THE PROPHET VERSUS THE KING

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In the Pentateuch, Moses is the prototypical prophet, the prophet *par excellence*. God singled him out by name (Ex. 33:17) and he saw God *face to face* (Deut. 34:10). He brought the Covenant and the Commandments from Mt. Sinai and gave the people of Israel the law.

In the Books of Samuel and Chronicles, David appears as the prototypical king, the messianic king. Like Moses, he is called a "Servant of God" and "Man of God." In I and II Chronicles, his name appears 263 times, and that of Moses appears 21 times. Moses wrote down the Ten Commandments dictated to him by God (Ex. 34:1). David wrote down the plan for the Temple: *All of this in writing from the hand of God given to him* (I Chron. 28:19).

Can the prototypical prophet and prototypical king represent the same theology? Do they represent different functions?

After David, who is already King of Judah, becomes King of Israel, the Ark with the Tablets of the Commandments is installed in Jerusalem and the city becomes the religious and political capital of Israel. Then come the passages that are sometimes called the "Davidic Covenant" (II Sam. 7). David himself now lives in a *house of cedar*. He seeks the approval of the Prophet Nathan to build a house of cedar for God *to dwell in* (7:1). Nathan tells David: *'All that is in your heart go do, for the Lord is with you*' (7:3). God, however, objects and says to Nathan:

> *'Go and tell My servant David, the Lord says to him this: Are you to build me a house* [ba'it] *for Me to live in? I have never lived in a house from the day when I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until today, but have walked in a tent and tabernacle. In all My travels with the Israelites, did I say to any of the rulers of Israel whom I had commanded to shepherd My people Israel, why do you not build Me a house of cedar?'* (7:5-7).

God's immediate response is quite remarkable: *'Go and tell My servant David* ' Before this, only two men have been called God's servant: Abraham (Gen.

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26:24) and Moses (Num. 12:7,8). Thus, God is comparing David to Abraham, the biological founder, and to Moses, the spiritual founder, of the people of Israel. Prior to David, only Moses has been called a Man of God.

But thereafter God is very critical of David: *'Are you to build Me a house for Me to live in?* [I] *have never lived in a house'* (II Sam. 7:5). All the gods have houses of cedar or other materials, so does David assume that God also needs a house? (Shamai Galander questions whether the issue is the need for a "dwelling" for God, or that David should build it.)[1] Is David, the recently crowned King of Judah and Israel trying to tie God down, to be the God only of Israel and not of the entire world? Is this the beginning of the nationalistic God of Israel?

Is God also asking whether David is being arrogant enough to suggest that he, David, has decided that God needs a house? Does David not realize what his son Solomon is to realize when he dedicates the Temple [*ba'it* – literally: "house"): *'But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built!'* (I Kg. 8:27). The key issue, as we will see, is: *'. . . a house for Me to live in.'*

Then God continues to Nathan:

> *'This is what you must say to My servant David. The Lord of Hosts says thus: I took you from the pasture, from following sheep, to be the leader of My people Israel. I have been with you wherever you went; I have gotten rid of all your enemies for you. I am going to make your name as great as the name of the greatest on earth. I am going to provide a place for My people Israel; I shall plant them there, and there they will live and never be disturbed again; nor will they be oppressed by the wicked anymore, as they were in former times, ever since the time when I instituted judges to govern My people Israel. I shall grant you rest from all your enemies, and I shall grant you a* ba'it [house, in the sense of "dynasty"] (II Sam. 7:8-11).

Like Moses, David had been a shepherd. Like Abraham, his name is made great (Gen. 12:2) Abraham is promised: *'I will give you this country as your possession*' (15:7). David rules or will soon rule from Damascus to Sinai and defeats all enemies of Israel. The promise to Abraham is in the future tense ("will"). With David, the promise has been fulfilled.

Then God says to David: *'I shall grant you a* ba'it.*'* In a remarkable change and word play, God says: I do not need you to build Me a *ba'it* ["house" meaning structure], but you will be My *ba'it* ["house" meaning dynasty]! As will be seen,

this *ba'it* is promised forever.

