

PRAYERS AND THE CONSTRUCTION
OF ISRAELITE IDENTITY

ANCIENT ISRAEL AND ITS LITERATURE

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PRAYERS AND THE CONSTRUCTION
OF ISRAELITE IDENTITY

Edited by

Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher and Maria Häusl



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Abbreviations

1QH ^a	1QHodayot ^a
AASF	Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Freedman, David Noel, ed. <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
AcBib	Academia Biblica
AG	<i>Amt und Gemeinde</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
A.J.	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates judaicae</i>
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATS	Artscroll Tanach Series
b.	Babylonian Talmud
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BCESS	Bibliothèque des Centres d'Études Supérieures Spécialisés
BE	Biblische Enzyklopädie
Ber.	Berakot
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelische theologie
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BibS(N)	Biblische Studien (Neukirchen, 1951–)
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament

BLS	Bible and Literature Series
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BRLJ	Brill Reference Library of Judaism
BThAT	Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments
BThSt	Biblich-theologische Studien
<i>BTZ</i>	<i>Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
Chr	Chronicler
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
<i>CV</i>	<i>Communio Viatorum</i>
DCLS	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
Dtr	Deuteronomist
DtrH	Deuteronomistic History
EJL	Early Judaism and Its Literature
<i>EP</i>	<i>Ekklesiastikos Pharos</i>
ETS	Erfurter theologischen Studien
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FJTC	Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GBT	Gender and the Biblical Tradition
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HBS	History of Biblical Studies
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HFK	Historisk-Filosofisk Klasse
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTS</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Studies</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>

<i>HvTSt</i>	<i>Hervormde theologiese studies</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
JANESCU	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBTh	Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie
Jdt	Judith
<i>JHebS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
KAI	Donner, Herbert, and Wolfgang Röllig. <i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1962–2002
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
KST	Kohlhammer-Studienbücher Theologie
LAB	Pseudo-Philo, Liber antiquitatum biblicarum
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
<i>LASBF</i>	<i>Liber Annuus Studii Biblici Franciscani</i>
LBS	Library of Biblical Studies
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
<i>LTK</i>	Kasper, Walter, et al., eds. <i>Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche</i> . 3rd ed. 11 vols. Freiburg: Herder, 1993–2001.

LXX	Septuagint
MJT	Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie
MS B	Manuscript B of Ben Sira
MT	Masoretic Text
NCB	New Century Bible
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
<i>Neot</i>	Neotestamentica
<i>NGTT</i>	<i>Nederduitse gereformeerde theologiese tydskrif</i>
NIB	New Interpreter's Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTR	Old Testament Readings
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studien
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
PFES	Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society
POuT	De Prediking van het Oude Testament
<i>PSPR</i>	<i>Personality and Social Psychology Review</i>
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SC	Sources chrétiennes
<i>ScEs</i>	<i>Science et esprit</i>
<i>SEÅ</i>	<i>Svensk exegetisk årsbok</i>
<i>Sem</i>	<i>Semitica</i>
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
<i>SI</i>	<i>Social Identities</i>
Siphrut	Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures
Sir	Ben Sira
SNVAO	Skrifter utgitt av det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo
SRA	Studies of Religion in Africa
SSEJC	Studies in Scriptures in Early Judaism and Christianity

SSH	Social Science History
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
STR	Studies in Theology and Religion
TDOT	Botterweck, G. Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Translated by John T. Willis et al. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
ThWAT	Botterweck, G. Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds. <i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> . 10 vols. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1970–2000
T&K	<i>Texte & Kontexte</i>
TRE	Krause, Gerhard, and Gerhard Müller, eds. <i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i> . Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977–
TW	Theologische Wissenschaft
TynBul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
VetE	<i>Verbum et Ecclesia</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
y.	Jerusalem Talmud
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZKT	<i>Zeitschrift für katholische Theorie</i>
ZLG	<i>Zeitschrift der Luther-Gesellschaft</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

