

Arjan van den Os

**“Vengeance is Mine”**

The Meaning and Function  
of Divine Vengeance in the New Testament

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# **“Vengeance is Mine”. The Meaning and Function of Divine Vengeance in the New Testament**

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I teach my students in Apeldoorn that reading and exploring the New Testament must end with a doxology. I consider finishing this project a blessing, given by God who has guided and blessed me in my life. Soli Deo Gloria!

## Abbreviations

ABD	D.N. Freedman (ed.), <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (New York: Doubleday, 1992).
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANRW	W. Haase and H. Temporini (eds.), <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der Neueren Forschung</i> (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972-).
AThANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AYBC	Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge
BCAW	Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World
BDR	F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and F. Rehkopf, <i>Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch</i> (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984 <sup>16</sup> ).
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETHL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BIW	G. Petzl (ed.), <i>Die Beichtinschriften Westkleinasiens</i> , Epigraphica Anatolica 22 (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1994).
BN	Biblische Notizen
BRS	Biblical Resource Series
BSIH	Brill's Studies in Intellectual History
BTNT	Biblical Theology of the New Testament
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNB	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CCWJC	Cambridge Commentaries on Writings of the Jewish and Christian World 200 BC to AD 200

CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CIG	A. Böckh e.a. (eds.), <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum. Band I-IV</i> (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1828-1877).
CNT III	Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament, Derde Serie
COT	Commentaar op het Oude Testament
CRINT	Compendium Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
DCLS	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies
DCLY	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook
DJG	J.B. Green, J.K. Brown, and N. Perrin (eds.), <i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013 <sup>2</sup> ).
DNTB	C.A. Evans and S.E. Porter (eds.), <i>Dictionary of New Testament Background</i> (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).
DOTP	M.J. Boda and J.G. McConville (eds.), <i>Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets</i> (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012).
DSD	Dead Sea Discoveries
DT	A. Audollent (ed.), <i>Defixionum Tabellae quotquot tam in Graecis Orientis quam in totius Occidentis partibus praeter Atticas in Corpore Inscriptionum Atticarum editas</i> (Paris: Fontemoing, 1904).
DTA	R. Wünsch (ed.), <i>Defixionum Tabellae Atticae, IG III<sup>3</sup></i> (Berlin: Reimer, 1897).
EHS	Europäische Hochschulschriften
EThL	Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses
EThR	Études Théologiques et Religieuses
EvTh	Evangelische Theologie
EWNT	H. Balz and G. Schneider (eds.), <i>Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. Band I-III</i> (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992 <sup>2</sup> ).
EZ	Exegese in unserer Zeit
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FAT II	Forschungen zum Alten Testament, 2. Reihe
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FJCD	Forschungen zum jüdisch-christlichen Dialog
FN	Filologia Neotestamentaria
FrGH	F. Jacoby e.a. (ed.), <i>Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker. Band I-IV</i> (Berlin/Leiden: Weidmann/Brill, 1923-).
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GAP	Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

HABES	Heidelberger Althistorische Beiträge und Epigraphische Studien
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HThKAT	Herder Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HThR	Harvard Theological Review
HTS	Hervormd Theologiese Studies
IDelos	F. Durrbach e.a. (eds.), <i>Inscriptions de Délos</i> , IG XI <sup>3</sup> , 1-2 (Paris: H. Champion, 1926-).
IG	Inscriptiones Graecae
IPergamon	M. Fränkel e.a. (eds.), <i>Die Inschriften von Pergamon</i> (Berlin: Spemann, 1890-1895).
IPriene	F. Hillier von Gaertringen (ed.), <i>Die Inschriften von Priene</i> (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968).
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JECS	Journal for Early Christian Studies
JPTSup	Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JRS	Journal for Roman Studies
JSJ	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSP	Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha
JSPL	Journal for the Study of Paul and his Letters
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
JThS	Journal for Theological Studies
KBANT	Kommentare und Beiträge zum Alten und Neuen Testament
KEKNT	Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LIB	Lire la Bible
LNTS	Library for New Testament Studies

LSTS	Library for Second Temple Studies
LThK	W. Kasper (ed.), <i>Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche. Band I-XI</i> (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1993-2001).
MHUC	Monographs of the Hebrew Union College
MJS	Münsteraner Judaistische Studien
MTNF	Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTTE	M. Silva, <i>New International Dictionary for New Testament Theology and Exegesis. Volume I-V</i> (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NovT	Novum Testamentum
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OTE	Old Testament Essays
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën
Peek	W. Peek (ed.), <i>Griechische Vers-Inschriften. Band I: Grab-Epigramme</i> (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1955).
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
PredOT	Prediking van het Oude Testament
PRSt	Perspectives in Religious Studies
QD	Quaestiones Disputatae
ResQ	Restoration Quarterly
RevMM	Revue de Métaphysique et de la Morale
RB	Revue Biblique
RGG <sup>4</sup>	H.D. Betz and others (eds.), <i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Band I-VIII</i> (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998-2005 <sup>4</sup> ).
RHPR	Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses
SBB	Stuttgarter Biblische Beiträge
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SCHNT	Studia ad Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti
SCS	Septuagint Commentary Series
SEA	Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum
SEG	Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum



SGD	D.R. Jordan, "A Survey of Greek Defixiones Not Included in the Special Corpora", <i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i> 26 (1985), 151-197.
SIG	W. Dittenberger, <i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1915-1920).
SJOT	Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament
SNTA	Studiorum Novi Testamenti Auxilia
SOTBT	Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology
SPB	Studia Post-Biblica
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
STh	Studienbücher Theologie
StudBL	Studies in Biblical Literature
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigraph
TAM	<i>Tituli Asiae Minoris. Band I-V</i> (Vienna: A. Hoelder, 1901-2007).
THAT	E. Jenni and C. Westermann, <i>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament. Band I-II</i> (München/Zürich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag/TVZ, 1971-1973).
ThRef	Theologia Reformata
TRE	G. Müller e.a. (eds.), <i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie. Band I-XXXVI</i> (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1976-2004).
TrGF	B. Snell, S. Radt, and R. Kannicht (eds.), <i>Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta. Band I-V</i> (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971-2004).
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
TUGL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
TW	Theologische Wissenschaft
TWAT	G.J. Botterweck. H. Ringgren and H.J. Fabry (eds.), <i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament. Band I-X</i> (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973-2000)
TWNT	R. Kittel (ed.), <i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. Band I-X</i> (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933-1979).
TZ	Theologische Zeitschrift
UNT	Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

UPZ	U. Wilcken, <i>Urkunden der Ptolemaerzeit</i> (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1927).
UTB	Uni-Taschenbücher
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WdF	Wege der Forschung
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WUNT II	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZPE	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik
ZThK	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche

## Introduction

### 1. A Troubling Notion

The notion of divine vengeance is troubling readers of the Bible. This can be explained by the use of the concept of vengeance. For many, vengeance is not something positive. A German proverb typifies the way people consider vengeance: “vengeance turns small justice into great injustice” (*Rache macht ein kleines Recht zu großem Unrecht*). When one takes revenge, one acts outside of the legal order in the eyes of many Western individuals. One bases one’s actions not on order and justice, but on one’s own taxations and insights. Vengeance is seen by many as a form of blind and uncontrollable destruction, paving the way for a vicious circle of violence. Vengeance cannot be tolerated in Western countries, because it is a characteristic of underdeveloped legal systems. The Canadian philosopher Trudy Govier summarizes it aptly: “to act as agents of revenge, we have to indulge and cultivate something evil in ourselves.”<sup>1</sup>

The observation of Govier makes the notion of divine vengeance even more difficult for many Western readers of the Bible. How can a perfect God cultivate evil within himself? Is there something demonic within God, as the German Old Testament scholar Paul Volz writes?<sup>2</sup> How can the God who reveals himself in the Bible as love (1 Joh. 4,8) be linked with vengeance? How can the God of justice (Ps. 11,7) exact vengeance, which is the epitome of extralegal actions? These and other questions make clear that the notion of divine vengeance in the Bible is conceived in Western contexts as difficult and troublesome.

These problems with the notion of divine vengeance have motivated several theologians to eliminate divine retribution from Christian thinking.

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<sup>1</sup> T. Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge* (London: Routledge, 2002), 12.

<sup>2</sup> P. Volz, *Das Dämonische in Jahwe*, Sammlung Gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religionsgeschichte 110 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1924).

The German theologian Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher writes in his lectures *On Religion* (1799) that Judaism is “a religion of retribution” with an avenging God, while Christianity is “a religion of redemption” with a saving and loving God.<sup>3</sup> Judaism for Schleiermacher is a “dead religion” (*totde Religion*), while Christianity is a religion of “higher potency” (*höhere Potenz*) because it has favored love over vengeance.<sup>4</sup> The Dutch theologian Anton Houtepen deems the love of God incompatible with violence, which results in his plea to eliminate violence (and thus vengeance) from God.<sup>5</sup>

Distancing God from vengeance seems to meet the difficulties Western readers of the Bible have with the notion of divine vengeance. There is a basic problem, though, which we have to tackle before we disqualify Biblical vengeance texts and imagery. This problem can be put into a question: do we have a proper understanding of the meaning of vengeance and the way vengeance functions in the historical context of the Bible?

## 2. The Case of Jared Diamond

Researchers in other fields draw attention to the position that the notion of vengeance must be valued on its own terms and that Western opinions can obfuscate a clear understanding of the mechanism of vengeance. One of those researchers is Pulitzer-price winning geographer and anthropologist Jared Diamond. In an April 2008 article in *The New Yorker*, he describes the mechanism of vengeance among certain tribes in Papua New Guinea.<sup>6</sup> The protagonist, Diamond’s driver Daniel Wemp, recounts the process of his successful attempt to avenge the death of his uncle Soll. Diamond interweaves this narrative from Papua New Guinea with the personal story of his father-in-law, a Holocaust survivor who refused to exact vengeance on the murderers of his

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<sup>3</sup> F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*, edited by R. Otto (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1899), 157-159.

<sup>4</sup> Schleiermacher, *Religion*, 156 and 160.

<sup>5</sup> A.W.J. Houtepen, “De vrede van God en de oorlogen van mensen”, in: idem, P. van Dijk, and H. Zeldenrust (eds.), *Geloof en Geweld. De vrede van God en de oorlogen der mensen* (Kampen: Kok, 1988), 79-124.

<sup>6</sup> J. Diamond, “Vengeance is Ours. What Can Tribal Societies Tell Us about our Need to Get Even?”, *The New Yorker*, 21 April 2008, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/04/21/vengeance-is-ours> [consulted 5-7-2022]. The article received some hefty backlash, questioning its credibility. See M. Balter, “‘Vengeance’ Bites Back at Jared Diamond”, *Science* 324 (2009), 872-874.

family and probably regretted that later. The goal of Diamond's article can be found in the subtitle: what can tribal societies tell us, Western societies, about our need to get even? The article thus sheds light on both the mechanism of vengeance in non-Western contexts and the presuppositions of Western readers.

Diamond's article provides two important insights. First, he shows that vengeance in tribalistic societies is more sophisticated than most Westerners think. The mechanism of revenge is not random. There is, in the words of Diamond, a certain "fighting etiquette (...) among groups".<sup>7</sup> It is quite clear for the family who is in charge of the act of revenge. The avenger must not be excessive in his vengeance: he may kill his object, but he may not set fire to his hut, for instance. There is variation among clans about the extent of vengeance, as Diamond observes, but in the clan of Daniel certain behavior is not allowed. Formally, the clan of Daniel has made it clear when the avenger must stop his activities, namely when the target of one's revenge is eliminated. Although these "rules" are not written down, they still do function most of the time among various clans and tribes in Papua New Guinea and maintain a delicate balance in society.

Secondly, Diamond exhibits that the concept of vengeance in Western societies is quite intricate. Western societies deem vengeance an act of injustice, taking matters into one's own hands. Vengeance does not deserve any room in civilized societies. It is rightly pointed out that vengeance opens up the possibility of excessive murder. Daniel and his companions want to avenge the death of their relatives, but there will be family members of the perpetrators who want to exact retribution for the death of their relative. A vicious circle of violence will commence, because after every killing there will be an avenging reaction. Letting the government handle these cases of revenge seems better, as even Daniel admits: "The Western way (...) is a better way."<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the need for personal satisfaction is very much present in Western communities. Societies and codes teach people revenge is bad, but the emotion of taking revenge is actually quite strong. Diamond's father-in-law Jozef Nabel is an example of this duality. The killers of his mother, who he has handed over to the justice system, were mildly punished. Jozef has felt miserable since then: he was not able to protect his parents and

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<sup>7</sup> Diamond, "Vengeance".

<sup>8</sup> Diamond, "Vengeance".

he has failed in his responsibility to avenge. In a lot of cases the central justice system cannot meet the feeling of retribution among the victims and their relatives.

Diamond's article thus detects the need for a clarification of vengeance in non-Western contexts, while at the same time he pleads for hermeneutical sensitivity towards vengeance in Western contexts. The results of Diamond's research are an impetus for further research on vengeance, also in the Bible. How did the authors of the Bible understand and use the motif of God's vengeance and how do their concepts relate with Western readings of vengeance texts in the Bible?

### 3. History of Research

There has been much research lately in Old Testament texts on the concept of God's vengeance. The most systematic work on divine vengeance is the Ph.D. dissertation of Eric Peels.<sup>9</sup> Before the work of Peels, there was some research done on this topic by for instance Erwin Merz<sup>10</sup>, R.H. Swartzback (who we will encounter in a moment), George E. Mendenhall<sup>11</sup>, and Walter Dietrich.<sup>12</sup> Some writings were published after Peels' book, for instance by Erich Zenger<sup>13</sup>, Walter Dietrich and Christian Link<sup>14</sup>, Bernd Janowski<sup>15</sup>, Jörg

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<sup>9</sup> H.G.L. Peels, *De wraak van God. De betekenis van de wortel NQM en de functie van de NQM-teksten in het kader van de oudtestamentische Godsopenbaring* (Zoetermeer: Boeken- centrum, 1992). Quotations from the English translation: idem, *The Vengeance of God. The Meaning of the Root NQM & The Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament*, OTS 31 (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> E. Merz, *Die Blutrache bei den Israeliten*, BZAW 20 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrich'sche Buch- handlung, 1916).

<sup>11</sup> G.E. Mendenhall, "The Vengeance of Yahweh", in: idem, *The Tenth Generation. The Origins of Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore/London: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 69-104.

<sup>12</sup> W. Dietrich, "Rache. Erwägungen zu einem alttestamentlichen Thema", *EvTh* 36 (1976), 450-472. For more literature, see Peels, *Vengeance*, 5-12.

<sup>13</sup> E. Zenger, *Ein Gott der Rache? Feindpsalmen verstehen*, Biblische Bücher Band 1 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> W. Dietrich and C. Link, *Die Dunklen Seiten Gottes. Band 1: Willkür und Gewalt, Band 2: Allmacht und Ohnmacht* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 2015<sup>6</sup>).

<sup>15</sup> B. Janowski, *Ein Gott, der straft und tötet? Zwölf Fragen zum Gottesbild des Alten Testaments* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 2013<sup>2</sup>).

Jeremias<sup>16</sup>, and Szabolcs-Ferencz Kató.<sup>17</sup> It is safe to say that there is enough scholarly material on the meaning and function of divine vengeance in the Old Testament. Can the same be said of the theme of vengeance in the New Testament?

In 1931, Floyd V. Filson made a contribution to the scholarly debate on Paul's theology of retribution.<sup>18</sup> His scopus is broad: how does Paul use the notion of recompense? The notion of retribution was necessary to Paul, according to Filson, because God is just and commands a just life.<sup>19</sup> God's grace gives the believer a responsibility to do justice in the world, in line with the just works of his Lord. Christians will be changed by God's grace to conceive this responsibility and life. Believers will receive a reward according to their 'life record': their place in the Kingdom of God will be meted out according to their works.<sup>20</sup>

An article of Swartzback in 1952 is an early explicit attempt to value the notion of divine vengeance against the maltreatment of it in theology.<sup>21</sup> His focus is on Old Testament theology, but at the end of his contribution he refers to the place of divine vengeance in the New Testament. He states that the vengeance of God is "a vital part of the divine personality".<sup>22</sup> Swartzback then proceeds to exhibit the theological relationship between the vengeance of God and other attributes and acts of God, such as God's love, justice, covenant, election, and eschatology.

Georges Didier wrote a study on the notion of retribution in Paul's letters in 1955.<sup>23</sup> Didier answers the question whether or not Paul uses the notions of reward and punishment as motifs for the good life and, if he does use these notions, to what extent. His analysis shows that Paul uses the motif of reward when he speaks about judgment. The importance of the notion of

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<sup>16</sup> J. Jeremias, "JHWH- ein Gott der Rache", in: C. Karrer-Grube (ed.), *Sprachen-Bilder-Klänge. Dimensionen der Theologie im Alten Testament und in seinem Umfeld*, Fs. R. Bartelmus (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2009), 89-104.

<sup>17</sup> S.F. Kató, "Rache als glühende Gerechtigkeit. Die Semantik der Wurzel נקם", *BN* 167 (2015), 113-129.

<sup>18</sup> F.V. Filson, *St. Paul's Theology of Recompense* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1931).

<sup>19</sup> Filson *Recompense*, 133.

<sup>20</sup> Filson, *Recompense*, 115.

<sup>21</sup> R.H. Swartzback, "A biblical study of the word 'vengeance'", *Interpretation* 6 (1952), 451-457.

<sup>22</sup> Swartzback, "Biblical Study", 453.

<sup>23</sup> G. Didier, *Désintéressement du Chrétien. La rétribution dans la Morale de Saint Paul* (Paris: Aubier, 1955).

reward in Paul's theology of judgment must not be exaggerated: in most cases Paul exhorts the Christian communities without any reference to reward.<sup>24</sup> Christians are not led by knowledge that a reward is given in the future, but they participate in the selfless love of Christ.<sup>25</sup>

In 1966, William Klassen published an article in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* on vengeance in the Book of Revelation.<sup>26</sup> Instead of considering divine vengeance in Revelation as a Jewish remnant, as for instance Eberhard Vischer claims,<sup>27</sup> Klassen opts for a hermeneutically sensitive and pacifistic reading of the vengeance texts of Revelation. The believers in Revelation are not victorious through violence, but "by refusing to love one's life so much that one resists martyrdom and through consistent patterning of one's life upon the Lamb's sacrifice."<sup>28</sup> Klassen states against critical Western readings of Revelation: "It is tempting for those who have never had to wrestle with major injustices to criticize these intense longings for justice as sub-Christian or a reversion to Judaism."<sup>29</sup>

Ernst Synofzik offers a form-critical investigation of Paul's theology of judgment and retribution in his study from 1977.<sup>30</sup> He distinguishes between pre-pauline traditions and Pauline redactions. On the basis of his investigation, Synofzik argues that Paul utilizes conflicting images of judgment in his writings, which shows that retribution is not an independent theme in Paul's thought. The images of divine retribution are pre-pauline traditions that Paul uses to ratify his rhetorical goal without any intent to let the images cohere.<sup>31</sup> The notion of divine vengeance can be used by Paul in his parenthesis, but it is "one possibility among many."<sup>32</sup>

Adela Yarbro Collins, in her article "Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation" from 1983, investigates the relationship between the notion of persecution and divine vengeance in the last book of the Bible.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Didier, *Désintéressement*, 221.

<sup>25</sup> Didier, *Désintéressement*, 228-233.

<sup>26</sup> W. Klassen, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John", *CBQ* 28 (1966), 300-311.

<sup>27</sup> E. Vischer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes. Eine jüdische Apokalypse in christlicher Bearbeitung*, TUGL 2.3 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1886).

<sup>28</sup> Klassen, "Vengeance", 306.

<sup>29</sup> Klassen, "Vengeance", 303.

<sup>30</sup> E. Synofzik, *Die Gerichts- und Vergeltungsaussagen bei Paulus. Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, GTA 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977).

<sup>31</sup> Synofzik, *Paulus*, 105.

<sup>32</sup> Synofzik, *Paulus*, 107: "eine Möglichkeit unter vielen."

<sup>33</sup> A. Yarbro Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation", in: D. Hellholm (ed.), *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 729-749.



Yarbro Collins views apocalyptic scenarios, in which scenes of divine vengeance are incorporated, through a socio-historical lens: they can be explained by “social settings of crisis or alienation.”<sup>34</sup> In the case of the Book of Revelation, she contends that “the eschatological woes and the destruction of the earth are portrayed as divine retribution for the persecution of the saints.”<sup>35</sup> These depictions have a clear function, namely “as an outlet for envy.”<sup>36</sup> Yarbro Collins elaborates this argument more extensively in her 1984 book *Crisis and Catharsis*. The Book of Revelation can be explained through a socio-historical lens of (perceived) persecution and it serves as a cathartic source of the vengeful feelings of the Christ-believers in Asia Minor.<sup>37</sup>

Joel Nobel Musvosvi wrote his PhD-dissertation on vengeance in Revelation.<sup>38</sup> His thoughts are fundamentally formed by George E. Mendenhall, who has argued that divine vengeance in the Old Testament must be considered a covenantal action.<sup>39</sup> Musvosvi thus states that vengeance in the Book of Revelation “has as its background the Old Testament covenant relationships”.<sup>40</sup> God, as the Suzerain, exacts vengeance on the enemies of his covenant people for their unjust actions of persecution. He stands up for his own name, which provides comfort for his people: “their covenant protector and Lord has not forgotten them.”<sup>41</sup> The notion of vengeance in the Book of Revelation, according to Musvosvi, thus serves to give hope and encouragement to the Christ-believers in Asia Minor.

Stephen Travis explores divine retribution in the New Testament in his 1986 book.<sup>42</sup> Travis argues that the judgment of God in the New Testament must not be understood “primarily in terms of retribution (...), but in

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<sup>34</sup> Collins, “Persecution”, 729.

<sup>35</sup> Collins, “Persecution”, 731.

<sup>36</sup> Collins, “Persecution”, 747;

<sup>37</sup> A. Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis. The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984).

<sup>38</sup> J.N. Musvosvi, *The Concept of Vengeance in the Book of Revelation in Its Old Testament and Near Eastern Context* (unpublished dissertation Andrews University, 1987).

<sup>39</sup> Mendenhall, “Vengeance”.

<sup>40</sup> Musvosvi, *Vengeance*, 277.

<sup>41</sup> Musvosvi, *Vengeance*, 280.

<sup>42</sup> S.H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God. Divine Retribution in the New Testament* (Basingstoke: MMS Publications, 1986). He has revised the book lightly in 2009 and has given it another title: *Christ and the Judgment of God. The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought* (Milton Keynes/Peabody: Paternoster Press/Hendrickson Publishers, 2009). I will refer to the 1986 edition, because the main theses of Travis did not change over the years.

terms of relationship or non-relationship to Christ.”<sup>43</sup> Christ is the “criterion of judgment”.<sup>44</sup> The New Testament does not use most of the Early Jewish terms for retribution or vengeance and images of judgment are not elaborated fully. Travis also underlines that Western theologians, in light of secularization, must deal with the notion of punishment in the Bible.<sup>45</sup>

The book *A Peacable Hope* from 2013 is a contribution to the debate on Biblical violence by the Anabaptist scholar David J. Neville.<sup>46</sup> Neville observes that divine vengeance is present in the New Testament, but he also states that some authors tend to “relativize or even eliminate divine vengeance”.<sup>47</sup> Neville opts for a “hermeneutic of *shalom*”: violent eschatological texts must be weighed in with Jesus’ theological message of *shalom* and they can also be contradicted by ancient and modern authors.<sup>48</sup> Neville also identifies some “treasure texts” that resonate within the hermeneutic of *shalom* and which form, together with the hermeneutic of *shalom*, “the normative midpoint of the biblical narrative as a whole.”<sup>49</sup>

The Old Testament scholar Walter Dietrich, who has published an article on divine vengeance in the Old Testament earlier, together with his colleague Christian Link, has provided observations on divine vengeance in the New Testament and also in systematic theology in the sixth edition from their book from 2015.<sup>50</sup> Although they focus on Old Testament texts, they sometimes underline the continuity of speech between Old and New Testament. They see for example a suffering community in both Psalm 58 and Revelation 6: communities who long for the future and request God’s justice in the world.<sup>51</sup> These communities receive comfort by the fact that God cares for them and that he will exact vengeance on their enemies.<sup>52</sup>

David Frankfurter has written an article in 2015 on the “vengeance fantasies of the New Testament”.<sup>53</sup> He investigates 1 John, 2 Thessalonians,

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<sup>43</sup> Travis, *Christ*, xi.

<sup>44</sup> Travis, *Christ*, 167-168.

<sup>45</sup> Travis, *Christ*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> D.J. Neville, *A Peacable Hope. Contesting Violent Eschatology in New Testament Narratives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Neville, *Peacable Hope*, 8.

<sup>48</sup> Neville, *Peacable Hope*, 253.

<sup>49</sup> Neville, *Peacable Hope*, 255.

<sup>50</sup> Dietrich and Link, *Dunklen Seiten*, 136-147.

<sup>51</sup> Dietrich and Link, *Dunklen Seiten*, 142.

<sup>52</sup> Dietrich and Link, *Dunklen Seiten*, 144.

<sup>53</sup> D. Frankfurter, “The Legacy of Sectarian Rage. Vengeance Fantasies in the New Testament”, in: D.A. Bernat and J. Klawans (eds.), *Religion and Violence. The Biblical Heritage, Recent Research in Biblical Studies 2* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2015), 114-128.

and Revelation and considers their description of “vengeance acts” as a display of sectarian rage towards outsiders.<sup>54</sup> These canonical texts then are used typologically by later sectarian movements to do three things: a description of violence against insiders, to guarantee God’s comfort, and to depict the ultimate triumph the believers receive from God. Frankfurter uncovers these “violent vengeance fantasies” within their graphic, sectarian, and apocalyptic context to show how these texts can be used as sources of violence in sectarian movements.<sup>55</sup>

The New Testament scholar Moisés Mayordomo has also contributed to the debate on divine retribution in the New Testament in 2019.<sup>56</sup> The goal of his article is “to shed some light on how this topic [of divine retribution, AvdO] is present in the New Testament and its cultural context.”<sup>57</sup> He considers reciprocity, the ancient system of giving, a fundamental category to understand retribution and vengeance, which he also shows in Greco-Roman and Early Jewish texts. Paul considers divine retribution the “necessary and ‘negative’ side of reciprocity between God and mankind”, while Luke-Acts shows that divine retribution becomes history.<sup>58</sup> Revelation is explained in line with Yarbro Collins: the motif of vengeance is used as catharsis “in order to maintain the non-violent ethos of Christ-believers in the churches addressed.”<sup>59</sup> Mayordomo pleads for the priority of forgiveness and for further research on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of these texts on violence.

The culture critic Christina von Braun has written a short contribution on vengeance in the Old and New Testament for the exhibition *Vengeance. History and Phantasy (Rache. Geschichte und Fantasie)* in the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt am Main (Germany).<sup>60</sup> She places vengeance in a context of justice and reciprocity. Vengeance in the Old Testament is a divine prerogative. She detects a development from the Old Testament concept of

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<sup>54</sup> Frankfurter, “Legacy”, 125.

<sup>55</sup> Frankfurter, “Legacy”, 124-128.

<sup>56</sup> M. Mayordomo, “Divine Retribution. Some Considerations on the New Testament and its Religious and Philosophical Contexts”, in; D. Hamidović, A. Thromas, and M. Silvestrini (eds.), *“Retribution” in Jewish and Christian Texts*, WUNT II/492 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 87-107.

<sup>57</sup> Mayordomo, “Divine Retribution”, 88.

<sup>58</sup> Mayordomo, “Divine Retribution”, 100-102.

<sup>59</sup> Mayordomo, “Divine Retribution”, 105.

<sup>60</sup> C. von Braun, “Rache und Gabe im Verhältnis von Judentum und Christentum”, in: M. Czollek, E. Riedel, and M. Wenzel (eds.), *Rache. Geschichte und Fantasie* (Frankfurt am Main: Hanser, 2022), 56-64.

vengeance to the New Testament: an intensification of divine vengeance through the concept of the hell and a personification of vengeance through the person of Satan. Her conclusion is that one cannot speak of God's gift of grace without vengeance: "one who fetches the gift from heaven will always find vengeance in one's backpack."<sup>61</sup>

There are several lemmas in theological dictionaries (*TWNT*, *EWNT*, *NIDNTTE*) that treat the notion of vengeance, especially the meaning of the verb ἐκδίδεω and its cognates ἔκδικος and ἐκδίκησις.<sup>62</sup> They note that ἐκδίδεω and its cognates have the meaning 'vengeance, to avenge', but also 'to punish, to discipline'. There is no word in Greek that is purely used for vengeance, each word or word-group has several other meanings and uses. Other dictionaries also contain lemmas on (divine) vengeance.<sup>63</sup> They provide an overview of (divine) vengeance with a history-of-religions-approach, Biblical-theological insights, and ethical considerations.

Previous research has brought us important insights into the mechanism of vengeance. Dictionaries have given us evidence that there is a wide array of words and word-groups that are used to describe the act of (divine) vengeance. An author such as Filson has noted that retribution and justice are connected with each other, while other authors (such as Swartzback and Musvosvi) have linked divine vengeance with the covenant. Mayordomo and Von Braun have drawn attention to the importance of reciprocity as a matrix for understanding divine retribution. Klassen, Yarbrow Collins, Musvosvi, Frankfurter, and Dietrich and Link have pointed out that the context of (perceived) persecution matters for understanding the use of divine vengeance as a motif in the Book of Revelation. Some authors (such as Didier and Synofzik) have shown that Paul uses the motif of divine vengeance in his exhortational material. The last important insight, provided by Klassen, Travis, Neville, Frankfurter, and Mayordomo, is that Western readers have to be aware of their own contextual reading of vengeance texts.

The need for an extensive exploration of divine vengeance in the New Testament, incorporating both exegesis and theology, becomes clear when we pay attention to the shortcomings of previous research. Several flaws can be

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<sup>61</sup> Von Braun, "Rache", 64: "Wer die Gabe von Himmel holt, findet immer die Rache in ihrem Gepäck."

<sup>62</sup> G. Schrenk, "ἐκδίδεω, ἔκδικος, ἐκδίκησις", *TWNT* II, 440-444; H. Goldstein, "ἐκδίκησις, ἐκδίδεω, ἔκδικος", *EWNT* I, 991-993; M. Silva, "δίκη", *NIDNTTE* I, 741-747.

<sup>63</sup> W.T. Pitard, "Vengeance", *ABD* 6, 786-787; F. Stolz, "Rache", *TRE* 28, 82-88; M. Ott, E. Zenger, and A. Bondolfi, "Rache", *LThK* 8, 790-792; B. Beinhauer-Köhler, E. Zenger, and S. Volkmann, "Rache", *RGG<sup>4</sup>* 7, 11-13.

detected. The studies by Neville and Frankfurter provide no clear definition of (divine) vengeance. A lot of writings have a limited scope, only focusing on one New Testament document or one aspect of (divine) vengeance. Other works are broad in their view of vengeance, also treating retribution and judgment, but this broad scopus does not help to clarify what (divine) vengeance actually entails and how it functions in New Testament documents. Research of Swartzback, Von Braun, and in the dictionaries exhibit a lack of exegetical research, not providing any exegetical evidence for their theological conclusions. The articles of Frankfurter and Mayordomo are valuable, but they are too brief to be labeled encompassing. Klassen and Neville impose their pacifistic hermeneutic upon the corpus of texts which they are investigating, which results in forced readings and, in the case of Neville, even critique on the authors of the New Testament documents. Authors such as Yarbro Collins, Musvosvi, Travis, and Neville can also be questioned on their use of methodology: their lenses of research are sometimes speculative and one-sided.

There is no study available which encompasses all New Testament vengeance texts, which provides an exegesis of all these texts, and which offers a theology of divine vengeance in the New Testament in all its variations and uses based on this exegesis. The issue of hermeneutical sensitivity must also come to the fore: how do modern (Western) scholars read and understand vengeance texts from a different culture and era?

#### 4. The Goal and Method of this Study

This study will provide an extensive analysis of the concept of divine vengeance in the New Testament. A twofold question needs to be answered in this regard: how do New Testament authors understand divine vengeance and how do they use it in their documents? To be able to answer this question, one has to investigate not only the New Testament texts, but also the matrices in which the New Testament writers live and write. Previous research and this Introduction have also shown the necessity of clarity about one's own view on (divine) vengeance, because it influences the way one evaluates (divine) vengeance in ancient texts such as the New Testament.

These observations also clarify the method of this study. In her book on the theme of vengeance in Attic tragedy, Bernadette Descharmes provides a useful overview on Greek terms which are used for vengeance.<sup>64</sup> She makes a distinction between five categories:

- **Give and take:** this category contains words like the legal δικ-root (δίκη, δίκαιος, αντίδικος, ἔνδικος, δικαστής, δικηφόρος, ἐκδικος, ἐκδικαστής, ἐκδίδειν), ποινή/ποίνιμος/ποινάτωρ, ἄποινα, τίνειν/τίσις and derivatives, δίδωμι and its derivatives, several composite words containing ἀντι, and words that could symbolize or have a subsidiary meaning of vengeance as γέρας, χάρις, ἀμοιβή, and ἀλλάτειν/ἀμείβειν. This category emphasizes the reciprocal aspect of vengeance and the restitution of guilt;
- **Honor and vengeance:** the most dominant term for vengeance is τιμωρία and its derivatives or coherent words τιμάορος/τιμωρός and τιμωρεῖν. Τιμωρία contains the elements of honor (τιμή) and the verb ‘arise’ (ὄρεσθαι). The term is not, as the first category, connected with restitution of guilt, but with the restoration of prestige and honor;
- **Protect and help:** words in this category do not necessarily have the primary meaning of vengeance, but could in a certain context be used for acts of vengeance as a way of protecting and helping. These words are ἀρήγειν/ἀρωγός/ἀρωγή, ἀμύνειν/ἀμύντωρ, and μελέτωρ/σωτήρ;
- **Damage and chastise:** this category of words focuses on the effect of vengeance. Words like ζημία/ζημιῶν and κολάζειν/κολάσις/κολαστής fall into this semantic field;
- **Prosecute and execute:** in a more legal context, words like πράττειν, πράκτωρ, πρᾶξις, and μετέρχεσθαι can be used to denote an act of vengeance.

Descharmes’ overview exhibits what we have already seen in the theological dictionaries: a pure semantic study of ἐκδίδεω and its cognates ἐκδικος and ἐκδίκησις does not provide a satisfactory answer to the twofold question of this study. The danger of a pure semantic approach to answer our main research question is that we make far-reaching conclusions about the

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<sup>64</sup> B. Descharmes, *Rächer und Gerächte. Konzeptionen, Praktiken und Loyalitäten der Rache im Spiegel der attischen Tragödie*, Freunde-Gönner-Getreue. Studien zur Semantik und Praxis der Freundschaft und Patronage 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 35-63.

concept of divine vengeance in the New Testament, with historical and theological dimensions, on the basis of words. Words do not contain concepts.<sup>65</sup>

This does not mean that we cannot be led by the words used to describe vengeance in the New Testament. This study will indeed focus on passages which contain specific vengeance vocabulary. As we will see, the New Testament uses ἐκδίδεω and its cognates ἐκδικος and ἐκδίκησις primarily as words for vengeance. There are several passages though which do not use specific vengeance vocabulary, but nevertheless depict scenes of vengeance. We can state that these passages exhibit scenes of vengeance, because they contain the pattern of aspects of vengeance which we will retrieve in the following chapters. This research is thus broader than a semantic research of vengeance, because these latter texts are also part of this investigation.

This research will focus textually both on passages which contain explicit vengeance vocabulary as well as texts which contain scenes of vengeance. This textual focus will be paired with an interest for cultural and religious contexts. The selected texts will be investigated within their historical context and the broader theological message of the author. The historical dimension also entails the hermeneutical awareness, which we have already noted. Before one can enter the terrain of the exegesis of the New Testament vengeance texts, one has to be conscious of modern questions and sensitivities with respect to the theme of divine vengeance. This research thus cannot be placed within one certain method of study: it will combine semantic research with anthropological, historical, theological, and hermeneutical studies.

## 5. Structure of this Study

Three parts will form the building blocks of the answer to the main research question. Chapters One and Two contain the examination of the socio-cultural and historical context of the New Testament. Chapter Three provides the hermeneutical considerations and questions relevant to the exegesis of the New Testament. Chapters Four to Six entail the exegetical-theological survey of the New Testament vengeance texts.

In *Chapter One* we will delve into the historical context of the Greek and Roman world. New Testament scholarship has benefited from

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<sup>65</sup> J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

incorporating classical studies on the society and economy of the Greek and Roman worlds.<sup>66</sup> New Testament authors lived and worked in specific historical and cultural contexts. The study of Greek and Roman texts and inscriptions provides a cultural and material matrix in which we can better understand the New Testament authors. We will discover that the cultural mechanisms of honor and reciprocity are vital in understanding vengeance in the world of Antiquity.

*Chapter Two* will focus on the Jewish understanding of (divine) vengeance by studying the Old Testament and Early Jewish literature. The Old Testament documents are mostly older than Greek and Roman texts and inscriptions, and thus it seems logical to examine the Old Testament documents before the Greco-Roman sources. Examining (divine) vengeance in the Old Testament and Early Jewish texts after Greek and Roman texts and inscriptions enables us to see the peculiarities of a Jewish(-Hellenistic) understanding of vengeance and also the interaction between Early Jewish sources and its Hellenistic and Roman environment. Several characteristics of the New Testament motif of divine vengeance can be found in these documents, such as the divine prerogative and the covenantal character of vengeance.

After investigating the historical context and before we study the New Testament texts, our own context must be clarified. *Chapter Three* first provides a historical survey of the development of vengeance throughout history, designating the main factors which have caused a change of vision concerning the use and legitimacy of vengeance. This historical survey culminates in several hermeneutical questions which are relevant for the interaction between the exegesis of the New Testament vengeance texts and modern hermeneutical sensitivities. The article of Diamond has already uncovered cultural differences and sensitivities towards vengeance in the modern Western world. This study will benefit from the incorporation of insights how a hermeneutical gap regarding vengeance has grown over time and which pressing issues must be addressed in the exegetical-theological investigation of the New Testament texts.

*Chapters Four to Six* explore the New Testament vengeance texts in respectively Luke-Acts,<sup>67</sup> the letters of Paul, and Hebrews and Revelation.

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<sup>66</sup> S.R. Huebner, *Papyri and the Social World of the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1.

<sup>67</sup> I will examine Luke-Acts and not the other Gospels in this study, because the author of Luke-Acts explicitly mentions vengeance several times in his work. Several pericopes in



Each chapter will place these texts into a broader matrix of divine retribution of the specific author. The vengeance texts, both those lacking and those containing vengeance vocabulary, will be examined. Theological-hermeneutical reflections will be added after every exegesis. At the end of each chapter, the fruits of the exegetical-theological investigation of the texts will be harvested and the hermeneutical issues raised in chapter three will be brought into dialogue with these results.

These chapters are the steps leading to the goal of this study: to answer the main research question. The *Conclusion* provides a summary of research results and the response to the twofold question of this study. The first element of the main research question is the question of the meaning of divine vengeance in the New Testament. This first element thus demands an encompassing definition. This definition will be given, together with an elaboration of the main characteristics of divine vengeance. Another section of the Conclusion will be the answer to the second part of the main research question: the use of divine vengeance in the New Testament writings. The hermeneutical harvest of the previous chapters will be explicated, as well as avenues for further research.

All these steps will result in the first exhaustive study of divine vengeance in the New Testament, thereby filling in the lacuna which has been described above.

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Luke-Acts can be found in other Gospels however, but these parallel texts do not alter the conclusions and do not warrant specific attention.

## Chapter 1

### Vengeance in its Greco-Roman Context

The German New Testament scholars Hans Conzelmann and Andreas Lindemann begin their chapter on the history of the New Testament with the following statement: “the knowledge of the life and thought of the time in which Jesus and ancient Christianity lived, is essential for the historical analysis and theological interpretation of the New Testament.”<sup>1</sup> It seems unnecessary to repeat such a truism, but nevertheless it is helpful to remember. Vengeance is not an abstract or supracultural phenomenon. It is embodied and understood in a specific cultural context. In the case of the New Testament documents, it is vital to take notice of the meaning and function of (divine) vengeance in Greek and Roman texts. Conzelmann and Lindemann exhort scholars to not only study literary texts, but also material artifacts such as papyri and inscriptions to get a grip of the New Testament context.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter attempts to reconstruct how vengeance operated in the specific context of the Greco-Roman world.<sup>3</sup> I will argue that to grasp the

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<sup>1</sup> H. Conzelmann and A. Lindemann, *Arbeitsbuch zum Neuen Testament*, UTB 52 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991<sup>10</sup>), 141.

<sup>2</sup> Conzelmann and Lindemann, *Arbeitsbuch*, 145-146.

<sup>3</sup> This chapter uses the term “Greco-Roman”. The risk of this identification is a monolithic approach to cross-cultural institutions: cultural mechanisms are present and identical in every context. J.K. Chance already pointed out this danger in his article on honor and shame (“Anthropology of Honor and Shame. Culture, Values, and Practice”, *Semeia* 68 (1994), 139-151). See also M. Herzfeld, “Honor and Shame. Problems in the Comparative Analysis of Moral Systems”, *Man* 15 (1980), 339-351. The Greco-Roman culture does not exist, because of the difference in origins (Greece and Italy), the diversity of religious and cultural movements, the pluriformity of people in different areas and classes etcetera (P.J. Achtemeier, J.B. Green and M. Meye Thompson (*Introducing the New Testament. Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 17-18) speak of many worlds surrounding the New Testament). Taking into account that the Greco-Roman culture does not exist, it is possible to detect similar cultural mechanisms and values in several contexts. Hence, the term “Greco-

meaning and function of vengeance two cultural values and principles are pivotal. The values of honor and dishonor firstly played a significant role in contemporary culture, because this value system defined culturally appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Secondly, reciprocity functions as a setting for the act of vengeance. The web of complicated and reciprocal relations and, more important, the injury of these relations formed the matrix for carrying out vengeance. An overall picture of vengeance is construed by fleshing out ancient honor and reciprocity, and connecting the two with vengeance.

The dynamics of the two values and the function and meaning of vengeance are examined in this chapter. The value of honor is firstly investigated in 1.1. The definition and terminology of honor can be found in 1.1.1, the characteristics of honor in 1.1.2 and a short conclusion in 1.1.3. The sections on reciprocity (1.2) and vengeance (1.3) are built on nearly the same structure: definition and terminology, characteristics and conclusion. The section on vengeance is also expanded with a survey of literature on vengeance in classical studies.

## 1.1 Honor in the Greco-Roman World

Honor was essential in Mediterranean culture. Individuals, groups, and societies were eager to show honorable behavior and receive honor, while they were careful to refrain from dishonorable conduct. The love of honor (φιλοτιμία) was an essential component in Greco-Roman life. Honor was a pivotal value and it pervaded the whole of Greco-Roman culture and the attention and concern of its inhabitants.<sup>4</sup>

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Roman” is used, taking into account the nuancing statements above. In the same manner, the term “Mediterranean” is employed interchangeably with “Greco-Roman”.

<sup>4</sup> E. Alexiou, *Ruhm und Ehre. Studien zu Begriffen, Werten und Motivierungen bei Isokrates*, Bibliothek der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaften II/93 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1995), 13-17; J. Georges and M.D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures. Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 17-18.

### 1.1.1 Honor: definition and terminology

Pitt-Rivers' definition of honor can be seen as a legitimate and accurate definition of honor: 'honour is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgment of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his right to pride.'<sup>5</sup> It brings together several important aspects of honor, such as the introspective and social aspect. The content of honor varies though per context and situation.<sup>6</sup>

Terms used in the discourse of honor and dishonor are glory (κλέος), honor (τιμή), reputation (δόξα, φήμη), praise (ἔπαινος) and its antonyms shame (αἰσχύνη), shaming (ῥύβρις), reproach (ᾄνειδος), scorn (καταφρόνησις), humility (αἰδώς), and slander (βλασφημία).<sup>7</sup> In Latin, the words *honor*, *gloria*, *fides*, *decus*, *laus*, *dignitas* and *fama* and its antonyms *pudor*, *infamia*, *contumeliai*, and *dedecus* are part of honor discourse.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.1.2 Characteristics of Greco-Roman honor

Honor is a broad category. The danger of "honor" as a research-object is that a monolithic understanding of honor is applied to every (Mediterranean) culture without discerning the local nuances. That being said, the notions of honor and dishonor contain several characteristics in every culture.

#### 1.1.2.1 Social Reality

Honor does not merely function as an introspective evaluation of one's self. This individualistic point of view on the self characterizes a Western, post-

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<sup>5</sup> J. Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem, or the Politics of Sex. Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology 19 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1. See also B.J. Malina, *The New Testament World. Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001<sup>3</sup>), 30.

<sup>6</sup> B.J. Malina and J.H. Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World", in: J.H. Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts. Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 25-66, there 27.

<sup>7</sup> D.A. DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity. Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 27-28.

<sup>8</sup> J.E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour. The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 272-276.

Enlightenment way of thinking, with its focus on individuality and reason. Personhood and honor in Antiquity are a social reality.<sup>9</sup> An individual can reckon oneself worthy, because one embodies certain aspects of behavior society deems honorable. At the same time the judgment of society and peer groups define one's worth in life. They are the Public Court of Reputation (PCR) from which a person derives its status and self-respect. The main PCR is the family, but other peer groups could also serve as virtual kin and PCR for individuals. An individual in Antiquity, in the words of Malina, possesses a dyadic or collective personality.<sup>10</sup> There is a constant dialectic between norms of society and reproduction in individual behavior.<sup>11</sup> Individuals ought to function as groups expect them to do and in exchange for socially favorable behavior one receives acknowledgment.<sup>12</sup>

Aristotle emphasizes the social dynamic of honor and personhood. He states that honor is dependent on the evaluation of others (*Eth. Nic.* I.5.4). Dio Chrysostom also confirms in his work that behavior and respect must be earned before a PCR (*Or.* XXXI.22; LXVI.18-19).<sup>13</sup>

In the Hellenistic period the social dimension of honor becomes even more apparent. An enormous rise in erecting honorific statues and inscriptions can be detected, mainly for political reasons.<sup>14</sup> These gestures of honor function as a recognition for someone's deeds for the city, but they also serve the purpose of elevating the honor of the individual honored. In an inscription in Peloponessos, Nikokreon narrates the honor given to him by the Cypriotes

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<sup>9</sup> See D.A. DeSilva, "Paul, Honor and Shame", in: J.P. Sampley (ed.), *Paul in the Greco-Roman World. A Handbook. Volume 2* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017<sup>2</sup>), 26-47, there 30: "while a person could have self-respect in terms of his or her awareness of being well aligned with the core values of the group, the affirmation of the group remained important." See also P.E. van 't Wout, "Visiblity and Social Evaluation in Athenian Litigation", in: R. Rosen and I.E. Sluiter (eds.), *Valuing Others in Classical Antiquity*, *Mnemosyne Supplements* 323 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 179-204.

<sup>10</sup> Malina, *New Testament World*, 62.

<sup>11</sup> Malina, *New Testament World*, 31.

<sup>12</sup> J. Blok, *Citizenship in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 199: "in a social context, *time* entailed recognition of one's social *persona*, shown by receiving what one might expect to be one's due."

<sup>13</sup> For the importance of honor and PCR, see Z.A. Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009), 591-611.

<sup>14</sup> See A. Heller and O.M. van Nijf (eds.), *The Politics of Honour in the Greek Cities of the Roman Empire*, *Brill Studies in Greek and Roman Epigraphy* 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2017); For an overview of inscriptions, see H. Kotsidu, *Time Kai Doxa. Ehrungen für hellenistische Herrscher im griechischen Mutterland und in Kleinasien unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der archäologischen Denkmäler* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000). The inscriptions in this section are mostly derived from this superb work.

(IG IV, 583). Ptolemy III Euergetes thanks the inhabitants of Xanthos for the honor given to him and his family (SEG XXXVI, 1218). Attalos I. Soter does not want to honor himself, but the people of Athens do (Polybius, *Hist.*, XVI.25.9-XVI.26.6).

Honor thus is a social phenomenon. There can be a variation however in socially desirable behavior. Norms and expectations can vary and sometimes clash between philosophical schools or cultural institutions. Societies understanding of behavior for instance can conflict with the norms of smaller groups. An individual can thus be torn between several different loyalties and courts of reputation which can be conflicting. Plato lets Socrates say that Crito does not have to bother about the opinion of the many, but he has to let his ears tend towards the wise few (Plato, *Crit.* 44C; 46C-47A).<sup>15</sup>

### 1.1.2.2 Source of Honor

Honor can be obtained in two ways: hereditary and through good deeds. People can inherit the honor of the family fortune and also the honor of the family name. This way of honoring “gradually intervened” in the social fabric of honoring, for instance in classical Athens.<sup>16</sup> This honor is ascribed or attributed by the PCR.<sup>17</sup> The kinship group possesses honor intrinsically and distributes it to the family members. Honor can also be distributed to an individual by people other than kin. Powerful or respected people can attribute honor to an individual without him or her having done any special deed. Ascribed or attributed honor is more passive: the person bestowed with honor has not done anything special to obtain honor.

Obtaining honor through good deeds, the second option, is a more active matter. Through demonstration of special abilities or by doing remarkable deeds one can be bestowed with honor, which is directed from others to a person. The elite possess honor already attributed to them, but they can

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<sup>15</sup> V.K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse. Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996); D.A. DeSilva, “Worthy of His Kingdom: Honor Discourse and Social Engineering in 1 Thessalonians”, *JSNT* 64 (1996), 49-79, there 49-58.

<sup>16</sup> Blok, *Citizenship*, 202.

<sup>17</sup> Crook (“Honor”) argues that the use of “attributed” instead of the use of “ascribed” (Malina, *New Testament World*, 32) does more justice to the PCR as sole arbiter of honorable behavior. In practice it does not make a big difference.

enhance their honor by military excellence or by public benefaction.<sup>18</sup> Aristotle states that honor is a token of a reputation of doing good (*Rhet.*, I.5.9; *Eth. Nic.* I.5.5).

The Hellenistic honorific inscriptions mentioned above are erected for virtuous behavior towards a city. Alexandros is honored in an inscription from 188/187 BCE for his zeal for the cause of Athens (IG<sup>2</sup>, 891). Philip receives honor from Peloponessos for defeating the Aetolians (IG IV<sup>1</sup>, 590b). The city of Priene honors Alexander for lowering taxes, thus saving women and children (IPriene, 108). An inscription in Bargyliae summarizes it concisely: good people are deemed worthy of honor (SIG<sup>1</sup>, 426).

### 1.1.2.3 Agonistic nature of honor

According to Malina, honor was considered a limited good.<sup>19</sup> Honor was not unlimited, but had to be distributed among individuals. Douglas Cairns disagrees: honor is not a limited good *per se*, it is limited by one's own limits.<sup>20</sup> Both agree however that the way to obtain honor is to withdraw it from someone else.<sup>21</sup> Every confrontation was a challenge to someone's honor.<sup>22</sup> The duel had the purpose of defining your boundaries and honorary position. This could get out of hand: the city of Kassandreia urges the *agon* (battle) for honor to stop to benefit the city (SEG XII, 373).

The *agon* contained several distinguished phases. First, there was the phase of the challenge. A challenge could be a physical, material or a verbal act and did not have to be negative at all. Most attention in scholarship is given to the challenge of equals, but this type of challenge did not always occur.<sup>23</sup> The second phase is that of perception. In this phase the challenge is

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<sup>18</sup> See B.W. Winter, "The Public Honouring of Christian Benefactors. Romans 13.3-4 and 1 Peter 2.14-15", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34 (1988), 87-103, especially 91-92.

<sup>19</sup> Malina, *New Testament World*, 81-107; See also DeSilva, "Paul", 30-32.

<sup>20</sup> D.L. Cairns, "Honour and Shame. Modern Controversies and Ancient Values", *Critical Quarterly* 53 (2011), 23-41.

<sup>21</sup> N.R.E. Fisher, *Hybris. A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece* (Warminster: Aris&Phillips, 1992), 25.

<sup>22</sup> C.A. Barton, *Roman Honor. The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 31-33. She calls Roman culture a "contest culture" (35).

<sup>23</sup> Crook ("Honor", 599-601) shows that a challenge could also come from individuals of unequal status in society.

communicated and understood as a positive or negative challenge. This challenge can be met with a suitable reaction, either positive or negative.<sup>24</sup> The third phase is the actual reaction, wherein the person challenged shows he is not weaker than the challenger.

A challenge had to be answered or else the person challenged was dishonored and ashamed. Affronting someone meant that the honor of the person challenged was in jeopardy before the PCR. If the person challenged neglected or forgot the challenge, the PCR could think that the challenge was legitimate and successful. The person challenged had to do something to return his honor and public recognition to the normal condition.<sup>25</sup>

#### 1.1.2.4 Gender diversity

In Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, honor roles were not similar for men and women. That does not mean that honor is exclusively found in the male section of society and shame is always female.<sup>26</sup> Honorable and dishonorable behavior yet required different sets of behavior for male and female individuals. In a predominantly male-orientated society, males had to be publicly honorable in their words and deeds. Masculinity was a matter of self-representation and something that had to be earned, or as Gleason puts it: “Manliness was not a birthright. It was something that had to be won.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, Attalos is honored in Pergamon for his manliness (IPergamon, 64). Externally, family honor was based on the honor of the *pater familias*.

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<sup>24</sup> Malina (*New Testament World*, 34) provides an useful figure to discern the types of challenges and responses.

<sup>25</sup> Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Malina (*New Testament World*, 49-51), together with Neyrey (Malina and Neyrey, “Honor and Shame”, 44), argues that this is the case. F.G. Downing (“‘Honor’ among Exegetes”, *CBQ* 61 (1999), 53-73), Chance (“Anthropology of Honor”, 141-144), L.J. Lawrence (*An Ethnography of the Gospel of Matthew. A Critical Assessment of the Use of the Honour and Shame Model in New Testament Studies*, WUNT II/165 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 260-294), and Crook (“Honor”, 604-611) have pointed out that this statement is a simplification of reality and is contradicted by the textual evidence.

<sup>27</sup> M.W. Gleason, *Making Men. Sophists and Self-Representation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 159. Cf. M. Mayordomo Marin, “Construction of Masculinity in Antiquity and Early Christianity”, *Lectio Difficilior* 2 (2006), 1-33; P.B. Smit, *Masculinity in the Bible. Survey, Models, and Perspectives*, Brill Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2017).



Women had to be more secluded and reserved, caring for their families.<sup>28</sup> Her body and words are not public property (Plutarch, *Conj. Praec.*, 9; 31-32). Thucydides writes that the most honorable women are the least talked about by men (*Hist.*, II.45.2). The honor of women was closely linked to their sexuality and also their visibility in public life.<sup>29</sup> Hellenistic and Roman sculptures showed this ideal of women: modest, showing decorum.<sup>30</sup> Yet, this expected pattern of behavior is sometimes contradicted. In classical Athens several offices were open for and also fulfilled by several women.<sup>31</sup> Texts such as Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Sophocles' *Antigone*, and Euripides' *Suppliant Women* testify of the active presence of women in the political sphere of Athens.<sup>32</sup> Hellenistic inscriptions also show the prominence of certain women on the political stage. Octavia is very much loved and honored in Athens (Plutarch, *Ant.*, LVII,1-2). In Delos, several honorific wreaths are given to women (IDelos 443 A b 29). An inscription is also dedicated to Laodike, the wife of Perseus (IG XI<sup>4</sup>, 1074). Roman society was more open to women taking important roles in houses and society than Greek society.<sup>33</sup> Gender roles thus mattered most of the times in regard to honor and dishonor, but sometimes gender was irrelevant for distributing honor.

#### 1.1.2.5 Embodiment

We have been investigating the relationship between behavior and honor thus far. There was also an inextricable link between honor and the body in Antiquity. Honor and physique are correlative.<sup>34</sup> The head and face of an individual “are particular loci of personal honor and respect.”<sup>35</sup> Honorable people were

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<sup>28</sup> J.B. Elhstain, *Public Man, Private Women. Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>29</sup> DeSilva, “Paul”, 32-33.

<sup>30</sup> R.M. Kousser, *Hellenistic and Roman Ideal Sculpture. The Allure of the Classical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 144.

<sup>31</sup> Blok, *Citizenship*, 248.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, 196.

<sup>33</sup> A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 8.

<sup>34</sup> Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem*, 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> Neyrey, “Despising the Shame of the Cross: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative”, in: V.H. Mathews and D.C. Benjamin (eds.), *Honor and Shame in the World of the Bible*, Semeia 68 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 113-137, there 116-117. See also

crowned with a crown or a laurel wreath to highlight their honorable deeds and/or status. These wreaths are mentioned frequently in Hellenistic inscriptions as a type of honor given (IG XI<sup>4</sup>, 566; IDelos 443 A b 29; SEG XXXVI, 1218). Blushing was a sign of shame: it was a penalty in itself (Cicero, *Rep.*, IV.6.6).<sup>36</sup> A slap in the face was seen as a humiliating act. The sound and strength of your voice showed that someone was a strong and thus a honorable individual (Juvenal, *Sat.*, VI.223).

The physical appearance of an individual also signified one's honorable stature (Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.*, I.12.2).<sup>37</sup> An impressive physique led to marveling reactions and thus the allotment of honor. The statue of the Stephanos Athlete showed the most honorable physique for men: slender and softly muscular.<sup>38</sup> The Big and Small Herculaneum Women were examples of idealized femininity: "heavily draped, constrained in their movements by enveloping mantles, but at the same time graceful, elegant, and poised."<sup>39</sup>

These statues also show that clothing confirmed the honorable or dishonorable status of an individual. Clothes covered the dishonorable parts of the body, but also displayed the wealth of an individual. Different colors, like purple, highlighted the high value of the clothing (Suetonius, *Claud.*, 17; Polybius, *Hist.*, VI.53).<sup>40</sup> As the modern proverb says: clothes make the man (and woman).<sup>41</sup>

Bodily postures also underlined someone's honorable or dishonorable position in society. Kings were seated higher than their inferiors. The official and banquet seating was also vital for showing your honorable status. Greco-Roman art depicts the high-status-chair (*sella curulis*, *subsellium*, *bisellium*).<sup>42</sup> To bow before someone was a sign of subjection and humiliation and

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Barton, *Roman Honor*, 7: "the body was the axis of the balancing systems that invested every aspect of Roman emotional life."

<sup>36</sup> Barton, *Roman Honor*, 18. Blushing could however be positively and negatively, see Barton, *Roman Honor*, 223-232.

<sup>37</sup> Mayordomo Marin, "Masculinity", 5-6.

<sup>38</sup> Kousser, *Ideal Sculpture*, 146.

<sup>39</sup> Kousser, *Ideal Sculpture*, 142.

<sup>40</sup> J.H. Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi. Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum*, SNTSS 132 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 12-19.

<sup>41</sup> L. Hackworth Petersen, "'Clothes Make the Man'. Dressing the Roman Freedman Body", in: T. Fögen and M.M. Lee (eds.), *Bodies and Boundaries in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 181-214. See also A.M. Baertschi and T. Fögen, "Schönheitsbilder und Geschlechterrollen im antiken Rom. Zur Bedeutung von Kosmetik, Frisuren, Kleidung und Schmuck", *Forum Classicum* 48 (2005), 213-226.

<sup>42</sup> G. Davies, "On being seated. Gender and Body Language in Hellenistic and Roman Art", in: D.L. Cairns (ed.), *Body Language in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2005), 215-238.

thus had to be avoided (Herodotus, *Hist.* VII.136).<sup>43</sup> Only the barbarians would fall down on their knees voluntarily to honor someone without expecting something (Isocrates, *Paneg.*, 151).<sup>44</sup>

#### 1.1.2.6 Religious honoring

There are some institutions in life which people have to pay a lifetime amount of honor to. In Greco-Roman thought, these institutes are your parents and the gods. The honor that an individual gave to the gods was not similar in character though. The gods were not named ‘father’ and the believers were not called ‘children’, as is usual in the Christian tradition. The gods wanted to be honored and respected.<sup>45</sup> The relationship of honor between men and gods can be compared to the bond between the king and his subjects.<sup>46</sup> The gods have more honor and might than any individual can ever have (Homer, *Il.*, 498). The gods are in themselves worthy to be praised (Plutarch, *Vit. Per.*, VIII.6).<sup>47</sup>

The overwhelming power of the gods could also be beneficial for the subjects. As Mikalson states: “the Greeks honored their gods because these gods had the power to help them and did help them in matters the Greeks thought lay beyond their control.”<sup>48</sup> The gods have given so much in this world that they deserve to be honored in an appropriate way (Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.*, IX.2.8; Seneca, *Ben.*, II.29.6). Hesiod urges to do one’s task of worshipping the gods to let them be favorable to an individual, so that they give a person their blessings in life (Hesiod, *Works*, 335-341). An individual could

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<sup>43</sup> See P. Ruch, *Ehre und Rache. Eine Gefühlsgeschichte des antiken Rechts* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2017), 136-148.

<sup>44</sup> The practice of bowing down to obtain certain favors or goods is described by Aristotle in his *Ethica Nicomachea*, VIII.8.2.

<sup>45</sup> J.D. Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010<sup>2</sup>), 21.

<sup>46</sup> Mikalson, *Greek Religion*, 21.

<sup>47</sup> F.T. van Straten, “Gifts for the Gods”, in: H.S. Versnel (ed.), *Faith, Hope, and Worship. Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World*, Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 65-151. See also the contribution of H.W. Pleket in the same book (152-192); A.W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility. A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 131-138; J.D. Mikalson, *New Aspects of Religion in Ancient Athens. Honors, Authorities, Esthetics, and Society*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 183 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 56-83.

<sup>48</sup> Mikalson, *Religion*, 21.

be blessed when he is giving the right amount of honor to the gods (Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.*, IV.3.10).<sup>49</sup>

Humans could also become like gods. The first divine ruler cults were local and honored kings and heroes because of their victories and heroic deeds.<sup>50</sup> They did not replace the traditional gods, but the human gods received a place inside the divine circle. Humans could not randomly be honored as gods, as was the case with Alexander the Great (*FrGH*, 124f14; 566f155). Individuals who were named gods were given the same amount of honor: emperor Augustus is the most famous example of this convention.<sup>51</sup>

### 1.1.3 Conclusion

Honor permeated Greco-Roman culture and therefore can be considered a pivotal value in society.<sup>52</sup> What we have found in this paragraph affirms this conclusion. Honor was an important feature in daily life, especially in more elite circles. The consideration of worth in one's own eyes and in the eyes of the PCR was a recurring matter in the lives of individuals, because of the frequent challenges by people who want to obtain (a piece of) one's honor. Honor extended across many life domains, such as the verbal capabilities and the physical appearance. It is therefore justified to designate honor as a weighty cultural value, not a static matter but a dynamic mechanism. Combining the notable position of honor in classical society and the dynamic character of honor, one of the cultural matrices of vengeance has been given. Another cultural characteristic is also important to understand the mechanism of vengeance: reciprocity.

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<sup>49</sup> See H.S. Versnel, "Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer", in: idem (ed.), *Faith, Hope, and Worship*, 1-64.

<sup>50</sup> J.D. Mikalson, "Greek Religion. Continuity and Change in the Hellenistic Period", in: G.R. Bugh (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 208-222, there 214-215.

<sup>51</sup> Mikalson, "Greek Religion", 208-222.

<sup>52</sup> Malina and Neyrey ("Honor and Shame") state that honor and shame are the pivotal values. But, as Downing ("Honor") rightly points out, a culture cannot be constricted to one particular value and in Greco-Roman society therefore this was not the case. Hence, honor and dishonor are pivotal values, but one of many.

## 1.2 Reciprocity in the Greco-Roman World

In the secondary literature, reciprocity has sometimes been described as the social cohesive in the fabric of Greco-Roman society.<sup>53</sup> This stance is derived from the work of Seneca on reciprocity, where he states that the practice of gift and giving is the most important bond of society (*maxime humanam societatem*) (*Ben.*, I.4.2). The exchange of goods and services in relation-type bonds provided the nexus between the different layers in society.

### 1.2.1 Reciprocity: definition and terminology

The concept of reciprocity is broad and covers a lot of research terrains: from economic commerce to familial exchange.<sup>54</sup> The broadness of the concept has led to criticism: the notion of reciprocity is too vague and general to be applicable.<sup>55</sup> The concept can however be justifiably used for analytical purposes.<sup>56</sup> The definition of reciprocity will be in line with the definition given by Seaford and Van Wees: reciprocity is the principle and practice of relational, voluntary requital of benefits (positive) or harm (negative) (cf. Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.*, V.5.6-7).<sup>57</sup>

There are a lot of terms used in the context of reciprocal relationships. The terms most found in these contexts are from the δῶρ-root, associated and

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<sup>53</sup> J.A. Whitlark, *Enabling Fidelity to God. Perseverance in Hebrews in Light of the Reciprocity Systems of the Ancient Mediterranean World*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2008), 1; J.M.G. Barclay, *Paul & The Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 24.

<sup>54</sup> D.E. Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy. A Socio-Theological Approach*, LNTS 494 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); T.R. Blanton, "The Benefactor's Account-book. The Rhetoric of Gift Reciprocation according to Seneca and Paul", *NTS* 59 (2013), 396-414; Idem, *The Spiritual Economy. Gift Exchange in the Letters of Paul of Tarsus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

<sup>55</sup> G. MacCormack, "Reciprocity", *Man. New Series* 11 (1976), 89-103.

<sup>56</sup> T.A. van Berkel (*The Economics of Friendship. Changing conceptions of reciprocity in Classical Athens* (unpublished dissertation University of Leiden, 2012), 40-44) shows that reciprocity is more an etic than an emic category: Greeks recognized and talked about the concept of reciprocity, but they did not denominate it with a single term.

<sup>57</sup> R. Seaford, "Introduction", in: C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite and R. Seaford (eds.), *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1; H. van Wees, "The Law of Gratitude. Reciprocity in Anthropological Theory", in: Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford, *Reciprocity*, 13-49, there 20.

intertwined with the *χαρ*-root.<sup>58</sup> Words as ‘to give’ (δίδωμι), ‘to return’ (ἀποδίδωμι), receiving (λαμβάνω), ‘grace’ (χάρις), and ‘worth’ (ἄξια) and several compounds with these words can be found in the vocabulary of reciprocity. In Latin, terms as *fides*, *beneficia*, *debeo*, *dignus*, and *obligare* etcetera are present to describe reciprocal exchange. Latin does not have a central word as the Greek for gifts. Words as *donum*, *beneficium*, and *donatio* are used, while *gratia* is frequently employed to express gratitude.<sup>59</sup>

### 1.2.2 Characteristics of Greco-Roman reciprocity

It is difficult to dissect reciprocity, because of its broadness and local nuances. Yet, some main characteristics can be seen in most cases and thus can be discerned.<sup>60</sup>

#### 1.2.2.1 Friendship

Friendship (φιλία) is a key element in reciprocity.<sup>61</sup> Some kind of affection must exist to maintain a reciprocal relationship. Greco-Roman friendship and its reciprocity did not demand a symmetrical relationship: a difference in social and economical position could exist between the two partners. Symmetrical reciprocal relationships always existed, but can especially be found in the early Greek texts.<sup>62</sup> In his *Odyssey*, Homer writes about the equal gift-giving relationship of Telemachus and Athena (*Od.* I.311-313) and between Odysseus and Laertes (*Od.*, XXIV.313-314).

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<sup>58</sup> Barclay, *Paul*, 26.

<sup>59</sup> Barclay, *Paul*, 581. See also C. Moussy, *Gratia et sa famille*, Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de l’Université de Clermont-Ferrand II/25 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966) for the study of *gratia* in the context of Roman reciprocity.

<sup>60</sup> For a cross-cultural model of gift, see G. Stansell, “Gifts, Tributes, and Offerings”, in: W. Stegemann, B.J. Malina and G. Theissen (eds.), *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 352-353.

<sup>61</sup> There is a discussion within classical studies which relationships fall under φιλία. Konstan considers the term to indicate the “mutual love between two people who are not kin” (*In The Orbit of Love. Affection in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 33). He thus understands φιλία to coincide with our modern understanding of friendship. Van Berkel disagrees with him: φιλία denotes a wide association of relationships with people who are kin and who are not kin (*Economics*, 15-20).

<sup>62</sup> Konstan, *Orbit*, 289-290.

Aristotle considers reciprocity as a maintaining bond, not on the basis of equality but on the basis of proportion (*Eth. Nic.*, V.5.6). The meaning of proportion must be understood in the context of Aristotle's peculiar discussion on friendship in book VIII of his *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>63</sup> He distinguishes between Utility Friendships and Virtue Friendships (*Eth. Nic.* VIII.3.1-9). Utility Friendships are mutual relationships with two distinctive features: a friend needs something and the friend has goodwill for the other friend (*Eth. Nic.* VIII.3.1-2).<sup>64</sup> For Aristotle, this relationship is deficient: "these friendships are based on an accident, since the friend is not loved (φιλεῖται) for being what he is, but as affording some benefit or pleasure as the case may be" (*Eth. Nic.*, VIII.3.2).<sup>65</sup> These friendships are quickly to dissolve, yet mutual in benefit. Virtue Friendships are permanent friendships between two virtuous friends who love each other in goodness and grant the other friend virtue and goodness (*Eth. Nic.* VIII.3.6). Both types of friendship can be found in reciprocity, although Aristotle favors Virtue Friendships.

Aristotle is not the only one who considers reciprocity as the framework in which friendship is shaped. Hellenistic inscriptions also emphasize friendship as an important aspect of reciprocity. An anonymous funerary epigram states that the honorand was favored (χάριν), because he was a best friend (βέλτιστος φίλος) of all.<sup>66</sup> Cicero also states that through reciprocal exchange some kind of affection exists (*Off.*, I.56). Stoic philosophers note that friendship is important in reciprocity. Seneca, in his famous work on reciprocity, notes that reciprocity shapes a mutual friendship (*amicitia*) (*Ben.*, II.18.5). A reciprocal relationship is based on the enduring loyalty (*fides*) of both parties (*Ben.*, III.14.2). There is a gradation in friendship however. Seneca shows the practice of Gaius Gracchus and Livius Drusus in distinguishing *amicos primos* (intimate friends), *secundos* (lesser friends), and *numquam veros* (poor plebs) (*Ben.*, VI.34.2).<sup>67</sup> Epictetus emphasizes loyalty

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<sup>63</sup> D. Konstan, "Reciprocity and Friendship", in: Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford, *Reciprocity*, 279-302.

<sup>64</sup> Van Berkel, *Economics*, 152.

<sup>65</sup> κατὰ συμβεβηκός τε δὴ αἱ φιλίαι αὐταὶ εἰσιν· οὐ γὰρ ἢ ἐστὶν οἷόσπερ ἐστὶν ὁ φιλούμενος, ταύτη φιλεῖται, ἀλλ' ἢ πορίζουσιν οἱ μὲν ἀγαθόν τι οἱ δ' ἡδονήν. Translation of Loeb.

<sup>66</sup> W. Peek, "Grabepigramm aus Aegypten", *ZPE* 21 (1976), 133-134.

<sup>67</sup> S. Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor. Reciprocity, Strategy and Theological Reflection in Paul's Collection*, WUNT II/124 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 29-30. This focus on distinguishing the types of friendship characterizes the Hellenistic period and beyond. It became important in reciprocal relationships to discern the real friends from flatterers, who wanted

and honor in maintaining a relationship of reciprocal friendship (*Disc.*, II.22.30).

Reciprocity thus creates and structures a relational bond: it connected people in a (sort of) relationship of gift and giving.<sup>68</sup> Reciprocity in its nature is non-commercial, yet commercial exchange can sometimes be reciprocal. Reciprocal friendships were not legislated, for legislation would destroy the internal dynamic of reciprocity.<sup>69</sup> Reciprocity without legislation would be flexible to the nature and needs of both parties.<sup>70</sup>

### 1.2.2.2 Χάρις

The central term in Greek reciprocity is χάρις (grace).<sup>71</sup> In older and poetic Greek, the term was used to highlight the quality of the object of favor which will further awake favors.

Χάρις could also highlight the attitude of the giver or the favorable gift he or she has given. Χάρις is done out of love for the object of the gift (Plato, *Phaed.*, 115b) and is connected with someone's inner world (Demos-thenes, LVII.63). A life and heart of benevolence is expressed in the giving of gifts which are χάρις.

The third use of the word χάρις is as an expression of gratitude. Kindness begets kindness (Sophocles, *Aj.*, 522). Someone saved could thank his savior for his χάρις (Plutarch, *Publ.*, XVII.4). The meaning of χάρις as gratitude or thanksgiving became dominant in the Hellenistic Period.<sup>72</sup> A thankful person was eager to repay his or her gratitude to the benefactor. The

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to gain materially without returning the favor. See Konstan, "Reciprocity", 289; idem, "Friendship, Flattery and Frankness", in: J.T. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Friendship, Flattery and Frankness of Speech. Studies on Friendship in the New Testament World* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 7-20.

<sup>68</sup> Whitlark, *Fidelity*, 20; Van Berkel, *Economics*, 16. See also E. Dickey, "Literal and Extended Use of Kinship Terms in Documentary Papyri", *Mnemosyne* 57 (2004), 131-176.

<sup>69</sup> Crook (*Reconceptualising Conversion. Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, BZNV 130 (New York: De Gruyter, 2004), 229) cites some examples, but emphasizes that "the loyalty of freedperson to patron was legislated far less than it was simply expected (and received)."

<sup>70</sup> A. Drummand, "Early Roman *Cientes*", in: A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society*, Leicester-Nottingham Studies in Ancient Society Volume 1 (London: Routledge, 1989), 89-115, especially 101.

<sup>71</sup> Greeks could use other terms to describe the gift, as Barclay (*Paul*, 576) justly underlines.

<sup>72</sup> C. Spicq, "χάρις, *charis*", in: idem, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament. Volume III* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 503.



Hellenistic dedicatory inscriptions testify of this. King Kotys of Thracia is honored by the Athenians in gratitude for his benefactions (IG II<sup>2</sup>, 3443). The city of Aigina honors Attalos I/II for maintaining justice in the city (IG IV<sup>1</sup>, 1). The Roman benefactors of Gytheion, Numerius, and Marcus Cloatius showed their favor by releasing the city from its repayment of two loans (SIG<sup>3</sup>, 748).<sup>73</sup>

Χάρις is used in a specific way. Van Berkel argues that χάρις operates in a functional unity: it denotes a successful interaction, it is seen from the participant's focalization of events, and it approaches situations as an ongoing process.<sup>74</sup> A healthy reciprocal relationship is characterized as χάρις: there is a constant and satisfactory exchange of gifts from one to another and vice versa. The two partners enter this relationship with the expectation that the friendship will hold. Χάρις denotes that this relationship is still going on, and that the gifts and the relationship itself is answering the needs and standards of the partners. That explains the double meaning of χάρις: the relationship is healthy, the gifts are reciprocated sufficiently, and the role of giver and receiver shifts from time to time.<sup>75</sup>

### 1.2.2.3 *The gift*

The anthropologist Marcel Mauss was the first one to publish a thorough study on the meaning and function of the gift.<sup>76</sup> He identified the gift as broader than objects exchanged from one person to another. A large array of favors, objects, and services could be transferred to another individual.<sup>77</sup> A gift did not have to be material in its nature, but it could also be more symbolic in the sense of honor and prestige. The symbolic gifts are given more widely in unequal reciprocal relationships to denote the difference in social and economical power.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> J.R. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace in Its Graeco-Roman Context*, WUNT II/172 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 47.

<sup>74</sup> Van Berkel, *Economics*, 67.

<sup>75</sup> Van Berkel, *Economics*, 75.

<sup>76</sup> M. Mauss, "Essai sur le Don. Forms et Raison de l'Échange dans les sociétés Archaiques", in: idem, *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), 145-279. The version used in English is the translation of Ian Cunnison with an Introduction by E.E. Evans-Pritchard (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974).

<sup>77</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, 17-45.

<sup>78</sup> Barclay, *Paul*, 63-64.

The conviction in Greco-Roman reciprocity was that one must enjoy giving gifts (Seneca, *Ben.*, I.6.1). One shows the worthy disposition of goodness and other-centeredness (Seneca, *Ben.*, I.1.10; I.2.2). At the same time, one would have experienced collective pressure to give. It was the only way to receive material goods or symbolic glorification. Kotsidu shows that the Hellenistic dedicatory inscriptions could be erected as a symbol of real gratitude, but they could also be a sign of political computability to maintain one's status or retain protection.<sup>79</sup>

The ideal of giving gifts is that one gives indiscriminately. Seneca stresses in his *De Beneficiis* that ideally one must not look at the worth of the receiver (I.1.2; cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* II.7.2).<sup>80</sup> The reality was that one had to investigate whether the receiver was honorable enough to receive your gift. Seneca himself states that worthiness is not a senseless category (*Ben.*, I.15.3). Someone who is not appreciated by others most likely turns out to be a bad person to be in a relationship with (I.15.6; cf. Hesiod, *Works*, 355-360). Not giving discriminately could lead to dishonor on the part of the giver. Humiliation was a nightmare for many givers.

The goal of benefaction is ideally to enrich the other individual, but in reality to secure or even enhance one's life, status, or wealth. A network of bonds of loyalty (*πίστις* or *fides*) was vital. A benefactor has to be loyal and trustworthy in the relationship, and so does the beneficiary.<sup>81</sup> Beneficiaries (and benefactors also) had to be cautious to not entangle loyalties or let loyalties conflict with each other. Greco-Roman individuals had several patrons and/or beneficiaries and they had to make sure these bonds did not result into diverging paths of behavior. There are some examples of conflicting loyalties in Greco-Roman literature and inscriptions.<sup>82</sup>

A central figure in the world of Greco-Roman reciprocity was the broker or mediator. A patron could give access to another patron who possessed the benefit or favor the asking party needs. He communicates and bridges

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<sup>79</sup> Kotsidu, *Time*, 593.

<sup>80</sup> Seneca himself could ideally apply this principle in practice, because he was influential and wealthy. His work *De Beneficiis* was also aimed at influential Romans and on many occasions in *De Beneficiis* the high-end status of Seneca and the readers shines through. See M.T. Griffin, "De Beneficiis and Roman Society", *JRS* 93 (2003), 92-113. The pressing question is whether ordinary Romans could give indiscriminately.

<sup>81</sup> DeSilva, *Honor*, 116-117; Whitlark, *Fidelity*, 33-35.

<sup>82</sup> R.P. Saller, "Patronage and Friendship in Imperial Rome. Drawing a Distinction", in: Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage*, 53-55; Whitlark, *Fidelity*, 37.

gaps between individuals and groups.<sup>83</sup> Pliny asks Trajan for a senatorial position for his friend Voconius Romanus (*Ep.*, X.4), while he was also a broker in the case of Neratius Marcellus, Caesennius Silvanus, and Suetonius Tranquillus (*Ep.*, III.8). Cicero wrote a whole book full of recommendation letters as a broker (*Fam.*, XIII.1-79).<sup>84</sup>

A specific form of civic benefaction was euergetism.<sup>85</sup> A certain amount of wealthy citizens would carry out different projects in the city as a gift, such as building bridges and buildings, the provision of soldiers and armor etcetera. In exchange, these citizens would receive gifts such as honorable offices, public announcements and archeologically the most interesting: dedicatory inscriptions. There was a certain amount of pressure on wealthy families to provide these services to their cities to obtain honor and influence: they had to show that they were worthy of honor.<sup>86</sup> In Roman times, patronage was also common in different cities.<sup>87</sup> Patrons would provide several services to cities or individuals ('clients') in exchange for honor or a good or service. The emperor was the great patron, but senatorial families and other influential and wealthy individuals could serve as a patron.

#### 1.2.2.4 Returning the Gift

In Western philosophy, the notion of the pure gift began to arise in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant reasons that being beneficent is a duty, and the act of beneficence has to be without expectation of return.<sup>88</sup> The French philosopher Jacques Derrida even makes the non-

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<sup>83</sup> J. Boissevain, *Friends of Friends. Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), 148.

<sup>84</sup> A. Wallace-Hadrill, "Patronage in Roman Society. From Republic to Empire", in: idem, *Patronage*, 77.

<sup>85</sup> See for an extensive treatment P. Veyne, *Le Pain et Le Cirque. Sociologie Historique d'un Pluralisme Politique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976). Also B.W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City. Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, First Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>86</sup> Barclay, *Paul*, 33.

<sup>87</sup> A broad discussion has been carried out on the definition of patronage. Patronage is not a monolithic category, but has several nuances and overlaps several areas of benefaction. See for an overview and nuanced vision on the discussion C. Eilers, *Roman Patrons of Greek Cities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); J. Marshall, *Jesus, Patrons, and Benefactors. Roman Palestine and the Gospel of Luke*, WUNT II/259 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

<sup>88</sup> I. Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten. Der Streit der Fakultäten*, Immanuel Kant Werke Band VII (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1922), 266: "Wohltätig, d.i. anderen Menschen in Nöten zu ihrer

circularity of the gift its main characteristic<sup>89</sup> Any return will destroy the gift and thus gift-giving is virtually impossible.<sup>90</sup>

This definition of the gift, however, is a modern construction.<sup>91</sup> In a reciprocal relationship, the return of the gift is not understood in the sense of an obligation or an enforced return. As Van Berkel explains, the return of the gift has to be appreciated as a “mutual conferring of favors, manifestations of gracefulness and expressions of gratification.”<sup>92</sup> There is no healthy reciprocal relationship centered around χάρις when a gift is given conditionally (cf. Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.*, VIII.13.4). When more economical terms come into play, the question can then arise whether a gift is really χάρις or not.

The norm of reciprocity was that a gift or favor begets another gift or favor (Sophocles, *Aj.*, 522). Sometimes, the obligation of returning gifts is described in terms of a debt settled, as an inscription in Ios demonstrates (IG XII Suppl., 168). In a healthy reciprocal relationship the lines between giver and receiver, gift and return ideally tend to blur over time: a trajectory of giving and receiving has been passed a numerous amount of times that the distinction between giver and receiver vanishes ideally.<sup>93</sup>

Receiving a gift or favor generates gratefulness in the heart of the receiver (Seneca, *Ben.*, IV.21.1; cf. *Ep.*, LXXXI.30). Cicero even calls it imperative to prove one’s gratitude (*Off.*, I.47). This joy on the side of the receiver ideally was the goal of the giver of the gift. This gratitude reveals a component of itself: it contains the urge and benevolence to repay (χάριτι ἀποδοῦναι or ἀντιδιδόναι).<sup>94</sup> Several inscriptions contain a manifesto clause in which people are encouraged to give as grateful imitators (SEG XXIV,

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Glückseligkeit, ohne dafür etwas zu hoffen, nach seinem Vermögen beförderlich zu sein, ist jedes Menschen Pflicht.”

<sup>89</sup> J. Derrida, *Donner le temps. Tome 1: La Fausse Monnaie* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1991), 18-19: “S’il y a don, le *donné* du don (...) ne doit pas revenir au donnant (...). Il ne doit pas circuler, il ne doit pas s’échanger, il ne doit en tout cas pas être épuisé, en tant que don, par le procès de l’échange, par le mouvement de la circulation du cercle dans la forme du retour au point de départ. Si la figure du cercle est essentielle à l’économique, le don doit rester *anéconomique*.” Italics by Derrida.

<sup>90</sup> Derrida, *Donner*, 18-19.

<sup>91</sup> See the discussion of B. Wagner-Hasel, “Gift-Exchange. Modern Theories and Ancient Attitudes”, in: S. Deger-Jalkotzy and I. Lemos (eds.), *Ancient Greece. From the Mycenaean Palaces to the Age of Homer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 257-269.

<sup>92</sup> Van Berkel, *Economics*, 90.

<sup>93</sup> Van Berkel, *Economics*, 75.

<sup>94</sup> Whitlark (*Fidelity*, 25) calls it “indebted gratitude”.

1100; IG XII<sup>9</sup>, 899).<sup>95</sup> As Seneca argues, gratitude is not yet the full reward (*Ben.*, II.33.3).

The gift or favor returned has to be related to the value of the gift given. The return ideally is equally valuable or, better, more valuable than the gift given. Inscriptions and statues are considered sufficient returns. Thus, the Dionysiac cowherds of Pergamon thank Soter for his leadership over the cult of Dionysios Kathegymon (IPergamon, 485). The people of the Thyateira area honor Gaius Julius Xenon for his gift of heroic powers (TAM V, 1098). The farmers of Psenamosis thank Paris for the gift of land to build a gymnasium and οἶκος (IProse I, 40).<sup>96</sup>

The return is also an act of χάρις, and thus invites the initial giver to repay his gratitude in another gift. A reciprocal relationship then is born, based on circularity in χάρις. In Greco-Roman literature, the image of the dance of the Three Graces is used to show the mechanism of reciprocity. The Three Graces cling their hands together and dance in a circle, thus pointing towards the relational and circular character of reciprocity (Seneca, *Ben.*, I.3.2-5; Horace, *Od.*, III.21). Gifts and returns should be in balance, but in the course of the relationship there is no such thing as a balance sheet where the value of gifts on both sides are counted on (cf. Seneca, *Ben.*, III.9.3).

The delicate question is when to return the gift in χάρις. A quick return could for the initial giver be a sign of ingratitude, a signal that the return was an apparent attempt to get rid of the responsibility of repayment. Waiting too long could be perceived as if the receiver forgot the gift and thus showed ingratitude. The right moment to reciprocate is a case of groping, fumbling, and sensing the right time to return the gift.

A gift should be remembered by the receiving party. When times were tough, a party in the relationship could refresh the past for the other party to achieve some sort of help (Homer, *Od.*, III.98-101).<sup>97</sup> Herodotus tells us the story of Darius, who after a long time reciprocates the gift of Syloson (a cloak) abundantly (*Hist.*, III.140.4). People should be reminded of the gifts received (Diodorus, *Bibl. Hist.*, I.21.6; cf. Seneca, *Ben.*, I.4.5). A benefactor has to forget his gift, a beneficiary has to remember it (Seneca, *Ben.*, II.10.4).

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<sup>95</sup> Harrison, *Paul*, 42.

<sup>96</sup> J.S. Kloppenborg, *Greco-Roman Associations. Texts, Translations, and Commentary. Volume III: Ptolemaic and Early Roman Egypt*, BZNV 246 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 41-49.

<sup>97</sup> DeSilva, *Honor*, 99-100.

Ingratitude was already mentioned. Ingratitude is also a reaction to a gift. Ingratitude is one of the chief vices in the Greco-Roman world, breaking the bond and dissolving a healthy reciprocal relationship. Ingratitude endangers the whole structure and cohesion of Greco-Roman society (Cicero, *Off.*, II.63). An ungrateful person is considered dishonorable, disloyal, and unreliable. He brings his future into jeopardy, because future benefactors would think twice to step into a reciprocal relationship with this individual (Dio, *Or.*, XXXI.65; Seneca, *Ben.*, I.4.4). Ingratitude could be shown in two ways. A gift could be forgotten: χάρις then turns into a shameful debt.<sup>98</sup> The second way is repaying a gift or favor with insult or injury. Each way should be avoided at all costs.<sup>99</sup>

People are not only commanded to stay away from ingratitude or negligence, but they must also remember that serious consequences will arise if a gift is met with an ungrateful or neglecting response. The giver can repay the receiver with negative χάρις, for instance by avenging oneself.<sup>100</sup> The giver thus tries to even the balance and to restore one's honor that was slighted. One repays hurt with hurt, just as gratitude must be met with gratitude.

#### 1.2.2.5 Religious reciprocity

Religious rituals and the relationship between men and the gods should also be seen in the context of reciprocity.<sup>101</sup> Religious reciprocity is in its social conventions the same as normal interpersonal reciprocal relationships, but deviates in the character of the relationship. Aristotle is not an exception when he enumerates several special reciprocal relationships, one of them being the religious connection (*Eth. Nic.*, VIII.12.5; VIII.14.4). Reciprocity between men and gods is on the same level as the relationship between parents and their children. The main difference between ordinary reciprocal relationships and these special reciprocal engagements is the possibility of giving back. Gods and parents have given so much in their lifetime by caring for their children that it is impossible to return gratefulness sufficiently. The gift of

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<sup>98</sup> Van Berkel, *Economics*, 119.

<sup>99</sup> DeSilva, *Honor*, 111.

<sup>100</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 72-77.

<sup>101</sup> Versnel, "Religious Mentality"; R.C.T. Parker, "Pleasing Thighs. Reciprocity in Greek Religion", in: Gill, Postlethwaite and Seaford, *Reciprocity*, 105-126.

individuals will always fall short in comparison with the enduring gifts of their gods and parents. The relationship thus is extremely unequal (Xenophon, *Mem.*, IV.3.15).

Yet, despite the inequality of the relationship, there is a form of reciprocity between men and gods.<sup>102</sup> The cultic practices are based on the idea that a reciprocal connection between gods and men is real and possible. The gods deserved to be recompensed for their favors and grace given to humanity.<sup>103</sup> There were several ways to reciprocate divine favor: votive offerings, sacrifices, hymns, and obedience (cf. Plato, *Euth.*, 14B-15A).<sup>104</sup>

In the cultic practice several forms of reciprocity between gods and humans existed.<sup>105</sup> The first form is “Give because you gave” (*da quia dedisti*). The one praying is asking for divine blessing on the basis of earlier divine gifts. In Hymn II to Isis-Hermouthis, Isidorus remembers the god of his past gifts and asks if the god could give the farmers in Egypt blessings again (SEG VIII, 549; cf. DTA, 109).<sup>106</sup> The second form of prayer is “give because I gave” (*da quia dedi*). The one praying could expect blessings of the gods, because one has given sacrifices and prayers in exchange previously. Croesus calls upon Apollo to stand by him if he was pleased by something Croesus had given in the past (Herodotus, *Hist.*, I.87.1).<sup>107</sup> The third way is “I give that you might give” (*do ut des*). The prayer or cultic act is done so that the individual or his environment is blessed. In an inscription in Gambreion the one praying offers his prayer so that those who obey will be well (SIG<sup>3</sup>, 1219).

The reciprocal relationship between men and gods had as its purpose to maintain the balance, just as every ordinary reciprocal relationship. Yet, sometimes the duty of giving was broken or neglected. The gods could intervene physically by the means of vengeance in the case of human negligence.

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<sup>102</sup> B. MacLachlan, *The Age of Grace. Charis in Early Greek Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 33: “*Charis* bridges the great divide between gods and mortals. It is a softening agent, offering relationship, the exchange of kindnesses.”

<sup>103</sup> Crook, *Conversion*, 76-80; Barclay, *Paul*, 27-28.

<sup>104</sup> J.M. Bremer, “The Reciprocity of Giving and Thanksgiving in Greek Worship”, in: Gill, Postlethwaite, and Seaford, *Reciprocity*, 127-137;

<sup>105</sup> See S. Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997). There are others, such as “give because (s)he gave” (*da quia dedit*), “give so that I will give” (*da-ut-dem*), and “give so that I shall be able to give” (*da-ut-dare-possim*). These forms are quite uncommon however. The three mentioned in the main text are the most dominant ways in cultic reciprocity.

<sup>106</sup> Harrison, *Paul*, 54.

<sup>107</sup> Pulleyn, *Prayer*, 31.

### 1.2.3 Conclusion

Reciprocity is justly called the most important bond of society in primary and secondary literature. This mechanism spread throughout the whole of society and took its place in the relational sphere of human lives. To obtain and sustain the life one want to live or the power one want to have, humans had to have one or more reciprocal relationships. Gaining the goods or acclaim came with a prize one had to pay (voluntarily or involuntarily). Problems are imminent when in a reciprocal relationship there is no return of the favor. The positive χάρις became a negative χάρις, called vengeance.

## 1.3 Vengeance in the Greco-Roman World

Vengeance functions as an act in the taxonomy of honor and reciprocity in Greco-Roman culture. An explicit background, but less emphatically present, is the justice system of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Vengeance is, as we will see, in our modern, Western understanding a tribal element, a pre-judicial matter which has rightfully been banned from our culture and justice system. This hermeneutical conclusion affects our reading of ancient texts which deal with vengeance. It is therefore necessary to sharpen our understanding of vengeance and to be all ears when ancient texts explain the structure and function of vengeance in their times and context.

### 1.3.1 Scholarship on vengeance

Vengeance has received minimal attention in New Testament scholarship. But even in classical scholarship, attention has been drawn just recently to the element and function of vengeance in ancient Greek and Roman texts.<sup>108</sup> The article of Hans-Joachim Gehrke can be seen as a turning-point in the study of

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<sup>108</sup> See the research history in Descharmes, *Rächer*, 15-23.



vengeance in classical literature.<sup>109</sup> Together with Yan Thomas,<sup>110</sup> Gehrke pointed to the legal character of vengeance in the ancient world.<sup>111</sup> They paved the way for new and revolutionary scholarship on vengeance. The first monograph in this new wave of research was written by Anne Pippin Burnett.<sup>112</sup> Burnett shows that the consensus on vengeance in Attic and later tragedy developed into a critical attitude, resulting in the categorical rejection of vengeance by Seneca. Gehrke, Thomas and Burnett paved the way for the works of McHardy, Belfiore, Allen, Fisher, Wilson, and Phillips.<sup>113</sup> The work of Bernadette Descharmes provides a balanced outlook on the structure, background and function of vengeance in Attic tragedy.<sup>114</sup> The work of Philipp Ruch is the most recent work on vengeance in the Greek world. He focuses on the legal character of vengeance, thereby ignoring seminal background features as honor and reciprocity.<sup>115</sup>

There are no thorough monographic studies on vengeance in the Roman period and world, besides several case-studies and articles.

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<sup>109</sup> H.J. Gehrke, "Die Griechen und die Rache. Ein Versuch in historischer Psychologie", *Saeculum* 38 (1987), 121-149.

<sup>110</sup> Y. Thomas, "Se venger au Forum. Solidarité familiale et procès criminel à Rome (premier siècle av. – deuxième siècle ap. J.C.)", in: R. Verdier and J.P. Poly (eds.), *Vengeance, pouvoirs et idéologies dans quelques civilisations de l'Antiquité*, La Vengeance. Etudes d'ethnologie, d'histoire et de philosophie 3 (Paris: Cujas, 1984), 65-100.

<sup>111</sup> Gehrke received critique of Gabriel Herman, who stated that vengeance was gradually considered unacceptable in Greco-Roman society and was not considered natural, as Gehrke argues. G. Herman, "Honour, Vengeance and the State in Fourth-Century Athens", in: W. Eder (ed.), *Die athenische Demokratie im 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr. Vollendung oder Verfall einer Verfassungsform* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995), 43-66; Idem, "Athenian Beliefs about Revenge. Problems and Methods", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 46 (2000), 7-27.

<sup>112</sup> A. Pippin Burnett, *Revenge in Attic and Later Tragedy*, Saither Classical Lectures 62 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). Cf. S. Saïd, "La tragédie de la vengeance", in: G. Courtois (ed.), *La Vengeance dans la Pensée Occidentale*, La Vengeance. Etudes d'ethnologie, d'histoire et de philosophie 4 (Paris: Cujas, 1984), 47-90.

<sup>113</sup> F. McHardy, *The Ideology of Revenge in Ancient Greek Culture. A Study of Ancient Athenian Revenge Ethics* (unpublished dissertation University of Exeter, 1999); N.R.E. Fisher, "Hybris, Revenge and Stasis in the Greek City-States", in: H. van Wees (ed.), *War and Violence in Ancient Greece* (London: Classical Press of Wales, 2000), 83-123; E. Belfiore, *Murder among Friends. Violation of Philia in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); D.S. Allen, *The World of Prometheus. The Politics of Punishing in Democratic Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); D. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); D. Phillips, *Avengers of Blood. Homicide in Athenian Law and Custom from Draco to Demosthenes*, *Historia Einzelschriften* 202 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008).

