# EARLY TORAH MISSIONS

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*Abstract: Where do religious missions begin in salvation history? Why did Israel first send out agents to communicate its beliefs? Although it is unclear when sending begins, Torah missions dispatched from Jerusalem to fringe regions were probably among the earliest according to the OT record. Viewing missions from the perspective of sending agents from an administrative core to its periphery may help in establishing a biblical framework for Torah missions. This study proposes that kings and priests developed practices of religious expansion compatible with the revelation God gave them and conducive to the movement, sojourn, and settlement of people. In addition to the admixture of peoples subsisting at Israel's borders at any time, forced and voluntary migrations of incoming peoples appear throughout Scripture, creating unique administrative needs. Due to the international scope of migrations, this study will consider common ancient Near Eastern administrative policies and practices pertaining to immigrants as conceptual background for understanding early Torah missions.*

*Key words: mission, agent, send, priest, immigrant, migration, border, periphery and core, administration*

Understanding Israel's early Torah missions requires first asking what gave rise to the mission impulse. One significant source of answers was the practices that Israel shared with its ancient Near Eastern neighbors, many of which were imposed on them.[1] But what were the circumstances that motivated administrators to dispatch priests as Torah instructors to remote locations? Some of the factors that occasioned religious missions were kingship, migrations, core and peripheral regions, borders, religious instruction, and administrative strategy. All were embedded in Israel's administrative power structure.[2]

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[1] The ancient Near Eastern conceptual basis for this study is set forth in David C. Deuel, "Mission at Arrapḫa," in *Tradition and Innovation in the Ancient Near East Proceedings of the 57th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Rome 4–8 July 2011* (ed. Alfonso Archi in collaboration with Armando Bramanti; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 355–68.

[2] ANE overlapping power spheres operate within a broad functional framework, whether ideological, economical, martial, or political. Ellen Morris, "Propaganda and Performance at the Dawn of the State," in *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia,* vol. 6 (ed. J. A. Hill, P. Jones, and Antonio Morales; Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, 2013), 60. In this study religion falls under the rubric of ideology, although the lines between categories are constantly blurred.

## I. ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN RELIGIOUS MISSIONS

1. *Kingship.* In Israel and among its neighbors, kingship depended upon systems of agents.[3] As Morris notes, "the king used both force and able administration to maintain order in his realm."[4] When dispatched, agents went on missions to conduct administrative projects within close proximity to the palace or in distant places such as borders or beyond.[5] Around the time of King David, perhaps earlier, it was an attested practice in ANE cultures to send out priestly officials from political centers to teach a nation's predominant religion(s), particularly its law as administrative policy.[6] Unindoctrinated indigenous or migrating peoples ignorant about the religion of their country commonly settled in fringe or remote regions. From an administrative perspective, their need for acculturation required religious-instruction missions.

2. *Migrations.* Movements of peoples appear in a variety of forms throughout the OT.[7] In the broader ANE, a continuous flow of people entered, exited, and settled at national borders.[8] People were constantly moving for a variety of reasons and with great effect: Ariel Bagg observes, "New population groups penetrated from neighboring areas and moved into the ancient Near East, and people were uprooted by deportations and settled in foreign regions. In addition, in every historical period nomadic peoples maintained relations with the sedentary population."[9] The identity and role of foreigners are crucial to understanding this pattern, for they both sought and spread religious ideas in their movement.[10]

What characterized an immigrant? Generally speaking, the shared regional concept of "foreigner" implies externality or peripheral location.[11] This could in-

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[3] Of Mari, Daniel Fleming argues that kingship was supported "by an elaborate system of advisors and administrators" (*Democracy's Ancient Ancestors: Mari and Early Collective Governance* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 237). Many of these were commissioned as agents.

[4] Morris, "Propaganda and Performance at the Dawn of the State," 60.

[5] Written records, however, often poorly reflect the happenings of the periphery due to the scarcity of administrative documentation for activity in remote and border regions. Alan Millard, "Only Fragments from the Past: The Role of Accident in Our Knowledge of the Ancient Near East," in *Writing and Ancient Near Eastern Society: Papers in Honour of Alan R. Millard* (LHBOTS/JSOTSS 426; ed. Piotr Bienkowski, Christopher Mee, and Elizabeth Slater; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 306.

[6] Morris, "Propaganda and Performance at the Dawn of the State," 60.

[7] Exile or forced migration is central to the religious life and activities of every major section of the Hebrew Bible (John Ahn and Frank Ritchel Ames, "Introduction," in *The Prophets Speak on Forced Migration* [AIL 21; ed. Mark J. Boda, Frank Ritchel Ames, John Ahn, and Mark Leuchter; Atlanta: SBL, 2015], 2).

[8] For example, at ancient Nuzi in the 13th century, "there are migrant workers of varied origins designated as ḫāpiru" (Nicholas Postgate, *Bronze Age Bureaucracy: Writing and the Practice of Government in Assyria* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013], 348). The ḫāpiru were also present in Israel with migrating peoples.

[9] Ariel M. Bagg, "Palestine under Assyrian Rule: A New Look at the Assyrian Imperial Policy in the West," *JAOS* 133 (2013): 122.

[10] Alan Millard, "Oral Proclamation and Written Record: Spreading and Preserving Information in Ancient Israel," in *Michael: Historical, Epigraphical, and Biblical Studies in Honor of Prof. Michael Heltzer* (ed. Yitzhak Avishur and Robert Deutsch; Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publications, 1999), 238.

[11] Gary Beckman, "Foreigners in the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 133 (2013): 203.

clude individuals or large groups such as foreigners, invaders, infiltrators, merchants, diplomats, technical experts, guest professors, brides and grooms, mercenaries, refugees, captives, and mass deportations.[12] In fact, Bagg observes that "while outsiders could play important roles in their new environments, they were generally soon assimilated into their host societies without effecting significant changes in them."[13] Those who did generally were receptive to the host culture.[14] But religious commitments did not change so quickly. And for those moving about, border regions served as points of entry that could become permanent residences. In addition to immigrants, the marginalized probably included people with disabilities or illnesses that isolated them from society.[15] The border regions in which these peoples most naturally settled were peripheries. Borders were difficult to guard and, at times, even more challenging to control; consequently, they required administrative missions of all sorts, including military missions.[16]

3. *Core and peripheral regions.* In the ANE world, the distinction between administrative core and periphery was crucial. What characterizes a peripheral region? One study concludes that peripheries tend to position and function relative to a political core, that is, they exist in response to a core region that often uses the periphery for its benefit.[17] Cores control and often exploit peripheries through propaganda and other control techniques.[18] One such benefit was access to the periphery's resources, which could take the form of raw materials, luxury goods, and people and animals.[19] Slave abduction and trade also were conducted there.[20] Another benefit to the core was that the periphery served as a buffer zone in times of enemy attack. Not surprisingly, border residents regularly experienced shifting loyalties.

