

## **Chapter Six: Israel's Experience of Cain's Disobedience – Work as Importing Paganism into Israel**

As Israel urbanized, their experience of work changed, and this deserves careful attention. Initially, God allowed and encouraged Israel to have some cities, but only cities which were headquarters for the priests. Israel's cities were to be priestly cities. There were three major instances. The first were the cities of refuge, numbering six in total (Num.35:9 – 34, Deut.19:1 – 10, Josh.20). They were ordained by God to be a place of refuge to a person that was guilty of what we would call manslaughter, but not murder: an accidental killer. If the killer could make it safely to the city gates, he was safe from anyone seeking vengeance. A strange series of instructions follow. The killer was safe as long as he stayed in the city of refuge. He remained in the city until the death of the high priest of Israel, at which time he was free to go and protected from vendettas. This is the only occasion where the death of the high priest had meaning: a vicarious sacrifice which released a guilty party into innocence and freedom. We cannot help but see the parallel of the city of refuge to Jesus Christ, who offers us a place of hiding in exile from our crimes, who is always available to us, who is very accessible, who shelters us from punishment, and who sets us free in grace because he is also the high priest whose death exonerates us.

I see the cities of refuge as inversions of Cain's city, and hence I disagree with Sailhamer's suggestion that they were simply more of the same type. Of course there were thematic similarities in that both cities, for instance, were established to protect someone who had taken another person's life. But whereas Cain was an intentional murderer which gave rise to more murder via Lamech, the city of refuge was established to stop intentional murder in Israel, even if it was justly motivated by the desire for family vengeance. God's first response to prevent reenactments of Cain and Abel had been to permit family-based vengeance in Genesis 9:6 which should have discouraged such killing (but apparently did not after a time), and the city of refuge was a part of God's further actions to reduce human bloodshed in Israel. More dissimilarities abound. Whereas Cain lived forever in his city in a defiant attempt to settle on the land, the benefactor of the city of refuge had to leave the city after the death of the high priest to bear witness to an atoning death, which required trust in God. Thus the city of Cain evidenced the work of a guilty humanity unable to settle the land, but the city of refuge foreshadowed the work of a guiltless Messiah that enabled Israelites to go out into the land once again and dwell in it. The city of refuge was the inversion of Cain's city, and it was fulfilled and surpassed by Jesus Christ because after his death, it became inappropriate to refer to the high priest of Israel without referring to Jesus himself.

The cities of the Levites were also inversions of Cain's city. The Levites were the tribe of Israel who dealt in the bloodshed of animal sacrifice so that Israel could dwell in the land. The origin of the Levites explains their unique role. Levi, their ancestor, and his brother Simeon deceived and killed Canaanites led by Hamor, Shechem, and their men. Shechem had raped their sister Dinah, then asked permission to marry her. Levi and Simeon wanted to avenge their sister for the wrong done to her. They asked all the men of Shechem to circumcise themselves, then, in their moment of vulnerability, Levi and Simeon slaughtered them all and rescued their sister Dinah (Gen.34). On his deathbed, Jacob revisited this. He consigned them to 'wander' without a land inheritance in Israel: 'I will disperse them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel' (Gen.49:7). Thus, the link between bloodshed and wandering, established with Cain, was preserved with the Levites. However, there were further developments. During the wilderness wandering, God appointed Aaron as priests at the tabernacle (Ex.28) and the whole tribe of Levites as custodians of the tabernacle apparatus (Ex.38). Then a Levite named Phineas distinguished himself later by slaying an Israelite man who took a Midianite woman and entered into the false worship of her people (Num.25:7 – 8). For this zeal, God awarded to his descendants 'a covenant of a perpetual priesthood' (Num.25:12). From that point, the Levites lived in cities scattered throughout Israel (Lev.25:32 – 34). Levi could have been the 'firstborn son' of Jacob but for his sin. In a sense, the Levites maintained a vestige of that firstborn role by being the priestly tribe in Israel. Notably, the thematic link between cities and sons, bloodshed and land disinheritance, is maintained in an inverted form relative to Cain and his city. God chose to inhabit the pattern already begun by Cain. Living in their cities, the Levites were a sort of 'firstborn son' who labored in blood to preserve Israel's presence on the land.

