



Mighty in Battle

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*A Literary Study of Battle Narrative in the Ancient
Near East and in the Bible*

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A Literary Study of Battle Narrative in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible

HARRY HAGAN, OSB

This monograph surveys the ways that the ancient Near East and in the Bible tell stories of battle to illuminate their typical patterns and motifs. This study does not presume or argue for a historical connection between these texts. Rather, it points out the recurring elements that appear in battle stories across time and culture. By understanding the typical, a reader is able to follow a story more easily, and, more importantly, the reader is able to see how a story alters expectations or breaks with them to tell its own particular story.

After an opening chapter clarifying some literary terms, this monograph divides into two parts. Part One deals with two forms of the battle narrative in the ancient Near East (ANE): the heroic pattern and the royal pattern. The heroic pattern tells of a community, attacked by an enemy, that calls and commissions a hero who then defeats the enemy. Six stories and their heroes serve as the basis for the heroic pattern. The royal pattern celebrates the victories of kings with their deities. Unlike the heroic pattern, the king is already the designated hero but is not present when the enemy threatens the kingdom. This pattern celebrates the relationship between the king and his deity.

Part Two surveys the battle narrative in the Bible, mainly the Hebrew Bible with the important addition of the Book of Judith for the heroic pattern. The story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 closely follows the heroic pattern except that David is not the traditional strong man but an unexpected hero, which is the hallmark of biblical battle narratives. Judith's triumph over Holofernes also follows the classic pattern except for the adaptations made for her as an unexpected hero. The Book of Judges likewise contains a number of battle narratives with

unexpected heroes. The royal battle narrative is represented particularly by Joshua as the designated hero. The Books of Kings adds the prophet as a new character representing the Lord, and the central conflict shift from the fight against foreigners to the conflict between the king of Israel and the prophet. The Story of the Red Sea (Exod 13:17–14:31) is arguably the most important biblical battle narrative, there the Lord God acts alone as the hero against a human enemy.

In the traditional battle narrative, the hero and “our” side always win, but the tradition eventually gives way to the realism of war and defeat. This break can lead to tragedy as in the story of Saul or to the history of the fall of Samaria and Jerusalem to foreign powers. The traditional motifs and patterns continue to shape these stories, but they do not lead to the traditional ending.

This monograph seeks to provide a clearer understanding of the tradition so that readers can better appreciate the individuality of each story.

Acknowledgements

This study is based on my doctoral dissertation, “1 Samuel 13 – 2 Samuel 8,” which I began under Dennis McCarthy, SJ. After his death, I completed and defended it in 1986 under Luis Alonso-Schökel, SJ at the Pontifical Biblical Institute.

Administrative responsibilities carried me in other directions after that. During a sabbatical in the spring of 2013 at the Catholic University of America, I revised Chapters 2 on narrative and Chapters 3 and 4 on battle narrative in the ancient Near East. These chapters I published privately to fulfill the doctoral requirements under the title of the dissertation: *The Battle Narrative of David and Saul: A Literary Study of 1 Sam 13–2 Sam 8 and its Genre in the Ancient Near East*. That monograph has become Chapter 1 and Part I of this monograph.

At that time, I also revised and expanded the chapter on battle narrative in the Old Testament which has become Part Two of this monograph. I dare say that many will find that section more interesting and relevant. This monograph is basically what I completed during the sabbatical of 2013. With the exception of Mark S. Smith’s *Poetic Heroes*, it does not deal with the scholarship since then.

I am most grateful to the late Fr. Stephen Pisano, SJ for his help in making possible the publication for the *Biblicum*. Also, I want to thank my confrere, Fr. Paul Nord, OSB, who took care of so many details in Rome and the final publication. At Catholic University, Dr. Monica Blanchard, director of the Semitics Library, and her assistant Ms. Michelle Dalites provided generous help and hospitality for the revision of the ancient Near Eastern material. Also at CUA, my confrere Fr. Raymond Studzinsky, OSB was the soul of hospitality along with the other members of Curley Hall. Thanks are also due to Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology for providing the time and resources to complete this project.

Tammy Schuetter designed the cover using a picture of a bronze helmet of the Corinthian type from the Met Collection API to capture the spirit of the book.

Though earlier attempts to publish this did not work out, Rev. Dr. Jeremy Corely encouraged me to revive the project. Happily, the Private Academic Library Network of Indiana (PALNI), supported by Lilly Endowment Inc., recently set up this platform for publishing scholarly monographs, and they accepted it for publication. I especially want to thank, Amanda Hurford, Scholarly Communications Director, for her kind and careful attention to the publication of this monograph.

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Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology
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PART I
MAIN BODY

I. Story and Genre: Traditional Motifs and Patterns

I.I. Narrative and Traditional Patterns

Storytellers do not create their stories from thin air. As Paul Ricoeur observes, they stand within a tradition that they reshape and transform to create new works.^[1] Their audience likewise depends upon the tradition to provide the context for understanding a new work. Because the tradition is a recurring phenomenon, it belongs neither to the storyteller nor the audience. This autonomy also functions for later audiences because the a-historical and a-cultural dimension of “the ‘form’ secures the survival of meaning after the disappearance” of its historical context and thereby “opens the message to fresh interpretation according to new contexts of discourse and life.”^[2] Ricoeur’s remarks help to explain why people continue to enjoy stories whose immediate historical context is largely unknown or irrelevant.

Studies of oral literature by Milman Parry and Alfred B. Lord and of folklore by Vladimir Propp have described how an oral storyteller re-creates a traditional story in performance from the traditional motifs of plot, characters, and details and their traditional patterns.^[3] Heda Jason, building on Lord and Propp’s work, describes the tradition as “a set of rules of compositions and a lexicon of content units.” Using the tradition, which is an unconscious possession of the performer, the storyteller recreates the story in performance for the audience.^[4] While some of these conventions transcend cultures, others have a specific cultural form that must be recovered.

The use of generic patterns is not just a strategy of oral literature. As Robert Alter argues, our ability to grasp an artwork, “whatever the medium, requires some detailed awareness of the grid of conventions upon which and against which, the individual work operates.” He discusses the importance of “type-scenes,” which allow us to “pick up directional clues in a narrative work, see what is innovative and what is deliberately traditional at each nexus of the artistic creation.”^[5] Christopher Booker has argued that seven basic plots shape all narratives, and he explores their meaning at both a literal and a psychological level.^[6] H. Porter Abbott calls these skeletal stories “master plots” which “play a powerful role in questions of identity, values, and the understanding of life.”^[7]

This study will explore the traditional pattern of the battle narrative by examining key literary texts from the ancient Near East (ANE) and the Bible without regard for historical connections. This analysis will show that these narratives reflect a similar plot with typical motifs making up the generic pattern of the traditional battle story. At the same time, each telling transforms that tradition to tell its own story. While each story reflects the genre, no story is definitive; rather, the tradition is continually changing and renewing itself.

1.2. Narrative: Tension and Resolution

The last fifty years and more have seen many studies of narrative—its techniques and complexity. In his *Poetics* (1.7), Aristotle brilliantly observes that a story has a beginning, middle, and end. The story’s beginning sets the context and, most importantly, introduces the tension or problem without which there is no story. The middle typically heightens the tension as it puts in place the means for resolving the problem. The end resolves the tension and ties up whatever details the storyteller deems good to bring closure.

Stories have three basic elements: plot, characters, and details.^[8] The plot, of course, is the chain of actions moving from tension to resolution. Generally, these ancient narratives tell the actions in chronological sequence, sometimes with repetition and occasionally with flashbacks or flashforwards, as in dreams or prophetic predictions. The characters populate the story and carry out its actions. Traditional characters are stereotypes who illustrate an idea rather than portraying the complex and conflicting motivations of a realistic character. E.M. Forster called these two groups “flat” and “round” characters, but rather than being two different categories, they are better understood as the ends of a continuum. The details include all the other pieces of a story: its objects, such as the hero’s weapon or clothing, along with time, place, and context. Though these details serve a literal function in the story, they may also carry a larger significance as also the actions and characters

A fourth element is easily overlooked: the storyteller who mediates the story. This voice may speak in the first person as a character in the story. Mainly, omniscient storytellers tell these battle stories in the third person. Authoritative and reliable, they stand outside the story with a knowledge of everything. However, they do not tell everything, but only what they deem important. These voices shape the story by repetition and their allotment of “narrative time.” In this way, they provide the lens through which the audience receives the story.^[9] Still, audiences find gaps in the story, sometimes significant gaps, which they must fill in as best they can.^[10] Meier Sternberg notes that audiences must answer a series of questions about the characters, the plot, and their values for us “to reconstruct the field of reality devised by the text, to make sense of the represented world.”^[11] While we fill in some of these gaps automatically out of our experience of the tradition, a gap may become a problematic “crux” upon which the story’s interpretation turns.^[12]

1.3. Tradition and Realism

Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg provide a helpful model for understanding the ways that narratives present reality. They argue that the traditional storyteller is primarily committed to “re-creating” the tradition. Therefore, the storyteller’s “primary allegiance is not to fact, not to truth, not to entertainment, but to the *mythos* itself, i.e., the story as preserved in the tradition,” for the story carries “a culture’s cherished religious, political, and ethical values.”^[13] Likewise, Abbott notes that the stories which “we tell in myriad forms” are those stories which “connect vitally with our deepest values, wishes, and fears.”^[14] In the traditional battle story, the hero and the victory represent more than a single, literal event; they celebrate the triumph of a culture’s values and self-understanding over the forces of chaos and futility. These stories also raise questions for the audience about their own values and self-understanding.

Traditional narrative, as defined by Scholes and Kellogg, is “stylized and stipulative, highly dependent on artistic tradition and convention.”^[15] However, this allegiance to tradition gives way to new allegiances, which Scholes and Kellogg identify with Plato’s truth, beauty, and goodness. The concern for goodness leads to didacticism, with propaganda being one type. Beauty concerns itself with art itself. The focus on truth moves narrative toward history or realism, what Aristotle called *mimesis*—the concern for human motive and emotion.^[16] Though the hero ultimately triumphs in traditional narrative, such is not always the case in life, as seen in the realism of Greek tragedy or in the history of Thucydides. Realistic narrative, whether as history or realism, “seeks continually to reshape and revitalize ways of apprehending the actual, subjecting conventions to an empirical review of its validity as a means of reproducing reality.”^[17] Erich Auerbach produced the classic study of the development of realism in the west, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*.^[18] As heirs of

Greece and Rome and their Renaissance, we value this worldview and the ability of art to reproduce it.

Scholes and Kellogg want to identify the movement from traditional narrative to realism with the movement from oral to written literature, but the situation is not so neat. Susan Niditch discusses orality and literacy in ancient Israel not as a question of either/or but of both/and. She shows an “interplay” between the two which forms an “ongoing continuum.”^[19] Heda Jason points out that much of popular literature is generated by the canons of a tradition and cites several modern examples of the traditional battle story: “the detective story, television plays, wild west movies.” As in oral literature, they depend on the audience, who assiduously guards and demands the tradition.^[20]

1.4. The Changing Tradition

Within biblical scholarship, the study of genre belongs to form criticism, but some studies have failed to allow for the flexibility and creativity of the generic patterns.^[21] These patterns are not mathematical formulae that yield the correct answer only when they contain all of the elements in the correct order. Robert Alter has criticized “professional Biblical scholars” of form criticism “which is set on finding recurrent regularities or pattern rather than the manifold variation upon a pattern that any system of literary convention elicits.”^[22] Dorothy Irvin has also insisted on this point: 1) the order of the motifs in a pattern may differ, 2) the motifs may be repeated or left out, 3) a pattern may be presented in an elaborate form and serve as the skeletal plot of a whole narrative, 4) the pattern may serve as only an episode or be reduced even further to a mere mention in the narrative.^[23] The reasons for this may depend either on the audience or the storyteller.

For the audience, knowledge of the tradition provides a common understanding which allows them to follow the story and recognize

the import of its form. On the other hand, there is no suspense for the traditional audience. They know that the hero will ultimately triumph. They know that Achilles will slay Hector even before Homer begins to sing. Therefore, the storyteller must “defamiliarize,” a term coined by the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky. He saw perception as a fundamental goal of art; thus, “the technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception.”[24] In this way, a storyteller forces the audience to confront the material as if for the first time.[25]

Elaboration and repetition and complication help to achieve this.[26] Elaboration expands the time of confrontation so that the audience can absorb the impact. Repetition creates the same by continual return, and complication retards the inevitable by increasing the story’s tension and the audience’s expectation. This may happen in two ways. First, the storyteller may complicate motifs and patterns by creating new configurations or displacing an expected motif with the unexpected. Second, the storyteller may also break a pattern by denying its fulfillment to retard the action; thus, the hero may fail in his first attempt to conquer the enemy. In a traditional story, however, the pattern is ultimately fulfilled. The story’s failure to fulfill the traditional expectation marks the shift of allegiance away from the tradition.

For the author, familiarity brings a mastery of both the generic pattern and specific story traditions. The mastery of technique bestows the powers of elaboration, repetition, and complication. To this technical mastery, some storytellers bring a creative power that allows them to transform the tradition and explore the potential complexity of the tradition.[27] Homer, like others before and after him, tells the story of the Trojan War, but his achievement is more than technical mastery. As the opening line of the *Iliad* states, he tells the story of the anger of Achilles. The hero’s anger is a traditional motif that characterizes his response to the enemy’s aggression. Still, Homer moves beyond the traditional confines of the motif and brings the anger to such a pitch that the hero is

almost consumed by his own rage. Unlike the traditional battle narrative, which reaches its climax with the single-combat between hero and foe, Hector's death does not resolve the tension, for Achilles' anger is not spent. The resolution comes only with the return of the body to Priam, Hector's father and king, for in Priam, Achilles recognizes his own father and finds again his compassion. Homer uses the battle story to tell a larger story of human emotions and relationships. The battle tradition serves as the frame and grammar, allowing Homer to transform and reshape the tradition.

Other forces of change and creativity have already been discussed above: the shift of allegiance from the tradition to history or mimesis, to art, or to instruction.^[28] Reshaped and broken traditional motifs and patterns indicate other forces at work. As Scholes and Kellogg argue, history plays a major role in the breakdown of the tradition in early western literature. By understanding the traditional movement of a story, the historian can more easily identify the replacement of traditional elements with unique events.^[29] This judgment is seldom simple because the tradition is not mechanical but flexible and creative. Also, where the historical facts fit the tradition, as in a victorious battle, the traditional storyteller can retell the history with the motifs and patterns of the tradition. Therefore, a story's traditional pattern does not necessarily imply that the basic facts are not true. Still, the shift of allegiance provides a valuable clue.

1.5. Conclusion

This study will explore the traditional motifs and patterns used by storytellers in their battle narratives. Although the storyteller's creative power and the audience's desire for a good story bring about an ongoing transformation of the tradition, the tradition lays the foundation for that transformation.

1.6. Footnotes for Chapter 1

[1] Cf. Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 4 (1975) 29-148, esp. 63-75.

[2] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 71.

[3] A.B. Lord, *Singer of Tales* (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 24; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1964). Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 21968). For a good overview, see Susan Niditch, *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

[4] Heda Jason, *Ethnopoetry: Form, Content, and Function* (Forum Theologicae Linguisticae 11; Bonn: Linguistica Biblica, 1977) 1,1. Cf. also by Jason, *Ethnopoetics: A Multilingual Terminology* (Israel Ethnological Society Studies 3; Jerusalem: Israel Ethnological Society, 1975) and "About 'Motifs', 'Motives', 'Motuses', '-Etic/s', '-Emic/s', and 'Allo/s-', and How They Fit Together," *Fabula* 48. 1/2 (2007): 85-99.

[5] Robert Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., 1981, 2011) "Chapter 3. Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention."

[6] Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (New York: Continuum, 2004). He lists overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, voyage and return, comedy, tragedy, and rebirth. The battle narrative fits under his category of overcoming the monster.

[7] H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 46-49, 236.

[8] Abbott, *Narrative*, 19.

[9] For narrative time, see Gerard Genette's *Narrative Discourse*

(Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980); he discusses narrative time from three perspectives: order, duration, and frequency.

[10] Abbott, *Narrative*, 90-92.

[11] Meier Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1985) 186-229.

[12] Abbott, *Narrative*, 92-95.

[13] Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative: Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, rev. ed. 2006), 12.

[14] Abbott, *Narrative*, 46.

[15] Scholes and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative*, 84.

[16] Ibid, 12-14, 29-31.

[17] Ibid, 84.

[18] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, translated by Willard Trask (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1953).

[19] Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*, Library of Ancient Israel, D.A. Knight, editor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 99.

[20] Jason, *Ethnopoetry*, 1.1.

[21] I have discussed this issue more recently in “Basic Plots in the Bible: A Literary Approach to Genre,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 49 (2019) 198-213.

[22] Robert Alter has characterized form criticism as being “set on finding recurrent regularities of pattern rather than the manifold

variations upon a pattern that any system of literary convention elicits”; *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 47.

[23] Dorothy Irvin, *Mytharion: The Comparison of Tales from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East* (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 32; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1978) 11.

[24] Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” in *Russian Formal Criticism*, translated with an introduction. by L. Lemon and M.J. Reis (Lincoln NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1965) 3-24, esp. 12.

[25] Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” 19-22.

[26] Luis Alonso Schökel, “Poésie Hébraïque,” *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, Supplément (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1972) v. 8, col. 47-90, esp. 72-73.

[27] A.B. Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 100, 102. Cf. also Scholes and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative*, 22-23.

[28] Scholes and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative*, 12-14, 29-31.

[29] *Ibid*, 40-41.

PART II

PART I: BATTLE NARRATIVE IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Part I establishes the basic motifs and patterns for the heroic and royal battle narratives. For the heroic pattern, Chapter 2 examines six important narratives from Egypt, the ancient Near East, and Homer. In these stories, “our” side meets the challenge of an enemy threatening to destroy “our” life. Typically the leaders must find a hero who is able to meet the challenge.

Chapter 3 explores the royal pattern, in which the king takes the role of both hero and leader. These narratives celebrate the relationship between king and deity who often takes a role in the battle.

2. The Heroic Battle Narrative in the Ancient Near East

The heroic battle narrative tells the story of a hero commissioned by a helpless leader to fight an enemy champion in single-combat. The foundation for this study was laid by Heda Jason, drawing on the work of A. Skaftymov^[1] and also the model of V. Propp's for the heroic fairy tale.^[2] With Skaftymov's episodes as a basis, the plot can be summarized as follows:

Beginning: Tension

- A description of the hero and his impediment
- The enemy threatens "our" side
- "Our" side reacts with fear.

Middle: Development

- The enemy threat increases.
- "Our" side calls and commissions the hero.

End: Resolution

- The hero defeats the enemy hero in single-handed combat.
- The enemy army reacts with fear and flees.
- "Our" side pursues and destroys the enemy.
- "Our" side takes its plunder.
- "Our" side recognizes the hero.

In addition to the traditional battle story, Jason cites several modern examples: "the detective story, television plays, wild west movies." Each would have its own conventions but would fit nonetheless

under this larger umbrella. Joseph Campbell's famous book *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* likewise points to the pervasive use of this generic plot which he sees as a monomyth with many manifestations.^[3] His emphasis on similarity and disregard for differences distorts the relationships. Without denying the common elements of the genre, I want to argue that we must respect the differences of each version. The generic allows us to discover and appreciate the uniqueness of each narrative.

The tradition then is not represented fully by any one story. Therefore, to discover the generic pattern in the ancient Near East, I want to look at six important battle narratives to explore how they use and expand upon the basic scenes outlined above.

2.1. Six Heroic Battle Narratives from the ancient Near East and Homer

2.1.1. *Marduk and Tiamat in the Enūma eliš* = Ee^[4]

The *Enūma eliš*, the creation story of ancient Mesopotamia, begins with the first father, Apsu (freshwater), and the first mother, Tiamat (saltwater), giving birth to the first generation of deities. These young deities disturb Apsu, who decides to kill them, but Ea, son of Anshar and one of the good gods, kills Apsu, causing Tiamat to fly into an emotional rage. She gives the Tablet of Destinies to Qingu, one of the bad gods, and looks to kill the good gods. After failed attempts to find a hero, Anshar asks the young Marduk, son of Ea, to fight Tiamat. He agrees on the condition that they make him king before the battle, which they do. Marduk then meets Tiamat in single-combat and shoots an arrow into her belly and heart—the internal organs representing her emotions. Splitting her in two, he creates heaven and earth, and from the blood of Qingu makes

humanity. The story ends with the fifty names of Marduk which show him holding together both reason and emotion.

2.1.2. *Ninurta fights Anzu in the Anzu Myth*[\[5\]](#)

The bird-like Anzu steals the Tablet of Destinies from Anu and flees disrupting the kingship and its ability to order all things. Anu calls three deities to be the hero, but each refuses. Ea asks the goddess Mami to send her son Ninurta. She agrees and commissions him. After mustering an army, he meets Anzu. Though the battle initially does not go well, Ea sends counsel, and Ninurta shoots an arrow into Anzu's heart. When the wind brings Anzu's feather, the gods realize what has happened and send a messenger to recognize the victory and bestow some fifteen names upon him, including "Bel" or "lord" in the later version.

2.1.3. *Gilgamesh and Humbaba in the Gilgamesh Epic* = *Gilg.*

The Gilgamesh Epic began as a series of stories during the earlier Sumerian culture and was handed on in the Akkadian language, particularly in an Old Babylonian form from the eighteenth century and a later standard version attributed to Sin-liqe-unnini in the late second millennium. Andrew George provides a translation and lucid introduction to the various manuscripts which make up this evolving corpus. This study will follow his presentations.[\[6\]](#) Because of the epic's fragmentary condition, the whole must be constructed by adding to the standard version tablets with the Old Babylonian version (OB), especially the Yale (Y) and Pennsylvania (P) tablets. The standard version is indicated by tablet in Roman numerals followed by lines.

The standard version opens with a description of the young Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, who divides himself between contests with

the young men and chasing the young women. To counteract this, the goddess Aruru creates a wild, primitive man, Enkidu, who will become the heroic friend. He is civilized by his sexual encounter with the woman Shamhat who tells him of the hero. Enkidu, now the equal of Gilgamesh, goes to fight him, and their wrestling match makes them fast friends.

To win glory, Gilgamesh proposes that they go and take trees from the forest of Humbaba, whose “breath is death” (Y 111). Enkidu objects because of Humbaba’s invincibility, but Gilgamesh persists because only the deities are immortal; therefore, he disdains death” If I should fall, let me make my name” (Y149). After forging weapons, Gilgamesh asks permission of the elders of Uruk. Enkidu again objects, and the elders counsel him: “You are young, borne along by emotion, / all that you talk of you don’t understand” (II 289-290), but Gilgamesh persists. The elders counsel him, “Do not rely, O Gilgamesh, on your own strength alone” (III 2) and then entrust him to Enkidu. The hero then applies to his mother, who prays to Shamash to protect her son; she then adopts Enkidu and entrusts her son to him. Then the young men of Uruk offer a final commission; again, they bid Gilgamesh not to trust in his “own strength alone” (III 216). After entrusting the hero to Enkidu, they offer a final blessing “Go, Gilgamesh, let / May your god go [before you!] / May [Shamash] let you attain [your goal!]” (Y 284-286).

After a long journey and several favorable dreams, they arrive at Humbaba’ forest (IV). Though Tablet IV is fragmentary at this point, Enkidu encourages the hero. Shamash then both encourages him and tells him not to let Humbaba enter his forest. The tablet ends with Gilgamesh encouraging his friend: “Take my hand, friend, and we shall go [on] together, / let your thoughts dwell on combat! / Forget death and [seek] life (IV 253-255)!

The hero meets with Humbaba, who accuses Enkidu of treachery and, with false confidence, tells the hero that he will slit his throat. Gilgamesh finally feels his fear, but Enkidu encourages him. The sun god Shamash also comes to the hero’s aid with thirteen winds to

immobilize Humbaba so that Gilgamesh's weapons can reach the enemy. Humbaba then pleads for his life, but Enkidu tells him to press on and kill the enemy. Humbaba then curses both with the wish that they do not reach old age. Gilgamesh then strikes the neck of Humbaba and kills him. The heroic pair takes trees from the forest as spoils.

On his return, the goddess Ishtar desires Gilgamesh, but he rejects her. After the heroic pair kill the Bull of Heaven, the spurned Ishtar stirs up the assembly of deities against them, and they demand the life of one as recompense. So the heroic friend Enkidu dies, leaving Gilgamesh alone. His earlier desire for fame now becomes a desire for immortality which takes him on a long journey to Utnapishtim, who survived the great flood, like Noah. Unlike the biblical figure, he receives eternal life as a reward. After a test, Utnapishtim gives Gilgamesh a miraculous plant that will keep him young, but a snake steals it on the return journey, and so he must die like all mortals.

2.1.4. *Baal and Yamm*^[7]

During a banquet held by El, the weak and old head of the Canaanite pantheon, the god Yamm, whose name means “sea,” demands that Baal, whose name means “lord,” become his vassal. The impotent El acquiesces, but Baal refuses. Unlike the other narratives in which the weak leader commissions the hero, El commissions the “enemy champion” who claims the kingship. When the text becomes clear again, Baal and Yamm are engaged in single combat with Baal on the verge of defeat, but the blacksmith deity fashions two clubs for him. With them, Baal triumphs over Yamm, who represents the chaotic waters. Athtart recognizes his victory and announces that “Baal shall be king.”

2.1.5. *Sinuhe and the Strong Man of Retenu in Sinuhe*[\[8\]](#)

The Story of Sinuhe is a masterpiece of Middle Egyptian literature.[\[9\]](#) Unlike the other stories told by omniscient storytellers who know all and present themselves as authoritative and reliable narrators, Sinuhe tells his own story creating a more mimetic text and establishing a more intimate bond with the reader.

Sinuhe begins telling his story at the accession of Sesostri I to the throne in 1961 B.C. For some reason, he flees at the news of the new king, and his flight makes him seem a rebel. He continues his journey into Lebanon, eventually settling in Upper Retenu, a part of Palestine and Syria. There he becomes part of the king's court and marries the eldest daughter, and takes his place as a "chief of a tribe of the finest in his land."

After some years, "a strong man of Retenu...without equal" challenges Sinuhe in order to take his wealth. Sinuhe meets the challenger and shoots him in the neck with an arrow. As a result, Sinuhe takes the strong man's possession as spoils and is renowned in the capital. Even so, Sinuhe is unhappy because he is an exile from Egypt. A report of his situation reaches the pharaoh, who issues a decree for his return. Though torn by his loyalty to the king of Retenu, Sinuhe hands over his property to his children and returns to Egypt.

2.1.6. *Achilles and Hector in the Iliad*[\[10\]](#)

Homer opens the *Iliad* by singing of the anger of Achilles. The hero is angry because Agamemnon has made him hand over the woman Briseis. Achilles had taken her in a raid with the idea of giving her to his friend Patroclus. The war against Troy began with Paris taking Helen from another man, and now Agamemnon has done the same to Achilles. With this, Homer throws into question the moral basis for this war. In anger, Achilles has withdrawn from the battle. He

knows that he can return home and have a happy but hidden life with a wife and family, or he can stay and fight. The battle will bring him enduring glory, but he will also lose his life. Because of this offense and with nothing worthwhile to die for, Achilles has sworn not to fight. As a result, Hector, the Trojan hero, is able to rally his countrymen and threaten the Greek ships with fire. Though Achilles refuses to join the battle, his friend Patroclus returns to the fight in Achilles' armor. Though warned, Hector kills Patroclus, and Achilles, now with something worth fighting for, returns to avenge his friend. The Greek and Trojan heroes meet in single combat. Achilles kills Hector, the paragon of civil and familial virtue. Even so, his anger is not assuaged. He drags the body around the city of Troy and refuses to return the body for burial. Finally, the last book tells how Hermes casts a great sleep over all the forces and leads Priam, king, and father, through the lines to beg for the body of his son. Though Achilles' anger still rages, he sees in Priam his own father, who will one day weep of him. With this insight, he saves his humanity and returns the body of Hector to Priam, bringing the epic to an end.

2.2. Characters

The central character is, of course, the hero who defeats the enemy and rescues the helpless people and the helpless leader(s) of "our" side. The helpless leader, unable to meet the enemy threat himself, may first call and commission false heroes who either refuse the commission or cannot carry it out. The helpless leader, perhaps with the help of counselors, calls and commissions the hero; the hero's parent may also play some role in this. Likewise, the parent and/or the leader often help the hero prepare for battle. The hero's friend may also fulfill the role of helper and assist in the battle along with the hero's army.^[11] In the stories with human heroes, deities may assume the roles of divine leader, divine parent, and divine friend.

The enemy side consists basically of the enemy leader, the enemy champion, and the enemy army; the roles of leader and champion may be combined in the enemy king.

2.3. The Beginning: The Description of the Hero, the Threat, and Helplessness

The story may open with a description of the hero, as does the *Anzu Myth*, which begins with a celebration of its hero, Ninurta.^[12] Marduk, the hero of the *Enūma eliš*, makes his appearance in a traditional birth episode at the end of the first story in which Ea slays Apsu.^[13] The birth makes Marduk the youngest of the gods, and this fact serves in the story as the hero's impediment, that is, the reason which keeps the hero from undertaking the fight immediately. Because of Marduk's youth, the gods do not immediately think of him as the hero. In other stories, the hero's impediment may be as simple as his absence from the place of encounter or as complex as Achilles' anger, announced in the epic's opening line. In the *Gilgamesh Epic*, the hero's disdain for death reveals his lack of maturity, but here the flaw spurs the hero to seek out the battle with Humbaba.^[14] Sinuhe, in a momentary act of cowardice, fled from Egypt during the accession of Sesostri I (B 1-45); this act of cowardice colors his whole story. However developed, the motif serves to increase the dramatic tension while developing significant themes in the narrative.

The tension of the story arises with the enemy's threat and display of great power. The threat may take the form of "attack," but in general, the motif unfolds in such a way that the threat, though imminent, remains only a threat so that "our" side has time to react. The siege of a city or the enemy's encampment provides a simple solution; likewise, the appearance of a messenger with outrageous demands, a challenge to fight, or the timely discovery of the enemy's plan may serve the purpose.^[15]

The enemy's power is always overwhelming whether in quantity, quality or both. The greater the power is the greater the fall, and, therefore, the greater the hero who achieves the victory. Finally, the enemy must have a motive, even a bad motive, for taking such drastic actions—the more complex the motive, the greater its importance for the central themes of a specific story. Traditionally the enemy represents the antithesis of order, the threat of chaos, but the storyteller may explore this theme in many ways. The enemy champion embodies this theme as the concrete expression of the foreboding chaos, as opposed to the hero who represents the summary expression of the ideals of “our” side.^[16]

After presenting the enemy threat and prowess, the reaction of helplessness by “our” side follows and provides the rationale for the middle section of the story with its commission of the hero. While fear is a common expression of helplessness, other imagery, such as weeping, drooping heads, retreat, or the like, may convey the sense of powerlessness.^[17] In the *Enūma eliš* and the *Anzu Myth*, silence serves as the motif of helplessness in contrast with the enemy's power of speech derived from the possession of the Tablets of Destiny.^[18] While underlining the need for a hero, helplessness also has negative implications for the leadership of “our” side. It may foreshadow a change of leadership with the hero becoming the leader. Finally, both the motifs of the enemy's threat and the reaction of helplessness renew and heighten the tension.^[19]

To summarize, the opening section may introduce the hero with the reason why he cannot undertake the fight immediately. In any case, the opening presents the story's central tension: the enemy's threat and great power and the reaction of helplessness by “our” side further

2.4. The Middle: The Call and Commission of the Hero

While typically raising the threat and reaction of fear, the middle section puts into place the means for resolving the tension. Basically, “our” side must find, recognize and commission a hero to meet the enemy. Since the traditional audience knows that the hero will arrive and resolve the threat, the storyteller must create obstacles to retard the story and increase both the tension and the interest. Often “our” side does not recognize the hero initially, and the hero’s impediment may block the possibility of taking up the fight immediately.

The call and commission may consist of a simple request and acceptance, but the storyteller has several possible avenues, which I have divided into four parts.

1. general call for a hero;
2. call and commission of false heroes;
3. call and commission of the hero;
4. preparation for battle.

In the stories of human heroes, a divine commission may be added, i.e., the commission of a human hero by a deity.

2.4.1. *General call*

If the hero is unknown or at least not apparent to the leader (s), the middle section may open with the council of leaders and a general call followed by the offer of a reward. In the *Anzu Myth*, the motifs of threat and helplessness bring about a council of the gods where Anu asks:

[A]nu made ready to speak
Saying to the gods his children:

general call: “[Which] one would slay Anzu?

reward: He shall make for himself the greatest name in [eve]ry habitation.[20]

The general call designates no specific person but calls for volunteers or suggestions. The story of Jephthah provides a parallel; there, the elders of Gilead ask:

general call: “Who will begin the fight against the Ammonites?

reward: He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead” (Judg 10:18).

The general call is a stock motif used to open a scene of commission for non-warriors as well. In 1 Kgs 22: 20 the general call is found without the offer of a reward: “The Lord said, ‘Who will entice Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead’”; so also in Isa 6:8. The hero’s reward, of course, is a traditional motif and need not be tied to the general call. As found in the *Anzu Myth* and Judg 10:18, the two most common rewards are a great name and leadership, or more specifically, kingship.

2.4.2 *Call, commission, and failure of the false heroes*

The call and commission of the false heroes follow the same patterns used for the hero, but they either refuse the commission or fail in the attempt.[21] Though good and worthy warriors, the false heroes reveal by their failure the extraordinary qualities that the hero must possess. More pragmatically, their failure removes any of the hero’s potential rivals, an important point in the *Enūma eliš* where the hero emerges as the head of the pantheon. Finally, the episode carries the fortunes of “our” side still lower and ends with a returning motif of helplessness.

2.4.3. *The call and commission of the hero*

Biblical scholars have widely discussed episodes of call and commission under the title of “call narrative.”^[22] With the exception of the warrior Gideon, the studies have concentrated upon material related to prophets in which an objection is raised to the call and commission by the Lord. The narrow focus of biblical scholarship has caused it to overlook the wider application of the form. The four patterns below apply equally to prophets, warrior-heroes, servants, messengers—in short, to anyone commissioned to carry out a specific task. Even so, I shall cast my terminology in terms of the battle narrative, i.e., hero and leader.

