

PART II

CONTINUED

C. THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

*"I [Yahweh] have made a covenant with my chosen,
I have taken oath to David, my servant:
I will establish your line in perpetuity,
I will make your throne stable for generations
to come."*

PSALMS 89:3-4 (BWA)

23. THE PROMISES OF GRACE TO DAVID

So far we have considered two major covenant perspectives found in the Old Testament: one associated with Abraham, and one with Moses. On the one hand, the Abrahamic covenant, we have seen, is unilateral in the sense that it expresses God's absolute commitment to a people, unconditioned by their behavior. This covenant, grounded in *sola gratia*, assures that the people will have a land and that they will increase on the land. It is a covenant of promise.

The Mosaic covenant, on the other hand, is more bilateral, for God and people are partners, having made a contractual agreement with each other. A heavy responsibility falls on the people, for they are called on to decide to serve their liberating God and to live in accordance with covenant obligations—God's commandments. If—and the conditional is important—if they prove unfaithful, deciding to live in a way that betrays the covenant relationship, they will suffer severe consequences—indeed, the whole thing could be called off. While the Abrahamic covenant is a covenant of promise of land and increase, the Mosaic covenant has to do with the behavior of the people on the land. It is a covenant of law, under the sanctions of blessing and curse.

The contrast between these two covenants is obvious, as it was to Paul, who draws a contrast between the Abrahamic covenant of promise and the Sinaitic covenant of obligation, which puts people under the blessing or the curse (see Gal. 5:6-14).

A Royal Covenant

We turn now to another way of symbolizing God's relation to the people and to the world: the royal covenant associated with David and with Zion. "Zion" is the ancient name for the southeastern ridge of the hill on which the city of Jerusalem was founded (mountain climbers will regard "mountain" as an extravagant translation). According to 2 Sam. 5:6-10 David's warriors took "the stronghold of Zion" from the pre-Israelite citizens (Jebusites) and David made it his capital, "the city of David." The temple was later built immediately to the north of this area, and because this shrine was regarded as God's chosen dwelling place (Ps. 132:13), it came to be known also as "the city of God" (Pss. 46:4-5; 87:3).¹ I have previously observed that Jon Levenson, in *Sinai and Zion*, regards Zion as one of the two symbolic mountains that dominate the Scriptures of ancient Israel.²

1. See Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths* (New York: Knopf, 1996), for an early history of Jerusalem.

2. John D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985). On the mountain symbolism, see above, chapter 17.

A Symbolic Vista

Like the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, this one too has its own symbolic vista or imaginative construal. Here the key elements in the pattern of symbolization are monarch and temple.

These two institutions, so basic to the cultures of the ancient Near East, were alien to Israel's "root experiences" of exodus and Sinai. Indeed, the Davidic covenant perspective was a "new theology," not easily absorbed into Israelite tradition. Conservatives who stood in the Mosaic tradition, like the prophet Samuel, opposed the new theology. In 1 Samuel 8, Samuel is portrayed as warning the people of the dangers of having a king "like the nations": this innovation would entail the loss of civil liberties enjoyed during the tribal confederacy. Further, the ideology of sacred kingship, known throughout the ancient Near East, would be a theological challenge, for it threatened the rejection of Yahweh as king, that is, the repudiation of Israel's theocracy.

Moreover, conservatives opposed the policy of building a temple (house) for Yahweh such as the great gods of the ancient world had. In 2 Samuel 7 the prophet Nathan is portrayed as opposing, at least initially, David's plan to build a house for Yahweh. In a dream, so the story goes, Nathan was told to say to David:

Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling.

—2 Sam. 7:5-6 (NIV)

The task of David's theologians was to adapt these two institutions that originally were alien to Israelite experience—dynastic kingship and sacramental temple—to Israel's faith so that they could become symbols for expressing the relationship between God and people, indeed, between God and the world. Their success is evidenced in the fact that David escorted the ark, the Mosaic symbol of Yahweh's presence in the midst of the people, into Jerusalem (see the processional ritual in Ps. 24:7-10). In the book of Psalms, the temple is regarded as the place where Yahweh "tabernacles" or "tents" in the midst of the people:

*How lovely is your dwelling place [tabernacle],
O LORD [Yahweh] of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD [Yahweh];
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.*

—Ps. 84:1-2

Moreover, the king was regarded as God's special agent or "messiah" (1 Sam.

3. See the ideological dimension of the promise of land, above, chapter 21.

4. This has been emphasized in the writings of George E. Mendenhall, e.g., "The Monarchy," *Int* 29 (1975) 155-70; quotation from p. 168. This sociological view was also advocated by Walter Brueggemann, "Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel," *JBL* 98 (1979) 161-85.

24:6), anointed for the leadership of the people, and in this sense the prototype of the one who is to come, the ideal ruler. The term "anointed one" (Hebrew *masiah*, Greek *christos*) refers to *function* as God's instrument, not to the divine nature of the officeholder. (Notice that the Persian king Cyrus is called Yahweh's "messiah," or anointed one, in Isa. 45:1, for he is the agent of God's purpose.)

Thus here we have a perspective that embraces urban symbolism (Zion, the city) and royal symbolism (the king, "Yahweh's anointed one"). Of course this covenantal perspective or "trajectory" had a profound influence on the New Testament portrayal of the Messiah, God's chosen agent to introduce God's dominion on earth, starting at Jerusalem (Zion).

Ideology and Faith

Before proceeding further, we must pause to consider a major question that hangs especially over the Davidic covenant. This covenantal perspective appears to be an "ideology," a sociological term that refers to a body of ideas and practices intended to justify or sanction a sociopolitical program.³

Some interpreters maintain that the Davidic covenant is essentially ideological. It was formulated to uphold and legitimate the power of the Davidic state, specifically to keep a single dynasty in office and to quell revolutionary movements. As such, it emphasized order at the expense of freedom. The Davidic covenant, according to some scholars, was a kind of "fall from grace." The period of grace, it is said, was the time of the tribal confederacy when the Mosaic covenant insured freedom and an egalitarian way of life. In the time of David, and especially Solomon, however, the ancient political ideology, derived from pre-Davidic (Jebusite) Jerusalem and the larger Mediterranean world (Syria, Egypt, Mesopotamia), "was superimposed upon the Yahwist tradition and remained there forever, though radically transformed in the New Testament tradition."⁴

There is a large element of truth in this sociological approach. Psalm 78—to take one witness to Davidic theology—is a document that seeks to justify the new social reality of the Davidic monarchy. Here a psalmist addresses the people, perhaps on the occasion of a public festival, in the manner of a wisdom teacher who looks back over Israel's history and traces its meaning. This bard perceives two threads interwoven in the story of Israel: the bright thread of Yahweh's marvelous deeds, and the dark thread of Israel's faithlessness ("Israel" in this case refers to Ephraim, the Northern Kingdom). Yahweh made a covenant (a reference to the Mosaic covenant) and gave the covenant commandments. Northern Israel, however,

*did not keep God's covenant,
but refused to walk according to his law.
They forgot what he had done,*

5. During the 1996 presidential election campaign one group ran television commercials entitled "God is on Our Side."

and the miracles that he had shown them.
—Ps. 78:10-11

Divine grace and patience abounded, but the people's sin increased more and more.

Finally Yahweh could take it no longer. Says the psalmist, Yahweh "forsook his dwelling [the old tent of meeting] among the people" and delivered his "glory" (an allusion to the ark) into captivity. Resolved to make a new beginning, Yahweh "awoke as from sleep," and "put his adversaries to rout" (vv. 65–66). The recital of the story of northern covenant failure reaches a climax in the new beginning that God made in southern Israel, that is, the kingdom of Judah.

*He [Yahweh] rejected the tent of Joseph,
he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
but he chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which he loves.*
—Ps. 78:67

The rejection of northern Israel and the choice of Judah is evidenced in two divine actions: first, Yahweh "established his sanctuary on Mount Zion" with spacious dimensions of creation: "like the high heavens" of the cosmos, "like the earth" that the Creator established firmly (v. 69); second, Yahweh designated David as "his servant," taking him from the sheepfolds and making him the shepherd (ruler) of the people (vv. 67–72). God's choice of Zion, God's choice of David: these are the twin pillars on which the Zion "ideology/theology" rests.

Psalms 78 draws our attention to a major problem in the community of faith: the temptation to present a theological justification of a sociopolitical program. We can find plenty of illustrations of the ideological dimension of faith in the history of Christianity—or of any religion, for that matter. Religion becomes an ideology when it is used to support and justify a national way of life or when God is portrayed as being "on our side" in the social struggle or even in war.⁵ In modern times, religion became an ideology when the Bible was used to support sociological realities, such as the institution of slavery, patriarchal society, or capitalistic economy.

It must not be supposed, however, that the Davidic covenant was unique in having an "ideological taint." Other construals of God's covenant with the people are not immune from ideological coloration. In the final form of the Pentateuch, the Abrahamic covenant is closely connected with the Priestly (Zadokite) establishment of the Jerusalem temple. The Priestly presentation justifies and legitimates the authority and standing of the priests, particularly those who can trace their lineage back through Zadok to Aaron and Moses. Moreover, the Mosaic covenant, as expressed for instance in the book of Joshua, is closely connected

6. On God's "accommodation," see above, chapter 8.

7. This question I explored in an address to the Catholic Biblical Association, "Biblical Theology and Sociological Interpretation," *TToday* 42 (1985) 292–306.

8. Patrick D. Miller, "Faith and Ideology in the Old Testament," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright*, ed. F. M. Cross et al. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 464–79.

with warfare to possess the land of Canaan. In this "Mosaic" view, Yahweh, the Divine Warrior, is the champion of Israel's political cause and justifies their taking the land from the native population.

A sociological approach to the Bible raises a fundamental question for people in the community of faith today, which treasures the Old Testament as sacred Scripture: The burning issue is the relation between faith and ideology, or stated differently, between the Bible as "Word of God" and "human words" in which God's revelation is communicated. This issue should be faced squarely in any exposition of biblical theology.

