I

The problem of “paying for the sins of others” has been raised with respect to the Babylonian exile since the eve of the disaster. Jeremiah and Ezekiel each responded to a contemporary proverb, “the ancestors have eaten sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge.” The “exile” refers to the entire catastrophe: the fall of the city of God, the destruction of the temple, the imprisonment of kings Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, and the deportations of the people of Jerusalem and Judah in 597, 586, and 582 BCE. The exile triggered numerous interpretations within the scriptural writings including the prophets, the stories of Esther, Daniel, the returns in Ezra-Nehemiah, the Lamentations and several psalms, as well as the Deuteronomistic Narrative and Chronicles.

The Chronicler’s version of the exile has often been interpreted as the premier embodiment and culmination of his much discussed views of God’s retribution upon the First Commonwealth. The present study seeks to offer some adjustments and alternate explanations of the Chronicler’s ideology of exile as it is exemplified in the closing chapter of his narrative, especially it relates to retribution. The term “retribution” denotes the enactment of God’s justice in punishment and reward, though it usually is used of the former. Sara Japhet’s work on

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1 Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2, or “… children’s teeth are blunted” (NJPS; HALOT, 2:1078). All translations from BHS are mine unless stated otherwise.
2 Deuteronomistic Narrative is my term for the four part serial narrative of the rise and fall of the ancient Hebrew kingdoms within the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. Deuteronomy functions as a covenantal compass for the tetralogy. While neither date nor diachronic matters are important to my present concerns, I affirm the idea that the Deuteronomistic Narrative reflects the exilic perspective of the storytakers. I use the term Chronicler to refer to the author of the book of Chronicles (“author” in the sense of redactor/editor/historical narrator). I find convincing the thesis that the Chronicler is not the same person(s) who redacted/edited Ezra-Nehemiah, though it seems he made use of Ezra-Nehemiah. See Sara Japhet, “The Supposed Common Authorship of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah Investigated Anew” in From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies of the Restoration Period (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 1-37 (originally published in VT 18 [1968]: 330-71); H. G. M. Williamson, Israel in the Books of Chronicles (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 83-86.
retribution in Chronicles provides a useful point of departure since so many recent discussions of both Chronicles and his view of retribution turn on her body of work. Japhet states:

The Chronicler’s well-known theory of ‘reward and punishment’ … [is] his way of portraying history as a concrete manifestation of divine justice. It is characterized by several features. Reward is mandatory, immediate and individual. Every generation is requited for its own deeds, both good and evil, with no postponement of recompense; there is no accumulated sin and no accumulated merit.

Yet, the Chronicler’s version of the exile does not fit with Japhet’s reading. This study will suggest that Chronicles presents the exile in terms of deferred justice, cumulative and corporate.

The next section will briefly frame the place of Japhet’s argument in the context of other leading interpretations of retribution in Chronicles, namely, the much discussed interpretations of Julius Wellhausen and Gerhard von Rad. In response, I will argue that the Chronicler’s interpretation of the exile turns on the way he uses Leviticus and Jeremiah.

II

Wellhausen (in)famously offers well-studied, sustained ridicule of Chronicles in a chapter on it. While many of his attacks have been overturned and seem increasingly unlikely, Wellhausen’s view of mechanical divine retribution in Chronicles remains convincing to many interpreters, including von Rad and Japhet. At the end of a sarcastic passage Wellhausen says, “Never does

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5 Japhet, I & II Chronicles, 44. Japhet considers the Chronicler’s presentation of the exile a leading example of his view of retribution, see Kelly, Retribution and Eschatology, 41. For another oft cited summary of immediate retribution in 2 Chron 10-36, cited approvingly by Japhet, see Raymond B. Dillard, 2 Chronicles (WBC 15; Nashville: Nelson Reference, 1987), 76-81.


7 See Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Israel, 203-10.
He then goes on to list examples of the Chronicler creating justice from Rehoboam to Zedekiah, by attaching consequences to deeds and vice versa. Wellhausen refers to these retributive connections as “inventions,” and speaks derisively of how they are born from the Chronicler’s plan for writing history, “as it is euphemistically called.”

For von Rad, Chronicles is a theodicy wrestling against the problem of retribution. Von Rad condenses Wellhausen’s list of retributive examples in Chronicles to demonstrate the Chronicler’s consistent effort to show “correspondence between guilt and punishment.” Von Rad interprets the retributive connections as part of the Chronicler’s strategy of narrating each generation to stand before the Lord “immediately” and “individually.” “It is characteristic of him [the Chronicler] that before the account of Jerusalem’s destruction in II Chr 36 he speaks only of the sins of the last living generation.” The Chronicler’s commitment to immediate and individual retribution is, for von Rad, part of the developments of “later Jahwism.” Von Rad spells out this late shift to individualism in his treatment of biblical wisdom. He explains individualism replacing collectivism in the context of the fall of the Hebrew monarchy. He uses Ezekiel 18 and Jeremiah 31:29, 30 to illustrate the new emphasis on every individual before God. Von Rad rightly discerns Ezekiel’s sweeping away of excuses, seen especially in the final

