actions of Josiah (who followed the scroll) to model their behaviour on; the implication is that, if another lawbook were to be found that could be validated, it would be a legitimate agent of ritual change. Thus, righteous people are those who recognise the importance of ritual texts, validate them, and act upon their recommendations to put aside or destroy ritual practices that were deemed to be at odds with correct Yahwism.

2 Kings 23 thus claims that the vessels for the Host of Heaven (amongst other things) were ritually destroyed as a result of the teachings of an ancient scroll; this ancient scroll deemed them to be illegitimate and necessitated their destruction and removal from the holy temple. The language of destruction is closer to Holiness texts than Deuteronomy and may reflect the use of formal ritual language to impute authority and legitimacy to Josiah's actions. The attribution of the negative interpretation of the Host rituals to an ancient scroll puts Josiah's actions beyond critique and offers a model for the reader to follow. As Josiah followed the contents of the ancient scroll, the reader can follow the scroll narrating Josiah's actions.

7.2 Destruction of Ritual Locations

In Jer 19:13 the rituals for the Host (and for the "other gods") will be ritually ended by the defilement of their ritual locations. This may be connected to the people's defilement of the temple in Jer 7:30.[415] Whereas in 7:30 the people defiled (טמא) the temple – "the house that is called by my [YHWH's] name," in Jer 19:13 YHWH will permit the defilement (טמא) of

[415] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 541.

the houses of Jerusalem.[416] In the current form of Jer 19, this defilement (v. 13) follows the prophetic sign act wherein Jeremiah breaks a pot as an image of how YHWH will break Jerusalem and his people (vv. 10-11). The defilement of the houses thus seems intended as permanent and irreparable, with the destruction of these locations implicitly signalling the end of the Host rituals. Defilement and impurity were priestly concerns and the example of Lev 14:34-45 may be instructive in understanding the passage in Jeremiah. In Lev 14, a house that is contaminated by disease is subjected to attempts to purify it — but, if it cannot be cleansed, it is declared defiled, torn down and the stones are taken to an unclean (טמא) place for disposal.[417] Something similar may be at play in Jer 19:13, wherein the city has become so impure that it can only be destroyed; the houses deemed to be contaminated by idolatrous rituals will be destroyed and defiled to prevent further contamination.[418]

Idolatry was a form of communicable impurity; its effects were communicated beyond the immediate practitioners and could affect others in the community.[419] This form of impurity could not simply be reversed

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[416] Jeremiah 19:7 refers to the enemies of Judah and Jerusalem who will kill the people and thus provide the defiling corpses. But the passage emphasises throughout that it is YHWH who allows this defilement, as evidenced by the use of the first person to state that YHWH will permit the slaughter of the people (19:7), make the people turn to cannibalism in sieges (19:9), break the people and city like a vessel (19:11), and make the city like the Tophet (19:12). This is a theme found also in Ezek 9, which also states that YHWH permitted outsiders to cause the defilement of Jerusalem with corpses (and cf. Ezek 6:1-7; Isa 43:28). Allen notes that in Ezek 9 the slaughter begins at the temple and then spreads out; L.C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19* (WBC 28; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 149. Thus, the centre of ritual purity (so Gorman Jr., *Ideology of Ritual*, 43-57) becomes the centre of defilement and can no longer serve as a sanctuary; W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24* (Trans. R.E. Clements; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 248-49. Although the idea of YHWH being involved in the downfall of Jerusalem is common in the biblical texts, when Jer 19 and Ezek 9 are considered with regard to ritual, the portrayal of YHWH (the holy god) permitting the ultimate pollution and defilement of his own sanctuary is an interesting one.

[417] Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*, 25-30.

[418] Notably, Jer 19 as a whole is concerned with the defilement of ritual locations; the Tophet is included in the defilement of 19:13 and the reference to the people falling by the sword in "this place" (במקום הזה) — likely either the temple or Jerusalem more broadly — may refer to further defilement caused by the presence of corpses.

[419] Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity*, 284. Impurity was conceived of in different ways in ancient Israel. Some forms, such as idolatry, were communicable, whereas others were non-communicable and limited the impurity to a person or object. For example, as murderers could seek sanctuary in the temple and the adulteress of Num 5:11-31 was brought into the

through the usual ritual processes of purification; rather, the cause must also be destroyed.[420] The manner in which the houses of Jerusalem will be defiled in Jer 19:13 is through the presence of corpses (Jer 19:11-13); this was also a form of communicable impurity, rendering anything that came into contact with them unclean. An awareness of pollution and ritual defilement thus provided a paradigm for the biblical authors to understand and express the downfall of the kingdom.[421] When considered through a ritual lens, the collapse of the kingdom and the deportation of the people could be viewed as a response to defilement caused by idolatry and impurity.[422] Ironically, in Jer 19 and Ezek 9, the people defile the land and city such that YHWH himself permits further defilement by outsiders, amplifying the people's defilement to its natural consequence – complete destruction.

7.3 Destruction, Deportation and Redefinition of Ritual Practitioners

Although the preceding texts relate the outcomes of Host of Heaven rituals to objects and locations, the majority of the polemical texts focus on the outcome of the rituals for the practitioners. To some extent, this is logical; the polemics are directed toward people and thus the consequences of the rituals for the people are of central importance. In all these texts, the consequence of participation in Host of Heaven rituals involves removal from the community of Israel, expressed in various ways. Some texts call for the execution of the practitioners (Deut 17:3) or predict the desecration

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temple, the impurity of these individuals seems different to that of idolatrous impurity which should not enter the temple; Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 30.

[420] T. Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (eds. C.L. Meyers and M. O'Connor; ASOR Special Volume Series 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 399-414, 406-07. As Ambos notes, however, ritual destruction could itself correct the effects of incorrect rituals; Ambos, "Types of Ritual Failure," 34-36.

[421] Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification," 409.

[422] See for example, Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification," 409; W. Pikor, *The Land of Israel in the Book of Ezekiel* (LHBOTS 667; London: T&T Clark, 2018), 55-64.

of their graves (Jer 8:1-2). Others narrate the removal of a specific group of practitioners from their positions (2 Kgs 23:5; Zeph 1:4-5), while others state that the deportation of entire nations would follow this illicit worship (2 Kgs 17:16; cf. 21:13-14; 23:26-27). Finally, Deut 4:19 explicitly associates the Host of Heaven with the other nations, implying that the people who worshipped the Host would no longer participate in the exclusive YHWH-Israel relationship, but be redefined as foreigners.

The range of outcomes the texts associate with the practitioners is related to the range of the practitioners identified therein. It is not surprising, for example, that 2 Kgs 17:16 and 23:5 differ in their presentation of the outcome of Host rituals: 2 Kgs 17:16 states that the practitioners were an entire nation, whereas 2 Kgs 23:5 singles out a specific group of practitioners. Even if the diversity of outcomes are not surprising, some are quite interesting. For example, the comparative lack of emphasis on these rituals causing exile or deportation should be noted. Only 2 Kgs 17:16 and the redactional strand of 2 Kings that associates Manasseh with the exile (2 Kgs 21:13-14; 23:26-27) mention deportation as a consequence of Host rituals.[423] These are also the only texts to associate the consequences of Host of Heaven worship with the people of Israel or Judah as a whole. Deuteronomy 17:3 presents the Host ritual practitioners as a potential threat to the community that must be eradicated, but, if the threat is identified correctly, the punishment is only to fall on the practitioner. One person should be executed to ensure the safety of the others. Similarly, although Jer 8:1-2 depicts many different groups within Judahite society suffering the consequences of Host worship, the list is limited to elites who engaged in the rituals and is perhaps also limited to Jerusalem.

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[423] Jer 8:3 may mention deportation: "'death will be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them' says YHWH of Hosts." Exactly who the evil "family" are, however is not explicit. "Where I have driven them" could refer to forced migration before or after an invasion of Jerusalem. Moreover, the Host of Heaven ritual practitioners are not explicitly connected with this evil family who are driven elsewhere. The bones of the Host practitioners will be taken out of their tombs and spread out on the ground; logically, these tombs would have been in Judah, especially if the tombs of the kings of Judah are in mind.

There are also differences in the temporal presentation of the outcomes. In keeping with its historical focus, 2 Kgs presents the outcomes of some Host rituals as having already occurred, while others are yet to come. Josiah's destruction of the vessels (2 Kgs 23:4) and the deportation of the northern kingdom (2 Kgs 17:16) have happened, while the references to exile as a result of Manasseh's sin are presented as anticipatory (2 Kgs 21:13-14; 23:26-27). Zephaniah 1:4-5 and Jer 19:13; 8:1-2 also present YHWH's judgement as a future event. This predictive tone in the prophets is more expected, whereas the predictive tone in 2 Kgs 21:13-14; 23:26-27 stands out. In all these texts, however, the predictive tone permits the message to appear as fulfilled by historical events.

The Deuteronomy references are very different: neither refer to historical events, but to hypothetical events. Deuteronomy 17:3 focuses on the theory of what to do *if* a Host of Heaven practitioner is identified in the community. Deuteronomy 4:19, meanwhile, interrelates the literary audience with the reader, addressing both simultaneously and producing a warning that transcends temporal boundaries.

The following discussion is divided into two sections, in order to take a closer look at these passages. The first section (7.4.1) focuses on texts concerned with the outcomes for specific individuals or groups of people (Zeph 1:4-5; 2 Kgs 23:5; Deut 4:19; 17:3). The second section (7.4.2) explores texts concerned with the outcomes of Host rituals for entire nations or communities (2 Kgs 17:16; 2 Kgs 21:3, 5 cf. 13-14; 23:26-27; Jer 8:1-2).[424]

7.3.1 Specific Groups and Individuals

Zephaniah 1:4-5 states that YHWH will stretch his hand out against Judah and Jerusalem and cut off the remnant of Ba'al and the names of the כמרים

[424] Jeremiah 8:1-2 overlaps both sections as it lists specific groups of people in a probable attempt to emphasise that none in Jerusalem would escape the judgement. It has been treated in section 7.3.2 here, but it blurs the boundaries between both.

