



The First Temple: United Monarchical Period

Reprise

About 12,000 years ago God endowed mankind with god-consciousness.¹ Human beings were instructed by auditory and visual commands that facilitated common development, migration and enculturation. This gift enabled mankind to move from hunting-gathering to sedentary cultures with advancing technology, population density, and interaction among human beings. Then, about 6,000 years ago, God bestowed a conscious awareness of “otherness” — of distinctions among peoples. However, the pre-existing god-consciousness, characterized by command, possession and domination, led to a general suspicion of the new relationality introduced by “other”-consciousness. And this suspicion, in turn, led to the development of oppressive power structures designed to counter “otherness” and to preserve authoritative god-consciousness. Ancient civilizations then emerged that were determined to subjugate or exterminate all “others.” Only the natural catastrophes that marked the Great Dark Age (1200-1000 BCE) were able to temporarily break this violent cycle of “grand domestication.” It was at this critical juncture that God acted to universally terminate god-consciousness and to inaugurate human self-consciousness — the “I” and the “Thou.”

The Judean tribal chieftain, David (ca. 1000 BCE), was the first recorded human being to exhibit genuine self-consciousness. Thus, the “Psalms . . . are filled with *I*s: the *I* of repentance, the *I* of anger and vengeance, the *I* of self-pity and self-doubt, the *I* of despair, the *I* of delight, the *I* of

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ecstasy.”² In this setting, mounting evidence indicates that David gathered a team of scholars to assemble existing records, oral traditions and legends in the very first effort to address relational self-consciousness. The result was the Tetrateuch — Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. This document was designed to show that God had granted mankind self-consciousness in order that humanity might

mutually relate to each other as God intended to relate to mankind. In this context, David understood that the divine “I” preceded the human “I.” So in the Tetrateuch God employs the “I” whenever he enters into relationship with mankind — the “Thou”:

[Unto Abraham, God said,] . . . [A]nd *I* will make of *thee* a great nation, and *I* will bless *thee*, and make *thy* name great; and *thou* shalt be a blessing: and *I* will bless them that bless *thee*, and curse him that curseth *thee*: and in *thee* shall all families of the earth be blessed. — Genesis 12:2, 3.

[Unto Isaac, God said,] . . . [A]nd *I* will make *thy* seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto *thy* seed all these countries; and in *thy* seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed . . . — Genesis 26:4.

[Unto Jacob, God said,] And, behold, *I* am with *thee*, and will keep *thee* in all places whither *thou* goest, and will bring *thee* again into this land; for *I* will not leave *thee*, until *I* have done that which *I* have spoken to *thee* of. — Genesis 28:15.

[To the Chosen People, God said,] *I* am the Lord *thy* God, which have brought *thee* out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. — Exodus 20:2.

The Davidic scholars employed the phrase “land of Egypt” as a metaphor for the original created order, based on command, possession and control. The Exodus from Egypt was therefore a metaphor for the liberation of all mankind from possessive bondage. It also was the symbolic promise of a new created order, with true relationality among all “others” — “I’s” and “Thou’s.”

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Thus, whenever God entered into external relationship, he referred to himself as “I” and reciprocally stated or inferred the “other” — the “Thou.” Since God was establishing a relationship with mankind as his own image, mankind also was an “I.” Furthermore, God was an “I” only because God had chosen an “other.” And mankind was an “I” only because mankind accepted an “other.” Through God’s inauguration of relationality with mankind, therefore, God could now define himself as “I” and could also allow mankind to consciously define itself as an “I.”

But God knew that the mere existence of the twofold “I” and “Thou” was insufficient to establish relationality. Thus, in his encounter with Moses in the wilderness, God had already declared his name YHWH as “’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh” (Exodus 3:14). As a derivative of the Hebrew verb *hayah*, the term *’ehyeh* has the triune meaning, “to be, to become and to effect.” And *’asher* conveys the sense of acting “on behalf of and because of.”³ In this enunciation, therefore, God uses his name to define a nature and character that constitute *action* for mankind. Moreover, since his name indicates “on behalf of,” God himself is *kenosis* — self-emptying, self-limiting, self-giving. *God is compassion!* And since his name indicates “because of,” God himself *is, becomes and effects* as mankind’s authoritative “Other.” God is our reference and standard — our “Third Voice.” God himself is the creative bridge between the “I” and the “Thou.”