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[12] Ibid., 204–11.

[13] Ibid., 203. Bagg adds that "by peaceful coexistence, by commercial relations, or more often by expansion processes and war, people came into contact" (Bagg, "Palestine under Assyrian Rule," 122).

[14] Bagg, "Palestine under Assyrian Rule," 122.

[15] J. Klinger, "Fremde und Aussenseiter in Hatti," in *Aussenseiter und Randgruppen: Beiträge zu einer Sozialgeschichte des Alten Orients* (ed. V. Haas; Xenia 32; Konstanz, Germany: Universitäts-Verlag Konstanz, 1992), 187–212. Based on his examination of Hittite texts, Harry A. Hoffner concluded that a stigma attached to disabilities due to penal maiming, and fear of contagion or curse by the gods marginalized some persons with disabilities. "The Disabled and Infirm in Hittite Society," in *Eretz-Israel: A Festschrift for Prof. Hayim Tadmor* (Archaeological Studies 27; ed. I. Eph'al et al.; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2003), 84.

[16] Mission is defined as follows: "With or without correspondence, written or oral, administrative mission is the practice of sending an authorized agent, often a titled official, to perform an administrative act, or to engage a process. The mission may be as simple as retrieving stolen lumber or as complex and strategic as maintaining peace between rival entities through ongoing treaty missions" (Deuel, "Mission at Arrapḫa," 356).

[17] Richardson argues that peripheries "existed wherever the state's role was unfinished or unaccomplished" (Seth Richardson, "Introduction: The Fields of Rebellion and Periphery" in *Rebellions and Peripheries in the Cuneiform World* [AOS 91; ed. Seth Richardson; New Haven, CT: AOS, 2010], xxviii).

[18] For example, even if the king did not participate in battle, he took credit for military victories. See Morris, "Propaganda and Performance at the Dawn of the State," 60.

[19] Richardson, "Introduction," xxv.

[20] See a study of slave abduction and trade in David C. Deuel, "Apprehending Kidnappers by Correspondence at Provincial Arrapḫa," in *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations* (JSOTSS 341; ed. Mark W. Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger Jr.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 191–208.

In response, the periphery often used revolt, competition, and faction as rebellion techniques against the core.[21] Border areas became places of unrest, even rebellion. Richardson argues that rebellion, which characteristically started in peripheries, played a regular part in political thought.[22] Rebellion could serve as a method of replacing one king with another, which the historical record often preserves as failure due to some form of decline.[23] Rebellion and unaddressed violence contributed to brigand culture and rampant danger in the periphery.[24] Borders were commonly and often persistently sources of problems.

Borders could offer unique opportunities. The reflex, annexation of periphery, also occurred. For example, in the Assyrian expansion, new provinces were established only when their territory bordered on already existing provinces.[25] Each new annexed region served as a platform for adding adjacent territories. Borders, perhaps the most common location of peripheries, could serve as tools for expansion. Although large tracts of land may be acquired through military conquest, this never-ending and often gradual expansion process of territorial contiguity also continued.[26] Consequently, immigrants added to the national population and required acculturation assistance from their host administrations.

4. *Borders*. The character and function of boundaries is pivotal in discussing migration, periphery, and religious mission in the ANE.[27] Modern understandings of national borders as well as related notions of ethnic containment would seem strange to ancient readers in Israel and among its bordering neighbors. The notion of a perceptible boundary is questionable, particularly where no natural barrier existed such as a river, sea edge, elevated or depressed landform, or other visible boundary marker. Where no marker was present, fringe regions—some potentially large—often expanded and contracted, conditioned by a variety of factors. Conse-

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[21] Responding to rebellion was essential. Bagg adds that "as a world empire, which claimed to have the Levant under control, Assyria could not allow herself to remain passive in the event of rebellion. At most, there might be a temporary delay in reacting—a possibility with which the rebels might indeed have reckoned—but not to react at all was not possible without endangering Assyria's own position" (Bagg, "Palestine under Assyrian Rule," 119).

[22] S. Richardson, "Writing Rebellion Back into the Record: A Methodologies Toolkit," in *Rebellions and Peripheries in the Cuneiform World*, 12–13.

[23] Rebellion played a prominent role in ANE theology and ideology. Eva von Dassow says, "In Mesopotamian myth, rebellion was present at the creation. … In Mesopotamian history too, rebellion was ever present, whether in deed or in word" (E. von Dassow, "Preface," in *Rebellions and Peripheries in the Cuneiform World*, ix).

[24] Peripheries reflect a larger occurrence of head injuries than cores, possibly demonstrating that they were more dangerous and violent. Arkadiusz Sołtysiak, "Head Injuries in Ancient Mesopotamia: What Do We Really Know?," *The Ancient Near East Today* 4.2 (February 2016): 1–2. The author says, "These were areas that were only occasionally under control of some Mesopotamian states; for long periods state control was illusory or absent" (ibid.).

[25] Bagg, "Palestine under Assyrian Rule," 120.

[26] Ibid.

[27] David Janzen treats the perceptions of borders or boundaries in Ezra-Nehemiah, "The Cries of Jerusalem: Ethnic, Cultic, Legal, and Geographic Boundaries in Ezra-Nehemiah," in *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader* (Hebrew Monographs 17; ed. Mark J. Boda and Paul L. Redditt; Sheffield; Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 117–35.

quently, boundaries were often disputed. Regarding borders, Maidman says, "By 'border' I mean territory where authority begins to be claimed by another state, not a specific line that can be surveyed. Such modern borders did not, for the most part, exist in the ancient Near East."[28] What is more, while some boundaries were difficult to define, others changed through territorial expansion and loss, re-routing of watercourses, and so forth.[29] In addition, fringe peoples moved in and out of the borders due to famines, wars, epidemics, migrations, and many other factors, creating pockets within perceived national borders.

