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LIBERATION, BIBLICAL ELEMENTS IN:

GOD AS RULER ("SOVEREIGNTY") AND JUDGE ("JUSTICE") ----- Elliott #1693

marily as Sovereign--on which see the splendid JBL article, Dec/82, pp.521-9 (by a woman scholar).

Because I grew up under the patriarchal rule of a bio-father who was at home the sovereign and judge and in public, hizzoner the Judge, and because I got some gut-informal and mind-formal legal experience and education in the process, I know a thing or two about the biblical dual role of God as Sovereign-Judge, and I am about to inform you if you hold still.

1. The Hebrew root whence MISHPAT, usually translated "justice," reflects the ancient-Near-East role of governor-judge. That's my ol' man: he was gov'nor at home (within the limits of 5 strong females + 1 me), and he held court both at work and (especially on me, when he got) home...As the root is among the Hebrew Bible's most used, reference materials on it are profuse. Try your own concordances, theological wordbooks, dictionaries of the Bible. So experience that--whereas in our American way the legislative-executive and judicial "branches" are separated, and the legislative and executive further separated--in OT the three powers are far less distributed, and in prophetic theology, radical monotheism, doctrinally undistributed: God is Sovereign-Lawgiver-Judge: Ruler over nature and history, Rules-Revealer in history and nature, and Distributor of consequences in the cosmic and historical courts. Because in the USA the three powers are more structurally distributed than in any other nation past or present, we are off to the worst possible start in feeling-thinking the undifferentiated role of the ancient Near East's patriarch of heaven-earth-heaven. By the term "heaven-earth-heaven," I mean (1) to affirm this as ontological sequence, we biblical peoples seeing this God as Origin-"Creator," as here-and-now Sustainer-Protector ("Providence"), and as Revealer-Promiser-Fulfiller; (2) to deny "earth-heaven," i.e., the reductionistic, pseudopsychological notion that "God" is "nothing but" the figment of human terror-aspiration; and (3) to assert my own way of integrating theology-philosophy-sociology-psychology.

2. Here's the meaning-sequence in the common lexicon BDB: (verb) "judge, govern". (lawgiving, judging, governing, discriminating, deciding controversies, executing civil-religious-political-social laws, condemning-punishing, vindicating); (nouns) "judgment," "deciding a case," "court" (judgment seat), "process, procedure, litigation," "case, cause," "sentence, decision," "executive," judgment "time," (by implication, the attributes of the one so acting) "justice, right, rectitude" (loving, and refusing to pervert, the values at the root's heart), "ordinance," "decision," (by extension to the ones acted upon) "right"(s)--"privilege"(s)--what's "due," (and further extensions) "proper, fitting, measure"--"fitness"--"custom, manner"--"what manner of."

3. In all periods, including the modern (Ivrit), "judge" overwhelms "govern" in usage (though I'm convinced that the former is a species, the latter is the genus). Why? Psychosocial fact: human being experience governance most sharply when "up against the law," i.e., when standing in violation of Torah-statute-custom-taboo-directive. Saints rejoice in God the Governor, sinners grumble at God the Judge. Permissive cultural stages (like ours today) experience God as the Great No-No (and the church sometimes supports this with inhuman proscriptions --e.g., forced clerical celibacy, as in David Wolpert's miniseries "The Thorn Birds," which, as antiPuritan(RCC form), psycho-updates Hawthorne's THE SCARLET LETTER).

4. "Liberation theology" tends to reduce the biblical roots (Hebrew and Greek) to court equity-vindication, the pleader-for-"the oppressed" taking also the role of judge of "the oppressor." This is both compassionately understandable and theologically wobbly and even perverse.

5. God converts Job from seeing him primarily as Judge to seeing him pri-