

# Reading the Old Testament

Introduction to the Hebrew Bible | 4<sup>th</sup> Edition

Barry L. Bandstra





FOURTH EDITION

# **R**EADING THE **O**LD **T**ESTAMENT

**BARRY L. BANDSTRA**

*Hope College*





# READING THE OLD TESTAMENT

*An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*

**BARRY L. BANDSTRA**

*Hope College*



---

Australia • Brazil • Japan • Korea • Mexico • Singapore • Spain • United Kingdom • United States

# **Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible, Fourth Edition**

**Barry L. Bandstra**

Acquisitions Editor: Worth Hawes

Assistant Editor: Sarah Perkins

Editorial Assistant: Daniel Vivacqua

Associate Development Project Manager: Diane Akerman

Marketing Manager: Christina Shea

Marketing Assistant: Mary Anne Payumo

Marketing Communications Manager: Tami Strang

Project Manager, Editorial Production: Matt Ballantyne

Creative Director: Rob Hugel

Art Director: Cate Barr

Print Buyer: Paula Vang

Permissions Editor: Margaret Chamberlain-Gaston

Production Service: Ruth Cottrell

Copy Editor: Betty Duncan

Cover Designer: RHDG: Dustin York

Cover Image: Erich Lessing, Art Resource, NY, Ref: ART825

Compositor: International Typesetting and Composition

© 2009, 2004 Wadsworth, Cengage Learning

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced, transmitted, stored, or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording, scanning, digitizing, taping, Web distribution, information networks, or information storage and retrieval systems, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

---

For product information and technology assistance, contact us at  
**Cengage Learning Customer & Sales Support, 1-800-354-9706**

For permission to use material from this text or product,  
submit all requests online at [cengage.com/permissions](http://cengage.com/permissions)

Further permissions questions can be e-mailed to  
**[permissionrequest@cengage.com](mailto:permissionrequest@cengage.com)**

---

Library of Congress Control Number: 2008928262

ISBN-13: 978-0-495-39105-0

ISBN-10: 0-495-39105-0

**Wadsworth**

10 Davis Drive

Belmont, CA 94002-3098

USA

Cengage Learning is a leading provider of customized learning solutions with office locations around the globe, including Singapore, the United Kingdom, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, and Japan. Locate your local office at [international.cengage.com/region](http://international.cengage.com/region).

Cengage Learning products are represented in Canada by Nelson Education, Ltd.

For your course and learning solutions, visit [academic.cengage.com](http://academic.cengage.com).

Purchase any of our products at your local college store or at our preferred online store [www.ichapters.com](http://www.ichapters.com).

Printed in the United States of America  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 12 11 10 09 08

“Kindle textbooks are functionally equivalent to the print textbook. In some cases, individual items such as ancillary images or multimedia have been removed for digital delivery due to rights restrictions.”

*Dedicated to Daniel and Mary Hornschemeier Bandstra*

# CONTENTS

## PREFACE

### Introduction: Reading the Bible

#### 1 Reading the Bible

##### 1.1 Text

##### 1.2 Author

##### 1.3 Referent

##### 1.4 Reader

#### 2 Academic Study of the Bible

##### 2.1 Teaching and Learning the Bible

##### 2.2 The Bible in the Modern World

#### 3 Which Bible?

##### 3.1 Hebrew Bible to Old Testament

##### 3.2 Spoken Word to Written Text

##### 3.3 Which Bible Should I Choose?

#### 4 The Biblical Story

##### 4.1 Primeval Story

##### 4.2 Ancestral Story

##### 4.3 Birth of Israel

##### 4.4 Promised Land

##### 4.5 Israelite Kingdoms

##### 4.6 Exile in Babylon

##### 4.7 Restoration of Judea

## PART ONE

### Torah

#### Prologue to the Torah

##### 1 Introduction

##### 1.1 Torah Terms

## 1.2 The Torah Story

### 2 Composition Analysis

#### 2.1 Mosaic Authorship

#### 2.2 Documentary Hypothesis

#### 2.3 Current Status of the Documentary Hypothesis

### 3 Narrative Design

#### 3.1 Priestly Covenants

#### 3.2 Promissory Structure

### 4 Text and History

#### Key Concepts

#### Discussion Questions

#### Reading the Text Today

## 1 Genesis 1–11: The Primeval Story

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 The Primeval Story: A Summary

#### 1.2 Study Guide

### 2 Creation to the Flood (1–7)

#### 2.1 Creation (1–3)

#### 2.2 Pre-Flood Generations (4:1–6:4)

#### 2.3 The Flood (6:5–7:24)

### 3 Re-Creation to the Ancestors (8–11)

#### 3.1 Re-creation (8–9)

#### 3.2 Post-Flood Generations (10:1–11:9)

#### 3.3 Generations to Abram (11:10–32)

### 4 Composition of Genesis 1–11

#### 4.1 Compositional Unity

#### 4.2 Structural Unity

#### 4.3 Theme and Genre

#### Key Concepts

#### Discussion Questions

#### Reading the Text Today

## **2 Genesis 12–50: The Ancestral Story**

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 *The Ancestral Story: A Summary*

#### 1.2 *Reading Guide*

### 2 Abraham Cycle (11:27–25:11)

#### 2.1 *Call and Covenant (12–17)*

#### 2.2 *Abraham and Isaac (18–22)*

#### 2.3 *Last Days (23:1–25:11)*

#### 2.4 *Interlude: The Ishmael Toledot (25:12–18)*

### 3 Jacob Cycle (25:19–35:29)

#### 3.1 *Jacob versus Esau: Stealing the Blessing (25:19–28:22)*

#### 3.2 *Jacob versus Laban: Building a Family (29–31)*

#### 3.3 *Jacob versus Elohim: Wrestling for a Blessing (32–35)*

#### 3.4 *Interlude: The Esau Toledot (36)*

### 4 Joseph Cycle (37:1–50:26)

#### 4.1 *Joseph and His Brothers (37–45)*

#### 4.2 *Israel in Egypt (46–50)*

### 5 Genesis as a Book

#### 5.1 *Toledot of Genesis*

#### 5.2 *Themes of Genesis*

### Key Concepts

### Discussion Questions

### Reading the Text Today

## **3 Exodus: Deliverance and Covenant**

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 *Deliverance and Covenant: A Summary*

#### 1.2 *Historicity of Exodus*

#### 1.3 *Reading Guide*

### 2 Exodus: Deliverance Traditions (1–18)

#### 2.1 *Israel in Egypt (1)*

#### 2.2 *The Early Moses (2–4)*

#### 2.3 *Plagues (5–11)*



[2.4 Death and Passover \(12:1–13:16\)](#)

[2.5 Exodus from Egypt \(13:17–15:21\)](#)

[2.6 Wilderness Journey \(15:22–18:27\)](#)

[3 Sinai: Covenant Traditions \(19–40\)](#)

[3.1 Theophany on the Mountain \(19\)](#)

[3.2 Law and Covenant \(20–23\)](#)

[3.3 Covenant Confirmation \(24:1–15\)](#)

[3.4 Covenant Breaking and Remaking \(32–34\)](#)

[3.5 Tabernacle \(25–31, 35–40\)](#)

[4 Exodus as a Book](#)

[Key Concepts](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

[Reading the Text Today](#)

## **4 Leviticus and Numbers: In the Wilderness**

[1 Introduction](#)

[1.1 In the Wilderness: A Summary](#)

[1.2 Reading Guide](#)

[2 Leviticus](#)

[2.1 Priestly Worldview](#)

[2.2 Leviticus as a Book](#)

[3 Numbers](#)

[3.1 From Mount Sinai to Moab](#)

[3.2 Numbers as a Book](#)

[Key Concepts](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

[Reading the Text Today](#)

## **5 Deuteronomy: The Torah of Moses**

[1 Introduction](#)

[1.1 The Torah of Moses: A Summary](#)

[1.2 Reading Guide](#)

[2 The Torah of Moses](#)

[2.1 The Great Commandment \(6:4–9\)](#)

[2.2 The Place That YHWH Chooses \(12:2–7\)](#)

[2.3 A Prophet Like Me \(18:15–22\)](#)

[2.4 The Earliest Creed \(26:5–9\)](#)

[2.5 Choose Life! \(30:15–20\)](#)

[3 Torah and Covenant](#)

[4 Deuteronomy as a Book](#)

[4.1 Themes](#)

[4.2 Style and Structure](#)

[4.3 Deuteronomistic History](#)

[4.4 Authorship](#)

[Key Concepts](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

[Reading the Text Today](#)

## **PART TWO**

### **Prophets**

#### **Prologue to the Prophets**

##### 1 Introduction

[1.1 Prophet Collections](#)

[1.2 Reading Guide](#)

##### 2 Former Prophets

[2.1 Deuteronomistic History](#)

[2.2 Historiography](#)

[2.3 Israelite Religion](#)

##### 3 Latter Prophets

[3.1 The Nature of Prophecy](#)

[3.2 Forms of Prophetic Speech](#)

[3.3 Social Location of Prophecy](#)

##### 4 The Prophets as a Whole

[Key Concepts](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

## **6 Joshua: The Conquest of Canaan**

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Conquest of Canaan: A Summary

#### 1.2 Reading Guide

### 2 Campaigns of Conquest (1–12)

#### 2.1 Joshua's Commission

#### 2.2 First Campaign: Jericho and Ai

#### 2.3 Second Campaign: Five City-States

#### 2.4 Third Campaign: Hazor

### 3 Tribal Territories (13–21)

### 4 Covenant Considerations (22–24)

#### 4.1 Joshua's Farewell

#### 4.2 Covenant Renewal at Shechem

### 5 Joshua as a Book

#### Key Concepts

#### Discussion Questions

#### Reading the Text Today

## **7 Judges: Securing the Land**

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Securing the Land: A Summary

#### 1.2 Reading Guide

### 2 Deuteronomic Introduction

#### 2.1 What Is a Judge?

#### 2.2 Deuteronomic Theme

### 3 Judge-Heroes

#### 3.1 Ehud (3:12–30)

#### 3.2 Deborah (4–5)

#### 3.3 Gideon (6–9)

#### 3.4 Jephthah (10:6–12:7)

#### 3.5 Samson (13–16)

4 Judges as a Book

Key Concepts

Discussion Questions

Reading the Text Today

## **8 Samuel: The Rise of Kingship**

1 Introduction

1.1 Rise of the Monarchy: A Summary

1.2 Archaeology of David's Kingdom

1.3 Reading Guide

2 Samuel Cycle (1 Samuel 1–12)

2.1 The Early Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1–4:1a)

2.2 Travels of the Ark (1 Samuel 4:1b–7:17)

2.3 Search for a King (1 Samuel 8–12)

3 Saul Cycle (1 Samuel 13–31)

3.1 Saul's Disobedience (1 Samuel 13–15)

3.2 Saul versus David (1 Samuel 16–31)

4 David Cycle (2 Samuel 1–24)

4.1 David's Rise to Power (2 Samuel 1–8)

4.2 Dynastic Succession (2 Samuel 9–20)

4.3 David's Last Days (2 Samuel 21–24)

5 Samuel as a Book

Key Concepts

Discussion Questions

Reading the Text Today

## **9 Kings and Prophets 1: The Early Monarchy**

1 Introduction

1.1 History of the Kingdoms: A Summary

1.2 Kings as a Book

1.3 Reading Guide

2 Solomon and the United Monarchy (1 Kings 1–11)

2.1 Solomon's Rise (1 Kings 1–2)

[2.2 Solomon's Wisdom \(1 Kings 3–4\)](#)

[2.3 Solomon's Temple \(1 Kings 5–8\)](#)

[2.4 Solomon's Demise \(1 Kings 9–11\)](#)

[3 The Divided Kingdoms](#)

[3.1 Division of the Kingdom \(1 Kings 12–16\)](#)

[3.2 Elijah Cycle \(1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 2\)](#)

[3.3 Elisha Cycle \(2 Kings 3–13\)](#)

[Key Concepts](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

[Reading the Text Today](#)

## **10 Kings and Prophets 2: The Assyrian Crisis**

[1 Introduction](#)

[1.1 Second Kings 14–20: A Summary](#)

[1.2 Reading Guide](#)

[2 Israel \(Northern Kingdom\) in Crisis](#)

[2.1 Amos](#)

[2.2 Hosea](#)

[2.3 Jonah](#)

[3 Judah \(Southern Kingdom\) in Crisis](#)

[3.1 Isaiah of Jerusalem \(First Isaiah\)](#)

[3.2 Micah](#)

[Key Concepts](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

[Reading the Text Today](#)

## **11 Kings and Prophets 3: The Babylonian Crisis**

[1 Introduction](#)

[1.1 Second Kings 21–25: A Summary](#)

[1.2 Reading Guide](#)

[2 Ezekiel's Prophetic Warnings \(Ezekiel 1–24\)](#)

[2.1 Throne-Chariot Vision \(1–3\)](#)

[2.2 Symbolic Acts 1 \(4–7\)](#)

[2.3 Vision of a Corrupt Temple \(8–11\)](#)

[2.4 Symbolic Acts 2 \(12–24\)](#)

[3 Jeremiah and Judah's Last Kings](#)

[3.1 During Josiah's Reign \(640–609 BCE\)](#)

[3.2 During Jehoiakim's Reign \(609–598 BCE\)](#)

[3.3 During Zedekiah's Reign \(598–587 BCE\)](#)

[4 Books of the Twelve](#)

[4.1 Zephaniah](#)

[4.2 Nahum](#)

[4.3 Habakkuk](#)

[Key Concepts](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

[Reading the Text Today](#)

## **12 Postmonarchy Prophets: Exile and Restoration**

[1 Introduction](#)

[1.1 Exile and Restoration: A Summary](#)

[1.2 Reading Guide](#)

[2 Prophets of the Exile](#)

[2.1 Obadiah and Jeremiah](#)

[2.2 Ezekiel after the Fall of Jerusalem \(25–48\)](#)

[2.3 Isaiah of the Exile \(Second Isaiah\)](#)

[3 Prophets of the Restoration](#)

[3.1 Isaiah of the Restoration \(Third Isaiah\)](#)

[3.2 Haggai](#)

[3.3 Zechariah](#)

[3.4 Malachi](#)

[3.5 Joel](#)

[4 Latter Prophets Collections](#)

[4.1 Isaiah as a Book](#)

[4.2 Jeremiah as a Book](#)

[4.3 Ezekiel as a Book](#)

[4.4 The Twelve as a Book](#)

[Key Concepts](#)  
[Discussion Questions](#)  
[Reading the Text Today](#)

## **PART THREE**

### **Writings**

#### **Prologue to the Writings**

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Roots of Judaism](#)

[3 The Writings as a Collection](#)

[4 Apocrypha](#)

[Key Concepts](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

[Reading the Text Today](#)

## **13 Psalms: Complaint and Thanksgiving**

[1 Introduction](#)

[1.1 Reading Guide](#)

[2 Biblical Poetry](#)

[2.1 Formal Features](#)

[2.2 Literary Features](#)

[3 Psalm Types](#)

[3.1 Speech Forms](#)

[3.2 Psalm Genres](#)

[4 Psalm Themes](#)

[4.1 Worship the King](#)

[4.2 Life and Death](#)

[5 The Psalter](#)

[6 After the Psalter](#)

[Key Concepts](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

[Reading the Text Today](#)

## **14 Proverbs and Job: The Wisdom of Israel**

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 *Wisdom Literature*

#### 1.2 *Reading Guide*

### 2 Proverbs

#### 2.1 *Prologue (1–9)*

#### 2.2 *Proverbial Wisdom (10–31)*

#### 2.3 *International Connections*

#### 2.4 *Proverbs as a Book*

### 3 JOB

#### 3.1 *Story Line*

#### 3.2 *Dialogues*

#### 3.3 *Job as a Book*

### 4 Apocryphal Wisdom

#### 4.1 *Wisdom of Solomon*

#### 4.2 *Sirach*

#### *Key Concepts*

#### *Discussion Questions*

#### *Reading the Text Today*

## **15 Five Scrolls: Stories of the People**

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 *Reading Guide*

### 2 Song of Songs

### 3 Ruth

#### 3.1 *Scene 1*

#### 3.2 *Scene 2*

#### 3.3 *Scene 3*

#### 3.4 *Scene 4*

### 4 Lamentations

### 5 Ecclesiastes

### 6 Esther

### 7 The Five Scrolls as a Collection



## 8 Apocryphal Additions

### 8.1 Tobit

### 8.2 Judith

### 8.3 Additions to Esther

### 8.4 Baruch

### 8.5 Letter of Jeremiah

#### Key Concepts

#### Discussion Questions

#### Reading the Text Today

## **16 Daniel: From History to Apocalypse**

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Apocalyptic Literature

#### 1.2 Reading Guide

### 2 Heroic Tales (Daniel 1–6)

#### 2.1 Keep the Faith

#### 2.2 Lord of History

### 3 Apocalypses (Daniel 7–12)

#### 3.1 Son-of-Man Apocalypse (7)

#### 3.2 Other Apocalypses (8–12)

### 4 Daniel as a Book

### 5 Apocryphal Additions

#### 5.1 Addition 1: The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews

#### 5.2 Addition 2: Susanna

#### 5.3 Addition 3: Bel and the Dragon

#### Key Concepts

#### Discussion Questions

#### Reading the Text Today

## **17 Chronicler's History: Retelling the Story**

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Reading Guide

## 2 First and Second Chronicles

### 2.1 Premonarchy History (1 Chronicles 1–9)

### 2.2 History of the Davidic Monarchy (1 Chronicles 10–2 and Chronicles 36)

## 3 Ezra and Nehemiah

### 3.1 Book of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1–6)

### 3.2 Ezra Memoirs (Ezra 7–10 and Nehemiah 8–9)

### 3.3 Nehemiah Memoirs (Nehemiah 1–7 and 10–13)

## 4 Chronicler's History as a Collection

## 5 Apocryphal History

### 5.1 Maccabees

### 5.2 Esdras

### Key Concepts

### Discussion Questions

### Reading the Text Today

## **Conclusion: After the Hebrew Bible**

### 1 Jewish Additions

#### 1.1 Apocrypha

#### 1.2 Pseudepigrapha

### 2 Canon

#### 2.1 A Hebrew Bible Appears

#### 2.2 Old Testaments Appear

### 3 Dead Sea Scrolls

#### 3.1 Biblical Manuscripts

#### 3.2 Documents of Judaism

### 4 New Testament

### 5 Rabbinic Literature

### Key Concepts

### Discussion Questions

### Reading the Text Today

## **WORKS CITED**

[GLOSSARY](#)

[INDEXES](#)

[\*Index of Subjects\*](#)

[\*Index of Biblical Texts\*](#)

[\*Index of Authors and Creators\*](#)

[\*Index of Figures\*](#)

[\*Index of Tables\*](#)

[ABBREVIATIONS](#)

# PREFACE

IT HAPPENS WITH annoying regularity. The end of the academic year finally arrives, I'm feeling good, and an acquaintance snidely observes, "So you've got the summer off again, eh? You professors have really got it made." Immediately on the defensive, I mumble a "well, no, not really" in response and try to explain. "I don't actually have the summer off. You see, I use summers to continue my research into the Bible and do my writing. I really need the time." My friend says, "What could you possibly need to research? The Bible hasn't changed in two thousand years." I mumble something about advances in the field and new methods as he slowly shuffles away shaking his head.

So then, does the Bible need more research? And if so, how do I go about explaining to friends and family why this is the case? More to the point regarding the book in your hands, how can I explain why *Reading the Old Testament* (RTOT) needs to be updated? You might wonder, has the Bible really changed?

There are in fact some recent changes that we need to account for in our study of the Bible. The field of biblical studies continues to generate a sizable amount of professional literature as does any academic discipline these days. New books and journal articles present research and interpretations of biblical texts in response to material discoveries, such as archaeological finds, and to contemporary social and cultural changes that inspire us to see the text in new ways. The introductory chapter will outline the nature of some of this new research when it examines the components of the reading process. For now simply note that this new edition of RTOT incorporates new insights from the best recent research regarding the shape of the biblical text, the authors who wrote it, the world to which the biblical text refers, and the way in which we as readers shape our understanding of it. New developments on all these fronts

have appeared since the last edition.

## CHANGES TO THE FOURTH EDITION

Comparing RTOT, fourth edition, to prior print editions, the following are the most significant changes in the form and content of the book:

- Closer integration of the printed text and the RTOT Internet course support site
- More attention to postmodern perspectives and interpretations
- More explanation of what constitutes the standard academic study of the Bible, including how and why biblical scholars read the text the way they do
- Reorganization of [Part 2](#) on the Prophets such that the Latter Prophets are interwoven with the narrative of the book of 2 Kings in order to enhance historical comprehension
- Expanded treatment of the Old Testament Apocrypha
- Detailed discussion of how the biblical canon took shape

Why these changes? Largely because the climate in which we read the Bible, the social climate in general and the academic climate in particular, has undergone significant development of late.

Most of us, perhaps especially college and university students, have grown less patient and less accepting of simply hearing “the experts” pontificate. We now live in a more interactive environment, and we are not interested in people just talking at us, no matter what their credentials. We also want to be heard and to make our own contribution. Today, social networking and the social construction of knowledge have taken on greater significance, and these are central features of the Internet era.

Because the intellectual climate that we work within is suspicious

of authority, this has also come to apply to the study of sacred texts such as the Bible. Increasingly, we have come to recognize that written documents reflect the interests, biases, agendas, and goals of their writers. This has become evident to us with communication forms such as commercial advertising and political campaigns. It also holds true for journalism, scientific analysis, and religious writings of the present and the past. The decentering of authorities is a feature of the postmodern era.

Not surprisingly, the roles of teachers and learners in higher education have had to adjust. In the past, professors were respected as the authoritative creators and providers of true knowledge. They themselves expected their students to accept what they presented because they held the credentials. But the climate of teaching, learning, and scholarship has changed significantly. Now we all realize that the growth of knowledge, including the interpretation of texts, is a complex and communal enterprise. Professors cannot presume to corner the market on truth because no one, in whatever field, can control everything there is to know. More and more, we realize that students also have something significant to contribute. At institutions such as Hope College where I teach, a large number of students are involved in original research with faculty, leading to scholarly publication. Effective pedagogy now makes room for the active participation of students in the development and acquisition of new knowledge. To facilitate this, in addition to providing students a knowledge base, teachers of the biblical text need to train students in good reading practices. This in turn helps us all become more aware of why we read the text in the ways we do. And we all experience a deepening of understanding and an appreciation for the text.

As much as anything else, the evolution of the Internet has opened up new pedagogical possibilities to facilitate active student learning, and this edition of RTOT takes advantage of them. The latest generation of Internet functionality has been labeled Web 2.0 as a way of indicating that a significant new set of web capabilities has

emerged. Components of this new web include social networking tools, blog applications for sharing information and analysis, collaborative knowledge-building applications such as wikis, sites that share images and videos, and new ways of managing and disseminating information such as really simple syndication (RSS) feeds. And new tools keep appearing. No doubt, by the time this edition of RTOT appears in print, there will be a Web 2.5 or 3.0 with additional capabilities not imagined at the time of writing.

These new means of communication have provided everyone with the ability to share their views and come to know the views of others. Of course, there is good and bad in all of this, but it has resulted in a certain democratization of access to and dissemination of content, at least for those with access to the technology. This has opened up the potential for greater understanding in many areas because more voices can join the conversation and more perspectives can find expression.

How does this impact Bible teaching and learning? For one thing, the Internet has made much more information available. As more voices are heard and more perspectives are articulated, more interpretive possibilities present themselves. Along with this wealth of information comes considerable challenge. As more voices seek to be heard, it is easy to become overwhelmed and confused. How do we know which interpretative claims to take seriously? How do we filter the noise in order to discern authentic voices? Teaching and learning the Bible in an Internet-enhanced setting presents numerous opportunities to examine, discuss, and evaluate the many interpretative options under the leadership of trained scholars.

What are the roles of teachers and textbook authors in this changed environment? They must be more than just text specialists and content providers. They need to train their students in discerning the potential credibility and worth of the materials now available at the press of a key. They need to train students in the discernment of proper sources and effective reading practices. Above all, they need to nurture a

spirit of dialogue and inquiry when it comes to discerning meaning in the biblical text. To these ends, the print edition of RTOT is accompanied by web materials that support the exploration of the Bible. In this edition, the Internet resources are not peripheral to the teaching and learning that the print text of RTOT supports, but they are viewed as essential to its pedagogy.

## INTERNET SUPPORT

The fourth edition of the RTOT print text is more closely integrated with the publisher's Internet support site. The publisher's RTOT site at <http://academic.cengage.com/religion> makes a variety of chapter resources available to the learner. Additional premium content, including audio, video, and guided study will be available on the Resource Center associated with this text. Content included on the site will include:

- Key terms flash cards and quiz for each textbook chapter
- Chapter concepts quiz for each textbook chapter
- Guided reading exercises of selected biblical texts for each textbook chapter
- A picture gallery keyed to the textbook chapters
- Audio podcast of each textbook chapter
- Discussion forum with issues keyed to each textbook chapter
- Searchable resource guides for further study and for making contemporary connections, including references to books and journal articles, art, literature, music, and video
- A searchable biblical text
- A blog written and moderated by the author for discussing the Bible in the news, as well as course content, pedagogy, and classroom activities



# NOTES

## Note to Students

RTOT was shaped by more than twenty-five years of teaching a college-level introductory course in biblical literature. Here are some suggestions for getting the most out of it.

This textbook examines the Hebrew Bible by quoting passages from the Bible and then interpreting them. Take the time to read these passages and read them closely. The maps, historical explanations, illustrations, and textual commentaries are designed to help you comprehend specific texts of the Hebrew Bible and are not meant as a substitute for reading the text itself. Each chapter incorporates the following components, all designed to aid you in studying the Hebrew Bible:

- **Key Terms** A list of key names and terms appears at the beginning of each chapter. Each term is boldfaced where it is defined. By looking over this list before you read the chapter you can alert yourself to the main characters and concepts. The list can also be used to study for tests and quizzes. The glossary near the end of the book contains the names and terms from each chapter, along with their definitions.

- **Discussion Questions** Each chapter includes questions to help you identify and review the main themes of that chapter. In addition, open-ended questions raise issues suitable for discussion.

- **Reading the Text Today** At the end of each chapter, there is a short selection of two or three books that can be used to more thoroughly study the material of that chapter. The resources included in these sections were chosen because they are especially appropriate for students who have worked through the chapter and want to go a bit further.

# Note to Teachers

RTOT was designed to teach students how to read the biblical text. Although it treats literary issues throughout, it is not a “Bible as Literature” textbook. Although it uses historical research and reconstructs Israelite history, it is not a “History of Israelite Religion” textbook.

The overall approach of the textbook is this: Beginning with actual biblical passages, it teaches how to draw out meaning by doing close readings of the text. Significant, sometimes lengthy, portions of the biblical text are included in the textbook for two reasons. First, the inclusion of biblical passages in the textbook makes it easier to follow the textual interpretations. Second, the biblical passages make it more likely that students will actually read those portions of primary material. Students often read a textbook but not the assigned biblical readings because it is more difficult to read the Bible itself and because the textbook summarizes the main points.

As RTOT develops the meaning of specific texts, it draws upon history, archaeology, and literature. It intends to do this not in isolation but to explain something in the biblical text. It intends to show how the ancillary disciplines of history, archaeology, literary criticism, and linguistics can be used to inform a reading of the text. This approach teaches students how to interpret biblical texts properly by modeling the process. The long-term goal is to equip students to handle the Bible correctly so that after the course they can evaluate how others read the text and can apply appropriate methods in their own reading.

RTOT also introduces modern and postmodern critical methodologies in a practical way by using them where appropriate to interpret texts. By the end of the course, students will have practiced using source analysis, form-critical analysis, reader-response criticism, canonical interpretation, feminist criticism, and third-

world critique.

RTOT is appropriate for beginning students of the Hebrew Bible and is targeted at the freshman–sophomore college and university level. It can be used in Old Testament/Hebrew Bible courses that are organized by literature or history. If by literature, you would assign chapters as you cover specific books of the Bible. If by history, you would probably assign chapters as they correspond to the period of history that you are covering.

RTOT is organized into three main sections according to how the books of the Hebrew Bible have been grouped in the Jewish tradition. Each section has an introduction that draws attention to broad issues and matters that affect the collection as a whole. Specific teaching and learning components of the textbook are as follows:

- **Content Summaries** If students get nothing else out of the course, at least they should know the main characters and the plot. This is encouraged in two ways. First, the chapter following this introduction summarizes the history of the Hebrew Bible and, in a general way, relates the story line to the book traditions in which it is found. Then, for each chapter of Israel's Primary History (Genesis through Kings), there is a summary of the story line of that biblical book.
- **Maps** Maps are generously distributed throughout and are customized to illustrate specific moments in biblical history.
- **Time Lines** Time lines are frequently shown because literature, history, and text need to be correlated.
- **Discussion Questions** The end of chapter Key Concepts may be useful for testing your students' comprehension of the chapter and are especially useful for review before tests. The Discussion Questions get students to think beyond the bounds of the chapter by suggesting ways that the material may relate to issues that they can identify with. In addition to their use in a review or discussion setting, these questions make good topics for term papers.

- **Reading the Text Today** Appended to each chapter are suggestions of readings pertinent to topics within that chapter. The works are briefly described and were deliberately chosen because they should be understandable to students at the beginning to intermediate level. The chapter bibliographies on the Internet support site are more comprehensive, and many entries contain the table of contents of that book. These will be especially useful to students as they search for monographs and journal articles if they have been assigned text interpretation or research papers.

- **Internet Support** The publisher's companion website has an expanded study guide for each chapter that contains a chapter summary, a list of the key terms with links to glossary definitions, and a set of quizzes that automatically score a student's performance and collect student scores into a class database for the teacher's records. There is also a classified bibliography of additional study resources for each chapter. Besides providing bibliographic information on individual books of the Old Testament, it can be used to introduce biblical research in general because it explains the various types of study tools available to students. Many of these resources could prove useful in a classroom setting. Maps can be projected or printed to supplement lectures, and many of the tables contain summaries of textual data that might inspire further reflection on the biblical text. Permission is automatically granted to use any of these materials in a nonprofit setting.

## **Book Notes**

All translations of the Hebrew Bible included in the body of RTOT are mine, unless otherwise noted. I made an effort to use gender-inclusive language throughout, but not when referring to God in the translations and discussions. I acknowledge the ungendered nature of God and in principle endorse the use of inclusive language, but the

translations follow the original text, which used male-gendered forms in reference to the deity. The goal is to render the original text as directly as possible, letting the reader make the transition to the deity who transcends gender. Apart from references to deity, inclusive language is used where appropriate when translating the text. When God is referenced with pronouns such as *he* or *his*, they are uncapitalized. Certain English translations consistently capitalize divine pronouns out of respect, but there is nothing in the original text that warrants this practice. The spelling of personal and place names follows the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the outside reviewers for this edition: Dexter Callender, University of Miami; Linda Schearing, Gonzaga University; and Scott Starbuck, Whit-worth College. I would like to thank my editor Worth Hawes and his very able staff. I am especially grateful to Betty Duncan for meticulously working through the manuscript and to Ruth Cottrell for adeptly handling the final preparation of the book.

Finally, I would like to thank my students at Hope College who have put up with so many drafts of this edition and all my bumbling efforts to incorporate web materials into the classroom experience. And they have done it all with such good grace. I am especially thankful to them for their feedback and for providing the occasion to write and refine this book.

*Barry L. Bandstra*  
bandstra@hope.edu

# INTRODUCTION

## Reading the Bible

[1 Reading the Bible](#)

[2 Academic Study of the Bible](#)

[3 Which Bible?](#)

[4 The Biblical Story](#)

---

## KEY TERMS

[Author](#)

[Hebrew Bible](#)

[Hermeneutical triangle](#)

[Master narrative](#)

[Old Testament](#)

[Reader](#)

[Referent](#)

[Tanakh](#)

[Text](#)

## Noah's Dove

The dove on the book cover's stained glass window evokes the story of Noah and the Flood. It represents an interesting “reading” of the story insofar as the bird has an oak-leaf cluster in its mouth rather than the “*freshly plucked olive leaf*” of Genesis 8:11—perhaps because the artist knew oak rather than olive trees. This is a fine example of how we typically imagine biblical stories within the framework of our own context rather than a more authentically historical one.



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on a detail of the cover graphic, Erich Lessing, Art Resource/NY.

---

*READING THE OLD TESTAMENT* (RTOT) has always been about reading the biblical text, not just reading about it. From the first edition, it has been my conviction that contextual information of a literary or historical nature is most useful when applied to a specific biblical passage. It is also my experience that students will appreciate contextual information more readily if they see that it is useful. Droning on about the history of the ancient Middle East or explaining a reading methodology such as form criticism in the abstract easily bores the reader who cannot help but wonder, “Why do I have to know this stuff?” So instead of explaining the history of Egypt or Mesopotamia or Israel in the abstract, RTOT draws on history and other matters when we need it to illumine a specific text.

## **1 READING THE BIBLE**

There are four main components that we must account for when it comes to reading the Bible. First, there is the [text](#) itself, the Bible. The text consists of written words on a page. It was originally written in ancient languages, which have to be translated and understood. We have to be aware of how books emerged in the ancient cultures of the Bible, what they were written on, and how they were organized. The Bible is really a collection of many

individual books, each with its own history of composition; all of this needs to be taken into account.

Second, there is the [author](#) (or authors) and editors who originated and shaped the text of biblical books. A good deal of biblical scholarship attempts to reconstruct the process by which biblical books were composed. The process may include a period of oral construction and then written composition, with later reworking and editing.

Third, there are the events and ideas to which the Bible refers and the context within which these [referents](#) make sense. The world that the Bible refers to emerged out of a context that is very distant and different from our own: distant temporally, geographically, and conceptually. We need to recover the original meanings of what we find in the written text as best we can, and to do this we need to call upon the tools of historiography, archaeology, sociology, and literary analysis.

Fourth, there is the [reader](#) of the text. Of course, the text cannot mean anything until someone reads it. The reader component is us but includes more than just us. It also includes readers who came before us, including those who read the text shortly after its publication. Each age has its own way of understanding the text, conditioned by its grasp of history, language, and what it is looking for in the text. All of us tend to acquire certain ways of reading the biblical text that simply seem intuitive and commonsense to us until they are examined reflectively. Some of these ways we have inherited from our immediate community, such as our home, temple, or church. Some we have adopted from the culture in which we are situated, more broadly speaking. The ways we read the text have for the most part been adopted involuntarily just by virtue of our living in a particular place and being part of a particular community. Additional personal factors that affect our reading include educational background, career choice, gender, and social and geographic profile.

The audience is perhaps the most important coordinate of the

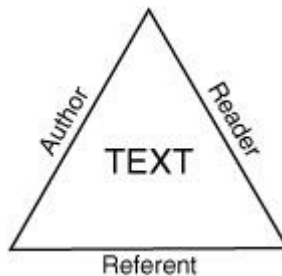


reading process for us to notice. It is the one that is the least obvious, yet it profoundly affects how we derive meaning from the text. We, meaning our culture generally and academic scholarship in particular, have increasingly come to realize that what we bring to the written text as readers profoundly affects the meaning that we get out of it.

These four coordinates of the interpretation process can be arranged as a triangle with text in the center, and some call it the [hermeneutical triangle](#) (see Barton, 1984/1996). The four coordinates can be remembered using the mnemonic word *TARR* from the first letter of each ([Figure 1](#)).

Recent sociocultural trends, global developments, and scientific discoveries have affected each of these four components of the process by which we derive meaning from the text. Using the four coordinates of the reading process identified above, let's summarize some of the developments that have been woven into this new edition of RTOT.

**FIGURE 1** The Hermeneutical Triangle



## 1.1 Text

Ancient texts have come to light from the Middle East that force us to see the biblical text in new ways. Some of these texts are copies of known biblical books, such as were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The recent opening of access to all these documents has in some cases changed the primary biblical text itself. For example, the

last paragraph of 1 Samuel 10 in one of the most widely used English translations, the New Revised Standard Version, was introduced into the main text (not the footnotes) on the basis of a single Dead Sea Scroll manuscript. It does not exist in the standard Hebrew text and was never in any modern Bible before.

With the wealth of newly discovered documents comes the awareness that many writings besides biblical books existed in ancient times. Some of them appear similar to books that are actually in our Bibles, but for some reason these other books never made the cut. This awareness has prompted a reexamination of how our Bible emerged out of its world and developed into the authoritative sacred collection of books it is today. Additionally, other newly discovered nonbiblical ancient texts and inscriptions have clarified the meanings of the vocabulary and concepts of the original languages. Because of such finds, we now know more about the shape of the text of the Bible.

## **1.2 Author**

Issues of when and by whom the biblical books took written form have long been part of the academic study of the Bible and never more pervasively than today. Detailed study of biblical books reveals that many of them have gone through a long process of composition on their way to becoming the books we know today. Although they may still be referred to as the books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible were not written by him according to the consensus of biblical scholarship; we examine the reasons in [Part 1](#), “The Torah: Prologue.” Likewise, the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others were not written as books by the men whose names are attached to them. This leads scholars to attempt to situate the books within an appropriate time and place and to recover as best they can who might have written them and why. There is currently a

vigorous discussion of such matters regarding the components of the books of the Torah and the prophetic books, with dates ranging from the Iron Age (900–600 BCE) down to the Hellenistic Age (300–100 BCE). Such matters turn out to be critical for coming to understand why and for whom particular books were written.

## **1.3 Referent**

Amazingly, discoveries still happen. It is true that the heyday of early treasure hunting in the name of archaeology is long gone when British, French, and American adventure scholars could storm into a Middle Eastern country and ransack its sites in order to stock museums in the style of Indiana Jones.

New knowledge still comes to light. It could be primary discoveries, such as the Assyrian palace recently discovered in Palestine when a new rail line was laid down (Shanks, 2007). Or it could be the application of new techniques to previous finds. Sometimes “discoveries” are made in the basements of museums, as happened in the Harvard Semitic Museum with “The Lost Tombs of the Israelite Kings” (Franklin, 2007). The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago reports that its basement contains upwards of 200,000 objects, some yet to be cataloged, that need to be studied (Tindel, 2007).

Furthermore, a good deal of unsensational archaeological fieldwork continues to be done in Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, and elsewhere in the Middle East. The focus of fieldwork has shifted from finding artifacts to recovering the cultures and societies of ancient times. A good example is the archaeological surface survey of the settlements of the central hill country of Palestine. This survey of the landscape revealed the demography of an entire region and clarified who the Israelites were in biblical times (Finkelstein, 1988). Such work, when politically feasible, continues to be done.

The results of this work have changed our understanding of the story of the Israelite conquest of Canaan (see RTOT [Chapter 6](#)).

Discoveries in archaeology, developments in linguistics, and new insights into Israelite religion and society have all sharpened our knowledge of the referents of the biblical text.

## 1.4 Reader

Social change is a powerful instigator of new ways to read the Bible. A striking example is nineteenth-century efforts to abolish slavery. Although the Bible implicitly allows slavery, abolitionists developed interpretive arguments to trump slavery texts using other biblical themes such as justice and the image of God (see Gomes, 1996, [Chapter 5](#) on “The Bible and Race”). Another example is the redefinition of women’s roles in society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that prompted reinterpretations of biblical gender expectations, even resulting in new translations of the biblical text that are gender inclusive.

The assertion that we live in a global village has become a truism, more evident with every passing year. The accelerated pace of globalization impacts more than just the world’s economic structures. It also has profound effects on the environment, human rights, health, gender roles, culture, religion, and politics at global, national, and local levels. Along with economic, social, and cultural change has come a much greater awareness of global diversity. We now have access instantaneously to news from around the world, and happenings anywhere can have an almost immediate impact upon us.

Consequently, with globalization has come an increased awareness of cultural difference, and this in turn has had an impact on the field of biblical studies. More voices are being heard, and more consideration and critique are now being applied to the ways that the biblical text has traditionally been interpreted. This has led to new

methods of reading the text. New approaches with increased sensitivity to previously marginalized constituencies have emerged within the last few years and have grown in influence and insight, including liberationist, third-world, and postcolonialist interpretations (see Kim, 2000, and Sugirtharajah, 2006).

The professional academic climate has also changed considerably. Academic biblical study in prior centuries was done primarily by European and American white males, mostly Protestant and Roman Catholic. This has shifted in the last few decades so that now the ranks of scholars are filled with people from around the world representing a variety of class, gender, ethnic, and faith backgrounds. Broadening the range of academic players has brought new perspectives, viewpoints, and analyses to bear on biblical texts. This will become evident as we look at various biblical episodes such as human disobedience in the garden of Eden, the wholesale slaughter of the Canaanites in the conquest, and Ezra's ethnocentric definition of God's chosen people.

Another result of these changes is that new forms of scholarship have emerged in the field. They carry names such as reader-response criticism, structuralist and post-structuralist criticisms, psychoanalytic criticism, and ideological criticism. Sometimes the proliferation of new textual methods and readings can become disorienting. Yet despite the challenges, it is important for us to become conversant with new developments if only so we can understand the conversation. Even better, as we learn more and become more confident, we can become active participants in the conversation. RTOT will still focus on the story line and referential meaning of the text, but we will explore how these new approaches might enrich our understanding both of the text and ourselves. A study of the biblical text can, and probably should, also become a study of the ways we read the biblical text.

# **2 ACADEMIC STUDY OF THE BIBLE**

RTOT draws upon academic scholarship to deepen the reader's understanding of the biblical text and the world out of which it came. The goal is to demonstrate the kinds of information that are available to the reader and to model an approach to reading the text. Writing this textbook has made me, a teacher, more aware of what it is I do myself as a reader and text analyst.

## **2.1 Teaching and Learning the Bible**

Earlier in my career I tended to do what probably most teachers in the academy did, which is to deliver what we judged to be the best, meaning most accurate and most “scholarly,” knowledge on the topic to my students: “This is what you need to know.” I expected my students to accept this because I said it and because I had the credentials to confirm my authority. This approach used to have some utility.

But increasingly I wanted something more for my students. I wanted them to know more than just what I considered the right interpretation to be. I wanted them to learn how to go about making their own “readerly” judgments about the biblical text once the class was over. More and more, I tried to explain how I and other scholars trained in the discipline of biblical studies go about our work. I began addressing questions such as these: What are our assumptions when we read texts? What do we look for in a text when we read it? What are good questions to ask of a text, and what kinds of questions are less productive when reading? What counts as a valid explanation of a text feature? Why do we draw upon the resources that we do when we read a text? What criteria do we use when we make a judgment about the validity and authority of secondary scholarly resources? In other words, we need to pass on to our

students not only what we do as scholar-readers but also why and how we go about it the way we do.

This textbook comes out of an academic setting, probably will be used typically in an academic setting, and is designed to teach the academic study of the Bible. I do want to make clear, however, that the way we read the Bible in RTOT is not the only legitimate way that the Bible can be read. We can identify any number of settings. As befits the role of the Bible in sustaining faith within Jewish and Christian communities, the Bible is used liturgically within temples and churches to shape worship, and it is the foundation of moral and spiritual formation. On my campus, numerous student-led Bible study groups meet regularly throughout the academic year. There the Bible is read, discussed, and prayerfully applied to everyday lives. Many students also report that they find inspiration and direction from their own private Bible reading and meditation. All of these are meaningful readings of the Bible, and many of my students come to find that the academic study of the text that we do in class does not contradict their inspirational reading but complements it. But they are quite different ways of reading the text.

Of course, not every student who reads the Bible in an academic way in an academic setting intends to make biblical scholarship her career. But every educated citizen might be expected to know some facts about the Bible and presumably know something about how to read the text. The fact is that the Bible can be a very difficult book to understand and appreciate. It may have a basic general message that is easy to grasp, but reading actual texts can be tough going.

## **2.2 The Bible in the Modern World**

The realities of Bible reading have been a contributing factor in the conflicted situation regarding the Bible, especially in North America. Each year the Bible is the best-selling book, with Americans buying

25 million a year, and the market is worth more than a half billion dollars. In polls conducted periodically over the last thirty years, more than three-quarters of Americans consistently report that they believe the Bible is literally the word of God or the inspired word of God (Polling Report, 2007). The most recent poll found that more than 30 percent agreed with the statement “the Bible is absolutely accurate and should be taken literally word for word.”

The Bible continues to be held in high regard and continues to be considered authoritative and divine in origin. Yet there is a significant disconnection between the authority that it wields and people’s actual knowledge of what it says. The Gallup organization recently polled young people for the Bible Literacy Project in order to measure Bible knowledge (Bible Literacy Report, 2005). Ninety percent knew that Adam and Eve were the first couple according to Genesis. Seven in ten correctly identified Moses as the one who led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. But only one-third correctly identified Cain as the one who said, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Bible knowledge is foundational to a good education, yet Bible knowledge is more than knowing just facts; it is also knowing how to read the biblical text.

Before you begin your study of the biblical text, take a moment and take the poll yourself using the online survey at the companion website. It uses the same questions as the Gallup poll and will give you the opportunity to see how you match up against national norms.

### **3 WHICH BIBLE?**

As we begin to read the biblical text, we need to pose an important question that may seem too obvious to ask: “Which Bible are we talking about?” Those of us raised in religious homes just had “The Bible.” The Bible is just the Bible, isn’t it? But it turns out not to be a question with an obvious answer because there are in fact many



different bibles, and the term *Bible* can be used to designate a variety of books that differ in a variety of ways.

If you are not talking about the Bible in its original language, then Bibles can differ in how they translate the original and into which target language they translate it. Regarding translation, there are different approaches ranging from very literal to very loose. Translations are also affected by the religious commitments and presuppositions of its translators, which enter into the way the text is rendered. Bibles can also differ in which books are collected between its covers. That is what we focus on now.

### **3.1 Hebrew Bible to Old Testament**

What the Bible is depends partly on who you are and where you come from. If you were not raised in a religious home or community, you probably would not import any particular content into the notion of Bible, except perhaps a certain sense that it is a special sacred book to some other people. If you happen to be Jewish or your frame of reference is Judaism, then you may know the Bible as the Hebrew Bible, or the Hebrew Scriptures, or the Tanak. If you happen to be Christian or your frame of reference is the Christian tradition, then you may know the Bible as having an Old Testament and a New Testament. Within Christianity itself there are different Bibles. The Bible of the Roman Catholic tradition includes certain books that would not be found in a Protestant Bible. In a rather ironic twist, Jews and Christians are divided by a common Bible. We need to further explain these different Bibles.

The Jewish Bible, also called the [Hebrew Bible](#), contains the same books as the [Old Testament](#) of the Protestant Christian Bible, but they organize the books in significantly different ways. This textbook, though it is entitled *Reading the Old Testament*, carries the subtitle *An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. It will be important to

realize from the start that we will follow for the most part the organization of the Hebrew Bible rather than the Old Testament. If you continue your study of the Bible beyond this introduction, you will find that the term *Hebrew Bible* is commonly used to refer to the Old Testament even outside Jewish circles, especially because of its nonsectarian character, whereas the term *Old Testament* is undeniably Christian.

The Hebrew Bible is divided into three subcollections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Hebrew names for these subcollections are *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*. Taking the first letter of each of these three words and inserting the vowel *a*, the Jewish community gave its Bible the name [Tanak](#). Take a moment to refer to the RTOT “Table of Contents.” You will see that it is likewise divided into three parts, each with a number of chapters. There is a prologue to each part that provides a basic orientation and defines the major issues that will be discussed in that part.

The Hebrew Bible is one book in the sense that it is typically bound as a single volume. At the same time, it is an anthology of books—a virtual library of separate works. In fact, the term *Bible* derives from the Greek *ta biblia* (itself from *biblion*, meaning “papyrus”), which means “the books.” The individual books came from a variety of authors who wrote over a span of a thousand years or more. They were gathered together and included in a single work that we now call the Hebrew Bible. Early pious Jews judged this particular collection of writings to contain an authoritative record of divine instruction for their community. The term that applies to an authoritative or authorized collection of materials is *canon*, and the process whereby books are designated canonical is called *canonization*.