In facing this theological question, we should not be surprised to find that Scripture bears the imprint of the sociological situation in which the relationship between God and people was expressed. As we have seen previously, God condescends to speak in the limitations of human language, and that includes the limitations of the sociological situation in which language functions.⁶ This, however, is only the starting point, from which the theologian proceeds to consider the symbolic power of biblical language. Specifically, the theological task is to consider how the various covenants, despite their sociological coloration, symbolize the relationship between God and people in such a way as to transcend and survive the original social situations in which they arose.⁷

In a pathbreaking essay on this subject, Patrick D. Miller proposes three criteria for distinguishing faith from ideology.⁸ First, faith is open to the voice of self-criticism, as expressed preeminently in the preaching of the great prophets. The king's position as Yahweh's anointed does not exempt him from searching criticism, as in the case of King David (see 2 Sam. 12:7: "You are the man!"). Political power must be exercised "under God," as Americans acknowledge in their Pledge of Allegiance.

Second, faith looks beyond the narrow interests of the social group to other peoples who live beyond the political boundary and are included in God's concern. We shall see that this ecumenical horizon belongs peculiarly to Davidic theology, which envisions "the city of God" as the world center to which the nations will ultimately come to find peace and well-being (Isa. 2:2-4).

Third, faith hears a moral demand for justice that is not confined to Israel's society but is worldwide. God's justice, being rooted and grounded in the cosmic

9. Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 1: *Israel and Revelation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1956); discussed above, chapter 2. See the previous discussion of liberation theologians such as George E. Mendenhall, Norman A. Gottwald, and Walter Brueggemann in chapter 18.

10. See the architectural sketch in NIV, p. 481; also my *Understanding the Old Testament* (4th ed.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 238-39; abridged paperback ed. (1997), 214-15. For archaeological parallels see William G. Dever, *Archaeology and Biblical Research* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 110-17.

11. Here I am influenced by Niek Poulssen, *König und Tempel im Glaubenszeugnis des Alten Testaments*, SBM 3 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967), whose view is summarized in my review, *CBQ* 31 (1969) 450-52.

order, is a universal moral demand. This too is a major accent of Davidic/Zion theology, as we shall see later when turning to the prophecy of Isaiah.

Cosmological Symbolism

Psalm 78, quoted above, concludes by saying that Yahweh "chose Mount Zion" as his sanctuary and that Yahweh "chose David to be his servant." We noticed earlier that the Mosaic pattern of covenant symbolism, found especially in the book of Deuteronomy, is analogous to, and probably influenced by, the suzerainty treaty form current outside of Israel. Also, the interpreters of the Davidic covenant have been influenced by, and indeed borrowed from, a symbolic vista known outside Israel. For in the ancient world monarch and temple belonged to a pattern of cosmological symbolism. In ancient Egypt, for example, this symbolism expressed the integration of society into the cosmic order and made possible a stable social order that remained essentially unchanged through several dynasties. The pharaonic structure, it was believed, belonged to the harmony of the cosmic order of creation.

In his monumental study of *Order and History*, the political philosopher Eric Voegelin maintains that the exodus from Egypt was not just a political event but a revolutionary departure from the "cosmological symbolization" of Egyptian culture and an entry into a new symbolic dimension in which an individual, typified by Moses, became the channel of the revelation of the transcendent God. Like some liberation theologians, but for different philosophical reasons, Voegelin maintains that under David (and especially under Solomon), who adopted the way of thinking prevalent in the ancient Near East, Israel fell back into a pharaonic outlook.⁹

The influence of the cosmological symbolism of the ancient Near East is apparent even in the architecture of Solomon's palace/temple complex as described in the account of Samuel/Kings. The whole plan, including temple and palace, expresses an architectural style that was influenced by the culture of Canaan and the ancient Near East. Like other ancient temples excavated by archaeologists, it had a tripartite structure (1 Kgs. 6:2-6): an entrance portico (*ulam*), a main hall (*bekal*), and an inner sanctuary (*debir*) or "Holy of Holies" (v. 16).¹⁰ It is significant that the temple-palace complex was constructed by a Phoenician (Canaanite) architect, Hiram of Tyre (1 Kgs. 5:1-11; 1 Chron. 14:1-2).

The historian goes into some detail about the temple and palace complex, giv-

12. The Chronicler's work is treated subsequently, chapter 25.

13. Ben C. Ollenburger, *Zion, the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult*, JSOTSup 41 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987).

14. See Samuel Terrien, "Presence in the Temple," Chapter 4, in *The Elusive Presence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978); an earlier, basic study is Ronald E. Clements, *God and Temple: The Idea of the Divine Presence in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965).

15. See Mircea Eliade, "The Symbolism of the Center," in *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1959), 12-17. See also my discussion of "The Songs of Zion," in *Out of the Depths* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983; rev. ed. forthcoming, 2000).

ing measurements of height, width, and elevation. When one stands back and looks at the whole Solomonic building program, several distinctive features stand out.¹¹ First, as elsewhere in the ancient world, the king was a temple builder (2 Samuel 7). Only the king had the financial resources for such an expensive project; and only the king could raise the labor force and skilled workers. Aspiring to be a king "like the nations" (cf. Saul, 1 Sam. 8:5), Israel's first dynastic king, David, was a temple builder, though the plan was executed by his son and successor in the dynasty.

Second, the temple, located adjacent to the palace, was part of a unified layout. The building complex showed the inseparable relation between king and temple, monarchy and cult. Indeed, the temple built by Solomon was actually a royal shrine, on royal property, having royal support. The king had jurisdiction over the temple (it may even be called "the king's sanctuary"; cf. Amos 7:13) and sometimes officiated at temple services (cf. 1 Kings 8). The relation between temple and king is even clearer in the presentation of the Chronicler, in which the historian, omitting the whole exodus story, hastens to tell about David's plans to build a temple (1 Chronicles 13–17) and devotes seven chapters to its construction (2 Chronicles 1–7).¹² Pilgrimages to this central shrine were actually expressions of national allegiance (cf. Psalm 137).

Finally, both temple and monarch belonged to a symbolic whole that included heaven and earth, the celestial and the terrestrial. The earthly temple was God's "palace" or "dwelling place," where God (or God's name) was present (1 Kgs. 9:3), corresponding symbolically to the heavenly palace where God is enthroned as king.

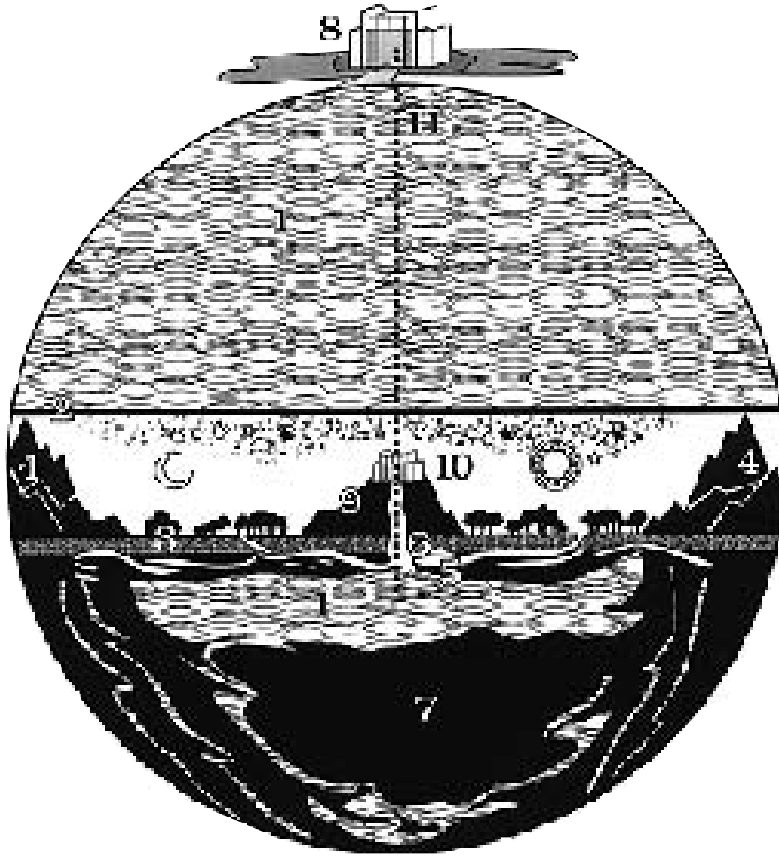
The Temple in Cosmic Symbolism

In an important study entitled *Zion, the City of the Great King* (echoing a phrase from Ps. 48:1), Ben Ollenburger presents a comprehensive and illuminating discussion of Zion theology.¹³ He shows that the theme of Yahweh as cosmic king was fundamental in the worship services of the temple of Jerusalem.

Let us consider the major features of Zion theology. In this symbolic vista, the earthly temple was regarded as a model of the heavenly temple, on the premise of the correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm, the celestial and the terrestrial. In a Priestly passage in the Pentateuch we find a hint that the Jerusalem sanctuary (the tabernacle) was constructed according to a heavenly model or "pattern" shown to Moses on the mountaintop (Exod. 25:9, a theme echoed in Heb. 8:5), just as Babylonian temples were thought to be miniature replicas of heavenly prototypes. Indeed, the Chronicler's history (1 Chron. 28:11–19) claims that David designed the temple according to a "model" or "plan" (*tabnith*), the same word as in Exod. 25:9, which rabbis later understood to be a

16. Ollenburger, in *Zion*, argues that the symbols of Davidic throne and Jerusalem temple belong to separate traditions. It is true that the symbols can be treated separately as in royal psalms (e.g., Psalms 18, 73) or in Zion psalms (Psalms 46, 48); but in some psalms the two symbols belong together (e.g., Psalms 78, 84, 132).

FIGURE 6. *Correspondence of Heavenly and Earthly Spheres: Macrocosm and Microcosm**



(1) Waters above and below Earth; (2) The firmament; (3) Surface of Earth; (4) Mountain-pillars supporting the Firmament; (5) The Fountains of the Great Deep (cf. Gen. 7:11); (6) The Navel (center) of the Earth; (7) Sheol (the Underworld); (8) The Celestial Temple (Heavenly Zion); (9) Earthly Mount Zion; (10) The Earthly Temple (miniature replica of cosmic temple); (11) *Axis Mundi* (imaginary line through symmetrically arranged parts of the cosmos).

*A view like this is presupposed in Hebrews 8:1-7 and Revelation 21:1-5.

heavenly prototype.¹⁴ Furthermore, the sanctuary was imagined to be at the “center” (navel) of the earth, the meeting place of heaven, earth, and underworld (see fig. 6).¹⁵ The temple hill was even likened to Mount Zaphon in the far north, the mythical Canaanite Mount Olympus where El, the high god, presided over the heavenly council of gods.

