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RIGHT WITHOUT MIGHT: PROPHECY AND ENERVATION IN THE AMERICAN POLITICAL TRADITION

by

JONATHAN J. KELLER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
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Abstract

RIGHT WITHOUT MIGHT: PROPHECY AND ENERVATION IN THE AMERICAN POLITICAL TRADITION

by

JONATHAN J. KELLER

Adviser: Professor Corey Robin

This dissertation examines the ways Old Testament prophecy has influenced American political thought and rhetoric. Although political scientists have long recognized the impact of the Scriptures on the ways Americans express and think about themselves, they have misunderstood this important part of America's political tradition. I study political sermons by leading Protestant ministers in three historical eras, to demonstrate three claims. First, American prophecy is not a singular but a multiple tradition, consisting of three Old Testament rhetorics. Second, only one of these rhetorics encourages political action while the other two urge political quietism. Third, all three rhetorics thrived until the middle of the twentieth century, when they converged into one type, the activating kind known as the jeremiad. My study recasts our understanding of Biblical rhetoric in the United States, by demonstrating that, while it is often fiercely critical of the status quo, it has encouraged political quietism during significant periods of American history.

For Dr. Herbert E. Keller
(1926-1994)

He might have liked it

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

In the final public lecture of his storied career, Wilson Carey McWilliams called the Bible "the second voice in the grand dialogue of American political culture."[1] Fueled by ancient modes of thought and hostility to the Enlightenment, the Bible will always collide with the emotionless character of the liberal tradition, as a "rhetorical assault on the complacencies of material power, custom, and law." Unlike Greek myths, which justify established orders, the Bible – especially the Old Testament – puts readers in conflict with the world. [2] Or, as Herbert Schneidau famously put it, the political message of the Hebrew Bible can be summed up in two words: "sacred discontent."[3]

The Bible is often brought to bear on political matters through the language of Old Testament prophecy, the world's oldest tradition of political rhetoric.[4] Spanning a period of more than three hundred years from the eighth to the fifth centuries BCE, the fifteen books of the Navi (the Hebrew word for "prophet," or more literally, "one who is called" or "one who announces"[5]) reveal God's will during periods of social or political crisis, when first Assyria and then Babylon threatened to destroy Israel.

Scholars of American political thought have a special regard for the prophetic tradition, claiming that Old Testament prophecy in particular has a broad influence on American political rhetoric. They have noted that the raw edges of Amos' invective and the

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[1] Quoted in Wilson Carey McWilliams, Patrick Deneen, and Susan J. McWilliams, *The Democratic Soul: A Wilson Carey McWilliams Reader* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 11.
[2] Wilson Carey McWilliams, "The Bible in the American Political Tradition," in *Religion and Politics*, ed. Myron J. Aronoff (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 15.
[3] Herbert N. Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).
[4] Although Israelite prophecy began before the time of King Saul (eleventh century BCE), it was not until the mid-eighth century BCE that scribes began the process of assembling oracles under the individual prophets' names and preserving them in written form.
[5] Nevi'im is the plural form of the word. Its Greek equivalent, *prophetes*, from which the English word is derived, means "a person speaking for God." See Stephen L. Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, 8th ed. (New York**:** McGraw-Hill, 2011), 166.

deep despair of Jeremiah's lamentations are rarely far from the scene during periods of intense conflict in American history.[6] From Puritan declension over a collapsing moral order to the purgative fires of the Civil War to the apocalyptic narratives of the Christian Right, American rhetoric has always been steeped in biblical prophecy.[7]

Because of the persistence of this variety of incendiary rhetoric throughout American history, scholars have assumed that it necessarily encourages political action, that deeds are compelled by words. However, this appears to be true only some of the time, and I intend to show how biblical rhetoric actually has encouraged political quietism or withdrawal from politics during significant periods of American history. This dissertation will recast the way we understand prophetic rhetoric in the United States by demonstrating that, while it is often fiercely critical of the arrangements of the status quo, most of the time it has not encouraged Americans to take political action.

I make three central claims in support of my broader argument. First, American prophecy is not a singular but a multiple tradition, consisting of three Old Testament rhetorics. Second, only one of these rhetorics encourages political action while the other two urge political quietism. Third, all three rhetorics thrived until the middle of the twentieth century, when they converged into one type, the activating kind known as the jeremiad. As the American public sphere grows more secular and Biblical literacy decreases, "Bible talk" has become an increasingly narrow political rhetoric.

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[6] See Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); James Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Andrew R. Murphy, *Prodigal Nation: Moral Decline and Divine Punishment from New England to 9/11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ernest L. Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation; The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[7] Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, especially Chapter 3.

The Old Testament and the American Jeremiad

Scholars have tended to see the prophetic tradition in America as politically activating for four reasons. First, because they have not attended to the varieties of prophetic rhetoric in the Old Testament, they have failed to see similar varieties in the American context. In the Bible, different types of prophecy carry different political valences. Second, in focusing on one particular strain of the prophetic, they have overstated both the optimistic character and the politically activating purposes of the prophetic tradition. Third, they have relied upon a set of canonical texts in the American tradition, ignoring influential religious texts from particular historical eras. Finally, their analysis is driven by a political project that seeks to locate progressive possibilities in the American prophetic.

Scholars have long been enamored by "the office of the prophet" in the Hebrew Bible. The fifteen Navi are described variously as "the individual who said No to his society"[8] by Abraham Heschel, as "social critics"[9] by Michael Walzer, as "watchmen who forewarn"[10] by George Shulman, and as those "fiercely at odds with the prevailing political climate"[11] by Howard Moss. Textbooks in Judaic Studies routinely present the Nevi'im as the Old Testament's "inspirational voices of political dissent."[12]

Scholars of American prophecy, however, have either missed or ignored the fact that Old Testament prophets are almost all political failures. Although the fifteen books of the Nevi'im contain some of the most magnificent poetry and soaring prose in the Bible, these

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[8] Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Perennial, 2001), ix.
[9] Michael Walzer, "The Prophet as a Social Critic," in *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, The Tanner Lectures on Human Values (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 69-94.
[10] George M. Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 5.
[11] Howard Moss, "Amos," in *Congregation: Contemporary Writers Read the Jewish Bible*, ed. David Rosenberg (San Francisco, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 212.
[12] Stephen L. Harris and Robert Leonard Platzner, *The Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 122.

oft-quoted passages against the conventions and institutions of the day invariably fell on deaf ears. Christopher Hill says their messages were dismissed by their audiences as the "disproportionate rantings of a lunatic fringe."[13] But what should we make of the fact that the Israelites rarely respond to the call? I suggest that political theorists have misunderstood this biblical genre or, rather, that they have missed the fact that not all prophecy seeks the same end. In the Bible, the long arc of history does not always bend in the direction of justice.

One of the reasons scholars of American political thought have failed to note this persistent strain of failure in the prophetic mode – both in the Old Testament and in its replication in American context – is that they focus on one type of prophecy to the exclusion of others. Biblical scholars in fact distinguish between three types of prophetic rhetoric in the Old Testament: the pre-exilic, which contains bleak forecasts of an unalterable national destiny (e.g., Amos, Hosea); the exilic, which features effusive optimism about the future of the Israelites (e.g., Jeremiah, Ezekiel); and the post-exilic, in which we find apolitical and esoteric visions of an otherworldly apocalypse (e.g., Zechariah, Joel).[14] Scholars of American political thought, however, have either ignored this literature[15] or implicitly concluded, as Murphy, Shulman, and Bercovitch do, that these distinctions do not carry over to the American context and that the American style is universally modeled on Jeremiah. In either case, the multiplicity of American prophetic forms is not directly considered.

In 1978 Bercovitch published the first of a series of challenges to the liberal exceptionalist hypothesis of Louis Hartz. While he agreed with Hartz that America is a nation

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[13] Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 16.

[14] This typology is maintained by Harris and Platzner; Heschel; and Walter maintains it as well in *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001).

[15] For the best example, see Perry Miller, "Errand in the Wilderness," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January, 1953), 4-32; and Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

with a puzzling degree of political consensus, he disagreed about the nature of this consensus. Whereas Hartz argued that it consisted of a permanent commitment to liberal values (such as property and individualism), Bercovitch contended that it has nothing to do with philosophical ideas but instead consists of a common rhetorical structure of political argument. He coined the phrase "The American Jeremiad"[16] for the quintessential style of American political rhetoric, modeled on the Book of Jeremiah, which unites figures on all sides of the political spectrum.

For Bercovitch, the American Jeremiad is an urgent call to action that originated in Puritan forms of sermonizing. It assumes that America has a providential mission that remains unfulfilled. It endures because it is malleable enough to adapt to new historical circumstances: a previous mission can be exchanged for a new one; its protagonists can be replaced. But all jeremiads have two related features: first, they "feed on the distance between promise and fact" by speaking to the American yearning to "repair the breach."[17] That is, they seek to bring contemporary society into closer harmony with America's founding principles. Second, they unite Americans "in the bonds of myth," bonds that are sealed by the rhetoric of the "outmoded, quasi-biblical forms"[18] of the American Jeremiad. For example, a sermon by the Puritan minister John Cotton in 1642 and a speech by anarchist Paul Goodman in 1962 share an identical rhetorical structure. Since Bercovitch's groundbreaking work, the jeremiad has become the standard term of art among scholars when referring to prophetic political criticism in the United States.

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[16] Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*.
[17] Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 6.
[18] Ibid., 33.

In a series of more recent writings, Murphy has clarified and enhanced Bercovitch's concept. In order for a speech to qualify as a jeremiad, he argues, it must have four features. First, it must have an obsession with virtuous founders and worship them as heroes. Second, it must identify a decline in the present from the past. Third, it must identify turning points when this decline first appeared.[19] Finally, it must call for reform, repentance, or renewal, through a specific set of political actions. The key point is that narratives of decline are never the whole story in a jeremiad because it always ends with optimism about America's capacity to fulfill its promise.[20]

According to Murphy, two types of narratives can appear in a jeremiad: nostalgic and Golden Age. The idea of nostalgia emerges out of early modern European medicine, where it referred to extreme forms of homesickness observed among seventeenth-century army recruits. By the twentieth century nostalgia had come to describe not a medical condition but an affective state, one marked by bittersweet associations with some aspect of the personally experienced past – a past that is favorably contrasted with a degenerate present. For Murphy, nostalgic jeremiads refer to a person's actual memories of a "better time," as distorted and unreliable as those memories often are. The Golden Age narrative reaches much farther back in time, beyond the life experience of any listener, to the early days of the American republic. It idealizes foundational moments and tries to recapture lost virtues. Unlike the nostalgic type, the Golden Age version is wholly imagined; no one from the time the virtuous past is imagined is still alive. Either of these narratives can fuel a jeremiad, or they can be combined, as they frequently are in a jeremiad's call for political action.

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[19] Andrew R. Murphy, "Longing, Nostalgia, and Golden Age Politics: The American Jeremiad and the Power of the Past," *Perspectives on Politics* 7 (March 2009), 127.
[20] Ibid.

Murphy's enhancements to Bercovitch's conception still leave scholars unable to see the full spectrum of the Bible's contribution to American political rhetoric. They leave readers with the sense that there is only one type of biblical rhetoric in the United States. One of the tasks of this dissertation will be to reframe our understanding of this rhetorical tradition in light of its relationship to the Old Testament. The clarion call of the jeremiad is only one kind of biblical rhetoric. Others representing a long-standing religious counter-tradition are politically enervating because they leave things wholly in God's hands.[21]

Another reason scholars see prophecy as a singular form is their emphasis on "peak" figures (both religious and secular) who "speak through the Bible" to appeal to a wide audience, as opposed to focusing exclusively on ministers, who used Scripture to weigh in on political matters from the pulpit. A rotating cast of characters routinely appears – figures as historically and politically diverse as John Winthrop, Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Alexander Stephens, Jr., and Patrick J. Buchanan – to demonstrate the predominance of the jeremiad.[22] If instead we look only at sermons by influential Protestant ministers – what thousands of congregants listened to on Sunday mornings and in Election and Occasional sermons – the picture no longer appears uniform.

Intellectual historians have avoided this methodological weakness because they do not fixate exclusively on high-profile figures that by now are considered part of a grand national dialogue. Several of these historians have collected sermons and biblically rooted speeches given by the leading clergymen of various historical eras.[23] Political theorists have

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[21] Jonathan Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741) is a prime example.
[22] See Conrad Cherry, *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).
[23] See Ellis Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1998); Mark G. Toulouse and James O. Duke, ed., *Makers of Christian Theology in America*

not made sufficient use of this research, however. Their "top-down" approach, which relies on collections of canonical works by office holders, secular leaders, writers and some ministers – collections in which neither the authors nor the materials are divided by type – continues to drive theorizing about prophecy in American political thought. That said, while historians have produced detailed snapshots of the pulpit in each of these eras, their conclusions remain confined to explaining aspects of each period. The strengths of both disciplines (history and political theory) would be better served if they were combined in order to theorize about the whole of the prophetic style in America.

Finally, scholars of prophetic rhetoric frequently evaluate it according to its utility as a contribution to progressive political movements. Here most scholars make one of two moves: either they attempt, as Shulman does, to reclaim the progressive DNA of the prophetic so that it can be deployed to advance progressive political goals; or they conclude that it is necessary to abandon the jeremiad (a proposition Murphy considers) because it is inherently conservative. Both interpretations, however, assume that prophecy motivates political action.

Bercovitch concludes that the jeremiad constrains the American political imagination even more than the Hartzian consensus does. Since the heart of the jeremiad is the assertion of "a sacred national destiny" that can be adapted to any new historical circumstance, it has proven nearly impossible to shake. He argues, however, that it must be discarded, if left-wing movements can ever hope to gain traction in American politics, because it remains chained to the notion that America is a chosen nation. Unlike the ancient prophets, who saw Israel's chosen status as lighting a path to national salvation, Bercovitch sees that a rhetorical tradition

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(Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997); David B. Chesebrough, *"God Ordained This War": Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

that places a nation above all others cannot escape what he calls a "hermeneutic of non transcendence."[24] For Bercovitch, this closed hermeneutic places limits on Americans' political imagination and is synonymous with a conservative political outlook.

More recent scholars reject Bercovitch's conclusion and instead have tried to reclaim the progressive thrust of prophecy. Murphy and Shulman both ask whether the jeremiad, which always understands the past as a corrective for the present, is ultimately capacious enough to redeem a multi-ethnic America in the twenty-first century. Murphy's answer is yes and no. It depends on *what kind* of jeremiad: the Golden Age and nostalgic varieties are constraining because they emphasize the past as a "set of empirical conditions to be replicated as closely as possible in perpetuity."[25] Instead, Murphy advocates for a kind of prophetic vision akin to Sheldon Wolin's notion of a "birthright," which champions a set of emancipatory principles that emphasize the bringing forth of the nation as "*a proposition*" to be worked out by human actors.[26] In other words, a progressive jeremiad should aim to resurrect the vision of the framers, not the world in which they lived. Lincoln, Douglass, and King are, in this account, "capacious Jeremiadists"[27] whom Murphy admires. Shulman elevates the same three examples, framing them as prophets who "disclose a power of decision in our hands."[28]

James Morone agrees with Murphy and Shulman, but is far more ambitious. In *Hellfire Nation*, he hopes to explain policy outcomes across all of American history. He

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[24] Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent*, 4.
[25] Murphy, "Longing, Nostalgia, and Golden Age Politics," 133.
[26] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Contract and Birthright," *Political Theory*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (May, 1986), 179-193.
[27] Murphy, "Longing, Nostalgia, and Golden Age Politics," 135.
[28] Yet both Murphy and Shulman express nagging doubts. Shulman asks whether narrating a return to origins necessarily "creates a trap," which constrains the range of our political imagination (and therefore the range of desired political outcomes). Murphy wonders why King's jeremiad suddenly lost steam when he began to challenge America's involvement in Vietnam. In Murphy's understanding, King stretched the jeremiad beyond its essential anchor of American chosenness, reducing God's Country to a mere nation among others.

argues that "moral panics and dreams of virtue" are what move Americans to take political action, ultimately to "enlarge the American state."[29] The winning formula in American politics, he contends, has always been the one that temporarily wrests control of the "endless Jeremiad."[30] The last line of his book states, "For better and for worse, we remain Puritans all."[31] Like Shulman and Murphy, Morone admits to the jeremiad's shortcomings while still trying to reclaim its redemptive power.

Multiple Prophetic Traditions

This dissertation advances four propositions. First, American political rhetoric is driven by a wider range of Old Testament prophetic forms than scholars have realized. Scholars of American political thought have focused exclusively on the jeremiad, to the exclusion of the other forms. Second, these overlooked forms constitute a rhetorical counter-tradition, where a fiery biblical rhetoric encourages political quietism. Third, this counter-tradition remained stable over time, until the middle of the twentieth century, when the multiple forms of prophecy collapsed into one form, the jeremiad, because of the increasing secularization of the American public sphere. Finally, while the prophetic counter-tradition is fairly common, scholars of political thought overlook it because they focus primarily on secular leaders at the "commanding heights" of political influence. To focus on secular leaders, as many theorists do, is to treat as representative figures who are in fact outliers. This produces two additional effects: first, these leaders do not speak for the broader tradition of American prophecy – and hence, American Protestant theology in general; second, they fail to

[29] Morone, *Hellfire Nation,* 278.
[30] Ibid., 497.
[31] Ibid., 463.

capture the contributions of influential religious minds to the broader tradition of American political thought.

While scholars have noted that American politicians frequently draw on Old Testament sources and mimic the "registers of voice" of the Hebrew prophets,[32] they incorrectly assume that political sermons can be reduced to a singular form, the jeremiad, which is defined as "a call to action, an exhortation to reform the community in the image of its founders and godly ancestors."[33] In fact, American political sermons mirror three types of Old Testament prophecy that were formulated at three distinct moments in Jewish history: before (pre-exilic), during (exilic), and after (post-exilic) the Babylonian Exile of 587 BCE.[34] In American hands, each form is incendiary and casts America as biblical Israel. Two of them – the pre-exilic and the post-exilic – are pessimistic about the nation's future, however, and encourage political quietism.

Modeled on Amos and Hosea, the pre-exilic form casts America's future as one of hopeless decline. These sermons disavow Winthrop's "City on a Hill" imagery of inevitable national ascension and compare America to the impenitent biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. These prophets' diagnosis is fatal: America's sins are unforgivable, and God's judgment cannot be averted. America will be destroyed – as Israel was – usually by a foreign power serving as the instrument of God's anger.[35]

Modeled on Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah, the exilic form also begins with a dire assessment but anticipates a national recovery. The jeremiad forces the audience to choose

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[32] Shulman, ix.
[33] Murphy, *Prodigal Nation*, 32.
[34] Harris, Chapter 16.
[35] In the Old Testament, the Assyrian Empire destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE and the Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom of Judah in 587.

between two possible futures: one where America is destroyed and another where it is rescued. The second is contingent on human action that prompts God to deliver the nation. Jeremiads identify and then call specific individuals to action as the redeemers of an "enduring national promise,"[36] which will allow America to regain God's favor.

The post-exilic form mirrors the "killjoy" narrative of later Hebrew prophets Joel and Zechariah, who wrote after the Jews returned from exile and reclaimed Israel. Here the nation's recent triumph is depicted as a disappointing "half-achievement."[37] These sermons cast aspersions on the usefulness of political engagement and begin to look for answers in an otherworldly apocalypse. Here the tension between political weariness and apocalyptic expectation produces great uncertainty. The calls for reform are muted, and the rhetoric lacks the intensity of the pre-exilic and exilic forms.

The two quietist strains of American prophecy – the pre- and post-exilic – remain obscured because scholars of American political thought have focused primarily on political leaders who are trying to appeal to a national audience. While these figures frequently speak in the registers of the Nevi'im and draw analogies between ancient Israel and the United States, they exemplify only the exilic form, the jeremiad. Scholars have mistaken this form for the whole because they have failed to draw a sharp line between the ways of the ministers (who have authority to explain what the Scriptures mean) and those of the political leaders (who do not) "speak through the bible" in the political arena. I argue that the canonical political orators use the jeremiad because it is the least deterministic of the three forms and because it is the only one that explicitly makes political action on behalf of the nation the condition for divine redemption. Since these peak figures are political agents par excellence,

[36] Murphy, *Prodigal Nation*, 11.
[37] Harris, 203.

they are naturally drawn to this strain of biblical rhetoric, often to shock an enervated public into taking political action.

This project recasts the scholarly understanding of the American prophetic by turning to a set of literatures that has gone largely unexamined by political scientists and literary theorists. First, I return to Scripture itself, which I use to show that the terrain of prophecy is richer and more complex than scholars have indicated. My readings show that this terrain contains not one overarching prophetic rhetoric but three distinct varieties, two of which are politically enervating. Second, rather than turning to the great speeches and canonical texts as most scholars do, I examine sermons by leading Protestant ministers that more accurately and fully capture the richness of the American prophetic tradition. The majority of these sermons reject optimistic narratives of hope and political activism. Turning to these texts will provide a more complete understanding of prophecy than the extraordinary or exceptional approach most scholars have taken.

The political preaching of Protestant clergymen reveals a persistent tradition of prophetic rhetoric that is remarkably stable over time – in spite of shifting historical circumstances and the maturation of Protestant theology and American civil religion. While at "the commanding heights," America is continually cast in the redemptive frame of the jeremiad, closer to the ground level, where my project will focus, the jeremiad does not prevail until the middle of the twentieth century. Prior to that point, the two enervating forms (the pre- and post-exilic) dominate the political sermonizing of Protestant ministers. Taken together, they constitute an American rhetorical tradition that undermines the promise and possibility of political action.

Case Selection & Methodology

My argument turns on demonstrating that American prophecy is a multiple, rather than a singular tradition, that its multiplicity can be seen by focusing on speeches that are not ordinarily part of the American rhetorical canon, and that these alternative traditions are sustained over time.

I rely on collections of published sermons by politically influential ministers – opinion leaders who are "second-tier" political actors but "first-tier" religious leaders – as opposed to collections of speeches by the superstars of American political oratory like Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass – public figures who skillfully wove the Bible into their most celebrated speeches.[38] I use four criteria to determine whether each figure meets the second-tier standard: first, they must be Protestant ministers; second, they must lead large congregations; third, their sermons must have been published in leading Christian publications before being collected by scholars; finally, each must be a significant contributor to the central theological debates of their era.

In Chapters Two and Three, on the American Revolution and the Civil War respectively, I rely largely on collections of sermons assembled by historians.[39] In Chapter Four (on the Christian Right and the Civil Rights Movement), I have assembled the document base myself, relying upon the same four criteria in my selection of ministers and sermons.

My argument could be countered in several ways. First, one could critique my methodology from the "everyday" level (at the ground level). For example, some scholars

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[38] Douglass's "What to the Slave is the 4th of July," and Lincoln's "Second Inaugural Address," are two examples of speeches that appear in collections such as Stephen R. Prothero's *The American Bible: How Our Words Unite, Divide, and Define a Nation* (New York: HarperOne, 2012).

[39] See Cherry, *God's New Israel;* Chesebrough, *"God Ordained This War."* One exception is the political scientist Ellis Sandoz's collection, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*.

argue that unpublished manuscript sermons are more representative of local preaching (and therefore Protestant religious culture in general) than the marquee published manuscripts examined in this dissertation.[40] I must demonstrate first that this level of actor is overlooked by scholars of American political thought, second that he appears in all the eras, and third that he operates at the right level of influence to demonstrate my hypothesis.

Second, it might be argued that perhaps my figures are themselves outliers or exceptions. How do I know that they are not? In several cases, historians have already situated these figures within the larger sectarian terrain. In these cases the added value will be a fine-grained analysis of how the minster interpreted the Bible in order to wield it as a political text. In cases where scholars have not sufficiently placed the minister in his historical element, I will do so before making the exegetical arguments that drive the central claims of the dissertation.

Third, scholars of American religion often caution that the Bible means different things in different historical eras – that any metaphor, concept, or historical analogy is particular.[41] How can the reader be certain that my tripartite analogy is sustained over time? The fact that I am able to establish that in the twentieth century it was no longer sustained demonstrates that I am as sensitive to historical context as my potential skeptics. The exception proves the rule.

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[40] This remains an ongoing debate among historians. On the unpublished manuscript side, see Donald Weber, *Rhetoric and History in Revolutionary New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). On the published manuscript side, see Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*; Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[41] See Introduction to Cherry, *God's New Israel.*

Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter One will introduce the Hebrew Prophets as political characters. I begin with a rereading of the fifteen books of the Nevi'im, as well as a critical engagement with scholarship in theology and political theory. This chapter has two purposes: first, to articulate the three types of Old Testament prophecy recognized by biblical scholars – pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic – composed before, during, and after the Babylonian Exile of 587 BCE;[42] second to argue that two of these kinds (pre- and post-exilic) do not encourage political action.

In Chapter Two I join the recent scholarly effort to reestablish the central role of the Bible in shaping the political rhetoric of the American founding era. I interpret six sermons by leading Protestant ministers in order to demonstrate two claims: first, all three modes of Hebraic prophecy appeared during this era and second, these rhetorics appeared in the same order that they appear in the Old Testament. Prior to the American Revolution, sermons encouraged political quietism, corresponding to the pre-exilic mode; during the Revolutionary War, the narrative shifted to the exilic cry for war; and, finally, in the aftermath of the Constitutional Convention, sermons reflected the muted praise of the post-exilic prophets. These biblical narratives endured, I argue, because they provided ministers with a sacred language to capture the political situation at any point along the historical trajectory of the American founding.

Chapter Three will demonstrate the enduring impact of Old Testament rhetoric during the Civil War era. In this chapter I also interpret six sermons, three by leading Northern preachers and three by Southerners, to demonstrate the persistence of the same three modes of

[42] See Harris, Chapter Five.

Old Testament prophecy, pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic, that I presented in Chapters One and Two. I argue that in the North the rhetoric progressed from pre-exilic to exilic to post-exilic. In the South, what began as a pre-exilic theology progressed to an exilic one during the Civil War – where it would remain long after the war ended, as Southern ministers became the leading spokesmen for the "Theology of the Lost Cause."[43]

In Chapter Four I argue that in the contemporary era prophetic rhetoric has winnowed to one type, the jeremiad. Because the American public sphere has become increasingly secular, Bible talk now yields diminishing returns in American politics. Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, high-profile ministers who used the pulpit to exert political influence could no longer fight a political battle through the language of religion but instead were forced to fight a political battle about the status of religion itself. Because the jeremiad is the most political of the prophetic rhetorics, it was the natural language of ministers trying to extend their visions into the political sphere. In this chapter, I again interpret six sermons, three by leading ministers of the Christian Right and three from the Civil Rights Movement, in order to demonstrate that, although these ministers pursued very different agendas, their sermons deployed the jeremiad, the only biblical rhetoric that still resonates in the American political arena.

The concluding chapter will summarize the main points of the dissertation and offer suggestions for the further study of American prophecy. Here I expand on the argument in Chapter Four about contemporary scholars' fixation on the jeremiad, which has led them to make an unwarranted generalization about all of American history based on the contemporary

[43] Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009).

historical moment. This weakness in the scholarship on the Bible in American politics parallels a more general speculation I offer about the future role of the Bible in America, a society that continues to hold the Bible in high regard yet is increasingly ignorant about its contents.

Chapter 1: Old Testament Prophecy

This chapter will introduce the classical Hebrew prophets as political figures and their work as political discourse. First, I will explain what this genre of biblical literature is, how it is related to other parts of the Bible, who the fifteen prophets (known as Nevi'im in the Hebrew Bible) are, and how they came to be canonized as political critics. Next, I will describe the evolution of the prophetic genre within the Old Testament over the 300-year period in which it developed. While all fifteen Nevi'im are preoccupied with the connection between Israel's covenant violations and its inevitable destruction, they vary significantly on both the prospect and nature of a future restoration.[1] A distinct type of prophecy emerges from each of three historical periods – pre-exilic, exilic, and post exilic – and is marked by a central political message of, respectively, impending doom and dispossession, ecstatic hope and national recovery, and post-achievement ambivalence and apocalypse. Prophesy starts as an open proclamation of Yahweh's condemnation of Israel; as it draws closer to its canonical end, it becomes increasingly esoteric in language and perspective as well as increasingly remote from historical circumstances.

In both the Old and New Testaments, figures as diverse as the patriarch Abraham, the lawgiver Moses, the warrior Joshua, the judge Samuel, and John the Baptist, are all referred to at one point or another as prophets. Even Christ is compared with a prophet at several points in the New Testament.[2] In addition, the Bible contains scores of prophetic utterances – oracles, predictions, and cryptic warnings – throughout the entirety of the text. A popular

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[1] Donald E. Gowan, *Theology of the Prophetic Books: The Death and Resurrection of Israel*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).
[2] See Luke 4:14-30 for the best example. All biblical references hereafter are from Robert P. Carroll and Stephen Prickett, *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

religious studies textbook defines a biblical prophet in appropriately general terms as "one who preaches or proclaims the word or will of his or her deity, a true prophet in Israel was regarded as divinely inspired."[3]

In Deuteronomy, a text often referred to as the "Constitution"[4] of ancient Israel, God introduces the "office of the prophet" after concluding that direct communication with Israel was a failed enterprise. As Daniel Elazar explained:

> This is a new institution and is presented as such, that God will raise up prophets to whom Israel should hearken, that prophets were introduced in place of requiring the people to meet God face to face, since the people had rejected that possibility at Horeb/Sinai out of discomfort with that confrontation.[5]

Beginning with Moses, prophecy endured as a defining institution of Israelite religious culture. In the Pentateuch Moses is presented as the ideal prophet, "whom the Lord knew face to face" and spoke to "Plainly, and not in riddles,"[6] thus anticipating the functions that later prophets would be expected to carry out. Yet in the Book of Numbers, God announces that he will no longer communicate with Israel directly. Instead, from time to time he will "raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."[7] Four centuries later, Amos, the first prophet to author a biblical text in his own name, reiterated the central role of prophecy in God's relationship with his people: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing," he declared, "but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."[8]

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[3] Stephen L. Harris, *Understanding the Bible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), G-36.
[4] The term for constitution in ancient Israel is Torah, literally "teaching," in this case a divine teaching.
[5] Daniel J. Elazar, *Covenant & Polity in Biblical Israel: Biblical Foundations & Jewish Expressions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 207.
[6] Numbers 12:6.
[7] Deuteronomy 18:18.
[8] Amos 3:7.

Distinguishing between true and false prophets was a daunting task, however. Although impersonating a prophet was punishable by death, the Bible offers little help identifying pretenders. Deuteronomy provides two contradictory criteria. In Chapter Twenty-Two, God explains that "when a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously."[9] In hindsight it is, of course, easy to tell which prophets have told the truth, because their predictions proved accurate, and their testaments became part of the biblical canon. But in the present, this criterion is of little assistance. Only the second criterion, if a "dreamer of dreams hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, he shall be put to death,"[10] is of immediate value. By definition, someone who instructed the Jews to worship a God other than Yahweh could not be a true prophet, even if his predictions proved accurate.

Six centuries later, Jeremiah, a contemporary of Deuteronomy's redactor,[11] added only this heavily biased advice: "The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him."[12] In other words, prophets who aim to upset established orders – political, religious, or social – might very well be the true representatives of God. In Chapter Two, I will show how eighteenth-century ministers stretched to deploy Jeremiah as a prophet of war. When dealing with the Bible on its own terms, however, it is more accurate to say that Jeremiah warned against

[9] Deuteronomy 22:18.
[10] Deuteronomy 13:5.
[11] Richard Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1997), 127.
[12] Jeremiah 28: 8-10.

prophets who predicted a bright future and/or recommended following the path of least resistance. Prophets of peace and prosperity could not be considered reliable, Jeremiah cautioned – unless, of course, their predictions come to pass.

Historical Context: Prophets and the Rise of Monarchy

The classical prophets are different from the figures known as "former prophets," like Abraham, Moses, and Samuel, as well as the sycophantic "house prophets" employed by biblical monarchs, for two reasons. First, the Nevi'im recorded their prophecies in the form of self-contained scrolls, and they are identified as the authors of the texts bearing their names. For example, The Book of Jeremiah, like its fourteen counterparts, contains short biographical information on the prophet's origin, an account of the time, location, and manner of his calling by God, followed by a lengthy account of his ministry. Second, as Abraham Heschel pointed out, former prophets like Moses essentially embodied all three functions of king, priest, and prophet. Over time, Heschel explained, the failure of both the monarchs and the priests led God to conclude that a kind of separation of powers was necessary between kings, priests, and prophets.[13] Kings led the state and the military, priests oversaw the temple and ritual, and prophets communicated messages received directly from God.[14]

Although the writings of the Nevi'im date as far back as the eighth century BCE (and the canonization of their writings as a distinct, separate collection of literature did not occur until the second century BCE), the original literary form of biblical prophecy began in the

[13] Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 12.
[14] This distinction, at least in theory, actually occurs much earlier in the Bible than Heschel indicated. Deuteronomy, an eleventh century text, summarizes the previous four books of the Torah in anticipation of a new polity in Canaan – one of separated but shared powers. A bright line is drawn between three ketarim ("crowns"), domains of power: keter torah (the Crown of Torah), keter kehunah (the Crown of Priesthood), and keter malkhut (the Crown of Kingship or civil rule).

eleventh century and was intimately tied to the rise of the Hebrew monarchy. Samuel, for instance, is given a dual role in the formation of the monarchy. In Samuel I and II the Former Prophet (and last of the Judges) bitterly opposes kingship, he says, because God does not want the Jews to be ruled by a king. He later becomes instrumental, however, in the election of Saul and David to the throne. In fact, Saul is anointed by Samuel; God then commands Samuel to support and help guide Saul, even though he knows his kingship has already been doomed to failure. Toward the end of his life, Saul asks Samuel for forgiveness and help in finding his way back into God's good graces. Samuel turns his back on him, telling Saul that God has condemned him, because he has "rejected the word of the Lord and therefore the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel."[15] Thomas Paine would later inspire American ministers to use this passage from Samuel to preach that monarchy is an illegitimate form of rule in the Bible or, at the very least, that kingship is frowned upon. Yet in the next verse, Samuel reveals to Saul that God will send the Jews their first great king, "a better man than you."[16] In 1 Samuel 16:1-23 Samuel anoints Israel's second king, David, establishing the Royal House of David and sanctioning a patrilineal line that would last more than four centuries. At the apex of the monarchic period, David's son Solomon "ruled over all the kingdoms west of the Euphrates River from Tiphsah to Gaza; he was at peace with all his neighbors."[17]

Prophets of a certain type were active at this time, but they were very different from the canonized rhetoricians they would become later on. They served in the royal court, giving

[15] 1 Samuel 15: 26-27.
[16] 1 Samuel 15:28.
[17] 1 Kings 4:24. At its greatest extent, David's kingdom reportedly stretched from the Euphrates River in the northeast to the frontiers of Egypt in the south – the borders of the Davidic state thus corresponded exactly to those which Yahweh outlined to Abraham in Genesis 15:18.

advice to kings and making predictions, but they did not represent a forceful, independent point of view. In Isaiah's terms, these prophets were false, because they spoke "smooth words."[18] It is not clear whether they are receiving the true word of God, because at that time God also communicated directly with the monarchs David and Solomon as well as with the priests who oversaw temple ritual and practice.

The golden age of monarchy did not last long, however. In 922 BCE the kingdom split in two, Judah to the south and Israel to the north. Over the next three hundred years, these fragile kingdoms were led by undistinguished kings and were intermittently threatened by surrounding hostile empires: first by Assyria in the eighth century BCE and then by Babylon in the sixth. Ultimately, the two fragile kingdoms proved to be no match for these powerful empires. Israel was destroyed in 722 BCE, and Judah was utterly defeated in 597 BCE. Ten years later, Solomon's temple was razed, and the Babylonians deported thousands of Judeans. This is the moment when the classical prophets, as opposed to the former and house prophets, appeared on the scene. The Nevi'im provided God's explanations for these previously unimaginable losses, both before and while they were happening. As theologian Donald Gowan put it, the Nevi'im became necessary because "the notion that actually losing the land was a possibility was not taken seriously until it actually happened."[19] In order to fully understand the role of Samuel's progeny, however, it is necessary first to consider both where the Nevi'im appear in the Bible and what role they played there as God's interpreters of history.

[18] Isaiah 30:10.
[19] Gowan, 16.

The Nevi'im's Location and Purpose in the Bible: A Commentary on Deuteronomic History

The placement of the classical prophets within the biblical canon is of central importance. In most Christian Bibles, including the King James Version, the fifteen books of the Nevi'im are removed from their historical context, placed instead at the end of the Old Testament.[20] In the Hebrew Bible, however, the prophets occupy the second of three sections of the Tanakh –Torah (T), Nevi'im (N), and Ketuvim (K). Torah consists of the Five Books of Moses; Ketuvim, the wisdom literature, are the final eleven books of the Old Testament; Prophets (Nevi'im) consists of twenty-one books, divided into two genres. The first six (Joshua-2 Kings) are the historical texts of the "Former Prophets" and feature charismatic leaders like Joshua and Samuel. The second part, the fifteen books of the "Latter Prophets," is divided according to the length of the scrolls (not their theological importance). The three "Major Prophets," Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, appear first. The twelve "Minor Prophets" (Hosea-Malachi) follow them.

Of particular note is the fact that the Nevi'im follow the books of the Former Prophets, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, texts that provide a linear account of Israel's history from the conquest of Canaan in the thirteenth century BCE to the destruction of the Jewish state in the sixth century BCE. Biblical scholars refer to these six books as the "Deuteronomic History" because their theologically oriented narratives reinterpret Israel's historical experience. This includes how the Israelites first took possession of the territory promised to Abraham's descendants and then lost it, according to a narrow interpretation of Deuteronomy that is focused exclusively on principles of divine retribution.

[20] I will have more to say about the importance of this in the following chapter. Mainline ministers in the Revolutionary Era generally understood the historical ordering of Old Testament texts and invoked them appropriately.

Using Deuteronomy as a historical sourcebook, the Nevi'im offer extended commentaries on Jewish history – accounts that explain how the covenant was violated or honored and why certain leaders and/or people were rewarded or punished. Below I provide an overview of the canonization of the Deuteronomic texts, in order to make it possible to understand the tradition that gave birth to the Nevi'im. Afterwards I return to a discussion of the ways they complicated and exceeded that tradition in their attempts to recover the ancient "constitution" at the heart of the Old Testament.

The Deuteronomic recasting of Israel's history required two stages to complete. The first redaction was undertaken in the sixth century BCE after Deuteronomy was rediscovered during the reign of the Judean King Josiah (640-610).[21] Josiah considered Deuteronomy the blueprint for a Jewish polity and ordered strict enforcement of its civil and religious codes throughout the kingdom. He commissioned court scribes to collect and edit the scrolls of Israel's history, refracting them exclusively through the lens of Deuteronomy or, rather, a particular understanding of Deuteronomy's principles. Events that a contemporary historian would view as the natural consequences of specific political or military conditions, the Deuteronomistic writers attributed solely to Israel's religious health.

This edition marked a big shift, as the Bible now justified violence, warfare, and genocide. In Genesis, Israel's ancestors generally live peaceably among the ethnically mixed inhabitants of Canaan; some of whom, such as the king-priest Melchizedek (Gen. 14:17–24) and King Abimelech (Gen. 20:1–18), appear as admirable characters. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob freely make alliances and conduct business with their Canaanite neighbors with little indication that the native population is morally problematic. By contrast, the Deuteronomistic

[21] Harris, 123.

writers portrayed the Canaanites as so dangerous to Israel's religious faith that they must be totally exterminated. The introduction to Joshua, for example, concentrates on the link between Torah observance and military victory before launching into a rapid series of successful attacks on Canaanite centers.[22] Pursuing a deliberate policy of genocide, Joshua's troops treat all Canaanites as condemned criminals, "delivering every single soul over to the ban, as Yahweh the God of Israel had commanded."[23]

A variety of battle scenes in Joshua portray Yahweh as an invincible warrior-king who directs Israel's assault on the Canaanites, granting the tribes total victory only when they are fully loyal to their covenant with him. In total, thirty-one kings and their armies are vanquished by Joshua's army – a far cry from the petrified Israelites depicted in Numbers. But the scene that resonates most strongly (especially in pro-war quarters during the American Revolution and Civil War, subjects taken up in the following chapters) occurs in Joshua 5:13: a supernatural "captain" of Yahweh's army suddenly appears to Joshua in human form, brandishing "a naked sword."[24] Fighting invisibly alongside Israel's soldiers, the presence of this heavenly commander reveals that God has predetermined Israel's success. The second half of the book then moves seamlessly into the apportioning of conquered territory among the twelve tribes, concluding with Joshua's farewell speech and an intertribal covenant-renewal ceremony.[25] In retrospect, the redactors apparently concluded that the only way to have protected Israel from religious apostasy was to eliminate Canaanite temptations altogether. The option of teaching Israel's neighbors the ethical superiority of Yahweh's Torah was no longer explored.

