The Biblical Herem

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CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

This study represents an effort to understand the ancient Israelite practice of 
ינ.loop in terms drawn from the ancient Near East (including the biblical texts). I have used the word “practice” to characterize the ינ.loop instead of “institution” advisedly. If Joshua 10-11 were an historical account of the Israelite subjugation of Canaan, perhaps it would be justifiable to speak of the ינ.loop as an institution (of war), in the sense of a normative, regular, and predictably repeated set of actions within set circumstances. Or it might seem on the face of it, that the laws of war in Deuteronomy provide grounds to consider the ינ.loop an institution, in the sense of a legal institution. I have argued the opposite. The texts of Deuteronomy 20 and 7 were designed to help make the ינ.loop a thing of the past, without application to the challenges faced by the law framers’ contemporaries, although the laws themselves reflect many of the most important realia of the ינ.loop—an indication that the memory of the living practice was still fresh. For one result of this investigation has been the conclusion that these laws date back to a time when the ינ.loop was still something that loomed large in the memory, if not the praxis, of Northern Israel in the period following the Moabite ינ.loop described in the MI. The aim of the laws was to prevent the inappropriate use of the ינ.loop at a time when the “primordial” seven nations and Amalek, the barrier to Israel’s world order in the Land, no longer constituted a threat. It was those nations who inhabited the Land (east of the Jordan) who were the proper object of the ינ.loop, not Moab (Sihon and Og being the long past exception in Transjordan, due to historical circumstance as Israel sought to enter the land—according to the biblical view). Deuteronomy 20 I placed not in the time of Josiah, but rather in the time of Jereboam II, a king well placed to apply the ינ.loop in revenge against Moab.

This account fits in with the fact that in the literature following Deuteronomy, the war-ינ.loop as such fades away into figurative language and oblivion. The evidence of the biblical narratives decisively favors a view of the ינ.loop as an ad hoc activity, brought about by the most elemental circumstances of a people’s struggle for life and land. This ad hoc activity had its source in a broader ancient world view, which I have brought to bear on the problem, as well as in the particular circumstance that called it into expression. (see below) The war-ינ.loop is occasioned only by direct divine order (Joshua 6, 1 Samuel 15), or, in one instance, by a vow striking a deal with the deity for his help (Num 21:1-3). That the ינ.loop was a sharp deviation from the normal way of waging war is proved by the need to explain what its content was to be (e.g. Joshua 6),and the subsequent copy difficulty Israelites had in respecting it in its full rigor (Joshua 7, 1 Samuel 15).

A chief object of this inquiry was to try to reconstruct the mentality which produced the ינ.loop and which enabled its execution to find a place in the warfare and the religious conceptions of Israel at the same time. Any such reconstruction had to be drawn from the ancient sources themselves. For this reason I made so little of the ‘Holy War,’ for as the author of Der
Heilige Krieg im alten Israel understood and acknowledged, the Holy War is a scholarly construct, a compendium of diverse components which appeared in various war texts, with no one component or group of components necessarily appearing in a given situation meriting the label 'Holy War,' which is a modern rubric. Our attempt at reconstruction was inevitably also a construct, but not one built on top of a prior construction. If the Holy War was a defensive war, as G. von Rad first propounded in Der Heilige Krieg, the war-דָּגִי would not in any case be subsumed under that rubric. However, if the Assyrian war of aggression was a Holy War, as it clearly was, then the war-דָּגִי, which was in essence an attempt to wed warfare with consecration, is by definition a type of Holy War. But mere classification of this kind did not seem to lead to anything terribly illuminating, so that 'Holy War' has not been a major focus of this study.