The city of Jerusalem was also intended to be a priestly city. Jerusalem was a human city, just like Babel, with Canaanite origins (Ezk.16:2) filled with war and blood as much as any other. Ezekiel later castigated Jerusalem for trusting in its own beauty (Ezk.16:15) and subverting the favor God had bestowed on it to impress and negotiate with other nations: the early Canaanites, the Egyptians, the Philistines, the Assyrians, and finally the Babylonians (16:23 – 29). Since Jerusalem had become like other cities in its sin, Ezekiel understood that God would judge Jerusalem as He had other cities. Thus, Ezekiel found it appropriate to compare Jerusalem to Sodom and Samaria (16:44 – 52). Other prophets likened Jerusalem to Nineveh (Zep.1:4, 2:13, Nah.1) and proclaimed God's great displeasure with it:

Indeed this city has been to Me a provocation of My anger and My wrath from the day that they built it, even to this day, that it should be removed from before My face (Jer.32:31).

Because Jerusalem had this negative spiritual influence, the prophets constantly strove to disarm it, even from the very beginning of the Davidic covenant, for which we turn to the book of Samuel.

The book of Samuel as a whole is a thematic inversion of the book of Genesis.<sup>1</sup> A thorough analysis at this point is not possible, but five points of reference may be recalled or established. First, the book of Samuel portrays Elkanah as the inversion of Abraham. Both Abraham and Elkanah were older men; both were involved with two women; both eventually fathered a supernaturally born son. But whereas Abraham cared about his future seed, which at the very least reflected a desire that Sarah be cared for should he die, Elkanah said to his wife Hannah, 'Am I not better to you than ten sons?' Understandably, Hannah remained unconsolated. But unlike Sarah, who laughed at God's promise of a supernaturally born son, Hannah continued to pray faithfully. The opening of the narrative with an Abraham family would, for Jewish readers familiar with their sacred texts, no doubt recall the Genesis patriarchal narratives.

Second, the book of Samuel inverts the relationship between fathers and sons portrayed in Genesis. In the patriarchal narratives, fathers bless sons. They may wrestle and struggle with one another, but remarkably, with God's providential help, fathers eventually bless their sons. In the narrative of Samuel, fathers curse their sons and vice versa. This is because the narrative of Samuel records Israel's quest for stable political institutions, a quest that made Israel more and more like the Gentiles surrounding it. The political norm in early Israel was to rely on God, which took the form of letting YHWH call forward judge-prophets as they were needed regardless of their tribal or familial associations. There was a succession of blessing, but no succession in office holding. In Samuel, we find the inversion: a preoccupation with dynastic office holding, and a succession of generational cursing, not blessing. Eli's sons were unworthy successors to Eli and so were unfit priests (1 Sam.2:12-17). Samuel's sons were unworthy of their father the prophet (1 Sam.8:3). Succession over the kingship caused all manner of problems. Kish's son Saul was the only character to have come from a prominent family, yet even though Kish was a mighty man of valor (1 Sam.9:1), Saul was the biggest tragedy of the book, even dragging down to death his own son Jonathan, the only worthy son of an officeholder in the narrative. David's sons showed many spiritual defects, not least due to David's own failings. Absalom carries off a *coup d'état* but then dies a tragic-comic death.