Border regions varied in size, some being quite large. Here, mixed groups of peoples commonly coexisted. Their status as citizens of a country is complex. Maidman points out that, in the ANE, "the presence of isolated ethnic minorities or foreigners in a polity with an ethnic majority has no necessary connection with the political relations existing between two adjacent states dominated by those different ethnicities."[30] Strategically, kings resettled loyal core nationals in troubled periphery regions to bring loyalty and stability. From the standpoint of national defense, border regions were subject to first enemy attack.

Throughout Israel's history, its borders changed as did the neighboring peoples'. At times, the nations at Israel's borders included Aram, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Amelek, Egypt, Philistia, Phoenicia, and broader Syria among others. Regarding these composite groupings, Ahlström argued that the term Canaanite "is not an ethnic term; it refers to the many groups of people who lived in the same country."[31] Canaanite priestly influence was stronger at certain national borders than others.[32] In short, the nations, themselves an admixture of peoples, were at Israel's borders, often within them.

5. *Religious instruction.* Movement of peoples and religion went hand in glove.[33] Ahn and Ames point out, "For many forced migrants … God or faith is prescribed as the most important value in life. For people in flight particularly, the driving force in their forced migrations is (paradoxically) God."[34] In fact, religion was not

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[28] Maynard P. Maidman, *Nuzi Texts and Their Uses as Historical Evidence* (SBLWAW 18; Atlanta: SBL, 2010), 233 n. 21. Identifying taxable regions may help define borders, although these are difficult to prove conclusively.

[29] Giorgio Buccellati distinguishes between national and territorial states in that the latter were inclined to add territory. *Cities and Nations of Ancient Syria: An Essay on Political Institutions with Special Reference to the Israelite Kingdoms* (Studi Semitici 26; Rome: Instituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, 1967), 108–10.

[30] Maidman, *Nuzi Texts and Their Uses as Historical Evidence*, 231–32 n. 8.

[31] Gösta W. Ahlström, "Administration of the State in Canaan and Ancient Israel," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (ed. J. M. Sasson; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), I:587.

[32] Y. Avishur and M. Heltzer, *Studies on the Royal Administration in Ancient Israel in the Light of Epigraphic Sources* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publication, 2000), 53.

[33] In the ANE, religious ideas engendered travel for individuals and groups. Even the gods traveled for a variety of reasons. See Karljürgen G. Feuerherm, "Have Horn, Will Travel: The Journeys of Mesopotamian Deities," in *Travel and Religion in Antiquity* (ed. Philip A. Harland; Studies in Christianity and Judaism 21; Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), 83–84. The images of deities could also be deported. Michael B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAWSup 3; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 358–59.

[34] Ahn and Ames, "Introduction," 3. "The use of mass deportation by the Assyrians, the more local and repeated small waves of forced migration for regional economic development through establish-

only a catalyst for immigrants, but also a tool of the host government for achieving unity.[35] Indeed, "The spreading of royal ideology and the propagation of religious ideas would serve to form a 'national' identity."[36] As a tool, religion also could be used to create division among peoples. Bagg argues, "Religion is a well-proven instrument for undermining the sense of belonging to a culture," although he is careful to point out that the Assyrians indoctrinated and enlarged the core of their population on the periphery, but not the far-reaching regions, particularly distant provinces.[37] Border regions usually fell in between. Religious instruction and propaganda are commonly two sides of the same message.

Administrations used education as an effective tool for indoctrination.[38] Schools indoctrinated administrators to introduce reform as they were placed in charge of or took control of new regions.[39] For example, in the Ur III period, schools followed reforms that contributed to a flourishing of textual activity.[40] In the Assyrian world, repopulation and instruction went together. Ahlström details how Sargon of Akkad, after building *Dūr Sharrukīn* and settling foreigners in the new city, "installed Assyrian officials such as overseers (*aklū*) to teach the people

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ments of ethnic enclaves by the Babylonians, or the use of return migrations to control overpopulation or infrastructure problems during the Persian period all attest to the theory of migration and economics" (ibid.).

[35] In his review of Richardson, Mark Chavalas observes that religious ideas came with the influx of peoples. Mark Chavalas, review of *Rebellions and Peripheries in the Cuneiform World*, *JAOS* 133 (2013): 177.

[36] Ongoing disagreement regarding the imposition of Assyrian religious ideas includes a refutation by Mordechai Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BCE* (SBLMS 19; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), updated in idem, "Judah under Assyrian Hegemony: A Reexamination of Imperialism and Religion," *JBL* 112 (1993): 403–14. Steven W. Holloway challenged Cogan's position arguing for Assyrian religious imposition in *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 10; Leiden: Brill, 2002). But Bagg argues that Cogan and Holloway are incorrect because the Assyrians rarely imposed their religious on their conquered peoples outside the core and immediate periphery ("Palestine under Assyrian Rule," 123–25).

[37] Ibid. Regarding Assyria, the author adds, "However, the imposition of Assyrian religion and the prohibition of local cults are absolutely foreign to Assyrian expansionist policy" (ibid.). Purdue and Carter also maintain that the Neo-Assyrian religious system supported annexing territories without pressure for religious conformity. See chapter 2 of Leo G. Perdue and Warren Carter, *Israel and Empire: A Postcolonial History of Israel and Early Judaism* (ed. Coleman A. Baker; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[38] Although administrative training for many periods in the ANE is not well-understood, it was essential: Nissen adds, "It is difficult to conceive how the application and maintenance of administrative structures were possible without an orderly transmission of expertise and experience, that is, without some sort of organized system for the training of future administrators" (Hans J. Nissen, "The Education and Profession of the Scribe," in *Archaic Bookkeeping: Writing and Techniques of Economic Administration in the Ancient Near East* [trans. Paul Larsen; ed. Hans J. Nissen, Peter Damerow, and Robert K. Englund; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993], 105).

[39] Piotr Michalowski, "Charisma and Control: On Continuity and Change in Early Mesopotamian Bureaucratic Systems," in *The Organization of Power: Aspects of Bureaucracy in the Ancient Near East* (SAOC 46; ed. McGuire Gibson and Robert D. Briggs; Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1987), 61–64.

