

Apostate Rejection in the United and Divided Monarchies

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Introduction

1 and 2 Samuel and *1 and 2 Kings* are replete with, in addition to instances of obedience to YHWH, many instances of disobedience to and apostate rejection of YHWH.¹ Disobedience and rejection can be found individually and corporately. Yet, throughout these books, YHWH's love for Israel remains steadfast. Thus, these books repeatedly display Israel's difficulty in reciprocating YHWH's love. It is Israel's apostate rejection of YHWH and YHWH's just and abiding love in the face of such rejection that are the subject of this paper. More specifically, it is contended herein that YHWH's just and abiding love, despite ongoing rejection by individuals and by corporate Israel, is made manifest, paradoxically, in the splitting of the united monarchy and in the exiling of the northern and southern kingdoms. In order to bolster this thesis, several sub-claims must be supported. First, "disobedience" and "rejection" are not herein synonymous. Instances of disobedience do not entail rejection, as rejection must herein be understood in terms of apostasy. Second, it is apostate rejection, not disobedience in general, that results in the division of the monarchy and the exiling of the two kingdoms. Third, though Israel's ultimate exile is presaged and set in motion by Israel's request for a human king, this act is at its core disobedience but not apostate rejection; thus, this action, as disobedience, does not directly entail exile. Fourth, the single division of the monarchy, as a result of the apostate rejection of YHWH by Solomon, can be understood in terms of exile. Thus, YHWH's response to apostate rejection is consistently that of exile. Fifth, any continued division of the monarchies of the north and the south would not be explainable in terms of exile but, rather, would have to be understood in terms of the dissolution of corporate Israel (if indeed such division had

1. Herein "rejection," even when used without the modifier "apostate," should be understood as "apostate rejection."

occurred); exile, in contrast to continued division, can be understood as a loving response because, while maintaining justice, exile avoids the utter extinction or dissolution of YHWH's people. Having established these five claims, we can affirm our central thesis, namely that the splitting of the monarchy and the exiling of the northern and southern kingdoms make YHWH's just and abiding love manifest.

Disobedience and Apostate Rejection are not Synonymous

Preston Sprinkle characterizes disobedience as a failure "to carry out the conditions of the covenant."² Thus, disobedience ranges across numerous types of actions that transgress any of the conditions of the covenant, and here we should think broadly (and rightly) in terms of the covenant being defined in terms of the entirety of the Torah. Sprinkle, in alignment with this claim, notes, for example, that Ezekiel's use of this language is referring to the "totality of the covenant stipulations."³ Further, *Leviticus* 18:3-5 makes such disobedience clear in its statement regarding keeping YHWH's "statutes and judgments." Various transgressions and their punishments in *1 and 2 Samuel* and *1 and 2 Kings* clearly indicate that punishment may vary according to the transgression. For example, David's transgressions, most notably in the Bathsheba incident, are repaid by the issues that never leave the Davidic line; Saul's numerous transgressions are repaid by his own death, the death of Jonathan and the removal of his line from the monarchy. Solomon's transgression are of a different nature, and, as will be seen, entail a different punishment.

Now, apostate rejection of YHWH certainly breaks the covenant and therefore counts as disobedience. However, apostate rejection is also a very specific and extreme action that rails against *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15. In these verses, YHWH's words are clear: should Israel follow other gods,

2. Preston Sprinkle, "Law and Life: Leviticus 18:5 in the Literary Framework of Ezekiel," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31, no. 3 (2007): 287.

3. *Ibid.*, 281.

YHWH will “destroy [Israel] from the face of the land.”⁴ Thus, this specific transgression has a clear and specific punishment. This clear and specific punishment is corporate in nature. It is certainly the case that the repercussions of David’s and Saul’s actions above affect more than themselves, and one might connect these transgressions, as precedents, to later corporate punishment.⁵ However, the actions themselves do not entail the corporate punishment referenced in *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15.