Third, in Samuel, Israel establishes a city within the fundamental fabric of its existence; this is in contrast to the Genesis narrative, where the only cities are built by Cain and Nimrod, whereas the patriarchs wander as pilgrims and sojourners in the land of promise. When at long last David became king and offered to build God a physical house in Jerusalem and Nathan blanketed David with blessing, God responded by *correcting* both Nathan and David. The narrative gives us a contrast between Nathan's disposition and God's in 2 Samuel 7:4, 'But it came about in the same night that the word of the LORD came to Nathan.' God then sent Nathan to David, saying, 'Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I bought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a Tabernacle.' (2 Sam.7:5-6). God made it clear that He had not initiated the selection of Jerusalem or the building of Jerusalem's Temple. One might argue that God's words sound like a proud compliment to David for his originality and initiative in proposing the idea. This notion dovetails with the view that Samuel's main thrust was to legitimate the Davidic monarchy and the Jerusalem Temple. The cumulative data within Samuel, however, throws that interpretation into question. Immediately afterwards, God asks, 'Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'' (7:7) which in common parlance, would sound like this: 'Did I say that? Where did you get that idea? Not from Me.' God did not comment any further on David's intent. Instead, He promised to build His own house through David's eventual descendant without validating David's notion of what God's house would be. The statement suggests at the very least that God preferred His wandering Tabernacle to a fixed house.

In his literary analysis of the Pentateuch, John Sailhamer has proposed that God chose to dwell in the Tabernacle as a way of signifying that He had to come veiled to Israel because of their initial failure to come up onto the mountain in Exodus 19. God wanted to relate to Israel as a whole 'face to face' as He did with Moses, but because they refused, He chose to come 'veiled' just as Moses then 'veiled' his own face.<sup>2</sup> It was, in effect, 'Plan B.' On God's part, the act of dwelling in the Tabernacle was both an act of faithfulness to His promise to be in the midst of His people, but was also as an act of judgment on the people.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Joel Rosenberg, '1 and 2 Samuel' in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode

<sup>2</sup> John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*. Also very pertinent to this discussion is N.T. Wright's study of Moses veiling his face in 2 Corinthians 3 in *The Climax of the Covenant*.

David's action can be seen as even more ironic if I am correct in discerning the episode of the Tabernacle and Moses' veil as a criticism of Israel. This subject appears to be the center of a chiasm running through the entire Pentateuch:

1. Primeval history dealing with all nations: Gen.1 – 11
2. Covenant inaugurated with Abraham, Blessings and Curses: Gen.12  
God's Faithfulness to the Patriarchs: Gen.12 – 50
3. Enslavement and Deliverance from Egypt, Arrival at Sinai: Ex.1 – 18
  4. Covenant Inaugurated, Broken, Re-Asserted: Ex.19:1 – 24:18
    - a. *God summons Israel to meet Him on the mountain on the third day: Ex.19:1 – 15*
    - b. *Israel's failure – to come up the mountain: Ex.19:16 – 23*
    - c. *God resumes with Moses and Aaron: Ex.19:24 – 25*
    - d. *God gives Israel the Ten Commandments: Ex.20:1 – 27*
    - e. *Israel's failure – Israel afraid of God's voice: Ex.20:18 – 20*
    - f. *God gives all Israel 49 laws (7x7): Ex.20:21 – 23:19*
    - g. *God and Israel agree to a covenant, and Moses, Aaron, and 70 elders see God, and eat and drink in His presence: Ex.23:2 – 24:11*
  5. Tabernacle instructions given to house the **veiled** presence of God: Ex.24:12 – 31:11
  6. God commands Israel to observe the Sabbath and the Covenant is documented on stone tables: Ex.31:12 – 18
    7. Covenant broken; Israel worships Aaron's golden calves: Ex.32:1 – 29
    8. Moses mediates for Israel and restores the covenant: Ex.32:30 – 33:23
    - 7'. Covenant affirmed: Ex.34:1 – 17
  - 6'. God commands Israel to observe three annual feasts and the Covenant is documented on stone tablets again; **Moses veils** his face as a sign of judgment, hiding God's glory from the nation: Ex.34:18 – 28
  - 5'. Tabernacle built to instructions; presence of God comes **veiled**: Ex.35:1 – 40:38
  - 4'. Covenant Mediation Inaugurated, Covenant Broken, Re-Asserted: Lev.1:1 – 27:34
    - a. *God gives Israel's priests a Priestly Code for sacrifices: Lev.1:1 – 9:24*
    - b. *Priests' failure – two of Aaron's sons offer strange fire and are consumed: Lev.10:1 – 7*
    - c. *God resumes with Aaron's two others sons: Lev.10:8 – 20*
    - d. *God gives Israel's priests a Priestly Code for the community: Lev.11 – 16*
    - e. *Israel's failure – God addresses worship of goat idols: Lev.17:1 – 9 (cf. Acts 7:42 – 43)*
    - f. *God gives all Israel a Holiness Code: Lev.17:10 – 25:55*
    - g. *God and Israel agree to a covenant: Lev.26:1 – 27:34*
  - 3'. Departure from Sinai, Punishment and Deliverance from Wilderness: Num.1:1 – 36:13
  - 2'. God's Faithfulness forms the basis for Moses' Exhortation: Dt.1 – 28  
Covenant offered to Israel, Blessings and Curses: Dt.27 – 28
  - 1'. Future prophecies dealing with Israel and other nations: Dt.29 – 33

