



The First Temple: Divided Monarchical Period

Reprise

In the Tetrateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers) the Davidic scholars assembled existing records, oral traditions and legends to trace ongoing Creation from the perspective of God's relationship with mankind. Thus, the Tetrateuch recorded that God had entered into relationship with four successive patriarchs — Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses.

YHWH gave Moses the historic metaphor of liberating Israel *from* bondage in Egypt *to* freedom in the Promised Land. This metaphor symbolized the liberation of humanity and all Creation from bondage to the original created order — a domesticated order necessarily based on command, possession and control. In order to achieve liberation to a transformed and relational created order, YHWH promised that he would *be, become* and *effect* on behalf of the Chosen People (Exodus 3:14). God then went before his people to lead them to their Edenic home in the Promised Land. Once his people were established in this Edenic land, God assured them that they would one day participate in a new, irrevocable and covenantal Creation — a noncontingent Creation with God as human and with all other humans as co-equals.

In developing this theme, God used the well-known symbol of a Temple — but reversed its prior symbolism. First revealed to David, this transformed Temple metaphor symbolized a new Creation. It was a new Creation/covenant that was to be inaugurated by the self-creation of YHWH as an androgynous human Father/Mother/Child. This indicated that the Triune God himself would fulfill the intended relationality of Creation by *being* the inaugural "I," by

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becoming the inaugural “Other,” and by *effecting* the bridging “Authoritative Reference” that is essential for human “I”/“Thou” relationality. In response to this compassionate (*racham* = “womblike”) *kenosis* (self-emptying) of YHWH, the Chosen People were called to accept God’s awesome revelation, to celebrate God’s unique manifestation, and finally to sacrificially embrace the new Creation as their own ultimate destiny.

Monarchical Apostasy and Reform

It was David’s son, Solomon, who then built the Temple. However, despite his vaunted wisdom, personal lasciviousness and general misrule marked Solomon’s reign. It was also marred by his reversion to the pre-human practice of domestication, command, possession and control through arrogant power structures.¹

When Solomon’s son, Rehoboam (ca. 933-915 BCE), assumed the throne, he adamantly continued his father’s arrogance. So Rehoboam spoke roughly to all the people, “My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions” (1 Kings 12:14). As a result, the northern tribes severed their union with Judah, thus terminating the United Kingdom of Israel. Jeroboam I then became king of the Northern Kingdom and installed a third Canaanite priesthood at the “high places” in Bethel and Dan. “Jeroboam ordained a change in the times for festivals in order to discourage pilgrimages to the Jerusalem Temple (1 Kings 12:33). In parallel fashion, he evicted the levites, who had been part of the administration of the United Kingdom, to prevent the people’s loyalty from turning toward Jerusalem.”² Many Levitical priests in the north fled south and were placed in frontier Judean villages as judges and teachers.

Over the next two centuries (ca. 930-721 BCE), the northern tribes (“Israel”) were ruled by a succession of 19 kings from various dynasties.³ While these kings were Yahwists, they and their people also accepted the subordinate gods of the reigning religio-political power structures. In 722/721 BCE the 10 northern tribes were finally obliterated by the Assyrians under Sargon II.

Meanwhile, just five years after Rehoboam became king of Judah, Shishak I, Pharaoh of the 22nd Bubastic dynasty in Egypt who had protected Jeroboam against Solomon, invaded both Israel and Judah. He conquered a number of fenced cities and plundered Jerusalem and the Temple (1 Kings 14:25, 26; 2 Chronicles 12).⁴ After Rehoboam’s death, 19 successive monarchs ruled the kingdom of Judah.⁵ Most of them rejected YHWH. Like Rehoboam, they supported the conventional religio-political power structures.

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Nevertheless, a few kings, including Asa, Jehoshaphat and Joash, did what was “good and right in the eyes of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 14:2). Thus, Asa (908-867 BCE), son of Abijah, called “an assembly in Jerusalem of the people who covenanted to ‘seek the Lord, the God of their fathers.’ It appears that Asa made genuine efforts to remove pagan influences and to restore the worship of the Lord in Jerusalem.”⁶

In the third year of his reign, Jehoshaphat (ca. 867-846 BCE), son of Asa, “sent a delegation of ministers, levites, and priests to visit the towns of Judah and teach the people the ‘book of the law of the Lord’. . . . Establishing teaching delegations in the towns and judges in all the fortified cities and Jerusalem indicates a tendency toward the consolidation of all authoritative institutions in Judah.”⁷

