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Article

Job and the Bible's Theo-Political Divide

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Abstract: The book of Job presents a unique and detailed contrastive study of two fundamental and fundamentally opposed religious personae: Job, on the one hand, and the collective image of his friends on the other. It is a normative dispute about the religion's most basic norm of disposition. How is one to respond to inexplicable disaster when one believes one is blameless? What is the religiously appropriate response to catastrophe? To confront God's judgment as did Job, or to submissively surrender to it, as his four friends insist he should? Is one supposed to question divine justice when deemed to be wanting, as did Job, or to suppress any thought to the contrary and deem it to be just, come what may? Rather than expound (once again) upon the theological implications of the Job dispute, this paper focuses on its theological-political dimensions, and its looming and vivid, yet largely overlooked presence in the Hebrew Bible's master narrative; and more specifically, on the marked, if inevitable antinomian nature of the Jobian side to the divide.

Keywords: religious confrontation; religious submission; Biblical political theology;

The book of Job presents a unique and detailed contrastive study of two fundamental and fundamentally opposed religious personae: Job, on the one hand, and the collective image of his three, and later four friends.

It is fore and foremost a normative dispute about the religion's most basic norm of disposition. How is one to respond to inexplicable disaster when one believes one is blameless (as the reader knows that Job is)? What is the religiously appropriate response to catastrophe? To confront God's judgment as did Job, or to submissively surrender to it, as his four friends insist? Is one supposed to question divine justice when deemed to be wanting (as the reader knows it was), as did Job, or to suppress any thought to the contrary and deem it to be just, come what may?[1]

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[1] This is the general understanding of the book's message implied by the lengthy passage devoted to it in the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate *Bava Batra* 15a-16b), that not only attributes these positions to its Job and the friends, but remains divided on who of them is right! According to one major voice, that was the issue disputed by God and Satan, with the latter rooting for the submissive Abraham of the *Aqedah* as opposed to God, who preferred Job's confrontational approach.

The fact that Job alone occupies the confrontational position, while the submissive position is occupied collectively by his friends is, I believe, telling in itself. Submissive religiosity requires one to justify divine action and obediently conform to God's will and the demands of one's religion – which are usually taken to be one and the same - regardless of individual circumstance and the assessment of one's conduct. The dictates of submissive religiosity are absolute and timeless; never a matter specific happenings. The voice of religious submission is hence unconditional and collective. By contrast, confrontational religiosity is animated by human reason and judgment, and is hence, by nature, forever perspectival, specific and local. It is therefore no surprise that its biblical paradigm is presented in the form of a tortured, well-meaning and reflective individual pondering his personal plight and first-person certainty of being deeply wronged.

In other papers I have tried show how this fundamental dispute of religiosity remains alive and is made even more explicit in throughout the Talmudic literature. The reader of Job is given, one could say, a glimpse of the truth by being made privy to God's wager with Satan – something of which neither Job nor his friends could have been aware, and which Karl Jung takes as his main target. But that is not what the book is ultimately about. It is about the appropriate form of disposition to adopt in standing before God when, like Job and his friends, one is not privy to God's reasons and motives. And in the Talmudic literature the theological premises of the two disputing positions are made cruelly explicit.[2] Submissive religiosity, the position maintained by the four friends, presupposes divine perfection. Divine justice is deemed to be impeccable, and God's law, The Torah, to be ultimately good and ultimately true, and, therefore, unchangeable. It is the yardstick against which we are to forever piously measure ourselves and others. Confrontational, Jobian religiosity, by contrast, premises a reflective and a good-intending, yet knowingly imperfect God, who is open to the possibility of being proven wrong, and, therefore, liable to change His mind. From such a perspective, it is our solemn religious duty to forever measure God's will, law and action against the yardstick of our own best normative judgment, and to act accordingly. Rather than expound once again upon the theological implications of the Job dispute within the Talmudic literature – which, as noted, can be shown to extend by the rabbis to their reading of the book of Job itself[3] – I would like to focus on its theological-political dimensions, and its looming and vivid, yet largely overlooked presence in the Hebrew

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According to another, in "railing against" in response to "a little suffering" Job is deemed to have failed the test he was put to, while the submissive friends are hailed the true heroes of the book!

