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REGENERATION AND THE HEART UNDER THE OLD
COVENANT: A STUDY IN DEUTERONOMY AND
THE MAJOR PROPHETS

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REGENERATION AND THE HEART UNDER THE OLD
COVENANT: A STUDY IN DEUTERONOMY AND
THE MAJOR PROPHETS

Kevin Sammy Gabriel

Read and Approved by:

Peter J. Gentry (Faculty Advisor)

Date _____

I affectionately dedicate this thesis to my son Owen Samuel Gabriel,
with hope and prayer that one day the Spirit will transform your heart:

למען ידעת ואהבת יהוה אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאדך

I love you, son.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	Ancient Near East
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs' Lexicon

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PREFACE

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Finally, thanks and praise are due to our gracious Lord, who has established his new covenant with us through his death and resurrection, and has poured out his Spirit into our hearts, bringing life where once there was nothing but death. How far we fall short of the whole-hearted devotion the Lord desires of us, and yet how rich is his mercy each day! May the Lord grant more and more joyful obedience from the heart among the nations for the sake of his name (Rom 6:17; Ezek 36:22).

Kevin Gabriel

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“On the face of the Bible, when fairly read, there stands out this grand doctrine, that each one of us must, between the cradle and grave—go through a spiritual change, a change of heart—or in other words be born again.”¹ Thus the nineteenth-century preacher J. C. Ryle commences his discussion of the doctrine of regeneration. Ryle’s claim finds ample evidence within the teaching of the New Testament (NT), which recurrently emphasizes this aspect of soteriology through both explicit terminology (παλιγγενεσία, “regeneration”) and related metaphors (e.g., being born again, born of God, made alive, given resurrection life, etc.).² Hence, the need for God to transform individuals, thus restoring their spiritual vitality and ability to know, love, and obey him, is clearly articulated in the NT.

In contrast, this type of language is remarkably absent from the Old Testament (OT), which nowhere explicitly articulates a concept of being “born again.” Nevertheless, some have identified the metaphor of heart circumcision, which appears several times in the OT, as an OT equivalent for regeneration.³ This metaphor, alongside equally vivid

¹ J. C. Ryle, “Regeneration,” Monergism, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/regeneration.html>.

² The word παλιγγενεσία is found only twice in the NT (Matt 19:28; Titus 3:5), but related metaphors are used repeatedly: for example, born again/of the Spirit (John 3:3-8), born from God (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18), re-creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Eph 2:10), revivification (Rom 4:17; 8:11; 1 Cor 15:22, 36, 45; 2 Cor 3:6; Eph 2:4-6; Col 2:3; 3:21; 1 Tim 6:13; 1 Pet 1:3), new birth (Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:3, 23), giving life (John 6:63; 10:10, 28), incorporation (spiritually) into Christ’s death/resurrection (Rom 6:1-11; Rev 20:5) . See Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 293-5; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 955-6; Peter Toon, *Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 43-44.

³ See especially James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 2-4,

images for heart change such as writing the Torah on the heart (Jer 31:33) or the heart of stone/flesh contrast (Ezek 11:19; 36:26), is identified as filling this theological and terminological gap within the OT.⁴ The dualistic nature of these OT metaphors (old/new, stone/flesh, circumcised/uncircumcised, etc.) certainly seems to align with the equally binary language of the NT (dead/alive, born once/twice, etc.); hence, several scholars argue that regeneration did indeed exist in the OT, but only for the remnant within Israel.⁵

Yet a significant exegetical barrier opposes this solution: when the OT authors describe these heart-change metaphors, they depict them as eschatological realities tied closely to the future new covenant age.⁶ This presents a problem from the perspective of systematic theology since, according to the NT, everyone under Adam is dead in their sins and thus unable to believe and obey without God's monergistic creation of new spiritual life (cf. 1 Cor 15:22; Rom 8:8);⁷ hence, if the NT doctrine of regeneration is to

139-41; cf. John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 946. Note also the correlation found between these concepts in the opening quote from Ryle.

⁴ All OT verse references refer to the Masoretic Text (MT).

⁵ For example, Schreiner asserts that, "Except for a remnant, Israel lacked a circumcised heart." Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Commands of God," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 74-75; cf. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, ed. Gerald Bray, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 25. Hamilton argues that believers under the old covenant were *regenerated* (granted by God the ability to hear, understand, believe, obey, and enter the kingdom of God) but not *indwelt* (given the abiding, positive, covenant presence of God through his Spirit); see Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 2-3. Pettegrew, writing from a dispensational perspective, provides a helpful survey of various understandings within his tradition before concluding that the Holy Spirit must have regenerated OT saints, and that circumcision of heart is a "simple Old Testament way of referring to regeneration;" Larry D. Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 24-27.

⁶ This point will be argued at length below. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 432-3; John D. Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart: The Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Stephen J. Wellum (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 157n60; Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit, Theology for the People of God* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 373-4n14; Mark Baker, "In Your Mouth and in Your Heart: The Future Promise of Deuteronomy 30:11-14" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Region of the ETS, Birmingham, Al., March 21, 2013), 6. Cf. Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 2 (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2017), 323-37, who argues that circumcision of the heart and having the law written on the heart were "states of being unknown to old covenant saints."

⁷ See Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 945-6. Frame solves this question by stating that "the new

hold water theologically, it must necessarily be a soteriological reality within the OT as well.⁸

The question of regeneration in the OT, then, stems from larger biblical and theological questions regarding covenants and covenant changes.⁹ What is the difference between the old and new covenant communities? What is “new” about the new covenant and its community? And more specifically—what level of continuity exists between the soteriological experience of the elect under the old covenant and those under the new?

The Moral Heart in the Old Testament

In this study, I seek to mediate and clarify these issues by undertaking a theological analysis of the heart in the OT, with a specific focus on metaphors for human heart change/transformation. Of the 858 total occurrences of לב/לבב in the OT, (לב = 599; לבב = 259),¹⁰ 814 occurrences deal exclusively with the human heart.¹¹ Although Wolff classifies these 814 occurrences using the anthropological categories of feelings, wish, reason, and will, another method of categorization would be to distinguish the inner *self* of humans (i.e., amoral emotions and reactions) from the inner *will* of humans (i.e., moral

covenant in Christ . . . applied to elect Israelites retroactively. In terms of that covenant, God himself indeed wrote his laws on their hearts, circumcised their hearts, and created in them new spiritual life.” This potential solution will be critiqued below.

⁸ See Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 141, who speaks of the reality signified by the term “regeneration” as a “theological necessity if those who lived under the old covenant were dead in sin and became believers.” Interestingly, when the question of regeneration in the OT is raised within systematic contexts, it is often met with less-than-thorough treatments. Erickson, for example, describes it as a “particularly problematic issue” which is not of “direct practical importance” yet has “far-reaching implications” (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 992). Likewise, Demarest describes the question as “an interesting but perhaps not a crucial issue” (Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 300), and in his chapter on regeneration, Hoekema never addresses the question of those in the OT (Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989], 95-96).

⁹ Cf. Toon, *Born Again*, 59.

¹⁰ These numbers include the Aramaic occurrences (1x and 7x, respectively) within the book of Daniel.

¹¹ See the thorough categorization in Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: SCM Press Ltd, 1974), 40.

decisions, desires, and allegiances);¹² according to this schema, roughly half of the occurrences fall into each set. The latter category is more germane to this study; thus, I have limited my focus to those instances where the OT describes the heart in moral terms and categories.¹³

Within this latter group, a kaleidoscope of both positive and negative adjectives and metaphors, many of which are overlapping and complementary, describes the human heart. Though found in all genres and almost all OT books, these adjectives/metaphors are particularly conspicuous in the Pentateuch, writing prophets, and Psalms—especially within Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The three major prophets are particularly noteworthy in that each one recapitulates Deuteronomic adjectives and metaphors while also contributing their own unique terminology. Furthermore, each prophet picks up some of the language of previous prophets; thus, Jeremiah repeats some of the terminology used by Isaiah, and Ezekiel repeats some of the terminology used by Jeremiah. In other words, Deuteronomy is the fountainhead of OT terminology/theology regarding the moral heart and its transformation, and each prophet in turn further expands this terminology/theology as he brings his covenant lawsuit against Israel.¹⁴

Consequently, these four books provide the most relevant data for this study regarding regeneration and the moral heart in the OT. As a result, while referring to other material in the OT when helpful (particularly when terminology overlaps with these

¹² See appendix 1 for a more comprehensive introduction to the heart in the OT and a description of my criteria for distinguishing moral vs. amoral characterizations of the heart.

¹³ That is, whereas many studies of the heart in the OT (such as Wolff's) are concerned with what the heart *is* (anthropology), I am instead exploring how the heart is *characterized* (morality/theology).

¹⁴ Kyle Wells undertakes a similar study of the transformed heart and moral agency in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel in Kyle B. Wells, *Grace and Agency in Paul and Second Temple Judaism: Interpreting the Transformation of the Heart*, ed. David P. Moessner and Margaret M. Mitchell, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 157 (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2015), yet his research answers different questions and is oriented toward Paul and Second Temple Judaism. I interact with Wells' work as our research overlaps.

books), I will focus primarily on the key adjectives/metaphors regarding the moral heart and heart transformation in these books, noting: (1) how the heart is described, including whether the heart of the elect is characterized differently from the heart of the non-elect; (2) what soteriological realities the adjectives/metaphors of heart transformation describe, and whether they are portrayed as exclusive to the new covenant; and (3) how these adjectives/metaphors are developed and recapitulated throughout the four books. After surveying the material, I will argue that, while there is a *qualitative* difference between the hearts of the elect and non-elect under both covenants, in the new covenant the transformation of heart brings *quantitatively* new covenant knowledge of YHWH leading to Spirit-empowered obedience.

CHAPTER 2

THE MORAL HEART IN DEUTERONOMY

Introduction

Deuteronomy stands at the headwaters of OT theology regarding the moral human heart. Of the 51 occurrences of לב/לבב in Deuteronomy (לב = 4; לבב = 47), 32 capture the heart in moral contexts; in comparison, the rest of the Pentateuch contains 64 total occurrences, with 33 occurring in moral contexts.¹

In the first four books of the Pentateuch, the moral heart is a minor character, emerging in shadowy and often laconic statements. The heart appears first within the flood account, which provides a devastating portrait of the human heart's corruption (Gen 6:5-6; 8:21),² then features prominently during the exodus concerning the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.³ During the tabernacle construction, the heart briefly appears in a positive moral context regarding those who are generous and willing to contribute to the work.⁴ Following these bursts in Exodus, the moral heart occurs only four times in Leviticus and Numbers.⁵

¹ Of these 33 moral uses of the heart in Genesis-Numbers, 19 refer to the hearts of Pharaoh and the Egyptians during the Exodus (Exod 4-14). Thus, when one sets aside this collection of related occurrences, only 14 moral occurrences remain within Genesis-Numbers.

² “And every purpose of the thoughts of his [humankind's] heart was only evil all the time” (Gen 6:5); “for the purpose of the heart of man is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

³ Exod 4:21; 7:3, 13, 14, 22-23; 8:15; 19, 28; 9:7, 12, 14, 34-35; 10:1, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 5, 8, 17.

⁴ Exod 25:2; 35:5, 21-22, 25-26, 29; 36:1-2.

⁵ These four occurrences characterize the heart as: (1) the seat of hatred (Lev 19:17); (2) the source of good and evil (Num 24:13); (3) the self-directing source of Israel's whoredom and abandonment of YHWH's commands (Num 15:39; these concepts become foundational within Deuteronomy's portrait of the heart—see below); and (4) an “uncircumcised heart” (לבבם הערל) in need of humbling after the covenant curses of the exile (Lev 26:41). Though I do not deal in detail with Lev 26:41 in this paper, I refer to it briefly below in connection with Deut 10:16 and 30:6. See the illuminating analysis of this passage by

In contrast with these sporadic occurrences, the moral heart explodes onto the scene in Deuteronomy as the defining moral center of humans. Whereas later writing prophets bring negative lawsuits against the nation's continuously unfaithful heart (see following chapters), Deuteronomy's characterization of the heart is mainly future-oriented.⁶ Because Deuteronomy is didactic and stands at the beginning of Israel's national history, the book emphasizes commands and potential outcomes for obedience vs. disobedience.⁷ In short, Deuteronomy contributes most significantly by: (1) building two opposing portraits of a faithful heart vs. an unfaithful heart, and (2) by emphasizing that YHWH is the only one who can make human hearts faithful.

The Heart in Deuteronomy: Two Portraits

Deuteronomy portrays YHWH as intimately concerned with his people's heart—past, present, and future. In the past, following the flagrant disobedience at Kadesh-barnea (1:19-46), YHWH caused Israel to walk in the wilderness for forty years (8:2):

<p>לְמַעַן עֲנֹתֶךָ לְנִסְתָּךָ לְדַעַת אֶת־אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְבְּךָ הִתְשַׁמֵּר מִצִּוֹתַי אִם־לֹא</p>	<p>. . . to humble you—to test you to know what is in your heart, whether you will keep his commands or not</p>
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Meade in John D. Meade, “Circumcision of the Heart in Leviticus and Deuteronomy: Divine Means for Resolving Curse and Bringing Blessing,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 18, no. 3 (2014): 64-69. These four occurrences are consistent with Deuteronomy's portrait of the heart, as will become evident below.

⁶ In affirming an early (~fourteenth-century BC) date for the composition of Deuteronomy, I follow the argumentation of Gentry, who presents his case, not only on the basis of internal evidence, but also based on the structure of the book as a law treaty. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 397-402.

⁷ Niehaus helpfully characterizes Moses' three addresses to Israel in Deuteronomy as recollection (1:6-4:43), admonition (4:44-28:68), and exhortation (29:1-30:20). He then notes, “Moses' repeated recollections, admonitions, and exhortations contribute in large part to the highly repetitive style of Deuteronomy. The need for such repetition—affirmed by its very God-breathed existence—shows once more the externality of the law. One need not be told again and again what is dynamically alive *at the core of one's being*” (emphasis original). This insight aligns with what will be shown below regarding the heart in Deuteronomy. See Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 2 (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2017), 229.

This glance at the past offers a transparent description of the moral heart: what is in (ב *locale*) the heart determines whether one keeps (שמר) YHWH's commands. This brief statement encapsulates the book's teaching regarding the heart's moral agency, as will become apparent below.

Aside from this instance, all other references to the moral heart in Deuteronomy refer not to the past but to present and future obedience. Nine passages feature commands associated with the moral heart,⁸ and twelve passages specify either promises or warnings related to the heart.⁹ True to the nature of Deuteronomy as a covenant-renewal document between YHWH and his people, these heart-associated commands, promises, and warnings focus heavily on allegiance to YHWH and obedience to his Torah. In fact, every one of the nine commands associates the heart with keeping/doing the commands/statutes/words of YHWH.¹⁰ Thus, when one compiles all the heart-associated commands, promises, and warnings in Deuteronomy, the heart emerges as the locus of faithfulness and unfaithfulness to YHWH (see the data summarized in tables 1 and 2 below).¹¹

These commands, promises, and warnings involving the heart reveal the heart's moral capabilities, functions, and instrumentality. The heart is the receptacle for YHWH's commands and thus determines whether one obeys/hears/serves YHWH. It is also the center of right thinking (knowing YHWH is God and remembering his actions), and thus when the heart's thinking goes astray, the actions/obedience follow. In short, *all*

⁸ Deut 4:9, 39; 6:5, 6; 10:12-13, 16; 11:18; 26:16; 32:46.

⁹ Deut 4:29; 8:14; 9:4-5; 11:13, 16; 13:4; 15:7-10; 17:17, 20; 29:17-18; 30:1-2, 17.

¹⁰ In eight of the nine commands, the heart is tied explicitly to keeping YHWH's instructions. Only in the command of 6:5 is there no *explicit* reference to YHWH's Torah; yet the following command in 6:6 forges an explicit connection, and loving YHWH is associated elsewhere in Deuteronomy with keeping his commands (10:12-13; 11:13; 13:4). Cf. the similar connection between loving and obeying in the NT writings of John: John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 6.

¹¹ Note that these tables do not include all occurrences of these expressions (e.g., fearing YHWH, turning from YHWH, etc.) in Deuteronomy; rather, they provide only the instances where these expressions are connected with the moral heart (i.e., those listed in footnotes 8 and 9 above).

of one's ability to remain oriented toward YHWH and his commands is determined by what is in one's heart.

Table 1. The heart as locus of unfaithfulness in Deuteronomy

Forgetting (שכח) YHWH and his acts	4:9; 8:14
Stiff-necked (קשה ערף, "hard of neck")	9:6; 10:16
Prideful (רום)/self-reliant	8:14; 17:20
Not righteous (צדקה) or upright (ישר)	9:6
Deceived (פתה)	11:16
Turning from YHWH to other gods	סור (11:16; 17:17, 20); פנה (29:17; 30:17)
Hard (אמץ) leading to doing evil (ירע)	15:7-10
Stubborn (שרירות)	29:18
Serving (עבד) other gods	11:16
Worshipping (חוה) other gods	11:16
Walking (הלך) in stubbornness of heart	29:18

Table 2. The heart as locus of faithfulness in Deuteronomy

Doing (עשה) statutes/rules/commands/words	4:9-14; 8:11; 26:16; 30:14; 6
Knowing (ידע) YHWH is God	4:39-40; 29:3
Keeping (שמר) commands/statutes	4:39-40; 5:29; 8:2; 10:13; 11:22; 17:19; 26:16; 32:46
Loving (אהב) YHWH	6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 13:4
Receptacle for words/commands of YHWH	words on (על) heart (6:6; 11:18); word in (ב) heart (30:14); set (שים) heart to words (32:46)
Fearing (ירא) YHWH	5:29; 10:12; 17:19
Walking (הלך) in YHWH's ways	10:12
Serving (עבד) YHWH	10:12; 11:13
Seeking/searching (דרש/בקש) for YHWH	4:29
Hearing/obeying (שמע) YHWH's commands	11:13; 30:2
(Re)turning (שוב) to YHWH	30:2; 30:10
Remembering (שוב; i.e., "calling back")	4:39; 30:1

Because the heart determines one's faithfulness to YHWH, he desires whole-hearted allegiance from his people. Deuteronomy regularly emphasizes this fact by

repeating the phrase *בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך*, which occurs nine times in the book.¹² Though expressed most prototypically with regard to loving YHWH in 6:5,¹³ the repeated use of the phrase concerning other moral actions displays a recursive theme emphasizing the whole-heartedness YHWH desires of his people (see table 3). The call to do all these actions “with” (ב) all one’s heart reveals that the heart is the *instrument* by which one fulfills these duties of faithfulness; in other words, the heart not only determines *whether* one is faithful to YHWH, but is also the *means* of exercising such faithfulness.

Table 3. Requirements for whole-heartedness (בכל לבבך) in Deuteronomy

Searching (דרש) for YHWH	4:29
Loving (אהב) YHWH	6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 30:6
Fearing (ירא) YHWH	10:12
Walking (הלך) in YHWH’s ways	10:12
Serving (עבד) YHWH	10:12; 11:13
Doing YHWH’s (עשה) statutes/rules	26:16
Hearing/obeying (שמע) YHWH’s commands	11:13; 30:2
(Re)turning (שוב) to YHWH	30:2; 30:10

To summarize the findings of this section: the positive and negative

¹² Deut 4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10; cf. Josh 22:5; 1 Sam 12:20, 24. In his exploration of these concepts, McConville argues that, where *לבב* “indicates something like a settled purpose and characteristic behavior,” *נפש* “adds a sense of the person in her full being.” See J. Gordon McConville, “‘Keep These Words in Your Heart’ (Deut 6:6): A Spirituality of Torah in the Context of the Shema,” in *For Our Good Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 140. A full study of the human *נפש* is beyond the scope of this study, yet McConville’s work appears to corroborate my findings—the heart is the locus of purpose and behavior (i.e., obedience and allegiance), and the addition of *בכל נפשך* does not take away anything from this, but rather adds the dimension of the full inner self/personality. See also Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: SCM Press Ltd, 1974), 17, 25, who describes the *נפש* as something like “the totality of inner life,” which would include in this context “the whole living force of his wishes and all his longing desire.”

¹³ Gentry argues, based on Deuteronomy’s form as a suzerain-vassal-treaty, that 6:5 is both the first command and the greatest command, since it is placed immediately after the preamble and historical prologue. Thus, to be completely devoted and loyal to YHWH “is the foundation of all the requirements and stipulations of the covenant.” See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 404-5.

commands/warnings of Deuteronomy assemble two opposing portraits of the faithful and unfaithful heart—or, to use a theological description, the holy and unholy heart.¹⁴ When viewed together, the portraits complement one another, enabling the listeners to grasp a stereo/three-dimensional understanding of the type of heart YHWH desires (see table 4).¹⁵ The heart, therefore, requires one’s careful and constant attention (cf. the repeated use of שׁמר throughout the book), since the character of one’s heart determines whether or not one obeys YHWH’s commands, and hence whether one receives his blessings or his curses.

Table 4. Two opposing portraits of the heart in Deuteronomy

<i>Unholy heart</i>	<i>Holy heart</i>
Uncircumcised	Circumcised
Forgetting YHWH/his acts	Remembering YHWH/his acts
Turning to other gods	Turning to YHWH
Serving other gods	Serving YHWH
Hard/stubborn	Hearing/obeying
Walking according to own heart	Walking in YHWH’s ways
Doing evil	Doing YHWH’s commands
Worshipping other gods	Loving/fearing YHWH

The Heart in Deuteronomy: Present Characterization

Given these two opposing portraits of the heart, the next logical question

¹⁴ By “holy” and “unholy” I mean “devoted to YHWH” and “not devoted to YHWH.” Here I follow Gentry’s exegesis in Peter J. Gentry, “No One Holy Like the Lord,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2013): 17–38. Gentry pushes against traditional definitions of holiness as moral purity or transcendence, instead arguing on the basis of Exodus 3, Exodus 19, and Isaiah 6 that holiness is equivalent to complete devotion and consecration *to* something. Though the word “holy” (שׁדק) is never used as a descriptor of the heart in Deuteronomy—or anywhere in the OT, for that matter—the book often describes the people as holy to YHWH (7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9), and thus this terminology (and the idea of complete devotion) is an apt means of summarizing the book’s presentation of the faithful heart.

¹⁵ This type of instruction is also found in Paul’s writings in the NT, particularly in how he uses “put off” and “put on” commands in order to show, not only what followers of Christ should avoid, but also what they should pursue (e.g., Col 3:5-17; Eph 4:25-6:20; cf. Gal 5:16-24). When taken together, a three-dimensional image of a faithful disciple emerges.

concerns whether Deuteronomy assigns Israel's heart to one of the above portraits. Several passages provide current descriptions of Israel's heart, and in each case, the description matches the above portrait of the unholy heart.

First, in 9:4-6, Moses warns Israel regarding flawed assumptions about why they will successfully conquer the land of Canaan. While Israel will be tempted to think that their possession of the land is on account of their righteousness (צדקה; 9:4), this is not the case; it is not on account of their righteousness (צדקה) or uprightness of heart (ישר לבבך), but because of the wickedness (רשעה) of the nations and YHWH's oath to the patriarchs (9:5). Though both of these positive descriptions are used only infrequently in Deuteronomy, each is connected at least once with keeping YHWH's commands.¹⁶ Yet Israel is not characterized by צדקה and ישר—instead, they are a stiff-necked people (עם קשה ערף; 9:6).¹⁷ Thus, according to these verses, Israel is currently characterized by an unfaithful, disobedient heart that does not keep YHWH's commands.

Another indication of the current state of Israel's heart is found in 30:1-10. After outlining the potential blessings and curses for obedience and disobedience (chs. 28-29), in 30:1-10 Moses shifts his perspective; the curses and punishments will surely come about (v. 1), but Israel will return to YHWH with all her heart (v. 2) due to the enabling heart transformation performed by YHWH (vv. 6-8).¹⁸ In other words, the current status of Israel's heart guarantees they will fail to keep the terms of the covenant, thus requiring future transformative work by YHWH.

¹⁶ צדקה is used only in 9:4-6 (3x); 6:25; 24:13. The cognate verb is used in 25:1, and the cognate adjective is used in 1:16; 16:18, 20; 25:15, 33:19. In 6:25, "righteousness will exist for us" (תהיה לנו וצדקה) if the people are careful to do all the commands YHWH has commanded. Similarly, the noun ישר is used nowhere else in Deuteronomy, but the cognate adjective is used in 6:18; 12:8, 25, 28; 13:19; 21:9; 32:4. In 13:19, keeping YHWH's commands and doing what is upright are parallel results of obeying YHWH's voice. Hence, צדקה and ישר can be understood as descriptions of those who keep YHWH's commands.

¹⁷ As we have seen above, being stiff-necked/stubborn is already connected in Deuteronomy with the portrait of the unfaithful heart.

¹⁸ More on this passage below.

A final passage of note is 29:17-18. After outlining potential future failures in chapter 28, Moses shifts back to the present and offers a warning for “this day” (היום):

פְּנִי־יֵשׁ בְּכֶם אִישׁ אִו־אִשָּׁה אוּ מִשְׁפָּחָה או־שִׁבֵּט
 אֲשֶׁר לִבּוֹ פָּנָה הַיּוֹם מֵעַם יְהוָה אֲלֵהֵינוּ לְלַכֵּת
 לְעַבֵּד אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי הַגּוֹיִם הָהֵם פְּנִי־יֵשׁ בְּכֶם שְׂרֵשׁ
 פְּרָה רֹאשׁ וְלַעֲנָה וְהָיָה בְּשִׁמְעוֹ אֶת־דְּבַרֵי הָאֱלֹהִים
 הַזֹּאת וְהִתְבָּרַךְ בְּלִבּוֹ לֵאמֹר שְׁלוֹם יְהִי־לִי כִּי
 בְּשִׁרְרוֹת לִבִּי אֶלְדָּ לְמַעַן סְפוֹת הָרֹוּה אֶת־
 הַצְּמָאָה

Lest there be among you a man or woman or clan whose heart is turning this day from YHWH our God, to go to serve the gods of these nations; lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit; and when he hears the words of this oath blesses himself in his heart, saying, “I will have peace, for I will walk in the stubbornness of my heart” —so that [there will be] a sweeping away of the saturated with the parched

Verse 18 indicates that the result of such heart-level disobedience will be the “sweeping away” (ספה) of the saturated (הרוה) and the parched (הצמאה). It is not immediately apparent what these adjectives refer to in this enigmatic expression, yet the balance of the evidence favors a description of the faithful and unfaithful within Israel.¹⁹ If this

¹⁹ The adjective רוה is used only three times in the Hebrew OT. Both Jer 31:12 and Isa 58:11 use the expression “saturated garden” (גן רוה) as a simile for those experiencing the Lord’s favor. צמא is used several times to describe literal thirst (2 Sam 17:29; Ps 107:5; Prov 25:21; Isa 21:14; 29:8; 32:6), yet is also used by Isaiah to describe pouring water on a “thirsty place” as a metaphor for YHWH pouring out his רוה on Israel (44:3; cf. 55:1). Both of these expressions can thus be used to describe watered/parched land; hence, the CSB translates this phrase “the well-watered land as well as the dry land.” This interpretation is supported by the following verses (21-23), which describe the afflictions on the land due to YHWH’s punishment. Yet this does not square so easily with the use of ספה, which is used only once with land as its object (Prov 13:23); instead, it almost always describes the sweeping away of people (e.g., Num 16:26; Deut 32:23; Jer 12:4). (Moreover, if the expressions were related to the land, one has to wonder how the watered status of the land has any bearing on Moses’ rhetorical point.) Of particular note are the occurrences in Gen 18:23-24 and 19:15-17 with regard to Sodom and Gomorrah; in 18:23-24 Abraham asks if God will “sweep away” the righteous together with (עם) the wicked. This monumental act of devastation is referenced explicitly just a few verses after our passage (Deut 29:22). Thus, it would seem that Moses is drawing a contrast between the two events: though YHWH spared the righteous from the sweeping destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah due to Abraham’s intercession, he will sweep away both “saturated and parched” (i.e., both righteous and wicked) into exile if some of his people turn to other gods; cf. Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013), 810. This interpretation also makes sense of the warning, since Moses is telling them to carefully observe if any others are turning from YHWH, because all of Israel (not just the offenders) will suffer the consequences. Of course, the land will suffer for their treachery as well, since the people are tied closely with their land (see vv. 23-27); yet this expression refers not to the watered/dry land, but to the righteous/wicked people. Conversely, McConville argues that the final purpose clause should be included in the direct speech, such that the phrase reads, “even though I act resolutely . . . so that plenty of water may put an end to drought;” i.e., so that his worship of the idols will bring about the rain. See J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy*, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary 5* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 412. The advantage of such an interpretation is that it reflects what the speaker might actually say of himself, yet the linguistic and contextual parallels favor the reading suggested above. Regardless of the specific referent of these two terms, it is clear that they together form a merism—a figure

interpretation is correct, this passage shows—albeit enigmatically—that a distinction does exist between faithful and unfaithful people within Israel. Under the old covenant, YHWH deals with his people as a covenant community, and thus the sin of some leads to the punishment of all—yet while the overall character of Israel is unfaithful, there does appear to be a distinction, at least on some level, between those who make up the community.²⁰

The Heart in Deuteronomy: Heart Transformation

Deuteronomy also introduces three distinct metaphors for heart transformation that the later prophets recapitulate and develop. Each also yields further information regarding the current character of Israel’s heart.

YHWH as Giver of an Obedient Heart

The first metaphor emerges initially in 5:29 and becomes explicit in 29:3. In 4:45, Moses begins articulating the general stipulations of the covenant, starting with a review of the Ten Words (5:1-21). He then reviews the peoples’ response at Sinai: they feared YHWH (vv. 24-26) and asked Moses to serve as their intermediary, promising to obey and listen to all that Moses declared (v. 27). In response, YHWH declared that all they had said was good (v.28) before expressing his desire that this obedience would always characterize his people (v. 29):

מִי־יִתֵּן וְהָיָה לְבַבְכֶם זֶה לְהֵם לְיִרְאַה אֹתִי Oh [lit: who will give?]²¹ that this

of speech in which two contrasting parts of a whole together refer to the whole..