In this study, the call refers to the element of request, and it may be initiated either by the leader or the hero; i.e., the leader may call the hero to receive the commission, or the hero may call for the commission from the leader. The commission, as N. Habel defines it, “is regularly couched in terms of a direct personal imperative which embraces the essential goal of the assigned task.”^[23] The central call and commission in the heroic tradition take place between the hero and the leader of “our” side, the latter usually being a helpless leader. Others, especially by the hero’s parent or a divine leader, may take this role. The type of leader has ramifications for the commission’s content, which I shall take up shortly. There are four logical patterns.

1. The leader calls and commissions the hero, and the hero accepts.^[24]
2. The hero calls for the commission, and the leader commissions him.^[25]

These two patterns differ only in the person taking the initiative. Neither holds much dramatic tension; thus, an objection or, less dramatically, a question may be raised by one and answered by the other. This further complication yields two derivative patterns:

3. The leader calls and commissions the hero;
the hero raises an objection or question;
the leader answers this;
and the hero accepts.
4. The hero calls for the commission;
the leader raises an objection or question;
the hero answers this;
and the leader commissions the hero.

The third pattern corresponds to what biblical scholars have termed the “call narrative.” A further example is found in the *Iliad*, which contains both question and objection (XVIII 170-216). Iris commands Achilles to rouse himself and help recover the body of the dead Patroclus (call and commission). Achilles questions the source of this commission, and Iris answers that Hera has sent her. Achilles then objects that he cannot carry out the commission because he has promised his mother Thetis not to enter the battle until she has brought new armor. Iris answers the objection by telling the hero that he need only mount the battlement, and with that, Achilles accepts and rouses himself. The pattern also appears in the commission of Jephthah (Judg 11:7-8) and of the false heroes in the *Anzu Myth*, where the leader withdraws the call from each false hero after he objects.^[26] In the *Iliad*, the leaders call, commission, and beg Achilles to fight, but because of his anger, he refuses.

In the fourth pattern, the hero’s initiative is paramount. The leader’s circumspection affords the hero a second speech in which he can reveal with greater resolve his determination to fight. The leader’s objection deserves close attention, for it typically touches the hero’s impediment and, therefore, a central theme. Such is the case in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, where the elders of Uruk object twice that the hero’s youthful heart “is bourne along by emotion.”^[27]

In addition to the call and commission, other traditional motifs appear in the speeches of these scenes. The leader may accompany his call with an appeal to duty^[28] and then add counsel, especially in the form of a battle plan.^[29] If the leader is human, he may

invoke a blessing and call for divine presence and aid.[30] In the case of divine commission, the content of the blessing becomes a statement, an assurance of divine presence and aid, as in the phrase, “I am with you.”[31] Commonly added to this is some form of encouragement, expressed most often by the phrase, “Do not fear.” This particular phrase has been studied especially by P.E. Dion, who argues that the phrase is not necessarily part of an oracle or limited to divine characters.[32] While I concur, it is mainly a deity who can offer the assurance necessary to make the encouragement meaningful. The encouragement motif, however, is not limited to the negative “Do not fear” but may be expressed positively as in the scene where Apollo commissions the disheartened Hector to re-enter the battle (*Iliad* XV254-261); the whole speech is a fine example of the divine call and commission:

encouragement:

“Take courage,”

assurance:

“a helper hath the son of Cronos sent ... to stand by thy side and succor them, even me, Phoebus Apollo.”

call & commission:

“But come now, bid thy many charioteers drive against the hollow ships their swift horses.”

assurance:

“and I will go before and make smooth all the way for the chariots, and will turn in flight the Achaean warriors.”

The hero's initiative in these scenes is typically triggered by his reaction of righteous indignation when informed of the enemy's threat. This anger contrasts with the reaction of helplessness by the others. The righteous indignation may carry into his call for the commission or color his response to the leader's call.[33] Where the hero seizes the initiative, his call for the commission is more often an assertion that he will fight; still, he cannot do this without the leader's official consent. In his call for the commission, the hero may also take over the encouragement motif and bid the helpless not to fear.[34]

2.4.4. *Preparation for battle: the arming of the hero and muster of the army*

Once the hero has received and accepted the commission to fight the enemy, the preparation for battle follows with the hero arming himself and mustering the army. The hero's weapons and armor, perhaps made especially for the occasion, reflect his greatness. Achilles' shield is the most famous example, but the clubs that Kothar makes for Baal become the focus for that story.[35] Others, such as a leader, parent, or friend, may assist him.[36] Sinuhe, for instance, spends the night preparing his bow, sharpening his dagger and polishing his weapons.[37]

The army may be considered a collective hero. If necessary, it is mustered with as its own call and commission.[38] The mounting of the chariot, drawn perhaps by named horses, leads to the transition from "our" camp to the place of battle.[39]

2.4.5. *Journey*

Though often abbreviated here, the journey can be a major scene where the distance is great, as in the story of Gilgamesh.[40] Along with the battle pattern, the journey can serve as a basic plot, as in the *Odyssey*. [41] It confronts the hero with situations beyond the normal world of sedentary life (as if Penelope did not have her own problems). Like the battle narrative, the journey may become a complex narrative embracing the whole of traditional literature with episodes of hardship and hospitality, hostility and victory, and more. The journey may even take the hero into the fantastic world of the dream or the unknown world of death. Thus the journey may travel the length of human experience to try the hero's physical prowess, intellectual acumen, and moral strength.

As a compendium of human experience, the great journeys are symbols of passage: from youth to maturity (Telemachus), ignorance

to wisdom and realism (Gilgamesh), alienation to reconciliation (Sinuhe), chaos to order (Aeneas), temptation and trial to victory (Odysseus), bondage to promise (the Exodus), punishment to forgiveness (the Exile and Return of Judah). The complexities of these classic journeys carry more than the basic themes outlined above. Still, these journeys attempt to reverse the most fundamental human transition: the movement from life to death. Each story solves this fundamental human problem differently. For Gilgamesh, the triumph comes in the acceptance of mortality as his lot. For Sinuhe, the reconciliation with the pharaoh brings the return to Egypt to prepare a tomb for the voyage of death. Aeneas carries the *penates* from the defeated Troy to The Eternal City, Rome. As Northrop Frye points out, the fundamental biblical journey begins with the expulsion from the Garden, which brings death. Abraham makes a journey to the promised land; his progeny journey to Egypt and return in the Exodus and later to Babylon and back. The New Testament tells of the journey to Jerusalem and then to Rome with the final journey ending with the New Jerusalem where “death will be no more” (Rev 21:4).[\[42\]](#)

2.4.6. Variations on a single motif or pattern

To summarize: This section’s major motifs are the call and commission, which the storyteller may unfold in many ways. The story may open with a general call for a hero. False heroes may then be called and commissioned only to fail. The hero’s call and commission by the leader of “our” side may be preceded or followed by a similar scene with the hero’s parent.[\[43\]](#) Where the hero is human, he typically calls for a divine commission from his deity.[\[44\]](#) Motifs of threat and helplessness from the opening section may appear even several times to raise the tension. The preparation for battle likewise may be divided into several scenes. These motifs, therefore, form interchangeable parts which can join together and

form many configurations depending upon character, theme, and the storyteller's genius.

In the *Enūma eliš*, the initial reactions of helplessness give way to the call and commission of Ea and Anu. The failure of these false heroes provokes a renewed reaction of helplessness which this story characterizes, especially by sitting still and silent (II 53-87). The lesser deities join the triumvirate to form a new council in which Ea breaks the silence and names Marduk as the hero (II 88-95). The hero's father then calls, exhorts, and commissions Marduk to present himself to the leader Anshar (II 96-102). In the scene with the leader, Marduk seizes the initiative; he encourages the leader not to be "muted" and calls for the commission which Anshar grants (*Ee* 139). Marduk then demands a reward of kingship *before* the battle has even begun. The hero's initiative concerning the reward demonstrates his total command of the situation. Anshar accepts this demand happily and convokes a larger council using a traditional messenger episode.^[45] The messenger reports the enemy's threat, bringing a further reaction of helplessness (III 1-128). The new council takes place within the context of a banquet, another traditional episode.^[46] After the gods make Marduk king, they renew the commission and prepare him for battle with a gift of "matchless weapons" (III 129 – IV 34). The hero then prepares for battle himself: he constructs a bow and net and then gathers meteorological forces, treated ambiguously as weapons and army. Finally, "wrapped in an armor of terror," Marduk mounts his chariot, drawn by named winds, while the other deities remain worried and helpless until the end (IV 35-62).

The *Enūma eliš* adds an important twist with the hero demanding the reward of kingship before the battle. Even so, the storyteller builds these scenes from traditional motifs and patterns. The same is true of the other stories. Even the lengthy middle section of the *Iliad* (XVI-XIX) deals with a false hero, calls and commissions, preparation for battle, mixed with other traditional elements such as the reconciliation of hero and leader^[47] as well as the lament over a dead hero.^[48] Whatever the obstacles or complications, the

hero emerges in the end with a commission confirmed by the whole society, represented by the leader.

2.5. The Resolution: Victory, Plunder, and Recognition

The story's major tension resolves with the hero's victory over the enemy champion, which allows "our" side to defeat and destroy the enemy army. The taking of plunder leads to the recognition of the hero, which rounds out the story and brings it to a close.

2.5.1. *Single-combat*

The single combat consists of the following traditional elements:

- the meeting of the warriors;
- the verbal exchange between the two warriors:
- the enemy's false confidence;
- the enemy's insults;
- the hero's indictment of the foe and enemy.
- the hero's initial failure
- help from other helpers
- the enemy's failure
- the hero's mortal blow with a missile
- the enemy's fall to the ground
- the hero's triumphal stance over the body
- the mutilation of the corpse with a hand weapon

The meeting of the warriors may include motifs from the earlier section, such as the description of the enemy's great power. The verbal exchange typically contains major themes, found especially the hero's indictment of the enemy.[\[49\]](#) The enemy's speech with

its insults raises the audience's contempt and manifests the enemy's moral emptiness.[50] The introduction of the enemy's false confidence, a motif also found elsewhere, adds dramatic irony to the story.[51] The hero's initial failure creates a new tension and retards the climax.[52] Furthermore, it shows his dependence upon outside help and brings a return to motifs of the middle section: new strategies for battle, new weapons, and perhaps new assurances or encouragement.[53] The enemy's failure likewise retards the climax.[54] Beyond this functional dimension, both motifs of failure may have thematic implications for our understanding of the story.

The hero's mortal blow to the enemy comes from some sort of missile: spear, arrow, stone, flying club. [55] The enemy then falls to the ground,[56] and the hero takes a triumphal stance over the body to represent the outcome visually. [57] Finally, the mutilation of the corpse with a hand weapon provides a final symbolic gesture illustrating the complete destruction of the enemy champion. [58]

2.5.2. The defeat of the enemy army

After the defeat of the enemy hero, "our" side recognizes the hero's victory and completes it by defeating the enemy army. With this, the opening motifs of the story are reversed. "Our" side now poses the threat, and the enemy reacts with helplessness. The section unfolds as follows:

- enemy's recognition of defeat:
 - the enemy's reaction of helplessness;
 - the enemy's flight.
- recognition of victory by "our" side:
 - a shout[59]
 - the pursuit of the enemy
 - the great or total destruction of the enemy.

The scene is a stable feature of the royal battle narratives,[\[60\]](#) but in these six stories of single-combat, the enemy army appears only in the *Enūma eliš* and the *Iliad*. Homer tells the destruction of Troy only in the *Odyssey*. In the *Enūma eliš*, Marduk himself defeats Tiamat's army and takes the Tablet of Destinies from Qingu.[\[61\]](#)

2.5.3. *Plunder*

Once the victory has been carried through, the plunder of the enemy takes place, for the spoils of war are also the trophies of victory. The hero typically receives a choice portion of the plunder, especially the slain's weapons and armor.[\[62\]](#)

2.5.4. *Recognition and reward of the hero*

There follows the recognition of the hero by the leader and then by others, including the

- announcement of the defeat to “our” side.

- the reaction of joy and celebration
- recognition of the hero with reward and renown (name)
- victory hymn

If the main body of “our” side is distant from the battle, someone must bring the news, as in the *Myth of Anzu*.[\[63\]](#)

Recognition may take the form of gestures and speeches that promise imperishable renown and the great name. Kingship is the great reward for the hero, and it typically comes with other motifs: royal insignia, dynasty (wife and progeny), kingdom, a dwelling (temple or palace) in the capital (city or mountain) of the kingdom. The hero, who does not become king, still receives rewards, especially some part of the plunder symbolic of the battle. Finally, the human hero may recognize the role played by his deity in the

victory, as in *Sinuhe*,^[64] a motif more common in the royal battle narratives treated in the next chapter.

Victory brings renown, yet the goal is not the fleeting fame of the moment but enduring renown. As Gregory Nagy argues, imperishable renown and glory, κλέος—*kleos* in Greek, serves as a primary motivating force in the *Iliad*; however, the pursuit of glory and immortality is inextricably bound up with death.^[65] Patroclus dies in the pursuit of glory (XVI 87-90), and Achilles knows in a revelation from his mother that if he fights, he will die young, but his “*kleos* shall be imperishable” (IX 410-416). When Odysseus meets the dead Achilles in Hades, he confirms the validity of the dead hero's choice: “Thus not even in death have you lost your name, but ever shall you have fair *kleos* among all men, Achilles” (Od. XXIV 93-94).

Noteworthy in Odysseus' statement is the parallel between *kleos*/"glory" and the "name," for, in the ancient Near East, the theme of renown is often expressed by the motif of the name, especially as the greatest or an everlasting/enduring name. ^[66] Significantly, the *Enūma eliš* ends with the fifty names of Marduk, which describe his exalted power and responsibilities (VI 99 – VII 144). Likewise, the *Myth of Anzu* ends with the names of Ninurta.^[67] In one of the earliest references from Mesopotamia, a hymn for Šulgi, a Sumerian king, names him as “hero, lord, mighty one of the foreign lands, the ‘champion’ of Sumer,”: “Like Anshar, may your name be placed in the ‘mouths’ of all the lands!”^[68] The tradition endures in 1 Macc 6:44, where Eleazar “gave up his life to save his people and to win for himself an everlasting name.”^[69] Likewise, before her battle, Judith proclaims that her victory “will go down through all generations of our descendants” (Jdt 8:32). By winning this name, the hero is able to establish for himself or herself a kind of immortality, sometimes symbolized also by the raising of a stele as a permanent monument.^[70]

The multiplication of names in the *Enūma eliš* and the *Myth of Anzu*, therefore, forms a fitting close to the epic and serves as a victory hymn. The response of Athtart to Baal's victory over Yamm has a similar function.^[71] The victory hymn proper appears in

Exodus 15, Judges 5 and Judith 16:1-17 to celebrate the battle, the hero, and, where appropriate, the hero's kingship. Motifs are drawn from the battle narrative expand the hymn but not necessarily in a narrative sequence since the audience knows or knew the story. Again, every extant story of a victorious hero is a celebration of the hero's glory and fame and so of the hero's "name." Where the story remains extant, the hero's glorious name remains imperishable.

2.6. Conclusion

While the battle narrative may provide the framework for the whole story as in the *Anzu Myth*, the pattern may be repeated to form a larger story or joined with other motifs and patterns. In the *Enūma eliš*, the fight between Marduk and Tiamat is preceded by a theogony and the first battle between Ea and Apsu; after the primary battle, the scene of recognition alternates with a cosmogony. The whole of the *Iliad* presents a constant return of battle motifs and patterns. Still, in both stories, the single-combat stands at the heart of the story. In the *Gilgamesh Epic* and *Sinuhe*, the battle narrative combines with other traditional elements and patterns. The fight against Humbaba belongs to Gilgamesh's youthful adventures before the reality of death confronts the hero; the battle ironically underlines the hero's immature understanding of death. This epic ends not with a battle but with a journey in search of immortal life. In *Sinuhe*, the fight forces the hero who once fled to "decide once more whether to flee or to stay and confront his personal difficulty."^[72] As such, the battle marks the transition from alienation to reconciliation, and the battle plays a vital role in this transition as a demonstration of the hero's courage, as opposed to his youthful cowardice, which brought about his exile.

The larger context must be considered in assessing the significance of these stories as well as the internal factors: narrative world, characterization, particular thematic concerns. All of these

factors contribute to the unique shape of each story. In short, there is a reciprocal relationship between form and content. Often this relationship is traditional, but the tradition does not account for everything, especially where the storyteller is of Homer's caliber. Homer creates new horizons for the tradition, especially in his treatment of Hector. The *Enūma eliš* offers a basic example of the tradition, for there the lines between good and evil, hero and enemy are clearly drawn. The battle narrative is a story of triumph, the triumph of the hero over the enemy, and the triumph of good over evil.

2.7. Footnotes for Chapter 2

[1] H. Jason describes A. Skaftymov's work, *Poetika I genesis bylin* [Poetics and origin of Russian epic songs] (1924) in "Precursors of Propp: Formalist Theories in Early Russian Ethnopoetics," *Journal of Poetics and Theory of Literature* 3 (1977) 471-516. For V. Propp's work, cf. his *Morphology of the Folktale*.

[2] H. Jason, "David and Goliath: A Folk Epic"? *Biblica* 60 (1979) 36-70. Also her "ilja of Muron and Tzar Kalin: A Proposal for a Model for the Narrative Structure of an Epic Struggle," *Slavica Hierosolymitana* 5-6 (1981) 47-55.

[3] Joseph Campbell, *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Bollingen Series 17 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949, 1968)

[4] Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 2 vol. (Bethesda MD: CDL Press, 1996), I 350-409. Other translations include that of E.A. Speiser and A.K. Grayson in ANET3 60-72 = *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, edited by James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 3rd edition, 1978). Stephanie Dalley has another in "The Epic of Creation" in *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford:

Oxford University Press, revised edition, 2000), 228-277. On Marduk as a divine warrior, cf. Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), pp. 37-38.

[5] There are two texts of the Anzu Myth: a partial Old Babylonian (OB) text which calls the hero Ningirsu, and a more complete Standard Babylonian or Later Version (LV) in four tablets from Middle and Late Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian manuscripts. The citations here follow Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses*, I, 458-481 with both an Old Babylonian (OB) text and a Later Version (LV). See also Stephanie Dalley's translation in *Myths from Mesopotamia*, the SB text (203-221), and the OB text (222-227). For Tablet I of the LV, see W.W. Hallo and W. L. Moran, "The First Tablet of the SB Recension of the Anzu Myth," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 31(1979) 65-115.

[6] *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian*, translated with an introduction by Andrew George (London: Penguin Books, 1999), esp. xxi-xxx. He has also produced a critical edition: *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, 2 Volumes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). There are many other translations including Dalley's in *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 39-153.

[7] The fight between Baal and Yamm is found in KTU 1.2.I and 1.2.IV as given by Mark S. Smith in *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Introduction with the Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1-2*, *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 55 (Leiden: Brill, 1994). Cf. also the translations in *Stories from Ancient Canaan*, edited and translated by Michael D. Coogan and Mark S. Smith (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012) 96-153; J.C.L. Gibson's *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: Clark, 21978) CTA 2 i and iv. Cf. also the translation of Dennis Pardee, "Ugaritic Myths" in *Context of Scripture*, edited by William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, vol. 1, pp. 241-282, esp. 245-249. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

[8] See W.K. Simpson's translation in *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, edited by W.K. Simpson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 3rd edition, 2003) 54-66. He includes an extensive bibliography and for the standard text points to Roland Koch, *Die Erzählung des Sinuhe* (Brussels: Fondation égyptologique Reine Elisabeth, 1990). Also the translation by Miriam Lichtheim, "Sinuhe" in *Context of Scripture*, edited by William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, vol. 1, pp. 77-82. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

[9] See, for instance, the literary interpretation of Vincent A. Tobin, "The Secret of Sinuhe," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 32 (1995) 161-178.

[10] My considerations are confined mainly to the last books of the *Iliad* beginning with Apollo's call and commission of Hector in XV 237. For the text and translation of the *Iliad*, I have used that of A.T. Murray (Loeb Classical Library 170, 171; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1924, 1971).

[11] By hero's friend, I mean anyone, human or divine, who helps the hero carry out his mission by serving as a messenger, supplying weapons, etc.

[12] *Anzu Myth*, LV I 1-14.

[13] *Ee* I 79-104. The Samson tradition also begins with a birth episode (Judg 13). A further example can be found in the Hittite battle narrative *The Song of Ullikummi*, ANET3, 121-125; however in this story the episode is transferred to the enemy champion; because of its fragmentary condition, I have not used it as a primary reference point. The "traditional birth episode" is not a unique feature of the battle narrative; it has been studied in depth by D. Irvin in *Mytharion*, Traditional Episode Tablet, Sheet 1. The episode includes eight motifs; only three are found in the *Enūma eliš*: the conception, the birth and the father's reaction; Irvin does not list it in her examples presumably because of this brevity.

[14] Compare Gilgamesh's approach to death in *Gilg.* Y 140-150, 189-192 to that found in Tablets VIII-X, Gilgamesh embarks on a journey in search of eternal life.

[15] *Iliad* XV: the Trojan threat takes the form of a direct attack. *Ee* I 108 - II 3: Tiamat, the bad gods push Tiamat into action, and she gives birth to a demonic army. KTU 1.2.I.11-19, 31-35: Yamm sends messengers with the outrageous demand that Baal be handed over as a slave. Typically this motif is followed by a provisional capitulation; here the helpless El agrees to the demand (i 36-38). Often these two motifs accompany the siege of a city. See an example of the siege in the following: the Sumerian narrative *Gilgamesh and Agga* also with outrageous demands in ANET3, 44-47 and in W. Römer's *Das sumerische Kurzepos "Bilgameš und Akka"* (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 209/1; Neukirchen: Butzon & Berekker, 1980); Josh 10:5; 1 Sam 11:1-3 with outrageous demands; 1 Kgs 20:1-12 with outrageous demands; 2 Kgs 6:24; 16:5; 18:13-37 (outrageous demands); Jdt 7:19-32 (provisional capitulation). The most famous siege is that of the Greeks against Troy, i.e. by "our" side against the enemy; the reversal here is perhaps one indication of the ambiguity of this war. In *Sinuhe* B 110, the Strong Man of Retenu, "a champion without equal" delivers a challenge, here directly to the hero; cf. also 1 Sam 17:8-10. In the *Anzu Myth* LV I 58-85, the motif is cast in cultural terms; the mythic bird Anzu steals the Tablets of Destiny which control the order and fate of the "world," and then he flees to his mountain.

[16] The fight between Baal and Yamm for kingship takes fertility as its major theme which is expressed in the identity of the two gods: the god of the storm against the god of the sea. *Enūma eliš*, though similar, contrasts the emotional and erratic Tiamat with the rational and measured Marduk, thus a contrast between anarchy and law. In *Sinuhe* the Strong Man is motivated by greed and jealousy, the latter touching on the hero's alien origin; but the enemy's motive is related only tangentially to the major theme of the story. Mindless greed for power motivates the mythic bird in the *Anzu Myth*, which is

thematically less complex than the other stories, the most complex being the *Iliad*. Homer presents a war in which right and wrong are not divided into two opposing camps, and the enemy champion, Hector, far from being the symbol of evil, is in many ways the most sympathetic character in the story. To this extent, Homer moves beyond the tradition.

[17] In KTU 1.2.I 23-24, the gods lower their heads to their knees when they see the messengers of Yamm. The *Iliad* includes a number of images to convey a sense of helplessness and to punctuate the mounting Trojan attack: fear in XV 279-305; a desperate prayer in XV 367-378; the continual retreat of the Greek forces; and finally the weeping of Patroclus XV 390-404, XVI 1-4.

[18] Ee II 4-6, 49-52, 121-122; Anzu Myth LV I 83-84: "Awful silence spread; deadly stillness reigned. / Their father and counselor Enlil was speechless"; also OB II 1-5.

[19] The description of Tiamat giving birth to the demonic army is repeated word for word four times in Ee I 129-161; II 11-48; III 15-52, 73-110; a reaction of helplessness follows. Homer, rather than repeat the same description, builds the enemy attack so that it reaches higher pitches as the story progresses.

[20] Anzu I 87-90. Dalley reads "our name" in her Standard Babylonian text but "his name" in the OB II 7-10. Foster as well as Hallo and Moran read "his name" which would be more traditional: Hallo and Moran, "The First Tablet of the SB Anzu Myth," 82-83.

[21] In Ee II 49-119, Anshar calls first Ea and then Anu to deal with the threat of Tiamat. Ea is unsuccessful though the broken text makes it difficult to ascertain whether he refuses or is unable to complete the task. Anu accepts but is unable to approach Tiamat. In the Anzu Myth LV I 91-158 || OB II 11-30, three false heroes are called and commissioned; but the false heroes object that the task is impossible, and the leader withdraws the commission. In the

Iliad, Patroclus calls for the commission to drive the Trojans from the Greek camp, and Achilles grants the commission. Although Patroclus carries out this commission, he continues the battle and takes it to the walls of Troy against the command of Achilles; there the false hero dies—typically the fate of the heroic friend.

[22] Old Testament scholarship has dealt with this genre primarily in terms of the prophetic call narrative with Norman Habel providing the foundation: “The Form and Significance of the Call Narrative,” *ZAW* 77 (1965) 297-323. Much scholarship has flowed from this down through at least Hava Shalom-Guy, “The Call Narratives of Gideon and Moses: Literary Convention or More?” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 11 (2011) 1-19. This line of scholarship tends to see the “call narrative” as an isolated biblical genre rather than a standard scene with various possibilities depending on the characters. What biblical scholars designate as the “call narrative,” I would classify as “a divine call and commission,” i.e. by a deity to a human character. As a result, these important biblical examples are a mixture of the call pattern with elements from the pattern of theophany as B.O. Long has observed; “Prophetic Call Traditions and Reports of Visions,” *ZAW* 84 (1972) 494-500. The sign, considered a special feature of the biblical tradition, often corresponds to the preparation for battle which includes the arming of the hero. Thus Moses is given tricks, and the Lord puts his words into Jeremiah’s mouth. These biblical “call narratives” thus fit into a much larger genre. I have recently explored this in my article, “Basic Plots in the Bible: A Literary Approach to Genre,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 49 (2019) 198–213, esp. 201-202.

[23] Habel, “Call Narrative,” 318.

[24] *Anzu Myth* OB II 31-73; LV I 161- SB I iii 99 – iv 13, II 1-28: Ea first asks the mother of the hero, Mami, for permission to send her son, and then she calls her son before the assembled deities and commissions him. His response is recorded in just one line: “The warrior heeded his mother’s word” (OB II 73; LV II 28). *Ee* II 130-162:

Ea's call and commission of Marduk to go to the leader Anshar and the hero's response. The *Iliad* XV 254-263 relates the divine call and commission of the disheartened Hector by Apollo to fight against the Greeks.

[25] The pattern is little used in the heroic narratives, but it is common for the king to call for a commission from the deity in the royal tradition discussed below. Still, the pattern is found in *Iliad* XVI 5-274: Patroclus calls on Achilles to send him against the Trojans, and the friend's request is granted without objection although Patroclus expected Achilles to object.

[26] Anzu Myth OB II 11-30; SB I 91-160.

[27] *Gilg.* Y 172-215, esp., 192-193 and Y245-271, esp. 249-250. The pattern also shapes the scene in which Enkidu objects to the hero's proposed fight against *Ḫuwawa*: Y 104-160. In the *Iliad*, the pattern shapes the meeting between Achilles and his mother (XVI 5-274). In 1 Kgs 22:19-22 the grand pattern is condensed into four verses: general call (22:19-20a); false heroes (22:20b); call for commission (22:21); leader's question (22:22a); answer (22:22b); commission (22:22c). Cf. also 1 Sam 17:32-37. In *Baal and Yamm*, the hero calls for the commission, but the leader ignores the call (KTU 1.2.I 24-28).

[28] The hero's parent in both the *Enūma eliš* and the Anzu Myth adds the exhortation to duty to their call and commission of the hero; *Ee* II 130-134; Anzu Myth OB II 44-72; LV I 198-210; II 1-28. After meeting with the elders, Gilgamesh goes to his mother, the goddess Ninsun, who adopts Enkidu, entrusts her son to him and prays to Shamash for a safe journey; *Gilg.* III 19-106.

[29] A battle plan is given in the Anzu Myth OB II 43-72, LV II 5-25; cf. Josh 6:2-5; 8:1-2, 3-8 (ambush). The elders of Uruk bless Gilgamesh and give him advice; *Gilg.* Y 247-271.

[30] A blessing by the elders is found in *Gilg.* Y 213-215 and by the young men in Y247-260, and 285-286 which reads: "May your God

go [before you] / May [Shamash] permit you to win [your victory!]" Cf. also 1 Sam 17:37b. Ninsun also prays for Gilgamesh and Enkidu; III 63-75, 88-106.

[31] The major example of the divine commission, delivered directly by a god, is found in *Iliad* XV 254-261, discussed below. The divine commission with these assurances is a typical feature of the royal battle narratives discussed below. For the biblical tradition, cf. for example Josh 1:5,9; Judg 6:14; 2 Kgs 6:16. The motif of the blessing or the assurance is not confined to the battle narrative; cf. H.D. Preuss, "... ich werde mit dir sein," ZAW 80 (1968) 139-173.

[32] M. Nissinen, "Fear Not: A Study on an Ancient Near Eastern Phrase," in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by M.A. Sweeney and E.B. Zvi (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 122-61. P.E. Dion, "The 'Fear Not' Formula and Holy War," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 32 (1970) 565-570, esp. 566; also H.M. (=P.E.) Dion, "The Patriarchal Traditions and Literary Form of the 'Oracles of Salvation,'" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29 (1967) 198-206. Also M. Weippert, "'Heiliger Krieg' in Israel und Assyrien: Kritische Anmerkungen, but strangely weeps (helplessness) when he sees the foe. Cf. 1 Sam 11:6 for Saul's anger. *Sinuhe* 113-127: the text does not refer to anger, but the hero's speech is characterized by his righteous indignation; also 1 Sam 17:26. In both cases, the rhetorical question helps convey the hero's indignation. Cf. also Judg 10:16; then, perhaps, Exod 3:7.

[34] Ee II 106-115; KTU 1.2.I 24-28; 1 Sam 17:32.

[35] *Iliad* 18.478-608. In *Baal and Yamm*, Kothar wa-Ḥasis fabricates clubs during the fight with the first-named Yagarriš and the second Ayyamarri; KTU 1.2.IV 11-20. Mark S. Smith, *Poetic Heroes: Literary Commemorations of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014) 163-164. Also Bowra, *Heroic Poetry*, 149-154.

[36] Ee IV 30, 35-58: both heroes and leaders take part in the preparation which includes the weapons, armor, chariot, and muster of the army. *Iliad* XVI 130-220, 257-271: after Patroclus has received the commission from Achilles, the preparation of all four elements follows; XVIII 127-137: after Achilles answers his mother's objection, Thetis agrees to her son's going to battle but makes him promise not to enter the fight until she returns with new armor; XVIII 203-218: in the next scene Achilles is commissioned to mount the battlement in order to turn the Trojans back; Athena clothes the hero with the sunset in place of armor, and she adds her voice to his so that his shouting becomes a weapon and turns the Trojans back; XIX 357-424: Achilles' meeting with the Greek leaders ends with a preparation which contains all four major elements; in addition, the gods strengthen the fasting hero with ambrosia and nectar while the Greek forces eat (XIX 338-356). See also Kang, *Divine War*, 28-29.

[37] *Sinuhe* 127-129. Hans Goedicke reads *Sinuhe* B 134 (R 159) to B139 (R 166) to mean that "his opponent came with the full battle gear customary in the Levant at the time. Sinuhe, however, mindful of his 'Egyptian' upbringing, opts for a bow and dagger as weapons to carry out the fateful duel. Thus he rejects the Retenu-hero's battle gear and insists that it be taken away. Only after it is laid down is Sinuhe ready to commence the actual duel"; "Sinuhe's Duel," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 21 (1984) 197-201, esp. 199. This would emphasize Sinuhe's Egyptian heritage which is a major theme in the story.

[38] Cf. the call of the Myrmidons in *Iliad* XVI 200-209, 269-274; Ramesses tries to call his army back into battle, but they do not come but leave him to fight the enemy army single-handedly; *Battle of Kadesh* P 115.

[39] Though the hero's mother harnesses the seven whirlwinds in the Anzu Myth, OB II 75-78, Ninurta does these things for himself in LV II 30-34.

[40] *Gilg.* IV & V: the journey is broken into days and extended by dreams.

[41] Scholes and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative*, 228. They delineate three types of journeys in terms of movement: “the journey to a distant goal (e.g., the *Aeneid*), and the return journey (e.g., the *Odyssey*), and the quest (e.g., the *Argonautica*).” Other examples of the journey from the ancient Near East may be found in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, Tablets IV-V, IX-XI, XII; also the journeys in the Sumerian stories of Lugalbanda; cf. C. Wilcke, *Das Lugalbanda Epos* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1969). Cf. also A.B. Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 162; also A.B. Lord, “A.B. Lord, “Tradition and the Oral Poet: Homer, Huso, and Avdo Medjedovic,” *Atti del Convegno internazionale sul tema: Poesia epica e la sua formazione* (Problemi Attuali di scienza e di Cultura 139; Rome: Academia Nazionale dei Licei 1970),” 13-30, esp. 24-28. Also Merrit Moseley’s “The Epic of Gilgamesh and the Hero’s Journey” in *The Hero’s Journey*, edited by Harold Bloom and Blake Hobby (NY: Blooms Literary Criticism, 2009) 63-74. See also my discussion in “Basic Plots,” 202-206.

[42] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 319-320.

[43] *Ee* II 130-134: Ea and Marduk. *Anzu Myth* OB II 43-72; *LV* I 198-210; II 1-27: the hero’s mother commissions the hero in the name of the community. *Iliad* XVIII 36-147: Achilles and Thetis. *Gilg.* III 15-133+: Gilgamesh and his mother Ninsun.