The new (or refurbished) ancient Near Eastern parallels adduced, the philological evidence, as well as the better of the previously proposed parallels, and perhaps above all, the Mesha Inscription (the wording of which reveals that the war-דָּגִי was part and parcel of Moabite religion, not just a recent borrowing from Israel), prove that the origins of the war-דָּגִי lie in the broader world of pagan antiquity, and that its antecedents are exceedingly ancient. I have tried to show that Israel integrated the war-דָּגִי into its religion because the war-דָּגִי helped meet its need to bring order and security to a hostile and chaotic environment. Further, I have suggested that the sacral aspect of the war-דָּגִי, which led Mesha to elevate Keremosh above any of the deities in his stele, was an integral part of the order vs. chaos aspect. The divine was, after all, responsible for creating the world, and for ordering it afterwards. Also, that quality of Israelite religion which H. W. F. Saggs labeled "exclusivistic" and "intolerant" vs. the "accretive" and "tolerant" required a term for holiness that would actively separate YHWH's holiness from that of foreign gods, "no-gods" whose worship was officially banned early on, in Exod 22:19. The war-דָּגִי also served to enforce the early anti-iconic view of deity, which survived even though it was destined to be bitterly contested. In contrast, the early Romans had an aniconic religion but it succumbed to Etruscan influence. Although the exact timing and course of events that brought the term to Israel will never be known, short of a miracle, it shows that the Israelites were able to "accrete" a basic way of looking at holiness and adjust it to fit their own needs. It probably needed little adjusting (judging from the MI and some of the other parallels), which made it attractive to those first responsible for its use in Israel.

The war-דָּגִי achieved its goal of turning the land of Canaan into a land of Israelite world order, according to Deuteronomy Joshua, (Judges), and Samuel. Perhaps it was a victim of its own success. Eventually, of course, the Israelite kingdoms were to lose their military option as great powers entered the arena. Such a practice could not survive forever; its turn came and it was naturally discontinued and even canonized--by elevating it to oblivion in the context of a day long gone by (Deuteronomy 7,20). Yet several prophets, including the prophet of 1 Kings 20, gave the war-דָּגִי a new life as they took it and used it for purposes of their own, forging with it a
radical rhetoric and finding in it a source of powerful imagery. Indeed, the
prophet of Isaiah 34, whose נרות rhetoric is elaborate and late, had a firm
grasp of the phenomenology of the נרות, as is illustrated by the chapter’s
affinities with the Mesha Inscription. The prophet explicitly described chaos
descending upon Edom following the נרות. Nor could the priests dispense with
its reinforcing of the inviolability and unique character of YHWH, and the
special relationship between deity, people, and land which is the aim of the
נרות. Indeed, Leviticus 27 places great emphasis on the sacral aspect of the
נרות and the deity, people and land relationship.

The key text, without which our study would have been foredoomed, is
the aforementioned Mesha Inscription, and it is from this text that I launched
the investigation. It is mainly from this text that I first derived the hypothesis
that the נרות represented the attempt to bring moral and physical order to the
universe of the group that resorted to it. It appears that a mentality in which
warfare in general was seen as a battle against the forces of chaos was
widespread in the ancient Near East from long before the advent of Israel.
This way of thinking was often expressed in myth. Finally, having tried to
establish the ancient Near Eastern evidence, both large scale and in less en-
compassing points of contact, I applied the hypothesis to the varied biblical
texts, to test its usefulness as a tool of interpreting the biblical נרות text. In
my view, the results prove it a powerful tool for biblical exegesis, especially
in such challenging but relatively full-bodied narratives as Joshua 6-7 and 1
Samuel 15.

The נרות has been a problem for biblical theologians. The view of the
נרות as a way of achieving moral and physical order in the world helps ex-
plain why neither Mesha nor the biblical writers hesitated to record the prac-
tice and assign a deity a leading role with regard to it. For to the Moabites
and Israelites, the נרות was a reenactment of creation, a way of achieving a
world order (literally creating sacred space) in which they could live and
thrive. The laws of Deuteronomy as I have interpreted them may seem to
contradict this. But if Jeroboam II had gone to Moab and retaliated for the
still unavenged deaths of his compatriots at Mesha’s hands (blood-feuds
have frequently lasted for generations, as the language of the Bible with re-
gard to Edom and Moab attests), applying the נרות himself, it would not
have contributed to the establishment of the Israelite world order as such.
Retaliation could easily assume another form. (2 Kings 3 is a work of apol-
ogetic theology; the success of the revolt against Ahab’s heir was due to the
wrath of YHWH Jehoram inherited from the Naboth episode (1 Kgs 21:29)
and to Jehoram’s own wickedness. The peculiar ending of 2 Kings 3 reflects
the actuality of Moabite independence without giving a historical account.)