²⁰ One also thinks of the way Moses (and Joshua and Caleb, to a lesser extent) is described within the narrative. Moses is far from perfect—his frustration and impatience result in YHWH preventing him from entering Canaan. As Taylor puts it: “if Moses, Israel’s greatest prophet ever, fails to inherit the promise [sic] land then what hope do Israel have?” John E. P. Taylor, “Moses and Old Covenant Obedience,” *Churchman* 131, no. 4 (2017): 347. Yet as the narrative unfolds, one sees a dedication and allegiance to YHWH present in Moses (and Joshua and Caleb) that is not present within most of the rest of Israel. Moses’ heart is never mentioned or characterized, yet his persistent obedience leads one to wonder why he acts so differently from unfaithful Israel. Cf. the descriptions of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel below.

²¹ The phrase *מי יתן* functions as an interrogative clause initiating a desiderative sentence (i.e.,

וְלִשְׁמֹר אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתַי בְּלִהְיִמִּים לְמַעַן
 יִיטֵב לָהֶם וּלְבָנֵיהֶם לְעֹלָם
 heart of them might exist to them,
 to fear me and to keep all my
 commands all the days, that it
 would be good for them and for
 their children forever!

YHWH expresses a desire for two specific qualities of the heart to exist within his people: fearing him and keeping all his commands. As we have seen above, these two specific qualities are recurrent Deuteronomic descriptions of the faithful heart, which do not currently characterize Israel except for the briefest of moments.

This idea is later recapitulated in 29:3. After outlining the covenant blessings and curses, Moses initiates the solemn oath ceremony by reviewing all that YHWH has done for Israel in Egypt and throughout the wilderness wanderings (vv. 1-8). Yet despite all of YHWH’s mighty actions,

וְלֹא-נָתַן יְהוָה לָכֶם לֵב לְדַעַת וְעֵינַיִם
 לְרְאוֹת וְאָזְנִים לְשָׁמֹעַ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
 Yet to this day,²² YHWH has not given to
 you all a heart to know or eyes to see or
 ears to hear

Here Moses explicitly clarifies the desire expressed by YHWH in 5:29—if the people are

expressing a wish). When *mi* is followed by an imperfect (as here), it expresses a wish which is still unfulfilled but possible, and hence something which is desired (cf. 1 Sam 20:10; 2 Sam 23:15). Sometimes the literal sense of “who will give” is present, particularly when the verb is followed by an accusative object (i.e. the thing given; see Deut 28:67; Judg 9:29; Ps 55:7), while at other times the notion of giving has entirely disappeared, with the phrase functioning as a mere desiderative particle (e.g. Job 14:4; 31:31). See Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 481, 485; Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley, 2nd English ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1910), 476-7. In this instance the phrase is likely functioning on some level as a fixed particle since no accusative object is present. Yet this case is unique in that no other time in the MT is this expression followed immediately by a *waw*-consecutive verb (here a modal *wegatal* expressing result [. . . *that* it might be . . .]). It would seem that the *wegatal* is expressing the result of the previous verbal action (i.e. the *giving* will result in the heart *existing*). Given the fact that this notion of “giving” a heart will recur in 29:3 (see below), and the fact that chapters 29-30 already recycle the notion of heart transformation with a change of agency to YHWH (cf. discussion on 10:16 and 30:6 below), I suggest that the notion of giving is retained in this expression, and thus *mi natan* is not functioning as a mere fixed phrase. Even if this is not the case, 5:29 is nevertheless linked conceptually with 29:3. Cf. the discussions in Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 3 (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2017), 162-3, and James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 123-5, which I discovered after first coming to this conclusion through my own study.

²² The expression עד היום הזה (“to this day”) describes a reality that exists up to the present time, and continues to exist in the present. See, e.g., Gen 26:33; 47:26; 48:15; Exod 10:6; Num 22:30; Deut 2:22; 3:14; 10:8; 11:4; 34:6; etc.

to be characterized by a holy heart, it is YHWH who must give (נתן) it to them.²³ Clearly, even until this day, Israel's heart is not oriented properly toward YHWH; yet this expression opens a door of hope that YHWH will give such a heart in the future.

Circumcision of Heart

The notion of heart transformation receives more explicit clarity in the metaphor of heart circumcision, which appears twice in Deuteronomy (10:16; 30:10). Both instances of the metaphor occur in the same location within the flow of thought of these parallel sections: after the people eventually violate the covenant in the future, circumcision of heart will serve as the means of covenant restoration and faithfulness.²⁴

The first instance of the metaphor occurs in 10:16. Moses reminds Israel that YHWH requires their full devotion and obedience (vv. 12-13), grounding this in YHWH's electing covenant love (vv. 14-15). In light of this, he commands Israel:

וּמְלִתָּם אֶת עַרְלַת לְבַבְכֶם וְעַרְפְּכֶם לֹא תִקְשׁוּ
עוֹד So circumcise the foreskin of your heart,
and do not stiffen your neck any longer

The command to circumcise their heart is explained in the parallel second line: an uncircumcised heart shows itself in a stiff-necked unwillingness to obey YHWH, so to circumcise one's heart is to be willing and eager to obey YHWH and his commands.²⁵

²³ Though 29:3 does not describe the same realities as 5:29 (fearing YHWH and keeping his commands), a heart that knows (יָדַע) is also part of the constellation of terminology describing a holy heart in Deuteronomy (see table 2); hence, these two verses are ultimately describing the same reality. Cf. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 430, where Gentry likewise affirms that these various expressions have the same ultimate referent, according to the normal recursive pattern of Hebrew literature. Note also the deep connection between knowing/understanding and obedience developed in the following chapters.

²⁴ See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 426-33. Lemke argues that Deuteronomy 10:16 is not original to the text; see Werner E. Lemke, "Circumcision of the Heart: The Journey of a Biblical Metaphor," in *A God so Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 301-2. Contra this perspective, see the response to his objections in Meade, "Circumcision of the Heart," 73-74.

²⁵ Words deriving from the stems קָשָׁה (to be hard/stiff) and עָרַף (neck) are paired 36 times in the MT, each time describing various features of the unholy heart outlined in table 1 above; for example, not listening (2 Kgs 17:14; Jer 7:26; 17:23; 19:15; Prov 29:1), not obeying (Neh 9:16-17, 29), unrighteousness (Deut 9:6), and defiance/rebellion (Deut 31:27; 2 Chron 30:8; 36:13).

Israel’s stubborn heart needs to be circumcised so that their inner devotion to YHWH will match their outer (physical) circumcision.²⁶

By itself, Deuteronomy 10:16 would indicate the potential ability of Israel to circumcise their own hearts; yet the reiteration of this terminology in 30:6 reveals that this is a work only YHWH can perform.²⁷ As mentioned above, 30:6 and 10:16 both occur in the same location in the flow of thought—as a description of the means of covenant restoration after covenant-breaking results in exile. After the blessing and the curse come upon the people (30:1), when they return to YHWH with all their heart and soul (30:2), then YHWH will restore their fortunes and gather them back to their land (30:3-5). At that time (30:6):

<p>וּמִל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת־לִבְּךָ וְאֶת־לִבְּ זַרְעֶךָ לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל־ נַפְשֶׁךָ לְמַעַן חַיֶּיךָ</p>	<p>And YHWH your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that [you will] love YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you will live</p>
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²⁶ This point, argued thus far merely from the way 10:16 connects with other descriptions of the heart in Deuteronomy, correlates perfectly with the illuminating elucidation of circumcision provided by Meade in John D. Meade, “The Meaning of Circumcision in Israel: A Proposal for a Transfer of Rite from Egypt to Israel,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 20, no. 1 (2016): 35–54. Meade describes how circumcision in Egypt functioned as an initiatory rite to the service of the king-priest, thus identifying the priesthood as devoted to and belonging to the king-priest. As the rite is applied to Abraham and to Israel, it transfers the same meaning, yet is applied to all the males within the nation, since the entire nation of Israel is a kingdom of priests devoted to YHWH (Exod 19:6). This notion of devotion to YHWH correlates perfectly with an eager willingness to remain loyal and obedient to him. Furthermore, the notion of circumcision representing devotion to YHWH aligns well with its role as a covenant sign, thus functioning to remind the covenant parties of their obligations (i.e., to walk before YHWH blamelessly; Gen 17:1); see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Circumcision in the Hebrew Bible and Targums: Theology, Rhetoric, and the Handling of Metaphor,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 14, no. 2 (2004): 183-6. See also the work of Deenick in Karl Deenick, *Righteous by Promise: A Biblical Theology of Circumcision*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 45 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), who argues that circumcision of heart includes not only the notion of righteousness and blamelessness, but also a humble trust in YHWH’s promise to Abraham for a blameless seed.

²⁷ Dumbrell argues that commands such as that found in Deuteronomy 10:16 presuppose an “ideal state that presumably can be achieved;” William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 100. This assertion is based on his argument that the newness of the new covenant is tied, not to its internality (see the discussion of this point in the next section), but to other factors. As we will see in future chapters, Dumbrell seems to ignore the tension present all throughout the prophets on this point—YHWH is constantly issuing commands his people are unable to obey due to the *externality* of the Torah; what is needed is an *internal* renovation. Cf. the discussion between the material/spiritual (i.e., internal/external) nature of the old/new covenants in Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 2, 34-65.

Two critical points are immediately evident. First, YHWH will be the one who eventually circumcises his peoples' heart. Though Moses commanded Israel to circumcise their own heart, they will fail so extravagantly that all of the covenant curses (including the culminating curse of exile) will come upon them. When all is said and done, it will be apparent that only YHWH can change their heart.²⁸ Second, the ל + infinitive construct clearly shows the result of heart circumcision—the people will love YHWH with all their heart and soul, and so will live.²⁹ We have seen above that such whole-hearted devotion is YHWH's supreme command and desire for his people; we see now that the only means of achieving this goal is for YHWH to circumcise his peoples' heart. This point is confirmed by the following verses, which describe the people obeying YHWH (vv. 8, 10), keeping his commands (vv. 8, 10), and turning to him with all their heart and soul (v. 10). In short, whereas the study above showed that Deuteronomy characterizes the problems of Israel's unholy heart as half-heartedness, disobedience, turning away, etc., 30:1-10 reveal that YHWH's future circumcision of their heart will provide the solution to all of these connected heart ailments.

²⁸ Wells discusses at length the various arguments for either (1) a priority on Israel's return in order to accomplish future restoration; or (2) a priority on YHWH's divine initiative and agency in order to accomplish future restoration. He helpfully shows that, while good arguments exist for both, the chiasmic structure of 30:1-10 highlights vv. 6-8 as the focus:

- A) Israel returns and obeys YHWH, returning to her heart (vv. 1-2)
- B) YHWH returns to Israel by turning her turning (v. 3)
- C) YHWH circumcised Israel's heart,
- C2) so Israel loves, returns, and obeys (vv. 6-8)
- B¹) YHWH returns to Israel (v. 9)
- A¹) Israel obeys and returns to YHWH (v.10)

Based on this schema, Wells argues that “the convergence of divine and human agency is located in the לבב. It is on the heart that God operates and it is from the heart that Israel loves.” Wells, *Grace and Agency*, 32. See also the discussions of this tension between divine/human agency in heart transformation within the following chapters.

²⁹ So Wells, *Grace and Agency*, 32.

Torah/Words on the Heart (Cardionomography)³⁰

A third and final metaphor of heart transformation involves language describing the word(s) of YHWH being on/in the heart of his people. Unlike the circumcision of heart metaphor, this image exists only in seed form in Deuteronomy, with no explicit promise given regarding YHWH placing/writing his words on the heart of his people. The prophets will further develop this theme, yet Deuteronomy serves as an important starting point for the metaphor.

The image first appears in 6:6, immediately following the foundational command to love YHWH in 6:5:

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם עֲלֶיךָ לְבָבְךָ And these words which I am commanding you today will be on your heart

In the following verses, Moses further explains this command with several examples of how Israel is to keep these words on their heart: by teaching them to their children (v. 7), talking about them throughout their daily activities (v. 7), binding them on their hands and between their eyes (v. 8), and writing them on their doorposts and gates (v. 9). In other words, Israel is to keep these words front-and-center by all means possible.

Two specific points are essential. First, when 6:6 is read together with 6:5, it appears that YHWH's words existing on the heart relate to the foundational command to be whole-heartedly devoted to YHWH. Yet when read in light of the rest of Deuteronomy, it is evident that this cannot currently characterize Israel; we have already seen that this whole-hearted devotion will come only through YHWH's future actions.³¹

³⁰ I utilize here the helpful term coined by Steven Coxhead in Steven R. Coxhead, "The Cardionomographic Work of the Spirit in the Old Testament," *Westminster Theological Journal* 79 (2017): 77. The term conveys "in a succinct way the concept of the Holy Spirit's work of writing the law on the hearts of God's people, a concept that is significant not only in Pauline theology but also in OT theology." Hence, he argues that one can even use the term "pneumato-cardionomography" in order to make clear the Holy Spirit's role.

³¹ Furthermore, it is fruitful to consider the connection of both 6:5 and 6:6 to 6:4. Duane Garrett, in a course lecture at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on 4/21/2020, argued that Deuteronomy 6:4 employs gapping in parallel lines, such as is present in Ps 3:4; 47:7; Song 6:9. He thus proposed the following translation: "Listen, Israel: YHWH [is] our God, YHWH [is our] one God." If this

Second, when 6:6 is read together with 6:7-9, a fruitful irony emerges—Moses commands the people to keep these words on their *internal* heart, yet the receptacles of the words in vv. 8-9 are transparently *external* (hands, eyes, doorposts, gates). Israel needs the word to be internalized, yet in their own strength, they can only pursue this through (ultimately ineffective) external means.³²

This same imagery—and same internal/external predicament—features in 11:18, which occurs in the final exhortations within the general stipulation portion (4:45-11:32). Sandwiched between two abbreviated descriptions of the blessings and curses (11:13-17; 11:26-32), Moses commands the people:

<p>וְשַׂמְתֶּם אֶת־דְּבָרַי אֱלֹהִים עַל־לִבְבְּכֶם וְעַל־נֶפְשְׁכֶם וְקִשְׂרִיתֶם אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל־יְדֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם</p>	<p>So you shall set these words [of] mine on your heart and on your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hands and they will exist as frontlets between your eyes</p>
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This command is followed by the same instructions as those in 6:7-9 above: they are to teach these commands to their children (v.19), talk about them throughout their daily activities (v. 19), and write them on their doorposts and city gates (v. 20). Moses then reiterates this instruction from a different angle: they are to carefully keep (שמר תשמרון) the commands in order to love, follow, and grasp YHWH (v. 22).

Thus, just like in 6:6, the instruction regarding words being on the heart in 11:18 is contextually explained by commands regarding allegiance and devotion to

interpretation is correct, then the Shema is a demand for complete devotion and loyalty, which shows how both 6:5 and 6:6 are closely related to 6:4. 6:4 declares the exclusivity of YHWH as Israel’s God, 6:5 calls therefore for whole-hearted devotion to him, and 6:6 calls for internalization of his word. See also McConville, “Keep These Words in Your Heart,” 127-44, who argues for the tight correlation of these three verses.

³² Coxhead reaches the same conclusion regarding the internal/external contradiction and its relationship to obedience: “The significance of cardionomography when applied to ancient Israel is that the law of Moses was supposed to be internalized within the hearts and lives of the people. Originally the law of Moses was delivered on tables of stone; but this external law was subsequently meant to be internalized in the hearts of the people through covenant instruction and meditation (Deut 6:7-9, 20-25). With the law internalized or written upon the hearts of the people of Israel, the obedience that God required of Israel under the stipulations of the covenant would be realized.” Coxhead, “The Cardionomographic Work,” 80.

YHWH (6:5; 11:22).³³ Likewise, 11:18-23 contains the same irony and tension found in 6:6-9: though the instruction is intended to be internal (on their hearts), the people cannot accomplish this and thus must set up external reminders in an attempt to remain faithful.

The metaphor of words being on the heart is found next in 30:14, in the passage following YHWH’s promise to restore his people in the future through a circumcised heart (see above). After asserting that the command is not too “wonderful” (i.e., difficult; פלא) for them, such that Israel should need to seek it out, Moses affirms:

כִּי־קְרוֹב אֵלַי הַדְּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ	But the word is very near you—in your mouth and in your heart—so that [you] might do it
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Steven Coxhead demonstrates that to have the word in one’s mouth means having a thorough knowledge of Torah, while to have the word in one’s heart means living in obedience to Torah.³⁴ This meaning aligns well with what we have seen above in 6:6 and 11:18. Yet scholars are perennially divided on whether vv. 11-14 apply to the present or the future;³⁵ if these verses (including 30:14) refer to the present, this would seem to contradict everything articulated thus far about the heart's moral capabilities in Deuteronomy. The balance of evidence, however, favors a future reading of this verse; as Gentry helpfully articulates, the emphasis of 30:14 is on the *proximity* of the source of life and death—it is in the hearts of the people.³⁶ Hence, 30:14 aligns with the imagery

³³ See Peter J. Gentry, *How to Read & Understand the Biblical Prophets* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 41-58, for an explanation of the way biblical Hebrew uses repetition to provide a full-orbed picture of a topic.

³⁴ Steven R. Coxhead, “Deuteronomy 30:11-14 as a Prophecy of the New Covenant in Christ,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 308-9.

³⁵ Without entering fully into this discussion here, I direct the reader to those scholars who rightly identify Deut 30:11-14 as future-oriented; see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 432-3; Peter J. Gentry, “The Relationship of Deuteronomy to the Covenant at Sinai,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 18, no. 3 (2014): 51-52; Coxhead, “Deuteronomy 30:11-14,” 305-20; Baker, “In Your Mouth and in Your Heart,” 1-16.

³⁶ As Gentry points out, in the epic of Gilgamesh, the protagonist seeks answers to life and death by going across the ocean. Moses, however, argues that the issues of life and death are not so far away; instead, they entail two matters: divine instruction (i.e., word in mouth) and loyalty of the heart (i.e., word in heart). The instruction has already been given in the covenant at Moab, so only one issue remains

found in 6:6 and 11:18.³⁷

In summary, the metaphor of words being on the heart describes a people who live in obedience to Torah; thus, the metaphor discloses the same reality as those of circumcision of heart and YHWH giving a heart. Unlike these two metaphors, however, Deuteronomy never explicitly promises that YHWH will put his words on his people's heart. Yet since Israel does not currently display such obedience, this metaphor can be read in concert with the other two to understand that one day YHWH will act to put his words on the hearts of his people.³⁸

to prevent blessing and life: the loyalty of the human heart. “So the answer is not very far away: *it is in our own hearts*. The answer is not out there; it is in us” (emphasis original). Since Moses thinks YHWH could potentially circumcise their hearts in his day, he brings a legitimate and forceful appeal. Moses himself recognizes the tension between the secret things (i.e., when YHWH will provide a circumcised heart) and the revealed things (i.e. Israel's responsibility to obey) in 29:29. See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 433; cf. Gentry, “The Relationship of Deuteronomy,” 52. Taylor, though arguing that Deuteronomy 30:11-14 speaks of a “gnomic present reality,” agrees essentially with Gentry's articulation of the rhetorical point of Moses' instruction—because of his ministry, the Torah is neither obscure or unintelligible, and thus the people are instructed to keep it. In other words, “there is nothing hindering them from inheriting the promise [sic] land, except themselves.” Taylor, *Moses and Old Covenant Obedience*, 358. This conclusion matches those articulated by both Gentry and myself—the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.

³⁷ One more passage connects words with the heart in Deuteronomy, yet does not explicitly describe words being in/on the heart. In Deuteronomy 32:46, immediately after the Song of Moses, Moses commands the people:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם שִׁמּוּ לְבַבְכֶם לְכָל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְעִיד בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר תִּצְּוּ אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם לִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת	And he said to them, “Set your heart to all the words which I am warning you today, that you shall command your children to keep [and] to do all the words of this Torah.”
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Though each of the three passages described above has a different combination of terminology, in all three דברים/דבר is the object (6:6; 11:18) or subject (30:14), and לבב is within a prepositional phrase (6:6: היה + לבב + על; 11:18: שים + על + לבב; 30:14: [implied copula] + ב + לבב). The situation in 32:46 is the opposite—לבב is the object, and הדברים is in the prepositional phrase (שים + ל + לבב). In other words, Moses is here getting at the same idea, but from the opposite direction—not only should words be on/in (ב/על) the heart, the heart itself should be set (שים; i.e. directed) toward the words. The use of שים with לבב/לב as the object is a stock Hebrew phrase indicating to consider/give attention to something (see e.g. with אל: Exod 9:21; 1 Sam 25:25; 2 Sam 13:13; 19:20; Job 2:3; with ב: 1 Sam 21:13; with על: Isa 42:25; 47:7; 57:1; 57:11; Jer 12:11; Ezek 40:4; 44:5; Hag 1:5, 7; Mal 2:2). As is evident from this data, the call to direct one's heart upon (על) something becomes an important phrase for the writing prophets (particularly Isaiah; see below). Regardless of this difference in terminology, the idea in Deuteronomy 32:46 remains the same—if the people will set their heart toward the words Moses is warning them, it will result in them keeping and doing all the words of the Torah.

³⁸ Jeremiah will make this explicit in the future; see chapter 4.

Summary and Significance

Before turning to the prophets, it is important to summarize and synthesize Deuteronomy's presentation of the moral heart in relation to the questions raised in the introduction. First, how is the heart described in Deuteronomy, and is the heart of the elect characterized differently from the heart of the non-elect? Uniquely in the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy emphasizes the heart as the moral center of humans, definitive in their allegiance and their obedience toward YHWH. In short, what is in the heart determines whether one will keep the commands of YHWH. When all the heart descriptions are read together, two distinct portraits emerge of the holy (i.e., devoted to YHWH) and unholy heart; thus, Deuteronomy presents the moral heart in binary terms. Though the emphasis of Deuteronomy is on future-oriented commands, warnings, and promises, the book nevertheless clearly portrays Israel as presently characterized by an unholy heart. Though the enigmatic language of 29:17-18 offers a potential distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous in the community, this is the only time this distinction is made in the context of the heart.

On the whole, then, Deuteronomy does not emphasize any distinction between the hearts of the elect and the non-elect in the community; yet in affirming this, it is essential to note that לבב/לב are always singular, even when commands are addressed to the community.³⁹ In other words, Israel's heart is viewed in corporate terms, and since

³⁹ Finding a meaningful distinction between singular and plural commands in Deuteronomy is not an easy task, and has often been used as a means of separating redactional layers. McConville counters this trend, arguing instead that rhetorical and theological reasons guide whether singular or plural is chosen. While the singular emphasizes Israel as a unity, the plural focuses on the responsibility of each individual to keep the covenant. The interplay between these two thus has the effect of placing the individual within the larger covenant context. See J. G. McConville, "Singular Address in the Deuteronomical Law and the Politics of Legal Administration," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 97 (2002): 19–36. This appealing theory makes sense of passages such as 29:17-18, where an individual's (dis)obedience has effects on the entire community. Nevertheless, regardless of the motivation for choosing singular vs plural, here I simply observe that whether heart occurs with a singular pronominal suffix (22x; e.g. לבבך, "your heart") or with a plural pronominal suffix (8x; e.g. לבבכם, "you all's heart"), in *all* cases the heart itself is *always* singular. Thus, Moses does not command Israel (in 10:16) to circumcise the foreskin of their "hearts," but to circumcise the foreskin of "the heart of you all" (לבבכם). Likewise, YHWH wishes that the "heart" of the people (לבבם) would fear and obey him (5:29), and Moses says that YHWH has not given "to you all a heart" (לכם לב) to know him (29:4). See also 11:13, 16, 18; 13:3; 32:46. This phenomenon continues into the prophets, as demonstrated in the following chapters.

she is a mixed community of elect and non-elect, she can by definition never have a collective “heart” to follow YHWH. The book emphasizes Israel’s obedience as a nation, and the effects this corporate obedience will have (e.g., showing wisdom to the nations; 4:1-8); yet the nation as a corporate entity has not been given a “heart” to know YHWH (29:3).⁴⁰ This raises a further question which Deuteronomy does not explicitly answer: just because the nation as a whole does not possess a holy heart, does it necessarily mean that no individual in the nation has one?⁴¹ We will return to this question later as we consider the evidence from the prophets.

Second, what soteriological realities do the metaphors of heart transformation describe, and are they characterized as exclusive to the new covenant? As demonstrated above, each of the three metaphors introduced in Deuteronomy describes the results of heart transformation in the same way: a transformed heart is a heart that is faithful in keeping YHWH’s commands.⁴² In terms of traditional soteriological terminology, then, a transformed heart is equivalent to a regenerate heart.⁴³

The metaphor of YHWH giving an obedient heart is not tied explicitly to the new covenant, yet is future-oriented and not a current reality within Israel. Similarly, descriptions of words being on the heart never correlate with an explicit promise, yet clearly the old covenant's external provisions are not accomplishing this reality (at least

⁴⁰ Taylor agrees, arguing that the rhetoric of Deuteronomy is explicitly corporate, and the people are regarded as being “one with each other.” Taylor, *Moses and Old Covenant Obedience*, 348.

⁴¹ To clarify this question by way of example—if YHWH must give Israel a heart to know him (29:4), and yet we read of Moses that YHWH knew him face to face (ידעו יהוה פנים אל-פנים; 34:10), we are forced to wonder how Moses had this privilege apart from the agency of YHWH in his own heart. Similarly, why did Caleb and Joshua obey and remain faithful to YHWH when the rest of Israel did not (1:34-38)? Deuteronomy provides no explicit answer to these thought-provoking questions.

⁴² This reality is expressed in a multitude of different ways (see table 2), but when one boils everything down, keeping YHWH’s commands is what *demonstrates* one’s devotion to him.

⁴³ Of course, sanctification is also closely related, since sanctification results in someone becoming more obedient to YHWH’s commands. Yet these metaphors for transformation of heart are clearly trafficking in binary terms (see again the opposing portraits in table 4). An untransformed heart is *unable* to obey YHWH’s commands, while a transformed heart *will by definition* obey YHWH. We will reexamine this question at length in the conclusion.

for most covenant members). However, the metaphor of circumcision of heart is tied explicitly to covenant restoration, which will take place after the exile. Since all three of these metaphors describe the same realities, it would seem that, by reading all three in concert with one another, one should conclude that all are descriptors of new covenant realities.⁴⁴ Yet as mentioned above, the collective language describing the “heart” of Israel should give some pause to this conclusion; we have not yet encountered any passages describing the *individual* hearts of the elect within Israel. Only in the later OT will this type of language begin to emerge.

Finally, regarding the development and recapitulation of descriptors/metaphors of the moral heart throughout the books, I simply note here that Deuteronomy introduces three metaphors for transformation,⁴⁵ as well as a significant dictionary of terminology regarding the moral heart. How these terms and metaphors are taken up and developed by the prophets will form much of the content of the following chapters.

⁴⁴ This will become explicit for all three metaphors—and more—in the prophets; see below.

⁴⁵ Technically Deuteronomy does not introduce the metaphor of circumcision of heart, since it appears first in Lev 26:41. Yet this passage provides only a hint of what is further developed in Deuteronomy, as it does not promise that YHWH himself will circumcise Israel’s heart in the future.

CHAPTER 3

THE MORAL HEART IN ISAIAH

The heart is mentioned 49 times in Isaiah (לב = 31; לבב = 18). Of these instances, 19 occur in amoral contexts (e.g., fear, merriness, rejoicing, anxiety, an idea being in the heart, “speaking to the heart,” etc.),¹ while the remainder occur in moral contexts. Several of these moral occurrences refer not to Israel's heart, but the heart(s) of her enemies;² since these are not germane to the questions at hand, we will focus instead on the moral characterization of Israel's heart.

Whereas Deuteronomy focuses on commands and open-ended promises/warnings for obedience/disobedience, Isaiah emphasizes present characterizations of Israel's heart.³ Surveying the past centuries of Israel's history, it is evident to the prophet that Deuteronomy's promises of heart transformation have not yet come about, and the nation stands in desperate danger of the ultimate covenant curse—exile.

Isaiah contributes most to the discussion at hand by adding further clarity to Israel's heart problem (especially its relational dimension) and including Gentiles within the scope of those who will receive the future transformation of heart. After first

¹ It should be emphasized again that amoral uses of לבב/לב often occur in moral *contexts* (e.g., the fearful heart of Ahaz becomes a cause of YHWH's judgment in ch. 7), yet in these cases, the feelings/emotions of the heart are an *amoral* result of a *moral* cause (e.g., not trusting in YHWH, in Ahaz's case).

² For example: the prideful heart of the king of Assyria (10:12), the arrogance of the king of Babylon (14:13), and the self-assurance of the nation of Babylon (47:7, 10).

³ On the unity of Isaiah, not only from a redactional perspective, but as an authorial-compositional unity, see Peter J. Gentry, “The Literary Macrostructures of the Book of Isaiah and Authorial Intent,” in *Bind Up the Testimony: Explorations in the Genesis of the Book of Isaiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2015), 227–53.

considering Isaiah’s negative descriptions of the heart, I will then briefly describe the book’s positive descriptions and the only place the prophet explicitly mentions the transformation of the moral heart.

The Heart in Isaiah: Negative Descriptions

Isaiah opens with a severe indictment of Israel due to her sinfulness, hypocritical worship, and disregard for social justice (1:2-31).⁴ The opening salvo (1:2-8) provides three descriptions of Israel’s rebellion alongside three causes of her behavior (see table 5).

Table 5. Characterization of Israel’s rebellion in Isaiah 1:2-6

<i>Verses</i>	<i>Description/result of rebellion</i>	<i>Cause of rebellion</i>
vv. 2-3	Rebellion (פשע)	Israel does not know (ידע) or understand (בין)
v. 4	Sinful nation (גוי חטא), people burdened by iniquity (עם כבד עון), offspring of evil-doers (זרע מרעים), perverted sons (בנים משחיתים)	Forsaking (עזב) YHWH, despising (גאץ) the Holy One of Israel, estranged (זור)
vv. 5-6	Being struck down (תכו) and continuing to rebel (תוסיפו סרה)	Whole head is diseased (חלי) and whole heart is weak (דוי); entire body is ailing

Verse 4 describes the most obvious causes for Israel’s rebellion—she has forsaken and despised YHWH;⁵ yet the surrounding verses reveal the deeper roots of her rebellion.

Verses 2-3 disclose an underlying relational problem: while even an ox and donkey know

⁴ On the concept of social justice in Isaiah, see Peter J. Gentry, “Isaiah and Social Justice,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2013): 1–16. In short, Isaiah 1 asserts that Israel has failed to keep the two greatest commands: they do not love YHWH or their neighbor.