<sup>114</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*.

<sup>115</sup> Ruch, *Ehre und Rache*.

### 1.3.2 Vengeance: definition

Vengeance and retribution are sometimes taken together and (consciously or unconsciously) mixed in meaning. There is however one distinctive difference between vengeance and retribution. Retribution could indicate positive or negative reciprocity, while vengeance in the Greco-Roman world can only be interpreted as a negative reaction.<sup>116</sup> Vengeance is the negative branch of the process of retribution, the practical elaboration of negative requital. Vengeance could be defined, in the footsteps of McHardy and Descharmes, as the attempt to defend or reestablish one's honor, status or goods by imposing suffering on the one who made one suffer.<sup>117</sup>

### 1.3.3 Characteristics of Greco-Roman vengeance

Some studies on Greco-Roman vengeance tend to narrow the function and scope of vengeance into one single facet.<sup>118</sup> Yet, vengeance encompasses a broad range of aspects and facets that need to be looked into. This section will flesh out these characteristic features of vengeance.

#### 1.3.3.1 Vengeance and religion

Vengeance is not limited to the human world, but also occurs in the divine sphere. When honor is affected or when social norms are violated, the moral and natural balance of society is shifting. The gods could react on these attacks to serve as a counterpoise and restore the social equilibrium. They are avenging gods (τιμαόρους θεούς) (Aeschylus, *Ag.*, 1577), gods who repay people's offences with vengeance (Sophocles, *Phil.*, 1041; *El.*, 1383-1390).

The core of this 'celestial' retaliation is the doctrine of divine justice (θεόδικη): victims have certainty, hope and comfort in the idea that the

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<sup>116</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 14. See for an elaboration on the notion of retribution the work of G. Schlee and B. Turner (eds.), *Vergeltung. Eine interdisziplinäre Betrachtung der Rechtfertigung und Regulation von Gewalt* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2008).

<sup>117</sup> McHardy, *Revenge*, 6; Descharmes, *Rächer*, 14.

<sup>118</sup> Ruch (*Ehre und Rache*) tends to limit vengeance to a single, legal context for instance.

perpetrator will be punished and that justice will be served.<sup>119</sup> The gods will deal out justice (νέμει τοι δίκαν θεός) (Euripides, *El.*, 1169). The νέμεσις is defined as the envy of the gods, but could also be an independent god (Sophocles, *El.*, 792; SIG<sup>3</sup>, 1176).<sup>120</sup> People could ask the gods to execute their vengeance, even on inscriptions on their grave (Peek, 2085).

The Erinyes, the infernal goddesses (χθόνιαί θεαί) (Sophocles, *Oed. Col.*, 1568), have the task to maintain the order of justice on earth (Aeschylus, *Ag.*, 748; *Eum.*, 520-565). They are helpers for everyone who seeks to take revenge (Sophocles, *Aj.*, 835-840). The Erinyes do not act as avengers, but haunt the guilty and give their power to the avenger.<sup>121</sup> The god Hermes is also frequently called upon for vengeance (DTA, 103; CIG, 2826). The Furies in Roman literature hold the same function: they chase and punish (Livy, *Ab Urb. Cond.*, I.57.10-13). Besides the Erinyes, the ἀλάστωρ (Euripides, *Or.*, 1230; Aeschylus, *Suppl.*, 414-418) and μιάστωρ (Euripides, *Med.*, 1371) are also identified as spirits of vengeance.

The gods did not only punish individuals because of injustice, but also when the religious reciprocal obligation was slighted. When people do not give the gods their honor, they are exposed to divine revenge.<sup>122</sup> Livy questions the arrogance of the Rhodians and even asks if the gods were overwhelmed by their cockiness, because the gods have not punished them by thunderbolts (Livy, *Ab Urb. Cond.*, XLV.23.18-19). The tyrant Philanthropos was killed by lightning, after he set the sanctuary of Olympia on fire out of frustration for a prayer not granted.<sup>123</sup>

People could also ask for divine revenge. There were several ways to ask the gods to state your case and serve justice in the human world. The gods could be asked in lamentations to restore the honor of the dead or to retaliate the reasonless death of a victim. The chorus in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* calls for the Erinyes to ensure justice (Aeschylus, *Eum.*, 508-515). A father asks

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<sup>119</sup> A. Chaniotis, "Von Ehre, Schande und kleinen Verbrechen unter Nachbarn. Konfliktbewältigung und Götterjustiz in Gemeinden des antiken Anatolien", in: F.R. Pfetsch (ed.), *Konflikt*, Heidelberger Jahrbücher Band 48 (Heidelberg: Springer Verlag, 2005), 233-254, there 234; Descharmes, *Rächer*, 122. The concept of divine justice is quite diverse in several sources, see H.S. Versnel, *Coping with the Gods. Wayward Readings in Greek Theology, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 173* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 151-237.

<sup>120</sup> Descharmes (*Rächer*, 126) points to this definition by E. Rohde, "Religion der Griechen", in: idem, *Kleine Schriften. Band 2* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1901), 329.

<sup>121</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 127-128.

<sup>122</sup> See for instance Versnel, "Religious Mentality", 39-40.

<sup>123</sup> Versnel, "Religious Mentality", 40.

the execution of vengeance for his murdered daughter (SIG<sup>3</sup>, 1181). Revenge prayers (*defixiones*) are prayers to the gods that they might help the avenger to successfully fulfill his duty.<sup>124</sup> Electra calls on the Erinyes to help her avenge the death of her father (Sophocles, *El.*, 110-120). The oldest revenge prayer is a prayer from Artemisia to Oserapis (UPZ, I). The author of a *defixio* in Delos asks for revenge from the Sykanoaoi and the female god Syria Sykona for the theft of a necklace (SEG LIII, 813).<sup>125</sup>

The curse is slightly different than the revenge prayer. The prayer asks for help from the gods, the curse places the whole case in the hands of the gods.<sup>126</sup> The Erinyes are called by Ajax to see the slight of the Atreidae and to slay them because of this crime (Sophocles, *Aj.*, 835-845). A tablet from Lilybaion curses an intended victim and asks the vengeance of several Greek gods and creatures (SGD, 109). Curses are frequently spoken by weak and defenseless people, who cannot defend their own honor or οἶκος.<sup>127</sup> Antigone curses the people who left Polyneikes unburied (Sophocles, *Ant.*, 427-428). The old Oedipus cursed his sons and these curses are being put in motion by the gods (Sophocles, *Sept.*, 655-656).

### 1.3.3.2 οἶκος

Vengeance in the Greco-Roman world was interwoven within the familial structure (οἶκος). Kin was, as has been said, a fundamental category and group in Greco-Roman social life and culture. If an individual of the kin-group was slighted, every member of the family was affected and must have had the intention to avenge the slighted family member (Demosthenes, *Or.*, XLIII.57; SEG L, 1233; Peek, 1875). When the slight had taken place and the crime had become public, the kin-group designated a family member to avenge the victim. The avenging kin-group members were predominantly male: fathers, brothers, brothers-in-law etcetera. A united front was formed to face the danger and task of avenging the slighted relative. The person who did not avenge the kin-group was a coward (Demosthenes, *Or.*, XLIX.12).

<sup>124</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 143. See also H.S. Versnel, *Fluch und Gebet. Magische Manipulation versus religiöses Verflehen? Religionsgeschichtliche und hermeneutische Betrachtungen über antike Fluchtafeln* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009).

<sup>125</sup> D.R. Jordan, "Une Prière de Vengeance sur une Tablette de Plomb à Delos", *Revue Archéologique* 1 (2002), 55-60.

<sup>126</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 143.

<sup>127</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 150-151.

The Athenian society encouraged to take revenge by laws and prosecution, but “the system still resembles one of self-help”.<sup>128</sup> Revenge was a family matter and was expected and accepted.<sup>129</sup> Vengeance had to restore the individual and family honor, had to calm the sorrowing and angry members of kin, and sought a way to retribute the fixed guilt.

The primary actor of vengeance was the most prominent and closest male relative: the father, the son, the brother, the husband. They had the daunting task to restore order and seek restoration of honor and justice for their slighted or even murdered relative. Coön attacked Agamemnon, after Agamemnon killed his brother (Homer, *Il.*, XI.248-252). Father Eupheithes wanted to avenge the death of his son (Homer, *Od.*, XXIV.469-471). Homer also writes in his *Odyssee* on the advantage of having a son who could take vengeance for you (*Od.*, III.196-198), after Orestes killed Aegisthus as revenge for the murder of his father (*Od.*, I.29-43).

The kin-group in society was the family, but the phenomenon of virtual kin-groups also existed. Groups and even the *polis* could function and behave as if it was a family, with a family code and the brotherhood loyalty of a family.<sup>130</sup> A slighting of a group member was also an offense to the rest of the group, although they were not related. The most famous example of this is written in Homer: the vengeance of Achilles on Hektor for the death of Patroclos. Achilles says that Hektor should pay the price (ἀποτίση) for the death of Patroclos (*Il.*, XVIII.93).

Vengeance was always directed towards enemies on behalf of friends or relatives. The φιλία towards a person is present in the process of taking vengeance. Yet, the role of friend and enemy could fluctuate in a life time. A friend or relative could become an enemy, while a dire enemy could turn into a friend after some time.<sup>131</sup> The most radical switch from friend to enemy is the situation when a family member becomes an enemy and an object of vengeance.<sup>132</sup> The οἶκος is abandoned and the blood bond is changed to a feud. Kinship does not always mean a bond of φίλος, behavior should also

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<sup>128</sup> McHardy, *Revenge*, 30.

<sup>129</sup> McHardy, *Revenge*, 65; cf. R. Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual. Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 25-29.

<sup>130</sup> McHardy, *Revenge*, 26-32.

<sup>131</sup> See Blundell, *Helping Friends*.

<sup>132</sup> See Seaford, *Reciprocity*, 338-344.

tell that individuals are related and that they are worthy of kinship.<sup>133</sup> Betrayal of the family is seen as one of the worst crimes an individual could commit.

The theme of family betrayal and kin-killing is an appropriate theme for tragedies. Attic tragedy contains some famous pieces of tragedy treating these sensitive matters. Euripides' *Medea* shows the disruption of the οἶκος of Jason: Medea kills their two sons to stall the pedigree of Jason, because Jason tried to also marry princess Creusa. The proceedings concerning Klytaimestra, Orestes, and Electra also resulted in several tragedies: Aeschylus and Euripides wrote a piece around Orestes, while Euripides and Sophocles also wrote a tragedy on the role of Electra. Euripides also wrote a tragedy on the vengeance of Hecuba on the murderer of her son, Polymestor. Other acts of vengeance against kin such as sons, sisters, brothers-in-law, uncles, nephews etcetera are also present in tragedy.<sup>134</sup>

Other sources confirm these observations. In an early Egyptian prayer for justice (fourth century BCE), Artemisia asks the god Oserapis to exact vengeance on her husband for robbing her deceased daughter (*UPZ*, I). A woman named Hegemone prays for a curse on her husband for his deeds (*DT IV*, A). Philodemus states that vengeful anger would not even spare good friends (*Ir.* XXXIII.27.26-28). In a confessional inscription in Anatolia Apollonios acknowledges a burden on him and his brother due to a curse spoken by his mother (*BIW*, 17).

When the hospitality of the οἶκος is slighted, then vengeance was also the right thing to do. Hospitality was a big responsibility and a duty. A slight of trust could arouse anger (Sophocles, *Phil.*, 923-924).<sup>135</sup> In Sophocles' *Trachiniai*, Heracles takes revenge on Eurytus' son Iphitus after Eurytus disrespected Heracles and made him ashamed (Sophocles, *Trach.*, 250-280).

Vengeance thus has two sides in the Greco-Roman οἶκος: it united the family into one corporate body (integrative side of vengeance), but could also disrupt the bond of kinship and destroy relationships (disintegrative side of vengeance).<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 262-263: "die strukturelle Gegebenheit der Verwandtschaft verlangt bestimmte Praktiken, die notwendig sind, diese strukturelle Gegebenheit aufrecht zu halten."

<sup>134</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 238-255; McHardy, *Revenge*, passim.

<sup>135</sup> G. Herman, *Ritualized Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 66.

<sup>136</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 207-262; cf. Seaford, *Reciprocity*, 25-29.

### 1.3.3.3 Honor

Vengeance is strongly connected to honor and dishonor. The term most used for vengeance (τιμωρία) is etymologically derived from honor (τιμή).

Vengeance is a reaction to the act of *hybris* (ὑβρις, *contumelia*, *iniuria*). In his monograph on ὑβρις, Nick Fisher defines ὑβρις as “the serious assault on the honour of another, which is likely to cause shame, and lead to anger and attempts to revenge.”<sup>137</sup> The honor of an individual could be slighted, verbally or physically. The humiliation and indignity one faced on the basis of the slight made an individual seek retribution and compensation (Isocrates, *Contr. Loch.*, XX.5; cf. DTA 120; Cicero, *Rep.*, IV.12). Not just the act, but the visibility of the act and in the case of ὑβρις also the intention of imposing superiority and pleasure made people retaliate.<sup>138</sup> Aristotle correlates vengeance with disparage when he defines anger (ὀργή) as “a longing, accompanied by pain, for a real or apparent revenge for a real or apparent slight, affecting a man himself or one of his friends, when such a slight is undeserved” (*Rhet.*, II.2.1).<sup>139</sup>

What is the function of vengeance in this context? When in the agonistic battle for honor an individual is slighted, the scale of honor is turned over. The existing equilibrium is breached. The person slighted could do two things towards this offense. One could deny what has happened or one could forget the offense and do nothing. The consequence of both acts of negligence is that the PCR could consider an individual a coward.<sup>140</sup> Another consequence is that the PCR could very well think that the slight was just: the person slighted probably deserved it and presumably earns a lowering of one’s prestige.

The anxiety that the PCR would consider an individual worthy of the slight made people diligent to take measures.<sup>141</sup> The equilibrium and social hierarchy had to be restored by a returning action of vengeance in front of the

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<sup>137</sup> Fisher, *Hybris*, 1.

<sup>138</sup> Fisher, *Hybris*, 51.

<sup>139</sup> ἔστω δὴ ὀργή ὄρεξις μετὰ λύπης τιμωρίας φαινομένης διὰ φαινομένην ὀλιγορίαν τῶν εἰς αὐτὸν ἢ τῶν αὐτοῦ, τοῦ ὀλιγορεῖν μὴ προσήκοντος. Translation of Loeb.

<sup>140</sup> Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem*, 5.

<sup>141</sup> D.L. Cairns, *Aidōs. The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 73.

PCR.<sup>142</sup> For the love of honor (φιλοτιμία) and to recover one's honor a person could avenge himself.<sup>143</sup> There was an acceptable side-effect: the avenger showed his superiority and power over his victim. Not every act of vengeance was lethal. Vengeance could also be social dishonoring. Aristophanes describes in a comedic and fantasizing fashion how someone is raped with a radish and is depilated with hot ash (*Nub.*, 1083). This scene does not correspond with an act in real life, but Aristophanes' comedy shows that vengeance could also have an aspect of social shaming.

The reaction of vengeance, however, should be appropriate and be in balance. Excessive vengeance was not allowed. Euripides' Orestes is shunned by his uncle Menelaos and in retaliation Orestes wants to kill Helen, the wife of Menelaos (Euripides, *Or.*, 1105-1130). Electra retaliates out of resentment and to improve her condition (Euripides, *El.*, 895-956).<sup>144</sup> These two examples show that sometimes extreme violence is used as a way of taking revenge for an offense and that this excessive vengeance is deemed wrong.

Vengeance could not only be aimed at the person who performed the slight. His family or friends could also be involved to let the slighting enemy know and feel the dishonor of his crime. Medea for instance kills her two sons to let Jason feel her contempt (Euripides, *Med.*, 790-817).<sup>145</sup> Several curse inscriptions ask the gods to also exact vengeance on accomplices of the one cursed or one's family (SEG LIII, 813 A; DTA 81; 94; 103).

The gods could also avenge the slighting of honor. The gods could use people to execute their restoring act of vengeance (Lysias, II.7-8) or act if honorable oaths are broken (Sophocles, *Phil.*, 776). They are the avengers of men (Aeschylus, *Ag.*, 1577).

### 1.3.3.4 Reciprocity

Most books on reciprocity focus on the nature of reciprocity and the positive exchange in the relationship. The negative side of a reciprocal relationship

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<sup>142</sup> D.J. Cohen, *Law, Violence and Community in Classical Athens*, Key Themes in Ancient History 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 97.

<sup>143</sup> Cohen, *Law*, 268: "Concern for *time* is a basic motivation, disgrace is to be feared or avenged". Cf. P. Bourdieu, "The Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle Society", in: J.G. Peristiany (ed.), *Honour and Shame. The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 192-241, there 220; Fisher, *Hybris*, 10;

<sup>144</sup> Pippin Burnett, *Revenge*, 225-245.

<sup>145</sup> Pippin Burnett (*Revenge*, 207) calls Medea's revenge a vengeance of superlative.



does not receive the same attention or is sometimes hardly noticed. A negative response to a gift of χάρις did have consequences.

Neglecting a gift of χάρις was seen as breaking the bond of friendship that is key to a reciprocal relationship. The negligence or refusal of χάρις was considered an act of ὕβρις, which had to be retributed. As Pippin Burnett states: “it was a form of necessary repayment, the opposite twin to the gracious return of favors that was called *charis*.”<sup>146</sup> In a positive reciprocal relationship there is a positive exchange between two friends, but when the bond becomes negative friends become enemies and χάρις becomes vengeance.<sup>147</sup>

Vengeance is the end of the chain-reaction and most of the times the end of the reciprocal relationship. Dikaiopolis offered a bad treaty for the Acharnians, hence the chorus in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* are seeking to avenge themselves (Aristophanes, *Ach.*, 230). Plato tells the story of the Bacchus-rites: Dionysius was robbed by Hera from the verdict on his soul, so out of vengeance he commenced the rites and its excesses (Plato, *Laws*, 672b5-7). Minos is placed on the torture rack to avenge his lack of payment (Plato, *Min.*, 321a4-6). Some Hellenistic sources confirm that the same can be said about vengeance in this period of time. Vengeance comes up after someone harms another individual, according to Philodemus (*Ir.* XXXIII.25). In a stele from Anatolia a certain Eudoxos confesses that he has committed perjury by not fulfilling his promise to the gods after they have given him grace (χάριν) and that he was punished for that offense (BIW, 58). Another stele from Anatolia tells about the punishing of Philemon after he neglected his task of honoring the gods for the healing of his son (BIW, 62). The gods are awarded with an inscription after they have successfully granted the curse-wish (SGD, 173).

Vengeance is sometimes acted out in a mimetic fashion.<sup>148</sup> The (verbal or physical) slight is reciprocated in a similar way: the same place, same

<sup>146</sup> Pippin Burnett, *Revenge*, xv; cf. Seaford, *Reciprocity*, 25-29.

<sup>147</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 67. See also W. Essbach, “Gabe und Rache. Zur Anthropologie der Gegenseitigkeit”, in: G. Treusch-Dieter, D. Kamper and B. Ternes (eds.), *Schuld* (Tübingen: Konkursbuchverlag Gehrke, 1999), 11-20. As J.P. Poly (“Quand les armes tombent”, in: idem and Verdier, *Vengeance*, 8) states: “La vengeance agit comme un système d’échange à rebours, d’échanges en négatif, particulièrement dans les cas de compensation, où la partie adverse accepte de s’approuver d’un équivalent, de s’affaiblir d’autant.”

<sup>148</sup> R. Girard had already seen that vengeance has a reciprocating aspect, although he understood vengeance differently and used the concept in another fashion. See M.R. Anspach, “Vengeance and the Gift”, in: J. Alison and W. Palaver (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 53-60.

weapon, or even the same slight.<sup>149</sup> Iphigenia avenges herself on Helena to create a second Aulis (Euripides, *Iph. Taur.*, 357-360). Aegisthus and Klytaimestra are killed the same way as Agamemnon was killed (Aeschylus, *Choeph.*, 274). In a prayer for justice, the goddess Demeter is called upon to exact vengeance on Epaphroditos for stealing servants (IG XII<sup>7</sup>, 1). The person praying asks Demeter to let him be left alone just as the individual praying was left alone through his crime.

### 1.3.3.5 Justice

Gilead Bar-Elli and David Heyd argue that revenge cannot exist next to a justice system, because vengeance is taking justice in one's own hands.<sup>150</sup> The concept of revenge in Greco-Roman society however was not opposed to order, but can be seen as "order itself in its original and vital form".<sup>151</sup> To restore the balance of honor in society and to maintain the status quo, justice had to be served through vengeance. The execution of vengeance was not only justified in cases of homicide, but also in several other instances.<sup>152</sup> Minor offences could be financially compensated, but crimes of ὕβρις could only be settled by vengeance.<sup>153</sup>

The act of vengeance was bound by societal norms.<sup>154</sup> The first norm is that vengeance has to be announced. The avenger has to be clear who he will avenge, who will be the victim of his revenge and sometimes also the

<sup>149</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 78: "Gerade durch die Mimesis knüpft die Gewalt an ihren Ursprungsmoment an, um Legitimität zu erhalten, das heißt um sie als Rache und Pflicht zu kennzeichnen."

<sup>150</sup> G. Bar-Elli and D. Heyd, "Can revenge be just or otherwise justified", *Theoria* 52, 68-86. Also S. Jacoby, *Wild Justice. The Evolution of Revenge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 1.

<sup>151</sup> Pippin Burnett, *Revenge*, 64. See also Allen, *Prometheus*, 21: "our intuitive distinction between 'revenge' and 'punishment' breaks down in face of the record."

<sup>152</sup> See Ruch, *Ehre und Rache*, 247.

<sup>153</sup> Chilon, politician in Sparta, puts it this way: ἀδικούμενος διαλλάσσει, ὕβριζόμενος δὲ τιμωροῦ (DK, I.63.34). See W. Burkert, "Vergeltung" zwischen Ethologie und Ethik. *Reflexe und Reflexionen in Texten und Mythologien des Altertums*, Carl Friedrich Von Siemens Stiftung Themen 55 (München: Siemens Stiftung, 1992), 18-19.

<sup>154</sup> I. Salvo, "Sweet Revenge. Emotional Factors in 'Prayers for Justice'", in: A. Chaniotis (ed.), *Unveiling Emotions. Sources and Methods for the Study of Emotions in the Greek World. Volume I*, HABES 52 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 251: "it was socially permitted to express one's own desires of revenge, and that for doing this there were culturally constructed means."

date and time and place of the deed.<sup>155</sup> This πρόρρησις was necessary to investigate the legitimate status of the act of vengeance and to make public who is to blame for an act of ὕβρις.<sup>156</sup> The act of vengeance must not exceed the amount and weight of the crime of ὕβρις. Revenge is mimetic and thus cannot pass the boundaries of the former offense or else it becomes an act of ὕβρις in its excess and illegitimate status. Vengeance also has to have clean intentions: there should be no ancillary “benefits” when the offender is slighted out of revenge. Lastly, vengeance has an end-point when the balance is even. Vengeance is not a never-ending story or vicious circle, but stalls when the victim has done sufficient damage to his assailant to level the score.<sup>157</sup>

The authors of Greek tragedies use their work to question the execution of vengeance in several histories. Excess and overstepping the boundaries are commonplaces for tragedy, also to determine what real and legitimate vengeance is and what its boundaries are.<sup>158</sup> Heracles goes beyond the boundaries of vengeance when he avenges himself without making it public (Sophocles, *Trach.*, 278-280). Ajax attempts to avenge his honor (Sophocles, *Aj.*, 98.426.440), but his revenge act is considered to be unjust and unclear (Sophocles, *Aj.*, 40.47.304).<sup>159</sup> Electra does not avenge Klytaimestra as the killer of her father, but as her stingy mother (Euripides, *El.*, 1086-1090).<sup>160</sup>

The concept of vengeance did develop in the course of history. Vengeance did not entirely disappear out of the private sector, but the balance shifted towards courts and gods as legitimizers of vengeance.<sup>161</sup> In Athens,

<sup>155</sup> Heiderich, *Rache*, 45-48; Descharmes, *Rächer*, 164-165.

<sup>156</sup> G. Thür, “Prorrhesis”, in: H. Cancik, H. Schneider and C. Salazar (eds.), *Brill's New Pauly. Encyclopedia of the Ancient World 12* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 39.

<sup>157</sup> J. Svenbro, “Vengeance et Societé en Grece archaïque. A Propos de la Fin de l’*Odyssee*”, in: Poly and Verdier, *Vengeance*, 53.

<sup>158</sup> McHardy, *Revenge*, 181; P.E. Easterling, “Greek Tragedy and the Ethics of Revenge”, in: M. Liatsi (ed.), *Ethics in Ancient Greek Literature. Aspects of Ethical Reasoning from Homer to Aristotle and Beyond*, Trends in Classics Supplements 102 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 129-144.

<sup>159</sup> Pippin Burnett, *Revenge*, 84: “Sophocles thus shows a revenge that is dangerous to the community, ill conceived, grossly disproportionate”. See also Seneca, *De Ira*, II.36.5.

<sup>160</sup> Pippin Burnett, *Revenge*, 242: “Here then is a new sort of vengeance, a retaliation built on resentment, a violence that looks to the improvement of worldly condition rather than to the restoration of honor, and that takes its most effective inspiration neither from Delphi nor from the underworld but from a jealous envy of those who have won what the avenger has lost.”

<sup>161</sup> Herman (“Honour”; “Revenge”; *Morality and Behaviour in Democratic Athens. A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 184-215) argues that Athenian society was quite pacifistic: they relinquished their right of vengeance and retaliation to

vengeance was most of the times executed by individuals and sometimes by public officials.<sup>162</sup> The most famous example in Greek literature is Lysias 1, *On the Murder of Eratosthenes*. Euphiletos is taken to court for killing Eratosthenes. Euphiletos claims that it was a justified murder: Eratosthenes was committing adultery with his wife. Euphiletos claims that the law killed Eratosthenes for his crime, framing his vengeance as an act of executed justice (Lysias, I.26). The judicial prayer to the gods also became dominant, especially in the Hellenistic period.<sup>163</sup> One of the earliest examples is a prayer towards the god Oserapis (UPZ I). Other prayers can be found in material history (SGD 51; 89; 169). An inscription from Phliunte calls upon the gods to avenge (SIG<sup>2</sup>, 1176). Chthonic demons are called to action in several prayers (DTA 103; 104), just as the Furies (DTA 108) and the Praxaidicae (DTA 109).<sup>164</sup>

In Roman times, a dual system of vengeance was maintained. Cicero asserts that vengeance must be in line with the common interests of the state (*Off.*, II.50). Vengeance could be carried out in Roman society, if no laws are violated.<sup>165</sup> In Stoic philosophy, vengeance was condemnable.<sup>166</sup> Seneca despises emotional vengeance, because of its violence, inhumane character and lack of restraint (*Ir.*, I.1.1). Yet, vengeance in itself is approved of: vengeance is legitimate (II.32.1) and has to be done effectively (II.33.1). The most effective vengeance is humiliation however (*Clem.*, I.21.1-2). Epictetus denounces vengeance, because it is harming for the perpetrator and the victim and it hurts the moral goal of humanity of doing good (*Disc.* II.10.24-30).

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maintain community peace, trading in the principle of “a head for an eye” for “turning the other cheek”. This position however is flawed, as Fisher (“Revenge”, 88) shows.

<sup>162</sup> Cohen, *Law*; Allen, *Prometheus*, 21. McHardy makes some nuancing statements in *Revenge*, 142-163.

<sup>163</sup> M. Dreher, “Gerichtsverfahren vor den Göttern? ‘Judicial Prayers’ und die Kategorisierung der *defixionum tabellae*”, in: G. Thür (ed.), *Symposion 2009. Vorträge zur griechischen und hellenistischen Rechtsgeschichte (Seggau, 25.-30. August 2009)*, Akten der Gesellschaft zum Griechischen und Hellenistischen Rechtsgeschichte 21 (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), 301-336.

<sup>164</sup> See H.S. Versnel, “Beyond Cursing. The Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers”, in: C.A. Faraone and D. Obbink (eds.), *Magika Hiera. Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 60-106; A. Chaniotis, “Under the Watchful Eyes of the Gods. Divine Justice in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor”, in: S. Colvin (ed.), *The Greco-Roman East. Politics, Culture, and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-43.

<sup>165</sup> Thomas, “Venger”.

<sup>166</sup> Greek rejection of vengeance was also present. Socrates (in Plato) rejects the notion of the *talio* (Plato, *Cri.*, 48c) and Plato prefers curing offenders to retribution. See G. Vlastos, *Socrates. Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 179-199.

### 1.3.3.6 Emotion

Philipp Ruch argues in his book on honor and vengeance that revenge is not a concept of emotion (*Gefühlsbegriff*) in itself: the idea that vengeance is emotion is a modern point of view.<sup>167</sup> The act of vengeance *sec* is not an emotion, but Ruch's point of view is too one-dimensional. Greco-Roman literature shows that vengeance is garbed in feelings and structures of emotions. Descharmes even calls emotions "essential ingredients of the phenomenon of vengeance."<sup>168</sup>

Before we explore the emotional side of vengeance, a short study on Greco-Roman emotion is necessary. David Konstan has made a significant contribution to the study of emotion in Antiquity.<sup>169</sup> Building on Aristotle, Konstan shows that emotions in Antiquity are more narrative than our understanding of emotions post-Enlightenment. Emotions are not expressions of inner states, as our modern, Western understanding conceives them, but an evaluation of a stimulating situation.<sup>170</sup> Hence, Aristotle does not treat emotion in his work on the soul, but in his rhetorical work: "the emotions are all those affections which cause men to change their opinion in regard to their judgments, and are accompanied by pleasure and pain" (*Rhet.*, II.1.8).<sup>171</sup>

Vengeance is closely associated with anger (ὀργή, χόλος, μῆνις/μένος, θύμος, κότος). The definition of anger in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* reflects this association (*Rhet.*, II.2.1), as can be seen above (section 1.3.3.2). Anger differs from rage or hate: Aristotle states that anger is accompanied by pain, while hate is not (*Rhet.*, II.4.31). Anger involves a judgment of intentions.<sup>172</sup> These assertions are important for our understanding of vengeance. Vengeance has as its base anger which derives its origin from hurt or slight, but vengeance is

<sup>167</sup> Ruch, *Ehre und Rache*, 229, note 1224.

<sup>168</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 96. See also Salvo, "Sweet Revenge".

<sup>169</sup> Konstan, *Emotions*.

<sup>170</sup> Konstan, *Emotions*, 30.

<sup>171</sup> "Ἔστι δὲ τὰ πάθη, δι' ὅσα μεταβάλλοντες διαφέρουσι πρὸς τὰς κρίσεις, οἷς ἔπεται λύπη καὶ ἡδονή. Translation of Loeb.

<sup>172</sup> Konstan, *Emotions*, 45. Cf. Descharmes, *Rächer*, 104: "durch die Rache wird der Zorn besänftigt und das Gleichgewicht wiederhergestellt." See also D. Konstan, "Aristotle on Anger and the Emotions. The Strategies of Status", in: S. Braund and G.W. Most (eds.), *Ancient Anger. Perspectives from Homer to Galen*, Yale Classical Studies 32 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 99-120.

also aimed at the person who has acted with bad intentions. As Konstan asserts: “the result of a slight or putdown is that we find ourselves diminished in esteem, and in order to turn the tables on the offender, we must first restore the original equilibrium through an act of revenge.”<sup>173</sup> Anger is possible when revenge is possible (Aristotle, *Rhet.*, II.1.2), but anger also justifies the possibility of vengeance.<sup>174</sup>

Vengeance thus comes forth out of and is motivated by the emotion of anger. The evaluation of the emotion and its consequence varies. Aristotle states that justified anger is a sign of gentleness and a way to blow off some steam, while restraining anger is foolish (*Eth. Nic.*, IV.5.1-6). Seneca on the other hand argues that punishment is not natural and therefore anger (*ira*) is not natural (*Ir.*, I.6.5). Anger has to be tamed by reason (I.11.5). He even calls wrath inadmissible (*numquam... admittenda est*) (II.14.1). Barbarians show their anger, reasonable people do not (III.2.1-5). He deviates in his position from Aristotle, which he also admits (III.3.1-6). Vengeance should not originate out of sheer emotion, but from reason: it is better to heal and let it rest a while than to take vengeance quickly and emotionally (III.27.1).<sup>175</sup> Rest and a good spirit remove the weapons of revenge (III.39.3; *Clem.*, II.3.1: *clementia est temperantia animi in potestate ulciscendi*).<sup>176</sup> The same line of reasoning can be found in the work of Philodemus (*Ir.* XXXIII.7-41) and Epictetus (*Disc.* II.10.24-30).

The emotion of grief (ἄλγος, πένθος, λύπη) is also associated with vengeance. Grief itself is not a catalyst of vengeance, but the combination of grief and anger could open up the opportunity for revenge.<sup>177</sup> When an injury or death is unjust and causes sadness, the victim or relatives could call for vengeance or act it out themselves. Medea and Creusa are betrayed and therefore crying and calling to the gods to avenge (Euripides, *Med.*, 24-29; *Ion*, 876-877), while Orestes lost his power and cries for vengeance (Sophocles, *El.*, 1176). A prayer from Arkesine calls upon Demeter to avenge and still the grief of solitude (IG XII<sup>7</sup>, 1 A). Another interesting prayer is the Jewish

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<sup>173</sup> Konstan, *Emotions*, 47.

<sup>174</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 103.

<sup>175</sup> *Quanto satius est sanare iniuriam quam ulcisci! Multum temporis ultio absumit, multis se iniuriis obicit, dum una dolet.*

<sup>176</sup> See W.V. Harris, *Restraining Rage. The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>177</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 100-102.

revenge prayer from Rheneia (SIG<sup>3</sup>, 1181): the grief of the murder of Hera-clea is transposed to God to arouse his avenging action.<sup>178</sup>

Vengeance itself also generates emotion, captured in the sentence: vengeance is sweet (Thucydides, *Hist.*, VII.68.1). A man's heart grows when he can avenge himself (Theognis, 361-362). Laughing and joy increases the humiliation and satisfaction of the act of vengeance.<sup>179</sup> The relationship between emotion and vengeance is clearly described by Irene Salvo: "a public expression of one's emotions served to regulate social behaviors and social interactions, and to culturally construct and to keep under control the negative emotions that could threaten a peaceful life in a community."<sup>180</sup>

### 1.3.3.7 Gender

Vengeance was predominantly a male task (Sophocles, *El.*, 1398).<sup>181</sup> It was an act which showed your masculinity: maleness was not a static, but a dynamic-practical category in which you had to show you were masculine. Aegisthus is shamed by the chorus, because Clytaimestra killed Agamemnon and he did not (Aeschylus, *Ag.*, 1644). He therefore has a woman's mind (θήλεια φρήν) (Aeschylus, *Choeph.*, 305).

As a male, you had to reach a specific age and strength to become an avenger.<sup>182</sup> Orestes had to grow up to become the avenger of his father (Sophocles, *El.*, 14). Aegisthus was brought back to take revenge (Aeschylus, *Ag.*, 1607). Vengeance thus asked for a certain amount of wisdom, strength and vitality. People would want to take revenge, but they are considered to be too old (Euripides, *Her.*, 230-235; *Ion*, 1040-1045).

Women were most of the times excluded from vengeance. They were considered physically weak, destined to remain passive.<sup>183</sup> There were some tasks women could do with regard to vengeance. They could muster men to avenge (Xenophon, *Cyr.*, V.2.7; Livy, *Ab Urb. Cond.*, I.58.7), they could raise children to take revenge, but they could not avenge themselves (Sophocles,

<sup>178</sup> P.W. van der Horst and J.H. Newman, *Early Jewish Prayers in Greek*, CEJL 6 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 137-143.

<sup>179</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 119.

<sup>180</sup> Salvo, "Sweet Revenge", 260-261.

<sup>181</sup> Gehrke, "Griechen", 135; Descharmes, *Rächer*, 92.

<sup>182</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 93.

<sup>183</sup> Pippin Burnett, *Revenge*, 143-144; Descharmes, *Rächer*, 85.

*Ant.*, 60-65).<sup>184</sup> Men had to do the job of avenging themselves, their women or next of kin.

Tragedy did subvert this image.<sup>185</sup> Women are set on stage as taking vengeance on the people who hurt them or their relatives, when male avengers seem to lack.<sup>186</sup> Alcmena, the mother of Heracles, wants to murder Eurystheus (Euripides, *Her.*, 976-980) and she exhorts the servants to escort him to the place where they (the servants and she) will kill him (1050-1052). Hecuba avenges the death of her murdered son Polydorus on Polymestor (Euripides, *Hec.*, 789-790; 882).

Female violence used in tragedies is cunning, but brutal. The brute physical force is absent, because females were considered weak. The act of vengeance in the case of a female avenger is therefore dressed in robes of intrigue.<sup>187</sup> Female revenge is used to defend the safe haven of the οἶκος.<sup>188</sup> Some examples can be mentioned. Electra wants to kill her mother Clytaimnestra and her lover Aegisthus with her brother Orestes to avenge the death of her father (Sophocles, *El.*, 1019; 1489-1490).<sup>189</sup> Sophocles also writes *Tereus* on the vengeance of Procne, who kills her son and serves him as a meal to avenge the rape and murder of her sister by her husband (*TrGF*, 581-589). Medea kills her sons, because of the “new marriage” (νεοδμήτες γάμοι) of her husband Jason (Euripides, *Med.*, 1366).

In Hellenistic times, prayer and cult also became a means to exact vengeance. Women could address a lament towards the gods to move them to action.<sup>190</sup> Artemisia calls upon Oserapis to receive her vengeance (UPZ I). The prayer from Arkesine asks Demeter to exact vengeance (IG XII<sup>7</sup>, 1). A figurine from the vicinity of Antinoopolis contains a curse of a woman (SGD,

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<sup>184</sup> See F. McHardy, “Women’s Influence on Revenge in Ancient Greece”, in: idem and E. Marshall (eds.), *Women’s Influence on Classical Civilization* (London: Routledge, 2004), 92-114.

<sup>185</sup> For the next examples, see Pippin Burnett, *Revenge*. Descharmes (*Rächer*, 87) calls them “manly women” (*männliche Frauen*).

<sup>186</sup> McHardy, *Revenge*, 50: “Women are occasionally represented taking revenge. They tend to act when they are in a position of isolation, lacking male relatives and on behalf of their blood relatives, usually fathers or brothers.”

<sup>187</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 86.

<sup>188</sup> Descharmes, *Rächer*, 89.

<sup>189</sup> In Sophocles’ piece, Electra herself does not execute the vengeance, but stimulates her brother to do so. Her role is seen by Chrysothemis as “anger in vain” (θυμῶ ματαίῳ) (Sophocles, *Elek.*, 331) and thus she cannot avenge. Yet, she crosses the line by stimulating and facilitating the execution of vengeance. See *ibidem*, 91.

<sup>190</sup> G. Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices. Women’s Laments and Greek Literature* (London: Routledge, 1992).



152). Women could be involved in the act of vengeance, but in most pieces of literature and material culture men were the designated protagonist of vengeance scenes.

### 1.3.3.8 Vengeance and purity

Angelos Chaniotis observes that inhabitants of Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor feared collective punishment on several occasions, because neglecting religious tasks made some impure, contagious, and worthy of divine vengeance.<sup>191</sup> Impurity was a vital danger for people in Antiquity.<sup>192</sup> The blood of a victim was on one's hands, thereby polluting an individual and those who come into contact with this person (Plato, *Euth.*, 4c).<sup>193</sup> Sickness and other dangers could hit those who became impure. There were several ways to purify, with sacrifices and vengeance being the most dominant. Impurity breached the order of the world and vengeance reversed this. In several literary and non-literary texts, vengeance and impurity are intimately connected.

Parker and Descharmes name a few examples in classical tradition.<sup>194</sup> Aeschylus talks about Agamemnon's impure status: the Erinyes attacked him because of "the blood of the fathers" (ἐκ τῶν πατρῶων αἱμάτων) (*Choeph.*, 284). Creon, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, makes clear that the vengeance of the gods is the only way purification can be attained for Thebes, because the city is defiled by Oedipus' crime (*Oed. Tyr.*, 95-107). Plato commands murderers of any type to purify (καθαρθεῖς) themselves legally, because they defiled someone and justice must be served on behalf of the victim (*Laws*, IX.865a-e).

The connection between vengeance and purity can also be found in later times. Apollonius Rhodius tells the story of Circe, who has to sacrifice to Zeus the Cleanser (καθάρσιον Ζῆνα) to purge the murders of the Argonauts from divine vengeance (*Arg.*, IV.699-717). In the Jewish inscription from

<sup>191</sup> Chaniotis, "Watchful Eyes", 2-3.

<sup>192</sup> For the following description of impurity and purification in Antiquity, see R.C.T. Parker, *Miasma. Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

<sup>193</sup> M. Visser, "Vengeance and Pollution in Classical Athens", *Journal for the History of Ideas* 45 (1984), 193-206.

<sup>194</sup> Parker, *Miasma*; Descharmes, *Rächer*, 152-158.

Rheneia, a father asks the execution of vengeance on the murderer of his daughter for her “innocent blood” (τὸ αἷμα τὸ ἀναίτιον) being shed (SIG<sup>3</sup>, 1181). In a small stele Sosandros of Hierapolis confesses that he has entered the temple impure (ἄναγνος) and was punished rightfully (BIW, 120; cf. BIW, 115).

### 1.3.4 Conclusion

Vengeance is best understood in the taxonomy of honor and reciprocity. A negative response to a gift had to be returned or otherwise the PCR could grant (a piece of) one’s honor to the offender. As we have seen, this was not only the case in human, but also in divine affairs. Vengeance had its roots in the familial structure, whereby the family members looked after one another and sought revenge when a relative was slighted in hybris. This avenging intervention was in accordance with and legitimized by the justice ‘system’ and could be a discharge of emotion. Vengeance was certainly not uncommon. It was in most cases accepted as a legitimate and functional tool in Greco-Roman society to restore the social equilibrium and eliminate impurity. J.E. Lendon rightfully states in an article: “it is modern scholarship that is uncomfortable with the vengeance motive.”<sup>195</sup> Most individuals living in Antiquity viewed vengeance as a clean way to solve problems, although some discussion among the elite remained regarding the legitimacy of revenge. We have to take this view from Antiquity into account in our research on the theme of vengeance in the New Testament.

## 1.4 Conclusion

Vengeance had a more differentiated position in Antiquity than one can see at first sight. Most of the times, vengeance was considered to be a legitimate response to an act of malice or contempt. An attack could cause loss of honor and impurity, so the attack had to be answered in some sort of way. Friends could become enemies and enemies could become friends. Vengeance was

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<sup>195</sup> J.E. Lendon, “Homeric vengeance and the outbreak of Greek wars”, in: Van Wees, *War*, 2.

bound to standards and unacceptable behavior was not tolerated. Vengeance could co-exist as an act of justice with the justice “system”. Some individuals however, such as Plato and Seneca, had the urge to denounce vengeance for several reasons.

The writers and readers of New Testament documents were living in the same societies. They breathed the same (cultural) air as their fellow countrymen and it is highly probable that this air in some way affected them. Greco-Roman culture however was not the only (cultural) air that was inhaled by the members of the New Testament congregations. Vital for the New Testament are the Hebrew Scriptures. The influence of early Jewish literature can also be detected. To attain a bigger and clearer picture of the context of the New Testament, these documents must also be explored. The next chapter will deal with these writings.

## Chapter 2

### Vengeance in the Old Testament and Early Jewish Literature

The social context of the New Testament is the Greco-Roman world. The primary sources for religious formation however were the Scriptures of Israel. It is therefore necessary to take the Old Testament and Early Jewish literature into view when one studies the New Testament. The New Testament authors use vocabulary, themes, and imagery from these literary traditions to formulate their messages. Contemporary writers, such as Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus, also processed the material of the Old Testament (and also other literature) into a shape that fits the purpose of their works.<sup>1</sup> Exploring the meaning and function of vengeance in the New Testament thus demands an inquiry into these writings.

This chapter is structured logically. First, the Old Testament is scrutinized (2.1), then Early Jewish literature (2.2). A Conclusion will complete this chapter (2.3).

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<sup>1</sup> Philo and Josephus are explicitly mentioned and examined, because they left behind a corpus of writings and we can reconstruct their biography. This means that a systematic investigation into their understanding of vengeance is possible, because the meaning and function of vengeance can be compared within the writings of the same author.

## 2.1 The Old Testament

### 2.1.1. Introduction

As with other issues, the notion of vengeance in the Old Testament has considerable influence on its use and function in the New Testament. This section will explicate what vengeance means and how it is used in the Hebrew Bible. Vengeance in the Old Testament is first defined on the basis of previous research, while the terminology of vengeance is also provided (2.1.2). Next the various aspects of vengeance in the Old Testament will be examined (2.1.3 to 2.1.8). This will be followed by a conclusion in which a review and synthesis will be offered.

### 2.1.2. Vengeance: definition and terminology

The existing works on vengeance in the Old Testament have provided us with an encompassing definition of the concept. This definition is formulated by Eric Peels in his dissertation: vengeance can be described as “*the punishing retribution of God, who in kingly sovereignty – faithful to his covenant – judging and fighting arises to defend the honour of his name, insures the maintenance of his justice and works for the liberation of his people.*”<sup>2</sup> This formula entails several aspects which we have already detected in Greco-Roman literature and artifacts, such as retribution, justice, honor, and emotion.

The root most commonly used for vengeance is נקם. Several other Hebrew roots could also be used to describe acts of vengeance, such as פקד and שלם. These roots have various other meanings though, which makes them quite unhelpful to thoroughly investigate the concept of vengeance in the Old Testament. Because נקם serves as the technical term for vengeance in the Hebrew Bible, it is possible to stick with an examination of נקם-passages to retrieve a thick description of the meaning and function of vengeance in the Old Testament. This semantic approach seems to contradict the observation in the

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<sup>2</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 277. Italics are his.

Introduction that a semantic lens does not suffice. This conclusion is only applicable in the case of the New Testament however: ἐκδικεῖν and ἐκδίκησις have multiple meanings, just as פקד and שלם. The root נקם has the act of vengeance as its sole meaning, thus serving as *terminus technicus*. A survey of נקם-texts thus provides not only a semantic study, but also an insight into the notion of vengeance in the Old Testament. Other passages containing vengeance vocabulary or vengeance scenes can be added to the analysis, but one will conclude that these texts do not add anything new to the outcome of the present research.

### 2.1.3 Divine Vengeance

The common conviction of the Old Testament writers is that vengeance is a divine matter. The most pronounced text to state this is the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. This text<sup>3</sup> states straightforward that vengeance is in God's hands: "Vengeance is mine" (Deut. 32,35).<sup>4</sup> YHWH is characterized as an Avenger in the prophecy (Nah. 1,2) and in the psalmody (Ps. 94,1).<sup>5</sup> YHWH's vengeance does not contradict his love. Psalm 99 for instance places YHWH's affection for Israel besides his vengeance in the climax of the psalm to emphasize his holiness (Ps. 99,8).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Eckart Otto ("Singing Moses. His Farewell Song in Deuteronomy 32", in: D. Human (ed.), *Psalmody and Poetry in Old Testament Ethics*, LHBOTS 572 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012), 169-180) states that Deuteronomy 32 is an amfiboly of psalms and prophetic texts and thus must be dated late. The work of Paul Sanders (*The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* (Leiden: Brill, 1996)) is more persuasive in dating Deuteronomy 32 early, between conquest of the promised land and the exile. For arguments for this early dating, see pages 295-436 of Sanders' book.

<sup>4</sup> The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint have a peculiar reading here: they read ליום instead of לי. This variant can be regarded as a synthesis with 35b, the עת of slipping feet. The reading of MT can be considered the more original reading.

<sup>5</sup> Zenger, in his theological exegesis of Psalm 94 (*Rache*, 139), claims that vengeance does not constitute the essence or Person of YHWH, but vengeance refers to his acts. When continuing Zenger's train of thought, what does it say about God when He can act as an Avenger? As Karl Barth (*Kirchliche Dogmatik. Band II, Erster Halbband: Die Lehre von Gott* (Zürich: EVZ, 1940), 288-305) has stated: God is "Being in the act" (*Sein-in-der-Tat*) and thus essence and act are inseparably connected to each other.

<sup>6</sup> R. Scoralick, *Trishagion und Gottesherrschaft. Psalm 99 als Neuinterpretation von Tora und Propheten*, SBS 138 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989), 84: "sie entfalten in unterschiedlichen Ausprägungen die Momente des 'tremendum' und des 'fascinatum', die das Heilige umfasst." Also 112: "Das Zusammen von Vergeben und Rächen verweist vielmehr darauf, dass Jahwe gerade *nicht* aus der Geschichte abgedankt hat, dass sein persönliches Engagement gerade *nicht* hinter einem wie auch immer gearteten Automatismus

God can execute vengeance as King. The kingship of YHWH is fundamental in the Old Testament (Ps. 95,3; 99,1; 1 Chron. 29,11). His kingship will endure forever (Exod. 15,18). As Peels states: “God’s kingship, understood as his sovereign, majestic rule in creation and history, permeates the entire Old Testament and forms the basis for the deepest content of the prophetic preaching concerning the eschatological kingdom of God.”<sup>7</sup> YHWH thus cannot tolerate the infringement of his kingship by individuals or nations. He then intervenes as the King who rules and punishes. The nations could tempt YHWH to act as Avenger (Ps. 79,10). Deuteronomy 32,35 is a reaction to the arrogance of the nations. Jeremiah prophesies that Babylon will be punished for mocking Israel and taunting YHWH (Jer. 50,24.29). Babylon therefore is punished by YHWH’s vengeance (Jer. 50,15.28; 51,6.11.36; cf. Isa. 47,3). Egypt is subjected to the same treatment (Jer. 46,10). The eschatological Psalm 149 points to the coming vengeance on the nations (Ps. 149,7).

Individuals could also fall prey to YHWH’s royal vengeance. The book of Kings tells the story of the anointing of Jehu, who is pointed out as the king of Israel to avenge the servants of God on Jezebel and the house of Ahab (2 Kgs. 9,7). Psalm 58 prays for YHWH’s vengeance on the oppressors of the righteous (Ps. 58,11).

YHWH’s vengeance as King could also be aimed at his own covenant people of Israel. YHWH sends the sword of vengeance to every Israelite who violates the covenant stipulations and remains unholy (Lev. 26,25). Jerusalem is corrupted and thus the Mighty One of Israel comes to exact vengeance on the city (Is. 1,24). Would YHWH not have his vengeance on his disobedient and rebellious people (Jer. 5,9.29; 9,8)?

YHWH could not only act as King in his vengeance, but could also attain the role of Warrior.<sup>8</sup> The roles of King and Warrior are not separated in the Old Testament, but are aligned. YHWH is mighty in battle (Ps. 24,8; cf.

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verschwindet. Jahwe selbst ist es, der immer wieder in die Geschichte eingegriffen hat, aus seiner persönlichen Freiheit heraus. Er hat durchgetragen und vergeben, aber auch – aus dem Ernst seines Engagements für Gerechtigkeit heraus – gestraft. Hier findet sich der Kern der Heiligkeit Jahwes: es ist seine persönliche, liebende Zuwendung, die den Ernst des Gerichts nicht aus-, sonder einschließt.”

<sup>7</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 278.

<sup>8</sup> A. Wénin, “‘Adonāi est un guerrier’ (Ex 15,2). La violence divine dans le premier Testament”, in: idem, J.D. Causse and E. Cuvilier (eds.), *Divine Violence. Approche exégétique et anthropologique*, LIB 168 (Paris: Cerf, 2011), 15-66 ; S.C. Ryan, *Divine Conflict and the Divine Warrior. Listing to Romans and other Jewish Voices*, WUNT II/507 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2020), 23-107.

Exod. 15,3) and יהוה צבאות (Ps. 24,10; Isa. 1,24).<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah confesses YHWH as a hero who is on his side (Jer. 20,11) and thus prays for his vengeance (20,12). Isaiah 59 professes YHWH as a Warrior clothed in vengeance (Isa. 59,17). YHWH brings the enemies under control of the king (2 Sam. 22,48=Ps. 18,48). He comes as the Warrior on the day of vengeance against Edom (Isa. 63,4), just as he will come as the Lord of hosts against Babylon (Jer. 51,55-57).

Vengeance in the Old Testament is a divine matter, yet YHWH could use people or nations to exact his vengeance. Israel has to take vengeance on the Midianites, because of their attempt to lure Israel away from YHWH (Num. 31,2-3).<sup>10</sup> Jehu is used as an instrument to retaliate the death of YHWH's servants (2 Kgs. 9,7). The anointed one is sent to proclaim the day of vengeance (Is. 61,2). Israel is used by YHWH to combat Edom (Ezek. 25,14). Rekab and Baanah think they are used by YHWH for his divine vengeance on Saul (2 Sam. 4,8).

The Conquest Narrative of Israel is sometimes named the YHWH-war.<sup>11</sup> This story tells the conquest of the Promised Land by Israel and features several acts of vengeance. In the divinely sanctioned battle of Gibeon (Josh. 10), Joshua asks the celestial bodies to support the Israelites in their battle and vengeance is then executed (Josh. 10,12-13).<sup>12</sup> Jephthah has been used by YHWH to exact vengeance on the Ammonites (Judg. 11,36). Samson asks YHWH to give back his strength to avenge his eyes on the Philistines (Judg. 16,28). This act of violence could be labeled as a personal vendetta<sup>13</sup>, yet Samson as a judge did deliver Israel from more Philistine enemies in this act than in his whole judging career (Judg. 16,30). Samson has, in this personal act of vengeance, done his job as YHWH's judge in releasing Israel

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<sup>9</sup> See T. Longman and D.G. Reid, *God is A Warrior*, SOTBT 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> T.R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 591: "This phrase (...) shows that this war is to be considered a Yahweh war in which ban or *cherem* was to be carried out."

<sup>11</sup> See G. von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel*, AThANT 20 (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1951); S.M. Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East*, BZAW 177 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> K. van Bekkum, *From Conquest to Coexistence. Ideology and Antiquarian Intent in the Historiography of Israel's Settlement in Canaan*, CHANE 45 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 246.

<sup>13</sup> For instance D.I. Block, *Judges and Ruth*, NAC (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1999), 468: "all he seeks is personal vengeance."



from its enemies.<sup>14</sup> The vengeance of YHWH is also carried out by Saul (1 Sam. 14,24) and David (1 Sam. 18,25) on the Philistines, and by the Jews on Haman and his companions (Esth. 8,13).<sup>15</sup>

Despite the conviction of the Old Testament that vengeance is a divine matter, human vengeance can also be found in several texts. The Law of Holiness (Lev. 17-26) contains a passage in which an attitude of human vengeance is prohibited: no revenge, but love (Lev. 19,18).<sup>16</sup> Yet, in the very beginning of the Old Testament, Lamech boasts about his power: for minor injuries he kills people and avenges himself seventyfold (Gen. 4,23-24). This evil disposition of single-handed revenge is addressed on several occasions. Psalm 8 exults that YHWH has established a stronghold to silence vengeful attitudes (Ps. 8,3). Enemies are plotting or acting against the people of God in vengeance (Ps. 44,17; Jer. 20,10; Lam. 3,60). Edom attacked Israel out of vindictiveness and rancor (Ezek. 25,12). Rekab and Baanah saw themselves as YHWH's instruments of vengeance (2 Sam. 4,8), but they took matters into their own hands (2 Sam. 4,9-11).

These instances of human revenge are characterized as hostile and unnatural behavior, in contrast to the righteousness of the victims. Humans do not have permission to take revenge into their own hands: vengeance is YHWH's matter of affair.<sup>17</sup> He executes vengeance when his enemies (nations, individuals, Israel) attempt to take his honor away by taunting or attacking him or his (needy) people. If something like that occurs, He will stand up for his honorable name and do justice.

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<sup>14</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 102: "in Samson's actions the personal and official, the individual and the national, are intertwined (...). It is (...) a moment imbedded in the effort to deliver God's people."

<sup>15</sup> For the background of the YHWH-war in Esther 8, see Peels, *Vengeance*, 97.

<sup>16</sup> K. Akiyama, *The Love of Neighbour in Ancient Judaism. The Reception of Leviticus 19:18 in the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, the Book of Jubilees, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament*, AJEC 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Dietrich, "Rache", 458: "So erscheint letztlich Gott als der einzige absolute zuverlässige Garant dafür, dass Unrecht nicht ungesühnt bleibt. Es ist nur eine Konsequenz daraus, wenn mehrfach Jahwe als Gott der Rache gefeiert wird, ohne dass deutlich würde, an wem und wofür er Rache nehmen sollte."

### 2.1.4 Retribution

The German Old Testament scholar Klaus Koch wrote an influential article on the existence of retributive thinking in the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup> He rejects the common opinion that a legal doctrine of retaliation or retribution is present in the Old Testament and construes a structure from the Old Testament texts he calls a “schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre” and a “Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang”.<sup>19</sup> This means that deeds determine the fate of an individual in a community.<sup>20</sup> Good deeds naturally come with welfare and prosperity, bad deeds come with evil and disaster. Koch questions the conventional view of justice in the Old Testament, but his alternative is insufficient.<sup>21</sup> Janowski for instance criticizes the static character of Koch’s model and instead obtains for reciprocity as the dynamic component of Koch’s model.<sup>22</sup> Peels objects to the complete rejection of legal terms and thoughts by Koch: the study of vengeance in the Old Testament shows that vengeance has a legal connotation.<sup>23</sup>

Vengeance can be considered as a reaction to an offense. The previous chapter has detected that revenge can be described as the negative *χάρις* in a reciprocal relationship in Greco-Roman texts and artifacts. It is uncertain that the Old Testament contains such a full-blown reciprocity system, although some researchers use the conceptual device of reciprocity to illuminate certain texts.<sup>24</sup> Vengeance however has in its essence a reciprocal element, namely the principle of *quid pro quo* (something for something). Vengeance

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<sup>18</sup> K. Koch, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?”, *ZThK* 52 (1955), 1-42; Reprinted in: idem (ed.), *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments*, WdF 125 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 130-180. Citations are from the reprint-edition.

<sup>19</sup> Koch “Vergeltungsdogma”, 160-164.

<sup>20</sup> Koch, “Vergeltungsdogma”, 166: “Durch sein Tun ‘schafft’ der Mensch sich ein Sphäre, die ihn bleibend heil- oder unheilwirkend umgibt.”

<sup>21</sup> For a lengthy discussion of Koch’s theses with its strengths and weaknesses, see N.A. Schuman, *Gelijk om Gelijk. Verslag en balans van een discussie over goddelijke vergelding in het Oude Testament* (Amsterdam: VU-Uitgeverij, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> B. Janowski, “Die Tat kehrt zum Täter zurück. Offene Fragen im Umkreis des ‘Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhangs’”, in: idem, *Die Rettende Gerechtigkeit. Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments 2* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 167-191. See also Schuman, *Gelijk*, 504-506.

<sup>23</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 302-305.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance S. Kirkpatrick, *Competing for Honor. A Social-Scientific Reading of Daniel 1-6*, BIS 74 (Leiden: Brill, 2005); E. Pfoh, “Genesis 4 Revisited. Some Remarks on Divine Patronage”, *SJOT* 23 (2009), 38-45; J. Schäder, “Patronage and Clientage between God, Israel and the Nations. A Social Scientific Investigation of Psalm 47”, *JourSem* 19 (2010), 235-262.

presupposes an antecedent offense, otherwise revenge does not have any legitimacy and turns into senseless violence.

The Old Testament texts consider vengeance to be retributive. A crime has been committed and punishment by vengeance is a legitimate way of *quid pro quo*. YHWH does not punish for no reason, in the case of vengeance he always disciplines as a reaction on a crime. When Cain is killed out of revenge, YHWH will exact his vengeance (Gen. 4,15). Israel is punished by YHWH because of their sins (Lev. 26,25; Isa. 1,24; 59,17; Jer. 5,9.29; 9,8; Ezek. 24,8). The nations are in the same way punished by their arrogance and sinful behavior (Num. 31,2-3; Deut. 32,35.41.43; Isa. 34,8; 47,3; 63,4; Jer. 46,10; 50,15.28; 51,6.11.36; Ezek. 25,14.15.17; Micah. 5,14). Crimes of individuals are punished in vengeance (Gen. 4,24; Exod. 21,20-21; 2 Kgs. 9,7; Esth. 8,13; Ps. 58,11; Prov. 6,34). Vengeance in the Old Testament thus functions as a retributive mechanism in a legal system.

### 2.1.5 Justice

Strongly linked to retribution is the concept of justice.<sup>25</sup> Vengeance is not a matter of personal vendetta: the Old Testament apprehends vengeance in a legal frame most of the times. YHWH can exact vengeance as a King or Warrior, but also as a Judge. He is recognized in ancient Israel as the most righteous Judge (Judg. 11,27; Ps. 7,12; 9,5). He conducts lawsuits (Isa. 43,26; Jer. 2,35), he does justice for the needy (Ps. 26,1; Isa. 51,5; Lam. 3,59) and punishes when needed (1 Sam. 3,13; Ezek. 5,10; 2 Chron. 2,20).<sup>26</sup> YHWH's title of Judge is tightly connected to his kingship, as rulers were judges in the ancient Orient.<sup>27</sup> In the psalms of YHWH's kingship (Pss. 93-99), his judgment and justice are dominantly present (Ps. 94,2; 96,10.13; Ps. 97,2; 98,9; 99,4).

The relation between justice and honor must be fleshed out shortly here. Justice and honor are connected in the Old Testament. Justice in the Old

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<sup>25</sup> Justice is understood here as the forensic process of punishment and restoration when standards of behavior in a community are infringed. See J. Krašovec, *La Justice (SDQ) de Dieu dans la bible hébraïque et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne*, OBO 76 (Freiburg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1988).

<sup>26</sup> M.C.A. Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds. Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1990), 286-289; H. Niehr, "שפּט", *TWAT VIII*, 408-428.

<sup>27</sup> S.W. Flynn, *YHWH is King. The Development of Divine Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 131-134.

Testament is communicative: it tries to restore the right order in the world between God and his people or between individuals.<sup>28</sup> A crime or slight disrupts this natural order. Justice employs the balance of honor and shame to restore the relationship as a PCR: the perpetrator is dishonored and shamed by punishment, while the victim is restored in his or her honor. Honor- and shame terminology can therefore also be used in a forensic context.<sup>29</sup> The disturbed order of relations and honor is met by a legal reaction of power.<sup>30</sup> Honor and justice can be seen in the light of the nexus of honor and community, which is described by John Goldingay: “the communal ethos thus reinforces the impetus to faithfulness and the disincentive to wrongdoing.”<sup>31</sup>

YHWH’s vengeance is connected to his role as Judge. He avenges the transgression of his justice and saves the oppressed who cannot stand up for themselves.<sup>32</sup> He stands as the avenging Judge on the side of Cain (Gen. 4,15), the Israelites at Gibeon (Josh. 10,13) and David in the face of Saul (1 Sam. 24,13). His vengeance will be comforting for his dispirited people (Deut. 32,35; Isa. 35,4) and servant (Jer. 11,20; 15,15; 20,12). The Psalter sings of YHWH’s avenging justice to save the needy (Ps. 58,11; 79,10; 94,1-2). The blood of innocent victims will be avenged (Ezek. 24,8). As a Judge he can punish Jerusalem (Isa. 1,24) and the nations (Deut. 32,41.43; Isa. 34,8; 63,4;<sup>33</sup> Jer. 50,15.28; 51,6.11.36; Ezek. 25,14.17) for their injustice. His judgment unifies the two elements of punishment and liberation: punishment for the oppressors and liberation for the victims of injustice.<sup>34</sup>

Several vengeance texts in the Old Testament also have a specific legal context. Exodus 21 narrates the case of a beaten slave (Exod. 21,20-21). If the slave died directly after the beating, the owner and perpetrator is responsible and the slave has to be avenged (Exod. 21,20). The beating was

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<sup>28</sup> G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments. Band I: Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels* (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1966), 382-383.

<sup>29</sup> J.W. Olley, “The Forensic Connotation of בֹּשֶׁת”, *VT* 26 (1976), 230-234; P. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice. Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup 105 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 369-371.

<sup>30</sup> A. Berlejung, “Sin and Punishment. The Ethics of Divine Justice and Divine Retribution in Ancient Near Eastern and Old Testaments Texts”, *Int.* 69 (2015), 272-287.

<sup>31</sup> J. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology. Volume II: Israel’s Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic Press, 2006), 531.

<sup>32</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 280.

<sup>33</sup> There is a strong connection between Isaiah 34-35 and Isaiah 63. See B. Gosse, “Isa 63 1-6 en relation à la synthèse du livre d’Isaïe en *mspt sdqh/ysw’h sdqh*, et la place d’Isa 34-35 dans la rédaction du livre”, *ZAW* 113 (2001), 535-552.

<sup>34</sup> J. Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, & Forgiveness. The Thinking & Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek & Modern Views*, VTSup 78 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 789-792.

deliberately so severe that a murder was committed and the death of the slave had to be recompensed.<sup>35</sup> If the slave stayed alive for one or two days, the beating was accidentally so severe and thus the crime was a property crime (Exod. 21,21). Thus the community stood up for the vulnerable people and the individuals without status and voice.<sup>36</sup> Another legal instance is the revenge of Samson on the Philistines for the murder of his wife and father-in-law (Judg. 15,7). The writer of Proverbs warns his readers to not commit adultery: the adulterer will receive vengeance (Prov. 6,34).

Vengeance thus cannot be described as an extralegal phenomenon, because it carries a strong legal connotation. Vengeance in most cases has to do with maintaining the balance of justice and restoring the order in the world.<sup>37</sup> This claim is further substantiated by the evidence from the Septuagint, which consistently translates texts containing נקם with legal terms such as ἐκδίκειν and ἐκδίκησις (to avenge, to chastise), κρίσις (judgment), ἀμύνειν (to retaliate), ἐκδικάζω (doing right, to avenge) and δίκαιος (just).

### 2.1.6 Kinship and Covenant

George Mendenhall has shown that the notion of covenant is important in the understanding of Old Testament revenge texts.<sup>38</sup> He states that YHWH, the head of the covenant, acts in vengeance as a *modus operandi foederis*. The covenant has been breached, either by Israel or by the nations, and God cannot look away. Mendenhall probably overstates his case, making vengeance an exclusively covenantal term.<sup>39</sup> Yet, he has rightfully detected that covenant is an important aspect in the study of Old Testament vengeance texts.

In the previous chapter, the notion of kinship is named as a crucial feature of the background of Greco-Roman vengeance. The understanding of ברית in the Old Testament also found its roots in notions of family and

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<sup>35</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 72.

<sup>36</sup> E. Otto, *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments*, TW 3.2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994), 79: "in Ex 21,18-32 wird die entsprechende Gegengewalt nur im Tötungsfalle um des generellen Lebensschutzes willen, also einschließlich der bislang rechtlich minder Geschützten, in Kauf genommen."

<sup>37</sup> Kátó, "Rache", 116.

<sup>38</sup> Mendenhall, "Vengeance". Cf. Musvosvi, *Vengeance*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> See Peels, *Vengeance*, 9-10 and 284.

kinship.<sup>40</sup> The Old Testament contains a significant correlation between the concept of covenant and the metaphor of father and son: YHWH is the patron and Father and Israel is the son in the covenant.<sup>41</sup> This relation does not exclude YHWH's kingship. Rather, the covenant includes the kingship of YHWH.<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly, a comparison can be made with the observations of Descharmes about Attic Tragedy. Descharmes observed that kinship is not only a blood-bond, but it comes with a certain expectation of behavior. Hostile conduct of family members meant that kinship was broken and those individuals could also expect revenge acts.<sup>43</sup> Descharmes' observations can also be applied to the Old Testament. The status of covenant partner required certain conduct to prove that one could be a loyal covenant partner. Vengeance within the covenant is applied when the people of Israel behaved contrary to the stipulations of the covenant and thus became enemies of the covenant (Ex. 21,20-21). They were targeted by the covenant curse (Lev. 26,25), because of injustice (Isa. 1,24; Ezek. 24,8), or oppression of the weak (Ps. 58,11; 94,1). YHWH is the Father and Patron of the covenant, but He can enact retribution when covenant partners turn out to be enemies and show hostile conduct (Isa. 59,17; Jer. 5,9.29; 9,8).

The enemies are not only localized within Israel, but also outside the covenant. The hostile nations are punished by YHWH, because of their attack on his son Israel (Num. 31,2-3; Isa. 34,8; 47,3; 63,4; Jer. 50-51; Ezek. 25,14.17; Nah. 1,2). YHWH delivers his people from the vicious grip of the nations by executing his vengeance (Deut. 32,35-43; Isa. 35,4). The nations are not allowed to offend Israel meaninglessly and without divine authorization.

The Old Testament texts treating vengeance do not entirely suit the frame of the covenant. Some texts do not have a covenantal focus, but are placed in the context of YHWH's universal justice and kingship. He thus stands up for Cain when he is hurt (Gen. 4,15), punishes when the relation

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<sup>40</sup> F.M. Cross, "Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel", in: idem, *From Epic to Canon. History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3-21; S.W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant. A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Hahn, *Kinship*, 42 citing C.J.H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (London: Marshall Pickering/HarperCollins, 1992), 122-123; D.J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant. A Study in the Form of Ancient Oriental Documents and the Old Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 266.

<sup>42</sup> Hahn, *Kinship*, 39; Peels, *Vengeance*, 285.

<sup>43</sup> Descharmes, *Rücher*, 262-263.

between YHWH and the nations is wretched (Jer. 46,10; Micah 5,14), and settles the case between two nations (Judg. 11,36). His vengeance is even universally eschatological (Ps. 149,7). It is wisdom to avenge the adulterer for breaking the family bond (Prov. 6,34). Vengeance thus is very often used in a covenantal context, but is not exclusively covenantal: “God’s vengeance is not only directed against those who break or threaten the covenant, but against all those who in any way despise God’s sovereign rule.”<sup>44</sup>

### 2.1.7 Honor

In his 1926 work on ancient Israel the Danish Old Testament scholar Johannes Pedersen already noticed that honor was a fundamental notion in the life and culture of ancient Israel.<sup>45</sup> The construction of honor by Pedersen has been nuanced in several ways by works of Martin Klopfenstein and Johanna Stiebert.<sup>46</sup> The main point of Pedersen however is still standing: honor is fundamental in the daily life and understanding of ancient Israel.

Vengeance is in the Old Testament often linked with the notion of honor. First and foremost, the status of YHWH is frequently subject of honor discourse. His honor cannot stand vengeful behavior (Ps. 8,3). When Israel fails to recognize YHWH as the God of Israel and act as gentiles, YHWH’s honor is affected and the equilibrium has to be restored by covenant vengeance (Lev. 26,25; cf. Isa. 59,17).<sup>47</sup> The Midianites have to be subjected to vengeance, because they attacked the honor of YHWH (Num. 31,2-3).<sup>48</sup> Ahab and Jezebel insulted YHWH by killing his servants (2 Kgs. 9,7; cf. Ps.

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<sup>44</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 287.

<sup>45</sup> J. Pedersen, *Israel. Its Life and Culture. Volume I-II* (Copenhagen/London: Branner og Korch/Oxford University Press, 1964<sup>5</sup>), 213-244.

<sup>46</sup> M.A. Klopfenstein, *Scham und Schande nach dem Alten Testament. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu den hebräischen Wurzeln bôš, klm und ḥpr*, ATThANT 62 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1972); J. Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible. The Prophetic Contribution*, JSOTSup 346 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. S.M. Olyan, “Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and Its Environment”, *JBL* 115 (1996), 201-218; T.R. Hobbs, “Reflections on Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations”, *JBL* 116 (1997), 501-503.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Ashley, *Numbers*, 591: “what is meant is an executive action on behalf of Yahweh, carried out through Israel, to vindicate the honor of Yahweh and Israel, which has been sullied by the matter of Baal-Peor.”

79,10).<sup>49</sup> The nations could attack the honorable status of YHWH, thus deserving vengeance (Jer. 46,10), sometimes by engaging in battle with Israel (Isa. 47,3; Jer. 50,24-29; 51,6.11.35-36; Ezek. 25,12.14-15.17), or his prophets (Jer. 11,20; 15,15), and sometimes by being haughty and egocentric (Deut. 32,27-35). YHWH will come to show his honor in the day of vengeance (Isa. 61,2) and in the future his honor will shine, also through vengeance (Ps. 149,7).<sup>50</sup> He will thus stand up for his honorable name by defending himself and his covenant people and taking away their (and his) enemies. He defends and restores the honor of Israel and himself by doing justice.

Individuals could also claim honor by vengeance. Lamech avenges everyone who slights his honorable status (Gen. 4,24). Rekab and Baanah think they deserve honor by avenging David on Isbosheth (2 Sam. 4,8). David also ties honor and vengeance together (1 Sam. 18,25). The Jews retaliate the hubris of Haman and his troops for affecting their existence, thus restoring their honor (Esth. 8,13).<sup>51</sup> The psalmist asks for retribution, because the vengeful behavior of the enemy has shamed him (Ps. 44,17; Ps. 94,1).<sup>52</sup> Jeremiah asks for vengeance to shame his enemies (Jer. 20,12). Honor and vengeance are thus connected with each other in the Old Testament: through vengeance the honor of YHWH, his people or other individuals is restored to its original status.

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<sup>49</sup> D.A. Glatt-Gilad (“Yahweh’s Honor at Stake. A Divine Conundrum”, *JSOT* 98 (2002), 63-74, there 66) on Psalm 79: “The very real consequence of God’s reputation being sullied is expressed through the nations’ taunt ‘Where is their God?’, whereas the necessary antidote to this belittling of God’s reputation is for God to exact his vengeance on these very nations who scorned him (v. 12).”

<sup>50</sup> P. de Vries (*The Kābôd of YHWH in the Old Testament. With Particular Reference to the Book of Ezekiel*, SSN 65 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 204) restricts YHWH’s glory to his appearance in Psalm 149 and not to the eschatological vengeance. This point of view does not do justice to the whole vision of Psalm 149, where the glory of YHWH is shining in his appearance and in the avenging eschatological acts.

<sup>51</sup> T.S. Laniak, *Shame and Honor in the Book of Esther*, SBLDS 165 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 142. See also N. Caldach-Benages, “War, Violence and Revenge in Esther”, in: J. Liesen and P.C. Beentjes (eds.), *Visions of Peace and Tales of War*, DCLY 2010 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 121-145.

<sup>52</sup> A.C. Cottrill, *Language, Power and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual*, LHBOTS 493 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2008), 95: “the language of revenge, while also a language of justice and righteousness (...) is part of a discourse that affords the psalmist a position of violently achieved dominance over the enemy. Ability to inflict revenge portends restored honor and an identity of social worth.”



### 2.1.8 Emotion, Gender, Pollution and Eschatology

The previous chapter has argued that emotions are approached differently in antiquity than today.<sup>53</sup> Emotions are more narrative and communicative in the Greco-Roman world than our modern notion of emotions as expressions of inner states. The same conclusion fits the Old Testament understanding of emotions. Bernd Janowski concisely states: “Emotions (...) are not expressions of an inner world of feelings, that exist independent from the outside world. On the contrary: they play a constitutive role in the communication with others, because they help the individual prepare themselves cognitively on a certain act or decision.”<sup>54</sup> This conviction about emotion in the Old Testament means that attributing emotions to YHWH describes his state, but also addresses the hearers and readers to believe in him.<sup>55</sup>

Wrath and anger are emotions which are often connected to vengeance. Wrath (אָר) is the expression of YHWH’s indignation that his world rule, despite his might, is not acknowledged by the nations.<sup>56</sup> YHWH’s anger (חַמָּה) is his fiery wrath about human conduct which contradicts his sovereignty and power.<sup>57</sup> These emotions thus do not primarily describe the inner state of YHWH, but can be considered a (pedagogical) reaction of God towards norm violations.<sup>58</sup> A couple of texts make the link between wrath/anger and vengeance explicit. The psalmist could ask God to pour out his grimness (Ps. 79,6) and do vengeance for his servants (Ps. 79,10). YHWH trod Edom in his anger,

<sup>53</sup> See 1.3.3.5.

<sup>54</sup> B. Janowski, *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments. Grundfragen – Kontexte – Themenfelder* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 150: “Emotionen (...) sind nicht Ausdruck einer inneren Gefühlswelt, die unabhängig von der Außenwelt existiert. Im Gegenteil: Sie spielen eine konstitutive Rolle für die Kommunikation mit anderen, indem sie dem Individuum helfen, sich gedanklich auf eine bestimmte Handlung oder Entscheidung vorzubereiten (...).” Cf. M. Köhlmoos, “‘Denn ich, JHWH, bin ein eifersüchtiger Gott’. Gottes Gefühle im Alten Testament”, in: A. Wagner (ed.), *Göttliche Körper – Göttliche Gefühle. Was leisten anthropomorphe und anthropopathische Götterkonzepte im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament?*, OBO 270 (Fribourg/Göttingen: Academic Press/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 191-217.

<sup>55</sup> Köhlmoos, “Gefühle”, 210.

<sup>56</sup> J. Jeremias, *Der Zorn Gottes im Alten Testament. Das biblische Israel zwischen Verwerfung und Erwählung*, Biblisch-Theologische Studien 104 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009), 28: “*der ‘Zorn’ ist jeweils Ausdruck der Empörung Gottes, dass trotz seiner Machtweise seine Weltherrschaft von Völkern nicht anerkannt wird.*” Italics by Jeremias.

<sup>57</sup> K.D. Schunck, “חַמָּה”, *TWAT II*, 1032-1036. For the difference between wrath and grimness, see G. Sauer, “חַמָּה”, *THAT I*, 581-583.

<sup>58</sup> Janowski, *Ein Gott*, 153-172.

because the day of vengeance was in his heart (Isa. 63,3-4). YHWH's vengeance comes down on Babylon in anger and wrath (Jer. 50,13,25). Israel did not cover up their crimes, and thus the anger of YHWH came up and he wanted to take revenge (Ezek. 24,8). He also exacts vengeance on Edom according to his anger and wrath, as well as his vengeance on the Philistines with wrathful punishments (בתוכחות חמה) (Ezek. 25,14,17). YHWH will do vengeance in anger and wrath (Micah 5,14); he is an Avenger in anger (Nah. 1,2).

More texts place YHWH's anger and wrath as an implicit background to his vengeance. The imagery of YHWH as Warrior who slays the adversaries can be read in such a setting (Deut. 32,35-43; Isa. 59,17; cf. Lev. 26,25). The psalmist implicitly asks for YHWH's angry vengeance on the wicked (Ps. 58,6-11). YHWH will pour out his wrath and avenges himself (Isa. 1,24). Jeremiah asks for YHWH's angry vengeance as a rightful Judge (Jer. 11,20; 15,15; 20,12). The wrath and anger of God manifested in his vengeance must be considered as attributes of his justice and conservation of the world, punishing violators and redeeming victims.<sup>59</sup> Readers must reckon with his emotional vengeance when they cross his normative lines, but they may also reach out to him for his wrathful and angry vengeance to serve their cause.

Individuals could also take revenge in anger. Thus Samson wants to take revenge on the Philistines for the murder of his wife and father-in-law and the context embodies his anger (Judg. 15,7; cf. 16,28). The husband in Proverbs 6 is angered by the act of adultery and he shows no restraint to take revenge (Prov. 6,34). The emotions of wrath and anger are thus dominantly present in the milieu of vengeance in the Old Testament. Vengeance is an emotional enterprise, sometimes with a just cause while in other cases the justification of emotional vengeance is questionable.

The issue of vengeance and gender is also an aspect in Greco-Roman literature and artifacts. In a small amount of Old Testament passages, vengeance and masculinity are implicitly connected. Thus Lamech is boasting about his might to avenge his wounds seventy-sevenfold, even more than Cain is avenged by YHWH (Gen. 4,24). Lamech uses this language to define

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<sup>59</sup> Janowski, *Ein Gott*, 171; W. Groß, "Keine Gerechtigkeit Gottes ohne Zorn Gottes. Zorn Gottes in der christlichen Bibel", in: G. Kruck and C. Sticher (eds.), "*Deine Bilder stehn vor dir wie Nahmen*". *Zur Rede von Zorn und Erbarmen Gottes in der Heiligen Schrift* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald, 2005), 19.

and emphasize his masculine powers.<sup>60</sup> The image of YHWH as Warrior is also sometimes seen as a way of expressing the masculine side of YHWH: his masculine strength is expressed in the imagery of the gear of combat (Deut. 32,41-42; Isa. 59,17; Jer. 50,25-28).<sup>61</sup> Although minor, gender thus plays a role in some texts in understanding vengeance as a masculine venture.

The previous chapter also detected a correlation between vengeance and impurity. Pollution of the life of an individual or of a society must be removed and cleansed. The uncleanness of Jezebel must be eliminated by the vengeance of Jehu (2 Kgs. 9,7). God himself will purify the land and the people of Israel by his vengeance (Deut. 32,43; cf. Ps. 79,10). YHWH will clean Jerusalem through revenge (Isa. 1,24; cf. Ezek. 24,8). He will get rid of the pollution of the Gentiles (Isa. 47,3; Micah 5,14). The illness of Babylon is untreatable and therefore God's vengeance must cleanse them (Jer. 51,6-9). The impurity of adultery will be ruthlessly avenged (Prov. 6,34).

The Old Testament does not have a comprehensive and coherent eschatology, but there are some texts which can be deemed "eschatological".<sup>62</sup> These eschatological texts are sometimes connected with vengeance. The clearest example is Psalm 149,7: the eschatological judgment of YHWH will include an avenging act on the Gentiles (cf. Micah 5,14).<sup>63</sup> The vengeance texts of Deuteronomy 32 can be conceived eschatological, opening up the

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<sup>60</sup> D.T. Olson, "Untying the Knot. Masculinity, Violence and the Creation-Fall Story of Genesis 2-4", in: L. Day and C. Presser (eds.), *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World. An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, Fs. K.D. Sakenfeld (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 73-86.

<sup>61</sup> D.J.A. Clines, "The Most High Male. Divine Masculinity in the Bible", in: O. Creangă (ed.), *Hebrew Masculinities Anew*, HBM 79 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2019), 61-82.

<sup>62</sup> The notion of eschatology is complicated in its relation to the Old Testament. An eschatological vision of an otherworldly heaven for individual believers can seldom be found. Yet there is a certain (growing) expectation in the Old Testament of a future time which is radically different than the present. For a more comprehensive review and approach, see B.T. Arnold, "Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism", in: J.L. Walls (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23-39.

<sup>63</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 219-221 who points to N. Füglistner, "Ein garstig Lied. Ps. 149", in: E. Haag and F.L. Hossfeld, *Freude an der Weisung des Herrn. Beiträge zum Theologie der Psalmen*, Fs. H. Groß, SBB 13 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1987), 81-105. Prinsloo ("Psalm 149. Praise Yahweh with Tambourine and Two-Edged Sword", *ZAW* 109 (1997), 395-407) states that the psalm is not eschatological (406-407). See also E. Zenger, "Die Provokation des 149. Psalms. Von der Unverzichtbarkeit der kanonischen Psalmenauslegung", in: R. Kessler e.a. (eds.), *Ihr Völker alle, klatscht in die Hände*, Fs. E. Gerstenberger, EZ 3 (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 1997), 181-194.

future for Israel (Deut. 32,35.41.43).<sup>64</sup> Vengeance is a dominant theme in the prophecy of the book of Isaiah and through the whole book vengeance is eschatologically loaded.<sup>65</sup> Jeremiah 50-51 focuses on YHWH's judgment of Babylon, but Babylon is sketched in suprahistorical traits and thus YHWH's vengeance becomes eschatological.<sup>66</sup>

### 2.1.9 Conclusion

This section has tried to elaborate aspects of vengeance in the Old Testament to illuminate its definition and function. The theme of vengeance is present and sometimes dominant across the Old Testament. The Greco-Roman vision of vengeance and the Old Testament understanding of this concept appear to have a lot in common with each other: the major aspects discerned in chapter one are also visible in the Old Testament. The same kind of mentality can be observed in both Greco-Roman society and ancient Israel. There is however a difference between the two. While the Hebrew Bible maintains that vengeance is a divine prerogative and humans are not allowed to show vengeful behavior, Greco-Roman literature describes both divine and human vengeance and does not prefer one over the other. The notion of the divine prerogative of vengeance exhibits a fundamental difference between the Old Testament and Greco-Roman literature on the meaning and function of vengeance.

Thus far two important matrices of the New Testament understanding of vengeance have been clarified: the Greco-Roman matrix in chapter 1 and the Old Testament concept in this section. The next step will be the reception of the Old Testament concept of vengeance in Early Jewish literature.

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<sup>64</sup> J. Luyten, "Primeval and Eschatological Overtones in the Song of Moses (Dt 32,1-43)", in: N. Lohfink (ed.), *Das Deuteronomium. Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft*, BETHL 68 (Leuven: Peeters, 1985), 341-347.

<sup>65</sup> Gosse, "Isa 63 1-6", 535-552.

<sup>66</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 150; J.G. Amesz, "A God of Vengeance? Comparing YHWH's Dealings with Judah and Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah", in: M. Kessler (ed.), *Reading the Book of Jeremiah. A Search for Coherence* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 99-116; U. Sals, *Die Biographie der "Hure Babylon"*. *Studien zur Intertextualität der Babylon-Texte in der Bibel*, FAT II/6 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

## 2.2 Early Jewish Literature

The province of Syro-Palestine encountered the vast influence of Hellenism, the set of Greek values and customs which spread from Greece into the Mediterranean.<sup>67</sup> The dialogue between the Jewish roots, the new Hellenistic influence, and the development of Early Jewish culture is vital for understanding parts of the Old Testament (like Daniel and the Books of Chronicles), Jewish literature from this period, and also the New Testament.

This section will treat the Early Jewish writings. Two important authors are the philosopher Philo of Alexandria and the historian Flavius Josephus. They will receive separate attention in 2.2.1 and 2.2.2. Other Early Jewish literature will be covered in 2.2.3.

### 2.2.1 Philo

Philo of Alexandria is a near contemporary of the New Testament writers.<sup>68</sup> He thus forms a historical link between Old Testament writings and New Testament works. His writings display an approach which tries to retain Old Testament fundamentals and aspects, while conversing with his Hellenistic surroundings. He uses the vocabulary and several philosophical (Platonic-Stoic) categories to communicate his message. It is therefore interesting to examine in this section how Philo processes and expresses the Old Testament view of vengeance in his work.

Philo's work can be divided into three categories.<sup>69</sup> Philo's continuous commentary on Scripture covers the most books and can be divided again in three categories: the Allegorical Commentary (*Legum Allegoriae*), the Explanation of the Law, and the Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus (*Quaestiones*). The second major category in Philo's works are his historical-apologetical works, like *Legatio ad Gaium* and *Contra Flaccum*. The third

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<sup>67</sup> See the critical work of Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, WUNT 10 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1973<sup>2</sup>); Also the recent contribution of Graham Stanton ("Hellenism", *DNTB*, 464-473).

<sup>68</sup> G.E. Sterling, "'Philo Has Not Been Used Half Enough'. The Significance of Philo of Alexandria for the Study of the New Testament", *PRSt* 30 (2003), 251-269.

<sup>69</sup> D.T. Runia, "Philo, Alexandrijn en Jood", *Lampas* 22 (1989), 208-210.

category are his philosophical tracts such as *De Virtutibus* and *De Providentia*.

After taking a quick look at the terminology Philo uses for vengeance (2.2.2.1), the concept of vengeance in the Philonic corpus is studied on the basis of its aspects (2.2.2.2 to 2.2.2.7). This section closes with a short conclusion.

### 2.2.1.1 Terminology

Philo employs several words to describe vengeance. He predominantly uses τιμωρία, but he also frequently describes vengeance with ἐκδίκειν, ἀμύνειν or τίνειν. Other words used for vengeance, which are catalogued by Deschermes (see the Introduction), are also employed by Philo.

### 2.2.1.2 Divine vengeance

As an observant Jewish believer, it is not surprising that Philo believes in YHWH as the one and only God. His understanding of God's being and acts however is different from that of most Jewish contemporaries. Philo's distinctive vision of God's essence and deeds must be understood in the dialogue between Jewish faith and Greek philosophy. Philo testifies of the basic Jewish belief of YHWH, yet he incorporates several Platonic and Stoic elements in his image of God. Philo thus emphasizes the transcendence of God.<sup>70</sup> YHWH makes himself known to humankind in the Old Testament, yet this name is not an identification of God's essence. God is ὁ ὄν (the Being), the Greek translation of אֱלֹהִים in Exodus 3,14. This title however is not merely a translation of אֱלֹהִים for Philo, but he deems it a statement: YHWH is the most ancient of the existing things (τὸ τῶν ὄντων πρεσβύτατον) and thus indescribable (Mut. 15; cf. Conf. 180).<sup>71</sup> He is the Creator of things, but cannot be established from his creation: God does not consist in relation to anything (Mut. 27).

<sup>70</sup> S. Sandmel, "Philo Judaeus. An Introduction to The Man, His Writings, His Significance", *ANRW* II.21.1, 23-24.

<sup>71</sup> D.T. Runia, "God and Man in Philo of Alexandria", *JThS* 39 (1988), 48-75; D. Zeller, "Gott bei Philo von Alexandrien", in: U. Busse (ed.), *Der Gott Israels im Zeugnis des Neuen Testaments*, QD 201 (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2003), 32-57.

Philo also believes that God is immanent. The Creator connects Himself to creation, without manifesting his full and true essence. Philo solves the tension between God's immanence and transcendence by inserting powers (*δυνάμεις*) as mediators between God and creation.<sup>72</sup> The powers are God's instruments who are guided by Him to act on his behalf. Philo thus guarantees that God is indescribably transcendent and at the same time can be immanently present and active in his creation. Two important powers of God are his creative *θεός* (Lord) and his ruling *κύριος* (Ruler) (Mut. 18-19).

These mediating powers are also pivotal for Philo to stress another aspect about God. God is for Philo the fountainhead of all good things. His beneficent gifts are fitting with his own nature (Deus 108). God is the cause of all that is good (*ἀγαθῶν ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς αἴτιος*) and the most perfect of all good (*τελειότατον ἀγαθόν*) (Conf. 180). Philo emphasizes the goodness of God's substance and deeds to repel all evil from God. God is not Creator of all things, because if He was He would be responsible for mischief in creation and thus his own nature would be corrupt (Prov. II,82). Wicked humans are answerable for hurt in this world (Sac. 81). God is in no way the cause of evil (Prov. II,102).<sup>73</sup> Causing harm does not suit God's good nature (Conf. 182). The powers then come into play: they are God's instruments to inflict punishment (Conf. 180-182). They fend off all evil from God and at the same time they establish God's reign in creation and restore the equilibrium needed to let the world retain its peace.<sup>74</sup>

This short exposition of Philo's theology of God is necessary to understand his vision on divine vengeance. Philo's view on divine vengeance is ambivalent. On the one hand, he connects vengeance to YHWH. He sometimes quotes texts where God's vengeance is named (Gen. 4,15 in Det. 167 and Deut. 32,35 in Leg. All. III,105). Philo uses vengeance as an act of YHWH in the biblical history. God avenges himself by evicting Adam and

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<sup>72</sup> C. Termini, *Le Potenze di Dio. Studio su *dunamis* in Filone di Alessandria*, SEA 71 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> L.H. Feldman, *Remember Amalek! Vengeance, Zealotry, and Group Destruction in the Bible According to Philo, Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus*, MHUC 31 (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2004), 92: "To punish people many times for the same cause, he remarks, is the act of a savage and bestial spirit, and this is not in accordance with God's nature, since He is good and kind and a lover of humankind and thus lightens their evils rather than adds to their misfortunes." Cf. D.T. Runia, "Theodicy in Philo of Alexandria", in: A. Laatto and J.C. de Moor (eds.), *Theodicy in the World of the Bible. The Goodness of God and the Problem of Evil* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 576-604.

<sup>74</sup> Termini, *Potenze*, 187-188.

Eve from Paradise (Leg. All. I,96). The punishment of the earth by YHWH was the deluge (Conf. 25). God eradicated the people of Sodom with an intensive vengeance that was unheard of (Abr. 137). Moses fled Egypt with the confidence that God would chastise the oppressors (Vit. Mos. I,47). God decided to remove his saving ten commandments from any influence of punishment and vengeance (Dec. 177). God takes vengeance for the apostasy of the temple keepers against the priests and Moses (Vit. Mos. II,284).

In his treatment of biblical texts, Philo sometimes links God directly with vengeance. God has storehouses of good and evil things and he is slow to open the storehouses of evil to take his revenge to give the sinner time to repent (Leg. All. III,105-106). Someone who demonizes another person or swears falsely will fall in God's hands, although he might escape the vengeance of humans (Spec. II,253). God punishes those whose desire is their belly (Spec. IV,127). God avenges Himself on the free soul of humans when they dishonor and are ungrateful to Him (Deus 48.74). God will come and make a separation between the offender and the offended and will avenge the offended as compensation (Her 271). Philo even states that God does not need instruments to exact his vengeance (Vit. Mos. I,111).

On the other hand Philo tries to separate God and vengeance from each other. He uses several ways to obtain his goal. The moderate separation is to state that God is more merciful and forgiving than avenging (Opif. 169; Praem. 166). The more radical separation is the insertion of instruments to exact God's vengeance. God does not punish himself (Fug. 66), but He hands people worthy of punishment over to others to avenge Him, showing that evil cannot be associated with Him (Fug. 74). Philo shows that the image that God is like a human, using weapons such as swords as instruments of vengeance (πρὸς τιμωρίας ὄργανα), was a pedagogical image and not his true nature (Somn. I,236).<sup>75</sup>

Philo does not typically identify God's instruments. He can talk about impersonal revenge of God's instrument on the wicked (Det. 169). YHWH could use (sinful) individuals to exact his vengeance (Conf. 180-182; Fug. 74; Spec. III,122.136; Prov. II,38-40) or celestial bodies (Her 203; Somn. I,22; Vit. Mos. II,286). A specific instrument of YHWH to exact vengeance is the figure of Justice. Justice is the God-led instrument to lead the wicked and unrighteous to court and to punish them for their iniquities (Conf. 118; Migr.

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<sup>75</sup> Punishment is in the eyes of Philo not so much retribution, but pedagogical: it tries to correct the offender. See Runia, "Theodicy", 594; Feldman, *Remember Amalek*, 92.



225; Dec. 177; Spec. III,19). Justice can also protect the process of vengeance, such as the revenge of the Israelites on the Egyptians (Vit. Mos. I,142).

### 2.2.1.3 *Justice*

Philo settles vengeance firmly in the matrix of retributive justice. Vengeance is not something out of the blue, but is a legal reaction on an offense, sin or slight. The legal context of vengeance counts for both divine and human revenge.

Philo posits that God is Judge over the whole of creation (Conf. 25). YHWH created order and maintains it as well. In some cases, Philo can freely speak of God's legal action in creation. God saw the corruption of creation and punished it as a Judge suitably with the deluge (Conf. 24-25). The free soul of humans is avenged by God when it does not honor God as it should be (Deus 48). God punished in vengeance those who had illegitimate sexual intercourse (Abr. 137). God will make a separation between the ill-treater and the ill-treated and will bestow the latter with gifts and the former with vengeance for one's misdeeds (Her. 271).

