

RIVERS IN THE DESERT OF ABRAHAM AND SARAH AND ZION (ISAIAH 51:1-3)

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It has become a commonplace in the study of Israel's religious traditions to observe that the ancestral and the Zion traditions are joined in a number of ways. The connections may be traced generally in terms of covenant type, for instance, or specifically in terms of a number of common themes, motifs, images and key words. It is therefore not surprising to find the two traditions together in Isa 51:1-3, in this instance connected by the theme of fertility: As the barren ancestors were blessed and became many, so shall desolate Zion be blessed with renewed and abundant life.

What is not immediately apparent, however, is that this theme of the restoration of fertility is presented here by means of an image at home in each of the two traditions. Recognition of this image has been hindered by the construal of the two lines in v. 1cd:

*habbîtu ʔel šûr huşsabtem
wěʔel maqqebet bôr nuqqartem*

These two lines customarily have been taken to refer to hewing and quarrying blocks of stone and accordingly have been translated as in RSV:

Look to the rock from which you were hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were digged.

The last line is translated in JPS, "And to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged," leaving the character of the hole undecided.

It will be argued in this paper that the image in these two lines is not of a rock quarry and its hewn stones, but of a tunnel hewn and bored in the rock and the life-giving water derived from it. This image draws upon a motif frequent in the two traditions and operates in the present instance to fuse the ancestral and Zion references into a single oracle of renewed memory, assurance and hope.

1.

I shall begin with a brief consideration of the lines in v. 3 relating to the renewal of Zion's fertility:

For Yahweh will comfort Zion,
 he will comfort all her waste places,
 and he will make her wilderness like Eden,
her desert like the garden of Yahweh.
 Joy and gladness will be found in her,
 thanksgiving and the voice of song.

That exilic Zion is to be "comforted" concerning her diminished population is suggested by the way this verse extrapolates the ancestral theme of "one to many" in v. 2. This is borne out by the term which seconds¹ the proper name Zion; for "waste places" (*horbôt*) are material structures which have been reduced to ruins and rendered uninhabitable. Just so, in 49:19–21 Zion is portrayed as a bereaved and barren woman whose "waste places" (*horbôt*) will soon be inhabited to overflowing. It is by virtue of this scarcity of human population that such a cultural waste is compared to the natural regions of "wilderness" and "desert" (*midbār* and *ʿārābā*), whose lack of human residents often serves the purposes of prophetic rhetoric.

The incapacity of wilderness or desert to support much life is of course due to the scarcity of water. Because of this scarcity, life is so precarious that these regions often take on connotations of extremity, death and sterility. Thus, the calls of desert animals and birds are almost always characterized in the Hebrew Bible as laments. The one or two exceptions come in Second Isaiah (hereafter DI), where the eschatological transformation of the desert into a garden causes jackals and ostriches there to break into praise (Isa 43:19–21). The applicability of these motifs to human experience is aptly illustrated in Job's contrast between his former prosperity and his present desolation: In his former days (29:23–25) others waited for him as for the rain, and he dwelt among them as one who comforts mourners. Now (30:29–31) he himself is so burned up with heat as to have become a companion of jackals and ostriches, with the result that "My lyre is turned to mourning, / and my pipe to the voice of those who weep."²

1. I use this term in the sense which Kugel (1981) gives to it.

2. Some commentators transpose the final verses of chapter 29, others emend the text; but neither expedient is called for. See Janzen (1985).

In Isa 51:3, the “turning” is in the other direction. The “comforting” of Zion means that the ruined city, desert-like in its desolation, is to be transformed into an Eden, a garden of Yahweh, a place of fertile growth and life; and Zion’s voice accordingly will turn from lamentation into joy and gladness. The agency of this transformation of the garden is not explicit, but it lies just below the surface. For one thing, DI frequently employs the imagery of waters in portraying Yahweh’s acts of restoration. For another, in its other two biblical occurrences the phrase “the garden of Yahweh/God” is accompanied by reference to an abundant supply of water (Gen 13:10; Ezek 31:3–9). Again, the mention of Eden in v. 3 conjures up the underground source that watered the Garden, producing four streams including the Gihon which, not incidentally, is the name of the natural spring whose water nourishes Zion and sustains a numerous citizenry. Finally, it may be noted that Isa 51:3 is closely (and more expansively) paralleled in Ezek 36:33–36, whose announcement of the restoration of the wasted and desolate cities to a garden of Eden cannot be separated from Ezekiel 47 with its vision of water issuing from the restored temple to re-fertilize the whole earth.