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8 Ibid., 203.
9 See ibid., 203-7.
10 Ibid., 207.
13 See ibid., 1:349, 350.
14 “Es ist bezeichnend, daß er vor dem Bericht von der Zerstörung Jerusalems II. Chr. 36 allein von den Sünden der letzten lebenden Generation spricht” (von Rad, *Das Geschichtsbild des Chronistischen Werks*, 13).
15 See *Old Testament Theology*, 1:349.
16 See ibid., 1:391-94. “Jeremiah and Ezekiel had to address themselves to the question, ‘the fathers have eaten sour grapes, but it is (only) the children’s teeth which are set on edge’ ..... The familiar quotation is in rebellion against the falling asunder of cause and effect, offence and punishment” (1:392). The proverb cited in Jer 31 and Ezek 18 is often compared to a passage in an ancient Hittite prayer: “O Storm-god of Ḫatti, my lord, and gods, my lords — so it happens: People always sin. My father sinned and transgressed the word of the Storm-god of Ḫatti, my lord. But I did not sin in any way. But so it happens: The sin of the father devolves upon his son. The sin of my father has devolved upon me” (“Plague Prayers of Muršili II,” trans. Gary Beckman [COS 1.60:158]). See Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 393-94; A. Malamat, “Doctrines of Causality in Hittite and Biblical Historiography: A Parallel,” *VT* 5 (1955): 1-12; and for critique of Malamat’s article see Jože Krašovec, “Is There a Doctrine of ‘Collective Retribution’ in the Hebrew Bible?” *HUCA* 65 (2001): 38-39, n. 9 [35-89]. Also discussed is an ancient Hittite punishment against the entire household of one who incites divine anger, yet this is applies only to the temple. “If, however, someone angers the mind of a god, does the god seek it (revenge) only from him alone? Does he not seek it from his wife, [his children,] his descendants, his family, his male servants, his female servants, his cattle, his sheep and his grain? He utterly
verses of Ezekiel 18. “If a man cannot rely on his own righteousness, so as to hide himself behind it from Jahweh, how much less can he rely on the righteousness of others.”

Japhet also notes Wellhausen’s list connecting sin and punishment and vice versa in Chronicles, but she expands attention to many more details and examples as well as establishing the Chronicler’s interest in justice regarding the cause and effect of merit and success. Japhet defines the Chronicler’s view in contrast to the Deuteronomistic interpretation of sin and guilt, the latter of which she defines as “cumulative” and “collective” both of which are evident by “delayed” punishment. Japhet, like von Rad, regards the Chronicler’s theology of retribution as part of an individual-oriented innovation born out of interpreting the fall of Jerusalem especially by Ezekiel. For Japhet, Ezekiel’s and the Chronicler’s views on divine justice are so similar that Chronicles’ “outlook may be defined in Ezekiel’s words: ‘The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.’”


17 Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, 1:394. Daniel I. Block interprets Ezekiel 18 similar to von Rad: “[C]hildren may not hide behind a theology of corporate solidarity and moral extension that absolves them of personal responsibility for their own destiny” (The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters I-24 [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 589). While studies of Ezekiel 18 continue to see it as making an argument for individual responsibility, many have discerned, I think rightly, the function of his example of individual accountability to indict the entire generation. For Ezekiel 18 as teaching individual responsibility, see Michael Fishbane, “Sin and Judgment in the Prophecies of Ezekiel,” Interpretation 38 (1984): 140-43 [121-50]. For examples of studies which challenge the thesis that individual accountability is a development, and also see Ezekiel 18 as judgment against the nation as a whole, see Herbert May, “Individual Responsibility and Retribution,” HUCA 31 (1961): 107-10 [107-20]; Barnabas Lindars, “Ezekiel and Individual Responsibility,” VT 15 (1965): 452-67; P. M. Joyce, “Individual Responsibility in Ezekiel 18?,” in Studia Biblica 1978: I. Papers on Old Testament and Related Themes (ed. E. A. Livingstone; JSOTSup 11; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1979), 185-96; Kaminsky, Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible, esp. 116-78. Kaminsky summarizes, “Although there is evidence of a growing awareness of the importance of the individual, there is also evidence that texts from the later biblical period continue to highlight the importance of the community” (138). I think some of Walther Eichrodt’s explanations of the effects of the exile upon the identity of the Judean expatriates help to explain the increased attention to the individual. He notes that the community became defined by what was not present reality: the kingdom of the past and the restoration to come. Eichrodt also suggests the universalistic attitude which included the nations underlines an identity defined by religious convictions and practices in the absence of the monarchical political structure of the First Commonwealth. See Theology of the Old Testament (trans. J. A. Baker; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961, 1967), 2:254-59. Eichrodt’s larger theses concerning the development of the place of the individual within emerging Judaism are unconvincing and fraught with all of the normal problems attending the dating of various biblical texts in traditional critical diachronic approaches (see 2:231-67; also see 1:39, 462-71).