Philo is however cautious and gradually distinguishes YHWH and vengeance.<sup>76</sup> He states, as has been mentioned above, that God uses powers to maintain the legal order in creation. God thus is involved in serving justice on earth, but not with his being. He has agents to do the legal work that can be connected to evil (Fug. 74; Spec. III,122.136; Vit. Mos. I,111; Dec. 178). The impious deserve it that God's beneficent powers will come to exact vengeance on them (Conf. 182). Cain fears vengeance: the parts of the world which are made for the good of men can also exact punishment on the wicked (QG I,74). God's mercy however will be more dominant than his longing for vengeance (Praem. 166). As mentioned above, Justice is the key factor in maintain order and justice in creation (Spec. III,19; Vit. Mos. I,142; Migr. 225; Virt. 227). Justice is not the only one that can vindicate: celestial bodies (Vit. Mos. II,286; Somn. I,22; Her. 203-204), Israel (Vit. Mos. I,142) and even animals (Praem. 149) could be part of God's legal powers. Philo constantly struggles with the relationship between God and vengeance and even

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<sup>76</sup> See for this movement of God as Judge towards the separation of God and evil Mendelson, "Philo's Dialectic", 104-125.

states that only the foolish will see God using instruments of vengeance (Somn. I,236), contradicting his own statements on God using people as executors of his revenge.

Vengeance terminology is also used by Philo in legal treatises such as *De Specialibus Legibus*. Words as τιμωρεῖν are used as connotations of legal punishment (Spec. III,106; Praem. 162; Vit. Mos. II,203; Prov. II,40.55; QE II,6). Criminal acts as harlotry and adultery (Spec. III,31.51.62) and other crimes (Spec. III, 195) must be punished by justice, especially for the ones who cannot retaliate (Spec. III,85; IV,197). The legal principle of *talio* is alive in Philo's legal thought (Spec. III,150.195). In a religious setting criminal acts, such as sin (Somn. II,290; Praem. 69), impiety (Conf. 118; Det. 169.173), blasphemy (Fug. 83-84) and refusal to honor God (Spec. II,255) are worthy of vengeance. Unjust deserve vengeance while the just deserve honor (Spec. III,105-106; IV,77).

Humans have a certain freedom to take revenge. Humans could take revenge on their enemies (Spec. IV,222) or criminals (Spec. IV,8). They could also avenge the slight or death of a relative (Spec. III,129-131). Wise people however are beneficent and slow to avenge (Ios. 166). People such as Moses and Joseph can take vengeance for crimes committed against them or their people, but they act overall like God Himself (Vit. Mos. I,40.46-47; II,169.284; Ios. 220; cf. Abr. 144). Phinehas is praised for his extralegal but pious action (Vit. Mos. I,303-304).<sup>77</sup> Unwise and wicked people like Pharaoh (Vit. Mos. II,248) and Gaius (Leg. 59.68.335.341; Flacc. 180-181) are examples of unbridled and unjust vengeance (cf. Vit. Mos. I,278). They can expect God to take vengeance upon them for their wickedness (Flacc. 175).

Humankind must watch their behavior: sin and ill-advised bravery could cause punishment (Mut. 200; Spec. III,103; Praem. 147; Vita 41). Vengeance must have a cause, even when it concerns animals (Spec. IV,121). Noble souls will not receive divine vengeance, although Joseph received unearned punishment (Ios. 50). One must be grateful and leave vengeance when one is satisfied (QE II,11). The divine Judge has established justice and will maintain it forever.

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<sup>77</sup> Feldman, "Phinehas".

### 2.2.1.4 Reciprocity

Philo does not consider vengeance to be a loose end in society, but embedded in a system of reciprocal relationships.<sup>78</sup> YHWH is the cause of all good (Deus 87) and He is the φιλόδωρος (“lover of gifts”) (Leg. III,166).<sup>79</sup> He is not like humans, who tend to be sellers, but he is a pure Giver (Cher. 122-123). God gives not according to worth, but out of his goodness (Deus 108). He gives to the unworthy, because everyone is unworthy (Deus 70-76). Yet God gives also discriminately to the worthy (Deus 104-107): through virtue they have acquired the worth to receive (Ebr. 94).<sup>80</sup> Philo tries to safeguard God from evil and the possibility that he is responsible for human wrong demeanor: God has to give indiscriminately because of the sinfulness of all humanity, yet He gives only to the worthy according to his own creative order.<sup>81</sup>

The short explanation above focuses on the giving of positive gifts, but the distribution of negative reciprocity in the form of vengeance is, although unequally balanced compared to the positive aspect, present in Philo’s theory of reciprocity. This unequal balance can be seen in Philo continuously stressing the beneficence of God. God moderates his punishment and vengeance out of mercy and pity (Opif. 169). However he avenges his honor when his gracious gift (χάρις) is not reciprocated. God has banished Adam from Eden: He avenged Adam’s disobedience as a Benefactor and Master (Leg. I,96). God possesses treasuries of good and evil: He bestows the good gifts on the virtuous and avenges those who do evil (Leg. III,105-106). Those from the nations who refuse to honor God should suffer punishment and vengeance (Spec. I,54; II,255). God will make a separation between the ill-treater and the ill-treated, bestowing the latter with gifts and the former with vengeance

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<sup>78</sup> P. Kaufmann (“Don, distance et passivité chez Philon d’Alexandrie”, *RevMM* 62 (1957), 37-56) states that Philo does not view the relationship between God and humankind as reciprocal, but this relationship is unilateral from God to humans. Kaufmann’s emphasis on the unilateral aspect is certainly true, but one-sided. He for instance does not take the use of χάρ- language into account, which shows that the relationship is unilateral, but in returning gratitude humans could answer God’s χάρις. Philo’s view on reciprocity is more intricate than Kaufmann shows. See Harrison, *Grace*, 114-133; Barclay, *Gift*, 212-238.

<sup>79</sup> Barclay, *Gift*, 221.

<sup>80</sup> Barclay, *Gift*, 224: “The ‘worth’-language serves to safeguard the fairness and rationality of God’s blessings, which could hardly be given at random or without some discrimination.” Cf. Harrison, *Grace*, 124-125.

<sup>81</sup> Barclay, *Gift*, 229: “Of course God gives to people of ‘quality’: to think otherwise would be to expect the Cause to contradict himself and to flout his own nature.”

for his misdeeds (Her. 271). An ungrateful soul will suffer revenge for his ungratefulness and the refusal to honor its Liberator (Deus 48). Noah found grace with God, but He avenged the others for their ungratefulness (Deus 74). God avenged Israel on Flaccus (Flacc. 121): the avenging furies (ἀλάστορες) of his victims visit Flaccus for his acts (Flacc. 175). Kings follow God's example to bestow gifts on people, but to employ others to exact vengeance (Abr. 144).

Philo connects vengeance and punishment with natural order: evil deserves to be repaid with vengeance (Spec. I,284; III,51.62.146.150; Somn. II,290; Flacc. 49-50.81).<sup>82</sup> This natural institution however can sometimes be unbalanced (Leg. 335). Philo also detects vengeance in interpersonal reciprocal relationships, but he tends to minimize or dissuade personal and collective revenge. He affirms the reality that people have avengers (Spec. III,351). A virtuous person however avoids vengeance. Joseph does not take vengeance for the insolent behavior of his brothers, but treats them worthy of his favor (Jos. 249). Moses discourages taking vengeance on the Amalekites, because the intention of Israel is not pure (Vit. Mos. I,245).<sup>83</sup> The gifts of God are of universal benefit, but cannot be used as vengeance against others (Virt. 169). Someone who receives one's straying donkey back puts aside one's rancor that seeks revenge if one is not completely ungrateful (QE II,11). Philo incorporates the Platonic notion of the brutal and primitive character of vengeance and the Stoic consideration of vengeance and impure intentions into his understanding of vengeance.

The link between vengeance and reciprocity thus is present in Philo's discourse, but it contains several nuances. God is the cause of all good, but he can (through his agents) take vengeance for ingratitude and immorality. The natural order in creation reflects this divine mechanism: evil cannot escape punishment. Philo notes the existence of vengeance in interpersonal relationships, but through examples and philosophy he tries to dissuade taking vengeance on a human being. Philo thus assumes the validity of the Old Testament instruction (Lev. 19,18), but in his elaboration he tends to follow the Platonic and Stoic line of thinking. The virtuous individual is balanced and cannot be overtaken by brutal and primitive emotions and impure intentions.

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<sup>82</sup> As Philo states in Spec. IV,77: "Let vengeance be meted to the unjust as honors be meted to the just" (τιμωρία δ' ἐπ' ἀδίκους ὡς ἐπὶ δίκαιους τιμαὶ βεβαιούσθωσαν).

<sup>83</sup> The focus on intention is a characteristic of the philosophy of Seneca.

### 2.2.1.5 Honor

Like the Old Testament and his contemporaries Philo's thoughts on vengeance are also connected to the matrix of honor and dishonor. The wise humans in this world will keep their souls pure and reasonable. They will honor God by doing his commandments and confessing and serving Him. "The gravest mistake a man can make is to fail to honor the One, the only living God (Leg. 347), the creator of all things (Leg. 293)."<sup>84</sup>

Blasphemy is in Philo's sight a slight of God's honor and therefore worthy of the death penalty (Fug. 84; Spec. II,255). Those who do not honor God are worthy of vengeance (Spec. I,54). God himself can avenge his honor (Conf. 25; Vit. Mos. II,283-284) and his avenging powers must be made known to the whole of humanity (Conf. 182). Others could also stand for God's honor by avenging Him on the wicked: Moses (Vit. Mos. I,47), Phinehas (Vit. Mos. II,303) or other humans (Fug. 74; Spec. I,316; III,122). God or one of his powers will take vengeance when humanity is ungrateful, although they will avenge mildly and with empathy (Opif. 169; Deus 48.74).

Humans themselves must stay honorable, pure and wise in the mind, the soul and the acts. Impurity is the gain of the foolish and will be avenged (Det. 169.173; Virt. 227). Criminal acts or thoughts make people worthy of vengeance (Vit. Mos. I,139; Spec. III,31.103) and must be punished (Somn. I,22). Examples those exhibiting bad, dishonorable behavior are Flaccus (Flacc. 40.81) and Gaius (Leg. 68.335), who may await God's vengeance (Flacc. 175). The Ammonites are examples of a nation who dishonored the people of God and deserved vengeance (Vit. Mos. I,244-245). Wise and pious people honor God and also higher-ranking people like the emperor to avoid revenge (Flacc. 48-50). Unjust people deserve vengeance, while just people must be honored (Spec. IV,77).<sup>85</sup> People could also avenge their loss of honor (Spec. III,146), although it is better to be moderate (Ios. 249) and bring people to court (Prov. II,40).

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<sup>84</sup> T. Seland, *Establishment Violence in Philo and Luke. A Study of Non-Conformity to the Torah and Jewish Vigilante Reactions*, BIS 15 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 110.

<sup>85</sup> Seland, *Establishment Violence*, 175.

### 2.2.1.6 Family

The household was the nucleus for vengeance in Greco-Roman society and the Old Testament. Philo does not diverge from this point of view. Family members and acquaintances of the victim can avenge the loss of their loved one (Spec. III,129.351; cf. III,175). Immoral behavior in the family can also meet with revenge (Spec. III,19.31; Vita 41). The family can be punished for the deeds of one member (Prov. II,55), but one member can also be smitten for the deeds of the family (Ios. 169).

Yet, as has already been observed, the family can encompass a wider array of social relations in contemporary society. The people of Israel can be seen as a family and when their honor is slighted through attacks or infidelity, revenge can take place (Vit. Mos. I,47.245.303; II,283). YHWH can avenge Israel through his instruments (Her. 203-204). Society can avenge the honor of their handicapped civilians (Spec. IV,197). Wise people avenge the honor of their God and punish immorality (Mut. 200; Spec. I,316). The betrayal of friends or telling secrets will be avenged (Det. 176).

Philo acknowledges the existence and legitimacy of vengeance within the family. However, he can also point to the legal system as executors of vengeance. He calls for moderation in the way of Joseph's restraining punishment (Ios. 220-221). He rejects vengeance which excesses moral boundaries, such as Gaius' revenge on his nephew for the increase of power (Leg. 68). Philo thus notices the boundaries of vengeance in a Platonic-Stoic fashion and admonishes moderation and legal action.<sup>86</sup>

### 2.2.1.7 Emotion, Gender, Pollution and Eschatology

The Old Testament connects emotions such as wrath and anger to the execution of divine vengeance. This connection becomes a struggling point for Philo. One of the main issues in the dialogue between the Old Testament and Greek philosophy was the use of emotion as language for God.<sup>87</sup> While the Old Testament ascribes emotions as wrath and regret to YHWH, the Greek

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<sup>86</sup> For an intellectual sketch and biography of Philo, see M.R. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria. An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

<sup>87</sup> H. Frohnhofen, *Apatheia tou Theou. Über die Affektlosigkeit Gottes in der griechischen Antike und bei den griechischsprachigen Kirchenvätern bis zu Gregorios Thaumaturgos*, EHS XXIII/318 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1987).

philosophy develops the viewpoint of the apathetic God: the gods cannot have emotions, because it will make them weak and thus unworthy (*theoprepes*).<sup>88</sup>

Philo tries to tie both positions, but as Van der Horst states: “Plato prevails over Moses.”<sup>89</sup> God is the Being and thus exalted above every human affect. He is not susceptible to any emotion (Deus 52; Abr. 202). The pious also receive *apatheia* from God as a gift, because a reasonable human being is without emotions according to Philo.<sup>90</sup> How can the Bible then speak about God’s emotions? Philo reasons that the solution lies in God’s accommodation. The Old Testament attributes affects to God for educational purposes: YHWH degrades himself to the perception of foolish people to let them understand his will and repent.<sup>91</sup>

Philo maintains the position that emotion and vengeance can be related. God can be reasonably wrathful about the ungrateful imperfection of humanity and can avenge Himself (Deus 70-74; cf. Opif. 169). His vengeance is a paragon of his mercy (Flacc. 121). God’s vengeance through his cloud and blizzards was aimed against the passion-loving Egyptians (Her. 203-204). God will subject murderers hereafter to his vengeance when they get away from punishment on this earth (Her. 271).

Philo often considers human vengeance as a wrong eruption of emotion. He regards avengers emotional degenerates. Avengers will follow their emotions instead of their reason (Congr. 65). The wife of Potiphar handed

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<sup>88</sup> P.W. van der Horst, “Philo and the Problem of God’s Emotions”, *Études platoniciennes* 7 (2010), 171-178. This English article of Van der Horst can also be found as “Philo of Alexandria on the Wrath of God” in his *Jews and Christians in Their Graeco-Roman Context. Selected Essays on Early Judaism, Samaritanism, Hellenism, and Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 128-134.

<sup>89</sup> Van der Horst, “Philo”.

<sup>90</sup> P. von Gemünden, “La Culture des Passions à l’Époque du Nouveau Testament. Une Contribution Théologique et Psychologique”, *ETHR* 70 (1995), 341; cf. C. Lévy, “Philo et les Passions”, in: L. Ciccolini e.a. (eds.), *Receptions Antiques. Lecture, Transmission, Appropriation Intellectuelle* (Paris: Rue d’Ulm, 2006), 27-41.

<sup>91</sup> M. Pohlenz, *Vom Zorne Gottes. Eine Studie über den Einfluss der griechischen Philosophie auf das alte Christentum*, FRLANT 12 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1909), 8: “Freilich spricht er von Eifersucht und Zorn, von Händen und dem Wandeln Gottes. Aber das sind Ausdrücke, die für die zweite Klasse von Menschen berechnet sind. Gott will allen nützen, und da die meisten Menschen nur durch Furcht zu erziehen sind und keine reine Vorstellung von Gott haben, so nimmt er ihretwegen menschliche Züge an und sucht durch die Drohung mit seinem Zorn und ähnliche Schreckmittel sie auf den rechten Weg zu bringen oder wenigstens ihnen dadurch die Größe ihres Unrechts klarzumachen.” Cf. D.M. Hay, “Philo of Alexandria”, in: D.A. Carson, P.T. O’Brien, and M.A. Seifrid (eds.), *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume I: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, WUNT II/140 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 371.

over Joseph into vengeance out of lust and indignation (Ios. 50). Lust for power drove Gaius to take vengeance on his nephew (Leg. 68), while his unbound anger and unpredictable vengeance was feared (Flacc. 180-181). Humans could take revenge out of pity and zeal for their loved ones (Spec. III,129), but they must moderate their emotions as Joseph did and not act out grudge (Ios. 263).

Other aspects which in Greco-Roman society and Old Testament are tied to vengeance are not as present in Philo's work. Philo connects vengeance and gender only once, when he demands that people must exact vengeance on violent women for their overconfidence (Spec. III,175). The relation between impurity, uncleanness and vengeance is more prominent. People can undergo revenge for their impurity (Spec. III,51; Vit. Mos. I,303) or are polluted because of their act of vengeance (Spec. III,136). Philo sometimes links vengeance with eschatology: God will give time to repent, but there will be a day of vengeance where evil will be punished (Leg. All. III,105-106; cf. Her. 271).

#### *2.2.1.8 Conclusion*

Philo tries to explain the Hebrew Scriptures apologetically to his readers, using Greek philosophy as a matrix of understanding. He notices the use of vengeance in the Old Testament and tries to connect this motif with Greek philosophical categories. He affirms the existence and legitimacy of legal vengeance, but he considers human vengeance to be an evil act of emotional outburst with devastating consequences. Although Philo sometimes connects God to vengeance in line with the Old Testament, he is convinced that God's pure transcendent essence cannot be directly linked with vengeance. God must use his powers to maintain the balance in his creation. Philo considers vengeance as a legal reaction to impious and impure behavior worthy of punishment, but at the same time Philo pleads for moderation.

Philo thus tries to understand Biblical notions in the context of Platonic-Stoic philosophy. The consequence of Philo's method is that philosophy can rule and sometimes rule out rough edges of Biblical notions, just as Van der Horst has pointed out in regard to God's wrath. This process is also happening in the case of vengeance, although Philo does not discard it completely. The divine prerogative of vengeance, found in the Old Testament, is not as pronounced in Philo's work. Human vengeance can be an option,



although a rational human being must act moderately. His criticism of vengeance thus is more Platonic and Stoic in that he considers unprecedented vengeance as irrational and not, as the Old Testament argues, that human vengeance claims a privilege that only belongs to God.

Philo attempted to make Judaism acceptable and accessible for his Greek readers in Alexandria by placing his Jewish roots in the matrix of Platonic-Stoic philosophy. He is not the only one in this period to undertake such a venture. Flavius Josephus also tried to explain and normalize Judaism to his Roman readers in his historical work. The next section will look into his understanding of vengeance.

### 2.2.2 *Flavius Josephus*

In his writings Flavius Josephus tried to define Judaism and give it a legitimate place in Roman thought.<sup>92</sup> Josephus, like Philo, interprets the Old Testament texts and describes their meaning and significance for contemporary readers. Josephus can be labeled a historian, because most of his works are historical narrations of Judean history. No one doubts that his first work was his *Jewish War* (*De Bello Judaico*), composed shortly after his arrival in Rome in 71 CE and in the style of Thucydides' historiography.<sup>93</sup> The goal of this work was to clarify the role of the Jews in the Jewish revolt (66-70 CE) and to defend the honor of the Jewish people against an anti-Jewish Roman audience.

His second major work is his *Jewish Antiquities* (*Antiquitates Judaicae*), composed around 93/94 CE and written in the style of Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Roman Antiquities*.<sup>94</sup> Josephus narrates the history of the Jews in Biblical and post-Biblical times until 66 CE to introduce the Jewish history to an interested Greco-Roman audience.<sup>95</sup> The notion of divine providence is

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<sup>92</sup> H.W. Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquitates Judaicae of Flavius Josephus*, HDR 7 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 181; G.E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition. Josephus, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography*, NovTSup 64 (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

<sup>93</sup> S.M. Mason, "Josephus' *Judean War*", in: H.H. Chapman and Z. Rodgers (eds.), *A Companion to Josephus*, BCAW 64 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 14.

<sup>94</sup> D.R. Schwartz, "Many Sources but a Single Author. Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*", in: Chapman/Rodgers (eds.), *Companion*, 36.

<sup>95</sup> L.H. Feldman, *Judean Antiquities 1-4*, Flavius Josephus. Translation and Commentary Volume 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), xxxiv-xxxv.

prominently present: certain events can be explained through the divine disposal of punishment and reward (Ant. I,14).<sup>96</sup> Smaller works of Josephus include his autobiography *Life of Josephus (Vita Josephi)* and his apologetical work *Against Apion (Contra Apionem)*.<sup>97</sup>

Josephus employs almost all vengeance vocabulary, but he predominantly uses τιμωρία, ἐκδίδκειν, and ἀμύννειν. The following pages will provide an inquiry into the motif of vengeance in Josephus' work. The structure of this section will be the same as the previous ones: every aspect of Josephus' view of vengeance will be examined, ending with a summative conclusion.

### 2.2.2.1 Divine vengeance

Josephus does not explicitly state that vengeance is a divine prerogative. He does, however, detect God's avenging hand in the history of Israel. God cannot leave crimes and sin unpunished. Abimelech tells his friends he is ill, because of God's revenge on behalf of Abraham and Sarah (Ant. I,208). God exacts vengeance on Josephs' brothers for the fate of their brother (Ant. II,107.129.137). He will take revenge on Israel for their hubris (Ant. III,311-313). Eli knows that God will come as an Avenger for his unjust sons Hophni and Phinehas (Ant. V,340). He is the avenging Judge in the case of the Gibeonites and Saul (Ant. VII,394) and the sins of Solomon (Ant. VII,93). He stands as the just Avenger in the case of David and Nabal (Ant. VI,303.307). God takes revenge on the Israelites for their sinful murders of his messengers (Ant. IX,266). God will punish crimes (Ant. II,293; Bell. VII,271). He also hears prayers to renounce his vengeance (Ant. I,101).

In his description of the events during the Hellenistic period, Josephus uses the same categories with one exception. He describes these historical events without mentioning the notion of direct divine vengeance. Human observations that God avenges himself and his honor are mentioned (Ant. XVII,170; XVIII,116.119; cf. Bell. I,656), but a full statement of Josephus that God did exact vengeance in a certain case cannot be found.<sup>98</sup> Instead, he

<sup>96</sup> Attridge, *Interpretation*, 67; Schwartz, "Many Sources", 51.

<sup>97</sup> S.M. Mason, "Josephus' *Autobiography (Life of Josephus)*", in: Chapman and Rodgers, *Companion*, 59-74; J.M.G. Barclay, "Against Apion", in: Chapman and Rodgers, *Companion*, 75-85.

<sup>98</sup> This does not mean that God cannot exact vengeance directly, but the leading principle for Josephus, especially in his *Antiquities*, is the divine providence.

writes that humans could execute vengeance to restore God's honor (Bell. I,649; II,394; Ant. XX,116; cf. Ant. XIV,309). People know that God takes vengeance on murderers (of self) (Ant. XIII,316; cf. Ant. XIV,25) and other criminals (Bell. I,378). He will however only avenge the righteous, those who pay due to his honor (Bell. II,394). He is the Avenger of Israel's suffering (Bell. V,377). The Jews can therefore call to God for his avenging aid (Ant. VII,45; XIV,28; Bell. IV,159; V,404.407). He can also protect against vengeance (Ant. XI,259).

God could also use instruments to exact his vengeance (Ant. XIX,16-20). Phinehas is seen as such an instrument (Ant. IV,159), just as David and his troops (Ant. VI,359.366; cf. VI,284), and Jehu (Ant. IX,108).<sup>99</sup> People can see themselves (Bell. I,649) or others (Ant. XX,116) as instruments of God's vengeance, while diseases (Ant. XVII,170; Bell. I,656) and defeat (Ant. XVIII,116) are also seen by Jews as instruments of God's legal action. God can also use non-Jews to exact his vengeance (Ant. VIII,253). Justice as God's agent of vengeance is also employed by Josephus (Bell. VII,34). God himself could also face revenge as an act of human hubris (Ant. I,114).

The curse is a human way of asking divine vengeance. Saul wants to take revenge on the Philistines and therefore proclaims a curse on his troops (Ant. VI,117). David curses the murderer of Abner, who avenged himself on Abner (Ant. VII,39). People cursed Antipater, thinking he would be the object of vengeance for the murder of his brothers (Ant. XVII,88). The general which Anilaeus kills curses him and his troops, so that they might receive the same fate (Ant. XVIII,346). Niger curses the Zealots with the vengeance of the Romans (Bell. IV,361).

Josephus employs vengeance language and imagery freely in connection to YHWH. He is not inhibited in applying this topos to the divine being in line with the Old Testament and other writings in his time. Josephus however does not restrict himself to the divine prerogative of the Old Testament, but he applies vengeance in several cases on human actions.

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<sup>99</sup> The reference to God's vengeance through Jehu is ambiguous: it is not certain if God takes revenge or Jehu. See C.T. Begg, *Josephus' Story of the Later Monarchy*, BEThL 145 (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 2000), 134. L.H. Feldman (*Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible*, JSJSup 58 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 356) states that God takes vengeance and not Jehu.

### 2.2.2.2 Retribution and Justice

Josephus predominantly considers vengeance to be an act of retributive justice. Retribution is a dominant motif in the work of Josephus, especially in the *Antiquities*.<sup>100</sup> God rewards the good and punishes evil (Ant. I,14). This is probably the reason why the theme of vengeance is quite dominant in the *Antiquities* in comparison with the *Jewish War* and Josephus' other work. Vengeance can be seen as a legal deed in divine and in human affairs to punish crimes and sins which disturb the balance of justice and honor and an attempt to restore the equilibrium in society.

God can punish sin retributively as a Judge (Ant. II,293; III,311-313; V,340; VI,303-307; IX,266). He is an Avenger of injustice (Bell. V,377) and he knows when to avenge (Bell. V,407). He only punishes those who are worthy of punishment (Bell. VII,32.34.271). As a Judge he can stand up for the weak and the victims of injustice (Ant. II,107; VII,294; XIV,25). God can ordain vengeance or enable the possibility to avenge (Ant. VI,284.359.366; XV,135). He can hear revengeful prayers (Ant. VII,45; XIV,28). He can send instruments to execute his vengeance (Ant. VIII,253; IX,108) and sometimes people to avenge God's honor and name by their own volition (Ant. XX,116; Bell. I,649). He can even prevent vengeance (Ant. XI,259). His punishments are diverse: illness (Ant. I,208; XVII,170; Bell. I,656) and defeat (Ant. VIII,116.119) are some options. The Jews must pay due to Him when they want God's salvific vengeance (Bell. II,394).

Humans could also take justice in their own hands. They could take vengeance for themselves (Ant. V,152-154.243; VII,296) or for others (Ant. IV,259; V,105-106; VII,36.173.285; IX,170-171; XI,268). Righteous people like Abraham (Bell. V,380) and David (Ant. VI,288-289) however refrain from vengeance, despite the hubris of their opponents. Human vengeance is feared (Ant. I,263.276). Justice is being done by authorities. Only criminals will be rightfully punished (Ant. II, 137). Authorities are for instance leaders like Moses (Ant. II,322; IV,304). Kings such as Joseph (Ant. II,148.197), Saul (Ant. VI,117.132-133), David (Ant. VI,201.209-211;

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<sup>100</sup> Attridge, *Interpretation*, 84-86; W.C. van Unnik, *Flavius Josephus als historischer Schriftsteller*, Franz Delitzsch Vorlesungen Neue Folge 1972 (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1978), 27; L.H. Feldman, "Flavius Josephus Revisited. The Man, His Writings, and His Significance", *ANRW* II.21.2, 791; P. Bilde, *Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome. His Life, his Works, and their Importance*, *JSPSup* 2 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 184-185; Schwartz, "Sources", 51.

VII,52.120.264.270), Solomon (Ant. VII,386-389), Jehu (Ant. IX,137) or other kings (V,11; IX,186.230) could also do justice through vengeance (Ant. VI,36). Other authorities include generals (Ant. VII,290), judges (Ant. II,54; V,315) and tribes (V,101). Countries or people could legally attack others to return a previous attack (Ant. II,239; XI,281.294).

Vengeance is also a common motif in Josephus' accounting of laws. The laws of Moses state that if someone is hit in a knifeless fight and dies on the spot he will be avenged in the same fashion (Ant. IV,277). Moses makes Israel to take an oath to punish pollution; if they are too weak to avenge this evil, they have to show good will anyway (Ant. IV,310). Human vengeance is done by the *quid pro quo* principle: injustice meets justice (Ant. II,239; V,253; XI,281.294). Unjust vengeance also exists: this vengeance is done out of unjust or impure intentions (Ant. VII,39; VIII,350.357; XI,211).

In his narration of events in the Hellenistic period, Josephus uses the same motifs. Authorities such as the Maccabees (Ant. XII,284; XIII,19-21; Bell. V,454), the Jewish elite (Ant. XX,77; Bell. II,233; IV,174) and others (Ant. XIII,108.219.232.362.381.426; XIV,309.315; XV,163; XVII,207.291; XVIII,323; Bell. I,62.100.600; II,302.455.643; III,348; IV,159.264.361.591; V,129.359.404) can do justice through vengeance. Generals can also be included (Ant. XVIII,334-335; 346-347; Bell. I,216). Vengeance overtakes injustice (Ant. XIII,316; Bell. I,531; Bell. II,471; cf. Ant. XIII,412; Bell. IV,409). Josephus himself can be seen as an avenger (Bell. II,643; Vita 111), yet he is sometimes escaping avengers or helped by other avengers (Bell. III,346.441; Vita 97.263.416). He also exhorts his troops that they battle not as saviors, but as avengers as if everything is lost (Bell. III,260; cf. IV,46-47; V,41).

Josephus shows that in the Hellenistic period unjust vengeance also exists. Unrighteous people could also exact vengeance (Ant. XIV,269; XVII,122.242; XIX,175; Bell. I,490; Vita 39; cf. Ant. I,114), but they are sometimes met by avengers (Ant. XVII,88.254; XIX,14.106.214-215; Bell. I,582). Wicked people could devise cruel vengeance (Bell. I,35) or waive just vengeance (Ant. XVII,211; XX,116.119; Bell. II,7-8), but they could also complain about or fear revenge acts (Ant. XVII,316; XX,126; Bell. IV,144). They could also try to evade vengeance (Ant. XVI,66).

Ordinary people could also avenge themselves or others in the matrix of justice. They could search for vengeance for themselves (Bell. IV,111; VII,49) or for others (Ant. XIX,20.151; Bell. I,236.521; II,237; III,239; cf.

Ant. XIX,108). Individual human vengeance could also be discouraged by others (Ant. XVIII,23.360; Bell. I,507; II,337.349). This resembles Philo's vision of human vengeance. The difference between the two however is that Philo is philosophically driven and tries to change people, while Josephus tries to work historically without trying to alter other people's moral courses. The most prominent story of retributive justice by an individual is found in the life of Herod.<sup>101</sup> He sometimes acts as an avenger of injustice (Ant. XIV,283.289.369.454.458.464; Bell. I,214.227.231.295.320.342.644) or as the king who exacts vengeance on nations and cities (Ant. XIV,336; XV,156; XVI,298; Bell. I,296.336.369-370.372.378.385). During his life, Herod decays into sin. His unjust behavior waxes (Ant. XVII,164). His children even seek his life to return his crime (Ant. XVI,70.73.183.210-212). Herod controls his anger against Pheroras, although he wanted to take revenge (Ant. XVII,50).

Vengeance for Josephus thus is a legal act done by authorities. These authorities are almost always senior officials like kings, leaders or generals. They have the power of judgment and thus the power to exact vengeance. When the acts of ordinary humans are described as vengeance, it denotes an act of retaliation for a crime committed and to restore their honor. The individual use of vengeance is also seen in the context of retributive justice, because justice was not strictly confined to authorities.

### 2.2.2.3 Reciprocity

Josephus is both influenced by his Jewish background and his Greco-Roman social position. He therefore tries to bring these three (Jewish, Greek, Roman)

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<sup>101</sup> The life of Herod is described in two ways by Josephus. In his *Jewish War* he describes Herod as "the archetypal friend and ally of the Roman people", while in the *Antiquities* Herod is brave and capable of virtue and piety, but "his kingship is constitutionally illegitimate (...) and his overweening pride leads him into serious violations of the laws (...) which inevitably bring a disastrous end to his career" (S.M. Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005<sup>2</sup>), 118). This vision of Herod is related to the goals and the lines of arguments in the different works. In *Jewish War* Josephus tries to defend the Jews as an example for all the nations, while in the *Antiquities* he wants to show the superiority of Jewish law and through this work Josephus lets his moral vision shine through his text. See also J.W. van Henten, "Herod the Great in Josephus", in: Chapman and Rodgers, *Companion*, 235-246; T. Landau, *Out-Heroding Herod. Josephus, Rhetoric, and the Herod Narratives*, AJEC 63 (Leiden: Brill, 2006). For a more historical approach to Herod, see A.K. Marshak, *The Many Faces of Herod the Great* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

traditions into conversation with each other. In the case of reciprocity and the covenant, the Greco-Roman vision dominates. Josephus retains the covenant as a contractual relationship between YHWH and Israel, but he conceives this relationship in terms of reciprocity.<sup>102</sup> The reason for this alteration is that Josephus lives in an environment where reciprocal relationships were dominant. He himself was in a reciprocal relationship with Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian.<sup>103</sup>

Vengeance also functions in the matrix of reciprocity as the negative reaction to a slight or social offense. God could avenge slights of his honor or the honor of his people (Ant. I,208; II,137.293; III,311-313; V,340; VI,303.305.307<sup>104</sup>; IX,266), but God could also be threatened with vengeance for negative acts (Ant. I,114). He could use instruments to obtain justice and restoration of his honor (Ant. VI,366; VIII,253). The divine law could also pledge for vengeance: the laws of Moses state that if someone is hit in a knifeless fight and dies on the spot he will be avenged in the same fashion (Ant. IV,277).

Individuals could avenge themselves for a slight (Ant. II,197; V,315; VI,352; VII,264.270; IX,230; XI,281.294) or they could act as avengers for others to restore their honor (Ant. I,129; IV,159; VI,132-133.201.209-211; VII,36.120.285; VIII,357). Virtuous people sometimes fear vengeance (Ant. I,276), but the virtuous could also decide to waive vengeance despite the slight received (Bell. V,380; Ant. VI,284-289<sup>105</sup>). The righteous can also receive unjust vengeance: Joseph is given retribution for denying the impure intentions of the wife of Potiphar (Ant. II,48.54).<sup>106</sup> The people of Israel or the tribes also have the possibility to exact vengeance when specific (religious) agreements are violated (Ant. II,322; IV,304; V,101).

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<sup>102</sup> P. Spilsbury, "God and Israel in Josephus. A Patron-Client Relationship", in: S.M. Mason (ed.), *Understanding Josephus. Seven Perspectives*, JSPSup 32 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 173-174. See also Attridge, *Interpretation*, 78-83; Harrison, *Grace*, 135-136.

<sup>103</sup> W. den Hollander, *Josephus, the Emperors, and the City of Rome. From Hostage to Historian*, AJEC 86 (Leiden Brill, 2014).

<sup>104</sup> L.H. Feldman, *Josephus' Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 553.

<sup>105</sup> David is sketched in Josephus' *Antiquitates* as a man with a virtuous character. See Feldman, *Josephus' Interpretation*, 556-561.

<sup>106</sup> Feldman, *Josephus' Interpretation*, 371: "Attempting an analysis of feminine psychology, Josephus adds that this method of avenging herself for so grievous a slight and of accusing Joseph in advance seemed to Potiphar's wife to be alike wise and womanly."

Human vengeance is often described by Josephus in a reciprocal matrix. People themselves could exact vengeance for a slight (Bell. I,320; II,302.643 Ant. XIV,315; XVI,212; XVII,122.164; Vita 111.172). Others stand up to avenge the honor of an individual (Ant. XIV,269). The slight of the family is also a common motive to exact vengeance (Bell. I,227.342; Ant. XIII,19-21.426; XIV,283.289.369.464; XVI,66.70.73.210; cf. Ant. XIX,20), while other peer-groups are also avenged by individuals (Bell. I,372.385; IV,591 Ant. XIV,336; XV,156; XVI,285.298; XVIII,334-335; cf. Bell. I,100). Groups of people could also exact vengeance for themselves (Bell. I,296; II,237; IV,46-47; V,41.359; Ant. XIII,362), for individuals (Bell. I,216; II,233; III,239.441; Ant. XX,126; Vita 97.263) or for collectives like cities or countries (Bell. I,378; IV,159.174; Vita 416). Rightful vengeance however is sometimes missing because of bad intentions of the intended avenger (Bell. II,7-8; Ant. XVII,211), while now and then humans are encouraged to abstain from vengeance (Ant. XVIII,360; cf. Ant. XVIII,23). People themselves could be caught up by vengeance for their hubris (Ant. XIII,316; Bell. I,531; Bell. II,471).

Josephus thus regards vengeance to be a reaction in the process of reciprocal relationships. Vengeance is the reaction towards slights and offenses of one's honor, which could be individual or collective honor. Vengeance restores the balance of divine or human power and honor and is a way of getting back at people for attacking them or others.

#### 2.2.2.4 Honor

In Greco-Roman literature and in the Old Testament, vengeance is intimately connected with the concept and mechanism of honor, as we have seen. It is therefore not remarkable that Flavius Josephus connects these two notions together too. Honor was important in his Roman environment of patronage, but a society of hierarchy and patronage was also present in his earlier residence in Galilee.<sup>107</sup>

In his exegesis of the Old Testament, Josephus firmly roots vengeance in the matrix of honor. The impairment of hospitality and thus dishonoring the host can meet divine or human vengeance (Ant. I,208; II,48.54).

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<sup>107</sup> S. Schwartz, "Josephus in Galilee. Rural Patronage and Social Breakdown", in: F. Parente and J. Sievers (eds.), *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period. Essays in Memory of Morton Smith*, SPB 41 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 290-306.



Individuals who dishonor the pious affect God and they will thus meet God's vengeance (Ant. II,107.137; VI,303-307; IX,266; XI,259). God himself must not be dishonored by wicked behavior against Him (Ant. II,293; V,340; VIII,253). Israelites could stand up for God's honor and exact vengeance (Ant. V,101.106). God can create possibilities for pious individuals to avenge themselves (Ant. VI,366). Humans have the right to avenge themselves, their loved ones or their peers when they receive dishonor (Ant. II,197; V,315; VI,201.209-211; VII,120.173.264.270.290.296.386-389; VIII,357; IX,230).

In the events in the Hellenistic period, Josephus detects and applies the same bond between vengeance and honor. The Maccabees could avenge God, Israel or their own fallen relatives (Ant. XII,284; XIII,19-21; Bell. I,649; V,454; cf. Ant. XIV,309). Crimes are also considered dishonoring and can thus meet vengeance (Ant. XIII,108). Herod is the avenger of the honor of his family and his people (Ant. XIV,283.289.336.369; XVI,212.285; Bell. I,214.320.372.644). He can also enable people to avenge themselves (Bell. I,296), but he is also met by people and God who want to take revenge for slighting their honor (Ant. XVI,73; Ant. XVIII,116.119; Bell. I,236.600). Kings and leaders in general must avenge their people (Ant. XVII,207.211; XVIII,323.334-335; XX,116; Bell. II,7.233; IV,159.591; Vita 111). Soldiers and inhabitants could also seek vengeance for their leader (Bell. III,239; Vita 97.263). Unrighteous people are easily offended and thus dangerous in their vengeance (Ant. XVII,122; XX,77) or they are eager to accumulate honor (Bell. I,72). Vengeance is sometimes discouraged, even when it affects one's honor (Ant. XVIII,360; Bell. I,507; II,337). God can exact vengeance when He or the pious are dishonored (Ant. XIV,28; XVIII,346-347). People could take revenge for dishonor or threaten with it (Bell. I,100; II,302; IV,174). A dishonoring act can be seen as an invitation to avenge one's honor (Ant. XIII,412; XVI,70; Bell. II,455.473; IV,144.264). Individuals could crave vengeance when they have received dishonor in the past (Bell. V,41.404).

Honor and vengeance are thus strongly connected to each other in the work of Josephus.

### 2.2.2.5 *Family*

Another one of the common traits between the understanding of vengeance in Greco-Roman and Old Testament literature and Josephus' concept of vengeance is the link between vengeance and family. The Old Testament often connected vengeance with covenant. Josephus maintains this connection, but he understands the covenant in Greco-Roman fashion as a reciprocal and filial relationship between God and his people. "Family" is understood here not only as a reference to direct family, but also to peer-groups who act and envision themselves as a family.

Josephus underlines the cohesion between family and vengeance in his exposition of the Biblical history. God could take vengeance for his "family" (Ant. VI,303-307). Family members stand up for each other (Ant. VI,209-211; VII,36.173.285; VIII,357; IX,186), but direct family could also become enemies (Ant. I,276; V,101). Family must avenge when rituals of the fathers are slighted (Ant. IX,137). Friends could avenge each other (Ant. IX,171), but they could also become antagonistic and worthy of vengeance (Ant. I,263). The "family" could get attacked and would react with vengeance (Ant. II,322; IV,304; VI,132-133) or at least received the possibility to avenge (Ant. VI,366). People could do horrible things to their family and become worthy to be avenged on (Ant. V,253). Unjust vengeance or injustice in general can make the family of the murderer eligible for reciprocal vengeance (Ant. VII,39.296).

In the events in the Hellenistic period the same motifs come back. Some members take revenge on the murderers of a family member(s), when there is an avenger (Ant. XIII,412; Bell. IV,409): brothers (Ant. XIII,19-21; XIV,369.454.458.464; Bell. I,236.342), fathers (Ant. XIV,283.289; XVIII,346-347; Bell. I,227.231) and mothers (Ant. XVI,66.73), sons (Ant. XV,59), leaders (Ant. XIX,108; Bell. I,216; Vita 97.263), or family in general (Ant. XIII,426; XV,163; Bell. I,336.644; Bell. II,7; IV,144). The family is made responsible for the deeds of an individual (Ant. XIII,232.381; XVII,291; Bell. I,594.600) or an individual made responsible for the acts of the family (Bell. V,359). Killing family will be retaliated in vengeance (Ant. XIII,316; XVII,88; Bell. I,531.582; II,471), although in some cases it is permitted (Ant. XVIII,23). The inner circle of "family" can become inimical for an individual (Ant. XIII,219; XVI,210.212; Bell. V,454). It is injustice when vengeance for family is absent (Ant. XVII,211; Bell. II,8) or when revenge is

done with unjustified motives (Ant. XIX,175; XX,77 Bell. I,72). People stand up to avenge the attack on their country (Ant. XVIII,334-335; Bell. II,455; III,260) or their friends or countrymen (Ant. XIX,20; Bell. II,233.237; IV,111). Family ties could be more important than vengeance (Bell. I,507). Vengeance for family is sometimes disheartened (Bell. II,237). God is the ultimate Avenger of his people (Bell. V,377).

#### 2.2.2.6 *Emotion, Pollution and Gender*

Some other notions regarding vengeance in Josephus pertain to emotion, pollution and gender. Although they are less present than the aspects of vengeance noted above, researching them is necessary to obtain a complete overview of the concept of vengeance.

The most dominant emotion in Josephus' work which is connected with vengeance is wrath.<sup>108</sup> God's vengeance is wrathful (Ant. II,293). People can be wrathful and they can proceed to avenge themselves (Ant. II,239; IX,230; XIII,232.362; XVII,50.254; XIX,106.108.151.215; Bell. I,216.230-231.507; II,237.337.643; III,441; IV,47.174; VII,48-49; Vita 263.416). Cognate emotions are hate (Ant. II,48; XVII,242), rage (Bell. VII,34), and indignation (Bell. I,214.320). Other emotions are shamelessness (Ant. XVI,70), desire (Ant. XVIII,360) and pride (Bell. I,72). The cause of vengeance could be contempt (Bell. I,600), while the whole act of vengeance could be surrounded by fear (Ant. I,263.276; Bell. II,8), happiness (Ant. II,137; XIV,369), wrath (Ant. XVI,298) or sorrow (Ant. II,107).

Vengeance is also in Josephus' work sometimes seen in the context of impurity and pollution. When people do something criminal or sinful, they make themselves impure. Thus Nabal makes himself impure by behaving badly against David, which is the reason why God exacts vengeance on him (Ant. VI,303-307). Jodas asks the troops to drag Othalia away, because he does not want to pollute the temple by exacting vengeance there (Ant. IX,152). The curse of a general pollutes Anilaeus, Asinaeus and their companions and they are eligible for vengeance, because the general was avenging the law (Ant. XVIII,346-347). The Jews have killed a Roman garrison, an

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<sup>108</sup> For emotion in Josephus' work, see T. Rajak, *Josephus. The Historian and His Society* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 79-82.

act which calls for vengeance from Rome (Bell. II,455). Simon sees his death as a worthy avenging of his pollution (Bell. II,473). Pollution must be punished (Ant. IV,310).

Gender is also a less prominent notion in the concept of vengeance.<sup>109</sup> As we have seen, vengeance most of the times is something male individuals could execute. This is also the case in Josephus' work: most acts of vengeance have male executors. Josephus shows, however, that vengeance is not always a male activity. The wife of Potiphar exacts vengeance for Joseph's rejection of her by taking him to court (Ant. II,54). Alexandra does not commit suicide, because she wants to quietly await the moment when she could avenge the death of her son (Ant. XV,59). Cleopatra urges Marc Antony to avenge the murder of Alexandra's son (Ant. XV,163). Female individuals could thus be the subject or instigator of vengeance. Eschatology does not play a role in Josephus' concept of vengeance.

### 2.2.2.7 Conclusion

Josephus pays ample attention to vengeance in all of his works, especially in his *Antiquities* with its focus on retribution and *quid pro quo*. He is not afraid to detect an act of vengeance in a certain event in history.<sup>110</sup> Vengeance for Josephus is a legal and retributive act by an authorized figure or authority responding to a crime or slight towards oneself or one's peer-group (family, country) to restore the equilibrium of honor and worth of oneself, the peer-group or God. He thus reflects a thorough understanding and sensitivity towards the meaning and function of vengeance in his cultural and religious matrix. There are several other Early Jewish writings who display a similar engagement towards their surroundings as Josephus. The next section will survey these texts.

### 2.2.3 Other Early Jewish Literature

The exegetical-philosophical works of Philo and the historical corpus of Josephus are not the only pieces of literature from this period which we can read

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<sup>109</sup> For Josephus and gender, see T. Ilan, "Josephus on Women", in: Chapman and Rodgers, *Companion*, 210-221; C.A. Reeder, "Gender, War, and Josephus", *JSJ* 46 (2015), 65-85.

<sup>110</sup> That does not mean Josephus is not embarrassed about vengeance. His description of Jephthah for example is problematic in several ways. See Feldman, *Studies*, 177-192.

and research. Early Jewish literature entails a vast amount of works in several genres.<sup>111</sup> Closely related to the Biblical texts are rewritten histories.<sup>112</sup> These writings expand, paraphrase and sometimes comment on the Biblical text. Examples are parts of the Enochic literature, Jubilees, and Early Jewish poets such as Ezekiel the Tragedian. Another form of literature are stories about Biblical and post-Biblical events.<sup>113</sup> These stories are loosely related to Biblical texts about Israel's past. Examples are Tobit, Judith, Joseph and Aseneth and 3 Maccabees. A third form of literature is historiography with books like 1 and 2 Maccabees.<sup>114</sup>

Other types of literature are wisdom literature (Ben Sira, Wisdom of Solomon, the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides, 4 Maccabees), testaments (Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Testament of Moses), poetry (Psalms of Solomon) and apocalyptic literature (Sibylline Oracles and the Enochic literature). The Dead Sea Scrolls show a wide range of text types: rules (Damasus Document, Rule of the Community), Biblical interpretations (Pesharim), eschatological-apocalyptic texts (War Scroll, Peshar Melchizedek), poetic works (Hodayot), and halachic works (Temple Scroll).<sup>115</sup>

### 2.2.3.1 *Divine Vengeance*

Most Old Testament writings testify that vengeance is a divine prerogative. Several documents such as Judith, Ben Sira, the Testaments of the Twelve

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<sup>111</sup> Most texts in this section can certainly be labelled Early Jewish, because their date and content stem from the Second Temple period. There are however some texts treated in this section that are debatably Early Jewish. Clear example are the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. These writings display an unmistakable Christian hand in their composition and content. They can however still be called Early Jewish, because their source material is undeniably Early Jewish. This paragraph will thus call all texts named here Early Jewish, but the reader must bear this nuance in mind.

<sup>112</sup> G.W.E. Nickelsburg, "The Bible Rewritten and Expanded", in: M.E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period. Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum Novum Testamentum II/2 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), 89-156; D.K. Falk, *Parabiblical Texts. Strategies of Extending the Scriptures Among the Dead Sea Scrolls*, LSTS 63 (London: Bloomsbury, 2007); M.M. Zahn, "Rewritten Scripture", in: *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. T.H. Lim and J.J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 323-336.

<sup>113</sup> G.W.E. Nickelsburg, "Stories of Biblical and Postbiblical Times", in: Stone, *Jewish Writings*, 33-88.

<sup>114</sup> H.W. Attridge, "Historiography", in: Stone, *Jewish Writings*, 157-184.

<sup>115</sup> D. Dimant, "Qumran Sectarian Literature", in: Stone, *Jewish Writings*, 483-550.

Patriarchs and other texts in Second Temple Judaism adhere to this point of view. The communities<sup>116</sup> of Qumran are also one of the examples. Although the documents of Qumran diverge in several ways from prominent strands of Judaism in Second Temple Judaism, they all agree on the confession that God is the Ruler of the World.

In the *Hodayot*, the community of Qumran can sing of God as the Prince of Gods, the King of the glorious ones, Lord of every spirit, Ruler of every creature (1QH<sup>a</sup> XVIII,8).<sup>117</sup> He therefore can exact his direct divine vengeance (4Q372 2 4; 4Q449 1 4) and raise his face in anger to avenge (1QS II,9; 4Q256 III,3; 4Q257 II,6). Vengeance is His and it is not intended for humans (1QS VII,9; 4Q259+4Q319 I,4; CD A VIII,5; XIX,2.4; 4Q300 7 2). The vengeance of YHWH is directed towards sins and sinners (1QS I,11; 4Q302 3 ii 6; 4Q418 122 ii+126 ii, 9; 4Q511 35 1). Only God could avenge himself and carry grudge against his enemies (CD A XIX,5). He is a jealous God who will devour gods and men in his vengeance (4Q400 1 i 18; 4Q491 8-10 ii 15). He exacts vengeance on those who shed the blood of the righteous Israelites (4Q372 3 11). YHWH is asked to take vengeance on foreigners and not on the sons of the covenant (4Q501 8). God is an Angry Lion who fills his cave with bodies out of revenge (4Q169 3+4 i 7). The vengeance of YHWH is also eschatological: there will be a day of vengeance and the Qumran communities will rejoice and be pure in this day (1QS IX,23; X,19; 1QM XV,6; 4Q258 VIII,7; 4Q259+4Q319 IV,5; 4Q260 IV,8).<sup>118</sup> God himself stands up for his honor and name in vengeance.

The Dead Sea Scrolls also see YHWH using instruments to exact his vengeance. The Levites curse the followers of Belial by asking God to hand them over to tyrants who execute vengeance (1QS II,6; 4Q257 II,3; 5Q11 1 i 5; cf. 4Q280 1 3). The spirit of deceit will be visited by the angels of destruction, the ardent wrath of the God of vengeance (1QS IV,12). The armed forces of Qumran can also carry out YHWH's vengeance, which can be read from

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<sup>116</sup> Scholars most of the times speak of the community of Qumran, but the documents show that this community consisted out of several communities. See J.J. Collins, "Sectarian Communities in the Dead Sea Scrolls", in: idem and T.H. Lim (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 151-172.

<sup>117</sup> J. VanderKam and P. Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 255-256.

<sup>118</sup> For the eschatological-apocalyptic worldview of Qumran, see J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, BRS 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998<sup>2</sup>), 145-176; M.A. Knibb, "Apocalypticism and Messianism", in: Lim and Collins, *Handbook*, 403-432.

their banners and trumpets (1QM III,6-8a; IV,12; XV,3). The nations could also be used as instruments of vengeance against the wicked (4Q171 IV,10; CD A VIII,12; CD B XIX,24). Individuals like Melchizedek are also agents of God's avenging judgment (11Q13 II,13), but also impersonal forces like "the sword" could act as God's instrument (CD A I,17; CD B XIX,13).

The book of Judith is also a document which emphasizes the monopoly of God on vengeance. It begins with the intention of king Nebuchadnezzar to take revenge on the nations in the East for taunting his power (Jdt. 1,12). After beating king Aphraxad of the Medes on the battlefield, this intention is turned into action (Jdt. 2,1). Nebuchadnezzar claims divine power through his might and strength.<sup>119</sup> This claim is confirmed by his commander Holofernes, who threatens to kill the Ammonite Achior after he exacted Nebuchadnezzar's divine vengeance on the people from Egypt (τὸ γένος τῶν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου) (Jdt. 6,5). Holofernes then besieges Bethulia (with Achior in it) and blocks the water supply of the city. The inhabitants invoke YHWH as a witness to force the elders of the city to surrender to Holofernes (Jdt. 7,28). The elder Uzziah promises to surrender within five days if God will not intervene.

The widow Judith hears this and confronts the elders: God cannot be forced to do things and the whole situation is not God's vengeance, but an exhortation (νουθέτησιν) (Jdt. 8,27). Judith, as a female Moses, will lead the Bethulians.<sup>120</sup> Uzziah and the other elders of Bethulia pray to God that He may take vengeance through Judith (Jdt. 8,35). Judith also prays: just as YHWH gave her grandfather Simeon a sword to exact vengeance on the Shechemites for the rape of Dinah, may He also give Judith the strength and opportunity to exact his vengeance on the Assyrians (Jdt. 9,2.9). Judith is brought before Holofernes and she confirms that God can only take vengeance when Israel sins (Jdt. 11,10). God exacts vengeance, because Judith kills

<sup>119</sup> H. Engel, "Das Buch Judit", in: E. Zenger (ed.), *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, STh 1,1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006), 298; B. Schmitz, "War, Violence and Tyrannicide in the Book of Judith", in: Liesen and Beentjes, *Visions*, 104; idem and H. Engel, *Judit*, HThKAT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2014), 63-64.

<sup>120</sup> J.W. van Henten, "Judith as a Female Moses. Judith 7-13 in the Light of Exodus 17; Numbers 20 and Deuteronomy 33:8-11", in: F. van Dijk-Hemmes and A. Brenner (eds.), *Reflections on Theology & Gender* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), 33-48; Idem, "Judith as Alternative Leader. A Rereading of Judith 7-13", in: A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, FCB 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 224-252; I. Fischer and B. Obermayer, "Die Kriegstheologie des Juditbuches als Kondensat alttestamentlicher Sichtweisen des Krieges", in: U. Dahmen and J. Schnocks (eds.), *Juda und Jerusalem in der Seleukidenzeit. Herrschaft – Widerstand – Identität*, Fs. H.J. Fabry, BBB 159 (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2010), 227-242.

Holofernes. Judith is the instrument of vengeance in God's hand to show that He is the only and true God.<sup>121</sup> Judith testifies in her hymn in chapter 16 that God will remain the same: the almighty God will avenge those nations who attack his people (Jdt. 16,17).<sup>122</sup>

Divine vengeance is also underlined in the book of Ben Sira. The author describes God as the One who is justice and exacts vengeance.<sup>123</sup> God exacts vengeance in several ways. He can avenge himself in the present on those people who deny his claim on their life (Sir. 5,3) or who sin (Sir. 32/35,20/22; 47,25; 48,7). He can also take revenge in the future on impious people (Sir. 5,7; 12,6; 17,23; 18,24; 27,28). God has also created elements in creation to exact his vengeance (Sir. 39,28-30).<sup>124</sup> Ben Sira even explicitly rejects human vengeance: "who avenges will find the vengeance of the Lord" (ὁ ἐκδικῶν παρὰ κύριου εὐρήσει ἐκδίκησιν).

God as Avenger is also a *topos* in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.<sup>125</sup> God will execute vengeance on the offspring of Ruben for attacking

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<sup>121</sup> B. Schmitz ("War", 117) states that the book of Judith develops a model wherein God does not intervene in the events. Humans can shape their own environment and future, but they are also responsible for their mistakes. In the case of vengeance, God formally exacts vengeance, yet Judith does all the work and is the only actor in the play. Schmitz makes a valid point, yet overlooks the use of instruments as executors of God's vengeance in the Old Testament. Judith indeed gets the attention and is the sole actor on the battlefield, yet she exacts God's vengeance and she prays for his power in 9,2.9.

<sup>122</sup> The author of Judith cites Isaiah 66,24 in this context to give the vengeance of God an eschatological perspective. See J. Gärtner and B. Schmitz, "...indem er Feuer und Würmer in ihr Fleisch gibt" (Jdt 16,17). Die Metaphern in Jdt 16,17 vor dem Hintergrund von Jes 66,24", in: M. Witte (ed.), *The Metaphorical Use of Language in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature*, DCLY 2014 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 107-123.

<sup>123</sup> O. Wischmeyer, "Theologie und Anthropologie im Sirachbuch", in: R. Egger-Wenzel (ed.), *Ben Sira's God. Proceedings of the International Ben Sira Conference Durham – Ushaw College 2001*, BZAW 321 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 21-22.

<sup>124</sup> Chapter 39,28-30 is not an attempt to sketch or solve a theodicy, but to praise God's work by exacting his vengeance through the elements as retribution of sinners. See J. Liesen, *Full of Praise. An Exegetical Study of Sir. 39,12-35*, JSJSup 64 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 272; P.C. Beentjes, "Theodicy in Wisdom of Ben Sira", in: Laatto and De Moor (eds.), *Theodicy*, 519-520.

<sup>125</sup> This view of the Testaments could originate from the Old Testament (Lev. 19,18), but the most plausible solution is to consider it to be a Christian point of view. The Testaments probably used older Jewish material and reworked it in a Christian matrix. See M. de Jonge, "Christian Influence in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs", in: idem (ed.), *Studies on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, SVTP 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 193-246; H.W. Hollander, "The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs", in: M. de Jonge (ed.), *Outside the Old Testament*, CCWJC 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 71-91; J.R. Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha. Jewish, Christian or Other?*, JSJSup 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2005); J. Marcus, "The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*. A Common Jewish Christian Milieu?", *JThS* 61 (2010), 596-626.



the progeny of Levi and thus trying to seize power and authority over them (T. Reub. 6,6). Levi sees a second heaven in which the lawless people will receive vengeance from God (T. Levi 3,2). The vengeance of God will come and it will take down the priestly office which has been contaminated by the offspring of Levi (T. Levi 18,1). God will bring death and the sword of vengeance on the children of Judah for acting as Gentiles (T. Jud. 23,3). God will execute vengeance on the Egyptians for oppressing the children of Joseph (T. Jos. 20,1). Cain received a sevenfold vengeance of God (T. Benj. 7,3). God could also use instruments to take revenge: troops in the third heaven (T. Levi 3,3), Levi (T. Levi 5,3) and the Savior (T. Dan 5,10). Humans cannot retaliate evil, they must forgive and leave vengeance to God (T. Gad 6,7).

Other documents use the motif of divine vengeance as well. Only God has the right to avenge hubris (JosAs. 28,14). Vengeance must be left in the hands of *Dikè* (Sent. Ps. Phoc. 77).<sup>126</sup> God could react in vengeance when Israel is attacked by others (1 Macc. 7,38; 2 Macc. 6,15; 3 Macc. 2,17; 7,9<sup>127</sup>). He could also avenge the attack or death of righteous individuals (Tob. 14,10; 4 Macc. 9,24; 11,3; 12,18; 17,21; 18,5<sup>128</sup>; T. Mos 9,7; 10,2,7<sup>129</sup>; Pss. Sol. 2,34-35<sup>130</sup>). He will exact his vengeance on sinners (Wis. 11,15; 1 En. 22,11; Sib. Or. III,259; V,70; Pss. Sol. 2,25; 17,8) or everyone (1 En. 25,4<sup>131</sup>; Sib.

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<sup>126</sup> P.W. van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides. With Introduction and Commentary*, SVTP 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 167: "it is notable that, whereas the Biblical and Jewish texts speak of leaving vengeance to God, Ps. Phoc. speaks of leaving it to *Dike*."

<sup>127</sup> N.C. Croy, *3 Maccabees*, SCS (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 112: "in the typical style of 3 Maccabees this inescapable divine vengeance is described as coming from the *all* powerful God, in *every way*, and for *all time*." Italics by Croy.

<sup>128</sup> J.W. van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyr as Saviours of the Jewish People. A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees*, JSJSup 57 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 172; B.J. Tabb, *Suffering in Ancient Worldview. Luke, Seneca and 4 Maccabees in Dialogue*, LNTS 569 (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 100-119.

<sup>129</sup> J. Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses. A Critical Edition with Commentary*, SVTP 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 229-235. J. Licht ("Taxo and the Apocalyptic Doctrine of Vengeance", *JJS* 12 (1961), 95-103) states that Taxo's acts in chapters 9 and 10 force divine vengeance and thus Taxo is instrumental in forwarding the eschaton. See also D.C. Carlson, "Vengeance and Angelic Mediation in *Testament of Moses* 9 and 10", *JBL* 101 (1982), 85-95; J.W. van Henten, "Moses as Heavenly Messenger in *Assumptio Mosis* 10:2 and Qumran Passages", *JJS* 54 (2003), 216-227; K. Atkinson, "Taxo's Martyrdom and the Role of the *Nuntius* in the *Testament of Moses*. Implications for Understanding the Role of Other Intermediary Figures", *JBL* 125 (2006), 453-476.

<sup>130</sup> K. Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord. A Study of the Psalm of Solomon's Historical Background and Historical Setting*, JSJSup 84 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 52-53.

<sup>131</sup> For a discussion of the tree metaphor in 1 Enoch 25,4 see V. Bachmann, "Rooted in Paradise? The Meaning of the 'Tree of Life' in 1 Enoch 24-25 Reconsidered", *JSP* 19 (2009), 83-107.

Or. III,634). God can use instruments to take revenge (1 En. 20,4; JosAs. 23,14). Divine vengeance thus is seen as God's universal reign as King and Judge over Israel and, in some texts, over the world. He stands up for the honor of his name and the honor of his people. YHWH could exact vengeance himself or He could use instruments for the job.

The idea of the priority of divine vengeance is commonly shared in Early Jewish literature, but some texts (also) pay attention to human vengeance. 1 Maccabees for instance focusses on the avenging acts of humans (the Hasmoneans and their enemies) instead of divine vengeance.<sup>132</sup> Human vengeance can also be found in the Apocryphon of Ezekiel (1,5) and Joseph and Aseneth (24,7; 28,4). So although divine vengeance is prominently present in literature in this period, human vengeance plays a (moderate) role in several documents.

### 2.2.3.2 Retribution and Reciprocity

The analysis of Greco-Roman and Old Testament texts has shown that vengeance reacts to an offense or slight. Vengeance thus has a retributive character. One can even say that for the majority of texts vengeance functions in a reciprocal system of receiving and giving. Early Jewish literature agree with this analysis: these documents stand in a line of continuity with Greco-Roman and Old Testament texts. Some writings however slightly modify the Old Testament understanding of reciprocal vengeance, because of the interaction between ancient Judaism and Hellenism.

Confirming retributive vengeance are the Dead Sea Scrolls. YHWH himself avenges in retribution (CD A XIX,5; 4Q372 2 4). The sons of darkness (1QS I,11), the adherents of Belial (1QSII,6.9; 4Q256 III,3; 4Q257 II,3.6; 5Q11 1 i 5), the spirit of deceit (1QS IV,12), workers of deceit (4Q418 122ii+126ii 9): all are not safe for the vengeance of God. He is a jealous God (4Q400 1 i 18) who cannot stand unfaithfulness (4Q302 3 ii 6), the attack on his covenant people (4Q372 3 11; 4Q501 8), or horrific behavior (4Q169 3+4 i 7). He will exterminate wickedness in vengeance (4Q511 35 1). The day of vengeance will be a day of YHWH's retribution (1QS IX,23; X,19; 1QM

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<sup>132</sup> This anthropocentric focus depends on the genre and also the apologetic goal of a document. 1 Maccabees for instance tries to defend the Hasmonaean dynasty and thus its focus lies on the great avenging acts of the Hasmonaean family and less on the vengeance of God himself. See H. Engel, "Die Bücher der Makkabäer", in: Zenger, *Einleitung*, 319-320.

III,6.8; IV,12; VII,5; XV,3.6; 4Q258 VIII,7; 4Q259+4Q319 IV,5; 4Q260 IV,8). The documents from Qumran also speak more individually and sometimes impersonally. Someone who breaks the covenant out of unfaithfulness or unbelief will receive (divinely sanctioned) vengeance (1 QS V,12; CD A I,17; XV,13). A human who takes its revenge without reasoning or out of unjust motives will in return receive vengeance (1QS VII,9; 4Q259+4Q319 I,4; CD A VIII,5; XIX,2.4; 4Q300 7 2).

1 Maccabees shows the battle between vengeful justice and illegal retribution. The vengeance of the Hasmonaean dynasty is pure and just. Mattathias appoints Judas as the military leader, in the footsteps of David, to exact vengeance on the nations for their crimes (1 Macc. 2,67-68).<sup>133</sup> Judas values Alcimus' coup as an evil greater than anything the nations have done, which results in Judas exacting vengeance on deserters (τοῖς ἀνδράσιν τοῖς αὐτομολήσασιν) (1 Macc. 7,24). Demetrius then sends Nikanor, who mocks the priests and elders and threatens to burn the temple. The priests and elders pray to God to exact vengeance on Nikanor and his army (1 Macc. 7,38). The Jambrites also kill a Hasmonaean (John), resulting in Jonathan and Simon taking revenge for their brother by causing a bloodbath on a Jambrite wedding (1 Macc. 9,42). After Jonathan is allegedly killed by Tryphon, Simon encourages the inhabitants of Jerusalem by stating he will exact vengeance on the Gentiles for the people, the temple and the women and children of Jerusalem (1 Macc. 13,6). He is supported by Rome, who decrees that fled apostates must be handed over to Simon to receive vengeance (1 Macc. 15,21).

This pure retribution of the Hasmonaean for treason and sinful attacks is countered by impure vengeance by apostates and Gentiles. King Seron wants to avenge the rebellion of Judas with his army of wicked men (παρημβολὴ ἀσεβῶν) (1 Macc. 3,15). Judas besieges the citadel of Jerusalem and kills some traitors and Gentiles, after which some of the traitors and Gentiles who have escaped ask king Antiochus Eupator to avenge the death of

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<sup>133</sup> T. Hieke, "The Role of 'Scripture' in the Last Words of Mattathias (1 Macc 2:49-70)", in: G.G. Xeravits and J. Zsengellér (eds.), *The Books of the Maccabees. History, Theology, Ideology. Papers of the Second International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Pécs, Hungary, 9-11 June, 2005*, JSJSup 118 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 61-74; A. van der Kooij, "The Claim of Maccabean Leadership and the Use of Scripture", in: B. Eckhardt (ed.), *Jewish Identity and Politics Between the Maccabees and Bar Kokhba. Groups, Normativity, and Rituals*, JSJSup 155 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 45-46.

their fellow men (1 Macc. 6,22).<sup>134</sup> The same request is made to king Demetrius, who killed Antiochus Eupator in a revolt. He sends Bacchides and Alcimus to take revenge on the Jews (1 Macc. 7,9). Demetrius sends Bacchides again and he eventually beats and kills Judas and exacts vengeance on the rebels (1 Macc. 9,26).

The other books of Maccabees also consider vengeance to be retributive. It is a sign of God's patronage (εὐεργεσία) that he does not delay exacting vengeance on Israel for their sins (2 Macc. 6,13-15). 3 Maccabees places vengeance with God and asks Him to avenge the desecration of the temple by lawless people (παράνομοι) (3 Macc. 2,17). Philopator writes that an attack on Israel is also an attack on the almighty God who will exact vengeance (3 Macc. 7,9). 4 Maccabees is in line with 3 Maccabees, asking God to exact vengeance on the tyrant Antiochus for his wicked behavior (4 Macc. 9,20; 11,3; 12,18; 17,21; 18,5).

The book of Ben Sira also regards vengeance as a retributive answer to sin and wickedness.<sup>135</sup> God's vengeance is directed towards sinners (Sir. 5,3,7; 12,6; 17,23; 23,21; 27,28; 28,1; 47,25; 48,7), the wicked (Sir. 7,17; 18,24; 39,28-30) or the nations (Sir. 32/35,20/22). His justice reveals itself in the context of reciprocity.<sup>136</sup> If a father dies, his son will be his avenger and will reciprocate his friends (Sir. 30,6). Joshua was great in saving God's elect by taking revenge on the enemies (Sir. 46,1). Sira wishes revenge, but not the ruthless revenge of a female (Sir. 25,14).

Apocalyptic literature and related writings validates vengeance as a reciprocal and retributive deed. In its apocalyptic framework, sinners will receive vengeance for their wickedness (1 En. 22,11.13<sup>137</sup>; Sib. Or. III,200.259;

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<sup>134</sup> The author of 1 Maccabees draws a line between the faithful Jews led by the Hasmonaeans and the Gentiles consisting of apostate Jews and people from the nations. See D.R. Schwartz, "The Other in 1 and 2 Maccabees", in: G.N. Stanton and G.G. Strouma (eds.), *Tolerance and Intolerance in early Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 30-37.

<sup>135</sup> Reciprocity is a vital mechanism used by Ben Sira to portray the intrahuman relations and the relation between God and humans. See S.A. Long, "The God who Repays". *Dynamics of Charity and Reciprocity in the Book of Sirach* (unpublished dissertation University of Notre Dame, 2018).

<sup>136</sup> L. Schrader, *Leiden und Gerechtigkeit. Studien zu Theologie und Textgeschichte des Sirachbuches*, BeitBExT 27 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 1994), 304.

<sup>137</sup> Another relevant text is 1 En. 23,4. This text however is difficult, because there is a text-critical problem: the text says ἐκδιώκω, yet some texts attest to a form of ἐκδίκηω. Nickelsburg (*1 Enoch 1. A Commentary on the Book of Enoch, chapters 1-36; 81-108*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2001), 311) prefers the first reading, while seeing the down sides of this choice. I prefer a reading of the latter form, because the text alludes to Isaiah 66

V,70; T. Reub. 6,6; T. Levi 3,2; T. Jud. 23,3). Vengeance even extends to the whole world (1 En. 20,4; 25,4; Sib. Or. III,634). Vengeance will not only be retribution towards humanity, but also to spirits and demons (T. Levi 3,3; T. Dan 5,10). In their historical sections, apocalyptic literature also considers vengeance to be reciprocal. Taxo tells his sons that their blood will be avenged by God when they persevere (T. Mos. 9,7), which is done shortly after (T. Mos. 10,2.7).<sup>138</sup> The history of Dinah and the Shechemites is also an example of vengeance as reciprocal action (T. Levi 2,2; 5,3). Vengeance is reacting to offenses or sins (Sib. Or. III,351-352; T. Levi 18,1; T. Jos. 15,5; 20,1; T. Benj. 7,3), but God is the only one who can exact it (T. Gad 6,7).

Other literature do not contradict the connection between vengeance and retribution. Sins (Tob. 14,10; T. Sol. 20,2; Pss. Sol. 2,25.34-35; Wis. 11,15; Jdt. 7,15.28; 8,27; 9,2; 11,10; 16,17), offenses or slights (Ap. Ez. 64-70,5; JosAs. 23,14; 28,4.14; Jdt. 1,12; 2,1; 6,5) and other crimes will receive retribution in vengeance (T. Sol. 22,4; JosAs. 24,7; Jdt. 8,35). People must not lose hope in this life for not having the opportunity to avenge (Sent. Ps. Phoc. 77).

### 2.2.3.3 Justice

Early Jewish documents confirm the belief that vengeance is a legal action. The most prominent history in which vengeance and justice is connected is the history of Simeon and Levi taking (divinely sanctioned) revenge on the Shechemites for their crime concerning Dinah (JosAs. 23,14; Jdt. 9,2; T. Levi 2,2; 5,3).<sup>139</sup> Several other retellings can be mentioned: Cain receiving

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which uses vengeance and retaliation terminology and is also used in other texts like Judith 16 in a vengeance context.

<sup>138</sup> An interesting question is: who will execute the vindication of Taxo and his sons? Assumptio Mosis 10,2 speaks about a “messenger” (*nuntius*) who will exact vengeance on behalf of God. Carlson (“Vengeance”) has argued that an angel is the *nuntius*, but within the document angels are not mentioned and *nuntius* refers to a human messenger. Tromp (*Assumption*, 230-231) states that the *nuntius* is Taxo himself, but this identification is strange: Taxo will fulfill his own prayer, while Taxo and his sons are also incorporated in the “them” of 10,2. Van Henten (“Moses”) has convincingly argued that the *nuntius* must be identified as Moses, alongside 11,16-17 12,6, and several Qumran-passages implying Moses’ role as mediator between God and the Israelites.

<sup>139</sup> See J.L. Kugel, “The Story of Dinah in the *Testament of Levi*”, *HThR* 85 (1992), 1-34; M.A. Bader, *Tracing the Evidence. Dinah in Post-Hebrew Bible Literature*, StudBL 102 (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

sevenfold vengeance (T. Benj. 7,3)<sup>140</sup>, the fear of the Ishmaelites for Jacob's vengeance for their possession of Joseph (T. Jos. 15,5), God's vengeance over the Egyptians (T. Jos. 20,1), Joshua taking revenge on Israel's enemies (Sir. 46,1)<sup>141</sup>, the divine vengeance over Israel during the reign of Jeroboam (Sir. 47,25) and God's judgments told to Elijah (Sir. 48,7).

The Dead Sea Scrolls also regard vengeance as a deed of justice. YHWH is the Judge who will judge the guilty (1QS I,11; cf. CD A XIX,5) and the wicked in vengeance (4Q511 35 1). He will avenge the blood of Israel on the nations (4Q372 3 11; cf. 4Q501 8). God can give the execution of his avenging judgment in the hands of others (1QS II,6; 4Q171 IV,10; 4Q257 II,3; CD B XIX,13; 4Q280 1 3; 5Q11 1 i 5; 11Q13 II,13). Vengeance is also understood in individual cases in the Dead Sea Scrolls as a legal action. Individual vengeance without proper substantiation is prohibited (1QS VII,9; CD A XIX,2.4) and vengeance itself is even forbidden (4Q259+4Q319 I,4). Illegitimate vengeance is met with (divinely sanctioned) retributive vengeance (CD A VIII,5.12; CD B XIX,24). There is no bigger poison for a human than to be an avenger who stays angry (4Q300 7 2).

God is also pictured as Judge in other literature. He is the only one who can rightfully judge hubris (JosAs. 28,14). He will punish crime (Tob. 14,10), rebellion (T. Reub. 6,6) and wickedness (T. Jud. 23,3). Sinners will be judged, although Israel will not be punished on the climax of their sins (2 Macc. 6,15).<sup>142</sup> God will stand up as the Almighty Judge for his people (1 Macc. 7,38; 3 Macc. 7,9), his temple (3 Macc. 2,17). He will prosecute the nations in vengeance (Sir. 32/35,20/22). He stands up for persevering martyrs (4 Macc. 9,24; 11,3; 12,18; 17,21; 18,5; T. Mos. 9,7; 10,7). God can do vengeance through others (1 En. 20,4; Jdt. 8,35; Sir. 39,28-30; T. Mos. 10,2).

Vengeance also functions in a mundane legal context. 1 Maccabees testifies of a more worldly application of just vengeance.<sup>143</sup> The Hasmonaeans exact just vengeance on apostates and Gentiles (1 Macc. 2,67-68; 7,24;

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<sup>140</sup> This statement in the Testament of Benjamin is remarkable, because Genesis 4,14 directs vengeance towards the killers of Cain and not towards Cain himself. See M. de Jonge and H.W. Hollander, *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs. A Commentary*, SVTP 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 432.

<sup>141</sup> A possible reference to Joshua 10,13. See P.W. Skehan and A.A. DiLella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, AYBC (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 519.

<sup>142</sup> B. Ego, "God's Justice. The 'Measure for Measure' Principle in 2 Maccabees", in: Xeravits and Zsengellér (eds.), *Maccabees*, 141-154.

<sup>143</sup> See also K. Trampedach, "The War of the Hasmonaeans", in: G. Signori (ed.), *Dying for the Faith – Killing for the Faith. Old Testament Faith-Warriors (1 and 2 Maccabees) in Historical Perspective*, BSIH 206 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 61-78.

9,42; 13,6; 15,21), while their opponents also take revenge as judges for the crimes of the Hasmonaeans (1 Macc. 3,15; 6,22; 7,9; 9,26). Other texts can also be named in this context. A father asks Solomon to take vengeance on his son for abusing him (T. Sol. 20,2). The fornicator will be avenged in the streets (Sir. 23,21).

The frame of justice thus functions as an important tool to understand the concept of vengeance in these Early Jewish texts.

#### 2.2.3.4 Honor

The concepts of vengeance in the Greco-Roman and Old Testament writings are also embedded in the notions of honor, dishonor, and shame. These notions are vital for understanding vengeance in the literature of the Second Temple period too. Dishonoring God will result in Him executing vengeance to restore his honor. Sin can also be seen as an attack on the claim of God on life and thus as an assault on his honor.

The Dead Sea Scrolls testify of a correlation between vengeance and the curse of the covenant. The curse of the covenant is covenantal vengeance as a reaction on a dishonoring sin. The covenant people may not sin and dishonor God or else YHWH through the curse of the covenant will restore his honor (1QS V,12; CD A I,17; XIX,4-5; CD B XIX,13.24; 4Q280 1 3). YHWH will punish disloyalty as an attack on his claim on global Kingship (4Q302 3 ii 6). He will avenge his people (4Q501 8) and execute vengeance on the deceitful (4Q418 122 ii+126 ii 9) to restore the honor of his people. He makes sinners ashamed (1QS IV,12).

This pattern of divine vengeance as a reaction to honor and dishonor also suits well with findings in other literature. God's vengeance will come over sin as a punishment for dishonor and/or a restoration of honor (Sir. 5,3<sup>144</sup>; 27,28; 28,1; Tob. 14,10; Wis. 11,15; Pss. Sol. 2,25.34-35). He stands up for his people as the Avenger to restore them in their honor and dishonor the

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<sup>144</sup> For the use of honor in Ben Sira, see DeSilva, "Wisdom"; C.V. Camp, "Honor and Shame in Ben Sira. Anthropological and Theological Reflections", in: P.C. Beentjes (ed.), *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research. Proceedings of the first International Ben Sira Conference, 26-31 July 1996 Soesterberg, the Netherlands*, BZAW 255 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 171-187.

enemy (1 Macc. 7,38; 3 Macc. 7,9; 4 Macc. 9,24<sup>145</sup>; 12,18; 17,20; 18,5; JosAs. 28,14; T. Jos. 20,1). His people will honor him and leave vengeance to him as the honorable way, so that He can take vengeance on those who dishonor him (Jdt. 16,16-17; Sent Ps. Phoc. 77; T. Gad 6,7). He can also punish his own people (Jdt. 11,10; T. Levi 18,1; T. Jud. 23,3), but also use his people to punish others as a reaction to dishonor (Jdt. 9,2; JosAs. 23,14; T. Levi 2,2; 5,3; T. Dan 5,10). One must honor Him and his justice to avoid global vengeance (Sib. Or. III,634).

Vengeance and honor are also connected in a human context. The book of 1 Maccabees tells the story of the vengeance battle for honor between the Hasmonaeans (1 Macc. 2,67-68; 7,24; 9,42) and the group of apostates and Gentiles (1 Macc. 3,15; 6,22; 7,9; 9,26). Nebuchadnezzar wants and exacts vengeance for the humiliation and dishonoring by the nations in the East (Jdt. 1,12; 2,1; 6,5), while Judith considers Nebuchadnezzar's acts not as vengeance (and thus dishonor), but as an ordeal for honor (Jdt. 8,27).<sup>146</sup> Slightings and other dishonoring acts will receive vengeance (Ap. Ez. 64-70,5; Sib. Or. III,351; V,70; JosAs. 24,7; 28,4; T. Sol. 20,2; T. Jos. 15,5). Humans have avengers who exact vengeance to restore their honor if they are killed or have died (Sir. 30,6; T. Mos. 9,7). Human vengeance must however not be excessive and too emotional (Sir. 25,14).<sup>147</sup>

The notions of honor, dishonor and shame are thus pivotal in understanding the concept of vengeance in Jewish and Jewish-Christian literature in the Second Temple Period.

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<sup>145</sup> For the battle for honor in 4 Maccabees see D.A. DeSilva, "The Noble Contest. Honor, Shame, and the Rhetorical Strategy of *4 Maccabees*", *JSP* 13 (1995), 31-57; Idem, *4 Maccabees*, GAP (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 86-96; B.A. Edsall, "Persuasion and Force in 4 Maccabees. Appropriating a Political Dialectic", *JSJ* 48 (2017), 92-112.

<sup>146</sup> P.F. Esler, "'By the Hand of a Woman'. Culture, Story and Theology in the Book of Judith", in: J.J. Pilch (ed.), *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible*, Fs. B.J. Malina, BIS 53 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 71: "the desire for vengeance to restore one's besmirched honor (...) motivates each of the latter stages of challenge-and-response." Cf. E. Juhl Christiansen, "Judith. Defender of Israel – Preserver of the Temple", in: G.G. Xeravits (ed.), *A Pious Seductress. Studies in the Book of Judith*, DCLS 14 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 79.

<sup>147</sup> Skehan and DiLella, *Wisdom*, 142; I. Balla, *Ben Sira on Family, Gender, and Sexuality*, DCLS 8 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 143, 228-229.



### 2.2.3.5 Covenant and Family

Vengeance can be understood through the study of several notions and concepts. One of the common features of vengeance in Antiquity is the structure of family and covenant. The matrix of kinship also leaves its mark in Early Jewish literature.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have a concept of the covenant that is vital for understanding the community itself and its thought. The idea of the covenant in the Old Testament is implemented in the community, but it is more narrow in the definition of the covenant people. The Qumran communities and their associates are the true Israel.<sup>148</sup> Vengeance in the Qumran literature must be understood in this specific covenantal matrix .

Thus, the true Israel in Qumran is protected by its covenant patron YHWH. He will punish the nations in vengeance when they attack the covenant people (4Q372 3 11). He takes revenge in his covenantal jealousy (4Q400 1 i 18). Disloyalty to the covenant is a great sin which will be met with the vengeance of YHWH (4Q169 3+4 i 7; CD A I,17; VIII,5.12; XV,13; CD B XIX,13.24; 4Q 302 3 ii 6). Negative behavior or thoughts against fellow covenant members are also forbidden and punished (1QS VII,9; CD A XIX,2). The laws of Moses separate the righteous from the sons of darkness, whereby the latter will be met with the vengeance of God (1QS I,11; cf. 4Q471 2 10). The curse of the covenant will be on those who are unrighteous and dishonor his revelation (1QS V,12). The righteous covenantal people can battle to execute God's vengeance (1QM III,6-8; IV,12; VII,5; XV,3.6) or pray that God himself or one of his instruments may exact vengeance (1QS II,6.9; 4Q256 III,3; 4Q257 II,3.6; 4Q501 8; 5Q11 1 i 5). He will avenge his people (4Q372 2 4) and will take revenge on the enemies (4Q491 8-10 ii 15). People may rejoice in his covenantal vengeance (4Q258 VIII,7; 4Q259+4Q319 IV,5).

The covenantal context of vengeance can also be traced in other literature from this period. God will stand up and take vengeance for his people and the weak when they are threatened by the nations or tyrants (2 Macc. 7,9; 3 Macc. 7,9; 4 Macc. 9,24; 11,3; 12,18; 17,21; Sir. 32/35,20/22; Jdt. 16,17;

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<sup>148</sup> VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning*, 262: "the Qumranites understood themselves and those who agreed with them, not all of Israel, as the people with whom God was in covenant and as the ones who accurately understood and implemented the laws of that agreement."

JosAs. 28,14; Sib. Or. V,70; T. Mos. 9,7; 10,2.7; T. Jos. 20,1; cf. T. Dan 5,10). His vengeance can be called up by the righteous in prayer (1 Macc. 7,38; Pss. Sol. 2,34-35). God however will punish his own people too when they violate the covenant stipulations (2 Macc. 6,15; Sir. 5,3.7; 7,17; 12,6; 17,23; 47,25; Jdt. 7,28; 11,10; T. Reub. 6,6; T. Jud. 23,3; T. Benj. 7,3). The righteous themselves could also legitimize their acts as covenantal (1 Macc. 2,67-68; 7,24; 13,6).<sup>149</sup>

Vengeance does not have an exclusive covenantal character.<sup>150</sup> The context of family or virtual kinship however is still vital. The (divinely sanctioned) killing of the Shechemites for the assault of Dinah was a family matter (Jdt. 9,2; JosAs. 23,14; T. Levi 2,2; 5,3). Family members avenge the slight or murder of their relative (1 Macc. 9,42; Sir. 30,6; JosAs. 24,7; 28,4; T. Jos. 15,5). Vengeance within the family is prohibited and also retaliated (Tob. 14,10; Sir. 25,14<sup>151</sup>; T. Sol. 20,2), while also destroyers of the family will be victims of vengeance (Sir. 23,21; Sib. Or. III,200). Kinship could also be broader than family and extended to peer-groups as a type of 'virtual' kinship. This sort of kinship could include fellow apostates (1 Macc. 6,22; 7,9) and allies (T. Sol. 22,4).

Vengeance is not restricted to the covenant, yet the idea of the covenant cannot be set aside. Some texts need to be understood in a covenantal context. The notions of family and kinship are much broader and enclose more texts than a strict focus on the covenant. Vengeance runs in the family, which could be blood-related relatives or spiritually like-minded people.

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<sup>149</sup> 1 Maccabees 1-2 legitimize the acts of the Hasmonaeans, because of their priesthood in the line of Phinehas. See Van der Kooij, "Claim"; D.D. Chang, *Phinehas, the Sons of Zadok, and Melchizedek. Priestly Covenant in Late Second Temple Texts*, LSTS 90 (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 23-51.

<sup>150</sup> The conclusion of Musvosvi (*Vengeance*, 134) that the concept of vengeance in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha receives no new directions and that "vengeance is based on the covenant" is a misrepresentation of the evidence.

<sup>151</sup> Balla, *Family*, 90: "If we take Sir 25:14-15 as a unit it may be another reference to polygyny, where the 'affliction' and 'vengeance' of the wives, who cannot get along and become each other's enemies, would affect not only them, but also the husband."

### 2.2.3.6 Emotion, Gender, Pollution, Eschatology

In a multiplicity of texts from the Second Temple period, vengeance is associated with emotions.<sup>152</sup> In line with the Old Testament texts, the Qumran community connects vengeance with the wrath (אף) of God (1QS II,6,9; IV,12; V,12; 1QM III,6; 4Q256 III,3; 4Q257 II,3,6; 4Q280 1 3; 4Q471 2 10; 4Q 511 35 1). His zeal (קנאה) for justice leads to vengeance (4Q449 1 4). God can have grudge (בוטח) against his enemies (CD A XIX,5; 4Q300 7 2), while human grudge is forbidden (CD A VIII,5; XIX,2,4). God is jealous in his vengeance (4Q400 1 i 18). The Instructor may fully hate the clandestine spirits and rejoice in the day of vengeance (1QS IX,23; 4Q259+4Q319 IV,5). Vengeance and emotion are thus strongly connected in the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>153</sup>

Some texts in the Second Temple period correspond with this association of vengeance and emotion. God can execute vengeance in wrath (Sib. Or. III,634; Sir. 5,7; 7,17; Jdt. 11,10; cf. 1 Macc. 2,49 in connection with 2,67-68). He can hate sinners (Sir. 12,6; 39,28-30) and punish their wrath (Pss. Sol. 2,24-25; 1 Macc. 13,6; 3 Macc. 2,17; T. Gad 6,7). Human vengeance can also be a reaction in wrath (1 Macc. 13,6; Jdt. 1,12). Multiple texts however show a different attitude towards emotion, conflating Judaism and Greco-Roman thought. Emotions must then be tempered and human vengeance is discarded (Sent. Ps. Phoc. 77). Judith executes vengeance without any emotion.<sup>154</sup> Aseneth distances herself from the vengeful displays of courage and instead pleads for mercy and philanthropy, while God can have his emotional vengeance (JosAs. 28,14).<sup>155</sup> The mother and brothers in 4 Maccabees are described

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<sup>152</sup> For an overview of the study of emotions in the Second Temple Period, see P. von Gemünden, "Affekte und Affektkontrolle im Antiken Judentum und Urchristentum", in: idem, *Affekt und Glaube. Studien zur historischen Psychologie des Frühjudentums und Urchristentums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 309-328; F. Mirguez, "The Study of Emotions in Early Jewish Texts. Review and Perspectives", *JSJ* 50 (2019), 557-603.

<sup>153</sup> A. Mermelstein, "Love and Hate in Qumran. The Social Construction of Sectarian Emotion", *DSD* 20 (2013), 237-263.

<sup>154</sup> B. Schmitz, "Judith and Holofernes. An Analysis of Emotions in the Killing Scene (Jdt 12:1-13:9)", in: S.C. Reif and R. Egger-Wenzel (eds.), *Ancient Jewish Prayers and Emotions. Emotions Associated with Jewish Prayer in and around the Second Temple Period*, DCLS 26 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 177-192.

<sup>155</sup> A. Mermelstein, "Emotion, Gender, and Greco-Roman Virtue in Joseph and Aseneth", *JSJ* 48 (2017), 1-32.

in a Stoic fashion as conquerors of their emotions and they thus leave vengeance to God.<sup>156</sup>

Vengeance can also be looked at through the lens of the study of gender in Antiquity.<sup>157</sup> Vengeance is in most texts seen as a male enterprise. Men must stand up for themselves or their family and execute vengeance (JosAs. 23,14; 24,7; 28,4). Ben Sira can affirm vengeance, but not the vengeance of a hostile woman in the context of polygamy (Sir. 25,14).<sup>158</sup> There are however exceptions to the rule. The most prominent example is the execution of God's vengeance by Judith. She was a widow, thus a vulnerable human being.<sup>159</sup> Yet, despite male presence in Bethulia, she happens to be the most suitable avenger.<sup>160</sup> The mother and brothers in 4 Maccabees also show a reversal of the conventional image of masculinity and the masculine avenger: the males control their emotions and do not avenge, while the mother acts like a man by exhorting her sons to persevere and to stand up against Antiochus.<sup>161</sup> Aseneth is also an example of a woman who shows masculine leadership by directing the brothers to release their power of vengeance to God (JosAs. 28,14).<sup>162</sup>

The notions of purity and purification also color the larger picture of vengeance in Jewish and Jewish-Christian literature in the Second Temple Period. Purity is best understood as "a state of being that renders persons, places or things as acceptable to participate in the cult and to maintain the

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<sup>156</sup> D.C. Aune, "Mastery of the Passions. Philo, 4 Maccabees and Earliest Christianity", in: W.E. Helleman (ed.), *Hellenization Revisited. Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman World* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), 125-158; B.D. Shaw, "Body/Power/Identity. Passions of the Martyrs", *J ECS* 4 (1996), 269-312; Van Henten, *Martyr*, 271.

<sup>157</sup> For an overview of gender in the Second Temple period, see L.J. Archer, *Her Price is beyond Rubies. The Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine*, JSOTSS 60 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); T. Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine*, TSAJ 44 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995).

<sup>158</sup> Ben Sira displays the *communis opinio* that men carry honor and women are weak vessels who must be controlled to maintain honor. See Camp, "Honor", 175-176; Balla, *Sira*, 143.

<sup>159</sup> Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 147-151.

<sup>160</sup> H. Efthimiadis-Keith, "Text and Interpretation. Gender and Violence in the Book of Judith, scholarly commentary and the visual arts from the Renaissance onward", *OTE* 15 (2002), 64-84; B. Schmitz, "Casting Judith. The Construction of Role Patterns in the Book of Judith", in: H. Lichtenberger and U. Mittmann-Richert (eds.), *Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature*, DCLY 2008 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 77-94.

<sup>161</sup> S.D. Moore and J.C. Anderson, "Taking it like a Man. Masculinity in 4 Maccabees", *JBL* 117 (1998), 249-273; Cobb, *Dying*, 60-80.

<sup>162</sup> Mermelstein, "Emotion".

presence of the deity.”<sup>163</sup> Purity is pivotal in the Dead Sea Scrolls as a matrix for understanding life and the borders of the community.<sup>164</sup> The spirit of deceit is impure and thus worthy of vengeance (1QS IV,9-12). Illegitimate vengeance makes people impure (CD A VIII,5-6). The soldiers of Qumran must be pure to fight in the day of vengeance (1QM VII,5). The pure priests take part in God’s jealous vengeance (4Q400 1 i 18). Other texts also consider purification as an aspect of vengeance. Simon and Levi avenge the act of impurity of the Shechemites with Dinah (Jdt. 9,2; JosAs. 23,14; T. Levi 2,2; 5,3). Israel made itself impure by honoring animals, a sin for which God executed vengeance (Wis. 11,15). The divine providence has taken vengeance on Antiochus through the martyrs and thus purified the homeland (4 Macc. 17,21). The vengeance of God entails the purification of Jerusalem by the Davidic Messiah (Pss. Sol. 17,8.22).<sup>165</sup>

The last important aspect to reckon with in studying vengeance is the notion of eschatology. A recurring theme in Early Jewish literature is the Day of the Lord as a day of judgment and vengeance. The theme of the “Day of the Lord” can already be found in the Old Testament as a day of judgment and salvation (Am. 5,20; Zeph. 1,14-16).<sup>166</sup> The theme of a cosmic eschatology and a fixed moment in which the Lord will turn the tables, will judge, and save can be found first in the Second Temple Period (Jdt. 16,17; 2 Macc. 7,9).<sup>167</sup> The apocalyptic book of Enoch points towards a day of vengeance in which God will rule the world, judge the wicked and save the righteous (1 En. 22,11.13; 1 En. 25,4). The Dead Sea Scrolls consider the day of vengeance a day of liberation and rejoice (1QS IX,19.23; 4Q258 VIII,7; 4Q259+4Q319 IV,5; 4Q260 IV,8; cf. 11Q13 II,13).<sup>168</sup> The book of Ben Sira envisions a day

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<sup>163</sup> H. Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East. The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia and Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 302. See also B.D. Chilton, “Purity”, *DNTB*, 874-882; D.A. DeSilva, “Clean and Unclean”, *DJG*, 142-149.

<sup>164</sup> H.K. Harrington, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis*, SBLDS 143 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); J. Klawans, “Purity in the Dead Sea Scrolls”, in: Lim and Collins, *Handbook*, 377-402.

<sup>165</sup> The discussion about the object of God’s vengeance and purification is ongoing: is it Pompey or Herod the Great? See K. Atkinson, “On the Herodian Origin of Militant Davidic Messianism at Qumran. New Light from Psalm of Solomon 17”, *JBL* 118 (1999), 435-460.

<sup>166</sup> H.G.L. Peels, “Eschatologie in het Oude Testament”, in: W. van ’t Spijker (ed.), *Eschatologie. Handboek over de christelijke toekomstverwachting* (Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 1999), 23; E.A. Martens, “Eschatology”, *DOTP*, 181.

<sup>167</sup> J.J. Collins, “Eschatologies of Late Antiquity”, *DNTB*, 330-337.

<sup>168</sup> For the relationship between Enochic literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls see J.J. Collins, “‘Enochic Judaism’ and the Sect of the Dead Sea Scrolls”, in: idem and G. Boccaccini (eds.), *The Early Enoch Literature*, JSJSup 121 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 283-299; J.C.

in which God will pour out his wrath and will set the records straight towards sinners and the righteous (Sir. 5,3,7; 7,17; 12,6; 17,23; 18,24; 28,1).<sup>169</sup> The Sibylline Oracles and The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs envision a heaven in which vengeance is executed on lawless people, Beliar, and evil spirits (T. Levi 3,2-3) and a moment in which God will punish in vengeance (Sib. Or. III,259.634; V,70; T. Gad 6,7).

