

THE HOLY HUSH OF ANCIENT SACRIFICE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
LEGITIMACY OF THE NON-CENTRALIZED CULT IN IRON AGE ISRAEL

by

ERIC MERLE CARLSON

(Under the Direction of David S. Williams)

ABSTRACT

The present study looks at various cult practices within Iron Age Israel that took place outside the environs of the Temple in Jerusalem. The focus will be on rituals not characterized by syncretism, but which on the whole lie within the parameters of Israelite orthodoxy. Chapters one and two give an overview of the problem and provide a synopsis of the history of research into the Deuteronomist, the biblical writer/editor most responsible for a negative view of the high places. Chapters three through six examine typical non-centralized rites, starting at the domestic setting and moving inward through township and regional practices to those cultic ceremonies performed just outside the Temple precincts. Chapters seven through ten outline the origins of the dominant priestly line and the tensions between that priesthood and the Davidic dynasty, the northern cult, and the Writing Prophets, arising from differences concerning faithfulness to the covenant with YHWH.

INDEX WORDS: Cult, Ritual, Purification, Passover, Unleavened Bread, Broken-Necked Heifer, High Places, Red Heifer, Zadokites, Jeroboam I, Josiah's Reform, Centralization, Prophetic Critique

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Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate

The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.

She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe
As a calm darkens among water-lights.

The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
Seem things in some procession of the dead
Winding across wide water, without sound.

The day is like wide water, without sound.
Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet
Over the seas, to silent Palestine...

from *Sunday Morning*—

by Wallace Stevens

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“In the course of time, Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions, and the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.”

—Genesis 4:3-5a

On this side of Eden, it did not take long for sacrifice to be introduced. One of Adam and Eve’s sons became a “keeper of sheep,” the other a “tiller of the ground.” Scholars have been more or less unable to satisfactorily explain why it God accepted Abel’s burnt offering of meat from his herd but turned a cold shoulder to Cain’s gift from the toil of his hands in the fields. Certainly, Abel brought of his firstborn lambs, and submitted the best parts thereof to the flames. But nowhere does the text explicitly state that Cain did not do likewise. He may well have presented only the finest examples of his harvest’s first fruits.

If the bestowing of favor on what Abel brought forth was just a preference on God’s part, this penchant for blood for the sake of blood never shows up again in the Hebrew Bible. Blood sacrifice is desired—indeed commanded—for the appeasement of sin. But other types of offerings—many involving grain—are often required, depending on the circumstance. Here the motivation appears to be mere thanksgiving for a providential harvest.

Why then is one altar legitimate and the other not? I believe the answer may come in the significance of the characters themselves. After the curse of the fall in the garden (precipitated by the seductiveness of the idolatrous snake), Adam and Eve are

relegated to a life of agriculturalism. Four more times in Genesis there are pairings of blessings and curses: as we have noted, Abel was favored and Cain not. In Genesis 8:21 Noah and his sacrifice are graced, putting an end to the curse of a flooded world. In chapter 9:25-27, Canaan is cursed while Shem (ancestor of the Semite Hebrews) and Japheth are blessed. Finally, in chapter 27:1-45, Jacob is loved and Esau (father of the Edomite nation) is hated.

All of these examples are from the J document, and this Judean is not being subtle about whom he feels YHWH favors and whom he does not. I cannot believe that it is an accident that the semi-nomadic Israelites in their conquest (or infiltration) of the settled Canaanite farmers can so easily be represented by Abel, and the Canaanites themselves by Cain.¹ But whether or not such a theory could ever be proven, one thing is clear: from beginning to end, the God of the Hebrew Bible honors altars based on two principles: his own commitment to the covenant cut with Israel and the character of those coming forward to sacrifice (in other words, their commitment to the covenant with him).

The Structure of the Present Study

The Hebrew Bible shows us a progression from isolated individuals from one particular family in covenant with YHWH, building their isolated altars in scattered places, to clan-based tribes joining together in confederacy. In the text, these twelve tribes form a nation on the move through the wilderness, worshiping in a portable tent shrine in one place at a time. As they relocate into more permanent surroundings they begin to build more permanent structures: first, open air installations constructed of stone

¹ Despite the similarity in English, Cain [*qáyin*] and Canaan [*kěná“an*] are not related etymologically.

or carved right into it, and then outright temples resembling those of their Canaanite neighbors.²

The study at hand is interested in those intermediate facilities, the high places (cultic platforms open to the sky or perhaps at times covered by a tented awning) and the early temples in outlying areas away from Jerusalem³. These were a focus of ancient Israelite religion during most of the Iron Age and into the Persian and Greek eras.

The range of cultic activity took place from priestless ceremonies within the home, often seasonal in nature, to communal rituals within each local township. Some of these villages would have had regional cultic centers, the so-called high places, with an ongoing Levitical presence to take care of district sacrificial requirements. Then there are those rites that because they involved purification of those found “unclean” (and thus unacceptable for Temple worship) occurred outside of the immediate precincts of the central sanctuary.

In chapters three through six, we will describe representatives of each of these types: 1.) Passover and Unleavened Bread, two traditions which over time coalesced as one, started out as domestic rites, the former going back perhaps to nomadic days. Though they become one of the three main pilgrimage festivals, their origins are in the home. 2.) The broken-necked heifer ritual is administered by the elders of any town with jurisdictional responsibility for an unsolved murder case. The priests take part but have only peripheral roles. 3.) Two purification ceremonies—the red heifer rite (for impurity incurred through contact with the dead) and a dove sacrifice (for the cleansing of the

² The resemblance is no accident according to a growing consensus of scholars: the Israelites themselves may not have been invading outsiders as the Hebrew Bible depicts them but either peaceful infiltrators or even native Canaanites themselves.

effects of scale disease and other similar skin disorders)—are staged outside the Temple but with significant priestly participation. Chapter five encompasses the textual and archaeological evidence for the high places themselves, recounting their construction, uses, contents, and locations.

In chapters seven through ten, we will spotlight the factions involved in determining whether these installations secured and/or maintained a level of legitimacy. The prophets and sages, like the later Pharisees, are more receptive to the needs of the common people (though some have cultic leanings or background like Isaiah, Malachi, and Ezekiel). The priests and the kings, on the other hand, vie for power between themselves: The lines and dynasties of Ephraim against those of Judah. Chapter seven will document northern Jeroboam I's "sin" of supposed idolatry through the polemic indictment of the southern Deuteronomist. Chapter eight will explore the intricacies of the origins of the priestly line of Zadokites. Zadok appears out of nowhere to head up this clerical faction, taking over from the long-established Elides. Chapter ten looks at Josiah's reform, the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem, which went a long ways toward making the high places obsolete. And chapter eleven investigates why it was that almost all the Writing Prophets sternly admonish the exercise of the priesthood, to the point of calling for the abolition of the sacrificial system as a whole.

The Deuteronomist's Agenda

First, however, we will undertake an analysis of the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) and its flagrant program against the non-centralized cult and in favor of the

³ We know of many possible high place sites (e.g., Dan, Bethel, Ramah, Gibeah, Hebron, and Beersheba) and a few tentative temple locales (e.g., Shechem, Shiloh, and Arad).

Judahite (Davidic) dynasty. Starting in the early 1940's with M. Noth and his successors' work on the unity of the DtrH, Josiah's reform has been taken as the focal point of the document (Deuteronomy—Kings). Some scholars, such as Noth, von Rad, and Smend, have favored the theory that the principal shaper of this corpus lived during the Exile, probably in Palestine. Others, such as Cross, Nelson, and Knoppers, have preferred the evidence for a pre-exilic writer whose loose ends were tied up by a later redactor wishing to rehabilitate Josiah's image.

Whichever school of thought proves correct, the cornerstone project of Josiah's reign—the centralization—does not bring with it the (physical) blessings of God which the Deuteronomist (Dtr) was expecting. Instead, we have the early, perhaps foolhardy, death of Josiah, along with the perceived inflexibility of the nation's deity, resulting in massive deportations. Supposedly, this situation brought with it the felt need to find someone to blame other than the beloved Josiah. Manasseh, of course, became this scapegoat. His relentless cruelty and idolatrous ways could be seen to deserve a divine judgment upon the nation so severe as to be without the possibility of reprieve. Of all the Davidide kings of Judah, Manasseh most closely resembled the wholesale faithlessness of the Baalistic Omrides and their successors in Samaria.

By contrast, the Chronicler does not pit the providentially protected South against the apostate North. Not only does he not focus on the fall of Ephraim to the Assyrians, he does not even mention it! In general, he relates the exploits of the kings of Judah, alluding to Northern kings only as military antagonists. He does not even bring up the sin of Jeroboam I. Nor does he gloss over any Judahite failing. In addition to the Dtr's indictment of King Ahaz as having sacrificed his own son to Molech and as blatantly

supporting the high places, the Chronicler accuses King Ahaz of making molten images to the Baals (2 Chron. 28:2). There is no inherent superiority of the South over the North either in Jeroboam's sin of idol making or Ahab's wholesale importation of Baalism. The writer is content to focus on the glory days of the height of the kingdom under David and Solomon.

Chronicles is a document for an audience later in time, a Southern audience with little interest in the plight of Ephraim. Benjamin and Judah were now the "true Israel" (2 Chron. 11:3). Contention with their brothers to the north was a thing of the past and needed no discussion. The writer clearly wished to reassure his readers / hearers that they were still the people of God: He had not abandoned them.

The Dtr, on the other hand, was closer to the action of the national crisis that was the Exile. The people were still reeling from the blow, "Why is this *happening* to us? Where do we go from here? Whom do we follow? There would have been discussion and contention and rivalry: Are the priests right? Do the prophets know what they are talking about? Where did we go wrong? Was it a lack of justice in our rulers' policies? Were our communal ethics oppressive and ungodly? Had the *Temple* become a syncretistic den of iniquity? Or was it those *high places* we blatantly left intact?

These are the questions that those who suddenly found themselves in a foreign land under the watchful eye of the Babylonians would have been asking. And these are the questions this study will seek to answer.

The Home Front: Domestic and Village Practices

In taking a look at the broad range of non-centralized practices, we will start with those customs most remote from Jerusalem. Though Passover became a pilgrimage fest, it and its companion rite of Unleavened Bread started out as domestic rituals celebrating the beginning of the barley harvest, as well as vouchsafing the safety and fecundity of the herdsmen's sheep and goats. They both have an etiological function connecting them with the tribal epic—their escape from slavery in Egypt, known as the Exodus. Israel's mixed history of pastoral nomadism and settled agriculturalism, made clear by many similarities/dissimilarities with neighboring Canaanite farmers, can be explained by the truth of the epic or by slower, less dramatic infiltration of the land. If one festival started first and drew the other to it, it would be difficult to ascertain which did which.

Turning from local homesteads to local administration, we will scrutinize the ritual of the broken-necked heifer. This rite was set in whatever township might require a certain type of "exoneration." When an unsolved murder took place within the general confines of a particular village, the land had to be purified of any possible guilt. This bizarre ceremony of breaking the neck of a heifer beside a nearby stream was quite unlike any other described in the Hebrew Bible, with the possible exceptions of the red heifer and the leprosy purification rites. They are intricate rituals, clearly rich in symbolism, but with many of the significant details left unexplained.

Regional Rites: Altars and High Places

Many other local sacrificial needs were taken to regional altars and high places (outdoor sanctuaries). From the Patriarchal era onward, Israelite religion was marked by

a multiplicity of regional high places free of the later onus placed on them by the Dtr, the Chronicler, and the Writing Prophets. Looking more closely at these texts, however, reveals that all such rebukes were limited to the negation of syncretistic practices or of the setting up of shrines as rivals to Jerusalem. Nowhere is multiplicity itself condemned, at least not explicitly. Intriguingly, Elijah and Elisha appear to assign little if any significance to *Jerusalem* and never even mention the Temple.⁴

The two Minor Prophets with ministries in the North—Hosea and Amos—can easily be interpreted to fit this same mold. Though we might expect them to rail against the high places, what we see is a condemnation only of *practice* at these sites (and not the sites themselves). The people are instructed to no longer go up to Bethel and Gilgal (Hos. 4:15) for YHWH has *withdrawn* himself from them (Hos. 5:6). The clear inference is that until their sin caused a change of heart, God was there amongst them.⁵ Plus, he promises to return if they “seek his face” (Hos. 5:15). In the meantime, God goes away like a lion to his *lair*, hardly a valid metaphor for Jerusalem.⁶ In point of fact, Jerusalem seldom comes up in the conversation. Amos tells them to “Seek the LORD and live” (Am. 5:6) and never admonishes them to turn back toward the Holy City.⁷

On the other hand, high places would have been difficult to monitor *even with* a strong central authority in place. Without one they would have been nearly impossible to keep in check. And from what we have to go on, almost uniformly they were hotbeds of

⁴ Neither do they stand against any Yahwistic high place: Bethel (2 Kgs. 2:2, 3, 23), Gilgal (2 Kgs. 2:2), Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:30-38), and Ramoth-Gilead (2 Kgs. 9:1-6) are dealt with positively; even the city of Samaria, a stronghold of Baalism, is treated ambivalently rather than harshly.

⁵ Their sin is stated as “vanity” (Hos. 5:11) not “multiplying altars.” (Hosea 8:11 should probably be translated “Though Ephraim multiplied altars to expiate sin, they became to him altars for sinning.” The resulting contrast of a *good* thing followed by a *bad* one, fits the context of the next two verses.)

⁶ At least not in the sense of “peaceful sanctuary with his people” though perhaps one of “presiding judge.”

⁷ Though he speaks of the LORD as “roaring” from Zion (Am. 1:2), he also threatens the city with destruction by fire (Am. 2:5).

an encroaching acquiescence to surrounding heterodoxies. But perhaps this was the point of the rebukes: the high places had outlived their usefulness. As the cultural and political systems changed over time, the remote shrines became impractical for the faithful maintenance of tradition.

Just Outside the Temple: Purification Rituals

A couple of purification rites are depicted as taking place outside the Tabernacle (and did take place outside the later Temple). We have no evidence one way or the other whether legitimate high places would have offered these same services. Both are characterized by the odd choice of cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet “stuff” as sacrificial accoutrements, possibly derived from Mesopotamian rites. Both are related to the continued purity of the camp/temple precincts and so at least come to be (an indirect) part of the central cult. The red heifer ritual cleansed those whom had come into contact in one way or another with a dead body (experiencing a death in the family, encountering a grave site). The somewhat similar rite for purification from skin disease treated the understandable horror the ancient community would feel toward the unknown causes of pathological corruption of the flesh.

These traditional ceremonies appear to have roots that go quite a ways back. They address communal needs that would have been there from the days of the wilderness wanderings and the moveable sacred tent. As such they hold much in common with other Israelite customs of more ancient provenance (and correspondingly less in common with those rituals directly associated with the Jerusalem cult enclosed within the Temple precincts.

Issues of Validity: The Priority of Jerusalem

Moving on from our description of the spectrum of sacrificial traditions beyond the confines of the Temple, we will undertake an account of how David unified his kingdom. This endeavor covered both political and religious considerations through the establishment of a new line of priests, and a new temple within a new capital city. Zadok himself is a somewhat mysterious entity with a fuzzy pedigree. Is he an Aaronid from Hebron, an Elide from Gibeon, or a Jebusite from Jerusalem? We can speculate based on David's likely motivations, but the evidence is insufficient for a clear conclusion. No matter what, the Zadokite line came to symbolize the continuity of the covenant between the Davidic dynasty and the God of Israel.

This covenant is seen as breached by the northern kings. In no uncertain terms, the Dtr excoriates Jeroboam I for the "sin of the calf." There are all sorts of parallels with Aaron, the golden calves, and Aaron's miscreant sons Abihu and Nadab. Modern scholars have tended to cleanse the Ephraimite king's sullied reputation by seeing his innovations as mostly harmless (the bulls being the footstools/thrones of the invisible God rather than actual idols): misguided perhaps, but not heretical. However this may be, in the final analysis, Jeroboam's selfish political motives for his religious revisions appear to stand. And the result of separation from the cult of Jerusalem was an eventual, perhaps inevitable, syncretism.

Then there was the ultimate historical negation. For just like Chemoshism, Milcomism, and even Baalism, "Jeroboamism" probably did not long survive the Exile. The dispersal of Canaanite groups under the hegemony of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians brought to an end the old way of life and subsumed most ethnic religions

under (at least the appearance of) the faith of their conquerors. Eventually, for example, Baal Shamem, during the era of Greek domination, became Zeus Olympios.⁸ Dan was not destroyed as was Bethel, but the archaeological remains of the sanctuary there suggest less than perfect orthodoxy, to say the least: figurines of the gods Bes and Osiris and the goddess Astarte; a shard with the name of Baal-Pelet engraved on it; and the enigmatic inscription which reads, “To the god who is in Dan,” invoking an unnamed deity.⁹ Though its influence can be noted in Second Temple and early synagogue practice,¹⁰ high place worship itself did not survive.

Critics of the Non-Centralized Cult

It may not have been the final nail in the coffin, but the Josianic Reform went a long way toward sealing the fate of outlying shrines. Although much has been made of the king’s startling turnaround, it was of short duration and within narrow geographical confines. The people ended up being dragged from their land into exile. Instead of One Temple, they had No Temple. Centralization, as a phenomenon of any significance, was post-exilic. Despite the Dtr’s rebuke of the Northern cult, the prophets almost unvaryingly speak of Ephraim’s restoration, of its final unity with the South.

Actually, the most enduring effect of Josiah’s reining in the Levites may have been the development of the synagogue. Remote areas, suddenly devoid of priestly

⁸ J. Day, “Baal (Deity)” *ABD* 1, 548.

⁹ A. Biran, “Dan,” *ABD* 2, 15-17.

¹⁰ For example, the raised area in the center of the synagogue, the *bemah*, though directly related to the Greek for “daïs,” may also be etymologically tied to *bāmā*.

leadership, may have been spurred on to initiate local, non-sacrificial worship of prayer and Torah reading, well ahead of the exilic separation from the Temple cult.¹¹

Still, the reform is the focal point of the Dtr's narrative. Its significance lies in its incorporation into the national epic and thus into the people's ongoing ethos. In many senses, the relative orthodoxy or heterodoxy of the high places *at that time* pales in comparison to the incontestable consequences of the steady march of time. The era of the high place was over, never to return. Future questions would concern the legitimacy of Jerusalem itself and the prophetic tendencies toward a universalizing of the faith to all peoples.

Critics of the Central Cult

Why is it that most of the writing prophets tend to deprecate the very sacrificial system the Dtr and the Priestly writer (P) have taken such pains building up? Is it because they came from two conflicting rival groups—a priestly guild opposed to a prophetic one? Is it that only certain sacrifices were proscribed (individual free-will offerings), but the main body of rites continued? Is it due to the temporal nature of God's judgment, which for the moment was inevitable (due to the depth of corruption in Judah), but which after a future restoration might be sacrificially appeasable? Or is it a “relative negation,” a hyperbole for effect as it were, teaching God's chosen people that mere mechanical obedience is insufficient? The biblical evidence is ambivalent as to when the cult was reestablished full force following the return to Israel from exile. It is also far from clear as to whether the Presence of God refilled the new Temple or took up

¹¹ R. Hachlili, “Synagogue,” *ABD* 6, 252. Hachlili believes that the high places were never seriously curtailed, before or after the Exile, and did figure into the rise of the synagogue, perhaps prominently.

residence in a more nebulous way: his footstool was no longer the Ark of the Covenant, his footstool was Jerusalem itself (Jer. 3:17; Is. 66:1).¹²

¹² P. Craigie, P. Kelley, J. Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, WBC 26, 61. Scholars debate whether or not the Ark of the Covenant was still extant in during Josiah's reign and Jeremiah's prophetic ministry. But as Craigie points out (he wrote the commentary on the first seven chapters before his untimely death) the actual situation is irrelevant because Jeremiah is addressing a *future* change in the cult.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF RESEARCH

“...the basic causes of Israel’s problems as presented in the Deuteronomistic History include its failure to accept YHWH alone as G-d and its pursuit of various pagan deities, the failure to establish a single sanctuary for the worship of YHWH in the land and the worship of other deities at various altars and high places throughout the land, the failure to abide by the commandments of YHWH’s covenant, and the abuse of power by the kings who continually led the people into apostasy by their failure to implement the stipulations of YHWH’s covenant.”

—from *King Josiah of Judah*
by Marvin A. Sweeney¹³

It was in 1943 that Martin Noth released his groundbreaking work, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*. Prior to Noth, the final book of the Pentateuch, together with the Former Prophets, were treated as separate units. Source criticism was applied to them in much the same way as the first four “Books of Moses.” (This was especially true of Deuteronomy and Joshua.) Noth’s great insight was to see them as a unified whole, stylistically and conceptually, and thus the work of one hand. He dubbed this compiler of historic sources—perhaps author in his own right—the Deuteronomist (Dtr). This chapter will discuss the implications of these new theories on the study of the non-centralized cult: how who wrote it and when affects how one evaluates the validity of competing northern voices.

As Noth saw it, the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) was initially written to chronicle the national epic of Israel from Joshua’s conquest of Canaan to the Babylonian Exile. A single exilic author utilizing earlier materials gave his take on court happenings during the glory years of Judah and Ephraim. The rise and fall of these kingdoms was told in staunchly religious terms. For the Dtr, the (comparative) faithfulness of the kings

of Judah to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob outshone any other criterion of success: the procurement of additional territories, the maintenance of national prosperity, or the completion of a long reign. Similarly, the *unfaithfulness* of the kings of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) completely overwhelmed any other consideration.

Noth dated the composition of the DtrH in the midst of the Exile, specifically in the aftermath of Babylon's release of Jehoiachin from prison, which occurred in 562 B.C.E. He saw the Dtr's purpose for writing as entirely negative. In so many words, "Judah got what it deserved, and that's why we are in this predicament. We have no one to blame but ourselves." For Noth, the Dtr is ensconced in the Exile and sees no way out.¹⁴

G. von Rad, on the other hand, while availing himself of Noth's proposal, felt that the DH was not just a diary of steady decline, but a document of hope. He believed the Dtr saw the release of the Davidide Jehoiachin as a harbinger of better times to come: that the promises of God to the children of Israel and to the Davidic line were not null and void.

Hans Walther Wolff saw in the writings of the Dtr a theme of repentance. The Dtr sees not a hopeless future, but an uncertain one. Wolff believes the Dtr would not have undertaken this huge project just to point out the dire straits the exiles found themselves in. Neither did the writer focus on the continuous and unconditional nature of God's promises to his people. Instead, the DtrH is rife with a cycle of national transgression followed by divine retribution, and then a necessary repentance followed by God's gracious redemption. This pervasive pattern in the narrative convinces Wolff that

¹³ M. A. Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah*, 21-22.

¹⁴ S. L. McKenzie, "Deuteronomistic History," 160-161.

the Dtr's purpose pursues similar lines. The blessings of God are conditional, and the exiles must address their past waywardness and correct it. Thus, they may take lessons from their history on the consequences of faithlessness, and then use those insights to work toward restoration.¹⁵

The Göttingen School

Beginning in 1971, R. Smend initiated a new school of thought at the University of Göttingen. He postulated that there were not one but two exilic editors. Working in Joshua, he suggested the first editor-compiler wrote the basic story of conquest, a clean one-sided victory. He called this preliminary author the DtrG (G for Grundschrift or 'basic text') and more or less equated him with Noth and von Rad's Dtr. He added, however, a second writer, a redactor who sullies the picture of Israel's great victory. Enemies are still in the land. Several groups remain to be repelled before any final triumph can be proclaimed. Indeed, the ground is set for the ongoing tension in the book of Judges. Beyond this, Smend detected an elevated awareness of the law in these passages on unfinished (battlefield) business. As a result, he called the second redactor DtrN (N for Nomistic).¹⁶

W. Dietrich, a colleague of Smend, did his work in the books of Kings. Through meticulous literary-critical techniques, he discerned a third redactor, DtrP (P for Prophetic). DtrP was not a peripheral editor according to Dietrich, but a major architect of DH, shaping DtrG's work to his own liking. Contemporary with Jeremiah's prophetic

¹⁵ S. L. McKenzie, 162.

¹⁶ E. Eynikel, 21-22.

heirs, he wove his own oracular poetry into the narrative. Dietrich included DtrN in his analysis, but assigned him a relatively minor role.

The fine-tuning of Dietrich's theories was left to T. Veijola, also at Göttingen. He brought in data from the books of Samuel and Judges. Veijola determined that the foundational work by DtrG was quite favorable to the monarchy and articulated the unconditional covenant between YHWH and the Davidic royal line. DtrN, on the other hand, ever attentive to the demands of the law, rejects the monarchy as a sinful imposition on the will of God (though prepared to accept the sovereignty of godly kings like David). His agenda is to outline a strategy of restoration under a narrow interpretation of Deuteronomistic law. DtrP ameliorates this legalistic, priestly approach by interspersing prophetic narratives that take the focus off the elite rulers of palace and sanctuary.¹⁷

Back to One Editor

A few scholars have tried to return to Noth's notion of a single exilic source for the redaction of the DtrH. B. Peckham contrived a complex combination of Pentateuchal source criticism and the DtrH to attempt to show the whole overarching spread from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Kings as an edited unit. H. D. Hoffmann made the Dtr out to be an inventive sort, writing something akin to historical fiction, going heavy on the fiction. The plot of his creation sways back and forth like a pendulum, from reform to rebellion to reform, swinging more quickly the closer it gets to the model reign of Josiah.¹⁸

¹⁷ S. L. McKenzie, 163; E. Eynikel, 20-30.

¹⁸ McKenzie, 164-165; Eynikel, 30-31.

The Dual Redaction Hypothesis

One possibility the earlier DtrH theorists neglected to pursue was that the basic document might have been compiled *before* the Exile. Of course, these scholars acknowledged pre-exilic sources, but they failed to even consider an early amalgamation of these. Abraham Kuenen was the pioneer of this very concept: that there were two redactors and that the first hailed from a time prior to the deportation to Babylon. He could not back away, however, from a post-exilic timeframe for this second editor. There were simply too many passages that seemed to him to presuppose the Exile (mostly by prophesying a coming eviction from Judah or the destruction of Jerusalem): 1 Kgs. 5:4; 9: 1-9; 2 Kgs. 17:19-20; 20:17-18; 21:11-15; 22:15-20; 23:26-27; 24:2-25:30, etc. Other verses he held to assume at the very least the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C.E.

F. M. Cross, with whom the dual redaction hypothesis is most often identified, evaluated what he saw as the twin themes of the book of Kings. The first of these was the sin of Jeroboam I and the resulting ceaseless censure of Ephraim. The other was, of course, God's faithfulness to Judah in spite of a spate of wicked kings. The few good kings were compared to David as a model of righteousness. But all of them, including Asa, Joash, and (to some extent) Hezekiah, could not measure up. They all had their faults. All, that is, except Josiah.¹⁹

In Cross's view, the pre-exilic Dtr1 was building up to this: an equal to David finally upon the throne and national favor in the sight of God restored. Writing within the Exile, Cross's Dtr2 had to find a way to rehabilitate the myth of Josiah. Getting himself killed at a young age did not go far toward establishing Josiah as graced by God.

¹⁹ M. A. Sweeney (Critique of Solomon, 1995) argues that Josiah is the model, not David and his corrupt son.

And the Judahites found themselves thrown into Exile despite his massive and rightly-motivated reform. Dtr2 polished Josiah's tarnished image by placing the onus on Manasseh. He did this by painting Hezekiah's son as so evil that no appropriate recompense was any longer possible. The point of no return had been crossed. Judah would have to take its medicine no matter what Josiah's efforts.²⁰

Helpfully, Cross corrected some of Kuenen's excesses. For example, he placed less reliance on the "dubious critical position that everything that hints at destruction and deportation must be exilic or that any statement reflecting pre-exilic conditions must come from a pre-exilic editor rather than from pre-exilic source material left intact by a later editor."²¹

Of course, these pre-exilic documents have been part and parcel of most all DtrH hypotheses from Noth on. They are often separated out into clearly discernible literary segments such as the "Ark Narrative" (1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22-25; 4:1-7:1), the "Saul Cycle" (1 Sam. 1:1-28; 9:1-10:16; 10:27-11:15; 13:2-7, 15-23; 14:1-46), the "History of David's Rise" (behind 1 Sam. 16-2 Sam. 5), and an apology for Solomon called the "Succession Narrative" (2 Sam. 9-16). Everyone tends to include these materials in their theories.²² They just disagree about their parameters and the extent of later editing.

P. K. McCarter, for example, recognizes the efforts of a Prophetic Historian who brought Northern oracles and narratives with him south during or right after the fall of Samaria and put them to parchment. This proposed writer has a basically negative view of kingship, instead advancing the superiority of the prophetic office. Much of the same

²⁰ S. L. McKenzie, 163-164; E. Eynikel, *The Reform of King Josiah*, 14-20.

²¹ Richard D. Nelson, "Dual Redaction Hypothesis in Kings." Chapter one in *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History*. Sheffield: JSOT, 1991, 8.
(online version: fontes.lstc.edu/~rklein/Documents/nelson.htm)

material and motivation which Veijola allots to the DtrP is taken over by the Prophetic Historian under McCarter's analysis. In other words, the main change is one of timeframe: these prophetic materials have a pre-exilic rather than an exilic origin.²³

In comparable fashion, A. Campbell assigns some of these same documents to what he calls the "Prophetic Record." Interestingly, however, he does not include the "Ark Narrative" and the "Succession Narrative." Also, he sees the pre-exilic writer(s) as favorable toward the monarchy. It is not a human initiative tolerated by God but rather a good gift from the Almighty.²⁴

The Hezekiah Edition

Several other scholars, while agreeing in large part with the Cross thesis, have noticed that just as we have a climactic reign in Josiah's tenure, we have one in Hezekiah's as well. They therefore put forward the notion of an earlier pre-exilic version that finds its recapitulation of King David in the life and reforms of Hezekiah. Helga Weippert noticed, for example, that the formulaic rebukes of transgressing kings change after Hezekiah's reign. This edition she assigns to R I (Redaktion I). Cross's Dtr1 becomes R II, and the exilic editor Dtr2 becomes R III.²⁵

I. Provan sees this same tension but reaches a slightly different conclusion. He believes Dtr1 produced this Hezekiah edition to serve as a model for Josiah's reforms. All of the narrative beyond 2 Kings 20 is attributed to Dtr2. The evidence is substantial: fully five Judahite kings judged as models of righteousness fail to remove the high

²² Everyone, that is, except those positing a particularly creative exilic Dtr (e.g., Hoffmann, Van Seters) and the minimalists, who champion a post-exilic provenance for these writings.

²³ S. L. McKenzie, 165-166.

²⁴ McKenzie, 166; Eynikel, 26-27.

places, in contrast to Hezekiah. Furthermore, Hezekiah rules immediately after the collapse of the Northern Kingdom and has the opportunity to basically centralize the cult. He “did what was right” according to “all that David his father had done.” He removed the high places, smashed the idols, cut down the *’āšērîm*, and broke the bronze serpent of Moses. After him was “none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him” (2 Kgs. 18:3-6). Hezekiah is clearly presented as an idyllic monarch. And his connections to Isaiah both personally (during the king’s sickness in 2 Kgs. 20) and prophetically (the messianic passage, Isaiah 7:14, may very well be about Hezekiah) only strengthen this depiction.²⁶

²⁵ M. A. Sweeney, 27-28; Eynikel, 18-19, 28-30.

²⁶ Sweeney, 29-32.

CHAPTER 3

THE PASSOVER AND UNLEAVENED BREAD

“When in the future your child asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall answer, ‘By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.’”

—Exodus 13:14

According to many critical scholars, neither of the given biblical etiologies for these combined celebrations is, in fact, historical.²⁷ Passover does not originate in YHWH’s protection of the Israelites from the angel of destruction during its slaughter of every firstborn in Egypt. Instead, it comes from an apotropaic rite performed by nomadic herdsmen during the end-of-winter transhumance of their pastured flocks to summer steppes.²⁸ Rain is not nearly as plentiful in the heat of the year in the Near East, and shepherds must move their sheep from place to place to find vegetation. (As early spring is within the time of lambing [roughly December to April], a propitiatory offering to the gods to vouchsafe a herd’s safety and fecundity makes some sense.) Likewise, according to these scholars, the Feast of Unleavened Bread stems not from making haste to leave Egypt and escape Pharaoh’s tyrannical grasp, but from an annual “spring cleaning” of the old year’s leaven. This practice would be borrowed from the neighboring Canaanite farmers in the hill country of the Levant, once the Hebrews’ strictly herding days were behind them.²⁹ Thus, these etiologies reveal early seasonal domestic rites, without the

²⁷ Beginning with J. Wellhausen in his *Prolegomena* (pp. 83ff).

²⁸ N. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 87-88.

²⁹ J. McConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy*, 99-123. McConville discusses the theories that both festivals derived from the neighboring agricultural Canaanites, but clearly prefers a nomadic origin. Unleavened bread fits in more with life on the move, and the early spring timetable is, as Halbe has suggested, probably too early for the initiation of harvest in the Levant. He also speculates about the affinity between the Sabbath and the weeklong Maṣṣôt festival, between creation and the annual renewal of the vegetated earth. This might make it a first-budding rather than a first-harvest fest.

usual necessity of clerical involvement and without any association with a centralized cult. Though they came to be extremely connected to Temple activities, incorporating the slaughter of literally thousands of sheep during the annual spring pilgrimage, this was not the case from the beginning. The Priestly Writer has placed his own fabricated (or at least highly ornamented) origins of these festivals within the narratives in order to historicize them. Perhaps he has also done so to invalidate this great change.

With almost one voice, scholars question the historicity of these traditions. With even more certainty, they posit that these two celebrations were not developed together, as in the Exodus account, but separately. There seems little reason to eat unleavened bread for seven days if the purpose is to symbolize the one day of haste in leaving. Such a custom befits a harvest festival, a yearly weeklong celebration of the barley crop, antedating the glorious departure from Egypt (a region where wheat was the dominant grain grown). The fact was that in Israel, especially in the pre-monarchic era, barley far outstripped the production of wheat. Barley was tailor-made for the poor man's bread, procured far more cheaply (perhaps half the price of wheat) as a result of being much more easily grown.³⁰ Its growing season was shorter, and it could flourish in a less arable soil, in a more arid climate.³¹ It could survive extremes in weather: the fierce heat of summer, as well as the frequent draughts (the worst of which sent nomads scurrying to Egypt with its Nile-watered wheat and vast stores of grain). It was often mixed with other grains—millet, spelt, and pea meal—and must have been a staple of the Israelite diet. Perhaps the pivotal event of Israel's prehistory, YHWH's leading them forth with a strong hand into a new and Promised Land, *coincided* with their already established early

³⁰ S. A. Reed, "Bread," 778.

³¹ I. Jacob and J. Jacob, "Flora," 808-810.

spring festival. Moses does ask leave for his people to go out into the desert to sacrifice to their God.

Ancient Israel's Economy: Pastoral or Agricultural?

The question, of course, is whether they were a nomadic group (or conglomerate of groups) that learned to subsist in a more sedentary, agricultural fashion in the land of Goshen (bringing their pastoral animals with them) or whether they already possessed a more “mixed” economy and simply adapted to a new environment. The Joseph story speaks of Jacob’s progeny as traveling to Egypt and buying grain, but not of growing it. None of the other Patriarchs were farmers. In fact, one has to go back to Cain’s agricultural sacrifices or Adam’s working the land by the sweat of his brow to find biblical growers of grain. On the other hand, once back across the Jordan under the leadership of Joshua and the judges who followed, the Israelites certainly did settle down, practicing both agriculture and pastoralism with equal vigor.

Of course, it could be that Maṣṣôt does not come into being until after they are in Canaan, eating off the land in emulation of their neighbors (be they newcomers to the territory or old cohorts of the Israelites). If Peśaḥ were the original festival (stemming from the Exodus), a beginning-of-the-harvest-season celebration might have grown up around it, incited by having the unleavened barley bread as a point in common.³² In such a case, only Maṣṣôt would have been “historicized” by being written into the Exodus passages.

³² According to McConville, J. Halbe has suggested that *maṣṣôt* did indeed have its origin as an aspect of Passover and then “detached and acquired its own identity.” (McConville, *Law and Theology*, 103.)