It was in this historic context that David led a heroic effort toward the worship of YHWH — the One God, who was committed to the creation and development of mutual “otherness.” YHWH alone had promised “to be, to become and to effect” “on behalf of” mankind. YHWH had pledged to provide the “Knowing Bridge” between the “I” and the “Thou.” In their reception of YHWH’s presence, the Chosen People also promised to love the Lord with all their hearts and their neighbors as themselves (Exodus 19:8; Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5). They pledged themselves to mutual relationality with God and with their neighbors — wholly apart from all falsely divinized power structures.⁴

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Journey to the Promised Land

David’s scholars then showed that Moses adopted a model of the warrior tent, in which YHWH could dwell with his people. This portable Tabernacle was virtually identical to the tent that Rameses II occupied during his encounter with the Hittite king, Muwatallis, in the Battle of Kadesh (ca. 1,275 BCE).^{5,6} However, from his tent YHWH did not embark on violence and the destruction of community but on the liberation of mankind *to* community.

The Davidic scholars further recounted the wilderness journeys of the Habiru subsequent to their encounter with YHWH at Sinai. After Moses died on Mount Nebo, the Habiru entered the Promised Land in two principal groups. One group, under Joshua, settled the eastern and northern areas of Canaan, while a second group, under Caleb, settled the southern and western areas (Joshua 3; Judges 1).⁷ The two groups dwelled largely apart until the coming of an anointed one — messiah or christ — who was David himself (1 Samuel 16:12, 13)!

David’s scholars also employed another fundamental symbol — the Garden of Eden (*Gan-Edhen* = Protected Place of Pleasure). The Garden was the center of the universe, where heaven and earth were united and where God would finish his Creation. In the Genesis account, God had fashioned the first Adam from the earth (*adamah*) in Eden. Upon Adam’s death, YHWH had Seth bury Adam in Eden at the exact site where he had been formed.⁸ Then, in Habiru tradition, the entire earth was inundated by Noah’s flood — except for the Garden of Eden.⁹ Later, after giving gifts to the priest-king, Melchizedek of Salem, Abraham went to offer his son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah, in Eden (Genesis 14:18-20; 22:1-19). Still later, standing on the summit of Mount Nebo, Moses received a vision of the Promised Edenic Land (Deuteronomy 34:1-4).

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The Deuteronomistic accounts record that, after David was anointed, he captured the city of Jebus (Jerusalem) from the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5:6-10). Jerusalem was located at the center of Eden on the site of the spring, Gihon (Genesis 2:13; 1 Kings 1:33; see also 2 Chronicles 32:30). Jerusalem also was situated between the northern tribes, originally led by Joshua, and the southern tribes, originally led by Caleb. The Levitical priesthood lived in the north, at Shiloh, and were responsible for YHWH's throne — the Ark of the Covenant. The Aaronic (Zadokite) priesthood lived in the south, at Hebron, and held YHWH's Tabernacle (see 2 Samuel 8:16, 17). David's move to Jerusalem therefore consolidated the priesthood — those who spoke to God for the people — at the center of the universe, at the place of Creation, at the axis of history in the Garden of Eden.¹⁰⁻¹²

King David's anointed mission thus reunited YHWH and the Chosen People in the Garden of Eden, with its center at Gihon in Jerusalem, its northern border extending to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Mesopotamia, and its southern border reaching the Nile River in Egypt (Genesis 15:18). David also repented at the threshing floor of Araunah (Ornan), on the Edenic Mount Moriah. The destroying angel then ceased from further punishing YHWH's people (2 Samuel 24:16-25). In a metaphoric sense, David succeeded where the first Adam had failed. It remained only for David to build a Temple in which YHWH could be present — at the center of heaven and earth and of the universe, where Creation takes place. Upon YHWH's intervention, however, the prophet, Nathan, told David that Solomon should build the Temple. David then had Solomon crowned as co-regent at Gihon, in Eden (1 Kings 1:32-48).

Solomon's Temple (ca. 968-586 BCE)

Upon David's death (ca. 969 BCE), Solomon took the throne of the United Kingdom of Israel (ca. 969-931 BCE). Soon thereafter, Solomon negotiated with Hiram, king of Tyre, for the architects, artisans and essential materials needed to erect YHWH's

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Temple. Although the Scriptures provide an extensive description of the Temple, many architectural terms remain vague (1 Kings 6, 7; 2 Chronicles 3, 4). “. . . [Fortunately, a] stunning parallel to Solomon's Temple has been discovered in northern Syria. The temple at 'Ain Dara has far more in common with the Jerusalem Temple described in the Book of Kings than any other known building. Yet the newly excavated temple has received almost no attention in [the U.S.] . . . , at least partially because the impressive excavation report, published a decade ago, was written in German by a Syrian scholar and archaeologist.”^{13,14}