*Great is the LORD [Yahweh], and most worthy of praise,
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.
It is beautiful in its loftiness,
the joy of the whole earth.
Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion,
the city of the great King.*

—Ps. 48:1-3 (NIV)

This cosmic symbolism is implicit in the account of the prophet Isaiah's call (Isaiah 6). Standing in the earthly temple of Jerusalem, the prophet found himself transported into the heavenly temple, where Yahweh is enthroned as cosmic king. The drama that was enacted in the earthly temple (the choral anthem, the burning incense on the altar, the acclamation of Yahweh as king) also was going on in the heavenly temple.

Owing to the correspondence between the heavenly and the earthly, one could say in religious symbolism that God, who is enthroned in the cosmic temple, is also present (or “dwells”) in the earthly temple. In this double sense the words of Habakkuk are often used even today as a call to worship:

*The LORD [Yahweh] is in his holy temple,
let all the earth keep silence before him!*

—Hab. 2:20

In this manner poets express one of the dialectical contradictions inherent in the experience of God's historical presence: transcendence and immanence, distance and nearness. The cosmic symbolism makes it possible to affirm that the earthly temple is God's dwelling place, where the holy God is truly present to worshipers. As we read in Psalm 46, Zion is “the holy habitation of the Most High”; God is “in the midst of her” (i.e., Zion, the city of God), giving present security and ultimate peace. Hence the repeated antiphon at the end of two stanzas (possibly at the end of all three originally):

*The LORD [Yahweh] of hosts is with us,
the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

—Ps. 46:7, 11

The Cosmic Significance of the King

Just as the temple was the place where God is present on earth, so the ruler (king

17. On the symbolism of kingship see especially Ollenburger, *Zion*. He maintains that various texts differentiate the symbolism of Zion from Yahweh's commitment to the Davidic king.

18. See *ANET*, 265–66.

or queen) was regarded as the channel through whom cosmic blessing and righteousness flow into society.¹⁶ The monarch enjoyed ex officio a unique relation to God: he was regarded as the son of God, and in some ancient Near Eastern texts was described as “the image of God,” that is, the one consecrated to be God’s representative on earth. Indeed, in one biblical psalm the king is addressed as “god,” if we follow the received Hebrew text (Ps. 45:6). This psalm is an ode for a royal wedding, when extravagant praise would be expected.¹⁷

The image of the king as “son of God” is found in Psalm 2, a psalm frequently quoted in the New Testament. Perhaps this was originally a coronation poem portraying the king as one installed as God’s vice-regent in Zion, God’s chosen sanctuary. Yahweh declares, “I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill,” and gives him a protocol that certifies: “You are my son; today [this day of coronation] I have begotten you” (Ps. 2:6, 7). In this theological perspective, Isaiah looked forward to the advent of a Davidic king who would carry the throne name Immanuel, “God with us” (Isa. 7:14), and would sit on the Davidic throne to rule with justice as God’s representative (Isa. 9:2-7).

In this way of thinking, the institutions of temple and monarchy are cosmological symbols that usher us into the spacious dimension of the cosmic order. The primary axis is vertical, the relation between heaven and earth, the cosmic order in relation to the social order, in contrast to the horizontal plane of history that, as in the Abrahamic or Mosaic covenants, moves from promise toward fulfillment. In adopting this pattern of symbolization, Israel has, so to speak, “entered the cosmos.” Creation theology is a fundamental dimension of this perspective, as we shall see.

Reinterpretation of Cosmological Symbolism

During the monarchy, then, Israel adopted the symbolism of throne and temple to express God’s relation to the people and through them to the world of nations. In Davidic theology this symbolism is reinterpreted by being linked with Israel’s adoption of the institution of monarchy under David and Solomon. Davidic theologians affirmed that it was in remembered historical time, not in the mythical realm beyond history, that Yahweh chose and established the institutions of monarchy and temple. The institution of kingship did not have a primordial origin, as in the Sumerian King List, which states that in primeval times “kingship was lowered from heaven”;¹⁸ rather, it had a historical beginning in Israel when, as recorded in books of history (Samuel, Kings), Yahweh chose David to be the shepherd of the people. Moreover, the temple mount was not always a sacred

19. This is argued by Antti Laato, “Second Samuel 7 and Ancient Near Eastern Royal Ideology,” *CBQ* 59 (1997) 244–69, on the basis of the persistence of similar promises to Assyrian kings of “an eternal dynasty.”

20. Ronald E. Clements, *Abraham and David: Genesis 15 and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition*, SBT 2/2 (Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1967).

place, the mythical center of the cosmos where creation began (as in Egyptian texts); rather, in a specific historical time God chose Zion, and chose the shrine that David proposed to build, as the divine dwelling place in the midst of the people.

The most radical change, however, was that Israelite interpreters placed the symbolism of throne and temple in the context of God's special covenant with David. Like the Abrahamic covenant, this one is also called an "everlasting covenant" (*berît 'olam*), which guarantees the unbroken continuity of the Davidic line. There is good reason to believe that this royal theology was not a "theological reconstruction" made in a late period (the exile), when the Davidic monarchy was idealized, but rather "reflects the actual history of the Davidic period."¹⁹ In an ancient poem, David's "last words," David is quoted as saying:

*Is not my house like this with God?
For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,
ordered in all things and secure.
Will he not cause to prosper
all my help and my desire?*

—2 Sam. 23:5

Closely related to this text is the oracle of the prophet Nathan, in which Yahweh makes a solemn oath of commitment to David and his house (2 Sam. 7:11b-17). The story goes that David proposed to build a "house" (temple) for Yahweh, only to be told that Yahweh would build him a "house" (dynasty) that would endure. Further, even though particular kings committed offenses in office, God would not withdraw covenant loyalty (*hesed*). This unilateral covenant is quite similar to the Abrahamic covenant; indeed, it has been suggested that David may have become acquainted with this southern type of covenant theology at Hebron, where he reigned before making Jerusalem his capital.²⁰ Be that as it may, the Davidic covenant, like the Abrahamic, is based on grace alone, not on human behavior.

Nathan's oracle contains the two essential elements of royal covenant symbolism: the unbroken continuity of the Davidic dynasty and of the temple as God's dwelling place in the midst of the people. The oracle stipulates that Yahweh will make a "house" (dynasty) for David.

I will raise up after you your offspring, who will issue from your body, and I will stabilize his kingdom. He shall build a "house" for my name, and I will establish his royal dynasty in perpetuity [*ad 'olam*]. (BWA)

Moreover, a special relationship will exist between God and the Davidic ruler.

21. See Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

22. See above, chapter 18.

I will be father to him, and he will be son to me. When he does wrong, I will chasten him with the rod of human punishment, and with the stripes of human justice, but my loyalty [hesed] I will not withdraw from him, as I did in the case of Saul, whom I removed before you. Before me your house and your kingdom will stand secure in perpetuity [ad 'olam]; your throne will be established in perpetuity [ad 'olam].

—2 Sam. 7:14-16 (BWA)

Notice especially that, according to Nathan's oracle, the Davidic ruler would enjoy a special relation to God: "son" in relation to "father." In the Mosaic covenant, the people Israel is regarded as God's son (Exod. 4:22-23; Hos. 11:1); here the anointed one is the son of God, as in Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi according to the Matthean version (Matt. 16:16).

The Davidic and Mosaic Covenants

The Davidic covenant stands in theological tension with the Mosaic covenant. Whereas the Mosaic covenant stresses that Israel binds itself voluntarily to Yahweh, the suzerain, in response to beneficent deeds, the Davidic covenant stresses that Yahweh, by a solemn oath, is bound to David and his dynasty unconditionally and "forever."

In Israel, as elsewhere in the ancient Near East, the king is fundamentally responsible for securing "justice and righteousness." This is accomplished by the administration of law (cf. the famous Code of Hammurabi) and the use of royal edicts to release people from social burdens.²¹ In difficult cases the king is the highest court of appeal, and ideally is the channel through whom the "righteousness" of the cosmic order flows into society (see Psalm 72). In Israel, however, the king is not the source of law, but is subject to the revealed torah, as stipulated in the law found in Deut. 17:14-20. The king is not "above the law," as shown dramatically in Nathan's parable (2 Sam. 12:1-14) with its pointed indictment, "You are the man!" In Israel, political power must be exercised under the judgment of God.

Moreover, there is a conditional element in the royal covenant, perhaps under the influence of the Mosaic covenant. Recall that in the Deuteronomistic history themes of the Mosaic and Davidic covenantal perspectives are worked together, with the result that the language of "if" is added to the royal covenant (e.g., 1 Kgs. 8:25).²² If a king commits offenses in office, he is subject to punishment, as in the case of David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). But the endurance of the covenant, in this view, is not contingent on human freedom, which makes for social unrest in the present and the potential unleashing of powers of chaos in society. This covenant is the basis for social stability, which is rooted not in the authority of the king but in the cosmic rule of God mediated through the anointed one. At the end of the book of Judges a contrast is drawn between the time of the tribal confederacy, when freedom was sometimes carried to excess, and the order of the Davidic monarchy: "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg. 21:25).

The second element of Davidic covenant theology is also implied in this oracle, especially when read in its narrative context and supplemented with some of the psalms. In 2 Samuel 6, the chapter just before Nathan's oracle, David is described as escorting the ark into Jerusalem with great pomp and ceremony, dressed so scantily that his wife was incensed at his "playboy" antics. The ark was eventually placed in the Holy of Holies, the innermost shrine of the Jerusalem temple, built by David's son, Solomon. Regarded as the throne stool on which Yahweh is seated invisibly, the ark was the symbol of God's real presence in the temple.

Both of these aspects of Davidic theology—the promises of grace to David, and the temple as God's dwelling place—are celebrated in Psalm 132:

*The LORD [Yahweh] swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:
"One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.
If your sons keep my covenant
and my decrees that I shall teach them,
their sons also, forevermore,
shall sit on your throne."*

—Ps. 132:11-12

Here the influence of the Mosaic covenant is apparent as evident in the conditional "if": the king is subject to God's law (cf. Deut. 17:18-20). This psalm also contains the second element of the Davidic covenant: the choice of Zion as God's dwelling place.

