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# EVALUATING DEAFNESS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE: A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF <sup>ל</sup>הרש

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I explore the semantic value of the Hebrew root denoting deafness in the Hebrew Bible, <sup>ל</sup>הרש. A majority of its attestations have been rendered by translators and lexicographers in a way that conveys conditions other than deafness, especially muteness. I propose a basic model for ascertaining the semantic value of <sup>ל</sup>הרש in the context of its adjectival and verbal occurrences. I find that an approach of rendering the root idiomatically allows for a majority of its attestations to reflect a semantic of deafness and, in a number of instances, to represent the condition in a way that is not socially marginalizing or stigmatizing in nature.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to conduct a reassessment of the term used to indicate the impairment of deafness in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>1</sup> This will be done through a semantic analysis of the attestations of the Classical Hebrew root <sup>ל</sup>הרש, which is connected with deafness, among other conditions. I will begin by introducing the discipline of biblical disability criticism and assessing the bearing it has had on an understanding of deafness as an impairment and disability in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup> From there, I will identify the attestations of the

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1. I must thank Dr. Matthew Grey, Dr. Donald Parry, and Dr. Stephen Ricks each for their valuable counsel in the preliminary stages of my research. I express further appreciation to Dr. Ricks, to Sam Mitchell, to my wife, and to the anonymous reviewer of my article for their careful readings of my final draft and their suggestions for improvement. Lastly, I thank my deaf parents, Jason and SteVee, and my wonderful wife Sarah for their love and support of my endeavors. Naturally, I accept ultimate responsibility for the thoughts and conclusions posited here.

2. For an important understanding on the distinction between impairment and disability in modern disability studies, see Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995), 73–74: “One could go so far as to say that disability, in our sense of the word, did not exist in such a world. Of course, impairments existed, but the impaired body was part of a lived experience, and in that sense functioned. It was not defined strictly by its relation to means of production or a productive economy.

root, examine its treatment by lexicographers, and offer an alternate suggestion for understanding the root's basic semantic value and rendering in translation. This root can be translated from a basis of deafness in more occurrences than acknowledged by major lexicons. I will then address the importance of this semantic treatment of חרשׁ<sup>11</sup> for an understanding of deafness in the Hebrew Bible. In doing so, the need for further research to examine the experience of deafness in the broader ancient Near East will be demonstrated.<sup>3</sup>

## DEAFNESS AS “DISABILITY” IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

If a date for the foundation of biblical disability criticism had to be identified, scholars in this field would likely point to November 20, 1995, when the first session of the “Religion and Disability Studies Consultation” was held at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting.<sup>4</sup> That same year, Hector Avalos, professor at Iowa State University, released his monograph *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East*, a work viewed as one of the first to illuminate this new field's possibilities.<sup>5</sup> Since then there have been many publications on the construction of disability in the biblical text. These works have tended either to revolve around specific biblical passages and the role of disability in them, or to discuss the broader

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But by the mid-nineteenth century, the body *an sich* had become the body *für sich* and the impaired body had become disabled—unable to be part of the productive economy, confined to institutions, shaped to contours defined by a society at large.” In addition, “impairment” is used here in connection with its nuance in disability criticism, not as a component of the designation *hearing impaired*, which is no longer considered orthodox as an inner-cultural term within the Deaf community nor acceptable for use by outsiders of the Deaf community as an indicator for the condition of deafness. See “Community and Culture—Frequently Asked Questions,” *National Association of the Deaf*, <https://www.nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/community-and-culture-frequently-asked-questions/>, for information from one organization of the Deaf, among many, on the incorrectness of several terms in referring to deaf people, as well as the incorrectness of an assumed natural relationship between muteness and deafness.

3. I have demarcated the scope of my research in this paper to an internal analysis of חרשׁ in the Classical Hebrew of the Hebrew Bible. For the Hebrew utilized throughout this paper, see Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1967/1977), which itself is based on the Masoretic Text of the Leningrad Codex B19A. More research on חרשׁ and deafness in the Hebrew Bible has yet to be done from a basis of textual criticism, historical linguistics, and comparative linguistics. These methods have not been applied in the present paper for the sake of space, though they will be part of my continuing research on this subject.

4. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper, “Introduction,” in *This Able Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, eds. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper, SemeiaSt 55 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 1–9, here 3.

5. Rebecca Raphael, *Biblical Corpora: Representations of Disability in Hebrew Biblical Literature*, LHBOTS 445 (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 15–16.

function of disability within the Hebrew Bible as a whole.<sup>6</sup> Few efforts have been made to systematically investigate a single disability in its entirety in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>7</sup>

Deafness is a condition that typically falls under the wider classification of “disability” in today’s social vernacular.<sup>8</sup> The designation of “disability” is a modern one, and, as a nuanced term in disability criticism, one that modern critical scholars bring with them into their reading of the biblical text.<sup>9</sup> Many of the conditions termed “disabilities” today can be found in the Hebrew Bible, including deafness, blindness, and muteness; however, the category delineated by the modern use of “disability” does not have a perfect analogy in Classical Hebrew. Rather, the biblical authors had their own contemporary categories for these conditions.

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6. For works centered on a specific passage, see Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story*, LHBOTS 441 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006); and *Disability & Isaiah’s Suffering Servant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). For works surveying disability in the Hebrew Bible at large, see Raphael, *Biblical Corpora*; and Saul Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Avalos, Melcher, and Schipper, eds., *This Aabled Body* is a figurative volume for biblical disability criticism that has compiled essays which reflect both approaches listed above.

7. Although few in number, some efforts to examine an impairment across the biblical corpus have been conducted. A noteworthy and exhaustive study is that done by Ray McAllister in his “Theology of Blindness in the Hebrew Scriptures” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2010). A recent treatment on biblical deafness by Mike Gulliver and William John Lyons, “Conceptualizing the Place of Deaf People in Ancient Israel: Suggestions from Deaf Space,” *JBL* 137 (2018): 537–53, deals with the impairment, albeit on a sociological level. I am not aware of any comprehensive treatment of the semantic basis of the lexeme denoting the condition of deafness in the Hebrew Bible that anticipates this paper’s analysis.

