

1 *Article*2 **Job and the Bible's Theo-Political Divide**3 **Menachem Fisch**4 ¹ The Cohn Institute for History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas, Tel Aviv University;
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7 **Abstract:** The book of Job presents a unique and detailed contrastive study of two
8 fundamental and fundamentally opposed religious personae: Job, on the one hand, and the
9 collective image of his friends on the other. It is a normative dispute about the religion's most
10 basic norm of disposition. How is one to respond to inexplicable disaster when one believes
11 one is blameless? What is the religiously appropriate response to catastrophe? To confront
12 God's judgment as did Job, or to submissively surrender to it, as his four friends insist he
13 should? Is one supposed to question divine justice when deemed to be wanting, as did Job, or
14 to suppress any thought to the contrary and deem it to be just, come what may? Rather than
15 expound (once again) upon the theological implications of the Job dispute, this paper focuses
16 on its theological-political dimensions, and its looming and vivid, yet largely overlooked
17 presence in the Hebrew Bible's master narrative; and more specifically, on the marked, if
18 inevitable antinomian nature of the Jobian side to the divide.

19

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

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

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

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.

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

44 In other papers I have tried show how this fundamental dispute of religiosity remains alive
 45 and is made even more explicit in throughout the Talmudic literature. The reader of Job is
 46 given, one could say, a glimpse of the truth by being made privy to God's wager with Satan –
 47 something of which neither Job nor his friends could have been aware, and which Karl Jung
 48 takes as his main target. But that is not what the book is ultimately about. It is about the
 49 appropriate form of disposition to adopt in standing before God when, like Job and his
 50 friends, one is not privy to God's reasons and motives. And in the Talmudic literature the
 51 theological premises of the two disputing positions are made cruelly explicit.² Submissive
 52 religiosity, the position maintained by the four friends, presupposes divine perfection. Divine
 53 justice is deemed to be impeccable, and God's law, The Torah, to be ultimately good and
 54 ultimately true, and, therefore, unchangeable. It is the yardstick against which we are to
 55 forever piously measure ourselves and others. Confrontational, Jobian religiosity, by
 56 contrast, premises a reflective and a good-intending, yet knowingly imperfect God, who is
 57 open to the possibility of being proven wrong, and, therefore, liable to change His mind.
 58 From such a perspective, it is our solemn religious duty to forever measure God's will, law
 59 and action against the yardstick of our own best normative judgment, and to act accordingly.
 60 Rather than expound once again upon the theological implications of the Job dispute within
 61 the Talmudic literature – which, as noted, can be shown to extend by the rabbis to their
 62 reading of the book of Job itself³ – I would like to focus on its theological-political
 63 dimensions, and its looming and vivid, yet largely overlooked presence in the Hebrew

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.

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

66 The Bible's master narrative, beginning with the covenantal promise of seed and land to
67 Abraham and culminating in the cruel double exile and the devastation of Jerusalem at the
68 end of II Kings, and its follow-ups in Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther, is tragic story of the
69 promise, the long preparation, the detailed legislation, the conquest, and the establishment of
70 the political entity that became the kingdom of Israel, and its eventual violent eradication.
71 Religions are constituted by their holy scriptures, and Judaism is no exception. However the
72 Hebrew Bible's master narrative is about more than the establishment and early history of the
73 Israelite religion or creed⁴. Although the Israelite religion does get established at Sinai en
74 route to claiming the land, it is first and foremost the story of an essentially *political* (if
75 ultimately unsuccessful) undertaking undertaken in the shadow of God; that of the vision, the
76 rocky birth, the establishment, and the eventual violent termination of the Israelite kingdom
77 in the promised land.

78 God's presence looms large in all stages of the narrative, but at differing levels of
79 intervention. For it is a story that, from its human actors' and readers' perspective, oscillates,
80 at times constructively, at times uneventfully, and at times vehemently, between what Walzer
81 dubs the opposing poles of politics and anti-politics⁵, namely, between the idea that political
82 reality is the domain and responsibility of human political endeavor, and the idea that
83 political reality remains the exclusive domain of divine action, which is wholly determined
84 by the religious standard of His human covenantal partners, even in conditions of political
85 sovereignty.