20 Ibid., 127 (1989 ed., 162); quotation from Ezek 18:20. Also see Japhet, From the Rivers of Babylon, 323.
may sin and neither he nor his son will be punished: every sin must be punished. For this reason, Chronicles cannot justify the destruction of the Temple as punishment for the sins of previous generations.”²² Japhet contends, “Only Zedekiah and his generation are responsible for the disaster that occurred in his time.”²³ Regarding the fall of Jerusalem Japhet distinguishes that the Chronicler accepted what others might call “horizontal” societal collective punishment while denying “vertical” generational collective punishment. She maintains that, according to Chronicles, the exile is punishment only of the exiled generation itself.²⁴

Whether or not Ezekiel 18 is emblematic of a turn from collective to individual identity and accountability in the outlook of biblical Israel falls outside the present study.²⁵ Japhet asserts Chronicles shares an identical outlook with Ezekiel 18, but it may be merely that her interpretation of retribution in Chronicles fits with her interpretation of this passage in Ezekiel.

I contend that the Chronicler’s interpretation of the basis for the fall of Jerusalem turns on the intertextual utilization of Leviticus 26 and Jeremiah. This is not to deny the Chronicler’s marked interest in illustrating retribution and reward across the First Commonwealth. However, the allusions to Leviticus 26 and Jeremiah in Second Chronicles 36 point to a decidedly corporate understanding of judgment by exile. The Chronicler’s ideology of exile is, in part, embodied in the description of exile in Leviticus 26:39, “And those of you who survive shall rot because of their iniquities, in the land of your enemies, and even because of the iniquities of their ancestors they will rot with them.” The next two sections will discuss the relevant details in the final chapter of Chronicles, before drawing conclusions.

III

What is the scope and significance the Chronistic account of Zedekiah’s rejection of Jeremiah’s warnings? Is it about Zedekiah and his generation exclusively? Does the Chronicler view

²⁵ The shift has been noted since late antiquity, “Moses said [Ex. xxxiv. 7]: ‘Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children.’ Ezekiel abolished it by saying [xviii. 4]: ‘The soul which sinneth, that alone shall die.’” (b. Mak. 24a; http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/t09/mac08.htm [accessed 11/1/12]). For brief remarks against the position by Wellhausen, von Rad, and others that Ezekiel’s individual focus is a new development during the exile, see Krašovec, “Is There a Doctrine of ‘Collective Retribution’ in the Hebrew Bible?” 85-86; Block, Book of Ezekiel, 1-24, 556.
Jeremiah as simply another in a long line of prophets dealing with the situations of their own
days? Such a reading seems unlikely.

The Chronicler appears to make significant allusion to Jeremiah in a manner that views
the prophet and his work in continuity with an ongoing mission of God to warn his people to turn
to him. The function of the prophets in Chronicles runs along the lines of Yahweh’s message to
Solomon in a theophany at the dedication of the temple, which, in turn, echoes the pivotal
language of Leviticus 26.

Zedekiah “did not humble himself (חננ Nif) before Jeremiah the prophet from the mouth
of Yahweh. ... And he stiffened his neck and he strengthened his heart from turning
(שׁוּב) to Yahweh the God of Israel. ... Moreover, all of the leaders of the priests and the
people increased infidelity according to all of the offences of the nations. And they
polluted the house of Yahweh which he had made holy in Jerusalem. And Yahweh the
God of their ancestors sent to them by the hand of his messengers, persistently sending
(دعوة נא), because he took pity on his people and on his dwelling place. And they
ridiculed the messengers of God, despising his words, mocking his prophets, until the
wrath of Yahweh rose up against his people, until there was no remedy (חפץ)“ (2 Chron
36:12, 13b, 15, 16).

Yahweh said to Solomon, “And if my people who are called by my name humble
themselves (חננ Nif) and pray and seek my face and turn (שׁוּב) from their wicked ways,
then I will hear from the heavens and I will forgive their sin and I will heal (חפץ) their
land” (7:14).

If then their uncircumcised heart humble itself (חננ Nif), and then they pay (רפואה) for
their iniquity ... (Lev 26:41b).

“And Yahweh has been sending to you all of his servants the prophets, persistently
sending (دعوة נא), but you have not listened and you have not inclined your ear to
listen (Jer 25:4).

The Chronicler’s use of “persistently sending”—literally “rising up early and sending”
(دعوة נא)—seems like an intentional allusion to the phrase in Jeremiah (see quotation
above). The majority of uses of the Hifil infinitive absolute of דיבּר complimenting various verbs
occur in Jeremiah, along with this one occurrence in Second Chronicles 36, a couple of

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26 The use of “infidelity” (שתילה) to describe the cause of “polluting” (חמה) temple is a significant element in the
Chronicler’s explanation for the cause of Judah’s downfall (see Milgrom, “Concept of Ma’al,” 236, 247). For a
treatment of Chron centered on שָׁלֹם, see William Johnstone, 2 Chronicles 10-36, Guilt and Atonement, vol. 2 of 1
and 2 Chronicles (JSOTSup 254; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Johnstone, “Use of Leviticus in
Chronicles,” 243-55; and for summary and evaluation of Johnstone’s work, see Kelly, “‘Retribution’ Revisited,”
210-13. Also note that Zedekiah’s broken oath to Nebuchadnezzar in 2 Chron 36:13a relates to Ezek 17:11-21 (see
occurrences in Samuel and one in Proverbs. Anyone who has read Jeremiah can remember the frequent use of this phrase and others similar to it. Jeremiah speaks of God as subject, usually in first person and sometimes in third person discourse, “rising early (שָׂרָא) and sending (רַבָּה)” (7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4) as well as “rising early (שָׂרָא) and speaking (רָבָא)” (Jer 7:13; 25:3; 35:14), “rising early (שָׂרָא) and warning (שָׂרָא)” (11:7), and “rising early (שָׂרָא) and teaching (דָּרָם)” (32:33).