Thus, we can characterize disobedience and apostate rejection differently in terms of the specificity of the transgression and the specificity of the punishment. We should also note that the punishment for apostate rejection is necessarily corporate. Apostate rejection, as opposed to other acts of disobedience, is a specific action that entails the following of the gods of surrounding peoples as opposed to following YHWH; this specific transgression carries the specific punishment of the destruction of Israel from the face of the land, whereas disobedience in general covers a range of actions and a range of punishments. All apostate rejection is disobedience, but not all disobedience is apostate rejection.

The Establishment of the Monarchy as Disobedience

As demonstrated in the above section, disobedience and apostate rejection are not equivalent. Thus, we should not expect YHWH’s response to varying instances of disobedience and rejection necessarily to be the same. As will be seen, YHWH’s response to such rejection is indeed exile. Thus, if Israel’s request for a human king is rejection and not some other form of disobedience, we should expect exile to follow. Exile does indeed follow much later, but this is the result of true rejection. A consideration of why Israel’s request for a human king does not constitute true rejection, in an apostate sense, is thus in order.

In *1 Samuel* 8:7, YHWH tells Samuel that the Israelites, in requesting a human king, have not rejected Samuel but have indeed rejected YHWH as king over them. This verse certainly seems to imply

4. *Deuteronomy* 6:15 (New International Version).

5. This is certainly the case with Saul’s use of a medium.

that the Israelites have been more than generally disobedient, for their request entails a rejection. However, the human king's royal dependence on YHWH and the whole of *1 Samuel* 8 indicate that the Israelites' actions in requesting a human king, though potentially a loose precedent for later apostate rejection, are better characterized here as a form of disobedience other than true rejection. Thus, we should not expect exile to follow as a direct result. Let us consider these points separately.

Ming Him Ko notes that, "an Israelite king should naturally recognize his royal dependence on YHWH, who is the anointing one."⁶ As Ko further notes, the Shema indicates that YHWH remains the true king regardless of the status afforded to a human king.⁷ YHWH's kingship is neither antithetical to nor on a par with human kingship; rather, human kingship foundationally requires YHWH's true kingship.⁸ YHWH's true kingship mandates that the human king "listen" to YHWH, and listening is not followed by a deliberation of whether or not one ought to do as YHWH commands; rather, listening is bound up with "doing" and "obeying."⁹ Drawing on *1 Samuel*, Dawn Maria Sellars notes that obedience, as understood by Samuel and conveyed to Saul, is indeed obedience to YHWH's word.¹⁰ The human king, just as every Israelite, must demonstrate obedience to YHWH. This mandate, in its general form, is found in *1 Kings* 2:3 in addition to *Deuteronomy*. Now, if it is the case that human kingship in Israelite society is such that the king rules directly over the people but foundationally requires YHWH's true kingship, then YHWH's kingship cannot be rejected by the request for, and installation of, a human king. Rather, the institution of human kingship, as opposed to amounting to a rejection of YHWH, amounts to the institution, in certain respects, of a layer of rule that remains subordinate to YHWH. The

6. Ming Him Ko, "Fusion-Point Hermeneutics: A Theological Interpretation of Saul's Rejection in Light of the Shema as the Rule of Faith" *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7, no. 1 (2013): 73.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 74.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Dawn Maria Sellars, "An Obedient Servant? The Reign of King Saul (1 Samuel 13-15) Reassessed," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35, no. 3 (2011): 326.

Israelites, in rejecting YHWH's direct rule over them, have not rejected YHWH wholesale but have rejected (again, in some respects) YHWH's direct rule by requesting the intermediary position of a human king. The greater context of *1 Samuel* 8 seems to confirm this claim.