[2] See, for example, the latter part of Fisch 2013, and in greater detail in my forthcoming *The Rabbis' Dispute of Religiosity: A Study of Talmudic Confrontational Theology* (Hebrew), Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, chs.2 and 6.

[3] See n. 1 above.

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Bible's master narrative; and more specifically, on the marked, if inevitable antinomian nature of the Jobian side to the divide.

The Bible's master narrative, beginning with the covenantal promise of seed and land to Abraham and culminating in the cruel double exile and the devastation of Jerusalem at the end of II Kings, and its follow-ups in Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther, is tragic story of the promise, the long preparation, the detailed legislation, the conquest, and the establishment of the political entity that became the kingdom of Israel, and its eventual violent eradication. Religions are constituted by their holy scriptures, and Judaism is no exception. However the Hebrew Bible's master narrative is about more than the establishment and early history of the Israelite religion or creed[4]. Although the Israelite religion does get established at Sinai en route to claiming the land, it is first and foremost the story of an essentially *political* (if ultimately unsuccessful) undertaking undertaken in the shadow of God; that of the vision, the rocky birth, the establishment, and the eventual violent termination of the Israelite kingdom in the promised land.

God's presence looms large in all stages of the narrative, but at differing levels of intervention. For it is a story that, from its human actors' and readers' perspective, oscillates, at times constructively, at times uneventfully, and at times vehemently, between what Walzer dubs the opposing poles of politics and anti-politics[5], namely, between the idea that political reality is the domain and responsibility of human political endeavor, and the idea that political reality remains the exclusive domain of divine action, which is wholly determined by the religious standard of His human covenantal partners, even in conditions of political sovereignty.

Many, certainly among my co-religionists, would evidently be puzzled by the very distinction. Taking political action "in the shadow of God", as in the biblical narrative, is never frowned upon as such, they would claim, but is always premised on religious obedience. If Israel obeys the Torah, God never intervenes, and politics may be freely pursued. It is when the people and their leaders go astray that God is known to retaliate at the political level. In the biblical story, Religious obedience is foremost. But in conditions of religious obedience, they would argue, the political can flourish. However, the biblical text presents a narrative far more complex and disturbing than what most of its pious readers and exegetes make of it.

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[4] I use the term well aware that the very term 'religion' has come under attack of late in this very respect. See Boyarin 2018. I use it here as shorthand for the descendants of the twelve tribes who, according the biblical story, entered a covenantal relationship with God at Sinai by receiving His Torah (as opposed to the 'national collective' of sovereign Israel, to risk another anachronism, as envisaged by the five books of Moses, and described in the books that follow.)

[5] Walzer 2012, pp. xii-xiv.

First, divine intervention is not always retaliatory or reactive, or even geared remotely to an economy of faithfulness or obedience. Sometimes it seems as if God feels he can simply do things better. Here's an interesting example of significant, if uneventful political-anti-political jostling, to which I shall return shortly. Just before crossing the Jordan to begin possessing the land, the newly appointed Joshua sent out two spies to gather the intelligence needed to plan the Jericho campaign, as a good military commander would. What they learnt, especially regarding Canaanite morale was very reassuring.[6]

But from that moment onwards, rather than strengthen Joshua's political standing, as God promised repeatedly,[7] He seriously undermines it. Instead of allowing Joshua to devise and execute a brilliant battle plan, God takes over the military planning and the city is taken by an extravagant display of anti-political divine intervention. God's decision to bring Jericho down by miraculously toppling its walls to the din of a procession of horn-blowing priests, renders Joshua's intelligence gathering and military planning wholly redundant, reducing him to a religious functionary whose job amounts to leading the miraculous crossing of the Jordan (not by man-made bridge, God forbid!), orchestrate the inaugurating mass circumcision of the people and coordinate their first Passover.