My point here does not hang on the validity of the chiasm; Sailhamer makes the same points without it simply by following the narration. What is significant here is the fact that the covenant at Sinai was stabilized only by creating a hierarchy of priests who would mediate the covenant on behalf of all for Israel after Moses' departure. As a result, Israel remained outside the Tabernacle. Only the High Priest of Israel was allowed to enter through the 'veil' of the Holy of Holies, and only in great peril at that, once a year on the Day of Atonement when the sins of the nation were addressed for that year. David's move from Tabernacle to Temple was therefore an ironic move to make the veiling of God more permanent. It made 'Plan B' look like it was 'Plan A' by firming it up! David more firmly institutionalized God's veiling of Himself, even though the veiling was a temporary measure that would become obsolete in and through Jesus, the mediator of a better covenant. Significantly, both the Gospel of Mark and the Epistle to the Hebrews both describe Jesus' death and resurrection in terms of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat sacrifice appropriate to that event, the tearing of the veil, and the new covenant that God always wanted to enjoy with His people, where He would relate to all His people 'face to face,' not through a hierarchy of priestly mediators, exactly Paul's point in 2 Corinthians 3 when he discusses Moses and his veil, the glory of the new covenant, and the equality of all believers rather than additional status and prestige given to exceptional leaders.

The ironic move concerning Jerusalem and the Temple is contextualized into a portrayal of David that makes him out to be a Cain or a Nimrod, precisely the opposite attitude of the pilgrim patriarchs. David uttered a beautiful prayer in response to God's word regarding this Temple, but then went out to capture the chief city of Moab. He retained their chariot horses, something the king of Israel had been warned against doing in Dt.17:16. His dalliance in Jerusalem entangled him with Bathsheba and Uriah. David's inverted the divine intent for the kingship of Israel by not leading the army out to holy war, and he made a poor contrast with the scrupulous Uriah, who was a foreign mercenary and yet upheld the sexual purity requirements of YHWH's holy war in Lev.15:16 – 18. God then cursed David's family with the sword, and David himself with betrayal from within his own family (12:10 – 11), all of which did not overturn God's earlier promise of blessing on David's line, but significantly undercut it. The Davidic dynasty would be firmly established, but stripped of peace, the inversion of Israel's expectations. This was followed by his family tragedy with Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom, and the loss of Amnon, David's first born son.

Yet another inversion of the Genesis narrative occurs in the story of Amnon's rape of Tamar (2 Sam.13).<sup>3</sup> The story alludes to the story of Joseph in a number of ways. To clear his bedroom of all but Tamar, Amnon says, 'Have everyone go out from me,' the same words Joseph used in Gen.45:1 when he began to disclose himself to his brothers to reconcile with them. Amnon then says, 'Come, lie with me, my sister,' which echoes the lusty words of Potiphar's wife to Joseph in Gen.39:12, 'Lie with me.' Tamar is portrayed similarly to Joseph in terms of the type of words and proportion of words she speaks while trying to extricate herself from this terrible situation. Unlike Joseph, Tamar was unable to escape. After the brutal rape, Tamar tears her 'coat of many colors' (*ketonet passim* in 13:18); Joseph was, and is, the only other biblical character who wore such a coat. The significance of these allusions is seen in the convergence of literary techniques and concerns. Alter notes that the sequence of allusion proceeds in the reverse direction as in the Joseph story. In Joseph's narrative, the coat is mentioned first, then the temptation by Potiphar's wife, and then the reconciliation with his brothers in a tearful but joyous family reunion in Egypt when he says 'Have everyone go out from me.' In the Samuel narrative, the order of the allusions reinforces the sense that David's family is falling apart; this is the beginning of the state of profound unreconciliation within David's family. The reversal of the Joseph story is a microcosm of what is happening more broadly, the reversal of the Genesis story. David's effort to secure a political dynasty (a *city* in the language of Genesis) by marrying various politically important women backfires and results in bloodshed in his own house.