It will be recalled that, in *1 Samuel*, the people, in their request for a human king, reject "YHWH as their king."¹¹ They attempt to justify this request in terms of their desire to be like other nations with a human king that leads them into battle.¹² D. Rudman states that, "Israel's decision to appoint a king over themselves is depicted as an act of rebellion against Yahweh."¹³ In this decision, Rudman notes, "is an implicit rejection of Israel's role as a 'holy' people."¹⁴ As noted, in *1 Samuel* 8:7, YHWH does indeed state that Israel has rejected him as their king. Further, *1 Samuel* 8:11-17 details what the people will suffer at the hands of human kings. *1 Samuel* 8:18 indicates that Israel will cry out for relief, but YHWH will not answer them; however, the detailed ways in which Israel will suffer do not include ultimate exile. The Israelites' request thus appears to be a function of the desire to have a human leader in specific human affairs; the request is not a rejection of the ultimate rule and sovereignty of YHWH. Further, the Israelites do not simply turn and reject YHWH; rather, they ask YHWH's servant Samuel for a king. In other words, the Israelites implicitly recognize the rule of YHWH when they ask for a human ruler. YHWH grants this request in *1 Samuel* 8:22, and closing the chapter in this way seems to indicate that the matter is closed by YHWH's decree, not by the people's request. Now, this being said, the Israelites' actions, though they do not constitute a true rejection of YHWH, do constitute disobedience to YHWH.

We should here recall the above central difference between (apostate) rejection and disobedience. Apostate rejection requires, by definition, according to *Deuteronomy* 16:13-15, the following of other gods as opposed to YHWH. This action carries the punishment of the

11. *1 Samuel* 8:7 (New International Version).

12. *1 Samuel* 8: 20 (New International Version).

13. D. Rudman, "The Commissioning Stories of Saul and David as Theological Allegory," *Vetus Testamentum* L, no. 4 (2000): 522.

14. *Ibid.*

destruction of Israel. However, in asking for a human king, the Israelites are not following the gods of surrounding peoples as opposed to YHWH. They are in fact following a custom of other peoples, but not the gods of other peoples. Thus, Israel's action, in requesting a human king, can be characterized as disobedience but not apostate rejection. As a result, the action does not entail the destruction of Israel from the face of the earth.

Disobedience and Apostate Rejection in the United Monarchy

Though the united monarchy is replete with instances of disobedience and rejection, true apostate rejection is found only in the actions of Solomon. It is Solomon's apostate rejection that necessitates the division of the monarchy as punishment, and this division is consistent with the punishment stated in *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15. This division can indeed be characterized as a species of exile. We shall look briefly, then, at the actions of Saul, David and Solomon. We shall then indicate that only Solomon's actions constitute apostate rejection and that the division of the monarchy is an appropriate outcome.

Saul

Sellars notes that Saul's obedience is "obedience to the people as opposed to the Israel."¹⁵ *1 Samuel* bears out this conclusion. In *1 Samuel* 13:9, Saul makes an offering to YHWH that is contrary to the timing indicated by Samuel; Saul does this because the people are beginning to scatter. His obedience is to the community. In *1 Samuel* 14:32, the people consume animals with their blood and thereby clearly violate YHWH's word stated in both *Deuteronomy* and *Leviticus*. Instead of condemning those who partook, Saul builds an altar to YHWH in order to try to rectify the issue after the fact. Saul again demonstrates obedience to the community and in so doing concomitantly demonstrates disobedience to YHWH. However, Saul does not demonstrate apostate rejection of YHWH.

15. Sellars, 319.

Now, in times of trouble, Saul reacts by reaching out to a medium. Victor Hamilton notes that this represents a distinct difference between Saul and David, as David reaches out to YHWH in times of trouble.¹⁶ In such instances, Saul demonstrates that his obedience is not to YHWH, but this is not surprising. *1 Samuel* is clear that Saul's heart was disinclined to YHWH from the outset and thus required YHWH to change his heart in *1 Samuel* 10:9. A pattern of Saul's disobedience to YHWH is clear in *1 Samuel*, but apostate rejection is not; for, even in seeking the medium Saul does not follow other gods; rather, he seeks an alternative path to YHWH's word. We might characterize Saul, then, as a disobedient opportunist.

David

There is never a point at which David's actions can be thought in any sense to be out of alignment with *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15. David is never guilty of apostate rejection. Further, David's obedience to YHWH never really comes into question in *Samuel*, *Kings* or the rest of the OT. T. Desmond Alexander notes that David bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem stands as a symbol of his obedience to YHWH.¹⁷ *2 Samuel* 6:16 tells us that David danced and leapt before YHWH as this took place. This event takes place prior to the incident with Bathsheba, and the incident with Bathsheba (and Uriah) entails multiple acts of disobedience that increase in gravity as the event plays out. One might infer, in light of this incident, that we might encounter a change in David's heart that ultimately pushes him toward apostate rejection. However, David A. Bosworth characterizes well David's obedience when he states that David has "a resilient faith that accepts the divine will."¹⁸ This statement is made in reference to David's processing of the death of Bathsheba's firstborn,

16. Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 285.