In the eyes of Mesha, Israel represented the forces of chaos that were
preventing Moab from living in its own proper world order. The Omrid
suzerainty was understood as a divine punishment (of Moab’s god Kemosh),
an old theme in the Near East. Mesha took a series of religiously dictated
steps. He took blood-vengeance to satiate his god and nation, and then he
sanctified Nebo—the Moabite seat of YHWH—by destroying it and devoting
it to Kemosh. The positive connotation of the root נרות, “sacred” (cf. the
personal names scattered across the Semitic languages, including Hebrew) was operational in the religious use of the verb in war, as C. H. W. Brekelmans recognized. One has to be aware of the tremendous emphasis the peoples of the ancient Near East placed on the destructive power of their deities. This was manifest in storms and natural disasters, and particularly manifest in war, when the god’s or goddess’s fury was, one hoped and prayed, turned on the enemy, not on oneself. Israel shared in this common view. With the הֵרֶם, the means might be destructive, but the object was to create a holier world, which required the divine general to lead the people in war (so one might interpret YHWH’s war leader, who appears before the battle of Jericho in this light, since even if the pericope comes originally from a different source than Joshua 6, someone put the sources together to depict him, Joshua and Jericho, in one context).

Mesha went on from Nebo to renew and rededicate Moabite cult centers, and he rebuilt the land of Moab from the ground up. In brief, Kemosh and Mesha re-sanctified Moab, and vanquished the forces opposed to Moabite world order, the forces of chaos. These were personified by Gad, Israel, and YHWH, whose name had its first known written appearance as a result of the Nebo temple of YHWH being an object of the הֵרֶם. The world order sought by those who practiced the הֵרֶם may be schematized as the harmonious working together of the elements of what I have characterized as the people-god-land triangle. This meant that the people lived freely and prosperously on its land, under the guidance and good will of its god.

The הֵרֶם mentality which I have detected in ancient sources typically found expression in myth or mythic thought. This is one of the strengths of my hypothesis, for as we have seen, the הֵרֶם itself is deeply rooted in mythic conceptions. So the mythic elements present in Joshua 6 attest, or Deut 3:11, where it is associated with the idea of primordial giants, like Og himself. The whole battle against the Amorites seems, as J. van Seters has argued, to be mythic (cf. Am 2:9-10, and the place of the Amorites in the list of primordial peoples). The cosmogonic character of the perpetual struggle for order against chaos not only lent itself to mythic expression but in the ancient world, demanded it. As a result, this discussion has utilized cosmogonic myths of Babylon, Egypt, Ugarit, and Israel, and doubtless other ancient myths could have been employed.

It might be objected that the proposed chaos/order paradigm for the הֵרֶם is both too abstract and too general. Actually, nothing could be more palpable than the human longing to dwell in a livable environment. In the real life of ancient Israel, this ‘abstraction’ to which the הֵרֶם was a specific response, was conditioned by the belief of a group of people that it had to assure its survival through its exclusivistic relationship with YHWH. For this reason biblical religion built on the etymological association of the root with the sacred to link the הֵרֶם with the most stringent anti-idolatry laws (e.g. Exod 22:19, Deut 7:24-5). For this reason (among others) it is wrong to see this linkage as secondary. In fact, it flows directly from the הֵרֶם’s role as a unique expression of the ancient perception of the holy, and it afforded a
unique opportunity for Israel to participate with YHWH in fighting the forces of chaos.