"from this place" (והכרתי מן־המקום הזה).[425] For a person or people to be "cut off" from a place or community as a result of ritual impropriety was a common pronouncement of judgement in priestly texts (e.g., Lev 7:20-27; 17:4, 9-14; 18:29; 20:3-6; 22:3). Milgrom observes that the כרת penalty is a divine one, where a person who sins against YHWH is "cut off" by YHWH.[426] Hagedorn notes potential connections between Zeph 1 and Ezekiel's use of the phrase כרתי מן with YHWH as the subject (e.g., Ezek 14:13, 17; 21:8; 25:13; 29:8; 35:7).[427] It is unclear whether the place – המקום – in Zeph 1:4 refers to the temple or Jerusalem; both are referred to as "this place" elsewhere in the biblical texts and the context of Zeph 1:4-5 does not give a clear indication either way.[428] Sweeney argues that it is more likely that המקום in Zeph 1:4-5 refers to the temple and he interprets YHWH's actions as a form of "cultic purification" of the temple.[429] Irsigler agrees, noting that in Deut 12:3 the names of other gods are to be blotted out "from this place," i.e., from the temple.[430] For someone to be cut off, or to

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[425] There is some disagreement about quite what the penalty of כרת means; it could mean childlessness, removal from YHWH's presence, death or loss of post-mortem rites; see the discussion in Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 457-60. In the Hiphil stem used in Zeph 1:4-5, כרת generally has the sense of destruction or extermination; "כרת," *HALOT* 2:500-501; "כרת," *DCH* 4:463-68. Whatever the exact connotations of the term, it is related to exclusion and identity and makes clear that the person in question could no longer benefit from inclusion in a community or society. As well as communal status, being "cut off" could also affect ritual status, if the individual was denied access to communal shrines or rites. As a result, their ability to communicate with their gods was affected and their ability to benefit from communal rituals — especially, perhaps, familial post-mortem rituals — would have been severely affected.

[426] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 457-60. The contrast between YHWH cutting off the כמרים in Zeph 1:4-5 and Josiah deposing them in 2 Kgs 23:5 has been noted by Wöhrle, who argues that Zeph 1 is a secondary allusion to Josiah's reform which does not mention Josiah in order to emphasise the judgement of YHWH and the need for repentance; Wöhrle, "'No Future," 623-25.

[427] A.C. Hagedorn, "When Did Zephaniah Become A Supporter of Josiah's Reform?" *JTS* 62 (2011): 453-75, 463.

[428] Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification," 406-409; E. Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study*, 62-63. Ben Zvi also notes that the phrase "from this place" (מן המקום הזה) commonly appears in Jeremiah (including Jer 19:12-13), but rarely elsewhere in the latter prophets (only Zeph 1:4; Hag 2:9) and thus the Zephaniah verse may have been influenced by Jeremiah. Holladay, however, argues that Jeremiah may have been influenced by Zephaniah; Holladay, "Reading Zephaniah," 672-73.

[429] M.A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets, Volume Two: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 502.

[430] Irsigler, *Zefanja*, 106.

exterminated as a consequence of cultic sins was, to some extent, a ritual act, designed to restore equilibrium in the social and cosmic order.[431] Thus, for YHWH to cut the כמרים off (hiphil) was a divine ritual act of destruction, intended to prevent further practice of incorrect rituals. YHWH's involvement also serves to highlight the faults with the Host of Heaven practices — the opposition toward them is not merely the word of the prophet but comes directly from YHWH himself, affording the polemic divine backing.

Deuteronomy 17:3 states that the Host of Heaven ritual practitioners should be executed so that the evil could be purged from the community (ובערת הרע מקרבך). This is the only text that states explicitly that the practitioners of Host worship should be executed; it may be interpreted in two ways. Blenkinsopp opts for a political interpretation, arguing that the execution of family members for cultic sins and the centralization of the sacrificial cult was designed to transfer allegiance from kinship groups to the state.[432] Others, however, argue that the execution of the individual was intended to protect the community from the danger that ensued from transgression of the covenant.[433] Deuteronomy demonstrates a deep concern for the protection of communal identity from internal dangers and instructs Israel multiple times to "destroy the evil from your midst" (e.g., Deut 13:6 [ET 13:5]; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21; 22:24; 24:27).[434] Stuhlman argues that "bad insiders" — those within the community who acted inappropriately — posed a threat because they ignored both divine and communal laws, transgressing social and cosmic boundaries intended to define Israel's identity by maintaining order and preventing chaos.[435] Worship of gods other than YHWH posed a threat to the community because, in following other gods, the individual abandons Israel's social model of God, king and

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[431] See Wright, *Disposal of Impurity*, for a detailed study of rites centred around the disposal of impurities and the importance of protecting sacred space from pollution.
[432] J. Blenkinsopp, "Deuteronomy and the Politics of Post-Mortem Existence," *VT* 45 (1995): 1-16.
[433] See especially Reeder, *Enemy in the Household*, 15-22.
[434] Crouch, *Making of Israel*, 120-28; Reeder, *The Enemy in the Household*, 4-15.
[435] Stuhlman, "Encroachment in Deuteronomy," 631-32.

people and shows a preference for external models.[436] Anyone who undermined Israelite identity and endangered Israel's standing with YHWH required the death penalty, to rebalance the cosmic order and remove the threat. Notably, whereas in other texts YHWH cuts off the ritual practitioners (e.g., Zeph 1:4-5) or brings enemies upon them (Jer 8:1-2; 19:13), in Deut 17:2-7 the community itself is required to identify and deal with such offenders.[437] The guilty parties are to be stoned at the city gate and thus cut off permanently from the people of Israel.[438] Communal participation in the execution served to repair the communal solidarity that had been threatened by the actions of the individual. In addition, communal participation would have also served to demonstrate the people's loyalty to YHWH and their rejection of those who worshipped other gods, with its attendant restorative impact on the cosmic order.

2 Kings 23:5 takes a different approach to the outcome of the Host of Heaven rituals. There, Josiah deposes the כמרים from their positions at the high places. In contrast to 2 Kgs 23:4, no mention is made of any destruction of the ritual objects, nor of any defilement of the high places (cf. 23:8, 13), or to the כמרים being killed or cut off (cf. 23:20). The contrast in the fate of the priests and the high places in 23:5 with that of 23:8, 13-14, 15-16, 20 may support Radine's observations of political (diplomatic) connections between the כמרים and the kings of Judah (cf. 23:5a).[439] Josiah tears down Judahite high places (23:8), or those built by Judahites (23:12-13), and slaughters the priests of Bethel (23:20), but he does not defile the high places of the כמרים, nor kill them. Whereas other texts attribute the judgement as a consequences of Host rituals to YHWH, foreign enemies or

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[436] Barrett, *Disloyalty and Destruction*, 209, 218.
[437] This is made clear through the second person address: "you" will inquire into the situation and "you" will stone the culprits to death.
[438] The city gate was a logical place to execute such individuals as it was a public location of judgement where the people could bear witness to events and it was also a liminal space between the chaos outside the city and the order within it. Those who were executed in the gate were thus removed from the communal order and given over to chaos; see further C. Quine, "On Dying in a City Gate: Implications in the Death of Eli, Abner and Jezebel," *JSOT* 40 (2016): 399-413.
[439] Radine, "The 'Idolatrous Priests,'" 35-38.

the community, 2 Kgs 23:5 uniquely emphasises that an individual — Josiah — brought about the end of the rituals.

Deuteronomy 4:19 takes a different stance again. This text is far more implicit than the others in this section, as it does not explicitly identify the outcome of Host of Heaven rituals. It does, however, associate them with foreign nations, which implies that those who practiced them would place themselves outside Israel and outside the YHWH-Israel relationship. Through their worship of the Host, the people would redefine their identity and become non-Israelite.

Thus far we have seen that the aforementioned texts all proclaim a negative outcome to Host of Heaven rituals for specific groups and individuals. Zephaniah 1:4-5 states that the כמרים will be cut off by YHWH, and Josiah deposes them from their position in 2 Kgs 23:5. Deuteronomy 17:2-7 declares that those who engage in Host rituals should be executed and places responsibility on the community to carry out the sentence. Deuteronomy 4:19, meanwhile, aligns those who practice rituals for the Host with foreign nations and thus redefines their identity through their rituals. In each of these cases, the consequences are not what the ritual practitioners would have expected. Rather than the rituals benefitting the worshippers, these texts claim that the rituals do precisely the opposite. They endanger the community, disrupt the social and cosmic order, undermine and redefine the identity of the individual and ultimately cause the downfall or death of the practitioners. The penalty in all cases is, ultimately, exclusion from the community of Israel, variously achieved through a loss of communal status, loss of Israelite identity or loss of life.

7.3.2 Entire Nations and Communities

Jeremiah 8:1-2 provides a list of groups that pronounces judgement on all the elites in Jerusalem for their participation in Host rituals. The passage states that the bones of all those who worshipped the Host will be disinterred and spread out on the earth, unshielded from the cycles of the

celestial bodies. The disinterment of corpses was a serious matter, as it prevented any possibility of post-mortem rituals being enacted.[440] Holladay observes that the Assyrian king Aššurbanipal's royal annals record desecration of graves during a punitive campaign to Elam, because the kings had rebelled against Assyria.[441] This grave desecration was intended punitively but was also ritually defiling.[442] McKane notes that the punishment of Jer 8:1-2 envisages a kind of *lex talionis*, wherein the bones were exposed to the effects of the elements and the heavenly bodies that they had worshipped as gods.[443] Thompson further observes that the exile meant that there would be no one to clear up the bones, which prolonged the severity of the judgement.[444] Ironically, therefore, the rituals the people practiced for the Host in the hope of beneficial outcomes would result, not in prolonged or improved life, but in the people's unburied corpses being spread out as a witness to their responsibility in bringing death upon the nation.[445] The scattering of bones was thus a pragmatically punitive and defiling act, but it was also a symbolically powerful one. Bones being spread out over an area would have clearly conveyed the judgement and power of the living over the dead. Jeremiah 8:1-2 picks up on this powerful image and prophesies about the fate of the dead to make a point to the living — their rituals for the Host would end in a fate worse than death and the Host of Heaven would not save them.