What is the sense of these combinations? The Hifil infinitive absolute שָׂרָא takes an intensifying adverbial sense of repetition or continuance in its several combinations with finite verbs in Jeremiah. For example, “Rising up early and speaking” (רָבָּא רֶבֶנֶס) in Jeremiah 7:13 signifies I have spoken to you already for a long period. The sense of the various hendiadyses which all include שָׂרָא in Jeremiah is earnestly, persistently, repeatedly (i.e., again and again).

The verb “has sent” (qatal) at the beginning of Jeremiah 25:4 can refer to acts which have already taken place and are still constantly reoccurring: “And Yahweh has sent to you all his servants the prophets rising early and sending but you have not listened.” A casual paraphrase would be “he has been talking about this all day long” roughly equivalent to the popular exaggeration “24/7.”

The Chronicler’s reference to Jeremiah’s refrain about the long line of prophets who warn of judgment makes explicit one of the significant tendencies across his narrative. Von Rad says,

No, Jahweh’s patience is not exhausted until the people (usually in its representative the king) reject the salvific relation with obvious intentionality—that is to say, when they freely step out from the divine ordinances. In this aspect in the outline of the Chronicler’s narrative, we find something almost like a sermon on Jahweh’s searching love. This becomes apparent especially in the tireless warnings that, from our author’s perspective, time and again go out to man who is about to step out of the present salvific relation.

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27 See Even-Shoshan, 1143.
28 See IBHS, § 35.3.2c.
29 See HALOT, 2:1494.
30 See GKC § 106 k. as applied in HALOT, 2:1493-94. GKC lists יָרַבֶּה in Jer 25:4 as וְגָרְתָל with a function of introducing frequently repeated action (see § 112 dd). The verb יָרַבֶּה in the qatal form can also refer to acts which have already taken place and are still constantly reoccurring (as in 7:25; 25:4; 26:5, etc.). For a brief description of the figural sense of יָרַבֶּה as rise early in the morning, see IBHS, § 27.4b.
31 “Nein, Jahwes Geduld erschöpft sich erst, wenn das Volk (meist in seinem Repräsentanten, dem König) in offenbarer Absicht das angebotene Heilsverhältnis verschmäht, wenn es sich also um ein freies Heraustreten aus den göttlichen Ordnungen handelt. Es liegt in dem Aufruf der chronistischen Geschichte in diesem Punkte geradezu etwas wie eine Predigt von Jahwes suchender Liebe, und das wird vor allem in den unermüdlichen Warnungen sichtbar, die nach Anschauung unseres Verfassers immer wieder dem Menschen zugehen, der im Begriff steht, aus dem bestehenden Heilsverhältnis herauszutreten” (Von Rad, Das Geschichtsbild des Chronistischen Werks, 12; emphasis original).
The rejection of the persistent warnings of the series of prophets is not confined to Zedekiah’s generation. The numerous Chronistic plusses featuring prophetic warnings stand as a leading feature of Second Chronicles 10-36.\(^{32}\)

The description of Zedekiah refusing to “humble himself” (ננים Nn) offers a negative counterpoint to the programmatic statement in Second Chronicles 7:14 (quoted above).\(^{33}\) The use of this term describing an “inner quality of the pious man in general, as resignation and repentance before God” is among the Chronicler’s innovative and distinct narrative ways of describing the “spirit of penitence.”\(^{34}\) Japhet suggests the Chronicler may have appropriated the use of self-humbling (ננים Nn) from Leviticus 26:41 and Psalm 107:12, but she does not list the negative use of this term in Second Chronicles 36 (even though she appears to be listing all occurrences in Chronicles).\(^{35}\) In light of this it will be worth considering the importance of the ideology of exile as rooted in the absence of self-humbling. The question, for my present purpose, is whether the absence of self-humbling in Zedekiah indicates an individual failure or if the Chronicler is using his personal lack of the central required quality of devotion to God as an embodiment and symbol of a collective apostasy of the First Commonwealth. While the answer turns on the significance of “rising early and sending” noted above, it is necessary to get at the function of the prophets in Chronicles before describing the meaning of Zedekiah’s rebellion.

Typically studies on “prophets” in Chroniclers include prophets, priests, Levites, kings, a soldier, and even an Egyptian Pharaoh. Discussions often work with or against von Rad’s thesis that the Chronicler spoke through prophetic speeches in non-synoptic narrative.\(^{36}\) Yet, according to William Schniedewind, such studies ignore the conventional distinctions between prophets of

\(^{32}\) See below for further discussion of the prophets and the prophetic word in Chron.

\(^{33}\) 2 Chron 7:14 is part of a plus (material not in 1 Kgs) which embodies the central themes of the narrative. See Williamson, 1 and 2 Chronicles, 225-26. For a detailed discussion of the structure, leading terms, and significance of this context, see Kelly, Retribution and Eschatology in Chronicles, 50-61. Kelly traces out the pattern of retribution in 2 Chron 10-36 in light of the themes in 2 Chon 7 (see 93-110). It should be added, as Knoppers suggests, that David’s repentance in 1 Chron 21 may function “paradigmatically” as the appropriate response to “disasters of one’s own making” (see Gary N. Knoppers, “Democratizing Revelation?: Prophets, Seers and Visionaries in Chronicles,” in John Day, ed., Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar [New York: T & T Clark, 2010], 404 [391-409]).