⁵ Both of these verbs (עזב and גאץ) are used regularly throughout Isaiah. Of the two, עזב is the most significant, occurring 23 times and referring both to Israel’s rebellion (1:28; 58:2; 65:11) and to YHWH’s judgment (54:6-7) and restoration (41:17; 42:16; 49:14; 55:7; 62:4, 12).

the master they serve, Israel does not know or understand.⁶ YHWH then asks why the people continue to destroy themselves through rebellion (v. 5), and provides the answer through a graphic representation of a bruised, wounded, and raw body (v. 6).⁷ Yet this lack of “soundness” (מתם) has a specific *inner* cause: the whole head is diseased (הלי), and the whole heart is weak (דוי). These two parallel phrases describe the same reality: Israel is diseased from the inside out.⁸ From the very beginning of Isaiah, we immediately see that something is fundamentally wrong with Israel’s heart, leading her to forsake YHWH. This problem is connected to her ability to know and understand YHWH as her covenant Lord. These same realities will be emphasized repeatedly throughout the remainder of the book.

“Fat” Hearts and Cognitive Impairment

Following the occurrence in 1:5, the heart appears next in the highly significant context of Isaiah’s vision of YHWH and commission to prophetic ministry (ch. 6). After receiving atonement (כפר) for his sin and volunteering to serve as YHWH’s ambassador,

⁶ These two verbs (בין and ידע) are extremely significant in Isaiah’s characterization of Israel’s moral heart, as will be shown below. It is important to recognize that these verbs do not describe a simple cognitive/epistemological deficiency; rather, in the Hebrew worldview they refer to relational intimacy, often in the context of covenant (see, e.g., Gen 4:1). Knowledge of YHWH is therefore inherently covenantal, and is also deeply tied to covenant faithfulness (which, in the context of Israel’s relationship to her covenant Lord, issues forth in *obedience*); see Frame’s illuminating discussion of the vital relationship between covenant knowledge and obedience in John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 705-710. In the case of Isaiah 1:2-3, Israel’s lack of understanding and knowledge is set in the context of a family relationship gone wrong; so wrong, in fact, that even animals have a better relationship to their masters! Moreover, the call to the heavens and earth hearkens back to the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy, and thus the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel. I thank Dr. Peter Gentry for drawing my attention to the relational/covenantal character of these verbs.

⁷ The use of a physical body as a metaphor to represent Israel and her spiritual state recurs repeatedly throughout the prophets, including language such as “deaf” and “blind.” See further below.

⁸ The term הלי is generally used of physical sickness (e.g., Isa 38:9), yet takes on moral overtones in the prophets (see, e.g., Jer 6:7; 10:19; Hos 5:13). The only other time it is used in a non-physical fashion within Isaiah is in 53:3-4, where it describes the suffering servant “knowing sickness” and “carrying our sicknesses;” given the context of the chapter (see vv. 5-6), this is clearly referring to the sins of the people. In other words, only YHWH’s servant will be able to remedy the moral sickness of the nation. The term דוי is rare, and as a result is difficult to translate; on two other occasions it describes the heart (Jer 8:18; Lam 1:22), and in both cases the heart is weighed down and failing as a result of grief over punishment due to sin. In this case, it evidently does not represent such grief in the context of repentance, but nevertheless depicts a heart that is weak and failing due to YHWH’s punishment for sin.

Isaiah receives his commission (6:9-10):

וַיֹּאמֶר לֵךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ לְעַם הַזֶּה שְׁמַעוּ
שְׁמוּעַ וְאַל-תִּבְיִנוּ וּרְאוּ רְאוּ וְאַל-תִּדְעוּ
הַשְׁמֹן לְבַהֲעֵם הַזֶּה וְאָזְנוֹ הִכָּבֵד
וְעֵינָיו הִשַׁע פְּנֵי-רְאָה בְּעֵינָיו וּבְאָזְנוֹ יִשְׁמַע
וּלְבָבוֹ יִבִּין וְשָׁב וּרְפָא לוֹ

And [YHWH] said, “Go, and say to this people: ‘Listen intently,⁹ but do not understand; look intently, but do not know.’ Make the heart of this people fat and make their ears heavy and make their eyes blind, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, and turn and be healed.”

Though space does not permit delving into all areas of debate surrounding these verses, several salient points are relevant to the topic at hand.¹⁰ YHWH first summarizes Isaiah’s mission (v. 9): to reinforce Israel’s inability to understand and know. Second, using an ABCC’B’A’ chiasm (v. 10), YHWH describes Isaiah’s ministry (ABC) and the (negative) purpose of his ministry (C’B’A’). Two *weqatals* after the chiasm delineate the ultimate purpose of Isaiah’s mission: preventing Israel from turning and being healed.

We have already seen in Isaiah 1:2-6 how YHWH identifies a relational problem with Israel—they are unable to know (יָדַע) or understand (בִּין)—and connects this to their heart; this same connection is made in 6:9-10, and is identified as the framing purpose of Isaiah’s entire mission.¹¹ No matter how intently Israel may listen (שָׁמַע) or look (רָאָה), they will not understand (בִּין) or know (יָדַע). These latter two verbs occur frequently throughout Isaiah (בִּין: 20x; יָדַע: 76x), yet when they are used to describe Israel’s (lack of) ability, they most often relate to her idolatry.¹² Since idolatry is the sin

⁹ When used alongside an imperative, the infinitive absolute usually intensifies the idea of the verb; see Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley, 2nd English ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1910), 343.

¹⁰ For a helpful integration of Isaiah 6 with other prophetic texts regarding the hardening of the heart, see Edward P. Meadors, *Idolatry and the Hardening of the Heart: A Study in Biblical Theology* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2006), 56-76.

¹¹ See Geoffrey D. Robinson, “The Motif of Deafness and Blindness in Isaiah 6:9-10: A Contextual, Literary, and Theological Analysis,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 8 (1998): 177, who also notes parallels between 1:2-9 and 6:9-10.

¹² In 40:18-31, when comparing his infinite strength to the worthlessness of idols, YHWH asks whether Israel has “known” (vv. 21, 28) or “understood” (v. 21). In contrast to the weakness of idols to save (41:7), YHWH strengthens and delivers his people so that they might “know” and “understand” that

that chiefly marks disdain for YHWH and disobedience to his Torah (see, e.g., Deut 5:7-10; 6:4-6), it follows that Israel’s heart impairment affects her ability to hear and obey the Torah.¹³

We turn now to the chiasm in verse 10, which identifies the *specific* problem with Israel’s heart/ears/eyes by characterizing the purpose of Isaiah’s ministry. Three causal Hiphil imperatives describe Isaiah’s role, with the second half of the chiasm describing the purpose of his ministry: he is to “make fat” (שמן) their heart (A) so they cannot understand (בין; A’), “make heavy” (כבד) their ears (B) so they cannot hear (שמע; B’), and “make blind” (שעע) their eyes (C) so they cannot see (ראה; C’). Based on Hebrew poetry’s recursive nature, all three of these metaphors describe the same reality from a slightly different perspective;¹⁴ yet of particular interest to this study is the A/A’ metaphor due to its relation to the heart. The verb שמן is not easy to translate, yet it

he is their salvation (41:20). YHWH challenges idols to announce the future so they may “know” what is to come (41:22-23), and declares that those who fashion idols do not see or “know” (44:9). Those who worship idols do not have the “knowledge” or “understanding” (cognate nouns) to understand the futility of such worship (42:18-19; cf. 45:20). In fact, YHWH specifically foretold coming events in order to show Israel that he was not like their idols (48:3-7), yet from even before their birth they have not “known” due to their stubborn rebellion (48:8). Despite their unseeing eyes and unhearing ears (43:8), YHWH calls for his people—and his Servant—to witness to the nations (v. 9) that he is the only God (vv. 10-13), and to “know” and believe (אמן) and “understand” that he alone is God (v. 10). The Servant’s role in the nations seeing/understanding is likewise identified in 52:15, where kings who are astonished at his appearance (v. 14) will—unlike rebellious Israel—“understand” what they have not heard, and see what they have not been told. Thus, Israel’s inability to ידע and בין is tied intimately to her idolatry, and her refusal to acknowledge YHWH as the only God. This makes good sense of the covenantal and relational nature of knowledge/understanding defined above. Beale further strengthens the linkage between Isaiah’s commission and Israel’s idolatry in a study of 6:9-13, arguing that the verses show how Israel has become as spiritually lifeless as her inanimate idols; see G. K. Beale, “Isaiah VI 9-13: A Retributive Taunt Against Idolatry,” *Vetus Testamentum* XLI, no. 3 (1991): 257–78; see also his later articulation of the same argument in G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 36-70.

¹³ This is confirmed by 42:18-19, where Israel is characterized as deaf and blind, not understanding that her punishment has come about (42:25) due to her refusal to obey the Torah (42:24).

¹⁴ “Blind” eyes are self-explanatory for Western readers, yet “heavy” (כבד) ears are not. A similar expression is found in Isa 59:1, where YHWH’s ear is not “heavy” so that he cannot hear (ולא כבדה משמוע); this is the same way that B’ describes heavy ears. Cf. Zech 7:11-13, where rebellious Israel makes her ears heavy (כבד) so they will not hear YHWH’s commands, and her heart “like a rock” (שמיר) (CSB) so it will not hear the Torah and the words of the prophets. For a helpful exposition of the biblical connection between the heart, eyes, and ears, see A. Craig Troxel, *With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires, and Will Toward Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 165-78.

appears to mean something like “to satiate” or “to make self-sufficient.”¹⁵ The heart is intended by YHWH to “understand” (בִּינָה)—who YHWH is, what idols are, what the results of rebellion/idolatry will be—yet when the heart of Israel is made replete by Isaiah’s preaching, it will no longer fulfill this function.¹⁶

It is evident, then, that Isaiah’s mission will serve to deepen/extend a heart problem that already exists, since a lack of understanding/knowledge already marks the nation of Israel.¹⁷ Instead of preaching for the sake of repentance, Isaiah’s preaching will *prevent* repentance, precluding Israel from turning (שׁוּב) and being healed (רפא).¹⁸ The

¹⁵ שָׂמֵן occurs only five times in the Hebrew OT, three times in the Qal (Deut 32:15 [2x]; Jer 5:28) and twice in the Hiphil (Neh 9:25; Isa 6:10). The Qal occurrences refer to Jeshurun (Deut 32:15) and the wicked (Jer 5:28), with both contexts describing them figuratively as sleek, healthy beasts. Similarly, Nehemiah 9:25 describes the nation of Israel in the promised land, eating and “causing themselves to be fat” and delighting themselves in the goodness of YHWH, before rejecting him and casting his Torah behind their backs (v. 26). Likewise, the cognate adjective שָׂמֵן describes rich food (Gen 49:20; Isa 30:23; Hab 1:16), land (Num 13:20; Neh 9:25, 35), and pasturage (Ezek 34:14; 1 Sam 15:9; 1 Chr 4:40), as well as strong/robust men (Judg 3:29; Ezek 34:16). Consequently, a “fat heart” is a heart that is satiated, replete, and prosperous to the point of deluded strength and self-sufficiency; as Wüncch describes it, “it is a heart that has everything it needs and wants and therefore does not feel a need to change.” Hans-Georg Wüncch, “The Strong and the Fat Heart in the Old Testament: Does God Harden [*sic*] the Heart?,” *Old Testament Essays* 30, no. 1 (2017): 180.

¹⁶ Perhaps it would be appropriate to contrast the “fat” heart with the “heart of the crushed [i.e., contrite] ones” (לֵב נִדְכָּאִים; 57:15) with whom YHWH dwells, since those who are crushed in heart/spirit recognize their neediness and utter dependence on YHWH. Importantly, in employing these three physical metaphors (and especially connecting the people’s unfaithful hearts with an inability to know/understand YHWH), Isaiah echoes and amplifies the statement seen earlier in Deut 29:3.

¹⁷ In an article examining the use of Isa 6:9-10 in John 12:37-41, Hartley reaches a similar conclusion: all people congenitally lack the ability to salvifically believe and are dependent on divine initiative in order to know and understand God in a saving way. The “fat heart” is thus the heart deprived of this salvific knowledge/understanding, due not to YHWH *subtracting* it, but due to him *withholding* noetic enablement, as seen in Deut 29:3 (see above; importantly, Deut 29:3 also connects these three physical metaphors with divine enablement). Thus, Hartley describes the mode of divine causality in this case to be that of *deprivation*. See Donald E. Hartley, “Destined to Disobey? Isaiah 6:10 in John 12:37-41,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 44 (2009): 286. Conversely, Wüncch argues that the “fat heart” is not *unable* to respond, but instead does not *want* to and feels no need to (Wüncch, “The Strong and the Fat Heart,” 181). This is perhaps correct from the perspective of the fat-hearted individual/community, yet, when read together with the remainder of the OT witness regarding the heart and its inability, it is correct to use the language of spiritual inability.

¹⁸ We have already see how “turning” (שׁוּב) to/from YHWH is used in Deuteronomy to describe (un)faithfulness. The term for “healing” (רפא) is used only four other times in Isaiah; one describes YHWH’s relation to Egypt (19:22), one refers to YHWH healing those who are contrite over their sin (57:18), while the other two refer to YHWH healing Israel’s wounds in the future restoration (30:26; 53:5). Of particular note is that the Servant of YHWH in Isaiah 53 will be the ultimate agent of this healing, which is currently unavailable for Israel, but will one day be offered to all through the Servant’s sacrifice. A related question concerns exactly *how* Isaiah’s preaching will accomplish the result of making fat/deaf/blind the heart/ears/eyes of Israel. As Wüncch explains, when preaching of salvation and judgment comes to a self-assured, self-sufficient, and prosperous people, it serves only to drive them further from their need for repentance, since they are lulled into thinking that all is well, since they appear to be

shock of this commission is reflected in Isaiah’s startled response in verse 11: “Until when, O Lord?” As is clear from verses 11-13, the answer is that the “fattened” hearts will remain until after the exile, since YHWH must remain faithful to his promised curses for covenant-breaking.¹⁹

This characterization of the heart and YHWH’s role in its inability to understand/know is developed further in several passages throughout the book.²⁰ First, in the brief Messianic prophecy found in 32:1-8, Isaiah describes the reversal of 6:9-10: when the king of righteousness finally reigns, eyes will once again be opened, ears will once again pay attention, the stammering tongue will speak, and the “heart of the impetuous will understand by knowing” (ולבב נמהרים יבין לדעת).²¹ Second, in chapter 63,

experiencing the pleasure of YHWH/their gods; see Wüch, “The Strong and the Fat Heart,” 181-3. See also the discussion in Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 38-49, who argues persuasively that “we resemble what we revere, either for ruin or restoration,” and that in the case of vv. 9-10, “[God] is punishing them by means of their own sin.”

¹⁹ The NT quotes Isa 6:9-10 three times, in each case emphasizing a different aspect of its fulfillment, yet in all cases affirming that the prophecy remained true up through the time of Jesus/the apostles. In Matt 13:14-15, Jesus references the verses in the context of speaking in parables, explaining that the crowds are fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy, since they are not receiving the secrets of the kingdom (vv. 11-13); yet these secrets have been revealed to the disciples (v. 16), despite the desire of many prophets and righteous people to understand (v. 17). In other words, there is a salvation-historical aspect to the hardening, wherein only through Jesus’ teaching can the lack of knowledge/understanding be truly remedied. In John 12:40, John quotes Isa 6:10 alongside 53:1 in order to demonstrate why the people who saw Jesus’ signs were unable to believe (διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἠδύναντο πιστεύειν)—though they saw some of his glory, they did not see his glory in the same transformative way Isaiah did (v. 41). For a helpful discussion of the fulfillment of Isaiah 6 in John 12, see Todd A. Scacewater, “The Predictive Nature of Typology in John 12:37-43,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 75 (2013): 129–43. Finally, in Acts 28:26-27, Paul applies Isa 6:9-10 to the fact that many Jews reject the gospel (v. 25), and thus salvation will be sent to the Gentiles, who will listen (v. 28). In addition to this NT data, it is worth noting that the language of “(re)turning” (שוב) to YHWH, as found in Isa 6:10, is eschatological language in Deuteronomy (30:2, 10) which is tied to the post-exilic/new covenant age, as was shown in the previous chapter.

²⁰ After noting the conceptual and terminological connections between these passages myself, I discovered similar analyses in Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 41-44, and John L. McLaughlin, “Their Hearts Were Hardened: The Use of Isaiah 6,9-10 in the Book of Isaiah,” *Biblica* 75, no. 1 (1994): 1–25.

²¹ The substantive Niphal participial of מהר is difficult to translate, occurring with this stem only four times. The verbal root typically communicates haste/speed, as seen clearly in its use in Job 5:13. In Habakkuk 1:6, the participle can be translated as something like “impetuous,” therein maintaining the notion of haste. The fourth use is Isa 35:4, where it also describes the heart, creating a close correlation to 32:4; yet in this case, given the context, it appears to indicate anxiety, cowardice, or fear. This meaning does not align with the use in 32:4, which is paralleled to (previously) blind eyes, inattentive ears, and stammering tongues—organs which are not functioning as they were intended to function. Furthermore, the remedy for the heart is that it will once more “understand by knowing,” clearly linking this passage to the lack of understanding seen in 6:10, rather than the anxiety/fear of 35:4. Perhaps a meaning such as “impetuous” is again a better fit here, describing a heart that is sporadic/erratic in its allegiances and is

YHWH describes his tender mercy for his people (vv. 7-9) despite their ongoing rebellion (vv. 10-14). An appeal is then made to YHWH for deliverance and compassion (vv. 15-16) before asking in v. 17:

<p>לָמָּה תַתְעֲנֹנֵנוּ יְהוָה מִדְרָכֶיךָ תִקְשִׁיחַ לִבֵּנוּ מִיִּרְאַתְךָ שׁוֹב לְמַעַן עֲבֹדֶיךָ שְׁבִטֵי נַחֲלָתְךָ</p>	<p>Why do you cause us to wander, YHWH, from your ways? [Why do] you cause our heart to be hardened from fearing you? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your inheritance.</p>
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Though this passage does not tie the heart to understanding/knowing, it is conceptually related to 6:9-10 through the recognition of YHWH’s role in hardening hearts.²²

Furthermore, this verse couples the heart language of Isaiah to concepts already explored in Deuteronomy (hardened hearts [cf. 10:16, which uses קשה in the context of the need for a circumcised heart], fearing YHWH, wandering from his ways), further cementing the conceptual linkages in how these two books describe the heart as the source of allegiance to YHWH and his ways.

Setting/Returning to Heart

A related metaphor—found already within Deuteronomy (4:39; 11:18; 32:46)—which strengthens the connection between the heart and understanding/knowing/idolatry is that of “setting” (שׂים; 41:22; 42:25; 47:7; 57:1, 11) or “returning” (שׁוֹב; 44:19; 46:8) something to heart.²³ Most revealing is 44:18-20, which links several of the concepts introduced above; after describing the foolishness of idols and those who make them (vv. 9-17), YHWH outlines the problem with idolaters:

quick to turn away from YHWH. Beale similarly identifies 32:3-4 as indicating that the judgment of Isaiah 6 will be lifted at some point in the future; see Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 269-70; cf. McLaughlin, “Their Hearts *Were* Hardened,” 17-20.

²² Of course, it is Isaiah’s ministry which will serve to harden (“make fat”) the heart of Israel in chapter 6, yet Isaiah is serving as the emissary of YHWH.

²³ As mentioned in the previous chapter, when these verbs are used in relation to the heart, they form—at least to some extent—stock Hebrew phrases meaning “to consider” or “to ponder.” Yet the moral contexts in which Isaiah uses these expressions suggest he is genuinely attributing these problems to the unresponsive and inattentive (i.e., “fat”) hearts of the people.

<p> לא ידעו ולא יבינו כי טח מראות עיניהם מהשכיל לבתם ולא ישיב אל-לבו ולא דעת ולא-תבונה לאמר חציו שרפתי במו-אש ואף אפיתי על-גחליו לחם אצלה בשר ואכל ויתרו לתועבה אעשה לבול עץ אסקוד רעה אפר לב הותל הטהו ולא יציל את-נפשו ולא יאמר הלא שקר בימיני </p>	<p> They do not know and they do not understand, for he has smeared their eyes from seeing, [and] their heart from understanding.²⁴ No one recalls to his heart, and [there is] no knowledge or understanding to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire, and over half of it I baked bread; I roasted meat and I ate. And will I make the rest of it into an abomination to worship a block of wood?” He feeds on ashes; a deceived heart turns him astray; and he cannot deliver his soul or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” </p>
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These verses draw together the concepts of malfunctioning organs, a lack of knowledge/understanding, idolatry, YHWH’s agency, and the heart’s determinative role in each of these things. A lack of the ability to ידע and בין reveals itself in the inability to think clearly about idolatry, and is rooted in a “deceived heart” and an inability to “bring back” to one’s heart a rational perspective on idols.

Similarly, in 46:6-11 YHWH once again describes the uselessness of idols before calling the transgressors to remember (זכר) and “recall to heart” (על לב) . . . that YHWH alone is God, accomplishing all his purposes.²⁵ Again, in 57:11, idolaters are chastised for not remembering (זכר) YHWH and “not setting to your heart” (לא שמת על לב). This phrase also occurs in several contexts not related explicitly to idolatry, but tied to the same terminology of ידע and בין; for example, in 42:25, YHWH pours on Israel the heat of his anger and the strength of battle due to their disobedience to the Torah (v. 24), yet Israel did not know (ולא ידע) and did not “set it to heart” (ולא ישים על לב). Likewise, in 57:1, no one “sets it to heart” when the righteous perish (ואין איש שם על לב), just as

²⁴ In this context, שכל is clearly functioning as a synonym of בין (and, to some extent, ידע), since the latter is used earlier in the same verse to describe the same reality.

²⁵ YHWH then goes on to characterize the people in verse 12 as “strong [i.e., obstinate] of heart” (אבירי לב); see more on this verse below.

there is no understanding (בין) when men of steadfastness are taken away.²⁶ In summary, failing to “set/recall to heart” (i.e., consider/ponder) serves as a synonym for the type of idolatry and disobedience characterized by lacking knowledge/understanding, which is in turn tied intimately to the sick hearts of the people.²⁷

Further Heart Troubles

Several other negative descriptions of the heart feature within Isaiah. First, after describing the uselessness of worshipping idols in 46:6-11, YHWH says in 46:12:

שְׁמָעוּ אֵלַי אֲבִירֵי לֵב הַרְחֻקִים מִצְדָּקָה Listen to me, strong [i.e., obstinate] of heart, those who are far from righteousness

The parallelism of this verse makes clear that idolatrous Israel’s heart defect is equivalent to her being far from righteousness, or, as in other verses above, being unable to obey the Torah. A similar concept appears in 29:13, where YHWH pronounces a judgment on Israel since, though they draw near with their mouths and honor (כבוד) YHWH with their lips, “their heart is far from me” (ולבו רחוק ממני), and their fear of YHWH is a command taught by men. This verse traffics in the internal/external distinction already highlighted in Deuteronomy (6:6-9; 11:18-20), wherein the people need *internal* renewal of the heart to obey the Torah; in the same way, Isaiah identifies that idolatrous Israel may display a pretense of fear and worship, yet it is merely *external*, since the heart—the inner center of allegiance—remains far from YHWH, in need of dramatic renewal.

²⁶ Two other passages use this same terminology of setting (שים) to heart, but in slightly different yet still illuminating contexts. In 47:7, YHWH pronounces judgement on Babylon for not “setting these things to heart” (לא שמת אלה על לבך) or remembering (זכר) their end. In other words, it is not just Israel who fails to take things to heart; Babylon as well ignores YHWH’s word, assuming she will be mistress of other kingdoms forever. In this way, Israel’s heart has become just like the nations surrounding her. Second, in 41:22 YHWH taunts idolaters, telling them to bring forth their idols so that they might tell the future in order that “we might set [it] to our heart” (ונשימה לבנו). This verse serves as a foil for the others, as YHWH makes it clear that the words of a deity are intended to be set to heart.

²⁷ Cf. the connection between idolatry and the heart in Josh 24:23: ועתה הסירו את־אלהי הנכר אשר בקרבכם והטו את־לבבכם אלי־הוה אלהי ישראל (“and now, put away the foreign gods that are among you and incline your heart to YHWH, God of Israel”).

Furthermore, after chastising Israel for not remembering him and “setting to heart” (57:11), before describing the type of heart with which he dwells (57:15), YHWH says that, despite his righteous judgment, Israel “went [literally: walked] on apostatizing [literally: turning] in the way of his heart” (וילך שׁוֹבֵב בְּדֶרֶךְ לְבוֹ; 57:17). This description is the polar opposite of commands such as Deuteronomy 10:12, where Israel is commanded to walk in YHWH’s ways; evidently, the heart of Israel directs her in ways contrary to those required by YHWH.

Finally, Israel’s heart is also described as prideful (גִּדְלֵ לֵב; literally, “great of heart”) in 9:8, due to her disregard for YHWH’s judgment, in failing to turn (שׁוֹבֵב) to him (v. 12). Isaiah uses this same terminology regarding the king of Assyria (10:12) and employs similar concepts regarding the prideful king of Babylon (14:13) and the nation of Babylon (47:8, 10). Just as we saw above with the terminology of “setting to heart” (i.e., considering), Israel’s heart is no different than the hearts of the nations around her.

To summarize this section: Isaiah repeatedly emphasizes the defective character of Israel’s heart, focusing primarily on her lack of knowledge/understanding, which results in her inability to obey YHWH and his Torah, as evidenced especially by her idolatry. In other words, Isaiah emphasizes the covenantal/relational roots at the core of Israel’s heart-troubles. While some of these terms and descriptions are novel, Isaiah often reuses terminology found already in Deuteronomy. Having spent significant time on these central themes regarding the heart in Isaiah, we turn now to a shorter discussion of positive descriptors of the heart within the book.

The Heart in Isaiah: Positive Descriptions

In contrast to its grueling list of negative descriptions of Israel’s heart, Isaiah describes the heart positively in only four places. Of these four, two refer to the future (32:4; 51:7), one characterizes an individual (38:3), and one describes a potential rather than a reality (57:15). Because 51:7 contains a metaphor for heart change, I deal with it in

the next section and describe the other three here.

First, as already described in the last section, 32:4 occurs within a short Messianic prophecy in which Isaiah describes the reversal of 6:9-10—when the king of righteousness finally reigns, eyes will once again be opened, ears will once again pay attention, the stammering tongue will speak, and the “impetuous heart will understand by knowing” (ולבב נמהרים יבין לדעת).²⁸ This verse is significant in holding out hope that Israel’s heart impairment will not last forever (cf. 63:17, and Isaiah’s response in 6:11); yet, when correlated with other eschatological imagery in the book, it will take nothing short of a new creation to bring about this change.

Next, as mentioned briefly above, in between two negative characterizations of Israel’s heart (57:11, 17), YHWH describes in 57:15 those with whom he dwells:

כִּי כֹה אָמַר רִם וְנִשְׂא שֶׁכֶן עַד וְקָדוֹשׁ שְׁמוֹ מְרוֹם וְקָדוֹשׁ אֲשֶׁבוֹן וְאֶת־דְּבָא וְשִׁפְלֵרוּחַ לְהַחְיֹת רוּחַ שְׁפֵלִים וּלְהַחְיֹת לֵב גְּדָבָאִים	For thus says the high and exalted one, who dwells in eternity, and whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy [place], and with the crushed and lowly of spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly ones, and to revive the heart of the crushed ones
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While שִׁפְלֵרוּחַ communicates “lowliness” which can, at times, extend to the metaphorical meaning of humility,²⁹ דְּבָא can extend beyond humility to repentance,³⁰ as it does here.

To receive the revivification of one’s heart and spirit, the necessary prerequisite is humble repentance over sin. Though utilizing various terminology, the concept of

²⁸ See the discussion above on this translation of מהר.

²⁹ See Ezek 17:14, describing the “lowliness” (i.e., forced humility) of a kingdom under the vassalage of Babylon.

³⁰ See especially Jer 44:10, describing Jews living in Egypt and Pathros (44:1), of whom YHWH says, “They have not crushed themselves [דְּבָא] until this day, nor have they feared, nor have they walked in my Torah and in my statutes which I set before you and before your fathers.” This passage brings דְּבָא into the orbit of Torah obedience and walking with YHWH, which are similar to the context at hand. As a side note, the only other time דְּבָא is used in Isaiah is verses 5 and 10 of chapter 53, where the Servant is “crushed” (מְדָבָא) for iniquities by the will of YHWH. We have already seen above that רָפָא (“healing”) and חָלִי (“illness”) are also only repeated in the context of the suffering Servant. Clearly, the role of the Servant in chapter 53 is key in dealing with the sins and sorrows of the nation—and the troubles of her heart.

repentance from a humble/penitent heart is scattered throughout the OT and is always a prerequisite for YHWH's favor and forgiveness.³¹ In addition, Leviticus 26:41 connects an uncircumcised heart which needs to be “humbled” (כנע) through repentance and making amends for sin; thus, this work of humbling should be seen as linked to the eschatological work of heart restoration tied to the other eschatological renewal metaphors being explored throughout these books.

Finally, and of particular interest for the aims of this study, 38:3 provides the only positive characterization of an individual's heart:

<p>וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יְהוָה זָכַרְנָא אֶת אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּאֵמֶת וּבְלֵב שְׁלֵם וְהֵטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ עָשִׂיתִי וַיִּבְדָּךְ חֲזָקִיהוּ בְּכִי גָדוֹל</p>	<p>And [Hezekiah] said, “Please, YHWH, remember that I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and I have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept with great weeping.</p>
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Hezekiah, when confronted with a deadly sickness, humbles himself before YHWH and self-describes his heart as “whole” (שלם). This terminology is not unique to this passage but occurs thirteen other times in the OT, all in Kings or Chronicles, and with eight of the occurrences describing the heart of a king.³² The expression is similar in meaning to בכל לבבך (“with all your heart”), describing unity of purpose or full commitment.³³ In other contexts related to David and Solomon, a לבב שלם is described as a heart devoted to YHWH and his Torah, which YHWH himself must give.³⁴ Three other

³¹ See Lev 26:41; 1 Kgs 8:47-48; 2 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 6:37-38; 32:26; 34:27; Ps 51:19; Dan 10:12; Joel 2:12-13. On three occasions this repentance is tied to the terminology of “all your heart” (1 Kgs 8:48; 2 Chr 6:38; Joel 2:13).