[44] *Iliad* XVI 221-256: Achilles pours out a libation for Patroclus, but the prayer is only partly answered by Zeus. *Gilg.* Y214-235: Gilgamesh prays to his god Shamash and promises to build a house for him on his return.

[45] The traditional messenger episode in the ancient Near East has been studied by D. Irvin, *Mytharion*, Traditional Episode Table, Sheet 2. The biblical material has been subjected to an exhaustive examination by Ann M. Vater, “Narrative Patterns for the Story of

Commissioned Communications in the Old Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980) 365-382. Basically, the episode has three basic elements: 1) call and commission of a messenger in which the message is delivered verbatim; 2) journey; 3) the delivery of the message verbatim. Such is the case in *Ee* III 1-128. The pattern may now be reversed with a return message. Furthermore, the pattern may be very minimal; cf. especially Vater on this point. The messenger episode is a functional pattern that transfers information; in general, the pattern itself is much less important than the information conveyed and the larger context in which it is set.

[46] Cf. D. Irvin, *Mytharion*, Traditional Episode Table, Sheet 1. She lists five motifs, the last four being found in the *Enūma eliš*: 1) orders to prepare a feast (missing); 2) invitations (III 1-124); 3) the arrival of the guest (III 129-133); 4) eating and drinking (III 134-137); 5) problem (III 138-IV 34). In *Baal and Yamm*, only motifs 4 and 5 appear; KTU 1.2.I 20-21, 22-38. Cf. also Bowra, *Heroic Poetry*, 179-183.

[47] For the reconciliation of hero and leader, see the story of Bellerophon in the *Iliad* (VI 155-197) in which the queen falsely accuses the hero of attempting to seduce her. The motif is found also in the Egyptian “The Story of the Two Brothers,” § iii; ANET3 p.24. Also Joseph and Potiphar’s wife in Gen 39:7-20; the Greek story of Phaedra, Theseus, and Hippolytus told by Euripides among others. The story of Bellerophon, as Gunkel noted, also includes the motif of a hero bearing a letter calling for his death; *The Folktale in the Old Testament*, translated by Michael D. Rutter (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1987) 145.

Motifs of alienation and reconciliation also shape the Egyptian “Story of Sinuhe” where the hero because of his fear or cowardice flees Egypt at the accession of Sesostri I who invites the hero after his victory over the Strong Man of Retenu to return. The *Odyssey* provides another variation in which the alienation between god and hero creates the basic tension of the story; under pressure from Zeus (Bk. XVIII), Poseidon relents so that the hero may return,

defeat the suitors, reunite with his family and take possession of his kingship and kingdom. The alienation of hero and deities also shapes Tablets VI and VIII of the *Gilgamesh Epic*.

In the Bible, the story of Jacob and Esau (Gen 25; 27; 32-33) and that of Joseph and his brother (Gen 37,39-50) recount the alienation and reconciliation of brothers. In the story of David and Saul, the pattern of alienation is introduced first between deity and king in 1 Sam 13-15 and then between king and hero in 1 Sam 19-31.

[48] Violent death brings in its wake a series of traditional responses from those who are bound to the dead person by family or covenant ties. The traditional mechanism can be seen at work several times in the *Iliad* (Glaucus' response to Sarpedon's death in *Iliad* XVI 508-867, Achilles' response to Patroclus' death in XVII-XXIII, and Priam's response to Hector's death in XXIV), and the duties demanded by others toward the dead carry the *Iliad* forward from Book XV to the conclusion. To the Homeric examples can be added the response to the death of Baal (Coogan and Smith, *Stories*, p. 144, 5.6.23-25), the response of Daniel and Pughat to Aqhat's death (Coogan and Smith, *Stories*, p. 47-49, 3.1-2), and David's response to Absalom's death (2 Sam 18:18-19:11). Typical motifs are the following: 1) messenger report of the death to an absent hero and/or family; 2) reactions of grief; 3) formal lament by the hero, family, and/or others; 4) retrieval of the body; 5) burial of the dead with mourning; 6) avenging of the death by the hero/family; B. Fenik notes that it is common for a man to avenge his slain "friend"/"brother"; *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad*, 139, 162.

[49] Verbal exchange: *Ee* IV 71-86: Marduk accuses Tiamat of hating those whom she bore and challenges her to single combat. *Anzu Myth* LV II 39-47; *Gilg.* V 85-94; *Iliad* XXII 249-272. The text of KTU 1.2.I 45+ breaks off before the content of Baal's message to Yamm becomes clear, but there has already been an exchange between Baal and the messengers of Yamm at the banquet. Verbal exchanges by messenger, rather than face to face, become the norm in the royal texts. For biblical examples, see Judg 11:12-28; 1 Sam 17:42-47;

2 Kgs 14:8-11. Susan Niditch, citing Quincy Wright's *A Study of War*, says that "the goal in taunting is, in fact, to preserve prestige and avoid physical combat: the taunt is often accompanied by bluffing, counter-taunting, and more bluffing." Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 92-93; Q. Wright, *A Study of War*, 2 vol. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1942) 1401-1415.

[50] Gilg. V 85-94: Humbaba mocks Enkidu and promises to slit Gilgamesh's throat. *Iliad* XXII 260-272. In the latter, the insults are all on the hero's side, a twist of the motif. Also 1 Sam 17:42-44.

[51] In addition to the false confidence manifested by the insults, see Anzu Myth LV II 39-42 where Anzu brags about stealing the Tablets of Destiny and demands to know who has come to fight him. *Iliad* XXII 278-311: after Achilles has failed with his first shot, Hector, already deceived by Athena, believes falsely that he will be the victor. See also below p.

[52] Anzu Myth LV II 48-Assy. II 57-147: Ninurta's attempt to hit Anzu with an arrow fails because the mythic bird is able to turn the arrow back with his powerful word; Ninurta sends a messenger to announce the failure to the leader who sends back a commission, essentially the same as the first, but with the addition of a new stratagem for the battle plan and with the promise of winning the name "Mighty One" (II 147). KTU 1.2.IV 1-18: As the column begins, Baal is recoiling (seemingly) from an initial(?) failure in the fight with Yamm. Kothar-and-Ḫasis offers encouragement to the hero and gives him a flying club which also fails to bring down the enemy champion in the first attempt. *Iliad* XXII 273-277: Achilles hurls his spear at Hector who avoids this initial attempt, but Athena, unseen by the Trojan hero, retrieves the spear for the hero. Here the initial failure allows Hector's false confidence to build the dramatic irony of the story. In each case, the initial failure is followed by a return to motifs from the middle section whether from the scene of call and commission or from the preparation for battle (gifts of weapons).

[53] Even while Ninurta is engaged with Anzu in battle, the messenger Sharur goes back and forth between the hero and Ea to bring counsel to direct the battle; *Anzu Myth* SB II 103-147. In *Gilg.* V 137-140, Hittite recension, Shamash appears to the hero after the foe has made his presence felt, and rouses the mighty gale-winds against Humbaba. *KTU* 1.2.IV 18-23: Kothar wa-Ḥasis provides two flying clubs. In *Iliad* XXII 214-225, Athena appears to Achilles and assures him that Hector will not escape now.

[54] *Iliad* XXII 289-293: Hector's spear hits Achilles' shield but does no damage. *Sinuhe* 134-137: The Strong Man of Retenu discharges a whole arsenal of weapons at the hero who avoids them all. The emphasis laid upon the sheer number of the enemy's arms must not be overlooked in the interpretation.

[55] *Ee* IV 87-103: Marduk engages the manic Tiamat in single-combat and when she opens her mouth to consume him, he drives in the Evil Wind to hold open her body and shoots her with an arrow. *Anzu Myth* LV III 1-21: Ninurta uses two weapons to strike repeatedly until Anzu drops his wings; he then with arrow and dart pierces Anzu's heart, lungs and wings. Humbaba pleads for his life twice, but Enkidu encourages the hero to finish the battle causing the enemy to curse them; finally, Gilgamesh strikes at Humbaba's neck: V 85-265. Baal subdues Yamm with two flying clubs provided by Kothar wa-Ḥasis: *KTU* 1.2.IV 18-23. *Iliad* XXII 312-329: Achilles hits Hector with the spear, retrieved by Athena and originally given to him by Peleus his father. *Sinuhe* 138: The hero hits the Strong Man with a single arrow.

[56] *Ee* IV 104a; *KTU* 1.2.IV 25-26; *Iliad* XXII 330a; *Sinuhe* 139.

[57] *Ee* IV 104b; *Iliad* XXII 330b-366; *Sinuhe* 140-141.

[58] *Ee* IV 129-132, 136-138: Marduk crushes Tiamat's skull and tramples her legs, but the severing of the body is reserved for the first act of creation. In the *Anzu Myth* LV III 10-20, Ninurta cuts off

the wings and shoots an arrow into his heart. In KTU 1.2.IV 27, *yqt b'l wyšt.ym.ykly tpt.nhr* is translated by Gibson: “Baal dragged out Yamm and laid him down, he made an end of Judge Nahar.” Smith translates it: “Baal drags and dismembered(?) Yamm, / He destroys Judge River (p. 323). The difficulties of translation are discussed by Smith in the *Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, 351-356. In *Gilg.* V 264-265: Gilgamesh strikes Humbaba’s neck “and the ravines did run with his blood” (Ish 25’), and on their journey back, “Gilgamesh [carried] the head of Humbaba”; V 302. *Iliad* XXII 371-404: The young men stab Hector’s body as they view it, and Achilles drags the corpse around Troy; however, the hero does not carry out his threat to mutilate the body but gives the body back to Priam, Hector’s father. The breaking of this motif in the *Iliad* becomes the climax of the story. In *Sinuhe* 140, the hero finishes off the Strong Man with the foe’s own ax. See also the similar analysis of Frolov and Wright, “Homeric and Ancient Near Eastern Intertextuality in 1 Samuel 17,” 466.

[59] *Sinuhe* 141; 1 Sam 17:52. Cf. also von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 48; he cites war cries also in Judg 7:20 and similarly in Josh 6:5; 1 Sam 17:20; 2 Chr 20:21-22. See also the note on the victory cry below in §2.5.4.

[60] Cf. the discussion in Chapter 3 on the enemy’s recognition of defeat and their destruction or capture.

[61] *Ee* IV 106-122. Similarly, in the *Battle of Kadesh*, Ramesses II defeats the Hittite army single-handedly. Samson also defeats the Philistine forces alone in Judg 15.

[62] *Ee* IV 121-122: Marduk takes the Tablet of Destiny from Qingu, Tiamat’s consort. At the end of *Gilg.* V, Gilgamesh and Enkidu take plunder from the cedar forest which is better preserved in two Old Babylonian fragments; George, *Gilgamesh Epic*, 46-47. *Iliad* XXII 367-368: Achilles takes the armor which Hector had taken from Patroclus. *Sinuhe* 143-147: Sinuhe plunders the Strong Man’s camp.

Smith notes that these are often mentioned in warrior poetry; *Poetic Heroes*, 17-18.

[63] *Anzu Myth* LV III 22-23: “The wind bore Anzu’s wing feathers / As a sign of his glad tidings. / Dagan rejoiced when he saw his sign.” He then invites the gods to reward the hero, and they send a messenger to that effect.

[64] *Sinuhe* 141-142: the hero gives praise to Montu; cf. the discussion in Chapter 3 on “Plunder, Recognition and Reward of the Deity and King.”

[65] G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1981) Ch. 5.

[66] *Ee* IV 133-134; V-VII: after the initial scene of recognition, the creation of the world and the establishment of Babylon alternate with more gifts and speeches ending with the proclamation of Marduk’s fifty names. *KTU* 1.2.IV 32: Athtart, seemingly, proclaims “Baal is/shall be king.” *Iliad* XXIII 35: Achilles is brought to Agamemnon, but the scene is still dominated by Patroclus’ death; in a sense, the real scene of recognition comes in Book XXIV between Achilles and Priam, the enemy king. *Sinuhe* 142-143: the hero is embraced by his prince, but the more important recognition comes from the pharaoh later in the story. In the *Anzu Myth*, LV I 90 and OB II 10, the hero is promised the reward of a great name and also to the false heroes (I 97, 119, 140. Also in LV II 27 and 103, Ninurta is told that his name will be “Mighty One.” The end of SB III contains a number of names given to Ninurta including Ningirsu, Lugalbanda and other names pointing to the Sumerian background. *Gilg.* Y 188: Gilgamesh undertakes the fight against *Ħuwawa* in order to “establish for ever a name eternal.” In *Gilg.* V 244-245, Enkidu encourages Gilgamesh to finish the fight: “Establish for ever [*a fame*] that endures / how Gilgamesh slew [*ferocious*] *Ħumbaba*!” Likewise for David; he “had more success than all the servants of Saul; so that his name was highly esteemed” (1 Sam 18:30); cf. also 2 Sam 7:9,23, 26; 8:13. The gift

of the name in Phil 2:9-10 belongs to this tradition. Cf. also Eph 1:21; 2 Thes 1:12.

[67] Anzu Myth LV III; the end of the tablet which in its fragmentary condition still records some fifteen names of the hero.

[68] J. Klein, “Šulgi X” in *Three Šulgi Hymns* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 1981) 133, 138. Cf. also F.R. Kraus, “Altemesopotamische Lebensfuhr,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 19 (1960) 117-132, esp. 127-131.

[69] The analysis here supports Cross’ argument against S. Herrmann who would trace the “making of a great name” (*šh šm gdwl*) to an Egyptian source (*iri rn*, etc.). As Cross says, “the notion of ‘making a great name’ is a common Hamito-Semitic concept, forming parallel idioms in many daughter languages. F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973) 248-249. S. Herrmann, *Die Königsnovelle in Ägypten und Israel*, (Leipzig: Karl-Marx-Universität, 1954) 41.

[70] M. Weinfeld cites the line, from a stele: “I inscribed my stele and established my name forever”; *Deuteronomy* 193, n. 4; KAH II 26:10. Weinfeld also points to the word pair of “name” and “stele” in Isa 56:5. Similarly in the *Enūma eliš*, Marduk turns the enemy gods into statues and says, “Let this be a token that this may never be forgotten” (V 71-76). The establishment of a name is also related to the founding of a house (= dynasty) whereby the hero’s name is carried on through the generations as with Abraham in Gen 12:2. The winning of a name is also connected with building projects; the tower of Babylon is begun in order to “make a name” (Gen 11:4). Even so, the battle is the typical arena in which glory is won. For Ramesses II who wins “a name” at the Battle of Kadesh, see below in §3.5.2. Also Kang, *Divine War*, 71-72.

[71] Athtart reacts to Baal’s scattering of Yamm by saying: “Yamm

surely is dead! / Baal rei[gns(?)]. Kothar or someone affirms this “Yamm surely is dead! / [Baal reigns (?)] / He indeed rules. Athtart then reaffirms this; *Baal and Yamm*, KTU I.2.IV 28-41, pp. 356. The

[72] Anthony Spalinger, “Orientations on Sinuhe,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur*, 25 (1998) 311-339, esp. 332.

3. The Royal Battle Narrative in the Ancient Near East

As seen in the last chapter, characters and themes shape and reshape the battle narrative, and this chapter considers a standard variation, the royal battle narrative. Here the roles of hero and leader are combined on both the human and divine levels. On the human level, the king takes the roles of both hero and leader; as such, he does not need to turn to any other human character for a commission. The official approbation and command to undertake the fight comes from the king's deity, who plays the role of the divine leader and also may fight as the divine hero. The fusion of the roles of hero and leader on both the human and divine levels identifies the king with the deity. The identification is not gratuitous but rather the point of the story.

In his famous work, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, Gerhard von Rad considered “holy war” only as an Israelite institution without reference to the larger ANE context.^[1] However, Manfred Weippert has shown that the literatures of Israel and Assyria reflect the same practices and ideologies of war.^[2] Instead of practices and ideology, I shall be dealing with motifs and patterns used in storytelling. Again we are faced with the differences between a historical and a literary approach. The two are not contradictory; rather, they should complement one another.

Weippert confines his study to Assyria, but I wish to extend the boundaries both in time and space. Much of this material can be characterized as “royal battle reports,” for little or no attention is paid to the development of narrative tension or to the retardation of the story. The enemy's threat quickly gives way to the announcement of the king's victory. The bulk of the report is concerned most often with the extent of the destruction, the plunder taken, and the tribute offered by defeated or neighboring

kings. As such, the battle report emphasizes the magnitude of the victory and the recognition paid to the king.[\[3\]](#)

In his meticulous study, K. Lawson Younger, Jr. has analyzed these conquest accounts of the ancient Near East and used the information as a lens to view Joshua 9-12. For this, he generated a set of motifs corresponding to those developed in the previous chapter,[\[4\]](#) and he uses these “syntagms” to analyze in great detail the Assyrian, Hittite, and Egyptian “conquest accounts,” and further refines these basic categories both in terms of actions and vocabulary. In the end, Younger uses his analysis to show that Josh 9-12 belongs to a literary genre and must be appreciated as such. His remarks are aimed mainly at historical critics who do not recognize “the figurative nature” or “the use of hyperbole in the narrative.” Therefore, “once one admits this element into the interpretive process, there is no reason to maintain that the account in Josh 9-12 portrays a *complete* conquest.”[\[5\]](#)

3.1. The Literary Texts of Royal Battle Narratives

The royal battle narrative, as defined here, exploits the traditional possibilities for tension and retardation to tell a story and not merely to report the king's greatness. Even so, these texts vary in literary quality. Not all are of great length, and some are very fragmentary, yet all are more than a battle report.

1. *The Sargon King of Battle Epic*, found in an Old Babylonian version and a Tel el-Amarna version.[\[6\]](#)
2. The Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin.[\[7\]](#)
3. The “Apology of Ḫattušili.”[\[8\]](#)
4. Pharaoh Ramesses II's “Literary Record” of the Battle of Kadesh.[\[9\]](#)
5. Pharaoh Merneptah's defeat of the Libyans in the Great Karnak Inscription.[\[10\]](#)

6. *Kurigalzu*: King Kurigalzu's two battles with the King of Elam.[\[11\]](#)
7. *Ashur-uballiṭ*: King Ashur-uballiṭ's fight with the Kassites.[\[12\]](#)
8. *Adad-narari Epic*: The triumph of King Adad-narari I over the Nazi-Maruttash, the Kassite king of Babylon.[\[13\]](#)
9. *Tukulti-Ninurta Epic*: the battles of King Tukulti-Ninurta I against Kashtiliash.[\[14\]](#)
10. *Shalmaneser in Ararat*: The campaign of King Shalmaneser III against Urartu.[\[15\]](#)
11. *Esarhaddon*: King Esarhaddon's fight for the throne.[\[16\]](#)
12. The Moabite Stone: King Mesha's victory over the "son of Omri."[\[17\]](#)

3.2. Characters

Whereas the hero and helpless leader take the major roles in the heroic pattern, the king and his deity are central in the royal pattern. Their relationship is that of hero and leader, yet the king is also the human leader, and the deity may take the role of divine hero; neither is helpless.

In his study of *Divine War in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East*, Sa-Moon Kang shows the deity act as "a warrior who fights against the enemy." Therefore the war is understood "as originating from divine command," and the core of these divine wars "is the divine intervention in battle by miracles of natural phenomena such as flood or rain-storms, or historical events of revolt amongst the enemies, or as the terror of the divine warriors themselves." Since the divine warrior is the true victor, the spoils of battle belong to him or her, and the king erects steles or monuments or builds temples to commemorate the victory of the divine warriors."[\[18\]](#) The literary texts considered here certainly carry out these themes and exalt the human king, except for the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin. "Initially, he is depicted as a self-willed

individual, putting himself above the gods. Since Naram-Sin defies the will of the gods, he must be punished. He must realize and acknowledge his tragic error before he can receive assistance from the gods.”[19]

Helpless characters make only an occasional appearance when the king, for some reason, is absent from the scene of the enemy threat. The other central character, the royal army, forms an extension of the king but has little personality otherwise. Counselors and religious personnel may play minor roles to carry out their functions.

Characters on the enemy side generally include only the enemy king and army who play their traditional roles as the representatives of chaos and destruction.

In the *Tukulti-Ninurta Epic*, an elaborate exchange of letters creates a larger and more mimetic sense of the enemy king, Kashtiliash. With the ring of history, Tukulti-Ninurta reminds the enemy king of the long history of their relationship and accuses him of violating their treaty, perhaps, as Foster notes, with the possibility of reconciliation. Kashtiliash, however, replies with insults and refuses to let the Assyrian messengers return. Tukulti-Ninurta sends further indictments and calls upon the deity Shamash to vindicate him for keeping the treaty. Filled with fear at the impending trial by battle, Kashtiliash “offers a soliloquy on his impending doom.”[20] Despite the realism, Kashtiliash plays the traditional role of the enemy king.

3.3. The Beginning: Description of the King, Threat and Helplessness

3.3.1. *Description of the king*

Since the royal battle narrative serves to exalt the king, the story

may open with a description of the hero. The only impediment which might keep a king from immediately resolving the enemy threat is his absence from the scene.^[21] Otherwise, the king appears as the complete hero.

3.3.2. Enemy's threat and power

In the *Legend of Naram Sin* (lines 31-62), a monstrous enemy arrives to wreak great devastation. The threat, created both by the enemy's proximity and their terrible power, is also found in the *Battle of Kadesh*; there, the Hittite troops arrayed before the Egyptians are said to be like the sands of the sea (P 66). In general, however, the enemy's strength is attenuated in these royal stories. This shift may well reflect the actual historical facts behind these narratives, but it also reflects a movement away from elements that would denigrate the magnificence of the king, the most powerful figure in the story. Still, something of the initial tension is lost in the exchange.

The enemy's threat divides into four different types of wars, which account for variations in the opening of the story:

1. wars against outside aggressors who usually attack some outpost of the kingdom;
2. wars against rebels within the kingdom;^[22]
3. wars of redress, i.e., wars waged to redress past atrocities by the enemy before the king's accession;^[23]
4. wars of conquest.^[24]

The first two types are similar to the threat posed by the enemy in the heroic pattern. The wars of redress begin with a history of the suffering and defeat endured in the past at the enemy's hands. Kings wage wars of conquest to expand the kingdom in the name of their deity, and so the pattern begins with a scene of commission and preparation.

3.3.3. *Reaction of helplessness*

In the heroic battle narrative, the leader is the central character in the reaction of helplessness, but the motif is inappropriate for the kings because they are the battle heroes and the human leaders. Therefore, where the reaction of helplessness appears, the king must be absent from the scene of conflict.^[25] Furthermore, since the narrative is told from the king's point of view, often in the first person, the reaction of helplessness, where it appears, is not developed with the vigor seen in the heroic battle narratives. It may only be implicit in the need to call for the king.

3.4. The Middle: Call and Commission with the Preparation for Battle.

3.4.1. *Call and commission of the king by the helpless*

Since the king is hero by virtue of his kingship, the search for a hero becomes inappropriate, and likewise, there are no false heroes.^[26] Where helpless inhabitants appear, a messenger must bring their call for help to the king, as in the case of a vassal besieged by an enemy.^[27]

3.4.2. *King's reaction of righteous indignation*

As seen in the previous chapter, the hero's stock response to the news of the enemy's threat is righteous indignation, and both Merneptah and Esarhaddon display their anger at the report of the enemy's villainy.^[28]

3.4.3. *Divine call and commission of the king*

Kingship brings a duty to wage war. Technically speaking, the king's primary call and commission come with his accession to the throne, and Merneptah's accession is incorporated into the battle narrative.^[29] As a result, the call motif does not have the prominence found in the heroic pattern. Still, a divine commission for each battle is a regular feature.

The patterns for the call and commission confirm almost exclusively to the first two patterns found in the heroic narratives:

1. The divine leader (calls and) commissions the king, and the king accepts.^[30]
2. The king calls for the divine commission, and the divine leader grants the divine commission.^[31]

Normally, this scene contains no objection by either the king or the deity because it serves to underline the unanimity between the human and the divine.^[32]

As Kang says, "There was a profound conviction that no military action could succeed unless its plan had the prior approval of the gods."^[33] The king typically calls for the divine commission in one of four ways:

1. direct personal prayer,^[34]
2. sacrificia consultoria^[35]
3. sacrifices entreating the favor of the gods,^[36]
4. a vow which promises something in return for victory.^[37]

The divine oracle of commission, whether initiated by the god(s) or in answer to the king's call, is communicated in the following ways:

1. to the king himself
 - a. by direct address,^[38]
 - b. by a dream;^[39]

2. a spontaneous oracle to a third person that is not a cultic person, for example, a person who reports a dream;[\[40\]](#)
3. an answer to *sacrificia consultoria*, as interpreted by the proper cultic personnel.[\[41\]](#)

These three orders represent a descending scale of dramatic intimacy in which direct personal contact is sacrificed more and more to the constrictions of ordinary experience. The sacrifices entreating favor and especially the vows do not envision either a direct or indirect response; likewise, the king's prayer in some narratives receives no reply, with the assumption that it is affirmative.[\[42\]](#)

The divine commission may appear without further elaboration, as in the *Moabite Stone*, where the deity Chemosh says to King Mesha: "Go, take Nebo from Israel" (line 14). The assurance of divine presence and aid is added to Amon's commission of Ramesses II: "Straight on! Forward! I am with thee; I am thy father! My hand is with thee, for I am worth more to thee than hundreds of thousands, and I am the strong lord who loves valor."[\[43\]](#) The commission to Esarhaddon is shorter but similar: "Go (ahead), do not tarry! We will march with you and kill your enemies."[\[44\]](#)

The encouragement motif ("Do not fear") does not fit well with the vision of the king as the great and mighty warrior.[\[45\]](#) Merneptah receives the commission both by an oracle from Amun and in a dream by Ptah. In preparation for the battle, he receives the gift of a sword with these words: "Then his majesty saw in a dream, as if a [statue] of Ptah were standing near Pharaoh, l.p.h. He was high [...] He was saying to him: "Seize (it) here! And expel the foul heart from yourself."[\[46\]](#)

The text may add the "hand-formula," a formula whereby the divine leader announces that the enemy has been given into the hand of the king.[\[47\]](#) The formula is an extension of the assurance of divine presence and aid; with its introduction into a narrative, all pretense of dramatic tension disappears.

Within the heroic tradition, the hero receives the divine

commission as approval from the ultimate dimension within the hero's society. While this is a factor in the royal tradition, the divine commission also establishes a primary theme of the story: the identification of the king and deity in both person and action. The deity, particularly the head of the pantheon, is responsible for the protection and defense of the community, as is the king, who is the human manifestation of the divine king.

3.4.4. Preparation for battle: the arming of the leader and muster of the army

The *Battle of Kadesh* recounts the arming of the hero with weapons, armor, and chariot for Ramesses II.^[48] The muster of the army is the major motif of preparation in these narratives.^[49] The king may also call and commission the army and add an exhortation.^[50] Interestingly in the story of Ashur-uballit, the army delivers a speech and calls on the king to lead them into battle.^[51]

3.4.5. Journey

Since the enemy is generally at some distance, the journey continually appears in these narratives, but the motif is not developed except in *Shalmaneser in Ararat*, in which the journey serves as the frame for the battle narrative.

3.5. The Resolution: Victory, Plunder, and Recognition

3.5.1. The verbal exchange between king and enemy

The king and enemy may carry out a verbal exchange, similar to that found in the heroic tradition. Typically it takes place through messengers rather than face to face on the battlefield as in the heroic pattern. *Tukulti-Ninurta* offers the most interesting example with the exchange between messengers creating the central drama of the story.^[52] The enemy king may display his false confidence in this exchange or thereby add dramatic irony.^[53]

3.5.2. Fight and the victory by the deity, king, and army

The royal fight scene ends almost as soon as it begins, sometimes being reduced to a simple statement of victory.^[54] These narratives typically recount the meeting of faceless armies whose diffuse and simultaneous actions do not lend themselves easily to the storyteller's art.^[55] This speed of the victory comes not from a lack of imagination but signifies central themes.

First of all, the speed underlines the divine aid promised the king. This promise may be fulfilled concretely in the story with the deity or deities taking part in the battle as the divine hero who leads the king into battle, marches at his side, and fights.^[56] Kang, in particular, has demonstrated that “from the pre-Sargonic period..., the gods began to intervene in wars.” Various Hittite and Mesopotamian deities aided their kings. In Mesopotamia, “the major divine warriors were rain-storm gods.”^[57] Therefore, the storm and other meteorological images point to the divine hand by recalling these weather deities.^[58] Amun-Re, the sun god, was the primary divine warrior in Egypt. Still, as Manassa points out, other deities

join him in “the earliest depiction of warfare,” and the *Merneptah Inscription* (42) proclaims, “All the gods have felled him [the enemy king] on account of Egypt.”[59] She goes on to point out that war in Egypt is a “cosmic struggle” with “the equation of foreigners to chaotic elements,” and Merneptah “as the earthly embodiment of Re” and therefore the representative of the divine hero.[60] Ramesses II also rushes into battle “like Mont ... like Ba’al,” that is, like a god (P 77, 155), and Tukulti-Ninurta I has vestiges of the storm god as “the raging, pitiless storm.”[61]

Secondly, as G. Furlani has shown, Babylonia and Assyria conceived of every battle as a trial in which the righteous party necessarily won.[62] From this perspective, a speedy victory represents a speedy verdict against the enemy and for the king.

Finally, the speed is a sign of the king’s magnificent power. Unlike the heroic narratives in which great power belongs to the enemy, the royal stories exalt the king’s might which may be so great that it pre-empt the fight and leads directly to the enemy’s recognition of defeat.[63] The Hittite king, Ḫattušili, announces that Ishtar goes before him and claims the heroic motif for himself: “I personally conquered the enemy. When I killed the man who was in command, the enemy fled.”[64]

The poetic text of Ramesses II at Kadesh breaks the traditional royal pattern by having his army retreat leaving only the king surrounded by 2,500 Hittites chariots (P 83-87). He prays to Amun (P 92-127) and sends the enemy fleeing (P 128-165). Rebuking his cowardly army, he retells his victory, attributing it to Amun (P166-204). In a flashback, his shield-bearer begs him to stop, but he refuses (P 205-234). The army now recognizes the hero of the battle, and the king rebukes them again, saying: “Fair indeed is fame (“name”) won in battle, over and over.”[65] The single-handed combat brings this story closer to the heroic pattern, and so magnifies Ramesses’ greatness.

3.5.3. The enemy’s recognition of defeat and their destruction

or capture

As in the heroic narrative, the victory brings about the enemy's recognition of defeat and leads to a reaction of helplessness: fear and flight. The royal army, already responsible for the victory, pursues and inflicts great or total destruction upon the enemy.^[66] Even so, the enemy king does not necessarily die in the conflict, unlike his counterpart in the narratives of single-combat. The enemy king may escape,^[67] or he may be captured^[68] and become part of the scene of recognition.^[69] These events rob the climax of its utter decisiveness but reflect a more realistic or even historical portrayal of the battle.

In the Merneptah's battle against the Libyans, the storyteller states that "there was none that escaped among them" (the Libyans), yet he contradicts this by reporting that the Libyan king fled, "his heart fearing." This news comes to the pharaoh with information about a new Libyan king who had opposed the old (§583-586). The specific details of the escape and new appointment have the marks of unique historical fact, yet this is mixed blithely with the traditional statement that no one escaped. In the royal tradition, however, the storyteller's fidelity to the tradition and even to history more often gives way to a more basic loyalty, the storyteller's loyalty to the king and the king's glory.

3.5.4, Plunder, Recognition, and Reward of the Deity and King

Plunder figures prominently in the royal narrative, along with the recognition of the divine and human heroes. As Kang points out, "it is natural that the spoils belong to the gods, for a war is the war of gods,"^[70] Kang links this to the Moabite Stone where Mesha "killed every one of [it]—seven thousand native men, foreign men, native women, for[eign] / women, concubines—for I devoted (*hṛm*)

it to ‘Ashtar-Kemosh.’[71] Kang ties this to the *ḥērem* or “ban,” which plays a vital role in biblical texts, but it has not been found elsewhere in the ancient Near East beyond the Moabite Stone.[72] The ban has, of course, received great attention from biblical scholars and theologians, but, for this study, the biblical *ḥērem* or ban serves the recognition of the divine hero, whatever it may have meant historically or may mean for us today. [73]

In *Shalmaneser in Ararat*, the king carries out a festival and “with joy in Aššur the lordliness of a lion [...] with all his lands pronounced Aššur [blessed].” In the prose account the king says: “I made for myself a large royal stele, [inscribed] on it the praise of Aššur my lord and the power of my might of which I had given evidence in the land of Urartu.”[74]

The recognition of the human victory undergoes some alteration since a king cannot easily recognize himself as a hero though Merneptah does it.[75] Most logically, perhaps, the divine leader (s) should recognize the hero-king, as in the *Battle of Kadesh* on Ramesses’ return to Egypt.[76] A captured enemy king, accompanied by appropriate tribute, may assume for this duty.[77] A neighboring king may offer the conquering king tribute, whether under duress or of their own accord.[78] Finally, the army or even the enemy army in *Kurigalzu* may acknowledge the hero.[79]

The scene of recognition is of special importance for Esarhaddon. Though he has been appointed crown prince by his father, Esarhaddon has not yet become king when his rebel brothers assassinate their father. Esarhaddon pre-empted the fight with a brilliant show of power, interpreted in the imagery of divine heroes, and this causes the rebel army to defect and proclaim, “This is our king.” The Assyrian people come next to kiss their king’s feet, and then, as the hero of the battle, Esarhaddon takes possession of the royal city and the throne of his father. The scene of recognition ends with the gods registering their acknowledgment through portents, omens, and oracles.[80] This narrative preserves the traditional tie between the victorious hero and the reward of kingship to justify Esarhaddon’s accession.