This alliance had its price. The spoils which in the normal course of events would accrue to the victors became inviolably attached to the deity. I have indicated, however, that the 'economics' of the מלחמה were not simply those of sacrifice to no purpose. As I. J. Gelb has noted, a social group had to be at a sufficiently high level of economic organization to absorb the vanquished soldiers en masse as slaves, and one should add that they had to have the will to do so. Solomon and Mesha did not hesitate, although a later editor censured Solomon for so doing. In Israel the demands of religion and economics did not conflict as one might have predicted. Consider, after all, the enormous social benefits to be gained from eliminating a predatory people like the Amalekites (as a factor—the מלחמה was not modern genocide, and Amalekites remained—cf. 2 Samuel 1; 1 Chr 4:43, the final elimination of Amalek, is more likely to be ideology at work than history). Hence the historical plausibility of an Amalekite war even in the beleaguered reign of Saul.

The aspect of renunciation was necessary for the Israelites to find favor and secure the cooperation of YHWH. In the case of mass idolatry in Deut 13:13-19, the מלחמה served to assuage the wrath of God and this was operative also in the victory Num 21:1-3, where the vow of מלחמה was the extreme means of placating YHWH's anger and displeasure. The מלחמה of the Mesha Inscription undoubtedly played a role in placating the wrath of Kemosh so glancingly and tantalizingly mentioned early in the inscription.

The Bible provides us with a good analogy to those who made such a vow of renunciation. The Nazirite, too, had to renounce certain things in order to reach the requisite level of holiness. Samson died because he breached such a requirement, just as Saul lost the Battle of Gilboa for failing to observe the rigor of the מלחמה. The economic side of the מלחמה, with the partial exception of the levitical מלחמה, in which the priests controlled property which fell מלחמה, interested the biblical writers very little. But from the religious point of view such renunciations were highly practical when adhered to, and this is one reason why the sanction for breaking them was severe. The מלחמה was not just a figment of the religious imagination, however. With the text of Osorkon in mind, with its mythological references which are contemporary to the action, it should not amaze the student of religion that the מלחמה, the stuff of a mythic world view, was actualized in history.

Returning to the question of the מלחמה and idolatry, touched on above, it must be reemphasized that the connection between these two is not secondary or fortuitous. Given the nature of the root as dealing with the sacred, the way it is used is definitely a statement about God. In biblical religion, this is expressed in a view of the nature of God as being of an aniconic character. Albrecht Alt emended Exod 22:19 and cut out the word מלחמה. However, as I showed above, he did this without support from the versions. The verse stands as a proof that the connection between the two is not secondary, but is as at least as early as the Covenant Code. YHWH would allow no sacrifices to other gods. Together with Deut 7:24-5, 13:13-19,
The הֶרֶם in Exod 22:19 appears in intimate relation to that most distinctive and most celebrated aspect of ancient Israel's religion, the acknowledgement of YHWH alone. This aspect of the הֶרֶם is of itself sufficient to demonstrate that the הֶרֶם is an important concept for the understanding of monotheism or its historical development. Deut 7:24-5, the prohibition against stripping idols, is a refinement of Exod 22:19. As a method for dealing with the abominable, it partakes of an ancient form; its origins should not lightly be consigned to a late period. It shows how the abominable and the sacred sphere of YHWH somehow meet in full circle; they are not polar opposites or most distant points in a linear continuum. The abominable must be destroyed or swallowed up in the sacred sphere of God's holiness so that things in the world of human beings may take their proper place as well.

Further, the Mesha Inscription is centered wholly on Kemosh as the god who speaks, feels, and acts, and authorizes the הֶרֶם. YHWH's cult was not allowed to continue at Nebo. The inscription of 

דrazy-Sin (Early Old Babylonian), which despite its fairly compact account provides us with an interesting parallel to the הֶרֶם, also shows a tendency to concentrate on one deity, albeit by dedicating its cultic observance to one god in each of three versions. We may see a certain exclusivistic tendency in the 

דrazy-Sin text but the Mesha Inscription provides firm support for the contention that the הֶרֶם proper was based on an exclusivistic kind of relationship with the deity, something found in its most extreme form in biblical religion. I cannot enter much more deeply into the question of monotheism here, but in antiquity, religion was not merely a passive question as to what one believed, but much more how one practised, and the prohibition of Exod 22:19 reflected the norm embraced by biblical religion. 