Sadly, bloodshed seems to be the major theme of the last portion of the book, as if to portray the seriousness of the curse of bloodshed God placed on the line of David. David's administration was undercut by Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam.15 – 18). During his retreat from Jerusalem, David was cursed for being a man of blood (16:5 – 8). Absalom was caught in the ridiculous situation of having his head caught between two branches of an oak tree and was killed by Joab and the ten young men with him (18:9 – 15). Absalom, having had no sons, was memorialized by a pillar called Absalom's monument, which is perhaps a minor play on the concepts of sons and city-like monuments. David's return led to a crisis of unity between the tribe of Judah and the other tribes of Israel, this time led by Sheba the son of Bichri, of Benjamin (19:40 – 20:26). While in pursuit of Sheba, Joab slew Absalom's former captain Amasa, who 'lay wallowing in his blood in the middle of the highway' (20:12). Sheba's rebellion was put down when the inhabitants of Abel Beth-maacah cut off Sheba's head and tossed it to Joab. David then intervened for the famine God had inflicted on the land for the bloodshed of Saul against the Gibeonites by hanging seven sons of Saul (21:1 – 14). 'After that God was moved by entreaty for the land.'

After describing the deeds of the mighty men and two of David's psalms (21:15 – 23:39), the book of Samuel comes to a peculiar end which deserves careful attention. Without any explicit explanation, God's ire was aroused against Israel, which incited David to number the people. This refers to a census taken for military purposes. It is unclear what caused God's anger in the first place, but one cannot rule out the possibility that all the bloodshed in the previous chapters had something to do with it. Regardless, the result was that David became aware that Israel's fighting force outnumbered Judah's by three hundred thousand. David apparently felt insecure about his position as king over the entire nation and was possibly seeking reassurance through the military strength of his own tribe. When he discovered that Judah was outnumbered, David repented, but not in time to ward off God's plague of pestilence which killed seventy thousand men indiscriminately from all twelve tribes. David encountered God's angel of death at Jerusalem, God's 'anointed,' at which point he offered himself and his house in place of the entire nation.

This brings us to the dominant theme running through Samuel, that of intercession and intervention before God. Throughout the narrative of Samuel are incredible moments where people intercede or intervene for others, or fail to do so; unfortunately this list is far too long to discuss here. This self-sacrificial intercession was the attitude God wanted in David, and indeed in all the characters of the Samuel narrative. This search began when God

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p.114-117.

declared at the start of the narrative, 'But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always' (1 Sam.2:35). But throughout the twists and turns in the story of Israel, there is a sense in which God's search for a priest falls imperfectly on David, the king. And there is a sense in which the 'anointed' figure before whom the 'priest' would walk is revealed ultimately not as the anointed prophet or the anointed king of Israel, but the angel of death. The narrative reveals that God desired not the attitude of Saul who used the kingship to guard against his own personal fears and insecurities, but that of the substitutionary priest who prays on behalf of the people and gives himself for them. This David finally seems to understand at the end of the narrative. He bought the threshing floor from Araunah the Jebusite and built an altar. He interceded for all the people and appealed for God's great mercy. 'Thus the Lord was moved by entreaty for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel' (2 Sam.24:25). And there the narrative ends.