8. Olyan, *Disability*, 2: “As a contested category, there is no single agreed-upon definition of disability in disability studies . . . There is, however, a virtual consensus among scholars in disability studies that disability, like gender, is a social construction rather than something ‘natural and timeless,’ a cultural product that has contributed significantly to the generation and maintenance of inequality in societies.” It is also important to note that, while society may regard deafness as a disability, the Deaf community does not accept the label (cf. Raphael, *Biblical Corpora*, 141: “The Deaf community often distinguishes deafness from disability, viewing itself as a linguistic minority, not a disabled population”).

9. In present Western society, the word *disability* is used in a broad sense to refer to conditions corresponding with a lack of function of the human body, usually relative to a socially constructed ideal of “normality.” These conditions can be emotional, mental, or somatic in nature. In disability criticism, however, different terms are used to encapsulate different nuances of how an individual’s condition is perceived. The term *impairment* is used within a social model of disability to indicate a condition that is connected with a loss of function of the human body. The term *disability* is used in representing the social prejudices faced by individuals with impairments on the grounds of their lack of bodily function, seen as different from a perceived “normality.” This distinction is taken from and explicated further in Nyasha Junior and Jeremy Schipper, “Disability Studies and the Bible,” in *New Meanings for Ancient Texts: Recent Approaches to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and John Kaltner (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 21–37, here 35.

In a number of works produced by biblical disability scholars, several categories of disabilities are treated. The only “native” category with a specific Hebrew designation is מום, “defect.”<sup>10</sup> This category, sketched predominantly in Lev 21:17–23, 24:19–20, and Deut 23:2[1], is comprised of somatic impairments, including blindness, lameness, dermal conditions, hunched backs, broken bones, and damaged genitalia, which preclude men of priestly lineage from participating in cultic offerings.<sup>11</sup> Curiously enough, in these qualifying passages, deafness is never designated as מום. On the grounds of its nominative structure, however, deafness can be attributed to a separate native but unnamed category. Schipper calls attention to an internal noun pattern in Hebrew, the *qittēl*, which includes terms designated as מום as well as those that are not, including “deaf” and “mute.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, deafness is classified by its morphology into a group including a number of other somatic impairments, a categorization that is difficult to define due to its inclusion of terms not associated with such impairments.<sup>13</sup> Olyan defines a number of unlabeled but native categories based on the grounds of different combinations of somatic impairments in clusters at various places throughout the Hebrew Bible.<sup>14</sup> He concludes that the grouping of these impairments, both מום and “non-defect,” was reflective of the societal stigmatization imposed on the impaired—specifically through the way these groups were set in parallel to other marginalized demographics in the biblical text.<sup>15</sup> Olyan’s conclusions are incomplete, however, since he only treats adjectival attestations of חרשׁ.<sup>16</sup> I seek to offer a fuller assessment of חרשׁ that considers its verbal attestations as well.

10. Saul Olyan differentiates between “native” classification qualifications and terminology, which originate in the biblical text, and “nonnative” modern language and critical categorization brought by scholars to the text, e.g., the modern use of the term “disability.” See Olyan, *Disability*, 12–13.

11. Olyan, *Disability*, 27. Bracketed numerals refer to English versification where it varies from the Hebrew.

12. Schipper, *Disability Studies*, 65–70. Edgar Kellenberger remarks in his essay that this noun pattern excludes any designations of mental and psychological impairments—see “Mesopotamia and Israel,” in *Disability in Antiquity*, ed. Christian Laes (London: Routledge, 2017), 47–60, here 48.

13. Joshua Fox, *Semitic Noun Patterns*, HSS 52 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 265: “Many of the adjectives in *qittēl* refer to bodily defects. . . . [Some] Hebrew *qittēl* adjectives refer to personal characteristics that are not necessarily defects.” These “non-defective” adjectives include “bald,” “proud,” and “seeing well.”

14. Olyan, *Disability*, 124. For a few examples of these “unlabeled impairment groupings” identified by Olyan, see Isa 35:5–6 and Deut 28:28–29.

15. Olyan, *Disability*, 121–24.

16. Olyan, *Disability*, 181–87. A quick glance through his monograph’s scripture citation index shows that a majority of the verses where verbal attestations of חרשׁ appear in the Hebrew Bible are not treated in this work, and the verses that are cited do not bear on

## DEAFNESS AS A TERM IN BIBLICAL HEBREW

The triconsonantal lexical root for the term “deafness” in the Hebrew Bible is  $\text{חרש}^{\text{II}}$ , which is homophonous with roots that have several other meanings, including  $\text{חרש}^{\text{I}}$  (“to cut in, engrave, plough”),  $\text{חרש}^{\text{III}}$  (with a derived nominal form meaning “wood, wooded height”), and  $\text{חרש}^{\text{IV}}$  (with a number of derived nominal forms, including “magic art or magic drug,” as well as the proper name of a Levite).<sup>17</sup>  $\text{חרש}^{\text{II}}$  appears fifty-seven times in the biblical corpus: nine times as an adjective, forty-seven times as a verb, and once as a noun. The definition of  $\text{חרש}^{\text{II}}$  provided by BDB is first “be silent, dumb, speechless,” then “be deaf.”<sup>18</sup>

### ADJECTIVES

An analysis of  $\text{חָרַשׁ}$ , the adjectival use of  $\text{חרש}^{\text{II}}$ , is important for understanding its verbal forms, as the adjective will serve to secure a semantic meaning for the root at large.<sup>19</sup>  $\text{חָרַשׁ}$  in its various forms appears nine times in the MT of the Leningrad Codex.<sup>20</sup> It is often used substantively and is typically indefinite.<sup>21</sup> In all but one occurrence, at least one other adjective designating a somatic impairment can also be found in the same verse.<sup>22</sup> The method of adjectival analysis begins with the basis of the semantic range offered by lexicons for the term  $\text{חרש}^{\text{II}}$ , being the impairments of deafness and muteness. Evidence is then collected from the context of each attestation, via terms and ideas, which lends to identifying either one impairment or the other as the primary intended

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the use of  $\text{חרש}^{\text{II}}$  in those verses. The verses containing the adjectival occurrences of  $\text{חרש}^{\text{II}}$ , however, are cited frequently.