\(^{34}\) Japhet, “Common Authorship,” 27.

\(^{35}\) See ibid., 27, n. 145.

God and “ad hoc inspired figures or ‘messengers.’” The classic view is that after the exile “there is no longer any prophet” (Ps 74:9), “her [Jerusalem’s] prophets do not find a vision from Yahweh” (Lam 2:9), and “prophets ceased” long before the days of the Maccabees (1 Macc 9:27). In this view, prophets function within the kingdom. The temporary postexilic revival of Haggai’s and Zechariah’s prophecies coincide with the glimmers of hope for a reestablishment of the Davidic monarchy with Zerubbabel and Joshua. Even Zechariah referred to the “former prophets” (Zech 1:4; 7:7, 12) and Malachi is referred to as “messenger” rather than prophet (see Mal 2:7; 3:1; cf. Hag 1:13).

This is not to say that prophecy ceased, but that the normative role of biblical prophets is relegated to the First Commonwealth. Is the end of prophecy thesis an “ideological construct” to protect power of a new class of religious leaders? Schniedewind analyses the non-synoptic prophetic speeches in Chronicles according to the prophetic figure, audience, and function of prophetic narratives, and demonstrates convincingly that the Chronicler made a distinction between “prophets” and other “inspired messengers.” The Chronicler refers to prophets as “prophet” (אָבְנִי), “seer” (חָזַה), “seer” (רָאָה) and “man of God” (אֶתְהוֹלֵךְ). The Chronicler often uses the standard prophetic “thus says Yahweh” with the prophets but uses “the spirit of God was upon him” and the like for the inspired messengers. The prophets in Chronicles address kings every time except once (Oded addressed the northern army in 2 Chron 28:9), but inspired messengers address others except once (Pharaoh Neco addresses Josiah in 35:21). Most important for my present concerns, Schniedewind identifies the function of the prophets to interpret and often warn, and the inspired messengers to exhort and sometimes warn.

function of the prophets in Chronicles is “to answer the historical questions that result from his doctrine of ‘retribution theology.’”

Prophets in Chronicles address both monarch and people. Gary N. Knoppers points out that monarchs in Chronicles function according to ancient Near Eastern ideology as both representatives and personal embodiments of the states they lead. This provides a mechanism for the Chronicler to hold the people and the leaders accountable. If the Chronicler presented horizontal corporate solidarity by the prophetic messages to the kings, his allusion to Jeremiah establishes vertical corporate solidarity.

The Chronicler’s presentation of Zedekiah’s rejection of the prophet’s message reflects a grasp of the book of Jeremiah (see 2 Chron 36:12-16 cited above). The starting point may be “but neither he [Zedekiah] nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of Yahweh which he spoke by the hand of Jeremiah the prophet” (Jer 37:2). Far from being an isolated warning to this king at this time, the Chronicler uses the prophet’s own constant refrain which situates his prophetic work within the ongoing context of God’s pity-motivated incessant sending of his prophets. Jeremiah did not claim to be innovative nor a lone voice, nor do anything unusual. The prophet frequently identifies his role and message as part of God’s persistent prophetic warning—“rising early and sending/speaking/warning.” By adopting Jeremiah’s mantra of continuity of constant warning, Zedekiah’s rejection functions as the culmination of a transgenerational rebellion against God’s covenantal will.

Jeremiah represents the trans-temporal company of prophets, and Zedekiah in the twilight of the First Commonwealth personifies by his own impudence the rebellion of his people across the generations. Jeremiah and Zedekiah are both individuals—prophet and king—and all that means. They also represent and speak for two collectives. The Chronicler appropriates Jeremiah’s language of continuity of warning to signify the prophetic and Davidic institutions by these two men.
The biblical prophets and storymakers see the exile as more than a political and social event. The exile is explained as just punishment at the hands of Israel’s God. Is the exile, according to the Chronicler, a judgment of the First Commonwealth as trans-temporal collective? Is it a punishment only of Zedekiah’s generation? The difficulty with this latter view, promoted by Japhet, is the way the Chronicler’s uses Jeremiah and Leviticus to explain the event. The Chronicler connects the duration of the exile and its rationale from Leviticus 26 with Jeremiah’s prophecy of seventy years. The relevant passages contain shared language.

And he took into exile the remnant from the sword to Babylon, and they were for him and for his descendants slaves until the reign of the kings of Persia, to fulfill the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah until the land paid back its sabbaths, all the days of its desolation, to fulfill seventy years. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia to accomplish the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah, Yahweh instigated the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, and he announced in all his kingdom and even in writing, saying, “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘All the kingdoms of the earth Yahweh the God of the heavens has given to me, and he has appointed me to build for him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah. Whoever among you from all his people, may Yahweh his God be with him, and let him go up.’” (2 Chron 36:20-23).