At his coronation the dynasty of Joash (835-798 BCE), son of Ahaziah, “was augmented by a joint covenant between the king and the people, in which the royal privileges and responsibilities were reestablished, and by a [proleptic] covenant between God, the king, and the people against the worship of Baal, which marked the beginning of religious reform in Judah. The city was cleansed of the Tyrian cult . . . and Mattan, the priest of Baal, was killed. It is not known if the ‘high places’ in Judah were destroyed, but it is clear that the Temple in Jerusalem . . . was repaired.”⁸

Two additional Judean monarchs were regarded as true reformers. One was Hezekiah (727-697 BCE), son of Ahaz. “In II Kings 18:3-4 stress is laid on the purification of . . . [worship] by Hezekiah from idolatrous elements, such as the removal of the high places, the breaking up of the pillars, the cutting down of the cult pole, and the smashing of the copper serpent which Moses had made in the desert (Num. 21:5-9). In II Chronicles 29-32, the emphasis is placed on the renewal of . . . [true worship] and the return to the service of God as in the days of David and Solomon (II Chron. 28:24, 29:3). In the Books of Kings and Chronicles, a personal and religious reason for this reform is given. The changes stemmed from the will of the king, who was pious and did that which was upright in the eyes of God, more than any other king who reigned before him (II Kings 18:3, 5-6, II Chron. 31:20-21). It seems that there were also some political aspects to this religious reform. Hezekiah abolished the cult of the high places, which had always been practiced in Jerusalem and the provincial towns, and concentrated the religious activity in the Temple of Jerusalem (II Kings 18:22).”⁹

Later there was Josiah (640-609 BCE), son of Amon. Known as Judah’s greatest reformer, Josiah was only eight years old when he was proclaimed king of Judah. “His reign was marked by a great national revival, and the author of the Book of Kings in evaluating Josiah says: ‘Before him

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there was no king like him . . . nor did any like him arise after him’ (II Kings 23:25; cf. II Kings 18:5 in connection with Hezekiah, the forerunner of Josiah). Indeed, Josiah’s role in the resuscitation of Israel can hardly be overestimated. Josiah not only acted as the king of a completely independent Judah but his kingdom extended northward into the erstwhile Assyrian provinces

of Samaria (II Kings 23:19), Megiddo (comprising the plain of Jezreel), and Galilee (II Chron. 34:6). . . .

“During Josiah’s reign, Jerusalem developed greatly, and it is at this time that a new wall was built on the western slopes of the city and new quarters (Mishneh and Maktesh) were constructed which served mainly as industrial and commercial centers. Remains of buildings and walls discovered in the Jewish quarter of Old Jerusalem prove that the city expanded even more to the west. . . . [Even further] territorial expansion was accompanied by a great national-spiritual upsurge. . . .

“Josiah’s reformatory activities are given in two parallel accounts: II Kings 22-23 and II Chronicles 34-35. . . . The first move of Josiah was the abolition of idolatry from Jerusalem and the cities of Judah ([II Kings] 23:4-14), then came the destruction of the altar of Bethel, and afterwards the destruction of the high places of the Samarian province (23:19-20). According to II Chronicles 34:6, the reform extended as far as the cities of Naphtali in Galilee.”¹⁰ Further reforms instituted by Josiah included (1) the execution of the pagan priests and false prophets, (2) the restoration of the chosen place for worship, (3) the celebration of the Passover at the chosen place, and (4) the obedience of the king himself to the commands of the Law.¹¹

In the 18th year of Josiah’s reign (622 BCE), the “Book of the Torah,” later known as Deuteronomy, was discovered in the Temple by Hilkiyah, the High Priest (2 Kings 22:8). The evidence strongly suggests that Deuteronomy (*deutero* = second and *nomy* = law) was the product of Levitical scholarship. Discovery of this document gave profound confirmation and impetus to the Josian reforms.

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“ . . . [Josiah’s centralization of worship in Jerusalem] revolutionized the Jewish faith. The abolition of provincial worship created a vacuum in daily religious life. People who were bound to the high places and local sanctuaries were suddenly denied the right to worship at them, and instead were presented with a single sanctuary which they could not attend frequently. This vacuum in religious experience was gradually filled with new religious values such as prayer and the reading of the Torah. The reading of the Torah which is so basic in the synagogue service was actually initiated in the time of Josiah when the people pledged for the first time in history to observe the Law ‘as written in the book.’ In short, Josiah’s reform brought about a metamorphosis in Israelite religion: from a religion of . . . [Temple worship] it became a religion of prayer and book. From now on the ‘Book of the Torah’ became the most important factor in Jewish life.”¹²