17. “ $\text{חרש}^{\text{II}}$ ,” BDB 361; “ $\text{חרש}^{\text{III}}$ ,” *HALOT* 1:357–58. The numbering of these homophonous roots of  $\text{חרש}$  and their conceptual definitions follows BDB, 360–61. Cf. *HALOT* 1:357–58, where a similar numbering system is employed; however, BDB  $\text{חרש}^{\text{III}}$  is removed from its list of roots and treated nominatively, and BDB  $\text{חרש}^{\text{IV}}$  is counted as  $\text{חרש}^{\text{III}}$ .

18. “ $\text{חרש}^{\text{II}}$ ,” BDB 361. A similar semantic range is presented in “ $\text{חרש}^{\text{II}}$ ,” *HALOT* 1:357–58.

19. The use of the pointed  $\text{חָרַשׁ}$  here is used to distinguish between the adjectival form and the lexical root mentioned throughout the paper.

20. Exod 4:11; Lev 19:14; Ps 38:14[13]; 58:5; Isa 29:18; 35:5; 42:18–19; 43:8. A thorough examination of the text-critical issues of the verses in which  $\text{חרש}^{\text{II}}$  appears was not conducted in the preparation of this paper. While I have attempted to draw only on internal evidence in the MT of the Leningrad Codex, there will be one textual variant that has bearing on a use of  $\text{חרש}^{\text{II}}$  that will be treated below. Its inclusion is only due to its bearing on the term.

21. Two definite uses of the adjective are identified in Isa 29:18 and Isa 42:18. An attributive use of the adjective is used in Ps 58:5[4], and the adjective is used in predicate position in Isa 42:19.

22. Seven instances (Exod 4:11; Lev 19:14; Isa 29:18; 35:5; 42:18, 19; 43:8) occur with blindness (root  $\text{עור}$ ) and two (Exod 4:11; Ps 38:14) with muteness (root  $\text{אלם}$ ). Ps 58:5[4] has no other impairment term.

understanding.<sup>23</sup> The different indications of somatic function and impairment that elucidate the meaning of all nine attestations of חָרַשׁ can be grouped into five cases: (1) juxtaposition with a separate term indicating vocal impairment; (2) relationship with the vocal verb קָלַל (“to curse”); (3) relationship with the aural noun אָזֶן (“ear”); (4) relationship with the aural verb שָׁמַע (“to hear”); and (5) proximity to a use of חָרַשׁ with a secured definition.

*Adjective Case 1: Juxtaposition with Term for Muteness (Exod 4:11)*

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מִי שֵׁם פֶּה לְאָדָם אוֹ מִי־יִשׁוּם אֵלָם אוֹ חָרַשׁ אוֹ פִקֵּחַ אוֹ עֵוֶר הֲלֹא  
אֲנִכִי יְהוָה

*And the LORD said to him, “Who gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?”<sup>24</sup>*

In this verse, the most important factor in narrowing the semantic possibilities of חָרַשׁ is the fact that the idea of vocal impairment that חָרַשׁ could represent is already encompassed by the adjacent term אֵלֶם. Here, חָרַשׁ is juxtaposed with the *qittēl* adjective אֵלֶם, “mute,” just as פִּקֵּחַ, “seeing,” is juxtaposed with עוֹר, “blind.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, with the option of muteness already occupied, this substantive adjective is left only to represent the concept of aural impairment. The resultant translation of “deaf” is a notion that most commentators of Exodus agree with.<sup>26</sup>

*Adjective Case 2: Relationship with Vocal Verb קָלַל, “To Curse” (Lev 19:14)*

לֹא־תִקְלַל חָרַשׁ וְלִפְנֵי עוֹר לֹא תִתֵּן מִקְשָׁל וְיִרְאֶתָּה מִפְּאֻלֶּיךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה

*You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am the LORD.*

23. That is to say, there is little way that scholars could preclude a secondary or resultant impairment, e.g., muteness that *can* be experienced simultaneously by those who are deaf; however, the assumption that both impairments always appear together is not founded and certainly is not to be supported by the premises of this paper.

24. The English translation of the presented verses are taken from Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). All renderings of Hebrew terms and phrases in the body of this paper are presented in quotation marks; variants to the NJPS’s wording reflect my own translation.

25. For lexical information on these terms, see the following: אֵלֶם: BDB 47–48, HALOT 1:57; פִּקֵּחַ: BDB 824, HALOT 3:959–60; עוֹר: BDB 734, HALOT 2:803.

26. For commentators who translate this use of חָרַשׁ as “deaf,” see John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 47; Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, 4 vols., HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), here 1:409; William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 182.

The connection of הָרַשׁ with the negated verb לֹא-תִקְלַל, “you shall not curse,” is the basis for understanding the adjective’s meaning. That the verb קָלַל in the *piel* stem can represent the vocalization of a curse is evidenced by the context of many of its uses.<sup>27</sup> Some scholars thus understand Lev 19:14a to be the prohibition of execrations against the deaf, with its underlying logic being that the deaf would not be able to hear or respond to curses pronounced against them.<sup>28</sup> This logical connection is paralleled in the second colon of the verse, where a different malign act (i.e., placing an obstruction before the blind) is prohibited on the grounds of the somatic impairment of the affected (i.e., the blind). Thus, the meaning of הָרַשׁ here is certainly “deaf.”<sup>29</sup>

*Adjective Case 3: Relationship with Aural Noun* (אָזְנוֹן (ים), “Ear(s)” (Isa 35:5)<sup>30</sup>

אֲזוּ תִפְתַּחְנָה עֵינֵי עִוְרִים וְאָזְנֵי הָרָשִׁים תִּפְתַּחְנָה

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.*

The meaning of הָרָשִׁים here is elucidated through its relationship to the aural noun אָזְנוֹן, “ears,” which is in fact explicit in the construct phrase of the two terms. There is no ambiguity in the verse that would allow the possibility of attributing the term to a vocal impairment. Following that logic, the translation of הָרָשִׁים here is “deaf.”<sup>31</sup>

*Adjective Case 4: Relationship with Aural Verbal Root* שָׁמַע, “To Hear” (Isa 42:18)<sup>32</sup>

הַחֲרָשִׁים שָׁמְעוּ וְהַעֲוָרִים הִבִּיטוּ לְרֹאוֹת

27. For example, Exod 21:17 demonstrates that the verb קָלַל is a discernable phenomenon. קָלַל as a vocal expression is noted in Lev 24:14 by the use of the participle הַשְּׁמָעִים, “those who heard,” as the designation for the individuals who witnessed the execration.

28. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1640: “Since the deaf cannot hear a curse, they cannot ward it off by a blessing.”

29. For commentators who translate this use of הָרַשׁ as “deaf,” see Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 1298; John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4 (Waco, TX: Word, 1992), 302–3.

30. This same evidence can be applied to the use of the adjective in Isa 43:8 and Ps 58:5[4].

31. For commentators who translate this use of הָרַשׁ as “deaf,” see Willem A. M. Beuken, *Isaiah: Part II, Volume 2: Isaiah Chapters 28–39*, HCOT, trans. Brian Doyle (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 305; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 251; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 455; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, WBC 25 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 5.

32. The same logic employed here applies to the adjectival uses of חָרַשׁ in Ps 38:14[13] and Isa 29:18.

*Listen, you who are deaf; You blind ones, look up and see!*

The non-aural meaning of החרשים is confirmed by its positioning relative to the aural verb שמעו. This sensory imperative is antithetical to the impairment of deafness; the same pattern is noted in the second colon of the verse, where העורים, “the blind,” are told to הביטו, “look.” On these grounds, the somatic impairment denoted here is deafness.<sup>33</sup>

*Adjective Case 5: Use of Immediate Context to Clarify Meaning (Isa 42:19)*

מִי עוֹר כִּי אִם-עֵבְדִי וְחֵרֵשׁ כְּמַלְאָכֵי אֲשַׁלֵּחַ מִי עוֹר כְּמִשְׁלָם וְעוֹר כְּעֵבֶר יְהוָה

*Who is so blind as My servant, so deaf as the messenger I send? Who is so blind as the chosen one, So blind as the servant of the LORD?*

Here there are no clear indicators elucidating the correct impairment to be understood by the use of חֵרֵשׁ. With the confirmed identification of החרשים in the preceding verse as “deaf,” however, as well as the juxtaposition of sight and hearing in verse 20 in parallel to עוֹר and חֵרֵשׁ in this verse, a translation of “deaf” rather than “mute” seems confirmed here.<sup>34</sup>

As seen in each case, חֵרֵשׁ in its adjectival form (חֵרֵשׁ) always arrives at a definition meaning “deaf.”<sup>35</sup> There is not a single adjectival attestation where a nonvocal meaning can be better secured than a nonaural one. This is supported either by the relationship of חֵרֵשׁ to context words connected with the somatic function of hearing (ear, the verb “to hear,” the verb “to curse”), or because חֵרֵשׁ is juxtaposed with another term already representing the impairment of muteness. The adjectival use of חֵרֵשׁ represents the condition of deafness on a fundamental level by modifying a subject as being deaf or acting substantively as such. We can thus see the root’s semantic meaning relating primarily to the impairment of deafness rather than muteness.<sup>36</sup>

33. For commentators who translate this use of חֵרֵשׁ as “deaf,” see Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah III*, 3 vols., HCOT (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1997), 1:261; Childs, *Isaiah*, 328; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19A (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 216; Watts, *Isaiah*, 122.

34. For commentators who translate this use of חֵרֵשׁ as “deaf,” see Koole, *Isaiah*, 1.261; Childs, *Isaiah*, 328; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 216; and Watts, *Isaiah*, 122.

35. Aside from consensus by commentators on the use of the adjective, both BDB and HALOT agree as to the number, location, and semantic value of the attestations of חֵרֵשׁ.

36. This is not to say that the root cannot and does not represent muteness. Most lexicons acknowledge that חֵרֵשׁ can reflect either deafness or muteness. If these two impairments reflected by the use of the root are to be understood in light of each other, it follows that one is likely the primary impairment, while the other is a resultant or secondary condition of the first, similar to the English “deaf” primarily invoking a sense of auditory impairment, but also (to the disappointment of some) secondarily connoting vocal impairment

## VERBS

While lexicons generally agree on the absolute connection of the adjectival attestations of  $\text{הָרַשׁ}^{\text{H}}$  with deafness, they tend to carry a broader and more nuanced semantic range for its verbal forms.<sup>37</sup>  $\text{הָרַשׁ}^{\text{H}}$  as a verb appears forty-seven times in the MT of the Leningrad Codex<sup>38</sup>—seven times in the *qal* stem, thirty-nine in the *hiphil* stem, and one in the *hithpael* stem. Of the seven *qal* stem attestations, BDB only connects two with deafness while associating the others with muteness. *HALOT*, however, connects all seven *qal* stem attestations with deafness. In both BDB and *HALOT*, all attestations of the *hiphil* stem except one are associated with muteness.<sup>39</sup>

The method applied in assessing the verbal attestations of  $\text{הָרַשׁ}^{\text{H}}$  will be the same as that for adjectival analysis with one addition: it will assume each occurrence is to be understood primarily from a basis of deafness. This assumption stems from two observations noted in the previous adjectival analysis: (1) All adjectival uses of  $\text{הָרַשׁ}^{\text{H}}$  can be attributed rather securely to a notion of deafness, and in most cases, a basis of muteness would not be viable; and (2) The existence of a separate root, אָלַם, the semantic value of which reflects a primary impairment of muteness.<sup>40</sup>

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as well. In light of earlier analysis, I argue that, in understanding the semantic basis of  $\text{הָרַשׁ}^{\text{H}}$ , deafness is the primary impairment, while either real or perceived muteness (i.e., the manifestation of speech impairments arising from a lack of aural function) is secondary. In other words, individuals who are deaf may manifest forms of vocal impairment as a result of their aural impairment, but muteness, as an isolated impairment, would not necessarily correspond with or lead to an aural impairment. Indeed, persons with a vocal impairment can and do receive and respond to aural stimuli. Thus, if there is a relationship between the impairments of deafness and muteness as denoted by the root  $\text{הָרַשׁ}^{\text{H}}$ , it is likely that the impairment of deafness takes primacy in the matter of semantics, and that the impairment of muteness, as a semantic possibility, would be secondary or resultant of deafness.