### 2.2.3.7 Conclusion

The category of Early Jewish literature does not form a homogeneous corpus of texts, although the title of this section could be seen by some as an attempt to pour all texts from this period in one mould. The notion of vengeance is present in several texts from this period, yet these texts phrase the notion in the context of their own distinctive literary system and goal. Authors thus could highlight an aspect of vengeance that fits the structure and pattern of their respective writings. This section has tried to show the several nuances the notion of vengeance receives in the literature of the Second Temple period. Vengeance in most texts can be seen as divine reciprocal and legal action after a breach of honor has occurred. Most authors take over fundamental issues in the notion of vengeance such as justice and the divine prerogative. Some writers could also try to synthesize the understanding of vengeance in Greco-Roman culture and the Hebrew Bible, fabricating a concept of vengeance that fits contemporary culture. Aspects such as the divine prerogative (1 Maccabees) or emotions (4 Maccabees) are interpreted differently compared to the Old Testament.

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VanderKam, "The Book of Enoch and the Qumran Scrolls", in: Lim and Collins, *Handbook*, 254-277.

<sup>169</sup> For eschatology in Ben Sira see B.G. Wright, "Eschatology without a Messiah in the Book of Ben Sira", in: M.A. Knibb (ed.), *The Septuagint and Messianism*, BEThL 195 (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 2006), 313-323. For God as Judge in Ben Sira A.A. DiLella, "God and Wisdom in the Theology of Ben Sira. An Overview", in: Egger-Wenzel, *Ben Sira's God*, 5-6; Wischmeyer, "Theologie", 22; M. Witte, "Theologien im Buch Jesus Sirach", in: idem, *Texte und Kontexte des Sirachbuches. Gesammelte Studien zu Ben Sira und zur frühjüdischen Weisheit*, FAT 98 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 74-75.

### 2.3 Conclusion

This chapter tried to show how the concept and motif of vengeance was used in several corpora of Jewish texts. There are general similarities between the use of vengeance in Jewish texts and its use in Greco-Roman texts. The several aspects of vengeance match and they can be discerned as common notions. The elaboration of the notions however can differ, as we have seen in this chapter.

Greco-Roman texts used vengeance to describe both human and divine actions. The Old Testament however emphasized the divine prerogative: only YHWH is entitled to exact vengeance. He avenges himself or his people as King, Warrior and Judge. Some texts like Ben Sira, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs affirm this line of thought. There are however texts which also tell about human vengeance, such as 1 Maccabees and the work of Josephus. Philo tries to maintain the Old Testament conviction that vengeance only belongs to YHWH, but his Platonic-Stoic philosophy withholds him on several occasions to connect these two together. Philo can freely speak of human vengeance, but his thoughts on divine vengeance are more complicated.

Vengeance in most texts is understood in terms of retribution and reciprocity. It is a reaction to the slight of honor and an attempt to restore the balance of power and honor. The Old Testament understanding of retribution can be called reciprocal (Janowski), but this epithet can be misleading. The Old Testament does not contain a full-blown system of reciprocity which can be detected in Greco-Roman society. A coalescence of reciprocity and vengeance can be seen in texts like the works of Philo, Josephus, Judith, and Ben Sira. The authors of these texts stand in both worlds of Hellenism and Judaism, are influenced by them, and try to connect both worlds together in their writings. Their understanding of vengeance can relate to both Greco-Roman as Old Testament texts, but cannot be limited to only Hellenism or only Judaism.

The notions of justice and honor are also pivotal in seizing the concept and motif of vengeance. These two must be kept close together, because they are not opposites of each other. Through an act of justice, God or a human could try to restore the equilibrium of creational honor or individual honor. The Old Testament testifies of YHWH defending and restoring his honorable name by exacting legal vengeance. Vengeance is placed within a legal

context, which can be seen in a text like Exodus 21,20-21. The Dead Sea Scrolls affirm and emphasize this testimony, while also Philo and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs support this point of view. The recovery of creational honor is found in a book like Ben Sira, while restoration of individual honor through justice can be clearly seen in books like 1 and 4 Maccabees. Some works, like the writings of Josephus, combine several perspectives, bundling for instance justice for God's honor and also individual honor.

Vengeance is also embedded in contexts of covenant and family ties. Vengeance is not an exclusive covenantal act or term, but in a lot of texts in the Old Testament it forms the matrix in which vengeance is executed. The context of family, in its broad definition, is also fundamental for a lot of texts in the Second Temple period. This could be covenantal, which can be seen in most anonymous works of the Second Temple period. Yet, in Philo and Josephus the notion of family is more dominant than the covenant. This can be explained by the philosophical discussions someone engages (Philo) or the focus on historiography in line of Greco-Roman *topoi* (Josephus).

A next step in the process could be engaging the New Testament texts with the results of the research done in the previous and the current chapter. This approach is tempting, but there is one objection against taking this step right now. It presupposes a hermeneutical and historical *tabula rasa* of the author who applies the findings on the New Testament texts. Several post-modern philosophers have pointed out that this presupposition is erroneous, because no one can engage texts in a historical and hermeneutical void. Readers always carry their hermeneutical baggage with them. The next chapter will therefore examine in short the historical development of vengeance and the hermeneutical questions which vengeance texts raise when modern Western people read them.



## Chapter 3

### Historical and Hermeneutical Survey of Vengeance

Moisés Mayordomo finishes his article on divine retribution in the New Testament with some final reflections.<sup>1</sup> His fourth reflection highlights “a need to gain consciousness about the historical process, which have (sic!) led to regard God’s retribution in a mainly negative light.”<sup>2</sup> He refers to the notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte* from the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer understands interpretation as the “inclusion in an event of tradition”.<sup>3</sup> This tradition is a set of presuppositions which has been shaped throughout time. Time, in the process of understanding, is no “abyss that must be bridged”, but “the foundation of understanding, in which the present is rooted.”<sup>4</sup> One must accept and explicate this *Wirkungsgeschichte* or hermeneutical awareness of time, because it is “a necessary demand for scientific awareness.”<sup>5</sup> One’s historical and hermeneutical situation thus requires a preliminary step in this present study before the exegesis and theological exploration of New Testament vengeance passages. We must take the hermeneutical tensions between present and past into account.

This chapter will attempt to answer the question raised by Mayordomo: why do modern Western interpreters conceive vengeance so differently than in Antiquity? To be able to give an appropriate answer, we have to trace back the tradition, as Gadamer puts it. This chapter will explicate some

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<sup>1</sup> Mayordomo, “Divine Retribution”, 106-107.

<sup>2</sup> Mayordomo, “Divine Retribution”, 107.

<sup>3</sup> H.G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1975<sup>4</sup>), 275: “einrücken in ein Überlieferungsgeschehen”.

<sup>4</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit*, 281: “Nun ist die Zeit nicht mehr primär ein Abgrund, der überbrückt werden muss, weil er trennt und fernhält, sondern sie ist in Wahrheit der tragende Grund des Geschehens, in dem das Gegenwärtige wurzelt.”

<sup>5</sup> Gadamer, *Wahrheit*, 285: “Die Forderung, sich dieser Wirkungsgeschichte bewusst zu werden, hat gerade darin ihre Dringlichkeit – sie ist eine notwendige Forderung für das wissenschaftliche Bewusstsein.”

historical and hermeneutical considerations for the following exegetical-theological chapters. The first part of this chapter (3.1) will provide a rough sketch of the modern understanding of and feelings connected with the concept of vengeance. The next section (3.2) will be devoted to a historical resume of the development of vengeance throughout the centuries. The historical timeline will be divided into four periods: Antiquity (3000 BCE-500 CE), the Middle Ages (500-1500), the Early Modern period (1500-1800) and the Modern period (after 1800).<sup>6</sup> The historical and hermeneutical challenges between the ancient understanding of vengeance which can be found in vengeance texts and our modern concept of vengeance will be explicitly addressed in the third section of this chapter (3.3). Besides the literary exegesis of the New Testament vengeance texts, one has to consider the historical and hermeneutical differences in understanding vengeance texts and provide space to designate the tensions and answer the challenges.

### 3.1 The Modern Understanding of Vengeance

The modern understanding of vengeance is quite complicated. A remarkable distinction can be observed between a formal, legal vision of vengeance and more emotionally loaded sentiments associated with vengeance. Most human beings adhere to the formal vision on vengeance, because it bans arbitrariness and includes a sense of objectivity in punishment. Theory and practice sometimes deviate though. Certain crimes and a certain instinct for retributive personal justice stir up a lust for vengeance in society. A sketch will suffice to elaborate this dichotomy and to shortly illustrate the modern concept of (divine) vengeance.

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<sup>6</sup> This division is open for criticism, yet it is not uncommon in historical studies to use such a periodization. Antiquity “ends” with the fall of Rome in 476. The Middle Ages pass into Early Modern times with the fall of Constantinople (1453), the invention of the printing press (ca. 1450), the discovery of the New World (ca. 1492) and the emergence of Humanism, the Renaissance, and the Reformation. The French Revolution in 1789 can be seen as a turning point from Early Modern to Modern history, although some historians label the fall of Napoleon as the starting point of the Modern period. These periods cannot be bluntly separated, because historical periods have their times of transition. The focus in this chapter lies on Western literature and theology, although Jewish and Islamic sources are also examined. That does not mean that the other parts of this globe were “dark”. Important works of literature and philosophical thought can also be found in the Arabic peninsula and Asia. Because of space and time this chapter will be limited to predominantly Western writings.

Most penal codes in the contemporary world consider vengeance an act of vigilantism. Taking matters into one's own hands is based upon a subjective judgment and taxation of one's own injury. These injuries may not be unjustified, but they are conceived by the victim or its relatives as hurting. Subjective taxations and judgments can then easily lead to arbitrariness and excess. Vengeance in this way will destabilize society and give rise to unlimited violent retaliation. In the German penal code (*Strafgesetzbuch*), murderous vengeance is considered to be an act of so-called "lower motive" (*niedriger Beweggrund*) and can be punished with a life sentence (§211,2 StrGB). The Penal Code of the United States also condemns revenge as an act of vigilantism with a prison sentence up to 30 years (e.g. 18 US Code §115 and §1513). Individual human beings are thus not allowed to execute vengeance. The monopoly on retaliatory violence is assigned to the government, specifically the justice system. Avenging violence cannot be dependent upon the subjective judgments of victims, but vengeance must be executed in a setting of objectivity and legal knowledge. Vengeance thus becomes formalized and objectivized by ascribing it to the legal power in a nation.

Why are subjective judgments and thus vengeance not allowed in a constitutional state? Firstly, vengeance makes a major infringement on human life and individual rights. The choice to injure human life over inalienable and highly esteemed human rights must be substantiated by balanced and rightful evidence and arguments. The problem with vengeance, one can argue, is that it cannot meet a lawful standard because of its subjectivity. Vengeance thus becomes an illegitimate and inexcusable attack on human dignity and life. A legal punishment is given by a judge who is qualified and competent to weigh in all the evidence and circumstances.

A second argument against the subjectivity of vengeance is the idea that vengeance is the result of an irrational mind overcome by emotions. An injury done to an individual can result in the rise of hatred and disgust in a victim or its kin and the drive to retaliate relentlessly. The personal lust to get even will cloud one's judgment. Legal punishment through an official apparatus deconstructs the emotionality of punishment and will ensure a certain social and emotional distance of the crime. A judge was not involved in committing or enduring a crime, so he or she is not overwhelmed by emotions and thus can pass on a sound judgment. The only emotion a judge has in this case is the love for justice.

Divine vengeance is even more complicated in the view of this formal understanding of vengeance. We have seen in the Old Testament and Early Jewish literature that God is considered to be the ultimate Judge who can execute vengeance as a legal means to obtain justice and restore one's honor. The movement of secularization problematizes this conviction: why would autonomous and rational human beings need an avenging God as judge? The ultimate judge becomes the highest court in the legal system. Divine vengeance is not only problematized by secularization, but also by theologians. The theological tensions circle around the image of God which is affected by the concept of vengeance. When one considers vengeance as an act of vigilantism and injustice, how can God be affiliated with such an act? Why does the Bible call God the God of love (1 Joh. 4,8) and also the avenging God (Ps. 94,1)? Divine vengeance thus becomes problematic for many people in the West.

It is remarkable that the 'official' conception of vengeance is sometimes contradicted by certain sentiments of vengeance and calls for retaliation in society. Some examples will suffice. In 2011 a pedophile swim teacher (Benno L.) in the Netherlands was sentenced to six years in prison for fornication and sexual assault of several young girls. After his conditional release in 2013 he was harassed and attacked in retaliation of his crimes.<sup>7</sup> The same treatment was given to the American child murderer Michael Woodmansee in 2011. The father of one of his victims, John Foreman, pledged to avenge the death of his son after Woodmansee's release out of prison.<sup>8</sup> A last example is the case of the Romanian Mihai Dinisoae, who received a ten year prison sentence in 2020. Dinisoae had tried to retrieve his motor bike from Josh Molloy, who stole it, and killed Molloy by hitting him with his car. This act of vengeance on Molloy was regarded proportional and legitimate by the general public.<sup>9</sup>

These examples illustrate that, although the legal system does its work of giving punishment, relatives and society in general do not experience

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<sup>7</sup> M. Slingerland, "Kerken vol Mededogen met Benno L.", *Trouw* 24-2-2014, <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/kerken-vol-mededogen-met-benno-l~ba127e60/?referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.nl%2F> [consulted 24-12-2020].

<sup>8</sup> "Victim's Dad Vows to Murder Child Killer Michael Woodmansee If He Gets Out", *ABC News Radio* 8-3-2011, <http://abcnewsradioonline.com/national-news/victims-dad-vows-to-murder-child-killer-michael-woodmansee-i.html> [consulted 24-12-2020]. See also T. Rosenbaum, *Payback. The Case for Revenge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 200-201.

<sup>9</sup> "Man who chased motorbike thieves jailed for 10 years after killing one in fatal crash", *Sky News* 19-12-2020, <https://news.sky.com/story/man-who-chased-motorbike-thieves-jailed-for-10-years-after-killing-one-in-fatal-crash-12165611> [consulted 24-12-2020].

satisfaction. A desire for vengeance is still present, although the official judges execute vengeance for the relatives and society by sentencing perpetrators. Theory and practice thus seem to deviate in some cases. One can maintain that vengeance must be an official legal action and at the same time stand for vengeance as a legal mode of action in some cases. Legal officials can argue that they provide satisfaction through prosecution and punishment, but there are numerous cases in which relatives or society deemed legal satisfaction insufficient.

The movie industry has detected this development and has recognized that vengeance-themed movies sell. One example is the *Godfather*-trilogy in which the mafia-family Corleone is depicted. Vengeance is a main theme in all three movies and the movies became a major success. Another example is the *Kill Bill*-diptych. The two movies follow the steps of Beatrix (named “The Bride”) who executes vengeance on her ex-lover Bill and his team of assassins who tried to kill her. Other movies can be mentioned,<sup>10</sup> but the two examples show that Hollywood movies which revolve around vengeance sometimes become blockbusters. Hollywood has apparently touched upon a lurking source of interest of human beings which may not exist according to formal theory.

The outlined distinction between an official, legal rejection of vengeance and lurking sentiments of vengeance in society can be traced back to three major developments: centralization of power, individualization, and secularization. These three streams of influence have altered the understanding of vengeance throughout history. The next section will substantiate the sketch above and the influence of the three developments by following the historical development from Antiquity to the present.

### 3.2 Historical Development of Vengeance

Centuries of reflection on the concept and practices of vengeance precede the Western, 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of vengeance. It is therefore interesting and necessary to go through this dynamic process of reflection before we

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<sup>10</sup> See P.A. French, *The Virtues of Vengeance* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 35-64 for a study of vengeance in Western cowboy movies.

encounter hermeneutical dilemma's. This examination of the understanding of vengeance through the ages is not exhaustive, but a brief representative overview will be our aim.

### 3.2.1 Antiquity

#### 3.2.1.1 Public, Private, and Divine Vengeance

The previous chapters have examined the concept of (divine) vengeance in several corpora of texts in Antiquity. Vengeance was considered to be an accepted means of legal action, although restrained through a set of unwritten mores. Courts were present, but civil action was permitted with the precaution of suitability of the punishment. Leaders such as the emperor (Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gest.* XXII.11.11)<sup>11</sup> or the wife of the emperor (Zosimus, *Hist. Nov.* V.38.4) were seen as executors of vengeance. There were voices in the societal discourse who pleaded for vengeance as a matter sole for the courts. Demosthenes for instance states that he expects his vengeance from courts (*Or.* XXI,76; 226) and that retaliation is only permitted after the verdict of a judge (*Or.* XXI,125). Only immoral people avenge themselves for small offenses (*Or.* XXI,123). Several theologians also argue for the government as the sole executor of vengeance (Augustine, *Ep.* 104,9;<sup>12</sup> 153,17-19;<sup>13</sup> *Cat. Rud.* 25; Lactantius, *Ira* 17; Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.* XXIV,688b). Their position however is not a common one and is not shared by the majority of societies in Europe and the Middle East.

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<sup>11</sup> For biographical data on Ammianus Marcellinus, see K. Rosen, "Ammianus Marcellinus", in: Cancik and Schneider, *New Pauly. Volume I: A-Ari* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 584-587. For the topic of vengeance in the work of Marcellinus, see R.F. Newbold, "Pardon and Revenge in Tacitus and Ammianus", *Electronic Antiquity* 6 (2001), <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/EIAnt/V6N1/newbold.html> [consulted 8-5-2020].

<sup>12</sup> Epistula 104 is a letter from Augustine to Nectarius, an official of Calama in Numidia. Augustine has sent him a letter earlier asking to punish the people of Calama for their crimes against Christians. Nectarius defends the citizens and accuses Augustine of excess (Ep. 103). Augustine then reacts to the accusations of Nectarius in Epistula 104.

<sup>13</sup> Epistula 153 is a letter to Macedonius, the imperial vicar of Africa and friend of Augustine. Augustine has asked Macedonius to impose a death sentence. In this letter he gives an exegesis of all relevant Biblical passages regarding the death penalty and other sentences that secure the well-being of society. See R. Dodaro, "Augustine on the Statesman and the Two Cities", in: M. Vessey (ed.), *A Companion to Augustine* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 387-388.

More common is the conviction that the divine being(s) are higher authorities and executors of vengeance.<sup>14</sup> Both philosophers and theologians articulate this widespread conviction. Julian the Apostate considers the goddess Justice to be an Avenger (*Caes.* 310a) who exacts vengeance (*Caes.* 321c; cf. Marcellinus, *Res Gest.* XXI.13.13). The Syrian philosopher Iamblichus states that avenging demons are part of the natural order (*Myst.* II,6). The Pyrrhonist philosopher Sextus Empiricus writes down the words of Critias of Athens, who argues that people have invented gods as supervisors of good and evil to instill fear of divine vengeance into humans (*Ad. Math.* IX,54). Augustine tells in his *De Civitate Dei* that the Romans trusted the god Mars to exact vengeance on those who violated their rights to marry (*Civ.* II,17). Christian theologians consider God to be the supreme divine judge (Tertullian, *Pat.* 10; Augustine, *En Ps.* 78,14; *C. Fort.* 15). Humans must forfeit their right to avenge to God (Tertullian, *Scap.* 2; *Adv. Marc.* V,14; *De Pat.* 10; Augustine, *Ep.* 138,9-12; 153,9; *En Ps.* 78,14; 93,7; *c. Faust.* XIX,25-26; Chrysostom, *Stat.* XX,7-9; *Hom. Rom.* VII,480c; XIII,556b-d; XXIII,682d).<sup>15</sup> Chrysostom describes God's vengeance even as an act of his friendship and love (*Hom. Rom.* X,516d). Early Christian theologians do not problematize the notion of divine vengeance and resist the temptation to distinguish between an Old Testament God of vengeance and a New Testament God of love.

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<sup>14</sup> Atheism only had a small amount of adherents in Antiquity. See T. Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods. Atheism in the Ancient World* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> R. Kearsley, *Tertullian's Theology of Divine Power*, Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology 4 (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), 104-107. Augustine uses the motive of divine vengeance often in his writings against Manichaeans. God is just in his vengeance (*C. Fort.* 15) and one must refrain as human from God's vengeance (*C. Faust.* 28). It is not remarkable that vengeance is a motive in Augustine's anti-Manichean work, because the main dispute between Augustine and the Manicheans was the relationship between God and evil. See G. Wurst, "Augustins Auseinandersetzung mit den Manichäern", in: V. Henning Drecoll (ed.), *Augustin Handbuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 168-171 and also idem, "Antimanichäische Werke", in: Henning Drecoll, *Augustin*, 309-316. For the notion of forgiveness in the works of the Church Fathers, see D. Konstan, *Before Forgiveness. The Origins of a Moral Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 125-145.

### 3.2.1.2 Vengeance and Justice

Vengeance in Antiquity is not considered to be an act of vigilantism or injustice, as we have seen in the previous chapters. There are some individuals who consider individual vengeance as illegitimate though. Plato distinguishes in his *Protagoras* between punishment with reason (μετὰ λόγου κολάζειν) and unreasonable vengeance (ἀλογίστως τιμωρεῖται) (*Pr.* 324a-b). A human being may not avenge oneself, because even in one's specific circumstances one may do injustice and doing wrong is never good or noble (*Cr.* 49a: οὐδαμῶς τό γε ἀδικεῖν οὔτε ἀγαθὸν οὔτε καλόν).<sup>16</sup> Revenge and justice cannot be affiliated with each other according to Plato. He is annoyed when poets and authors apply the motive of vengeance to the gods for the same reason.<sup>17</sup> Plato thus argues that: one may not requite evil for evil to restore one's honor.<sup>18</sup>

The Roman poet Decimus Magnus Ausonius (ca. 310-ca. 393) is another example of rejecting individual vengeance. In his poem "Cupid Crucified" (*Cupido Cruciatu*s) he writes about the women in the underworld who blame the gods for their unrequited love.<sup>19</sup> They recognize Cupid and catch him. They choose a myrtle-tree and they crucify Cupid out of punishment. He is found guilty without a judge (*reus est sine crimine, iudice nullo accusatur Amor*). The act is sweet revenge (*ultio dulcis*) to avenge their grief. Ausonius values this case of vengeance as injustice.

There are thus voices in Antiquity that argue for a distinction between justice and vengeance. Vengeance is an act of excess, inhumanity and impure intentions. Individuals could not enact justice on their own, because just punishment is something completely pure and balanced. Authorities like kings, judges and God must exact punishment with reason, purity and moderation. These voices however are a minority, because most sources in Antiquity regard vengeance and justice as synonymous.

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<sup>16</sup> Vlastos, *Socrates*, 194-199. See also Plato's *Republic* 335C-E.

<sup>17</sup> See Socrates' criticism of the unreliable portraits of the gods by the poets in connection to the revenge of Chronos in *Republic* 377e and his portrayal of the gods as beneficent in 379c. McHardy, *Revenge*, 192.

<sup>18</sup> Seaford ("Introduction", 8) also points to Plato's *Seventh Letter*.

<sup>19</sup> W.L. Liebermann, "Ausonius, Decimus Magnus", in: Cancik/Schneider, *New Pauly. Volume II: Ark-Cas* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 392-395.



### 3.2.1.3 Vengeance and Emotion

The legal system is not the only framework for vengeance: emotion is also an important factor in which vengeance is understood. For most literary sources this connection of vengeance and emotion does not pose any problem. Others are highly critical. Chapter 1 already identified an important voice in this debate: the Stoic Seneca.<sup>20</sup> He has issues with the contemporary institution of vengeance in his work *De Ira*. People can be taken over by their eager for revenge, their lives raging of inhumane lust (*humana furens cupiditate*) (*Ira* I.1.1). Vengeance and anger are not according to human nature (I.6.5). Patience is better than vengeance: vengeance takes time and it exposes the perpetrator to returning injuries (III.27.1). In his *Thyestes* he describes the revenge of Atreus as excessive, full of impious wrath (*impiae irae*, 712-713).<sup>21</sup> It is clear that “revenge is not only an impious crime against mankind and the gods, but also a metaphysical attack upon the entire order of nature.”<sup>22</sup> Through this play and this extreme form of revenge, Seneca shows the brutality and the unnatural character of vengeance done in irrationality and emotion. Seneca thus rejects vengeance, because of its emotional component and its negative reciprocity. As a Stoic he considers emotions to be “hurdles for the good life”.<sup>23</sup> Emotions must be governed by reason according to Seneca.<sup>24</sup> The anger of vengeance is unreasonable and thus emotional vengeance must be repudiated.

We have already seen that Protagoras, in Plato’s work, distinguishes punishment with reason (μετὰ λόγου κολάζειν) from unreasonable vengeance (ἀλογίστως τιμωρεῖται). Vengeance, according to Protagoras, is done without reason (λόγος). Ausonius in his poem *Cupido Cruciatu*s shows that the women of the underworld crucify Cupid out of vengeance and thus give free play to their emotions of hate and anger. The Hellenistic philosopher Plotinus (205 CE-257 CE) argues that the desire for vengeance puts an individual off balance (*Enn.* IV,17). The Neoplatonist philosopher Damascius (458 CE-538

<sup>20</sup> See also G. Courtois, “Le sens et la valeur de la vengeance, chez Aristote et Sénèque”, in: idem (ed.), *Vengeance*, 107-114.

<sup>21</sup> Pippin Burnett, *Revenge*, 10-18.

<sup>22</sup> Pippin Burnett, *Revenge*, 15.

<sup>23</sup> F. Buddensiek, “Stoa und Epikur. Affekte als Defekte oder als Weltbezug”, in: H. Landweer and U. Renz (eds.), *Handbuch klassische Emotionstheorien* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 72.

<sup>24</sup> Buddensiek “Stoa”, 76.

CE) states that an irrational soul longs for desirable things such as honor and vengeance (*Princ.* XV,2). The Stoic philosopher and Emperor Marcus Aurelius writes a characteristic Stoic aphorism: “the best form of vengeance is not to be like them” (*Med.* VI,6).

Early Christian theologians have extensively reflected on reason and emotion.<sup>25</sup> The ideal of *apatheia* leaves considerable traces in Early Christian thought.<sup>26</sup> Augustine considers affections to be naturally human, but they can be either useful or harmful.<sup>27</sup> Anger is harmful according to Augustine. Augustine defines anger, in line with Cicero’s definition (*Tusc. Quast.* III,6; IV,9), as the “lust for vengeance” (*ulciscendi libidinem*) (*Civ.* XIV,15). A Christian must not be carried away by the lust for vengeance (*libidine ulciscendi ad poenam cuiusque rapiatur*), but overcome hate (*Ep.* 104,8; cf. *En Ps.* 57,21). One must be patient and forgiving (*Ep.* 138,9-12; cf. 153,9; *Pat.* 8). When anger and lust for vengeance is tamed, room for peace arises (*C. Faust.* 25). Tertullian earlier argued in the same fashion as Augustine (*De Pat.* 10). Humans must follow the divine example of patience instead of immediate revenge, according to Lactantius (*Ira* 17). Chrysostom even calls it a shame and disgrace when Christians persist in their passion to long for vengeance and refuse to forgive (*Stat.* XX,7-8).

There is consequently an upcoming group of thinkers and writers in Antiquity that plead for the control of emotions and the primacy of reason.<sup>28</sup> Vengeance is not compatible with this ideal lifestyle of moderation and rationality, because vengeance is an expression of lust and irrationality. Most authors however do not pay attention or do not reflect extensively on the relationship between vengeance and emotions.

### 3.2.1.4 Vengeance and the Individual

Classical texts show a lack of attention towards the infringement of human dignity through vengeance. There were voices that plead for human rights and human dignity, such as Aristotle (*Pol.* 1252a31-33; 1254a22-24) and Cicero

<sup>25</sup> See R. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind. From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Frohnhofen, *Apatheia*; F. Young, *God’s Presence. A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 290.

<sup>27</sup> J. Brachtendorf, “Augustinus. Die Ambivalenz der Affekte zwischen Natürlichkeit und Tyrannei”, in: Landweer and Renz, *Handbuch*, 143-162.

<sup>28</sup> See also J.P. Beckmann, “Rationalismus I”, *TRE* 28, 161-170.

(*Leg.* I.28-29), but most authors did not reflect upon human dignity and human rights.<sup>29</sup> The Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry values human beings over animals, because of human rationality. Human beings have the right to avenge themselves if animals attack them (*Abst.* I.19-20). Christian theologians plead for the love for one's neighbors, because it is a command of God (Augustine *Ep.* 138.9-12; *En Ps.* 78,14; *C. Faust.* XIX.28; Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.* IV.453d).

Another example of the want of a philosophy of the individual is the establishment of vengeance as a familial enterprise. Blood kin and virtual kin are vital for understanding ancient society, but also for discerning the concept of vengeance in Antiquity. Vengeance was embedded in familial structures. Ammianus Marcellinus narrates the death of general Libino on the battlefield against the Alamanni and the fierceness of his troops in battle to avenge the death of their general (*Res Gest.* III.3). Julian the Apostate tells in an eulogy on emperor Constantius that the emperor was just and did not attack the army of his brother other than to exact vengeance for his brother's death (*Or.* II.95a). The army of Alexander the Great exacted vengeance on the Persians on behalf of the Greeks (ὕπερ τῶν Ἑλλήνων) according to Julian (*Caes.* 323d). Simplicius of Cilicia states that a father wants to avenge the death of his child on the perpetrator (*Comm. Ep. En.* XV,11-13). Vengeance is always done by an individual or individuals, but authors almost always consider these individual acts of revenge as a collectivistic and familial affair.

### 3.2.1.5 Conclusion

Antiquity in general thus exhibits a different attitude towards vengeance than the modern understanding as described above. The lust for vengeance is present in ancient texts, but a formal rejection of vengeance can only be detected in some works (e.g. Plato). The three broad processes of development which are fundamental in changing the understanding of vengeance throughout history (centralization, secularization, individualization) cannot be fully traced in Antiquity. However, incentives of these developments can be uncovered in

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<sup>29</sup> One has to observe that Aristotle and Cicero have free men in vision and not so much a perspective of universal human worth and rights.

some writings. The reasons for formally rejecting vengeance can be found *in nuce* in texts of authors such as Plato and Seneca.

### 3.2.2 Middle Ages

The Middle Ages exhibit continuity with Antiquity in several ways, but also an elaboration of several notions which were of minor importance in Antiquity. The double practice of vengeance through the legal system and through individual vengeance continues. Vengeance outside the courtroom is still a legitimate way of justice being served, although the concerns increase and a movement towards centralization is visible.<sup>30</sup>

#### 3.2.2.1 Public and Private Vengeance

The sources in Antiquity have shown the existence of a double practice. Judges were appointed to execute vengeance on behalf of society, as we have seen in the text of Demosthenes. Private vengeance was also accepted as a legitimate form of justice outside the courtroom. Private vengeance was not unlimited: it was guided by guidelines of reciprocity and proportionality. One's honor had to be restored, but not in an excessive fashion. There was no stringent separation between public justice and private vengeance.

The double practice of vengeance inside and outside the courtroom can be traced back in the texts of several works in the Middle Ages. The author of the *Vengeance de Raguidel* (*Vengeance of Raguidel*, 13<sup>th</sup> century) tells us about a duel between Gauvain and Guengasouain in which Gauvain wants to avenge the death of knight Raguidel (5806-5807). Albertan Brixiensis writes in his *Liber consolationis et consilii* (*Book of Consolation and Council*, 13<sup>th</sup> century) the story of Melibeus, whose wife discourages individual vengeance and instead points to the court as the place of vengeance (XXXIX). The Babylonian Talmud (5<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>31</sup> allows human vengeance outside the court room (*b. Yoma* 22b-23a). Thomas Aquinas argues that vengeance in

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<sup>30</sup> See for instance C. Gauvard, "De Grace Especial". *Crime, Etat et Société en France à la Fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1991), 753-788; P. Arnade and W. Prevenier, *Honor, Vengeance, and Social Trouble. Pardon Letters in the Burgundian Low Countries* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 27-28.

<sup>31</sup> H.J. Becker, "Talmud", *TRE* 32, 626-636.

itself (*per se*) is not illegitimate (*ST*, IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 s.c.). God has given a natural order and vengeance is part of that natural order (*ST*, IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 ad 1). Courts also have the possibility to exact vengeance (*ST*, IIa-IIae q. 108 a3 ad 2; a4 ad 2). A development towards centralization becomes apparent during the twelfth century, although private vengeance remains present.<sup>32</sup>

### 3.2.2.2 Vengeance and Justice

Vengeance and justice thus were not opposites in the Middle Ages. Raymond Verdier even calls those individuals distinguishing vengeance and justice in history “prisoners of a double illusion.”<sup>33</sup> Vengeance was considered to be a legitimate form of justice in several societies in medieval times. Arthur in the *Vengeance de Raguidel* is asked in a letter to be the righteous avenger of Raguidel (181) and he completes his task (5806-5807). Ernaut of Douai in *Raoul de Cambrai* (10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century) wants to exact vengeance on Raoul for murdering his sons (381-382), while Raoul must take revenge for the slaughter in the town of Origny (1235-1237).<sup>34</sup>

Thomas Aquinas defines vengeance as “inflicting punishing evil on a sinner” (*vindicatio fit per aliquod poenale malum inflictum peccanti*) (*ST*, IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 co.). Vengeance however, in his eyes, is not merely retributive, but also corrective: vengeance must not have the intention to do evil, but to take away evil (*ST* IIa-IIae q. 108 a2 co.; cf. 108 a3 co.: vengeance is to prevent evil, *cohibitonem malorum*). The virtue of vengeance is to defend the

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<sup>32</sup> Gauvard, *Grace*; Arnade and Prevenier, *Honor*, 27; J. Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy. Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 154; P.R. Hyams, “Neither Unnatural nor Wholly Negative. The Future of Medieval Vengeance”, in: idem and S.A. Throop (eds.), *Vengeance in the Middle Ages. Emotion, Religion and Feud* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 215.

<sup>33</sup> R. Verdier, “L’Au-Delà et l’Ici-Bas des Vengeances”, in: D. Barthélemy, F. Bougard, and R. Le Jean, *La Vengeance. 400-1200, Collection de l’École Française de Rome 357* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2006), 487. He states that those individuals are captured by historicism and eurocentrism. This verdict of Verdier seems to contradict the evidence in Antiquity with Plato for instance separating reasonable punishment and irrational vengeance. We have to discern the object of Verdier’s statements though. He attacks a modern understanding of vengeance which is read back in old texts, thus imposing one’s modern frame of understanding unto older literary texts and brushing away the conflicting evidence.

<sup>34</sup> *Raoul de Cambrai* can be considered an attack on the concept of vengeance. The story shows that one act of vengeance may unleash a vicious circle of avenging reactions and excessive violence. See S. Kay, “Introduction”, in: idem (ed.), *Raoul de Cambrai* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), ix-lxxiii.

rights of an individual and to avert evil (*ST* IIa-IIae q. 108 a2 ad 1). The avenging punishment of justice is medicinal and may include the death penalty (*ST*. IIa-IIae q. 108 a3 ad 1-3; cf. 108 a4 co.). The Babylonian Talmud and the Qur'an also consider vengeance to be a form of legal intervention. Vengeance is the distribution of punishment according to Rabbi Eleazar (*b. Sanh.* 92a; cf. *b. Berakhot* 33a). Vengeance is a legitimate form of retribution (*b. Yoma* 22b-23a). A believer must be willing to answer manslaughter and desecration according to the *lex talionis* (Al-Bakara 178-179; 194; cf. Al-Ma'ida 45). Medieval sources thus do not consider vengeance as the opposite of justice, on the contrary: vengeance is an act of justice.

### 3.2.2.3 Divine Vengeance

Medieval sources do not consider God and vengeance incompatible: authors believed and accepted that God could exact (legitimate) vengeance. This view is not surprising, given the fact that theology and philosophy coincided most of the times and the church was a dominant force in medieval society.<sup>35</sup> Several authors articulate this belief in an avenging God. He executes vengeance on the Antichrist (*Chanson* 87) and the Arabs (*Chanson* 241). He would avenge without delay if he was not compassionate (*Bouc* I,23-24) and his vengeance is multiform and unexpected (*Bouc* I,25-28). Anselm states that Christians may not take revenge, because vengeance is a divine prerogative (*CDH* I.7; I.12; I.20). Duns Scotus considers some evils to be impossible to punish humanely; they can only be punished by divine vengeance (*Ord.* III.39.25). Van Ruusbroec envisions God's vengeance (*Cierheit* 115) and even Christ's vengeance (*Cierheit* 119). The Babylonian Talmud establishes that God can take vengeance and that humans must renounce it (*b. Sanh.* 92a; 102b; *b. Meg.* 28a). There is however some room for human vengeance, but only in religious or financial affairs (*b. Yoma* 22b-23a). Allah will exact vengeance on sinners and unbelievers according to the Qur'an (Ali 'Imraan 4; Al-A'raaf 136; Al-Hidjr 79; Ar-Rum 47; As-Sadjda 22; Az-Zuchruf 25.41.55; Ad-Duchan 16).

Divine vengeance could also be executed by humans, as we have seen in several ancient writings. Medieval authors would agree. The *Vengeance de*

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<sup>35</sup> J. Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 4-5.

*Notre Seigneur (Vengeance of our Lord, 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century)* narrates the promise of Emperor Vespasian to avenge the death of Jesus (74; 152; 219; 310; 944; 1040). In the *Wrake van Jherusalem (The Vengeance of Jerusalem, 13<sup>th</sup> century)* Jacobus van Maerlant writes that the Romans avenged the death of Jesus on Jerusalem (9-12; 30-34).<sup>36</sup> Thomas Aquinas states that one can fulfill the task of executing God's vengeance, but not outside the divine order (*ST IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 ad 1*). Believers must protect God and his church with vengeance (*ST IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 ad 4*). Thomas rejects the assertion that vengeance is the opposite of love (*ST IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 arg. 3*) and thus a Christian must be patient (*ST IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 arg. 2*). One must not tolerate injuries to God and the neighbor (*ST IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 ad 2*) and vengeance is targeted against those who are not moved by the divine law of love (*ST IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 ad 3*). Vengeance is even a force driven by the zeal for love (*ST IIa-IIae q. 108 a2 ad 2*).

The connection of Christian theology and vengeance also had disastrous consequences in medieval times. A lot of powerful people saw it as their task to avenge the death of Jesus on the Jews and to destroy the idolatry of the Muslims.<sup>37</sup> The Crusades were the practical elaboration of this conviction.<sup>38</sup> Zealous Christians should be the agents of God's vengeance in the East.<sup>39</sup> This phenomenon was supported by several novels, such as the *Vengeance de Notre Seigneur* (74; 313), the *Wrake van Jherusalem* (30-34)<sup>40</sup>, and the *Chanson d'Antioche* (31-32; laisse 1-14). Bernard of Clairvaux was the theological voice of this belief: he states that "God has aroused the spirits of kings and prominent people to execute vengeance on the nations and that the

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<sup>36</sup> F.P. van Oostrom, *Maerlants Wereld* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Prometheus, 1996), 251-264; W. Kuiper, "Die *Destructie van Jherusalem* in handschrift en druk", *Voortgang* 25 (2007), 67-88.

<sup>37</sup> S.A. Throop, "Vengeance and the Crusades", *Crusades* 5 (2006), 21-38.

<sup>38</sup> See C. Tyerman, *God's War. A New History of the Crusades* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006) for a comprehensive survey of the motives for the Crusades.

<sup>39</sup> S.A. Throop, "Zeal, Anger and Vengeance. The Emotional Rhetoric of Crusading", in: idem and Hyams, *Vengeance*, 177-201.

<sup>40</sup> See the observation of Van Oostrom (*Maerlants Wereld*, 430) about the lesson of this book: "their war was also our war, and in the city of Christ's grave once again a nation is the boss that deserves punishment. Up to Jerusalem, just like the Romans did!" ("hun oorlog is ook onze oorlog, en in de stad van Christus' graf is wederom een volk de baas dat afstraffing verdient. Op naar Jeruzalem, zoals ook de Romeinen deden!").

enemies of the Christian name shall be exterminated from the land” (*Ep.* 457,9-10).<sup>41</sup>

### 3.2.2.4 Vengeance and Emotion

Vengeance in Antiquity was not only considered a form of (divine) justice, but also an act of emotion. The Middle Ages demonstrate a new episode in the ongoing discussion on rationality and emotion. The rediscovery of Aristotelianism and the uprising of Scholasticism provided a new impulse for the prominence of the *ratio*.<sup>42</sup> These new discussions asked for a reevaluation of vengeance as an emotional enterprise. Vengeance was considered an act of passion in medieval literature.<sup>43</sup> Raoul de Cambrai is passionate to exact vengeance on Bernier for his injuries (*Raoul* 1576), while Bernier is emotional and stops executing his vengeance after wounding Raoul again (*Raoul* 2962). Bernier later on wants to be happy and this happiness can only be achieved by taking revenge on Gautier, Raoul’s nephew (*Raoul* 4834).

The most prominent voice in the philosophical discussion on rationality, emotion, and vengeance is Thomas Aquinas in his paragraph on vengeance in his *Summa Theologiae* (IIa-IIae q. 108).<sup>44</sup> Vengeance out of hate finds joy in other people’s evil and that is not acceptable (IIa-IIae q. 108 a1. co.). The zeal for love however expresses oneself in vengeance (IIa-IIae q. 108 a2 ad 2). Vengeance must not be brutal or cruel, but virtuous (IIa-IIae q. 108 a2 ad 3). Vengeance can be considered the formal side of anger, rooted in the love for God and neighbor.<sup>45</sup> Thomas thus makes room for wrath and vengeance, but within the boundaries of reason and virtue.<sup>46</sup> God cannot have negative emotions like anger and thus his punishments cannot be called

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<sup>41</sup> *Quomodo suscitaverit spiritum Deum regum Deus et principum ad faciendam vindictam in nationibus et extirpandos de terra christiani nominis inimicos*. See Throop, “Crusades” for more on the role of Bernard in crusading.

<sup>42</sup> W.D. Hauschild, *Lehrbuch der Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte. Band 1: Alte Kirche und Mittelalter* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2011<sup>4</sup>), 606-610.

<sup>43</sup> Hyams, “Unnatural”, 211.

<sup>44</sup> For the question of emotions in the theology of Aquinas, see P. King, “Emotions”, in: B. Davies and E. Stump (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 209-226; N. Slenczka, “Anthropologie”, in: V. Leppin (ed.), *Thomas Handbuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 347-362.

<sup>45</sup> King, “Emotions”, 211.

<sup>46</sup> M.M. Davy, “Le Thème de Vengeance au Moyen Age”, in: Courtois, *Vengeance*, 132.



vengeance.<sup>47</sup> Another theologian with attention to emotion and vengeance is John Duns Scotus in his *Ordinatio*.<sup>48</sup> He makes room for anger (*irasci*) as (irascible) passion. The object of this angry power is vengeance (*Ord.* III.34.36). This angry power must be tamed by patience to preserve it from excess (*Ord.* III.34.38), but it must not be held back (III.34.39-40). The emotion of personal vengeance for Duns Scotus brings about “a certain pleasure in both the sensible and rational appetites.”<sup>49</sup>

Vengeance thus balanced on the scale of reason and emotion in the Middle Ages.<sup>50</sup> There was room for revenge, but it must be curtailed by reason through patience and virtue. While in Antiquity a small group of thinkers pleaded for the curbing of the emotions surrounding vengeance, this group becomes larger and more widespread in the Middle Ages. This did not mean a clear-cut rejection of vengeance because of its emotionality, but a movement arising in Antiquity was extended in the Middle Ages and had a lasting influence on Early Modern and Modern thinkers and societies.

### 3.2.2.5 Vengeance and the Individual

Individualizing tendencies can thus be seen *in nuce* in the debate on rationality, emotion, and vengeance. The Middle Ages exhibit a certain movement towards individualization, although it is modest compared to modern times. Human rights came more to the fore in medieval times, although one must not exaggerate the size of this development.<sup>51</sup> Two important developments concerning human rights can be observed in the Middle Ages. Firstly the exposition of natural law took center stage in the medieval circles of law.<sup>52</sup> Secondly the Middle Ages were also the breeding ground for the disquisition of individual rights, although one may look in vain for a system of inbred

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<sup>47</sup> B. Leftow, “God’s Impassibility, Immutability, and Eternality”, in: Davies and Stump, *Handbook*, 174.

<sup>48</sup> See for emotions in the theology of Duns Scotus A.R. Perreiah, “Scotus on Human Emotions”, *Franciscan Studies* 56 (1998), 325-345.

<sup>49</sup> Perreiah, “Scotus”, 340.

<sup>50</sup> B.H. Rosenwein, “Les Émotions de la Vengeance”, in: Barthélemy, Bougard, and Le Jean, *Vengeance*, 237-257; Hyams, “Unnatural”, 211.

<sup>51</sup> Noble, *Western Civilization*, 264-265.

<sup>52</sup> B. Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights. Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law 1150-1625*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion 5 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

individual rights.<sup>53</sup> R.H. Helmholz thus concludes rightly: “Human rights were recognized in the medieval *ius commune*. However, their source was not the inalienable right of individual human beings.”<sup>54</sup>

The case of human rights and vengeance did not receive much attention in medieval literature. Just as literature from Antiquity, medieval authors were convinced that every human life was worthy to be avenged. Thus Gauvain in the *Vengeance de Raguidel* had to execute vengeance for the murder on the (first unknown) knight Raguidel (531-532; 5039-5049). Raoul in *Raoul de Cambrai* has to avenge the lives of two boys and the wounds of one boy in Origny (1235-1237). The work of Thomas Aquinas contains the concept of individual (or subjective) human rights according to many scholars.<sup>55</sup> Humans have certain kinds of dispositional properties which must not be repressed by evil.<sup>56</sup> This point of view can also be seen in his exposition on vengeance. Vengeance can only be considered to be legitimate if it is aimed at promoting the good and punish the evildoer (*ST II-IIae q. 108 a1 co.*). Vengeance as virtue defends the rights of a person and wards off evil (*ST II-IIae q. 108 a2 ad 1*). Vengeance must be exacted with caution, because one will take away the most precious things of an individual (life, safety, freedom, and material goods) (*ST II-IIae q. 108 a3 co.*).

Contrary to this individualizing tendency in human rights, medieval literature and philosophy still understood vengeance to be a collectivistic act in terms of kin and peer-groups. Medieval society in general can be considered collectivistic, because familial structures provided the backbone of economy and society.<sup>57</sup> Family and virtual familial structures were the central sources of worth and protection.<sup>58</sup> Vengeance continued to be understood in

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<sup>53</sup> A.S. Brett, *Liberty, Right, and Nature. Individual Rights in Later Scholastic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>54</sup> R.H. Helmholz, *Fundamental Human Rights in Medieval Law*, Fulton Lectures 2001 (Chicago: University of Chicago Law School, 2001), 16.

<sup>55</sup> Brett, *Liberty*; J. Finnis, *Aquinas. Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); A.J. Lisska, “Human Rights Theory Rooted in the Writings of Thomas Aquinas”, *Diametros* 38 (2013), 134-152.

<sup>56</sup> Lisska, “Human Rights”, 146.

<sup>57</sup> This does not mean that individuals and their work must be understood purely in collectivistic terms. There were philosophical frameworks on the individual persona. See A. Black, “Society and the Individual from the Middle Ages to Rousseau. Philosophy, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory”, *History of Political Thought* 1 (1980), 145-166; F.J. Arlinghaus, “Conceptualizing Pre-Modern and Modern Individuality. Some Theoretical Considerations”, in: idem (ed.), *Forms of Individuality and Literacy in the Medieval and Early Modern Period*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 1-45.

<sup>58</sup> Arlinghaus, “Conceptualizing”.

medieval literature and philosophy in familial terms. A damsel asks Gauvain to avenge the death of her friend Raguidel (*Veng. Rag.* 5039-5049). In *Raoul de Cambrai* avenging family is a predominant theme. Count Ernaut wants to avenge the death of his sons on Raoul (381-382). Raoul wants revenge on Bernier for dishonoring his family (1576). Bernier wants to exact vengeance on Raoul for dishonoring his family (1686, 1766) and the killing of his mother (2068-2069). The sons of Herbert (the uncles of Bernier) want revenge on Raoul for taking their land (2332-2334). Guerri the Red exacts vengeance for the murder of his son (2381). Renier wants revenge for the murder of his brother Garnier (2431). Gautier wants to avenge the murder of his uncle Raoul (3557). Julian wants to exact vengeance for the murder of his father Bernier (8360-8361) and his family member Savari (8483).<sup>59</sup> Melibeus, in Albertan's *Liber Consolationis et Consilii*, longs for revenge for the dishonor done to his wife and daughter (XXXIX).

Thomas Aquinas, as we have seen, has individuals and their natural rights in mind. He pays attention to the intention of the individual avenger (*ST* IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 co.). Vengeance must also be considered collectivistic in Aquinas' writings though. Vengeance in a legitimate fashion maintains societal and divine order (*ST* IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 co.; 108 a1 ad 1). Avengers react on the injury of God or the neighbor (*ST* IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 ad 4). Crowds or parts of the crowd must be victims of vengeance when they all sin, but the guilty ones must be separated from the innocent individuals when the multitude of the crowd did not commit any sin (*ST* IIa-IIae q. 108 a1 ad 5). Groups thus cannot be punished for the sin of one or a few more individuals when they are innocent. Vengeance is a part of commutative justice (*commutativae iustitiae*) (*ST* IIa-IIae q. 108 a2 ad 1). People can receive temporal punishment as a sign of community bond: one person who is punished deters the mass (*ST* IIa-IIae q. 108 a4 ad 1). Other sources confirm this corporate outlook on vengeance in medieval times. The Babylonian Talmud places words of Rabbi Papa in its corpus, who states that "he who takes revenge destroys his own house" (*b. Sanh.* 102b).

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<sup>59</sup> Kay, ("Introduction") states that the story shows that the three pillars of society (comradery, feudalism, family) are in crisis.

### 3.2.2.6 Conclusion

The medieval understanding of vengeance thus shows continuity and progress compared to Antiquity. Vengeance was still an act of justice in a (virtual) kin context. In practice there was a double-sided image: vengeance in court and personal vengeance. Divine vengeance was still accepted and believed and even abused in the crusades. There are some advances in several areas. Vengeance in late medieval times became more and more a governmental affair. The notion of restraining emotional vengeance through rationality became more widespread and accepted in philosophical circles. Human dignity became an object of consideration in vengeance discourse, as can be seen in the theology of Aquinas. The intricate handling of the concept of vengeance in medieval times proved to be influential in Early Modern and Modern times.

### 3.2.3 Early Modern Era

The Early Modern period characterizes itself as a period of continuity, but also of progress and innovation. With movements like the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment these centuries fall back on old methods of thought, but they take these philosophies a step further on several occasions. Some examples can be seen in this section.

#### 3.2.3.1 Public and Private Vengeance

The Late Middle Ages testify of the rise of centralized monarchies and stronger state structures.<sup>60</sup> Rulers tie together their lands and their power by the use of royal officials as regulators and enforcers.<sup>61</sup> The Early Modern period shows constant innovations of political structures and the centralization of authority, culminating in the imperial centralization of Napoleon.<sup>62</sup> These political and authorial developments also affect the use and the concept of vengeance in Early Modern times.

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<sup>60</sup> J. Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe. Volume One: From the Renaissance to the Age of Napoleon* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010<sup>3</sup>), 3-43.

<sup>61</sup> Merriman, *History*, 29.

<sup>62</sup> Merriman, *History*, 50-52; 245-262; 387-388; 494-498.

Private vengeance is a recurring theme in literature in the Early Modern period, more than before. This emergence was a reaction to propaganda of the church and the state to battle private vengeance in favor of centralized punishment.<sup>63</sup> The revenge tragedies displayed the use of vengeance against criminal lords and kings. Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* tells the story of the vengeance of Vindice against the count for poisoning his fiancée (I.ii.2-3). Shakespeare's *Hamlet* narrates Hamlet's revenge on his uncle, king Claudius, for murdering his father (I.v). Hamlet's revenge is out of order, killing Laertes also and thus disturbing the general social order.<sup>64</sup> Shakespeare's *Othello* narrates from the other side of the spectrum: the frantic unjust revenge of Othello on his wife Desdemona.

Philosophers also contribute to the centralization of authority and the transfer of vengeance to the lawful authorities. Hugo Grotius writes in his *De Iure Belli ac Pacis* (*On the Law of War and Peace*, 1625) that in essence only the government carries the sword of vengeance (II.20.12). Natural laws permit vengeance for injuries back in the day because of the lack of legal systems (I.1.10).<sup>65</sup> The argument that vengeance was allowed due to absent authorities is also ushered by Francis Bacon in his essay *On Revenge* (1625). He states that one can take revenge when there is no law that allows for punishment. Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* (1651) negates the freedom for individuals to take revenge privately (II.27.35; cf. II.30.12) and instead heads an absolute power to bind the hands of the avengers and to punish offenders in a pure legal fashion (II.17.2; cf. II.28.3).<sup>66</sup> John Locke detects in his *Second Treatise on the Government* (1689) that the possibility of unlimited and unrestrained vengeance makes everyone a judge and would cause anarchy (II.13; IX.125).

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<sup>63</sup> F.T. Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy. 1587-1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), 281.

<sup>64</sup> E.L. King, *Civil Vengeance. Literature, Culture, and Early Modern Revenge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

<sup>65</sup> M. de Blois, "Blessed [Are] the Peacemakers... Grotius on the Just War and Christian Pacifism", *Grotiana* 32 (2011), 1-20.

<sup>66</sup> Hobbes is convinced that a robust legal system and a unified absolute power contribute to the purity of the legal process. This constitutional punishment opposes private revenge, which is an attitude of non-sovereign and illegitimate avenging. As S.T.G. Allen (*Thomas' Hobbes Theory of Crime and Punishment* (unpublished dissertation Queen Mary University of London, 2016), 152-153) argues: "as Hobbes notes, 'private' revenges are to be disallowed in the commonwealth, even when conducted according to the natural laws outlined. Hobbes no doubt worries that acts of private revenge would, if either threatened or carried out, increase precisely that sense of insecurity which characterizes the state of war, and believes that they should be banned for this reason."

Adam Smith however, contrary to Hobbes and Locke, considers private vengeance a possible way of doing justice when it is done in a certain fashion.<sup>67</sup> In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Smith states that vengeance can be permissible if others could imagine it and empathize with the feelings of vengeance (II.i.iv.1-4), a statement he validates in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (1763) (ii.89-90). Immanuel Kant denies the private right of vengeance in his *Metaphysik der Sitten* (*Metaphysics of Morals*, 1797) and pleads for retribution by the authorities (452-453).

Several theologians also plead for a centralization of vengeance in governmental structures. Philipp Melanchthon writes in his *Scholia in Epistulam Pauli ad Colossenses* (*Scholia on Paul's Letter to the Colossians*; 1527; 1528<sup>2</sup>) that private vengeance is forbidden (*prohibita vindicta privata*) and that authorities exercise the divine mandate to avenge (*exercent magistratus mandato divino*) (264,8-10; 41b).<sup>68</sup> John Calvin confirms Melanchthon's line of reasoning in his *Institutio Christianae Religionis* (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, final edition in 1559). Christians have the right to avenge, but this vengeance must take place in court (*Inst. IV.20.17*). God has given authorities the power to avenge (*Inst. IV.20.19*). Francis Turretin follows Melanchthon and Calvin in his *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1679-1685). He rejects private vengeance (*Inst. II.3.16*; *II.11.17.31*) and instead obtains for the government as the carriers of the sword of vengeance (*Inst. II.11.17.4*; *II.11.17.12*). The latter distinction between public and private vengeance can commonly be found in the works of theologians in this period, more than in earlier times.

### 3.2.3.2 Vengeance and Justice

The centralization of authority also affected the concept of justice. Due to effective government propaganda, vengeance was considered illegitimate and extralegal.<sup>69</sup> Vengeance was described as causing an excessive vicious circle of violence for a small human slight, while punishment by central authorities

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<sup>67</sup> R. Stalley, "Adam Smith and the Theory of Punishment", *Journal for Scottish Philosophy* 10 (2012), 69-89.

<sup>68</sup> See T.J. Wengert, *Human Freedom, Christian Righteousness. Philipp Melanchthon's Exegetical Dispute with Erasmus of Rotterdam*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 126-132.

<sup>69</sup> Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, 281; W.R.P. Kaufman, *Honor and Revenge. A Theory of Punishment*, Law and Philosophy Library 104 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 108.

was balanced, pure, and inherently just. This development of the relationship between justice and vengeance can be seen in writings of early modern authors.

The Elizabethan revenge tragedies underscored the excessiveness and impurity of vengeance. Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* describes vengeance as "murder's quit-rent" (I.i.39). Vengeance in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is clothed in mystery with secret meetings where murders of revenge are arranged (IV.ii.119), while murderers have a day-job executing vengeance for several individuals. Shakespeare's work delineates vengeance as a legitimate act which deteriorates due to its passionate execution.<sup>70</sup> In *Hamlet* Shakespeare describes the legitimacy of Hamlet's revenge on his uncle, King Claudius. His revenge however is clothed in emotionality (his uncle must burn in hell, III.3.86-96) and excess (he also kills Laertes and his sister). *Othello* is a more superior example of excessive vengeance. It tells the story of the vengeance of Othello, but foremost the cunning plan of vengeance of Jago. Jago wants to take revenge on Othello for stealing away his promotion as lieutenant (I.1). He convinces Othello that his wife Desdemona cheats on him (II.3). Othello is set up with fake evidence and eventually kills Desdemona out of rage by smothering her. Jago in the process killed his companion Rodrigo and his wife Emilia, who revealed Jago's plans to Othello (V.2). In all examples vengeance is described as excessive, not counting on the evidence, impure in intentions, and vengeance comes with a vicious circle of violence.

Several philosophers argue that vengeance is extralegal and primitive justice. Desiderius Erasmus states in his *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* (*Handbook of a Christian Soldier*, 1501) that injustice is not taken away by vengeance, but propagated (XIII.22-23). Francis Bacon even calls revenge "wild justice" in his essay *On Revenge*: it sidelines the law. Vengeance knows no limits, Hugo Grotius writes (II.1.18). Vengeance breaks the law and is a crime, according to Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* (II.27.35). John Locke describes in his *Second Treatise on the Government* the endless stream of violence which will arise if everyone can take justice in one's own hand through vengeance (II.13; IX.125). Adam Smith makes space for personal vengeance for injuries in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (II.i.i.6), but it must

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<sup>70</sup> Jacoby, *Wild Justice*, 36-40.

be proportional (II.ii.iii.8) and the feeling of vengeance must be shared by just others (II.i.iv.1-4; cf. *LJ* (A) 89-90).

An important discussion on the goal of punishment changes the concept of justice and the position on vengeance.<sup>71</sup> Immanuel Kant states in his *Metaphysik der Sitten* that punishment is guided by the principle of retribution (452-453), a position called 'retributivism'. Punishment then is governmental vengeance. Others, called utilitarianists, consider punishment not to be looking to the past (as retribution does), but looking to the future: punishment must serve the greater good of society and deter others to do the same crime, as Cesare Beccaria famously argued in his *Dei Delitti e Delle Pene* (*On Crimes and Punishments*, 1764) (Par. XII; cf. Hobbes, *Lev.*, I.15.19). Vengeance in this mode of thought does not receive a legitimate place, because vengeance is unjust and impure.

### 3.2.3.3 Divine Vengeance

Divine vengeance is still a common belief in the Early Modern period, although criticism starts to arise since the Enlightenment. The Elizabethan revenge tragedies focused on the tensions between divine and civic vengeance. Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Othello* show these tensions, but they cannot be understood without any hint of divine vengeance.<sup>72</sup> Milton's *Paradise Lost* pays full attention to divine vengeance: God has the ultimate revenge over Satan, while Satan tries to take revenge for his loss of power and honor.

Philosophers also reckoned with a transcendent being having the right to avenge. Erasmus emphasizes God's grace and forgiveness over his vengeance in the *Enchiridion*. Hugo Grotius also points towards a divine Being taking revenge (*Iur.* II.20.44). Adam Smith is convinced that there is a God to whom one can reach out to exact vengeance (*TMS* II.ii.iii.11). Theologians such as Philipp Melanchthon testify of God as the sole executor of vengeance who also directs his vengeance to the authorities (*Scholia Col.* 1527, 264,9-10; 41b). God, according to John Calvin, could act out vengeance as result of his wrath (*Inst.* IV.20.19), but also out of love (*Comm. Libr. Ps.* 79,10; *CO*

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<sup>71</sup> See L. Zaibert, "Punishment and Revenge", *Law and Philosophy* 25 (2006), 81-118.

<sup>72</sup> Jacoby, *Wild Justice*, 34-40.



XXI, 752). God and affections are a field of tension for Calvin.<sup>73</sup> He continuously states that God has no passions (*Prael. Jer.* 10,24; *CO XXXVIII*, 93; *Prael. Jer.* 50,17; *CO XXXIX*, 409).<sup>74</sup> This statement affects his reading of vengeance texts. In his commentary on Jeremiah 9,9 he argues that God “speaks in a human way when he reminds of vengeance, because we know that God doesn’t befall any passions” (*loquitur humano more quum vindictae meminit, scimus enim non cadere ullas passiones in Deum*). God is connected with vengeance to show that he detests crimes (*exsecratur scelera*) and that he is judge (*iudex*) (*Prael. Jer.* 9,9; *CO XXXVIII*, 34). To connect the negative passions of vengeance with God is a bridge too far for Calvin, because “emotions (...) belong to a lower mode of being.”<sup>75</sup> Although he problematizes God’s passionate vengeance, Calvin affirms the notion and belief of a divine Avenger.

The first cracks in the belief of a transcendent Avenger, however, arise in this period of time, as has been said. The trauma of the Reformation, but especially the gruesome wars or religion (1560-1650) were catalysts of the decline of religious beliefs.<sup>76</sup> Scientific discoveries and the primacy of reason in Enlightenment thought further undermined the role of religion in Europe.<sup>77</sup> A prominent philosopher who criticizes the notion of divine vengeance is David Hume. He condemns divine punishment and vengeance in his essay *On the Immortality of the Soul* (1777), stating that they are disproportionate and morally repugnant (*IS* 19-29).<sup>78</sup> Although he believes God has the right to punish through vengeance, Thomas Hobbes observes that divine vengeance was more feared in former times than in recent times (*Lev.* I.15.3-4).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> A. Huijgen, *Divine Accomodation in John Calvin’s Theology. Analysis and Assessment*, Reformed Historical Theology 16 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

<sup>74</sup> Huijgen, *Divine Accomodation*, 276-279.

<sup>75</sup> Huijgen, *Divine Accomodation*, 278.

<sup>76</sup> A.E. McGrath, “Religion”, in: J.W. Yolton e.a. (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 447-452.

<sup>77</sup> Merriman, *History*, 308-310.

<sup>78</sup> P. Russell, “Hume on Responsibility and Judgment”, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 20 (1990), 539-563.

<sup>79</sup> Allen, *Hobbes*, 42-46.

### 3.2.3.4 *Vengeance and Emotion*

The Early Modern period is sometimes described as the Age of Enlightenment.<sup>80</sup> Early modern writers emphasized the rightful place of the individual and the priority of reason. Prioritizing reason affected the relationship between reason and emotion and thus the positions on vengeance as emotional enterprise. In Jean Racine's *Andromaque* (1667) hate is the primary emotion connected to vengeance (84-87). Vengeance must still the wrath of individuals (363-372). One can hate a person and find joy in vengeance (1261). Shakespeare's work delineates emotions of vengeance clearly, as we have seen. The lust for vengeance is described in several ways to accentuate the act of vengeance (*Hamlet* II.2; *Othello* I.1; V.2). John Milton also connects wrath and vengeance with each other in his *Paradise Lost* (1667) (I.148; 220; IV.123; X.1023). Literary works thus shows the connection between vengeance and emotions and even the identification of vengeance as passion.

The discomfort with emotional vengeance, which we have detected in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, increased significantly in the Early Modern period. Enlightenment philosophers prioritize reason over emotions, because individual persons are reasonable human beings (*cogito ergo sum*).<sup>81</sup> Erasmus considers vengeance and its rage and joy primitive, female, and weak (XIII.13-14). Someone is childish, because a characteristic of a proper male is that one can contain one's emotions. The individual in question is not capable of doing that (XIII.15-16). Restraining oneself requires governing one's emotions through reason (XIII.89-90). Hugo Grotius states that vengeance is a delight from the old nature which must be rejected (*Jur.* II.20.10).<sup>82</sup> Francis Bacon argues that an avenger is not better than his enemy, while someone who ignores the slight (thus containing emotions and letting reason reign) is far more superior. Reasonable people cannot form an idea of revenge, because they can control their emotions according to David Hume in his *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Moral*

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<sup>80</sup> See J.I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity. 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); idem, *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man. 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>81</sup> See J. Plamper, *Geschichte und Gefühl. Grundlagen der Emotionsgeschichte* (München: Siedler, 2012), 28-34. He points towards Descartes and Kant for the radical dualism between reason and emotions and the priority of reason.

<sup>82</sup> G. Courtois, "Hugo Grotius. La Bonne et la Mauvaise Vengeance", in: idem, *Vengeance*, 137-151.

(1777) (20). The desire for revenge for Hume is savage (*Enq.* 291). We become blinded animals when we eagerly pursue vengeance (*Enq.* 302).<sup>83</sup> Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* regards vengeance without prospect of any future irrational and unnatural (I.15.19). Vengeance is a natural passion and the natural laws are opposite to those passions (*Lev.* II.17.2). Vengeance according to John Locke is an “irregular passion” (*Sec. Treat.* XVIII.199).

Theologians argue in the same way as their philosophical counterparts. Philipp Melanchthon asserts that Christ forbids every sense of passionate vengeance (*odium cupiditatem vindictae*) (*Schol. Col.* 1528, 66v<sup>o</sup>). Humans cannot have vengeful passions of hate according to John Calvin (*Inst.* IV.20.19). Calvin states in his commentary on Leviticus 19,18 that the lust for vengeance is the source of enmity and must be banned from human hearts (*Comm. Lev.* 19,18; *CO* XXIV.613-614). Turretin considers the hate of private vengeance forbidden (*Inst.* II.11.17.13; cf. II.11.17.15). Vengeance in Early Modern sources thus is considered a dangerous enterprise, because its emotional content is influenced by irrationality. One must abhor vengeance to let reason receive its deserved place of honor.

### 3.2.3.5 Vengeance and the Individual

The Early Modern period is the period of time in which ‘the subjective turn’ was made.<sup>84</sup> Human rights became prominent in the Early Modern period, as can be seen in the US *Declaration of Independence* (1776) and the French *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* (*Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens*, 1789).<sup>85</sup> Hugo Grotius was one of the first in the Early Modern period to address the rights of humans.<sup>86</sup> Humans have certain rights, responsibilities, and virtues, all aimed to enhance the common good. Vengeance infringes these rights and also the possibility to act out one’s

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<sup>83</sup> For affects in Hume’s work: C. Demmerling and H. Landweer, “Hume, Natur und soziale Gestalt der Affekte”, in: Landweer and Renz, *Handbuch*, 393-412; S. Buckle, “Hume on the Passions”, *Philosophy* 87/340 (2012), 189-213.

<sup>84</sup> C. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 26. See also his *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>85</sup> J.I. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment. Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights. 1750-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>86</sup> J.S. Geddert, *Hugo Grotius and the Modern Theology of Freedom. Transcending Natural Rights*, Routledge Innovations in Political Theory (New York: Routledge, 2017).

responsibilities and virtues. Personal vengeance assumes a superiority of power and might over people and must be repudiated (*Jur.*, II.24.7). John Locke, echoing earlier voices like Grotius, writes that God has created humans free and equal to obey his will and thus one must be careful to harm another human being (*Sec. Treat.* II,6-8).<sup>87</sup> He admonishes caution with vengeance, because social borders are easily exceeded (*Sec. Treat.* II,19; 233).

Hobbes asserts in his *Leviathan* that vengefulness is the negative desire to hurt or condemn another human being (I.6.34) and this attitude of wanting to hurt another individual must be rejected (I.15.19). Adam Smith argues the other way: vengeance can be used, because one's happiness and integrity are sacred and cannot be trampled upon without any satisfaction (*TMS* II.iii.iii.4). Revenge for Smith however is not unlimited: one has to respect another human being's integrity too and only execute vengeance when others can acknowledge your right to avenge and the perpetrator of the injury does not show any sign of remorse or correction (*TMS* II.i.i.6; II.iii.i.5; *LJ* (A) ii.89-99).<sup>88</sup> The increasing attention to human rights and human dignity in especially the Enlightenment affected the view on the concept of vengeance in general. Vengeance encompasses the humiliation or annulment of human life and worth and thus is a considerable infringement on human rights. Vengeance then becomes unacceptable as a way of getting right.

Another example of individualization in this period is the shift from a collectivistic outlook on life to a more individualized outlook. This development also influences the use and position of the concept of vengeance. Early Modern literature is inclined to delineate vengeance in a collectivistic fashion, but sometimes vengeance is described as an act of punishment for a personal injury. The vengeance of Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy* could be described as familial revenge, but it could also be considered a reaction to a personal injury (the death of his fiancée). The same applies to the revenge of Hamlet and Laertes in *Hamlet*: they are avenging kin (Hamlet's father, Laertes for Polonius), but the main focus is on vengeance for personal injuries. The most famous example is Othello's (unjust) vengeance on Desdemona as an attempt to restore his honor after her alleged affair.

Philosophers and theologians reflect the same two-sidedness of a collectivistic and an individualistic outlook on vengeance. Erasmus conceives

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<sup>87</sup> R. Ashcraft, "Locke's Political Philosophy", in: V. Chapell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 226-251.

<sup>88</sup> Stalley, "Adam Smith".

revenge as an individualistic and childish reaction of anger on a personal injury (*Ench* XXXIII.15). Philipp Melanchthon repudiates the use of private (and thus individual) vengeance (*Schol. Col.* 1527, 264,8-9; 41b), a conviction shared by other theologians (Calvin, *Inst.* IV.20.18-19; *Comm. Lev.* 19,18; *CO* XXIV, 613-614; Turretin, *Inst.* II.11.17.2-32). Hugo Grotius rejects vengeance as a delight of the old nature (*Iur.* II.20.10), a cruel (*Iur.* II.20.43) and individualistic (*Iur.* II.20.8) reaction of superiority towards others (*Iur.* II.24.7). David Hume considers vengeance to be a reaction of uncivilized and irrational individuals for personal injuries (*Enq.*, 20; 291; 301-302). Thomas Hobbes observes that people are even willing to give their lives for their injuries rather than to be unavenged (*Lev.* I.15.20). Private vengeance and vengeance for individual injuries cannot be called legitimate punishment in Hobbes' eyes (*Lev.* II.28.3). Immanuel Kant alleges that the *ius talionis* cannot be applied to the private judgment (*Metaph. Sit.* 452-453). Vengeance is considered to be a corporate punishment, but attention is more and more drawn to the individual avenger and the personal character of the injury done to the avenger.

### 3.2.3.6 Conclusion

The Early Modern period is a period of continuity and transition. Societies have the same structure as in the Middle Ages with honor and family as important notions. The movement of centralization, burgeoned in the Middle Ages, perseveres and affects the individual institution of vengeance. Vengeance becomes more and more a state affair and the legal system is entrusted with the task to execute vengeance for civilians. In the centuries of rationality, vengeance becomes suspected: it is driven by tribal emotion and excess lurks. Voices who stand up for vengeance as a legitimate mechanism, such as Adam Smith, become a minority. Humans must be nurtured with dignity and not with individual actions of revenge which make profound infringements on one's worth. Compared to the Middle Ages, the Early Modern period thus testifies of connectedness with the past and also ongoing development of several notions which decry the use of individual vengeance in society.

### 3.2.4 *The Modern Era*

The formal rejection of vengeance as a means to exact justice is an illustration of several interlocking developments which are perfected in the Modern period. The discomfort with this formal rejection of vengeance is an offshoot of several historical developments too. Vengeance in the Modern period becomes the double-sided phenomenon one can behold today.

#### 3.2.4.1 *Public and Private Vengeance*

The Modern era can be defined as a period of relative institutionalization with the growth of institutionalized democracies, but also the anarchy of civil wars and two World Wars. The reign of Napoleon catalyzed centralization and after the 1850's several democracies in Europe were created.<sup>89</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Western countries developed themselves into fully institutionalized democracies which "could afford to deliver on promises of enhanced security, social welfare, and equal opportunity."<sup>90</sup> This development even resulted into supranational institutions like the United Nations and the European Union. The right to give a verdict on crimes has more and more been placed within the legal structures of national and supranational courts and taken away fully from individual responsibility, with an enduring influence on the concept of vengeance.

Whitley Kaufman argues: "one of the defining features of the modern civilization is the near-total suppression of private revenge and the assertion of a state-monopoly on retributive violence."<sup>91</sup> He identifies two reasons for this development: centralization of justice had financial benefits, and the power and prestige of the ruler or the state was accentuated.<sup>92</sup> His conclusion in general is correct, but his assertions are not completely substantiated. Several individual philosophers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century already plead for the usurpation of vengeance by central legal structures. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel argues in his *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (*Ground Lines of the Philosophy of Justice*, 1821) that private vengeance causes new injuries and thus opens up a vicious circle of violence (§102). Vengeance is a primitive

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<sup>89</sup> Noble, *Western Civilization*, 631-636.

<sup>90</sup> Noble, *Western Civilization*, 823; 828-830.

<sup>91</sup> Kaufman, *Honor*, 130.

<sup>92</sup> Kaufman, *Honor*, 131.

state of mind which must be replaced with central retribution (§103). John Stuart Mill asserts in his *Utilitarianism* (1863) that one must not take revenge individually, because one gives in to animal instincts and forgets the society and legitimate authorities (327). The 20<sup>th</sup> century American philosopher Robert Nozick is regularly cited in this matter, considering revenge unjust, limitless and biased in comparison with legal retribution.<sup>93</sup>

### 3.2.4.2 Vengeance and Justice

The main reason for the monopolization of vengeance by central institutions in the Modern period is articulated by Tineke Cleiren in a Dutch article: “vengeance is lifted to a higher plan by the courts, namely towards the level of the good in society, towards a balance between reasonableness and deterrence.”<sup>94</sup> The legal system is more objective and reasonable than individuals and thus judges can give a more just verdict than victims or their avenging relatives. Vengeance is considered an act of vigilantism and subjectivity, not an act of justice. The notion of retribution is separated from vengeance and incorporated into the legal system and its punishments.

An important voice contradicting this development of suppressing private vengeance is Friedrich Nietzsche. He observes that modern culture deems vengeance immoral (*Menschliches* I.42), while in ancient Greece for instance individual vengeance was deemed legitimate justice (*Menschliches* I.42; I.96). Nietzsche maintains the right to avenge individually and even states that an individual is almost obligated to avenge (*Menschliches* II.2.259). Containing vengeance in authorial structures is an act of a slave morality (*Genealogie* I.6; I.13-14; II.10-11).

The discomfort with the monopolization of vengeance by the legal system is aptly worded by the father of the murdered Dutch woman Anneke van der Stap. Her murderer, Ron P., was acquitted at first and sentenced ten years in prison after appeal. After the first verdict father Harry van der Stap

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<sup>93</sup> R. Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 366-368.

<sup>94</sup> C.P.M. Cleiren, “De andere kant van het gelijk. Strafgeding of mediation?”, *Justitiële Verkenningen* 27 (2001), 123.

said: “Justice has been spoken, no justice has been done.”<sup>95</sup> Father Van der Stap acknowledges the verdict, but this verdict does not correspond to his legitimate feelings of vengeance and retribution. The objective and reasonable judgments sometimes conflict with the needs of relatives. The “higher plan with vengeance” of the legal system sometimes leaves the relatives unsatisfied in their desire for justice and vengeance for their loved ones. It is remarkable that several authors who examine the theme of revenge plead for a rehabilitation of vengeance as an act of justice.<sup>96</sup>

Some characters in literature and movies are portrayed as executors of extralegal vengeance. Jacoby states rightly: “it is obvious that many of the portrayals of revenge in modern fiction run counter to the prevailing cultural myth of a dichotomy between justice and vengeance.”<sup>97</sup> The difference between these modern portrayals of avengers and their predecessors in the Early Modern period is that authors such as Shakespeare for instance wanted to educate their readers in the morality of vengeance, while modern authors do not have the same goal with their works. Modern writers and producers describe the execution of vengeance without any moral lesson. The revenge stories of novels and movies appeal to lurking feelings in society.

Camilla Läckberg for example describes in her novel *En bur av guld* (*The Golden Cage*, 2019) the self-chosen revenge of Faye on her ex-husband Jack. Other novels, such as *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* (*The Count of Monte Cristo*, 1844) of Alexandre Dumas, tend to accentuate the mechanics of extralegal vengeance. Movies show the same interest in vigilance to hold people’s attention. The movie-trilogy *The Godfather* evolves around the criminal behavior of the mafia-family Corleone. They elevate vigilantism to a next level by getting even with enemies without any police or legal interference. The use of the “primitive” concept of vengeance, with the *pater familias* as the main distributor of vengeance and the family as nucleus of protection, is the main thread throughout the movies.<sup>98</sup> The same can be said of the movie-

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<sup>95</sup> “Vader van studente: Geen recht gedaan”, *Reformatorsch Dagblad* 29-9-2012, [https://www.digibron.nl/viewer/collectie/Digibron/id/tag:RD.nl,20120929:newsml\\_fd9800937d90ccc76200dff37bea8c87](https://www.digibron.nl/viewer/collectie/Digibron/id/tag:RD.nl,20120929:newsml_fd9800937d90ccc76200dff37bea8c87) [consulted 14-01-2021].

<sup>96</sup> Besides the works of Jacoby, Kaufman, and Ruch see R. Solomon, *A Passion for Justice. Emotions and the Origins of the Social Contract*, Camden Fifth Series 5 (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1995); French, *Vengeance*; J.G. Murphy, *Getting Even. Forgiveness and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>97</sup> Jacoby, *Wild Justice*, 55.

<sup>98</sup> A.S. Boddhu, “Revenge, Masculinity and the Glorification of Violence in *The Godfather*”, *International Journal for Social Science and Humanities Research* 3/2 (2015), 6-12.



diptych *Kill Bill* which centers on the exciting extralegal vengeance of Beatrix.<sup>99</sup>

### 3.2.4.3 Vengeance and Emotion

One of the reasons for the appeal of the revenge theme in society and thus the attraction of literary works and other productions is the re-evaluation of emotions and rationality. The understanding of vengeance as an expression of negative emotions and irrationality, as we have seen in earlier times, can still be detected in several corpora. Emotions like hate and anger act as fuel for revenge acts in literary works like Dumas' *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* and Läckberg's *En bur av guld* and in movies such as the *The Godfather*-trilogy. Several philosophers also consider vengeance as an outburst of negative affections. Arthur Schopenhauer in his essay on psychology in *Parerga und Paralipomena* considers vengeance to be the emotional appetite to return an injury (8). Robert Nozick regards vengeance as an emotional enterprise with pleasure in one's suffering, while retribution does not involve emotion or just the emotion of pleasure in justice.<sup>100</sup>

The relationship between emotion, rationality, and vengeance could be valued differently. *Ressentiment* (resentment) is a central emotion in Nietzsche's distinction between the master morality and the slave morality.<sup>101</sup> Vengeance is a product of the *ressentiment* of the slaves, although masters could also exact vengeance (*Genealogie* I.10). The vengeance of slaves however is imaginary and oppressive. Vengeance in either case is an affect which must be discharged (*Genealogie* III.20), a heavy burden which must be lifted from humanity (*Menschliches* I.629). The latter conclusion can also be distilled from the *Kill Bill*-diptych. Vengeance is emotional and justified to a

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<sup>99</sup> See D.K. Johnson, "Revenge and Mercy in Tarantino. The Lesson of Ezekiel 25:17", in: R. Greene and K.S. Mohamad (eds.), *Quentin Tarantino and Philosophy*, Popular Culture and Philosophy 29 (Chicago: Open Court, 2007), 55-73; T.D. Roth, "A Sword of Righteousness. *Kill Bill* and the Ethics of Vengeance", in: *ibidem*, 85-95.

<sup>100</sup> Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, 366-368.

<sup>101</sup> P. Stellino, "Affekte, Gerechtigkeit und Rache in Nietzsches *Genealogie der Moral*", *Nietzscherforschung* 15 (2008), 127-138.

certain level according to Quentin Tarantino in *Kill Bill*.<sup>102</sup> Tarantino even considers vengeance to be an act of love in the case of Beatrix.<sup>103</sup>

Nietzsche's observation that the emotions behind vengeance must be released is adopted by Peter Sloterdijk in his book *Rage and Time (Zorn und Zeit)*, although Sloterdijk searches for a rage without *ressentiment*. Sloterdijk argues in his book that humans have thymotic energies which must be released. Societies have tried to suppress emotional vengeance in so called *wrath banks*, such as God, communism, and Islam. These banks tried to navigate the feelings of suffering and injustice in a morally unbalanced world.<sup>104</sup> These projects however failed. Sloterdijk states: "there is no politics of compensation of suffering, that builds upon resenting earlier injustice, possible at large in the globalized situation."<sup>105</sup> The lust for vengeance will only disappear when a rational cultural code is formulated to cope with this anger.<sup>106</sup> The discomfort with the formal, legal rejection of vengeance, according to Sloterdijk, thus stems from the lack of a rationality that can contain human thymotic energies.

Nietzsche and Sloterdijk have pointed out that the legal system is not sufficiently capable to encapsulate the human feelings of revenge and thus discomfort exists. Some psychologists have also pointed out that the coping strategy of society and authorities insufficiently includes the strong emotions of vengeance of humans. The most influential elaboration of vengeance in psychological terms can be found in the work of the Dutch psychologist Nico Frijda.<sup>107</sup> He states that society must acknowledge the desire for revenge and find ways to handle this desire instead of denying or condemning it.<sup>108</sup> The desire for vengeance is meaningful and rational on five levels: it protects the interests of the avenger, it settles suffering, it recovers loss or lack of power, it recovers pride, and it escapes pain.<sup>109</sup> He distinguishes between the desire

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<sup>102</sup> Johnson, "Revenge".

<sup>103</sup> Johnson, "Revenge"; Roth, "Sword", 88-89.

<sup>104</sup> P. Sloterdijk, *Zorn und Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2006), 353.

<sup>105</sup> Sloterdijk, *Zorn und Zeit*, 354: "In der globalisierten Situation ist keine Politik des Leidensausgleichs im Großen mehr möglich, die auf dem Nachtragen von vergangenem Unrecht aufbaut".

<sup>106</sup> Sloterdijk, *Zorn und Zeit*, 98.

<sup>107</sup> N. Frijda, "De lex talionis", in: idem, *De psychologie heeft zin* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1993), 159-196 (translated as: "The lex talionis. On Vengeance", in: S.H.M. van Goozen, N.E. Van de Poll, and J.A. Sergeant (eds.), *Emotions. Essays on Emotion Theory* (Mahwah: L. Erlbaum Ass., 1994), 263-289).

<sup>108</sup> Frijda, "Lex Talionis", 192.

<sup>109</sup> Frijda, "Lex Talionis", 169-191.

of vengeance and the vengeance act: the desire can be respected when one is hurt, but the act destabilizes the harmony and the social order.<sup>110</sup> The work of other psychologists show that a pure legal definition of vengeance as “harm for harm” is too narrow to do justice to the concept of vengeance<sup>111</sup> and humans are more satisfied in several ways by first-hand punishments than by third-party punishments.<sup>112</sup>

It becomes clear in the Modern period that the distinction between rationality and emotion thus is too one-sided and simplistic. Although the desire of vengeance and the act itself is considered widely as a negative emotional outburst, researchers and philosophers are seeing that suppressing vengeance through *apatheia* and reason is not the most healthy option for human beings. The hate and anger behind vengeance must be released in some other way. The position on the concept of vengeance in an emotional point of view is thus dual: the blunt action of emotional vengeance is considered negative, but the desire for vengeance is acknowledged in recent times and ways must be found to blow off some steam.

#### 3.2.4.4 Divine Vengeance

Not only the grip of central authorities on vengeance is loosened in the Modern period. Divine vengeance becomes a notion which few people adhere to. The role of the church was still important in the Early Modern period and also in the beginning of the Modern era. After World War II a movement of secularization started to sign off in European culture. People began to abandon churches and popular culture distanced itself from religious influences. This development means that fewer people share the conviction that there is a personal God who (eventually) does justice in this world. The notion of divine retribution even becomes a stumbling block.<sup>113</sup> Peter Sloterdijk states that for a long time leaving vengeance with God was a great solution for the wrath of

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<sup>110</sup> Frijda, “Lex Talionis”, 159-160.

<sup>111</sup> M. Elshout, *Vengeance* (Ridderkerk: Ridderprint, 2014).

<sup>112</sup> E.C. Seip, *Desire for Vengeance and Revenge. An Emotion-Based Approach to Revenge* (unpublished dissertation Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2016). See for more research on vengeance in psychology J.C. Jackson, V.K. Choi, and M.J. Gelfand, “Revenge. A Multilevel Review and Synthesis”, *Annual Review of Psychology* 70 (2019), 319-345.

<sup>113</sup> Taylor, *Secular Age*, 649.

humans, but this solution is considered in recent times to be “an unacceptable imposition.”<sup>114</sup>

Friedrich Nietzsche is the most fierce opponent of the notion of divine vengeance. Christianity believes in a divine Avenger, because otherwise God would be weak (*Antichrist* 16). Leaving vengeance to God is also a sign of weakness (*Genealogie* I.13-14). The sub-humans (*Untermenschen*) use Jesus as the instrument of their imaginary vengeance on their powerful lords (*Genealogie* I.8). They follow the footsteps of the disciples (*Antichrist* 40) and especially the apostle Paul (*Antichrist* 45).<sup>115</sup> Christianity is an uncivilized religion (*Antichrist* 22) with an enormous potential of imaginary vengeance (*Antichrist* 62). God is uncivilized too, because he is portrayed as avenger (*Menschliches* I.116) doing avenging justice (*Menschliches* I.132).

Charles Taylor lucidly describes the modern pains with divine violence and vengeance. Divine violence firstly inflicts human flourishing which problematizes the modern day image of God as the one whose purpose it is to let people grow.<sup>116</sup> In the modern anthropocentric climate (“the Age of Authenticity”)<sup>117</sup> violence must be repudiated and thus divine violence too must be renounced. Taylor pinpoints an important cause of friction regarding divine vengeance: divine vengeance infringes human lives and worth.

Secondly, according to Taylor, history shows that divine violence is sometimes colonized by human violence.<sup>118</sup> As Taylor describes it: “the violence of God can be all too easily appropriated by the warrior cultures which internalize the numinous force of violence.”<sup>119</sup> This point is demonstrated in several works. In *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* Dantes is considered to be the agent of divine vengeance on his injurers.<sup>120</sup> In *Kill Bill* the vengeance of

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<sup>114</sup> Sloterdijk, *Zorn und Zeit*, 72.

<sup>115</sup> D. Havemann, *Der “Apostel der Rache”. Nietzsches Paulusdeutung*, MTNF 46 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002).

<sup>116</sup> C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007), 649.

<sup>117</sup> Taylor, *Secular Age*, 473.

<sup>118</sup> This point is demonstrated in several works. In *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* Dantes is considered to be the agent of divine vengeance on his injurers (see K. Vassilev, “Vengeance et récit dans *Le Comte de Monte Cristo*”, *French Forum* 26 (2001), 43-66). In *Kill Bill* the vengeance of Beatrix is associated with the Old Testament theme of divine vengeance. In *Part I* she even states: “when fortune smiles on something as violent and disgusting as vengeance, it seems prove of no other that not only God exists, you’re doing his will” (00:34:02-08). She is the instrument of God’s vengeance in the world. She possibly even thanks God on the bathroom floor at the end of *Part II*. See Roth, “Sword of Righteousness”.

<sup>119</sup> Taylor, *Secular Age*, 653.

<sup>120</sup> K. Vassilev, “Vengeance et récit dans *Le Comte de Monte Cristo*”, *French Forum* 26 (2001), 43-66.

Beatrix is associated with the Old Testament theme of divine vengeance. In Part I she even states: “when fortune smiles on something as violent and disgusting as vengeance, it seems proof of no other that not only God exists, you’re doing his will” (00:34:02-08). She is the instrument of God’s vengeance in the world. She possibly even thanks God on the bathroom floor at the end of Part II.<sup>121</sup>

Divine violence thirdly serves as a mechanism of exclusion: it creates borders and facilitates divisions between people. This divisive character of divine violence and vengeance contradicts our modern understanding of love and charity as accepting the other without the rough edge of exclusion. Inclusion is the modern norm, love is all-embracing.<sup>122</sup> Divine vengeance violates this norm and this notion of love, because it is discriminating and divisive. The movie *Kill Bill* remarkably contradicts this position on vengeance. Tarantino molds the vengeance of Beatrix in the movies as an act of love: “for herself as one who is violated; for her missing daughter; for her innate sense of righteousness; and for her emotionally necessitated reconciliation with her former lover, Bill.”<sup>123</sup> Tarantino however is quite alone in this depiction of vengeance.

Taylor not only describes the renunciation of the image of the violent God in modernity, but also how secularization has entered the church. He states that even modern Christians have trouble and renounce “any hermeneutic of divine violence”.<sup>124</sup> The same three reasons, as given above, are major factors in this repudiation of divine vengeance. R.P.C. Hanson describes the process of muting the violent side of God in contemporary churches, highlighting God’s wrath:

Most preachers and most composers of prayers today treat the biblical doctrine of the wrath of God very much as the Victorians treated sex. It is there, but it must never be alluded to because it is in an undefined way shameful (...). God is love; therefore we must not associate him with wrath. God is love; therefore he is indefinitely tolerant.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Roth, “Sword of Righteousness”.

<sup>122</sup> M. Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 58.

<sup>123</sup> Roth, “Sword of Righteousness”, 88-89.

<sup>124</sup> Taylor, *Secular Age*, 656.

<sup>125</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *God. Creator, Saviour, Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 37; cited in A.N.S. Lane, “The Wrath of God as an Aspect of the Love of God”, in: K.J. Vanhoozer (ed.),

Lane points to several ways of muting violent sides of God in church and theology.<sup>126</sup> The first trajectory is the blunt denial of the violent aspects of the image of God. A second option is ignoring certain topics to avoid the confrontation. Peels for example highlights the incredible lack of treatment regarding the concept of divine vengeance in Old Testament theologies.<sup>127</sup> A third trajectory is a pseudo-Marcionistic approach to the Bible. A distinction is made between the Old Testament and its violence and the New Testament with its love and mercy.<sup>128</sup> Gregory Boyd for instance maintains that God cannot act violently, because of his love revealed in Christ. Humans and demonic powers act out violence and vengeance in this world according to Boyd.<sup>129</sup> Old Testament authors are fallible people who wrongly attribute violence to God and they must be criticized for their writings.<sup>130</sup> The message of the New Testament is one of love and acceptance. The last option is to reinterpret divine violence, as we can see in several theological works.<sup>131</sup> Taylor is right when he pinpoints the ongoing struggle within the modern day church and academic theology with divine violence and thus also with divine vengeance.

### 3.2.4.5 Vengeance and the Individual

In modernity, with important documents as *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), and the Geneva Conventions (1949) which state that every

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*Nothing Greater, Nothing Better. Theological Essays on the Love of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 139.

<sup>126</sup> Lane, "Wrath", 138-167.

<sup>127</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 271-274.

<sup>128</sup> G.C.H Macgregor, "The Concept of the Wrath of God in the New Testament", *NTS* 7 (1960-1961), 101-109.

<sup>129</sup> G.A. Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God. Interpreting the Old Testament's Violent Portraits of God in Light of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).

<sup>130</sup> See besides Boyd C.A. Kirk-Duggan, *Violence and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006); E.A. Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior. Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009); E.A. Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture. Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012); T.E. Fretheim, *What Kind of God? Collected Essays* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

<sup>131</sup> For example A.T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: SPCK, 1957); R. Miggelbrink, *Der zornige Gott. Die Bedeutung einer anstößigen biblischen Tradition* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002). For an overview see E.A. Seibert, "Recent Research on Divine Violence in the Old Testament (with Special Attention to Christian Theological Perspectives)", *Currents in Biblical Research* 15 (2016), 8-40.

human has inalienable rights, an infringement of human dignity is an act of major proportions. (Divine) vengeance is not tolerated, because it seriously impacts human lives and degrades people in their worth and safety. A paradox however arises. An injury is an infringement of basic human conditions, but humans are not allowed to exercise their freedom to reverse this impingement in a physical or an emotional way according to the formal, legal opinion on vengeance. Human rights thus do not ensure absolute freedom of individual identity, worth and actions. This paradox explains partially why the desire for vengeance is not eradicated and discomfort with the formal, legal rejection of vengeance exists.

#### *3.2.4.6 Conclusion*

Modernity exhibits the completion of several historical developments considering vengeance, such as the gradual centralization of power and justice and thus the termination of civil vengeance. A changing concept of justice, the progressive rise of secularizing tendencies, and the emphasis on individual rights and worth can also be counted as historical trajectories blooming in the Modern era. These developments lead to the formal rejection of vengeance as a means for doing justice. This formal rejection however cannot be considered on the same level of understanding as the more popular vision on vengeance, the latter supported by several psychological studies. Some crimes and cases evoke victims and their families to avenge the injuries to restore the balance and to unleash emotions. This two-sidedness of formal rejection and the popular discomfort with this formal rejection characterizes the Modern era and the understanding of people reading vengeance texts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### *3.2.5 Conclusion*

This part of the chapter has shown that our modern understanding of vengeance is fundamentally different from the ancient conception of vengeance. Scholars cannot examine vengeance texts without dealing with the historical trajectories and explicating our hermeneutical presuppositions. Several historical developments have been crucial to the development of the modern understanding of vengeance. The gradual centralization of power has reduced

the possibility of doing civic justice. Vengeance was an act of justice in Antiquity, but it has developed into an act of vigilantism in modern times. This changing concept of justice also affects the notion of divine vengeance. Secularization has resulted in the abandonment of the notion of divine vengeance in general. Divine vengeance is also considered to be an act conflicting with the image of the loving God. Lastly, the growing attention to humanity and its worth resulted in the rise of human rights. Infringing these rights is almost impossible without sufficient substantiation, thus making civic vengeance redundant. These developments have led to the formal rejection of vengeance. Discomfort with this formal rejection is the result of the loss of power and instruments of justice in society, supported by several psychologists who plead for a way to express suppressed negative emotions.

This two-sidedness in Modernity must be taken into account in the exploration of the New Testament vengeance texts. The exegesis and theological reflection on these texts can be enriched with some hermeneutical considerations. The next paragraph will provide some hermeneutical questions which form an essential part of the examination of the New Testament vengeance texts in the next chapters.

### 3.3 Hermeneutical Questions Concerning Vengeance Texts

The next chapters will take all the data of the previous chapters into consideration when the vengeance texts in the New Testament will be exegetically and theologically explored. The hermeneutical dimension of this process of interpretation cannot be ignored. Several sensitivities and fundamental questions arise when modern readers read ancient vengeance texts. These hermeneutical points of tension must be addressed. This brief section will provide some hermeneutical considerations. These thoughts will be incorporated in the interpretation of New Testament vengeance texts in the next chapters.

#### *3.3.1 Who Executes Vengeance?*

The previous section has shown that the issue who executes vengeance is a prominent hermeneutical question. The sources throughout history exhibit a



tendency towards centralization: central institutions must execute vengeance on behalf of citizens. This conviction is quite foreign to most written sources in Antiquity. There were courts who decided in lawsuits, but the right to avenge one's injuries was common and tolerated. This ancient practice thus forms a point of tension with the modern legal conception that rejects vengeance as vigilantism.