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[22] Joshua, 2-12.
[23] Joshua 10:40.
[24] Joshua 5:13.
[25] Joshua 13-22.

In its original form, the Deuteronomistic history has a remarkable literary symmetry. It begins with Joshua's stunning military and religious exploits and ends in 2 Kings with the triumphant reign of Josiah, who zealously purged Yahwism of Canaanite influences, led the people in a renewal of their covenant vows, and led the military effort to reconquer most of the Promised Land. Hence, Josiah is one of only two monarchs (aside from King David) to receive an unqualifiedly positive review in the Books of Kings.[26] His achievements, as recounted in 2 Kings 22-23, are highlighted by the centralization of temple worship in Jerusalem, making it illegal to make sacrifices at the "high places," urban and rural sites where Yahweh's rituals had been performed since the days of Abraham and Jacob. The Deuteronomistic writers denigrated all of the rulers of the northern kingdom for setting up rival shrines in such places and reserved their approval only for Josiah and Hezekiah, religious zealots framed as the only true guardians of Israel's ancient constitution. Traditional methods of evaluating political leadership are nowhere to be found in these texts.

Two catastrophic events rendered this version of history untenable, however. First, Josiah was unexpectedly killed in battle in 609, and his glorious reign was followed by national calamity just twenty-five years later. The final chapter of 2 Kings describes the end of the Jewish monarchy and its people's dispossession from Judea:

> And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the Lord and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls of Jerusalem all around. Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive the rest of the people who remained in the city and the defectors who had deserted to the king of Babylon, with the rest of the multitude…

[26] The other is the Judean King Hezekiah (715-686 BCE).

…Thus Judah was carried away captive from its own land.[27]

Since Josiah could no longer be seen as the climactic fulfillment of the covenant people's relationship to Yahweh, the Deuteronomistic historians had to revise their neatly symmetrical presentation of Israel's history to reflect the devastating historical reality of the Babylonian exile. Viewing Israel's history from the perspective of exile, the Deuteronomistic editors had to find a way to explain both the nation's collapse and the extinction of David's royal line, which Yahweh had promised would govern his people forever.[28] Subordinating the complexities of history to a single theme, the Deuteronomic history drives home the point that God's protection was no longer unconditional; the covenant was no longer Davidic. In other words, it was being restored to its original, Mosaic (conditional) form. When Israel's leaders remained true to the covenant, the nation prospered. But when David's successors – most notoriously, King Manasseh – violated the Mosaic pact, Yahweh abandoned his people to their more powerful Near Eastern neighbors. Harris sums it up well:

> Without land, kings, sacrifices, or temple, anonymous editors in Babylon – striving to understand their God's intentions – reworked ancient legal and prophetic traditions to produce the epic of Israel's creation and fall, Genesis through 2 Kings.[29]

In this "exilic" redaction several key phases of Israel's political development had to be reframed, including the period of chaotic, decentered rule under military leaders in the Book of Judges – the "confederate drift" which led to the establishment of monarchy under King Saul. Other examples include the rise and fall of the royal House of David, beginning with the golden age of monarchy under Kings David and Solomon (1010-930 BCE); the division

[27] 2 Kings 25: 1-11; 18.
[28] In 2 Samuel 7:13-16, God promises David that, "He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men; But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever."
[29] Harris, 163.

of the monarchy into the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah in 922 BCE; and, finally, the conquests of Israel by the Assyrian Empire in the eighth century BCE and Judah by the Babylonians in the sixth. Writing from a deliberately limited viewpoint, the Deuteronomistic author(s) proposed only one factor to account for Israel's rise and fall, across eras: its loyalty or disloyalty to Yahweh. All the factual information that a modern historian would consider essential – a more objective picture of the social, economic, cultural, and religious forces that created ancient Israel – are nowhere to be found. Sometimes the judgment focused on a political leader, a general like Joshua, a judge like Sampson,[30] or a king like Solomon. At other times, the "edah" (the congregation) was placed on trial. In either case, fidelity to the Deuteronomic covenant became the sole standard by which the political fortunes of the ancient Israelites was judged.

Neither of these versions related sufficiently to Israel's constitution. As Elazar pointed out, like other ancient constitutions, Deuteronomy is an expansive text, aimed at the ordering of the entire polity, not merely its government. Because it is limited, a great deal is left open to interpretation. It does not specify institutional structures or arrangements in the way of modern constitutions (a subject that will come into play again in Chapter Two, regarding the issue of kingships vs. republics). Although Deuteronomy is the restatement of the teachings of the previous four books of the Torah in more systematic and properly constitutional form (with some final additions and modifications adapting the constitution to a settled life in the

[30] A transitional book surveying the turbulent period between Joshua's death and the formation of the Israelite monarchy (c. 1200–1020 BCE), today Judges is the principal source of information about Israel before it became organized as a national state. The composite narrative portrays a weak and disunited people struggling on two fronts: to maintain their precarious toehold in Canaan and to discover their identity as a covenantal community. The compilers of Judges imposed a theoretical unity on their extremely diverse sources by organizing Israel's premonarchic history into a cyclical pattern: when a Judge loyal to Yahweh presided and the people worshiped Israel's God exclusively, the whole community prospered, winning battles against invading troops and reaping the benefits of their heritage. After the Yahwist judge died, however, the people soon "prostitute themselves to Baal," arousing Yahweh's anger and causing him to deliver them over to enemy oppression.

promised land), it is animated by *Hesed*, which means something like "loving covenant obligation."[31] As Elazar explained, "Hesed is the antidote to the narrow legalism that can be a problem for covenantal systems and would render them contractual rather than covenantal." This formed the basis of Jewish political thought, he argued, that goes beyond a concern with following laws."[32] Thus, Elazar concluded that the rich ambiguity of Deuteronomy "lays out the possibilities the prophets later demonstrate: why they can be dispossessed, but can be restored."[33]

The Nevi'im: Interpreters of Israel's "Constitution"

In the collections of prophetic writings that follow the Deuteronomistic History in the Hebrew Bible (traditionally called the Latter Prophets), readers discover the specific ways the covenant was violated by the Israelites, which is to say, why the aggressive powers of Mesopotamia (first Assyria and then Babylon) were permitted to overwhelm the chosen people. Spanning a period of more than 300 years (roughly from the middle of the eighth to late in the fifth centuries BCE), the canonical prophetic books reveal Yahweh's will during periods of social or political crisis. Divine explanations are provided for these unimaginable events.

The fifteen Nevi'im expanded the Deuteronomic accounts in order to problematize and deepen the meaning of the covenant between the Jews and Yahweh. They expanded the Bible's understanding in two senses. First, they took factors more familiar to social scientists

[31] Daniel Elazar, "Deuteronomy as Israel's Ancient Constitution: Some Preliminary Reflections" (April 2, 1992) http://jcpa.org/article/deuteronomy-as-israels-ancient-constitution-some-preliminary-reflections/.
[32] Daniel Elazar, "HaBrit V'HaHesed: Foundations of the Jewish System," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (January 1990): 4.
[33] Elazar, "Deuteronomy as Israel's Ancient Constitution."

into account such as how efficiently the king managed his kingdom, how popular he was, or how deftly he handled relations with neighboring peoples. Second, they insisted that obeying the covenant necessarily required the adoption of a wider conception of justice than the Deuteronomic historian(s) contended, one that encompassed concerns of economic exploitation, imperialism, authentic practices of worship, and treatment of non-Hebraic peoples living amongst the prophets' audiences. This represents what Michael Walzer termed "the earliest form of political criticism."[34]

Although this dissertation is primarily concerned with differences between types of prophecy, I should note that all Nevi'im shared at least six characteristics. First, they used the Deuteronomic History as source material in order to offer their opinions. Second, although several prophets were descended from priestly families, as a group they generally kept their distance from both the temple and the royal court, asserting an independence that reflected their self-perception as Yahweh's servants alone. Third, they shared a vision of a righteous God who demanded exclusive worship and thus all persons or nations who attempted to picture divinity in human or other form were guilty of idolatry. Fourth, they simultaneously announced God's will in an immediate crisis and presented glimpses of the future. Fifth, they exhibited a range of behaviors and personality traits that distinguished them from priests, wisdom teachers, and other spiritual leaders of Israelite society. They dramatized their messages through unconventional, sometimes outrageous conduct; they publicly acted out their visions in vivid displays of ecstatic passion that could not fail to attract onlookers' attention. Sixth, they recast the terms of the covenant with God by linking exclusive worship of Yahweh with ethical behavior.

[34] Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, The Tanner Lectures on Human Values (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 71.

Pre-Exilic Prophecy: The Destruction of Israel and Judah

Six of the fifteen classical prophets – Amos, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk (as well as one-third of a seventh, Isaiah[35]) – can be classified as pre-exilic because they were active prior to two moments of extreme devastation and destruction, the conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrian empire late in the eighth century BCE and the destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians in the sixth.

Both of these catastrophic events were seemingly unimaginable until they occurred. In reality, the leaders of each kingdom probably failed to take the threats posed by these neighboring empires seriously, but in the biblical account the notion that God would not intervene as he always had and protect the Jews from their imperialistic neighbors was unthinkable. Hence, this group of prophets were delivering a message that was bound to be considered preposterous. The general point made by Walzer (in response to Weber's characterization of the Nevi'im as demagogues) that prophets are profoundly uninterested in gaining sympathizers seems especially true in the pre-exilic period.[36] The citizens of the two kingdoms believed themselves to be at moments of relative peace and security when they were confronted by these figures with a message from God that they would soon be destroyed and were subjected to what must have seemed disproportionately harsh, unremitting rage by these prophets.

Although there are variations between the pre-exilic prophets in terms of setting, tone, and message, they share at least eight distinct features, which are most visible in the books of

[35] Although traditionally regarded as the work of a single prophet, the Book of Isaiah, some scholars believe, is an anthology of prophetic literature that spans almost the entire era of Israelite prophecy, from the mid-eighth to the early fifth century BCE. Verses 1-39 were likely written by someone theologians call "Isaiah of Jerusalem," who lived during the pre-exilic era.

[36] See Michael Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum, No am Zohar, Yair Lorberbaum, and Ari Ackerman, *The Jewish Political Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), Vol. 1, chapter 5.

Amos, Hosea, Micah, and First Isaiah: the charges the prophet levels against the people, in the form of what is referred to as a "covenant lawsuit" by theologians; their tone of unremitting rage; the claim that the Israelites will no longer enjoy unconditional protection from God (with an explanation as to why); the claim that God's punishment, dispossession from the land, when it comes, will be just; the lack of esoteric features (mysticism and apocalypticism); a lack of a theology of exile (while exile is mentioned in some of them, none posit an explanation for the exile, as their successors do); their messages of hopelessness and doom, denial of anything that can be done to remedy the situation; and, finally, a lack of interest in "the remnant," the survivors of catastrophe so central to previous sections of the Old Testament.

There are four categories of charges in pre-exilic covenant lawsuits: syncretism/idolatry, economic oppression, empty ritual worship, and indictments of "the nations" (gentiles), who are subject to God's omnipotence but held to a lesser, "minimal ethical"[37] standard than the chosen people. The last three are not emphasized in the Deuteronomic History, although, as these prophets remind us, they are featured in Deuteronomy.

In the Nevi'im's rendering of ancient history, religious syncretism occurred because of peace, not war, in the period following the conquest of Canaan. When the Jews conquered the Promised Land, they occupied but did not destroy it. After a period of warfare, they eventually made peace with their gentile neighbors, which led to the slow incorporation of local religious practices, a slackening of vigilance that ultimately diluted the Jewish faith. In other words, the Jews felt safe worshipping Yahweh and Baal simultaneously. In fact, they

[37] Michael Walzer, "Prophecy and International Politics," *Hebraic Political Studies* 4, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 319–28.

saw nothing wrong with doing so. Some of the Judean and Israelite kings even encouraged this practice (as the Books of Kings relate), which was anathema to Yahweh, who demanded absolute fidelity above all else. In response, the entirety of Hosea as well as significant portions of Amos and Micah reference passages from Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Psalms, about a jealous God who demands exclusive worship. As Psalm 106 relates:

> but they mixed with the nations
> and learned to do as they did.
> They served their idols,
> which became a snare to them.
> They sacrificed their sons
> and their daughters to the demons;
> they poured out innocent blood,
> the blood of their sons and daughters,
> whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan,
> and the land was polluted with blood.
> Thus they became unclean by their acts,
> and played the whore in their deeds."[38]

For Hosea, the only Navi who hails from the northern kingdom, syncretism is framed as a sin against God as a jealous and jilted lover. In Chapter Four he rants to his audience, telling them that God insists on exclusivity and that his people are promiscuous adulterers:

> whoredom, wine, and new wine,
> which take away the understanding.
> My people inquire of a piece of wood,
> and their walking staff gives them oracles.
> For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray,
> and they have left their God to play the whore.[39]

Whereas Hosea was centered on syncretism and infidelity, Amos was the first prophet to argue that social justice is as vital to Judaism as is worshipping one God alone. Amos rails against economic exploitation including the improper treatment of slaves and "grinding the

[38] Psalms 106: 35-39.
[39] Hosea 4:11-14.

faces of the poor."[40] It is important to note the background of these prophets here. Amos is introduced as "one of the sheep farmers of Tekoa"[41] and a "tender of sycamore trees."[42] The earliest of the canonical prophets, Amos set the tone of these pre-exilic authors. They went out of their way to explain that they were not professional prophets in the tradition of Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. Prophets were not expected to rise out of the desert rabble at that time; they were supposed to come from the upper strata. Hence, the earliest of the classical prophets was set up in opposition to conventional notions of what a prophet should be. Amos trumpeted the fact that he was not particularly learned and that his status as a member of the class he championed furnished him with special authority when he reminded the Israelites of their covenantal obligation to social justice:

> Therefore because you trample on the poor
> and you exact taxes of grain from him,
> you have built houses of hewn stone,
> but you shall not dwell in them;
> you have planted pleasant vineyards,
> but you shall not drink their wine.
> For I know how many are your transgressions
> and how great are your sins—
> you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
> and turn aside the needy in the gate.
> Therefore he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time,
> for it is an evil time.[43]

Drawing on Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, Amos, Micah, and Isaiah of Jerusalem[44] repeatedly pointed out that one of the major reasons for Yahweh's anger was the painfully unequal distribution of material possessions in Israelite society. They reminded the Israelites that God was the champion of the poor and defenseless and that he abhorred the

[40] Amos 2:7.
[41] Amos 1:1.
[42] Amos 7:14.
[43] Amos 5: 11-13.
[44] This is the other name for First Isaiah.

ruling classes' practice of gaining riches at the expense of the poor. In contrast to Mesopotamian law, which applied different legal standards to nobles and peasants, the Torah mandates that the poor are entitled to the same legal rights in court as the rich,[45] that no interest be charged on loans made to the poor,[46] that their debts be cancelled every seventh year,[47] and that landowners were not to cut the wheat growing in the corners of their fields but were to leave it for the poor to harvest.[48] In other words, although Canaan might be, as Exodus says, "a land flowing with milk and honey,"[49] God's commandment to the Israelites to form a just society when they had taken possession of the land remained in force.

An equally severe covenant violation in the prophets of the pre-exilic period was a disdain for surface adherence to the law without any internal commitment to the principles that animate the covenant. Empty ritual worship was particularly vile to Micah, who inveighed:

> What Does the LORD Require?
> With what shall I come before the LORD,
> and bow myself before God on high?
> Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
> with calves a year old?
> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
> with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
> Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
> the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
> He has told you, O man, what is good;
> and what does the LORD require of you
> but to do justice, and to love kindness,
> and to walk humbly with your God?[50]

[45] Deuteronomy 16:18.
[46] Leviticus 23:35-37.
[47] Deuteronomy 15:1-2.
[48] Leviticus 23:22.
[49] Exodus 3:8.
[50] Micah 6: 6-8.

Amos's paint-peeling version of this rhetoric is perhaps better known to Americans, via Frederick Douglass' 1852 jeremiad, "What to the Slave is the 4th of July?" or Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech (which I will discuss in Chapter Four). Like those two later prophets, Amos conflated empty ritual worship and economic exploitation into a single charge. A quote like the one below would never be found in the Deuteronomic History, but it occurs frequently among the pre-exilic prophets:

> I hate, I despise your feasts,
> and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
> Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
> I will not accept them;
> and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,
> I will not look upon them.
> Take away from me the noise of your songs;
> to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
> But let justice roll down like waters,
> and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.[51]

Walzer and Gowan both have argued that Amos's message was so shocking to his audience because the Israelites' economic crimes were not particularly severe in comparison with those of their neighbors.[52] They did not exploit the poor or mistreat their slaves any more than their neighbors did. However, as with Hosea's revulsion for religious syncretism, being like everyone else, even if to a lesser degree, was an offense to God. Being chosen, they argued, meant that the Israelites needed to adhere to a higher standard.

In the minds of the Israelites, however, they had done nothing wrong. Therefore, they fully expected Yahweh to intervene, as he had always done before and destroy Israel's enemies. But Amos informed them that they could expect no such rescue. Biblical scholars call this moment "the reversal," because Amos reversed popular assumptions about the "Day

[51] Amos 5: 21-24.
[52] Gowan, 30.

of Yahweh," when God would appear to judge the world. Amos delivered the devastating news that on that day the Israelites would be punished just like any other nation that fostered social and economic injustice. This helps explain the harsh and unremitting tone of the pre-exilic prophets; God is in complete shock that the chosen people simply assume that he will protect them regardless of how they behave. When Amos announced charges against "the nations" (the word Nevi'im used to refer to gentiles), it demonstrated not only that God ruled over all mankind but also that he had a universal, minimum standard of justice. Because the Israelites could not meet even this minimum standard (let alone their failure to meet their special obligations), the pre-exilic prophets offered an extremely raw, bottom-line condemnation. Their tone is universally harsh and direct, lacking the poetical and lyrical qualities of their exilic successors, some of whom hailed from higher social or priestly classes. Micah, a rural villager like Amos, stated plainly that the Israelites had behaved like cannibals:

> I said, 'Please listen, leaders of Ya'akov,
> rulers of the house of Isra'el:
> Shouldn't you know what justice is?
> Yet you hate what is good and love what is bad.
> You strip off their skin from them
> and their flesh from their bones,
> you eat the flesh of my people,
> skin them alive, break their bones;
> yes, they chop them in pieces,
> like flesh in a caldron, like meat in a pot.
> Then they will call to Adonai,
> but he will not answer them;
> when that time comes, he will hide his face from them,
> because their deeds were so wicked.[53]

While offering a harsh judgment on the present, the pre-exilic prophets also made it clear that the die had been cast: the sins already committed were too great for God to forgive.

[53] Micah 3:1-4.

The non-negotiable penalty, in both the Assyrian and Babylonian cases, was dispossession from the land. Here Micah issued the verdict, in typical pre-exilic style:

> Hear this, you leaders of Jacob,
> you rulers of Israel,
> who despise justice
> and distort all that is right;
> who build Zion with bloodshed,
> and Jerusalem with wickedness.
> Her leaders judge for a bribe,
> her priests teach for a price,
> and her prophets tell fortunes for money.
> Yet they look for the LORD's support and say,
> "Is not the LORD among us?
> No disaster will come upon us."
> Therefore because of you,
> Zion will be plowed like a field,
> Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble,
> the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.[54]

In addition, these prophets offer a very bleak vision of the future. They extended none of the hope – neither of regrouping as exiles in Babylon nor for the eventual restoration of David's line to Jerusalem's throne – that their exilic successors would. Nor did they offer the kind of esoteric, other-worldly optimism or apocalyptic visions of the future seen in the post-exilic period. Finally, though some of their texts casually mention "the remnant," none is preoccupied with the survivors of catastrophe, which sets them apart from previous biblical stories of destruction. In the words of Hosea, "their root is dried up."[55]

It is not difficult to understand why political theorists do not draw distinctions between types of prophecy. At some level, all the Nevi'im sound alike. They all operate according to the central dynamic between God's forgiveness and disavowal. But when

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[54] Micah 3:9-12. Amos's version reads as follows: "Your wife will become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be measured and divided up, and you yourself will die in a pagan country. And Israel will certainly go into exile, away from their native land" (7:17).
[55] Hosea 9:16.

examining this rhetoric, it is important to pay close attention to how the dynamic is resolved. In the pre-exilic era, the conclusion is ultimately one of mournful resignation. Hosea's warning, for example, expresses the wish that the coming end could be averted, but he has been told by God that things have reached the point of no return:

> There is no faithfulness or steadfast love.
> and no knowledge of God in the land;
> there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery;
> they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.
> Therefore the land mourns,
> and all who dwell in it languish,
> and also the beasts of the field
> and the birds of the heavens,
> and even the fish of the sea are taken away.[56]

Exilic Prophecy: The Resurrection of Judah

Whereas the pre-exilic prophets warned the people of impending punishment for their social injustice and disloyalty to God, their exilic successors proclaimed that the people's suffering was nearly complete and their release from Babylon imminent. They move beyond the bleak forecasts of their predecessors, offering the comfort of hope and restoration of divine favor – a "new exodus" out of Babylon and back to the Promised Land.

The exilic prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel are markedly different from their pre-exilic forerunners, for two reasons. First, they both actually witnessed Nebuchadnezzar's armies destroy Jerusalem and raze Solomon's temple in 587 BCE and then lived to tell about it. Second, their ministries continued briefly into the exile. Jeremiah was active from 627 to 580, and Ezekiel received his calling shortly after the devastating Babylonian victory in 597, ending his ministry in approximately 571. Both could see beyond the conquering of their

[56] Hosea 4: 1-4.

capital and the leveling of their central place or worship; both witnessed their king – with his eyes put out, and bound in chains – being carried captive to Babylon. But in spite of these horrifying facts, unlike the early prophets they could imagine a future where the Israelites would reconstitute themselves in exile.

While they shared some characteristics with their pre-exilic forerunners, ultimately they represent a very different style of preaching. Below I will explain five defining features of exilic prophecy: the exilic version of doom as the first word, not the last; how the sermons shift their messages from judgment prophecy to the notion of a "new covenant" in Jeremiah, and a new principle of divine justice in Ezekiel; the theology of exile which is absent in the pre-exilics; the promise of future blessing that Israel will be even greater than before; finally, the inklings of the mysticism and esotericism that prefigure post-exilic prophecy as well as Christianity.

Like their predecessors, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel opened by presenting the fate of Judah in the direst terms. In both prophets' texts there is a subtle shift in emphasis, from simply foretelling the end of the kingdom of Judah to mournfully lamenting its desecration and desolation, as if they had always been a foregone conclusion.[57] Further, in Chapter Seven God tells Jeremiah that he is forbidden to intervene on behalf of any remaining virtuous Judeans: "As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you."[58] Here is Jeremiah's warning to a doomed Judah before it is to be sent into exile:

[57] Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1-25* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1988).
[58] Jeremiah 7:16.

> Behold, I am bringing against you
> a nation from afar, O house of Israel,
> declares the Lord. It is an enduring nation;
> it is an ancient nation,
> a nation whose language you do not know,
> nor can you understand what they say.[59]

Jeremiah and Ezekiel also each contain a key shift toward hope in their narratives, in the second half of the Book of Ezekiel and interspersed throughout Jeremiah.[60] In these moments, Jeremiah articulates "A New Covenant," whereas Ezekiel articulates a new principle of divine justice.

Following verse after verse of doom and destruction, in Chapter Thirty, Jeremiah's tone suddenly and dramatically shifts: "The time is coming," the prophecy reads, "when I shall restore the fortunes of my people, both Israel and Judah, says the Lord, and bring them back to take possession of the land which I gave to their ancestors."[61] But it is not until two chapters later that he explains God's rationale for this reversal. In the span of a few key passages at the center of the book, Jeremiah tells the people that God has admitted that the original Mosaic covenant was a failure because it depended on an unrealistic expectation of human nature. In the new order, God will establish "a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, a covenant they broke, though I was patient with them,

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[59] Jeremiah 5:15.
[60] Repeated redactions of Jeremiah, as late perhaps as the second century BCE, most likely account for this. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996). Ezekiel, on the other hand, is the most well preserved, and chronologically ordered of the prophetic texts. See "The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel," in M. Jack Suggs, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, and James R. Mueller, *The Oxford Study Bible: Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 857.
[61] Jeremiah 30:1-3.

says the Lord."[62] God instead decided that the new covenant would be one where the law is to be

> set within them, writing it on their hearts; I shall be their God, and they will be my people. No longer need they teach one another, neighbor or brother, to know the Lord; all of them, high and low alike, will know me, says the Lord, for I shall forgive their wrongdoing, and their sin I shall call to mind no more.[63]

This represents a dramatic shift, once again, from a covenant that is conditional to one that is unbreakable. Now that they have lost everything – their king, their temple, the promised land – God makes an astonishing confession, telling Jeremiah, "I am sorry for the evil I have done you [the covenant community]."[64] In this part of the text, God redoubles his commitment to them, but in the process he alters its substance. The Jewish people are now to be defined as a people in exile, with the law no longer inscribed on tablets but instead "on their hearts." It will stay with them wherever they go and whatever happens to them. This is very much at odds with the temple faith so central to the Deuteronomic History.[65] It also prefigures later Christian perspectives.

Jeremiah's "new covenant" combines elements of God's earlier agreements with Moses and Abraham/David. It is more like the latter because it is permanent, not conditional. In Genesis 12, God promises Abraham that "I will make of you a great nation" in Canaan, a land that, God promises, the people will rule for all time. Similarly, God's covenant with David provided for the continuance of his dynasty and his throne forever,[66] and it was considered by David's heirs to be a guarantee that the kingdom of Judah would never be

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[62] Jeremiah 31:31-32.
[63] Jeremiah 31:33-34.
[64] Jeremiah 42:10. Although biblical writers occasionally show God changing his mind (Exodus 32:7–14; Numbers 14:10 –25), this divine admission of self-doubt is unique in Scripture.
[65] It is also more similar to the Yahweh tradition of God in the Bible, who dwells amongst the people, with a movable tabernacle, a opposed to the Elohim tradition, wherein God communes with the people via Solomon's temple.
[66] 2 Samuel 7:4-29.

conquered and that its capital, Jerusalem, would never be destroyed: "His posterity shall continue forever, and his throne shall be like the sun before me. Like the moon, which remains forever; a faithful witness in the sky."[67]

In one respect, however, Jeremiah's covenant is more like the Mosaic covenant in that it is not a promise with a single, privileged family nor a guarantee of the kingdom to a royal house. The covenant with Moses makes no mention of his descendants. In fact, it does not name a successor, and, furthermore, Joshua is not even a relative of Moses's. In Deuteronomy 29: 9-10 the agreement is forged between God and the edah, an ancient Hebrew word that translates roughly to "the body politic."[68] Harris argues that Jeremiah takes it one step further, "God now rejects a state that does not recognize the ethical implications of his worship, and feels no obligation to preserve a corrupt Davidic monarchy or Aaronic priesthood."[69] In Chapter Thirty-One, Jeremiah announces the new covenant:

> "Here, the days are coming," says Adonai, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them," says Adonai. "For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says Adonai: "I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, 'Know Adonai'; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.[70]

Ezekiel had a similar dramatic shift, though for him it was not a rearticulation of the covenant but the establishment of a fundamentally new principle of divine justice. Prior to

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[67] Psalm 89:35-38.
[68] Etymology gives a more precise definition. Edah is related to the word "ed," meaning "witness." Hence an edah is a group or community of people that bears witness. See Daniel J. Elazar, "Deuteronomy as Israel's Ancient Constitution;" Julian Sinclair, "Edah | The Jewish Chronicle," June 19, 2014, http://www.thejc.com/judaism/jewish-words/edah.
[69] Harris, 187.
[70] Jeremiah 31:30-31.

Ezekiel it is taken for granted in the Old Testament that a father's sins will always be borne by his descendants, very often for several generations. For example, in Exodus, when God delivers the Ten Commandments to Moses, God explains that "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me."[71] Ezekiel, however, proclaimed a new concept of ethical responsibility, saying that Yahweh would no longer punish the Israelites for the wrongdoing of their ancestors. Thus, when in Chapter Eighteen Ezekiel says, "the one who sins shall die," he is reversing centuries of the opposite understanding of divine justice.[72] Ezekiel concluded this sermon with the following summation:

> Therefore I shall judge every one of you Israelites on his record, says the Lord God. Repent, renounce all your offences, or your iniquity will be your downfall. Throw off the load of your past misdeeds; get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you Israelites die? I have no desire for the death of anyone.[73]

The notion that every generation will be judged on its own merits has a dramatic effect on the expectations of thousands of exiles (Ezekiel and Jeremiah among them). Though the damage has been done and Solomon's temple destroyed, the king exiled, the people removed from their land, according to Ezekiel the debt has been paid, the slate cleaned. Thus a need developed for the next theological step, an "exilic faith" of which Jeremiah and Ezekiel could only provide glimpses, because, while they prophesied through the destruction of Judah and into the exile, they did not live long enough to witness the restoration of 538 BCE, when the Jews were permitted to return to the land. They speculated and had visions and oracles about it, however.

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[71] Exodus 20: 5-6.
[72] To be sure, although individual responsibility is asserted by biblical authors before Ezekiel, as in Deuteronomy 24:16, 2 Kings 14:6, and Jeremiah 31: 29-30, Ezekiel's challenging affirmation here stands in clear contrast to the strong formulations of the inherited doctrine found in Exodus 34:7, Leviticus 26:39-40, and Deuteronomy 5:9.
[73] Ezekiel 18:30-32.

The exilic faith has four core elements: first, the exiles should not expect an early return; second, the exiles constitute the true Israel as much as the people who remained behind; third, the climax of the original covenant story, in both Exodus and Deuteronomy, was not the *sefer torah* (the giving of the law) but Yahweh's continuing presence amongst the Jews; and, finally, the exilic faith contains the unconditional guarantee that one day Israel will be even greater than before.

Jeremiah delivers the bad news to the exiles that their captivity in Babylon will be a long one. He crushes their hopes that the Egyptian army[74] will come to their assistance, fight off the Babylonians, and restore them to their land. He then instructs the exiles to settle in and build new lives in Babylon:

> Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.[75]

Jeremiah reassures Judeans that their dispossession will not be a total loss. They will be able to build new lives as citizens of the Babylonian Empire.

The second and third features of the exilic faith are related. The notion that the exiles now constitute Israel involves a radical revision of another ancient tradition from Deuteronomy. During his legendary final discourse, Moses wrote down all the laws he has just received from God, and gave them to the priests (sons of the Levi) to place in the Ark of the Covenant. Then Moses instructed them that God's laws shall be read aloud every seven years, "in the place which he will choose." He goes on to say that this will be "in the land you

[74] The hope that the Egyptians would intervene and defeat the Babylonians was commonly held, so one of the tasks of both Jeremiah and Ezekiel was to get the Jews to face the reality that this was not going to happen.
[75] Jeremiah 29:4-7.

will occupy after crossing the Jordan."[76] What will eventually become the location of Solomon's Temple, the holiest place in the holiest land on earth, is understood to be the spiritual and material center of Jewish life. Existing without it was unthinkable, until Ezekiel and Jeremiah delivered the words from God that Israel now resided among the exiles, who would live in foreign cities, in a foreign land, with no temple in which to worship Yahweh. Moreover, the exilic prophets announced that God's commitment to them would once again be eternal, what Second Isaiah calls an "everlasting covenant"[77] in which Yahweh vowed "never [to] hide his face from them again."[78]

Fourth, as theologian Thomas Raitt has pointed out, the key feature that distinguishes exilic prophecy from the other two types is the fact that, a mere few years after the utter destruction and devastation of 587 BCE, Ezekiel and Jeremiah were ultimately promising Judah a regeneration to a life beyond anything which it had previously known.[79] That is the essence of prophecy from this era: the wait will be long and arduous, but, after a very long time, Israel will be redeemed and will be greater even than the heights of the glorious eleventh and tenth century monarchies of David and Solomon. It is interesting that the famous passage in which Yahweh summons the Judean exiles to be "a light to the nations" appears in the exilic (middle) portion of Isaiah.[80] This is why James Ward spoke of the entire book of Jeremiah as "an interpretation of the fall of the kingdom of Judah, for the benefit of surviving Judeans and their descendants."[81] It is a truly exilic work, he argued, because Jeremiah

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[76] Deuteronomy 31:9-13.
[77] Isaiah 55:3.
[78] Isaiah 39:28-29.
[79] Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), 3.
[80] Isaiah 42:6.
[81] James Merrill Ward, *Thus Says the Lord: The Message of the Prophets* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 122.

demonstrates no knowledge of the future Babylonian surrender to the Persians in 538 BCE, the key event in Cyrus's restoration of the Judeans to their homeland. In Gowan's terms, "most of the promissory passages [in Jeremiah] represent true promises, issued before there was any obvious evidence that they might come true."[82]

Although the exilic prophets were primarily interested in worldly events, the mystical passages of Ezekiel form an exception that inspires both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic theologies. In his most famous vision, the subject of a well-known spiritual, Ezekiel observes a "valley of dry bones," a long valley littered with human skeletons, when he suddenly hears a voice ask, "Son of man, can these bones live?"[83] Miraculously, the fragmented skeletons reassemble themselves and are again clothed in flesh. Yahweh directs the winds to breathe life into them, and their resurrection is complete. When reading this famous vision, it is important to remember that Ezekiel saw a preview, not of human resurrection but of Israel's future rebirth. In 587 BCE the nation had perished, but now Yahweh was raising it to renewed life. It was not until the Book of Daniel was composed four centuries later that a biblical writer explicitly described a belief in the resurrection of individual humans. Though to be sure, in the postexilic period that followed, mystical and esoteric notions were prominently featured.

Post-Exilic Prophecy: From Classical Prophecy to Apocalypticism

In 538 BCE the Persian King Cyrus defeated the Babylonian army and allowed the exiles to return to Judah. This did not turn out to be the triumphant return imagined by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, however. The hope that Yahweh would restore Judah to political autonomy and economic prosperity did not come to fruition. Judah was still a small and

[82] Gowan, 100.
[83] Ezekiel 37:3.

impotent vassal state, and the early resettlement was difficult for the returning exiles. This was a far cry even from the days of weak monarchs during the divided kingdom (let alone the time of King Solomon). Also, as the years under Persian rule dragged on,[84] prophecy was coming to an end in ancient Israel with a growing disbelief in prophets as effective spokesmen for Yahweh.[85] Less than one hundred years after the restoration of Judah, the era of classical prophecy ended. God would never again communicate directly with his people.

The destruction of Israel and Judah and the failure of post-exilic hopes that Yahweh would restore Judah to political autonomy and economic prosperity meant that biblical writers now had great difficulty treating ordinary events of history as a vehicle for fulfilling God's ancient promises. As it draws to an end, prophetic literature becomes increasingly remote from the unfolding historical crises that motivated earlier classical prophets. The conclusion that human effort is futile engendered a kind of prophecy in which the central thrust is that only a supernatural agency can implement their prophetic visions of a glorious future.

Five features stand out in the words of the post-exilic prophets: first, they begin by recognizing that the grand predictions of their forerunners were partially realized (such as Cyrus's defeat of the Babylonians); second, they conclude that the restoration has been disappointing; third, they express increasing uncertainty about whether a messianic leader from the Davidic line will ever arrive to reestablish Israel's glory; fourth, out of desperation, they reiterate that the covenant now applies to gentiles as well as Jews; finally, they accept the futility of human action and look instead to an other-worldly apocalypse.

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[84] Persia remained in control of Judah until Alexander the Great conquered it in 330 BCE.

[85] Late additions to the Book of Zechariah forbid prophesy altogether: "And if anyone again prophesies, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, 'You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the LORD.' And his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies" (Zechariah 13:3).

Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi all recognized that the predictions of Jeremiah and Second Isaiah had partially come true. Cyrus did defeat the Babylonians. He allowed the exiles to return to their homeland, and some of them did go back (but only a few).[86] The temple was eventually rebuilt, though with little enthusiasm and none of the splendor of Solomon's building. Jerusalem was repopulated, but its notoriously high walls were not restored for another hundred years. The visions of a restored Davidic monarchy glorified with "treasures of all the nations"[87] flowing into a rebuilt sanctuary seemed a far cry from reality.[88]

Although all three prophets recognized the bona fides of their predecessors, Zechariah provided the most detailed recollections. Most striking here are his references in Chapter One to Jeremiah's prediction that the exile would last seventy years;[89] the echoes of salvation promises from Second Isaiah;[90] and the usage of the metaphor of God's "measuring line," which plots Israel's movement along a continuum from judgment to salvation.[91] Zechariah used it to capture the historical moment "between salvation and salvation" that post-exilic prophets sought to explain:

> Therefore, thus says the LORD, I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it, declares the LORD of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. Cry out again, Thus says the LORD of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.[92]

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[86] According to Gowan, many Jews chose not return to Judah, because they were born and raised in Babylon, and thought of it as their home.
[87] Haggai 2:7-9.
[88] Gowan, 162.
[89] Zechariah 1:12. While the Judeans returned in 538 BCE, the temple was not rebuilt until approximately 517 BCE.
[90] Isaiah 40-55.
[91] Zechariah 1:16. The metaphor of the "measuring line," or the "plumb line," appears throughout the prophetic texts, starting with Amos (7:8).
[92] Zechariah 1:16-17.

Ultimately, however, the dominant note struck in the beginning of post-exilic texts is a profound disappointment with the return from Babylon. Haggai and Zechariah explain the situation differently from Malachi, however. Haggai and Zechariah are shocked by the lack of enthusiasm for rebuilding Solomon's temple. Malachi, who wrote shortly after its completion in 517 BCE, rails against Judeans' shoddy attention to religious rituals. In both cases, as Robert Carroll pointed out, post-exilic prophets were repeatedly trying to resolve some kind of cognitive dissonance, because conditions were nowhere near what the Judeans had expected.[93]

Haggai, who wrote between twenty and twenty-five years after Judah's restoration, and four years before the rebuilding of Solomon's temple, presented the crisis as God's single-minded obsession with the temple's rebuilding. God, according to the prophet, was dismayed that, after he allowed the exiles to return home, twenty years had gone by without the completion of the holiest building on earth. In order for the repeated crop failures and famines to stop and for Israel to reclaim its rightful place atop the nations, Haggai insisted that the temple had to be rebuilt:

> You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors.[94]

Haggai and Zechariah both prophesied that a savior from the Davidic line would spearhead the stalled restoration of the temple and, as the divinely sanctioned monarch in a

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[93] Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Cognitive Dissonance in the Prophetic Traditions of the Old Testament* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).
[94] Haggai 1:9-11.

new historical epoch, lead Israel. But like many messianic predictions in the Bible, there were a series of complications that diluted the force of these oracles.