37. For lexical information on the verbal forms of  $\text{הָרַשׁ}^{\text{H}}$ , see “ $\text{הָרַשׁ}^{\text{H}}$ ,” BDB 361; *HALOT* 1:357–58.

38. Gen 24:21; 34:5; Exod 14:14; Num 30:5[4], 8[7], 12[11], 15[14] (x3); Judg 16:2; 18:19; 1 Sam 7:8; 10:27; 2 Sam 13:20; 19:11[10]; 2 Kgs 18:36; Isa 36:21; 41:1; 42:14; Jer 4:19; 38:27; Mic 7:16; Hab 1:13; Zeph 3:17; Ps 28:1; 32:3; 35:22; 39:13[12]; 50:3, 21; 83:2[1]; 109:1; Job 6:24; 11:3; 13:5 (x2), 13, 19; 33:31, 33; 41:4[12]; Prov 11:12; 17:28; Esth 4:14 (x2); 7:4; Neh 5:8.

39. That is to say, verbal attestations of  $\text{הָרַשׁ}^{\text{H}}$  in the *qal* and *hiphil* stems, as presented in many lexicons, never represent only a single basis of impairment. The *qal* attestations noted in BDB include references to both impairments, while the *qal* usages in *HALOT* are each connected with deafness. Both lexicons only attribute one *hiphil* attestation to deafness: 1 Sam 7:8 in BDB and 1 Sam 10:27 in *HALOT*. All other *hiphil* occurrences are connected to muteness. The point of demonstrating these discrepancies is to show that there is room for alternate readings and flexibility in an understanding of the underlying impairment reflected by the term.

40. See, for example, the adjectival use of the root in Exod 4:11 (included herein with Adjective Case 1).

In many instances of  $\text{הָרַשׁ}$  in the *hiphil* in both lexicons and English translations, the verb has been rendered not literally but metaphorically, with a nuance based on the construed impairment. One such example offered by some translators is the phrase “to hold one’s peace,” a metaphorical definition derived from the silence associated with the impairment of muteness.<sup>41</sup> Another such derived meaning is “to be idle,” again likely arising from the connection of silence with the impairment of muteness.<sup>42</sup> Similar idiomatic meanings for  $\text{הָרַשׁ}$  make sense considering the causative sense of the *hiphil* stem, as it would be unlikely for one to cause oneself to become literally and permanently impaired. An idiomatic reflection of the semantic value also works well in light of the grammatical contexts of many of these *hiphil* occurrences, which attribute the verbal idea to individuals and groups who, while not literally impaired, temporarily take on an aspect of a somatic impairment for some purpose.

What has not been assessed by these lexicons at all, and by few other scholars on a basic level, is how a starting point of deafness with  $\text{הָרַשׁ}$  could also render many of its attestations into idiomatic expressions. Aside from a literal basis of deafness, one such derived meaning could be “to ignore [by means of self-deafening],” arising from the lack of response to auditory stimuli manifested by those with aural impairments. It should be noted that some instances of the use of  $\text{הָרַשׁ}$  for this metaphorical meaning have connotations which are not negative. Another such derived meaning from a basis of deafness could be “to not fear” or “to not be afraid.” Many instances throughout the Hebrew Bible connect the aural sense with the experience of fear, both in connection with YHWH and with enemy forces.<sup>43</sup> It follows, then, that an inversion of the aural sense could carry a corresponding inversion of fear.

*Verb Case 1: Qal Attestation of  $\text{הָרַשׁ}$  as Deafness (Mic 7:16)*

יִרְאוּ גוֹיִם וַיִּבְשׁוּ מִכַּל גְּבוּרָתָם יִשְׂמְרוּ יָד עַל־פִּיהֶם אֲזַנֵּיהֶם יִתְחַרְשְׁנָה

*Let nations behold and be ashamed despite all their might; Let them put hand to mouth; Let their ears be deafened!*

Both BDB and HALOT agree on a definition stemming from a semantic of deafness, and it is clear to see how the consensus is reached. Similar to the analysis of Isa 35:5 treated above, the impairment intended to be conveyed by

41. E.g., the translation of the verb in many instances in the KJV.

42. “ $\text{הָרַשׁ}$ ,” HALOT 1:358.

43. For scriptures that connect aural function with fear, whether lexically (through aural verbs) or thematically (through themes like the reception of negative or terrorizing news), see Gen 3:10; Deut 4:10; 5:25; 13:12[11]; 17:13; 19:20; 21:21; 31:12–13; 1 Sam 4:6–7; 7:7; 17:11; 28:20; 1 Kgs 3:28; 2 Kgs 19:6; Ps 76:9[8], etc.

the verb תִּחַרְשְׁנָה here is clarified by its connection with the noun אַזְנוֹתֵיהֶם, “their ears.” While no terminology here is specifically associated with muteness, the phrase יָשִׁימוּ יָד עַל־פִּיהֶם (“they will place [their] hand upon [their] mouth[s]”)<sup>44</sup> signifies allusion to vocal impairment. Thus, using logic similar to that in the analysis of Exod 4:11, תִּחַרְשְׁנָה can be doubly confirmed as “[they] will be deaf,” with the concept of vocal impairment captured here by the phrase “they will place [their] hand upon [their] mouth[s].”<sup>45</sup>