17. T. Desmond Alexander, "Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings: Their Importance for Biblical Theology," *Tyndale Bulletin* 49, no.2 (1998): 207.

18. David A. Bosworth, "Faith and Resilience: King David's Reaction to the Death of Bathsheba's Firstborn," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 73 (2011): 697.

and, of course, the Bathsheba incident itself does demonstrate an instance of disobedience to YHWH on the part of David. However, David's "resilient faith" is telling, for he at no point resorts to following gods other than YHWH (even in the face of the death of Bathsheba's firstborn). It can be cogently argued that the Bathsheba incident is David at his worst; if that is the case, then David not only eschews apostate rejection but he is also positively obedient. It is worthwhile to consider briefly the many affirmations of David's obedience to YHWH.

Firstly, *1* and *2 Samuel* and *1 Kings* refer to David as the "servant" of YHWH no less than 14 times. These instances involve others referring to David as YHWH's servant, YHWH referring to David as his servant and David referring to himself as YHWH's servant. Further, David's obedience to YHWH is recognized by kings and common folk throughout the monarchy (both united and divided) in *Samuel*, *Kings* and *Chronicles*; it is also recognized by the prophets Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah and Hosea, in the Psalter and in the NT in *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke* and *Acts*. As Hamilton Notes, "David stands out as an exemplar in allowing the word of and from God to strike home in his own heart."¹⁹ He at no point even considers apostate rejection.

Solomon

In contrast to Saul and David, Solomon is clearly guilty of apostate rejection. Jerome T. Walsh notes that Solomon marrying Pharaoh's daughter and thereby becoming son-in-law to Pharaoh "foreshadows foreign abominations," despite the fact that the relationship is sketched in political terms.²⁰ Thus, Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter is linked to the ultimate worship of gods other than YHWH. The foreshadowing referred to above certainly refers to much greater and widespread apostasy than is seen in Solomon alone, but it certainly also includes Solomon's apostasy, as he is "enticed by foreign wives into the

19. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 335.

20. Jerome T. Walsh, "The Characterization of Solomon in First Kings 1-5," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57 (1995): 486.

worship of alien gods.”²¹ This apostasy is clearly laid out in *1 Kings* 11:1-8. Solomon takes his wives from nations on which YHWH has placed a marriage restriction, and pleasing his wives certainly contributes to his decision to follow other gods.²² However, regardless of circumstances, the fact that Solomon commits the apostate rejection referenced in *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15 is undeniable. Solomon moves beyond the disobedience of Saul and David.

Division as Exile

As noted, *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15 indicates that destruction from the face of the land is the consequence of apostate rejection. In a corporate sense, this destruction can be viewed as the placement of a hostile sovereign over the nation or deportation by such a sovereign. Such an action would destroy Israel, as a corporate body, from the face of the land, as Israel would have no geographical existence. “Exile” is, generally speaking, forced existence outside of one’s land and country. Thus, exile can be understood as punishment consistent with *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15. Here, though, we are concerned with the division of the monarchy, not literal exile. But, if the monarchy and land are divided, the country is now no longer one corporate body and the one nation has been partially destroyed from the face of the land. Division here is just a species of exile, as Israel is exiled from itself by YHWH as a result of its own actions, namely apostate rejection.

Disobedience and Rejection in the Northern Kingdom

Nelson notes, “the infidelity of the Northern Kingdom has led to its destruction by Assyria.”²³ *2 Kings* chronicles this exile. In order to understand exile as a fitting end according to *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15, we need only to see that apostate rejection took place in the northern kingdom.

21. Richard D. Nelson, *The Historical Books* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 137.

22. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical books*, 403.

23. Nelson, *The Historical Books*, 147.

A consideration of but two kings will make this clear. We shall consider briefly the reigns of Jeroboam I and Ahab.

