

## DID YHWH CONDEMN THE NATIONS WHEN HE ELECTED ISRAEL? YHWH'S DISPOSITION TOWARD NON-ISRAELITES IN THE TORAH

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Among the prominent themes within the OT, YHWH's election of Israel to be his special people is especially significant. This motif pervades the individual corpora in the canon; it is given particular expression in the benefactions bestowed on Abram (Gen 12:2), reiterated in the covenant ceremony at Mount Sinai (Exod 19:5), affirmed throughout Moses' sermons in Deuteronomy (Deut 4:37; 7:6–7; 10:15), proclaimed by the psalmist (Ps 135:4), and maintained by the prophets (e.g. Isa 44:1). However, the idea that YHWH chose one specific group to be his special people has offended many people in the modern world, for whom the ideals of equality and equal opportunity are very important. Some have wondered why YHWH would limit himself to one group of people and not give the same opportunity to other people to serve him. Others have moved beyond the issue of equal opportunity and argued that the idea of election leads to violence because it defines all other nations as the “other” who must be kept at a distance or even destroyed.<sup>1</sup> In this view, election creates a binary universe, in which the elect and the non-elect exist in mutually antagonistic categories until one or the other is destroyed.

These observations serve as a backdrop against which to understand the question raised in the title of this essay: Did YHWH condemn the nations when he chose Israel? This question can be answered in a variety of ways, such as examining the significance of the blessing for the nations in the foundational statement of Israel's election (Gen 12:1–3).<sup>2</sup> However, one of the most obvious ways to address the issue is to examine YHWH's relationship with the nations. Even a cursory examination shows that YHWH dealt graciously with several non-Israelite nations even while he condemned others. This has led Joel Kaminsky to suggest that a third category should be included alongside the elect and the non-elect: the anti-elect, comprising those nations who oppose the elect, including the Amalekites, the Canaanites, and perhaps the Midianites. The non-elect occupy a middle ground

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Cott, “The Biblical Problem of Election,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (1984) 199–228; Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997) 15–38; Hector Avalos, *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2005) 137–44.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent detailed study of this verse, see Keith N Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in Its Narrative Context* (BZAW 332; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003).

between the other two groups.<sup>3</sup> Although this theory helpfully demonstrates how the other nations are not automatically rejected by God, it suffers from terminological confusion (are the anti-elect those who oppose the elect or those who are elected by God to be anti-elect?) and from a lack of support of such categories in the text.<sup>4</sup> In addition for Kaminsky's categories fail to provide an adequate explanation for several nations that appear in both the non-elect and anti-elect categories.<sup>5</sup>

In view of the problems associated with Kaminsky's conceptual model, this article will examine several groups whom YHWH views ambiguously in the Torah to refine Kaminsky's categories and to explore in more detail YHWH's relationship with non-Israelite nations in light of the election of Israel. These groups include Sodom and Gomorrah, the Amalekites, the Egyptians, the Midianites, and the Canaanites.

### I. SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Although the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are not often associated with YHWH's favor, their status vis-à-vis YHWH is a helpful starting point for a discussion of his ambiguous relationship with the nations. Sodom and Gomorrah were two cities near the Dead Sea and remain famous for being the standard of despicably evil sinners (e.g. Isa 1:10). YHWH came to investigate these cities when he heard an outcry coming from Sodom (Gen 18:21; 19:13) and destroyed the cities with fire and brimstone (Genesis 18–19). Although their inhabitants are not called Canaanites, they are part of the eastern boundary of the land of Canaan (Gen 10:19), leading to the possibility that they could be considered "honorary Canaanites."<sup>6</sup> The ambiguity surrounding the identity of the Canaanites also supports the identification of anyone who lived in the land of Canaan as a "Canaanite."<sup>7</sup>

However, the legendary fire and brimstone is only part of Sodom and Gomorrah's story. Before YHWH destroyed them, he informed Abraham about his intentions because "all of the nations will be blessed in him" (Gen 18:18). Perhaps as an example of this blessing, Abraham interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah, bargaining with YHWH not to destroy the cities (Gen 18:22–32). Although he was ultimately unsuccessful this time, earlier he had successfully interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham's nephew Lot moved to Sodom and Gomorrah after he and Abraham no longer had enough room to live together in the highlands (Gen 13:5–13). When several kings from the east conquered

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<sup>3</sup> Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007) 107–36. For his earlier work on this topic, see idem, "Did Election Imply the Mistreatment of Non-Israelites?," *HTR* 96 (2003) 397–425.

<sup>4</sup> See this critique in Joel N. Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen: Conceptions of Election in the Pentateuch and Jewish-Christian Interpretation* (Siphrut 2; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009) 40–44.

<sup>5</sup> Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob* 112.

<sup>6</sup> However, Gen 13:12 might differentiate between Canaan and Sodom and Gomorrah.

<sup>7</sup> See below for more on this concept.

Sodom and Gomorrah and captured Lot, Abraham followed the eastern kings and defeated them, rescuing his nephew Lot and returning all of the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah to them. After the battle Melchizedek proclaimed to Abraham that “El Elyon has delivered your enemies into your hands” (Gen 14:20), indicating that YHWH had granted Abraham the victory. Although it might reasonably be assumed that Abram’s primary motivation was to rescue Lot, his later intercession for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah indicates that his concern for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah most likely also played a role in his decision to fight. Josephus says that Abraham was afraid for Lot and “felt sympathy for the Sodomites, who were his friends and neighbors” (*Ant.* 1.10.1). Whatever Abram’s primary motivation, the result of his attack on the eastern kings was not only the rescue of Lot, but also the restoration of the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham was not known as a mighty general, as this is the only recorded narrative of him fighting.<sup>8</sup> Surprisingly, in contrast to later Israelites, Abraham did not fight against the Canaanites. Instead, he fought on behalf of several “honorary Canaanite” cities to restore their property to them and interceded for them when YHWH decided to destroy them. Although Sodom and Gomorrah became notorious as wicked sinners, Abraham interceded for them on two occasions with YHWH’s blessing. Perhaps Abraham’s rescue of Sodom and Gomorrah was YHWH’s gift to them of more time to repent and turn to follow him. It is even possible that Lot should have instructed them about YHWH. Regardless, Sodom and Gomorrah illustrate YHWH’s ambiguity toward the nations: he both saved them from the hands of the eastern kings through Abram’s intercession and destroyed them with fire and brimstone.

