GRANT F. GATES

Disability, Faciality, and Redaction

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183

Mohr Siebeck

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Grant F. Gates

Disability, Faciality, and Redaction

Deterritorializing Disability in the Deuteronomistic Collection

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This book is a revision of my doctoral dissertation written at Claremont School of Theology and defended in October 2025. I experienced the time researching and writing the dissertation as caffeine-human assemblage, hardly able to clearly see because of pushing ahead at a frenzied pace. However, the research answered a question I had pursued for a much longer time: can the experiences of disability, of care for and ministry to and with people with disability, and of disability-informed biblical interpretation be integrated into the mainstream project of biblical studies? In this project I approached a more specific example of this general question, that is, could reading the Deuteronomistic Collection with disability deepen our understanding of the historical origins of the Deuteronomistic Collection? Along the way, answering this question required significant development of my own disability readings of a number of passages that I trust you will find edifying.

There are always more people behind a book than it is possible to thank by name. For the inspiration to write this project, I would like to thank my coworkers at Joni and Friends and the many people with disabilities I have lived and served alongside in churches since childhood. I would like to thank my friend Jay Olsen-Thrift for insights and discussions on the practical matter of organizing a large writing project. For encouragement in research, I would like to thank the Healthcare and Disability in the Ancient World program unit at the Society of Biblical Literature. For friendship in academia, I especially thank the members of the PhD Student Tweeps Discord server. Non-human elements played a significant role in my work as well, with Total Wine & More store #1116 and Ragamuffin Coffee Roasters providing significant contributions to the production of this work.

I owe enormous gratitude to my PhD committee for my formation as a scholar. Dr. Marvin Sweeney proved a natural fit for my advisor from our first conversation and shaped my historical critical sensibilities during my coursework. Dr. Jeffrey Kuan is uniquely gifted at bringing the best out of students, and he pushed my historical rootedness in the broader near eastern world. And without Dr. Sharon Jacob, I would not know the joys of theory.

Many other teachers as well have shaped me, from my parents Sean and Andrea as first teachers to those who taught me Hebrew and Israelite History

in seminary like Dr. Iosif Zhakevich, Dr. Paul Twiss, and Dr. Michael Grisanti. My sister Grace Gates helped me with image creation and is due thanks. Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to acknowledge the sacrifices of my wife Celene and daughter Imogen. While I cannot say this piece of research is really for you, I pray we continue to grow and enjoy life together as we celebrate and find our next steps. To God be the glory.

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Abbreviations

ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ASJ	*Acta Sumerologica*
AOS	American Oriental Series
AnSt	*Anatolian Studies*
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
ANEP	*The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by James B. Pritchard. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
BT	*The Bible Translator*
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.* Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1946–2006
CSHJ	Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
CAL	*The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon.* Cincinnati: The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project at the Hebrew Union College, 1987–
CurBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
DSD	*Dead Sea Discoveries*
DCH	*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Edited by David J. A. Clines. 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2014

ECL	Early Christianity and Its Literature
ET	English Text
Expedition	*Expedition: Bulletin of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania*
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by Emil Kautzsch. Translated by Arther E. Cowley. 2nd edition. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999
HvTSt	*Hervormde teologiese studies*
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
IECOT	International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament
Int	*Interpretation*
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IBHS	*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990
Joüon	Joüon, Paul. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Translated and revised by T. Muraoka. 2 vols. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991
JIBS	*Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies*
JESOT	*Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JHS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MT	Masoretic Text
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
NAC	New American Commentary
NCB	New Century Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NRSVue	New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTR	Old Testament Readings
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
ÖBS	Österreichische Biblische Studien

OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
RB	*Revue Biblique*
RA	*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
LXX	Septuagint
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SRTD	Studies in Religion, Theology, and Disability
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Even those with no interest in disability studies or little knowledge of the subject of disability recognize characters with disability in the Hebrew Bible such as Mephibosheth, Samson after the Philistines gouge out his eyes, or Isaac in his old age when Jacob deceived him. These and other examples have drawn the attention of readers of the Hebrew Bible including scholars, clergy, artists, poets, lyricists, and musicians. However, interpretation of the Bible utilizing insights from the lived experiences of disability and from academic disability studies is a relatively recent development. Significant scholarly progress in this direction began in the 1990s. Various research groups and program units within various professional guilds attest to this rapid progress and expansion. At this point, the interdisciplinary work integrating disability studies and biblical studies has been largely positively received. However, as a subfield, Disability and Bible remains much smaller in biblical studies than many other subfields of biblical and religious studies.