[40] Nissen, "The Education and Profession of the Scribe," 108. But along with an increase in text generation, reforms might lead to administrative rebellion: A. R. George, "In Search of the é.dub.ba.a: The Mesopotamian School in Literature and Reality," in *"An Experienced Scribe Who Neglects Nothing": Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Jacob Klein* (ed. Yitzhak Sefati et al.; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 127–37.

the ways of Assyria, 'to revere (fear, respect) god and king' (*palāḫ ili u šarri*)." He goes on to explain that "the phrase *palāḫ ili u šarri* refers to the national religion."[41] Political thinking and discourse, therefore, were inseparable from theology.[42] With this nexus in view, Cogan says, "In several newly provincialized areas, the populace underwent instruction in the 'proper behavior' (inu) befitting Assyrian citizens."[43] This orientation invariably included religious ideas and practices.

Temple-building campaigns extended religious instruction. For example, "The Pharaohs of the New Kingdom built temples in Nubia in order to 'teach' the people of the area the Egyptian way of life."[44] In addition to temples at the core, frontier temples and other religious sites extended priestly instruction to far-reaching regions. How did religious instruction policies reach the periphery?

6. *Administrative strategy.* In the ancient Near Eastern world where administrative and religious mission characteristically worked together, we see a pattern with many applications that identify "sanctuaries as local centers of administration."[45] Although this policy of religious expansion may sound strange to modern readers, sensitive to government encroachment on religion or visa-versa, the ANE characteristically knew no strict dichotomy between religion and state, secular and sacred, or indoctrination and government-sanctioned instruction. In the ANE, including Israel, "Religion was the ideological base for both the king's existence and for his policies."[46] What is more, many leaders functioned in both secular and religious spheres.[47] Some administrators were sent away to school, thus becoming a part of the moving masses and the spread of religious ideas.[48] Indeed, "Religion and poli-

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[41] Gösta W. Ahlström, *Royal Administration and National Religion in Ancient Palestine* (SHANE 1; Leiden, Holland: E. J. Brill, 1982), 8. The full text is, "I sent Assyrians to them as overseers and commanders to teach them to respect the gods and the king" (*CAD* A[1]:278). The Akkadian term *dūrum* refers to "a fortified settlement that could be the size of a large city" (J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol* [SAHL 2; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001], 196).

[42] Regarding the discourse of political matters: "These ancient peoples' reflections on authority in their communities necessarily involved speaking about God or the gods, which means that their political reflections took the form of political theologies, rhetorically shaped by metaphors, symbols, and narratives, rather than the form of political theories, composed primarily to meet the expectations of reasoned argument" (Dale Launderville, *Piety and Politics: The Dynamics of Royal Authority in Homeric Greece, Biblical Israel, and Old Babylonian Mesopotamia* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 2). Commenting on ancient rhetoric, Katz says, "until the age of empiricism, the analogy had served for centuries as mankind's primary, if not sole way of thinking about and describing things which exist outside of his normal sensory reality" (R. C. Katz, *The Structure of Ancient Arguments* [New York: Shapolsky/Steimatzky, 1986], 1).

[43] Cogan, *Judah under Assyrian Hegemony*, 412.

[44] Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 11.

[45] Ibid., 22.

[46] Gösta W. Ahlström, "King Jehu: A Prophet's Mistake," in *Scripture in History and Theology: Essays in Honor of J. Coert Rylaarsdam* (ed. A. L. Merrill and T. W. Overholt; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1977) 54.

[47] In Babylon, the role of the mayor (*ḫazannu*) was "as much religious as civil" (H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that Was Babylon* [New York: Hawthorn, 1963], 252).

[48] "From the Tell-el-Amarna letters we know that the princes of the Canaanite city states had to send their sons, the presumptive heirs, to Pharaoh's court to be 'educated' and so to become faithful vassals … they learned how court and administration were organized and functioned" (Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 27).

tics both serve in the structuralization of social order."[49] Ostensibly, religion was an extension of the royal administration.[50] Consequently, religious mission often served as an administrative strategy.[51]

Administrative cores sent out priests to the peripheries. City design reflected this fusion of religion and state. Archaeological reconstructions of these centers reveal a *kirḫu* likened to an acropolis that was both the highpoint of a city and the location around which the rest of the city expanded.[52] Ahlström wrote, "The point being emphasized here is that a palace complex in the nation's capital required a sanctuary, for religion and state could not be separated."[53] All too often, neither could the central administration unite them.[54] Doctrine and its requisite instruction radiated out from the city cores to the peripheral regions. It is not surprising that the palace was typically located in close proximity to a temple, regardless of the tensions that might lie between these two institutions.

Religious-instruction missions not only helped increase loyalty to the administration in boundary regions but also quell rebellion, for while many fringe peoples might appear fully integrated, they might also remain religiously unindoctrinated unless the establishment took action to instruct them. Administrative-teaching missions might extend to the borders or beyond. Administrations relied heavily on all

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[49] Dominik Bonatz, "The Divine Image of the King: Religious Representation of Political Power in the Hittite Empire," in *Representations of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East* (ed. M. Heinz and M. H. Feldman; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 111. The author adds, "As is commonly made manifest in the ancient Near East, the very slight difference between the two [politics and religion] depends on the form of the forces or powers to which they appeal. Whereas in the case of religion one would claim these powers to be 'supernatural' or 'transcendent,' in the case of politics they are human" (ibid.).

[50] Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 8.

[51] For example, at Nuzi the administration commissioned priests to conduct sacred rituals as well as celebrate religious festivals in peripheries. Gernot Wilhelm, *The Hurrians* (trans. Jennifer Barnes; Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, 1989), 45. As with the Hittite Kingdom, and only with rare exception, this does not imply a superimposition of religious ideas either on peripheries or in acquired territories. See A. Archi, "Aštata: A Case of Hittite Imperial Religious Policy," *JANER* 14 (2014): 158.

[52] Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 16.

[53] Ibid., 18.