2 Kings 17:16 states that the people of the northern kingdom of Israel made cast images of two calves and an Asherah, worshipped all the Host of

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[440] For a recent study see C.L. Crouch, "Jehoiachin: Not a Broken Vessel but a Humiliated Vassal (Jer 22:28-30)," *ZAW* 129 (2017): 234-246, esp. 238-241 with further literature; see also C.B. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah* (FAT 79; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 11-132, 151, 161; F. Stavrakopoulou, *The Land of Our Fathers* (LHBOTS 473; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 109-12; F. Stavrakopoulou, "Gog's Grave and the Use and Abuse of Corpses in Ezekiel 39:11-20," *JBL* 129 (2010): 67-76.
[441] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 271-72.
[442] Crouch, "Jehoiachin," esp. 238-241. Bones and corpses were a defiling entity that rendered both people and locations unclean. They could thus be used strategically to put a ritual location out of use; e.g., 2 Kgs 23:14, 20; Ezek 6:5. For the defiling properties of corpses see, for example, Num 5:2; 6:6; 9:10; 19:13; 31:19; Lev 22:4.
[443] McKane, *Jeremiah I–XXV*, 181.
[444] Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 295.
[445] Clements, *Jeremiah*, 50, 52.

Heaven and served Ba'al. The immediately following verse (17:17) adds that they caused their children to go through fire and engaged in divination and augury. Because they provoked YHWH to anger with these practices, YHWH removed them from his sight and Judah alone was left (17:18). The emphasis on provocation places the blame for the ensuing catastrophe firmly on the people rather than on YHWH.[446] 2 Kings 17:7-23 also emphasises corporate responsibility for the participation in illegitimate rituals that caused the consequences of destruction and exile. All the people of Israel contributed to the events which befell them and thus the widespread suffering in the wake of 721 was justified. The passage focuses primarily on the exile of the people and the influx of foreign deportees, rather than the destruction of the city of Samaria or the loss of the kingdom (2 Kgs 17:18, 20, 23, 24-41). This emphasis on illegitimate rituals causing deportation and social upheaval stands in contrast to 2 Kgs 17:3-5, which presents the fall of Israel as the result of Hoshea's rebellion against the Assyrian king. A similar phenomenon is found in later chapters of Kings: 2 Kgs 24 and 25 both note a correlation between the rebellions of the Judahite kings and military responses by Babylon and their vassals. However, 2 Kgs 24:3-4 and 23:26-27 also override political or military interpretations with accusations of ritual failures by Manasseh.[447] Despite statements about Jehoiakim and Zedekiah's rebellions, these texts follow 2 Kings 17:7-23 in attributing the cause of destruction and deportations to ritual failures. Rather than espousing a message of corporate responsibility, however, these 2 Kgs 24:3-4 and 23:26-27 blame the actions of an individual. Despite this different identification of practitioners, 2 Kings 17:16, 24:3-4 and 23:26-27 combine to create a strong message associating the outcome of certain rituals — including those for the Host of Heaven — with the destruction of

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[446] S. Joo, *Provocation and Punishment: The Anger of God in the Book of Jeremiah and Deuteronomistic Theology* (BZAW 361; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 3-4.

[447] These stand in contrast to the reversal of Manasseh's actions by Josiah in 2 Kgs 23:1-20. There, Josiah destroys Manasseh's altars for the Host (23:12), the vessels (23:4), the Asherah (23:6), and deposed the priests of the high places (23:5, 8-9). As no other king is mentioned to have reinstated these cult practices post-Josiah, on the literary level Josiah's reform ended Manasseh's sins.

these nations and the deportation of the people. For the authors, these rituals did not uphold the social and cosmic order but had the opposite effect, causing the downfall of the kingdoms and turning society on its head. Neither the rituals nor the gods to whom they were practiced protected the people; instead, participation in these rituals angered YHWH and caused the people's deportation to foreign lands.

7.4 Destroying and Discarding Failed Rituals and their Practitioners

The polemical texts all agree that the outcomes of Host rituals are decidedly negative, attempting to persuade their audience not to engage in the rituals by inverting the usual expectations of their outcomes. Rather than protecting or benefiting the practitioners, the polemical texts claim that the rituals will cause their deaths (Deut 17:3), deportation (2 Kgs 17:16), deposition (2 Kgs 23:5), destruction (Zeph 1:4-5), redefine their identities as non-Israelite (Deut 4:19) and lead to a fate worse than death (Jer 8:1-2). Rather than upholding the social and cosmic order, they undermine and endanger it, necessitating destructive action to restore the balance (Jer 19:13; 2 Kgs 23:4; Deut 17:3) and remove the practitioners from the community (Zeph 1:4-5; 2 Kgs 17:16; 23:5; Jer 8:1-2; Deut 4:19; 17:3). Yet, the ways in which these negative outcomes of the Host rituals are envisaged (or portrayed) differ from text to text. Some limit the consequences to the individuals involved (Zeph 1:4-5; 2 Kgs 23:5; Deut 17:3), while others extend it to entire communities and nations (2 Kgs 17:16; Jer 8:1-2). Some present YHWH as enacting the necessary punishment or judgement (Jer 8:1-2; 19:13; Zeph 1:4-5; 2 Kgs 17:16) while others present humans as the agents of judgement (2 Kgs 23:4, 5; Deut 17:3).

All of the texts agree that the Host rituals were flawed or failed in some way, but they view the impact of these failures in different ways and present different solutions to the situation. To some extent, this is probably the result of different authors responding to different situations and directing their message toward different audiences. The range of topics that the

authors comment on is notable, however, as it demonstrates that different authors utilized polemic against ritual to achieve different goals. Thus, 2 Kgs 21 and 23 justify Josiah's reform, while later insertions blame Manasseh for the exile; Deut 17:2-7 innovates legal traditions, Deut 4:19 explicates the second commandment, Jer 19:13 prophesies coming the destruction and defilement of Jerusalem and 2 Kgs 17 explains the relationship between illegitimate rituals and national disaster. Despite these differences in agendas, underlying similarities between the texts demonstrate basic worldviews about ritual that all the authors held in common. For example, the texts all concur that "bad rituals" were a fundamental cause of social and cosmic upheaval that affected the people of Israel and Judah, their land, and their relationship with YHWH, though they express this point differently. In addition, the texts all concur — though, again, they express it differently — that the means of dealing with a "bad ritual" involved preventing its practice and removing the offending people or objects from the community. Ritual spaces that had become associated with idolatry must also be destroyed or defiled. These observations have implications for our understanding of the prevalence of ritual polemic during and after the final years of the kingdom of Judah. If beliefs about the relationship between flawed and failed rituals and social upheaval were widely known, then it is completely unsurprising that ritual polemics of various kinds would have multiplied in light of the crises of the long seventh century and especially in the wake of the disasters of 597 and 586.[448] Moreover, it suggests that the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportations of its people would have confirmed the basic worldviews of the people vis-à-vis ritual. The removal of the people and the destruction and defilement of ritual locations probably indicated — to those who were theologically minded — that the cause of these crises lay in flawed or failed rituals. The question would have been — which rituals had failed? Identifying the

[448] This was also not a new phenomenon; the history of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible clearly demonstrates that rituals had been connected with social upheaval for centuries. Polemic against "bad rituals" was thus a long-established part of Israelite rhetoric in prophetic circles.

flawed and failed rituals was vital in order for the community to respond to and change their situation.

The polemical texts considered in this study all identify the Host of Heaven amongst these flawed and failed rituals, even if it is not always clear quite what they refer to as the "Host of Heaven." As this chapter has shown, the authors all associate Host rituals with negative consequences, inverting the probable expectations of the worshippers and claiming that the rituals did not offer protection or benefits, but only destruction, death, deportation or removal from the Israelite community. It is likely that the authors drew on the circumstances around them to bolster their arguments that the Host rituals were flawed or failed; so, for example, Jer 19:13 uses the devastation of Jerusalem to argue that Host rituals had caused this destruction. The people's experiences are used as proof of the author's portrayal of these rituals. It is also worth noting that, while Host of Heaven rituals were often one amongst a number of illegitimate rituals singled out in these texts as flawed or failed, certain prominent rituals are never mentioned. Yahwistic sacrifice is a notable absentee — the authors never claim that Yahwistic sacrifices had not worked, but rather that the other rituals had caused so much sin that the people's sacrifices could not prevent the coming disaster. This seems to be a useful rhetorical technique of the authors, stating very clearly which rituals (they deemed to have) caused the social upheavals that the people had experienced — and, in doing so, deflecting attention away from rituals they did not want to be associated with these disasters. The overriding emphasis on the negative consequences of these rituals meant that, to some extent, the detailed form of the rituals and the identity of the Host of Heaven to whom they were offered did not really matter. What mattered was that the people, whether original audience or later readers, be made to understand that it was these rituals — and implicitly, not certain others — that had caused the negative consequences that Israel had experienced. As such, any ritual that could be construed as offered to the Host of Heaven (whatever their form) rather than to YHWH was identified as illegitimate; it must be stopped and its practitioners removed from the

community. Ending these rituals would restore the communal order and help to repair Israel's relationship with YHWH.

Thus, ritual's relationship to order explained the cause of Israel's suffering, but it also offered a way forward. Through identification of the rituals that had gone wrong and polemic urging the eradication of their practice the authors could lay out a program for change. The association of the Host of Heaven rituals with solely negative consequences justified the polemic against them and the attempts to end their practice, as well as deflecting attention from rituals that the authors believed to retain their efficacy and importance. The Host of Heaven rituals could become a scapegoat, minimising doubts about the efficacy of "correct" Yahwistic ritual practices. The claim that the Host rituals angered YHWH, who therefore brought about the downfall of Israel and Judah, suggests that ceasing to worship the Host would please YHWH — who might accordingly restore the people. Ritual offered explanations and solutions to Israel and Judah's struggles, although the identification of the flawed and failed rituals was not straightforward. The polemical authors agree that the Host rituals were to blame, at the same time that the very existence of this polemic indicates that not everyone agreed with their assessment of the situation.