In contrast to the state of affairs in the academia of biblical and religious studies, estimates put the number of individuals with disabilities in the world over fifteen percent.[1] This fraction is higher in developed countries such as my own (the United States), where the Center for Disease Control estimates over twenty-five percent of the adult population lives with some sort of disability.[2] These statistics only provide a cursory look at the surface level of disability in the world – data on the varieties and categories of disabilities reflect a broad array of experiences which may at times seem to have little to do with

[1] "Disability," World Health Organization, March 7, 2023, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health; "Factsheet on Persons with Disabilities," United Nations, accessed July 31, 2025, https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/factsheet-on-persons-with-disabilities.html.

[2] "CDC Data Shows Over 70 Million U.S. Adults Reported Having a Disability," CDC Newsroom, July 16, 2024, https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/s0716-Adult-disability.html; "Disability Impacts All of Us Infographic," Disability and Health, CDC, last updated July 15, 2024, https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/articles-documents/disability-impacts-all-of-us-infographic.html.

each other.[3] That said, the extent of this population and the potential insights the various groups within the population can bring to reading the Bible have not been appreciated in a manner commensurate with its sheer size. As other research works at the intersection of biblical studies and disability studies have as well, I hope to exhibit some of the power of insights from disability communities.

Additionally, my hope is that by undertaking a study expressly interested in redaction criticism (in particular, a diachronic reading of the Deuteronomistic Collection) and disability, I can make a significant move toward fully integrating disability insights into the center of biblical scholarship. Rather than limiting disability insights to synchronic readings, I hope to deterritorialize disability methods from one mode of research and apply them to another, one ironically well-trodden in much of biblical scholarship, but less trodden at the intersection of disability studies and the Bible.

1.2 Proposed Thesis

Readings of the Bible informed by disability studies[4] and detailed redaction critical analyses of biblical texts have rarely appeared together. Disability emerges out of socio-cultural contexts. Because disability emerges out of socio-cultural contexts, differences in conception of disability arise in different societies and cultures. Applying this logic to historical criticism of the Hebrew Bible, disability readings provide insights useful for making historical critical conclusions that can guide redaction critical studies. In particular, conceptions of disability in texts from southern Judah, especially in the times of the late Davidic monarchy (after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel), exhibit a more developed, representational, reductionistic character. These conceptions of disability are more likely to symbolically develop characterization or have moral overtones. Conceptions of disability in texts from the northern kingdom of Israel, particularly those in pre-Deuteronomistic redactions of Samuel and Kings, do not display this same level of development toward reductionism or representation. In particular, texts from the northern kingdom are more likely to describe persons with disability in terms of their actions or functions, whereas texts from the southern kingdom are more likely to describe persons with disability in terms of single nouns reducing their identities to representational categories of subjectivity. Isolating these trends supports arguments for which texts are northern and southern, bolstering evi-

[3] Note the variety of disability categories on the infographic in "Disability Impacts All of Us."

[4] What I call *disability readings*.

dence for a block model understanding of the redaction of the Deuteronomistic Collection.

1.3 Literature Review: Disability and the Bible

The word *disability* does not have direct equivalents in the biblical texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. However, the presence of various individuals with physical diseases or impairments related to what moderns might today call disability has produced a long history of interpretation and commentary on these examples. More recently the field of disability studies has influenced biblical studies,[5] both broadly in Hebrew Bible interpretation[6] and in the case

[5] Within biblical studies, especially with a historical bent, earlier work primarily focused on topics like diagnoses of specific medical conditions in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern literature, and Ancient Mediterranean literature. See for example Julius Preuss, *Biblisch-talmudische Medizin: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Heilkunde und der Kultur überhaupt, 3 Auflage* (Berlin: Verlag von S. Karger, 1923); Stanley G. Browne, *Leprosy in the Bible*. (London: Christian Medical Fellowship, 1970). A major transitional work between these primarily medically-driven studies and later disabilities studies-driven work on the Bible is Hector Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel*, HSM 54 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). That said, the medical direction continues to prove fruitful, as evidenced by recent works such as Laura M. Zucconi, *Ancient Medicine: From Mesopotamia to Rome* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