*For the LORD [Yahweh] has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his habitation:
"This is my resting place forever;
here I will reside, for I have desired it."*

—Ps. 132:13-14

Summary

In summary, the Davidic covenant, which has affinities with the Abrahamic covenant, represents a distinctive pattern of symbolizing the relationship between God and Israel and indeed between God and the world. It is a unilateral covenant, grounded solely in God's solemn oath, unconditioned by human behavior; therefore it assures stability, security, and hope for the future despite the contingencies of history.

Moreover, in this view the God who is enthroned in cosmic transcendence is

"God with us," present in the midst of the people through the office of the anointed one and dwelling in their midst in the temple. At this point there is affinity with the Priestly theology of the tabernacling Presence.

Further, Davidic covenant theology, despite its ideological coloration, carries us into the spacious realm of creation theology. King and temple symbolize God's ordering of creation and God's will that the social order reflect the peace and righteousness of the cosmic order. The people learned to sing a "new song"—with the new notes of the kingdom of God that is to come on earth as it is in heaven.

Finally, in this covenant the primary symbols are throne and temple. The Davidic king rules *ex officio* as God's representative. In poetic language, the monarch is described as Yahweh's anointed, indeed, the "son of God" (Ps. 2:7) who is seated "at the right hand of God" (Psalm 110). Also, the temple of Zion is the *axis mundi*, the center, to which not only Israel but all peoples must come to find order, well-being, and peace. The ecumenical horizon of this covenant perspective is expressed in the well-known poem, found in both Isaiah (2:2-4) and Micah (4:1-4), that portrays the eschatological consummation when all nations will make a pilgrimage to the center, the elevated temple mountain of Zion, in order to hear the word of God that brings order, security, and peace.

24. THE COSMIC RULE OF YAHWEH IN ZION

No covenantal perspective is more prominent in the Bible, both the Old Testament and the New, than the one associated with David. To be sure, it is not found explicitly in the Priestly Torah, though, as we have noted, there are affinities between the everlasting covenants made with Abraham and with David. Furthermore, the Davidic covenant is a subordinate theme in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history, which on the whole is governed by the Mosaic covenantal perspective. In other literature, however, the theology of the Davidic covenant provides the major perspective: the book of Psalms, the book of Isaiah, and the Chronicler's history. Each of these units of Scripture we shall consider in successive chapters.

Psalms: A Davidic Hymnbook

We have already found that the Davidic covenant is the subject of some of the psalms. Psalm 89, for instance, is a poetic celebration of the promises of grace to David given in Nathan's oracle (2 Sam. 7:4-17, echoed in Ps. 89:28-37), first in the major key of hymnic praise (vv. 1-27) and then in the minor key of lament (vv. 28-51) with its poignant question:

*Lord [Yahweh], where is your steadfast love [hesed] of old,
which by your faithfulness you swore to David?*

—Ps. 89:49

Also we have touched on the storytelling Psalm 78, which reaches a climax in God's choice of David and of Zion, and Psalm 132, where the twin themes of Davidic king and Jerusalem temple are treated side by side. Having looked at a few trees, however, we now must stand back and look at the forest as a whole: the Psalms as a book.

The book of Psalms as a completed whole is attributed to David, "the sweet singer of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1, as some translate). David is specifically associated with some psalms whose superscriptions relate the psalm to a particular event in David's career. For instance, Psalm 51 is associated with David's "sin with Bathsheba" (2 Samuel 11). The Hebrew expression *ledavid*, found at the head of a number of psalms, may mean "dedicated to David" or "belonging to a Davidic collection" (e.g., Psalm 11). The composition, singing, and collection of some psalms can undoubtedly be traced back to the man who was reputed to be a favorite singer of songs. However, the attribution of the book of Psalms to David does not

1. See my classification of the psalms in *Out of the Depths* (rev. ed., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983; rev. ed. forthcoming, 2000), especially the outline in appendix A.

2. Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 76 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

mean that he was the author of the whole collection. Rather, Davidic "authorship"

must be understood theologically. David symbolizes the king who represents the

people as they come before God in worship.

3. Proposed in *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version*, ed. Victor Gold et al. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), as in the Lord's Prayer: "Your dominion come." On the larger question of how divine sovereignty is exercised, see my essay, "The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: The Sovereignty of God in the Bible," *TToday* 53 (1996) 5–14.

4. J. C. Rylaarsdam, "Jewish-Christian Relationship: The Two Covenants and the Dilemmas of Christology," *JES* 9, no. 2 (1972) 249–70, quotation 261. Reprinted in *Grace upon Grace: Essays in Honor of Lester J. Kuyper*, ed. James I. Cook (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 70–84, quotation 78. In this essay Rylaarsdam compares the Mosaic and Davidic covenants.

Also, the structure or arrangement of the book of Psalms is significant theologically. The preface to the Psalter consists of two psalms, one a psalm in praise of God's torah or "instruction" (Psalm 1), and the other a royal psalm, dealing with the installation of Yahweh's "anointed" (messiah) on the holy hill of Zion (Psalm 2). Since both of these psalms stand outside the first Davidic collection, which comprises Psalms 3–41, and unlike other psalms in this collection they have no headings ascribing them to David, we may safely assume that they were located here by an editor for the purpose of sounding major themes of worship: rejoicing in the torah and the hope for a messianic king to rule in Zion. Mixed in with hymns, laments, and thanksgivings are a number of royal psalms that highlight the imagery of kingship (e.g., Psalms 45, 110, 118).¹

The Theological Center of the Book of Psalms

Just as the organization of a modern hymnal may indicate its overall theological flavor, so the canonical shape of the book of Psalms may contribute to our theological understanding of the book as a whole. Gerald H. Wilson has suggested an interesting way to understand the present shape of the book of Psalms.² He notes that the Psalter opens with a psalm of the Davidic covenant (Psalm 2), that there is a royal psalm at the end of book II (Psalm 72), also that there is another royal psalm at the end of book III (Psalm 89), though this one, as we have seen, shifts from praise to lament about the failure of the promises of grace to David. Looking at books I–III, Wilson suggests that the placement of these psalms is intended to display the failure of the Davidic covenant and the need for a larger theological view. The problem is resolved, he maintains, in book IV, which he calls "the editorial center of the final form of the Hebrew Psalter," especially the psalms of God's dominion clustered in Psalms 93, 95–99. In these psalms, sovereignty is lifted from the human level (trust in kings and princes) to the cosmic level (trust in the God who is cosmic king and creator).

This is an attractive, even tempting, hypothesis. It enables us to see that the book of Psalms was not just thrown together but was composed in its final form to make a theological statement. The hypothesis is challenged, however, by the structure of the book of Psalms itself, for Psalm 132, which comes after the psalms of Yahweh's enthronement, presents a restatement of the tenets of the Davidic covenant: election of the Davidic king and choice of the temple of Zion. The truth is that Israelite interpreters never regarded the Davidic covenant as superseded, but held on to the promises of grace to David, though lifting them above the level of prosaic historical reality. It is noteworthy that Augustine in his great work, *The City of God* (book 17), devoted great attention to Psalm 89.

5. Ibid.

6. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), chap. 11.

The Cosmic Dominion of God

Despite its vulnerability, this hypothesis has the merit of drawing attention to a central teaching of the Psalms as an edited hymnbook. While the Mosaic covenant emphasizes the dimension of Israel's history, the Davidic covenant is deeply rooted in mythopoetic symbolism. Davidic covenant theology explodes beyond the limitations of Israel's sacred history and Israel's covenant community by announcing that the God whom Israel worships is not Israel's God in a narrow, possessive, or exclusive sense, but the God who is creator of heaven and earth and the sovereign of all nations. This is an ecumenical theological perspective.

Located at the center of the Psalter, the psalms of Yahweh's dominion sound forth the central message of the whole book: the sovereign rule (kingdom) of God. Today the word "kingdom" sounds foreign, especially in the United States, which has had no experience with monarchy, and for some the language is too heavily laden with masculine imagery. Is there another word in English that conveys the interrelated meanings of (a) the power of a sovereign (b) who rules over a territory and (c) is accorded allegiance by subjects? "Rule" stresses the sovereign's control, but lacks the spatial dimension. "Realm" conveys the spatial dimension but lacks the emphasis on sovereignty. "Regime" suggests a system of management but lacks a personal dimension of loyalty. The "monarchy" or "empire" of God sounds forced and is too political. For the sake of being honest with Scripture the word "kingdom" should be retained, as in most modern translations (NRSV, REB, NIV, NJB). If we shift terminology to soften the emphasis on divine sovereignty, perhaps the best word is "dominion of God."³

In the psalms of Yahweh's dominion, then, the horizon expands from the praise of "our God"—the God revealed in Israel's historical experience—to an ecumenical vision of God's worldwide sovereignty, which is not bounded by politics or geography.

To be sure, these psalms do not lose contact with the plane of history, even Israel's history. There are occasional references to episodes of Israel's story, such as the years of testing in the wilderness (Ps. 95:8-10), the leadership of Moses, Aaron, and Samuel (99:6-7), or the choosing of a heritage (land) for Israel (47:3-4; cf. 98:2-3). By and large, however, the primary axis of these psalms is the vertical relation of heaven and earth, not the horizontal one of the fulfillment of God's promise in history. "The real center of action, in the Covenant of David," remarks J. C. Rylaarsdam, "lies in the primordial, the cosmic, and the pre-temporal world that antedates the world of human contingency."⁴ These Davidic psalms, he goes on to say, move in a mythical dimension: they "sing about the triumph of God as Creator by recalling his establishment of order (*zedek*), by the overcoming of chaos and anarchy in struggles that lie in that mythical past." Therefore the social order—especially the Davidic dominion—is securely founded.

Yahweh's Kingship, and the Davidic kingship as well, rests on a series of decrees which are eternal and unchangeable: the world is established, it will not be moved. Yahweh is King forever; mightier than the breakers of the many waters [i.e., the

forces of chaos]. He decrees the place of the nations in the scheme of things, and by that same immutable decree David is his first-born. He [David] has set his right hand over the sea and the rivers [cf. Ps. 89:25], a token which coordinates his rule with that of Yahweh himself.

He concludes this summary by saying that Davidic theology soars above the contingencies and changes of human history.