8 Perceived Ritual Failure and the Development of the Biblical Texts

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that ritual stands at the heart of the biblical polemics against the Host. The authors invert expectations of ritual outcomes by associating rituals for the Host of Heaven with negative consequences for the practitioners, their community and the ritual locations themselves. They thereby sought to change their audiences' perception of these rituals. By being associated with disasters, the Host rituals are presented as flawed and as having failed. They were associated with foreigners (Zeph 1:4-5; 2 Kgs 23:5; Deut 4:19), they could not save the people from disaster (Jer 8:1-2), they broke the covenant with YHWH (2 Kgs 17:16; Deut 17:3) and their practice led to the defilement of their locations (Jer 19:13).[449] The biblical authors regularly abbreviate and omit details of these rituals, in order to emphasise their negative outcomes and limit the audience's ability to disagree with the rituals' portrayal. This abbreviation contrasts with the lengthy descriptions of "legitimate" Yahwistic rituals and ritual locations that are preserved elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. While detailed descriptions of "legitimate" rituals are provided to permit them to be practiced, or at least imagined, the Host rituals are abbreviated so much that they cannot be practiced or even imagined. The reader cannot reflect on the ritual process, only on their destructive consequences. In this respect, the Host of Heaven polemics cohere in their portrayals of the Host rituals and their consequences. Yet they differ in others. Different language is used to describe the rituals, different ritual practitioners and locations are identified as involved in them and the negative consequences manifest in different ways. While this suggests agreement about the rituals identified as problematic, it also

[449] I refer to "social upheaval" throughout this chapter, but it should be remembered that this upheaval could be of different kinds in different contexts — it could refer to a "reform" of normative ritual traditions enacted by a king, the unexpected death or deportation of a king, invasion, destruction or exile. "Social upheaval" as used here does not imply that the same events underlie the texts being spoken about; the term covers a range of potential events.

suggests that there was ambiguity about who was responsible for the rituals' failure and what the consequences of this failure were or would be.

8.1 Ambiguity and Negotiation

As demonstrated previously, ritual plays a vital role in creating, maintaining and legitimising worldviews, but this produces cognitive dissonance when expectations about ritual outcomes do not match reality.[450] If the experiential world cannot sustain the worldview espoused in rituals, the legitimacy and efficacy of the rituals and the worldviews they construct are called into question.[451] Social upheaval, in particular, has a significant impact on perceptions of ritual and may lead to rituals being deemed to have failed and subsequently discarded.[452] Yet, it is not always obvious which rituals or practitioners are at fault in the production of such upheaval. If a society has multiple ritual systems, it may be difficult to distinguish which is the cause of the problem. In addition, people may simply disagree over which rituals are dysfunctional. This ambiguity results in negotiation amongst ritual actors and controllers, which may manifest in a variety of ways. Negotiations could entail a communal effort to identify the failures, such as investigations into ritual performances or requesting a sign from the gods.[453] Alternatively, it may be reflected in polemic — in arguments between different parties, each accusing the other of ritual failure.[454] These disagreements can have an important impact on power relations within a society; if one group's or one individual's rituals are deemed to have failed, they may cede ritual control to others — even to their accusers.[455]

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[450] See 2.4 and Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 86-110.
[451] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, 134; Alexander, "An Afterthought," 210.
[452] This upheaval need not be caused by destruction. Geertz demonstrates that incongruity caused by the development of part of society may cause rituals connected to a less or differently developed part of society to fail; C. Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 142-69.
[453] E.g., Polit, "Social Consequences."
[454] E.g., Hauser-Schaüblin, "Rivalling Rituals."
[455] Hauser-Schaüblin, "Rivalling Rituals," 268-70; Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, 77-101. Kaulana observes that ambiguity could prove a useful tool for early Confucians, allowing them to strengthen their social status by using ambiguity over ritual failure to avoid

Accusations of ritual failure can thus reflect or prompt a change in the power structures of a community.[456] What results from the identification of ritual failure differs depending on context, and a variety of outcomes are possible. Ritual practitioners who have engaged in or caused ritual failure may perform corrective rites or undergo corrective procedures. They may lose their authority, temporarily or permanently — or, in the case of ancient Israel, they may be deported, killed or executed. The rituals themselves may be corrected via other rites, discarded completely, or changed in some respect, leading to refined or even entirely new ritual traditions.[457] The process of textualization of ritual opens up still further doors for developments — existing ritual texts may be altered to reflect new perspectives, or new ritual texts may be created.[458] In addition, as Buc and others have shown, texts possess the ability to (mis-)frame their portrayals of ritual for rhetorical gain — a fact that should be borne in mind when dealing with accusations of ritual failure in the Hebrew Bible.[459]

A clear example of ambiguity and negotiation over ritual failure is seen in Jer 44:15-30. In Jer 44 the people are unhappy with their situation in Egypt and declare a desire to return to worship of the Queen of Heaven, as things were better for them when they practiced rituals for her (Jer 44:17-18).[460] The people do not state explicitly that Yahwistic rituals have failed,

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responsibility for ritual failures and claim that the failures were other people's fault or no one's fault; Kaulana, *Dysfunction of Ritual*, 130-32.

[456] See, for example, M. Rudolph, "Failure of Ritual Reinvention? Efficacious New Rituals among Taiwan Aborigines under the Impact of Religious Conversion and Competition between Elites," in *When Rituals Go Wrong*, 25-35, 27-32; Kerzter, *Ritual, Politics*, 134, 151-73; McClymond, *Ritual Gone Wrong*, 175-77.

[457] Ritual failure can thus be a creative force, contributing to the ongoing dynamism of ritual; McClymond, *Ritual Gone Wrong*, 180. For a biblical example, see R. Achenbach, "The Empty Throne and the Empty Sanctuary: From Aniconism to the Invisibility of God in Second Temple Theology," in *Ritual Innovation*, 35-54.

[458] So, MacDonald, "Ritual Innovation," 73-75; Bell, "Ritualization of Texts."

[459] Buc demonstrates how ritual can be manipulated for the author's purpose in *Dangers of Ritual*, 55-87; see also Smit, "Ritual Failure," 9-12; Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, 29. Hüsken draws attention to "distorted relational aspects," frequently found within negative portrayals of rituals, wherein elements are presented as dissonant — a ritual is offered to the wrong person, or is comprised of the wrong substance, or offered by the wrong person. If the elements are not in harmony then rituals are easily portrayed as flawed; Hüsken, "Ritual Dynamics," 347.

[460] Some manuscripts add an aleph to MT's למכלת השׁמים, rendering it למלאכת. As the LXX commonly translates מלאכת/מלאכים and צבאות/צבא in the same way, this has led to

but their desire to change their ritual practice indicates dissatisfaction with the outcome of their current practices.[461] Jeremiah critiques this, however, claiming that the rituals to the Queen of Heaven had angered YHWH, who sent the people into exile (Jer 44:20-23). The negotiation between Jeremiah and the people over which rituals had caused the current situation is indicative of theological ambiguity; if it was obvious which rituals had led to negative outcomes, there would be no debate. In this light it is worth noting that Jeremiah represents the minority view. The majority are of the opinion that rituals for the Queen of Heaven represent the best chance of changing their circumstances.[462] Yet, despite Jeremiah representing the minority view, the text conspires to make the reader agree with the prophet. This is achieved through the dialogue being framed by oracles from YHWH supporting the prophet's perspective (44:11-14, 24-30) and by the inversion of the people's argument concerning YHWH. Whereas the people seem to view YHWH as unable or unwilling to change their circumstances, Jeremiah explains that YHWH is punishing them for their sins.

The identity of the Queen of Heaven is obscure and has long been debated, with arguments variously identifying her as Astarte, ʻAnat, Ištar, or a combination of female deities.[463] I suggest, however, that the identity of the Queen has been left deliberately obscure by the author.[464] "Queen of

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Jeremiah's "Queen of Heaven" at times being translated "Host of Heaven"; see the discussion in McKane, *Jeremiah I-XXV*, 170-71. Elsewhere in MT, however, the מלאכים are clearly distinguished from the צבא השמים (e.g., Ps 103:20-21), which indicates that the reading "Queen of Heaven" should be retained.

[461] Allen, *Jeremiah*, 447.

[462] This is also seen in the contrast between the perceived blessing and protection from the goddess and the judgement and apparent inactivity of YHWH; W.E. Rast, "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven," in *Scripture and Theology: Essays in Honor of J. Coert Rylaarsdam* (eds. A.L. Merrill and T.W. Overholt; Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1977), 167-80, 175-76.

[463] For an overview of proposals see Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree*, 6-35, 8-10; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 254-55; G.L. Keown, P.J. Scalise and T.G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52* (WBC 27; Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 267-68. Differently, Ellis argued that the Queen or "Sovereign" of heaven could be YHWH, although this seems unnecessarily ingenious; T.A. Ellis, "Jeremiah 44: What if the Queen of Heaven is YHWH?" *JSOT* 33 (2009): 465-88.

[464] Craigie, Kelley and Drinkard Jr. also conclude that the identity of the Queen cannot be uncovered from these texts (*Jeremiah 1-25*, 123) and Leuchter argues that the Queen is "a generic reference to astral goddesses worshipped in the pre-Josianic period" (*Polemics of Exile*, 132).

Heaven" is a title, not a name — it reflects the status of the deity rather than the deity's specific identity. The point in Jer 44, I suggest, is a broader one about perceptions of ritual in a context of theological ambiguity, rather than a polemic against a specific cult. The author uses the Queen of Heaven as a foil to argue that rituals directed to deities other than YHWH were not the answer to the current situation, even if they had previously seemed beneficial. The lack of specificity means that the Queen of Heaven can represent any major deity or cult that the people of Judah previously worshipped. Regardless of the Queen's identity, the prophet's point remains: YHWH is Israel's god and the people should worship him correctly.