## II. AMALEK

The second group to be discussed is also surprising, as nothing positive is said regarding the Amalekites in the OT.<sup>9</sup> This group attacked the Israelites on their way from Egypt to Sinai and were only defeated with YHWH’s help when Moses raised his hands. After the battle, YHWH promised to “completely blot out the memory of Amalek” and to be at war with them forever (Exod 17:8–16). In his account of the battle in Deuteronomy, Moses added that the Amalekites attacked the stragglers of Israel and commanded the Israelites to blot out the Amalekite’s memory (Deut 25:17–19). Amalek later defeated Israel when they attempted to enter Canaan (Num 14:40–45) and continued to be in conflict with the Israelites after the conquest (1 Samuel 15; 30).

However, the background of the Amalekites complicates this seemingly simple picture. Amalek was a grandson of Esau (Gen 36:12) and became a chief in

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<sup>8</sup> However, later Judaism transformed him into a great general. See Louis H. Feldman, “Abraham the General in Josephus,” in *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel* (ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn, Earle Hilgert, and Burton L. Mack; *Homage Series*; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984) 43–50.

<sup>9</sup> They were usually associated with the Negev (Gen 14:7; Num 13:29; 1 Sam 15; 27:8; 30) or Edom (1 Chr 4:42), but they also appear in the land of Canaan (Num 14:25; Judg 12:15).

the land of Edom (Gen 36:16). The Edomites were an important neighbor of Israel who descended from Esau and possessed a monarchy before Israel (Gen 25:30; 32:3; 36:1–43).<sup>10</sup> The Song of the Sea proclaims that the chiefs of Edom were terrified when they heard about the Exodus (Exod 15:15), but they refused to allow Israel to cross their territory (Num 20:14–21). Later Edomite-Israelite relations were bitter, especially when Edom took an extensive amount of land from Judah in the Negev at the time of the defeat of Jerusalem by Babylon.<sup>11</sup>

Although Amalek descended from Esau, the OT treats them differently than the Edomites. YHWH commanded war against Amalek for all of eternity, and Israel fought them under the rule of both Saul and David. In the book of Esther, Haman is described as an Agagite, linking him with Agag, the Amalekite king killed by Samuel. In later Jewish tradition, Amalek became the symbol of evil, as illustrated by the following citation of Rabbi Eliezer in the Mekiltah, an early midrash on Exodus: “God swore by the throne of His Glory that if a person of any of the nations should come desiring to be converted to Judaism, Israel shall receive him, but a person from the house of Amalek they shall not receive.”<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, Deuteronomy’s account of Israel’s journey through Transjordan on the way to Canaan records that YHWH prohibited Israel from provoking Edom to war or taking any of their land because he had given it to Esau (Deut 2:5). Deuteronomy also prohibited Israel from abhorring Edom, because he was their brother (Deut 23:7 [Hebrews 8]). Although the Israelites later engaged the Edomites in battle and took their land (2 Sam 8:13–14; 1 Kgs 11:15–16; 2 Kgs 8:20), these texts in Deuteronomy indicate that such action was not permitted for them because YHWH had given the Edomites their land. The Edomites even became Jewish later in Israelite history when the Hasmonian king John Hyrcanus conquered the Idumeans (later descendants of Esau) and forcibly converted them to Judaism (125 BC). Although the Edomites are often viewed negatively, YHWH never commanded their destruction.

The OT never explains the difference in disposition toward the two descendants of Esau.<sup>13</sup> If Israel was not to abhor Edom because he was their brother, then they should not have abhorred Amalek, who was also descended from Esau (even if it was through his concubine). While YHWH’s distinct disposition toward the two descendants of Esau is unclear, I propose that the

<sup>10</sup> For more on Edom, see John R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites* (JSOTSup 77; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); Diana Edelman, ed., *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite for He Is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition* (Archaeology and Biblical Studies 3; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Num 24:18; 1 Sam 14:47; 2 Sam 8:14; 1 Kgs 11:14–22; 2 Kgs 8:20–22; 14:7; Ps 137:7; Jer 49:7–22; Amos 1:11–12; Obadiah.

<sup>12</sup> Tractate Amalek 2 in Jacob Z. Lauterbach, trans., *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (The JPS Library of Jewish Classics; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1933) 2.160–61. For more on the later Jewish thought on Amalek, see Elliott Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006) 107–46.

<sup>13</sup> For the suggestion that the Amalek texts in Genesis simply reflect an earlier and more peaceful time, see Hans Andreas Tanner, *Amalek: Der Feind Israels und der Feind Jabwes: Eine Studie zu den Amalek-texten im Alten Testament* (IVZ Dissertationen; Zürich: TVZ, 2005) 262–64.

difference derives from the severity of their rejection of YHWH. Both rejected YHWH and his people. However, while Edom did not allow Israel to pass through their land, the Amalekites attacked Israel and were punished more severely for it. Their actions toward YHWH and his people, not their genealogy, led to the differing reactions from YHWH. That is, their actions against Israel caused them to forfeit any benefit their familial relationship with Israel might bring.

### III. EGYPT

The third group under investigation is the Egyptians. The most familiar image of Egypt is the strongly negative portrayal of the nation in the book of Exodus. Both Pharaohs in the narrative opposed YHWH and oppressed his people. In response to their provocation, YHWH sent the plagues against Egypt and defeated the Egyptian military at the Red Sea with the goal of showing his power and sovereignty to the Egyptians and to the world. The *Chaoskampf* patterns in the Song of the Sea even imply that the Egyptians were the embodiment of chaos threatening Israel.