> *'And when your days are over and you fall asleep with your ancestors, I shall appoint your heir, your own seed from your bowels to succeed you and I shall make his sovereignty secure. He will build Me a house* [ba'it] *for My name. And I shall make his royal throne secure forever. I shall be a father to him and he a son to Me; if he does anything wrong, I shall punish him with a rod such as men use, with blows of men. But My mercy will never be withdrawn from him as I withdrew it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your dynasty* [ba'it] *and your sovereignty will stand forever before Me and your throne be secure forever'* (II Sam. 7:12-16).

The psalmist later affirms: *I shall never withdraw from him My faithful love . . . . I shall not violate My covenant* (8:30). *I have made a covenant with My chosen one, sworn an oath to My servant David; I have made your dynasty firm forever, built your throne for all generations* (89:4-5).

When God speaks to Moses just before his death, He says: *'You will soon be sleeping with your ancestors, and these people are about to play the harlot by following the gods of foreigners of the country'* (Deut. 31:16). God speaks in a more forgiving tone to David: *'I shall appoint your heir, your own seed . . . . And I shall make his sovereignty secure.'* The first passage suggests future problems with the Covenant after the death of Moses. The second passage suggests a covenant of optimism; the punishment for sin will be manlike and not God-like. God does not threaten as He did to Moses that He will destroy the people (Ex. 32:32). He will never destroy David's dynasty as He had Saul's.

When God says your son shall *'build a house* [ba'it] *for God's name'* (I Kg. 5:17) a "house" is suddenly acceptable, but only for God's name. A house for **My dwelling** like other gods: No. A house for **My name**: Yes.

David is the first successful King of Israel, who unites the tribes, defeats the threatening Philistines and expands the borders. He wants God to have a dwelling where He will be the protector of the people of Israel alone. But God, the Creator of the world and the Protector of all people, rejects that role: I cannot **dwell in your house,** but I can have a **house for My name**.

What is the difference between a house for "My dwelling" and a house for "My name"? The significance of the **name** of God first appears when He meets Moses at the burning bush. Moses is given his mission to go to the Pharaoh and tell him to release the children of Israel from Egypt. Moses asks what he should say when

the children of Israel ask who sent him. God says to Moses: *'My name is* Ehyeh asher Ehyeh *and tell the children of Israel* `Ehyeh *sent me* [Moses] *to you'* (Ex. 3:14).

This ambiguous term can mean "I am the God who existed" before time and will exist after time, the universal God who created the world. God tells Moses that for *'Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I appeared as El Shaddai, but I did not make My* ***name*** *the Lord known to them'* (Ex. 6:3). (The Tetragrammton rendered as "the Lord" is a variant of *Ehyeh*.) To the Patriarchs, God was their Father. To Moses, He will be the God of the entire world.

After the Exodus, Moses takes the people to Mt. Sinai and a Covenant with God. The Covenant begins with a theophany (Ex. 19-20), with a theme of fear and warning (19:21-24) and a terrified people (20:18-20). They are terrified, and say: *'Speak to us yourself and we will obey; but do not let God speak to us, or we shall die'* (20:16). Moses becomes God's mediator to the Israelite people, indeed the Servant of God.

God says to Moses*: 'I know you by name and you enjoy My favor'* (33:12). Moses asks God: *'Show me your glory'* (33:18). God responds: *'I shall make all My goodness pass before you, and before you I shall pronounce the name Lord* [the Tetragrammaton]. *I am gracious before whom I am gracious and I take pity on those whom I take pity*' (33:19). The people will receive God's grace as a result of God knowing Moses' name. This is symbolized for Moses by then hearing God pronounce His own name, "Lord." Just as God knows his name, so Moses now knows God's name. (33:22-23).

