

Chapter 7: Visions and the End

After the collaborative spirituality of the opening books of Genesis, the Bible rapidly asserts the primacy of Men. This is codified by the covenant with Noah, in which God separates his concerns for man from the rest of creation. Men are made responsible for managing their own justice:

And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.

[NIV Genesis 9:5-6]

Through geography, the Middle East found itself in a precarious political situation. It was the stage on which three great civilizations struggled for dominance. Egypt harnessed the fertility of the Nile Valley through great civil works, creating an unassailable haven in the midst of the desert. Persia to the East ruled the Great Asian Steppes. The consistent mildness of the climate facilitated military adventure, enabling warlords and planners to enforce a centralized political hierarchy in the region. To the West, separated from Egypt by the Mediterranean, was the upstart: Greece, and its heir, Rome. The influence of Greece was cultural: the city-states of Greece formed under the guidance of philosophically sophisticated elites. They grasped and analyzed the spiritual essence of the process, and leveraged its benefits to achieve enormous advances in science, art, industry and governance.

Each of these systems had its strengths, which waxed and waned over the centuries. None was able to completely subjugate the other two. Instead, the Middle East became a melting pot in which their strengths were integrated.

Of course, the booty was Palestine. Life was tough for the Hebrews. The books between Genesis and the New Testament document the strategies they evolved to preserve their culture without the benefit of political hegemony.

Of those strategies, we should recognize that the foremost was monotheism.

The Benefits of One

As I write this, I am sitting in a Barnes and Noble bookstore, surrounded by the printed word. My orientation to the Torah comes from study in the company of Reform Jews. Their discussion of Deuteronomy was frequently accompanied by the outburst: “How can this be right? Is it right to do this to other people?”

The context in which Judaism evolved lies at a great distance from us. As the law unfolds in the course of Exodus, I frequently found myself wincing as the Rabbi attempted to construct a unified meaning from each week’s readings. The breadth of the social and ethical issues in the book is enormous – but it wasn’t a book then! It was a scroll. Moses couldn’t cut and paste! Law was propounded, implemented, and the weight of the consequences stimulated revision – which was tacked on to the end of the scroll. It also appears that, in the interest of economy or in the service of religious gravity, the political wrangling was omitted. Lacking the “Federalist Papers”

of Judaism guarantees the controversy of any modern attempt to unravel its social and theological threads.

But that is perhaps the beauty of the format. The great mass of humanity in that era was entirely uneducated. The propagation of an ambiguous social code under the authority of religion stimulated the formation of a spirit of reason in the Jewish priesthood. That it was written and shared ensured the stability of that spirit. The book and the spirit of its interpretation was the glue that held together a people frequently displaced, and often at hazard of forceful subjugation. The perceived integrity and social fairness of the law was critical in conserving the support of the common people, and therefore the survival of the priesthood.

In the realm of Spirit, this cohesion had other benefits. In multi-party negotiations, the cohesive minority often carries weight far in excess of its representation. The power of the Moral Conservatives in modern America testifies to this, as does the influence of the Hassidic parties in modern Israel. When the nation was in crisis, the priesthood was able to redirect the loyalties of the people to support whatever agent was best situated to address the needs of Israel. It is no accident that the name of the Eternal changes from book to book. Israel was able to demand the best from its succession of spiritual partners. The only *quid pro quo* was the integration of the political history under the thesis of monotheism, in order to prevent the fragmentation of priestly authority.

I will not attempt to summarize the Mosaic Code. The 613 laws demand a life of devoted study.

What I can attest to, however, is the degree to which they affirm Life. The Mosaic Law is a land-based spiritual socialism.

By ordering that part of the harvest be left in the field, the law supports a dignified practice of gleaning. While individual irresponsibility can lead to loss of land, the continuity of family title is restored with the Jubilee every seven years.

The spilling of blood on the land occupies a significant part of the code. It is treated as an act of spiritual pollution. While procedures are established to prevent revenge in cases of accidental taking of life, those procedures are withheld when the implement of death is iron. In those cases, the spiritual connection to the trauma of death is too powerful, and cannot be purged from the land until the killer is released from life.

The effect of these laws was to create a pure, enduring and increasingly powerful spiritual connection to the land.

The institution of marriage receives the attention it warrants. The balance between masculine aggression and feminine manipulation is preserved through a civilized procedure for divorce. The vulnerability of the conquering warrior to blood spirituality is also addressed at length, with procedures for vetting and integrating foreign daughters left vulnerable by the loss of their men.

Parental responsibility and practice are developed, not avoiding the pathological cases of parental incompetence and the irredeemable son. In the first case: “Honor thy mother and father.”

A child is not to humiliate a parent whose life difficulties affect the family as a whole. In the latter, parents unable to manage asocial conduct are to pronounce their son a “drunkard and a lout”, rather than subjecting themselves to a socially humiliating and psychologically divisive testimony of failure.

The Hebrews were served well by their monotheism. While we have largely assimilated those precepts, they stand out when compared to the utilitarian ethics of the surrounding cultures. (Weak children left to the wolves? Blood sport in the Coliseum? Ouch!)

Perhaps the principal modern criticism of Judaism is its paternalism. I tend to believe that this reflects, at least in part, the benefits of feminine spirituality. The Torah is largely about men’s problems, one of which is the inability to keep track of history unless it is written down.

Prophecy

Of the tools provided by Spirit to aid Humanity in managing its nature, we have considered two: spiritual “uplift” and law. The third is prophecy.

In the models of physics we considered in the first section, we understand that where spirit concentrates, it may enter paths that permit information to flow through tunnels in time. The authentic prophet simultaneously taps into and grounds such tunnels. While prophets initially demonstrate this capacity by “predicting” the future, ultimately they may participate in its creation.