Ernst Knauf, it should be noted, believes that the whole nomadic model for Israelite settlement is somewhat off track. There were individuals who would have earned their living through strictly pastoral means in Iron Age Canaan, but not whole groups of people. Tribes could not have managed to be self-sufficient without an agricultural home base. He posits either a non-sedentary agriculturalism or (for a slightly different emphasis) a village-based pastoralism.³³ Younger men, brothers and cousins, might be sent off in the summertime with the flocks in search of better grazing land from a family base of operations (where everyone would winter). We see such a model clearly in play when Jacob sends off Joseph after his older brothers to see how they are faring and to bring back word.³⁴ If such is the case, Israel did not learn farming from their Canaanite neighbors. Nonetheless, they may have become more dependent on agriculture for their subsistence, and agricultural feasts may have taken on new importance. A look at their use of calendars does indeed seem to imply such a change in significance.

Harvest Festivals

The agricultural season in the ancient Near East falls easily around the three main harvest festivals celebrated by the Israelites. Peśaḥ comes at the beginning of the barley harvest and includes the cutting of the first ripened leaf-sheath, which is presented to the high priest with great rejoicing. He indeed waves it before YHWH in thanksgiving. Šāvu'ôt, approximately seven weeks later, marks the end of the time for bringing in the wheat crop. The counting of the weeks may actually coincide with the progressive steps

³³ E. A. Knauf, *Bedouins and Bedouin States*, 634-636.

³⁴ Gen. 37:12-17.

taken to bring in the whole of the harvest of grain. This would have been a legitimate time not only of concerted labor, but also of concerted waiting and watching until all was safely stored away and the elements could no longer steal their prosperity from them. Then there was the final ingathering of fruit—grapes and olives and dates—falling during the late summer/early autumn and ending with the celebration of Sukkôt, the Feast of Booths.

According to the Gezer Calendar (thought to have originated in the North [Israel]), the fruit harvest is divided up into two months for the grapes (after which they are immediately crushed, with the juice being bottled and left to ferment). Then there would be one month for “summer fruits,” and finally two (evidently only one in Judah) for harvesting and extracting the oil from the olives. Sowing of seed for barley and wheat started in October when the beginning of seasonal rains would soften up the ground enough for planting. These seeded fields, of course, would lie dormant until the spring came around and the cycle began all over again with Maṣṣôt.³⁵

Passover and Calendars

These feasts were fixed in the solar calendar required by an agrarian society. One must plant in accordance with the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, not by the phases of the moon. Pastoral nomads, on the other hand, though they remain at the mercy of seasonal rains and droughts, can more or less follow their sheep from one moon to the next. Muslims still adhere to a lunar calendar left over from the pastoral heritage of the various Arab tribes, and Ramadan as a sacred time of fasting rotates throughout the seasons. Some of the aspects of Peśaḥ point to its being a pastoral rite:

1.) It seems to have originally taken place in the home, shared with neighbors and presided over by the head of the family. Not only do priests not figure into the proceedings, but also none of the meat is saved back for the Levites.

2.) The detail about no bone being broken smacks of the kind of apotropaic rituals common amongst herdsmen.

3.) The setting is late evening—the angel passed over at midnight—and nighttime is the only time when shepherds might be expected to be comparatively free from duties to watch over their flocks.

4.) The time of month (the fourteenth/fifteenth) brings with it a full moon in a lunar calendar: an obvious advantage for a rustic evening get-together.³⁶

The Israelites, truth be told, used a lunisolar calendar, adding a month now and again to keep new moons in line with seasons.³⁷ That could speak of a shift from pasturing to farming (as the lunar aspect does appear to be primary) but could also fit a people who, from time immemorial, utilized both means of gaining a living. Judging from the scarcity of references concerning the Patriarchs' farming efforts, perhaps the former is more probable.

The Rise of “Unleavened Bread”

The greater reliance on agriculture may account for the rise of Maṣṣôt from being a sidelight—a mere plot detail in the great deliverance—to the shared significance of a weeklong combined ceremony and pilgrimage. But why the use of *unleavened* bread?

³⁵ O. Borowski, *Agriculture*, 96-98.

³⁶ N. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 87-88.

Certainly, a one-day prohibition may have made sense in light of the Exodus story. Once on the road, however, they would have had the time to let dough rise. Does the week correspond to a week of being chased by Pharaoh before the climactic parting of the sea? There is no such indication in the text or in the practice of the feast. True, whatever wheat or barley they took out into the wilderness with them would soon have been depleted (and thus the need for manna). But surely they took more than a week's worth of foodstuffs with them.

So what was unleavened bread used for?

1.) It served hospitality purposes: it was a quick meal for unexpected guests (Gen. 18:6) and for other spur-of-the-moment occasions.

2.) It was—notwithstanding the leavened wave offering at Pentecost—the predominant bread proffered in worship; the Bread of Presence, for example, was twelve loaves of unleavened wheat, each representing one of the tribes.

3.) When made of barley, it could be used as a grain offering for jealousy (Nu. 5:15), a reminder of guilt for unjustly suspecting one's wife of adultery.

4.) Also, I assume it was a staple for travel, for military campaigns, and for workers in the field.³⁸

³⁷ N. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 82, 89.

³⁸ J. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 154 (and endnote #16, p. 371). Tigay discusses the nomenclature “bread of distress” or “bread of affliction.” These have ties to the flat bread served to beggars, slaves, and prisoners and would clearly smack of the Hebrews experience of servitude in Egypt. He mentions that Ibn Ezra spoke of being served unleavened bread while a captive in India.

Abigail, in packing provisions for David and his men (1 Samuel 25), included 200 loaves of bread. Presumably, with all the other foodstuffs she was carrying, it would have been far easier to pack flat bread. If this presumption be true, perhaps it would offer a possibility for the weeklong observance: although short on time, they were able to bake a week's worth of bread to pack along with them on the journey. Of course, they would have been on the run at least at first, and, while certainly not impossible, baking would have been difficult at best. (Nomadic groups manage it routinely by means of portable "stoves.")

Though we don't know for sure how (or even if) Maṣṣôt was practiced in pre-monarchic times, by the reign of Josiah it had been joined with Peśaḥ as a major pilgrimage festival.³⁹ Here again, however, it did not appear to be a seamless fit. After the Passover sacrifice and Seder meal, pilgrims were allowed to go back to their own towns to continue out the remainder of the week. Furthermore, they were not commanded to eat unleavened bread during these days. They merely had to *refrain* from partaking of baked goods which were *leavened*.

According to Talmudic sources, the unleavened bread is to be baked quickly: in an amount of time equal to or less than the time it takes to walk a (Roman) mile, or about eighteen to twenty-four minutes. The reason is that it might have no available chance to rise.⁴⁰ Barley and wheat are amongst the five Near Eastern grains which are fermentable

³⁹ In a recent exchange with J. Gordon McConville [*JBL* 119], Bernard M. Levinson defends his theory that at the time of the Josianic Reform the two festivals combined and switched priorities: Peśaḥ became the major pilgrimage feast of spring--a "hag"--and Maṣṣôt withdrew into a home-centered rite subsequent to Passover. Before this it was celebrated at the regional sanctuaries and/or high places, a situation the Deuteronomist would surely desire to amend. McConville, on the other hand, argues for a unified rite well prior to centralization, motivated by covenant considerations within the anti-autocratic premonarchic community.

⁴⁰ J. Halbe has called *maṣṣâ*, "the bread of all situations which prohibit the baking of dough which has stood for any length of time." (quoted in McConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy*, 103)

(spelt, rye, and oats are the other three). And leavened or not, given time it will rise on its own a bit. Though they were careful not to add anything to the flour and water mixture (not even salt), the batter had to be watched and baked in haste, lest any “corruption” seep in unawares. The seriousness with which later generations kept the traditions speaks of a festival of thanksgiving marked by sober reflection and profound reverence rather than carefree excitement and revelry.

The Impact of Passover

After the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb was centralized as part of the Temple cult, a general excitement over Passover might well have arisen. Certainly by the time of Jesus, the crush of the crowds and the wave after wave of lambs waiting to be sacrificed in shifts (starting earlier in the day than prescribed on the fourteenth just to be able to get through them all), would have precipitated a carnival-like atmosphere. But older, more traditional versions would have been built around quiet domestic scenes of reverence and awe, in remembrance of both the bitterness of slavery and the wistful acknowledgement of deliverance. There was no dancing associated with the Exodus but only haste in fleeing a Pharaoh who might yet change his mind (as he had proven more than capable of doing). Its portrayal as a family affair rather than a community extravaganza befits a more solemn occasion than the corporate joy of harvest beginnings or the corporate concern of warding off demons. We never get with Peśah and Maṣṣôt the picture of gaiety which marks Purim—a similar remembrance of the sparing of the Jewish people. Indeed, Jesus, in clearing the Temple courts of money changers, reacts with anger and disgust that a time for the sober reflection of the greatness of God in Israel’s midst had

degenerated into solipsistic thanksgiving for an economic windfall. If this is the combination of two earlier unrelated festivals, then they have mostly lost their original character. And most likely this could only have happened before the reforms of Josiah made Passover a major national happening. Some life-changing event would best explain this utter transformation. Either the Exodus or something very akin to it must lie in Israel's past.

Another reason the Passover does not match up well with the apotropaic rites of Arabic nomads is that their blood rites are performed upon arriving and settling in an area—not when leaving. After all, why protect a house one is abandoning? It makes more sense to wait until one is established in a new region before blessing the habitation of it. That is, of course, unless one is being chased. In that case every dwelling one passes through needs protecting until one reaches a safe haven.

Questioned Origins

There are those scholars, on the other hand, who doubt the antiquity of either festival. Van Seters, for example, believes them to be of exilic origin. The Jews in Babylon, banished from their homeland, substituted the seven days of Unleavened Bread in the absence of a means of celebrating acceptable sacrifice (the First Temple having been destroyed). Then with the restoration of the Temple under Zerubbabel, a “limited form of animal sacrifice—the pascal lamb—was permitted in the homes of the Diaspora.”⁴¹

⁴¹ J. Van Seters, *The Life of Moses*.

Part of this uncertainty stems from the work of J. Halbe, who questions the ancient origin of Maṣṣôt based on the following observations:⁴²

1.) The month of Abib (Nisan) is too early in the spring to represent a genuine harvest festival. Actual harvest fests take place when ingathering is done, *not* at the start of the process.

2.) Maṣṣôt is called a *hag*, a pilgrimage to a (centralized) sanctuary. Most people, however, would not be able to remain for an entire week, needing to promptly return to watch over flocks and fields. And this is the way it is described in Scripture: pilgrims arrive for Peśaḥ but leave long before the days of Unleavened Bread are over. This nonchalance of practice makes it sound like a later writing/redaction.

3.) Both and Šukkôt reflect direct harvest activity (unlike Maṣṣôt). They are tied to exact times and specific ingatherings in the agricultural year. Maṣṣôt by itself (if not distinctly tied to Peśaḥ) is identified with the month of Abib, but no particular grouping of days therein.

4.) In Deuteronomy 16:9 and Leviticus 23:9ff, the beginning of Šāvu‘ôt is not (pointedly) figured from Feast of Unleavened Bread but from when the harvesters start to put the “sickle to the grain.” (Halbe, evidently, does not equate the cutting of the first sheaf of barley and its subsequent use as a wave offering with Maṣṣôt.)

While citing these obstacles to the certitude of Maṣṣôt and Peśaḥ’s antiquity, Van Seters gives no positive reasons to accept his thesis that these activities are exilic. Why

⁴² Van Seters, *The Life of Moses*, 119 (quotes J. Halbe, *Erwegungen zu Ursprung und Wesen des Massotfestes*, ZAW 87, 1975, pp. 324-346).

on earth would the eating of unleavened bread substitute for an inability to sacrifice?

Some time after the Second Temple is destroyed, when it becomes clear that it will not be restored (i.e., after the Bar Kochba revolt fails), Rabbinic Judaism replaces sacrifice with the notions of prayer and good deeds/obedience to the commandments. Of course, unleavened wheat was used in Temple sacrifice and for showbread, but whence would the acceptance of its use outside of the Temple come? If one could not sacrifice animals domestically, why then could one sacrifice bread?

Besides, the slaughter of the paschal lamb was clearly limited to the celebrations in Jerusalem. The mere presence of a replacement Temple would not make it acceptable for the Diaspora to sacrifice sheep without coming to the Temple (if that is what Van Seters is saying). If he is speaking instead of pilgrimage, he needs to somehow prove that this is an innovation and not just the restoration of an earlier practice.

The Merging of Traditions

Exactly how is it that holidays coalesce? For starters we could examine present day celebrations whose histories we somewhat know:

1.) They take the calendar place of popular pagan festivals. For example, Christmas was placed in the middle of December in spite of scanty evidence of Jesus' nativity occurring in that month. It thus replaced the Roman feast of Saturnalia and the Norse Yuletide. Midwinter feasts of light were a common enough thing in the ancient world—note Hanukkah, as well—an understandable break from the long, dreary nights near the winter solstice.

2.) They bring with them some of the thematic essence of the previous religious heritage. Easter is a time of commemorating God's liberating grace amongst his people, just like the earlier Jewish Passover.

3.) They bring with them some of the symbols or festivities from superceded traditions. Here again we see that Easter—derived from the name of a pagan goddess—carries on old spring fertility rites in its use of bunny rabbits and eggs.

4.) A major festival draws a lesser one to it on the calendar. A good example of this is Christmas, again. The feast day of St. Nicholas, traditionally celebrated on the sixth of December, has become part and parcel of the Nativity season. Jolly old St. Nick has become "Father Christmas" himself. Likewise, the forty days of Lent, ostensibly to memorialize Jesus' sojourn in the wilderness and his temptation by Satan, has attached itself to the Easter season. His preparation for ministry becomes our preparation for absorbing the significance of his death. In the Greek Orthodox tradition, Jesus' Baptism and his Nativity coincide (on the sixth of January).

5.) Two more-or-less equal holidays may be subsumed into one on the calendar for convenience sake: The birthdays of Messrs. Lincoln and Washington have become "Presidents' Day," taking place on a Monday or a Friday between the actual dates of their births.

Can any of these possibilities (or something similar) be applied to the joining of Peśah and Maṣṣôt? Well, probably not. After all, the comparative method is fraught with difficulties even when used with contemporaneous cultural events. Still, we do know of comparable Canaanite and Arab nomad festivals that may have indeed been reworked for

a new setting/new people. The two feasts have theme, symbol, and content in common (*maṣṣâ* being the poor man's bread of poverty, oppression, slavery, and haste). Peśaḥ, drawing on the focal significance of its relation to the key event in Jewish history, might well have drawn Maṣṣôt, the lesser "champagne-toasting" of the start of the harvest cycle, toward its spot in mid month. This assumes the accuracy of some interpreters' surmise that in this context (Deuteronomy 16:1) the word *ḥódeš* can mean 'new moon' rather than 'month.'⁴³ Of course, it could also be that two earlier spring festivals—a fairly insignificant apotropaic fest coinciding with lambing or fleecing or transhumance and an equally mundane "opening day" of harvest season—joined forces to become one ceremonial week. Thus, transformed by the Exodus event into one of the principal pilgrimage occasions of the Israelite ecclesiastical year, Peśaḥ /Maṣṣôt rose from relative obscurity.

Analysis

What then should one make of all the conflicting data? How should one evaluate the various speculative theories that have been put forward? At the very least, one should not retreat into the skepticism of those who find everything to be of late provenance with undetermined and indeterminable predecessors. One should also not look on these predecessors as analysis insignificant, as bearing little resemblance to the finalized festivals worked out by exilic redactors for the purposes of the restoration of cultic order.

What I think may have happened is the following:

⁴³ J. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 152-153.

1.) Originally, there existed a weeklong observance of the reawakening of the earth, an agricultural festival celebrating the vernal equinox. The thanksgiving shown over the first ripe grains of barley in Deuteronomy 26:5-11 typifies this occasion. Recent research shows the Mesopotamian Tammuz may have been depicted more as a Shepherd than as a dying—rising god. Still, we also possess the Ba'al cycle, where the Canaanite “Rider on the Clouds” is clearly cut from the fertility mold of succumbing to the parching summer heat and being resurrected in the fecundity of spring. Also, in spite of later switching to an autumnal equinox New Year’s celebration (just like the Hebrews), the Mesopotamians originally held the Akitu fest as a week-long *opening-of-harvest* ritual. The Jews could easily have had something similar.

2.) In the spring of the year, at the time of this “new cycle” ritual, the Israelites finally break free from the Egyptians. Though Moses had requested permission to go out into the wilderness that they might make sacrifices to their God, the significance of the Exodus interrupts and supercedes the older festival. In their hurry to leave, the people only go through some of the motions of the prior ceremonies. These take on new meaning as they are conflated with the massive rescue operation at the hand of God.

3.) Since their sendoff is delayed till the middle of the month, Maṣṣôt is dragged forward to coincide with the newly instituted Passover sacrifice and meal.

4.) The combined celebration is in a good position to join Šāvu‘ôt and Šukkôt as a major pilgrimage when centralization is affected under Josiah.

If Peśaḥ had apotropaic antecedents, they have been continued in the regular sacrifice of the first-born of one’s flock. Clearly, the final plague brought upon the

Egyptians ties in with this notion, as does the setting aside of the Levites as an equal-numbers replacement for the first born male Israelites owed to God.⁴⁴ Was this concept read back into the Exodus narrative or derived from an earlier rite? My guess is that it came later as a priestly etiology for the yielding over of livestock for their own as well as God's use. The central thrust of the Exodus is the rescue of God's people from bondage. The slaughter of all firstborn males makes for good motivation for Pharaoh to allow the Hebrews to leave, but it holds too much of center stage to look original in its entirety.

Of course, all of this is too speculative for my liking. We need to come up with "objective" criteria for evaluating the historicity of data that cannot be cross-referenced with contemporary sources (because none or few exist). We have plenty of examples of etiological folk-lore, historical fiction, and true history from which to derive rules for deciding which is which (perhaps even when layered on top of each other by successive redactors). We have, however, no surefire way of deducing when, where, or if the supernatural has broken into human history. The literary, linguistic, and historical clues themselves should decide the matter irrespective of spiritual content.

⁴⁴ J. Van Seters, *The Place of the Yahwist in the History of Passover and Maṣṣôt*.

CHAPTER 4

THE BROKEN-NECKED HEIFER

“All the elders of that town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the wadi, and they shall declare: ‘Our hands did not shed this blood, nor were we witnesses to it.’”

—Deuteronomy 21:6-7

Let us now move from sacrifices in the domestic setting to those in the community as a whole, from a seasonal celebration in the family home to the municipal administration of law and order. Imagine the following scene: In Iron-Age Israel a man lies dead, struck down in a field out in a rural area away from town. No one knows who did it, and no one knows whose jurisdiction it is to investigate the case (Dt. 21:1). They call in heads of families from nearby villages and those responsible for deciding and enforcing the law, which are probably one and the same. (Even today in small town USA, the mayor, the sheriff, and the majority of a town’s council members are likely to come from one or two leading families.) These gentlemen proceed to measure off the distance between the place where the body was discovered and each of their respective villages (Dt. 21:2). The municipality found to be the closest is given responsibility, not only for the ongoing investigation (or consequent trial should any new clues come to light), but also for providing for the removal of the curse placed on their fields by the outpouring of the innocent blood of the victim. After all, this blood has not been expiated by the only way it can be expiated: by the spilling of the blood of the murderer. Numbers 35:33 states that “...atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it.”

So what is to be done? In rabbinic times, they would simply bury the body where it lies. That patch of land, and a small area circumscribed around it, would be forsaken in terms of agricultural purposes, and the owner's rights would be forfeit. But these are earlier times, and the people more prone both to superstition and to the possibility that their God could and would intervene in nature. They are worried about their crops, their livelihood, and their very survival.

What they resort to may reflect an earlier reliance on magic or even a cult of the dead, but it has been sufficiently sanitized (or Yahwicized) to be included by the Deuteronomist and/or his editor(s). The elders of the specific town in question take a heifer which has not been yoked for work behind a plow and take it out into the wilderness to an uncultivated (or perhaps even unarable) valley through which flows a brook that does not cease in the dry seasons like most Mid-Eastern wadis (Dt. 21:3-4a). There they break its neck (with a hatchet blow to the back of the neck according to mishnaic sources), whether in the stream itself or on its banks is left unclear. These men continue by washing their hands over the carcass of the fallen beast (Dt. 21:4b-6) and by unequivocally pronouncing their innocence: "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done" (Dt. 21:7). A prayer is then intoned, and the rite is finished: the guilt has been purged, the town is safe (Dt. 21:8-9).

The Mere Presence of Priests

The ceremony of the broken-necked heifer in Deuteronomy 21:1-9 is one of the more enigmatic rites in the whole Hebrew Bible. For only a very few sanctioned cult practices take place outside of the environs of the Tabernacle or the later Temple. As

examples we have first, the cleansing of lepers (Lev.14), where one bird is killed and another set free into the surrounding wilderness; second, the goat for Azazel (Lev.16), which is likewise set free, having been burdened with the sins of the people on Yom Kippur; and last, the purification rite (Nu.19)—for any person who has come into contact with a corpse—by sprinkling of water mixed with the ashes of a pure red heifer. Yet this particular ritual, wherein a young cow is summarily dispatched (*ēglâ arufâ*), is the only instance described in Deuteronomy. In general, the Dtr is intensely passionate about the centrality of the Jerusalem sanctuary and curtly proscribes sacrifices performed outside of “the place the LORD shall choose.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, here is a ceremony where the priests have absolutely no significant role. Unless they are a later insertion, some priests are there, merely standing by. We are not told much: though they may speak the prayer (syntactically problematic but possible), their direct involvement is not detailed in any way. They are there. They step forward (and that only after the neck of the heifer is snapped).⁴⁶

Still, it must be remembered that the priests’ normal role in sacrificial rites was somewhat less than all encompassing. They were there to make sure an appropriate offering has been brought and to ascertain the legitimate motivations and cultic worthiness of the offerers. But generally it was the offerers themselves who slaughtered the animals and cut them in pieces. The priest then arranged these on the altar and burned them. It was he who variously poured, smeared, or spattered the blood within the Debir or on the horns of the altar or at the entrance to the Tabernacle. In the present case, there is no altar, no sacrifice in the truest sense, absolutely nothing to burn and nothing to

⁴⁵ This line is found throughout the book of Deuteronomy., especially in chapters 12, 14, and 16.

⁴⁶ P. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 279.

spatter. The priests would be there to supervise and to lend legitimacy. These are active priests—actual altar clergy—from a regional Temple (if not the Temple). They are not the unemployed “Levite at your gates” to whom the village owes charity. The status of the heifer must be evaluated, as must the hearts and cultic purity of the elders. If the elders’ declaration of innocence may be construed as an oath, then the priests are there to administer it. To finish things off, it may well have been appropriate for the clergy to invoke the mercy of God and pronounce an absolution. But from the text, all we know is that each of these steps was taken. They may or may not have been performed by the clerics.

The Town Elders

But before any ceremonies can even begin, measurements must be taken. For this purpose neighborhood judges and elders are indicated. According to Deuteronomy 16:18, these officials are to be “appointed in every town” with general civil, judicial, and law-enforcement duties. Here they supply neutral administrators to determine jurisdiction. There are numerous examples of similar policies in the ancient Near East: W. Robertson Smith cites sources from ancient Arabia where, in like circumstances, inhabitants of the nearest town must swear to their innocence. Danel, in the Ugaritic epic of Aqhat, after recovering the body of his dead son in the claw of a vulture, curses the three nearest cities, one of which does happen to be the guilty town where the assassination plot was hatched.⁴⁷ Hittite law produces the step of taking measurements similar to those in the biblical passage.⁴⁸ In centuries to come, Jerusalem elders, from the

⁴⁷ CTA 19.III.148-IV.168 (=UT 1 Aqht, 148-168).

⁴⁸ H. A. Hoffner, “Some Contributions of Hittitology to OT Study,” *TB* 20 (1969) 39ff.

Great Sanhedrin, took measurements only when it was presumed the murderer was a Jew. Near the borders with Gentile nations, they dispensed with the practice. Toward the end of the 1st Century C.E., they did away with the ceremony altogether, as there had become entirely too many murders of which to keep track.

In a similar way in adjacent cultures, the near town may be held responsible, either for purification or compensation. The Code of Hammurapi, for example, states, “If a person is robbed, the town and the heads of the elders must pay a manah of silver to his family.”⁴⁹ A Hittite king, in a letter to Babylonian royalty, wrote that for a homicide where the killer is known, the victim’s family has the option of accepting monetary satisfaction. Should they do so, however, the town where the killing takes place must be likewise purified, evidently because it has not been purified with the blood of the perpetrator.

The responsibility for just such a purification falls into the hands of the elders of the specific Israelite community closest to our unsolved murder case. As mentioned before, without viable suspects, they must follow an alternative plan. They represent the entire village and, in some sense, the entire nation of Israel. Deuteronomy 19:10 declares that unexpiated guilt for the shedding of innocent blood besmirches the whole land. (Likewise, Jeremiah, in the 26th chapter of the book, warns his would-be assailants that should they shed innocent blood, not only would they incur guilt, but the city of Jerusalem and all of its inhabitants would, as well.) It is quite consistent that the elders should be called to this particular communal duty. In Leviticus 4:13-15, when the Israelite community as a whole has inadvertently sinned, it is the elders who lay hands on the sacrificial bullock, indicating their representation of the people.

Their corporate guilt, nonetheless, should not be taken as implied complicity in the crime. They are guilty of allowing an atmosphere of tolerance towards violence, perhaps, or of oversights in protection and prevention. The heifer picked as the means to atonement seems to indicate as much. Throughout the sacrificial system, a female animal is indicated only for individuals, and usually only for unintentional sins. (Numbers 15:27, where the individual must bring a female goat, is a clear example of this.) Here, that individual is without doubt the undiscovered murderer; the unintentional sin, on the other hand, belongs to the community at large. That would make this instance unique in the way it combines guilt and intention from different entities.

A Borrowed Rite?

A better explanation might be that it is a borrowing from earlier Israelite (or Canaanite) practices. The red-heifer ritual in Numbers 19 shows signs of being just such an adaptation of prior folk traditions (though it also fits the previous criterion of being for inadvertent, individual sin: specifically, contact with the dead). Then there is the Philistine elimination rite depicted in 1 Samuel 6, where they send the Ark of the Covenant back to the Israelites along with a guilt offering of solid gold tumors and rats (representing their afflictions). These they load on the back of a new wooden cart pulled by two heretofore unworked cows.⁵⁰ (Interestingly, when the bovines make their way to Beth-Shemesh in Israelite territory, the overjoyed citizens offer them up as sacrifices on a makeshift altar: a large, natural rock outcropping in the middle of a field. This is definitely not a sanctioned event, and seventy men lose their lives, as a result. But it

⁴⁹ Code of Hammurabi § 24, *ANET*, 167.

⁵⁰ They add one more stipulation: their calves are to be separated from these cows and left at home.

shows a rank-and-file acceptance of using female sacrifices.) For each of these rituals, the cows used are specified as having not been placed under a yoke or, thus, before a plow.⁵¹ No other Israelite rites include this constraint, though it may well be just a roundabout way of ensuring a healthy, unblemished animal. For even though the possibility exists that the particular form and required characteristics of these sacrificial animals has indeed been borrowed, the ceremony itself has been cleaned up and made presentable. No magic or divination is performed; no victim's ghost haunts the land.

Though Mesopotamian beliefs saw the wilderness as the abode of demonic forces and underworld deities⁵² and though some ancient Greeks placed chthonic sacrifices in a head down position as if to break their necks, this heifer, led docilely out into the wilderness, is not part of a cult of the dead. The elders convey it to virgin, untilled soil for other reasons. In the fourth chapter of Genesis, Cain is allowed to live in spite of being found guilty of the premeditated slaying of his brother. Penalized instead with a permanent curse, he is told the ground will “no longer give of its strength.” Indeed it will withhold its abundance from him. For Abel's blood “cries out from the ground.” This then will be the fate of the nearest town's fields if the victim's blood remains uncovered, unprovided for. They must hope to transfer this curse to land that does not matter so much, unarable ground on the periphery of civilization. After all, one cannot curse that which is already cursed. Some scholars believe that only the curse transfers; others, that the whole murder scenario is reenacted and that through this symbolic gesture, the crime is spiritually replaced.

⁵¹ G. B. Driver (“Three Notes,” *VT* 2 [1952] 356ff.) discusses the possible translation that the heifer “has never been mated or worn a yoke” (e.g., NEB).

A Sacred Space?

The possibility exists, however, that we are not meant to see this outlying valley as under a curse, but more as the unsoiled virgin Israel: Holy ground for a sacred undertaking. The heifer's unworldliness certainly sets it apart as holy. Perhaps this out-of-the-way parcel of real estate is similarly marked or, at the very least, kept ritually clean. Spattered with blood like the Holy of Holies or the Bronze Altar, it is nonetheless similarly pure. If it is indeed arable land, the plot of ground may even be something of a "first fruits" sacrifice, set aside for God. Not many locales in the Mid-East seem to fit the given description for this uninhabited dale. For it is said to contain an ever-flowing stream and not a seasonal wadi. Nomadic inhabitants and shepherds of these arid lands would know these places well and pass along the information. The few spots that did correspond might well have had to have been set aside. Also, the fact that this valley is watered means it is probably arable and thus less than fully appropriate for the transference of a curse.⁵² Though the elders might consider the loss of productive fields a suitable sacrifice (as stated above), if it actually took the curse upon itself, they would have to find a *new* unspoiled tract every time these circumstances reappeared.

Repenting of Spilled Blood

Into this valley of the shadow of death, as it were, they lead the fated beast, finally forcing it to kneel down and breaking its neck. If this be from a blow by a hatchet as the rabbis contend, then copious blood would have flowed. Coaxing her into the water

⁵² D. P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity*, 31-74.

⁵³ B. F. Batto ("Curse," *DDD*, 214) claims that in ancient Israel a valid curse had to be conditional upon "the speaker having legitimate reason to utter the curse," upon "the object person being deserving of

before delivering the *coup de grâce* means her life's blood would harmlessly filter away on its eventual journey to the sea. It is into the "depths of the sea," the prophet Micah informs us (7:19) that YHWH "hurls all of our iniquities." On the other hand, if they bring her to a halt on the banks of this brook, in the middle of a field just like the innocent murder victim, her blood will pour out onto the land and "cry out from the ground." By and large, the killing of sacrificeable animals away from the Temple was seriously frowned upon, was looked on as an infraction rather akin to murder (Lev. 17:3-4).⁵⁴ To warrant her fate, in some sense this young cow must be a replacement, either for the murdered or the murderer.

At any rate, this animal killing—and by extension, the previous human killing—must be repented of. If the consensus translation of *náḥal ʿetān* is to be accepted as "a constant, permanent, or ever-flowing stream" (as in Amos 5:24, "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"), then living water is called for here.⁵⁵ The elders cannot simply lug jugs of water to a dry river bed. In an unexplained gesture, they must wash their hands over the carcass of the dead cow. This is strongly reminiscent of an ancient Greek ritual of purification from homicide where a piglet is slaughtered over the head of the perpetrator and then the blood rinsed off. Here, however, all of the elders wash their hands, not just the designated slaughterer, and we are not told that they are spattered with the beast's blood.

punishment," and upon "the complicity of the deity in effecting the curse." The waters of *niddā* in Numbers 5 had no effect unless the woman was actually adulterous.

⁵⁴ Game animals (clean ones) could be slaughtered but their blood had to be covered by dust (Lev. 17:13).

⁵⁵ Craigie, 279.

Ritual Purification with Water

There are plenty of occurrences of simple washing in the ancient world to declare one's innocence, especially in the form we would think of as an executioner's pardon: after Hittite executions, for example, all the citizens of the town involved would bathe; ancient Greek judges would wash their hands after capital offense trials; the Beth Din in Mishnaic times would do the same thing; by the New Testament period it is an established Jewish rite, and evidently a Greco-Roman one, as well, since Pilate would hardly have been aping his Jewish underlings.⁵⁶ The practice is broadly attested throughout the Greco-Roman literature of the era. In addition, two of the psalmists proclaim, "I have washed my hands in innocence" (Ps.26:6 and 73:13).

Having washed their hands, the elders are ready to declare their innocence. When they do so, it is not couched in the technical form of an oath though it is similar. They are not declaring themselves physically innocent of the heifer's blood though they clearly identify the blood of which they speak as "this" blood—right here and now, not miles and days distant. It does not make sense to me that they would also pronounce their own absolution. The text does go straightway into it without a break, but the style changes. Some have thought it a Deuteronomistic addition, as the presence of the onlooking priest. It may be just as logical, however, to assume that there have been deletions due to the priests' being described as having done or said something controversial or otherwise unacceptable to the editor(s). It simply makes more sense that the priests, being right there in their midst, would have performed their rightful duties.

⁵⁶ R. E. Brown (*The Death of the Messiah*, 833-834) cites Homer (*Iliad* 6.266-268), Sophocles (*Ajax* 654-655), Herodotus (*History* 1.35), and Virgil (*Aeneid* 2.718-20) as having depicted the practice.

Theoretical Implications

Now then, when all is said and done, what is this rite all about? Some have mentioned possibilities ranging from a magical punishment of the perpetrator to a warding off the victim's ghost.⁵⁷ Most, however, have put forth some variation of one of the following five theories:

1.) It is a representation of the penalty the elders will incur if they are lying. This is a possibility in the ancient Near East. In the 8th Century C.E., the Assyrians made a treaty with the subdued nation of Arpad, where a lamb was beheaded and said to represent the vassal king. Were he to break the treaty, a similar fate would by inference befall him. Likewise, in the Iliad, an oath is backed up by the slaughter of a boar. The king of Carchemish, in dealing with a murder case in the vassal kingdom of Ugarit, makes the indicted townsfolk swear: "...we did not kill this man, and none of us knows who did." He does not, however, include any graphic sacrifice as a warning. This explanation, in the final analysis, breaks down because it cannot explain the location or the need for flowing water or the emphasis on "this" blood.

2.) It is a rite of elimination wherein the murder is reenacted and the blood drained away to the sea. Here again there are many such rites in the ancient Near East. The aforementioned Philistine riddance of the ark and its afflictions is one. Another is the ritual cleansing of the Esagila temple during the Mesopotamian Akitu festival. A ram is decapitated, and a holy room splattered with its blood. They wipe up the blood with

⁵⁷ D. P. Wright ("Heifer," *ABD* 3, 114) includes the possibility that the killing of the cow could be "a sacrifice to the victim's ghost or underworld powers," but his other options roughly follow those listed here. He selects my second one: "a reenactment of the murder which transfers blood pollution to an uninhabited area." He does not include an actual atonement (my number five).

the carcass after which they throw head and body into the river to find its way to the sea and oblivion. The Hittites provide several examples: the Ambazi rite where evil is transferred onto a mouse, symbolized by a cord around its neck. It is then driven to the highest mountains and the deepest valleys. In the Tunnawi rite, one's evil is combed from one's hair. The combs used, plus the ritual black clothing one was wearing, are thrown into the river. From the city of Samuha comes the ritual in which a small boat laden with gold and silver (representing one's oath and curse) is set assail in a basin of water before the god. The basin is connected to the river via a canal where it goes sailing away. And, of course we have the Jewish traditions of the Yom Kippur scapegoat and of Tashlikh, where one's pockets are emptied of crumbs symbolizing one's sins and dumped into a river. As appealing as this option is, the bloodguilt is never officially transferred onto the cow. There is no laying on of hands or the like. The transference is merely representational. And why would the elders reenact a murder for which they are swearing innocence?

3.) It is an isolating (or fixing) of the defilement far away from civilization where it can do no harm. Of course, the preceding option isolates the blood even farther away in the sea. But some have said that the cow is killed to prevent it from returning anywhere near town and re-defiling their fields. In later rabbinic writings, the scapegoat is thrown over a cliff rather than being allowed to survive (and possibly make its way back to civilization). That transference of some sort occurred was clear to them. In practice the "defiled" valley was never thereafter allowed to be tilled. They proscribed agriculture in the affected area in order to ensure that the land would have no opportunity to retaliate.