## 3.2 Spoken Word to Written Text

The process whereby the Hebrew Bible came to be a book was rather complex, and we understand it only imperfectly. Jews and Christians have traditionally attributed the origin of the Bible to God and have said that the Bible was divinely inspired. The doctrine of biblical inspiration is an affirmation that cannot be proven empirically but depends on faith. The doctrine of biblical inspiration claims that the very words of the biblical text in some significant way came directly from God. Using human agents, God “inscripturated” his word for humans. Whatever one’s view of the inspiration of the biblical text, all students of the text would agree that the text was also delivered through human agency.

There were in fact many more Jewish writings, written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, that circulated within the Jewish community before the Common Era. But the Jewish community came to accept only a certain number of them as the ones through which they believed God spoke. These they treated as divinely inspired books.

But not all Jews accepted the limits of this particular collection called the Hebrew Bible. There were many Jews living outside the territory of Palestine in what were largely Greek-speaking areas called the *Dispersion*, also called the *Diaspora*. The Jewish communities of the Diaspora, especially the one in Alexandria, Egypt, produced many books and had their own ideas of what should be included in the canon. These communities had come to revere other books in addition to those included in the canon recognized in Palestine.

The additional materials—some complete books, others just appendixes—are known as the Apocrypha. They are accepted as part of Holy Scripture by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. The Greek canon, which includes the Apocrypha, is called the *Septuagint* (often abbreviated by Roman numerals LXX, referring to the seventy-plus Jewish elders who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek). Protestant churches, along with the Jewish community, deny the divine authority of the apocryphal books and instead accept the more

restricted Hebrew Bible of Palestinian Judaism.

Many groups and individuals were responsible for handing down the material contained in the Old Testament and for giving the individual books their final shape. Most remain nameless to this day. Even the books of identifiable prophets such as Isaiah and Amos were not written entirely by those men. The books are collections of their sayings, which anonymous editors gathered together and annotated. Much of the material that eventually was included in the Hebrew Bible started out as folktales, songs, and religious liturgies. The common people inherited these stories and passed them on from one generation to the next by word of mouth.

*Oral tradition*, as it is called, was the source of many of the stories that have survived about Israel's ancestors and early history. Priests and highly trained scribes, typically employed by the king, were virtually the only ones able to read and write. They were responsible for gathering materials from oral and written sources, organizing them, and compiling them into books. Probably the earliest conceivable time that any books could have been written was around 950 BCE, during the reign of Solomon who was the king of Israel at its golden age, though many scholars believe that the process of writing the books happened much later.

Scholars have demonstrated that the Hebrew Bible took centuries to shape. After individual books were completed, they were joined into collections of books. The earliest collection was the Torah. It was given its overall shape sometime during the Babylonian exile and was accepted as authoritative by 400 BCE. The Torah was followed by the Prophets, which was finalized around 200 BCE. After the Writings were added to these, the Tanak was completed around 100 CE, as reflected in a conference of rabbis meeting at Jamnia. Although the process was in fact much more complicated than the above summary implies, the Hebrew Bible as we know it today became a fixed collection after a long period of growth and development. We will treat the composition and growth of the canon

in each of the three section prologues and come back to the general issue in “Conclusion: After the Hebrew Bible.”

## **3.3 Which Bible Should I Choose?**

Since this course of study is designed around reading the Hebrew Bible, it will be important for you to have ready access to a copy of the Bible. You should have no trouble finding one because 25 million Bibles are sold each year in the United States, making it the perennial best seller (see Swanson, 2007). But which one should you choose? Unfortunately, the issue is more complicated than deciding whether you want hardcover or paperback. Here are some of the relevant variables.

### **3.3.1 Hebrew Bible or Old Testament**

A translation of the Bible is called a *version*. This term will often be included in the popular name of the edition and its abbreviation such as the King James Version (KJV) or the Revised Standard Version (RSV). These are different versions because they differently render into English what the original Hebrew and Aramaic states. Each version is the result of the work of a team of scholars, translators, and editors. Each team has its own particular notion of how best to communicate the meaning of the original text.

Published editions of the Bible often align with religious communities that sponsored the work of translation. As such, they might differ in which books are included. The Jewish Publication Society’s Tanakh—The Holy Scriptures (1985) contains the Hebrew Bible. The Protestant New International Version (1973, 1978, 1984) contains the Old and New Testaments. The Roman Catholic New American Bible (1971) contains the Old and New Testaments and retains what the Protestant tradition calls the Apocrypha. The New

Revised Standard Version (1989) was an ecumenical effort primarily of university and seminary scholars, and it is probably the most widely used version in higher education today.

### **3.3.2 Traditional or Contemporary Language**

Versions differ on the style and character of the English they use. The King James translation tradition uses formal language, whereas The Message employs a more colloquial and idiomatic style. Language varies considerably among versions, from very stately to hip. Versions can also reflect a local idiom and style. For example, the New English Bible (1970) and its successor the Revised English Bible (1992) reflect a British English context. The Revised Standard Version (1952) and its successors use a formal American English.

### **3.3.3 Literal or Dynamic Equivalent**

Translators must choose whether they will follow the style and concepts of the original text or translate biblical notions and metaphors into modern ones using the translation practice known as *dynamic equivalence*. For example, where the King James Version of Ecclesiastes 12:12 famously states “*of making many books there is no end,*” the Living Bible reads “*there is no end of opinions ready to be expressed,*” and the New Century Version Youth Bible dismissively puts it as “*people are always writing books.*” The issue of translation practice plays out in various ways, including whether the gender specific character of the original text would be translated into gender inclusive locutions in English.

### **3.3.4 Plain Text or Study Edition**

Publishers have devoted considerable resources to developing study

Bibles. A study edition takes a translation such as the New Revised Standard Version and inserts a variety of explanatory material within its pages. These materials typically include introduction essays to biblical books, plot summaries, content outlines, concept explanations, and maps. Some also include theological lessons and life applications. Although all of this supplemental material can be useful in understanding the text, the introductory student can easily become confused about what is and what is not the Bible.

### **3.3.5 Print or Electronic**

Publishers have also reformatted their versions into electronic texts. They come in the form of stand-alone desktop applications or Internet sites, many of them available at no cost. Students might find reading off the screen less comfortable than hard copy, but electronic Bibles have an advantage for serious study because of their search-and-display capabilities.

### **3.3.6 Niche Bibles**

Lastly, publishers have produced a variety of printed editions targeted to specific niche audiences. Here are just a few of the many that are available: NIV True Images: The Bible for Teen Girls; Chicken Soup for the Soul Bible; Every Man's Bible: New Living Translation; NIV Men's Devotional Bible and NIV Women's Devotional Bible; The Life Recovery Bible: New Living Translation for those in a twelve-step program; KJV Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible; Precious Moments Bible; Lighting the Way Home Family Bible by Thomas Kinkade; and Aspire: The New Women of Color Study Bible.

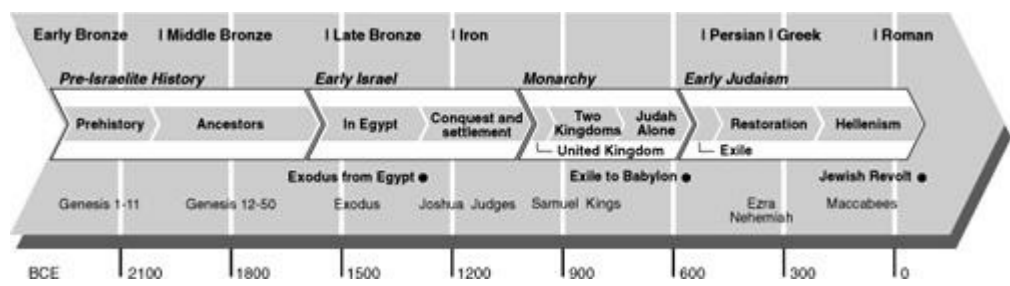
The issue of choosing a Bible version is potentially so intimidating that books have been written just to explain the choices. See Ryken (2005) and Dewey (2005) and the companion website for further

information.

## 4 THE BIBLICAL STORY

The Hebrew Bible consists of a variety of books, only some of which present what might be called a historical narrative of Israel’s experience. The books of Genesis through Kings are the primary history. Taken together, these books construct a linear account from the Creation of the world to the Babylonian exile. The books of Chronicles are a later retelling of that story and along with Ezra and Nehemiah carry the story forward into the period of postexilic Judaism.

**FIGURE 2** Time Line: The Biblical Story



For a variety of reasons, we need to familiarize ourselves with the basic plot of the Bible. Having a thumbnail outline of the course of events provides us with a sense of orientation and confidence because we will then know where things are going. More particularly, knowing the outline of the story in advance helps us better appreciate the relevance of particular episodes and their interconnections when we come to study them in more detail. For example, if we know who Joseph is and why he ended up in Egypt, we can better anticipate why the Hebrews needed to escape from Egypt.

In terms of studying the growth and development of the biblical



text, knowing the overall plot will also give us a framework for understanding discussions about when a narrative was written in relation to the event it reports. For example, certain episodes in the life of the patriarch Abraham, very early in the stream of events, were actually written during the time of the Babylonian exile, much later. The time of writing is an important component in understanding what an event means (see [Figure 2](#)).

## **4.1 Primeval Story**

The basic story line of the Hebrew Bible goes something like this. God created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh. The first human being, named Adam, was placed in the garden of Eden where he enjoyed a comfortable life and lived in direct contact with God. To meet his need for human companionship, God created Eve out of his rib. The two humans were expelled from the garden after they disobeyed a direct divine command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. Out of jealousy, Cain killed Abel. This first act of murder was just the first offense of many that were perpetuated by early humans. The growth of violence prompted God to send a flood to destroy the world, along with all humans. Only Noah and his family were spared annihilation, and after the waters receded they repopulated the earth.

## **4.2 Ancestral Story**

The race of humans offended God yet again by building the tower of Babel. In response God scattered humanity around the world and turned his attention to Abraham. The divine nurture bestowed on Abraham eventually resulted in a large clan, anchored by the twelve sons of Jacob, who regarded the God of Abraham as their patron and

protector. Jacob's sons sold their young brother Joseph to traders, who in turn sold him as a slave in Egypt. Eventually, Joseph rose to great power in Egypt. Due to a famine, the Jacob clan left Canaan, joined Joseph, and resettled in Egypt. As they grew in number there, they became a threat to the Egyptians who treated them harshly and forced them into slavery.

## 4.3 Birth of Israel

Moses became the leader of the descendants of Jacob, now called the Hebrews. Moses's calling was validated when he met God in a burning bush in the wilderness. In that encounter, the deity revealed that his name was Yahweh (spelled YHWH in the original text) and that he was the same deity as the god whom Abraham and the other patriarchs knew. Moses mediated the release of the Hebrews from slavery with the help of ten plagues sent by the god of the Hebrews upon the land of Egypt. After Pharaoh authorized their departure, God enabled the successful exodus of the Hebrews by opening a pathway through the Red Sea when it barred their way. When the Egyptian army pursued them, the waters drowned the army. The sequence of events that resulted in their freedom was celebrated in the Passover festival, still observed today by Jews around the world.

The Hebrews, now also called Israel and the Israelites, entered the Sinai wilderness east of Egypt, and Moses led them to the mountain of God. YHWH revealed himself to the Israelites and communicated the Ten Commandments and other laws through Moses. While encamped there, the people built a tent dwelling for YHWH, called the *tabernacle*, so that he would be present with them on their journey.

Moses brought the people through the wilderness to the southern border of Canaan. But the Israelites refused to advance into this territory in order to reoccupy the land where their forefathers once

lived because they were fearful of the Canaan-ites who lived in fortified cities. Because the people failed to follow YHWH's plan, they were condemned to remain in the wilderness for forty years.

## **4.4 Promised Land**

After the first generation of Israelites perished in the wilderness and after the death of Moses, Joshua led the people across the Jordan river and into the Promised Land. They fought the Canaanites at Jericho and other cities, and eventually they established a presence in the land. But their efforts to settle the land were frustrated by certain local groups such as the Philistines. Time and again, various leaders, called judges, came to their rescue. The likes of Gideon, Deborah, and Samson held off these Canaanite challengers until more capable leaders emerged to rally the tribes to build a confederation of tribes that would be capable of fending off serious threats to their existence.

## **4.5 Israelite Kingdoms**

Samuel was the most significant religious leader after Moses. He oversaw the religious institutions of Israel and transitioned the nation to a monarchy. Samuel appointed Saul to be the first king of Israel, whose major challenge came from the Philistines. To meet this challenge, Saul organized an army and led the charge, eventually losing his life in the effort.

David distinguished himself in combat with the Philistines at this time. After Saul and his sons died, David was in position to assume leadership. He created an administrative center in Jerusalem and built an empire that stretched from the border of Egypt to the Euphrates River of Mesopotamia. David was devoted to YHWH, who in turn made a commitment to perpetuate the rule of David over Israel forever through his offspring.

David died after securing the nation, and his son, Solomon, became king in his stead. Solomon concentrated on fortifying major cities and constructing monumental structures in Jerusalem, including a palace complex and a temple to YHWH. Although this served to elevate the stature and reputation of Israel among the nations, royal excesses had the negative effect of creating a national debt, which roused popular dissatisfaction. Dissension grew until a majority of Israelite tribes split off from Judah and the leadership of the house of David. The result was two states, Israel and Judah, that lived side by side for approximately 200 years. Each had its own separate set of political and religious institutions. They continued to have much in common, and certain people continued to hold out hope of reconciliation.

The prophets of Israel and Judah were individuals who heard the voice of God and publicly communicated a divine perspective on life and politics. The prophets emerged as divine spokespersons at the same time the monarchy arose, and they brought a transcendent perspective to the affairs of the nations. Sometimes they brought words of support and encouragement, and sometimes they brought words of challenge and condemnation. Sometimes they were well received by king and people, but more often they were not. Prophets were especially present and active in times of social and national crisis. This was the case during the time of the Philistine threat and the rise of a monarchy. It was also the case during the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian crises.

The Assyrian war machine attacked and conquered Israel, and Israel's ten tribes were scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire. Although Assyria also attacked Judah, it survived. After the decline of Assyria, Judah's influence in Palestine grew under the leadership of Josiah, a king from the lineage of David. The resurgence of an Israel was checked by the growth of the Babylonian Empire under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar.

## 4.6 Exile in Babylon

When Judah resisted the domination of Babylonia, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple of YHWH, killed many, and deported thousands to Babylon where he held them captive. The Judeans remained in exile until Cyrus the Great and the Persian Empire swallowed the Babylonian kingdom. Cyrus authorized the release of the Judeans, and with his support they set about rebuilding Jerusalem, which resumed its role as their spiritual and administrative center.

## 4.7 Restoration of Judea

While the Judeans were held captive in Babylonian exile and afterwards, the caste of priests and scribes assumed greater power and authority. They reorganized the community and governed it on the basis of the laws of Moses. Ezra in particular distinguished himself as an effective administrator and rebuilt a sense of national identity by emphasizing Hebrew ethnic solidarity. Nehemiah was a civic leader who effectively directed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. This period after the exile is the time when key components of Judean identity and culture come together such that the foundations of Judaism were laid firm.

This is the standard story of the Hebrew Bible. The basic outline of the story, though maybe not all the details, may be familiar to some of us. At its core are the macromoments of creation, human disobedience, Israel as the chosen people, divine rescue and eventual freedom, the gift of the Promised Land, the rule of God on earth, threat and danger from evil empires, and hope for a blessed life in the future. Some have called this the [master narrative](#) of the Bible. It is the grid or schema through which we typically view the Bible and grasp its overall meaning.

In our study of the biblical text that follows, we will do two things with this master narrative. First, we will use it to maintain an orientation so that we can keep individual episodes and historical stages in context. Second, we will test this grid, which functions as the basic truth of the Bible, against the witness of the biblical text itself, to see if the Bible, when read closely, can actually sustain the master narrative. We will be in for both affirmations and surprises as we immerse ourselves in the text and read the Old Testament.

# **PART ONE**

## **Torah**

# Prologue to the Torah

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Composition Analysis](#)

[3 Narrative Design](#)

[4 Text and History](#)

---

## KEY TERMS

[Ancestral covenant](#)

[Anthropomorphism](#)

[Covenant](#)

[Deuteronomic source](#)

[Documentary hypothesis](#)

[Elohim](#)

[Elohism source](#)

[Five Books of Moses](#)

[Historicity](#)

[Pentateuch](#)

[Priestly document](#)

[Source analysis](#)

[Tetrateuch](#)

[Torah](#)

[Yahweh](#)

[Yahwist](#)

[Yahwist narrative](#)

[YHWH](#)

## Reading the Torah



The Torah is the foundation document of Judaism and the heart of the Hebrew Bible. This Jew is intently studying a Torah scroll near the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Notice the prayer shawl and the *tefillin* (boxes that hold Torah texts) on his forehead and the strap holding one to his left arm. Torah readings and Torah ceremonies take place daily at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The Western Wall, called the *kotel* in Hebrew, dates to the first century BCE and is a surviving portion of the retaining wall of the temple mount. It is the closest Jewish point of contact to the site of the second temple of Judaism.



Photo by Barry Bandstra, 1996

---

# 1 INTRODUCTION

As you learned in the “Introduction,” the Hebrew Bible, or Tanak, consists of three parts: the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. Each part is a collection of individual books. The Torah consists of five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. After explaining certain key terms, this chapter summarizes the story line of the Torah and then introduces general issues in the study of the Torah.

## 1.1 Torah Terms

The term *Torah* has a variety of meanings and possible connotations.

It can refer to the *T* part of the Tanak. But it can also have a much broader meaning. In early biblical tradition, [torah](#) primarily designated oral instruction and teaching of various kinds, often delivered by priests and other community leaders. According to Schniedewind (2004), oral torah came to be written down relatively late in biblical history, and from then on it became Torah with a capital *T*, designating a corpus of documents.

In certain religious contexts, such as within temple and synagogue circles, Torah is another way to refer to divine revelation generally or the Hebrew Scriptures as a whole. The Torah in its widest sense was Israel's constitution and the foundation of its spiritual and communal life. The Torah corpus can also be referred to as the [Five Books of Moses](#) because the traditional view, examined later in this prologue, held that in addition to being the central figure in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, he was also responsible for writing the Torah books. The Torah translations of Fox (1995) and Alter (2004) both bear the title *The Five Books of Moses*.

Although Torah is the traditional name for the set of books that includes Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, many modern readers tend to call it the [Pentateuch](#). This is a term derived from the Greek word for “five scroll jars,” which then came to designate the five scrolls themselves. You will probably find that the term *Pentateuch* is more often used in academic settings and the term *Torah* more often in religious ones.

## 1.2 The Torah Story

The books of the Torah tell a story that begins before the Creation of the world and ends with the death of Moses. Here is a summary of the Torah's contents, which is outlined in [Table 1](#). Genesis contains two accounts of origins. The first relates the Creation of the world, culminating with the appearance of humankind in the image of God.

The second relates the creation of the first human couple, Adam and Eve. The story of subsequent human history is related beginning with the episodes of Cain killing Abel and the growth of violence on the earth. Although positive cultural developments occurred, human violence convinced God to send a flood. This flood destroyed all life on earth, except for Noah, his family, and a remnant of animal life. Humanity again multiplied, but when their urban building project threatened God, he scattered them about the earth.

**TABLE 1** Outline of the Torah Story

| Torah                |                         |            |                      |                  |
|----------------------|-------------------------|------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Genesis              | Exodus                  | Leviticus  | Numbers              | Deuteronomy      |
| Creation             | Hebrews in Egypt        | Ritual law | Ritual law           | Sermons of Moses |
| Adam and Eve in Eden | Birth of Moses          |            | Wilderness wandering | Death of Moses   |
| Noah and the Flood   | Ten plagues             |            |                      |                  |
| Tower of Babel       | Reed (Red) Sea crossing |            |                      |                  |
| Abraham              | Ten Commandments        |            |                      |                  |
| Isaac                | Golden calf             |            |                      |                  |
| Jacob                | Tabernacle              |            |                      |                  |

The remainder of Genesis relates episodes centering on the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This intergenerational family received God’s special favor along with the promise that it would inherit the land of Canaan.

The book of Exodus begins with the offspring of Jacob residing in Egypt where they were slaves to the Pharaoh. God raised up Moses to be the leader of these Hebrew people, also called the Israelites. He mediated the series of disasters that came upon the Egyptians, which paved the way for the departure of the Hebrews, called the *Exodus*, along with its biggest moment, the crossing of the Reed (Red) Sea. This event of disaster with deliverance was celebrated as the Passover, which is still marked today in both Jewish and Christian communities.

Moses became the channel through whom God communicated a

divine design for their life as his people. The content of the constitution was delivered at Mount Sinai and consisted of the Ten Commandments, along with a large collection of other moral and ritual laws. These instructions are contained in the books of Exodus (the second half), Leviticus, and Numbers (the first half).

After building God's portable tent dwelling, called the *tabernacle*, they left Mount Sinai and headed toward their eventual homeland, Canaan. Along the way, they challenged the good intentions of their God and the leadership of Moses. In response and as punishment, God relegated them to live out their existence in the wilderness of Sinai. Although God sustained their lives with miracles of food and water, the entire first generation of Hebrews perished in the wilderness without stepping foot on the Promised Land. The book of Deuteronomy consists of speeches that Moses addressed to the next generation, reviewing the divine laws and counseling them to remain faithful so that they would be permitted to remain in the Promised Land once they arrived.

The story of the Torah is presented in a linear historical fashion. It begins at the very beginning and spans the period from the appearance of the habitable earth to the point where the Israelites can enter the homeland that had been divinely set aside for them. The elaborate body of biblical law delivered through Moses is all set within this stream of historical events, not as an abstract or theoretical collection of rules. The Torah is rich with drama, narrative detail, memorable characters, and remarkable interaction with a deity who had taken up their cause. It lays the foundation for Israel's subsequent history told in the prophetic literature, which will be examined in [Part 2](#) of our book.

It is probably no exaggeration to say that the Torah is the most intensely studied section of the Hebrew Bible, both within Judaism generally and within the academic community of biblical scholars. Consequently, there is a wealth of scholarship that attempts to sort out where it came from, how it is organized, and what it means. A

good deal of this study wrestles with the issue of who wrote these books and how they composed them.

## 2 COMPOSITION ANALYSIS

Ancient practices of authorship and text production differ significantly from those of today. In biblical culture, writers did not sign their works, though some clay tablets do record the name of the scribe. The shaping of what today we call biblical “books,” in their earliest form probably parchment scrolls, came about through the collaboration of many parties and may have taken a lengthy period of time from the earliest oral stories to the final written product. Van der Toorn (2007) traces the emergence of scribes in Israel and their role in committing oral tradition to writing.

None of the five books of the Torah state who the author was. Other books of the Hebrew Bible use phrases such as “the Torah of Moses,” but in light of the ambiguity of the term *torah*, this does not necessarily imply the Mosaic authorship of any particular biblical book. In the absence of specific claims, the authorship of each book can only be based on hints and clues contained within the books themselves. Scholars offer many proposals as to the dating and authorship of the books of the Torah, but they have not achieved final agreement. As with much biblical scholarship, research can greatly increase our understanding of the text, but results are typically provisional and subject to refinement. As we will see, this is especially the case with Pentateuchal investigations.

### 2.1 Mosaic Authorship

Premodern Judaism and Christianity assumed that Moses was the author of the Torah, and this view is still held by some people. Early authorities, including the Jewish philosopher Philo, the Jewish

historian Josephus, and various New Testament writers (see Matthew 19:7–8 and Acts 15:1), all first century CE sources, assumed that Moses was the Torah’s author, as did the Babylonian Talmud (see Baba Bathra 14b).

The assumption of Mosaic authorship developed because a number of biblical texts outside the Pentateuch appear to attribute the Torah to Moses, and people assumed the Torah was the equivalent of the books Genesis through Deuteronomy. For example, Joshua built an altar using the specifications given in “*the book of the Torah of Moses*” (Joshua 8:31). David charged Solomon to keep the commandments “*as written in the Torah of Moses*” (1 Kings 2:3). Ezra read from “*the book of the Torah of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel*” (Nehemiah 8:1). About this same time, the Chronicler referred to a passage from Deuteronomy as being from “*the book of Moses*” (2 Chronicles 25:4).

If such references to a Torah written by Moses are found in the Bible itself and in other worthy sources, why would anyone think otherwise, and why would scholars challenge Mosaic authorship? A close reading of the Torah itself reveals that the issue of authorship is actually rather complex. For example, there is the issue of the death of Moses as recorded at the end of the fifth book of the Torah. Common sense informed scholars as early as the Middle Ages that Moses could not have written the account of his own death (Deuteronomy 34:5–12). Some suggested that Joshua, Moses’s assistant and successor, might have appended it. Other features of the text suggest non-Mosaic authorship and a complex process of development. The text often refers to Moses in the third person *he* rather than the first person *I*, suggesting someone other than Moses wrote those sections.

In addition to linguistic clues, there are a number of what some readers consider literary lapses. In three distinct places, Genesis contains the ploy of a patriarch lying about his wife’s marital status to protect his own life—twice with Abraham and Sarah (12:10–20;

20:1–18) and once with Isaac and Rebekah (26:6–11). This suggests to scholars that one basic story circulated in three versions in different underlying documents, with all three variants being included in the final text.

Some readers affirm that Moses finalized the Torah, often out of what they feel is a principled commitment to the veracity of the text as the inspired word of God, with its presumed references to a book of Moses. Other readers are convinced that the Torah was given its final shape much later than the lifetime of Moses. While differing considerably in how they reconstruct the underlying sources and the process of composition, both positions typically acknowledge that the Torah was composed from different types of oral and written material. The following section summarizes the approach of [source analysis](#) (also called *source criticism*), widely known as the [documentary hypothesis](#), which attempts to rationally explain how the various materials came together. This theory posits the existence of a collection of written documents that preceded the Torah as we now have it and served as the basis for it. These documents are hypothetical in the sense that they are reconstructions done by biblical scholars, and they do not physically exist today. Scholars developed this theory as a way to account for the many inconsistencies and irregularities they observe in the Torah. Friedman (2003) is a useful tool that color codes the sources of the Pentateuch to make identifying them easier.

## 2.2 Documentary Hypothesis

The study of ancient texts, both secular and sacred, in their original languages blossomed during the Renaissance and Reformation. This inspired a new look at the Hebrew Bible. The existence of similar stories in Genesis (such as the aforementioned duplicate stories of Abraham and Sarah) prompted Richard Simon (1638–1712) to

develop a theory that the Pentateuch was compiled from a number of sources, some of which may have derived from Moses. He claimed that the final Pentateuch was produced by Ezra in the postexilic period (400s BCE).

A variation in the way Pentateuchal texts refer to God, either as **Elohim** (translated as “God”) or **YHWH** (pronounced **Yahweh** or Yahveh and rendered “the LORD” in most English translations), prompted Jean Astruc (1684–1766) to argue that Moses compiled the Pentateuch from two different written documents and other minor materials. Ironically, the approach to Mosaic authorship that Astruc advocated gave birth to the documentary hypothesis, which ultimately took the Pentateuch out of Moses’s hands.

Over the next two centuries, the documentary hypothesis developed into the dominant explanation for the authorship and composition of the Pentateuch. Essentially, this hypothesis deconstructs the Pentateuch into four primary underlying documentary sources: a Yahwist narrative dated to the 900s or 800s BCE, an Elohist source dated to the 800s or 700s BCE, a Deuteronomic source dated to the 600s BCE, and a Priestly document to the 500s or 400s BCE (see [Figure 1](#)). The documentary hypothesis goes by the initialism JEDP for the four sources in their presumed chronological order.

**FIGURE 1** Sources and Composition of the Torah

This time line illustrates the growth of the Torah through its various stages.

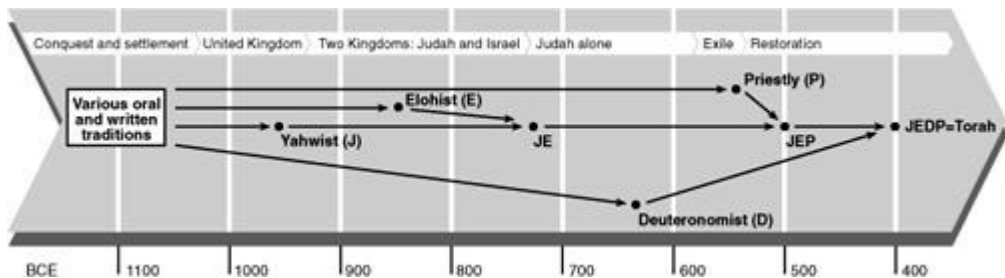
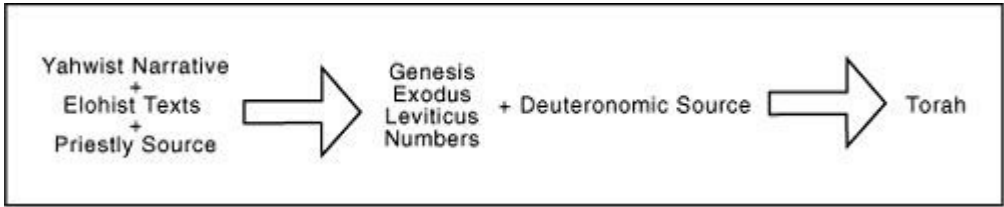




**FIGURE 2** Growth of the Torah



The classical documentary hypothesis uses five literary features to distinguish and identify the sources:

- Repetition of stories or laws
- Different ways of referring to deity
- Local geographical and political perspectives
- Variations in vocabulary and style
- Evidence of editorial activity to combine sections

The editorial work of combining the various sources took place in stages. The editor (sometimes called the redactor by scholars) who joined the Yahwist (J) and Elohist (E) sources into JE put them together shortly after 721 BCE when the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians. Around 500 BCE, a different editor added material from a Priestly source (P), giving rise to an edition of the text called JEP, resulting in the books Genesis through Numbers essentially in the form in which we have them today. Although the Deuteronomistic source was independently composed in the 600s, it was added to JEP around 400 BCE, resulting in the complete Torah as we now have it (see [Figure 2](#)).

Although none of the actual writers of the sources has been definitively identified by name, we can piece together some general features of the people responsible. Each of the sources has a distinctive style, vocabulary, and theology; each came out of a particular period in Israel's history; and each reflects the attitude and perspective of a particular constituency within Israel (see [Figure 3](#)).

Each source reflects a particular region's political and social perspectives at particular times in Israel's history.

## 2.2.1 Yahwist Narrative (J)

The earliest written source of the Torah is the [Yahwist narrative](#). It got this name because it uses the divine name YHWH to refer to God. Its story line formed the backbone of the Torah narrative with the other sources building upon it. The Yahwist narrative is sometimes considered an epic because with broad historical scope it tells the story of how humankind developed and how one branch became the people of God. It frequently makes use of [anthropomorphism](#); that is, it often describes the deity as having human characteristics, such as when YHWH “walked” in the garden of Eden.

The Yahwist source is referred to as J in scholarly literature because German scholars first formulated this source analysis, and YHWH begins with a German. It appears to contain the first account of where the nation of Israel came from and why it was special to God. This national story provided a common identity for all the people united under the rule of the Davidic dynasty. The [Yahwist](#) composed his story sometime during the reign of Solomon (961–922 BCE), though some scholars would date it as much as a century or more later. One way to remember to associate the Yahwist, or J source, with the early monarchy in Judah is that both begin with J.

**FIGURE 3** Sources of the Torah by Geographical Location



The Yahwist source was written out of love for the royal house, providing a sense of history and destiny for the grand new kingdom of David. The Solomonic era was most conducive to such a historical project. This golden age had the resources and provided the opportunity to write a national epic. Royally sponsored scribal schools provided the training, royal income supported the work, and

the increased international contact afforded by the new status of Israel stimulated historical reflection and perhaps even prompted the need for a national story.

The Yahwist was especially interested in those traditions that supported the legitimacy of Davidic rule and the centrality of the tribe of Judah. He (or she, if Bloom, 1990, is correct) believed that God's plan was working itself out in the rule of David and Solomon. The Yahwist came from Judah, so understandably thought highly of King David. David was originally from Bethlehem in Judah, and first ruled from Hebron, an influential city in Judah, for many years. The Judah connection is evident in the Yahwist's interest in Abraham. The bulk of the Abraham traditions are associated with locations in and around Judah. For example, several Yahwist stories of Abraham have him living in Hebron (Genesis 13:18; 23:2). On the other hand, the Jacob stories are generally located in the north or in Transjordan.

There are other obvious connections between the patriarch Abraham and the kingdom of David. The covenant that God made with Abraham promised that his descendants would possess the land "from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18–21). Not coincidentally, this turns out to be the extent of the nation under King David. Thus, the Yahwist epic provided supportive history and a theological foundation for David's new empire. Going back to its primeval stories, it first exposed the need for an enlightened empire by painting a picture of human sin and natural rebellion. Then, by unfolding the groundwork of the empire in YHWH's promises to Abraham, it revealed the plan of YHWH. David's empire was its culmination.

The Yahwist is bold and honest in his portrayal of Israel's early history. He does not overly glorify the role of YHWH's chosen ones and has a keen eye for human failing. Yet his eye stays fixed on the promises of YHWH, which wend their way to fulfillment within the crucible of Israelite history.

As you read the Pentateuch, watch for these features of the Yahwist

source:

- Divine promises and a curse on disobedience
- Sin as the impulse of humans to become divine
- Geographical locations within Judah
- Use of anthropomorphic imagery in relation to the deity
- Use of the divine name YHWH from beginning to end

Go to the companion website and see the table showing major episodes of the Yahwist narrative and additional details of the Yahwist story line, style, and theology.

## 2.2.2 Elohist Source (E)

The [Elohist source](#) was written after the Yahwist source and was composed in the northern kingdom of Israel in the 800s or early 700s BCE by a priest. The Elohist source gets its name from its use of the Hebrew word *elohim* to refer to the deity. *Elohim* is a general word for God, as opposed to the personal divine name YHWH. The *-im* ending of the word is the typical plural ending of nouns. Occasionally this leads to ambiguity because technically *elohim* could be rendered “gods” or “god.” When the word *elohim* appears in the Hebrew text, typically we will render it Elohim rather than translate it as deity, god, or God. The Elohist source has survived only as fragments that were inserted into the Yahwist narrative. It is not nearly as extensive, at least in its recoverable form, as the other sources.

Fragments of the Elohist source can be found in Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers and maybe even in Joshua and Judges. The Elohist source appears for the first time at Genesis 20 in which Elohim appeared in a dream rather than directly to individuals as we tend to find in the Yahwist epic. The Elohist source favors a distant deity who comes in dreams or in the form of an angel. In contrast to the Yahwist narrative, the Elohist source refers to Sinai as Horeb and to

the Canaanites as Amorites.

The Elohist author lived in the northern kingdom after the breakup of the Davidic kingdom, probably sometime in the 800s BCE. The northern kingdom was ruled by a succession of dynasties. The largest tribal territory in the northern kingdom, called Israel after the breakup, was Ephraim. Because the tribe of Ephraim was immense and politically dominant, the whole northern territory was sometimes called Ephraim. An easy way to remember that this source is from the north is that both Elohist and Ephraim begin with *E*.

The Elohist was a reflective theologian and probably a Levite. Based on his attitudes, he probably did not hold a position in the royal court, but authorities cannot be more precise than this. Whoever he was, his perspective was conditioned by the theological and political difficulties of Israel in the 800s BCE.

While the Yahwist believed that God would overcome the problem of sin and extend blessing to all the families of the earth through the Davidic empire, the Elohist lived at a time when the national mood was less optimistic. Israel was struggling with its identity. The deity seemed distant; the people were spiritually adrift, finding themselves drawn to Canaanite Baal worship. The Levites had something to say about this and drew upon stories that reinforced Israel's special relationship with God.

As you read the Pentateuch, watch for these features of the Elohist source:

- Sensitivity to the moral implications of human decisions
- The fear of God as a recurring human reaction
- God revealing himself in dreams
- Heroic faithful individuals presented as prophets
- Use of the term *Elohim* for deity or the divine name El until the time of Moses, after which it is YHWH

Go to the companion website and see the table showing

major episodes of the Elohist source and additional details of the Elohist story line, style, and theology.

### **2.2.3 Combined Yahwist–Elohist Epic (JE)**

The joining of the Yahwist and Elohist sources into JE—what some scholars call the “Old Epic” tradition and others the “Jehovistic source”—took place shortly after the fall of Israel in 721 BCE. The northern Levite author of the Elohist source fled south to Judah after the Assyrian invasion, taking his writings with him. He ended up in Jerusalem, and King Hezekiah used both the Elohist and Yahwist materials as the manifesto for a national religious revival. Putting these two traditions together supported the legitimacy of the Davidic line, of which Hezekiah was a part, and also promoted the religious and moral devotion that was at the heart of the Elohist tradition.

The Yahwist source remained the primary text, and material from the Elohist source was incorporated into it. It is understandable that the two sources would be joined together. Both had the same basic scope, though the Elohist did not have any preancestral stories, and both the Yahwist and Elohist sources shared the fundamental convictions that YHWH is the God of the Israelites and that he must be worshipped by his people. Perhaps the combination of these two national stories, one from the north and one from the south, also promoted a sense of unity among the people. Those from the north who fled to the south and found a home there after 721 BCE now had a voice in the national story.

### **2.2.4 Deuteronomistic Source (D)**

Scholarly consensus has it that the core of Deuteronomy, or the [Deuteronomistic source](#) (D), is the book that Hilkiah found in the temple and presented to Josiah in 622 BCE (see 2 Kings 22). Thus,

the Deuteronomic source follows the Yahwist, Elohist, and JE sources in composition order. It differs significantly in that it was not combined with the other sources into a larger work. Although the Yahwist, Elohist, and Priestly sources were combined together to create Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, the book of Deuteronomy stands apart from these four books. It does, however, continue the story line of the preceding books and provides the conclusion to the life of Moses.

Deuteronomy also differs from the preceding four books of the Pentateuch in that it is not so much an account of events as it is a collection of Moses's sermons to the Israelites just before they entered the Promised Land. It has a style quite different from that of the preceding books. Most of it is addressed directly to the Israelites.

Deuteronomy is distinctive and has the following characteristics:

- Its core consists of Moses's sermon addresses to the second-generation of Israelites who had left Egypt.
- It takes place in Transjordan immediately before the conquest of Canaan.
- It generally refers to the deity as YHWH and also employs the phrase "*YHWH your Elohim.*"
- It refers to Mount Sinai as Horeb, as does the Elohist source.

Although Deuteronomy was composed later than J and E, it contains traditions such as Deuteronomy 33 that can be traced back to Israel's tribal origins. It appears that Levites, who previously lived in the northern kingdom of Israel, are the ones responsible for preserving this material and shaping it into the book. In this regard, it has certain affinities with the Elohist source. Details of the style and concepts of Deuteronomy will be dealt with in more detail in [Chapter 5](#) of RTOT.

## 2.2.5 Priestly Document (P)



The [Priestly document](#) is the last of the four great Pentateuchal documents. It comes out of the circle of priests who revived Israel's soul after the political and spiritual tragedy of the Babylonian exile. Judah had been conquered by the Babylonians in the early 500s BCE, and many survivors of the disaster were taken to Babylonia as refugees. The trauma of this exile prompted the survivors to conclude that the tragedy happened because they had forsaken their covenant with God. In exile they were at risk of losing their social and religious identity, so priests took the initiative to sustain the faith of the refugees and rebuild their identity. In the absence of temple worship, these priests gave traditional religious practices new significance, particularly the observance of the Sabbath day and the covenant ritual of circumcision.

The Priestly source is usually dated to the period of the Babylonian exile (587–539 BCE) or to the postexilic period immediately thereafter. The priests recovered and recorded religious traditions so that the identity of the community would not be lost. They sought to reinforce covenant practices in repentance for past neglect and to avert a subsequent and possibly worse tragedy in the future.

The Priestly tradition also dealt with the problem of defining Judean faith in contrast to Babylonian religion. How do other nations and empires fit into our God's plan? How can we affirm the power of our YHWH when we live in a world dominated by Babylonians, who trumpet the power of their god, Marduk? Why does our God seem to be silent as we suffer? By addressing such issues in its writings and rituals, priestly theology sought to adapt Israelite faith to circumstances in the 500s BCE.

The writer of the Priestly source envisioned a world ordered and controlled by YHWH. Israel's history was progressing according to their deity's predetermined plan. God was in total control, and the world was secure and stable. Israel's relationship with YHWH was ordered by covenant. Even when Israel alienated itself from its deity,

there were sacrifices and rituals that could atone for faithlessness. Indeed, YHWH was a demanding God, but what he wanted was to bless Israel. These assurances inspired hope in the hearts of demoralized and struggling Israelites.

As you read the Pentateuch, watch for these features of the Priestly source:

- Divine blessing becomes evident in population growth.
- Covenants define stages in human relationships with the deity.
- Genealogies indicate connections among individuals and peoples.
- Priests have prominent social and religious roles within the community.
- References to the deity change from Elohim in the primeval period, to El Shaddai in the ancestral period, ending with YHWH in the Mosaic period.

Go to the companion website and see the table showing major episodes of the Priestly document and additional details of the Priestly story line, style, and theology.

[Table 2](#) shows the characteristics of all the sources.

**TABLE 2** Characteristics of the Sources

|                     | Yahwist Source | Elohist Source                            | Deuteronomic Source | Priestly Source                                                          |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Abbreviation</i> | J              | E                                         | D                   | P                                                                        |
| Dates BCE           | 900s           | 800–700s                                  | 600s                | 500–400s                                                                 |
| Location            | Judah          | Israel                                    | Judah               | Exile or Judah                                                           |
| Divine designation  | YHWH           | Elohim<br>El<br>YHWH beginning with Moses | YHWH                | Elohim (primeval story)<br>El Shaddai (ancestral story)<br>YHWH (Israel) |

## 2.3 Current Status of the Documentary

# Hypothesis

Academic biblical scholarship never stands still; one generation's "assured" results will inevitably be reexamined and revised by the next generation. This is certainly the case with the classical documentary hypothesis. Although some scholars continue to reject source analysis outright because it conflicts with their preconceived notions of divine inspiration and biblical authorship, many scholars accept the general outlines of the theory. The hypothesis continues to be taken seriously by scholars and continues to be taught because it takes the data of the text seriously and tries to make sense of it. Just because features of the hypothesis continue to be debated does not mean that thinking about the Torah as the result of a lengthy process of composition is in question.

Recent scholarly discussion regarding the documentary hypothesis strives to align it more accurately with other literary and historical research generated in the field of biblical studies. On the basis of linguistic data, Friedman (2003) advocates an earlier date for the Priestly source, placing it shortly after JE rather than the traditional exilic/postexilic date. The coherence of the Yahwist narrative and the claim that it is the epic core of the Pentateuch has been called into question (see Dozeman and Schmid, 2006). The existence of an originally independent Elohist source has always been problematic. There has also been more focus on the composition history of the reputed individual sources J, E, D, and P themselves. Despite such uncertainties and questions of detail, the field has established that the Torah has a composition history spanning many centuries, and there is no going back to the time before the documentary hypothesis.

Go to the companion website for a discussion of the documentary hypothesis: refinements, revisions, and alternate hypotheses.

The documentary hypothesis has continued to be a force in biblical studies—attested, for example, by the popularity of Friedman’s many books and articles that continue to promote it—and needs to be understood by all students of the biblical text. Any recent decline in interest is due more to new ways of reading the Torah than to questions about the theory’s validity. Newer approaches tend more to focus on the overall literary shape of the text (structuralism and new literary criticism), or on conceptual relationships to other biblical books (canonical criticism), or on the way these texts have shaped or can shape social and cultural values (liberationist and postcolonial criticism).

Whether the sources were oral or written or a combination of both is not entirely clear. When they arose is not clear either. Still, for many students of the Torah, continuing to view it as having arisen out of a combination of basic sources is a productive way to begin thinking about the shape of the literature and the theology of the writers. Reference to sources and their implied background permeates scholarship on the Torah and continues to be actively employed. One cannot join the conversation on the Pentateuch without a knowledge of source analysis.

The use of source analysis in RTOT does not imply a full endorsement of it. It is used alongside other reading techniques, including literary and linguistic analysis, form criticism, canonical criticism, and postmodern perspectives. All these methods together constitute the toolkit of an informed readership. Our goal as students of the text is to immerse ourselves in the narrative of the Hebrew Bible, and the use of these methods forces all of us to face the Bible on its own terms. Reading the text closely is where the real fun of interpretation begins. If these methods help us attend more closely to the text and our context of reading it, then they are worth using.

### **3 NARRATIVE DESIGN**

If we read the Torah with our eyes focused only on the microfeatures of the text, especially if we are looking for underlying sources, we risk overlooking the architectural unity of the text. The Torah has a remarkable wholeness and unity that overcomes the complexity of its composition, and we need to note and affirm this before we dig into the texts themselves. Keeping the macrostructure in mind will serve to keep our close readings in perspective.

The Torah achieves its narrative unity in a number of ways. First of all, the story moves in linear fashion from Creation through the period of ancestors to the nation of Israel, and this makes it easy to follow. The deity who directs this story retains the same character and upholds the same promises throughout, even if he is known by different names at different times. The following sections describe other complementary schemes that work together to achieve narrative unity.

### **3.1 Priestly Covenants**

The Yahwist narrative may have been responsible for the backbone of the event line in Genesis involving the creation of humanity, the first rebellious impulses, and the turn to Abraham. This sequence set the parameters of God's challenge to create a people obedient to him. The Elohist source supplemented this story line, and the Priestly writers added their own episodes and created continuity to the event line by using genealogies.

In addition, the Priestly writer employed a series of covenants to add theological structure to Israel's relationship with God and a macrostructure organization to history. In the biblical world, a **covenant** was a basic structure, a legal metaphor, whereby two parties pledge their abiding commitment. The general schema of history developed by the Priestly writer is worked out in three covenants ([Table 3](#)). Each covenant was accompanied by a

distinctive indicator or sign, labeled with the Hebrew word *‘ot*, as evidence that it was in force. The Priestly writer also distinguished each era by the name that the deity used to make himself known to people.

### 3.1.1 Creation Covenant

Elohim made the first covenant with all living things through Noah after the Flood. The covenant contains the promise that God will never again destroy the earth by flood and gave the rainbow as a natural sign of hope. This is the first recorded covenant in the Hebrew Bible. It established a binding relationship between God and the earth. In this covenant, there is no reciprocity, no return pledge of loyalty from humankind or any other creature. All living things are the gracious recipient of God’s promise to preserve life indefinitely. The rainbow signifies God’s eternal commitment to this covenant.

**TABLE 3** Covenants and Signs

The Priestly source contributes a sequence of three covenants to the narrative that function to structure it into three successive historical periods. Each period has a distinctive way in which people relate to the deity.

| Period    | Party         | Deity      | Mediator | Sign         | <i>‘ot</i> Text  |
|-----------|---------------|------------|----------|--------------|------------------|
| Primeval  | All creatures | Elohim     | Noah     | Rainbow      | Genesis 9:12     |
| Ancestral | Patriarchs    | El Shaddai | Abraham  | Circumcision | Genesis 17:11    |
| Israelite | All Israel    | YHWH       | Moses    | Sabbath      | Exodus 31:13, 17 |

### 3.1.2 Ancestral Covenant

The [ancestral covenant](#) through Abraham, recorded in Genesis 17, is more restricted, being tribal in scope. In this covenant, God assures the ancestral family that it will become a nation under his

care and protection. This covenant differs from the creation covenant in that it required the ancestral family to demonstrate commitment on its part: the circumcision of all males in the ancestral household.

### 3.1.3 Israelite Covenant

The third great Priestly covenant was mediated by Moses at Mount Sinai and marks the last defining moment of divine–human bonding in the Priestly history. This covenant, made with all the people of Israel, was regulated by an extensive set of laws and regulations, which are now contained in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The people expressed their solidarity with God in this covenant by observing the Sabbath day, called the “*sign of the covenant*” in Exodus 31:12–18, and by keeping the other laws.

### 3.1.4 Covenant and Exile

Each of the three covenants marks a significant development in God’s covenantal relationship with Israel. Each covenant has a specific sign attached to it whereby the continuation of the covenant would be evident. The special importance of the last two signs becomes clear in the context of the origin of the Priestly source in the Babylonian exile. All three are called *eternal covenants* (Genesis 9:16, 17:7; Exodus 31:16), and the signs of circumcision and Sabbath observance became the covenant community’s primary identifying symbols in the exilic period and after.