(Re)modeling Biblical Figures through Prayers

Testing Tales: Genesis 22 and Daniel 3 and 6

Christo Lombaard

1. Three Testing Tales

The proposal put forward in this chapter is a simple one, concerning the theological possibility that God would test the faith of believers. The question to which an answer is sought is: When would this theological possibility that God would explicitly test one's faith have occurred prominently, at least as it is attested to by the Hebrew Bible texts? It seems, as will be argued below, that this is a late development in the history of the religion of Israel, probably emerging under Hellenistic influence, introduced as a reaction to aspects of the dominating culture at that time.¹ Even if the kernel of

Presentation at the "Israel and the Production and Reception of Authoritative Books in the Persian and Hellenistic Period" group's session, "Prayers: Remembering and Constructing Israelite identity, 2," European Association for Biblical Studies Annual Meeting in Córdoba, Spain, July 12–15, 2015. The paper has been published in a shorter version in the *Pharos Journal of Theology* 97 (2016) (<https://tinyurl.com/SBL2633b>) and is republished here with the permission of the editors. I dedicate this contribution to St. John Vianney Seminary in Pretoria, South Africa, in sincere gratitude for the possibility afforded me during 2013 as a guest lecturer to teach some Old Testament classes. It was during my preparation for those classes that the insight that led to the proposal put forward in this contribution dawned on me. My thanks to colleague Hans van Deventer for much-valued comments on the postconference version of this article.

1. The problematic content of the concept "Israel" indicated by Philip R. Davies and others is not meant to be overlooked here (see Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel,'* JSOTSup 148 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 2006]). Rather, I follow the habit among scholars of employing the term as a matter of shorthand, all the while acknowledging just how complex a construct this is, as the people represented by it over time underwent changes in identity, composition, and location.

the idea that God would test had existed earlier, with this kernel occurring a few times earlier in the Hebrew Bible, the idea became narrativized—that is, more prominent and in a way culturally and theologically institutionalized—only later in the religious history of Israel—at least, as far as the texts give evidence of the development of this theological possibility.

This lateness, however, should not be construed as therefore being an inauthentic or syncretistic form of religion. Neither newness/lateness nor intercultural influence imply either lesser or greater legitimacy, as is at times assumed within Hebrew Bible scholarship—for various reasons—with respect to texts, traditions, or developments. The theological coherence of the possibility of a testing God was, moreover, affirmed in the three narratives in view by the juxtaposition of this possibility with different kinds of prayer material. The religious intimacy of prayer is accepted as a theological given. Legitimacy was therefore conferred on the possibility of a testing God. By associating such divine testing with prayer in these texts, further credence had been given to the experienced validity of this aspect of faith. This, I propose, occurred relatively late in Israel's faith history within the period of the development of the biblical texts.

2. The God Who Tests

The idea that YHWH would test those who believe in him is not a dominant theme in the Old Testament. By employing the verb נִסָּה, “to test,” a mere mention of this idea is, for instance, found in the following verses: Ps 26:2 (“Probe me, YHWH, examine me, Test my heart and my mind in the fire”; see 2 Chr 32:31), Exod 20:20 (“Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid; God has come to test you, so that your fear of him, being always in your mind, may keep you from sinning’”), and Deut 8:2 (“Remember the long road by which YHWH your God led you for forty years in the desert, to humble you, to test you and know your inmost heart—whether you would keep his commandments or not”).²

The synonymous בָּחַן occurs, for instance, in Job 23:10 (“And yet he knows every step I take! Let him test me in the crucible: I shall come out pure gold”), Zech 13:9a (“I shall pass this third through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, test them as gold is tested”), and Ps 17:3 (“You probe my heart, examine me at night, you test me by fire and find no evil”).

2. All translations are from the NJB.

These are instances of the rare occurrence of the simple, unexplored idea that God would test.