The king may also set up a monument to mark the victory. As Weinfeld points out, this is connected with the establishment of a “name forever.”^[81] In several instances below, the erection of a stele is connected to the king’s recognition of the god(s) as the divine hero, a motif expressed by sacrifice, etc.^[82] Weippert lists the return journey and the disbanding of the army as other concluding motifs.^[83]

3.6. Conclusion

This survey is by no means exhaustive. It does not attempt to isolate the peculiarities of specific cultures. Instead, I have tried to show that the royal pattern is a variation of the heroic pattern, which results from the combination of the human hero and leader into a single character—the king. Appendix 2 provides a list of these motifs. Again this pattern is a theoretical model, a distillation of the tradition, as is the heroic pattern. Both are descriptive rather than prescriptive. The close between the two appears most clearly in the *Battle of Kadesh*, where the lone king defeats a great army. However, the royal storytellers are less interested in the drama of the story than are their heroic counterparts. Narrative tension and retardation give way to the exaltation of the king and his identification with the deity. In short, the battle narrative has become a tool of royal propaganda.

3.7. Footnotes for Chapter 3

^[1] Except for a passing reference to the Assyrian use of mercenaries, von Rad does not point to the larger ANE context; *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 124, n. 12.

^[2] M. Weippert, “Heiliger Krieg,” 460-493.

[3] W. Richter's work focused particularly on vocabulary; *Traditionsgeschliche Untersuchungen zum Richterbuch* (Bonner Biblische Beiträge 18; Bonn: P. Hastein, 21966) 262-266. For Assyrian other examples of the battle report, cf. the annalistic reports of Shalmaneser III in ANET3, 276-280. Cf. also Manfred Weippert, "Die Kämpfe des assyrischen Königs Assurbanipal gegen die Araber: Redaktionskritische Untersuchung des Berichts in Prisma A," *Die Welt des Orients*, 7.1 (1973) 39-85. This longer report offers a good example of a historical report with its many details and people. It makes clear that Ashurbanipal acts at the command of his many deities and that Umwaite' receives the curses of the oath he has violated, but the text is not interested in narrative tension and resolution. Michael G. Hasel has also produced a descriptive survey of siege tactics and the destruction of life support systems in the ancient Near East; *Military Practice and Polemic: Israel's Laws of Warfare in Near Eastern Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2005).

[4] K. Lawson Younger, Jr. *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series, 98 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 72-79. His "syntagms" with correlation to this study in brackets are as follows: A. spatio-temporal coordinates; B. disorder [tension]; C. divine aid [divine commission]; D. gathering of the troops [muster]; E. move from place to place [journey]; F. presence of the deity [deity as hero]; G. flight; H. pursuit; I. combat; L. outcome of the combat [destruction of the enemy and plunder]; M. submission; N. exemplary punishment; O. consequences; P. acts of celebration [recognition of deity and king]; Q. return [journey]; R. supplemental royal activities on the campaign [recognition]; S. summary statement; T. geographic note. What I find interesting about Younger's motifs is the occurrence of flight and pursuit after the appearance of the deity and before the battle. As outlined in the heroic pattern, the enemy's flight is a reaction to the recognition of helplessness after the defeat of the enemy hero. The "combat"

comes here only after the pursuit of the enemy. This alteration of the pattern underlines the power of the deity and of the king.

[5] Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 243.

[6] Joan Goodnick Westenholz, surveys the various fragments along with Amarna Recension in Text 9B: “King of Battle.” in her *Legends of the Kings of Akkad* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), pp. 102-140. Also cf. Foster, *Before the Muses*, vol. I, 103-108.

[7] *Cuthean Legend of Naram Sin*: Joan Goodnick Westenholz has published the various Babylonian texts related to this narrative which she renames “Naram-Sin and the Enemy Hordes”: The “Cuthean Legend,” in her *Legends of the Kings of Akkad*, Texts 20-22, pp. 263-368; Text 2: The Standard Babylonian Recension, pp. 294-331. Cf. also Peter Machinist’s comparison of the historian’s perspective in this text with that of the Deuteronomistic History in “The Voice of the Historian in the Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean World,” *Interpretation* 57. 2 (2003) 117-137. Westenholz has also gathered a number of literary texts recounting the heroic deeds of Sargon and Naram Sin. All are rather fragmentary; still, a few references are included below.

[8] “The Apology of Ḫattušili” has been translated by Th. P. J. van den Hout, in *Context of Scripture*, edited by William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger (Leiden: Brill, 2003) vol. 1, pp. 199-203. J. Randall Short comments extensively on the relationship of this text to the “History of the Rise of David” (1 Samuel 16 – 2 Samuel 5) in his *The Surprising Election and Confirmation of King David*, Harvard Theological Studies 63 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). As he shows, the text is a justification by Ḫattušili for his rebellion. It is more of a historical document than a literary document. Still, it emphasizes his devotion and reliance particularly on Ishtar which fits with the typical call and commission in the royal pattern.

[9] *Battle of Kadesh*: A. Gardiner, *The Kadesh Inscription of Ramesses II* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1960) 7-14. Gardiner refers to the text in question by the letter “P” which stands for “poetic text” although he notes that the text is not in verse. I have quoted the newer translation by K. A. Kitchen, “Ramesses II (2.5): The Battle of Qadesh: The Poem, or Literary Record,” in *Context of Scripture*, edited by William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger (Leiden: Brill, 2003) vol. 2, pp. 32-38.

[10] *Merneptah Inscription*: Colleen Manassa, *The Great Karnak Inscription of Merneptah: Grand Strategy in the 13th Century B.C.* Yale Egyptological Studies (New Haven, CT: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 2003). Originally in J.H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906-1907) III, §572-592. Manassa divides the narratives into sixteen sections that correspond closely to the pattern of the battle narrative:

1. List of enemies (1 with some text lost here and elsewhere) [= threat],
2. Merneptah as a warrior (2-6); [= description of the warrior],
3. vanguard of the enemy (7); [= threat],
4. the beloved land without a champion (8-9) [= reaction of helplessness],
5. Merneptah: Champion of Egypt (10-12) [= hero],
6. One came to say: “The Libyans attack.” (133-15a) [= threat],
7. Merneptah’s address: Pharaoh rages (15b-19) [= The king describes the threat],
8. Conclusion of Merneptah’s address and oath (21-25) [= He claims his role as hero.],
9. The oracle and preparation for battle (26-28a) [= divine commission],
10. Message of Ptah: the divine dream (28-30a) [= divine commission],
11. The victory of the battle of Perire (30b-40a) [= the victory; the Egyptian army destroys the enemy “without a remnant amongst them” and the enemy leader flees],
12. Frontier report and speech of the captives (40b-44) [reports are unable to confirm the death of the enemy king],
13. Aftermath of the Battle: Egypt rejoices (45-48a) [= army bearing plunder and recognition by “the entire land rejoicing”],
14. The plunder list 48b-61) [= plunder including the other enemy chiefs brought alive before the hero-king],
15. Royal appearance and speeches of Merneptah (62-73a) [=

recognition of the hero-king who appears and gives a speech announcing the death of the enemy king by his tribe and recognizing his deities], 16. Speech of the Council of Thirty and concluding praise (73b-79) [= recognition of the hero-king by others].

Manassa classifies this text as a “Königsnovelle” (107) because it “serves functionally as royal propaganda, specifically focused upon actions performed by the king in order to preserve cosmic order” (109). Still from the standpoint of plot, the text belongs to the genre of the battle narrative.

[11] *Kurigalzu*: A fragment telling of the battle, the flight and capture of the enemy king is known: A.K. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts* (Toronto Semitic Texts and Studies 3; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975) Ch. 5, esp. p. 52-55. As he says, “The main source for the Kurigalzu epic is oddly enough, Chronicle P. This chronicle quotes extensively from an epic in its description of two battles fought by Kurigalzu. It is possible that the fragment in chapter 5 in which the hostilities with Elam are narrated is part of the same epic” (42). Chronicle P is found as “Chronicle 22” in A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, Texts from Cuneiform Sources 5 (Locust City, NY: J.J. Austin, 1975) 170-177. The same text is also translated as “45. Chronicles of the Kassite Kings” in Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, edited by Benjamin R. Foster (Leiden: Brill, 2005) 278-281.

[12] *Ashur-uballiṭ*: For the text see R.C. Thompson, “VII. The Excavations on Nabû at Nineveh,” *Archaeologia* 79 (1929) 103-148, esp. 131-132, and the commentary in Thompson, *Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* 20 (1933) 116-117. This fragment tells of the army calling Ashur-uballiṭ II (c. 1386-1369) to battle against the king of the Kassites.

[13] *Adad-narari Epic*: E. Weidner, “Assyrische Epen über die Kassiten Kämpfe,” *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 20 (1963) 113-116. Grayson, *Chronicles*, 57, n. 65.

[14] *Tukulti-Ninurta Epic* is translated by Foster in *Before the Muses*, vol. I, pp. 211-230 with information on the various text on p. 230, and for the citations, I have followed his indications. For the recent discussions dealing with the relation of this text to the Bible, cf. P. Machinist, "Literature as Politics: The Tukulti Ninurta Epic and the Bible," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1976) 455-482, and P.C. Craigie, "The Song of Deborah and the Epic of Tukulti Ninurta," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969) 253-265. On Ninurta as a divine warrior, cf. Kang, *Divine War*, 24-31.

[15] *Shalmaneser in Ararat*: W.G. Lambert, "The Sultantepe Tablets: VIII. Shalmaneser in Ararat," *Anatolian Studies* 11 (1961) 143-158. Lambert includes both a prose account and a poetic account which "unlike the hundreds of other Assyrian royal inscriptions containing annalistic material this one is—uniquely, so far as the present writer knows—poetry" (143). The prose account contains several battle reports (147-149). The poetic text contains only some sixty lines (149-153).

[16] *Esarhaddon*: R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Assarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien* (Archiv für Orientforschung, Beiheft 9; Graz: 1956; Osnabrück: Biblio-Verlag, 1967) §27; English translation in ANET3, 289-290; Weippert also discusses the text; "Heiliger Krieg," 466-468.

[17] *Moabite Stone*: Kent P. Jackson and J. Andrew Dearman, "The Text of the Mesha' Inscription," and Kent P. Jackson, "The Language of the Mesha' Inscription" in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*, ed. Andrew Dearman (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989) 93-95, 96-130. Aarnoud van der Deijl, *Protest or Propaganda: War in the Old Testament Book of Kings and in Contemporaneous Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 304-339.

[18] Kang, *Divine War*, 108-110.

[19] Westenholz, *Legends*, 264.

[20] Foster, *Before the Muses*, 216-221.

[21] *Battle of Kadesh*, P 1-24; *Legend of Naram Sin*, 1-30; *Esarhaddon*, I 1-9. Except in the *Legend of Naram Sin*, the king's absence from the scene of conflict is the only impediment to his dissolving the enemy's threat immediately.

[22] Cf. *Esarhaddon*, in which the hero's brother kills the old king and father, Sennacherib.

[23] *Moabite Stone*, 1-9; *Merneptah Inscription*, 1, 7, 18-23.

[24] Weippert, "Heiliger Krieg," 469, 487-488, 492; cf. *Shalmaneser in Ararat* where the Assyrian king wages a fierce war of conquests which causes others to come with tribute; poetic text, 56-57. Weippert points out that the wars of conquest are undertaken at the will of the god; there is no qualm of conscience about undertaking an offensive war. Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, *passim*.

[25] *Merneptah's Inscription*, 8-9: the narrator describes the situation before the pharaoh's appearance.

[26] The retreating Egyptian army in the *Battle of Kadesh*, (P 74-75) can be analyzed as a false hero whose failure brings the hero into the battle.

[27] *Merneptah Inscription* 15b: "raged like a lion"; also Josh 10:6. The *King of Battle Epic* (Tel el-Amarna edition), merchants call upon King Sargon to defeat the oppressive king, and they offer to pay for the campaign, a very businesslike reward (ll. 13-21); Westenholz, *Legends*, 114-117.

[28] *Esarhaddon*, I 53-59; *Merneptah Inscription* 15b.

[29] *Merneptah Inscription* 10-12. *Esarhaddon*, I 8-22: The hero is designated as heir to the throne by his father, the gods, and the people; this likewise functions as a primary call and commission which allows Esarhaddon to act like a king even though his enthronement comes after the battle. Note also the "Apology of

Ḫattušili” §11 = 4:7-40; for most of this story, the hero is not a king in his own right and thus receives commissions to wage war from his brother the king; cf. §5 = 1:66; §6 = 2:20; §7 = 2:35.

[30] *Merneptah Inscription* 26-28a contains an oracle announcing that “Amun has assented,” and in 28b-30a, Ptah appears in a dream saying “Seize it here” while giving Merneptah “the scimitar.” A dream is found in *Shalmaneser in Ararat*, poetic text, 25-30; “Apology of Ḫattušili” §11 = 4:7-15; Moabite Stone, 14.

[31] *Battle of Kadesh*, P 92-123. *Legend of Naram Sin*, 72-83, 99-114+; *Esarhaddon*, I 60-62. In Text 13: “Erra and Naram-Sin” 1-15, Ishtar commissions the hero and grants him weapons; Westenholz, *Legends*, 192-195, ll. 1-15.

[32] An exception is found in the *Legend of Naram Sin*. The king calls and gathers his seers to seek an oracle, but the gods refuse to grant the commission. Against their will, Naram-Sin goes out against the enemy and meets with defeat, followed by a reaction of helplessness (72-83, 84-87, 88-98). In the fourth year, the gods at the behest of Ea (seemingly) grant the king an oracle of commission (99-114+). The importance of seeking an oracle of commission is stressed again toward the end when the king is faced with deciding the fate of his prisoners. In the *Tukulti-Ninurta Epic*, iii (A obv.) 41'-46', the enemy king Kashtiliash complains that he is unable to obtain a divine commission by oracle or dream—an indication of rejection by the gods; see also 1 Sam 28 where Saul has Samuel conjured up without effect.

[33] Kang, *Divine War*, 42.

[34] *Tukulti-Ninurta*, ii (=A obv.) 11'-24': prayer to Shamash; *Esarhaddon*, I 59-60; *Battle of Kadesh*, P 91-125; *Ashur-uballit*, ii 2-18. The first two kings receive a direct reply. Scholes and Kellogg note: “Prayer, in particular, was designed in ancient literature to reveal thought and character with unquestionable validity, and this

attitude persists right up through Shakespeare”; *Nature of Narrative*, 200-201.

[35] Weippert, “Heiliger Krieg,” 470-472. *Sacrificia consultoria* are found in the *Legend of Naram Sin* and in the *Tukulti-Ninurta Epic* iii 41-46, the enemy king is denied omens and dreams. Cf. also *Esarhaddon*, I 61. Kang discusses these sacrifices in some detail; *Divine War*, 42-45, 56-65, 98-101.

[36] *Shalmaneser in Ararat*, poetic text, 41: sacrifices are offered even though the king has received a divine commission in a dream.

[37] There are no vows in this selection of royal narratives, but Weippert treats vows in “Heiliger Krieg,” 476, n. 74. Alice Logan also discusses the vow during biblical warfare found in Num 21:23; Joshua 6-7; Judg 8:4-21; Judg 11:30 and 1 Sam 14; she notes that “all underscore the seriousness of wartime pledges and the encumbrances that deals with the deity placed on those who made them”; “Rehabilitating Jephthah,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128.4 (2009) 665-685. Younger does not list it as a motif in his *Ancient Conquest Accounts*.

[38] *Battle of Kadesh*, P 125-127: Amun says: “Forward! I am with you. I am your father, my hand is with you! I am more useful to you than hundred-thousands of men, I am the Lord of Victory, who loves bravery.” *Moabite Stone*, 14. Kang in *Divine War* discusses oracles and signs in Mesopotamia (42-43), Anatolia (56-62), in Syro-Palestine (79-80) and Egypt (98-99).

[39] *Merneptah Inscription*, 28b-30a; Manassa also discusses dreams in Egyptian texts, 117-119; *Shalmaneser in Ararat*, poetic text, 25-30 according to Lambert’s text: “Aššur inspired me with confidence and [showed me a dream,]” (25). Dreams play an important role in the “Apology of Ḫattušili,” §3 = 1:9-21; §9 = 3:1-13; in §11 = 4:7-40, the goddess appears to his generals and to his wife saying: “”I will march

ahead of your husband and all of Hattusa will turn to (the side) of your husband.”

[40] Weippert has used the term “*spontane Orakel*”; “Heiliger Krieg” 471. He cites an example of a dream to a third person in the *Prism of Ashurbanipal A*, III 118-127.

[41] Weippert, “Heiliger Krieg,” 470-471.

[42] *Ashur-uballit*, ii 2-18.

[43] *Battle of Kadesh*, P 125-130.

[44] *Esarhaddon*, I 61-62. *Shalmaneser in Ararat*, poetic text, 25-30: “Aššur inspired me with confidence and [showed me a dream], the rest is largely obliterated except for the assurance of divine presence and aid, “May Ninurta go before you, may Girru follow at your rear.”

[45] For the motifs of assurance and encouragement in a different context, cf. “Apology of Ḫattušili” §4 = 1:37-38.

[46] *Merneptah Inscription*, 28b-29. According to Manassa, the command to “expel the foul heart from yourself” refers to the “foul heart” of the enemy king; *Great Karnak Inscription* 118. Breasted, however, translated it: “and banish thou the fearful heart from thee” (§ 582) which would be more traditional. While Manassa tries to exclude this reading on the basis of grammar (the preposition *ʾim* can imply both “within” and “from”) and also the lack of other indications that “Merneptah’s heart ever possessed the quality of *ḥw3*,” the tradition does not always follow logic.

[47] Weippert, “Heiliger Krieg,” 472-473, n. 54. The biblical tradition is surveyed by von Rad in *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 42-44; also C. Westermann, *Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament*, translated by Keith Crim (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991) 24-25 where “Übergabeformel” is translated as the

“conveyance formula”; in this text I have referred to it as the “hand-formula.” Kang discusses the formula in a Mari letter; *Divine War*, 43-45, 67. Also van der Deijl, *Protest or Propaganda*, 289-290.

[48] Ramesses, informed of his army’s retreat, girds for battle and mounts his chariot drawn by “Victory of Thebes,” he being “like his father Mont...like Ba‘al...”; *Battle of Kadesh*, P 76-80. Note also the sword given to the pharaoh in *Merneptah Inscription* 29. Manassa notes that “the image of the god handing the khepesh scimitar to the king is a ubiquitous motif in the New Kingdom reliefs and inscriptions” and “is accompanied by statements proclaiming the inevitable victory of the king over the enemies to be smitten with the divinely given weapons; *Great Karnak Inscription*, 117-118.

[49] Cf. *Iliad* XVI 155-220; also *Battle of Kadesh*, P 25-28 following the initial description of Ramesses. In Weippert’s pattern of motifs, the muster of the troops follows immediately after the report of the enemy threat; “Heiliger Krieg,” 269. In the *Merneptah Inscription* 15b-25, 30, the pharaoh gives his army or people a speech to lay out the enemy threat and encourage them who “are trembling like birds,” and at the beginning of the battle the army gathers in rank. In Cf. also *Shalmaneser in Ararat*, poetic text 17-19. In *Ashur-uballit* and *Esarhaddon*, the muster follows the divine commission as in the heroic pattern. The army may also be called and commissioned; typically an exhortation is included. For the muster see also Kang, *Divine War*, in Egypt, 100-101.

[50] *King of Battle Epic* (OB edition) 1-9; *Battle of Kadesh*, P 167-195, 250-277; *Shalmaneser in Ararat*, poetic text 17-24. In Text 13: “Erra and Naram-Sin” 1-15, the hero receives weapons from Ishtar; Westenholz, *Legends*, 195, l. 16. Kang notes the ritual of the soldier’s oath in Anatolia; *Divine War*, 63.

[51] *Ashur-uballit*, ii 2-22: This speech ends with the prayer (ii 22): “And may the Sun-god cause our lord [i.e. Ashur-uballit] to attain in the revolt a glorious name o’er the king of the Kassites!”

[52] *Tukulti-Ninurta Epic*, ii (=A obv.) 26ff; ii (= F col. “x”) 10’; iii (=A obv.) 1’-20’; iv (A rev.) 11’-33’. In *Adad-narari Epic*, the verbal exchange is the only extant part of the story. See also in Westenholz, *Legends*, Text 12: “Naram-Sin and the Lord of Apišal,” col v and vi, pp. 182-187; Text 13: “Erra and Naram-Sin,” ll. 19-23, p. 95.

[53] *King of Battle Epic* (Tel el-Amarna edition), ll. rev. 3-7; Weippert, “Heiliger Krieg,” 478, n. 84.

[54] An exception would be *Ashur-uballiṭ* ii 23-45 which describes the deities leading the hero into battle as he cries: “I am Ashur-uballiṭ, the destroying giant”—with his army “eager for the fray” like lions and whirlwinds.

[55] In the *Legend of Naram Sin*, three initial failures by the king extend the battle scene. The ambush would also seem to be a conventional way of drawing out a battle; cf. *Tukulti-Ninurta Epic* iv (=A rev.) 36’-40 where the enemy tries to ambush the Assyrians but fail; Joshua 8; Judg 9:34-45; 20:29-48.

[56] *Ashur-uballiṭ*, 25-32 lists Ashur, Bel, Anu, the Crescent Moon, Adad, the Sun-god, Ninurta and Ishtar leading the king at the forefront of his army; *Esarhaddon*, I 72; “Apology of Ḫattušili” §6 = 2:24; §7 = 2:37; §11 = 4:8: “My Lady, marched ahead of me.” In the “Deeds of Šuppiluliuma” translated by Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., the Hittite text repeats thirteen times the phrase: “The gods (of my father) marched before PN”; in *Context of Scripture*, vol. 1, pp. 185-191. Cf. also von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 48-49. Rowlett, *Joshua*, 54-65.

[57] Kang, *Divine War*, 23. 45-46, 101-105, and his summary 108-109.

[58] Weippert, “Heiliger Krieg,” 479; cf. *King of Battle Epic* (OB edition), 59-63. Both the heroes of *Baal and Yamm* and *Ullikummi* are storm gods; note also Marduk’s army of meteorological forces.

[59] Manassa, *The Great Karnak Inscription*, 119.

[60] Manassa, *The Great Karnak Inscription*, 122-124.

[61] Tulukti Ninurta, iv (=A rev.) 41'.

[62] G. Furlani, "Le guerre quali guidizi di dio presso i Babilonesi e Assiri," *Miscellanea Giovanni Galbiati* (Fontes Ambrosiani 27; Milan: U. Hoepli, 1951) III, 39-47, esp. 47. Also R.M. Good, "The Just War in Ancient Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104.3 (1985) 385-400; Kang, *Divine War*, 14-15 and 108 where he notes that the "lawsuit chiefly appears in the Hittite and Mesopotamian historical sources, but not in the Egyptian historical sources"; Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 236-237.

[63] *King of Battle Epic* (OB edition), 65-68; *Esarhaddon*, I 72-73; Weippert, "Heiliger Krieg" 477.

[64] "Apology of Ḫattušili" §7 – 2:31-47. See also Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., "A Hittite Analogue to the David and Goliath Combat of Champions?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968) 220-225. He translates the short Hittite text. Hoffner argues that this is a contest of champions parallel to the fight between David and Goliath in which a fighter from each side fights as a representative. Roland de Vaux suggested this phenomenon existed in Greece and the ancient Near East in his "Les combats singuliers dans l'Ancien Testament," *Biblica* 40 (1959) 495-508; translated as "Single Combat in the Old Testament" in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, translated by Damian McHugh (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) 122-135.

[65] P257: Kitchen's translation.

[66] Younger notes that the outcome of the battle results in either destruction or acquisition. In the Assyrian texts and Hittite text, the destruction is massive; war in the ancient Near East brought slaves, and so total destruction was against the interests of the victor. Under hyperbole Younger cites the common phrase in Egyptian military accounts: 'who makes them non-existent'; *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 75-76, 190-192. In Text 13: "Erra and Naram Sin,"

ll. 33-45: Erra and Naram-Sin join forces in the battle against Enlil and in the “attack (on) the cities of the enemies [...]”. Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkad*, 197-199. Kurigalzu, in Chronicle P ii 4-6: “did not leave a soul”; even so, another battle takes place in column iii.

[67] *Merneptah Inscription* 40b-44; *Esarhaddon I* 82-84. In the “Apology of Ḫattušili,” the Hittite king spares the life of Urḫitešub, but when the enemy king “plotted another plot against me, and wanted to ride to Babylon—when I heard the matter, I seized him and sent him alongside the sea”; §11 = 4:7-40. The passage shows the marks of being shaped by historical rather than traditional forces.

[68] In *Kurigalzu obv.(?) ii (?)* 17-19, the enemy king “retreated, he headed toward the mountains” ... but “they overtook/captured him.”

[69] *King of Battle Epic* (Tel el-Amarna edition), ll. rev 19-23. Similarly, in the *Battle of Kadesh*, (P 295-332), the Hittite king sues for peace, and Ramesses graciously accedes; in the Hittite version (ANET3, 319), the Egyptians are defeated. In each case, the historical reality is subordinated to a traditional ending of the battle narrative. In Text 13: “Erra and Naram Sin,” the victory ends with the building of a temple and the blessing of Naram-Sin and the giving to King Naram Sin, “the might weapon, the scimitar”; ll. 46-67, pp. 197-199.

[70] Kang, *Divine War*, 46.

[71] Jackson, “The Language of the Mesha Inscription,” 98.

[72] Kang, *Divine War*, 80-82. For the exclusion of the *ḥērem* elsewhere in the ancient Near East, he cites C.H.W Brekkelmans, *De Ḥerem in het Oude Testament* (Nijmegen: Centrale Drukkerij, 1959) 128-145.

[73] So also Kang, *Divine War*, 224.

[74] *Shalmaneser in Ararat*, poetic text, 61-62; prose text, 55.

Merneptah Inscription 48b-61: a long plunder list with some enemy chiefs brought alive before the pharaoh.

[75] Merneptah Inscription, 62-73a.

[76] *Battle of Kadesh*, P 339-345: the gods receive Ramesses on his return. "Apology of Ḫattušili" §6 = 2:30: Ishtar proclaims the hero's name after the battle in § 12a = IV 47-48: "And my Lady Ishtar gave me the kingship of the land of Hatti also, and I became a great king. / My Lady Ishtar took (as a) prince and placed me on the throne." In *Ashur-uballiṣ* ii 22, the army prays before the battle that the Sun-god grant the king "a glorious name" for victory over the enemy.

[77] *King of Battle Epic* (Tel el-Amarna edition), ll. rev 19-23.

[78] In *Battle of Kadesh*, P 335-345: The gods of the land <come> to him in greeting saying: "Welcome, our beloved Son, King of Southern and Northern Egypt, Usima[re] Setepenre, Son of Re, Ramesses II, given life! – according as they have granted him a million jubilees and eternity upon the throne of Re, all lands and all foreign lands being overthrown and slain beneath his sandals, eternally and forever." *Shalmaneser in Ararat*, poetic text, 55-57. Kurigalzu in Chronicle P, iii 17-19: Hurbatila, king of Elam, recognizes Kurigalzu.

[79] Merneptah Inscription, 73b-79: the Council of Thirty recognize Merneptah as the hero; *Battle of Kadesh*, P 235-250: Ramesses army praises him for saving them single-handedly. *Kurigalzu Chronicle* P, ii 9-14: the enemy army recognizes Kurigalzu.

[80] *Esarhaddon*, I 77 - II 10.

[81] M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) 193, n.4.

[82] Shalmaneser III says in the "Monolith Inscriptions" (ANET3, 277): "At that time, I paid homage to the greatness of (all) the great

gods (and) extolled for posterity the heroic achievements of Ashur and Shamash by fashioning a (sculptured) stela with myself as king" For a larger discussion of Aššur, cf. Kang, *Divine War*, 40-42. Cf. also Esarhaddon's "Sinjirli Stela" in ANET3, 293. In the "Apology of Ḫattušili" §12B = 4:48-80, Ḫattušili makes peace with the previous allies and with those who had been enemies of his father and grandfather; then he gives "Ishtar, My Lady, the property of Armatarḫunta" and sees to the erection of her statue and the worship of her as "Ishtar the High." For a fuller discussion of Ishtar as a warrior, see Kang, *Divine War*, 31-36.

[83] Weippert, "Heiliger Krieg," 486; here Weippert also gives a schema for the royal battle narrative which focuses on the praxis of war in the ancient Near East; as such, it is more restrictive than my own proposal for the traditional pattern.

PART III

PART II: BATTLE NARRATIVE IN THE BIBLE

Part II traces the ways in which the heroic and royal patterns are used and reshaped in the historical books of the Bible. Exodus 14 contains arguable the most important narrative which tells how the Lord alone, without any human assistance except for Moses raising his staff, defeats the Egyptians at the Red Sea. This story asserts the fundamental theme in the Bible: The Lord is the hero.

Chapter 5 examines the story of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17), which closely follows the heroic pattern with the exception of the unlikely hero. While the traditional hero typically manifests the ideals of manly strength and virtue, David is a boy, an unlikely hero, and this motif recurs throughout the biblical tradition. Chapter 6 examines this motif first in the story of Judith which reshapes the heroic pattern for her triumph over Holofernes. The Book of Judges likewise tells of the victories of other unlikely heroes often with their weapon of deception: the left-handed Ehud, the woman Jael, the frightened Gideon, the bastard Jephthah, and the blinded Samson. In each case, the unlikely hero points to the basic biblical theme: The Lord is the hero.

Chapter 7 explores the royal pattern which celebrates the relationship between the king and the deity. In the book that bears his name, Joshua shows himself the most faithful servant of his Lord. The pattern also shapes a number of the stories in 2 Chronicles as well as the stories about the kings of Judah. The kings of Israel, however, introduce a new tension with the prophet who represents the Lord. The main tension of these comedies turns on the recognition of the Lord as the true hero, a recognition that the kings of Israel are loathed to give. As such, these stories are less about a battle with a foreign enemy and more about the tension within our community.

Chapter 8 explores battle and defeat which runs contrary to the traditional pattern. This break with the tradition can be a sign of a shift of allegiance to history and the reality of defeat. The death of the enemy hero is comic in the sense that it must be celebrated because the threat to our life and values and culture has ended. However, some death is tragic—the result of sin or flaw or fate. This death evokes sadness and pity, and we find it in the stories of David the King and most especially in the death of Saul and his Jonathan.

4. The LORD and Pharaoh at the Red Sea: Exod 13:17–14:31

The story of the Lord and Pharaoh at the Red Sea is arguably the most important story in the Hebrew Bible. Retold or referred to in various places, it becomes the paradigm for understanding Israel's relationship with God.^[1] Embracing both journey and battle, it takes Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land and begins with the battle with Pharaoh and his army. The confluence of various traditions marks the importance of the narrative.^[2] Still, as Jean Louis Ska, SJ has shown, the construction of Exod 13: 17–14:31 creates unity from the complexity.^[3] I have recently examined the narrative craft of this text.^[4] Here I shall focus on the battle pattern found in this text with its victory hymn in 15:1-18, 19-20.

4.1. A description of the hero directing everything: Exod 13:17-22, 14:1-4

This narrative opens with a description of the hero, but this hero has no impediment, nor is he distant from the place of battle. Instead, the Lord is completely in charge of the action.^[5] In 13:17-18, the Lord has Israel take a roundabout way lest encountering a war they lose heart and return to Egypt. The pillars of cloud and fire, visible yet intangible images of God's mystery, appear in 13:21-22 to lead the Israelites by day and protect them by night. In 14:1-4, the Lord announces to Moses that Israel is to turn back and encamp at the Red Sea so that he can get glory (renown) over Egypt. To do this, the Lord says that he will harden Pharaoh's heart so that the Egyptians will come to know "that I am the Lord." Recognition of the hero and

king even by the enemy leader is a traditional motif. Here it becomes the major theme.

4.2. The enemy's threat and false confidence: Exod 14:5-10a

The plagues recounted in Exod 7-10 end each time ends with Pharaoh saying that he will relent and let Israel go, but in each instance until the last plague, he does back on his word. Only with the death of the firstborn does Pharaoh let Israel go. However, with his officials, the king again goes back on his word: "What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?" With false confidence, he deploys his vast army with its chariots and horsemen to pursue Israel. In 14:6, 7, 9, the narrator continually repeats the elements of the Egyptian forces and so creates a sense of their overwhelming power.

The text juxtaposes Pharaoh's false confidence with the Lord's insistence that he will harden the Egyptian king's heart to gain renown. The two traditional motifs seemingly vie with each other although the outcome is never in doubt.

4.3. The reaction of fear: Exod 14:10-12

Seeing the Egyptians, the Israelites predictably cry out "in great fear," and then they cry to the Lord. In one of the great comic scenes of the Bible, they ask Moses if there were no graves in Egypt—a line that emphasizes a total lack of hope. In this way, the Israelite capitulate to their own fear.

4.4. A variation on the "call and commission: Exod

14:13-14

In the heroic battle narrative, the search for a hero and his commission follows. In the royal battle narrative with the king already the designated hero, the people may cry out to the king for help. Here the people expect nothing but doom. Moses, in the role of the leader, does not initiate a search for a hero but meets their fear with the encouragement motif: “Do not fear!” He then announces their deliverance that God will achieve by winning the victory.

The idea of the deity fighting for “our” side appears throughout the ancient Near East. As Kang says, “the basic concept of the divine war” shows that the deity “is a warrior who fights against the enemy.”^[6] However, in the traditional royal pattern of “divine war,” the king represents the deity and carries out his or her will. The motif, as Rowlett says, is a function of imperial ideology, which glorifies the deity and likewise glorifies the king.^[7]

Here in Exod 14:14, Moses states definitively: “The LORD will fight for you; you have only to keep still.” In Exodus 14, there is neither human king nor human hero nor human army. The Lord alone is the hero. Though the divine warrior as hero serves as a basic motif in the ancient Near East, Moses’ statement stakes out an extreme position. There is no king, no human hero—only the human leader lifting and lowering his staff. Moreover, this basic idea of the Lord as the primary hero serves as the dominant theme for the whole battle tradition in the Bible. Human heroes will appear later in the biblical tradition as we shall see; even so, the various traditions respect and underline in their own way this basic theme: The Lord is the true hero of the battle.