During those times when the people were expatriates, as the result of conquest and deportation or by choice, these rituals became the primary means of expressing religious affiliation because they could be practiced anywhere. Even though the people might not be in Jerusalem—the only place where temple rituals and sacrifices could be rightly performed—they could still do their religious duty by performing circumcision and observing the Sabbath.

## 3.2 Promissory Structure

In addition to the series of Priestly covenants that structure history, the Torah views Israel's experience as the fulfillment of divine promises. It presents Israel's history as goal oriented and divinely driven. The promises specifically concerned posterity, eventually leading to nationhood, a homeland, and a perpetual divine presence.

Clines (1978: 29) argues that promise is the heart of the Torah:

The theme of the Pentateuch is the partial fulfillment—which implies also the partial non-fulfillment—of the promise to or blessing of the patriarchs. The promise or blessing is both the divine initiative in a world where human initiatives always lead to disaster, and a re-affirmation of the primal divine intentions for man. The promise has three elements: posterity, divine-human relationship, and land. The posterity-element of the promise is dominant in Genesis 12–50, the relationship-element in Exodus and Leviticus, and the land-element in Numbers and Deuteronomy.

If promise and fulfillment are the defining issues of the Torah, then the question must be asked why the Torah ends without fulfillment. Deuteronomy concludes with the death of Moses and the Israelites on the edge of the Promised Land without possession of it. This tension raised a rather large issue that bears on the overall meaning of the Torah and concerns how Deuteronomy relates to the preceding four books.

By the end of the fifth century BCE, there were two major collections of material. The first was constituted by JEP and consists of Genesis through Numbers. Scholars call this the [Tetrateuch](#) (on analogy with the term Pentateuch)—a set of four books. The second was Deuteronomy through Kings, the Deuteronomistic history (we



will study this in depth in RTOT, [Part 2](#)). The Tetrateuch covered the early history of the nation from creation to conquest. The Deuteronomistic history told the story of the rise and fall of Israel, from conquest to exile. Each collection has its own integrity and perspective.

The compilers of the Hebrew Bible did not, however, divide their material along these lines; the major break in the canon comes after Deuteronomy, not before it. Theologically speaking, a Tetrateuch would be more natural because those books share the three sources J, E, and P. Why then did the early Jewish community of faith structure the early books as a Pentateuch and not a Tetrateuch when they designed the Hebrew Bible?

The answer has a great deal to do with when and where the Torah took shape. The Torah was formed in an exilic or early postexilic setting to provide a theological vision for the Jewish people. These people came to reside not just in Palestine but also throughout the Persian Empire. Those who survived the exile needed a narrative and legal tradition that could ground their communal and religious life. The priests naturally turned to Moses as the great lawgiver. Because, in addition to Exodus through Numbers, Deuteronomy provided legal material attributed to Moses, it was included in this core community document, thus creating a Pentateuch.

More particularly, the Torah took shape as a document for a people “on the road,” which is to say, an alienated and disparate people who have not yet reached the Promised Land. For many, it was still a geographical alienation; for most, it was also a spiritual and existential alienation. In positing a Pentateuch, with the resulting major break falling between Deuteronomy and Joshua, the community of faith affirmed this basic historical and theological fact: The people of YHWH are continually moving from promise to fulfillment. They have not yet “arrived”—they never really do. Like Moses, the exilic and postexilic people can only view the Promised Land from a distance. By not including the conquest of Canaan, as recorded in the

book of Joshua, the hope of these people resonated with that of their forefathers. Like their forefathers, they too would gain possession of the land . . . someday. The structure of the Pentateuch affirms that YHWH's people are ever and always a community of hope.

## **4 TEXT AND HISTORY**

The Torah begins at the beginning with the Creation. The exact date of creation presumably could be calculated by following the genealogical notices of the Hebrew Bible—many genealogies provide life spans—and working backward. Bishop James Ussher (1581–1656) did just that and determined that the universe was born on 4004 BCE. Based on the Priestly genealogies of Genesis 1–11, the span from the Creation to the Flood was 1656 years and from the Flood to Abraham, 290 years. Because these genealogies incorporate immense life spans, as many as 969 years in the case of Methuselah, they are of questionable value in determining real dates. Yet Ussher's chronology was widely accepted and was printed in the margins of many Bibles even into the twentieth century.

Of course, establishing the chronology of the Hebrew Bible is not quite so simple, and contemporary science tells us that the universe is at least 15 billion years old. Here is what we can say about Torah and time. The books of the Torah are in chronological order, with events moving in a linear fashion from Creation through the ancestors and into the period of Moses and early Israel. But there is no Torah-internal dating scheme that positions events absolutely in reference to each other, nothing like the notations BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era) that we use today.

Within the Hebrew Bible, the Exodus out of Egypt seems to be the pivotal point of history, and other events are dated in reference to it. For example, Aaron's death (Numbers 33:38) and the construction of the temple (1 Kings 6:1) are specified relative to the Exodus. The

internal evidence for the ancestral period enables us to determine that the time from Abraham's migration to Canaan until Jacob and his family moved to Egypt was 215 years; the length of time that the Hebrews were in Egypt was 430 years (Exodus 12:40). After the Exodus, Israel remained in the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan for 40 years.

The time indication that can be correlated most directly with absolute chronology is the 480 years from the Exodus to the beginning of temple construction in Solomon's fourth year, as stated in 1 Kings 6:1. Because the fourth year of Solomon's reign can be dated to 964 BCE, this places the Exodus in 1444 BCE. Unfortunately, this conflicts with the evidence of Exodus 1:11, which mentions that the Hebrews were engaged as slaves to build the Egyptian cities Pithom and Rameses. These cities in turn have been associated with the reign of the pharaoh Ramses II (1290–1224 BCE). The result is a discrepancy of approximately two centuries. Based on the confluence of archaeological, historical, and textual evidence, the generally accepted date of the Hebrews' Exodus from Egypt is around 1280 BCE.

There is no definitive way to locate the ancestors within absolute chronology. There is no external Egyptian or Mesopotamian evidence that can verify when or even if the patriarchs and matriarchs existed. About all that authorities are left with is to infer from circumstantial evidence when Abraham, Sarah, and the other ancestors best fit in, based on linguistic and cultural features of the biblical stories about them. Some interpreters place them in the Middle Bronze I Age (2000–1800 BCE). This is based primarily on the description of the ancestors as seminomadic clans similar to the Amorites who moved through the Old Babylonian Empire, as described in documents from the ancient Mesopotamian city of Mari. Other interpreters place them in the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BCE), based on certain social practices that are attested at another ancient city called Nuzi.

So-called historical minimalist scholars argue that the ancestral

stories were written very late and that we should not infer that the events really happened or even that the ancestors ever existed (see Davies, 2000). Others argue that the stories, although admittedly written well after the fact, retain a valid remembrance of historical figures and fit what we know of the second millennium based on other sources (see Dever, 2000, and Maidman, 2006). With Moses and early Israel, the situation is only slightly better. Though Moses is not attested outside the Bible, there are some clues in Exodus that may provide connections to Egyptian and Palestinian history (the relevant data will be treated later in the appropriate chapters of RTOT).

Uncertainties regarding biblical chronology and the question of the very existence of the early figures of biblical history inevitably raise the question of the Bible's [historicity](#). Readers may want to know if the events described in the Torah—and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible for that matter—are fictional or true. And if they happened, was it in the way described? Our discussion of the written traditions of the Torah suggests this is not an easy issue. The biblical text that we have before us is surely not a firsthand travelogue, nor can it be in its entirety an eyewitness record of what happened. It has been deliberately shaped and molded so as to present Israel's historical experience in a way relevant to the concerns at the times it was written.

This is not to suggest that subversive or misleading intentions lurk behind the process. Rather, the contemporary framing of past experience is inevitable, and it is a good and necessary thing. All history writing is a selective and intentional appropriation of the past. Recollection of the past on the part of biblical writers is imperfect at best, which is no doubt especially the case with the earliest historical eras of the book of Genesis. All history writing is done inevitably from a certain point of view that incorporates the writer's individual personality and larger cultural setting. Source analysis in all its forms and permutations attempts to identify just

such factors.

Although there is a necessary subjectivity to history writing, this does not imply that all history writing is equally subjective. Some writing may be more or less faithful to the events themselves, and personal or political agendas may distort that writer's account of events. That is why critical study of the biblical text, indeed of all writing, is essential. Understanding a text involves more than just understanding what the words mean. It also involves grasping the reasons why it was written, in light of who wrote it and when. This is an imperfect science, an impossible achievement, yet a necessary goal.

It's also a fascinating one, especially where the biblical text is concerned. The Hebrew Bible presents us with an account of Israel's history and ancestors. By reading between the lines, it also presents us with how Israel's thinkers interpreted these events and how they related these events to their concept of deity. By doing our historical and literary research, we are able to reconstruct their worldview—their construal of human experience in the context of divine reality.

With all serious study, there can be a range of positions on the basic issues. When it comes to the study of Israel's historical works, this is especially true. On one side are those who accept every historical statement in the Hebrew Bible as fact, pure and simple. Often such readers are predisposed to the Bible's complete accuracy out of their conviction that it must be inerrant if it is the word of God. On the other side are those who are suspicious of every biblical statement and tend to consider the text fundamentally unreliable because the biblical writers believed that a God actually intervened in human history. Such readers are sometimes called historical minimalists and tend to view all Torah sources as late.

This book is somewhere in the middle. It values the contributions of modern studies of the Pentateuch and advocates their use as a means to enter into the mind and worldview of the ancient writers. While it takes a rational, or what is in biblical studies called a

historical–critical, approach to the text, RTOT also honors the Hebrew Bible as a sacred text. Of course, this position will be unsatisfying to parties on the poles, with precritical readers charging that it tears apart the Bible and hypercritical readers charging that a moderate position is historically naive. No doubt the debate will continue long after this book is out of print.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Mosaic authorship*. What are the main arguments for and against Mosaic authorship of the Torah?
2. *Documentary hypothesis*. Why did the modern study of the Pentateuch give rise to the documentary hypothesis? Why and in what ways has source theory been questioned in recent scholarship?
3. *Source documents*. What are the four literary sources of the Pentateuch according to the documentary hypothesis? What are the distinguishing characteristics of the sources?
4. *Torah themes*. What are some unifying themes of the Torah?
5. *Historicity*. What is the most probable date for the time of Moses? What problems arise in trying to establish dates for the early figures of Israel's history?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Composition*. How might compositional issues in the study of the Torah affect your attitude toward the biblical text and its truth value?
2. *Factuality*. Is it important to prove that Israel's ancestors and Moses actually existed?

# READING THE TEXT TODAY

*The Five Books of Moses*, by E. Fox (1995), is a translation of the Torah done in such a way that it recovers the rhythm and power of the original language more effectively than most other renditions. It expresses all names in their Hebrew phonetic form, which has the effect of making the text more authentic and culturally distant, which it most certainly is. For close study of the Pentateuch in the mode of the documentary hypothesis, *Sources of the Pentateuch: Texts, Introductions, Annotations*, by A. F. Campbell and M. A. O'Brien (1993, 2000), is indispensable. It provides the source documents in continuous form, along with detailed notes and conceptual summaries.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Genesis 1–11: The Primeval Story

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Creation to the Flood \(1–7\)](#)

[3 Re-Creation to the Ancestors \(8–11\)](#)

[4 Composition of Genesis 1–11](#)

---

### KEY TERMS

[Abel](#)

[Adam/\*adamah\*](#)

[Apsu](#)

[Babel/\*Babylon\*](#)

[Blessing](#)

[Cain](#)

[Chaos](#)

[Cosmology](#)

[Covenant](#)

[Creation](#)

[Divine Council](#)

[Eden](#)

[Enuma Elish](#)

[Eve](#)

[Fall](#)

[Flood](#)

[Genealogy](#)

[Gilgamesh Epic](#)

[Ham](#)

[Image of God](#)



[Inclusion](#)

[Japheth](#)

[LORD God](#)

[Marduk](#)

[Myth](#)

[Noah](#)

[Original sin](#)

[Primeval Story](#)

[Sabbath](#)

[Shem](#)

[Tiamat](#)

[Toledot](#)

[Tower of Babel](#)

[Waters of chaos](#)

[Ziggurat](#)

## **William Blake's *Elohim Creating Adam***

Blake's painting powerfully depicts the creation of the first man; see the companion website for the complete picture. The book of Genesis provides two depictions of the creation of humans, one describing the creation of humanity as a whole and the other describing the creation of the first male person.



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on William Blake (1757–1827) *Elohim Creating Adam*, 1795 (London: Tate Museum).

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The Bible opens with the famous line “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” This sentence asserts an essential belief of Jewish and Christian faith, the belief that the deity of Jews and Christians is the creator of the world. So why have scholars haggled over the meaning of this line for centuries? And why has it become a wedge issue in the modern battle between biblical belief and modern science? To be able to answer these questions, we need to read the text and read it closely.

**TABLE 1.1** The Book of Genesis

| RTOT Chapters | Genesis | Narrative       |
|---------------|---------|-----------------|
| 1             | 1–11    | Primeval Story  |
| 2             | 12–50   | Ancestral Story |

The [Primeval Story](#) whisks us back in time to ultimate origins—hence the term *primeval*. The narrative takes us to the earliest imaginable time, the time of cosmic beginnings, where we witness the formation of a world where life can thrive. The very first word of the Hebrew text, *bereshit*, “in the beginning,” became the book’s biblical name. As the book describes the Creation of the world, along the way it reveals the basic features of Israel’s worldview, including its concepts of deity and the nature of humanity. Later, the book of Genesis relates the origin of the nation of Israel by telling tales of its ancestors.

Genesis is so full of stories that have become so important in the Western world that it takes two chapters to unpack. In this text, [Chapter 1](#) covers Genesis 1–11 and is called the Primeval Story; [Chapter 2](#) covers Genesis 12–50 and is called the Ancestral Story ([Table 1.1](#)).

# 1.1 The Primeval Story: A Summary

God created a world of light, sky, sea, land, and living things in six days and rested on the seventh day (Genesis [Chapter 1](#)). The first humans were formed directly by the deity and in such a way that they could relate to their maker. Male and female were placed in the comfortable world of [Eden](#) where they communed with God daily (2). Though living contentedly, they were cleverly misled by a snake into disobeying the direct divine command not to eat from a certain tree. As a consequence, God cursed all three and expelled the humans from the garden (3). The first couple had offspring that typified both the worst of sin, when their son [Cain](#) killed his brother [Abel](#), and the best of culture as their offspring built cities, developed animal husbandry and agriculture, and cultivated arts and technology (4). As generations of humans multiplied (5), so did sin, prompting the deity to staunch its growth with the Flood (6). Only righteous [Noah](#) stood apart. He and his immediate family, along with a representative sample of living creatures, survived in a divinely designed boat (7). After the world and its creatures perished, God remembered Noah, and the waters subsided (8). God made a covenant with Noah pledging that there would never again be a flood to destroy the world. But the problem with people had not been wiped away with the Flood; Noah's episode of drunkenness and Ham's behavior proved that human perversity still remained (9). Nonetheless, humanity grew in number and spread throughout the world (10). To make a name for themselves, humans united to build a massive tower ascending heavenward. This threatened God's sovereignty, so he frustrated their plans by confounding their ability to communicate, scattering them abroad (11). The Primeval Story ends with the genealogy of Shem, to whom Abraham traced his lineage. Through this first father of Israel, the deity reestablished a promising relationship with humanity.

## 1.2 Study Guide

1. Identify the core events of the Primeval Story and order them in relative chronological sequence. The Primeval Story contains key components of a biblical master narrative: The deity created both a world and humans to live in it, humans disobeyed the deity and were punished for it, and humans populated the world with both positive and negative results.
2. Compare and contrast the literary styles of the major episodes and notice differences in detail so that you can understand why scholars believe that the Primeval Story was compiled out of originally separate documents.
3. Complete the end-of-chapter “Discussion Questions” to gain direct experience reading key passages.
4. Consider the Primeval Story as a totality and ponder what its holistic meaning might be. Then reconsider what the individual episodes in the story, such as the Creation stories and the Flood story, might mean in relation to that overall notion.

## 2 CREATION TO THE FLOOD (1–7)

The Primeval Story can be thought of as a two-part narrative. The second part mirrors the development of the first part but ends in a decidedly different way. The first part of the story begins with waters (1:2) and ends with the return of those waters (7:24). That is, God created an inhabitable world out of the waters of [chaos](#) and then removed that world with the return of the waters. The second part sees God recreate the world and repopulate it with the creatures that had been preserved in Noah’s ark. As the first part sees creation out of the deeps, the second sees recreation after the Flood. A structural analysis confirms this division. As revealed by those boring (but by no means pointless) genealogies, there are ten generations from

Adam to Noah and ten from Shem, Noah's son, to Abram (whose name was changed to Abraham in Genesis 17).

## 2.1 Creation (1–3)

Before we dive into the waters of Genesis 1, it is worth noticing that the Hebrew Bible makes reference to divine [Creation](#) in a variety of places, not just at the beginning of Genesis. One of the issues to probe is why the Bible includes stories of creation at all. Anthropologists tell us that most cultures have creation accounts (see Sproul, 1979), but these creation myths served a variety of different purposes. They had social value beyond providing stories to children who inevitably ask “why” questions.

The Hebrew Bible references the Creation in a variety of Psalms, including number 33 that counsels everyone to fear YHWH because he created the world. Creation is a theme of wisdom literature; for example, Proverbs 8:22–31 claims that wisdom was present with the deity at Creation and was the craftsman that brought all things into being. The biblical prophet Second Isaiah in 40:12–31 uses creation to affirm the adequacy of YHWH's power to deliver his people from captivity. Each of these texts uses creation concepts in service of a larger point that the writer needed to make. None of the texts are purely informational—that is, giving us facts about creation just for the sake of cognitive enlightenment. These are the questions that we will ask ourselves: What points do the two Genesis Creation stories make? How did they serve the needs of the Israelites in their time and place?

Despite the prevalence of creation talk in the Hebrew Bible, certainly the most well-known creation statements come out of the book of Genesis. As suggested above, it contains not just one but two accounts of the Creation. The first one is characterized by the use of the Hebrew term *elohim* to refer to the deity. The Elohim account of

the Creation is just one of a number of Elohim passages in Genesis that uses this reference for the deity, and the passages have other features in common. When taken as a collection, these texts seem dominated by God's initiatives, and they view the gift of supernatural blessing as the source of all life and goodness. Most translations of the Hebrew Bible render *elohim* as God, though this term can more accurately be rendered "deity" or "god." Capitalizing *elohim* as God might suggest the term is a name, which it is not, rather than a common noun.

The second Creation account was actually composed earlier than the Elohim account, even though it follows in serial order. It uses the phrase "*YHWH Elohim*" to refer to the deity. YHWH is how the Hebrew text represents the personal name of Israel's deity, often rendered Yahweh. The collection of these YHWH episodes of the Primeval Story often deal with the challenges of human freedom and responsibility and the resulting problem of sin. The YHWH story of the first humans was expertly combined with the Elohim big-picture story of world beginnings to give us the text that we have today.

### **2.1.1 Priestly "Elohim" Creation Story (1:1–2:4a)**

The Elohim Creation story opens with an earth that was "*shapeless and void.*" This world was dominated by vast depths of threatening and unruly water. Into this wilderness of water, the deity injected the divine voice and brought forth life, along with the means to sustain it. First came light, then the firmament to control the waters, and then land and vegetation to sustain terrestrial creatures. In succession, the deity created birds, fish, land animals, and human beings.

The individual creative acts were spread over six days and culminated in the creation of human beings as the image of Elohim. The deity gave humans charge of the entire realm, both to care for

and make use of it. On the seventh day, later termed the [Sabbath](#), Elohim ceased creating and rested, satisfied that everything was very good.

### ***Pre-Creation: Waters of Chaos***

*When Elohim began to create heaven and earth, and the earth was untamed and shapeless, and darkness was on the surface of the deep water, and the wind/spirit of Elohim hovering on the surface of the water. ... (1:1–2)*

These first two verses of the Elohim Creation story describe the world before God shaped it into a life-sustaining environment. Then come the six days in which God created the elements of this new world. Lastly, the seventh day marks the grand conclusion of the process by the absence of creating activity.

This account of Creation uses the term *Elohim* to refer to God throughout. It is Israel's most neutral and general way of referring to a divine being and might be thought to suggest a distant and powerful divine being. The account tells us nothing about the deity's qualities or characteristics, only that when deity commands, things instantly appear. Although the text later describes how the world came into being, from the beginning it simply assumes the existence of God, with no word at all of where this being came from. In fact, nowhere does the Hebrew Bible even speculate on God's origins. God is simply there, no explanation needed or expected. Nor does anything in the text suggest that this deity is specifically the Israelite God, apart from the fact that it is used in an Israelite text written in Hebrew. The term *elohim* may have been chosen deliberately here because it is the most universal term for God.

Ancient Middle Eastern texts can be difficult to interpret because their language is challenging and may not be perfectly understood and because their cultural context is far removed and only vaguely appreciated. Both problems are evident, for example, when we try to

understand these first verses of Genesis. They can be translated in at least three different ways, all of which are linguistically possible. The first option takes verse 1 as an independent statement: “*In the beginning Elohim created heaven and earth.*” This reading implies that the writer posited an absolute beginning to the world. The second option reads it as a temporal statement followed by the main assertion: “*When in the beginning Elohim created heaven and earth, the earth was untamed and shapeless.*” This reading suggests that the writer was more interested in the condition of the world at the time God started creating it, rather than in positing an absolute beginning.

The third option is similar to the second in reading the first part as the temporal setting, but then it also reads the whole of verse 2 as background information. In this reading, the main assertion consists of verse 3: “*When in the beginning Elohim created heaven and earth—earth being untamed and shapeless ...—Elohim said, ‘Let there be light.’*”

Variant readings of the first verses of Genesis have long been debated, most famously by two medieval Jewish interpreters (see Wenham, 1987). Rashi (1040–1105) read the first words temporally and the creation of light as the main clause (option 3): “*When God began to create ... God said, ‘Let there be light.’*” Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092–1167) also read the first words temporally but read the clause that immediately follows as the main clause (option 2): “*When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was unformed and untamed.*” Modern English translations evidence the same range of options ([Table 1.2](#)).

The issue might seem of little significance at first glance, but it bears directly on the question of whether God created the world out of nothing, termed *creation ex nihilo* in classical theology, or whether there was an already-existing substance that God tamed and shaped into an ordered world. The doctrine of creation from nothing, if not implicitly found here, is found explicitly for the first time in 2



Maccabees 7:28, which postdates the Hebrew Bible. Even if option 1 is chosen, it could be understood to be the title or topic statement of the episode rather than a proposition positing an act of creation, as if to say, “This is the in-the-beginning-God-created story.”

**TABLE 1.2** Modern Translations of Genesis 1:1–3

| Verse | NKJV (Option 1)                                                                                                                                        | NRSV (Option 2)                                                                                                                          | NJPS (Option 3)                                                                                                                   |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | <i>In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.</i>                                                                                         | <i>In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,</i>                                                                      | <i>When God began to create heaven and earth—</i>                                                                                 |
| 2     | <i>The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.</i> | <i>The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.</i> | <i>the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—</i> |
| 3     | <i>Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.</i>                                                                                       | <i>Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.</i>                                                                         | <i>God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.</i>                                                                       |

On the basis of ancient literary parallels, an argument can be made for options 2 and 3 over 1, in which case the second verse contains a description of the universe before God started ordering and creating the preexisting material. This material was probably imagined as a mass of murky water-stuff that scholars refer to as the [waters of chaos](#); as such it could not support life.

The phrase “*deep water*” (1:2) used here is an important clue connecting our story to other ancient Middle Eastern creation stories. The Hebrew word behind “deep water” is related to the Akkadian word *tiamat*, which names the ocean goddess in the Mesopotamian creation story called the Enuma Elish. It signifies not just bottomless oceans but the threatening waters of Mesopotamian lore that its ancient people feared would be their undoing. The role of the deity is to subdue the personified waters before building a world.

Go to the companion website for a discussion of the Enuma Elish, the most influential Mesopotamian creation myth, featuring Tiamat, Apsu, and Marduk.

A variety of ancient myths describe a cosmic battle with water at the beginning of time. The personified ocean, portrayed as a monster, is variously called Sea (Yamm), River (Nahar), Snake (Lotan/Leviathan), Dragon (Tannin), or Arrogance (Rahab). In such myths, the high god subdues the waters after a battle and restrains the villain of primeval chaos, thus achieving victory. In Genesis 1, the description of the move from chaos to cosmos is not explicitly described as battle, but many scholars find tell-tale remnants of the cosmic myth here and elsewhere in biblical literature (see McCurley, 1983; Levenson, 1988; Batto, 1992).

### ***Day 1: Light***

*Then Elohim said, "Let there be light!" And there was light. Elohim saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. Elohim called the light day and the darkness he called night. Evening and morning of day one came about. (1:3–5)*

God's work of creating things begins at verse 3, and the means is not physical activity but speech: When the deity speaks, things appear! This suggests that the deity was intentionally pictured here on analogy with royal figures—a king is typically the supreme one whose word is law and at whose mere utterance things happen.

The first element that God created was light. It is the material precondition of life. It also has connotations of goodness, warmth, and safety, especially when contrasted with the damp darkness of chaos. The creating activity of this day is curious, at least from a Western scientific perspective. God first created light and only later, on the fourth day, the sun. Given a moment's pause, we would consider that the order should be reversed or that the two events should be simultaneous. After all, everyone knows that light comes from the sun—so how can there be a first day and night without it? This is one of many pieces of textual evidence indicating that the

Creation story was not designed to be a science textbook. The writer had a different orientation and probably had other intentions than providing a procedurally correct account of the physical process. The text was shaped around a somewhat artificial sequence driven by its own internal logic; it highlights the order of God at the expense of scientific precision.

## ***Day 2: Super Dome***

*Elohim said, “Let there be a barrier in the middle of the water, a separator between water and water.” Elohim made the barrier and separated the water under the barrier from the water above the barrier. And it happened. Elohim called the barrier heavens. So evening and morning of a second day came about. (1:6–8)*

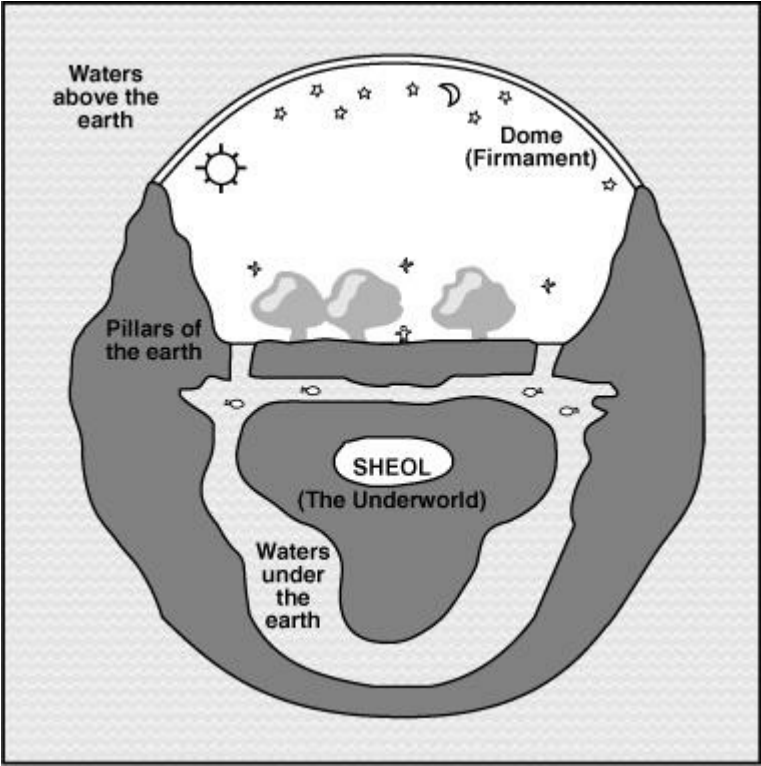
On the second day, God created a solid barrier to separate the original waters of chaos into two massive bodies of water. This barrier is called a *firmament*, *dome*, or *expanse*, depending on your version. To understand what God accomplished, it helps to visualize biblical [cosmology](#)—that is, the Hebrew Bible’s picture of the universe ([Figure 1.1](#)).

People of the ancient Middle East, including the Israelites, believed that the inhabited earth existed as an island surrounded completely by water. Its existence was precarious at best because the waters that surround the inhabited earth always threatened to break through its levees and inundate the ground. This barrier gets the designation Heaven (KJV) or Sky (NRSV) or “the sky” (NAB).

There were two great bodies of water: one above the sky, the source of rain and snow, and one below the sky, the source of oceans, lakes, rivers, and wells. While strange to us, this design made perfect sense to prescientific Mesopotamian minds, and it is not difficult to see why. Beyond the sky on a clear day there is a vast blueness, very close to the hue of the ocean. One can imagine that someone gazing

toward the horizon of the Persian Gulf or the Mediterranean Sea would see the water blend into sky, suggesting that they were made out of the same material. It is not surprising that these ancient peoples thought water lay beyond the sky in the heavens. They may have asked, “Where do rain and snow come from?” And their answer may have been that God opens the windows of heaven and releases them in measured amounts. This they could understand, but they knew nothing about the cycle of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation.

**FIGURE 1.1** Ancient Middle Eastern Cosmology



Israel shared a common cosmology with its neighbors. It has been referred to as the three-tiered universe. It is evident, for example, in the Decalogue’s rule prohibiting material images of God, “*whether*

*in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Exodus 20:4 NRSV)—the sky, earth, and sea of days 2 and 3 of Creation.*

### ***Day 3: Dry Land and Vegetation***

*Elohim said, “Let the water under the heavens be gathered to one place and let dry land appear.” And it happened. Elohim called the dry ground earth and the waters gathered to one place he called seas. Elohim saw that it was good. Elohim said, “Let the earth sprout greenery on the earth, seed-producing plants, fruit trees producing fruit according to their type. And it happened. The earth brought forth greenery, seed-producing plants according to their type, and trees producing fruit which have their seed in it. Elohim saw that it was good. So evening and morning of a third day came about. (1:9–13)*

At the end of the second day, the water under the barrier was still mixed with what was to become dry land. These two elements were separated on the third day. The dry land was called earth, and the water was called sea. As a second act, the ground sprouted plants that could propagate themselves. The work of Creation took the shape of separating, gathering, and growing. Thus, by the end of three days God had created a foundational environment with light, the heavens, the seas, and the earth.

### ***Day 4: Sky Lights***

*Elohim said, “Let there be lights in the barrier of the heavens to separate day and night, and let them be used for signs, seasons, days, and years. Let there be lights in the barrier of the heavens to light the earth.” And it happened. Elohim made the two great lights, the great light to govern day and the small light to govern night and the stars. Elohim put them in the barrier of the heavens to light the earth, to*

*govern day and night, and to separate light and darkness. Elohim saw that it was good. So evening and morning of a fourth day came about. (1:14–19)*

The work of Creation continued by separating and dividing. On the fourth day, the lights in the sky separated day from night and distinguished times and seasons. In the overall structure of Creation, the fourth day is related to the first day. Light in general was created, and then on the fourth day this light was embodied in light-giving entities.

The language of ruling is introduced into the account at this point and becomes a prominent factor in days 4 and 6. The bodies of light have a ruling and regulating function. They determine the calendar and the seasons. Here, the writer of this Elohim-based text affirms the orderliness of the created world. Some suggest that he was priestly in character based on the dominant concerns of the Elohim texts. Israel's ritual and religious life was organized around a cyclic series of holy days and festivals, all determined by the course of the sun and moon. Priests were the caretakers of this religious life, and it was important for them to point out that the regularity of life and its patterns were established by God at Creation.

### ***Day 5: Birds and Fish***

*Elohim said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly over the earth up against the barrier of the heavens." Elohim created the great sea monsters and every teeming living creature which swarms the waters according to their type, and every flying bird according to its type. Elohim saw that it was good. Elohim blessed them by saying, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the waters in the seas, and birds, increase in number on the earth." So evening and morning of a fifth day came about. (1:20–23)*

On this day, the sky and the sea became home to soaring and swimming creatures. The literary scheme that the writer used to structure the account becomes clearer. The fifth day corresponds to the second day. The arenas for life that appeared as a result of the appearing of the water barrier, the sky and the sea, are now filled with resident creatures.

A new element is added when these living creatures are given God's verbal  **blessing**  to be fruitful and increase. Such a word of blessing expresses God's intention for the future welfare of these creatures. Blessing becomes a very important theme in Genesis. Growth and living space are blessings from God and express the deity's desire for the flourishing of all beings, including humanity.

### ***Day 6: Animals and Humanity***

*Elohim said, "Let the earth produce living creatures according to their type: beast and swarmer and land animal according to its type." And it happened. Elohim made the land animal according to its type, and the beast according to its type, and the swarmer of the ground according to its type. Elohim saw that it was good. Elohim said, "Let us make humanity as our image, according to our likeness. And let them rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the heavens, the beast, the whole earth, and all the swarmers which swarm on the earth. And Elohim created humanity as his image: as the image of Elohim he created him, male and female he created them. And Elohim blessed them and Elohim said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth and dominate it and rule the fish of the sea, birds of the heavens, and every swarming creature on the earth." (1:24–28)*

As with the third day, so on the sixth day there were two distinct creative acts. First, God created the animals to live on land. Then, in a separate and differently conceived act, God created humans. This

last act of Creation is set off from the others; instead of saying, “*Let there be humans*,” God said, “*Let us make humans*.” A similar reference to the divine “us” is found in 3:22 and 11:7. To whom was God speaking? The history of interpretation reveals there are at least three possibilities.

1. *Royal plural*. God was simply thinking out loud, talking to himself. Supporters of this position point to the fact that Elohim is grammatically plural. This might account for the plural “us.” A variation is to call this the *plural of majesty*, which royal officials preferred others to use when addressing them, something like “your Highness.”

2. *Christian Trinity*. Those trained in Christian theology might see a reflection of the Trinity here. God the Father was conferring with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Support is sometimes garnered by seeing the deity’s spoken command as the Word, as Jesus was called in the Gospel of John. And the Holy Spirit was the Spirit of God hovering over the waters (see 1:2 in the NIV). This option is remote, however. Certainly the early writer of this passage had no concept of a Trinity because this doctrine is a much later theological development. A minimal rule for interpreting the text might be, What could the original writer have meant in his or her day?

3. *Divine Council*. Based on an analysis of similar notions in the Hebrew Bible, the most likely reading is that the “us” refers to the Divine Council. The [Divine Council](#) was thought to be the governing assembly of angelic beings that managed the world with God. The angels, called “sons of God” in other texts, were the administrative council of heaven. A good example of this notion can be found in Job 1–2, where the “sons of God” met in session with YHWH and the accuser (the satan) to evaluate the sincerity of Job’s piety (for further explanation, see RTOT [Chapter 14](#)).

Humanity is the only entity whose creation is related to the image of God. When God said, “*Let us make humanity in our image*,” the act of creating humanity was deemed so momentous that God sought



the approval and cooperation of the Divine Council. This underscores the importance of humanity. In addition, it implies that the image of God, to which humanity was to be related, was something held in common with the council.

Go to the companion website for the table “Divine Council in Biblical Literature.”

The [image of God](#) notion is central to a biblical understanding of the nature of humanity. It defines who people are and what people should do. Humanity was created as the image of God on earth to represent and implement the divine rule. Done rightly, this would lead to blessing and benefit for all of God’s world.

It is difficult to be sure what the phrase “*image of God*” precisely meant. Some suggest that it has to do with certain moral qualities that humans originally shared with God, such as wisdom and righteousness. Others suggest that it has to do with a physical shape or form that humans have in common with God. This view, which implies that God has arms and legs, is usually rejected. Still others, including theologian Karl Barth, note how being made in the image of God is followed immediately by the words “male and female he created them.” This, they say, means that in God, as in humanity, there is relationship within unity. Being made in the image of God, therefore, means that the capacity for interpersonal relationship is the essential characteristic of personhood. Giving it another twist, others suggest the mention of male and female makes explicit that both males and females image, or reflect, God, or that God has both male and female components (see Garr, 2003, for a close study of the image of God in biblical and ancient Middle Eastern contexts).

As always, we should expect the text itself to provide essential clues. The image of God specified in verses 26–27 is immediately followed by the mandate to rule and have dominion and as such is a political and probably royal concept. In Egypt and Mesopotamia, a

ruling king is described as the image or the likeness of a god in some texts, expressing the status of the king and indicating the source of his authority. This suggests that the image of God is something that we have as well as something we do. Humanity was created to model God's (and the Divine Council's) ruling function on the new earth that God had created or to represent and extend that rule to creation. This suggests humanity was created as God's image as much as in it—both as and in are viable translations of the Hebrew preposition used here.

### **FIGURE 1.2** Adad-iti's Image and Likeness

The statue of King Adad-iti from Tell-Fekheriyeh contains an Assyrian inscription, also translated into Aramaic, dedicating the statue to the god Adad (see Millard and Bordreuil, 1982). In it the king acknowledged that Adad was his lord and was the one who had blessed him. The statue and inscription memorialized the king's rule over the territory of Guzan in Assyria and, in the words of the text, was to function "for perpetuating his throne, for the length of his rule." The Aramaic translation contains the words *image* and *likeness*, which are linguistically equivalent to the Hebrew terms found in Genesis 1:26. The statue is the image and likeness of the king. This supports the reading that these terms refer to humans as representations of the deity on earth in Genesis 1.



Photo by Wayne Pitard

Source: Statue of Adad-iti. Damascus Museum, Syria. Used with permission.

A further meaning of image derives from the function of royal statues in the ancient world ([Figure 1.2](#)). A conquering monarch in Mesopotamia would install statues of himself in the territories subject to his rule. They would be visible evidence of his claim to authority, and they would remind citizens that he was in charge. In a similar way, according to Genesis 1, humanity was to give evidence of the rule of God on earth. In other words, humans are to function as walking, talking statues of God, created by God's authority, and designed to rule the earth on God's behalf. We are not to infer anything about the physical shape of God from the fact that humanity is God's "statue." Rather, the text is saying that humanity was created to perform a unique function, to be a reminder of God's rule and to rule the created earth as divine agents.

Further points could be noted with regard to the image of God. Whatever it is, male and female alike are related to it or partake of it. Furthermore, God's blessing is somehow associated with being created in God's image. This blessing is to be realized as growth and

fruitfulness, as well as power and rulership. Verses 29–31 detail all the created things that God places under human dominion. And at the conclusion of the sixth day, God declares that everything was “very good,” using the qualifier “very” for the first time. This implies that creation was perfect; no more work was needed, no tinkering was necessary to fine-tune the product, so God could cease working.

### ***Day 7: Sabbath***

*The heavens and the earth and all their host were complete. Elohim finished the work he had done on the seventh day, and he ceased on the seventh day from all the work he had done. Elohim blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he ceased from all his work of creating he had done. (2:1–3)*

These last verses complete the week of Creation. The Hebrew verb for “cease” and “rest” is *shabbat*, from which comes the word for the Jewish week-ending holy day, the [Sabbath](#). The seventh day was given special status because it was the only day that God blessed. A priestly agenda is evident here: Keeping the Sabbath day holy is a core component of Jewish religious identity, especially during the exile and afterwards. In this story, the writer finds hard and fast warrant for the holiness of the Sabbath day and for the structure to life defined by six work days and a Sabbath. If that is the way that God ordered the work of creation, then surely humanity should model this. In fact, the Sabbath commandment as found in Exodus 20:8–11 cites the divine week of Creation as the reason for keeping the Sabbath day holy.

### **2.1.2 The *Toledot* of Heaven and Earth**

*This is what became of heaven and earth when they were created. (2:4a)*

This half-verse also provides the transition between the Elohim Creation story and the following YHWH Elohim Creation story. It was provided by the Priestly editor of the final form of Genesis. This verse contains the Hebrew word *toledot*, which is often translated “generations.” The phrase “*these are the generations of*” or, as translated here, “*this is what became of*,” introduces outcomes. ***Toledot*** is derived from the verb “give birth” and can be translated “generations,” “story,” “history,” or “developments.”

Verse 2:4a contains the first of eleven *toledot* formulas in Genesis (see RTOT [Table 2.4](#) for the structure of Genesis *toledot*). *Toledot* formulas are usually attributed to the Priestly editor who used them to organize the large blocks of Genesis. A narrative section introduced by a *toledot* formula typically elaborates the outgrowth of the specified figure—in this case, heaven and earth. Thus, the following YHWH Elohim Creation story relates what became of heaven and earth. Here, it leads us to expect a logical continuation of the story; it links us to the story of Adam and Eve as the outcome of the broad-scale Creation story. Notice also how the words of this verse mirror the words of the first verse of the story:

1:1 When Elohim began to *create heaven and earth*.

2:4a This is what became of *heaven and earth* when they were *created*.

These verses are verbal brackets around the first creation account, a technique literary analysts call ***inclusion***. This technique gives the entire story a certain wholeness and the feel of being well formed. Within these brackets, the account is structured literarily as two parallel and symmetrical series ([Table 1.3](#)). The distribution of the separate creative acts into six 24-hour days was a deliberate scheme used by the writer. The writer uses repeated phrases—such as “*and Elohim said*,” “*Elohim saw that X was good*,” and “*Evening and morning of an Nth day came about*”—to divide the events of Creation into sets and fit them into six days. Notice especially the obvious connection between the environments created on the first

three days and the creatures made to inhabit them on the last three days.

**TABLE 1.3** Parallel Symmetry of Genesis 1

| Day | Environment | Day | Inhabitant       |
|-----|-------------|-----|------------------|
| 1   | Light       | 4   | Sun, moon, stars |
| 2   | Sky and sea | 5   | Birds and fish   |
| 3   | Land        | 6   | Creatures        |
| a   | Dry land    | a   | Land animals     |
| b   | Vegetation  | b   | Humanity         |

Go to the companion website for the table “Repetitions in the Priestly Creation Story.”

Each living being has its appropriate place within the structure. Only a hint of authorial manipulation is evident in that there are eight discrete creating acts, yet they are contained within a six-day structure. Remember, the Priestly writer had an interest in grounding the present practice of Sabbath rest with divine precedent. Organizing the activities in this way implies that God’s design had rhythm, order, and intentionality. It proposes that the world was perfectly formed.

As a final structural observation, note that this six-day structure is prefaced by the pre-existing condition of primeval chaos, and is concluded by day seven, the Sabbath, a situation of completeness, cosmic order, and goodness. This is another framing device. Also noteworthy is the way that humanity stands as the culmination of all God’s acts, and in some sense as their goal. God ceased making new things after he had made man and woman.

### 2.1.3 Yahwist “YHWH Elohim” Creation Story (2:4b–3:24)

To this point, the text always referred to the deity using the word *Elohim*. Beginning at 2:4b and to the end of [Chapter 3](#), the narrator refers to the deity as YHWH Elohim (twenty times), typically rendered **LORD God** in English translations. It refers to the deity as Elohim only in the dialogue between the snake and the woman.

In this YHWH Elohim story, God created the shape of a man out of clay and breathed life into him. This man cared for the garden of Eden and was allowed to eat from any tree except the tree of knowledge. When the man did not find fit companionship among the animals, God anaesthetized him and fashioned a woman out of one of his ribs. The man and woman were thus made companions matched to each other.

The perfect harmony of the garden was shaken when the snake appeared. This creature convinced Eve to disregard God's command not to eat from the tree of good and bad knowledge. She in turn gave some to the man. Realizing their transgression, Adam and Eve, as they are later called, tried to hide their shame from YHWH but with no success. The deity placed curses on all of them, including the snake, and then expelled Adam and Eve from Eden. The YHWH Elohim Creation story thus shapes an enduring morality tale of human craving, personal responsibility, and divine punishment for insubordination.

### ***Creation of Adam and Eve (2:4b–25)***

*On the day YHWH Elohim made the earth and the heavens, no vegetation yet being on the earth, no plant yet springing up (for YHWH Elohim had not caused it to rain on the earth and there was no man to till the ground; only a mist rose from the earth and watered the surface of the ground), then YHWH Elohim fashioned some dust of the ground into a man [Hebrew adam]. He breathed the breath of life into his nostrils and he became a living being. (2:4b–7)*

God is portrayed as a potter using earth to fashion a man. One can almost picture God on his knees in the clay, working over the body, manually shaping and smoothing the man's physical form. This picture of God as a craftsman is a good example of this writer's use of anthropomorphic language; that is, he describes the deity in human terms. This kind of humanlike description is not present in the earlier account; the Elohim version is quite unanthropomorphic, except possibly where it has God speak. Note also how life resulted only after God infused the body with his own breath. These details imply that a human person consists of both physical body and divine life-breath.

This human is called an *adam* in Hebrew. The Hebrew term *adam* as used in Genesis is ambiguous. It can variously designate humanity collectively (as in 1:24, 27), the first man (when used with the definite article *the*, as in [Chapters 2–3](#)), or the personal name [Adam](#) (when used without the definite article, as in 5:3). His mate is referred to in general terms as “the woman” or “his woman” until 3:20 when she is named *chavvah*, [Eve](#), which means “life.” The Adam and Eve described in the YHWH Elohim Creation story are the first individuals, yet at the same time they are archetypal humans, “everyman” and “everywoman.”

Notice how many times the words *earth* and *ground* are used in the story. This “earthiness” suggests that it comes out of an agricultural setting or at least acknowledges the inextricable connection of people and land. The story reinforces a connection between earth and humanness by a linguistic pun in the Hebrew text: “ground” is *adamah* and “humanity” is *adam*. Word play occurs frequently in the Hebrew Bible and was often used to make a serious point. We could duplicate the pun and get the point across using, say, humus and human—that is, if our culture did not think that puns were trite.

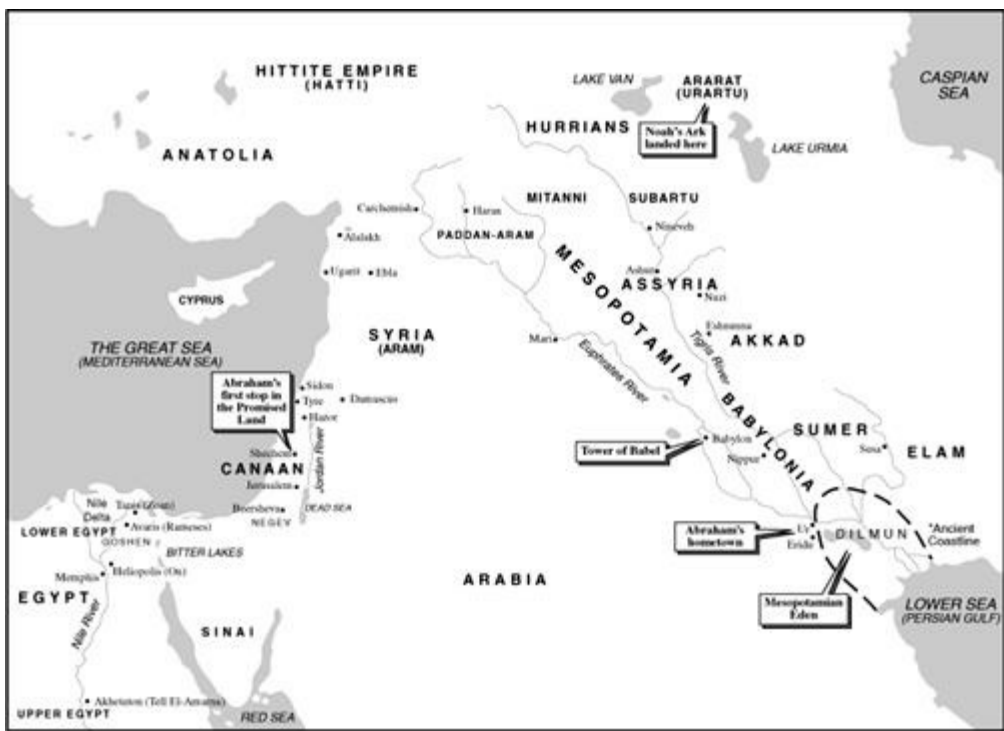


*YHWH Elohim planted a garden in Eden in the east and there put the man he had fashioned. YHWH Elohim caused to grow from the ground every tree that was pleasant to view and good to eat, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of good and bad knowledge. (2:8–9)*

These verses describe a place called Eden, a garden of lush growth that included the tree of life. The term is related to the Sumerian word *edin*, which refers to the fertile steppe region in the Mesopotamian basin, which later became barren. Then the Babylonian word *edinu* came to mean “plain, desert,” though it could be noted that this derivation may be superseded by evidence from the bilingual Tell-Fekheriyeh statue of Adad-iti that uses the word *‘dn* in the sense of “enrich” when describing a god who provides all things necessary to produce food. Consequently Eden may mean “place of luxuriance” rather than “steppe” (see Millard and Bordreuil, 1982, 140). Eden was translated *paradeisos* in the Septuagint, which in turn became “paradise” in English.