*Verb Case 2: Hiphil Attestation of חָרַשׁ<sup>11</sup> as Deafness [BDB] (1 Sam 7:8)*

וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל־תִּחַרְשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ מִזְעַק אֶל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיִשְׁעֵנוּ מִיַּד פְּלִשְׁתִּים

*And they implored Samuel, “Do not neglect us and do not refrain from crying out to the LORD our God to save us from the hands of the Philistines.”*

While *HALOT* connects this verbal form of חָרַשׁ<sup>11</sup> to the derived meaning “to keep, be silent,” BDB defines it as “be not deaf.” Many attestations of חָרַשׁ<sup>11</sup> in the *hiphil* are also figurative—they are attributed to characters, such as Samuel here, who are marked elsewhere as engaging in both vocal and aural activity.<sup>46</sup> Here, the children of Israel implore Samuel to cry to YHWH on their behalf. Part of that plea is the *hiphil* verb of חָרַשׁ<sup>11</sup> with a negating adverb. If the verb is rendered from a primary basis of deafness, then its stative sense could be rendered “do not be deaf.” The causative sense of the *hiphil* stem, again negated, can also be used to render the derived meaning “do not cause yourself to be deaf.”<sup>47</sup> In understanding the nuance here of associating an aural impairment with Samuel, one can see how the use of חָרַשׁ<sup>11</sup>, again here with the negating adverb, likely carries the derived nuance of “do not ignore.”<sup>48</sup>

44. See also the same phrase, albeit in a different tense and mood, in Job 21:5, where it still fits into a similar verbal context (Mic 7:16 = בִּישׁ in parallel with Job 21:5 = שָׁמַם). For one such example of verbs used in parallel, see Ps 40:15–16 [14–15].

45. In conjunction with BDB and *HALOT*, note also the association of the verbal use of חָרַשׁ<sup>11</sup> in this verse with deafness in Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 24E (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 587; and Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, WBC 32 (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 56.

46. E.g., the servant of Abraham (Gen 21), Jacob (Gen 34), Saul (1 Sam 10:27), Esther (Est 4, 7), etc.

47. For a basic introduction to the nuances of the Hebrew *hiphil* stem, including the stative and causative uses mentioned here, see Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), 211–13.

48. For one scholar in conjunction with this same position, see Ralph W. Klein, 1 *Samuel*, 2nd ed., WBC 10 (Nashville: Nelson, 2008), 63, where he renders the translation “do not be deaf toward us.” Also see Klein’s note on 67: “The people turned to Samuel and asked that he not ignore or be deaf to their need. In the Psalter it is often God who seems to be deaf to need (e.g. Pss 28:1; 35:22). . . . Ironically the Hebrew word for ‘being deaf’ is

Verb Case 3: *Hiphil* Attestation of  $\text{הַרְשִׁיׁל}$  as Deafness [HALOT] (1 Sam 10:27)

וַיִּבְנֵי בְלִיעֵל אָמְרוּ מִה־יִשְׁעֶנּוּ זֶה וַיִּבְזֶהוּ וְלֹא־הִבִּיאוּ לוֹ מִנְחָה וַיְהִי כִּמְחַרֵּשׁ

*But some scoundrels said, “How can this fellow save us?” So they scorned him and brought him no gift. But he pretended not to mind.*

If the *hiphil* participle here is to be received and not ignored as a variant reading, then an analysis of the form is still necessary.<sup>49</sup> There is no immediate clarification of meaning from the context of the verse so far as intended somatic impairment is concerned. A reading of silence could imply that Saul here refused to address the insubordination and criticism of the children of Belial. Understanding the term from a deaf reading, however, brings different and multiple perspectives. If the last colon is translated literally—“But Saul was like one causing oneself to be deaf”—it could support nuanced readings aside from a plain definition of aural impairment, like one of ignorance: “But he was like a deaf man, ignoring them.” Another idiomatic nuance from the deaf basis of  $\text{הַרְשִׁיׁל}$  could be rendered as “to not be afraid, to not fear,” with the last segment of this verse being “But he was like a man being deaf, not fearing their words” or “But he was not afraid.”<sup>50</sup> Regarding this fearlessness, the stative nuance of the *hiphil* of the verb could be demonstrated by Saul toward either the children of Belial (because of their treasonous behavior in

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used in Exod 14:14 to describe the *people’s* silence and inaction as Yahweh fights for them.” With regard to Klein’s concluding comment, such a use is not ironic because the term actually connects with the concept of deafness, not silence: see Verb Case 6 below. For a representation of the majority that associates the term with silence, see P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, & Commentary*, AB 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 140.

49. While the present paper does not engage in thorough text-critical analysis of each use of  $\text{הַרְשִׁיׁל}$  and its contexts, an important variant tradition, noted in *BHS* 461, is found in both in  $\text{כִּמְחַרֵּשׁ}$  (כמו חדש) and  $\text{ὡς μετὰ μῆνα}$  (ἡμερῶν), both of which reflect a reading of “[and it was] about a month [after/after],” rather than “[and he was] like one who is deaf.” Also see McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 191, for commentary on the alternate reading.

50. As far as understanding the function of Saul’s behavior in this verse in connection with deafness, a few things should be considered. First, the narrative suggests that Saul is not actually deaf. In fact, Saul is grammatically distanced from a literal impairment of deafness in this verse by two degrees of removal: (1) the  $\text{כִּי}$  preposition (“like, as”) and (2) the *hiphil* participle of the root (“one *causing* oneself to be deaf”). Second, it does not appear that this idiomatic deployment of deafness is alluded to in subsequent passages discussing Saul’s later life. Third, there is ambiguity in how Saul’s behavior here should be perceived. One possible reading could see Saul’s disregard for the children of Belial and their insubordination as a positive demonstration of prudence. Another could take his behavior here as a negative portrayal of apathy toward the children of Belial when he should have inflicted a stern punishment instead. A third reading could take both of these readings and understand the former as indicative of Saul’s early life and the latter as reflective of Saul in light of his entire narrative.