The previous chapters and also the previous paragraph have shown an active friction concerning human and divine vengeance. The Old Testament, several Early Jewish documents, and most Christian theologians have pleaded for a divine prerogative on vengeance and the dismissal of any possibility of human vengeance. Several documents in Antiquity however showed that vengeance was also executed by humans. Who executes vengeance according to the New Testament vengeance texts? The matrix for this question is the modern feeling about power and the abuse of it: who has the control over vengeance in the New Testament?

### *3.3.2 Is Vengeance Just?*

The discussion about the legitimacy of vengeance as an act of justice has taken place in the course of history. While in Antiquity the majority of the authors consider vengeance a legitimate legal institution, writers in the Early Modern and especially the Modern period would state that vengeance is not appropriate and crosses the line of legitimate justice. Justice must be served impartially by centralized authorities. Vengeance cannot be a form of justice, because it is an act of frontier justice and vigilantism which is punishable by law. This formal rejection of vengeance as just is contradicted by a lurking conviction in society and media that consider some acts of vengeance just. Certain crimes and injuries are deemed damaging and subsequent retaliation is legitimate. The approval of vengeance as a way of doing personal justice also comes into play when people regard legal punishment as unsatisfactory. The ongoing debate surrounding the modern concept of vengeance is an interesting interlocutor for New Testament vengeance texts.

These observations establish the legitimacy of discussing the question whether vengeance is just in the following chapters. The debate on the just character of vengeance, which has been going on for centuries, justifies the

conclusion that this hermeneutical point of tension must be in view in the next chapters.

### *3.3.3 How Does Vengeance Affect Human Worth?*

Since the Enlightenment human beings became more and more aware of a general esteem of human life. Humans were worthy and had a certain amount of dignity in themselves. They have rights which are inalienable and must not be violated. This awareness and conviction can be explained by the trends towards individualization in philosophical and popular thought. The focus on individuality and worth creates a tension with the practice of vengeance, because vengeance makes a particular violent and humiliating infringement on an individual. Modern authors therefore reject vengeance as a transgressing violation of an individual's integrity. In Antiquity (and also in popular modern thought) the reason for exacting vengeance was the other way around. An injury humiliates and dishonors the victim and his relatives. Vengeance restores their dignity and vengeance is therefore legitimate. The question is how New Testament vengeance texts relate to this tension. How do New Testament authors engage this hermeneutical challenge?

### *3.3.4 Can Emotional Vengeance Be Accepted?*

The relationship between rationality and emotion in vengeance is a major point of discussion in history. Vengeance, as we have seen, is intimately connected with emotions such as hate and anger. Authors like Seneca already pleaded in Antiquity for the suppression of emotions and thus refraining from vengeance. Vengeance then was problematized for being too emotional and in movies such as *The Godfather* vengeance is sometimes considered to be an act of pure emotion. How are emotions and vengeance related in the New Testament? Which position do the New Testament authors take in the discussion about emotions, *apatheia*, and vengeance?

### *3.3.5 How Do Old Testament and New Testament Vengeance Texts Relate?*

Some theological-hermeneutical questions arise when authors read vengeance texts. We have seen that in the Modern period authors have theological trouble with violent texts in the Bible. One of the “solutions” was a pseudo-Marcionistic approach by distinguishing the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament then is the part of war and violence in the Bible and the New Testament the part of peace and love. Vengeance indeed is an important aspect in the Old Testament divine revelation, as we have seen in section 2.1.<sup>132</sup> The question then arises how the Old Testament concept of vengeance and the New Testament understanding of vengeance relate to each other. Is a pseudo-Marcionistic distinction between an Old Testament God of cruel vengeance and the New Testament God of love legitimate or is this distinction artificial and a product of our modern pains with violence and our favoritism of categories like love?

### 3.3.6 *Can the God of Love Execute Vengeance?*

Another theological-hermeneutical question, connected to the previous question, comes up when violent texts are connected to God. Several theologians dismiss the relationship between God and vengeance, because they cannot relate the execution of violence and vengeance with the creed that God is love. Gregory Boyd for instance maintains that God cannot act violently, because of his love. Humans and demonic powers act out violence and vengeance in this world according to Boyd.<sup>133</sup> Other scholars share Boyd’s position that God and violence cannot be associated and they focus on Jesus: in him violence, wrath, and vengeance are dismissed.<sup>134</sup> The message of the New Testament is one of the love of God in Jesus Christ and violence (and thus vengeance) must be rejected, even when the Biblical authors connect these attributes to God. Another group of scholars reject this theological and hermeneutical position and plead for a theological answer to the tension between the

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<sup>132</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*.

<sup>133</sup> Boyd, *Crucifixion*.

<sup>134</sup> See K.E. Biezeveld, “The One and Only God”, in: D. van Keulen and M.E. Brinkman (eds.), *Christian Faith and Violence. Part I* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2005), 47-68; S. Janse, *De tegenstem van Jezus. Over geweld in het Nieuwe Testament* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2006); Seibert, *Violence of Scripture*.

God of love and the God of violence which respects the Biblical texts and their authors.<sup>135</sup>

This seemingly theological tension between love and vengeance is old (as we have seen in discussions in the works of Chrysostom and Aquinas), but it is intensified in the Modern period. This can partly be explained by a changing concept of love, but also partly by a shift in the modern image of God. The tension between love and vengeance thus is a worthy point of hermeneutical reflection in the exploration of New Testament vengeance texts. Can theologians still speak about the vengeance of God as a concrete reality or has Jesus forbidden vengeance in the Sermon on the Mount and eradicated the notion of vengeance on the cross?

### 3.3.7 Conclusion

The six hermeneutical questions above formulate several tense issues in the discussion on (divine) vengeance. They have been troubling individuals throughout history in the literary, theological, and philosophical discussions on the legitimacy and practice of the concept of vengeance. These questions will accompany the exegetical and theological considerations in the next chapters. In this way, the next chapters will not only ask how the New Testament authors understood and used the concept of vengeance, but also how their understanding of vengeance confronts our (problematic, two-sided) understanding of vengeance, and our modern image of God.

## 3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that vengeance is still a precarious issue in the modern-day Western world. The understanding of the concept of vengeance has developed from an emotional act of justice to restore honor and the balance of power to a vigilant and emotional imbalanced infringement of human rights and authorial power. This development can be traced along several historical and cultural processes as centralization, secularization, and individualization. Human vengeance is met with disapproval most of the times,

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<sup>135</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*; Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*.

although vengeance is in some cases regarded legitimate by society. Human vengeance is rejected, divine vengeance even more so. Secularization has almost annulled the belief in a transcendent judge in Western societies. Those who still believe in a divine judge have difficulties harmonizing seemingly opposite images of God. How can the God of love also be the God of vengeance?

All these historical and hermeneutical issues must be processed in the exegesis of the New Testament vengeance texts. We can examine New Testament vengeance texts purely for their meaning in their social, cultural, and literary context. The misleading pretension is that we read these texts as if historical processes and hermeneutical assumptions do not matter. We are not the first readers though; a significant multitude of voices precede our reading of the texts. They point towards our historical and hermeneutical contingency and the need to converse the New Testament vengeance texts with historical readings and our contemporary hermeneutical challenges.<sup>136</sup> History then becomes a helpful interlocutor who conveys several hermeneutical and theological issues and solutions in reading and explaining these type of texts. This chapter has provided us with this critical partner for the exegesis of the New Testament vengeance texts in the following chapters.

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<sup>136</sup> G.R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral. A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 29. Peter Stuhlmacher (*Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testaments. Eine Hermeneutik*, Grundrisse zum Neuen Testament. NTD-Ergänzungsreihe 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 206) pleads for a hermeneutic of consent (*Hermeneutik des Einverständnisses*): “diese Hermeneutik schließt ein, daß wir die Bibel als Lern- und Lebensbuch der Kirche ernstnehmen, daß wir uns in reflektierter Weise der historisch-kritischen Auslegungsmethode bedienen und daß wir uns der Lebenssituation bewußt sind, aus der heraus wir zur Exegese aufbrechen und in die unsere Schriftinterpretation zielt.”

## Chapter 4

### Vengeance in Luke-Acts

Our first encounter with vengeance in the New Testament is in Luke-Acts. Luke devotes a substantial amount of text to the notion of divine retribution. O. Wesley Allen even argues that “divine retribution is clearly an important theme for Luke. Those who reject (i.e. persecute) God’s ambassadors and thus oppose God place themselves in danger of experiencing God’s dramatic punishment.”<sup>1</sup> It is instructive for our purposes to examine how Luke uses vengeance in his work and to determine its meaning in his literary agenda(s). We will also explore how Luke’s use of vengeance coalesces with our modern hermeneutical questions, discerned in section 3.3.

This chapter will examine the vengeance texts in Luke-Acts.<sup>2</sup> The first section (4.1) will provide an overview of divine retribution in Luke-Acts. Several texts which suggest the notion of vengeance, fleshed out in chapters 1 and 2, will also be discussed in this section. The second section (4.2) will focus on texts which contain vengeance vocabulary (e.g. Luke 18,1-8; Luke 21,22; Acts 7,24; Acts 28,4). A synthesis of the material in section 4.1 and 4.2 will then be furnished to draw a composite description of Luke’s understanding of vengeance (4.3). The last section (4.4) will interact with the hermeneutical questions raised previously (3.3). How does Luke interact with our modern hermeneutical presuppositions concerning vengeance? The chapter will close with a short conclusion (4.5).

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<sup>1</sup> O.W. Allen, *The Death of Herod. The Narrative and Theological Function of Retribution in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 158 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 119.

<sup>2</sup> I consider Luke-Acts a unity, see D.L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts. God’s Promised Program, Realized for all Nations*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2012), 55-61. For an overview of the discussion surrounding the unity of Luke-Acts see M.F. Bird, “The Unity of Luke-Acts in Recent Discussion”, *JSNT* 29 (2007), 425-448.

## 4.1 Vengeance in Luke-Acts: An Overview

The vengeance texts in Luke-Acts cannot be isolated from the narrative flow of Luke's narrative. They find their place in the overall arch of the story which Luke is telling his readers. This section will explicate the narrative of divine retribution of Luke-Acts and the place of vengeance texts within this structure. We will first pay attention to Luke's theology of divine retribution (4.1.1). Then some texts will be examined which do not contain explicit vengeance vocabulary, but where the motif of vengeance can unmistakably be detected (4.1.2).

### 4.1.1 *Luke's theology of divine retribution*

Loveday Alexander argues that we must read Luke-Acts from back to front.<sup>3</sup> The quotation from Isaiah 6 in Acts 28,26-27 functions as a hermeneutical key in understanding the rocky course of the gospel of Jesus within Israel and from Israel to the Gentiles. Read from this perspective, one understands the beginning of Luke. Jesus is prophesied as the fulfillment of all Israel's expectations and prophecies. He is the Messiah, the Son of the most High (Lk. 1,32) and the Son of God (Lk. 1,35).<sup>4</sup> The story of his birth is already clothed in the bigger picture of God's word. Mary believes the word of God (Lk. 1,38), while Zechariah is punished for his unbelief (Lk. 1,18-20). After Jesus' birth, Simeon prophesies that this pattern of belief and disbelief will center around Jesus: he is the Savior (Lk. 2,30), but he is also destined to cause the fall of many (Lk. 2,34). Jesus' message will first be for Israel (Lk. 2,34; cf. 1,54-55; 68-75), but the Gentiles will also hear it (Lk. 2,32).

The opinion that Luke 1-2 serves as an introduction to several themes which Luke unfolds in his twofold story is also affirmed when one reads

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<sup>3</sup> L.C.A. Alexander, "Reading Luke-Acts from Back to Front", in: idem, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context*, LNTS 298 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 207-229.

<sup>4</sup> J.W. Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 86-89.

Luke-Acts through the lens of divine retribution.<sup>5</sup> It becomes abundantly clear that a final judgment in the future will come and is nearby. John the Baptist warns against the upcoming wrath of God (Lk. 3,7). Galilean cities are threatened with coming judgment (Lk. 10,12-16). The Pharisees are threatened, because God will hold them responsible (ἐκζητηθήσεται) for the death of his prophets (which will include the messianic Prophet Jesus later) (Lk. 11,49-51). The believers must not fear present tribulation, because they will receive future vindication (Lk. 12,4-8). They must be ready for the future judgment (Lk. 12,35-40). God will judge the world through Jesus (Act. 17,31).

This divine judgment becomes apparent on several occasions. The most obvious of these is the destruction of Jerusalem (Lk. 21,20-24). But there are several other instances in Acts where divine retribution comes into play. These include the deaths of Judas (Act. 1,18-20) and Ananias and Sapphira (Act. 5,1-11), the death of Herod Agrippa (Act. 12,20-23), the blinding of Elymas (Act. 13,6-11), and the punishment of the sons of Sceva (Act. 19,13-16). Several texts will return shortly, because they exhibit an element of vengeance in them. What is clear however is that God's divine judgment becomes present in the history narrated by Luke in Luke-Acts.

While divine vengeance is evident, human vengeance is forbidden. In Luke 6,27-36, Jesus forbids his followers to exact vengeance on their own. Instead their behavior must be more rooted in love (Lk. 6,32-34). Luke does not reject the mechanism of reciprocity, but radicalizes the essence of reciprocity. Instead of the conventional set of expectations, one must love another human being without attention to someone's worth and without hope of receiving a gift in return.<sup>6</sup>

The principle of Luke 6,27-36 is put into practice in Luke 9,54-56. James and John want to exact vengeance on the Samaritans for refusing to let Jesus and his disciples go through and stay in Samaritan land. The Samaritans

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<sup>5</sup> For the idea that Luke 1-2 serves as an introduction to Luke-Acts, see U. Busse, "Das 'Evangelium' des Lukas. Die Funktion der Vorgeschichte im lukanischen Doppelwerk", in: C. Bussmann and W. Radl (eds.), *Der Treue Gottes trauen. Beiträge zum Werk des Lukas*, Fs. G. Schneider (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1991), 161-179.

<sup>6</sup> A. Kirk, "'Love Your Enemies,' The Golden Rule, and Ancient Reciprocity", *JBL* 122 (2003), 667-686. The opinion that Luke contradicts the ancient mechanism of reciprocity is uttered by for instance W.C. van Unnik, "Die Motivierung der Feindesliebe in Lukas VI 32-35", *NovT* 8 (1966), 284-300. See also G. Theissen, "Gewaltverzicht und Feindesliebe (Mt. 5,38-48/Lk. 6,27-38) und deren sozialgeschichtlicher Hintergrund", in: idem, *Studien zur Soziologie des Urchristentums*, WUNT 19 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 166-167.



have dishonored them by neglecting hospitality. The fire from heaven in the style of Elijah (2 Kgs. 1,10-12) is retribution for this slight. Jesus however denies this possibility (Lk. 9,55-56).<sup>7</sup> There will thus be a final moment of judgment, but Jesus in Luke's narrative makes it clear that before that moment there is still a time of grace. The Isaiah-quotation in Luke 4,18-19 lacks one important line of Isaiah 61,2: "and the day of vengeance".<sup>8</sup> One can understand this omission through the study of reciprocity. In Luke 4,22 the crowd is amazed by the "words of grace" (τοῖς λόγοις τῆς χάριτος) which they have heard from Jesus. The words of grace Jesus has given to the crowd are the words of the year of God's favor (δεκτός), which Luke highlights in Luke 4,19. In Luke 4,19 the period of God's acceptance is announced in Jesus and the gift of God's grace in Jesus is given.

This period of acceptance is also preached elsewhere. It is decision time now: one must repent or one will be judged (Lk. 11,31-32). The vintner (Jesus) in the parable of the fig tree asks for some time (a year) to work on the tree (Israel) before he cuts it down (Lk. 13,8). Before the time of eschatological judgment vintner Jesus labors on Israel to make it fruitful. As Jens Gillner states: "the present also becomes decision time in the Gospel of Luke."<sup>9</sup>

What does this decision include? Luke makes this abundantly clear in Luke-Acts: repentance and conversion (Act. 3,26; 17,30; 20,21; 26,18).<sup>10</sup> John the Baptist exhorts his hearers to repent and live a life according to the standards of their repentance (Lk. 3,8). Gillner states that in Luke 13,1-9 Luke's theology of divine retribution can be found *in nuce*.<sup>11</sup> Jesus confronts

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<sup>7</sup> The reason is not given, although some manuscripts and textual traditions insert the explanation that "the Son of Man has not come to ruin, but to save."

<sup>8</sup> For a study of the full quotation, see B.J. Koet, "Today this Scripture has been Fulfilled in Your Ears'. Jesus' Explanation of Scripture in Luke 4,16-30", *Bijdragen* 47 (1986), 368-394.

<sup>9</sup> J. Gillner, *Gericht bei Lukas*, WUNT II/401 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 70: "Die Gegenwart wird so auch im Lukasevangelium zur Entscheidungszeit."

<sup>10</sup> Conversion in Luke-Acts does not entail the transition from Judaism to Christianity, as some may think when reading the word "conversion" in Christian contexts. Joel B. Green (*Conversion in Luke-Acts. Divine Action, Human Cognition, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 162) provides a helpful definition of converts: "converts are those who have undergone a redirectional shift and are now on the move with the community of those faithfully serving God's eschatological purpose." Italics are Green's.

<sup>11</sup> Gillner, *Gericht*, 143-173.

his hearers with his message of repentance: they will perish (*ἀπολείσθη*) in the future when they do not convert and repent now (Lk. 13,1-5; cf. Act. 8,18-23). To be part of the great eschatological dinner one must carry the cross of discipleship (Lk. 14,25-35). In the parable of the rich man and the poor Lazarus Jesus makes clear what the consequences are when one rejects the word of God brought by the prophets (and thus by Jesus) (Lk. 16,29).<sup>12</sup> One must pray to be empowered and found worthy for the Son of Man in the Parousia (Lk. 21,36). The real honor is for those who are humble (Lk. 22,26-27; cf. Lk. 1,52). The one on the cross next to Jesus is justified because he showed repentance (Lk. 23,43).

Jesus plays an important role in the repentance of Israel. He is the messianic King (Lk. 19,38) and the one who will judge (Lk. 3,16-17; 22,30; Act. 10,42; 17,31). It becomes evidently clear in the Gospel however that Jesus evokes resistance and unbelief. He brings the gospel of repentance and conversion in the time of God's grace (Lk. 4,19; 13,8), but most hearers do not believe. The hearers of Jesus are described as an "evil generation" (*γενεὰ πονηρά*), because they want a sign to believe (Lk. 11,29). Jesus in Luke's narrative states that Israel heard the message of repentance of Jonah and the One who is more than Jonah preaches the same gospel (Lk. 11,32). Jesus cries over Jerusalem, because it has not believed in Jesus and thus blinded its own sight (Lk. 19,41-42). The city will be destroyed, because on the "time of visitation" (*καιρὸν τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς*) they have not acknowledged Jesus (Lk. 19,43-44). He states that the Sanhedrin will not believe him being the Messiah when he says it is so (Lk. 22,67). This unbelief and refusal to repent will be punished in the fall of Jerusalem and the Parousia, as Jesus tells in Luke 21, which we will examine later.

Luke's theology of divine retribution can be sketched as follows. There will be a future divine judgment in which repentance, conversion, and belief in Jesus the Messiah are central. The time before this eschatological verdict are considered to be days of grace and mercy. The message of Jesus the Messiah is spread throughout Israel and later on among the Gentiles. Several texts which contain vengeance scenes fit this narrative matrix of retribution.

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<sup>12</sup> Gillner, *Gericht*, 240.

#### 4.1.2 Vengeance scenes in Luke-Acts

This research could focus on texts which explicitly display vengeance vocabulary. The motif of vengeance however is sometimes employed without any words that can be counted as vengeance vocabulary. This section will give a short overview of texts in which vengeance is involved and will answer the question how these texts fit the Lukan theology divine retribution as sketched above.

Vengeance plays an important role in Luke 12,41-48 (cf. Matth. 24,45-51), a parable in which a steward (οἰκονόμος, cf. Lk. 16,1) who is faithful to his calling is rewarded, while a slave who is unprepared and shows dishonorable behavior (beating others, abuse of food and drinks) will be cleaved in half (διχοτομήσει) (Lk. 12,46).<sup>13</sup> The stewardship is probably quite practical: in line with the parable of the Unjust Steward in Lk. 16,1-8, stewardship probably includes caring for the vulnerable.<sup>14</sup> For Luke the present behavior of repentance and Kingdom-like behavior is decisive for avoiding future judgment.

In Luke 20,9-19 Jesus narrates the parable of the Wicked Tenants, in which at the proper time (καιρῷ) for the owner of a vineyard to collect his share, the tenants treat his slaves dishonorably (ἀτιμάσαντες) and even kill his beloved son. Eventually, Jesus says, the owner himself will come and destroy (ἀπολέσει) them and give the vineyard to others, i.e. the Gentiles. God will avenge the dishonorable behavior of the people of Jerusalem. They have killed the prophets and in the future they will kill Jesus, the Son of God (cf. Lk. 11,49-51). Therefore, he will punish them as a form of divine justice.

Acts 1 tells the story of the Ascension, but also of a speech by Peter and the choice of Matthias as the successor of Judas (Act. 1,15-26). In his speech Peter addresses the death of Judas. In Peter's speech the financial motif is prominent: from the "reward of his wickedness" (μισθός τῆς ἀδικίας)

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<sup>13</sup> For the context and meaning of διχοτομήσει, see T.A. Friedrichsen, "A Note on καὶ διχοτομήσει αὐτόν (Luke 12:46 and the Parallel in Matthew 24:51)", *CBQ* 61 (2001), 258-264.

<sup>14</sup> C.M. Hays, "Slaughtering Stewards and Incarcerating Debtors. Coercing Charity in Luke 12:35-13:9", *Neotestamentica* 46 (2012), 41-60.

Judas bought a piece of land (χωρίον) (Act. 1,18).<sup>15</sup> Due to his actions against Jesus and his greed he is punished severely.<sup>16</sup> The field of Judas becomes the Field of Blood. The retributive character of Judas' death is apparent in the quotation of Psalm 68,26 LXX in verse 20. The context of this psalm presupposes divine retribution: the poet asks YHWH to exact vengeance on his enemies (Ps. 68,23-25 LXX). Zwiep states justly: "The whole narrative pattern strongly suggests an air of divine retribution."<sup>17</sup> God's divine judgment thus becomes present reality when Judas exhibits deeds which dishonor God and show his greed. He received grace and even became apostle, but in the end he demonstrated no repentance and conversion towards Jesus. He was a threat for the church and had to be eliminated by God.

The death of Ananias and Sapphira also involves a piece of land (χωρίον) (Act. 5,1-11). The two have seen the example of Joses Barnabas who gives up his field to donate it to the church (Act. 4,36-37). This was an example for Luke of the Christian community being "of one heart and soul": they shared their possessions with others within the community (Act. 4,32). Ananias and Sapphira also sell their land, but they keep a share of the profit for themselves. Luke makes clear in Acts that the community sharing their possessions was an effect of the work of the Holy Spirit, because one did not hinge on wealth and possessing goods. Instead of being one of heart and soul with the community, Ananias and Sapphira opened up their hearts for Satan's work of division.<sup>18</sup> They want to share with the community, but not to their detriment. Peter, as an apostolic prophet, confronts Ananias and Sapphira with this masquerade. They were not forced to sell, and when they did, they became dishonest and lied. The severity of this deed is indicated by Peter: they did not lie against him, but against God who created this community

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<sup>15</sup> A.W. Zwiep, "Judas Iskariot. De rare sprongen van een kat met (minstens) negen levens", *Kerk en Theologie* 71 (2020), 37-54.

<sup>16</sup> The function of the graphic description of Judas' death and also of the death of Herod in Acts 12 is probably twofold. First, it underlines the evil nature of their character and deeds and the equal punishment God gives to them. Their slight of God is answered with this dishonoring treatment. Second, it ensures the readers that God is in control and will eradicate all opposition completely. See A.W. Zwiep, *Judas and the Choice of Matthias*, WUNT II/187 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 177.

<sup>17</sup> Zwiep, *Judas*, 149.

<sup>18</sup> R.F. O'Toole, "'You Did Not Lie to Us (Human Beings) but to God' (Acts 5,4c)", *Biblica* 76 (1995), 182-209. The struggle of Jesus and the early Christian community with Satan concerning authority is an important feature in Luke-Acts, see S.R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil. Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

through the Spirit and who appointed Peter as apostle.<sup>19</sup> God strikes them for dishonoring him and his community: he exacts justice upon Ananias and Sapphira by taking their lives. Their action stood in the way of the blossoming of the early church and must be eradicated.<sup>20</sup> The point of Luke inserting this history is concisely stated by Crabbe: “The overriding message is that Ananias and Sapphira have opposed God and, as a sign of reassurance for readers who seek to follow the divine purpose, such behavior never ultimately succeeds.”<sup>21</sup> Their choices and lies dishonored God and the Christian community and exhibited a lifestyle not compatible with repentance and conversion.

Luke reports the death of Herod Agrippa in Acts 12,19b-24.<sup>22</sup> He is characterized in Acts 12 as a merciless tyrant: he kills James (Act. 12,1-2) and captures Peter during Passover (Act. 12,3-4).<sup>23</sup> Herod wants to show his power to the Tyrians and Sidonians, which came to him to settle a dispute. He puts on his royal clothing (ἐσθῆτα βασιλικὴν). On the judgment seat (βῆμα) he delivers a speech to all attendees<sup>24</sup> and in reaction to his speech those present start to honor him as a god.<sup>25</sup> The legitimate reaction to this idolatrous worship is noted by Luke in other places. Peter, Paul, and Barnabas are also worshipped as gods, but they reject this claim for they are only humans (Act. 10,25-26; 14,11-15). Herod however does not say a thing, thereby accepting the idolatrous honor. The gesture of honor given to him is not answered by Herod, but by God. An angel of the Lord immediately reacts with destructive force. He strikes down (ἐπάταξεν) Herod, “because he did not give

<sup>19</sup> O’Toole, “You Did Not Lie”.

<sup>20</sup> M. Ertl, *Göttliche Vergeltung in der Apostelgeschichte unter Berücksichtigung des literarischen Umfelds* (unpublished dissertation LMU München, 2016), 231-233.

<sup>21</sup> K. Crabbe, *Luke/Acts and the End of History*, BZNT 238 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 249.

<sup>22</sup> For biographical information on Herod Agrippa I, see D.R. Schwartz, *Agrippa I. The Last King of Judaea*, TSAJ 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990). The different Herods play a remarkable role in Luke-Acts, see F.E. Dicken, *Herod as a Composite Character in Luke-Acts*, WUNT II/375 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> A parallel between Peter’s capture during Passover and Jesus’ capture during Passover is obvious. See D.P. Moessner, “‘The Christ must Suffer’. New Light on the Jesus-Peter, Stephen, Paul Parallels in Luke-Acts”, *NovT* 38 (1986), 220-256.

<sup>24</sup> This pericope contains several *hapax legomena* in the New Testament: “being angry” (θυμομάχέω), “to deliver a speech” (δημηγορέω), and “eaten by worms” (σκοληκόβρωτος).

<sup>25</sup> In Josephus’ version of the story, the attendees start to honor him for his clothing (*Ant.* XIX,344-345). Luke however focuses on his voice and speech, contrasting this idolatry with the divine speech of God. See B.E. Wilson, “Hearing the Word and Seeing the Light. Voice and Vision in Acts”, *JSNT* 38 (2016), 456-481.

the honor to God” (ἀνθ’ ὧν οὐκ ἔδωκεν τὴν δόξαν τῷ θεῷ) (Act. 12,23). Sitting on his judgment seat he is judged by the divine Judge. He is “eaten by worms” (σκωληκόβρωτος) and dies.<sup>26</sup> The result of his death is not disarray, but expansion: the word of God is spreading (Act. 12,24). God makes room for the Christian mission by eradicating its threatening enemy.<sup>27</sup> The words of the Magnificat are affirmed yet again: “he has brought down rulers from thrones” (Luk. 1,52a).<sup>28</sup>

In Cyprus Paul and Barnabas meet the magician Barjesus or Elymas who tries to stop Sergius Paulus from believing the message of Paul. Paul then curses him through the power of the Spirit (Act. 13,9) and God immediately punishes Elymas with blindness (Act. 13,11).<sup>29</sup> He stood in the way of the preaching of the Word of God to Sergius Paulus and therefore he is a “son of the devil” (υἱός διαβόλου) (Act. 13,10). The hand of the Lord is against him and gives him blindness (Act. 13,11), while Sergius Paulus repents and believes (Act. 13,12). Ertl summarizes this text concisely: “who stands in the way of the spread of the message of salvation can ultimately be considered an enemy of God.”<sup>30</sup>

These vengeance texts provide important features of Luke’s understanding of vengeance in his twofold work, such as honor, reciprocity, and justice. These findings can be combined with the texts which contain explicit vengeance vocabulary. These texts will be examined next.

#### 4.2 Specific Vengeance Texts in Luke-Acts

This section will focus on the vengeance texts in Luke-Acts which contain specific vengeance vocabulary. This vocabulary is quite limited however.

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Africa (“Worms and the Death of Kings. A Cautionary Note on Disease and History”, *Classical Antiquity* 1 (1982), 1-17) states that Luke probably refers here to the disease of phthiriasis, an infestation with pubic lice. This suggestion however is quite far-fetched. Σκωληκόβρωτος probably points to the cruelty of Herod’s death, a literary motif also used for Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 2 Maccabees 9,9. See W. Nestle, “Legenden vom Tod der Gottesverächter”, *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 33 (1936), 246-269.

<sup>27</sup> Allen, *Death*, 144-146.

<sup>28</sup> There are more parallels to the Gospel of Luke in Acts 12. See Moessner, “‘Christ’”.

<sup>29</sup> B.H.M. Kent, “Curses in Acts. Hearing the Apostles’ Words of Judgment Alongside ‘Magical’ Spell Texts”, *JSNT* 39 (2017), 412-440.

<sup>30</sup> Ertl, *Göttliche Vergeltung*, 175: “Wer sich aber der Ausbreitung der Heilsbotschaft in den Weg stellt, kann letztlich auch als Gottesfeind gesehen werden.”

Luke, like other New Testament authors, uses δίκη and its composites (ἐκδίκειν, ἐκδίκησις) to denote an act of vengeance. This vocabulary is commonly used in the LXX and Early Jewish literature to describe vengeance, sources which Luke probably used. Translations of δίκη, ἐκδίκειν, and ἐκδίκησις as “retribution” or “restorative justice” touch upon important features, but these translations are not accurate when one wants to hear what Jesus in Luke’s narrative is saying. The conventional translation “vengeance” can be justified historically and linguistically.

This section will take an exegetical and theological-hermeneutical look at these texts. The examination of the different texts will be similarly constructed: first a contextual analysis, then an exegesis of the text, and finally some theological-hermeneutical reflections on vengeance in the specific text. The texts are examined in different sections: Luke 18,1-8 in 4.2.1, Luke 21,22 in 4.2.2, Acts 7,24 in 4.2.3, and Acts 28,4 in 4.2.4. This section will be closed with a conclusion (4.2.6).

#### 4.2.1 Luke 18,1-8

*He told them a parable about the need to always pray and not to give up.*

*“There was a certain judge in a certain town, who did not fear God and did not respect people. There was a widow in the town and she constantly came to him and said: ‘Execute vengeance for me on my opponent.’ He refused it for a while, but then he said to himself: ‘although I do not fear God and do not respect anyone, I will execute vengeance for her, so that she will not come in the end and hit me in the face, because this widow harasses me.’”*

*The Lord said: “Hear what the unjust judge says. Will God not execute vengeance for the elect who cry to him day and night? Will he keep them waiting for long? I tell you that he will quickly execute vengeance. But will the Son of Man, when he comes, find faith on earth?”*

Luke narrates a parable of Jesus which centers on prayer and justice, in which vengeance is a recurring theme. The parable of Luke 18,1-8 provides us with a good example of the need of a holistic view on vengeance in its ancient context. The pericope cannot be understood properly when one does not take notions of honor, reciprocity, and justice into account. We will first look at the context of the parable (4.2.1.1), then to the parable itself (4.2.1.2), and we

will close this section with a theological-hermeneutical exploration of the definition and function of vengeance in the parable (4.2.1.3).

#### 4.2.1.1 *The context of Luke 18,1-8*

The context of Luke 18,1-8 shows that Luke has framed the parable eschatologically.<sup>31</sup> Prior to the parable, Jesus has narrated the coming of the Son of Man (Lk 17,20; 17,22). Luke frames Jesus' arrival in the style of the Old Testament prophets ("the day of the Lord"), as a declaration of salvation and mischief.<sup>32</sup> The examples of Noah and Lot describe this double function of the eschatological day of the Son of Man: there will be salvation for believers, just as Noah and Lot were saved in the Ark and from Sodom, but the unbelievers will be repudiated (Lk 17,29). The key to salvation or judgment is the ministry of Jesus, as Luke 17,20-21 shows.<sup>33</sup>

Jesus in Luke's narrative makes it clear that the days in which the disciples live are determined by the Parousia. Young Ho Kim rightfully says: "the present 'days of the Son of Man' acquire their specific meaning from the perspective of the 'Day' (Parousia)."<sup>34</sup> One can see this influence of the Parousia in the examples of Noah and Lot and also in the narration of mundane activities in Luke 17,34-36. The present ordinary life is apprehended in the compelling matrix of the Parousia. The disciples must reckon with the sudden, but already announced coming of the Son of Man.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> J.D.M. Derrett ("Law in the New Testament. The Parable of the Unjust Judge", *NTS* 18 (1971-1972), 178-191) argues that Luke 18,1-8 has nothing to do with eschatology. The context however implies the opposite. T.J. Lang ("'You will not desire to see and you will not see [it]'. Reading Luke 17.22 as Antanaclysis", *JSNT* 33 (2011), 281-302) denies that Luke 17,22-37 concerns the Parousia. He is quite solitary in this point of view though. See Y.H. Kim, *Die Parusie bei Lukas. Eine literarisch-exegetische Untersuchung zu den Parusieausagen im lukanischen Doppelwerk*, BZNW 217 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 180-181.

<sup>32</sup> Kim, *Parusie*, 212, note 177 for Old Testament texts. Luke is influenced by the Old Testament notion of the "day of the Lord", but one cannot ignore the relationship between Luke 17 and the omission of the "day of retribution" in Luke 4,19b. Now it is the time of the message of grace and people can respond (hence the omission in Lk. 4,19b), but in the day of the Lord salvation and vengeance will come definitively.

<sup>33</sup> J.T. Carroll, *Response to the End of History. Eschatology and Situation in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 92 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 88.

<sup>34</sup> Kim, *Parusie*, 224.

<sup>35</sup> Carroll, *Response*, 72-76.



The parable is followed by Jesus' teaching about rightful prayer, aimed against the Pharisees (Lk. 18,9-14). Luke 18,9-14 continues Jesus' teaching about prayer, but with the focus on the ethics: how does one pray rightly? Jesus in Luke's narrative states that the right attitude towards prayer is characterized not by self-exaltation (ὑψῶν ἑαυτόν), but by humility (ταπεινῶν ἑαυτόν). In the Parousia the reality will be different: those who deemed themselves honorable will be dishonored, and those who deemed themselves dishonorable will be honored (Lk. 18,14).

The preceding and following passages thus frame the parable of Luke 18,1-8 in a matrix of eschatology, honor, and reciprocity. This framework thus must be elaborated in our understanding of the parable in Luke 18,1-8 and the meaning and function of vengeance within the parable.

#### 4.2.1.2 *The parable of Luke 18,1-8*

Luke 18,1 is an unmistakably Lucan comment on the parable that follows. Luke focuses the message of the parable on Jesus' admonition to keep on praying despite difficult circumstances.<sup>36</sup> Persevering prayer shows the preparedness for the day of the Son of Man (Lk, 18,8).<sup>37</sup> The setting of the parable is vague: Jesus speaks of "a certain town" (τινὶ πόλει) and "a certain judge" (κριτῆς τις), making the parable universally applicable. The Romans "tended to let local indigenous laws and legal customs prevail, challenging them only when they posed a threat to the empire."<sup>38</sup> The image which Jesus transposes in the parable agrees with reality: citizens of a lower status in society (*humiliores*) were treated badly and complaints of people with a low social position were often not treated, especially when their complaints were

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<sup>36</sup> For prayer in Luke's gospel, see D. Crump, *Jesus The Intercessor. Prayer and Christology in Luke-Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1999); I.H. Marshall, "Jesus. Example and Teacher of Prayer in the Synoptic Gospels", in: R. Longenecker (ed.), *Into God's Presence. Prayer in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 113-131.

<sup>37</sup> G.O. Holmås, *Prayer and Vindication in Luke-Acts. The Theme of Prayer within the Context of the Legitimizing and Edifying Objective of the Lukan Narrative*, LNTS 433 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2011), 139.

<sup>38</sup> C.S. Wansink, "Roman Law and Legal System", *DNTB*, 986.

against more honorable citizens.<sup>39</sup> Judges themselves were also from a higher social status and misuse of their offices was common.<sup>40</sup>

Luke describes this judge with two participial clauses: he does not fear God (τὸν θεὸν μὴ φοβούμενος) and he does not respect people (ἄνθρωπον μὴ ἐντρέπόμενος<sup>41</sup>) (Lk. 18,2). This judge does not possess two important features of a worthy judge, as spelled out in Deuteronomy 16: the awareness that the office of judge was divinely appointed, and honoring people by giving a just verdict without regard to status (Deut. 16,18-20; cf. Deut. 17,9). The judge deems himself honorable for these character traits, as can be seen in his boasting in verse 4c. This judge is self-sufficient in his honor, but Jesus paints him in dishonorable colors.

A widow is introduced as an opposite to the judge. Luke mentions the figure of the widow often in his gospel (Lk. 2,37; 7,12; 21,3), probably for two reasons. The first reason is that Luke often implements elements of the Old Testament narratives of Elijah and Elisha in his work (cf. Lk. 4,25-26). Luke does not equate Jesus with Elijah or Elisha in his gospel, but Jesus' acts are sometimes interpreted and described in the perspective of the Old Testament stories of Elijah and Elisha.<sup>42</sup> The figure of the widow is found twice in the stories of Elijah and Elisha in the books of Kings (1 King. 17,7-24; 2 King. 4,1-7), thus strengthening the parallel between their ministry and the ministry of Jesus. The second reason is that the widow embodies two important groups which Luke frequently highlights: women and the poor.<sup>43</sup>

Widows were women who were placed in the lowest regions in societal hierarchy: they were poor and had no husband to obtain honor from and

<sup>39</sup> Wansink, "Roman Law", 987.

<sup>40</sup> W. Cotter, "The Parable of the Feisty Widow and the Threatened Judge (Luke 18.1-8)", *NTS* 51 (2005), 332.

<sup>41</sup> Ἐντρέπω could mean "not being ashamed" (1 Cor. 4,14), but in its medial form it means "to respect someone, to esteem" (Mark. 12,6; Luk. 20,13).

<sup>42</sup> See C.A. Evans, "Luke's use of the Elijah/Elisha Narratives and the ethic of election" *JBL* 106/1 (1987) 75-83. T.L. Brodie ("Towards Unravelling Luke's use of the Old Testament: Luke 7.11-17 as an Imitatio of 1 Kings 17.17-24", *NTS* 32 (1986) 247-267) describes Luke's style as mimetic, equating Elijah/Elisha and Jesus. The remark of John Nolland (*Luke 1-9:50*, WBC (Dallas, TX: Word Books Publisher 1989), 322) on Brodie's conclusions is legitimate: "this line of interpretation quite mistakes the anthological style – which is concerned not with the fulfilment of prophecy but with the interpretation of God's present acts in line with those of the past."

<sup>43</sup> J.P. Versteeg, *Evangelie in viervoud. Een karakteristiek van de vier evangeliën*, Bijbel en Gemeente 16 (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 74-85; Bock, *Theology*, 344-357; F.S. Spencer, "Women", *DJG*, 1010.

who defended them.<sup>44</sup> The behavior of this widow is deemed inappropriate and dishonorable in the social context. Cotter rightfully states: “women’s ‘natural condition’ belonged in the domestic, private sphere of the home, not in the public male domain of the courts.”<sup>45</sup> The demand of the widow is simple: she wants to have an avenger against her antagonist (ἀντιδίκος). It is not clear what her antagonist did to her, but she is convinced that she has a legitimate cause. The strong will of the woman becomes clear when the judge (dishonorably) refuses to do justice. The imperfect ἤρχετο (‘to come’) is rightfully read by most commentators as an iterative-durative imperfect: she is constantly coming to him with the same question. The weak widow turns out to be a power-woman.

Luke then narrates an inner dialogue of the judge. This judge deems his unbelief and disrespect honorable, but he fears the woman. She causes trouble (παρέχειν κόπον) and he even fears that she will come eventually and give him a black eye (ὕπωπιάζη).<sup>46</sup> The man of high status with the powerful office fears a dishonoring treatment of a manly woman of lower stature. The influential man gives in to the widow and will execute vengeance for her. The judge infringes his masculinity, because he makes it clear that this decision was not made out of noble consideration, but out of fright for a ‘weak’ woman.

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<sup>44</sup> There are indeed some exceptions to this conventional image of widows, as Cotter (“Parable”) shows. The dependence of Luke on the Elijah/Elisha depiction of the widow (and the Old Testament use of the oppressed widow in for instance Psalm 94,6 and Isaiah 10), the general image of widows, and the probable explanation of the parable as prayer in times of need indicate that it is more plausible to argue that the image of the widow in Luke 18,1-8 is conventional. See M. Leineweber, *Lukas und die Witwen. Eine Botschaft an die Gemeinden in der hellenistisch-römischen Gesellschaft*, EHS XXIII/915 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> Cotter, “Parable”, 333.

<sup>46</sup> The word ὕπωπιάζη is a notoriously difficult word. The word stems from the world of boxing (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1413a22; Philostratus Maior, *Imag.* II.6.3; Plutarch, *Fac. Lun.* 921f) and means “to cause a black eye”. Some commentators argue that the word has to be understood metaphorically as in 1 Corinthians 9,27, meaning “to scold, to ridicule, to tire” (D. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1449) or that the word is derived from an Aramaic equivalent which means “to blackface” (Derrett, “Law”, 191). These explanations are improbable. The judge fears what she wants to do to him *at the moment*, and not what will be the aftermath (Cotter, “Parable”, 339). The meaning given by Marshall and Bock cannot be found in other texts. See M. Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, HNT 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 588; J.R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids/Nottingham: Eerdmans/Apollos, 2015), 498.

Jesus then connects his teaching about prayer and justice to this parable.<sup>47</sup> He draws attention to the judge and what he is saying (Luk. 18,6). Jesus calls the judge “unjust” (ὁ κριτῆς τῆς ἀδικίας). A Jewish reading rule is applied: the (implicit) comparison from smaller to greater (*qal wa-chomer* or *a minore ad maius*).<sup>48</sup> God’s acts are compared to the acts of the unjust judge. If a corrupt judge gives in to the plea of the widow after a while, how much more will the highest and purest judge exact vengeance (ποιήσῃ τὴν ἐκδίκησιν) when his elect (ἐκλεκτοί) will pray for vengeance? Their prayer is continuous (day and night) and they have to persevere in prayer, just as the widow constantly visited the judge and had to wait for the execution of his verdict.

Jesus assures the disciples that God will avenge them quickly<sup>49</sup>, in contrast to the unjust judge. They will have to persevere, because the answer to their prayers will come swiftly, on God’s (eschatological) time. It is sure however that God will answer their petitionary efforts.<sup>50</sup> The uncertainty lies not with the divine Judge but with the ability of the elect to persevere. The faith (πίστις) mentioned in Luke 18,8 does not mean ‘orthodox faith’, but it intends to describe the attitude of perseverance in hard times and the trust that God will eventually exact retribution.<sup>51</sup>

The parable and its explanation thus function as a piece of Jesus’ teaching to his disciples about prayer and justice. Holmås summarizes the pericope succinctly:

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<sup>47</sup> The unity of Luke 18,1-8 is sometimes questioned: verses 6-8 are considered to be secondary. See J.M. Hicks, “The Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18: 1-8)”, *ResQ* 33 (1991), 209-223 for a strong defense of the unity of Luke 18,1-8.

<sup>48</sup> For ancient Jewish reading rules, often known as the rules of Hillel, in Luke’s gospel, see J.W. Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1953); C.A. Kimball, *Jesus’ Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke’s Gospel*, JSNTSup 94 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 56-60. For the rhetorical technique of *a minore ad maius*, see H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik. Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft* (München: Max Huber Verlag, 1973<sup>2</sup>), 219 (§397).

<sup>49</sup> The phrase ἐν τάχει is by some commentators translated as “quick” (Marshall, Schweizer, Fitzmyer, Bock, Garland, Green, Wolter), by others as “sure” (Edwards), and another group translates the phrase as “sudden” (Bovon; C. Spicq, “La parabole de la veuve obstinée et du juge inerte, aux décisions impromptues (Lc. xviii, 1-8)”, *RB* 68 (1961), 68-90; G. Delling, “Das Gleichnis vom Gottlosen Richter”, *ZNW* 53 (1962), 1-25). The translation “quick” seems to be the most fitting: God will retribute quickly in contrast to the long period (ἐπὶ χρόνον) of decision-making of the unjust judge.

<sup>50</sup> Holmås, *Prayer*, 140.

<sup>51</sup> Kim, *Parusie*, 223-224. See also D.R. Catchpole, “The Son of Man’s Search for Faith (Luke XVIII 8b)”, *NovT* 19 (1977), 81-104.

The Lukan Jesus urges prayer because it is itself a most dynamic expression of hopeful anticipation and unreserved reliance on God's capacity and readiness to save, i.e. what Luke calls the faith. As such, persistent prayer is for Luke the antidote to the distractions and dangers of the present time that threaten to deprive the believers of spiritual vigilance. Incessant prayer embodies indomitable dedication towards God's end-time agenda and a firm belief in his promise to act benevolently on the part of the elect in providing eschatological vindication (...) over against any faith-threatening despondency caused by the pressures of worldly existence in the present.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4.2.1.3 Theological-Hermeneutical Reflections on Vengeance in Luke 18,1-8

Christoph Niemand touches upon the underlying theological and hermeneutical difficulties which most commentators experience with vengeance in Luke 18,1-8. He states that the combination of God and vengeance provides "several problems which make it difficult to hear biblical texts in their own linguistic matrix."<sup>53</sup> Commentators hurry to explain that "vengeance" (ἐκδίκησις) and "to avenge" (ἐκδίδκειν) mean "to provide justice". The eagerness to downsize and explain vengeance reveals modern theological and hermeneutical sensitivities concerning vengeance, which Niemand exposes in his article.<sup>54</sup>

According to Luke 18,1-8, vengeance is a divine act. The widow does not execute vengeance herself, but she tries to obtain justice through the unjust judge. In the same way, Jesus implicitly makes clear that believers cannot take matters into their own hands. They have to persevere in prayer to God who will come and avenge evil on their antagonists. In this way Luke 18,1-8

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<sup>52</sup> Holmås, *Prayer*, 141. See also Spicq, "Parabole", 90; Carroll, *Response*, 95-96; Kim, *Parusie*, 225.

<sup>53</sup> C. Niemand, "Übersetzungsprobleme im Gleichnis vom Richter und der Witwe (Lk 18,1-8)", *SNTU* 35 (2010), 121: "mehrere Probleme, die es schwierig machen, biblische Texte nahe an ihrer eigenen Sprachwelt (auch nur) zu hören."

<sup>54</sup> See also Allen, *Death*, 202: "Luke's use of retribution has generally been neglected by scholarship. Perhaps this neglect is due to modern sensitivities which find a theology of retribution unappealing. Nevertheless, it was a theme of some importance in the ancient world"

resembles the depiction of the prayer of the martyrs in Revelation 6,9-11. It is God who will restore justice and give the believers their just vengeance.

Secondly, vengeance must be seen in the context of justice, honor, and reciprocity. The parable and its explanation contain terms and concepts which can only be understood in a legal context: “judge” (κρίτης), “antagonist” (ἀντιδίκος), an accusation, and a plea for action.<sup>55</sup> As we have seen, justice is intimately connected with honor. Justice restores one’s honor which has been damaged by an action or word of an antagonist. The widow and the elect ask the judge to rectify the balance of honor and to do them justice. They want legal retribution, because the assailant has slighted them and they want to return an equal punishment through the judge to get things even. The elect call upon God to exact vengeance, i.e. to retribute the wrongs which are done against them and to restore and emphasize their position as his elect.

The last sentence shows that the concept of vengeance in Luke 18 can be understood in terms of kin and covenant. The widow asks the judge to avenge her, probably because she has no avenger. The familial connection becomes stronger when Jesus in Luke’s narrative explains the parable. The believers are called “his elect” (ἐκλεκτοί). This term can be used as a designation of individuals who are picked by God to occupy a special office or have a special task (2 Sam. 21,6; 1 Chron. 7,40), but also as a title for Israel as the chosen people of God who have a covenantal relationship with him (Ps. 104,6.43 LXX; Is. 42,1; cf. 4 Ezz. 5,23-27). In later times this term is used to denote the faithful within Israel (Is. 65,9) and from this narrow definition of “the elect” arises a universal and eschatological understanding of the chosen ones (CD A IV,3-4; 1 En. 62,8; 2 (Syr.) Bar. 48,20-24).<sup>56</sup> The believers are described as God’s eschatological faithful who can trust the God of the covenant. He will exact covenantal vengeance on their adversaries in the end of times when they cry to him for vengeance (Ps. 17,48 LXX; Jer. 11,20; Rev. 6,9-11).

It was demonstrated in the section above (4.2.1.1) that vengeance in Luke 18 must be understood eschatologically. The elect can pray for

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<sup>55</sup> See J.D. Hays, “‘Sell Everything You Have and Give to the Poor.’ The Old Testament Prophetic Theme of Justice as the Connecting Motif of Luke 18:1-19:10”, *JETS* 55 (2012), 43-63.

<sup>56</sup> G. Schrenk, “ἐκλέγομαι, ἐκλογή, ἐκλεκτός”, *TWNT* IV, 189; J.L. Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, WBC 35B (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 869.

vengeance in the present, but they only can await the execution of vengeance in the eschaton.<sup>57</sup> This eschaton however is near: God will come fast to exact vengeance (Lk. 18,8). Evil will be punished and the evildoers will receive their fair share for their deeds. Thus, the elect must be faithful and persevering in prayer to receive the fulfillment of their desire for vengeance on those who oppress them in the present.<sup>58</sup>

Jesus in Luke's narrative thus highlights vengeance in this parable about prayer and justice. He does not refrain from using it, but applies the notion of vengeance to God's actions in the eschaton for the believers. Many theological and hermeneutical aspects of vengeance found in Luke 18 are also present in Luke 21,20-24, which is the subject of the next section.

#### 4.2.2 Luke 21,22

*Because these are the days of vengeance, of the fulfillment of all that has been written*

Luke 21,20-24 narrates Jesus foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem to his disciples. Luke 21,20-24 parallels Mark 13,14-20 and Matthew 24,15-22, but there are significant differences. It appears that Mark and Matthew describe the destruction of Jerusalem in the colors of the Old Testament prophet Daniel.<sup>59</sup> Luke, however, takes a different approach. I will argue that Luke describes the destruction of Jerusalem in an amalgam of Old Testament prophecies of judgment.

This section will first look at the context of Luke 21,20-24 (4.2.2.1). Section 4.2.2.2 will focus on Luke 21,20-24. The paragraph will be closed with some reflections on the theological and hermeneutical meaning of vengeance in Luke 21,20-24 (4.2.2.3).

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<sup>57</sup> For a deconstruction of the thesis of *Parusieverzögerung* in Luke, see Crabbe, *Luke/Acts*.

<sup>58</sup> R. von Bendemann, *Zwischen ΔΟΞΑ und ΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ. Eine exegetische Untersuchung der Texte des sogenannten Reiseberichts im Lukasevangelium*, BZNW 101 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 250-254.

<sup>59</sup> F. Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas (19,28-24,53)*, EKKNT III/4 (Neukirchen-Vluyn/Düsseldorf: Neukirchener Verlag/Patmos Verlag, 2009), 182.

#### 4.2.2.1 *The Context of Luke 21,20-24*

Luke already spoke about the demise of Israel in Luke 11. Jerusalem will fall, because God will hold the Israelite elite responsible (ἐκζητηθήσεται) for the rejection and murder of the prophets he had sent to warn them (Lk. 11,50-51). Jesus places himself and his message in the tradition of the rejected prophets. The Pharisees will reject Jesus and his message just like they did with other prophets of God. The fall of Jerusalem is also discussed in Luke 19. Jesus cries and begs that Jerusalem will accept his message (Lk. 19,42). Times will come in which Jerusalem will be surrounded and the city will be destroyed. Luke then writes that Jerusalem, at the time of God's visit, did not recognize it as his visitation (Lk. 19,44).<sup>60</sup>

Luke 21 starts Jesus' eschatological discourse after remarks about the temple in Jerusalem (Lk. 21,5). Jesus prophesies that the temple will be destroyed. A shock for his hearers, because the destruction of the temple meant the end of times.<sup>61</sup> That is the reason why they ask when these things will happen and what will be the sign of the beginning of these times (Lk. 21,7). Jesus does not immediately start with his eschatological discourse, but narrates several events which will take place before the end of times will come. Carroll states correctly:

Verses 12-24, while not portraying end-time events, link the recent past of Luke's church to the awaited Parousia. The outcome of this phase clarification is that Luke places his own community within the closing chapter of the period before the End. There they are to await an imminent Parousia which, while its timing remains unknown and undecipherable, will assuredly come in a decisive manner for 'all who dwell on the face of the earth'.<sup>62</sup>

The followers of Jesus will suffer at the hands of the magistrates of Jerusalem (Lk. 21,8-19). They will be hated for their persevering faith in Jesus Christ, but this perseverance will bring them life (Lk. 21,19). Persecution is not a sign of the end of times, but as Cunningham describes "it is a sign of

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<sup>60</sup> C.H. Giblin, *The Destruction of Jerusalem According to Luke's Gospel*, AnBib 107 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1985), 87.

<sup>61</sup> Kim, *Parusie*, 232-233.

<sup>62</sup> Carroll, *Response*, 113. See also Kim, *Parusie*, 235.



the age.”<sup>63</sup> Luke reiterates the apocalyptic imagery of Mark and Matthew in Luke 21,25-36. The goal of Jesus’ eschatological discourse becomes clear in Luke 21,36. His hearers must be persevering in faith and be vigilant for the times to come. They must be faithful to be deemed worthy (κατισχύσητε) (Lk. 21,36). Jesus thus does not really answer the question posed in Luke 21,7, but redefines the Parousia. Jesus’ new definition does not center on the temple, but on himself. One’s eschatological fate will be determined by one’s relationship with Jesus.<sup>64</sup>

The fall of Jerusalem is thus not separated from the end of times according to Luke, nor is it identified with it. Instead the destruction of Jerusalem is a crucial event which is a type for the eschatological judgment to come.<sup>65</sup>

#### 4.2.2.2 *The fall of Jerusalem in Luke 21,20-24*

Some scholars already pointed out that Luke 21,20-24 is written in a prophetic fashion.<sup>66</sup> John Nolland argues that an Old Testament prophetic pattern can be distilled from Luke 21,20-24.<sup>67</sup> He states that several elements of Jeremiah 25 can be found in Luke 21,20-24, namely the fact that a judgment is called upon God’s people, that this judgment will be executed by the dominant nation at that time, that this dominant nation itself will also receive judgment for its sins, and that judgment begins in Jerusalem.<sup>68</sup> Nolland states that in the other Old Testament prophets the notions of judgment and the execution of

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<sup>63</sup> S. Cunningham, “*Through Many Tribulations*”. *The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts*, JSNTSup 142 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 133.

<sup>64</sup> Kim, *Parusie*, 251.

<sup>65</sup> Giblin, *Destruction*, 93.

<sup>66</sup> C.H. Dodd, “The Fall of Jerusalem and the ‘Abomination of Desolation’”, *JRS* 37 (1947), 47-54; B. Reicke, “Synoptic Prophecies on the Destruction of Jerusalem”, in: D.E. Aune (ed.), *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature*, Fs. A. Wikgren, Nov-TSup 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 121-134; L.G. Bloomquist, “Rhetorical Argumentation and the Culture of Apocalyptic. A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Luke 21”, in: S.E. Porter and D.L. Stamps (eds.), *The Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture. Essays from the 1996 Malibu Conference*, JSNTSup 180 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 173-209.

<sup>67</sup> J.L. Nolland, “‘The Times of the Nations’ and a Prophetic Pattern in Luke 21”, in: T.R. Hatina (ed.), *The Gospel of Luke. Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels 3*, LNTS 376 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010), 133-147.

<sup>68</sup> Nolland, “Times”.

this judgment by a dominant nation can also be detected. Luke 21 follows this pattern: “the assumption that Luke has made use of the prophetic pattern identified from Jeremiah 25 is commended by the snugness of its fit: it allows the intrinsic coherence of the material in Luke 21 to emerge clearly.”<sup>69</sup>

Luke 21,20 exhibits a certain prophetic style. The hearers will see Jerusalem surrounded (κυκλουμένην) by troops. The word Luke uses for troops (στρατοπέδων) is used in Jeremiah (Jer. 41,1 LXX; 48,12), but also in other parts of the Septuagint (Wisd. 12,8; 2 Macc. 8,12; 9,9; 4 Macc. 3,13). Jerusalem for Luke is the “axis point” of his work.<sup>70</sup> The hearers will see the city fall and know that its destruction is near. Luke uses just ἐρήμωσις instead of the broader Danielic allusion ὁ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως (“the abomination of desolation”) of Mark and Matthew (Mark. 13,14; Matth. 24,15). The allusion of Luke can be interpreted as a shortening of the Danielic allusion, but more plausible is an obvious reference to the expression in Jeremiah LXX (Jer. 4,7; 7,34; 22,5; 32,18; 51,6.22).<sup>71</sup> Luke thus evokes imagery of the destruction of Jerusalem in Old Testament prophetic writings. This destruction of the city, in Old Testament times executed in the rampage in 587/586 BCE by the Babylonians, is recapitulated in Luke 21.

Jesus in Luke’s narrative then calls the inhabitants of Judea in verse 21 to flee (φευγέτωσαν) into the mountains (εἰς τα ὄρη) (cf. Mark. 13,14; Matth. 24,16) and those in the midst of Jerusalem (οἱ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς) must depart (ἐκχωρεῖτωσαν). This incentive, in the style of Hebrew poetry (*parallelismus membrorum*), matches several Old Testament prophecies (Jer. 16,16; 28,6 LXX). The people from the fields around Jerusalem may not re-enter the city.

The reason for this incentive to flee and the prohibition to enter Jerusalem is given in verse 22. The days of vengeance (ἡμέραι ἐκδικήσεως) have dawned. Most commentaries point towards two possible Old Testament texts which Luke evokes: Hosea 9,7 and Jeremiah 28,6 LXX.<sup>72</sup> Luke probably did

<sup>69</sup> Nolland, “Times”, 147.

<sup>70</sup> H.J. Klauck, “Die Heilige Stadt. Jerusalem bei Philo und Lukas”, *Kairos* 28 (1986), 137.

<sup>71</sup> Dodd, “Fall of Jerusalem”, 49; Edwards, *Luke*, 602.

<sup>72</sup> Heinrich Baarlink (“Ein gnädiges Jahr des Herrn – und Tage der Vergeltung”, *ZNW* 73 (1982), 204-220) considers Isaiah 61,2 the Old Testament text which Luke uses here, followed by Dietrich Rusam (*Das Alte Testament bei Lukas*, BZNW 112 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 233). Luke evokes the memory of his readers by intentionally referring to days that will come in which God will exact his vengeance, referring to the omission of Isaiah 61,2b

not depend on one of those two texts for the expression “days of vengeance”, but echoes a plethora of Old Testament judgment texts. Luke refers to the fulfillment of “all the things that were written” (πάντα τὰ γεγραμμένα) in plural. Besides Jeremiah 28,6 LXX and Hosea 9,7 one could think of Isaiah 61,2b and even Deuteronomy 32,35. By using this expression he elicits the knowledge of his readers of these texts. He invites them to consider the fall of Jerusalem not as a random act of fate, but as a divine judgment and fulfillment of divine judgment prophecies. The fall of Jerusalem is God’s work and is in line with God’s previous revelations of judgment. Jerusalem has rejected Jesus as the Messiah (Lk. 13,34-35; 19,41-44) and it has started to oppress the people of God (Lk. 21,8-19).

The fall of Jerusalem cannot be the Parousia, because “the times of the Gentiles” must still come (Lk. 21,24). The reason that Luke uses the plural days (ἡμέραι) in verse 22 can be found in Luke 17,22-37. Jesus in Luke’s narrative discusses the eschatological Day of the Son of Man and days in which his disciples will long to these days (Lk. 17,22). These “days” are part of the eschatological times, but not the Parousia (the Day of the Son of Man).<sup>73</sup>

Jesus in Luke’s narrative continues in verse 23 with a woe statement (Lk. 6,25; 10,13; 11,42-52; 22,22). The woe statement is aimed this time at pregnant women (ταῖς ἐν γαστρὶ ἐχούσαις) (cf. Hos. 14,1) and young babies (ταῖς θηλαζούσαις) (cf. Jer. 51,7 LXX), two vulnerable groups who cannot move swiftly when danger happens. Pregnant women and young babies must fear these days, because there will be great distress (ἀνάγκη μεγάλη) in Jerusalem and wrath (ὀργή) against this people (τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ). Kylie Crabbe concludes that ἀνάγκη stresses the necessity and inevitability of the fall of

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in Luke 4,19b. That Luke points back to Luke 4,18-19 can also be seen by the use of αἰχμαλωτισθήσονται (“to be made prisoner”) in verse 24. The rare verb αἰχμαλωτίζω is also mentioned in Luke 4,18, where Jesus quotes a central motif in his ministry: “to proclaim freedom to the prisoners” (κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν). Baarlink and Rusam however are too fast in easing out the differences between parent text Isaiah 61,2b and Luke 21,22. They do not elaborate on the lack of further thematic and verbal links with Isaiah 61 and the differences of wording between Isaiah 61,2b and Luke 21,22. They also ignore that in Luke 4,18 the noun αἰχμαλώτοις is used, which is less rare than the verb αἰχμαλωτίζω in verse 24. I argue that Isaiah 61,2b functions in the whole of Old Testament prophecies which Luke evokes in 21,20-24, but that Isaiah 61,2b is not the primary text to which Luke alludes.

<sup>73</sup> Kim, *Parusie*, 215.

Jerusalem, in line with the use of *ἀνάγκη* by contemporary writers.<sup>74</sup> The motif of God's wrath on God's people can be found in several Old Testament texts, such as Deuteronomy 28,58-68 and Jeremiah 28,11 LXX.<sup>75</sup>

Verse 24 carries on the message of prophetic judgment over Jerusalem. The pregnant women and young babies will fall through the blade of a sword (*πεσοῦνται στόματι μαχαίρης*). This expression resembles several Old Testament judgment texts condemning unfaithfulness (Num. 14,43; Is. 13,15; Jer. 18,21; Ez. 26,6). The Old Testament imagery continues in verse 24. There will be imprisonments (*αἰχμαλωτισθήσονται*) (Is. 61,1; Am. 1,5; cf. Deut. 28,64) and Jerusalem will be trampled (*πατουμένη*) (cf. Zech. 12,3: *καταπατούμενον*). Again, Jesus in Luke's narrative uses Old Testament prophetic imagery to communicate his message of vengeance and judgment.

Luke adds a mysterious sentence in verse 24: "until the times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled" (*ἄχρι οὗ πληρωθῶσιν καιροὶ ἐθνῶν*). Several interpretations of this expression have been given: a period of preaching the Gospel to the nations, a time for Israel's repentance and conversion, and a time of vindication against the oppressors of Israel.<sup>76</sup> Nolland, in my view, provides the most plausible explanation of this intricate sentence.<sup>77</sup> He argues that the expression makes sense from an Old Testament point of view. The nations have received dominance over Jerusalem as a purpose of God's judgment. Luke 21,24, in Nolland's words, "points to the coming time when the nations will experience their own version of the judgment that they have inflicted upon Judea and Jerusalem."<sup>78</sup> This fits a reading that is implied by several Old Testament prophets. Jeremiah 25 for instance mentions the destruction of Jerusalem, but also the fulfillment (*πληρωθῆναι*) of time when Babylon will be destroyed (Jer. 25,12). There will be salvation for YHWH's people through the judgment of themselves, but also of their dominant

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<sup>74</sup> Crabbe, *Luke/Acts*, 154-157.

<sup>75</sup> Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1679n31; D.W. Pao and E.J. Schnabel, "Luke", in: G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (eds.), *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids/Nottingham: Baker Academic/Apollos, 2007), 251-414, there 376-377.

<sup>76</sup> Giblin, *Destruction*, 89.

<sup>77</sup> Nolland, "Times". See also M. Morgen, "Lc 17,20-27 et Lc 21,9-11.20-24. Arrière-fond scripturaire", in: C.M. Tuckett (ed.), *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, BEThL 131 (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 307-326.

<sup>78</sup> Nolland, "Times", 146.

oppressors. This type of prophecy cannot be separated from the covenant of YHWH with Israel.

The reason for the destruction of Jerusalem, according to Jesus in Luke's narrative, is the rejection of Jesus and his divine, salvific preaching. In connection to the starting-point of the discourse (Lk. 21,5-6), Jesus confronts them with their tenacious belief in temporary things as the temple. He shows that this belief will be in vain when God's judgement comes in eschatological times.<sup>79</sup> Judgment on Jerusalem is inevitable, because they have rejected Jesus and oppressed his followers (Lk. 21,12-19). There will be salvation for those who remain faithful to him and persevere.

#### 4.2.2.3 Theological-Hermeneutical Reflections on Vengeance in Luke 21,22

One important hermeneutical question, which we have distilled in chapter 3, pertains to the relationship between the Old and the New Testament regarding vengeance (3.3.5). This question is sufficiently answered by Luke in Luke 21,20-24. Jesus in Luke's narrative uses Old Testament imagery to describe the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>80</sup> The fall of Jerusalem is thus in line with Old Testament descriptions of vengeance acts, which is confirmed by the use of verbs of fulfillment (πίμπλημι, πληρόω) in Luke 21,20-24. Luke's concept of vengeance in Luke 21,20-24 accords to the Old Testament concept of vengeance.

What is Luke's understanding of vengeance and how does he use it in Luke 21,20-24? First, Luke considers vengeance to be a divine matter. The destruction of Jerusalem will be done by the nations (ἔθνη), but they are just instruments of God's wrath and judgment. The nations execute the divine will, just as they did in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. Luke thus perceives the concept of vengeance in light of Old Testament prophesy:

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<sup>79</sup> There are several links between Luke 21 and the speech of Stephen. See Carroll, *Response*, 117-118; Cunningham, *Theology of Persecution*, 128-130.

<sup>80</sup> Scholars often state that Luke describes the fall of Jerusalem as a *vaticinium ex eventu*. He presents a theological explanation of the fall of Jerusalem, because confusion among his readers was lurking. Though this point of view cannot be excluded, it is not necessary to regard Luke's description of the fall of Jerusalem a later statement. Luke offers a meta-description using Old Testament imagery, thereby distorting the possibility to derive historical data.

vengeance is a divine prerogative, but God sometimes utilizes nations to punish his people and to bring them back to him.

Luke's concept of vengeance cannot be understood completely when one does not take the Isaiah-quotations and its aftermath in Luke 4,16-30 into consideration.<sup>81</sup> Luke's concept of vengeance becomes part of divine reciprocity. Luke has described Jesus' message as "words of grace" (τοῖς λόγοις τῆς χάριτος) (Lk. 4,22). The gift of God in Jesus' ministry was salvation and perseverance. The omission of Isaiah 61,2b in Luke 4,19 was deliberate, because the gift must first be given. Throughout the Gospel of Luke it becomes clear that Jesus' ministry and message was rejected by Jerusalem (Lk. 11,50-51; 13,35; 19,41-44). That the fall of Jerusalem is described in Luke 21,20-24 as vengeance thus is not coincidental: it is God's reciprocal retribution to the rejection of his gift in Jesus.

The use of ἐκδίκησις in Luke 21,22 highlights the legal character of this retribution. By rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, Jerusalem has polluted the honor of God. Israel is God's people (λαός), but the leaders have chosen not to listen to him and his messengers (Lk. 11,50-51).<sup>82</sup> They thereby slighted God's honor, because idolatry and unbelief always rejects the honorable claim of God on his people. Justice tries to restore this honor. The fall of Jerusalem is God's righteous judgment over disobedience. Luke 21,20-24 thus shows the act of divine justice with the intent to restore God's honor and erase pollution.

As we have seen, Luke's Jesus still speaks of Israel as God's people (Lk. 21,23). Connected with the context of the Old Testament imagery used, vengeance must also be considered a covenantal act here in Luke 21,20-24. Vengeance, as we have seen, commonly takes place in some sort of kin-relationship. The covenant in the Old Testament is considered to be the relationship between God and Israel. Luke shows in his Gospel that Israel is still God's people, but Israel rejects him who fulfills all Old Testament prophecies (Lk. 1-2).<sup>83</sup> The judgment of Jerusalem can be considered the reaction of God

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<sup>81</sup> It is remarkable that scholars do not take the bigger picture into consideration that Baarlink sketches in his article. See Baarlink, "Ein gnädiges Jahr".

<sup>82</sup> J. Kodell, "Luke's Use of *Laos*, especially in the Jerusalem Narrative (Lk 19,38-24,53)", *CBQ* 31 (1969), 327-343.

<sup>83</sup> For a recent discussion regarding the relationship between Israel and the Gentiles and the salvation for Israel, see P.L.G. Du Toit, "Reconsidering the Salvation of Israel in Luke-Acts", *JSNT* 43 (2021), 343-369.

towards this covenantal unfaithfulness. Luke 21,24 promises however that the grip of the nations will not be eternal.<sup>84</sup>

Luke shapes the prophecy over Jerusalem as an emotional enterprise. The execution of vengeance on Jerusalem will be the product of God's wrath (ὀργή) poured out upon the city. The use of strong words such as "devastation" (ἐρήμωσις), "woe" (οὐαί), and "distress" (ἀνάγκη) denote the severity of the situation, just as the imagery of pregnant women and young babies being killed in the process. Vengeance is placed in an emotional context to highlight the gravity of the situation and the cruelty of the destruction of the city.

The whole act of vengeance in Luke 21,20-24 is fitted in an eschatological context. As noted before, eschatology does not coincide with the Parousia in Luke 21,20-24. The destruction of Jerusalem is not the beginning of the Parousia. Jesus in Luke's narrative corrects the conventional image of the eschatological times and the Parousia of his hearers. The destruction of Jerusalem belongs to eschatological times before the Parousia, highlighted by Luke with the use of "days" (ἡμέραι) in line with the sayings of Jesus in Luke 17,22-37. The fall of Jerusalem functions as a prophetic preview of the Parousia and as a picture of the destructive nature of this eschatological event for those who do not believe Jesus the Messiah.<sup>85</sup> It also serves a parenetic goal: it encourages the readers of Luke's Gospel "to stand before the Son of Man on his day."<sup>86</sup>

#### 4.2.2.4 Conclusion

The destruction of Jerusalem forms a pivotal moment in Jewish history. The echoes of this critical point in history can be found in Luke's description in Luke 21,20-24. Luke uses Old Testament imagery to give a theological

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<sup>84</sup> R. Bauckham, "The Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts", in: J.M. Scott (ed.), *Restoration. Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, JSJSup 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 435-487.

<sup>85</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 1675; Crabbe, *Luke/Acts*, 320.

<sup>86</sup> Carroll, *Response*, 117.

exposition of the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>87</sup> The historical event of the destruction of the capital was no ordinary accident, but it serves as divine reaction of vengeance and a prelude to the Parousia.

#### 4.2.3 Acts 7,24

*When he saw someone suffering injustice he intervened and avenged him who was mistreated: he struck the Egyptian.*

Acts 7 is considered “one of the most dense webs of OT material in the NT.”<sup>88</sup> The speech of Stephen narrates several key moments in Israelite history in such a way that it evokes resistance and even leads to Stephen’s death (Act. 7,54-60). This reaction shows that Stephen did not use Israelite history in a neutral fashion. The speech contains carefully chosen episodes of the Old Testament and the narration of these historical narratives matches contemporary Greco-Roman apologetic and epideictic speeches.<sup>89</sup> One of the narratives Stephen uses in the speech is the story of Moses. Stephen describes the murder of the Egyptian by Moses in Acts 7,24 as an act of vengeance. This description is deliberately used, just as all the other elements in the speech are inserted with a certain aim.

This paragraph will examine the vengeance scene of Moses in Stephen’s speech. The focus will be on Acts 7,20-29, but important links within the Moses-episode (Act. 7,20-43) will be included. We will first examine the context of the vengeance scene (4.2.3.1). Acts 7,20-29 is then scrutinized

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<sup>87</sup> This phenomenon is not unfamiliar in other Jewish pieces of literature. The use of the book of Jeremiah for instance increases after the fall of Jerusalem, because Jeremiah endured a similar crisis and gave theological explorations of this crisis. See C. Wolff, *Jeremia im Frühjudentum und Urchristentum*, TUGL 118 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1976).

<sup>88</sup> Pao and Schnabel, “Luke”, 556.

<sup>89</sup> There is a lengthy discussion on the genre of the speech of Stephen, which cannot be dealt with in detail due to the limits set in this study. The *communis opinio* is that the speech in Acts 7 reflects the apologetic historiography of Luke’s work. Acts 7 uses the form of contemporary classical speeches, but employs the content (God’s revelation and rejection by his people) of Old Testament speeches (Ps. 78; Neh. 9). See Sterling, *Historiography*; M.L. Soards, “The Speeches in Acts in Relation to Other Pertinent Ancient Literature”, *ETHL* 70 (1994), 65-90; T. Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins. Stephen and the Hellenists in Lukan Apologetic Historiography*, Emory Studies in Early Christianity 10 (London: T&T Clark, 2004).



(4.2.3.2). The last section (4.2.3.3) offers a theological-hermeneutical reflection on the concept of vengeance used in Acts 7,24.

#### 4.2.3.1 *The Context of Acts 7,24*

Acts 1-5 describes the rise of the Christian community in Jerusalem. The community receives blessings, but also encounters suffering. Suffering however is not considered to be a problem: the apostles are happy that they are found worthy (κατηξιώθησαν) to be dishonored (ἀτιμασθῆναι) for their faith (Act. 5,41). The murder of Stephen starts the persecution of the Christian community in Jerusalem by Saul and the dispersion of the community into Judea and Samaria (Act. 8,1-4). Acts 7 thus forms a bridge between Acts 1-5 and the rest of the book of Acts.<sup>90</sup> The problems for the Christian community are not limited to suffering. Luke tells in Acts 6 that there is animosity between Hebrews and Hellenists concerning the neglect of Hellenistic widows. To resolve this problem, the apostles appoint seven deacons. One of the deacons is Stephen. He is singled out as a man “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (πλήρης πίστεως καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου) (Act. 6,5), “full of grace and power” (πλήρης χάριτος καὶ δυνάμεως) (Act. 6,8), and full of “wisdom and the Spirit” (σοφία καὶ πνεύματος) (Act. 6,10). This description of Stephen matches the description of Jesus in the Gospel (Lk. 4,14; 21,15). The parallel between Jesus and Stephen is already recognized in scholarship: Stephen follows Jesus in his justness and rejection.<sup>91</sup>

The parallel with Jesus (and also with Peter and Paul in Acts) becomes apparent again when Stephen is trialed. He is falsely accused of attempting to overthrow the temple and the laws of Moses (Act. 6,13-14). The crowd stares at Stephen, whose face is shining (a possible allusion to Moses’ shining face

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<sup>90</sup> See G.N. Stanton, “Stephen in Lucan Perspective”, in: E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Biblica 1978. Sixth International Congress on Biblical Studies Oxford 3-7 April 1978. Volume III: Papers on Paul and Other New Testament Authors*, JSNTSup 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1980), 357: “For Luke, Stephen’s death is important because it marks the first involvement of Paul with the Christian movement – and Luke reminds his readers of this at 22.20. But for Luke the even more important point is that Stephen and Paul shared the fate of Jesus; neither Jesus, nor Stephen, nor Paul ever intended to alienate Israel. Luke’s Stephen is the precursor or Luke’s Paul.”

<sup>91</sup> Moessner, “‘Christ’”.

in Exodus 34,29-35). The speech of Stephen starts after the high priest asks him to respond to these accusations. The speech itself is carefully selecting its biblical episodes from the Old Testament. In its narration, it is loyal to the Septuagint text of the episodes.<sup>92</sup>

The speech can be divided in several episodes<sup>93</sup>: Abraham (Act. 7,2-8), Joseph and the Patriarchs (Act. 7,9-16), the period between Joseph and Moses (Act. 7,17-19), Moses (Act. 7,20-43), the tabernacle and the temple from Joshua to Solomon (Act. 7,44-50). The speech closes with the reversal of accusations (Act. 7,51-53) and the deadly reaction of the crowd in killing Stephen and the beginning of the hunt for the Christian community (Act. 7,54-8,3).

The speech begins with the Abraham-episode (Act. 7,2-8). The emphasis in this part of the speech is on the promises God gave to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15. Acts 7,7 is considered a key verse: after the Exodus the progeny of Abraham will come and serve God. Stephen uses this specific Abrahamic episode as a “form of ideal start of the history of Israel”.<sup>94</sup> The Joseph-episode can be considered a “Kontrastgeschichte”.<sup>95</sup> Stephen describes the existence of two sides in the Joseph-story: the unrighteous patriarchs and the righteous Joseph. It becomes clear that God works through Joseph with Israel. Earl Richard has characterized the Joseph-episode as polemical: the righteous Joseph is the true progeny of Abraham (just as Stephen), while his unrighteous brothers are deviant (just as the accusers of Stephen).<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> E.J. Richard, *Acts 6:1-8:4. The Author's Method of Composition*, SBLDS 41 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1978), 101-102; A.M. Schwemer, “Lukas als Kenner der Septuaginta und die Rede des Stephanus (Apg 7,2-53)”, in: T.S. Cauley and H. Lichtenberger (eds.), *Die Septuaginta und das frühe Christentum – The Septuagint and Christian Origins*, WUNT 277 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 301-328; M.R. Whinton, “Rewriting Abraham and Joseph. Stephen's Speech (Acts 7:2-16) and Jewish Exegetical Traditions”, *NovT* 54 (2012), 149-167.

<sup>93</sup> See for an elaboration of this division H. Braun, *Geschichte des Gottesvolkes und christliche Identität. Eine kanonisch-intertextuelle Auslegung der Stephanusepisode Apg 6,1-8,3*, WUNT II/279 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 77-97.

<sup>94</sup> Braun, *Geschichte*, 201.

<sup>95</sup> Braun, *Geschichte*, 231.

<sup>96</sup> E.J. Richard, “The Polemical Character of the Joseph Episode in Acts 7”, *JBL* 98 (1979), 255-267. Soards calls this line of thought a “near-allegory” (*The Speeches in Acts. Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 63n148), but this caricature does not do justice to the remarkable similarities between Joseph and Stephen in this regard.

The verses describing the period between Joseph and Moses (Act. 7,17-19) serve as a bridge between the previous biblical narrative and the Moses-episode.<sup>97</sup> These verses show the fulfillment of God's promise in Acts 7,6: Israel will be enslaved and oppressed. This worrying situation sets the scene for Moses: Israel needs a savior. Moses provides the divine answer to Israel's troubles. Important to know beforehand is that Moses is divinely appointed, but rejected by unrighteous Israelites (Act. 7,27). He prophesied the coming of Jesus (Act. 7,37), but the fathers would not listen and became idolatrous (Act. 7,39-41).<sup>98</sup> This idolatry is met with divine judgment, as Stephen shows with his quotation of Amos 5 in Acts 7,42-43.

#### 4.2.3.2 *The Moses-episode in Acts 7,20-29*

The Moses-episode (Act. 7,20-43) is a vital part in the speech of Stephen. The section on Moses can be divided in three units: the first forty years of his life (Act. 7,20-22), the second forty years of his life (Act. 7,23-29) and the rest of his life (Act. 7,30-43). I will limit myself to the first two sections, but relevant connections will be made with the third unit.

Stephen narrates the birth and upbringing of Moses, as can be found in Exodus 2,1-10. Although Stephen is faithful to the Greek text of Exodus 2,1-10, his choice of segments shows that he wants to describe Moses in a distinctive way.<sup>99</sup> In the difficulties of slavery and oppression Moses was born. He was born 'handsome' (ἄστεῖος), a quote from Exodus 2,2, to which

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<sup>97</sup> Braun, *Geschichte*, 244.

<sup>98</sup> Some scholars state that Stephen does not really react to the allegations of Acts 6,13. I would argue that the contrary is the case. Stephen is reacting to the allegation of temple criticism in 7,47-50. He reverses the allegation of criticism on the laws of Moses in 7,37-41. The laws of Moses are bound in the confession of the Shema: Israel has only one God and that God is YHWH (Deut. 6,4). Stephen shows in the Moses-episode that Jesus is prophesied as the eschatological prophet of YHWH to whom one must listen (Act. 7,37). The unrighteous Israelites refused, thereby violating the central confession of Israel and thus the laws of Moses. Stephen thus reverses the situation: he is listening to Jesus, the eschatological prophet who opens up a new divine path, while his accusers (and probably hearers) follow their fathers in the idolatry of the temple. Stephen in this way certainly reacts to his allegations: he faithfully follows Jesus to whom the laws of Moses point, his accusers however infringe the Mosaic laws.

<sup>99</sup> Richard, *Acts*, 101.

Stephen adds ‘before God’ (τῷ θεῷ). The beauty of Moses is expanded in several other Early Jewish works (Philo, *Vit. Mos.* I,9; Josephus, *Ant.* II,231).<sup>100</sup> He was hidden for three months (an expression not found in Exodus 2,2 but an inference)<sup>101</sup> in his father’s house. The use of “father” here makes it clear that Stephen wants to emphasize the Jewishness of Moses: he was a real Jew, although he seems Egyptian. He was found by the Egyptian princess and raised in the courts of the Pharaoh. Stephen underlines the Egyptian education and the verbal and physical power of Moses (cf. Lk. 24,19). Acts 7,20-22 thus underscores the beauty, the power, wisdom, and Jewishness of Moses.<sup>102</sup>

The second period of his life begins when Moses is forty years old.<sup>103</sup> Although Moses is raised Egyptian, he decides to visit “his brothers, the Israelites” (τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοῦ τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραήλ). Stephen again underlines the Jewishness of Moses: the Israelites were his family. His visit is not only brotherly love, but it becomes part of divine visitation.<sup>104</sup> He sees an Israelite, described as “someone who is suffering injustice” (ἀδικούμενον), and exacts vengeance (ἐποίησεν ἐκδίκησιν) on his behalf on the Egyptian abuser by killing him.<sup>105</sup> This action of Moses is directly explained in verse 25: Moses considers it an act of divine salvation (σωτηρίαν). That Moses’ thought was correct is confirmed in the third part of the Moses-episode. When Moses encounters YHWH in the burning bush, YHWH makes clear that he saw the abuse of his people and that he came down to set them free (Act. 7,34).

This act of salvation on God’s behalf is done by Moses. God has sent Moses as “ruler and deliverer” (ἄρχοντα καὶ λυτρωτήν) of his people (Act. 7,35). Moses’ authority is however not recognized by his people. Their incomprehension becomes visible when Moses tries to mediate between two

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<sup>100</sup> See J.M.G. Barclay, “Manipulating Moses. Exodus 2,10-15 in Egyptian Judaism and the New Testament”, in: R.P. Carroll (ed.), *Text as Pretext*, Fs. R. Davidson, JSOTSup 138 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 28-46; L.H. Feldman, “Philo’s View on Moses’ Birth and Upbringing”, *CBQ* 64 (2002), 258-281.

<sup>101</sup> C.S. Keener, *Acts. An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 1383.

<sup>102</sup> Braun, *Geschichte*, 255.

<sup>103</sup> Forty years is the age when one begets wisdom, according to Gen. Rabbah C,10; Ex. Rab. I,27.

<sup>104</sup> Richard, *Acts*, 336.

<sup>105</sup> The murder on the Egyptian is in some Jewish-Hellenistic works, such as Josephus’ *Antiquitates*, omitted and in other works set in a different context (Artapanus considers it an act of self-defense). See Barclay, “Manipulating Moses”.

fighting Israelites. He wants to bring peace and points towards this injustice, but the initiator of the fight pushes him away and says: “who made you ruler and judge over us?” (τίς σε κατέστησεν ἄρχοντα καὶ δικαστὴν ἐφ’ ἡμῶν) (Act. 7,27). Although Moses’ authority is divinely confirmed, he is rejected by his own people. This pattern of rejection comes back in the present: Jesus is the divine Prophet (Act. 7,37), but he is rejected and even murdered (Act. 7,52). Almost the same can be said of Stephen: the fullness of the Spirit lives within him (Act. 6,5) and he proclaims the message of God in Jesus the Messiah, but he is rejected and even murdered by the crowd (Act. 7,54-60).

#### *4.2.3.4 Theological-Hermeneutical Reflections on Vengeance in Acts 7,24*

It is interesting to see that New Testament authors go beyond the text of the Old Testament and define certain acts of biblical figures. The speech of Stephen goes beyond Exodus 2,11-12 LXX when it describes Moses’ murder of the Egyptian as an act of vengeance. Luke apparently understood the concept of vengeance in a certain way and this section wants to look at Luke’s use of vengeance here in Acts 7,24.

Moses’ act of vengeance is considered to be a divine activity. When the murder is narrated in Acts 7,24 an explanation is immediately given. Moses thinks that the Israelites will understand that his vengeance was an action of divine salvation. He is appointed by God in Stephen’s speech as the ruler and redeemer of Israel (Act. 7,34-35) and thus this action against the Egyptian must be seen in the context of divine vengeance. Through the murder of the Egyptian God saved his people from injustice and oppression.

Vengeance is regarded in Acts 7,24 as an act of justice. Moses did not kill the Egyptian randomly, but only after the Egyptian committed injustice. The victim of the Egyptian is not identified, but in Acts 7,24 he is called “someone who is suffering injustice”. The victim is singled out as the embodiment of Israel’s oppression in Egypt. The behavior of the Egyptians dishonored the Israelites, the people with whom God made a covenant (Act. 7,2-8). The Israelites did not deserve this treatment of the Egyptians, they were powerless. Someone had to step up for them and punish the Egyptians. Moses’ deed thus must be viewed as a form of (divine) legal punishment, as can be

seen by the use of ἐκδίκησις (see section 4.1.4). In this one Egyptian the whole nation is punished for their unjust actions.

Vengeance thus must be considered an act of reciprocal retribution. God made his covenant with Abraham and blessed his progeny. God was the benefactor of Joseph and he bestowed upon him grace (χάρις) and wisdom (Act. 7,10). The covenantal structure of this reciprocal relationship made this benefaction lasting. When the Egyptians dishonored the offspring of Joseph, God stood up for them in the shape of Moses' act of vengeance. The benefactor protects his client, especially when they suffer injustice.

The covenant has already been mentioned above. Vengeance is also an act of loyalty to family matters. This can be seen on the micro-level of the text first. Moses visits "his brothers, the Israelites" (Act. 7,23), thus creating a bond of kin between Moses and the people of Israel. When he sees a family member suffering injustice, he stands up as the avenger of the victim. Stephen emphasizes the Israelite identity of Moses in the beginning of the Moses-episode. He was raised as an Egyptian, but he never assimilated: he still remained an Israelite. It was fair and just that Moses exacted vengeance on the Egyptian for the victim, for he was his brother and he defended (ῆμύνατο) him. In the wider context of the speech the covenant comes into play. YHWH aligns himself to Israel in Abraham and thus stands up for them through Moses when they are in need.

#### *4.2.3.5 Conclusion*

Moses' act of vengeance against the Egyptian is purposely chosen by Stephen to reinforce his case. Moses was the divine mediator who exacted YHWH's vengeance on oppressors to set Israel free. His salvific act however is not recognized, just as his divine calling (Act. 7,27). Moses is the type of Jesus and also of Stephen. They both proclaimed the message of divine salvation, but they were not appreciated. The speech of Stephen thus forms a bridge between Acts 1-5 and the rest of the book of Acts.

#### 4.2.4 Acts 28,4

*When the natives saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other: 'this man must be a murderer for sure; though he escaped from the sea, Dike does not allow him to live.'*

The Malta-episode in Acts 28,1-10 forms an integral part of the ending of the book of Acts. Even in this last chapter of Luke-Acts, vengeance returns as a motif. It is a remarkable use of the notion of vengeance though. Vengeance is not connected with the God of Israel, but with the Greek god Dike. The explanation for this phenomenon will become apparent in the examination of this pericope.

This paragraph will research the Malta-episode in Acts 28,1-10, specifically the scene around the campfire in verses 1-6. First, one must look at the context of the shipwreck narrative in Acts 27,1-28,16 and the events in Rome in Acts 28,17-31. Section 4.2.4.1 will contain this contextual reading, although it will not be exhaustive. Section 4.2.4.2 will examine Acts 28,1-10 with a special interest in verses 1-6. The third section will comprise a theological-hermeneutical exploration of vengeance in Acts 28,4, similar to the set-up in previous sections.

##### 4.2.4.1 *The context of Acts 28,1-10*

Acts 27,1-28,16 forms one narrative, centering on the travel of Paul the prisoner to Rome via the sea. The sea voyage is a well-known *topos* in Hellenistic

literature.<sup>106</sup> Luke employs this maritime *topos* in a specific way.<sup>107</sup> Paul has been called for Jews and Gentiles (Act. 26,23) and the realization of this calling is apparent in Acts 27-28. In Acts 27,1-28,16 the focus is on Paul and the Gentiles. The *topos* of the sea voyage underscores this observation, as Joshua Jipp remarks: “both the theme of Mediterranean sea-travel as well as the specific vocabulary signal that the reader is in Gentile territory.”<sup>108</sup> Luke thus describes in these verses the coming of the message of Jesus the Messiah through Paul to the Gentiles and the Gentile reaction towards these words.

Paul is handed over with other prisoners to Julius, a centurion from the Imperial Regiment (Act. 27,1). He is described in Acts 27 as a Gentile who was kind and hospitable (φιλανθρώπως) towards Paul (Act. 27,3). This feature of Gentile favor towards Paul is also emphasized in Acts 28,2, which suggests that Luke wants to underscore “some potential” of the Gentiles to believe and have fellowship with believers of Jesus the Messiah, in contrast with some Roman Jews who refuse to believe (Act. 28,24).<sup>109</sup>

Luke pictures Paul in this pericope as a protected prophet. David Moessner already detected in his article from 1986 that Paul is described in several places in Acts in line with Jesus, Peter, and Stephen as a rejected prophet.<sup>110</sup> Paul predicts the damaging of the ship, its load, and the lives of the people on board (Act. 27,9-10), which is fulfilled in the storm Euraklydon (Act. 27,15-19). Paul refers to this fulfillment later, but he carries on encouraging the crew, because “God has gifted (κεχάρισται) you all those who sail

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<sup>106</sup> S.M. Praeder, “Acts 27:1-28:16. Sea Voyages in Ancient Literature and the Theology of Luke-Acts”, *CBQ* 46 (1984), 683-706. Praeder considers Acts 27-28 as a literary and fictional novel of Luke. There is no need however to deem Acts 27-28 merely a fictional novel. See M. Reiser, “Von Caesarea nach Malta. Literarischer Charakter und historische Glaubwürdigkeit von Act 27”, in: F.W. Horn (ed.), *Das Ende des Paulus. Historische, theologische, und literaturgeschichtliche Aspekte*, BZNW 106 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 49-73. The topic of a sea voyage can also be found in the Old Testament: the parallels between Acts 27-28 and the book of Jonah are widely recognized. For an extensive survey, see J. Börstinghaus, *Sturmfahrt und Schiffbruch. Zur lukanischen Verwendung eines literarischen Topos in Apostelgeschichte 27,1-28,6*, WUNT II/274 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 183-209.

<sup>107</sup> L.C.A. Alexander, “‘In Journeyings Often’. Voyaging in the Acts of the Apostles and in Greek Romance”, in: idem, *Acts*, 69-95.

<sup>108</sup> J.W. Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers in Luke Acts. An Interpretation of the Malta Episode in Acts 28:1-10*, NovTSup 153 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 30. See also D. Marguerat, *Lukas, der erste christliche Historiker. Eine Studie zur Apostelgeschichte*, AThANT 92 (Zürich: TVZ Verlag, 2011), 332-356.

<sup>109</sup> Praeder, “Acts 27:1-28:16”, 702; Jipp, *Divine Visitations*, 25.

<sup>110</sup> Moessner, “Christ”.



with you” (Act. 27,24). Paul promises in a Eucharist-like meal that “not a hair from your head shall perish” (οὐδενὸς γὰρ ὑμῶν θριξὶ ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἀπολεῖται) (Act. 27,34; cf. Lk. 21,18). Paul thus is a prophet under God’s providential protection.<sup>111</sup>

Paul thus must arrive in Rome (Act. 27,24). The ship with Paul onboard will go down, but all will be saved (Act. 27,20; 31; 44). The context of the Malta-scene is thus set. “God’s rescue of the ship through Paul is a metaphor for Gentile salvation. The salvation is God’s, but Paul is the agent on whose behalf God acts and through whom God mediates his salvation.”<sup>112</sup> Some Roman Jews finally reject this salvific visitation of God in Paul (Act. 28,24), while some Jews and Gentiles believe and will be counted to God’s people. Acts thus closes with “a sense of hope that the message will continue to take root in new Gentile lands.”<sup>113</sup>

#### 4.2.4.2 *Divine vengeance in Acts 28,1-6*

The Malta-episode in Acts 28,1-6 follows the shipwreck near Cauda seamlessly. The castaways save themselves by swimming or hanging on to planks and other floating material (Act. 27,43-44). After they saved themselves from the water, they strand on an island which they later find out is Melite. There have been debates about which Melite Luke is referring to: is it present-day Malta (Sicula Melita), Mljet in the Adriatic Sea (Melita Illyrica), or Kefallinia in the Ionian Sea?<sup>114</sup> The evidence points towards Sicula Melita, for it is on route to Rome and is near Crete.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> S. Schreiber, *Paulus als Wundertäter. Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Apostelgeschichte und den authentischen Paulusbriefen*, BZNW 79 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), 123; Jipp, *Divine Visitations*, 31-33.

<sup>112</sup> Jipp, *Divine Visitations*, 35.

<sup>113</sup> Jipp, *Divine Visitations*, 287.

<sup>114</sup> See A. Acworth, “Where Was St. Paul Shipwrecked? A Re-examination of the Evidence”, *JTS* 24 (1973), 190-193 for the position on Mljet, and H. Warnecke, *Die tatsächliche Romfahrt des Apostels Paulus*, SBS 127 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1987) for the choice for Kefallinia.

<sup>115</sup> See B.M. Rapske, “Acts, Travel and Shipwreck”, in: D.W.J. Gill and C. Gempf (eds.), *The Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting*, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting* 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 1-47. Reiser (“Von Caesarea nach Malta”, 68) even states: “Jede Alternative zu Malta ist Phantaserei.”

The inhabitants of the island are called ‘barbarians’ (βάρβαροι) by Luke. This term is used predominantly to describe non-Greeks (Rom. 1,14; 1 Cor. 14,11), those lacking Greek virtues.<sup>116</sup> Those barbarians show unusual (τυχοῦσαν) hospitality to the castaways. As noted above, these people are qualified by Luke as a group of individuals who are susceptible for the gospel message of Paul.<sup>117</sup> They do not know the castaways, but they show them hospitality nevertheless (cf. Lk. 10,33-37). They kindle a fire and invite the castaways in the community surrounding the fire.