### **FIGURE 1.3** The Ancient Middle East

Much of Israel’s prehistory takes place within Mesopotamia, and Abraham comes from there as well. This indicates that Israel understood itself as having a Semitic ethnic, historical, and cultural identity in common with the larger Mesopotamian world.



By locating Eden in proximity to the Tigris, Euphrates, Pishon, and Gihon Rivers, the text seems to indicate that it lay somewhere in Mesopotamia ([Figure 1.3](#)). Eden as an actual place has never been located, nor should we expect to find it, though Sauer (1996) speculates that the Kuwait River may be the ancient Pishon. Wherever this place was presumed to be, it was the locale of all good things, including intimate fellowship with God. The ancient Sumerians of Mesopotamia had their own story of origins in a primeval wonderland. Enki and Ninhursag were two gods, as well as husband and wife, who enjoyed goodness as long as they stayed near the tree of life (see ANET, 37–41). They lived in a place called Dilmun.

*YHWH Elohim took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to till it and oversee it. YHWH Elohim commanded the*

*man, “You may eat from any tree of the garden; except you shall not eat from the tree of good and bad knowledge. On the day you eat from it you shall die.” (2:15–17)*

The man was placed in Eden to tend it, not simply to enjoy it. Perhaps we can extrapolate a claim that even from the beginning humanity’s task was to be the caretaker of the world. Of all the good things in the garden, God only prohibited the man from sampling the tree of knowledge. The punishment for disobedience was death. The tree of knowledge plays a crucial role in Genesis 3, and eating from it becomes the quintessential symbol of human defiance.

*Then YHWH Elohim said, “It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper matched to him.” So out of the ground YHWH Elohim formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would name them. Whatever the man named each living creature, that became its name. The man named all the beasts, birds, and living things. But Adam had no helper matched to him. (2:18–20)*

God was concerned that the man might get lonely, so animals were fashioned to provide companionship. The man named the animals; in the ancient world, having authority to give names implied mastery over them (see Marks, 1995). Some interpret the man’s naming the animals as an early form of scientific-like classification and an attempt to order the world in which he lived. But still he found no fitting friend. The animals, not being his equal, failed to satisfy his deeper longing. Note that verse 20b is the first time that the Hebrew text uses the word *adam* as a personal name.

*YHWH Elohim cast a deep sleep upon the man. While he slept he took one of his ribs and closed up with flesh the place where it had been. YHWH Elohim built a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man. He brought her to the man. Then the man said, "Finally this is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh. Let her be called woman because she was taken out of man." (2:21–23)*

YHWH, as is typical of this epic, was sensitive to innate human needs and wanted to provide genuine fulfillment for the man whom he had fashioned. He crafted a woman out of the man's body so that they would be of the same substance. Later (3:20), Adam gave her the name Eve, which the text renders "mother of all things." The choice of the rib, being so specific and unexpected, seems deliberate. Genetically, any material taken from the man could have been used as source material for the woman. But God chose a rib. Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that the Hebrew word for "rib" can also mean "side." The choice of this word may imply that the man and the woman were meant to be side-by-side—in other words, to complement each other and accompany each other through life.

The woman is now the one who is "a helper matched to him," according to the Hebrew text (see Clines, 1990). The term *helper* does not imply inferiority or subordination. In support we need only cite Exodus 18:4 in which God is described as a helper to Moses, using the same term *ezer*. The original text further ties the man and woman together—when he cries out "At last ... a woman!" his Hebrew *ishah* makes a pun on the word "man," Hebrew *ish*.

*Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and adheres to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and the woman were both naked, but they were not ashamed. (2:24–25)*

These words are the comments of a narrator from a time when marriage had become an established social practice—obviously from a much later time than the implied setting of the Creation. They comment on the oneness of a man and a woman in marriage. The primary allegiance would be to the marriage partner rather than to one's parents.

Becoming “one flesh” suggests a spiritual, emotional, and sexual union that characterizes the togetherness of marriage. Though without clothes, the first couple was unabashed at their nakedness and felt no need to shield themselves from the other's gaze. Their relationship was characterized by an almost childlike innocence and naiveté.

Overall, this account stresses God's involvement with the newly fashioned creatures. The deity lived in intimate association with humanity in the garden of Eden. What happens next in the story explains in biblical terms why humanity no longer lives this way, in the immediate presence of God in a perfect world.

## **2.1.4 Disobedience and Expulsion from Eden (3:1–24)**

*The snake was craftier than any other wild creature that YHWH Elohim had made. It said to the woman, “Did Elohim say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden’?” And the woman said to the snake, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but Elohim did say, ‘You cannot eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, nor can you touch it, or you will die.’” But the snake said to the woman, “You would not die. Elohim said this because he knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like Elohim (gods/God), knowing good and bad.” (3:1–5)*

The Hebrew text establishes a subtle connection between this

scene and the preceding. Whereas the happy couple was “naked” (Hebrew *arom*), the snake was “crafty” (Hebrew *arum*). Who or what was this snake, and where did it come from? Apparently, it was one of the creatures that God had made though no mention is made of this. Only in later interpretations is the snake identified with Satan and the Devil (for example, Revelation 12:9 in the New Testament; see Pagels, 1995). Ancient mythological texts, however, suggest that more is involved than just snakes here. The snake is akin to the dragons and monsters of ancient creation myths, creatures such as Lotan (Leviathan) in the Baal texts from Ugarit and the water god Apsu in the Enuma Elish from Mesopotamia. And we can see why the snake was described this way. It cleverly misrepresented the prior command of God (compare his words to the man in 2:16–17) and did so in such a way as to force the woman to become defensive. Then, with the snake’s next statement, it drives a wedge between the woman and God by implying that the divine death warning was really only intended to keep from them something good and rightly desirable. The snake held out the prospect of life, immortality, even divinity.

The essential temptation to the woman and man was to become like gods or like God—Elohim can be translated either way (though the verb “knowing” in verse 5 is plural, so the translation “gods” may be preferable). The urge to achieve divinity seems to be the persistent impulse of humanity in these early chapters of Genesis, surfacing again in [Chapters 6](#) and [11](#).

Theologians tend to call this episode the [Fall](#). Although the notion of a “once for all fall” is not found in the Hebrew Bible, this story became the basis for the Christian notion of [original sin](#). It explicitly appears first in 2 Esdras 7:118 (a book of the Apocrypha) and was developed by Paul who said, “*Sin came into the world through one man*” and “*One man’s trespass led to condemnation for all*” (Romans 5:12, 18 in the New Testament). Judaism does not adopt a notion of original sin. Instead, it holds that a person is subject to the

evil impulse (*yetser hara*) that must be controlled by the good impulse (*yetser hatov*). This good impulse is cultivated by doing godly deeds and observing the commandments.

*So when the woman saw that the tree was a good food source and that it was pleasant to look at and desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband and he ate. The eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin cloths. (3:6–7)*

Because the tree's fruit was appealing and Eve wanted to gain wisdom and knowledge, she ate the fruit and passed it on to Adam. Conventional lore has it that the fruit the original couple ate was an apple, and this is perpetuated in Western tradition. For example, Chagall's *Adam and Eve* and Gauguin's *Self-Portrait* make use of this interpretation (see the companion website's "Garden of Eden Gallery"). But our text says nothing about apples. The fruit was probably something native to the ancient Mesopotamian world, more likely a pomegranate, date, or fig. Immediately upon eating the fruit, they recognized that something had gone wrong. Each felt vulnerable and threatened by the other, and both became afraid of God. The man and woman had intentionally disregarded God's instruction not to eat from the tree of knowledge. This marks the occasion when humans first rejected the authority of their God.

*They heard the sound of YHWH Elohim walking in the garden in the cool of the day. The man and his wife hid from YHWH Elohim among the trees of the garden. YHWH Elohim called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard you in the garden and I became afraid, because I am*

*naked. So I hid.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman you gave me, she gave me something from the tree and I ate.” Then YHWH Elohim said to the woman, “What did you do?” And the woman said, “The snake tricked me and I ate.” (3:8–13)*

Adam and Eve now felt estranged from God and became fearful. They sought to distance themselves from God, so they hid in the garden, of course to no avail. When God confronted them, both tried to disown responsibility for their actions. The man blamed the woman, and she blamed the snake. The text suggests that denying personal responsibility for one’s actions is the primal human reaction to guilt. Their choice to disregard God’s instruction not to eat from the tree of knowledge epitomizes the human tendency to assert independence and autonomy and deny subordination to God.

Contrary to what God seemed to mean in his warning, “*On the day you eat of it you shall die,*” they did not die on the spot. The death predicted in Genesis 2 apparently implied much more than just the cessation of physical life. Death signified alienation from God, which first became evident as interpersonal disharmony and shame and later as biological death.

#### **FIGURE 1.4** Temptation Seal



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on G. Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* (London, 1875), 91.



*Then YHWH Elohim said to the snake, “Because you did this, cursed are you more than any beast or creature of the field. On your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life. Enmity I will create between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head and you will bruise his heel.” (3:14–15)*

God cursed them and expelled them from the garden. Each of the three received a suitable punishment through a curse. God’s curse is the opposite of his blessing. In the snake’s case, God made it the lowest of all creatures, forced now to crawl on its belly. Compare the Temptation Seal, where the snakes stand upright ([Figure 1.4](#)). The curse on the snake is somewhat cryptic, but God seems to be saying that the temptation to do evil, as represented by the snake, will not dominate humanity. The couple’s offspring will be bruised by the snake’s evil but not overcome by it. Perhaps this suggests that, at the very least, there is hope for humanity.

*To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pregnancy pain: in pain you will bear children. Yet you will long for your husband and he will dominate you.” And to the man he said, “Because you heeded your wife and ate from the tree I commanded you not to, cursed is the ground on account of you: you will eat with pain all the days of your life. Thorn and thistle will sprout for you when you want to eat the plants of the field: by the sweat of your forehead you will eat bread until you return to the ground (for from it you were taken)—dust you are and to dust you will return.” (3:16–19)*

The curses were targeted to the created role of the man and woman. The woman was cursed in her relationship to her husband

and in her indispensable role of continuing the race. They had been created for a relationship of mutuality, but now the husband would dominate. The text states unambiguously that woman's subordination to man follows the break with God and is a result of the curse; it was not part of the created order. In addition to the broken relationship, the woman would have great pain in the course of child birthing and child rearing.

The man was created to care for and till the ground. His curse related to his calling to care for creation. From now on, food production would be accomplished only with great difficulty. Although he was inextricably tied to the ground (remember the pun on his name), it would resist him as he tried to live off it. Furthermore, when he died, he would return to the soil out of which he came.

These curses set the stage for the blessing that God pledges to Abram in Genesis 12. This would mark the beginning of the divine program to overcome the relationships broken here in the garden. In the meantime, God clothed the couple. Then they were expelled from the garden, according to God, because “the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil” (3:22). Note again the use of the plural “us” for the Divine Council. Cherubim—the Divine Council's body guards and bouncers—were placed at the entrance to the garden to keep humans away from the tree of life ([Figure 1.5](#)).

### **FIGURE 1.5** Winged Protector Figure

A cherub (Hebrew plural, *cherubim*) was not a cherry-cheeked toddler the likes of Cupid with his bow and arrow. In the ancient Middle East, a cherub was a man-headed lion or bull with eagles' wings that stood guard outside Mesopotamian temples. The term *cherub* appears to derive from the Akkadian word *kuribu* that was attached to such protector figures.



Source: Human-headed lion from the northwest palace in Nimrud, from A. H. Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains* (London, 1851), 53.

The break between humanity and deity determines the course of events that follows. God was deeply offended by human disobedience. What exactly was the offense? It might be important to pin this down; identifying the nature of the offense makes the fix comprehensible. Was the sin a moral failing, an intellectual craving, or a sexual transgression?

The significance of the tree of knowledge and the prohibition of eating its fruit are much debated (see Barr, 1993). Here, we outline three basic interpretations of the nature of the problem:

1. *Morality*. By eating from the tree of knowledge, humanity chose to discriminate between what is good and what is bad on the basis of their own judgment rather than by automatically accepting God's definition. By acting on their own, the couple irrevocably separated themselves from God, and their relationship to God was forever changed.

2. *Knowledge*. The Hebrew phrase "good and evil" can sometimes designate the totality of knowledge (see Deuteronomy 1:39 and 2 Samuel 19:35). Eating the fruit of that tree was an act of human pride, an attempt to know everything God knows. God would not tolerate any such challenge to his preeminence and expelled the original

couple from the garden lest they also eat from the tree of life and become invulnerable.

3. *Sexuality*. The story in Genesis 2–3 is rich with sexual innuendo. The couple is naked and not ashamed. Later they experience shame because of their nakedness. Even the snake has been interpreted by psychoanalysts as a sexual symbol. The Hebrew term for *knowledge* can have sexual associations, as in Genesis 4:1 where “Adam knew Eve,” clearly a euphemism for sexual intercourse, and gave rise to the phrase “carnal knowledge.” The sexual interpretation suggests that coming to knowledge, symbolized by eating the forbidden fruit, signifies the passage from childhood through puberty to adulthood. Sexual experience involves the pain and alienation of coming to know oneself and the other in new ways. Discovering the sexual impulse means that one cannot go back to the state of innocence ever again.

All three interpretations have hints of truth in them. Yet the big affront to YHWH seems to be humanity’s desire to become like gods, like Elohim—that is, to become immortal beings. By focusing on this dimension, perhaps the first interpretation contains the most truth. By their act of self-determination, the original couple declared their intent to live by their own authority, not by God’s. They tried to seize what could only be divinely granted. God would not abide this direct challenge, expelled them, and denied them access to a rich and full existence, symbolized by the tree of life.

This concern with autonomy versus divine determination appears to be an important key to the larger story. Those who position the authorship of the story within the politics of the Israelite monarchy suggest that this issue illumines the problems of kingship. Would the prosperity of the Davidic empire lead the Israelites into an attitude of self-sufficiency? Would they forget about their God? Would they try to grasp greatness on their own or wait for divine blessing? In this view, the writer relates the story of the first ancestors as a warning

against national self-determination.

## 2.1.5 Ancient Middle Eastern Creation Stories

The two Creation accounts of Genesis taken together establish fundamental biblical truths about God in relation to the universe and humanity. God is sovereign and powerful yet approachable and concerned. God established certain boundaries for proper human behavior yet granted humans tremendous freedom. The world is wonderfully ordered and internally consistent, indeed very good, yet it is distorted by human willfulness.

These features of the Hebrew worldview were not held universally throughout the ancient Middle East. While the biblical Creation narratives share certain similarities of detail with the creation stories of the ancient Middle East, their understandings of deity and humanity significantly differ. By comparing the stories, we can not only identify commonly held mythic motifs but also grasp the Hebrew Bible's distinct perspective.

The biblical writers drew from legends, stories, and literary materials that were part of the larger ancient Middle Eastern cultural environment when they constructed the Israelite accounts of creation. Some of the surviving creation material includes the Egyptian creation theology, the Atrahasis Epic, and the Enuma Elish. It is no surprise that virtually every people has given thought to ultimate origins and every culture has shaped creation myths.

### FIGURE 1.6 Egyptian Cosmology

Shu, the sky god is supporting Nut, the sky goddess above Geb, the earth god.



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on a tomb painting in Valley of the Kings, Thebes.

***Creation Theology from Egypt.*** In the earliest Egyptian creation story, the world began as a formless watery void, entombed in darkness. When this primeval water-stuff subsided, the first mound of earth appeared. On this first island, the creator-god Atum brought into being all other creatures and things. How he did this varies in the versions. According to one account, he masturbated (since he was male and had no mate) and brought the lesser male and female deities into existence. From their mating came the populated earth. According to another version, Atum named his own body parts and, as it were, out of himself came other separate beings. Egyptian cosmology associated with the temple at Heliopolis imagined heaven to be a female deity and earth a male deity (see [Figure 1.6](#)).

Another creation story later emerged, called the *Memphis theology of creation*. Dating to the earliest dynastic period in Egypt (third millennium BCE), this story supported the superiority of Memphis and its patron god Ptah over the previous capital. It states that Ptah was the heart and tongue, which is to say he was divine mind and speech. Ptah conceived the idea of the universe, ordered it, and called it into being with a command. Because of this, Ptah existed prior to Atum as the principle and mechanism through which the world came into being (see Simpson, 1972). In positing the priority of the divine word, this theology of creation has a notable

similarity to the Elohim account of the Creation in Genesis.

***Atrahasis Epic.*** The Atrahasis Epic, named after its human hero, is a story from Mesopotamia that has rather specific similarities to the Primeval Story. It includes the making of humans out of clay (see Genesis 2:7), a flood, and a boat-building hero. It was composed as early as the nineteenth century BCE. In its cosmology, heaven is ruled by the god Anu, earth by Enlil, and the freshwater ocean by Enki. Enlil set the lesser gods to work farming the land and maintaining the irrigation canals. After forty years, they refused to work any longer. Enki, also the wise counselor to the gods, proposed that humans be created to assume the work. The goddess Mami made humans by shaping clay mixed with saliva and the blood of the undergod We, who was slain for this purpose.

The human population worked and grew, but so did the noise they made. Because it disturbed Enlil's sleep, he decided to destroy the human race. First he sent a plague, then a drought followed by a famine, and lastly a flood. Each time Enki forewarned Atrahasis, enabling him to survive the disaster. He gave Atrahasis seven days' warning of the flood and told him to build a boat. Atrahasis loaded it with animals and birds and his own possessions. Though the rest of humanity perished, he survived. When the gods realized they had destroyed the labor force that had produced food for their offerings, they regretted their actions. The story breaks off at this point, so we learn nothing of the boat's landing or the later Atrahasis (see Lambert and Millard, 1969).

**Enuma Elish.** The **Enuma Elish** is the best-known Babylonian creation account. It existed in various versions and copies, the oldest dating to at least 1700 BCE. According to this account, before heaven and earth were formed, there were two vast bodies of water. The male freshwater ocean was called **Apsu**, and the female saltwater ocean was called **Tiamat**. Through the fusion of their

waters, successive generations of gods came into being. As in Genesis 1, water is the primeval element, but here it is identified with the gods, who have unmistakable gender.

Younger gods were created through sexual union. These younger, noisy gods disturbed the tranquility of Apsu, so Apsu devised a plan to dispose of them. The wisest younger god, Ea, found out about the plan and killed Apsu ([Figure 1.7](#)). To avenge her husband, Tiamat decided to do away with the younger gods with the help of her henchman Kingu. When the younger gods heard about this, they found a champion in the god [Marduk](#). He agreed to defend them only if they would make him king. After they tested his powers, they enthroned him.

**FIGURE 1.7** Ea in the Apsu

The Mesopotamian god Ea (right), residing in the freshwater ocean Apsu, receives another god.



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra after a cylinder seal of the Akkadian period found at Ur; see J. Black and A. Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia. An Illustrated Dictionary* (London: British Museum, 1992), 27, no. 19.

Mesopotamian mythology imagined that the world was the outcome of the mingling of two oceans, Apsu and Tiamat. Hebrew



creation, in contrast, was initiated by the one god Elohim, who harnessed the deep waters and brought forth life. When finally they met on the field of battle, Tiamat opened her considerable mouth as if to swallow Marduk and plunge him into the immeasurable deeps. Marduk rallied by casting one of the winds into her body, expanding her like a balloon. He then took his bow and shot an arrow into her belly, splitting her in half. Marduk cut her in two like a clam, and out of her carcass he made the heavens. The “clamshell” of heaven became a barrier to keep the waters from escaping, a parallel to the Genesis notion of a barrier or firmament. Marduk also fixed the constellations in the heavens. They, along with the moon, established the course of day and night as well as the seasons.

Then Marduk devised a plan to relieve the drudgery of the gods. They were tired of laboring to meet their daily needs, so he created humanity out of the blood of Kingu to be the servants of the gods. In appreciation for their deliverance, the gods built Marduk a palace in Babylon, called Esagila, meaning “house with its head in heaven.” There Marduk sat enthroned.

The similarities and differences between Genesis 1 and the Enuma Elish are intriguing (see Heidel, 1963). One of the most striking features of Genesis that the Enuma Elish helps bring to light is the struggle between order and chaos that lies just under the surface of the Genesis text. Marduk’s battle with Tiamat reveals that the effort to create the world took the form of a battle. The victory secured Marduk’s position as king of the world. The comparison may help to explain the claims of YHWH’s kingship over creation in such places as Psalms 29 and 93, in which the deity is pictured sitting enthroned over the floods.

## **2.1.6 Reading Creation Today**

The biblical creation stories have been immensely influential in the history of Western thought. Certain interpretations of key components

of these stories have shaped foundational social and cultural institutions. A literal reading of the six-day Creation story has resisted the discoveries of astronomy and evolutionary biology from Galileo and Darwin to the present day. The mandate to “*be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth and dominate it and rule the fish of the sea, birds of the heavens, and every swarming creature on the earth*” (1:28) has been read to give us permission to exploit the world’s natural resources. The woman’s taking the first bite has been read to place the blame for sin on the female. The curse on the woman that “*he will dominate you*” (3:16) was read to justify subordination to the husband in marriage.

Reading these stories from out of our changed social setting and illumined by historical and literary analysis reveals the degree to which such readings may have been shaped by their cultural status quo. For example, Middleton (2005) reads the Priestly Creation narrative as a counterstory to the Mesopotamian creation myth. This myth with its exaltation of the king and its low view of ordinary humanity promoted social structures of repression and human exploitation. On the other hand, Israel’s Creation narrative promoted a high view of humanity where each person, male as well as female, was the image of God. Reading these same stories today with what Gomes (1996) calls “moral imagination” provides us with rich new meanings and possibilities.

The act of eating from the tree of good and bad knowledge has traditionally been read within Christianity as the original sin resulting in a disastrous fall from grace, symbolized by expulsion from the garden. This story could also be read in an opposite way, as a tale of healthy human growth and maturation (see Bechtel, 1993). The first humans move from naiveté and dependency to self-determination, even though it results in alienation from the parent deity. And this movement is driven by the initiative and curiosity of the woman. Such readings open new possibilities for appreciating and appropriating the text.

Explore the “Garden of Eden gallery” at the companion website. The garden of Eden is the subject of many artistic renditions, each in its own way a reading of the story.

## 2.2 Pre-Flood Generations (4:1–6:4)

Genesis 4:1–6:4 fills the gap between the first couple, Adam and Eve, and the story of Noah. These chapters tell two stories: one of the growth of population and culture and the other of the growth and development of sin. The narratives of the pre-Flood heroes and villains come from the same tradition as the YHWH Elohim Creation account. Taken together they explain why God sent the Flood. Yet, at the same time these aberrations were occurring, human culture continued to develop, including the construction of cities, the domestication of animals, and the rise of the fine arts.

There are two genealogies in these chapters, one in [Chapter 4](#) and one in [Chapter 5](#). The genealogy in Genesis 4 belongs to the YHWH collection and tracks the growth of humanity through Cain. The one in Genesis 5 belongs to the Elohim collection and extends from Adam to Noah. A [genealogy](#) is a record or table of the descent of a person, family, or group from an ancestor or ancestors; in other words, it is a family tree. Most readers would probably rather ignore genealogies completely. In themselves they are unexciting, but they are quite important to the overall scheme of Genesis.

The genealogies of Genesis 1–11 accomplish at least two things. First, they give evidence that humanity did in fact multiply and fill the earth, as God mandated in 1:28. This is evidence of blessing. Second, they establish the connection between Adam and Abram so that the line of continuity between Israel and its origins can be traced all the way back to the Creation.

### 2.2.1 Cain, Abel, and After (4)

Once expelled from the garden, Adam and Eve had sexual relations and their first son Cain was born, followed shortly thereafter by Abel. Cain became a farmer and Abel a shepherd. For no apparent reason, YHWH accepted an offering from Abel but not one from Cain. Apparently out of envy, Cain took it out on Abel and killed him. YHWH punished him by cursing his relationship to the ground, which would no longer bear fruit for him. So Cain was forced to become a wanderer. Notice that the deity is now referenced by the divine name YHWH (rather than YHWH Elohim), and this is consistent throughout [Chapter 4](#).

A conflict story similar to Cain and Abel is found in Sumerian literature. In this tale, the shepherd-god Dumuzi vies with the farmer-god Enkimdu for the favors of the goddess Inanna. Dumuzi quarrels with Enkimdu and wins the prize of Inanna's attention (see ANET, 41–42). Both the biblical and Sumerian stories reflect the early conflict between shepherds and farmers over use of the precious arable land. In the biblical tale, each man offered a gift to YHWH from his respective produce.

This first murder is a continuation of the series of human scandals begun in Eden. Its immediate effect is to demonstrate the snowball effect of sin. Adam and Eve sinned against God and were cursed. The curse was passed on to their children. With the second generation, death was no longer just a spiritual condition of alienation from God but also a physical reality. The escalation of violence continued. Cain's offspring included Lamech, who was the prototype of violent attackers (4:17–24). He boasted to his two wives that he took revenge on a man by killing him while he himself had only been slightly wounded.

But even while violence was increasing, there was a parallel development. Culture and technology rapidly developed. Cain's son Enoch built the first city. Lamech's three sons were credited with various first-time achievements: Jabel for domestication of animals, Jubal for music, and Tubal-cain for copper and iron industries. We

might wonder, Was the writer making a negative judgment on these so-called advances by associating these developments with the notoriously sinful line of Cain? There was a tradition in Israel that a patriarchal, seminomadic, and unurbanized lifestyle kept one closest to God. The Yahwist writer may have been implicitly criticizing the cultural advancements of the Davidic monarchy by associating them with the line of Cain and Lamech.

Mesopotamian tradition likewise traces the arts and accomplishments of civilization back to primeval times. It recalls a line of seven apkallu figures, wise men who lived before the flood and taught humanity the arts and crafts of civilization (see the Sumerian King List, ANET, 265–266). Genesis 4, which also contains seven generations in the Cain genealogy, may retain a reflection of this tradition. In the pre-flood Mesopotamian tradition, the seventh preflood king, Enmeduranki, who was taken to sit before the gods and given special wisdom, may be the model for Enoch in Genesis 5, who is the seventh in the Priestly genealogy.

Certainly such momentous human achievements were not the work of single men from the same family. The biblical text telescopes developments that took many, many generations into a brief span. But interestingly, the text does evidence the importance of these developments and places them in early prehistory. Archaeologists and anthropologists have confirmed the importance of these developments for the progress of civilization, even claiming that these developments occurred first in the Middle East. [Chapter 4](#) ends with the mention of the birth of Seth, Adam and Eve's third son. The Yahwist tells us that at this time people began to call on the name of YHWH.

### **2.2.2 Genealogy: Adam to Noah (5)**

The Priestly writer contributed the genealogies of [Chapters 5](#) and [11](#) to the Primeval Story (compare 5:1–2 with 1:26–28). The [Chapter 5](#)

genealogy has notable similarities to the YHWH-text genealogy of [Chapter 4](#), as if they were different versions of the same underlying tradition. The genealogy of Genesis 5 contains ten generations going from Adam to Noah, and the genealogy of Genesis 11:10–27 contains ten generations from Shem to Abram.

Go to the companion website for tables that compare the Genesis 4 and 5 genealogies and the priestly genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11.

These two genealogies are essentially alike in that they are linear, going directly from one generation to a single offspring in the next, and both have a similar literary pattern (though [Chapter 11](#):10–27 omits the last sentence, “He died”). Here is the generalized structure:

After X had lived M years, he sired Y. X lived N years after he had sired him, and he sired other sons and daughters. All the days of X were O years. He died.

Two descendants are of special interest in [Chapter 5](#), Enoch and Methuselah. Enoch is said to have “*walked with the gods/God (halelohim)*” and then mysteriously “*was no more because Elohim took him*” (5:24). Because he did not die, Enoch became associated with a large body of postbiblical apocalyptic literature that supposedly was revealed to him in heaven. Methuselah lived longer than any other person, reputedly 969 years.

### **2.2.3 Divine–Human Intermarriage (6:1–4)**

The writer now exposes the limitless human capacity for wickedness. Sin grew in extent and intensity, from sibling murder to the blood feud of Lamech (4:23–24). The growth of sin culminated in the encounter between the sons of the gods/God and the daughters of

men:

*When humanity began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of Elohim saw that the daughters of humanity were good. They took wives for themselves from them as they chose. And YHWH said, "My spirit shall no longer remain with humanity forever, because they are flesh. His life span will be 120 years." The fallen ones were on the earth in those days (and also afterward) when the sons of Elohim had intercourse with human daughters and bore offspring for them. They are the warriors, from eternity called the men of a name. (6:1–4)*

Certainly one question that jumps out of this text is, Who are the sons of God? Some interpreters have suggested they are the offspring of Cain and that this story records the interbreeding of the lines of Cain and Seth. This would represent a mixture of the good and the bad lineages. This view is probably mistaken. Parallels to the phrase "sons of Elohim" in biblical and other ancient literature strongly suggest that they are divine creatures, commonly identified as angels (for example, Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). They would appear to be errant members of the Divine Council, the body of angels who rule the universe with God. According to 6:1–4 then, certain of these angels were sexually attracted to human women and sired a race of giants.

The possibility of such interbreeding defies human conceiving (pun intended). Were it possible, presumably such interbreeding would have resulted in humans acquiring the immortality of divine creatures. Probably for this reason, God took steps to limit the longevity of humanity to a maximum of 120 years.

Fantastic and strange as the incident may seem, it plays an important role in the developing scheme of the narrative. The writer uses this incident to explain why God was finally moved to action.

Sin had evolved so far as to infect the relationship between the divine and the human realms. The proper division between heaven and earth was no longer intact. Many authorities see the survival of an early myth about the gods and humanity in this story. Kilmer (1987) notes the parallels between the “fallen ones” and the preflood apkallu sages of Mesopotamian tradition, mentioned above. The biblical tale also recalls those notorious incidents of divine–human intercourse in Greek mythology, as when Zeus bedded Io and Europa.

## **2.3 The Flood (6:5–7:24)**

The episode of divine–human intercourse exceeded the limit of God’s tolerance, so he decided to destroy what he had made and start again with righteous Noah. God chose the [Flood](#) as the instrument of destruction and cleansing. The Flood was no ordinary overflow. It is portrayed as a veritable reversal of creation. The language and imagery of the Flood narrative echo the Elohim Creation story at too many strategic points to be coincidental. The parallels indicate that God intended to return the universe to its pre-Creation state of watery chaos and then remake it using the microcosm of Noah’s ark. The story of the Flood is the pivot point of the Primeval Story.

The ancient list of kings from the early Mesopotamian civilization of Sumer, called the *Sumerian King List*, likewise uses the flood to divide history into preflood and postflood periods. The preflood kings had enormous life spans, whereas those after the flood were much reduced. Similarly, the pre-Flood heroes of the biblical story had tremendous life spans, whereas those after are closer to what we would consider normal (see ANET, 265–266, and Jacobsen, 1939).

### **2.3.1 Prologue to the Flood (6:5–13)**

The immediately preceding YHWH story of the sons of God and the



daughters of men in Genesis 6:1–4 provides the premier instance of moral erosion. Following this episode, both Yahwist and Priestly writers analyze the state of the world and why God decided to “uncreate” it. In this section and throughout the Flood narrative, we see evidence of both writers who we identified in the Creation stories by their differing use of divine designations. The difference here is that these two versions are interwoven with some sentences attributable to the Yahwist writer and others to the Priestly writer. Because their respective contributions can still be identified by their characteristic style and vocabulary, you can read this new episode with heightened awareness.

### **YHWH Version**

*And YHWH saw that the evil of humanity on the earth was great; every willful plan of its mind was only evil every day. YHWH regretted that he had made humanity on the earth, and he was pained to his heart. YHWH said, “I will wipe out humanity which I had created from the face of the ground, from humanity to beast to reptile to bird of the sky. For I regret that I had made them.” And Noah found favor in the eyes of YHWH. (6:5–8)*

### **Elohim Version**

*This is the account [Hebrew toledot] of Noah: Noah was a righteous man, upright was he in his generation. Noah walked with the gods [Hebrew ha-elohim]. Noah sired three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And the earth was corrupt before Elohim, and the earth was full of violence. And Elohim saw the earth: it was corrupt. For all flesh corrupted his way on the earth. And Elohim said to Noah, “The end of all flesh before me is coming. For the earth is full of their violence. I am destroying them with the earth.” (6:9–13)*

These two versions are not really contradictory; mostly they just use different vocabulary to get the same basic point across. In the YHWH version, humanity is at fault and humanity along with all other living things becomes the focus of YHWH's wrath. In the Elohim version, the earth is the focus and how flesh had corrupted it. Also note that the Elohim version here is introduced by this version's characteristic *toledot* notice, "*these are the generations of ...*"

### **2.3.2 Undoing Creation (6:14–7:24)**

God gave Noah instructions for building a waterproof vessel in which to house his immediate family, along with a sample of animal life. After they entered the ark, the springs of the deep burst open and the floodgates of heaven broke wide; this is the reverse of the separation of the waters recounted in [Chapter 1](#). The Flood rose over the earth drowning everything that was not in the ark.

The waters rose so high that they eventually covered even the loftiest mountain by 15 cubits (about 45 feet). A number of Mesopotamian cities give evidence of ancient flooding caused by the overflow of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. But there is no archaeological evidence for a worldwide flood. There is no evidence of a widespread flood in Palestine, but that does not pose a problem. The Flood account locates itself in Mesopotamia with the resting place of Noah's ark in the Urartu mountain range. Ancient Shuruppak—where Utnapishtim, the survivor of the Gilga-mesh Epic flood, lived—as well as Ur, Kish, Uruk, Lagash, and Nineveh, all present evidence of flooding. But the evidence comes from different times (see Parrot, 1955). Most scholars agree that the biblical Flood account was triggered by the memory of a local disaster, though the discoveries of Ryan and Pitman (1999) in the Black Sea present a possible scenario for a wide-area flood that may be distantly behind the biblical account.

## 2.3.3 Mesopotamian Flood Stories

As with the creation stories, there are notable ancient Middle Eastern tales of a flood that, in some cases, display close parallels to the biblical account. In the Deluge Tablet, Ziusudra survived a flood sent by the gods by building a boat. In the Gilga-mesh Epic, Utnapishtim survived a flood and was granted eternal life. The Atrahasis Epic also has a flood episode.

***Deluge Tablet.*** The hero is Ziusudra, the counterpart of the biblical Noah. Ziusudra heard the decision of the Divine Council to destroy humanity. He was able to survive the flood by constructing a vessel. The mention of the great waters, the boat, and the window on the boat all have biblical parallels.

*All the windstorms, exceedingly powerful, attacked as one, At the same time, the flood sweeps over the cult-centers. After, for seven days [and] seven nights, the flood had swept over the land, [and] the huge boat had been tossed about by the windstorms on the great waters, Utu [the sun-god] came forth, who sheds light on heaven [and] earth. Ziusudra opened a window of the huge boat, The hero Utu brought his rays into the giant boat. (ANET, 44)*

***Gilgamesh Epic.*** The [Gilgamesh Epic](#) was a widely known and often copied epic about Gilgamesh, the king of ancient Uruk. One episode of this lengthy epic contains an account of a flood. After losing his best friend and thereby confronting the issue of human mortality, Gilgamesh went to Utnapishtim to learn the secret of eternal life. Utnapishtim was a preflood hero who survived the flood and was granted eternal life by the gods. The following is Utnapishtim's recollection of what the gods advised him to do to survive the coming flood.

*Tear down [this] house, build a ship! Give up possessions, seek thou life. Forswear [worldly] goods and keep the soul alive! Aboard the ship take thou the seed of all living things. Six days and [six] nights blows the flood wind, as the south-storm sweeps the land. When the seventh day arrived, the flood [-carrying] south-storm subsided in the battle, which it had fought like an army. The sea grew quiet, the tempest was still, the flood ceased. When the seventh day arrived I sent forth and set free a dove. The dove went forth, but came back; then I sent forth and set free a raven. The raven went forth and, seeing that the waters had diminished, he eats, circles, caws, and turns not round. Then I let out [all] to the four winds and offered a sacrifice. The gods smelled the sweet savor, the gods crowded like flies about the sacrificer. (ANET, 93–95, selections)*

The Gilgamesh Epic has notable parallels to the biblical Flood story, from the waters that rise, to the boat, to the birds Utnapishtim sent out the window to look for dry land. And as with Noah, Utnapishtim sacrificed to the deity after he abandoned the boat. The Gilgamesh Epic may be based on the flood story found in the Atrahasis Epic (see Lambert and Millard, 1969). The version quoted here dates to around 650 BCE. The Gilgamesh Epic has a long literary history going back as early as 2000 BCE (see Tigay, 1982). After closely examining its tradition history, Tigay says this in defense of the plausibility of Pentateuchal source analysis:

The stages and processes through which this epic demonstrably passed are similar to some of those through which the Pentateuchal narratives are presumed to have passed. What is known about the evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic shows that some of the results of biblical criticism are at least realistic. (1985: 27)

The Gilgamesh Epic is probably the single most important text from ancient Mesopotamia.

Go to the companion website for further information about the Gilgamesh Epic.

### **3 RE-CREATION TO THE ANCESTORS (8–11)**

The first half of the Primeval Story contained two versions of Creation. The first version was comprehensive in scope, giving account of the big moments of world creation yet also treating the creation of humans in God's image. The second version makes only passing reference to the grand environment and dwells on human origination. After God created Adam and Eve, they disregarded their maker's explicit command not to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge and were expelled from the garden. They became the first family with the birth of Cain and Abel and the first dysfunctional family after Cain killed Abel.

The remainder of those chapters contains two parallel, sometimes interwoven, threads. One traces the growth of the human race and its developing culture. Cain's offspring pioneered the building of cities, the domestication of animals for human service, and the arts. The other thread dwells on the problems that human willfulness created. Sin grew horribly, as told in episodes following the first murder. Lamech broke out with wanton violence, the sons of God sired monstrous creatures, and general human wickedness prompted God to send the Flood. Overall, this section is enclosed in a creation–destruction, goodness–sin envelope.

The second half of the Primeval Story parallels the first half in its broad developments and details. Noah patterns after Adam in overseeing the earth coming to life. Both receive the divine injunction to “*be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth.*” Both were

also implicated in wrongdoing, though curiously, to a degree passively: Adam followed Eve's initiative, and Noah's stupor became the occasion for Ham's indiscretion. In both phases, the human population increased, as the genealogical catalogs attest, but sin also increased and prompted divine reactions both times.

Go to the companion website for table "Parallels between the Creation and the Flood."

So they seem to tell, in many ways, the same story: creation, transgression, and crisis. As we move through this second series, the tension builds and we begin to ask, What will become of God's bold human project now that even the second-time, post-Flood humans go astray? In the first phase, except for Noah and the boatload, all life perished because of disobedience. Will God respond in a similar manner because humans again revealed a distinct propensity to perverse behavior?

## **3.1 Re-creation (8–9)**

The devastation of the Flood eliminated all life from the earth. The text indicates that the waters rose even higher than the highest peak, causing the earth to disappear. The narrative in effect takes us back to the pre-Creation state of the world, and it would have been a totally formless, watery void except for the preservation of Noah and those with him in the boat.

The remaking phase of the Primeval Story establishes important thematic points. Noah is pictured as a second Adam, and the earth is re-created. God brings the divine relationship with humans to a new level by means of a covenant, yet wrongdoing returns in an episode of suspicious sexuality.

### **3.1.1 Return of Earth and Life (8)**

The tragedy of the Flood was reversed when “*Elohim remembered Noah*” (8:1). God blew a wind over the earth so that the waters receded, similar to God’s wind hovering over the deeps in Genesis 1:2. Eventually, the ark came to rest on one of the peaks of the Ararat mountain range, called Urartu in Mesopotamian sources. The traditional identification of Mount Ararat is 17,000-foot-high Agri Dagi, northwest of Lake Van in Turkey. Various expeditions have claimed to recover remains of Noah’s ark, but none of the reports have been substantiated (see Bailey, 1989).

Noah first sent a raven out the window of the boat and then sent a dove out three times to see if there was any dry land. The first time the dove returned with nothing, then it came back with an olive twig in its beak, and finally it did not return at all. Knowing that the ground was dry, Noah, his family, and the survivors of the animal kingdom disembarked. The list of creatures that left the ark (8:17–19) mirrors the terms used in the Elohim Creation story.

The Yahwist writer tells us that Noah immediately built an altar to YHWH and presented sacrifices from every ritually clean animal and bird as an offering to YHWH (8:20–22). The deity accepted his sacrifice, indicating reconciliation. YHWH vowed never again to curse the ground or destroy all life as punishment, knowing now that evil is ingrained in humanity. The short poetic conclusion to the divine musing signals a blessed return to order:

*As long as earth lasts, sowing and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will not end. (8:22)*

With the Creation, the Elohim and YHWH versions were separate. Here with the Flood, the Elohim rendition is artfully woven into the YHWH version. But the vocabulary of each is so distinctive that, for the most part, the two sources can be easily distinguished. Read separately, we would notice the following contrasts. The YHWH

version tells nothing of the building of the ark, though perhaps it was eliminated in favor of the Elohim description. In the YHWH version, the flood waters are the result of a torrential downpour lasting 40 days, later receding in 7-day periods. In the Elohim version, the Flood is supernatural, inundating the earth from above the firmament (the windows of heaven) and below the surface of the ground (the sources of the great deep). It prevails for 150 days and takes 220 days to finally disappear.

In the YHWH version, the animals are gathered in sevens for the clean and only by twos for the unclean. The excess clean animals were presumably the ones used for Noah's sacrifice after leaving the ark because only clean animals would be accepted by YHWH. The Priestly writer is content with one pair of each species of animal, and Noah does not offer a sacrifice, presumably because the proper rules for sacrifice had not yet been established—remember that the Priestly writer sweated the ritual details and the chronology of the development of Israel's religion. For him, proper sacrifices could only be offered beginning with the time of Moses. The Yahwist writer's epic has no problem saying there were good sacrifices before Moses, as he does here and earlier with Abel's acceptable sacrifice.

Newer literary analysts have sought to move beyond classical source analysis in demonstrating the literary wholeness of the Flood narrative. Some have discerned a comprehensive literary symmetry that is evidence for unitary composition (see Wenham, 1978). Nonetheless, the fact that the final text shows symmetry does not disallow that the final compiler may have used a variety of separate sources. The story of the Flood can be separated into its two versions for easy comparison. It is a superb case study of a story in double tradition. Read the two versions separately, being attentive to the differences as well as the similarities, and then study the combined account.



Go to the companion website for tables showing the text of the Flood account separated into its component two versions for easy analysis and comparison. Additional tables identify the distinctive vocabulary of the two versions, the chronology of the Flood, and the palistrophic structure of the narrative.

### 3.1.2 God's Covenant with Noah (9:1–17)

Both YHWH and Elohim versions record God making a pledge of commitment to Noah. The Elohim version in [Chapter 9](#) takes the form of a [covenant](#). Covenants in the ancient world were formalized relationships regulated by terms and conditions:

*I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. (9:11)*

This is the first explicit act of covenant in the Hebrew Bible, and for that reason it is quite significant. In fact, the term *covenant* is used a total of seven times in this episode. Through this act of relationship, God commits to continue life, both human and animal. As the following episode demonstrates, perversity still characterizes human behaviors, but because of the covenant, God refrains from initiating a second deluge. The rainbow in the sky—the return of brilliance after the dark of storm—is the sign and reminder of this covenant.

Notable elements of this covenant episode echo the language of the Elohim Creation story. God blesses Noah and his sons using the same language as Genesis 1:28: “*Be fruitful and increase and fill the earth.*” As in the Creation story, humans here are given charge of the created world with the added provision that animals may be eaten as food—if the blood is first removed. Human life receives special

divine sanction because humanity is made in the “*image of Elohim*” (9:6; compare 1:27).

### 3.1.3 Noah’s Insobriety (9:20–27)

Noah and his three sons set about repopulating the earth. Noah settled down and became a farmer, much in the tradition of Adam and Cain. In the process, Noah, although “*a righteous man, upright in his generation*” (6:9), fell prey to what appears to be unseemly behavior—he gets drunk. God’s judgment on humanity in the Flood obviously had not improved human nature:

*Noah became a man of the ground. He planted a vineyard, drank wine and got drunk. He was uncovered in his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Shem and Japheth took a cloak, placed it on their shoulders, walked backwards, and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away so they did not see the nakedness of their father. (9:20–23)*

The text is not direct in its negative judgment on Noah’s insobriety, but from other biblical passages we can assume so. We cannot be sure exactly what made Noah so distraught, though there is the hint of sexual misdemeanor. Whatever Ham did, he dishonored his father. Bassett (1971) suggests that Ham committed incest with Noah’s wife, arguing that uncovered nakedness is equated with sexual intercourse. Cohen (1974) suggests that Ham acquired Noah’s sexual potency by the act of seeing him naked. Such interpretations go beyond what is given in the text, which is not specific enough to determine exactly what Ham’s offense was, beyond the fact that he dishonored his father:

*When Noah awoke from his insobriety, he knew what his youngest son had done to him. He said, “Cursed is Canaan! The most lowly servant will he be for his brothers.” He also said, “Blessed is YHWH, the Elohim of Shem. May Canaan be his servant. May Elohim enlarge Japheth. He will dwell in the tents of Shem. May Canaan be his servant.” (9:24–27)*

Note the special interest in Canaan. God’s curse of Ham’s son, Canaan, is especially difficult to justify. Why doesn’t Ham suffer the consequences of his actions himself? Perhaps the “Ham to Canaan” direction of cursing reinforces the biblical rule that later generations suffer the consequences of the sins of previous generations. Wherever the fault lies, this story is here to demonstrate that sin was still around after the Flood. Not even Noah was perfectly righteous.

There also may have been a political agenda in this story. Many suppose that the Yahwist writer lived in the tenth century BCE and was connected to the royal court. Israel’s leaders would have been interested in justifying the elimination of the Canaanite inhabitants of Palestine, who were their enemies. This story gives Israel sacred warrant for dispossessing the Canaanites and possessing their land. Other places where the YHWH source shows special interest in neighboring peoples include Genesis 26 regarding the Philistines (this is especially anachronistic because the Philistines did not establish a presence in Palestine until the thirteenth century BCE; presumably, Abraham is much before that); Genesis 29–31 regarding the Ara-means; and Numbers 20–25 regarding Ammon, Moab, and Edom.

## **3.2 Post-Flood Generations (10:1–11:9)**

After the Flood and the death of Noah, humanity repopulated the

earth. [Chapter 10](#), called the Table of Nations, is devoted to Noah's sons [Shem](#), [Ham](#), and [Japheth](#) and their descendants. This genealogy comes from the Elohim source with some Yahwist insertions (see Westermann, 1984), but it differs structurally from the genealogies in [Chapters 5](#) and [11](#). It has a segmented or treelike structure, going from one father to many offspring. This genealogy details three broad groups of people, one from each of the three sons.

Many of the offspring bear the names of geographical areas or cities. For example, the descendants of Ham include Egypt and Canaan. Nimrod, "*a mighty hunter before YHWH*," is singled out for special attention and is credited with building Nineveh, the great capital city of Assyria.

The Tower of Babel account (11:1–9) follows the Table of Nations. These two accounts seem strangely out of order. The Tower of Babel story presumes a unitary human population that disperses after God confused their language. But the Table of Nations precedes it and locates peoples in various places around the world.