³² 1 Kgs 8:61; 11:2-4; 15:3, 14; 2 Kgs 20:3; 1 Chr 12:39; 28:9; 29:9, 19; 2 Chr 15:17; 16:9; 19:9; 25:2.

³³ See 1 Chr 12:39 and 29:9, which provide a window into the meaning of the phrase by utilizing it in non-spiritual contexts. In 12:39, the expression is used in parallel with לב אחד (“one heart”) to describe how all of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh are united in their desire to make David king over Israel. Along the same lines, in 29:9, after David oversees a collection for the building of the temple, the people rejoice because they had given generously with a “whole heart.” The former passage uses the expression to describe a group of people having unity in *purpose*; the latter describes a group being fully *committed* to a task.

³⁴ In 1 Kgs 8:61, Solomon charges Israel during the temple dedication to “Let your heart be whole toward YHWH your God [וְהָיָה לְבַבְכֶם שְׁלֵם עִם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ] *in order to* [ל + infinitive construct] walk

kings (Abijam, Amaziah, and Asa) are also evaluated according to this criterion of a לבב שלם, yet these descriptions reveal that the possession of such a heart is not a clean-cut reality.³⁵ Though descriptive of individuals who are generally walking in obedience to YHWH's Torah and potentially legitimate in distinguishing between the elect and the non-elect, this expression is nevertheless laced with irony (both in Isaiah and elsewhere) due to the failures of all three kings described by this phrase (David, Hezekiah, and Asa). Furthermore, the expression is not descriptive of Israel as a whole. In short, לבב שלם should not be taken as unambiguous proof for the fulfillment of eschatological heart transformation predictions within the OT; the book of Isaiah is still looking forward to the realization of these new covenant promises.

The Heart in Isaiah: Heart Transformation

Isaiah's treatment of the new covenant does not major on metaphors of heart change, as do the related passages in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Instead, it uses the terminology of "everlasting covenant" (55:1-5; 61:8-9) or "covenant of peace" (54:1-10) and emphasizes both the inclusion of the nations in Israel's future redemption and the

in his statutes and to [ל + infinitive construct] keep his commands, as this day" (emphasis added). Ironically, three chapters later (1 Kgs 11:2-4), Solomon's heart is led away (נטה) from YHWH by his wives, and the language from 8:61 is reused to characterize his failure: "And his heart was not whole toward YHWH his God (ולא היה לבבו שלם עם יהוה אלהיו), as the heart of David his father." Similarly, in 1 Chronicles 28:9 David instructs Solomon to serve YHWH with a whole heart and willing mind, since YHWH seeks (דרש) all hearts in order to determine if they will seek (דרש) him or forsake (עזב) him. David then prays in 29:19 that YHWH will give (נתן; recall the earlier discussion on Deut 29:3) Solomon a whole heart "in order to [ל + infinitive construct] keep your commandments and your testimonies and your statutes" (emphasis added). In summary, a whole heart is one devoted to YHWH which walks in obedience to him and keeps his Torah—and this kind of heart must be given by YHWH.

³⁵ Abijam walked in all the sins of his fathers and did not have a whole heart toward YHWH, as did David (1 Kgs 15:3); so much is clear. Yet Amaziah, despite doing some of what was right (ישר) before YHWH, did not have a whole heart (2 Chron 25:2). Conversely, Asa, despite not taking away the high places, had a heart which was whole toward YHWH all his days (1 Kgs 15:14; 2 Chr 15:17). In other words, a לבב שלם is *not* a binary reality like the circumcised/uncircumcised heart, or the heart of stone/flesh; it is a heart characterized by obedience to YHWH, and is depend on YHWH giving such a heart to the individual, yet it does not guarantee the type of consistent obedience one sees described in the circumcised heart/cardionomographic heart/heart of flesh. Even David himself, who is twice affirmed as having a לבב שלם (1 Kgs 11:4; 15:3), clearly had major gaps in his obedience to YHWH and his Torah.

role of YHWH's Servant in bringing about redemption and forgiveness.³⁶

Nevertheless, one crucial passage (51:7) picks up the concept of cardionomography from Deuteronomy:

שְׁמְעוּ אֵלַי יְדַעֵי צְדָק עִם תּוֹרַתִי בְּלִבָּם אֶל-	Listen to me, knowers of righteousness,
תִּירְאוּ חֲרַפַּת אָנוּשׁ וּמַגְדִּיפָתָם אֶל-תִּתְחַתּוּ	people [who have] my Torah in their heart: do not fear the reproach of man, and do not be dismayed at their reviling

This verse taps into the book's frequent usage of יָדַע described above, using the term to portray a faithful group of those who know righteousness. This group is further characterized by the parallel statement regarding a people who have "my Torah in their heart;" this statement refers back to the parallel commands in Deuteronomy 6:6 and 11:18. Coxhead, commenting on this verse, argues that it presents a clear case that "pneumato-cardionomography is not a unique prerogative of the new covenant, but it was indeed a historical reality in the lives of a minority of Israel under the old covenant."³⁷

Yet determining the referents of Isaiah's descriptions is not always straightforward due to Hebrew literature's recursive nature and how the book regularly intermingles near and far prophecies with one another; careful attention must first be given to the context and macrostructures of the book.

³⁶ For a thorough exegesis of Isaiah's treatment of the new covenant, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 489-525.

³⁷ Steven R. Coxhead, "The Cardionomographic Work of the Spirit in the Old Testament," *Westminster Theological Journal* 79 (2017): 81; cf. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15, no. 1 (1972): 19. Coxhead also refers to three verses in the Psalms (37:31; 40:9; 119:11) in order to strengthen his case. Yet, when read contextually, two of these do not provide clear support: Hebrews 10:5-10 interprets 40:9 as Messianic in nature (not to mention the fact that the verse never utilizes לב/לבב terminology), and 119:11 ultimately describes the faithful king, as defined in Deuteronomy 17; see Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms*, ed. Adele Berlin, Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica 17 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 171-5. Psalm 37:31 provides a more convincing argument, yet it must be remembered that portrayals of the righteous in Psalms and Proverbs are often idealistic (i.e., describing the ultimate Torah-follower—ultimately the king); it would therefore not be advisable to draw a definitive conclusion from this verse, but to first consider carefully how the rest of the prophetic literature describes the transformation of the heart (including pneumato-cardionomography). See also the argumentation against cardionomography within OT saints in Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 2 (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2017), 331-5.

Isaiah 49:1-55:13 describes the work of the servant of YHWH with a panel of three poems, each followed by a message of comfort to Zion; within this larger structure, 51:1-52:12 is the second message of comfort.³⁸ The literary structure of this smaller section is indicated by the use of imperatives as rhetorical markers: three in 51:1-8 (51:1, 4, 7), and five double imperatives in 51:9-52:12 (51:9, 12, 17; 52:1, 11). Thus, 51:1-8 serves as an independent, introductory paragraph to the larger section, which is also closely related to the previous chapter.³⁹ The larger context, then, is the future work of the servant of YHWH, and the immediate context is a call for YHWH's people to align themselves with his servant (50:10-11).

The paragraph is divided into three smaller strophes by the use of imperatives (vv. 1-3, 4-6, 7-8); each strophe contains an imperative encouraging listening to YHWH followed by a word of assurance and consolation.⁴⁰ Table 6 outlines the strong conceptual parallels between the three strophes: each begins with two descriptions of the addressees, delivers a short message, and ends with a word of eschatological comfort couched in new creation imagery. Yet the strophes also contain escalation; for example, the address moves from past to future to exhortation. Furthermore, the addressees move from being “pursuers” of righteousness to “knowers” of righteousness. While the first strophe could initially be read as applying to the righteous remnant within Israel, the second and third clarify that this group will include the peoples/coastlands (i.e., the Gentiles). Moreover, while YHWH's Torah goes out as a light to the peoples in strophe 2, it is found in their

³⁸ Information on the structure of this section is drawn from Peter J. Gentry, *Biblical Studies*, vol. 1 (Peterborough, ON: H&E Academic, 2020), 33-34.

³⁹ The focus on righteousness (צדק) and salvation (ישׁוּעָה) in these verses also serves to mark them out as an independent section. See also the discussion of 51:1-8, and its relation to the preceding and following verses, in Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, The New American Commentary 15B (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 387-9; cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 401-2, who affirms the paragraph's close unity with the previous chapter (especially vv. 10-11) and the actions of the servant of YHWH.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 389.

hearts in strophe 3.⁴¹

Table 6. Conceptual parallels between strophes 1-3 in Isaiah 51:1-8

<i>Strophe</i>	<i>Addressees</i>	<i>Content of Address</i>	<i>Eschatological Comfort</i>
1 (vv. 1-3)	Pursuers of righteousness (רדפי צדק); seekers of YHWH (מבקשי יהוה)	<i>Past:</i> faithfulness of YHWH to his promises to Abraham and Sarah	YHWH will once again restore Zion to be like Eden
2 (vv. 4-6)	My people (עמי); my nation (ולאומי)	<i>Future:</i> YHWH's Torah as a light to the peoples (עמים); YHWH's arm brings judgment (שפט), righteousness (צדק), and salvation (ישע) to the peoples (עמים) and coastlands (איים)	New creation imagery: passing away of old creation and its inhabitants; eternity of YHWH's salvation (ישע) and righteousness (צדק)
3 (vv. 7-8)	Knowers of righteousness (ידעי צדק); people [having] my Torah in their heart (עם תורה בלבם)	<i>Exhortation:</i> do not fear those of the old creation	Future destruction of the unrighteousness; eternity of YHWH's righteousness (צדק) and salvation (ישע)

It follows that, when Isaiah 51:7 is read carefully within its immediate context, those who have the Torah in their heart are *not* the righteous remnant of the author's time but are instead a group in the eschatological future made up of both Jews and peoples/coastlands (Gentiles).⁴² Furthermore, when read in light of the surrounding context and larger section, this group is associated with the time of the servant of

⁴¹ See a similar analysis of the progression in Gentry, *Biblical Studies*, 38; cf. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 397-8.

⁴² The inclusion of the Gentiles into the nation of Israel fits well with other passages promising the same in Isaiah (see, e.g., 2:2-5; 14:1-2; 19:18-25; 45:20-25; 49:26; 60:1-16; 66:19-21); see Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 395.

YHWH.⁴³ At some point in the future, YHWH will send his servant, and at that time, his Torah will go out to the peoples, resulting in both salvation and judgment. Those who receive salvation and righteousness from the arm of YHWH will have the Torah in their heart and will thus be “knowers of righteousness.”⁴⁴

Summary and Significance

Whereas Deuteronomy’s characterization of the moral heart emphasizes commands and potential blessings/curses, Isaiah instead focuses on negative descriptions of the heart. Furthermore, while Deuteronomy speaks recurrently about the future transformation of heart, Isaiah draws greater attention to the ongoing *need* for such transformation. In these ways, Isaiah stresses that Israel has remained stubborn of heart, refusing to obey the Torah or hear the commands found in Deuteronomy.

Moreover, Isaiah contributes significantly by highlighting the relational dimension of the moral heart—Israel’s idolatry and sinfulness are rooted in a lack of *דע* and *בין*.⁴⁵ An epistemological solution cannot fix this relational problem, since Isaiah’s preaching only serves to harden their heart further. In this way, Isaiah agrees with Deuteronomy that the external Torah of YHWH is insufficient to effect change—a radical inward transformation of Israel’s “weak” (*דני*; 1:5) heart is necessary, in which the Torah will finally enter her heart and effect obedience from the inside out.

Given its role as a covenant document, Deuteronomy speaks exclusively to the

⁴³ Childs notes connections between verses 4-6 and Isa 42:4-6, further strengthening the connection between this section and the servant of YHWH; see Childs, *Isaiah*, 402-3.

⁴⁴ It is worth noting the curiosity of the phrase *ידעי צדק*—it is more natural, in light of the OT storyline, to speak of those who “do” righteousness (e.g., Isa 64:4). Yet this phrase accords well with the emphasis on the relational dimension of the heart and obedience to YHWH throughout the book, which has its roots, as already noted, in Deuteronomy 29:3.

⁴⁵ The relationship between the heart and knowing is expressed prototypically in Psalm 95:10: *עם תעי לבב הם והם לא ידעו דרכי* (“they are a people of wandering heart, and they do not know my ways”). We have noted already that Deuteronomy first introduces the connection between the heart and knowing (29:3), as well as the need for YHWH to give a heart that “knows.” This theme will continue on into Jeremiah and Ezekiel; see below.

nation of Israel; thus, another key contribution of Isaiah concerning the moral heart is the inclusion of Gentiles within the scope of heart transformation.⁴⁶ This is taught explicitly in 51:7 but is also implied in the many other contexts where the inclusion of Gentiles is emphasized.⁴⁷

Whereas Deuteronomy focused almost exclusively on the heart of the nation as a whole, Isaiah includes several characterizations of individual hearts, both negative and positive. Where Isaiah does speak of the nation, it continues to view her “heart” as a whole, and thus a distinction is not made between the faithful and the unfaithful. With that said, it seems clear that some individuals within the nation (including Isaiah himself) did possess understanding and knowledge in order to worship YHWH.⁴⁸ A remnant exists, yet in the only verse where Isaiah speaks explicitly about heart transformation (51:7), he ties it to the eschatological time of the servant of YHWH and characterizes those who receive it as “knowers of righteousness.”

In summary, Isaiah takes much of the language of Deuteronomy regarding the moral heart and shows how the nation has persisted in willful disobedience up through the time of Isaiah. It is abundantly clear that Deuteronomy’s eschatological promises regarding the nation's transformation have not yet come true, and Isaiah once again casts them forward into the future, associating them with the time of the servant of YHWH. Even those in Isaiah who serve with a “whole” heart (e.g., Hezekiah) are anything but perfect, so while a remnant does exist, it is not clear that the promised transformation of

⁴⁶ Of course, the inclusion of Gentiles is clear as far back as YHWH’s covenant with Abraham, yet Isaiah uniquely includes the Gentiles within the scope of future heart transformation.

⁴⁷ Another passage of particular interest on this point is 52:15, where Isaiah prophesies that kings will “understand” upon seeing the suffering of the servant of YHWH. Given the loaded nature of this word within Isaiah (see above), this is close to another explicit affirmation of the inclusion of Gentiles within those who will receive a transformed heart.

⁴⁸ However, it should be noted again that, of the four positive characterizations of hearts, two relate to the future, one is a potential, and one relates to an individual (Hezekiah)—yet even the characterization of Hezekiah is not a clear binary description such as those found in the heart transformation metaphors (see above).

heart has yet come about, even within the elect. This delay in the heart transformation promises will become more explicitly clear in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 4

THE MORAL HEART IN JEREMIAH

The previous two chapters have begun to describe the moral heart in the OT, metaphors of heart transformation, and how these characterizations and metaphors are developed and recapitulated throughout the OT. In working through these topics, we have taken steps toward answering whether these realities existed for the elect under the old covenant and thus to approach the larger question of regeneration in the OT. Nevertheless, despite the ground covered so far, we have yet to encounter the OT's most devastating depictions of the corrupted heart, vivid portrayals of loyal hearts, and dramatic promises of coming heart transformation; without a doubt, these are found in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. As we turn to these final chapters, we thus begin to approach more explicit answers to this study's guiding questions.

In comparison to the 51 occurrences in Deuteronomy and 49 occurrences in Isaiah, Jeremiah uses the terminology of לב/לבב 66 times (לב = 58x; לבב = 8x). Of these instances, about a third (21x) occur in amoral contexts, often related to fear or to an individual's inner intentions and thoughts;¹ the remainder (68%) occur in moral contexts.

While also introducing significant new metaphors and descriptions of the moral heart, Jeremiah recapitulates much of the terminology found in Deuteronomy and Isaiah, including all three of Deuteronomy's heart transformation metaphors. In both his negative and positive portrayals of the heart, Jeremiah amplifies what has been seen already. Though adding and extending many elements, the book's most significant contributions are its growing emphasis on the heart of individuals and its explicit

¹ See, e.g., 4:9, 19; 19:5; 23:16, 20; 30:24; 32:35; 48:41; 49:22; 51:46.

connections between heart transformation metaphors and the new covenant. To demonstrate this, we will examine the book's negative depictions of the heart, its positive descriptions (including how the book characterizes the prophet's own heart), and how it builds on the heart transformation metaphors encountered already in Deuteronomy and Isaiah.

The Heart in Jeremiah: Negative Descriptions

More than any other prophet, Jeremiah emphasizes the deep-rooted evil and rebellion found within the human heart. In addition to three portrayals of Israel's past heart-unfaithfulness and one command regarding the heart, the prophet negatively characterizes Israel's current heart twelve times. Significantly, where the previous books have focused almost exclusively on Israel's collective heart, Jeremiah begins to address the individual evil hearts within the community.

Past

Just as Isaiah mentions the sickness of the heart in his first (and foundational) prophecy (Isa 1:5), Jeremiah refers to the moral heart in the context of his first prophecy (2:1-4:4), which sets the scene and tone for the remainder of the book.² While relating the devastating whoredom of Israel, YHWH describes how he thought she might eventually return (שוב) to him, yet she continued in her unfaithfulness, and so he divorced her (3:7-8). Yet despite seeing the punishment of YHWH on her sister, Judah went on in her sinful ways (v. 9) and refused to return to YHWH (v. 10):

וְגַם-בְּכָל-זֹאת לֹא-שָׁבָה אֵלַי בְּגֹדָה אַחֻזָּה	Yet even for all this, her treacherous sister
יְהוּדָה בְּכָל-לִבָּהּ כִּי אִם-בְּשָׁקֶר נֹאמְרֵיהָ	Judah did not return to me with all her
	heart, but falsely, declares YHWH

Timothy Edwards notes that this verse represents one of the 111 times Jeremiah uses שוב

² See Timothy Edwards, "The Heart of the Problem: The Problem of the Heart in Jeremiah," *Churchman* 132, no. 2 (2018): 150.

(significantly more than any other OT book), with the densest concentration of these occurring within the first prophecy, and functioning together to represent the seriousness of Israel’s plight.³ As Jeremiah introduces his prophecy, he paints a scenario similar to that seen previously in Isaiah 29:13—the people, while maintaining some outward signs of repentance and obedience, are completely disengaged on the level of the heart (i.e., the level of allegiance); this is, as we might say today, the “ministry context” into which Jeremiah steps.

Yet this is merely the start. Twice in the next few chapters, Jeremiah reaches back to the exodus generation as an illustration of Israel’s ongoing heart trouble, which has plagued her since the beginning of her marriage to YHWH (7:24; 11:8):

<p>וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ וְלֹא־הִטּוּ אֶת־אָזְנָם וַיִּלְכוּ בְּמַעֲצוֹת בְּשִׁרְרוֹת לִבָּם הָרַע וַיְהִיו לְאַחֹר וְלֹא לְפָנִים</p>	<p>Yet they did not listen, and they did not stretch out their ear, but they walked in their counsel—in the stubbornness of their evil heart—and they [went] backward and not forward</p>
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<p>וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ וְלֹא־הִטּוּ אֶת־אָזְנָם וַיִּלְכוּ אִישׁ בְּשִׁרְרוֹת לִבָּם הָרַע וְאָבִיא עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית־הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר־צִוִּיתִי לַעֲשׂוֹת וְלֹא עָשׂוּ</p>	<p>Yet they did not listen, and they did not stretch out their ear, but each man walked in the stubbornness of their evil heart; and all the words of this covenant came on them, which I commanded [them] to do but they did not do</p>
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Both passages develop a tight linkage between “the stubbornness of their evil heart” and a refusal to listen to and obey the voice of YHWH.⁴ In chapter 7, Jeremiah notes that, at the inception of YHWH’s covenant relationship with Israel,⁵ he commanded them not

³ Edwards, “The Heart of the Problem,” 152. Edwards describes the five steps of the prophecy, all tied together by uses of the word *שוב*: (1) Israel has *turned* from YHWH; (2) this calls into question whether YHWH will *turn* back to them in mercy; (3) they must *turn* back to YHWH with all their heart for there to be any hope; (4) their hearts are faithless so they cannot but *turn* from YHWH; (5) thus, they cannot *turn* back to YHWH unless YHWH in his grace grants them a new heart.

⁴ Jeremiah draws this phrase from Deut 29:18 (see analysis in the chapter on Deuteronomy above) and utilizes it a total of eight times (3:17; 7:24; 9:13; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17); see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 548.

⁵ Verse 23 contains the covenant formula: “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you

regarding sacrifices, but to “Obey my voice” (שמעו בקולי; vv. 22-23).⁶ Yet they did not listen to his voice (v. 24 above), but instead went on ignoring the prophets from the time they came out of Egypt “until this day” (עד היום הזה), despite YHWH “persistently” (השכם) sending his servants the prophets (v. 25).⁷ Yet despite these warnings, the people have continued in their sin, doing worse than their fathers (v. 26). Hence, they will not listen to Jeremiah either (v. 27),⁸ since “this is the nation that does not listen to the voice of YHWH its God” (זה הגוי אשר לוא שמעו בקול יהוה אלהיו; v. 28).

The context and language of 11:8 paint an identical picture. When YHWH brought Israel out of Egypt, he “persistently” (again, השכם) warned them, “and until this day” (ועד היום הזה), to “Obey my voice” (שמעו בקולי; v. 7). Yet the people refused to listen and did not do YHWH’s commands, so he brought all the curses of the covenant upon them (v. 8).⁹ Thus, in both parallel accounts relating the history of Israel’s stubborn and evil heart, the stubbornness is explicitly connected to not listening to/obeying (שמע) the voice of their covenant Lord.

Present

Jeremiah carries these same concepts and terms into the book’s descriptions of the current state of Judah’s heart. In chapter 5, after describing Judah’s idolatry (v. 19), YHWH calls to a “people [who are] foolish and [who have] no heart” (עם סכל ואין לב),

will be my people.” On the covenantal significance of this formula, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 552-3.

⁶ Of course, YHWH’s desire for obedience over sacrifice is a major theme of the prophets (1 Sam 15:22; Isa 1:10-13; 66:3; Jer 6:20; 14:12; Hos 6:6; 9:4; Amos 5:21-24; Mic 6:6-8; Mal 1:10) and psalms (Ps 40:6-8; 50:8-15; 51:18-19; 69:30-31).

⁷ Jeremiah often uses the Hiphil form of שכם to communicate the urgency with which YHWH sent prophets to warn his people (see 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; cf. 2 Chron 36:15).

⁸ Note here the connection to Isaiah’s commission in Isaiah 6, described in the last chapter; in both cases, the ineffectiveness of the prophet’s ministry is due to the heart of his hearers.

⁹ It is important to note a subtle change from 7:24 to 11:8; in 7:24 the people are spoken of as a whole (“they walked . . .”), yet in 11:8 the prophet adds in the disobedience of *every individual* (“each man [איש] walked . . .”). This subtle shift to speaking of not just the evil heart of the whole, but also of every individual, is a unique layer added in by Jeremiah, as will become more evident below.

who have eyes but do not see, and ears but do not hear (v. 21).¹⁰ Verse 23 provides the reason for this deficiency in the people:

וְלֵעָם הַזֶּה הָיָה לֵב סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרָה סָרוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ
But this people have a stubborn and
rebellious heart; they have turned [aside]
and walked [away]

Such descriptions of the heart occur multiple times in Jeremiah. In five places (in addition to 7:24 and 11:8 above, describing the past), he employs the bound phrase לב שררות (“stubbornness of heart”) to characterize the people of his day,¹¹ and in every case, it is tied directly to not listening to YHWH or his Torah.¹² In four cases (9:12-13; 13:10; 16:11-12; 23:17) the people walk (הלך) after/in the stubbornness of their heart, while in one case they do (עשה) according to it. Three times the phrase is related to walking (הלך) after idols (9:12-13; 13:10; 16:11-12),¹³ and twice it is tied to forsaking (עזב) or not keeping (שמר) the Torah (9:12-13; 16:11-12). In 9:12-13, the people do as their fathers taught them, yet in 16:11-12, they do worse than their fathers. Moreover, while this characterization describes Judah as a whole in 9:12-13 and 13:10, it relates to each individual (איש) in 16:11-12 and 18:12. In short, Jeremiah consistently correlates a stubborn/evil heart with idolatry (cf. Isaiah) and not listening to YHWH/his Torah (cf.

¹⁰ Note again the strong conceptual connections with Isaiah regarding ineffective eyes/ears. The metaphor of “no heart” is used repeatedly in Proverbs to characterize the fool as one who is lacking moral sense, and who ignores all sound warnings (see 6:32; 7:7; 9:4, 16; 10:13, 21; 11:12; 12:11; 15:21; 17:16, 18; 24:13). This is the same problem so evident in Israel/Judah—they have “no heart,” and thus lack the knowledge and understanding (cf. the discussion on Isaiah above, and the recapitulations of these same themes in Jeremiah below) to listen to the voice of YHWH. What the fool displays on an individual scale, Israel/Judah display on a national scale.

¹¹ See Jer 9:12-13; 13:10; 16:11-12; 18:12; 23:17. In two instances (16:11-12; 18:12) he adds the adjective רע (“evil”) to describe the heart, as in 7:24 and 11:8 above.

¹² The people do not hear (שמע) YHWH’s voice or walk (הלך) in it (9:12-13). They refuse (מאן) to hear (שמע) his words (13:10). They walk (הלך) after their hearts in order not to hear (שמע) YHWH (16:11-12). When a nation hears (שמע) the warnings of YHWH, he relents of disaster (18:5-11), yet Judah calls this vain and walks (הלך) in her own plans (18:12). Finally, the false prophets tell those who despise (נאץ) YHWH’s word that “peace will be to you” (23:17). Particularly significant is how 23:17 places “the despiser of the word of YHWH” (למנאצי דבר יהוה) in parallel with “everyone walking in the stubbornness of his heart” (וכל הלך בשררות לבו); the ל preposition governs both participles, which are connected by the conjunctive *waw*, thus cementing the relationship between the two concepts.

¹³ In 13:10 and 16:11-12, this walking after idols is further described as serving (עבד) and worshipping (חזה) them.

Deuteronomy), and states that this has been true, not only of Israel/Judah as a whole, but of every *individual* from the time of the “fathers” (i.e., the exodus) until now.¹⁴

The most vivid descriptions of Judah’s heart sickness arise in 17:1-10.

Beginning in the first verse, Jeremiah employs imagery from Exodus and Deuteronomy to demonstrate the horror of Israel’s rebellion:

חַטָּאת יְהוּדָה כְּתוּבָה בְּעֵט בְּרִזָּל בְּצַפְרֵן שָׁמַיִר חֲרוּשָׁה עַל-לִוַח לְבָבָם וּלְקַרְנֹת מִזְבְּחֹתֵיכֶם	The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of her heart and on the horns of your altars
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The use of כתב (“write”) with לוּחַ (“tablet”) is an unmistakable reference to the giving of the Torah (specifically, the Ten Words), where the narratives repeatedly emphasize that YHWH “wrote” the Words on “tablets” of stone.¹⁵ As we have already seen, though the Torah was initially written on stone, Israel was commanded at the time to put it on her heart (Deut 6:6; 11:18; 32:46); yet centuries later, a terrible irony has come about: instead of writing YHWH’s Torah on her heart, she has written her sin with a “pen of iron” and “point of diamond” upon her heart—in effect, the polar opposite of cardiomography. Here the heart is once again linked to whether or not one keeps the Torah.

Verses 5-8 next set up a contrast between two men: the one who trusts in man (vv. 5-6) and the one who trusts in YHWH (vv. 7-8). The one who trusts in man is further described as one whose heart turns (סור) from YHWH. Verses 9-10 then provide what is perhaps the most well-known description of the heart in the OT:

עֵקֵב הַלֵּב מִכֹּל וְאָנֵשׁ הוּא מִי יִדְעֶנּוּ The heart is more deceitful than anything,

¹⁴ Even the kings of Israel have sick hearts; for example, Shallum son of Josiah “does not have eyes or a heart” except for unjust gain, shedding innocent blood, violence, and oppression (22:17). Of course, we have already seen that some individuals’ hearts were faithful to YHWH (at least to some extent; more on this below); Jeremiah is using hyperbole to describe the general character of the people. The point here is that these criticisms of Israel and Judah are not simply blanket statements describing the *collective* “heart” of the nation—they describe the hearts of *individuals* within the nation.

¹⁵ This language is prevalent both in the initial account (Exod 24:12; 31:18; 32:15-16; 34:1, 28) and in the re-telling of the account (Deut 4:13; 5:22; 9:9-11; 10:1-5).

<p>אֲנִי יְהוָה חֹקֵר לֵב בַּחֲזֹן כְּלִיּוֹת וְלִתְתָּ לְאִישׁ כְּדַרְכּוֹ כַּפְרֵי מַעַלְלָיו</p>	<p>and it is incurable;¹⁶ who can know it? I, YHWH, am a searcher of the heart and a tester of the kidneys [i.e., mind], to give to each man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds</p>
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Though this passage (especially v. 9) is often repeated, its significance and concordance with the remainder of the OT should now be evident. The human heart—the center of moral allegiance and obedience—is more deceitful than anything else, to the point of being, from a human perspective, utterly incurable and incomprehensible. Yet YHWH alone can comprehend what is incomprehensible—and, as we will see below, he alone can cure what is incurable. Jeremiah here again emphasizes that YHWH searches the heart of the *individual*, giving to each man (אִישׁ) according to his ways.¹⁷

Commands

Before turning to Jeremiah’s positive descriptions of the heart, we note briefly one command given in the context of Judah’s heart trouble.¹⁸ In 4:14, within the context of besiegers coming to judge Judah for her “ways and deeds” (v.18), YHWH commands, “Wash your heart from evil, Jerusalem, that you might be saved” (כבסי מרעה לבך ירושלם) (למען תושע). Significantly, כבס is used regularly throughout the Pentateuch to describe ritual washing to purify oneself from ceremonial uncleanness;¹⁹ hence, YHWH instructs Jerusalem that their heart is ceremonially impure and in need of cleansing if they are to

¹⁶ Jeremiah also uses אָנֹשׁ in 15:18 and 30:12 to describe an “incurable” wound (in 15:18 it “refuses” [מֵאֵן] to be healed), thus suggesting this as a better translation than something like “desperately wicked” (cf. CSB; contra ESV).

¹⁷ Note also the connection again between the *character* of one’s heart and what one *does*.