4.) It is a symbolic execution of the murderer in absentia. After all, Scripture does say that only the perpetrator's blood is able to expiate the bloodguilt. Of course, the ceremony would not exactly let him off the hook. He will still die if found. So all in all, it cannot be thought of as a complete substitution. Christ took the place of Barabbas, and Barabbas went free. This man will not. Also, the heifer is not killed in the traditional spot for executions, just outside of town.

5.) The last possibility is usually dismissed without much fanfare: that it is indeed some sort of atoning sacrifice. It is not called a sacrifice; it doesn't happen in the Temple; it doesn't use the terminology of sacrifice (e.g., the verb *zābah*); there is no altar; and the priests are barely involved. And yet it alleviates the bloodguilt of the land. In Exodus 13:13 and 34:20, the firstborn of unclean animals, such as the ass, if left unredeemed are to have their necks broken. It seems to be God's way of dealing with an alternative, with "plan B" if you will.

To conclude, I don't see any reason to flush the problem out to sea. I think this picture of sin being carried downstream to the ocean is a later Jewish conceptual development anyway. Besides, there may not be enough water for such a ceremony anywhere nearby. They may have to settle for a spring or even a well. The crucial events are the transference of land defilement to an uncultivated area and the expiation of bloodguilt held to be on the people of the nearest town. If my theory of the selected land being holy space proved true, there would be a lifting of bloodguilt rather than an actual transference. The land itself would be a participant in the final effectiveness of the

expiating event. Whatever the case, there is some sort of substitutionary atonement going on here though I, as well, would stop short of calling it a sacrifice.

CHAPTER 5

THE LEGITIMACY OF ISRAELITE HIGH PLACES

“When I had brought them into the land that I had sworn to give them, they took note of every high hill and every leafy tree. There they offered their sacrifices; there they sent up their soothing aromas; and there they poured out their drink offerings.”

—Ezekiel 20:28

The translation above is not exactly how this verse reads in the MT. The Hebrew text adds the phrase *wayyittēnū šām ka ʿas qorbānām* (and there they presented the provocation of their offering). The LXX on the other hand, omits this addendum and instead inserts that there they sacrificed *tois theoïs autôn* (to their gods). Has a lovely commendation of high place worship been corrupted by this exilic oracle (or by his editors)? The chances are that it probably has not. The surrounding context is unambiguously negative toward *bāmôt*. But one can easily imagine that there were such commendations. The high places were evidently still very much in fashion. The following verse declares that these practices continue “down to this very day.”

This chapter will endeavor to overview the evidence for high places both in terms of physical realia and textual records. We will detail how they were built, how they functioned, what they contained, who they venerated, and where they were located. In doing so, we will try to shed light on the discrepancy that exists between those passages which condemn the high places in uncompromisingly harsh language and others which commend noteworthy individuals for utilizing or even constructing them.

Of course, later rabbinic tradition had no trouble differentiating the regulations for centralization of the cult laid down in the Deuteronomic law (and taken up again by Josiah in his reform) from the sanctioned visits to high places by prophets and judges and

kings. Such venerated men include Samuel, Saul, David, Elijah, and Elisha, not to mention Moses (Ex. 24) and each of the Patriarchs. The rabbis explained the apparent incongruity by postulating that up until the time the Tabernacle was erected in the Wilderness, high places were deemed legitimate. Once the Israelites crossed over the Jordan into the Promised Land, *bāmôt* were again tolerated for a short while. The establishment of the Ark of the Covenant at Shiloh brought with it a proscription of other cultic sites. After Shiloh's fall, they were once more permitted until the Temple in Jerusalem was built and consecrated. At this point, they were prohibited for all time (Zeb. xiv.4 ff.).

Without question, this analysis does express the facts of the case. This is indeed what the text says. But what reason could be given for such erratic behavior on the part of priesthood or deity? In general, the God of Israel is never depicted as whimsical in nature. True, he is not always thought of as *predictable*. This is understandable: the writers of the Hebrew Bible would not wish him to be seen as able to be cornered, manipulated, or “fit into a box.” Nevertheless—and one would expect nothing different—his actions can almost always be taken as *reasonable*. He acts with a purpose in mind. Undoubtedly, his ways are inscrutable, beyond the understanding of the ways of mankind. On the other hand, they are never portrayed as capricious.

So, what is going on here? The Dtr certainly could have edited out these inconsistencies. Why did he not? Many take him as having come from the North or of at least having employed Ephraimite traditions in his manuscript. Did he perhaps not wish to revise treasured accounts of regional lore? Then why would he not choose stories without specific cultic content? After all, the great Elijah could have confronted the

Baalite priests without offering a sacrifice of his own on Mt. Carmel. Elijah goes so far as to cry out to God against the Ahab-led Israelites who “have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your *altars*, and killed your prophets with the sword” (1 Kgs. 19:10, 14). It is easy to imagine that Elijah would not have reacted well to Josiah’s destruction of all the high places from “Geba to Beer-sheba,” not to mention the king’s utter debasement of Bethel (2 Kgs. 23:8, 15-20). Indeed, over two hundred years have passed and the Assyrians have vanquished Ephraim. The worlds inhabited by these two men *are* very different. But are they really *this* different? Why have the old ways fallen on such hard times?

If my guess is correct, the answer is that these traditional practices were at one time perfectly honorable, even praiseworthy, but that over the centuries they became corrupt, unrecognizable. Syncretism crept in and then took over, but not everywhere at once. There was an overlap. In the North, for example, there were those who, like Elijah and Elisha, had not bowed the knee to foreign gods. Still, they had little or no access to Jerusalem. And so they carried on with their old customs.

Let us turn now to giving a face to some of these old ways. Exactly what did a high place look like? Of what was it comprised? How was it built and in what locations? We will see if there are any means of separating new, heretical accretions from the tried and true of ancient Yahwistic pathways.

Etymology of bāmâ

The Hebrew term *bāmâ*, which came to mean a cultic “high place,” was derived from Semitic forms meaning the back or torso of an animal (e.g., Akk. *bamtu*, *bamati*,

and Ugaritic *bmt.*) By extension it was applied to objects similar in shape, as in English: the ‘back’ of the clouds (Is. 14:14; Job 9:8), the ‘back’ of a mountain range (Dt. 32:13; 2 Sam. 1:19, 25; Am. 4:13; Mic. 1:3; 3:12; Is. 58:14; Ps. 18:33). It could also be used derisively of humans, such as when one trod on the upturned backs of one’s enemies (Dt. 33:29). Typically, cultic sites were built, at least initially, on the heights. Thus, religious adherents named these “high places” after what had become a term for mountain ridges (1 Sam. 9:12; 1 Kgs. 11:7; 2 Chron. 33:17; Jer. 48:35; etc.).

Quite possibly, however, the high places were situated not merely on lofty peaks to be near, as it were, the abode of the god(s). To some extent they clearly became associated with more down to earth ritual practices, such as funerary rites. The Hexateuch does indeed depict as common practice the burial of one’s dead on (or near) a mountain, especially in caves (natural or cut into cliffs). According to Genesis (Gen. 25:9-10; 35:27-29; 49:31; 50:13), Abraham’s family—Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, and himself—are interred in the Cave of Machpelah near Hebron. Joseph’s bones are laid to rest in Shechem, likely on one of the two mountainsides (Josh. 24:32). Moses’ burial takes place in an unknown spot in the vicinity of Mt. Nebo and Mt. Pisgah. His brother Aaron is entombed on Mt. Hor (Nu. 20:22-29).

But burials also take place under sacred trees. For example, Saul and his sons are buried under a tamarisk tree (1 Sam. 31:12-13). Rebekah’s nurse, Deborah, was put into the ground under the sacred oak at Bethel. Trees lend themselves to various symbolic interpretations, either along the lines of present life, health, prosperity, and fecundity (Ps.

1:3) or of mystery, spiritual presence, and eventual immortality (e.g., the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden).⁵⁸

Moses' burial, though in a mountainous area, is located specifically in a valley. Similarly, high places, originally placed on mountaintops, were later built in more convenient spots close to towns. Sometimes this would have been on hills (thus the practice of “going up” to a *bāmā*), but often just on artificially elevated platforms of rocks and dirt.

Home of the Gods—Mountains and Hilltops

Palestine is not noted for the height of its topographical elevations. Seldom in excess of 3,000 feet, its *mountainsides* would be hillsides to cultures residing in areas more distinctly mountainous. Nevertheless, the scenery can be rugged, and the hills, while lacking in overwhelming elevation in a comparative sense, do rise at times precipitously over the surrounding countryside (e.g., Mt. Tabor, Mt. Carmel, Mt. Hermon, Mts. Ebal and Gerizim).⁵⁹ In Psalm 125:2, however, Jerusalem is depicted as a city built on a mountain, surrounded by other mountains. This is a more typical description of the hill country of Palestine: a thoroughly undulating landscape without conspicuous peaks. Hebrew possesses two main designations for these rocky prominences: *har*, usually translated ‘mountain’ and *gib‘ā*, usually translated ‘hill.’ In general, the former is slightly higher than the latter though the range of meaning definitely overlaps.

⁵⁸ E. Bloch-Smith, “Burials.” *ABD* 1, 785.

⁵⁹ Here in the US, one sometimes hears Rocky Mountain folk commenting on the Great Smokies: “*These are mountains!?*” On the other hand, one ought to keep in mind not only absolute elevation but also height from base to peak. In these terms (what is called *vertical gain*), Mt. Adams in New Hampshire outshines

Consisting of nomadic wilderness tribes before settling into the hill country of Palestine, the Israelites picked up some of their fascination with mountain heights from the surrounding Canaanite cultures. Whencesoever their origins might have been, they did not come from some stretch of fertile plain out of sight of the allure of jagged hills. The deserts and coastal plains of the Near East are either fraught with crags and outcroppings themselves or else rugged scenery is well within view. Even the broad valley of Mesopotamia is flanked by 14,000-foot peaks in the Zagros Mountains of Persia. Besides, the mystical appeal of the higher elevations runs across almost all cultures and has been expressed throughout recorded history. In keeping with their inherent mythical qualities, mountains are thought to be “older than creation” or at least among the “first to be created” (Prov. 8:25; Job 15:7). Their solidity accords them a folkloric permanence: though all else fade, surely they “will last forever” (Gen. 49:26; Hab. 3:6).⁶⁰

Their closeness to the sky above—the heavens, as it were—marked mountain ridges as correspondingly closer to the abode of the deities. Thus, they were viewed as set apart and holy, sometimes to the point of inapproachability (Mt. Sinai). It is small wonder many cultures have chosen them as spots of cultic significance. The biblical place names Baal-Hazor, Baal-Hermon, and Baal-Perazim, located on mountaintops, may indicate the presence of high places. The Moabites worshiped (Baal-) Peor on a mountain of that name; the Canaanites worshiped Baal on Mt. Carmel. The Ugaritites venerated this selfsame Baal at Mt. Zaphon.

the highest mountain in the Rockies, Mt. Elbert. A nearby New Hampshire promontory, Monadnock, has become a generic term for any isolated mount rising sheerly above a surrounding plain.

⁶⁰ S. Talmon, *TDOT* 3, 430.

The Israelites tended to follow suit, sometimes almost literally. They were tempted to apostatize when coming in contact with Mt. Peor during their wilderness wanderings. Elijah's contest with the Baalite priests took place on Carmel. And Psalm 89:12 speaks of YHWH as having created Mt. Zaphon, as well as Mts. Hermon and Tabor. Psalm 48:2 appears to equate YHWH's sacred Mt. Zion with the Baalite Mt. Zaphon. It could be that in the same way Zaphon came to mean the extreme north (and thus the north point on the compass); it also came to be identified with the actual abode of YHWH in the heavens, straight above the omphalos—umbilicus mundi—of Jerusalem's Mt. Zion (cf., Job 26:7 and 37:22, where Zaphon correlates to the firmament of the heavens).⁶¹ On the Mount of Olives, directly across from Mt. Zion (as it came to be associated with Jerusalem), Solomon established high places for Chemosh and Molech to appease his foreign wives (the former deity is identified in the Baal Cycle with Athtar [Ashtar]—see next paragraph—and the latter is matched up with Baal himself in Jer. 32:35).

Divine phenomena described as occurring on these mountains bear similarities, as well. Oracles are sought on these heights both in Ugaritic literature and in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Is. 2:3; Micah 4:1-4). The appearance of Baal on Mt. Zaphon is accompanied by storm cloud, lightning, and thunder.⁶² His voice from out of the cloud shakes the mountain itself. YHWH's visitation of Moses on Sinai includes almost identical meteorological and geological events.⁶³ The defeat by YHWH of his rival, Helel ben-

⁶¹ H. Niehr, "Zaphon," *DDD*, 929.

⁶² *CTA* 4.5.68-71; 4.7.29-35; Exodus 19:16-19.

⁶³ H. Avalos, "Zaphon, Mount," *ABD* 6, 1040-41.

Shachar (Day Star, son of the Dawn), on Mt. Zaphon (Is. 14:12-17) mimics the theomachy between Baal and Athtar, son of Asherah⁶⁴ on that very mountain.⁶⁵

Of course, the Hebrews also revered mountains without any connections to the Canaanites. The testing of Abraham on Mt. Moriah (Gen. 22:1-14), the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai / Horeb (Ex. 31:18), and the pronouncing of blessings and curses on Mts. Ebal and Gerizim (Josh. 8:30-35) are all pivotal events in the journey of the Israelite people. From the initiating covenant with YHWH to their entry into the Promised Land, mountains form guideposts along the way. On Mt. Tabor, Deborah and Barak muster their troops for an assault on Sisera (Jdgs. 4:4-16). On the summit of a hill (at Rephidim), during a sweeping defeat of the Amalekites, Moses has his arms held up to maintain the aiding presence of YHWH (Ex. 17:8-13). On Mt. Hor, Aaron dies and his son Eleazar is tapped to take his place (Nu. 20:22-29). On the Mount of Olives, David weeps, prays, worships, and seeks assistance with his next move to thwart Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam. 15:30-32).

A number of these mountains do get corrupted after a time. Solomon erects idolatrous shrines in Jerusalem, and the Samaritans build a rival temple on Mt. Gerizim. Also, Hosea 5:1 takes priests to task for sullyng the name of Tabor.

Deities Venerated

The high places mentioned in the Hebrew Bible are devoted to familiar names among the Canaanite pantheon (El, Baal, Asherah, and Ashtoreth/Astarte), as well as the

⁶⁴ KTU 1.6 i.

⁶⁵ W. G. E. Watson, "Helel," *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 392-94.

gods of the Transjordanian peoples of Ammon and Moab (Milcom⁶⁶ and Chemosh).

Usually, these cult sites are not depicted as syncretistic (though their *bāmôt* may be side by side). Solomon builds separate installations to Chemosh, Milcom, and Astarte on the Mount of Olives (1 Kgs. 11:5-8), and Josiah rips them down and defiles them one by one (2 Kgs. 23:13-14). Of course, those in the pantheon may have sites in common, especially consort pairs (e.g., Baal and Astarte [Jdgs. 2:13; 10:6; 1 Sam. 7:4; 12:10] or Baal and Asherah [1 Kgs. 18:19]). To whatever else the term *’āšērîm* may refer, it definitely describes cult objects which are found across the board in most all high places. 2 Kings 23:14, for example, says that Josiah cut down the *’āšērîm* connected with the *bāmôt* dedicated to Chemosh, Milcom, and Astarte, the first two having no known association with the goddess Asherah.

The Israelites, on the other hand, engage in syncretistic practices at high places devoted to YHWH. In general, this may have excluded actual side altars, idols, *maṣṣēbôt*, or *’āšērîm* given over to other deities. Instead, it would be what J. Day calls “syncretistic Canaanitizing worship.”⁶⁷

2 Kings 17:7-8 chides the defeated Northern Kingdom not only for following other gods, but for obeying the customs/statutes [*huqqôt*] of the surrounding nations (directly or through the bad example of Israelite kings, starting with Jeroboam, son of Nebat). More than likely, it was Jeroboam’s unauthorized actions in worshiping YHWH that brought censure upon his head, not the veneration of other gods. Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, were incinerated for offering unauthorized fire before YHWH

⁶⁶ The designation Molech may be a variant of Milcom (1 Kgs. 11:7), or he may be the King (*mlk*) of the Ugaritic Netherworld [Ugaritica V—7:41; 8:17], and thus associated with the Ugaritic deity Rapiu and the related spectral Rephaim of Ps. 88:11. [c.f., G. C. Heider, “Molech” *ABD* 4, 895-98]

⁶⁷ J. Day, “Asherah,” *ABD* 1, 486.

(Lev. 10:1-2). Uzzah was struck down merely for touching the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam. 6:6-7). The *’āšērîm* and *maššēbôt* may be no more than customary accoutrements of Canaanite high places. Indeed, they are associated—at least in Ugarit—with the tree-oracle aspect of Anat (or at Ta’anach, Asherah) and the stone-oracle aspect of Baal.⁶⁸

But *maššēbôt* have many different uses (funerary, boundary markings, etc.), as do poles. 2 Kings 18:4 states that Hezekiah cut down an asherah right before it describes him breaking the bronze serpent, Nehushtan, in pieces. From Numbers 21:6-9, we know that this molten snake was mounted on a pole [*neš*] to effect healing. Though depicted as originally Yahwistic, it has become, through the influence of Canaanite practices, a temptation to idol worship for wayward Hebrews.⁶⁹ Evidently, the Dtr. does not appreciate the Israelites copying even the look of Canaanite cultic rituals. Hence, it is possible it was no more than this: “They have decorative poles by their altars; let’s put some up by ours.” This tendency to imitate could perhaps even explain the inscriptions found at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, “YHWH and his asherah” might mean nothing more than “YHWH and his sacred tree.” Deuteronomy 16:21-22 seems to say as much: “You shall not plant any tree as an asherah beside the altar that you make for the LORD your God; nor shall you set up a *maššēbâ*—things that the LORD your God hates.” The principal point remains. Rather than a propensity toward idol worship, the characteristic of high places which ended up being more frequently denounced may have been non-mandated cultic supplementation.

⁶⁸ J. C. de Moor, “Asherah,” *TDOT* 1, 440.

⁶⁹ P. J. Budd, *Numbers*, *WBC* 5, 233-234.

General Formation / Features

According to Emil G. Hirsch, a high place was “a raised space primitively on a natural, later also on an artificial, elevation devoted to and equipped for the sacrificial cult of a deity.”⁷⁰ This elevated space was sometimes circular and sometimes rectangular, sometimes dirt floored and sometimes built upon a hewn-rock platform. In later times, an already existing threshing floor was often utilized.

Since sacrifice was part and parcel of Levantine cultic ritual leading up to and including the Iron Age, one would expect to find blood altars (*mizbēḥôt*) at these sites. In many cases, memorial and incense altars (*ḥammānīm*) will be found, as well. Large obelisks or monoliths and smaller *maššēbôt* frequently accompany them, usually in a single row of columns or a pair of rows. These larger stones are called *pēgārīm*, translated “corpses” or “memorial stones.” Various other forms of idols are depicted in the biblical text: *pēšīlīm* (2 Chron. 33:19; 34:3-7; Jdgs. 3:19-26), which are graven images of wood stone, or metal, including sculptured standing stones; *maššēkôt* (Isa. 30:22, 1 Kgs. 14:9, Nu. 33:52), which are molten images; *šalēmīm* (Am. 5:26), which are generic images; *gillulīm* (1 Kgs. 15:12, 2 Kgs. 17:12, Ezek. 6:13) which are generic idols; and *maskiyyôt*, which are another type of carved stones. Besides these idols, the aforementioned *’āšērīm* (see previous paragraph) are a ubiquitous component of the Israelite high places.

The *maššēbôt* in particular are widely distributed, perhaps owing to their versatility of purpose. They are employed as phallic symbols in Canaanite religion; they also serve as memorial markers for the dead and boundary markers between land owners or national territories. They can be treaty stones or commemorate some other significant

event, like a victory in battle. They can be used to indicate the sacred dwelling space of a deity or represent the deity him or herself. Or they can stand in for a prominent (say, royal) worshiper, where the surrogate is thus perpetually in the presence of the divine.

General Uses

Most likely, these regional cultic sites were the center of communal life in the villages to which they were attached or to which they stood nearby. The universal religious rites of marriage⁷¹ and burial (Gen. 35:7—the burial of Rebekah’s nurse Deborah at the “Oak of Weeping”; Josh.24:32—the burial of Joseph’s bones at Shechem), as well as seasonal festivals (Jdgs. 21:19—Shiloh’s annual fest; Hos. 2:13-15). Civil services are rendered: the divining of personal destinies, the judicial settling of differences between quarreling parties; the providing of safe haven for those wrongly or rashly accused of murder; the bringing of tithes. Then there are national or tribal gatherings: coronations and royal weddings; the mustering of troops for battle; the establishment of covenants with foreign or divine powers; the consulting of oracles (sacred trees, the Ark of the Covenant, the High Priest’s ephod, Urim and Thummim) for guidance. And of course, the principal use was as a focus for the people’s adoration of their God through worship and sacrifice.

⁷⁰ E. G. Hirsch, “High Place,” *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

⁷¹ Weddings are not often described in the Hebrew Bible, but when Isaac marries Rebekah, perhaps (the text is ambiguous) the ceremony takes place near Beer Lahai Roi (The Living One who Sees Me), the well commemorated for saving the life of Hagar out in the Negeb. A possible high place? In the allegory of faithless Jerusalem in Ezekiel, where the city appears as a young bride to the LORD, the following statement may be instructive: “You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places....” [Ezek. 16:16a]

General Locations

At first the high places were just that, relegated to actual physical elevations (1 Sam. 9:13ff; 19, 25; 10:5), but over time they become situated side by side with hills (1 Kgs. 14:23; 2 Kgs. 16:4; 2 Chron. 28:4), or even in the valleys themselves (Jer. 7:31; 19:5ff.; 32:35).

Sometimes they are found just outside a village but within walking distance (Samuel “goes up” to the high place near Ramah where he resides) and other times within the settlement (1 Kgs. 13:32; 2 Kgs. 17:9, 29; 23:5,8; 2 Chron. 21:11 [LXX]; 28:25). They have been often found by archaeologists right inside the city wall near the gate.

Even before the incorporation of the cult in Jerusalem, the placement of key high places may have been strategically or symbolically central. There are a couple of phrases used that may indicate something on this order. One is the stock expression for Israel’s farthest North-South limits: “from Dan to Beersheba” (found at least 7 times in the DtrH and a couple of times in Chronicles). Looking at a map of Palestine, one will notice that if a straight line is plotted between these two points, it will pass almost right through Shechem, *exactly* half way. Shechem is 75 miles S of Dan and 75 miles N of Beersheba. Similarly, Josiah breaks down the high places “from Geba to Beersheba,” evidently the range of extant *bāmôt* at that time. Once again, if one lays a plumb line from Geba to the Negeb high place, Hebron will intersect it precisely in two (24 miles each direction). Of course, this placement could very well be nothing but coincidence. But it certainly gives food for thought.

Another possibility of planned placement would be a circular rather than a linear one. When the Israelites cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land, Joshua has them

set up twelve stones in a circle, presumably to represent the unity of the tribes. He does this at Gilgal (always *ha-gilgal* in Hebrew, The Circle [or Wheel]). Perhaps this may indicate that the twelve stones set up at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24) for the ratification of the Covenant (where Moses splashed blood on the *maṣṣēbôt* and then the people) were also arranged in a circle. Likewise, a number of the early Israelite towns were enclosed by circular walls: Shechem, Shiloh, and Megiddo. And then there is the annual judging circuit traveled by Samuel (“from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah,” 1 Sam. 7:16).

The high places of Ramah (Samuel’s hometown), Mizpah, Bethel, Ai, Michmash, and Gibeah roughly form a circle on the high hills N of Jerusalem. Gilgal has proved difficult to locate, and if this circular placement of *bāmôt* carries with it any genuine significance, perhaps Gilgal was a name for the array itself: “The (Sacred) Circle.” Stone circles are prevalent in ancient times (from Stonehenge to Delphi), but there is as yet no Syro-Palestinian archaeological corroboration of the Hebrew textual evidence for the circular placement of *maṣṣēbôt*.⁷²

Examples (Specific Locations)

The following charts [Nos. 1 and 2, below] show the range of possible locations for high places in the Hebrew text. Arranged from N to S, the sites in the first chart are those with clear relationships to high place accoutrements from altars to standing stones. The second chart continues with mostly the same sites, but following instead the multiple purposes to which *bāmôt* are put: convocations, coronations, and safe havens for the Ark

⁷² Zech. 14:10 also offers an intriguing (possible) use of circuits for the eschatological Jerusalem. First, a couple of old high places (Geba and Rimmon) are the starting points for a new plain ringing (*yiššōb*) the city. They are pushed down while Jerusalem is pushed up (at points circumscribing the perimeter of the Holy City).

and Tabernacle. The number in brackets displayed on the first column of the first chart tells how many total columns that site is presented on in both charts. (Presumably, the higher the number, the higher the chance such a location was indeed utilized as a high place.)

Archaeological Evidence

Relatively few material remains of possible Israelite high place locations have been uncovered to date. There are several good reasons for this scarcity:

1.) High places were generally built in vulnerable spots (on every high hill and under every leafy tree), exposed to the relentless onslaught of weather and erosion.

2.) They were subject to periodic destruction by invading military forces (Egyptians, Philistines, Assyrians, and Babylonians) and iconoclastic rival religions (Baalists, Deuteronomistic Yahwists).

3.) Later groups tended to scavenge already cut rock for their own building projects.

That which does remain is not subject to clear-cut interpretation. Many of the realia of the period had multiple possible uses. Besides having several cultic purposes, standing stones are used to mark graves and boundaries and to commemorate political treaties. Cup marks found in the stone may indicate cultic activity. But they may just as easily have been caused by the long-term effects of weather or have been used for mixing mortar or the like. Implements employed for sacrifices could also have been used for secular butchering and cooking, as well as many other domestic and agricultural functions (See archaeological tables, Israel: Iron Age I and II, after the text-data charts.)

Chart 1

LOCATIONS (from N to S) ↓	ALTARS OF SACRIFICE	t=TOMBS ma= MEMORIAL ALTARS	STANDING STONES— HEAPS— STELAE	SACRED TREES	a=ASHERIM, p=PESELIM, t=TERAPHIM, e=EPHOD, m=MASSEKOT
Dan [3] (75 miles NNE of Shechem)	1 Kgs. 12:28-30		possible border marking (repeated phrase "all Israel, from Dan to Beer-Sheba") Jdgs. 20:1; 1 Sam. 3:20, etc.		<i>petm</i> -Jdg. 18:18, 20,29-31
Golan [3] (E of Sea of Galilee)	Ex. 21:12-14 may imply that all cities of refuge contained altars (holding to altar horns guarantees "sanctuary")				
Mt. Tabor, Kedesh-Naphtali [4] (just SE of Sea of Galilee)	Dt. 33:18-19 Mt. Tabor where Zebulun and Issachar "shall offer right sacrifices" Hosea 5:1 appears to infer a bāmâ or sanctuary: a "net spread upon Tabor" (Ex. 21:12-14; 1Kgs. 1:50 imply that Cities of Refuge possessed altars.)			Jdgs. 4 Judgess Deborah, who fought from Mt. Tabor (Oak?) Jdgs. 4:11 Oak at Zaananim ['elon]	

LOCATIONS	ALTARS	TOMBS	MAŠSEBOT	TREES	ASHERIM
Ramoth-Gilead (Gad) "heights of Gilead" [3] (E of the Jordan)	(Ex. 21:12-14; 1 Kgs. 1:50 imply that Cities of Refuge possessed altars.)				
Mahanaim [4] (25 miles S of R-G on Jabbok R.)			Possible border marking—formed S boundary of half- tribe of Manasseh		
Samaria[4] (10 miles NW of Shechem)	1 Kgs. 16:31- 32 (Ahab built altar to Baal) 1 Kgs. 13:32 (predicts destruction of beth bamot in Samaria)				a-1 Kgs. 16:33 (Ahab, temple to Baal)
Shechem [7] (30 miles N of Jeru- salem, 9 miles N of Shiloh)	Gen.12:6-7 (Abraham built an altar to his 'seed') YHWH appears and speaks Gen. 33:18-20 (Jacob built an altar: 'El Elohe Israel' within sight of city) (Ex. 21:12-14; 1Kgs. 1:50 imply that Cities of Refuge possessed altars.)	†-Josh. 24:32 (Joseph's bones buried at Shechem)	Jdgs. 9:6 (Oak at mutsab=at the pillar?) Josh.24:25-32 (Jacob set up stone under the oak as renewal of covenant) miqdash-	Gen 12:6-7 ['elon]; Gen. 35:4 ['elah]; Dt. 11:30 ['elon]; Jdgs. 9:6 ['elon]; Oak of Musab / 'at the pillar' (maqom) <i>(Hill of Moreh is 30 miles north)</i> Jdgs. 9:37 "Diviner's Oak"(may be the same tree as "Oak of Moreh" [hiphil masc. part. of yrh])	

LOCATIONS	ALTARS	TOMBS	MAŠSEBOT	TREES	ASHERIM
Shiloh [3] (9 miles N of Bethel)	1 Sam. 1:3				
Ebenezer[1] (20 miles W of Shiloh)			1 Sam. 7:12 (between Mizpah and Shen)		
Gilgal [6] (7 miles NE of Bethel) (or...near Jericho and the Jordan)	a-1 Sam. 11:14-15 a-1 Sam. 10:8, a-1 Sam 13:9 a-1 Sam 15:21		Josh. 4:19-24, Josh. 7:6 (ark there) Joshua (site by Jordan)		
Ophrah [5] (4 miles NE of Bethel)	Jdgs. 6:11-32; 8:27	ma-Jdgs. 6:23-27 (Gideon destroyed father's Baal altar and erected a new one called "The Lrd is Peace")	?Jdgs. 9:5 (Gideon killed his brothers "on one stone" ['eben])	Jdgs. 6:11 (under the oak ['elah] at Ophrah) Lrd appeared to Gideon	a-Jdgs. 6:25-27 (Gideon cut down Asherah at his father's Baal cult site) e-Jdgs. 8:24-27 (Gideon made an ephod of collected gold jewelry)
Bethel (Bochim, "Tabor") [8] (12 miles N of Jerusalem and 9 miles S of Shiloh)	b-1 Kgs. 12:28-30 2 Kgs 23:15-16 (established by Jeroboam I, destroyed by Josiah) Jdgs 2:5 (Bochim) Jdgs. 21:4 (called Mizpah in vs. 5 and 8)	†-Gen. 35:7 (burial of Rebekah's nurse, Deborah) †-1 Sam. 10:2 (Rachel's Tomb: Zelzah) (Saul's destination after anointing)	Gen. 28:18-22;31:13. Luz—('Jacob's Ladder' dream) Gen. 35:14,20 (Jacob: YHWH appears and blesses) drink, oil poured out on stone	Gen. 35:8 ['allon bakut] Oak below Bethel burial of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse (Allon Bacuth) "oak of weeping" 1 Sam.10:3 ['elon]; Oak of Tabor or [BDB='of Deborah'] (Rebekah's nurse)(Saul's journey after anointing)	a-2 Kgs 23:15-16)

<i>LOCATIONS</i>	<i>ALTARS</i>	<i>TOMBS</i>	<i>MAŠSEBOT</i>	<i>TREES</i>	<i>ASHERIM</i>
Ai [3] (2 miles ESE of Bethel)		ma-Gen. 12:8; 13:3-4 (Abram called on the name of YHWH)	Josh. 8:29 (heap of boulders set up over destruction of Ai)		
Mizpah [6] (3 miles N of Ramah; 4 miles SSW of Bethel)	1 Sam. 7:9-10		Gen. 31:44-52 (maššēbâ, heap) covenant witness b/t Laban and Jacob (meal).	Jdgs. 4:5 Palm of Deborah [tomer, tamar] lay between Ramah and Bethel	
Michmash [5] (2 miles NE of Gibeah) Rimmon / Migron (1 mile SE of Michmash)		†-Isa. 22:16 (Crag or Cliff [sela']—as in Crag of Rimmon—used for tomb in Isaiah)	1 Sam. 13:23 2 pillars either side of Michmash Pass: Bozez [slippery one] and Seneh [thorny, toothy one]	1 Sam. 14:2 (Saul camps army under the Pomegranate shrub(s) [Rimmon] near Gibeah)	
Gibeah [8] (3 miles E of Ramah) Geba (alternate spelling?) [Beth-Aven (1 mile NE of Gibeah: Tel Maryam?)]	b-1 Sam. 10:5-8,13 where Saul fell in with the prophets 1 Sam. 14:35	†-Josh. 24:33 (Eleazar, son of Aaron buried at Gibeah)		1 Sam. 14:2 (Saul stayed on the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate shrub.) 1 Sam. 22:6 (Saul again stayed at Gibeah; this time, under a tamarisk tree.)	
Ramah [5] (5 miles N of Jerusalem)	b-1 Sam. 9:112-13;-10:1 (Saul and Samuel meet.) a-1 Sam. 7:17	†-Nebi Samwil (Samuel buried near Ramah, his hometown)			

LOCATIONS	ALTARS	TOMBS	MAŠSEBOT	TREES	ASHERIM
Gibeon [5] (3 miles W of Ramah)	b-1 Kgs 3:4; 2 Chr. 1:1-13 (Solomon) 1 Chr. 16:39; 1 Chr. 21:29 (Zadok)		2 Sam. 20:8 (Joab and Amasa meet at the 'great rock' in Gibeon)		
Nob [4] (a mile or two N—and within sight—of Jerusalem)	1 Sam. 21:3-6 (sanctuary with consecrated bread)			1 Sam. 21:9 Valley of Terebinth ['elah] mentioned, where David slew Goliath	e-1 Sam. 21:9
Bezer (Reuben) [2] (30 miles S of Mahanaim, E of Jordan River)	Ex. 21:12-14 may imply that all cities of refuge contained altars (holding onto altar's horns guarantees "sanctuary")				
Jerusalem [8] (12 miles S of Bethel; 19 miles NNE of Hebron)	a-2 Sam. 24:18-25 b-1 Kgs 11:7 (built by Solomon for Chemosh, Molech) on hill east of town [Mt. Olives] a-2 Sam. 15:12 at Giloh (b/t Jerusalem and Bethlehem)	ma-Starry host: 2 Kgs. 21:4 (Manasseh)	2 Sam. 18:18 memorial stela for Absalom (no children). In King's Valley—Valley of Shaveh—just SE of Jerusalem, where Hinnom and Kidron Valleys join.		a-2 Kgs. 21:3,7 (Manasseh)
Bethlehem [2] (5 miles S of Jerusalem)	a-1 Sam. 16:2-5 (consecration of Jesse's sons by Samuel) a-1 Sam. 20:6,29 (annual sacrifice)				

<i>LOCATIONS</i>	<i>ALTARS</i>	<i>TOMBS</i>	<i>MAŠŠEBOT</i>	<i>TREES</i>	<i>ASHERIM</i>
Beth Shemesh [3] (15 miles WSW of Jerusalem)	Jdgs. 13:16-19 in Zorah (2 miles N of Beth Shemesh)				
Hebron (Kiriath Arba) [6] (19 miles SSW of Jerusalem; 24 miles NE of Beersheba)	2 Sam. 15:7-12 (Absalom's conspiracy) (Ex. 21:12-14; 1Kgs. 1:50 imply that Cities of Refuge possessed altars.)	†-Gen. 23:19; 25:9-10; 35:29; 49:31. (Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah all buried in cave near Hebron.)		Gen. 13:18 ['elonei]; 14:13; 18:1 ['elon] Oak(s) of Mamre (angelic visitors) Abram's abode	
Moabite site [1] (other side of the Dead Sea)	Jer. 48:35; Isa. 16:12				
Beersheba [1] (45 miles SSE of Jerusalem)			Jdgs. 20:1; 1 Sam. 3:20, etc. (possible border marking (repeated phrase "all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba"))		
Kadesh-Barnea [2] (in Negeb) Moserah / Mt. Hor (near Kadesh Barnea?)		†-Num. 20:1 (Miriam buried at Kadesh.) †-Dt. 10:6 (Aaron buried at Moserah.) †-Nu. 20:22-29 (Aaron's Mt. Hor burial)			
Mt. Sinai [4] (traditional site: S Sinai peninsula)	Ex. 24:1-8 altar, people sprinkled with blood from bowls	ma-Exod. 17:15 ("The Lrd is my Banner") Moses at Rephidim	Ex. 24:4 (12 maššēbôt represent 12 tribes)		