The theme of Zion’s restoration to populousness is, of course, prominent in DI. Already in 40:9–11, Zion is called to announce to the cities of Judah God’s return from exile leading an abundant “flock” of people. The fecundity of this flock is emphasized in the image of the divine shepherd carrying lambs and gently leading those ewes who are nursing their young. In 49:14–18, exilic Zion is portrayed as a bereft mother to whom Yahweh says, “Can a woman forget her sucking child?” In the following verses (49:19–21), it is announced that Zion’s waste places (*horbôt*, as in 51:3) are to be inhabited by many children. Meanwhile, the wasted, desolate “woman” laments (49:14) in her bereavement and her barrenness. The word translated “barren” in 49:21, *galmûd*, is noteworthy: It apparently refers, in the first instance, to hard and stony (and, of course, unproductive) ground, and by extension to human sterility.³

Zion, then, as a material and social site can be imaged as either a sterile or a fertile woman. The fertile and sustaining character of the city is often

3. One of the words peculiar to DI and Job, *galmûd* in its connotations is central to the concerns of both books. It seems to be cognate with Arabic *jalmadun*, “rock”, and *jalmadatun*, “stony (of land)” (Lane, 1865, I.2.445–6). Job 30:3 (on which see n. 12) is difficult to analyze precisely; but *galmûd* there either modifies nouns describing excessively hungry persons, or stands in parallel relation with *šiyyā* and is direct object of the double duty verb in the next line. The wicked in 15:34 inherit a barren future (see 15:33); and the word is similarly used of barrenness in 3:7 and Isa 49:21.

connected with the waters that arise in her. So Psalm 87, which celebrates the birth in Zion of this and that person and people, concludes, "Singers and dancers alike say. / 'All my springs are in you,'" The material connection between ground and woman can work also the other way. A barren woman can be analogized to "the earth ever thirsty for water" (Prov 30:15–16). A fertile woman can be imaged, like the bride in the Song of Songs, as a locked garden and a sealed fountain, a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon. The imagery of the watered garden in Jer 31:12 connotes the marital bliss and fruitfulness, and the general well-being, of the restored community.

Ground water as an image for fertility occurs repeatedly in the ancestral traditions and elsewhere, in the type scene discussed by Alter (1981), wherein future bride and groom meet at a well. The well is not merely an incidental meeting place, for its life-giving ground waters are thematically integral to the impending marriage and its generative outcomes. Abraham and Sarah are not introduced as meeting at a well, but simply as barren (Gen 11:30). Yet Sarah compares herself negatively to fertile ground in her skeptical question. "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have ^ʿ*ednā*?"⁴ This brings us to the imagery in Isa 51:1cd, where the ancestors are likened to a rock and to what may be hewn from that rock.

2.

The construal of the image in v. 1cd in quarrying terms initially strikes one as unexceptionable; for the verb *HŠB* occurs elsewhere in reference to

4. That ^ʿ*ednā* in Gen 18:12 refers not simply to sexual delight but also to fecundity is indicated by the relation between closely succeeding parts of the text. The narrator tells us that "(a) Abraham and Sarah were *old, advanced in age*; (b) it had *ceased to be* with Sarah *after the manner of women*." Then another version, still in direct but imagistically more graphic, is placed on Sarah's lips: "(a) after I have grown *old*, and my husband is *old*, (b) shall I have ^ʿ*ednā*?" Finally Sarah's condition is stated unambiguously, as Yahweh says her words back to her: "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, '(b) shall I indeed *bear a child*, (a) now that I am *old*?" Various cognate nouns connote luxurious dainties, as products of a well watered and richly productive land. So, for example, Ps 36:9[8]: "They feast on the abundance of thy house. / and thou givest them drink from the river of thy *delights*." In Isaiah 47:8 the adjective ^ʿ*ādīn* should not be translated "love of pleasures" (RSV). The immediately following lines associate this adjective with a plentiful population: Lady Babylon sits *luxuriantly populous*, and boasts of never being deprived of children or husband. A recently attested Aramaic verb ^ʿ*DN* indicates plenty in food production, and gives support to the older construal of the name *Eden* and its Hebrew cognates in terms of luxuriant fertility of the ground. See conveniently Millard and Bordreuil (1982, p. 140).

quarrying. But this verb is not specific to hewing out stones, for in Jer 2:13 it is used of hewing out cisterns to hold water. It is used similarly in the Siloam Inscription (hereafter SI), where it refers to hewing through rock in order to bring within Zion's walls the waters of the Gihon. Such an activity is entirely consonant with *HŠB* and the other elements in v. 1cd. Since SI will form a backdrop to the rest of this paper, it will be well to quote it in full:⁵

1. * * *hnqbh wzh hyh dbr hnqbh b^cwd* * * * * *
2. *hgrzn* ^{ʔš} ^{ʔl} *r^cw wb^cwd šlš* ^{ʔmi} *lh[nqbh nšm]^c ql[]š q*
3. *r]* ^{ʔl} *r^cw ky hyh zdh bšr mymn* * * * * * *wbym h*
4. *nqbh hk^w hššbm* ^{ʔš} *lqrt r^cw grzn* ^{ʔl} *[g] rzn wyk^w*
5. *hmym mn hmwš* ^{ʔl} *hbrkh bm^ʔtym [w]* ^{ʔlp} ^{ʔmh} *wm* ^ʔ
6. *t* ^{ʔmh} *hyh [g] bh hš[r]* ^{ʔl} *r^{ʔš} hššbm*

and this was the way in which it was cut through:- While [. . .] (were) still [. . .] axe(s), each man toward his fellow, and while there were still 3 cubits to be cut through, [there was heard] the voice of a man calling to his fellow, for there was *an overlap* in the rock on the right [and on the left]. And when the tunnel was driven through, the quarrymen hewed the rock), each man towards his fellow, axe against axe, and the waters flowed from the spring toward the reservoir for 1,200 cubits, and the height of the rock above the head(s) of the quarrymen was 100 cubits.