This hostility is reflected in Egyptian literature, where Asiatics were viewed as the “other,” often recording an aversion to them because of the damage that they caused in Egypt. The Prophecies of Neferti portray chaos as the coming of the Asiatics: “The land is burdened with misfortune because of those looking (?) for food, Asiatics roaming the land. Foes have arisen in the east, Asiatics have descended into Egypt. The fortifications are destroyed. ...”<sup>14</sup> The Instructions of Merikare describes the Asiatics as follows:

Lo, the miserable Asiatic, He is wretched because of the place he’s in: Short of water, bare of wood, Its paths are many and painful because of mountains. He does not dwell in one place, Food propels his leg, He fights since the time of Horus, Not conquering or being conquered, He does not announce the day of combat, Like a thief who darts about a group.<sup>15</sup>

However, this aversion to Asiatics did not prevent Semites from entering Egypt, as Egyptian texts record many examples of people with Semitic names dwelling there.<sup>16</sup> A frontier official in the 13th century BC reported that he allowed Edomites to enter Egypt in order to “keep them alive and to keep their cattle alive.”<sup>17</sup> Sinuhe was adopted by an Asiatic leader who recognized him from his time in Egypt.<sup>18</sup> The Egyptians probably welcomed the wealthier Asiatics for the trade that they brought to Egypt.

This ambivalence to Asiatics is reflected in the positive view of Egypt that is found alongside the negative characterization of Egypt throughout the Torah. In

<sup>14</sup> “The Prophecies of Neferti,” translated by Nili Shupak (*COS* 1.45:108).

<sup>15</sup> “Instructions of Merikare,” translated by Miriam Lichtheim (*COS* 1.35:64).

<sup>16</sup> See “Semitic Slaves on a Middle Kingdom Estate,” translated by Robert K. Ritner (*COS* 3.11:35–37); “Semitic Functionaries in Egypt,” translated by Robert K. Ritner (*COS* 3.12:37); “Middle Kingdom Egyptian Contacts with Asia,” translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET* 228–29).

<sup>17</sup> “The Report of a Frontier Official,” translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET* 259).

<sup>18</sup> “Sinuhe” (*COS* 1:78).

Exodus, the daughter of the oppressive Pharaoh flagrantly ignored her father's orders and rescued Moses from the water (Exod 2:1–10).<sup>19</sup> The “mixed multitude” who left Egypt with Israel (Exod 12:38) might have been Egyptians who left their country to follow Israel, although their identity is uncertain. Moreover, Deuteronomy commanded Israel not to abhor the Egyptians because they lived as sojourners in their land (Deut 23:7 [Hebrews 8]).

While these texts paint a favorable portrait of Egypt, the book of Genesis presents the most positive picture of the nation. Egypt's first action in Genesis consisted of giving refuge to Abram during a famine in Canaan (Gen 12:10–20). However, Abram deceived the Egyptians about his wife Sarai, leading them to take her into Pharaoh's house. The narrative does not include any record of Pharaoh interacting with YHWH, but when YHWH struck his house with plagues, Pharaoh comprehended YHWH's displeasure, gave Sarai back to Abram, and sent them away from Egypt. YHWH's attack on Egypt arose from Egyptian misconduct (taking another man's wife), but it was made possible by Abram's deceit. Although the narrator does not condemn Abraham explicitly, the similarity of Pharaoh's rebuke (“What have you done?”) to God's rebuke of Eve (“What have you done?”) in the garden (Gen 3:13),<sup>20</sup> as well as Abram's silence in the face of the rebuke indicates that the narrator accepted the truth of Pharaoh's reprimand. Even though their relationship was soured by Abram's deceit, Pharaoh graciously gave Abram refuge and recognized what YHWH was communicating to him through the plagues. This is a remarkable narrative because it invites the reader to sympathize with the deceived Egyptians and to renounce the deeds and objectives of the patriarch. The narrative also provides a model for how Egypt should have responded in Exodus: when YHWH instructed Pharaoh to send away their Asiatic visitors by sending a plague (נגע; cf. Exod 11:1), Pharaoh immediately commanded Abram to take his wife (לקח; cf. Exod 12:32) and sent them away (שלח, piel; cf. Exod 3:20).<sup>21</sup>

The next appearance of Egyptians in Genesis comes in Canaan (Genesis 16; 21:9–14). The childless Sarai counseled Abraham to conceive a child for her through her Egyptian maid-servant, but when Hagar conceived, “her mistress lost status in her eyes” (Gen 16:4)<sup>22</sup> and Sarai oppressed (ענה) her (Gen 16:6).<sup>23</sup> After

<sup>19</sup> For a good discussion of this narrative in light of Israel's election, see Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen* 115–24.

<sup>20</sup> F. V. Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map: Constructing Biblical Israel's Identity* (JSOTSup 361; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 29.

<sup>21</sup> See also the fear that the Egyptians would kill (הרג) them (Gen 12:12; Exod 5:21). For parallels with the exodus, see Thomas Römer, “Exodusmotive und Exoduspolemik in den Erzvätererzählungen,” in *Berührungspunkte: Studien zur Sozial- und Religionsgeschichte Israels und seiner Umwelt: Festschrift für Rainer Albertz zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Ingo Kottsieper, Rüdiger Schmitt, and Jakob Wöhrle; AOAT 350; Münster: Ugarit, 2008) 7–8.