[54] "Although in Mesopotamia kingship is considered to be of divine origin, and although in the ideological discourse, power and authority are combined in one agency and the king is presented as the sole agent, in reality he had to rely on professional experts for mundane and religious matters. In other words, the king had to defer authority and rely on expert advice" (Beate Pongratz-Leisten, "All the King's Men: Authority, Kingship and the Rise of the Elites in Assyria," in *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, 6:286).

sorts of religio-political agents and missions.[55] Religious expansion was often indistinguishable from political, even military mission.[56] Ahlström writes,

> Religion was an arm of the royal administration. By sending out and placing military personnel and civil servants including priests in district capitals, at strategic points, in store cities, and in the national sanctuaries, the central government saw to it that both civil and cultic laws were upheld and that taxes were paid. This was extremely important when a conquered area was added to the nation or when a new city was built.[57]

In addition to teaching, priests were sent to peripheries to conduct religious rituals as well as political business on behalf of core administrations.[58] For example, at provincial Arrapḫa located in northern Mesopotamia, the king commissioned an official in the city of Nuzi and a mayor in the city of Anzugalli to conscript and send five women and two men to a priest in the city of the gods in order to render service to the god Tešup (HSS 5 104). On another occasion, the king sent a priest and one of his cabinet members (*sukkallu*) to a remote region to proclaim an edict to an entire town. If the town residents refuse to comply, they will be executed (HSS 14 14). In the Arrapḫa corpus of letters, many agents were commissioned to conduct missions from the core to the periphery and to bring back reports from mayors (*ḫazannu*) of rural towns, from the periphery to the core. Without exception, letters and other documents supported missions by providing message content or agent instructions to fulfill missions.[59] Not surprisingly, some of these ANE mission patterns are also found in ancient Israel and in early Judaism.[60]

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[55] Kings and their assisting administrative officials relied on agents to perform their roles, particularly when distance was a significant factor. For example, in The Annals of Sennacherib, column III, lines 48–49, the Assyrian king says of Hezekiah, "He (also) dispatched his messenger to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance" (*COS* II:303). See also A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 1* (The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 3/1; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 177.

[56] Expansion occurred through everyday travel and movement of peoples but also through state-sponsored strategy. See Philip A. Harland, "Pausing at the Intersection of Religion and Travel," in *Travel and Religion in Antiquity*, 16.

[57] Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 8.

[58] For example, Archi says, "The king of Kharkamiš, who exercise Hittite control over Emar, sent there one of his diviners to enquire through oracles if the local gods were in favour of his travelling to the city" (Archi, "Aštata: A Case of Hittite Imperial Religious Policy," 141).

[59] For a treatment of how agents, missions, and mission texts such as letters functioned within their ANE administrative contexts, see David C. Deuel, "Mesopotamian Literature," in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts of Ancient Israel* (ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, forthcoming).

[60] Consistent with Dickson who finds in Judaism "a framework conducive to missionary activity that was translated into action by some Jewish teachers who took it upon themselves to instruct Gentiles in the way of Torah which is analogous to that of 'missionary'" (John P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities: The Shape, Extent, and Background of Early Christian Mission* [WUNT 2/159; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], 11–50, esp. 49–50).

## II. ISRAELITE PRIESTLY BORDER MISSIONS

As in the broader ANE context, at different times Israel both acted as a migrating people and received migrating peoples from other countries.[61] Many immigrants continued to reside in Israel's border regions. The central administration at the core maintained a connection to the peripheral border regions through agents. In so doing, it used methods similar to its ANE conceptual environment to propagate its messages, primarily its law.

1. *The priestly commission.* In the Pentateuch, God commissioned priests to teach,[62] and covenanted with them to help fulfill their mission.[63] What is more, a teaching priest was described as a messenger (*mal'āk*),[64] imagery clarifying their administrative role as well as heightening God's kingship role.[65] As an administrative act, God established a treaty with Levi to teach the people: Scripture says, "They shall teach your ordinances (*mišpāṭ*) to Jacob, and your law (*tôrāh*) to Israel" (Deut 33:10). Although this contract is not recorded for us in Scripture,[66] it is mentioned in Mal 2:5 with reference to the priest's commission to instruct the people. Here it clearly stands out as the charter for the priest's teaching role.[67] Preeminently,

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[61] Israel's law required a welcoming treatment of strangers: "The meaning of the divine challenge to be 'holy (ones)' for them extends far beyond the idea of 'separation' from other peoples to include the deepest kind of ethical and humanitarian concerns: regard for the poor, the deaf, and the blind (Lev. 19:9–10, 14); avoidance of hate (v. 17); love of neighbor as self (v. 18); and love of stranger as self (v. 34). The latter commandment to love the stranger, is curiously, often overlooked" (John G. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel* [Overtures to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 33).

[62] The expression, "kingdom of priests" in Exod 19:6 and its variations in 1 Pet 2:9 and Rev 1:6 draw from the imagery of collective priestly service. Hess says, "In Leviticus, in addition to presiding over the sacrifices, the priests are given the responsibility of distinguishing between what is clean and unclean and of teaching the people of Israel about the Torah ('law' or 'instruction'; Lev 10:10–11)" (Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 193). This included the Levites who were grouped with the priests in Deuteronomy, although the tribe of Levi is only mentioned with reference to the cities of refuge in Lev 25:32–34. These also assisted with the teaching mission (Deut 17:8–13; 31:9–13; 33:8–10; ibid.).

[63] This covenant is the basis for Malachi's rebuke of the priests. The words, "My covenant with him [Levi]" (Mal 2:5), identify the violated contract.

[64] The Akkadian term for "mission" or "message" is *šipru* (*CAD* Š III:82). The most frequent and longstanding Akkadian term for "messenger" in the ANE is *šipru* (*CAD* Š II:74), or *mār šipri* but may be rendered "agent," for often no message is involved.

[65] For an explanation of how Scripture portrays messengers such as priests as members of God's royal court that dispatched messengers, see Marc Zvi Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (JSOTSS 76: Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 100–102. Malachi 2:1–3 underscores the roles of messenger priests who fail to complete their missions and are replaced by the messenger of the covenant (3:1). See also divine messengers in theophany (ibid., 185 n. 13).

[66] But is possibly alluded to in Jer 33:20–21 and Neh 13:29.