The archeological evidence strongly suggests that the 'Ain Dara temple was erected and dedicated to the pagan goddess, Ishtar, about the same time that Solomon's Temple was built — and probably by the same Phoenicians! Explicit mythological evidence indicates that Ishtar took a mountain god, Ba'al-Hadad, as her lover. The 'Ain Dara pavement contains engraved footprints of this god standing before, and also entering, Ishtar's temple. Each footprint is three feet

long, with a distance of 30 feet between single footprints. A stride of 30 feet would belong to an individual about 65 feet tall!¹⁵

By comparing the biblical description of Solomon's Temple with the excavated remains of the 'Ain Dara temple, scholars have reached some stunning conclusions regarding the symbolic nature of Solomon's project. However, in order to appreciate the metaphor of Solomon's Temple, it is helpful to recall that, after creating the first Adam in Eden, God "caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept [reclined]; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man" (Genesis 2:21, 22).

Reminiscent of this Edenic story, Solomon's Temple represented a reclining human form. The Holy of Holies symbolized the head. The staircase represented the neck. The Holy Place symbolized aspects of the chest/abdomen. The bronze pillars portrayed the legs. The priestly side chambers represented the two arms. The five lavers on either side represented the fingers. The two pillars at the entrance symbolized and bordered the genital opening.^{16,17}

However, unlike the Edenic story of a sleeping Adam, Solomon's Temple was not a metaphor for a reclining Adamic male. Rather, it was the metaphor for an androgynous parent (father/mother) awaiting the birth of their Adamic child as *the human manifestation of God*.¹⁸⁻²¹ This triune metaphor — father, mother, child — symbolized God's promised inaugural "fillment" of the covenant and God's self-creation as human. This triune metaphor further implied that *the totality of the Godhead participated in the human manifestation of God!*

The Temple, as a metaphor for an androgynous individual in pregnancy, has profound implications in Hebrew thought. "... [Thus, i]n Hebrew (as well as Aramaic), the word [*racham* or *rechem*] usually translated as 'compassion' is the plural of a noun that in its singular form means 'womb.' ... To say that God is compassionate is to say that God is 'like a womb,' ... In its sense of 'like a womb,' *compassionate* has nuances of giving life, nourishing, caring, perhaps embracing and encompassing. ... [T]his is what God is like."²²

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As early as his epiphany at Sinai, YHWH himself declared to Moses:

... I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy [*racham* = compassion = "womblikeness"] on whom I will shew mercy [*racham*]. — Exodus 33:19.

And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful [*rachum*] and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth ... — Exodus 34:6.

Then, in the Psalms, David said:

But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion [*rachum*], and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. — Psalm 86:15.

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. . . . who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies [*rachamim*] . . . — Psalm 103:1, 4.

He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of compassion [*rachum*]. — Psalm 111:4.

Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion [*rachum*], and righteous. — Psalm 112:4.

Great are thy tender mercies [*rachamim*], O Lord: quicken me according to thy judgments. — Psalm 119:156.

The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion [*rachum*]; slow to anger, and of great mercy. — Psalm 145:8.

And in his prayer at the dedication of the Temple, Solomon said:

. . . and forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee, and give them compassion [*rachamim*] before them who carried them captive, that they may have compassion [*racham*] on them . . . — 1 Kings 8:50.

It is profoundly counterintuitive to attribute the female womb explicitly to God as Father. Yet the biblical scholars deliberately used this metaphor, since the term *womb* symbolizes the creative relationality out of which living entities are born. It is only out of divinely ordained relationality that human beings constitute “selves” — that they are then persons, that they are then “I’s” and “Thou’s.”

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Monarchical Struggles

Nevertheless, because Solomon did not truly appreciate what he was commissioned to do, he reverted to reliance on power structures. He therefore banished the Levitical priest, Abiathar, who had a pedagogical role in upholding the Mosaic Law — which promised human equality in opposition to all coercive power structures. Also, Solomon oppressed the northern tribal peoples with taxation and forced labor. He relinquished Edenic territory to the Phoenicians. He was lascivious in his life and person. He endorsed pagan gods and temples. And he reverted to the pagan idea that the Temple revealed the power of *possession* rather than the self-emptying (*kenotic*) power of powerlessness that constitutes mutual *relationality*.