What is the meaning of the book of Samuel, and how does it help us understand the political work Israel engaged in? We can say with confidence that David was not the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy of a faithful priest because he was about to die and his family was cursed. He was not the great intercessor between God and the people that the prophecy expected. This question, that of succession, of fathers and sons, as to who will intercede between God and the people, arose with every major character and is not resolved in the narrative of Samuel. The open-ended nature of the close presses a searching question: Who will be the person who is both from David yet greater than him? This very uncomfortable ending may be the reason why Jewish literary scholar Robert Alter, in his commentary of Samuel, extends his commentary beyond the boundaries of the narrative of Samuel and into 1 Kings 1 – 2.<sup>4</sup> This gives Alter's treatment of Samuel the appearance that the narrative really climaxes in the building of the Temple, as if the Temple became the permanent institution of which Eli, Samuel, and David were the human precursors. However, it manifestly does not. If a literary scholar designed a commentary of the Torah, which ends with a prophecy of Israel's future failure and Moses' death, but included the first few chapters of Joshua's conquest of the land out of an uneasy sense that the Torah should not end negatively, such a move would negate the main point of both the Torah and Joshua! Furthermore, the narrative of Kings contains a very similar message to that of Samuel, in particular a negative one regarding the Davidic house, the Temple, and Jerusalem, so Alter's attempt to make the introduction of Kings serve as the final appendage of Samuel is dissatisfying from literary and theological points of view.

We should therefore consider the role of Samuel and the historical place it had within Israel. If we suspend for a moment the hasty conclusion that the book of Samuel was composed and circulated during the Babylonian Exile to reinforce Israel's monarchy-Temple traditions, then we might place the book where it more naturally belongs: after David's kingship, during the first Temple period, when the kings of Israel increasingly behaved like ordinary pagan kings and the stationary priestly center was firmly established at Jerusalem. If this is the correct setting, then the book is an extraordinary literary critique of those historical events.

If Samuel the prophet had already been warned against the king and his actions, if prophetic attention was turning to study the effect of the centralization of the worship of YHWH as early as the days of Saul, David, and Solomon, then we should not be surprised if the book of Samuel seems to be a subtle critique of the priests, the kingship, the Temple, and the city of Jerusalem: the key institutions of Israel. The Jerusalem priests incurred criticism in this narrative via the stationary priesthood exemplified by the fat and perpetually sitting Eli. The sedentary, stationary figure of Eli was perhaps a negative foreshadowing of the Jerusalem Temple; once the spiritual leadership became stationary, it too became fat and slow. The Temple, too, was implicitly criticized by the book's treatment of the ark of the covenant. This was confirmed later by Jeremiah, when Jeremiah upbraided the people for their naïve notion that Jerusalem would not fall to Babylon simply because the Temple was there (Jer.7:1 – 14), he referred back to Israel's error during the days of Samuel in turning to the ark at Shiloh as if it were a magical talisman (1 Sam.4 – 7). Hence, the mistaken interpretation of the ark reflected the very live issue of the first Temple, and Jeremiah is our witness that the ark narrative (and probably all of Samuel) was known and understood well before the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, suggesting a dating for the composition of Samuel well within the first Temple period, not the exilic period. Jeremiah's parallel was especially devastating because it indicated that Israel's belief in a semi-pagan superstition during Samuel's days would have the same disastrous results as their belief in another semi-pagan superstition, even one centered on the great Temple. If the book of Samuel was meant to legitimate the Temple, we might expect the narrative to end fittingly with the Temple being built, but instead, it has a different focus altogether: God did not want an object, a talisman, a locale, or an institution. He wanted a *person*.

The city of Jerusalem proper received its due criticism also. David's inauguration of the city of Jerusalem was not vitally integral to his role as a faithful intercessor. In fact, Jerusalem was the setting of David's major