Jeroboam I

Jeroboam I starts the northern kingdom down a road to apostate rejection, and this same road is traversed by most succeeding northern kings. Of the 18 kings who follow Jeroboam I, Hamilton notes that 15 follow his example.²⁴ Hamilton further notes that Jeroboam I “opens the door to rampant idolatry.”²⁵ *I Kings* 12:28-33 recounts Jeroboam’s disobedience, and the seeds of rampant idolatry are indeed present; and, further, some of this disobedience can be characterized as apostate rejection of YHWH. In verse 28, Jeroboam I presents the northern tribes with two golden calves and tells the people that these are their gods.²⁶ He establishes worship outside of Jerusalem and creates a religious infrastructure that drives a permanent wedge between himself and the Davidic line.²⁷ Further, the bull icons given to the northern tribes for worship “represented a rejection of the ark.”²⁸ Thus, Jeroboam goes beyond establishing centers of worship outside of Jerusalem, and he goes beyond a reworking of the religious calendar and the establishment of non-Levitical priests. David’s bringing of the ark to Jerusalem, as noted prior, stood as a testament to his obedience to YHWH, but the rejection of the ark and the presentation of idols “as gods” go beyond disobedience to a rejection of YHWH. Jeroboam sets the northern kingdom on the path of apostate rejection, as his actions run counter to YHWH’s mandates in *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15.

Ahab

As noted, most northern kings follow the ways of Jeroboam I; thus, apostate rejection in the north is common. Such apostasy reaches new

24. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 420.

25. *Ibid.*, 419.

26. *I Kings* 12:28 (New International Version).

27. Mark Leuchter, “Jeroboam the Ephratite,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 1 (2006): 67.

28. *Ibid.*

heights in Ahab, and *I Kings* devotes a good deal of text to Ahab (indeed more than any other northern king). Some actions of Ahab bear resemblance to those of Solomon, e.g. the establishment of foreign worship sites at the urging of a spouse, but Ahab goes even further than Solomon does.

I Kings 21:25 tells us that there was never anyone so evil in the eyes of YHWH as Ahab and that Ahab's wife (Jezebel) urged many of his evil actions. His evil actions were indeed many, but of particular importance here is the establishment of cultic worship of Baal in Israel. Now, this is not to say that Ahab was a wholly ineffective king. Patricia Berlyn points out that Ahab does appear concerned for the welfare of Israel, but this is in a material, not a religious, sense.²⁹ He may even have thought it a sound idea, for political reasons, to adopt some of the customs of surrounding peoples.³⁰ In this sense, Ahab's actions are reminiscent of Solomon, for the purposes of political gain and regional security, marrying Pharaoh's daughter and subsequently hundreds more foreign wives from communities dubbed "off limits" by YHWH. However, Ahab goes further than Solomon in accommodating his wives' national deities by moving from private apostasy to public apostasy, for the establishment of the priests of Baal in Israel served to "foist [Jezebel's] native deities on her husband's people."³¹ Thus, Ahab not only brings apostate rejection on the northern tribes through his own actions, he also draws them into participation in such apostasy. His adoption of some customs were likely instances of disobedience of a sort other than apostate rejection, but Baal worship was blatant apostate rejection. Thus, the establishment, maintenance and promotion of the Baal cult clearly rail against *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15. YHWH does indeed prolong disaster on Ahab's house until "the days of his son," but Ahab pays with his life and the northern kingdom faces the inexorability of exile in the future.³²

29. Patricia Berlyn, "Elijah's Battle for the Soul of Israel," *Jewish Biblical Quarterly* 40, no.1 (2012): 53.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, 54.

32. *I Kings* 21:29 (New International version).