<sup>22</sup> The strong translations of the phrase, such as the NIV's “she began to despise her mistress,” or NRSV's “she looked with contempt on her mistress,” portray Hagar in a more negative light than the milder translation offered here. The stronger translation would be appropriate if the verb was in the *piel* stem rather than the *qal* stem of קלל. See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Continental Commentary*

Hagar's son Ishmael had matured, Sarah saw Ishmael playing (צחק, *piel*),<sup>24</sup> which some have interpreted as mocking Isaac or performing some other negative action toward him.<sup>25</sup> The verb denotes mocking elsewhere, but uses the *qal* or the *hifil* stem in those cases.<sup>26</sup> The verb in the *piel* stem denotes more light-hearted scenes, including celebrating (1 Sam 18:7; 2 Sam 6:5), children playing in the street (Zech 8:5), or wild animals playing (Job 40:20; Ps 104:26),<sup>27</sup> implying that Ishmael's activities were innocent.<sup>28</sup> Sarah requested that Abraham drive out Hagar and Ishmael not because of the harm Ishmael was causing Isaac, but because of Ishmael's usurpation of Isaac's role.

In a surface reading of the narrative it appears that YHWH supported Sarah against the Egyptian, particularly since YHWH permitted Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. However, a closer reading of the narrative in its canonical context shows the narrator's disapproval. Biblical law did not address this specific issue, but its general tenor prohibited this kind of oppression. The Covenant Code prohibited the mistreatment of foreigners and the oppression (ענה) of widows, because YHWH would hear their cry (Exod 22:20–22[21–23]).<sup>29</sup> Not only did Sarah oppress (ענה, *piel*) Hagar (Gen 16:6), but YHWH also heard Ishmael's voice in wilderness (Gen 21:17).

The parallels between Hagar and Israel in Egypt in Exodus also highlight the disapproval of Sarah's actions.<sup>30</sup> The ruling power (Pharaoh, Sarah) oppressed (ענה, *piel*; Gen 16:6; Exod 1:11–12) the weaker power (Israel, Hagar) and banished them (גרש, *piel* [Gen 21:10; Exod 6:1] and שלח, *piel* [Gen 21:14; Exod 14:5]). Hagar's name sounds like the word “foreigner” (גר), which was used to describe Israel in Egypt (Exod 22:20[21]; 23:9; Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19).<sup>31</sup> But when YHWH saw their

(trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 240; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 442.

<sup>23</sup> The narrative emphasizes the oppression of Hagar by recording Hagar's dialogue only when she is in the wilderness, away from her oppressors.

<sup>24</sup> LXX adds “with Isaac.”

<sup>25</sup> NIV; NLT; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC 2; Dallas: Word, 1994) 82; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (NAC 1B; Nashville: B&H, 2005) 268–69. For several rabbinic interpretations, see Rambam, *Commentary on the Torah: Genesis* (trans. Charles B. Chavel; New York: Shilo, 1971) 269–71.

<sup>26</sup> 2 Chr 30:10; Job 5:22; 30:1; 39:22; Ps 2:4; Lam 1:7; Hab 1:10.

<sup>27</sup> Even the negative uses of the *piel* stem, including the “playing” at the golden calf incident (Exod 32:6) and the deceit of a neighbor through jesting (Prov 26:19) depict a light-hearted atmosphere, although the narrator disapproves of them.

<sup>28</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* 339. The verb lacks a sense of superiority (R. Bartelmus, “צחק/שחק,” *TDOT* 14:61–63).

<sup>29</sup> Gershon Hepner, “The Affliction and Divorce of Hagar Involves Violations of the Covenant and Deuteronomic Codes,” *ZABR* 8 (2002) 173–74.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Römer, “Typologie exodique dans les récits patriarcaux,” in *Typologie biblique: De quelques figures vives* (ed. Raymond Kuntzmann; LD; Paris: Cerf, 2002) 65–69; Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (OBT 13; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 9–35; Pamela Tamarkin Reis, “Hagar Required,” *JSOT* 87 (2000) 75–109.

<sup>31</sup> Römer, “Typologie exodique dans les récits patriarcaux” 65.

affliction (עָיַ; Gen 16:11; Exod 3:7; 4:31), he encountered them in the wilderness and transformed them into a nation (see also Amos 9:7).<sup>32</sup>

YHWH also cared for Hagar in the wilderness. His promise to multiply her descendants to make them too numerous to count and to make them into a great nation paralleled the Abrahamic promise (Gen 16:10; 21:18). Hagar not only recognized the power of YHWH but also named God, “El Roi” (אל ראי; Gen 16:13), becoming the only character in the OT to give God a name. Hagar appeared to understand YHWH better than Sarah. YHWH did not condemn Hagar, but blessed her and disapproved of Sarah’s oppression of her Egyptian maid-servant.

In addition to the Abrahamic narratives, Egypt plays an important role in the Joseph narrative. The portrayal of Egypt begins negatively when Joseph arrives as a slave and calls Egypt the land of “his affliction” (Gen 41:52),<sup>33</sup> but the narrative softens this portrayal by demonstrating how his slavery began with a betrayal by Joseph’s brothers. Although he was a slave, each of his masters appreciated his abilities and gave him greater responsibility. Potiphar recognized YHWH’s influence in Joseph’s life (Gen 39:3–4), the prison warden gave Joseph responsibility because of the prosperity that the narrator attributes to YHWH (Gen 39:21–23), and Pharaoh recognized both a divine spirit in Joseph (Gen 41:38) and God as the source of his dream interpretation (Gen 41:39). When Jacob and his family descended to Egypt, the only Egyptian to deal with them harshly was Joseph, the Israelite Egyptian. Pharaoh welcomed them warmly by giving them “the best of the land” and requesting that some of the sons of Jacob be overseers for his livestock (Gen 47:6–12). After Jacob died, the Egyptians embalmed him and wept for him for seventy days (Gen 50:3). The Canaanites thought that a national Egyptian tragedy had occurred when Joseph went to bury Jacob in Hebron because so many Egyptians accompanied him on his trip (Gen 50:4–14). These details suggest that Egypt was a gracious host for Israel, giving them a place to prosper and multiply (Gen 47:27). The Egyptians recognized the work of YHWH in the life of Joseph and gave him great responsibility because of YHWH’s influence.