“ . . . [All the] innovations of the Deuteronomic Code . . . revolutionized the religious life of the people, and, in fact, changed certain concepts in the faith of Israel. The sanctuary is here presented as a dwelling place of the name of God . . . rather than the domicile of God Himself as in the ancient sources. . . . Similarly the ark which in the previous sources is regarded as the seat of God or His chariot . . . is seen in Deuteronomy only as the receptacle for the tablets.”¹³

In this context, still another profound event in Josiah's reign was his disposition of the Most Holy Place of the Temple. "When informed of the impending destruction of the Temple, Josiah hid the Holy Ark and all its appurtenances, in order to guard them against desecration at the hands of the enemy (Yoma 52b)."¹⁴

There are some lingering questions regarding the Josian reforms. Were these reforms intended to disclose the true nature of the Temple symbols as *the human manifestation of God*, or were they intended to centralize worship and reinforce the symbol of the Temple as *the manifestation of imperial power*? Although we cannot answer these questions, we do know the subsequent history:

Notwithstanding [the Josian reforms] the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath . . . And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen . . . Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? In his days Pharaoh-nechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he [Pharaoh] slew him [Josiah] at Megiddo . . . — 2 Kings 23:26-29.

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Priestly Rivalry

Meanwhile, throughout the First Temple period there was constant rivalry among the Zadokite and Levitical priesthoods.¹⁵ “ . . . [T]he Zadokite priesthood installed by David in Jerusalem had a quite different background and history than that of the Levite priesthood simultaneously installed there. Both priesthoods were devoted to Yahweh; both traced their origins to . . .Yahwists who had escaped from Egypt under providential circumstances; both situated their beginnings in the general time-period of Moses and in the region to the south of Canaan. But the Zadokites were heirs to a southern Aaronite tradition of Yahweh worship that was more akin to the beliefs of the pre-Moses patriarchs and other settlers of this region (like the Kenites) than to the traditions of those whose cult center was at Shiloh, who traced their origins to the teachings of Moses. . . .

“ . . . [To] the Zadokites, God was thought of as a wise, benevolent creator, and a set of unconditional covenants (with Abraham, Zion and David) promising progeny, land, rule and blessing were preeminent; in Levite theology (as expressed in Deuteronomy) creation theology and

the promises to the forefathers play a lesser, background role — here these themes are viewed as but a prelude to the work of Moses, and a sharply defined set of . . . conditions are regarded as definitive for Israel's future.

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“Hence, Yahweh’s activity as creator and his unconditional oaths to Abraham, David and Zion were at the heart of Zadokite theology, and the . . . [relationship] with Yahweh mediated by Moses was at the heart of Levite theology. Both Zadokite and Levite sources agree that the period of the two Israelite kingdoms under the leadership of the Zadokites in the south and the priests of the calf-shrines in the north was marked by recurrent episodes of religious instability and assimilation to surrounding religions and culture. It was only the disenfranchised Levites whose tradition resisted these tendencies, but in the period of the two Israelite kingdoms it was difficult to make their voice heard.”¹⁶

Fundamentally, the Aaronite (Zadokite) tradition emphasized the *manifestation* of YHWH, while the Levitical tradition emphasized the *reception* and celebration of YHWH. Neither apparently understood that both the manifestation and the reception of YHWH are indivisibly essential. There can be no manifestation without reception, and there can be no reception apart from manifestation!

Prophetic Influences

Little attention has been given to the fact that the literary prophets also came from either a Zadokite or a Levitical priestly background. On one hand, the prophets Isaiah, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Ezekiel and Haggai had Zadokite lineages. Thus, their prophetic messages reflected the tradition of

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YHWH’s proleptic (anticipatory) covenant with Abraham. These prophets particularly focused on the promised restoration of the kingdom and Temple with the return of Yahweh and the coming of the Messiah. On the other hand, the prophets Amos, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Second Isaiah, Zechariah and Malachi had Levitical lineages. Thus, their prophetic messages reflected the tradition of YHWH’s Mosaic Law. Their ministries emphasized the restoration of the proleptic (anticipatory) covenant and the priesthood with the return of the people to obedience and judicial fairness.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the prophets were united in their repeated declaration of YHWH’s compassion, pity and tender mercy [*racham* and *rachamim* = “wombliness”] toward the Chosen People:

[Joel said,] Therefore also now, saith the Lord . . . rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful [*rachum*], slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. — Joel 2:12, 13.

[Hosea said,] And I [the Lord] will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies [*rachamim*]. — Hosea 2:19.

[Micah declared,] He will turn again, he will have compassion [*racham*] upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. — Micah 7:19.