On the other hand, much interest in work oriented around disability studies partly arose out of theological work, especially after the publication of Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994). The ongoing legacy of Eiesland's work is evident within theology, for example in the *Journal of Disability and Religion* and the *Nancy Eiesland Endowment Lecture*. E.g., Julia Watts Belser, "Violence, Disability, and the Politics of Healing: The Inaugural Nancy Eiesland Endowment Lecture," *Journal of Disability & Religion* 19, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 177–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2015.1061470. A revival of interest in disabled-God theology continues at present, see Lisa D. Powell, *The Disabled God Revisited: Trinity, Christology, and Liberation* (London: T&T Clark, 2023). Baylor's series *Studies in Religion, Theology, and Disability* (SRTD), the Healthcare and Disability in the Ancient World program unit of the Society of Biblical Literature, and the Religion and Disability Studies program unit of the American Academy of Religion all provide further evidence of the impact of disability studies on religious and biblical studies, with a significant amount of this impact traced back to early works by Eiesland and Avalos in their respective fields. Eiesland's impact in particular is noted by Louise A. Gosbell, *"The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, and the Lame": Physical and Sensory Disability in the Gospels of the New Testament*, WUNT II 469 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 17.

[6] Saul M. Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Rebecca Raphael, *Biblical Corpora: Representations of Disability in Hebrew Biblical Literature*, LHBOTS 445 (London:

of specific texts or canonical collections.[7] Discussion of the nature of disability in works influenced by biblical studies often begins with the question of various "models" of disability, such as medical, ritual, moral, social, cultural, relational, economic, etc. The idea of models of disability provides a useful heuristic starting point for conceptualizing the development of disability studies and the development of interpretation of disability within biblical studies.

Prior to the advent of biblical research expressly influenced by disability studies, the default mode in modern scholarship[8] has been to attempt to find

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T&T Clark, 2008). In addition to monographs, Baylor published a full Bible commentary. Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong, eds, *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*, SRTD (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017).

[7] Examples include Jeremy Schipper's monograph on Mephibosheth: Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story*, LHBOTS 441 (London: T&T Clark, 2006). Influential edited volumes include Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper, eds., *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, SemeiaSt 55 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper, eds., *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). More recently, see Isabel Cranz, *Royal Illness and Kingship Ideology in the Hebrew Bible*, SOTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Shorter contributions include Rebecca Raphael, "Disability, Identity, and Otherness in Persian-Period Israelite Thought," in *Imagining the Other and Constructing Israelite Identity in the Early Second Temple Period*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana Vikander Edelman, LHBOTS 456 (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 277–96; Jeremy Schipper, "Why Does Imagery of Disability Include Healing in Isaiah?" *JSOT* 39, no. 3 (March 2015): 319–33, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089215577594; Eric J. Harvey, "Not Seeing, Unseeing, and Blind: Disentangling Disability from Adjacent Topoi in the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 142, no. 3 (September 15, 2023): 363–83, https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1423.2023.1. Harvey works toward differentiating between ableism "within" a biblical text and ableism "read into" a biblical text by the historical stream of interpretation in its reception, which in his view tends historically to compound and grow nascent ableism.

While a number of additional works in New Testament studies deserve mention as well, the recent monograph by Isaac T. Soon has already received significant attention, with a review session at the Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting in 2024 and a presentation at the Institute on Theology and Disability in 2025. Isaac T. Soon, *A Disabled Apostle: Impairment and Disability in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023). In New Testament, see also Anna Rebecca Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body: Representations of Disability in Early Christian Texts*, ECL 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018); Gosbell, *"The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, and the Lame;"* Lena Nogossek-Raithel, *Dis/Ability in Mark: Representations of Body and Healing in the Gospel Narrative*, BZNW 263 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023). Finally, Zucconi's broad survey of ancient medicine in various Ancient Near Eastern and Ancient Mediterranean contexts integrates brief discussions of disability throughout, *Ancient Medicine*.