The “rock” hewn in v. 1cd is matched by the two-fold mention of the *šûr* through which the miners of SI tunnel for water. Not too much should be made of this correspondence, since hewing is normally directed upon rock or wood, or (figuratively, as it were) upon humans. The more frequent word for the tunnelling process in SI is *NQB*, “bore, pierce”, cognate with the noun *maqqebet* in v. 1d. The latter noun, a hapax legomenon in the Hebrew Bible, may be said to designate a place made by the activity of boring and piercing. But it is possible to specify the sort of place more closely, partly from the distinction between the sorts of digging indicated by the two verbs *HŠB* and *NQB*.

In SI, of course, both verbs may be said to describe the same action of the diggers. Yet *NQB* does not describe the digging and tunnelling process as a whole, but only the climactic point, when the pick-axes of the two parties broke through to one another and enabled the water to flow forth from the *môšā*^ʔ to the *bērēkā*. It is precisely this climactic action of boring

5. Photograph and text may conveniently be found in Driver (1980). The English translation is that of Albright (1955).

or piercing *through*, as from one side to the other, that is celebrated in the inscription,⁶ and that calls for the use of *NQB*. As the following analysis should show, the latter verb is used consistently for this sort of action.

In 2 Kgs 12:10 *NQB* indicates the boring of a hole in the lid of an offering box. In Hag 1:6 it indicates a money bag with holes through which the money can dribble out. In Job 40:26 it refers to a hook piercing through the jaw and in Job 40:24 a snare piercing through the nose. In 2 Kgs 18:21 (=Isa 36:6) it refers to a broken reed of a staff piercing and perhaps passing through the hand of one who leans on it. In Hab 3:14 the verb describes a warrior's shaft piercing the head, breaking through the skull into the vital interior.⁷ The homonymous noun *maqquebet*, "hammer", identifies an instrument which is used to achieve quite a different effect than the axe or pick. For, whereas the latter tools are used to hew chips or chunks of stone from a large rock mass, or to cut down a tree, the hammer is used to drive nails or pegs into and perhaps through a hard surface. The place name ³*ādāmī hanneqeb* (Josh 19:33) apparently identifies a pass,⁸ in which case again the basic meaning is that of penetrating through.

The noun *neqeb* in Ezek 28:13 is difficult to construe. Albright (1948, p. 13, n. 39) takes it to mean "mine", as in the alphabetic inscriptions from Sinai. Insofar as it suggests a source of precious stones and metals, *neqeb* comes close to a possible meaning "quarry" for *maqquebet*. But a mine is a long, narrow tunnel through earth and rock, channelled to obtain hard substances quite distinguishable from the rock. Insofar as the rock stands between the miner and these substances, one may be said to bore and pierce *through* and *past* the rock to what one is after (see the description in Job 28). In quarrying, by contrast, one digs, not a tunnel, but an open and usually shallow pit; and one digs, not *past* the rock, but *for* it.

One Hebrew cognate remains to be considered—the noun *nēqēbā*. This noun is highly germane to our investigation for the way in which it relates the activity of piercing to the specific goal of bringing forth life. I will examine this noun more fully later; meanwhile, I will turn to other elements in Isa 51:1cd. The noun *bôr* commonly means "spring, well". Though the word may refer to an empty pit, whenever reference is made to what is or is not in it, the reference is to water. Never does this word

6. The first full sentence of the extant text reads like a caption: *wzh hyh dbr hnqbh*; the body of the text likewise connects *NQB* with the act of breaking through.

7. The other occurrences of this verb involve figural usages of no clear help in determining its non-figural sense.

8. Compare Arabic *naqbun*, "road between mountains" (Lane, 1893, I.8, 2834).

indicate a source of stones or anything solid. Such a reference in Isa 51:1 would therefore be unparalleled.

It is frequently held that *bôr* is a secondary gloss on *maqqebet*: textually it is absent in the Syriac version, prosodically it overloads the line, and semantically it and *maqqebet* are redundant. As a secondary gloss, of course, *bôr* would still have the value of an early commentary on the meaning of *maqqebet*. Given the reference of *bôr* generally (see above), as a gloss it would more likely associate a *maqqebet* with water than with stones. But the authenticity of *bôr* need not be doubted. *maqqebet* may be more specific in its reference than *bôr*; or, more likely, it may identify a different part of a general water system.⁹