The attention then is directed towards Paul. While he lays gathered wood on the fire, Paul is bitten by a snake (ἔχιδνα). Snakes are in the Old Testament sometimes used as a divine agent of judgment (Am. 5,19; 9,3), similar to passages in classical literature.<sup>118</sup> The inhabitants have their mind set: the god of justice Dike is sending the snake to finish the job of killing a murderer. Dike was first portrayed by Greek literature as a goddess who positively watches over justice, but later on she is portrayed as “a mighty and relentless deity who wrathfully wielded the weapons of revenge.”<sup>119</sup> The snake on Paul’s hand thus is a form of retribution for his actions according to the inhabitants of Melite.

The snake however stands for more. Paul, as the apostle of Jesus the Messiah, is bitten by a viper, a creature linked with Satan in Luke’s Gospel (Lk. 10,18-19). Jipp articulates the scene concisely: “a turf battle ensues between the realm of Satan, symbolized through the viper, and the kingdom of God, represented through Paul.”<sup>120</sup> The kingdom of God however is triumphant, because Paul shakes the viper off and does not suffer from the snake-bite (Act. 28,4). Jesus already said that believers will conquer snakes and Satan too (Lk. 10,19). The inhabitants of the island expect severe effects of the bite, but Paul seems to be in a good medical condition.

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<sup>116</sup> Jipp, *Divine Visitations*, 40.

<sup>117</sup> Jipp, *Divine Visitations*, 259: “it is evident that the pairing of βάρβαροι with prized Greek virtue of φιλανθρωπία is jarring, and the surprising juxtaposition must indeed be intentional.”

<sup>118</sup> See Börstinghaus, *Sturmfahrt*, 414-415 for texts.

<sup>119</sup> P.W. van der Horst, “Dike”, in: idem, K. van der Toorn, and B.E.J.H. Becking (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1999<sup>2</sup>), 251.

<sup>120</sup> Jipp, *Divine Visitations*, 261; see also J. Clabeaux, “The Story of the Maltese Viper and Luke’s Apology of Paul”, *CBQ* 67 (2005), 604-610.

The focus then again is on the identity of Paul. The inhabitants begin to call him a god. The situation then becomes remarkable. In Acts 14,11-18 Paul and Barnabas rebuke the people of Lystre for worshipping them as gods, while Herod Agrippa I is killed in Acts 12,20-23 for receiving divine honors without reprimanding the worshippers to divert their worship to the true God. Why does Paul not reject this idolatry? Some scholars argue that the inhabitants are partly right: Paul is sent by God to Rome as prophet of Jesus and the Maltesers recognize this divine presence.<sup>121</sup> Others state that Luke presupposes that his readers know from Acts 14 which reaction is in place here and he therefore does not mention it again.<sup>122</sup> The latter explanation seems the most reasonable. Luke wants to predominantly highlight the powerful providence of God in saving his witness.<sup>123</sup>

The verses 7-10 then focus on an interesting reciprocity scene. A certain Publius, the leading man of the island, offers hospitality. In return his father is cured by Paul, while other inhabitants are also healed as a return for their hospitality (Act. 28,2). In return the inhabitants give their honors and provide what is needed to travel to Rome. Eventually Paul arrives in Rome to preach the Gospel there (Act. 28,10-31).

The Malta-episode is an interesting scene at the end of Acts. It does not revolve around Paul and his innocence, as some scholars have argued.<sup>124</sup> Paul's innocence has been emphasized already in Acts 26,30-32.<sup>125</sup> The narrative tells the climactic and successful story of God's visitation through his prophet Paul to the Gentiles in Melite, defeating the satanic power which was present there.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Börstinghaus, *Sturmfahrt*, 422; Jipp, *Divine Visitations*, 263.

<sup>122</sup> J. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, KEK 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998<sup>17</sup>), 616; D.G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids/Nottingham: Eerdmans/Apollos, 2009), 701; Keener, *Acts*, 3681.

<sup>123</sup> Schreiber, *Paulus*, 132-133.

<sup>124</sup> G.B. Miles and G.W. Trompf, "Luke and Antiphon. The Theology of Acts 27-28 in the Light of Pagan Beliefs about Divine Retribution, Pollution, and Shipwreck", *HThR* 69 (1976), 259-267; D. Ladouceur, "Hellenistic Preconceptions of Shipwreck and Pollution as Context of Acts 27-28", *HThR* 75 (1980), 435-449.

<sup>125</sup> Börstinghaus, *Sturmfahrt*, 424.

<sup>126</sup> Jipp, *Divine Visitations*, 270.

#### 4.2.4.3 *Theological-Hermeneutical Reflections on Vengeance in Acts 28,4*

Acts 28,4 is quite a remarkable text at first sight compared to other uses of vengeance vocabulary in Luke-Acts. The text highlights the actions of a classical god against an apostle of Jesus the Messiah. Yet when we examine the meaning and function of vengeance there are striking similarities with the other Lukan texts.

As in other texts, vengeance in Acts 28,4 is a divine activity. The “punishment” of Paul is the alleged result of the actions of the Greek god Dike. The use of Dike and her actions fit the understanding in antiquity of divine vengeance and in a certain way also Luke’s concept of vengeance. Luke clarifies, though, that this knowledge and observation, articulated through the natives, are limited and incorrect.

What is also clear in Acts 28,4 is that vengeance is considered to be reciprocal retribution to crimes committed by an individual. The natives think that Paul must be a murderer (φονεύς), because a divine punishment by a snakebite must be proportional to his crimes. The inhabitants of Melite themselves utter the lasting retributive character of this act of vengeance: “though he escaped from the sea, Dike does not allow him to live” (διασωθέντα ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης ἡ δίκη ζῆν οὐκ εἴασεν) (Act. 28,4).

Acts 28,4 also reveals the legal character of vengeance. Vengeance does not happen suddenly or unexpected, but is an act of legal retribution. The name of Dike already implies this understanding. The conception of the natives confirm this: the snakebite is considered to be an act of vengeance for murder(s) committed by Paul. Vengeance thus in Acts 28,4 can be understood as a legal act of the Greek god Dike to restore the honor and balance of justice. Other aspects, such as the familial or emotional character of vengeance, are not obvious or clear in this short text.

#### 4.2.4.4 *Conclusion*

The Malta-episode is an important narrative in the climactic last chapter of Acts. Several threads from Luke-Acts come together in this story: preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, the Gentile insufficiency to understand and believe

immediately, the Gentile openness to the truth of Jesus the Messiah, and the reciprocal bond of the natives of Melite to Paul as prophet. Vengeance takes its place in this web of threads. The natives of Melite regard vengeance correctly as a divine action. They fail to see however that the viper on Paul's hand is not a form of divine justice, but Satan trying to hinder the progress of the message of Jesus the Messiah. Their eyes are opened by Paul shaking off the viper and staying healthy. They then are more open to the Gospel than some of the Roman Jews (Act. 28,24). Their knowledge is limited, but they are susceptible to Paul's message.

The Malta-episode is not only an integral element in the last chapter of Luke's work, but it is also the last vengeance text in Luke-Acts. We can now bring together all data and articulate Luke's understanding of vengeance.

#### 4.3 The Use of Vengeance in Luke-Acts

The exegetical and theological examination of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles in the previous sections have shown that vengeance can be considered an important aspect of Luke's message in his two writings. Vengeance is not a side note for Luke: the theme of vengeance is placed in both the gospel and the Acts on several important places and it is connected with aspects of Luke's theology. The places where Luke inserts the theme of vengeance demonstrate that Luke understood vengeance in a specific, theological way.

Vengeance for Luke is clearly a divine prerogative. In every insertion of the theme of vengeance God or the divine is the subject and actor. Some passages, such as Luke 12,41-48, 18,1-8, and 20,9-19, clearly focus on God as the active Avenger (cf. Act. 28,4), sometimes in an implicit fashion (Act. 1,18-20; 5,1-11). Other pericopae show that God uses intermediates to execute his vengeance: the nations (Lk. 21,20-24), Moses (Act. 7,24), an angel (Act. 12,23), and Paul (Act. 13,6-13). This latter category of passages make abundantly clear however that God is behind the actions of the mediators.

Human vengeance without divine authorization is forbidden. It is God alone who has the right and power to exact vengeance.

The goal of divine vengeance according to Luke is to remove evil and sin from this world. He brings rulers and the power of Satan down and elevates the humble (Lk. 1,52). Israel and the hearers of the apostles have time to repent and convert, as the omission in Luke 4,19 makes clear. The evil of greed and financial abuse is eradicated by God's just vengeance (Lk. 12,41-48; 20,9-19; Act. 1,18-20; Act. 5,1-11). The sin of unbelief and dishonoring the divine is also punished on various occasions (Lk. 21,20-24; Act. 12,20-23; 13,6-13). God's vengeance also involves the protection and salvation of the believers (Lk. 18,1-8; Act. 7,24). Belief in Jesus the Messiah and following the path Jesus and his apostles teach are the conditions to avoid divine judgment and to enjoy divine protection and salvation.

Luke's writings interact with the cultural mechanism of reciprocity. Several passages can only be understood properly when one considers these texts in light of ancient reciprocity.<sup>127</sup> This principle also applies to vengeance in Luke's corpus. In Luke 4,16-30 the gracious gift of Jesus is highlighted (Lk. 4,22), while Luke omits in his citation of Isaiah 61,2 the notion of vengeance (Lk. 4,19). There can be no vengeance when one does not receive a gift first. It becomes clear in the Gospel of Luke that some people waiver God's salvation in Jesus and reject the Christological way of the Kingdom of God. Jesus in Luke's narrative comforts his followers that God will avenge them (Lk. 18,1-8) and exact vengeance on those who reject his gift, persecute the believers, and exhibit behavior which does not line up with a life of repentance and conversion towards Jesus (Lk. 12,41-48; 20,9-19; 21,20-24).

The same pattern can be traced in Acts. Judas perishes due to his actions of betrayal and greed (Act. 1,18-20). Ananias and Sapphira die for their lies and greed (Act. 5,1-11). Moses, as an act of divine salvation, beats down the Egyptian for mistreating the Israelite (Acts. 7,24), thus retributing his fellow compatriot. Herod is slain by the angel of the Lord for his idolatry, appropriating God's position and thus rejecting God's status and gifts (Act. 12,20-23). Elymas is blinded for his resistance to the gospel of Paul (Act.

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<sup>127</sup> For a detailed study of several passages in light of ancient reciprocity, see M. Adrian, *Mutuum date nihil desperantes (Lk 6,35). Reziprozität bei Lukas*, NTOA/StUNT 119 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019).

13,6-13). The inhabitants of Melite consider the snakebite the divine means to punish Paul for something he did (Act. 28,4). Luke thus understands vengeance as a form of negative retribution in the context of reciprocity.

Retribution in the ancient world is intimately connected with honor. The same connection can be found in Luke's works. The rejection of God's gift in Jesus (Lk. 4,22) and idolatry (Act. 5,1-11; 12,23) mean that God's honor is slighted: ingratitude and idolatrous rebellion comprise an attack on God's status. The same applies to the persecution of his people: whoever slights the honor of the believers also charges the honor of their God. God reacts to these slights with vengeance: he stands up for his own dignity and the dignity of his people. This act of vengeance means that he attacks the dignity of the assailants, but in the ancient context of reciprocity and honor such an attack is justified. God restores the balance of honor by decreasing the status of those who went too far in appropriating honor and status.

Vengeance for Luke is thus not an act of ferocity, but an act of justice. Through vengeance God or his mediators exact justice in a world or a situation in which justice is bent. The followers of Jesus are unjustly persecuted and do not receive any assistance of justice (Lk. 18,1-8; 21,12-24; cf. Act. 7,24). The divine order of justice could also be subverted (Lk. 20,9-19; Act. 12,20-23). Vengeance restores the (divine) order in the world and thus can be considered an act of (divine) justice. God also has the authority to exact vengeance and sometimes mediates this judicial power to earthly instances. This pattern can also be found in the Old Testament writings, which Luke clearly uses in his work. YHWH can use other people to exact his vengeance. Vengeance in Luke's writings is thus not an act of wild justice, but of legal power exacted by the appointed authorities.

The preceding sections have mentioned another aspect of vengeance in Luke's corpus. Vengeance is exacted in the context of familial affairs. Divine vengeance is exacted for those who belong to God's covenantal family (Lk. 18,1-8). The rejection of God's gift in Jesus or the slight of God's honor through idolatry are considered to be infringements of the covenant of God with Israel and are thus punished through vengeance (Lk. 20,9-19; 21,20-24;

Act. 1,18-20; 5,1-11; 12,23; 13,6-13).<sup>128</sup> Vengeance also occurs on the micro-level of familial affairs. Luke emphasizes the Israelite status of Moses in Acts 7 and thus the legitimacy of his action, because the Egyptian attacked a fellow family member of the house of Israel (Act. 7,24). Vengeance is regarded to be an act of family justice in Luke-Acts, mostly on the macro-level of God and his people. His faithfulness to his people however is not forgotten: his vengeance does not last forever, but is momentarily. This is in line with the Old Testament writings: God could exact his vengeance, but ultimately his love prevails (Lk. 1,50-55).

Vengeance in Luke-Acts is not regularly connected with notions of emotion. The only explicit connection between vengeance and emotion is in Luke 21,20-24. The days of vengeance bring about wrath on the people (Lk. 21,22-23). The brutal death of Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, and Herod implicitly point towards the notion of God's wrath imposed on them for their idolatry. Other passages stay silent, perhaps presuming that the readers are familiar with the emotions of vengeance in Greco-Roman, Old Testament and Early Jewish writings. The same can be said of the notion of impurity. The deaths of Judas and Herod probably touch the symbolic world of purity and impurity: the impure Judas and Herod die a vile death. Other passages do not note any connection between vengeance and impurity. Luke also not pays attention to the relationship between vengeance and gender, which is an aspect in classical sources.

If one considers all passages in which Luke uses the theme of vengeance, a peculiar phenomenon can be detected. O. Wesley Allen already noted concerning retribution in Luke-Acts: "throughout the gospel, statements are made predicting retribution and defining the offenses for which it comes. Then in Acts, scenes of retribution are narrated which are told in direct accordance with the predictions."<sup>129</sup> In the Gospel, Luke frames vengeance as an eschatological reaction of God to the ingratitude of idolaters within the Jewish people. Vengeance becomes reality "when he comes" (Lk. 18,8) or

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<sup>128</sup> See for the covenant in Luke-Acts A.J. den Heijer, "The Concept of Covenant in Luke and Acts. With Special Focus on the Speech of Peter in Acts 3: 12-26", in: J.M. Burger, G. Kwakkel, and M.C. Mulder (eds.), *Covenant. A Vital Element of Reformed Theology. Biblical, Historical, and Systematic-Theological Perspectives*, Studies in Reformed Theology 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 147-160.

<sup>129</sup> Allen, *Death*, 196.



when the eschatological events are on the brink of starting (Lk. 21,20-24). This eschatological event becomes a historical reality in Acts, where God enacts his vengeance. Peter already stated on Pentecost that the last days have begun (Act. 2,15-17a). Luke's elaboration of the vengeance motif reminds us of Paul's use of vengeance in Romans 12-13: vengeance is a divine eschatological phenomenon, but it is also partially realized in history.

Overviewing the vengeance passages in Luke-Acts, the function of vengeance in the Lukan narrative is twofold. On the one side Luke uses the motif of vengeance as a warning signal. Divine vengeance is a terrifying reality which one must expect when one rejects God's gift of salvation in Jesus, when one attacks God's primacy through idolatry, or when one persecutes God's people. Divine vengeance was shown in history (Act. 1,18-20; 5,1-11; 7,24; 12,20-23; 13,6-13) and one must anticipate it in the future (Lk. 12,41-46; 20,9-19; 21,20-24). On the other side, Luke uses vengeance as pastoral guidance. Believers who suffer from persecution may retrieve hope when one reads Luke's narrative: God punishes those who oppress his people. He has shown that in history, he has done it in the present, and will do it in the future. Satan can employ different types of oppression to usurp the Christian community, but the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah will go forth and reach those who must be reached. Divine vengeance thus forms an important theme for Luke to describe history, but also to counsel his readers.

#### 4.4 Luke's Understanding of Vengeance and Contemporary Hermeneutical Questions

We have encountered several modern hermeneutical questions regarding vengeance texts in chapter 3. This paragraph provides a dialogue between the vengeance texts in Luke-Acts and these hermeneutical considerations.

The first hermeneutical question asked for the executor of vengeance. Who has the power and authority over vengeance? Luke attributes such prerogative solely to God, although he can employ other agents to exact his vengeance. But such agents have no authority, and are strictly forbidden to enact any kind of personal vengeance (Lk. 6,27-36). In Luke's perspective,

God's execution of vengeance is just, neither excessive nor abusive. A text like the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Act. 5,1-11) arouses modern sensitivities, but Luke describes God's actions as consistent. The pair is punished, just as Judas (Act. 1,18-20), for their greed, lies, and opening up for Satan (Act. 5,3).

Luke also takes up the question about the just character of vengeance. Throughout Luke-Acts, divine vengeance is considered justified. Mary already said in the Magnificat that God will bring down rulers, especially the ruling Satan and his evil powers. God will overturn the existing order of injustice and unbelief in Jesus the Messiah. The deeds done against this restoration of order and justice are objects of vengeance: unbelief, greed, lies, idolatry, resistance against the progress of the gospel. Vengeance in Luke-Acts, as we have already stated above, is not a form of wild justice, but a form of divine justice.

Vengeance in Luke-Acts affects human dignity and life. It goes against our modern sensitivity towards human sovereignty and worth. People are killed or wounded in the execution of vengeance in Luke-Acts. Two things should be kept in mind, though. First, this infringement of human dignity is not random, but it is a retributive reaction to wicked behavior. Second, Luke emphasizes that people have the time and space to avoid vengeance and the infringement of their life. God gives time to repent and convert (Lk. 4,19); people have the opportunity to avert the punishing actions of God. This observation however does not ease the tension between the texts in Luke-Acts and our modern hermeneutical sensitivities towards human dignity.

The motif of vengeance in Luke's work is rarely associated with explicit emotions. Luke 21,20-24 is the only example, where vengeance and wrath are connected. That does not mean however that vengeance in Luke-Acts is emotionless. To the contrary, as we have seen above, several vengeance texts arouse emotions throughout the scenes. Luke however clarifies that God is not driven by his emotions in a spur of the moment. God's actions are well thought out and spread over a period of time. The offenses to which God reacts reveal the same pattern: they revolve around unbelief and idolatrous behavior. Luke thus elucidates that God is not apathic. This however does not contradict the pure execution of justice, because God's emotions respond to

acts of injustice. Divine vengeance is not clouded by God's emotions, it is the product of God's intense and just character and acts.

Modern biblical scholarship has wrestled with divine violence, sometimes opting for a pseudo-Marcionistic distinction between Old and New Testament. Luke does not maintain such a distinction. To the contrary, his use of Old Testament texts and imagery makes it clear that Luke considers his work a sequel to the Old Testament.<sup>130</sup> Vengeance scenes are described in Old Testament fashion, as can be seen in the fall of Jerusalem (Lk. 21,20-24). The act of vengeance is even identified in Old Testament texts (Act. 7,24). The only discontinuity Luke can observe in God's actions is the actual extension of salvation towards the Gentiles, not in God's use of judgment.<sup>131</sup>

Another field of modern hermeneutical tension is the relationship between divine love and divine violence. Does vengeance not exclude love? The Magnificat of Mary demonstrates however that divine love and mercy in Luke's work includes the reversal of the existing order (Lk. 1,50-55). The Satanic forces of unbelief, idolatrous behavior, and resistance against God is repulsed step by step in Luke-Acts.<sup>132</sup> God takes care of Satan and evil. At the same time God stands up for his people. Out of mercy he cares for the believers when they are oppressed (Lk. 18,1-8). Divine vengeance thus comes up when his gift is rejected and his love is hurt or when the followers of Jesus experience hardship. Love, mercy, and vengeance are for Luke not contrasted. One can even say that divine love comprises divine vengeance for Luke.

This section will not ease out modern hermeneutical pains with vengeance in Luke-Acts. There still remains a tension between Luke's understanding of vengeance and our modern hermeneutical duality towards vengeance. The questions however direct our attention to several underlying notions in Luke's understanding of vengeance, while at the same time Luke's (ancient) conception of vengeance questions our modern grip of the notion of vengeance.

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<sup>130</sup> Sterling, *Historiography*, 363.

<sup>131</sup> See for the enduring mercy of God for Israel in Acts A.J. den Heijer, "God Has Compassion for Israel – also for Gentiles? The Specific Direction of God's Love in Luke-Acts", in: A. Huijgen, A. van den Os, H.G.L. Peels, and R.T. te Velde (eds.), *The Logic of God's Love* (forthcoming).

<sup>132</sup> Garrett, *Demise*.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

We may affirm at the end of this chapter the conclusion given by Allen in the preface that divine retribution and vengeance are important aspects of Luke's message. Luke warns his readers not to become disobedient and not to behave as persecutors of the people of God, while at the same time he comforts those readers who suffer from oppression and persecution that God will exact his vengeance on their assailants as he has done in the past. He takes away the obstacles on the way of the community and the gospel. Lukan vengeance is an eschatological phenomenon which has been a reality in history several times. We have seen that Luke uses vengeance in line with the Old Testament writings and other Jewish literature, as well as most classical works in Antiquity. Several familiar aspects return in Luke's understanding of vengeance: divine prerogative, reciprocity, honor, justice, eschatology, and to a lesser extent emotion and impurity.

We have already seen some similarities between Luke-Acts and the writings of another New Testament author: Paul. Traditionally, Luke and Paul are connected with each other with Luke as the companion of Paul in some of his missions. The question comes up: is Paul also using vengeance in the same way Luke does? The next chapter will focus on the Pauline corpus and the meaning and function of vengeance texts in his work.

## Chapter 5

### Vengeance in the Pauline letters

Despite the numerous studies on Paul and his writings an extensive exegetical-theological treatment of Paul's understanding of vengeance lacks. That is quite remarkable since Romans 12,19 is often cited to substantiate the conviction that Christians must refrain from vengeance or any other type of violence. The question remains to be answered then: what does Paul mean by vengeance and how does the concept of vengeance function in his letters?

This chapter will attempt to fill this void in the context of the larger project. First, we have to establish what the Pauline corpus is. Relevant for this research are first some undisputed Pauline letters: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, and 1 Corinthians. Then there are some disputed epistles: 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy. I deem these latter Pauline, but for different reasons. Paul Foster has convincingly shown in his 2012 article that traditional arguments for Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians stand the test of time: the style does not deviate that much from the undisputed letters of Paul, the parallel with 1 Thessalonians and forthcoming literary dependence does not necessarily disprove Pauline authorship, and the signature in 2 Thessalonians 3,17 is "hard to explain from a stance of inauthenticity."<sup>1</sup> The arguments against the Pauline authorship of Colossians, which comprises of style, vocabulary, theological content, and the parallel with Ephesians, are, in the words of David DeSilva, "ambiguous at best" and "the more important objections are readily explicable in reference to the contingent circumstances of Colossae, and would be even easier to explain if we allowed a substantial

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<sup>1</sup> P. Foster, "Who Wrote 2 Thessalonians? A Fresh Look at an Old Problem", *JSNT* 35 (2012), 150-175, there 168. See also the same line of argument by A.J. Malherbe in his *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, AB 32B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 349-375.

contribution to the framing of the letter on the part of Timothy.”<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy is more difficult, although “the difficulty is least acute.”<sup>3</sup> The topics and the style of 2 Timothy reflect Pauline characteristics found in the undisputable letters.<sup>4</sup> There is thus no substantial evidence to deviate from the position that these disputed letters can also be considered Pauline.

The structure of the previous chapter will also be applied in this chapter. First, we will look at Paul’s concept of divine retribution (5.1). This paragraph will also contain a survey of vengeance passages which do not include specific vengeance vocabulary. Next, we will look at the explicit Pauline vengeance passages in chronological order (5.2). 1 Thessalonians 4,6 is thus the first passage which we will investigate (5.2.1). After that, 2 Thessalonians 1,6.8 (5.2.2), Romans 12,19, and 13,4 (5.2.3) are examined. All data will then be collected and explored: what is Paul’s understanding of vengeance (5.3) and how do our modern hermeneutical sensitivities and Paul’s use of the concept of vengeance collide (5.4)? This chapter thus provides the first systematic exploration of the theme of vengeance in Paul’s writings.

### 5.1 Paul’s Concept of Divine Retribution

Paul’s concept of divine retribution is vital for understanding several important aspects of his theology. Jörg Frey states in his contribution on judgment and grace in Paul’s thought: “only under the conditions of the potentially threatening sayings about judgment and ruin can the power of the message of salvation, justice and eternal life be understood.”<sup>5</sup> Or as Christian Stettler

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<sup>2</sup> D.A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament. Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 700. See also P.T. O’Brien, *Colossians and Philemon*, WBC 44 (Waco: Word Books, 1982), xli-xlix (who pleads for Pauline authorship) and J.D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 35-39 (who pleads for Timothy writing the epistle on the basis of Pauline teaching).

<sup>3</sup> I.H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 79.

<sup>4</sup> See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 85-89; also H.J. van Nes, *Pauline Language and the Pastoral Epistles. A Study of Linguistic Variation in the Corpus Paulinum*, LBS 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2018) for a defense of Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles on the basis of linguistics and statistics.

<sup>5</sup> J. Frey, “Gericht und Gnade”, in: F.W. Horn (ed.), *Paulus Handbuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 471: “Allein unter Voraussetzung der potentiell bedrohlichen Aussagen über Gericht und Verderben ist die Kraft der Rede von Rettung und Heil, Gerechtigkeit und ewigem Leben verstehbar.”

describes in his book on the last judgment in Paul: “the central judgment sayings of Paul make it clear that the last judgment, judging works, forms the indispensable prerequisite to Pauline soteriology.”<sup>6</sup> Paul’s concept of divine retribution is not only vital for getting grip of Pauline soteriology, but also for comprehending divine vengeance in Paul’s writings.

This section will sketch divine retribution in the Pauline writings. First, we will examine the Pauline concept of divine retribution (5.1.1). Some Pauline vengeance passages which do not contain explicit vengeance vocabulary will be the subject of 5.1.2.

### 5.1.1 Paul’s vision of divine retribution

Paul does not provide us with an elaboration on divine judgment. Scholars agree that Paul and his ancient readers share a common concept of divine retribution.<sup>7</sup> Several German scholars however have argued that the judgment images in Pauline letters are not compatible with each other and even contradict each other in certain ways.<sup>8</sup> Stettler provides a fundamental critique on this stance: these scholars conflate the phenomenon of divine judgment and the literary motif of judgment.<sup>9</sup> Stettler means that Paul and his readers share the same understanding of the phenomenon of divine retribution, but Paul uses the literary motif of divine judgment and several aspects of it in different contexts to either highlight certain features of faith or to exhort the Christian communities.

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<sup>6</sup> C. Stettler, *Das Endgericht bei Paulus. Framesemantische und exegetische Studien zur paulinischen Eschatologie und Soteriologie*, WUNT 371 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 279: “Zentrale Gerichtsaussagen des Paulus machen deutlich, dass das die Werke beurteilende Endgericht die unverzichtbare Grundvoraussetzung der paulinischen Soteriologie bildet.”

<sup>7</sup> Stettler, *Endgericht*, 54; K.M. Bull, “‘Wir werden alle vor den Richterstuhl Gottes gestellt werden’ (Röm 14,10). Zur Funktion des Motivs vom Endgericht in den Argumentation des Römerbriefs”, in: M. Becker and M. Öhler (eds.), *Apokalyptik als Herausforderung neutestamentlicher Theologie*, WUNT II/214 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 143. See also C. Stettler, *Das letzte Gericht. Studien zur Endgerichtserwartung von den Schriftpropheten bis Jesus*, WUNT II/299 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> E. Brandenburger, “Gerichtskonzeptionen im Urchristentum und ihre Voraussetzungen”, in: idem, *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des Urchristentums*, SBAB 15 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1993), 289-338; M. Konradt, *Gericht und Gemeinde. Eine Studie zur Bedeutung und Funktion von Gerichtsaussagen im Rahmen der paulinischen Ekklesiologie und Ethik im 1 Thess und 1 Kor*, BZNW 117 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Stettler, *Endgericht*, 50-51.

From the paucity of Pauline textual references to divine judgment we can still determine some central aspects of the concept of divine retribution. The first question is: what does Paul mean by divine retribution? One may immediately think of the negative side of condemnation: unbelievers and those who do not do the will of God will be condemned. Condemnation is certainly part of the Pauline concept of divine judgment, but as Stettler notes it is “not the dominating and certainly not the total content of judgment.”<sup>10</sup> Divine retribution also entails the “universal enforcement of the cosmic well-being and the salvific justice of God.”<sup>11</sup> In Romans 8, for instance, Paul emphasizes that living by the flesh will imply one’s condemnation (Rom. 8,13), while the believers and creation itself will be freed and glorified (Rom. 8,21). Divine retribution thus has two sides: salvific restoration and condemnation.

It is quite clear that Paul considers God to be the subject of divine judgment (1 Cor. 10,5-12; Rom. 8,32). For Paul Jesus is also the agent of divine retribution (2 Cor. 5,10; Rom. 14,10). In other passages the subject of divine judgment could either be God or Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 2,14-16; Phil. 2,12-16). Paul clarifies the relationship between God and Christ in relationship to divine retribution in Romans 2,16: God judges through Christ (διὰ Χριστοῦ). Even the believers can be agents of divine judgment (1 Cor. 6,2-3; Rom. 2,27), though God is the main subject of divine retribution for Paul.

Paul uses the notion of divine retribution as a motif to discourage the Christian communities from judging others. In 1 Corinthians 3,5-4,5 Paul addresses the factionalism in the Corinthian community.<sup>12</sup> Some Corinthians tried to obtain an honorable position within the congregation through displaying ‘spiritual’ wisdom (1 Cor. 3,18). They employed this wisdom to assess the teachers of the community, thereby dividing the community (1 Cor. 3,4; 16-17). Paul reveals this attitude as worldly (1 Cor. 3,3-4). Paul urges the community in Corinth to “not judge before the time, before the Lord comes” (ὥστε μὴ πρὸ καιροῦ τι κρίνετε ἕως ἂν ἔλθῃ ὁ κύριος) (1 Cor. 4,5). Paul uses the same exhortation in Romans 14. In the Roman conflict between the strong and the weak, Paul urges the Romans to not judge their brothers, because “we will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (πάντες γὰρ παραστησόμεθα τῷ βήματι τοῦ θεοῦ) (Rom. 14,10).

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<sup>10</sup> Stettler, *Endgericht*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Stettler, *Endgericht*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> See D.W. Kuck, *Judgment and Community Conflict. Paul’s Use of Apocalyptic Judgment Language in 1 Corinthians 3,5-4,5*, NovTSup 66 (Leiden: Brill, 1992).



Retribution is thus a divine prerogative. The object of divine judgment differs in Paul's writings.<sup>13</sup> In Romans 2-3 Paul makes clear that in God's judgment (Jewish or Gentile) identity is not a decisive criterion: "all human beings" (πᾶσα σάρξ) will be judged and found unjustified according to the Torah (Rom. 3,20).<sup>14</sup> But divine retribution is a factor regarding the future status of Christians (1 Cor. 9,24-27; 10,5-12; Phil. 3,20-21; Col. 3,24). In other cases divine judgment is aimed against those who deserve judgment through their acts (sins, unbelief, heresy, non-Christians) (1 Cor. 6,9-11; Phil. 3,18-19; Col. 3,25). Even angels can be judged (1 Cor. 6,3), as well as the non-human creation which will be "freed from the anthropological consequences of the fall" (Rom. 8,19-23).<sup>15</sup>

A striking feature of Paul's concept of divine retribution is that retribution is according to works. Pauline scholars have paid a lot of attention to the relationship between judgment according to deeds and the justification by grace alone, even calling judgement according to one's deeds a Jewish remnant in Paul's theology.<sup>16</sup> For Paul, justification and judgment according to one's deeds are not antithetical. In Christ's death believers are freed from the coming wrath of God (1 Thess. 1,10; Rom. 5,9). In Christ's resurrection, believers receive a new life (Rom. 6,4-11). This new life must participate 'in Christ' and presupposes doing the law of Christ (Gal. 6,2) or the law of the Spirit (Rom. 8,2).<sup>17</sup> The question regarding judgment according to deeds is: does the believer show the fruits of one's conversion in a life of love (Gal. 5,14) and guidance by the Spirit (Gal. 5,25)? Receiving the gift of Christ's grace and still unrepentantly persevering in a life of flesh and sin will result in being condemned by God.<sup>18</sup> Paul therefore exhorts the Christian

<sup>13</sup> See Stettler, *Endgericht*, 133 for this paragraph.

<sup>14</sup> K.S. Kim, *God Will Judge Each One according to Works. Judgment according to Works and Psalm 62 in Early Judaism and the New Testament*, BZNTW 178 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 168: "Paul (...) modifies the concept of God's mercy radically and redefines the criteria of judgment to demolish wrong Jewish belief, so that he argues the Jews also stand under God's impartial judgment."

<sup>15</sup> M. Wolter, *Der Brief an die Römer. Teilband 1: Röm 1-8*, EKKNT VI/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn/Ostfilder: Neukirchener/Patmos, 2014), 510.

<sup>16</sup> H. Braun, *Gerichtsgedanke und Rechtfertigungslehre bei Paulus*, UNT 19 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1930).

<sup>17</sup> J.M.G. Barclay, *Obedying the Truth. Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2005), 125-142. See also G.A. Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ. Paul's Gospel and Christian Moral Identity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Stettler, *Endgericht*, 264-267; J.M.G. Barclay, "Believers and the 'Last Judgment' in Paul. Rethinking Grace and Recompense", in: H.J. Eckstein, C. Landmesser, and H. Lichtenberger (eds.), *Eschatologie-Eschatology. The Sixth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium*.

communities to be holy, blameless, and pure (1 Thess. 3,13; 1 Cor. 1,8; Phil. 1,9-11) and to “work out” their salvation (Phil. 2,12-13). The gift of God’s grace in Christ thus provides the foundation for the salvation of a believer, but for Paul this worthy gift must be met with a worthy life of spiritual works.<sup>19</sup> As Matthias Konradt states: “the aspect of lifestyle does not principally belong in the field of soteriological irrelevance in Paul’s theological thinking.”<sup>20</sup>

This latter observation and the previous paragraphs have already disclosed that Paul does not provide us with an elaboration of divine retribution, but that he uses the motif of divine judgment in parenetical contexts. As Simon Légasse aptly argues: “the perspective of Paul is less theoretical than parenetical.”<sup>21</sup> Paul’s use of judgment sayings serves as demarcations: “they announce punishment for behaviors that violate the for Paul elementary features of Christian identity.”<sup>22</sup> Divine retribution serves as an incentive for the Christian community to convert, to do the law of Christ and the Spirit (Gal. 6,2; Rom. 8,2), and to refrain from deeds which can be classified as works of the flesh and sin such as judging others (1 Cor. 3,5-4,5; Rom. 14,10). Believers must be a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5,17), a designation rooted in Old Testament eschatological expectations (Isa. 43,18-19; 65,17; 66,22) which entails a new pneumatological reality in which believers participate and which becomes apparent in their concrete actions of love.<sup>23</sup>

It is obvious that Paul considers divine retribution an eschatological phenomenon. Judgment will come in the future, when Christ will return and the Day of the Lord will dawn (1 Cor. 4,5; 5,5; Rom. 2,5). The link between the Day of the Lord and the return of Christ is apparent in 1 Thessalonians:

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*Eschatology in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity (Tübingen, September, 2009)*, WUNT 272 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 195-208.

<sup>19</sup> Stettler, *Endgericht*, 287. See also K.R. Snodgrass, “Justification by Grace – to the Doers. An Analysis of the Place of Romans 2 in the Theology of Paul”, *NTS* 32 (1986), 72-93; H.N. Ridderbos, *Paulus. Ontwerp van zijn theologie* (Kampen: Kok, 2000<sup>7</sup>), 192-196.

<sup>20</sup> M. Konradt, *Gericht und Gemeinde. Eine Studie zur Bedeutung und Funktion von Gerichtsaussagen im Rahmen der paulinischen Ekklesiologie und Ethik im 1 Thess und 1 Kor*, BZNW 117 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 531: “Der Aspekt des Lebenswandels gehört in Paulus’ theologischem Denken keineswegs prinzipiell in den Bereich soteriologischer Irrelevanz.”

<sup>21</sup> S. Légasse, “Le jugement dernier chez Paul”, in: C. Coulot and D. Fricker (eds.), *Le Jugement dans l’un et l’autre Testament. Volume II*, Fs. J. Schlosser, *Lectio Divina* (Paris: Cerf, 2004), 263: “La perspective de Paul est moins théorique que parénétiq.”

<sup>22</sup> Konradt, *Gericht*, 523.

<sup>23</sup> See P. Stuhlmacher, “Erwägungen zum ontologischen Charakter der *καινή κτίσις* bei Paulus”, *EvTh* 27 (1967), 1-35.

Paul connects the Parousia (1 Thess. 4,15-16) with the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5,2-4).<sup>24</sup> Paul derives the motif of the Day of the Lord as judgment day from the Old Testament and Early Jewish literature. He understands this phenomenon as the “completion of the positive beginning God has set.”<sup>25</sup>

Divine retribution for Paul thus is a future reality which encompasses the world. He uses the motif of divine judgment to equip the Christian communities. David Kuck has formulated this aptly: “Paul uses such language to affirm the Christian community’s separation from the world, to shore up confidence in their way of living and believing, and to encourage continued perseverance in purity and faithfulness.”<sup>26</sup>

### 5.1.2 *Non-explicit vengeance passages in Paul*

Most vengeance passages in Paul’s writings contain explicit vengeance vocabulary. There are a few passages though, that do not include this type of language, while obviously referring to the concept of vengeance. In this section we will consider these Pauline passages.

The first passage is Galatians 6,7-8. Paul has provided some examples of a community life characterized by love (6,1-6). He then warns the community for rival teachers and going astray from Paul’s Gospel. The Galatian community must not be deceived (*πλανᾷσθε*). God cannot be fooled (*μυκτηρίζεται*) and he will hold accountable those who misuse the Christian freedom to maintain and proclaim a life of the flesh. Those who live a life dominated by flesh and sin will receive divine retribution: they will not inherit the Kingdom of God (cf. Gal. 5,21). Believers who stand in the Christian freedom will obtain eternal life (Gal. 6,8). Paul exhorts the Galatian community “to take the long view in regard to the gratification of the impulses of the flesh over against devoting oneself to following, in a disciplined and consistent fashion, where the Spirit leads.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Stettler, *Endgericht*, 131.

<sup>25</sup> N. Wendebourg, *Der Tag des Herrn. Zur Gerichtserwartung im Neuen Testament auf ihrem alttestamentlichen und frühjüdischen Hintergrund*, WMANT 96 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003), 207: “Vollendung des von Gott gesetzten positiven Anfangs.”

<sup>26</sup> Kuck, *Judgment*, 229.

<sup>27</sup> D.A. DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 493.

A remarkable passage is Romans 16,20. Paul warns the believers in the Roman community in verses 17-19 for people who stay with them and spread doctrinal confusion among the community. These individuals do not serve Christ, but mislead the “simple-minded” (ἄκακοι, Rom. 16,18). Paul comforts the congregation in verse 20a with an eschatological statement: “the God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet” (ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης συντρίψει τὸν σατανᾶν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας ὑμῶν ἐν τάχει). The God who produces peace (τῆς εἰρήνης as a genitive of product; Rom. 1,7; 5,1)<sup>28</sup> will overcome Satan and his accomplices through forceful vengeance, a process which Paul describes in Old Testament imagery.<sup>29</sup> This eschatological victory will come ‘quickly’ (ἐν τάχει, cf. Lk. 18,8), because “the day is near” (Rom. 13,12). Paul, “against the background of a crisis-ridden reality, wants to immunize the reader against doubts about the orientation of their existence and to strengthen their willingness to persevere.”<sup>30</sup>

Two other texts also suggest implicit notions of retribution. Colossians 3,25 Paul urges a group of slaves within the community to obey their earthly masters wholeheartedly, in light of them being slaves of their Master Jesus Christ (Col. 3,22). They must not be “people-pleasers” (ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι), but they must please Christ and find their honor in him (Col. 3,23). The Colossian slaves must do that, because they know that in “retribution” (τὴν ἀνταπόδοσιν) they will receive the eschatological inheritance of God (cf. Col. 1,12), as heirs of God’s Kingdom (Col. 3,24). Paul mentions the flipside in verse 25. Those slaves (and also harsh masters) who ignore these commands of Paul, and thus are “those doing injustice” (ὁ ἀδικῶν), will receive their wrongdoings in return (κομίσεται) (Col. 3,25). God will exact his impartial eschatological vengeance on them. This way, Paul exhorts his readers to view their identity in Christ and persevere in the ways Christ, through Paul, has learned them.

The second passage is 2 Timothy 4,14, where Paul addresses a certain Alexander, a copper smith, who has been “turned over to Satan” (παρέδωκα

<sup>28</sup> D.B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics. An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 106.

<sup>29</sup> Several Old Testament passages come into play here. Scholars point to Genesis 3,15, but also to Ps. 8,7; 18,39; 109,1 LXX. Ryan (*Divine Conflict*, 230-240) interprets Paul’s statement against the background of Old Testament and Early Jewish Divine Warrior passages, such as Exodus 15,3.

<sup>30</sup> M. Wolter, *Der Brief an die Römer. Teilband 2: Röm. 9-16*, EKKNT VI/2 (Ostfildern/Göttingen: Patmos Verlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 492-493: “sie will die Leser vor dem Hintergrund einer krisenhaften Wirklichkeitserfahrung gegen Zweifel an ihrer Existenzorientierung immunisieren und ihre Durchhaltebereitschaft stärken.”

τῷ σατανᾷ; 1 Tim. 1,20). Alexander did Paul harm (κακὰ ἐνεδείξατο) and Paul is assured that God will “exact retribution” (ἀποδώσει) Alexander according to his works (cf. Ps. 61,13 LXX). It is clear what Paul means by that: God will exact his just vengeance on Alexander for the harm he did to Paul. Paul admonishes the community to refrain from Alexander, because he opposed the preaching of Paul and his workers fiercely (2 Tim. 4,15).

From these passages we gather several facets of Paul’s understanding of vengeance. It serves as a divine action within contexts of reciprocity, honor, justice, and eschatology. These are substantiated with the corpus of passages in which Paul explicitly mentions vengeance.

## 5.2 Specific Vengeance Passages in Paul

Paul uses explicit vengeance vocabulary in several letters from different periods of his life. Vengeance texts can be found in early letters (such as 1 Thessalonians), as well as in later letters (2 Timothy). The lack of scholarly attention to divine vengeance is thus striking and incomprehensible. Divine retribution is not (to put it in Schweizerian terms) a *Nebenkrater* in Pauline theology, but it is a fundamental aspect in Paul’s thinking, as Frey and Stettler already noted (see the introduction of section 5.1). The language he uses to express divine revenge is, just as Luke, quite limited to δίκη and its composites (ἐκδίκειν, ἐκδίκησις).

This section will focus on passages in which Paul uses explicit vengeance vocabulary. The structure of this section is based on the passages in question: 1 Thessalonians 4,6 (5.2.1), 2 Thessalonians 1,8 (5.2.2), Romans 12,19 and Romans 13,4 (5.2.3). A concluding section (5.2.4) will synthesize the findings in these sections into a coherent profile of the whole of vengeance passages in Paul.

### 5.2.1 1 Thessalonians 4,6

*That no one wrong or exploit his brother in this matter, because an Avenger is the Lord in all these things, as we already said and showed to you.*

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is considered the oldest of all Pauline letters. It was probably written between 49 and 51 CE.<sup>31</sup> Paul wrote his letter to the community in Thessalonica in Corinth, shortly after he left Thessalonica. Because First Thessalonians is probably Paul's oldest letter, it is interesting to see how the concept of vengeance is used in Paul's early writings. How does Paul employ the motif and what does it mean in its given context?

The structure of this section will resemble the sections in the previous chapter. First, we will consider the context of 1 Thessalonians 4 (5.2.1). 1 Thessalonians 4,1-8 is the subject of the second section (5.2.2). After a theological-hermeneutical exploration of vengeance in 1 Thessalonians 4,6 (5.2.3) a conclusion (5.2.4) will close off this section.

### 5.2.1.1 *The Context of 1 Thessalonians 4,1-8*

The city of Thessalonica was a small provincial city for a long time, but gradually grew, due to its harbor, into one of the most important metropolises in Greece.<sup>32</sup> Paul stayed there for a couple of months when the city, in the words of Vom Brocke, "was a trade- and province capital on its way to becoming one of the biggest cities in the Aegean region."<sup>33</sup> Thessalonica harbored a multitude of religious cults throughout its history, with the veneration of the emperors becoming important in Augustan times.<sup>34</sup>

In this urban and religious diverse context a community of Christ-followers existed. They received a letter from Paul. The occasion of 1 Thessalonians is probably twofold. Throughout the letter it becomes apparent that the Christian believers suffer (1 Thess. 1,6). They suffered just as the congregations in Judaea did (2,14). They live in times of suffering, just as Paul and his colleagues are (3,3). This suffering probably did not entail martyrdom, but it

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<sup>31</sup> B.D. Ehrman, *The New Testament. A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004<sup>3</sup>), 302; D.A. Carson and D.J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005<sup>2</sup>), 542-543.

<sup>32</sup> C. Steimle, *Religion im römischen Thessaloniki. Sakraltopographie, Kult und Gesellschaft. 168 v. Chr.-324 n. Chr.*, STAC 47 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 203.

<sup>33</sup> C. vom Brocke, *Thessaloniki. Stadt des Kassander und Gemeinde des Paulus. Eine frühe christliche Gemeinde in ihrer heidnischen Umwelt*, WUNT II/125 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 19-20.

<sup>34</sup> See the valuable dissertation of H.L. Hendrix, *Thessalonians Honor Romans* (unpublished dissertation Harvard University, 1984).

is likely that it did include taunting, pressuring, and abuse.<sup>35</sup> The suffering community was probably also confused over a question which is important in the second half of the letter: the death of believers. There was a possible fear in the community for death, because it was thought that dead believers would miss the Parousia.<sup>36</sup> These two cases prompted Paul to write a letter.

The emphasis in this letter on honor and kinship cannot be missed. Paul presents himself as the mother (2,7) and father of the Thessalonians (2,11), while the Thessalonians are his children (2,7.11). Paul employs his loving authority over the Thessalonians to teach them important aspects of the gospel.<sup>37</sup> The message he wants to bring across in this letter is a way of life “worthy for God” (2,12). They have been chosen by God (1,4) and they believed in him, thereby turning away from the idols (1,9). Because of this turn towards the one true God, they have become a sanctified community (3,13) which is characterized by ‘brotherly love’ (4,9). They thus have been made worthy through their faith and should behave worthy in times of oppression and confusion.<sup>38</sup> This worthy way of Christian life becomes pressing in light of the coming Parousia (5,3-8). Paul ties all notions mentioned above together in his eschatology. Because of their faith, the Thessalonian community is saved (ῥυόμενον) from the eschatological wrath of God in the resurrection of Jesus (1,10).

God’s eschatological wrath, however, also becomes immanent in the Jewish oppressors of the Thessalonian community: “wrath has already reached them at last” (ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος) (2,16). The future wrath which the Thessalonian Christ-followers have escaped (1,10) has reached (ἔφθασεν) Jewish history according to Paul.<sup>39</sup> It is unclear to which event he refers: the crucifixion of Jesus, the fall of Jerusalem, the expulsion

<sup>35</sup> DeSilva, ““Worthy””; M.G.P. Klinker-De Klerck, “Lijden omwille van Christus”, in: A.D. Baum and P.H.R. van Houwelingen (eds.), *Theologie van het Nieuwe Testament in Twintig Thema’s* (Utrecht: KokBoekencentrum, 2019), 372-375.

<sup>36</sup> C.R. Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica. Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, SNTSMS 126 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 112.

<sup>37</sup> A.J. Malherbe, “God’s New Family in Thessalonica”, in: L.M. White and O.L. Yarbrough (eds.), *The Social World of the First Christians*, Fs. W.A. Meeks (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 116-125; T.J. Burke, “Paul’s New Family in Thessalonica”, *NovT* 54 (2012), 269-287.

<sup>38</sup> DeSilva, ““Worthy””.

<sup>39</sup> Paul does not refer to the whole of Israel, but, in the words of Tj. Baarda (““maar de toorn is over hen gekomen’ (1 Thess. 2,16c)”, in: idem, H. Jansen, S.J. Noorda, and J.S. Vos (eds.), *Paulus en de andere joden. Exegetische bijdragen en discussie* (Delft: Meinema, 1984), 15-74, there 50), to an anti-Israel within Israel.

of the Jews from Rome under emperor Claudius, or other disasters in Jewish history.<sup>40</sup> What Paul means with this cryptic statement however is formulated aptly by Malherbe: “the Jews, who hindered Paul from preaching to Gentiles so that the latter could now hold of a salvation still to be fully realized in the future, have now proleptically experienced God’s wrath that will also be fully realized in the future.”<sup>41</sup>

God’s wrath is thus a future phenomenon (1,10) which can be experienced in the present, which Paul underlines with εἰς τέλος: the process of proleptic wrath on Jewish oppression will climax in the final eschatological wrath.<sup>42</sup> Salvation from wrath and the impending judgment of God on the oppressors must stimulate the Thessalonian community to persevere in faith. God has destined them not for wrath, but for salvation (5,9). They must appear ‘blameless’ (ἀπέμπτως) at the Parousia of Christ (5,23; cf. 3,13).

Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonian community thus serves several parenetical purposes.<sup>43</sup> In the face of dishonoring oppression Paul aims to strengthen the bond between the community and himself and between the believers within the community. He inverts the apparent force of the oppressors in the light of the wrath of God: divine judgment awaits and has already been manifested to the enemies. On the way to the Parousia, the Thessalonian community must not yield to the pressure of dishonor and persecution, but they must persevere in the worthy Christian life to which they have been called by God. 1 Thessalonians 4,1-8 forms an important building block within this epistolary argument of Paul, as we will see.

#### 5.2.1.2 Paul’s Exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 4,1-8

First Thessalonians 4,1 marks the beginning of a new section in the letter to the Thessalonian community, signified by the use of ‘further’ (λοιπόν). Paul emphasizes in 4,1-2 that the following statements do not differ from his earlier teaching in Thessalonica. They have already received these exhortations

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<sup>40</sup> See J.A.D. Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 177.

<sup>41</sup> Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 177.

<sup>42</sup> Malherbe *Thessalonians*, 177; Weima, 177-178.

<sup>43</sup> See for the characterization of 1 Thessalonians as a parenetical letter S. Walton, “What Has Aristotle to Do with Paul? Rhetorical Criticism and 1 Thessalonians”, *TynBul* 46 (1995), 229-250.



regarding the Christian way of life. Now Paul iterates his instructions to let this Christian lifestyle “grow more and more” (περισσεύητε μᾶλλον) (4,1).

First Thessalonians 4,3-8 is sometimes associated with the discourse of contemporary philosophical traditions.<sup>44</sup> Although this context cannot be excluded, Paul’s teaching here has a strong affinity with the Holiness Tradition of the Old Testament.<sup>45</sup> The vocabulary (ἁγιασμός, ἀκαθαρσία) and topics (fornication, purity, holiness) Paul employs here show an awareness of traditions found in for example Leviticus.<sup>46</sup>

In 1 Thessalonians 4,3 Paul states that the will of God comprises the sanctification (ἁγιασμός) of the Thessalonian community. In 3,13 Paul’s wish is that the Thessalonians will be “blameless in sanctification” (ἀμέμπτους ἐν ἁγιωσύνη) at the Parousia. The difference between 3,13 and 4,3 is that ἁγιασμός is more of a process (becoming holy), while ἁγιωσύνη denotes a state (being holy).<sup>47</sup> Paul does not want to limit the will of God to sanctification, but he wants to underline the necessity of sanctification for the community.<sup>48</sup> Paul narrows the action of sanctification here to abstaining from fornication (ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας). For early Christian readers πορνεία probably denoted unlawful sexual conduct outside marriage, maybe

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<sup>44</sup> H.D. Betz, “De fraterno amore (Moralia 478A-492D)”, in: idem (ed.), *Plutarch’s Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature*, SCHNT 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 231-263; A.J. Malherbe, “Exhortation in First Thessalonians”, *NovT* 25 (1983), 238-256; J. Chapa, “Is First Thessalonians a Letter of Consolation?”, *NTS* 40 (1994), 150-160.

<sup>45</sup> R.J. Hodgson, “1 Thess 4,1-12 and the Holiness Tradition (HT)”, in: K.H. Richards (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1982 Seminar Papers*, SBLSP 21 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), 199-215; P.H.R. van Houwelingen, *Tessalonicenzen*, CNT III (Kampen: Kok, 2002), 1160. In my view, the affinity of 1 Thessalonians 4,3-8 and the Holiness Tradition of the Old Testament can be elaborated further than Hodgson offers in his article, which I hope to demonstrate elsewhere.

<sup>46</sup> G.P. Carras, “Jewish Ethics and Gentile Converts. Remarks on 1 Thes 4,3-8”, in: R.F. Collins (ed.), *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, BEThL 87 (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 306-315.

<sup>47</sup> T.J. Deidun, *New Covenant Morality in Paul*, AnBib 89 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 86; P.E. Langevin, “L’intervention de Dieu selon 1 Thes 5,23-24”, in: Collins, *Thessalonian Correspondence*, 251. See also the general article of W. Schrage, “Heiligung als Prozess bei Paulus”, in: D.A. Koch, G. Sellin, and A. Lindemann (eds.), *Jesu Rede von Gott und ihre Nachgeschichte im frühen Christentum. Beiträge zur Verkündigung Jesu und zum Kerygma der Kirche*, Fs. W. Marxsen (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1989), 222-234.

<sup>48</sup> V.P. Furnish, “Der ‘Wille Gottes’ in paulinischer Sicht”, in: Koch, Sellin, and Lindemann, *Jesu Rede von Gott*, 208-221; J.A.D. Weima, “‘How You Must Walk to Please God’. Holiness and Discipleship in 1 Thessalonians”, in: R.N. Longenecker (ed.), *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, McMaster New Testament Studies 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 98-119.

even inside marriage.<sup>49</sup> In oversexualized societies as in Greco-Roman times, sexual promiscuity was a great temptation for the believers (cf. 1 Cor. 6,15-20).

The abstinence from πορνεία is explicated firstly in 4,4 as controlling one's vessel (τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι). There has been much discussion what Paul means by σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι: "to acquire a wife"<sup>50</sup>, "to control one's body"<sup>51</sup> or, with a variation on the latter translation, "to control one's genitals".<sup>52</sup> The most compelling case, in my view, is the latter position: Paul uses an euphemistic term for genitals. This translation fits the textual evidence best and also befits the context of verse 4, where Paul condemns the promiscuity of πορνεία. Paul exhorts his (male) readers to reduce the urge to fornicate and to control one's libido.

Paul considers the right mode of controlling oneself "in holiness and honor" (ἐν ἀγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ). He contrasts this in verse 5 with the behavior of the Gentiles "who do not know God". Gentiles are led "by lustful passion" (ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας). In several early Jewish passages the sexual behavior of Gentiles is regularly associated with unnatural lust for apologetic reasons, for instance when it comes to homosexual activity (Philo, *Spec.* III,39-40; Josephus, *C. Ap.* II,275; Pseudo-Phocylides, *Sent.*, 190-192). What Paul seems to be doing in 4,4-5 is reworking the definition of honor and shaping the worldview of the community.<sup>53</sup> Outside of the community male promiscuous sexual behavior is considered normal: it was a sign of masculine freedom, social position, and dominance.<sup>54</sup> However, in light of the call towards holiness by God and the values consistent with this call, this behavior is abnormal for Christ-believers. It is more honorable to be moderate and to restrict

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<sup>49</sup> See for recent discussions on πορνεία K. Harper, "Porneia. The Making of a Christian Sexual Norm", *JBL* 131 (2011), 363-383; J.M. Reno, "Pornographic Desire in the Pauline Corpus", *JBL* 140 (2021), 163-185.

<sup>50</sup> This position is defended by for instance O.L. Yarbrough, *Not Like the Gentiles. Marriage Rules in the Letters of Paul*, SBLDS 80 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985); D.E. Frederickson, "Passionless Sex in 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5", *Word & World* 23 (2003), 23-30.

<sup>51</sup> This position is taken by for instance C.C. Caragounis, "Parainesis on ΑΓΙΑΣΜΟΣ (1 Th 4,3-8)", *FN* 25 (2002), 133-151; E. Verhoef, "1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. The Thessalonians Should Live a Holy Life", *HTS* 63 (2007), 347-363.

<sup>52</sup> See for this last translation S. Légasse, "Vas Suum Possidere (1 Thess 4,4)", *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 10 (1997), 105-115; P.H.R. van Houwelingen, "Een vat vol tegenstrijdigheden (1 Tessalonicenzen 4:4)", in: idem, H.R. van de Kamp, and J.A. Meijer (eds.), *Exeget[h]isch*, Fs. J. van Bruggen (Kampen: Kok, 2001), 104-120.

<sup>53</sup> W.R.G. Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 155-156.

<sup>54</sup> Harper, "Porneia".

sexuality to its natural context of marriage, just as some moral philosophers in Paul's time argued.<sup>55</sup>

What Paul means by dishonorable sexual behavior becomes apparent in verse 6.<sup>56</sup> The community is urged to refrain from overstepping boundaries (ὑπερβαίνειν) or appropriating (πλεονεκτεῖν) something that is not one's own. Paul mentions that this behavior is targeted against brothers, probably referring to the sin of adultery. Sleeping with the wife of a community member disrupts the holiness and unity of the community.<sup>57</sup> It imposes dishonor on families, pollutes the Christian community, and sends a wrong message towards the outside world. Community members must control themselves and cannot overstep the boundaries of honor and holiness when it comes to sexuality.

Paul substantiates his warning with three incentives. First: "an Avenger is the Lord in all these things" (ἔκδικος κύριος περὶ πάντων τούτων). Paul uses κύριος in this letter in several places to refer to Jesus (1,1; 3; 6; 8; 2,15; 19; 3,8; 11-13; 4,1-2).<sup>58</sup> He emphasizes ἔκδικος by placing it in front. Paul underlines that the position that ethics are redundant is incorrect. Jesus, as the divine Judge, will exact vengeance on those who overstep the boundaries of sexual behavior as pointed out in verses 4-6a. Obedient believers have no vengeance to fear. Paul makes clear that the notion that Jesus is an Avenger is not new to the Thessalonian community: he already told them and warned them for it (verse 6c). The notion of divine vengeance thus was a part of Paul's basic teaching to new believers.

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<sup>55</sup> Loader, *Sexuality*, 156.

<sup>56</sup> O. Merk (*Handeln aus Glauben. Die Motivierungen der paulinischen Ethik* (Marburg: N.G. Elwert Verlag, 1968), 47-48) and T. Holtz (*Der Erste Brief an die Thessalonicher*, EK-KNT 13 (Zürich/Düsseldorf: Benziger/Neukirchener Verlag, 1998<sup>3</sup>), 161-162) argue that from 4,6 onwards Paul discusses financial ethics. The grammatical structure of 4,3-8 and the use of sexual vocabulary in 6-8 (ἀκαρθασία in 4,7 is employed by Paul in 2 Cor. 2,21; Gal. 5,19 parallel to πορνεία) make it unlikely that Paul addresses a completely different field of ethics in these verses.

<sup>57</sup> T.J. Burke, *Family Matters. A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians*, JSNTSup 247 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 193-199.

<sup>58</sup> J.H. Neyrey ("Eschatology in 1 Thessalonians. The Theological Factor in 1,9-10, 2,4-5, 3,11-13, 4,6 and 4,13-18", in P.J. Achtemeier (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1980 Seminar Papers*, SBLSS 19 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980), 219-232) argues that Paul refers to God. Paul's use of κύριος, in my view, points evidently towards Jesus. See Van Houwelingen, *Tessalonicenzen*, 122.

The second incentive is God's calling (4,7). This probably refers back to 1,4, the election of the community by God.<sup>59</sup> Paul states that the Thessalonian community is called to "holiness" (ἐν ἁγιασμῷ) and not to "impurity" (ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ). This statement fits the vocabulary and theme of the Holiness Tradition of Leviticus: Israel is called to holiness and must refrain from a permanent state of impurity.<sup>60</sup> Their life has, through the call from God, been dedicated and consecrated to God and a lifestyle of seeking impurity is not compatible with this calling. The Thessalonian community must act according to their new Christian status.

The third incentive is that by rejecting these exhortations of Paul one actually rejects God himself (4,8). Paul already stated that he does not speak merely words of humans, but he speaks as the authorized apostle of God (2,2-6; 4,2; cf. 1,5-6; 2,13). Paul connects the gift of the Holy Spirit with this incentive: God is characterized as the giver of the Holy Spirit to the community. Paul deliberately speaks of the "Holy" Spirit: it is the Spirit, who is holy, who realizes holiness in the community.<sup>61</sup> It is also an allusion to Ezekiel 36,25-27 LXX: Israel will be purified and will receive the Holy Spirit (cf. Ez. 37,14). The emphasis again is on the holy character of the Thessalonian community: they must not pollute their holiness.

In 4,3-8 Paul thus ties together several parts of the letter in a practical exhortation. The community suffers and is tempted to give in to sexual immorality. Paul however redefines their definition of honor and underlines their status as holy and called community of God. They must walk according to their honor and status. This exhortation is substantiated with three incentives: the eschatological vengeance of Jesus, the historical call of God to faith, and the present words of God and gift of the Spirit. This way Paul tries to prepare the Thessalonian community for the Parousia, so that they will be found worthy before God.

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<sup>59</sup> R.F. Collins, "The Function of Paranaesis in 1 Thess 4,1-12", *ETHL* 74 (1998), 398-414, there 407.

<sup>60</sup> Hodgson, "1 Thess 4,1-12".

<sup>61</sup> G.D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence. The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994), 50-53.

### 5.2.1.3 Theological-Hermeneutical Reflections on Vengeance in 1 Thessalonians 4,6

How does Paul understand vengeance in 1 Thessalonians 4,6 and how does his understanding address our hermeneutical questions? This section offers some reflections on these two questions.

Paul places vengeance in the hands of Jesus the Messiah, who as Lord will exact vengeance when the Thessalonians do not conform to the sexual norms spelled out in this pericope. Jesus is portrayed in 1 Thessalonians as the coming One (2,19; 3,13; 4,15; 5,23) who will judge the Thessalonians according to their deeds (4,6) on the “day of the Lord” (5,2). They are saved from divine wrath (1,10) and they must persevere to eventually obtain complete salvation from wrath (5,9).<sup>62</sup> The notion of Jesus’ kingship cannot be denied here: Jesus has established his eschatological reign in cross and resurrection and the Thessalonian believers will be “with him” in his kingdom on the future “day of the Lord” when they persevere (5,9-11).<sup>63</sup> The vengeance of Jesus is not a shallow argument for Paul to let the Thessalonian community live a Christian life. Divine vengeance is a fundamental teaching of Paul, about which he claims to have told the Thessalonians beforehand and warned them (4,6c: καθὼς καὶ προείπαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ διεμαρτυράμεθα). Vengeance is a divine act of Jesus both as King and Judge, while, as we have seen elsewhere, personal revenge is clearly not (5,13).

Divine vengeance in 1 Thessalonians 4,6 is retributive. Paul continually emphasizes the special status of the Thessalonians as a called community of God (1,4; 4,7). God calls and elects, but also is described as one who gives (διδόντα) the Holy Spirit and his words (through Paul) to the community. In other words, they have been deemed worthy by God and have received his precious gifts. When the Thessalonians are disobedient they slight God and his gifts. This behavior cannot be left unpunished and unavenged. Vengeance thus is deemed the retributive answer of God to a relapse into a Gentile sexual ethic.

Vengeance and honor are intimately connected in 1 Thessalonians 4,3-8. Paul redefines the norm of honor: not the positions of the Gentile majority,

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<sup>62</sup> Stettler, *Endgericht*, 71.

<sup>63</sup> E. Käsemann, “Der Anfang des Evangeliums. Die Botschaft vom Reiche Gottes”, in: idem, *In der Nachfolge des gekreuzigten Nazareners. Aufsätze und Vorträge aus dem Nachlass*, hg. von R. Landau and W. Kraus (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 1-12.

but the call of God and the holy way of life must be deemed honorable. The life of sexual promiscuity (πορνεία) dishonors God, his commandments, and one's own holy status. Paul assures the Thessalonian community that God cannot put such a dishonor aside. God will avenge for this slight.

Justice is also an important aspect of Paul's understanding of vengeance in 1 Thessalonians 4,6. As the previous paragraphs showed, breaking God's commandments evokes his vengeance. His honor is slighted by sexual promiscuity. The eschatological act of vengeance will call the Thessalonian sinners to account for their misbehavior. Vengeance thus is a legal act of God to punish sin and evil: "a holy *response* to injustice in God's world."<sup>64</sup>

Paul continually uses kinship language to describe the Thessalonian community and the relationship between God, the community, and him. The act of adultery for instance, which Paul mentions in 4,6, is an infringement of the family. In addition Paul uses vocabulary and themes from the Holiness Tradition to articulate this specific sexual ethic, thereby leaning towards an understanding of the church as the new Israel.<sup>65</sup> This new and exclusive covenantal status also produces the notion of God's covenantal vengeance, as can be found in Leviticus 26 for instance. God's vengeance in 1 Thessalonians 4,6 is a form of carrot-and-stick-approach: the Thessalonians must go in the paths of the new covenant and do the divine will (4,3) to avoid divine vengeance.

Another fundamental aspect of Paul's understanding of vengeance in 1 Thessalonians 4,6 is purity. Purity language is found in several places in 1 Thessalonians 4,3-8 in line with the emphasis on the holiness of the Thessalonian community. The believers have been called to holiness in Christ and purity through the Spirit, not to impurity (4,7). As Gupta concisely states: "Paul's response and challenge to the Thessalonians is that the living God that rescued them in Jesus Christ expects consecration and exclusive devotion to

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<sup>64</sup> N.K. Gupta, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Zondervan Critical Introductions to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 93. Italics are Gupta's.

<sup>65</sup> This statement is not meant to be an expression of (a form of) supersessionism. Paul makes it absolutely clear in his letters that Israel has not been abolished as the people of God. The Gentiles however will share in the hope of Israel (Rom. 15,6). In the words of Michael Mulder ("Paul's Dual Focus: 'Rejoice, o Gentiles, with His People'. An Intertextual Analysis of the Quotations in Romans 15:7-13", in: K. van Bekkum e.a. (eds.), *Israel as Hermeneutical Challenge. Biblical and Theological Reflections* (forthcoming)): Paul has a dual focus on Jews and Gentiles. The application of the allusion of Ezekiel 36,27 in 1 Thessalonians 4,8 shows however that Paul in a certain way envisioned the church to be the people of God, consisting of Jews and Gentiles called to God in Christ. See Weima, "'How You Must Walk to Please God'", 103.

him.”<sup>66</sup> Vengeance thus is connected by Paul with the punishment of impurity: the sexual deviance from the divine will pollutes the believer and the community and deserves a divine response. Paul thus not only redefines honor, but also shapes the community in terms of purity and pollution.<sup>67</sup>

It is clear that Paul understands vengeance to be an eschatological act. Jesus will exact vengeance at the Parousia on those who did not do the divine will. This is confirmed when we look at the first letter to the Thessalonians in its entirety. In 1,10 Paul already has stated that divine wrath will be poured out in the eschaton, from which the believers are saved by Christ. The statement in 4,6 must be seen in line with 1,10. That does not exclude a realization of divine vengeance in the present, as Paul has observed in 2,16. It is obvious though that Paul speaks here about Jesus’ future judgment. Paul’s warning for divine vengeance reinforces the incentive to stay pure and holy now, which only makes sense when Paul’s admonition refers to a future event.

#### 5.2.1.4 Conclusion

It is important to note that Paul already used the motif of vengeance in an early letter. He also makes clear in this letter that divine vengeance is an important aspect of his basic teaching (4,6). Matthias Konradt summarizes the function and meaning of 1 Thessalonians 4,6 poignantly: “the judgment saying in 4,6b, in its form only looking at God’s punishment of defamatory ways of life, serves to define the ethical boundaries that a Christian may not cross and to define, in the matrix of the dualistic concept that characterizes 1 Thess as a whole, the boundaries between congregation and (‘Gentile’) world.”<sup>68</sup> It is interesting to see how the second letter of Paul to the Thessalonians conceives the concept of vengeance.

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<sup>66</sup> Gupta, *Thessalonians*, 101.

<sup>67</sup> See DeSilva, *Honor*, 279-315.

<sup>68</sup> Konradt, *Gericht*, 193: “Die Gerichtsaussage in 4,6b in ihrer allein auf Gottes Bestrafung lasterhaften Wandels blickenden Form dient dazu, die ethische Grenze zu definieren, die ein Christ nicht überschreiten darf, und im Rahmen der dualistischen Grundkonzeption, wie sie den 1 Thess im ganzen prägt, ist damit zugleich die Grenze zwischen Gemeinde und (‘heidnischer’) Welt definiert.”

### 5.2.2 2 Thessalonians 1,6.8

Second Thessalonians 1,3-12 is in several ways an intricate Pauline text. It contains a focus on apocalyptic eschatology, differing from 1 Thessalonians in its more schematic approach to the future.<sup>69</sup> The relationship between the present pastoral issues (the Parousia and Christian life) and the Old Testament allusions in the text is also intriguing. How does the motif of (divine) vengeance function in this intricate web of Pauline apocalyptic theology and pastoral pedagogy?

This section will concern Paul's concept of vengeance in 2 Thessalonians 1. The structure of this section will be slightly different from the previous ones. The context of 2 Thessalonians 1,3-12 will be integrated in the exegesis of the pericope, because there is not much context to study. We will thus start with the exegetical exploration of 2 Thessalonians 1,3-12 (5.3.1), followed by the theological-hermeneutical reflections on vengeance in the passage (5.3.2.) and a conclusion (5.3.3).

#### 5.2.2.1 Paul's Pastoral Eschatology in 2 Thessalonians 1,3-12

After opening the letter (2,1-2), Paul gives thanks (εὐχαριστεῖν) to God for the Thessalonian community (1,3), a conventional element in contemporary letter-writing.<sup>70</sup> The thanksgiving in 1,3-12 is paralleled in the letter by another thanksgiving in 2,13-3,5. The two thanksgivings are quite similar, but they have a different point of view on the obedience of the Thessalonians: 1,3-12 focuses on the faithful persistence that the Thessalonians exhibit and

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<sup>69</sup> Malherbe (*Thessalonians*, 368-369) points towards the different pastoral situation that Paul addresses (a more realized eschatology) to explain the differences between 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The opinion that the difference between eschatological visions in 1 and 2 Thessalonians is an argument for the non-Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians is quite far-fetched, considering the evidence. 1 Thessalonians also contains several elements of future and scheme (1,10; 2,16; 5,1-11). Even Maarten Menken, who is a proponent of the pseud-epigraphy of 2 Thessalonians, asserts that "as far as eschatology is concerned, it is *possible* that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians. Whether it is *probable* is another matter" (*2 Thessalonians*, New Testament Guides (London: Routledge, 1994), 29-30).

<sup>70</sup> P.T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul*, NovTSup 49 (Leiden: Brill, 1977).



must hold, while 2,13-3,5 reasons from God's election of the community to persisting obedience.<sup>71</sup>

Paul does not consider the thanksgiving just an obligatory convention. Several words and interjections in 1,3 exhibit this: he must "always" (πάντοτε) give thanks, the thanksgiving "is right" (ἄξιόν ἐστιν) etcetera. This thanksgiving is well deserved and fitting according to Paul. The reason is also given by Paul: their faith is "growing abundantly" (ὑπεραυξάνει) and their love for each other is "increasing" (πλεονάζει). Paul emphasizes the abundant growth of the two, in comparison to the situation he addresses in 1 Thessalonians (1,3; 3,10).<sup>72</sup> Paul witnesses a remarkable progress in faith and love in the Thessalonian community and wants to make that known to the community and, above all, to God.

This progress is made explicit by Paul, because he boasts (ἐγκυαυᾶσθαι) about it in other Christian communities, probably in the region of Achaia. The content of his *laudatio* in other congregations is the perseverance and faith of the Thessalonian community in the midst of persecution and affliction (διωγμός and θλιψίς) (1,4). These circumstances are probably also a reason why Paul is writing this second letter to the Thessalonians. His eschatological message in 1 Thessalonians is misunderstood, as 2,2 shows: the believers thought that the Parousia had already come. This conviction has led to confusion and trouble: should the believers not receive a better fate in the Parousia than persecution? This erroneous conviction about the Parousia has also led to disorderly behavior (3,6). The persevering faith of the Thessalonians thus was weakening (2,2). Paul wants to correct this misinterpretation of his words. To state it in the words of Maarten Menken: Paul emphasizes "eschatological realism", in that the Thessalonian community is still in "Paradise Lost", not yet in "Paradise Regained".<sup>73</sup>

The persevering faith of the Thessalonians thus was the subject of Paul's thanksgiving, but amidst the circumstances of persecution it also worried him. Paul addresses the confusion about the relationship between eschatology and persecution in 1,5-12. The Parousia had not already come (2,2) and thus the Thessalonians did not have to worry. God's just judgment is

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<sup>71</sup> O'Brien, *Thanksgivings*, 167-96; J.L. Sumney, "The Bearing of a Pauline Rhetorical Pattern on the Integrity of 2 Thessalonians", *ZNW* 81 (1990), 192-204.

<sup>72</sup> O'Brien, *Thanksgivings*, 172-173.

<sup>73</sup> M.J.J. Menken, "Paradise Regained or Still Lost? Eschatology and Disorderly Behaviour in 2 Thessalonians", *NTS* 38 (1992), 271-289.

coming and they will be witnesses of this apocalyptic event (1,5). The sentence “a sign of God’s just judgment” (ἔνδειγμα τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ) is a *crux interpretum*: does it refer to the steadfast faith of the Thessalonians or to a *Leidenstheologie* in which suffering is a sign of expiation and judgment?<sup>74</sup> There are multiple problems with both options.<sup>75</sup> Both readings do not do justice to the grammar, because the retrospective reading of both options results in an incomprehensible sentence. Secondly, both options refer to Philippians 1,28, but this reference is not exact qua vocabulary (Phil. 1,28 uses ἐνδειξις while 2 Thes. 1,5 contains ἐνδειγμα) as well as qua content (Phil. refers to the destruction of the wicked and salvation of the believers, while the evidence of 2 Thes. is the just judgment of God). Thirdly, extraneous elements, such as a *Leidenstheologie*, must be read into the verse to make sense of these readings.<sup>76</sup>

Witherington and Weima provide a plausible third explanation.<sup>77</sup> The sentence must not be read retrospectively, but prospectively: 1,5 is the apodosis to the conditional clause 1,6-10, which must be translated as “[this is] the sign of God’s judgment that...” This reading makes the sentence understandable and does justice to the grammar. This option is also supported by the frequent use of the root δικ- in the following verses and the internal structure of the passage: “evidence for the ‘just judgment of God can be seen in the equitable way the divine judge will punish those afflicting the Thessalonian believers and reward the church members who are being afflicted.”<sup>78</sup> The retribution of the persecutors and the believers is the sign of God’s just judgment and that time of judgment has not dawned already.

Paul emphasizes that God’s just judgment will have as its purpose or result (εἰς τό, BDR §402,2) that the Thessalonian believers are made worthy (καταξιωθῆναι) for the Kingdom of God, for which they are suffering. Paul, just as in 1 Thessalonians 4, is redefining what honor means. Suffering for the majority in antiquity was a sign of weakness and dishonor.<sup>79</sup> Paul considers it a sign of worth and honor though, because God is the source of real honor and the Thessalonian community is suffering “for” (ὑπέρ) the Kingdom

<sup>74</sup> See for a clear summary of the discussion Weima, *Thessalonians*, 458-461.

<sup>75</sup> See for these objections Weima, *Thessalonians*, 460-461.

<sup>76</sup> See C.A. Wanamaker, *The Epistle to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 221.

<sup>77</sup> Weima, *Thessalonians*, 464; B. Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 192.

<sup>78</sup> Weima, *Thessalonians*, 462.

<sup>79</sup> Klinker-De Klerck, “Lijden”.

of God. The focus in 1,5 thus does not lie on the punishment of the persecutors, but on the vindication of the believers.<sup>80</sup>

Paul's statement in 1,5 about God's just judgment is substantiated in 1,6-10. Paul first emphasizes the just (δικαιος) character of the divine judgment. God will reciprocate (ἀνταποδοῦναι) the afflictions of the believers to the perpetrators (1,6). Several scholars point towards an allusion in this verse to Isaiah 66,6 and 15, which is plausible because of the multiple attestation of Isaiah 66 in 2 Thessalonians 1 (1,8; 12).<sup>81</sup> The message is very clear: those opposing and harassing the Thessalonian community, thereby resisting God, will receive divine retribution. At the same time the believers will receive "relief" (ἄνεσιν) (1,7a). The Greek word order betrays that Paul contrasts the two groups to show the fittingness of divine retribution.<sup>82</sup> Paul includes himself and his co-workers in the payment of "relief", thereby reinforcing the ties between him and the Thessalonian community: they now share in the same fate of suffering (1 Thess. 2,2; 3,3-7), but they will share in the same future of relief.<sup>83</sup>

1,6-7a is elaborated upon in 1,7b-10, where Paul fleshes out the two-way result of God's just judgment: the demise of the oppressors (1,8-9) and the glorification of the believers (1,10). This will happen, according to Paul, in the "revelation" (ἀποκαλύψει)<sup>84</sup> of the Lord Jesus (1,7b). Paul thus places God's just judgment in the hands of Jesus the Messiah and in the eschaton. The revelatory coming of Jesus is substantiated with three prepositional phrases: "from heaven", "with his mighty angels"<sup>85</sup> and in flaming fire (1,7b-8a).<sup>86</sup> These phrases emphasize the divine authority and the theophanic

<sup>80</sup> P. Foster, "The Eschatology of the Thessalonian Correspondence. An Exercise in Pastoral Pedagogy and Constructive Theology", *JSP* 1 (2011), 57-82.

<sup>81</sup> R.D. Aus, "The Relevance of Isaiah 66 7 to Revelation 12 and 2 Thessalonians 1", *ZNW* 67 (1976), 252-268; I.H. Jones, "Once More, Isaiah 66: The Case of 2 Thessalonians", in: S. Moyise (ed.), *The Old Testament in the New Testament*, FS J.L. North, JSNTSup 189 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2000), 235-255.

<sup>82</sup> Weima, *Thessalonians*, 467.

<sup>83</sup> Paul probably uses ἄνεσις in the same way as 4 Ezra (7,36-38) and the author of Hebrews (4,1-11) use κατάπαυσις or *requies*, as a term for eschatological rest. See also Van Houwelingen, *Tessalonicenzen*, 180.

<sup>84</sup> Instead of using παρουσία Paul uses ἀποκαλύψει here, probably to stress "the revelatory aspect of Christ's return" (Weima, *Thessalonians*, 469).

<sup>85</sup> Μετ' ἀγγέλων δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ (1,7) is an intricate sentence. The word order indicates that Paul considers these angels the agents of God's power through which Jesus establishes divine justice.

<sup>86</sup> Ἐν πυρὶ φλογός (1,8) forms a text-critical problem. The alternative ἐν φλογὶ πύρος is also a strong reading with much support and a stronger allusion to Isaiah 66,15. The problem

character of Jesus and his coming. Paul alludes to Isaiah 66,15: a messianic text describing the theophany of YHWH and the eschatological punishment of the enemies. The eschatological punishment is worded by Paul in almost the same fashion as Isaiah 66,15: “exacting vengeance” (διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν; Is. 66,15: ἀποδοῦναι ἐν θυμῷ ἐκδίκησιν). Paul uses Isaiah 66 to identify Jesus as the messianic judge, the enemies of the believers as the Gentiles, and the Christian community as in line with the covenantal people of Israel.<sup>87</sup> In Paul’s formulation, Jesus will exact just punishment on those who deserve it.

The object of Jesus’ divine vengeance is: “those who do not know God and those who do not obey the Gospel” (τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν καὶ τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ) (1,8b), which is probably an allusion to Isaiah 66,4 (καὶ οὐχ ὑπήκουσαν μου). Paul describes the Gentiles as people “who do not know God” (1 Thess. 4,5). In this way Paul widens the group falling under God’s negative judgment to include not only the oppressors, but all Gentiles who will experience God’s retributive vengeance for not acknowledging him.

What this vengeance means is explained in verse 9: they will receive “punishment” (δίκην τίσουσιν). Paul thus far has used several words of the δίκ- root to highlight the legal character of God’s acts (δίκαιος in 1,5-6; ἐκδίκησις in 1,8). God’s legal punishment is described as “an eternal destruction” (ὄλεθρον αἰώνιον). Paul points towards God’s judgment as a destruction or torture (1 Thess. 5,3; 1 Cor. 5,5) which has no end (Ps. Sol. 2,35; 4 Macc. 10,15).<sup>88</sup> Paul further describes that those who will receive God’s judgment will be “away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ). He alludes to Isaiah 2,10.19.21: passages which underline the holiness, presence, and honor of YHWH. The objects of God’s punishment will be far away from Jesus, his theophany is a mismatch with their idolatry.

The other side of the eschatological judgment coin is also described by Paul. The “relief” of the believers in verse 7a is further developed in verse 10. On the day that Jesus will come from heaven he will be “glorified by his saints” (ἐνδοξασθῆναι ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις) and, in synonymous parallelism, “marveled at among all who have believed” (θαυμασθῆναι ἐν πάσιν τοῖς πιστεύσασιν). The first expression is an allusion to Psalm 88,8 LXX, the latter

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for this alternative is that the former reading receives back-up from stronger textual witnesses and it forms the *lectio difficilior*. See P. Katz, “Ἐν πυρὶ φλογός”, *ZNW* 46 (1953), 133-138.

<sup>87</sup> Jones, “Isaiah 66”.

<sup>88</sup> Weima, *Thessalonians*, 474.

hints at Psalm 67,36 LXX. Jesus will be welcomed on earth by a large group of people who, because of their faith, are set apart from the non-believers. The Thessalonian community will be part of this multitude, because it has believed Paul's testimony of Jesus the Messiah.

Paul elaborates the pastoral character of this apocalyptic teaching in verses 11-12. The Parousia of Jesus the Messiah, described in 1,5-10, is for Paul and his co-workers the incentive to pray for the Thessalonian community that it will be made worthy (ἀξιώση) of God's call on that day. He beseeches God to make the Thessalonian community not only full of desire towards goodness, but also full of a faithful drive towards outward actions.<sup>89</sup> The goal of these prayers is doxological: that Jesus will be glorified (ἐνδοξασθῆ) and that the community will be glorified in return in Jesus. This allusion to Isaiah 66,5 LXX is pastoral: the suffering Thessalonians will participate in the eschatological glory of Jesus in the Parousia, while the perpetrators will be banished from God's glorious presence. The glorification of Jesus and the community will be in line with the grace (χάρις) given by God and Jesus. Here, the principle of reciprocity is vital: through their steadfast faith the Thessalonians must (and will) glorify Jesus in the Parousia and in return Jesus will glorify them and save them.

Second Thessalonians 1,3-12, in the words of Krentz, "does not present abstract or theoretical theology; it is rather a response to human need, hope, and aspiration in a time of persecution. The fundamental conviction that God is a God of justice who will vindicate his suffering church underlies this theology and gives it unity."<sup>90</sup> Paul offers an eschatological and pastoral perspective on the present circumstances to exhort the Thessalonian community to persevere and eventually overcome both their enemies and their present situation. He also corrects their eschatological convictions: the Parousia is not already realized, but it will come.

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<sup>89</sup> Weima, *Thessalonians*, 482-484.

<sup>90</sup> E.M. Krentz, "Traditions Held Fast. Theology and Fidelity in 2 Thessalonians", in: Collins, *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 505-515, there 505.

5.2.2.2 *Theological-Hermeneutical Reflections on Vengeance in 2 Thessalonians 1,6.8*

Vengeance functions in 2 Thessalonians 1 within Paul's pastoral eschatology and derives its meaning from this apocalyptic context. The concept of vengeance in 2 Thessalonians 1 entails several recognizable aspects.

Paul places the future vengeance in the hands of God, who will repay affliction to those who afflict the Thessalonian community (1,6) and will exact vengeance on those who do not know God and are disobedient to the Gospel (1,8). Vengeance thus is a divine prerogative: the Thessalonian believers must not react to their suffering with vengeance, because their vengeance will come fully and righteously when Jesus will return in his eschatological theophany. Their oppressors and all others who are not followers of Jesus the Messiah will receive their legitimate retribution in the Parousia.

This pericope also shows that vengeance is understood by Paul in the matrix of retributive reciprocity. This is very obvious in verse 6, where Paul explicitly states that God will "reciprocate" (*ἀνταποδοῦναι*) afflictions to the afflicted. The explication in verse 8 which people will receive vengeance also demonstrates the retributive character of vengeance in 2 Thessalonians 1. Jesus will exact vengeance on those who do not believe in him and disobey his Gospel, a retributive reaction which was already present in Isaiah 66 and one thus could have known. Unbelief, disobedience, and harassing the Thessalonian community prompt God to exact eschatological vengeance, measure for measure. In the same way, he will give his glory to the suffering believers who glorify him now (1,5) and in the future (1,12).

Paul's pastoral eschatology and thus the concept of vengeance in 2 Thessalonians 1 is articulated in the vocabulary of honor. The present suffering of the Thessalonians community is redefined as a position of honor which will result in the glorification of Jesus and the community in the Parousia. The theophany of Jesus will dishonor the enemies of the believing community through vengeance, because they have dishonored the believers through afflictions (1,6). Divine vengeance thus assures that the dishonoring treatment of the believers will ultimately not prevail, but God will intervene on behalf of their honor.

Justice is a central aspect in Paul's understanding of vengeance in 2 Thessalonians 1. As shown above, the vocabulary of justice is prominent in 1,5-9. Paul explicitly states that it is just (*δίκαιον*) for God to reciprocate the afflictions of the Thessalonian community to those who are afflicting them

(1,6). He also describes the execution of eschatological vengeance on the unbelievers in 1,9 as “inflicting punishment” (δικην τίσουσιν). Jesus, the agent of God’s vengeance, will exact vengeance as a legal act of restoring the honor of the community and of God. He establishes divine justice in the world in the eschaton through vengeance.

Vengeance is also closely connected to kinship. Paul establishes the Thessalonian community as a community “in God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1,1). Through Paul’s testimony the Thessalonians have relied on God as their Lord (1,10). This relationship results in God standing up for them in their present circumstances. God, as the avenging Patron of the weakened community, will make sure that those who do not belong to him will not escape their just punishment. Paul portrays the receivers of God’s vengeance as outsiders: they do not know God and disobey his Gospel (1,8). Vengeance in 2 Thessalonians 1 thus cannot be understood properly when one does not envision the bond of kinship between God and his people in Thessalonica.

Emotion is not really present in this pericope as an aspect of divine vengeance. Paul’s language is quite evoking though. The theophanic nature of Jesus’ coming, with angels and fire, and the use of words like “destruction” and “glorify”, are quite strong. These images and use of words service Paul in communicating his message of pastoral care. The emotions of fear and anger within the community must be diverted into peace and assurance: God takes responsibility for the community and the offenders will not escape his avenging attention. Divine vengeance in 2 Thessalonians is thus evocative, but Paul does not allocate an explicit emotional character to it. .

An important feature of vengeance in 2 Thessalonians 1 is eschatology. In the previous section we have seen that Paul explicitly frames vengeance in an apocalyptic-eschatological matrix. The vengeance of God will be executed in the future. This act of eschatological vengeance will be on the one hand an act of punishment for unbelievers and the perpetrators of the suffering of the Thessalonian community (1,9). On the other hand it will be a moment of glorification and liberation of the Thessalonian believers (1,10-12). Vengeance in Paul’s pastoral eschatology in 2 Thessalonians 1 thus has the two sides of punishment and deliverance.

### 5.2.2.3 Conclusion

Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte offers a clear and just description of this passage: “The passage 1,3-12 has a double function. On the one hand, it offers consolation to the readers. Their distress is temporary; they will eventually be vindicated, and those who inflict them with tribulations will be judged. On the other hand, it enables the author to make an implicit exhortation (1,11-12).”<sup>91</sup> Paul employs the concept of vengeance to show the Thessalonian community that God in Jesus will aid in delivering and glorifying them. Paul’s pastoral eschatology and the motif of vengeance within this narrative admonishes the Thessalonian believers to persevere in faith in the middle of suffering and to expect the revelation of God’s restoring vengeance in the future.

### 5.2.3 Romans 12,19 and 13,4

*Do not avenge yourself, beloved, but leave room for the wrath, for it is written: “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”*

(...)

*For it is God’s servant for your good. If you do wrong things, fear, for she does not carry the sword in vain. Because she is God’s servant, the Avenger to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.*

The lack of intensive scholarly attention to the notion of vengeance within Romans is surprising and remarkable in the light of the two quoted explicit vengeance texts in the epistle to the Romans (12,19; 13,4). Interpreters commonly note the presence of vengeance in these passages, its pagan, Old Testament, and Early Jewish equivalents, and its meaning in these two verses. But the valuable steps of reflection are scarcely present: an extensive comparison with other Pauline and New Testament vengeance passages, the meaning of vengeance in the overall structure and message of the epistle, and the question of the mechanics of vengeance.<sup>92</sup> This section thus breaks new

<sup>91</sup> L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *The Antecedents of Antichrist. A Traditio-Historical Study of the Earliest Christian Views on Eschatological Opponents* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 71.

<sup>92</sup> O. Michel (*Der Brief an die Römer*, KEKNT (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966<sup>4</sup>)), C.E.B. Cranfield (*Romans. Volume II*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979)), U. Wilckens (*Der Brief an die Römer (Röm 12-16)*, EKKNT VI/3 (Zürich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener Verlag, 1982)), D.J. Moo (*The Letter to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018<sup>2</sup>)), and T.R. Schreiner (*Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker



ground, investigating how Paul employs the motif of vengeance within his letter to the Roman community.

This section not only examines the two explicit vengeance passages, but also examines its role within Paul's broader argument in Romans 1-11. Paul creates a context for his parenetical statements directed to the Romans in 12,19 and 13,4. The two vengeance passages are treated together, because they are placed within the first parenetical framework in the letter (Rom. 12,9-13,10) and the use of vengeance language within close range forges a connection between the two passages. This section is set up the same way as previous sections and will subsequently discuss: the context of the letter to the Romans (5.4.1), the examination of Romans 12,9-13,7 (5.4.2), some theological-hermeneutical reflections on vengeance in Romans 12,19 and 13,4 (5.4.3), and a conclusion (5.4.4).

### 5.2.3.1 *The Context of Romans 12,9-13,7*

Paul makes it clear in the beginning of his letter that his epistle revolves around honor and justice (1,18.23; 2,2-6; 3,5-7).<sup>93</sup> He is not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah, because it is the power of God to save Jews and Gentiles (1,16). In 1,17 Paul explains the content of the Gospel: God has revealed (*ἀποκαλύπτεται*) his righteousness (*δικαιοσύνη*) in Jesus Christ (cf. 1,2-4).<sup>94</sup> The use of *ἀποκαλύπτεται* shows that this revelation of the Gospel

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Academic, 2018<sup>2</sup>) offer some theological reflection on vengeance in relationship with the cross of Jesus Christ, but these can be considered more loose thoughts than systematic reflections. R. Jewett (*Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007)) pays some attention to theological questions surrounding vengeance in 12,19, but his treatment of these questions remains superficial.

<sup>93</sup> H. Moxnes, "Honor, Shame, and the Outside World in Paul's Letter to the Romans", in: J. Neusner e.a. (eds.), *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism*, Fs. H.C. Kee (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 207-218; idem, "The Quest for Honor and the Unity of the Community in Romans 12 and in the Orations of Dio Chrysostom", in: T. Engberg-Pedersen (ed.), *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 204-230.

<sup>94</sup> There has been much discussion surrounding the notion of God's righteousness and the justification of the ungodly. The righteousness of God, in my view, is the punitive and salvific power of God which is revealed in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1,30; Rom. 3,21-26; 10,3). It is thus not merely a *iustitia saluifera*, because the Old Testament sometimes describes the notion of punishment as God's righteousness (Ps. 7,9-12; 11,4-7; cf. Rom. 3,25). See M.A. Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism", in: idem, D.A. Carson, and P.T. O'Brien (eds.), *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, WUNT II/140 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 415-442.

is eschatological, in that God's future world makes its way into this world in Jesus Christ.<sup>95</sup> The coming, the life, and the death of Jesus Christ is the eschatological event already promised in the Old Testament (1,2) and it is the precursor of future events.<sup>96</sup>

This eschatological revelation of God's righteousness in Christ is made explicit in the following chapters. Paul connects the wrath of God in 1,18 with the revelation of God's righteousness in 1,17 by repeating the word ἀποκαλύπτεται.<sup>97</sup> With the proclamation of God's righteousness the divine power to save is revealed, but also the eschatological wrath of God. Finamore in my view summarizes Paul's point in 1,17-18 most poignantly:<sup>98</sup>

the best interpretation of Rom. 1,17-18 understands the gospel to be an agent for the revelation of God's wrath and integrity: the two are related for both are processes set in train by the Christ-event and its representation in the gospel. This twin process is eschatological because it presents humanity with a final crisis in which the choices are the gospel or destruction.

In Romans 1,19-3,20 Paul argues that both Jews and Gentiles are "storing up wrath" (Rom. 2,5). Both have knowledge of God's divine will, but both groups choose to dishonor God by not doing the divine will properly (Rom.

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The revelatory power of God in his righteousness is also not merely covenantal, as C.L. Irons has shown on a lexical level (*The Righteousness of God. A Lexical Examination of the Covenant-Faithfulness Interpretation*, WUNT II/386 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015)). As Seifrid ("Righteousness Language") and also N.T. Wright (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God. Volume II, Christian Origins and the Question of God 4* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 801) argue, God's righteousness has a cosmic dimension: he must be Judge over all of creation. His righteousness restores order in the world, punishing sin and evil, while saving the oppressed. Paul envisions this process in Christ: he has taken up the punishment on sin and unworthiness to declare fallen human beings worthy covenantal people (Rom. 4,5,25). Justification is God's gift (Rom. 5,17) which creates a new situation of covenantal rightness (Rom. 4,5; 5,1.9).

<sup>95</sup> G. Bornkamm, "Die Offenbarung des Zornes Gottes (Röm 1-3)", in: idem, *Das Ende des Gesetzes. Paulusstudien*, Gesammelte Aufsätze Band I (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1961), 9-33.

<sup>96</sup> S. Finamore, "The Gospel and the Wrath of God in Romans 1", in: C. Rowland and C.H.T. Fletcher-Louis (eds.), *Understanding, Studying and Reading*, Fs. J. Ashton, JSNTSup 153 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 137-154, there 139.

<sup>97</sup> H.J. Eckstein ("Denn Gottes Zorn wird vom Himmel her offenbar werden". Exegetische Erwägungen zu Röm 1,18", *ZNW* 78 (1987), 74-89) wants to read ἀποκαλύπτεται as a futuristic present: the wrath of God will only be revealed in the future. The apocalyptic nature of Paul's theology, viewing the future coming into the present in Jesus Christ, is more suitable with a "ingressive-futuristic" present: an event begun in the present but completed in the future. See Wallace, *Grammar*, 537.