4.5. The divine hero commands the leader: 14:15-18

In 14:15, the hero appears on the scene asking Moses why he cries

out to him—a line that admittedly does not follow smoothly from the previous verse. The hero then commands Moses to perform the only human act. The hero has the human leader lift his rod and raise his hand. This gesture miraculously opens the way for escape and prepares for the resolution. To this, the Lord repeats the theme of the hardened heart that will lead to recognition: “the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord” (14:18).

4.6. The first resolution: Israel’s escape: 14:19-22

The narrator is in no hurry to resolve the tension in order to make absolutely clear that the Lord alone resolves the tension. In 14:19-20, Israel passes the night under the protection of the angel of the Lord and the pillar of darkness. Finally, in 14:21, Moses stretches out his hand, and the Lord creates a way of escape. On the one hand, the narrator realistically reports that a strong east wind dried up the land; on the other, the narrator reports that the water miraculously split and become two walls of water through which the people pass.

4.7. The second resolution: the destruction of Pharaoh and the Egyptians: Exod 14:23-28

The Egyptians, still full of false confidence, pursue Israel into the midst of the sea, but their chariot wheels begin to clog. With this, the Egyptians recognize their defeat and so fulfill the prophecy of the Lord (14:4) and of Moses (14:13): “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt” (14:25). With that, the Lord has Moses stretch out his “hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers” (14:26). The chaotic waters which served as the enemy in the stories of the *Enūma Eliš* and *Baal and Yam*, here become the

hero's instrument of destruction.^[8] Unlike those narratives which take place before human time, the Lord achieves this victory within human time against a human enemy.

The narrator repeats the resolutions of Israel's escape and the Egyptian's destruction to build and prolong the events until “not a man was left.” The total destruction of the enemy, a traditional motif, is appropriate and even necessary because it represents the total eradication of slavery and oppression. Likewise, Pharaoh's death is the traditional death of the enemy hero. Without a personal name, he too represents the ideas of slavery and oppression. His death is to be cheered and not mourned because he represents an idea and not a real person.

4.8. Victory Hymn

The recognition of the hero follows in Exod 15. As a victory hymn, it tells the story of the battle, but not in narrative sequence. The hymn presumes that the singers and hearers know the story and so begins with the conquest (15:1-7) and follows it with the events prior (15:8-10) before repeating to the victory (15:11-12). It finishes with the Lord leading Israel forth and inspiring great fear in other peoples (15:13-18). The final verse celebrates the kingship of God. Although some immediately connect kingship to Jerusalem, Baal wins his kingship by defeating Yamm, and Marduk demands his kingship before the battle. The recognition of the victor as king is an ancient motif. Having seen what has happened to the Egyptians, “the people feared the LORD. They believed in the LORD and in Moses his servant” (14:31). Israel's fear has become awe, and they believe in both their warrior God and in “Moses his servant.” Those who know the story also know that this will not last.

4.9. Conclusion

Exodus 14 shows the Lord as the one and only hero of this battle story. Moses assists the Lord but only in a representative way by lifting and lowering his staff or hand. Unlike the *Enūma eliš*, the *Myth of Anzu* and the battle between Baal and Yamm, this battle takes place within human time; a deity fights a historical enemy, and so the Lord is like the deities of the royal narratives who fought with and for the king and thereby exalted the king. Here, however, there is no king, no hero other than the Lord alone. The traditional pattern of the ancient Near Eastern narratives has been transformed, and this theme dominates the biblical battle tradition and transforms the tradition in various ways to insist that the Lord is the hero.

4.10. Footnotes to Chapter 4

[1] Deut 11:14; Josh 2:10; 4:23; 24:6; Judg 11:16; Neh 9:9-10; 1 Macc 4:9; Ps 106:7-9; 136:13-15.

[2] For a recent discussion of sources, see Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmann's Publishing Co., 2009) 300-318. See now Charles M. Trimm, "YHWH Fights for Them!": *The Divine Warrior in the Exodus Narrative* (Dissertation: Wheaton College, 2012). Also his "Recent Research on Warfare in the Old Testament," *Currents in Biblical Research* 10 (2012): 1-46.

[3] Jean Louis Ska, SJ, *Le Passage de la Mer: Étude de la construction, du style et de la symbolique d'Ex 14,1-31*, AnBib 109 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986). Ska demonstrates that the three basic pieces of the narrative (14:1-14; 15-25; 26-31) begin Lord's discourse to Moses (14:1-4; 15-18, 26) and conclude with shared themes (14:14

and 14:25; 14:13 and 14:30-31). This unified approach in recent times began with Brevard Childs who initiated his famous canonical approach with his commentary on Exodus which acknowledges the complexity while searching for its theological unity; *The Book of Exodus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974) 237-239.

[4] Harry Hagan, *The Elements of Biblical Narrative and the Red Sea Story in Exod 13:17-14:31* (Palni, 2021).

[5] See §2.3 above.

[6] Kang, *Divine War*, 108. and 45-46, etc.

[7] Rowlett, *Joshua*, 62.

[8] See, for instance, Dozeman, *Exodus*, 298-300. Also Bernard Botto's discussion of "The Exodus as Primeval Event" in *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992) 118-123. He offers a critique of Gunkel's antiquated definition of myth which seeks to place a dividing wall between stories before human time and those in human time.

5. David and Goliath: The Heroic Pattern in 1 Sam

17:1–18:4

If the Red Sea is the most famous battle narrative in the Bible, then the story of David and Goliath must be the second. It follows the traditional heroic pattern with a significant modification. The ideal of the physically strong warrior gives way to an unlikely, weak hero.^[1]

5.1. The Beginning: The Enemy's Threat and the Reaction of Fear: 1 Sam 17:1-11

The story begins with the stock encampment formula (17:1-3). The storyteller does not provide a specific motive for the hostilities between the Philistines and Israel, who are traditional enemies. This lack of specific motive reflects the fundamental conflict of two cultures that permeates the whole narrative.^[2]

The enemy's threat and great strength appear in the person of Goliath. He is huge, gigantic, even monstrous. His height of six cubits and a span, some three meters or ten feet, is the only unrealistic element of the story.^[3] This monstrous size helps to link Goliath with other enemies of the mythic mode, such as Humbaba. Even so, Goliath is presented otherwise as a man and not as a mythic monster. Likewise, his weapons and armor, though massive, are also realistic.^[4] The Philistine threat, made explicit in his challenge to the Israelite army, is full of irony and bravado and introduces the motif of the enemy's false confidence (17:8-10). Thus Goliath is pictured as the embodiment of Philistine culture:

tremendous in size and strength, technically better prepared for war than Israel (cf. 1 Sam 13:19-22). This point is made by referring to Goliath as “the Philistine,” and lest anyone miss the point, the gentilic occurs twenty-eight times in the story.^[5] Goliath thus symbolizes his warrior culture, just as David will symbolize his. Still, as Francesca Aran Murphy points out: “To David’s imagination, Goliath is not a representative of an advanced culture, but just like a wild beast.”^[6]

A classic statement of the reaction of helplessness follows in 17:11: “When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.” Jason interprets the king’s fear as “a symbol of the people’s weakness; the weakness serves to accentuate the hero’s greatness, which overpowers the might of the enemy despite all obstacles.”^[7] Without denying this traditional function of the motif, I would point out that Saul himself was once a hero (1 Sam 11; 15), but now he has been reduced to a helpless king, a significant point within the larger chain of stories.

5.2. The Middle: Identification and Commission of the Hero: 1 Sam 17:12-40

The middle section also is shaped by the traditional pattern and may be outlined as follows:

17:12-15 — Description of the hero and his brothers (false heroes).

A: 17:16 — Enemy’s threat: Goliath repeats his challenge without receiving a response for forty days (“our” helplessness).

B: 17:17-18 — Commission of the hero by his father to bring provisions to his brothers and inquire about their safety.

C: 17:19 — Description of the general situation of war.

X: 17:20ab — Hero’s journey: departure and arrival.

C’: 17:20c-21 — Description of the general situation of war at the hero’s arrival.

B’: 17:22 — The father’s commission is fulfilled.

A': 17:23-24 — Enemy's threat and "our" helplessness: Goliath's challenge provokes flight and fear.

17:25-30 — A report of the general call and reward to the hero who reacts with righteous indignation.

17:31-37a — The hero's call and the commission by an objecting leader with blessing.

17:37b-40 — Preparation for battle and departure.

The adjustments of the traditional pattern have their roots primarily in the hero's character. Unlike Gilgamesh or Achilles, who represent the perfection of human strength, David is a boy, the youngest son of Jesse (17:12-15). While the youngest is often the hero where brothers figure in the story,^[8] the motif also serves as an impediment to David's action. There is no thought of his following the three older brothers to war; instead, the boy is left to shepherd his flock—though the shepherd is a traditional image for the king.^[9] Like Marduk, who is initially overlooked (Ee II), David is an unlikely hero, yet his physical immaturity, in contrast to Goliath's size, raises the question of appearance and reality in this story. Moreover, the motif of the weak or unlikely hero is a standard feature of biblical narrative because it identifies the Lord as the unseen hero—a pervasive theme in biblical battle narrative.

Jason has identified David's three brothers as false heroes who go off to war but cannot carry out the hero's task.^[10] As with other classic battle narratives, the failure of the false heroes, whether by their refusal or defeat, is used to deepen the plight of "our" side and to emphasize that only the hero is capable of meeting the match. In this story, not only David's brothers but all of Israel fall into this category, for no one from the Israelite side answers Goliath's challenge for forty days (17:16).

One impediment to the hero's action, his absence from the battlefield, disappears with his father's commission to carry provisions to the brothers and inquire about their health. The commission is menial, but it underlines David's insignificance while bringing the hero to the battle. The alternation of events concerning David with motifs of threat and helplessness creates a sense of

passing time as it builds tension. The whole section has a concentric construction noted in the outline above.

Major motifs and their repetition shape the larger framework of the story:

- enemy's threat: 17:3-10,16,23;
- "our" helplessness: 17:11,16,24;
- the emergence of the hero:
- description of the hero: 17:12-15;
- his journey: 17:17-22;
- report to him of the general call: 17:25-30.

The storyteller handles the general call in a novel way. The leader does not announce the general call and reward in an assembly of "our" side. Rather, the hero overhears a report of the king's call, as if by chance. This emphasizes again that the general call has gone unanswered for forty days.

David then enquires about the reward and adds the hero's traditional reaction of righteous indignation:^[11] "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy (*hrp*) the armies of the living God" (17:16)? The word "defy" is a keyword for this story. In 17:11, Goliath "defies" the ranks of Israel, and Israel understands the challenge in like manner, as defiance of themselves (17:25). David, however, shifts the focus to "the armies of the living God" (17:26, 37), for he is the only one among the Israelites who understands the true significance of the challenge made by this "uncircumcised Philistine." As David tells the giant just before the fight, it is "the Lord of Host, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied" (17:45). Appearance and reality increasingly become the theme of the story, and David's brother develops it.

Eliab, the eldest of David's brothers, belittles David as a shepherd boy and accuses him of having "come down to see a battle." David cuts off his brother: "What have I done now? Isn't that the point?"^[12] Eliab is trapped by the apparent motives and possibilities of this world, but David sees beyond. After venting his righteous

indignation at Eliab, the hero inquires a second time, and the people repeat the general call and reward for a third. The repetition, a common feature of traditional narrative, delays the inevitable and emphasizes once again that no one has answered the call.

In 17:31, the people inform Saul of David's words, and the king calls the hero. In the meeting between leader and hero, David takes the initiative and calls for the commission from the objecting Saul.[\[13\]](#)

- hero's encouragement:
"Let no one's heart fail because of him;"
- call for commission:
"your servant will go and fight with this Philistine" (17:32).
- leader's objection:
"You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth" (17:33).
- hero's answer:
David boasts of his battles against the lion and the bear, concluding: "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine" (17:34-37a).
- leader's commission and blessing:[\[14\]](#)
And Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you" (17:37b).
- preparation for battle:[\[15\]](#)
 1. by the leader: Saul gives David arms and armor, but David, unable to move, rejects them (17:38-39).
 2. by the hero: David takes his staff and five smooth stones for his sling
- hero's journey: and moves toward the Philistine (17:40).

Again the narrative departs from the traditional pattern with the hero rejecting the traditional arms, and the reason lies in the hero's impediment: The boy is unable to move. As Jason points out, Goliath, rather than David, appears as the traditional hero with his

magnificent arms and armor. [16] Some disparity between hero and foe is not altogether unexpected. Except for Achilles, the heroes typically face foes with an air of invincibility, often underlined by false heroes or an initial failure by the hero.[17] This air of invincibility heightens tensions and redounds ultimately to the glory of the hero. Still, the warrior-hero is traditionally at the height of his physical strength, but again David is a boy.

The contrast between the very large and the very small belongs more properly to the world of the fairy tale where the youngest son conquers dragons and giants.[18] These youths inevitably receive marvelous protectors, magic swords, etc. David, however, has no marvelous helpers. His narrative world is this world and not the marvelous, imaginary world of the heroic fairy tale.[19] David, a typical biblical hero, relies not on physical strength but on intelligence and on the Lord. Therefore, he wisely and symbolically rejects the cumbersome, if heroic, arms of Saul in favor of the sling of the shepherd which a boy can wield. Even so, there is no deception, which is the traditional weapon of the unlikely heroes in the Bible. David meets Goliath face to face. The storyteller links David specifically with the warrior-heroes in the boy's report of his victories over the lion and the bear, traditional images of heroic conquest.[20] Thus David becomes an ironic vision of the powerful warrior-hero.

The story derives its force in large part from the tension of three elements. First, the fairy tale motif of the boy as a giant killer appeals to the audience's hope in the dream, in the ideal. Second, David's means are entirely realistic and affirm the possibility of that dream and ideal within this human space and time. Finally, the link to the Old Testament's unlikely heroes underlines the hand of God making the dream a realistic ideal.

5.3. The End: The Victory and Recognition: 1 Sam 17:41—18:4

5.3.1. *Single combat between the Hero and the Enemy: 1 Sam 17:41-52*

More than any other in the Old Testament, this story follows the battle tradition of single-combat:

- the meeting of the warriors: 17:41
- the verbal exchange:
- the enemy's false confidence and insults: 17:42-44.
Goliath, full of bravado, insults the hero because of his youthful and handsome appearance.
- the hero's indictment and prophecy of the outcome: 17:45-47
- the foe charges the hero: 17:48
- Hero's mortal blow with a missile: 17:49a-c: stone from his sling.
- the enemy's fall to the ground: 17:49d
- summary: 17:50[\[21\]](#)
- the hero's triumphal stance over the body: 17:51a
- the mutilation of the enemy corpse with a hand weapon: 17:51b, decapitation
- the recognition of defeat by the enemy army: 17:51c, flight
- the recognition of victory by "our" side: 17:52: shout, pursuit and great destruction of the enemy

David carries out the hero's traditional actions in single-combat, much like Marduk, Sinuhe, and Achilles. The uniqueness of the biblical story is found in the irony of the boy-hero rather than in the displacement of traditional motifs.

When the warriors meet, "the Philistine looked and saw David, and he disdained him; for he was only youth, ruddy and handsome

in appearance” (17:42). Beauty is a traditional trait of the hero, and David’s beauty marked him as the hero already in 16:12 and 16:18.^[22] As Alonso Schökel notes, the emphasis falls not on physical prowess but upon beauty that mirrors the quality of David’s heart.^[23] The foe does not recognize this tradition. Instead, Goliath sees only a boy, the appearance of weakness, and this becomes the focus of Goliath’s taunts and false confidence: “and the Philistine cursed David by his gods.” (1 Sam 17:43).^[24]

David’s indictment of Goliath counters these taunts with a definition of apparent and real power: “You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” (17:45). As Brueggemann notes, “no one else in the story has named the name of Yahweh.”^[25] He is the only one who understands what is truly happening, and this statement sums up that major theme, carefully prepared by the continual contrast of big and small, strong and weak, old and young, apparent and real. The hero’s speech ends with the prophecy of the outcome, a traditional element of the biblical battle tradition, which affirms that the resolution is not happenstance.^[26]

The identification of hero and deity is a central theme of the royal battle narratives, and its suggestion here fits David. Already in 1 Sam 16:13, “the spirit of the Lord” comes upon David and claims him for the divine. Then in 16:18, one of Saul’s court states, “The Lord is with him.”^[27] This phrase, the assurance of divine presence, is linked mainly with the divine commission of a hero. Significantly, there is no divine commission in 1 Sam 17. The hero does not need it because it has already happened in 16:1-13. Instead, David himself delivers the hand-formula to Goliath, proclaiming that both the Philistine foe and army will be delivered into his hand and the hand of Israel (17:46,47). The hero confronts the foe’s false confidence with his own true and well-placed confidence. Again we have the theme of appearance and reality.

The fight itself moves very quickly. There is no initial failure by the hero which would be inappropriate here. Furthermore, the foe finds

no chance to hurl a spear or shoot an arrow; also inappropriate. When Goliath charges, David with the first stone causes the giant to fall to the ground.[28] Then, after taking the triumphal stand over the body, the boy cuts off the Philistine's head, using the foe's own sword.[29]

David's victory is eminently realistic. Although the boy rejects the conventions of warfare, his sling is nonetheless a realistic and deadly weapon. What seemed ridiculous in the eyes of Eliab, Saul and Goliath become in retrospect a most intelligent strategy. The realism and simplicity of the solution are significant. No deity appears in the action either to assist the hero or to strike a first blow, as happens for both Achilles and Gilgamesh. The intervention of the gods for those heroes, as A.B. Lord says, shows them to be human and not divine, dependent upon powers beyond themselves.[30] Here David's humanity is in no danger of being forgotten because it is blatantly manifest in his youth. However, David does not point to himself or to the intelligent shift in his strategy. The boy makes no distinction between his action and the Lord's. The two are one. As a result, the triumph becomes a celebration of divine power made real through its human instrument.

This is not a new insight. Michelangelo understood this story's fundamental metaphor when he turned the boy into a Goliath of a statue embodying the ideal form of physical strength. The sculptor has radically overturned the story's central metaphor to reimagine David's stature in this victory. Michelangelo's ideal form, admittedly a Platonic ideal, reflects in its own terms the human ideal which David becomes for much of the biblical tradition. This youth, innocent of adult fears and conventions, trusts wholly in the Lord of Hosts and triumphs over defiant humanity through the union of the human and the divine.

This interpretation builds on the tradition of the cosmic struggle seen in the *Enūma eliš*. Goliath, however, is no mythic force of chaos; rather, he represents the tangible chaos of this world, and he is all the more menacing because his blasphemous defiance is

part of this world. David meets this chaos within the confines of this world, but the hero's view of reality does not exclude the Lord of Host. On the contrary, reality is precisely the union of the human and the divine within this world. For David, it is no longer necessary to re-enter the garden to recover the ideal.

5.3.2. Plunder and recognition: 1 Sam 17:53-58, 18:2

After the destruction of the enemy army and the return journey, Israel plunders the Philistine camp: "David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put the armor in his tent" (17:53-54). The foe's armor is the battle hero's traditional share of the plunder.^[31] Likewise, the bodies of the slain are trophies of war and are carried back to the hero's town or camp as a sign of victory.^[32] The mention of Jerusalem introduces the theme of David's kingship, which flows in part from his role as a national hero, yet Jerusalem and the recognition of David as king lie in the future.

The storyteller begins the king's recognition of the hero with a flashback: as David goes out to meet Goliath, Saul turns to Abner his commander and asks about the identity of the boy's father.^[33] Saul's ignorance of David's parentage underlines once again the boy's insignificance, and this produces the vivid scene in which the boy, "with the head of the Philistine in his hand," appears before the king and announces, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite" (17:57).^[34] As Jason notes, the dragon-slayers of the heroic fairy tales traditionally bring back the head as a sign of their victory, and here David brings the head of Goliath with him to meet Saul in the scene of recognition.^[35] The boy does not receive the rewards promised in 17:25 (riches, princess, and free house); rather, they are held in abeyance for the moment and are used to bind this story with 1 Samuel 18. Instead, Saul makes David a part of his court (18:2), a reward similar to the one that the hero received in 16:21-22.

The recognition of David by Saul (17:55-58; 18:2) alternates with the recognition by Jonathan (18:1,3-4). As B. Fenik, in his analysis

of the *Iliad*, has pointed out, alternation is a traditional technique used to create a sense of simultaneous action.^[36] In 17:55 –18:4, the alternation suggests the immediacy of Jonathan's reaction to the hero's victory.

From the prince, David receives covenantal love (18:1, 3-4), just as he received Saul's love in 16:21. As a sign of their covenant, Jonathan gives the hero his armor and robe. Some scholars, noting the connection of robe (*m'yl*) with royalty, interpret this divestiture as a symbolic gift of royal succession to the hero.^[37] This interpretation fits with the battle tradition in which the hero receives kingship as the reward for his victory. Still, the robe is only a foreshadowing of the future. David is not yet king, and much lies between the portent and its fulfillment. This relationship also fits into the larger tradition of heroic friendship

5.3.3. Heroic friendship: 1 Sam 18:1,3-4.

The storyteller can create the relationship between David and Jonathan with surprisingly few strokes because it evokes the tradition of heroic friendship, represented by Gilgamesh and Enkidu, and by Achilles and Patroclus.^[38] The metaphor of heroic friends as brothers conveys the intensity of this bond. As such, the relationship is a variation of the bond between lord and servant (father and son) with the same demands of mutual loyalty and protection.^[39] Ninsun, the mother of Gilgamesh, interprets the dream of her son about a rock which fell from heaven and says: "Like a wife you loved it, caressed and embrace it: / a mighty comrade will come to you, and be his friend's savior."^[40] This theme is prominent in the *Iliad* as well. When Hector kills Patroclus, Achilles curses himself, "Straightway may I die, seeing I was not to bear aid to my comrade."^[41] Though presented most dramatically in the relationship of Achilles and Patroclus, the theme shapes the relationships of other heroic pairs in the *Iliad* who attest to the pervasiveness of this code.^[42]

Significantly, Hector has no heroic friend. On the battlefield, the Trojan hero is linked continually with Polydamas, the bane of his life. Hector's primary relationships lie within the city with his wife Andromache and with Priam, his father and king. When Deiphobus appears at Hector's side in the traditional role of a heroic friend just before the battle with Achilles, the hero praises his friend as the "dearest of my brethren" because he has come to help while the others have taken refuge within the walls (XXII 233-237). The sentiment is touching but deluded. Deiphobus is safe within the walls of Troy, and Pallas Athene has disguised herself as the heroic friend in order to lead Hector into an unequal battle with Achilles. A lone man against unequal odds does not survive on the battlefield, and the heroic friendship is precisely a pact against death, although in Homer death is an ever-present reality.

The heroic friendship between David and Jonathan opens in 1 Sam 18:1 with the sentence: "The soul (*nepeš*) of Jonathan was knit to the soul (*nepeš*) of David, and Jonathan loved (*'hb*) him as his own soul (*nepeš*)." The word Hebrew word *nepeš* means "life" or "self." "To love another as one's own self" expresses the bond between lord and servant, and it dates at least from the period of the Mari letters.^[43] Weinfeld has demonstrated that the Akkadian phrase "to love PN as yourself" (*rāmu kī napšatkuna*) becomes a recurrent phrase in the political loyalty oaths and is equivalent to the willingness to die as discussed below.^[44] This covenant love binds warriors together so that they may face death, for only together do they stand a chance of surviving. Moreover, having faced death together, this bond becomes indestructible.

The relationship between the two men is formalized in 18:3, where "Jonathan and David cut a covenant (*yikrôt berît*) because of each loving the other as his own self (*nepeš*)." ^[45] Jonathan's gift of clothes and weapons becomes the concrete sign of covenant.^[46] While all of this is traditional, the friendship has a new complexity: Jonathan is the prince while David is the hero destined to become king. Still, the prince neutralizes the inherent conflict from its very outset by recognizing David as the hero. This recognition never wavers

and presumes that David will become king according to the battle tradition.

Jonathan fulfills his duties of loyalty and service to David in 19:1-7 by preventing Saul from carrying out the plot to kill David. By this reconciliation, Jonathan has also managed to head off a potential conflict between his loyalty to Saul, king and father, and his loyalty to David, friend and hero. That proves false and allows the storyteller to rebuild the tension to a new and higher pitch. When Jonathan again enters the story in 1 Sam 20, the possibility of reconciliation between leader and hero is fast receding into the past. In the end, David must flee the court. However, Jonathan's loyalty to his king and father takes precedence over the covenant with his friend. The prince remains and dies with his father. His death, like Hector's, is a tragic death caused not by some flaw but by loyal love.

The death of the heroic friend is a traditional motif. In the end, the hero must face the final battle alone. Therefore, Enkidu and Patroclus must die so that Gilgamesh and Achilles may prove themselves alone. The psychological implications of this are not difficult to imagine.

This text and others about heroic friendship affirm the love between men. Present concerns with homosexuality have placed this relationship into a new context.^[47] As is often the case, the Bible's concerns and ours do not overlap exactly. Sexuality may be used both literally and metaphorically. The plain meaning of the text does not support a reading of literal sexual relations. To argue for a metaphorical reading, one would need to define homosexuality to ascertain whether there is a relationship of likeness. That would require a definition that is much discussed today.

Much of the discussion has turned on a line from David's lament where he says of Jonathan: "your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." (2 Sam 1:26). While some have interpreted this love of men and women as the difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality, the interpretation does not fit its traditional context. Within the battle tradition, this division distinguishes

between the loves in war and the loves in peace. The love in war is that love that allows warriors to face death together.^[48] As Ittai the Gittite says to David: “As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be” (2 Sam 15:21). Being there for death or for life is the content of covenantal love and faithfulness. Although Ittai’s words make clear the battle context of this love, we find the same sentiment expressed by Ruth to her mother-in-law Naomi as they face the prospect of death:

“Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
17 Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.
May the Lord do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!” (Ruth 1:16-17)

In the Song of Songs 8:6, one of the lovers also speaks of death and the love between a man and a woman:

Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a raging flame.^[49]

Though Jonathan will die with his father in battle, David will sing famously of that love—a love that allows both men and women to face death together.

5.4. Footnotes for Chapter 5

[1] Although the text of 1 Sam 17 presents some textual problems, the two major traditions found in LXXB and the MT present coherent stories, and I shall consider the story as it stands in the Hebrew. This opinion is substantiated by Stephen Pisano in his text-critical study which shows that, contrary to the tide of recent scholarship on the Books of Samuel, the recension of LXXB does not necessarily represent the better textual tradition. He concludes: “LXX has sought to lighten what is considered to be an overloaded redundant or contradictory text”; *Additions or Omissions in the Books of Samuel: The Significant Pluses and Minuses in the Massoretic, Septuagint, and Qumran Texts* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 57; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1984). Despite this study, various scholars still hold that the Hebrew text of LXXB was expanded to create the MT; cf. A. Graeme Auld I & II *Samuel: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 2011) 194; also A. Caquot and Philippe de Robert, *Les Livres de Samuel* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994) 199-201.

[2] For a full discussion of the ways in which David and Goliath embody their cultures, see Mark K. George, “Constructing Identity in 1 Samuel 17,” *Biblical Interpretation*, 7.4 (1999) 389-412. According to George, David’s identity reflects the needs of the Israelite community in the exilic and post-exilic periods (408).

[3] Jason notes that “a round number plus ‘a little more’ is a standard formula for expressing large amounts and sizes in the ethnopoetry of the Middle East”; “David and Goliath,” 47.

[4] Cf. K. Galling, “Goliath und seine Rustung,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 15 (1966) 150-169.

[5] 1 Sam 17:8, 10, 11, 16, 23, 26, 32, 33, 36, 37, 40, 41, 42, 43², 44, 45,

48², 49, 50², 51, 54, 55, 572; also in the plural in 17:1, 2, 3, 4, 19, 21, 23, 46, 51, 52², 53.

[6] Francesca Aran Murphy, *I Samuel*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010) 178.

[7] Jason, “David and Goliath,” 46.

[8] Jason, “David and Goliath,” 41. Stith Thompson, *The Folktale*, 125-130; *Motif-Index*, L 10. Marduk also is the last of the gods born in the *Enūma eliš*, I 79-82; IV 73-74. In *Esarhaddon*, I 8, the hero describes himself as “younger than my older brothers”; this awkward phrase would seem to be an attempt to express the tradition motif since Akkadian has no superlative form; cf. W. von Soden, *Grundriß der Akkadischen Grammatik* (AnOr 47; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute: 1969) sect. 68. Also Nestor was the youngest when he slew Ereuthalion “the tallest ... and strongest man” whom he ever killed (*Iliad* VII 150-156).

[9] As is generally recognized, 1 Sam 17:15 is an attempt to harmonize 16:14-21 and 1 Samuel 17, but it fails to neutralize the difference. The image of the shepherd is pervasive throughout the ancient Near East as an image for the king. For examples in the ancient Near East, cf. Ee VI 108; VII 72; *Legend of Naram-Sin* 91-92; *Esarhaddon* I 4.

[10] Jason, “David and Goliath,” 41; she also discusses the formulaic numbers in this story.

[11] The hero’s reaction of righteous indignation is the complement of the reaction of helplessness by “our” side. Typically anger, whether overt or implicit, fills the motif. As here, *Sinuhe* uses rhetorical questions (113-127). For the motif, see §2.4.3.

[12] 1 Sam 17:29; my translation which follows the suggestion of Henry Preserved Smith, in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (ICC; NY 1904), ad. loc. and followed by Stoebe,

Kommentar, 324, v. 29a. However, this has not been followed by more recent scholars such as Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 201.

[13] For the hero's call and the commission by an objecting leader, see §2.4.3.

[14] For the blessing by a human leader, see §2.4.3.

[15] For the preparation for battle, see §2.4.3.

[16] Jason, "David and Goliath," 49.

[17] False heroes are discussed in §2.4.3, and the hero's initial failure in §2.5.1.

[18] Jason, *Ethnopoetry*, 4.2.1, "Heroic Fairy-tale." Stith Thompson discusses "The Dragon Slayer" in *The Folktale*, 24-33, Type 300 in A. Aarne and S. Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale* (Folklore Fellows Communications 184; Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1962). This is also noted by Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*. (NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 1999) 104. Jason uses the term "mode" rather than "narrative world" which she defines in terms of time and space but also in terms of the power that resolves the tension. The biblical narrative world is this world where divine power is also at work.

[19] Jason, "David and Goliath," 61-66.

[20] The lion and the bear are linked in other Old Testament passages (sometimes with other wild animals); cf. Isa 11:6-7; Hos 13:7-8; Amos 5:19; Prov 28:15; Lam 3:10. The killing of a lion is associated with other heroes as a sign of heroic strength: Samson in Judg 14:5-6 kills a lion without his parents knowing; Hercules kills a lion on Mount Cithaeron at the age of eighteen, and the lion skin becomes that hero's iconographic image. The kings of Assyria enjoyed lion hunting as a royal sport as seen in the famous lion hunt reliefs in the British Museum.

[21] This summary provides the narrative space which allows the audience time to assimilate the victory. A restatement of a victory can also be found in Ee IV 123-128 and Exod 14:30.

[22] He is described in 1 Sam 16:12 as “ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome.” In 16:18, David is described as a hero: “who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him.”

[23] Alonso Schökel, *Samuel*, 91. Bowra points out that physical beauty is part of the hero’s traditional attributes; *Heroic Poetry*, 99.

[24] For insults and the enemy’s false confidence, see §2.5.1. Also Niditch, *War*, 92-94. For the “dog formula,” cf. A. Rainey, “Morphology and the prefix-Tenses of West Semiticized El ‘Amarna Tablets,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 7 (1975) 395-426, esp. 408.

[25] Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990) 130.

[26] Deborah foretells that Sisera will die by the hand of a woman, and in 2 Kgs 3, Elisha prophesies the miraculous flood in the desert. Prophecies appear also in the following texts: Exod 14:1-4,13; Josh 6:5; Judg 4:9; 7:13-14; 1 Sam 17:46-47; 28:19; 1 Kgs 22:17; 2 Kgs 3:16-19; 9:6-10; 19:6-7, 32-34; 2 Chr 20:15-17. This motif is related to the more general hand-formula; for that cf. von Rad’s list in *Der Heilige Krieg*, 7-9. Compare also *Iliad* XXII 216-223.

[27] 1 Sam 16:18 records the assurance of divine presence. Within the larger context, Saul’s blessing in 17:37 strikes a note of dramatic irony because David needs no blessing, “The Lord is with him” (16:18).

[28] The foe is typically killed by this initial blow in the rest of the tradition with the exception of Homer who, as Fenik notes, typically tells of a warrior wounded by “a stone or spear” and then killed by

a sword. Homer's departure from the tradition allows the warriors to engage in a final dialogue (cf. *Iliad* XVI 830-861; XXII 331-360). *Typical Scenes in the Iliad*, 64. As Auld notes Goliath falls on his face to the ground as does "Dagon, the Philistine god before the ark in an earlier episode" (1 Sam 5:3-4); I & II *Samuel*, 212.

[29] In *Sinuhe* 140, the foe is killed with "his ax"; there "his" must refer to the enemy because the story is told in the first person. Interestingly, the later version in the Ashmolean Ostrakon (line 54) reads, "I felled him with my ax." In my opinion, the later scribe has missed the significance of the traditional motif and, therefore, has given us a more "logical" reading.

[30] A.B. Lord, "Tradition and the Oral Poet," 18-19. For Hector, see *Iliad* XVI 712-725, 785-793; for Gilgamesh see the Hittite version of the fight with *Huwawa*; ANET3, 83. Athena does not strike Hector for Achilles, but she deceives the Trojan hero and returns Achilles' spear which goes astray in the initial attempt (*Iliad* XXII 214-231, 271-278).

[31] For armor as the hero's share of the plunder, see §2.5.3.

[32] Cf. 1 Sam 31:9-10; see Hector's threat in the *Iliad* XVI 836; Achilles carries off the body of Hector but returns it to Priam as a sign of his humanity (*Iliad* XXII, XXIV).