Then the land shall pay its sabbaths all the days of its desolation, and you are in the land of your enemies, then the land will rest and shall pay its sabbaths… If then their uncircumcised heart humbles itself, and then they pay for their iniquity …. And the land will be abandoned by them and it shall pay its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them, and they pay for their iniquity, because they rejected my rules and their soul spurned my statutes (Lev 26:34, 41b, 43; cf. 25:2). All of this land will become a ruin and a waste, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it will be when seventy years are fulfilled I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, declares Yahweh, and the land of the Chaldeans, and I will make it an everlasting waste (Jer 25:11, 12).

For thus says Yahweh, “When seventy years are fulfilled for Babylon I will visit you and I will establish my good word to you to return you to this place” (29:10).

The Chronicler’s intentional allusion is demonstrated by using several of these terms from Leviticus, “pay back” (26:41), “desolation” (26:46), “rested” (25:2; 26:34), and “sabbaths”
The Chronicler innovates by making explicit connection between the land’s sabbaths and Jeremiah’s oracle concerning seventy years (see Jer 25:11; 29:10).48

The use of seventy years to signify judgment occurs in Isaiah 23:15-17 regarding Tyre and regarding Babylon in the Esarhaddon inscription (c. 679 BCE).49 Zechariah twice refers to the seventy years of Jerusalem’s suffering without directly referring to Jeremiah’s oracle (see Zech 1:12; 7:5). The seventy years of Jeremiah are referred to directly in Daniel and Chronicles, and connected to Leviticus 26 in both cases. When Daniel observes Jeremiah’s seventy years he offers a “Leviticus 26 style confession,” only to learn that these are seventy weeks of years (see Dan 9).50

Jeremiah explains the seventy years in terms of Babylon’s rule (see Jer 25:11, 12 cited above). Jeremiah elsewhere used three generations to denote the duration of Babylon’s rule: “And all the nations will serve him [Nebuchadnezzar] and his son, and his son’s son, until the time of his own land comes, then many nations and great kings will make him their slave” (27:7).51 Whether Jeremiah meant the seventy years as an exact period or round number or symbolic number akin to three generations is not important for my present purposes.

The Chronicler’s innovative interpretation aligns with, broadly speaking, the references to the seventy years in Zechariah and Daniel. The messenger of Yahweh asks, “How long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which you have been angry for these seventy years?” (Zech 1:12). Zechariah seems to think of the seventy years as literal rather than symbolic.

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50 Michael Fishbane suggests that the “seventy sabbatical cycles” (or ten Jubilees) of Dan 9 plays off 2 Chron 36:21, which reads the seventy years of Jeremiah in relation to Lev 26:34ff., see Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 482-91.

51 See Leslie C. Allen, Jeremiah, A Commentary (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 307. Also see Japhet, I & II Chronicles, 1074. Jer 27:7 is a MT plus (not in the LXX). The reference to seventy years in 25:11, 12 as three generations could be seen as a general figurative reference, however the difference between the MT and LXX is explained. For a summary of the discussion surrounding this verse see William McKane, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 2:689-90. Lious Jonker argues that it cannot be determined if the Chronicler used the proto-MT or the Vorlage of the LXX, see “The Chronicler and the Prophets: Who Were His Authoritative Sources?” in What Was Authoritative for Chronicles?, 161 [145-64]. Jonker goes on to affirm the Chronicler’s reference to seventy years has most affinity with Jer 29:10 (not 25:11, 12) since both Jer 29:10 and 2 Chron 36:21 focus on the restoration of the exiles (see 162).
than symbolic, and associate the beginning and pending conclusion with the destruction (586 BCE) and rebuilding of the temple (within a few years of 520 BCE when the oracle is dated). In a later exchange, Zechariah receives an oracle from Yahweh that implies his skepticism as to the purpose of the people’s fasts over the seventy years—“Did you really fast for me, indeed for me?” (7:5). These passages infer that the destruction of Jerusalem should invoke true repentance by his people. Confession would signal that the people had been humbled and turned to God for mercy. Daniel has the turning point of Leviticus 26 in view: “I prayed to Yahweh my God and I made confession (הדבר) … we have sinned and committed iniquity (השון)” (Dan 9:4, 5).

The pivot from judgment to restoration reads “they shall confess (הדבר) their iniquity (השון) and the iniquity (השון) of their ancestors … and I will remember my covenant” (Lev 26:40, 42).

The Chronicler makes more concrete the predicted doom for breaking the covenant according to Leviticus 26. He explains the seventy years of exile as directly associated with the destruction of the temple in order to give the land its sabbaths. The personification of the land of promise runs across several passages in Leviticus: the contamination of the land by the Canaanites, and later the Israelites, will cause the land to vomit out its inhabitants (18:24-28; 20:22), the trees bear foreskinned fruit that needs to be circumcised upon Israel’s initial entry into the land (19:23-25), and the land needs to observe sabbath years (25:2). The personification of the land offers a powerful figure to denote the accumulated iniquity of the First Commonwealth. The Chronicler equates the seventy years of exile with the land’s sabbaths. This follows the description that the judgment had been deferred while God persistently sent his

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53 Four fasts are listed in Zech 8:19 “The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months”; those in the fifth and seventh months are referred to in 7:5, 6. The fasts: “fourth,” lamented the breaking into Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 25:3-4; Jer 39:2; 52:6-7); “fifth” mourned the burning of temple (2 Kgs 25:8-10; Jer 52:12-14); “seventh,” marked the assassination of Gedaliah (2 Kgs 25:22-25; Jer. 41:1-3); “tenth,” commemorated beginning of Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:1; Jer 39:1; Ezek 24:1-2). For a discussion of the force of the rhetorical questions in Zech 7:5 as an indictment against the people who remained hardened against God’s word in exile, see Stead, *Intertextuality of Zechariah 1-8*, 221-26.