not bringing him a coronation offering), toward the impending conflict with the Philistines (which the children of Belial claim he will not be able to deliver them from), or both.<sup>51</sup>

*Verb Case 4: Overturning Silence—Self-Deafening as a Mechanism of Focus (Gen 24:21)*

וְהָאִישׁ מִשְׁתַּאֲה לָהּ מִתְרִישׁ לְדַעַת הַהֲצָלִיחַ יְהוָה דְרָכּוֹ אִם-לֹא

*The man, meanwhile, stood gazing at her, silently wondering whether the LORD had made his errand successful or not.*

There are no context words here tied to either aural or vocal somatic function to elucidate the meaning of the verb. Abraham's servant had earlier vocally addressed (root אמר) YHWH to set conditional requisites for the recognition and identification of Isaac's wife-to-be (vv. 12–14). Though Rebekah had already fulfilled these conditions (v. 20), the servant is still inquiring in v. 21. If the *waw*-conjunction at the beginning of v. 21 indicates that this verse temporally follows v. 20's events, then the servant is awaiting final confirmation that Rebekah's actions were indeed a manifestation of YHWH's will, perhaps necessitating that he again communicate with YHWH. This second (presumably vocal) supplication would preclude *הרש* here as representing figurative self-muting. This verse also states that the servant was "gazing" at Rebekah to know if she was YHWH's appointee. Understanding a derived nuance of "to ignore" from the deaf basis of *הרש* here, the servant of Abraham could have deafened himself in order to ignore audible distractions. Ignoring auditory stimuli that would otherwise avert his visual attention from Rebekah is key here, as his gaze is the sensory act which the verse identifies as potentially leading to the confirmation he seeks.<sup>52</sup> This deafness-derived nuance of "to ignore [by self-deafening]" serves as an example of how aural impairment denoted by *הרש* can reflect a positive or beneficial act.<sup>53</sup>

51. For a representation of the scholarly consensus rendering the verb of *הרש* here in connection with silence, see David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 296, 300–301.

52. This is all to say that, despite the fact that the servant's prayer explicitly petitioned for the will of the Lord to be made known through the words of the woman, the wording of this verse states that he awaits further confirmation which will come, in some part, through an act of visual focus.

53. For a good example of the scholarly consensus seeing this verbal use of *הרש* in relation with silence, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 143.

*Verb Case 5: Overturning Silence—Self-Deafening as a Mechanism of Ignorance (Jer 4:19)*

מְעִי מְעִי [אֲחִילָהּ כ] (אֲחִילָהּ ק) קִירוֹת לְבִי הִמְהִלֵי לְבִי לֹא אֲתָרִישׁ כִּי קוֹל שׁוֹפָר  
 [שְׁמַעְתִּי כ] (שְׁמַעְתָּ ק) נִפְשִׁי תְרוּעַת מְלָחָמָה

*Oh, my suffering, my suffering! How I writhe! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart moans within me, I cannot be silent; For I hear the blare of horns, alarms of war.*

There is immediate context which could lend to the somatic impairment meant by the use of חרש<sup>11</sup> here, but both vocal and aural phenomena are present. At least one term is connected with spoken performance (e.g., root המה, “to murmur, make a noise”), but the vocal verbs are attributed to objects of the speaker’s body, not to the speaker himself. However, the *hiphil* verb of חרש<sup>11</sup> here is attributed to the speaker. Immediately proximate to it is the noun קול, “voice, sound.” In connection with the aural verb root שמע, “to hear,” קול is designated as aural stimulus, not as the speaker’s form of expression. Thus, the noun becomes charged with aural function, as does the verb of חרש<sup>11</sup>. Further, the *ketiv* of the verb here is conjugated to correspond to the speaker, but the *qere* associates the verb with נפשי, “my [the speaker’s] soul, life-force.” On the basis of a similar construction in v. 21 (verb root שמע + קול שופר), the *ketiv* is preferred by this paper, with the “soul” of the speaker only functioning in the vocative of direct address, with no connection to the aural verb. Due to these connections between the speaker and aural function words, a basis of deafness for the verb of חרש<sup>11</sup> here can be supported.<sup>54</sup> The layered derived nuances of deafness possible (i.e., ignoring and not fearing) are negated because the aural stimuli of the present verse (i.e., the “sound of [the] horn” and the “alarm of war”) overpower the speaker’s ability to self-deafen.

*Verb Case 6: Overturning Silence—Self-Deafening as a Mechanism of Fearlessness (Exod 14:14)*

יְהוָה יִלָּחֶם לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תִּחְרְיוּן

*The LORD will battle for you; you hold your peace!*

There is no context in the present verse to clarify the intended impairment of the verb from חרש<sup>11</sup> here. Approaching the term from a basis of deafness does

54. For a representation of a scholarly consensus that understands the verbal use of חרש<sup>11</sup> here to be in connection with silence, see Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 21A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 349–50 (note especially his comment, which is *contrary* to his translation, on the aural context of the verse: “the auditory sense is clearly dominant”).

reveal a number of supporting proofs from a slightly larger context, however. The only other use of *חַרַשׁ* in Exodus is an adjectival one in 4:11, which has already been demonstrated to connect to an idea of deafness. Secondly, Exod 4:11 and the present verse are not only connected by canonical designations, but also by source—some scholars attribute both verses to E.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, if the present verse is recognized as thematically parallel to the beginning of the preceding verse, then the verb of *חַרַשׁ* here could correspond to *אַל־תִּירָאוּ*, “do not be afraid,” in v. 13a.<sup>56</sup> The aural sense is connected with the experience of fear either lexically (root *יִרָא*) or by theme throughout the Hebrew Bible.<sup>57</sup> A derived meaning of *חַרַשׁ* could therefore be “to not be afraid” or “to ignore [a fear-inducing matter],” just as the underlying notion of muteness seen in *חַרַשׁ* has allowed for the derived understanding of “to hold one’s peace.”