Leuchter argues that Jer 44 delineates which "ideology pertains to proper Israelite identity (Jeremiah's oracles) and which does not (the people's refutation)."[465] In his interpretation, proper Israelite identity is associated with the community in Babylon, whereas the community in Egypt are presented as foreign through their residence in a foreign land, worship of a non-Yahwistic deity and their association with a foreign king, namely, Hophra (44:30).[466] Yet, for our purposes, it is worth emphasising that the primary means of communicating the foreignness of the people's identity is via a dialogue about ritual.[467] The author uses this dialogue to define correct Israelite identity by delineating between outsiders and insiders based on ritual practice. The rituals for the Queen of Heaven are also redefined — presented as having been a part of the people's former ritual traditions, but illegitimate in the current circumstances and the cause of recent social upheavals. As the people are not permitted a response to Jeremiah's refutation (44:20-23), the legitimacy of the rituals is undermined, along with

[465] Leuchter, *Polemics of Exile*, 132-34.
[466] Leuchter, *Polemics of Exile*, 134-35.
[467] Jeremiah 44 accuses the people of engaging in flawed rituals — they committed "abominations" (התועבת), "burned offerings" (קטרתם) and sinned (חטאתם) before YHWH. Crouch notes that "abominations" (תועבת) often appear in contexts of identity formation in the Hebrew Bible, serving to identify that which falls outside of Israel's boundaries; C.L. Crouch, "What Makes a Thing Abominable? Observations on the Language of Boundaries and Identity Formation from a Social Science Perspective," *VT* 65 (2015): 516-41. Here, the people are located outside of Israelite identity through their ritual practice.

the status of their practitioners. The textualization of ritual is vital to this process of redefinition, presenting the reader with a carefully constructed "dialogue" that champions the minority view represented by the prophet.

Jeremiah 44 never mentions the Host of Heaven, but it provides an excellent example of the power of a textualized polemic against ritual. Like the Queen of Heaven, the identity of the Host of Heaven is obscure, permitting them to serve as a foil for whatever deities or cultic tradition the authors had in mind. Rituals for the Host of Heaven are also used to delineate identity, both of the people of Israel and Judah and of YHWH. Like the Queen, worship of the Host identifies people as foreign, whereas the Host's worship of YHWH identifies him as all-powerful. Like the offerings for the Queen, the rituals for the Host are identified as a cause of social upheaval, with no room for disagreement. Yet, the texts polemicizing against the Host rituals do not themselves reflect a consensus over who was to blame for the rituals and their outcomes — nor even what these outcomes were. This ambiguity may reflect historical circumstances, or it may be a rhetorical device utilised by the authors to consolidate their own authority.[468] By identifying a long-dead king or foreigners as responsible for ritual failures, others may be absolved of them. Alternatively, entire communities could be identified as responsible, necessitating a shared response to the situation. Ambiguity is key: if the answer to which rituals caused social upheaval in ancient Israel and Judah were self-evident, the polemic would not exist. The polemics attempt to resolve this ambiguity by offering their own interpretation of these events and identifying rituals associated with the Host as the cause of the crisis.

8.2 Ritual as Cause of and Solution to Crisis

Ritual arises from chaos and exists to resolve it.[469] As such, there is always anxiety underlying ritual performance and a risk inherent in its practice, for

[468] E.g., Kaulana, *Dysfunction of Ritual*, 130.
[469] Gorman Jr., *Ideology of Ritual*, 29, 80; Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 26; Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 140.

failed ritual may unveil the disorder that ritual masks and reveal that the society that constructed it (and that it constructs) is arbitrary and contrived.[470] The danger is increased for religious rituals, because failed ritual in a religious context questions the validity of the religious construct.[471] Yahwistic rituals in ancient Israel and Judah presuppose a YHWH-Israel relationship that required that the people worship YHWH, who protected and blessed the people in return. The polemics against the Host of Heaven blame the Host rituals for disrupting this relationship. Some connect their practice explicitly with breaking the covenant (2 Kgs 17:14-18), justifying the downfall of Israel and Judah and the exile of the people as YHWH's punitive response to covenantal infractions. Others more generally refer to the Host rituals as rejecting or provoking YHWH (2 Kgs 21; Jer 19:4-13; Zeph 1:4-5). These disruptions to the cosmic sphere were mirrored in the earthly sphere in the form of social upheaval and the punishment of ritual practitioners.[472]

The downfall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah are sometimes allowed to have been caused by political decisions which provoked military responses (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:3-6; 23:29-36; 24:1-2; 25:1-7). These occasional political interpretations, however, are significantly outweighed by the number of texts stating that Israel and Judah's ritual and cultic misdemeanours were to blame.[473] This is usually interpreted in terms of theological interpretation, designed to explain circumstances whilst upholding belief in YHWH as supreme god and contributing to the rise of monotheism.[474] However, explaining these negative events in terms of ritual specifically laid the foundation for future action in a way that political interpretations could not. Within a political-military interpretation, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah fell due to bad political decisions and their

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[470] Moore and Myerhoff, "Secular Ritual," 17-18.
[471] Moore and Myerhoff, "Secular Ritual," 12; Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 26-28.
[472] Gorman Jr., *Ideology of Ritual*, 80.
[473] See, for example, the range of texts explored in Middlemas, *Templeless Judah*; Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree*.
[474] See the overview of scholarly reconstructions of the exile's impact on the development of monotheism in Gnuse, *No Other Gods*, 62-128.

weakness compared to the strength of other nations around them. This paradigm entails little hope for the future. Any hope of restoration would have to involve seismic changes in the ancient Near East; there was little the people could do to change their situation. A ritual paradigm offers much more hope. If the people's situation was brought about by their own cultic failings, then correction of the failures could change the circumstances going forward.

Weitzman highlights the creativity of biblical writers that enabled Yahwism to survive the centuries.[475] He does not touch directly on our texts, but he does discuss ways in which strategies such as storytelling in Ezra-Nehemiah could identify ways to "salvage the Temple without surrendering one's fate to foreign rule."[476] I propose that a focus on ritual was another strategy employed by the biblical authors to explain social upheavals whilst retaining control of the situation. Identifying the cause of Israel and Judah's problems as flawed and failed rituals detracted from the importance of other nations' military and political victories, as well as the perceived victories of their gods. It also permitted YHWH to retain his status, as the issue lay with the people, not their god. It also offered hope for the future, because ritual failures could be corrected, or rituals could be adapted to new situations.[477] This paradigm of ritual failure was highly useful, therefore, in the wake of social upheavals. Ritual failure also had the advantage of being a concept already familiar to Israel and Judah, which did not require great theological changes to develop and make use of. Ritual and thus the threat of ritual failure was already a well-established part of Israel and Judah's worldviews.

Explaining social upheaval as the consequence of ritual failure also offered an opportunity for Yahwistic ritual specialists and their rituals to

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[475] S. Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege: Cultural Persistence in Jewish Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[476] Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege*, 15. De Hulster offers also the paradigm of appropriation of symbols reflecting other deities' status — especially the sun — to maintain YHWH's importance; e.g., I.J. de Hulster, *Illuminating Images: An Iconographic Method of Old Testament Exegesis with Three Cases Studies from Third Isaiah* (PhD Dissertation; Utrecht: Universiteit Utrecht, 2008), 334-40; see also Anderson, *Monotheism*.

[477] As Gruenwald states, "rituals are empowered to create and establish changes in both realities, physical and spiritual alike"; Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 17-18.

remain relevant. We will explore this more in the next section; here it is worth noting that the polemics against the Host of Heaven deflect accusations of failure away from Yahwism and onto all other rituals. Yahwistic rituals thus evade accusations of failure, permitting them to retain notions of efficacy despite upheavals to the social and cosmic order. Ritual failure thus probably provided a natural explanation of social upheavals in ancient Israel and Judah, although the rituals that were deemed to have failed depended on a process of negotiation following ambiguity over ritual efficacy. Many people may have thought that it was the Yahwistic rituals — especially the temple cult — that had failed in the wake of 586, but the polemical texts cohere in their deflection of this criticism onto other rituals.

8.3 Textualized Rituals and Ritual Control

Biblical ritual texts are literary artefacts that follow literary strategies.[478] This does not mean that they contain no historical information about ritual or the society it reflects, but it does mean that interpreters must consider the literary nature of the texts at hand.[479] Treating texts about rituals *as texts* means that we cannot assume that the portrayal of ritual within them is historical, or even accurate.[480] This, then, brings us back to Brett's discussion of motives and intentions — a text may portray a particular view of a ritual (a "communicative intention"), but the motive behind the creation of this document must be explored in order to understand it properly.[481] In particular, we must ask three questions. First, we must ask whether the

[478] Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 154.
[479] Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 189.
[480] Wright argues that, just as historians have difficulty reconstructing biblical history on the basis of "historiographical" biblical texts, so too should those studying ritual expect difficulties in reconstructing rituals or applying social theory to ritual texts; Wright, "Ritual Theory, Ritual Texts," 199-200. However, these difficulties do not mean that the task is thankless, as the constant advances in our understanding of Israelite and Judahite history have shown.
[481] Brett, "Motives and Intentions," 5. This is no easy task, thanks to the diversity of ideologies in the biblical texts — some of which are explicit, but many of which are never stated (so Wright, "Ritual Theory, Ritual Texts," 199). Reflecting on *why* a text has been created may thus offer insights into its interpretation.

portrayal of ritual matches what we know of historical reality — is historical depiction or some other motive prioritised?[482] Second, we must question why *this ritual*, or *this portrayal of ritual* was textualized — what does the text seek to achieve?[483] Third, as Frick and Olyan point out, we should also ask, *Cui bono?* Who benefits from this text and the portrayal of rituals within it?[484] Considering these questions allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the rituals recorded in the texts, and proves particularly useful for interpretation of polemics against ritual. As McClymond observes, ritual disruption draws attention to what is at stake in the control and performance of ritual.[485] The stakes are high in these texts: the interpretation of Israel's history, of Israel's identity, of Israel's faith in YHWH, and of the efficacy and legitimacy of Yahwistic rituals are all up for debate.