דrazy-Sin's text is a remarkable early example of the idea of "consecration through destruction."

In the same vein, the association of the הֶרֶם with the anti-iconic tendencies that manifested themselves early on in the history of the religion of Israel (e.g. the ark had images of the cherubim but none of YHWH) was an important development in the religion of ancient Israel. Its importance was recognized by the priests, who held on to the הֶרֶם as living practice. Num 18:14, assigning devoted property and objects to the priests, may have been a cherished principle to the priests (it is hard to imagine otherwise). The complex history of the הֶרֶם, known only in bits and pieces, shows that in the matter of God's image, the subject leaves little room for a simple evolutionism that the religion of Israel must have evolved from "lower" to "higher" forms.

There are interesting counterexamples which have cropped up in the course of our research: 1) as already mentioned, ancient Roman religion was apparently aniconic and the gods were non-anthropomorphic, but this early phase gave way to Etruscan influence and a full-blooded image-using polytheism and 2) according to the account given in an Egyptian document of the Second Intermediary Period (Hyksos), "The Quarrel of Seqenenre and Apophis," Apophis is denigrated for his exclusive worship of a god named Sutekh (who was associated with Syro-Palestine and identified with Seth), which offended the sensibilities of the Egyptians. The idea of exclusive
worship of one deity had long preceded Akhenaton, and did not need a long evolution over time in Israel.\(^1\) There need be no doubt that the connection between the וָדָר and monolatry and iconoclasm was early and intrinsic to the Israelite conception of וָדָר.

The וָדָר was an important component of Israelite theology at a second level. It is an extremely pragmatic level, wherein abstention from some or all of the spoils of war leads to the manifestation of the warrior god, YHWH, and the triumph of the divine order over chaos. Here Israel shows how much it owed to its ancient Near Eastern background. In Egypt, the god Re was viewed as the deity ultimately responsible for maintaining the order of the world; in Babylon, Marduk. Yet in Egypt other gods such as Sekhmet played important roles in the fight against chaos, as we have seen. The Mesha Inscription restricts that role to Kemosh, the Bible to YHWH.

It is not desirable to leave the term “chaos” an unreal abstraction. In the context of וָדָר we are dealing with a concrete idea of chaos. It is, very simply, the enemies who threaten the world order of a group from within or without. Indeed, this is how ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia viewed the matter (with individual refinements), among others. This concept was then “reified” into the mythology, a major way a people has at its disposal of expressing its collective view of reality. The tendency to mythicize one’s enemies transcends specific times and cultures. One has only to consider the role the Communists played in the minds (and under the beds) of many Americans in recent decades. The myth sets the stage for the extreme measures the group will feel compelled to take (or justifies them after the fact). The form in which the tendency to mythicize crystallizes is the result of a complex web of historical and cultural factors, but the guiding impulse is to further the group’s ability to survive in a world aswarm with hostile forces. Nature’s own prickliness in an era of primitive agricultural practices meant that the sanctification of the land of which I have spoken was no joke to the ancients who survived if the god rained on them. Due to this perception of the world (found also in the MI), early Israel had plenty of incentive to adopt the cosmogonic, sacral term וָדָר, which was pregnant with myth-making potential. It could thus provide the adherents of YHWH with a down-to-earth and practical avenue for urgent, myth-based action to help insure the survival of a fairly small group surrounded by potential enemies.

The mythicizing of the enemy--evident in the וָדָר narratives of Deuteronomy 2-3, Joshua 6, and elsewhere--enabled the mass destruction of the enemy to take place, as J. Yoyotte pointed out in relation to the much more richly documented domain of ancient Egypt. Nevertheless, the mythic had its limits when competing with basic human acquisitiveness. There were always those who were tempted to defy the rigor of the וָדָר. One can only imagine how this process would have intensified in the case of the idolatrous