¹⁸ One other command associated with the heart is in 31:21, where YHWH instructs Israel to “set to your heart” (i.e., consider; שְׁתִּי לִבְךָ) the way by which they went into exile, that they might know how to return. This command is closer to utilizing the heart within an idiomatic saying, though it does tap into the terminology used much more frequently by Isaiah (see above). Cf. 12:11, where YHWH mourns that the whole land is desolate, yet no one sets (שִׁים) it to heart. This expression, which is a favorite of Isaiah’s to describe the heart trouble of Israel, is used only minimally by Jeremiah.

¹⁹ See Exod 19:10, 14; Lev 6:27; 11:25, 28, 40; 13:6, 34, 54-56, 58; 14:8-9, 47; 15:5-8, 10-11, 13, 17, 21-22, 27; 16:26, 28; 17:15-16; Num 8:21; 19:7-8, 10, 19, 21; 31:24.

be saved.²⁰

The Heart in Jeremiah: Positive Descriptions

Given the number of verses in Jeremiah describing the heart negatively, it is not surprising—and yet deeply revealing—that the book offers no positive descriptions of Israel’s heart in the past or present. Nevertheless, two positive elements are present: YHWH gives several promises regarding the future character of Judah’s heart, and Jeremiah himself describes his own heart in remarkably different terms.

Future

In the future, both the covenant people as a whole and their leaders will be transformed.²¹ YHWH draws attention to both of these realities within the message found in Jeremiah 3:11-18. After calling Jeremiah to speak to Israel, YHWH assures them that if they return, acknowledge their guilt and idolatry, and admit that they have not listened to his voice (vv. 12-13), he will bring them again to Zion (v. 14). At that time, YHWH will give them shepherds “like my heart” (כלבי) , who will feed them “knowledge and understanding” (דעה והשכיל; v. 15).²² At that time, the ark of the covenant of YHWH will not be missed by the people (v. 16) since, as we will see below, the covenant document will be written instead on the people’s hearts.²³ Furthermore,

²⁰ It is interesting to note that though commands—at least those related to heart—are very frequent in Deuteronomy, they are few and far between in the prophets, having been replaced by negative descriptions of the heart. This change is instructive in itself, as it reveals that the people are unable to obey such commands (note again the emphasis on Israel/Judah not hearing YHWH); only YHWH will be able to produce the heart-obedience that hitherto has been impossible.

²¹ The metaphors of heart transformation in the next section could also be listed in this category as further promises regarding the future character of Israel and Judah’s heart; however, they will be addressed in the following section in order to afford special attention to these metaphors.

²² Note again the conceptual links with Isaiah, which emphasized the people’s need to know (ידע) and understand (בין), and connected this intimately to their heart. Though this passage uses the cognate noun for שכל instead of בין, we have already seen in Isa 44:18-20 how the two words can be used interchangeably.

²³ See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 551-2.

<p>בְּעֵת הַהִיא יִקְרְאוּ לִירוּשָׁלַם כִּסֵּא יְהוָה וְנִקְווּ אֵלֶיהָ כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם לְשֵׁם יְהוָה לִירוּשָׁלַם וְלֹא־יֵלְכוּ עוֹד אַחֲרֵי שְׁרָרוֹת לְבָם הָרָע</p>	<p>At that time, they will call Jerusalem “throne of YHWH,” and all the nations will gather to it—to the name of YHWH, to Jerusalem. And they will never again walk after the stubbornness of their evil heart</p>
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Here YHWH utilizes the same terminology used frequently throughout the book to promise that the hearts of the people will not always be stubborn and evil. Positively—and remarkably—this future healing of the stubborn and evil heart will include not only Israel and Judah, but “all the nations” as well.²⁴ Negatively, we see that Israel and Judah have become just like the surrounding nations in walking after the stubbornness of their evil heart. Yet at that time, all nations—including Israel and Judah—will be healed.

Jeremiah’s Heart

In describing Jeremiah’s negative characterization of Israel and Judah’s heart, we noted that the prophet often emphasizes a correlation between their stubborn/evil heart and their rejection of YHWH’s word/voice. Yet when depicting his own heart—which the prophet does no less than seven times—Jeremiah presents a remarkably different picture.

The first (8:18) and last (23:9) times Jeremiah describes his heart, he reveals its emotions due to the flagrant sins of YHWH’s people. In 8:18, after outlining the judgment coming upon the people due to their idolatry, he declares, “My joy is gone; grief is on me; my heart is sick within me [עלי לבי דוי].”²⁵ Instead of having a heart that is stubborn and unashamed in the face of sin (cf. 8:12), Jeremiah has a heart that is sickened

²⁴ Cf. the previous chapter, where Isa 51:7 likewise included the Gentiles in future heart transformation.

²⁵ The term *דוי* was already encountered above in Isaiah 1:5, describing how the heart of Israel is weak and failing due to YHWH’s punishment for her sin. I noted then that the term is also used of the heart in Lam 1:22, where it characterizes a heart weighed down and failing as a result of grief over punishment due to sin. The usage in Jer 8:18 clearly correlates with the latter, since both are used to describe one who is burdened and failing due to a *repentant* grief over sin.

by rebellion. Similarly, in 23:9, Jeremiah describes his reaction to the ungodly prophets so pervasive during his time: “my heart is broken within me [נִשְׁבַּר לְבִי בְקִרְבִּי],” all his bones shake, and he is as disoriented as a drunk, “because of YHWH and because of his holy words [מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה וּמִפְּנֵי דְבַרֵי קֹדֶשׁ].”²⁶ Here is the first hint of a remarkable contrast: while the heart of Judah/Israel despises the words/voice of YHWH, Jeremiah’s heart is broken by them.

The prophet amplifies this contrast dramatically in 15:16 and 20:9. In 15:15-18, Jeremiah languishes under the reproach and vengeance of his adversaries, wondering if YHWH will remain devoted to him. As he pleads with YHWH for help, he declares:

<p>גִּמְצָאוֹ דְבַרְיָךְ וְאֶכְלָם וַיְהִי דְבַרְיָךְ לִי לְשֹׁן וְלִשְׂמֹחַת לְבָבִי כִּי־נִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עָלַי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת</p>	<p>Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words were to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for [I am] called [by] your name, YHWH, God of hosts</p>
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YHWH answers Jeremiah’s plea by reassuring him that if he continues to declare what is precious (יקר), he will be as YHWH’s mouth, and YHWH will deliver him (vv. 19-21).

Likewise, in chapter 20, Jeremiah declares a message of judgment on Pashhur the priest and the city of Jerusalem, after being beaten and placed in the stocks (vv. 1-6).

Jeremiah’s resolve flags once again, and the word of YHWH becomes a reproach (חרפה) and derision (קלס) to him all day (vv. 7-8). Yet even in this weak state, as Jeremiah contemplates no longer speaking in the name of YHWH, he states the impossibility of this decision: “yet it [YHWH’s word] is in my heart as a burning fire, restrained in my bones, and I am weary of containing it, and I cannot” (וַיְהִי בְלִבִּי כְאֵשׁ בְּעֵרַת עֵצֵר בְּעֵצְמָתִי) (v. 9). In short, the heart of Jeremiah has an entirely different relationship to the word of YHWH—it is to him a compelling, unavoidable delight.

These dramatic contrasts explain why Jeremiah invites YHWH on three

²⁶ In a three member bound-phrase, where the final member is a pronominal suffix, context determines to which element the suffix belongs. In this case, the suffix clearly belongs to the word in *status constructus*. See Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 224.

occasions to test and judge his heart. In both 11:20 and 20:12, Jeremiah calls on YHWH, the one who “sees” (ראה; 20:12) and “tests” (בהן; 11:20) the kidneys (כליה) and heart (לב), to pour out his vengeance on Jeremiah’s oppressors, since he has committed his cause to YHWH. Even more personally, in 12:1-4, Jeremiah asks YHWH why the wicked prosper even when “you are near in their mouth but far from their kidneys [כליה];”²⁷ but, in contrast, “you, YHWH, know me; you are seeing me; and you test my heart toward you [ואתה יהוה ידעתני תראני ובהנת לבי אתך].” Jeremiah recognizes that the heart of every person is “toward” (את) YHWH, whether for good or for evil, and is confident that what YHWH sees, knows, and tests within Jeremiah’s heart pleases him.²⁸ Given the devastating descriptions of Judah’s heart presented elsewhere in the book, these self-descriptions from Jeremiah are arresting and suggest that the character of his heart is fundamentally different. Before drawing any definitive conclusions, however, we must first examine how the prophet recapitulates the heart transformation metaphors used in Deuteronomy and Isaiah.

The Heart in Jeremiah: Heart Transformation

Whereas Isaiah contains only one explicit reference to heart transformation (51:7), Jeremiah picks up all three of Deuteronomy’s metaphors, bringing them forward into his day. Most significant for our purposes is how Deuteronomy’s promises of future heart transformation remain unfulfilled in Jeremiah’s time.

²⁷ Note how in 11:20, 20:12, and 12:2-3, כליה and לב are used in parallel to describe the inner character of a person. A distinction should not be made between these terms, at least in these passages. Note also the similarity between 12:1-4, Isaiah 29:13, and the two passages in Deuteronomy (6:6-9; 11:18-23) which highlight the internal/external problem of Israel’s heart.

²⁸ Cf. 1 Kgs 8:37-40 (cf. 2 Chr 6:30; 32:31) for a similar description of how YHWH knows (ידע) the heart of “all the sons of man” (כל בני האדם).

Circumcision of Heart

Jeremiah refers to an uncircumcised heart in two places (4:4; 9:24-25),²⁹ both of which indicate that Israel/Judah have not yet received the heart circumcision promised in Deuteronomy 30:6. In 4:1-2, YHWH reaches back to his covenant with Abraham, promising that if Israel will be faithful to YHWH, blessing will flow from them to the nations.³⁰ Verses 3-4 then describe what this faithfulness should look like: the people should break up their fallow ground and not sow among thorns,³¹ and should “Circumcise yourselves to YHWH and remove the foreskin of your [plural] heart [המלו ליהוה והסרו] [ערו ליהוה לבבכם].”³² The second half of verse 4 describes that the uncircumcised heart is the cause of the “evil of your deeds [רע מעלליכם],” which are bringing the wrath of YHWH

²⁹ Jeremiah also refers to “uncircumcised ears [עוּרְלָה אָזְנוֹם]” in 6:10, further describing them as making the people “unable to listen [קָשָׁב],” and causing the word of YHWH to be an object of scorn and disgust (“no pleasure”). We have already seen how both Isaiah and Jeremiah connect the ears and the heart, as well as how the stubborn and rebellious heart despises the word of YHWH; thus, this passage depicts the same reality using related terms—Israel’s ongoing lack of internal circumcision causes them to reject the commands of YHWH. See John D. Meade, “Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart: The Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Stephen J. Wellum (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 139n19.

³⁰ See the discussion of this passage in Meade, “Circumcision of Flesh,” 139-40.

³¹ The language of breaking up fallow ground is a reference to Hosea 10:12, and is an agricultural metaphor for covenant infidelity; see Werner E. Lemke, “Circumcision of the Heart: The Journey of a Biblical Metaphor,” in *A God so Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 303.

³² The Niphal form of מוּל leaves open the question of whether the command is passive (“be circumcised [by YHWH]”) or reflexive (“circumcise yourselves”), though the Hiphil imperative (וְהִסְרוּ) in the parallel line lends strong support to the reflexive; see the extended discussion in Kyle B. Wells, *Grace and Agency in Paul and Second Temple Judaism: Interpreting the Transformation of the Heart*, ed. David P. Moessner and Margaret M. Mitchell, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 157 (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2015), 45-48. Wells argues that, even if taken as a passive, the imperative would nevertheless insinuate that the people are competent to rectify their situation. He goes on to note (pp. 51-52) that Jeremiah seems to lose hope in the people’s ability to overcome their heart troubles, and thus begins to speak in terms of a heart transplant (24:5-7; see below). In comparing Jeremiah’s portrayal to Deuteronomy’s, he asserts that in both, “the interplay between divine and human action converges in the heart . . . Human agency is thereby grounded in divine agency.” I agree overall with Wells’ proposal, yet affirm that this tension between human inability and divine ability is hardwired into the entire discussion of heart transformation, including in Deuteronomy, where YHWH commands the people to circumcise their own hearts (10:16), and then later promises that he will accomplish what they cannot (30:6). Given Jeremiah’s characterization of the heart throughout the book, I would suggest that he never believed Israel was capable of rectifying her own heart trouble. Instead, Jeremiah plays on the same tension as that found in Deuteronomy, wherein YHWH both commands obedience and promises that same obedience. One thinks of the famous quote from Augustine: “Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt.” Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. J. G. Pilkington (New York: Liverwright Publishing Corporation, 1943), 249.

upon his people. If the heart would only be circumcised, the people would turn from their evil (v. 4) and idolatry (v. 1).

Jeremiah returns to this metaphor in 9:24-25, declaring in an oracle that the days are coming when YHWH will “punish all who are circumcised with the foreskin [ופקדתי על כל מול בערלה]:”³³ Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, and Moab, as well as all the desert-dwellers who cut off the corners of their hair. YHWH then provides the reason for his punishment: “for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart [כי כל הגוים ערלים וכל בית ישראל ערלי לב].” In other words, just as these nations practice incomplete circumcision (“circumcision with the foreskin”), so also the circumcision of Israel is incomplete; while her males may be circumcised externally, her heart remains uncircumcised.³⁴

Though these two verses provide no specific characterization of the uncircumcised heart, the preceding verses are telling. Earlier in the chapter, YHWH describes Israel’s idolatry and hard-hearted rebellion against his Torah (9:12-13), concepts which we have already seen correlated with the uncircumcised heart. Furthermore, the well-known verses which immediately precede (vv. 22-23) call on “him who boasts” to boast, not in wisdom, might, or riches, but in “understanding and knowing me [השכל וידע אותי], that I [am] YHWH, doing steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.” We have seen how Jeremiah and Isaiah both portray an inability to know (ידע) and understand (שכל/בין) YHWH as the root of Israel’s unfaithfulness;³⁵ this passage brings this concept into the conceptual orbit of the uncircumcised heart. In short,

³³ Meade presents a compelling case for translating מול בערלה as “circumcised *with the foreskin*,” rather than “circumcised *according to the flesh*” (ESV), on the basis of the grammar of the phrase and archeological evidence regarding the practice of incomplete circumcision in the ancient near East; see Meade, “Circumcision of Flesh,” 140-1.

³⁴ Meade, “Circumcision of Flesh,” 141.

³⁵ In addition to those passages already mentioned in this chapter and the previous, see Jer 2:8; 4:22; 5:4-5; 8:7; 9:2, 5; 24:7.

then, while Jeremiah does not use the terminology of heart circumcision to point forward to future renewal, he employs the metaphor to indicate that the renewal promised in Deuteronomy has not yet been fulfilled.

Cardionomography

Turning next to the metaphor of cardionomography in Jeremiah, we encounter a passage (31:31-34) with significant importance for the questions of this study, yet which also generates sharp interpretive disagreements. Though this passage spawns many questions, our discussion will be limited to points germane to this study: what soteriological realities are described by this metaphor, and are they exclusive to the new covenant?³⁶

We have seen how, in 17:1, Jeremiah presents the antithesis to cardionomography: instead of writing the Torah on her heart as she was instructed to (Deut 6:6; 11:18; 32:46), Israel has written her sin on her heart.³⁷ In 31:31-34, Jeremiah describes “days coming” when YHWH will overturn this reality through a new covenant (vv. 33-34):

כי זאת הברית אשר אכרת את־
בית ישראל אחרי הימים ההם נאם־יהוה נתתי
את־תורת־י בקרבם ועל־לבם אכתבנה והייתי
להם לאלהים והמה יהיו־לי לעם
ולא ילמדו עוד איש את־רעהו
ואיש את־אחיו לאמר דעו את־יהוה כי־כולם
ידעו אותי למקטנם ועד־גדולם נאם־יהוה כי
אסלח לעונם ולחטאתם לא אזכר עוד

“For this [is] the covenant which I will cut with the house of Israel after those days,” declares YHWH. “I will place my Torah within them, and I will write it on their heart, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. And no longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know YHWH,’ for all of them will know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares YHWH, “for I will forgive their iniquities, and I will never again remember their sins.”

³⁶ For a thorough discussion of Jer 31:31-34 and the surrounding context, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 535-66.

³⁷ Cf. Joachim J. Krause, “‘Writing on the Heart’ in Jeremiah 31:31-34 in Light of Recent Insights into the Oral-Written Interface and Scribal Education in Ancient Israel,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 132, no. 2 (2020): 241-2.

This is the only passage in the OT where the term “new covenant” is used (v. 31) and is also the first time that a heart transformation metaphor is tied explicitly to the new covenant YHWH will make with his people.³⁸

We begin by addressing the soteriological realities attached to this metaphor. To answer the question of *how* cardionomography is described in this passage, one must read verses 33-34 together: verse 33 describes the *nature* of the new covenant in terms of writing the Torah on the heart, while verse 34 portrays the *effect* (“all of them will know me”) and the *basis* (“I will forgive their iniquities”) of this cardionomography.³⁹ In other words, to have the Torah written on one’s heart is to know (ידע) YHWH.⁴⁰

Our study has shown repeatedly how deeply the unfaithful heart is related to not knowing (ידע) and understanding (שכל/בין) YHWH—i.e., not acknowledging him as covenant Lord or obeying his Torah. Moses declared that YHWH had not yet given Israel a heart to know him (Deut 29:3), Isaiah’s entire mission was predicated on the fact that Israel did not know or understand (Isa 1:3; 6:10; etc.), and the people of Jeremiah’s day know only evil (e.g., 4:22; 5:4-5; 8:7; 9:2, 5). Furthermore, we have already seen how the

³⁸ In the previous chapter, we saw in Isa 51:7 the concept of cardionomography tied deeply to the coming age of YHWH’s servant, which is also situated in the midst of Isaiah’s oracles regarding the everlasting covenant; yet Jeremiah 31 makes this correlation explicit. Incredibly, *the prophet equates the new covenant with cardionomography* (“*this [is] the covenant I will cut . . . I will place my Torah within them, and I will write it on their heart . . .*” [emphasis added]). Thus, unless one argues for the new covenant simply being a republishing of the old, it is counterintuitive to argue from this text that cardionomography—at least as it is described here—could have existed under the old covenant; more on this below.

³⁹ Verses 33 and 34 are joined by a simple conjunctive *waw*, but they are placed within a larger paragraph (vv. 31-34) in Hebrew and thus should be read together. Of these verses, verse 31 provides the *announcement* of the new covenant and its parties, verse 32 describes what the covenant *will not* be like (i.e., “the covenant with their fathers”—the Mosaic covenant), verse 33 describes what the covenant *will* be like (the Torah on the heart), and verse 34 describes its *effect* and *basis*. On this point, see Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 3 (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2017), 110-11, who argues that this intimate covenantal knowledge of YHWH is possible only because Israel’s sins have first been forgiven.

⁴⁰ In a recent article, Kraus argues on the basis of scribal education in ancient Israel that to have the Torah written on one’s heart is essentially a metaphorical idiom for learning a text by heart; see Kraus, “Writing on the Heart,” 244. While Kraus’ argument is interesting, he does not appear to take into account two features. First, YHWH himself claims to be the one to do this “writing,” but this makes little sense given Kraus’ interpretation. Second, this position does not properly connect verses 33-34 with the larger prophetic significance (seen already in Isa and Jer) behind knowing YHWH.

concept of cardiomography is tied to living in obedience to Torah (cf. chapter on Deut) and being a “knower of righteousness” (Isa 51:7). In Jeremiah 31:33-34, these two concepts converge beautifully, revealing that YHWH’s solution to Israel’s lack of heart-knowledge (and accompanying disobedience) will be to write his Torah on their hearts. Instead of teaching evil (Jer 2:33; 9:4, 13), the people will not even need to teach each other to know YHWH since they will all know him. Thus, the solution of the new covenant perfectly matches the problem with the old covenant (v. 32)—it will be able to effect the obedience it enjoins.⁴¹

Having determined that cardiomography in Jeremiah 31 refers to knowing YHWH (i.e., what we might define as *covenantal knowledge leading to obedience*), we must now address whether the passage presents cardiomography as exclusive to the new covenant. A cursory reading of the passage would seem to argue in the affirmative, given the future-oriented phrases and imperfect verbs;⁴² this would line up with what we have already seen regarding both Deuteronomy and Isaiah casting their visions for heart transformation into the eschatological future. Nevertheless, several covenant theologians argue for the reality of cardiomography within the elect of Jeremiah’s time.⁴³ Often

⁴¹ On this point, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 551. See also the lucid argumentation in Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 3, 108-110. Niehaus helpfully correlates Jeremiah 31 with Hebrews 8 and Romans 8, demonstrating that the fault with the old covenant was that “it could not impart the power to live up to it.”

⁴² Two phrases look forward to the future: “days are coming [ימים באים; v. 31],” and “after those [i.e., the days when Israel broke the covenant made with the fathers] days [אחרי הימים ההם; v. 33].” Verses 31-34 also contain ten imperfect verbs.

⁴³ For example, Kaiser argues that, given the centrality of the law for both the old and new covenants, the fact that Moses urges the placement of the law upon the heart of the believer, and the claim of some righteous men that the law was upon their heart (Ps 37:31; 40:8), “the difference [between the two covenants] seems to be a relative one only;” Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15, no. 1 (1972): 19. Likewise, Dumbrell argues that the law within the heart is an “assumed prerequisite for individual godly experience” in the OT; William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 100. Similarly, in his thorough and illuminating article on cardiomography, Coxhead argues that Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 should be read together, thus correlating the concepts of cardiomography and the giving of the Spirit, as well as equating these with the circumcision of heart. On these points I agree heartily. Coxhead goes on to argue that cardiomography was present for the elect under the old covenant (cf. the discussion of Isa 51:7 above), and therefore draws a thoroughly logical conclusion: if the Torah is written on the heart of the elect in the old covenant, then they must have also possessed the same outpouring of the indwelling Spirit, and thus the same enablement to keep the Torah.

this position is predicated on the assertion that the “new” covenant is actually a “renewal” covenant; hence, OT saints participate in the blessings of the “renewed/new” covenant since both covenants are one and the same.⁴⁴ From this perspective, even the quantifier that “all of them will know me” is not representative of the inaugurated new covenant community, but simply reflects an “idyllic, eschatological portrait of the redeemed community.”⁴⁵ In other words, since a covenant perspective sees the change from old to

He finds additional evidence for this in passages which refer to old covenant saints obeying the law (Gen 22:15-18; 26:45; 1 Kgs 14:8; Ps 18:21-25; 119:11, 30-32, 44, 51, 56, 67, 69, 102, 112, 129, 153, 157, 167-168). Yet this poses a problem which Coxhead acknowledges: in what way is the pouring out of the Spirit under the new covenant “new,” if these realities already existed under the old covenant? He responds by affirming that the Spirit “ramps up” in the new covenant, essentially ensuring larger numbers of believers, since his cardiomographic work is less “limited;” see the discussion in Steven R. Coxhead, “The Cardiomographic Work of the Spirit in the Old Testament,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 79 (2017): 78-91. I will engage with this compelling argument in more detail within the conclusion, yet here I simply raise a few questions: does this schema make sense of the NT’s portrayal of the newness of the age of the Spirit? Just because a believer under the old covenant was obedient to the Torah, does this necessarily mean that they experienced the fullness of the promised cardiomography/circumcision of heart? In other words—was the obedience of believers under the old covenant qualitatively and quantitatively the same as that of believers under the new covenant? More on these questions later.

⁴⁴ See Kaiser, “The Old Promise,” 22-23, who quotes from Jacob Jocz, *The Covenant: A Theology of Human Destiny* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 244: “The Old Testament saints already participate in the New Age in anticipation even though in time they still belong to the old order . . . The ‘new’ is only different from the old in the sense of completion.” Cf. John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 945-6. For vigorous argumentation against the concept of the “new” covenant being a “renewal” covenant, see Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 3, 34-40, 106-11.

⁴⁵ Michael G. McKelvey, “The New Covenant as Promised in the Major Prophets,” in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 197-8. Locatell pushes this argument one step further, arguing that credobaptists have misinterpreted the phrase “all of them, from the least of them to the greatest” to mean all without *exception*, when it should in fact be understood as all without *distinction*. He points to five other uses of this phrase in Jeremiah (5:4-5; 6:13; 8:10; 9:2-5; 16:6), each of which describes the apostate Mosaic Covenant community; in none of these groups does קטן + גדול constitute a group for which “its predicate was the necessary condition of membership.” Thus, when interpreting this phrase contextually, the contrast between old and new covenants is between “present pervasive lack of knowledge of the Lord” and “future pervasive presence of knowledge of the Lord;” it describes a community about which something is “pervasively, though not exhaustively, true;” see Christian Locatell, “Jeremiah 31:34, New Covenant Membership, and Baptism,” *Scriptura* 114, no. 1 (2015): 1–14. Locatell’s argument is illuminating and compelling, and perhaps exposes an overdependence from credobaptists on a particular interpretation of Jeremiah 31:34; certainly, if one’s entire ecclesiology and view of baptism rests on this verse, one would have an impoverished ecclesiology indeed! I agree with Locatell that this verse emphasizes all without distinction, yet one has to ask whether this necessarily supports a paedobaptist interpretation. It does not follow that, because this phrase refers to groups including apostates earlier in the book, it must also refer to a mixed community in this passage. If Jeremiah’s use of the phrase is intended to express the *diversity* of those of whom this is true, it does not necessarily mean the community contains the apostate; such comparisons between similar uses are illuminating, but not determinative. Instead, one must look to other new covenant/heart transformation passages in order to understand further what is true of the new covenant community. Perhaps a fruitful comparison on this point would be Joel 2:28-29, where the accent again is on the outpouring of the Spirit on all without *distinction* (young/old, men/women, slave/free); yet clearly, only those who are united with Christ receive the gift of his indwelling Spirit. Moreover, the statement about all knowing YHWH is the ground (כי) for asserting

new covenant as only *relative* and *quantitative* (i.e., a larger *proportion* of believers to unbelievers in the new covenant), it has no problem with arguing for the reality of cardionomography within the elect under the old covenant.

These points bring us to the crux of answering the questions posed within this thesis, and thus I will delay a full discussion until the concluding chapter. At this stage, we simply note that Jeremiah 31:31-34 aligns its presentation of cardionomography with what we have already seen in Deuteronomy and Isaiah regarding obedience and saving knowledge of YHWH—as well as what will be seen soon in Ezekiel regarding the new heart and the giving of the Spirit. As the various metaphors of heart transformation begin to converge in Jeremiah, it is becoming more evident that one’s interpretation of whether these exist for the elect under the old covenant is tied deeply, not only to how one interprets these specific passages, but also to one’s ecclesiology and pneumatology.

YHWH as Giver of an Obedient Heart

Finally, Jeremiah twice repeats Deuteronomy’s metaphor of YHWH giving an obedient heart (24:7; 32:39-41). Both passages tie the metaphor to the covenant formula (and hence to the new covenant), and both look forward to a future fulfillment of the Deuteronomic promise. The first comes after Nebuchadnezzar takes Jeconiah into exile, as YHWH describes his plans for the exiles. Not only will YHWH bring the people out of Babylon (24:6), but he will also bring Babylon out of the people (24:7):⁴⁶

וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם לֵב לְדַעַת אֶתִּי כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם וְאֲנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים כִּי יָשׁוּבוּ אֵלַי	And I will give to them a heart to know me, that I am YHWH, and they will be my people, and I will be their God, for they
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that no one will need to teach his neighbor/brother. Covenant theologians often use this as proof that Jeremiah 31 is fulfilled only in the eschaton, since clearly there remains a need for teaching and preaching today (see, e.g., McKelvey, “The New Covenant,” 197-8). Yet given our growing perspective on what it means to “know” (דע) YHWH in the prophets, this passage clearly does not refer to teaching/preaching—it refers to a salvific/covenantal knowing. Knowing is, as we have seen repeatedly, a binary reality—either one knows YHWH (savingly), or does not. Thus, the covenant argument against this passage does not take into account the larger prophetic portrait of what it means to know YHWH.

⁴⁶ I draw this phrase from Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 492.

בְּכָל-לִבָּם will return to me with all their heart

The correlations between this passage and Jeremiah 31 are clear—both utilize the covenant formula, and both describe YHWH acting on the heart of his people so that they might “know” him.⁴⁷ Moreover, the passage correlates YHWH giving a heart with the people returning (שוב) with all their heart; we have already seen these concepts connected to the circumcision of heart in Deuteronomy 30. Thus, Jeremiah 24:7 portrays cardionomography, heart circumcision, and YHWH giving a heart as the same event.

Jeremiah 32:39-41 is a parallel passage to 24:7, drawing together many of the same themes. Once again, Jeremiah first describes the people being taken out of Babylon (v. 37) before Babylon will be taken out of the people (vv. 38-41). After employing the covenant formula again (v. 38), YHWH promises (vv. 39-40):

וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם לֵב אֶחָד וְדַרְךְ אֶחָד לִירְאָה אוֹתִי כָּל-הַיָּמִים לְטוֹב לָהֶם וּלְבָנֵיהֶם אַחֲרֵיהֶם	And I will give to them one heart and one way, to fear me all the days, for their good, and for their children after them.
וְכָרַתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-אֶשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם לְהִטִּיבֵי אוֹתָם וְאֶת-יְרֵאָתִי אֲתֵן בְּלִבָּם לְבַלְתִּי סוּר מֵעָלַי	And I will cut for them an eternal covenant, that I will not turn from them to do them good; and I will give the fear of me in their heart, so that they will not turn from me

Here YHWH’s giving of the heart is tied, not to knowing YHWH, but to fearing him; in this case, he draws clearly from Deuteronomy 5:29, which relates YHWH’s heart-gift to fearing YHWH and doing good to the people. Jeremiah also introduces a new term—“one heart” (לב אחד)—to describe this future new covenant community.⁴⁸ Just as

⁴⁷ In this case, the knowledge of YHWH is clearly the result (ל + infinitive construct) of YHWH’s giving of the heart. Furthermore, the content of the knowledge is spelled out explicitly: they will know “me, that I [am] YHWH [יהוה] אתי כי אני יהוה.” In other words, they will finally know YHWH as their covenant Lord. This aligns well with the correlation in Isaiah between not knowing/understanding and idolatry, since idolatry reveals that the people do not know YHWH alone as their covenant Lord.