Chart 2

<i>LOCATIONS</i>	<i>ARK AND TABERNACLE SITES</i>	<i>CONVOCATIONS (also: TROOP MUSTERINGS)</i>	<i>CORONATIONS</i>	<i>JUDGE CIRCUIT</i>	<i>CITIES OF REFUGE; LEVITIC CITIES</i>
Dan					
Golan					Josh. 21:27 (Levitic city in Manasseh) (City of Refuge)
Mt. Tabor, Kedesh (Naphtali)		Jdgs. 4:10-14 (Barak, Deborah with troops at Mt Tabor)			Josh. 21:32 (Levitic city in Naphtali) (City of Refuge)
Ramoth- Gilead (Gad) "heights of Gilead"			2 Kgs. 9:1-13 Ramoth-Gilead (*Jehu)		Josh. 21:38 (Levitic city in Gad) (City of Refuge)
Mahanaim		2 Sam. 17:24-18:2 (David musters his troops during Absalom's rebellion)	2 Sam. 2:8-9 (Ishbaal crowned by Abner)		Josh 21:38 (Levitic city in Gad) [also: one of Solomon's district capitals] (1 Kgs. 4:14)
Samaria		Amos 3:9 (Ashdod and Egypt commanded to "assemble on Mt. Samaria")	1 Kgs. 16:29-30 (Ahab almost certainly crowned in this city.)		
Shechem		Josh. 24:1 1 Kgs. 12:1-19 2 Chr. 10:1	Judges 9:6 (Abimelech, Gideon's son) 1 Kgs. 12:1-19 (Rehoboam) 1 Kgs. 12:20 Schechem? (*Jeroboam I)		Josh 21:21 (Levitic city in Ephraim) (City of Refuge)

<i>LOCATIONS</i>	<i>ARK SITES</i>	<i>CONVOCACTIONS</i>	<i>CORONATIONS</i>	<i>CIRCUITS</i>	<i>CITIES/REFUGE</i>
Shiloh	Joshua 18:1; 21:9; 1 Sam. 1:3,21; 2:19	Jdgs. 21:19 (annual festival to YHWH)			
Gilgal	Joshua 7:6 (site by Jordan)	1 Sam. 11:14-15 1 Sam. 13:4 2 Sam. 19:15 (David, all Judah)	1 Sam. 10:1-8 Gilgal (Saul, as designate) 1 Sam. 11:14-15 (Saul confirmed as king)	1 Sam. 7:16- 17	
Bethel (Bochim)	Jdgs. 20:27-28	Jdgs 2:1, Jdgs. 20:18-26, (made inquiry) Jdgs. 21:2-3 (called 'Mizpah' in vs. 5 and 8)		1 Sam. 7:16- 17	
Ai					Isa. 10:27-32 [as Aiath] (List of high places?)
Mizpah		Jdgs. 20:1-3, Jdgs. 21:5,8 (called 'Bethel' in vs.2) 1 Sam. 7:5-9	1 Sam. 10:24 (proclamation of Saul as king)	1 Sam. 7:16- 17	
Michmash Rimmon / Migron		1 Sam. 13:2 (Saul gathers his troops to attack Philistines at Michmash.)			Isa. 10:27-32 [Michmash, Rimmon and Migron noted] (high places?)
Gibeah (or Geba) Beth-Aven	1 Sam. 14:16-19		1 Sam. 10:26-27 (reception of Saul as king)	from Ramah— Schechem (Oak of Tabor)— Gibeah (Also, met men from Bethel) 1 Sam. 10:1-8	Josh. 21:17 (Levitic city in Benjamin:Geba) Isa. 10:27-32 [both Geba and Gibeah noted] (List of high places?)
Ramah			1 Sam. 10:1 (anointing of Saul)	1 Sam. 7:17	Isa. 10:27-32 (List of high places?)
Gibeon	1 Chr. 16:39; 1 Chr. 21:29; 2 Chr.1:1-13 (tabernacle, but w/o ark) 1 Kgs 3:4	2 Sam. 20:8 (Joab and Amasa meet at the 'great rock' ['eben gedolah] in Gibeon)			Josh. 21:17 (Levitic city in Benjamin)

<i>LOCATIONS</i>	<i>ARK SITES</i>	<i>CONVOCATIONS</i>	<i>CORONATIONS</i>	<i>CIRCUITS</i>	<i>CITIES/REFUGE</i>
Nob					Isa. 10:27-32 [Anatoth—a Levitic city—also included] (List of high places?)
House of Obed-Edom the Gittite	2 Sam. 6:10-12				
Nacon / Chidon (threshing floor)	2 Sam. 6:6; 1 Chr. 13:9 (where Uzzah died, transporting the ark)				
Kiriath- Jearim (Baalath of Judah)	1 Sam. 7:1 (Abinadab's house)				
Jerusalem	2 Sam. 6:12-23		<p>1 Kgs. 1:9 Jerusalem / Gihon? Job's Well? (Adonijah) Serpent's Stone (Stone of Zohelath in En- Rogel)</p> <p>1 Kgs. 1:33-39; 1 Chron. 29:22 Jerusalem / Gihon (Solomon) Spring outside city walls</p> <p>2 Kgs. 11:12; 2 Chron. 23:11 Jerusalem Temple (Joash) Coup against Athaliah by Jehoiadah</p> <p>2 Kgs. 23:30 Jerusalem Temple (Jehoahaz)</p>		Isa. 10:27-32 (List of high places?)

LOCATIONS	ARK SITES	CONVOCATIONS	CORONATIONS	CIRCUITS	CITIES/REFUGE
Bethlehem			1 Sam. 16:1,5,12-13 (anointing, sacrifice) David as a lad, as future King		
Hebron (Kiriath Arba)		2 Sam. 5:3-4 1 Chron. 11:3 (All [the tribes of] Israel gathered together to David)	2 Sam. 2:4 (anoint David as King of Judah) 2 Sam. 5:3-4 1 Chron. 11:3 (anoint David as King of Israel) 2 Sam. 15:7-12 Hebron / Giloh (*Absalom)		Josh. 21:11-13 (Levitic city in Judah) (City of Refuge)
Beth-Shemesh	1 Sam. 6:9-15				Josh. 21:16 (Levitic city in Judah)
Bezer (Reuben)					Josh. 21:36 (Levitic city in Reuben) (City of Refuge)
Beersheba					
Kadesh Barnea		Nu. 20:22 The whole assembly of Israel came to Mt. Hor.			
Mt. Sinai		Ex. 19:17 (All Israel at foot of mountain.)			

These next two tables give a good overview of the amount and type of evidence that has been recovered thus far. Fairly frequently it will be difficult to tell how a piece of realia was intended to be used. As already stated *maṣṣēbôt* can be employed for countless purposes and are not readily distinguished from other carved and graven images.

Israel: Iron Age I

Archaeological Site	Evidence of High Places
1. Bull Site ⁷³	Central paved area, large standing stone, bronze bull idol (votive?), possible altar, surrounding wall.
2. Tel Dan ⁷⁴	11 th -8 th Cent. B.C.E.; flight of steps to platform area, adjoining three-room sanctuary (lishka?); horned altars, implements, dice, figurines.
3. Hazor (Tell el-Qedah) ⁷⁵	Early 10 th Cent. B.C.E. temple complex, platform with niche for banana-shaped standing stone (found fallen over), incense stands, bronze figurine found with cultic implements inside a jug.
4. Mt. Ebal ⁷⁶	12 th Cent. B.C.E. ramped, stone altar in an enclosure on the SE slope of Mt. Ebal (alternatively interpreted as a watchtower, though Zertal and Zevit believe it too permanent a structure to serve that purpose)
5. Shechem ⁷⁷	11 th , early 10 th Cent. B.C.E. Fortress temple, formerly dated MB III, reinterpreted as early Iron I by L. Stagers. He sees the Temple of El Berit (the God of the Covenant) mentioned in Judges 9, in conjunction with Abimelech's massacre of a thousand innocents, as this large, fortress-like structure rather than the much smaller rebuild on top of it.

⁷³ Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 176-180.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 180-196.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 202-205.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 196-201.

⁷⁷ L. Stager, "The Shechem Temple: Where Abimelech Massacred a Thousand," *BAR* 29.4 (2003) 26-35, 66-69.

Israel: Iron Age II

1. Dan ⁷⁸	A continued site: platformed raised and nearly doubled in size, large stone altar. Elimination of lishka, addition of altar room, 4 cult corners with multiple <i>maṣṣēbôt</i> .
2. Bethsaida ⁷⁹	8 th cent. B.C.E. cult corner within city gate; platform, stone basin, engraved stele of an erect “bull” wearing a dagger at waist.
3. Megiddo	10 th Cent. B.C.E., household shrine, cult vessels, horned incense altars
4. Ta’anach	10 th Cent. B.C.E., figurine mold, 2 offering stands (one, possibly a naos, depicting “asherah” as the lion lady and an invisibly enthroned “YHWH”
5. Tell el-Far’ah (Tirzah)	9 th Cent. B.C.E., gate shrine with maṣṣēbâ, figurines, naos (temple model)
6. Shrine E207 (Samaria)	8 th Cent. B.C.E., cut from solid rock like Petra; trench 20’ wide at top and 13’ wide at bottom, about 10’ deep.
7. Jerusalem	8 th and 7 th century B.C.E. 19 circular or elliptical tumuli, (SW of Jerusalem) cairn type; heaps of rough stones; from 2 to 7.5 m. in height and from 7 to 42 m. in diameter, flight of stairs, 17-sided polygonal walls, no chambers or graves = cult setting (chthonic sacrifices?)
8. Khirbet el-Qom	8 th Cent. tomb inscription, “May ‘Uriyahu be blessed by YHWH, for from his enemies he has saved him by his asherah.”
9. Arad	9 th -8 th Cent. B.C.E., three-room sanctuary, stone altar, offering stand, cult platters inscribed as “holy,” approach steps to the inner chamber (which includes 2 small horned altars, 2 maṣṣēbôt)
10. Beersheba	Large four-horned altar.
11. Kuntillet ‘Ajrud ⁸⁰	offering benches (for placing votives), cultic bowl, store jar inscribed with “May X be blessed by YHWH of Samaria and by his a/Asherah”

⁷⁸ Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 185-196.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 149-153.

⁸⁰ W. G. Dever, “What Did the Biblical Writers Know, and When Did They Know It?” 174-87.

Pre-monarchial Legitimacy

The history of cult legitimacy among the early Hebrews is not easy to trace with any consistency. The patriarchs within the Pentateuch set up altars whenever and wherever the notion struck them. Abel sacrificed right on his home turf. Abraham brought provisions of wood and knife with him for the trek up Mt. Moriah. Jacob set up a *maṣṣēbâ* at Bethel after his celebrated dream (Gen. 28:10-22) and may well have done something similar at Peniel after wrestling with the Most High (Gen. 32:24-32). Not until the construction of the Ark of the Covenant to house the tablets of stone did Israel have one (principle) place of worship. It was, of course, not a fixed place, the Tabernacle traveling with them as they roamed the wilderness. When Joshua led them into the Promised Land, those having been allotted territory on the east bank of the Jordan asked to erect an altar. Not before articulating assurances that its construction was for symbolic purposes only were the Gadites and Manassites granted permission to build this altar (Josh. 22:10-29).

United Monarchy Tolerance

Along with the unification of the tribes of Israel under King David's administration came a tacit centralization of the cult. This was seldom strictly enforced. David's own heir Solomon being incredibly syncretistic during his reign. David's motivations for bringing the Ark to Jerusalem appear to have been more political than theological. It is not that orthodoxy was not a priority: it was simply not the reason for centralizing. He named the Elide Abiathar, a Northerner, as co-High Priest to balance the ticket alongside Zadok (probably a Southerner, whether he hailed from Kiriath Jearim,

Hebron, or Jebusite Jerusalem). The high places continued unabated and were not condemned until after David's reign (in particular, Solomon's altars set up to foreign gods and Jeroboam I's rival sanctuaries).

Divided Kingdom Syncretism and Attempts at Centralization

Temple worship flourished in Jerusalem until its destruction in 586 B.C.E., but so did regional sites for the most part. Not only were pilgrimages arduous and inconvenient in themselves, but thrice annually was simply too frequent for involved agrarians to manage. A contingent of workers had to be left behind in the fields during the high holidays. As a matter of course, local worship and sacrifice became commonplace. Some commentators have suggested that these established ceremonies—rather than practices imported from Babylon after the Exile—were the origins of the Synagogue movement which thrived during Second Temple Judaism and thereafter.

Most of the rulers in the Divided Kingdom, North and South, let these regional cultic sites alone. Both full-blown high places and scattered altars abounded, only interrupted by temporary, less than thorough reforms. Purportedly, Hezekiah did away with many of them although it is not specified how widely his iconoclasm may have stretched. According to the Chronicler, he does invite remnants of the Northern tribes of Manasseh, Ephraim, Issachar, Zebulun, and Asher to the restored Passover celebration (2 Chron. 30). Clearly, however, he had no authority whatever to rid these Assyrian-held territories of their indiscretions. Not even Josiah could accomplish a thorough housecleaning from top to bottom. Indeed, he brought the scattered Levites into Jerusalem and away from temptation. He was also able to defile and destroy the altar at

Bethel and thus put an end to idolatrous worship there. But his limited jurisdiction did not allow him to rip down the high place at Dan, for example, nor other sites on the periphery of his kingdom. It is up for debate exactly how far his borders stretched. According to some, the momentous act of centralizing the cult may not have amounted to a whole lot. If they are correct, his sovereign reach did not extend much beyond the environs of Jerusalem itself.

Post-Exilic Decentralization and Synagogue Origins

M. Weinfeld believes that “[t]he destruction of the high places and the provincial sanctuaries created a vacuum, which was filled by the institution of the synagogue. After the reform, the people who, until this point, had entered into their religious experience in a sanctuary close to where they lived or in a high place situated in their town, needed to find a substitute. The abolition of the high places without any provision of a replacement for them would have been tantamount to the destruction of daily religious experience, a thing that, unlike in our own times, would have been impossible in the ancient world. The substitute was found, therefore, in prayer and reading of the book of the Torah, which comprised the worship of God in the synagogue.”⁸¹

This is a likely scenario, but not the only one possible. The high places probably continued on, at least into the exilic era. It may be a long shot, but centralization might even have been a post-exilic phenomenon, taken over from the Mesopotamian notion that each god was headquartered in a home city. Jerusalem would have been viewed as YHWH’s Holy City and the only appropriate place to worship him. Were this idea

⁸¹ M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, AB 5, 80.

combined with the notion that Israel's God was the only God, the belief in the absolute uniqueness of Jerusalem would be thus established.

At any rate, such a scenario would have only put off for a while the introduction of synagogues as centers for local cultural and religious life. Whether subdued by the Persian governors or harassed by the returnees from the Exile, the remaining *bāmôt* either disappeared or morphed into these regional synagogues.

CHAPTER 6

THE RED HEIFER RITUAL

“Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect, in which there is no blemish and on which no yoke has been laid. You shall give it to the priest Eleazar, and it shall be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence.”

—Numbers 19:2b-3

Because the cult of Yahwism was centered on the Tabernacle during Israel's nomadic existence in the desert, there was a need to keep the entire area inside the camp as a refuge of holiness—a sacred space set aside for the worship of the Most High. This necessitated a hierarchy of holiness, starting with the Holy of Holies and working outward in concentric circles, so to speak, until one reached the uninhabited places outside the camp, out in the surrounding wilderness. It was out there in the impure open spaces that one went to be cleansed of the impurity caused by contact with the dead. This was not in order that any advantage might be gained by one so defiled, but that he or she might not despoil the precious sanctity of the inner sanctuary. It was out there that one went to be freed of contamination in a ritual, described in Numbers 19, involving the slaughter and burning of a rare red heifer, one completely faultless and without blemish.

Though our focus is still outside the Temple, this very early but nevertheless long-lasting tradition became quickly associated with the central sanctuary. There is no reason to believe that it was not performed at Shiloh or Bethel or Dan. People in these localities would have needed the purification services it provided. But we have no record of its having occurred in these places. Despite being drawn into the midst of the hierarchical establishment and out of regional control early on, it appears clearly to be a genuine vestige of a non-centralized heritage.

The Ritual Itself

The ceremony accompanying the purification offering of the red heifer (*pārâ ădummâ*) is fairly straightforward: First, a suitable cow must be found. It must be reddish in color, have no defects or blemishes, and have been unused for work pulling a plow or cart. Also, though no longer a calf, it was still meant to be a young cow—one that had not given birth (and thus the Greek translation renders “heifer” [*damalis*] where the Hebrew says “cow” [*pārâ*]).⁸² Normally, cattle are bred for the first time between the ages of fifteen and twenty-seven months.⁸³

The selected cow was led to a spot outside of camp but within clear sight of the entrance to the Tabernacle, whose flap was to remain open.⁸⁴ The cow was then slaughtered in the presence of the assistant High Priest at the time, Eleazar (in later practice, the High Priest presided).⁸⁵ The officiating priest took a bit of the blood on his finger and spattered it in the direction of the Tabernacle seven times. According to later tradition, as soon as he was finished, he wiped the blood off his hand onto the carcass of the cow.⁸⁶ He threw cedar wood, hyssop, and pieces of wool dyed scarlet on top of the slain beast, which was then set ablaze. There is some debate as to whether the red heifer was a “sacrifice” [*zēbah*] like those placed on the altar *inside* the Tabernacle. If she was indeed a sacrifice, then, unlike all the others, this cow was burnt as a whole: blood, hide, flesh, and offal. The resulting ashes were gathered up and stored in a ritually purified place, outside of the encampment. Both the burner of the sacrifice and the gatherer of the ashes were unidentified individuals. Though they must take pains to be ceremonially

⁸² P. J. Budd, *Numbers*, 212.

⁸³ E. Frimage, “Zoology,” *ABD* 6, 1129.

⁸⁴ J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 159.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

clean for participation in the rite, no other qualifications are mentioned. Some have theorized, as a result, that the red heifer began as a lay ceremony (much like the ritual of the broken-necked heifer in Deut. 21 [see chapter 4 above], which expiates any possible responsibility the townspeople of a nearby village might have for an unsolved murder out in the countryside). In both situations, the priests appear to have little to perform as if they were added as afterthoughts. In fact, M. Noth and others have viewed their inclusion as secondary emendations.⁸⁷ A later editor may indeed have supplemented these narratives in this way for two reasons: to legitimize rituals not taking place within the sacred confines of the Temple and, at least in the case of the red heifer, to validate a longstanding practice that at the time of the editing included sacerdotal activity. (But then again, most ritualistic religions incorporate procedures that vary in terms of the intensity of priestly involvement.)

What seems to be the second stage of the red heifer ceremony took place later, after an Israelite had come into contact with a dead body, a bone, or a grave, or had been under the same tent (roof) with someone who had died. Spring water was poured into a vessel containing some “burnt dust of the *hattā’*,” presumably the ashes of the heifer. A branch of hyssop, perhaps with a handle of cedar tied on with scarlet wool thread,⁸⁸ was dipped into this mixture of water and dust (or ashes), and the person to be cleansed was sprinkled with it. He or she then laundered clothes and bathed. This process was then repeated on the third and seventh day. Only after all these steps were completed was such a person considered cleansed and allowed to rejoin full participation in the cult, to re-enter the Tabernacle.

⁸⁶ J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 159.

⁸⁷ Z. Zevit, “The Eglā Ritual in Deuteronomy 21:19,” *JBL* 95/3, 379-80.

The Red Heifer's Qualifications

Criteria for selecting the sacrificial red cow were fairly strict. The rabbis thought first and foremost that it was to be a perfectly (i.e., purely) red specimen. In their opinion, the appearance of more than two white hairs in its tail would disqualify it. That this would make an appropriate animal a rare phenomenon commends this interpretation to Milgrom.⁸⁹ Others feel the concept of purity is doubled merely for emphasis: faultless and unblemished.⁹⁰ But the first term *tēmîmâ* more naturally implies “entirely healthy” (i.e., uninjured and undiseased), which is a rather commonly required trait for sacrifices and suitably complementary to “unblemished.” Also, no yoke was to have gone up, on the neck of the heifer (*lo’ ‘alâ ‘alêhâ ‘ol*).⁹¹ Taken together with “unblemished,” this condition makes it sound like a young animal—unworked, unbred, and unmarked—is in mind (thus, a heifer, usually interpreted as less than three years of age). As G. B. Gray aptly remarks, the sacrifice is to be the “best available,” unused for any profane purpose.⁹²

The Ruddiness of Blood

This particular animal needed to be not only the best available, but nigh unto unique in hue, at least according to rabbinic traditions. But the exact color of red required is difficult to determine. *’Ădummâ* might well be related to the ruddiness of blood (*dām*),⁹³ the soil (*’ădāmā*),⁹⁴ humanity (*’ādām*), human skin tanned by the sun

⁸⁸ P. J. Budd, *Numbers*, 212.

⁸⁹ J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 158.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁹¹ T. R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 362.

⁹² G. B. Gray, *Numbers* (ICC, 1903) quoted in B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 461.

⁹³ J. Milgrom, “The Paradox of the Red Cow,” *VT* 31, 62-72.

⁹⁴ J. Sturdy, *Numbers*, 134.

(*ʿādôm*-Cant. 5:10), Esau's hair or complexion (*ʿadmônî*) or his reddish-brown stew (*ʿādôm*)(“Edom”—Gen. 25:25-30), mahogany bay or perhaps chestnut coloring on a horse (Zech. 1:8), or ripened wheat. Then again, it may simply indicate a generic brown, for which there is no other distinct Hebrew term.⁹⁵ Most, however, feel it indeed has some symbolic connection to blood, to somehow increase, as it were, the amount of blood in the ashes.⁹⁶ In fact, the later tradition that saw the priest wipe the blood off his hand onto the carcass of the beast came about for that very purpose—in order not to waste a single efficacious drop.

Mary Douglas comments that blood in ashes is a magical element in the code of ancient exorcisms.⁹⁷ In this case, though, the blood was encapsulated in the ash so that continual sacrifice would not be needed, not as long as the supply of ashes held out. The very life of the animal is in the blood (Lev.17: 11), making it a powerful cleansing agent.⁹⁸ Moreover, blood is symbolic of the death of the animal and of its sacrifice necessitated by impurity in man.

As a result, blood is connected with sin and shame. “Though your sins be as scarlet,” YHWH declares through the prophet Isaiah, “they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). Blood is likewise a reminder of the covenant cut with Abraham: in YHWH passing between the halved sacrifices (Genesis 15); in the blood of the ram provided as a substitute for Abraham's son, Isaac (Genesis 22); and in the ritual of circumcision (Genesis 17). The renewal of this covenant was institutionalized in the continual sacrifices in the Tabernacle. As a

⁹⁵ A. Brenner, *Color Terms in the Old Testament*, 62-65.

⁹⁶ J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 158.

⁹⁷ M. Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers*, 165.

⁹⁸ J. Milgrom, “The Paradox of the Red Cow,” *VT* 31, 64.

matter of fact, the rite of the red heifer pays homage to this fact wherein the officiating priest must dip his finger in the blood of the heifer and sprinkle it toward the entrance of the Tabernacle. According to J. W. Wevers' interpretation of the LXX, the priest must actually take some blood to the flapped entrance of the tent and spatter it there (*apenanti tou prosopou*) "before the face of" the Tabernacle.⁹⁹ He does this seven times for a sense of completion (God is able to finish what he starts) and of perfection (the acts of God are marked by the utmost in excellence). This is a distinctive action of purification rites.¹⁰⁰

Cedar Wood, Hyssop, and Scarlet Wool

Another distinctive of purification rites held outside the camp is the inclusion of cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool. As D. P. Wright notes, "The only other place where these three elements appear together is the non-sacrificial rite for purification from scale disease [*šāra ʿat*] in Lev. 14:5-7; 51-52."¹⁰¹ In this example, lepers are cleansed in an outside ceremony involving two birds. One is killed and its blood co-mingled with cedar, hyssop, and scarlet thread in a vessel of fresh spring or river water. The other is dipped and allowed to fly off free over the open fields. The leper, sprinkled with this bloody water, is likewise (metaphorically) free of his virtual "death" within the community.¹⁰² One of the problems inherent in ascertaining the symbolic or ritual significance of these three items is that each is impossible to identify precisely. Hyssop is almost assuredly not what we call hyssop today (*hyssop officinalis*). That plant is

⁹⁹ J. W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Numbers*, 313.

¹⁰⁰ B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 462.

¹⁰¹ D. P. Wright, "Heifer, Red" *ABD* 3, 115.

¹⁰² M. Weinfeld, "Social and Cultic Institutions in the Priestly Source against Their Ancient Near Eastern Background," *Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies*, 111.

native to southern Europe and rarely found in the ancient Near East.¹⁰³ More likely it is marjoram or sorghum, both of which were plentiful enough and had sprigs absorbent enough to be used as aspergilla (sprinklers).¹⁰⁴ Much the same is true for the cedar which, though plentiful in Lebanon at the time, would not have been readily available in Palestine or the Sinai.¹⁰⁵ Then again, both could have been obtained in trade and have taken on the same significance as the “pure” red heifer: something rare, and thus precious and costly. Hyssop has typically been viewed as a purgative, connected, one would assume, with its use as an aspergill (e.g., Psalm 51:7, “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me and I will be whiter than snow.”)¹⁰⁶ Some Babylonian rites were enhanced by the use of the distinctively aromatic cedar.¹⁰⁷ Several scholars have suggested that, being a long-lived tree, it is symbolic of the continuance of life. Another, that it was viewed as special for its medicinal properties.¹⁰⁸ Also, cedar *oil* was evidently used to anoint the dead.¹⁰⁹ The “scarlet crimson” has traditionally been seen as wool dyed red.¹¹⁰ In the view of most, it is representative of blood and reminiscent of the similarly colored inner curtains of the Tabernacle, as well as some of the sacred garments of the high priest.¹¹¹ It should be noted that not only do we see this scarlet wool cropping up in the leper-cleansing rite of Deuteronomy 14, but also in a Hittite substitution ritual mirroring the Yom Kippur scapegoat release (instead involving a ram) and in the

¹⁰³ Irene and Walter Jacob, “Flora” *ABD* 2, 812.

¹⁰⁴ J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 159.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁰⁶ T. R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 366.

¹⁰⁷ P. J. Budd, *Numbers*, 212.

¹⁰⁸ T. R. Ashley, 366; T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, 123.

¹⁰⁹ T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, 123.

¹¹⁰ B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 463.

¹¹¹ J. Milgrom, 159.

scapegoat ceremony itself. Evidently, each animal (ram and goat) had a piece of this red cord tied to its horns.¹¹²

Though it is nowhere stated that more than one heifer would ever have to be burnt, the amount of ashes that could be produced at one time, from one cow, necessitated the continuation of the sacrificial part of the rite. It is interesting to note that, according to the rabbis, in later practice they would load on the hyssop and cedar in overflowing proportions in order to create a greater abundance of usable ash. They must have done a good job, for there are reports of ashes being available in a number of locations for several hundred years after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.¹¹³

Further Significance

Obviously, the ancient Israelites and their descendents found this ritual quite important. Just as surely, the additional elements of cedar, hyssop, and wool were not selected randomly. Drawing from observations on the texts, I would submit a couple of other possibilities for their origin and significance:

First, they may be representative of the categories of life (i.e., of living organisms) or at least those on land. Genesis 1 sets forth two basic types of vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees (thus hyssop and cedar) and three types of creatures: livestock, things that creep on the ground, and wild game (thus the cow and the

¹¹² M. Weinfeld, "Social and Cultic Institutions in the Priestly Source against Their Ancient Near Eastern Background," *Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies*, 113; c.f. Mishna: Yoma 4:2. Lev. 14 does not specify whether the scarlet was tied to the released bird.

¹¹³ J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 159.

crimson, which is produced by worms). Wild game was not deemed fit for sacrifice and would not have been included.

Second, they may have represented some of the other kinds of articles to be cleansed. In Numbers 31, where purification from contact with the dead is again mentioned, various other materials are cited as those to be cleansed. “Purify every garment as well as everything made of leather, goat hair, or wood” (Num. 31:20). Perhaps this is no more than coincidence, but it is not hard to see here the cow, the scarlet wool, and the cedar. (Both marjoram and sorghum are used in foodstuffs, which—as long as they were properly sealed—would also need purification. I am imagining that unsealed foodstuffs would be burned and not strewn with wet ashes! [Num. 31:22-23])

Finally, perhaps some of these materials were borrowed from the tanning process. The making of leather was a trade generally looked down upon by the Israelite culture because one had to work with lime, dye, bovine urine and excrement, and tannic acid. This was a noxious and malodorous mixture of ingredients that usually relegated one's business to just outside of town (beside a flowing stream for clean up).¹¹⁴ In the rite of the red heifer, we have many of these same elements: the cow, the dye (scarlet crimson), the living water, the location (outside of town), and the wood (tannic acid happens to come from various types of tree bark).

A similar Mesopotamian ritual does indeed appear to have a tie-in with tanning: it involves the creation of a leather skin to stretch across the Kalu temple kettle drum. Here they burned the cowhide together with cedar chips, much like with the red heifer.¹¹⁵ All this, of course, most likely would not be taking place outside a desert encampment, but

¹¹⁴ D. J. Wiseman, “Arts and Crafts” (The Tanner), *NBD*, 92.

¹¹⁵ A. I. Baumgarten, “The Paradox of the Red Heifer,” *VT* 43/4, 442-51; J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 159.

the writer may be reading things back into that timeframe anyway. In either setting, the ritual emphasizes the impurity of that which is beyond the gates as opposed to the sanctity within.

Fire and Water

However, it is not as if all outdoors—all of nature—were considered unholy. For the red heifer ritual makes abundant use of the natural purifying agents that are fire and running water. Numbers 31 specifies that those articles that can withstand it (e.g., pots and pans and utensils of “gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, and lead”) must be passed through fire and thus made pure. Other items must be sprinkled with the water of/for impurity (*niddâ*). Most translations state that the metals must incur both treatments. Evidently, the rabbis felt that this was a practical consideration: cooking utensils may have baked-on foodstuffs removable only by first passing them through fire. Vessels that had held only cold food would only need to be rinsed with water.¹¹⁶

Fire is used as a symbol of God’s power and presence throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. Though often this is a consuming fire meant to display his wrath (by bringing about complete destruction), it can also be a refiner’s fire meant to display his mercy. In such cases it is a symbolic purgative that restores right standing before God. In Malachi 3:2 it is compared to launderer’s soap as a cleansing agent. And in Zechariah 13:9, its purifying powers are applied to a remnant—to the survivors—just as with the red heifer rite.

Most purification rites involving water require that it be clean and from a natural source (i.e., not from a cistern). In only a very few rituals is anything mixed with the

water. There are the waters of bitterness in Numbers 5, where dust from the floor of the Tabernacle is added to the drink of a woman suspected of adultery. This potion has no effect if she is innocent, but causes her “thigh to waste away” and her “abdomen to swell” if she is guilty. Similarly, Moses blends water with gold dust (ground from the overlay of golden calf idol) and forces his wayward charges to gulp it down (Ex. 32:20). In each of these cases, the guilty party drinks in, as it were, the consequences of his or her sin.

A third ritual assumes no such guilt, at least not directly. This is the aforementioned cleansing of lepers in Leviticus 14. Here, blood is dripped into a bowl of water. Rather than being imbibed, however, the resulting mixture is sprinkled on the defiled person. Clearly, the blood could be meant to enhance the purifying action of the water. But it could also mark the recipient as touched by “death” and in need of the symbolic or mystical life-giving properties of blood.

It is somewhat unclear what the waters of *niddâ* in Numbers 19:20-21 are meant to designate. Are they like the waters of bitterness in Numbers 5? Or are they like the purging waters of Leviticus 14? They certainly appear to have more in common with the waters used for cleansing lepers. It is not so much about guilt being removed as association with death. This is a different type of impurity, but nonetheless defiling.

But how do they effect the changes that they do? Perhaps these are waters *of* impurity where the person’s defilement is re-enacted, as it were, with impure water and then washed off with clean. Or perhaps they are waters *for* impurity (“de-impurifying”

¹¹⁶ J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 261.

waters, if you will) as Milgrom and others have suggested.¹¹⁷ In this case, the ash-laced waters are a detergent agent—lathering soap—which is then rinsed off.¹¹⁸

Ḥaṭṭā't, the word used for the slaughter of the beast, is regularly translated as either “sin-offering” or “purification-(from sin)-offering,” based on the piel of the corresponding verb and on common-sense (what else would a sin-offering do but purify from sin?). But *niddā* has no corresponding piel usage, and no other potential renderings as cleansing / purifying outside of these passages in Numbers (i.e., Chapters 19 and 31). I prefer therefore a significance that bespeaks the abhorrence with which the Israelites held even the appearance of death and matches it with a natural distaste for the blood of menstruation to which the term *niddā* refers. Then again, the LXX renders it simply as *hudor rantismou*, “water of sprinkling / cleansing,” completely bypassing any sense of “impurity.”¹¹⁹

Perhaps, in the final analysis, it would be best to assume the waters can comfortably carry both meanings, for they do not conflict. Physical impurity as an element of purification may serve as a form of penance, which in turn purges the spirit.

The So-Called Paradox

Impurity as an element of purification and impurity as a byproduct of purification are all the explanation needed for the conundrum that supposedly stumped Solomon and mystified the rabbis: that which purifies the defiled, defiles the pure.¹²⁰ Strikovsky and

¹¹⁷ J. Milgrom, “The Paradox of the Red Cow,” *VT* 31, 64.

¹¹⁸ Milgrom conceives of the blood of the *ḥaṭṭā't* also as a detergent, but the added use of oil to anoint the altar (Ex. 29:36; Lev. 8:10-15) for cleansing militates against such a notion's being comprehensive.

¹¹⁹ J. W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Numbers*, 315.

¹²⁰ J. Milgrom, “The Paradox of the Red Cow,” *VT* 31, 62-63. It is worth noting that the Hebrew idiom for canonical Scripture is that which “defiles the hands.”

Milgrom basically agree that there are two levels of impurity being described.¹²¹ The person defiled by contact with a corpse must first be sprinkled and then wash himself, repeating this process three times over. The handlers of fire and ash, as well as the attending priest, need only wash their clothes, bathe, and wait till sundown to be pronounced clean. The cleansing agent—the waters of *niddā*—even if not impure in and of itself would contain residual impurities after use. It is not in the least illogical to have to clean *oneself* after scrubbing a filthy tub or giving a pet dog a bath. Also, as Milgrom points out, this rite is called a *ḥaṭṭā't*, which in every other case does indeed defile its handlers.¹²²

A. I. Baumgarten, on the other hand, unconvincingly asserts that the handles become infused with *too much holiness* (from contact with the consecrated ashes) and must be brought back into “balance.”¹²³ Yet Moses, fresh off his tête-à-tête with YHWH on Mount Sinai, is not required to cleanse himself. And though the others are afraid of his preternaturally glowing face, he beckons them near (Exodus 34:29-35).

Conversely, the Israelites to whom he came down from off that mountain had defiled themselves. Though that generation would never set foot in the Promised Land, their children would. As God told Moses in rejecting his plea to be punished in place of the headstrong people, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book” (Ex. 32:33).

¹²¹ A. Strikovsky, “Red Heifer,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 14, 13-14.

¹²² J. Milgrom, “The Paradox of the Red Cow,” *VT* 31, 63-64.

¹²³ A. I. Baumgarten, “The Paradox of the Red Heifer,” *VT* 43/4, 442-51.

The idea that the sins of the fathers are visited on their children was a common one in Israel (Ex. 20:5; 34:7; etc.) and throughout the ancient world¹²⁴ (though the prophets sought to dispel this notion). As Ezekiel 18:20 and Jeremiah 31:30 relate, the *individual* who sins is the one who will die. This natural tendency to equate death and the punishment of sin can be expected to permeate funerary ceremonies and find its way into corresponding purification rites: “Our fathers sinned and are no more, and we bear their punishment” (Lamentations 5:7). *Personal* remorse and grief can also go hand in hand. Survivors wonder whether they themselves are somehow to blame for tragic circumstances and whether the same can happen to them.

