

On the Verge of ‘Another’ Exile:

A Metaleptic Reading of David and the Ark
in 2 Samuel 15:23-29

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1. Why Metaleptic Reading?

The central question driving this study is: Why did David decide to return the Ark while fleeing from Absalom, as described in 2 Samuel 15:23-29? What led him to make that choice at that critical moment? The lack of clear answers in the text prompts a deeper examination of the interpretive process. How can readers claim to grasp a text fully when its content remains ambiguous and external factors—such as authorship, historical context, or archaeological evidence—are challenging to obtain?

This challenge is evident when we engage with texts that claim to convey divine truths while remaining within the realm of literature. This also raises a personal question: Why do we, as readers—myself included—continue to look for connections with the worlds portrayed in literature, even though we understand that clear boundaries separate those worlds from our own?

As a reader, I am driven by two desires: to immerse myself

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in the text by engaging with the author's ideas and characters and to invite them into my contemporary reality. This duality reflects my desire to communicate with the characters while acknowledging the distance between us. Ultimately, these desires represent an ontological crossing, as I seek to dialogue with the characters to gain deeper insights and realign my journey.

This desire serves as the foundation for my approach: metal-epic reading. To clarify this concept in narratology, we can refer to Irene de Jong, who explains that "metalepsis" involves dismantling the layers of a narrative.¹⁾ Gérard Genette further expands on this idea, suggesting that any act of shifting "from one narrative level to another" can also be classified as "metalepsis."²⁾ Biblical scholars have also explored this concept. David Clines encourages readers to immerse themselves in the textual realm by relating to the characters within the text.³⁾ Similarly, Annemarieke van der Woude suggests that texts invite readers to participate in the co-creation of meaning.⁴⁾ In this study, I will employ an ontological metal-epic reading—a methodology that encourages readers to engage with characters by crossing boundaries to create dialogue and foster a deeper understanding.⁵⁾ I am not analyzing texts written in a metal-epic style,⁶⁾ but I will provide my metal-epic reading and designate

1) Irene de Jong, "Metalepsis in Ancient Greek Literature," in Jonas Grethlein and Antonios Rengakos, eds., *Narratology and Interpretation: The Content of Narrative Form in Ancient Literature*, TCS 4 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 87–116.

2) Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Jane E. Lewin, trans. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 234–326.

3) David Clines, *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1976), 62.

4) Annemarieke van der Woude, "Can Zion Do Without the Servant in Isaiah 40–55?" *CTJ* 39 (2004), 109–16.

5) Julian Hanebeck, *Understanding Metalepsis: The Hermeneutics of Narrative Transgression*, *Narratologia* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 93–94.

6) Metal-epic writing is prevalent in literature, sermons, and our everyday conversations,

my metaleptic reader to act on my behalf for this specific interpretation.⁷⁾ This article represents a latent, semi-materialized temporal art that operated within my cognitive framework.⁸⁾

Within this framework, I invite David into my mental space for engagement and exploration.⁹⁾ This figure is reconstructed through my interpretive process and is designated with a label,

as it occurs whenever an author breaches the boundaries of a narrative. One example is the conversation between David and Nathan regarding the parable of the poor man and the rich man (2 Samuel 12:1-15). In this instance, both characters grasp the purpose and content of the parable, ultimately using it as a basis to address the real issue of David's actions towards Uriah and Bathsheba. Similarly, in YHWH's vineyard parable and the subsequent accusations (Isaiah 5:1-30), the character YHWH crosses the boundary between the world of the parable and the character audience's real world to directly confront his target audience.

- 7) Roland Barthes' concept of "writerly" texts aligns with my metaleptic reading. "Writerly" texts encourage active engagement and meaning-making, while metaleptic reading delves into the layers beneath a text's surface, allowing for new interpretations. Both stress reading as a creative act. Metaleptic reading enhances Barthes' idea by showing how readers transform texts into sources of inspiration, generating ideas that extend beyond the text's explicit boundaries and celebrating the interplay between text, imagination, and individual perspective. Cf. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (UK: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975).
- 8) My "metaleptic reader" can be understood in the sense of the Acting Reader that I created during my reading and writing. Soo Kim Sweeney, "Zion in L'heure entre chien et loup: Reading Isaiah 40:1-11 in the Acting Reader's Blending Network," in Archibald L. H. M. van Wieringen and Sehoon Jang, eds., *The Function of the Reader in the Formation and the Reception of the Book of Isaiah*, Studies in Cultural Contexts of the Bible 11 (Paderborn: Brill, 2024), 108-10.
- 9) This term refers to a transient cognitive environment that facilitates the processes of perception and imagination, thereby contributing to the construction of comprehensive knowledge structures. Gilles Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 16. Also, see my article, Soo J. Kim, "Between Abandoned House and Museum: Intertextual Reading of the Hebrew Bible as Embracing 'Abjection,'" in Marianne Grohmann and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, eds., *Second Wave Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta: GA: SBL, 2019), 191-210.

such as ^MDavid (Metaleptic David), to distinguish it from the textual character David.

Most readers naturally desire to assert their findings as essential to the text, striving to appear 'authorial.' However, many of these insights stem from the reader's own interpretive efforts, making them 'readerial' instead. My approach to ontological metaleptic reading can be seen within the framework of intertextual reading as a valid process of negotiation that aims to ease the tension between 'authorial' and 'readerial' perspectives. Instead of claiming objectivity in my interpretation, I openly acknowledge the subjective crossing of existential boundaries, thereby allowing space for heuristic reflections.

The Ark narratives in Samuel provide an ideal framework for exploring this approach. The Book of Samuel employs the Ark as a pivotal mechanism to illuminate the transition from tribal society to nationhood, juxtaposing divine kingship with human kingship. It intertwines themes of divine and human exile, charting the separations and reunions of both David and the Ark. This study argues that David's command to return the Ark is not merely a narrative detail but a turning point that propels the Ark narratives from a state of crisis—threatened by exile—toward their theological and narrative climax.

I will analyze David's reasoning by exploring Israel's collective memories¹⁰⁾ and his personal experiences with the Ark as recorded up to 2 Samuel 15. Understanding the tension between fear and hope, as well as guilt and shame, is essential to grasp how ^MDavid views himself as a complex individual influenced by historical and theological factors. I will also explore the lessons from YHWH through the journeys of the Ark, highlighting parallels with David's exiles in the context of the Ancient Near East (ANE). Ultimately, I aim to connect these narratives to

10) For the general introduction, see Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Lewis A. Coser, ed. and trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

contemporary challenges, encouraging readers to reflect on their own experiences of faith, resilience, and reconciliation.

2. How to Approach the Ark and the Ark Narratives?

I want to outline two key presuppositions that underlie this study. My analysis views the Ark as a symbol of YHWH's presence, similar to deity statues found in the ANE.¹¹⁾ This perspective enables us to comprehend how the infinite deity is embodied in a finite and vulnerable form. The Ark's capture and confinement illustrate this exile, while its restoration in Jerusalem signifies the return of YHWH. My second presupposition concerns the narrative structure of the Book of Samuel, which chronicles the Ark's journey from Shiloh to Jerusalem, as described in 1 Samuel 2-2 Samuel 22. These events may co-occur but are presented in order, encouraging readers to recognize that the interconnected narratives surrounding the Ark can encompass the entire Book of Samuel.