First, there is confusion between Haggai and Zechariah regarding who this messiah is supposed to be. Haggai is certain that it is Zerubbabel, the Persian-appointed governor of Judah and a descendant of David. Zechariah, on the other hand, offered a contradictory prediction. In Chapter Three, he repeats the language of Jeremiah, when he says "the branch"[95] will be the messianic leader, without specifying whether he means Zerubbabel or Joshua, the temple priest, or someone else entirely. Then in Chapter Six, he says that Joshua will restore both the temple and the monarchy.[96] Finally, in addition to this confusion about who the messiah is, the two leading candidates soon disappear from the prophetic record. In the second half of the book of Zechariah and in all of Malachi (who was active after the temple was rededicated),[97] Zerubbabel and Joshua are nowhere to be found.[98] So Malachi had to devise another explanation for why Judah had no civil defense, royal dynasty, or other marks of a biblically significant nation and how it might go about attaining these things. As things stood, Judah was once again a vassal state, one with little hope of overthrowing the Persians and regaining its independence.

Malachi proposed a reactionary solution, the resurrection of the "covenant of our fathers,"[99] which meant honoring the original Mosaic covenant by obeying its strict legal code. This represented a break from the prophetic register of Jeremiah's "new covenant,"

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[95] Zechariah 6:12.
[96] "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9). Incidentally, New Testament authors misinterpreted this sequence. In Matthew 21:1-7, Jesus is riding on two animals at once.
[97] Harris said that Malachi was active somewhere between the rededication of the temple and 450 BCE.
[98] Gowan speculated that Zerubbabel was probably removed from the governorship by the Persians.
[99] Malachi 2:10.

which de-emphasized ritual worship and all temple-centered practices. Sounding desperate, Malachi said here that God now wanted to bring back the original code. Repeatedly referencing Leviticus, Malachi said that God was extremely insulted by the condition of the animals being sacrificed to him in Jerusalem's shoddily "rededicated" temple. Now that the temple had been re-established, the people had to worship properly in it, as their ancestors did.

Disappointment and desperation on all of these fronts led to two major shifts as the era of classical prophecy neared its end. First, these prophets expanded the covenant to include any gentile who worshiped Yahweh; second, they gave up on worldly affairs and told people to seek salvation in an other-worldly apocalypse. These two features figure prominently in early apocalyptic literature and prefigure Christian theology. Malachi, which means "my messenger," featured these elements most emphatically. Hence it makes sense that in Protestant and Catholic Bibles Malachi appears as the final book of the Old Testament.

After God excoriated the Jews, Malachi related that God was impressed with the offerings of the gentiles:

> From farthest east to farthest west my name is great among the nations, and everywhere incense and pure offerings are presented to my name; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of Hosts. But you profane me by thinking that the table of the Lord may be defiled, and you can offer on it food that you hold in no esteem.[100]

This move towards universality in the final prophetic text signals an opening towards the New Testament. While the rules of the original covenant were being resurrected, participation would no longer be restricted by bloodline. Israel's meaning had been reinvented in these visions, defined not as a historic people but by the volitional act of being faithful to

[100] Malachi 1:11-12.

Yahweh. This created another problem, however: although the covenant was now universal, suddenly it was no longer unconditional (as it was during the exilic period). It is a replay of Moses's final words in Deuteronomy, in universalized form, of a people constituted to fail. Ironically, universalism accentuates the pessimistic side of post-exilic prophecy.

But this universalism also fuels a countervailing voice of eschatology. In the end, when God will create a new heavens and a new earth, the righteous (law-abiding) will be saved, not just the Jews. For writers like Third Isaiah and his successors, particularly the author of Daniel, only divine intervention could free the people from their oppressors and achieve a cosmic transformation not merely of Israel but of the entire world. It would take a supernatural agency to implement prophetic visions of a glorious future.

The writings of Zechariah, Third Isaiah, and Joel contain full-fledged eschatological visions describing the end of history. In the final chapter of Zechariah, the prophet says that Yahweh will gather all nations to Jerusalem in a climactic battle. The enemy will plunder the city and slaughter nearly all its inhabitants before Yahweh intervenes at the last minute, striding from the Mount of Olives, which will be sundered by titanic earthquakes, to fight for Israel. After annihilating his enemies, Yahweh will transform the earth and its climate. Cold and frost will cease, streams will issue from Jerusalem, mountains will disappear, and all of Palestine will become a plain.[101]

In Third Isaiah's version, the eschatological visions of universal peace and plenty are perhaps the most enduring part of the prophet's legacy. Looking beyond Judah's bleak present to "new heavens and a new earth," a global paradise in which humans and wild animals dwell peacefully together, the prophet encompassed all humanity in his vision of cosmic harmony:

[101] Zechariah 14:1-10.

> See, I will create
> new heavens and a new earth.
> The former things will not be remembered,
> nor will they come to mind.
> But be glad and rejoice forever
> in what I will create.[102]

Joel's version contains in miniature the pattern for Judgment Day and the New Age on which later biblical writers elaborated in such books as Daniel, 2 Esdras, and Revelation. The eschatological features that Joel foresees as occurring at the end of history include: (1) a series of natural, political, and supernatural disasters, "signs" in heaven and earth that portend the wrath to come; (2) a cosmic battle fought in both the material and spiritual realms, in which Yahweh and his people triumph over their enemies; (3) an outpouring of Holy Spirit on Yahweh's people; and (4) the divine presence among the faithful. Although the Day of Yahweh will involve "portents in the heavens and on earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke,"[103] it will also provide an opportunity to obtain individual salvation, for at that time "all who call on the name of Yahweh will be saved."[104] After repentance, Joel foresaw the dawn of a new age. Not only would the land recover from its present desolation and prosper, but Yahweh would also pour out his spirit upon all humanity so that dreams, visions, and prophecies would reopen channels of communication between the Deity and his creation. Understandably, Joel is frequently quoted by later Jewish and Christian writers.

Prophecy started as an open proclamation of Yahweh's condemnation of Israel, but as it drew closer to its canonical end, it became increasingly esoteric in language and perspective and increasingly remote from historical urgencies of classical prophetic speech and discourse. The growing popularity of apocalyptic literature in the post exilic period signaled not only a

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[102] Isaiah 65:17-18.
[103] Joel 2:30.
[104] Joel 2:32.

growing disenchantment with history but also a growing disbelief in the prophet as an effective intermediary for Yahweh. Less than a century after the exiles' return from Babylon, prophecy virtually ceased. As the years dragged on under Persian domination and prophetic glimpses of a universal peace dimmed, Israel's prophetic institutions rapidly declined. Hence, the closing of the biblical canon and the end of the era of prophecy are related – the cessation of direct communication with God meant the end of transcribing divine speech. But signs of a corrosive skepticism about prophecy appeared as early as Ezekiel, when he cited a proverb that apparently circulated throughout Israel: "Days go by, and visions fade."[105]

[105] Ezekiel 12:22.

Chapter Two: The Bible and the American Founding Era

In *Federalist* 37 James Madison paused for a moment and reflected on the achievement of the Constitutional Convention. The difficulties faced by the framers would never have been surmounted, he argued, without divine assistance:

> It is impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it a finger of that Almighty hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages of the revolution.[1]

Although it might be easy to admire God's handiwork, Madison continued, understanding what God meant when he chooses to explain that handiwork is a very different matter. About the Bible Madison said that

> When the Almighty himself condescends to address mankind in their own language, his meaning, luminous as it must be, is rendered dim and doubtful by the cloudy medium through which it is communicated.[2]

This chapter will examine the ways the "cloudy medium" of the Scriptures influenced the political thought of the American founding era. I have two main purposes: first, to contribute to the recent scholarly effort to reestablish the central role of the Bible in shaping the rhetoric of the American founding era[3] and, second, to demonstrate the presence and persistence of the three modes of Old Testament prophecy – pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic – that I presented in Chapter One. I begin with a brief description of the two most influential

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[1] James Madison, "Federalist #37," in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: Signet Classics, 2003), 226-227.
[2] Madison, 225.
[3] By "American founding era," I use Daniel Dreisbach's definition: "The term 'American founding era,' covers the period between approximately 1760 and 1800 during which Americans began to agitate for their full rights as Englishmen, then to assert their claim to political independence from Great Britain, and, finally, to articulate the theory and develop the institutions that shaped the state and national constitutions." See Daniel L. Dreisbach, "The Bible in the Political Rhetoric of the American Founding," *Politics and Religion* 4 (2011): 401-427 (See Footnote 1, on 420).

contemporary scholarly paradigms of the founding era, Hartzian liberalism and republicanism, each of which obscures the Bible's impact. Then, focusing on the ongoing debate regarding how Old Testament narratives were deployed, I briefly discuss the recent scholarly turn toward emphasizing the Bible's role during this era in order to present secular events as part of a sacred history. Drawing on sermons by leading ministers of the era, I go on to demonstrate that Old Testament forms of rhetoric endured during this era. I describe the development of three distinct varieties of this rhetoric between the pre-revolutionary and post-constitutional periods: the first is characterized by an indifference to monarchy and is focused inwardly on sin and repentance (corresponding to the pre-exilic mode of Hebraic prophecy); the second is "exclusivist" or anti-monarchist, which is a clarion call to political action (and corresponds to the exilic mode of Hebraic prophecy); and finally, the third is the constitutional Hebraicism that accompanies the counter-revolutionary settlement of the Constitutional Convention and its aftermath, which corresponds to the post-exilic mode of prophecy. These ancient rhetorical forms endured, I argue, because they provided ministers with a sacred language to capture the political situation at any point along the historical trajectory of the American founding**.**

Liberalism, Republicanism, Biblicalism

Sandwiched between two religious revivals known as the First and Second Great Awakenings, the American founding era is often described as an age of Enlightenment and rationalism in which "the founding generation," according to McWilliams, "rejected or deemphasized the Bible and biblical rhetoric." McWilliams goes so far as to say that "Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* is almost alone among the great works of the founders in making an

explicit appeal to the Bible."[4] Compared to the previous century's rhetoric of Puritan divines, it is easy to see why this claim might appear to be accurate. Biblical language in the founding generation seems muted at best, rhetorical window-dressing at worst. In addition, scholars have long emphasized the secular character of the United States Constitution. As Kramnick and Moore argue, the "Godless Constitution" does not mention a heavenly creator even once; it contains an explicit prohibition against requiring religious tests for office-holding; and the First Amendment forbids the establishment of a national religion.[5]

Scholars of the secular founding privilege newer ideas and innovations – Publius' "science of politics" – over more antiquated notions of a covenant and other "organic" Puritan conceptions of society. The most important example of this interpretation was Louis Hartz's *Liberal Tradition in America* (1955), a work that inspired a generation of "consensus" historians, who argued in grand fashion that America was born, and would remain, a liberal society, forever delimited by Lockean principles. In his influential account, Hartz noted the proto-revolutionary ambitions of Protestant millennialism in colonial America but (perhaps too neatly) folded it into an emerging dominant liberal tradition: "A society that begins with Locke," Hartz argued, "and thus transforms him, stays with Locke…"[6] Americans took to Locke, Hartz maintained, because American society was already Lockean in its social marrow: individualistic, ambitious, protocapitalist.

In the decades following *The Liberal Tradition*, scholars began to level strong criticisms of the Hartzian paradigm, accusing consensus historians of, among other things, projecting twentieth-century categories onto the eighteenth century as well as of leaving "a

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[4] McWilliams, 21.
[5] Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution: A Moral Defense of the Secular State* (New York: Norton, 2005); U.S. Constitution, art. 6, sec.3, cl. 3; U.S. Constitution, amend. 1, sec. 1.
[6] Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America.*

great deal of revolutionary anxiety suspended anonymously in the air, unintegrated into the Hartzian paradigm, yet without any counter-paradigmatic structure of its own."[7] Beginning with Robert Shalhope's initial identification of the concept of "republicanism" in 1972,[8] a range of scholars argued that what animated eighteenth-century America – and more importantly, what stirred the hopes and passions of colonial patriots – was miles away from the Lockean world Hartz had imagined. The most important proponents of this republican paradigm were Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood.

Bailyn did not deny Locke's influence in eighteenth-century America, but he did surround him with a large number of rival publicists. In *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution,* he argued that the century-old rhetoric of English radical Whig pamphleteers galvanized American readers by providing the organizing frame that integrated all of the seemingly incongruous elements of American revolutionary ideology. This patchwork ideology included the covenant theology of New England Puritanism. Bailyn recognized that this theology was "channeled into the main stream of eighteenth-century political and social thinking by a generation of enlightened preachers," but he downplayed its importance. Ultimately, argued Bailyn, this religious way of thinking was "restricted in its appeal to those who continued to understand the world, as the original Puritans had, in theological terms."[9]

Wood, who had been Bailyn's student, focused less on radical Whig rhetoric, instead emphasizing the "irretrievability and differentness" of the founding generation's "essentially

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[7] Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *The Journal of American History* 79 (1992): 15.
[8] Robert E. Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 29 (1972): 49–80.
[9] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 31.

classical and medieval mental frame."[10] For Wood, American society was organic, precisely the opposite of how Hartz described it. Whereas Bailyn believed that American revolutionaries drew their rhetorical force from a trans-Atlantic revival of the radical seventeenth-century pamphleteering of John Milton and Algernon Sidney, Wood argued that the animating ideas and tropes of the Revolution were plumbed directly from Roman writers such as Plutarch, Livy, Cicero and Tacitus , all writers who wrote at a time when the republic either was being challenged or when its greatest days were past and its political and moral virtues had decayed.[11] In Wood's opinion, the signature characteristics of liberalism – the individualism, realism, or vaunted science of politics – until at least the late 1780s.

In the meanwhile, Edmund Morgan's brilliant but betwixt and between essay, "The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution," (1967) zeroed in on virtually all the themes soon to be subsumed under the "republicanism" framework: Americans' fear of corruption, fear of the fatal effects of luxury, and fear of the inability to sustain the self-denying virtues on which a republic depended. Morgan explained all of this away as the "residue of Puritanism," which, he argued, had not only endured in New England but had also reached the southern colonies to resurface in the "Puritan manqué" of figures like Richard Henry Lee.[12]

Both the liberal and republican schools minimize a very important fact: it is well documented that the vast majority of the founders were intimately familiar with the Bible and that many of them read it regularly. Their many quotations from and allusions to both familiar and obscure passages demonstrate far more than a passing familiarity with the Scriptures. In

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[10] Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 61.
[11] Bailyn, 25.
[12] Edmund S. Morgan, "Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 24 (1967): 3–43.

fact, it is well documented that several of them knew the Scriptures from cover to cover.[13] The phrases and cadences from the King James Bible informed both their written and spoken words, and its ideas unquestionably shaped their habits of mind. This is why it is vitally important not only to revisit the sermons of influential ministers, which is to say key opinion leaders of the era, but to move them back to the center of the dramatic events of the era and to their leading role within the main currents of eighteenth-century American political thought. Failing to do so has led to an incomplete picture of how most ordinary citizens understood the tumultuous events in which they participated or which they witnessed swirling around them. As impressive as the collection of pamphlets assembled by Bailyn is, it remains unclear, as Harry Stout has pointed out, whether they were read widely and who actually read them.[14] While measuring receptivity with any kind of precision continues to be a problem during this era, as Kenneth Lockridge explains,[15] certainly, colonial culture, especially in New England, was heavily saturated in religious discourse.

This insight became dramatically more apparent following Donald Lutz and Charles Hyneman's extensive surveys of American political literature between 1760 and 1805. Reviewing an estimated 15,000 items, Lutz and Hyneman found that the Bible was cited more frequently than any European author or even any European school of thought, including the

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[13] Several of the founders were students of the Bible, and a few even wrote Bible commentaries as well as involved discourses on Christian doctrine and practice. Among the prominent founders who wrote about Christian theology and doctrines are Elias Boudinot, John Dickinson, Oliver Ellsworth, John Jay, Benjamin Rush, Roger Sherman, and John Witherspoon. See Shalom Goldman, *Hebrew and the Bible in America: The First Two Centuries*, Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life (University Press of New England [for] Brandeis University Press and Dartmouth College, 1993), esp. Chaps Three and Five.

[14] Harry S. Stout, "Religion, Communications, and the Ideological Origins of the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 34, no. 4 (October 1, 1977): 519–41.

[15] Kenneth A. Lockridge concludes that "the literacy of that American generation which took the colonies into the Revolution was less than perfect. It seems probable that one-quarter of the generation born around I730 . . . was totally illiterate. Including New England in the total would not much alter the level of enduring illiteracy since two-thirds of the population lived outside of New England." See Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England; An Enquiry Into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West* (New York: Norton, 1974), 87.

Enlightenment and Whig traditions.[16] Further, even though they excluded most documents from their sample that included no citations to secular political thinkers (including political sermons), the Bible still accounted for approximately one third of all citations.[17] Deuteronomy was the most frequently cited book, followed by Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws.*[18] Deuteronomy was cited "almost twice as often as all of Locke's writings put together," and "Saint Paul was cited about as frequently as Montesquieu and Blackstone, the two most-cited secular authors."[19] Again, they eliminated any material that did not reach outside the ambit of religion; any sermons they included were of an expressly political nature. It is hardly surprising that they found such saturation of Bible talk, since over 80 percent of political pamphlets from this era were written by ministers, and 10 percent of all pamphlets were republished sermons. The era was indisputably steeped in biblical language, and making reference to Scripture helped ensure that a writer's ideas would be understood.

It would be wrong to mistake the ubiquity of biblical quotation and cadence for serious exegesis, however. As Noll pointed out, passages that would seem to be the most relevant such as Romans 13[20] were conspicuously rare. References instead reliably sought to

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[16] They analyzed approximately 2,200 items with explicitly political content, including books, pamphlets, newspaper articles, and monographs, excluding anything that remained private and did not enter public consciousness such as letters and notes. See Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz, eds., *American Political Writing During the Founding Era, 1760-1805*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press, 1983).
[17] Ibid.
[18] For a description of Hyneman and Lutz's method of analysis and sample, see Lutz, "The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late 18th-Century American Political Thought," *American Political Science Review* 78 (1984): 189–197.
[19] Donald S. Lutz, *The Origins of American Constitutionalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 140.
[20] Letter of Paul to the Romans 13:1-7:
"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.
Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.
For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that

dramatize the moments and heroic figures of the Old Testament, such as likening Washington to Moses or the warrior-leader Joshua, or comparing George III to Pharaoh, or, as Noll noted, "to depict the American-British conflict as between the woman and the beast of Revelation 12."[21] While there may have been little real attempt to discern the true political meaning of the scriptures, the rhetoric invariably sounded like the Bible, regardless of whether the author was being particularly introspective about it. An obsession with the Scriptures permeated "the writing of the elite and the speech of the humble" in the early United States, Noll asserted, to the extent that it became "the common coinage of the realm."[22]

The founders' frequent use of the Bible should come as no surprise because they lived in an overwhelmingly biblically literate society. Moreover, Barry Kosmin and Seymour Lachman have concluded that over 98 percent of men and women of American or European descent identified with Protestantism during this period.[23] Further, and far more important for my purposes, the overwhelming majority of the population (as much as three-quarters) identified with the family of sects religious historians call the Reformed theological tradition,[24] a tradition with a particular disposition toward applying the Bible to political life.

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which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.
Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.
For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.
Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."

[21] Mark A. Noll, "Was the Revolutionary War Justified?," *Christianity Today*, February 8, 1999, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/february8/9t2070.html?paging=off.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Barry A. Kosmin and Seymour Lachman, *One Nation Under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993), 28-29. It should be noted, however, that records establishing the religious affiliation of late eighteenth-century Americans can be elusive (because of methodological problems in how to weight various markers of sectarian identification).

[24] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 350.

Strictly speaking, all of the churches that grew from the sixteenth-century revolt against the Roman church can be called "reformed." However, the term usually designates that branch of the Reformation originally distinguished by two features that would later become central to American Puritanism: a high ecclesiology – that is, both containing an exalted view of the church as a holy people, chosen and destined by God for glory and having little regard for any ecclesiastical tradition that was not traceable either to the Scriptures or to the earliest church.

In the American context, Protestant leaders understood themselves to be reformed in two senses, both reminiscent of the classical prophets. First, they had abandoned what they believed to be the defective practice of Christianity promulgated by the corrupt Roman Catholicism of the day. Sometimes this position was summed up in the phrase "Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei," which means "The church reformed and always being reformed according to the word of God." Yet this phrase was not necessarily understood to mean that the church ought constantly to morph into something new with the passage of time. Instead, this seventeenth-century motto is consistent with the Reformers' idea that they were not innovating but "turning once again" to the form of the church and belief originated by Jesus Christ, lived out by the first disciples and the early church and borne witness to in the writings of the Old and New Testaments, shorn of later additions. Second, *reformed* meant rejecting the idea that tradition could provide a sufficient basis for matters of belief. Instead, the reformers insisted that "the Word of God" was the only ultimate source of appeal in matters of faith and that all other sources of knowledge, including a church's tradition, had to appeal to this source.

All of these developments contributed to what historians of American religion call the "Reformed approach," a hermeneutic that gestated in the American remainders of Calvinism, that is, the Puritan and Presbyterian congregations of the Atlantic seaboard. This theological bent was most prevalent among New Englanders; mid-state Presbyterians; and Scottish, English, and Dutch forms of Protestant Reformers[25] and was characterized by three over-arching principles: first, *scriptura sola* (by Scripture alone); second, the "regulative principle," which held that people are required to do what the Bible commands and not do what the Bible is silent about; and, third, what Noll calls "The Third Use of the Law,"[26] meaning that Scripture not only demonstrates the individual's need for salvation but also provides a precise blueprint for how a Christian should live out his entire life.

Noll contends that this hermeneutic developed because of two factors. First, varieties of Reformed Protestantism composed the bulk of America's churches. Second, these churches matured within an emerging democratic culture: "the engine that drove this hermeneutic was 'social transformation' – from hierarchy to democratic, ideological anti-hierarchy – a revolution which created a distinct American form of biblicalism – the notion that anyone could understand the Bible."[27] More importantly, the role of Providence was central to the Protestant Reformed theology of most Americans, as Americans were curious to learn how God might be both directly and intimately involved in the affairs of their nation and directing the steps of their leaders.

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[25] For useful examinations of the differences between New Englanders and ministers from the middle and southern colonies, see Melvin Endy, "Just War, Holy War, and Millennialism in Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (January 1985): 3–25; Mark Valeri, "The New Divinity and the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 46, no. 4 (October 1, 1989): 741–69, especially 765; Keith L. Griffin, *Revolution and Religion: American Revolutionary War and the Reformed Clergy* (New York: Paragon House, 1994).

[26] Nathan O. Hatch, Mark A. Noll, and George Mardsen, *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 76.

[27] Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 26.

Ministers and the American Founding

According to historian Patricia Bonomi, clergymen were not prominent in the revolutionary leadership, a surprising fact given the extraordinarily high degree of sermonizing during the Revolutionary War.[28] Only a single minister took part in the Continental Congress and signed the Declaration of Independence. That was John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian and president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) from 1768-1792. Witherspoon trained not only a substantial segment of leading Presbyterian clergy but also a number of political leaders as well. Nine of the fifty-five participants in the Federal Convention in 1787 were College of New Jersey graduates, including James Madison (who spent an extra year studying Hebrew and philosophy with Witherspoon after his graduation in 1771). Moreover, his pupils included a president and a vice-president of the United States, twenty-one senators, twenty-nine representatives, fifty-six state legislators, and three Supreme Court justices.[29] The famed educator also had the distinction of being touted by John Adams as the first high-profile figure in New Jersey to publicly support the cause of independence, assuring Americans that God was on their side in the war with "Satan's Empire." While Witherspoon was unusual both in terms of his direct participation and considerable influence, like all prominent ministers who preached against the British crown, he was tasked with framing the revolution in theological terms during his legendary sermons every Sunday in Princeton. His pupils were everywhere in positions of command in the American forces during the Revolution.[30]

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[28] Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 209.
[29] Ibid.
[30] See Sandoz, 362.

Stout argued that it is possible to debate both the amount and impact of the ministers' participation during this period. However, the impact of religious ideas cannot be overestimated, particularly in New England, which maintained a high ratio of preachers to general population over time. By the time of the revolution, New England had 720 Congregational churches for a population of about 500,000 – approximately one church for every 700 people.[31] More importantly, the average churchgoer listened to approximately 7,000 sermons in a lifetime (equivalent to 15,000 hours of concentrated listening). All of this led Stout to conclude, "Until the last decade of the colonial era there were at the local level few, if any, competing public speakers offering alternative messages. For all intents and purposes, the sermon was the only regular voice of authority."[32] Sandoz went further, claiming that, while "the role of the clergy as the philosophers of the American founding has not received great attention from students of political theory, it was abundantly clear to contemporaries."[33]

In her groundbreaking work, *Visionary Public: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800,* historian Ruth Bloch argued that the support that eventually came for the revolution developed overwhelmingly in "the remainders of Calvinist churches"[34] – Congregationalists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. Other denominations, most notably the Anglican Church, were torn apart by the revolution,[35] which is part of the reason why there

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[31] This does not count the scores of itinerant preachers who travelled throughout the region offering sermons, sometimes in the churches, other times in town squares.
[32] Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 19.
[33] Sandoz, xii.
[34] Ruth H. Bloch, "Religion and Ideological Change in the American Revolution," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 49.
[35] The traditionally-pacifist Quakers were split in two – some were conscientiously convinced that, despite the Friends' peace testimony, they could take up arms against the British. In the years following American

were far fewer pro-war sermons published by Southern ministers than by their counterparts from New England. While some Anglican priests joined the British cause, more than half of them were unable to reconcile their oaths of allegiance to George III with the independence of the United States and relinquished their pulpits during the Revolutionary War.[36]

Bloch has argued that, among these "neo-Puritan" ministers with large congregations, a religious tradition of millennial thinking was a popular, powerful, and persistent element. She illustrated a vital, enduring religious mentality that construed social and political developments in particular eschatological terms, with many Americans conceiving of the imperial crisis with Britain as a struggle that would end "with the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth."[37] Her argument maintains that they relied on the Scriptures to learn how God might be both directly and intimately involved in the affairs of their nation and directing the steps of their leaders. However, like most scholars working in this area, Bloch has provided scant details regarding how these ministers actually engaged with the Bible. A more fine-grained analysis of how the Bible shaped eighteenth-century understandings of America's political history is needed.

Using the tools of biblical criticism, intellectual historians Eric Nelson, Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, and Eran Shalev recently revisited the political speech of the era. They have reached a significant preliminary consensus: the DNA of early American political rhetoric is

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independence, Anglican ministers who had remained in the colonies began planning for an independent American church. One of the publications that focused discussion on the issue was a volume by William White. A series of conferences in the 1780s failed to bridge the differences between two parties that emerged, but, at a convention in 1789, the two groups formed the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States. They adopted a church government and a revised Book of Common Prayer which they believed was compatible with a rising democratic nation.

[36] "Religion and the American Revolution - Religion and the Founding of the American Republic | Exhibitions (Library of Congress)," http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel03.html.

[37] Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought 1756-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 167.

decidedly Hebraic, by which they mean animated by political ideas derived from the Old Testament. Shalev has called the American adaption of Old Testament rhetoric from this period "pseudo-biblicalism:"

> We moderns, much less immersed in the Bible than were early Americans, need to be reminded of the extent to which the Bible has its vehemently acerbic instances of irony and contempt, particularly toward wrongdoers. Americans did not inject the Bible with sarcasm, irony, and satire it was devoid of, but framed their political views within a biblical outlook that could accommodate their vitriolic and Manichean political culture.[38]

More concretely, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, the political history of the Israelites (the narrative of the relationship between God and his chosen people) is traditionally understood as the account in the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, and both Books of Samuel, Judges and Kings. This encompasses the period from the Mosaic era to the time of "confederate drift,"[39] concluding with the rise of the monarchy and subsequent dissolution into the divided kingdoms. These more recent scholars, however, have demonstrated that sermons from the Revolutionary War era are based on a more specific Old Testament tradition they have named Hebraic republicanism.[40] Working from Shalev, Nelson, and Perl-Rosenthal makes it possible to identify three different ways of interpreting the meaning of the Deuteronomic history in these sermons. These correspond to three distinct moments of the American founding. During the pre-Revolutionary era, these sermons channeled an indifference to monarchy in the Deuteronomic history. During the Revolution, they exhibited an "exclusivist" or anti-monarchic strain of that history. Finally, after the Revolution they

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[38] Eran Shalev, "'Written in the Style of Antiquity': Pseudo-Biblicism and the Early American Republic, 1770–1830," *Church History* 79, no. 04 (2010): 810.
[39] Daniel J. Elazar, "The Book of Judges: The Israelite Tribal Federation and Its Discontents," http://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles/judges.htm.
[40] Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, "The 'Divine Right of Republics': Hebraic Republicanism and the Debate over Kingless Government in Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 66 (July 2009), 536.

showed a strain of Hebraic "Constitutional republicanism"[41] derived from the Old Testament provisions regarding how to establish and govern the ideal republic of the Israelites.

While this tripartite characterization of the historical development of political sermons during this period was a significant scholarly advance, the analysis of Shalev et al. falls short because these authors were only interested in isolating the shifting notions of the best Israelite constitution in political sermons. This led them to draw sweeping conclusions such as Shalev's contention that "the impressive life span of an American Old Testamentism…all but disappeared after the Civil War…never to regain their antebellum prominence."[42] Shalev went on to claim that by the late nineteenth century "biblicism can no longer be considered a major component of national political discussions."[43] But Shalev's conclusion only rings true under a narrow definition of "biblicism." It is important to consider sermons not just as recitations of political ideas but also as a distinct method – or, as I argue, several distinct methods – by which those ideas were delivered by preachers. I turn next to a short discussion of the form of the eighteenth-century sermon, followed by an examination of six sermons by leading ministers from the era.

The Form and Structure of Eighteenth-Century Sermons

The form of the Protestant sermon remained remarkably stable from the Puritan era to the American founding, following a model taught by English cleric and Cambridge theologian William Perkins, who wrote *The Arte of Prophesying* (1607). Echoing Augustine and Calvin, the principle of Perkins's approach was simple: he taught that the Bible is reflexive, providing

[41] Perl-Rosenthal, 541.
[42] Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 8.
[43] Ibid., 12.

its own explanation of its meaning in a consistent whole. This literal meaning could be found through use of the three methods: circumstance, collation, and application. Thus, it was the task of the preacher to place Scripture into its proper context, collating that text with similar verses elsewhere in the Bible; to find consistent meaning; and then to finish by conforming his preaching to the "analogie of faith."[44] A proper sermon, then, was expected to be delivered in three parts: Text, Doctrine, and Application.[45] In Perkins's formal outline, the preacher should proceed as follows:

1. To read the Text distinctly out of the canonicall Scripture.
2. To give the sense and understanding of it being read by the Scripture itself.
3. To collect a few and profitable points of doctrine out of the naturall sense.
4. To applie (if he have the gift) the doctrines rightly collected to the manners of men in a simple and plain speech.[46]

The format of Text, Doctrine, and Application remained typical of sermons in the hands of the most accomplished preachers, especially on such formal occasions as the political sermons studied here. As Sandoz explained, the old form could be effective for "sustaining rigorous analysis and dramatizing the essential relationships among the Word, human intelligence, and conduct."[47]

Four types of sermons were most commonly preached during this era. Election Sermons were given annually to the governor and legislature following the election of officers for two-and-a-half centuries in New England. This was the main vehicle for ministers to expound their political theology.[48] It was an honor to be selected for this task, and these

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[44] Following the Reformation, this phrase was used to mean that all Scripture was to be interpreted with reference to all other Scripture. In other words, no single text or expression of Scripture was to be isolated or interpreted in a way contrary to its general teaching. See Sandoz, xix.
[45] Sandoz, xviii.
[46] Quoted in Sandoz, 18-19.
[47] Ibid.
[48] This was a precursor to the later Convention Sermon.

sermons were usually published afterwards.[49] The Artillery Sermon was an annual affair and dealt with civic and military matters. Thursday or Fifth-day Lecture Sermons, begun by John Cotton in Boston in 1633, were popular events for gathering and discussing matters of social and political interest. Finally, the Occasional Sermon was given to commemorate particular events or to mark days of prayer, fasting, and thanksgiving.

In the section that follows, I interpret six sermons by leading Protestant ministers, two given before the Revolutionary War, two during it, and two after the United States Constitution was ratified. I chose these sermons for three reasons: they were all published works and enjoyed a wide circulation as pamphlets; they were written by the leading lights of mainline Protestant denominations, and they shaped the opinions and influenced the preaching of a wide swath of ministers who were politically active during this era.[50]

Pre-Exilic Sermons: Moral Reform and Political Quietism Before the Revolutionary War

While sermons from all three periods discussed in this chapter compare America with ancient Israel, the comparison is particularly apt prior to the Revolutionary War, because the colonies functioned similarly to a vassal state like sixth-century Judah. In the establishment churches at least, ministers did little preaching of political independence or of a national greatness separate and apart from the British Empire. Like the ancient pre-exilic Nevi'im, these ministers offered commentary on a kind of "Deuteronomic History" of America, a scathing interpretation of secular events through the prism of a covenant with God. They

[49] See Sandoz, xi.
[50] Only previously published materials have been selected – that is, nothing from manuscript sources has been included. This limitation derives from the fact that the publication of sermons in America in the eighteenth century was a specialty, if not a monopoly, of New Englanders. See Sandoz, xi-xxii.

predict, as Moses did shortly before his death, that the people's "foot shall slide."[51] The hope that one day God would redeem them is remote in these sermons, and they made abundantly clear that resisting the British would not be judged favorably by God.

Together with Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Prince (1687-1758) is considered *the historian* of the Great Awakening, authoring *An Account of the Revival of Religion in Boston in the Years 1740-1-2-3*, which was published posthumously in 1823. By the time he was officially ordained, Prince was already a noted sermonizer, fielding multiple offers to lead congregations in New England. He chose to lead Old South Church, a Congregationalist church originally established by John Winthrop that broke away in 1669. Prince remained there for forty years, from 1718 until his death in 1758. Prince was a quintessential example of a leading theological light from an establishment church; he cautiously supported the religious revival in New England.[52]

Prince's Election Day Sermon of 1730 was a special one, however, given to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the landing of the Arbella. Ordinarily Cotton Mather would have been chosen to deliver it, but the scion of the great Puritan family died in 1728, so the honor fell to Prince. On May 27, 1730, he delivered *The People of New England* before the Massachusetts State Legislature, a sermon later published by Massachusetts' official printer.

As might be expected from a minister in the Reformed Tradition, Prince began by reminding his congregants that the Bible should be interpreted "literally." Like all preachers

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[51] See Deuteronomy 32 (especially verse 35).

[52] Prince is an example from a very distinguished group. Similar ideas can be found in several sermons collected in Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era*; Benjamin Colman, "Government the Pillar of the Earth" (1730), 7-24; Joseph Sewall, "Nineveh's Repentance and Deliverance" (1740), 25-50; Charles Chauncy, "Civil Magistrates Must Be Just, Ruling In the Fear of God" (1747), 137-77; Samuel Dunbar, "The Presence of God With His People" (1760), 208-230.

who relied on the Old Testament to explain American history, however, Prince had to account for how a nation over 3000 years and 5000 miles away from the original and never mentioned in the Bible could really be a "New Israel." It would seem that such a fact was at odds with a literal interpretation. But what reads like an historical parallel to modern readers is not what Prince intended: he and his brethren did not recognize history as divided into distinct secular eras. Echoing Winthrop's words a hundred years before, Prince said that the people of New England were chosen because of their role in the continuous, sacred history of the Old Testament, as the explicit "antitype" of the biblical Israelites:

> I cannot forbear observing, that there never was any people on earth, so parallel in their general history to that of the ancient ISRAELITES as this of NEW ENGLAND. To no other country of people could there ever be so directly applied a multitude of Scripture passages in the literal sense, as to this particular country: that excepting miracles and changing names, one would be ready to think, the greater part of the OLD TESTAMENT were written about us; or that we, though in a lower degree, were the particular antitypes of that primitive [early] people.[53]

Since this sermon was preached shortly before the installation of a new royal governor in Massachusetts, it is easy to see, based on Prince's words alone, why Shalev would frame ministers during this era as uninterested in the Bible's critique of monarchy. In fact, Prince appears enthusiastically supportive of the crown:

> We the ministers and people account it happy, that we see so many in place of public power, descending from the ancient founders of these towns and churches, and others, in such a measure like them, in exalted stations. We also esteem it a joyful smile of Heaven, that our most gracious KING has given us principal rulers out of ourselves; men of known virtue, and well-acquainted with our constitution, genius, circumstance, and chief concern and interest. And the late surprising turn of Providence in favor to this distressed people, fills us with humble adorations of the sovereign power and government of GOD; and gives us such raised apprehensions of the gracious dispositions of our KING and QUEEN to favor us, as both inspires us with universal

[53] Thomas Prince, "The People of New England," in *The Wall and the Garden: Selected Massachusetts Election Sermons, 1670-1775*, ed. A. W. Plumstead (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), 199. In a Puritan sermon, an "antitype" meant someone explicitly foreshadowed by an earlier person in the Bible.

joy and gratitude, [....][54]

More important, however, is the epigraph at the beginning of Prince's sermon, a quote from Samuel's farewell speech in the First Book of Samuel. Here the former prophet (who as I mentioned in the previous chapter was at the center of Israel's transition from confederation to monarchy) is departing from political leadership, after anointing Saul to be Israel's first king:

> And SAMUEL said unto the PEOPLE: "It is the LORD that advanced MOSES and AARON, and that brought up your FATHERS out of the Land of Egypt; Now therefore, stand still, that I may Reason with you before the LORD, of all the Righteous Acts of the LORD, which He did to YOU and to your FATHERS."[55]

The point of Samuel's departing message is to reiterate that all political leaders are chosen by God, a show of begrudging acceptance after he has spent most of the story railing against the evils an earthly king will bring. However, Samuel also offers a stern warning, in the manner of Amos and Hosea, regarding the futility of political action. Both Samuel and God are offended when the Hebrews ask repeatedly and despite continued warnings to upend their political system and replace it with the unexceptional type all of their neighbors live under, to boot. The epigraph serves as a reminder that God, not man, is responsible for everything that occurs in the world, political or otherwise.

Prince went on to warn that God's "own institutions ought not to be set on a level, mixed or debased with the low devices of men,"[56] before closing the first section of the sermon with a quote from Psalm 105 celebrating the "marvelous works that HE has done, his Wonders, and the Judgments of his mouth."[57] This is significant, because the Book of Psalms,

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[54] Prince, 214.
[55] Ibid, 184 (1 Samuel 12:6-7).
[56] Ibid., 201.
[57] Ibid., 208 (Psalm 105:5-6).

which was a popular sourcebook for sermons since the Puritan era, is less a text with a coherent message than a collection of 150 poems containing the full range of Israel's religious faith. Prince and his fellow pre-exilic sermonizers did not look to Psalms for tales of heroic acts by human beings or to motivate political action, as their exilic progeny would do.