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city of Deut 13:13-19. The fury a society may vent on its external foes is likely to be a pale thing compared to the rage it hurls at its own members who have become the enemy. Deuteronomy 20 and 7 focused first and foremost on the six or seven nations defunct by the time of the composition of the chapters. In contrast, the הֵרֵם of Deuteronomy 13, which dealt with the Israelites themselves was a possibility throughout the period of the monarchy. It would be foolish to assume that such a thing never occurred or never was contemplated. A story in which the הֵרֵם was levied against Israelites is found in Judges 21. The fact that the Bible has no record of an application of the legislation of Deuteronomy 13 tells us very little. The pericope bears witness to the fact that the legislator and those who preserved his legislation felt that the conception should continue to play a part in the society in which they lived. The linking of the הֵרֵמ to the exclusive worship of YHWH is therefore one of the keys to its understanding. It should be clear that in a society in which YHWH alone was the source of order (Exod 22:19, Deut 6:4), a practice like the הֵרֵם could function only through loyalty to the God of Israel. Few things could be more fearful to those who accepted this role of YHWH than an internal plague of worship of other gods, that might spread from place to place, bringing disorder and disaster in its wake, as in Sodom and Gomorrah. One might conclude, then, that Deut 13:13-19 was written with serious intent, even though we cannot know whether it reflected an actual Israelite practice.

A practice like the הֵרֵם reflects a certain mythicization of the enemy as the monster of chaos, which helped justify the massacre of large populations. Yet with it one enters the realm of the sacred. This is what is most difficult for us as products of modern secular culture to grasp, although a crusading knight might well have grasped it more easily. The הֵרֵם was a sort of philosopher’s stone, with the ability to transmute disorder and chaos into the consecrated order of God. As the sacred was involved, there could be no room for error. In dealing with the deity, all ancient Near Eastern religions had set ways of bridging the gap between mortal and divine in order to avert the divine wrath insofar as it was possible. The most widespread means of accomplishing this in the ancient world was through sacrifice. However, the הֵרֵם comes to realization in more extreme circumstances. The cases of Achan (Joshua 7) and Saul (1 Samuel 15) illustrate this point vividly. Achan was executed on the spot with his family (Israelites had already died in the first, vain, foray against Ai). Doom was not only Saul’s fate, but as a result of his sin he led Israel to another military defeat, and his line was supplanted by that of David. Subjective considerations of justice have no place here. When one tampered with the deity’s projection of the sacral sphere on this earth--for YHWH was not omnipresent, rather manifestations of YHWH (e.g. הבוא) radiated in every direction--one is subject to the penalty imposed by the elemental nature of God. Experience demonstrated that such tampering was risky.

The הֵרֵם has been labelled a taboo partly because of the association with danger. But I have noted that the taboo was not isolated in its original setting, but part of a complex of ideas expressed by terms, two of which at
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least (noa, mana) are integral to taboo but lacking any counterpart in biblical language and thought. Another factor, the supposed contagious nature of the דָּרָה, is not all that similar to the contagion of taboo. For instance, no one had any fear of touching the banned objects which Achan stole. The real 'contagion' is that the intrusion on what deity has set up as an inviolable object or border invariably is fatal. The phenomenon of the war-דרה has many parallels from antiquity (of greater or lesser value), but it is not something paralleled in the annals of modern cultural anthropology. It was primarily an urban phenomenon, the product of high civilization and long-literate cultures. The urban nature of the phenomenon is certain. Practically every instance of the דָּרָה is directed at a city with the exception of the Amalekites, who were a menace to Israelite cities, such as Ziklag (1 Samuel 30). Even the deuteronomic law of דָּרָה aimed at the 6 (or 7) autochthonous peoples speaks in terms of their cities. Therefore the דָּרָה reflected the urbanized condition of ancient Palestine, and was not a 'primitive' rite.

Since the דָּרָה cannot be satisfactorily understood from Polynesian taboo and the terms associated with it, I examined the terms made available by the sources. The war-דרה does appear as part of a complex of terms that define the semantic domain of the דָּרָה, and thus help clarify the context and the quality of the דָּרָה as it was perceived in ancient times. Some of the most important of these were עָפַר, "expel," רָדָה, "slay," רָש, "take possession," and מצ"א, "capture." The verbs, common to both the MI and the Exodus-Conquest narratives of the Bible, form part of the authentic verbal "matrix" within which the war-דרה took its place, a matrix very different from that of the Polynesian "tapoo."