This positive portrayal of Egypt is reinforced by the fact that YHWH did not prevent Israel from going to Egypt; rather he guided Israel to Egypt (Gen 45:4–8; 46:3–4; 50:20) through a variety of means: Joseph’s dreams (Gen 37:5–11);<sup>34</sup> the prosperity of Joseph in Egypt (Gen 39:2, 21, 23); the interpretations of the dreams of the butler and the baker to Joseph that facilitated his passage into the presence of Pharaoh (Genesis 40); the dreams of Pharaoh that gave Joseph the opportunity to prepare Egypt to receive Jacob’s family (Genesis 41); and the famine that caused Jacob’s family to come to Egypt for help (Genesis 42–45). Joseph confirmed that YHWH had sent him to Egypt to maintain a remnant for Israel (Gen 45:7). When

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 67–69.

<sup>33</sup> The same word (עָיַ) describes the affliction of the Egyptian Hagar (Gen 16:11) and the Israelites in Egypt (Exod 3:7, 17; 4:31; Deut 26:7).

<sup>34</sup> Dreams were a common method of communication from God (Gen 20:3, 6; 28:12; 31:24; Judg 7:13; Joel 3:1[2:28]).

Israel was in Egypt, YHWH blessed Egypt. Indirectly, he blessed them through Joseph's work in Potiphar's house (Gen 39:3–5), in the dungeon (Gen 39:23), and under Pharaoh (Genesis 41). More directly, Jacob blessed Pharaoh (Gen 47:7, 10), fulfilling the divine promise that Abraham would be a blessing to the nations and that YHWH would bless those who blessed Israel (Gen 12:2–3).

In Genesis, Egypt played the role of a gracious host to Israel during times of distress and consistently recognized the power of YHWH.<sup>35</sup> In accordance with the Abrahamic covenant, in which YHWH promised to bless those nations who blessed Israel, YHWH blessed Egypt through the work of Joseph and the words of Jacob. In contrast, when Egypt oppressed Israel in the book of Exodus YHWH fought them and condemned their actions. YHWH's disposition toward the Egyptians varied based on the Egyptian attitude toward him and his people.

#### IV. MIDIAN

Together with Sodom and Gomorrah, the Amalekites, and the Egyptians, the Midianites provide a window into YHWH's relationship with the nations. In general, the Torah displays two very different attitudes about the Midianites.<sup>36</sup> On the one hand, the Midianite relationship with the Israelites was antagonistic. During Israelite sojourn in the wilderness, the elders of Midian collaborated with the Moabites to hire Balaam to curse the Israelites (Num 22:4–7). In addition, the Midianite women led the Israelites to idolatry at Baal Peor (Num 25:6–15), leading YHWH to command Israel to attack Midian (Num 25:17–18). Though the Israelites attacked the Midianites and killed all of them, except for the girls (Numbers 31), the Midianites continued to fight with Israel, especially during the time of the judges (Judges 6–8).

However, on the other hand, Moses had close connections with the Midianites. He fled from Pharaoh to the land of Midian, where he met Jethro, a Midianite priest, and married his daughter (Exod 2:15–22; 3:1). Like Egypt in Genesis, Jethro acted as a place of safe refuge for YHWH's people.<sup>37</sup> While he was living in Midian, YHWH first appeared to Moses (Exod 3:1; 4:19). After the exodus, Moses visited with this group of Midianites, and Jethro praised YHWH for his work in the exodus and proclaimed that YHWH was greater than all other gods (Exod 18:9–12). The placement of this narrative immediately after the battle with the Amalekites highlights the difference between the two groups.<sup>38</sup> Jethro's confession even throws a negative light on the Israelites, who had frequently not

<sup>35</sup> The one exception to this positive portrayal of Egypt is YHWH's declaration that Abram's descendants would be oppressed in a foreign land (Gen 15:13–15). However, while readers of the Torah know that this country is Egypt, the text significantly does not name the country or even give any hints about the identity of the country.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the ambiguity surrounding Midian, see Adriane Leveen, "Inside Out: Jethro, the Midianites and a Biblical Construction of the Outsider," *JOT* 34 (2010) 395–417.

<sup>37</sup> Leveen, "Inside Out" 401–2.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus* (ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 399; Leveen "Inside Out" 404–5.

been trusting YHWH in the desert.<sup>39</sup> When the Israelites left Sinai, Moses invited Jethro to join Israel (Num 10:29–32).<sup>40</sup> He turned down the initial invitation, but no response is included for the second invitation, which might imply that he accepted it. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that the book of Judges includes the descendants of Jethro among those who lived in Judah (Judg 1:16; 4:11).

These features suggest that this group of Midianites had a much more favorable relationship with Israel than the group of Midianites that was attacked by Israel. Similar to YHWH's relationship with the Egyptians, his different relationship with these two groups of Midianites depended on their respective actions. Jethro, who recognized the power of YHWH, was a friend and fellow follower of YHWH. In contrast, the Midianites associated with Moab harassed Israel and forced a wedge between Israel and their god. YHWH did not command Israel to strike Midian simply because they were Midianites, but because of their actions. A person from a different country who became a follower of YHWH could become a part of the nation of Israel.

## V. CANAAN

The final group we will examine is the Canaanites. In the main, the OT identifies the Canaanites in two ways. First, Genesis names the sons of Canaan: Sidon, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites (Gen 10:15–18). Second, the inhabitants of the land of Canaan are named as follows: the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites (Gen 15:19–21), although later lists of Canaanites vary as far as their number and order of nations (e.g. Exod 3:8; Deut 7:1; Josh 3:10).<sup>41</sup> The many differences between these lists imply that the definition of a Canaanite was only loosely conceived.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps the ambiguity reflects the idea that a Canaanite simply reflects any inhabitant of the land of Canaan, with the seven nations serving as ciphers for all the inhabitants.<sup>43</sup>

Through most of their history Canaan and Israel were opposed to each other. Canaan was a son of Ham who “saw the nakedness” of his father and told his

<sup>39</sup> Leveen, “Inside Out” 408–9.