Apostate Rejection in the Southern Kingdom

Nelson notes, “Josiah’s perfect reformation makes no difference in God’s implacable decision to punish Judah for Manasseh’s sins.”³³ Thus, the southern kingdom, once it also had rejected YHWH in favor of a foreign deity, was fated to suffer exile. YHWH’s promise to David, and the fortitude of the Davidic line, held Judah in place for longer than the northern kingdom, but ultimately the south went down the same path. Here we shall look at the rule of only Manasseh. We considered Jeroboam I, as the first king of the northern tribes above, but we will not consider Rehoboam here. As Hamilton points out, Rehoboam and Jeroboam I are quite different, in that Rehoboam “obeys the prophetic message” and Jeroboam I does not.³⁴ Thus, the divided kingdoms begin differently from the standpoint of the piety of their first kings. However, we should note that Solomon ruled from the south; thus, there is already some precedent for apostasy in the south.

Manasseh

Though Hezekiah institutes numerous reforms in Judah, these reforms are undone by his son, Manasseh. *2 Kings* 21 is very clear regarding the apostasy of Manasseh. In *2 Kings* 21:3 alone we are told that Manasseh reestablished the high places, built altars to Baal and Asherah and worshipped the “starry hosts.”³⁵ Thus, according to the author of *2 Kings*, Manasseh was wildly apostate. Further, verse 9 in chapter 21 tells us that Manasseh was able to lead the people astray; he was not alone in his apostasy.³⁶ Hence, similar to Ahab in the north, Manasseh makes apostasy public. It is unsurprising, then, that he is compared to Ahab in *2 Kings*. In the case of Manasseh, comparative archaeology seems also to confirm the apostasy set forth in *2 Kings*.

William S. Morrow draws some relevant conclusions regarding Manasseh’s apostate rejection of YHWH, through the worship of alien

33. Nelson, *The Historical Books*, 147.

34. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 421.

35. *2 Kings* 21:3 (New International Version).

36. *2 Kings* 21:9 (New International Version).

gods in the Jerusalem temple, by looking at the case of Ekron. He first acknowledges that the author of *2 Kings* (DtrH) ascribes such apostasy to Manasseh, as this ascription is undeniable.³⁷ However, Morrow casts doubt on distinct Neo-Assyrian influence and, rather, finds influence in “an amalgam...from the West Semitic world.”³⁸ He also indicates the likelihood of sun worship in Judah prior to and during the time of Manasseh; thus, he agrees with the author of *2 Kings* about the practice of worshipping the “starry hosts” during Manasseh’s reign.³⁹ Morrow further indicates that he is unclear whether evidence can support the notion that Manasseh oversaw widespread apostate innovation, but notes that there is good reason to accept the notion that Josiah did have a massive religious reform project to face; thus, apostasy was rampant during the time of Manasseh and Amon.⁴⁰

Considering the length of Manasseh’s reign, much of this apostate rejection of YHWH must have taken place during Manasseh’s time. Morrow closes his consideration of potential Neo-Assyrian influence by making two points. First, there is indirect support from the prophetic tradition that Manasseh installed apostate cults in Jerusalem; second, these cults may have been indigenous cults that were not Neo-Assyrian.⁴¹ In the case of Manasseh, then, we can conclude from both *2 Kings* and the archaeological evidence, that Manasseh and corporate Judah were guilty of apostate rejection of YHWH. Thus, as per *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15, Judah, just as Israel, was fated to suffer exile. Having laid the foundation of the division of the united monarchy and the exile of both kingdoms, we can now consider, in light of *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15, how exile (and division as a species of exile) might be seen as an expression of YHWH’s just and abiding love.

37. William S. Morrow, “Were There Neo-Assyrian Influences in Manasseh’s Temple? Comparative Evidence from Tel-Miqne/Ekron,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2013): 54. As the title implies, Morrow’s focus is on the possibility of Neo-Assyrian influence. He concludes this is unlikely but, in so doing, draws conclusions relevant herein.

38. *Ibid.*, 58.

39. *Ibid.*, 59.

40. *Ibid.*, 73.

41. Morrow, 73.

Exile as an Expression of a Just and Abiding Love

We concluded prior, in light of *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15, that exile was justified as a function of apostate rejection. That exile fulfills the punishment stated specifically in verse 15 deserves a bit more clarity. This will require both interpreting the verse less literally than other verses that use “*shamad*” and indicating how “exile” fits that interpretation, but this differing interpretation is necessary in making the claim that exile is an expression of just and abiding love. Bolstering the claim that exile is a just and abiding love will therefore follow the above interpretation.