2.1. The Ark as YHWH's Flickering Symbol

In the Book of Samuel, the Ark is pivotal, symbolizing both divine protection and a potential source of divine wrath, which complicates its interpretation. In exploring this issue, I will focus on

11) W. W. Hallo, "Cult Statue and Divine Image: A Preliminary Study," in W. W. Hallo, J. C. Moyer, and L. G. Perdue, eds., *Scripture in Context II* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 12. David Lorton, "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt," in Michael Dick, ed., *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 123-210. Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus* Vol. 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 369.

two key relationships: YHWH and the Ark in this subsection and YHWH (through the Ark) and the people of Israel in 2.3. subsection.

The Ark is often viewed as a symbol of YHWH, but referring to it as a “flickering symbol” highlights its inconsistent presentations and the confusion that may arise between the sender's intentions and the receiver's interpretations.¹²⁾ At times, the Ark appears merely as a wooden box when it remains inactive despite being disdained by enemies. Conversely, its fearful reactions suggest YHWH's presence or a supernatural power at play. To understand these dynamics better, I propose categorizing their relationships in Samuel into three thematic positions: embodiment, adjacency, and representative agency.

The first perspective views the Ark as a manifestation of the divine presence.¹³⁾ This connection led people to transport the Ark to specific locations to invoke YHWH's presence. Understanding the correct logical order is essential because it implies that the Ark can be “en-spirited” by God's will. Still, YHWH is not “embodied” by the Ark or any human custodian. The belief that possessing the Ark brings divine blessings often leads to conflict, as illustrated in 1 Samuel 4. Despite this potential danger, the biblical authors likely embraced this theology to facilitate communication between the invisible God and finite humans. While the proximity may imply some degree of interdependence, the embodied YHWH should never be viewed as replaced by the en-spirited Ark.¹⁴⁾

12) For the sender and receiver interactions in pragmatics, see my article “Communications of the Book of Ezekiel: From the Iron Wall to the Voice in the Air,” in Corrine Carvalho, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ezekiel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 312-29.

13) Cf., Mark O. Enemali, “*The Danger of Transgression against Divine Presence: The Case of the Ark Narrative (1 Samuel 4:1b-7:1; 2 Samuel 6)*,” Ph. D. Dissertation (University of Notre Dame, 2014).

14) Soo Kim Sweeney, “Embodiment, Liminality, and Intertextual Allusions: A Spatial Reading of the Jeroboam Narrative,” *LTQ* 49 (2021), 59-61.

A second interpretation suggests that YHWH approaches the Ark, seated upon an invisible throne, with the Ark acting as a visible footstool that defines a sacred boundary.¹⁵⁾ The phrase describing YHWH Tzevaot, “sitting above the cherubim,” appears twice in Samuel, highlighting the complexities of moving it.¹⁶⁾ When rejecting David’s proposal for a temple, YHWH emphasized his presence within the Tent, using the dynamic term “מְתַהַלֵּךְ” in 2 Samuel 7:6. In contrast, a more sedentary term “יָשָׁב” conveys both ‘sitting’ and ‘dwelling,’ allowing for a nuanced interpretation of the relationship between the Ark and YHWH. YHWH visits the Ark’s ‘dwelling’ place and ‘sits’ above it to engage with human agents. This visiting-leaving theological framework in Samuel underscores that proximity between the Ark and YHWH does not imply fusion or interchangeability, instead emphasizing their distinctiveness and dynamic relationship.

A third perspective suggests that YHWH sends a supernatural envoy to perform miraculous acts. The Book of Samuel does not detail YHWH’s thoughts or the mechanics of the Ark’s journey. Instead, YHWH is portrayed through his actions, oper-

15) Cf. 1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalm 99:5 and 132:7.

16) In 1 Samuel 4:4, the Ark’s presence contributes to Israel’s defeat, while in 2 Samuel 6:2, the death of Uzzah underscores the dangers of mishandling it. For the idea of the possible existence of YHWH’s statue above the Ark lid, see Seung-Il Kang, “The Ark of God as YHWH’s Portable Statue,” 『신학사상』 (*Theological Thought*) 176 (2017), 53. For this image and conception, see R. S. Hendel, “The Social Origins of the Aniconic Tradition in Early Israel,” *CBQ* 56 (1988), 376. For the translation of this term, Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 64-68. Also, see Choon-Leong Seow, “*Ark Processions in the Politics of the Monarchy*,” Ph. D. Dissertation (Harvard University, 1984), 16-17. For the relationship between this term, the Ark, and the holy war, see Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 148-51 for the Ark Narratives in Samuel and 148-65 for general discussions.

ating independently while sending distinct supernatural agents that represent him. This view highlights YHWH's detachment from the events surrounding the Ark, asserting that he transcends mere circumstances and cannot be considered in exile. Even during the Ark's capture by the Philistines or its confinement at Obed Edom's house, YHWH exists in an enigmatic space, shrouded in mystery and unbound by earthly limitations.

However, from a narrative standpoint, the Book of Samuel also intertwines two other perspectives to convey the complex relationship between Israel and its deity with the Ark. Therefore, I find it fitting to apply this third view only in instances where we ponder God's transcendence. When the Ark resided in the Philistine territory or at Obed-Edom's house, where was YHWH? Was he within the Ark, above it, or in a realm beyond comprehension? We may logically lean towards the third option, while an emotional response could lead us to favor the first two. Even in his invisibility, YHWH is symbolized by the Ark—a tangible representation that flickers and eludes human control, urging us to explore its deeper nature.

2.2. Candidate Memories to Consider

Once we have established a conceptual and literary understanding of the Ark, we now explore the significant memories that ^MDavid might reflect upon when the priests bring it to the ford of Kidron Brook.¹⁷⁾ Key narratives include Joshua 3-7, 1 Samuel 4-7, 1 Samuel 14, 2 Samuel 6, 2 Samuel 11, and 2 Samuel 7.

17) For an in-depth consultation regarding the cultural memories of the Ark, particularly concerning material culture and the evolution of literary works addressing diachronic issues, refer to Daniel Shalom Fisher's dissertation, *"Memories of the Ark: Texts, Objects, and the Construction of the Biblical Past"* (University of California, Berkeley, 2018).

In Joshua 3-7, the Ark guides the Israelites as they cross the Jordan and confront the city of Jericho, reaffirming Joshua's leadership role. The priests play a crucial part in this narrative, marking a moment of victory and fostering a sense of collective memory among the people. However, when this triumph is soon overshadowed by their defeat at Ai, Joshua approaches the Ark to seek guidance regarding the cause of this setback.

In 1 Samuel 4-7, the Ark is captured by the Philistines and later returned, leading to its prolonged residence in Kiriath-Jearim. This narrative reflects themes of exile and internal displacement, underscoring the disastrous consequences of its battlefield presence and highlighting Eli's incompetent leadership.

In 1 Samuel 14, Saul initially commands the Ark to be brought for guidance but changes his mind when chaos erupts in the Philistine camp. This highlights his conflicted feelings about the Ark between divine support in battle and past failures.¹⁸⁾

In 2 Samuel 6, David brings the Ark to Jerusalem, but Uzzah's death highlights the Ark's sanctity and the risks of improper handling. Key themes include the Ark's sensitivity to military pageantry and established standards. The second attempt also ends poorly, leading David to distance himself from his wife, Michal.

In 2 Samuel 11, Uriah's conversation with King David reveals that the Ark was on the battlefield against the Ammonites, suggesting its presence may have contributed to the victory; however, it's unclear whether this was a divine command or a customary practice. The Ark's presence in the deaths of Uriah and other innocent soldiers creates uneasiness, indicating that the issue is not over.

18) Interestingly, the Book of Samuel restricts the house of Saul from associating with the Ark, with one notable exception in 1 Samuel 14:18. This limitation can be interpreted as a reflection of the process of establishing kingship in Israel, where Saul's distant and minimal connection to the Ark suggests that his reign is insubstantial, almost non-existent.