<sup>40</sup> Although this might refer to Jethro's son rather than Jethro himself, the phrase “son of Reuel” most likely means that Hobab was from the clan of Reuel and is the same person as Jethro.

<sup>41</sup> For more on the lists of Canaanite nations, see T. Ishida, “The Structure and Historical Implications of the Lists of the Pre-Israelite Nations,” *Bib* 60 (1979) 461–90; E. Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous: The Biblical View of Palestine's Pre-Israelite Peoples* (BIBAL Dissertation Series 3; Richmond Hills, TX: BIBAL, 1995); Kevin G. O'Connell, “The List of Seven People in Canaan,” in *The Answers Lie Below: Essays in Honor of Lawrence Edmund Toombs* (ed. Henry O. Thompson; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984) 221–41.

<sup>42</sup> Some scholars have even suggested that the term Canaanite was not even an ethnic term at all, but was a derogatory term meaning “outsider.” See Niels Peter Lemche, *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites* (JSOTSup 110; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) 52.

<sup>43</sup> Lohr, *Chosen and Unchosen* 164–67.

brothers about it. When Noah awoke and knew what Ham had done, he cursed Ham's son Canaan. The exact nature of Ham's action is unclear, and suggestions have included maternal incest, paternal incest, voyeurism, and even castration (Gen 9:18–29). It is also unclear why Canaan was cursed and not Ham. However, irrespective of the precise nature of Ham's action, the Canaanites enter the biblical story already under a curse.<sup>44</sup>

The opposition between the Canaanites and Israelites punctuates the narratives of the Pentateuch. This opposition is introduced in Genesis 34, when Simeon and Levi killed the Hivites living in Shechem after the rape of their sister Dinah. However, the first permitted violence against the Canaanites is found in an obscure note at the end of the Joseph story in which Jacob told Joseph that he had taken a ridge of land from the Amorites by his sword and his bow and he would now give that to Joseph (Gen 48:22). Since the word “ridge” is the same as the name of the city of Shechem, it is possible that this is another reference to Genesis 34. However, since the next chapter condemns Levi and Simeon's actions at Shechem (Gen 49:5–7), and Genesis 34 does not describe Jacob as taking part in the conquest of the city, this battle seems to refer to a different and otherwise unknown event. In addition to the narratives of Genesis, the Pentateuch includes several accounts of Israelite battles with the Canaanites on their way to the land of Canaan. They were defeated by Canaanites in their first attempt to enter the land (Num 14:39–45). However, the Israelites defeated the Canaanite king of Arad (Num 21:1–3) and the Amorite kings Sihon and Og of Transjordan (Num 21:21–35). Finally, they defeated many Canaanite kings in the land of Canaan, as recorded in the book of Joshua.

The opposition between the Israelites and Canaanites corresponds with the Torah's consistent portrayal of the latter as a sinful people. When Abraham entered the land of Canaan, YHWH promised to bring Abraham's descendants back to Canaan after the iniquity of the Amorites was complete (Gen 15:16). Not only did Shechem rape Dinah, but he and his father Hamor attempted to convince their people to allow Jacob and his family to live in their land by describing how they could take all the Israelites property (Genesis 34). The directions about the Canaanites indicate that they worshipped other gods who would be a snare to the Israelites (Exod 23:20–33; 34:11–24; Num 33:50–56; Deut 7:1–5, 17–26; 20:16–18). The land itself would vomit out the Canaanites because of their sexual immorality and other customs that displeased YHWH (Lev 18:3, 24–30; 20:22–24). That is, YHWH would drive out the nations in Canaan because of their wickedness (Deut 9:4–6).

Although the OT speaks frequently about the sinfulness of the Canaanites, it does not appear that the OT views the Canaanites as worse sinners than their neighbors. Rather, their wickedness comes to attention more because they occupy

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<sup>44</sup> For more discussion of this text, see Frederick W. Bassett, “Noah's Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan: A Case of Incest?,” *VT* 21 (1971) 232–37; John S. Bergsma and Scott Hahn, “Noah's Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:20–27),” *JBL* 124 (2005) 25–40.

the land that YHWH had promised to Israel. Deuteronomy 20 contains two sets of directives regarding captured cities based on their location (outside or inside Canaan), not their relative levels of sinfulness. The Canaanites sinned as much as other nations, but would be a greater danger to Israel because of their proximity. Presumably, if YHWH had granted some other land to Israel, then the inhabitants of that land would have been treated in this fashion rather than the Canaanites.

Unlike the Amalekites, the OT does not uniformly speak negatively of the Canaanites. Most famously, the book of Joshua portrays the Israelite Achan acting like a Canaanite and put to death like a Canaanite, while the Canaanite Rahab proclaims the greatness of YHWH and becomes part of the people of Israel. In light of this dialectical portrayal of a Canaanite, it is necessary to examine several specific Canaanite nations to determine whether this positive sentiment towards the Canaanites appears elsewhere in the Torah.

1. *The Hittites.* We will begin with the Hittites. The Hittites descended from Canaan (Gen 10:15) and lived in the land of Canaan (Gen 15:20). Even though they share the same name as the empire in Asia Minor, the Hittites in Genesis most likely were not related to them.<sup>45</sup> In general, the Torah views the Hittites negatively. Rebecca expressed disdain for the Hittite women, asking what good her life would be if her son Jacob married one of them (Gen 27:46). In addition, Esau the problem child married a Hittite woman (Gen 26:34; 36:2).