However, Joshua held his ground, and after Jericho was taken, he responded, as we shall see in a moment, with great political authority.

First, however, a word needs to be said about two central and largely understudied inherently political aspects of how the Torah conceives the sovereignty project it envisages and legislates for, and how that project is first realized, and then discontinued. I shall refer to them somewhat anachronistically as nation-building and statesmanship.

By nation-building I mean the following. Although the direct descendants of Jacob – literally the "the children of Israel" – were who evolved while in Egypt into the people of Israel, it was they who experienced the cruel bondage and the miraculous exodus, and it was they who stood at Sinai, entered the religious covenant with God, and received the Torah, that very Torah is explicit in envisaging an Israeli national collective, if I may be permitted the term, far greater than the religious community established at Sinai. For it repeatedly refers to the "strangers" (*gerim*) – i.e. the non-Jewish minorities - who will dwell amongst you, just as you were strangers in Egypt.[8] And with regard to them, the Torah is adamant. Their status will be

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[6] Joshua, 2:1-24.

[7] Cf. Deuteronomy 31:23; Joshua 1:5-9, 3:7, and 4:14.

[8] Several Christian and especially Jewish translations take the biblical "*ger*" (as opposed to the rabbinic rendition of the term as convert to Judaism, a category unknown to the Bible) to denote a temporary resident, a sojourner rather than a resident. (See for example the King James, JPS and the Jerusalem Bible's renditions of Leviticus 19:33-34.) I think this is a mistake (if not in some cases, a deliberate one), that serves (if not designed) to obscure (if not to hide) the notion, of which the biblical narrative is rife, of there being gentile Israelis, that is to say, gentile bona fide members of Israel's national collective. Joseph's

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identical to your own: "When a stranger that dwells among you in your land, you shall not mistreat them. The stranger dwelling among you must be treated as your native-born. *Love them as yourself*, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God." (Lev. 19:33-34). This is a remarkable statement. The term for "As your native born" in the original Hebrew is ezrach, which is the word used today for citizen: "כאזרח מכם יהיה לכם - הגר אתכם"A citizen like yourself, shall be the stranger who dwells amongst you". This is much more than a formal legal demand for equality before the law. The category of civil inclusion is grounded explicitly in love, in a way that would make Martha Nussbaum "political emotions" project proud![9]

In fact the Torah more than implies that whole idea of Israel taking form as a people enslaved under the cruel boot of Egypt – an enslavement made part and parcel of the Abrahamic promise to begin with - was to render them morally sensitive in their future role as founding members of their own sovereign nation, which, as in Egypt, will comprise ethnic minorities other than them, whom, as bearers of the harsh memories of their former bondage, will know how not to mistreat.

The other aspect of sovereignty is statesmanship or statecraft. This becomes exceedingly important in the light of the Torah's firm instruction to appoint a king, but not a foreign king (Deut. 17:15-16), which I take to be a prohibition against being tempted to seek the security of the imperial rule of a larger regional or world power. Sovereign Israel, even at its greatest, never harbored imperial fantasies and remained small and forever dependent on a combination of military power and wise statesmanship.

Both undertakings – nation-building, and statesmanship - are inherently political. They can only be undertaken and seen through by human actors. God can throw people together, but cannot forge them into a mutually caring and cohesive body politic. That is only something they and their leaders can do. Similarly, God can throw nations together or against each other, but cannot create the trust or dependency between sovereign nations, Nation-building or forging, and state-craft can be divinely hindered and disrupted, but not divinely promoted or achieved.

As noted,[10] the biblical narrative contains ample evidence of gentile Israeli minorities among the rank and file of the national collective, as well as in leadership roles, who rose mainly, but

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father, and brothers may have initially intended to merely sojourn in Egypt until the famine lifted, but by the time the new Pharaoh arose who identified "the children of Israel" as a "people" (Exodus 1:8), they had settled in permanently as an Egyptian minority, that would have remained there had they not been enslaved and miraculously taken out. And the same goes for the very many members of other nations – including the seven Canaanite nations that were never fully eradicated (See Joshua 15:63, 17:12-13, and Judges 1:21-33) – of whom several rose to positions of significant military and civil authority in the Kingdoms of both David and Solomon.