Finally, 2 Samuel 7 elucidates King David's desire to build a permanent dwelling for the Ark. This desire underscores a notable tension between human aspirations for stability and divine preference for a nomadic presence. The subsequent announcement of an enduring dynastic promise through David's lineage serves as a provisional resolution to this complexity.

2.3. Theological Implications: From Nomadic to Sedentary: Unavoidable Restlessness of the Book of Samuel

The analysis of candidate memories suggests a shift toward more complex or antagonistic interactions between the Ark and its constituents, transitioning from the narratives in Joshua 3-7 to those in Samuel.¹⁹⁾ Even seemingly successful outcomes, such as Ark's settlement in the Jerusalem Tent, carry troubling elements like Uzzah's death and David's curse on Michal. This prompts crucial questions: Are these outcomes coincidental, or do they reveal more profound insights into the evolving relationship between the Ark and the Israelites?

In this subsection, I will explore the dynamics between YHWH/the Ark and the Israelites. I'll begin by examining the traumatic memory of the Israelites' battle against the Philistines in 1 Samuel 4, contrasting sharply with the victorious Jericho campaign in Joshua. A superficial analysis may suggest divergent outcomes are due to the agency behind the Ark—YHWH versus human actors—but this view overlooks the narrative's complexities, especially considering Samuel's settled context compared to Joshua's nomadic setting. Both Joshua and Numbers highlight the Ark's theological significance,²⁰⁾ shaping a collective memory

19) For the view of this shift as a product of the DtrH, C. L. Seow, "Ark of the Covenant," *ABD* 1: 391-92.

that influenced later generations,²¹⁾ including those in Samuel, who believed the Ark's presence ensured victory.

In contrast, the Book of Samuel depicts a settled Israelite community, which led to a physical and relational separation of the Ark from the people. As a result, it became possible for soldiers to engage in battle while civilians remained in their villages, leaving the Ark in the Tent. The Uriah case is particularly intriguing as it highlights the Ark's presence on the battlefield and the subsequent victory it brings. However, it also reveals the unsettling truth that the Ark does not protect innocent individuals from death.

The Book of Samuel wrestles with the tension between the stability of a settled lifestyle and the inherent unrest associated with a nomadic existence. This conflict permeates the narrative, which oscillates between these two paradigms. The preparations for the temple, envisioned as a resting place for the Ark, emphasize the importance of selecting the right individual and adopting the appropriate approach. The Ark narratives in Samuel convey a theology of caution, illustrating that attempts to manipulate the Ark for human purposes can lead to failure and severe consequences. At this time, neither the people nor YHWH are ready to embrace a temple setting, indicating that the matter is more complex than initially assumed. David's interactions with the Ark reveal a mix of failures and successes, creating

20) In Joshua 3:4, there is no direct command from God to carry the Ark during the Jordan River crossing; rather, officials instruct the people to acknowledge its presence. Similarly, in Joshua 6:2-5, carrying the Ark isn't the sole requirement for victory at Jericho. The Ark is associated with the priestly leaders, emphasizing that its presence, along with other directives, positions the battle as one directed by God.

21) My argument relies on a synchronic interpretation of the text. For a comprehensive analysis of the compositional history of the Ark narratives in Samuel through a diachronic approach and form-critical analysis, refer to A. F. Campbell's book, *The Ark Narrative: A Form-Critical and Traditio-Historical Study*, SBLDS 16 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975).

a duality of memories associated with this sacred object. The Book of Samuel thus offers theological reflections pertinent to this liminal state, where various paths appear viable. How should we interpret this revered object, which embodies both triumph and disaster? Which collective memories should guide our decisions in critical moments?

3. ^MDavid's Theological Motivations in the Metaleptic Reading

This section will explore ^MDavid's theological motivations by examining his reflections on characters from the Ark narratives in Joshua and Samuel. First, I will analyze the significance of the narrator's depiction of King David's crossing of the Kidron. Next, I will focus on three key figures: Achan in Joshua 7, Eli's sons in 1 Samuel 2-4, and Uriah in 2 Samuel 11-12, noting that they all met violent ends—Achan and Eli's sons as sources of national trouble, and Uriah as a victim of David's actions. Finally, I will discuss ^MDavid's theological motivations in my metaleptic reading regarding his decision to return the Ark to Jerusalem during his flight.

3.1. David's Crossing of the Kidron: All? Yes, All!

The event of crossing the Kidron is a crucial part of the plot development, connecting the Crisis to the Climax of the Ark Narratives and ultimately influencing the destinies of both the Ark and David. Let's begin by reading 2 Samuel 15:22-24.²²⁾

22) The English translations are my own. I aim to provide a literary reflection of the original text, even if that sometimes compromises fluency in English. Key terms or concepts for discussion are emphasized in bold.

וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־אִתָּי
לֵךְ וְעֵבֶר וַיַּעֲבֵר אֶתִּי הַנְּחִי
וְכָל־אֲנָשָׁיו וְכָל־הַטֶּף אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ

וְכָל־הָאָרֶץ בּוֹכִים קוֹל גָּדוֹל
וְכָל־הָעָם עֹבְרִים וְהַמֶּלֶךְ עֹבֵר
בְּנַחַל קִדְרוֹן וְכָל־הָעָם עֹבְרִים
עַל־פְּנֵי־דָרֶךְ אֶת־הַמִּדְבָּר

וְהִנֵּה גַם־צָדוֹק וְכָל־הַלְוִיִּם אִתּוֹ
נֹשְׂאִים אֶת־אֲרוֹן בְּרִית הָאֱלֹהִים
וַיֵּצֵקוּ אֶת־אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַל
אֲבִיָּתָר עֲדָתָם כָּל־הָעָם לַעֲבוֹר
מִן־הָעִיר

²² Then David said to Ittai, “Go and **cross over**.” So, Ittai the Gittite—and **all** his men and **all** the little ones who were with him—²³ **crossed over**.

²³ While **all** the land was **weeping loudly**, **all** the people were **crossing over**, and the king was **crossing over the wadi Kidron**. Thus, **all** the people were **crossing over** toward the **wilderness**.

²⁴ Then, behold! Also, Zadok and **all** the Levites with him were bearing the Ark of the Covenant of God. While they laid down the Ark of God, Abiathar went up until **all** the people had completed **crossing over** from the city.

In analyzing David's crossing of the Kidron, I present two main arguments: first, that this event is characterized as a national exile, and second, that it parallels the crossing of the Jordan in Joshua 3-4. To begin with the first one, the term “all” appears seven times in these verses, referencing Ittai's group, the land, David's followers, and the Levites. At first glance, “all the people” in vv. 23-24 refers to the Jerusalemites fleeing to the Judean desert. Yet, there's a deeper meaning at play.

As the narrative unfolds, we observe that Ittai's foreign exiled community becomes part of “all the people” in 15:23. His choice to stand by David during this crisis underscores the narrator's inclusivity toward David's faction. In contrast, Absalom's supporters are referred to as “all the men of Israel,”²⁴ which estab-

23) To maintain the grammatical concord between subject and verb for gender, number, and person, I employ the en-dash format for references to individuals associated with Ittai in verse 22. This principle will likewise be applied consistently in all relevant subsequent instances.

24) Notably, the phrase “all the men of Israel” appears fourteen times throughout the text, differing from the term “the men of Judah” with a singular exception

lishes a clear division between the two groups.