[First Isaiah stated,] For the Lord will have mercy [*racham*] on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land . . . — Isaiah 14:1.

[Second Isaiah poetically declared,] Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion [*racham*] on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me. — Isaiah 49:15, 16.

[In one of his numerous allusions to “womblikeness,” Jeremiah prayed,] It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions [*rachamim*] fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. — Lamentations 3:22, 23.

[Hababbuk also prayed,] . . . O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy [*racham*]. — Hababbuk 3:2.

At the same time, the prophets also were united in opposing predatory and oppressive power structures. “The prophets. . . denounced the insolent, exploitative, tyrannical use of royal power and prerogative. They denounced the enlisting of God and religion to serve state ends. Hosea was

‘the first man in history to condemn militarism as a religious-moral sin’ (Hos. 8:14, 10:13-14, 14:3). Isaiah put power politics on the same footing as idolatry; he denounced reliance on arms, fortresses, and alliances with great powers. He urged trust in God and quietism that waits on God’s salvation . . . Jeremiah and Ezekiel gave voice to God’s terrible decision that the present Israel was so degenerate that he could realize his original purpose for the people only by wiping the slate clean and starting over again with renovated survivors.”¹⁸

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Conclusion

The period of the Divided Kingdom was marked by diverse developments. On one hand, there were episodic but profound reforms both in worship of a compassionate God and in national obedience to YHWH. On the other hand, there were centuries of misrule, rivalry and general apostasy in which coercive power structures were regarded as the human manifestation of God. Ultimately, YHWH brought judgment upon his people. Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon, invaded the Southern Kingdom, sacked and destroyed the Temple, dethroned the king(s), and took all prominent personages into exile (597/586 BCE).

The overarching development of the divided monarchical period, however, was the consistent role of the prophets, who spoke on behalf of God to the people. On numerous occasions and in diverse circumstances, the prophets repeatedly called the people to renounce possessive power structures and to witness, accept and celebrate the promised revelation of YHWH as the embodiment of compassion (“womblikeness”). This concept of YHWH’s

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Israel . . . : ‘He being full of compassion, forgives iniquity and does not destroy’ (Ps. 78:38; see Ex. 33:19, Deut. 8:18, Isa. 9:16, etc.).”¹⁹

The ultimate truth is that the new, transformed Creation is the consequence of the new, transformed covenant; and this Creation can only be “effected” by the compassionate, covenantal Creator. At the same time, an all-compassionate Creator can only complete the new Creation with the free and responsible acceptance of that Creation by those who are to be “effected.”

Notes and References

1. See “The First Temple: United Monarchical Period,” *Outlook* (Nov. 2001).
2. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM edition, s.v. “History: Kingdoms of Judah and Israel.”
3. The kings of Israel (ca. 930-722 BCE) included Jeroboam I, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Joash, Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hoshea.
4. See Where is the Ark of the Covenant? at members.aol.com/abbylm1989/ark.html.
5. The monarchs of Judah after Rehoboam’s reign included Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah [queen], Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah (ca. 915-587/6 BCE).
6. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD ROM edition, s.v. “Asa.”
7. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM edition, s.v. “Jehoshaphat.”
8. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM edition, s.v. “Joash.”
9. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM edition, s.v. “Hezekiah.”
10. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM edition, s.v. “Josiah.”
11. See Robert I. Bradshaw, Deuteronomy, at www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_deuteronomy.html.
12. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM edition, s.v. “Josiah.”
13. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM edition, s.v. “Deuteronomy.”
14. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM edition, s.v. “Josiah: In the Aggadah.”
15. In the first commonwealth the High Priests who descended from Aaron through his son Eleazar included Phinehas, Abishua, Bukki, Uzzi, Zerariah, Meraioth, Amariah, Ahitub, Zadok, Ahimaaz, Azariah, Johanan, Shallum, Hilkiyah, Azariah, Seriaiah and Jehozadak. The priests who descended from Aaron through his son Ithamar included Eli, Phinehas, Ahitub, Ahimelech, Abiathar and Jonathon.
16. John W. Miller, *The Origins of the Bible: Rethinking Canon History* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), pp. 46, 65-66.
17. See *ibid.*, pp. 67-81. The prophets Ezekiel, Haggai, Second Isaiah, Zechariah and Malachi date to exilic and post-exilic periods.
18. Moshe Greenberg, “Biblical Attitudes toward Power: Ideal and Reality in Law and Prophets,” in Edwin B. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss and John W. Welch, eds., *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 112.
19. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM edition, s.v. “Compassion.”