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

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹ Davis 2008.

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

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

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

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.

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

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

225 The anti-political dystopia described in Judges is replaced in I Samuel 8 by political
226 revolution, with the divinely disgruntled appointment of Israel’s first human monarch, Saul.
227 And as if to prove that the challenges of nation-building have little to do with high
228 state-politics, the book of Ruth situates the remarkable story it tells “in the days when the
229 judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). It is the story the integration of another female “stranger” within
230 Israel, that, unlike that of Rahab, sets forth from an interesting reversal of the Exodus. Like
231 Jacob and his family, Naomi, Abimelech and their two sons were forced by the famine to
232 leave Bethlehem in Judah and seek their fortune among the Moabites – to dwell, לגור,¹³ in the
233 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.

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

238 Naomi does everything in her power to convince her daughters-in-law to return to their
 239 Moabite families and not accompany her to Bethlehem. Nothing is said explicitly but the
 240 looming shadow of Deuteronomy 23 is unmistakable: “No Ammonite or Moabite or any of
 241 their descendants may forever enter the congregation of the LORD, not even in the tenth
 242 generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you
 243 came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to
 244 pronounce a curse on you.” (Deut. 23: 4-5). The fact that the prohibition was introduced in
 245 the light of a particular historical event does not render it less absolute and timeless. Torah
 246 law is forever timeless and absolute, regardless of what might have initially prompted it.
 247 ‘Contrary to how your country welcomed me and family, you, my Moabite lasses, have no
 248 future in mine’, Naomi all but states. ‘Your only hope would be that I give birth to two more
 249 sons,’ she continues, but that will not happen (Ruth 1:11). Her presupposition is clear.
 250 Although my Israelite sons were allowed to marry you’re your Moabite families,
 251 Bethlehemite law is different. No Israelite family there will allow their sons to marry you.
 252 Orpah picks up and leaves to return “to her people and to her gods”, but Ruth refuses to go
 253 (1:14-15). “Entreat me not ... to return from following thee,” she pleads, for wherever you
 254 go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be mine, and the God you
 255 worship will be mine to worship too; and whither you die, I too will die and shall be buried!
 256 But Ruth’s great devotion goes unanswered. When Naomi realizes that Ruth is serious, she

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.

257 falls into tight-lipped silence – not an embrace, not a kiss, not even a ‘thank you’, just grim
258 silence:¹⁵ “When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left off
259 speaking to her” (1:18).

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

274

275 If the detailed stories of Rahab and Ruth can be said to represent the Bible’s paradigmatic
276 cases of nation-building, King Solomon’s reign represents its paradigmatic case of
277 statesmanship and statecraft. After a brief “Game of Thrones” phase in I Kings 2, in which
278 the young, newly anointed king dealt firmly with his and his father’s opponents, the narrator
279 announces that “The Kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon” (I Kings 2:46).
280 Chapter 3 opens with two decisively political royal acts, followed by a third, all profoundly
281 antinomian. First, as the verse nicely puts it: was to marry Pharaoh King of Egypt by taking
282 his daughter to be his wife (I Kings 3:1) – a move that paid off handsomely when Egypt went
283 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)

298

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

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.

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

304

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

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

319 From that point on until the end of Chapter 10 Solomon's reign is described in great detail
320 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!

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

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

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.

330 the many impious ones remain by and large impervious to God's heavy hand. Manasseh's
 331 blatant sinfulness seals the fate of Judah to the extent that even his grandson, Josiah, by far
 332 the most pious of Judean religious reformers, was unable to powerless to reverse the verdict.
 333 The Kings version of the post-Solomonic chapters of Bible's master narrative is one of
 334 colossal and tragic failure, if only because it seems no longer to view repentance as genuine,
 335 deep and widespread as it might be – and Josiah righteousness, as the text attests, was without
 336 precedence²¹ - as a religiously viable healing option. Chronicles, again, tells a dramatically
 337 different story. There, even the wicked Manasseh repents successfully!²²

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

351 The real tragedy of the Kings' version becomes fully apparent, however, only in the two
 352 jointly, and explicitly concluding²³ pictures it is given in Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther

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

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 sovereignty²⁴ 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

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...

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

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

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