At the point in the narrative where the red heifer instructions are inserted, Israel has just been through a major rebellion. It had resulted in the deaths of the Korahite rebels and in a general plague amongst the people (similar to the fate, coincidentally, of the reveling worshiper of the golden calf: massacre followed by plague). Immediately following the insertion are the deaths of Aaron and Miriam and the foreshadowing of Moses’ demise. He is told he will not be crossing over the Jordan into the Promised Land as a result of disobedience (or alternatively, his momentary self-righteous disrespect for God). It would seem the editor of the material was indeed trying to make a connection between the continuance of life and ritual purity, between the continuance of God-appointed leadership and ceremonially renewing one’s allegiance to the covenant.

¹²⁴ J. A. Thompson, *Jeremiah, NICOT*, 578: “In Israel and the Ancient Near East in general, as well as in many primitive cultures, a sense of collective responsibility largely prevailed in areas like morality and law” (commentary on Jer. 31:29).

Besides the purifying agents of blood and living water, the ash involved in the red heifer rite includes fecal matter, symbolic of humiliation.¹²⁵ Though radical penance was not a significant aspect of repentance or grief in the Hebrew Bible (limited mostly to rending of garments, the wearing of uncomfortable sackcloth, and rolling in ashes), the more extreme measures of tattooing and the slicing of flesh were common mourning customs in adjacent cultures.¹²⁶ These, the priests would have been eager to discourage. An element of shame in the purification process may have helped accomplish this.

The Dangers of Syncretism

The origins of the rite of the red heifer are clouded in the shadows of prehistory. What does seem convincingly clear is that the customs of the surrounding cultures were freely borrowed and stubbornly practiced by Israel even when these came into conflict with the practice of their own evolving monotheistic cult. The Yahwistic priesthood, with what they understood as the leading of the spirit of God, may well have adapted some of these traditions in order to reel strays in, back into the confines of the faith.

In transforming this particular ceremony though, they would have had a monumental task on their hands. There was little room in a cult that fiercely protected the sanctity of the encampment (in order that the Presence of YHWH might not depart there from) to venture outside the compound. Israelites were instructed in no uncertain terms that “sacrifices” performed anywhere other than within the Tabernacle would be

¹²⁵ Malachi 2:3 speaks of the offal of sacrifices being spread on the Levites’ faces, to shame them for being untrue to the covenant YHWH initiated with them (initiated, by the way, as a reward for their heeding the call of Moses to slay the guilty golden-calf idolaters).

¹²⁶ J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, *WBC* 4, 320-21. These more radical forms were certainly not unknown in Israel: Lev. 19:28; Dt. 14:1; Jer. 16:6; 41:5; 47:5; 48:37.

met with stiff penalty: they would be cut off from the people of God (Lev.17: 2-5).¹²⁷

Indeed, the mere butchering of livestock in one's own field, and thus spilling their blood away from the Tabernacle, was proscribed.

Most likely the sacrifice of the red heifer was an attempt to rein in some objectionable funerary practices: to allow the common folk to deal with their inherent fears of death and afterlife without allowing them to be sidetracked into pagan speculations. Burial rites, in general it would seem, tend to be made up of some of the more conservative of customs, highly resistant to change.¹²⁸ It was imperative that rituals concerning the dead be incorporated into the cultus so as to leave the people the comfort of some vestige of the outward forms of their syncretistic traditions without compromising loyalty to YHWH alone.¹²⁹

The danger to Israel was that many of the surrounding ancient Near Eastern cultures had flourishing cults of the dead.¹³⁰ For them the dead remained an ongoing part of the community, whose power was duly respected and feared. These peoples prepared their dead for the afterlife, appeased and nourished them, often in a continuing ritual.¹³¹

Conversely, it was the duty of the Levites to urge the Israelites to draw a sharp distinction between the living and the dead. The dead were no longer to remain an active part of the community, and after a period of mourning, life was to go on as normal.¹³²

¹²⁷ J. Milgrom, "Prolegomena to Leviticus 17:11" in *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology*, 100-02.

¹²⁸ Not only do funerals mark a significant life event, but their somberness ought to fend off faddishness. It should be noted, however, that we have no record of graveside committal services from that era (J. B. Payne, "Burial," *ISBE* 1, 560).

¹²⁹ Perhaps like elements of the Roman Saturnalia and the Germanic Yuletide have been incorporated into Christmas. To this day we have all sorts of little folk traditions woven into our wedding and funeral services.

¹³⁰ C. A. Kennedy, "Dead, Cult of the," *ABD* 2, 106.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹³² T. Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel" in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, 399-414.

Not only was worship of the dead strictly forbidden by the first three commandments, but offerings made to or for the dead were held to be off limits (Deut. 26:13-15).

Furthermore, it was forbidden to consult or communicate in any way with the departed (Deut. 18:11). For example, Saul's conference with Samuel through the necromancer of Endor was clearly unsanctioned. YHWH, the I AM THAT I AM, wished to be unambiguously associated with life. Everything associated with death (or even reminiscent of death, such as some of the symptoms of leprosy) defiled that which was sacred.¹³³ And thus the need for a purifying rite had to be filled.

Comparisons with Funeral Rites

Over the course of time, the most common beneficiaries of this cleansing would have been relatives of the deceased, whose responsibility it was to see to a proper burial. It is not surprising then that many contemporary funerary customs would come to be mirrored in the rite of the red heifer.

As a first example, bereavement practices gave prominent place to the use of dust and ashes (Est. 4:1; Jer. 6:26).¹³⁴ Though these were not generally mixed with water, they were nonetheless “doused” on the person (Ezek. 27:30). Sitting or rolling in ashes and dust often took place outside of camp on the ash-heap (or dung-hill) where refuse and carcasses and excrement were regularly burnt (1 Sam. 2:8). This perfunctory spirit of abjectness finds its counterpart in the burning of the heifer outside of town, hide and blood and offal (that is, dung) and all.

¹³³ M. Douglas, *In the Wilderness*, 24.

¹³⁴ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 264.

Secondly, special notice was given to the third and the seventh days. Burial traditions called for three days of watchfulness (to make sure the deceased really was dead and not in a swoon of some kind) and a full week of intense mourning and grief (Gen. 50:11). The week was marked by the rending of clothes (1 Sam. 4:12; 2 Sam. 1:2), the wearing of sackcloth (Is. 32:11), the keeping of an unkempt appearance (2 Sam. 12:20), the shaving of one's head (Jer. 48:37) or the plucking of hair and/or beard (Is. 22:12), the rolling in dust or covering one's head with ashes (Jer. 25:34), the wailing of mourners (Jer. 49:3)—even hiring “extras” in order to wail all the louder (Eccl. 12:5), fasting (Ps. 35:13), and the playing of dirges or the singing of laments (2 Sam. 3:33; Amos 8:10).¹³⁵ After the one week, the bereaved cleaned up and, for the most part, went on with life. Similarly, the person cleansed of contamination from contact with the dead could rejoin cultic life within the gates after his or her weeklong ordeal (with purifications on those third and seventh days).

A later funeral custom called for the pouring of water out of a vessel onto the ground to serve as a reminder of the scarcity of water and thus the preciousness of life. According to rabbinic tradition, this practice was first enacted for the death of Miriam (recorded in Numbers 20:1, immediately after the passage in which the red heifer ritual is described). Though the ash-water mixture of the latter is dashed or sprinkled instead of poured, both traditions involve the dispensing of water from a vessel.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ J. B. Payne, “Burial,” *ISBE* 1, 557, 560.

¹³⁶ Yoreh De'ah 339:5.

Other Purification Rites

There are also a plethora of similarities between various purification rituals in the Hebrew Scriptures. Though they do not seem to admit to rigorous systematics, there is a general rational consistency. Fundamental examples would include purification for leprosy (Lev 14), national sin (Lev 16), and contamination by contact with the dead (Num 19), but other rites (e.g., for mildew, childbirth, or genital emissions) follow the pattern to varying degrees.

These three ceremonies all feature the sacrifice and burning of at least one animal, the bathing of bodies, the washing of clothes, and the sprinkling and/or daubing of blood. Two of them present female animal to be slain, a comparative rarity. Perhaps this is due, as Milgrom suggests, to their being sacrificed explicitly for individuals.¹³⁷ Two of them depict the symbolic “freeing” of the defiled person through the release of an animal. The red heifer ritual does not, perhaps because it treats the finality of a real death, a going down to Sheol never to return (or if so, only at the end of the age). Only the Day of Atonement leaves out the cedar, wool, and hyssop. This could indicate their significance has something to do with death or the appearance of death.

The rite for the cleansing of lepers contains a couple of idiosyncrasies: the shaving of body hair and the application of oil. More than likely these are meant to enhance the recovery from illness. Besides beneficial hygienic effects—nowadays we know it can prevent the spread of infection and is a common prerequisite for surgery—shaving one’s body smooth could represent a return to newborn status, a metaphorical rebirth. It also frequently represented shame, mourning, or separation: each potentially relevant here. Oil was often applied as a healing agent (Isaiah 1:6) or as an

announcement of good health or mood (2 Samuel 14:2, Ps. 104: 15). Healing as such would not be a necessary component of the other rites.

Thus it would appear that the red heifer ritual was well within the normal parameters for purifications. The many correspondences with the other major rites can be clearly seen in the chart at the end of this chapter.

Conclusions

The ritual of the red heifer is a fascinating if enigmatic phenomenon of the Yahwistic cult of Iron-Age Israel. To what extent we have the original ceremony described in Numbers 19 cannot be definitively ascertained. It is enough in keeping with other Hebrew ritual slaughters and purification rites to be of later priestly origin. But it is also sufficiently distinct from Levitical practices (and similar to ancient Canaanite religiosity) to have begun very early on.

Whereas Yahwism centered on the Ark within the adytum (or, in terms of daily practice, around the altar of burn offerings just outside the Holy Place), this particular ritual is enacted outside the encampment. It shares elements in common with funerary customs of the day and with the worship traditions of surrounding cultures, including their cults of the dead. Also, the role of the priest is minimal at best.

Like the customary procedures of the monotheistic priesthood, however, its very *raison d'être* is the preservation of the sanctity of the Tabernacle. It is the severity of this defilement that calls for its purification being performed outside the sanctuary. In spite of some idiosyncrasies (e.g., the pure color prerequisite or the purification through the

¹³⁷ J. Milgrom, "The Paradox of the Red Cow," *VT* 31, 65.

use of ashes), the rite is more or less in keeping with other *hattô* ʔ, right down to the ritual bathings, the sprinkling of blood, and the complete burning of the sacrificial animal.

Perhaps the future discovery of ancient Near Eastern texts or the better understanding of those we already possess will shed the light we need, and will finally unveil the original significance of the enduring mystery of the red heifer ritual.

PURIFICATION RITES

		Leviticus 14	Leviticus 16	Numbers 19
animal	sacrificed	clean bird	goat for YHWH (sin offering for the people)	red heifer (no defects, never yoked)
		2 male lambs and 1 ewe lamb (no defects)	bull (sin offering for the high priest) and a ram (burnt offering)	
	set free	...in open fields: another clean bird (dipped in first bird's blood)	...in wilderness: goat for Azazel	
fire		2 lambs cooked and eaten; other lamb burned up	ram cooked and (perhaps) eaten; bull and goat burned up	burn hide, flesh, blood, and offal of heifer, plus cedar, yarn, and hyssop
water	sprinkling	mixed with blood, cedar, yarn, hyssop (7X)		mixed with ashes of blood, cedar, yarn, hyssop (7X)
	bathing	person to be cleansed	high priest (2X), scapegoat handler, and hide burner	priest, heifer burner, and person to be cleansed
	laundering	clothes of person to be cleansed		clothes of priest, heifer burner, ash gatherer, cleanser, and person to be cleansed
hair	shaving	all of body of person to be cleansed		
blood	sprinkling		before atonement cover (7X each, bull blood / goat blood)	<i>toward</i> tent of meeting (7X)
	daubing	right ear, thumb, toe of person to be cleansed (lamb's blood) [also done to ear, thumb, and toe of priest during consecration rites ...Exodus 29]	on horns of altar (7X, bull and goat blood)	
oil	sprinkling	before YHWH (7X)		
	daubing	right ear, thumb, toe of person to be cleansed		
	anointing	head of person to be cleansed		
flour		grain offering		

CHAPTER 7

THE ORIGIN OF THE ZADOKITE PRIESTHOOD

“He (the angel) said to me, ‘This chamber that faces south is for the priests who have charge of the temple, and the chamber that faces north is for the priests who have charge of the altar; these are the sons of Zadok, who alone among the descendents of Levi may come near to the LORD to minister to him,’”

—Ezekiel 40:45-46

In terms of its affects upon the socio-political and religious life of Ancient Israel, the establishment of the United Monarchy was debatably a greater watershed than either the Exodus or the Exile. We have a change from a loose tribal confederacy to a federal oligarchy of king and priesthood, from a focus on rural and domestic Levitical ritual to a centralized pilgrimage-based cult, from a defense relying on local militias to a standing army, from a theocracy led by inspired judges to an alliance of powerful man-made institutions.

In other words, we have an entire society thrown on its head, but with little evidence of extraordinary tumult. Certainly, we have the massacre of Shilonites at Nob and the decimation of the house of Saul following his defeat. We have Absalom's and Adonijah's coup attempts, as well as Sheba's and Jeroboam's rebellions. Thus, it was not an eventless house cleaning. It was not bloodless. But it appears to have been limited in scope: both in terms of time and place. Indeed, immediate individuals are discredited: Eli and his progeny, Saul and his line, David's seditious sons. Narratives of the former glory days of the opposition are, on the other hand, left intact. New heroes are perhaps spliced into the history of the people, but no attempt is made at a brand new telling. Samuel and his predecessor judges are still romanticized. Moses remains a figure larger than life.

Saul's Benjaminites become an integral part of Judah. Even Abiathar is allowed to flourish in exile in Anathoth, where his Shilonite influence may be reflected on down the way in Jeremiah.

There is a chance, of course, that this apparent continuity in the midst of upheaval is but the result of a later editor weaving disparate and polemical stories together into one narrative. Other than the reluctance to alter a sacred text, however, scholars have yet to identify sufficient justification for the blending of traditions from opposite camps. If all these texts were deemed holy and untouchable, then to whom were they sacred and why? If they indeed originate amongst adversaries, why have they been incorporated together?

The answers one gives to these and similar questions will highly impact the conclusion one draws concerning Zadok and his cohorts. The dating and comparative reliability of the various authors involved—the Priestly Writer, the Deuteronomist, the Chronicler—as well as the interpretation of their motives, will go a long way toward determining what we believe we can and cannot know. We possess a confusing and convoluted set of data.

Sorting out these various strands is a Herculean task. The conflicting interests of David, establishing an expanding kingdom rather than heading a conglomeration of feuding tribes; Abiathar, holding onto the tenuous power of a fading tradition; Zadok, coming into his own against all odds; and Nathan, carrying on the ethical watchdog role that Samuel filled before him. But these are not the only conflicting interests we must ultimately explore. We must consider the fight between Jeroboam I and his Josianic (and/or exilic) Dtr antagonist. We must also look ahead to the aftermath of Josiah's iconoclastic reform, where his successors are pitted against Jeremiah's polemics. These

last will be taken up in ensuing chapters. Presently, however, we turn to the tensions inherent in the original centralization under David and his innovative choice of Zadok as co-high priest.

We must do better at unraveling how these tensions came to be and how they played out, using all the methodology within our means: textual, literary, historical, archeological, sociological (comparative cultural), and psychological. It will not be possible within the limited range of this chapter to definitively respond to these uncertainties. I can only react to the logical argument of the current theories.

Who was Zadok?

In determining exactly who this Zadok was, whose descendants came to dominate the Israelite priesthood, we must establish reasonable replies to the following queries:

1. What conflict—what precise event—brought about this revolution in the priesthood?
2. Between which two parties did this infighting occur?
3. From which tribe or clan or region might Zadok have originated?
4. How were the kingship and the priesthood interrelated?
5. How would the whole situation have most logically resolved itself?

Theories have abounded as to who these mysterious adversaries may have been. Guesses range from political ones (Saul against David, North against South, Urban against Rural) to cultic ones (Priestly Class against Levite, Aaronid against Mushite, or Amramite against the rest of the Kohathites [Hebronites and Uzzielites]). Nobody seems

to know quite what to do with the Korahites. A couple of the genealogies of the Chronicler (1 Chr. 15 and 23) appear to leave Korah out of the picture entirely (in keeping with his destruction in the wilderness). Another (1 Chr. 6) clearly ties him to the rise of Samuel. And then there are the psalms attributed to the “sons of Korah.” In fact, the chief Temple musician, Heman, comes from Samuel’s line. F. M. Cross cites the Aaronid rivalry with Korah as a precursor to their later dispute with the Mushites.¹³⁸ One can easily see in the beating of the censers of the Korahite dead into an altar covering such a provocative act as might well have lingered in memory for quite some time (Nu. 16:36-40).¹³⁹

Political Conflicts

Surely, the political conflicts cannot be excluded from the overall scheme of things. For it is clear the developing kingship brought with it the power to bestow or retract priestly power. Saul nearly obliterated the Shilonite line, David established a brand new Zadokite line, Solomon exiled Abiathar (and was perhaps responsible for the Gershonite removal to the far north), and Jeroboam I created a non-Levitical priesthood in Bethel. But theories that directly involve the intraconfederate conflicts—especially the one between Saul and David—come up short in the search for significant corroborating evidence. While Zadok may have been in service at Gibeon prior to his appearance there in 1 Chronicles 16:39, there is absolutely nothing to tie him to the oracle in 2 Samuel 21:1, indicting Saul for the massacre at Nob. Even if he were the source of this

¹³⁸ F. M. Cross, *CMHE*, 205-206.

¹³⁹ I myself would like to determine if Elisha could have been a Korahite (due to the epithet “baldhead” *qere^ah* given him by some Bethelites [thus, Aaronids?]) If not, might it indicate a tonsure perhaps (for novice or Nazirite)?

condemnation, why would that fact alone merit sufficient gratitude from David to warrant an appointment to a joint high priesthood with Abiathar (who would, one would imagine, have been even stronger in his denunciation of Saul!) Of course, such a Zadok might have had to come over to David's side, but not nearly as early as a Jebusite or Hebronite Zadok.

The other theory of a *Gibeonite* Zadok, which makes him the son of Abinadab and brother of Uzzah/Eleazar, fails to impress. Though we may be able to interpret "Ahyo" as "his brother" rather than as a proper name, that still would not make Zadok that brother. Added to this argument from silence are the difficulties of chronology (Zadok would supposedly be in his 80's at his installation to the high priesthood) and the double identity of Uzzah as Eleazar. The first problem may be dealt with after a fashion. After the abortive attempt at transferring the Ark from Kiriath Jearim to Jerusalem (in which Uzzah loses his life and David loses his nerve), the "footstool of God" remains with Obed-Edom for a scant three months. So the age differential must refer to Eleazar's consecration as protector of the Ark at the start of its twenty-year stay in Kiriath Jearim (1 Samuel 7:1-2). But the text does not give Eleazar's age at the time; neither does it state that the consecration took place immediately. Eleazar could have taken over the duty from his father, in whose house the Ark of the Covenant resided. On the other hand, concluding that Uzzah and Eleazar are one and the same person is even more problematic. Perhaps a simpler remedy would be to posit Uzzah as Abinadab's grandson. This would make Zadok both the son and the descendant of an Eleazar (cf., 1 Chr. 24:3).

Of course, if the split (in the priesthood) occurred later on in the Solomonic or Josianic tenures, or even in the exilic or restoration eras, our theories would need to

change accordingly. Solomon felt compelled to banish the Shilonite/Mushite element (represented by Abiathar) for its ill-advised alliance with Adonijah. Perhaps he also needed to be “his own man” and step out from under the shadow of his father. Or perhaps political/military entanglements with Egypt, Philistia, Phoenicia, or Aram forced his hand.

Josiah, on the other hand, was absorbed with centralization and the purity of the national cult. He was looking to minimize the chances of disloyalty and rebellion amongst the Levites, spread throughout the hinterlands of his kingdom. The returning exiles can be seen as either the winners or the losers of whatever power struggles went on in Babylon. They are either a remnant still true to the original intent of the cult and looking to restore Israel's glory days, or a group of malcontents pushed aside in Mesopotamia and searching for a new stomping ground (i.e., they have a “we're going to go take our ball and play elsewhere” attitude). Eventually, of course, they emerge the long-term victors: Zadokites holding sway at least until the Hasmoneans take charge. There can be little doubt; the significance of the change is felt deepest in the post-exilic era. As Nelson points out, the Zadokites don't even merit a mention during Josiah's reform.¹⁴⁰

But to take the entire pre-exilic narrative corpus to be etiologies for the legitimization of a line of priests (and a future king) is to unnecessarily minimize the historicity of the underlying stories, not to mention the archeological and textual evidence we do have from the United Monarchy. It may not be much as yet, but it is enough to put the nay-sayers on the defensive. The shared purposes of the Davidic and Josianic eras—to consolidate political and religious power—give us little reason to choose between

them. Whoever the exact actors in the play might be, the warring factions and their motivations would most likely stay fairly analogous. The politicians were definitely involved “pulling strings,” but who were the direct combatants?

Rival Priesthoods

We will confine ourselves for the moment to the era of the United Monarchy. Though we cannot discount the political aspects of each possible conflict therein, the principal engagement is almost certainly between rival priestly lineages. The biblical conflicts which Cross mentions set up these plausible contestants:

1. The righteous Shilonites vs. the corrupt Elides.
2. The Korahites (and/or Hebronites, Uzzielites) vs. Aaronids.
3. The descendants of Phinehas (the Eleazarites) vs. the Ithamarites.
4. The (Hebronite) Aaronids vs. the (Shilonite) Mushites.

Any details regarding a possible reform within the Shilonite camp are missing from the extant texts. We have the indirect evidence of the Nobite stance in favor of David,¹⁴⁰ and in David's retention of Abiathar when he establishes his court. Be that as it may, the reprieve only lasts until Abiathar makes the mistake of “backing the wrong horse” in Adonijah. The Shilonites fade from history.

As regards the second option, Olyan is the only one I know advocating a version of it. His view that Zadok was not an Aaronid from Hebron stems from Hebron's (the

¹⁴⁰ R. D. Nelson, *The Role of the Priesthood*, 191.

¹⁴¹ 1 Samuel 21:1-9.

Calebites') participation in the failed coup attempt by David's son Absalom. That does not sound like fertile ground for a loyal Davidide compatriot. Instead, Olyan turns his gaze southward to the Negeb. There is some slight evidence (1 Chron. 12:26-28) to suggest familial ties between Zadok and a couple of David's early allies: Jehoiadah and his son Benaiah (eventually commander-in-chief of Solomon's military forces).¹⁴² If this is indeed *the* Zadok who presided over the Jerusalem Temple under David, then he hails from the far south in Kabzeel. This is taken as a possible connection with Mushite / Kenite influences in and around Kadesh Barnea and Arad. Influences directly opposed to the Aaronid majority in Hebron and in league with the Shilonites.¹⁴³ Though later given an Eleazarite pedigree (by the Chronicler), this hypothetical Zadok would actually be a Mushite / Kenite (or perhaps an Ithamarite). Technically, this reconstruction assumes more than we presently know about sociological particulars in the Negeb, but it neatly and plausibly fits the available data.

The last two options proffered by Cross are likewise plausible and neat in terms of the bigger picture while remaining speculative in the details. Since they overlap a great deal, I will treat them as one. For whether we speak of Eleazarites and Ithamarites, or Aaronids and Mushites, he is referring to the same regional rivalry: the Hebronites and the Shilonites.

Ostensibly, the biblical record depicts both these houses as Aaronid. Hebron is at the center of the Levitical cities designated for the Aaronids and served as the power base for David's fledgling kingdom. The Deuteronomist gives Eli no pedigree, but the

¹⁴² S. Olyan, *Zadok's Origins*, 185-190.

¹⁴³ Of course, Olyan is not at all sure that Hebron is Aaronid. It is named as an Aaronid Levitical city right enough. And Caleb the spy's forbear Hur helped Aaron hold Moses' arms up in battle against the

Chronicler ties him to Aaron's fourth son, Ithamar. We must go to Old Greek sources for an alternative: 2 Esdras 1:2 actually makes him a descendant of Eleazar. Yet this still makes him an Aaronid. Going the speculative route, Wellhausen and Cross after him postulate a Mushite priesthood, based partly on an interpretation of 1 Samuel 2:27-28.

The “man of God” who delivers the oracle to Eli speaks these words for YHWH:

“Did I not clearly reveal myself to your father's house when they were in Egypt (as slaves) under Pharaoh? I chose your father out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod in my presence.”

This revelation was indeed directed toward the sons of Amram, but there exists no contraindication anywhere to the tradition that it was specifically given to Moses' brother Aaron. Certainly, Moses performed some priestly functions. But other than Jonathan (Moses' grandson) showing up as a priest in Dan, the progeny of Israel's greatest prophet take on no greater official role than safeguarding the royal treasury.¹⁴⁴ To be sure, there are, as Cross points out, promises meted out in the name of Moses.¹⁴⁵ But they appear to be applied to him personally (Exodus 33:7-11) or to a larger group than his own direct descendants (e.g., the Levites in Deut. 33:8). It is true that the Mushite hypothesis lends a certain symmetry to the situation under Jeroboam I, where an Aaronid Bethel and a Mushite Dan in the North match an (earlier) Aaronid Hebron and a Mushite Shiloh in the South.¹⁴⁶

Amalekites [Exodus 17:10-12]. But even though one of them [Bezalel] crafts the furniture for the Tabernacle, the Calebites are normally seen as Judahites, not Levites.

¹⁴⁴ Though believed to be retrojected into the genealogy, Shubael appears in 1 Chron. 26:24.

¹⁴⁵ F. M. Cross, *CMHE*, 196-197.

A Brand New Priesthood?

Though it has some significant weaknesses to overcome, the theory, which is probably most widely followed today, is the Jebusite hypothesis. According to this scenario, David chooses a pagan Jerusalemite to begin a new priestly order completely loyal to him and his monarchy. As a pragmatic necessity, he keeps the one remaining link to the Shilonites (Abiathar) around as a transitional figure, but his clear intention is to create a unique hereditary line without previous allegiances to overcome.¹⁴⁷

First suggested by S. Mowinckel in 1916, the hypothesis varies according to the motivations scholars see for David's elevation of this unknown, unpedigreed usurper of clerical power. Some believe the priest was being rewarded for housing the Ark until a proper shrine could be built. According to Rowley, for example, Zadok was a pagan priest in the Jebusite cult of El-Elyon when Jerusalem fell into Judahite hands.¹⁴⁸ David, quickly and quietly working behind the scenes, endeavored to gain the Northern symbol for the holy presence of God for his own administration's glory. It took some doing. In fact, he got cold feet for several months due to the horrific death suffered by Uzzah. But finally, realizing the divine windfall it would provide his nascent kingdom, he danced it into town. Being instructed by God not to build a temple, David installed the Ark in a tent instead, only later buying Araunah the Jebusite's threshing floor to build an altar upon.

Rowley changes the story just slightly. Believing the original tent sanctuary (the wilderness Tabernacle of Moses) to have been destroyed in the Philistine attack on Shiloh, he suggests that David temporarily housed the Ark in an already extant Jebusite

¹⁴⁶ Cross, *CMHE*, 206.

¹⁴⁷ M. A. Cohen, *The Role of the Shilonite Priesthood*, 89.

shrine presided over by Zadok. In an attempt to placate local religious sensibilities, the king allowed for joint custody of the precious article between the hometown priest and Abiathar. In the meantime, some syncretism resulted, most notably the incorporation of a Jebusite cult symbol into Yahwistic worship: the bronze serpent Nehushtan from the Mosaic era of wandering in the desert.¹⁴⁹ But by and large, perhaps through the oversight of Abiathar, the purity of the cult was maintained. With the passage of time, David recognized a job well done by his faithful servant Zadok and granted the once upstart priest his own “enduring house.”

Hauer, on the other hand, maintains that favor must have already been given for responsibility for the Ark to fall into Zadok's hands. He then speculates on what action may have merited this honor. He keys in on the mention of Zadok's name with a Negeb contingent of early supporters of David: Jehoiada and his cohorts (1 Chron. 12:26-28). From this he makes of him a Jebusite insider willing to give up information regarding access to the crucial water supply for the city of Jerusalem. Defecting early on and joining David's ranks in Hebron, Zadok betrayed his own people by disclosing what he knew. His newfound fealty to the Judahite leader engendered a change of heart religiously, as well. Thus, after the conquest of Jerusalem and the transition to power there, Zadok was in an enviable position to garner rewards. And indeed, they were forthcoming.¹⁵⁰

The main problem with either of these versions is the notion of placing the reigns of the high priesthood in the hands of a convert. Obviously, David would be desirous of placing a trusted subordinate in that position, but not a neophyte. Though he might go

¹⁴⁸ H. Rowley, *Melchizedek and Zadok*, 466. (cf., Ramsey, *Zadok*, 1035.)

¹⁴⁹ Rowley, *Zadok and Nehushtan*, 132-140.

outside the bounds of the established hierarchy (i.e., the Elides/Ithamarites) he could scarcely dare to go outside Aaronid parameters. The Shilonites were decimated and in disarray, but the Aaronic priesthood gave no indication of faltering—unlike Uzzah—over their grasp on accountability for the Ark. Later, one of Josiah's motivations for centralization was to keep the Levites under his wing and thus, in check. David would not have risked their out and out rebellion. Aaronids must remain in charge of the Ark. They alone must minister directly before the face of YHWH. Therefore, the most likely group for him to have tapped would be the long-out-of-power Eleazarites, promised a dynasty through Phinehas. Though the Dtr may seem confused by (or at least unconcerned with) genealogical accuracy, the Chronicler consistently names Zadok an Eleazarite.

Not only would David never dream of installing a convert as the highest priest in the land, but also he would never have turned to a defeated enemy.¹⁵¹ Whatever his popularity in town had been prior to the conquest, Zadok's poll ratings would have plummeted in the post-war era. One does not earn the hearts and minds of a local populace by embracing its oppressors. Neither will turning one's coat to follow a new and unfamiliar religion win one many favorability points.

Many of the other arguments for the Jebusite Hypothesis fail for lack of evidence: no mention of a pre-existing Jebusite shrine anywhere, no mention of the Ark's being placed in one, no mention of Jebusite unrest. Bathsheba may well have been a local, but nothing much is ever made of the fact. Likewise, Araunah, in selling David his threshing floor, is all politeness (though, in fairness, we cannot read his mind). Furthermore, he

¹⁵⁰ C. E. Hauer, *Who was Zadok?* 93-94.

¹⁵¹ G. W. Ramsey, *Zadok*, 1035 (*contra* Bentzen).

appears not to have accepted the new religion in town: in speaking to the king, he refers to YHWH as “your” God (2 Sam. 24:18-25). F. M. Cross has convincingly shown that the *s-d-q* element in the Jerusalemite names Melchizedek and Adonizedek need not be defining. Certainly, all persons with these names in the Hebrew Bible hail from the City of David, but two of them, Jehozadak and Zedekiah, arrive on the scene after Zadok. Extra-biblical sources, moreover, make it clear the appellation is not restricted to Zion.¹⁵² And again, presuming that Melchizedek and Adonizedek did somehow represent an ancient hereditary kingship/priesthood, why then trace Zadok's lineage back through Aaron? Perhaps even the feisty Levites could be made to toe the line in respect for such an august and longstanding heritage. Yet in the end, it is only the Aaronic priesthood that is given such obeisance. And Zadok's star is hitched to their wagon.

Many scholars cite Zadok's lack of lineage as pivotal in upholding this hypothesis. But no reconstruction of the contested verse (2 Sam. 8:17) is clearly superior. All things being equal, Cross's interpretation—Zadok, son of Ahitub and Abiathar, son of Ahimelek—has a better feel to it. It fits the overall situation, reads smoothly and logically, and is the result of an eminently rational reconstruction.¹⁵³ Wellhausen's take—Zadok and Abiathar, the son of Ahimelek, the son of Ahitub—makes of Zadok a mystery man while giving distinct standing to Abiathar. But it is Zadok who gets the prize of an eternal priestly dynasty. Even if we conclude that Zadok was never provided with a viable pedigree, the fact itself does nothing to prove the hypothesis: it merely

¹⁵² Cross, *CMHE*, 209. (*s-d-q* is common in Amorite, Ugaritic, Canaanite, and Hebrew names.)

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 211-214.

keeps it within the realm of possibility.¹⁵⁴ We may simply have a Levite—a quasi-Aaronid—whose connections to the line happened to be sketchy or unknown.

The weakness of Cross's reconstruction, of course, is that he must posit two different Ahitub's: one the father of Zadok and the other the grandfather of Abiathar. The reason they cannot be one and the same is that that would make Zadok an Elide (and put his genealogy in direct conflict with the oracle in 1 Sam. 2:27-36, taking the priesthood from the Elides and granting it—presumably—to Zadok). Though scholars are split between these two, I believe the edge goes to Cross (but barely). Before we can decide, the scrambled identity of Ahitub will need further clarification.

In the long run, in spite of its popularity, the Jebusite Hypothesis is not the best available. Though it explains the appearance of Zadok out of the blue, it does not rightly square with the known details. It does not make socio-political sense. When trying to control a people, to make them servile and loyal, a sovereign must take an existing institution and mold it to his will. Attempting to start from scratch (as in the French Revolution) seldom produces abiding results. Throughout history despots have used the religion of the people to do their bidding; beneficent rulers have also used existing faith traditions to bolster their regimes. David would not have started over. As a Yahwist he would have most likely named a co-religionist to the post of high priest. My guess is that he would have chosen someone from his power base: a Judahite (especially since the co-priest is the Nobite, Abiathar). Also, since he was intent on including the Ark in the

¹⁵⁴ I might be more inclined to buy off on the Jebusite theory if it might be reasonably concluded that either 1.) Zadok was a faithful practitioner of Yahwism within the pagan confines of Jebus or that 2.) David himself was a clandestine Jebusite: he did seem to know the insider secret of the vital water supply (and no espionage operation was cited), and he does name it “City of David.”

Jerusalem cult, he would have found himself an Aaronid. But where in Judah would he have gone looking?

Zadok's Hometown

Hebron is a good choice, given it was his seat of government for seven years and apparently a prominent Aaronid base. If Olyan is right, however, in assigning it links to Kenite and Korahite traditions instead (the Calebites), David might well have shied away.¹⁵⁵ We do have the possible tie in with Jehoiada in the extreme South (Kabzeel in the Negeb). And we do get the sons of Korah showing up as psalmists, but no significant Mushite or Kenite influence takes hold. Rooke makes a good point, asking why a Hebronite Zadok would side against Absalom's rebellion, which took David's former stronghold as its rallying point. Otherwise, however, we could do much worse in our speculations than Hebron.

Of course it could also have been Gibeon, which though connected with the reign of Saul, was redeemed by the sacrifice at Nob. It would have been dominated by Elides in the time before the war. I can't think why anyone of significance would have remained afterwards, especially considering the slaughter of Saul's progeny, but then it was a royal cult center of sorts. No sanctuary has been uncovered in excavations at the site (el-Jib), but according to the Chronicler, the Tabernacle stood there for a while during David's reign.¹⁵⁶

Personally, I favor Kiriath Jearim for two main reasons. First, Aaronids from this city would have been the ones to carry it to Jerusalem. Though Uzzah died in transit, his

¹⁵⁵ S. Olyan, *Zadok's Origins*, 192-193.

¹⁵⁶ P. M. Arnold, *Gibeon*, 1010-1012.

brothers/relatives Eleazar and Ahio (or even Zadok, as has been proposed) brought it to its resting spot on Mt. Zion. Eleazar had been consecrated to protect it during its stay at Obed-Edom's estate there in Kiriath Jearim. Secondly, Beth-Shemesh, where the Ark came back into Israelite hands, is an Aaronid Levitical city. Though there are Levites in town to perform the necessary sacrifices, Kiriath Jearim must be appealed to for proper transport. In other words, the Aaronids have congregated there (for whatever reason—probably safe distance from the frontlines in the conflict with the Philistines).