Instead, Prince made clear that the answer to what ailed the people lay only in moral renewal. He asked,

> "Have any of the other Plantations suffered so much as we, by cruel wars, depredations and bloodshed, impoverishing disappointments, fires and losses, both by sea and land, contagious sicknesses and other evils, which have marked us out for the censure and condemnation of the world?"[58]

Prince attributed this devastation of New England to a steady decline in morality since the Puritan founding. Channeling the declensive tone of second-generation Puritan ministers, Prince lamented, "But like that ancient people also, we have not hearkened to the voice of GOD, but hardened our necks against Him, and have done worse and worse in every generation."[59] Finally, Prince ended the sermon at the both ironic and meaningful Book 7 of Jeremiah (recall Chapter One, where I explained the bifurcated nature of Jeremiah):

> "Since the day that your Fathers came forth out of the land of EGYPT unto this day, I have sent unto you all my Servants the Prophets, daily rising up early, and sending them. Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their Ear, but hardened their Neck, they did worse than their Fathers. Therefore thou shalt speak all these Words unto them, but they will not hearken unto thee: thou shalt also call unto them, but they will not answer thee. But thou shalt say unto them, This is a Nation that obeyeth not the Voice of the LORD their GOD, nor receiveth Correction."[60]

Prince made it clear, as clear, as Samuel once did, that there could not be a political solution to a spiritual problem. In fact, he note, God would be angered if the colonists took

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[58] Ibid., 209.
[59] Ibid., 211.
[60] Ibid., 212 (Jeremiah 7:25-28).

matters into their own hands and resisted British rule. The best the faithful could do, Prince contended, was to show humility in the eyes of God and obey St. Paul's admonition to "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."[61]

In 1750 Samuel Phillips delivered a sermon before Massachusetts Bay's House of Representatives, which also illustrates this pre-revolutionary form of American Hebraic political thought. It also closely resembles the pre-exilic mode in the Old Testament. He recalled for his audience the angel who appointed Moses "to lead his people out of Egypt" and who later assigned Joshua to guide "the several Tribes into Canaan, and [to make] room for them there." After their deaths, "several Judges being authorized from Heaven, presided over Israel successively." Phillips did not stress the commonwealthean attributes of the Hebraic government under the period chronicled in the Book of Judges (~ 1380-1050 BCE), the period between the exodus from Egypt and the rise of Saul. That use of Scripture would be the standard move of an advocate of rebellion such as that which Paine would use to illustrate God's true opinion of monarchy Instead, Phillips praised Israel's "Succession of Kings," who followed the reign of the Judges "by the express Direction and Appointment of the most high."[62]

The political moral that the tale of ancient Israel revealed was thus one of subservience. When Phillips concluded that men should be "under the Government of Men,"[63] he meant the men who were currently in charge. This was not a call to political action of any

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[61] Romans 13:1.
[62] Samuel Phillips, *Political Rulers Authoriz'd and Influenc'd by God Our Saviour to Decree and Execute Justice - A Sermon Preached at Boston* (Boston: John Draper, 1750), 7.
[63] Ibid.

kind. In fact, it was a polemic against the kind of revolutionary sentiment that would later be a key facet of the period's sermonizing.

The sermons by Prince and Phillips reflected the long shadow of American Puritanism often discussed by scholars of the era.[64] They took as their reality the still familiar biblical images of Creator and creation, of fallen and sinful men who strove anxiously in a mysteriously ordered existence in which eschatological fulfillment was a middling proposition at best. More importantly, for these ministers the political fate of the colonies lay wholly in God's hands. They urged only moral reform as an end in itself not as the necessary precondition for political transformation that the "war ministers" in the next section would claim it to be.

Exilic Sermons: The "War Jeremiad" and the American Revolution

Once revolution was afoot, establishment ministers began to espouse a radically different perspective on biblical history, though it involved more than what Nelson, Perl-Rosenthal, and Shalev have contended, mining the Old Testament for God's views about kings, as Paine did in *Common Sense*.[65] What we find instead in these sermons is the full range of the exilic prophetic register, which included not only an increasing frequency of quotations from the exilic prophets themselves but also their style and substance.

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[64] Edmund S. Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic, 1763-89, Fourth Edition*, Chicago History of American Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), xi.

[65] Thomas Paine, "Common Sense," in *Paine: Collected Writings*, ed. Eric Foner, The Library of America Series: Library of America (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1995), 12-15. As Frank Manuel points out, "Hebraic political theory, rooted in the biblical and rabbinic tradition, was throughout the long history of the Jews rather consistently monarchical." See Frank Edward Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

These sermons provided a road map to a glorious future for America with several features of exilic prophecy present including the emphasis on moral reform as a key to demonstrating fealty to God (which is common to all classical prophecy) and several others. Among them were the characterization of doom as the first but not the last word; the procession from judgment to the anticipation of a new order; the urging of patriots to dig in and prepare for the long struggle; the notion that Americans would have a future greater than anything they had experienced thus far; and the call to action, but with the caveat that trust in God was ultimately the most important thing.

After graduating from Harvard University in 1740 (in the same class as Samuel Adams), Samuel Langdon (1723-1797) became a Congregational clergyman and educator, serving first as pastor in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Through the influence of John Hancock, he was appointed president of Harvard in 1774, a post he held until 1780. At Harvard, his unwavering support of independence alienated his many Tory students, ultimately causing him to resign. The following year, he became pastor of the Congregational Church at Hampton Falls, New Hampshire. Seven years later Langdon was chosen to be a delegate to the New Hampshire convention that adopted the Constitution of the United States, where he was a vocal advocate for the Federalist cause.[66] During the Revolutionary War his regular Sunday jeremiads – such as his famous *Government Corrupted by Vice* (1775), which he preached a month after shots were fired at Lexington and Concord – were all fire and

[66] Langdon was distinguished as a scholar and theologian and exerted a wide influence in his community. The University of Aberdeen gave him the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1762. He was a charter member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; he published Summary of Christian Faith and Practice in 1768, Observations on the Revelations in 1791, and Remarks on the Leading Sentiments of Dr. Hopkins' System of Doctrines (1794), as well as many sermons.

brimstone. In that particular one, he denounced the corrupt British monarchy and located the original sin of political life, as Paine had done, in the evil of monarchy itself:

> That ever-memorable day, the nineteenth of April, is the date of an unhappy war openly begun, by the ministers of the king of Great Britain, against his good subjects in this colony, and implicitly against all the colonies. But for what? Because they have made a noble stand for their natural and constitutional rights, in opposition to the machinations of wicked men, who are betraying their royal master, establishing Popery in the British dominions, and aiming to enslave and ruin the whole nation, that they may enrich themselves and their vile dependents with the public treasures, and the spoils of America.[67]

Langdon's anti-monarchism only appeared in the first one-third of the sermon, however. Quoting heavily from Jeremiah and "exilic" (Second) Isaiah, he envisioned the wholesale rebirth of America, one that would be both religious and political. He located the causal factors of the colonists' predicament less in the glory and sins of an empire than in the vices and moral degeneration of Americans themselves. When he arrived at the "Application," while there is a clarion call to take up arms to destroy the monarchy, he said that this was only a secondary task commanded by God. Fidelity to God and the moral law was the only path to true redemption, he maintained. Finally, Langdon exhibited the hopeful optimism of the exilic tradition, in which the future is imagined much as John Winthrop had imagined it, as a "City upon a Hill."[68]

Langdon opened by saying that his sermon on the current predicament would be told explicitly through the story of Isaiah. The epigraph is from Isaiah 1:26:

> And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.[69]

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[67] Samuel Langdon, "Government Corrupted By Vice," in *The Patriot Preachers of the American Revolution*, ed. Frank Moore (New York: C. T. Evans, 1862), 54.
[68] John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity --- by Gov. John Winthrop, 1630," http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html.
[69] Langdon, "Government Corrupted By Vice," 50 (Isaiah 1:26).

Bailyn and Wood interpreted these types of statements as code for Roman republicanism. Indeed, Langdon made reference himself at one point to the corrupted state of the Roman republic under Julius Caesar, which did little more than "retain all its ancient formalities."[70] Shalev et al. read the "restore" to "the beginning" as Hebraic republican exclusivism, arguing that this anticipates the reintroduction of the *shoftim* (judges) into the polity, as heroic leaders (like Sampson, Deborah, and Barak) from 1 and 2 Judges. Neither of these interpretations captures what Langdon actually intended, however. Langdon chose Isaiah because he wanted to say to Americans what Isaiah said to the Israelites: the problem was not that the political arrangements needed to be altered; it was that the judges needed to be replaced by ones who were honorable. This sounds like a far less radical proposition, but consideration of the entirety of the sermon reveals that the message was that the form of rule as such was not the true source of the problem – just as it was not for Samuel, nor for any of the Nevi'im. In the Old Testament, societies under all types of political rule are equally susceptible to moral decay. Their citizens are equally likely to be guilty of syncretic religious practices, to fall for the charms of wealth, or to become decadent. The restoration of true belief, fidelity to God, and the honor of individual citizens were Langdon's main concerns. Overthrowing a political system alone could not save a nation or constitute an authentic polity. In order to restore the judges to what they were "at the first," the body politic had to be repaired. Good leaders would never emerge from a corrupted people.

In Langdon's view political changes followed from religious reformation and redemption. The problem with the interpretation of Bailyn and those of a similar opinion is that they interpreted religious language as code for a political sensibility, when in fact

[70] Ibid., 62.

Langdon was interpreting political events through a religious lens, just as the exilic prophets did.

To reinforce this point, Langdon turned next to a paraphrase of Jeremiah before returning to Isaiah to describe the long, slow civic decline of the British Empire, which he cast as analogous to the ancient kingdom of Israel:

> We must keep our eyes fixed on the supreme government of the ETERNAL KING, as directing all events, setting up or pulling down the kings of the earth at His pleasure, suffering the best forms of human government to degenerate and go to ruin by corruption; or restoring the decayed constitutions of kingdoms and states, by reviving public virtue and religion, and granting the favorable interpositions of His providence. The kingdom of Israel was brought to destruction, because its iniquities were full; its counselors and judges were wholly taken away, because there remained no hope of reformation.[71]

Langdon continued rousing the crowd, explaining that the decline of civic virtue in the empire had infected the entire body politic – from monarch to lowly functionary:

> We are no longer permitted to fix our eyes on the faithful of the land, and trust in the wisdom of their counsels, and the equity of their judgment; but men in whom we can have no confidence, whose principles are subversive of our liberties, whose aim is to exercise lordship over us, and share among themselves the public wealth; men who are ready to serve any master.[72]

All of the criticism of the British occurred during the first one-third of Langdon's sermon. In a style similar to Paine's in *Common Sense*, first he prodded the crowd by trying to show that the bonds of affection that Americans shared with the British had worn thin. Then the remaining two-thirds of the jeremiad focused only on the Americans, building up to an exhortation to fight and to the exilic hope that the end result would live up to the colonists' expectations. He began the second-third mimicking Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's linking of sin with political misfortune:

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[71] Ibid., 55. The phrase "Setting up or pulling down" of kings is a paraphrase of two closely-related sections of Jeremiah: 1:10 and 24:6.
[72] Ibid., 52.

> But, alas! have not the sins of America, and of New England in particular, had a hand in bringing down upon us the righteous judgments of Heaven? Wherefore is all this evil come upon us? Is it not because we have forsaken the Lord? Can we say we are innocent of crimes against God? No, surely; it becomes us to humble ourselves under His mighty hand, that He may exalt us in due time. However unjustly and cruelly we have been treated by man, we certainly deserve, at the hand of God, all the calamities in which we are now involved. Have we not lost much of that spirit of genuine Christianity which so remarkably appeared in our ancestors, for which God distinguished them with the signal favors of providence, when they fled from tyranny and persecution into this western desert?
>
> Do not our follies and iniquities testify against us? Have we not, especially in our seaports, gone much too far into the pride and luxuries of life? Is it not a fact open to common observation, that profaneness, intemperance, unchastity, the love of pleasure, fraud, avarice, and other vices, are increasing among us from year to year?[73]

Then Langdon reiterated that a change in political leadership would not solve America's real problems:

> Doubtless, they complained much of men in power, and very heartily and liberally reproached them for their notorious misconduct. The public greatly suffered, and the people groaned, and wished for better rulers and better management. But in vain they hoped for a change of men and measures and better times, when the spirit of religion was gone, and the infection of vice was become universal. And God, in righteous judgment, left them to run into all this excess of vice to their own destruction, because they had forsaken Him, and were guilty of willful inattention to the most essential parts of that religion which had been given them by a well-attested revelation from heaven.[74]

Channeling Jeremiah, he explained to his audience that, if they were perplexed because they did not feel especially sinful, they should remember that it was because of their chosen status that they received both special protection and greater punishment. Using a rhetorical strategy similar to several of the Nevi'im,[75] Langdon first condemned the British before applying the same standards to judge the Americans:

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[73] Ibid., 64.
[74] Ibid., 65.
[75] See Amos 3-6; Ezekiel 27:23.

> If such sins have not been so notorious among us as in older countries, we must, nevertheless, remember, that the sins of a people who have been remarkable for the profession of godliness, are more aggravated by all the advantages and favors they have enjoyed, and will receive more speedy and signal punishment; as God says of Israel: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities."[76]

With all of its focus on sin, idolatry, and moral decay, it is easy to forget that Langdon's sermon was ultimately a jeremiad for war. Like his pre-war (pre-exilic) predecessors, Langdon said that the colonists' ultimate end had to be the redemption of religion However, like all war sermons given at this time, it ended with a call to arms:

> At least five or six of our inhabitants were murderously killed by the regulars at Lexington, before any man attempted to return the fire, and…two more of our brethren were likewise killed at Concord Bridge by a fire from the king's soldiers, before the engagement began on our side. Our late happy government is changed into the terrors of military execution. Our firm opposition to the establishment of an arbitrary system is called *rebellion*, and we are to expect no mercy but by yielding property and life at discretion. This we are resolved at all events not to do; and therefore, we have taken arms.[77]

Langdon then reinforced his call to arms by invoking two military episodes from the Old Testament in order to demonstrate that God still stood with the Israelites. First, in Exodus 14, just before Moses parts the Red Sea, the Israelites were petrified as they fled from the larger and far more powerful Egyptian army. Then, however, the angel of God, who was travelling before the camp of Israel, moved to a position amongst them; and then "the pillar of the cloud stood behind them."[78] Second, as I mentioned in Chapter One, a variety of battle scenes in Joshua portray Yahweh as an invincible warrior-king who directs Israel's assault on the Canaanites, granting the tribes total victory only when they are fully loyal to their covenant with him. The battle scene that resonated most strongly for Langdon (and more

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[76] Langdon, "Government Corrupted By Vice," 65-66.
[77] Ibid., 52.
[78] Exodus 14:19.

generally in pro-war sermons during both the American Revolutionary and Civil Wars) occurs in Joshua 5:13. A supernatural "captain" of Yahweh's army suddenly appears to Joshua in human form, brandishing "a naked sword."[79] Fighting invisibly alongside Israel's soldiers, the presence of this heavenly commander reveals that God will resume his interventions on behalf of his people, if they are deserving:

> Oh, may our camp be free from every accursed thing! May our land be purged from all its sins! May we be truly a holy people, and all our towns, cities of righteousness! Then the Lord will be our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; and we shall have no reason to be afraid though thousands of enemies set themselves against us round about, though all nature should be thrown into tumults and convulsions. He can command the stars in their courses to fight His battles, and all the elements to wage war with His enemies. He can destroy them with innumerable plagues, or send faintness into their hearts, so that the men of might shall not find their hands. In a variety of methods He can work salvation for us, as He did for His people in ancient days, and according to the many remarkable deliverances granted in former times to Great Britain and New England.[80]
>
> Yet if a general reformation of religion and morals had taken place, and they had turned to God from all their sins--if they had again recovered the true spirit of their religion, God, by the gracious interpositions of His providence, would soon have found out methods to restore the former virtue of the state, and again have given them men of wisdom and integrity, according to their utmost wish, to be counselors and judges. This was verified in fact, after the nation had been purged by a long captivity, and returned to their own land humbled, and filled with zeal for God and His law.[81]

In these closing sections, the similarities between Langdon and the exilic prophets are striking, He ended on the same hopeful exuberance of Isaiah and Jeremiah; what he omitted is precisely what Jeremiah and Ezekiel omit: the next episode, the disappointment of a shattered and spare community of returning exiles that is described by post-exilic prophets. Unlike them, however, Langdon lived far enough into the next era for his perspective to evolve. The

[79] Joshua 5:13.
[80] Langdon, "Government Corrupted By Vice," 72.
[81] Ibid., 59.

following section will limn how the political sermons he delivered before he died in 1797 marked a shift towards a post-exilic perspective in his preaching.

Delivered on the third anniversary of the Battle of Lexington, Jacob Cushing's *Divine Judgment Upon Tyrants* (1778) is the prototypical sermon that jeremiad scholars like Bercovitch and Shulman had in mind when they discussed prophecy as a generalizable form of rhetoric. While Langdon's sermon displayed several core features of exilic prophecy, Cushing's paint-peeling diatribe featured a more highly developed theodicy. It contained a righteous call for violence, a call for repentance, the universalization of Old Testament principles. It exhibited a more vengeful tone than his previous sermons and included the notion that tribulation would purify the people, a pitched battle cry, and the exilic promise that one day Americans would triumph and possess the land permanently.

Cushing's epigraph is from a particularly vengeful portion of Deuteronomy:

> Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people, for he wilt avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries; and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.[82]

Here Cushing echoed God's judgment and promise to deal with Israel's enemies, reasserting that the chosen people are under God's special protection. Like Langdon, Cushing explained that in the Bible the Jews themselves were always partially to blame for the cruelties visited upon them – whether it was exile, dispossession of their land, or plagues. Their oppressors (be they Assyrians, Babylonians, Amalekites, or the hardened heart of Pharaoh) were always instruments of God's judgment. However, this presents a theological puzzle, one that is not explained by the Hebrew prophets: if the Jews themselves were to

[82] Jacob Cushing, "Divine Judgments Upon Tyrants," in Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding* Era, 611 (Deuteronomy 32:43).

blame for what befell them and if, when "the rod of the wicked rests on them," the oppressor nations were merely carrying out God's judgments, how could their enemies (the British, in this case) be also evil and therefore worthy of both human and divine punishment?[83]

In the "Doctrine" (interpretation) portion of the sermon, Cushing attempted to provide an explanation. First he explained why Israel's (America's) enemies deserved to be punished because they were more than "mere instruments" God used to dispense justice; they were morally corrupted to begin with. He then returned to the more important part of the message, the theodicy which explained that backsliding caused God to turn away from the colonists, albeit temporarily, just as he turned away from the Israelites. Here, he ascribed agency to the enemies of God's chosen:

> It by no means reflects upon the righteousness of God, that those whom he employs as instruments in the execution of his judgments upon a revolting, sinful people, are themselves chargeable with injustice and cruelty; and have nothing in view but the gratifying their own ambition, avarice and lust of power. And commonly they who are the authors, or perpetrators of such violence and severity upon a people, are afterwards, in God's time, justly punished in their turn, for their vices, their pride, wantonness and barbarity.[84]

Cushing cited the destruction of the Edomites, as described by the exilic prophet Obadiah, as an example. Jacob's brother Esau originally founded the city of Edom. When Nebuchadnezzar II sacked Jerusalem, carted away the King of Judea, and installed a puppet ruler in 597, the Edomites not only failed to come to the aid of their brethren; they also actually helped the Babylonians loot the city. In 590 BCE, Obadiah prophesied that in judgment God would completely wipe out the house of Esau forever; not even a remnant would remain:

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[83] Ibid., 618. This case proves thornier than the early biblical stories, however, due to the "common sanguinity" of Americans and Englishmen.
[84] Ibid., 615.

> Thus utter destruction is denounced upon Edom, for their unnatural enmity against the Jews, and cruelty towards their brethren, in Obad. ver. 10, "For thy violence against thy brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off forever."[85]

Ultimately, Cushing failed to resolve this nettlesome tension in the Old Testament, and fell back on the pronouncements of late (Third) Isaiah to explain why the enemies of the chosen people are to be condemned. In short, Isaiah claimed that, though they be "the rod of God's divine anger," they also possessed agency:

> Accordingly they are described by the prophet, as persons whose hands are defiled with blood; adding, "their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, wasting and destruction are in their paths."[86]

Although the enemies of Israel had the a priori taint of an evil nature and therefore deserved to be punished, as in all jeremiads, the heart of Cushing's sermon remains its theodicy of blaming the – old or new – Israelites themselves:

> His church and chosen are not without mistakes and errors, in this imperfect state—hence they are prone to degenerate and transgress—to be too regardless of God, and deficient in their obedience—nay, to be guilty of great wickedness. And it becomes necessary, to punish such revolters from the ways of God, and purity of manners. Hence, when the all-wise God designs the chastisement and reformation of his backsliding people, he "visits their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes," and uses those methods, that shall best promote his moral government.[87]

Cushing specified that God's punishment could manifest in many ways, traditional punishments like famines, pestilence, or plagues as well as hellfire rained upon the guilty by others. In all cases, though, Cushing derived the originating sins from the lengthy list of

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[85] Ibid., 616. After describing the horrific crime against their brothers, Cushing described how the Edomites' land was eventually possessed by Egypt, and they ceased to exist as a people. But the book ends on the triumphant exilic note that, when the Jews return from exile, the land of Edom will be among the reclaimed territories.
[86] Ibid., 612 (Isaiah 59: 6-7).
[87] Ibid., 613.

admonitions in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, a distillation of the sins "that relate to them chiefly as a body politic."[88] These passages all center on moral transgressions committed by the Israelites themselves, which is perhaps another reason why scholars conflate this form of prophecy with its pre-exilic antecedent. These differences across the prophetic genre are subtle both in antiquity and in America, but they are important. Shalev, Perl-Rosenthal, and Stout have missed the key shift within exilic prophecy which universalized the message – to suddenly claim, as Ezekiel does, that the principles that animate the Jewish polity were never intended to apply to only the ancient Israelites:

> The prophecy then before us, is not limited to the Israelites; but may be understood as extending to all God's chosen, though oppressed and injured people, in all generations, that he will recompense their wrongs – plead their cause – and do justice upon their enemies.[89]

Presumably, God's chosen here included Americans. Cushing continued on, quoting and commenting on the Song of Moses near the end of Deuteronomy:

> "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people." These are the concluding words of Moses his song, which setteth forth God's works of mercy and judgment towards the children of Israel, his covenant people. And though, in their primary meaning, they respect that nation only, yet they may be accommodated and fairly applied to God's faithful and obedient people, at all times, and in all ages; inasmuch as the latter part of the prophecy reaches unto the latter days, and is not yet wholly fulfilled.

The exilic promise described above was meant to include all pious Judeo-Christian nations. Cushing put the matter plainly here:

> And with regard to mankind in all ages, may it not be said, that when a people have been remarkable for justice, temperance, industry, and zeal for the public good, they have prospered in all their affairs, and been high in reputation? And, perhaps, no

[88] Ibid., 614. See Ezekiel 36:25-27.
[89] Ibid., 613.

> instance can be produced of a nation's being given up to exterminating judgments and calamities, so long as virtue, probity and religion flourished among them.
> But when falshood and perfidy, injustice and general corruption, with a contempt of religion, have generally prevailed among them, they have fallen into many calamities, and been deprived of those advantages they so much abused.[90]

In other words, any nation of believers could be subject to the same protections, the same judgments, and the same standards of piety and ethical behavior. "Though God chastise his people with the rod of his hand, or permit enemies to oppose and oppress them, yet he will remember his holy covenant, and shew compassion to them, upon their humiliation and repentance."[91] Quoting Psalm 94 (a favorite of the exilic prophets) Cushing reminded his audience that God would never "cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance: The Lord will not cast off forever—but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies. He will arise, and have mercy upon Sion, when the set time to favor her, is come."[92]

Following the exilic portrait of the future in the "Doctrine" portion of the sermon, where Cushing reminded the audience that God would fulfill his obligations if Americans did their part, in the "Application" Cushing launched into a full-throated jeremiad for war. He argued that God was urging Americans to "chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword."[93] After explaining that his listeners could be certain that God was on the side of the colonists because the odds were so stacked against them in the military confrontations thus far ("under one of the greatest generals, perhaps, that Britain can boast of," he noted), Cushing drew his exhortation to violence from Jeremiah 48, a passage that is a deliberate reversal of the famous phrase originating in early Isaiah (and repeated in Micah): "they shall

[90] Ibid., 615.
[91] Ibid., 618.
[92] Ibid., 619 (Psalm 94).
[93] Ibid., 619 (Leviticus 26:7).

beat their swords into plowshares."[94] Channeling Jeremiah, Cushing here not only said that fighting the British was a sacred charge but that those who avoided combat would anger God. After American arms had been sacralized, he warned, to keep one's sword sheathed was a sin:

> If this war be just and necessary on our part, as past all doubt it is, then we are engaged in the work of the Lord, which obliges us (under God mighty in battle) to use our swords as instruments of righteousness, and calls us to the shocking, but necessary, important duty of shedding human blood; not only in defence of our property, life and religion, but in obedience to him who hath said, "Cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood." You were spared, it may be, further to signalize yourselves, and to do yet greater service for God and your bleeding country, which calls aloud to you, and all its hearty friends, to rouse and exert themselves, for the destruction of the common enemy and oppressor; and to wipe away the blood wherewith this land has been stained. To arms! To action, and the battle of the warrior! is the language of divine providence; and you have every motive imaginable to awaken, and excite you to be up and doing the work of the Lord faithfully. The honor and glory of God, and the salvation of your country under God, call aloud upon all. Duty, interest, liberty, religion and life, every thing worth enjoyment, demand speedy and the utmost exertions.[95]

Cushing ended with a quintessential exilic simultaneity of hope and peril:

> A close attention to the occurrences in this unnatural war, from its rise to the present time, affords us great occasion to sing of God's mercy, and to rejoice with his people; and likewise to fear and tremble before the Lord, that his anger is not yet turned away, but his hand is stretched out still."[96]

The American "war" sermons reflected the same subtle but critically important shift in ancient Hebrew prophecy. Like their pre-exilic forerunners, exilic ministers warned the people of impending punishment for their disloyalty to God. However, they also added the distinct feature of a revolutionary horizon. They could imagine a time after the war ended, when Americans would be released from "Babylon." These sermons present the full range of the exilic register: doom as the first but not the last word, moral reform as a key to

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[94] Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3.
[95] Cushing, 624 (Jeremiah 48:10).
[96] Ibid.

demonstrating fealty to God, and trust in God as ultimately the most important thing. Further, they also urged patriots to dig in and prepare for the long struggle. Through this, they were able to catch a glimpse into The Promised Land.

Post-Exilic Sermons: Ratification and Decline in "The Republic of the Israelites"

After the ratification of the Constitution, ministers began to preach differently about the history of biblical Israel. Shalev has suggested that by the late eighteenth century the biblical history of the Israelites offered Americans "not just an argument against monarchy, but a model for their emerging polity."[97] This shift, though, amounted to more than a sudden interest in the early phase of the Hebrew polity described in Judges when it was still kingless and, to Shalev's view, republican. Sermons given after ratification more closely resemble what Deuteronomy signals that the role of ancient prophecies will be – to elucidate America's "true constitution" according to the ancient conception in Deuteronomy. Israel's constitution "did not specify institutional structures or arrangements in the way of modern constitutions," Elazar explained. "Deuteronomy, like other ancient constitutions, has to do with the ordering of the polity, not merely of its government."[98]

The current scholarly approach has failed to capture the full political range of these sermons, most importantly, their underlying disappointment over the counter-revolutionary settlement of the new Constitution. In short, the dominant note sounded by these preachers is that they see a people who are as morally flawed as they were before. To be sure, the establishment clergy offered praise for the new Constitution (noting its similarity to its ancient

[97] Shalev, "A Perfect Republic," 240.
[98] Daniel J. Elazar, "Deuteronomy as Israel's Ancient Constitution: Some Preliminary Reflections," http://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles2/deut-const.htm.

antecedents), but their praise was muted. While they recognized it as a significant achievement, they were in agreement that it in no way could guarantee the nation's deliverance. Ultimately, the ministers concluded that such deliverance could not be found in worldly affairs but rather in esoteric visions of the afterlife , what we might now call a more traditionally Christian perspective.

Just as the failure of post-exilic hopes that Yahweh would restore Judah to peace and prosperity caused biblical writers to stop regarding ordinary events of history as vehicles for fulfilling God's promises, these post-revolutionary era sermons expressed the same sort of ambivalence. On the one hand, they sacralized the new legal code; on the other hand, they lamented the fact that the new Constitution was all there was to celebrate about the *Novus Ordo Seclorum*. As a result, just as ancient prophetic literature became increasingly remote from the unfolding historical crises that motivated the biblical prophets, these ministers begin to express a similar disenchantment with the world. The conclusion that human effort is futile generated a kind of prophecy whose central thrust was that only a supernatural agency could implement the prophetic visions of a glorious future.

As I said in Chapter One, four related features stand out in post-exilic prophecy. First is the recognition that, while the grand predictions of their forerunners were partially realized, the anticipated triumph had been disappointing; second came an uncertainty about whether a messianic leader would finally arrive to reestablish the nation's glory. The third involved the reintroduction of the notion that the covenant applies to gentiles as well as Jews – this time for reasons of desperation; finally, came a tension between a deep pessimism about the future and the ecstatic expectation of an apocalypse.

Thirteen years after delivering "Government Corrupted By Vice," Langdon gave the most famous sermon of his career. On June 5, 1788, while serving as a delegate at New Hampshire's ratifying convention, Langdon uttered the following phrase, "The Republic of the Israelites as an Example to the American States." Sixteen days later, New Hampshire voted to ratify the Constitution, by a narrow 57 to 47 margin.[99] Langdon was instrumental in New Hampshire's becoming the ninth state to ratify the Constitution, thus bringing it into effect under the rules of the Articles of Confederation.

Langdon opened his sermon with a quote from Deuteronomy 4, a natural starting point for a Federalist minister:

> Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, who shall hear all these statutes, and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people: for what nation is there so great, which hath God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, which hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day.[100]

Langdon went on to say that, if the Israelites "may be considered as a pattern to the world in all ages, high among other nations as a wise and understanding people," it is only because of their "excellent national laws."[101] Langdon explained that it was the excellence of the Israelites' constitution not the intrinsic moral, spiritual, or biological superiority of the nation nor the superior character of their leaders that made the Jews a people worthy of imitation:

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[99] William B. Allen and Gordon Lloyd, *The Essential Antifederalist* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), xxxiv.
[100] Samuel Langdon, "The Republic of the Israelites as an Example to the American States," in Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era*, 945. (Deuteronomy 4:5-8).
[101] Ibid.

> When first the Israelites came out from the bondage of Egypt, they were a multitude without any other order than what had been kept up, very feebly, under the ancient patriarchal authority. They were suddenly collected into a body under the conduct of Moses, without any proper national or military regulation. Yet in the short space of about three months after they had passed the red sea, they were reduced into such civil and military order, blended together by the advice of Jethro, as was well adapted to their circumstances in the wilderness while destitute of property. Able men were chosen out of all their tribes, and made captains and rulers of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens: and these commanded them as military officers, and acted as judges in matters of common controversy. But the great thing wanting was a permanent constitution, which might keep the people peaceable and obedient while in the desert, and after they had gained possession of the promised land.[102]

At this point, Langdon considered two related objections. First, if the above were true, why was the Israelite model not universally celebrated? Second, if the vaunted Hebraic legal code was so superior, why did it not survive anywhere near as long as the "grossly inferior" legal codes of Lycurgus (Sparta) and Solon (Athens), which were instituted 600 and 900 years after Moses, respectively:

> But now you may say, Why then were they not universally celebrated? Why did not princes and politicians from all parts of the world visit them, to learn maxims of polity from so well regulated a nation? Why did not philosophers come, and enquire into that system of religion and morality which carried virtue to such an height of perfection?...The plain answer to this objection is—They never adhered in practice either to the principles of their civil polity or religion: but on their practice depended the prosperity and honor of the nation. They received their law from God, but they did not keep it. They neglected their government, corrupted their religion, and grew dissolute in their morals, and in such a situation no nation under heaven can prosper.[103]

In the post-exilic prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, and Third Isaiah, the disappointment after the Israelites reclaim the Holy Land is represented by the metaphor of the Jerusalem temple. Although a remnant of devout Jews had returned from Babylon in 538 and laid the foundation for a new sanctuary on the site of Solomon's Temple, there was little

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[102] Ibid. Langdon goes on to draw an analogy between Moses' need for tribal elders (the Sanhedrin) and the proposals for the Senate in Article I of the Constitution.
[103] Langdon, "The Republic of the Israelites," 952.

enthusiasm to complete the temple, and twenty years later the project was abandoned. God was enraged by this insult, as Haggai related.[104] Haggai, who prophesied in 520 BCE, urged Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and Joshua, the High Priest, to restart the project, and Zechariah stressed that rebuilding the temple was imperative. Older Israelites who remembered the glories of Solomon's Temple were especially disappointed. They had anticipated so much more.[105]

Even under the few "pious kings," such as Jehoshaphat, Langdon contended, God's chosen people continued their habitual backsliding.[106] Toward the end of the sermon, he referenced Jeremiah's historical moment, saying that the Israelites' vices had "increased to the utmost degree of enormity in Jeremiah's time and that their complicated crimes at length brought them desolation and a long captivity."[107] However, he left Jeremiah's vision behind when he compared the situation after ratification of the Constitution with the reconstitution of the Israelite nation after the Babylonian exile. Whereas Jeremiah died during the exile (likely in Egypt), Langdon lived until 1797.

First, Langdon praised the accomplishments of the restorers Zerubbabel and Joshua in the manner of the postexilic prophets Zechariah and Haggai. At first the new regime demonstrated great discipline and fidelity to Torah, and the restoration of Solomon's Temple began with great enthusiasm:

> And now let us just take a glance at their general state after the captivity in Babylon. When they returned to their own land they endeavored to conform their religion and government to the mosaic standard; idolatry was entirely purged out; they discovered great zeal for the law of their God and the instituted worship; they appointed a general

[104] Haggai 1:4-11.
[105] Haggai 2:3-7; Zechariah 1-6.
[106] As I mentioned in Chapter One, in 922 BCE the kingdom split in two, Judah to the south and Israel to the north. After Solomon there are four Judean kings. Jehoshaphat, the fourth king of Judah, ruled for twenty-five years (~ 873-849 BCE).
[107] Langdon, "The Republic of the Israelites," 956.

> senate of seventy elders, called by them the Sanhedrin, with a supreme magistrate at the head, for the government of the nation; and while their pious zeal continued they grew and prospered.[108]

As Langdon moved toward the conclusion of the sermon, however, it reflected the same progression in post-exilic prophecy from an early optimism of the first few chapters to the inevitable disappointment of the revolutionary afterglow. The grim state the Jews faced had finally ended, but they returned to Israel with an underwhelming number of exiles, and bittersweet feelings about their restored home:

> But according to the common course of things in the world, religion soon degenerated into mere formality, without proper regard to its principal intention, and became only shadow of that delivered to their fathers; the affairs of state were badly administered, and the highest honors were gained by favor, bribery, or violence; hypocrisy was substituted in the room of the true fear of God, and the practice of righteousness; all the vices natural to mankind daily increased; and finally they filled up the measure of their sins by crucifying the Lord of Glory, and rejecting his gospel, for which they have been made monuments of the divine displeasure unto this day. Therefore upon the whole view we see, that the Israelites never attained to that fame and dignity among the nations which their constitution encouraged them to expect, because they took little care to practice agreeably to the good statutes and judgments given them by Moses. Their constitution both of government and religion was excellent in writing, but was never exemplified in fact.[109]

Remember that Langdon was a vigorous supporter of the Constitution and a delegate to New Hampshire's ratifying Convention. Yet he ended his sermon not by exalting the Israelites' for their great constitution but by using their example as a cautionary tale. Langdon reminded Americans, as Haggai reminded the Israelites, that the Promised Land could slip from their grasp or be taken from them, again, at any time. Not all ministers of the post-revolutionary moment shared Langdon's muted optimism and salutary fear, however. I turn now to a darker side of post-revolutionary American sermonizing, where more critical

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[108] Ibid. After Moses had begun to lead the Israelites on their Exodus, it was Jethro who encouraged Moses to appoint others to share in the burden of ministry to the nation Israel by allowing others to help in the judgment of smaller matters coming before him (Exodus 18:1-23).
[109] Ibid., 956.

appraisals of the Constitution were made and pessimistic predictions about America's future were offered.

Timothy Dwight (1752 -1817) was a legendary educator, Congregational minister, theologian, and Federalist power broker from a distinguished American family. His father was a Revolutionary War hero, and he was the grandson of famed theologian Jonathan Edwards. He served with distinction during the war after Congress appointed him chaplain of the Connecticut Continental Brigade. In 1783 he was named rector of Greenfield Hill, a Congregational church in Fairfield, Connecticut,[110] before succeeding Ezra Stiles as president of Yale College in 1795, a post he held until his death in 1817.

Dwight was the rare public figure who simultaneously wielded influence as a philosopher, a politician, and a theologian. His philosophical tracts against David Hume and Voltaire were widely read.[111] His political enemies referred to him as "Pope Dwight," because he wielded both the temporal sword (as head of Connecticut's Federalist Party) and the spiritual sword (as nominal head of the state's Congregational Church). His two-volume *Sermons by Timothy Dwight* had a large circulation both in the United States and in England. Dwight also had a special talent for developing protégés, among them were Lyman Beecher, Nathaniel Taylor, and Leonard Bacon, all of whom would become major religious leaders and theological innovators of the Second Great Awakening.[112]

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[110] There he established an academy, which at once acquired a high reputation and attracted pupils from all parts of the Union.

[111] Timothy Dwight, "The Triumph of Infidelity" (1788), quoted in Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 280.

[112] Taylor 's (1786–1858) major contribution to the American Christianity (and to American religious history) was known as the New Haven theology, which lined up historical Calvinism with the religious revivalism of the time. Lyman Beecher (1775-1863) was a proponent of New School theology, which challenged the Calvinist doctrine of sin and to put a greater emphasis on free will. He was also said to be the "father of more brains than any man in America," for among his children were Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher, who is

Dwight first came to public attention with his "Valedictory Address" of 1776, in which he described Americans as having a unique national identity as "a new people, who have the same religion, the same manners, the same interests, the same language, and the same essential forms and principles of civic government."[113] Like many New England clergyman, though, by 1800 Dwight felt increasingly alienated by the political and religious culture of Jeffersonian America. Like most Federalist preachers, he saw Jefferson as an atheist who was bent on destroying America's religious heritage.[114] He spent his final years rallying Congregational ministers in an effort to prevent the disestablishment of the church in Connecticut. When its disestablishment was inevitable,[115] he encouraged efforts by protégés like Beecher and Bacon to organize voluntary associations to maintain the influence of religion in public life.

Dwight's "Discourse in Two Parts" (1812) was ostensibly a diatribe against the War of 1812. Like all thirty-nine Federalists in Congress who voted against the war resolution, Dwight saw "Mr. Madison's War" as a sign that the end of America was nigh, both politically and cosmologically. Displaying the provincial worldview of a Federalist preacher, Dwight spun a tale of a vast, centuries-long conspiracy, which began with the French. In-between, his

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featured in Chapter Three. Leonard Bacon was a leader in both the temperance and anti-slavery movements. His "Slavery Discussed" in *Occasional Essays from 1833 to 1846* exercised considerable influence upon Abraham Lincoln. See Leonard Bacon, *Slavery Discussed in Occasional Essays: From 1833 to 1846* (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1846).

[113] Quoted in Benjamin Spencer, *The Quest for Nationality: An American Literary Campaign* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1957), 3.

[114] Jefferson's religious beliefs in actuality were not that out of step with other framers, but he was seen that way because he was smeared by opponents as an atheist. His views could best be described as Unitarian, although he never formally left the Episcopalian church into which he was born. See Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution: A Moral Defense of the Secular State* (New York: Norton, 2005), 99-100.

[115] It became official a year after he died, in 1818. See Michael W McConnell, "Establishment and Disestablishment at the Founding, Part I: Establishment of Religion," *William and Mary Law Review* 44, no. 5 (April 2003): 2106–2208.

narrative of decline included the related consequences of a "Godless Constitution" and Deism and atheism, and ended with the apocalypse described in Revelations.

The sermon opens with Isaiah 21, "the Burden of Dumah." Dwight refers to the prophet as a "watchman," excerpt he is not "the one who forewarns," as Shulman erroneously argues that all prophets do.[116] Dwight's take was true to the text of Isaiah: the prophet predicts and then observes the destruction of Edom, a land populated by Esau's descendants that was eventually destroyed by John Hyrcanus, a Maccabean leader of the second century BCE. The Edomites ultimately were done in by their infidelity and lack of gratitude after God rewarded them with centuries of material success.