At the giving of this Covenant of Sinai, Moses proclaims: *'Lord, Lord, You are long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth'* and ends with '[I will] *visit the iniquity on their sins'* (34:6). This Covenant has two parts; mercy and punishment, obligations and responsibilities. These are based on the issues of God's name and God's knowledge of Moses' name. This is a universal covenant between the people of the world, the people of Israel and God, the Creator of the world. The Israelites were to be a kingdom of priests, to follow more strict behavioral laws as a symbol of the universal laws -- the Ten Commandments. As Moses says toward the end of his life: *'I set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life* (Deut. 30:19).

The people fail, as God had predicted to Moses they would (Deut. 31:16). They request a secular king similar to all other kings. While God rejects Saul's mo-

narchy as a secular monarchy, He realizes that universal laws not mediated by nationalism had failed. Thus, He gives David a nationalistic monarchy, but mediated by David's being God's vassal. This is the compromise that is the covenant given to David by God.

Solomon builds not a house for God to dwell in, but a Temple for the name of the Lord (I Kg. 5:17). This Temple has a universalist message, as Solomon says in his prayer of dedication:

> *'Even the foreigner, not belonging to Your people Israel, but coming from a distant country, attracted by Your name -- for they to will hear of Your name, . . . listen from heaven where You reside, and grant all that the foreigner asks of You, so that all the peoples of the earth may acknowledge Your name . . . and know that this Temple, which I have built, bears Your name* (8:41-43).

The Davidic covenant, however, is nationalistic and ends with: *'I shall be to him* [Solomon] *a father and he shall be to Me a son . . . . If he sins I will chasten him, but My mercy shall not depart from him . . . . And your dynasty and your sovereignty will stand forever'* (II Sam. 14:16). It appears to have no conditions or requirements. No matter what Israel did, God would protect it. The Temple built by David's son became the symbol of the father's national Judaism.

There is a potential conflict between these two covenants; that given to Moses on Mt. Sinai and that given to David on Mt. Zion. The Zion covenant appears unconditional: *'Your dynasty and your sovereignty will ever stand firm before Me and your throne be forever secure'* (7:16). When Solomon built the Temple, the Israelites believed that it would last forever and was God's guarantee of David's dynasty. This created a theology of optimism.

That this was a false theology is shown by Isaiah, Ezekiel, and most especially by Jeremiah. Jeremiah's tortured life was based on his recognition of the Covenant of Sinai, while the people believed in the covenant of Zion. God informs him to tell the people and the priests at the gates of the Temple of the greater importance of universal ethics.

> *Do not put your faith in delusive words such as 'This is God's sanctuary, God's sanctuary, God's sanctuary' . If you treat one another fairly, if you do not exploit the stranger, the orphan and the widow, if you do not shed innocent blood in this place and if you do not follow other gods, to your*

own ruin, then I shall let you stay in this place, in this country that I gave for ever to your ancestors of old (Jer. 7:4-5).

Making the sacrifices is not sufficient to satisfy the God of Moses. When God says: *'Be holy, for I Your God, am holy'* (Lev. 19:2), the laws of sacrifice and the following statements surround this section. *You will not exploit or rob your fellow . . . . You will love your neighbor as yourself (*Lev. 19:13, 18). The people of Jeremiah's day chose to adopt the sacrifice ritual and neglect Moses' law of ethical behavior toward their fellow man. The God of Jeremiah, like the God of Moses, makes clear that His Covenant was conditional. But the people did not believe Jeremiah, preferring the more optimistic covenant of David. But the Temple was destroyed and Zedekiah was the last of the Davidic dynasty to rule.

Medieval Jewish commentators continued this argument. Rashi said that to be holy meant doing the sacrifices. Nachmanides said that was not sufficient, the ethical rule of *love your neighbor as yourself* was what made the people holy.

NOTES

1. S. Galander, *David and His God* (Jerusalem: Simor Ltd., 1991) p. 76.

עשה תורתך קבע

THE TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

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January	Isaiah 23-45
February	Isaiah 46-66
March	Jeremiah 1-26
April	Jeremiah 27-52
May	Ezekiel 1-25