The Ark, of course, falls out of Elide hands at Ebenezer. Evidently, God is no longer their “help.” The deaths of Hophni, Phinehas, Eli, and the priests of Nob certainly underscore this conclusion. When the Ark is delivered back into Israelite hands, it is farther south at Beth-Shemesh. Thus, if original, the narrative would appear to be a *justification* for replacing the Elide high priesthood with a more southerly group (or, if added later, an *etiology* for the same switch). Is there any evidence to suggest that the descendants of Eleazar settled farther south?¹⁵⁷ If so, the transference of power from the discredited Ithamarites to the alternate legitimate line, the Eleazarites, would be effected in orderly fashion. That the Ark was placed in the protective custody of a priest by the name of Eleazar, while doing nothing to prove this hypothesis, does not argue against it.

Plus, it would seem to be the version of events that comes down to the Chronicler. The fact that his genealogies come about much later do not preclude their being handed down intact. Scholars cannot simply dismiss his data out of hand. Whatever agenda the Chronicler may have adopted, his interpretation may yet be historically accurate (for the

¹⁵⁷ I have to admit there isn't much. Though the name of Eleazar's son, Phinehas, means "southerner," so does that of his namesake, Eli's son. The Levitical cities are divided between those in Benjamin (including two definite Elide towns, Gibeon and Anathoth) and those in Judah/Simeon (including Beth-Shemesh). Could there be an Ithamarite-Eleazarite regional split? Probably not completely. A hegemonic Ithamarite

facts as they are—without change—may actually further his purpose. As far as I can tell, this logically simple origination requires little if any twisting of details involving those narratives preceding or following these events (either chronologically or by authorial dating).

Just where were the Aaronids concentrated? It is difficult to say. Cross says Hebron is an Aaronid center. Olyan points out that there is no hard evidence for such a conclusion. Elides seemed to be headquartered in Shiloh, Gibeon, Anathoth, and Nob. Eleazar's son Phinehas ministered before the Ark in Bethel according to Judges 20:27-28. (Earlier, his father was said to have presided at Shiloh.) Rooke claims that the very notion of Aaron as priest is unheard of in the Deuteronomistic History (outside of some late interpolations in Joshua). So the whole “Aaronid” business crops up later.¹⁵⁸ Kaufmann concludes, conversely, that the Aaronids were the pagan priests of the enslaved Israelites in Egypt and were too ensconced to ever be totally shoved aside.¹⁵⁹ The Levitical cities set apart for them were mostly in the South, in Judah, Benjamin, and Simeon. So we have them spread approximately from Shiloh to Hebron. Tradition implies that Ithamarites ruled the roost from the death of Eleazar until the coming of the Zadokites (this in spite of the promise of a lasting priesthood for Phinehas). If there be any truth to this, it would make sense for the disenfranchised Eleazarites to consolidate as much power as possible. They might well have segregated themselves and waited for the opportunity to shed their underdog status. They could most likely have done so in Judah, and David would have been their ticket to the bright lights.

priesthood might well have insisted on oversight of all high places and sanctuaries. Of course, the better-known cultic centers (Gibeon, Shiloh, Bethel, etc.) were in the North.

¹⁵⁸ D. Rooke, *Zadok's Heirs*, 54.

¹⁵⁹ Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, 197-198.

Pawns or Kingmakers?

The exact nature of the interplay between the developing kingship and the established priesthood may never be known. It is important, however, to reconstruct as best we can where the power lay and how it was wielded. Did the Elides seek to retain their sovereignty despite the diminished capacity of the local militias to fend off the Philistines? Regionalizing under an effective military commander like Saul would answer some concerns, and centralizing under the charismatic leadership of a king like David might solve things more permanently. The trouble, according to M. Cohen, would be to control these political authorities once one endowed them with power.¹⁶⁰ Of course, even today the authority who controls the military effectively controls the country. Once that control is institutionalized, it is not as difficult to maintain. But gaining it in the first place demands political savvy and not a little clout. Priests and judges accustomed to getting their way in a town or even a small league of cities might find trouble holding a tribal region in line, let alone a nation. There is little evidence the priesthood ever held sway over any major stretch of territory. Their power, such as it was, was over the domestic affairs of the local people.¹⁶¹ My guess is that the kings would have used this influence for their own purposes as they rose to power and as the Israelite fiefdoms expanded. We never see kings deposed or enthroned by priestly decree. The priests are there to bestow the imprimatur of God, but in the meantime they had best watch their step lest they find themselves seeking new employment elsewhere.

¹⁶⁰ M. A. Cohen, *The Role of the Shilonite Priesthood*, 67-78.

¹⁶¹ R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 83, 88.

More Questions than Answers

In the final analysis, the things we can know with a fair degree of certainty are all generalities. We know that the tribal confederacy of Judah and Israel federalized its power structure into a monarchy in order to defend itself from aggressive neighbors. At the same time the high priesthood, never before having more than local control, found itself the commander of a centralized cult and the beneficiary of the financial windfall of pilgrimage commerce. Whereas before one could seemingly aspire and train for the priesthood based on a vague notion of Levitical connections, now one must have a suitable and documented genealogy showing Zadok as his forbear. Doubtless, these changes were a work in progress. They became clear-cut only as time went on.

I think we can assume that Zadok—if that was indeed his name and not simply a title of respect like the Hasidim's “Tsaddik”—was a Levite. Moreover, in spite of the Jebusite hypothesis, there was probably no paradigm shift here. We can be fairly certain he was an authentic Aaronid. Abiathar would seem to represent the fading Ithamarite/Elide line. Who could the newcomer be except an Eleazarite?¹⁶²

¹⁶² I should add, nevertheless, that there may have been an intermingling of the bloodlines of Eleazar and Ithamar. Each shrine or high place may have had its own legitimizing genealogy that was conflated with the onset of centralization. The 24 priestly divisions we see in 1 Chron. 24 include 16 for Eleazar and 8 for Ithamar, but which are which is not specified. The difference in numbers may reflect attrition from the Nobite massacre (and the Exile) or simply lower prestige.

CHAPTER 8

JEROBOAM I AND THE SIN OF THE CALF

“There is not a misfortune that Israel has suffered which is not partly
a retribution for the sin of the calf.”

—Sanhedrin 102a

Now we turn to the friction between an avowed Zadokite—the Deuteronomist—and a much earlier northern king who most probably grew up under the influence of the Elides—Jeroboam I. Though separated by at least three centuries, the Dtr has no problem expressing himself concerning Jeroboam’s sin; he does not mince words; there is no hint of hesitation or equivocation. Jeroboam is the initiator of the downfall of the Northern Kingdom. He is the rule which others follow. And his sin is blatant, out-and-out idolatry. He is not guilty of mistakes borne of an eagerness to establish a new and unblemished cult for YHWH. He is not misunderstood. The golden calves placed at Bethel and at Dan are not the footstools of YHWH Sabbaoth. Neither are they justifiable substitutes for the Ark and cherubim in the Temple at Jerusalem. Furthermore, the use of non-Levites in the service of God is in no way a tolerable variant on the established practice. No, Jeroboam is seen as knowingly untrusting of the prophecy that promises him a dynasty if he obeys the call to serve YHWH alone. As Abraham before him did in having a child by way of Hagar, Jeroboam has yielded to the temptation of taking matters into his own hands. As Moses in the wilderness succumbed to adding the stroke of his staff to the clear command of God only to speak, Jeroboam adds two sanctuaries and, at least in effect, two new gods. Unlike Abraham and Moses, however, Jeroboam is not viewed as having the good of the people in mind, but his own survival in power. It is a

calculated move. He knows thoroughly what he is doing and proceeds without pangs of conscience. It is a monstrous sin and we need not commiserate with the Israelites that the consequences are too harsh. As a result of Abraham's indiscretion, he and his progeny will forever—down to the present era, in fact—contend with their Ishmaelite cousins to the south. Moses' actions, which to modern minds seem the most trifling of all, bar his entry into the Promised Land. Jeroboam's sin will bring about the destruction of his nation, as well as the dispersion of his people.

Another Point of View: Iconism rather than Idolatry

But, of course, though it all seems so cut and dried, scholars are quick to point out that all we have is a one-sided report. The Dtr has his agenda of extolling the reign of Josiah and the centralization of the cult of YHWH. Indeed, it is necessary to bear the author's prejudices in mind. We do have to ask, however, what his motivations might be for exaggerating the circumstances. Undoubtedly, it sounds worse to accuse Jeroboam of idolatry rather than simply wrongful worship. But hammering home just how serious are God's commands to worship in Jerusalem and Jerusalem alone would seem the politic thing to do. By condemning outright the high places and additional sanctuaries, the Dtr could certainly make more of a case for the sanctity of the central Temple.

What (positive) difference could it possibly make that Jeroboam well intentionally meant the calves as footstools for YHWH? Aaron meant the feast of the golden calf as a celebration for YHWH according to the text. His sons Abihu and Nadab offered "strange" fire (perhaps incense not mixed to the formula set forward in Exodus 30¹⁶³) before YHWH—and not some foreign god or idol—but suffered death as a result.

Evidently, Jeroboam's sin would not need to be egregious—at least, not in modern eyes—to warrant catastrophic consequences. Why bring up idolatry at all unless that is what is taking place?

It is not as if the surrounding regions are strangers to idolatry. The Israelites would surely be exposed to Molech of the Ammonites; Chemosh of the Moabites; El¹⁶⁴, Baal, and Dagon of the Canaanites (and Phoenicians); Marduk of the Babylonians; and many Egyptian deities. We know they erected Asherah poles and various standing stones. Were these also aniconic? Solomon had become extremely syncretistic as a result of pleasing his multitudinous wives. We are not told that Rehoboam did anything drastic to reverse the situation. And these are the wondrous models that Jeroboam was supposed to live up to? Obviously not. He had been required to do far better as a condition for retaining the dynasty promised him by the prophet. He was to be another David, a man after God's own heart. His problem was not that he turned his back on Jerusalem and went after idols, but that he refused to turn his back on idolatry and follow after God. Idolatry was the order of the day, not aniconicism.

If we stick to the text, the aniconic tradition doesn't truly resurface until the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. Even if we were to go out on a limb and speculate—as many scholars deign to presuppose—that Jeroboam's sin was a rejection of centrality rather than idolatry. What about the Asherahs, the high places, the altars to Chemosh and Molech? It is not mentioned that Jeroboam lifted a finger to purge the realm of these. Whereas this "oversight" may reflect the bias of the Dtr, by what evidence do we

¹⁶³ J. C. H. Laughlin, *The "Strange Fire" of Nadab and Abihu*, 560.

¹⁶⁴ Time and space constraints preclude my delving into the rich correlation between bovine images and El: his epithet, Bull-El, icons at Hazor, Ashkelon, and the "Bull Site," biblical allusions to the "wild ox horns" of El (Nu. 23:22; 24:8; Ps. 22:21), and the ambiguous phrase "Mighty One/Bull of Jacob," which hinges its

conclude that this Northern king was anything more than a man of his age? I know of no rival tradition that depicts him as a great man of God. (The Samaritans, for example, have no conflicting account. They believe the crucial shift away from the graces of YHWH occurred much earlier, when Eli transferred worship to Shiloh.¹⁶⁵) It is one thing to expound on the narrow-mindedness of the Dtr; it is quite another thing to show that there is any likelihood that any Israelite king of that era would have risen above the idolatrous norm.

Did aniconism exist in any significant fashion before the exile? And if so, why? W. Zimmerli posited that unlike the gods of the surrounding ancient Near Eastern cultures, YHWH was a god who acted within human history.¹⁶⁶ He was not a god of nature who fell with the rain, or was reborn with the first buds of the spring rye. Nor was he a god of myth, who interacted personally only with the divine and the semi-divine. His direct involvement in the lives of men required he be given freedom to so act. He could not be confined to or restrained by any representative icon. Similarly, Zimmerli felt that such a god of sovereign freedom could never be controlled or manipulated by man through magic.¹⁶⁷ And of course, idols have been used through the ages predominantly for such purposes. Indeed, some scholars have claimed that other ancient Near Eastern gods (e.g., Marduk) at times intruded themselves into the lives of historical men. Though this is true, with YHWH it is the rule rather than the exception. Again, some have pointed out that pagan priests and prophets were not discernibly more “manipulative” in their intercourse with their gods than Israel with its God. They were

interpretation on a dagesh. Jeroboam's Reform, so tied up with Bethel (and its ancient association with Jacob) may well have included some reestablishment of the worship of El.

¹⁶⁵ R. T. Anderson, “Samaritans,” 941.

¹⁶⁶ R. S. Hendel, *Social Origins of the Aniconic Tradition*, 368-369.

seeking revelations of the divine will much the same as their Yahwistic counterparts. These arguments against the uniqueness of the Israelite experience of the transcendent, however, are somewhat disingenuous. Moses' relationship with the Almighty was face to face, as one man with another almost. The dynamic was decidedly different even when similar methods were employed for communication with the divine (such as the High Priest's ephod with its Urim and Thummim or blood sacrifice).

A God Remote, Transcendent, and Unique

Gerhard von Rad thought it was the remoteness and transcendence of YHWH which necessitated the polemic against idolatry.¹⁶⁷ The dualistic split between spirit and flesh meant the material could not satisfactorily represent that spirit. This suggestion has been successfully countered by the examples of the Mesopotamian gods, Marduk and Enlil, who are spoken of in the Babylonian Theodicy as remote, hidden, and beyond the understanding of man. The Canaanite high god El is also depicted as dwelling remotely. Indeed, a point is made that Asherah herself, his queen and consort, must travel some distance to where he resides. Though I would maintain that YHWH's transcendence is of a different character—the distinction between spiritual and corporeal existence is much more complete: He does not eat or drink or copulate or eliminate—still the argument stands. If the problem is merely transcendence, the other ancient Near Eastern gods probably possess the quality to a sufficient degree to warrant a similar polemic against the representations of other gods. Perhaps that touches on another possibility: It is not the belief in the transcendence of YHWH that merits condemnation of idols, but the

¹⁶⁷ R. Hendel, *Social Origins of the Aniconic Tradition*, 369-370; Schmidt, *The Aniconic Tradition*, 75-76.

¹⁶⁸ Hendel, 370-371; Schmidt, 75-76.

belief that those idols do not symbolize transcendent entities themselves. To the Israelites—at least by the time the faith matured—there was only One who was transcendent.

This oneness of the God of Israel is sometimes mentioned as another possible motivation.¹⁶⁹ That they saw YHWH as their God and nobody else's may have caused them to more earnestly reject the gods of other nations rather than half-heartedly embracing them "just in case." The Assyrians, for example, often destroyed but also often deported the foreign idols they came in contact with. The Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and set it up in their Temple (though they soon thought better of the idea). Yet these cultures never destroyed their own people's idols as Israel did. Indeed, the priests and prophets and kings set up by the Dtr as role models for the people to follow are obsessed with the purity of the cult. Some have felt this was out of a rebellious streak the incoming nomads maintained against the urban practices of the established Canaanites, thus a vendetta against the introduction of a kingship, an immovable sanctuary, or any icon to represent their God. But then, of course, we still don't know to what extent the Israelites did move in to the Levant. They may well have been mingled with the closely related Canaanites for some time or moved in too slowly to have developed such a sharp identity for a resulting rift.

R. P. Carroll has added a few ideas of his own to this mix.¹⁷⁰ The exquisite protectiveness placed around the sacred name of God by the Tannaim had a long prior history. The Decalogue's remonstrance against taking the name of YHWH in vain may have spilled over into aniconism. One should not approach too near to the actual name of

¹⁶⁹ Hendel, *Social Origins of the Aniconic Tradition*, 371-372.

¹⁷⁰ R. P. Carroll, *The Aniconic God and the Cult of Images*, 51-64.

God; neither should one dare create a likeness too close to the substance of YHWH. (Of course, only Moses having seen the Almighty—his backside that is— and lived, a potential idol-maker would have to use his imagination.) Then again, Carroll believes it may have been a reaction against the theriomorphic cults the Israelites encountered in Egypt. Or finally, perhaps the notion of mankind's having been created in the image of God militates against any artificial schemes to represent him.

There are some other options, I believe, not treated in the literature. The first is often excluded for scholarly reasons: the Israelites did not come up with the requirement on their own. Their aniconic practices are the direct result of interaction with a *real* God, honestly jealous of the people of his choosing. The whole concept of covenant (and its coordinate jealousy) however, is a scholarly motivation worth exploring. Another path to take is the self-constraint YHWH approves of in terms of his dwelling among men. He will not be limited to indwelling an icon, but a house, a tent, or a temple is a different matter. His abode on earth is iconic: representative of His heavenly habitations. And lastly, in a bit of a twist on the first of Zimmerli's suggestions, perhaps the aniconism is, in fact, due to the omnipotence and sovereignty of God, but not to maintain his freedom but theirs. For an invisibly enthroned deity cannot be captured. Though he may not be Israel's to command or control, neither can he ever truly be possessed by any other nation.

Aniconism in any pure sense probably did not evolve until after the Babylonian Exile. But it did have its great pushes forward from time to time. Without the rise of the likes of Hezekiah and Josiah or the persistence of a faithful remnant, the Deuteronomistic History would most probably never have been written and/or retained. Had it nonetheless

found its way into creation, the tone towards Solomon, Rehoboam, and their ilk would necessarily have been as scathing as the existing rebukes of Jeroboam. Though Manasseh gets his share of thoroughly justified “bad ink,”¹⁷¹ generally the Judahite kings come out looking better than their actions would warrant.

Two Stories about Golden Calves

Does the possibility remain that Jeroboam I was a faithful Yahwist and that his golden calves were as aniconic as the Temple cherubim? I suppose anything is possible. However, it seems more likely—given the level of syncretism within Solomon’s reign—that even the cherubim were not aniconic, or at least not totally. Perhaps to the attending priests or to those devoted enough or trained enough to know better, this orthodoxy remained in place. But to the masses, surrounded by idol-worshipping Canaanites and led by kings who sacrificed to some of these same idols, the claim that “Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” was almost certain to sound quite credible.

Nothing we know of the time or the situation militates against such a straightforward interpretation of these words. They are striking enough, however, to take a closer look. Matching up almost exactly with Aaron’s proclamation in Exodus 32 after presenting his version of a golden calf, they resound with a magisterial, more-or-less liturgical ring to them. Indeed, some scholars have noted the similarity to incantations involved in the mouth-opening ceremonies in Mesopotamian idol worship.¹⁷² Besides this age-old confession concerning God’s rescue of His people from the throes of slavery

¹⁷¹ Of course, the Chronicler speaks of the repentance of Manasseh in 2 Chron. 33:10-17.

in the land of Egypt and the obvious inclusion of golden calves in both pericopes, many similarities between these two stories (the one at the foot of the Sinai in Exodus 32 and the one in Ephraim in 1 Kings 12) have been duly noted.¹⁷³

- 1.) Both Aaron and Jeroboam act on their own without any impetus from God. Aaron, for his part, does repent of wrongdoing. Something Jeroboam never manages.
- 2.) Both build altars, ostensibly for YHWH but certainly for the golden calf/calves.
- 3.) Each offers sacrifices (with himself as the officiant of these rites).
- 4.) Both meet with stern opposition from Levites.
- 5.) Each event is described as the very quintessence of sin, bringing down a multitude of people, or in the case of Jeroboam, an entire nation.
- 6.) Each as an individual is spared the type of judgment meted out to others. Aaron dies in old age after serving as high priest, and Jeroboam fills out a fairly lengthy 22-year reign.
- 7.) Each is individually held up in prayer. Moses prays for his brother Aaron, and the man of God from Judah entreats YHWH on behalf of Jeroboam's paralytic hand.
- 8.) The rank and file of those involved are harshly punished. The Levites slay 3,000 of their fellow Israelites at Sinai, and God kills many more in a plague. Retribution against the priests of Bethel is longer in coming: Josiah taking their fate into his iconoclastic hands, hewing them down and immolating their bones before destroying the altar.

¹⁷² E. M. Curtis, "Idol, Idolatry," 377. These ceremonies may have been a reenactment of the birth of the particular deity or a symbolic portrayal of its entering in to an image.

9.) In Exodus the golden calf is burned and ground to dust. In the Josianic reform, as has been stated, the altar was obliterated in similar fashion.

10.) Both men have sons with extremely similar names (Nadab and Abihu/Abijah) struck down in the prime of life. These sons, for all their faults, each manages to garner post-mortem praise of his endeavors.

Scholars have several suggestions about the inter-relatedness of these two texts. First, the Dtr may be reading back the story of Jeroboam's idolatry into the Exodus account. This option would call for a Deuteronomistic editing of the Elohist Exodus passage in spite of the tale's repetition in the 9th Chapter of Deuteronomy.¹⁷⁴ Another possibility is that the Dtr is belittling Jeroboam by putting impossibly inane words in his mouth and associating him with a black hour in the history of Israel.¹⁷⁵ Here the probable precedence of the writing of the Sinai text is acknowledged.¹⁷⁶ Lastly, it might be that the editor's ability to rebuke Jeroboam's sins is due not to an anti-Northern bias or agenda, but the Ephraimite king's actually grievous shortcomings. Though the Dtr framed extant materials to fit his purpose, Jeroboam did his part to see that few changes would be needed.

An Alternative to Aniconism?

To acknowledge Jeroboam as innocent requires that God's instructions to him to obey all his commandments were either never spoken or never understood. Of course, if

¹⁷³ M. Aberbach and L. Smolar, *Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves*, 129-134.

¹⁷⁴ Van Seters, *The Life of Moses*, 291-95.

¹⁷⁵ Cross, *CMHE*, 73-75.

Jeroboam is not historical, then he merely provides a convenient etiology for the eventual downfall of Israel. More than likely he was not innocent. But was he as nefarious as the Dtr makes him out to be? Could there have been legitimate even sincere religious motivations for his split with Jerusalem and its emphasis on the invisible enthronement of YHWH?

It could actually be the case that there was an alternative tradition in Israel of an iconic YHWH. Certainly, the archaeological evidence for such a conclusion is lacking, but there is a similar lack of evidence with Chemosh, for example. Later rabbinic writings picture him as human in form with an ox head, but the Mesha Stone inscription reads like a biblical passage in terms of describing the Moabite god. Several scholars have in fact suggested that the Bes drawings at Kuntillet Ajrud are iconic depictions of “YHWH and his Asherah” and that some of the illustrations and carvings of cherubim may also have that function.¹⁷⁷ Such an alternative tradition may see the proliferation of sanctuaries and high places as a good thing and posit a substitute priesthood. Why keep the Levites in cultic service, those who mercilessly slaughtered their fellow Israelites who worshiped that first golden calf? If such a tradition were widespread and popular, it would put into doubt the Dtr’s assertion that Jeroboam schemed against the people’s embrace of Jerusalem. There would be no need, the centrality of the Temple cult at that time being a mere literary device. It would be at least hyperbole if not complete fiction.

On the other hand, if we remain faithful to the text, Jeroboam is guilty of manipulative propaganda intended to keep the Northern peoples subservient to his will. We must accept in this instance that the populace was vulnerable and uninformed as to

¹⁷⁶ G. Knoppers, *Aaron's Calf and Jeroboam's Calves*, 94: “...from a literary vantage point, Aaron's calf predates Jeroboam's Calves.”

the true form of worship or that they are brazenly rebellious against their former beliefs out of spiteful feelings toward their Southern brethren or an emerging nationalistic fervor. One other option does exist, however. Rabbinic tradition¹⁷⁸ actually holds a better opinion of the Israelites under Jeroboam: they say that many of them continued to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem despite a ban on such activity. Perhaps Jeroboam's reforms were not as far reaching—at least in terms of the populace—as the Dtr so vehemently believed. At the very least we know that a sizeable portion of Ephraimites escaped south into Judah when the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E. finally overran Israel. These do not seem to be synonymous with the *'ām hā-'ārēš* (or Samaritans or Tobiads) who caused such tension with the returning exiles over the rebuilding of the Temple. Evidently there was a remnant faithful to orthodox Jerusalem-centered worship. What we do not know is how much influence they ever had outside of a few exceptions (such as Elijah and Elisha).

A Northern Priesthood

Indeed, it is extremely difficult to assign cultic and political loyalties to the clans and tribes of the North. Just trying to figure out the complex patchwork quilt of Levitical groups is daunting. Exactly whom did Jeroboam turn to in retooling a cult for Ephraim? The situation in Dan seems clear enough though why the king would have to make a calf for it is not. Most scholars agree that Micah's graven image (Judges 17 and 18) was probably bovine in nature.¹⁷⁹ It was taken from him—along with the Levite in his service—to a sanctuary in Dan. This Levite is tied to the Mushite lineage in the text: He

¹⁷⁷ B. Schmidt, *The Aniconic Tradition*, 96-105.

¹⁷⁸ The Encyclopedia Judaica lists the following sources: Talmud Yerushalmi, Avodah Zarah, Tosefta, Ta'anit 4:7, Sanhedrin 102a, and Mo'ed Katan 28b.

is identified as Jonathan, the son (or ancestor) of Gershom, the son of Moses. This could match him up with the son of Abiathar, the Elide priest from Anathoth who survived the massacre at Nob. B. Halpern does not suggest this arrangement because to him the Elides, as Shilonites, are too connected with the Ark of the Covenant and thus liable to be thoroughly opposed to the calf cult. S. Frolov, on the other hand, sees them as Aaronids, not Mushites, disgruntled and displaced and no longer tied to Shiloh. He thinks them vulnerable to the offer of involvement in a revamped cult as an opportunity to regain lost prestige.

The situation in Bethel is far less clear. Though it is a site of ancient significance for the worship of YHWH (having been founded by Jacob, who set up a *maṣṣēbâ* there—Gen. 28), it seems to have been controlled cultically by first the Mushites and then the Aaronids. In fact, the aforementioned Jonathan and his former employer Micah may have come from Bethel (not named as such, but having a description corresponding quite closely).¹⁸⁰ The Aaronids of Bethel are thought to be closely associated with the centralized Temple (though I haven't seen firm evidence). This would put them into direct conflict with Jeroboam's reforms and constitute a sensible reason for their expulsion in favor of "non-Levites." Some have speculated, of course, that these were either Mushites or Elides (or both). If the Shilonite Mushites are correctly identified by Halpern as devoted to the service of the Ark and cherubim, then they would also come into conflict with Jeroboam (as the Shilonite prophet Ahijah's turnabout rebuke of the king appears to confirm). Jeroboam's dilemma as to how to keep the various factions

¹⁷⁹ S. Frolov, "Days of Shiloh" in *the Kingdom of Israel*, 214-215; B. Halpern, *Levitic Participation in the Reform Cult of Jeroboam I*, 36.

¹⁸⁰ B. Halpern, 36-37.

happy, or at least “at bay,” is obviously a tricky one. Dan, on the extreme northern edge of his realm looks well in hand. But Bethel is another story.

Bethel is quite close to the border with Judah and only a few miles (12) north of Jerusalem. Establishing himself at Shechem politically and Bethel cultically, Jeroboam must hope to fortify his southern frontier. He knows to use the heritage of the Shechems and Shilohs and Bethels to his advantage, but Bethel is terribly exposed to incursion. And, of course, in Josiah’s reign it is overrun and its priesthood put to the sword, their bones burned on the altar, their ancestors’ graves defiled. Why pick a site so close to Jerusalem? Shechem, in its strategic mountain-pass location, as well as Penuel and Tirzah so much farther north, makes more sense militarily. Perhaps he wished the two somehow superimposed in the minds of the people. A pilgrimage to Bethel would not be far different from a trek to the holy city of Zion. And he could employ sanctuary workers familiar with the common Israelite rituals, as well as versed in the distinctively Northern variations of the same.

If he used Mushites in Dan (since they were most likely already there), then one would think he would use like-minded Mushites at Bethel. He would need them for the purpose of training and leading even if he interspersed them with random selections from other tribes or clans. Abiathar, an Elide who served under David, had been ignominiously cast off by Solomon for siding with Adonijah. Undoubtedly he was not the only one of his ilk to make the move a couple of miles north to Anathoth, in the environs of Bethel. The town produced a steady string of prophets perhaps all the way down to Jeremiah. Some of them may have been lured into what appeared on the surface to be a legitimate alternative to worship in Jerusalem. After all, David and Solomon

would never be able to claim innocence to the accusation of their being radical innovators. It is not at all clear that the Zadokite line of priests ever had any Levitical connections though they boasted of such later on. As stated above, they may even have had Jebusite origins.¹⁸¹ Also, David moved the Ark and the cherubim into a new and permanent sanctuary (urban centralization of cult and substantial temples were Canaanite characteristics). Moreover, the bronze serpent of Moses, Nehushtan, erected by Moses to cure those Israelites bitten by poisonous snakes (Nu. 21) continued as an object of worship within the Temple for centuries. Not until Hezekiah did a Judahite sovereign finally rid the Jerusalem sanctuary of this fetishistic stumbling block (not to mention an Asherah pole!)

The Soft Edges of Aniconism

According to M. Habertal and A. Margalit, the Jerusalem hierarchy made a clear distinction between similarity-based representations of the deity as opposed to causal (metonymic) and conventional (literary) representations thereof.¹⁸² This meant that technically the Ark, as the footstool of God; the wings of the cherubim, as his throne; the menorah, as the lights of Heaven (or the Tree of Life); and the molten sea with its supporting oxen were all perfectly acceptable. The decorations and carvings—lions, palm trees, pomegranates—though perhaps a temptation and a hindrance to ordinary worshipers did not officially cross the boundary into idolatry. Admittedly, most of these were tucked away in portions of the sanctuary accessible only to priests. But it is clear enough that Israelite aniconism never reached the degree of sensitivity displayed in

¹⁸¹ M. Aberbach and L. Smolar, *Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves*, 136-137.

¹⁸² C. Evans, *Cult Images, Royal Policies, and the Origins of Aniconism*, 195-195.

Islam, for example. Only images felt to be immediate objects of worship were deplored.¹⁸³ It was not to be “viewed as a total condemnation of artistic forms of representation,” as R. P. Carroll has noted.¹⁸⁴ This doesn’t mean that the Jerusalem High Priest would have given his imprimatur to the reforms of Jeroboam even if reassured that no one was directly worshiping the golden calves. Centralization of cult would have entailed centralization of power and standardization of policy. No matter how orthodox in practice, eventually the high places and rural sanctuaries (or any sanctuary outside of the Temple Mount) would not be tolerated. And this very thing came to pass in the reign of Josiah where all of the Levites were rounded up from their various sites of service and re-stationed in Jerusalem.

The Rehabilitation of Jeroboam

Though the Judahite establishment probably could have cared less about the “good intentions” of Jeroboam I, many modern commentators seem compelled to clean up his reputation. S. Lasine quotes J. Morgenstern as attributing to Jeroboam “the best and the most sincere of intentions and commendable piety.”¹⁸⁵ Lasine himself believes in the historicity of the goodness of the Israelite king's motivations. The evil effects on the Northern Kingdom resulting in its eventual fall from grace are merely literary in nature.¹⁸⁶ He also quotes F. Cross claiming Jeroboam as a victim of “polemic distortion,” for no leader in his right mind would have repeated the words, “Here are your gods, O

¹⁸³ Evans, *Origins of Aniconism*, 193-194.

¹⁸⁴ R. P. Carroll, *The Aniconic God and the Cult of Images*, 52.

¹⁸⁵ S. Lasine, *Reading Jeroboam's Intentions*, 133.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

Israel....”¹⁸⁷ The Dtr is castigated for his ignorance of the beliefs of those bowing down to cult images (although Lasine admits that whatever the king's intentions, the convictions and practice of the populace probably did degenerate into fetishism).¹⁸⁸ What Jeroboam's “sin” boils down to in this scenario is a failure to constrain the people from idolatry (as Jehu, 2 Kings 10:29; Asa, 1 Kings 15:13; and even Hezekiah, 2 Kings 18:11-12, are rebuked in similar fashion).

It may well be that Jeroboam had sincere religious convictions and that he felt his innovations did not stray far from orthopraxy (or even that they brought back into acceptability practices that were part and parcel of the Northern heritage of experience). But even more likely is the possibility that he was much as the Dtr portrayed him: a pragmatic politician bent on survival. One who understood that from a human point of view his dynasty would not last forever split between a government centered in the North and a cult of worship centered in the accursed and oppressive South. In this day and age, we would indeed commend him for his astute and effective leadership. The Dtr condemns him only for his faithlessness to YHWH. And though the charge may be exaggerated in one sense or another, in the final analysis it is also almost undoubtedly true.

¹⁸⁷ F. M. Cross, *CMHE*, 73.

¹⁸⁸ S. Lasine, 135-136.

CHAPTER 9

IN THE WAKE OF JOSIAH'S REFORM

“The king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem.... He broke the pillars in pieces, cut down the sacred poles, and covered the sites with human bones. Moreover, the altar at Bethel, the high place erected by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin—he pulled down that altar along with the high place. He burned the high place, crushing it to dust; he also burned the sacred pole. As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs there on the mount; and he sent and took the bones out of the tombs, and burned them on the altar, and defiled it, according to the word of the LORD that the man of God proclaimed....”

—2 Kings 23:13a-16a

Josiah's meteoric and brutal reform represents a high point of uniformity among prophet, priest, and king. For a short while everyone is on the same page: there was a consensus opposition to the non-centralized cult and a favorable attitude toward Jerusalem. When Josiah dies in battle, however, the coalition dies with him. The tensions endemic to these struggles for political and theological ascendancy returns full force. In this chapter we will examine the enduring significance of the reform itself. In the next we will tackle the growing unrest within prophetic circles toward the corruption in the established Temple-centered hierarchy. The prophets' rising frustration will, of course, blossom into full-blown disparagement of Judahite kings and priests. The hopeful note sounded by the Josianic regime sours all too fast.

Ever since Graf and Wellhausen associated the agenda of the Deuteronomist with that of the Josiah and his court, it has been generally assumed that from the mid-seventh century B.C.E. on, the orthodoxy of centralization was set in stone. The uncovering of the Book of the Law (and the resultant cult reform), was certainly a seminal moment; however, it would take many long years—with decisive actions and the individuals who

initiated them lost in obscurity—before the Jerusalem Temple would reign supreme as the lone icon of Yahwistic religious life.

Josiah's Judah was a vassal state, sandwiched in tightly between a disintegrating Assyria on the north and an apprehensive Egypt to the south.¹⁸⁹ Babylon's star was fast on the rise. Realistically, Josiah could only wait and hope events played out in a favorable manner. For some reason he was not patient enough to manage such inaction. The end results, of course, were tragic.

The Scope of the Reform

Was Josiah all that important in the overall scheme of things? He only centralized the cult for about twelve years. The extent of his realm was small at best. He began his reign as a vassal of Assyria. Backing Babylon against the unlikely alliance of Egypt/Assyria got him killed and relegated Judah to an Egyptian vassal state. Jeremiah seems to have indicated the reform degenerated into mere formalism. His early death—whether due to his own lack of wisdom, the broken promises of others, or the lack of YHWH's protection—does not bespeak a blessed king in ancient Near Eastern terms. Hezekiah, in spite of his minor “failings” (the character flaw of pride¹⁹⁰ perhaps), or even Asa with his 40-year reign, might have been viewed as a better king than Josiah, who didn't make it to 40 years of age. Evidently, he did help plant the seeds of a dream: a sovereign Judah under a sovereign God, resident amongst his people. But the dream would be many years in coming. His and his successors' failure to pacify the Chaldeans did not produce a nation with just one temple for its God, but a nation with none.

¹⁸⁹ R. Althann, “Josiah,” *ABD* 3, 1016.

Is it possible that centralization became an issue only at some point long *after* the exile? Neither Haggai nor First Zechariah mentions Ephraim (though Zechariah may mention the House of Israel in passing). The seventh chapter of Zechariah appears to site the town of Bethel, but it is probably best to see this as part of personal name of one returning from Babylon. The question asked concerns fasting in the fifth month (for the burning of the Jerusalem Temple) and in the seventh month (for the assassination of Gedaliah, the Judahite governor), not exactly queries interfering Samaritans might pose. Mizpah becomes the administrative center in Jerusalem's stead during the Exile and may have had a temple of its own. Elephantine sends off letters to the governors of both Samaria and Yehud to request a resumption of sacrifices (after the prophets of Ptah had destroyed their temple). Interestingly, they are allowed to reinstate incense and grain offerings but not to have a bloody altar. Other temples are built at Leontopolis in Lower Egypt and a little later on Mt. Gerizim (there are conflicting data on when this temple was erected: some archaeological evidence: rebuilt Samaria's Hellenistic round towers, and temple remains including a Greek-style altar).¹⁹¹ Other temple plans include an idealistic one in Ezekiel 40-48 (much larger than either Zerubbabel's or Herod's renditions) and the Qumran Temple Scroll which describes three concentric square courtyards.¹⁹² Also, priesthood takes center stage, supplanting a diarchy it had held together with the Davidic prince (Zerubbabel).