[9] See especially Nussbaum 2013, and also her more recent 2016, and 2017.

[10] n.8 above

not exclusively from among from the large pockets of Canaanite population in many of the Israeli tribal territories, detailed once at the end of Joshua and again in the beginning of Judges. But it also contains two remarkable stories of gentile incorporation into the body politic of Israel – in both cases of decidedly foreign women – which brings us back to Joshua. Rahab the harlot was the quintessential Canaanite enticer, as Ellen Davis nicely puts it.[11] However, by risking her life to hide the two spies and smuggle them out, she proved her political allegiance. And she is repaid royally by Joshua who gives refuge to her and her "families" – i.e. her entire clan, in biblical Hebrew - who, the text tells us "live amongst the Israelites to this very day!" (Joshua 6:25).

Why is this important? Because Joshua's decision runs afoul of the Torah's central commandment regarding the great war of conquest for which he took over from Moses: the total annihilation of the seven Canaanite nations. Deuteronomy 20 firmly instructs that "of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth. But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites … That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods…" (Deut. 20: 16-18) War against the seven Canaanite nations is to be genocidal for religious reasons, lest they corrupt Israel with their idolatry. The death warrant applies universally and unconditionally, and was fully enforced by Joshua and his army after the fall of Jericho: "And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both men and women, young and old as well as oxen, sheep, and assess, by the edge of the sword"! (Joshua 6:21).

The Bible has no notion of religious conversion. One cannot become an Israelite any more than one can morph into an Ammonite or Moabite. One may lose faith in one's Gods and gain faith in others – this is certainly a biblical option, for which Israel is punished repeatedly! - but the injunction against all Canaanites, men and women, old and young, has nothing to do with personal circumstance, faith or practice. That the terrified Rahab saw fit to betray her people and cross the lines should have made no difference at all. The Torah's explicit ruling is absolute. It carries no exemptions, and makes no allowances for mitigating circumstances And even if it did in the case of Rahab, which it could not, her extended "families" would on no count be included in the exemption.

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[11] Davis 2008.

The text does not tell us anything about Joshua's motivation for deciding to blatantly transgress the Torah's explicit command and not merely by turning a blind eye and allow Rahab and her extended family to escape, but to grant them permanent residence within the community of Israel, oblivious to the idolatrous threat they would constantly pose, according to the Torah's very explanation.[12] It was not he who made her the promise, and he could very well have overridden that of the spies in the name of his solemn religious duty in the midst of the Holy War. But he did not. Rather than grant them temporary asylum, or smuggle them across the border, he preferred to create with them the very first Canaanite pocket of Israeli "strangers", who are still part of Israel to this very day, as the verse goes. (Which, again, goes to prove that *ger*, the stranger of whom the Torah speaks is not a temporary resident, but a full-fledged member of the national collective.)

Whatever Joshua's motives were for acting in flagrant defiance of the Torah's explicit command, they were political. And insofar as by nature, political considerations always respond to the special circumstances of the here and the now, and insofar as the divine law of the Torah is by nature inherently timeless and absolute, the two realms will be in perpetual conflict. If God is king then His rule is inherently anti-political, for it is conditional upon the total submission of Israel and her leaders to the timeless Law of Torah. Only if Israel and her leaders are granted political discretion and responsibility by God, can their inevitable politically motivated transgressions of Torah be tolerated.