<sup>98</sup> Finamore, "Gospel", 154.

1,21). They both will be condemned in the future when God will “repay every person according to his works”, Paul states in Romans 2,6 quoting Old Testament teaching (Ps. 61,13 LXX; Prov. 24,12). His conclusion in Romans 3,20 that neither Jew nor Greek is righteous shows a dark reality: vengeance on both Jews and Gentiles is unavoidable. Paul however offers light in this dark reality. The righteousness of God and thus the possibility of being just is given in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3,21-26; 5,1-11).<sup>99</sup> Just as both Jews and Gentiles deserve punishment, both Jews and Gentiles can be justified in the Christ-gift. This gift can be accepted through faith, just as Abraham believed the promise of God (3,28; 4,1-25).

Through receiving the Christ-gift the believer is freed from sin (5,12-14), condemnation (5,18), and death (Rom. 7,5) and is granted new life (5,18; 6,1-11). Grace becomes the reigning power in life (Rom. 5,22; 6,12-14). That does not mean that there is no struggle in the believer between the old world of the condemning law and the new age of grace (7,7-25).<sup>100</sup> The Spirit is the key for understanding this (eschatological) tension: he brings believers in the resurrection life of Christ (8,1-11). The believers only received the “firstfruits” of the Spirit (8,23) though: the fullness of this resurrected and Spirit-filled life will be received in the future (8,25).<sup>101</sup> Until then, believers may not give in to the temptations of the flesh, but rejoice in the victory and love of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8,31-39). This assurance in Christ leads Paul to ask the question why his Jewish contemporaries do not accept God’s promise in Jesus Christ. He concludes that there is still hope for the Jewish people, although hope does not seem to be justified at the moment.<sup>102</sup>

After his theological discourse in Romans 1,18-11,36 Paul applies this theological foundation to concrete situations of the church of Rome (Rom.

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<sup>99</sup> See my contribution “His Love is Greater. Romans 5,1-11 in the Context of Ancient Reciprocity”, in: idem, A. Huijgen, H.G.L. Peels, and R.T. te Velde (eds.), *The Logic of God’s Love* (forthcoming).

<sup>100</sup> For the use of *προσωποποιία* in Romans 7,7-25, see S.K. Stowers, “Romans 7.7-25 as a Speech-in-Character (*προσωποποιία*)”, in: Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul*, 180-202; N. Elder, “‘Wretch I Am!’ Eve’s Tragic Speech-in-Character in Romans 7,7-25”, *JBL* 137 (2018), 743-763. I benefitted greatly from a Twitter-discussion (<https://twitter.com/jrrodson/status/1475830236075933701> [consulted 4-2-2022]) between Joey Dodson, Max Lee, David Shaw, Nick Elder, Jason Myers, and Emily Gathergood.

<sup>101</sup> J.P. Versteeg, *Het heden van de toekomst* (Kampen: Kok, 1969).

<sup>102</sup> J.P. Versteeg, “Kerk en Israël volgens Romeinen 9-11”, *ThRef* 34 (1991), 151-169; M.C. Mulder, “Israël, een mysterie... Over de verhouding van Joden en heidenen in de gemeente van God”, in: A.D. Baum and P.H.R. van Houwelingen (eds.), *Theologie van het Nieuwe Testament in twintig thema’s* (Utrecht: KokBoekencentrum, 2019), 95-109.

12,1-15,13). Paul asks the believers in Rome to devote their bodies to God as a thanksgiving (Rom. 12,1). They must transform their mind and discern the will of God (Rom. 12,2). Paul addresses these two points in Romans 12,3-8: “the Christian community should have *unity* in avoiding conformity to the world but transforming their mind, and, at the same time, they [the readers, AvdO] should keep the *diversity* of roles and functions (...) so that the will of God may be discerned.”<sup>103</sup> Paul then builds upon this paraenesis and the theological framework he has harnessed in Romans 1-11 to exhort the Christian community in Rome even more.

### 5.2.3.2 Paul’s Exhortation in Romans 12,9-13,7

Most scholars consider Romans 12,9a the motto for the following exhortations: “love must be sincere” (ἡ ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος).<sup>104</sup> Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 4, has already spoken about the will of God being the sanctification of the community and he has already connected that with love (1 Thess. 4,3-9). In the letter to the Romans, the love of God receives special attention. Divine love was, according to Paul, not dependent on the worth or performances of the community, because it was given to worthless people (Rom. 5,1-11). Believers are filled with the love of God through the Spirit (Rom. 5,5) and they cannot be separated from it, albeit the hard circumstances (Rom. 8,35-39). When Paul urges the Roman community to let its love be genuine, he refers to the example of divine love which the community received: incongruous, lasting, patient, and not retaliatory.<sup>105</sup>

Kuo Wei Peng has persuasively argued that Romans 12,9bc must be considered “subtitles” to the “title” in Romans 12,9a.<sup>106</sup> 12,9b (which Peng calls “subtitle 1”) is fleshed out in 12,16b-21, describing the evil behavior from which the Roman community must refrain in relation to the outside world. 12,9c (which Peng calls “subtitle 2”) is elaborated in 12,10-16,

<sup>103</sup> K.W. Peng, *Hate the Evil, Hold Fast to the Good. Structuring Romans 12,1-15,1*, LNTS 300 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006), 129.

<sup>104</sup> To name a few examples: Cranfield, *Romans*, 631; Jewett, *Romans*, 758; Moo, *Romans*, 793; Wolter, *Römer. Teilband 2*, 281.

<sup>105</sup> W.T. Wilson, *Love Without Pretense. Romans 12.9-21 and Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Literature*, WUNT II/46 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 154.

<sup>106</sup> Peng, *Hate*, 61. See for an alternative, but almost similar division Th.C. de Kruijf, “The Literary Unity of Rom 12,16-13,8a”, *Bijdragen* 48 (1987), 319-326.

clarifying the good attitude of the community.<sup>107</sup> Both subtitles are dependent on the title of sincere love in 12,9a. The internal structure also serves as an argument for Peng: the words “evil” and “good” function as key words in this pericope.<sup>108</sup> Paul connects the categories of good and evil with the place of and the dynamics within the community. In Romans 13,1-7 Paul then mixes these two points: the Roman community must “give up bearing malice towards the authorities and (...) pursue the ‘good’ of the outsiders in their public life.”<sup>109</sup>

Romans 12,10-16a can be divided in two segments: 12,10-13 and 12,14-16a. The two segments are bound together by the recurring motif of unity in the community (Rom. 12,10a; 16a). Romans 12,10-13 is demarcated by the *inclusio* φιλαδελφία-φιλοξενία. Paul urges the Roman believers to do good to their fellow believers (Rom. 12,10-11a). They are also encouraged to be enthusiastic, to be steadfast in faith and faith practices and to do good to outsiders (Rom. 12,11b-13). In Romans 12,14-16a Paul breaks the structure with the imperative “bless” (εὐλογεῖτε), but the content is the same. He exhorts the community to bless enemies (not curse them), rejoice with the happy, mourn with those who grief, ending with the command to live in harmony (Rom. 12,14a-16a).

Romans 12,16b-21 focuses on regulating evil behavior in relation to the world outside of the Christian community. Paul connects the previous and the present section through the use in verse 16 of φρον-words: he focuses on the mindset and the resulting behavior.<sup>110</sup> Paul exhorts the community to consider their honor in humbleness (ταπεινοῖς) and not in haughtiness (ὕψηλά φρονοῦντες). They must not boast in their own wisdom, because one will then relapse into the societal definition of honor and honorable behavior instead of the honor derived from discerning God’s will.

Paul then turns to the notion of retribution, where he insists that “one must not repay anyone evil for evil”, but instead one must be “minded” (προνοοούμενοι) towards the good (καλά) of another human being (Rom. 12,17). It is clear by the use of “repay” (ἀποδιδόντες) that Paul has in view behavior couched in terms of reciprocity. He does not reject the system of

<sup>107</sup> Peng, *Hate*, 61.

<sup>108</sup> See also Jewett, *Romans*, 757.

<sup>109</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 92. See also R.M. Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism. A Comparative Study of Ancient Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 96-99.

<sup>110</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 746; Wolter, *Römer. Teilband 2*, 293

reciprocity, but, just as Jesus did in Luke 6,27-36, Paul envisions the behavior towards evil in terms of reciprocity, removing it from the sphere of personal retribution. One must not retaliate evil, one must always do that which is widely considered good to the other person. Paul underlines this point in verse 18: the Roman believers must avoid conflicts and seek peaceful relationships with others. When conflicts arise it must not be the fault of the Roman believers: they must do anything within their powers (εἰ δυνατόν τὸ ἐξ ὑμῶν) to avoid quarrels.

In verse 19 Paul condemns the use of vengeance towards others (μὴ ἑαυτοῦς ἐκδικοῦντες). The Roman community instead must leave room for wrath (δοτε τόπον τῇ ὀργῇ). This is clearly not human wrath, but divine, eschatological wrath.<sup>111</sup> The use of reciprocal justice language reminds the reader of the previous sections of the letter, where God's right of retributive justice is presumed. However, God did not retaliate, but instead offered justification and salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul's message to the Romans is thus clear: retributive justice is the exclusive prerogative of God, whereas the responsibility of the Roman Christians is to overcome evil by doing good (12,21). By doing good in the world one shows the signs of the new life and participation in Christ.<sup>112</sup>

Paul states that those who seek revenge would violate Deuteronomy 32,35 (12,19d).<sup>113</sup> Paul probably used this citation for several reasons. First, the citation emphasizes the divine prerogative of vengeance, placing ἐμοί first. Secondly, Deuteronomy 32 emphasizes salvation for the people of God in difficult circumstances (32,15-25). In the vulnerable position in which early Christians found themselves, especially in the epicenter of the Roman Empire, Paul reminds them that God will step up for them when they are ridiculed or subjected to suffering (Rom. 5,3). Thirdly, Paul uses Deuteronomy

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<sup>111</sup> E.R. Smothers, "Give Place to the Wrath (Rom. 12,19). An Essay in Verbal Exegesis", *CBQ* 6 (1944), 205-215.

<sup>112</sup> T. Söding, *Das Liebesgebot bei Paulus*, NTA NF 26 (Münster: Asschendorff, 1995), 250.

<sup>113</sup> The textual form of this citation is highly debated. Both the Septuagint and Masoretic traditions do not contain a form of Deuteronomy 32,35 as Paul cites here (and is also cited in Hebrews 10,30). Other options are mentioned: a reading of one of the Targums or an oral tradition (D.A. Koch, *Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums. Untersuchungen zur Verwendung und zum Verständnis der Schrift bei Paulus*, BHT 69 (Tübingen Mohr Siebeck, 1986), 78). This reading of Deuteronomy 32,35 shows more affinity with the Masoretic tradition than with the Septuagint tradition, so my inconclusive reading is that Paul uses a textual tradition which has affinities with the Masoretic tradition and which is known in the Christian community, either orally or through a textual collection.

32 in other places in the letter (Rom. 10,19; 15,10) to define the behavior of the people of God.<sup>114</sup> Fourthly, the context of justice and reciprocity in Deuteronomy 32 fits Paul's understanding of vengeance. The text from Deuteronomy 32 thus suits Paul's argument here.

The pattern of verse 17 is repeated: evil must be rejected and good must be done. Paul rejects willful vengeance in verse 19 and shows the good way in verse 20. Paul provides an example of doing good. When an enemy is starving or thirsty, the Roman believers must give food or something to drink as an act of goodness. Paul also gives a rationale for this behavior: doing that will "heap burning coals on their heads" (ἄνθρακας πυρὸς σωρεύσεις ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ; 12,20). Scholars are puzzled by this sentence: does it mean shaming the enemy, aggravating judgment, or even converting the enemy? This sentence is probably a quotation of Proverbs 25,22, in which the statement about heaping coals on the heads of enemies is followed by "YHWH will retribute you" (MT: וַיַּהֲרֹג יְשׁוּעָה לְךָ; LXX: ὁ δὲ κύριος ἀνταποδώσει σοι ἄγαθά). The most plausible explanation is that the good deeds of the believers are retributed for salvation in the future, but also function as aggravating evidence for the enemy. As Krister Stendahl notes: "if you act in non-retaliation your good deeds are stored up as a further accusation against your enemy for the day of Wrath to which you should defer all judgment."<sup>115</sup>

The perspective is then changed to the attitude of the Roman believers towards the government (Rom. 13,1-7).<sup>116</sup> Paul does not develop a political theory here<sup>117</sup> nor does he react to an actual problem in the Roman

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<sup>114</sup> G. Waters, *The End of Deuteronomy in the Epistles of Paul*, WUNT II/221 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 223; Mulder, "Paul's Dual Focus".

<sup>115</sup> K. Stendahl, "Hate, Non-Retaliation, and Love. 1 QS x,17-20 and Rom. 12,19-21", *HThR* 55 (1962), 343-355, there 348. For further reading on this matter, see W. Klassen, "Coals of Fire. Sign of Repentance or Revenge?", *NTS* 9 (1962/63), 337-350; J.N. Day, "'Coals of Fire' in Romans 12,19-20", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (2003), 414-420.

<sup>116</sup> 1 Peter 2,13-17 reflects in a certain way the same tradition as Romans 13,1-7 and also uses ἐκδίκειν in verse 14. See for the parallel between 1 Peter 2 and Romans 13 W.C. van Unnik, "A Classical Parallel to 1 Peter ii.14 and 20", *NTS* 2 (1955-1956), 198-202. The reason why this study does not include 1 Peter 2 is that the context of 1 Peter 2,14 makes the translation "punishment" for ἐκδίκειν more likely (cf. 2 Cor. 7,11). The link between Romans 12,19 and 13,4 make it plausible to translate ἐκδίκειν as "vengeance" in these two verses.

<sup>117</sup> See L. Goppelt, "Der Staat in der Sicht des Neuen Testaments", in: idem, *Christologie und Ethik. Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 190-207, there 204.

community.<sup>118</sup> Paul wants to “prevent Christians in Rome from doing something wrong in their public life”, thereby threatening the Roman community’s existence.<sup>119</sup> He therefore exhorts the Roman believers in Romans 13,1 to adopt an attitude of subjection (ὕποτασσεσθω) with respect to the authorities (ἐξουσία).<sup>120</sup> Paul elaborates the rationale of this exhortation in the next verses. Romans 13,1a can be considered the command.

Romans 13,1bc provides the “theological reason” for the command.<sup>121</sup> All authorities are given by God, because there can be no authority besides what is given by God. The authorities are “the institution of God” (τῆ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῆ), as Paul puts it in Romans 13,2. Paul thus gives the governing bodies in the contemporary Roman empire a theological foundation. The governments are part of God’s given order. Resistance against this God-given institution is thus a slight of God and thus deserves to be condemned. Although Paul emphasizes the divine gift of authorities (even calling them “God’s servant” in verse 4), he also puts the governing bodies in place. They have a “limited duration”<sup>122</sup>, “a *Provisiorum* that belongs to the transient world, not the last or absolute, but something penultimate and provisional.”<sup>123</sup> That relativizes the claim to divine supremacy of the Roman empire and emperors: they are ordinances and creations of God, the supreme King.

That does not minimize the function of the authorities, as Paul shows in the verses 3-4. These verses provide another, more practical reason for the attitude of subjection which Paul advocates in this pericope. One does not have to fear when one does good things (τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ): one even receives praise (ἔπαινον) for those activities.<sup>124</sup> The attitude of subjection and doing

<sup>118</sup> According to M.J. Borg (“A New Context for Romans XIII”, *NTS* 19 (1973), 205-218), Paul reacts to a movement of Jewish zealotism. Within the context of Romans 12-13 and the whole letter, this view does not make sense, because Paul did not address any zealous tendency within the Roman community. The Jewish community in Rome was also not that strong to form such a group. See P. Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten*, WUNT II/18 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989<sup>2</sup>), 57-58.

<sup>119</sup> Peng, *Hate*, 97; Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 98-99.

<sup>120</sup> The authorities are not angels, as Oscar Cullmann (“Zur neuesten Diskussion über die ἐξουσία in Röm 13,1”, *Theologische Zeitung* 10 (1954), 321-337) argued, but the political authorities. See R.H. Stein, “The Argument of Romans 13,1-7”, *NovT* 31 (1989), 325-343.

<sup>121</sup> Stein, “Argument”.

<sup>122</sup> Blanton, *Spiritual Economy*, 87.

<sup>123</sup> W. Schrage, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments*, NTD-Ergänzungsreihe 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 227: “Auch der Staat ist ein Provisiorum, das der vergehenden Welt angehört, nichts Letztes und Absolutes, sondern etwas Vorletztes und Vorläufiges.”

<sup>124</sup> Winter (“Public Honouring”) argues that Paul here envisions rich Christian benefactors who receive praise for their good deeds of benefaction. This explanation seems forced and



good thus even honors the Roman believers, praised by the authorities who are God-given for their good (Rom. 13,4a).

The flip side is more frightening. When one does bad things, one will meet the power of the authorities. This power is described by Paul as “carrying the sword” (Rom. 13,4b). One can overhear the notion of the *ius gladii* of the Roman government, but perhaps also hints of Deuteronomy 32 and YHWH’s sword of vengeance (Deut. 32,41). This hint is reinforced when Paul calls the authorities “avenger” (ἔκδικος), called to execute the wrath of God on evil people.<sup>125</sup> The reference to Romans 12,19 cannot be missed: God avenges in the future, but his avenging judgment is also executed partially by the authorities in this world. This serves as an encouragement to the Christians who suffer (Rom. 5,3): God will punish those who persecute them.<sup>126</sup>

Paul then emphasizes in verse 5 that the Roman Christians must not only subject to the authorities out of fear of divine wrath, but also because of their conscience (συνείδησις). Here Paul summarizes the previous arguments. The Roman community must subject to the governing bodies because of the theological basis of the authorities (conscience), and because of their function as punishing avengers of God (fear of wrath).<sup>127</sup> One will be shamed in one’s conscience when one chooses to resist the government, because one resists the authorities appointed by God.<sup>128</sup>

Paul then raises the question of paying taxes, probably the incentive of this pericope.<sup>129</sup> The payment of taxes was a point of discussion in the Jewish and early Christian movement, as can be seen in the Gospel of Matthew (17,24-27; 22,15-22).<sup>130</sup> Paul makes clear that one of the ongoing tasks the “servants of God” (λειτουργοὶ θεοῦ) have is to collect the taxes (Rom.

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speculative when one considers the context in which “good” and “evil” are frequently used to denote “small” activities as non-retaliatory love for enemies.

<sup>125</sup> J. Friedrich, W. Pöhlmann, and P. Stuhlmacher (“Zur historischen Situation und Intention von Röm 13,1-7”, *ZThK* 73 (1976), 131-166) argue that Paul refers to the authorities as lawyer who defend the Christians in Rome. The word ἔκδικος can indeed also mean “lawyer”, but the connection with Romans 12,19 makes this translation not plausible.

<sup>126</sup> Peng, *Hate*, 107.

<sup>127</sup> H.J. Eckstein, *Der Begriff Syneidesis bei Paulus*, WUNT II/10 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 288. See also J.I.H. McDonald, “Romans 13,1-7. A Test Case for New Testament Interpretation”, *NTS* 35 (1989), 540-549.

<sup>128</sup> Stein, “Argument”, 337-338.

<sup>129</sup> T. Engberg-Pedersen, “Paul’s Stoicizing Politics in Romans 12-13. The Role of 13,1-10 in the Argument”, *JSNT* 29 (2006), 163-172, there 169.

<sup>130</sup> Paul makes extensive use of the Jesus-tradition in Romans 12-13. See M. Thompson, *Clothed with Christ. The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12,1-15,13*, JSNTSup 59 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

13,6). In verse 7 Paul completes the incentive to pay taxes (and also the whole pericope) by pointing to their responsibility: paying taxes and also fear and honor towards the authorities are things the Roman believers “are due” (τὰς ὀφειλάς). This obligation is centered around love by Paul, referring to the exhortation to love one another in Romans 12,9. The Roman believers are committed (ὀφείλετε) to love, as a fulfillment of the law (13,10).

Ernst Käsemann has provided a beautiful summary of the core of Paul’s message in Romans 12,9-13,10. He states:<sup>131</sup>

This world is not *Regnum Christi*, but remains a fallen creation, from which God does not withdraw his blessings, not even the gift of a worldly dubious-looking authority and secure societal ordinances. But the world will be *Regnum Christi*, by and so far the free, true to the Word of Christ, go into it servantly and through their own subjection bring more than just an order, namely peace.

Paul exhorts the Roman community to show love to one another and to do good in society. The broader context of Romans shows the necessity and framework of this exhortation: the believers have laid off their old life of idolatry in the death of Christ and put on the new life in the resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6,1-14; 8,9-13).

### 5.2.3.3 *Theological-Hermeneutical Reflections on Vengeance in Romans 12,19 and 13,4*

Romans 12-13 exhibits the most explicit and practical use of the concept of vengeance in the Pauline corpus. This section will provide a survey of the meaning and function of vengeance in Romans 12-13 besides some hermeneutical remarks concerning vengeance in this pericope.

As in the Thessalonian correspondence, Paul considers vengeance to be a divine matter. While Paul implicitly links vengeance with God and exhorts the Thessalonians not to seek retribution (1 Thess. 5,15), he makes this connection explicit here in Romans 12-13. The Romans are urged to not take

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<sup>131</sup> E. Käsemann, “Römer 13,1-7 in unserer Generation”, *ZThK* 56 (1959), 316-376, there 376: “Dieser Welt ist nicht *Regnum Christi*, sondern bleibt gefallene Schöpfung, der Gott seine Gaben nicht entzieht, auch nicht die Gabe einer irdisch noch so zweifelhaft erscheinenden Autorität und gewisser gesellschaftlicher Ordnungen. Aber die Welt wird *Regnum Christi*, indem und soweit die Freien, dem Worte Christi gehorsam, dienend in sie hineingehen und ihr mit der eigenen Unterordnung mehr als bloß Ordnung, nämlich Frieden bringen.”

matters into their own hands, but to leave vengeance with God and his wrath (Rom. 12,19). The early Pauline passages contextualize vengeance in Old Testament categories, while in Romans 12-13 Paul explicitly connects the prohibition of human vengeance with Scripture. The readers can recognize the allusion to Leviticus 19,18, but Paul adds the quotation of Deuteronomy 32,35 as a further substantiation of this command. Vengeance is a divine affair, God will seek retribution (Rom. 12,19). However, God uses the authorities, as divine agents, to deal with evil by imparting to them, in part, the right to avenge (Rom. 13,4). Paul thus regards vengeance as still a divine prerogative, which is partially exercised by the governing bodies as “servants of God”.

Vengeance in Romans 12-13 is also embedded within a matrix of reciprocity. Paul prohibits the Roman Christ-believers from repaying evil with evil (Rom. 12,17), suggesting such vengeance is not a matter of human concern. Instead believers must search for peace in the world by doing good, by serving their neighbors and subjecting themselves to the governing authorities. Again, retribution for evils done to the believer is forbidden and must be left solely in the hands of God. They should not discredit the community and God by letting themselves be ruled by the flesh of the “old human” (Rom. 8,9-13). While retribution is left to God, the human response is to follow the example of Jesus who suffered for ungodly human beings. So too the Roman Christ-believers must repay good things in response to evil and suffering. Paul maintains the role of punitive institutions and their retribution, while at the same time he provides the legitimate mode of reciprocal action for the Christian believers.

Connected with reciprocity is the notion of honor. Halvor Moxnes already pointed out that honor is an important feature in the letter to the Romans.<sup>132</sup> The ultimate sin of humanity was to not give honor to God and even claiming divine honor to themselves (Rom. 1,21-23). Paul shows however that God does not exact vengeance on these unworthy individuals for this disgraceful lifestyle, but he makes them worthy in his Son Jesus Christ (Rom. 3,21-26; 5,1-11). This divine pattern of honor must be imitated by the Roman believers. Here, the relationship between honor and vengeance comes into play. Instead of standing up for their slighted honor, the Roman community must persevere in honoring enemies. It is not the responsibility of the Roman

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<sup>132</sup> Moxnes, “Honor”; idem, “Quest”.

Christians to avenge, because vengeance is God's business (which he communicates through his agents). They must find their honor in Christ and nowhere else. The Roman community must embody the mind and virtues of Christ, as Paul writes in another letter (Phil. 2,5). That is the divine will which the Roman believers must discern (Rom. 12,2).<sup>133</sup>

The notion of justice is also emphatically present in Romans 12-13, as Erwin Ochseneier has shown extensively.<sup>134</sup> Human vengeance in Romans 12-13 is considered to be an act of vigilance. Paul defines human vengeance in Romans 12-13 as an evil deed, appropriating an activity which is designated to the authorities (Rom. 13,4). Paul thus urges the Roman community to not defend and restore one's honor through vengeance, but to let the governing bodies do their assignment and let God eventually do justice for them. The calling of the Roman believers is to do good, thus aggravating the charge against the enemies before the supreme Judge.<sup>135</sup>

Paul also considers vengeance to be a covenantal act. Paul's struggle in Romans 1-11 is not only soteriological, but it is also sociological: how do we view the people of God? Paul makes it clear in Romans 9-11 that the new people of God is not the replacement of Israel, because Israel will eventually be saved (Rom. 11,26). The covenant with Israel is however broadened and now, through the work of Christ, also encompasses the believing Gentiles. The church, in the words of Mike Bird, is now "the representative of Israel in the messianic age."<sup>136</sup> This covenantal status ensures the believers that God will stand up for them if their honor is slighted. Paul therefore prohibits vigilant vengeance and directs them towards the authorities. The God, who has designated the authority to the governing bodies, will remember his people and restore its honor. The Roman community must leave room for his wrath (Rom. 12,19) and act as a worthy covenantal people by doing good and serving the world. God, as the Father of the believers, will be faithful to his children (Rom. 8,14-17).<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> L.T. Johnson, "Transformation of the Mind and Moral Discernment in Paul", in: idem, *Contested Issues in Christian Origins and the New Testament. Collected Essays*, NovTSup 146 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 255-275.

<sup>134</sup> E. Ochseneier, "Romans 12,17-13,7 and the Justice of God. Two Neglected Features of Paul's Argument", *ETHL* 89 (2013), 361-382.

<sup>135</sup> Ochseneier, "Romans", 366.

<sup>136</sup> M.F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology. A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 725.

<sup>137</sup> M.M. Thompson, "'Mercy Upon All'. God as Father in the Epistle to the Romans", in: S.K. Soderlund and N.T. Wright (eds.), *Romans and the People of God*, Fs. G.D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 203-216.

Vengeance is connected in Romans 12-13 with the wrath of God, thus giving it an emotional feature. Wrath in Romans “is judgement that involves punishment in a broad sense.”<sup>138</sup> God has revealed his wrath in the world (Rom. 1,18) and will judge those who do not believe (and thus are not saved) in the future (Rom. 2,5; 3,5; 5,9). Paul also uses the Old Testament notion of the wrath of God to highlight the intensity of God’s punishment. The authorities are in these times the agents of divine wrath, using their avenging power to impose wrath upon evildoers (Rom. 13,4). Legal punishment thus anticipates proleptically what is to come in the future, in God’s wrathful judgment.

Another prominent aspect of vengeance is purity. Paul has presented the community as a group of people purified by Jesus Christ (Rom. 3,25): “Jesus is the means of cleansing the people so that they may be indwelt with the Spirit, and the Spirit is the means by which the people may be virtuous in the present.”<sup>139</sup> This understanding of purity also has consequences for the Pauline concept of vengeance. Human vengeance is not the way to restore one’s purity after it has been polluted. On the contrary, vengeance makes the Roman community impure, because they have appropriated a divine (and political-legal) instrument. Their purity is not a construction of one’s own deeds, but imputed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6,1-14). The Roman believers therefore must act holy (Rom. 12,1-2). Human vengeance is not compatible with this status of purity.<sup>140</sup>

Paul understands divine vengeance as an eschatological enterprise. The Roman community must not usurp the eschatological divine wrath and vengeance by taking matters into its own hands. The eschatological dimension of vengeance becomes even more apparent when we take the whole letter to the Romans in consideration. Paul, as we have seen earlier, envisions an eschatological moment in which God will retribute humanity (Rom. 2,5-6). The same can be said of Paul’s statement in Romans 12,19: God will deal with the evil done to the Roman community in the future. Paul underlines this

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<sup>138</sup> T.P. Dixon, “Judgement for Israel. The Marriage of Wrath and Mercy in Romans 9-11”, *NTS* 66 (2020), 565-581, there 576.

<sup>139</sup> W.D. Jackson, *Glory in the Letter of Paul to the Romans. Purity, Honor, and Eschatology* (unpublished dissertation University of Edinburgh, 2019), 203.

<sup>140</sup> It would be an interesting enterprise to read Romans 12,9-21 as a whole against the background of the Holiness Tradition of the Old Testament. Leviticus exhorts Israel to do good on the basis of their holy status before YHWH (Lev. 18,4-5; 20,7-8). Paul’s exhortation in Romans 12,9-21 seems to point in the same direction, with his reference to sacrifice and holiness as the basis for good behavior (Rom. 12,1-2).

with his quote from Deuteronomy 32 (which is written in the future tense): God will bring about retribution (Rom. 12,19). This eschatological moment becomes partially historical in the actions of the authorities: they will exact vengeance on evil (Rom. 13,4). Eschatological vengeance for Paul will be done in the future, but also becomes present in God's agents.

#### *5.2.3.4 Conclusion*

The letter to the Romans offers contemporary readers a view of Paul's more systematic theological ideas. Paul also makes room for the concept of vengeance in this letter. This epistle demonstrates that Paul on the one hand understands vengeance in the same fashion as the Thessalonian correspondence, while on the other hand several aspects become more explicit. Human vengeance is prohibited by Paul, even when the Roman community faces suffering. The community must not despair, because God will stand up for it and exact his vengeance in the present (through the authorities) and in the future. Denouncing human vengeance thus is a feature of a virtuous Christian life, while at the same time divine vengeance serves as a legal and pastoral motif for Paul.

### 5.3 Paul's Understanding of Vengeance

Now that all vengeance passages in Paul's writings have been examined, we can summarize the findings and provide an answer to the question what Paul's definition of divine vengeance is and how it functions in his writings. It is clear that divine retribution is not a trivial phenomenon for Paul, because it can be found on key moments in several of his letters. What does divine vengeance mean and entail for Paul?

Paul explicitly states in Romans 12,19 that vengeance is a divine prerogative. His elaboration of the motif of vengeance confirms that this statement is not lip service only. He consistently connects vengeance with God, while also urging the Christian communities to not take matters into their own hands (1 Thess. 5,15; Rom. 12,19; cf. 1 Cor. 3,5-4,5; Rom. 14,10). In several passages Paul explicitly mentions God exacting vengeance on people (Rom. 12,19; 16,20; cf. 2 Tim. 4,14). He however attributes the execution of

vengeance in other places to Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 4,6; 2 Thess. 1,8). He once connects vengeance with the (divinely authorized) powers, while in several other cases he does not designate the agent(s) of vengeance (Gal. 6,7-8; cf. Col. 3,25). For Paul God is the only being authorized to exact vengeance, though he can and does other agents as executors of vengeance.

Vengeance in Paul's writings also functions in a matrix of reciprocity. God exacts negative retribution on those who return his grace with evil. Paul employs the threat of divine vengeance mostly in parenetical contexts. Divine vengeance is frequently used as a motif when Paul wants to exhort Christian communities to reflect divine grace in their lifestyles. When believers react to divine grace in Christ with a dishonorable and unholy life, divine vengeance will await them (1 Thess. 4,6; Gal. 6,7-8; Col. 3,25). Another aspect of the parenetical use of vengeance concerns Paul's assurance of the Christian communities that their enemies will receive God's avenging punishment (2 Thess. 1,8; Rom. 16,20; Rom. 13,4). The retributive character of vengeance can also be found in the context of the repudiation of enemies (2 Tim. 4,14). Paul thus considers vengeance to be a negative answer to divine grace, aimed at those within or outside the Christian communities.

The previous chapters have shown that honor is also a critical aspect of the ancient concept of vengeance. Divine retribution for Paul is a response to dishonor, especially in the spheres of ethics. On several occasions Paul points the believers to the honorable way of living in Christ. Divine vengeance serves as a threat: God will exact his vengeance on those who still live the life of flesh and sin, not reflecting the death and resurrection in Christ and thereby dishonoring God in their lives (1 Thess. 4,6; Gal. 6,7-8; cf. Col. 3,25; 2 Tim. 4,14). Divine vengeance is also used as an instrument for reclaiming honor. Believers may not avenge themselves, they must be patient when enemies dishonor them: God will stand up for them and exact his vengeance to restore his and the communities' honor (2 Thess. 1,8; Rom. 12,19; 13,4; 16,20).

In his letters Paul also frames vengeance in terms of justice. Human vengeance is deemed vigilance (1 Cor. 3,5-4,5; Rom. 12,19), while divine vengeance is an act of God to restore the balance of power and justice. He exacts vengeance on those who attack the Christian communities (2 Thess. 1,8; cf. Rom. 13,4), but also on those within the Christian community who violate the just laws he has imposed on the believers (1 Thess. 4,6; Gal. 6,7-8; cf. Col. 3,25). Paul's choice of the legal terms ἐκδίδκειν and ἐκδίκησις as

vengeance vocabulary show that he understood vengeance to be an act of justice, as can also be seen in the frequent use of justice language (δική and δίκαιος for instance) in the context of vengeance passages. God is pictured as the supreme Judge, exacting retribution upon the works of believers and enemies of the Christian churches.

Another important feature of vengeance was the connection to covenant and kin. Paul understands the Christian communities to be covenantal communities where believers consider each other kin.<sup>141</sup> Because the Christian believers are covenantal people, they must behave properly, holy and according to the law of Christ and the Spirit (Gal. 6,2; Rom. 8,2). God will enact retribution upon those who do not live according to his laws, hinting towards the covenantal curse and vengeance found in Leviticus 26,25 for instance (1 Thess. 4,6; Gal. 6,7-8). The other aspect of the covenantal feature of vengeance in Paul's writings is that God stands up for his people, slaying the enemies himself or through his agents (2 Thess. 1,8; Rom. 13,4; 16,20; cf. 2 Tim. 4,14).

Vengeance in Paul's letters is frequently connected to the emotion of wrath (ὀργή), thereby giving vengeance an emotional feature. Believers must leave room to God's wrath by not avenging themselves (Rom. 12,19). God has imposed his avenging wrath on the opponents of the Thessalonian community already (1 Thess. 2,16). The powers are presented as the agents of divine wrath and vengeance by Paul (Rom. 13,4). The imagery and language of 2 Thessalonians 1,3-8 is also quite emotional and evocative: Jesus comes with fire, with his angels of power, imposing salvation and damnation in the world. Vengeance for Paul is thus an emotional enterprise, intimately connected with scenes of wrath and damnation.

Purity and vengeance are also linked by Paul in his writings. The honorable way of a Christian life is a life of purity, according to the new Torah of Christ and the Spirit. The Christian communities must thus remain pure in their time on this earth (1 Thess. 3,13; 1 Cor. 8,3; Phil. 1,9-11). Impurity is punished by divine vengeance (1 Thess. 4,6). Human vengeance is also deemed impure, because it appropriates something divine and enacts this divine prerogative on the neighbor, whom one is called to love (Rom. 12,9). Pollution must be avoided in the Christian community, because impurity within the Christian community and within individual life are prone to divine vengeance.

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<sup>141</sup> See especially the work of Burke, *Family Matters*.



The latter observation also presupposes that vengeance is an eschatological act. For Paul it is obvious that divine vengeance is a future phenomenon. God will exact retribution upon the works of human beings in the future (Rom. 2,5-6). Those who do not believe in him and enemies of the church meet a moment of divine wrath (1 Thess. 1,10; 2 Thess. 1,8; Rom. 5,9; 12,19). Divine retribution is also aimed at the believers: they must expect the eschatological moment of reckoning, with divine vengeance when their deeds are not in line with the new life in Christ (1 Thess. 4,6; Col. 3,25; 2 Tim. 4,14). Divine vengeance is not just something of the future for Paul though. On several occasions he mentions that divine vengeance is observed in time too (1 Thess. 2,16) and mediated through divine agents (Rom. 13,4). Eschatological vengeance for Paul thus has a present and a future moment.

Paul's understanding of vengeance thus reminds us of Luke's concept of vengeance. Just as Luke, Paul also uses divine vengeance in a twofold manner. As has been mentioned before, he employs the motif of vengeance to warn the community to not go on the worldly path of dishonor and impurity. God will not leave sin and flesh unpunished. Instead, believers must be found holy, pure and blameless (1 Thess. 3,13; Phil. 1,9-11), reflecting the new life of Christ (Rom. 6,11-14; 12,1-2). On the other hand Paul assures the Christian communities that their present situation of suffering is not ignored by God. This world is in his hands and he will repay the evil done to the Christians by enemies of the church (2 Thess. 1,8; Rom. 12,19; cf. 2 Tim. 4,14). Even Satan will be the object of his avenging wrath, placing him under the feet of the Christian believers (Rom. 16,20). Divine vengeance for Paul thus can be parenetical and pastoral.

#### 5.4 Paul's Understanding of Vengeance and Contemporary Hermeneutical Questions

Just as in chapter four, this section will bring the hermeneutical questions, distilled in chapter three, into dialogue with our exegetical-theological findings in Paul's letters. How do Paul's utterings concerning vengeance meet our contemporary hermeneutical sensitivities?

One of the contemporary hermeneutical sensitivities found in chapter three concerned the executor of vengeance. Not only modern people have this

question, Paul has already addressed it in his writings. He emphatically rejects human vengeance in Romans 12,19, in line with Old Testament passages such as Leviticus 19,18. Instead, only God can exact vengeance on human beings, in the future or through agents in the present (Rom. 13,4). It is God who is the supreme Judge, the only one with the authority to condemn and punish people purely and justly.

Vengeance for Paul is an act of justice, as we have seen earlier. This seems to contradict our modern understanding of vengeance as an act of vigilance. Vengeance for Paul is a divine instrument to punish the unrighteous and set the righteous free (2 Thess. 1,8). It also amerces behavior which is not in line with the law of Christ and the Spirit, opposing the new life and creation in Christ. Because God is the supreme Judge, his vengeance is a pure and just tool to implement punishment, deliverance, and renewal on earth.

The Pauline understanding of vengeance does entail damage to human dignity. Divine vengeance will affect human lives, thereby corroding their worth. Paul emphasizes however that human life in itself does not have a sense of worthiness, because humanity is unworthy and receives worth in Christ (Gal. 2,19-20; Rom. 5,1-10). This worthiness must be met with holy and pure behavior, as God commands in Scripture. Paul thus works with another definition of worth and honor. Another footnote is that, just as Luke points out, vengeance is aimed at wicked behavior. Violence against the Christian community, sexual deviance, or other sins of the flesh are met with God's legal vengeance. There is however still a tension between the Pauline understanding of vengeance and our modern hermeneutical sensitivity towards the inalienable rights and worth of individuals.

Vengeance is in our modern eyes an irrational act of an individual or group, an emotional deed by people who cannot restrain themselves. Paul frequently links vengeance with the emotion of wrath, but does not deem vengeance irrational. The avenging wrath of God has a specific target (namely, those who infringe his laws and those who attack the Christian community) and goal (namely, to restore order and impose his divine goodwill in this world). Divine vengeance is not a sudden outburst of a God who cannot compose himself, but a calculated act of justice of a God who is provoked by unbelief, unholiness, and violence against his people.

Douglas J. Moo makes a general remark about the relationship between Paul and Scripture, which can also be applied to the relationship between Paul's understanding of vengeance and the Old Testament concept: "when he replaced Torah with Christ at the center of his thinking, his

understanding of the Old Testament underwent a radical revision, but his commitment to its authority remained as strong as ever.”<sup>142</sup> The citation of Deuteronomy 32,35 in Romans 12,19 shows that Paul does not argue for an absolute distinction between the Old Testament and his writings and that the Old Testament does not contradict his understanding of divine vengeance. Paul to the contrary seems to presuppose a continuity between the Old Testament concept of vengeance and his own understanding of divine retribution.

Paul also does not consider divine retribution to be in conflict with God’s love. Divine love in Paul goes out to those who were previously unworthy, but who God makes worthy in Christ.<sup>143</sup> He stands up for them when they are suffering under the hands of enemies (2 Thess. 1,8). Divine love not only includes justification, but also the demand for sanctification. Paul uses the motif of vengeance several times in this domain: God’s love demands a life of holiness and purity. Vengeance reacts to the injury of God’s love through a life of sin and flesh. Divine vengeance thus can serve as the assurance of God’s love for his people, while also being a warning to not injure his love.

The previous chapter concluded the section on the relationship between Luke’s understanding of vengeance and our modern hermeneutical sensitivities with a twofold observation. The contemporary hermeneutical questions highlight some otherwise hidden features of the ancient concept of vengeance, while at the same time ancient passages questions our modern understanding of vengeance. The same twofold conclusion can be applied to this section. The dialogue between Paul and modern hermeneutical sensitivities illuminates several important notions, such as the place of the concept of vengeance in the modern discussion about the relationship between the Old and the New Testament. At the same time tensions are indicated, for instance when it involves human dignity.

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<sup>142</sup> D.J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters. The Gift of the New Realm in Christ, Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 17.

<sup>143</sup> See my “His Love”.

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the first systematic exploration of the concept of vengeance in Paul's writings. Divine vengeance is an integral part of Paul's theology and his ethics. God's vengeance for Paul can be defined as the legal eschatological act of God restoring the order in his creation and implementing his will, through the punishment of wicked behavior within and outside the community. We have seen that several common features of vengeance in Antiquity, such as honor, reciprocity, and purity can be found in Paul's understanding of vengeance. Paul uses the motif of vengeance to strengthen the community in its pursuit of a holy and pure life in Christ, but also as an assurance that overstepping the boundaries of the Christian community will not remain unanswered.

We have already examined the understanding of vengeance in the writings of Luke and Paul. It is interesting to explore how other New Testament documents formulate their concept of vengeance. We will take a step further into the New Testament by examining the Epistle to the Hebrews and the book of Revelation. What does vengeance mean for the authors of these documents and how do they employ vengeance in their narrative? The next chapter thus will provide us an additional building block in answering the question of the meaning and function of divine vengeance in the New Testament.

## Chapter 6

### Vengeance in Hebrews and Revelation

Two New Testament documents remain to be examined: Hebrews and Revelation. Revelation is frequently associated with vengeance, portraying scenes of judgment, violence, and bloodshed. These depictions apparently define what vengeance is according to many people.<sup>1</sup> Though the book of Hebrews is not often mentioned when one speaks about vengeance in the New Testament, it also employs the motif of divine vengeance. What does divine vengeance mean in both books and which role does it play in the structure of both Hebrews and Revelation?

Divine vengeance in the books of Hebrews and Revelation is the topic of this chapter which together will form another stone in the building of our argument. The structure of the chapter resembles that of previous chapters. First, the book of Hebrews is the subject of research (6.1). This intricate piece of literature mentions divine retribution at several places, but divine vengeance appears only once, in one of the warning sections of the epistle (10,30). The first section of this chapter will be devoted to this explicit text and other relevant texts in the context of the whole epistle and its message. Then we will turn to divine vengeance in the book of Revelation (6.2). How does John understand and use the motif of divine vengeance in his apocalyptic writing? The third section offers a synthesis of the data from the previous sections and provides an outlook for what follows (6.3). In the fourth section these findings are brought into dialogue with our modern hermeneutical questions (6.4). Is there room for some agreement between divine vengeance in Hebrews and Revelation and our modern understanding of vengeance or must they be mutually exclusive? The chapter will end with a conclusion (6.5).

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<sup>1</sup> See J.W. van Henten, "Violence in Revelation", in: A.Y. Collins (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Book of Revelation*, BEThL 291 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 49-78.

## 6.1 Vengeance in Hebrews

The Epistle to the Hebrews is described to the readers as a “word of exhortation” (λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως) (Heb. 13,22). The letter, in the words of Barnabas Lindars, is “not a theological treatise, but an urgent address to the original readers.”<sup>2</sup> Doctrinal sections concerning Jesus as the Son of God, the superior High Priest, and the inauguration of the new covenant are alternated with hortatory material and dire warning passages. The epistle, written by an anonymous Jewish rhetorician between 60 and 100 CE<sup>3</sup>, addresses a community of second-generation Jewish Christians (2,3-4.16) who suffers from external pressure and “a waning commitment to the community’s confessed faith.”<sup>4</sup> The danger is that they will relapse into old religious habits, thereby denying their Christ-believing identity marked by baptism (10,22). Within the fourth warning passage (10,26-31), the motif of vengeance is employed with the help of a quotation of Deuteronomy 32,35.

How does the author of Hebrews use the notion of vengeance in his work and what does it mean to the readers of the letter? This question will be addressed in this section. Several steps are required to come to an answer. First, the concept of divine retribution in Hebrews is explained (6.1.1). Divine retribution is linked to the purpose of the letter, so the cause for writing this “urgent address” must also be clarified. Next, Hebrews 10,30 is examined in the context of verses 26-31 (6.1.2). The exegesis of this pericope must clarify what vengeance means for the author of Hebrews and how he employs it in his overarching message. Third, some theological-hermeneutical reflections

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<sup>2</sup> B. Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xi. Attridge (*Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 21) states it more balanced: “Hebrews (...) is a balanced combination of doctrinal exposition and paraenesis.”

<sup>3</sup> Several names have been mentioned as the author of Hebrews: Paul, Apollos, Luke et cetera. None of these names convince however and the conclusion of Attridge (*Hebrews*, 5) is sufficient: “the beginning of sober exegesis is a recognition of the limits of historical knowledge and those limits preclude positive identification of the author.” The same can be said of the date: there is no decisive argument to pinpoint a certain date or narrower range. See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 9; C.R. Koester, *Hebrews*, AB 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 50-54.

<sup>4</sup> Lindars, *Theology*, 13.

will be provided on vengeance in Hebrews (6.1.3). This section will be rounded off with a conclusion (6.1.4).

### 6.1.1 Divine Retribution and the Purpose of Hebrews

Gregory of Nazianzus writes in *Epistula* 51 that an excellent and beautiful (ἀρίστη καὶ κάλλιστα) letter will be most persuasive for educated and uneducated alike (*Ep.* LI,4). In other words, an author has to reckon with his readers when he writes his letter. It is pivotal to know the situation of the readers in order to understand the focus of the epistolary message. The narrative of Hebrews is shaped to fit the occasion, with Biblical texts, themes, and concepts used in such a fashion that it reinforces the narrative goal of the author. The notion of divine retribution must thus be understood within the epistolary purpose of Hebrews.

The Christian community (either in Rome or Jerusalem) which is addressed in Hebrews suffers from spiritual lethargy. The author of Hebrews accuses the community of being dull and immature people (νωθοί) (5,11). Suffering has affected the believers (10,32-34), although there were no casualties reported (12,4). Members do not attend the services anymore (10,25) and are probably relapsing into former lifestyles and habits. The author of Hebrews describes this situation as “drifting away” (παραρυῶμεν) (2,1) and one “of shrinking back” (ὑποστολῆς) (10,39). Throughout the epistle it becomes clear that the author of Hebrews addresses apostasy among the community members (3,12; 6,4-6; 10,29).<sup>5</sup>

This movement of relapse and apostasy contrasts the faith and identity of those addressed. They are “partners in the heavenly calling” (κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι) (3,1; cf. 3,14) and “the house of the Son” (3,6). They are “purified from an evil conscience” (ῥεραντισμένοι ἀπὸ συνειδήσεως πονηρᾶς) (10,23). They have persevered in previous sufferings (10,32-34) and shown their love to God and their neighbors (6,10). In Hebrews 6,4-5 the author uses several descriptions to describe them: they have once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the

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<sup>5</sup> G.E. Rice, “Apostasy as a Motif and Its Effect on the Structure of Hebrews”, *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23 (1985), 29-35.

goodness of God's Word and the powers of the age to come. Considering the data from Hebrews, it is quite clear that these people were genuine believers.<sup>6</sup>

This honorable status however is being put in jeopardy due to the circumstances of the addressees. Social marginalization, suffering, and humiliation take its toll on the community. The author of the Hebrews must exhort the believers not to apostatize, but to stay faithful to the God who has called them. The author points to Jesus as their focal point in life, in several ways. First, he must be the object of their praise and the source of their honor. He is the superior high priest who inaugurated the new covenant (Heb. 7,1-8,13) and his sacrificial death was sufficient to obtain forgiveness (Heb. 9,1-10,18). Through him they receive honor with God (2,10), because he "disregarded shame" (ἀισχύνης καταφρονήσας) on the cross (12,2).

Jesus is also described as the "pioneer and perfecter of faith" (τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγόν καὶ τελειωτήν) (12,2). Although he was the Son of God, he continually showed obedience to God and thus earned eternal salvation (5,8-9). He thus "perfected" the persevering faith until the end.<sup>7</sup> He was also the first to show perfect obedience and perseverance, being the forerunner and example of the believing Hebrews (2,10). In him the Hebrews can remain steadfast on the path to eternal honor before God (12,3), thereby disregarding societal norms of honor and shaming.<sup>8</sup>

The perseverance of Jesus until the end is the way to go for the Hebrews (Heb. 12,2). They must be confident and persevering in times of suffering and dishonor (Heb. 10,35-36), just as for instance Moses did (Heb. 11,23-27). Persevering faith does not see the divine reality (Heb. 11,1), but it

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<sup>6</sup> Several Calvinist scholars contest the identification of the addressees of Hebrews as believers, because they deny the possibility of apostasy by genuine Christians (Canons of Dort V, Rejection of Errors III). Several questions arise then. The obvious question is: is it legitimate that a theological position determines the exegetical outcomes? Concerning Hebrews, this ancient discussion on the identification of believers overcharges the Biblical text. Knut Backhaus states that the warning passages address the Hebrews and their apostasy rhetorically, not from a theological point of view: "last truths are not the subjects of deliberative orators" ("Zwei harte Knoten. Todes- und Gerichtsangst im Hebräerbrief", in: idem, *Der sprechende Gott. Gesammelte Studien zum Hebräerbrief*, WUNT 240 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 131-151, there 150). See for an illuminating discussion between several positions H.W. Bateman (ed.), *Four Views on the Warning Passages of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> See D. Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection. An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, SNTSMS 47 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); C.A. Richardson, *Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith. Jesus' Faith as the Climax of Israel's History in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, WUNT II/338 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> D.A. DeSilva, *Despising Shame. Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, SBLDS 152 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 177-178.



keeps the eyes fixed on the divine promise and joy (11,13; 12,1-2). They must set aside the worldly honor, travelling as pilgrims to the eschatological motherland (2,5; 4,9-11; 6,19; 11,16; 12,22-28; 13,14).<sup>9</sup> They are not alone in this journey, because the superior high priest will care for them (2,18; 4,14-16).

The warning passages of Hebrews (2,2-3; 3,7-4,11; 6,4-6; 10,26-31; 12,25-29) find their place within this overarching message and purpose of the epistle. The Hebrews must reckon that the God in which they believe is “the living God” (3,12; 9,14; 10,31; 12,22), who judges the hearts and lives of people with his living word (4,12-13). The author of Hebrews makes clear that this living God speaks to them through this epistle and through the multitude of Old Testament quotations, images, and allusions.<sup>10</sup> These Old Testament texts also mark the identity of the Christian community and the severity of apostasy. As believers they are regarded as part of the people of God and apostasy means breaking away from God’s care and covenant. The warning passages are thus the dire warnings of the living God to his covenant people not to apostatize.

The first warning passage is Hebrews 2,2-3. These verses contain a *qal-wa-chomer* or a *minore ad maius* argument, preceded by the programmatic statement that the Hebrews must pay attention to what has been heard so that they do not “drift away” (παραρυῶμεν) (2,1). The argument in 2,2-3 begins with the minor part: the Torah (“the word that has been spoken by the angels”) was binding (βέβαιος) and it demanded legal retribution (ἐνδικὸν μισθαποδοσίαν) when people were disobedient. Verse 3 includes the major part of the argument: when this legal punishment was given to disobedient Torah-observers, how much more punishment will be given to those who

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<sup>9</sup> Hebrews understands the eschatological space not in terms of temporality, but in spatiality, as Erich Grässer rightly argues (*Der Glaube im Hebräerbrief*, Marburger Theologische Studien 2 (Marburg: Elwert Verlag, 1965), 174). In other words: “heaven” is not merely a future affair, but the divine space which can be entered in Christ right now through persevering faith. The Kingdom of God already exists above the material and visible reality, but will be completed when the divine promise is fulfilled. See D.A. DeSilva, “Entering God’s Rest. Eschatology and the Socio-Rhetorical Strategy of Hebrews”, *Trinity Journal* 21 (2000), 25-43. For the motif of pilgrimage in Hebrews, see the famous work of Ernst Käsemann, *Das Wandernde Gottesvolk. Eine Untersuchung zu Hebräerbrief*, FRLANT 55 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959<sup>3</sup>) and Attridge, *Hebrews*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> M. Theobald, “Vom Text zum ‘lebendigen Wort’ (Hebr 4,12). Beobachtungen zur Schrifthermeneutik des Hebräerbriefes”, in: C. Landmesser, H.J. Eckstein, and H. Lichtenberger (eds.), *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift. Studien zur Hermeneutik des Evangeliums*, Fs. O. Hofius, BZNW 86 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 751-790; T. Lewicki, “*Weist nich ab den Sprechenden!*” *Wort Gottes und Paraklese im Hebräerbrief*, Paderborner Theologische Studien 41 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004).

“neglect so great a salvation” (τήλικαυτῆς ἀμελήσαντες σωτηρίας)? The salvation neglected is the “preservation from the eschatological judgments that await sinners.”<sup>11</sup> This warning is quite broadly formulated and not really explicit about the content of the neglect and the form of punishment.

The necessity of the fidelity of believers is also underlined in Hebrews’ exposition of Psalm 93 LXX (3,7-4,11) and its conclusion in 4,12-13. The warning in this passage makes some elements of the previous warning passage more explicit. The readers are urged to hear the voice of God and persevere in their belief so that they may inherit the eschatological rest which God has promised. Israel’s wilderness generation forms the negative example for them (4,11): Israel tested God and was punished by the divine wrath as it was denied the rest in the promised land (3,9-11). The readers must “render account” (πρὸς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος) to God in the same way (4,13). His word discerns all people and thus he cannot be fooled (4,12). The content of the neglect therefore is infidelity to God and “missing out” (ὑστερηκέναι) on the promise of God. The punishment is the denial of the eschatological rest.

One of the most severe warning passages in Hebrews is Hebrews 6,4-8. The author has observed in 5,11 that the Hebrews are “immature” (νοθοί) in hearing and obeying the word of God. They have received plenty of time and the basics of the Christian faith were taught to them (5,12-6,3). They were privileged with the honor of the gifts of God (the Spirit, the Word of God, the eschatological promise) (6,4-5). The author then severely warns that those who have received such privileges and then “fall away” (παραπεσόντας) cannot be converted again (6,6). The author also provides the reason for this conclusion: apostates crucify Christ again and disgrace (παραδειγματίζοντας) him. They must not be immature (6,12), but be “convinced of better things” (πεπείσμεθα τὰ κρείσσονα) (6,9). Shaming the hearers here “is an effective step to overshadowing the shame and fear of public disgrace so that they may believe and act boldly.”<sup>12</sup>

The fourth warning passage (10,26-31) will be examined in the next section. The last warning passage is 12,15-29.<sup>13</sup> The Hebrews are urged to not “miss out on the grace of God” (ὑστερῶν ἀπὸ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ) (12,15).

<sup>11</sup> Attridge, *Hebrews*, 66. See also the eschatological nature of salvation in Hebrews 9,28 and 10,25.

<sup>12</sup> P.S. Perry, “Making Fear Personal. Hebrews 5,11-6,12 and the Argument from Shame”, *JSNT* 32 (2009), 99-125, there 122; see also DeSilva, *Despising Shame*, 260.

<sup>13</sup> See for the reasons to include 12,15-29 as a warning passage S. McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews. A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions”, *Trinity Journal* 13 (1992), 21-59, there 22-23, note 3.

The grace of God here could mean both what God has given the addresses in Christ now, but also the final salvation from judgment.<sup>14</sup> The author already provided a negative example by referring to the wilderness generation (3,7-4,11) and now he points towards Esau as a (negative) example of forfeiting the promise for earthly goods (12,16-17). The Hebrews must reckon with God, who is also fearful (12,21) and a consuming fire (12,29). They are exhorted to hold fast to grace and serve God to receive the “unshakeable Kingdom” (12,28). The author again uses a *qal-wa-chomer* or a *minore ad maius* argument in 12,25, also referring to the same argument in 2,2-3: if Israel under the Torah could not escape punishment when they rejected God’s commandments, how much more will those, who still hear God’s speech, not escape divine judgment?

We can thus conclude that the warning passages in Hebrews are intimately connected with the purpose of the epistle. The Hebrews, part of God’s covenantal people, are admonished that God does not take up apostasy lightly. The Old Testament texts used in the epistle underline the certainty of God’s promises to his people, but also the severity of his punishment. The Hebrews must view their current situation through the lens of Scripture: God cares for his people when they are faithful, but he also rejects and punishes his people in the future when they are found unfaithful. The Christian community is urged to be faithful and receive God’s promises, while the members are also warned that God can punish them in the future for their infidelity. The warning passages form the backbone of the parenetical body of the epistle. The motif of vengeance in Hebrews 10,30 is an important piece of this backbone.

### 6.1.2 Vengeance in Hebrews 10,30

For we know the One who said: “Vengeance is mine, I will repay;” And again: “The Lord will judge his people.”

The presence of vengeance in the fourth warning passage consists of the quotation from Deuteronomy 32,35 in verse 30. That seems to be meager, but the quotation is one of the main elements in this pericope and it fits the pattern of

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<sup>14</sup> Attridge, *Hebrews*, 368.

divine speech in Hebrews.<sup>15</sup> This section will survey the motif of vengeance in this passage. Contextual remarks will be incorporated within the exegesis of the passage 10,26-31, which will be the topic of the first section (6.1.2.1). Next, some theological-hermeneutical reflections will be given on the meaning and function of vengeance in Hebrews 10,26-31 (6.1.2.2).

### 6.1.2.1 Vengeance in Hebrews 10,26-31

After he has written an extensive section on the superiority of Jesus' priesthood (7,1-8,13) and Jesus' perfect sacrifice (9,1-10,18), the author of Hebrews draws conclusions from this exposition. The Hebrews can have "confidence" (παρρησία) to enter the heavenly temple through Jesus Christ (10,19). His incarnation and sacrifice has opened the way to God and the heavenly temple and he purified the hearts and bodies of the believers (10,20-22).<sup>16</sup> The believers are purified and honored to be God's children and Jesus' brothers (2,10-15) and the author urges them to serve God, to be in his (heavenly) presence, and to grasp the hope on the basis of Jesus' faithfulness to God. This individual exhortation is combined with a more collective incentive. The community members must look after each other, encouraging each other to do good and to see each other in the meetings of the community (10,24-25). This incentive arises from the previous verses, but also from the coming eschatological Day of the Lord (10,25).

The notion of the coming day of judgment evokes the fourth warning passage (10,26-31).<sup>17</sup> This passage is sometimes described, in connection

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<sup>15</sup> See M.N. Pierce, *Divine Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Recontextualization of Spoken Quotations in Scripture*, SNTSMS 178 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>16</sup> For the connection between incarnation and sacrifice in 10,19-20, see O. Hofius, "Inkarnation und Opfertod Jesu nach Hebr 10,19f", in: E. Lohse, C. Burchard, and B. Schaller (eds.), *Der Ruf Jesu und die Antwort der Gemeinde*, Fs. J. Jeremias (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 132-141.

<sup>17</sup> The assertion of R.C. Gleason ("The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10,30-31", *TynBul* 53 (2002), 97-120) that this warning passage does not say anything about eschatological judgment is remarkable as the warning passages in Hebrews frequently point towards eschatological judgment (4,11; 6,2; cf. 9,27). I agree with David Moffitt as he states: "The eschatological context of the entire homily (cf. 1:2) and the language of judgment and the enduring realities that remain in 12:25-29 leave little doubt that the exhortations in Heb 10:23-36, 39 make reference to the coming of the eschatological judgment and reward" (*Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, NovTSup 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 249).

with 10,19-25, as antonymy: “the author offers a rationale for why the community should follow his prescribed course of action.”<sup>18</sup> Reading this pericope one will notice that several elements of warning are already mentioned in the previous warning passages. Hebrews 6,4-6 and 10,26-31 are connected through their explicit descriptions of the content of the relapse by the Hebrews and the divine punishment that arises from this move.

The connection between the mutual discipline and the coming day of judgment in verse 25 and the subsequent verses is already given in the use of “because” (γάρ) in verse 26. Mutual encouragement is necessary, because those who will be found without purification in the eschaton will be punished. This danger is lurking among the Hebrews due to the apostasy of community members. When believers, receiving the “knowledge of the truth” (τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας), still willfully (ἐκουσίως) keep on sinning (by staying away from the community and from God), the perfect sacrifice of Christ will not be applicable to them. The author of Hebrews thus contrasts knowledge of the truth and willful sin (cf. Num. 15,25-31): the knowledge of the truth aggravates this sin, because the sinning believer knows the right conduct, but willfully deviates from it.<sup>19</sup> Jesus has done the will of God (10,9-10) and he has earned forgiveness for believers (10,18).

The consequences of being separated from the perfect sacrifice of Christ is explicated in verse 27 in a rather graphic fashion. All that is left for those willfully sinning believers is “a fearful prospect of judgment and torrid fire” (φοβερὰ ἐκδοχὴ κρίσεως καὶ πυρὸς ζῆλος). Several Isaianic judgment texts come into play, especially when the author also adds that God’s opponents will be “consumed” (ἐσθίειν) (Is. 26,11; 30,27 LXX; 66,15-16). Scott Mackie provides a fitting summary: “and so the author again encircles the recipients with bare eschatological facts, forcing a reconsideration of unexamined lives and half-hearted commitments, and providing well-reasoned motivation for them to step boldly into the eschatological realities Jesus has provided them.”<sup>20</sup> The horrific imagery of divine judgment must scare off the apostatizing believers and provide a return to the persevering faith and the

<sup>18</sup> Richardson, *Perfecter*, 116; see also C. Long-Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews. The Relationship between Form and Meaning*, LNTS 287 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 244.

<sup>19</sup> H. Löhr, *Umkehr und Sünde im Hebräerbrief*, BZNW 73 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 49.

<sup>20</sup> S.D. Mackie, *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, WUNT II/223 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 134-135.

knowledge of the truth. Otherwise they will be enemies (ὑπεναντίους) instead of God's children (2,13-14; 12,5-8).

The author then inserts another *qal-wa-chomer* in verses 28-29, the same way he did in 2,2-3 and he will do in 12,25. Most commentators recognize an allusion in verse 28 to Deuteronomy 17,2-7 LXX. These verses in Deuteronomy 17 prescribe the death penalty for idolaters within the Israelite community. On the basis of the matching testimonies of two or three witnesses idolaters will be stoned (Deut. 17,6-7). The author of Hebrews uses the same pattern of reasoning. When Israelites “violate” (ἄθετήσας) the Torah, they will be punished “without mercy” (χωρὶς οἰκτιρμῶν) on the basis of two or three testimonies.

This minor part of the argument is complemented with the major part in verse 29. Those who live under the new covenant and who are purified in Christ will receive a more severe punishment than those who violate the Torah. Instead of being honored with the divine honor (2,10), the apostate believers are worthy (ἀξιοθήσεται) of punishment (τιμωρίας). The author of Hebrews then explicates what they have done. By apostatizing they have “trampled the Son of God” (ὁ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καταπατήσας) first. This description resembles the image of re-crucifying Jesus in 6,6: they show their contempt and neglect by spurning the Mediator of the new covenant and the superior high priest (9,15).

The second element in verse 29 is that they “profane the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified” (τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης κοινὸν ἡγησάμενος). They were sanctified by the blood of the high priest Jesus, in his covenantal sacrifice (2,11; 9,14; 10,10.14; 13,12). This bloody sacrifice was sufficient to forgive and purify them for eternity, making them suitable for God. They are the elected people of God.<sup>21</sup> Through their apostatizing attitude they perform idolatry, making themselves morally impure.<sup>22</sup> Apostasy thus is a defilement of Jesus' sacrifice as well as a declaration that living in the new covenant is dishonorable. The third element is that they “slight the Spirit of grace” (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς χάριτος ἐνυβρίσας), a possible allusion to Zechariah 12,10.<sup>23</sup> Jesus, through the Spirit, has given himself as a sacrifice before God (9,13-14). The Spirit is the mediator between on the one hand God and the Son and on the other hand the community of the Hebrews (2,4;

<sup>21</sup> Whitlark, *Fidelity*, 152.

<sup>22</sup> See J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> J. Levison, “A Theology of the Holy Spirit in Hebrews”, *CBQ* 78 (2016), 90-110.

6,4-5). Apostatizing believers thus dishonor the acts and speech of the Spirit to them by neglecting him. We see that the apostasy in the community dishonors the three figures of the Trinity in the epistle: by trampling the Son they dishonor God, by profaning the blood of the covenant they dishonor the Son and by slighting they dishonor the Spirit. This deserves a severe punishment.

The author of Hebrews again emphasizes the intimacy of God and the believers, and thus the intensity of the disruptive behavior of the Hebrews. He mentions that “we know the one who says” (οἶδαμεν τὸν εἰπόντα). God is not unknown, they know him. This covenantal God is speaking. The author of Hebrews reifies God’s speech here with two citations of Deuteronomy 32 (32,35-36).<sup>24</sup> The context of Deuteronomy 32 clarifies why the author of Hebrews cites these verses. Israel is exhorted to honor God (32,3), because he is true and just (32,4) and they are his people (32,9). They distanced themselves from God though by being idolatrous, making them unworthy of being his children (32,5.20). Moses asks Israel: is this the way they want to repay their Father (32,6)? The result of their actions is that God shows his justice: his wrath is evoked (32,22) and he will judge his people (32,36). He will exact vengeance on them in the future and this moment is near (ἐγγύς) (32,35). Through this act of vengeance he will show his power, liberate his children and make everyone worship him (32,43, which is cited in Heb. 1,6).

By apostatizing the Hebrews have also distanced themselves from God. The Hebrews are called his children (2,10, 13-14; 12,5-8), part of his household (3,6) and brothers of Jesus (2,11-12, 17). They have acted unworthy though and evoked the wrath of God. They have been ignorant and unfaithful, just as the Israelites according to Deuteronomy 32 (32,20.28-29). In return, God will show his justice to make clear that he must be feared.<sup>25</sup> The first line of Deuteronomy 32,35 assures that vengeance is a divine instrument, which can be used according to the second line of the quotation. The second quotation, from Deuteronomy 32,36 LXX, is parallel to the previous

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<sup>24</sup> The quotation here in Hebrews 10,30 corresponds with Paul’s quotation in Romans 12,19 (see chapter 5, note 113). Just as in Romans 12,19 the quotation here deviates from both the Septuagint and Masoretic traditions. It is safe to say that this form of Deuteronomy 32,35, which has more affinity with the Masoretic traditions than the Septuagint, stems from the same branch of tradition as where Paul got it from. See G.J. Steyn, *A Quest for the Assumed LXX Vorlage of the Explicit Quotations in Hebrews*, FRLANT 235 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 308.

<sup>25</sup> Löhr, *Umkehr*, 224-225.

quotation, although the person shifts from first to third person.<sup>26</sup> The message of the second quotation is the same: God will judge his people and the apostatizing believers must fear this judgment (cf. 4,13; 9,27).<sup>27</sup> The use of Deuteronomy 32 thus gives a covenantal character to this warning: the Hebrews, as part of God's people, must fear his justice and vengeance when they keep being unfaithful. The day of judgment is near (ἐγγίζουσιν) (10,25; cf. Deut. 32,35).

The use of "fearful" (φοβερόν) in verse 31 refers back to the "fearful" (φοβερά) judgment of verse 27. The Hebrews must dread the future when they apostatize. The author here provides the appropriate answer to the quotations of verse 30: fear.<sup>28</sup> They must fear that they "fall in the hands of the living God" (τὸ ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς χεῖρας θεοῦ ζῶντος). "Fall in the hands of" is sometimes used in a positive way (2 Sam. 24,14; 1 Chr. 21,13), but here it denotes a negative prospect. The expression "the living God" (θεοῦ ζῶντος) is used in other places in Hebrews (3,12; 9,14; 12,22). The God of the community is not unresponsive or defenseless, he is actively speaking and he will actively condemn those who chose another way of life after they met him and were part of the Christian community. This knowledge must instill fear into the hearts and lives of the Hebrews and ought to act as an incentive to actively search God and imitate the faithfulness and obedience of Jesus.<sup>29</sup>

#### 6.1.2.2 Theological-Hermeneutical Reflections on Vengeance in Hebrews 10,30

The concept of vengeance in Hebrews has many similarities with the Lukan and Pauline concepts of vengeance. Yet, the concept of vengeance in Hebrews is shaped by the addressees and purpose of the epistle. This section will flesh out this concept of vengeance in Hebrews, summarizing what we have

<sup>26</sup> The assertion of Pierce (*Divine Discourse*, 185) that the first quotation is the Father's speech about himself and the second quotation is the voice of the Spirit is surely possible, but not certain.

<sup>27</sup> J. Proctor ("Judgment or Vindication? Deuteronomy 32 in Hebrews 10,30", *TynBul* 55 (2004), 65-80) and J. Swetnam ("Hebrews 10,30-31. A Suggestion", *Biblica* 75 (1994), 388-394) argue that the second quotation must be read positively: God will vindicate the true believers. The context of judgment day and the connection with the other warning passages make this argument highly unlikely.

<sup>28</sup> H.W. Attridge, "God in Hebrews", in: R. Bauckham e.a. (eds.), *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 95-110, there 107.

<sup>29</sup> Whitlark, *Fidelity*, 168.



found and adding some new elements from research. Another part of this section will set up a dialogue between vengeance in Hebrews and our modern hermeneutical questions.

The quotation of Deuteronomy 32,35 in Hebrews 10,30 shows that for the author of Hebrews vengeance is a divine prerogative. This is not the main emphasis of the quotation though, contrary to the Pauline use of the quotation in Romans 12,19. The author of Hebrews does not want to underline the divine prerogative of vengeance in relation to the human use of revenge, but the quotation serves to clarify that vengeance is a divine instrument which can and will be used on the eschatological day of judgment. The idea of the divine prerogative of vengeance however comes along with the use of the quotation: vengeance is a divine means of judgment.

Vengeance in Hebrews should clearly be understood within the context of reciprocity. David DeSilva has shown that reciprocity is an important matrix for interpreting Hebrews, thus also for the warning passages.<sup>30</sup> The author of Hebrews formulates his message also in terms of reciprocity when he writes that the community may “find grace” (χάριν εὐρωμεν) when they enter the heavenly sanctuary (4,16) and that “we have gratitude” (ἔχομεν χάριν) (12,28; cf. 13,13). The community has received gifts in Christ and the Spirit (6,4) and will find divine gifts when they enter the heavens (4,16). For these gifts they must show gratitude in persevering faith and fidelity. The warning passages urge the community to show this gratitude, lest they will meet the negative retribution of God (instead of the heavenly gifts). Vengeance thus is the negative side of God’s retribution in Christ: “I will repay” (ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω) (10,30).

Connected to reciprocity in Hebrews is the notion of honor. The incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ has brought him “glory and honor” (2,9). The cross was the method of shaming, but in Christ it became the throne of glory (12,2). The exposition of the superiority of Jesus’ priesthood and sacrifice underlines this honorable status. The author of Hebrews exhorts the community to not find its honor in the expectations of society, but in God as the alternative PCR and source of honor.<sup>31</sup> When one apostatizes, one slights the triune God, as we have seen in verse 29. Slighting God, the Son, and the Spirit will not go unpunished. God wants to restore his honor

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<sup>30</sup> DeSilva, *Despising Shame*.

<sup>31</sup> DeSilva, *Despising Shame*; K. Backhaus, “‘Auf Ehre und Gewissen!’ Die Ethik des Hebräerbriefs”, in: idem, *Der sprechende Gott*, 215-237.

and show that slighting him is a big mistake. The author of Hebrews wants to warn the community of this danger: God will not let these slights go unavenged, they are “worthy” (ἀξιωθήσεται) of punishment (10,29).

The parallelism with the second quotation of Deuteronomy 32,36 shows that one must understand vengeance in Hebrews also in the context of justice. God will judge (κρίνει), as the Judge of all (12,23; cf. 4,12). The *qal-wa-chomer* arguments in Hebrews also highlight this feature: the (re)lapse into idolatry is a felony which was severely punished in the Torah and how much more will this punishment be in these times of the new covenant and the ultimate high priest. Vengeance thus is an instrument of God to punish the crime of breaking the covenant and slighting the high priest and his work (cf. Lev. 26,25). He will exact his judgment on people (9,27).

David DeSilva argues that God is described in Hebrews as Benefactor and Patron.<sup>32</sup> Several studies have asserted that the description of God in Hebrews is more intimate than the image of the distant Benefactor and Patron.<sup>33</sup> The epistle already begins with the intimate connection between Father and Son (1,1-6). The Hebrews are also called children (2,10, 13-14; 12,5-8), part of God’s household (3,6), and brothers of Jesus (2,11-12, 17).<sup>34</sup> This is the new covenant situation, inaugurated and mediated in the Son (8,6). When this new covenant is profaned and the Father and the Mediator of this covenant are slighted (10,29), then vengeance is evoked as an instrument of covenantal punishment. The context of Deuteronomy 32 also points in this direction. God as covenantal Father will judge “his people” (τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ), which can mean two things: salvation or punishment. Vengeance in Hebrews 10,30 is strongly connected with the covenant God: “Vengeance is mine” (10,30a).

Vengeance in Hebrews 10,30 is not explicitly connected with certain divine emotions. The whole passage 10,26-31 however arouses several emotions, especially that of fear. It is recognized by several authors that the warning passages in Hebrews instill fear in the Hebrews to persuade them to go the way of faith: they must recognize the severe consequences of drifting away and missing out on grace so that they renew their fidelity and faith.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> DeSilva, *Despising Shame*, 209-210.

<sup>33</sup> See especially the critique of A.L.B. Peeler, *You Are My Son. The Family of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, LNTS 486 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 184-186.

<sup>34</sup> Peeler, *You Are My Son*; see also H.J. Klauck, “Moving In and Moving Out. Ethics and Ethos in Hebrews”, in: J.G. van der Watt (ed.), *Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the New Testament*, BZNTW 141 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 417-443.

<sup>35</sup> DeSilva, *Despising Shame*; Perry, “Making Fear Personal”; Backhaus, “Zwei harte Knoten”.

Hence the author of Hebrews uses several strong words and images in 10,26-31: fearful (φοβερὰ, φοβερόν), torrid fire, and the description of the sin of idolatry in verse 29 and its consequences in verses 29 and 31.<sup>36</sup> Emotions are an agent for the paraenesis of the author of the Hebrews.

Purity is another important motif in the epistle. The Hebrews are an elected, holy people (2,11; 9,13-14; 10,14.29; 12,23; 13,12). They are purified by the sacrifice of the Son (9,14.22; 10,10). The Hebrews must prevent defilement (12,15). The danger which apostatizing believers brought into the community is that they, by deeming the sacrifice of the Son “unclean” (10,29), polluted all the community members. Iutisone Salevao describes the function of the warning passages in the context of purity: “To prevent such pollution of the community and thereby preserving its purity, the boundaries between the community and the dirty world must be strong, clear and firm (...). Its rigorism was demanded by the enormity of the need to preserve the purity of the community.”<sup>37</sup> Vengeance thus serves as an instrument to restore and maintain the purity of the Hebrews and their community, as the explicit connection between profaning the Son and God’s vengeance makes clear.

The author of Hebrews considers vengeance as a divine eschatological act. There will be a day in which God will judge all (10,25; 12,25).<sup>38</sup> The warning passage in 10,26-31 is intimately connected to the announcement of the Day in which God will come (10,25). It is thus unmistakable that the execution of divine vengeance will be on the moment when this Day will dawn. The theophanic imagery in verse 27, which resembles 2 Thessalonians 1,8, reinforces this point: on the day of God’s theophany, he will judge his people and execute his vengeance on those who have apostatized and forfeited their holy status. They can either step into the eschatological reality which Jesus has inaugurated (2,5-9) or face the consequences: “they will be *overtaken* by the *coming* day of judgment, brought by the *Coming One*, Jesus.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In the other warning passages, the divine emotion of wrath is mentioned (3,10-11; 4,3).

<sup>37</sup> I. Salevao, *Legitimation in the Letter to the Hebrews. The Construction and Maintenance of a Symbolic Universe*, JSNTSup 219 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 306.

<sup>38</sup> Wendebourg, *Tag*.

<sup>39</sup> Mackie, *Eschatology*, 124. Italics by Mackie.

### 6.1.3 Conclusion

Vengeance for the author of Hebrews is an instrument to instill fear into the hearts of the Hebrews. This fear is not the final objective, but it is an incentive to go the path of faith as the “wandering people of God” (E. Käsemann). The eschaton is near and the Hebrews must stand on the right side of salvation. Vengeance for the author of Hebrews is the divine activity of judgment which will come and which the Hebrews do not want to meet. They must show their gratitude for the gift of God and the Son, thereby honoring him and doing justice to the reality of Jesus’ glorification. These are the words of exhortation (13,22) which the author wants to communicate to his hearers and readers. Vengeance is a small piece in the exhortative structure of Hebrews.

## 6.2 Vengeance in Revelation

The Dutch scholar Jacobus de Vuyst has described the book of Revelation as one of hope and exhortation.<sup>40</sup> The violent rhetoric of Revelation has been met with other, more mixed reactions. Several authors have denounced the violence in the last book of the Bible, stating that it is “a sick text”<sup>41</sup> and “an orgy of hatred, wrath, vindictiveness, and blind destructive fury.”<sup>42</sup> Others take a more nuanced position, considering John’s rhetoric within first-century apocalyptic literature but also arguing that Revelation has a “violence problem”.<sup>43</sup> Why does John use this violent rhetoric and imagery, including the motif of vengeance?

This section will seek an answer to this urgent question. Several familiar steps will be taken to give an encompassing response to this scholarly challenge. First, the purpose of Revelation and John’s theology of divine retribution will be discussed (6.2.1). Several non-explicit vengeance texts are also covered in this section. The focus will then be on the explicit vengeance texts of Revelation: Revelation 6,9-11 (6.2.2) and 19,1-5 (6.2.3). These two

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<sup>40</sup> J. de Vuyst, *De Openbaring van Johannes. Het laatste Bijbelboek ingeleid en, voorzien van aantekeningen, vertaald* (Kampen: Kok, 1987), 17.

<sup>41</sup> W. Self, *Revelation*, Pocket Canons (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1998), xii.

<sup>42</sup> C.H. Jung, *Answer to Job* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 125.

<sup>43</sup> G. Carey, “Revelation’s Violence Problem. Mapping Essential Questions”, *PRSt* 42 (2015), 295-306.

texts are strongly connected with each other, so it is explainable that the theological-hermeneutical reflections will encompass both texts (6.2.4). A conclusion will end this section (6.2.5).

### 6.2.1 Divine Retribution and the Purpose of Revelation

John's theology of divine retribution cannot be understood without considering the purpose of Revelation. Knowledge of the epistolary goal of Revelation and the circumstances of the readers is necessary to comprehend John's vision of God's judgment.

Revelation is an extraordinary document. It combines three different types of writing: an apocalypse (1,1), a prophecy (1,3; 22,6-7.18-19), and a letter (1,4; 22,21). We must not limit Revelation to one of these three, because the three genres can overlap in the document.<sup>44</sup> The document is dated traditionally around 95 CE, under the reign of Emperor Domitian: the church father Irenaeus points towards this date (*Adv. Haer.* V.30.3), but also the internal evidence (Rome called Babylon; the Nero *redivivus* legend in Rev. 13) advocate this dating.<sup>45</sup> The author, who calls himself John<sup>46</sup>, has knowledge of the situations of the Christian communities in Asia Minor and sides with them in their afflictions (1,9). According to John the Christian communities are threatened by internal and external dangers. Internally, the communities are threatened by deviant teaching. These teachers, who John depicts as

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<sup>44</sup> See also R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1-17; D.E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, WBC 52A (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), lxx-xc; G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 37-43.

<sup>45</sup> P. Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb. Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgment in the Book of Revelation*, LNTS 586 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2018), 16-19.

<sup>46</sup> There has been much discussion who this John is. The traditional identification is that this John is John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee (Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 81,4; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III.11.1-8). The author however does not identify himself as eye-witness of Jesus, contrary to the writer of the Johannine Gospel and Epistles (Jn. 1,14; 21,24; 1 Jn. 1,1-3). There are similarities between Revelation, the Gospel, and the Epistles. There are also striking stylistic differences between Revelation and the other Johannine documents. The option of pseudonymity is also not viable, because the author introduces himself as "John", not as "John the Apostle". It is fairly possible that another John wrote Revelation, perhaps belonging to "a group of early Christian itinerant prophets" connected to Asia Minor (Beale, *Revelation*, 36; cf. M. Karrer, *Johannesoffenbarung. Offb. 1,1-5,14*, EKKNT XXIV/1 (Göttingen/Ostfildern: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht/Patmos Verlag, 2017), 49). There is however no argument decisive enough to decide who John is.

“Nicolaitans” (2,6.15), “Bileam” (2,14), and “Jezebel” (2,20), seduce the congregations to “commit fornication” (πορνεῦσαι) (2,14.20). John probably hints at people within these congregations who do not find it a problem to accommodate to the cultural and economic standards and practices of the Greco-Roman world.<sup>47</sup> They do not find it troubling to participate in the economy of the Roman Empire (and become rich) (13,16-17; 18,3) and to fit into behavioral patterns appreciated by Greco-Roman environments. John warns the congregations for these teachers: these people are objects of divine hate (2,6) and will ultimately lead one to destruction (2,16.23).

An important external threat to the Christian communities in Asia Minor is the separation from the Jewish synagogue.<sup>48</sup> John describes individuals several times as “those who say that they are Jews” and often mentions “synagogues of Satan” as opponents of the congregations (2,9; 3,9). He connects Jewish opposition against the Christian community in Smyrna with the work of the devil (2,10).<sup>49</sup> These harsh descriptions point towards a separation between Jewish and Christian communities in Asia Minor in these times. This separation endangered the Christians there, because Judaism was considered a “permitted religion” (*religio licita*) because of its antiquity. When Jews and Christians have been separated in Asia Minor, the Christian movement was deemed new and possibly dangerous. This observation would result in repression from the Roman authorities and their Gentile environment.<sup>50</sup>

This repression was an immediate threat for the Christian communities in Asia Minor. Although an empire-wide persecution can be dismissed on the basis of external evidence,<sup>51</sup> local movements of repression are probably the cause of suffering for the Christians in Asia Minor.<sup>52</sup> John hints within the seven oracles several times towards the suffering of the communities (2,10.13; 3,8). This repression is probably connected with a movement of

<sup>47</sup> D.A. DeSilva, “The Social Setting of the Revelation to John. Conflicts Within, Fear Without”, *WTJ* 54 (1992), 273-302.

<sup>48</sup> DeSilva, “Social Setting”; J. Lambrecht, “‘Synagogues of Satan’ (Rev. 2,9 and 3,9). Anti-Judaism in the Book of Revelation”, in: R. Bieringer, D. Pollefeyt, and F. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville (eds.), *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 279-292; P.L. Mayo, “Those Who Call Themselves Jews”. *The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John*, PTMS 60 (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> A.Y. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis. The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 85-86; Mayo, *Jews*, 61-67.

<sup>50</sup> Mayo, *Jews*, 67.

<sup>51</sup> C.R. Moss, *The Myth of Persecution. How Early Christians Invented the Story of Martyrdom* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Middleton, *Violence*, 16-64.

honoring the divine emperor and empire in Asia Minor.<sup>53</sup> John even mentions a victim of these local movements of persecution: Antipas of Pergamum (2,13). The evidence thus points towards a local persecution and dishonoring of the congregations, which John describes in rather vague and broad terms.<sup>54</sup>

With all these threats, John must exhort the seven congregations. They have shown perseverance in the past (2,3.19) and must also exhibit this attitude in the present (2,10.25; 3,3.10). Those who accommodate or who are giving in to the pressure of outsiders must repent (2,5.16.22; 3,3.19). They must be focused on Jesus, who is killed (1,7) but remained faithful (1,9). John thus questions the loyalty of the Christian believers of Asia Minor: who will receive your praise (13,1-18)? For the persevering believers, John also provides comfort: God does not repel them nor will he turn away from them in their difficult circumstances. They will be awarded for their perseverance and loyalty in the end and justice will be served. To confront, comfort, and exhort the Christian communities in Asia Minor, John writes Revelation. The book does not merely provide an alternative reality for the Christian believers, but, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Michelle Lee have stated, it gives a prophetic and true understanding of their present situation.<sup>55</sup> John addresses concrete problems and structures within the context of the Roman Empire and Asia Minor and offers divine insights and comfort.

Within this social and literary matrix, John formulates his theology of divine retribution. Just as Paul's concept of divine retribution has two sides (condemnation and salvation), so John formulates his theology of God's judgment. It is certainly the case in Revelation that divine retribution includes divine judgment. In the seven oracles the congregations are threatened with divine judgment when they do not repent and persevere (2,5.16.22-23; 3,3). The three septets (seals, trumpets, bowls) in 6,1-16,21 each contain the unfolding of divine judgment, in the mode of recapitulation: with each part and

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<sup>53</sup> Middleton, *Violence*, 35-39; J.W. van Henten, "Dragon Myth and Imperial Ideology in Revelation 12-13", in: D.L. Barr (ed.), *The Reality of Apocalypse. Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, SBLSS 39 (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 181-203.

<sup>54</sup> J.W. van Henten, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Revelation", in: J. Frey, J.A. Kellhofer and F. Tóth (eds.), *Die Johannesapokalypse. Kontexten-Konzepte-Reception*, WUNT 287 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 587-618.

<sup>55</sup> E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation. Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 49; M.V. Lee, "A Call to Martyrdom. Function as Method and Message in Revelation", *NovT* 40 (1998), 164-194, there 172.

each septet the condemnation and severity of judgment increases.<sup>56</sup> The severity of judgment can also be seen in the judgment of Babylon (17,1-19,5), Christ judging the evil forces (19,11-21), and the last judgment (20,11-15). The book even closes with a warning to those who do not act properly (22,15) and add to the prophecies of John (22,18). Yet, the scenes of judgment are regularly alternated with depictions of those who receive eternal salvation (5,10; 7,9-17; 14,1-5; 19,6-10; 20,4-6; 21,1-22,5). Divine retribution for John does not only entail the negative aspect of judgment, but also the positive aspect of salvation for the (suffering) believers.

The actor of divine retribution varies in Revelation. John regularly notes that scenes of judgment are the result of God's wrath (6,17; 11,18; 14,10.19; 15,1; 19,15). Divine retribution is also frequently connected to the activity of the Lamb, such as in the seven oracles (2,1-3,22), the prophecy of the harvest (14,14-20), and the scene of the Warrior (19,11-21). God also uses instruments to exact judgment: horse riders (6,1-8), angels (8,6-9,21; 11,15-19; 15,1-16,21), and the archangel Michael (12,7-17). Just as we have seen in Paul's writings, John also depicts believers as those who exact judgment on the world (22,4). John however communicates that divine retribution is the task of God and the Lamb and that instruments and believers can only judge when they receive authority from God.<sup>57</sup>

Another similarity with Paul's theology of divine retribution is that John frequently speaks about judgment of the works of the believers. People will be judged in the last judgment "according to their works" (κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν) (20,13; cf. 2,23; 18,6). Christ will come to distribute rewards and retribution "according to one's work" (ὡς τὸ ἔργον ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ) (22,12). Those who do the commandments of God will be saved (14,12; cf. 12,17). In the seven oracles, Christ regularly states that he "knows their works" (οἶδα σου τὰ ἔργα) and judges them according to it, leaving room for repentance (2,2.5.19.22; 3,1.8.15). The deeds of the righteous will follow them (14,13). John thus accepts that God will judge according to works. Divine retribution will provide salvation or condemnation according to the measure of righteousness of the works of individuals.

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<sup>56</sup> J. Lambrecht, "A Structuration of Revelation 4,1-22,5", in: idem, (ed.), *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, BEThL 53 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1980), 77-104.

<sup>57</sup> M.J. Streett, *Here Comes the Judge. Violent Pacifism in the Book of Revelation*, LNTS 462 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012).



The goal of John's theology of divine retribution is to exhort the congregations in Asia Minor, as we have seen above. The difficult times they face may not undermine their perseverance and faith, because God promises salvation to the faithful and condemnation for the unrighteous and the perpetrators of the suffering committed to the Christian communities. They must show their loyalty and fidelity to God and not commit to the satanic powers of Rome.<sup>58</sup> They must conquer (2,7.11.17.26; 3,5.12.21; 12,11; 15,2; 17,14; 21,7), persevere (2,10.25; 3,3.10-11; 13,10; 14,12), and testify (11,7; 12,11). The victor will eventually receive the promise of reward in heaven (2,7.11.17).<sup>59</sup>

John describes the object of divine retribution regularly as "those who inhabit the earth" (οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν) (3,10; 8,13; 11,10; 13,8.14; 17,2.8). They hear the message of salvation and the exhortation to honor God (14,6-7), but they refuse to repent and keep honoring the evil powers (9,20). They are seduced by Satan and his instruments (17,2) and thus not written in the book of life (17,8). Besides these individuals others receive divine retribution: "Jezebel" and her followers (2,22-24), the Dragon and his forces (12,9; 20,1-3.7-10), the Whore Babylon (17,1-19,5), and Death and Hades (20,14). John thus envisions Satan, Rome, and the unbelievers to be judged and condemned in the final coming of God.

Divine retribution in Revelation is connected with eschatology. John however provides an intricate interplay between history, meta-history, and eschatology.<sup>60</sup> The addressees of Revelation live in the present, but suffer and have possible doubts about the authority and justice of God. The vision of John lifts the believers into heaven, where their question is asked by those who have suffered and died (6,9-11). God makes clear that his justice will prevail in the final judgment. God is described in several instances as the One who is coming soon (2,16; 3,11.20; 22,7.20). John thus emphasizes that final salvation and condemnation is near: the *Kairos* of judgment is almost there (11,18; cf. 6,11). Retribution however is also already present in God's judgments now, as for instance the opening of the first four seals indicate (6,1-8). The septets in Revelation (4,1-8,5; 8,6-11,18; 15,5-16,21) combine the motifs

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<sup>58</sup> R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 38.

<sup>59</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 124.

<sup>60</sup> See the insightful article of E. Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Eschatology and Composition of the Apocalypse", *CBQ* 30 (1968), 537-569.

of linear progression and cyclical recapitulation: God's judgment develops itself in severity in the septets (with complete destruction in the last septet), while the motifs used to describe God's judgment are repeated and intensified with every septet.<sup>61</sup>

John's theology of divine retribution thus is recognizable, because other New Testament authors, such as Paul, show similarities with John's approach. Divine retribution is two-sided, encompasses the whole world, and is both future and present. As Richard Bauckham concludes:<sup>62</sup>

What is depicted is, emphatically, the outworking of God's perfect justice, not only in this world, but also in eternity. Moreover, we must once again observe that Revelation's readers are not encouraged to view the scene as the punishment coming to *other people*, their enemies, but as the judgment they themselves risk if they give way to the enticements of Babylon and the threats of the beast by participating in the worship of the beast.

### 6.2.2 Non-Explicit Vengeance Texts

Several texts in Revelation exhibit characteristics of vengeance scenes, but do not contain explicit vengeance vocabulary. This section will pay attention to these texts. These texts in Revelation are strongly connected to Revelation 6,10, one of the explicit vengeance texts. This relationship must be taken into consideration when the non-explicit vengeance texts are being discussed.

Revelation 11,18 is the first text in which vengeance plays a role. After the prophecy of the two witnesses (11,1-14), John hears the trumpet of the seventh angel. This trumpet is one of victory and benediction. What follows is a hymn of the 24 elders about the reversal of the earthly situation by God and Jesus Christ (11,16-18). The reign of God has begun and his time of final eschatological wrath has come. This future Day is explicated: the dead will be judged, the prophets of God and the believers will receive a reward (δοῦναι τὸν μισθὸν), and those who destroy the earth will be destroyed (διαφθεῖραι) (11,18). The center of judgment thus is the relationship with God and Jesus

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<sup>61</sup> Lambrecht, "Structuration"; R. Bauckham *The Climax of Prophecy. Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1993), 1-37.

<sup>62</sup> R. Bauckham, "Judgment in the Book of Revelation", in: G.V. Allen, I. Paul, and S.P. Woodman (eds.), *The Book of Revelation. Currents in British Research on the Apocalypse*, WUNT II/411 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 55-79, there 79.

Christ: those who serve him will be saved, those who do not serve him (and destroy his earth and church) will be condemned.

The next text is Revelation 16,4-7. After the pouring out of the third bowl, John hears the angel of the waters speak a doxology (cf. 7,1; 14,18). He honors God for his just judgment, for he gave those who shed the blood of the holy and the prophets blood to drink (16,5-6). They are worthy of this punishment (16,6). John then hears “one from the altar” (τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου) (a clear reference to 6,9-11) underline the truthfulness and just character of God’s judgment. The objects of God’s judgment receive divine vengeance for shedding the blood of God’s servants and children.

One of the most intense texts in Revelation is the Babylon-prophecy (17,1-19,5). John sketches the great antagonistic power as Babylon, a perverse prostitute with a hunger for power and wealth.<sup>63</sup> The image of Babylon is also not coincidental: it is the Old Testament antagonist (especially in Jeremiah 50-51). John may give away whom he is referring to: the beast who carries the Great Whore Babylon resembles Rome, with its seven mountains and influential emperors (17,9-10). John also mentions that the woman is “the big city” (17,18). Within this prophecy, John hears a voice from heaven exhorting the community first to leave the city (18,4). The inevitability of judgment then is emphasized, because God “remembers her iniquities” (ἐμνημόνευσεν τὰ ἀδικήματα αὐτῆς) (18,5). The voice from heaven then calls upon God to “retribute her as she has retributed” (ἀπόδοτε αὐτῇ ὡς καὶ αὐτὴ ἀπέδωκεν) and to pay her double according to her works (18,6). God must return to Babylon torment and grief (18,7). He already did this clearly and thoroughly in Scripture, punishing ancient Babylon for its sins. This request therefore does not require God to do new things, but to show his power and faithfulness again against a Babylon-type enemy. The voice thus urges God to exact his vengeance unto the city of Babylon for its own behavior towards the church and God.

These texts provide us with indications of how John understands divine vengeance. These characteristics overlap with the use of the motif of vengeance in other New Testament writings. John understands vengeance

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<sup>63</sup> D. Pezzoli-Olgiati, “Zwischen Gericht und Heil. Frauengestalten in der Johannesoffenbarung”, *BZ* 43 (1999), 72-91; S.E. Hulen, “The Power and Problem of Revelation 18. The Rhetorical Function of Gender”, in: C.A. Kirk-Duggan (ed.), *Pregnant Passion. Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*, SBL Semeia Studies 44 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 205-219.

within the matrix of honor, reciprocity, justice, purity, and eschatology. This claim can be substantiated with the explicit vengeance texts, which we will examine in the next section.