The focus is on the Alpha of the beginning, and the psalms repeatedly appeal to this *me az* [from time of old], this primordial *illo tempore* [those ancient times], as the rock of assurance amid the instabilities of time and history.⁵

Israel's Theology of Divine Kingship

Several things deserve attention in this summary of Davidic theology. First, these psalms move in the spacious horizon of creation—not just creation in the primordial past (as in Genesis 1), but the whole creation that is radically dependent on the Creator for its order and permanence. The earth belongs to Yahweh who made it, founding it securely on the waters of chaos (Ps. 29:10). Creation is not just an event of the remote past but also includes the present cosmic order that the Creator sustains against continuing disruptions of the powers of chaos. In this creation theology, the whole *'erets* (earth), not narrowly *'erets yisra'el* (the land of Israel), belongs to the Lord (Yahweh) who made it, founding it on the waters of chaos (Ps. 24:1). Hence worship becomes ecumenical. All peoples are invited to join Israel in worshipping the God who is creator and king.

*For he [Yahweh] spoke and it came to be,
he commanded, and it stood firm.
—Ps. 33:9*

Moreover, the invitation to praise God is extended to the whole realm of nature: heaven and earth, the sea and fields, the trees and the forest. Here we do not find the dichotomy between “history” and “nature” that has contributed to the present ecological crisis. God’s dominion embraces the great whole.⁶

Creation versus Chaos

Second, these psalms celebrate Yahweh’s dominion by recalling divine triumphs that occurred in the primordial era, “those ancient times.” The language moves beyond historical recital, found for instance in the storytelling Psalms 105 and 106, into the imaginative realm of mythical exploits of creation. Yahweh is portrayed as the Divine Warrior who came, comes, and will come to overcome the powers of chaos symbolized by the sea, the rivers, the floods. An ancient Israelite

7. See the discussion of “The Dominion of God versus the Dominion of Evil,” below, Chapter 33.

8. See the insightful study by Walter Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity, and the Making of History* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991).

9. “This Is My Father’s World,” by Maltbie D. Babcock (1858–1901).

hymn displays strong influence of Canaanite poetry:

*Yahweh sits enthroned over the flood,
Yahweh sits enthroned as king forever!*
—Ps. 29:10 (BWA)

The same language occurs in one of the hymns of Yahweh's dominion (93:3-4), where the poet portrays "the floods," "many waters," and "the sea" lifting up their stormy waves, as though seeking to challenge the sovereignty of Yahweh. But the tumult is in vain:

*More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters,
more majestic than the waves of the sea,
majestic on high is the LORD [Yahweh]!*
—Ps. 93:4

Establishment of Cosmic Order

Third, the result of these mythical victories in the primordial past is that Yahweh the creator has established right order or "righteousness." The cosmic King has issued a series of eternal decrees that shape and govern the future, including the establishment of the Davidic throne and the assignment of lands to Israel and other peoples (Pss. 93:5; 97:8). Therefore the dominion of Yahweh, the Creator and cosmic King, is to be proclaimed among all nations:

*Say among the nations, "The LORD [Yahweh] is king!
The world is firmly established,
it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity."*
—Ps. 96:10

To be sure, there are flare-ups of disorder, when it seems that God has lost control. Israelite poets, however, are confident that Yahweh is sovereign, even though that sovereignty may be hidden at present or seemingly threatened by powers of chaos, evident in attacks of foreign enemies, disruption of fertility, or social breakdown. Confident that God is fully in control, poets looked to the future in the expectation that God would come to judge (rule) the earth with righteousness and truth (Ps. 96:10-13). Thus God's dominion provides "the rock of assurance amid the instabilities of time and history" (Rylaarsdam). The worship of "the King, all glorious above," resounds in Christian worship services even today, as in our hymn, "O, Worship the King."

The earth with its store of wonders untold,

10. Sigmund Mowinckel's view is set forth in *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas, 2 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), summarized in my *Out of the Depths*, "The Festival of Zion," Chapter 6. The whole subject is discussed helpfully by Ben C. Ollenburger, *Zion, City of the Great King*, JSOTSup 41 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 33.

11. On the macrocosm in relation to the microcosm, see above, chapter 23.

*Almighty, thy power hath founded of old,
hath established it fast by a changeless decree,
and round it hath cast, like a mantle, the sea.*

Current Battles against the Powers of Chaos

Finally, the founding of the Davidic kingdom is seen to be part of the cosmic order that God has established. As the "son of God," or in some ancient Near Eastern texts "the image of God," the earthly ruler is God's representative through whom the cosmic order is mediated to earthly society, so that there may be justice and peace (Psalm 72). The king's battles against his enemies are seen in the perspective of God's warfare against the powers of chaos:

*I will set his hand on the sea
and his right hand on the rivers.
—Ps. 89:25*

Although the Israelite king is not considered divine or an incarnation of God, in some sense his task is to make the dominion of God a reality in human society. Through the king, the social order is related harmoniously to the cosmic order.

In one respect, New Testament portrayals of the coming of God's dominion are similar to this worldview. Jesus' battles against Satan's dominion, as portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels (especially Mark), are part of God's ongoing warfare against the powers of evil in order that there may be a "new creation." In apocalyptic visions, which we will consider later, faithful people are called to take part in the struggle against evil and, as in the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer, to pray that God will deliver persons from "the evil one."⁷

The Enthronement of God

It is appropriate that the songs of God's dominion belong in a hymnbook, for it is in worship that people are invited to leave the ordinary world, with its illusory values and misleading ways, and to enter imaginatively into God's world, where God is "enthroned on the praises of Israel" (Ps. 22:3).⁸ Perhaps it is in imagination that we discern the real world that belongs to God and, as we sing in one of our hymns, affirm "That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet."⁹

The psalms of Yahweh's kingship (Psalms 47, 93, 94–99) reflect a cultic festival, perhaps analogous to the New Year's festivals celebrated in surrounding countries such as Babylonia. On that occasion, as the great Scandinavian scholar Sigmund Mowinckel proposed, the dominion of Yahweh was not just expressed hymnically; it was celebrated in a ritual drama of Yahweh's ascension to the divine throne.¹⁰ The ritual included a reenactment of David's bringing the ark to Jerusalem (Ps. 132:6–10; cf. 2 Samuel 6), the triumphal procession through the gates of the city (Ps. 24:7–10), and the placement of the ark in the Holy of Holies

12. See Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1959).

of the temple, where Yahweh "sits enthroned upon the cherubim" (99:1).

Psalms 47 is an excellent witness to this view. Here the theme of Yahweh's ascension is announced: God (Yahweh) has "gone up" (ascended) amid shouts of acclamation and with the sound of the shofar (trumpet):

*God has gone up with a shout,
The Lord [Yahweh] with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises,
sing praises to our King, sing praises.*

—Ps. 47:5-6

Since, however, the earthly temple was regarded as the counterpart of the heavenly, on the principle of the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm, the drama symbolized Yahweh's ascension to the heavenly throne.¹¹ Thus "the great king" (47:2) not only reigns in Zion, where anthems of praise are sung, but over the whole earth.

*God is king over the nations,
God sits on his holy throne.
The princes of the peoples gather
as the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields [rulers] of the earth belong to God,
he is highly exalted.*

—Ps. 47:8-9

The throne ascension, analogous to the coronation of an earthly monarch, was accompanied by trumpet fanfare, shouts of acclaim, and songs of joy. Emissaries from foreign nations ("the princes of the peoples," 47:9) were apparently included in this ecumenical celebration.

The Lord Is King!

The keynote in these psalms is the cultic exclamation, *YHWH malak* (93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1), which may be translated "The LORD [Yahweh] has become king" (so REB), a translation that refers to an event that has happened. Alternatively, the cultic cry may be rendered "The LORD is king" (so NJPSV; NRSV; cf. NJB) or "the LORD reigns" (NIV), a translation that indicates Yahweh's eternal kingship.

The first-mentioned translation, while grammatically justifiable, is questionable if it implies regaining a kingship that has been lost. Unlike Baal in the Canaanite religion, Yahweh is not involved in "the myth of the eternal return"¹²—a dying-rising god who is subject to the powers of death and darkness. Some suggest that the language is existential, referring to the confession that God has been dethroned in human life and needs to be reenthroned, but this is rather forced. In all probability the exclamation refers to God's eternal kingship: Yahweh is king forever! God was king "from of old" (Ps. 93:2), God is acclaimed as king now (47:7), and God will come as king to judge the earth (98:9). All the tenses—past,

13. See below, chapter 35.

present, and future—must be employed to praise the God who was, who is, and who is to come.

In this language the biblical poets express the faith that human security is grounded in the rule of God who is transcendent—beyond the historical realm where powers of chaos are at work. From our human point of view, the disorder and suffering in the world seem to challenge the sovereignty of God. But above the waters of chaos—so faith affirms poetically—God sits enthroned as the eternal King, holding the cosmos in being and maintaining the order of cosmic law. It is the eternity of God, who remains God even though the earth be destroyed, that inspires a poet to affirm in a well-known Zion psalm:

*God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.*

—Ps. 46:1-3

God's Dominion as Future Horizon

God's dominion has a future horizon; for God's kingdom has *not* come on earth as it is in heaven. People still experience the threat of chaos, the shaking of earth's foundations, the sinister powers of death and darkness. In faith's imagination, however, the King, whose throne is securely established from of old, will come.

*Let the sea roar, and all that fills it,
the world and those who live in it.
Let the floods clap their hands;
let the hills sing together for joy
at the presence of the LORD [Yahweh], for he is coming
to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.*

—Ps. 98:7-9; cf. 96:10-13

The Christmas carol, "Joy to the World, the Lord Is Come," echoes the jubilant notes of this psalm (see Ps. 98:4-9).

These psalms, as we have noticed, may reflect a cultic festival that was celebrated in the Jerusalem temple during the period of the monarchy. If so, in the final form of the Psalter the poetic language bursts beyond the limitations of the cult and becomes an expression of praise for all times and all peoples. Imagination portrays the eschatological coronation of God!