[8] Pre-modern scholarship lies beyond the scope of this study. While some readings of pre-modern scholarship, especially rabbinic, will occasionally be mentioned later in the dissertation, they primarily serve to discuss issues of diagnosing conditions, which inherently approaches disability medically. Hence, while there remains significant potential for

diagnoses of biblical figures, demonstrating the use of a medical model of disability.[9] In other words, the medical model of disability represents disability as a problem to be solved through medical technology,[10] and applying the medical model to biblical studies involves an attempt at interdisciplinary work between the Bible and medicine. The development of the social model of disability in the UK was a significant twentieth-century advance in disability studies, founded on a distinction between medical *impairment* and social construction of that impairment as disability.[11] This basic insight of the social model distinguishes between the body in itself (so to speak) and the body as interpreted socially in relation to other individuals and the environment.[12] The dominant model of disability, however, within published biblical studies so far, especially North American biblical studies, is referred to as the *cultural* model.[13] This approach may be partly inspired by the influence of Michel

anachronism in describing pre-modern scholarship as adhering to a medical model of disability, there are elements similar to a medical model of disability present in some pre-modern scholarship.

[9] That such an approach is medical arises from the search for scientific precision of understanding the body within medical discourse. Such an approach frequently anachronistically considers biblical texts without regard for their socio-cultural backgrounds, the discursive structures at work in the worlds from which they arose, the ambiguities of the descriptive language, literary genre, etc. A typical example is the work of Liubov Ben-Nun on the Hebrew Bible, whose work generally tries to align descriptions in the biblical texts with potential matching diagnostic criteria in modern medical discourse. See Liubov Ben-Nun, *The Diseases of the Kings of Israel: Medical Research in the Bible from the Viewpoint of Contemporary Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Beer-Sheva: B. N. Publication House, 2007).

[10] See Lucy Series, "Disability and Human Rights," in *The Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, 2nd ed., ed. Nick Watson and Simo Vehmas (London: Routledge, 2020), 72–88, here 81–82; Nick Watson and Simo Vehmas, "Disability Studies: Into the Multidisciplinary Future," in Watson and Vehmas, *The Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, 3–13, here 10. The medical approach proves insufficient for a number of reasons, including the unintuitive result that individuals with similar medical differences may not always be considered "disabled." The social model attempts to theorize disability in a means that permits greater agency and subjectivity for individuals living with disability.

[11] Colin Barnes, "Understanding the Social Model of Disability: Past, Present and Future," in Watson and Vehmas, *The Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, 14–31; Watson and Vehmas, "Disability Studies: Into the Multidisciplinary Future," 4.

[12] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, 6. For further sources and discussion not just of the Nordic model, but variations of the social model from continental Europe and some majority world contexts, see the discussion and footnotes in Soon, *A Disabled Apostle*, 6–7.

[13] Schipper's introduction to his published dissertation may have helped set this trajectory through his consideration of medical, social, minority, and cultural models. What he identifies as the *minority* model primarily arose in activism in the United States, identifying disability in terms of a marginalized minority. As an activist model, the minority model has made little traction in biblical studies, and the North American theorists behind the

Foucault on sociology;[14] one starting point for the cultural model is the observation that the social model's binary distinction between inherent bodily impairment and socially constructed disability cannot be absolute or clean. Bodily impairments are discursively constructed, not necessarily a feature of a body in itself. Impairments are context dependent, since impairment pertains to expectations of function constructed in particular environments. The social model's concept of impairment requires a pre-social or asocial concept of a body; no human body is without social or cultural context. The cultural model of disability views disability as emergent and evolving along with culture, as an integral part of culture. Constructing culture constructs disability, and constructing disability is a part of constructing culture.[15] The appropriation of the cultural model within biblical studies cites theoretical work on the model produced within disability studies, especially the work of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson[16] and the collaborations of David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder.[17]

Isaac Soon has recently criticized this cultural model on two main points: first, that its practitioners in biblical studies seem to draw very differently from various theorists, and second, that this variety has resulted in the dissolution of a cultural model into cultural models; in other words, that the cultural model of disability is not well defined.[18] Following Anne Waldschmidt's work, he takes a socio-cultural approach, recognizing the limitation of approaching disability from the perspective of models in the first place.[19] These

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cultural model have done significant work bridging some of the initial insights of the minority model with more scholarly attempts to theorize disability. Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible*, 7, 15–24. Issues regarding the cultural model and its underlying theory will be further discussed in the methodology chapter.