However, the Torah also records that the only land Abraham owned in Canaan was the burial plot he bought from a Hittite (Genesis 23; 25:9–10; 49:29–32; 50:13). When Sarah died in Hebron, he requested the cave of Machpelah from the Hittites for a burial plot (Gen 23:20) and bought it for four hundred shekels of silver. He did not take the land by force from the Hittites, but bought it from them, most likely at an inflated price.<sup>46</sup> The purchase of Machpelah from the Hittites does not necessarily place them in a positive light, but at the very least it is a different tone from the harsher characterization of the Hittites elsewhere (e.g. Exod 23:23; 33:2; Deut 7:1; Josh 3:10) and it is significant that the only land Abraham owned in Canaan was acquired by means of negotiations, not warfare.

2. *The Amorites.* The next Canaanite group to be examined is the Amorites. The Amorites appear frequently outside the OT and are the most well known of the Canaanite nations. For those living in Mesopotamia, the Amorites were the people living in the west (the term even served as a directional word).<sup>47</sup> In the OT,

<sup>45</sup> However, the kings of the Hittites probably refer to the Neo-Hittites in Syria (e.g. 1 Kgs 10:29; 2 Kgs 7:6). For more on the Hittites in the OT, see Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., "Some Contributions of Hittology to Old Testament Study," *TynBul* 20 (1969) 27–37; Byrant G. Wood, "Hittites and Hethites: A Proposed Solution to an Etymological Conundrum," *JETS* 54 (2011) 239–50.

<sup>46</sup> Nathan MacDonald, "Driving a Hard Bargain? Genesis 23 and Models of Economic Exchange," in *Anthropology and Biblical Studies: Avenues of Approach* (ed. Louise J. Lawrence and Mario I. Aguilar; Leiden: Deo, 2005) 93.

<sup>47</sup> A group of Amorites migrated to Mesopotamia and subjugated the people there. Alalakh spoke of an Amorite kingdom in Syria in the fifteenth century, and might have served as the source of the Amorite kings east of the Jordan. See P. E. Satterthwaite and D. W. Baker, "Nations of Canaan," *DOTP* 601; Hostetter, *Nations Mightier and More Numerous* 52–53.

the Amorites descended from Canaan (Gen 10:16) and frequently appeared among the inhabitants of the land.<sup>48</sup> The terms Canaanite and Amorite might have been used interchangeably in the OT, such as the reference to the “iniquity of the Amorites” (Gen 15:16). When the term was used more specifically, the Amorites dwelt in the hill country (Num 13:29; cf. Deut 1:7, 19–20).

The most significant negative statement about the Amorites is found in Genesis 15, where it states that YHWH did not give the land of Canaan to Abraham because the iniquity of the Amorite was not yet complete (Gen 15:16).<sup>49</sup> According to this text, the Amorites were already recognized at the time of Abraham as a sinful people who opposed YHWH. Genesis 48:22 also describes Jacob’s battle to take a ridge from the Amorites by sword and by bow, referring to military conflict with an Amorite group.

However, not everything is negative about the Amorites. Mamre was an ally of Abraham when he went to defeat the eastern kings to rescue Lot and restore the goods of Sodom. Little is known about Mamre except that he was an Amorite who owned oaks in Hebron near Machpelah (Gen 13:18; 14:13, 24; 18:1; 23:17, 19). Even in the time when the Amorites were already declared to be sinful and would shortly be in conflict with his grandson, Abraham allied with an Amorite to fight the eastern kings. One author even suggests that the story found in Genesis 14 was included in order to give legitimacy to Amorites living among the Israelites during the monarchy.<sup>50</sup> Although this scenario is unlikely, it does show that the positive mention of an Amorite is unusual and once again introduces ambiguity into YHWH’s relationship with the Canaanites.

3. *The Kenizzites.* The third group we will examine are the little known Kenizzites. Nothing is known about them except that they lived in Canaan (Gen 15:19) and they might have been connected with the Edomites, as Esau had a grandson named Kenaz (Gen 36:11). However, they do have a famous representative: Caleb the son of Jephunnah, a Kennizzite (Num 32:12; Josh 14:6, 14), who was one of the twelve scouts to Canaan. He and Joshua were the only two scouts who brought back a positive report about their scouting mission. The book of Joshua records his conquest of Hebron at eighty-five years old (Josh 14:6–15). It appears that Caleb’s ancestors had left the Canaanites and became part of the tribe of Judah at some point (Num 13:6; 34:19).<sup>51</sup> In this instance, we have an example of a Canaanite and his family turning to follow YHWH and becoming a paradigm of faith. Expectations are turned on their head when one of Israel’s great military heroes comes from Canaanite lineage.

<sup>48</sup> Gen 15:21; Exod 3:8, 17; 13:5; 23:23; 33:2; 34:11; Deut 7:1; 20:17; Josh 3:10.

<sup>49</sup> This reference to Amorites probably signifies all of the pre-Israelite inhabitants of the land. See Hamilton, *Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17* 436.

<sup>50</sup> A. Zeron, “Abraham’s 318 Retainers (Gen 14) (Hebrew),” *Tarbitz* 52 (1982) 129–32.

<sup>51</sup> Othniel also appears to be a Kenizzite, as he is described as the son of Kenaz and brother of Caleb (Josh 15:16–17; Judg 1:12–13; 1 Chron 4:13–15).

## VI. CONCLUSION

The dialectical portrayal of YHWH's relationship with Sodom and Gomorrah, the Amalekites, the Egyptians, the Midianites, and the Canaanites indicates that YHWH exhibited mixed responses to several nations in the Torah. Each of these nations is portrayed negatively at some point in the narratives because of their evil actions. However, YHWH also acted graciously to these same nations at other times, and various people from these same groups even came to follow YHWH and were incorporated into Israel.