[33] Saul's ignorance does not square well with his interaction with the hero earlier in the story and has been a source of scholarly wonderment. Robert Alter also suggests that the discrepancy was as clear to the redactor and his audience as it is to us but "these contradictions would have been inconsequential in comparison with the advantage gained in providing a double perspective on David." Though such contradictions run contrary to modern Western narrative, the Bible places these variants "in a kind of implicit dialogue with one another" as in Genesis; *The David Story: A*

Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel (NY: W.W. Norton & Co. 1999), 110

[34] Robert Alter accepts that the presence of two different traditions but says: “What we need to ask, however, is why the redactor set these two stories in immediate sequence, despite the contradictions that must have been as evident to him as to us. A reasonable conclusion is that for the ancient audience, and for the redactor, these contradictions would have been inconsequential in comparison with the advantage gained in providing a double perspective on David; *The David Story*, 110.

[35] 1 Sam 17:57; the severed head functions as a proof of victory; also in Jdt 13:15-17. As for Saul’s ignorance of David’s parentage, Jason notes that it is typical for the hero in the heroic fairy tale to reach “the father of the king’s daughter unrecognized”; “David and Goliath,” 44-45. An example of this motif can be found in the Egyptian story of “The Doomed Prince,” 6,5-10, translated by Edward F. Wente, Jr. *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, ed. William Kelly Simpson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) 75-79, esp. 77. There the question also concerns the identity of the hero’s parent, and the motif is crucial for the plot. When the hero is identified as the son of an Egyptian charioteer, the father of the princess goes into a rage, refuses to hand over his daughter in marriage, and orders the hero killed. Eventually, all is set right because the father, on seeing the hero, recognizes that young man’s worth although the hero’s real identity as the son of the pharaoh is never revealed. Before arguing that the motif once had a more prominent role in the tradition of David and Goliath, it is wise to remember that every story does not always develop all the possibilities of a motif.

[36] Fenik lists two typical ways of handling simultaneous action in the *Iliad*: 1) “the action that is interrupted is resumed at exactly the same point where it left off, without any time having elapsed; cf. V 319-330; XIII 39-136; XV 666-684”; 2) “the action continues

to move forward as we proceed from one part of the scene to the other; cf. V 663-698; XIII 402-424 “; *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad: Studies in Narrative Technique of Homeric Battle Descriptions* (Hermes Einzelschriften 21; Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1968), 37-38. A good example of the first pattern may be found in 2 Sam 13:37-39. The second type can be seen in the middle section of this story (17:12-24), where scenes about David, Goliath, and the armies alternate in order to suggest simultaneous action taking place in Bethlehem and on the battlefield. The action in 1 Sam 17:55-18:4 conforms basically to the second pattern with the exception of 17:55-56 which provides a flashback to the time before the fight scene with 17:57 picking up the action of 17:54 (37-38). Fenik also describes a third technique in which the time required for one action to be completed is filled by something else that goes on simultaneously (109).

[37] Cf. Mettinger, *King and Messiah*, 34, 39. McCarter indicates that this has been pointed out by earlier scholars and cites J. Morgenstern, “David and Jonathan,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78 (1959) 322-325, esp. 322.

[38] Mark Smith discusses at length the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Achilles and Patroclus, David and Jonathan at some length; *Poetic Heroes*, 51-67. Wilhelm Schmid and Otto Stahlin, in their *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 7.1.1; Munich: C.H. Beck, 1929) 63, list the following as examples of *Freundespaar*, heroic friends: Achilles and Patroclus, Hercules and Iolaus, Theseus and Pirithous, Orestes and Pylades, Herzog Ernst and Werner von Kyburg, Tristan and Kurwenal, Don Carlos and Marquis Posa; in addition to friends, Schmid and Stahlin also cite pairs of fathers and sons, kings and vassals. This list of pairs reflects A. Orliks’s “Law of Twins” in “Epische Gesetze der Volksdichtung,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 51 (1909) 1-12. See also Bowra, *Heroic Poetry*, 65-68; in addition to Achilles and Patroclus, Bowra lists Roland and Oliver, Gilgamesh and Enkidu, the Uzbek Alpamys and

Karadzhan, and the Armenian brothers Sanasar and Bagdasar. D.J. McCarthy has discussed the friendship between David and Jonathan as a heroic friendship, and he notes the “imitation” of heroic tradition “in the stories like Fennimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*”; cf. “Berît and Covenant in the Deuteronomistic History,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 23 (1972) 65-85, esp. 70-71. The tradition of hero and friend continues, if as a shadow, in literature of all kinds and may be found on television today in the adventure stories of cowboys, policemen, etc.

[39] On brothers, cf. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* 2, 189. Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant*, 99-101 et passim. Cf. also 2 Sam 1:26 and 1 Sam 25:20.

[40] *Gilg.* I 267-268 with parallels in I 270-71, and in a second dream about an ax, I 284-285, 289-290. The story of Gilgamesh’s dreams and his mother’s interpretation is told to Enkidu by Shamhat the woman who civilizes through sexual union.

[41] *Iliad* XVIII 98-99.

[42] Sarpedon and Glaucus, cf. esp. *Iliad* XII 387-399; XVI 461-501. Aias and Teucon, the Aiantes, VIII 266-273; they fight Sarpedon and Glaucus in XII 370-412.

[43] CAD cites under *napištu*, Jørgen Laessøe, *The Shemshara Tablets* (Copenhagen: I kommission hos Munksgaard, 1959) 81, SH 812:57-58, “whom his lord loves as his own life” (*u <sa-tu> be-el-su ki-ma na-piš-ti-su/ i-ra-mu-su*). Also ARM II 72:24 which CAD translates “Do you not know that I love (you like my own) life (<ki>-ma na-piš-tam a-ra-am-mu at-ta u-ul ti-de-e).

[44] Moshe Weinfeld, “The Loyalty Oath in the Ancient Near East,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 8 (1976) 379-414, esp. 383-385; cf. “Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon,” ANET3, 534, lines 266-268: “If you do not love ... Ashurbanipal ... your lord ... as your own lives ...” Cf. also *Iliad* XVIII 81-82: “Patroclus, whom I honored above all my comrades

even as my own self (κεφαλή = head).” As Weinfeld points out the tradition comes to rest in the Šema’ (Deut 6:4-5); also in Lev 19:18 which is juxtaposed with the Šema’ in Matt 22:36-39 and Luke 10:27.

[45] McCarthy, “Berît and Covenant,” 68, n. 3; he argues that the double subject with a singular verb is “perfectly acceptable grammar” and refers the reader to Gen 9:23 and also to Paul Joüon, *Grammaire de l’hébreu biblique* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1923) 150q. In view of that, perhaps the phrase, “because of his loving him as his own *nepes*” should be translated as a reference to both subjects: “because each loved the other as his own *nepes*.”

[46] McCarthy discusses the giving of gifts as a symbolic action for sealing a covenant in “Three Covenants in Genesis,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1964) 179-189, esp. 182-183.

[47] Mark Smith explores the question of homosexuality and heroic friendships concludes with others that the biblical “texts in the first place do not address sex, but love.” He notes that “modern scholarship has expended considerable energy on trying to peek behind the narrative via various tantalizing details,” adding: “As a result, we have perhaps been seduced into an approach that largely opts between maximal and minimal conclusions influenced by modern issues.” ; *Poetic Heroes*, 82.

[48] Smith, *Poetic Heroes*, 275. He also notes, “that the male bonding of David and Jonathan may in part emblemize the exclusion of females, reflected in Aqhat’s famous retort to Anat (KTU 1.17 VI 39-41): ‘Bows are ...warriors; now shall womanhood go hunting?’ In this statement, Aqhat asserts the gendered understanding of warrior culture”; *Poetic Heroes*, 274-275.

Though admittedly an *ad hominem* argument, I would like to point to a story on American veterans of the Vietnam war who gathered for “a twelve year-on reunion organized by CBS News, with Newsweek cooperation.... It was a made-for-television event, but the artifice fell away in the rush of sentiment and the reawakening

of that powerful bonding they had known in danger together – love stronger in its way (Donald M.) Stagnaro guessed, than most have felt even for their wives”; “Reunion,” *Newsweek* 24 (December 14, 1981) 97. This speaks to the universality of this experience.

[49] Mark Smith notes that “flashes of fire” could be understood as “arrows of fire,” and so a military image suggesting that “the romantic love of the man and the women in the Song is stronger than the fierceness of warriors engaged in a life-and-death struggle”; *Poetic Heroes*, p. 409, n. 72.

6. The Unlikely Human Hero

The ideal of the traditional hero evokes the strong warrior at the height of his physical prowess. His masculine beauty also reflects his intellectual and moral strength as well.^[1] We see this in the three human heroes: Gilgamesh, Sinuhe, and Achilles. The three deities, Marduk, Ninurta, and Baal, conform to this ideal in their anthropomorphic presentation. In the Bible, David represents this physical ideal in his victories from 1 Samuel 18 through his final triumph over the Philistines in 2 Sam 8. This story of the heroic David runs counterpoint to the tragedy of Saul, which we shall consider in Chapter 8. Some biblical scholars have read David's story as a thinly veiled account of a usurper or worse. However, this is not the plain meaning of the text, as J. Randall Short has persuasively argued. He compares the David story with the "Apology of Hattušili," which tells the story of a king who "forcefully seized his predecessor's throne and, therefore, published the text as his personal exoneration." While the Hittite narrative "makes sense only in light of the historical Hattušili's individual predicament, the biblical account...can be read in light of multiple predicaments of multiple individuals and/or communities of people whom they might be understood as representing."^[2] The "faithful readers," to use Short's term, find that the plain meaning of the narrative celebrates David as a traditional hero and king carrying out the will of his Lord.

Jonathan likewise represents this ideal in 1 Samuel 14. There the prince proposes to his armor-bearer that they attack the garrison, for, as he says, "nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few" (1 Sam 14:6). With the Lord's power dutifully acknowledged, Jonathan and his armor-bearer proceed to slay twenty Philistines and throw the enemy camp into a panic.

In general, however, the heroes of the biblical battle narrative are unlikely candidates who are weak or unexpected in various

ways. The boy David against Goliath captures this biblical motif, and Judith, in her way, also reflects this ideal.

6.1. The Book of Judith

The Book of Judith unfolds according to heroic pattern with the scene of single-combat and other motifs transformed to accommodate its heroine, and it may be summarized as follows:

The book opens with the ever-increasing threat of the enemy army under Holofernes, culminating in a siege (1:1-7:18). It includes a traditional episode of counsel. According to the tradition, bad counselors offer bad counsel, and good counselors offer good counsel; a bad leader then chooses the bad counsel while a good leader chooses the good.^[3] Here Achior, the leader of the Ammonites, offers Holofernes good counsel telling him to delay until the Israelites have sinned.^[4] All the others around Holofernes, in typical fashion, reject the good counsel and argue that Israel cannot withstand them. Holofernes, following the tradition, accepts the bad counsel (Jdt 5:1 –7:16). The Israelites react with helplessness and wish to surrender, and their leaders agree if no help comes within seven days (7:19-32; cf. 1 Sam 11:1-3).

After a description of the heroine in 8:1-8, Judith meets with the elders and delivers a long didactic speech that the elders misunderstand. Judith then offers to go herself, and the elders commission and bless her (8:9-36). Judith also calls for a divine commission through prayer (9:1-14). She then prepares for battle, but instead of girding on sword and armor, she puts off her widow's dress, makes herself beautiful, and prepares provisions taking with her a trusted maidservant as her heroic friend (10:1-5).

Judith makes the traditional journey to the enemy camp (10:6-10), where she is captured and brought to Holofernes, who ironically promises her protection. (10:6-11:4). Judith then offers him bad counsel saying that he should wait until the inhabitants sin by eating

the first fruits. The enemy leader again follows the tradition and accepts her bad counsel. Judith then becomes a guest of Holofernes, and though invited to his banquet, she explains that she cannot eat any but her own food; moreover, she gets his permission to go out of the camp toward morning to purify herself and pray.[5]

Deception serves as an important weapon for these unlikely heroes of the Bible. Physically they cannot meet the enemy and win, and so they must resort to their shrewdness. Susan Niditch has related this motif to the trickster of folklore,[6] but those characters are typically rule-breakers who break expectations to create new possibilities. However, these unlikely heroes use deception to achieve victory for the Lord. They stand against human trust in physical might as they act for the Lord, who is the true hero of these stories. Within the biblical world, deception becomes another pointer to the unseen causality at work in these battle narratives.

The battle between Judith and Holofernes becomes a battle of wits complicated by his lust. Thinking on the fourth day[7] that he would seduce her, Holofernes invites only Judith to his banquet. “Waiting for an opportunity to seduce her,”[8] he becomes drunker and drunker—an image of his lust—and therefore of his undoing. When the other servants withdraw, Judith prays and then cuts off his head. To disguise the deed, she puts the head in her food basket; then she and her maid go “out together, as they were accustomed to go for prayer” (13:10). The irony is palpable.

After the return journey (13:10b-11), she announces the victory to the town and produces the head of Holofernes, much as David did (13:15). The people, recognizing the victory, take up arms and go out to fight. The enemy army, realizing what has happened to their leader, is overcome with fear (14:11-15:3a). The traditional pursuit and destruction of the enemy follow (15:3b-6). “Our” side takes its plunder while recognizing and rewarding the hero. Here Judith receives as her share: the vessels and canopy of Holofernes’ bed chamber (15:7-13). “Then all the women of Israel gathered to see her, and blessed her, and some of them performed a dance in her honor...” (15:12). Judith sings a victory hymn (16:1-17) and recognizes

the Lord as the divine hero (16:18-20). The story ends with an account of her old age and of no one spreading terror “for a long time after her death” (16:21-25).

While the story has a strong didactic character, it nonetheless follows and adapts the heroic pattern to tell the heroic story of Judith. By recognizing the tradition, we can follow the unfolding of an ancient story made new and unforgettable with this woman as the unlikely hero. Its cultural and psychological dimensions have been explored recently by Margarita Stocker in *Judith Sexual Warrior*^[9] and Helen Efthiniadis-Keith’s Jungian analysis.^[10] During the Baroque period, Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi most powerfully, and others celebrated Judith’s triumph through their art.

6.2. The Unlikely Heroes in the Book of Judges: Strong and Weak.

Though the traditional hero represents a human ideal, his impediment is also a traditional feature. Marduk is the youngest deity. Achilles is angry—a moral impediment. Gilgamesh enters the story as an abusive and juvenile king though perfect in strength and form; his friendship with Enkidu curbs the moral defect of the hero’s personality, and the heroic friend’s death poignantly shows that the hero has yet to confront the reality of death.^[11] In both the *Iliad* and the *Gilgamesh Epic*, the climax of the whole perfects the hero’s character. In these two pieces of sophisticated literature, the battle within the hero becomes more important than the battle without.

The battle narratives in the Book of Judges also reflect the heroic pattern, but like 1 Sam 17, they give us an unlikely hero with his or her impediment serving as a recurring motif that points to the Lord as the true hero of the battle. Though none match Gilgamesh or Achilles, Some struggle with their impediment, and they all challenge us to reconsider our understanding of a hero.

6.2.1. Samson: *Judges 13-16*

Samson is certainly the Bible's most famous strong man and, in the best of the heroic tradition, defeats the Philistines single-handedly.^[12] In his definitive study, Gregory Mobley explores Samson as a traditional hero in relation to Heracles, Enkidu and Gilgamesh, and David and Saul. ^[13] Mobley focuses on Samson as a liminal figure "stuck betwixt and between," those who like James Bond "never 'get the girl, or finish their adventure with marriage."^[14] I would add that Samson fits into the biblical tradition of the unlikely, weak hero. Samson's moral and intellectual defects of character, particularly his desire for Philistine women, muddle whatever better judgment he may have, and not once but twice (Judg 14:10-20; 16:4-22). In the first instance, this does not diminish his physical powers, but his betrothed is given to someone. In his anger, he burns the enemy's fields, and they come and demand his own people hand him over. Rather than commissioning him to fight the enemy, they give him up to save themselves, but Samson slays a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass as the victory hymn recounts. In the second, Delilah's wiles leave the hero blind and captive.

Niditch has pointed out how the story becomes a web of deception by both Samson and the Philistines, and "only when he abandons deception and reveals the truth about his strength is he overpowered."^[15] However, in this state of weakness, the blind Samson calls on the Lord and then outwits his captors by pulling down the pillars of the roof. "So those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life" (Judg 16:30). Though this story celebrates Samson's physical strength, it ultimately celebrates the blind hero and his deception, the weapon of weakness.^[16] Biblical battle narratives continually subordinate the hero's strength to the power of God.

Cheryl Exum has asked whether Samson should be considered a tragic hero and concludes that he does not fit there but belongs rather to the classic vision found in comedy which affirms life.^[17]

The problem is, of course, Samson's death which typically belongs to tragedy. However, death is a part of war. Achilles knows that he will die young but will win enduring fame if he stays to fight. As the *Iliad* opens, he has nothing worth the fight. Samson does not have Achilles' grandeur, and his early exploits belong to comedy, but the last scene with him pulling the house down on himself and the Philistines becomes an act of self-sacrifice that redeems the rogue. His death makes him a hero worth remembering. As a result, this story has received much attention throughout the history of Jewish and Christian interpretation, which David M. Gunn has surveyed in his literate commentary on Judges.^[18]

6.2.2. *The Left-Handed Ehud: Judg 3:12-30*

As is typical for all the heroic narratives in Judges, the Deuteronomistic editor provides the threat and reaction of helplessness, as in Judg 3:12-14: King Eglon of Moab has not only threatened but has conquered and oppressed the Israelites for eighteen years. Here there is no traditional commission of the hero—a sign of the hero's initiative and courage. The left-handed Ehud, going with a delegation to present tribute, takes the heroic role for himself. He pretends to bring a secret message and presents instead a sword hidden on his right thigh (Judg 3:15-30).^[19] With the enemy leader dead, the hero escapes, and the narrative unfolds with the muster of troops and the slaughter of the enemy: “no one escaped” (3:29).

Ehud's left-handedness alerts us to his difference. Susan Niditch points out that, while left-handedness is a potential stratagem against a right-handed society, it “is the symbolic dark side, the marginal, underhanded side of the body as indicated by ritual preferences.” Therefore, it “is symbolically appropriate for judges who are often liminal or marginal.”^[20] To his difference, the story adds deception, which becomes all the more daring because it is carried out alone in the enemy's royal city. Here the hero's

weakness, signaled by his left-handedness, stems from inequality of numbers rather than a lack of physical strength. This type of inequality is not unique to the Bible, for traditionally, the enemy appears with seemingly invincible power to heighten the tension. Thus the hero's triumph continually illustrates the power of good over evil.

6.2.3. Deborah and Jael: Judge 4-5

Judges 4-5 builds the biblical tradition by dividing the hero's roles between a strong warrior hero and an unlikely hero. The whole story relies on traditional motifs with typical biblical adjustments.^[21] Deborah, a fearless leader-prophet, calls and commissions the strong warrior Barak to undertake a war of redress against the oppression of Hazor.^[22] The warrior hero does not object, but he makes his acceptance conditional on Deborah's accompanying him because she represents the real hero: the Lord. Already the strong hero's condition begins the subordination of apparent strength to apparent weakness, and Deborah makes this emphatic by prophesying that "the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." During the battle, the storyteller subordinates Barak's human strength to the divine by reporting that "the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak at the edge of the sword" (Judg 4:15 RSV). According to the traditional motif, "all the army of Sisera fell by the sword; no one was left" (4:16).

Even so, Sisera, the enemy general, escapes and finds his way to the tent of Jael, a Kenite. Unlike other biblical women who hide people to protect them, Jael deceives Sisera.^[23] When he asks her for water, she, like a mother, offers him milk, but the motif of deception will bring about his death. As with David and Samson, the victory is entirely realistic, for it is quite reasonable that a woman who must set up her own tents could drive a tent peg through the head of a sleeping warrior. Still, the motifs of deception and the

unlikely hero point to a hidden causality. Judges 5 celebrates the triumph in the justly famous victory hymn. As Niditch says: “The Israelite writer identifies with the power of the feminine. She who is expected to be weak turns the male warrior into the woman raped, a theme drawn much more overtly in the version in 5:27.”[\[24\]](#)

6.2.4. *The Fearful Gideon: Judges 6-8*

Gideon’s story begins with his call and commission by “the angel of the Lord” as he beats out the wheat in the winepress lest the enemy notice—the first sign of the hero’s fear. Gideon objects to the call and commission with fear and cynicism. However, the angel’s dramatic acceptance of an offering leads the hero, though “afraid of his family and the townspeople,” to destroy the altar of Baal “by night.” Gideon then calls “Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali” to fight against the Midianites, but before he goes further, he asks for a sign: dew on the fleece but the ground dry. Just to be sure, he asks for the sign’s reverse. Ready to move, the Lord surprises him: “The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, ‘My own hand has delivered me.’” (7:2). This statement sums up the battle narrative’s basic theme: The Lord is the hero.[\[25\]](#)

As a result, the Lord has Gideon send away all who wish, but still too many remain. The Lord imposes another test that leaves only three hundred of the original twenty-two thousand. There follow another call and commission with the hand-formula: “I have given it into your hand.” (7:9). Even so, the Lord gives Gideon one more sign. Our hero and his heroic friend Purah sneak down to the camp and hear a soldier’s dream, which becomes the final confirmation for this most ambivalent hero. He calls his army, adding the hand-formula, and they attack with their trumpets, lamps, and a shout: “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon” (7:20)! These are surely preposterous weapons, but they make the central theme clear. The enemy panics; Israel captures and kills the enemy kings.

Interestingly, the story ends with the hero making an ephod, and it “became a snare to Gideon and his family” (8:27). Paddy Chayefsky turned this story into the play *Gideon* (1961) to explore the question of faith within our modern context, but the basic questions are present within the Hebrew text, and the central question is a traditional one: Is God the hero, or am I?

6.2.5. *Jephthah the Chosen Outcast: Judg 10:6-11:40*

The story of Jephthah begins with the typical Deuteronomistic description of the enemy’s threat (10:6-16), followed by an announcement that the Ammonites had come up and encamped in Gilead with Israel encamped at Mizpah. The description of the hero follows and identifies Jephthah as both the “son of a prostitute” and “a mighty warrior” who becomes an outcast and outlaw with his own band of outlaws (11:1-3). Though a man of physical prowess, Jephthah is an unlikely hero because he was born outside the law and lives outside the law. Still, after the threat is repeated (11:4a), the elders issue the traditional call. Jephthah objects that they had previously rejected and driven him away.^[26] The elders counter that they have “turned back” and again offer the commission. Like Marduk in the *Enūma eliš*, Jephthah demands that they make him their head before the battle. The elders swear and make him “head and commander over them” (11:4b-11).

Jephthah carries on a dialogue with the enemy king, much as we find in the royal battle narrative.^[27] There follows Jephthah’s vow to sacrifice the first person who comes from his house after his victory. The vow is a typical feature of the royal narratives,^[28] and, as Alice Logan has pointed out in biblical stories, “a ‘war vow,’ especially one that offered ‘devoted’ human life, is a trump card, so to speak, to be played when victory really mattered. Under such circumstances, vow making, especially by the king, was extremely serious, and if the deity fulfilled his end of the bargain, no king would have wanted to incur God’s wrath by not living up to his.

The battle is reduced to two verses, an indication of its relative unimportance. After Jephthah crosses over to meet the enemy, the narrator tells us first that “the Lord gave them into his hand” and then that the hero “inflicted a massive defeat on them” (11:32-33).

Typically these stories should end with the death of the enemy hero, but here the virgin daughter of Jephthah dies according to the vow he has made. As Alice Logan argues:

The author told the ancient audience that Jephthah was trapped—by Western Semitic custom, by Israelite war vow tradition, by Priestly votive law, and by the strict law of *ḥērem*. Jephthah and his daughter should be remembered, he contends, because they performed as custom demanded of its royals despite the enormous personal cost.[\[29\]](#)

Still, the traditional battle motif is displaced.[\[30\]](#) The hero's daughter dies instead of the enemy hero. She weeps for her virginity, and the audience cannot help but weep for her. Because the death does not fit the generic pattern, the story must mean something different. The question is enlarged by Jephthah himself. Though a strong warrior like Samson, Gilgamesh, and Achilles, he is an outsider and so an unlikely hero. Is he more unlikely than the boy or the woman or the coward? Still, the storyteller is pushing away from the traditional expectation toward, if not history, then mimesis and tragedy.

6.3. Conclusion

These biblical battle narratives repeat time and again the central theme of Exodus 14-15: the Lord is the hero. This survey of battle narratives, including that of the boy David, reveals a series of unlikely heroes who break in important ways with the physically strong hero at the height of his manly prowess. Ehud, Jephthah, and Samson reflect the traditional motif, but each possesses some

telling impediment. The left-handed Ehud is alone in the enemy capital; Jephthah is an outcast, and Samson is blind. Moreover, Ehud and Samson depend on the typical stratagem of the unlikely heroes: deception. Ehud invites Eglon to believe that he has a special message for him alone. The blind Samson has his unsuspecting handler position him for victory.

War belongs to the world of men, and so gender makes the women Jael and Judith unlikely heroes. They too depend upon deception, but they strike the fatal blow themselves. David's youth makes him an unlikely hero against Goliath, and Gideon's fear gives him a place among this illustrious group of biblical heroes. Each one has some impediment, some perceived weakness which makes them appear unsuited for the role of battle hero.

These heroes use physical force when possible and their wits, when necessary, to outwit their enemy. Deception serves as both a necessary and a worthy stratagem against an enemy that represents chaos and oppression. Significantly, none of these heroes triumph using a miracle. God saves Israel through these human instruments. At the same time, the various motifs of weakness point to an unseen causality which is often named by the characters themselves or by the narrators: The LORD is the hero.

6.4. Footnotes to Chapter 6

[1] See the discussion of the hero's beauty in §5.3.1. This motif is captured in the description of David found in 1 Sam 16:18 where "one of the young men answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him."

[2] J. Randall Short, *The Surprising Election and Confirmation of King David*, 97. Short surveys the modern scholarship on 1 Sam 16

to 2 Sam 5 (13-50) and then compares this text to the “Apology of Hattušili.”

[3] A.B. Lord has called “council ... one of the most common and useful themes [i.e., patterns] of all epic poetry”; *Singer of Tales*, 68, 71. Lord outlines an elaborate scheme beginning with the arrival of a letter. The essential elements, however, are those of good and bad counsel, with the good leader accepting the good and the bad leader accepting the bad. Most of the examples in the Old Testament involve a bad leader/king choosing bad counsel over good: 2 Sam 16:15 –17:14; 1 Kgs 12:6-20; Jdt 5:5 –7:16. Similarly, the rebellious people choose the report of the terrified spies over the counsel of Caleb and Joshua in Num 13-14, and Ammon takes the bad advice of Jonadab in 2 Sam 13:1-6. As for good leaders who choose good counsel, cf. 1 Kgs 20:7-8 where only good counsel is presented, and Jdt 7:19–8:36 where Uzziah rejects the bad counsel of the frightened people (at least for the moment) and accepts the good counsel of Judith. In certain instances, counsel crosses the lines of war: Moses offers the pharaoh good counsel, which is rejected (Exod 7-11). Rabshakeh advises Hezekiah to capitulate, but the good king rejects the bad counsel (2 Kgs 18:17–19:37). Also, King Rehoboam rejects the good counsel of the elders and takes the bad counsel of the young men and so shows himself to be a bad king who deserves to lose the kingdom to Jeroboam (1 Kgs 12:1-15).

[4] In this, Achior is like Ahitophel, who offers Absalom wise counsel while the good Hushai deceives the would-be king with bad counsel (2 Sam 16:15–17:14.)

[5] On the function of prayer in the story S. van den Eynde, “Crying to God Prayer and Plot in the Book of Judith,” *Biblica* 85 (2004) 217-231. As van den Eynde argues, prayer underlines the power of the Lord.

[6] Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 106-122.

[7] As Alonso Schökel pointed out in class, lists typically come in threes or sevens with the first or last being the most important, or they may come as three plus one or seven plus one with the addition indicating the beginning of a new sequence as here. The fourth day here represents three plus one.

[8] Jdt 12:16. The verb ἀπατῆσαι has as its basic meaning “deceive” which ironically ties his motive into a larger biblical theme.

[9] Margarita Stocker, *Judith Sexual Warrior: Women and Power in Western Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). She particularly notes the connection to Jael (13-15).

[10] Helen Efthimiadis-Keith, *The Enemy Is Within: A Jungian Psychoanalytic Approach to the Book of Judith* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[11] Compare Gilg. Y 90-119 and II 216-240 where Gilgamesh disdains death until Tablet VII where Enkidu, his heroic friend, dies as punishment for their killing Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven and Tablet VIII which tells of Enkidu’s funeral. Then Gilgamesh begins his journey in search of immortal life.

[12] Judg 13-16; the Samson tradition forms a unified whole, beginning with a traditional birth episode and ending with the hero’s death. Judg 15, like KTU 1.2.I, tells of the leader’s capitulation to the enemy’s outrageous demand that the hero be handed over.

[13] Gregory Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), esp. 6-16, 109.

[14] Ibid. 110.

[15] Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 113.

[16] S. Thompson, *Motif-Index*, L 300, “Triumph of Weak.”

[17] J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 37.

[18] David M. Gunn, *Judges*. Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 170-230.

[19] Lawson G. Stone argues that the story is less burlesque and more realistic than what recent scholars have proposed; “Eglon’s Belly and Ehud’s Blade: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128.4 (2009) 649-663.

[20] Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*. The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008) 57. She also argues that imagery of sword and thigh can easily be interpreted as a metaphor for sexual power.

[21] The traditional motifs are as follows: Judg 4:1-3. a Deuteronomistic description of the enemy’s past aggression and Israel’s helplessness; 4:4-5. description of the prophetess-leader, Deborah, instead of the hero; 4:6-9. the divine call and commission of Barak, the warrior-hero, by the prophetess-leader; the hero does not reject the commission but sets a condition for his acceptance: the presence of Deborah at the battle; by setting this condition, Barak acknowledges the pre-eminence of the Lord as the hero; Deborah agrees to the condition yet adds a prophecy of the outcome which foretells Jael’s triumph which undercuts still further Barak’s position as the hero.

4:10. preparation for battle: muster of the troops; 4:11. description of the weak heroine’s background; 4:12-13. the enemy’s renewed threat and its great power; 4:14a. the prophetess-leader gives the hero a second divine call and commission with the addition of the hand-formula, assurance of divine presence and aid.

4:14b. journey; 4:15a. fight in which Barak subordinated to the Lord as the hero; 4:15b. recognition of defeat by the enemy leader, Sisera, who flees; 4:16. pursuit and destruction of the enemy so that “not a man was left.”

4:17-22. death episode in which Jael kills the enemy commander; 4:23. summary; 4:24. notice of the enemy king’s death; 5:1-31a. victory hymn sung by Deborah.

[22] For a careful literary analysis of the story, see Yairah Amit, “Judges 4: Its Content and Form,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 39 (1987) 89-111. The war of redress is discussed above in §3.3.2. The four types of wars discussed there can be used to analyze the different ways in which the biblical narratives begin.

[23] Rahab hides the Israelite spies in Judges 2, and a woman hides Jonathan and Ahimaaz (2 Sam 17:17-20); Niditch, *Judges*, 66.

[24] Niditch, *Judges*, 67. Mark Smith also provides a careful analysis of this poem in *Poetic Heroes*, 234-266.

[25] Compare it with Jonathan’s statement in 1 Sam 14:6: “Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.” Cf. also Jdt 9:11 and 1 Macc 3:18-19).

[26] Cf. §2.4 for the third pattern of the call narrative, which includes an objection by the hero.

[27] Cf. §2.5.1 for the verbal exchange between the king and the enemy leader.

[28] Cf. §3.4.3 and 3n37 for the vow.

[29] Alice Logan, “Rehabilitating Jephthah,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128.4 (2009) 665-685, esp. 683. Niditch too observes that “the deity receives the best spoil, and no spoil is more valuable than human spoil”; *Judges*, 133.

[30] Susan Niditch points out a parallel “used in some tellings of the folktale ‘Beauty and the Beast’; *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 33.

7. The Royal Battle Pattern in the Biblical Tradition

The royal battle pattern exalts the king, who acts with and for the divine hero. By virtue of his kingship, the king already possesses the call and commission, so there is no need to seek another hero. Even so, the consultation of the deity for a sign of favor is a standard motif of the ancient Near Eastern narratives. In the Book of Chronicles, this takes the form of the king's prayer. The Books of Kings make the prophet into a central character who speaks and acts for the Lord. The prophet's role grows as he becomes locked in a comic conflict with the king of Israel—the comedy achieved mainly at the expense of the king who is no longer identified with the Lord.

7.1. The Royal Battle Pattern: King Saul against Nahash: 1 Samuel 11

The story of Saul's triumph over Nahash in 1 Samuel 11 provides an example of a hero who answers the call for help at his own initiative, as in the royal battle pattern.^[1] Within the larger narrative, Saul is already king, and the story recounts an army's victory as is typical of the royal pattern. The story opens with the enemy's threat: a siege of Jabesh-gilead by Nahash the Ammonite (11:1a). The Hebrew word *naḥaš* means "snake" and suggests a connection to Tiamat and Leviathan.^[2]

The people attempt to sue for peace, but their helplessness is exposed by the enemy king's outrageous demands: the gouging out of their right eyes—a mark of shame. The people ask for seven days and send a messenger through Israel with a general call for a hero. When the news reaches Gibeah of Saul, the people there show their

helplessness by weeping. Returning from plowing, the absent hero hears threat and general call, and “the spirit of God came upon Saul in power⁴ and his anger was greatly kindled” (11:5-6). No human leader commissions him; rather, “the spirit of God” comes upon him as in the divine commission for the great judges, and, as Joachim Vette argues, the motif ties Saul to that tradition.^[3] With the spirit comes anger, the typical image of the hero’s righteous indignation.

Saul prepares for battle in a dramatic call and commission to muster Israel while messengers announce to Jabesh-gilead the imminent arrival of help. With dramatic irony, the people of Jabesh tell Nahash that they will capitulate on the morrow to raise the enemy’s false confidence. Victory, flight, and destruction follow in quick succession. The recognition picks up a detail from 10:27; the people want to kill the men who opposed Saul’s kingship. However, the magnanimous hero allows them to go free (death episode denied; 11:12-13). The hero is then recognized and receives his reward: Samuel accompanies Saul to Gilgal, where the hero’s kingship is “renewed.” The story ends with the sacrifices to the Lord and with a feast.