⁴⁸ The concept of “one heart” will be further described in the next two chapters. Here we note that, where credobaptists use this term to argue for their position (e.g., Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 559), covenant theologians counter this by pointing to the familial language in verse 40. For example, McKelvey criticizes Gentry, arguing that this verse does not entail that all the children of God’s people will receive personal salvation; rather, they “in some way” benefit from being a part of the covenant community; see McKelvey, “The New Covenant,” 199. If Gentry glosses over the familial language, as McKelvey maintains, then the same could be said of McKelvey glossing over the language of “one heart”—never before has this terminology been used to describe the covenant community. How can a

Deuteronomy looked forward to the day when YHWH would give the people a heart to fear him, so Jeremiah looks forward to that future day, casting these metaphors further into the eschatological future. Though Israel has wrestled throughout her entire history with a divided heart, YHWH is committed to accomplishing this heart transformation with all his heart (v. 41).

Summary and Significance

At the end of the previous chapter, we noted how Isaiah drew from Deuteronomy in order to construct a picture of the state of Israel's heart; Jeremiah follows suit, utilizing many of the same descriptions and connections between stubborn hearts and idolatry, Torah disobedience, lack of knowledge/understanding, and turning from YHWH. Yet Jeremiah also amplifies his descriptions both of the unfaithfulness of the heart and the promised future heart transformation.

Jeremiah's negative portrayal of Israel/Judah's heart takes several steps beyond that of Isaiah. The prophet wrestles with the human heart's incurably wicked nature and emphasizes the connection between Judah's hard heart and her refusal to listen to YHWH's word/voice. Moreover, while previously we have noted how Israel's prophetic literature speaks of her as having a collective (singular) stubborn heart, Jeremiah adds to these comprehensive statements a focus on the unfaithful heart of every individual within Israel. In other words, the prophet emphasizes that YHWH deals not only with the nation

community have "one heart" to fear YHWH if unbelievers are in their midst? One has to deal with *both* of these features of the text. If the "one heart" is not intended to include unbelieving children, then in what way are the children involved? It would seem that two interpretive options are possible: either (1) all believers *and their children* have a heart to fear YHWH (clearly, an unsustainable position), or (2) the community has one heart to fear YHWH, and in God's providence, this is for the "good" of the children as well. Yet just because option 2 is affirmed, it does not mean the children are included in the covenant—it just means they are benefited "in some way," to use McKelvey's own words. No credobaptist denies that unbelieving children are benefited by their association with the covenant community; the question is whether this warrants including them *within* the "one heart" community which fears YHWH. These issues have significant import for our study, as was seen above in the discussion on Jeremiah 31, and will continue to become clearer—if the constitution of the covenant community changes so that *all* have a transformed heart within the new covenant, then further support is added to the notion of a dramatic change between the Spirit's heart-transforming work in the old and new covenants.

as a whole, but also with *individuals* on the level of their heart, testing their hearts toward him.

Of particular interest is how Jeremiah describes his own heart. Whereas the stubborn heart of Israel rejects YHWH's word/voice, Jeremiah's heart is profoundly and irrevocably allegiant to the word of YHWH. In some way, then, the heart of Jeremiah is fundamentally different from the heart of Israel. Yet it is essential to note that Jeremiah never explicitly describes himself using one of the heart transformation metaphors and presents these metaphors as unfulfilled future realities.

With regard to heart transformation metaphors, Jeremiah recapitulates the same three metaphors used by Deuteronomy, thus drawing more attention to these promises than Isaiah. Yet Jeremiah agrees with Isaiah that these promises have not been fulfilled in his time; what Isaiah tied to the coming of YHWH's servant, Jeremiah now links with the future gift of a new covenant.⁴⁹ While Jeremiah connects these metaphors with turning to YHWH, Torah obedience, and fearing YHWH, his emphasis—just like Isaiah—is that the renewed heart will *know* YHWH.⁵⁰ Drawing again from Deuteronomy 5:29 and 29:3, he picks up this major theme and states clearly that the resolution to Israel's lack of knowledge/understanding will be when YHWH writes the Torah on their heart. This transformation will be both individual, since every person in the renewed community will know YHWH (Jer 31), and corporate, as emphasized by his introduction of the terms “one heart” and “one way” (Jer 32).

This brings us to the specific question of this study, concerning whether these

⁴⁹ Note again that in Jer 31:33, the prophet *equates* the new covenant with cardiomography (“*this [is] the covenant I will cut . . . I will place my Torah within them, and I will write it on their heart*”).

⁵⁰ Allison and Köstenberger provide a helpful suggestion for why Jeremiah's prophecy focuses on *knowing* YHWH. Whereas Isaiah and Ezekiel style their books in terms of a visionary experience (Isa 1:1; Ezek 1:1), Jeremiah focuses more intently on the *word of YHWH* he is bringing to the people. Thus, his hopes for the future transformed heart center on cardiomography, the day when YHWH's law will be written on their hearts, removing any need for intermediaries. See Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit, Theology for the People of God* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 40.

realities are exclusive to the new covenant or if they existed for the elect under the old covenant. It is crucial to affirm that Jeremiah, like Deuteronomy and Isaiah, looks forward to a future fulfillment of these promises; some sort of change is coming. Yet Jeremiah's focus on the individual raises a critical question: will the new covenant bring a change at the *community* level or the *individual* level? If cardiomography already exists for elect individuals, as Coxhead and Kaiser argue, then it would seem the change must take place at the community level—yet their argument that this simply involves a “ramping up” of the Spirit's activity to create a larger *proportion* of believers is difficult to square with these extravagant promises.

Furthermore, aside from the question of Jeremiah's heart, it is safe to say that no evidence exists within Jeremiah for the *present* fulfillment of these metaphors in the elect; instead, the heart transformation promises go as far as *equating* the new covenant with cardiomography. Thus, when Kaiser and Coxhead argue for the present reality of cardiomography (and hence the other metaphors as well), both must look *outside* Jeremiah. Yet if a look outside the prophetic literature is necessary to answer this question, it reveals the larger biblical-theological issues of continuity and discontinuity at play and necessitates a whole-Bible synthesis to answer the question. Before attempting a resolution to this issue, we turn to the final prophet of Israel's heart: Ezekiel.

CHAPTER 5

THE MORAL HEART IN EZEKIEL

Having considered the moral heart and its transformation in Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, we turn now to Ezekiel, the final OT book contributing significantly to this subject. The heart is mentioned 47 times in Ezekiel (לב = 41x; לבב = 6x); 5 of these occurrences refer to the “heart of the sea” (27:4, 25-27; 28:8), and another 9 describe the human heart in amoral contexts. The remaining moral occurrences focus on the current state of Israel’s heart and its future transformation.

Each prophet studied has developed the theology and characterization of the moral heart one step further. Whereas Deuteronomy focused mainly on commands and open-ended warnings/promises, Isaiah characterized the heart as unfaithful and tied its waywardness to a relational problem. Jeremiah went one step further, amplifying the negative descriptions of the heart and emphasizing that, not only does the nation as a whole possess an unfaithful heart, so too do the individuals within the nation. Yet the most damning depiction of the heart is found in Ezekiel; whereas in Isaiah and Jeremiah the heart is stubborn, evil, blind, and incurable, in Ezekiel it is dead. The heart of Israel is a lifeless stone, in need of YHWH’s Spirit to breathe new life if the people are to be restored to their covenant Lord.

Because Ezekiel contains no positive characterizations of Israel’s heart,¹ this

¹ In two places near the end of the book, YHWH commands Ezekiel to “set” (שים) his heart upon what he is being shown (40:4; 44:5). As we have seen, this phrase takes on moral overtones elsewhere, especially in Isaiah. In Ezekiel, it appears to be functioning more at the level of a simple figure of speech, and thus while Ezekiel does follow YHWH’s instructions, these two expressions do not contribute significantly to the discussion at hand. Perhaps more significant is 3:10, where YHWH instructs Ezekiel to “take in your heart [קח בלבבך] all the words which I am speaking to you, and hear with your ears [ובאזניך שמע].” To take YHWH’s words into the heart means to allow his words to direct one’s thinking and actions; this sets Ezekiel in opposition to Israel, who instead sets idols upon her heart (see below). Yet

chapter's outline will be more straightforward. After first considering Ezekiel's negative descriptions of Israel's heart, we will examine the culminating heart transformation metaphors found within the prophecy, and whether they are characterized as exclusive to the new covenant.

The Heart in Ezekiel: Negative Descriptions

Ezekiel does not focus on the past unfaithfulness of Israel's heart as much as Isaiah and Jeremiah; instead, he emphasizes her present condition. The past is referenced only once in 20:16, when he describes how Israel rejected his judgments, did not walk in his statutes, and profaned his Sabbaths, because (כי) "their heart walked after their idols" (אחרי גילוליהם לבם הלך). Of note here is not only the connection between the unfaithful heart and idolatry, which has been seen before, but also the link between idolatry and disobeying the Torah. Previous passages have shown both of these problems linked individually to the heart, yet this verse brings all three together. Torah disobedience is the result of wayward hearts following after idols.

In addition to this, Israel's present heart trouble is described several times throughout the book of Ezekiel. Just as in Isaiah and Jeremiah, Israel's problem is portrayed in these terms early on; in Ezekiel's case, within his commission (2:1-7). As YHWH's Spirit fills Ezekiel, he sends him "to the sons of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me" (אל-בני ישראל אל-גוים המורדים אשר מרדו-בי), even up to the present day (v. 3). He then characterizes Ezekiel's generation in verse 4: "And the sons [i.e., descendants] [are] hard of face and strong of heart" (והבנים קשי פנים וחזקי-לב). Ezekiel is to speak to them whether or not they will listen (vv. 5-7) so that they will know a prophet has been among them.² Again, Israel's unfaithful heart is characterized by an

even still, these descriptions of Ezekiel's heart are only implicit, and the prophet nowhere describes Israel's heart in comparatively positive terms.

² Note the close connection with Isaiah's and Jeremiah's commissions, which were similarly tied to the unresponsive heart of the nation. It would perhaps not be an exaggeration to assert that YHWH

inability to hear, as seen in Isaiah and Jeremiah.

YHWH then gives Ezekiel a scroll to eat (2:8-3:1) and reiterates his commission. Ezekiel will not be sent to a foreign land with a difficult language—if he was, “they would listen to you” (3:6). Instead, he will be sent to the house of Israel, which is worse than the surrounding nations:

וּבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יֵאָבֹוּ לְשָׁמַע אֵלַי כִּי־אֵינָם אֲבִים לְשָׁמַע אֵלַי כִּי כָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲזָקֵי־מֵצַח וּקְשֵׁי־לֵב הֵמָּה	But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me, for all the house of Israel is strong of forehead and hard of heart
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To enable Ezekiel to counteract this refusal to listen, YHWH will make his face and forehead as strong as those of the people (v. 8). In fact, his forehead will be as hard as a diamond (שמיר), harder than flint, so that he might not be afraid (v. 9).³ Moreover, while the people of Israel reject the word of YHWH due to their hard heart, Ezekiel is to “receive with your heart and hear with your ears” (קח בלבבך ובאזניך שמע) (v. 10). Where Israel’s heart refuses to hear YHWH’s word (v. 11), Ezekiel is to receive it into his heart.⁴

Several other passages revisit Israel’s wayward heart. In Ezekiel 6, YHWH speaks of the devastation that will come due to Israel’s sinful idolatry (vv. 1-7). Yet a few will be kept alive (v. 8), and as they remember YHWH in their captivity, they will remember how YHWH was “broken” (שבר) over their “whoring heart which turned from me” (לבם הזונה אשר סר מעלי), and their “whoring eyes [which] go after their idols” (v.

raises and commissions these three major prophets in order to deal with the waywardness of Israel’s heart.

³ We have already seen how in Jer 17:1, the people have engraved their sin upon their heart with a point of diamond (again, שמיר), rather than bringing the Torah into their heart. Likewise, in Zech 7:12, a diamond-hard heart is again correlated with a refusal to hear the word of YHWH through his prophets. In Ezek 3:9, YHWH employs this same terminology in order to provide a fruitful contrast—whereas the people have what appear to be indestructibly-hard hearts, YHWH will make his messenger even more indestructible as he brings, not only YHWH’s judgments, but also his promises of future hope to the people of Israel.

⁴ Though much less developed than what is found in Jeremiah, a hint is present here of the same contrast between the heart of the prophet and the heart of the people. Just as in Jeremiah, the difference for Ezekiel is in the disposition of his heart toward the word of YHWH.

9).⁵ The description of Israel’s heart as “whoring” (זנה), found only here in the OT, is a fitting metaphor for her unfaithful heart, which was introduced first in Deuteronomy. Yet this passage is not without hope; as the people realize their unfaithfulness, they will be repentant, loathing themselves (v. 9b), “and they will know that I am YHWH” (וידעו כי; v. 10). This last phrase is used repeatedly throughout Ezekiel to describe the purpose of YHWH’s actions, both in judgment and in mercy.⁶ We have seen in the previous chapters the inability of Israel’s heart to “know” YHWH; though these notions are not connected explicitly in Ezekiel, the book is nevertheless overflowing with evidence that all of YHWH’s coming actions of judgment and mercy will be so that his people and the surrounding nations will know that he is YHWH.⁷

Another significant passage is 14:3-7, in which YHWH three times condemns the people because “they have set their idols upon their heart” (העלו גלוליהם על לבם; v. 3; cf. vv. 4, 7).⁸ This unique expression recalls other instances where the people were

⁵ This passage uniquely shows how the unfaithfulness of Israel has affected YHWH—he was broken (Niphal of שבר) by their actions.

⁶ YHWH executes judgment in order that both his people and the surrounding nations might know that he is YHWH (5:13; 6:7, 10, 13-14; 7:4, 9, 27; 11:10, 12; 12:15-16, 20; 13:9, 14, 21, 23; 14:8; 15:7; 17:21, 24; 20:26; 21:5; 22:16, 22; 23:49; 24:24, 27; 25:5, 7, 11, 17; 26:6; 28:22-24; 29:6, 9, 16; 29:21; 30:8, 19, 25-26; 32:15; 33:29; 35:4, 9, 11-12, 15; 39:6). Yet he also demonstrates mercy in order that both Israel (16:62; 20:4-5, 9, 11-12, 20, 42, 44; 28:26; 34:27; 34:30; 36:11, 38; 37:6, 13-14; 37:28; 39:22) and the nations (36:23, 36; 38:23; 39:7) might know that he is YHWH. In some passages, both judgment and mercy appear side-by-side (e.g., 28:22-26; 39:28).

⁷ Several of the passages in Ezekiel regarding knowing YHWH are tied to significant notions we have seen in previous chapters; for example, 34:30 connects the phrase with the covenant formula, and 37:6-14 relates it to YHWH bringing new life into his people. Thus, while there is not an explicit connection between the new covenant and “knowing YHWH” (as in Jer 31:34), there is nevertheless an association between YHWH’s future, life-giving mercy, and the fact that all people will finally know that he is YHWH. Cf. how Jer 24:7 describes YHWH giving his people a heart “to know me, that I am YHWH” (לדעת אתי כי אני יהוה), in the context of the giving of the new covenant. The knowledge described in Ezekiel is sometimes akin to this personal covenant knowledge.

⁸ Here Ezekiel appears to be using לב to describe the mind (as is often the case), and thus this phrase means something like “you have brought your idols to mind”—i.e., the idolaters have focused their minds on their idols. This makes good sense of the Hiphil form of עלה (literally, “to cause to bring up”). This also fits with verses 4 and 7, which both use the preposition אל instead of על; the people bring the idols to/into their heart/mind. Practically speaking, the expression indicates that the people are directing their attention toward their idols, thus allowing the idols to direct and control their thinking and acting. Interestingly, in all three verses, the Septuagint translates עלה with τίθημι (set/put/place) and the preposition as ἐπί (on/upon); this suggests that the Septuagint translator interpreted the phrase as more than simply “bringing to mind.” To set something upon one’s heart has a richer meaning—what is set on the heart becomes the controlling and guiding influence in one’s life.

commanded to set something “on” or “in” their heart—most notably, the words of YHWH in Deuteronomy 6:6. If we recall that the heart is the locus of allegiance, then to bring something “upon” one’s heart is to allow it to direct one’s will and actions—this is why YHWH commanded the people to set his words to heart, and promises to write his Torah on their heart. Yet Israel has instead brought idols upon this privileged place, allowing them to direct her affection and conduct. Thus, while it is perhaps a stretch to argue that this verse serves as an intentional contrast to cardionomography (such as Jer 17:1), the concept nevertheless is related; instead of the Torah of YHWH being on her heart, directing her actions, Israel has given that privilege to her idols.

The specific context of these verses relates to those who come to consult YHWH while retaining their allegiance to their idols. Those who do so will be answered in judgment by YHWH himself, who will destroy both the inquirer and the prophet (vv. 4, 7-10). Yet this judgment is for the sake of Israel’s future restoration—YHWH’s actions are “in order to seize the house of Israel by their heart, who are all estranged from me by their idols” (למען תפש את־בית־ישראל בלבם אשר נזרו מעלי בגלוליהם כלם; v. 5). This purpose is reiterated in the parallel expression (also beginning with למען) in v. 11:

<p>לְמַעַן לֹא־יִתְעוּ עוֹד בַּיַּת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאַחֲרַי וְלֹא־ יִטְמְאוּ עוֹד בְּכָל־פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה</p>	<p>. . . in order that the house of Israel might not go astray again from me, and might not defile themselves again with all their transgressions, but that they might be my people and I might be their God, declares YHWH the Lord</p>
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The parallelism between these purpose statements is clear and correlates with what this study has already demonstrated: if YHWH is to cause his covenant people (note the covenant formula at the end of v. 11) to yield to him in faithful allegiance, he must “seize” their heart—the center of their allegiance.⁹ We thus see one of the most severe

⁹ BDB offers the same translation for 14:5 (“seize Isr. [acc.] by [ב] their heart”), yet interprets this to mean that YHWH’s purpose is to “terrorize them;” see Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers,

indictments of Israel paired with a promise of great hope within these verses. We will see the same in the passages regarding heart transformation, to which we now turn.¹⁰

The Heart in Ezekiel: Heart Transformation

Ezekiel is the end of the road for heart transformation metaphors—at least until they are taken up by the NT. As such, the book draws from terminology found in the previous chapters while also introducing dramatic new imagery. Both the bleakest portraits of Israel’s heart and the brightest descriptions of YHWH’s restorative action are found within the book.

Circumcision of Heart

Circumcision of heart appears once in Ezekiel within the third temple sermon (44:7, 9); however, the metaphor's context is different from its usages in the past. In Ezekiel 44, the term is used twice to describe “sons of foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh” (בני־נכר ערלי־לב וערלי־בשר) who are serving in YHWH’s sanctuary, thus profaning (חלל) his temple (see Exod 12:48).¹¹ Though this metaphor

2015), 1074. This is a possible interpretation, given that the heart is the locus of emotion and fear, as we have seen, yet it is not the most likely interpretation. *תפס* often indicates seizing something with intention—i.e., wielding or handling something. For example, it is used of wielding physical implements such as a sword (Ezek 21:16; 30:21; with *ב*), bow (Amos 2:15), lyre and pipe (Gen 4:21), sickle (Jer 50:16), and shield (Jer 46:9). It can also be used to describe wielding something abstract: e.g., “wielders of war” (Num 31:27) or “wielders of the Torah” (Jer 2:8). The choice of this term is thus suitable for indicating YHWH seizing/handling/wielding the heart of Israel for a purpose. That purpose is articulated briefly in the relative phrase within verse 5 (Israel’s estrangement from YHWH), and fully in verse 11 (covenant faithfulness, obedience, and restoration). Mere terror will not accomplish this purpose; YHWH must “seize” the people’s heart and redirect it to himself, as he promises to do in chapters 11 and 36; see below.

¹⁰ For further exegesis on the relationship between idolatry and the heart in Ezekiel, see John N. Day, “Ezekiel and the Heart of Idolatry,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (2007): 21–33.

¹¹ Lemke argues that the close correlation between uncircumcision of heart and flesh in this passage “in effect obliterates the distinction between them,” thus indicating that the author viewed both as essentially one. He therefore argues that this late text reveals the dismissal of the metaphorical meaning of circumcision, since it never again is seen in the OT. In other words, this text reveals the “deconstruction” of the metaphor; see Werner E. Lemke, “Circumcision of the Heart: The Journey of a Biblical Metaphor,” in *A God so Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 311–12. Despite the many illuminating features of his article, Lemke’s conclusion on this point is incorrect. A correlation between the two types of circumcision does not, by definition, obliterate a distinction between the two; rather, it reveals the tension present throughout the OT, wherein the *exterior* sign does not match the *interior* reality of YHWH’s people

characterizes foreigners, the blame is squarely on Israel's shoulders for failing to guard YHWH's "holy things" (קִדְשֵׁי; v. 8); instead, they have outsourced the job to those uncircumcised in both heart and flesh (v. 8), and gone after their idols (vv. 10-13).¹²

Thus, just as in Jeremiah, circumcision of heart is used not as a promise of future heart transformation (as in Deuteronomy) but as an indictment against YHWH's people—in this passage, specifically due to their negligence about YHWH's devoted spaces as a result of their commitment to idols. Yet Ezekiel uses his own unique terminology to represent the same future realities described by the other prophets as circumcision of heart or cardionomography.¹³

One Heart, New Heart, Heart of Stone/Flesh

Ezekiel describes the future heart-transforming work of YHWH in two parallel passages (11:19-20; 36:26), as well as one command (18:31) which provides the foil for the other two. While drawing from previous terminology and heart transformation concepts, each of these also introduces new language and imagery.

The first passage (11:19-20) comes amid an oracle of judgment against Israel for not walking in YHWH's statutes or doing his judgments (v. 12). Ezekiel despairs,

(on this tension, see John D. Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart: The Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Stephen J. Wellum [Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016], 144). To describe a foreigner as "uncircumcised in heart and flesh" draws a comparison and contrast with Israel: Israel too is uncircumcised in heart (cf. Jer 9:25), yet she is at least circumcised in flesh. The contrast draws attention to Israel's failure to "keep" (רָמַז) YHWH's sanctuary (v. 8); whereas, under the Mosaic covenant, those circumcised in flesh but not in heart could serve in the temple, Israel has allowed those uncircumcised in *both* flesh and heart to serve. Furthermore, Lemke's assertion that metaphorical circumcision meets its end in this chapter does not do justice to how the prophets draw together multiple heart transformation metaphors to describe the same reality of covenant faithfulness, as we have seen.

¹² Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh," 143.

¹³ Wells agrees, arguing that while Ezekiel nowhere describes the heart as being circumcised, "it is best to understand that concept as the one being described in 11:19 and 36:26;" see Kyle B. Wells, *Grace and Agency in Paul and Second Temple Judaism: Interpreting the Transformation of the Heart*, ed. David P. Moessner and Margaret M. Mitchell, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 157 (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2015), 54n63.

fearing that the whole remnant of Israel will come to an end (v. 13). Yet there is hope for the future—YHWH will bring his people back from exile (v. 17) and cause the people to remove all their abominations (i.e., idols) from the land (v. 18). Just as in Jeremiah, once YHWH has removed the people from Babylon, the next step will be to remove Babylon from the people (vv. 19-20):

<p>וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם לֵב אֶחָד וְרוּחַ חַדְשָׁה אֲתֶנּוּ בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְהִסְרֹתִי לֵב הָאֲבָן מִבְּשָׂרָם וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם לֵב בָּשָׂר לְמַעַן בַּחֲקֹתַי יֵלְכוּ וְאֶת־מִשְׁפָּטַי יִשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשׂוּ אֶת־מִצְוֹתַי לְעַם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים</p>	<p>And I will give them one heart, and I will give a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh, and I will give to them a heart of flesh, in order that they will walk in my statutes and they will keep my judgments and will do them; and they will be my people, and I will be their God</p>
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Ezekiel draws the “one heart” language from Jeremiah 32:39, adding to it a “new spirit.”¹⁴ The inclusion of the term *חדש* (“new”) brings a novel innovation to the realm of heart transformation—where previous metaphors indicated that Israel’s heart could perhaps be repaired through surgery (circumcision of heart) or engraving (cardionomography), Ezekiel reveals what these metaphors have been pointing to all along: a heart transplant. Israel’s heart is so devoid of spiritual life that it can be described as the most dead and unresponsive object imaginable: a stone. Only when YHWH gives to Israel a new, responsive, “flesh” heart will the intended result (*למען*) come about—she will once again obey YHWH’s Torah. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel then ties this promise explicitly to the covenant formula (v. 11b), thus correlating this promise with the new covenant.

Before describing the parallel passage in chapter 36, we first note the related command given in 18:31. In chapter 18, YHWH affirms that he deals with people as

¹⁴ Wells rightly identifies the *רוח חדשה* in this verse as the human spirit, rather than the divine Spirit, who enters the stage in chapter 36. The correlation of *לב* and *רוח* speaks of “anthropological renovation,” or the change of the entire human by YHWH’s gift of the heart; see Wells, *Grace and Agency*, 54. While we have not yet seen these two terms related in this way, we saw how YHWH often correlates *לב* with *נפש* in Deuteronomy to describe the human in their entirety.

individuals, and thus everyone who sins will be punished, and everyone who repents will be spared (vv. 2-24). The people protest that this is unjust (vv. 25-29), yet YHWH counters that it is Israel who is unjust—they will be judged, “every man according to his ways” (איש כדרכיו), if they do not repent and turn from their transgressions (v. 30). Thus, they should (v. 31):

<p>הַשְׁלִיכוּ מֵעַלְיֶיכֶם אֶת־כָּל־פְּשָׁעֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר פָּשַׁעְתֶּם בָּם וַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה וְלִמָּה תִּמְתּוּ בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל</p>	<p>Throw away from yourselves all your transgressions in which you transgressed, and make for yourselves a new heart and new spirit; for why should you die, house of Israel?</p>
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The correlation between this passage and 11:19-20 is clear—a new heart and new spirit are needed for an individual to turn from sin and walk in obedience to YHWH’s Torah. The fact that YHWH commands what he has already described as his prerogative is identical with what was seen regarding heart circumcision in Deuteronomy (10:16; 30:6) and heart circumcision/cardionomography in Jeremiah (4:4; 31:33). YHWH commands a faithfulness that the old covenant cannot create; a new covenant is needed which will enable the obedience it requires.

Ezekiel returns to the new covenant in Ezekiel 36:26, the parallel passage to 11:19-20. In chapter 36, YHWH describes how his reputation is at stake among the nations since his people have been driven out of his land (vv. 16-20). Therefore, YHWH will act, not for Israel’s sake, but so the nations will know he is YHWH (vv. 22-23). As in chapter 11, he will first remove the people from Babylon, restoring them to their land (v. 24). He will then atone for their sin by cleansing them from all their uncleanness and idolatry (v. 25)¹⁵ before giving them a new heart (vv. 26-27):

¹⁵ The deeply cultic terminology of sprinkling (זרק), cleansing (טהר), and uncleanness (טמאה) refer to the atonement which will be necessary in order for YHWH to transform the hearts of his people; recall the similar connection in Jeremiah 4:14. If one reads these promises within the storyline of Scripture, it is evident that a different kind of atonement will be necessary in order to accomplish an *inner* renewal, which is impossible through the practices of the old covenant cult. This is exactly the argument made by the author of Hebrews—only the blood of Christ could cleanse from the *inside out* (in his terminology, the “conscience;” cf. Heb 9:14; 10:22).

<p>וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה אֶתֶן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְהִסַּרְתִּי אֶת־לֵב הָאֲבֹן מִבְּשָׂרְכֶם וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב בָּשָׂר וְאֶת־רוּחִי אֶתֶן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְעָשִׂיתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר־ בְּחֻקֵי תִלְכוּ וּמִשְׁפָּטַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם</p>	<p>And I will give to you a new heart, and I will give a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and I will give to you a heart of flesh. And I will give my Spirit within you; and I will make you walk in my statutes, and I will make you keep my judgments</p>
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Just as in chapter 11, YHWH then repeats the covenant formula in verse 28.

Verse 26 is largely the same as 11:19, except that Ezekiel replaces “one heart” with the “new heart” terminology of 18:31. Verse 27 describes the same realities as 11:20 (i.e., enablement to obey the Torah), though with language that focuses more deeply on YHWH’s determinative role in Israel’s obedience—he will “make” (עשה) them obey. Yet verse 27 also introduces something radically new and previously unseen into the equation: YHWH’s Spirit as the *means* by which he will able his people to obey his Torah.¹⁶ We have already seen repeatedly in this study how the goal of the coming heart transformation is to enable obedience in YHWH’s people; Ezekiel 36 at last shows *how* this will come about—the “missing ingredient,” so to speak, is YHWH’s gift of his enabling, life-giving Spirit.¹⁷

Lest we think this is an overinterpretation of one verse, the assertion is confirmed and escalated in the following chapter (37:1-14). Here we see the most

¹⁶ Cf. James Robson, “Ezekiel,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Keith Warrington (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 67, who describes YHWH’s promise to place his Spirit within his people as “unprecedented.”

¹⁷ See Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 2 (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2017), 329-31. Niehaus helpfully shows how the promise of future heart circumcision in Deuteronomy 30:1-6 is intentionally paralleled by Ezekiel’s promise of the Spirit in 36:22-27. Both describe: (1) exilic situation (Deut 30:1-4; Ezek 36:22-23); (2) return from exile (Deut 30:3-5a; Ezek 36:24); (3) blessings in the land (Deut 30:5b; Ezek 36:25); (4) promise of heart circumcision (Deut 30:6) and promise of the Spirit (Ezek 36:26-27). He concludes that heart circumcision and the indwelling of the Spirit are parallel, as is confirmed later in Romans 2:29, since it is the indwelling Spirit who performs heart circumcision. Furthermore, “In both Deuteronomy and Ezekiel, the promises are to be fulfilled *at some indefinite future date*, that is, after the exile. It follows that the events they describe—having one’s heart circumcised by the Lord, and having the Lord put his Spirit within one—have *not yet been part* of Israel’s experience under the Mosaic covenant” (emphasis original). As will become clear in the final chapter, I would argue that the case is not quite as clear as Niehaus asserts, and yet when terms are defined carefully, I agree with his conclusion.

devastating picture of Israel in all the prophets: from YHWH’s perspective, she is a valley of “very dry” (יבשות מאד) bones (v. 2)—in other words, she is completely dead (v. 3), a land of people lying within their graves (vv. 11-12). Yet even if sinews, flesh, and skin are added, the bones remain lifeless (v. 8); only the Spirit of YHWH can give them life (vv. 9-10).¹⁸ This is precisely what YHWH intends to do: at the time when he restores the people to their land, “I will give my Spirit within you, and you will live” (ונתתי רוחי) (בכם וחייתם; v. 14; cf. v. 6). At that time, the people will finally know (ידע) that “I am YHWH” (vv. 6, 14).¹⁹

To summarize Ezekiel’s portrayal of heart transformation: whereas Isaiah and Jeremiah focus more heavily on the new community knowing YHWH, due to their emphasis on the relational roots of Israel’s heart trouble, Ezekiel links back to Deuteronomy in emphasizing the *results* of that knowledge: enablement to obey the Torah.²⁰ Where Deuteronomy describes this promise through the metaphor of heart circumcision, Ezekiel instead speaks of a new heart, one heart, and a heart transplant—and ultimately, as the very Spirit of YHWH being given within Israel to “make” her obey his Torah. Regardless of the metaphor highlighted in each book, the goal of all is the same: covenant knowledge of YHWH leading to Spirit-empowered obedience.