In more narrational formats, the idea of God putting people to the test comes to the fore in somewhat expanded form, yet really still only in something of a *précis*, in texts such as Judg 2 (as a summary of typical Deuteronomistic theology; see specifically 2:22), in the book of Job (in philosophical format, as a question of theodicy rather than of adherence to God in the face of other religions), in Gen 2–3 (especially 2:16–17 with chapter 3, on the tree of knowledge of good and evil), and, in a way, in the Joseph account.

In the three “short short stories” to be discussed below, however, the understanding of God testing people’s faith stands explicitly in the foreground.³ The merest mention or the briefest summary is here expanded into a full tale, thrice, with all the narrative elements inherent to a developed piece of literature. As an act of loyalty, in Daniel, amidst the presence of other religious orientations, narrativized expressions are found of what has in these accounts clearly become a demonstrable, maturely unfolded theological position. Obstacles to faith are in these accounts set, in each instance, both as an experience in itself and as a means to an end: to refine faith. For this reason, Gen 22 and Dan 3 and 6 may be called “testing tales”; the dominant theme of these three legends of loyalty is an unwavering commitment to YHWH. The communicative intent of such accounts is clearly to encourage commitment to faith on the part of the intended audience, most probably—if an allusion to a popular modern song would be pardoned—when they found themselves in times of trouble.

2.1. The Genesis 22 Text

The Akedah is not a text without its difficulties; the main problems may be summarized as follows: (1) What is the most appropriate exegetical methodology: namely, historical or narratological?⁴ (2) What are the possible

3. The expression “short short stories” was first related to such accounts in Christo Lombaard, “Isaac in the Old Testament: A New Interpretation from Genesis 22, Based on Hermeneutical-Methodological and Exegetical Investigations” (DD diss., University of Pretoria, 2009), 100.

4. On this matter, see also Elizabeth Boase, “Life in the Shadows: The Role and Function of Isaac in Genesis—Synchronic and Diachronic Readings,” *VT* 51 (2001): 312–35.

historical explanations for the origination of the text during its main stages of composition? (3) What are the theological-ethical considerations raised by a Bible narrative on divine instruction to commit child sacrifice? (4) How should verses 1 and 15–18 be treated? The last of these four aspects is the most important for the argumentation presented here.

With rare exceptions (which include, most prominently, the objections by George W. Coats and John Van Seters), Gen 22:1b and 15–18 are held to be insertions within an already-existing account that we now have in the composite text Gen 22:1–19.⁵ The earlier text, *sans* 22:1b and 15–18, narrated an event in which the patriarch Abraham was instructed by God to take his son Isaac to Moriah as a burnt offering. That constituted the whole account, without any added editorial interpolations.

The historical aspects of this account's meaning—possibly related to a protest against human sacrifice, to etiology, to theodicy, or to interne-cine power relations (which are the historical explanations attested in the scholarly literature)—are not of prime concern here; most important to note for the sake of the argument here are the editorial additions. Accurately dubbed by R. Walter Moberley “the earliest commentary on the Akedah,” these few verses, particularly the framing insertion of 22:1b, “(and/that) God tested Abraham,” altered the popular and much of the academic (usually based on methods such as close reading or narratological analysis) reception of Gen 22 for more than two millennia.⁶ From that point on, the meaning of this text would predominantly be understood as “God tests Abraham.”⁷

The *theological* turn implied by the insertions of 22:1b and 15–18 should not escape us. Especially verse 1b alters a text with cultic-protest, etiological, philosophical, or power-play intentions into an account of exemplary religious piety. God sets a test; Abraham passes the test. The account now becomes one of how the father of all believers treated a rather dramatic examination of his personal fidelity. The result of this success story is explicitly reward: progeny, protection, and influence/honor. Verses

5. George W. Coats, “Abraham’s Sacrifice of Faith: A Form-Critical Study of Genesis 22,” *Int* 28 (1973): 389–412; John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 229.