Isaiah does not intervene on their behalf, in an attempt to set the Edomites on the right course. He merely

> marks the period of time for which the watchman was set as an inspector of the passing events. In familiar language, it was the prophet's watch, or season of watching. The morning cometh; and also the night, i.e. a season of prosperity is immediately before you, and will be succeeded by a season of adversity."[117]

For Dwight the sin that was allowed to fester in modernity was Deism, "a French invention from about the middle of the sixteenth century."[118] But it was Voltaire who taught the modem world the "worship of Abstract terms, to the exclusion of a personal deity." Deism was so insidious for Dwight because it depersonalized the cosmos, and, in so doing, denied the possibilities of providential origins, the ongoing covenant, and millennial hope – each of which depended on a transcendent presence in the life of the nation. Ultimately, he laments,

> We formed our Constitution without any acknowledgment of God; without any recognition of his mercies to us, as a people, of his government, or even of his existence. The [Constitutional] Convention, by which it was formed, never asked,

[116] Recall that the first part of Isaiah, known as "First Isaiah," was composed prior to the Babylonian Exile.
[117] Theodore Dwight, *A Discourse in Two Parts* (Boston, MA: Flagg and Gould, 1813).
[118] Ibid., 17.

> even once, his direction, or his blessing upon their labours. Thus we commenced our national existence under the present system, without God.[119]

Dwight went further than Langdon, who argued that the Constitution at least contained the right principles for a good society. Dwight conceded only that the Constitution helped establish order but left deeper questions about the nature of the American polity unanswered:

> At length, in 1788, the present Constitution, having been adopted, the present system commenced its operations; and in a good degree restored order, and stability to the public affairs of our country. The great principles, upon which we were to act as a nation, were, however, to be settled.[120]

In the rhetorical world of the post-revolutionary pulpit, the greatest threat to republican government was not population expansion, war, or runaway inflation, but infidelity to the covenant with God, an antiquated notion that was not compatible with Deism. Americans' only hope of halting their backsliding was to turn back to the religion of New England's founders.

The atheism, the Godless Constitution, and the "Canadian War"[121] were all interpreted by Dwight as signs of the apocalypse. He interpreted the present state of American affairs through the lens of Isaiah, Daniel, and Revelations. Here he displayed three hallmarks of the post-exilic tradition: he described France as the "Babylon" of Revelations; his message was esoteric rather than political; he ended by claiming that the descent of America was proof that the apocalypse was nigh.

Although his treatment of France ostensibly began with a critique of the War of 1812, Dwight quickly descended into a conspiratorial diatribe about the French and the "poisons" inflicted on those who sought their military aid. After comparing France to Egypt and Assyria,

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[119] Ibid., 46.
[120] Ibid., 40.
[121] The "Canadian War" is now commonly referred to as the French and Indian War.

two powers Israel approached for aid only to regret it, Dwight placed France within the language and context of Revelations:

> The miseries, brought upon the French nation by the Infidels, who were the agents in its republican government, soon became intolerable. The whole system was formed of a fiend-like oppression; and the empire was filled with alarm, and blood, and wo. France became a kind of suburb to the world of perdition. Surrounding nations were lost in amazement when they beheld the scene. It seemed a prelude to the funeral of this great world; a stall of death; a den, into which the feet of thousands daily entered; but none were seen to return. The touch of France is pollution. Her embrace is death.[122]

Instead of drawing closer to Babylon, Dwight said, America should orient itself toward its millennial destiny. Here he moves deliberately into post-exilic ("Third") Isaiah. He quotes verse 66:8, the passage cited most frequently by ministers during this era who looked to the Scriptures to correct America's course: "Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once?"[123]

July 4, 1776 was the day God had in mind when he inspired Isaiah to record his prophecy. Since that time, American society had steadily decayed – politically, morally and spiritually. This led Dwight to conclude that the End Times were near:

> The period in which we live, is, in my own belief, marked out in prophecy as a part of that which is included within the effusion of the seven vials. The fifth of these I consider as unquestionably poured out at the Reformation. According to this scheme, we are now under the sixth, or the seventh.[124]

In Revelation, the sixth seal, seventh trumpet, and seventh vial all describe the same set of events that occur during the period just prior to, and immediately following the second coming of Christ. These events are the culmination of God's wrath upon the earth.

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[122] Dwight, 26.
[123] Isaiah 66:8. Regarding the popularity of the passage, see Harry S. Stout, "Rhetoric and Reality in the Early Republic: The Case of the Federalist Clergy," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 73.
[124] Dwight, 8. The fifth seal appears in Revelation 6:9-11; the sixth at 8:1-13; the seventh at 16:1-21.

Dwight's sermon ended by striking the central thrust of post-exilic prophecy, the rejection of temporal power in favor of a supernatural agency that would create new heavens and a new earth. First, Dwight dwelled on the untimely death of the last great Jewish monarch, King Josiah, the only political leader who received a positive review in the two books of Kings.[125] In the following passage Dwight also noted the significance of the place where Israel's last great king was laid low – Megiddo – where God later gathered armies for the final battle of the end times, Armageddon. This Greek word was adapted from the Hebrew *Har Megiddô*, the "Mountain of Megiddo."[126] Dwight ended the sermon by weaving together parts of passages from the Old Testament and Revelation, juxtaposing temporal and celestial power:

> because Megiddo was the place, where Josiah was slain; of whom it is said, "And like unto him there was no king before him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with ail his might, according to all the law that these potentates may be assembled in a vast war, in which the vengeance of GOD will be wonderfully executed upon the eminently wicked inhabitants of the countries, included within its limits; called, because it is a day of such retribution, "the battle of that great day of GOD Almighty." To this account is subjoined, "And he gathered them into a place, called in the Hebrew tongue, Armageddon; or the mountain of Megiddo; or the mountain of the Gospel*. The mountain of Megiddo, very naturally denotes the mountain of sorrow or mourning: because Megiddo was the place where Josiah was slain; of whom it is said, "And like unto him there was no king before him., who turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him." After his death it is said, "All Judah and Jerusalem wept for Josiah; and Jeremiah lamented for Josiah and all the singing men and singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations, to this day; and made them an ordinance in Israel: and behold they are written of in the Lamentations."[127]

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[125] In 2 Kings 23:29 and then again in Jeremiah 46:2, King Josiah is killed in battle by the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho at the battle of Megiddo in 609 BCE. His death is mourned in several places in the Old Testament, most notably in 2 Chronicles 35:20-24, where Jeremiah composes laments for the fallen monarch that "all the singing men and the singing women spake in their lamentations to this day."

[126] See Harris, G-4. The word *Armageddon* only appears once in the New Testament, in Revelation 16:6. Megiddo is also the site of several other famous battles in the Old Testament. See Judges 5:19; 2 Kings 9:27; 23:29.

[127] Dwight, 11 (2 Kings 23:25; 2 Chronicles 35:20-24; Revelation 16:16).

Dwight's sermon serves as a good example of post-exilic tradition, both in the Old Testament and in America. While his dim assessment of the political situation in the United States might have lacked the drama and symbolism of the battles of Armageddon and Megiddo, the War of 1812 portended dark times. To a Federalist preacher like Dwight, the hope that an American Josiah would emerge had become a fool's errand. It was just so for Zechariah, one of the last Hebrew prophets, as well. He also came from a priestly family and urged the Israelites to stop pining for a King David and look instead to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Conclusion

Much had changed in the two centuries between the royal charters of the 1600s and the federal republic of the early nineteenth century. Constitutional monarchy was replaced by democratic republic, religious tests for office were eliminated at the national level, and the Federalist Party was driven from power. Yet surveying Protestant preaching in the early republic, makes it clear that, alongside the celebration of religious liberty, separation of church and state, and the privatization of religious conscience, lay a competing rhetorical world that was every bit as real and compelling for its hearers as the language of the Constitution.

It is hard not to be struck both by how much political sermons of the era hewed to Old Testament rhetorical forms and that these forms developed in the same order as they developed in the Bible. In the decades before the Revolutionary War, the ministers issued stern warnings against political resistance and urged only moral reform, corresponding to the

pre-exilic mode. When it became clear that armed conflict was unavoidable, they shifted to the exilic battle cry for war. Finally, in the aftermath of the Constitutional Convention, when the imprimatur of leading clergy was particularly sought after, it was only two cheers at most for the *Novus Ordo Seclorum*. Dwight and his ilk were as deeply disenchanted with America as the post-exilic prophets had been with the Israel.

Chapter 3: The Bible in the American Civil War Era

In *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War,* Eran Shalev contends that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the Old Testament had lost its grip over the political consciousness of Americans:

> Between two American wars, one to replace British imperial rule and found a republic, the other, fourscore years later, to secure the Union created by the first, a biblical world of Hebraic political imagination burgeoned and then withered. While Americans would never stop expressing and modifying the notion that Providence had a special relationship with the United States, a bond consciously derived from ancient Israelite history, by the second half of the nineteenth century the Old Testament's influence on the American political imagination had dramatically diminished. It became clear that public language was losing its earlier characteristic explicit and robust biblicism; the repeated and unabashed references to, and articulation of, the image of America as the New Israel and the accompanying identification with the biblical Israelites of old waned as years went by, never to regain their former vitality. As fundamental as those biblical notions were to the emerging national culture during the first half-century of the republic's existence, by the era of the Civil War their earlier popularity and sway were evidently spent.[1]

This chapter offers a counter-narrative to Shalev's account and demonstrates the continuing impact of Old Testament ideas during this era. More specifically, I will establish the persistence of the three modes of Old Testament prophecy, pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic, that I presented in Chapters One and Two, with the intention of providing a fine-grained analysis of the rhetoric of the most politically influential ministers during this era. I begin with a discussion of the exegetical debate in nineteenth-century mainline Protestantism that led to the adoption of the "American Hermeneutic" – a commitment to biblical literalism shared by both Northern and Southern preachers prior to the Civil War. Next, I explain how the controversy over slavery radically disrupted the natural evolution of this hermeneutic,

[1] Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 151.

causing a crisis of interpretation that ultimately led to a crisis over the authority of the Bible itself. I then describe how slavery sent Northern and Southern ministers along different exegetical trajectories. Although the battle over the Bible now revolved almost exclusively around the slavery question, the rhetorical registers of leading ministers demonstrated the persistence of the pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic modes of the Old Testament. Deploying prophetic rhetoric provided ministers on each side with several advantages: it allowed them to readily organize themes in rhetorical arrangement; to move away from the constraints of sect; to maintain the appearance of a literal interpretation of the Bible; and, most importantly, to maintain the notion that the people from their region were America's true chosen people.[2] Ultimately, in the North the rhetoric progressed from pre-exilic, to exilic, to post-exilic. In the South, what began as a pre-exilic theology progressed to an exilic one during the Civil War – where it would remain long after the war ended, as Southern ministers became the leading spokesmen for the "Theology of the Lost Cause," the permanent exile of a people within their own country.

Unlike historians who debate the causes of the Revolutionary War, scholars have readily recognized the centrality of religion during the Civil War era. Noll, however, argued in *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* that the pulpit presents one of the great ironies of the American Civil War: the most highly influential ministers, while both learned and steeped in biblical understanding, oddly "did not engage in any actual biblical exegesis"[3] when making the case for or against slavery. Noll's claim is overstated, though, particularly regarding

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[2] As David Blight explains, "by the 1850s a powerful conception of American chosenness became a central unifying myth of nineteenth century America, and had firmly entrenched itself in public discourse." David Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 104.

[3] Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 3.

Southern theologians' defenses of slavery, which demonstrated great willingness to assess the Bible's teachings – chapter and verse, Old and New Testaments alike – regarding servitude. Cherry's interpretation is more accurate: "few persons were able to rise above sectional interpretations of national destiny and speak of the Civil War as a judgment of God falling upon the nation as a whole."[4] An exclusive focus on the lack of sophisticated hermeneutics might lead to the expectation of finding that scholars have missed the rhetorical patterns in both Old and New Light churches[5] of the era. Nearly all of the political sermons of the era shared a common repertoire of rhetorical registers. These rhetorical modes were inherited from their Protestant forbears, modeled on the rhetorics of the Old Testament prophets, and remained remarkably stable within a dynamic American context of interpretation.[6]

The American Hermeneutic

Mid-nineteenth-century preaching, both Northern and Southern, was based on a fundamental premise generally accepted in pre-Darwinian America: that God controlled the universe and every action and everything in it.[7] North and South also shared a wealth of commonalities: language, law, the heritage of the revolution, political institutions,[8] and the Union itself as an organizing myth. Both sides saw the Union as having transcendent worth;

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[4] Cherry, 166.
[5] The terms "Old and New Light" are used in Christian circles to distinguish between two groups that were initially the same but came to a disagreement. Those who did not change are referred to as the "Old Light," while those who changed are referred to as the "New Light." During the Second Great Awakening, New Lights were more evangelical, Old Lights establishmentarian – what is now considered mainline. See Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 139.
[6] Murphy, "Longing, Nostalgia, and Golden Age Politics," 125-141.
[7] Charles Stewart, "Civil War Preaching," in *Preaching in American History*, ed. Dewitte Holland (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1969), 204.
[8] There were several differences between the American Constitution of 1789 and the Confederate Constitution of 1861. Most relevant to my purposes here were changes to the Preamble: The words "invoking the favor and guidance of Almighty God" were added to the Confederate Constitution.

each had grandiose perceptions of America's mission in the world. However, although the Bible was ostensibly at the center of the debate over slavery, Noll explained:

> The hermeneutical crisis of the Civil War – the crisis arising from the full deployment for more than two generations of a common set of reformed and American assumptions, about how to read, interpret and apply the scriptures – was a crisis on two levels. The obvious crisis that bore directly on the fate of the nation was that a "simple" reading of the Bible yielded violently incommensurate understandings of Scripture with no means, short of warfare, to adjudicate the differences. The less obvious crisis was more directly theological; it concerned the fate of biblical authority itself.[9]

Before Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* became popular in the United States,[10] very few Americans could distinguish between the Bible and the Bible as read in America, because of a certain kind of hermeneutic described by British observer James Sterling in 1857 as "the notion that every direction contained in its pages is applicable at all times to all men."[11] What is now referred to as biblical literalism at this point was far more popular in the United States than in Europe. America was still very much a laggard in the rapidly advancing field of biblical criticism.[12] This broad notion continued to dominate the debate over how to read, interpret, and speak through the Bible, especially regarding the question of slavery.

As Chapter Two notes, it would in fact be less accurate to characterize this approach as biblical literalism than as what Noll called "a hermeneutic of the 'Reformed' approach" – a method of engaging the Scriptures, still commonly found in the remainders of American

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[9] Mark Noll, "The Bible and Slavery," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 49.
[10] Although *On The Origin of Species* (1859) first appeared in America in 1860, Ronald Numbers has argued that it was not taken seriously in the American scientific community until approximately 1870. Thus, the religious leaders of the time saw no need to respond to it. See Ronald Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
[11] Noll, "The Bible and Slavery," 46.
[12] Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 7.

Calvinist churches deep into the nineteenth century. This disposition toward the Bible was most prevalent among New Englanders and mid-state Presbyterians as well as within Scottish, English, and Dutch forms of reformed Protestantism.[13] For over a century its three core principles remained remarkably stable and intact: first, *scriptura sola* ("by Scripture alone"); second, the "regulative principle," which held that people are required to do what the Bible commands and not do what the Bible is silent about; third, what Noll and Hatch have called "The Third Use of the Law,"[14] meaning that Scripture not only demonstrates the individual's need for salvation but provides a blueprint for how Christians should live out their entire lives.

This hermeneutic developed from two factors: first, varieties of Reformed Protestantism composed the bulk of American churches; second, as Noll said, it occurred within a context of continual social transformation – from hierarchy to ideological anti-hierarchy – a revolution that created "a distinct American form of biblicalism."[15] As one might imagine, once the notion that anyone could actually understand the Bible collided with the developing debate over chattel slavery, the impact caused enormous theological disagreement – both within and between regions.

The combination of these broad principles and the democratizing tendencies of Jacksonian America made agreement on the meaning of specific scriptural imperatives next to impossible. However, it had the ironic effect of elevating the authority of the Bible itself. In Nathan Hatch's terms, "the Bible saved people from the din of sectarian confusion."[16] Initially, American Protestants did not attempt to defend their interpretative practices with a direct

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[13] Noll, *The Civil War As a Theological Crisis*, 47.
[14] Mark Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 76.
[15] Noll, *The Civil War As a Theological Crisis*, 47.
[16] Quoted in Noll, 48.

appeal to Scripture. Instead, the Reformed literal hermeneutic originally grew from particular American circumstances and a simple confidence in the Bible itself. This idiosyncratic elevation of biblical authority, a kind of "literalism without the text," became the norm during this era. Although this hermeneutic was not rooted in the chapter and verse of the Scriptures, its Northern and Southern versions grew to be markedly different.

In the South solidarity over slavery caused religious culture to become strikingly homogeneous during the middle third of the nineteenth century.[17] Following the American Revolution, many Southern religious leaders were actually opposed to slavery; by 1830, however, most of them had adopted strongly pro-slavery positions. The strongest support for the Confederacy came from Southern Protestant churches, 94 percent of which were either Presbyterian, Methodist, or Baptist. Fifteen years before shots were fired on Fort Sumter, all three denominations had experienced schisms over the slavery question, in 1837, 1844, and 1845, respectively. Southern Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and even Episcopalians began attending each other's meetings with ease and frequency.[18]

Political sermons in the antebellum and Civil War periods reflected this homogeneous religious culture. The biblical status of chattel slavery amalgamated a host of key theological and political questions, sectionalism, war, assigning guilt and blame, and after the war theologies of victory versus the "religion of the lost cause." Lost in much of the scholarship, however, is the persistence of Old Testament theology in the South. All of these themes ultimately revolved around developing notions of American chosenness and were captured by

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[17] Richard Beringer, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 92.
[18] Jewish and Catholic leaders also visibly boosted Confederate morale. In addition, all eleven Catholic bishops in the Confederate states cooperated with the Confederacy (though none were native Southerners). Two slaveholding states, Maryland and Louisiana, had large contingents of Catholic residents. However, only in Maryland (where three percent of the country's slaves were owned) did Catholics have the economic clout to own slaves.

prophetic rhetoric, which was the best way to make sense of, retain, and integrate ancient conceptions of nation and slavery during a dynamic age of democracy. What united the theology of the three major Southern sects was the belief in an Old Testament God, one who is all powerful and totally just yet vengeful and one who makes covenants with his people and rewards them richly but is not merciful.[19]

In the North, churchmen who opposed slavery faced a serious conundrum when they attempted to wield the Bible as a weapon. They seemed to have only four options, all of them unappealing. They could simply admit that the Bible sanctioned slavery and abandon the Scriptures when they went on the attack against slavery. This option was by far the least popular, but it had the authority of the luminary abolitionist figures William Lloyd Garrison and Gerrit Smith to recommend it. Ultimately, however, this option was too problematic, as it put the otherwise extremely pious like Garrison, who was a strict Sabbatarian and Sunday school teacher before he became a radical abolitionist, in an awkward position and left religious moderates like Smith vulnerable to charges of heresy.

Alternatively, they could conclude that, since the Bible sanctions slavery, it is either explicitly defended or a background condition throughout the Old and New Testaments[20] and thus they should also accept it in the United States. However, that did not mean that it should be supported as a positive good. People might, nonetheless, want to reform it and eliminate its cruelest practices. This view was most popular among southerners around the time of the American Revolution, but, after the British manumission of most slaves throughout the empire in 1833, this position appeared far less frequently.

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[19] Beringer, 92.
[20] Some examples include (in order of their appearance in the Bible) Genesis 14:4; Exodus 21:1-36, 22:3; Leviticus 19:20, 22:11, 25:44; Deuteronomy 20:10; 1 Kings 9:20-21; 2 Kings 4:1; 1 Corinthians 7:20-23; Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22, 4:1.

Third, the most complicated position was a recognition that the Bible only sanctions a particular form of slavery but not necessarily American slavery. This approach required moving away from the Bible itself to a discussion of how the Bible should be applied to modern life via analogy and other more flexible means of interpretation. This option smacked of an antiliteralism to which ministers rarely would admit but which they frequently practiced during this era.

Finally, it was possible to draw a general distinction between the letter and the spirit of the Bible itself, arguing, as many abolitionists did, that to be a literalist meant fidelity to immutable principles rather than to particular sections of the Bible which clearly condoned, or at the very least recognized, slavery as a legitimate institution of the ancient world.

Supporting options three or four posed a serious problem: a person risked being labeled an infidel by attacking the authority of the Bible itself. Any way the abolitionists tried to frame it, the notion that overarching principles drawn from inference are more authoritative than literal passages from the Bible was a difficult sell. Therefore, in the end these positions were ultimately reduced to just two: "orthodox" and pro-slavery versus "heretical" and antislavery.

Someone closely following the exegetical debate during this period, might rightly have concluded that Northern ministers would seem to have ceded the debate over slavery in the Bible. Blight points out that Black Christian abolitionists in particular tended to shy away from Talmudic weighing of competing biblical passages, instead choosing the more vocal registers of the prophetic tradition in order to dramatize the conflict in moral terms. Frederick Douglass, for instance, sounded like a nineteenth-century millenialist when he emphasized eschatological symbolism, God's Second Coming, and retributive justice, all enveloped in the

American sense of mission as a redeemer nation.[21] Blight's conclusion is too circumspect, however, to cover the main action in Northern Protestant culture. As I will demonstrate, the common position advanced by Blight, that "proslavery advocates had won the Bible, in its traditional sense" and that they were long on biblical bluster but short on exegesis,[22] provides an incomplete picture of the Protestant world.

The most influential mainline Northern ministers such as Theodore Parker and Henry Ward Beecher moved away from a literalism of textual fidelity toward a fidelity to universal biblical principle, which in their minds clearly condemned American slavery. Prophecy was the medium through which this was expressed.

Deploying prophetic rhetoric provided ministers on each side with several advantages. It allowed them to readily organize themes in rhetorical arrangement; to move away from sect; to maintain a notion of chosenness; and, most importantly, to maintain the appearance of a literal interpretation of the Bible. As noted in the previous chapter, sermons from before, during, and after a major armed conflict compared America with ancient Israel. Like the ancient pre-exilic Nevi'im, these ministers again also offered commentary on a kind of "Deuteronomic History" of America, an interpretation of secular events but through the prism of a covenant between God and his people. In the North the progression ultimately travelled from pre-exilic to exilic to post-exilic; in the South it went from pre-exilic to exilic, where it would remain.

Before initiating a discussion of the sermons, a brief word should be said regarding my selection criteria. Each of the six sermons has at least five features in common. It is of

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[21] David Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 8.
[22] Blight cites several long-winded condemnations of slavery by Beecher – jeremiads in support of this assertion.

sufficient literary quality; it was written and delivered by a well-known minister; it expresses a widely accepted sectional point of view; it represents a denomination different from its counterparts; finally, related to the previous four criteria, it is from larger, more established urban churches, where someone was able to take the time and pay the cost of publication.[23]

Northern Sermons: Quietism, Jeremiad, Postwar Settlement

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887), brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, son of Lyman Beecher, and a leading light of the Second Great Awakening, was the most popular minister in America. Some even said he was the most famous man in the United States. As historian William G. McLoughlin put it:

> For at least three decades Beecher was the high priest of American religion. His pulpit was the nation's spiritual center…Millions read him, millions heard him, millions believed in him. Beecher was the first American clergyman to attain a national audience which acknowledged him as its spokesman; the first to make it part of his regular practice to speak out on every significant social and political issue; the first to make a point of being seen with Presidents, to campaign for Presidents – in short, our first self-appointed national chaplain.[24]

Initially, Beecher favored separation from the South. However, like many of his contemporaries, after the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter on February 12, 1861, he quickly changed his mind and fully supported the war, delivering several of the most memorable jeremiads of the era. Beecher had always preached that the North was the truly American region and that its society was superior to that of the South morally, culturally, and

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[23] As David Chesebrough points out, country churches tended to have less sophisticated preachers and congregations; hence, a different quality of sermon was delivered. These were usually neither written out nor published. See David B. Chesebrough, *God Ordained This War: Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 10.

[24] William G. McLoughlin, *The Meaning of Henry Ward Beecher: An Essay on the Shifting Values of Mid-Victorian America, 1840–1870* (New York: Knopf, 1959), 252. Chesebrough also contended that Beecher helped persuade Lincoln to release the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and that his trip to England in the fall of 1863 was instrumental in turning British thinking in favor of the North.

intellectually. Over time, however, his resolve hardened; his unwillingness to advocate violence dissipated. In fact, he ultimately believed that allowing the dissolution of the Union would be a national sin against God. On the eve of the war, his words carried the full voltage of the exilic charges leveled by 2 Isaiah on the sacred responsibility of preserving Zion. Israel could only now become "a light unto the nations,"[25] with a Bible in one hand and a Springfield rifle musket in the other.

Beecher's evolving position on the war occurred in two stages. He moved first from a paralyzing ambivalence to strongly favoring going to war against the Confederacy, but only in order to force the Confederate states back into the Union. Over time, he came to see the war very differently, particularly after the North experienced severe losses in early battles and suffered a crisis of confidence and morale. After the Union's bruising defeat at the Battle of Bull Run in 1861, Beecher gave a series of guilt-ridden "sermons of humiliation," wondering aloud whether God was punishing the North because its purpose in going to war was not noble enough. Secession was hardly an offense against God, he noted, whereas in his mind, at least, slavery most certainly was.

Hence, the development of Beecher's sermons has been framed by several scholars as typical of Northern Protestant sermons. Their arguments have proceeded as follows: early losses on the battlefield deeply influenced perceptions of the war in the Northern pulpit. There was a period of introspection, particularly in May-July, 1863, before the decisive battles of Gettysburg and Vicksburg tipped the course of the war. Eventually, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, issued on January 1, 1863, came to be seen as responsible for the North's finally regaining God's grace. At long last, Northerners had purified themselves, and the

[25] Isaiah 42:6.

course of the war shifted. There remains no in-depth study of the ancient rhetorics used to organize and convey this concept, still very much in use in the nineteenth century. Rather, it is fairer to say that the jeremiad is assumed as a constant, when in fact political sermons of this era only take this form at certain points. Sermons from all three periods in both regions compared America with ancient Israel; yet, prior to the attack on Fort Sumter, there appears to have been little thirst for taking up arms against the Confederacy in order to compel the rebel states to rejoin the Union. In fact, there was a general sense that the nation to which the Framers gave birth in 1789 was doomed; this was presented as a fait accompli. Like their ancient pre-exilic and pre-Revolutionary-era forerunners, these ministers also offered commentary on a kind of Deuteronomic History of America, an interpretation of dynamic secular events through the prism of a covenant with God.

Less than a month after Abraham Lincoln was elected President, Beecher stood in the well of Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York, and delivered "Against a Compromise of Principle" to a packed house of 2,500. Reminiscent of any of William Lloyd Garrison's most famous jeremiads in *The Liberator*, Beecher, high in the air on a raised pulpit which he had designed himself for such occasions so that the audience could surround him on all sides, announced to the congregation that compromising with slavery had officially run its course. He pushed further than Garrison, however, declaring not only that it was imperative to disavow the Southern slave empire for the salvation of the individual Christian soul but that America was irreparably doomed. As Murphy has pointed out, in any prophetic sermon the events and initial causes of the decline are presented and organized according to the prophetic rhetorical structure. However, the hope in Beecher's sermon was not in the foreground (as it is in Jeremiah or 2 Isaiah); it was, instead, relegated to the small recesses, much like the doom-

and-gloom prophecies of the pre-exilic era. As I will demonstrate, at this point, though Beecher was pleased that Lincoln had won the election, he nevertheless preached that the Union was doomed. Further, he urged his parishioners to take no action. This is an especially interesting fact, considering that it would be almost another month until the first Southern state, South Carolina, would officially secede from the Union.[26]

On that Sunday, Beecher began his sermon with The Gospel of Luke, an interesting choice for several reasons. First, as a general matter, Luke is considered the *consolatio* gospel, because it offers consolation. It presents the least confrontational and most ecumenical Jesus of the four Gospels, best exemplified by the Parable of The Good Samaritan, a story about living peaceably next to neighbors with fundamentally different beliefs.[27] Most importantly, though, Beecher says that Luke explains that Christ had come to save "the world – not laws, not governments, not institutions, not dynasties, but *the people.*"[28] In 4:17-19, a young Jesus[29] is at the lectern of a Jewish temple, when he turns directly to the verses from Isaiah that announced his impending arrival:

> And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,
> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.[30]

A reading of the second stanza might lead to the conclusion that Beecher intended to center on the admonition to "preach deliverance to the captives." Yet, the remainder of the

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[26] South Carolina seceded on December 20, 1860. Six more states – Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas – also seceded before Lincoln was inaugurated. Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee all seceded afterwards, between April and June, 1861.
[27] Luke 10:29-38.
[28] Henry Ward Beecher, "Against a Compromise of Principle," in Chesebrough, *God Ordained this War*, 65.
[29] This is the only moment in the (canonical) New Testament where Jesus is depicted as anything other than an infant or an adult.
[30] Luke 4:17-19, quoted in Chesebrough, *God Ordained this War*, 65.

sermon made no such demand on its audience. In fact, after quoting Luke, Beecher displayed the full gamut of pre-exilic sensibilities. In his text he explained that America's demise was a foregone conclusion, that the North was already in too deep to redeem itself. He traced the "evil seed" to its roots, the actions and compromises of the Framers. He claimed that any solution would not be a product of actions taken by men (in fact, political acts by men were responsible for the current predicament) and that all that could be done is to let the dissolution of the union unfold. Finally, as in Amos and Hosea, any sliver of hope that remained was confined to a very distant future, to be granted only by God. In fact, there was an urgency in Beecher's insistence that Northerners not act. They should just let the South go.

Beecher began by reminding the congregation, as Amos reminded his, that whatever material benefits Americans had enjoyed so far came not from their genius, but only from God: "And for men to think that this nation has been prospered on account of the skill, the wisdom, or the arrangements of combinations of men, is the worst of infidelities."[31]

This rhetorical strategy could have been taken from Amos' playbook. First, to believe that men are responsible for the good fortune of nations is the pure hubris of the Tower of Babel. However, then, like Amos, Beecher offered contradictory reasons for the nation's decline. On the one hand, the downhill slide was foreordained by God and therefore could not have unfolded any other way, but at the same time key causal events were always identified as mistakes committed by men. In this case, it was the compromises regarding slavery made by the Framers which doomed the republic from its inception:

> Do you suppose that if, knowing what you know now, you had sat in the original convention to frame the Constitution, you would have made compromises? Persons say "Are you wiser than your fathers?" Yes! A man that is not wiser than his father, ought not to have had such a father, if his father was wise! Our fathers, when they laid

[31] Beecher, "Against a Compromise of Principle," 71.

> the foundations of that structure, did the best that the wisdom of that time would enable them to do; and they were wise men, - much wiser, doubtless, for their time, than we are for ours. But, nevertheless, we may know now; better than they did then, what their wisest course would have been. When Carolina refused to come into the Confederacy except on the ground of certain favors to slavery, then was the time to have said to her, "Stay out."[32]

Beecher's indictment of the Framers is very much in keeping with the Navi's criticism of the patriarchs: though they were great leaders, they remind us that they were mere men, and therefore imperfect. In the philippics of the prophetic tradition, God is never criticized, only the men who have either misunderstood God's instructions or, having never received any, made the fateful decisions Beecher called "the poisonous seed sown in colonial days."[33] Beecher then listed the specific compromises as a causal chain that generated increasingly disastrous results. The Three-Fifths Compromise and the Migration and Importation Clause of the Constitution, the Missouri Compromise of 1820, and the California Compromise of 1850 were examples of nothing more than how to "duck and dodge and trim, the minute ways of microscopic statesmanship."[34]

After covering the shaky moral foundation of the country and the magnifying errors of political leaders, Beecher pivoted to the present. Here the tone of the sermon shifts to one of great urgency. It is clear why this sermon is a jeremiad like any other. "Let us look things right in the face, then, and speak some plain truths," he warned, "We are approaching times when men will not hear what they will listen to now."[35] Here he cautioned against two courses of political action, advocating, instead, for taking no action at all. His sermon is insistent that the North not enter into another compromise with the South over slavery; it is also insistent

[32] Beecher, "Against a Compromise of Principle," 78.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 78-79.
[35] Ibid.

that taking up arms would be even more foolish, running against nature: "You might as well attempt to prevent the tides of the Atlantic Ocean. You might as well attempt to prevent vegetation in the tropics."[36] It was too late, Beecher said. The South was "an Empire of slavery…a virtue, a religion! It is justice and divine economy!"[37] All he wanted Northern Christians to do was nothing. Let the South secede, and let America die. At the end of this section, he returned to the arboreal metaphor, which was also a favorite of Amos: "The tree of life, whose leaves were for the healing of the nations, has been evilly dealt with. Its boughs have been lopped, and its roots starved till its fruit is knurly…The harvest time has now come. We are reaping what we sowed."[38]

Perhaps because the different styles of sermons carry equal rhetorical voltage, scholars have not ruminated on their differences. Ultimately, however, dwelling on the political payout of these voltages, i.e., what the preacher did or did not want the congregation to do, makes it clear that the differences are as stark in the nineteenth century as they were before and after the Babylonian exile. It is always important to pay close attention to where the sermon concludes, in ministerial terms, the parting words of the "application." As I will demonstrate, while the amount of bluster is frequently very similar, the political payload often differs.

The scholarly paradigm that collapses prophecy into one form, the jeremiad, accurately describes Northern sermons during but not, as in the case of Beecher, before the Civil War. These sermons also display the same features as those delivered during the height of the Revolutionary War. They provide a road map to a glorious future for America, with several features of exilic prophecy. They predict potential doom as the first, but not the last

[36] Ibid., 77.
[37] Ibid., 76.
[38] Ibid., 68.

nor the most dominant word. They proceed from judgment to the anticipation of a new order, urge patriots to dig in and prepare for a protracted struggle against an enemy army raised as an instrument of God, foretell that Americans will enjoy a future greater than anything they have experienced thus far, and raise a call to action with the caveat that trust in God is ultimately the most important thing.

On Sunday, April 14, 1861, Beecher's tone shifted dramatically. Just hours before the Union garrison surrendered Fort Sumter to Confederate personnel, Beecher again stood in the well of the Plymouth Church, declaring his full support for war to an even greater crowd of 3,000. While Beecher always opposed slavery, his sermons, especially ones delivered earlier in 1861, reflected only a resignation over the South's imminent departure. Suddenly, however, the man who used to send "Beecher's Bibles," shotguns packed into crates marked "books" that were shipped to Kansas abolitionists in the mid 1850s, was reawakened. The "Battle Set in Array" sermon was one of the strongest jeremiads for war and represented a turning point in Beecher's career.

Whereas earlier in 1861 Beecher frequently began his sermons with Luke, this time he chose an epigraph from Exodus 14:15, a key decision point both for Moses and for the Israelites in their escape from Egyptian bondage: "And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward."[39] Prior to this point, Beecher explained, Moses misunderstood what he and the Israelites were supposed to do next. Moses assuages their fears by telling them not to worry, because God will deliver them:

[39] Beecher, "The Battle Set in Array," in Cherry, *God's New Israel,* 169.

> And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever.
> The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.[40]

Beecher reminded his audience that Moses was eighty years old, about the same age as the United States at that time,[41] before he was called away from shepherding his father-in-law's sheep by a burning bush at Mount Horeb and instructed to liberate the Israelites. He then not only led the Israelites out of Egypt, he also performed numerous miracles (including splitting the sea, extracting water from a rock, bringing down manna), received the Torah from God and taught it to the people, built the Mishkan (Divine dwelling) in the desert, and led the Israelites for forty years on their journey through the wilderness. Beecher's winding analysis, following the epigraph, was meant to awaken the North, just as Moses and his flock were awakened. God, said Beecher, was now asking for courage.

After signaling where his focus would be, Beecher dropped into a long lamentation, exactly the sort found in both pre-exilic and exilic prophecy, a tale of hopelessness and despair, of conditions which have deteriorated beyond repair, and of a sickness which cannot be cured. As was his custom, though, Beecher did not remain mired in the despair. At this point, in the descent, Beecher reiterated what he had said in his preachings prior to Fort Sumter, that the North was already too infected with the stain of its complicity with slavery to redeem itself. This portion of the sermon is peppered with phrases such as "As a matter of fact, you know, and I know, and everybody knows, that there will be no change in the

[40] Exodus 14:13. Quoted in Beecher, "The Battle Set in Array," 171.
[41] The Declaration of Independence (1776) was issued eighty-four years before Beecher's sermon.

convictions of the North. We have reaped too bountifully from the seed we have sown to change. Our method of moral and political tillage will be the same as heretofore."[42]

Beecher spoke at length about the chosen status of the Americans and what providential purposes God had in mind, specifically for Northerners, as redeemers of the American republic. When looking at the course of the world's history, he declared, even though "prophets are dead," and "God no longer tells us beforehand what he is going to do," no one could help but be struck by the fact that tyrannical nations were in decline, and liberty was increasing. "While we cannot know the end of all this," Beecher observed, "it would seem that God chose us for a pivotal period on which ages turn – barbarism or civilization."[43] Religious historian William Clebsch described this period as the moment of the realization "that the Civil War was the 'anvil of suffering' out of which the nation could finally be actualized." It was also a nineteenth-century American iteration of the most martial and nationalistic passages of Isaiah or Jeremiah, who also preached to a beleaguered nation "shut up" and "hedged in" by enemies raised by the divine rod of God's anger to test the mettle of the Israelites.

Beecher declared that "revolutionary" thought was required, but he meant a revolution of restoration, one harking back to the past in order to rescue the future. He meant this in two related senses. First, like any of the Navi, Martin Luther, Christ, or almost any Christian prophet, he said that Christianity must return to "the old spirit of the church." Following that, however, is a remarkable reversal of what he had preached about the Framers before the war. Suddenly they were heroic icons without flaws. After praising the Puritan struggle as the alpha of principled American causes, Beecher said that the framers of the Constitution were

[42] Beecher, "The Battle Set in Array," 169.
[43] Ibid.

saints and that their creation was a universal enshrinement of the principles of human freedom:

> There is no fact susceptible of proof in history, if it not be true that this Federal Government was created for the purposes of justice and liberty; and not liberty, either, with the construction that traitorous or befooled heads are attempting to give it, – liberty with a devil in it! We know very well what was the breadth and the clarity of the faith of those men who formed the early constitutions of this nation. If there was any peculiarity in their faith, it was that their notion of liberty was often extravagant.[44]

Beecher then went on to declare that the leading figures of the Confederacy were blasphemers. He singled out Confederate Vice-President Alexander Stephens' "Cornerstone Speech," delivered less than a month before Beecher's sermon,[45] as a particularly egregious example of defiling the memory of the country's founders:

> The Vice-President of the so-called Southern Confederacy has stated recently that there was a blunder made in the construction of our Constitution on this very truth of universal liberty, thus admitting the grand fact that the immortal instrument, as held by the North, embodies the views of those who framed it; and that those views are unmistakably in favor of liberty to all.[46]

If the nation looked back, he argued, it would see that the totality of American history taught that God favored the intrepid and the brave, those who did not shrink from a righteous challenge when it was laid before them. Beecher exhorted the crowd:

> In every one of these instances darkness and the flood lay before the champions of truth and rectitude. God in his providence said to them, though they were without apparent instrumentalities, "Go forward! Venture everything! Endure everything! Yield the precious truths never! Live forever by them! Die with them, if you die at all." The whole lesson of the past, then, is that safety and honor come by holding fast to one's principles; by pressing them with courage; by going into darkness and defeat cheerfully for them.[47]

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[44] Ibid., 172-3.
[45] March 21, 1861.
[46] Beecher, "The Battle Set in Array," 173.
[47] Ibid., 172.

At this point the sermon reached a fever pitch. After saying that he despised war, he said

> Give me war redder than blood, and fiercer than fire, if this terrific infliction is necessary that I may maintain my faith of God in human liberty, my faith of the fathers in the instruments of liberty, my faith in this land as the appointed abode and chosen refuge of liberty for all the earth! War is terrible, but that abyss of ignominy is yet more terrible![48]

The trajectory of Beecher's two sermons was commonly shared by Northern ministers. Prior to the war, they hewed to a largely apolitical message, urging moral reform and concluding that political events were a fait accompli, the pre-exilic mode. Once military conflict was imminent, however, they shifted to strong-chorded jeremiads for war, calling upon Northerners to enlist in the Union Army and fight the South to the death, regardless of how long it would take or how many men would be sacrificed.