With SI in mind, one may propose that *maqqebet* refers to that part of an excavation where the water issues from a hole or fissure in the rock. Such an excavation (as exemplified in SI) might be humanly produced; or it could arise by what we would call natural processes, but what the ancients would attribute to divine activity. So, for example, in the Atrahasis myth the Annunaki dig [*herûm*] with pick and basket to open up the earth so that the deeps (*naqbum*) can issue in the form of springs and rivers.¹⁰ In the Hebrew Bible Yahweh is said to cleave open (*bāqa*^c) springs and brooks (Ps 74:15), and to open (*pātaḥ*) rivers on the bare heights and fountains in the midst of the valleys, making the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water (Isa 41:18). In the case of natural (or divine) openings, the *maqqebet* then will refer to the fissure in the rock depression or *bôr* holding the water, while in the case of humanly bored openings it will refer to a hole or the enlargement of a slight natural crack (see again SI). An apt translation of *maqqebet*, in that case, will be *aperture*, having in mind the latter's etymology.¹¹

9. The prosodic objection is baseless. The lines contain 8 and 9 syllables. If strict balance be insisted on, one can achieve it less radically by counting *maqqebet* as disyllabic in virtue of its segholate ending, or by deleting the conjunction, a frequent accretion in poetic texts. The balance of the couplet is in fact elegant: ^ʔel is balanced by (*wē*)^ʔel, *šûr huṣṣabtem* by *bôr nuqqartem*, and the double-duty verb *habbîṭû* by the noun *maqqebet*. If at one level, *šûr* and *bôr* refer to Abraham and Sarah, the balancing pair *habbîṭû* / *maqqebet* forms the rhetorical focus of the couplet: "Look at the opening!" of what formerly and fatefully has been closed. (It is difficult to see how digging stones out of the rock could image the vital act of opening a closed womb.) The Syriac reading by itself is insignificant, and one suspects that it has been called in to support a judgment based on prosodic and semantic considerations.

10. Marduk opens a spring in Tiamat's body, *nagbu uptettā*; Ninurta opens the springs, *petû nagbu*; Ea digs canals (*muḥerrû narati*) and provides springs (*muṣabšu nagbi*)—examples from the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, s.v. *nagbum*.

11. Webster's *New International Dictionary* gives a first meaning (now rare) as "act of opening", and a second as "opening; gap, cleft, a passage perforated, a hole, as an aperture

Moving on to *nuqqartem*, we may begin by asking whether it is connected to *bôr* or *maqqebet*. That it connects with *bôr* (“the pit from which you were digged”) is indicated by etymology, by the poetics of the couplet, and by the point of the application of the image in this couplet to the ancestors in the following four lines.

The infrequency and the attested usage of *NQR* make it difficult to ascertain its precise meaning with confidence. But such clues as there are suggest a closer synonymity with *NQB* than with *HŠB*. In addition to what may be gleaned from usage,¹² we may discern in the radicals of *NQR* the suggestion of a semantic affinity with the verbs *NQB* on the one hand and *QWR* on the other.¹³ The sole verbal occurrence of *QWR* refers to digging for water (2 Kgs 19:24). The noun *maqor* refers to a spring or fountain; or, figuratively, to a woman as the source of life or of blood of menstruation or childbirth, or to the eye (‘*ayin*) as the source of tears.

in a wall.” A quoted usage, “an aperture between the mountains”, compares with Arabic *naqbum* (see n. 8 above).

12. Four times, *NQR* refers to the gouging out or piercing of a person’s eyes. One may resist the temptation to see in the collocation of *NQR* and ‘*ayin* here the echo of a use of the verb in connection with the digging of wells. The one other occurrence of *NQR*, in Job 30:17, is more suggestive, though the suggestiveness is entangled in the poetics of 30:16–17 as a whole.

Chapter 30 as a whole opens with a description of *les misérables par excellence*, those whose execrable existence makes them outcasts reduced to grubbing for food in the wilderness. In v. 3 they are portrayed as gnawing the very ground (parched as it is) for nourishment. But Job is so execrable as to be outcast in the eyes of even such *miserables*, and by the end of the chapter he too is in the desert, burning up in the heat, a companion of jackals and ostriches. This description of Job as desiccated begins in v. 16, which opens with the third of the three instances of ‘*attā* in this chapter. He laments, “And now my soul is poured out (*tištappēk*) within me.” In this desiccating affliction he approaches a dustlike state of death (see v. 19; and see, e.g., Ps 22:13–14[EVV 14–15]). If “soul” in v. 16 and “bones” in v. 17 are parallel ways of signifying his whole being (as in, e.g., Ps 6:3–4 and 35:9–10), it is likely that v. 17a seconds v. 16a. In that case, *NQR* may indicate a piercing of Job’s being that spills his vital energies. So pierced and drained of life (vv. 16a, 17a), Job is seized by days of affliction (v. 16b) and “gnawed” ceaselessly (v. 17b). The last-mentioned image takes up the verb from v. 3 (the only two occurrences in the Hebrew Bible): If the *miserables* of v. 3 gnaw on the dry ground in a fruitless search for sustenance, Job’s worse plight is signalled figurally in that what gnaws upon him gnaws ceaselessly but in vain, because of his desiccation.