Additionally, examining King David's exile through a spatial lens yields significant insights. The clause "all the land is weeping loudly" (15:23) conveys a profound sorrow, reflecting the physical void left by the departing people.²⁵⁾ According to Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja's tripartite spatial theories,²⁶⁾ "the wilderness" (15:23) refers to the Judean wilderness as the group's first destiny, a conceptual realm filled with uncertainty. David's remark about the wilderness in his dialogue with Ittai (15:20), "I am going to where I am going" (וְאֲנִי הוֹלֵךְ עַל אֲשֶׁר-אֲנִי הוֹלֵךְ), highlights themes of disorientation and anxiety. However, Lefebvre's third concept, "lived space," enables readers to see this wilderness as a potential site for restoration. Within this framework, the narrative portrays David's flight as a symbol of national exile, underscoring the complex themes of displacement, grief, and longing for restoration.²⁷⁾

In this context, my second argument is that crossing the Kidron in 2 Samuel 15 symbolizes a reversal of the Jordan crossing described in Joshua. In Joshua, the Ark unequivocally serves as a guide, leading the people throughout their journey from

in 2 Samuel 23:9. This lexical distinction suggests David's overarching success in unifying the northern and southern tribes, reflecting the tribal complexities of ancient Israel. Specifically, the repetition of this phrase in contexts associated with King Saul underscores the parallelism between Saul's followers and Absalom's forces, reinforcing the connections within the northern tribal identity.

25) This sentiment resonates strongly with the parallel in Lamentations 1:2, where Zion embodies the encroaching desolation.

26) Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1974). Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

27) In contrast to Jacob Wright's argument, the portrayal of David's exile at the national level indicates that both in Chronicles and Samuel, David is depicted "as a catalyst of national unity." (Jacob L. Wright, *David, King of Israel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014], 148-50).

beginning to end. In contrast, 2 Samuel 15:24 presents the Ark's crossing only after the entire community had already crossed the brook in 15:23. Verse 23 functions as a 'proleptic summary,' creating an analeptic structure in which the Ark's arrival is revealed later. Essentially, the narrator, David, and the readers all come to understand the priests' strategy for the Ark simultaneously, a point underscored by the narrator's exclamation of "Behold!" in verse 24.²⁸⁾ Moreover, 2 Samuel 15:24 intertextually connects to Joshua 4:10-17 through the roles of the priests, Zadok and Abiathar. Zadok carried the Ark while Abiathar led the people, highlighting a dual priesthood under David, in contrast to the single priesthood during Joshua's time.

Verse 24 presents further complexities with the verb "יָצַק" (to pour or to set down). Abiathar is noted to have guided "all the people" without the Ark, which raises questions about the sequence of his actions, especially since he is described as coming from the city rather than from Kidron. The phrase 'to go up ... from the city' is also curious, given the geographical and symbolic elevation of Jerusalem.²⁹⁾ Although the ESV modifies the sentence structure, I choose to preserve the Hebrew arrangement. Abiathar's ascent parallels that of the priests instructed by Joshua to "come up from the Jordan" (Joshua 4:16-17), suggesting that both scenarios represent a significant transition for the community through these priestly actions. Moreover, the verb "יָצַק" prompts an inquiry into why the Zadokite priests opted to set down the Ark instead of carrying it, as seen in Joshua 4. Although a definitive explanation remains

28) This narrative technique suggests that David and his companions fled ahead of Zadok and his group, distancing David from making hasty decisions regarding the Ark. This distinction reveals significant aspects of David's character, setting him apart from King Saul in 1 Samuel 14, who wavered in his stance about the Ark.

29) Generally, the action of ascending to Jerusalem employs the verb "עָלָה" (to go up), while departing from the city uses "יָרַד" (to go down).

elusive, the verb's connotations, such as “to lay down” or “to secure” (cf. Joshua 7:23; Job 11:15), imply that they may have placed the Ark down as a precaution on dry ground, indicating that crossing the Kidron did not entail navigating dangerous waters. Finally, in 2 Samuel 15:22-24, “the Kidron” is mentioned once as the King crosses it, with this singular reference emphasizing its role as a geographical boundary of Jerusalem.

In sum, while the literal crossing might occur on dry ground or in a shallow wadi, the community's fleeing can be seen as crossing metaphorically “troubled waters,” a reversal parallel with Joshua's crossing of the Jordan. In other words, the real challenge in the battle narrative does not rest in Kidron's water level but rather in the daunting act of leaving the capital city in response to Absalom's pursuit.

3.2. Upon the Impending Battle with Absalom: Who Am I?

In the Book of Joshua, the Battle of Jericho unfolds after the Israelites cross the Jordan River. Similarly, in the David-Absalom battle narrative, David faces the looming battle against Absalom after crossing the Kidron and the Jordan. This encounter with Absalom marks the first significant conflict following the national war against the Ammonites—a battle notable for the Ark's presence on the battlefield in Samuel. The critical themes of the Ark's presence during battle and the ensuing victory invite the metaleptic reader to draw connections between the Battle of Jericho in Joshua and the confrontation against the Ammonites in Samuel.

In this discussion, I will briefly touch upon the Battle of Jericho but will primarily focus on the subsequent events, particularly the disastrous defeat at Ai. The victory at Jericho quickly became overshadowed by the failure at Ai, which stemmed from

Achan's transgression: he had secretly taken spoils from Jericho. This act, which went unnoticed by the community, rendered Israel impure with the stolen items still present in the camp. In response, YHWH expressed his disapproval, leading to a devastating defeat.

Ultimately, Achan's sin and the stolen goods were brought to light. This revelation occurred after Joshua mourned before the Ark and sought guidance from YHWH. The significance of the Ark cannot be overstated! In Joshua 7:7, when Joshua addresses YHWH, he uses the term 'crossing' (עבר) alongside 'the Jordan' (הירדן) as a symbolic reference to entering the Promised Land. We have more terms and descriptions to compare. In Joshua 7:11, God's answer includes terms such as 'sin' (חטא), 'transgressed' (עבר), and 'the covenant' (ברית) in his accusation against Achan. Although the phrase describing Achan's 'disgraceful act' (נבלה) in Joshua 7:15 is not directly mentioned in Nathan's admonishment, the term 'despised' (בוז) used by the prophet in 2 Samuel 12:9 serves to critique David's actions in a manner that echoes the critique of Eli's sons in 1 Samuel 2:30. This adds another layer of comparison to my analysis of David. Even though David declares, after Nathan's parable, that the rich man (David) must die (מות) in 12:5, YHWH sends a message through Nathan, stating: "YHWH has also crossed away (עבר) your sin (חטא); you shall not die (מות)" in 12:13. However, the death sentence immediately follows: His innocent firstborn son from Bathsheba 'also/nonetheless'³⁰ must die (מות).

As a metaleptic reader, I position Achan alongside King David and inquire: What similarities do they share? Given the events surrounding Bathsheba and Uriah, does David bear a

30) The particle conjunction וְ in 12:14 can convey dual nuances: 'also' and 'nonetheless'.

When interpreted as 'also,' it connects the infant's death as a compensatory outcome for Uriah's demise. Conversely, when understood as 'nonetheless,' the infant's death contrasts with David's survival from God's judgment.

closer resemblance to Joshua, or does he have more in common with Achan? Where should our analysis take us next if David is indeed more like Achan?

In the case of Ai, innocent Israelites lost their lives (7:5) due to Achan's actions before he was punished (7:24). In David's camp, soldiers, including Uriah, died because of David's secret orders during the battle against the Ammonites—deaths that could have been prevented. In both cases, they could not even know the causes of their deaths! This raises questions for the metaleptic reader about who should have died in the narrative, to which ^MDavid responds, "I, indeed." This confession prompts an inquiry into his self-perception: does he see himself as a redeemed person living on borrowed time? Before discussing Uriah further, I will introduce another character for comparison.