[67] The connection with the covenant may be a reference to the priest's unfaithfulness in permitting alliances with the nations, for in Malachi 3 the people have married foreign gods. Probably the clearest relationship is with the covenant with Phinehas (Num 25:12ff.), a connection solidified when one notes that Phinehas abolishes sexual practices associated with idolatry, the topic Malachi focuses on in the next section (Mal 2:10–16). B. Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger* (SBLDS 98; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 80 n. 159. In this regard, Glazier-McDonald cites Halévy for his observation regarding the emblematic persona Phinehas assumes: "le lévite, generalement admis comme ancètre et modèle idéal du sacerdoce officiant du temps de Malachie." J. Halévy, "Le prophète Malachie," *RS* 17

the focus was upon Torah missions to Israelites that were un-indoctrinated for any number of reasons.[68] But admixtures of peoples resided in their midst, identified with them, and wanted to worship their god. One example, although from an earlier period, is Ruth the Moabitess.

2. *The priestly missions.* The OT use of priestly missions was often consistent with ANE practice. Ahlström said, regarding Israel's early period of the monarchy, "Moreover, it is probable that a priest was sent out from Jerusalem to 'teach' the people the religion of the new nation."[69] This practice may have existed earlier.[70] As in other parts of the ANE, border areas were often strongholds for those who rejected or had violated the national law.[71] Indoctrination of Israelite and fringe non-Israelite people was administrative necessity.

Under David and especially Solomon, internal affairs were integrated with foreign policy as Israel developed international status.[72] During the territorial expansion of the united monarchy, David and Solomon dispatched priestly missions: Ahlström wrote, "When David became king in Jerusalem he appointed members of Hebronite 'levitical' families as his officials in Transjordan, 1 Chr. 26:30ff. The text states that they were sent out 'for all the work of Yahweh and the service of the king.'"[73] The standard term for mission ($m^{e}l'\bar{a}k\bar{a}h$) is employed.[74] Of crucial signifi-

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(1909): 20, cited in Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 80. Treaties of this nature consistently disrupted political and religious stability in Israel. Smith says, "The sons of Jacob, frequently trusted in deceptive political alliances, failing to recognize YHWH's sovereign control over other nations" (G. V. Smith, "Alienation and Restoration: A Jacob-Esau Typology," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison* [ed. A. Gileadi; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988], 172).

[68] People on the periphery in Israel included the *ger,* loosely "sojourner." Hoffmeier says, "In the Hebrew Bible the alien (*ger*) was a person who entered Israel and followed legal procedures to obtain recognized standing as a resident alien" (James Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012], 52).

[69] Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 38.

[70] Although disputed, G. E. Wright argued that this practice went back to a historic Deuteronomic charter. "The Levites in Deuteronomy," *VT* 4 (1954): 325–33.

[71] Vern Sheridan Poythress argues that the distinction between replicating the culture of Israel and summoning peoples to the dictates of God's Law must be clear. Israel's mission to unbelieving Israelites here is not "forcibly to convert them to their own way of life" (*In the Beginning Was the Word: Language, A God-Centered Approach* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009], 143). But this may have been just one mode of cultural interaction for Israel. It was not the only or necessarily the dominant pattern of ANE culture.

[72] Donner argues, "It is obvious that one cannot confine one's interests to Solomon alone, for he certainly cannot be understood apart from what his father began and built up. The period of the two kings became the unique epoch in the life of ancient Israel, in which the state rose to the status of an empire. Under David and Solomon, for the first time, one can properly speak of internal affairs and foreign policy and of their mutual interaction. … They were the first to appear as performers in the international concerto of Near Eastern powers." Herbert Donner, "The Interdependence of Internal Affairs and Foreign Policy during the Davidic-Solomonic Period with Special Regard to the Phoenician Coast," in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays: Papers Read at the International Symposium for Biblical Studies, Tokyo, 5–7 December 1979* (ed. Tomoo Ishida; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 206.

[73] Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 47.

[74] This study translates the Hebrew term $m^{e}l'\bar{a}k\bar{a}h$ as "mission" in some contexts, although that rendering is an unresolved issue with a long history. Many lexicons reject "mission," preferring "occupation" or "work" (BDB 521). W. F. Albright challenged the translation "work" for Hebrew $m^{e}l'\bar{a}k\bar{a}h$, arguing for "trading mission": "Specimen of Late Ugaritic Prose," *BASOR* 150 (1958): 38. Albright

cance for the Davidic period of military expansion, this practice of sending out priests "was extremely important when a conquered area was added to the nation or when a new city was built."[75] Similarly, "Solomon dispatched officials (some probably called levites) to let the people of the district know how to 'revere god and king.'"[76]

After the kingdom was divided, the practice of sending out priests on missions continued: "In 2 Chr. 17:7ff. king Jehoshaphat of Judah is said to have placed chief officials and Levites in the cities of his kingdom in order to 'teach them [the people] the law of Yahweh.'"[77] The passage states, "He sent (*šalāḥ*) them to teach … and he had a great mission (*mᵉl'ākāh*) in the cities" (17:13). The king mandated a priestly mission of instruction. "This is supported by 2 Chr. 19:7ff. which states that Jehoshaphat sent high officials ('princes') and Levites to all the cites of Judah in order to 'teach' the people the law, *tôrāh*, of Yahweh from the lawbook they carried with them. … This was especially important in strategical [*sic*] places and newly incorporated areas."[78] Not only was this pattern consistent with ANE practice in method but it also accomplished the objective of its neighboring administrations: "In other words, in the historical reconstruction one way of making the different Canaanite areas 'Israelite' was to place Levites in them."[79]

The deportation of the northern kingdom and the exile of Judah created a need for priests to conduct missions to perform priestly functions, particularly to teach the law.[80] Assyrian deportation of Israel created a need for a priestly mission.

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argued, "The word *ml'akt*, not found in the epics, appears repeatedly in our new prose documents in the sense of 'ambassade, délégation' (Virolleand); it still has the unrecognized sense of 'trading mission, business abroad' in several biblical passages (e.g. Psalm 107:23 and Proverbs 22:29, where its use with *māhir*, meaning primarily 'courier,' is significant), though Heb. *mel'ākāh* generally means simply 'business, work, craft'" (ibid., 38 n. 14). After revisiting the issue, Ed Greenstein concluded that the term held no specific meaning of "mission": "Trans-Semitic Idiomatic Equivalency and the Derivation of Hebrew *ml'kh*," *UF* 11 (1979): 329–36. Yet Wolff understands the question, "What is your mission?" in Jonah 1:8 as referring to a "business trip." Hans W. Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 114. In disagreement with those who limit the meaning of *mᵉl'ākāh* to 'work', Koehler and Baumgartner accepted Albright's proposal and renders the term "trade mission, business journey" as first gloss in *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), II:586. Following KB, Holladay's first gloss is "(business) mission, business trip" (William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 196). Passages such as Prov 18:9 seem to require the translation "mission."