Despite the logical tension between the Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel, the two accounts tell somewhat the same story of tremendous post-Flood human growth ("*be fruitful and multiply*"). At the same time, the narrative reveals that human nature has not changed a bit, even after the cleansing effort of the Flood. Humans still want to be like God and reach heaven, the realm of the divine. But God is not going to allow this. Remembering how God earlier responded to human presumption, the obvious question is this: What will God do now? Will he destroy humans again? Yet that option is not available because God made a covenant with Noah. So then, how will God respond?

### 3.2.1 Table of Nations (10)

The genealogy of Genesis 10 (the Table of Nations) is different from the other main genealogies of the Primeval Story in [Chapters 5](#) and

[11](#). The Table of Nations is a lateral rather than linear genealogy. It follows this general pattern: The sons of A were B and C and D. ... The sons of B were X and Y and Z. ... Its primary purpose was to identify connections among population groups based on their common paternity. Repeatedly we are told that “*these are the sons of [X], by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations*” (10:5, 20, 31).

The narrative placement of this material is logical in that it fills out the lines of descent of the three sons of Noah. From Shem, Ham, and Japheth, “*the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood*” (10:32). But the placement is also illogical in that it comes before the Tower of Babel incident (11:1–9), which presupposes that humanity is linguistically and geographically one entity.

Additional genealogies follow the Tower of Babel story in [Chapter 11](#). The genealogy of Shem (11:10–32; see “3.3 Generations to Abram”) concludes the Primeval Story on a positive note—positive because God did not destroy humanity even though it offended divine sensibilities yet again and because Shem was an ancestor to Abram, who would become the father of Israel.

### **3.2.2 Tower of Babel (11:1–9)**

The Yahwist narrative contributes the plot line of humanity’s reach for deity. The [Tower of Babel](#) episode continues the story of rebellion against God and depicts the overreach of human aspirations. A united humanity initiates an enormous project to build a turret that would reach heaven:

*The whole earth had one language and the same vocabulary. When they left the east they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, “Let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” So they had bricks*

*for building blocks and tar for mortar. Then they said, “Let us build a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens. Let us make a name for ourselves so we will not be scattered around the earth.” (11:1–4)*

The locale of this story is the broad plain of lower Mesopotamia called Shinar. In this episode, humanity is still a unified community. The people had plans to secure their own greatness, “to make a name for themselves.” They were intent on creating their own city and culture. Building a tower that would reach heaven itself was their goal. YHWH, however, took considerable offense at this:

*YHWH came down to see the city and the tower which the men had built. YHWH said, “If as one people with one language this is the beginning of what they can do, then nothing they plan will be impossible for them. Let us go down and confuse their language there so no one can understand the other’s language.” (11:5–7)*

Notice that the name of the deity in this episode is simply YHWH. And who is the “us” in “*Let us go down*”? Probably the Divine Council again (see the earlier section on “Day 6: Animals and Humanity”).

Why should YHWH get so upset? Surely these ancient people were not capable of building a skyscraper that could physically reach heaven and thereby challenge God. Whether or not they could actually do it, God took their activity as yet another attempt to grasp greatness rather than wait for God’s blessing:

*And YHWH scattered them from there around the earth. They quit building the city. For that reason he called its name*

*Babel because there YHWH confused the language of the entire earth, and from there YHWH scattered them around the earth. (11:8–9)*

**TABLE 1.4** Literary Parallels in the Babel Story  
The structure of the story suggests that for every human action there is a matched divine reaction.

| Human Plans (Genesis 11:1–4)                     | Divine Actions (Genesis 11:5–9)                 |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <i>One language, same vocabulary (1)</i>         | <i>One people, one language (6)</i>             |
| <i>Settled there (2)</i>                         | <i>Confuse language there (7)</i>               |
| <i>Let us make bricks (3)</i>                    | <i>Let us go down (7)</i>                       |
| <i>Let us build a city (4)</i>                   | <i>Quit building the city (8)</i>               |
| <i>Make a name (4)</i>                           | <i>Called its name (9)</i>                      |
| <i>Lest we be scattered around the earth (4)</i> | <i>YHWH scattered them around the earth (9)</i> |

God confounded their ability to communicate effectively. The people could no longer cooperate, so their building plans had to be scrapped. The result was human disunity. The word *confuse* used here is the seed of another pun in the original text; the Hebrew *balal* is a wordplay on Babel.

Perhaps there is an additional level of meaning in the text. [Babel](#) is also how the Hebrew language writes “Babylon.” With this story, we may be learning how and why Israel’s great nemesis later in its history, the Babylonian Empire, got its name. This story characterizes the great Babylon, even at the very beginning of history, as an evil city that demonstrated its defiance of God by these activities.

The Tower of Babel story is a good example of how thematic analysis can be supported by literary analysis. New literary criticism, to be distinguished from classical source criticism, focuses on the structure and plot development of stories. Fokkelman (1975) intensively studied the literary shape of the Babel episode. He shows it to have interweaving symmetrical structures, defined by repeated

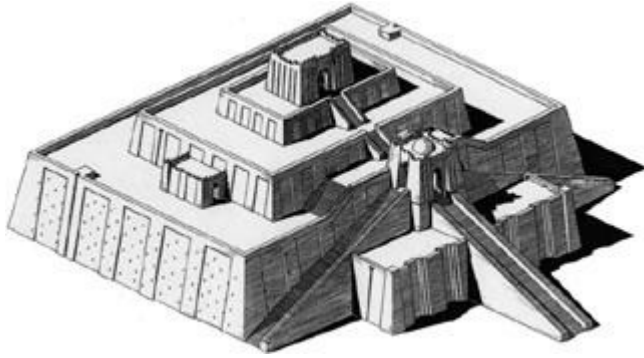
words and phrases. One such structure contains parallel action sets ([Table 1.4](#)). This is the effect of the structure: Humanity's attempt to go up is placed alongside God's going down. The language of the text highlights how God's actions are a response in kind to human efforts. For everything that humanity tried to do, God had a countermeasure. This reactive nature of God seems to characterize the Yahwist epic. It portrays God as ready to respond to the problem of human sin, both negatively (curses) and positively (blessings).

In addition to thematic and literary analysis, archaeology and cultural analysis increases our understanding of the text. The “*tower with its top in the heavens*” was a [ziggurat](#), a stepped, pyramid-shaped structure that typically had a temple at the top. Remains of ziggurats have been found at the sites of ancient Mesopotamian cities, including Ur and Babylon ([Figure 1.8](#)). The term *ziggurat* comes from the Akkadian word *ziqquratu*, meaning “mountain peak.” The reason why ancient Mesopotamians built ziggurats derives from their understanding of religion and the gods. In ancient times, mountains were often considered to be holy places where gods were thought to dwell. For example, Zeus dwelt on Mount Olympus, Baal on Mount Saphon, and YHWH first on Mount Sinai and later on Mount Zion. Such mountains were thought to be contact points between heaven and earth. On the Mesopotamian plain, there were no mountains. To remedy this, the inhabitants constructed artificial ones, ziggurats. One of the most famous ancient ziggurats was Etemenanki in Babylon, completed by Nebuchadnezzar around 600 BCE. According to Babylonian religion, [Babylon](#) was built by the gods and was the dwelling of Marduk. From there people could meet the gods. This is reflected in the authentic Akkadian name for Babylon; derived from the Babylonian phrase *bab-ilu*, it literally means “gate of the gods.” The Hebrew folk derivation of the name from “confuse” does not correctly reflect this true native meaning of the name Babylon.

**FIGURE 1.8** Ur Ziggurat



This reconstruction of the ziggurat at Ur displays the stepped pyramid style with a temple at the pinnacle.



Source: The ziggurat of Ur-Nammu, from H. R. Hall and L. Woolley, *Ur Excavations*, Vol. 5: *The Ziggurat and Its Surroundings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927).

The Babylonians believed that their capital city, through its ziggurat, gave them access to the heavens, as the meaning of the name Babylon suggests. The ziggurat itself embodied the concepts of pagan polytheism to the Israelites as it emerged in the early stages of city development in Mesopotamia (see Walton, 1995). The ziggurat represented this affront to the true God and lies somewhere behind Israel's Tower of Babel story.

The Tower of Babel story is the Yahwist writer's final contribution to the Primeval Story, and it ends on a sad note. As a collection, the YHWH episodes deal with the relationship between God and humanity. Originally the relationship was close and pure. Then humans wanted to be gods themselves. This destroyed the intimacy of the divine-human relationship and had destructive effects on humanity and the larger created world. The episodes of the Yahwist core of the Primeval Story demonstrate the disastrous effects of human sin.

Go to the companion website for a collection of excavation

photographs, reconstructions, and site diagrams of Mesopotamian ziggurats, as well as artistic renditions of the Tower of Babel.

### 3.3 Generations to Abram (11:10–32)

The genealogy of Shem, to the exclusion of Japheth and Ham, indicates that he will now carry on the line of promise. The genealogy of Terah that follows enables us to place the origin of Abraham's clan in Ur. Both connect the Primeval Story to the family of Abraham.

The Terah *Toledot*, the ten-level genealogy from Shem to Terah, completes the genealogical material of the Primeval Story and draws it to a conclusion by accounting for the origin of Abram. In fact, the genealogy consists of two *toledot*: the *toledot* of Shem (11:10) and the *toledot* of Terah (11:27). Insofar as the *toledot* of Terah is really the story of Abram, this is the real beginning of the Abraham cycle (see RTOT [Chapter 2](#)). The editors who drew up chapter and verse divisions could have made the major break here.

The Terah genealogy locates the family originally in Ur of the Chaldeans and establishes a number of important facts and connections. First, the family left Ur and headed west, perhaps as part of the historically attested movement of the Amo-rites, called *amurru* in Mesopotamian sources. When Terah's family came to Haran on the Euphrates, they settled there.

The story of Abram proper begins in Genesis 12. Presumably, when YHWH commanded Abram to leave, he would have left Haran, not Ur, as later tradition has it (for example, see Acts 7:2–5 in the New Testament). Second, Terah's family evidently had put down roots in Haran. This explains why Abram and Sarai later got a wife for Isaac from there, to keep it all in the family. Also, when Jacob fled Canaan, he went to this area, located his uncle Laban and

eventually married his daughters.

## 4 COMPOSITION OF GENESIS 1–11

When we focus on the account as a whole we see that there are structural features and themes that unite the episodes of Genesis 1–11 into a cohesive text, and we will see that they extend through the whole of Genesis. In addition, the final composition has a remarkable structural unity, developed as complementary parallel series. [Chapters 1–7](#) tell a story of Creation to destruction, and [Chapters 8–11](#) tell a story of divine grace despite continued human willfulness. The startling conclusion of the Primeval Story is that, in the face of the post-Flood return of sin, humanity does not meet the same fate as before the Flood, but instead God singles out Shem, blesses his line, and creates a nation through it.

### 4.1 Compositional Unity

Our close reading of the Primeval Story, with special attention to its vocabulary, revealed that at least two writers or two source texts contributed to the story as it now stands. This strongly suggests that, originally, separate documents were somehow combined to form the final text. The way of reading the biblical text with an eye to composition issues is called *source analysis*. The theory of source analysis that has longest standing in scholarship is called the *documentary hypothesis*. It calls the collection of YHWH Elohim and YHWH texts the Yahwist source, and it calls the Elohim collection of texts the Priestly source.

Of the two literary sources found in Genesis 1–11, the Yahwist source seems especially fascinated with the events of the primeval period. The YHWH stories shaped the plot of the Primeval Story. According to the documentary hypothesis, the Yahwist narrative was

written during the time of the Davidic monarchy or shortly thereafter. It primarily focuses on the growth of the human race, and it demonstrates how sin dogged that development. The growth of the Davidic kingdom and the development of cultural contacts with other nations inspired Israel’s interest in stories with global connections. Israel was striving to understand its place in the larger world, including its God’s relationship to other nations.

**TABLE 1.5** Sources of the Primeval Story

| Genesis 1–11    | Yahwist (J)            | Combined (J + P) | Priestly (P)           |
|-----------------|------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| 1:1–2:4a        |                        |                  | World creation         |
| 2:4b–25         | Creation of humanity   |                  |                        |
| 3:1–24          | Garden of Eden         |                  |                        |
| 4:1–16; 4:17–26 | Cain and Abel          |                  |                        |
| 4:17–26         | Cain’s generations     |                  |                        |
| 5               |                        |                  | Adam <i>toledot</i>    |
| 6:1–4           | Sons of God            |                  |                        |
| 6:5–8           | Reason 1 for the Flood |                  |                        |
| 6:9–13          |                        |                  | Reason 2 for the Flood |
| 6:14–7:24       |                        | Flood            |                        |
| 8               |                        | Re-creation      |                        |
| 9:1–17          |                        |                  | Covenant with Noah     |
| 9:18–27         | Noah’s insobriety      |                  |                        |
| 10              |                        | Table of Nations |                        |
| 11:1–9          | Tower of Babel         |                  |                        |
| 11:10–26        |                        |                  | Shem <i>toledot</i>    |
| 11:27–32        |                        |                  | Terah <i>toledot</i>   |

The Priestly source contributed its own versions of the Creation and Flood, along with some other, mostly genealogical, material. As the term *priestly* indicates, the authors responsible for this account were priests, presumed on the basis of indicators in the text. In addition to being spiritual leaders, they were concerned with ritual matters, including Sabbath rules and food laws. These concerns are implicit in the Creation story, with its seven-day structure and clear distinctions of types of animals. The priest’s Creation and Flood

stories do not deal with the problem of sin but present the gift of divine blessing. Furthermore, the documentary hypothesis posits an exilic Priestly editor as the one who skillfully combined the Yahwist and Priestly sources together and used genealogical material to give the chain of stories historical connectedness by inserting a variety of transitional phrases and sentences to smooth the text.

[Table 1.5](#) shows that the Yahwist supplies the bulk of the account—almost everything except for the first Creation story, parts of the Flood story, and the covenant with Noah. For these, the Priestly writer had his own traditions, which supplement the Yahwist core narrative.

## 4.2 Structural Unity

The Primeval Story gives evidence of two dimensions of structural organization. One is constituted by the priestly *toledot* headings. There are five of them in the Primeval Story and five in the Ancestral Story (more on this in RTOT [Chapter 2](#)). Each one introduces a “what became of X” account. These notices are obviously headings or captions that segment the story into five main components.

**TABLE 1.6** Parallel Structure of Genesis 1–11

|               | Creation to the Flood (Ten Generations)   | Re-creation to the Ancestors (Ten Generations)                             |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>A</i>      | Creation (1-2)                            | Re-creation (8:1-9:17)                                                     |
| 1             | Deepfs (1:2)                              | Deepfs (8:2)                                                               |
| 2             | Blessing (1:22)                           | Blessing (8:17)                                                            |
| 3             | Mandate (1:28)                            | Mandate (9:1-2, 7)                                                         |
| 4             | Food (1:29-30)                            | Food (9:3)                                                                 |
| 5             | Adam worked the ground (2:15)             | Noah worked the ground (9:20)                                              |
| <i>B</i>      | Adam and Eve ate fruit of the tree (3)    | Noah drank fruit of the vine (9:18-28)                                     |
| 1             | Fruit of the tree (3:1-7)                 | Wine (9:20-21)                                                             |
| 2             | Nakedness exposed (3:7)                   | Nakedness viewed (9:21-23)                                                 |
| <i>C</i>      | Cain sinned and was cursed (4)            | Ham sinned and Canaan was cursed (9:25-27)                                 |
| <i>D</i>      | Genealogy: Adam to Noah (5)               | Genealogy: Sons of Noah (10)                                               |
| <i>E</i>      | Sons of God (6:1-4)                       | Tower of Babel (11:1-9)                                                    |
| 1             | Divine-human mix (6:1-2)                  | Reach heaven (11:4)                                                        |
| 2             | Men of a name (Hebrew <i>shem</i> ) (6:4) | Make a name (Hebrew <i>shem</i> ) (11:4)                                   |
| <i>F</i>      | Flood (6:5-7:24)                          | Genealogy of Shem (11:10-26)                                               |
| <i>Result</i> | Undoing creation                          | God focuses on Abram and makes his name (Hebrew <i>shem</i> ) great (12:2) |

A different way of organizing the episodes looks for parallels and similarities in the content of the stories. Some of the correspondences are remarkable. For example, in part one, Eve and Adam eat the forbidden fruit and thereby sin; in part two, Noah drinks from the fruit and thereby occasions sin. In part one, Cain sins and is cursed; in part two, Ham sins and Canaan (which in Hebrew, as in English, sounds much like Cain) is cursed. Genealogies also stand in parallel positions across the columns. [Table 1.6](#) summarizes the parallel structural development of the Primeval Story.

An especially suggestive device is the use of the Hebrew word *shem*, meaning “name.” It appears to have some significance as a signal of structure. Humanity’s essential failure was in trying to make a name for itself. In each parallel series of events, the culminating offense was humanity’s attempt to become like God rather than acknowledging and accepting divine authority. Be it marriage with divine beings or a building project that gives access to heaven, they overreached and were ultimately frustrated by God.

The first attempt resulted in the Flood, a destructive cleansing of the world that had become corrupted. After the second attempt, the

Tower of Babel, God turned his attention to Shem, whose name in Hebrew means “name.” From his line, God took Abram and made a special covenant with him. God promised to make his name great and to make his lineage into a great nation. One lesson was this: The human race would achieve blessing and distinction only through divine initiative, not through its own engineering and scheming.

## **4.3 Theme and Genre**

What is the overall intent of these stories when seen together as a whole? They tell the following tale. God created the world a perfect place. The Creation, however, was distorted and corrupted by humanity’s efforts to achieve autonomy from God. God’s first response to the growing problem of sin was to wipe the slate clean with a flood and begin again with righteous Noah.

Even after the earth was uncreated and then re-created, sin was still present. Noah’s drunkenness, perhaps a sin in itself, brought out the worst in his son Ham. Just as before the Flood, sin continued to spread and increase in perversity. The immensity of sin was evident in the monstrous city and tower-building project conceived by humanity. God was outraged by this project. But he did not repeat his prior attempted solution by sending another flood. Indeed, he could not. He had made a covenant through Noah that he would never again eliminate the life that he had created just because of sin. Instead, at that point, he narrowed the focus of his attention and concentrated on the line of Shem. Out of that line, he took Abram and created a people called Israel.

The true nature of sin, from first to last, was trying to become like God: by knowing good and evil (Adam and Eve), or through divine marriage (Sons of God and human women), or by ascending to heaven (Tower of Babel). Humanity was created as the image of God. But there is a vital distinction between being the image of God

and being God. Humanity persistently tried to eliminate this distinction. The Ancestral Story follows next in RTOT [Chapter 2](#) and continues the epic story line of the Primeval Story. It shows how God developed a plan to bless humanity despite their continual urge to work out their own future.

Tracing the structure of the story line enables us to see how individual episodes contribute to the overall meaning. It is natural, then, to ask what kind of writing this is. Does it demand that we read it as an historical record? Is its truth the truth of historical fact? Even if it was originally intended as history, do we still have to read it that way today or risk losing its value? This can be a divisive issue among people of good faith. The answer is often framed as a choice between history and myth. And each of these terms is weighted with connotations and associations.

Those who choose to classify the Primeval Story as myth do not necessarily claim that the story is untrue, even though they probably would claim it is not factual. Modern authorities do not use the term *myth* to denote something that is false. Rather, [myth](#) is a culture's way of coming to grips with fundamental realities, and a culture's myth reflects its worldview. A myth is a traditional story of supposedly real events that is told to explain a culture's beliefs, practices, institutions, or something in nature (see Kirk, 1971). Myths are often associated with religious rituals and doctrines and often employ archetypes of creation, deity, and the hero (see Leeming, 2002). Both early cultures and modern ones have their particular myths. The cosmology of the "big bang" could be called a contemporary myth insofar as it strives to account for the universe. It remains a construct under frequent revision, even though it is backed by scientific evidence and reasoning.

Reading the Primeval Story as myth recognizes that through these episodes Israel is articulating its central affirmations about the nature of deity, the nature of humans and the historical process, the nature of the world as cosmos and creatures that inhabit it, and all these



components in their varied and complex relationships. The narrative, in other words, defines Israel's worldview. It is this highly integrative story that has lasting value to all those who would read and consider it.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Worldview*. What is the Israelite understanding of God, humanity, and the cosmos as implied in Genesis 1:1–2:4a and in 2:4b–25 in both their similarities and differences?
2. *Fall or maturation*. What does the story of human disobedience in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3) tell us about the Israelite understanding of human nature and the human condition?
3. *Mesopotamian myth*. What are the similarities and differences between the Enuma Elish and the biblical stories of the Creation? How might they be conceptually related?
4. *Flood*. What is the structural and thematic importance of the biblical Flood story in relation to the entire Primeval Story?
5. *Babel*. What is the relationship of the Tower of Babel story to previous stories of sin in Genesis 3–10, and why it is a fitting conclusion to the overall tale of disobedience told in the Primeval Story?
6. *Toledot*. How does the structure of the Primeval Story reveal itself through the *toledot* passages?
7. *Literary structure*. How does the first part of the Primeval Story, [Chapters 1–7](#), parallel the second part, [Chapters 8–11](#), in theme and structure?
8. *Name*. What is the thematic significance of the Hebrew word *shem* in the Primeval Story?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Story and context.* We have seen that the Primeval Story is a composite literary product with originally separate sources. In what ways do the YHWH episodes, which form the epic core of the Primeval Story, reflect the presumed historical context of its writer? Likewise, how do the Elohim additions reflect their exilic context? Our modern origin stories of cosmology (the “big bang”) or stories of national origin reflect to a certain degree our understanding of ourselves (or how we would like to be). What are the similarities and the differences between our stories and the Primeval Story?
2. *Creation stories.* Compare and contrast the various creation stories described in this chapter: the YHWH Elohim account in Genesis 2–3, the Elohim account in Genesis 1, and the Mesopotamian account of the Enuma Elish. What does each account say about the nature of the divine realm? What does each imply about the nature of humanity? In much the same way, our modern world tries to account for origins, and these accounts imply something about values. What does a modern scientific account of human origins, such as that found in evolutionary biology, physical anthropology, and modern medicine, imply about human nature?
3. *Creation and re-creation.* The Primeval Story as a whole implies that God created the world by subduing and shaping the waters of chaos. Later, humanity rebelled against God and contaminated the world. After an attempt to start over, even the “reborn” world of Noah was sinful. What does it say about God that he started over and yet never gave up trying to fashion a perfect world? What does it imply about humanity?
4. *Contemporary context.* What episodes of the Primeval Story were you familiar with because you had heard about them before you began your formal study of the biblical text? What details from these stories are common cultural trivia? Has your passing acquaintance with this material based on random tidbits

that you have picked up in other contexts led you to expect something in these stories that is different from what you have now discovered?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

*At the Start: Genesis Made New*, by Mary Phil Korsak (1992), *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*, by Robert Alter (1996), and *Genesis: A New Translation of the Classic Biblical Stories*, by Stephen Mitchell (1997), are translations of the book of Genesis that are informed by recent scholarship and have a literary flair. *Genesis: A Living Conversation*, by Bill Moyers (1996), is a ten-part video series with accompanying book in which writers and scholars explore the stories of Genesis for their experiential and moral value. *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, by Richard Middleton (2005), examines the ancient context of the image of God concept and explores its contemporary application.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Genesis 12–50: The Ancestral Story

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Abraham Cycle \(11:27–25:11\)](#)

[3 Jacob Cycle \(25:19–35:29\)](#)

[4 Joseph Cycle \(37:1–50:26\)](#)

[5 Genesis as a Book](#)

---

## KEY TERMS

[Abraham cycle](#)

[Abram/Abraham](#)

[Abrahamic covenant](#)

[Ancestors](#)

[Ancestral Story](#)

[Aram](#)

[Benjamin](#)

[Birthright](#)

[Circumcision](#)

[Covenant](#)

[Cycle](#)

[Edom](#)

[Eponym](#)

[Esau](#)

[Goshen](#)

[Hagar](#)

[Isaac](#)

[Ishmael](#)

[Jacob](#)

[Jacob cycle](#)  
[Joseph](#)  
[Joseph cycle](#)  
[Judah](#)  
[Laban](#)  
[Leah](#)  
[Lot](#)  
[Matriarchs](#)  
[Patriarch/patriarchs](#)  
[Pharaoh](#)  
[Potiphar](#)  
[Rachel](#)  
[Rebekah](#)  
[Saga](#)  
[Sarai/Sarah](#)  
[Theophany](#)  
[Toledot](#)  
[Ur](#)

## **Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac***

The story of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 is the climax of the Abraham stories. It conveys the nature and extent of Abraham's commitment to his God. This detail from Caravaggio's famous painting isolates the hand of Abraham holding a knife to Isaac's throat, thereby freezing the story's moment of truth.



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac* (Florence, Italy: Uffizi, 1603, oil on

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Genetic inheritance profoundly shapes every individual—from hair color to body shape, even personality quirks. Each of us inevitably resembles mother and father, and this can be hopeful or discouraging. Each of us naturally wants to shape our own identity and be our own person, but we might get disheartened once we realize how much we have turned out to be like our parents.

This can be the source of rebellion against parents and frustration that we cannot ultimately escape our genetic history. Genetic research confirms the scientific side of what the writers of Israel seemed to realize long ago. Telling the story of their [ancestors](#) was the way that the tellers came to understand their own being.

The history of Israel really begins with family history, and the Ancestral Story is the account of Israel's earliest forebears. The great Hebrew storytellers instinctively knew that Israel's parentage could teach a great deal about the nation's character.

The [Ancestral Story](#) is the prehistory of Israel, the cultural genetics of the nation. The Ancestral Story is dominated by sibling rivalry and family infighting. Yet the tales also have international significance. The names of many of the characters are eponyms; hence, they are eponymous ancestors. An [eponym](#) is one who gives his name to a people, place, or institution. For example, Jacob's name was changed to Israel, and his sons bore the names of Israel's tribes.

The main protagonists of the Ancestral Story are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are often referred to as the [patriarchs](#), or first fathers, of Israel. Male family and clan heads dominated social structures in Israel although the powerful role of [matriarchs](#), or first

mothers, is evident throughout the biblical story. Calling Israel a patriarchal society would oversimplify its complex social organization. The Ancestral Story gives ample witness to the essential functions of women in shaping national destiny. Most of the episodes of the Ancestral Story are tales of family life with a domestic orientation, and the matriarchs are dominant players.

The primary literary form of the Ancestral Story is the saga. A [saga](#) is a legendary narrative about an ancestor or community figure. The plot of a saga is simple and recounts the leader's success in weathering threats or overcoming obstacles. Sagas explore human experiences and may have been intended to support the reader through life's problems.

Overall, the Ancestral Story does not have the same architecture as the Primeval Story, which, as we saw in [Chapter 1](#), was organized into two series of parallel developments. The Ancestral Story is organized into three major saga collections. Each collection is called a [cycle](#) because the stories revolve around a major ancestral figure, respectively, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. These three cycles are separated from each other by brief genealogical notices of the two ancestral offspring who branched off from the trajectory of Israel, namely, Ishmael and Esau.

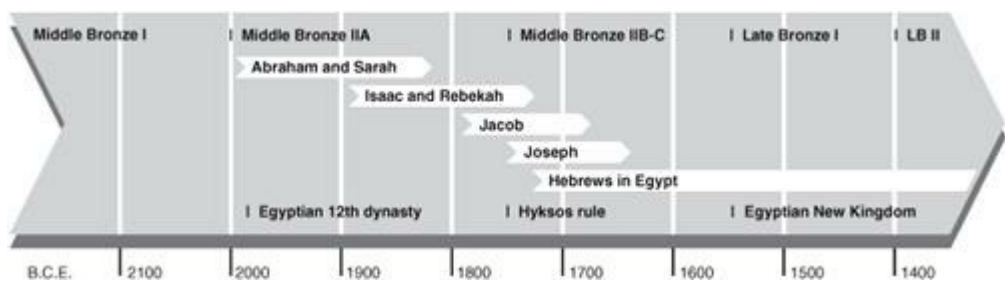
The Abraham and Jacob cycles could be called *albums*, the episodes being similar to snapshots. The individual tales within each cycle are not altogether tightly connected nor are they ordered by a linear plot structure. Nonetheless, threads and themes unite the collections. In contrast, the stories of the Joseph cycle are dramatically unified in what may be the world's earliest novella. It is replete with consistent characterization, theatrical tension, and narrative suspense—as befitting any good tale.

The literary shape of the Ancestral Story is much easier to establish than the ancestors' relationship to history ([Figure 2.1](#)). No outside source makes reference to the ancestors of Israel, and Genesis makes no unambiguous references to otherwise known

historical figures. Authorities have attempted to establish the time frame of the ancestors using biblical parallels to the known social customs. On this basis, the ancestors have been positioned in the Middle Bronze period (2000–1550 BCE; see Kitchen, 1995). Other authorities have challenged the social and historical parallels and have built a case that the Ancestral Story is largely a fictional account written long after Judah’s exile in Babylonia (see Thompson, 2000). According to this view, the story reflects the later community’s understanding of its identity and as such is not a historically reliable chronicle of actual events. This view is supported by anachronisms in the narrative. For example, the city of Abraham’s origin is called Ur of the Chaldeans, but the term *Chaldean* could only apply to southern Mesopotamia from the tenth to eighth centuries BCE at the earliest.

**FIGURE 2.1** Time Line: The Ancestors

Many interpreters place the ancestors in the Middle Bronze period, but this cannot be established conclusively.



Go to the companion website and see the table “Chronological Data Relating to the Ancestors.”

## 1.1 The Ancestral Story: A Summary

When God held out the promise of a homeland and a large family, [Abram/Abraham](#) migrated from **Ur** in southern Mesopotamia to



Palestine (Genesis [Chapter 12](#)). Because of a famine, he and his wife [Sarai/Sarah](#) sought refuge in Egypt. Abram and Lot had competing claims to Canaan and finally separated (13). Note that the names Abram and Sarai are used to refer, respectively, to the first patriarch Abraham and the first matriarch Sarah from the time of their departure from Ur until the covenant of circumcision (called the [Abrahamic covenant](#)). At this point God changed their names to Abraham (17:5) and Sarah (17:15). Where a distinction is not relevant, discussions will use the names Abraham and Sarah.

God made a covenant with Abram as an assurance that he would fulfill his promise of offspring (15). After many years had passed, Abram and Sarai still did not have a son. Sarai had her husband lay with her servant Hagar (16), and Ishmael was born to be the surrogate heir. God reaffirmed the covenant promise of offspring, founded the ritual of circumcision, and gave new names to Abram and Sarai (17).

When Abraham was almost 100 years old and Sarah almost 90, God announced that they would have their own son (18–19). After the promised son Isaac was born, Ishmael and Hagar came into conflict with Sarah and were driven away (21). Then God tested Abraham's faith by commanding him to slaughter and sacrifice Isaac. At the last moment, God stopped Abraham from killing Isaac (22). Sarah died shortly thereafter and was buried in a plot purchased by Abraham (23). Then Abraham sent his servant to the Terah clan in Aram to get a wife for Isaac (24). Isaac married Rebekah, and Abraham passed away knowing his line would continue (25).

Twin sons, Esau and Jacob, were born to Isaac and Rebekah. The firstborn Esau sold his birthright to Jacob (25). Residing in Gerar, Isaac felt threatened and deceived Abimelech the king by saying that Rebekah was his sister (26). Later, Jacob and Rebekah deceived Isaac and stole the family blessing from Esau (27). Jacob fled from his brother (28) and lived for an extended period of time with his uncle Laban in Haran. Eventually, he married Leah and Rachel, the

daughters of Laban, and had many children (29–31). Rachel was his favored wife. Laban grew jealous of Jacob because his flocks increased at Laban's expense. So Jacob felt compelled to leave with his family and considerable belongings. Returning to Palestine, he wrestled with God (32), and then he met up with Esau (33). Jacob and his family settled in Palestine but tried to remain separate and distinct from the Canaanites who lived in the land, as the story of Shechem illustrates (34). Jacob journeyed to Bethel and settled there (35).

Jacob blatantly showed favoritism to Joseph. For this as well as for Joseph's own arrogance, his brothers despised him and eventually sold him into Egyptian slavery. He became a servant to Potiphar, an Egyptian official (37). An interlude describes Judah and Tamar's conflict over marriage rights and offspring (38). Back on the main story line, Joseph faithfully served Potiphar but was sent to jail after Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him and Joseph rebuffed her. While in jail, Joseph distinguished himself by his trustworthiness and his ability to interpret dreams (39–40). When Pharaoh had a series of dreams he could not comprehend, Joseph was summoned to interpret them. Pharaoh was pleased with his reading and appointed him to a high government post (41). Under his leadership, Egypt prepared for a famine, thus providing the occasion for a reunion with his brothers. When they came to buy grain, he accused them of espionage and imprisoned one of his brothers, inflicting on Simeon the ordeal that he himself had suffered because of them (42). Eventually, he revealed his identity to them and forgave them (43–45).

Joseph brought his entire family to live in the [Goshen](#) region of Egypt, a fertile area in the eastern Nile delta. They grew into a sizable clan under the care of Jacob. In his old age, Jacob passed the family blessing on to his grandchildren, Ephraim and Manasseh, (48) and to his sons (49). Shortly afterward, Jacob died and was taken back to Canaan for burial. Before Joseph died in Egypt, he extracted a promise from his family that they would not bury him in Egypt but

would carry his bones back to Canaan (50).

## 1.2 Reading Guide

As you read the Ancestral Story pay special attention to the following issues that are common to all three cycles:

1. Each tracks how God extends blessing to the ancestral family and from them to others, but each cycle has its own variation on the theme.
2. Each employs a journey motif that mirrors in some way the movement from barrenness to blessing.
3. From the perspective of text composition, the first episode of each cycle also contains in some embryonic form the dynamics of the blessing theme, especially as it relates to offspring and land.

See if you can identify the thematic episode of each cycle and the specific features of blessing it signals.

We saw that the Primeval Story has two underlying contributors, a writer who used Elohim for God and one who used YHWH. These same writers also contribute episodes to the Ancestral Story, and a third contributor appears. The classical documentary hypothesis identifies the three sources as the Yahwist, the Elohist, and the Priestly writers, which we described in [Part 1](#), “The Torah: Prologue.”

Beginning here with the Ancestral Story and continuing through Numbers, we will be using these designations to identify the three sources. Again we should point out that not all scholars agree with every detail of the documentary hypothesis or even with the general approach. But it has proved to be a useful tool for reading texts closely, is still used widely in the scholarly literature, and can provide plausible explanations for certain features in the text.

## 2 ABRAHAM CYCLE (11:27–25:11)

The [Abraham cycle](#) continues the primeval theme of blessing and lays the groundwork for the history of Israel. The new beginning notably coincides with its hero, Abraham, departing for a new land. Reflecting universal epic patterns (see Campbell, 1968), the hero's journey is played out in Abraham's story. He leaves his comfortable surroundings with an eager but simple faith, faces many dangers, and occasionally stumbles. Through these challenges, his faith matures and his relationship with God deepens. When God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son, he faces his most difficult challenge—and is forever changed.

The Abraham cycle of stories formally begins with the [toledot](#) of Terah (11:27–32). This genealogical notice mentions two essential details: Abram married Sarai, who was barren, and Abram's clan left Ur for Canaan but stopped short and settled in Haran. These facts set the stage for the two itineraries that drive the cycle. The first is the metaphorical journey from barrenness to fertility; the unifying motif of this cycle is the concern for a son. The second itinerary is the geographical journey from Mesopotamia to the Promised Land ([Figure 2.2](#)).

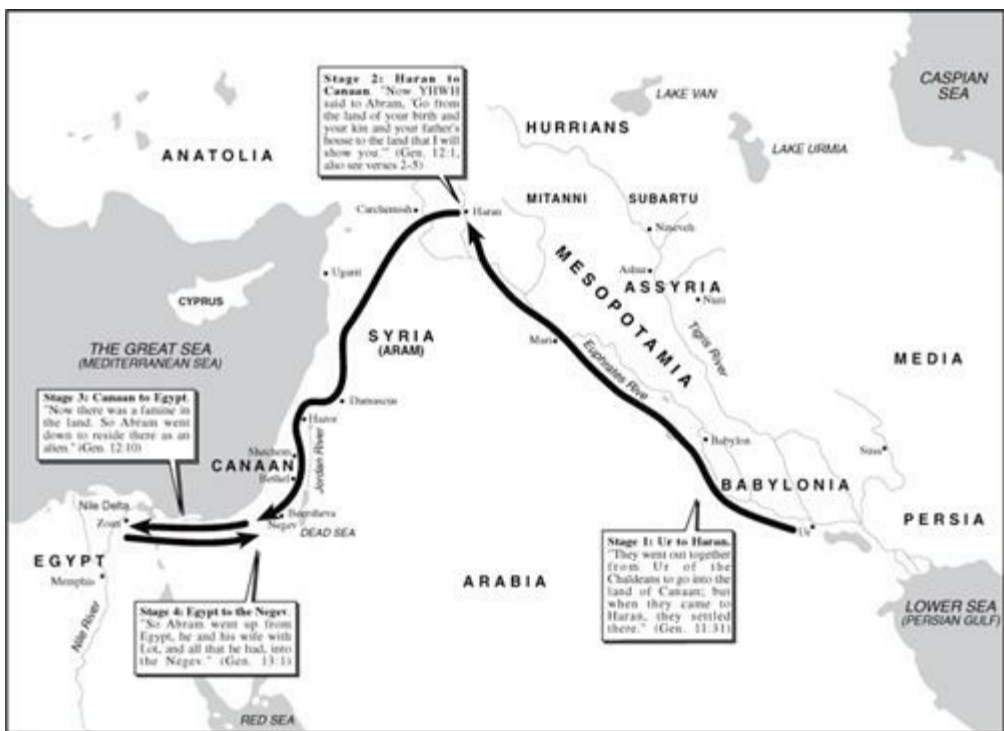
For years, historians and archaeologists have been looking for evidence to substantiate the biblical picture of Abraham (see Kitchen, 2003). However, there is no specific mention of Abraham or his associates in any ancient extrabiblical text. Some have suggested that Abraham's wide-ranging travels through the Middle East may be related to the well-known movements of the Amorites of the second millennium BCE. Also, the type of names held by Israelite ancestors fits the pattern of Amorite personal names. Abraham was not necessarily an Amorite, but the biblical portrait of him correlates generally with patterns of Bronze Age migrations in western Mesopotamia.

## 2.1 Call and Covenant (12–17)

The first episode of the Abraham cycle articulates what God intended to do with Abram. The divine charge in 12:1–3 contains the programmatic theme of the cycle. In it YHWH makes some rather bold promises to Abraham, perhaps as an incentive to get him moving. Having given up everything to follow YHWH's lead, Abraham awaits fulfillment of the promises, but as years turn into decades, Abraham verges on disillusionment—still no children, still no land. Through various means, including the device of covenant, God maintains Abraham's hope.

### **FIGURE 2.2** Abraham's Journey

According to Genesis, Abraham's clan originally came from southern Mesopotamia and then settled in western Mesopotamia. Abraham, Sarah, and Lot traveled from Haran to Canaan. After arriving in Canaan, Abraham's principle sphere of activity is the territory of Judah.



## 2.1.1 To and From Canaan (12–14)

The divine promise speech in 12:1–3 is crucial for understanding the theological intention of the Yahwist source. Abraham was commanded to leave his home and his family and follow YHWH's leading to a new land:

*Now YHWH said to Abram, "Go from the land of your birth and your kin and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and through you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves/be blessed." (12:1–3)*

God essentially promised Abraham three things: a homeland, offspring, and, less tangible than these two, that he would be a blessing. Take note of the phrases “*great nation*” and “*make your name great*” in YHWH’s speech. God is the one who will secure Abraham’s future greatness. This language recalls the earlier significance of name (Hebrew *shem*) in Genesis 6:4 (“*men of a name*”), in 11:4 (“*make a name for ourselves*”), and as the genealogy of Shem. The name that God will make for Abraham will reverse humanity’s previous misguided aspirations.

The prominence of the word *blessing* in this text suggests that God had something special in store for Abraham. But not only for him; through Abraham, all humanity would be blessed and move out from under YHWH’s curse. This is as close as we come to identifying an overall theological theme in the Yahwist narrative. Perhaps the Yahwist writer, theoretically connected to the Davidic or Solomonic court, believed that God’s blessings had been given to David, especially through the gift of an empire, and he saw this as the beginning of the renewal of society—perhaps even a new world order.

Go to the companion website and see the table “The ‘Bless Themselves’ Passages in the Ancestral Story.” The last statement of the divine call in verse 3 can either be translated “be blessed” or “bless themselves.” This table lays out the collection of texts that use this phrase.

Abraham followed YHWH’s command and traveled from Haran to Canaan. He stopped at two places, Shechem and the region of Bethel, before arriving in the Negev. At both Shechem and Bethel, he built an altar to YHWH, demonstrating his devotion to God, and perhaps also, at least in the eyes of later Israelites, founding these sites as authentic worship centers and staking claim to these lands.

No sooner had Abraham journeyed to Canaan under YHWH’s

promise than a famine forced him and Sarah to go elsewhere in search of sustenance. Arriving in Egypt, Abraham feared for his life because he believed that the Egyptians would kill him to gain his beautiful Sarah. He and Sarah agreed to keep their spousal relationship a secret so that he would be spared. [Pharaoh](#), the ruler of Egypt, did take Sarah into his court, but as a consequence YHWH afflicted the royal house with plagues. When confronted by Pharaoh, Abraham admitted his deception and was summarily expelled.

This story is notable for a number of reasons. First, Abraham is pictured in a less than flattering way. The story reveals his striking lack of faith—notable because he had just received YHWH’s remarkable promises. The episode is strategic for the theological plot development of the cycle. It benchmarks Abraham’s insecurity and sets the story up for Abraham to grow in trust and confidence in YHWH’s promises as the narrative progresses. Second, the famine, the journey from Canaan to Egypt and back, Pharaoh, and plagues foreshadow the large-scale confrontation between the Hebrews and Egyptians that will be told in the book of Exodus (see RTOT [Chapter 3](#)).

After the famine, another threat to the promise of land came by way of Abraham’s nephew, [Lot](#). Both of their flocks had grown so large that they started competing for pasturage. In a fit of generosity and evidently also a show of faith, Abraham allowed Lot to choose where he wished to be. Lot chose the well-watered Jordan valley. In response, God reiterated to Abraham his promises of land and offspring (13:14–17), and Abraham moved to the Hebron area.

In the meantime, Lot drifted toward Sodom and Gomorrah. A coalition of Middle Eastern kings ransacked these cities and carried off Lot. Abraham mustered a fighting force of 318 men out of his own estate and gave chase. His troops recovered the goods and people stolen from the cities of the plain. On his journey back to Hebron, Melchizedek, the king of Salem (possibly Jerusalem), blessed Abraham in the name of “*El Elyon, Creator of heaven and earth*”



(14:19). This episode illustrates how powerful Abraham had become, displays concretely how the nations were blessed through him, and confirms that he was blessed by God.

## 2.1.2 Heir to the Promise (15–16)

Although YHWH had promised that Abraham would become a great nation, in advanced old age he and Sarah still did not have children. In [Chapter 15](#), a highly significant passage, YHWH approaches Abraham and confirms his promises with a covenant. A [covenant](#) is an oath-bound relationship with defined expectations and obligations. The texts of many ancient Middle Eastern covenants have survived and been analyzed for setting and form. Covenants originated in politics and international law and have standard elements. Treaty covenants and charter covenants were the two main types (see McCarthy, 1978).

A *treaty covenant* defined and regulated a relationship between nations. The parties to the covenant could be of equal power and status (a parity covenant) or unequal status (a *suzerain–vassal covenant*). The covenant that God made with Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai was a suzerain–vassal type (see also RTOT [Chapters 3](#) and [5](#)). Ancient treaty covenants are analogous to the formal international alliances and trade agreements modern countries still negotiate.

A *charter covenant* consisted of a grant of property. The grant was usually made to reward faithfulness or loyal service. For example, kings would give land to loyal military officers after a campaign; hence, it is sometimes called a *royal land grant covenant* (see Weinfeld, 1970). In Genesis 15, the Yahwist uses the charter form of covenant to give shape to God's commitment to Abraham. It is a unilateral divine promise in which God binds himself by an oath to provide land to Abraham and his offspring in perpetuity.

The documentary source of this episode is a bit difficult to pin

down. YHWH is used throughout the story, and this is usually indicative of the Yahwist source. It might also be assigned to the Yahwist source on account of its style and theme. But it does contain some inconsistencies that suggest it might have come from elsewhere, perhaps the Elohist source. Verses 3, 5, and 13–16 are usually assigned to the Elohist source because revelations in visionary form are typically an Elohist characteristic. Blenkinsopp (1992:122–124) suggests that [Chapter 15](#) was “written or extensively rewritten by a D author.” The Abraham charter covenant is similar in structure to the David charter covenant in 2 Samuel 7 (see RTOT [Chapter 8](#)), leading Clements (1967) to argue that Genesis 15 and 2 Samuel 7 come from the same source.

Here is the text of this remarkable covenant ceremony:

*After these events, the word of YHWH came to Abram in a vision, “Don’t be afraid, Abram ...” (15:1a)*

YHWH came to Abraham in a vision, indicating Abraham’s special relationship with God. The phrase “*the word of YHWH came*” typically introduces prophetic revelation (see 1 Samuel 15:10 and Hosea 1:1). Fear is a natural reaction when someone is in the presence of God, and therefore “*don’t be afraid*” is a phrase that frequently introduces announcements of salvation (see 21:17; 26:24; 35:17; as well as Isaiah 10:24).

*“... I am your shield. Your reward will be very great.” (15:1b)*

YHWH declared himself to be Abraham’s shield—that is, his protector. The reward would not be contracted wages for service rendered but an unexpected favor in appreciation for faithful service.

*Abram said, “My Lord YHWH, what of lasting significance can you give me since I continue to be childless, with Eliezer of Damascus, a servant, standing to inherit my estate!” Abram further stated, “You have not given me offspring. One of my servants stands as my heir.” Then there was a word of YHWH for him, “That one shall not be your heir! One who comes from your own loins—he will be your heir.” He took him outside and said, “Look at the heavens and count the stars if you can. So will your offspring be.” He placed his trust in YHWH, and he (YHWH) considered that a righteous act. (15:2–6)*

Because Abraham had no son born to him, his inheritance was due to go to his servant, Eliezer of Damascus. This story demonstrates that concern over descendants is central to the plot line. This will be a continuing interest of the Yahwist within the Ancestral Story. Lacking a son, Abraham was not sure that God’s promise would ever be realized. After God reassured him that he would have numerous offspring—even more than the stars—Abraham committed his future to God, even though he saw no evidence that fulfillment was even a possibility. God took Abraham’s faith as an indication that he wanted to stand in a relationship of living trust with him. The word *righteous* is significant. Righteousness in the Torah applies to human activity. Righteous acts are God-approved ones, whereby the doer demonstrates that he or she intends to stand in a relationship of dependence on God. Here, Abraham’s faith is reckoned as a righteous act.

The next part of the story (verses 7–12, not given here) describes a rather strange ceremony. Abraham slaughtered a heifer, goat, ram, turtledove, and pigeon, and he placed the animal halves in two rows. Then Abraham was cast into a deep sleep, and YHWH appeared to him and symbolically passed between the animal halves:

*When the sun set and it was dark, a smoking oven and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. (15:17)*

This ceremony drew Abraham into a formal relationship with the deity. Through this ritual action, God demonstrated to Abraham the depth of his commitment. The narrative says that God took the form of a smoking oven pot and torch for the purposes of the ceremony. According to the Hebrew Bible (depending on how the notion of the image of God is understood), God has no physical form, but when he does appear, he is typically represented by smoke and fire. Such a symbolic appearance of God is called a **theophany**. The most notable appearance was his descent onto Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, when he appeared to the Israelites and delivered the Ten Commandments.