In *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War 1860-1869*, James Moorhead has argued that the inordinate amount of attention paid to the sermons in the immediate aftermath of President Lincoln's assassination has created a distorted barometer of the Northern pulpit's attitude in the decade following the Civil War.[49] Two powerful narratives appeared then, but each had a limited durability. The first was that, even if he had not been murdered on Good Friday, Lincoln would already have been seen as a Christ figure who was sacrificed so that the nation could be saved. The second was a revenge narrative such as the one suggested by the Reverend Henry Butler of New York, who suggested an

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[48] Ibid., 179.

[49] James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 180. In fact, there are no print collections of Northern sermons during Reconstruction, whereas there are a plethora of Civil War sermons and collections on Lincoln's assassination such as Chesebrough's *No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow: Northern Protestant Ministers and the Assassination of Lincoln* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994).

appropriate Old Testament lesson for the hour: "America's spirit should be that of Samuel when he hewed the guilty Agag in pieces, sad, serious, determined, godlike."[50]

It is more accurate to say that, although the immediate aftermath of the war brought jubilation to the Northern pulpit, the euphoria was short-lived. The self-congratulatory chauvinism of the Northern pulpit gradually gave way to the sense that all was not well in Zion. While McKivigan has questioned whether Northern ministers ever had any true antislavery commitment,[51] Moorhead's description of a "nagging feeling of an incomplete victory," which carried the sense that "something additional was required: one more mopping up operation before the campaign could be declared officially ended"[52] better describes the more politically active ministers. This nagging feeling that Lincoln had led Americans to the River Jordan but that somehow they could not cross it, as Joshua did after Moses died,[53] left the Northern pulpit very much in a post-exilic frame of mind.

Hence, while I agree with Moorhead's recommendation to look beyond Lincoln's assassination, the framework that he, Dunham, Hatch, and Noll used to capture the theological terrain during this era, millennialism and apocalypticism, provides only a partial account of the political features of Northern sermons. Perhaps this is because none of them engages in a close reading of the source material; each offers instead a broad overview of the religious terrain. The political sermons of this era remain steeped in a slightly more primitive theological tradition, one whose rhetoric most closely resembles a post-exilic style that has remained remarkably stable over time in America. Looking at them in this way brings about a

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[50] Quoted in Chester Forrester Dunham, *The Attitude of the Northern Clergy Toward the South, 1860-1865*. (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1974), 186.
[51] John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 200.
[52] Moorhead, 178.
[53] See Joshua 3:15-17.

better understanding of their connection to an earlier era of political sermonizing as well as an understanding of the practice of American political sermonizing as a distinct tradition.

Political sermons in the North after the Civil War contain several of the interrelated features of post-exilic prophecy. First, they recognize that, while the grand predictions of their forerunners were partially realized, the long-anticipated triumph had been disappointing. Second, they express a disappointment about contemporary political leaders, which led to uncertainty about whether a messianic leader would finally arrive to reestablish the nation's glory. Third, they contain the notion that the covenant needed to be universalized, if it were ever to be fulfilled; and, finally, they admit a tension between uncertainty about the future and the ecstatic expectation of an apocalypse.

Gilbert Haven (1821-1880) was a Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and President of the Freedman's Aid Society, an organization founded in 1861 by the American Missionary Association (AMA), an umbrella organization supported chiefly by the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches in the North.[54] Although Haven was born in Massachusetts, because of his radical belief in the absolute equality of all people both in the eyes of God and in civil law and practice, he was assigned to an Atlanta conference composed entirely of African Americans, where he remained throughout the Civil War. He returned to Massachusetts after the war ended, and became editor of *Zion's Herald*, a weekly newspaper for New England's Methodists. After his death, Benjamin Tanner, editor of *The Christian Recorder*, wrote of Haven, "he was one of the few that made public opinion

[54] Haven was also an early benefactor of Clark College (now Clark Atlanta University), visualizing it as a university of all the Methodist schools founded for the education of freedmen.

rather than followed it; and happily...he made it on the side of the poor…and the ostracized."[55]

On November 26, 1868, Haven delivered a Thanksgiving Day sermon in commemoration of Ulysses S. Grant's election as president. Like many abolitionist ministers, Haven was disgusted both with Andrew Johnson, whom he deemed "a hostile President" and with what he called a "powerless Congress."[56]Although he expressed great hopes for a Grant presidency, the sermon was really more of a meditation on why, even in victory, the American covenant remained unfulfilled after the Civil War and why the victory remained incomplete.

Haven chose a phrase from the Post-Exilic (Third) Isaiah for his epigraph, "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."[57] This passage is considered part of the Old Testament's apocalyptic literature, appearing near the end of Isaiah. It is meant to convey the destruction and subsequent rebirth of the world after the failure of the restoration following the return of the Babylonian exiles. But Haven made an unorthodox connection, tying it to the original creation story of Adam and Eve:

> Out of this wreck of matter came the perfection of Eden, and the blessedness of the holy parents of our race. They saw the conflict increase in fierceness as it began to consummate itself in the final victory; the death-ocean of ice from pole to pole being the last, and, to other eyes than those of faith, the complete annihilation of all life positive and possible. But in faith they still looked and labored. Conspiring with their Creator, they aided in the resurrection of the earth from this sepulcher of being, and again beheld it glowing in more beautiful and more abundant life on the Paradisiac morn of the human creation and their Edenic home.[58]

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[55] Quoted in William Gravely, *Gilbert Haven: Methodist Abolitionist; A Study of Race, Religion, and Reform, 1850-1880*, Commission on Archives and History of The United Methodist Church (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1973), 256.
[56] Gilbert Haven, *National Sermons, Speeches and Letters on Slavery and its War: From the Passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill to the Election of President Grant* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1869), 603.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

Haven then drew an analogy between the creation in Genesis and the "creation" of the rebirth of America in the Civil War:

> How many weary years contribute to the triumph of this hour. Standing on this summit, beholding the glory that is breaking forth upon all our land, feeling the joy that pervades every breast, we can hardly fail to look back upon the steps that slowly led, through indifference, hostility, storms of war, and streams of blood, to these Delectable Mountains. So we can note the mighty war of spiritual, and even material elements, that has attended this new creation of our land and people in the truth and love of God.[59]

After the initial two-and-a-half pages of ecstatic exaltation, the remainder of Haven's sermon hews closely to the post-exilic format. He expressed disappointment with the results after the victory; he explained that sins past and present had caused the current predicament. Further, he reaffirmed America's chosen status; he evaluated Lincoln and Johnson and set forth muted hopes for Grant. He called for the universalization of the covenant; finally, he ended the sermon in cosmic, as opposed to worldly terms.

Haven posited that slavery was perhaps as old as human civilization itself, cataloging so-called the enlightened societies from India to Greece that allowed slavery for centuries. The ancient Hebrews, he maintained, were enslaved by the Egyptians only because they neglected God, "[t]his liberty the chosen nation lost by rejecting its sole Author, and on its captivity, the human race was plunged again into slavery."[60] In the American case, Haven averred, God would not be so forgiving after 350 years of slavery – a strange irony, given that the North had just won the Civil War. Rather than celebrate the Union victory, instead Haven catalogued the most egregious episodes from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century federal policy including Washington's signing of the first fugitive slave bill, the Missouri

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 607.

Compromise of 1820, the offers to extend the Missouri line to the Pacific coast, and a constitutional amendment forbidding the national government from ever emancipating a slave. It was no wonder, he concluded, that Stephens, the Vice-President of the Confederacy, was able to make the bold proclamation in 1861 that "slavery had become, in the language of its most eminent advocate, 'the corner-stone of the Constitution.'"[61] To Haven, this persistent unwillingness to face the issue head on, the committed avoidance of it, in fact, was not conduct befitting a chosen people. Mirroring the Navi's central criticism of empty worship, adherence to law, and observation of ritual without true faith, Haven concluded that God was not quite ready to forgive Americans (both North and South) for their violations of the Covenant, the true meaning of the U.S. Constitution:

> The controversy God has waged with us because of this sin we all know by heart, especially its last and bloodiest chapters. We know how our Constitution admitted seemingly, and in the intent of its founders, this iniquity, though it also enunciated principles that made it actually unconstitutional.[62]

Haven then raised the stakes even higher, targeting four of the high priests of the abolitionist movement, Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison, Salmon Chase, and Horace Greeley. None of them, he said, was ever fully committed to emancipation, because they were willing to allow the South to secede for two indefensible reasons: they did not believe the North had the stomach to see emancipation through and, ultimately, they worried more about the purity of Northern souls than about the emancipation of slaves:

> We kissed their hands and feet in fear of the threat of disunion which they constantly flourished over us. Many went yet further, and advocated the dismissal of the slaveholding section. Even some of our wisest leaders fell into this snare. Phillips and Garrison, Chase and Greeley, advised this course. They did not believe the people

[61] Ibid., 611. See Alexander Stephens, "Cornerstone Speech," http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1861stephens.asp
[62] Ibid., 610.

> would endure the test to which the Union would compel them. They feared slavery would subdue the North, rather than the North abolish slavery. They dreamed that, cut off from the North, the slave would soon compel his master to emancipation. But the wisdom of God is wiser than men. He allowed His enemies to most daringly defy our national principles, organization, and even existence.[63]

This led Haven to proceed to an evaluation of Presidents Lincoln and Johnson and to express his hopes about Grant. Regarding Lincoln, Haven expressed the kind of muted disappointment reminiscent of the postexilic prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who lament the sudden disappearance of King Zerubbabel, a Judean king descended from David and Solomon, who was considered a potential messiah in early postexilic writings. While scholars have speculated that Zerubbabel was likely killed on the battlefield, the postexilic prophets Haggai and Zechariah shroud discussion of him in esoteric reference, and muted enthusiasm. Lincoln, said Haven, was not the messiah that many hoped he was:

> As clouds of angel faces surround the heads of victor saints, misty yet distant in beauty, so do clouds of reforms, the faces of the true angels, messengers of God to man, encompass the victor President. Black were the clouds about the head of Lincoln when first he became the head of the nation. A winter storm of darkness and death beat upon his head. How dark, how dreadful that hour! The flush of morning joy at his success was instantly extinguished in the sulphurous folds, shooting lightnings, rumbling thunders, portending rain. How sadly, wearisomely, patiently did he wade through the sea of troubles…A slightly brighter cloud encompassed the last election. Still it was a dreary mixture of light and darkness.[64]

Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, was not even mentioned by name in Haven's sermon. Several times Haven even skipped over Johnson completely, talking about Lincoln as Moses and Grant as Joshua, as if they served consecutively. When he did discuss Johnson, however, he referred to him as having "imbecile hands." In Johnson, he saw the nadir of the republic:

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[63] Ibid., 612.
[64] Ibid., 628.

> So, when the night of staggering weakness and seeming dissolution came, when men's hearts were everywhere failing themselves with fear, and with a looking for the things that were about to come upon the earth; when the head of the nation threw up his imbecile hands in confessed powerlessness, and allowed his chiefs of State to rob his treasury and arsenals, to scatter his petty navy and pettier army, while he, like a sick girl, cried "No coercion," "I shall be the last President of the United States," as he certainly will be the least.[65]

In contrast, Haven called Grant the man who could finally take America "across the River Jordan." Like Grant, "Joshua's arm alone could batter down the walls of Ai, Gath, and Ashkelon. Moses, the Lincoln liberator, must give way to the conquering warrior."[66] He went on to say that Grant might achieve true greatness. Whereas six years before, no one had heard of him, now "his deeds are written broadest of all our soldiers on the pages of all our history."[67] Further, he deserved to be more revered than Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Washington, or Cromwell because, "unlike all other great generals, his military fame is indissolubly united with the emancipation of millions of slaves."[68] Thus, he was far beyond a "mere man of ability." The warrior-king Zerubbabel was described with equal zeal and expectation in the early parts of the post-exilic prophets Zechariah and Haggai.

If Grant were to succeed, however, he had to make the American covenant universal. This meant three things for Haven, presented in increasing order of importance. First, the law: universal suffrage rights in both the North and South had to be guaranteed (for women as well); second, white society had to take tolerance into its heart so that all aspects of a Christian life were available to all; finally, the races needed to amalgamate, as God intended.

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[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

The first of the three components above, suffrage rights, is relatively straightforward. Haven argued that the federal government needed to enforce the right to vote for all Americans, North and South. Currently, he said, "Georgia and Connecticut today are practically united. Both exclude law-abiding and patriotic citizens from the ballot. One does it with Colt's revolvers, the other with Colt's workmen." In order for Ohio to cease "being as wicked as Louisiana, universal suffrage must be done at Washington. The Constitution demands it. The President should urge it – Congress ordain it. Only thus can the blot which stains this jubilee-hour be wiped away."[69]

Equality at the polls was not the only work laid upon the coming government, Haven said. This evil could not be abolished by any enactments, he maintained, because

> [T]he leprosy lies deep within. It dwells in our churches, in our souls, in our education, in society. It still makes us look on many a human face with repulsion which is of the complexion of the mother of our Lord – nay, of the Lord himself. It still leads us to erect barriers between us and our kindred, and to make us and them talk of "our race" as if they and we had a different parentage, Savior, and eternity. It must come to an end.[70]

Haven went much farther than preaching mere acceptance, however. He went on to argue that God wanted the two races to mix as much as humanly possible to eliminate distinct races of white and black. He quoted extensively from the Song of Solomon (Song of Songs in the Hebrew Bible), which is a unique book within the King James Bible, in two senses. It is inserted there as the final text before the prophets, and it makes no reference to Law, Covenant, or Yahweh, nor does it teach or explore wisdom like Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. Instead, it celebrates sexual love between men and women.[71] Haven said, "Song of Songs will

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[69] Ibid., 620.
[70] Ibid., 622.
[71] Some traditions interpret the Song of Solomon metaphorically, as celebrating the relationship between God and his people.

have a more literal fulfillment than it has ever confessedly had in America," and proceeded to say that, "The lightest and darkest of the children of Adam and Noah are divinely planted together in this land, that they may, by obeying this law of God, work out the perfect oneness of the race of man. Who art thou that fightest against God?"[72]

Leaving aside all of these corporeal preoccupations, Haven closed his sermon on an esoteric and apocalyptic note.[73] Stitching together portions of passages from Daniel and Revelations, Haven admitted that he was not quite sure what lay in store for America, but it would operate on a cosmic level. First, he maintained that people should be hopeful that the Jubilee of Heaven was at hand before deciding that more sinister forces were at work. He invoked the archangel Michael, who appeared three times in Daniel but who, in the Book of Revelations, leads God's armies to victory in the war against Satan's forces during the war in heaven. "They fear his arm. They will crouch, and tremble, and obey. As the devil and his angels fled and fell before the mighty Michael, Prince of God, so will this new revelation of the same evil spirit submit to this new revelation of the decree of the Almighty."[74]

Like all postexilic prophecy, Haven's sermon ends on a contradictory and unsatisfying note. On the one hand, the esotericism and apocalyptic yearnings poke out throughout the text, pointing listeners to the cosmos for answers. On the other, in the here-and-now the country was faced with a profound sense of national drift. There was hope placed in the newly-elected president, but "the principles which this election is designed by him to settle, the path on which he orders us to march"[75] remained unclear.

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[72] Haven, 626.
[73] It is easy to see how the apocalyptic portions of these sermons could be misread by scholars like Bercovitch and Murphy as jeremiads, given the pitch of the rhetoric in these moments.
[74] Haven, 619.
[75] Ibid., 630.

Southern Sermons: From Calvinism to Exile to the Lost Cause

The situation in the Southern pulpit leading up to the Civil War was markedly different, for three reasons. First, as I mentioned previously, the Protestant world became homogeneous in the three decades leading up to the war. Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians accounted for 94 percent of Southern Protestant congregations during the era. Second, because the slavery question supervened upon otherwise naturally developing theologies, the defense of slavery galvanized the southern pulpit, drawing already fraternal churches closer together in two ways. They were unified in their insistence that their sermons were not political, whereas many of their Northern counterparts proudly were, and they stuck to the script they already had, as it were, refraining from novel interpretations when responding to thunderous jeremiads from the likes of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. They hewed close to the text of the Bible and wove slavery into a long-established, rigid, and static theology. Confident that God was on their side, they thought abolitionist preachings were the acts of false prophets and infidels. It is not surprising, therefore, that Southern sermons never progressed beyond the exilic stage. The South may have lost the war, but many Southerners – their ministers especially – were never willing to accept defeat.

James Henley Thornwell (1812-1862) was a Presbyterian preacher who became the most prominent leader of the Southern half of Old School Presbyterianism, the more theologically conservative branch of Presbyterianism, which was established after the 1837 schism within the American Presbyterian Church.[76] After studying at Harvard, Thornwell

[76] The Old School - New School Controversy was a schism of the Presbyterian Church in the United States which began in 1837. The Old School, led by Charles Hodge of Princeton Theological Seminary, was much more conservative theologically and was not supportive of revivals. It called for traditional Calvinist orthodoxy as outlined in the Westminster standards. The New School derived from the reconstructions of Calvinism by New England Puritans Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Hopkins, and Joseph Bellamy and wholly embraced revivalism.

served as pastor of the Waxhaw Presbyterian Church of South Carolina, before becoming president of South Carolina College. He then went on to teach at Columbia Theological Seminary, founded the *Southern Presbyterian Review*, and edited the *Southern Quarterly Review*. He had a prominent role in establishing the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, preaching the first sermon and writing the first address for the new denomination.

"Old Schoolers" like Thornwell were notoriously hostile to revivals. They hewed closely to Calvinist principles, from which Thornwell's entire sermon flowed: they advocated strict biblical literalism and predestination, downplayed human agency in worldly affairs, and criticized ministers who, they thought, were otherwise "too political." Hence, as it was for their Puritan forbears, pre-exilic tropes were tailor-made for their message. This derived from the Calvinist extension of the Israelites' no longer enjoying unconditional protection from God (with an explanation as to why); the lack of esoteric features; the lack of a theology of exile (as it would appear in the South during bleaker moments of the Civil War); a message of hopelessness and doom; a minimization of "the remnant," the survivors of catastrophe so central to many other sections of the Old and New Testaments; and, finally, the denial that anything could be done to remedy the situation. In "The Rights and Duties of Masters" (1850), Thornwell said that man's relationship with God was a fallen one, wherein humanity was no longer in a perfect Adamic state; humans were sinners. Thornwell recognized this standard account, but he went further, describing humankind's situation as utterly hopeless, completely separated from God. This Calvinistic doctrine, known as total depravity, states that humans can do nothing that is truly good or of God. He describes it as "a total defection from the

authority of God – in an alienation of the heart from its Maker."[77] This condition, Thornwell said, could not be remedied.

Thornwell was emphatic that, at the salvific level, the black and white races were equal. Both shared an unredeemably sinful nature. Both races were enslaved to wickedness. This notion of "slavery to sin" being "the "truest form of bondage," appeared in several of Thornwell's sermons about slavery, in order to avoid dealing directly with the subject. In this instance, he supported the claim with a quote and interpretation of a well-known quote from John 8:34,

> "Verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant or slave of sin." This moral slavery, from which it was the professed object of their pretended philosophy to deliver men, was a subject of fruitful and eloquent declamation among the ancient moralists, philosophers and poets. No bondage is more grievous than that which is voluntary.[78]

Slavery was folded in by Thornwell with several other curses inflicted by God upon humanity. It should not be singled out, as abolitionists would, as simply the "machinery of man." Like all other curses,

> Slavery is a part of the curse which sin has introduced into the world, and stands in the same general relations to Christianity as poverty, sickness, disease or death. In other words, it is a relation which can only be conceived as taking place among fallen beings – tainted with a curse. It springs not from the nature of man as man, nor from the nature of society as such, but from the nature of man as sinful, and the nature of society as disordered.[79]

Thornwell then returned to the question of slavery. Here he descended into the Old Testament notion that God intends slavery as a punishment for sins – a debt to be paid, as they are in the Hebrew Bible, by the progeny of sinners over multiple generations. Presumably, he

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[77] James H. Thornwell, "The Rights and Duties of Masters," in Chesebrough, *God Ordained this War*, 177.
[78] Ibid., 183.
[79] Ibid., 185.

was referring here to the argument from Genesis that black slaves in America are the descendants of Ham and Canaan. He offered no references to scripture, however, an interesting omission for someone who considered himself a biblical literalist. All he offered was a sweeping general claim, "the perpetuation of grievous a wrong no lapse of time can make it subsequently right."[80]

Like all curses which manifest as a distinct people's lot in life, it would be mistaken, Thornwell argued, to assume that God made an error in relegating slaves to slavery, just as he relegated the poor to poverty, or the sick to disease or death. It would be hubristic, he argued, to

> regard Society, with all its complicated interests, its divisions and sub-divisions, as the machinery of man – which, as it has been invented and arranged by his ingenuity and skill, may be taken to pieces, re-constructed, altered or repaired, as experience shall indicate defects or confusion in the original plan.[81]

Those who believed that the social order is the result of anything other than God's design, especially "political" ministers, were risking great offense to God. Thornwell repeatedly harped on this point, calling these ministers "socialists or communists" at one point, "red republicans and jacobins" at another.[82] All the church should ever have done about slaves, he argued, is what it did with anyone else, "contemplate them only as sinners." He closed with the more general statement, cautioning the church against meliorism: "Christian knowledge inculcates contentment with our lot; and in bringing before us the tremendous realities of eternity, renders us comparatively indifferent to the inconveniences and hardships of time."[83]

A review of sermons by Southern ministers in the decades preceding the Civil War

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[80] Ibid., 190.
[81] Ibid., 178.
[82] Ibid., 177.
[83] Ibid., 192.

gives the sense that, if Northern ministers had not picked a fight with their Southern counterparts, men like Thornwell would never have become preoccupied with slavery. The glacial pace of reform in the Southern Protestant world, already under way by the 1830s, would have continued, with the controversy between the Old and New Light schools becoming more pronounced. Slavery, however, placed this debate in suspended animation, as the mainline churches banded together to defend their peculiar institution. They did so, however, with a remarkable degree of rigidity, as if slavery was just simply integrated into a well-established and highly durable theological system. An important part of this system's durability was the mode of sermonizing which ministers found most natural in order to express themselves and connect their experiences with an Old Testament story to which they could relate. In this era, however, although they felt compelled to defend slavery, there was not yet a sense that fifteen years later Southerners would feel like exiles in their own land.

Just before and during the Civil War, as Cherry, James Silver, and Richard Beringer have argued, the Old Testament was especially prevalent in Southern sermons. This rings true, for two reasons. First, as Beringer put it, "despite the teachings of Christ, the Old Testament frequently portrayed a God of war, who helped the Israelites defeat the Amalekites, Canaanites, Philistines (in aggressive war, it might be added). Would he not do as much to destroy the Yankee Philistines in these latter days?"[84] Second, the notion of a chosen people was always more necessary to the Southern cause. Since the Confederacy was always both overmatched and yet more unified than the Union, Southern religion helped provide the intestinal fortitude that the Southern soldier required. Thus, a greater burden was placed upon Southern ministers to explain events in theological terms. Every victory was seen as an

[84] Beringer, 100.

affirmation of their chosenness, each loss, a punishment for their sins. Charles Stewart argued that such a theology had a direct impact on the war effort and its duration. It did not matter how badly the war was going, "if Confederates believed that God could intervene and tip the result at any time."[85] Beringer put it somewhat differently, arguing that "religion played a bigger role in the South than the North because the South needed it more: piety did what military victories could not."[86]

One of the key crafters of Confederate religion was Benjamin Morgan Palmer (1818-1902), the first moderator of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederacy. Like many Presbyterian luminaries, Palmer attended college in the North, before being named pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia, in 1841 and then in Columbia, South Carolina, a post he held until 1855. In 1856, he accepted the pastorate of the First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, a position he held for forty-six years, until his death in 1902. Palmer spent the war preaching primarily to Confederate soldiers, and after 1865 he served as a minister in the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

Palmer's most famous sermon was delivered just three weeks after Abraham Lincoln was elected president. The sermon was distributed broadly, and its vigorous defense of slavery and endorsement of secession definitely helped push Louisiana to join the Confederacy, which it did on January 26, 1861. Chesebrough argues that it also influenced South Carolina to be the first state to secede, less than a month after Palmer delivered it. While it was the most famous sermon of Palmer's career, however, it was not his greatest. That honor belongs to his June 13, 1861, sermon, "National Responsibility Before God,"

[85] Stewart, "Civil War Preaching," 9.
[86] Beringer, 92.

delivered five days after Tennessee, the last state to secede from the union, joined the Confederacy.

This lengthy but eloquent sermon was delivered two months after the Union surrender at Fort Sumter.[87] Palmer raised nearly all of the issues that were important to the Confederate States, the varieties of sin the people had committed, the way the driving principles behind the Civil War were greater than even those of the American Revolution, and a clarion call to arms as a moral imperative to restore the covenant with God. All of this was presented through an entirely Old Testament lens; Palmer made no references to the New Testament and did not mention Christ once.

Palmer chose 2 Chronicles 6:34-35 for his epigraph,

> If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that
> thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee toward this city which
> thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name;
> then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.[88]

Palmer's choice here is fascinating, for several reasons. 1 and 2 Chronicles are the final books of the Hebrew Bible, [89] whereas in Christian Bibles they follow 2 Kings but come before Ezra-Nehemiah, representing the end of historical narrative portion of the Old Testament. All of biblical history is recapitulated in Chronicles, from Adam and Abraham on – in a kind of shorthand that prefigures the genealogical introductions of Christ in Matthew and Luke, with long stops at three key moments: the founding of the monarchy, the reigns of Kings David

[87] Benjamin Morgan Palmer, "National Responsibility Before God," in Chesebrough, *God Ordained this War*, 201-220. The sermon was delivered June 13, 1861. Fort Sumter was surrendered to Confederate officials on April 13, 1861.
[88] 2 Chronicles 6:34-35.
[89] Chronicles was originally written as one continuous work, but was split into two books in the Septuagint Bible.

and Solomon,[90] and the division of the ancient kingdom. Next follows a much greater emphasis on the history of the southern kingdom of Judah, with scant references to the northern kingdom of Israel. The last chapters depict the fall of Judah to the Babylonian empire and the way that the Persian king, Cyrus, became regarded as a savior when he returned the Judean exiles to their homeland in 539 BCE.

Palmer chose this portion of Chronicles because, like any prophetic narrative, he said it was imperative to begin at the source, to see from whence troubles sprang. In 2 Chronicles 6 King Solomon gives a long prayer at the rededication ceremony of the temple in Jerusalem, in which he expounds at length on the temple's fundamental significance for the Israelites. Verses 34-36 are explicitly about how the Jews are to know if a potential war is a just one. The meaning of the passage is simple to Palmer: no one should enterprise any war but at the Lord's command; that is to say, one that is lawful by his word. The Civil War, Palmer contended, was such a war. He was absolutely certain of it.

Unlike King Solomon, however, Palmer traced the roots of the American calamity to the building of its temple, the Constitution. Like his northern counterpart Beecher, he blamed the framers for the "original sin" contained in their creation. For Palmer, however, the original sin was not slavery, but the creation of a Godless Constitution:

> But to whatever causes we refer it, the certain fact is that the American nation stood up before the world a helpless orphan, and entered upon its career without a God. Through almost a century of unparalleled prosperity, this error has been but partially retrieved: as the religious spirit of the people has silently compelled the appointment by executive authority, of days of public thanksgiving and prayer – yet to this day, in the great national act of incorporation there is no bond which connects the old American nation with the providence and Government of Jehovah.[91]

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[90] 1:11-29, to 2:1-9.
[91] Palmer, 203.

Palmer contended that the flawed foundation of the American "temple" had begotten a multitude of sins, the harm of each magnified over time, in a continuous history of infidelity festering in the American "bosom." After enumerating them, he engaged in long diatribes over four categories of sins: the idolatry of American history, the devotion to political party, the want of reverence for the authority and majesty of law, and greed. I will discuss the first and third charges of Palmer's jeremiad here.

American history is celebrated, Palmer argued, by crediting only the virtuous character of the nation's ancestors, the benevolence of its leaders, and the self-reliance of the American people – none of which would be a problem, for Palmer, if they all were carried out in the name of their divine underwriter. The sin of being in awe of human handiwork, admiring the country's Towers of Babel, was particularly egregious to Palmer. When he went to illustrate his point, however, his choice of scriptural passages was highly unorthodox. Normally, this point was illustrated with the story of Pharaoh or King Saul, both of whom grew intoxicated by political power. Palmer instead chose King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king who conquered Judah, razed the Jerusalem temple, and repatriated the Jews to Babylon, to make his point. According to the prophet Daniel, while boasting about his achievements, Nebuchadnezzar is humbled by God. He lost his sanity and was forced to live in the wild like an animal for seven years. After serving his penance, his sanity and position were restored, and he praised and honored God. Palmer hoped that the Confederacy could redeem America and avoid the fate of Nebuchadnezzar:

> The terrible infliction upon Nebuchadnezzar of old, is a lesson for all time. The poor monarch, driven among the beasts of the field and driveling in his insanity, proclaims through his affecting experience that all "those who walk in pride God is able to abase."[92]

[92] Palmer, 208.

Although the selection of Nebuchadnezzar is unorthodox, the message is unmistakably the dire indictment of any exilic prophecy. When the Babylonian king finally let go of his hubris, his powers, his kingdom, and his life were all restored. Palmer pivoted directly from there, to the Israelites, and then to an analogy with America:

> Never was such a debt of gratitude for providential blessings contracted by any people, as that due to God from the American nation. He gave them a broad land and full of springs – He emptied out its former inhabitants who melted away as the Canaanites before Israel – and His gracious providence was a wall of fire around their armies through a long and painful war. Yet we have seen how speedily they forgot the God of their salvation, and made an idol of themselves. Looking out from their palaces and towers, they have cried, saying, "is not this great Babylon that we have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of our power and for the honor of our majesty?"[93]

As in all true jeremiads, these "original sins" – in this case, a Godless Constitution compounded by the failure to credit God for America's success – begat the second-order sins of avarice and attachment to party. Those sins paled in comparison, however, to a "grievous want of reverence for the authority and majesty of law."[94] He next cited Thomas Hooker, a Puritan dissenter and founder of Connecticut and author of the "Fundamental Orders of Connecticut" – a document cited by some as the world's first written constitution, the one that established a representative government.[95] Using Hooker's text as a shibboleth, Palmer railed against the lack of respect for the law: "Like the attraction of gravitation in physics, law binds together all the spheres of human duty and holds them fast to the throne of God."[96] In short, his long diatribe amounts to the argument that the lack of the principle of obedience is tantamount to a lack of "harmony, peace, and joy." Here Palmer sounds a lot like the young

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[93] Ibid., 210.
[94] Ibid., 213.
[95] See Donald Lutz, Stephen Schechter, and Richard B. Bernstein, *Roots of the Republic: American Founding Documents Interpreted* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 24.
[96] Palmer, 213.

Abraham Lincoln in his Lyceum Speech of 1837, when he concluded that to "trample upon these….is to extinguish the national life by shameful felo de se."[97]

Palmer did not believe, as Lincoln did, that America could be rescued by creating a "political religion." Simply obeying the law for its own sake would be a half-measure for Palmer. What he had in mind was a rededication of the temple in the manner of King Solomon. It needed to be rebuilt entirely from scratch. Fortunately, the Confederate Constitution did precisely that:

> Thanks be unto God, my brethren, for the grace given our own Confederacy, in receding from this perilous atheism! When my eye first rested upon the Constitution adopted by the Confederate Congress, and I read in the first lines of our organic and fundamental law a clear, solemn official recognition of Almighty God, my heart swelled with unutterable emotions of gratitude and joy. It was the return of the prodigal to the bosom of his father, of the poor exile who has long pined in some distant and bleak Siberia after the associations of his childhood's home. At length, the nation has a God: Alleluia! "the Lord reigneth let the earth rejoice." And now in the beautiful proclamation of our President our whole people through eleven States are called to ratify the covenant, and to set up the memorial stone thereof.[98]

Now that Tennessee, the eleventh and final state to secede, had done so, the new covenant still needed ratification. He dwelled for a moment there, as if collecting his energy before the final jeremiad of assault leading to the denouement of the sermon. There was no other conclusion possible, he argued, if his listeners reviewed American history objectively. It was maddening, he said, if

> we have vainly read the history of our Fathers, if we failed to see that from the beginning two nations were in the American womb; and through the whole period of gestation the supplanter has had his hand upon his brother's heel. The separation of North and South was as surely decreed of God, and has as certainly been accomplished by the outworking of great moral causes, as was the separation of the colonies from their English mother.[99]

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[97] An archaic legal term for suicide.
[98] Palmer, 218.
[99] Ibid, 220.

From here, Palmer provided the familiar exilic call to violence:

> In past ages, the sword has been the universal arbiter, and every issue has been submitted to the ordeal of battle. How fondly many of us hoped and pleaded for the rejection of this brutal argument; and for such an adjustment of our difficulties, as both the civilization and the religions of the age demanded! But our overtures of peace were first fraudulently entertained, and then insultingly rejected. I accept that rejection. I will go to my God, and I will tell him how we have desired peace. I will tell him how we have sought to realize the scripture idea of "beating the sword into the plowshare:" and then I will remit those who have rejected our treaties of amity and commerce, to his retributive judgment. But in this act, let us bow in low humility before his throne.[100]

Like all exilic sermons, Palmer ended by reminding the audience that they needed to actively participate in their struggle, or their future would never be actualized. If they did what was being asked of them, God would deliver them to the Promised Land, and their future would be more glorious than any experienced in human (biblical) history up to that date – greater, even, than the era where the sermon began, the golden age of King Solomon:

> There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.[101]

On the eve of the Civil War, it made sense that sermons would take the exilic form, because it offered a complete narrative of the situation and, more important, one that would resonate both with Southerners "chomping at the bit" to go to battle as well as those terrified by the prospect. Either way, Palmer made it clear that there were mortal sins which needed to

[100] Ibid., 220.
[101] Deuteronomy 33:26-33.

be paid for and could not be ignored any longer; a good Christian had to fight to save both himself and the "true" America, the Confederacy. The call had been given. If the Southern man responded, God would reward him with the privilege of living in a "land of corn and wine."[102]

The devastation of the war might have led Southerners to question whether God ever favored the Confederate cause; but, in fact, it had the opposite effect, especially on chaplains who served in the Confederate army during the war. It was they who were transformed the most, either by fighting alongside the Confederate soldiers or by providing them with spiritual succor. Chaplaincy in the Confederacy was a deeply formative experience for a generation of Southern ministers: they were both memorialized and mythologized themselves as the "fighting chaplains," men who "shot as straight as they preached."[103] It was they who most ignored the worldly defeat at Appomattox; it was they who made most sure that "the cause was lost at one level, but it was grand and triumphant deeper down."[104]

Paul Harvey has argued that the Civil War and Reconstruction not only revolutionized Southern religious life but also "reshaped the relationship of the ministry to public life."[105] Their self-appointed status as "keepers of the flame" meant that chaplains remained just as politically engaged throughout the post-bellum era as they had been during the war. Whereas in the antebellum era the axiom that "politics had no place in the pulpit" caused them to avoid controversies over the tariff or state constitutional controversies, the Civil War moved White

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[102] Palmer, 220.
[103] Paul Harvey., "Yankee Faith and Southern Redemption: White Southern Baptist Ministers, 1850-1890," in Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 172.
[104] Samuel S. Hill, "Religion and the Results of the Civil War," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, 363.
[105] Harvey, 171.

ministers to the front and center of the public arena, where they would stay. Thus, Protestant ministers served as the lead authors of what Charles Reagan Wilson dubbed "The Religion of the Lost Cause," a sense of permanent exile in one's own country:

> A Southern political nation was not to be, and the people of Dixie came to accept that; but the dream of a cohesive Southern people with a separate cultural identity replaced the original longing…Religion was at the heart of this dream, and the history of the attitude known as the Lost Cause was the study of the use of the past as the basis for a Southern religious-moral identity, an identity as the chosen people.[106]

Central to the religious-moral identity that Wilson described was the Southern yearning for "Redemption," which literally means "washed in the blood," a concept taken from The Book of Revelations: "they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."[107] The battlefield losses, widespread death, and ultimately humiliating surrender were all seen as punishments visited upon the region for its moral transgressions. "Confederate setbacks simply meant," according to Hill, "that the people of God are not exempt from calamities."[108] Few doubted that ultimate victory would come to the South.

The Reverend Stephen Elliot was a prime exemplar of this certainty, second only to Palmer as the most outspoken and tireless defender of the Confederate cause, according to Chesebrough.[109] Elliot served both as the rector of Christ Church in Savannah, Georgia, as well as the Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia before, during, and after the war. From 1861 to 1864, his sermons supported slavery, secession, and war; denounced Northerners as heretics, infidels and evildoers; and urged the South to keep fighting after all

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[106] Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 1.
[107] Revelations 7:14.
[108] Hill, 173
[109] Chesebrough, *God Ordained This War*, 243.

was lost. As Palmer fled from invading Yankee forces in New Orleans, so Elliot escaped from Georgia just before Sherman's troops arrived in December, 1864 – knowing, as Palmer did, that he would be a target for retaliation. Elliot never gave up the cause, however, eventually becoming a leading crafter of "the normative narrative of Reconstruction," the story of an oppressed but heroic white south."[110] His postwar sermons reflect Southerners as "in captivity," in the manner of the ancient Israelites during the Babylonian Exile.

A prime example of this is "Ezra's Dilemma," delivered in Savannah on August 21, 1865. The title is somewhat ironic, as it does not exactly fit the situation confronting the defeated Confederacy, but the sermon presents a unique application of the biblical story of Ezra, as recounted in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.[111] Ezra was a priest and a scribe who was sent by the Persian monarch Artaxerxes to reintroduce the Torah to Jerusalem, in 457 BCE – well into the post-exilic period. Ezra led a large body of exiles back to Jerusalem, where he discovered that Jewish men there had made a regular practice of marrying non-Jewish women. Ezra tore his garments in despair, confessing the sins of Israel before God before braving the opposition of some of his own countrymen by enforcing the dissolution of these sinful marriages. Hence, one element that runs throughout Elliot's jeremiad is an indictment of this sinful "marriage" of Union and Confederate Americas – this unholy marriage needed to be annulled in the manner of Ezra.

Elliot's tasks ran far deeper, however. He had to explain why the South lost the war, why a benevolent God would make the righteous suffer, why Southerners should maintain their faith, and why they should continue to believe that they were God's chosen people. Like

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[110] Harvey, 168.
[111] Originally, Ezra was one continuous work, divided into Ezra 1 and 2. It was later divided into Ezra and Nehemiah. This is why this section of the Old Testament is often referred to as "Ezra-Nehemiah."

Ezra, Elliot understood that rebuilding religious faith and reconstituting the people are one and the same. Relying exclusively on the Old Testament for source material, Elliot offered the full complement of exilic rhetoric to make his case: a theodicy. an exhortation for the South to reform, an account of the ghastly consequences if they did not, and the certainty that one day God would redeem his chosen people of the South.