13. Compare the group of verbs having to do with cutting or hewing, collected in Gesenius and Kautzsch (1898, Section 30.g-m, pp. 100–102). These verbs have in common the radicals *H*, *Š*, and phonetic modulations. Compare also the roots *HM* and *NHM*. Without prejudice as to the question of an original tri-radical or bi-radical root system, I suggest that *NQB*, *NQR*, and *QWR* constitute a similar vocabulary group.

If *NQR*, then, is closely synonymous with *NQB* and *QWR*, its syntactical relation is likely with *bôr*: "and to the *maqqebet* of the-pit-from-which-you-were-digged." A pit without a *maqqebet* at or near the bottom would be hewn from *šur* to make a cistern for catching and holding rain-water; but there would be no breaking through to the underground deeps to open a fountain of living waters. As Jeremiah would readily recognize (Jer 2:13), the call to "look to the *maqqebet*" of the pit from which they were digged is a call to discern Yahweh's distinctive style of working and its distinctive results: not just a cistern, but living water from a rock.

The above considerations from etymology and usage may be augmented by remarks on the poetics of v. 1cd. In a chapter entitled "From Line to Story," Alter (1985, p. 39) identifies miniature narrative movement within poetic units as short as two lines (or, as he calls them, the versets of a line). He writes,

... narrative movement forward in time is typically generated by the establishing of a series of linked actions that, according to the poetics of parallelism, are approximate equivalents but prove to be, on closer inspection, logically discriminated actions that lead imperceptibly from one to the next.

Except that the effect is quite perceptible, v. 1cd is an excellent case in point. Construed in the way I am proposing, the couplet displays narrative movement in both the nouns and the verbs: from *šur* to *bôr* to *maqqebet*; and from *HŠB* to *NQR*. The *šur* yields a *bôr* through the activity in the verb *HŠB*. But that activity itself gives way to another activity, *NQR*, approximately equivalent yet in fact coming (as in SI) as the climactic conclusion of *HŠB* and producing the *maqqebet*. The couplet, then, is a miniature analog to the narrative in SI.

This mini-narrative movement is echoed also in the sound values. The couplet contains two contrasting groups of phonemes: *H*, *Š* and *B*; and *L*, *M*, *N* and *R*. The *H* and the *Š* are harsh and intense, sonantly effective in verbs for cutting and hewing (see above, n. 13); while the bilabial *B*, by requiring the closing of the lips, impedes the flow of sound. In contrast, *L* and *R* have an agreeable and unimpeded flowing tone, reflected in our term for them, "liquids." Though *M* and *N* nowadays are given other phonetic labels, their effect on the ear is fairly indicated by their earlier inclusion among the liquids. (Compare the onomatopoeic "murmur" as applied to a quietly running brook.)

Considered in terms of these two prominent sound-groups, the couplet displays an audible shift in sound values: The first line, with three liquids

(*L, R, M*) interspersing *B, Ṣ, H* and *B*, gives way to the second line, which contains two interspersing *B*'s but now no *H* or *Ṣ*, and which contains no less than six liquids (*L, M, R, N, R, M*). This sonant shift is epitomized in the third root letters of the line-ending verbs: respectively, impeding *B* and flowing *R*. Thus the narrative movement signalled in the semantic sequence *HṢB-NQR* is reinforced in the sequence of their sound values, as the sonant shift to the liquids in this couplet comports with the image being constructed. The prominent sounds of v. 1cd then spill over into v. 2, in the sequence, *B, L, B, R, M, B, M, L, R, L, M, R, B, R, R, B*. The continuation of the sound values of v. 1cd into v. 2 reinforces the connection between the image in v. 1cd and its application in v. 2. The color and tone of these sounds give affective body to the imagery, contributing to the total effect on the sensitive hearer in evoking felt imaginative perception.

At this point it will be helpful to take up the term *nēqēbā*, "female", the one form of the root *NQB* not analyzed earlier. The Latin translation *perforata* (BDB) is correct denotatively, but leaves the connotations open. The usage of *nēqēbā* in the Hebrew Bible may be summarized as follows: It occurs only in P, once in Deuteronomy, and once in Jeremiah; that is to say, within a closely defined temporal horizon encompassing also DI. Often it is paired with *zākār*, "male"; and contexts which reflect the connotations of these terms all in one way or another have to do with generativity, that is, the production of offspring.¹⁴ In that case, the so-called "perforation" may be understood as occurring for the sake of what will issue. This is supported by the idiom "to open the womb", connoting conception and childbirth, and not simply sexual activity as such. I propose that, as a word for a female whose womb has been opened or is openable for conception and issue, *nēqēbā* is to be associated with the imaging of human fertility as ground water. Such an association is suggested by Akkadian usage of the root *NQB*.