The ceremony takes on the meaning of a ritual of self-condemnation. By passing between the bisected animals, YHWH was symbolically calling down upon himself the same fate that the animals suffered in the event that he would be unfaithful to the covenant promise. In this ceremonial way, the deity staked the divine life on the promise of offspring and the promise that they would possess the land of Canaan:

*On that day YHWH cut a covenant with Abram: "To your offspring I give this land: from the River of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates." (15:18)*

The entire encounter between Abraham and YHWH in this passage is summarized in the statement, "*YHWH cut a covenant with Abram.*" In biblical language, "to cut a covenant" refers to the animals that were ceremonially cut in half. Cutting animals in a covenant ceremony may have been a traditional practice. Cutting an ass in half

was part of a ritual of covenant ratification attested in Mari. The cutting of the animals and passing between the pieces is ritualized self-condemnation, invoking mutilation and death on oneself if one is disloyal to the covenant.

Here, the cutting ritual was used to ensure YHWH's grant of offspring and land. Charter covenants typically specify land boundaries, and such is the case here. YHWH gave Abraham a grant of land and finalized it with a charter covenant because Abraham had demonstrated his faith. Not accidentally, these borders correspond with the limits of the Davidic–Solomonic kingdom (see 1 Kings 4:21). The point is that Israel's claim to the land, even to the definition of the borders, was traced back to the covenant promise YHWH made to Abraham.

Despite the covenant and the promises, Abraham and Sarah were unable to have children for a long time. They grew impatient and Sarah arranged for a surrogate wife for Abraham, [Hagar](#), who bore a son, [Ishmael](#) ([Chapter 16](#)). Hagar then refused to take second place behind Sarah. Sarah made life so difficult for Hagar that she fled into the wilderness, only to return later to Sarah and Abraham.

These stories clearly reflect the concern for an heir, which was the ancestors' great hope for the future. They also reveal the uncertain nature of the inheritance, given the constant threat of infertility. Perhaps the fixation on such matters reflects the monarchic setting of the Yahwist narrative and its consuming interest in heirs and succession within the royal house of David (see RTOT [Chapter 8](#)).

### **2.1.3 Covenant of Circumcision (17)**

As Genesis 12:1–3 is central to the Yahwist's theology of promise, so Genesis 17 is foundational to the Priestly theology of covenant. In the following passage, notice how the God of Abraham goes by three different designations—YHWH, El Shaddai, and Elohim. From Creation until Abraham, the deity was Elohim. Then he revealed

himself to Abraham and the other ancestors as El Shaddai. The ancestors never knew his name to be YHWH. Here, in one of its rare uses of the name YHWH, the Priestly tradition makes the identification between YHWH and El Shaddai explicit so that readers will not be confused. In the Priestly historical record, God did not clarify that he was both YHWH and El Shaddai until he spoke to Moses (Exodus 6:3). In 17:3 the Priestly writer reverts to Elohim, which is his normal pre-Exodus designation for *God*:

*Abram was ninety-nine years old. YHWH appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Live in my presence and be perfect. So I will put my covenant between me and you: I will multiply you greatly. Abram fell on his face. Then Elohim spoke with him: My covenant now is with you; you will be the father of a multitude of nations. And your name will no longer be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you very prolific, and I will make you nations, and kings will come from you. I will solidify my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you for generations, as a long-lasting covenant as your Elohim and your offspring's Elohim after you. And I will make the land of your sojournings, the land of Canaan, your and your offspring's long-lasting possession. And I will be their Elohim. Elohim said to Abraham, "You will keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you. This is the covenant you will keep, the one between me and you and your offspring after you: Circumcise every male." (17:1–10)*

The language of multitudes and multiplying recalls the blessing placed on humanity in Genesis 1:28. The Priestly writer viewed Abraham as the fulfiller of the promise given at Creation. "*Father of a multitude of nations*" is the Priestly equivalent to the Yahwistic

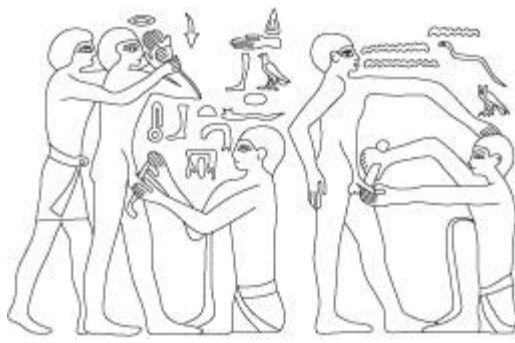
promise of becoming a great nation, which YHWH pledged to Abraham in 12:2.

The imminent fulfillment of the promise of offspring was signaled by a name change. Abram, meaning “Exalted Father,” was changed to Abraham, “Father of a Multitude,” affirming that the promise of offspring was still intact. Immediately after God reaffirmed the promises, [circumcision](#) was introduced as the ceremony and perpetual sign of Abraham’s commitment to God ([Figure 2.3](#)).

This covenant is a new development because here for the first time God requires Abraham to do something to demonstrate his good faith as part of the covenant arrangement. This covenant assumes the structure of a treaty covenant, with mutual rights and obligations, in contrast to a charter covenant. In this case, Abraham had to perform the ritual of circumcision on himself, Ishmael, and all the males in his household. Abraham vowed to live in such a way that would please God—live “perfectly,” the text says.

### **FIGURE 2.3** The Practice of Circumcision

This Egyptian tomb painting from Sixth Dynasty (2350–2000 BCE) Saqqara illustrates the practice of circumcision, which was performed on males between the ages of 6 and 12 years of age. Circumcision was not unique to the Israelites, as this painting demonstrates, but the Israelites invested it with unique significance by using it as the mark of the covenant. Circumcision is the surgical removal of the foreskin of the penis and is still practiced today by many families. For parents who choose to have their sons circumcised, it usually takes place in the hospital a day or two after birth. In the Jewish community it happens with great ceremony eight days after a son is born (see Hoffman, 1996).



Source: Drawing by Barry Bandstra based on a Saqqara tomb painting from the Sixth Dynasty (2350–2000 BCE).

Circumcision established itself within Judaism as a distinctive mark of covenant commitment. Sealing the covenant by circumcising the organ of procreation with a knife, with its implied threat of sterility, has the effect of symbolically handing over the possibility of offspring to the grace of God. By practicing the rite from generation to generation, the Israelites almost literally placed their future into the hands of the God of covenant. Contrast the Yahwist perspective in which covenant was primarily a reminder that YHWH granted blessing in perpetuity. For the Yahwist, covenant took the form of a charter covenant given to Abraham with no required action in return, only a commitment of faith. By retaining both notions of covenant within the Abrahamic narrative, the final edition affirms that the two covenants complement each other.

Go to the companion website and see the tables “Priestly Statements of the Ancestral Covenant” and “The Term *Covenant* in Genesis and Exodus.”

## 2.2 Abraham and Isaac (18–22)

The decisive action of the Abraham cycle takes place surrounding the birth of the son of promise. Surrogate son Ishmael and dependent



nephew Lot were marginalized and made satellites of the ancestral orbit, while true son Isaac emerged from the matriarchal womb to take his destined place. But not all threats to the promise automatically vanished. Indeed, the promise was to face its greatest challenge just at the point that fulfillment seemed sure.

### **2.2.1 Birth Announcement (18–19)**

One day three men appeared at Abraham's door. As the account develops, we learn that one is YHWH and the other two are apparently the angels that rescue Lot. Abraham prepared a Bedouin banquet for these visitors, and the disguised YHWH in return promised that Abraham and Sarah would have a son by the same time next year. When Sarah overheard this prediction, she could not suppress a loud guffaw because she was so old.

After the meal, Abraham and "the men" gazed down on Sodom, and YHWH revealed that he intended to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness. Because Lot lived there, Abraham bargained with God to save Sodom if even ten righteous people could be found. But it turned out that there were not enough to save the city.

The two angels entered Sodom to rescue Lot. To demonstrate the depravity of Sodom, we are told that the men of the city demanded that Lot throw out his visitors so they could "sodomize" them. The angels urged Lot to leave, and he took his wife and two daughters with him. After they reached safety,

*YHWH rained brimstone and fire from YHWH out of heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah (19:24).*

But when Lot's wife cast a longing glance back toward Sodom, she was converted into a salt pillar. Lot's daughters despaired of finding

husbands, so they got their father drunk enough to sleep with them. Their children of incest became the Moabites and Ammonites; the Israelites had quite an outrageous way of defaming their neighbors.

### 2.2.2 Threat (20–21)

The Primeval Story does not contain any material from the Elohist source. The first Elohist stories that we can find in Genesis have to do with the ancestors. Genesis 15 seems to bear some of the characteristics of the Elohist source, but Chapter 20 is the first full-scale Elohist episode. Here, Abraham and Sarah encounter Abimelech, and Abraham again seems threatened. It is an instructive and interesting story because it contains many of the central themes of the Elohist:

*Abraham traveled from there to the area of the Negev and made his home between Kadesh and Shur. When he was staying in Gerar Abraham claimed about his wife Sarah, “She is my sister.” So Abimelech, king of Gerar, had someone get Sarah. (20:1–2)*

It is not clear where “there” was. It probably refers to Mamre-Hebron, the last known home of Abraham. From “there,” Abraham and Sarah moved to the area around Gerar. Its powerful king, Abimelech, took Sarah for his wife. The motif of a patriarch claiming that his wife is his sister is also found in Genesis 12:10–20 and 26:6–11, both by the Yahwist. Having this particular motif repeated in three separate stories indicates it is a type-scene (see Alter, 1981), and it is one of the supporting reasons for a multiple literary source theory of the Pentateuch.

We learn that Abimelech desired Sarah—a bit strange, because according to Genesis 17:17, she was 90 years old. Remember,

though, that these seemingly incongruous points arise because of the combination of stories from different sources, and we may just have to accept the fact that certain inconsistencies like this remain unresolved in the final text.

*Elohim came to Abimelech in a dream at night and said to him, "You are a dead man on account of the woman you have taken. She is married." Now, Abimelech had not made any sexual advances. He said, "My Lord, would you kill people even though they were innocent? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she is the one who said, 'He is my brother.' With a pure heart and clean hands I did this." (20:3–5)*

Characteristic of the Elohist, God does not appear directly but communicates in dreams or visions. Also, this story contains a first for Genesis: In a dream, God comes to Abimelech, a foreigner no less. This opens up an intriguing possibility that Israel's God could be in relationship with a foreigner and that a righteous Gentile could actually exist.

Furthermore, the question of Abimelech's guilt is thorny. He is guilty of wrong because he took someone else's wife, but he is innocent insofar as he was deceived by Abraham. On top of that, Abimelech never even touched Sarah. So why should he be found guilty?

*Elohim said to him in the dream, "I, too, know that you did this with a pure heart. It was I that kept you from sinning against me; for that reason I did not let you touch her. Now then, return the man's wife. He is a prophet, he will pray for you, and you will live. But if you do not return her, you should know that you will die, you, and everything that belongs to*

you.” (20:6–7)

God came to Abimelech a second time in a dream and revealed that he had been working in Abimelech’s life to prevent him from doing anything wrong. Is the Elohist telling us God providentially attends to the behavior even of non-Israelites?

Note also the language used to describe Abraham. God calls him a prophet. This is the first time the label “prophet” is used in the Hebrew Bible. Here the term refers to someone who is able to intercede between God and other people. The Elohist source as a whole appears to be intimately associated with prophetic circles in the north and so would naturally be interested in prophetic models and in tracing the prophetic calling to Israel’s earliest history.

*So Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told them everything; and the men were very afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, “What did you do to us? What did I do to you, that you should bring on me and my kingdom this problem? You did things to me that shouldn’t have been done.” Abimelech also said to Abraham, “What were you thinking when you did this thing?” (20:8–10)*

Abimelech took the whole matter very seriously. He called together his servants and they talked about it. Then he turned the tables and blamed the situation on Abraham. Abraham really was the guilty one because he had led Abimelech into trouble with his deception:

*Abraham said, “I did it because I thought, ‘There is no fear of Elohim at all in this place. They will kill me because of*

*my wife. Besides, she is my sister anyway, the daughter of my father (though not the daughter of my mother), and she became my wife.’ When Elohim made me leave my father’s house, I said to her, ‘This is how you should show your loyalty to me: everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother.”’” (20:11–13)*

The reason why Abraham acted the way he did is now made clear. He was concerned that there was no “fear of God” in Gerar. In fact, Abimelech and his men seemed to have had a very healthy respect for God, confirmed by the way in which God came to Abimelech directly, warned him, and saved him from disaster. The story seems to suggest that Abraham had underestimated the moral character of these foreigners. Apparently, “fear of God,” a big interest of the Elohist, was not to be found exclusively in Israel.

*Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and returned his wife Sarah to him. And Abimelech said, “Now, my land is open to you; live where you want to.” To Sarah he said, “See, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your vindication in the eyes of all who are with you; and it proves to everyone that you are in the right.” Then Abraham prayed to Elohim; and Elohim healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they could bear children. For YHWH had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife. (20:14–18)*

Abimelech graciously gave gifts to Abraham to make a public acknowledgment of responsibility. Furthermore, he issued Abraham an open invitation to settle anywhere he wanted. Then Abraham interceded prophetically, and Abimelech and his people were made

whole again. Even though Abraham was the one at fault, curiously he is also the one who can remedy the situation. He is a prophet and hence capable of mediating healing to Abimelech and his people.

The account of the birth of Isaac (21:1–7) is amazingly brief given the tremendous buildup. We learn that Abraham was 100 years old at his birth and Sarah was 90. The child was named **Isaac**, meaning “he laughs,” to memorialize Sarah’s incredulous response upon hearing that she would become pregnant in her old age. Setting the precedent for Jewish covenant practice, Isaac was circumcised on the eighth day.

### 2.2.3 Testing (22)

The story of the almost sacrifice of Isaac is one of the most profound tales of the Torah. It conveys a deep lesson in testing and faith. Not only is it one of the most poignant tales in the Hebrew Bible, but it is also well told.

In the larger thematic development of the Abraham cycle, the birth narrative of Isaac and the subsequent expulsion of Ishmael set the stage for this Elohist account of Isaac’s near sacrifice. Now that Isaac is the only son, God tests Abraham to expose the authenticity and true object of his faith. This episode is segmented into three units on the basis of repeated phrases. Each of the units is introduced with a summons addressed to Abraham ([Table 2.1](#)). In each unit Abraham responds the same way.

The following discussion of Genesis 22 examines the account by units. The words in boldface are the elements of the text that reveal the structure.

#### 1. *Elohim summons Abraham*

*After these events, Elohim tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” He answered, “I am right here.” He said, “Take your son, your only one, he whom you love, Isaac, and go to*

*the land of Moriah, and sacrifice him there as a whole burnt offering on one of the mountains, the one I will tell you.”*  
(22:1–2)

The first sentence of this unit is the theme statement; “*Elohim tested Abraham*” gives us the purpose of the story right at the beginning. God was testing Abraham’s faith. Many Elohist stories have to do with faith and faithfulness. Interest in this theme can be partially explained by conditions at the time the Elohist source was written. It was a time of severe testing in Israel, and a story like this assured the people that God was behind such testing and it served a purpose.

**TABLE 2.1** Akedah Summons and Response

| Unit 1 (22:1–2)                           | Unit 2 (22:7–8)                                                                                | Unit 3 (22:11–12)                                             |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Elohim summons Abraham                    | Isaac summons Abraham                                                                          | Angel of YHWH summons Abraham                                 |
| Elohim: “ <i>Abraham!</i> ” <sup>13</sup> | Isaac: “ <i>Father!</i> ” <sup>14</sup>                                                        | Angel: “ <i>Abraham, Abraham!</i> ” <sup>15</sup>             |
| Abraham: “ <i>I am right here.</i> ”      | Abraham: “ <i>I am right here....</i> ”                                                        | Abraham: “ <i>I am right here.</i> ”                          |
| Command: “ <i>Take your son....</i> ”     | Question: “ <i>Where is the sacrificial lamb?</i> ” <sup>16</sup>                              | Command: “ <i>Do not reach out your hand to the boy....</i> ” |
|                                           | Abraham: “ <i>Elohim himself will provide a lamb for the offering, my son.</i> ” <sup>17</sup> |                                                               |

Unit 1 contains God’s command to sacrifice Isaac on a mountain. Moriah is impossible to locate geographically. The later tradition of 2 Chronicles 3:1 identifies Mount Moriah with the site of Solomon’s temple. The connection this story draws between Abraham and Solomon’s temple through the interpretation of the Chronicles tradition gives the site of the temple an ancestral connection; hence, the site acquires greater venerability.

*Abraham got up early in the morning and saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, and Isaac his*

*son. He cut offering wood and journeyed to the place Elohim told him. On the third day Abraham glanced up and saw the place in the distance. Abraham said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go there. We will worship and we will return to you." Abraham took the offering wood and put it on his son Isaac. He took in his own hand the fire and the knife. And the two of them walked together. (22:3–6)*

Unit 1 contains emotionally charged narrative. Abraham and his dear son together traveled to the mountain. They ascended the mountain, Isaac carrying in his own arms the wood that was intended to ignite him as a burnt offering to God. The notice that "the two of them walked together" is touching in its simplicity.

## *2. Isaac summons Abraham*

*Isaac said to Abraham his father, "**Father!**" And he said, "**I am right here, my son.**" And he said, "The fire's here, and the wood. **Where is the sacrificial lamb?**" Abraham said, "**Elohim himself will provide a lamb for the offering, my son.**" And the two of them walked together. They came to the place Elohim told him and Abraham built there the altar and arranged the wood and bound Isaac, his son, and put him on top of the wood. Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. (22:7–10)*

Unit 2 is distinctive among the three units. Only here Abraham replies a second time. He says, "*God himself will provide a lamb for the offering, my son.*" By the way, catch the double meaning in the phrase "God will provide a lamb, my son." "My son" is both the one addressed and the lamb. At this point, Abraham makes his most profound statement of faith: "God will provide." Note how the story centralizes Abraham's profession of faith by placing it in the middle



of the three-unit literary structure.

Note also how Abraham went all the way and bound Isaac on the altar. This story is called “the binding of Isaac” or the *akedah*, meaning “binding,” in the Jewish tradition, referring to Abraham binding Isaac in verse 9.

### 3. *Angel of YHWH summons Abraham*

*The Angel of YHWH called to him from heaven, “**Abraham, Abraham!**” And he said, “**I am right here.**” And he said, “**Do not reach out your hand to the boy and do not do anything to him.** For now I know that you fear Elohim. You have not held back your son, your only one, from me.” Abraham raised his eyes and saw a ram right there, with one of its horns caught in a thicket. Abraham went and took the ram and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering in place of his son. (22:11–13)*

In the nick of time, the angel of YHWH stopped Abraham. The sacrifice was halted because God now had confirmation that Abraham truly feared him. That established, Abraham sacrificed a ram in place of his son. Note the introduction of the name of God “YHWH” at this point in the story. Verses 11–18 have certain characteristics of the Yahwist, especially the mention of blessing. Perhaps this indicates that the Elohist used an earlier form of the story from the Yahwist source, which he reshaped into his own version.

Note also how units 1 and 3 are tightly linked. Verses 2 and 12 are linked by the phrase “*your son, your only one.*” Verse 2 establishes the test: “*take your son.*” Verse 12 records passing the test: “*you have not withheld your son.*” The concepts of testing (22:1) and the fear of God (22:12) are found in proximity only here and in Exodus 20:20, the conclusion of the Ten Commandments narrative. Perhaps we are to infer from this that Abraham is presented as a model for

Israel by the way he demonstrates full and immediate obedience to God's word (see Moberly, 1992).

*Abraham called the name of that place "YHWH provides." To this day it is said, "On YHWH's mountain it will be provided." (22:14)*

Tradition apparently had invested this place with great significance, even though today we do not know exactly where it was. In the editor's own day, it was still an important place of worship. It gets its name from the ram that God made available as a substitute for Isaac.

*The Angel of YHWH called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "I swear by myself (YHWH's oracle) that because you did this, you did not withhold your son, your only one, I will richly bless you and greatly increase your offspring, like the stars of heaven and the sand of the seashore. And your offspring will inherit the gate of their enemies. All the nations of the earth will bless themselves through your offspring, because you obeyed my voice." (22:15–18)*

Having passed the test of faith, God repeated the promise of blessing. Abraham's offspring would increase, and he would be richly blessed. This reaffirms the Yahwist principle that blessing follows obedience. The analogies of sand and stars recall the covenant promises found in Genesis 13:16 and 15:5, respectively. The phrase "*sand of the seashore*" also creates a link to 1 Kings 4:20 where this promise was seen to be fulfilled in the Solomonic kingdom. This further reinforces the theological understanding that

the blessings of the later monarchy were founded on the promises to the ancestors.

*And Abraham returned to the servants and they journeyed to Beersheba together. And Abraham lived in Beersheba. (22:19)*

Abraham traveled to the southern part of Palestine, called the Negev, where he established himself in Beersheba. Curiously, Isaac is not mentioned in the conclusion, only Abraham and the servants. This leads some to suggest that in an earlier form of the story Isaac was actually sacrificed, but this is pure speculation. Still, having survived a close encounter with the knife, one might think Isaac would have been explicitly mentioned. Yet the focus of the entire episode is on Abraham. In this remarkable story, we see a changed man, one radically different from the early Abraham of [Chapter 12](#). Back then he was insecure and afraid of losing his own life. He deceived the Pharaoh of Egypt in order to save his own skin. He did not trust God to ensure his future, even though God had promised to do so.

**TABLE 2.2** Genesis 12 and Genesis 22 Parallels: Call and Testing

| Verse | Call of Abram (Genesis 12)                                                 | Verse | Testing of Abraham (Genesis 22)                                               |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | <i>Go [Hebrew lek-leka] from your land</i>                                 | 2     | <i>Go [Hebrew lek-leka] to the land</i>                                       |
| 6     | <i>Morch</i>                                                               | 2     | <i>Moriah</i>                                                                 |
| 3     | <i>All peoples on earth will be blessed/ bless themselves through you.</i> | 18    | <i>Through your offspring all the nations on earth will bless themselves.</i> |

The new Abraham of this episode declined to cling to what, humanly speaking, must have been his last hope for a future. He did not take Isaac and run from God. Instead, willing to sacrifice Isaac, he obeyed God. By this he demonstrated his deep and secure faith in

the promises of God. The testing of Abraham episode within the Abraham cycle displays his maturation in the faith.

There are structural indications in the overall account of Abraham that the writer intends us to see the Abraham of Chapter 22, the “late” Abraham, in relation to the “early” Abraham. Verbal and thematic parallels create a point-counterpoint relationship between Genesis 12 and 22 ([Table 2.2](#)).

[Table 2.2](#) displays the parallels between the two episodes. These parallels suggest that these two stories are to be seen in juxtaposition, as a kind of framework or inclusion, around the Abraham collection of stories. What is the point of these connections? The editor who brought J and E together urges us to see the testing of Abraham as a major step toward the realization of the promises stated in 12:1–7. As a result of his willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, Abraham demonstrated that he relies implicitly on the promises of God. He staked his future on God, not on the life of his son. Thus, the account of Abraham finds satisfying resolution.

That said, it is possible that this story had a different meaning before it found its way into the Ancestral Story. It is probable that this Abraham–Isaac story originally existed independently before the Elohist or any other source existed. Using the procedures of form criticism to recover the original setting of the isolated tale, some scholars have suggested that the original intent of this story was to displace child sacrifice as a form of worship and replace it with animal sacrifice (see Levenson, 1993).

Perhaps this is the story the Elohist found. Reconstructing the course of its inclusion into the book of Genesis, the Elohist took the core story and supplemented it with the promise of blessing and other details from the Yahwist source. He was interested in the story for his own reasons and reshaped it to show how God may test one’s faith yet ultimately provide. This story is a likely example of an early tale that meant one thing, then was taken up by a later writer and given new meaning in connection with his themes and interests, and

lastly incorporated into a larger cycle of stories as its climax and fulfillment.

Go to the companion website and view the Sacrifice of Isaac Gallery. The near sacrifice of Isaac has given rise to a variety of artistic interpretations, from ancient mosaics to modern paintings.

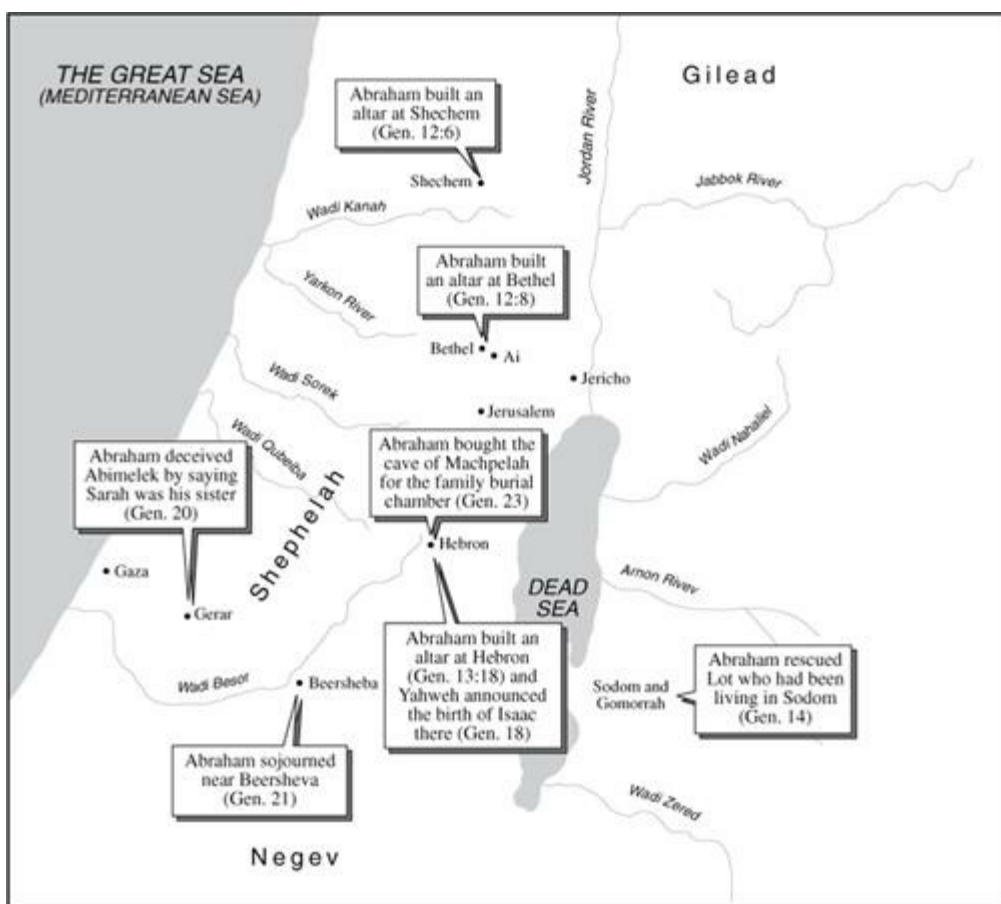
## 2.3 Last Days (23:1–25:11)

After the testing of Abraham, the cycle seems to end quickly. First, Sarah died. Abraham approached Ephron, a Hittite who owned property near Hebron, and bought from him a field that contained a cave, called the Cave of Machpelah, where he buried Sarah ([Figure 2.4](#)).

Then Abraham took steps to ensure the continuity of the family by securing a wife for Isaac. However, a wife from among the Canaanites would not do. Abraham sent his servant to [Aram](#), where earlier his clan had settled after leaving Ur (see Genesis 11:31 and [Figure 2.2](#)). He brought [Rebekah](#) back, she became the mother of Esau and Jacob, and the blessing continued.

### **FIGURE 2.4** Abraham in Canaan

The Abraham traditions are mostly located in southern Palestine, especially Judah and the Negev. These traditions are mostly associated with the Yahwist source document.



## 2.4 Interlude: The Ishmael *Toledot* (25:12–18)

Although not the son who continued the covenant promise, Ishmael nonetheless was blessed, and he became a great nation in his own right (17:19–22). The offspring of Ishmael were twelve tribes, which according to tradition developed into the Arabic peoples.

## 3 JACOB CYCLE (25:19–35:29)

The [Jacob cycle](#) continues the themes of the Abraham cycle, including blessing, offspring, and land, but it gives each theme a new

twist. The Abraham cycle dealt with fertility and offspring via the father-to-son relationship. The Jacob cycle analyzes the brother-to-brother relationship within the promise. If there is more than one son, who should inherit the promise? Is there an ironclad law that the firstborn gets it? The action of these stories is driven by sibling rivalry.

**Jacob**, impelled by his own (and sometimes also his mother's) scheming and trickery, connived to possess the blessing. Do we see here a repeat of primeval sin, trying to steal rather than await God's favor? The Jacob cycle proceeds in a threefold series of struggles. First, Jacob outwits his twin brother, **Esau**, to gain possession of the family birthright. Second, Jacob outmaneuvers his Aramean Uncle **Laban** and acquires substantial wealth. Third, Jacob outlasts Elohim in a wrestling match, determined to receive divine blessing.

As with the Abraham cycle, so too with the Jacob cycle, the story also involves a good deal of travel. Jacob's maturation involves a multistage journey ([Figure 2.5](#)) necessitated by his own deceptions and built around significant encounters with the deity.

### **3.1 Jacob versus Esau: Stealing the Blessing (25:19–28:22)**

The birth narrative of Jacob and Esau establishes points of contact with the Abraham cycle. Rebekah was barren and, like Sarah before her, she had children only after YHWH intervened. The pregnancy proved painful as the babies jostled each other in the womb. YHWH revealed that this was happening because the twins would be rivals:

*Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you will be divided; the one will be stronger than the other, the elder will serve the younger. (25:23)*

The brothers would struggle with each other, but the outcome was foreordained. The younger would win. The Jacob cycle finds a parallel with the Abraham cycle in the rivalry of the favored sons Ishmael and Isaac, though the earlier rivalry was played out more by the mothers. In the present case, the cycle is driven by Jacob's determination not to let Esau get the inheritance. First, Jacob bought the birthright (25:27–34) from Esau, who was willing to sell it for a pittance. The [birthright](#) is the right of the firstborn to inherit the family estate. Then Jacob deceived his father, Isaac, into giving him the blessing that was intended for Esau (27). The irony of the cycle is that Jacob did not know he had been foreordained to prevail. He schemed to get what God had already granted him at birth.

There is also a transparently deeper level to the sibling conflict. The divine oracle to Rebekah reveals that these stories are about more than just brothers at odds. “*Two nations are in your womb*”—they are stories of national conflict. These tales prefigure the later antagonism of Israel and [Edom](#). Jacob and Esau are, respectively, the ancestors of Israel and Edom.

## **FIGURE 2.5** Jacob's Travels

Most of the sites associated with Jacob are located in northern Palestine and Transjordan, especially the tribal territories of Ephraim and Manasseh. With its interest in this region, especially Bethel and Peniel (for a time the capital of Jeroboam's kingdom; see 1 Kings 12:25), the Jacob cycle seems to legitimate the beginnings of the northern kingdom's religious institutions.





Throughout their history, Israel and Edom were bitter rivals. The Edomites refused the Israelites passage during the wilderness sojourn (Numbers 20:14–21). David defeated the Edomites (2 Samuel 8:13–14) in the process of establishing his kingdom. On many occasions, Israel's prophets condemned the Edomites. The Jacob–Esau conflict is, among other things, a story of the origin of Israelite–Edomite animosity (see Dicou, 1994, and Edelman, 1995).

**TABLE 2.3** Jacob Cycle Theme Words

Hebrew words are typically constructed from a root of three consonants. Various noun and verb forms are differentiated by the vowels associated with these consonants. There appears to be a deliberate use of the *b*, *k/q*, and *r* sounds in the Jacob cycle to create focus, a feature lost in translation.

| Term       | Hebrew Word    | Hebrew Consonants |
|------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Firstborn  | <i>bekor</i>   | <i>b-k-r</i>      |
| Birthright | <i>bekorah</i> | <i>b-k-r</i>      |
| Blessing   | <i>berakah</i> | <i>b-r-k</i>      |
| Rebekah    | <i>rivqah</i>  | <i>r-b-q</i>      |

The birth account and the birthright episode relate Esau to Edom. Esau’s red and hairy appearance provide opportunity to pun on the place names Edom (from the word *red*) and Seir (sounds like *hairy*). The land of Seir was the homeland of the Edomites. Jacob sounds like heel, and he had a hold on Esau’s heel coming out of the womb. A more precise linguistic derivation of the name Jacob relates it to the word for “protect” so that Jacob (probably originally Jacob-el) means “May God protect.” Later in the cycle, God will change Jacob’s name to Israel (32:28).

The blessings intended for the firstborn go to the younger. Whether intended or not, this reversal of tradition, as well as the unity of birthright and blessing, seem to be reinforced by clever word choice. *Firstborn* and *birthright* derive from the same root, and *blessing* has the same consonants, with the second and third reversed ([Table 2.3](#)). In addition, Rebekah, who loves Jacob over Esau, has a name sounding suspiciously close to these thematic terms.

Throughout the Ancestral Story, threats to the promise come both from inside, in the form of barrenness, and from outside, in the form of enemies. Sandwiched between Jacob buying the birthright and stealing the blessing is the tale of Isaac and Rebekah’s sojourn in

Philistia where they found themselves in danger (26:1–11). Isaac deceived the local population into thinking Rebekah was his sister so that he would not be killed for her. Where have we heard this before? You will recall similar situations with Abraham and Sarah (12:10–20 with Pharaoh in Egypt and 20:1–18 with Abimelech in Gerar).

Later, as Isaac's holdings increased, he came into conflict with the Philistines over water rights and wells. The conflict was settled amicably when both parties agreed to a nonaggression treaty. The culminating episode of Jacob's early life is his flight from the Promised Land to Mesopotamia. Fearing Esau, he fled for his life and headed to Aram, the territory of Rebekah's brother Laban. Leaving parents behind and traveling alone, Jacob stopped for the night in a remote and lonely place. Jacob is now on his own. Or is he?

Genesis 28:10–22 is one of two passages in the Jacob cycle where the patriarch has a direct encounter with God. The two places are marked by complementary names. In this passage, the place comes to be called Bethel; the other place was Peniel:

*Jacob left Beersheba and walked toward Haran. When he reached the place, he spent the night there, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep in that place. He had a dream. There was a stairway set on the ground with its top reaching to heaven. Angels of Elohim were going up and down it. YHWH stood above him/it and said, "I am YHWH, the Elohim of Abraham your father and the Elohim of Isaac. The land on which you sleep, to you I will give it and to your descendants. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth. You will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south. By you and your descendants will all the families of the earth bless themselves/be blessed. I am with you and will*

*protect you wherever you go, and will return you to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.” Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely YHWH is in this place, and I did not know it.” He was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of Elohim, and this is the gate of heaven.” (28:10–17)*

In this dream, God spoke to Jacob and personally confirmed the promises of descendants and land that had been transferred to him by his father Isaac. Many phrases echo earlier promise statements, including the transnational component “*all the families of the earth bless themselves/be blessed*” (12:3) and “*dust of the earth*” (13:16).

This episode appears to have elements of both Yahwist and Elohist writing. The shell of the story is the dream setting in which angels of Elohim appear on a stairway (11b–12, 17–18, 20–22). This bears the marks of the Elohist for whom theophanies typically occur in dreams. The Yahwist contributed the content of the divine oracle (13–16) and the location references (10–11a, 19). The Yahwist also contributed the Abraham promise statements in Genesis 12 and 13, which are similar to this passage.

In his dream, Jacob sees a stairway reaching to heaven. This component of the incident may be intended to provide counterpoint to the notorious primeval building project (Genesis 11:1–9). In that episode, humanity tried to build a tower with its top in heaven. Babel was to be the gate to heaven. In this episode, Jacob happens upon the authentic heavenly access point, Bethel. The similarity of the names Babel and Bethel may be more than just coincidence.

*Jacob rose early in the morning and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel (previously the name of the city was Luz). Then Jacob vowed a*

vow, *“If Elohim stays with me, and protects me on this path I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear, and I return to my father’s house in shalom, then YHWH shall be my Elohim. This stone that I have set up as a pillar shall be the house of Elohim. Of all that you give me I will give a tenth back to you.”* (28:18–22)

Jacob set up his stone pillow as a *matsevah*, or standing stone, an object often associated with a sacred place. Then he took a solemn vow pledging that he would adopt YHWH as his God if his journey proved successful. The conditional character of the vow seems characteristic of the Jacob who was always ready to negotiate relationships to his own advantage. Though the word *covenant* is not used explicitly here, making a covenant may have been the intent of setting up and anointing the pillar. Elsewhere, Joshua set up a pillar as a witness to God’s covenant with Israel (Joshua 24:27), and this practice is also attested in Aramean treaties from Sefire (see Fitzmyer, 1967). Jacob’s obligation in covenant was to return a tithe, or tenth of his wealth, to God. Perhaps this pledge grounded the later Israelite practice of bringing a tithe to the priests at the Bethel sanctuary.

Jacob named this place Bethel, literally “house of El/god.” Excavations have suggested that Bethel (if it is to be identified with modern Beitin) may have been a Canaanite religious center. It certainly became a major worship center in Israel’s history. It housed the ark of the covenant at the time of the judges (see Judges 20:27). After the breakaway of Israel, Jeroboam chose Bethel as one of two national sanctuary cities. This story provides the initial holiness experience on which its later Israelite significance is grounded. When Jacob returned to Bethel after his journey, he erected an altar and Elohim appeared to him again (35:1–15).

### **3.2 Jacob versus Laban: Building a Family (29–**

Jacob arrived in Haran and soon met [Rachel](#) at the local watering hole. He was warmly welcomed by Rachel and Laban after he revealed that he was Rebekah's son. Jacob stayed with Laban and agreed to work seven years for the right to marry Rachel. On their wedding night, he slept with his bride, only to wake up in the morning to find he had consummated the marriage with [Leah](#), Rachel's older sister!

With righteous indignation, Jacob confronted his uncle and exposed the deception:

*“What have you done to me? Haven't I worked with you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?” (29:25)*

Dripping with irony because of how we know Jacob himself has been deceiving people all his life, Laban replied, *“But it is not done so in our place—to give the younger before the firstborn”* (29:26)—not accidentally the motif of birthright also returns.

As a concession, Laban agreed to allow Jacob to marry Rachel, in return for seven more years of labor. It appears that Jacob, the consummate trickster, had himself been tricked.

Though in exile from the Promised Land, Jacob prospered. He sired a sizable family by his two wives and their handmaids, Zilpah and Bilhah. Leah bore him six sons, and when she was past childbearing her maid Zilpah served as a surrogate mother (remember the surrogacy of Hagar in the Abraham cycle), bearing another two. Rachel was at first barren (remember the barrenness motif of the Abraham cycle), so Bilhah became a surrogate bearing another two sons. Finally, Rachel became pregnant and bore Joseph. Later she had another son, [Benjamin](#), but died in childbirth.

Jacob wished to return to Canaan with his family, yet Laban sought to retain him because he realized he was being blessed through Jacob (remember the ancestral blessing: “*through you all the families of the earth will be blessed*”). Jacob bargained with Laban to acquire his own holdings of sheep and goats, and by a devious (and scientifically dubious) breeding method, he increased his flocks to the detriment of Laban’s. Tensions mounted until Jacob found it prudent to leave. He took his family and flocks and left in the middle of the night. Rachel got in on the action and plundered Laban’s household gods.

When Laban found out that his daughters and grandchildren had left with Jacob, he pursued and confronted this Jacob who had “deceived” him (31:20, 26). Jacob and Laban parted ways after making a covenant and setting up a pillar. The covenant included a pledge that Laban would stop pursuing Jacob and Jacob would not return to Aram. Jacob now found himself between a rock and an angry brother. However, he had no choice but to continue on toward Canaan where he suspected Esau would be waiting to confront him. And right he was.

### **3.3 Jacob versus Elohim: Wrestling for a Blessing (32–35)**

The final sequence of the Jacob cycle finds Jacob arriving in Canaan:

*Jacob went on his way and angels of Elohim met him. Jacob said when he saw them, “This is the camp of Elohim.”*  
(32:1–2)

A greeting party of angels was waiting for Jacob at the border, presumably ready to welcome and protect him. He might indeed need

them for back in Canaan the great issues of his life and destiny would seek resolution, and resolution would come only after more conflict. Jacob expected to meet Esau, still enraged about having been deceived, shortly after entering Canaan. Jacob took great pains to soften Esau's anger by sending ahead wave upon wave of gifts. He also made contingency plans to escape if Esau met his entourage with force.

However, a more trying confrontation would come before he had the chance to meet his brother. All alone, hence completely vulnerable (where were those angels now?), he met a fighting deity face to face. The story of Jacob's wrestling with God, Genesis 32:22–32, demonstrates the patriarch, true to character, persistently taking advantage of every situation to secure a blessing:

*That same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the wadi, along with everything he owned. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the break of the day. (32:22–24)*

Jacob separated himself from his flocks and family and remained on the far side of the Jabbok river. Should Jacob's behavior be construed as an act of cowardice, or did he just need time alone to contemplate his future? The narrative does not tell us for sure. It may have been part of his scheme to distance himself from Esau, using his dependents and estate as buffers. Or he was going to call on God for help again (see 32:9–12), or it may have been both. In any case, the isolation of Jacob there at Peniel matches his isolation at Bethel at the beginning of his journey. Both leaving and returning, Jacob met his God alone.

Note how these introductory verses (22–24) meld the wrestling into the larger Jacob narrative by giving it a context. They are part of



the Yahwist's account of Jacob's trip back to Canaan. The story of the wrestling proper (25–32) is itself actually quite self-contained and comes from the Elohist source. After the testing-of-Abraham story of Chapter 22, the Elohist contributed no other episode to the Abraham cycle. In fact, the Elohist seems to be more interested in Jacob than Abraham or Isaac. This is not surprising because many of the Jacob stories have Ephraimite, or Transjordan, locations, precisely the northern kingdom places dear to the Elohist tradition.

*When the man saw that he could not gain the advantage over Jacob, he touched his hip socket; that put Jacob's hip out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name will no longer be called Jacob, but instead Israel, for you have wrestled with Elohim and with men, and have prevailed." (32:25–28)*

The assailant is called a "man," but as the story develops it becomes clear that it is Elohim himself. Jacob, whose name means "heel-grabber"—hence "trickster"—undergoes a name change to Israel, which means "wrestles with God." By giving an account of his dual name Jacob/Israel, the Elohist identifies Jacob as the [patriarch](#) of the nation of Israel. Again, the story is both personal and national:

*Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why are you asking for my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "I have seen Elohim face to face, and I am still alive." The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel; he was limping*

*because of his thigh. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the muscle of the hip which is part of the hip socket, because he touched Jacob's hip socket on the muscle of the hip. (32:29–32)*

Penuel (and the alternate spelling Peniel) literally means “face of God,” because there Jacob saw God directly. A recurring theme in the Elohist is that one cannot look at God and live (see also Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3). This reinforces the utter powerfulness of Elohim. Yet Jacob saw the face of God and lived—a sign that he was blessed indeed.

The final note in verse 32 is introduced by “*Therefore to this day,*” indicating that this version of the story was written down later than the event itself, namely, when Israelites were around. Working with the methodology of form criticism, some authorities have reasoned that this story contains the remains of a very early mythic tale of a river-spirit or demon. In many cultures, rivers were thought to possess a power that tried to thwart a crossing unless the river-spirit was appeased. This element may have been present at a very early stage. Although a primitive motif may have been behind this story at one time, those notions of demonic spirits have been sublimated in this version, since the one trying to stop Jacob is identified with Elohim. However old the core of the story may have been (see Barthes, 1974, and Miller, 1984), it is used here also to explain the Jewish avoidance of eating the thigh muscle, identified in Jewish tradition with the sciatic nerve.

The overall meaning of the story in its present context is elusive, yet at the very least it serves to characterize Jacob as persistent, even relentless, in his pursuit for blessing. Taken together with the other Jacob stories, this episode shows Jacob would stop at nothing to secure a personal advantage. He never could await his destiny; he always had to make it happen. Single mindedly and often deviously he pursued divine blessing. Divine destiny and human initiative are

inextricably united in the Jacob cycle.

Recognizing that Jacob stands for all Israel, one might expect the story also to be saying something about the nation. Is it saying that Israel also worked hard to secure a blessing, sometimes too aggressively? Is it saying that all along, when Israel fought others, it was wrestling with God? Is the story suggesting that persistence pays off, and that despite sometimes questionable tactics, tenacity gains the blessing? Perhaps not in spite of but because of dubious methods? The story is wonderfully open and suggestive; perhaps it was meant for soul searching, both individual and communal.

After Jacob wrestled with God, he met Esau. It was a tense but nonviolent encounter, almost a letdown. The two brothers parted ways. In the gracious way that Esau received his brother, we see that time had changed the ruddy one as much as the trickster. Jacob saw in Esau's embrace the evidence of God's protection, and he said to Esau, "*Seeing your face is like seeing the face of Elohim*" (33:10)—a remark with apparent double meaning in light of Jacob's recent encounter with God at Penuel, "*face of God*."

After leaving Esau, Jacob headed to Shechem where one of the Bible's most disturbing stories has its setting (34; note that Shechem is both a town and a person in this story). Shechem, the son of Shechem's ruler Hamor (whose name means "donkey"), ravished Jacob's daughter Dinah and then sought to marry her, offering anything for the marriage rights. Jacob's sons set one condition, that all Canaanite males in the town be circumcised. The Shechemites agreed, and on the third day when they were all in debilitating pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, entered the town and slaughtered all the males. They defended their actions to Jacob by claiming they were only avenging their sister's honor. The story reinforces the separation of Canaanites and Israelites and attests the violent zeal of Simeon and Levi. Levi is the ancestor of the Levites, who have a special place within Israel as caretakers of the cult; in many stories, the Levites are notable for the violent way in which

they uphold the honor of YHWH (for example, their role in the golden calf incident, Exodus 32:25–29).

After this the family of Jacob, for obvious reasons, was no longer welcome in the region. Jacob returned to Bethel with his family (35, mentioned above) where he built an altar and set up a pillar to commemorate the fulfillment of God's promises given there earlier when he was alone and a refugee; yet another standing stone.

The Jacob cycle reveals an interesting quality about our storytellers. As much as they revered their patriarchs and matriarchs, the biblical writers harbored no illusions. They realized that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—indeed the whole lot—had serious character flaws. Certainly the stories about Jacob's ill treatment of Esau, the heinous behavior of Simeon and Levi, and the incest of Reuben (35:22) are at the top of the list. Israel's stories about its forerunners are remarkably honest, especially in this cycle. Insofar as the nation identified itself with its forebears (remember, Jacob is Israel), the chosen people had an amazing capacity for self-criticism. The Israelites saw their own character revealed through their parentage, perhaps as a way to account for it, and it was not always a flattering picture.

As we have seen, the Jacob cycle has a thematic unity based on promises, especially the promise of blessing. In addition, the cycle evidences a literary symmetry. The following outline displays the broad narrative scheme that takes its shape from similar notions:

A—Birth of Jacob and Esau: Jacob gets the birthright (25)

B—Isaac and Abimelech: conflict over land (26)

C—Jacob flees from Esau with the blessing (27)

D—Jacob at Bethel: “house of God” (28)

E—Jacob stays with Laban (29–31)

D'—Jacob at Peniel: “face of God” (32)

C'—Jacob and Esau reconciled (33) B

B'—Jacob and Shechem: conflict over marriage (34)

A'—Return to Canaan and death of Isaac (35)

As the outline illustrates, the stories have a recursive structure, with A returning to A', B to B', and so on. Chapters 26 and 34 have often seemed out of place to interpreters because they seemed to break the flow of Jacob-centered events. Yet in this structural scheme, these otherwise isolated and incongruous B episodes have a place. In literary, thematic, and architectural ways, the Jacob cycle displays a remarkable wholeness.

### **3.4 Interlude: The Esau *Toledot* (36)**

An entire chapter is devoted to Esau's descendants by his three wives. Esau, like Jacob, had received the promise that he would become a nation (25:23). The fulfillment of this promise is thus attested here. It also contains a list of kings who ruled Edom before the Israelite monarchy. This minor *toledot* serves to divide the major Jacob and Joseph cycles in the same way as the minor Ishmael *toledot* separated the Abraham and Jacob cycles (see Section 2.4).