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that our authors used their freedom of textual expression to be creative in their portrayals of the Host of Heaven rituals.[486] They abbreviate and omit details to suit their agendas, place the Host of Heaven alongside other high-profile targets of polemic (e.g., Asherah and Ba'al) to discredit their worship, invert expectations of ritual outcomes and ascribe only negative consequences to their practice. They identify ritual practitioners in ways that suit their message, whether that means blaming a dead king for later problems (2 Kgs 21; 23:26-27), supporting the removal of foreign cultic practitioners (2 Kgs 23:5; Zeph 1:4-5), or proclaiming corporate responsibility for negative events (Jer 8:1-2; 19:13). Some of these elements may reflect historical reality, but others

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[482] Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 31-32.
[483] Watts notes that rituals rarely required explanation until they were contested; Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 34-35.
[484] F.S. Frick, "*Cui Bono?* — History in the Service of Political Nationalism: The Deuteronomistic History as Political Propaganda," *Semeia* 66 (1994): 79-93; Olyan, "Two Types of Ritual Innovation."
[485] McClymond, *Ritual Gone Wrong*, 179.
[486] This should be no surprise — Grimes notes that ritual can be traditional, creative and invented and that it is ever changing (*Reading, Writing*, 8).

most likely reflect the prioritisation of the author's own agenda.[487] As we have seen, authorial agendas differ from text to text, including supporting certain royal innovations in ritual practice (2 Kgs 23), updating legal processes (Deut 17:2-7), explaining destruction and deportation (2 Kgs 17:16; Jer 19:13) and explaining the second commandment (Deut 4:19). This range of purposes and agendas testifies to the rhetorical flexibility of accusations of ritual failure or impropriety. Declarations that certain rituals were flawed or failed served a whole range of purposes: some theological, some political, and most a combination of both. Moreover, the more rituals that could be blamed, the more Yahwistic rituals could be distanced from accusations of failure. Gruenwald draws attention to the fact that rituals embedded in tradition "project a form of guarantee, enabled by the presence of their ongoing existential stability."[488] The polemical authors reverse this paradigm, using ongoing existential instability to undermine any notion that the Host rituals could guarantee such stability. This raises the question of whether the Host of Heaven rituals were actually widely perceived to have been flawed or failed — or if they were victims of attempts to preserve faith in YHWH and the authority of the Yahwistic ritual system in light of crisis. As Haüser-Schaublin has demonstrated, accusations of ritual failure are a powerful tool in political negotiations.[489] At any time, a loss of ritual control for one party opens the door for new ritual controllers to take the stage. Evidence of negotiations over correct ritual performance often betrays underlying political tensions between competing groups.[490] In this respect Kertzer usefully discusses "rituals of revolution," observing that ritual's role in facilitating solidarity and legitimacy means that ritual is even more important to those who wish to challenge ritual controllers than it is to long-

[487] History and motive need not be — and, indeed, are unlikely to be — exclusive; the question is whether historical reality or motive is the primary factor in a text's portrayal of ritual.
[488] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 30.
[489] Haüser-Schaublin, "Rivalling Rituals." See also Kertzer, who states that "rituals are far more than a means of communicating the result of political struggles in other arenas. Rituals have their own power and are themselves an important field of political struggle"; Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, 102-24, 25.
[490] Haüser-Schaublin, "Rivalling Rituals," 268-29.

established political organizations.[491] Similarly, Platvoet observes that "ritual expression of boundaries and relative group status is particularly prominent when groups are engaged in competition."[492] These are provocative observations to bear in mind as we consider who benefits from these polemics against ritual. The polemics are overtly and overwhelmingly interested in ritual — yet, they do not proclaim an established history of ritual authority, as do Priestly texts or Deuteronomy.[493] A loss of ritual control and authority following the death and deportation of kings, the deportation of priests in 597 or the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 586 would have opened the door for the ritual arena of ancient Judah to become a battleground for the negotiation of ritual authority and identity. These polemics seek to persuade their audiences that Host rituals are fundamentally flawed, arguing that the Host of Heaven rituals and their practitioners must be removed from the community, either through human or divine intervention. This removal will protect the community's holiness — but, in the process, it will also (re)locate ritual control among a different group of people, namely, the non-Host worshippers.

In this vein, we should specifically consider the role of texts as agents of ritual change and ritual control. Recall again Bell's discussion of Master Lu's canonisation of Taoist literature during a time of crisis.[494] This revised canon was not intended to solve the immediate socio-historical situation, in which Taoism flourished in North China and "traditional mediumistic" cults flourished in the South, but was intended to offer a ritual path between both.[495] Master Lu used formal Taoist ritual concepts to address the concerns of both sides, producing a canon designed to control ritual practices and negate dissent and competition.[496] By prescribing a particular ritual programme, Master Lu eased dissonance between rival groups and

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[491] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, 151-73, 152-53.
[492] Platvoet, "Ritual in Plural," 40.
[493] This may be because the texts have diverse authorship or may reflect the formation of a newer group staking a claim to ritual control. Both options, or a combination of the two, may be more relevant depending on the text.
[494] Bell, "The Ritualization of Texts."
[495] Bell, "The Ritualization of Texts," 370-71.
[496] Bell, "The Ritualization of Texts," 373-74.

defined Taoist ritual authority.[497] Notably, this was achieved through appeals to existing tradition, even as Master Lu altered these received traditions. In the biblical context, ritual texts are similarly prominent in and around times of upheaval. Jeremiah and 1-2 Kings both reference and discuss authoritative texts and prophetic texts and their revision seem to have been especially prevalent in periods of crisis, and parts of the Priestly texts and the Pentateuch were also composed and edited in the context of the exilic and post-exilic periods.[498] During these periods of crisis the loss of centralized ritual control and the resulting ambiguities over ritual practice likely contributed to the prevalence of ritual texts seeking to offer explanations of these upheavals.[499]

8.4 Ritual Failure and the Development of the Biblical Texts

Ritual theory underscores the relationship between politics and ritual, elucidating the ways in which ritual upholds hierarchical societies and affords authority and legitimacy to those in power.[500] The central importance of ritual in politics, however, can prove a double-edged sword, as manipulation of ritual, or perceptions of ritual failure, offers opportunities for others to oust or undermine those in power.[501] Failed rituals can result in a loss of authority, legitimacy and ritual control.[502] Accusations of ritual failure are thus powerful tools in the negotiation of power structures within

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[497] Bell, "The Ritualization of Texts," 379-87.
[498] Leuchter draws attention to the way the Book of Jeremiah became a "surrogate sanctuary" — a place in which texts were recorded, studied, questioned, retransmitted and expanded ("Pen of Scribes," 22-23). Similar processes seem to have taken place in some Priestly texts and, perhaps, in the collection and editing of texts now called the Deuteronomistic History.
[499] Not least because texts were elite documents that could be disseminated amongst diaspora communities.
[500] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, esp. 77-184; Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 97-98, 142; Alexander, "An Afterthought," 212.
[501] Buc, *Dangers of Ritual*, 15-87, Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, 29, 134, 160-68; Lukes, "Political Ritual," 301-02; Hauser-Schaüblin, "Rivalling Rituals," 268-69; Hüsken, "Ritual Dynamics," 347.
[502] Hüsken, "Ritual Dynamics," 340.

and between social groups.[503] These observations suggest that the ritual polemics in the Hebrew Bible should be analysed with attention to the information about the power struggles and tensions they betray.[504] These sorts of questions are commonly asked with reference to the prophets, but the polemical texts analysed here also offer provocative food for thought. For example: although the Books of Kings appear to prioritise the power of the monarchs over the priesthood, the authors of the polemical texts strongly critique the ritual practice of these kings. This implicitly identifies the authors themselves as the highest ritual authorities — it is the authors, not the kings, who determine what is and is not "correct" ritual. Yet, these authors remain anonymous, using their construction of the history of Israel and Judah to augment their authority rather than claiming descent from the authorities of ancient tradition in order to support the ritual programme they advocate. This raises questions about their actual status in society, particularly whether these authors would have been considered ritual authorities of the status they lay claim to.[505] Kertzer notes that revolutionary or resistance rituals are "best catalysed either by pre-existing ritual specialists and the transformation of pre-existing rites, or by leaders who pioneer new ways of generating ritual forms."[506] In which category might

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[503] Baumann, "Ritual Implicates 'Others,'" 98-99; Polit, "Social Consequences," 200-201; Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 53-55. Lukes ("Political Ritual," 302) argues that consideration of political ritual should examine the ways in which ritual serves as a means of social control, reinforcing and perpetuating the dominant models of social structures. This view of ritual is similar to the public transcript that Strine (*Sworn Enemies*, 26-39) draws attention to.

[504] Alexander, "An Afterthought," 212, and see also MacDonald's discussion of Ezekiel 44's polemic against foreigners in the temple (*Priestly Rule*, 23-38). As Wright states, the Priestly-Holiness corpus was created in dialogue with its sociocultural environment and in reaction to it ("Ritual Theory, Ritual Texts," 207). The polemical texts are no different. McClymond observes that ritual is often a means for one group to establish dominance over others (*Ritual Gone Wrong*, 176); ritual and politics are thus inextricably linked.

[505] In some of our cases, the polemical texts resist what they see as the status quo (e.g., Jer 8:1-2 claims that all the elites of Jerusalem worshipped the Host; 2 Kgs 17 claims that all the northern kingdom worshipped them; 2 Kgs 23:4 refers to practices in the Jerusalem temple; Zeph 1:4-5 and Jer 19:13 locate the practices in Jerusalem; and 2 Kgs 23:5 and Jer 8:1-2 mention royal support for the practices). If so, then perhaps we could make a case for the Host of Heaven being part of the public transcript (Strine, *Sworn Enemies*, 31) of ancient Judah, reflecting ritual practices of the elites. Yet, the polemics use this transcript to rebel against it, stating that the rituals will bring about destruction, not salvation.