In Akkadian, the word *naqbum* refers to the deep, as the source of ground water. In his discussion of the god Enki, under the heading "The Fertilizing Sweet Waters," Jacobsen (1976, p. 111) comments as follows: "The Akkadian Naqbu, 'Source,' present[s Enki] as the specific power in rivers or underground waters." Again he writes, "Another connection between productivity and water is the 'birth water' which precedes and announces birth." In another perspective, the Annunaki (or a specific god, Marduk, Ninurta, or Ea) dig to open up springs and rivers in the earth

14. Gen 1:27-28, 5:1-2, 6:19, 20; Deut 4:16; Jer 31:22.

(see above, n. 9). Finally, the verb *naqābum* is to be rendered “(durchbohren,) deflorieren”, or “rape.”¹⁵ In the light of the Akkadian noun usage just canvassed, this Akkadian verb for sexual activity (admittedly of a particular sort) carries figural connotations of the opening of a “water” source. Just so, I suggest, Hebrew *nēqēbā* connotes the female as an opened or openable life-source imaged as ground water.

In passing, it may be noted that the Akkadian verb occurs only in legal texts, where it refers to acts of violent penetration, that is, rape. Does this imply that the mythic usages also carry implicit overtones of violence in impregnation, reflecting a male ideology concerned for progeny obtained from women viewed as passive sources, sources in fact victimized in the process? Or does the legal use of the term concern itself with practices which violently caricature customary sexual interactions as mythically figured? An ideological critique is beyond the scope and competency of this paper. It may be suggested, however, that the biblical usage of *nēqēbā* appears to identify the human female not simply as a sexual object of the male, but as the human source of human life.

3.

To this point, the discussion has been focussed on the imagery and terminology of fertility in *nature*, analogous with or including human experience and concern. But Zion is also a *political* entity. Cities continue to have a vital interest in the fertility of field, flock, and citizenry. But in addition, they constitute a distinctive new material embodiment of an old concern for human security; and they become bases for powerful systems of human organization, redoubts from which royal military might can proceed with expansionist and acquisitive goals and policies. The Zion traditions in the Hebrew Bible give frequent and vivid expression to these political and military concerns, both defensive and aggressive. Of particular relevance to our investigation, water and its imagery are integral to the theology and polity of the city; for water becomes a paramount issue in time of siege.

A classic expression of the thematics of water in a city under threat occurs in Psalm 46. The psalmist is confronted with the prospect that the earth may change, the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, the waters roar and foam, and the mountains tremble with the tumult (vv. 3–4[EVV2–3]). The imagery may apply to any threat conceived as undoing

15. Respectively, von Soden's *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, s.v., and the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, s.v.

the sustaining order. But a specific threat is suggested by the fact that in Isa 8:7–8 (to give only one example) raging waters connote the attack of an enemy military power; and that in Babylonian royal inscriptions city walls and other defensive fortifications are frequently analogized as mountain-like, while routinely in Assyrian royal inscriptions such fortifications are said to be founded in the watery abyss. In Psalm 46, the “change” of the earth may refer to a shift in international affairs which brings against Zion enemies imaged as roaring and foaming waters.¹⁶

Other examples of this aspect of the Zion traditions may easily be adduced. In contrast, Isaiah frequently inveighs against the policy of Zion’s leaders, a *Realpolitik* which no doubt they conceive to be grounded in those traditions. Now, both sides of this issue, the royal and the prophetic, come to focus in the waters that are collected in one or another pool or *bērēkā*, either outside Zion’s walls or, after the hewing and boring of the Siloam Tunnel, inside the city’s fortifications, in either case waters derived from the spring Gihon.

One or another aspect of this strategic water system is mentioned repeatedly in the Hebrew Bible. In 2 Kgs 18:17 (= Isa 36:2) the Rabshakeh stations his troops by “the conduit of the upper pool (*bērēkā*)” to assert control of the city’s water supply. In 2 Kgs 20:20 the one deed of Hezekiah selected for mention in the Deuteronomic Historian’s summary is that “he

16. This interpretation is given more specific point if the verb *hāmîr* is taken as hiphil infinitive construct of *MRR* II, cognate with Arabic *marra*, “pass by, go, (sometimes) flow”, *marmara*, “cause to flow”, and *marmarrun*, “water-course”. “Therefore we will not fear though the earth [i.e., the nations] should come against us like water” and “though the mountains [our defensive walls] should shake in the heart of the sea [in which they are founded].” The following verse then seconds the respective themes: “though its waters [earth’s armies] roar and foam, though the mountains [our fortifications] tremble with its tumult.” In view of such a possibility, *bēšārôt* in v. 2[1] is peculiarly apt, since the “straits” in question come in the form of surrounding and besieging armies. Or, the noun may derive from *šRR* II, and be read “enemies”, the feminine plural referring to the nations or other city-states who are collectively referred to as “the earth” (feminine) and contrasted with Zion as feminine (v. 6[5]). In face of them, Yahweh is Zion’s refuge, stronghold and mighty help (v. 2[1]). This divine defense then in v. 5[4] is identified in terms of a river whose streams make glad the city of God. If the enemy is characterized as an onrushing flood, Yahweh is characterized in terms of a river in Zion which rises to meet the overwhelming threat. Isa 40:15 may offer some support for *hāmîr* as from *MRR* II and signifying the onrush and imposition of foreign power. There, exilic Israel/Zion is reassured in the face of its imperial overlords that those supposed “overwhelming waters” are in fact “like a drop [*mar*] from a bucket.” The latter parallelism may contain, not alternate and unrelated images of insignificance [“drop” and “dust”], but another narrative in miniature, connoting the “drying up” of the great foreign “waters” first to a drop from a bucket and then to dry dust, powerless as death ([°]*ayin*, [°]*epes* and *tôhû* which often refers to desert conditions).