## **4 JOSEPH CYCLE (37:1–50:26)**

The Joseph cycle, Genesis 37–50, is one of the more well-crafted and cohesive works of Hebrew literature. Whereas most other Hebrew stories are only a few paragraphs long, the Joseph narrative sustains a story line over many chapters. In view of this, some scholars call it a short story, others a novella. Despite the variety of its presumed documentary sources, the [Joseph cycle](#) hangs together as a tale of sibling rivalry and providential deliverance.

This block of text, Genesis 37–50, is called the Joseph cycle because [Joseph](#) is indisputably its main character, apart from Chapter 38. But it is somewhat curious that he should get so much attention. Judged on the basis of later tribal history, Joseph is not the most significant of Jacob/Israel's sons. Instead, Judah might be the

expected focus. The tribe of [Judah](#) becomes the source of so much later history and the home of the Davidic monarchy. Still, to make some sense out of Joseph's centrality, Ephraim, the son of Joseph, does become the core of the northern kingdom; in fact, Joseph was the father of both Ephraim and Manasseh, the two largest of the ten northern tribes. Arguably this is one reason why the Elohist writer, who contributed a sizable proportion of the cycle, was interested.

Go to the companion website and see the table "Sources in the Joseph Cycle." The Joseph cycle is a mixture of passages from the Yahwist, Elohist, and Priestly sources.

## **4.1 Joseph and His Brothers (37–45)**

The Joseph cycle continues the theme of birth order and birthrights found in both the Abraham and Jacob cycles. Joseph is the son who receives the greatest attention; although he was the firstborn of Rachel, he was not the firstborn overall. Reuben was the firstborn, but he was denied preeminence because he slept with one of Jacob's wives. Judah was one of the youngest sons of Jacob and Leah, yet he became one of the premier tribes of Israel. This theme of the preeminence of the younger is reinforced by Jacob switching the blessing on Manasseh (the firstborn) and Ephraim (see Greenspahn, 1994).

The birthright details may have been included in Israel's epic to explain later geographical and social realities. The tribes of Judah and Ephraim rose to preeminence even though they did not descend from firstborn sons. An additional reason to make a point of birth order was to support the legitimacy of Israel's greatest kings. David was the youngest son of Jesse, not the oldest, and Solomon was not David's oldest son, yet he became king. Likewise, Joseph and

Benjamin, sons of Rachel, receive Jacob's special affection, and this drives the plot. But the linkage between favored son and line of promise is not as obvious in this cycle as in the Jacob cycle. Although Joseph is the focus of narrative attention, by the end of the cycle, all Jacob's sons receive paternal blessings before he dies.

Judah's character development is a lesser thread running through the cycle. He is certainly secondary to Joseph judging by the lesser attention given to him in the narrative, but he is significant nonetheless. He convinced his brothers not to kill Joseph but rather to sell him into slavery. He briefly takes center stage in his dealings with Tamar and returns to the drama at the climax of the story when Benjamin was threatened and Judah offered to take his place. This willingness to sacrifice himself stands in stark contrast to his failure to take a risk for Tamar.

### **4.1.1 Joseph the Dreamer (37)**

Joseph was the firstborn son of Jacob's most-loved wife Rachel, and Jacob made no secret of favoring him. The motif of preferential parental treatment continues (remember, Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob) and continues to be the source of family discontent.

The first episode of the cycle effectively foreshadows later events. Joseph had two dreams, and in both his family bowed down to him—Joseph expended no effort in trying to hide this. The dreams and Joseph's skill at interpreting them also prefigured his interpretive insight at Pharaoh's court.

Understandably, his brothers became jealous of the favoritism that Jacob showed Joseph, and they are equally put off by Joseph's own superior airs. One day, when he was far from his father, making a delivery to his working brothers, they seized him with the intention of killing him. The narrative turns a bit murky here as both Reuben, the firstborn of Leah (the Elohist source's contribution) and Judah, the

firstborn of Rachel (the Yahwist source's contribution), seek to save his life. In the end, Judah convinced his siblings to sell Joseph to traders (sometimes called Ishmaelites, other times Midianites). They returned Joseph's trademark colored tunic to Jacob all bloody and torn so that Jacob would believe he had been killed by an animal. Meanwhile, the traders carried Joseph down to Egypt and sold him to [Potiphar](#), a royal official and captain of the guard.

### 4.1.2 Judah and Tamar (38)

With minimal transition, the cycle introduces this story about Judah's family. Now Judah had married a Canaanite woman who bore him three sons. His firstborn son, Er, married Tamar, but he died before having any children. According to the Israelite law of levirate marriage (from the Latin *levir*, meaning "a husband's brother"), the brother of a childless dead man is required to raise children to his dead brother's name by marrying the widow (see Deuteronomy 25:5–10). Judah's second son failed to perform his responsibility and died for it. Judah intentionally withheld his third son out of fear of losing him too.

Once Tamar realized that Judah would not provide her with a surrogate husband, she devised her own plan. She dressed as a prostitute, perhaps of the type associated with the Canaanite fertility cults of Baal and Asherah, intending to lure Judah into sleeping with her. Judah engaged her services one day, not realizing he was sleeping with his daughter-in-law. He left his seal and staff with her in place of the payment he would send later. When he attempted to make payment, the prostitute was nowhere to be found.

Three months later, Judah learned that Tamar was pregnant and thought it could only be because she had played the harlot because he had not provided her a proper husband. Judah imperiously decreed that she must be burned to death. When Tamar appeared for the execution, she produced Judah's seal and staff and said, "*Do you*



*recognize these?"* Immediately he acknowledged they were his and declared, "*She is more righteous than I am.*" Her righteousness was that she faithfully performed her duty toward her dead husband, to raise up offspring to perpetuate his name, whereas Judah had failed to do his duty by providing her a husband. Tamar gave birth to twins, the younger of whom went on to become an ancestor of David (see Ruth 4:18–21).

The reason for including this story is difficult to discern. It interrupts the encompassing Joseph plot and does not obviously connect to it. Perhaps the reason it was retained was because it centers on Judah, whose tribe later became the core of the Davidic kingdom. Some authorities have argued for its fittingness in this place on the basis of subtle literary allusions (see Alter, 1981). Judah may serve as a foil for Joseph in this way. Judah failed in his responsibility to his son and was exposed because of his sexual desire. In contrast, Joseph upheld his responsibility to his Egyptian master, Potiphar, by refusing to give in to the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife.

Go to the companion website and see the table "Joseph Cycle Links to the Judah–Tamar Episode." There are literary and linguistic allusions that connect the Judah–Tamar story to the Joseph cycle that surrounds it.

### **4.1.3 Joseph's Rise to Power (39–41)**

Joseph distinguished himself while serving Potiphar. Not only was Joseph a faithful servant, but he was also smart and handsome, so much so that Potiphar's wife made sexual advances to him. One day Joseph rebuffed her seductions and fled the house. Out of spite, she accused him of rape, and he was thrown into prison. While there he again distinguished himself by his administrative abilities and trustworthiness, and when two inmates had dreams, he was able to

interpret them convincingly.

Later, when Pharaoh had dreams he could not comprehend, Joseph was brought to court and interpreted those dreams as portents of seven coming years of agricultural abundance, to be followed by seven years of famine. The Pharaoh immediately put him in charge of food production and management so that the country could prepare for the coming crisis. On this particular point, Egyptian literary tradition provides documents with similarities to the Joseph story. “The Story of Two Brothers” (ANET, 23–25) has a scene similar to the seduction of Joseph, and “The Tradition of Seven Lean Years in Egypt” (ANET, 31–32) parallels the famine portion of Pharaoh’s dream.

#### **4.1.4 Joseph versus His Brothers (42–45)**

The famine affected Canaan as well as Egypt, and Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain. When they came before Joseph, now the high official in charge of food supplies, to make their purchase, they did not recognize him. He accused them of being spies and proceeded to interrogate them. In the process of detailing their background, they referred to their youngest brother Benjamin. Joseph agreed to sell them grain on condition that one of them remained in Egypt as pledge. They were required to return with their youngest brother to prove the truth of their story.

Once home they told Jacob that they would have to take Benjamin to Egypt if they expected to buy more grain. After their supplies were depleted, Jacob reluctantly agreed, and his sons traveled back to Egypt, this time with gifts to appease the harsh official. Joseph was overcome at the sight of Benjamin, but he managed to hide his emotions. Still not revealing his identity, Joseph threw a banquet for his brothers, seating them all in order of their age. The brothers were amazed but still did not recognize Joseph.

Joseph sent his brothers away heavily laden with grain, along with

one of his own sacred artifacts hidden in Benjamin's sack. Then he sent soldiers after them to accuse the brothers of stealing. The cup was found in Benjamin's possession, and Joseph demanded that he become a slave and remain in Egypt. At this point, Judah came forward and pleaded with Joseph to reconsider, even going so far as to offer to take Benjamin's place.

Joseph could no longer hold back. He cried out, "*I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?*" His brothers understandably were terrified at this revelation, but Joseph proceeded to explain how he had come to understand all of the past events as the work of God:

*Do not be agitated or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. Elohim sent me ahead of you to preserve life. The famine has been in the land for two years, and five more years of no plowing or harvest are coming. Elohim sent me ahead of you to preserve a remnant on earth for you and to keep survivors alive for you. It was not you who sent me here, but Elohim. (45:5–8)*

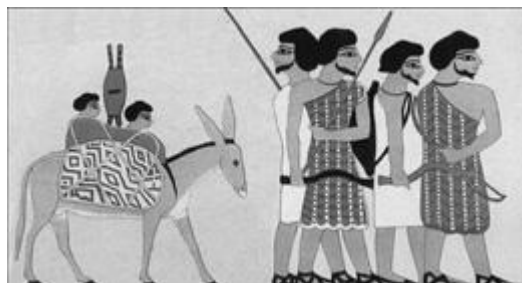
The Joseph cycle is notable for its general lack of God-talk and clearly differs in this respect from the other two cycles. There are no theophanies, no divine oracles to Joseph, no angels or visions, no direct divine interventions. The only explicitly religious dimension to the tale is these words, Joseph's metaphysical interpretation of events. With them, Joseph presents an explanation of historical experience through divine providence. With its general absence of theological or covenantal perspective, it has been claimed that the Joseph cycle finds its closest affinity with the ancient Middle Eastern wisdom tradition (see Crenshaw, 1981). After these words and a tearful reunion, Joseph sent his brothers home with instruction to come back as soon as possible with everything, including their father Jacob.

## 4.2 Israel in Egypt (46–50)

When Jacob heard the news about Joseph, he eagerly packed up the family belongings and hastened to Egypt ([Figure 2.6](#)). Because of Joseph's status and importance, the family received royal permission to settle in Goshen, and they were treated well.

### **FIGURE 2.6** Semites Arrive in Egypt

This painting on the wall of a tomb at Beni Hasan depicts people from Asia arriving in Egypt. In a similar manner, the clan of Jacob traveled from Canaan and settled in the Goshen region of the Nile Delta.



Source: Asiatic Semites Arrive in Egypt, from C. R. Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien*, Vol. 2 (Berlin, 1849–1859), plate 133.

The themes of blessing and growth are most obvious in these final chapters. The family of Jacob prospered in Egypt, and he lavished the patriarchal blessing on each of his sons (Genesis 49), as well as on his favored grandsons (Genesis 48), before he died. This latter episode, the account of Jacob laying blessing on Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim, demonstrates that Jacob had lost none of his caprice. Joseph had positioned his sons before Jacob in such a way that the preferred right hand of blessing would fall on Manasseh's head, the firstborn. But true to form, Jacob defied expectations,

crossed his arms, and gave the younger Ephraim the better blessing. Yet the richness of blessing was tempered by Israel’s family being in Egypt. Even as the blessings of fertility and benefit were coming to fruition, the promise of land was still elusive. Although the family was fruitful and multiplied, they were exiles from the land of promise because of the famine there.

Lastly, we should note that the Joseph cycle is important because it gave the explanation of how and why the Israelites ended up in Egypt. Looking ahead to the book of Exodus, where the Israelites are in bondage, we need to know how they got there. The Joseph cycle explains this, and points ahead to the time God rescues his people in the great exodus from Egypt.

## 5 GENESIS AS A BOOK

The book of Genesis displays a remarkable unity of structure and purpose. Its structure is provided by a coherent and comprehensive plot line, as well as by the deliberate device of *toledot* introductory statements. The spiritual and moral themes of the book also engage the reader at a deeper level. It is no wonder that Genesis has fired the imagination of artists, writers, and theologians more than any other book of the Hebrew Bible.

The three literary sources of the Torah—the Yahwist narrative, the Elohist source, and the Priestly document—interweave to create the Ancestral Story. All three sources are well attested in Genesis 12–50 and make significant contributions. Elohist passages appear here in the Pentateuch for the first time.

**TABLE 2.4** Translations (in Boldface) of the Term *Toledot*

| Version                               | Genesis 2:4a                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| New Revised Standard Version          | <i>These are the <b>generations</b> of the heavens and the earth when they were created.</i> |
| New International Version             | <i>This is the <b>account</b> of the heavens and the earth when they were created.</i>       |
| New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh | <i>Such is the <b>story</b> of heaven and earth when they were created.</i>                  |
| New King James Version                | <i>This is the <b>history</b> of the heavens and the earth when they were created.</i>       |
| The Five Books of Moses (Fox, 1995)   | <i>These are the <b>begettings</b> of the heavens and the earth: their being created.</i>    |
| The Five Books of Moses (Alter, 2004) | <i>This is the <b>tale</b> of the heavens and the earth when they were created.</i>          |

Go to the companion website and see the table “The Sources of the Ancestral Story.”

## 5.1 *Toledot of Genesis*

As we have already noticed, the overall structure of the Ancestral Story is provided by the repeated use of the Hebrew term *toledot*. *Toledot* means “generations” and comes from the Hebrew word for “giving birth.” It is rendered in various ways by different English translations, as you can see from the options available for handling Genesis 2:4 (see [Table 2.4](#)). The use of *toledot* to structure the book is usually attributed to a Priestly editor because it is supposed that priests controlled the genealogical and historical data.

The term *toledot* has to do with developments, outcomes, and begettings. When found in the phrase “These are the generations of X,” it introduces an account of what happens next to the offspring named in the *toledot* expression. Virtually every time that it is found, it has a transitional function. It draws the preceding section to a conclusion while introducing the next section. The term is found twelve times in Genesis. Ten of those times, it is found at important break points in the narrative (the *toledot* in 10:32 is not in a formula,

and the *toledot* in 36:9 is a repetition of the one in 36:1).

These ten *toledot* units divide Genesis into two collections of five each according to their subject focus: the Primeval Story and the Ancestral Story (see [Table 2.5](#)). The Primeval Story consists of five *toledot* units in a linear trajectory. The Ancestral Story consists of five *toledot* units of alternating interest: three major ones (1, 3, and 5) and two minor ones (2 and 4). The three major units contain cycles of stories, and the two minor ones consist merely of descendant lists. Thus, the ten *toledots* of Genesis display the direction of the story. The book begins with the widest possible scope, the cosmos, and gradually constricts its attention to Israel until it ends with the *toledot* of Jacob, the eponymove ancestor of the nation of Israel.

**TABLE 2.5** The *Toledot* of Genesis

|    | <i>Toledot</i>            | What Becomes of It                                      |
|----|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Heavens and earth (2:4)   | Creation and expulsion (2:4b–4:26)                      |
| 2  | Adam (5:1)                | Adam to Noah genealogy (5:1–32) and sons of God (6:1–4) |
| 3  | Noah (6:9)                | Flood and re-creation (6:9–9:29)                        |
| 4  | Shem, Ham, Japheth (10:1) | Table of Nations (10) and Tower of Babel (11:1–9)       |
| 5  | Shem (11:10)              | Shem to Terah genealogy (11:10–26)                      |
| 6  | Terah (11:27)             | Abraham cycle (11:27–25:11)                             |
| 7  | Ishmael (25:12)           | Ishmael genealogy (25:12–18)                            |
| 8  | Isaac (25:19)             | Jacob cycle (25:19–35:29)                               |
| 9  | Esau (36:1, 9)            | Esau genealogy (36:1–43)                                |
| 10 | Jacob (37:2)              | Joseph cycle (37–50)                                    |

## 5.2 Themes of Genesis

Each narrative cycle has its own literary integrity. Yet there are common themes, motifs, and interests that serve to give the Ancestral Story a wholeness that is greater than the sum of its parts.

1. *Divine–human relationship.* These stories take for granted the

existence of an intimate relationship between the ancestors and their patron God. The deity promises, protects, and directs the lives of the ancestors. He treats them differently than the people with whom they are in contact (and conflict). Still, these other people—be they Egyptian or Philistine, Edomite or Aramean—would find benefit in being associated with the ancestral family.

a. *Promise.* God determined and guided the ancestors' future, and he pledged that future through promises. The consistent way in which the divine promises were transferred from one generation to the next signals their programmatic character. The promises ensured longevity through their offspring who would become a nation and ensured possession of the land of Canaan. In their Priestly form, the promises entailed fruitfulness and multiplication.

b. *Covenant.* The relationship between God and the ancestors was formalized by covenants. God bound himself by oath to fulfill his promises. In its Priestly form the covenant was termed everlasting. A succession of covenants progressively builds and defines the relationship of God with his world beginning with Noah, continuing with Abraham, and culminating with Moses at Mount Sinai.

c. *God of the fathers.* The patriarchs developed an intimate relationship with the deity such that Abraham could be found in conversation with God near his tent. God also came to Abraham and Jacob in visions. The deity came to be personally associated with the patriarchs and was termed "*the Elohim of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*" God was not immediately present to Joseph in the same way and appears only as the force of history in Joseph's lecture to his brothers. In Israel's developing history, God seems to continue receding from personal contact (see Friedman, 1995).

2. *Offspring.* Israel understood itself as having descended from Abraham in a line of succession miraculously engineered by God.



Many of the stories touch on the question of family succession: conceiving, having children, determining the line of inheritance. The frequent genealogies and the *toledot* structure of Genesis reinforce this overall theme.

a. *Firstborn*. Consistently the oldest son does not end up being the favored son. Perhaps one of the lessons intended by all three cycles is that God does not follow human convention when he decides whom he will bless. He is unpredictable and likely as not will choose the younger over the older. Yet it must also be observed that each of the firstborn sons had some flaw that may have been the reason for their disqualification. Ishmael was the son of a concubine; Esau cheaply bartered away his status; Reuben slept with Bilhah, his father's concubine. However, one could ask if their failings were inherently more heinous than some of the actions of Jacob or Judah.

b. *Barrenness*. As a further indication of the sovereignty of God, the younger son predestined for greatness was in almost every case conceived through the help of God after an extended period of barrenness: Isaac to Sarah, Jacob to Rebekah, Joseph to Rachel, Perez to Tamar (though more through Tamar's initiative than God's help). Divinely enabled conception of the gifted son is a pattern repeated later with Samson, Hannah and Samuel, and Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament.

c. *Matriarchs*. Women were marginalized within the patriarchal social system of the ancient Middle East (see Jeansonne, 1990). Although they may not have had institutionalized power, they were not necessarily powerless. Within the family, they exercised considerable control. Israel's matriarchs—strong willed, often employing trickery and deceit—were directly responsible for determining lines of descent and inheritance. Abraham deferred to Sarah, who expelled Hagar and her son Ishmael. Sarah and Rebekah agreed to play sister instead of spouse to save their husbands and keep the

promise of offspring alive. Rebekah conspired with Jacob against her husband to steal the blessing from Isaac's favorite son Esau. Rachel and Leah were rivals to Jacob's sexual attention and presumably also rivals to inherit the promise. Rachel stole her father's household gods and cleverly hid them from him. Tamar entrapped Judah into fathering a child by her and was judged more righteous for it. Quite possibly some of these women may have been models for the likes of Bathsheba who deftly secured the throne for her son Solomon over his rivals (see RTOT [Chapter 9](#)).

3. *Land*. Israel was vitally invested in the claim that Canaan was its heritage and homeland (see Brueggemann, 1977, and Weinfeld, 1993). The people found justification for that claim in the promise made first to Abraham and in the fact that he actually lived in Canaan for many years. Each cycle contains the notice that at least an earnest of land had been purchased; Abraham bought Ephron's field near Hebron (23), and Jacob bought a plot near Shechem (33:18–20). The family of Jacob even purchased property in Egypt (47:27). The divine land promise is the foundation for Israel's claim to the land and justifies their conquest of Canaan under Joshua in the 1200s BCE. All three ancestral cycles are shaped around geographical itineraries and always in respect to Canaan. Abraham left Mesopotamia and journeyed to Canaan with a sojourn in Egypt; Jacob left Canaan for Haran and returned to Canaan with great wealth and a large family. Joseph was deported to Egypt but eventually brought the entire family there to survive another famine. All these journeys suggest that Israel's hold on the land was tenuous, and separation from the land was an inevitable experience. Perhaps these ancestral periods of exile and return shaped the hope of the Israelites who underwent their greatest trial in the Babylonian exile. Certainly, the ending of Genesis, as it leaves Jacob's family in Egypt awaiting return to the Promised Land for the burial of Joseph's bones, thrusts the reader onward to the book of Exodus expecting

return and rest.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Covenant*. What are the similarities and differences among the covenants that the deity makes with Abraham in 13:14–17, 15:17–21, and 17:1–21?
2. *Theophany*. What theophany episodes can be found in the Ancestral Story, and what are the ways that God appeared to people in each of the three literary sources?
3. *Character development*. How do the main characters of the Ancestral Story change from the beginning of a cycle to the end, and how do names change to reflect this?
4. *Blessing*. How does the theme of blessing and curse surface in each cycle, and how does blessing and curse connect thematically with the Primeval Story?
5. *Type-scenes*. What are the similarities among the stories about Sarah and the Pharaoh (Genesis 12:14–20), Sarah and Abimelech (Genesis 20:10–20), and Rebekah and Abimelech (Genesis 26:6–11)? Why are these said to be based on a type-scene?
6. *Firstborn*. How does the theme of firstborn sons in relation to the younger sons surface within each cycle? Why does the Ancestral Story give so much attention to family birth order? Why does the Ancestral Story seem to subvert the tradition of primogeniture?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *National character*. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are considered the fathers of the nation of Israel. In a way, telling their stories is telling the story of the Israelites. What episodes in the Ancestral

Story reveal the character of Israel? What episodes may have reinforced a northern Israelite identity? What episodes may have reinforced a southern Judean identity? How do we use stories to clarify our personal identities and our national identities?

2. *Trust*. Which ancestral stories relate to the issue of trust in divine promises? List some specific episodes that stand out in your mind that have to do with issues of belief, trust, and faith. What developments can you trace in the growth and quality of the ancestors' trust?
3. *Matriarchs*. What do the stories of the matriarchs reveal about the social roles of women in the ancestral period? How does the sociology of women in that time, insofar as you have been able to glean it from the texts, compare with your understanding of the role of women in society today? How has the portrayal of the Genesis matriarchs shaped traditional views of women? Is there material in the stories of the matriarchs and other women of Genesis that could be used to challenge traditional views?
4. *Blessing*. What is the meaning and the role of blessing in the Ancestral Story? In what ways are all people dependent on the blessing, encouragement, and support of others in order to develop constructive self-images and productive attitudes? Were the ancestors positive or negative models of how to respond to blessing? Have you found encouragement and blessing from anyone in particular, and if so, what effect has that had on your life?
5. *Flawed forebears*. The main characters of the Ancestral Story, both male and female, seem generally strong and determined, but at times they also revealed weaknesses. Can you identify examples of each? Do you see the patriarchs and matriarchs as the movers and shakers of Israel's future in relation to the promises of God, or were they mostly just passive recipients of the divine promises?

# READING THE TEXT TODAY

*The Genesis of Ethics: How the Tormented Family of Genesis Leads Us to Moral Development*, by Burton L. Visotzky (1996), reflects on the episodes of the Ancestral Story to gain perspective on contemporary moral formation. *Abraham and Family: New Insights into the Patriarchal Narratives*, edited by Herschel Shanks (2000a), is a collection of provocative essays on the characters and episodes of the Ancestral Story. *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (1993) and *Genesis: The Feminist Companion to the Bible* (1998), both edited by Athalya Brenner, consist of feminist readings of selected Genesis stories. David Rosenberg (of *The Book of J* fame) has written *Abraham: The First Historical Biography* (2006), a biography set within a reconstructed Sumerian context.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Exodus: Deliverance and Covenant

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Exodus: Deliverance Traditions \(1–18\)](#)

[3 Sinai: Covenant Traditions \(19–40\)](#)

[4 Exodus as a Book](#)

---

## KEY TERMS

[Aaron](#)

[Absolute law](#)

[Book of the Covenant/Covenant Code](#)

[Burning bush](#)

[Case law](#)

[Code of Hammurapi](#)

[Covenant](#)

[Decalogue](#)

[Ethical Decalogue](#)

[Exodus](#)

[Glory of YHWH](#)

[Golden calf](#)

[Hebrews](#)

[Horeb](#)

[Hyksos](#)

[Jethro](#)

[Meeting tent](#)

[Midian](#)

[Miriam](#)

[Moses](#)

[Mount Sinai](#)  
[Passover](#)  
[Pesach](#)  
[Pharaoh](#)  
[Plagues](#)  
[Ramses](#)  
[Reed Sea/Red Sea](#)  
[Ritual Decalogue](#)  
[Sinai covenant](#)  
[Tabernacle](#)  
[Theophany](#)  
[Zipporah](#)

## **Michelangelo's *Moses***

Moses is the central figure of the book of Exodus, famously depicted by the great artist and sculptor Michelangelo (1475–1564). Moses delivered the Hebrews out of Egyptian slave bondage, led them to Mount Sinai where he received the commandments from YHWH, and brought the people into covenant relationship with their God.



Source: Marble sculpture in the Church of San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome, 1515. Drawing of the sculpture's head by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on a photo by Barry Bandstra, 1998 (see page 144).

---

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The book of Exodus is the bedrock of Israel's faith. It relates two foundational experiences, the Exodus from Egypt and the reception of the covenant at Mount Sinai. The [Exodus](#) declared that Israel exists by the powerful delivering action of YHWH. The [covenant](#) shaped Israel's relationship with YHWH whereby YHWH became their patron deity. This relationship has clear expectations of both parties and holds the promise of a glorious future. Taken together, these events establish Israel's core identity as a delivered people in covenant with God.

The Exodus is also foundational to Judaism and Christianity. In Judaism it is celebrated as [pesach](#), the Passover, and is the premier festival of freedom and liberty. In Christianity it has been transformed into Easter, with Jesus of Nazareth as the Passover lamb. The book of Exodus gets its name from the central event recounted therein: Israel's miraculous departure from Egypt. A bit of clarification: The book of Exodus is not *the* Exodus; the first is a book, and the second is an event. In serial order, the book of Exodus follows the book of Genesis, but in terms of its religious and national significance, it is number one. It can be divided into two main parts: traditions centering on the exit from Egypt ([Chapters 1–18](#)) and traditions associated with the Mount Sinai revelation of YHWH ([Chapters 19–40](#))

## 1.1 Deliverance and Covenant: A Summary

The opening (Exodus 1) describes how the Egyptians oppressed the descendants of Jacob, subjecting them to forced labor. Because this failed to curtail their growth, all male Hebrew infants were killed—all but one. When Moses was born (2), his parents hid him temporarily and then put him into a basket and set him afloat on the



Nile River. Pharaoh's daughter found Moses, had compassion for him, and raised him as her own in the royal court.

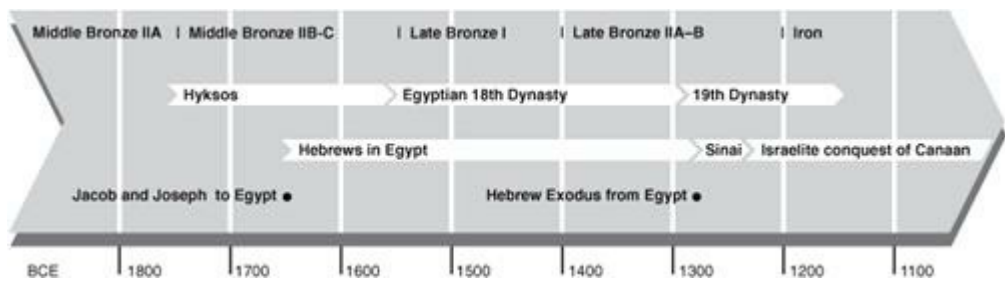
When Moses reached adulthood, he rashly attempted to rescue some fellow [Hebrews](#) by killing their Egyptian task master. He fled Egypt and took refuge in the Sinai wilderness. There he married [Zipporah](#) and raised a family. While shepherding the flocks of his father-in-law [Jethro](#), he met YHWH at a [burning bush](#) (3–4). YHWH instructed Moses to return to Egypt, which was not exactly what he wanted to hear. Nonetheless, once back in Egypt, he mediated Israel's deliverance from slavery and oppression. With a series of natural and supernatural disasters (5–11), YHWH demonstrated his superior power. After celebrating the first Passover, the Hebrews escaped into the Sinai wilderness (12–13). The Egyptian army pursued them and, just when it looked like the Hebrews were doomed, God miraculously opened a pathway through the Reed Sea. The Hebrews passed through safely, but the Egyptians were drowned when they tried to follow (14–15). Then Moses led the people to Mount Sinai (16–18) where earlier he had met YHWH at the burning bush.

At Mount Sinai, YHWH revealed the law to the Hebrews and established an abiding covenant relationship with them (19–24). In addition to making this covenant, he gave them instructions for building worship items and a portable shrine (25–31). Soon after the people agreed to the terms of the covenant, they broke it by worshipping the golden calf instead of YHWH (32–34). Though they deserved to be annihilated, God reestablished his covenant with them. Then, while still encamped at Mount Sinai, the Hebrews built a tent shrine as the residence for their God and called it the tabernacle (35–40).

## 1.2 Historicity of Exodus

The Exodus from Egypt is generally positioned in the 1200s BCE, more than two centuries before the founding of the monarchy in Israel (see [Figure 3.1](#)). The events narrated in the book of Exodus are set in northern Egypt and in the Sinai Peninsula. There are details in Exodus that have been used to build a case that the story matches the situation in Egypt at this time. For example, the places that the Hebrews labored as slaves, Pithom and Rameses (1:11), match known sites, and those locations were occupied at the appropriate time. Also, various documents attest the presence of Semitic people in Egypt—that is, people like the Israelites—who were perceived to be a threat to indigenous Egyptians. Thus, there is substantial circumstantial evidence that the Hebrews could have been there at that time (see Hoffmeier, 1999, for a positive appraisal and Redford, 1992, for a more skeptical analysis).

**FIGURE 3.1** Time Line: Early Israel



However, there is no direct evidence to substantiate the Exodus account (it should be added that there is no direct evidence to refute it either). This means that we are not absolutely sure which Pharaoh reigned at the time of the Exodus, though most presume it was Ramses II. There is no mention of the Hebrews or the Israelites in Egyptian documents of this period that would substantiate their presence at this moment in Egyptian history and no mention of a Moses. There is no archaeological evidence of the Israelites in either Egypt or the Sinai dating to this time. There is no record of a

devastating series of plagues or a crossing miracle at the Reed Sea. And nobody has found the broken remains of the commandment tablets. All this demonstrates the difficulty of correlating the biblical text, especially in the early periods, with documentary history. The quip “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence” could be invoked here as a caution not to rush to negative judgment regarding the facticity of early events.

## **1.3 Reading Guide**

The book of Exodus should be read attentively for the simple reason that it is the most important book of the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps the only sections that could be read lightly are the extended descriptions of the tabernacle and its accessories and the priestly regulations (26–31 and 35–39).

The basic story line of Exodus is straightforward, and the events follow a linear chronological progression. But just because the Exodus event in Egypt and the revelation event at Mount Sinai were taken to be so vitally important to Israel’s identity, many traditions got attached to these events to give the traditions Mosaic authority. The resulting text shows signs of this clustering. For example, over time Israel accumulated a variety of statutes and law collections. All of these came to be attached to Mount Sinai. To get them all entered into the text, Exodus has Moses going up and down the mountain multiple times—so many times that the text almost loses track of him.

## **2 EXODUS: DELIVERANCE TRADITIONS (1–18)**

The first half of Exodus is a narrative account of the Israelites’ escape from Egyptian bondage and their journey to Mount Sinai. This

deliverance account includes the story of Moses, YHWH's chosen leader. Moses mediated a series of disasters that culminated in the Israelites' release. Overcoming all obstacles, including a great expanse of sea, the Israelites made their way through the wilderness until they came to the mountain of God where the terms of the covenant were revealed to them through Moses.

## 2.1 Israel in Egypt (1)

The first verse of the book of Exodus connects the Joseph cycle of Genesis (see RTOT [Chapter 2](#)) to the Exodus story by showing how the Hebrew people came to Egypt. In Jewish tradition, the book of Exodus is named *shemot*, "names," from the first sentence of the book. Could the use of *shemot* here be an allusion to the importance of name in the primeval story and in Genesis 12:2, "*I will make your name great*"?

*These are the names of the sons of Israel who entered Egypt with Jacob, each with his family. (1:1)*

Using the phrase "*sons of Israel*" for the Israelites is deliberate because Jacob's name had been changed to Israel. He is the eponymous ancestor of the nation; that is, the nation takes its name from him. After naming all the sons, the writer remarks that the Israelites were fruitful and prolific, so much so that Egypt was teeming with them. The language of multiplication echoes the ancestral covenant blessing (Genesis 17:2, 28:3, 35:11) and goes back even further to the Priestly creation blessing (Genesis 1:28, 9:1).

Beginning with Jacob's clan, the Hebrews lived in Egypt for many generations. After a time, the government changed hands, and the Egyptian [Pharaoh](#), or king of Egypt, enslaved the Hebrews. The term

*pharaoh* is derived from the Egyptian phrase “the great house.” It designates the highest office of Egypt and is not a personal name. In the following text, notice how their covenant blessing became their curse; they had become so numerous that the new ruler considered them a threat:

*A new king rose to power over Egypt, who did not know about Joseph. He said to his people, “Now, the Israelites are more numerous and powerful than we are. Come on, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will become even more numerous. If war breaks out they would join our enemies, fight against us, and leave the land.” They put slave masters over them to inflict hard labor on them. They built the store cities Pithom and Rameses for Pharaoh. (1:8–11)*

Although there are no direct references to Moses or the Israelite Exodus outside the Hebrew Bible, extrabiblical sources have helped to build a plausible setting for Israel’s experience. Specifically, Egyptian history provides a context for understanding the Egyptians’ change of heart toward the Hebrews, implied by the reference in verse 8 to the “*new king*” who rose to power. Prior to this time, from 1750 to 1550 BCE, a group of non-Egyptians had ruled northern Egypt. This foreign rule, which historians call the Second Intermediate Period, was a break in the flow of indigenous African–Egyptian government.

### **FIGURE 3.2** Ahmose I and the Hyksos

The middle panel on this ceremonial axe depicts the Egyptian Pharaoh Ahmose smiting an enemy. Egyptian sources credit Ahmose I with expelling the Hyksos, who were foreign invaders of Egypt (see ANET, 230–234). Jacob and Joseph, along with all the Hebrews, were likely considered part of the Hyksos group and would have

been despised by ethnic Egyptians.



Source: Ceremonial axe of King Ahmose I, from W. von Bissing, *Ein thebanischer Grabfund* (Berlin, 1900), plate 1.

The invaders were the [Hyksos](#), an Egyptian term that means “rulers of foreign lands.” Most of them were Semites from Syria and Palestine, the same general area that the ancestors of the Hebrews called home. If Joseph was part of this influx of the foreign Hyksos, it might explain how he could come to such prominence and power in Egypt.

Under Pharaoh Ahmose I (1552–1527 BCE) of the Eighteenth Dynasty, native Egyptian rule resumed, and Egyptians began to subjugate foreigners ([Figure 3.2](#)). According to Exodus 12:40, the Israelites were in Egypt for 430 years and perhaps as many as 300 years of that were spent in subservience. If the traditional date of the Exodus (early 1200s BCE) is accepted, the Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus was [Ramses](#) II (1290–1224 BCE), the great empire builder of the Nineteenth Dynasty. He moved Egypt’s center of government to the eastern Nile delta and initiated sizable building projects there.

Dating the Exodus turns out to be a complex issue, dependent on chronological hints in the biblical text, evidence from history and

archaeology, as well as certain assumptions. There are two recognized candidates, 1440 BCE and 1280 BCE. The early date is calculated by counting back from the known date of Solomon's temple building using the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1. The late date depends heavily on the date of the conquest of Canaan as determined by archaeology and then working back from the forty years of the wilderness wandering to the Exodus (see Bimson, 1978, and Bimson and Livingston, 1987).

### **FIGURE 3.3** Making Bricks in Egypt

This depiction of the brickmaking process is from the tomb of Thutmose III of the Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty, circa 1460 BCE. Laborers are shown processing the raw mud and forming the bricks used to construct walls and buildings (see Lesko and Lesko, 1999).



Source: Drawing by Karla VanHuysen based on N. de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Rê at Thebes* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition, 1943), plate 58.

Go to the companion website and see the table “Historical Evidence for Dating the Exodus.”

The Israelites were set to work building Pithom and Rameses (1:11), two Egyptian fortress cities in the eastern Nile delta region.

The cities were strategic in defending Egypt from Asian attack and served as bases for extending Egyptian power into Palestine and Syria. The Israelites were forced to manufacture the mud bricks and construct the fortresses (see [Figure 3.3](#)). However, the hard work of city building did not diminish their numbers, so the Egyptians initiated a policy of male infanticide:

*The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives—one was named Shiprah and the other Puah, “When you perform midwifery to the Hebrew women, and you see them on the birthing stool, if it is a boy, kill him. But if it is a girl, let her live.” (1:15–16)*

Notice that the text changes talking about them as Israelites now and instead calls them Hebrews. The term *Hebrew* is used only about thirty times in the entire Hebrew Bible. Interestingly, it is used mostly by people of other ethnic or national groups when referring to early Israelites, rather than by Israelites themselves. The term *Hebrew* may be related to the Mesopotamian *habiru*. Documents from Mesopotamia and Egypt from the second millennium to the 1100s BCE make frequent reference to groups of people associated with the term *habiru*. These *habiru* were evidently not a homogenous ethnic group but a class of social misfits and troublemakers. The term may be linguistically related to the biblical word for a Hebrew, *‘ivri*. The question has been raised whether the Israelites were originally such people. If so, this would have implications for the geographical origin of the Israelites (currently a much disputed question), their ethnic constitution or lack thereof, and their social formation (see Na’aman, 1986).

Go to the companion website and see the table “Distribution and Use of the Term *Hebrew*.”



The midwives who serviced the Hebrews (it is not clear whether the midwives were themselves Hebrew or just helped the Hebrews) secretly refused to cooperate. So the desperate Pharaoh commanded that all Hebrew infant sons be drowned in the Nile. This set the stage for the birth story and early life of Moses.

## 2.2 The Early Moses (2–4)

**Moses** was born to Amram and Jochebed who were from the tribe of Levi (6:20). After they were no longer able to conceal the baby Moses, they placed him in a reed basket waterproofed with tar and set him afloat on the Nile, in much the same way as Sargon, a famous king of Akkad, was hidden (see ANET, 119). The Mesopotamian birth legend of Sargon of Akkad contains additional points of contact to the Moses birth story. Sargon was the illegitimate son of a high priestess. To keep her position, she needed to conceal the birth, so she placed Sargon in a basket of reeds caulked with tar and set him afloat on the Euphrates River. He was discovered downstream by Akki the water drawer, who adopted and raised him. Sargon rose to become the architect of the empire of Akkad (see Longman, 1991).

Setting Moses adrift on the Nile was a deliberate ploy to win the compassion of Pharaoh's daughter, who frequented the river to bathe. When she discovered Moses, she took him to court and raised him there as a virtual grandson of the Pharaoh. Pharaoh's daughter gave him the name Moses, *moshe* in Hebrew. The Hebrew Bible attaches a folk etymology to the name (2:10); the Hebrew verb "draw out" puns with Moshe. In reality, Moshe is a name derived from the Egyptian verb *msy*, meaning "be born," with the noun *ms* meaning "child or son."

Although Moses was raised as an Egyptian, apparently it was through his birthmother, hired as his wet nurse and au pair (2:7–10), that he came to realize his Hebrew origin. Clearly, Moses had a

mixed and conflicted Hebrew–Egyptian identity. This explains how he could on the one hand be knowledgeable of the royal court to negotiate the departure of the Israelites and on the other hand identify with the plight of the Israelites, even if they failed to identify with him.

One day, as Moses was surveying the royal projects, he rescued a Hebrew slave by killing his abusive Egyptian master. In danger of being exposed, Moses fled Egypt, an episode with similarities to the story of Sinuhe, another Egyptian who had to take flight (see ANET, 18–22). Moses went to [Midian](#), where he found refuge with Jethro, a desert priest. Moses eventually married one of his daughters and served as shepherd of his father-in-law’s flocks.

Go to the companion website and see the text “The Tale of Sinhue.”

Moses’s encounter with YHWH at the burning bush in Exodus 3:1–15 marks a turning point in Israel’s history. Here Moses learned the identity of the deity who would deliver the Israelites from bondage. Moses would be his mediator. The full account is a mixture of YHWH and Elohim material, with Elohim passages predominating.

## 2.2.1 Moses at Horeb (E)

*Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of Elohim.*  
(3:1)

Jethro is the name of Moses’s father-in-law in the Elohist source, but it is Reuel in the Yahwist source (see 2:18) and Hobab in the Deuteronomistic history (see Judges 1:16 and 4:11). [Horeb](#) is the name the Elohim source (and Deuteronomy) applies to the mountain

of God, whereas the YHWH source calls it [Mount Sinai](#).

Some authorities have suggested that Horeb and Mount Sinai are not the same place. According to such a view, Mount Sinai would be located in the Sinai Peninsula and Horeb probably somewhere in Midian; it is notoriously difficult to pin down.

## **2.2.2 The Burning Bush (J)**

*The angel of YHWH appeared to him in a flaming fire out of the middle of a bush. As Moses watched, the bush burned but it did not burn up. Moses said to himself, “I’m going to stop and observe this amazing thing! Why does the bush not burn up?” When YHWH saw that Moses stopped to observe ... (3:2–4a)*

Verse 2a summarizes the story. Probably added later, it gives the story an explanatory framework so that we will understand that YHWH did not appear directly to Moses (as the story implies) but indirectly in the form of an angel or messenger; the word here translated “angel” is not necessarily nonhuman and can also mean “messenger.” The “*flaming fire*” that is such a prominent part of this story is typical of a biblical theophany, or appearance of God. In Genesis 15, God appeared to Abraham in a smoking fire pot. Here, he appears to Moses in a flaming bush. On Mount Sinai, he appears in lightning, smoke, and cloud. In the wilderness, he appears in pillars of cloud and fire.

## **2.2.3 The God of the Fathers (E)**

*... Elohim called to him out of the middle of the bush and said, “Moses! Moses!” He replied, “Yes, I’m here.” He said, “Don’t get any closer. Take your sandals off your feet. The place where you are standing is holy ground.” He said, “I am*

*the Elohim of your father, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at Elohim. (3:4b–6)*

Whereas the deity is referred to as YHWH in verse 4a, in 4b the reference changes to Elohim, indicating a return to the Elohist. Note the similarity between this story and Genesis 22 (also an Elohist account) in the way that God initiates the encounter, saying Abraham’s name twice and him answering, “Here I am.”

Verse 6 explicitly associates the God of the Exodus with the God of the ancestors, thus connecting Israel’s deliverance with the history of promises to the ancestors. The phrase “God of my/your/his father” is often used in Genesis and in Mesopotamian literature of a personal patron god and protector. It suggests a special relationship between the individual and his deity. Beginning with Moses, the phrase becomes “God of our/your/their fathers,” with the plural referring to the Israelites as a people.

We are no longer dealing with the angel of YHWH. Note also how the Elohist protects Moses from looking directly at God. Facing God directly is not allowed in Elohist theology; the fear of God is a prominent motif in the Elohist source.

## **2.2.4 Land of Milk and Honey (J)**

*YHWH said, “I have seen the hardship of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cry for relief from their oppressors. I know of their suffering. I have come down to deliver them from the grip of Egypt and bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites.” (3:7–8)*

As is typical of this source, YHWH is a caring and compassionate

deity who hates to see his people suffer and acts out of compassion. Not only will he relieve their suffering, but he will also bring them to the land promised to the ancestors. The land is described as “flowing with milk and honey.” Obviously, milk did not flow through the streams and honey did not ooze down the wadis; these images depict the richness of the land, with all the flowering plants needed to support life. The six nations listed here are often cited as the inhabitants of Palestine before the Israelites got there (for example, see Genesis 15:18–21 where these and more are listed).

## **2.2.5 Moses the Mediator (E)**

*“The cry of the people of Israel has now reached me. I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians mistreat them. Go, I will send you to Pharaoh so that you can bring my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to Elohim, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” He said, “But I will be with you. This shall be the sign for you to know that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship Elohim on this mountain.” (3:9–12)*

In contrast to the Yahwist in the prior passage, here the focus is on the Egyptians’ wrongdoing rather than on the Israelites’ suffering. Characteristic of the Elohim source, God acted through an intermediary, Moses, in this case. He revealed his deep-seated feelings of inadequacy as mediator, humility being a sign of genuine godliness in God’s prophets. The YHWH source, which does not quite so adore Moses as does the Elohim source, later portrays him as putting up more resistance. The sign that God gave him was not something that could give him assurance right then and there but would be a later confirmation of his calling:

*Then Moses said to Elohim, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The Elohim of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” Elohim said to Moses, “Ehyeh-asher-ehyeh.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘Ehyeh has sent me to you.’” Elohim also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘YHWH, the Elohim of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, has sent me to you’: this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.” (3:13–15)*

Moses impertinently asked God for identification: “Who are you? How can I identify you to the Israelite elders?” In response God identified himself as the God of the fathers, later specified as the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then God in a cryptic manner said that Ehyeh-asher-ehyeh is his name, enigmatically translatable as “I am who I am,” or “I will be who I will be,” from which the name YHWH appears to be derived linguistically.

This revelation of the divine name has given rise to reams of research and speculation. Most authorities acknowledge that *ehyeh* is a Hebrew verbal form meaning “I am.” When the first-person verbal form *ehyeh* is transformed into the third-person form, it becomes *YHWH*, which can be translated “he is” or “he causes to be.” However, what this name really signifies remains a mystery and maybe deliberately so. At the same time God revealed his name, he also concealed its precise meaning. We can only speculate what the deeper significance of “I am” might be. Perhaps God was suggesting that he was the only self-existing one. Others, relating the name to the verb “to be” in a causal sense, have said it is a statement about God’s creative power: “I am the one who calls into being.”

Whatever the deeper meaning of the divine name YHWH, it is the name by which all the textual sources identify the God of Israel from

now on. Each of the three Tetrateuchal sources has a specific point at which it begins to use the divine name YHWH ([Table 3.1](#)). It is the name of Israel’s patron deity, a name that is specifically associated with the covenant.

From this point on, even the Elohist uses YHWH for the divine name, though not to the exclusion of the designation Elohim. The change of divine name is also noted in the Priestly source at Exodus 6:2–5. This account adds that the ancestors knew God as El Shaddai (probably meaning “God Almighty”), but beginning with Moses and the Exodus he made himself known as YHWH.

Moses offered excuses why he should not go back to Egypt. In response, God gave him signs to authenticate his calling, including a staff that could transform itself into a snake. When Moses claimed he was not eloquent enough to speak before Pharaoh, God appointed Moses’s brother [Aaron](#) to be his spokesperson. YHWH sent Moses away with these instructions (from the Yahwist):

**TABLE 3.1** First Use of the Divine Name YHWH in the Sources

| Source   | Text           | Translation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Yahwist  | Genesis 4:26   | <i>To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time men began to call upon the name of YHWH.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Elohist  | Exodus 3:14–15 | <i>Elohim said to Moses, “Elyeh who Elyeh.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘Elyeh has sent me to you.’” (15) Elohim also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘YHWH, the Elohim of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, has sent me to you’: this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”</i> |
| Priestly | Exodus 6:2–3   | <i>And Elohim said to Moses, “I (am)” YHWH.” (3) “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as El Shaddai, but by my name YHWH I did not make myself known to them.”</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

<sup>a</sup>There is no Hebrew verb in this clause, just the pronoun *I* and the name YHWH.