In Joshua the conflict does not erupt into actual confrontation, of course. Joshua does not react disapprovingly to God's taking over of the Jericho campaign, and God does not react disapprovingly to Joshua's blatantly antinomian granting of Israeli membership to Rahab and

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[12] If the Torah's reason for eliminating of all Canaanite, young and old, is "that they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods…", then the actual conduct of any particular Canaanite is irrelevant to their gruesome fate. Such collectivist punishment can have nothing to do with individual guilt. From such a perspective, what counts is not any Canaanites does, but what he or she *represents*. It is in this respect that Joshua's decision regarding Rahab was inherently antinomian.

her Canaanite clan. The sense is that Joshua is granted political discretion in principle, and that God's intervention in the Jericho battle plans was an exception designed perhaps to strike terror in the hearts of other Canaanite townships to come. But read through the prism of the political-anti-political divide, the tension is obviously and inevitably there from the very first practical step toward inheriting the Land and establishing Israeli sovereignty, which Joshua saw fit to turn into a defiant and dramatic first act of nation-building as well.

The Book of Judges, that follows, is a case in point. With the great war of inheritance fought and won, and the tribes of Israel safely settled in their territories, God seems to no longer see need for a central human government. Joshua dies, and He names no successor. The impression is that (to paraphrase the well-known verse) God believed that in those days there was be no need for a king in Israel, because every man would do that which was right in His (i.e. in God's) eyes. This is God's first and disastrous anti-political takeover of sovereign Israel in the biblical narrative. It fails miserably, resulting in the notorious roller-coaster cycles of idolatrous betrayal, severe punishment by the hand of a cruel external enemy, and salvation by temporarily appointed, divinely picked warrior judges, that are repeatedly punctuated at the end of the book by the author's anarchic ridicule of God's anti-political slogan: "In those days there was no king in Israel, each man did what was right in *his own* eyes"!

The anti-political dystopia described in Judges is replaced in I Samuel 8 by political revolution, with the divinely disgruntled appointment of Israel's first human monarch, Saul. And as if to prove that the challenges of nation-building have little to do with high state-politics, the book of Ruth situates the remarkable story it tells "in the days when the judges ruled" (Ruth 1:1). It is the story the integration of another female "stranger" within Israel, that, unlike that of Rahab, sets forth from an interesting reversal of the Exodus. Like Jacob and his family, Naomi, Abimelech and their two sons were forced by the famine to leave Bethlehem in Judah and seek their fortune among the Moabites – to dwell, לגור,[13] in the benign social setting of "the country of Moab". In Moab they were apparently made

[13] And not to "sojourn" as the King James and the Jerusalem Bible have it.

welcome, were able to make a decent living, and were allowed to integrate into Moabite society by marrying Moabite women. But with the untimely deaths first of Abimelech and then of her two sons, Naomi was forced to return to Bethlehem with two young Moabite widows in tow.[14]

Naomi does everything in her power to convince her daughters-in-law to return to their Moabite families and not accompany her to Bethlehem. Nothing is said explicitly but the looming shadow of Deuteronomy 23 is unmistakable: "No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may forever enter the congregation of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you." (Deut. 23: 4-5). The fact that the prohibition was introduced in the light of a particular historical event does not render it less absolute and timeless. Torah law is forever timeless and absolute, regardless of what might have initially prompted it. 'Contrary to how your country welcomed me and family, you, my Moabite lasses, have no future in mine', Naomi all but states. 'Your only hope would be that I give birth to two more sons,' she continues, but that will not happen (Ruth 1:11). Her presupposition is clear. Although my Israelite sons were allowed to marry you're your Moabite families, Bethlehemite law is different. No Israelite family there will allow their sons to marry you. Orpah picks up and leaves to return "to her people and to her gods", but Ruth refuses to go (1:14-15). "Entreat me not … to return from following thee," she pleads, for wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be mine, and the God you worship will be mine to worship too; and whither you die, I too will die and shall be buried! But Ruth's great devotion goes unanswered. When Naomi realizes that Ruth is serious, she

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[14] The text firmly implies that had the menfolk not died, there would have been no reason for them to leave Moab. For it is quite evident from the narrative that considerable time had passed since they had left Bethlehem, and that by time Naomi was forced to return the famine had long been over. Which further strengthens my contention that in biblical Hebrew the noun form "*ger*" and the related verb "*lagur*" and adjective "*megurai*", carry no connotation of temporary residence.