There is ample evidence to defend a reading of several of the verbal attestations of *חַרַשׁ* from the basis of deafness. This is made possible through derived meanings, including “to ignore” and “to not fear, to not be afraid.” In my evaluation of each verbal usage of *חַרַשׁ*, I have determined that a definition stemming from a basis of deafness can be supported in all cases except those in Job, Proverbs, and Nehemiah. In each instance of *חַרַשׁ* in these three books, however, a meaning rendered from a basis of vocal impairment is supported. These instances preclude any suggestion that the root *חַרַשׁ* represents the condition of deafness alone, with no possibility of reflecting secondary or resultant conditions. However, my proposed approach to a method of understanding the semantic value of *חַרַשׁ* did not exclude the possibility of understanding the root and its derived forms from a basis of muteness, but rather that an understanding of the root from the condition of deafness should be the

55. In *Exodus*, Propp attributes Exod 4:11 (191) to E and Exod 14:14 (478–79) to JE, with further notes that the latter could be further scrutinized so as to demonstrate attribution to E. A contrary position is represented by Richard Elliott Freedman, who attributes 4:11 to E and 14:14 to J, in *The Bible with Sources Revealed: A New View into the Five Books of Moses* (New York: HarperOne, 2003), 124, 143. The evidence garnered from source criticism here is not central to my semantic argument but simply something worthy of note.

56. Although in *Exodus*, 462, Propp translates the verb of *חַרַשׁ* here as “you will be still,” on page 496 he connects this verse with the preceding one, as I have here. The parallel between the verb of *חַרַשׁ* in this verse and “not fearing” in the preceding verse can also be noted in the comparison of the present verse with Deut 3:22. This is further supported by the themes in other pericopes containing the form *יָרָה* + verbal form of the root *לָחַם* + preposition with pronominal suffix *לָכֶם* (e.g., Exod 14:25; Deut 1:30; 20:3–4; Josh 10:14; 23:3, 10). Indeed, the verb of deafness in v. 14, in light of the parallel with the preceding verse, could be reflective of all three volitional ideas in v. 13a: not being afraid (*אַל־תִּירָאוּ*) of the approaching Egyptians; standing stationary (*הִתְיַצְּבוּ*), perhaps as an indication of fearlessness; and seeing (*וַרְאוּ*) the works that the Lord would do on their behalf and that would justify their fearlessness.

57. See note 43 above.

primary approach. As mentioned above, the impairment of muteness could be perceived as being connected or resultant to the experience of deafness, but such a perception would not necessarily reflect a medical rule.

## NOUNS

### *Noun Case 1: Secretly or Fearlessly? (Josh 2:1)*

וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּרִנּוֹן מִן־הַשְּׁטִימִים שְׁנַיִם־אֲנָשִׁים מִרְגָּלִים תְּרַשׁ לְכוּ רְאוּ אֶת־  
הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־יְרִיחוֹ וְנַלְכוּ וְנִבְאוּ בֵּית־אִשָּׁה זֹנָה וְשָׁמָּה רָחַב וַיֵּשְׁבּוּ־שָׁמָּה

*Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim, saying, “Go, reconnoiter the region of Jericho.” So they set out, and they came to the house of a harlot named Rahab and lodged there.*

תְּרַשׁ, the only example of תְּרַשׁ as a noun, is taken adverbially to modify the way Joshua dispatches the two spies to Jericho.<sup>58</sup> There is no contextual information that secures the adverb to either a basis of muteness or deafness. Thus, the rendering of the NJPS, “secretly,” is as unsecured as any translation stemming from deafness would be. Assuming a basis of deafness, and in light of the semantic observations from my previous analyses, תְּרַשׁ could allude to the passage of the twelve spies and their report to Moses in Num 13–14.<sup>59</sup> In light of the fear the children of Israel experienced in connection with the report of Canaan in Num 14:1–4, followed by Joshua and Caleb’s joint response to them in Num 14:6–9, this verse could reflect Joshua’s sending the spies into the land “deaf,” taken through a derived nuance adverbially as “fearlessly.” Indeed, this time only two spies are sent—the same number of spies who demonstrated faithfulness in Num 14:6–9 (i.e., Caleb and Joshua). In Num 14:1–3, the children of Israel express their fear regarding the report of the people of Canaan. In Josh 2:9–11, it is the people of Jericho, who, according to Rahab, are in terror regarding the report of the Israelites. I propose that the correct semantic meaning of תְּרַשׁ here be connected with deafness, perhaps rendered as “fearlessly” or “without hesitation.”

58. The pointed תְּרַשׁ here is used to distinguish between the nominal form and the adjectival form.

59. The intertextual allusion to the former narrative hypothesized here is not a support for understanding the form of תְּרַשׁ in this verse as reflective of a semantic of deafness, but rather a possible way of understanding the deaf basis of the term itself. The decision to begin from a semantic of deafness with תְּרַשׁ stems from the method applied here, not from the possible allusion to Num 14.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have attempted to extract the intended semantic value for the root  $\text{חרש}''$  in its various forms through an analysis of a number of samples indicative of all the attestations of the root in the Hebrew Bible. In doing so, I have limited my qualifying evidence to internal support alone so as to understand the biblical meaning of the term. The evaluation of the adjectival form  $\text{חרש}$  demonstrated that the fundamental concept represented by the root  $\text{חרש}''$  was the condition of deafness. A number of verbal attestations were then examined—first those that have traditionally been associated with deafness by major lexicons, and then other verses that have been traditionally attributed to silence but which here have been shown to support a context of deafness.

While analysis of deafness as a disability in the Hebrew Bible has largely been performed by scholars using only the adjectival attestations of  $\text{חרש}''$ , this paper suggests a new evaluation of the root, especially its verbal forms, in understanding the term primarily from a concept of deafness. There are a number of possible derived meanings of  $\text{חרש}''$  from a basis of deafness, including “to ignore” and “to not fear.” It should not be taken as a matter of course that the concept of aural impairment was seen intrinsically as negative. The use of the root  $\text{חרש}''$  as a verb, with individuals who are established in context as not being impaired as objects, demonstrates the separation of *the concept of impairment* from *the impaired body*. It is possible that a comparable analysis of other roots associated with impairments would render similar results.