Many scholars have explained this ambiguity by appealing to varied sources and the tradition history of the text. For example, Dozeman ascribes the positive view of the Midianites to a non-Priestly author and the negative view to a Priestly author. The presence of the two traditions side by side reflects a postexilic disagreement about the nature of Yahwism in general and the relationship of foreigners to the Israelite cult in particular.<sup>52</sup> In relation to Egypt, F. V. Greifenhagen argues that the Pentateuch betrays two sources that were combined in the Persian period by compilers who desired to convince their fellow Jews that all Jews should live in Palestine rather than Egypt. Removing the pro-Egyptian material would antagonize a significant part of their audience, so they subverted it by framing it with anti-Egyptian material, making the final form of the Pentateuch "overwhelmingly" anti-Egyptian.<sup>53</sup>

While these proposals provide reasonable explanations for YHWH's varied relationship with the nations, these ambiguous attitudes may also be attributed to the theology of the text rather than to contradictory accounts. As noted above, Israel's election did not lead to the condemnation of all other nations, and Kaminsky's categorization of other groups as either non-elect or anti-elect is a helpful heuristic model to reading the final form of the text. However, YHWH's ambiguous disposition toward several groups in the Torah complicates this categorization, as the data do not reflect such static categories as Kaminsky proposes. A further complication is that Edom's status is somewhere between non-elect and anti-elect, not as bad as Amalek but as not as favored as Caleb. In light of these complications, a better model is to keep all non-Israelites in the non-elect category, but to create a spectrum within the category, with opposing poles of pro-Israel/YHWH groups and anti-Israel/YHWH groups. This would allow more flexibility in describing a complex reality than binary and static categories and permits the groups to more easily change positions.

Within this spectrum, the individuals and families who follow YHWH and become part of Israel are on one extreme of the spectrum (the Caleb end), while those who attack Israel are located on the other extreme (the Amalek end). The groups place themselves on the spectrum by means of their treatment of Israel and their attitude toward YHWH, reflecting YHWH's promise to Abraham: "I will

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Midianites in the Formation of the Book of Numbers," in *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers* (ed. Thomas Römer; BETL 215; Leuven: Peeters, 2008) 261–84.

<sup>53</sup> Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map* 261.

bless the ones blessing you, and I will curse the one cursing you" (Gen 12:3). God's disposition toward the nations was not dependent upon their ancestry, but upon the way they responded to his people and to him. A nation like Edom that neither helped nor attacked Israel would be near the middle of the spectrum, incurring YHWH's displeasure but not a divine command for extermination. Although a nation like Midian might be placed on the Amalek end of the spectrum, individuals and families from Midian could turn to follow YHWH and place themselves on the Caleb end of the spectrum. In the case of Egypt, an entire nation could move on the spectrum, depending upon their attitude toward Israel.

The implication of this pattern is that individuals from other nations, including Canaanites, could have turned to follow YHWH and been preserved. The book of Joshua never indicates that the Israelites presented this option to the Canaanites, but the preservation of Rahab implied that they honored such testimonies by those who helped them. The early Jewish interpreters believed this was the case. Wisdom of Solomon 12:10 says that the conquest happened gradually in order to give the Canaanites time to repent (although it also claims that the Canaanites would never change). *Midr. Deut.* V.13 notes a parallel with Sihon, the Amorite king. YHWH commanded Moses to fight Sihon, but Moses' first action was to send messengers of peace to Sihon (Deut 2:24–26). Therefore, even though YHWH commanded the destruction of the Canaanites, the Israelites should still have sent messengers of peace. The Midrash even speculated that the Girgashites left Canaan when Israel arrived and went to Africa (*Midr. Deut.* V:14). Hebrews declares that the Canaanites were disobedient, implying that they knew how YHWH wanted them to act and rejected his commands (11:31).

Such a reading that allows for Canaanites to follow YHWH would appear to conflict with the frequent commands to place the Canaanites under the ban (Deut 7:1–2; 20:16–18), as well as the Israelite displeasure to the deception of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9), as they should have accepted these people who recognized YHWH's greatness. However, further clarity might be achieved by categorizing three possible responses to Israelite advances. First, their enemies could resist them forcibly and force Israel to attack them militarily. When Israel was victorious against cities far away they were to put the men to death and take everything else as spoil (Deut 20:12–14). For conquered cities in the land of Canaan, they were to put everyone under the ban (Deut 20:16–18). Second, their enemies could submit before battle to the Israelites, recognize the greatness of YHWH, but continue to worship their own gods. For cities far away, Israel was to make them slave labor. However, for cities in Canaan Israel was to place them under a ban, exactly the same as if they had fought Israel. Third, their enemies could proclaim the greatness of YHWH and help the Israelites. Although Deuteronomy does not offer any regulations concerning these cases, the narratives concerning Jethro, Caleb, and Rahab imply that these people were to be incorporated into Israel, regardless of whether they were from Canaan or a more distant land. In contrast to the second option, those who took this path would turn away from their former gods and serve YHWH. This option is also supported by the frequent purpose clauses for the destruction of the Canaanites as the danger their religious service would bring

to the Israelites (Deut 7:4–5, 25–26; 20:18). The danger was not the Canaanites as people, but their devotion to gods other than YHWH.

These categories help explain the different Israelite reactions to the people of Jericho, Rahab, and the Gibeonites. The people of Jericho resisted the Israelites, and were put under the ban, following the directions of Deut 20:16–18. Rahab took the third option, assisting the Israelites and praising YHWH, and so was incorporated into Israel, following the example of Caleb. The Gibeonites did not follow the example of Rahab, but submitted to the Israelites and made a peace treaty with them. The Israelites should have put them under the ban because they lived in the land of Canaan, but did not do so because of their deception. Following the logic of the Israelite reception of Caleb and Rahab, if the Gibeonites had assisted the Israelites and praised YHWH rather than deceiving them, Israel would have accepted them into Israel.

Regardless of the accuracy of this speculation concerning the Canaanites, Israel's election did not automatically entail the condemnation of the other nations. Like YHWH promised to Abraham, in general he blessed those nations that blessed Israel, while he cursed the nations who attacked them. However, their choices did not imply permanence in YHWH's disposition toward them, as individuals or other parts of the group could act differently and consequently be viewed differently by YHWH.