54 Baruch Levine invites comparison of this confession with the confession for the “guilt offering” (5:5) and the Day of Atonement (16:21); see *Leviticus* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 190, 28, 106. Von Rad considers the biblical notion of retribution as integral to the evil actions themselves. Rather, than a separate word for punishment, “sin” and “iniquity” (שון, עון) denote both the acts and their results (see *Old Testament Theology*, 1:385, 266).

55 For brief remarks on the function of the personification of the land in Leviticus, see Gary E. Schnittjer, *The Torah Story* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 344-47.
prophets. This does not mean that there are no immediate retributive acts, nor is this view mutually exclusive of the responsibility of individual persons or individual generations.

The Deuteronomistic and Chronistic narratives each present immediate judgments upon individuals and particular generations even while interpreting the continuation of the kingdom according to the patience and mercy of God. The Chronicler does not view the removal of the Davidic monarch, the destruction of Jerusalem and temple, and the exile of the people in 586 BCE, as the immediate judgment of Zedekiah’s generation alone. Rather, the seventy sabbath years infer a penalty for rejecting God’s will for nearly five centuries—“seventy sabbatical cycles.”\(^{56}\) The Chronicler often seems exacting and he may mean seventy sabbaths for 490 years of rebellion. The seventy sabbath years might be seen as a round number inferring judgment for the comprehensive rebellion of the First Commonwealth.\(^{57}\)

When did the seventy years begin and end in the Chronicler’s view? David Kimchi infers that the completion of the seventy years is the edict of Cyrus (c. 539 BCE) and thus began with the rise of Nebuchadnezzar and includes the fifty-two years of exile.\(^{58}\) However, the period from the destruction of the temple to its rebuilding comes close to seventy years.\(^{59}\) The seventy years without the temple in Jerusalem and Cyrus’ edict directed toward the temple fits well with the centrality of the temple in Chronicles.

The contexts of two references to the seventy years in Jeremiah thematically correspond with the Chronicler’s narrative interpretation in the last chapter of his story. The Chronicler emphasizes the reason for God’s persistent sending of messengers to preach against the sins of the people as including the pity he had for his people and his dwelling place (2 Chron 36:15). This emphasis accords with the persistent warnings by the prophets across the years and including Jeremiah himself (Jer 25:4; cf. seventy years in 25:11). While Jeremiah associates the seventy years with Babylonian rule, in his letter he connects the completion of these years with renewal of his people. “For thus says Yahweh, ‘When the seventy years are fulfilled for Babylon,  

\(^{56}\) Since sabbath years are due once every 7 years, 70 sabbaths are due for 490 years of rebellion. Even a strong proponent of the Chronicler’s theology of immediate retribution like Dillard concedes the Chronicler has cumulative guilt in mind when he narrates the indictment against Zedekiah and the seventy years of exile (see 2 Chronicles, 300-1). Also see Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel, 480-85; Kelly, Retribution and Eschatology in Chronicles, 108-9.

\(^{57}\) Williamson says that the dates the Chronicler gives from the beginning of David’s reign to the destruction of the temple come to a total of 474 years, plus the uncertain length of the reign of Saul (see 1 Sam 13:1 MT) means 490 years is “more or less co-extensive” with the period of the monarchy (see 1 and 2 Chronicles, 418).


\(^{59}\) See Williamson, 1 and 2 Chronicles, 418.
I will visit you and I will establish upon you my good word to return you to this place” (29:10). The Chronicler may make allusion to this connection when speaks of Cyrus’ edict after referring to the seventy years of exile.

V

What are the findings of this study? The exile in Chronicles functions as collective retribution for the rebellion of the First Commonwealth. The Chronicler’s version of the exile explains divine judgment as deferrable and cumulative. The Chronicler establishes vertical accountability by tapping into Jeremiah’s claim to continuity of prophetic warning. The rejection of Jeremiah’s message—the latest of a long line—by Zedekiah, and the society continues the long tradition of deriding the messengers of God, finally provoking God to wrath against his people. The Chronicler goes so far as to calculate the length of accumulated judgment by identifying Jeremiah’s seventy years as the land’s sabbath years via exile. By “showing the math” the Chronicler clears away mystery regarding the rationale of the exile, at least in one respect. If the secret things belong to God, they do not include the mathematical equation of the exile’s duration in Chronicles.