Elliot opened with the suggestion that God was "hiding his countenance from our rulers, from our armies, and from our people"[112] in the manner that appears frequently in all three genres of Old Testament literature (Torah, Prophecy, Writing) – most notably, in Ezekiel, Psalm 104, and Job. This was a manner of "visitation" from God, wherein God berated the Israelites without looking them in the face in order, as Elliot said, "to teach us our own weakness."[113] The recent horrifying battlefield losses and subsequent surrender at Appomattox – after things had gone so well for the Confederacy early on – were all a reminder that, although Confederates had "forced him to hide his face from us," final success "will depend altogether upon his presence and his favour."[114]

After setting this general frame, Elliot descended into a theodicy, given in two parts: a short description of how the South was with God whereas the North was against Him, followed by a lengthy explanation of why, if that were so, God had turned against the South. He said that the Southern man needed to come to understand what had happened between the early victories at Manassas and the defeat. He reminded listeners why *Deo Vindice*, the motto

[112] Stephen Elliot, "Ezra's Dilemma," in Chesebrough, *God Ordained This War,* 248.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

that appeared on the Great Seal of the Confederate States, meant "Our Vindicator" and "Our Champion," but also and most importantly, "Our Judge."[115]

Elliot contended that God was with the South because, in the big picture, Southerners had done nothing wrong. First, Elliot suggested that they take the long view and remember all of the glory with which God had already blessed them – Bull Run and Norfolk "were to us what the miracles at the Red Sea and in the wilderness were to the Israelites."[116] More importantly, he reiterated that slavery was ordained repeatedly in both testaments of the Bible. Citing selectively from Genesis, Elliot presented fragments from the story of Ham:

> the poor shall never cease out of the land
> Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life he said, cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.[117]

Elliot then explained these passages, saying that, since God is both omnipotent and perfect, He cannot have changed his mind about slavery. What was once true must remain so. This was due to the nature of God as a divine being. Elliot ruminated on the connection between God's divine essence and his inability to make mistakes and the fixed character of His pronouncements. He quoted two well-known Old Testament sources, one from Numbers, the other from the prophet Micah:

> God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent: Hath he said and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken and shall He not make it good?[118]
>
> For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.[119]

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[115] Ibid., 246.
[116] Ibid., 255.
[117] Ibid., 253. Although Elliot does not identify the passages, they are all fragments from Genesis 9:21-19.
[118] Numbers 23:19.

Elliot then went further than the Bible's authors did. In the Bible Ham's descendants, the Canaanites, are to be enslaved as a punishment for Ham's misdeeds; Elliot, however, argues that God not only sanctions slavery, but views it as a positive good. It is interesting that, in this "moral expansion" of slavery section, Elliot provided no biblical references, only general statements about the virtues of slavery in the contemporary era:

> It means that we have been not only masters to these people, but so far as circumstances have permitted us, that we have been friends and instructors. Let their increase attest their general comfort! Let their change from the tattooed savage to the well-bred courteous menial, bear witness to their culture! Let their quiet subordination thro' all this fierce conflict speak trumpet tongued to the world of their treatment. Let the numbers who flock to the table of the Lord attest to the nations the missionary work which is going on amongst them.[120]

In contrast, he posited, Northerners taking it upon themselves to free slaves exemplified the opposite of divine inspiration and the ultimate hubris. They had "blotted out all the records of divine inspiration," he said, in their pursuit; they were "never led by truth, only by passion." Like the French, they were

> atheists, led down the track of lawless licentiousness, which led over the ruins and ashes of the altar and the fireside…they turned their rage against the word of God, and covered it all over with ridicule and with abuse. Catching the echo of the French revolution, they set up liberty, equality, fraternity, as their idols, and virtually dethroned the God of the Bible.[121]

Northerners had been fooled into suddenly believing in abolitionist righteousness by the elixir of smooth rhetoric. But, eventually, he said, the "silver veil will be lifted, and lo, the hideous features of the false Prophet!"[122] Elliot summed up the entire abolitionist enterprise by quoting The Epistle of James as "the wisdom which descendeth not from above, but is

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[119] Micah 3:6.
[120] Elliot, 252-253.
[121] Ibid., 253.
[122] Ibid., 254.

earthly, sensual, devilish."[123] Elliot concluded this section by reassuring the audience that one day the North would receive its come-uppance:

> It means that all the blood which has been shed—that all the misery which has been endured—that all the desolation which has been visited upon our land—that all the curse which is laid up in the future, whether for the white race or the black race, is upon our enemies, and that God will require it at their hands.[124]

Elliot then explained why the North was Babylon (the rod of God's anger) and the South was Israel. He asked:

> Why then, you will ask, if God is so clearly on our side, are we so sorely pressed and made to bleed at every pore? Why do our enemies triumph over us, and spoil our homes and desolate our hearth stones? Why are our young men smitten and our houses filled with lamentation? Why does the widow send up her wail before the Lord and why does the orphan weep because he is fatherless?[125]

The explanation was simple, he argued: "our Bibles answer it very directly and plainly."[126] Southerners were guilty of two interrelated sins: greed and draft-dodging. But, before cataloging them, Elliot reaffirmed the inerrancy of God, this time from Deuteronomy – interesting because, as the final book of the Torah, Deuteronomy ("Second Giving of the Law") is a condensed but much more emphatic restatement of the teachings of the previous four books. In other words, Elliot saved the most hard-hitting statement of God's inerrancy for this portion of the theodicy. He quoted from Book 32, the Song of Moses, a lyrical meditation on Israelite suffering: "He is the Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he."[127]

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[123] Ibid. (see James 3:15).
[124] Ibid., 253.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid., 255.
[127] Deuteronomy 32:4.

Southerners who dodged the draft, Elliot said, did so "not from cowardice or doubt about the value of the conflict or the certainty of its success," but from "liberty to mingle in this mad hunt after money."[128] Worse still, they often sought "feeble substitutes in place of able-bodied men."[129] This, in turn, caused the men who were serving to grow dissatisfied, and

> lose their enthusiasm, when he was perceived that he was to bear and to suffer, while others, as able-bodied as himself, and the soldier, who had retained his early enthusiasm and was ready to sacrifice every thing for the cause, grew dissatisfied when he perceived that he was to bear and to suffer, while others, as able-bodied as himself and as deeply interested in the struggle, remained at home to speculate and grow rich upon his endurance and his sufferings, Just as victory was foreshadowed at the beginning in the earnestness of every heart, in the devotion of every spirit, in the one concentrated idea of victory and independence, so was defeat just as plainly foreshadowed in the distraction of the public mind, in the struggle which rapidly grew up between the administration and the people, in the complaining and the murmuring against the inefficiency of the armies, which was but the natural result of the demoralization of the country.[130]

In keeping with exilic prophecy, Elliot pinned the devastation on the faithlessness of the people; he said that the South had strayed so far that it had "lost sight of its landmarks," and had "forgotten its resolution to suffer anything and lose everything, on this journey towards the promised land of our national independence."[131] In closing this point, he invoked Exodus, saying that many Southerners were asking, "Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?"[132]

In addition, like the exilic prophets, after the charges were made, Elliot also warned his audience that the situation was about to get even worse. First he provided a prediction for the downfall that the South would experience, if it surrendered. Then, he followed that with a

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[128] Elliot, 260.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid., 257.
[132] Ibid.

series of unattributed quotes from disparate parts of the Old Testament that were rendered as if they were about the same story in the Bible and appeared consecutively. First, Elliot's warning:

> submission not to the conservative and Christian people of the North, but to a party of infidel fanatics, with an army of needy and greedy soldiers at their backs. Who shall be able to restrain them in their hour of victory? When that moment approaches, when the danger shall seem to be over and the spoils are ready to be divided, every outlaw will rush to fill their ranks, every adventurer will hasten to swell their legions, and they will sweep down upon the South as the hosts of Attila did upon the fertile fields of Italy. And shall you find in defeat that mercy which you did not find in victory? You may slumber now, but you will awake to a fearful reality. You may lie upon your beds of ease and dream that when it is all over, you will be welcomed back to all the privileges and immunities of greasy citizens, but how terrible will be your disappointment! Yon will have an ignoble home, overrun by hordes of insolent slaves and rapacious soldiers. You will wear the badge of a conquered race, Pariahs among your fellow creatures, yourselves degraded, your delicate wives and gentle children thrust down to menial service, insulted perhaps dishonored. Think you that these victorious hordes, made up in large part of the sweepings of Europe, will leave you any thing? As well might the lamb expect mercy from the wolf.[133]

Next, he unleashed a dense cloud of scriptural utterances, from Ezra, Isaiah, and Lamentations, as if these lines all appeared together in the Bible:

> Oh! for the tongue of a Prophet to paint for you what is before you, unless you repent and turn to the Lord and realize that "His hand is upon all them for good that seek him." The language of Scripture is alone adequate to describe it – "The earth mourneth and languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness. They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets: they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills. They ravished the women in Zion and the maids in the cities of Judah. They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood. The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning. The crown is fallen from our head: wo unto us that we have sinned."[134]

The inclusion of Lamentations (the last biblical passage above), is curious. Likely written by the author of Jeremiah, Lamentations is the work that is chanted in sorrow when Jews gather

[133] Ibid., 262.
[134] Ibid. When separated, the biblical quotations, in order, are from Ezra 8:22; Isaiah 33:9; Lamentations 5:11-16.

each year to mourn the destruction of Jerusalem. According to tradition, the city fell to the Babylonians on August 9, 587 BCE, and again on the same day and month to the Romans in 70 CE. The five poems composing this brief book express the people's collective grief for the loss of their holy city. While the prophetic books record public pronouncements of doom against the Judean capital, Lamentations embodies the private anguish of individuals who witnessed the fulfillment of Yahweh's harsh judgment. It also ends with a question: Has Yahweh forsaken His people permanently?

In Elliot's mind, the answer was decidedly no. Hence, it was imperative that Confederates never give up their fight. The situation was just as urgent then as it was the day before Lee signed the Letters of Surrender at Appomattox. So Elliot moved on to the call-to-action portion of his jeremiad, which has four parts: a call to every Southern man to self-examination and the demand to come correct with God, which, in turn, would legitimate the request that God "reignite" the southern flame; calls to political action; finally, a benediction which he quoted from Exodus.

Elliot urged Southerners to engage in

> great searchings of heart to-day. From the President of the Confederate States, who once occupied the most responsible position in the world, to the humblest person who is involved in their destiny, each one of us should examine himself and find out, if possible, wherein he has offended God and turned away his face from us.[135]

By doing this, Elliot said – not in a "Pharisaical" manner but in an honest one – the process of Southern reconstitution could truly begin. By "separating the wheat from the chaff, the pure gold from the worthless dross" (substantially distorting Christ's metaphor from the Gospel of

[135] Ibid., 259.

Matthew),[136] Confederates could *then and only then* ask God to intervene – after they had engaged in sufficient self-reflection. Man "might force the body, but he could not give the spirit. He might carry the man to the camp, but he could not impart the dash which distinguishes him whose heart is in the work." So he said, reiterating the exilic combination of the call to action with the caveat that trust in God that was ultimately the most important thing:

> What we should now ask of God is, that he would revive within us those qualities of mind and of heart—so near akin to the graces of the spirit—which qualify us for carrying on our conflict successfully, earnestness, singleness of purpose, honesty, integrity. The whole people need to be aroused and the government should take the lead, under God, in doing it. The chord of sympathy which vibrated so harmoniously in the past, must be touched anew. This is not a warfare which can be coldly left to the Government and the army; it is the cause, emphatically, of the whole nation--of every man, woman and child in the Confederacy.[137]

After Southerners "shall have fasted and prayed," they then should

> use means to rekindle the sacred fire of patriotism which burned so vividly in the outburst of this revolution. Where is the orator? Where is the statesman? Where are the voices which, like a trumpet's blast, led on the soldier to the field of glory—of glory, because the field of duty? They are all mute; some silent in death, some wrapped in inglorious ease. Is this the time for him who has the divine gift of eloquence to keep it pent within his own burning bosom? Is this an hour when any man, who can sway his fellow men, who can enkindle his hope with lips touched with a live coal from off the altar, or excite his fears with the dark shadows of coming events, should leave his country and his country's hopes to drift to ruin without one effort to arrest the misery? Where are the people themselves? Where is that influence of the multitude which is so terrible for evil, so powerful for good? Where is the low sweet voice of woman which has mingled so harmoniously thro' all this tumult with the clangor of the trumpet and the clash of arms? Why is it unheard?[138]

Elliot concludes with Moses' exhortation from Exodus 14:

> Awake to the reality of things and arouse yourselves, children of the sun, or God's hand will not be with you. "Wherefore criest thou unto me," said the Lord to Moses, when he and his people were hedged up among the mountains, with the fierce Egyptians in their rear, and the deep waters of the red sea before them, "speak

[136] See Matthew 3:12.
[137] Elliot, 261.
[138] Ibid.

unto the children of Israel that they go forward."[139]

Just as it was startling to see Heaven's disappointment in the aftermath of the Union triumph, the above passages from Elliot's jeremiad are equally surprising, for two reasons. First, because they demonstrate the full irony of Charles Wilson Reagan's "Theology of the Lost Cause." The cause was anything but lost to these Southern ministers during Reconstruction. They also present a second irony – one at the very heart of this dissertation: the longest-sustained jeremiad in American history is not in fact the one celebrated by Murphy, Shulman, et al., for a liberal, redemptive vision of a just society. It is the jeremiad maintained rather by the South – which never won but which never admitted defeat and never gave up on the notion that its mythological nation would eventually rise again.

Conclusion

Shalev contends that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the Old Testament's influence on the American political imagination had dramatically diminished. Quite to the contrary, the image of America as the New Israel and the accompanying identification with the biblical Israelites of old had, in fact, not waned. This was because such a wide range of political circumstances could be so powerfully captured by reasserting the ancient storytelling of the Nevi'im. Their rhetoric endured, not only throughout the Civil War but well into the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras. This was especially true for Southern ministers. Permanently politicized by the war, they then became the chief spokesmen for the "The Lost Cause," the theology of a nation that no longer existed but whose people saw themselves as permanent exiles in their own country.

[139] Ibid., 261 (Exodus 14:15).

The persistence of these rhetorical modes meant more than the durability and ready availability of a powerful set of rhetorics for ministers, however. Resorting to this way of expressing the meaning, origins, and purposes of America also saddled ministers with some heavy theological baggage. As I will explain in the following chapter, carrying these ancient expressions of nationhood forward – the oldest of which was written 1,200 years before the Civil War – has contributed to the collision in the modern era between the antiquity of the church and a modern, diverse, and secular nation.

Chapter 4: The American Jeremiad in the Contemporary Era

In a recent essay in *The New York Times*, "American Jeremiad: A Manifesto," Wen Stephenson, a contributing writer to *The Nation* and senior producer of NPR's *On Point*, declared that "Americans aren't supposed to write manifestos. The manifesto is not a native plant…'manifesto' implies a radicalism that American writers generally lack." Paraphrasing Sacvan Bercovitch's classic study *The American Jeremiad*, Stephenson claimed

> We Americans tend to gravitate in another direction. We write jeremiads. If the manifesto looks fearlessly to the future, seeking to replace the established order with something entirely new, the jeremiad is at once jittery and nostalgic, looking anxiously over its shoulder at a prelapsarian past. We Americans, the jeremiad proclaims, have failed to live up to our founding principles, betrayed our sacred covenant as history's (or God's) chosen nation, and must rededicate ourselves to our ideals, reclaim our founding promise.[1]

Although the previous three chapters on the ancient Nevi'im, the American Revolution, and the Civil War are an extended critique of the scholars who informed Stephenson's account, in the contemporary era Murphy, Morone, et al. are correct in concluding that the contemporary era is, in fact, an age of jeremiads. Hence, in this chapter my ambitions are somewhat different. I will explain why American biblical rhetoric has collapsed into one type and why that type is the jeremiad.

I first briefly offer some general propositions as to why the jeremiad form has come to dominate contemporary political sermons. I then provide historical details about the development of the Christian Right and the Civil Rights movements, as these histories are central to understanding why leading ministers in the second half of the twentieth century turned exclusively to the jeremiad. Finally, I interpret six sermons – three by leading ministers of the Christian Right and three from the Civil Rights Movement – in order to demonstrate the

[1] Wen Stephenson, "American Jeremiad: A Manifesto," *The New York Times,* March 28, 2010.

pervasiveness of the exilic form in the contemporary era. Although these ministers pursued very different agendas, their sermons shared three exilic characteristics: they identified themselves as exiles like the ancient Israelites; they called for political action as the only means of rescue from "Babylon"; and their ultimate goals were earthly, not otherworldly.

For at least three centuries religion was a standard vernacular through which political problems were both apprehended and expressed in America. Speaking "through the Bible" about political matters was common for politicians for two reasons. First, this was so because the most influential religious figures frequently held positions in the power elite. Second (and more important), as McWilliams has noted, at that time America had a broadly literate religious culture. When President Lincoln adapted passages from Matthew for his Second Inaugural Address, for example, he could be confident that most Americans understood his references.[2] In today's more secular era that dialect is spoken by a diminishing percentage of Americans.[3]

The Secularization Hypothesis – which holds that, as societies progress (through modernization and rationalization), religion loses its authority in social life and governance[4] – can only explain why religious rhetoric was relegated to a dialect. It cannot explain why the varieties of prophecy have winnowed over time to one type or why that type is the jeremiad. My contention here is that this narrowing occurred because high-profile ministers were no

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[2] The decline of biblical literacy was distressing to McWilliams, which is why he was an advocate of secular Bible education in public schools and universities. Without it, he argued, Americans have little hope of understanding their origins and history. See McWilliams, "The Bible in the American Political Tradition," 11.
[3] In 2014 The Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture conducted a study on "The Bible in American Life." This concluded that, although the Bible is still held in high regard by a majority of Americans, biblical literacy has declined. See "The Bible in American Life Report, " The Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University and Purdue University, March 2014), http://raac.iupui.edu/research-projects/bible-american-life/bible-american-life-report/.
[4] See Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3-32.

longer fighting a political battle through the language of religion but were forced to fight a political battle about the status of religion itself. Put another way, the status of religion has changed fundamentally; it is no longer the medium of politics but is now an object of politics. Religion is no longer a political tradition with a political language; it now must defend itself qua religion. Because the jeremiad is the most political of the prophetic languages, it is the natural language deployed by ministers who were trying to extend their visions into the political sphere.

The American Jeremiad

It is important to remember that, according to Murphy, in order for a speech to qualify as a jeremiad, it must have four features. First, it must have an obsession with virtuous founders. Second, it must identify decline vis-a-vis the past. Third, it must identify turning points – "why these events? Why this decline? When did destructive practices first appear?"[5] Finally, it must call for reform, repentance, or renewal with a specific set of political actions. The key element here is that narratives of decline are never the whole story in a jeremiad. "A sacred story always surrounds, enfolds, and gives meaning to the mundane tale of decline from virtuous origins,"[6] he has explained, but it always ends with optimism about America's capacity to fulfill her promise.

There are two types of jeremiads, according to Murphy: nostalgic and Golden Age. The nostalgic conception emerges out of early modern European medicine, where it referred to extreme forms of homesickness observed among seventeenth-century army recruits. By the twentieth century nostalgia had come to describe not a medical condition but an affective

[5] Murphy, "Longing, Nostalgia, and Golden Age Politics," 127.
[6] Murphy, *Prodigal* Nation, 101.

state, one marked by bittersweet associations with some aspect of the personally experienced past, a past favorably contrasted with a degenerate present. In other words, nostalgic jeremiads refer to the author's actual memories of a "better time," as distorted and unreliable as those memories often are.

The Golden Age jeremiad reaches far back in time, beyond the life experience of any listener, to the early days of the republic. It idealizes foundational moments and tries to recapture lost virtues, "Such accounts narrate the founding period as a national Golden Age, where individuals subordinated their particular interests to the common good, and a Judeo-Christian consensus structured public and private life more generally."[7] Unlike the Nostalgic type, the Golden Age jeremiad is wholly imagined. Neither the authors of this type nor their audiences were alive at the time the imagined virtuous past. Both types are critical sources for the exilic narrative, however, and both are deployed to call the faithful to action.

Deploying the jeremiad provided both Christian Right and Civil Rights ministers with two distinct advantages that only the exilic tradition can provide: first, it unambiguously demands that listeners take political action; and, second, it allows ministers to maintain the notion that America not only is a chosen nation but that its bond with God is unbreakable. This is why Murphy was correct when he argued that, no matter how devastating their indictment of America is and what hellfire might await it, deep down all American Jeremiahs are, like the Bible's Jeremiah, true patriots. "As we have seen time and time again," he argued, "the jeremiad contains both lamentations of decline and invocations of national chosenness and promise."[8]

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[7] Murphy, "Longing, Nostalgia, and Golden Age Politics," 130.
[8] Murphy, "Longing, Nostalgia, and Golden Age Politics," 126-127.

The Christian Right

I use the term "Christian Right" to denote a political alliance of evangelical Protestants and politically like-minded Catholics who share social, political, and moral concerns. In other words, I use a political rather than a theological definition of the term.[9] The jeremiad of the Christian Right has always been closely aligned with a particular vision of the American future and a particular political agenda designed to advance that vision. The main features of that agenda follow directly from the traditionalist character of the narrative: outlawing abortion, opposing gay marriage (and any notion of rights for homosexuals), returning voluntary prayer into the nation's public schools, conducting public campaigns against pornography and violent or sexually explicit media, shrinking the size and scope of the federal government and its reach into private and religious sectors, calling for a strong national defense, and championing school choice programs.[10]

A brief look at the period between the Civil War and World War II provides some perspective on the rise of the Christian Right. Just as clergy hammered home themes of chosenness and sinfulness throughout the revolutionary, founding, and Civil War eras, these themes continued to animate public debate during the Gilded Age and into the early twentieth century. New and troubling developments such as concerns over the effects of rapid post-Civil War urbanization and the Constitution's omission of God and worries over the nation's changing demographic makeup in the wake of a major influx of immigrants, especially

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[9] There are important definitional debates regarding the precise use of such terms as evangelical, fundamentalist, charismatic, Pentecostal, etc., but these distinctions are not germane to the argument of this chapter. Those interested in such distinctions should see the following: George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Part 1 of Richard John Neuhaus and Michael Cromartie, *Piety and Politics: Evangelicals and Fundamentalists Confront the World* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1987); and Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2004).

[10] Different issues in the list above were dominant at different times. Opposing gay marriage, for example, did not become a salient issue until the late 1990s; prayer in schools, though critical early on, receded.

Catholics from southeastern Europe, played a significant part in post-Civil War Christian activism.[11]

Ultimately, however, the rising influence of Darwinism was the opening salvo that provoked concerns about America's moral decline.[12] William Jennings Bryan's closing argument at the famous 1925 Scopes trial was never delivered in court, but it was published soon after the trial. In it, he connected the spread of evolutionary ideas among the nation's educational elite to an increase in unbelief among the young and went on to make the further connection to moral decline in his own time. The three-time losing Presidential candidate inveighed:

> Evolutionists say that back in the twilight of life a beast, name and nature unknown, planted a murderous seed and that the impulse thus originated in that seed throbs forever in the blood of the brute's descendants, inspiring killings innumerable, for which murderers are not responsible because coerced by a fate fixed by the laws of heredity. It is an insult to reason and shocks the heart. That doctrine is as deadly as leprosy; it may aid a lawyer in a criminal case, but it would, if generally adopted, destroy all sense of responsibility and menace the morals of the world.... If all the biologists of the world teach this doctrine – as Mr. Darrow says they do – then may heaven defend the youth of our land from their impious babblings.[13]

Bryan's account of the influence of Darwinian theory on the moral state of twentieth-century America contains clear echoes of the jeremiad form: lamenting a current crisis, identifying a historical point in time where the source of decline was introduced (and

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[11] The National Association to Amend the Constitution was formed even before the Civil War ended, and expressed a fear that, unless the government took a clear stand endorsing Christianity, the moral decline that activists saw all around them would spiral out of control. Despite orchestrating an avalanche of petitions to Congress in 1868 and 1869, this movement repeatedly failed to gain congressional support. Renaming itself the National Reform Association in 1875 and taking on a broader agenda of moral and religious activism did not yield any greater success. Persistent campaigns for Sabbath closing laws also proved unsuccessful. See Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), Chapter 11.

[12] While Darwin's *Origin of Species* was a commercial success soon after arriving in America, America was a laggard in adopting biblical historicism. See Ronald L. Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969).

[13] Genevieve Forbes Herrick and John Origen Herrick, *The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2005), 398-99.

implicitly identifying a point before which moral health prevailed), and calling for reform and action – in this case, the conviction of Scopes. Darrow's moral victory at the trial devastated Christian Fundamentalists.

Christian Smith and Leonard Sweet argued that the devastating "loss" in the Scopes trial caused many American fundamentalists to withdraw from politics because they felt alienated from mainstream American culture and political life. They retreated to a project of constructing an insular world of their own. They embarked on ambitious educational and communications programs, created Bible institutes, radio (and, later, television) ministries, and founded evangelical and fundamentalist seminaries and religious publishing ventures.[14] However, as Murphy astutely pointed out, while it might have looked as if they were opting out of politics and were disillusioned with American culture, fundamentalists continued to display a strong sense of patriotism toward the nation which they still considered God's country.[15] Joel Carpenter put it more strongly: "Haunted by the 'Christian America' of their memory and imagination, fundamentalists could not shake the proprietary responsibility they felt for their nation's character."[16] To reiterate, this is another key element that makes an American prophet a Jeremiah: love of his country which he will never give up on.

Frank Lambert and others have argued that the reemergence of conservative Protestants in American politics was driven by a backlash against the social protests and counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s and the Supreme Court decisions on school prayer and

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[14] Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 25-28; Leonard Sweet, "The Modernization of Protestant Religion in America." In *Altered Landscapes: Christianity in America, 1935-1985*, ed. David W. Lotz, Donald W. Shriver, and John E Wilson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).
[15] Murphy, "Longing, Nostalgia, and Golden Age Politics," 83.
[16] Joel Carpenter*, Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 116.

abortion.[17] More recent scholars have contested this account, however. Joseph Crespino and Randall Balmer have argued that school desegregation was the real prime mover of the Christian Right's political engagement.[18] In 1970 the Supreme Court issued a preliminary injunction denying tax exemptions to "segregation academies" (all-White "religious" schools). President Nixon then ordered the IRS to deny tax exemptions to all segregated schools in the United States.[19]

The true origin of the Christian Right is immaterial for my purposes, since I am concerned here only with political rhetoric. In fact, one of the key features of prophetic rhetoric (of all three types) is that it provides the author with a rhetorical structure in which to narrate a causal chain of events. In the Christian Right's account, ministers such as Jerry Falwell, who co-founded the Moral Majority in 1979, claimed that their reentry into politics was both reluctant and purely defensive. It sprang up as a response to two simultaneous threats, an increasingly powerful federal government with an increasingly long reach into areas previously left to local institutions and a hostile mainstream culture increasingly dominated by secularism and liberalism. Falwell phrased his "reluctant calling" this way:

> Things began to happen. The invasion of humanism into the public school system began to alarm us back in the sixties. Then the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision of 1973 and abortion on demand shook me up. Then adding to that gradual regulation of various things it became very apparent the federal government was going in the wrong direction and if allowed would be harassing non-public schools, of which I have one of 16,000 right now. So step by step we became convinced we must get involved if we're going to continue what we're doing inside the church building.[20]

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[17] Frank Lambert, *Religion in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
[18] Although Christian Right leaders have gone to great lengths to revise this narrative.
[19] Randall Balmer, "The Real Origins of the Religious Right," http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/religious-right-real-origins-107133.html#.U5Npxy_BeUc.
[20] Edward Dobson, Jerry Falwell, and E.E. Hindson, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: The Resurgence of Conservative Christianity* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 144. Roughly similar accounts of the defensive nature of this reentry into politics appear in Edward Dobson, "The Bible, Politics, and Democracy," in Edward Dobson

In his study of the Christian Coalition, Justin Watson explains how the Christian Right jeremiad figures into the broader contours of American history and politics. Watson sees a twofold agenda at work in the Coalition's career. First came a defensive agenda, driven by a sense of threat. Christian Right Jeremiahs often narrated their entry into American politics as motivated by the sense that a secularizing, liberalizing federal government was threatening traditionalist America. However, they also had an "offensive" agenda, a hard-driving call of the faithful to action to restore traditional religious values and practices to the center of American life.[21]

Neuhaus and Colson, Falwell, Robertson

The sermons that follow, by Richard John Neuhaus and Charles Colson, Falwell, and Pat Robertson, make it easy to see why the Christian Right's jeremiad has mobilized so many traditionalist Americans who feel marginalized by the secularization of public life. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the enduring power of the jeremiad lies in its two key elements: the simultaneous lamentation of decline and invocation of national promise, which often involved tacking back and forth between the two, and the call to political action as the only means by which the nation's promise could be actualized. Although there are slight differences among these sermons, they each follow the same script. They valorize both eighteenth-century America and the 1950s, before presenting a narrative of decline that

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and Richard John Neuhaus, *The Bible, Politics, and Democracy: Essays* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987) and in Ralph Reed, *Politically Incorrect: The Emerging Faith Factor in American Politics* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1994), 16-18.

[21] Justin Watson, *The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands for Recognition* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), Chapter 2.

highlights the same three links in a causal chain, moral relativism, especially in schools; the toleration of sexual deviance; and, worst of all, abortion.

Evangelicals and Catholics Together was an ecumenical document signed in 1994 by leading Evangelical and Roman Catholic scholars in the United States. The co-authors of the document, Charles Colson, representing Evangelical Christianity, and Richard John Neuhaus, representing Catholicism, reflected a larger rapprochement between para-church organizations that began in the 1980s. The statement was written as a testimony that spelled out the need for Protestants and Catholics to deliver a common witness to the modern world on the eve of the third millennium. It did not mention many specific points of theology, instead it sought to encourage what it called "spiritual ecumenism."[22] What it did do, however, is what all exilic prophets do; it bore witness to human horror while lighting a path to redemption. On the Protestant side, signatories included Pat Robertson, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, Larry Lewis of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Mark Noll. Catholic signatories included bishops Francis Cardinal George, William Murphy, and Carlos Arthur Sevilla as well as philosophers George Weigel, Mary Ann Glendon, and Michael Novak.[23] Their mission statement refers to their alliance as being "theologically rooted," not merely one of political expediency, although its wording is noticeably anodyne.

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[22] "Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," *First Things*, http://www.firstthings.com/article/1994/05/evangelicals--catholics-together-the-christian-mission-in-the-third-millennium-2.

[23] The list of signatories is exhaustive, but it also included the evangelicals Os Guinness of the Trinity Forum, Richard Mouw, of Fuller Theological Seminary, J. I. Packer of Regent College, of Regent University, Richard Land of the Christian Life Commission, Jesse Miranda of the Assemblies of God, and John White of Geneva College. Among the Catholic signatories were Peter Kreeft and theologians Joseph Augustine Di Noia, Avery Cardinal Dulles, Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, and Keith Fournier. The agreement was reached a few years before in the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (between Lutherans and Catholics), which in substance says many of the same things as ECT does in that it emphasizes *Sola gratia* over *Sola fide*.

The fact that this occurred in the face of the traditional hostility of evangelicals toward Catholics is especially noteworthy:

> Our culture's sickness is far too deep for mere political remedies.... [The American culture war presents] a clash of worldviews that involves fundamental differences about truth and ultimate reality, the nature of God, the created order, the moral law, and the human condition.... [in which] these two communions stand shoulder to shoulder.[24]

What comes next is reminiscent of Southern Protestantism in the mid-nineteenth century, when Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, the three leading denominations in the South, submerged their theological differences and unified in defense of slavery. In the face of a supervening moral crisis, which could only be solved via political means, otherwise unbridgeable theological differences are papered over in this document as matters of consumer preference. Two distinctions stand out here in particular: the infant baptism of Catholicism vs. the adult, publicly-declared baptism of Evangelicalism–i.e., whether a person needs simply to be born or must be "born again" to qualify for church membership. The second is the difference between the Evangelical belief in the sole authority of Scripture versus the Catholic position that Scripture must be authoritatively interpreted by the Church. Colson and Neuhaus said to the 1.7 billion Christians in the world – a billion Catholics and over 300 million Evangelical Protestants – that these differences are unimportant in the face of the fundamental breakdown of traditional society.

Like all jeremiads, this one presented a causal account of the current predicament by isolating its root cause, in this case, increasing secularization, from which all subsequent evils flowed. Secularization, the authors averred, leads to moral relativism, which then produces a hopelessly misguided conception of "multiculturalism." Multiculturalism ought to mean a

[24] "Evangelicals & Catholics Together."

respectful attention to human differences, something like, "it is nice to enjoy Chinese food every now and then, so long as one does not become a Buddhist." Instead it means, "affirming all cultures but our own. We reject the claim that, in any or all of these areas, 'tolerance' requires the promotion of moral equivalence between the normative and the deviant."[25] Like the ancient Israelites, this jeremiad declared, America, too, has been infected by syncretism, "which increasingly descends into a moral, intellectual, and spiritual nihilism that denies not only the One who is the Truth but the very idea of truth itself."[26] They argued that this charge was true in two senses. First was the belief that having no religion had become acceptable and second was the fact that it was precisely the freedom of religion they claimed to celebrate that allowed the syncretic practices, which they tarred as hokey, vaguely spiritual, or non-Western, to seep in and contaminate American culture.

Just as the corruption of the ancient civil courts were favorite targets of the Nevi'im, Colson and Neuhaus took aim at the Supreme Court for two decisions unambiguously related to religion and primary education: first, the 1962 ruling in the case *Engel v. Vitale*, that school-sponsored Bible reading is unconstitutional and one year later the decision in *Abington v. Schempp*, which outlawed school-sponsored prayer. The Christian Right jeremiad contended that the removal of religion from public schools and institutions since 1962 had paralleled the entrance into American public life of a host of non-Western, meditative, therapeutic, or occult practices. Colson and Neuhaus emphasized the importance of the school prayer decisions in marking the nation's moral decline, arguing that the Schempp decision "set asunder what had been a unified tradition."[27] Within a providentialist worldview these

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

decisions marked the kinds of offenses that invited the rod of God's anger. Events such as the United States' defeat in Vietnam; the September 11, 2001, attacks; and Hurricane Katrina, were intelligible only as God's displeasure at the increasingly liberal and secular direction that the nation has taken since the 1960s.

The worst abomination of all, of course, was *Roe vs. Wade*. As Murphy argued,

> It is difficult to overstate the importance of legalized abortion in the Christian Right's narrative of American moral decline. Abortion is to the Christian Right narrative what slavery was to the abolitionist: the single, overriding national sin, beside which all others pale by comparison, that threatens to bring God's judgment on the nation.[28]

Murphy's assessment has been borne out. Roughly one-third of *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* is devoted to defending the rights of the unborn. Whereas at points Colson and Neuhaus delivered mild criticisms and reasoned statements about other public sins, their rage reached a fever pitch over abortion. After saying that the claim that a fetus is a "human baby" is a "biological fact, not a religious assertion" and declaring the pragmatic goal of reducing the incidences of abortion, they launched into a diatribe about "The Culture of Life":

> As the unborn must be protected, so also must women be protected from their current rampant exploitation by the abortion industry and by fathers who refuse to accept responsibility for mothers and children. Abortion on demand, which is the current rule in America, must be recognized as a massive attack on the dignity, rights, and needs of women. Abortion is the leading edge of an encroaching culture of death. The helpless old, the radically handicapped, and others who cannot effectively assert their rights are increasingly treated as though they have no rights. These are the powerless who are exposed to the will and whim of those who have power over them. We will do all in our power to resist proposals for euthanasia, eugenics, and population control that exploit the vulnerable, corrupt the integrity of medicine, deprave our culture, and betray the moral truths of our constitutional order.[29]

Falwell and Robertson's jeremiads paralleled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*: in order to avoid narrowing their appeals to sectarian identification, they, too, concentrated their

[28] Murphy, *Prodigal Nation*, 90.
[29] "Evangelicals & Catholics Together."

firepower on those who were ripping down the columns of the sacred temple of America. Falwell began by noting that only twenty-five years separated Columbus's voyage to America from the beginning of the European Reformation. "It was as if God had preserved a great 'Island in the Sea' as a place of refuge for persecuted believers from continental Europe."[30] From there, the narrative skips ahead to Jamestown, the Mayflower Compact, and especially John Winthrop's idea of the New England settlement as "a city on a hill." Robertson made the same case, placing slightly more emphasis on the American revolutionary experience. He saw the colonists' victory as nothing short of miraculous. Into the early national period, he explained, God blessed Americans in their bold experiment in self-government, since such an enterprise was undertaken in a covenantal relationship with God: "God promoted America to a greatness no other nation has ever enjoyed because her heritage is one of a republic governed by laws predicated on the Bible."[31]

In addition to the early history of American colonization and the founding period, Robertson and Falwell both highlighted the period before the 1960s as a time of national virtue. These two periods are intimately connected in both sermons, the 1960s as the decade that severed America from its traditional Judeo-Christian foundations and life just prior to the 1960s which represented the last generation truly in touch with those foundations. The founding was important because it provided an example of a time in which liberty, religion, and authority coexisted in a proper balance; while post-World War II America offered an echo of this founding moment that was still a vivid memory for many Americans.

The legacy of the 1960s, they argued, caused the "increasing penetration of the nation by foreign religious influences that the West once unhesitatingly called alien, such as

[30] Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 47; Robertson, *Ten Offenses*, Chapter 1.
[31] Falwell, *Listen America!*, 16.

witchcraft, cults, mosques, shrines, and temples."[32] These foreign cultural forms not only alienated people from God but also created a selfish culture of rampant individualism in a manner not unlike Bruce Frohnen's formulation that "Americans have come to reject their duty to God's will because they have come to identify the good, not with the holy, but with the pleasant."[33] Robertson and Falwell, though, wanted to have it both ways. They celebrated religious freedom while condemning syncretism. This is what Watson meant by an offensive as opposed to a defensive agenda, the impulse to impose truth onto a pluralistic, "naked public square,"[34] as Neuhaus described it. Here is Robertson's formulation: "For some time, a major shift has been taking place in our culture. Where we once worshipped and held in high esteem the God of the Bible and His laws, we now worship another god-that is, the individual."[35]

The key moments for Robertson, as they were for Colson and Neuhaus, were the *Vitale* and *Schempp* decisions. Robertson lamented that, "since 1963, despite 340 years of biblical education of our children, one atheist and a handful of judges stripped the Bible from all the schools of the nation. The moral education of our children was trampled underfoot by a tiny leftwing minority."[36] This decision provided a strong shove to the cultural decline Robertson believed was already under way:

> Until modern times, the foundations of law rested on the Judeo-Christian concept of right and wrong and the foundational concept of Original Sin.... Modern, secular sociology, however, shuns such biblical teachings in favor of an evolutionary hypothesis based on the ideas of Darwin, Freud, Einstein, and others. This view, often called "secular humanism," takes the view that man has evolved from the slime and that with time and ever greater freedoms, mankind will ascend to the stars. These

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[32] Robertson, 65.
[33] Bruce Frohnen, *The New Communitarians and the Crisis of Modern Liberalism* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 46.
[34] Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986).
[35] Pat Robertson, *The Ten Offenses* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 67.
[36] Robertson, *The Ten Offenses*, 22.

> ideas, which are contrary to the Word of God, have led directly to the bitter conflict and social chaos of our day.[37]

Pluralism and individualism, Falwell and Robertson argued, instigated a downhill slide into a society with eroding standards, which then began to accept pornography, sexual depravity, the celebration of violence, and anti-religious bigotry in the entertainment media. Murphy summarized Robertson's and Falwell's views this way: "Behaviors long relegated to the fringes of American society – unbelief, homosexuality, skepticism of authority, extramarital sexual activity – have in recent years become normalized. Practices once engaged in, as quietly as possible, by just a countercultural few, were now common."[38] This is very reminiscent of Isaiah, when he rails against how pervasive the Israelites' idolatry has become and how much they have become alienated from God.