made the pool (*bērēkā*) and the conduit and brought water into the city.” In Isa 7:3, in the face of the Syro-Ephraimite threat, Yahweh tells Isaiah to meet Ahaz “at the end of the conduit of the upper pool (*bērēkā*) on the highway to the Fuller’s Field.” There he is to give the king a message of reassurance in the face of the threat to Zion, perhaps in the spirit of Psalm 46 (compare, e.g., “do not fear” in Isa 7:4 with “we will not fear” in Ps 46:3[2]). The message falls on deaf ears, and Yahweh then speaks in a different vein: The flood-waters of the Euphrates, in the form of the king of Assyria, are to sweep over the whole land; and this is “because this people have refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and melt in fear¹⁷ before Rezin and the son of Remaliah” (Isa 8:5). The waters of Shiloah may signify Yahweh’s countervailing (if deceptively “gentle” or “quiet”) power in face of the enemy imaged as threatening waters (compare Psalm 46). It is difficult to ascertain whether these waters of Shiloah are to be associated with the Gihon water system, or (in view of 22:9–11) stand in dialectical contrast with it.

The final mention of this water system in Isa 22:9–11 deserves quotation in full for its possible function as a background to Isa 51:1–3:

You looked (*wattabbēt*) in that day to the weapons of the House of the Forest, and you saw (*rēʾitem*) that the breaches of the city of David were many, and you collected the waters of the lower pool (*bērēkā*), and you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall, and you made a reservoir (*miqwā*) between the two walls for the water of the old pool (*bērēkā*). But you did not look (*hibbattem*) to him who did it, or have regard (*rēʾitem*) for him who planned it long ago.

The passage is striking, and characteristic of one side of Isaiah’s message in its denunciation of Zion’s preparations for self-defense in the face of aggression. The last two clauses, moving toward poetry, connect closely with 37:21–29, especially v. 26. The connection indicates that Yahweh plans to bring Assyria against the nations in judgment (see also 10:5–19), and that Zion’s siege preparations amount to rebellion against God. Whereas, then, the Siloam tunnel is celebrated in 2 Kgs 20:20, and may be alluded to in Isa 8:5, here that hydraulic achievement is condemned along with the other defensive works of the army corps of engineers.

17. In a number of passages (e.g., Jer 51:41), great military powers are referred to as “the praise (*tēhillā*) of all the earth.” In one or two passages (e.g., Ps 48:3[EVV 2]) a similar expression contains the word *māsôs*. To “praise” or “rejoice” in a great power apparently is to acknowledge its power and authority, either sincerely or diplomatically. The problematical term *māsôs* in Isa 8:5 may reflect this usage, though the text still needs restoration.

At the root of the indicted activity is a failure to *see* properly (Isa 6:10). Zion looks to its weaponry rather than to Yahweh. The city discerns the so-called empirical realities of armaments, fortifications and water supplies, but not the deeper, radically empirical reality of Yahweh's action in what is happening.

The addressees in Isa 51:1 are in the same existential situation as those of Isa 22:9–11. Given the placement of 51:1–3 in the second half of DI, where the community is always addressed as Zion-Jerusalem, they are in every way direct descendants and inheritors of the Zion traditions in one form or another (see, e.g., Psalm 137). What I wish to propose is that these exilic descendants, like their ancestors of Isa 22:9–11, are looking for deliverance in the wrong place. They seek *sedeq*, a restoration of the right order of things, including deliverance and safety from their enemies as well as a restoration of their former prosperity and generativity.¹⁸ In seeking all this they intend to be seeking Yahweh. This seeking appears to derive support from the old Zion traditions, as customarily received and understood.

Just such a looking for deliverance is the topic also in 48:1–2. There, the people seem to be doing all the right things, including “call[ing] themselves after the holy city, / and stay[ing] themselves on the God of Israel” (compare Psa 71:6 in context), rather than staying themselves upon Egypt the broken reed who pierces through the hand (Isa 36:6). Yet that reliance is “not in truth or right” (48:1); indeed, according to vv. 3–8 it is tantamount to idolatry.

Similarly with 51:1: The conception of what deliverance should look like, or how it should come, evokes a prophetic response which attempts (as in Isa 22:9–11) to re-direct their looking. Their looking and pursuing seems to be of the sort that inspired, among other things, the building of the Siloam tunnel, and that evoked Isaiah's critical response in 22:9–11. That tunnel with its inscription would have been a continuing reminder of the “glory days” of Hezekiah as celebrated in 2 Kgs 20:20. It would still be accessible to the exilic inhabitants of ruined Zion; and in all likelihood it would be remembered by at least some of the Zionist exiles in Babylon. To see or recall this inscription, and to long for a restoration of what it represented, would then have been one form of remembering the former things, of considering the things of old (43:18), and of hankering after them in forgetfulness of the old prophetic word of 22:9–11. For DI, exilic

18. For overtones of generativity in *SDQ* see, e.g., Isa 45:8, 48:18–19; Joel 2:23, and for a full discussion of the core meaning and range of specific applications of this root, see Schmid (1968, esp. pp. 15–18).