While the Book of Samuel contains several episodes concerning the Ark and the battlefield, I will focus on the account in 1 Samuel 4 due to space constraints. This narrative concludes with Israel's devastating defeat by the Philistines, the exile of the Ark, and the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas. Hophni and Phinehas dishonored God and committed sexual misconduct with the women serving at the Tent. They died when the Ark was brought to the battlefield. The downfall of Eli's household—including the deaths of Hophni, Phinehas, Eli himself, and Eli's daughter-in-law—occurred within a relatively short period, reflecting immediate retribution.

The metaleptic reader ponders the connection between this story and David's situation. There seems to be no direct link, as, in 2 Samuel 15, David does not order the Ark to be brought to the battlefield. However, a second thought arises: Is there a commonality between Eli's sons and David? Both engaged in sexual misconduct and abused their leadership roles. How could the priests commit their offenses with women working at the Tent? Did David also act inappropriately concerning the

Ark? ^MDavid responds, "Unlike their case, Bathsheba is not a temple person. When I raped her, the Ark wasn't even in the Tent beside my palace." The metaleptic reader acknowledges, "Ah, that removes one correlation."

Based solely on Uriah's mention in 2 Samuel 11:11, we cannot determine if the Ark was at the battlefield from the start or was brought later by someone.³¹⁾ What is certain is that Uriah regarded the Ark as nearly synonymous with God's presence. Ironically, the Ark did not protect him, and Uriah perished. While the Ark brought safety to the Israelites and victory over the Ammonites, it did not shield the righteous Uriah.³²⁾

^MDavid counters, "The absence of the Ark near me at that time troubled me even more. It kept my thoughts fixated on Uriah!" He continues, "How could I forget my last conversation with Uriah that night? As I faced these events, my wretched thoughts spiraled into countless scenarios. Then, the dreadful news of his death came. Such was my pitiful state."

Ah, Uriah!

In this moment, both ^MDavid and the metaleptic reader find themselves at a loss for words. Much like the overflowing Jordan River creates chaotic whirlpools, the mention of Uriah stirs up profound turmoil within ^MDavid's soul. It brings us back to Achan, who stands as a somber reminder amid the battles of Jericho and Ai. With a heavy heart, ^MDavid confesses: While Achan, Hophni, and Phinehas faced death, I remain alive. When I should have

31) For the view of the Ark as a small scale of the moveable tabernacle in the battlefield in the Arab qubba, see Julian Morgenstern, *The Ark, the Ephod and the Tent of Meeting* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1945), 94-131. Cornelis van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (USA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 80-81; 140-52.

32) Jacob Wright draws an intriguing comparison between David, Uriah, and Achimelech, noting that the latter two share the same ethnicity as the Hittites. Wright, *David, King of Isarel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory*, 80-83.

confronted judgment, it was Uriah, the innocent soldiers, and my child who paid the ultimate price. Who am I that God spared this sinner's life, allowing him to witness the deaths of so many innocent people instead of facing judgment himself?

Now, the metaleptic reader concludes that ^MDavid sees himself as someone wrapped in redemption, living with a profound sense of grace yet weighed down by remorse before God. What shall the one who has lived on probation on the verge of another exile?

3.3. The One on Probation: Fear, Shame, Grief, and Hope

If the Ark had eyes, what might it have witnessed? The thought that “I, David, should have been in Uriah's place” likely evoked a complex mix of emotions, including fear, shame, grief, despair, and perhaps a glimmer of hope.³³⁾

Let us first consider fear. In what situations does fear become overwhelming? It often arises when the future is uncertain, when the present is too unpredictable to assess, or when one cannot comprehend how an absolute power figure might evaluate their past actions. In a state of probation, fear can expand infinitely, leading a person to a standstill. This fear relates to what I previously described as the flickering nature of the Ark. It embodies the anxiety surrounding God's judgment—sometimes immediate, sometimes delayed, and at times seemingly indifferent to our struggles—and highlights the unpredictability of his timeline.

When we reflect on the collective memory of the Ark, we see that David must have been shaped primarily by a memory rooted in fear.³⁴⁾ This fear is not solely related to his sins but

33) Dan Gabriel Rusu, *Life Beyond Murder: Exploring the Identity Reconstruction of Mandatory Lifers After Release* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2024), see especially “Living in the Shadow of Guilt: Performing Remorse” (132-49) and “Managing Shame: Hierarchies of Moral Abomination” (174-86).

also to a careless mistake, evident in the tragedy of Uzzah's breach. David learned that YHWH is the ultimate authority, reinforcing that the Ark and YHWH cannot be viewed as subordinate to him or under his control.

Alongside his fear, ^MDavid is overwhelmed by a wave of shame and guilt, weeping inconsolably as the echoes of his sorrow resonate through the depths of his heart. He is consumed by remorse for his sins involving Uriah, Bathsheba, their first son, unnamed soldiers, and his relationship with God. Burdened by the weight of his transgressions, he grapples with the pain of having hurt both his Creator and the countless people around him. In this state of shame, he mourns his inability to change the course of the past.

At the same time, a metaleptic reader notes that ^MDavid's initial feelings of sorrow gradually evolve into a determined commitment to safeguard YHWH from humiliation in the impending battle and the potential wanderings that may follow. By choosing to return the symbol of God, he not only protects it from vulnerability but also honors YHWH. David's decision to ask Ittai not to follow him underscores his reluctance to put others in danger for his own sake, reflecting his strong sense of responsibility. ^MDavid contemplates his current status: Where do I stand now? Am I still on probation? Even in the absence of the Ark, YHWH remains fully aware of everything that has transpired concerning both Uriah and Bathsheba, creating a rift in his perception of God's governance and instilling a lingering fear within him. Nevertheless, he remembers YHWH's assurance through the prophet Nathan that he would not face death (2 Samuel 12:13). This brings him a glimmer of hope, suggesting that God has not abandoned him.

34) For the collective trauma, see Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in Jeffrey C. Alexander, ed., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1–30.

Beyond fear, guilt, shame, and despair, ^MDavid begins to accept this separation as a form of discipline, envisioning it as a seed of hope and imagining himself virtually alongside the Ark. This is a new perspective on probation—not merely a period of uncertainty and unease, but also an opportunity for personal growth and a bright future. As he departs the city, ^MDavid casts his spiritual aspirations upon it, envisioning the Ark as his guiding North Star³⁵⁾—a beacon of hope for a future reunion. Thus, by transcending fear, this act of separation transforms into a profound symbol of reverence and enduring love for the divine.

4. The Ark's Exiles and David's Exiles

This section delves into the multifaceted messages of YHWH as conveyed through the Ark's experiences of exile, wandering, confinement, and eventual return. The Ark's journey toward its resting place represents the search for the right person, manner, and place, willingly enduring humiliation until its goal is achieved. Notably, the Ark's exile in the land of the Philistines occurred before David's own exile, allowing for a metaleptic interpretation that positions the Ark's experiences as a blueprint for David during his trials.

4.1. Exile as Disguised Warrior-King's Infiltration

The Ark's first exile occurred when the Philistines captured

35) This feeling is somewhat similar to the sense that György Lukács laments, “Selig sind die Zeiten, für die der Sternenhimmel die Landkarte der gangbaren und zu gehenden Wege ist und deren Wege das Licht der Sterne erhellt,” in *Die Theorie des Romans: ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der grossen Epik* (Germany: P. Cassirer, 1920), 9.

it and brought it into their territory in 1 Samuel 4. The divine wrath appears to stem from the improper summoning of the Ark into battle; however, the narrative suggests that the deeper source of anger lies in the disrespectful actions of Eli's household, leading to numerous deaths and the demise of Eli's priesthood.