[75] Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 8.

[76] Ibid., 46.

[77] Ibid., 47.

[78] Ibid., 55. The author adds, "this was initiated at the beginning of the 'settlement' in the country" (ibid.).

[79] Ibid. National outposts reflected this mission activity. At Arad, "priests and the military were the extended arms of the government, the reins by which the king kept his subjects within the law… . Arad was not only part of the royal administration as a military base, but was also an arm of the national cultic establishment" (ibid., 40–41).

[80] Gammie argued that the portability of the tabernacle, with the Law written on tablets of stone inside, represents the impulse to keep priest and law with the people wherever they are: "It was completely portable, and all its parts equipped with rings, poles, or bars for carrying (Exod. 25:12–15, 26–28; 26:26–30). In my judgment, this feature not only goes back to the period prior to the monarchy but it may well

Because those peoples the Assyrians deported and settled in Israel did not fear the Lord or know the custom (*mišpāṭ*) of the land, God sent lions to kill some of them (2 Kgs 17:25). In response, the Assyrian leaders sent one of the Israelite priests originally deported from Samaria on a return mission to instruct the people in Israel's law. The passage says that he "taught them how they should fear the Lord" (2 Kgs 17:28).[81] The Assyrian-commissioned priestly mission illustrates how the nations resolved a peripheral crisis due to a need for indoctrination.

Similarly, Persian administrative policy sanctioned Ezra's priestly mission from Babylonia to Judah in the postexilic period to rebuild the temple and instruct from the law.[82] Ezra's personal mission is consistent with both God's and Artaxerxes's (originally Cyrus's) dispatch. "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). When called upon by the people, Ezra fulfills his mission as is recorded in Neh 8:1ff. In both Assyrian and Persian missions, Israelite and Judahite priests were sent to teach the law, although in one case the recipients were deported peoples from outside Israel and the other, a remnant of Judah. The role of dispatching agents for mission in the prophets is also well established.[83]

In the late postexilic period, the Jerusalem core administration sent priests to instruct the Jewish Diaspora in Egypt.[84] In fact, Second Maccabees is addressed to "Aristobulus, teacher of King Ptolemy, who is one of the stock of the anointed priests, and to the Jews of Egypt."[85] Even into the Maccabean period we are told that after the death of Judah, "lawbreakers began to show their heads in all the borders of Israel."[86] A later example, the Idumeans whom Josephus describes as having come from outside the country, adopted the Jewish Law they were taught.[87]

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reflect a practice of itinerancy among the priests who ministered to the Israelites in exile" (*Holiness in Israel*, 17).

[81] Referring to this occasion, Ahlström said, "The Assyrian king (which one is not said) sent one of the exiled priests back to Bethel and not to Samaria to ensure that the religion of the country was carried out efficiently, according to its norms, *mišpāṭ*, 2 Kings 17:26ff' (*Royal Administration*, 60).

[82] For a treatment of Ezra's complex priestly mission, see Kenneth G. Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah* (SBLDS 125; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 226. The administrative documentation for this mission is treated in Bezalel Porten, "The Documents in the Book of Ezra and the Mission of Ezra," *Shnaton* 3 (1978–79): 174–96 [Hebrew].

[83] A recent example is Jerry H. Hwang, "The *Missio Dei* as an Integrative Motif in the Book of Jeremiah," *BBR* 23 (2013): 481–508.

[84] The letter from Aristeas to Philocrates offers a perspective on the care given to administration: "These kings used to administer all of their business through decrees and with great precaution; nothing was done negligently or casually" (*Aristeas to Philocrates,* 28 [trans. and ed. Moses Hadas; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951], 109).

[85] 2 Macc 1:10–11, in *The Second Book of Maccabees* (trans. Sidney Tedesche; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 103.

[86] 1 Macc 8:17–26, in *The First Book of Maccabees* (trans. Sidney Tedesche; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 159.

[87] *Ant.* 13.258. Bird observes that this was "not because of their ethnicity or territorial proximity to Judea" (Michael F. Bird, *Crossing Over Land and Sea: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010], 14). But neither does this preclude a monolithic Judaism: Overman clarifies, "So varied was Jewish society in the land of Israel in this period, and so varied were the Jewish groups, that scholars no longer speak of Judaism in the singular when discussing this formative and

Commitment to and obedience of the law came ostensibly through priestly instruction missions.

Priests also conducted missions by correspondence. Alan Millard says, "Gamaliel and successive religious leaders in Jerusalem during the first and second centuries sent instructions to Jewish communities within the Holy Land and beyond."[88] Student-recipients sent letters back to priestly instructors asking questions about the Law.[89] The Jedaniah archive from Elephantine held Aramaic documents treating priestly matters pertaining to temple reconstruction.[90] Letters could function as surrogate missions for actual priestly presence and instruction. In short, the pattern of priestly missions from core to peripheral areas was established early in Israel's national experience.

3. *Other administrative activity in priestly missions.* Because travel was slow, difficult, and potentially dangerous, priests accomplished multiple tasks on their missions. The priestly role could include raising and collecting tax revenues for temple reconstruction.[91] King Joash of Judah, who ascended the throne after the coup against queen Athaliah, tried to collect money in order to restore the temple of Solomon. According to 2 Chr. 24:4–11, "He ordered the first priest, Jehoiadah, to send priests and Levites to the cities of the nation to collect money for the work."[92] Second Chronicles 24:12 and 13 identify this endeavor as the mission (*mᵉl'ākāh*) of the house of the Lord for repairs.

The priest's role in peripheral regions often involved military activity.[93] In fringe areas vulnerable to brigands and enemy attack, priests commissioned to teach or collect taxes in these areas could also function as guards, even militia for

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fertile period in Jewish history. Instead, we speak about Judaisms. In this time and place, there existed a number of competing, even rival Judaisms" (J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel according to Matthew* [Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996], 9).

[88] Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (The Biblical Seminar 69; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 219.

[89] We might ask: In what ways was Paul's letter ministry to individuals and churches new or novel?

[90] See *COS* 3.166–134. I am indebted to Professor Alan Millard, Rankin Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Ancient Semitic Languages, University of Liverpool, for this suggestion.