Summary and Significance

Ezekiel’s depiction of the moral heart is an extension and expansion of what we have seen already in Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Like the other prophets,

¹⁸ As Wells aptly phrases it: “The indwelling of YHWH’s Spirit is thus native to reconstituted human nature;” Wells, *Grace and Agency*, 56. Wells helpfully notes the clear correlations between the creation narratives in Genesis 1-2 and Ezekiel 37; cf. Robson, “Ezekiel,” 69.

¹⁹ Note again the connection between a transformed heart and knowing YHWH, as seen within Isaiah and Jeremiah. As mentioned already, to “know YHWH” in Ezekiel is a broader concept, but in these verses, the knowledge certainly appears to be of the same quality as that described in the earlier prophets.

²⁰ See Risa Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile and the Torah*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 358 (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 93.

Ezekiel has nothing good to say about the current state of Israel’s heart. Much of the prophet’s depiction of heart transformation is drawn from these previous sources, including the “one heart” language of Jeremiah, the metaphor of an uncircumcised heart (Deut and Jer), the notion of YHWH giving a heart (Deut and Jer), the explicit ties between heart transformation and the new covenant (Jer), and the correlation between a new heart and enablement for Torah obedience (especially Deut). Though less pronounced, Ezekiel also connects heart transformation with knowing YHWH (Deut, Isa, and Jer).

Yet the prophet also introduces new terms and metaphors. Israel’s unfaithful heart is “whoring,” and has taken idols into itself rather than the Torah of YHWH. In fact, Israel’s heart is beyond wicked—it is lifeless as a dead stone. YHWH therefore must “seize” the heart of his people by giving a “new heart”—by completing a heart transplant. Most significantly, this heart transplant, and its accompanying enablement for obedience, will be on account of YHWH giving his Spirit in the midst of his people.

Ezekiel nowhere describes the heart (including his own) in positive terms, and yet the prophet clearly must be distinguished from the people (as were Isaiah and Jeremiah) due to his close relationship with YHWH’s Spirit and his obedience to YHWH.²¹ Yet it must be reiterated that nowhere does Ezekiel describe himself *in terms of the eschatological heart transformation metaphors*.²²

Instead, Ezekiel agrees with Deuteronomy (and the prophets) that this heart transformation will come about after the exile and restoration to the land (and after a qualitatively new atonement; see 36:25). So while the elect (at least, the elect *leaders*)

²¹ See 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; 11:1. Cf. Wells, *Grace and Agency*, 57.

²² We have noted already that the Spirit is closely aligned with prophets, priests, and leaders (e.g., kings and judges) in the OT. Yet this does not mean that the Spirit’s relationship to these leaders is equivalent to what is described in Ezekiel 36-37; see James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 27-34.

certainly had some relationship to the Spirit, did they have hearts of flesh and the indwelling presence of the Spirit? If we follow the logic of Coxhead, they must have;²³ yet if this is true, a simple “ramping up” of the *proportion* of Spirit-filled members of the covenant seems to strip this future-oriented promise of its power. We turn now to attempt a synthesis and to answer these challenging questions.

²³ Steven R. Coxhead, “The Cardionomographic Work of the Spirit in the Old Testament,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 79 (2017): 78-91; cf. discussion in previous chapter.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND INTEGRATION

The purpose of this study has been to explore whether elect members of the old covenant experienced the realities described by OT heart transformation metaphors, or whether those realities are tied exclusively to the new covenant and its members. Despite the confident assertions of some advocating for either position, a careful look at the evidence reveals that a clear answer is surprisingly elusive.

In one sense, none of the data presented in this study is new; even a cursory reading of the OT reveals that the nation of Israel possesses an unfaithful heart—and yet a remnant exists that relates properly to YHWH. Nonetheless, it is the details, implications, and entailments of this reality that are crucial for this study. Unquestionably, a remnant existed within Israel, and the members of this group displayed at least some of the characteristics associated with the OT heart transformation metaphors; yet this does not strip away the overwhelmingly eschatological, forward-pointing nature of these promises. These renovations, particularly as they culminate in the giving of YHWH’s Spirit, simply cannot be reduced to OT realities; instead, the NT is abundantly clear that Pentecost inaugurated a “qualitatively new era” with regard to the Spirit’s work.¹ To determine where *exactly* that change is qualitative or quantitative, on both the individual and community level, is the challenge. To shed light on this issue, we

¹ This description comes from Horton, who—as a covenant theologian—is wrestling with the implications of Pentecost. See Michael Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit: God’s Perfecting Presence in Creation, Redemption, and Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 149. In characterizing Pentecost in such terms, a brief note should be made regarding the so-called Johannine Pentecost in John 20:22-23. A careful analysis of the evidence reveals that this event does not interfere with such an understanding of Pentecost in Acts 2; rather, what John describes is a “symbolic act that anticipates future imminent bestowal;” see D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 649-55.

now attempt to synthesize the data and provide an answer for each of the three related questions posed at the beginning of this study.

The Development of Heart Transformation Metaphors in the OT

We begin with the most straightforward question of the three: how adjectives and metaphors related to the moral heart and its transformation are developed and recapitulated throughout these four OT books. Table 7 summarizes the relevant data, outlining both the terminological and conceptual connections.

Deuteronomy is the fountainhead of the OT's moral heart theology, as shown by the significant correlation between terms and concepts found in Deuteronomy and those appearing later in the prophets. Some of Deuteronomy's terms are widespread, such as stubborn/hard hearts, prideful hearts, and hearts as the locus of turning to/from YHWH. Yet different prophets repeat various expressions/words more or less; for example, Isaiah favors the terminology of considering/pondering (i.e., setting [שים/שוב] something to heart), while Jeremiah recapitulates the term "all your heart" and the concept of YHWH as the searcher of human hearts.

Moreover, as redemptive history progresses, each prophet begins to introduce their own unique terminology; for example, Isaiah speaks of hearts that are far from YHWH, deluded hearts, and penitent hearts; Jeremiah speaks of evil hearts, deceitful hearts, washing the heart, and no heart; and Ezekiel describes the whoring heart, heart of stone/flesh, and new heart. Furthermore, later prophets begin to draw from earlier prophets; for example, Jeremiah takes from Isaiah the strong correlation between the heart and Israel's inability to know/understand, and Ezekiel draws from Jeremiah the idea of "one heart." Yet despite the vivid diversity of metaphors and images, the prophets present a unified—though fruitfully multi-dimensional—picture of the soteriological realities associated with the transformed heart.

Table 7. Metaphors/adjectives related to the moral heart and its transformation

Metaphor	Deuteronomy	Isaiah	Jeremiah	Ezekiel
words/Torah/sin /idols on (על)/in (ב) heart	על (6:6; words); ב (11:18; words; 30:14; word)	ב (51:7; Torah)	חרש (17:1; sin); כתב (31:33; Torah)	על (14:3, 4, 7; idols)
set/recall X on/to heart	שוב (4:39); שים (11:18; 32:46)	שוב (44:19; 46:8); שים (41:22; 42:25; 47:7; 57:1, 11)	שים (12:11; 31:21)	שים (40:4; 44:5)
prideful heart	8:14, 17; 9:4; 17:20	9:9; 10:12; 14:13; 47:8, 10	48:29; 49:16	28:2, 5-6, 17; 31:10
stubborn/hard/fat heart	קשה (10:16); אמצ (15:7); שררות (29:19)	שמן (6:10); אביר (46:12); קשה (63:17)	שררות (3:17; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17); סרר (5:23); מרה (5:23)	קשה (3:7); קזק (2:4)
heart (re)turning from/to YHWH/his commands/ways	סור (11:16; 17:17, 20); פנה (29:18; 30:17); שוב (30:2, 10)	שוב (6:10); תעה (63:17)	סור (3:10; 24:7); שוב (5:23; 17:5; 32:40)	סור (6:9); הלך (11:21; 20:16)
YHWH as giver of an obedient heart	29:4; 30:6	63:17 [implied]	24:7; 32:39	11:19; 36:26
following/walking after own heart	29:17-18	57:17	3:17; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 23:17	
(un)circumcised heart	מול (10:16; 30:6)		וקסרו ערלות מול (4:4); ערל (9:26)	ערל (44:7, 9)
“all your heart” (בכל לבבך)	4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10		3:10; 24:7; 29:13; 32:41	
a heart to fear YHWH and/or keep his commands	5:29; 8:2; 32:46		32:40	
God testing/searching the heart	נסה (8:2; 13:4)		בחן (11:20; 12:3; 20:12); חקר (17:10)	
upright (ישר) heart	9:5			
hearts far (רחוק) from YHWH		29:13		
whole (שלם) heart		38:3		
deluded (תלל) heart		44:20		
penitent/humble (דבא) heart		57:15		
sick heart		דני (1:5)	דני (8:18); אנוש (17:9)	
heart after (כ) YHWH's heart			3:15	
evil (רע) heart			3:17; 4:14; 7:24; 11:8; 16:12; 18:12	
wash (כבס) your heart			4:14	
no heart			5:21	
deceitful (עקב) heart			17:9	
one (אחד) heart			32:39	11:19
whoring (זנה) heart				6:9
heart of stone (בשר/אבן)/flesh (בשר)				11:19; 36:26
God seizing (חפש) heart of Israel				14:5
new (חדש) heart				18:31; 36:26

Soteriological Realities Described by Heart Transformation Metaphors

Having seen how heart transformation metaphors are recapitulated and developed throughout the OT, we turn to an examination of what specific soteriological realities these metaphors describe. Yet it is important first to summarize how the OT characterizes the moral heart. The heart is the director of both allegiance and action, and the center of both covenant knowledge and obedience. As a result, what is in one's heart determines the nature of one's relationship to YHWH and his commands; hence, to change someone's covenant (un)faithfulness, one must change their heart. Because Israel is incapable of accomplishing this change herself, the prophets present these heart transformation metaphors as the solution to all the problems of Israel's unfaithful heart.²

Table 8 summarizes the results of heart transformation, organized by book and metaphor. The data reveal several different, yet related, results of heart transformation: (1) whole-hearted allegiance to YHWH, (2) obedience to his Torah (or, from the opposite perspective, turning from evil deeds), (3) knowing YHWH, and (4) knowing righteousness. Interestingly, whereas circumcision of heart emphasizes the dimension of *obedience/allegiance* and cardiomography focuses on *knowledge*, the metaphor of YHWH giving a heart draws the two together. Hence, when read together, all heart transformation metaphors concentrate on the four loci of (1) allegiance/obedience to and (2) knowledge of (3) YHWH and (4) his Torah. Thus, the transformation involves both a *relational* and a *moral* dimension. Yet one further layer remains, which Ezekiel alone introduces: the *enablement/empowerment* for this renovation is found in the life-giving

² This characterization of the heart, its determinative character, and its (in)ability, helps make sense of the tension between commands and promises we have seen throughout the OT. Because actions flow from the heart, YHWH consistently directs his commands in this direction; yet sin has so twisted the heart that the people are unable to obey apart from the enabling power of YHWH. This tension is found within all major heart transformation metaphors (circumcision of heart, cardiomography, the new heart, and YHWH giving a heart)—in each one, Israel is commanded to transform her own heart, yet YHWH later promises to do what she could never do. The heart transformation metaphors thus exemplify the biblical tension between YHWH's sovereignty and human responsibility.

Spirit of YHWH.³ Combining these layers, we can summarize the circumcised/Torah-inscribed/new heart as a heart possessing *covenant knowledge of YHWH leading to Spirit-empowered obedience*.⁴

Table 8. Results of heart transformation

<i>Book</i>	<i>Transformation metaphor</i>		
	<i>Circumcision of heart</i>	<i>Cardionomography</i>	<i>YHWH giving a heart</i>
Deuteronomy	Fearing, loving, and serving YHWH whole-heartedly (10:16; 30:6)	Ongoing obedience to YHWH's words (6:6; 11:18); doing YHWH's word (30:14)	Fearing YHWH and keeping his commands (5:29); knowing, seeing, and hearing (29:3)
Isaiah	-	Knowing righteousness (51:7)	[Implied; fearing YHWH and keeping his ways; 63:17]
Jeremiah	Turning from evil deeds (4:4)	All covenant members knowing YHWH (31:33-34)	Knowing and returning to YHWH (24:7); fear of YHWH preventing from turning away (32:39-40)
Ezekiel	[Used only negatively; 44:7, 9]	-	Walking in and keeping the Torah (11:19-20); receiving YHWH's Spirit and keeping the Torah (36:26-27)

With this description in mind, we now turn to the question at hand: what *specific* soteriological reality aligns with this characterization of the transformed heart?

We have seen already that many scholars connect these metaphors to regeneration,⁵ and

³ We might say that Deuteronomy prefigures this in a proleptic way, given Moses' promise in 30:6 that YHWH will circumcise Israel's heart "so that you will *live*" (למען חייד; emphasis added). Ezekiel clarifies that this spiritual life will come from the indwelling and transforming gift of YHWH's Spirit.

⁴ The connection between knowledge and obedience, which we have already seen in the OT, is deeply embedded within NT theology as well. See, e.g., 1 Thess 4:5, where Paul describes the Gentiles, who walk in the passion of lust, as those who do not know God. Cf. 1 John 2:3-6; 4:7-8.

⁵ To be more precise, it seems that most scholars draw connections specifically between

for good reason—regeneration is typically defined in terms of God’s impartation of new spiritual life/vitality.⁶ This connection is suitable, especially since the crowning description of these realities within the OT (Ezek 36-37) culminates in the metaphor of new spiritual (i.e., Spirit-given) life. Yet in forging this connection, it is essential to consider whether an *instantaneous* change such as regeneration is sufficient to comprehensively describe what seems to be an *ongoing* reality—an initial heart transformation, indeed, but also the continuous, moment-by-moment empowerment by YHWH’s Spirit in *causing* his people to obey. In other words, the heart transformation described by the prophets grants not just the *ability* but also the *reality* of holiness through the ongoing work of the Spirit.⁷ This suggests that the transformation metaphors relate as much to regeneration as to *indwelling* and *sanctification*.

Moreover, we have already seen how Jeremiah 31:33-34 emphasizes the forgiveness of sins as the basis of new covenant cardionomography, and how Ezekiel 36:25-27 describes atonement/cleansing as the prerequisite for the new heart/gift of YHWH’s Spirit. These passages draw the heart transformation metaphors into the orbit of *justification*, as well—not as the result but as the basis of the transformation. Hence, heart

regeneration and *circumcision of heart*, rather than the other heart transformation metaphors—at least in discussions pertaining to regeneration within old covenant saints. Yet see Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, ed. John S. Feinberg, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 145, who places circumcised hearts, hearts of stone/flesh, and the new spirit all within the same “conceptual field” as the NT concepts of regeneration and new birth.

⁶ A survey of several standard theological works proves this point. Grudem defines regeneration as “a secret act of God in which he imparts spiritual life to us;” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 699. Frame describes it as “a sovereign act of God, beginning a new spiritual life in us;” John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013), 945. Erickson explains regeneration as “God’s transformation of individual believers, his giving a new spiritual vitality and direction to their lives when they accept Christ;” Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 955. Demarest adds further detail, defining regeneration as “that work of the Spirit at conversion that renews the heart and life (the inner self), thus restoring the person’s intellectual, volitional, moral, emotional, and relational capacities to know, love, and serve God;” Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 293. While this point may seem obvious given the etymology of the word, it is important to determine exactly what is intended by this word when determining whether it applies to OT believers.

⁷ More on this point below.

transformation metaphors in the OT are connected not only with regeneration, but also with indwelling, sanctification, and justification. It would seem, then, that what the prophets anticipate through these metaphors is nothing less than the *fullness of new covenant salvation*, with an emphasis on Spirit-empowered obedience.

The Heart of the Elect Under the Old Covenant

Before addressing whether these realities are exclusive to the new covenant, we must first address a second entailment of the previous question: do we see the OT itself characterize the hearts of the elect according to the criteria of the transformed heart? In other words, do the hearts of the OT elect display such covenant knowledge of YHWH leading to Spirit-empowered obedience?

Each of the books surveyed presents the prophet in contrast to the people of Israel. Though Deuteronomy never characterizes Moses' heart, he clearly has a dramatically different relationship with YHWH than the unregenerate majority of Israel.⁸ Similarly, Isaiah is responsive to YHWH, and describes Hezekiah within his prophecy as having a “whole” (שלם) heart.⁹ Likewise, though never describing his own heart, Ezekiel

⁸ Recall also Deut 29:17-18, which provides—albeit enigmatically—a distinction between faithful and unfaithful members of the old covenant, while emphasizing the fact that, under the old covenant, faithful and unfaithful alike suffer for the sins of the nation.

⁹ We have noted how this term is used regularly throughout Kings and Chronicles to describe the hearts of kings with respect to their relationship to YHWH. A “whole” heart can be summarized as a heart that keeps YHWH's commands and walks in his Torah. We saw at the time, however, that this is not a binary term (such as the heart transformation metaphors), but rather contains shades of gray. It is worth mentioning here that Kings and Chronicles also employ other Deuteronomic terms and metaphors to characterize the righteous kings of Judah. YHWH desires kings to walk before him “in truth with all their heart and with all their soul” (באמת בכל לבבם ובכל נפשם; 1 Kgs 2:4), and Solomon confirms that his father walked “in truth and in righteousness and in uprightness of heart before you” (באמת ובצדקה ובישרת לבב) (עמך; 1 Kgs 3:6; cf. 9:4). Furthermore, David is described in 1 Kgs 14:8 as one “who kept my commands and walked after me with all his heart, to do only what was upright in my eyes” (אשר שמר מצותי ואשר הלך) (אחרי בכל לבבו לעשות רק הישר בעיני שׁב אל יהוה בכל לבבו ובכל נפשו ובכל) (“turned to YHWH with all his heart and soul and might, according to all the Torah of Moses” (מאדו בכל תורת משה; 2 Kgs 23:25), and who “cut a covenant before YHWH, to walk after YHWH and to keep his commands and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and with all his soul—to do the words of the covenant written upon this book” (ויכרת את הברית לפני יהוה ללכת אחרי יהוה ולשמור את מצותיו) (2 Chr 34:31; cf. 2 Chr 15:12, 15; 22:9). Moreover, in 1 Kings 8:57-58, Solomon extends these same requirements beyond the kings to all the people of Israel, praying that YHWH might not leave or forsake Israel, “that he might incline [literally, “stretch out”] our heart to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep his commands and his statutes and his

has a close relation to the Spirit and is obedient to YHWH's commands. Yet most remarkable is Jeremiah, whose heart is deliberately portrayed as the opposite of the heart of Israel; he is sensitive to the word of YHWH, delights in the word of YHWH, finds it impossible to turn away from YHWH, and invites YHWH to test his heart for faithfulness. This certainly comes close to clear evidence that Jeremiah (and perhaps, by extension, the others) possesses a transformed heart.¹⁰

Yet having said this, it is critical to remember that *none* of the prophets ever explicitly depict their own hearts as matching the transformed heart given by YHWH, and *all* of them cast these metaphors forward into some unknown point in the future (see the next section). This should give the careful reader pause before asserting that these metaphors apply to the prophets (and, by extension, the elect) under the old covenant.

It would seem that, for those under the old covenant, whether an individual has a faithful or unfaithful heart (i.e., a heart “toward” or against YHWH [Jer 12:3]) is a *binary* reality; in other words, there is a *qualitative* difference between the hearts of the elect and the non-elect. Because there is only one way of salvation, regardless of which

judgments” (להטות לבבנו אליו ללכת בכל דרכיו ולשמר מצותיו וחקיו ומשפטיו). This important passage aligns with the prophets in affirming that the character of the heart directs the actions of the person, especially with regard to keeping the Torah. In short, the authors of Kings and Chronicles clearly employ Deuteronomic terminology regarding the faithful heart in order to describe, not only ideal behavior, but also the actions of faithful kings. Yet this does not necessarily mean that the kings possessed transformed hearts in their fullness (see below). A final passage of note is 1 Sam 10:9, which speaks of how YHWH “gave” (ESV) Saul “another heart” (לב אחר); this could be construed to suggest the reality of heart transformation in the OT. However, the verb used is הפך, which refers to turning/changing rather than giving; rendered more literally, it would read “God changed for him [Saul] another heart.” When the prophets speak of YHWH giving a transformed heart, they always use the verb נתן, rather than הפך; thus, this verse should not be confused with the eschatological promises of the prophets.

¹⁰ Given the remarkable affirmations of heart faithfulness *in Deuteronomic terms* found within Kings/Chronicles (see above), and in the Psalms (e.g., Ps 119:11), it is perhaps worth asking why we do not see these types of explicit descriptions regarding the prophets. Two points are important. First, in the post-Davidic covenant worldview of Israel, the hopes of the nation have come to rest on the faithfulness of one man: David's son, the king. Thus, there is great motivation to track the faithfulness of the king (both in the historical records and in the hopes/prayers of the Psalter), particularly according to the criteria found in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Secondly, while the historical and poetic books describe the hearts of *individuals*, the prophetic books deal mainly with the *community*, describing the hearts of kings/prophets only incidentally. The community of Israel can never have a faithful heart or “one heart,” since the community is mixed. In other words, the mismatch between genres is due to the fact that wisdom and historical literature relate the character/experience of the individual, while prophetic literature describes the character of the nation as a whole.

covenant one lives under, one can only stand under one of two covenant heads—Adam or Christ (Rom 5:12-21).¹¹ Old covenant saints were not half-saved and certainly displayed some characteristics of the transformed heart (some degree of obedience, knowledge of YHWH, forgiveness of sins, etc.).

Yet while all of these realities are seen *on some level* in the saints of the OT, it is doubtful whether they are seen *in fullness* since final atonement has not yet been made and the day of Pentecost has not yet arrived. Their hearts may be *qualitatively* different, yet a profound *quantitative* change is still in store. We turn now to explore this final point.

Heart Transformation and the New Covenant

We arrive finally at the crux of the question introduced at the beginning of this study: based on the association between heart transformation metaphors and the new covenant, can we argue that these realities existed for the elect under the old covenant? As we have seen, Hamilton argues that the OT elect possessed circumcised hearts (i.e., regeneration—the ability to hear, understand, believe, obey, and enter the kingdom of God), but not indwelling (the abiding, covenant presence of God through his Spirit).¹² Alternatively, we have seen how Coxhead (and other covenant theologians) affirms the reality of cardionomography within the OT elect and asserts that the Spirit indwells the OT elect based on the correlation between Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36.¹³ Based on our

¹¹ I thank Dr. Stephen Wellum for pointing this out to me in a private conversation.

¹² James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 2-3. Elsewhere, Hamilton concedes that Deut 30:6, Jer 32:39, and Ezek 36:26 all point to a day in the future, yet counters that “there is evidence that there were people under the old covenant who did delight in the law of the Lord (see Psalm 119), which indicates that there has always been ‘a remnant according to the election of grace’ (cf. Rom. 11:5);” see James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 125. This is certainly true; yet just because there was a remnant whose members delighted in the law of YHWH, it does not necessarily mean that these individuals experienced the realities accompanying the final fulfillment of these promises.

¹³ Steven R. Coxhead, “The Cardionomographic Work of the Spirit in the Old Testament,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 79 (2017): 81-84.

analysis, both of these scholars provide one piece of the puzzle. Coxhead correctly draws a close link between the various heart transformation metaphors since, as we have seen, they are mutually interpretive and collectively describe the same realities. Yet Coxhead wrongly flattens redemptive history by arguing for the indwelling of the Spirit in the OT elect, which Hamilton demonstrates is impossible based on both the OT and NT evidence.¹⁴

Hence, our solution to this problem must make sense of three clear textual features: (1) all heart transformation metaphors collectively describe the same realities, so should not be separated; (2) the promises are thus all linked to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; and (3) the promises are all tied to the eschatological new covenant age (see table 9). This correlation between the gift of the Spirit and the fulfillment of these metaphors in the eschaton is plausible, since the prophets portray the outpouring of the Spirit as linked

¹⁴ Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 100-160. Not all covenant theologians make this mistake; see the excellent discussion by Horton, who wrestles with how exactly the new covenant will be “not like the covenant” Israel swore at Sinai (Jer 31:32), and concludes that “God will unilaterally circumcise the hearts of his people, the Spirit will indwell them (writing the law on their hearts), and all of this on the basis of the forgiveness of their sins;” see Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit*, 141; cf. p. 117: the “personal occupation of individuals by the glory of God, the Spirit who divides and unites, was unknown in the old covenant.” Interestingly, Mark Snoeberger, writing from a dispensational perspective for the DBTS blog, advances an argument more in line with that of Coxhead; see Mark Snoeberger, “Synthesizing Indwelling, Omnipresence, and Sanctification,” Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary Blog (blog), January 21, 2019, <https://dbts.edu/2019/01/21/synthesizing-indwelling-omnipresence-and-sanctification/>. Snoeberger argues that the concept of “indwelling” is a relatively new invention of certain dispensationalists, which has been (rather surprisingly, in his estimation) adopted by some progressive covenantalists. Snoeberger articulates two concerns: first, it is incorrect to state that indwelling is primarily a matter of *location*; rather, it describes the *activity* of the Spirit within certain persons. Second, to assert that the Spirit was uninvolved in the regeneration and perseverance of the OT saints suggests two separate ways of salvation: one with/by the Spirit, and one without. Snoeberger concludes that any attempts to describe the indwelling of the Spirit as “new” are examples of “biblical theologies forced unnaturally upon texts without regard for the steadying hand of systematic theology;” rather, “there is no difference at all between OT indwelling and NT indwelling.” Snoeberger’s latter point regarding the Spirit’s relation to OT believers will be addressed below, yet his former point perhaps reveals a lack of careful theological thinking regarding the concept of indwelling—particularly in its relationship to omnipresence. A full resolution to this question is beyond the bounds of this study, yet two points may be offered in response. First, Snoeberger is correct in stating that indwelling concerns the *activity* of the Spirit more than his *location*; yet it does not necessarily follow that the activity of the Spirit remained the same throughout redemptive history. Just because the Spirit is active in every place and time (and believer), this does not mean he is personally bringing about obedience and faith in each person *to the same extent*; the evidence of Scripture must inform our theological conclusions on this matter. Second, Snoeberger’s assertion that the concept of new covenant indwelling is “forced unnaturally upon texts” is inaccurate, given the findings of this study; the Spirit is uniquely and deeply tied to the eschatological transformed heart, and any systematic conclusions must make sense of these features of the various texts. Nevertheless, further research is necessary to illuminate the exact relations between indwelling, omnipresence, and the eschatological gift of the Spirit.

to the eschaton (see, e.g., Joel 2). Furthermore, as table 9 shows, all four books link the giving of the new heart with various features associated with the new covenant: YHWH’s Servant, Gentile inclusion, and atonement for the nation. When viewed together, then, it is difficult to dismiss the evidence that the transformed heart will arrive only in the eschaton alongside the outpouring of the Spirit.¹⁵

Table 9. Time of heart transformation fulfillment

<i>Book</i>	<i>Time when heart transformation will occur</i>
Deuteronomy	After the exile and return to the land
Isaiah	Time of the Servant of the Lord, Gentile inclusion, and the “everlasting covenant”
Jeremiah	Coming days, after return from Babylon, when YHWH makes a new covenant
Ezekiel	After returning to the land and atonement is accomplished, when YHWH pours out his Spirit

It would appear, then, that pneumatology is the lynchpin of this debate: what *specifically* is new about the coming of the Spirit in the new covenant? Does Pentecost usher in qualitative or quantitative changes, and what are they? Given the evidence above, one can see the appeal in asserting that both personal regeneration and indwelling are unique to the new covenant; yet this is difficult to square with the NT data. For example, in the classic NT text on regeneration (John 3:1-15), Jesus refers to the life-giving work of the Spirit in Ezekiel 36 and expects that Nicodemus should already

¹⁵ To state the argument more formally: if (1) Ezekiel is the final word on the heart transformation metaphors, and (2) Ezekiel ties the outpouring of the Spirit to these metaphors, and (3) the outpouring of the Spirit happens only after Pentecost, then (4) the metaphors cannot be realized—at least in fullness—before Pentecost. Cf. Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 2 (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2017), 329, who states that, given the parallels between Deut 30:1-6 and Ezek 36:22-27, “any other biblical statements regarding, for example, someone under the old covenant having the Spirit in him must consequently be understood in a qualified way in light of what the Lord has promised through Ezekiel.”

understand what the prophet is describing (v. 10).¹⁶ In other words, Jesus affirms that the outpouring of the Spirit coincides with the fulfillment of these realities. Yet this only brings us back to the same question: if the Spirit is the one who empowers covenant obedience and enables covenant knowledge of YHWH, and if we see these realities (at least to an extent) within the OT elect, and if Jesus affirms that Nicodemus should have understood this, then we must assert that the Spirit was involved *personally* with the OT elect. In other words, the question is not *whether* the Spirit was involved in the OT elect, but rather *how* he was involved—in what way, and to what extent.¹⁷

Moreover, suppose we follow this line of argumentation and recall that the heart transformation metaphors describe not only regeneration, but rather the full reality of new covenant salvation. If this is the case, it is thus possible that some of the realities associated with the transformed heart did indeed exist within the OT elect (hence, Nicodemus should understand), yet not in their full, eschatological, Spirit-empowered glory.¹⁸ What remains to outline, then, is *how* (i.e., *to what extent*) the Spirit's work

¹⁶ See, e.g., Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, Theology for the People of God (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 372. Toon summarizes well the tension this passage introduces: “the new birth, while presented as a necessity by Jesus, is also seen as the work of the Spirit, who came in fullness only after the exaltation of Jesus into heaven;” Peter Toon, *Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 59. Based on the fact that Jesus assumes Nicodemus should have understood regeneration, Horton asserts that no “major dichotomy” exists between the Spirit’s ministry in the old and new covenants, yet still cautions against flattening the contours of redemptive history; Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit*, 155. It is important to note that Jesus’ expectation does not necessarily entail that these realities must have existed before the new covenant; however, it *does* mean that Nicodemus should have at least known that such realities formed the content of the prophetic hopes for the coming age of the Spirit. Cf. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 195-6, who argues that Jesus is *not* demanding that Nicodemus should be capable of experiencing the new birth at the instant of their conversation; rather, he is describing what must be experienced for one to enter the kingdom of God. Carson continues: “The coming-to-faith of the first followers of Jesus was in certain respects unique: they *could not* instantly become ‘Christians’ in the full-orbed sense, and experience the full sweep of the new birth, until *after* the resurrection and glorification of Jesus [emphasis original].” Carson’s argument presupposes that the “full sweep of the new birth” could not have been experienced by the elect under the old covenant; he thus appears to align with the conclusion argued here.