We have all of these temple possibilities—whether envisioned, referenced, or actually built (as evidenced by archaeological remains). We also have biblical passages

¹⁹⁰ Hezekiah is upbraided for arrogance in 2 Chron. 32:24-26; no such indictment is forthcoming in 2 Kgs. 20, but in verses 8-11, the king does demand a sign from the LORD that he will indeed be healed.

¹⁹¹ R. E. Brown, et al., eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 75:127, 76:55 (pp. 1239, 1266).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 67:95 (p. 1073); L. H. Schiffman, "Temple Scroll," *ABD* 6, 349.

and contemporary correspondence that turn a blind eye to non-centralized sacrifice. There are some data to suggest Bethel was up and running (despite the reports of destruction by Josiah) until 553 or 521 B.C.E, when fire destroyed it. Supposedly, it revived in the Hellenistic era and lasted as a cult site well into the Maccabean time period.¹⁹³

Centralization as an Innovation

Then there is one verse in Isaiah which actually seems to give the cult in Samaria (where Elijah and Elisha would have been headquartered a hundred years earlier) a modicum of legitimacy.

“As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols, whose engraved images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; shall I not, as I have done to Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?”

—Isaiah 10:10-11

Though it may be in a back-handed way, Samaria is found to be qualitatively superior to pagan idol makers. Without a doubt, it is being reprimanded, but it is also being grouped with Jerusalem, the favorite child in the family. It is not relegated to the status of stranger. She (Ezekiel’s “Oholah”) may be in need of discipline; however, as is the case with her sister (“Oholibah”), she will not be cast aside.

So, with all this in mind, let us go back to the putative beginning. Did the writer of Deuteronomy 12 espouse centralization? Not necessarily. He may have been weighing in against indiscriminate high places. While there is no question that Dtr2 was a strict constructionist when it comes to “One God—One Sanctuary,” the evolution of ethical monotheism (and a concomitant central cult) would probably have been a slow one. The

¹⁹³ H. M. Jamieson, “Bethel,” *ZPEB* 1, 532-535.

materials Dtr1 was working from, both oral and written, would have been adapted to the concept over time. No doubt a number of intervening phases took hold for a while, only to give way to greater refinement.

What form might this have taken for Israelites during the period they were just settling the new land of promise? A number of commentators have envisioned something similar to an amphictyonic system.¹⁹⁴ Like our “county seat” structure here in Georgia, an official site would be located within a day’s ride of any place in the jurisdiction. Such a system would make sense for a sacrificial cult wanting a reasonable check on orthodoxy without diminishing accessibility to the people.¹⁹⁵

If a single sacred sanctuary is in view, then it is indeed surprising that a ceremony of sacrifice is enacted on Mt. Ebal in Deuteronomy 11 and 27. Given such a fixed purpose, it would be equally amazing if Jerusalem were just one more place in a long string of central (or at least preeminent) worship sites. Yet this is precisely what appears to be the case. In fact, chapters 5 through 28 of Deuteronomy delineate a liturgical procession from Succoth to Shechem. And the end goal is not Jerusalem at all, but the self-same Mt. Ebal.

Going back to the pattern started in the last chapters of Exodus, with the wanderings in the wilderness, we see a long established series of movements for the holy shrine. First, of course, this path follows the guidance of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The setting up, the striking set and packing up, of the Levite-borne Tabernacle, with the nomadic Israelites trudging dutifully behind, would have been

¹⁹⁴ Though no longer in vogue, this concept was first put forward by M. Noth. (*NJBC*, 75:58; 77:82).

¹⁹⁵ J. Tigay claims that the law relegating worship to a single sanctuary “would have been extraordinarily disruptive to popular religion since most of the public lived far from the Temple and could not often travel there, and would have to decrease, delay, or forgo vital services that it provided for them” (Tigay, 459).

routine. (We can assume that the Ark of the Covenant would have been placed at point, leading the way, as it was in the crossing of the Jordan and in battle.) In camp it was surrounded by the tents of the different Levite groupings, right in the center of things. For theirs was the life-and-death responsibility of caring for the sacred shrine.)

Y. Aharoni has suggested that the first semi-permanent resting spot for the Tabernacle and the Ark was Qadesh-Barnea.¹⁹⁶ Be that as it may, M. Noth certainly voices the consensus of scholarship in positing the transfer of the central site within Canaan from Shechem to Bethel to Gilgal, and then on to Shiloh. The Ark is captured and returned, and, after some tentative meanderings, winds up once and for all in Jerusalem. A later editor may well have seen Zion as the intended termination point for these wanderings. But seeing the larger picture (or even the final destination) still does not make Jerusalem the one and only place where YHWH's Name would ever dwell. Implicit within the author's overarching intention for Deuteronomy 12 may well be such a fixed destination. But the place and time he describes so vividly was one of multiple altars and of multiple housings for the Ark of the Covenant.

Then again, as Wenham points out, the mere protection of the Ark does not necessarily imply a central cult for Israel.¹⁹⁷ The "nation" as such was much in flux, trying to establish itself through warfare with the surrounding Canaanite cultures. First taking control of the hill country, it was fitting that they build simple altars on high places. Proceeding down into the fertile valleys and life among the settled and agricultural peoples there, they modeled their worship sites more and more after the

If hard evidence does not point conclusively to there being any early command to centralize, this observation of his would appear to militate against it.

¹⁹⁶According to Aharoni ("The Solomonic Temple, the Tabernacle, and the Arad Sanctuary" [1973]), the Arad sanctuary has dimensions almost identical with those of the wilderness Tabernacle.

comparatively substantial, permanent temple structures of these Canaanites. But from the first, YHWH was a god of war. The Ark was the focal point for that warfare, the very core of divine power, but a moving epicenter. YHWH did not take on the role of resident king, palaced in splendor, until the transitory nature of his chosen people was at a standstill.

Of the aforementioned shrine locations, only Shiloh took on any appearance of a genuine cult center. The others were mere way stations, protective structures for the housing of the all-important Ark. Shiloh had the makings of a high priesthood in Eli's family, and it had a building of some kind—a *hêkāl*—not just a raised platform and an altar open to the sky (though perhaps one covered with a tent). The tribes joined there annually for a festival of YHWH, an honest-to-goodness national pilgrimage feast, at least according to the 21st chapter of Judges. Its presence in Ephraim appears to have given them added prestige and influence over the others.

Nevertheless, only when the Ark finally moved to Jerusalem were the centers of religious and political power truly combined.¹⁹⁷ Shechem was a veritable repository of patriarchal tradition and at times of almost king-making power (e.g., Gideon, Abimelech, and Rehoboam). But it does not appear to have been a locus of political strength unto itself as Jerusalem became (and thereafter remained).

The Benefits of the Reform

At first blush the centralization of the cult looks anything but practical. Given the right circumstances, however, it could have served some useful purposes. During times

¹⁹⁷ G. J. Wenham, "Deuteronomy and the Central Sanctuary," 94-108.

¹⁹⁸ 2 Samuel 6.

of crisis, it might have solidified national unity. With all the religious and political leaders concentrated in Jerusalem, they could more easily speak with one voice. Those disinclined to confront the perceived enemy boldly—those unashamedly bucking for a switch of alliances to a competing major power—might be effectively silenced or curtailed. Indeed, this rationale might well be appropriate for both Hezekiah's and Josiah's reigns. However, with Josiah hemmed in between a preoccupied Egypt and the fading glory of Assyria (as opposed to Hezekiah who was constantly threatened by the relentless, siege-minded Sennacherib), he had freer reign to act. (In fact, he began his initial reforms the same year Ashurbanipal died.) Thus, his counter-measures prove more far reaching and thorough than Hezekiah's. Not only was Jerusalem established as unique, but the high places were reduced to rubble.

Preserving among the general populace the concept of the Temple as unique and worthy of their awe and obeisance might have similar benefits for a time. But once the crisis cleared up, convenience would have reared her head. Of course, if enough years went by with a tradition of pilgrimage plainly established, this tendency might be countervailed. Still, pilgrimage in time of war, however, was likely to be spotty at best.

An effort to restore the royal (and/or priestly) coffers could also reasonably come into play. Whether from leader greed or from the necessities of battle, economic considerations almost certainly could have had an effect on the reining in of cult accessibility. On the other hand, a well-organized hierarchy might ultimately show itself more profitable than a centralized monopoly of power. Only if for some reason the Levites had become untrustworthy, if they had run amok and become difficult to control, would it be desirable to call them in from presumably lucrative high places.

Then again, the possibility remains that Hezekiah and Josiah acted from pure religious motives. One would think there would have had to have been proponents fairly early on of what was to become the prevailing orthodoxy. And such a constituency would have been mightily encouraged by the monarchy taking their side. Perhaps they had even been acting as a lobby pushing forward their cause in the courts of the king. Whoever they may have been, they are never spoken of at all: all credit is given to the throne. It should be noted, however, that each of these reforms was short lived. There was no significant pre-exilic return to the days of Davidic orthodoxy. If Hezekiah's efforts do indeed reflect the beginning of his reign when he was at best a young man, then his program of renewal lasted less than 30 years. (According to J. McHugh, Hezekiah was only 15,¹⁹⁹ but according to 2 Kings 18, he had turned 25.). Josiah's death in battle brought his restructuring of the cult system to an end after but a dozen years. By comparison, the entire tenure of the Kingdom of Judah, from Rehoboam to Zedekiah, spanned approximately 335 years.

As a result, it is difficult to speak of the permanent centralization of the cult in Jerusalem as having come about because of these two Judahite kings' reforms. For the long-range motivation we must seek elsewhere. Josiah may well have felt compelled to consolidate in Jerusalem in order to distinguish official Yahwism from the surrounding cultures' pagan practices.²⁰⁰ He may also have wanted to display YHWH as being but one god. There were not only many temples to Canaanite gods, such as Baal or El, but often many varieties or manifestations of that god. Josiah may have desired to limit Yahwisms to one.

¹⁹⁹ J. McHugh, *VT* 14.

²⁰⁰ R. Althann, *ABD* 3, 1016.

Hezekiah, of course, did not even completely centralize sacrifices. The cultus remained legitimate in the outlying areas at the high places beyond his military reach. Furthermore, the priority of pragmatic concerns makes his religious motives somewhat suspect. Sennacherib, after all, left him for a time at least with little under his control besides Jerusalem itself. All in all, Hezekiah's reform has scant effect.²⁰¹ And the twelve years of freedom from syncretism and heterodoxy during Josiah's reign—if we accept the accuracy of the Dtr's description of its thoroughness—hardly sets a precedent for the enduring establishment of the practice.

If one takes an even greater overarching perspective, taking in the views of prophets immediately before and after the exile, one may, as Tigay does, postulate the inspiration of the move to a desire to actually curtail and spiritualize the sacrificial system.²⁰² What begins in Isaiah's and Jeremiah's critiques of the cult and continues through the abstract reforms of the Pharisees in preferring prayer and halakhah to sacrifice is probably not in view by any of Judah's kings. The emphasis in Josiah's restructuring—in spite of the finding of the “Book of the Law”—is the renewing of a correct state-run cultic ritual (such as the reinstitution of the Passover celebration and the destruction of idols) rather than any personal obedience of the Torah (such as circumcision and Sabbath keeping).

For all practical purposes, the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem is a post-exilic phenomenon. Perhaps it is a battle between priests and Levites, perhaps between the priestly line and quasi-Davidic governors. Perhaps it results from competition with the *ʾām hā-ʾārēš* or with a cultus centered in Bethel (and run by Aaronid priests who were

²⁰¹ Unlike Josiah, Hezekiah did not centralize the priesthood, at least if we can believe the Chronicler (2 Chron. 31:15-19).

never exiled). No one knows for sure, but there are numerous conjectures. At any rate, the political vacuum created by the deportation of most of the Israelite elite brought about an inevitable power struggle. And the winners (ostensibly the Zadokites) were left free to declare their locus of worship as legitimate.

If then it were true that centralization was more or less localized or situational before the Exile, how could we expect Ephraim and Ephraim's cult to be written of contemporaneously? Most likely, in a way very similar to how it actually *is* presented. Its refusal to accept Jerusalem as the one locus for worship will obviously be condemned owing to the corresponding agenda of the Dtr. This is especially in evidence when there are practices that are distinct from Jerusalem's and might easily be construed as heterodoxical (e.g., Jeroboam's idol-like bulls or his consecration of non-Aaronids into priestly service). Straightforward, unadorned Yahwistic practice—like that exhibited by Elijah and Elisha—escapes all censure.

Two Measuring Sticks

The Chronicler, in fact, gives some indication that cultic practice in the North and South were to be judged by separate rules. In 2 Chronicles 14:2, Asa is commended for taking away “the foreign altars and the high places” from Judah. Similarly, his son Jehoshaphat is praised for removing “the high places and the sacred poles” from Judah.²⁰³ Yet at the same time, each is seemingly blasted for *not* eliminating the high places (2 Chron. 15:17 [Asa]; 20:33 [Jehoshaphat]). Asa's case might provide the key; for the narrative says “the high places were not taken *out of Israel*.” Were the Judahite kings

²⁰² J. H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy: the JPS Torah Commentary*.

²⁰³ 2 Chron. 17:6.

somehow given responsibility to eradicate false worship from regions not within their political control? We are given no indication of such though Josiah eventually did destroy Bethel which lay beyond his (original) borders. Or is there a different measuring stick for Ephraim?

When Manasseh is reported to repent of his longstanding wickedness in 2 Chronicles 33:10-17, his reform includes the demolition of foreign gods and idols in the Temple precincts and of all extraneous altars on Mt. Zion. On the other hand, he is *not at all* reproached for leaving outlying shrines intact as verse 17 makes clear: “The people, however, still sacrificed at the high places, but only to LORD their God.” At least in these situations, the Chronicler appears to be using descriptive rather than proscriptive language in referring to the non-removal of (Northern) high places.

Though there is some out and out condemnation, typically Ephraim itself is spoken of in familial terms. Its restoration is almost universally alluded to right alongside Judah’s. Moreover, the eschatological reunification of the two sides gets mentioned by a number of prophets, without any hint of the rancor Jonah demonstrated against the general amnesty announced for Nineveh.

The Ephraimites have a proud and worthy heritage both as a single tribe and as a designation for the 10 Northern tribes joined in confederation. The Exodus Myth seems to stem largely from Northern sources (c.f., Psalm 78). The Ark of the Covenant was, by scholarly consensus, a Northern phenomenon²⁰⁴—incorporated into the life and worship of the whole of Israel through the political shrewdness of David. And the settlement—if not the conquest—of Canaan by the Israelites began here. Archaeological remains indicate three-fourths of the early Iron Age population of what soon became the United

Monarchy under Judahites David and Solomon resided in Ephraim. Until the rise of the one “after God’s own heart,” most of the significant personnel mentioned in the biblical narratives are from the North. David, in fact, appears almost as a complete outsider, as a usurper from the Southern hinterlands of Hebron—more closely associated with the Philistines than the Hebrews at times.

If we take a look at the Book of Judges, we see a list filled with notable Northerners. The most unambiguous Southerner, Othniel, is not even a Judahite, but a Kenizzite (only later assimilated into Judah). Of the rest, Deborah is from within hollering distance of Bethel and musters her troops (in Barak’s stead) in the very center of Ephraim. Likewise, Ehud rallies his armies against Moab in the heart of the North. Gideon and his son Abimelech are groomed for power by the Shechemites. Tola, an Issacharite, dwelled in the Ephraimite hills. Shamgar, Jair, Elon, Abdon, and Ibzan are also all from the North (the last being from the Bethlehem of the North in contradistinction to its more well-known counterpart south of Jerusalem).

Jephthah hails from Gilead, also in the North, famously fighting the neighboring Sibboleth-speaking tribe of Ephraim. (Some Hebrew consonants—in this case, initial sibilants—are more highly palatalized as one moves east through Gilead towards Akkadia.) That leaves Samson, and though his hometown lies south of the Ephraimite border, he is more importantly a Danite. In other words, he is from a tribe which later moved—lock, stock, and barrel—to the far north of the country.²⁰⁵

Moses, of course, never settled in Canaan, having to be content to view it from a distance. Thus he cannot technically be spoken of as either a Northerner or a Southerner.

²⁰⁴ C. L. Seow, “Ark of the Covenant,” *ABD* 1, 389-390.

²⁰⁵ Judges 18.

(However, Moses is intimately connected to the Tabernacle, and Aaron to the Ark of the Covenant, both ostensibly Northern traditions.) Also, Joshua, his second in command, comes straight out of the tribe of Ephraim. The Northern cities “conquered” by Joshua outnumber those in the South about 20 to 5. (Though, of course, it should be noted that there are 8 tribes in the North compared to just 3 (Benjamin, Judah, and Simeon) Southern groups.)

Levi, it is to be remembered, had no territorial boundaries given it. Moses and his brother Aaron were both Levites. The Aaronid Levites were, for the most part, assigned to Judahite towns. On the other hand, some scholars, following F. M. Cross, suggest a predominance of Mushite Levites in the North (e.g., the Shilonite Elides or David’s co-High Priest Abiathar from Anathoth).²⁰⁶

Within the Pentateuch, Jacob, whose name will in time become synonymous with the Northern Kingdom of Israel, has preeminence over Esau, the progenitor of Edom (south of Moab). The exploits of Judah (with Tamar, his daughter-in-law, in Genesis 38) pale beside the expansive plot set aside for Jacob’s fair-haired son Joseph. Born, of course, to his father’s favored wife Rachel, Joseph is described as “a prince among his brothers” (Deut. 33:16). And the very next verse fashions Ephraim “a firstborn bull with majesty.”

Typically, the Elohist is marked as a writer/editor of Northern provenance. And the Dtr1, though difficult to nail down geographically, sure includes a great deal of Northern material: the Elide priesthood, most of the Book of Judges, and the Elijah/Elisha narratives. Then again, he thoroughly involves himself in anti-Northern polemics from time to time (weighing in against the idolatrous Jeroboam I, and all who

followed in his wake, including the Omride Baalists). Yet these censured kings are to a man clearly heterodox. Any self-respecting Northern prophet would be wailing on them just as strenuously (as Hosea himself demonstrably did).

But there is no getting around the force with which the Northern Kingdom is condemned by the Dtr. It is with an intensity seldom matched in the Hebrew Scriptures (one might indeed wonder whether Edom gets off lightly by comparison!) Arguably, it may lack the passionate eloquence of Hosea as he rails against his own people, but does it ever put Jacob in its place.²⁰⁷ At any rate, for both of them, Jacob's judgment is sure. No one should be surprised by the total destruction of the North when it comes. No one should fancy as unjust the dispersal of her peoples throughout the Assyrian Empire.

Hope for Ephraim

Still, why is it that prophet after prophet—Northern and Southern alike—was merciful toward this despicable Ephraim? Even fiery Hosea speaks of a return from exile from Egypt and Assyria for his corrupt compatriots. In chapter 11, YHWH asks, “How can I give you up, Ephraim?” (vs. 8) In chapter 14 YHWH implores, “Return, O Israel.” (vs. 1) He goes on to restate his own faithfulness: “I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them” (vs. 4). “They shall again live beneath my shadow; they shall flourish as a garden” (vs. 7). These are decidedly hopeful words with which to finish a book. And they are hopeful *for Ephraim*.

The Major Prophets clearly follow suit. Isaiah ben Amoz admits the gleanings will be scarce—“two or three berries in the top of the highest bough”—but a remnant

²⁰⁶ F. M. Cross, *CMHE*.

²⁰⁷ One could even contend that this matching vehemence marks the Dtr as Northern!

shall remain (Is. 17:6). Not only does Second Isaiah claim that “the LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob” (Is. 48:20), but that it is his will “to restore the tribes of Jacob,” (Is. 49:6). The prophet is very specific in pointing out the former kingdom of the North and its ongoing plight. Jeremiah sounds a brighter note, telling “Rachel”: “Keep your voice from weeping...they shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future” (Jer.31:16-17). Ezekiel chimes in with his metaphor of two sticks, one for Judah and the other for Joseph. And they will be joyfully combined—both unified and sanctified before YHWH (Ezk.37:15-28).

Not to be outdone, the Minor Prophets do not disappoint. Amos declares that YHWH “will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob” (Am. 9:8). Micah exudes that the remnant of Jacob “shall be like a lion among the animals of the forest.” Continuing on, he surely gives them a tremendous sense of comfort and hope: “Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries, and your enemies shall be cut off” (Mic.5:7-9). In the very last verse of the book, he confidently states: “[The LORD] will show faithfulness to Jacob...as [he] has sworn to our ancestors from the days of old” (Mic.7:20).

Nahum (in 2:2) says plainly, “For the LORD is restoring the majesty of Jacob, as well as the majesty of Israel, though ravagers have ravaged them and ruined their branches.” Second Zechariah, is likewise more than clear: “Then the people of Ephraim shall become like warriors, and their hearts shall be glad as with wine. Their children shall see it and rejoice, their hearts will exult in the LORD. I will signal for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them...” (Zech. 10:7-8). Last of all, Malachi reminds the “children of Jacob” that “the LORD do[es] not change.” They “have not perished.” “Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of Hosts” (Mal.3:6-7).

The punishments meted out are harsh to say the least, but over and over again the entire Hebrew Bible postulates the final unity of North and South. There is no monolithic Judean Kingdom stretching into the future, but a reunified Israelite one. According to archaeological evidence, the city of Jerusalem quadrupled in size after the fall of the Kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians.²⁰⁸ Despite Sennacherib's boasting of dragging off thousands into oblivion, myriads of refugees fled toward the City of David. This would have left Judah a virtual melting pot of North and South and helps explain the subsequent melding of traditions in Scripture.

Nor is Judah itself left unscathed. The terrible penalties exacted on Jacob are not withheld from its complement to the South. No one gets by with a slap on the wrist. Undoubtedly, some of the refugees have leapt out of the frying pan and into the fire. Perhaps some of them will end up being punished twice. But everyone will get his just desserts. And Judah is described time and again as infinitely deserving.²⁰⁹ That said, it must be noted that whereas all of the Northern kings are summarily dismissed as wicked, only three from Judah are so roundly denounced: Joram, Ahaziah, and Manasseh. And two of these are directly related to Athalia, dear old Ahab's daughter (Joram is her husband and Ahaziah, her son). On the other hand, only two Judean kings unequivocally pass muster: reformers Hezekiah and Josiah.

In Jeremiah's Temple Sermon, the promises to destroy the Temple in Jerusalem just as he did to Shiloh (Jer.7:11-15). Earlier in the book, the prophet lays it on the line: "Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah" (Jer.3:11-12). Ezekiel similarly admonishes Jerusalem that "Samaria has not committed *half* your sins" (Ezk.16:51). As

²⁰⁸ P. J. King, "Jerusalem," *ABD* 3, 753.

²⁰⁹ 2 Kings 21:9-16.

for Micah, he gets downright testy: “Samaria’s incurable wound has come to Judah...to the very gate of Jerusalem!” (Mic.1:9) He asks the question, “What is the ‘high place’ of Judah?” His answer? “Jerusalem!” (Mic.1:5) In chapter 3, verse 12, his dark prediction must have sent chills down his listeners’ spines: “Therefore because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field: Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the House, a wooded height” (Also, Jer.26:18).

A great deal of the time, Scripture treats both entities together. Sometimes they are even inseparable. The returned exiles are known whole cloth by the longstanding historical title of Israel (or Jacob). But often, including in exilic and post-exilic writings, the two “peoples” remain truly distinct. Even in these cases, their fates are inexorably linked. If one is punished and exiled, they both are. If one is restored, so is the other. One would think that the surviving nation state of Judah would predominate and subsume all further mention of Ephraim. Unquestionably, many from the House of Jacob have escaped south before the rampaging Assyrians. But they would have merely assimilated into Judah. Why have these old names (and the people to which they refer) been held onto so devotedly? For all we know, Ephraim, as it had been known, ceased to exist—thinly scattered throughout the crumbling Assyrian Empire.²¹⁰ It was repopulated by Sennacherib and may have even gained some hegemony over Judah during the exile (and perhaps into the Persian era). But it never reasserted any form of cultic equality. Why do we have all this nostalgia?

Traditional Names

Without a doubt, there are instances of nations keeping ties with outdated names for ceremonial or poetic purposes: Britannia used to “rule the waves”; Columbia remains the “gem of the ocean.” [Also, Gaul, for France; Hibernia, for Scotland; Persia, for Iran] But seldom would one idealize a lost (even disreputable) portion of one’s nation’s history. Would the U.K. think to call itself “Normandy”? Or [modern] Germany, “Prussia”? Or Japan, “Manchuria”? Perhaps none of these are sufficiently analogous. Maybe people groups that spill across borders would prove better examples. But greater Hungary or Albania or Kurdistan have focal points within recognized boundaries. Albanians would simply never use “Kosova” as a moniker for the entire nation.

Still, Macedonia “resurrected” an ancient name (incurring the wrath of northern Greece in the process), and the modern state of Israel did likewise. Perhaps it was nothing more than this, a conscious reaching back to the United Monarchy or before for labels reflecting a common heritage. Perhaps there had been a certain camaraderie between Baalistic states, and perhaps with Yahwism it was the same: Joseph and Judah—North and South—brothers sharing a mutual religion.

Not until the tactical consolidation of the cult under David, uniting a nation and spurring a short-lived “empire,” did orthodox Yahwism demand centrality. From the earliest times, altars sprang up everywhere for a grateful people to praise their God. There is no holding back such thanksgiving: the very act of centralizing sacrifice may have given impetus to localized expressions of communal prayer and Torah reading, thus giving rise to the synagogue movement. When the nation divides, so does the

²¹⁰ And what *was* left became known as Samaria.

administration of the cult. When the people return from exile, various temples again spring up. There is a curious passage in Malachi that may allude to the tacit acceptability of these practices the Dtr takes such pains to rebuke.

Oh, that someone among you would shut the [temple] doors, so that you would not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of Hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hands. *For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations*, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering for my name is great among the nations, says the LORD of Hosts.

—Malachi 1:10-11.

Catholics, of course, have used these verses as a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the mass. Commentators tend to think them hyperbole: however imperfect the worship of the gentiles might be, at least they sometimes approach the deity with sincerity of heart, something Malachi will not ascribe to God's own particular people. But a straightforward reading is certainly not out of the question. Writing a mere 50 years or so later, the Elephantine elders, in 407 B.C.E., appeal to Bagohi and Sanballat concerning sacrifice there where they reside, among the nations. And the reply echoes Malachi almost exactly: they may offer incense and the regular cereal oblations (the *minha*, the very thing to which a 'pure offering' most likely refers), but the blood of animals must not touch their altar. That is to be reserved for the Jerusalem cultus. Though the evidence is in bits and pieces, it seems clear that at least in certain periods a portion of orthodoxy remained which did not absolutely insist that the utter uniqueness of Zion was sacrosanct.

CHAPTER 10

THE PROPHETIC CRITIQUE OF THE PRIESTLY CULT

“I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring me choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”

—Amos 5:22-23

It is easy to see how such stirring words—a challenge laid down by the God of Israel through his prophet—might become one of Martin Luther King’s favorite biblical passages. But what were the Israelites themselves to think? Hadn’t these very components characterized their worship of God from time immemorial? Why the sudden change? Why the unmistakable anger? Even now, looking back from at least 2500 years later, it is difficult to understand how Solomon can be commended for sacrificing 120,000 sheep and goats for the dedication of the First Temple while these poor Ephraimites are getting reamed over a few grain offerings.

Though paying fuller attention to those prophets immediately preceding or overlapping into the period of the Exile, this chapter will include prophetic denunciations of the reigns of kings prior to this time. With the possible exception of Hezekiah, all of these previous kings were just as worthy of some level of rebuke and for similar practices. In general there is a consistency among the prophets: Solomon does not get a free pass concerning his construction of high places on the Mount of Olives. Elijah and Elisha do not earn censure for their purely Yahwistic yet non-centralized activities. Syncretism, injustice, and self-absorbed indifference toward God warrant criticism from those prophets truly devoted to YHWH. Still, it is not always easy to sort out mere

devotion to details of ritual and the prophets' predilection for a devotion of the heart. Indeed, sometimes the prophets come forward to praise the sacrificial system and then just as suddenly reverse themselves for no readily apparent reason. How should one interpret these turnarounds which to all the world look rife with contradiction?

Relative Negation

Scholars, of course, have come up with a number of possibilities for the seeming contradiction. One is that there is nothing "seeming" about it. The two points of view are just that: two distinct groups—be they prophet and priest, rival priestly lines, or contending prophetic schools—simply don't see eye to eye when it comes to sacrifices! Another possibility is that there really is no contradiction at all. Only certain sacrifices are being proscribed. The broader cultic system is meant to be kept intact. A couple of options lie between these two extremes. The first of these derives from a common-sense approach to the situation at hand: perhaps tough times demand tough measures. In this particular case, as well as similar instances, the prophet is faced with the thankless task of informing a wayward and disobedient people that their comeuppance is upon them. God has had enough and is serious about judging them. More than likely, nothing is going to change the course of events. It doesn't matter how many animals they slaughter; God is not about to relent. In the highly charged atmosphere of the ongoing crisis, sacrifice will achieve no good whatsoever. Temporarily, at least, it is to be rejected as a resource.

The final possibility is probably the most commonly cited. God is not content with mere mechanical performance of his revealed commandments but wishes a wholesale imitation of his own moral character: not words spoken by rote, not good

deeds done out of sheer duty, not a mindless routine of daily sacrifices. Instead, he demands an ethic that genuinely engages all of one's life.

In other words, the shocking language of such out-and-out rejection of the cult is employed in order to get us to see a more important underlying truth. Sacrifices are not actually abrogated, but we need to see that righteousness and justice are more important than they are. This particular type of hyperbole is commonly used in the Hebrew Bible (and the New Testament, as well)²¹¹ and is known among scholars as “relative negation.” As such, it is a sort of thesis-antithesis: no more of *this*, but instead *that*.²¹² As examples, in Jeremiah 31 we're told that the old covenant written in stone will be no more, replaced by a new covenant indelibly inscribed on one's heart.²¹³ In the same chapter of Jeremiah, the prophet proclaims that the children's teeth will no longer be “set on edge” by their parents' wrongdoing, but that everyone will die for his or her own sins. The first example emphasizes making the covenant stipulations personal and vibrant. They veritably *live* in one's heart. The second focuses on the necessity of understanding individual responsibility. Undoubtedly, children will still suffer needlessly for the mistakes of their parents, but they need not see it as some sort of destiny they cannot overcome.

Many scholars believe that relative negation is called for in these circumstances because any absolute negation of the cult is unreasonable. We simply cannot imagine

²¹¹ “And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off”—Matt. 5:30—is obvious hyperbole, as are the instructions to hate “father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters” in Luke 14:26. Each is commanding preference for the unstated: holiness is to be preferred over life and limb; love of God is to be preferred over dedication to family. Perhaps more analogous to prophetic “abrogation” of sacrifice is the request in Ephesians 5:18 to “not get drunk,” *but rather* to be “filled with the spirit.” Since there are no other instances in Scripture advocating a complete ban on intoxication, this may be an example of relative negation.

²¹² M. Weinfeld, *Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel*, 17.

how these prophets could have meant any such thing. All of the surrounding cultures had sacrificial systems. Evidence from Ugarit shows the practice to go at least as far back as the Late Bronze Age.²¹⁴ We can fairly safely assume that the Israelites had always had one, as well. Surely, they could not have even *envisioned* appropriate worship without the cultus. Besides, how can we take seriously Amos' deprecation of *music* or Isaiah ben Amoz's forbiddance of *prayer*?

“‘The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?’ says the LORD. ‘I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear you evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean.’”

—Isaiah 1:11-16a²¹⁵

The Spiritualization of Sacrifice

If this take on the prophetic critique is true, what message is God sending to the Israelites through Amos (et al.)? What would be the rationale for—to some extent, at least—*spiritualizing* the cult apparatus? J. Philip Hyatt suggests five major reasons:²¹⁶

²¹³ Messianic Jews use these verses to interpret Paul as justifying a continued practice of halakhah, seeing the preference as grace before Law, not grace instead of Law.

²¹⁴ M. Weinfeld, 1976, 53.

²¹⁵ Normally in Israelite prayer it is the worshipper who diverts his gaze, not God. Instead, His face is said to shine upon the believer (Nu. 6:25, Ps. 67:1). The comment concerning “hands full of blood” may refer to violence and brutality in the land or (as Calvin and others interpreted it) to the animal bloodshed inherent in the cult. Y. Kaufmann has observed that the priests were not to offer prayer while their hands were bloody from the ritual, but should wash them first (HIR II, 476-78). Interestingly, we get the same combination of hidden face and bloody hands from Third Isaiah (Isaiah 59:2-3).

²¹⁶ J. P. Hyatt, *The Prophetic Criticism of Israelite Worship*, 211-19.

1. The Israelites had become too focused on what God had done for them in the past. This is seen not only through their unabashed historical promotion of such events as the Passover and the Exodus, the Wanderings in the Wilderness, and the Conquest of Canaan, but also in all the related festivals and sacrifices. To counter these excesses, the prophets felt the people of Israel needed to engage God more in the here and now. For only in the present could he affect the routine of their day-to-day lives, and more importantly, their ongoing moral choices.

2. Canaanite sacrifices, which Israel had a tendency to imitate, were often tinged with the magical and the occult in scope and appearance. They also seldom had—at least in the evaluation of Israelite prophets—any deeply spiritual elements in them. One sacrificed out of duty without any real sense of penance or remorse. Or one offered his or her gift at the altar of a certain god or goddess in order to receive something back for oneself (rather than out of joy or gratitude).

3. The cult had become too centered on man and his needs: the priest's need for sustenance, power, or attention; the worshipper's need to cleanse a guilty conscience or to be seen doing the “right” things in public. Nobody thought much of God or his requirements.

4. The Israelites had become too comfortable, too familiar with the transcendent God of the universe. In going through their daily routine, they had lost touch with a sense of awe for the Almighty. Borrowing again from Canaanite practices, they may have begun to anthropomorphize God, thinking him in need of constant attention or even feeding.

5. Without doubt, God would wish the community as a whole to unite in making the covenant a relationship that did indeed affect their entire cultural, economic, and spiritual lives. That they would meet his ethical demands and accurately reflect his moral character.

So then, these are some possible reasons for a permanent shift in focus of how God might desire to be worshipped through the cult. Though they are based on conditions and practices current in neighboring communities at the time, they remain speculative at best.

We can more clearly determine the temporary circumstances that brought about the shrillness in each prophet's voice. Take the passage from 1 Samuel 15, for instance:

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.”

—1 Samuel 15:22-23

Here, Samuel is responding to Saul's failure to uphold the “ban” on captured goods and livestock and to kill the Amalekite king, Agag. His kingship is to be rejected on account of his arrogance and rebellion (which are compared to divination and idolatry). Tough words. But Saul has indeed been unlistening and stubborn, believing he knows better than the prophet, better than God. Samuel is “getting his attention” by means of this harsh message. As opposed to some of the other passages, this one is direct in stating that whereas God *prefers* obedience to sacrifice, He by no means rejects the latter.

A Call to Repentance

One can make a fairly strong case that these men are simply confronting the crisis they encounter. They are not establishing theology; they are meeting a pressing need. One should not gloss over the urgency of their language. They *are* using strong words—words pitched with emotion, intense. But they are summoning their people to repentance, warning them of impending disaster (sometimes including a fleeting glimpse of hope far down the way, sometimes offering none).²¹⁷ Perhaps we should not base our arguments on what we feel the prophet *should* not have said or *could* not have meant. For example, how do we ameliorate these words from Third Isaiah?:

“Whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man, and whoever offers a lamb, like one who breaks a dog’s neck; whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig’s blood, and whoever burns memorial incense, like one who worships an idol. They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations.”