[506] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics*, 169.

our polemical authors belong? The polemical texts resist common ritual practices and are strongly invested in a particular, transformed, kind of Yahwism, but claim no specific authority for their programme.[507] We recall, however, that texts can create their own authority, which makes them a powerful tool in societies where few were literate enough to read them.[508] Ritual texts were powerful tools that could take pre-existing traditions and establish them as authoritative, discarding rituals the author deemed ineffective or dangerous.[509] Texts can also be constantly innovated, updated, and edited, with new innovations being projected into earlier times, creating authority through attachment to (purported) literary antiquity.[510] They can also be disseminated to a wider audience than their authors may reach in their own lifetimes, and can provide a point of reference in times of social or theological ambiguity.[511] Bell defines "textualization" as "the generation of textual objects that structure social interactions around their use and transmission."[512] As such, ritual texts are often ritualizing — they impact people's ritual practice, directing and dictating it, and can form local communities based around their use and structured according to their content.[513] Ritual texts are also a means of transferring, enacting and affirming the values that define groups.[514] They are thus vital in the construction of identities, especially of elite groups.[515]

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[507] Their adaptation of existing discourses allowed their message to survive and pre-existing discourses to remain effective. Adaptation of dominant discourse for survival is common, not just in ancient Israel (e.g., Strine, *Sworn Enemies*), but also in other communities where cult became a dominant force in the negotiation of political struggles: e.g., K. Mata, "Colonial Entanglements and Cultic Heterogeneity on Rome's Germanic Frontier," in *Ritual Failure: Archaeological Perspectives*, 131-54, 136.

[508] Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 199-203, 214-15; Leuchter, "Politics of Ritual Rhetoric," 347; Bell, "Ritualization of Texts," 390-91.

[509] Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 29-31, 214-15; Leuchter, "Politics of Ritual Rhetoric," 346-48; Bell, "Ritualization of Texts," 369, 390-92.

[510] Bergen, *Reading Ritual*, 78-79; MacDonald, *Priestly Rule*, 111-13, 146-50; Småberg, "The Ritual Battle," 167-69.

[511] Bell, "Ritualization of Texts," 369, 387, 392.

[512] Bell, "Ritualization of Texts," 390.

[513] Bell, "Ritualization of Texts," 391-92. Watts (*Ritual and Rhetoric*, 2-3) defines ritual texts as "texts that describe or mandate" the performance of rituals. Prescription of ritual performance necessarily structures social relations.

[514] Småberg, "The Ritual Battle," 177.

[515] Småberg, "The Ritual Battle," 177.

I contend that the polemics against the Host of Heaven should be considered in this light. They do not all reflect the same authorship, background, or exact understanding of the consequences of Host rituals. Yet, they all claim that the Host rituals have failed or were flawed, such that their practice threatens the efficacy of other, Yahwistic rituals. They all abbreviate the details of the Host rituals to serve their own rhetorical purposes.[516] And they all involve power plays, intimately connected with ritual practice.[517] These texts are inherently ritualizing — they seek not just to persuade the reader of their worldview but to translate the acceptance of that worldview into action.[518] They seek to structure society through their use of ritual; Host of Heaven worshippers are deemed non-Israelite, even if they had lived in Israel or Judah all their lives. Even kings could be classed as idolaters and subordinated to correct ritual practitioners. Through their polemic against other ritual practices, our polemical texts implicitly prescribe certain ritual practices as "correct" — staking their claim for control of Israel's rituals and, thereby, for control of the definition of

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[516] Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 61, 67-68, 130, 177-78, 188-89; Janzen, *Social Meanings of Sacrifice*, 151; Bergen, *Reading Ritual*, 6-7. Watts (*Ritual and Rhetoric*, 29) rather excellently states that, rather than complaining about abbreviation of ritual details, we should focus on what details *are* included in our texts and ask *why* they are included. To this I would add that the abbreviation of ritual details should not be an excuse for the avoidance of studying texts concerned with ritual via a ritual paradigm. Abbreviation of ritual details does not render a text non-ritual.

[517] Hendel notes that prophetic critiques of ritual were "of a piece with their critical discourse about society" ("Away from Ritual," 77-78), which modern scholars tend to see as (falsely) isolated from their social and political contexts. Ritual negotiates, establishes and communicates borders and identity (Platvoet, "Ritual, 37, 40); politics, social discourse and ritual thus go hand in hand. The polemics against the Host of Heaven should therefore be studied with reference to all of these, ritual included.

[518] As did the prophetic critiques of ritual, see Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 70-77, and see also his comments on the strategic dimension of ritual (*Bridging the Gap*, 224-25), drawing from Platvoet, "Ritual," 35-37, 40. Watts argues that Leviticus 1-7 seeks to persuade the readers and hearers that the instructions of the text were normative and thus should be followed; Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 62. Gorman Jr. acknowledges that "ritualizing activity has indeed been thought about and inscribed into the Bible. Such thinking and writing may well reveal ritualizing dynamics and structures"; Gorman Jr., "Ritual Studies," 29.

Israel.[519] Highlighting *what not to do* drew attention, albeit implicit, to what *ought to be done*.[520] In this sense, "failure is an integral part of order."[521]

Undoubtedly, the textualization of these polemics empowered their authors, by enabling their message to survive when opposing views did not. Their abbreviation of the Host rituals also effectively prevented their reconstruction — not just for modern scholars, but also for the generations of Israelites who following the cultic instructions drawn from these scrolls. Without further details or dialogue preserved in textual form, the Host rituals faded from memory and lost their legitimacy.[522] Through the textualization of their message and the development of these texts as agents of ritual change, the authors eventually succeeded in achieving their objectives.

The persuasiveness of these polemics is found, I suggest, in their use of ritual. Ancient Israel was a highly ritualistic society, well aware of the dangers of ritual failure, the necessity of correct ritual practice and the fear of angering the gods. The polemics against the Host use this familiar concept to explain negative situations and events as the outcome of Host rituals.[523] Such statements have multiple benefits; accusations of Host of

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[519] Gane states that ritual control begins when a paradigm "begins to apply as the standard against which activities are judged"; Gane, *Ritual*, 70. The polemical texts use polemic against other rituals to create a paradigm of Yahwism that should be followed; as such, they stake a claim to ritual control.

[520] Bell argues that ritualization is powerful because it "addresses a situation, namely, the experience of a contradiction between the cultural order and the conditions of the historical moment. It does not see what it does to this situation, which is to redefine it"; Bell, "The Ritual Body," 310. Ritualization sees dissonance, then redefines it and offers a solution. Polemic against ritual thus seems to be a useful agent of ritualization, directly addressing the disjunction (or perceived disjunction) between the cultural order and a given situation by redefining it and allowing for the propagation of alternative resolutions.

[521] Hüsken, Ritual Dynamics," 361.

[522] Rituals either thrive, are innovated or are discarded when faced with ritual disruption or perceptions of failure; McClymond, *Ritual Gone Wrong*, 182. The Host of Heaven rituals were eventually discarded, but the polemics against them replaced them (and other discarded rituals), at least to some extent, insofar as they became ritual texts in their own rights, prescribing correct ritual in place of the former dysfunctional ones. Note also that disruption to previous ritual systems caused by social upheaval can expose vulnerabilities in that system (McClymond, *Ritual Gone Wrong*, 180) that can be corrected and strengthen the tradition going forward.

[523] Waldman and Baum highlight the oscillation between familiar and unfamiliar that is seen when prophets emerge as "oppositional characters." To persuade audiences of their views, prophets often co-opt familiar features used by their competitors, but reinterpret

Heaven worship could undermine some groups and individuals, while adding to the authority of others. In addition, placing blame on the Host rituals for negative consequences meant that Yahwism could be protected from accusations of failure; more specifically, it offered a solution to the problems that permitted Yahwism to take centre stage.[524] If all this social and cosmic upheaval was caused by ritual failure of non-Yahwistic practices, it could be resolved through correct Yahwistic ritual practices. In times of social upheaval, the major question for ritual practitioners would have been which rituals had gone wrong. Ambiguity over the attribution of ritual failures led to negotiation amongst ritual actors; it is for this reason that the texts that have come down to us identify a range of rituals deemed to have been flawed or failed — the Host of Heaven prominent among them.[525] Perceived ritual failure led to polemics against those rituals which was in turn textualized, eventually developing from the product of ritual controllers to an agent of ritual change in and of itself. As Klingbeil argues, ritual is a "multifaceted mirror on the ancient world."[526] It was not limited to one area of life, or one group, or one type of text; rather, it "provided the area within which cultures and individuals networked."[527] Ritual — and thus, the potential for ritual failure — brought both stability and innovation, enabling the survival and development of Yahwism. It is thus no surprise that it stands at the heart of the biblical texts, polemics included.

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their meaning, content or practice. Use of familiar concepts affords legitimacy to these figures, who may not have any other means of compelling recognition from their audiences; Waldman and Baum, "Innovation as Renovation," 245-46.

[524] McClymond (*Ritual Gone Wrong*, 178-79) concludes that "ritual is much less about what gets accomplished by ritual action and much more about what is at stake in the ritual arena." I argue that the claims that the Host rituals were dysfunctional reflects something similar — it is less about what the Host rituals were, or did, or who they were offered to, and much more about the ritual arena's status as a battleground, wherein YHWH's supremacy was not yet assured.

[525] As Frevel notes, this negotiation may not have reflected actual practice; it may constitute problems solved in a textual world, known to limited circles of priests, and used within the study of literary traditions; Frevel, "Practicing Rituals," 138.

[526] Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 242.

[527] Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 242.

Conclusions

The preceding sought to demonstrate the difficulty of studying the Host of Heaven and advocated a new approach to texts concerning them. Chapter One surveyed the variety of contexts in which the Host appear in the Hebrew Bible. It observed that, despite the persistent use of the term צבא, the Host of Heaven are not connected with military activity in the biblical texts. Rather, the biblical texts employ a wide range of terminology to refer to YHWH's divine army. The Host appear connected once with a divine council scene and three, perhaps four, times among a divine congregation worshipping YHWH in the heavens.[528] They are connected four times explicitly with the celestial bodies and three times implicitly with the stars.[529] Most commonly, however, they are left undefined.[530] In some cases, they refer to foreign deities, and in others they may reflect a plurality of beings in the pantheon.[531] The lack of specificity in the term "Host" — which inherently denotes a large plurality of beings — thus allows them to be connected with any tradition the authors sought to polemicize against. As they have no name and no real identity, their actions become their defining feature. When these actions involve the Host receiving rituals that should have been offered to YHWH, the people's identity and YHWH's authority is threatened and the rituals become a target of polemic. When the Host act in ways which indicate YHWH's supremacy and his worthiness of worship, however, they are acceptable within the Yahwistic paradigm (e.g., 1 Kgs 22:19-23; Neh 9:6). Thus, the Host did not need a fixed identity to prove rhetorically and theologically useful for the biblical authors. They are best described as "multivalent."