6. R. Walter Moberly, “The Earliest Commentary on the Akedah,” *VT* 38 (1988): 302–23.

7. H. A. J. Kruger, “God Tests Abraham: The Command to Sacrifice Isaac,” *NGTT* 32 (1991): 187–200.

15–18 therefore go on to expand the kernel of 1b: obedience and unquestioning religious loyalty are compensated with very concrete blessings (namely, progeny and international power, in 22:17 and 18). The implied encouragement intended by such a positive (now, *with* 22:1b and 15–18) testing tale is this: the addressed audience should follow this example of blind trust in all circumstances, even in incomprehensible and reprehensible situations.

The dating ascribed to this textual and hence theological insertion has consistently been late; my own work has led me, albeit hesitantly, to propose the period of the first half of the third century BCE.⁸ Given what follows below on the Daniel texts, the theological parallels that come to the fore seem to offer increased intertextual linkage evidencing such a dating.

2.2. The Daniel Texts

The composition history of the book of Daniel is a principal issue of scholarly debate. I follow here the research trajectory of Johan D. Michaelis and James A. Montgomery via Rainer Albertz and then Hans J. M. Van Deventer.⁹ The Hebrew chapters 8–12 are regarded as the oldest textual collection in the book of Daniel, with the Aramaic chapters 4–7 added roughly a decade later (that is, the mid-second century BCE), to which the Aramaic chapter 3 was subsequently appended. After this, the opening and closing chapters were added to this loose collection of “Märchen- und Legendenmotive” (Jan-Wim Wesselius employs the imaginative term “dossier on Daniel”) at different stages, with the deuterocanonical Greek prayer and narrative sections appended even later.¹⁰

8. See Lombaard, “Isaac Multiplex: Genesis 22 in a New Historical Representation,” *HvTSt* 64 (2008): 915–17, doi.org/10.4102/hts.v64i2.49.

9. Johann D. Michaelis, *Ezechiel und Daniel*, part 10 of *Johann David Michaelis deutsche Übersetzung des Alten Testaments, mit Anmerkungen für Ungelehrte* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1781); James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979); Rainer Albertz, *Der Gott des Daniel: Untersuchungen zu Daniel 4–6 in der Septuagintafassung sowie zu Komposition und Theologie des aramäischen Danielbuches*, SBS 131 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988); Hans J. M. Van Deventer, “Another Look at the Redaction History of the Book of Daniel: or, Reading Daniel from Left to Right,” *JSOT* 38 (2013): 239–60.

10. Hans-Peter Müller, “Märchen, Legende und Enderwartung: Zum Verständnis des Buches Daniel,” *VT* 26 (1976): 340; Jan-Wim Wesselius, “The Writing of Daniel,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, vol. 2 of *Formation and Interpreta-*

Given the seemingly deferred addition of Dan 3, a brief description of the Dan 6 text sets the initial, earlier context here. Daniel 6 deals with the possibility of sociopolitical challenges to the faith of an individual. During succession politics, machinations by court officials render Daniel's personal piety *religio non grata*; Daniel, however, miraculously survives the resultant death sentence in the famous lion's pit. This leads to two outcomes, rhetorically meant to encourage the addressed readers during testing times: royal recognition of an "act of God" (here meant in a positive, redemptive sense, rather than in the modern negative sense akin to the expression *force majeure*), and a state of acceptance of the Jewish faith.

This "success story" is expanded in Dan 3. In a world of high politics—an emperor, a bevy of powerful officials, international relations, and orchestrated religion—this time a group of people are threatened for religious reasons. Associated with Daniel by means of the renaming scene inserted in the Hebrew chapter 1 (specifically Dan 1:7), Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in Dan 3 find themselves an assembly on the receiving end of, successively, imperial fury, a fiery death sentence, divine protection, and, again, royal affirmation and state sanction.¹¹ This affirmation of overtly recognized loyalty to God forms a kind of *mantra* throughout the Daniel stories, clearly meant as lessons of encouragement to the intended audience.