The story shows Saul standing squarely within both the heroic and royal tradition as the strong hero carrying out the deity’s will. This one bright moment attests to Saul’s heroism before his character unravels in the larger story. Even so, the people of Jabesh do not forget this heroic victory. After Saul’s death at the hands of the Philistines, they come and gather his bones with those of his sons and carry out the required funeral rites for the hero who once saved them (1 Sam 31:11-13).

7.2. The Royal Battle Pattern in Joshua 1-12

Interestingly, Joshua 1-12 offers some of the clearest examples of the royal pattern.^[4] As stressed in Chapter 3, this pattern combines the human hero and the fearless leader into the single character

of the king, and this change shapes the movement of the royal pattern. Joshua, of course, takes this role.^[5] The Book of Joshua opens with a divine call and commission in which the Lord charges the hero-leader with an office and not merely for a single battle (Josh 1:1-9). The Lord's speech contains motifs proper to the Bible (promise and observance of the law), but there also appear the traditional motifs connected with the divine commission: encouragement and the assurance of divine presence and aid.^[6] A divine commission to Joshua with its attendant motifs reappears for each of the major battles except for the first attempt against Ai, which fails because of Achan's sin.^[7] The opening chapter ends with Joshua calling and commissioning Israel (Josh 1:10-18), a motif that reappears for the various battles.^[8] André Wénin argues that this narrative complex divides into two sections, Joshua 2-8 and 9-11, each beginning with a story of deception followed by victories. He sees the covenant at Mount Ebal (8:30-35) serving as a bridge between the two, with Joshua 12 summarizing the conquests.^[9] From the perspective of the battle narrative, Joshua 1-12 can be outlined as follows:

- 1:1-9 — divine call and commission of the hero-leader.
- 1:10-18 — call and commission of Israel by Joshua.
- 2:1-24 — spy episode^[10]
- 3:1-4:24 — journey, modeled on the crossing of the Red Sea with its roots in the fight between the storm and the sea.
- 5:1 — the enemy's reaction of helplessness
- 5:2-15 — motifs completing the transition: circumcision of the new generation, the cessation of the manna, and Joshua's vision of the commander of the army of the Lord telling him to take off his sandals similar to the story of Moses and the burning bush in Exod 3.
- 6:1-7:1 — the battle of Jericho.
- 7:2-3 — spy episode.
- 7:4-5 — the battle against Ai with its: initial failure because of sin.

- 7:6-26 — a death episode in which Achan is killed for taking plunder contrary to the ban.
- 8:1-35 — the second battle against Ai and victory.
- 9:1-27 — the deception of the Gibeonites (comic relief).
- 10:1-27 — the battle against the five Amorite kings.
- 10:28-43 — battle reports.
- 11:1-15 — the battle against Jabin.
- 11:16-23 — battle reports.
- 12:1-24 — a list of Joshua's victories.^[11]
- It would also be possible to isolate smaller motifs of the battle pattern, just as K. Lawson Younger has done in his careful analysis of Josh 9-12 and its relationship to his pattern of the historical conquest accounts from the ancient Near East.^[12]

Although the Joshua tradition conforms to the royal pattern, there is a difference in tone and emphasis. Joshua is not exalted like the kings of the ancient Near East but is continually subordinated to the Lord, the divine hero-leader. As the divine hero, the Lord is manifest in the tumbling walls of Jericho and other miraculous events.^[13] As the divine leader, he also controls the action to an extent not seen in the royal narratives; there, the point of view is always that of the king. Moreover, all plunder belongs to the Lord alone according to the *herem* or ban—another indication of the Lord alone as the hero. Whatever its historical reality, here, the ban serves a literary function.^[14] Finally, Joshua is one of the flattest major characters in the Old Testament. He is the perfectly obedient vassal of the Lord, carrying out everything commanded him, like Moses, “the servant of the Lord” (Josh 1:1 and often). Everything that this hero-leader does points to the Lord. The Book of Joshua exalts not Joshua but the Lord, Israel's true hero-leader.

7.3. The Royal Battle Pattern in the Books of Chronicles

The Books of Chronicles offer three battle narratives that appear only in abbreviated parallels in the Book of Kings: 2 Chr 13:1-22; 14:9-15 and 20:1-30. These stories are pious versions of the battle pattern. In general, the Chronicler heightens the piety of the good kings of Judah through their prayer to the Lord or in speeches to the army. This narrator also minimizes the human involvement in the battle to celebrate the Lord as the unquestionable hero. Thus the Chronicler trades narrative tension for a more explicit didactic function.

7.3.1. King Abijah of Judah against King Jeroboam of Israel: 2 Chronicles 13

In 2 Chronicles 13, King Abijah and the army Judah are caught between the army of Jeroboam I. Then “the people of Judah raised the battle shout. When the people of Judah shouted, God defeated Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah” (13:15). This story finishes in traditional fashion with “five hundred thousand picked men” of Israel slain and the death of the enemy king announced (13:20). The narrator devotes the largest part of the narrative time to Abijah’s speech indicting Jeroboam, which ends with the warning: “O Israelites, do not fight against the Lord, the God of your ancestors; for you cannot succeed” (13:4-12). As discussed above, the battle in the ancient Near East serves as a trial by ordeal.^[15] The outcome represents not a consequence of military might or skill but a judgment by the deity against the unjust party. Abijah’s speech provides the justification, and the victory condemns the bad King Jeroboam of Israel.

7.3.2. King Asa of Judah against Zerah the Ethiopian: 2 Chr 14:9-15

In 2 Chr 14:9-15, King Asa of Judah goes out against Zerah the Ethiopian. The narrator gives the largest part of this short narrative to a prayer by Asa stating that “in your name we have come against this multitude” and praying: “let no mortal prevail against you.” The next sentence follows the tradition: “So the Lord defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled” (14:12). The story reiterates the theme of the Lord as the hero and clearly subordinates the monarch to his God.

7.3.3. Jehoshaphat against the Moabite and Ammonites: 2 Chr 20:1-30

In 2 Chronicles 20, messengers report to King Jehoshaphat of Judah that the Moabites and Ammonites, traditional enemies, have come with a great multitude. Contrary to the royal pattern, “Jehoshaphat was afraid.” Immediately the pious king goes to the house of the Lord to seek help from the divine hero, and the largest narrative block is devoted to Jehoshaphat’s prayer (20:5-12), which he ends by acknowledging that “we are powerless” (20:12).

“Then the spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel..., a Levite of the sons of Asaph,” who urges the troops in typical fashion. “Do not fear,” and he ends by reasserting the theme found in Exod 14:14: “This battle is not for you to fight; take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem” (20:17). On the morning of the battle, King Jehoshaphat exhorts his troops to believe in the Lord and in his prophets. He appoints singers to sing of the Lord’s steadfast love. “As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the Ammonites, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed,” and “all helped to destroy one another” (20:22-23). After

three days of taking great plunder, they recognize the Lord as the hero both on the battlefield and then in Jerusalem with the whole people. Again the Chronicler gives us a good and pious king who recognizes the Lord as the hero.

7.4. Good Kings in the Books of Kings

The battle narratives in the Books of Kings continually revise the traditional motifs and patterns even as they reiterate the ancient theme of the Lord as the hero. David is, of course, the ideal king for the Deuteronomistic Historian. He fulfills the role of the good hero and then good king in 1 Sam 19 through 2 Sam 8, which culminates in the taking of Jerusalem (2 Sam 5) and subduing the Philistines along with Moab and Edom and thereby winning a name for himself (8:13). Interestingly, neither Kings nor Chronicles tell a battle story for Solomon. For the Deuteronomist, only Hezekiah and Josiah measure up to the ideal of David, but their wars break from the traditional pattern with the reality of defeat except for Sennacherib's flight in 2 Kings 19. I shall consider them all below as part of the movement from traditional to realistic narrative. Of the other battle narratives in the Books of Kings, only two present a good king.

7.4.1. *Elisha strikes the Syrians blind: 2 Kgs 6:8-23*

In this battle narrative, Elisha first plays his expected role as prophet and then takes the hero's role, which properly belongs to the king. The prophet tells the unnamed king of Israel to avoid the king of Syria trying to make war, and he obeys. The story's real tension arises when the Syrian king sets out to capture the prophet, Elisha. When the enemy shows up and surrounds the city, the prophet responds to his servant's fear: "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." (6:16). Elisha opens his servant's

eyes so that he can see the divine army that has mustered around the prophet. Then as the hero, Elisha strikes the enemy but not with a sword; rather, he strikes them blind and tricks them so that they follow him into Samaria. Once inside, he opens their eyes, and the king of Israel asks whether he should kill them. The prophet-hero commands that the enemy share the feast, which is a traditional part of the recognition. Afterward, he sets them free and so puts an end to the Syrian raids. The story offers a fresh and pacific twist on the traditional pattern.

7.4.2. Jehu overthrows the House of Ahab: 2 Kings 9

The story of Jehu overthrowing Joram mixes traditional motifs with realistic elements. The story begins with a divine commission. The prophet Elisha sends a young prophet to secretly anoint and commission Jehu to “strike down the house of your master Ahab” (9:1-10). When Jehu’s army learned what has happened, they proclaim, “Jehu is king,” a motif that traditionally belongs to the recognition of the hero after the victory (9:11-13). Jehu prepares for war by issuing orders and mounting his chariot for the journey. These motifs alternate with a report about Joram, the enemy king, to create the impression of simultaneous action. Rather than being a fearful antagonist, Joram is recovering from wounds inflicted by the king of Aram. This wound could signify his weakness, or it could be a realistic detail or both.

In the royal tradition, messengers often carry messages back and forth to illuminate the thematic content of the battle. Here Joram twice sends a messenger to inquire if Jehu comes in peace. Both times Jehu makes no reply but has the messengers join him. The watchman reports to Joram that the messenger “reached them, but he is not coming back,” and then he reports, “It looks like the driving of Jehu son of Nimshi; for he drives like a maniac” (9:20).

Joram, with the King of Judah, goes out to meet Jehu, who finally answers the inquiry of peace with an indictment. At this, Joram

attempts to flee, but the hero, in traditional fashion, pierces his heart with an arrow (missile), causing Joram to sink in his chariot. Jehu has the dead king's body desecrated by casting it on the property of Naboth to fulfill a prophecy (9:23-26). In another digression from the tradition, the narrator tells us that Jehu has the king of Judah killed as well (9:27-28). The typical regnal formula about Jehu's kingship follows.

The battle narrative ends with Jezebel's death and a banquet celebrating the victory. Though presented as a great, two-dimensional villain, Jezebel takes on the gravity of the psychological realism with her role in the death of Naboth (1 Kgs 21). Here she adds to that mimetic portrayal. She does not run or panic but puts on her make-up and confronts Jehu with a sarcastic question: "Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?" (9:31). Jehu shows no mercy and has her thrown from the window. Even at the banquet, he adds his own realistic touch by sending out servants to bury her, as he says, "for she is a king's daughter" (9:35), but they find only "the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands" as Elisha had prophesied.

The presence of these non-traditional realistic elements gives this story the ring of history. While those questions are larger than this methodology, this approach can help in sorting out those questions.

7.5. The Conflict between King and Prophet in the Books of Kings

Aarnoud van der Deijl, in his analysis of nine stories in the Books of Kings, develops his own "morphology" of biblical war stories in those books.^[16] His analysis focuses particularly on the scene of counsel and the appearance of the prophet as a central character. As van der Deijl shows, the prophet receives the largest share of narrative time in these stories.^[17] In four narratives, the narrative tension shifts from the battlefield to the conflict between the

prophet and the bad king of Israel. This shift is so prominent in three stories that they share more with comedy than narratives of heroic victory.

Christopher Booker points to identity as the critical element of comedy. Its tension arises with confusion about identities, and its resolution comes with the revelation of the true identities of the characters and their situation.^[18] The last three stories, especially, displace the traditional expectations of character. The conflict between good and evil moves from outside “our” community to inside it. Even so. The central role of the Lord as the hero remains, though emphasized in different ways. The prophet becomes the manifestation of God rather than the king. In 2 Kgs 3 and 6-7, the tension resolves with a miraculous event, as at the Red Sea or Jericho. Thus, they continue to assert the basic theme of the biblical battle tradition.

7.5.1. King Ahab triumphs over Ben-hadad: 1 Kgs 20:1-21,22-43

This story in 1 Kings 20 divides into two stories. The first, a battle narrative, ends with the king of Israel granting terms of peace to the enemy king instead of taking his life. This story gives rise to the second story, a conflict between king and prophet.

After Ben-hadad of Aram musters his army and besieges Samaria, he makes outrageous demands for the king's gold and silver, his wives and children. Ahab gives in and so shows himself fearful and weak. Going further, Ben-hadad extends the demands to Ahab's servants. The king of Israel consults the elders and all the people, who counsel against capitulations. When Ahab refuses the second demand, Ben-hadad makes the traditional boast of false confidence, and Ahab replies with a proverb: “One who puts on armor should not brag like one who takes it off” (20:11). The drunken Ben-hadad then commands his army to take their positions for the fight.

A prophet, like a hero, appears and delivers an oracle from the Lord, indicating how the battle should proceed. The king of Israel

executes the plan, causing the Arameans to flee and inflicting “a great slaughter.” Even so, the prophet tells the king to strengthen his position because Ben-hadad will return in the spring as if the victory were a false resolution.

Ben-hadad’s servants inform him that Israel’s “gods are gods of the hills” and give the enemy king bad counsel to fight a second time in the plain. Being an enemy king, “he heeded their voice, and did so” (20:25). A prophet brings another oracle containing the hand-formula and the theme of the Lord as the hero (20:28). The battle takes place on the seventh day with the Israelites killing “one hundred thousand Aramean foot soldiers”; with the rest fleeing while a wall fell on “on twenty-seven thousand men that were left” (20:30). At this point, the story takes a realistic turn. Ben-hadad hides in the city of Aphek, and, on the good counsel of his servants, he sues for peace, including his own life. In the end, he and the king of Israel make a covenant.

Deception makes its way into the story at this point, but not to deceive the enemy. Instead, a prophet has himself wounded—a scene memorable—and then disguises himself to trap the king, much as Nathan traps King David with a story after the death of Uriah (2 Sam 12:1-15). Here the prophet tells the king that he was guarding a prisoner of war with the condition that he would forfeit his life if the prisoner escaped, and he claims that the prisoner has escaped. The king of Israel says that he should forfeit his life as was the condition. The prophet, taking off the disguise, turns the judgment on the king: “Thus says the Lord, ‘Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction (*hērem*), therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people” (20:42).

Initially, the capitulating Ahab receives help in the form of good counsel from God, but the second story introduces tension between the prophet and the king. This conflict is not new. From their first appearance, Elijah and Ahab are always in conflict. Here the wounded prophet delivers a death sentence against Ahab that moves the story beyond comedy. This conflict between king and

prophet becomes the central tension in the three battle stories which follow.

7.5.2. *The King of Israel and Micaiah: 1 Kings 22 // 2 Chr 18:1-34*

The conflict between prophet and king takes center stage in 1 Kings 22, a parody of the royal battle tradition. The story opens with the bad king of Israel and the good king of Judah playing their traditional roles. The story eventually identifies Israel's king as the petulant Ahab and Jehoshaphat as Judah's good king. After agreeing to go to war, Jehoshaphat insists on consulting the deity for a commission. This scene takes up the largest part of the narrative and raises questions of identity between true and false prophets (22:5-28). The king of Israel gathers about four hundred prophets—a number reminiscent of Elijah's contest (1 Kgs 18:19, 22), and they give the traditional affirmation with the hand-formula; "Go up; for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king" (22:6, 12, 15). Strangely Jehoshaphat asks if there is not another prophet though we are not told why—an interesting gap in the story. The king of Israel admits that there is one other prophet, Micaiah: "but I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster" (22:8).

The storyteller shows his mastery by telling a story within the story, complete with its own call narrative. The Lord issues a general call to entice Ahab, and a spirit volunteers. Then the Lord asks the question: "How"? And the spirit responds that he will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all the king's prophets. The story ends abruptly with Micaiah slapped and put into prison until, as the king of Israel says: "I come in peace." Micaiah replies: If you return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me" (22:28). This comedy turns on the questions of the identity: the identity of the true prophet and also the true king.

There follows the preparation for war, which may include the

arming of the hero. Significantly, the king of Israel disguises himself while encouraging Jehoshaphat to wear the royal robes of Israel. The Syrians believe the ruse and pursue Jehoshaphat until he identifies himself. Even so, “a certain man drew his bow and unknowingly struck the king of Israel” (22:34). Though they prop him up in his chariot, the cry goes out to retreat at sunset, for Ahab is dead. The enemy king, of course, should die the traditional death, but here the king of Israel fulfills that motif and shows himself to be the real enemy king. As a result, there is no plunder or recognition of the victor. Instead, “the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed in it, according to the word of the Lord that he had spoken” (22:38). The royal battle narrative has become a comedy, and its climax reveals the true and false identities.

7.5.3. The Deception of Moab: 2 Kings 3

In 2 Kings 3, King Jehoram of Israel invites King Jehoshaphat of Judah along with the king of Edom to join him in putting down the rebellion of Mesha, king of Moab. As in 1 Kings 22, the kings of Judah and Israel play their traditional biblical roles of the good and the bad king. After seven days without water, the mistrustful king of Israel complains: “Alas! The Lord has summoned us, three kings, only to be handed over to Moab” (3:10). The good king of Judah asks whether there is a prophet to consult, and a servant of the king of Israel, not the king himself, names Elisha “who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah.”

The prophet meets the mistrustful king of Israel with an ironic rebuke inviting him to go “to your father’s prophets or to your mother’s.” Still, because of the good Jehoshaphat, the prophet sends for a musician, and “the power of the Lord” takes hold of him and reveals an oracle. The Lord will end the drought and miraculously bring enough water to fill the wadis and provide drink for all though they will “see neither wind nor rain.” Besides that, the Lord will hand over Moab.

And so it happens: the water comes, and in the early morning light, the Moabites see the water as red and conclude that Israel and Judah have slain each other. Again the deception motif appears, and it brings Moab full of false confidence to the camp of the Israelite army, which rises against the unsuspecting Moabites who flee. The Israelites pursue the enemy and work the traditional great destruction on the enemy until the king of Moab offers his firstborn son as a burnt offering on the wall. “And great wrath came upon Israel, so they withdrew from him and returned to their own land” (3:27b).

This story, with its prophet-king conflict, follows the traditional pattern with one addition. Israel's bad king becomes the real enemy because he is unwilling to trust in the Lord even though human power offers no solution. The prophet's inquiry and then his prediction underscores the theme of the Lord as the hero. The traditional victory and rout follow. The traditional death of the enemy hero comes with the king of Moab offering his firstborn son as a burnt offering. While the Canaanites practiced child sacrifice, its use to halt the battle is unexpected, and its desperation belongs to realism rather than the tradition.[\[19\]](#)

7.5.4. Benhadad's Siege of Samaria: 2 Kgs 6:24-7:20

Benhadad's siege of Samaria provides another wonderful comedy. The story begins with the enemy besieging “our” city and causing a great famine resulting in outrageous prices for donkey heads and pigeon dung. The threat reveals “our” helplessness. When two women beg the king for help, he answers: “Let the Lord help you. How can I help you” (6:27)? The impotent king hears the argument of two women about the eating of their children. The same motif appears in Lamentations 4:10, which is full of tragedy. Here it is melodrama and an occasion for the king to blame the prophet, Elisha. He dispatches a servant to bring back the prophet's head but then goes himself and hears Elisha's prophecy that food will be

cheap on the next day. “The captain on whose hand the king leaned” challenges the prophecy, and Elisha predicts that he will see it but not eat of it. As in 1 Kings 22, the traditional scene of consulting the deity has been turned upside down.

Four lepers now replace the hero going forth to meet the enemy. Despairing of life in the city, they journey to the enemy camp to see what fate may hold. Miraculously they find the enemy has dispersed. At first, they enjoy a victory feast and begin to plunder the camp until they realize that “what we are doing is wrong” (7:9). So returning to the city, they announce the victory. The bad king suspects a trap and scouts to see what has happened. They return with the same news of victory, and the people rush from the city to plunder the camp and have their own victory feast of cheap food. As predicted by Elisha, the king’s servant is trampled at the gate and so sees but does not eat. Instead of the death of the enemy hero or king, this story gives us the death of “the captain on whose hand the king leaned” because he did not trust the word of the prophet. The central tension has shifted from the enemy outside to the enemy inside, from the enemy’s physical threat to a lack of faith and hope in the Lord as the hero.

7.6. Footnotes to Chapter 7

[1] For a discussion of the historical issues of this text, see Diana Edelman, “Saul’s Rescue of Jabesh-Gilead (1 Sam 11:1-11): Sorting Story from History,” *Zeitschrift für alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft*, 96 (1984) 195-209.

[2] Cf. C. Grottanelli, “The Enemy King is a Monster: A Biblical Equation,” *Studi Storico-Religiosi*, 3 (1979) 5-36. Grottanelli discusses the serpentine qualities of Nahash, whose name means “snake” in Hebrew and relates them to roots in the battle stories of the mythic mode.

[3] The coming of the Spirit as a sign of divine commission is found also in Judg 3:7-11; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14. Joachim Vette has recently argued that this motif ties Saul to the great judges and makes him, and not Samuel, the last great judge if also at the same time the first king; “Der Letzte Richter? Methodische Überlegungen zur Charaktergestaltung in 1 Sam 11,” *Communio Viatorum*, 51.2 (2009), 184-197.

[4] A similar complex of stories reflecting the royal pattern is recounted for Judas Maccabeus in 1 Macc 1:1 –9:22 (compare with 2 Macc 8-15). Noteworthy in these stories are the following: 1) the commission of Judas by his father Mattathias (1 Macc 2:49-68); 2) the use of the rededication of the temple as an act re-establishing the social and religious order after the victory (1 Macc 4:36-61); and 3) the defeat resulting from the breaking of the leader's command (1 Macc 5:18-19,55-62, compare with Patroclus' fate in Iliad XVI). Unlike Josh 1-12, which tells a story of conquest from the Lord's perspective, 1 Macc 1-9 recounts a war of redress from the hero's point of view. In this, Judas is exalted as the hero, and his religious zeal is equated with patriotism. Finally, 1 Macc 1-9 reflects a heightened realism resulting from a stronger allegiance to history than seen in Josh 1-12.

In 1 Macc 9-16, the story of Jonathan and Simon, the allegiance to history can be seen in the political machinations and the hero's death by treachery; still, traditional motifs continue to appear and shape the story. For example, the battle with Demetrius (10:67-89) may be outlined as follows: enemy threat and challenge, the hero's righteous indignation, muster, fight and victory, enemy's muster, second fight with a realistic description of ambush, victory and great destruction, the reward of the hero: honor, a symbol of Alexander's favor, and land.

In 2 Macc 3, the threat of the enemy is cast realistically as an attempt to rob the temple funds; when the people beg the Lord for a hero, a heavenly horseman with “armor and weapons of gold” ends the threat and demonstrates yet again that the Lord is the hero (3:39). The book's realism reaches its height in the accounts of

martyrdom (2 Macc 6-7), but the book ends with a great victory and the beheading of the enemy leader. Again the narrative is a mix of realism and traditional motifs.

[5] Already in Exod 17:9-10, Moses commissions Joshua to fight the battle; likewise, in Num 31:1-54, Moses commissions Israel, but he does not go into battle himself. In smaller narratives, Israel is designated as the hero; cf. Num 21:1-3, 21-31, 33-35.

[6] Josh 1:5-7, 9; cf. also Deut 31:7-8, 14, 23

[7] Josh 6:2-5. commission and battle plan; 8:1-2. encouragement, commission, and hand-formula; 8:18. commission and hand-formula; 10:8. encouragement and hand-formula; 11:6. encouragement, hand-formula, and commission.

[8] Josh 6:6-7, 10, 16-19; 8:4-8.

[9] André Wénin, “Joshua 1-12 comme récit” in *The Book of Joshua*, edited, by Ed Noort (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2012) 109-136, esp. 132.

[10] Cf. also Num 13-14; 21:32; and below in Josh 7:2-3. C. Gordon cites the spies in the Odyssey IX 83-104 and X 102; “Homer and the Bible,” *HUCA* 26 (1955) 43-108, esp. 86.

[11] The list of victories is also found in 2 Sam 8 and in the “King of Battle Epic.”

[12] Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 199-237.

[13] In Josh 10:11-14, the Lord takes the role of the divine hero by throwing down hail, by holding the sun and moon still, and by fighting for Israel. Also, Josh 10:42; 11:6. Beyond the Joshua tradition, two major examples of the Lord as the divine hero are found in Exod 14-15 and in 1 Sam 7:3-14. Von Rad adds Deut 1:30; Josh 10:14, 42; 11:6; 23:10; Judg 20:35; 1 Sam 14:23; *Holy War*, 45. I would add Judg 4:14, but this may not constitute a complete list.

[14] For a discussion of the theological and ethical questions around the ban in the Bible, see Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 28-77. She deals with it under two headings: the ban as God's portion and as God's justice. Much of the scholarly discussion wrestles with the paradox between the ban's devotion of everything to destruction and the Bible's "life-affirming ethic" (28-29). In a culture where war was often waged to take booty, one would have to think long and hard before setting out for a war that would bring no material gain. The reason for the war would have to be a good of such importance that one was willing to risk one's life for the value alone.

[15] For battle as a trial, see above §3.5.2.

[16] Van der Deijl has examined in great detail nine stories in 1-2 Kings, not all of them strictly battle narratives: 1 Kgs 12; 20:1-22; 20:23-43; 2 Kgs 3; 6:8-23; 6:24-7:20; 18:13-19:9a; 19:9b-37. He has identified "a limited number of the types of events that ...occur in the war stories investigated." These are as follows: 1. occasion; 2. negotiation; 3. counsel; 4. decision by the king; 5. prophetic appearance I; 6. divine intervention; 7. declaration of war; 8. mustering; 9. battle; 10. flight; 11. prophetic appearance II; *Protest or Propaganda*. 268. From my perspective, the pattern reflects the dominance of a scene of counsel, which plays an important role in these narratives because of the conflict with the prophet. Moreover, although van der Deijl isolates many pieces, his synthesis is difficult to follow.

[17] Van der Deijl, *Protest or Propaganda*. 283.

[18] Booker, *Seven Basic Plots*, 109. Hagan, "Basic Plots," 208-209.

[19] See Niditch's discussion of the Rabbinic interpretation of this passage in relation to the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22); *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 42-46.

8. The Battle Narrative and Defeat

According to the traditional pattern, “our” side represents the ideal human and religious values, and “our” hero or king wins the victory, which represents the triumph of these values over chaos and destruction. However, as a battle narrative moves toward realism, this victory is either frustrated initially or denied altogether, and the two main reasons are sin and history.

8.1. Sin and the Traditional Battle Pattern

The traditional pattern does not always reach the expected resolution immediately, for that would make for a dull and predictable story. The ancient Near East saw battles as trials, with the just party receiving the victory as noted above.^[1] Defeat then points to some unrighteousness which typically belongs to the enemy. In several biblical stories, however, we find the sin within “our” side.

8.1.1. *The Sin of Achan: Joshua 7*

In Joshua 7, Israel’s first attempt to take the city of Ai fails. Though the spies report that it is an easy target needing only a few thousand soldiers, the forces no sooner go up than they are fleeing before the men of Ai, who kill thirty-six Israelites. As a result, “the hearts of the people melted and turned to water” (7:5). Joshua reacts in shock, and the Lord reveals to him that some have violated the ban, “have stolen, have acted deceitfully.” The Lord has the people “brought

near,” and by elimination, Achan is taken. Though he humbly confesses his sin, they stone him to death to rid the community of sin. From the story’s perspective, one person’s sin infects the whole community, and his death reestablishes its righteousness. With that restored, Joshua moves again toward Ai. Using deception, he sets an ambush by pretending to fall back in order to draw out the men of Ai and burn the unguarded city. Israel then destroys the forces of Ai to fulfill the ban. Though the resolution satisfies this story, its confidence raises some questions.

8.1.2. *Jonathan the Hero and Saul, the Foolish King: 1 Samuel*

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In 1 Sam 14, Jonathan and his armor-bearer cause “a very great panic” in the Philistine camp. Saul calls for the ark and begins his consultation, but the tumult is so great, he enters the battle without finishing. With the help of Israelites defecting from the Philistines and coming out of hiding, “the Lord gave Israel the victory that day” (14:23). The storyteller then tells us that Saul had “committed a very rash act on that day” by imposing a fast until evening. In a flashback, we learn of two “sins.” First, Jonathan violated the fast, whether knowingly or unknowingly, by tasting a bit of honey that made his eyes bright (14:27). Second, during the plunder, the hungry troops slaughtered the animals and “ate them with the blood... sinning against the Lord” (14:3-33). When Saul learns of this, he builds an altar for a proper sacrifice.

Later, when Saul wants to pursue the Philistines by night, the priest proposes another consultation of the Lord, but that yields no answer. Saul then has everyone “brought near” and swears that whoever is at fault, “even if it is in my son Jonathan, he shall surely die” (14:39)! The sacred lot indicates Jonathan is taken, and Saul prepares to kill his son, the hero of the battle. However, the people intervene to protect the prince, whether because of their common sense or their sense of the tradition or both.

Here the “sins,” caused by the king’s inappropriate piety, tells us more about Saul’s character than about any real sin. Klaus-Peter Adam argues that this particular narrative shows the influence of Hellenistic Greek tragedy, with Saul as a tragic figure defined by Aristotle.^[2] Francesca Aran Murphy also reads this story as a tragedy in which Saul “symbolically killed his son twice.”^[3] While I shall argue below, along with many others, that Saul becomes a tragic figure, at this point, I find him still a comic figure. If Saul put the hero to death, the story would have been a tragedy. While Jonathan will die tragically with his father, here, Saul is still a comic figure. He is a foolish king unable to be the hero or to recognize his son as the hero of the battle. In this, we see the seed of the tragedy: Saul’s inability to recognize David as the hero, but that is still to come.

8.1.3. *King Abimelech, the Bad King: Judges 9*

The story of Abimelech in Judges 9 does not follow the traditional pattern but tells of a bad man who became a bad king. Traditionally the enemy, representing evil and chaos, attacks “our” side from the outside. Here the bad king has taken control, and the youngest son, who escaped, tells the allegory of the trees to interpret the events (9:7-21). Even so, the story follows the tradition by seeing that evil is punished. The bad king goes out to fight the bandit lords of Shechem, who sends out the treacherous and proud Gaal ostensibly to be the hero but in reality to bring about his defeat. Indeed Abimelech routs him. However, when Abimelech presses his advantage to the city tower, a woman throws down a millstone crushing his skull. Though he has his armor-bearer slay him, still the report goes out that he dies at the hand of a woman—again, an unlikely hero like Jael and Judith. Though the story seems to break with tradition by enthroning a bad person, injustice still receives its traditional reward.

8.1.4. *The Battle against Benjamin their Brother: Judges 18-20*

Niditch begins her commentary on Judges 18-20 by noting that this cycle of stories, though “shocking,” tells of the strong emotion and dramatic deeds “familiar to readers of the great epic traditions of the world” which are “filled with tales of violence and recreation.”^[4] Here, the threatened violence against hospitality leads to real violence against women, which provokes a civil war. Dramatically the Levite cuts the dead concubine into two pieces and sends them throughout Israel to muster troops to avenge the crime (19:27-30). Once mustered, all swear to avenge the deed (20:1-11). A verbal exchange takes place with the Benjaminites who refuse to hand over the perpetrators of the violence (20:12-13). Three days of battle follows in traditional fashion. Despite the encouraging oracles, Israel must retreat the first two days, and only on the third do they claim a victory achieved by ambush as at Ai. There follow the burning and the destruction of “the city, the people, the animals, and all that remained” (20:48). While Israel’s defeat on the first two days retards the action and builds the tension, it also underlines their determination to avenge the crime.

The main differences between this story and the traditional pattern are two. First, the enemy’s threat is not against the people but against two women. The women are raped, and at least one dies. The crime’s specificity with the complicity of the father and Levite creates a realism that evokes outrage even within the story. Second, the enemies are not outsiders but “brothers” (19:23). This heightens the outrage. However, their destruction presents a new tension: there are no wives for the Benjaminites. In Judges 21, Israel takes wives from Jabesh-gilead, who had not come up for battle, and gives them to Benjamin. How is this different from earlier rape in the cycle? These breaks with the traditional pattern undermine the traditional meaning of the story.

As Niditch observes: “At the end, harmony prevails, at least in the view of the androcentric author: the warriors are domesticated, building houses, dwelling in them, and returning home. A renewal

of order has taken place.”[5] From a non-androcentric perspective, many questions and problems remain. Gunn, in his survey of interpretation, notes that the story “clearly raised problems from early on,” with “early modern and modern readers...becoming increasingly inclined to condemn the Israelites, as well as the Gibeahites, for wanton behavior.” This concern “gains grounds in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as views of women and women’s rights were changing,” particularly in the later twentieth-century by feminist critics.[6] Phyllis Tribble includes this story in her classic *Texts of Terror*. [7] While Niditch finds “little comfort...for feminist appropriation,” she notes that Judges ends not in chaos but “with wholeness, reconciliation, rehabilitation and peace, made possible in men’s eyes through the taking of women.”[8]

8.2. History and the Traditional Battle Pattern

Several battle narratives break with the traditional pattern in important ways. As Scholes and Kellogg point out, the shift of allegiance from tradition to realism, whether fictional or historical, contributes to the breakdown of the traditional narrative. Since the tradition carried the culture’s identity and values, “our” triumph was necessary to reaffirm those themes. In real life, “our” side sometimes loses, or things are more complicated than we would wish. These facts must sometimes be faced, and these narratives deal with that complexity.

8.2.1. *Jehoash defeats Amaziah: 2 Kgs 14:8-14 // 2 Chr 25:17-24*

Amaziah of Judah, fresh from a victory of Edom, challenges Jehoash of Israel to a fight. Prudently the king of Israel tells him: “Be content with your glory,” but “Amaziah would not listen.” They meet at Beth-Shemesh, and “Judah was defeated by Israel; everyone fled home.”