—Isaiah 66:3

When one remembers the fierceness with which the Maccabees and the Hasideans fought Antiochus over his sacrifice of a pig on the Jerusalem altar, it is not an easy task to pass this off as so much hyperbole.

Such a passage does not easily yield to Jacob Milgrom’s argument that what is abrogated is not the cult as a whole but merely certain sacrifices. In Jeremiah 7:22 it says, “For when I brought you forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifice.” According to Milgrom these last two terms—in Hebrew, *zēbah* and *‘ōlâ*—refer only to the free-will offerings brought by

²¹⁷ G. Anderson, *Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT)*, 882.

individuals and not the daily, communal *tāmîd* sacrifices.²¹⁸ He believes Jeremiah is calling his hearers to “renounce their individual offerings because their ritual piety is vitiated by their immoral behavior.” Others, like Baruch Levine, Brevard Childs, and Gary Anderson, think Milgrom is overspecializing this common pairing of terms, which they believe to be a merism for the whole of the sacrificial system.²¹⁹ Besides, as Anderson states, since Jeremiah never directly expresses any such fine-tuned distinction, Milgrom’s thesis is merely an argument from silence.²²⁰ In fact, this particular text is part of Jeremiah’s “Temple Sermon” informing Judah that the Temple with its service is *not* inviolable, that their reliance on it is misplaced.²²¹ In other words, the context is not that conducive to Milgrom’s hair-splitting²²² and fits in better with the notion these terms refer to *all* sacrifices.

On the other hand, there may actually be something to a delineation being made between sacrifices offered for inadvertent sin and those brought forward for advertent transgressions (what is sometimes biblically referred to as “sinning with a high hand”).²²³ In such a case, we can even bring evidence from the Priestly Writer (Leviticus 26, Numbers 15:22-31) where God states his patience definitely has a limit. There comes a time, due to high-handed sin, when sacrifices no longer suffice and God will go ahead with destruction:

²¹⁸ J. Milgrom, *Concerning Jeremiah’s Repudiation of the Cult*, 273-75.

²¹⁹ B. Levine, In the Presence of the Lord, 20-22; Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, 172-73.

²²⁰ G. Anderson, 1992, 882.

²²¹ Jeremiah 7:4. “Put not trust in the lying words, saying, “The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD.””

²²² On the other hand, as both D. R. Jones and P. Craigie point out, material from the original sermon is restricted to verses 1-15. The rest [Jer. 7:16-34] is an amalgam of supplementary texts supplied by a later editor (though possibly deriving from Jeremiah himself).

²²³ G. Anderson, 882.

“I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings.”

Leviticus 26:31²²⁴

Indistinct Factions

For me the most fascinating possibility for these prophetic critiques is also the hardest to pin down. If these men honestly and unequivocally mean exactly what they say—especially some of the more damning material stating that God never even commanded that sacrifices be made—then we are dealing with diametrically opposed points of view. We are dealing with sectarianism. We know that during the United Monarchy a rift existed between the Zadokite and Elide lines of the priesthood. But we have no idea how long the contention lasted. Abiathar is exiled to Anathoth, which is coincidentally where Jeremiah hails from (though that’s far too distant a connection to do anything with, without further evidence). We have factionalism sprouting up again during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. We have Oniads (Zadokites who run off to Leontopolis in the Nile delta and build a rival Temple) and Tobiads (who gained power in the Temple through their role as tax collectors and through inter-marriage with Zadokites); we have Hasideans (who may be the forerunners of the Pharisees) and Hasmoneans (non-Zadokites who joined the Hasideans to overthrow the Greco-Syrians); and we have the elitist Zadokite Saducees and the escapist Zadokite Qumran community, not to mention the apocalyptic Essenes (who may or may not share an identity with the Qumranians).²²⁵

²²⁴ Note the word choice: Both here and in Amos 5, the aroma is referred to as “pleasing,” the fellowship offerings as “choice.” The rejection of sacrifices does not necessarily have anything to do with *how* they are brought or of what quality they are—as opposed to Malachi—but purely according to the hearts of the people.

²²⁵ J. D. W. Watts remarks on the post-exilic times of Third Isaiah [Is.66]: “The priests have fixed their choice on their own ways without seeking to know Yahweh’s decisions for his own house.” This challenge

Any group that is a direct predecessor of the Pharisees might be a good suspect: any group characterized by ethical monotheism, a progressive response to the plight of the people, and a willingness to decentralize (as opposed to one characterized by Hellenistic accommodation, as well as a focus on the restoration and preservation of the Jerusalem Temple and its conservative ritual standards). There's really nothing new under the sun. It seems one is destined to have one group defending the status quo and moneyed interests, while another takes up for the poor and sees change as good. Both can maintain old or reach new ethical high points, as well as sink to corrupt lows. From the outside looking in, it can even be difficult to distinguish between them.

Another problem making distinctions difficult is inexact dating. We know fairly well when the prophetic ministries themselves are set in time, but not when the final compilation takes place. And the critique of the cult might be motivated from either timeframe. Thus we are working with about a 330-year window from 760 B.C.E. to 430 B.C.E. In terms of life events—rather than message—we know more about kings and governors and generals therein, than we do priests and prophets.

We do know that some of the prophets had run-ins with priests: Amos up against Amaziah (Amos 7:10ff.) and Jeremiah against Pashhur ben Immer (Jer. 20:1-6), against some priestly antagonists (Jer. 26:1-24), and against Zephaniah ben Maaseiah (Jer. 29).²²⁶ Of course, Amaziah was a priest at Bethel under Jereboam II. Though Amos includes a rebuke of Judah (Amos 6:1), his principal target is Samaria. Therefore, Jeremiah's critique, coming after the fall of the North, can hardly be a coordinated attack. Pashhur,

he believes is meant for "remnants of the old Zadokite priesthood who were fighting to maintain their grip on Zion's ritual" (Watts, 1987, 356). He muses that these may be the selfsame Zadokites who expelled the Levites in Ezekiel 44:10ff. Also, Watts quotes Elizabeth Achtemeier, who in "The Community and Message of Isaiah 56-66" notes that God is "never coerced by ritual" (E. Achtemeier, 1982, 141).

who is described as the overseer of the Temple, is not a Zadokite, and there would be question (with his name being of Egyptian derivation) whether he would even have been from a legitimate priestly family. Those who put him on trial and sentenced him to death for his words against Jerusalem—“This house shall be like Shiloh”—are not clearly identified. Whether Jeremiah harbored a nostalgic sentimentality for the former Elide sanctuary and was rubbing their noses in it is hard to conjecture. But he clearly did not believe the Jerusalem locale sacrosanct. As for Zephaniah, who may have been cousin to Jeremiah and brother to the false prophet Zedekiah, we know only that he was next in line to the Chief Priest at the time, Seraiah. He was likely then a Zadokite of some sort.

Cult Differences over Time

As far as I can ascertain, there were some significant differences in sacrificial practice before and after the exile. Archaeologically, this can be found in terms of osteal remains in the immediate environs of altars. For example, the pre-exilic temple at Arad is set up for sacrifice, whereas the so-called “solar shrine,” a temple built at Lachish after the return, not only does not provide for them, but there are no remains.²²⁷ In Nehemiah 12 at the rededication of the walls of Jerusalem there is no mention of sacrifice. Of the Jewish temple built at Elephantine during the Exile, it is remarked that sheep and goats were never sacrificed there. When the Elephantine officials write Jerusalem, requesting the Persian governor Begohi and Jewish High Priest Jehohanan for permission to rebuild (after the Egyptian priests of Khnum run wild and destroy their sanctuary in 410 B.C.E.),

²²⁶ S. Paul, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 1173.

²²⁷ D. Ussishkin, “Lachish,” *ABD* 4, 125. This is not my original documentation for this, and it doesn’t completely corroborate what I had (evidently the shrine has a small altar).

they are told they can keep their sacrificial service just “as it was formerly,” meaning thereby a restriction to grain offerings and incense.

Similar restrictions may indeed apply to the forty years of desert wandering (and thus account for the claims that the cult does not go back all the way to Sinai). Weinfeld suggests that only the Decalogue was given then and there.²²⁸ The sacrificial system in all its glory and detail may not have been unveiled until the Israelites were encamped on the plains of Moab, shortly before Moses’ demise. He quotes Redakh²²⁹ as saying,

“In the entire Ten Commandments which are the principals of the Law, there is no reference to a burnt offering, to a sacrifice...and to the daily burnt offerings or to the Temple built for the Divine service: it may be, as our Rabbi Moses [Maimonides], of blessed memory wrote, that this was to eradicate alien views and to assign the temples built for idolatry to the service of God, that the name of idolatry shall be obliterated from them.”

In other words, the cult was enacted to keep the Israelites from pagan temples in Canaan and from remembering idolatrous practices experienced by them during their sojourn in Egypt.

There was also a difference in at least the description of practice between the Dtr and the Chronicler. This can be clearly seen in the depiction of the Josianic Reform—a keynote event for the Dtr. His narrative of the renewal of the Passover in 2 Kings 23 says nothing at all concerning a sacrifice. On the other hand, the Chronicler goes on and on, boasting of the slaughter of 30,000 sheep and goats, plus 3,000 cattle. (2 Chron. 35)

²²⁸ J. A. Thompson (pp. 287-88) likewise remarks that the covenant is ratified in Exodus 24 before any sacrificial details are stipulated.

²²⁹ I have not been able to figure out who this is.

Similarly, the eschatological restoration of the Temple is depicted either with or without the cult. In the second chapter of Isaiah, YHWH's Temple on his Holy Mountain is a peaceable kingdom sans sacrificial bloodshed.²³⁰ From chapter 43 through 46 of Ezekiel, on the other hand, is an intricate description of the complete reestablishment of ritual animal slaughter.²³¹

Imagining the Temple

So, there are differences in administration of temple service both chronologically and by circumstance (dependent on which group is in control). Also, there seems to have been a shift, or perhaps an innovation in how the Temple was viewed theologically and/or philosophically. Instead of God residing in the confines of the Temple, the whole city is seen as sacred. Instead of the Ark being the footstool, Jerusalem itself is. And partly as a result of this shift, the Temple is no longer viewed as inviolable. God may remove his Presence at will as he did during the Exile according to Ezekiel. This prophet's idealized and as yet unrealized plan for a temple could not possibly fit on the present Temple Mount site. Even the Qumran community's Temple Scroll speaks of a Temple City that would have engulfed most of the contemporaneous Jerusalem.²³² Correlatively, Third Isaiah (Is. 66:21) appears to open up the priestly functions to all Levites. For they have been mostly locked out of their inheritance since the time of

²³⁰ In a similar vein, Hosea 3:4 speaks of the Israelites living "many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol." The prophet may be inferring that it will then be restored, but he doesn't directly say so. And he could by no means be implying a "restoration" for *maṣṣēbôt* and idolatry (*teraphîm*), both considered illegitimate forms of worship.

²³¹ J. G. Williams, *Steadfast Love and Not Sacrifice*, 88.

²³² L. Schiffman, *Temple Scroll*, 349.

Josiah.²³³ And Jeremiah (Jer. 3) claims that in the restoration of Zion, the Ark of the Covenant will not even be missed. There will be no need to rush to rebuild the Temple, for Jerusalem itself will be YHWH's throne. Clearly, all of these ideals retain the sacredness of the Holy City but reduce the importance of the priesthood.

Likewise, the sacred relationship between the purity of man's heart in true repentance and the never-failing patience and forgiveness of God is maintained and strengthened. "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). From the bulk of these texts, the cult appears to be on more than temporary hiatus. And indeed in the talisman of time, it has been. Though it was restored for perhaps 500 years, the bleat and cry of sacrificial victims has fallen silent for over 1930 years now. The proud priesthood has been brought low, and a humble Levite faithful had been raised in its place. Psalm 51 extols the "broken spirit": "...a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." In fact, here and in Isaiah 66:2-3, humility and contrition are termed the true "sacrifices of God."²³⁴

In the wake of the prophetic critique, the faith of the ancient Israelites was in the throes of transformation to a whole new theological level. It detected the first rumblings of the paradigm shift to ethical monotheism. Though it retreated from this higher concept on numerous occasions, it continued on from there to Rabbinic Judaism with its cult of

²³³ The reproof of the priesthood and the restoration of the Levites is also striking in Malachi 2:7-9, "'For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction—because he is the messenger of the Almighty. But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi,' says the LORD Almighty. 'So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law.'" Why, in verse 2 he even claims the LORD will curse their blessings. Temporarily or not, the imprimatur of God has been swept away from the practice of sacrifices.

²³⁴ The "righteous sacrifices" and "whole burnt offering" of verses 20-21 of Psalm 51 are by consensus an addendum. Perhaps this emendation is a correction to what was seen as too harsh of an anti-cult statement. Or perhaps it is a clarification, making it known that what God wishes are sacrifices done rightly and with a repentant heart.

holy prayer and godly deeds. It also continued on from there to Christianity with its focus on the universal application of the blessings first given to the Jewish people. And this was accomplished, of course, through a sacrificial reform of an entirely different nature. God himself offered a Providential Sacrifice: once for all.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

*“Jerusalem was uninhabited like a wilderness;
not one of her children went in or out.
The sanctuary was trampled down,
and aliens held the citadel; it was a lodging place for the Gentiles.
Joy was taken from Jacob;
the flute and the harp ceased to play.’*

Then they gathered together and went to Mizpah, opposite Jerusalem, because Israel formerly had a place of prayer in Mizpah....”

—1 Maccabees 3:45-46

Here a Second Temple document gives deference to a former high place on the Samuel circuit. Mizpah itself never receives direct rebuke in the Hebrew Bible although Hosea 5:1 comes close. (There, the priests and the nobility are castigated for becoming a “snare at Mizpah.”) The Maccabeans are, of course, in an exceptional situation: Antiochus’ troops are garrisoned in Jerusalem; the Temple has been defiled; and no altar is ever set up there in Mizpah. Instead, the people fast, tear their clothing, read the book of the law, tithe, and cry aloud in prayer. It will be remembered that David and his men, while fleeing from Saul, accepted the bread of the Presence from the hand of Ahimelech, priest at Nob. Though they eat what is normally forbidden, no rebuke is forthcoming. Unusual circumstances make for bad law.

In the final analysis, the evidence for and against the legitimacy of the non-centralized cult must be weighed against data confirming or not confirming the status of Jerusalem as the site *par excellence*. Neither Solomon’s Temple nor the subsequent sanctuary of Zerubbabel “has been conclusively identified with any archaeological

remains.”²³⁵ This circumstance does, in fact, stand to reason. Herod cleared away any vestiges of the earlier post-exilic structure in building up a platform for his gargantuan project begun in 20 B.C.E. Then, the Muslim conquerors carted off the debris from the utter destruction of Herod’s once awe-inspiring edifice before beginning work on the Dome of the Rock. Even if excavations were to be allowed today in the vicinity of the Muslim holy sites—which they are not—more than likely little would be left to be discovered.

Although we do possess Josephus’ reasonably objective eyewitness description of the Herodian Temple,²³⁶ we have no extra-biblical accounts and precious little from the Hebrew Bible itself attesting to Zerubbabel’s structure. We do know that Jerusalem nearly quadrupled in size following the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C.E. to about 25,000 inhabitants. Long after the Exile concluded, the city regained considerable size during the Hasmonean era. Thus, it was a major town for 150 years until the end of the Divided Kingdom, and was again so halfway through the Hellenistic period. During much of the remaining years of its existence, it was relatively insignificant. At its height in the Herodian years, Jerusalem encompassed only about 230 acres (or 1 square kilometer).²³⁷ Babylon at its height was at least 8 or 10 times that size.

Was Jerusalem simply the chief locale for sacrifice among many? Or was it unique, precluding any other site from exercising legitimacy? Was it temporarily preeminent, based on its sheltering of the Ark of the Covenant (as was Shiloh before it)? Or was it given permanent title as the (one and only) Holy City of the Most High? On the cusp of the Exile, we see Jeremiah released from Ramah and allowed to join up with

²³⁵ D. Tarler and J. M. Cahill “David, City of,” 55.

²³⁶ C. Meyers, “Temple, Jerusalem,” 353.

Gedaliah, the regional governor, at Mizpah (Jer. 40:1-6). Certainly, by the time of the Maccabean Revolt, Jerusalem appears to have no notable rivals.²³⁸ By New Testament times, no *bāmôt* have significance enough to merit more than an historical allusion (such as Ramah [Mt. 2:18] and Shechem [Act 7:16]). None are mentioned as still extant with the possible exception of Shechem. The Samaritan sect evidently still utilized Mt. Gerizim as their Holy Mountain (John 4). But the likes of Bethel, Dan, Gibeon, Gibeah, and Gilgal are all gone, mere ghosts of history.

The Causes of Change

Without question, Jerusalem over a period of time gained ascendancy. In large part, this can be seen as a quite natural development. The evolution of politics from one based on familial and clan components to one in which a tribal confederacy or full-blown monarchy held sway would bring with it all manner of sociological changes. Economic development from the animal husbandry of semi-nomadism to the cash crops of an established agriculturalism and from there to metallurgy, manual industry, and commerce would mean a need for the centralization of administration. As a matter of practical concern, these adaptations would be mirrored ecclesiologically. It is no real surprise to see henotheism morph into ethical monotheism or for the centralized monarchy to bring with it a centralized cult.

Alongside these internal pressures to change, foreign influences had to have been a major catalyst of development. The Exodus from Egypt, if historical, established the Hebrews as a people under a liberating God. As example of their Egyptian roots, many

²³⁷ P. King, "Jerusalem," 753.

have pointed to the iconoclastic monotheism of Akhenaten as a forerunner of an aniconic Yahwism: one God, without rival or peer. The Canaanite peoples in their midst pushed the Israelites politically toward monarchy and sacerdotally toward temple building. The Assyrian takeover of the North and the resulting influx of refugees into Judah helped to amalgamate the regional varieties of Hebrew religion. The Babylonian Exile (and to a smaller extent the contemporaneous Egyptian Exile) entrenched the Zadokites in power and perhaps elevated Jerusalem's status upon their return. Marduk was clearly the lord of the city of Babylon. YHWH perhaps in mimicry gets tied closer and closer to *his* Holy City. Besides, the territory to which the Exiles come back is somewhat restricted. They no longer have Beersheba or even Hebron, for that matter. The former sites of high places to the north of Jerusalem (e.g., Bethel, Gibeon, and Mizpah) are under their control, but the particular priesthood that served them is long gone. In the battle of attrition, Jerusalem is the clear winner.

Concerning the post-exilic situation, we always hear of the tolerant suzerainty of Persia. But toward whom were they tolerant? The usual policy was one of pragmatism: who would maintain stability against unrest? As a result, there was a sustained favoritism shown toward the governing line of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah and against the *'ām hā-'ārēš* faction. Sanballat in Samaria (along with his progeny) was able, through stubborn opposition to the Judeans, to keep his segment of the satrapy independent. Thereby, eventually they won an alternative temple construction on Mt. Gerizim. But Judea was the coveted buffer against Egyptian ambitions and held preeminence in Persia minds. Furthermore, there was a party spirit amongst those who

²³⁸ This is certainly true in spite of the meeting in Mizpah. Judas Maccabeus could not meet in Jerusalem because the enemy was there in force at the Akra.

returned that rejected outsiders and admission to the group through half measures. A strictness of purity, a separation from “the uncleanness of the Gentiles of the land” (Ezra 6:21) was demanded and achieved.

Clearly, among the rivals vying for power before the Exile, there were winners and losers. Whole factions had been scattered to the four winds. There were far fewer leaders to follow. Most of the former Judahites had not left the comparative security and comfort of life in Mesopotamia. Most of the former Ephraimites possessed no possibility of return (unless they managed to survive Assyrian dispersal and subjugation by fleeing South after Ephraim’s demise).

Besides the priestly class, intent on reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the other winner seems to have been the nascent synagogue movement. While in Exile, the seasonal pilgrimages to the Holy City would have been disrupted. The heritage of rites employed by those obliged to stay behind and keep watch over flocks and crops and property may well have become normative under exilic conditions. Divisions (ma’amadot) of priests, Levites, and lay leaders were left at home to perform these services, which are clear antecedents of synagogue practice. Since, for the most part, pilgrimage itself was not an option during the years of Exile, the rituals of temple-going and domestic ma’amadot would surely have coalesced. This experience of devotional unity seems to have carried over into Palestinian worship customs. The former regional high-place sites, however, did not become synagogue locations upon return to the land. Aside from Jerusalem itself, none of the *bāmôt*—as far as we know—was reappropriated

or rebuilt.²³⁹ Evidently, they were a part of the discredited past. There was no going back to former ways.²⁴⁰

The Effects of Change

These sea changes that occurred as Israel lurched forward under the sway of each gale-strength shift in the wind, left many behind in their wake: The move from monolatry to strict monotheism; the move from altars strewn about the countryside to a preeminence of a central Ark locale;²⁴¹ the move from a transitory tent shrine to a permanent temple; the move from a period of acceptance to one of tolerance to one of eradication of the far-flung high places; the move from a literal to a (more) figurative understanding of the indwelling Presence of the Most High.

In the eighth chapter of 1 Kings (and in 2 Chron. 6), Solomon stands before the altar of YHWH and “spreads out his hands toward heaven” in fervent entreaty:

“But will God indeed dwell [with men] on earth? Behold, neither heaven nor the highest heaven can contain you. How much less this temple which I have built! Yet regard the prayer of your servant and his supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which your servant is praying before you today: that your eyes may be open toward this temple day and night, toward the place where you said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that you may hear the prayer which your servant makes toward this place. And may you hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven your dwelling place and when you hear, forgive.”

²³⁹ Returnees from Ai, Anathoth, Bethel, Bethlehem, Geba [Gibeah], Gibeon, Kiriath Jearim, Michmas[h], and Ramah are mentioned in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7. Nehemiah 11 adds Beersheba, En Rimmon, and Kiriath Arba [Hebron], but then—except for Beersheba, Bethlehem, and Hebron—they basically disappear from history.

²⁴⁰ There is an interesting mention of Geba and Gilgal in Nehemiah 12:29. The singers brought in to help dedicate the new walls of the Holy City are said to have built (or rebuilt) villages for themselves round about Jerusalem, including these two old bamot towns.

²⁴¹ Apparently, this preeminence was not nearly as strong as it was to become with the building of a centralized temple. When Israel gets the Ark back from the Philistines, they take it to Kiriath Jearim where it remains a long while. But when Samuel announces a sacred convocation of all Israel, calling them to repentance, he convenes it at Mizpah, a good ten miles distant!

Unmistakably, the Dtr (and in this case, the Chronicler, as well) does not literally hold to YHWH as fully (or perhaps one could say, physically) indwelling the Temple in Jerusalem. In Psalm 22, God “inhabits” the praise of his people, or as it is sometimes translated, he is “enthroned on the praises of Israel.” Indeed, God dwells in the midst of his people, but in a deeper, figurative (spiritual) sense.

Why was it that Jerusalem in particular was chosen? For all we are told, it was a purely pragmatic selection. David decided, without consulting God (at least as far as we are told), that the Jebusite city would make a good capital. Standing as it does on “common ground” between North and South, Jerusalem did not have historical baggage: neither a Judahite nor an Ephraimite heritage. Except to some extent on its north side, it was easy to defend. Plus, it was already walled and had a reliable source of water.

On his own, David resolved to bring the great Ark of YHWH to Jerusalem. He put in on a new cart for transportation, but this ran against the explicit instructions from God (it was supposed to be carried by poles hoisted onto the shoulders of Levites, Ex. 25:13-15; Dt. 10:8). When YHWH strikes Uzzah down for inadvertently touching the Ark, David gets angry, but even more frightened. He leaves it with Obed-Edom for a spell, not renewing his quest until he sees that the house wherein the Ark stays is blessed and not destroyed.

Though Jerusalem is honored, it is never given a status that is fully sacrosanct. It is rather the shadow of a greater reality: the dwelling place of YHWH in the “highest heaven.” More than likely, Jeroboam’s mistake was to set up a rival sanctuary (another Holy of Holies) instead of a simple altar. It is one thing to offer sacrifices to the same God worshiped in Jerusalem; it is quite another to imply that he inhabits more than one

abode. The king is thus guilty of vying for possession of the Almighty when in fact God cannot be possessed.

The development of the concept of the Oneness of God in the mind of the Hebrews meant that it was inevitable that their religion would jump the fence that rimmed them round and united them as a people. Logically, a God who was the only God was also the God of all peoples. Eschatologically, therefore, Jerusalem became the place to which all nations would stream (Micah 4:1-4). This tenet finds even fuller expression in the noted universalism of Second (and Third) Isaiah.

From the Exile onward, a change in viewpoint toward the history of Israel occurred. Especially after the rebuilding of the Temple and the city walls of Jerusalem, everything became an exercise in nostalgia, a looking back to the Golden Age of the Kings of Israel. Prophecy was at an end. The Jewish canon was soon closed. Those who remained in Babylonia faced Jerusalem to pray.²⁴² When it again became possible they pilgrimaged to Jerusalem. Scholarship found its home in Palestine, almost exclusively until after the destruction of the Second Temple. As far as we know, no one ever attempted to build a Temple in Mesopotamia.

Perhaps no one was ever allowed to do so. But in Egypt, a temple at Elephantine was in place before Zerubbabel's Temple was built. Onias IV built another one in Leontopolis, near Alexandria. His father, one time High Priest in Jerusalem, fled the persecution of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and was not welcomed back by the Hasmoneans.

²⁴² Most early synagogues also faced Jerusalem (E. M. Meyers, "Synagogue," *ABD* 6, 255-59), and the Jews of Medina in Muhammad's day worshiped in the direction of the former Temple, in which he joined them for a while.

Yet another (possible) sanctuary went up outside the Holy Land at ‘Araq el-Emir in the Transjordanian region.²⁴³

This reliance on temples would come to an end once and for all in 70 C.E. Some foresaw this destruction as inevitable to make way for the ideal temple of Ezekiel.²⁴⁴ Others thought the building of a new temple could only be accomplished by God himself in the apocalyptic renewal of the Messiah. Most, however, were distraught beyond belief. Once again though, out of the ashes, we observe a flowering of theology. Just as we saw with the great prophets when the Exile became a reality, the idea of centralization was focused on God and his temple in heaven. And this became the controlling paradigm for the nascent sister religions of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.

²⁴³ Peder Borgen [“Judaism (Egypt),” *ABD* 3, 1062] believes this building (the Qasr el-‘Abd, located on an estate owned by the Tobiads) was a temple, while Ernest Will [“‘Iraq el-Emir,” *ABD* 3, 455] thinks it a castle or palace.

²⁴⁴ The discrepancy between the description of Ezekiel’s Temple and the actual details of those of Zerubbabel and Herod could not easily escape attention. (S. Westerholm, “Temple,” *ISBE* 4, 768)

CHAPTER 12

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

“We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.”

—Hebrews 13:10-13

New Testament Ramifications

Though he has not been entirely affirmed in his convictions, the British New Testament scholar N. T. Wright attracted attention when he asserted that the Second-Temple Judaism of first century Palestine did not actually believe that the Exile was a *fait accompli*, a thing of the past. They were still under subjugation, having tasted of self-autonomy for only a short while under the early Hasmoneans. Accepting such an understanding will make one rethink a great many things. E. P. Sander’s notion of the *covenantal* nomism of the Judaism of New Testament times shifts one’s paradigms in Pauline studies in similar ways.

To a lesser extent, viewing the conception of the preeminence of Jerusalem through different lenses can have a corresponding effect. In spite of the universalizing tendencies of the Isaianic school of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, the Judaism of Jesus’ day was priest-centered and bound securely to Jerusalem. In contrast, Jesus’ ministry in Galilee and Judea focused on non-centralized aspects of the cult. Though he gave the great city deference, he saw its role as soon to be eclipsed.

This was not, as might be supposed, that he held heterodoxical views concerning the Temple and its cult. His Galilean heritage might be thought to incline him toward divergent practices, but Galilee was actually surprisingly free of syncretism at this time.²⁴⁵ Actually, his ideas would have fit nicely with most groups outside of the power structure. The Dead Sea Scrolls show the community at Qumran to be utterly opposed to both the Hasmonean priesthood and its “temple.”²⁴⁶ The Pharisees also disfavored the Sadducees, yet most would not have denounced the Temple along with its administrators. By and large, though, Jesus is seen by most modern commentators (including many Jewish scholars, such as Jacob Neusner) as well within the mainstream of first-century Judaism (not including, of course, any claims of divinity).

Jesus in the Gospels is actually aligned with the nobility of Judah—the royal line of David (and not the then current Herodian dynasty). On the other hand, the writer of Hebrews ties him in *not* with the Zadokite priesthood established by David, but with the enigmatic Melchizedek who served Abraham. Though some think the Sadducees claimed a link to this earlier Zadokite line (perhaps even etymologically), few believe there genuinely was one. Most probably, that would also hold true of those alive at the time. At any rate, if Jesus is matched in some sense with a Jerusalem establishment, it is the establishment of the First Temple period.

Jesus spent much of his time before the culminating week in out of the way places in Galilee and the Decapolis. He was born in Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem and grew up in the inconsequential northern village of Nazareth. At Jacob’s well, he conversed with

²⁴⁵ John the Baptizer, also from Galilee, is often portrayed as the coming of Elijah (Mt. 3:4; 11:7-15; 17:10-13; Mk. 6:14-16; c.f., Ben Sirach 48:1-10), but this N prophet is fully incorporated by this time into S eschatological hopes and apocalyptic myths (and has been at least since Malachi).

the Samaritan woman without condescension, telling her that the time would come when they (Jews and Samaritans) would worship “neither on this mountain [Gerizim] nor in Jerusalem” but “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:4-47). Though he did not condone her alternative worship site, neither did he censure it.²⁴⁷ Certainly, he never built nor approached an illicit altar, but his habit was to pray early in the morning up on the heights (reminiscent of high-place practice). And of course, his high priestly prayer came in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. He did teach in the temple precincts at times, but his instructing within the decentralized synagogue system was more the norm.

In fact, on several occasions, his words and actions appear to favor the illegitimacy of the Jerusalem Temple, at least in its then current practices. The Cleansing of the Temple wherein Jesus throws out the money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals (Mt. 21:12-17; Mk. 11:15-19; Lk. 19:45-48; Jn. 2:13-17) is framed—in the Mark passage—by Jesus’ cursing of the unproductive fig tree, clearly representing the equally fruitless temple.²⁴⁸

Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple in all three Synoptics (Mt. 24:2; Mk. 13:1-2; Lk. 21:5-7). The Gospel of John. (2:19) uses similar language to presage the death and resurrection of Jesus. Here his *body* is depicted as “the Temple.”²⁴⁹ The

²⁴⁶ They viewed this as temporary: God would in time allow them to retake and purify the Jerusalem Temple.

²⁴⁷ It is interesting that the Samaritan Pentateuch adds an eleventh commandment to the Decalogue about worshiping on Mt. Gerizim and translates the phrase “the place the LORD you God will choose” (found five times in Dt. 12) as “the place he *has chosen*,” namely Gerizim.

²⁴⁸ Already in the fifth century, Victor of Antioch recognized this deed as and an *enacted* parable condemning the unfruitful temple. R. T. France (*The Gospel of Mark* NIGTC, 437) comments that the factor which “most united all elements of the Jewish people against [Jesus] was that he was perceived as an opponent of the temple.” Though J. P. Meier attributes the story to early Christian teachings (*A Marginal Jew* 2:986, n.63), N. T. Wright believes it to be at least in part original, hearkening back, as it were, to Hebrew Bible prophets’ ideas on the subject, as in Jeremiah 8:11-13 and Micah 7:1. (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 421-22) [in C. A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, WBC, 152]

²⁴⁹ Several patristic writers (Tatian, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen) translate this line as ‘He was talking about the body’ leaving out the words, *the temple of his*. This gives it a spiritual or ecclesiastical spin.

notion of Christ rebuilding the Temple (after its destruction) has four main interpretations in the NT. First, the renewed sanctuary represents the formation of the church (Eph. 2: 19-21; 1 Peter 2:5, 4:17). Second, the Temple is the individual Christian (1 Cor. 3:16, 4:19). Third, the Temple is—and in its ideal sense has always been—in heaven (Heb. 9:11-12; Rev. 11:19).²⁵⁰ And lastly, of course, is John’s rendering of the Temple as Jesus’ body. Qumran, also opposed to the legitimacy of the Temple in Jerusalem, tended to see its renewal in the first sense: as a designation of the righteous *community* as the proper abode of God’s spiritual presence amongst his people (1QS 5:5-6; 8:7-10; 1QH 6:25-28; 4QpPs^a 2:16).²⁵¹

Only in the Gospel of John is the Christ’s resurrected body the renewed Temple. The writer of Hebrews, however, appears to designate the cross of Calvary as an alternative altar “outside the city gate” of Jerusalem (Heb. 13:10-14). He likens the execution of Jesus to the *ḥaṭṭā’t* of the Day of Atonement, where the shameful carcass and offal are disposed of “outside the camp.” Believers are called upon to “recognize that true sacred space will not be found in Jerusalem, with its impermanent sanctuary and altar, but in the presence of Jesus and in the anticipation of the qualitatively different city to which they have come proleptically (c.f., Heb. 12:22-24).²⁵²

The whole notion of an ideal, eschatological Jerusalem—suggested in Jeremiah 3:17-18 and explicitly depicted in Ezekiel 40-48—turns up throughout the NT. Paul in Galatians 4:24-26 contrasts the slave woman Hagar with the freeborn wife of Abraham, Sarah. These he matches with the present Jerusalem (“in slavery with her children”) and

²⁵⁰ Hebrews 9:11 calls the heavenly temple “the greater and perfect tent.” Stephen, the first Christian martyr, sermonizing prior to his death, states that “the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands” and goes on to quote Is. 66:1-2: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.” (Acts 7:48-50)

the Jerusalem above (“she is free”) respectively. Revelation 3:12 infers that the new Jerusalem will be given a new name, which begs the question, “If it descends from the heavens and bears a new name, in what way is it still Jerusalem?” It is still the Holy City, of course, still the City of God, but little relationship to the present Jerusalem remains. Revelation 21:2, 10 compares the new city to a bride and pictures it bedecked in jewels, coming down out of heaven.²⁵³

Beyond the Temple’s Destruction

Though both Judaism and Christianity as they grew were centered on a spiritualized temple located in heaven, the old ways did not disappear. After the fall of Jerusalem to the armies of Titus, the city continued to be the focus of Pharisaic (and then Rabbinic) Judaism, at least in an eschatological sense. The synagogue became the center of Jewish worship and cultural life, but the hope for return remained. During the brief Roman Emperorship of Julian the Apostate 361-63 C.E., they even attempted to begin rebuilding the Temple.²⁵⁴ Christianity as it diverged, eventually centralized in Rome (and Constantinople), became extremely sacerdotal in nature, and took on a temple-style worship (including the Eucharistic Mass as “sacrifice”).

In contrast to the Jews, however, the early Christians eschewed the idea of a material, earthly temple in Jerusalem. The Byzantines, during the time they held sovereignty over the Temple Mount, purposefully let it go fallow, a desolation of

²⁵¹ *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 954.

²⁵² W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, WBC 47B, 546-47.

²⁵³ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 293-296.

²⁵⁴ Again, during an equally brief rule of the Persians in Palestine (614-616 C.E.), plans to rebuild the Temple commenced.

brambles and debris. Their motivation—clearly anti-Semitic in its nature—was to show the Jewish remnant as cursed of God for rejecting the Messiah.

In modern times, Reform Judaism has decentralized completely, symbolically calling their worship centers “temples” to disengage from the notion of the centrality of Jerusalem. Orthodox Jews still look for the renewal of Mt. Moriah, including the rebuilding of the Temple and the reinstitution of the sacrificial cult. Some sects have even been seeking to find a pure red heifer with which to reconstitute the priesthood through appropriate purification rites. The toast at the end of the Seder meal each spring is still, “Next year in Jerusalem!” Christian fundamentalists often join them in these dreams of the total reestablishment of Mt. Zion and its Temple. Much of the rest of Christendom sees the Holy Land as simply a place of heritage. This is where the physical Jesus was born, walked the earth, died, and rose to life. Though it is special, it is not sacrosanct. “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea...” (Habakkuk 2:14).

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