In both these testing tales within Daniel, despite their differences, the relative passivity of the main characters begs attention. It is not through their own activity that these characters find themselves protected and their fidelity vindicated; their saving grace is divine, and the resulting confession is at one and the same time both official and heathen, both aspects that are notably beyond the sphere of influence of the Jewish characters.

The communicative intent is evidently to place the events outside of the hands of the faithful adherents: threatening circumstances develop outside their control (the persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes); divine protection coincides with fidelity, more so than humans would expect (the extent of divine benevolence remains surprising); and a restoration of religious peace occurs in superlative forms. The placement of these tales at the imperial court increases the intended audience's sense of identification

tion of Old Testament Literature, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, VTSup 83.2 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 296.

11. Dan 1:7: "The chief eunuch gave them other names, calling Daniel Belteshazzar, Hananiah Shadrach, Mishael Meshach, and Azariah Abed-Nego."

with leadership (hence, also, the connection of the three with Daniel in 1:7) and adds in this way a universalizing scope to these events. In this emancipating theology, when God allows for testing times, redemption is dramatic and at once wide-ranging and personally representative.

3. In God We Trust: The Three Testing Tales Taken Together

It should be clear by now that the idea of historical reliability subscribed to in this contribution is not the kind in which it is assumed that historical veracity about the figures referred to in these narratives—principally Abraham, Isaac, Daniel, and the three men of Dan 3—is a goal.¹² Rather, the kind of historical understanding that may be deduced from the texts is restricted to the community in which these ancient writings were developed and/or accepted. The idea-logical context—that is, the theology and mores of the acceptance community—can be inferred. This idea-logical context may be described in broad outline only, given the difficulties of all historical reconstruction. Such broad insight, however, is already enough to grasp at least some dimensions of the religious sensibilities of an acceptance community.

Drawing upon the testing tales above, then, with their respective editorial histories and dating possibilities as outlined above, the argument can be made that it was only late in the history of Israel's religion that the theological possibility of God testing heroes of faith became more fully developed.

The concept does occur throughout the Hebrew Bible, in passing references and in précis texts, which together indicate that the idea of a testing God was alive within ancient Israel's faith conception. The divine assessment of the quality of the commitment on the part of believers, however, is given great prominence in the accounts discussed above through narrative expansion that illustrates the idea more fully and encourages the intended audience to persevere in their faith commitment, even (or perhaps especially) in trying times. This happened late:

- ◆ The editorial insertions within the narrative of Gen 22:1–19, verses 1b and 15–18, transform the original account into a

12. See Christo Lombaard, "Getting Texts to Talk: A Critical Analysis of Attempts at Eliciting Contemporary Messages from Ancient Holy Books as Exercises in Religious Communication," *NGTT* 55 (2014): 210–16.

testing tale. In the earlier third century, the already-venerated patriarch Abraham now becomes a hero of fidelity to all who take this text seriously.

- ◆ About a century later, Dan 6 and then the Dan 3 narrative additions expand this idea, initially relating to the individual but then democratizing this message by also relating the same idea to a group.¹³

In these accounts, the core idea is thus *unfolded*, in fully construed narratives, that God has at times examined the faith of important figures. The intended implication is apparent: those who read/hear these texts and hold them as religiously important should emulate these examples.

Apart from the dating of the pertinent verses and chapters to Hellenistic times, it seems also that aspects of the Hellenistic culture provide milieus that best fit these testing tales. This placement is not simply part of the trend (again recently indicated by Christoph Levin) of understanding by far the greater part of the Hebrew Bible to be late; as Niels Peter Lemche warns, “The Old Testament may be a Jewish collection of literature dating to the Hellenistic and Roman Period, but it is definitely not a Greek or Roman book.”¹⁴ I do not propose the Hellenistic background to these testing tales simply for the sake of such a late dating trend. In the two Daniel accounts discussed here, the influence of the politics of Antiochus Epiphanes is foundational to understanding them. In the Gen 22 additions, parallels from Hellenistic mythology such as the testing of Jason by Hera may well have provided additional impulses for expanding an existing idea into a fuller theological construct and then for relating that idea of divine examination to some of the basic foundations of Israel’s theology, namely, blessing in its various forms.