[14] As notes Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, 6.

[15] Gosbell, *"The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, and the Lame,"* 36–39; Raphael, *Biblical Corpora*, 8–9. Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible*, 19–20; Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, 7.

[16] In particular, her concept of the culturally constructed *normate* helps relate the minority model to the cultural model. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[17] Mitchell and Snyder's primary contribution was that of understanding disability as a literary trope used as a sort of prosthetic; hence their term narrative prosthesis. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, Corporealities: Discourses of Disability (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[18] Soon, *A Disabled Apostle*, 8.

[19] Soon, *A Disabled Apostle*, 8–9; Anne Waldschmidt, "Disability Goes Cultural: The Cultural Model of Disability as an Analytical Tool," in *Culture – Theory – Disability: Encounters between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies*, ed. Anne Waldschmidt, Hanjo

criticisms are accurate of the situation in biblical studies and well-conceived in their theoretical suggestions for improvement. Perhaps the reason the cultural model has fallen short in biblical studies is the very reason it was appealing in biblical studies in the first place: a cultural model of disability places a high emphasis on literature and the arts.[20] Because disability is a real-world issue of lived experience, and because the Bible is more than literature, given its complicated historical origins and religious significance, approaches to disability in biblical studies should reflect such more-than-literary concerns as well. Developing such an approach is the topic of the next chapter.

At this point, rather than directly answering the question of the nature of or methodological approach to disability, I will survey work on heuristic categories of impairments in the Bible, likely disabling in their historical-cultural context. While blindness, skin disease, mobility impairments, barrenness,[21] and shortness or dwarfism[22] are all major categories in the broader literature

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Berressem, and Moritz Ingwersen, Disability Studies: Body – Power – Difference 10 (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2017), 19–27; Anne Waldschmidt, "Disability–Culture–Society: Strengths and Weaknesses of a Cultural Model of Dis/Ability," *Alter* 12, no. 2 (June 2018): 65–78, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alter.2018.04.003. Waldschmidt's observations that, like disability, culture is a contested category, and that critical disability studies requires more than a heuristic model.

[20] There are of course exceptions that foreground lived experience, such as Tom Shakespeare, "Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?" *Disability & Society* 9, no. 3 (1994): 283–99, https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599466780341. But indeed, Mitchell and Snyder's work and Garland-Thomson's work both heavily emphasize literature and the arts.

[21] For consideration of infertility, barrenness, and other sexual disabilities in the Bible, see Eleanor Vivian, "Human Reproduction and Infertility in the Hebrew Bible," *CurBR* 21, no. 1 (2022): 7–32, https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X221104182; Jeremy Schipper, "Disabling Israelite Leadership: 2 Samuel 6:23 and Other Images of Disability in the Deuteronomistic History," in Avalos, Melcher, and Schipper, *This Abled Body*, 103–13; Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible*, 32–33; Joel S. Baden, "The Nature of Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible," in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, ed. Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 13–28; T. M. Lemos, "'Like the Eunuch Who Does Not Beget:' Gender, Mutilation, and Negotiated Status in the Ancient Near East," in Moss and Schipper, *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, 47–66; David Tabb Stewart, "Sexual Disabilities in the Hebrew Bible," in Moss and Schipper, *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, 67–88; Sarah J. Melcher, "A Tale of Two Eunuchs: Isaiah 56:1–8 and Acts 8:26–40," in Moss and Schipper, *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, 117–28.

[22] Dwarfism is recognized under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Little People of America endorses the identification of dwarfism as a disability. "Frequently Asked Questions," Little People of America, accessed November 29, 2024, https://www.lpaonline.org/faq-.

of disability and the Bible, I will limit my discussion here to the first three of these only. They will form the major starting points for the analysis in later chapters of this work.[23] Throughout the discussion of this scholarly literature, several key questions will guide the discussion, including the author's choices of texts for discussion, how interaction with disability studies impacts the discussion of the text, how ableism may have historically contributed to the interpretation of these texts, how the author conceives of disability, and what theoretical bases may undergird the interpretation.