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falls into tight-lipped silence – not an embrace, not a kiss, not even a 'thank you', just grim silence:[15] "When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left off speaking to her" (1:18).

Thus is the contrastive space in which this remarkable book's great drama unfolds. Upon returning to Bethlehem, Naomi does not introduce Ruth to her former acquaintances, but treats her as her Moabite handmaid. The sheer contrast between Naomi's mute and dour internalization of the divine law, and her townsfolk's easygoing disregard for it is dramatic. Unlike Rahab, Ruth has done nothing to earn special treatment. She is not made an exception. All that is at play is the humanity of a comfortable Judean township who treat their needy decently, regardless of their origin, race or creed. The fact that she eventually catches Boaz's eye is aside the point, and comes later. It is not as if her Moabite origin was a secret. She is referred to consistently as Ruth the Moabite by all the characters of the story, its narrator, and by she herself. As opposed to Naomi's grave misgivings, not only is Ruth not deported, discriminated against, nor in any way harassed on account of her Maobite origin, but becomes living proof of the social mobility a gentile can enjoy in decent Judean society, and of how a God-fearing and decent society can do that which was right in its own eyes, if you wish, in carefree defiance of such Torah prohibitions as Deuteronomy 23.

If the detailed stories of Rahab and Ruth can be said to represent the Bible's paradigmatic cases of nation-building, King Solomon's reign represents its paradigmatic case of statesmanship and statecraft. After a brief "Game of Thrones" phase in I Kings 2, in which the young, newly anointed king dealt firmly with his and his father's opponents, the narrator announces that "The Kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon" (I Kings 2:46). Chapter 3 opens with two decisively political royal acts, followed by a third, all profoundly antinomian. First, as the verse nicely puts it: was to marry Pharaoh King of Egypt by taking his daughter to be his wife (I Kings 3:1) – a move that paid off handsomely when Egypt went to war a few chapters later (9:15-16). The fierce antinomian overriding of Torah law by

[15] See Fewell and Gunn's insightful 1988.

284 political consideration is not that he married a gentile. That is commonplace in the biblical
285 narrative. Diplomatic marriages were different. The Egyptian Princess is not married to be
286 incorporated into an Israelite household, as in Zipporah's marriage to Moses and Boaz's
287 marriage to Ruth. The union here is meant to symbolize and clinch the pact between the two
288 countries. To this end, Pharaoh's daughter was required to remain Egyptian and represent
289 Egypt in Jerusalem in both custom, dress and especially creed. Her royal palace and
290 entourage were to be Egyptian, to maintain the Egyptian ritual calendar and cult, and function
291 as the Egyptian embassy, if I may be allowed the term, in Jerusalem. Marrying Egypt hence
292 necessarily introduced a small, exterritorial idolatrous institution in the heart of Jerusalem,
293 where protocol might well oblige the king to participate on certain occasions, although this is
294 nowhere mentioned explicitly.[16] Diplomacy, in this sense, clashed openly with the Law.[17]
295 His second questionable political act was to participate in the mass sacrificing at "the great
296 high place" in Gibeon, where he is said to have offered a thousand personal burnt offerings
297 (3:2-4)

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299 Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built to the name
300 of the LORD, until those days. And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of
301 David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. And the king went

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[16] And yet, the fact that the princess's palace was indeed to function as an Egyptian temple is all but explicitly stated by the second part of the verse: "And Solomon became allied by marriage with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, *until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall of Jerusalem round about*" (3:1). There would have been no reason for her place of residence to be moved outside the city walls once the Temple was built and functioning, and the boundaries of the city set, unless there was something religiously objectionable about it. The verse clearly implies that Solomon was aware of this from the very start.

[17] The firm prohibition against the very presence of idolatrous worship within the boundaries of sovereign Israel is most resolutely stated in Deuteronomy 12:2-3.

