CHAPTER SIX

THE BATTLE AT BAAL PERAZIM (1 CHR 14:8-12) AND THE ACCOUNT OF PEREZ UZZAH (1 CHR 13:1-14)

The final two case studies of this work examine battle stories from the Book of Chronicles. The contribution of these accounts to my thesis is twofold. The first is their contribution to the aggregate of accounts in which a battle report forms a metaphor plot of the story that precedes it. Two more such examples make the validity of the proposition that much stronger. Yet, these examples add a unique dimension to the documentation of my thesis precisely because they are drawn from the Book of Chronicles. The Chronicler’s version of these two battle stories will be compared with the parallel versions found in the apparent Vorlage in Samuel-Kings. In each instance we will see that the version of the Vorlage does not reveal the battle story to be a metaphor plot of the preceding narrative and that in subtle ways the Chronicler has reworked the material by means of this convention as an overarching principle of design. In each instance we will highlight salient aspects of the version of the story found in the Vorlage and their rhetorical implications. We will then document the relevant differences in the Chronicler’s version of the story and proceed to analyze closely that account and the new readings that it generates.

This chapter explores the intertextual relationship between two episodes within the ark narrative of 1 Chronicles 13-16: David’s victory over the Philistines at Baal Perazim (1 Chr 14:8-12) and the unsuccessful attempt to bring the ark from Kiriath Jearim to Jerusalem and the debacle at Perez Uzzah (1 Chr 13:1-14). Both accounts are also found in 2 Samuel 5-6 where their order is the reverse. We will contend that it is only within the ark narrative of 1 Chronicles, however, that the battle account of Baal Perazim stands as a metaphor analogy to the account of Perez Uzzah.

Our study is executed in three stages. There are competing interpretations of the nature of the failing that led to the debacle of Perez Uzzah. These interpretations, in turn, bear upon the meaning of the interrelationship between the account of Perez Uzzah and that of Baal
Perzaim. Our first order of business, then, is to clarify the Chronicler’s view of the deficiency that resulted in the debacle of Perez Uzzah. While the two accounts are arranged in close proximity, they comprise but two elements of the larger ark narrative of 1 Chronicles 13-16. Their interrelationship, then, should not be discussed in a vacuum but rather in terms of the meaning of the larger structure of the narrative unit. Before bringing the two pericopes into comparison, therefore, our second order of business will be to assess the organizing principles guiding the Chronicler’s structure of the ark narrative. Finally, we will perform a close reading of the two pericopes, noting the Chronicler’s reworking of the stories found in the Vorlage. We will interpret the evidence to suggest that the Chronicler reworked the material in a fashion that casts the story of David’s victory at Baal Perazim as a contrastive metaphor analogy that parallels the account of the fiasco of Perez Uzzah.

Perez Uzzah: An Anatomy of the Failure

Sara Japhet has correctly noted that the Chronicler’s account of the ark narrative witnesses a shift of onus for the debacle at Perez Uzzah from Uzzah to David. The moment of failure in the first attempt to transport the ark is not solely at the moment that Uzzah touched the ark. His trespass represents only the final improper act of a string of missteps. David’s self-incriminatory remarks in 1 Chronicles 15, as he prepared to transport the ark a second time, offer a view onto the chain of missteps:

Because you (i.e. the Levites) were not there the first time, the Lord our God burst out against us, for we did not show due regard for Him... The Levites carried the ark of God by means of poles on their shoulders, as Moses had commanded in accordance with the word of the Lord (1 Chr 15:13-15).

It is now, and only now, in 1 Chronicles 15 that David turns to Levites to perform the task of the ark’s transport. Whereas David acknowledges the Pentateuchal law that specifies that Levites should

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