1.3.1 Blindness

Blindness, encompassing a spectrum of visual impairments, may be the most prominent example of a disability category in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. Incidentally, in contrast to some other disability categories in the Bible, blindness has remained sufficiently similar as a category of disability in the contemporary world that multiple scholars who themselves identify as blind work on blindness in biblical texts.[24] While these authors recognize differences in the experiences of blindness in ancient contexts and those of blindness in the twenty-first century,[25] they utilize their personal experience

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Much of the work on dwarfism in the Bible has been done by Isaac Soon. He compares shortness to the idealization of large stature, with accompanying often extreme stigmatization of the extremely short. This allows him to note shortness in the contexts of disability and liminality. See Soon, *A Disabled Apostle*, 169–213. The work on liminality draws from the theory of Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2012). See also for additional thoughts on height and disability Isaac T. Soon, "Little James: Μικρός as an Indication of Height or Affection Not Comparative Age in Mark 15.40," *NTS* 69, no. 4 (2023): 462–71, https://doi.org/10.1017/S002868852300019X; Isaac T. Soon, "The Little Messiah: Jesus as Τῇ Ἡλικίᾳ Μικρός in Luke 19:3," *JBL* 142, no. 1 (2023): 151–70, https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1421.2023.8.

[23] Barrenness does play a significant role in stories included in the corpus of the Deuteronomistic Collection (especially the birth narratives of Samson and Samuel), but shortness or dwarfism is not a major motif in that same corpus. The decision to exclude these from the primary scope of this dissertation arises from the comparatively smaller scope and variety of these disabling conditions in their portrayals within the Deuteronomistic Collection.

[24] Notable examples include Eric J. Harvey and the late John M. Hull. Harvey's work is primarily in ancient Mesopotamia and the Hebrew Bible, e.g., Eric J. Harvey, "Not Seeing, Unseeing, and Blind: Disentangling Disability from Adjacent Topoi in the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 142, no. 3 (2023): 363–83, https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1423.2023.1. Hull worked more as a practical theologian, but he produced readings of biblical texts as well. See John M. Hull, *In the Beginning There Was Darkness: A Blind Person's Conversations with the Bible* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002).

[25] One example includes Harvey's observation of the different emphases in blindness metaphors between "earlier" in Old Testament metaphors and "later" in New Testament metaphors, with a greater emphasis on blindness related to difficulties in navigating the

to aid their readings of ancient texts, helping in particular with insights such as distinguishing metaphorical from literal usages of blindness or recognizing the sightedness of the biblical authors through their inaccurate representations of the experience of visual impairment.[26]

The main Hebrew word for blindness is עִוֵּר. This noun and several other key Hebrew words describing disabilities exhibit vowel morphology called the *qittel* pattern. Schipper's discussion has largely set the stage for the understanding of the *qittel* patterned words in discussions of the Bible and disability, citing research into Semitic languages supporting that the noun pattern reflects a linguistic category for defectiveness, despite the significant problems with this linguistic theory.[27] That said, the noun vowel pattern corresponds nicely among multiple key examples of collocations with עִוֵּר. In particular, mobility impairments (פִּסֵּחַ/פסח, see Lev 21:18; Deut 15:21; 2 Sam 5:6, 8; Isa 35:5–6; Jer 31:8; Mal 1:8; Job 29:15), deafness (חֵרֵשׁ, see Exod 4:11; Lev 19:14; Isa 29:18; 35:5; 42:18–19; 43:8), and muteness (אִלֵּם, see Exod 4:11; Isa 35:5–6; 56:10) are all examples of key language for other disability categories that exhibit the same *qittel* vowel pattern. While the frequency of collocation with these other categories has been used to present evidence for the conceptual category of disability in biblical literature,[28] different authors approach this with different perspectives and conclusions. One

world in the former and a greater emphasis on blindness as symbolic of ignorance or lack of knowledge in the latter, with literacy likely a cultural factor at play. Eric J. Harvey, "Metaphor and Medical Language: Descriptions of Visual Impairment and Ophthalmological Symptoms in Mesopotamian and Hebrew Biblical Sources," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Healthcare and Disability in the Ancient World, San Antonio, TX, November 18, 2023. Similar observations underly the argument in Harvey, "Not Seeing, Unseeing, and Blind."