> to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.

Until God's Temple was built, he explains, the people's need for cultic expression has to be met, despite the Torah's firm prohibition against sacrificing to God outside the Tabernacle or Temple.[18] And yet, God obviously warmly approves of both! For that very night, while still sacrificing at Gibeon, He reveals Himself to him in a dream and famously grants him the gifts of supreme wisdom and enormous wealth. This I believe is the quintessential biblical moment of theo-political harmony; a major moment of divinely approved yet blatantly antinomian political questioning and transgression of divine decree. Politics, in this regard, is hence inherently Jobian.

And Solomon's third royal decision after securing his crown, to which the latter part of the chapter is devoted, was taken immediately after he was granted the gift of supreme wisdom "to discern judgment" (3:11), was his ruling in the case of the two harlots. Here again his unconventional, and, again, manifestly antinomian threat to cut the live baby in two, not only cleverly resolved the case, but is explicitly described as serving the central political goal of winning the people's respect (3:28).

From that point on until the end of Chapter 10 Solomon's reign is described in great detail and in glowing, almost utopian political terms. His wise and effective foreign policy,

[18] Stated, again, repeatedly and most resolutely in the immediate continuation of the same opening passage of Deuteronomy 12!

extensive international commerce, elaborate and just economy,[19] massive building projects and lavish court. And the Temple, of course, which in the Kings version of the story was, I believe, the main cause for the abrupt, dissonant and furious anti-political reclaiming of the kingdom of chap 11 – wholly absent in the Chronicles version, but that's a story for a different paper.[20]

Unlike the Book of Judges, throughout the remainder of Kings the monarchy remains in place. An appointed king is always in place, but is no longer in power. God, mediated by messenger prophets, attempts unsuccessfully to forcefully impose His will. The few religiously pious kings of the divided kingdom fail to leave a mark or make a difference, and

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[19] Solomon employed two large bodies of unlanded gentile workers. The first comprised able-handed Canaanites, descendants of the survivors of the great war of conquest, whose servitude was considered a royal corvée (I Kings 9:20-22). The second consisted of one hundred and fifty-three thousand and six hundred *gerim*, that is to say gentile Israeli paid laborers (I Kings 5:29-30, II Chronicles 2:16-17). In addition, a third group of ten-thousand skilled Israeli landed workers needed in Lebanon at all times. were employed on a generous three-month rotation of two months at home for every month in Lebanon (I Kings 5:27-28). Supplying the everyday needs of the monarchy's large body of military and civil "government workers" was a significant undertaking in itself. (5:2-5). To this end Solomon re-divided the kingdom into twelve "districts", presumably of comparable means of production, who were each made responsible for providing a month's worth of supplies each year. Many read this (in retrospect through the lens of Jeroboam's provocative demand (12:4) that Rehoboam lift his father's heavy yoke) as proof of Solomon's heavy, oppressive and exploitive hand. See for instance Brindle 1984. I disagree. Because the people are repeatedly described as happy, at peace and as prosperous under Solomon (cf. 4:20, 5:5, and 8:66), and the state economy as extremely thriving, it makes far better sense to read the mass employment and especially the rotation of suppliers as a just sharing, not of the kingdom's expenses, but of its enormous earnings!

[20] See my forthcoming *The Zionist Revolution and its Enemies: The Sources of Israel's Reaction to Political Zionism*, Chapter 3.

the many impious ones remain by and large impervious to God's heavy hand. Manasseh's blatant sinfulness seals the fate of Judah to the extent that even his grandson, Josiah, by far the most pious of Judean religious reformers, was unable to powerless to reverse the verdict. The Kings version of the post-Solomonic chapters of Bible's master narrative is one of colossal and tragic failure, if only because it seems no longer to view repentance as genuine, deep and widespread as it might be – and Josiah righteousness, as the text attests, was without precedence[21] - as a religiously viable healing option. Chronicles, again, tells a dramatically different story. There, even the wicked Manasseh repents successfully![22]

