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Jeremy Schipper
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PARABLES AND CONFLICT IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

This book examines the intimate relationship between parables and conflict in the Hebrew Bible. Challenging the scholarly consensus, Jeremy Schipper argues that parables do not function as appeals to change their audience's behavior. Nor do they serve to diffuse tensions in regard to the various conflicts in which their audiences are involved. Rather, the parables help create, intensify, and justify judgments and hostile actions against their audiences. To examine how the parables accomplish these functions, this book pays particular attention to issues of genre and recent developments in genre theory, shifting the central issues in the interpretation of Hebrew Bible parables.

Jeremy Schipper is Assistant Professor of Religion (Hebrew Bible) at Temple University. He is the author of *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible* (2006) and co-editor of *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies* (2007). Schipper has published articles in a number of scholarly journals, including *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, *Vetus Testamentum*, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, and *Biblical Interpretation*.

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JEREMY SCHIPPER
Temple University

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Preface

The ideas for this book began during a class discussion in an undergraduate introduction to the Bible course at Siena College in the fall of 2005. As I introduced my class to the notion of 2 Sam 12:1–4 as a juridical parable, one student asked about Joab's place in Nathan's parable. I responded by using the multivalent interpretation of the parable as I remembered it from a class I took with Larry L. Lyke at Yale Divinity School in the fall of 1997. Lyke's wonderful book on parabolic narrative, titled *King David and the Wise Woman of Tekoa*, has influenced my thinking on Hebrew Bible parables a great deal, as evidenced by the number of times I cite it in this book. Yet, when I consulted his book after that particular class, I realized that I had not remembered his interpretation correctly and that he did not actually address the place of Joab in Nathan's parable. My student's question and my misreading of Lyke got me thinking about how parables operate in the Hebrew Bible. Soon I saw the need for a serious re-evaluation of some influential scholarly notions and assumptions about genre and function in relation to Hebrew Bible parables.

My first attempt to articulate the need for re-evaluation came in a paper on 2 Sam 12:1–6 that I presented at the Society of Biblical Literature's 2006 Mid-Atlantic Regional Meeting. Further research along these lines found encouragement and support when Stephen L. Cook, F. W. "Chip" Dobbs-Allsopp, Tod Linafelt, and the rest of the region's executive board nominated the paper for the Society's 2007 Regional Scholar's Award. I would like to thank them all for their role in this project's development. I continued to work out of my understandings of individual parables in

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two articles: "Did David Overinterpret Nathan's Parable in 2 Samuel 12:1–6?" *JBL* 126 (2007): 383–91, and "From Petition to Parable: The Prophet's Use of Genre in 1 Kings 20:38–42," *CBQ* 71 (2009): 264–74. Portions of these articles appear respectively in chapters 3 and 5 of this book. I would like to thank the editors of *JBL* and *CBQ* for granting permission to reuse these articles in this volume.

Although I suspect my work on Nathan's parable represents the creative highpoint of this book, the book as a whole aims to reinvigorate the scholarly study of Hebrew Bible parables by providing innovative readings of selected texts and by framing these readings within established scholarly conversation. Of course, any attempt at reorienting a scholarly conversation involves interpretative risk. At points where readers do not find my specific exegetical proposals compelling, I hope that they place their concerns with such details within the larger framework of the project's overall goals. This would allow for a more robust scholarly conversation about Hebrew Bible parables than currently exists. Ultimately, my goal for this book is not simply to convince readers of isolated exegetical points. Rather, I hope this book is a catalyst for livelier scholarship on Hebrew Bible parables.

As most readers know, a very lively scholarly conversation already exists in regard to the parables of Jesus and their function. I have tried as much as possible not to let this impressive body of scholarship guide my approach to parables in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, I have kept the references to scholarship on the parables of Jesus and to those in rabbinic literature to a minimum. This does not mean that I find such scholarship unimportant or that I am unaware of it; it means that introducing it as a primary conversation partner may distract from a clear articulation of how parables function in the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, after I finished writing nearly the entire manuscript, C. Clifton Black suggested to me that my conclusions fit well with Jesus' parables because when Jesus addresses his parables to a specific named audience, the parables tend to accelerate tensions between him and his addressees rather than resolve conflict or change his addressees' minds on a particular matter. Along these lines, I suspect that Jesus' reference to Isa 6:9–10 when explaining why he speaks in parables (Mark 4:10–12) fits into the arguments in the book better than I first realized. Nonetheless, this disclaimer does not

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hurt the conclusions I reach in this book. If my conclusions find support in the Hebrew Bible, how well they resonate with the parables of Jesus or the rabbis should not invalidate them.

Unless noted otherwise, I am responsible for all biblical translations in this book. My translations follow the versification in *BHS*. To make this book more accessible to readers without knowledge of Hebrew, I employ a simplified system of Hebrew transliteration that usually follows the "general-purpose style" transliteration system in *The SBL Handbook of Style*.

Before I conclude this preface, several other scholars deserve acknowledgment for helping refine and improve my thinking about parables through conversations, emails, readings, and bibliographic recommendations. I would like to thank Hector Avalos, David Downs, Jeremy Hutton, Mark Leuchter, Patrick D. Miller, and Dennis T. Olson for their various roles in the book's production. I would also like to thank my students in my special topics course on parables at Siena College in the spring of 2007. I appreciate that in his capacity as chair of Siena's Religious Studies Department, Peter Zaas allowed me to teach this course as a visiting assistant professor. My new colleagues in Temple University's Department of Religion, chaired by Rebecca T. Alpert when I arrived and currently by Terry Rey, have provided a wonderfully supportive environment in which to complete this project. The department arranged for me to work with a superb graduate research assistant, Elizabeth V. Lawson. Beth's careful editing greatly improved the quality of the manuscript as we prepared it for publication. Of course, this book would not have come about without the enthusiastic and much-appreciated support of my editor at Cambridge University Press, Andy Beck.

I am pleased to recognize and thank two scholars who proved especially helpful throughout this project's development. My friend since graduate school, J. Blake Couey, has discussed this project with me over meals, at conferences, in phone calls, and in emails. As far as scholarly conversation partners go, the only thing better than the sharpness of Blake's input is his unfailing generosity with his time and energy.

Each page in this book, if not each sentence, shows the influence of Nyasha Junior. She helped me clarify my writing and my arguments and, most importantly, finish the book. No one has endured and supported

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this project as she has. She is always involved in the best of my scholarship, my thinking, and my life. As my partner in everything, academic and otherwise, Nyasha improves it all. Every day.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this book to my father, Paul Howard Schipper. This book assumes that the best way to understand how a text operates is to read it slowly and closely. As a lifelong student of the Bible, my father helped teach me the value of digging into a text. To a certain extent, this book is a product of that lesson.

Jeremy Schipper
Philadelphia
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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature*
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Related to the Old Testament.* Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, 1969
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Oxford, 1907
BHS	*Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*
Bib	*Biblica*
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BRev	*Bible Review*
BT	*The Bible Translator*
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.* Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2006.
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
COS	*The Context of Scripture.* Edited by W. W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997–2002.
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies

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IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	*Interpretation*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KAI	*Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. H. Donner and W. Röllig. 2d ed. Wiesbaden, 1966–1969
KJV	King James Version
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NIB	*The New Interpreter's Bible*. Edited by Leander E. Keck. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2002.
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	*Novum Testamentum*
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OTL	Old Testament Library
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*
RSR	*Recherches de science religieuse*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
STDJ	*Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah*
Syr.	Syraic
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
Vulg.	Vulgate
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WBC	World Biblical Commentary
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

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