But these cultural conflicts were just the undercards building up to the main event. In Falwell's telling, the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade* was the final insult, representing an evil so unfathomable that it demanded otherwise-reluctant prophets to enter the political arena. While other "sins"– the secularization of public life, what Francis Schaeffer described as a conflict between Christianity and humanistic materialism, the intrusions on traditional schooling, the broader laments over the marginalization of the Judeo-Christian religion, opposition to so-called activist courts, and denunciations of the mainstream media for liberal bias – chafed the moral center of Christian Right activists, they paled in comparison to the state's willful participation in infanticide. Other prominent Christian Right figures–Edward Dobson, Ralph Reed, James Dobson, and William Bennett– have invoked abortion as a singularly important marker of the nation's rejection of traditional

[37] Ibid., 23.
[38] Murphy, *Prodigal Nation*, 95.

sexual morality and consequent moral decline. Falwell listed abortion at the top of his list of five major sins with political consequences for the nation. Indeed, four of the five major national sins identified by Falwell in 1979–abortion, homosexuality, pornography, humanism, and the fractured family–involved sexual matters. However, abortion was the wake-up call for conservative Christians of many stripes: "If we expect God to honor and bless our nation, we must take a stand against abortion," wrote Falwell in *Listen, America!*, a book devoted entirely to explaining how abortion had led him to see that it was now imperative for Christians to engage in political activism.[39]

Regardless of how bad things had become, in the Christian Right jeremiad the path forward could only be found by looking backwards. It offered two discreet examples of the virtuous past, of a time of national spiritual health and well-being that provided a template for what a redeemed and reformed polity might look like, the founding era and the 1950s, which are not especially different from one another in the Christian Right's imagination. In this regard, the prophets of the Christian Right invoked a "Deuteronomic History,"[40] a historical narrative with a particular, often distorted biblical perspective. This movement's ancient forerunners reinterpreted Israel's historical experience – how the Israelites first took possession of the territory promised to Abraham's descendants and then lost it–according to a narrow interpretation of the covenant focused exclusively on principles of divine retribution. In the same vein Falwell warned that, "America must not forget where she came from. Let us not forget the warning God gave the Israelites, which is the same warning that applies to America today."[41]

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[39] Falwell, *Listen, America!*
[40] Murphy, *Prodigal Nation*, 102.
[41] Falwell, *Listen, America!*, 49.

When the ministers of the Christian Right assumed the mantle of the prophet, they did so according to the exilic model that affirms the unbreakable bond between God and his people and demands that because one loves God, he must love God's country. In spite of America's moral failings and current tribulations, fundamentally they believed that there is something unique and powerful, something out of the ordinary, about the American rise to power, a theological strain of American exceptionalism that the Christian Right refuses to let go.

The Civil Rights Era

Although they faced very different political challenges, the ministers who led the Civil Rights movement such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Abernathy, and Andrew Young were shaped by the same one-hundred-year battle about the status of religion in American society. Like their Christian Right counterparts, they also were outsiders, in two senses. Within their own religion they had no effective voice in America's religious marketplace;[42] more importantly, they sought to use a religious language to engage politically in a secular age. The natural language of the movement, according to David Howard-Pitney, was a specifically African-American variant of the jeremiad.[43]

In this section, I explain why the Civil Rights movement should be understood as both a religious and a political movement. Next I discuss the Civil Rights era jeremiad in general terms, noting its similarities and differences with the prophetic narratives of the Christian Right. I then interpret three sermons–two well-known speeches by King (one early and one

[42] See Robert Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 173-200.
[43] See David Howard-Pitney, *The African American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2005), 3.

late) and one by Reverend James Cone, who was instrumental in creating Black Liberation Theology, a powerful Black Christian theology developed in response to the growing popularity of the Black Power movement of the late 1960s. I conclude by showing that, although the two ministers call for different kinds of political action, they hewed closely to the rhetoric, politics, and theological commitments of the jeremiad.

Lambert argued that, fundamentally, African Americans envisioned the struggle for equal rights in religious terms, as a mission akin to that of the Apostle Paul, to spread the gospel to the gentile world.[44] As King wrote in "Letter From Birmingham Jail" in 1963,

> Just as the prophets of the eighth century, B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.[45]

When viewed from within the Civil Rights movement, however, the role of the Black church looks quite different from the familiar public images. Many activists in voter registration drives recall the reluctance of ministers to open their churches or even lend their support to such activity. The ministers' fears were hardly groundless. In the early summer of 1964 alone, more than forty Black churches were burned in Mississippi.[46] Just as it was for the Christian Right, part of the Civil Rights movement's jeremiad, therefore, was aimed at stirring reluctant ministers to enter the political fray.

In addition, many of the activists in the movement came from outside the Southern Black evangelical church, but they recognized the importance of religion in inspiring and

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[44] Lambert, 161.
[45] Quoted in M.C. Sernett, *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 431.
[46] Cited in Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War Through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 169.

encouraging African Americans. Radicals in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and students from the Free-Speech Movement had little personal connection with the faith of their fellow workers in voter registration drives and freedom marches. One nonreligious activist recalled, "The religious, the spiritual was like an explosion to me, an emotional explosion. I didn't have that available to me before. It just lit up my mind. And gave the logic of what we were doing emotional and human power to make us go forward."[47]

In addition to providing solace and stiffening resolve, Black Protestantism also contained a radical religious vision for embattled Civil Rights activists. Accompanying the radicalization of the movement during the 1964 Freedom Summer was a radical theological message. One SNCC idealist wrote that racial prejudice was a "judgment on the lie we have been living…. For though the days of lynching may be over, the lynching of personhood continues. It is a spiritual issue." They confronted all Americans with the charge that, if America was once a Christian nation, then it was a racist Christian nation that had made a mockery of the gospel. Denied a voice within the religious marketplace, Blacks in the mid-1960s condemned that marketplace as racist, unchristian, and un-American.[48] It was on these grounds that King brought his case to the American people.

"I Have a Dream," was arguably the most famous speech of Martin Luther King Jr.'s career. Delivered to 250,000 people gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial during the 1963 March on Washington, it was at the time the largest gathering of protesters in Washington's history. King appeared as the representative of the SCLC (Southern Christian

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[47] Cited in Beth Schweiger and Donald Mathews, *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 319.
[48] Lambert, 174.

Leadership Conference). Although mired in controversy about how strident the message and how severe the demands should be, the march ultimately made five specific demands.[49]

King opened the speech by celebrating President Lincoln's status as an American founder:

> Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity.[50]

Immediately afterwards, however, he expressed great despair, and, throughout the remainder of the speech, he tacked back and forth between hope and despair, following the format of the jeremiad – soaring high, and then low, and back up again:

> But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free.
>
> One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.

King said he had appeared to "dramatize an appalling condition," exactly what all biblical prophets did in the Old Testament. Then he refers to the Negro as "an exile" in his own land, "One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land."[51] This is similar to the notion found in the Christian Right jeremiad of being exiled in one's own country. Both are lamentations of deep

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[49] The five demands were (1) an end to racial segregation in public school; (2) meaningful Civil Rights legislation including a law prohibiting racial discrimination in employment; (3) protection of Civil Rights workers from police brutality; (4) a $2 minimum wage for all workers; and (5) self-government for the District of Columbia, then governed by congressional committee.

[50] Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Melvin Washington, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 217.

[51] Ibid., 218.

despair, and cast their group as the redemptive "remnant." This is the point at which the speech turns and centers on four core themes of the jeremiad: lament, action, hope, and universality.

As I mentioned above, lament and hope alternate in the speech, generally in the same stanza. For example, just after he said that "we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check," indemnified by "the architects of our republic who wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence," King said, "they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir."[52] He was saddened because "It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.'"

After this he responded with: "But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation."[53] Ultimately, this belief in the redemptive potential of America is the guiding principle of the speech. This point is worth dwelling upon, because here King drew explicitly on the exilic portions of the Old Testament to stir people to action. The first exilic reference is adopted from Ezekiel. King said, "Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice."[54] This is clearly a reference to Ezekiel's exhortation to the nation of Israel to rise from its slumber in The Valley of the Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14), which seems as bleak and desolate as King understood it to be. Yet, it could be resurrected by God into a great and powerful nation.

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

The second exilic reference is from Isaiah, when the prophet imagined the glorious future the people would one day achieve. Here King's wording is nearly identical to Isaiah's:

> I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.[55]

King's choice here was very telling because it expressed the central idea of exilic prophecy: God could deliver a glorious future to America, but only if the people would do their part. Unlike the pre-exilic era, where all is lost and nothing is left to human agency, in the exilic narrative, human action is critical if the nation were ever to "cross the Jordan River." King told listeners not to "wallow in the valley of despair" but to "Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed."[56]

King offered an interesting twist to an oft-repeated prophetic metaphor of justice flowing as a river, which first appears in Amos and then with variations throughout the prophetic texts (as well as in radical American political circles more generally): "No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."[57] His dream, he reminded his audience, "is a dream fundamentally rooted in the American dream."[58]

"It's A Dark Day In Our Nation," or "Why I Am Opposed to the War in Vietnam" (1967) was a blistering critique of American imperialism delivered by King later in his career,

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[55] Ibid., 219. See Isaiah 40:4.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid. See Amos 5:24.
[58] Ibid.

when his political outlook had shifted, many argue, from his earlier optimism.[59] As such, it is reasonable to expect the tenor of his biblical rhetoric to have reflected this change of heart. A close reading of the speech, however, reveals that King still hewed closely to the exilic form.

The epigraph of King's sermon is especially jarring:

> I call on the young men of America who must make a choice today to take a stand on this issue. Tomorrow may be too late. The book may close. And don't let anybody make you think that God chose America as his divine, messianic force to be a sort of policeman of the whole world. God has a way of standing before the nations with judgment, and it seems that I can hear God saying to America, "You're too arrogant! And if you don't change your ways, I will rise up and break the backbone of your power, and I'll place it in the hands of a nation that doesn't even know my name. Be still and know that I'm God."[60]

The indictment above is actually a combination of passages stitched together from two parts of the Bible: the "hands of a nation" portion is from Isaiah, a familiar warning to the Israelites that a foreign power would serve as an instrument of God's wrath to destroy Israel, if the Israelites did not reform themselves. The second part is from Psalm 46, part of the Writings genre of the Tanakh.[61]

This speech could be read as a denial of American exceptionalism for good reason. King specifically said his calling "is beyond national allegiances," and he suggested that America was not chosen to be God's "divine, Messianic force." Like God, prophets are also meant to stand above nations in judgment. Nations and kings might come and go, but God's law is eternal. America should not have assumed that it was the beneficiary of any special providence.

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[59] See Howard-Pitney, 140.
[60] Martin Luther King, Jr., "It's A Dark Day In Our Nation: Why I Am Opposed to the War in Vietnam," http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article16183.htm.
[61] Isaiah 55:5; Psalm 46.

King most certainly struck this note in the speech, buttressed by claims about being "ecumenical rather than sectional," imploring people to "develop an overriding loyalty to mankind." But when considered as a whole, the opposite turns out to be the case because of several factors: the intended audience; the call to action; the strong note of hope; and, most importantly, King's "true Patriotism" (perhaps in spite of himself).

King made it clear that his message was addressed to Americans not "to Hanoi, or to the National Liberation Front."[62] In other words, it was an internal critique, in Walzer's terms, harsh at times perhaps, but carrying a priori authority.[63] Prophets not only serve as direct representatives of God, but they carry messages that reaffirm a tradition assented to long ago by their ancestors. Drawing directly on Isaiah, King said that Americans should "move beyond the prophesying of smooth patriotism, to the high grounds of firm dissent."[64] Like all Biblical prophets, he was asking his audience to confront a deeply uncomfortable truth about itself, one that the audience was heavily invested in disavowing.[65] Hence, the prophet was extremely unwelcome. The "smooth prophesy" of the flattering class of "court prophets" (the Bible's false prophets) would not stir people into action.

King repeatedly said that he had come "to make a passionate plea to my beloved nation." Here is how he explained his opposition to the Vietnam War:

> Let me say finally that I oppose the war in Vietnam because I love America. I speak out against this war, not in anger, but with anxiety and sorrow in my heart, and, above all, with a passionate desire to see our beloved country stand as the moral example of the world. I speak out against this war because I am disappointed with America. And there can be no great disappointment where there is not great love.[66]

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[62] King, Jr., "It's A Dark Day In Our Nation."
[63] Michael Walzer, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Yale University Press, 2012), 74.
[64] King, Jr., "It's A Dark Day In Our Nation."
[65] Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 30.
[66] King, Jr., "It's A Dark Day In Our Nation."

King then issues the exilic call demanding his listeners to take action: "I agree with Dante, that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in a period of moral crisis maintain their neutrality. There comes a time when silence becomes betrayal."[67] Specifically, he wanted a litany of injustices reversed: he wanted citizens to pressure the government to withdraw from Vietnam, desegregate schools, and end economic exploitation. In short, he said that what was required was a radical reorientation of American values:

> A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our present policies. On the one hand, we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be changed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth with righteous indignation.[68]

King meant that, in order to combat the "triplets of racism, militarism and economic exploitation," the nation needed to transition "from a thing-oriented society, to a person-oriented society." From here he shifted into exilic-style poetry, expressing both hope for the future and the citizenry's role in actualizing God's promise. Note the simultaneity of agency and grace in the following stanza: "With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our world into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood."[69]

King ended the speech by combining some disparate Old Testament poetry in the distinctly American style that appears frequently in this dissertation:

> With this faith we will be able to speed up the day when justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. With this faith we will be able to speed up the day when the lion and the lamb will lie down together, and every man

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

> will sit under his own vine and fig tree, and none shall be afraid because the words of the Lord have spoken it.

The first part speaks to the human agency needed to initiate God's divine justice. The phrase "lion and the lamb will lie down together" is not technically in the Bible, though it is reminiscent of Isaiah 11:6 ("The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid"), and Revelations 5:5-7. The metaphor of the "vine and fig tree," as I explained in Chapters One and Two, is a phrase quoted in the Hebrew Scriptures in three different places – Micah 4:4, 1 Kings 4:25, and Zechariah 3:10. It also appears frequently in American religious writings.[70] Finally, King ended his sermon with his own twist on another passage from the Nevi'im that appears frequently in American radical political writings: "Men will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. And nations will not rise up against nations, neither shall they study war anymore. And I don't know about you, I ain't gonna study war no more."[71]

The Civil Rights movement and the role of religion within it underwent a profound change during the mid-1960s. Prior to that time, it had been confined primarily to the South and had been by and large nonviolent. When King and the SCLC went north, however, they met an entrenched white power structure that enforced de facto segregation with a determination that matched the de jure segregation of the South. As Northern cities erupted into riots and violence in the summer of 1965, southern Civil Rights leaders saw their dreams of a nonviolent movement go up in smoke. A new, angrier and younger leadership arose in urban areas, where the new cry was Black Power, not nonviolence.[72]

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[70] In the Bible, it refers to the independence of the peasant farmer who is finally freed from military oppression.
[71] King, Jr., "It's A Dark Day In Our Nation." This phrasing appears in Micah 4:3 and Isaiah 2:4.
[72] Lambert, 175-6.

By the mid-1970's, Black ministers recognized the church's need to reclaim its place in Black society. Black Power had challenged the church's claim to be the central agency in the struggle for freedom, and Black churches were finding it difficult to situate Black Power within a Christian context. The Black church faced a dilemma: to reject Black Power was to go against a popular grassroots tide that refused to return to the days of acquiescence and accommodation, but to reject the traditional church was to reject the best of Christianity as taught by Dr. King.

Reverend James Cone claimed that how the church resolved that dilemma would determine its continued place in the unfinished struggle for liberation. Cone grew up in Bearden, Arkansas, where he attended a Macedonia African Methodist Episcopal Church. He received a B.A. from Philander Smith College in Arkansas in 1958, a B.D (Bachelor of Divinity) degree from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in 1961, and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Northwestern University in 1963 and 1965, respectively. Currently he is a Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where he has taught since 1970, and an ordained African Methodist Episcopalian minister. Best known as a statement of Black Liberation Theology, Cone's 1969 book *Black Theology and Black Power* offered a theology of Black Power specifically for the Black church.[73]

Cone's theology was inspired by a frustration with the Black struggle for civil rights. He felt that Black Christians in North America should not follow the "White church" on the grounds that it was a willing part of the system that had oppressed Black people. Both

[73] The origins of contemporary Black Liberation Theology can be traced to July 31, 1966, when an ad hoc group of fifty-one concerned clergy, calling themselves the National Committee of Negro Churchmen (NCNC), bought a full page ad in *The New York Times* to publish their "Black Power Statement," which proposed a more aggressive approach to combating racism using the Bible for inspiration.

Malcolm X and the Black Power movement heavily influenced Cone's theology. King, whom Cone has described as "a liberation theologian before the phrase existed,"[74] also had a profound influence on Cone. Hence, Cone believed that Black Power must be three things: Christian, rooted in the Bible, and demanding action "*by whatever means black people deem necessary*."[75]

In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone's thesis is that "Black Power, even in its most radical expression, is not the antithesis of Christianity, nor is it a heretical idea to be tolerated with painful forbearance. It is, rather, Christ's central message to twentieth-century America."[76] Although Black Christianity was inherited from White slaveholders, it nevertheless holds the key to black liberation. Cone seeks to complete King's work of rescuing the gospel from the heresy of White churches by returning to Scripture, particularly to the parts he calls the liberatory elements of the Exodus-Sinai tradition and the life of Jesus.[77] Cone relies nearly exclusively on an Old Testament theology consisting of two elements: first, a radical reorientation of Black religion toward the concerns of this world as opposed to the afterlife and, second, a Black Christianity that cannot be eschatological.

Cone says first that "the most corrupting influence among black churches was their adoption of the 'white lie' that Christianity is primarily concerned with otherworldly reality."[78] In the Bible, Cone argues, it is plain that God intervenes only on behalf of "people oppressed and powerless" in contrast to the "proud and mighty nations." He notes that later on in the Bible, within Israel "his righteousness is on behalf of the poor, defenseless and

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[74] Rufus Burrow, *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1994), 13-16.
[75] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 6.
[76] Cone, 1.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Cone, 121.

unwanted."[79] It is telling that, near the beginning of Chapter Three, Cone cited the origin of the Bible's first political community as an inherently revolutionary endeavor:

> The call of Abraham was the beginning of this revolutionary activity on behalf of man's liberation from his own sinful pride. This was followed by the exodus, the most significant revelatory act in the Old Testament, which demonstrated God's purposes for man. God showed thereby that he was the Lord of history…The history of Israel is a history of God's election of a special, oppressed people to share in his creative involvement in the world on behalf of man. The call of this people at Sinai into a covenant relationship for a special task may be said to be the beginning of the Church. In the Old Testament, Israel often refers to herself as the gahal, the assembly or people of God. Israel is called into being as a people of the covenant in which Yahweh promises to be their God and they his people. Israel's task is to be a partner in God's revolutionary activity and thus to be an example to the whole world of what God intends for all men. By choosing Israel, the oppressed people among the nations, God reveals that his concern is not for the strong but for the weak, not for the enslaver but for the slave, not for whites but for blacks.[80]

The call to action as God's "partner" in a political revolution illustrates the exilic thrust of Cone's theology. According to the covenant, Blacks must trust in God, Cone argues, but they can only be delivered through political action. Then Cone drives a theological wedge in deeper, when he insists that any eschatology that interferes in the slightest degree with the pursuit of earthly liberation must be stamped out of Black Christianity. Passages like the following one are what have made Cone such a radical theologian:

> If eschatology means that one believes that God is totally uninvolved in the suffering of men because he is preparing them for another world, then Black Theology is not eschatological. Black Theology is an earthly theology! It is not concerned with the "last things" but with the "white thing." Black Theology like Black Power believes that the self-determination of black people must be emphasized at all costs, recognizing that there is only one question about reality for blacks: What must we do about white racism? There is no room in this perspective for an eschatology dealing with a "reward" in heaven. Black Theology has hope for this life… The idea of heaven is irrelevant for Black Theology. The Christian cannot waste time contemplating the next world (if there is a next).[81]

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[79] Ibid., 45.
[80] Ibid., 64.
[81] Ibid.,123.

Cone is clear, however, in explaining that this worldly focus demands confrontation: "There will be no more meetings," he says, "between liberal religious whites and middle class Negroes to discuss the status of race relations in their communities. Black Theology believes that the problem of racism will not be solved through talk but through action."[82] Cone then makes clear that by "action" he means by any means necessary. Earlier in the book, he says that this may include "selective buying, boycotting, marching, or even rebellion."[83] In the final chapter, however, "Revolution, Violence, and Reconciliation in Black Theology," Cone says that by "rebellion" he meant "revolution," – not the kind envisioned by Billy Graham, "merely a change of heart," but of "a radical black encounter with the structure of white racism, with the full intention of destroying its menacing power. I mean confronting white racists and saying: 'If it's a fight you want, I am prepared to oblige you.'"[84] At this point he explains that Black people must not shy away from civil disobedience or revolution, if a law "violates God's purpose for man," by which he means, like King, that God demands that the oppressed break laws "which contradict human dignity."[85]

> The revolutionary attitude of Black Theology stems not only from the need of black people to defend themselves in the presence of white oppression, but also from its identity with biblical theology. Like biblical theology, it affirms the absolute sovereignty of God over his creation. This means that ultimate allegiance belongs only to God. Therefore, black people must be taught not to be disturbed about revolution or civil disobedience if the law violates God's purpose for man. The Christian man is obligated by a freedom grounded in the Creator to break all laws which contradict human dignity.[86]

In his book Cone next dwells, just as ministers during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars often did, on the biblical justification of violence. First he acknowledges that "carving

[82] Ibid., 135.
[83] Ibid., 6.
[84] Ibid., 136.
[85] Ibid., 137.
[86] Ibid., 137.

out a theology of black revolution which does not sidestep the question of violence is difficult."[87] He then argues that the Bible's justification for violence rests on two concepts: first, it is a mistake to take the Bible, particularly the New Testament, literally. The danger of asking "What would Jesus do?" he says, is the implied literalism of such a question. In *Black Theology and Black Power* he states bluntly: "We cannot solve ethical questions in the twentieth century by looking at what Jesus did in the first." Second, his approach offers a nuanced view of the question of violence itself, saying that "violence per se is not a primary question. It is a subordinate one." He explains,

> Violence is a cost that must be estimated and pondered in relation to a particular revolutionary situation. It is "relative" because in most revolutionary situations ... violence is already a fact constitutive of the situation: injustice, slave labor, hunger and exploitation are forms of violence which must be weighed against the cost of revolutionary violence. It is this fact that most whites seem to overlook–the fact that violence already exists. The Christian does not decide between violence and nonviolence, evil and good. He decides between the less and the greater evil. He must ponder whether revolutionary violence is less or more deplorable than the violence perpetuated by the system.[88]

The closing portions of the book turn toward the possibility of reconciliation. As in any exilic prophecy, after painting a dire picture of the situation, the prophet continues that the future is not foreclosed. The nation is presented with a choice, Cone has said. God's grace can be restored:

> Whether the American system is beyond redemption we will have to wait and see. But we can be certain that black patience has run out, and unless white America responds positively to the theory and activity of Black Power, then a bloody, protracted civil war is inevitable. There have occasionally been revolutions—massive redistributions of power—without warfare. It is passionately to be hoped that this can be one of them. The decision lies with white America and not least with white Americans who speak the name of Christ.[89]

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[87] Ibid., 138.
[88] Ibid., 143.
[89] Ibid.

This roots Cone squarely in the exilic tradition, because his jeremiad identifies African Americans as a people in exile; he harnesses the jeremiad's call to political action; and finally, because the ultimate goal is an earthly end. While it is fair to say that Cone is more pessimistic than King, they both would agree that Zion can only be reached at some time in the future.

Conclusion

In the second half of the twentieth century, it makes sense that high profile ministers would deploy the American jeremiad to make their political cases. In an increasingly secular society, their legitimacy as opinion leaders and their preferred language of expression were called into question. Whereas ministers once moved freely within the American political vernacular, deploying several biblical registers, they were now in danger of speaking the tongue of an antiquated dialect. With the status of religion itself at stake, they did the only thing they could do: defend it. But the strong-chorded biblical language they used to do so should not be mistaken, as it was by Bercovitch, for the enduring vitality of religion in America's public sphere. Ironically, the ubiquity of the jeremiad demonstrates that religious expression no longer resonates as widely as it once did.

Although Christian Right and Civil Rights ministers pursued very different agendas, their sermons reflected the same biblical language of exile. Christian Right leaders perceived themselves as exiles in their own country, although in reality they and their followers were part of a White Protestant majority. They expressed declension over the loss of a formerly Christian nation and hoped to restore Christianity's place at the heart of the American

republic. Their "Zion" could only be reached by restoring the virtuous social conditions of a bygone era.

In contrast, African Americans actually were exiles within their own land. In the Civil Rights jeremiad, however, while "Zion" was also an earthly goal, it could only be reached in the future. Civil Rights leaders could not champion a return to any point in American history, so instead they sought to restate founding principles in a language appropriate to changing times.[90] The claim that the meaning of the American founding, for example, is not exhausted by the concrete conditions of 1776, as King's confidence in bringing the "check" back to Washington illustrates, represents an extraordinary confidence in the emancipatory potential of American ideals and requires tremendous optimism about the willingness of Americans to support the expansion of such concepts as liberty and equality.

The sermons discussed in this chapter form part of a continuous tradition of political rhetoric that stretches from the Puritan era to the present, one originally developed during the Babylonian Exile in the Hebrew Bible. Like their forerunners in the Revolutionary and Civil War eras, the contemporary Jeremiahs claimed that they bore witness to a devastating loss, and brought the full complement of exilic rhetoric to bear on their time. Doom was the first, but neither the last nor the most dominant note in these sermons; they proceeded from judgment to the anticipation of a new order. They urged patriots to dig in and prepare for a protracted struggle against an evil enemy raised as an "instrument" of God's anger; they called for political action as the only means of salvation with the caveat that trust in God is ultimately the most important thing.

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[90] In this sense, the prophets of the Civil Rights era more closely resemble Michael Walzer's characterization of all prophets as radicals who "not only recall and repeat the tradition, they also interpret and revise it." See Walzer, "The Prophet as a Social Critic," 82.

Conclusion

This dissertation has detailed the host of ways Old Testament prophecy has influenced American political thought and rhetoric. Although political scientists have long recognized the impact of the Scriptures on the ways Americans express and think about themselves, they have misunderstood this important part of America's political tradition. A great deal of political speechmaking in the United States is drawn from these ancient biblical orators, who inveighed against their societies between the eighth and fifth centuries BCE. Yet their impact on American political thought and rhetoric remains only partially understood.

When McWilliams referred to the Bible as "the second voice in the grand dialogue of American political culture," he was thinking, as most scholars of American political thought do, about a specific form of American rhetoric, the American Jeremiad, as Bercovitch first named it in 1978. McWilliams argued that this rhetoric will always collide with the liberal tradition, because of its hostility to Enlightenment rationality. McWilliams saw the Bible as a rhetorical battering ram, an "assault on the complacencies of material power, custom, and law."[1]

Multiple Traditions of American Prophecy

Like most scholars who are interested in the Bible's impact on American politics, McWilliams was partially correct. It is true that some of the time, American Jeremiahs have inveighed against established orders; they have commanded their audiences to take political action, often asking them to harm others or risk their lives for divinely sanctioned causes. Several examples of this type of rhetoric have appeared in this dissertation. And one of them,

[1] McWilliams, 15.

Dr. King's "I Have a Dream," is considered one of the masterpieces of American oratory. Other sermons were delivered by figures who are perhaps not as well known to modern readers, but their authors were superstar preachers of their eras. Some of their speeches, such as the war sermon delivered by Henry Ward Beecher during the Civil War, were marquee political events. Jeremiahs like Beecher have appeared in every era of American history and remain a central part of the American political tradition.

Just as often biblical rhetoric was deployed for altogether different purposes. Several key sermons from the Revolutionary and Civil War eras urged their audiences to take no political action at all. Others expressed disappointment in the aftermath of a national triumph, like Haven's sermon following the Union victory in the Civil War. Other sermons offered muted praise but called for mild reform. Still others dwelled in the diffuse esoterica of the final, more mystical portions of the Old Testament. Ultimately, my study has shown that American prophecy is not the singular tradition that scholars have long understood it to be. It is a multiple one.

The assumption that American prophecy is a monolithic discourse has generated three broad misunderstandings: first, political scientists have misstated the central thrust of the prophetic tradition (and therefore, a key dimension of American Protestant theology), as an overly activating tradition. This in turn has rendered them unable to see all of the ways that Biblical rhetoric has been deployed as a rhetorical tool over the course of American history. But it also carries an important implication for scholars of American political thought: it prevents us from recognizing the full range of contributions made by religious minds to the American political tradition.

One of the reasons American prophecy has been misunderstood is because scholars have focused exclusively on the religious rhetoric of the "superstars" of American oratory, like Henry David Thoreau, William Lloyd Garrison, and Abraham Lincoln. While some of these figures were also ministers, they are known more to us now as the interlocutors of the "grand dialogue" of American political culture.

This dissertation has instead examined prophetic rhetoric in the hands of a specialized group of practitioners, influential Protestant ministers of the last three centuries. With the notable exception of the preachers discussed in Chapter Four, they are figures most political scientists may have heard of but most certainly have not read. At the time each of these ministers preached, however, they were listened to by thousands of congregants, in regular Sunday sermons and on important political occasions. Their writings were published and circulated widely. Several of them, Langdon, "Pope" Dwight, and Beecher, for example, had the ears of Presidents, and were some of the most influential people in America.[2] It fell on them to explain what the Bible (and therefore, by extension, God) had to say about the most important issues of the day, including the American Revolution and the Civil War; whether slaveholding was a sin or a Godly duty; and whether Evangelical Christians ought to take the bold step of venturing outside of the "Garden of the Church," in order to brave the "Wilderness of the World," when they believed their religion was under assault.

I was surprised to discover that although all of these ministers were Christians (and Protestants), they made scant references to the New Testament in their political sermons.

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[2] Lincoln attended services at Beecher's church on February 26, 1860 – the day before he delivered the Cooper Union Speech. Lincoln had long admired Reverend Beecher and read several of his speeches. See Paxton Hibben, *Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 144. Halford R. Ryan called Beecher "the North's *vox populi* on slavery." See H.R. Ryan, *Henry Ward Beecher: Peripatetic Preacher* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 44.

When they did it was in a cursory manner. Instead they drew on the Old Testament for political inspiration and guidance. They did so in part because of the value certain Protestant sects (and African-American preachers more broadly) have historically placed on Old Testament Scripture, as Noll and others have pointed out.[3] But these ministers also intimately understood something that biblical scholars understand, but most political theorists do not: although the Prophets appear in the Bible as a coherent literary genre, there is an historical trajectory and an accompanying evolution of ideas within it.[4] In the seventeenth century the full range of the genre was grafted successfully onto American soil. Since then it has provided its practitioners with a timeless repertoire of narratives that can be used to capture any moment in political time. It was only natural for them to deploy this rhetoric, in its appropriate form, when they weighed in on political matters from the pulpit.

The Legacy of Sacvan Bercovitch

Although Chapters One, Two and Three are an extended critique of the scholars who improved upon Bercovitch's conception of the jeremiad, in Chapter Four I argue that in the contemporary era prophetic rhetoric has winnowed to one type, the jeremiad. Up until that point religion was a standard vernacular through which political problems were both apprehended and expressed in the United States. Speaking "through the Bible" about political matters was common for politicians, for two reasons. First, because the most influential religious figures frequently also held positions in the power elite. Second (and more important), as McWilliams has noted, at one time America had a broadly literate religious

[3] See the recent study conducted by Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, *The Bible in American Life Report*, March 6, 2014, http://raac.iupui.edu/research-projects/bible-american-life/bible-american-life-report/.
[4] Michael Walzer and Daniel Elazar are two notable exceptions.

culture. When Frederick Douglass adapted passages from Isaiah and Psalms 66 and 137 for his "What to the Slave is the 4th of July" speech, for example, he could be confident that most people in the audience understood his biblical references. In today's more secular era, this dialect is spoken by a diminishing percentage of Americans.

My contention is that "Bible talk" narrowed because high-profile ministers were no longer able to fight a political battle through the language of religion but were instead forced to fight a political battle about the status of religion itself. Religion was no longer simply a medium of politics but became an object of politics. Religion was therefore forced to defend itself qua religion. Because the jeremiad is the most confrontational of the prophetic languages, it was the only biblical rhetoric that resonated politically for figures like Falwell, Robertson, King, and Cone.

While Bercovitch, et al were undoubtedly correct about the contemporary era, when they made their sweeping claims about the jeremiad, they were actually reflecting the one period in American history when the themes of the jeremiad were most prominent. As I have explained, the pre-exilic dread and the post-exilic despair are no longer as prominent as they once were. So it is understandable that these scholars fixated on the Jeremiad as they did. In doing so, however, they made an unwarranted generalization about all of American history. If one is looking only for the activating tradition of the American Jeremiad, undoubtedly one will find it.

Extending the Multiple Traditions Hypothesis

My study presents several possibilities for further research. First, it remains to be seen whether the three types of biblical rhetoric were sustained in the intervening period between

Reconstruction and when my account resumes in the 1950's. In the intervening decades, Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was a smash hit in the United States;[5] industrialization altered the terms of economic life; Scopes "lost" his trial in Tennessee; and America emerged as a world power and then became a superpower. A study of the responses in the Protestant pulpit to each of these developments might confirm or challenge my claims. The Gilded Age comes to mind here, as a logical test case. One wonders what the role of Old Testament preaching was at that time, when the gospel of wealth was forcefully defended in sermons such as Russell Conwell's *Acres of Diamonds*,[6] and countered by the Social Gospel movement led by Protestant theologians Walter Rauschenbusch, Josiah Strong, and Washington Gladden – all of whom fit my criteria as "first tier" Protestant ministers.

A second question concerns the eras that I did consider in the dissertation. One issue might be whether ministers outside the ambit of mainline Protestant denominations hewed to the same biblical forms, and if they did, whether their theology travelled along a similar developmental arc or remained frozen in time like the ministers of the "Lost Cause" in the South after the Civil War. Chapters Two and Three provided a concentrated study of a few clusters of mainline Protestant sects. As I explained, I chose these figures because they were at the center of the political action and were key opinion leaders of the religious world. But certainly there were other influential ministers, both mainline and evangelical. A future study might include Baptist ministers from the early nineteenth century – especially ones who were not allied with the Federalists. I suspect that Baptist ministers who enthusiastically supported

[5] See Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 74.
[6] Russell Herman Conwell, *Acres of Diamonds*, Dover (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2008). Conwell gave this sermon thousands of times, both in America and around the world.

Jefferson may not have shared the bitterness and dread of Theodore Dwight, in the post-Constitutional era – when their champion and their party dominated American politics.

A future study might also consider the manner in which rabbis and Catholic priests wielded the Bible for political purposes. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, Jewish and Catholic leaders in the South visibly boosted Confederate morale during the Civil War. All eleven Catholic bishops in the Confederate states cooperated with the Confederacy (though none were native Southerners). Two slaveholding states, Maryland and Louisiana, had large contingents of Catholic residents. Likewise, a case study of politically active rabbis might prove fascinating, as Jewish Americans undoubtedly had a particular relationship to Old Testament scripture. One wonders if Jewish leaders were as likely as their Protestant counterparts were to draw analogies between the United States and biblical Israel.

Another question concerns the future. In Chapter Four I argued that the contemporary era marks the triumph of the jeremiad, because religion has been placed on the defensive in a more secular America. While I would argue that the election (and subsequent reelection) of President Obama has enflamed the zeal of jeremiadists on the Christian Right, some political scientists have pointed to a trend that suggests that the influence of the Christian Right has waned.[7] Further, some of the newer generation of evangelical leaders, such as Rob Bell and Rick Warren, eschew the confrontational posture of their predecessors, in an effort to attract a younger generation of evangelical Christians.

[7] Clyde Wilcox and Robinson, Carin, *Onward Christian Soldiers?: The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2010), 5.

The Bible in Twenty-First Century America

McWilliams was not only a scholar of the Bible's role in the American political tradition. He was also an advocate of secular Bible education in high schools and universities. McWilliams worried that,

> Lacking knowledge of the Bible, Americans are likely to be literally inarticulate, unable to relate themselves to American life and culture as a whole and locked a little more securely in Tocqueville's prison of the self.[8]

While I do not believe the problem to be as dramatic as McWilliams thought it was and I do not advocate biblical education, secular or otherwise, for fear of what it might look like in practice, I do agree that Americans' lack of knowledge about the Bible is potentially a serious problem. As I explained in Chapter Four, although "Bible talk" now operates in a narrow rhetorical band and yields diminishing returns in political campaigns, it still has a significant impact on American politics. Generally speaking, unfortunately, it is not a positive one. A much worse problem exists than the dearth of knowledge about the Bible in the scholarship, however: the lack of knowledge about the Bible in the American population.

The Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture recently released the results of the most comprehensive study ever conducted on the role of the Bible in the everyday lives of Americans (outside of formal worship). The investigators attached a battery of questions to the 2012 General Social Survey (GSS) that is conducted every other year by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.[9] Below are eight of their most interesting findings:

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[8] McWilliams, 11.

[9] Their questions appeared alongside many others that helped them to distinguish among groups of people, including denominational affiliation, age, gender, race, education levels, income, political persuasion, region, etc. This provided them with deeper insights into Bible reading in relation to other social factors.

1) 50% of Americans have read the Bible at least once during the past year.

2) Less than 50% of Americans knew that Jesus turned water into wine at the Cana wedding and nearly two-thirds could not identify a quotation from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. And one in ten thought Moses was one of Jesus' twelve disciples.

3) Among those who read the Bible, women outnumber men, older people outnumber younger people, and Southerners exceed those from other regions of the country.

4) The strongest correlation with Bible reading is race: 70% of African-Americans read the Bible in the past year, compared to 44% of whites and 55% of Hispanics.

5) 15% of those who have not read any scripture in the past year still think the Bible is the "inerrant Word of God." Another 50% of those who have not read scripture think of the Bible as the "divinely inspired Word of God.

6) Despite the proliferation of Bible translations, 55% of Bible readers prefer the less accessible King James Version (KJV), compared with 19% for the New International Version (NIV), an evangelical Bible published in 1978.

7) The less educated the Bible reader is, the more likely she is to prefer the KJV, as opposed to the NIV.

8) The less educated the Bible reader is, the less likely she will be to seek help with understanding and interpreting it.[10]

These findings show four things related to the claims I make in chapter Four. First, a sizable percentage of Americans still read the Scriptures. Second, biblical literacy is declining in America. Third, in spite of that, Americans still hold the Bible in very high regard − whether they read it or not. Paul Guthar, one of the advisors to the study, argues that the Bible has taken on a kind of "sacred totemic value" and now enjoys an "outsized status in the culture."[11] Finally, even among those who read it regularly, the Bible is not well understood.

[10] Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, *The Bible in American Life Report*, March 6, 2014, http://raac.iupui.edu/research-projects/bible-american-life/bible-american-life-report/.
[11] Ibid.

The fact that two-thirds of non-Bible readers have a high view of scriptural truth and authority is especially troubling (see #5 above). This group is potentially susceptible to manipulative messages that twist the Bible's meaning for political purposes.

Further, the fact that the King James Version (KJV) is still the most commonly read Bible (and by such a wide margin) is very surprising, since the far more accessible evangelical translation, the New International Version (NIV) became the top-selling Bible in the United States in 1986.[12] Before this study was released it was logical to assume that the version of the Bible that sells the most and is the most accessibly written must also be the most widely read. The study's finding that this is not the case is doubly surprising because the NIV's sales are boosted by the multi-million dollar evangelical publishing industry. And yet it was outpaced by the KJV nearly two-to-one among Bible readers. Sylvester Johnson, another advisor to the project, speculates about the peculiar cultural power of the King James Bible, noting that its language seems to function for many Americans as "a type of lingua sacra or sacred dialect."[13] But numbers seven and eight above are worth repeating: consumers with the lowest levels of education not only prefer to read the least accessible translation of the Bible; they are also the least likely to seek help to understand what it means.

The investigators summed up the report this way:

> There is a paradox in American Christianity. According to the General Social Survey, nearly eight in ten Americans regard the Bible as either the literal word of God or as inspired by God. At the same time, other surveys have revealed – and recent books have analyzed – surprising gaps in Americans' biblical literacy.[14]

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[12] The New International Version (NIV) was published in 1978. On the sales of figures of the KJV vs. the NIV, see *The Bible in American Life Report*.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

The weakness in the scholarship on the Bible in American political thought would appear to parallel a more serious problem in America, a society that continues to hold the Bible in high regard yet is increasingly ignorant about its contents.

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