¹⁷ Grogan—and, following him, Kaiser—miss this distinction by pointing to 2 Cor 4:13 as evidence that the Spirit was at work within the OT elect. This is true, but it does not entail that the Spirit worked in the same *way* or to the same *extent*; see Geoffrey W. Grogan, “The Experience of Salvation in the Old and New Testaments,” *Vox Evangelica* 5 (1967): 13; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Indwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (2010): 308.

¹⁸ It seems that Coxhead would agree with this statement on some level, since he too identifies the eschaton as the time with the Spirit’s work would “ramp up” dramatically. Yet he counters that, “even

changes from old to new covenant. In answering this, it is critical to keep both the community and the individual in mind, since we have seen that both sides of this coin feature within the prophetic promises.¹⁹ In short, when the OT and NT describe the difference in the work of the Spirit between old and new covenants, the emphasis within the *community* relates to *extent*, and the emphasis within the *individual* relates to *empowerment*.

Community Change

Coxhead agrees that the work of the Spirit ramps up in the new covenant community; whereas the small minority of elect under the old covenant suffered for the nation's sins, the new covenant will end this limited cardiomographic work of the Spirit.²⁰ Yet the “climax,” or fully “consummated form” of the Spirit’s work in the community will come only in the eschaton when the entire community will know YHWH.²¹

A full discussion of this issue is not possible here, yet I affirm with Coxhead that, with relation to the community, the difference in the Spirit’s new covenant work relates to the *extent* of those within the covenant who know YHWH. Yet if the prophets prophesied that the *entire* community would have “one heart” possessing covenant knowledge of YHWH leading to Spirit-empowered obedience, one wonders how this could apply to unregenerate children within the covenant. In other words, if, as Horton claims, the two principal gifts of the new covenant are the forgiveness of sins and the

though it is true that the Spirit is fully intrinsic to the new covenant in its consummated form, this truth does not invalidate the reality of a genuine but limited cardiomographic work of the Spirit during the old covenant age;” Coxhead, “The Cardiomographic Work,” 82-83. The key phrase here is “genuine but limited”—Coxhead and I both assert this, but define that “genuine but limited” work differently; see below.

¹⁹ See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 195, who argues that, despite the general prophetic focus on the corporate results of heart transformation, the prophets “also anticipated a transformation of individual ‘hearts’—no longer hearts of stone but hearts that hunger to do God’s will.”

²⁰ Coxhead, “The Cardiomographic Work,” 90-91.

²¹ Coxhead, 83.

outpouring of the Holy Spirit,²² then how can anyone within the covenant community *not* possess these gifts? Instead, the prophets assert that *all* of the members of the new covenant community will possess a transformed heart, and thus all will furthermore possess the indwelling presence of the Spirit. The new covenant community will be a “Spiritual” people.²³

Individual Change

More specifically related to this study's focus is the challenging question of how the Spirit's work within elect *individuals* changes from the old to the new covenant. The OT prophets are relatively silent on this issue, focusing instead on the upcoming changes to the community with the arrival of YHWH's Spirit. Yet, as we have seen, the heart transformation metaphors culminate in a promise of the gift of YHWH's Spirit *within* his people, enabling them to obey the Torah (Ezek 36). The fact that the OT elect enjoyed and displayed some measure of Spirit-empowered obedience cannot be allowed to mute the prophets' insistence that this reality has not yet arrived; instead, the text must drive us to affirm that the Spirit's empowering work within individuals increased dramatically under the new covenant, enabling obedience in a way that was previously impossible.²⁴

²² Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit*, 190.

²³ This discussion is necessarily short, due to its indirect relevance to the larger questions at hand. For a fuller discussion, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 704-12, 749-52.

²⁴ Goldingay argues that the Spirit is often “active yet unnamed” in the OT, on the basis of the similarities between old and new covenant worship, prayer, and displays of the Spirit's fruit within the OT elect. In other words, “they are not described as people in whom the Spirit is active, but that is what they are.” He concludes that “the relationship between OT believers and God was essentially like that of NT believers, rather than essentially unlike it. The argument of passages such as Romans 4 or Hebrews 11 depends on that assumption.” See John Goldingay, “Was the Holy Spirit Active in Old Testament Times? What Was New About the Christian Experience of God?,” *Ex Auditu* 12 (1996): 19. This argument is doubtless true on some level, yet it does not do justice to the future hopes of the prophets, or the way the NT describes the newness of believers' relationship to the Spirit in the new covenant; see below. Similarly, Fredricks argues that “If the Spirit is the one who is to enable a renewed ‘Israel’ to ‘walk in my statutes’ and ‘keep My ordinances’ (Ezek 36:27), then is it too much to think that those living before the inauguration of the New Covenant also had the indwelling Spirit enabling them to keep His

If such is the expectation created by the OT prophets, it should come as no surprise that the NT repeatedly affirms this to be true. In the only NT passage that explicitly describes the fulfillment of the circumcision of heart (Rom 2:25-29), Paul defines it as keeping (φυλάσσω)/fulfilling (τελέω) the law, “by the Spirit, not by the letter” (ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι).²⁵ This πνεῦμα-γράμμα contrast, also found in Romans 7:6 and 2 Corinthians 3:6, is a transparent salvation-historical duality, setting the old covenant law in contrast with the agency of the Spirit in the new covenant.²⁶ Paul utilizes similar contrasts elsewhere in Romans 8:2 and Galatians 3:14.²⁷ In short: the Spirit is so integrally and uniquely tied to the new covenant that he can be contrasted with the law/letter/written code (i.e., the old covenant).

What then does the NT emphasize as the *specific* change brought to individuals within the new covenant? As mentioned above, the answer is *empowerment for*

commandments? If they did not have the power of the Spirit available, then what other Spirit did they have?” See Gary Fredricks, “Rethinking the Role of the Holy Spirit in the Lives of Old Testament Believers,” *Trinity Journal* 09, no. 1 (1988): 102-3. This objection is well-stated; yet just because it is the same Spirit at work, it does not necessarily follow that the Spirit was at work in the same *way* and to the same *extent*. Ezekiel 36 clearly looks forward to a *future* giving of the Spirit.

²⁵ Cf. Phil 3:3 and Col 2:11-13, which both likewise refer to spiritual circumcision. In Philippians 3:3, the agency of the Spirit is highlighted once again. In Col 2:11-13, the circumcision without hands/circumcision of Christ relates to putting off the body of flesh/trespases. See the discussion of these passages in John D. Meade, “Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart: The Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Stephen J. Wellum (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 145-57.

²⁶ See the thorough exegesis of these verses in Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, ed. Robert W. Yarabrough and Joshua W. Jipp, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 150-2; cf. a similar conclusion in Trevor J. Burke, “Romans,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Keith Warrington (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 134. Niehaus states that an “act of will” is necessary to imagine that circumcision of heart in Romans 2 could have applied to Jews prior to the new covenant; see Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 2, 330n9. In personal communication, Schreiner clarified that he believes Paul is thinking generally of the unregenerate in Romans 2:25-29, and thus these verses are describing those who are *not* regenerated under the old covenant. Thus, despite affirming that Paul is describing a salvation-historical shift from old to new covenant, Schreiner would nevertheless affirm (contra Niehaus and myself) that the elect under the old covenant *did* possess circumcised hearts.

²⁷ Rom 8:2 contrasts the “law of the Spirit of life” with “the law of sin and death.” Gal 3:14 contrasts the “curse of the law” with the “promised Spirit.” Note also the extended discussion in 2 Cor 3:6-9, where Paul contrasts the ministry of death/condemnation (i.e., the “letter”) with the ministry of the Spirit/righteousness (i.e., the “new covenant”). It is critical to emphasize that these dualities are dealing *not* with two ways of relating to the Torah/commands of YHWH (as does the contrast between “works of the law” and “hearing with faith” in Gal 3:5, for example), but with a salvation-historical/covenantal change.

obedience. Though present throughout the NT, no passage describes this in greater detail than Romans 6-8.²⁸ Romans 6 thoroughly outlines the new *ability* for obedience enabled by the work of Christ, and employs the same contrast between death/condemnation and life/freedom seen above. This contrast is set in covenantal terms in 7:1-6; under the old covenant, while living in the flesh (v. 5), sinful passions bore fruit for death, but now having been released from the law, “we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code” (v. 6). The rest of the chapter describes that the law in itself is not sin, but those under the old covenant are “of the flesh, sold under sin” (v. 14);²⁹ thus, verses 14-25 describe the predicament of an elect member of the old covenant: delighting in the law of God, yet lacking the Spirit-given ability to obey the law.³⁰

Chapter 8 outlines the solution to this predicament: the indwelling Spirit. No condemnation exists for those united to Christ (v. 1), since (vv. 2-4, emphasis added):

. . . the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By

²⁸ A full discussion of this passage is impossible here, yet see the illuminating discussion in Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 3 (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2017), 143-63; Niehaus helpfully examines these chapters to explain the difference between life under the old and new covenants.

²⁹ The Spirit, after all, inspired and empowered the prophets, included Moses, so clearly the law *itself* is not opposed to the Spirit. The problem was the *people*, who were not empowered to obey under the old covenant, and needed their hearts to be circumcised. Cf. the exegesis of Hebrews 8 and Jeremiah 31 in Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 3, 108-11.

³⁰ The identity of the speaker in Rom 7:14-25 is, of course, a subject of much debate. I suggest that this section portrays a member of the elect under the old covenant—i.e., someone regenerated and so persisting in faith and desiring to do what is good, yet struggling against the flesh due to the inability of the law and the absence of the indwelling Spirit (see further on this characterization of regeneration in the OT below). In other words, rather than understanding these verses as describing Paul (or anyone else) before or after conversion, it makes better sense to characterize this as a member of the elect under the old covenant (7:14-25) vs. a member of the elect under the new covenant (8:1-14). The “I” in chapter 7 desires to do what is right—hardly a characterization of the non-elect in OT Israel—yet is unable to carry it out (v. 18). Instead, he keeps doing the evil he does not want to do, rather than doing the good he desires (v. 19). Though he delights in the law of God in his inner being (v. 22; again, hardly a characterization of the non-elect in OT Israel), his body (i.e., his sinful flesh) wages war against his mind and makes him captive to the law of sin (v. 23), so that he cries out in frustration for a deliverer (v. 24). In summary (v. 25), the elect OT member is serving the law of God with his mind (i.e., desiring to do what is good), yet is serving the law of sin with his flesh (i.e., unable to carry out those good desires). It seems to me that this characterization makes better sense of this passage, and aligns clearly with the old covenant/new covenant contrast presented in 7:6. Niehaus appears to reach a similar conclusion, arguing that it is “quite impossible” that 7:14-25 describes the experience of a new covenant believer; yet because he does not bring in the OT elect/non-elect distinction, I am unsure whether he would agree with this characterization. See Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 3, 159-61.

sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh so that *the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us*, who walk not according to the flesh but *according to the Spirit*.

Again, it is imperative to notice that the contrast in verse 2 (law of the Spirit of life vs. law of sin and death) refers to a redemptive-historical/old vs. new covenant change. Paul goes on to describe how the Spirit brings life to the flesh, which is dead in sin (vv. 10-11), enabling believers to put to death the deeds of the body by his power (v. 13),³¹ before describing other benefits of the indwelling Spirit (adoption, assurance, etc.; vv. 13-16). In short, in Romans 6-8 Paul argues that a life of consistent obedience to the law, empowered by the Spirit (ch. 8), was not a reality for the elect under the old covenant (ch. 7), but is now possible through union with Christ in his death and resurrection (ch. 6).³²

It would appear, then, that the NT confirms what the above study of the prophets anticipated: the gift of the transformed heart, which results in *covenant knowledge of YHWH leading to Spirit-empowered obedience*, is a new covenant reality accomplished by the eschatological operations of the Spirit within individual believers. The NT's call for believers to "walk" (περιπατέω) in the Spirit, be "led" (ἄγω) by the Spirit, "live" (ζάω) in the Spirit, and "keep in step" (στοιχέω) with the Spirit—thus producing the fruit he brings, which is the fulfillment of the law—is a unique existential privilege known only to the elect within the new covenant (Gal 5:16-25).

³¹ As Niehaus puts it, "We thus have an existential choice [i.e., the choice to offer ourselves as slaves to righteousness instead of as slaves to impurity; cf. Rom 6:19] that was not available under the old covenant." Niehaus, *Biblical Theology Volume 3*, 147.

³² Though not as systematically as in Romans 6-8, these same realities are also described in Galatians 3-6. In Galatians 3, Paul counters those who argue that the Spirit can be received through obeying the "works of the law." Instead, he reminds the Galatians that the promise of Abraham (i.e., the giving of the Spirit; v. 14) came 430 years before God gave the law (vv. 15-18); hence, the law does nothing to annul the promise of the coming Spirit (it is worth noting here that the coming of the Spirit is looked forward to as a *future blessing*). The law was given after the promise of the Spirit, *not* because it could give life (v. 21), but "because of transgressions" until the promised seed (Jesus) would come (v. 19; here again the coming of the Spirit is tied to the work of Christ). Yet now that Christ has come under the law to redeem those under the law (4:4-5), we (as a result) receive new covenant adoption as sons; and "because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (4:6). Just like in Romans 8, Paul then shifts in Galatians 5 to describe the flesh vs. Spirit struggle, affirming that those led by the Spirit are not under the curse of the law, and are now enabled by the Spirit to resist the desires of the flesh and display Spirit-empowered "fruit" instead (i.e., to obey God's law; 5:16-25).

Of course, this does not entail that knowledge of YHWH and obedience to his law are *entirely* new; as demonstrated above, these realities can be seen, to some extent, within the OT elect.³³ It is nevertheless true that the *potential* for covenant knowledge and obedience is *greater* for Spirit-empowered new covenant believers.³⁴ The possibility of defining this greater potential for obedience with quantitative specificity is doubtful, yet to deny this reality is to risk minimizing the magnificent changes brought about by the new covenant.³⁵

³³ It is worth noting that, despite the evidence provided in Kaiser, “The indwelling presence,” 309, the NT rarely emphasizes the *obedience* of the elect within the old covenant; rather, it emphasizes their *faith*, and their obedience only as it is tied to that faith (e.g., Rom 4; Heb 11). Some examples of day-to-day obedience exist (e.g., Joseph resisting Potiphar’s wife “day after day” [יום יום]; Gen 39:10), yet this is atypical; instead, what normally receives attention are crucial, life-altering moments of obedience (e.g., Heb 11:8), in the midst of lives often marked by failings and disobedience. Certainly, saints under the new covenant still wrestle against sin; yet it is instructive to notice the remarkable optimism and confidence with which the NT authors describe NT churches—an optimism that is conspicuously absent from the OT. The entire community possesses glad and generous hearts (Acts 2:46), and the full number of the believers have “one heart and soul” in their generosity (Acts 4:32). So also, Paul is sure that the Roman Christians are “full of goodness” (Rom 15:14) and the author of Hebrews is confident that the suffering believers will not fall away (Heb 6:9). One would be hard pressed to find this type of language and optimism within the OT. Furthermore, even the greatest chapter in the NT regarding the obedience of OT saints (Heb 11) is placed within a book that, from start to finish, is an *a fortiori* argument; thus, if even the OT saints had faith leading to obedience, how much more should Spirit-empowered believers now that they can look to and consider Jesus (Heb 12:1-3)! I thank Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum for helping me, in personal conversations, to think through this point. See also the discussion of 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 in Peter J. Gentry, *Biblical Studies*, vol. 1 (Peterborough, ON: H&E Academic, 2020), 67-71. Gentry demonstrates the connection between 1 Thess 4:10 and LXX Ezekiel 36:27, arguing that “to know the Lord, to be taught by him, is to have his Spirit impel the believer to act”—this is exactly what was demonstrated above, based on the correlations between Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. Gentry goes on to point out how, under the new covenant, believers no longer need to write out the instructions of the covenant, since “it is the Holy Spirit who writes the instructions on our hearts moment by moment [cf. 2 Cor 3:3].”

³⁴ See Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 3, 160-1, who affirms that new covenant believers with the indwelling presence of the Spirit “have the potential to live more godly lives than those under the old or Mosaic covenant.” This is directly opposite to the conclusion reached by Kaiser, who argues that “there is nothing in Scripture that suggests that New Testament believers were enabled to live on a higher plane or to experience holiness and righteousness more than their Old Testament counterparts;” see Kaiser, “The indwelling presence,” 310. Yet this conclusion is based on Kaiser’s argument that there is nothing inherently “new” about the new covenant, other than the fact that “all believers would now be incorporated into one body of Christ, regardless of their denominational identities, as all were baptized into one body and were given one Spirit to drink (1 Cor 12:13);” Kaiser, “The indwelling presence,” 315. Based on the evidence of this study, Kaiser does not do justice to the promises and portrayals found in either the Old or New Testament.

³⁵ We have already seen how covenant theologians accuse credobaptists of over-realized eschatology due to their insistence that Jer 31:34 applies to the new covenant community today; see Coxhead, “The Cardionomographic Work,” 83n16. I have responded to this argument already in the chapter on Jeremiah. Yet we are now in a position to see that credobaptists can likewise accuse covenant theologians (such as Coxhead) of the same due to their insistence on bringing the eschatological gift of Spirit-empowered heart transformation back in time into the old covenant community. To quote Niehaus once more: “There is a vast difference between having God’s *torah* in stone (which of course is no small thing) and having it straight from the Lord himself as he walked and talked among his people. There is a

Resolution

It would seem that clarity regarding the hearts of the elect under the old covenant is impossible until the NT; indeed, even now, full precision is elusive. Whatever covenant one lived under, it is eminently clear that whether one has a faithful or unfaithful heart (i.e., a heart “toward” YHWH or against him) is a binary reality. In other words, there is a *qualitative* difference between the heart of the elect and non-elect, regardless of the time in redemptive history. If this is what we understand by the term “regeneration,” then surely the elect within the old covenant were regenerated.

Table 10. Schemas comparing the work of the Spirit in the old and new covenants

<i>Schema</i>	<i>Old covenant</i>	<i>New covenant</i>
Coxhead, Kaiser, etc.	Regenerated (enabled to believe) and indwelt (empowered to obey), yet limited number	Same as old covenant, but accomplished in larger proportion of covenant members
Hamilton	Regenerated: given ability to hear, understand, believe, obey, and enter the kingdom of God	Indwelt: experience the abiding, covenant presence of God through his Spirit
Proposal	Covenant knowledge of YHWH (limited) Spirit-empowered obedience (limited; no indwelling)	Torah-inscribed heart: greater covenant knowledge of YHWH Circumcision of heart: greater Spirit-empowered obedience New heart: indwelling of the Spirit

Yet there appears to be a *quantitative* difference between the hearts of the elect in the old and new covenants, which is tied to the forward-pointing nature of the heart transformation metaphors. The prophets looked forward to a day when all the covenant people, both individually and as a community, would possess *covenant knowledge of YHWH leading to Spirit-empowered obedience*. To be sure, these realities are evident to a

difference—yet more vast—between these cases and what we now enjoy as people of the new covenant: the Holy Spirit within us convicting us of sin, righteousness, and judgment;” Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, vol. 3, 104.

certain extent within the old covenant elect, but not in their full new covenant glory. Only believers under the new covenant experience the circumcised heart, Torah-inscribed heart, and new heart, which together represent the indwelling of the Spirit and the fullness of new covenant salvation. Table 10 outlines the differences between this proposal and those of Hamilton and Coxhead/Kaiser, which have been discussed throughout this work.

One more note bears mentioning. Given this study's findings, it is perhaps misguided from the start to approach this question by asking whether *individuals* under the old covenant experienced the promised heart transformation. As we have seen repeatedly, these promises are inextricably bound up with the fullness of new covenant salvation, including the transformation of the entire *covenant community*. The hope of the prophets is not merely for more individuals to worship YHWH, but for all of his people to know and serve him. Thus, the transformation of individuals by the indwelling Spirit is inseparably tied to the transformation of the entire community—a reality which is unique to the new covenant.

Application

Finally, a brief word of application is in order. We have seen already in the introduction how some theologians treat the question explored in this study as one of interest and curiosity, but not of crucial or practical importance. While this may be true relative to other primary issues of doctrine, the conclusions reached in this study nevertheless have direct relevance to life and ministry.

On a personal level, the reality of the Spirit's unique empowering work under the new covenant should fill us gratitude for the ability to experience this remarkable privilege, which has been made possible by the atonement of our perfect, Spirit-filled Savior. Furthermore, this awareness should fill us with encouragement and assurance that the Lord will complete the work he has started in us (Phil 1:6). God has promised through

the prophets that he will *cause* those who are given the seal of the indwelling Spirit to obey his instructions. No longer do we live under a covenant which gives commands without accompanying empowerment; under the new covenant, no sin or temptation is beyond the power and reach of the life-giving Spirit.

On a pastoral level, the results of this study should affect the way pastors preach, teach, and counsel from the OT. Given the progress of revelation, the OT should not be used mainly as a source of moral examples, since this is not the *primary* point of contact/comparison between the elect under the old and new covenants. Instead, OT believers should primarily be held up as examples of *faith*. More specifically, pastors should be cautious about offering consolation based on the failures of OT saints, since those saints *did not experience the same empowerment we do today*. Rather, unpopular as it may be, pastors should regularly emphasize the radical nature of new covenant conversion and empowerment (e.g., Rom 6-8; Gal 5-6; 1 John) in their preaching, teaching, and counsel. The covenants must not be flattened; the new work of the Spirit within the new covenant elect should be emphasized for the comfort of those who are struggling and the warning of those who are wandering. Moreover, the results of this study remind pastors that the goal of our teaching is not simply information transfer or moral instruction; rather, it is for the sake of stoking *covenant knowledge of YHWH leading to Spirit-empowered obedience*. The goal of our charge should always be “love from a pure heart and good conscience and sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:5).

Finally, on an ecclesiological level, the conclusions of this study emphasize the radically new nature of the new covenant people—they are a *regenerate* people with *greater* Spirit-empowered ability to obey. This theological reality ought to bolster and encourage pastors in the good—but hard—work of laboring for meaningful and pure membership, both at the front door (rigorous membership processes) and the back door (church discipline), knowing that the Spirit-empowered obedience of new covenant believers, though not perfect, *will* show itself in all those who belong to the Lord.

APPENDIX 1

לבב/לב IN THE HEBREW OT

Hans Walter Wolff, in his classic study of anthropology in the OT, includes an extensive discussion of לבב/לב in the Hebrew Bible. Of the 858 total occurrences of these words (לב = 599; לבב = 259),¹ 5 refer to animals, 26 to the heart of God, 11 to the heart of the sea, 1 to the heart of heaven, and 1 to the heart of a tree; all of the remaining 814 occurrences deal exclusively with the human heart.²

While modern Western societies use heart terminology almost exclusively to describe emotions, ancient Hebrews—and other surrounding ANE cultures³—viewed the heart as the center of the whole person, responsible for emotions, desires, thinking, planning, will, and decisions.⁴ Wolff describes the acts performed by the heart in four categories: (1) feelings (sensibility, emotions, mood), (2) wish (desire, longing, arrogance), (3) reason (intellect, reasoning, understanding, perception, insight, consciousness, memory, knowledge, reflection, discernment), and (4) decisions of the will (planning, conscience, intention, devotion).⁵ Thus, Wolff categorizes various aspects

¹ Note that there is no discernible semantic or grammatical difference between לבב and לב.

² Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: SCM Press Ltd, 1974), 40.

³ See Hermann Spieckermann, “Heart, Spirit, and Steadfast Love: Substantial Contributions of Torah and Psalter to Old Testament Theology,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 28, no. 2 (2014): 255.

⁴ *Contra* Routledge, who asserts that the heart in the OT is the seat of the will, rather than the emotions. Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 145. In his discussion of the heart, Wolff helpfully refers to 1 Sam 25:37-38 as critical for understanding the OT view of the heart. In this passage, Nabal’s heart dies and he becomes as a stone (וימת לבו בקרבו והוא היה לאבן), yet he continues to live for ten days before YHWH strikes him down. To have a “dead heart” is essentially equivalent to being in a coma, without normal cognitive and volitive abilities. See Wolff, *Anthropology*, 40-41.

⁵ See Wolff, *Anthropology*, 45-54 for extensive references and examples.

of the Hebrew heart according to thoroughly anthropological categories.

Without rejecting Wolff's helpful categories, for the purposes of this study I have analyzed the heart according to theological and moral categories. Since the heart is tied deeply to will, desire, and devotion, it is often described with moral categories of good/evil, proud/humble, etc.⁶ Yet heart terminology is also used regularly in amoral contexts, focused on what we might describe as the "inner self" (i.e., amoral emotions and reactions) rather than the "inner will" (i.e., moral decisions, desires, and allegiances).⁷ When analyzed according to these criteria, around half of the total 814 occurrences related to the human heart occur in amoral contexts, while the other half occur in clearly moral contexts. Moral uses are evident due to the use of ethically-charged adjectives (e.g., good, evil, proud, stubborn) or metaphors (e.g., turning away from YHWH); amoral uses are identified by the absence of such descriptors (see table A1).⁸

Given the focus of this study, only *moral* uses of לב/לבב terminology are germane to the research question and thesis, and thus I have largely ignored amoral uses in my analysis. Hence, while not discounting or disregarding the heart's anthropological features, the study remains focused on the more salient theological and moral characteristics.

⁶ Cf. Spiekermann, "Heart, Spirit, and Steadfast Love," 258, who claims, "One could almost say the heart is the center in the human where good meets evil."

⁷ This is not to say that emotions are always amoral in the OT; emotions play a critical role in the right worship and orientation of the heart toward YHWH (e.g., Deut 12:7; 16:11; 28:47; Ps 32:11; Zeph 3:14; Zech 9:9). Yet it is important to separate amoral *effects* from moral *causes*. For example, the covenant curses in the Pentateuch speak of the emotional (heart-level) effects of disobedience (Lev 26:36; Deut 28:65, 67), yet these are amoral *effects* of moral *causes*—e.g. fearfulness *because* the Lord has handed over his people to their enemies. While it is not always easy to separate causes and effects, it nevertheless remains true that many of the heart responses described in the OT are amoral (see table A1).

⁸ Amoral uses may (and often do) occur in morally-significant contexts, yet the heart itself is not described in moral categories.

Table A1. Examples of amoral uses of לב/לבב in the Hebrew Bible

Category	Description	Sample references
Expressions	Speaking in/to (על/אל/ב) one's heart (i.e., speaking to oneself)	Gen 17:17; 24:45, 27:41; Deut 7:17; 8:17; 1 Sam 1:13; 27:1; etc.
	Stealing (גנב) the heart (i.e., deceiving)	Gen 31:20, 26
	Speaking to (על) the heart (i.e., speaking tenderly)	Gen 34:3; 50:21; Judg 19:3; 2 Sam 19:7; Isa 40:2; etc.
Negative situations	Shock	Gen 45:26
	Fear	Gen 42:28; Lev 26:36; Deut 1:28; 20:3; 28:65, 67; Josh 2:11; 5:11; 7:5; 1 Sam 4:13; 17:32; 28:5; Isa 7:2, 4; 21:4; Jer 4:19; etc.
	Discouragement	Num 32:7, 9; Deut 20:8; Ezek 13:22; etc.
	Sadness/grief	1 Sam 1:8; Jer 8:18; Ps 13:2; Prov 14:13; 25:20; Neh 2:2; etc.
	Concern/confusion	2 Kgs 6:11; Ezek 32:9; Ps 25:17; etc.
	Anxiety	Isa 35:4; Ps 55:4; Prov 12:25; etc.
Positive situations	Broken-heartedness	Isa 61:1; Jer 23:9; Ps 34:18; Ps 109:16; 147:3; etc.
	Refreshment	Gen 18:5; Judg 19:5-6, 8-9; Ps 104:15; etc.
	Joy/Merriness	Exod 4:14; Judg 16:25; 18:20; 1 Sam 25:36-37; 2 Sam 13:28; 1 Kgs 8:66; 21:7; Isa 30:29; Zech 10:7; Ps 4:7; Prov 15:13; 17:22; Esth 1:10; etc.
	Courage	2 Sam 17:10; Amos 2:16; Ps 27:14; 31:24; etc.
	Delight	Jer 15:16; etc.

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ABSTRACT

REGENERATION AND THE HEART UNDER THE OLD COVENANT: A STUDY IN DEUTERONOMY AND THE MAJOR PROPHETS

Kevin Samy Gabriel, ThM
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Peter J. Gentry

Biblical scholars debate whether elect members of the old covenant were regenerate, often tying the discussion to the language of circumcision of heart. Yet an analysis of heart transformation metaphors in the prophets reveals that all are mutually-interpreting, eschatological, and linked to the new covenant. This study examines and characterizes the moral heart and its transformation in the prophetic books of Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The heart is shown to be determinant in both allegiance and action, and the epicenter of covenant knowledge and obedience. As a result, heart transformation is needed in order to change one's relationship to YHWH and his commands. An analysis of the relevant data reveals that, while there is a *qualitative* difference between the hearts of the elect and non-elect under both covenants, in the new covenant the transformation of heart brings *quantitatively* new covenant knowledge of YHWH leading to Spirit-empowered obedience.

VITA

Kevin Samy Gabriel

EDUCATION

BS, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, 2013
MDiv, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019
ThM, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Student Success Advisor, Boyce College, Louisville, KY, 2017-2021
Garrett Fellow, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY,
2019-2020
Adjunct Instructor of Humanities, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,
Louisville, KY, 2020-2021