Conclusion

The First Temple symbols were meant to convey that YHWH himself “is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory” (Matthew 6:13). YHWH is the ultimate “Actor” *on behalf of* mankind. YHWH is ultimate *kenosis* — self-emptying, self-limiting, self-giving. YHWH is the ultimate relational authority — the “Third

Voice.” YHWH determined *to be* humanly embodied and born as the Logos (Word), then *to become* anointed as the messianic Human One and *to effect* a transformed Creation. Thus, the sanctuary was designed to reveal YHWH’s irrevocable promise, to anticipate his human disclosure, and to celebrate this epic historical event.

While conveying the promise of YHWH’s action for mankind, the Temple symbols also conveyed a reciprocal promise for mankind’s future. The sacrificial services of the sanctuary symbolized a future creation of a transformed humanity apart from all imagined power structures.

It was essential to employ Temple symbols, since the reality had not arrived. And even now, though inaugurated in the Christ event — YHWH become human as Jesus Christ — the reality of a fully human future for YHWH and his people is “not yet” fully manifest (1 John 3:2). Like the Temple symbols that received their inaugural “fillment” in Jesus Christ, so the Christ event itself is a promise, anticipating a fully human future for both YHWH and mankind. By its very nature, human relationality means that YHWH himself cannot be a fully manifest “I” without the fully human manifestation of his “other.” Reciprocally, neither can God’s people become a fully manifest “I” without the full disclosure of YHWH as their human “Other.” And finally, there cannot be either a fully manifest “I” or “Thou” without the full disclosure of the mediatorial “Bridge” — the relational presence of the human YHWH as the “Third Voice.” Thus, the full manifestation of this threefold, reciprocal “otherness” is essential to the full realization of the human goal of mutual relationality.

The Christ event itself is a promise, anticipating a fully human future for both YHWH and mankind.

Notes and References

1. See “The Dawn of Self-Consciousness,” *Outlook* (Oct. 2001).
2. Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 93.
3. See Thorlief Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1960), pp. 38-49.
4. See note 1.
5. See Kenneth A. Kitchen, “The Desert Tabernacle: Pure Fiction or Plausible Account?” *Bible Review* 16, no. 6 (Dec. 2000): 14-21.
6. See Michael M. Homan, “The Divine Warrior: A Military Model for Yahweh’s Tabernacle,” *Bible Review* 16, no. 6 (Dec. 2000): 22-33, 55.
7. See John W. Miller, *The Origins of the Bible: Rethinking Canon History* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), pp. 44-45.
8. See “The Cave of Treasures” (pre-medieval apocrypha), at jefferson.village.virginia.edu/~anderson/retellings/Cave.html.
9. See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 14.
10. While it is clear that David brought the Levitical priest, Abiathar, from Shiloh to minister in Jerusalem, there remains a debate about whether he brought an Aaronite priest named Zadok from Hebron (2 Samuel 8:17; 1 Chronicles 12:23-29) or

- appointed a Canaanite priest named Zadok, the presumed descendant of Melchizedek (zedek = zadok) (Genesis 14:18; Psalm 110:4).
11. See Lawrence E. Stager, "Jerusalem as Eden," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26, no. 3 (May/June 2000): 36-47, 66.
 12. See Victor Horowitz, "Inside Solomon's Temple," *Bible Review* 29, no. 3 (March/April 1994).
 13. John Monson, "The New 'Ain Dara Temple: Closest Solomonic Parallel," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26, no. 3 (May/June 2000): 20-35, 67.
 14. See Ali Abu Assaf, "Der Tempel von 'Ain Dara," *Damaszener Forschungen* 3 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1990).
 15. See Monson, "The New 'Ain Dara Temple," pp. 27-28.
 16. See Tony Badillo, "The Floor Plan – Does It Reveal a Temple with a *Human Form*?" at www.templesecrets.info.
 17. In ancient times the created order was believed to be constituted by just four fundamental elements – air, earth, fire and water. These were represented in the Temple by the incense (air), bread (earth), lamps (fire) and laver (water).
 18. See John M. Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, at www.meta-religion.com/New_religious_groups/Groups/Christian/sacred_mushroom.htm.
 19. See Laurence Gardner, *Bloodline of the Holy Grail*, at www.karenlyster.com/body_bookish1.html.
 20. See David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996), p. 104.
 21. There are numerous recorded examples of God's "womblikeness" (*racham*, *rachamim*) throughout the Old Testament. See also Revelation 12 for an allusion to the Temple symbol of a mother in childbirth. For earlier, parallel allusions, see Isaiah 26:17; 66:6-10; Micah 4:10. Furthermore, note that "the child becomes a symbol of salvation for Israel (Isa. 7:14, 9:6, 11:6). . . . [Indeed,] the child becomes a universal image of salvation and reconciliation with God" (David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* [Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998], p. 289).
 22. Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), pp. 47-49.

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