How can we understand this divine exile within ANE contexts? Paul-Alain Beaulieu highlights that cult statues in the ANE were considered living embodiments of deities.³⁶⁾ When taken by a victorious power, these statues symbolized a rupture between the god and their homeland, often held captive until they could be returned to their original shrines. This divine anger is frequently articulated through people's attempts to "twist God's arm," as exemplified by the displacement of divine statues against their will, such as in the case of King Nabonidus of Babylonia.³⁷⁾ The furious gods would call upon their enemies to ravage their own lands and carry off their cherished statues to a distant realm. In time, the conqueror would return these statues to prevent disaster in their own territory and to restore both the temple and city in the conquered land. This act would enable them to rule over the former inhabitants on behalf of the gods, ultimately restoring peace to the once-chaotic city.³⁸⁾

36) Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "An Episode in the Fall of Babylon to the Persians," *JNES* 52 (1993), 241-61.

37) Patrick D. Miller Jr. and J. J. M. Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel* (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 24. Beaulieu, "An Episode in the Fall of Babylon to the Persians," 243. Andreas Johandi, "The Motif of Divine Abandonment in Some Mesopotamian Texts Featuring the God Marduk," in John Doe and Jane Smith, eds., *Kings, Gods, and People: Establishing Monarchies in the Ancient World*, AOAT 390 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2016), 150.

38) Angelika Berlejung, *Die Theologie der Bilder: Herstellung und Einweihung von Kultbildern in Mesopotamien und die alttestamentliche Bilderpolemik*, OBO 162 (Fribourg: University Press, 1998). Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1991), 192. Mordecai (Morton) Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah, and Israel in the Eighth*

In another scenario, divine departure can also be understood as voluntary; the deity leaves a corrupted homeland and chooses the conqueror's territory as a new (temporary) abode.³⁹⁾ This perspective is illustrated in Ezekiel 1-11, where YHWH's moving chariot-sanctuary is presented as accompanying his exiled people in their enemy's land. These scenarios enable the victors to side-step unnecessary rivalry between deities, assert their rights and responsibilities in caring for the gods during their exile, and govern the subdued city as new servants of the same deity.

However, the divine exile patterns typical of ANE do not entirely align with the events in 1 Samuel 4-7. First, although YHWH was angry at Eli's house, he did not abandon his people or land. According to the text presentation, no Israelites were exiled to Philistia; the primary focus was on the capture of the Ark. Unlike the divine abandonment model, YHWH did not select the Philistine priests as his new servants. Second, the Ark narrative in 1 Samuel 4 suggests that the troubles arose not from the attempt to relocate the deity's shrine but rather from the misguided intention of using God's power to ensure victory in battle. The disastrous consequences, including tumors and deaths, were mainly reported in Philistia first and then followed by Israel's border village of Beth-Shemesh, demonstrating the active judgment of the hand of God of Israel. Therefore, the godnapping model stemming from divine abandonment fails to account fully for the Ark narrative in 1 Samuel 4-7. The defeat served as a judgment on the religious leaders rather than a reflection of YHWH's anger towards Israel.⁴⁰⁾

Considering this complexity, we must examine the divine exile from a deeper perspective beyond YHWH's passive silence.⁴¹⁾

and *Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1974), 12, 30-34.

39) Cf. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 22-41.

40) Miller and Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*, 71.

41) Jaime Myers, in her Ph.D. dissertation "*The Ark under Empire: Confronting Ideologies*

Strategic exile, which I propose, can be understood as YHWH's approach to kingship, where he operates as a concealed warrior-king in enemy territory.⁴²⁾ YHWH may have voluntarily chosen exile as a strategic maneuver to fulfill multiple objectives, including advocating his kingship over all human leaders.⁴³⁾ In this context, the Ark serves as the chosen means by which YHWH communicates, acting as his hand in dealings with both the people of Israel and the Philistines. During this period of 'exile,' YHWH orchestrates the downfall of the flawed leadership practiced by Eli and his sons in Israel (1 Samuel 4:11) while simultaneously wreaking havoc on Dagon and unleashing plagues upon the Philistines. This series of events leads the Philistine leaders to return the Ark voluntarily, underscoring YHWH's sovereignty (1 Samuel 5:1-12). As Miller and Roberts observe, the judgment upon the Elides has been executed "as part of Yahweh's defeat."⁴⁴⁾

Interestingly, the narrator withholds the disclosure of God's emotional state until the divine voice reemerges in response to the Israelites' request for a human king in 1 Samuel 8. This interpretation deepens our understanding of YHWH's anger regarding the Israelites' demand for a king. Previously, YHWH had demonstrated his unparalleled kingship through the Ark while in enemy territory. Indeed, YHWH embodies the perfect "candidate" the elders sought as their king, as noted in 1 Samuel 8:20.

of Domination through the Construction of a Cult Object" (New York University, 2022), interprets the Philistines and their deity Dagon in 1 Samuel 4-6 as extensions of Mesopotamian imperial power. She views Dagon as a symbolic representative of all deities that could potentially challenge YHWH's supremacy.

42) Serge Frolov offers a deeper interpretation of this episode through the lens of the divine conspiracy theory, suggesting that YHWH orchestrates this situation to eliminate the chief evildoers. (See Serge Frolov, *The Turn of the Cycle: 1 Samuel 1-8 in Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004], 114-16.)

43) Rainer Schmitt, *Zelt und Lade als Thema alttestamentlicher Wissenschaft: Eine kritische forschungsgeschichtliche Darstellung* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1972), 139-44.

44) Miller and Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*, 66.

We can identify several common themes when comparing David's exile in Philistia to God's first divine exile. In both instances, identities are concealed, people are protected, and enemies are defeated. At first glance, it seems God, represented by the Ark, entered into exile involuntarily, while David sought refuge in enemy territory voluntarily. However, a closer examination reveals that God's exile was a voluntary choice, whereas David's flight was compelled by Saul's persecution. David's situation forces him to escape and, at one point, humiliate himself by pretending to be insane. David's exilic narrative highlights David's hidden identity, intentions, thoughts, and emotions during this time, allowing us to infer YHWH's intentions and emotions in the Ark's exile in Philistia based on these parallels.

This period of exile served as a crucible for David, transforming him into a capable leader who could rescue his people from various threats. David's exile occurred between his private and public anointing as king, paralleling the first divine exile that marks the transition from Samuel's private recognition in 1 Samuel 3 to his public authority in 1 Samuel 7.

4.2. Internally Displaced Ark: Exile in One's Own Land

The phenomenon of exile extends to the Ark's transitory residence in various locations outside of Jerusalem, including in Obed-Edom's house. This scenario resonates with the experiences of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines IDPs as "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border."⁴⁵⁾

Following the Ark's relocation from Philistia and before its eventual establishment in Jerusalem, a critical question emerged: Was Israel ready to accept YHWH as their king? The answer is no. It appears that the narrator also overlooks the Ark while discussing human kingship. However, we should note that the Book of Samuel employs a block-storytelling technique. This technique keeps the Ark stories separate from the story of kingship. The narrator focuses on one topic at a time rather than mixing them. Consequently, the Ark, which was stored separately, received little attention until King Saul mentioned it during a battle in 1 Samuel 14. Throughout Saul's reign, the status of the Ark remained uncertain, as it resided in Abinadab's house for twenty years (1 Samuel 7:1-2).⁴⁶ Likewise, during David's rise to kingship, the Ark remained absent from the narrative until the episode involving Uzzah's death posed challenges in transporting it, leading to its sojourn at Obed-Edom's house (2 Samuel 6:6-10).