The thematically relatively tightly-knit nature of the Gen 22 additions and these two Daniel stories, discussed above, could be further explored.

13. See Van Deventer, “Another Look at the Redaction History,” 257, drawing on Gabriele Boccaccini, *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism: An Intellectual History, from Ezekiel to Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 164.

14. Niels Peter Lemche, “Does the Idea of the Old Testament as a Hellenistic Book Prevent Source Criticism of the Pentateuch?,” *JSOT* 25 (2011): 92; see also Christoph Levin, “Die Entstehung des Judentums als Gegenstand der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft,” in *Congress Volume Munich 2013*, edited by Christl M. Maier, VTSup 163 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1–17.

Similarities in terminology may, for instance, be indicated by pointing to the appearance of the angel of God motif in all three accounts. Given the methodological uncertainties related to linguistic links, however, thematic association provides for a broader frame of reference here. The occurrence of prayer in all three of these texts provide a good case in point.

This relates at the same time also to the issue of the perceived legitimacy of a theology about a God who tests, rather than a God who either remains unremittingly true regardless of the actions of the human party (as is generally the case with respect to the patriarchs of ancient Israel) or who would omnisciently know the result before a test would be set (as in ancient Greek mythology). Such theological questions are not argued in these texts. Clearly, however, this testing theology has no difficulty functioning alongside one of the most intimate acts of experienced and expressed religiosity: prayer.

In Gen 22, the interaction between Abraham and God is constituted by the former's response, in word and deed, to the divine initiative. In Dan 6, it is the faith of the hero's daily devotions that is the trigger of the events set up to play out the way they then do. In Dan 3, the Greek prayers (3:24–90 LXX, the so-called Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Holy Children) are often disregarded in academic discussions.¹⁵ Yet they show a continued acceptance, and perhaps even expansion, of the theological notion of a testing God.¹⁶ That such affirmation could be expressed by means of an inserted prayer is not an unknown phenomenon in the Hebrew Bible, with the underwater prayer in Jon 2:2–10 as a well-known example.

Such prayer shows that the theological context in which it appears is experienced as valid and authentic. Prayers display a unique kind of religious intimacy, with canonized prayer carrying the additional implication of accepted theological soundness.

With additional legitimacy therefore added to the possibility of a testing God, precisely by associating a testing God in these texts with prayer, greater credence had been given to the experienced authenticity of this aspect of faith. A God who tests thus is not, as could perhaps be assumed, on the prey; rather, the figures affected pray. The emphasis here is not on a God who creates hurdles or temptations; the emphasis is on the act of human-divine communication. This, too, was most probably

15. See Albertz, *Gott des Daniel*, 9.

16. The better-known prayer in Daniel is in chapter 9, with its strong Deuteronomistic influences.

intended to direct and/or reflect the experience of the intended audiences of these texts.

4. Addendum: On a Wing and a ...

Perhaps the proposal made in this contribution is couched too comfortably in my own theological history, in which the notion of *sola gratia* has been foundational. From such an existential vantage point, the idea that God would test believers does not fit well. This introspective theological self-placement does not mechanistically invalidate the proposal set forth here—that the three Old Testament testing tales discussed above are late developments in Israel under Hellenistic influence. Such a dating is not understood here as a corrupting influence on the texts, though it was possibly a somewhat syncretistic development—which is, however, regarded here not as something negative but as a fully natural part of all expressions of religiosity. (The implications of this for contextualizing more thoroughly the testing of Job should be thought through further.)

My own contextual position as an investigator, along with all the historiographical vagaries involved in reconstructing a part of the history of the religion of ancient Israel, is another aspect that should lead to intellectual modesty; this interpretative possibility is here only proposed, rather than put forward firmly. When theology and history intersect, the result is as much a case of faith seeking understanding as it is a case of seeking to understand an aspect of ancient Israel's faith.

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