This imaginative portrayal is found in the magnificent passage, Isa. 52:5-7, where language transcends historical reality. The poet gives a concrete picture,

1. Robert North, S. J., "The Chronicler," in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown et al. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 364.

such as people of the time probably experienced. The countryside beyond the walls of Jerusalem is desolated by war; the people are huddled in the city, anxiously wondering how the battle goes with those fighting against hopeless odds; the sentinels are on the ramparts of the city gate, scanning the surrounding territory for any sign of activity. Suddenly in the distance the watchmen spy a single runner, a herald who approaches to announce that the war is over, that peace is at hand, that a new day is breaking. In Hebrew the word of the herald of good news is described in four participles (translated "who . . ."):

*How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger:
who announces shalom,
who proclaims tidings of good,
who publishes victory [salvation],
who says to Zion: Your God reigns!*

—Isa. 52:7 (BWA)

Here too the herald's exclamation may be translated, "Your God has become king" (REB), although more likely the poet refers to the imminent display of God's royal rule that is everlasting: past, present, and future. It is noteworthy, however, that in this passage the poet envisions the triumphant return of God to Zion (52:8). The Divine Warrior has "bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations" (52:10), with the result that God's people in the ruined places of Jerusalem experience deliverance, and "all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."

The theological overtones of this language of God's dominion, specifically God's coming to the temple of Zion with saving power, are picked up in the New Testament.¹³ The Gospel of Mark begins with the announcement of the imminent coming of God's kingdom:

Now after John was arrested Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

—Mark 1:14-15

25. HISTORY VIEWED IN DAVIDIC PERSPECTIVE

We turn now to a major presentation of the Israelite story: the Chronicler's history, especially 1 and 2 Chronicles. This important theological writing has unfortunately been out of bounds for most modern biblical readers. Earlier generations, however, who read the Bible from cover to cover, were influenced by this portion of Scripture. We are told that John Newton's famous song, "Amazing Grace," was influenced by 1 Chron. 17:16. According to this passage David "sat before Yahweh" and said: "Who am I, O Lord God, . . . that you have brought me thus far?" ("Tis grace that brought me safe thus far.") Also, in some churches the offertory prayer is used: "All things come from you, O God, and of your own have we given you" (1 Chron. 29:14b).

The Chronicler's History

The Chronicler's history includes the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles (the last two books of the Hebrew Bible) and, in the judgment of many scholars, also the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Even if the two historical works belong together, which is a debatable point, there are important differences between them. One obvious theological difference is that the books of Chronicles stress the Davidic covenant, with its twin institutions of monarchy and temple, while saying little about the Mosaic tradition; whereas the books of Ezra and Nehemiah stress the Mosaic covenant and minimize the importance of Davidic theology. There is good reason, then, to consider the Chronicler's work as a separate theological statement.

In connection with our study of the Mosaic pattern of symbolization we turned to another historical work, the so-called Deuteronomistic history. We found that Deuteronomistic historians attempted to understand Israel's history of failure, culminating in the fall of the nation and the exile of the people, in the light of the covenant perspective associated with Moses. These historians also attached great importance to the royal covenant associated with David, but that covenant was subordinated to the primary Mosaic covenant. The Chronicler's history reverses the priority, placing primary emphasis on God's promises of grace to David. To be sure, the Mosaic Torah, here called "the book of Moses" (2 Chron. 25:4; 35:12), in its halakic or "legal" sense is invoked, as we shall see; but the key to understanding Israel's history, according to these theologians, is Yahweh's covenant promises of grace to David. Indeed, some have argued that Chronicles "was written to vindicate the definitiveness of David's covenant over Sinai."¹

It is striking that Chronicles was written in a time when monarchy had ceased

2. The "everlasting covenant" with David we have considered above, chapter 23.

3. See above, chapters 21 (promise of land) and 23 (legitimation of Davidic rule).

in Israel and when builders of the Second Temple looked back to the glory of the First Temple, the one built by Solomon. This "historical" work, composed after the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (probably ca. 400 to 300 B.C.), relies primarily on the source of Samuel/Kings, although it also refers to unknown sources. The story is retold, however, in such a way as to give an imaginative construal in the perspective of Davidic theology. The Chronicler's work soars beyond the concrete history, with which modern historians attempt to deal, into a symbolic vista perceived by religious imagination.

A Theological Revision of History

As in the case of the Deuteronomistic history, we may ascertain the theological perspective of the Chronicler in two ways. First, let us examine the way sources are used. Unfortunately, most of the sources referred to are no longer extant, if indeed they ever existed. It would be a great day for archaeology if one of them should turn up, for instance, "the records of the prophet Nathan" (1 Chron. 29:29) or "the story of the prophet Iddo" (2 Chron. 13:22). Fortunately, one of the Chronicler's sources is readily available, namely, Samuel–Kings (specifically 1 Samuel 32 to 2 Kings 25). The Chronicler's perspective is indicated by how he uses this source, sometimes quoting verbatim, sometimes condensing, sometimes omitting, sometimes changing to accord with special interests.

The scope of this work extends from creation (Adam) to the fall of the nation and the exile of the people. The first part, from creation to David, is spanned by genealogies (1 Chronicles 1–9; cf. Matthew's genealogy, which begins with David and leads to Jesus). Amazingly the historian skips over the period of the ancestors (Genesis 12–50) and the root experiences of exodus and Sinai (Exodus–Numbers), and the period of the tribal confederacy (Joshua, Judges) and comes immediately to the decisive beginning in Israel's history: the covenant with David and the building of the temple. In this regard the Chronicler is comparable to the prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem, who likewise ignores Israel's sacred history, even exodus and Sinai, and focuses on the Davidic king and the temple of Zion (see below, chapter 26).

Theology Set Forth in Key Addresses

The second way to ascertain the Chronicler's perspective is to study key addresses that are introduced at transitional points in the narrative. Illustrative of these is the account of the warfare between Abijah (sometimes spelled Abijam), son of Rehoboam, who was Solomon's son and successor, and Jeroboam, king of northern Israel (2 Chronicles 13). Readers are carried back to the time of the breakup of the united kingdom (922 B.C.) and the split into Northern and Southern Kingdoms, each claiming to worship Yahweh, the God of Israel. The Deuter-

4. C. Mangan, *1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah*, OTM 13 (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier 1982), 16.

onomistic historian says precious little about King Abijah (1 Kgs. 15:1-2), but the Chronicler gives an extended account of his war with Jeroboam I, founder of the Northern Kingdom. The account includes Abijah's speech on a mountain in the hill country of Ephraim, as the two armies confronted one another (2 Chron. 13:3-12). In this dramatic setting the speech makes these points:

- Yahweh, God of Israel, gave the kingship over Israel forever to David and his sons by "a covenant of salt"—a covenant that lasts, because salt is a preservative (v. 5).²
- You northerners suppose that you can withstand "the kingdom of Yahweh in the hands of the sons of David" because of your military might and the religious innovations of Jeroboam (v. 8). These included setting up calf images of Yahweh, installing a separate priesthood, and gathering the people for worship at northern sanctuaries (cf. 1 Kings 12).
- But this strategy will not work. Yahweh is "our God whom we have not forsaken." The evidence that we worship God in truth is that we have the proper priesthood, the proper worship, and the proper sanctuary (the Jerusalem temple; v. 10).
- So, "God is with us," leading us in battle. In opposing us, you are really fighting against Yahweh, the God of our ancestors, and you cannot succeed (v. 12).

This is clearly not an unbiased account of a war between northern and southern Israel (is there ever an unbiased military account?); rather, it is an ideological claim, that is, an attempt to justify the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the religion of the Jerusalem temple. Who is on the Lord's side? The question was raised not just in a contest between armies but in the division within the people of God into north and south, Ephraim and Judah. The people of Judah, according to this view, were confident that God was with them and that, because of their faithfulness, they were on the winning side.

This ideological account, of course, has many historical parallels: people who are confident that God is on their side in a political struggle, warriors who invoke God to help them win battles, or clergy who claim that they are properly ordained and stand in the true succession. It is even reported that during time-outs some professional football players pray that God will help their side to attain victory. Here we come up against the whole question of faith and ideology, which as we have noticed previously, attends all covenant theologies.³

The Chronicler's Major Theological Convictions

Davidic theology, however, cannot be reduced to pure ideology, as we shall see when considering the message of the prophet Isaiah (chapter 26). This is evident from two major convictions expressed in the Chronicler's history.

5. Gerhard von Rad, "The Historical Work of the Chronicler," in *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962-65), 1:347-54.

Obligation to the Revealed Law of God

The first conviction is based on Mosaic tradition: the people and their leaders are subject primarily to the law of God, not to human regulations. In previous discussions we have noticed that *torah*, which means "teaching," has two dimensions: story (*haggadah*) and commandment (*halakah*). The specific obligations of the covenant were set forth within the whole story of God's actions on behalf of Israel. In the Chronicler's history, however, the emphasis falls heavily on the commandments written in the Mosaic torah:

According to all that is written in the law of the LORD [Yahweh] that he commanded Israel. —1 Chron. 16:40

Keep the law of the LORD [Yahweh] your God. . . . Observe the statutes and the ordinances that the LORD [Yahweh] commanded Moses for Israel.
—1 Chron. 22:12-13

According to the commandment of Moses for the sabbaths, etc. —2 Chron. 8:13

Keep the law and the commandment. —2 Chron. 14:4

To offer burnt offerings to the LORD [Yahweh], as it is written in the law of Moses.
—2 Chron. 23:18

According to what is written in the law, in the book of Moses. —2 Chron. 25:4

Priests and Levites "took their accustomed posts according to the law of Moses the man of God."
—2 Chron. 30:16

Burnt offerings . . . as it is written in the law of the LORD [Yahweh]."
—2 Chron. 31:3

Strangely, in none of these cases is there mention of the exodus or the guidance in the wilderness. It has been observed that if we had only the Chronicler's history we would never know that there was an exodus out of Egypt.⁴

In Chronicles the Torah, understood in its halakic sense, is undoubtedly identified with the whole Pentateuch, not just the book of Deuteronomy, as in Josiah's reform. The Pentateuch, in substantially its final form, was the Torah of Moses that Ezra brought back to Judah from Babylonian exile and that became the constitutional basis of the restored community (see Nehemiah 9). The book of Psalms, as we have seen, begins with the announcement that those persons are blessed (happy) who meditate on the torah "day and night," making it the basis of their life and thought (Psalm 1).