Deuteronomy uses “*shamad*” in verse 15 when referencing the punishment for following other gods. Verse 15 ends, “he will destroy you from the face of the land.”⁴² Here “*shamad*” is rendered with “destroy.” A literal reading seems to entail the complete destruction of Israel. *1 Kings* 15:29 uses the same verbal form when referring to the destruction of Jeroboam’s family, and the usage here must certainly be a literal usage. Thus, literal usage and interpretation seem justified. However, if the usage in *Deuteronomy* 6:15 is indeed a literal usage, then we should expect complete destruction of Israel and Judah (as a result of apostate rejection), just as the usage in *1 Kings* 15:29 tells us that Jeroboam’s family was completely destroyed. Israel and Judah were not destroyed from the face of the earth in a literal sense, so a somewhat different interpretation is required. If, alternatively, we interpret “destruction from the face of the earth” in terms of separation of the corporate bodies of Israel and Judah from their geographical and cultural homes through captivity by a hostile nation, then we can affirm the actuality of the punishment referenced in *Deuteronomy* and we can interpret exile, as noted in the foregoing, as the fulfillment of that punishment. Further, as noted prior, we can understand the division of the monarchy as a species of exile. Thus, *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15 can be understood to fit the historical situation of YHWH’s division of the monarchy and the subsequent exiles of Israel and Judah.

42. *Deuteronomy* 6:15 (New International Version).

Now, considering that “destruction from the face of the earth” can plausibly be interpreted in terms of “exile,” we must consider how exile can be understood as a just and abiding love. St. Anselm indicates why God’s love requires punishment for all forms of disobedience in order to be just. First, if disobedience to God goes unpunished, then there is no satisfaction and God oversees an unregulated kingdom.⁴³ Second, and perhaps more important for the present context, forgiveness without satisfaction places disobedience on a par with God, in that both God and disobedience would be “subject to no law.”⁴⁴ Such a state would therefore allow apostate rejection of God, as a particular and extreme species of disobedience, to exist on a par with God. It is a short step from here, then, to place foreign gods themselves on a par with or above YHWH if YHWH did not punish apostate rejection according to *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15.

Having established that punishment is required as a result of apostate rejection, we must consider how exile, as such punishment, can be thought of in terms of abiding love. Two considerations are relevant. First, exile is a less harsh fulfillment of “destruction from the face of the earth” than is found in *1 Kings* 15:29 but maintains YHWH’s “justness.” Thus, such fulfillment, as a less harsh but just alternative, can certainly be understood as a loving response. Second, YHWH does not abandon his people even during exile. YHWH clearly does not abandon Israel or Judah after the monarchy is divided, and *Ezekiel* 11:16 also tells that YHWH did not abandon the exiles. YHWH’s love is just and abiding both in the imposition of the exile and during the exile.

Conclusion

Throughout the events narrated in *1* and *2 Samuel* and *1* and *2 Kings*, YHWH’s love for Israel remains steadfast; the books repeatedly display Israel’s difficulty in reciprocating YHWH’s love. Having established the following five claims, we affirm our central thesis, namely

43. Anselm of Canterbury, “Cur Deus Homo,” in *The Major Works*, eds. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 284.

44. Anselm of Canterbury, 284.

that the splitting of the monarchy and the exiling of the northern and southern kingdoms make YHWH's just and abiding love manifest. First, "disobedience" and "rejection" were shown not to be synonymous. Second, it is specifically rejection that resulted in the division of the monarchy and the exiling of the two kingdoms. Third, Israel's request for a human king did not entail and should not have entailed exile (per *Deuteronomy* 6:13-15). Fourth, the single division of the monarchy can and should be understood in terms of exile; YHWH's response to apostate rejection is consistently that of exile. Lastly, exile can and should be understood as a loving response because, while maintaining justice, exile avoids the utter extinction or dissolution of YHWH's people. Thus, YHWH's just and abiding love, despite ongoing rejection by individuals and by corporate Israel, is indeed made manifest, paradoxically, in the splitting of the united monarchy and in the exiling of the northern and southern kingdoms.

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