[91] In the story of Solomon's temple construction, Victor Hurowitz finds a pattern shared with temple-building mission accounts from Sumerian, Akkadian, and West Semitic, including Ugarit and the Bible. All of them include a divine selection of a temple builder and a revelation of the command to build, an announcement of the intent to build by the builder, preparations for the building with the acquisition of materials, a description of the construction process and of the structure and furnishings of the temple, the entry of the deity into the completed temple, and the determination of destinies in divine revelation (*I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic Writings* [JSOTSS 115; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992], 146).

[92] Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 64. See also 2 Kgs 12:5–17.

[93] Ahlström explains one occasion: "Manasseh's administration had to be extended in order to reincorporate … cities territorially and religiously into the kingdom of Judah. This was accomplished by sending out Judahite commanders, troops, and civil servants including priests. Only when the official religion of Judah was established according to its *mišpāṭ* (rule, and norms) could Yahweh's rule be reestablished. … Therefore, the purpose of both the military and the cultic reorganization that Manasseh undertook was the same: to incorporate the regained territory into his kingdom" (ibid., 78).

the administrative center.[94] Their presence in the periphery suggested core interest and participation while at the same time, provided the core administration with reports about activity in the periphery, particularly dissention or revolt. Even here, the priestly role focused on teaching and observing the law in a united civil and religious sense.[95]

In general, as agents of the central administration, priests conducted overland missions for a variety of reasons. Second Maccabees records a mission when the priests went to find the fire from the altar which other priests had hidden at the time of enemy attack: "After a certain number of years, when God thought best, Nehemiah, dispatched on a mission by the king of Persia, sent the descendants of the priests in search of the fire which their ancestors had hidden away."[96] A Tannaitic letter sent out by the Sanhedrin regularly for public reading captures the crucial nature of priestly missions: "From there (the chamber of hewn stone) they would write and dispatch all over."[97] In short, priests used missions to conduct their administrative assignments. But these same missions to Jews incorporated fringe peoples, some non-Israelites.

Aspects of OT priestly missions carried over into the intertestamental[98] and NT eras.[99] Paul once said of his pre-Christian role to persecute Christians: "One day, I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with the authority and commission of the leading priests" (Acts 26:12, NLT). Paul prefaced his statement saying, "I even chased them down in foreign cities" (v. 11), that is, beyond national borders.[100] This priestly mission from Jerusalem to the periphery—even as the church

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[94] Ibid. The priestly role combined cultic, military, and political activities during the Hasmonean period. See chapters 2–3 of Vasile Babota, *The Institution of the Hasmonean High Priesthood* (JSJSup 165; Leiden: Brill, 2013). See also G. McEwen, *Priest and Temple in Hellenistic Babylonia* (FAOS 4; Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1981), 63–66.

[95] "Priests and Levites were … part of the government's law enforcement personnel—law here taken in its wider meaning of both civil and religious law" (Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 47).

[96] 2 Macc 1:10–11, in *The Second Book of Maccabees* (trans. Sidney Tedesche; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 107.

[97] D. Pardee et al., *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters* (SBLSBS 15; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 211. Pardee explains: "The public letter treated here was supposed to have been dispatched regularly by the Jerusalem Sanhedrin which met in the chamber of hewn stone (*lškt hgzyt*). According to rabbinic tradition the Sanhedrin had the authority to appoint judges to local courts. In theory a judge might progress from a local jurisdiction to the Sanhedrin itself" (ibid.).

[98] See Jack N. Lightstone, "Migration and the Emergence of Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism," in *Travel and Religion in Antiquity*, 188.

[99] Regarding some of the church's earliest missions in the NT (Mark 7:27; Matt 10:5–6 with 15:24), Bird says, "The mission of Jesus to Israel is taken as axiomatic in early Christianity" (M. F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission* [LNTS 331; London: T&T Clark, 2006], 50). More recently, the author says: "Paul consciously worked in areas that were under Roman control and usually had a Jewish community of some form" (M. F. Bird, "Paul's Religious and Historical Milieu," in *Paul's Missionary Methods in His Time and Ours* [ed. R. L. Plummer and J. M. Terry; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012], 20).

[100] In an ironic twist, after Stephen's stoning and while Paul was conducting his priestly mission to the periphery in Antioch, persecution in the Jerusalem core was driving the church's earliest witnesses to the Diaspora out in the margins. See Cynthia Long Westfall, "The Hebrew Mission: Voices from the Margin?" in *Christian Mission: Old Testament Foundations and New Testament Developments* (McMaster NT Studies Series; ed. Stanley E. Porter and Cynthia Long Westfall; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 189.

was forming—ensured fidelity to the doctrines of Judaism, much like OT priestly missions. Not surprisingly, the apostle Paul's Christian pattern of mission expansion moved "from the centers he had founded into the surrounding regions,"[101] from core to periphery, as was common practice in Israel's religious-administrative missions.

### III. CONCLUSION

Some of the earliest Torah missions consisted of sending out priests to instruct Jews and fringe peoples in remote places to fear YHWH and submit to his law. In general, the further one moved away from the teaching core, the temple in Jerusalem, the greater the need for priestly teachers. Most missions were administrative acts of government, for in the OT, religion and state were one. In general, we will understand Torah missions better if we view religious mission as part of the royal administration, its functions, and its goals.[102]

As regional powers, Israel and Judah dispatched Torah missions to disenfranchised peoples—some ethnic nationals, others foreigners—throughout the united monarchy and after. But when imperial superpowers conquered Israel and Judah, YHWH's missions still went forth, not from Jerusalem but from Assyria and Persia. No empire could stop YHWH from sending out Torah missions, even through the agency of foreign kings.

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Early in Jesus's earthly ministry, priests and Levites were sent on a mission from Jerusalem to inquire of John the Baptist (John 1:19), then return to give an answer to those who sent them (John 1:22).

[101] James P. Ware, *Paul and the Mission of the Church: Philippians in Ancient Jewish Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 1.

[102] In this regard, Bird says, "There are of course different ways of trying to convert people to another religion such as through oral proclamation, military conquest, the written medium, cultural inducements, or via social integration into a new group. … All of these missionary methods (if we can call them that) can be related to events and episodes in ancient Judaism" (Bird, *Crossing Over Land and Sea*, 18; and idem, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, 18).