Yahweh's Covenant with David

The second conviction, which is much more dominant in Abijah's speech, is that Yahweh has "chosen" David to be ruler and has chosen the Jerusalem temple, including its priesthood. Accordingly, the Chronicler jumps into Israel's history (as presented in the Deuteronomic "source") at the point of David's rise to power (1 Chronicles 9–15). All at once we are told about David bringing the ark to Jerusalem, accompanied by the singing of psalms (1 Chronicles 16). Then follows immediately Nathan's oracle of dynastic promise to David, which was taken over from 2 Samuel 7 with few changes (2 Chronicles 17). Unsavory episodes, such as the Bathsheba affair, are passed over in order to give attention to David's plans for the construction of the temple and the organization of its liturgical and musical service (1 Chronicles 22–29).

In this connection David's address in 1 Chronicles 22 deserves attention. Here David gives a speech to Solomon, in which he charges him with the task of building a temple and assures him of prosperity if in his wisdom he observes "the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord [Yahweh] commanded Moses for Israel" (22:7-16). In succeeding chapters David organizes the priests and Levites and assigns them their duties (chapter 23), as well as the Aaronic priests descended through Zadok (chapter 24), the musicians (chapter 25), other functionaries (chapter 26), and finally those dealing with civil and military affairs (chapter 27). Above all, David submits to Solomon the plan (*tabnith*) of the temple (28:11-12, 18-19), just as Moses, in Priestly tradition, constructed the tabernacle and its furnishings according to the pattern (*tabnith*) that Yahweh showed him on the mountaintop (Exod. 25:9). Seen in the perspective of Davidic covenant theology, David appears as a figure even greater than Moses!

Temple and King

Written late in the biblical period, the Chronicler's history is an impressive witness to the power of the Davidic covenant symbolism to survive, despite the end of the monarchy and the destruction of Solomon's Temple. The twin convictions of the Davidic covenant are stressed in David's speech to the assembled officials of Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 28). Here David recalls that Yahweh chose the temple as a resting place for the ark and "the footstool of Yahweh's throne" (v. 2); that Yahweh chose him to be "king over Israel forever" (v. 4); and that Solomon, commissioned to carry out David's plan, would "sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD [Yahweh] over Israel" (v. 5). Here the institutions of throne and temple are brought closely together in the imaginative vista of the Chronicler. Indeed, the cosmic dominion of God seems to be manifest in the earthly kingdom of David.

This is an amazing portrayal of David, which far exceeds historical reality. In a time when there was no king on the Davidic throne, the king is portrayed as one who rules as God's representative, indeed who sits on the earthly throne of *God's* kingdom. The Chronicler's lively imagination has produced a view of history that has messianic overtones. As Gerhard von Rad remarks,⁵ the Davidic king is portrayed with such a *doxa* (glory) that the reader is prompted to ask with John the

Baptist: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we expect another?"

The Chronicler's history provides a point of transition to our next major subject, "Trials of Faith and Horizons of Hope." This history work was composed during the period of the Second Temple, the so-called postexilic period, when the complex phenomenon known as Judaism was emerging. It was a time of suffering and dislocation, yet also a time of "waiting for God" in hope of the coming of God's dominion on earth as it is in heaven. Before turning to this subject, however, let us pause to consider the great prophet who stands in the circle of Davidic/Zion theology: Isaiah of Jerusalem.

1. See my essay, "The Holy One of Israel," in *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Harrelson*, ed. Douglas A. Knight and Peter J. Paris (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 3–19.

2. Trans. John W. Harvey (2d. ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1950); see above, chapter 5.

26. PROPHECY IN THE ZION TRADITION

Like the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenantal perspectives discussed previously, the Davidic covenant also had a profound influence on prophecy, as evident from the message of the eighth-century prophet, Isaiah of Jerusalem. As pointed out earlier, it is significant that each of the three major covenant perspectives has its chief prophetic spokesman: Ezekiel speaks out of the Priestly tradition; Jeremiah is a "prophet like Moses"; and Isaiah of Jerusalem stands in the tradition of Davidic or Zion theology.

The Seminal Message of Isaiah

It is not easy to separate out the distinctive message of Isaiah from the book that bears his name. After a century or so of intensive study, many scholars agree that the book falls into three major parts divided roughly into First Isaiah (chapters 1–39), Second Isaiah (chapters 40–55), and Third Isaiah (chapters 56–66). This oversimplified analysis indicates that the book of Isaiah has undergone a long and complex history of traditions, from the time when the eighth-century prophet "bound up" his "teaching" in a scroll among his disciples (8:16) to the final shaping of the book in its present canonical form, probably in the early period of the Second Temple (ca. 520–515). Later we shall look at the book as a whole, when considering the movement from prophecy to apocalyptic (chapter 33).

In order to ascertain the seminal message of the eighth-century prophet, Isaiah of Jerusalem, we shall restrict our attention to the first part of the book (chapters 1–39) and, within that compass, especially to chapters 1–12 and 28–33. Some of the oracles against the nations (chapters 12–23) reflect Isaiah's preaching. But chapters 24–27, the so-called Apocalypse of Isaiah, and chapters 34–35, the Little Apocalypse, come from the period of Third Isaiah, when prophecy was becoming apocalyptic in tone. Chapters 36–39, paralleled for the most part in 2 Kgs. 18:13—20:19, serve as a bridge from the first part of the book, predominantly a message of divine judgment, to the second (beginning at Isa. 40:1), which gives a message of hope and consolation.

The King, the Lord of Hosts

One of the first things that strikes the reader who turns to so-called First Isaiah is that this prophet, unlike Hosea and Jeremiah, does not appeal to the exodus/Sinai root experiences, at least not explicitly. To be sure, there is a passing reference to what Yahweh "did in Egypt" (10:26) and a poetic depiction of a highway from

3. See the discussion of Eric Voegelin's *Israel and Revelation* above, chapter 2.

Assyria analogous to one Israel used in the exodus from Egypt (11:16). But these references, if they reflect the prophet's message (which some doubt), are exceptions that prove the rule. The Mosaic covenant tradition has not made a significant impact on the message of this eighth-century prophet.

While the preaching of the prophets Hosea and Jeremiah moves primarily on the horizontal plane of Israel's history, the message of Isaiah is oriented in the vertical axis of heaven and earth, the eternal and the temporal, macrocosm and microcosm. Isaiah's message soars above Israel's sacred story (exodus, Sinai covenant, sojourn in the wilderness, occupation of the land) into the symbolic world of Yahweh's cosmic rule, which we explored in a preceding chapter (chapter 24). As Isaiah perceived in his vision in the temple, Yahweh is the King par excellence, who is seated on a celestial throne, "high and lifted up," that is, transcendently (Isa. 6:1). In response, the prophet exclaimed:

Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD [Yahweh] of hosts.

—Isa. 6:5

In this theological perspective, Yahweh is the eternal King, before whose transcendent majesty no human power can claim ultimate sovereignty, no social or economic order can escape criticism, no cultural or national values can boast ultimacy. The prophet envisages God's appearance on the horizon of the future to judge all the proud symbols of human achievement, including economic wealth, military fortifications, and commercial exploitation of the seas.

*For the LORD [Yahweh] of hosts has a day
against all that is proud and lofty,
against all that is lifted up and high,
against all the cedars of Lebanon,
lofty and lifted up;
and against all the oaks of Basban,
against all the high mountains,
and against all the lofty hills;
against every high tower,
and against every fortified wall,
against all the ships of Tarsish,
and against all the beautiful craft.
The haughtiness of people shall be humbled,
and the pride of everyone shall be brought low,
and the LORD [Yahweh] alone will be exalted on that day.*

—Isa. 2:12-17

4. Nicholson, *God and His People* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 207. Here Nicholson seems to be talking about the Mosaic covenant, but the observation is more pertinent in regard to the Davidic covenant, which lies beyond his study.

In this powerful poetry Isaiah develops a theme sounded in the psalms that cele-

brate Yahweh's enthronement as king (Psalms 47, 93, 95–99). The nations of the

earth and the whole realm of nature are summoned to praise the cosmic king,

for he is coming to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,

and the peoples with his truth.

The Holy One of Israel

The keynote of Isaiah's message is that Yahweh, the Holy One, who is enthroned in cosmic majesty, dwells in the midst of the people, and in this sense is "God with us." The first Isaianic collection (chapters 1–12) is appropriately rounded off with a song that strikes this fundamental theme.

*Sing praises to the LORD [Yahweh], for he has done gloriously,
let this be known in all the earth.
Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.*
—Isa. 12:5-6

The sense of the holy resounds in the account of the prophet's inaugural vision in the temple, where a celestial choir sings an anthem of praise:

*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD [Yahweh] of hosts,
the whole earth is full of his glory.*
—Isa. 6:3

The anthem sounds a note of universalism: it is not just the temple of Jerusalem (tabernacle) that is filled with the glory of God (as in Priestly tradition), but "the whole earth is full of God's glory," even as the heavens display the glory of the Creator (cf. Ps. 19:1).

The prophet uses the divine epithet repeatedly: *qadosh yisra'el*, "the Holy One of Israel" (1:4b, 10:20; 12:6; etc.).¹ The epithet does not refer in a broad sense to the *mysterium tremendum*, the divine mystery beyond all human experience and conceptuality, to recall Rudolf Otto's classical study, *The Idea of the Holy*;² rather, the term designates the holy God who has turned toward a people and who in prayer may be addressed by a personal name (YHWH). The formula signifies close relationship between God and people—not in the possessive sense sometimes implied in popular religion ("My God," "Our God") but in the sense that God is inescapably involved in Israel's life story as critic and savior. In this double sense, "God is with us" (Immanuel)—in judgment and in grace.

As expressed in Isaiah's message, the experience of the holy evinces dialectical contradictions or theological paradoxes. One paradox, mentioned above, is that of the universal and the particular: the God whom Israel worships is not the Holy One of Israel in a narrow sense but is actually God of the whole earth and the entire cosmos. Another is the paradox of transcendence and immanence: the God who is "high and lifted up" in cosmic splendor is inescapably present "in your midst," "the Beyond in the Midst" (Bonhoeffer). To recall a line from a wonderful poem in the book of Hosea (Hos. 11:1-9), Yahweh is "God, not a human, the Holy One in your midst" (v. 9b).

Cosmic Order and Social Order

In Isaiah, however, this sense of Yahweh's holy presence in the midst of the peo-

5. See later discussion, chapter 32.

ple is expressed in a different pattern of symbolism than in the case of Hosea or other prophets in the Mosaic tradition. Isaiah's preaching is informed by the twin images of temple and kingship. It is through these sacral institutions that the cosmic "righteousness" of God is mediated to society and the holy God is present in the midst of the people.