A basic feature of the דָּרָה emerges from looking at these four roots. Together they form a small glossary which could be used to describe the struggle for control of land. Such a struggle was inevitable given the number of peoples on it, its small size, and its strategic location. The four terms divide nicely. Two describe ways of dealing with the enemy ("killing, expelling"). The other two deal with occupying and possessing the land (although the Bible has only remnants of MI's usage of מצ"א). דָּרָה in both Moabite and Hebrew usage takes the deity as subject.

The דָּרָה represents the most intensely religious form of action, taking the land and dealing with the enemy, thus uniting both poles. Paradoxically, the war-דרה unites the pragmatic with an idealistic yearning for the sanctification of life (of one's own folk). This duality gave the דָּרָה a special place in the religious conceptualizing of war in Moab and Israel.

Another, rather different point arises out of the matrix of terms in which the דָּרָה was embedded in the MI and the Bible. I drew the Hebrew roots from Exodus-and-conquest narratives of the Pentateuch. YHWH speaks prospectively to the Israelites about how they will come to possess the land sworn to the forefathers (and incidentally already made sacred by God's promise to them and their presence there in 'primordial' times). However, we find the same terms used, significantly, in a context of a rooted people's attempt to assert mastery over its land. A partial biblical example is Judges
11 (Jephthah and the Ammonites) where נֶפֶשׁ plays a major role. In Jud 11:24 both Kemosh and YHWH are the subject of the verb. The chapter also calls attention to two other roots found in the MI, מָמַשׁ “to wage war,” and מָשַׁבְּה “to settle, colonize.” This yields the following matrix, which is in itself incomplete.

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<th>נֶפֶשׁ</th>
<th>מָמַשׁ</th>
<th>מָשַׁבְּה</th>
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We could add, on the basis of our reading of KTU 1.13, לָם, “annihilate,” and still others (the left column relates mostly to treatment of land, the right to treatment of the enemy people, the מָמַשׁ of both). From this matrix I concluded that the biblical use of these verbs in the context of Exodus and conquest had its source in this complex of verbs for interstate warfare, via retrojection them into the idealized, Mosaic past. The complex actually arose from the post-settlement situation, in Israel as in Moab. The content of Judges 11, Jephthah’s long speech to the Ammonites embraces both periods, and helps confirm this deduction. The struggle for land and the willingness to fight for it, (and one’s freedom) were taken up into the emotional and intellectual life of the people and transformed by myth into a chaos vs. order paradigm or set of paradigms. A great biblical result of such a myth-forming process is Joshua 6, a cosmogonic myth in which order wins over chaos (the enemy forces). YHWH intervenes directly, but the Israelites participated through the obedient execution of the מָמַשׁ. A gateway to the land had opened. The struggle for land was equally an effort to create “sacred space,” a space consecrated by the presence of God in which the people could serve deity and in turn be blessed with the dignity and deserts of a “people of YHWH.” The מָמַשׁ was linked (philologically) to concepts of sacred space in the first chapter, with Arabic haram, and if I am correct, with the irregular and in many ways mysterious sacred space of Akkadian bit hamri. The מָשַׁבְּה was a projection of and reaction to basic realities and human needs. It was an expression of the search for life for the individual and the community (under the aegis of the national god), as well as for fruitfulness and holiness. It was an expression fully integrated into biblical religion from paganism, playing a role not only in war but even in times of peace. It helped a people suffering from an inchoate or fractured world order to find the way to walk. The faithful saw it as ultimately one of the דְּרָכֵי חֶוֶם, the “paths of YHWH,” of which prophets, sages, and psalmists spoke and sang, in a world where paths were often crooked. It was a world where disorder and death, epitomized for the YHWHist by the gold and silver plated idols that people worshipped, were never far away.