Jehoash captures Amaziah, tears down “four hundred cubits” of the wall in Jerusalem, and plunders the temple and palace. In 1 and 2 Kings, the king of Judah is the good king, but here he is proud and suffers defeat at the hands of the prudent Jehoash. The story does not follow the expectation of its tradition. The story also reports the plundering of the temple and other specific details that create the sense that this actually happened.

8.2.2. The king of Assyria defeats Rezin at the call of Ahaz: 2 Kgs 16:5-9

The story of the Syro-Ephraimite war is also the context of Isaiah 7-8. As it stands in 2 Kgs 16:5-9, the events follow the traditional royal pattern but run contrary to the biblical tradition. When Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria attack Judah, King Ahaz of Judah calls for his overlord to rescue him—King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria. As the Isaiah prophet makes clear, Ahaz should trust in the Lord and not in foreign kings (Isaiah 7-8); that is the tradition. However, Ahaz tells the Assyrian king: “I am your servant and your son” (16:7). The king of Assyria makes short work of it all in ancient Near Eastern fashion. The break with the biblical tradition points creates a sense of realism, as does the detail about Edom recovering Elath in 16:6. The realism supports a judgment that the text reflects the history of the events.

8.2.3. The Sennacherib Narratives: 2 Kgs 18:13-16, 17-19:37 // 2 Chr 32:1-33 // Isa 36-37

Sennacherib's brutal campaign through Judah appears in sources beyond the Bible, but I am concerned only with the two stories in 2 Kgs 18:13-16 and 18:17-19:37. In the first, the good King Hezekiah capitulates and admits guilt, promising that whatever “you impose

on me, I will bear" (18:14), and then he strips the temple and palace of everything to save Jerusalem. Even without the supporting evidence from the Assyrian archives, the break with the tradition creates a sense of realism and history.

The second story conforms to the biblical battle tradition. The king of Assyria sends messengers with outrageous demands belittling the Lord. The Judean elders react with fear by asking the Assyrian general to speak not in Hebrew but in Aramaic. Though the Assyrian messengers continue their outrageous commands, the Judeans at the king's command do not answer. When Hezekiah receives the report, he reacts as a good and pious king by tearing his clothes, covering himself with sackcloth, and going into the house of the Lord while sending for Isaiah the prophet. After hearing how the Assyrians mocked "the living God," Isaiah delivers an oracle beginning with "Do not be afraid" and foretelling that "I myself will put a spirit in him so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land" (19:7). After a further demand by the king of Assyria, raising the tension, Hezekiah prays for God's salvation. Isaiah assures Hezekiah that his prayer is heard and gives a sign promising a return to normal life (19:29-31) and ending with the traditional motif of an oracle promising that the king of Assyria "shall not come into this city." The traditional victory follows: "That very night the angel of the Lord set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies" (19:35). As at the Red Sea, the Lord brings about the victory without any help from his chosen people. The story adds the death of the enemy king, just as the tradition expects. In short, this story follows the traditional pattern.

The last two stories exemplify well the pull between the tradition and realism.^[9] Things do not always work out as in the traditional way.

8.2.4. *King Josiah dies in Battle against the Pharaoh Neco: 2 Kgs 23:29-30 // 2 Chr 35:20-26*

Contrary to the traditional battle pattern, the good King Josiah dies in battle fighting Pharaoh Neco and the Egyptians. The narrator in 2 Kgs 23:29-30 gives only the barest account, but the Chronicler adds that Neco told Josiah that he had not come out against him. Interestingly the Chronicler tells us that Neco's words are "from the mouth of God." Still, Josiah does not turn back, and even disguises himself as Ahab in 1 Kgs 22:29. Again the displacement of the traditional pattern points to the storyteller's allegiance to history.

8.3. Comic Death

In *The Story of King David*, David M. Gunn observes that the death of a significant person is a hallmark of biblical battle narrative.[\[10\]](#) Our survey of biblical stories here has made that clear. To better understand the function of these deaths, I want to make a distinction between comic and tragic deaths.

Comedy necessarily moves toward a happy ending, and this means reconciling or eliminating the forces of chaos and evil.[\[11\]](#) By comic death, I mean the destruction of the forces that war against good order and stability that the hero's victory (re-)establishes. The death in these stories is thematic rather than realistic to realize the comic pattern of the happy ending.

Traditional battle stories belong to this comic pattern. Their hero defeats the forces of chaos and destruction and establishes a new order of stability and life. The death of the enemy hero represents the destruction of chaos and oppression. In that sense, the enemy's death is comic, and the story invites the audience to rejoice and celebrate this death.

Comic deaths include those of Pharaoh, Holofernes, Sisera, Nahash, Goliath, and Holofernes, among others. The traditional story does

not invite us to feel sad or weep for Pharaoh who stands for slavery and oppression; rather, it invites us to sing a victory hymn. Anyone feeling sorry for Pharaoh or Goliath reads the story contrary to its tradition.

Somewhat more complicated are the deaths of those within “our” side. In 1 Kings 22, the king of Israel, who “hated” the prophet Micaiah, is hit with a stray arrow and dies. He is “our” king, but has allied himself against the prophet of God, and so his death is really comic. So also in 2 Kgs 7:17. The captain who mocked the prophet Elisha is trampled at the gate, as foretold. Both have set themselves against the representatives of the divine hero and die a comic death. Jezebel, as the protector of Baal’s prophets, would fit into that category although her death has a strange, realistic dimensions. She puts on her makeup and calls out Jehu sarcastically: “Is all well, you Zimri, murderer of your master?” (2 Kgs 9:31). Even Jehu, who had her thrown from a window, sends out his servants to bury her because she was “the daughter of a king.” In death she becomes a rounder character.

Ahithophel’s death is also a cause for rejoicing. He was a traitor to king David and offered his wise counsel to the rebel Absalom, who, according to the tradition, rejects it. Ahithophel, realizing the implications, takes his own life. Even so, the storyteller captures his resignation and suicide with realistic directness (2 Sam 17:23).

Abner, Saul’s general, survives his lord and comes to serve Ishbaal, the successor to the throne. The general quarrels with Ishbaal and then tries to make peace with David who is open to the alliance. Joab, however, must avenge the death of his brother, and so he kills Abner treacherously (2 Sam 2-3). Abner’s death is more complicated than the simply comic deaths of Pharaoh and Goliath. Whether historical or not, we have moved toward realism.

In Joshua 7, Achan is put to death because he sinned by breaking the ban and so caused the initial defeat and deaths of his fellow Israelites. Joshua invites Achan to give glory to God by making a confession which he does. His simple owning of guilt creates empathy for this sinner, but still Israel stones him to death (Josh

7:16-26). The story's realism creates a tension between Achan's heartfelt admission of sin and the swift justice of death. The text conveys an empathy that does not set well today. Even granting the justice of the punishment, Achan's death evokes sadness and points toward tragedy. Rather than being two categories, the comic and the tragic are rather poles of a continuum.

8.4. Tragic Death

Tragic death does not invite us to rejoice but rather to mourn. Unlike comic death with its stereotypical characters, tragic death demands some realism, and its characters must deal with the complications of the real world. In both the Greek and Shakespearean tradition, the tragic character brings about their own death because of some tragic flaw, but this need not be the case. Hector's death in the *Iliad* is tragic. He plays the traditional role of the enemy hero, who should represent chaos and destruction. Hector, however, is arguably the finest human being in the *Iliad*. He is the loyal and devoted son of King Priam and the faithful and loving husband of Andromache. He fights dutifully and valiantly for Troy, but he cannot match Achilles, the "hero" who kills him. Hector's death is not one to be cheered but mourned, for it is tragic and captures for Homer something of the tragedy of war. His tragedy, however, is not of his own making but the result of his commitments and loyalty.

By understanding how Hector's character breaks with the traditional role, his tragedy is made clearer. This same approach helps to clarify tragic death in the Bible.

8.4.1. 2 Sam 9-20, 1 Kgs 1-2

The storyteller of what is sometimes called "the Succession

Narrative” or “The Court History” (2 Sam 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2) provides us with the most realistic long narrative in the Bible. David’s son Absalom rebels against his father and, with his hair caught in a tree, is killed by Joab, David’s friend and commander. David famously weeps for his son, the rebel. Joab confronts the grieving father and king with the brutal reality of loyalty. As Joab says, “You have made it clear today that commanders and officers are nothing to you; for I perceive that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased” (2 Sam 19:6). For Joab, Absalom is the traditional enemy whose death must be celebrated. For David, Absalom is his son who must be mourned. For the audience, Absalom is more complicated still. He is the brother of a sister raped by her half-brother, about which David, his father, did nothing. Absalom is the avenger of his sister but also a hot-headed young man ingratiating himself to the populace and rebelling against his father, who does not quite know what to do with him. Absalom’s death is more complicated because of the story’s realism.

Other characters die a tragic death as well. Joab is David’s faithful servant. He kills Abner, Saul’s general, by deception; he puts Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, in the front line to die by the enemy’s hand; he tricks David into bringing back his exiled son, Absalom, and then kills that son when he rebels. For this service, David removes Joab as general and replaces him with Amasa, whom Joab also kills, seemingly by deception, to become again general. However, at Solomon’s accession to the throne, Joab finds himself among the opposing faction. When Adonijah proves treacherous, Solomon has the rival killed and then sends men to kill Joab, even as he holds on to the horns of the altar. Such is his tragic reward for a life of loyal, if violent, service to David, his king.

8.4.2. The Tragedy of Saul: 1 Sam 13-31

Many have recognized Saul as a tragic figure. Cheryl Exum recounts Saul’s violence and names him as a “tragic hero...haunted by

demonic forces from both within and without..., but most disturbing is the realization that the evil spirit which torments him and makes his plight even more desperate is the agent of none other than Yhwh.”[12] She contrasts Saul’s tragic situation with those found in Greece.

“In Greek tragedy, the hero faces an indifferent, arbitrary world alone. Saul, in contrast, knows the agony of rejection by the God whose aid he repeatedly seeks—and more, he feels the terror of divine enmity.”[13]

While I understand how Exum arrives at this understanding, the motif of the nemesis deity seems more at home in the Greek world where various gods and goddesses create trouble for human beings.

From the perspective of the traditional pattern, Saul is a tragic figure because he breaks the traditional roles. Lacking the techniques of a modern novelist who builds a coherent and organic whole, Saul’s storyteller(s) fabricate(s) a complex picture from pieces. In 1 Samuel 11, Saul shows himself a hero in the royal tradition by defeating Nahash and rescuing the citizens of Jabesh-Gilead. However, in 1 Samuel 14, he becomes a cautious and foolish king who imposes unwise fast and then is ready to put to death the hero of the day, Jonathan, his own son, until the people step in and quash this foolishness. His battle against the Amalekites and rejection by God in 1 Sam 15 has provoked much reaction by scholars, and much of the interpretation of Saul’s tragedy reflects the understanding of this text. Indeed it is hard from our vantage point to understand how the punishment of rejection fits the crime of violating the ban, which required the killing of men, women, and children. Samuel does not help the modern interpreter as he hews Agag in pieces. Although both narratives stand by themselves, they contribute to the complication of Saul’s character that follows in 1 Sam 16–31.

Although the seams of the stories show, the juxtaposition creates a sense of Saul’s disintegration. After David’s secret anointing, the spirit of the Lord departs from Saul and is replaced by “an evil spirit from God.” Saul brings David to play the harp and cause the spirit to

depart. In the story of David and Goliath, Saul plays the traditional of the leader who commissions the hero, as does Anshar in the *Enūma eliš* and Anu in the *Myth of Anzu*. Moreover, Saul recognizes the hero by setting David over his army (18:5). When David returns, having killed “ten thousands” with Saul having only “thousands,” the king becomes “afraid of David,” and the evil spirit returns. Although promised the hand of the princess, Merab, as in fairy tale,^[14] Saul does not give her to the hero. However, David falls in love with the princess Michal whom he receives only after passing a test that caused Saul to realize “that the Lord was with David” (18:20-30). This is the central issue for Saul. He should call and then recognize the hero. Though he does this initially, more and more, he is unwilling to accept David as the hero and his successor.

In 1 Samuel 19-20, the evil spirit returns, and the princess Michal helps the hero escape. When Jonathan, the heroic friend, tries to defend David before his father, Saul turns on him as well. With no alternative, the hero begins the journey that will eventually bring him to Jerusalem. Saul pursues David, and in perhaps his lowest moment has the foreigner Doeg kill the priest of Nob for assisting the hero, though unknowingly. During the pursuit, David twice has the possibility of killing Saul but does not; rather he shows loyalty to this disloyal king. Between the two scenes comes a romantic comedy; here, too David might have killed Nabal the Fool but is prevented by Abigail, the wise wife. However, when Nabal finds out, he has an apoplectic fit and dies. Thus this comedy ends according to the tradition with the marriage of David and Abigail.

Though Saul blesses David for sparing his life and predicts the hero's success, the king's repeated attacks prove to David that he cannot be trusted. Ironically, David must pretend allegiance and service to Achish, king of Gath. When the Philistines prepare for war, Saul inquires of the Lord according to the tradition, but “the Lord did not answer him, not by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets” (28:6). So Saul turns to a medium whom he had driven from the land. In one of the great scenes of the Bible, she brings Samuel from the dead. The mimesis of the scene comes in part from the tension

between Samuel's coolness and the care of the woman who insists with his servants on feeding the desperate king.

The Philistine kings refuse to let David join the fight against Saul lest he betray them. The Amalekites, traditional bad guys, plunder David's camp and carry off the women and children forcing the hero and his followers to follow and retrieve family while the Philistines bear down on Saul. The hermeneuts of suspicion will find the text too convenient, but the text plainly shows the hero being a hero.

In 1 Samuel 31, the Philistines immediately cause Israel to flee, with many falling on Mount Gilboa, and among them were the three sons of the king. Saul, wounded and with the battle pressing on him, asks his armor-bearer to draw his sword and thrust him through. The armor-bearer, "terrified," refuses in a final act of loyalty. So Saul falls on his own sword to avoid capture by the enemy. The armor-bearer heroically follows his leader into death by falling on his own sword. According to the traditional battle pattern, the enemy hero and king should die at the end of the battle, but here "our" king dies by his own hand. His death is both heroic and tragic. By taking his own life, Saul shows that he is not afraid to meet death now that it has come. In that sense, his death, like Samson's, is heroic. At the same time, death by his own hand is emblematic of the self-destruction that has overtaken him, and in that sense, his death is tragic. The complexity bringing about this self-destruction yields no simple interpretation. Exum portrays God as Saul's great nemesis, and though she does not want to, I find that she exonerates Saul in her attempt to explore the "hostility of God."^[15] Francesca Aran Murphy, standing against Exum and Gunn, interprets Saul as a Greek tragic hero caught in *hybris* – pride.^[16] but that, I find, depends too much on a Greek vision. Though the storyteller did not have the instruments of Dostoyevsky or even Euripides, the layering of stories creates a complex and complicated human being moved by both rational and irrational forces that bring the promise of his early triumph to a tragic end. The "spirit of God" leaves him and moves to David. However, Saul cannot accept David as the hero, for that would require him to accept his own rejection. Such acceptance

of failure is difficult under the best of circumstances. At the same time, Saul is no villain; we do not cheer. The medium of Endor, who recognized his humanity and showed him care, points the way. His death evokes sadness, and though a broken man, he dies nobly facing the reality of his defeat.

This nobility shows itself in his armor-bearer dying with his lord. This servant refuses to lay his hand on the king—a theme closely associated with David in 1 Samuel 24 and 26. Moreover, in 16:21, Saul had made David his armor-bearer. And so, this armor-bearer who dies with his liege stands in for David.^[17] Also, Saul's sons die with their father and king—particularly Jonathan, who could have chosen David instead. Exum calls Jonathan “a victim” like Jephthah's daughter.^[18] However, the daughter had no choice. Jonathan had a choice. Like Hector, he is caught up in tragedy from which he cannot escape without surrendering his loyalty and duty. The men of Jabesh-Gilead, whom Saul saved from Nahash, add to the heroic theme by taking the bodies of father and sons from the wall and burying their bones under a tamarisk tree in Jabesh (31:11-13). Their actions reshape the motif of the hero's recognition, and David continues this in 2 Samuel 1.

An Amalekite messenger brings Saul's crown to David, claiming that he has killed the king to save him from the Philistines. Since this contradicts the story in 1 Samuel 31, modern scholars obsessed with finding sources have found it difficult to accept the simple conclusion in the text as it stands; the messenger lies.^[19] The Amalekites are the traditional enemy of Israel and David.^[20] Though David does not know that the messenger lies, he slays the man because he has laid his hand against the king. Instead of a victory hymn, there follows the famous lament over Saul and Jonathan, discussed above in §5.4.3.

The tragedy of Saul in counterpoint to the picture of David as hero uses the traditional motifs and patterns to build a battle narrative if transformed for Saul. Perhaps, some mix of sin and history lies as the base of this story, but the storyteller has given us something larger than just the facts.

8.5. Footnotes for Chapter 8

[1] For battle as a trial, see above §3.5.2.

[2] Klaus-Peter Adam has recently argued that Greek drama from the Hellenistic world has influenced 1 Sam 14:24-46. He finds that “the dialogue between Saul and the people resembles a typical setting of Greek tragedy,” specifically the dialogue between the main character and the chorus (132-136). The question of the casting of lots, the vow and the sacrifice of the son have parallels as well (137-150). Adam then argues that Saul’s character fits Aristotle’s definition of tragedy (156-168); “Saul as a Tragic Hero: Greek Drama and its Influence on Hebrew Scripture in 1 Samuel 14,24-46 (10,8; 13,7-13A; 10,17-27)” in *For and Against David: Story and History in the Books of Samuel* edited by A.G. Auld and E. Eynikel (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010) 123-183.

[3] Murphy, *I Samuel*, 15.

[4] Niditch, *Judges*, 190. For a redaction critical study, see Georg Hentschel and Christina Nießen, “[Der Bruderkrieg zwischen Israel und Benjamin \(Ri 20\)](#)” *Biblica* 89 (2008) 17-38.

[5] Niditch, *Judges*, 208.

[6] Gunn, *Judges*, 243-275, esp. 244.

[7] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary Feminist Readings of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

[8] Niditch, *Judges*, 211.

[9] Peter Dubovský has “argued that the biblical ‘distortion’ of the historical events was intentional. The writers probably did it to offer their interpretation of the downfall of Assyria. This presentation and organization of the events can be explained in terms of the historiography of representation”; “[Assyrian Downfall through](#)

[Isaiah's Eyes \(2 Kings 15–23\): the historiography of representation,](#)
Biblica 89 (2008) 1–16.

[10] 8n10 David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David*, (Journal for the Study of Old Testament, Supplement Series 6; Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978) 51–54; “Narrative Patterns and Oral Tradition in Judges and Samuel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 24 (1974) 286–317, esp. 287.

[11] new J. Cheryl Exum edited an important, foundational collection of essays called *Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible*, and in the opening article, she and J. William Whedbee discuss these two terms: “Isaac, Samson, and Saul: Reflections on the Comic and Tragic Visions” in *Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible*, edited by J. Cheryl Exum, 1–48. Semeia 32. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985. See also Booker, *Seven Basic Plots*, 117, and Hagan, “Basic Plots,” 208–209.

[12] 8n18 J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 40.

[13] 8n19 Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 41.

[14] 8n20 The princess may play the part of a helper, but she traditionally is part of the recognition and reward of the hero See Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, p. 63–65, XXXI. The hero is married and ascends the throne.

[15] 8n 21 Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 18. Edwin Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965).

[16] 8n22 Murphy, *I Samuel*, 283.

[17] 8n 23 Jonathan’s armor-bearer is also linked to David as Walter Brueggemann notes, for “David is indeed the one ‘after Yahweh’s own heart’ (13:14)”;
First and Second Samuel, 129.

[18] 8n24 Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 77.

[19] 8n25 See, for example, Jacques Vermeylen, “Comment sont

tombés les héros?’ Une lecture de 1 S 31 et 2 S 1,1-2,7,” in *Analyse narrative et Bible* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005) 99-116.

[20] 8n26 Exod 17:8-15; Num 14:43-45; 1 Samuel 15; 28-29, etc.

PART IV

9. CONCLUSION

This comparative study of genre has identified the traditional patterns of battle narratives in the ancient Near East to clarify how the biblical stories use and transform the genre. A genre is not a fixed formula but rather a set of traditional possibilities which a master storyteller can elaborate and transform. No story provides the definitive form of the genre, but taken together, they reveal the common expectations.

By understanding the generic shape of the battle narrative, the audience can identify what is specific to each story. Since battle is a common metaphor for life, the battle narrative carries the values and ideals of its narrative world and invites its audience to share this larger vision. Although the traditional pattern claims the traditional storyteller's allegiance, other forces can reshape the pattern, especially a new commitment to history or politics.

Part I has examined the major literary examples of the battle narrative in the ancient Near East to describe its two basic patterns. First, the heroic pattern tells of a hero called by the leader and community to fight an enemy. In these stories, the hero represents the values and ideals that create a community, and the victory represents the affirmation of that order. Second, the royal pattern tells of a king who combines the roles of leader and hero and, therefore, has the duty to meet the enemy threat. The royal pattern celebrates the relationship between the king and his deity, who must approve the plan and typically fights with the king. These narratives celebrate the existing order of the society represented by both the king and the deity, with their victory having cosmic dimensions.

Part II has explored the battle narratives in the historical books of the Bible. As various scholars, including Manfred Weippert and Sa-Moon Kang, have argued, the biblical tradition reflects the broader ancient Near Eastern tradition in which the deity fights for their

nation. However, as I argue, there is a significant difference in these biblical narratives. Exodus 14, the battle against Pharaoh at the Red Sea, has the Lord fighting for Israel, but Exod 14:14 says: “The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.” Exodus 14 gives the human characters of Israel no role in the battle and underlines the basic biblical theme: The Lord alone is the hero. Even when human beings participate in the battle, the biblical tradition continually subordinates the human to the divine in ways not found in the larger culture.

The heroic tradition celebrates the hero's physical strength and appearance, which manifests his intellectual and moral power, but the Bible transforms the pattern in two important ways. First, it celebrates unlikely heroes. In 1 Samuel 17, a boy goes against a giant and brings him down with one blow. The boy's actions are realistic and believable, but the motif of the unlikely hero, a boy, indicates that an unseen cause is at work. The motif of the unlikely hero appears in the women Judith and Jael, the left-handed Ehud, the frightened Gideon, the outcast Jephthah, and the blind Samson, who though once a manifestation of the physical ideal, has become an unlikely hero through his blindness and imprisonment. Since these unlikely heroes are typically unable to meet physical force in kind, they resort to deception as a critical stratagem that reveals both their intellectual and moral power while pointing to the Lord as the true hero.

The royal pattern appears in Saul's defeat of Nahash in 1 Samuel 11 and perhaps most clearly in Joshua who carries out the Lord's will in the conquest of the Promised Land. However, unlike the royal pattern in the ancient Near East, which exalts the deity in order to exalt the king as well, the Book of Joshua subordinates its human hero-leader by making him a perfectly faithful and obedient servant of the Lord. The Chronicler gives us good kings of Judah who subordinate themselves through their piety. In the Books of Kings, the prophet, representing the Lord, becomes a major character in a conflict with the king of Israel. This turns these

narratives into comedies that parody the royal battle narrative by undermining the bad king of Israel to exalt the Lord.

The biblical battle narratives use both heroic and royal patterns, but the emphasis is different, and their similarities to the ancient Near East sets the differences in high relief. In the Bible, the Lord is the hero. Human beings may contribute to the victory, but their contribution must never overshadow that of the Lord. This is the traditional meaning of the biblical battle narrative in its context.

Traditional stories with their stock characters are about ideas. The hero represents the values and ideals of the narrative world shared by the storyteller and audience, with the enemy representing the forces of chaos and destruction. The death of the enemy is comic in that it brings about the reestablishment of order and peace. Those who would treat the death of these enemies realistically misunderstand the genre. Some biblical stories, like that of Saul, tell of tragic death and invite us to mourn. However, the Bible's battle stories mostly tell of the struggle between good and evil.

An audience must be clear about the difference between traditional and realistic narratives. Today our sense of realism, heightened by the evening news and the novel's dominance, color our expectations and reactions. We expect our literature to be realistic even though much is fabricated from traditional plots. Moreover, we would rather save ourselves than put God to the test. The Bible's battle stories continually confront us with the Lord as the hero and invite us to join in bringing about the Lord's victory.

Appendix I. Motifs and Patterns of the Heroic Battle Story

I. Characters

A. “our” side

1. leaders

- a. helpless leader (s)
- b. strong leader (s)
- c. parent
- d. divine leader (deity)

2. leader’s court

- a. helpless people
- b. counselors
- c. religious officials
- d. messengers

3. heroes

- a. false heroes

2. the hero

4. hero’s helpers

- a. hero’s army
- b. hero’s friend

2. enemy side

- a. enemy leader
- b. enemy people
- c. enemy champion
- d. enemy army

II. The Beginning: Tension

A. Description of the Hero: hero’s impediment

B. Enemy’s threat and great power

1. muster of enemy army
 2. challenge, attack, siege, outrageous demands
 - C. Reaction of helplessness by “our” side: fear, weeping, retreat, provisional capitulation
- III. The Middle: Development
- A. Search for a hero
 1. council
 - a. general call
 - b. offer of a reward
 2. call, commission
 - a. call, commission, and failure of false hero
 - b. call and commission of the hero by parent or leader or deity
 - 1) leader initiated pattern
 - a) leader calls and commissions the hero
 - b) hero raises an objection or question
 - c) leader answers
 - d) hero accepts
 - 2) hero initiated pattern
 - a) hero calls for the commission
 - b) leader raises an objection or question
 - c) hero answers
 - d) leader commissions hero
 3. motifs connected with the call and commission
 - a. hero’s reaction of righteous indignation (anger)
 - b. exhortation to duty
 - c. blessing of human hero by human leader
 - d. assurance of divine presence and aid from deity

- e. encouragement
- f. counsel, especially battle plan
- 4. preparation for battle by leaders and/or the hero
 - a. hero's weapons, armor, and chariot
 - b. call and commission of hero's army
- 5. journey

IV. The End: Resolution

A. Single-combat between the Hero and the Enemy Champion

- 1. meeting of warriors
- 2. verbal exchange
 - a. . enemy's false confidence
 - b. . enemy's insults
 - c. . hero's indictment of the enemy
- 3. hero's initial failure
- 4. hero's victory
 - a. hero's mortal blow to the enemy with a missile
 - b. enemy's fall to the ground
 - 1) hero's triumphal stance
 - 2) mutilation of the enemy with a hand weapon (decapitation)

B. The enemy's recognition of defeat and reaction of helplessness

- 1. fear
- 2. flight

C. recognition of victory by "our" side

- 1. pursuit
- 2. destruction of the enemy army
- 3. plunder of the enemy with the hero receiving a prize share

D. return journey

E. recognition of the hero by the leader and other

- 1. by means of acclamation or loyalty oaths
- 2. by means of reward:

- a. a great name
 - b. rank/kingship
 - c. symbols of victory
 - d. symbols of kingship
 - e. wife and progeny/dynasty
 - f. dwelling, city (mountain), land/kingdom
3. victory hymn or shout with dance
4. banquet
- F. recognition of deity and loyal servants by human hero
- G. restoration of order, fertility, and peace

Appendix 2: Motifs and Patterns of the Royal Battle Story

I. Characters

A. "Our" Side

1. king as human hero and leader
2. deity as divine hero and leader
3. king's army
4. divine army or meteorological elements

B. Enemy Side

1. enemy king
2. enemy king's army
3. other characters found in the classic pattern

II. The Beginning

A. Description of the king

B. Enemy's threat: aggression from the outside whether past or present

C. Reaction of helplessness by those other than the king

III. The Middle

A. Call and commission of the king by the helpless

B. King's reaction of righteous indignation

C. Divine call and commission of the king by the deity

1. call by the king

- a. direct personal prayer
- b. *sacrificial consultoria*
- c. sacrifices entreating divine favor
- d. king's vow

2. deity's oracle with the call and commission

- a. to the king by direct address or by a dream
 - b. spontaneously to a third person
 - c. through cultic means
- 3. preparation for battle by the king
 - a. arming of the king
 - b. call and commission of the army

IV. The Resolution

A. Verbal exchange between the king and the enemy by messengers with the enemy's false confidence

B. Battle and victory

- 1. the divine warrior precedes and fights with the king and his army
- 2. The king's great power alone brings about the victory
 - a. The enemy's recognition of defeat and reaction of helplessness
 - (1) fear
 - (2) flight
 - b. Recognition of victory by "our" side
 - (1) pursuit
 - (2) great/total destruction of the enemy army
 - (3) fate of the enemy king: death, escape, capture
 - c. Plunder
 - d. Recognition of the deity as hero: sacrifices
 - e. Recognition of the king as hero
 - (1) speeches by the enemy king, other kings, the army, the people
 - (2) gifts: tribute
 - (3) erection of a stele or temple.

Appendix 3: Battle Narratives in the Historical Books of the Bible

1. Gen 14. The rescue of Lot by Abraham.
2. Gen 32:22-32. Jacob wrestles at Penueel.
3. Gen 34. The Rape of Dinah.
4. Exod 14-15. The defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea.
5. Exod 17:8-16. Israel over Amalek.
6. Num 21:1-3. Israel over Arad.
7. Num 21:21-31 (|| Deut 2:16-37; Judg 11:16-23). Israel over Sihon.
8. Num 21:33-35 (|| Deut 3:1-11). Israel over Og.
9. Num 31:1-54. Israel over Midian.
10. Josh 6. The conquest of Jericho.
11. Josh 7-8. The initial defeat and conquest of Ai.
12. Josh 10. Joshua over the five Amorite kings.
13. Josh 11. Joshua over Jabin, king of Hazor.
14. Judg 3:7-11. Othniel over Cushan-rishathaim, a Dtr narrative.
15. Judg 3:15-30. Ehud over Eglon and the Moabites.
16. Judg 4-5. Deborah, Barak, and Jael over Sisera.
17. Judg 6-8. Gideon over the Midianites.
18. Judg 9. The story of Abimelech, the bad king.
19. Judg 10-11. Jephthah over the Ammonites.
20. Judg 12:1-6. Jephthah over Ephraim.
21. Judg 15:1-17. Samson over the Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey.
22. Judg 16:23-31. Samson pulls down the temple for his greatest victory over the Philistines.
23. Judg 19-20. Israel over Benjamin.
24. Judg 21:1-12. Israel over Jabesh-gilead.
25. 1 Sam 4:1b-11 (5:1-7:2). The Philistines defeat Israel and capture

the ark.

26. 1 Sam 7:3-14. The Lord over the Philistines.
27. 1 Sam 11. Saul over Nahash the Ammonite.
28. 1 Sam 13-14. Jonathan over the Philistines.
29. 1 Sam 15. Saul over the Amalekites.
30. 1 Sam 17:1-18:4. David over Goliath.
31. 1 Sam 18:13-29. David over the Philistines for the princess.
32. 1 Sam 23:1-5. David over the Philistines at Keilah.
33. 1 Sam 28-29, 31 (|| 1 Chr 10:1-14). The Philistines defeat Saul.
34. 1 Sam 30. David over the Amalekites.
35. 2 Sam 2:12-32. The indecisive battle between Joab and Abner.
36. 2 Sam 5:6-10 (|| 1 Chr 11:4-9). David takes Jerusalem.
37. 2 Sam 5:17-21, 22-25 (|| 1 Chr 14:8-12, 13-17). David over the Philistines.
38. 2 Sam 10 (|| 1 Chr 19:1-19). David defeats the Ammonites and Syrians.
39. 2 Sam 11-12. David's campaign against Rabbah.
40. 2 Sam 15-19. The rebellion of Absalom.
41. 2 Sam 20. The rebellion of Sheba.
42. 2 Chr 13 cf. 1 Kgs 15:1-8. Abijah over Jeroboam.
43. 2 Chr 14:9-15. Asa over Zerah the Ethiopian.
44. 1 Kgs 20:1-21, 22-43. Ahab over Ben-hadad.
45. 1 Kgs 22 (|| 2 Chr 18:1-34). The kings of Israel and Judah against the Syrians.
46. 2 Kgs 3. The kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom over Moab.
47. 2 Chr 20. Jehoshaphat watches the enemies ambush themselves as prophesied.
48. 2 Kgs 6:8-23. Elisha strikes the Syrians blind.
49. 2 Kgs 6:24-7:20. Benhadad is turned away from Samaria by the sound of a great army.
50. 2 Kgs 9. Jehu anointed king, overthrows Joram.
51. 2 Kgs 14:8-14 (|| 2 Chr 25:17-24). Jehoash of Israel defeats Amaziah of Judah.
52. 2 Kgs 16:5-9. The king of Assyria defeats Rezin at the call of Ahaz.

53. 2 Kgs 18:13-19:37 (|| 2 Chr 32:1-33; Isa 36-37). The angel of the Lord destroys the army of Sennacherib.
54. 2 Kgs 23:29-30 (|| 2 Chr 35:20-26). Josiah dies in battle against the Egyptians
55. Daniel 14:23-42. Daniel kills Bel, the dragon, and survives the lion's den.
56. Jdt 1-16. Judith over Holofernes.
57. 1 Macc 1-7 (|| 2 Macc 8-15). The victories of Judas Maccabeus.
58. 2 Macc 3:1-40. The Lord, at the call of the people, defeats Heliodorus.

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* References marked with an asterisk (*) focus on that text, and they contain single verses within that range. E.g. Joshua 1–12, §7.2* contains a number of references found in the first twelve chapters of the Book of Joshua.

§ References marked by a section sign (§) refer to the various sections of the chapters. E.g. §5.3.1 refers to chapter 5, section 3, subsection 1.

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§ References marked by a section sign (§) refer to the various sections of the chapters. E.g. §5.3.1 refers to chapter 5, section 3, subsection 1.

n References containing the letter “n” for “note” begin with the chapter and after the “n” have the note number. E.g. 2n70 refers to chapter 2, note 70.

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