Zion's hope lay in another direction. "Look (*habbîû*) to the rock from which you were hewn, / and to the aperture from which you were digged."

This call appears to point to the ancestors. But I propose that v. 1cd in the first instance refers to the water system whose other biblical mentions (including three in Isaiah) we have been reviewing. The couplet does indeed apply to the ancestors, but only in retrospect, by way of a rhetorical subversion of the import of the imagery as first presented. The rhetorical strategy may be analyzed as follows.

Rather than cut directly across the line of pursuit along which the people sought Yahweh, DI chose a more subtle means of "speaking to the heart" (40:2), a strategy well known to public speakers in which the people's energies of interest and concern are first identified, intensified, enlisted, and then redirected. If the people's pursuit of deliverance led them to hanker after the glory days of Hezekiah epitomized by the Siloam Tunnel and its inscription, DI chose language that seemed to relate in the closest way to that focus of remembrance and hope:

habbîû ʔel şûr huşsabtem
wěʔel maqqebet bôr nuqqartem

The opening verb and its prepositions may be distinguished from the ensuing image, as a viewer's eye is distinguished from its object. If we take the image by itself as

şûr huşsabtem
wě-maqqebet bôr nuqqartem,

a striking fact appears: Of the five terms in the image, three are identical or cognate with terms appearing in SI. Given that (surely not accidental) correspondence, it is not beyond the reach of rhetorical means that the verb "blessed (*nibrak*) in v. 2 echoes the word "pool" (*běrkā*) which occurs at the end of SI and repeatedly in the biblical references to the Gihon water system.

Now we may reconstruct the rhetorical strategy served by the word *maqqebet*. Through the first line, the people would hear a reference to the rock through which they had hewn the tunnel. But the last word in the line would bring them up short. Did DI refer to a rock from which they had *been* hewn? What could that mean? (The active voice attested in LXX reflects the sonal similarity of *huşsabtem* and *hāsabtem*.) The second line, with its opening noun of place, would seem to reassert the allusion to the waterworks; and *bôr* would further reinforce the allusion. Only with the second *habbîû* and its reference to the ancestors would the earlier reference be subverted.

As rhetorical modes, *metaphor* and *irony* may be contrasted in the following manner: While both modes involve saying one thing and meaning another, metaphor binds the one thing to the other in the resultant meaning, while irony subverts the first meaning in order to erect the second in its place. Thus, metaphor is well suited to portrayals of the world's connectedness, and to assertions of socially and cosmically coherent meaning; while irony comes into its own in dialectical situations which, taken to extreme, attest a world which has no coherence or core of meaning (Booth, 1974). The analysis of the rhetoric of Isa 51:1-3 may be taken to imply ironic subversion for the sake of a dialectical alternative. Such a strategy may be discerned often in the pre-exilic prophets. But DI's rhetorical aim is not simply subversion or deconstruction. The same prophet who could tell the people to remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old (43:18), could turn around and draw on the former things to portray the future working on which they should fix their hope. In that strategy, the subverted element is not simply discarded, but re-united with that for which it was subverted, through the metaphorical bond between former and latter things. Just so, once the Siloam Tunnel with its *maqbebet* has been subverted in favor of the ancestors, then it is re-attached to them metaphorically.

Such a rhetorical strategy draws attention in a fresh way, illumined by the people's own anxieties, engineering experience, and subsequent history, to the central issue of the old ancestral stories. If it is the case that old metaphors are renewed through re-contextualizing, then DI may be observed at work in renewing this central thematic of the ancestral tradition from a related aspect of the Zion tradition. Israel did not arise through their own labors, as of hewing out cisterns for water (Jer 2:13), but through Yahweh's labor of bringing them forth from Abraham and Sarah, the font of the life of both historical and eschatological Israel.

Conversely, the ancestral traditions would renew the Zion traditions. From the outset, Zion was tempted to "become like the nations" in its monarchy. The military aspect of this could be imaged as overwhelming flood-waters—an ancient Near Eastern usage going back to the fusion of storm, flood and royal imagery in the representation of the high gods and their governance of the world. But Zion was called to an existence amid the nations more properly imaged as waters that flowed gently—not against other nations, but out to them and for them. In this, Zion would be like the ancestral pair in whom all the families of the earth might seek a blessing. Yet the temptation was often overwhelming, as Zion's waters were muddied by *Realpolitik*. In Isa 51:1-3, DI helped to purify Zion's waters by re-connecting them with the ancestral tradition. To change the

figure, DI here sought to re-establish Zion more squarely on its true foundations, a true disciple of the Isaiah who said,

Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation
a stone, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:
'He who believes will not be in haste.' (28:16)

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