### 6.2.3 *Explicit Vengeance Texts*

John only uses explicit vengeance vocabulary in two places: Revelation 6,10 and 19,2. Though this seems to little upon which to base much research, further investigation reveals that these two texts shape the structure, themes, and content of the whole book. J.P. Heil even calls 6,9-11 “the key to the Book of Revelation”.<sup>64</sup> This section will thus examine these two explicit vengeance texts in Revelation: Revelation 6,9-11 (6.2.3.1) and 19,2 (6.2.3.2), ending with a conclusion (6.2.3.3).

#### 6.2.3.1 *Revelation 6,10*

*They cried out with a loud voice: “how long, holy and true Ruler, do you not judge and avenge our blood on those who inhabit the earth?”*

When the Lamb opens the fifth seal, John hears and sees the cry of the martyrs. The opening of this seal is remarkable, for it seems to deviate from the opening of the previous seals (6,1-8). Its content also seems to differ from the content of the previous seals. Why does John hear and see this cry and what does it mean and which effect does it have? How does this text relate to the whole book? This section will deal with these questions. The structure of this section is the same as in previous chapters: first, we will look at the context of the passage (6.2.3.1.1). We will then look at the passage itself (6.2.3.1.2). Some theological-hermeneutical reflections will follow (6.2.3.1.3) and the section will be closed with a conclusion (6.2.3.1.4).

##### 6.2.3.1.1 *The Context of Revelation 6,9-11*

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<sup>64</sup> J.P. Heil, “The Fifth Seal (Rev 6,9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation”, *Biblica* 74 (1993), 220-243.

Revelation 6,9-11 is preceded by several visions that are constitutive for the Book of Revelation. The seven oracles (2,1-3,20) have been examined in the previous sections, so we can put these texts aside here. The seven oracles are followed by John's vision of the heavenly throne room and the Lamb being handed the divine scroll or plan of salvation (Rev. 4,1-5,14).

Several elements of this vision are important for understanding 6,9-11. First, God is praised in 4,8 as "the Almighty" (ὁ παντοκράτωρ) (cf. 1,8; 11,17; 15,3; 16,7.14; 19,6.15; 21,22). He is the one with the power and authority to judge the world and bring his kingdom into this world. His kingship is then also acknowledged: he has the dignity and honor and through his will creation has been created and still exists (4,9-11). Secondly, the scroll of God's plan of salvation is handed to the Lamb. He has conquered (ἐνίκησεν) and is worthy to open the scroll (5,4-5.9.12). In this victory of the Lamb, the believers in Asia Minor will receive their victory and their reward (12,11; 15,2). They will reign with him (1,6; 5,10; 20,4-6). Thirdly, Jesus is first described as "the Lion of Judah" and then as "the slaughtered Lamb" (5,5-6). He is both: he is the Lamb who has sacrificed himself on the cross to earn the final victory (5,9; 12,11), while also being the Lion and the horned Lamb who exercises his judging and royal authority over his enemies.<sup>65</sup>

The scroll of God's plan of salvation thus is placed in the hands of Jesus. John then sees the scroll being opened (6,1). The first four seals (6,1-8) form a coherent structure, whereby the fourth horseman (6,8) summarizes the previous horsemen. Zechariah 1,7-11 and 6,1-8 are most likely in mind here.<sup>66</sup> The horsemen and chariots in Zechariah are instruments of God to bring salvation, while in Revelation the four horsemen bring respectively (pseudo-)victorious war (6,2), civil war (6,3-4), famine (6,5-6), and disaster (6,7-8).<sup>67</sup> These disastrous events are the result of the Lamb opening the seals,

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<sup>65</sup> There is a pacifistic movement in Revelation research that wants to merge the two images of Lion and Lamb or give priority to the image of the Lamb for its non-violent character. See L.J. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John. An Investigation into its Origins and Rhetorical Force*, WUNT II/167 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). I agree with Susan Hylen ("Metaphor Matters. Violence and Ethics in Revelation", *CBQ* 73 (2011), 777-796) and Paul Middleton (*Violence*, 65-96) that the two images should not be treated as opposites. Together they designate the messianic and conquering might of Jesus, who is stronger than his (and the churches') enemies. This conclusion is confirmed when one also considers the image of Jesus as the conquering Warrior (19,11-21). See Van Henten, "Violence".

<sup>66</sup> Beale (*Revelation*, 372) also points towards Ezekiel 14,12-23.

<sup>67</sup> There has been much discussion about the identity of the first horseman: is it Christ (parallel to Rev. 19,11-13) or is it (a) pseudo-christological Satan(ic force)? The arguments

thus these disasters must be read as divine judgments connected to (and therefore distinguished from) the elaboration of God's plan of salvation.<sup>68</sup> The Lamb is beginning to establish the divine kingdom on earth, which requires the punishment of the unbelievers and the tribulation of the believers.<sup>69</sup>

The first four seals are logically followed by the opening of the fifth seal (6,9-11). Both the tribulation of the martyred believers and the punishment of the unbelievers trigger certain emotions and thoughts among the Christian community (on earth and in heaven). The next section examines how this is taken up in the vision of John.

#### 6.2.3.1.2 Vengeance in Revelation 6,9-11

The opening of the fifth seal deviates from the opening of the previous seals in several ways. First, the image of the Zecharian horsemen is missing and is replaced by the image of martyrs. Second, the numeral stands between the article and the noun, instead of the numeral following the noun as in the previous verses. Another difference is that in the opening of the second, third, and fourth seal John was "hearing" (ἤκουσα) and in the opening of the fifth seal, just as in the opening of the first seal, John is "seeing" (εἶδον). The content of 6,9-11 exhibits traces of a common tradition: there is a strong affinity with apocalyptic texts such as 1 Enoch 47,1-4, 4 Ezra 4,35-37 and 2 Baruch 23,4-5a.<sup>70</sup>

When John sees the Lamb opening the fifth seal, he observes a heavenly altar (θυσιαστήριον). There is much discussion about the altar: does John

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for the first and the latter position are clearly formulated by Beale (*Revelation*, 375-377). I prefer the latter position for several reasons. The Lamb opening the first seal and being the subject of the first seal seems odd. The context of judgment in chapter 6 justifies reading a negative image in the first horseman. Considering a pseudo-satanic force imitating Christ finds evidence in Revelation 12-13, where Satan and his companions imitate Christ. The Beast also conquers (11,7; 13,7), while demonic forces are also described as horsemen with crowns (9,7). The parallel with 19,11-13 can be explained as "polemic parallelization" (T. Witulski, "Der 'erste apokalyptische Reiter' (Apk 6,1-2) und der Reiter auf dem Weissen Pferd (Apk 19,11-16.19-21). Ein Beispiel von polemischen Parallellismus innerhalb der Apokalypse des Johannes", in: Collins, *New Perspectives*, 269-292). Although this satanic force seems to conquer and be victorious, the real horseman on the white horse (Christ in 19,11-13) will have the final victory.

<sup>68</sup> As Bauckham (*Theology*, 80) describes, the seals are "to narrate a series of visions which prepare for the revelation of the contents of the scroll."

<sup>69</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 388; De Vuyst, *Openbaring*, 37.

<sup>70</sup> Bauckham, *Climax*, 51-56; D.A. DeSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way. The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 165.

refer to the altar of burnt offering or the altar of incense (cf. 8,3-5)? Here, the altar makes sense as the altar of burnt offering. The martyrs are depicted as sacrifices through the word “slaughtered” (ἐσφαγμένων). Yet, the altar also functions as the altar of incense and prayer, as verse 10 and 8,3-5 show. The word θυσιαστήριον has both meanings, so a lexical solution does not provide conclusive proof.<sup>71</sup> When we take into account the dual meaning of the word θυσιαστήριον and the use of sacrificial and cultic language concerning the martyred souls at the altar, it is justified to qualify the altar in 6,9-10 as both the altar of burnt offering and of incense.<sup>72</sup> John wishes to accentuate the sacrificial character of the martyrdom of the believers and the cultic character of their imprecatory prayer before God.

John thus sees “slaughtered” souls before this altar. They have followed the footsteps of the Lamb (5,6.9.12) and are the victims of the woes of the first four seals (6,4). John also provides the reason for their death: “for the Word of God and the testimony they had given” (διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον).<sup>73</sup> The genitive in this sentence can be read as exegetical (explaining “the word”), possessive (it is the word owned by God), or subjective (the word that has been spoken by God). This clause is paralleled in 20,4, where John narrates that the souls were “beheaded” (πεπελεκισμένων). John is on the island Patmos for the same reason (expressed by δία plus an accusative) as the martyrs are killed (1,9). It is also the cause of the victory of the martyrs, according to the voice from heaven (12,11). These martyred souls have testified of God and Jesus the Messiah and had to pay with their lives for their boldness and perseverance. The martyrs have several different functions in this vision: they show that faithful testimony leads to martyrdom, they show the distinction between the unbelieving inhabitants of the earth and the faithful believers, and their fate is the justification for the coming judgment.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> H.J. Klauck, “Θυσιαστήριον. Eine Berichtigung”, ZNW 71 (1980), 274-277.

<sup>72</sup> H.R. van der Kamp, *Openbaring*, CNT III (Kampen: Kok, 2000), 2000; C.R. Koester, *Revelation*, AYBC (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 398.

<sup>73</sup> It is quite odd that authors such as A. Feuillet (“Les martyrs de l’humanité et l’Agneau égorgé. Une Interprétation Nouvelle de la Prière des Égorgés en Ap 6,9-11”, *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 99 (1977), 189-207) state that these martyrs are probably pre-Christian. Pre-Christian martyrs do not come into view in the whole book of Revelation, while the Word of God and the testimony of the Christian community are frequently linked to the Lamb and its activities. We can quite certainly say that John views these martyrs as Christian martyrs.

<sup>74</sup> Middleton, *Violence*, 192-193.

John not only sees in the opening of the fifth seal, but also hears the voice of the martyred souls (6,10). Their cry is audible: it is done “with a loud voice” (φωνῆ μεγάλῃ), thus there can be no uncertainty of what has been said. Their cry is one for justice for themselves and the world: “how long will you not judge and avenge our blood from those who inhabit the earth?” (ἕως πότε (...) οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). This prayer for supplication resembles several imprecatory prayers from the Old Testament (LXX Ps. 12,2; 34,17; 73,10; 78,5; 81,2; 88,47; 93,3). There is quite a resemblance with Psalm 78 LXX: the author of this psalm asks YHWH how long he will wait before he comes into action (78,5) and he requests vengeance from YHWH on his enemies (78,10-12).

God is addressed as “holy and true Sovereign” (ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός). This designation points towards God’s authority, faithfulness and power as King (cf. 16,7; 19,2). He is the one who can exact vengeance, because he has the authority and power.<sup>75</sup> Why this prayer? This imprecatory prayer is not a cry for help in a personal vendetta, but it is a call for divine justice from the heavenly Judge and King.<sup>76</sup> The believers are crowned as kings and priests by the Lamb (5,10) and divine judgment has set in (6,1-8), but judgment has not provided any visible breakthrough of the heavenly Kingdom and God has not yet judged the unbelievers and rehabilitated the believers.<sup>77</sup> The martyred souls ask for justice for the loss of their lives and the establishment of God’s Kingdom in the world, the latter becoming evident further in Revelation (10,5-7; 11,17-18; 20,4-6).<sup>78</sup> This heavenly prayer probably communicates the thoughts of the Christian communities in Asia Minor. The believers in Asia Minor are thus encouraged that their difficulties and despair are recognized: their sacrifices have been acknowledged and their prayers reach into the heavenly temple.<sup>79</sup>

God does not immediately answer their request. Instead, he hands them white robes (στολὴ λευκή), which John later describes as robes who are whitened by the blood of the Lamb (7,14). The white robes denote purity and victory (3,4-5.18; 4,4; 7,9.13; 19,14). It declares that God qualifies them as

<sup>75</sup> Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 201.

<sup>76</sup> Bauckham, “Judgment”, 66. See also R. Bauckham, “Prayer in the Book of Revelation”, in: Longenecker, *In God’s Presence*, 252-270, there 263.

<sup>77</sup> Bauckham, “Judgment”, 66; R. Schwandt, “Der Klageruf der Märtyrer. Exegetische und Theologische Überlegungen zu Öffb 6,9-11. Teil I”, *BN* 141 (2009), 117-136, there 127-128.

<sup>78</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 481.

<sup>79</sup> T.B. Slater, *Christ and Community. A Socio-Historical Study of the Christology of Revelation*, JSNTSup 178 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 179.



innocent, worthy, and pure. They receive heavenly clothing and are thus part of the conquering army of the Lamb (3,4-5). God announces that they must have patience and rest (*ἀναπαύσονται*) for a short period of time (cf. 2 Thess. 1,7-10). Life with God is thus, just as in Hebrews, formulated in terms of rest: when one is clothed with heavenly robes, one can put down one's work and rest. The martyrs must also await God's eschatological judgment in this period of rest. Those who are judged by God receive an opposite future: they do not have any rest and await judgment (14,11).

The explanation for this delay of divine judgment is that the number must be completed (*ἕως πληρωθῶσιν*). There has been some discussion on the exegesis of the sentence *ἕως πληρωθῶσιν*: does it denote a number of martyrs which must be added to the already existing group of killed believers (*numerus iustorum*) or a limit of time in which the work of judgment and salvation is completed (*mensura temporum*)? The first option is the most plausible explanation here, in conjunction with other passages in Revelation which hint at a *numerus iustorum* which will be fulfilled in a short period of time (12,12-17; 13,10.15). Rainer Schwindt argues rightly that the *mensura temporum* is determined by the *numerus iustorum*.<sup>80</sup> In the meanwhile, the believers must persevere in their testifying of Jesus as the Messiah (11,7-12).

The martyred souls (and the believers in Asia Minor) are comforted by the next sections of Revelation. The Day of the Lord commences when the sixth seal is opened (6,12-17), the believers are marked and assured of a bright and secure future (7,1-17), and their prayers are heard by God (8,3-5). This vision is not anticipatory, but reality: God hears and sees the martyrs. Revelation 6,9-11 is thus a scene in which divine justice plays an important role: it revolves around salvation and rehabilitation for the believers, and the condemnation of the guilt of the sinful unbelievers.<sup>81</sup> It serves as a catalysator for the events happening further in Revelation, in which God shows and exerts his justice and royal authority on the world.

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<sup>80</sup> Schwindt, "Klageruf. Teil I", 133.

<sup>81</sup> T. Söding, "Gott und das Lamm. Theozentrik und Christologie in der Johannesapokalypse", in: K. Backhaus (ed.), *Theologie als Vision. Studien zur Johannesoffenbarung*, SBS 191 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2001), 77-120, there 84.

6.2.3.1.3 *Theological-Hermeneutical Reflections on Vengeance in Revelation 6,10*

The introduction to section 6.2 has provided some theological-hermeneutical remarks on violence in Revelation from several authors. This list of authors reflecting on violence in Revelation could be effortlessly supplemented. This observation shows that theological-hermeneutical reflection on vengeance in Revelation 6,9-11 is vital in shaping the overall understanding of vengeance and violence in Revelation.

Revelation 6,9-11 first exhibits that vengeance is a divine prerogative. The martyrs are killed so they cannot avenge themselves, but John does not envision the spirits of the martyrs visiting and requesting family to exact family vengeance. Instead, the martyred souls seek God and ask him to do justice and impose his vengeance on the cruel perpetrators. John has shown that God has the authority and the ability to do justice purely and no one else.<sup>82</sup> Believers may not avenge, but must testify and persist, or as William Klassen formulates: “victory comes not by engaging in armed battle but by refusing to love one’s life so much that one resists martyrdom and through consistent patterning of one’s life upon the Lamb’s sacrifice.”<sup>83</sup>

Vengeance in Revelation must also be considered from the perspective of the matrix of reciprocity. John mentions the pattern of retribution of God on several occasions: God rewards (and restores) his people, while punishing and judging those who refuse to repent and even persecute the believers (11,18; 16,5-7). The martyred souls in the heavenly temple plead upon the certainty of God’s reciprocal vengeance: he is the conquering Lamb, the Creator of the universe, and he cannot be unjust and untrue to his promises. Vengeance in Revelation 6,10 thus must be seen as the divine answer to the unrepentant character and the persecuting acts by the inhabitants of the earth against the followers of Jesus the Messiah.

Strongly linked to reciprocity is the topic of honor. In several passages the readers of Revelation are exhorted to honor God (5,9-10; 7,12; 14,7) and to fear him (15,4). The problem of the inhabitants of the earth is that they refuse to honor God and repent and instead honor the demons (9,20-21). God secures his own honor and the honor of the believers by retribution. Revelation 6,9-11 shows that the honor of the believers is slighted by killing them.

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<sup>82</sup> Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*.

<sup>83</sup> Klassen, “Vengeance”.

In the heavenly temple they pray to God for supplication and the restoration of their (and God's) honor. This prayer must also comfort the believers in Asia Minor to hold on to God's honor and their honor in the Lamb instead of honoring that what is not worthy of honor (14,9-11). David DeSilva states correctly: "John thus weaves into his vision the dual considerations of concern so to live as to preserve God's honor and assurance of God's care for the believers' honor."<sup>84</sup>

An important theme in Revelation is justice. Richard Bauckham formulates: "The desire for justice in an unjust world or – better – the desire for a just world is a major concern of the book of Revelation."<sup>85</sup> Justice is distributed by God through the *lex talionis*: the punishment of the perpetrator will be equal to one's crime (11,18). God is the highest Judge and just are his decisions (15,3; 16,7). In 6,9-11 "God is invoked as the perfectly just judge who in his judgments enacts the truth."<sup>86</sup> Justice reveals truth and enforces God's just order on this world, which in 6,9-11 means the eradication of evil and evildoers. The martyred souls can pray for vengeance, because the hour of God's judgment has come (3,10; 14,7).<sup>87</sup> Vengeance thus must be seen as an act of divine justice, enabling order and tranquility into the world.

Another important feature of vengeance in Antiquity was its familial and sometimes covenantal content. This aspect also plays a role in the imprecatory prayer in Revelation 6,10. The believers are considered to be a family, as can be seen in the designation of fellow believers of the martyrs in 6,11 ("brothers and sisters"). God is also called "Father" by John, mostly in relationship with Jesus (1,6; 2,27; 3,5.21; 14,1). Believers belong to the Father through the Lamb (3,5.21; 5,9). The use of vengeance in 6,10 thus must also be seen in this familial, covenantal context. The believers are the "holy" (5,8; 8,4) and their prayer for supplication is the request to the God and Father of the covenant to help his children (21,7) and to restore order in his world.

Revelation is recognized by most scholars as being an emotional and evocative text. Although John does not link the imprecatory prayer of 6,10 to a certain emotion, the broader context of 6,9-11 shows that vengeance is embedded in divine emotion. The most dominant emotion is wrath. The

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<sup>84</sup> D.A. DeSilva, "Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy of the Apocalypse of John", *JSNT* 71 (1998), 79-110, there 98.

<sup>85</sup> Bauckham, "Judgment", 55.

<sup>86</sup> Bauckham, "Judgment", 66.

<sup>87</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 47-48.

elaboration of the prayer of 6,10 in the sixth seal is recognized as an act of wrath of the Lamb (6,16-17; cf. 11,18). Other important emotions are trust and fear: God must be feared for his vengeance and he can also be trusted because of his faithfulness to the covenant.<sup>88</sup> Vengeance thus is an emotional enterprise, a result of God's wrath poured out and a means of instilling trust and fear in the believers.

The previous sections and chapters have also highlighted vengeance as an instrument of purification. The white robes the martyred souls receive are a sign of purity, being purified as a gift of God in the blood of the Lamb (6,11; 7,14). The impurity is also present, as can be seen in the seven oracles (2,14.20-22; 3,4-5.17-18). The slaughter of the martyrs has produced a stain of impurity upon the inhabitants of the earth and the imprecatory prayer of 6,10 asks God to purify his earth. Divine vengeance is necessary to purify the earth from impurity and to provide full purification for the believers.

The notion of eschatology is an intricate problem in Revelation, as we have seen above. John transmits a prophetic interpretation of the present, yet without merely focusing on the present. Paul Middleton describes it accurately when he states that "the Last Day (...) is the vantage point from which John's present should be understood."<sup>89</sup> The prayer of 6,10 is the heavenly display of the present circumstances and thoughts within the Christian communities in Asia Minor. Their situation has most certainly propelled the urgency of prayers of supplication. John provides the heavenly outlook: their needs are also the content of the heavenly prayer, vengeance is asked for, and in the meantime they may rest in their acquired status in the Lamb (6,11). The process of exacting vengeance is eschatological: the coming Day of the Lord (6,17) will commence soon. 6,9-11 thus stands in the tension between already and not-yet: the imprecatory prayer is going to God and the martyrs are pure in the Lamb, while at the same time divine vengeance will come and will be exacted by the One who is coming (1,4).

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<sup>88</sup> D.A. DeSilva, "The Strategic Arousal of Emotions in the Apocalypse of John. A Rhetorical-Critical Investigation of the Seven Oracles to the Seven Churches", *NTS* 54 (2008), 90-114.

<sup>89</sup> Middleton, *Violence*, 177.

#### 6.2.3.1.4 Conclusion

Revelation 6,9-11 most certainly reflects the difficult circumstances the believers in Asia Minor are facing right now. Their need is addressed with 6,9-11: purifying divine justice is coming, because God is coming. Their current situation is also illuminated. The sacrifices they have to make for confessing Christ are recognized by God and they are comforted that their fellow-Christians (and probably they themselves in the future) are welcomed in the haven of rest near God. They will be part of God's victory in the Lamb. The truth of 6,9-11 as the key for understanding Revelation will become apparent when we examine Revelation 19,2 next.

#### 6.2.3.2 Revelation 19,2

*“For his judgments are true and just, for he has judged the great whore, who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he avenged the blood of his servants from her hand.”*

Revelation 19,2 is part of the Babylon-complex in Revelation (17,1-19,10). The interplay between Old Testament texts (especially from Jeremiah and Ezekiel), previously in Revelation mentioned themes, and new evocative material results in a complex piece of literature. Within this dense network of themes and texts, the motif of vengeance comes up as a reminder why Babylon has fallen. It is the answer to the imprecatory prayer of Revelation 6,9-11, due to the use of the same vocabulary. The vengeance motif in Revelation 19,2 is the topic of this section. The structure will be the same as previous sections: a sketch of the context of Revelation 19,2 (6.2.3.2.1), an exegesis of Revelation 19,1-5 (6.2.3.2.2), and theological-hermeneutical reflections on vengeance in Revelation 19,2 (6.2.3.2.3), which are topped off with a conclusion (6.2.3.2.4).

##### 6.2.3.2.1 The Context of Revelation 19,2

After the description of the three septets (6,1-16,21), John is taken to another place by one of the angels (17,1). This move inaugurates the Great Whore

Babylon vision (17,1-19,10), which has already been alluded to in previous passages (14,6-12; 16,19). The image of a prostitute presupposes a set of expectations: a whore is open to everyone and she crosses moral boundaries.<sup>90</sup> John sketches the Great Whore Babylon as wealthy and exuberant, but the wealth and superabundance are not divinely given. She belongs to Satan (17,3). She seduces kings and inhabitants of the earth to fornication (πορνεία) (17,2) and kills those who belong to Jesus (17,6). It will try to conquer the Lamb, but it will fail: God will enforce his plan of salvation and condemnation unto her and she will be self-destructive (17,14.16-17).<sup>91</sup>

Chapter 18 focuses even more on the fall of Babylon and the characterization of the fall as divine judgment. A powerful angel exclaims that Babylon has fallen, due to her impurity, sin, and seduction (18,1-3). Her fall is linked to fornication and divine wrath (18,3). 18,4-20 presents the judgment on Babylon from various angles.<sup>92</sup> As we have seen already, another angel calls upon God's people to withdraw from the city and requests God to avenge himself on Babylon (18,4-7). The kings and merchants, already mentioned as products of Babylon's seduction in 18,3, and also seamen will cry and mourn over Babylon (18,9-19). They have profited from the wealth and flourishing trade and now it is all gone. The angel calls upon God's people to rejoice, because God has judged the city (18,20; cf. 18,4-7). There will be no more rejoicing, no more seduction, and no more shedding of the blood of believers, because the city will be destroyed (18,21-24). Chapter 18 forms the dirge of Babylon for the persecution of the believers.<sup>93</sup>

The emphasis in Revelation 17-18 falls on the wealth and the height of power of Babylon, but also on the great fall and total destruction of the city. She is punished by God for slaughtering the believers (17,6; 18,24) and the economic exploitation of God's earth and people (18,7).<sup>94</sup> Another highlight in these chapters is God's royal authority and his restorative and punishing justice. It is God who judges and overturns the Great Whore Babylon (17,14; 18,8.20). This prophetic outlook on the fall of Babylon turns into a doxology and an image of God's salvific actions in chapter 19.

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<sup>90</sup> Hylén, "Power".

<sup>91</sup> Sals, *Biographie*, 121.

<sup>92</sup> Sals, *Biographie*, 71.

<sup>93</sup> A.Y. Collins, "Revelation 18. Taunt-Song or Dirge?", in: Lambrecht, *L'Apocalypse*, 185-204; idem, "Persecution".

<sup>94</sup> P.G.R. De Villiers, "Unmasking and Challenging Evil. Exegetical Perspectives on Violence in Revelation 18", in: idem and J.W. van Henten (eds.), *Coping with Violence in the New Testament*, STAR 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 201-226.

### 6.2.3.2.2 Vengeance in Revelation 19,1-5

The first verses of chapter 19 constitute an unmistakable continuation of the previous chapters. At the same time, these verses form a bridge to the next sections (19,10-22,5).<sup>95</sup> 19,1-5 is a passage of doxology and a song of victory, an answer to the invitation to rejoice in 18,20.

The next episode begins in chapter 19 with John hearing a voice from heaven. This voice is unison, while being the voice “of a great multitude” (ὄχλου πολλοῦ) (19,1). The connection with 18,20 and the use of the vengeance motif in 19,2 makes it possible that the multitude is formed by the martyred souls in heaven (6,9; 7,9). Their blood was spilled by Babylon (17,6; 18,24) and now they see justice being served. The song begins in a psalmodic style: “Hallelujah” (Ps. 104,1-2 LXX; Ps. 112-117 LXX). God is honored and praised, incorporating elements from previous hymns in this climactic hymn. The multitude wishes God salvation (7,10; 12,10), honor (4,11; 5,12-13; 7,12; 16,9), and power (4,11; 5,12; 7,12; 11,17; 12,10). God is sovereign, honorable, powerful, and mighty to save.

Verse 2 provides the explanation for this doxology. First, the multitude praises God for his “true and just judgments” (ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἰ κρίσεις). This motif is already used in the hymn from the altar (16,7; cf. 15,3). It underlines the purity of God’s actions: they are in line with the legal order and the divine motives are clear. God does not punish unjustifiably or with collateral damage, because he himself is truthful and just (3,7; 6,10; 19,11). He keeps his covenantal promises and frees his people. The truthfulness and justness of God’s judgments are also explicated: he condemned the Great Whore (19,2b). John underlines the nature of her crime (and thus the justness of God’s judgment): she “corrupted the earth with her fornication” (ἔφθειρεν τὴν γῆν ἐν τῇ πορνείᾳ αὐτῆς; cf. Jer. 28,25 LXX). John already made clear that Babylon was seductive and pulled the earth in her net of fornication (14,8; 17,2; 18,3.9). She seduced many people into worshipping idols and is punished for this heinous crime of idolatry.

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<sup>95</sup> M.A. Harris, *The Literary Function of Hymns in the Apocalypse of John* (unpublished dissertation Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988), 303; J.J. Schedtler, *A Heavenly Chorus. The Dramatic Function of Revelation’s Hymns*, WUNT II/381 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 101.

The second reason for God's judgment was, as we have seen, the murder of the believers (17,6; 18,24), and the multitude clarifies that the fall of Babylon was God's vengeance for the blood of his children. The imprecatory prayer of 6,10 is answered in this verse, which shows that the period between the prayer being brought to God and the destructive victory of God on the Great Whore Babylon must be seen as the execution of God's vengeance on the world and its satanic forces. A possible allusion to Deuteronomy 32,43 LXX can be heard in 19,2: God has avenged the blood of his servant (Deut. 32,43 LXX reads "of his son"). It becomes clear that God hears the prayers of the believers and also saves them from oppression and persecution by eradicating the opposition.<sup>96</sup> Justice has been served and a new future lies ahead: the believers are vindicated for the evil they suffered and being retributed for their faithfulness and perseverance.<sup>97</sup>

A second "Hallelujah" is shouted by the multitude in heaven (19,3). This repetition of the Hallelujah is supplemented with yet another element of praise. The multitude honors God, probably because of the smoke of the city that stays for eternity (cf. Is. 34,9-10). The city has been burned by God (17,16; 18,9.18) and the eternal smoke reminds the readers of the total destruction of the satanic city and the encompassing victory of God.<sup>98</sup> The doxology of the multitude is answered and supplemented in verse 4 by the doxology of the 24 elders and four animals (cf. 4,4-11; 5,11-14). They reply with an underlining of the doxology of the multitude ("Amen") and another repetition of the praise to God ("Hallelujah"). The threefold "Hallelujah" exhibits that this hymn has a strong theocentric focus, praising God for his actions destroying Babylon.<sup>99</sup> The elders and animals embody this praise by kneeling down and worshipping God on the throne (4,2-3). Verse 4 elucidates that these doxologies take place at the heavenly throne, depicted in Revelation 4-5.<sup>100</sup>

A third doxology is uttered in verse 5. This time a voice from the throne exhorts "all his servants" (πάντες οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ) and "all those who fear him, the small and the great" (οἱ φοβούμενοι αὐτόν, οἱ μικροὶ καὶ οἱ

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<sup>96</sup> J.P. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse. The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16,17-19,10*, EHS XXIII/376 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 489-490; Middleton, *Violence of the Lamb*, 196.

<sup>97</sup> DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 168.

<sup>98</sup> Ruiz, *Ezekiel*, 492.

<sup>99</sup> Harris, *Hymns*, 195-196.

<sup>100</sup> S. Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns. Commentary on the Cosmic Conflict*, LNTS 511 (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 197.



μεγάλοι) to praise “our God.” It is difficult to identify the voice from the throne: the position on the throne of God exhibits divine authority, but the voice speaks of “our” God. It is possible that John, with an allusion to Psalm 110,1, envisions Jesus as the voice.<sup>101</sup> This exclamation underlines the idea that only God is worthy of worship and that the readers must be loyal to him, instead of dedicating themselves and their praise to others.<sup>102</sup>

The tone of comfort and doxology is continued in the next verses. John envisions a wedding with a Bride clothed in pure linen (19,8; cf. 6,11). The whore Babylon makes room for the Bride and the new Jerusalem: a new woman and a new city. These (Old Testament) images show that God has authority and gradually enforces this authority in this world, on the basis of the victory of Christ.<sup>103</sup> The incentives are clear: praise God and testify of him (19,10). They will be blessed when they persevere until the end (19,9; 20,6).

19,1-5 thus serves as a bridge passage between the Babylon-prophecy and the image of the Bride and the new Jerusalem (19,6-22,5). It is a climactic passage, showing that the tone of the judgment of Babylon is not that of mourning, but of “joyful praises”.<sup>104</sup> On the basis of this decisive victory of God’s vengeance, the martyred souls (and the readers) can receive their new home and life with God. This prospect must encourage the believers in Asia Minor to praise God and persevere in the face of persecution and other difficult circumstances.

#### 6.2.3.2.3 *Theological-Hermeneutical Reflections on Vengeance in Revelation 19,2*

The hymn of Revelation 19,1-5 contains the motif of vengeance, already evoked in Revelation 6,10. The following theological-hermeneutical reflections show similarities with the reflections on vengeance in 6,10, as well as on related texts of the New Testament.

Vengeance in Revelation 19,2 is articulated as a divine matter. The multitude does not praise itself or other human beings, but it praises God for

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<sup>101</sup> See also Beale, *Revelation*, 930.

<sup>102</sup> J.P. Ruiz, “Praise and Politics in Revelation 19,1-10”, in: S. Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 69-84.

<sup>103</sup> K.E. Miller, “The Nuptial Eschatology of Revelation 19-22”, *CBQ* 60 (1998), 301-318.

<sup>104</sup> Bauckham, *Climax*, 378.

avenging the blood of the martyred souls. The theocentric focus of the hymn shows that vengeance can only be pure and complete justice when the ultimate King and Judge exacts his avenging verdict on the world and its evil powers and inhabitants. The multitude of believers entrust their case and the monopoly of violence to God.<sup>105</sup>

Retributive reciprocity is in Revelation 19,2 also an important matrix to understand vengeance. God's vengeance is emphatically described as a reaction to the killing of the believers by Babylon (19,2; cf. 17,6; 18,24). The punishment for this heinous crime is given in equal measure to Babylon by eradicating the city and its influence completely. Just as in 6,10 vengeance is the divine answer to the persecuting activities of the enemies of the church. What was a prayer in 6,10 will become real in 19,2: God has dealt with the enemies of his believers and repaid them for oppressing his believers and corrupting the earth.

Just as in 6,10 honor is an important factor in understanding the exclamation about God's vengeance in 19,2. The martyred souls asked in 6,10 to repay the persecutors of the church for slighting the honor of their lives. Now, in 19,2, God has stood up for his people and restored the balance of honor. He has also restored the balance of power: Babylon tried to take up the place of honor, but God reversed it and humiliated Babylon (17,14-17). Babylon attacked God's honor, but he has shown his worth, strength, and authority by destroying Babylon. That is why the multitude, the elders, the animals, and the voice from the throne give him praise and honor. He exhibited who really is the honorable One in this universe. God's reputation was at stake, but he underlined and established his status.<sup>106</sup>

The notion of justice is also vital in the hymn of chapter 19. God let justice rule and has shown that fornication, corruption, and killing believers cannot be tolerated. His justice is retributive, punishing Babylon, and restorative, creating "a new order of human community."<sup>107</sup> He has eradicated evil, answered human injustice and judged sin and violence.<sup>108</sup> The legal character is also emphasized when the multitude addresses the 'just' character of God's

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<sup>105</sup> M. Mayordomo, "Gewalt in der Johannesoffenbarung als theologisches Problem", in: T. Schmeller, M. Ebner, and R. Hoppe (eds.), *Die Offenbarung des Johannes. Kommunikation im Konflikt*, QD 253 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2013), 107-136, there 132.

<sup>106</sup> Grabiner, *Hymns*, 205.

<sup>107</sup> DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 168.

<sup>108</sup> D.M. Harris, "Understanding Images of Violence in the Book of Revelation", in: M. Zehnder and H. Hagelia (eds.), *Encountering Violence in the Bible*, The Bible in the Modern World 55 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 148-164, there 151.

judgments (19,2). God's justice prevails, he will do what is necessary to raise those that have been beaten down by injustice and humble those who think they stand above his perfect laws.

The familial and covenantal character of God's vengeance is present too in 19,2. The multitude in heaven says explicitly that God has avenged "his servants" (τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ; cf. 17,14). He has stood up for those who belong to him and suffer for the sake of his word and testimony (19,10). God acts as the prime Avenger of his children and servants, the believers who have already pleaded for his vengeance (6,10). God exacts vengeance on those who harm his covenant partners, just as he frequently did in Scripture (Gen. 4,15; Ez. 25,12-14).

Although vengeance in chapter 19 is not explicitly linked to emotions, the previous chapter indeed sees a relationship between God's vengeance and his anger (θυμός) (18,3; cf. 14,10). Babylon has fallen because of God's anger over her sins, seduction, and rebellion (17,14). The vocabulary used to describe the fall of Babylon is also evocative in these chapters, ranging from hate and disrobing (17,16) to pain, sorrow, grief, and destruction (18,7.15-16; 19,2). Vengeance thus is emotional, a product of God's anger poured out unto enemies and injustice.

Purity is also an aspect which must be reckoned with when understanding vengeance in Revelation 19,2. The Great Whore Babylon has polluted herself and has also become a source of pollution for many individuals by seducing them to share in her impurity. She is a dwelling-place for impure (ἀκαθάρτου) spirits and beasts (18,2). By destroying Babylon God has purified the world from this place and source of impurification of the world. Vengeance thus is an act of divine purification, taking away the constant stream and supplier of impurity, the Great Whore Babylon.

The last important aspect of vengeance is its eschatological outlook. Vengeance is considered an act of divine eschatological intervention. In Revelation 19 God's vengeance has been executed. Yet, the connection with 6,10 shows that the heavenly scene in Revelation 19 is eschatological: it is a future answer to the present troubles and the desperate prayer of the martyrs before the altar in the heavenly temple. Ruiz defines the relationship between past, present, and future in Revelation 19 precisely: "because God is the judge who has decreed the downfall of the Great Prostitute, and since there can be no doubt that his will must come to pass, that event can be spoken of as though

it had already taken place.”<sup>109</sup> Vengeance in Revelation is thus spoken of in the past tense, but it is a future event of divine enactment which can be seen as comfort for the believers in the present.

#### 6.2.3.2.4 Conclusion

The description of the act of divine vengeance in Revelation 19,2 thus makes a deliberate connection to Revelation 6,10. In 6,10 revenge was still a possibility, not foreseen or foreboded for the believers in Asia Minor. In 19,2, they receive hope, because divine vengeance will be exacted upon the enemies and oppressors of God’s people. Their task is to persevere and testify of the God who acts in their sake. This way, J.P. Heil was quite right when he defined vengeance (in 6,10) an important key for understanding Revelation.<sup>110</sup>

### 6.3 The Use of Vengeance in Hebrews and Revelation

Although Hebrews and Revelation are separate books without obvious similarities or affinities, their understanding of vengeance is quite similar, although they have their own peculiar nuances in the light of the occasion of the letter. In general, however, the two documents have strong resemblances in their concept of vengeance, so that this section can take both into consideration when asking for their understanding of vengeance.

Vengeance is a divine prerogative for both the author of Hebrews as well as for John. In Hebrews the emphasis does not lie on the subject of vengeance, but more on vengeance as a divine instrument of chastisement and judgment for those who apostatize. The believers in Revelation are comforted that God will take up their case and that he will answer their afflictions and oppression. Throughout Revelation it becomes evident that God uses instruments: creation (8,10; 9,3; 16,18), kings (17,16), and angels (18,21). God still remains the subject of vengeance, according to both Hebrews and Revelation, although the emphasis on this divine prerogative is greater in Revelation than in Hebrews.

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<sup>109</sup> Ruiz, *Ezekiel*, 485.

<sup>110</sup> Heil, “Fifth Seal”.

Divine vengeance in Hebrews and Revelation serves to take away evil and sin in the world. Those who apostatize in the Christian community are threatened in Hebrews with God's avenging acts. In Revelation, divine vengeance targets the enemies of the believers in Asia Minor. The motif of vengeance thus has a parenetic function. The believers in Hebrews are stimulated to persevere and avoid apostasy, while the followers of Jesus the Messiah in Revelation are exhorted to testify of God and persevere in faith and an appropriate lifestyle. In Hebrews divine vengeance serves as a warning, while in Revelation divine vengeance, besides being a warning, comforts the suffering communities.

We have seen that divine vengeance must be understood within the matrix of reciprocity. God has given grace and blessings to serve him well, as believers in Jesus the Messiah. Divine vengeance in Hebrews will hit those who fail to show gratitude and faithfulness for God's gratitude. John also understands vengeance in the context of reciprocity, but slightly different than Hebrews. Divine vengeance in Revelation is the divine answer to the unrepentant attitude and even oppressing deeds of the enemies of the church. God will give them equal measure for their infidelity and persecution (11,8; 18,6-8). Vengeance is the negative retribution for the lack of loyalty, gratitude, and faith in God and the presence of hatred against God's people.

Vengeance and honor are also connected in both Hebrews and Revelation. The author of Hebrews exhibits the superiority and honor of Christ and belonging to him. Apostatizing is considered a slight of God and thus his honor must be restored (Heb. 10,29). John has a dual focus on honor in Revelation: God will preserve his honor and will stand up for the honor of the believers through vengeance. Both documents therefore make clear that vengeance must also be understood in the framework of honor and the restoration of honor.

Although vengeance is considered an act of vigilance nowadays, the authors of Hebrews and Revelation understand vengeance as the execution of a legal judgment. The author of Hebrews quotes not only verse 35 of Deuteronomy 32, but also verse 36 where God's judgment is mentioned. Deuteronomy 32 may also play an important role in Revelation to underline the just character of God's vengeance. The plea for vindication in 6,10, which is rooted in Old Testament texts such as Psalm 13 and 79, is answered in 19,2, with an allusion to Deuteronomy 32,43 LXX. John emphasizes that the God of the Old Testament will also do justice in this case. David DeSilva puts it

poignantly: “the scenes of God’s judgment throughout Revelation are anchored in this traditional expectation that God vindicates God’s servants, an expectation relevant to the past and forthcoming violence against the Christian community and the people of God more broadly.”<sup>111</sup> The use of Scripture here undergirds the continuity and trustworthiness of God’s vengeance: God hears and acts just as he did in the past as the highest Judge. Vengeance thus is for both Hebrews and Revelation a vital instrument of divine justice.

Vengeance in Hebrews and Revelation also has a covenantal and familial character. Vengeance is a covenantal punishment after believers, through apostatizing, became unfaithful to the covenant and slighted the Father and Son (Heb. 10,29). The God of the covenant owns the power to avenge (10,30) and he will use it. The covenantal character of vengeance in Revelation exhibits a slightly different nuance in comparison with Hebrews. John shows that God will stand up for his covenantal people (19,2: “his servants”) and will eradicate the enemies who taunt and persecute them. The two documents thus reflect different sides from the same notion of covenantal vengeance.

The association of vengeance with emotions was also common in Antiquity. Revelation connects the divine emotions of wrath (ὀργή) and anger (θύμος) to the outpouring of divine vengeance on the enemies of the church. The passages in Hebrews and Revelation also implicitly trigger emotions, especially of fear, comfort, and trust. Vengeance therefore cannot be seen without emotion, either explicitly named emotions or implicitly awakening emotions with the readers or hearers.

Vengeance is also considered an instrument to purify individuals and communities. The author of Hebrews regards the believers as holy people who are purified by the Son. Apostates deem the sacrifice of the Son “unclean” (10,29), thereby polluting the community. John describes the big antagonist of God as impure, polluted by slaughtering believers among other things. God’s vengeance gets rid of this impurity and opens the door for a future of pure communion with God, illustrated by the white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb. Vengeance therefore is a divine instrument of purification, maintaining and restoring the purity of the Christian communities and the world.

The last, but not the least, important feature of vengeance is its eschatological nature. Both books regard vengeance as a divine eschatological act:

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<sup>111</sup> DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 165.

God will exact his vengeance on a specific time in the future. For the author of Hebrews this knowledge must result in perseverance and faith, because his avenging judgment is real and fearful (Heb. 10,31). Revelation exhibits an interplay between the past, present, and future. Vengeance is an eschatological act which is praised in the end (19,2), but the execution of vengeance can be seen in the present through several cataclysmic and divine interventions.

When we take all information concerning vengeance in Hebrews and Revelation into consideration, we recognize that vengeance in these two documents has a twofold function. This twofold function has already been detected in the works of Luke and Paul. First, divine vengeance is used as a warning signal for the believers. Both in Hebrews and Revelation the believers are exhorted to persevere in the truth of faith in God (as was taught to them) and (in the case of Revelation) testify of Jesus the Messiah. They must do these things because divine vengeance is coming and God will judge everyone according to the measure of faith and works. Divine vengeance therefore urges the believers to be ready and to be worthy especially through faith and testimony. On the other hand, divine vengeance serves as pastoral guidance. Especially in Revelation God's vengeance is the fulfillment of the prayers of the suffering Christian communities of Asia Minor. The execution of God's vengeance comforts the believers that they are not left behind by God, but that he will protect and instate them eventually in their righteous and worthy position. That is the reason why he is praised in the end.

#### 6.4 Vengeance in Hebrews and Revelation and Contemporary Hermeneutical Questions

In the previous chapters we have made explicit which questions arise when we, as modern individuals, read vengeance texts. We have also seen how these questions and other texts in the New Testament relate to each other and how we can construct a dialogue between them. The same process of dialogue between our findings on vengeance in Hebrews and Revelation and our modern hermeneutical questions will take place in this section.

The question of the executor of vengeance has been answered unisono in the previous chapters. Both Luke and Paul consider God to be the only one who can exact vengeance in this world, although he can use others as

instruments to enforce his vengeance. Hebrews and Revelation are no exceptions to this point of view. God has the authority and power to execute vengeance in the world, while Jesus also shares in this power and responsibility. For the author of Hebrews the divine prerogative is not a major point. In Revelation this point is more urgent. Everyone can imagine that suffering individuals eventually reciprocate. Revelation however tells them that God takes up their case and will do them justice. God has the might to do this and the authority as the one and only God.

Although vengeance in our times is considered frontier justice, vengeance in New Testament texts is regarded as an act of justice. God is characterized as the highest Judge, destroying structures of evil and punishing idolatrous and sinful behavior. The acts of divine vengeance are thus not random or irrational, but are in line with the order of divine justice. Sins such as idolatry, unrepentance, and even the persecution of the Christian communities result in God laying his devastating verdict on the perpetrators. Vengeance is not wild and outside the legal order, but it is embedded in the legal structures of God. He maintains this order, punishing the evil and rehabilitating the needy.

One of the most difficult questions thus far is the relationship between vengeance and human dignity. Can vengeance be justified when it is such as a major interference on human worth? The two notes, already made in previous chapters, can also be placed here. Hebrews and Revelation clarify that divine vengeance is not exacted out of the blue, but is the result of a divine judgment of evil. The citation of the Old Testament texts shows the latter: God's vengeance is recognizable and trustworthy, because he already reacted in vengeance in Old Testament times to these evil actions. Also, the readers and hearers have the time to escape this judgment by converting to God, persevering in faith, and testifying of him. The tension between these texts and our modern emphasis on human dignity stays though and some will still be abhorred by the vengeance scenes in the New Testament texts.

Vengeance in Hebrews and Revelation can be emotional, but is not irrational. God's anger and wrath are not suddenly evoked, but they are a response to a pattern of longtime idolatry and mischievous behavior. These emotions show the intensity of God's vengeance, but they are part of the legal process of the highest Judge which eventually results in the execution of divine vengeance. God is deeply touched in his honor when believers apostatize or persecute his people, but he is not overwhelmed. Hebrews and Revelation show that God's vengeance is emotional, but it is not a sudden outburst of



irrationality. God has patience and grants people time to convert and repent. God's emotional vengeance must instill fear, perseverance, and faithfulness to him.

The modern option of discerning between the violent Old Testament and the peaceful New Testament is contradicted by the evidence from Hebrews and Revelation. The two New Testament documents use Old Testament texts and imagery to describe or intensify God's vengeance. The authors view a continuity in Scripture, also in the case of divine vengeance. The God of the Old Testament is the same as their God and especially the author of Hebrews argues that his vengeance is just as threatening in the new covenant as it was in the old. A separation between the Old and the New Testament would amaze these authors when we look at the evidence of their treatment of Old Testament texts.

Another pressing hermeneutical question is the relationship between divine love and divine vengeance. The authors of Hebrews and Revelation emphasize the love of God in extending his grace and mercy to people, but this love has its own logic. The first boundary is for the believers: they cannot apostatize. The author of Hebrews (and to a lesser extent John) shows that when one apostatizes God's love is hurt and his mercy is disregarded. God will not let this step unpunished. This also relates to the necessity of repentance, either before coming to faith or after one has sinned. The refusal to repent meets divine vengeance too. The second boundary is external: attacking his loved ones evokes God's wrath and anger. The God of love will then step up for his people and protect them, as John vividly shows in Revelation. The relationship between divine love and divine vengeance thus is twofold: divine vengeance can be the result of hurt love or protecting love. They are not contrasted by Hebrews and Revelation.

This dialogue between the vengeance texts of Hebrews and Revelation and our modern hermeneutical questions shows that some modern questions can be addressed by these old texts, while at the same time there can be a different set of concepts and sensitivities to divine vengeance in Antiquity and our present day.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the last building block in the structure of our research. The examination of the vengeance texts in Hebrews and Revelation has contributed to a fuller understanding of the meaning and function of divine vengeance in the New Testament. Several similarities can be noticed between the New Testament authors, while at the same time every document places its own nuances related to the occasion and circumstances of the author and the recipients. Vengeance in Hebrews and Revelation, in line with Luke and Paul, is God's eschatological act of justice, restoring the order through the punishment of wicked behavior within and outside the community, thereby purifying the community and urging it to persevere and testify. Divine vengeance serves as a warning for the community and the world that God does not tolerate idolatry, while at the same time the motif of God's vengeance comforts the believers that their voices are heard and there will be a reversal in this cruel and corrupt world.

Now that we have examined all New Testament vengeance texts we can take a look at the full picture of the New Testament understanding of divine vengeance. What does divine vengeance mean for the authors of the New Testament documents and how does the motif function in their writings? In the conclusion in the next chapter the building blocks are put together to reveal the answers to the questions raised at the beginning of this research.

## Conclusion

On May 8th 1945 the German Wehrmacht signed its capitulation, resulting in the official end of World War II in Europe. On the next Sunday a message from the Church Council (*Kirchenrat*) was read in the reformed churches of Basel (Switzerland). This message was based on a text written by Karl Barth. One of the passages of this message states:<sup>1</sup>

We can consider the outbreak and the end of this war neither as blind fate nor as a natural phenomenon nor as just the work of man. In all these events God has judged and administered justice on certain undesirable human developments. But we also have shared and share in these undesirable developments. The arbitrariness of man, in which he becomes slave of his own power, in which he disregards and blasphemes the names and the Word of God and in which he eventually hides for his own guilt, because he has sued the Jews, all that was and is not only the German, but also the Swiss sin, although it did not become that apparent among us this time.

This passage from 1945 explicates some lines of thought for its own time which we have also seen in the present research. First, it underlines that humans will be held accountable for their actions. In this case, sins against other humans are not left unpunished. Secondly, it confesses God's justice (and forthcoming avenging act) as an answer to sinful human behavior. Thirdly, the relationship between God and the Jewish people is reiterated. The Germans and the Swiss persecuted the Jews and God responded to these acts by administering justice on the Europeans. Fourthly, it shows that God's justice

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<sup>1</sup> K. Barth, *Offene Briefe 1945-1968*, edited by D. Koch, Gesamtausgabe V (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1984), 49-50: "Wir können den Ausbruch und das Ende dieses Krieges weder als blindes Schicksal und Naturgeschehen noch als bloßes Menschenwerk verstehen. In diesen Ereignissen hat Gott geurteilt und gerichtet über bestimmte menschliche Fehlentwicklungen. Aber eben an diesen Fehlentwicklungen hatten und haben auch wir Anteil. Die Willkür des Menschen, in der er zum Sklaven seiner eigenen Macht wird, in der er das Recht und die Würde der Schwachen mit Füßen tritt, in der er den Namen und das Wort Gottes mißachtet und lästert und in der er sich schließlich vor seiner eigenen Schuld verbirgt, indem er den Juden verklagt, das alles war und ist nicht nur die deutsche, sondern auch die schweizerische Sünde, obwohl sie diesmal bei uns so kraß nicht offenbar wurde." Also in Dietrich and Link, *Dunklen Seiten*, 178-179.

will prevail over evil. The events that happened during the Second World War are thus not random or merely caused by humans, and the Basel church council, in line with Karl Barth's text, acknowledged the divine element of judgment.

The present research has tried to explore the concept of divine vengeance in the New Testament, making aspects such as those in the previous section explicit. The main question of this study was: what is the meaning and function of divine vengeance in the New Testament? This question contains two elements: the meaning and the function of God's vengeance. These two aspects will be elaborated in this conclusion.

### 1. The Meaning of Divine Vengeance in the New Testament

I define the meaning of divine vengeance in the New Testament as follows: *the vengeance of God is the retributive, eschatological, legal, covenantal, and sometimes emotional reaction of God on those who inflict damage or suffering on him or his people to eventually restore his and/or his people's honor and purity and the balance of justice.* This definition encompasses several elements which will be fleshed out in the following sections: the divine prerogative, retribution, eschatology, justice, the covenantal character of divine vengeance, emotion, honor, and purity.

Vengeance in the New Testament is first and foremost God's prerogative. In Greco-Roman texts the gods have the power to avenge themselves or others, but humans have the same potential. Humans are also allowed to take revenge on those who have slighted them. The New Testament view is more in line with Old Testament texts which state that humans may not avenge themselves (Lev. 19,18). YHWH is the one who, as King and Warrior, executes vengeance on those who deserve this punishment (e.g. Ps. 58,11; Is. 59,17). The divine prerogative on vengeance can also be found in Early Jewish texts (Philo, *Vit. Mos.* I,111; 1QS VII,9; JosAs 28,14). Where the Old Testament and Early Jewish texts sometimes exhibit human actions of vengeance (Gen. 4,23-24; JosAs 24,7), the New Testament documents are unisono in their rejection of human vengeance (Lk. 6,27-30; Rom. 12,19). They do not exclude humans exacting vengeance, but these actions are divinely sanctioned (Act. 13,6-12; Rom. 13,4). Exacting vengeance on individuals and

groups is not a human task, but a divine duty and responsibility. God protects his people and punishes those who made themselves punishable, outside and within his people.

The question could be why vengeance is a divine prerogative. Greek and Roman texts and artifacts mention the possibility of the gods exacting vengeance, but humans have the right to take revenge when they are affected by another individual. The answer is already mentioned above: the kingship of God.<sup>2</sup> God in the Old Testament is portrayed as the King of all nations and in particular the people of Israel (Ps. 99,2; Jer. 10,7,10). He has the highest authority and exercises his royal and sovereign rule upon this world. When this authority is attacked and his rule despised, his vengeance will show his might and the restoration of his royal order. The New Testament continues the line of God as King (Matt. 6,10; Rev. 4-5), while at the same time attributing messianic kingship to Jesus as the Son of David (Mark. 10,47; 15,26; Fil. 2,11; Heb. 1,8).<sup>3</sup> His work through the Spirit manifests the coming of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 4,23; 12,28). He is made Kurios in his resurrection (Act. 2,36; Heb. 1,3). That is why Jesus may judge (Joh. 5,22) and is described as Judge (Act. 10,42; 2 Cor. 5,10; Rom. 14,10) and Avenger (1 Thess. 4,6). Humans do not have the right to avenge, because they do not have royal authority.<sup>4</sup> The royal status belongs to God and Jesus the Messiah as well as the right to exact vengeance.

God's vengeance in the New Testament is retributive. We have seen that in the Greco-Roman context of the New Testament the mechanism of reciprocity was omnipresent. Vengeance can be described as the negative retribution within this system, responding to a crime or slight. The Old Testament vengeance can also be best understood within the context of reciprocity, as Bernd Janowski has argued.<sup>5</sup> Several texts presuppose a *quid pro quo* principle (Gen. 4,15; Isa. 34,8; Jer. 46,10). Early Jewish texts show that vengeance is retributive: crimes against God or humans will not be left unpunished, there will be an avenging reaction (CD A XIX,5; 1 Macc. 9,42; T. Lev. II,2). The New Testament authors argue in the same fashion: God exacts his vengeance as a reaction towards offenses, sins, and slights. These include the unbelief in Jesus (Lk. 4,19; 21,22), sexual misbehavior (1 Thess. 4,6), attacking

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<sup>2</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 277-279.

<sup>3</sup> See Jipp, *Messianic Theology*.

<sup>4</sup> Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*.

<sup>5</sup> Janowski, "Die Tat".

the people of God (2 Thess. 1,8; 2 Tim. 4,14; Rev. 6,10; 19,2), and apostasy (Hebr. 10,30). In the New Testament documents, God's vengeance is considered the legitimate punishing response towards these offenses. He has given the gift of grace in Jesus and this gift cannot be met with ingratitude within or outside the Christian communities in the form of the actions mentioned above.

Divine vengeance in the New Testament is also eschatological. The category of eschatology is not present in Greco-Roman texts, but it is important in the Old Testament. Several texts refer to future vengeance or exhibit a certain openness towards an act of vengeance in future times (Deut. 32,35.41.43; Ps. 149,7; Jer. 50-51). Early Jewish texts point towards the Day of the Lord, the future moment in which God will judge the world in vengeance (Jdt. 16,17; Sib. Or. III,259). The New Testament explicitly phrases divine vengeance in eschatological terms. Most dominant is the focus on the future: God will exact vengeance on the Day of the Lord (Rom. 16,20; 2 Thess. 1,8; Hebr. 10,30; Rev. 6,10; 19,2). Eschatology in the New Testament does not only refer to the future though, but also shows that the future is a reality in the present. Thus, divine vengeance could also be exacted in the present (Act. 1,15-20; 7,24; Rom. 13,4). God's vengeance thus is an eschatological act, in that it is fully revealed and completed in the future but is also exhibited on several occasions in the present.

God's vengeance in the New Testament has a legal character. Greco-Roman texts and material artifacts show that vengeance was an act of justice. The legal courts and the gods were more involved in later times, but exacting vengeance on an offender by the offended was legal. One's honor must be restored. Old Testament texts also relate vengeance and justice. God's vengeance helps the needy and restores the equilibrium in society (Josh. 10,13; Ps. 79,10; Ez. 24,8). Early Jewish texts underline this line of thought: God as King stands up for the weak and exacts vengeance to impose his justice (Josephus, *Ant.* II,107; JosAs 23,17; 1QS I,11), although some find it difficult to connect God and legal vengeance (Philo, *Somn.* I,236). New Testament texts also consider vengeance an act of God's justice. As the highest Judge, he punishes evil within and outside the Christian community (Lk. 21,22; 1 Thess. 4,6; Rev. 19,2). Human vengeance is an act of vigilance (Rom. 12,19), divine vengeance is an act to restore justice.

The covenant is also an important aspect of divine vengeance in the New Testament. Greco-Roman texts and artifacts testify of vengeance as an act interwoven within the fabric of the household (οἶκος). It was the duty of

the family to stand up for the victim of a crime or slight and avenge one's honor and name. Old Testament scholars such as Mendenhall and Peels have recognized that the covenant as a term of kinship between God and Israel is a weighty matrix for the motif of vengeance, although vengeance is not exclusively covenantal. Israel is punished when it does not behave as a loyal covenantal partner (Lev. 26,25; Isa. 1,24; Jer. 9,8), but its enemies are also objects of divine vengeance when they attack God's covenantal people (Num. 31,2-3; Isa. 47,3; Nah. 1,2). Early Jewish texts also highlight the familial character of vengeance: people may avenge their family members (Philo, *Spec.* III,129; Josephus, *Ant.* IX,171; 1 Macc. 9,42), while God could also exact vengeance in the context of the covenant (Josephus, *Ant.* VII,209-211; 4Q372 3 11; T. Jos. XX,1). God is portrayed in the New Testament as being loyal to his covenant. He punishes those who do not believe in Him or Jesus (Lk. 21,22; Hebr. 10,30), those who do not act according to covenantal holiness (1 Thess. 4,6; Gal. 6,7-8; Col. 3,25), and those who attack his covenantal people (Lk. 18,8; Act. 1,15-20; 7,24; 13,6-12; 2 Thess. 1,3-12; 2 Tim. 4,14; Rev. 6,10; 19,2). Refraining from vengeance is an act of holiness demanded by God (1 Thess. 5,15; Rom. 12,19). There is no doubt that the New Testament authors consider divine vengeance an act of covenantal justice.

The aspect of emotion within vengeance is more complicated in the New Testament documents. Greco-Roman authors and artifacts regularly connect vengeance with emotions such as wrath and anger. Old Testament texts relate vengeance and emotion in similar fashion (Is. 63,3-4; Jer. 50,13,25; Nah. 1,2). Early Jewish texts also consider vengeance an emotional enterprise on numerous occasions, with wrath and anger as main emotions (1QM III,6; Sib. Or. III,634; Sir. 5,7). Some New Testament texts link vengeance directly with divine emotions mentioned before (Lk. 21,22-23; Rom. 12,19; 13,4; 1 Thess. 2,16; 2 Thess. 1,3-8; Rev. 6,9-17; 19,2). Some texts are also evocative, stirring up emotions among the readers (Act. 1,15-20; 2 Thess. 1,3-8; Rev. 19,2). The New Testament authors thus do not consider God apathetic, but they do not combine vengeance and divine emotion as often as Greco-Roman, Old Testament, and Early Jewish texts do. The quantity of texts which do consider vengeance as an emotional act warrant the implementation of the aspect of emotion within the main definition of New Testament vengeance, although it is less prominent than the other features.

This study has emphasized the notion of honor as a vital matrix for the notion of vengeance. Texts and artifacts from the Greek and Roman world

show that vengeance is a reaction to ὕβρις: a slight disrupts the equilibrium of honor. A victim or one's family must restore the name and honor of the individual or group. Sin and idolatry affect YHWH's honor in the Old Testament, which he must restore through an act of vengeance (Lev. 26,25; 2 Kgs. 9,7; Jer. 46,10). He also stands up for the honor of his people (Isa. 47,3; Jer. 51,35-36; Ez. 25,12-17). The same can be said about Early Jewish texts: God (and individuals) must avenge to re-obtain their 'stolen' honor (Josephus, *Ant.* VI,303-307; 1QS V,12; Sir. 27,28-28,1). God also defends and restores the honor of his followers (4Q418 122 ii+126 ii 9; JosAs. 28,14; 4 Macc. 9,24). God's vengeance in the New Testament must also be seen in light of honor restoration. God punishes those who do not believe him, thus dishonoring him (Lk. 21,22; Hebr. 10,30). Vengeance is also exacted on those who behave unworthy (Act. 1,15-20; 12,20-23; 1 Thess. 4,6; Gal. 6,7-8; Col. 3,25). He also defends the good name of his people, using his avenging justice to retribute slights (Lk. 18,8; 2 Thess. 1,3-12; Rev. 6,10; 19,2). God's vengeance thus restores his honor and sometimes also his people's honor after it was slighted by enemies.

The restoration of purity is another important feature of divine vengeance in the New Testament. Impurity was a vital danger for individuals and groups in Greco-Roman times. In some cases, vengeance was needed to reverse the impurification. Some Old Testament texts also consider vengeance as an act of purification: human impurity must be avenged to obtain purity (2 Kgs. 9,7; Prov. 6,34; Isa. 1,24). Early Jewish texts state the same: vengeance and purity are closely related (Philo, *Det.* 169.173; CD A VIII,5-6; 4 Macc. 17,21). The New Testament texts sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly state that vengeance is an act of purification. Enemies of God are objects of his vengeance because of their impure actions (Act. 1,15-20; 12,20-23; Rev. 18-19). The life of the believer must be pure, impurity is purged out of the community through divine vengeance (1 Thess. 4,6; Hebr. 10,30). God thus protects his people (and his world) from impurity and restores the pure status of the Christian community by taking away the impure elements.

One may observe that the aspect of gender lacks in the definition given above. Gender is a relevant aspect in Greco-Roman, Old Testament, and Early Jewish texts. Vengeance was mostly done by men and it exhibits their masculinity, while the task of women is described as supportive and sometimes as exhorting men to enforce their revenge. Female avengers are seen rarely. The evidence in New Testament documents is slant and there is, therefore, no reason to insert the notion of gender within the definition of divine vengeance



in the New Testament. One might guess what the reason could be for this absence: the paucity of vengeance texts in the New Testament compared to the corpora of Greco-Roman, Old Testament, and Early Jewish texts could provide a reasonable explanation. All in all there is no real ground for an incorporation of the aspect of gender into the definition.

The first part of our main research question has been elaborated in this section. The second part, regarding the function of divine vengeance in the New Testament, will be discussed next.

## 2. The Function of Divine Vengeance in the New Testament

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the study of semantics has given us the insight that words do not contain concepts on their own, but derive their meaning from the context. In line with this assertion it can be argued that words (and also concepts) are consciously chosen and placed in a text to create a semantic web that formulates the thought of an author. When we take this statement and apply it to this research, one can assert that the notion of divine vengeance is consciously incorporated into the New Testament documents with a specific goal. Divine vengeance can not only be traced by investigating texts containing specific vengeance vocabulary (in the case of the New Testament ἐκδίκειν, ἐκδίκησις, and ἐκδίκος), but also in passages which portray a scene of vengeance without using specific vengeance vocabulary. How does the New Testament concept of divine vengeance function in the texts?

Throughout this study we have detected a twofold function of divine vengeance in the New Testament. Firstly, the theme of divine vengeance is used as a means to warn the hearers and readers. One will meet the terrifying reality of God's vengeance when boundaries are overstepped or when God's gifts of grace are ignored. Divine vengeance is exacted when people do not repent (Lk. 20,9-19; Lk. 21,22), when they apostatize (Heb. 10,30), when they attack God's people (Lk. 18,1-8; Act. 7,24, 12,20-23; 13,6-12; 2 Thess. 1,1-8; Rom. 16,20; 2 Tim. 4,14; Rev. 6,10; 19,2), or when their behavior is inappropriate and unworthy of God's Kingdom (Lk. 12,41-46; Act. 1,15-26; 5,1-11; 1 Thess. 4,6; Gal. 6,7-8; Rom. 13,4; Col. 3,25). The New Testament authors thus use the language of divine vengeance as a severe warning: God will

not let unfitting actions towards himself or his people go unpunished. The hearers and readers must believe in him and adhere to the ethic of the law of the Spirit, in Christ (Gal. 6,2; Rom. 8,2). God is holy (Rev. 4,8) and therefore they must be holy too (Lev. 19,2; 1 Cor. 3,17; 1 Thess. 4,3-8; 1 Petr. 1,15-16).

Secondly, the theme of divine vengeance serves as pastoral guidance for the believers. An aspect of this is already mentioned in the previous section: the admonition to adhere to the ethics of God which is taught by the New Testament authors. Another feature of this pastoral guidance is in line with something also mentioned in the previous section: the reality of suffering. Early Christians faced verbal and physical abuse when they made themselves known as Christians, due to them being, in the words of Larry Hurtado, “destroyers of the gods.”<sup>6</sup> In these difficult circumstances the New Testament authors provide care and comfort by showing that their lives matter to God. He will exact vengeance, restore order and grant retribution on behalf of his people. Evil people and evil in general will not prevail, because God will overturn the present situation (Lk. 21,22; 2 Thess. 1,3-8; Rev. 19,2). Divine vengeance is thus used as a tool for guiding the Christian communities into the path of righteous living and as a guarantee for their righteousness and the overturning of oppression and suffering.

Our elaboration of the meaning and twofold function of divine vengeance in the New Testament has mostly been a historical-theological discussion. However, we have concluded in chapter 3 that readers and researchers of New Testament texts do not operate in a historical and hermeneutical vacuum. The hermeneutical dimension of this research will be the topic of the next section.

### 3. Encountering Vengeance Texts in a Post-Modern Context

Chapter 3 has provided us with several hermeneutical questions which formulate Western and (post-)modern sensitivities towards divine vengeance. Historical processes and hermeneutical assumptions matter for the exploration of a delicate subject such as divine vengeance. This section explicates the modern Western pains regarding vengeance and what (historical) factors

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<sup>6</sup> L.W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods. Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016). See also Klinker-De Klerck, “Lijden”.

play a role in this view. It also presents the results of the dialogue between the New Testament vengeance texts and the hermeneutical questions explicated in chapter 3.

We have seen in chapter 3 that vengeance in modern Western minds has two sides. Formally, vengeance is condemned as a form of vigilance. The decision to make an infringement on basic human rights must not be clouded by emotions and subjective factors. The justice system can provide a more balanced and objective verdict than an affected victim or family. Secularization has problematized the view of God as avenging Judge: why do rational Westerners need the vengeance of God? At the same time, however, sentiments that call for or justify acts of vengeance are present in certain cases. The justice system thus formally provides satisfaction, but in numerous occasions relatives or the general public deem the punishment given insufficient or acknowledge revenge as a just action.

There are several factors and processes which have led to this dual view on vengeance in Western societies. First, the centralization of power has taken away the possibility of citizens taking justice into their own hands. The justice system is deemed the legitimate way to receive legal satisfaction since the Early Modern and Modern times. This development towards the centralization of vengeance within the justice system is also complemented by the process of secularization, in which the image of God as Avenger becomes redundant or difficult. The justice system seems to have enough control, why do Westerners need God as Avenger and how does this avenging character of God relate to his love? These two processes are also connected to the growing attention to human rights and human dignity during the last centuries. Human lives are precious, so there must be plausible and sufficient reason to punitively intervene in the existence of humans. The justice system seems to secure this, while God's vengeance might threaten this objective burden of proof. These three interlocking factors and processes have led to the formal rejection of (divine) vengeance, but at the same time dissatisfaction became a prominent voice in society: are victims retributed sufficiently?

These three developments will guide our hermeneutical considerations. The most basic question raised by centralization and secularization is: do we need God as Avenger? The New Testament authors would answer affirmingly. God is the highest legal authority as Creator and King, his acts and motives are consistent and pure. Jesus the Messiah is also ascribed the right to avenge by the New Testament authors for the same reasons. Humans

cannot provide complete retribution for victims, as the general dissatisfaction with the legal system exhibits. God has authorized the central authorities with the power to avenge (Rom. 13,4), but his eschatological vengeance remains the most definite and complete act of vengeance on injustice.

Human vengeance can be considered a form of vigilance when it is not divinely authorized (Lk. 6,27-36; 1 Thess. 5,15). God is the Judge who can execute vengeance purely and impartially. He exacts vengeance with legitimate legal authority, not appropriating rights which are not his (which is inherent when one deems vengeance unjust and a form of frontier justice). On the basis of these convictions the New Testament authors deem divine vengeance an act of divine justice imposed on the world, to restore order and guide his people into the way of righteousness.

The New Testament sometimes describe God's vengeance as emotional, which seems to form a problem with the legal character of his vengeance. The background of this contradiction is the century-old tension between emotion and rationality. Is God's ability to avenge purely and soundly not clouded by these emotions? God in the New Testament is not apathetic, but that does not mean that rationality and emotion are fundamentally opposed within God. The New Testament authors show that God does not show his emotion in the spur of a moment without any thoughts in advance, but that his actions are well thought out and take a lot of time. His judgment is not clouded: he even offers people the chance to repent (Lk. 13,6-9). God's emotions underline the intensity of his vengeance and God's desire to protect and guide his people. Divine vengeance can thus be both rational and emotional.

Does the notion of an avenging God not relate to the Old Testament image of God more than the New Testament depiction of God? It is interesting to see that Deuteronomy 32 influences the New Testament texts deeply, giving vengeance a covenantal character but also describing God's character and actions. A pseudo-Marcionistic approach, rejecting God's violence in favor of God's love in Jesus, would be astonishing for the New Testament authors. God's threatening and destructing vengeance is real and is not diminished by the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ himself is described in several places as (avenging) Judge (1 Thess. 4,6; 2 Cor. 5,10; Rom. 14,10; Rev. 19,2).

The relationship between the Old Testament vengeance texts and those in the New Testament can be described in terms of continuity and discontinuity. The God of the Old Testament is in this respect not very different from the God of the New Testament and Old Testament Scripture is not redundant, but the living word of God (Heb. 4,12). There is a change however

with the coming of Jesus Christ in the world. His coming and work does not lessen God's vengeance, but rather intensifies and extends it. Christ will be judging the works of both Jewish and Gentile believers and enemies and he will once exact vengeance on those who deserve it. Divine vengeance is more severe than before, because disbelief tramples the Son and deems his blood impure (Heb. 10,29-30). God is avenging (Rom. 12,19) and the believers must rejoice in it (Rev. 19,2).

But do these observations concerning God's vengeance not contradict the Biblical notion of God's love? At a first glance God's vengeance and love seem incompatible. It is clearly formulated by John that God is love (1 Joh. 4,8). The notion of vengeance then must be ignored or explained away as a human perception projected on God. Peels has formulated several valuable considerations regarding this sensitive topic. He asks which definitions are used for "love" and "vengeance". Vengeance in the Bible is not a cruel or hateful urge to destruct, while love does not dissolve in dearness.<sup>7</sup> God's love is dynamic and holy, the fate of his people is important to him. God shows both love and vengeance in the Bible, maintaining the tension between the two. Love and vengeance are not two equals though: God's love is the permanent factor within God's relationship with humanity, while wrath and vengeance are variables (depending on behavior). Vengeance in both Old and New Testament is considered to be in service of salvation: it warns God's people to prevent them falling away from God (1 Thess. 4,6; Hebr. 10,30), while it also denotes the restoration of justice (Rom. 13,4) and the future unfolding of God's Kingdom (2 Thess. 1,3-8; Rev. 19,2). That is also the reason why God's people can rejoice in vengeance: order will be implemented in the world and evil and suffering are taken away. Peels therefore concludes: "the God of vengeance and the God of love are one. He is the Lord who lets his Kingdom come in justice and mercy."<sup>8</sup>

This God, as the highest legal authority, does indeed infringe human dignity when he avenges. Two remarks must be made in this respect. First, the New Testament texts shows that God's vengeance does not affect innocent human lives. The individuals who are objects of divine vengeance receive this punishment for wicked behavior and idolatrous acts. Connected with this observation is the second remark, namely that people are warned

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<sup>7</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 293.

<sup>8</sup> Peels, *Vengeance*, 295.

and are given time to repent. Luke, Paul, Hebrews, and Revelation do not address the last things but the penultimate situation, to state it in the words of Backhaus.<sup>9</sup> Human beings thus have space to avoid the infringement of their own dignity. These two sidelines do not take away the uneasy tension between the New Testament texts and the Western appreciation of human dignity.

There is however another side to the question regarding dignity and vengeance. The infringement on one's human rights could be focused on the situation of a perpetrator, but the attention can also be directed towards the rights of a victim. Then the New Testament vengeance texts can have a positive influence. God's vengeance takes up the case of victims who are helpless. The New Testament (and other cultural contexts) can criticize a Western perspective in this regard for its neglect of the rights and feelings of victims. The dissatisfaction with the centralization of vengeance, mentioned above, underlines this critique: victims deserve acknowledgment and sufficient retribution. The God of the New Testament provides this with his vengeance.

Western people thus must be considerate in their objections against (divine) vengeance. They can absolutize their situation of relative peace, as the Jewish Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) does. He wants to undermine the 'naive' belief in God and biblical descriptions of his wrath and vengeance with a reference to modern times: "The current secondary school pupils of secondary school are not thrown lightning on; they are not brought up one day by God; the plague, famine, and danger of war do not hang like a discipline rod over them."<sup>10</sup> Why do we need divine vengeance? The Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf (1956) writes from a different background and context. He presents a perspective different from Bloch's when he states his case for an avenging God:<sup>11</sup>

My thesis that the practice of nonviolence requires a belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many Christians, especially theologians in the West. To the person who is inclined to dismiss it, I suggest imagining that you are delivering a lecture in a war zone (...). Among your listeners are people whose cities and villages have been first plundered, then burned and leveled to the ground, whose daughters

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<sup>9</sup> Backhaus, "Zwei harte Knoten", 150.

<sup>10</sup> E. Bloch, *Atheismus im Christentum. Zur Religion des Exodus und des Reichs* (Reinbek: Rowolt Verlag, 1970), 12: "Den Realschülern von heutzutage wird kein Blitz mehr geschleudert, kein Tag mehr von Gott heraufgebracht, ist keine Pest, Hungersnot, Kriegsnot als Zuchtrute verhängt." Also in Dietrich and Link *Dunklen Seiten*, 168.

<sup>11</sup> Volf, *Exclusion*, 304.

and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit. The topic of the lecture: a Christian attitude toward violence. The thesis: we should not retaliate since God is perfect noncoercive love. Soon you would discover that it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence corresponds to God's refusal to judge. In a scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die. And as one watches it die, one will do well to reflect about many other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind.

New Testament vengeance texts have something to say within contexts of suffering and war, while a Western paradigm of a nonviolent God breaks down, as Volf insistently describes. Hence, several theologians consider God's avenging judgment joyful and beautiful: evil does not last at the end, God does rectify.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Avenues for Further Research

This research has elaborated the New Testament concept of divine vengeance, but several interesting objects of study concerning divine vengeance in the New Testament remain. First, there is no recent New Testament study of emotional terms such as divine wrath and anger, incorporating recent studies in the fields of psychology, classics, the Hebrew Bible, and Early Jewish texts. These fields have brought forth important insights in respect to the evocative and communicative nature of emotions. To my knowledge, an encompassing study of divine emotions in the New Testament has not yet been published.

Secondly, the concept of (divine) vengeance within Early Jewish texts deserves to be expanded. The present research has provided some insights into the view of Early Jewish authors, but a good amount of texts have not been investigated thoroughly. It will be interesting to see how Early Jewish authors read the texts from the Bible and how their elaborations influence the New Testament concept of vengeance.

Thirdly, the theological exploration of the New Testament image of God deserves further study. There have been studies on the Old Testament image of God, such as his mercy and his patience, but a *theologia proper* with

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<sup>12</sup> A.A. van Ruler, *Over de psalmen. 66 meditatie* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1983), 23; J. Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes. Christliche Eschatologie*, Systematische Beiträge zur Theologie 5 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1995), 284.

attention to God's properties from a New Testament perspective is still lacking according to my knowledge. There are some studies who make a start of this field of study,<sup>13</sup> but more research from New Testament scholars is very welcome.

The study of purity in Second Temple Judaism has given New Testament research new and interesting insights into the dynamics of New Testament texts and their cultural matrices. The incorporation of these findings into a study of the discourse of vengeance in the New Testament could lead to valuable conclusions, although they probably will not lead to significant changes in the outcomes of the present research.

## 5. Conclusion

The New Testament scholar C.F.D. Moule wrote a provocative piece on divine retribution in the New Testament.<sup>14</sup> His thesis is that the concepts of punishment and retribution "have (...) no legitimate place in the Christian vocabulary."<sup>15</sup> The authors of retributive texts use this motif consciously, but "the essentially personal character of the Christian gospel is temporarily obscured."<sup>16</sup> Suffering could be inflicted due to pedagogical reasons, but not for the purpose of retribution. The thought that retribution is an element of the Christian message can be "alien bits of secularism and subpersonal standards".<sup>17</sup> Moule rejects retribution as an important category of interpretation of the message of the New Testament.

Although Moule is right when he states that the number of retributive texts is confined compared to the Old Testament,<sup>18</sup> that does not take away the fact that the *Sache* of retributive justice is present in the New Testament. Retribution in the form of reciprocity is very well present in the New

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<sup>13</sup> For instance the study of Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *Der Gott der Lebendigen. Eine biblische Gotteslehre*, TBT 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> C.F.D. Moule, "Punishment and Retribution. An Attempt to Delimit their Scope in New Testament Study", *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 30 (1965), 21-36. The article (and the edition used here) can also be found in Moule's *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 235-249.

<sup>15</sup> Moule, "Punishment", 235.

<sup>16</sup> Moule, "Punishment", 235.

<sup>17</sup> Moule, "Punishment", 237.

<sup>18</sup> Moule, "Punishment", 247.



Testament as a cultural mechanism, just as honor (which Moule also dismisses as merely a term of worship)<sup>19</sup> is relevant for New Testament interpretation. Moule's thesis is an interesting example of a wide array of studies on vengeance and retribution in the New Testament: they accept that New Testament authors use vengeance as a motif in their texts, but they deem these texts irrelevant, outrageous, or diminished by the Gospel of God's love.<sup>20</sup> The basis for this latter conclusion is not exegetical evidence, but theological one-sidedness or hermeneutical sensitivity.<sup>21</sup>

This study has tried to be honest towards the New Testament texts and the concept of divine vengeance by exploring the meaning and use of this concept within the New Testament documents. A sense of hermeneutical consciousness was also a necessary step in this process to explicate certain presuppositions and to clarify troubles with the concept of vengeance. This investigation into divine vengeance in the New Testament context and its *Wirkungsgeschichte* in (post-)modern contexts is intended to provide a contribution to the scholarly debate on God, the Bible, and texts about violence. It is better in my view to grapple with texts that are hard to handle than to serve them off too easily. This study is an attempt to get a grip on a difficult subject with hermeneutical honesty and theological openness, although it may not provide a satisfying answer or theological relief to some readers. We have to face the fact that the God of the Bible can exact vengeance and that this does not reduce his loving care. The Bible does not say what we want it to do. The issue of divine vengeance in the New Testament is an example of an interesting hermeneutical process. On the one hand the Bible invites us to wrestle from our hermeneutical point of view with Biblical concepts and texts, while on the other hand the Bible can question our hermeneutics and images of God. Thus this study is not only an attempt to fill a lacuna in New Testament research, but it also participates in the exciting and confronting interplay of Biblical and systematic theology.

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<sup>19</sup> Moule, "Punishment", 249.

<sup>20</sup> See also Boyd, *Crucifixion*.

<sup>21</sup> This observation is in line with what Hans-Joachim Kraus (*Theologie der Psalmen*, BKAT XV/3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989<sup>2</sup>), 233) already observed about these antithetical approaches: they suggest, "aber keine sachgemässen *biblisch-theologischen Entsprechungen und Zusammenhänge* [werden] erarbeitet." For more issues within this approach, see G.G. de Kruijf, "Give Place unto Wrath!", in: Van Keulen and Brinkman, *Christian Faith*, 115-129.

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#### V. Multimedia

FORD COPPOLA, F., director, *The Godfather* (Paramount Pictures, 1972), 2 hours and 55 minutes.

—, *The Godfather. Part II* (Paramount Pictures, 1974), 3 hours and 22 minutes.

—, *The Godfather. Part III* (Paramount Pictures, 1990), 2 hours and 42 minutes.

TARANTINO, Q., director, *Kill Bill* (Miramax Films, 2003), 1 hour and 43 minutes.

—, *Kill Bill. Volume II* (Miramax Films, 2004), 2 hours and 17 minutes.

## Nederlandse samenvatting

Veel Westerse lezers hebben in de loop van de geschiedenis moeite gehad met de notie van de wraak van God in de Bijbel. God associëren met geweld ligt gevoelig, vooral omdat God door Johannes gekarakteriseerd wordt als liefde (1 Joh. 4,8). Sommige theologen hebben radicale oplossingen geboden: de complete eliminatie van geweld uit het Godsbeeld van de Bijbel of een scheiding tussen de gewelddadige God van het Oude Testament en de liefdevolle God in Jezus Christus van het Nieuwe Testament. De vraag is echter of met deze benadering Gods geweld, waaronder de notie van Gods wraak, voldoende recht wordt gedaan. Wat betekent Gods wraak en hoe functioneert deze wraak in de nieuwtestamentische geschriften? Deze vraag is de hoofdvraag van deze studie.

Om deze vraag te kunnen beantwoorden zal eerst gekeken moeten worden naar de achtergrond van het nieuwtestamentisch spreken. Hoofdstuk 1 richt zich op de Grieks-Romeinse context. Om het functioneren van wraak in het Middellandse Zeegebied van de Oudheid goed te kunnen plaatsen is een verdieping in twee noties belangrijk: eer en reciprociteit. Eer en status waren erg belangrijk in de Grieks-Romeinse wereld: er was een voortdurende strijd om eer. Een aanval, zowel verbaal als fysiek, kon je eer aantasten en deze aantasting kon niet ongewroken blijven. Het mechanisme van reciprociteit is tevens van belang. Individuen in Grieks-Romeinse samenlevingen werden verbonden door een systeem van reciproke relaties, waarbij de uitwisselingen van gaven (*χάρις*) centraal stond. Het negeren of verwerpen van een gave werd beschouwd als het schaden van eer en de enig mogelijke reactie op deze handeling was de wraak. Wraak is daarbij niet iets buitensporigs, maar wordt in het algemeen beschouwd als een uitvoering van recht door naaste familieleden. Dit geheel functioneerde ook op het niveau van de godsdienst: de goden konden zich wreken als hun eer geschaad werd, bijvoorbeeld als er geen gebed of offer kwam als antwoord op hun gaven. Vanuit de Grieks-Romeinse bronnen en artefacten krijgen we het volgende beeld van wraak: zowel menselijke als goddelijke wraak is toegestaan, wraak staat in het kader van de *οἶκος*, wraak is een juridisch toegestaan antwoord op het beschadigen van eer en/of reinheidsstandaarden, wraak is reciprook, emotioneel en genderbepaald.

Hoofdstuk 2 besteedt aandacht aan de oudtestamentische en vroegjoodse achtergrond. De noties van eer en reciprociteit spelen in deze

documenten ook een rol. In het Oude Testament is er echter wel een verschil met de Grieks-Romeinse context: het principe dat de wraak alleen God toekomt. God is Koning en Rechter en alleen Hij heeft de macht en autoriteit om de wraak uit te oefenen. Wraak is daarbij een vorm van recht doen. De wraak wordt veelal (maar niet exclusief) uitgevoerd in het kader van het verbond: de verbondswraak treft Israël als zij zijn verbond overtreden, maar de God van het verbond oefent zijn wraak ook uit op de volkeren als zij zijn verbondsvolk aanvallen. De praktijk is echter dat de wraak, die voorbehouden is aan God, ook door mensen wordt gehanteerd.

In de vroegjoodse literatuur zien we interessante ontwikkelingen, vooral door de ontmoeting tussen het vroege Jodendom en het Hellenisme. De associatie van God met wraak blijft veelal staan, maar wordt bijvoorbeeld door Philo van Alexandrië bemoeilijkt vanwege de transcendentie, perfectie en apathie van God. Wraak wordt verbonden met recht doen namens God en het herstel van reinheid, bijvoorbeeld door de Makkabeeën en Judith. Gods verbondswraak speelt in bijvoorbeeld de gemeenschappen van Qumran een grote rol. Sommige documenten verstaan Gods wraak als een eschatologisch fenomeen, meer dan de oudtestamentische geschriften dat doen. Vanuit het Oude Testament en de vroegjoodse literatuur zien we de volgende aspecten bij Gods wraak geregeld terugkomen: een goddelijk prerogatief, reciprook, juridisch, herstel van eer en reinheid, emotioneel, eschatologisch, genderbepaald.

De overgang naar de exegese van de nieuwtestamentische teksten lijkt een logische stap te zijn. Het probleem is echter dat met deze stap geen recht wordt gedaan aan een ander aspect van de historische context: het hermeneutische kader van de 21ste-eeuwse, Westerse lezer. Hoofdstuk 3 is een belangrijke tussenstap waarin geschetst wordt hoe het verschil tussen de antieke opvatting van wraak en de huidige Westerse opvatting is ontstaan. Filosofen als Gadamer hebben het bewustzijn ingebracht dat teksten niet neutraal gelezen worden, maar vanuit een historisch gevormd kader. In Westerse landen is een dualisme met betrekking tot wraak te zien. Aan de ene kant wordt wraak principieel beschouwd als een vorm van eigenrichting buiten de rechtsorde om. Wraak is excessief en te emotioneel. Aan de andere kant wordt bij bepaalde misdaden geroepen om wraak, terwijl het verlangen naar wraak tevens een sterke emotie is als slachtoffers ervaren dat hen geen recht is gedaan door de rechterlijke macht.

Drie grote ontwikkelingen hebben in de geschiedenis gezorgd voor een ontwikkeling van het wraakbegrip. Allereerst heeft de centralisatie van de juridische en politieke macht bij een centrale overheid ervoor gezorgd dat wraakoefeningen geband en geproblematiseerd werden. Ten tweede heeft de secularisatie geleid tot een devaluatie van de notie van Gods wraak. Ten derde heeft de opkomst van de erkenning van basale mensenrechten een bepaalde mate van beschermwaardigheid van leven gegeven, waardoor een ingreep op dit menselijk leven zwaar telt en grondig beargumenteerd dient te worden. Hoofdstuk 3 loopt uit op enkele hermeneutische vragen die meegenomen dienen te worden in de exegese van de nieuwtestamentische teksten. Deze vragen geven de gevoeligheden en kwesties weer die opkomen als moderne Westerse lezers in aanraking komen met wraakteksten en -motieven.

Na de reconstructie van de historische achtergrond van het nieuwtestamentisch spreken over wraak en de moderne Westerse opvatting van wraak worden de nieuwtestamentische teksten belicht. Hoofdstuk 4 behandelt allereerst de wraakteksten in Lukas-Handelingen. In het evangelie van Lukas is een macrostructuur van reciprociteit te ontdekken. In Jezus' openingswoorden in Nazareth (Lk, 4,18-19) worden de woorden van Jesaja 61,2b over de wraak bewust weggelaten: de bediening van Jezus draait om de inauguratie van het jaar van Gods welbehagen. Israël krijgt de kans zich te bekeren tot de God van Israël. Een groot deel van Israël weigert zich echter te bekeren, ondanks het geduld en het werk van Jezus. Daarom wordt in het evangelie de val van Jeruzalem geprofeteerd als "de dag van wraak" (Lk. 21,22): een antwoord op de weigering om zich tot God te bekeren. Ongeloof en afgoderij schaadt namelijk Gods eer en Hij kan die niet ongestraft laten. Lukas laat in zijn evangelie, maar meer in Handelingen zien dat Gods wraak niet alleen toekomstig, maar ook historisch aanwijsbaar is. Verschillende individuen vallen onder zijn wraak: de pachters die de dienaren en de zoon van de eigenaar doden, Judas Iskariot, Annanias en Saffira, Herodes Agrippa, Elymas. Het werk van Satan is in ieder geval aanwijsbaar in het handelen van al deze personen. Gods wraak zorgt echter voor redding, bevrijding en de voortgang van Gods kerk in de wereld. Wraak bij Lukas is dus Gods zaak, juridisch, reciprook, een reactie op het schaden van Gods eer of de eer van zijn volk, soms emotioneel, een herstel van reinheid en vooral een eschatologisch fenomeen dat te lokaliseren is in zowel heden als toekomst.

Paulus' geschriften worden in hoofdstuk 5 behandeld. Paulus gebruikt het motief van Gods wraak enerzijds als element in zijn paretische. De gemeenten moeten gaan in de wegen die God (door middel van Paulus) gewezen

heeft. Gods wraak is daarbij een middel tot aansporing: de gemeente moet niet uit de status van geroepene vallen in de handen van de wrekende God. In Christus zijn zij bevrijd van Gods toorn, maar een leven in het vlees kan leiden tot de wraak van Christus in het eschaton. Leven in het vlees behelst daarbij de seksualiteit (1 Thess. 4,1-8), christelijke vrijheid (Gal. 6,7-8), gehoorzaamheid aan meesters (Kol. 3,22), het schaden van Gods dienaren (2 Tim. 4,14) en eigenhandig wraak nemen (Rom. 12,19). Anderzijds gebruikt Paulus de wraak om de verdrukte gemeenteleden te troosten. God heeft oog voor hun lijden en Hij zal recht doen, in het heden (Rom. 13,4) en in de toekomst (2 Thess. 1,3-8). Paulus maakt expliciet duidelijk dat wraak Gods zaak is: Hem komt de wraak toe (Rom. 12,19). Hij kan daarbij wel gebruikmaken van instrumenten, zoals de overheid (Rom. 13,4). Gods wraak is een juridisch antwoord op het verkeerd beantwoorden van zijn genade, namelijk door een oneervol en onrein leven. Gods wraak omvat ook het opkomen voor zijn verbondsvolk als zij aangevallen wordt. Paulus ziet wraak dus ook in het kader van eer, reinheid en verbond. Andere belangrijke aspecten zijn de emotie van toorn en de plaatsing van Gods wraak in het eschaton, waarbij deze eschatologische wraak door middel van het handelen van de overheid soms ook historisch belichaamd wordt.

De wraakteksten in Hebreeën en Openbaring vormen de inhoud van hoofdstuk 6. In Hebreeën staat de notie van Gods wraak ook in dienst van de parenese. Er is een dreiging van afval bij de geadresseerden. De schrijver van de Hebreeënbrief maakt duidelijk wat afval betekent en veroorzaakt in Gods ogen: het schenden van de eer van Vader, Zoon en Geest en het verschrikkelijke oordeel van Gods wraak. De geadresseerden kunnen dit eschatologische noodlot voorkomen door te volharden in geloof en bij de waarheid van Gods boodschap te blijven. In Openbaring draait het om troost voor verdrukte gemeenteleden. Openbaring moet gelezen worden als een profetische doorlichting van de werkelijkheid, waarbij de vragen en roepen om recht van de christelijke gemeenschappen in Klein-Azië geadresseerd en beantwoord worden. De roep van de martelaren bij het altaar om wraak (Op. 6,9-11) wordt beantwoord in de ontvouwing van het oordeel over de verdrukkers en satanische machten in de volgende hoofdstukken. Daarom kan en zal er in de hemel gejubeld worden over Gods wraak: er is recht gedaan, God is volkomen overwinnaar. De taak van de gemeente in de periode van verdrukking (Op. 12,17) is volharden en getuigen van Christus, zelfs tot in de marteldood (Op. 12,11). Zowel de schrijver van Hebreeën als Johannes zien wraak als een zaak van

God, al hoewel dat bij Hebreeën niet zo pregnant is als bij Johannes. Gods wraak is het juridisch opkomen voor zijn eer of de eer van zijn volk, als een antwoord op het overschrijden van de grenzen van zijn verbond en de maatstaf van reinheid. Wraak wordt bij zowel Hebreeën als Openbaring omkleed met de toorn van God. Gods wraak is een eschatologische handeling die in bepaalde mate ook gestalte krijgt in de geschiedenis.

Gods wraak in het Nieuwe Testament kan als volgt gedefinieerd worden: de retributieve, eschatologische, juridische en soms emotionele reactie van God op hen die schade toebrengen aan Hem of zijn volk om uiteindelijk zijn eer en/of de eer en reinheid van zijn volk en de balans van het recht te herstellen. De wraak van God wordt op twee manieren in het Nieuwe Testament toegepast: als waarschuwing voor lezers en hoorders om de weg van God te gaan en als troost voor de verdrukte gemeente.

Als het gaat om de dialoog tussen exegese en hermeneutische teksten zien we dat het Nieuwe Testament duidelijk stelt dat God autoriteit heeft om zich te wreken, als Koning en Rechter. Gods wraak is juridisch handelen, menselijke wraak is een vorm van eigenrichting. Het veelvuldig gebruik van Deuteronomium 32 wijst erop dat de nieuwtestamentische auteurs enerzijds continuïteit zien met het oudtestamentisch Godsbeeld, terwijl zij anderzijds Christus beschouwen als Rechter en Wreker. Gods wraak is niet in tegenspraak met zijn liefde: er is een spanning tussen de twee, maar zij zijn verenigd in God. Wraak kan zelfs soms aangedreven worden door Gods liefde voor zijn volk en voor zijn recht. Zijn wraak tast de menselijke waardigheid inderdaad aan, wat een spanningsveld laat ontstaan met de moderne Westerse aandacht voor basale mensenrechten en menselijke waardigheid. De focus in het Westen ligt echter wel veel op de rechten van daders, terwijl Gods wraak zich vaak richt op het herstel van slachtoffers. Daarom kunnen oorlogsslachtoffers als de Kroatische theoloog Miroslav Volf Gods wraak beter aanvaarden dan Westerse mensen die leven in relatieve vrijheid en rust.

Een constatering van deze studie is dat Gods wraak niet uit de Bijbel geschrapt, maar op waarde geschat dient te worden. Deze studie heeft een verheldering willen geven van het nieuwtestamentisch spreken over Gods wraak, waarbij ook aanzetten zijn gegeven tot verdere doordenking van het nieuwtestamentisch Godsbeeld.

## Curriculum Vitae

Arjan van den Os, born June 12th 1992, received his pre-university education at Van Lodenstein College in Amersfoort (2004-2010). Subsequently, he studied History at the University of Amsterdam (2010-2011) and Theology at the Theological University of Apeldoorn (BA 2014; MA 2017, *cum laude*). From 2018 until 2022 he was a part-time pastor of the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in Spijkenisse. Since 2018 he is a part-time research assistant in New Testament Studies at the Theological University of Apeldoorn. He combines this position since 2022 with the position of Lecturer in the same field at the Theological University of Apeldoorn.