The Chronicler’s interpretation of the exile as collective retribution of the First Commonwealth may have come from Leviticus 26:39 as noted above. The Chronicler, in part, built his case for the judgment from allusion to Yahweh’s word to Solomon including the need for the people to humble themselves (see 2 Chron 36:12 with 7:14 cited above) which, in turn, tracks with the needed response of the exiles (see Lev 26:41). The Chronicler contextualized the exile into an opportunity for response to God’s will by equating it with the sabbaths granted to the land by means of the exile of the covenantal community (see Lev 26:34, 35, 43). The Chronicler does not quote, “And those of you who survive shall rot because of their iniquities, in the land of your enemies, and even because of the iniquities of their ancestors they will rot with them” (26:39). Yet, by emphasizing both the responsibility of the final generation of the First Commonwealth and establishing their continuity with the vertical collective identity of their ancestors, Second Chronicles 36 shares this aspect of the ideology of exile with Leviticus 26.60

60 Jeffrey H. Tigay explains that the punishment explained in Lev 26:39 “occupies the middle ground between cross-generational retribution and the principle that individuals should be rewarded and punished only for their own deeds. It recognizes the reality of the former but holds that cross-generational rewards and punishments only come to those who merit similar retribution on their own” (Deuteronomy [JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996], 436-37). See the affirmations of and qualifications to Tigay’s point in Jacob Milgrom, Leviticus 23-27 (AB 3B; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2326-28. Also see Milgrom, Numbers, 392-96.
The Chronicler, it seems, built his interpretation of exile from the larger context of Leviticus 26, beyond those passages to which he alludes directly.\(^{61}\) In both Leviticus 26 and Second Chronicles 36 the judgment of God against the iniquities of the exiles and their ancestors situates the expatriates in a context where they need to humble themselves and respond to God’s plan for restoration.

What are significant selected implications of this study in terms of individual and/or collective retribution? Individual and collective retribution are not mutually exclusive.\(^{62}\) There is some merit in the recognition by Wellhausen, von Rad, Japhet, and many others, that the Chronicler makes explicit retributive justice in the lifetimes of many kings and many generations of the First Commonwealth. Greater attention to individually oriented accountability in no way precludes collective responsibility. The problem appears to be a mindset that says the Chronicler can only emphasize individual justice if he rejects the possibility of collective culpability. Reality does not work that way, and neither do the Deuteronomistic and Chronistic narratives.

Human persons simultaneous sustain multiple intersecting and overlapping social functions as a part of ordinary identity. An ancient person may be husband/father, and in a larger familial context brother/son/uncle/grandfather, while in society being temple-goer/city elder/employee/taxpayer, and so on. All of these social roles naturally carry their own sorts of responsibility—whether or not rules are followed, and whether or not injustice pervades. Normal social collectives and their associated responsibilities in no way excuse personal accountability, and vice versa. There are all sorts of contingencies, exceptions, and the like, but people naturally exist in multiple collectives, all of which is the normal stuff of identity and social function.\(^{63}\)

People typically do not object to collective identity when it means they benefit. Yet, ideals of fairness and justice materialize quickly and persistently in the wake of corporate accountability, especially punishment.\(^{64}\) Collective responsibility for citizens of a kingdom is not exceptional. Framing the issue between individual and collective poles diverts attention from the

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\(^{61}\) The idea that cited texts point to whole contexts is one part of Dodd’s hypotheses which remains viable even after his more speculative explanations on the use of scripture in scripture have been rightly challenged. See C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-structure of New Testament Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 126; and see Luke Timothy Johnson, *Septuagintal Midrash in the Speeches of Acts* (Père Marquette Lectures in Theology; Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 37.


\(^{64}\) For a similar comment see Kaminsky, “Sins of the Fathers,” 327.
more basic concerns of retribution and responsibility. When God holds an individual to account as an individual, he in no way abdicates his prerogative to bring judgment against the social collectives of which the individual is a part, and vice versa. The Chronicler’s explanation of the exile juxtaposes the persistent patience of God toward the First Commonwealth against the callous rebels who ridicule his messengers sent to warn the people of impending peril. Yet, the Chronicler does not conclude that the failure of the people eliminates their responsibility or the mercy of God. In Chronicles the exile is not the end, but fulfillment which opens new possibility and new responsibility. The edict of Cyrus simultaneously embodies fulfillment and new beginning for individual citizens who will participate in the assembly of God’s people.

How do the findings regarding the final chapter of Chronicles fit with the book as a whole? First, the corporate perspective is not confined to the final episode of the book. The ideals of deferred judgment and collective judgment are made explicit beginning with Hezekiah (2 Chron 32:25) and Josiah (34:26-28).65 Second, Mark Boda argues that Second Chronicles 36 needs to be interpreted in light of its intertextual connections with previous parts of the story. He suggests Hezekiah’s revival of worship that had been shut down by Ahaz, along with Manasseh’s repentance and restoration, need to be collated with the book’s ending.66 To this can be added David’s renewal of honor to God by means of bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, which had been neglected in Saul’s day. Days of declension and judgment provide opportunity for God’s people to respond to dark days in the fashion of David, Hezekiah, and even Manasseh. Together these narratives provide models for Chronicler’s target readers. These connections suggest some of the responsibilities and directions for the shared identity of those who accept the implications of Cyrus’ call to go up.

65 See Kelly, Retribution and Eschatology in Chronicles, 102-8. For other examples of deferred judgment in Chronicles, see Ehud Ben Zvi, “Are There Any Bridges Out There?: How Wide Was the Conceptual Gap between the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles?,” in Community Identity in Judean Historiography, 64-70 [59-86].