The Kings' version reads like a Greek tragedy; the tragic downfall being inevitable and final – an impression strengthened, as we shall see in a moment by its two supposedly happy endings – as if despite all good intentions the tension between religious faithfulness and the politics of sovereignty is inherently irresolvable. I think not. The Jobian political questioning and dramatic suspension of Torah Law in the case of Rahab and the Book of Ruth and Solomon's three important opening moves are wholly positive. Not only are they not described in the least as *transgressions* of religious obligation, but count among the Bible's most positive moments, and in the case of Solomon, rewarded by supreme divine gift! They seem to sit extremely well within the constructive boundaries of religious politics, in the same way Job's confrontational religiosity, as opposed to his friends theology of submission, is wholly approved. At some point - but only in the Book of Kings' version – Solomon, as I indicated above, seems to have drastically overstepped those boundaries - but there was nothing inevitable about it.

The real tragedy of the Kings' version becomes fully apparent, however, only in the two jointly, and explicitly concluding[23] pictures it is given in Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther

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[21] II Kings 23:25-26.

[22] II Chronicles 33:12-17.

[23] In the closing verses of his book Nehemiah explicitly justifies their "cleansing" of the community from all "foreign wives" (Nehemiah 13:27, 30) by pointing to the Solomon of I Kings 11 whose "foreign wives cause[d] even him to sin" (26). And the Book of Esther describes Mordecai as

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353 respectively. The return to the Zion described in former represents by far the most pristine
354 form the Bible has to offer of a humanly internalized, exilic anti-political political theology; a
355 knowing relinquishing of any pretense of sovereignty[24] by an ethnically self-cleansed Jewish
356 settlement exclusively devoted to restoring the Temple cult and living their lives according to
357 the (overly) strict letter of the Law, come what may. While the diasporic option described in
358 the latter represents by far the most pristine form the Bible has to offer of a humanly
359 internalized politically motivated, markedly antinomian political theology![25] The difference
360 between Mordecai and Esther's politically integrated proud and inherently Jobian Persian
361 Jewish community, and Ezra and Nehemiah's avidly anti-political, self-ghettoized
362 Jerusalem, so befitting the religiosity of Job's friends, could not be more glaring.

363 However, taken together the Kings' version's two 'happy ends' have one tragic element in
364 common. For, needless to say, though fiercely political, the story of Mordecai and Esther also
365 represents, just like its anti-political counterpart, a knowing relinquishing of any pretense of
366 *sovereignty*. The Book of Esther thus combines with that of Ezra-Nehemiah to leaves us with
367 the false impression that sovereignty and politics are inherently antagonistic; as if the return
368 to Zion cannot but be submissively anti-political, while diasporic Jewish existence cannot but

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having "been exiled from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah" (Esther 2:6), an exile only mentioned in the Kings version: II Kings 24:14-16)

[24] Despite the fact that sovereignty (to the extent that it can be granted in an imperial setting) was handed Ezra and Nehemiah on a silver platter, as it were. Nehemia reports to have been appointed governor of the Land of Judah (Nehemia 5:14), and Ezra, to have received supreme legal authority (with extensive license to enforce even capital punishment) over "all the people that are beyond the river" (Ezra 7:25-28; Nehemia 5:14). Neither, however, exercised the authority they were granted beyond the confines of the Jewish community proper.

[25] By the time the doomsday scenario of Haman's rise to power and genocidal plot are set in motion, Mordecai and Esther, with great political insight, have cleverly positioned themselves in the royal palace and the royal court. With Esther, the beloved queen, and Mordecai the faithful courtier firmly in place, Haman, one could say, never stood a chance…

be political, thus rendering the Torah's great vision of a religiously faithful, Jobian, yet fully political sovereign Israel an option null and void!

This is precisely the dismal deadlock with which the Hebrew Bible supposedly leaves us with; a deadlock that is broken by the Chronicles version. But that is a topic for another day.

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