This study has taken the view that this multivalence should not be perceived as a problem to be solved by searching for a definitive description, but an opportunity to take a different approach to these texts. My analysis of the polemical texts relating to the Host indicated that the

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[528] As a divine council: 1 Kgs 22:19-23; as a divine congregation: Pss 103:19-22; 148:1-4; Neh 9:6 cf. Dan 8:10-14.
[529] As explicitly connected with a range of celestial bodies: Deut 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kgs 23:5; Jer 8:1-2; implicitly connected with the stars: Isa 40:26; 45:12; Jer 33:22.
[530] So 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3, 5//2 Chron 33:3, 5; 23:4; Zeph 1:4-5; Jer 19:13; Isa 24:21-22; 34:1-4; Ps 33:6.
[531] As foreign deities: Deut 4:19; Isa 24:21-22; as a possible referent for the pantheon: 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3; 23:4.

targets of these polemics are not primarily the Host of Heaven themselves, but those who practice rituals for them. To some extent, this explains why the Host survived the polemic and are portrayed positively in later texts — because the existence of the Host was not a problem itself, although the rituals offered to them were.

This observation underlies our use of ritual theory in the study of these polemics. We explored these theoretical underpinnings further in Chapters Two and Three. Chapter Two drew from social scientific approaches to the study of ritual and analysed elements of ritual theory that proved particularly useful in the study of these texts. This chapter highlighted ritual's rhetorical qualities, which persuades people of its importance and necessity such that ritual failure becomes a dangerous prospect. It also emphasised the gap between texts and lived rituals and explored the opportunities that textualization of ritual offers. The discussion demonstrated that textualized rituals can become ritualized or ritualizing texts, either by design or by circumstance. Ritual texts seek to mandate and control ritual practices; using Watts' definition of a ritual text, I argued that the biblical polemics against ritual can be considered ritual texts.

Chapter Three then observed some of the major causes of polemic against ritual in the Hebrew Bible, including competing worldviews, social upheaval and ritual innovation. This chapter sought to demonstrate that there are multiple different kinds of polemic against ritual in the Hebrew Bible and that these manifest in different ways and come from different contexts. Priestly polemics and prophetic critiques of ritual appear prominently in scholarly works; the polemical texts analysed in this study have not featured as prominently in these conversations. This is largely a result of the development of the field and the language which we use when approaching particular sections of the biblical corpus. Whereas Priestly and prophetic texts are often discussed with ritual in mind, the narrative texts considered here are commonly classed as "Deuteronomistic" and discussed in terms of phenomena such as cult, tradition, Deuteronomy, monotheism, monolatry, polemic, politics and identity. These texts are rarely considered with a view to ritual, despite their evident interest in ritual practices.

Chapters Four to Six therefore sought to analyse the polemics against the Host rituals with a particular focus on three key aspects of ritual performance: the form of ritual activity (including objects used in

performance), ritual locations and ritual practitioners. These chapters demonstrated that the biblical authors presented these rituals in ways that support their rhetorical agenda, especially by abbreviating or omitting ritual details. This abbreviation has a two-fold effect. First, it undermines the legitimacy of the rituals presented, portraying them without acknowledgement of the meaning or importance of ritual processes. Second, it permits the polemic to have a greater and more widespread impact and applicability than it otherwise would have done. Polemic tied to specificity dates quicker and is less applicable to a wide audience than polemic which is vague and open to multiple interpretations. By not offering detailed insights into the rituals they polemicize against, the biblical polemics gain an increased range in their potential application.

These chapters also highlighted a probable diversity of authorship across the texts. In particular, a number of texts in 2 Kings seem to be closely interrelated (e.g., 2 Kgs 21:5; 23:4, 12); others are connected more loosely, using similar language and lack of ritual locations (2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3; cf. Jer 8:1-2). Deuteronomy 17:3 and Jer 19:13 are the only two texts to associate the Host with the "other gods," but they portray ritual space very differently and have different agendas. Zephaniah 1:4-5 and 2 Kgs 23:5 both connect the כמרים with worship of the Host, but the combination of high places and Host in 2 Kgs 23:5 is unique, as is the association of high places with any form of astral worship.

This diversity was also seen in Chapter Seven, which sought to explore the purported consequences of engaging in rituals for the Host of Heaven. Some texts connect these rituals to the destruction of the ritual locations at which they were performed, the objects involved in their performance, or the communities that participated in them. The ritual practitioners are variously threatened with death, deportation and the redefinition of their identity. Notably, the texts depict, or emphasise, different outcomes of the rituals. Some limit the consequences to individuals (Deut 17:3) or to select groups of ritual practitioners (Zeph 1:4-5; 2 Kgs 23:5; Jer 8:1-2?). Others extend the consequences to the entire community or nation (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:16; cf. 21:3, 5, 14-15; 23:26-27). The positive outcomes expected by the practitioners of the Host rituals are thus inverted by the biblical authors; rather than being connected with order and beneficial outcomes for their practitioners, they are said to cause the exact opposite. In ancient Israel and

Judah, ritual was believed to have the power to affect both the cosmic and social order. It was vitally important, therefore, that correct rituals were practiced with great care, to ensure the maintenance of cosmic and social order and to uphold the relationship between YHWH and Israel. Ritual failure threatened to disrupt this order and necessitated a class of trained ritual specialists — priests — to diminish its possibility. Ritual failure and its inherent dangers would thus have been a well-known concept in much of ancient Israelite society.

Building on the preceding, Chapter Eight argued that our corpus of polemical texts arose from and in relation to this concept of ritual failure. I argued that social upheavals — the death/deportation of a king, the invasion of an enemy, the destruction of cities or ritual locations and the deportation of people — would naturally have prompted inquiry into ritual efficacy. It would have been important to determine which rituals had failed, so that corrective measures could be taken. These corrective measures could involve destruction of ritual objects (so 2 Kgs 23), locations (so Jer 19) or ritual practitioners (Deut 17; Zeph 1:4-5), or the removal of practitioners from the community (2 Kgs 17:16), perhaps even by death (Jer 8:1-2). The aim of such destructive actions, however, was intended restoratively. Flawed and failed rituals could be corrected, adapted or discarded. Implicit in the possibility of ritual failure is hope for ritual restoration; if social upheaval could be explained as the consequence of ritual failure, correct ritual practice could restore social equilibrium.

I also noted that ritual and politics are intrinsically interlinked. As ritual upholds social order it reinforces hierarchies, which can be undermined or thrown into disarray if the rituals are manipulated or deemed to have failed. Accusations of ritual failure can thus serve political ends: if ritual controllers are proven to have failed in their ritual practices, the door is opened for new ritual controllers to take their place. Ritual's role in identity formation and expression also plays an important part in these shifting power structures, as group identity and dominance are formed and expressed through ritual. Thus, the rare examples of ritual failures in Priestly texts (e.g., Lev 10) highlight the skill and authority of the legitimate priests, who do not cause these failures and thus keep Israel safe. Prophetic critiques of ritual are also similarly used to bolster the prophet's reputation. The linkage of ritual and authority is also apparent in the books of Kings and

Deuteronomy; Josiah and Hezekiah are celebrated for their ritual innovations, while other kings (Ahaz, Jeroboam, Manasseh) are criticised. These accusations of ritual failings amongst the kings serve to support some and undermine others — whilst implicitly attributing the real authority to the author, who ultimately determines what constitutes good and bad ritual. Deuteronomy also uses ritual to define political authority and legitimacy; the kings are only good kings if they act in a certain way (Deut 17) and the people can only be considered "Israelite" if they act in certain ways. Ritual both includes and excludes people from communities, and thus plays an important part in political power-struggles. Competing worldviews regularly lead to competition, expressed and portrayed in ritual terms.

There are thus a number of ways in which a better understanding of ritual phenomena and the consequences of (perceived or proclaimed) ritual failure inform our understanding of the biblical polemics concerning the Host. Prompted by the impossibility of pinning down the elusive Host, this study has sought to demonstrate the transformative potential of perceptions of failure. Departing from traditional studies of the Deuteronomistic History and the rise of monotheism, I have argued that approaching these polemics against ritual *in light of ritual* is a worthwhile endeavour. It permits cogent observations from the social sciences to be brought to bear on biblical studies, highlighting under-observed and under-appreciated features of these polemics, improving our understanding of their intentions, and raising new questions about the development of these texts. In particular, thinking in terms of ritual and ritual controllers prompts significant questions about the authors of these texts and their relationship to other ritual controllers. In practice, ritual control usually lay with the priesthood — what does that mean for our texts? Should we seek our authors within the Jerusalem priesthood, or were they in competition with it? Did these authors have pre-existing authority in the ritual arena, or did they create it in light of the perception that others had failed? Did they ever have real ritual authority, or has the survival of their texts created an authority that was not manifest in reality? Considering these polemics in light of ritual theory also encourages us to think about the gap between text and rituals and the ability of texts to be ritualizing and to become ritual texts. Ritual is highly rhetorical, but at what point does rhetoric become ritual? This study has not resolved these questions, but it has offered a framework through which these and other

questions may be asked. Ritual and thus ritual failure was a well-known concept in ancient Israel — it underpinned its fundamental conceptions of society, the cosmos, and Israel's relationship with its god. Considering the potential of perceptions and proclamations of ritual failure for theological and ritual development may, therefore, prove a significant avenue for biblical interpretation. Going forward, we need not abandon our discussions of Deuteronomism, monotheism, cult, politics, identity and textual composition, but we should acknowledge the centrality of ritual in all these. Ritual was central to ancient Israelite life and it should be permitted to take its place in our research — particularly when the texts at hand are polemics *against ritual*.

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