The responses of the Ark to human leadership, often resulting in calamity, highlight YHWH's dissatisfaction with Israel's flawed leadership models. Importantly, the Ark preserved its dignity and sanctity until the right conditions—such as an appropriate leader, manner, and setting—were established. This narrative serves as a commentary on leadership, offering insights into the treatment of internally displaced persons and the urgent need for them to advocate for their rights in today's world.

Moreover, a parallel can be drawn between the Ark's displacement and King David's wanderings within Israel. After leaving Saul's palace, David faced a period of displacement, during

45) UNHCR "Internally Displaced People," www.unhcr.org

46) Kiriath-Jearim as the temporary lodging place in the ANE context, see Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, *Exalted House, Temple Building in the Bible in the Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 328-29.

which he sought temporary refuge in the cave of Adullam. There, he rallied a group of disaffected individuals into a strong band of warriors. This second exile illustrates the lessons learned by key figures: King Saul, who showed no engagement with the Ark, serves as an example of failure. In contrast, King David, who sought to bring the Ark into Jerusalem, demonstrates a learning process influenced by the tragedy of Uzzah's death.

4.3. On the Verge of Another Exile

As David confronted another period of exile, the Ark experienced further dislocation, particularly during the tumultuous events of Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 15:24-29). This third exile highlights the Ark's passage across the Kidron amid the upheaval, conveying a significant theological message. The crisis marks a vital moment in David's awareness of the complexities of the divine. His decision to return the Ark to Jerusalem highlights that divine victory is not solely dependent on its physical presence.

From YHWH's perspective, he guided David from the complacency of the palace back to the wilderness, a place where David had once embraced a brave and humble lifestyle. Within this educational context, YHWH allowed the Ark to be exposed to the risk of another exile. This situation led to the marginalization of pro-Northern tribal factions, particularly the House of Saul and its supporters, including those aligned with Absalom.

A salient question emerges: On what basis does the Ark respond during instances of extreme crisis? As we contemplate this question, it becomes evident that the answer resides in the dynamic relationship between the human leader who bears the Ark and YHWH, its sovereign owner. A pertinent example can be found in the episode where the Philistines returned the Ark,

accompanied by golden figurines of rats as a guilt offering (1 Samuel 6:1-11). Even considering their violations of the ritual laws detailed in Exodus and Leviticus, YHWH chose not to punish them. In this instance, the Ark's response exemplified the nature of its relationship with the Philistines, one that transcended the established ritualistic norms.

In conclusion, the trajectories of the Ark and the accompanying shifts in leadership signify profound transitions—from the wilderness to Shiloh, Ebenezer, Philistine territory, Beth-Shemesh, Kiriath Jearim, and ultimately to Jerusalem and the ford of Kidron Brook, before returning once more to Jerusalem. The experiences of the Ark during periods of exile and its eventual return function as vital conduits through which YHWH communicates with his people and the surrounding nations, particularly the Philistines. This dynamic underscores YHWH's role as the warrior king and affirms his autonomy from rigid frameworks of control during the transition from nomadic existence to a settled way of life.

5. The Structure of the Book of Samuel with the Ark's Exile and Return

In this section, I will conclude my argument by examining the plot development of the Book of Samuel, focusing on the Ark's exile and return, as well as its presence and absence among human agents.

1. Beginning (1 Sam 2:11-4:22). This section introduces the initial placement of the Ark at Shiloh, detailing its mistreatment and eventual capture, leading to the downfall of Eli's household. The Beginning lasts until Eli's daughter-in-law's final

statement, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the Ark of God has been captured” (4:22). This section highlights that the location of Shiloh, along with the house of Eli, was not an appropriate place for the Ark to reside. The captured Ark in the enemy’s temple showcased an unequivocal humiliation for the Ark and YHWH. Consequently, the Beginning raises questions about YHWH’s purpose in enduring exile despite the potential to avoid such humiliation.

2. Development (1 Sam 5:1-2 Sam 10:19). This phase outlines the intertwined paths to kingship for both David and YHWH. It encompasses a series of wanderings, escapes, delays, and humiliations, interspersed with moments of victory. The Development begins with the Ark’s active reactions against various human groups, demonstrating the kingship of the invisible YHWH. While the phase begins with God’s activity to manifest his divine kingship over Israel, it concludes with David’s rise as a human king. Consequently, the Development ends just before David’s downfall due to the Bathsheba affair. Regarding the Ark’s journey, this phase marks the return of the exiled Ark to Jerusalem, where it is ultimately settled in the Holy of Holies within the Tent in Jerusalem. Key events include YHWH’s time in Philistine territory, the houses of Abinadab and Obededom (the location suggesting continued control by the tribe of Benjamin, i.e., King Saul’s leadership is transitory so as the location for the Ark), alongside David’s own exile and return from the Philistines, culminating in the entry of both David and the Ark into Jerusalem.

3. Crisis (2 Sam 11:1-15:24). The narrative shifts as King David engages in an affair with Bathsheba in his Jerusalem palace while the Ark is on the battlefield. This stage deals with the subsequent tragedies within David’s household, including Amnon’s assault on Tamar and the repercussions of Absalom’s revenge, further escalating tensions. Readers experience a sense of unease due

to the transgressions within the house of David, as King David and his household find themselves in a state of probation. During this period, the Ark appears neglected amid the unfolding events in the Jerusalem palace. Consequently, readers may contemplate how David's moral failures might influence the fate of the Ark. The crisis reaches its peak when the Ark faces another potential exile as David flees Jerusalem, raising critical questions about YHWH's response to David's transgressions and whether David will choose the Ark to accompany him during his exile.

4. Climax (2 Sam 15:25-15:37). The turning point occurs when David orders the Ark's return to Jerusalem, resolving the crisis. Despite the palace and the Tent being under the control of Absalom and engulfed in chaos, symbolized by the rape of David's concubines, David's confessional moment in 2 Samuel 15:25-26 signifies his belief that the God of the Ark of the Covenant will guide him home, despite the current separation. As David steps back from his position of power, YHWH, represented by the Ark, assumes true kingship. This act of returning the Ark prefigures David's own return, encouraging readers to envision the Ark paving the way for its people as described in Numbers 10:33-36. The Climax ends with the narrator's statement that Absalom returns to Jerusalem, which means that both the Ark and Absalom, combatants at another level, encounter each other in Jerusalem. Readers are intrigued by how YHWH would lead Absalom to leave Jerusalem even after conquering the city.

5. Denouement (2 Sam 16:1-2 Sam 21:22). The Denouement addresses the battle against Absalom and other various challenges that David overcomes to return to Jerusalem as the king of both the northern and southern tribes. The narrative shows that King David and his people successfully crossed the Jordan from west to east (2 Sam 17:22) and then back from east to west toward Jerusalem (2 Sam 19:39). Conversely, it also shows that Absalom crossed the Jordan from west to east with all the

(northern) Israel men to pursue David (2 Sam 17:24). However, Absalom could not cross the river again, as he was killed in the Mahanaim-Gilead battle (2 Sam 17:26-18:18). As readers of the Ark narrative, we can perceive the indirect governance of the Ark/YHWH from a distance. The Denouement concludes with the return of the bones of Saul and his sons and the complete victory against the Philistines, who had captured the Ark in the Beginning.

6. Epilogue (2 Sam 22:1-22:51). I refer to the Epilogue from David's Thanksgiving Psalm in 2 Samuel 22:7, which encapsulates and generalizes his conviction that YHWH hears his cries for assistance from his temple.⁴⁷⁾ At this point, the Ark is no longer in exile or considered essential for accompanying human agents on their wanderings. Instead, it symbolizes the tangible manifestation of the divine presence in a permanent setting: the temple.