At first glance, the symbolic vista of Isaiah has striking affinities with the mythical symbolism of the ancient Near East. In the ancient world the cosmic kingship of the high god was manifest in society through the sacral institutions of temple and kingship. In ancient Egypt, for instance, as Eric Voegelin has shown,³ "cosmological symbolization" expressed the integration of society into the cosmic order and made possible a static social order that remained essentially unchanged through several dynasties. In this Egyptian view, the pharaonic social structure reflected the harmony of cosmic order.

Some interpreters, especially those associated with Solomon's court, may have held a similar view of the monarchy. Psalm 72, whose superscription associates the poem with Solomon, speaks of the ideal king as one who mediates cosmic "righteousness" (or right order) to society, with the result that the king is the upholder of justice for the helpless and the source of blessing and prosperity. Indeed, the king, revered as the son of God, was crowned with a kind of supernatural halo, as suggested in the lofty language of Psalm 72:

*May he live while the sun endures,
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations,
May he be like the rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.*

—Ps. 72:5-6

Indeed, in a wedding ode, the king is addressed as "god," if we follow the received Hebrew text (Ps. 45:6), and therefore is invested with sovereign power. In short, Yahweh's rule as cosmic King in the heavenly temple is manifest sacramentally through the reign of the Davidic king (God's "son") and in the Jerusalem temple (God's "dwelling place" or tabernacle). Isaiah speaks in the name of "the LORD [Yahweh] of hosts who dwells on Mount Zion" (Isa. 8:18).

Isaiah's Reinterpretation of Cosmological Imagery

While this view is similar to the cosmological symbolism of the ancient Near East, there is a vast difference, owing to the holiness of God, which, as in Isaiah's temple experience, establishes a gulf between the divine and the human, between God's cosmic kingship and earthly dominion. Before the transcendent majesty of the Holy One of Israel, the whole social order is "relativized." As E. W. Nicholson says in his study of God's covenant with Israel:

The presupposition of such a relativizing of the social order was a radical differentiation between the divine and the human world, between God and his creation, so that the human world is not viewed as simply continuous with the divine: the

divine-human continuum is split apart, so that the human world even can be viewed as being at loggerheads with its creator. In short, the transcendence of God over the human world is emphasized.⁴

Stated differently, the institutions of temple and monarchy are divested of their divine authority and ultimacy (desacralized) and are seen in relation to a social entity that holds power in society (relativized).

In Isaiah's message the images of king and temple belong to the "everlasting covenant" with David. In this context the metaphors have a different ring than in the cosmological symbolism of the ancient Near East. Since Yahweh is the Holy One, the transcendent Ruler and Creator, what is required is not the integration of society into a changeless cosmic order but, rather, the change of the social order so that it conforms to the will of the cosmic King. Isaiah senses a conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world: the two are "at loggerheads" (Nicholson). The prophet looks forward to a time when the conflict will be resolved and God's kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. In this sense, this theological perspective is "soteriological," to use a Christian theological term, that is, it is concerned with salvation (wholeness, welfare, peace).

Hence the proper response to Yahweh's utter holiness is humility and penitence (the fear of the Lord). Humility before God's transcendent majesty, expressed in Isaiah's temple vision, will occur in the social world on the Day of Yahweh's appearance. The encounter with the holy God on that day will be dreadful because, in contrast to the proud and the mighty on earth, God demands and executes justice.

*People are bowed down, everyone is brought low,
and the eyes of the haughty are humbled.
But the LORD [Yahweh] of hosts is exalted by justice,
and the Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness.
—Isa. 5:15-16*

God's Demand for Social Justice

Yahweh's demand for social justice resounds through the prophet's preaching found within the first booklet, chaps. 1–12. In a powerful poem found in the preface to this collection (1:10-26), the prophet declares that God is not interested in the people's temple sacrifices and will not even listen to their prayers, for "your hands are full of blood" (1:15). Those who misuse power to oppress the weak and defenseless need more than ritual cleansing.

*Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean,
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;*

6. There is a special word in Hebrew for "virgin" (*betulah*), though it is not used here.

*seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.*

—Isa. 1:16-17

The theme of justice is stated powerfully in the “song of the vineyard” (Isa. 5:1-7), in which the prophet portrays God’s disappointment with “my people.” A farmer planted a vineyard and lavished attention on it, expecting a good harvest of grapes. But the vineyard yielded wild grapes, prompting the owner to plan to tear it down. The threat to command the clouds to pour no rain on the fruitless vineyard (v. 6) indicates the meaning of the metaphor. Yahweh is the farmer who had planted a vineyard (the house of Israel, the people of Judah), expecting it to yield a good harvest. But alas, to God’s great disappointment, “his pleasant planting” failed, as the poet indicates by a play on words that is hard to reproduce in English translation: God looked for *mishpat* (justice) but found *mispah* (bloodshed), for *tsedaqah* (righteousness) but heard *tse’aqah* (a cry of distress) (v. 7). The paronomasia, or play on words, may be sensed in English word pairs such as “justice/violence,” “righteousness/rotteness.”

To summarize, in Isaiah’s portrayals of God’s coming to judge the earth, the once sacred institutions of temple and kingship retain their symbolic value: the city of Jerusalem with its temple, and the monarch who sits on the throne of David. When reinterpreted in the Davidic covenant, however, they are invested with a different meaning than in the cosmological symbolism of the ancient Near East. They give poetic expression to the dominion of the holy God, who transcends all earthly institutions and who is nevertheless present “in the midst of the people” in judgment and mercy.

God’s Strange Work

When God “comes to judge the earth,” the two institutions of Mount Zion—the Jerusalem temple and the Davidic monarchy—will not escape the impact of the divine epiphany.

First, Zion, the city of God, will stand secure, not because of military fortifications but because it is God’s chosen dwelling place. According to Isaiah, however, God is about to do something surprising in the eyes of those who suppose that God’s coming will vindicate the people’s interests and support their way of life. On Mount Zion—the place that God has chosen as the sign of God’s dwelling in the midst of Israel—God will perform a “strange work” (Isa. 28:21)—strange because God seems to be abandoning the city of God and leaving it to be destroyed by invaders. Isaiah gives the central tenet of Davidic theology a new twist, saying that “God is with us” means, at least in part, that the judgment of God is inescapable. The agency of divine judgment, according to Isaiah, will be the Assyrian monarch; he is “the rod of Yahweh’s anger,” as portrayed in a powerful poem (10:5-19). Of course, the Assyrian dictator does not see things this way; he thinks that his successful feats result from his military power and political strategy.

That is how all great military leaders (Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, etc.) view their conquests. But, asks the prophet, "shall the ax vaunt itself over the one who wields it?" (10:15). Even the chosen military agent cannot escape the sovereignty of God's judgment. When God has finished the *opus alienum*, the "decree of destruction," on Mount Zion, the Assyrian agent will be cast aside and judged for his arrogant boasting.

By means of this strange work, the city of Zion will be purified, as fire removes dross and impurity, and it will become, as it was in the beginning, "the faithful city," a city of righteousness (Isa. 1:21-26). A "remnant," purified by suffering, will turn to God in troubled times, trusting the overruling sovereignty of the God, who brings down the high and mighty and elevates those of low degree (a theme later developed in Mary's psalm, the Magnificat: Luke 1:46-55). Beyond tragedy, Isaiah declared, Zion will emerge in resplendent glory as the center to which all nations would ultimately make a pilgrimage in order that they may find peace and security by hearing God's teaching (Isa. 2:2-4).

Isaiah's theme of the vindication of Zion is a major current that runs through the whole book of Isaiah. Zion imagery was used extensively in the apocalyptic reinterpretation of Isaiah's message, as we shall see in due course.⁵

The One Who Is to Come

Isaiah also used royal imagery in his portrayal of the future consummation. Not only will there be a New Jerusalem—a City of God purified in the fire of divine judgment—but also a righteous leader will appear to shepherd the people. Faithless kings may sit on the throne of David in the present age, but the time is coming when a faithful "son of God" will sit on the Davidic throne, ruling in justice and righteousness. This monarch will be the agent of God's dominion, through whom the righteous order of God's creation will be realized in the social order. In contrast to other kings, whose reigns are transient, his rule will be endless.

*His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it*

*with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.*

—Isa. 9:7

This exquisite poem (Isa. 9:2-7) concludes with the ringing announcement: "The zeal of the LORD [Yahweh] of hosts will do this" (cf. 2 Kgs. 19:31), indicating that the coming of this ruler will not occur in the ordinary course of pragmatic politics but will be accomplished in God's determination. In that day, the throne name Immanuel (God with us) will have a positive meaning, as indicated by the lofty names of the future Davidic king:

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

—Isa. 9:6

The Jewish translation (NJPSV, v. 5) gives quite a different reading; the coming king will have a long name, full of meaning:

*The Mighty God is planning grace,
The Eternal Father, a peaceable ruler.*

The Basis of Security

Here, then, is a pattern of symbolism that grounds human security in the transcendent, majestic sovereignty of the holy God—not in the changes and fortunes of human history. It imposes on rulers and people the sovereign demand of justice, with consequent divine judgment on the powerful who shirk their responsibility; but it enables people to relax in the confidence that God is creator and the ruler of history. Indeed, according to Isaiah this is what faith means: to be firm in trust of God, who executes righteousness, and not to be shaken, not to be moved. Such faith is the foundation stone that God lays in Zion, the city of God:

*Thus says the Lord [Yahweh] GOD,
See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone,
a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation:
"One who trusts will not panic."*

—Isa. 28:16

Those who trust, that is, who place their faith in God rather than in human achievements, will enjoy deep security, even in difficult times. This theme of "walking humbly with God" in faith (cf. Mic. 6:8) is expressed exquisitely in a passage that has come to be a favorite for many.

7. On the *opus alienum*, see above, chapter 6.

8. See further my study, "God with Us—In Judgment and in Mercy: The Editorial Structure of Isaiah 5–10 (11)," in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, ed. Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen, and Robert R. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 230–45.

*For thus said the Lord [Yahweh] GOD, the Holy One of Israel:
In returning and rest you shall be saved,
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.*

—Isa. 30:15