The Torah establishes prophecy as the principle test of the authenticity of a prophet. Usurpation of the authority is not taken lightly: under the Law, false prophets are to be put to death. The reason is that the capability to enter the time stream is not unique to man. Shamanic cultures honor the relationship between the prophet and these other forms. Some of those spiritual forms arise from this place, others reach across into it. The shaman’s challenge is the challenge faced by Eve in the presence of the serpent: “What assurance do I have that my welfare is tightly entwined with the interests of my guide?”

Alarmingly, the Old Testament prophet’s worst enemy was often his people. Broadly, we can characterize the prophets as either men that built a bridge with other nations, or those that scolded a politically independent Israel. The former, including Joseph and Daniel, were honored. The latter, including Jeremiah, Elijah and others, were generally scorned by their peers. They had the unfortunate job of trying to convince them that the Law was still important, even when it wasn’t a controlling factor in their survival.

The prophets are central players in the Jewish Bible. Amidst the political intrigues and gender politics of the Old Testament is a thread that documents the rise of the prophets to spiritual independence.

Where Adam and Eve had been like innocent children in the garden, Noah is the obedient son.

Abraham challenges God, making demands of him, but ultimately capitulates. When I read the offering of Isaac, I hear the angel thinking: “You’re a man, of independent purpose! Why do you

continue to follow voices towards the death of that which you hold most dear? It's not just 'no', it's 'HELL NO!'”

Moses is the first recognizable adult. He initially lacks confidence in his powers, shying from the responsibilities of leadership. But on the Mount, he pleads for 40 days for forgiveness of his peoples' idolatry. He assumes responsibility for their conduct, and guides them through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

While the Modern Jew tends to exalt Moses as the greatest of all prophets, I believe that is more a reflection of the political implications of the story. In the Jewish Bible, the line continues to strengthen, appearing to culminate with Elijah and Elisha. Elijah not only reached into higher dimensions to read the future, he seems to have walked off into them!

Of Elijah's power, Elisha asks for a double helping. This is obviously a man confident in the powers of his judgment! At the end of his life, he lay ill. King Jehoash comes to him:

Elisha said, “Get a bow and some arrows,” and he did so. “Take the bow in your hands,” he said to the king of Israel. When he had taken it, Elisha put his hands on the king’s hands.

“Open the east window,” he said, and he opened it. “Shoot!” Elisha said, and he shot. “The LORD’s arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram!” Elisha declared. “You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek.”

Then he said, “Take the arrows,” and the king took them. Elisha told him, “Strike the ground.” He struck it three times and stopped. The man of God was angry with him and said, “You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times.”

Elisha died and was buried.

[NIV 2 Kings 13:14-20]

These lines carry the authority of independent spiritual power and judgment. The references to God are tangential. Elisha spontaneously defines his ritual, a ritual through which he launched his fading spirit into the world, tying to it the martial will of the king – a will that failed him.

The Dream of Four Beasts

The political influence of the prophets, and thus their relevance to the story of the Jewish Bible, arose from the relevance of their prophecy to affairs of the time. Most of the dreams relate to contemporary events, reaching at most a few years into the future.

The later dreams of Daniel depart from this constraint. The most famous of them is the Dream of Four Beasts. The interpretation provided by his angelic guide suggests that they convey meaning

that relates to the outcome of Man's struggle to control his nature.

The tendency in subsequent interpretation is to hold to the political line. The beasts are generally seen as avatars of contemporary political regimes. I find the analogies to be strained. I believe that the dream reflects Daniel's success in penetrating the barriers the Ancients had placed around the spirit of Humanity.

Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. [NIV Daniel 7:2]

The first three beasts are familiar to Daniel.

The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle...

And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear...

...another beast, one that looked like a leopard.

[NIV Daniel 7:4,5,6]

The fourth appears to be a thing of a different nature:

...there before me was a fourth beast – terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from the other beasts, and had ten horns. [NIV Daniel 7:7]

...[A little horn] came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. [NIV Daniel 7:8]

The first three beasts represent the mammalian predators that rule the three great ecosystems of the earth: the savanna and grasslands (African lion, American mountain lion, and the eagle), the temperate forest and tundra (bear) and the equatorial rain forest (the leopard).

The fourth beast is their replacement, Humanity.

The teeth of iron are the machines we use to reorganize the earth according to our liking, displacing all of the life that inhabited it before us.

The ten horns were the great human cultures of the earth. Seven of the Old World are Asian, Slavic, European, African, Persian/Arabian, Indian and Pacific Islander. The other three – the native cultures of North, Central and South America – survived until subjugated by the pulsing individualism of the European invaders.

This last horn, according to Daniel, is “boastful.” As it spoke,

...the Ancient of days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire...A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him...The court was seated, and the books were opened.
[NIV Daniel 7:9,10]

The parallels with the ascension of Elijah are clear. The Ancient of 'days' can only be the spirit that rules the Sun. It comes to pass judgment on the fourth beast.

I continued to watch because of the boastful words that the horn was speaking...until the beast was slain and its body destroyed...
[NIV Daniel 7:11]

...and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven...He was given authority, glory and sovereign power...and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.
[NIV Daniel 7:13,14]

Quo vadis, America. Predatory capitalism cannot survive global warming.

Predators are spiritually weak entities. They encounter resistance at every turn. The only way they can survive is by continuing to draw energy from others. As the Earth warms, the thermodynamic conditions within the spatial lattice will become more hostile. The vanishing of the ozone layer allows in high-energy ultraviolet radiation. Weak spiritual forms will be unable to sustain their coherency. What remains of Humanity will survive by banding together in common cause to preserve the life that remains on the Earth. With the maturity and wisdom of self-knowledge, we will competently assume the role that we forsook in Eden.