6. How to Apply the Ark and the Ark Narratives to the World of “Troubled Waters”

David's decision to distance himself from the Ark during his crisis profoundly reflects the themes of exile present in biblical texts and historical contexts. This perspective encourages metaleptic readers to consider that ^MDavid internalized the eternal covenant promise conceptually addressed in 2 Samuel 7. The memory of this promise enables him to separate from the

47) For the materials and environmental context of the Great Hall of the Temple, particularly in relation to the creation of the guardian imagery to protect the Ark, see Marvin A. Sweeney, *1-2 Samuel*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 309-10.

Ark and embrace an exilic path, viewing it as a form of fulfillment of the 'conditional' aspect of YHWH's irrevocable covenant relationship with him.⁴⁸⁾ It empowers contemporary exiles to maintain their faith amid the complex interplay of divine presence and absence. Through metaleptic reading and literary analysis intertwined with intertextual and theological connections, I encourage readers to (re)consider how the Ark's journey embodies the tension between wandering and settlement, surrender and manipulation, and presence and absence. This tension offers profound insight as we navigate our own troubled waters alongside God and our friends. I will conclude this article by quoting Shai Held, who connects Isaac Luria's notion of *Tzimtzum* as a divine absence with the Talmudic sages' understanding of *Tzimtzum* as an intensified presence.

A real divine-human relationship depends on God making space for humanity. The covenants between God and Israel and between God and humanity thus depend upon a kind of *tzimtzum*.

[...]

God is radically present while still making space for us. Since the Torah commands us to "walk in God's ways," this paradox can teach us about the kind of human relationships to which we should aspire—we must be present while making space, make space while remaining present.

So often in life, we are tempted to seize one pole at the expense of the other—to be present in such a way that we leave no space for the other, or to allow so much space that we cease to be present at all. Our goal, then, should be to steer a course between narcissism and abandonment. All deep human relatedness depends on a capacity to be present while making space.⁴⁹⁾

48) For a fluid and interactive understanding of the "unconditional" and "conditional" aspects of the Davidic covenant, see Jungwoo Kim, "*Psalm 89: Its Biblical-Theological Contribution to the Presence of Law within the Unconditional Covenant*," Ph.D. dissertation (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1989).

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<주제어>

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49) Shai Held, “Being Present While Making Space Or Two Meanings of Tzimtzum,”
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<Abstract>

On the Verge of 'Another' Exile:

A Metaleptic Reading of David and the Ark

in 2 Samuel 15:23-29

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Second Samuel 15 recounts David's flight from Absalom's coup, during which the priests bring the Ark to Kidron Valley. However, David commands its return to Jerusalem. Faced with such existential crises, we often yearn for more explicit and logical explanations, yet the narrative withholds further insight into his inner thoughts. This study seeks to understand David's motivations in this silent narrative, raising key methodological questions: (1) How should we approach the unresolved queries from the text's silence? (2) As readers, when we wish to engage with the stories and characters in Scripture to address issues relevant to our lives, what criteria guide our alignment with certain characters or situations? Utilizing Metaleptic Reading—a method that allows interactions across narrative boundaries—I explore the internal struggles of David within the Ark narratives. While grounded in inference and imagination, this analysis distinguishes between the textual David (David) and the conversing metaleptic David (^MDavid). ^MDavid reflects on figures like Achan and the sons of Eli, acknowledging his mistakes and the weight of punishment he feels. This leads to a confession that isn't directly in the Bible but could make sense for ^MDavid. His decision to return the Ark is influenced by complex emo-

tions—fear, shame, guilt, and hope. ^MDavid's desire for reunion with the Ark is central to this analysis, symbolizing a conscious choice amid exile. He suggests that our relationships and shared histories should guide us in times of crisis. Furthermore, ^MDavid's awareness of his judgment fosters humility and freedom from narrow attachments. If readers were to encounter my ^MDavid in a metaleptic “café” and engage in meaningful dialogue, the aspirations of this study would indeed be overfulfilled.

<초록>

다시 피난길의 기로에 서서:

사무엘하 15:23-29의 다윗과 언약궤에 대한 메타렉틱 리딩

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사무엘하 15장은 다윗이 압살롬의 쿠데타를 피해 피난길에 오르던 중, 제사장들이 언약궤를 기드론 시내까지 가져왔으나 그것을 예루살렘으로 돌려보내는 장면을 전한다. 다윗은 왜 그와 같은 명령을 내렸을까? 성경 속 다양한 이야기와 인물들을 통해 우리의 현실 문제를 해결할 실마리를 찾고자 할 때, 우리는 어떤 기준으로 자신을 특정 인물 혹은 상황과 동일시할 것인가? 본 연구는 이렇게 본문이 명시적으로 답하지 않는 질문을 탐구하고자 하는 갈망에서 시작하여 메타렉틱 읽기(Metaleptic Reading)라는 방법론적 제안을 내는 것으로 마무리되었다. 서사의 경계를 넘나들며 작가와 인물, 인물과 나레이터, 나아가 독자와 등장인물 간의 소통을 시도하는 모든 행위는 메타렉시스를 형성한다는 점에 주목하게 되면, 독자의 내적 공간(mental space)은 이러한 메타렉시스를 펼칠 플랫폼으로 작용하게 된다. 예컨대, 필자는 메타렉틱 리더로서 사무엘하 15장의 다윗(메타렉틱 다윗)과 대화를 시도하며, 독자들이 언약궤 내려티브 안에서 다윗의 내면으로 들어갈 수 있는 가능성을 모색한다. 본 논문은 텍스트 속의 다윗(David)과 메타렉틱 다윗(^MDavid)을 구분한 후, 메타렉틱 분석을 통해 ^MDavid를 아간, 엘리와 아들들과 대면시킴으로써 성경 본문에는 나오지 않지만 충분히 다윗이 괴로워했을 법한 고백—“우리야의 자리에 있어야 할 사람은 바로 나다”라는 고백을 이끌어낸다. 이러한 읽기는 언약궤를 되돌리기로 한 다윗의 선택이 두려움, 수치, 죄책감,

절망, 희망이라는 복잡한 감정들, 그리고 언약궤와의 재회에 대한 갈망에서 비롯되었음을 보여준다. 다윗은 언약궤를 붙잡는 대신, 다시 피난길을 떠나는 자신을 예루살렘으로 돌아가는 언약궤에 투사함으로써 자신의 선택을 완성한 것이다. ^MDavid는 메타랩틱 플랫폼을 통해 위기 상황, 즉 또다시 피난길에 나서야 하는 순간에 무엇보다도 관계의 성찰과 함께 걸어온 역사를 돌아보는 것이 중요하다고 증언한다. 그 결과, ^MDavid는 자신의 삶이 은혜 아래 형 집행이 유예된 상태라는 인식을 통해, 불안감 너머로 나아가 겸손함을 배우고, 근시안적 집착에서 해방되었음을 고백한다. 이러한 전환은, 메타랩틱 리더인 필자가, 비참한 최후를 맞이한 아간과 엘리의 아들들을 여전히 왕직을 유지하고 있던 다윗의 옆자리에 병치시켰을 때, 비로소 스파크가 일어나며 수면 위로 떠올라 가능하게 된 것이다. 독자들이 메타랩틱 카페에서 필자의 ^MDavid를 만나 대화를 나누는 것을 상상하는 것만으로도, 필자의 목표는 이미 초과달성된 셈이다.