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: Norton, 1999)

tragedies: David's concubines and wives came from Jerusalem, David shed Uzzah's blood on the way to establishing Jerusalem, David sinned with Bathsheba in Jerusalem, God cursed David's family in Jerusalem, Amnon's incestual rape of Tamar occurred in Jerusalem, David's problems with Absalom began in Jerusalem, David had to overcome personal inertia in Jerusalem to bring Absalom back safely, Absalom rebelled and then went into David's concubines in Jerusalem, and David and Joab took a census of the nation at Jerusalem. Special attention should be paid to the event of David's undoing. A deliberate contrast between tent and city is made when Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in booths' (2 Sam.11:11). Not only is this a subtle rebuke of the immoral David by the scrupulous foreigner Uriah, and not only is it a direct comparison of the nation laboring at war and the king (who should have been leading the troops) taking his ease in the city, it condemns David's temple idea by displaying how David's tendencies were in direct opposition to the ark of God and the whole nation. The very idea by which David achieved permanence in Israel, not only dynastically but also geographically, also became David's undoing and the cause of the curse that fell on his future sons. It appears that the book of Samuel plays out in a microcosm the tragic relations between father and son in the city, complete with the motif of bloodshed. Not only did Absalom murder Amnon, David's first born, he refused to dwell with the family, he rebelled against his father, he violated his father's concubines, and he was slain while being stuck in an oak tree, a fate which would have been comical were it not simultaneously terrible due to the Deuteronomic proviso, 'Cursed is he who hangs on a tree' (Deut.21:22 – 23). The inauguration of a permanent city in God's name resulted in the cursing of sons, even to the point of David's entire future house – every son! – being cursed. David was the man who established Jerusalem as a permanent fixture in Israel, and every son of his entered into a curse.

Herein lies the tragedy that reinforces the pattern of cities and sons, and it is here, in Samuel. As we place ourselves under the bittersweet story as it would have been understood then, one of the questions we must ask is: If priest, prophet, and king did not have worthy spiritual sons, who then will stand between God and the nation Israel after David? In fact, the question posed to Israel is: What dynasty or institutional role can last beyond one generation? When the divine norm had been the spontaneous calling of judge-prophets to stand between God and the people, what did it mean that Israel inverted that pattern to establish well-defined national institutional roles? Who then will fulfill the prophecy of the faithful priest? Only someone that Eli the priest, Samuel the prophet, and David the king together foreshadowed: the Messiah, the true mediator who will be a faithful priest, prophet, and king, who will do according to what is in God's heart and soul, who will have an enduring house, and who will walk before God always (1 Sam.2:35). But it would come at a terrible price: Jesus the true son of David had to hang, cursed, on a tree (Gal.3:13), and bear in full the fury of God towards David's house. In fact, it was almost certainly an awareness of this which stimulated David to look forward to a Messianic descendant embodying Melchizedek's combination of king and priest (Ps.110). If these themes – *criticism* of Jerusalem and hope in Messiah – are the thrust of the narrative, then commentators who have long viewed the book of Samuel in the opposite direction, simply as the genesis document of the monarchy-Jerusalem-Temple tradition,<sup>5</sup> are overdue for a major adjustment.

If the book of Samuel is the inversion of Genesis because it portrays how fathers and sons fail to bless – and even curse – each other, how should we then think of the political activity and occupational work that is, in effect, an attempt to achieve permanence on this earth? It is difficult to regard such activity in a positive light. In fact, it is important not to take Old Testaments books that discuss Jerusalem positively – like Ezra-Nehemiah or the Chronicles or the Psalms – as a legitimation of Gentile city-building in general, precisely because Jerusalem was absolutely unique in its role in Israel. God was acting to honor His commitment to David so He could resolve it in and through Jesus. Jesus needed to march into Jerusalem to proclaim his reign beginning there, but from that point, his lordship was not localized and the actual city of Jerusalem did not need to be defended against the Romans, said Jesus. Jesus needed to stand in the Temple to proclaim its end, because from that point, God's indwelling presence was not located in a building, but in the disciples of Jesus by the Spirit of Jesus. It therefore becomes more understandable why the New Testament takes up with renewed force the language and ethics of pilgrimage, with considerable significance for a Christian theological understanding of work in its social, economic, and political aspects. We shall explore this in considerable detail in Parts Two and Three.

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<sup>5</sup> Virtually all the commentaries I have consulted assume this, from liberal (e.g. Gerhard Von Rad) to conservative. Rosenberg and to some extent, Alter, are the exceptions.