[26] See especially Harvey, "Not Seeing, Unseeing, and Blind," 363–83.

[27] For Schipper's full discussion, see Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible*, 64–69. The exceptions he identifies and the inherent instability of any definition of *defect* relevant for his discussion undermine the conclusion, as will be further discussed in the chapter on blindness.

[28] So Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible*, 64–69, as discussed above. Also, Raphael, Biblical Corpora, 13–15. Olyan's discussion of disabilities perceived as defects (מומים) makes similar connections between blindness (עִוֵּר) and mobility impairment (פִּסֵּחַ). However, he intentionally separates deafness and muteness into disabilities not perceived as defects. See Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible*, 26–36, 48–53. The argument from collocation to conceptual category undergirds later arguments too, such as that for the place of female barrenness in disability. See Susan Ackerman, "The Blind, the Lame, and the Barren Shall Not Come into the House," in Moss and Schipper, *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, 43. So also Melcher's analysis of metaphors of impairment and restoration from exile. Sara J. Melcher, "With Whom Do the Disabled Associate? Metaphorical Interplay in the Latter Prophets," in Avalos, Melcher, and Schipper, *This Abled Body*, 115–29.

major insight in which there is relative unity is the key role of blindness imagery in the theology of Isaiah, a book in the Bible which has received significant attention in disability readings, especially those framed from visual impairment or blindness.

Moving canonically across the book of Isaiah, themes related to blindness begin with the famous words from Isaiah's commission in Isaiah 6:9, "Go, speak to this people, 'Hear, hearing but not perceiving, and see, seeing but not knowing.'" Bearing in mind this failure to see and hear should not be read as referring to actual disability, this motif of stubbornness[29] sets the stage for much of the other usage of language describing blindness and other disability. According to Bava Batra 14b, Isaiah is a book of comfort, so there is little surprise that beyond this period of colorfully depicted stubbornness emerges a pictured period of restoration, and this period of restoration is associated with the healing of disabilities (e.g. Isa 29:18; 35:5–6; 42:7, 16, 18). This emphasis on the healing of disability is unique among the prophets, as observed by Jeremy Schipper.[30] Whereas other prophetic passages, such as Jeremiah 31:6–8; Micah 4:6–7; and Zephaniah 3:16–20, each describe people with disability (not only visual impairment) in the context of a return from exile to the land, healing is not depicted. This emphasizes the unique usage of healing imagery of disability within the book of Isaiah, which incorporates a theological development of earlier themes introduced in Isaiah 6, culminating in an idealized new Jerusalem (Isa 65:17–20).[31] Hence disability imagery, including that of blindness, in Isaiah is frequently subsumed into metaphori-

[29] A common biblical motif, especially in the latter prophets, cf. Jer 5:20–21 and Ezek 12:1–2, as well as Harvey's discussion of them as existing outside the metaphorical space of disability. Harvey, "Seeing, Unseeing, and Blind," 369–72. In this way the metaphors may be more appropriately considered alongside other non-disability metaphors for stubbornness such as the "stiff neck" description of Israel, e.g., Exod 33:3; Deut 9:13. This latter metaphor typically depicts intentional resistance more than an inability to move the neck.

[30] Jeremy Schipper, "Why Does Imagery of Disability Include Healing in Isaiah?" *JSOT* 39, no. 3 (2015): 319–33, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089215577594.

[31] As such, Isaiah depicts a utopian result to the return from exile, in which the healing of these disabilities may also be metaphorical rather than referring to actual people with disabilities. Schipper, "Why Does Imagery of Disability Include Healing in Isaiah?" 327–33. See also for further discussion related the development from Isaiah 6 particularly into the servant songs in Isaiah 42 and 43, see R. E. Clements, "Beyond Tradition-History: Deutero-Isaianic Development of First Isaiah's Themes," *JSOT* 10, no. 31 (1985): 95–113, https://doi.org/10.1177/030908928501003106. Notably, Clements like other traditional historical critics prior to the trend of incorporating disability studies into biblical studies, does not as strongly distinguish between disability as a metaphor and disability language as referring to actual persons with lived experience. Perhaps the awareness of this distinction stems from the awareness of ableism brought by disability studies.

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