*“When you return to Egypt, make sure you perform before Pharaoh all the miracles I have given you the ability to do. Yet, I will harden his heart so that he will not allow the people to leave. You must say to Pharaoh: ‘This is what YHWH says: Israel is my firstborn son, I command you, Let my son leave so*

*that he may worship me. If you refuse to let him leave, I will slay your firstborn son.’’* (4:21–23)

Having received the revelation of the divine name along with his mandate, Moses went back to Egypt and presented YHWH’s demand to Pharaoh: “Let my people go!” Pharaoh refused to budge. Only after a devastating series of disasters did he allow them, in fact urge them, to leave Egypt—all in the name of the one God of Israel. By this, Moses stands at the center, some claim, of a religious revolution. He championed a religion devoted to one God against the pantheon of Egyptian gods and won. It is possible that Moses was influenced in a monotheistic direction by the Egyptian king Akhenaton (1360–1340 BCE), who tried to simplify Egypt’s religious system by declaring that the sun god, Aton, was the only deity (see Redford, 1984).

## 2.3 Plagues (5–11)

Because Pharaoh refused to grant permission to leave, God sent the **plagues**. The description of disasters told here is graphic and engaging. The Nile turned to blood, making the water undrinkable. Then frogs invaded the land, and after they died, there was an infestation of gnats, then flies. Soon the livestock became diseased, and later animals and humans suffered from boils. Crops were devastated, first by a hail storm and then by locusts. After all this, an impenetrable darkness descended on the land. Though the Egyptian population reeled, Pharaoh still refused to let the Israelites go.

The story of the plagues has given rise to a variety of interpretations deriving from different angles taken on the text. The varying interpretations are not mutually exclusive; rather, they demonstrate the multilayered nature of possible meanings in the text. From the perspective of biblical salvation history, the plagues were intended to reveal YHWH’s power to break Egyptian resistance.



They are called God's great acts of judgment and were said to come from the finger of God (Exodus 8:19). From a naturalist perspective, many of the plagues can be explained by biological or climatic occurrences that have been observed in the Nile valley (see Hort, 1957). From a comparative religions perspective, the plagues may represent YHWH's judgment on the gods of Egypt, including Amun-Re the sun god who was implicitly attacked in the ninth plague.

From a literary perspective, the plagues are arranged in three series of three disasters, with the tenth plague as the climax. From the perspective of source analysis, there were two different traditions of the plagues, a Yahwist and a Priestly version. The core plague narrative comes from the Yahwist source. It attests eight plagues and focuses on the role of Moses. The Priestly source added two plagues and highlights the role of Aaron.

After each plague, Pharaoh refused to allow the Israelites to leave. Pharaoh's response is variously described depending on the particular plague. Sometimes it is attributed to him hardening his own heart and other times to God hardening Pharaoh's heart. A third way of putting it just has his heart hardening without the agent being specified (see Wilson, 1979). Thus, Exodus both lays responsibility on Pharaoh and indicates that his stubbornness was part of a higher purpose.

Go to the companion website and see the tables "Pharaoh's Hard Heart," "Descriptions of the Plagues as the Work of YHWH," "Plagues as YHWH's Judgment on the Deities of Egypt," "Literary Structure of the Plagues Narrative," and "Yahwist and Priestly Versions of the Plagues Compared."

## **2.4 Death and Passover (12:1–13:16)**

The last plague was the death of Egypt's firstborn, both humans and

animals. It was the culmination of the series and the most devastating, and it compelled Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. The Israelites avoided the tenth plague because each family slaughtered a lamb as a substitute for its firstborn. They painted blood from the sacrificial lamb on the door frames of their homes, and when God saw this evidence, he “passed over” that house, sparing the firstborn son. Beginning with the Exodus, God laid claim to all firstborn sons and provided for their redemption, or buying back, with a substitutionary sacrifice (13:11–16).

The avoidance ritual of the tenth plague developed into a ceremonial meal called the [Passover](#), or *pesach* in Hebrew. During this meal, a roasted lamb was eaten along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread (bread made without yeast) called *matsot*. Eating *matsot* symbolized the rush of Israel’s departure; the bread simply had no time to rise. In pre-Israelite times, the Passover sacrifice and the feast of unleavened bread may have been two separate occasions, one pastorally based and the other agriculturally based. They were combined in biblical tradition and stand as a perpetual memorial of the Exodus (12:14).

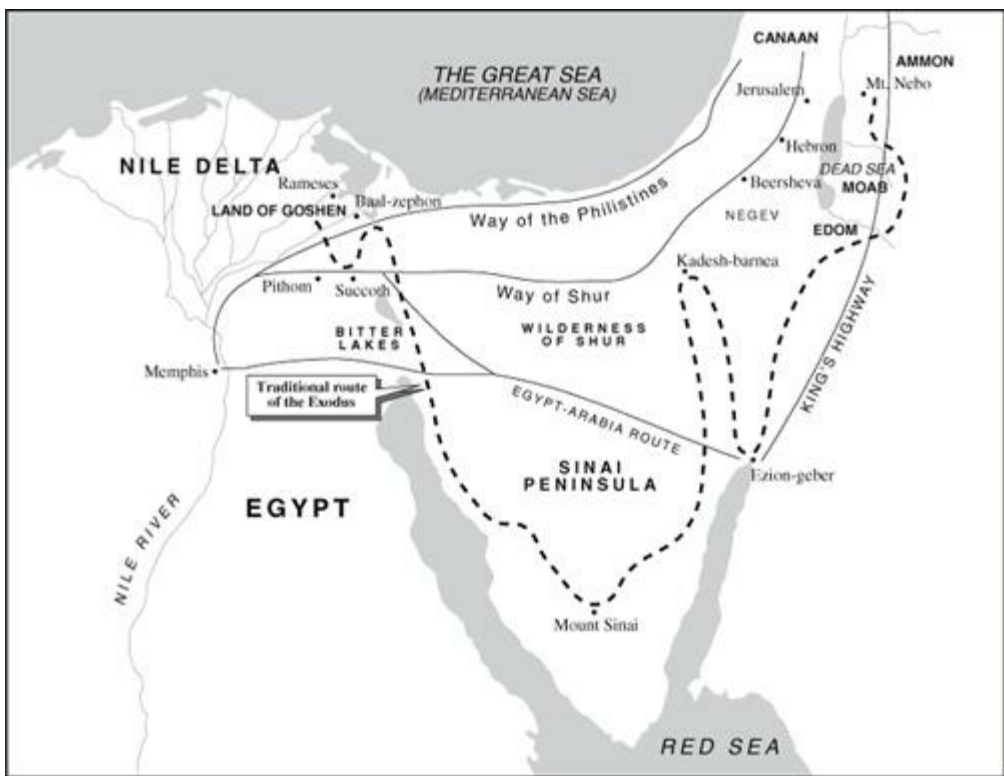
The Passover ritual is defined not just in Exodus but also in other Torah texts (see Leviticus 23:4–8; Numbers 9:1–14, 28:16–25; Deuteronomy 16:1–8), which attests to its significance in the life of Israel. The Exodus story became so important to Israel’s identity that the prescription for remembering it came to be contained within the tradition of the event itself. Observing it or failing to observe it later became a measure of the faithfulness of Israel (see 2 Kings 23 and 2 Chronicles 30). It is still widely celebrated today as a symbol of Jewish cultural identification and as an enduring monument to human freedom and divine compassion.

## **2.5 Exodus from Egypt (13:17–15:21)**

After leaving Egypt, the Israelites fled into the Sinai Peninsula. Pharaoh had second thoughts about allowing them to depart, so he mustered his chariotry and gave chase. The Israelites took a jagged route, avoiding the main road controlled by Egyptian troops, before heading south into the wilderness (see Beit-Arieh, 1988, Krahmalkov, 1994, and [Figure 3.4](#)).

After a short time, the Israelites were pinched between Pharaoh's army and the [Reed Sea](#). This is not a typographical error. Although translations and maps still use the designation Red Sea, the biblical text actually says Reed Sea. The underlying Hebrew phrase is *yam suf*. *Suf* is derived from the Egyptian word for the papyrus reed, which grows only in freshwater. This would most likely place the crossing at one of the lagoons or inland lakes in the northeast of Egypt near the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. *Suf* also puns on the Hebrew word for "end" and may indicate it has an additional symbolic or mythological sense (see Batto, 1984).

### **FIGURE 3.4** The Exodus Route



The Israelites, as was their tendency, blamed Moses for their predicament. But then, when all hope seemed lost, by a divine act the Israelites escaped through the sea on dry ground and the army of Pharaoh drowned when they tried to follow. This escape is the most important event in Israel's history. It is the culmination of God's great work in delivering the Israelites from oppression and bondage and providing salvation. Forever it would be remembered as the event that revealed both the compassion and power of Israel's God. Its significance to the religious faith of Israel cannot be overestimated.

What exactly happened at the Reed Sea remains an open question. Some readers prefer to call it a miracle and leave it at that. Others, while not automatically discounting that a divine hand was at work here, seek a natural explanation and speculate about what might have occurred there. One writer suggests that the eruption of a volcano on Thera in the Aegean Sea produced a tidal wave that swept away

Pharaoh's army, while Israel survived because they occupied higher ground (see Shanks, 1981). Two scientists attribute the drying of the sea to identifiable oceanographic patterns (see Nof and Paldor, 1992).

The exit from Egypt and deliverance at the Reed Sea is the salvation high point of Israel's history. In this event, YHWH revealed his deep love and care for Israel. In biblical literature, it became the prototype saving event. When at a later time the Israelites were alienated from the Promised Land and oppressed by foreign overlords, especially during the Babylonian exile, they recalled the great Exodus from Egypt and were encouraged.

The crossing was remembered within Israel in at least three different ways. The Old Epic version may be a virtual eyewitness account, while the Yahwist and Priestly accounts reveal notable differences in narrative emphasis. Each seems to shape the miracle and the roles of YHWH and Moses somewhat differently.

- Old Epic version: *"You blew with your wind, the sea covered them. They sank as lead into the mighty waters"* (15:10). Exodus 15 celebrates the victory over Pharaoh in a poetic song of triumph. Moses and his sister, [Miriam](#), led the people in a victory hymn to YHWH: *"I will sing to YHWH, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."* The style and vocabulary of this hymn date it as one of the oldest Hebrew compositions in the Bible, and some scholars place it quite close to the time of the event itself (see Cross, 1968). This hymn, often referred to as the Song of the Sea, contains an independent description (neither Yahwist, Elohist, or Priestly) that concentrates on how the waters of the floods destroyed Pharaoh's army. There is no talk of YHWH splitting the sea or the Israelites crossing on dry ground.

- YHWH version: *"YHWH drove the sea back with a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land"* (14:21b). According to this version, the people were saved when God sent a

wind to drive back the sea. In this version, God acted directly. Overall, the Yahwist places primary focus on YHWH and his activity. He was present in the cloud. He was the one that saved Israel. Moses's only role was to reassure the people that they would be saved. The Yahwist strand concentrates less on the details of the miracle and more on the faith response of the people. The Israelites moved from fear to faith as they stood back and observed what YHWH had done.

• Priestly version: “*Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. ... And the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground. The waters formed a wall on their right and on their left*” (14:21a, 21c–22). In this version, the miracle is more spectacular, with the water rising up like walls on either side of the traveling Israelites. God acts indirectly through the agency of Moses rather than directly. This version, with its motif of dividing and separating, has much in common with the Priestly story of Creation, especially the dome of the second day.

Go to the companion website and see the tables “Yahwist Version of the Exodus Episode,” “Elohism Version of the Exodus Episode,” and “Priestly Version of the Exodus Episode.” The book of Exodus retains various memories of the Exodus event, and each can be read separately using these tables.

Just because the Exodus was such a defining moment, it should not be surprising that it was remembered and then described in a variety of different ways. The portrayals differ, at least in part, because they are not journalistic records but rather memories combined with mythic themes. In particular, the accounts of the Reed Sea crossing seem to be a combination of themes from the Creation story and the divine warrior myth of the ancient Middle East (see Miller, 1973, and Dozeman, 1996). We have seen that the major action of the creation myth, which is worked out in the Elohim Creation story, was

the splitting of the primeval waters so that dry land and life could emerge under the dome. In the divine warrior myth, a high god slays the monster of chaos, personified as the sea or the great river, thereby ensuring order and fertility. This was often followed by the crowning of the victorious god. For example, in Canaan mythology of the period just before the Exodus, the storm god Baal subdued the sea god Yamm (whose name means “sea”). The myth of YHWH as the warrior who subdues the waters finds expression in many places in the Hebrew Bible, including the Psalms (for example, 29 and 74:12–15), prophetic literature (Isaiah 51:9–11), and here in the Exodus account. The Exodus deliverance experience was creatively combined with the myths of creation and the divine warrior to portray YHWH as the God who splits the waters—in this situation, the waters of the Reed Sea—and overcomes the forces of death. In response, Moses and the Israelites sang, “*YHWH is a man of war! YHWH is his name!*” (15:3).

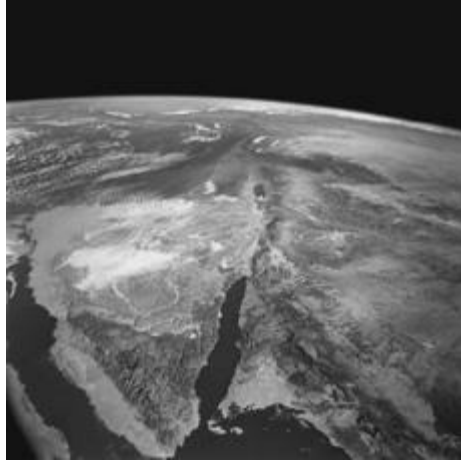
## 2.6 Wilderness Journey (15:22–18:27)

After the escape from Egypt, Moses led the Israelites into the wilderness to meet YHWH. Moving on from the shore of the Reed Sea, they traveled toward Mount Sinai where their deity would make a covenant with them (see [Figure 3.5](#)). Along the way, they had numerous difficulties that tried Moses’s leadership ability and patience and tested the faith of the people. These troubles also served to test the resourcefulness of God and to reveal the character of the Israelites.

### **FIGURE 3.5** The Sinai Peninsula

The Sinai is the triangular peninsula toward the lower left. It is defined by the Mediterranean Sea toward the top and the two gulfs extending upward from the Red Sea. Led by Moses, the Israelites

escaped slavery in Egypt and traveled through the Sinai wilderness to Mount Sinai.



Source: STS109-708-024 (1–12 March 2002). Picture taken by astronauts aboard space shuttle *Columbia*. Courtesy of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

When they arrived at an oasis called Marah, the water was undrinkable. The people complained to Moses, who changed the bitter water to sweet. When they lacked food, God rained down manna and quail. Manna is called the “bread of heaven” and is described as thin flakes that are white like coriander seed and taste like wafers made of honey. The term *manna* is given a folk etymology in 16:15, 31 based on the people’s exclamation when they first saw it: *man hu’*, “what is it?” Some seek a naturalist explanation for manna, relating it to the honeylike secretion of a scale insect on tamarisk trees that is common to the Sinai (see Bodenheimer, 1947).

When they came to Rephidim expecting to find water, they found none. The people again turned on Moses and blamed him for their predicament. God instructed Moses to strike a rock and water flowed. Then the Amalekites fought the Israelites. Joshua led the



counterattack, and the Israelites prevailed so long as Moses's arms were raised to God. This episode is notable because it introduces the Amalekites, who are a persistent Israelite enemy. The Amalekites receive the honor of being the archetypal Israelite enemy because they were the first to attack this new nation. Always attentive to the worship dimension of Israel's experience, the Elohist notes that Moses built an altar there to commemorate the event and called it "*YHWH is my banner*."

Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, met the Israelites in the wilderness. Observing that Moses was exhausting himself by single-handedly administering the entire community, he convinced Moses to delegate all but the most difficult cases to subordinates. Jethro, called the priest of Midian, also made a rather remarkable statement. He professed that YHWH was greater than any other god because he had delivered the people from Egyptian oppression. Then Jethro offered sacrifices to God. The Elohist is showing how outsiders, too, can perceive the greatness of Israel's deity and worship him.

The wilderness experiences of Israel related in these preSinai stories, getting water from the rock at a place Meribah, manna and quails, and meeting Moses's father-in-law, are similar to Israel's post-Sinai wilderness experiences (see RTOT [Chapter 4](#)). The repetitions form brackets, an inclusion, around Israel's Mount Sinai experiences.

Go to the companion website and see the table "Israel's Pre- and Post-Sinai Wilderness Experiences."

### **3 SINAI: COVENANT TRADITIONS (19–40)**

Mount Sinai is the geographical setting of the second half of Exodus, as well as of the entire book of Leviticus and the first portion of Numbers. At Mount Sinai, the Hebrews received the definitive

revelation of covenant from YHWH. The covenant traditions in Exodus lay out crucial dimensions of the relationship between YHWH and his people Israel.

Go to the companion website and see the tables “Law Giving in the Yahwist Version,” “Law Giving in the Elohist Version,” and “Law Giving in the Priestly Version.” All three sources of the Tetrateuch contribute components of law giving to the book of Exodus.

## **3.1 Theophany on the Mountain (19)**

This important chapter marks the moment the Israelites arrived at Sinai. Presumably this place is also the Horeb mentioned earlier in Exodus, the place where Moses had met God (connecting Exodus 3:1 and 3:12 to the present text). Upon their arrival, God first met with Moses alone and revealed what Israel might become, if only they would keep their side of the covenant. Then God appeared to all the people who were assembled at the base of the mountain. Together they witnessed a divine apparition on the mountain. Divine appearing, or [theophany](#), is typically mediated using the symbolic forms of the storm, including dark clouds, thunder, and lightning. In the following close reading of this chapter, we will segment the text into paragraphs and link them to the sources of the documentary hypothesis (following Campbell and O’Brien, 1993).

### **3.1.1 Introduction (P)**

*On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone forth out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. And when they set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the*

wilderness ... (19:1–2a)

Verses 1–2a are attributed to the Priestly source, which typically tracks the itinerary of the Israelites as they travel from Egypt to the Promised Land. This passage builds a bridge between the Exodus and the giving of the covenant at Mount Sinai.

### 3.1.2 God to Moses (E)

*... and there Israel encamped before the mountain. And Moses went up to Elohim, and YHWH called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the sons of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now then, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples (though all the earth is mine), and you shall be my kingdom of priests and holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the sons of Israel.” (19:2b–6)*

Verses 2b–9 are exclusively the work of the Elohist. The destination of the people was the mountain of God, as the Elohist refers to it; here, mountain for short. God’s statement is a well-formed literary unit with an introduction (“*Thus you shall say*”) and a conclusion (“*These are the words which you shall speak*”). “House of Jacob” is an Elohist synonym for sons of Israel. This makes sense once you recall that Jacob was closely associated with the northern territories (the entity called Israel during the divided monarchy) and that the Elohist hailed from the north.

The Elohist stresses the conditional character of covenant. The people will remain God’s adopted people if they demonstrate obedience as defined in the covenant. They were separated from the rest of the nations to become God’s special possession. Yet the

Elohist also knows of Israel's broader responsibilities. They will minister to the remainder of humanity as a kingdom of priests.

### 3.1.3 Moses to the Elders (E)

*So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which YHWH had commanded him. And all the people answered together and said, "All that YHWH has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to YHWH. And YHWH said to Moses, "Now I am coming to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you for ever." Then Moses told the words of the people to YHWH. (19:7–9)*

Moses presented YHWH's program to Israel's leadership, and they agreed to covenant in principle. Throughout the process, Moses functioned as the intermediary between the deity and the people. The Elohist portrays Moses as the prototypical prophet, standing between God and Israel to mediate the covenant. The people could not view God directly, but when they saw the luminescent cloud they were assured of God's presence and knew that he was conferring with Moses. Here, as throughout Israel's history, a glowing cloud is evidence of God's presence. In the Priestly tradition, this visible aura is called the [glory of YHWH](#).

In the next section, largely attributable to the Yahwist, God tells Moses how to prepare the people for their meeting.

### 3.1.4 YHWH to Moses (J)

*And YHWH said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments, and be ready by the third day; for on the third day YHWH will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all*

*the people. And you shall set bounds for the people round about, saying, 'Take heed that you do not go up into the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death; no hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." So Moses went down from the mountain to the people, and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments. And he said to the people, "Be ready by the third day; do not have intercourse with a woman." (19:10–15)*

This version implies that YHWH will appear personally. Consequently, the people had to prepare themselves ritually to be qualified to meet their God. Here, in the Yahwist version, the people meet God directly, contrasting with the Elohist version where Moses is the intermediary between God and the people.

The people made themselves ritually clean through a process called *consecration*. The instructions in verse 15 were obviously directed at the male population. Note the directive: "*Do not have intercourse with a woman.*" Laws of ritual purity demanded refraining from sexual intercourse. One writer comments that in this statement "nowhere is the secondary status of women and their exclusion from the central institutions of Israelite society more apparent" (Newsom and Ringe, 1992: 33).

### **3.1.5 The Theophany (J and E)**

*On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. All the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet Elohim; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because YHWH descended upon it in fire;*

*and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and Elohim answered him in thunder. YHWH came down onto Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. YHWH called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up. (19:16–20)*

Verses 16a, 18, and 20 belong to the Yahwist source (italicized); 16b–17 and 19 belong to the Elohist source. In the Elohist source, God reveals himself in meteorological phenomena: thunder and lightning and a thick cloud. These signs are all associated with the thunderstorm. In such a portrayal, YHWH is manifest as a storm God. Baal of Canaanite religion was also associated with such phenomena. The text tells us the people were fearful of God and trembled (the “*fear of God*” is one of the characteristic themes of the Elohist). The Elohist narrative will continue in 20:18–21 where we learn that the people pleaded with Moses to speak to them rather than have God do it because hearing God directly made them scared. Moses replied that God was only testing them (remember that the sacrificing Isaac story in Genesis 22 was intended as a test, and it too was from the Elohist) and that God was intentionally making them afraid so they would think twice about sinning.

In verse 18, which bears the marks of the Yahwist source, the appearance of YHWH is more like a volcanic eruption than a thunderstorm. Smoke ascended in a column, and there was an earthquake. This is evidence that we might have two different theophany traditions in Exodus 19, an Elohist–Horeb one and a Yahwist–Mount Sinai one.

Verse 20 returns us to the Yahwist version. God descended upon the mountain, and Moses ascended to the top—yet another time. There he received directions for guarding the sanctity of the holy mountain, which he brought back down to the people (21–25). For the Yahwist, the mountain is where revelation takes place. It is

different for the Elohist, who will make things easier for Moses; a [meeting tent](#) (also called *tent of meeting*) will be constructed, which will be where Moses will journey to confer with God (see 33:7).

Thus, the theophany passages of Exodus 19 establish a model of divine communication. Revelation comes from God at the mountain of God, called Mount Sinai by the Yahwist and Horeb by the Elohist, and Moses mediates it all. This narrative lays down the structure that gives authority to all the moral and ritual laws that follow in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.

### **3.2 Law and Covenant (20–23)**

Although the Elohist source contributed some of the ancestral material to the book of Genesis, the heart of the E source is the Exodus from Egypt and the law giving at the mountain of God. The Elohist contains one of the fullest records of the nature of the covenant relationship that God established with his people.

Covenant-law traditions were stronger in the northern territories of Israel than in Judah to the south. The covenant accounts of the Elohist provide a direct link to these traditions going all the way back to the time before the monarchy. Before becoming a nation, the tribes had formed a federation with its headquarters at Shechem. There they periodically engaged in covenant-renewal ceremonies that affirmed their solidarity and confirmed their faith in YHWH. The one led by Joshua in Joshua 24 is the most elaborate. It is probable that the Elohist was associated in some way with prophetic circles in Israel, most likely with an Elijah group.

Moses's activities on the mountain of God are very much like those of the northern prophet Elijah who came after him. Points of similarity include the following. Moses, like Elijah, confronted a difficult and contentious Israelite people as Elohim's spokesman.

Each had a loyal disciple, Joshua and Elisha, respectively. And both Moses and Elijah traveled to Horeb (for an account of Elijah, see RTOT [Chapter 9](#)).

The covenant making that takes place in Exodus was a response to the miraculous escape from Egypt that God had arranged. In this covenant, God formalized his relationship with the Hebrews by, in effect, drawing up a contract, very similar to what governments do when they draw up treaties.

### **3.2.1 Ethical Decalogue (E)**

Elohim devised a set of ten basic moral mandates that defined the relationship of Israel with YHWH and people with one other (20:1–17). Commonly referred to as the Ten Commandments (“ten words” in Deuteronomy 4:13; hence, [Decalogue](#)), they are the [Ethical Decalogue](#) of religious and moral commands. The core stipulations appear to come from the Elohist, with elaboration to some of them coming from later Priestly additions. Deuteronomy 5 contains a near duplicate of the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20, with some subtle but important variations. When we treat Deuteronomy (RTOT [Chapter 5](#)), the ancient Middle Eastern treaty background of the decalogue and the covenant will be examined.

Go to the companion website and see the table “Comparison of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.”

The narrative places the voicing of the Ten Commandments at the point where Moses is down from the mountain (19:25). It is presented as the direct address of Elohim to all the people (not just to Moses). This setting is reinforced by the narrative that immediately follows (the Elohist passage in 20:18–21) in which the people react in great fear of Elohim who has just spoken to them, asking Moses to mediate God to them in the future.



The commands are framed in the second-person masculine singular form of address—again, we might ask, were the women not included? The singular form of the imperatives might have the effect of targeting the individual person in Israel while addressing Israel as a collective unit. The ambiguity of “you” in English (is it singular or plural?) is not present in the Hebrew text. In the discussion that follows, we will not refer to the commandments by number because Judaic and Christian traditions enumerate the commandments differently.

Go to the companion website and see the table “Commandment Numbering in Postbiblical Religious Traditions.”

The commandments begin with Elohim’s self-identification and also evoke the Exodus:

*And Elohim spoke all these words, saying, “I am YHWH your Elohim, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of enslavement.” (20:1–2)*

This is the prologue to the commandments in Christianity, but in Judaism it is the first commandment. It emphasizes the loving character and concern of God, which he demonstrated by rescuing the Israelites from slavery and oppression. The sequence of historical events is significant. First, he delivered them from slavery, and afterwards he came to them with the covenant commands. An implication might be that obedience to these commands would be Israel’s expression of appreciation, not an onerous imposition from a distant and demanding God.

*“You may not have any other Elohim [translated as either “gods” or “God”] except me.” (20:3)*

This command prohibits devotion to any deity but YHWH. Perhaps to your surprise, it does not categorically deny the reality of other gods. This and other biblical texts implicitly acknowledge the existence of other gods, for example, Psalm 95:3.

*“You may not make for yourself a sculpted image, or any representation of anything that is in heaven above, or on the earth below, or in the water under the earth. You may not bow down to them or serve them; for I YHWH your Elohim am a possessive god, visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and the fourth generation of those who disown me, but showing loyalty to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.” (20:4–6)*

This command prohibits constructing any material object as a representation of YHWH. Nothing that God has created could ever adequately represent him. The only thing that bears a likeness to God is humankind, which was created in his image and after his likeness, according to Genesis 1. This command to appropriately honor God stresses the seriousness with which God treats loyalty and disloyalty. The reference to heaven above, earth below, and water under the earth in the formulation of this command is evidence that the Israelites had a trilevel concept of the cosmos, a notion also evident in the Priestly Creation narrative of Genesis.

*“You may not take the name of YHWH your Elohim in vain; for YHWH will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in*

vain.” (20:7)

This command originally intended to prohibit taking false oaths. More than that, it also forbade disrespect shown to God by using his name wrongly or frivolously. God’s name was special. It was the nearest the Israelites came to possessing any part of God and had to be treated with the utmost care. Later Jewish practice takes this prohibition so seriously that the name of God, and even the word God, is never spoken, with phrases such as “the Lord” and “the Name” (*hashem*) used in its place, and G\_d used in print.

*“Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy. Six days you may work, and do all your jobs; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to YHWH your Elohim; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your cattle, or the resident alien who lives with you; for in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them, and ceased from work on the seventh day; by doing this YHWH blessed the Sabbath day and made it a holy day.” (20:8–11)*

The Sabbath command institutionalizes a periodic cessation of typical daily work. The Hebrew term *shabbat* literally means “cease, stop, rest.” The warrant for such a time of inactivity is the pattern of creation in which God completed divine efforts in six days and ceased work by the seventh. The explanation from Creation was added by the Priestly writer to provide the reason for Sabbath observance. The Deuteronomy 5 restatement of this command warrants Sabbath rest by recalling Israel’s period of slavery in Egypt and God’s deliverance from it. In this light, Sabbath rest commemorates Israel’s freedom rather than God’s creation.

*“Honor your father and your mother, so that your days in the land which YHWH your Elohim gives you may be numerous.” (20:12)*

Respect is due one's ancestors and especially one's parents. A high social value was placed on children's duty to care for parents, and veneration of ancestors, even dead ones, was broadly practiced in the ancient Middle East. Note that this is the only command that is future oriented and holds the promise of blessing attached to its observance. The blessing is evidently one of communal more than individual application (even though the grammatical form is singular), assuring lasting possession of the Promised Land.

*“You must not murder.” (20:13)*

This is a prohibition of murder, not of killing generally. Capital punishment was mandated for a variety of offenses in the Hebrew Bible (for example, see 21:12–17). Killing in war, especially the holy war against the Canaanites, was even a religious duty.

*“You must not commit adultery.” (20:14)*

In its original setting, this command primarily prohibited sexual relations with another man's wife. This prohibition against the sexual promiscuity of married persons is aimed to protect the blood line of offspring. This was a crucial issue in matters of inheritance where a father wanted to be sure he and not someone else had sired his heir.

*“You must not steal.” (20:15)*

Stealing, in the first instance, probably applied to persons rather than property in the biblical world. Kidnapping was a common ancient practice (see 21:16 where the same Hebrew verb is used), and this commandment was intended primarily to promote personal security; by extension, it applied to material property. Remember the story of Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery. Kidnapping fueled the slave trade, along with war and economic deprivation.

*“You must not bear false witness against your neighbor.”*  
(20:16)

Here, deceitfulness and perjury are in view, perhaps first of all in a judicial setting. However, the commandment extends to a general protection of personal reputation, which is crucial for maintaining social order.

*“You must not covet your neighbor's estate: that is, you must not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”* (20:17)

This is the only command that was intended to regulate attitude rather than behavior. The reason seems understandable: coveting, or deeply desiring what is not one's own, is a state of mind that often leads to other prohibited behaviors. Contentment with what God has already provided is implicitly recommended. Mention of “*your neighbor's wife*” indicates that this, and probably all the commands, were addressed primarily to free Israelite males, not to women. Remember also 19:15 and the command Moses spoke to those preparing to meet YHWH on the mountain: “*Do not have intercourse with a woman*”—clearly addressing only the male population of the

Israelites.

The commands naturally divide themselves into two general categories. The first set defines behaviors that apply to the people's relationship with YHWH. This relationship is to be an exclusive one demanding total loyalty. These injunctions were given at a time when most of the world was polytheistic. The emphasis is on Israel adopting YHWH as their Elohim, not on affirming that YHWH is the only God. The practices defined by the commandments reinforced their loyalty and respect for YHWH.

The latter commands define behaviors that apply to relationships within the community. Both categories of behavior together constitute the essence of covenant. Put positively they command this: Love God and your neighbor as yourself (see Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18).

Most of the Ten Commandments take the form of [absolute law](#), also termed *apodictic law*. The commands, in other words, are unconditional. They apply with no ifs, ands, or buts. Even though most of these commands are negative in form ("do not do this"), this does not imply that God's requirements were oppressively restrictive. In fact, they merely placed certain general types of actions and attitudes out of bounds. Beyond that, they leave a rather wide latitude for freedom of action. They were certainly not perceived as oppressive by the Israelites, who found delight in God's law (for example, see Psalms 1 and 119). Although cast in the negative, they can be considered general policy statements that were intended to shape the broader religious and moral character of the nation.

### 3.2.2 The Book of the Covenant (E)

The [Book of the Covenant](#) (20:22–23:19), also called the [Covenant Code](#), is the earliest biblical collection of covenant laws.

Probably going back to premonarchic traditions, it seems to have been an independent collection predating the Elohist, but preserved through the efforts of the Elohist. Features of this law code presume a livestock economy rather than a settled agricultural or urbanized economy, and this supports the claim for a premonarchic setting.

The Book of the Covenant is introduced with a narrative describing the theophany and the people's reaction to it:

*Now when all the people witnessed the thunder and the lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood far away. They said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let Elohim speak to us, otherwise we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Elohim has come to test you, and so that you may be aware of his fearfulness. Then maybe you will not sin." (20:18–20)*

Following the giving of the Ten Commandments, God again appeared in a storm theophany heralded by a trumpet. The people were terrified of God's appearing. Fear of Elohim is very important in this narrative, as in the Elohist source as a whole. Out of fear of getting too close to God, the people enlisted Moses as their intermediary. Moses assumed the role of the prophet and explained that God was putting them through this experience so that they would be impressed with his power and think twice before sinning:

*The people stood far away, while Moses drew near to the thick cloud where Elohim was. And YHWH said to Moses, "This is what you should tell the people of Israel: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken with all of you from heaven. You must not make me into a god of silver, and you*

*must not make for yourselves gods of gold.’” (20:21–23)*

Moses approached God, who was visibly present in the form of a thick dark cloud. The Book of the Covenant proper begins with verse 22. Note that a change from the preceding verse is evident; the divine designation changes from Elohim to YHWH. YHWH impressed upon them that they were encountering the God of heaven. His prime directive was the absolute prohibition of making statuary representations of God. The Israelites must not represent the God of heaven with metal images, as the Canaanites did of their gods.

This general prohibition of idols and the prescription concerning the type of altar they could use (20:23–26) precedes the main body of laws that is introduced with the preface: *“These are the ordinances which you must place in front of them”* (21:1). The typical form of these ordinances in the Book of the Covenant differs from the form of the Ethical Decalogue. The Book of the Covenant contains [case law](#), also called *casuistic law*. This type of law takes the form “If X ..., then Y.” An example of case law is the law of the goring ox:

*If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox must be stoned, and its flesh may not be eaten; but the owner of the ox will not be liable. But if the ox has had the habit of goring in the past, and its owner had been warned but had not kept it restricted, and it kills a man or a woman, then the ox must be stoned, and its owner also must be put to death. (21:28–29)*

Typical of case law, first a condition is specified—in this case, an ox that gores a person. The consequence is then specified: The ox must be killed, but the owner may not benefit from it by eating the meat. In this instance, the owner is not held responsible. This particular statute specifies a subcategory that results in a much harsher punishment. If the ox had been in the habit of terrorizing the



community, the owner had done nothing to prevent it, and then the ox kills someone, the owner will be held directly responsible and must be put to death along with the animal. Biblical law obviously distinguished degrees of responsibility.

In addition to injury laws, the Book of the Covenant also contains laws regarding slaves, death sentences, bodily injuries, a calendar of feasts, and other religious duties.

Go to the companion website and see the table “Summary of the Book of the Covenant.”

### **3.2.3 Law Collections from Mesopotamia**

Many ancient Middle Eastern cities have yielded documents through the work of archaeologists. At least seven law codes have been found. The earliest one is the Sumerian Code of Ur-Nammu, dating to the twenty-second century BCE. Others include the Code of Lipit-Ishtar, the Code of Eshnunna, Middle Assyrian laws, Hittite laws, and Neo-Babylonian laws (see ANET, 159–198). Thus, the legal traditions of Israel stand within a well-developed context of legally ordered societies in the ancient Middle East. Israel’s law codes have many points of contact with ancient nonbiblical law codes.

#### **FIGURE 3.6 The Hammurapi Monument**

The Code of Hammurapi contains 282 laws chiseled onto a pillar of basalt rock. The upper register is a picture of Hammurapi standing before the sun god Shamash, the patron god of justice. The bottom register contains the Code of Hammurapi in cuneiform. This free-standing stone was a monument to justice rather than a reference manual for the use of judges at court. It gave public testimony to the character of Hammurapi as a promoter of righteousness.



Source: Drawing by Karla VanHuysen based on the Hammurapi Stele (Paris: Louvre Museum).

The most famous collection is the [Code of Hammurapi](#) (see [Figure 3.6](#)). Hammurapi was a Babylonian ruler from the eighteenth century BCE. The code begins with Hammurapi's call "*to promote the welfare of the people ... to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil that the strong might not oppress the weak.*" (ANET, 164).

Go to the companion website and see the text "The Code of Hammurapi."

There are notable similarities between the Code of Hammurapi and certain Israelite legal statements, especially some in the Book of the Covenant. For instance, as in Israelite law, the Code of Hammurapi contains the law of retribution in kind, famously known by its Latin designation *lex talionis*, which prescribes proportional punishment: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth:

Code of Hammurapi (sec. 196–197)

*If a man has destroyed the eye of another man, they shall destroy his eye. If he has broken another man's bone, they shall break his bone.*

Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21:23–25)

*If any injury occurs, you shall take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, beating for beating.*

While such physical retaliation may seem brutal, in fact, it was probably humane in its day. Specifying restitution in kind prevented resort to harsher punishments for such offenses, typically the death penalty. The existence of this code and others like it also demonstrates that Israel shared with her neighbors an ideal of justice that would be administered by a righteous king. Deuteronomy makes clear that the king must uphold the law (see 17:17–20). In Israel, David and Solomon were thought to epitomize this ideal.

### 3.3 Covenant Confirmation (24:1–15)

After the content of the covenant had been revealed, the covenant relationship was ceremonially initiated. Chapter 24 contains two different traditions relating to the covenant confirmation ceremony. In the first tradition, probably from the Elohist source, only representatives of the people approached God:

*And he said to Moses, “Come up to YHWH, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel, and worship at a distance. Moses alone shall come near to YHWH; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.” (24:1–2)*

This tradition is continued in verses 9–11, which describe a meal Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the elders ate with God in a

covenant confirmation (or ratification) ceremony. In this version, the Israelites as a whole take part in the covenant ceremony only indirectly through their leaders. The traditions of YHWH's appearing are complex. In 24:9–11, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders all saw God. In the meeting tent, YHWH appeared to Moses “*face to face, as one speaks to a friend*” (33:11). In 33:18–23, an Elohist text, Moses would see only the divine backside. In 34:5–8, a Yahwist text, YHWH descends in a cloud and stands with Moses. On the one hand, no one can see God and live (33:20), but on the other hand, many do see God:

*Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up, and they saw the Elohim of Israel; and there was under his feet what looked like a sapphire stone street, like the heavens itself for clarity. And he did not lay his hand on the leaders of the people of Israel; they saw Elohim, and ate and drank. (24:9–11)*

Eating a meal at the conclusion of covenant making also is found in Genesis 26:30 and 31:46, 54. Eating a ceremonial meal in the presence of God is an important component in later sacramental meals such as the Eucharist. All in all, this is a remarkable story and quite uncharacteristic of Elohist theology, which typically guards people from seeing God. Perhaps this story is actually from a different source, even though it has the markers of E. Israel's leaders actually saw God and ate with him, and even though they gazed on him, they did not die.

In the second version, the people gathered together for sacrifices and directly took part in the covenant ceremony:

*Moses came and told the people all the words of YHWH*

*and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words which YHWH has spoken we will do." And Moses wrote down all the words of YHWH. And he got up early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, along with twelve pillars, matching the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to YHWH. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that YHWH has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, "Here is the blood of the covenant which YHWH has made with you, in agreement with all these words." (24:3–8)*

In this ceremony, the altar represents God. When Moses took blood from the sacrifices and sprinkled it on the altar and on the people, the two parties were bound together in the covenant. Blood represents life in the Hebrew Bible. This ceremony symbolically states that both parties were pledging their lives to the endurance of the covenant relationship, and they would die, symbolized by the shed blood, if they failed in their commitments.

Note how the people agreed to the covenant with full knowledge of its requirements. The Book of the Covenant was read directly to them and the people knowingly accepted the covenant requirements. The covenant would remain in effect as long as they were obedient. As with Exodus 19:3b–6, here too the Elohist covenant has the condition of the people's obedience attached to it.

After the covenant ratification ceremonies, God called Moses up to the mountain to receive copies of the law:

*YHWH said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there. I will give you the stone tablets containing the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” So Moses got up with his servant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of Elohim. And he said to the leaders, “Wait here for us, until we return. For now, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a problem, let him go to them.” Then Moses went up onto the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. (24:12–15)*

These verses record yet another trip up the mountain and seem to contain yet another tradition of meeting God. Joshua and Hur are introduced in this account, while Nadab and Abihu are absent. Moses received the stone tablets containing “*the law and the commandments*.” This seems to be a reference to the Ethical Decalogue, but one cannot be sure. Moses presumably already had something written down according to 24:7, which refers to the Book of the Covenant.

Go to the companion website and see the tables “Scribing the Covenant,” which gathers the evidence in the book of Exodus related to who wrote what and where, and “Moses Up and Down the Mountain,” which gathers the evidence regarding Moses’s multiple trips.

In any case, these two stone tablets are the ones Moses smashes in Exodus 32. Exodus 31:18; 32:15; and 34:1, 4, 29 specify two tablets (or tables) of stone. Traditionally, it has been imagined that five commandments were written on each tablet. Studies of ancient Middle Eastern covenant conventions clarify that the two tablets represent two complete copies of the covenant document, one for each party to the covenant.

Reading through these chapters, we might get exhausted for Moses

—he has been going up and down, up and down. It is really difficult to sort out how many trips he actually takes. Apparently, these chapters have a complicated editorial history. Each tradition associates Moses with the mountain, and episodes from each were retained in the final version.

## 3.4 Covenant Breaking and Remaking (32–34)

The section between Chapter 24 (the covenant confirmation) and Chapter 32 (the covenant breaking) is a collection of Priestly specifications for the main apparatus of Israel’s religious system: the tabernacle, the ark and other accessories, and the priesthood that will care for it all. This detailed blueprint will be followed in Chapters 35–39, which detail the construction phase.

When the narration of events resumes following the technical interlude of Chapters 25–31, we come to the dramatic and sad affair of Israel’s worshipping an idol. This episode demonstrates that almost immediately after the covenant was ratified the Israelites were willing, even eager, to break it.

### 3.4.1 Golden Calf (Mostly E)

Moses spent a longer time on the mountain receiving the covenant from God than the people had expected. Thinking that they had lost Moses and thus their contact with the deity, they demanded that Aaron the high priest provide a substitute. Responding to their urging, Aaron solicited gifts from the people and proceeded to make a [golden calf](#):

*He took the gold from them, cast it in a mold, and made a calf image. They said, “These are your gods/elohim, Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” When Aaron*

*saw it, he built an altar before it and made a proclamation, "Tomorrow there will be a feast to YHWH." (32:4–5)*

Thus, the Israelites committed idolatry. This calf seems reminiscent of the bull of Canaanite religion that was associated with the high god Baal. Bulls, cows, and calves were religious objects in the ancient Middle East. In Canaan the high god El was called a bull. Baal, another Canaanite deity, was the god of fertility who rode on a bull, surely a symbol of virility. Technically then, the bull was not itself Baal; rather, it functioned as his mount or throne. In a functionally similar way, the ark of the covenant was YHWH's throne. Giving Aaron the benefit of the doubt, when he constructed the golden calf he may have intended it to be the throne of Elohim rather than a deity in its own right. Practically speaking though, this is a rather fine distinction, and one easily lost on the people.

This episode stands as a warning against worshipping the gods of the Canaanites who inhabit the Promised Land. Also, the golden calf unmistakably echoes the golden calves that Jeroboam, the first king of Israel after the civil dispute, erected in Dan and Bethel when he established religious centers in the northern kingdom of Israel in the tenth century BCE. The negative way in which the golden calf is viewed in Exodus is a veiled prophetic condemnation of Jeroboam's golden calf worship centers. The statement, *"These are your gods,"* in the plural, when only one calf was molded, evokes the multiple calves of Jeroboam. In fact, these words are the same as the words of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12:28.

Whatever Aaron's intentions, there is no doubt how YHWH took it. Israel had rejected him and proved themselves disloyal. In response God became extremely angry and resolved to destroy the people and begin building a new nation from Moses. Moses argued with God, suggesting that if all the Israelites died, the Egyptians will have triumphed. He urged God, *"Turn from your fierce anger, change your mind, and do not bring catastrophe on your people."*



Remarkably, God responded to Moses's plea and voided his threatened punishment.

God instructed Moses to return to the people. Going down the mountain he saw the pagan revelry of the people. Partly out of anger he smashed the two tablets containing the record and testimony of the covenant. And partly to make a point he smashed them, to signal that the covenant had been broken because the people had forsaken their pledge of loyalty by worshipping another god. The people had gone wild in celebration, and Aaron was held to blame:

*When Moses saw that the people were out of control (for Aaron had let them get out of control, to the point that they were a menace to anyone opposed to them), Moses stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Who is on YHWH's side? Come over to me!" He said to them, "This is what YHWH, the Elohim of Israel, says, 'Each of you, strap your sword to your side. Go back and forth through the camp, from gate to gate. Each of you kill your brother, your friend, and your neighbor.'"* The Levites did what Moses commanded, and about three thousand people fell on that day. Moses said, "Today you have dedicated yourselves to YHWH, each at the cost of a son or a brother. You have earned a blessing today." (32:25–29)

This incident demonstrates the loyalty of the Levites to the cause of YHWH. They were the only ones who had not succumbed to the lawlessness of golden calf worship. The story again pictures the Levites in a very favorable, if somewhat violent, light; this is not surprising, for the Elohist was a Levite. Though he was an advocate for the Levites generally, the Elohist did not admire Aaron. He directly implicates Aaron in the golden calf incident. Why would he want to put Aaron in such a bad light? Perhaps because the Elohist

and his group had migrated to Jerusalem after the fall of Israel in 721 BCE. Even though they were Levites, they were unable to practice their livelihood in Jerusalem because the family of Aaron, also of the tribe of Levi, had tightly locked up the priestly craft. The privilege of serving as a priest was inherited, and one had to be from the family of Aaron of the tribe of Levi to qualify. Aaron, understandably, came under their severest criticism.

YHWH then told Moses to take the people and head on to the Promised Land without him. Distressed at this change of plan, Moses met with YHWH in the meeting tent and urged him to reconsider. The meeting tent is the symbol of YHWH's dwelling among the Israelites in the Elohist tradition. The Elohist never mentions the ark of the covenant, only the meeting tent. Perhaps this is because the Elohist was from the north where Shiloh was situated. Shiloh was the home of the tent shrine during the days of the tribal federation (see RTOT [Chapter 8](#)). The Yahwist never mentions the meeting tent. The ark ended up in Jerusalem, and that was the focus of worship there. That was of interest to the Yahwist, who was from Judah, but the Elohist ignored it because northern priests were not allowed to minister in the temple.

Again YHWH changed his mind and decided to continue on with the Israelites. As proof of his commitment, the glory of YHWH passed by Moses, and Moses caught a glimpse of the backside of YHWH.

### **3.4.2 Covenant Remaking (J)**

Having destroyed the first copy of the covenant tablets, Moses was instructed to ascend Mount Sinai and receive another copy. However, the actual commands of this version of the covenant differ from the more famous ones of Exodus 20. While still containing ten statements, Exodus 34 consists of laws related to worship practices and is called the [Ritual Decalogue](#). Various schemes have been

devised to come up with the exact ten suggested by 34:28. This is one possible enumeration:

1. You may not worship another other god because YHWH, whose name is Jealous One, is a jealous God. (14a)
2. You may not make molten gods for yourselves. (17)
3. Every firstborn human or animal belongs to God. (19a)
4. No one may appear before God without an offering. (20c)
5. You can work six days, but on the seventh day you may not work. (21a)
6. You must observe the Feast of Weeks, the First Fruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering. (23)
7. You may not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened. (25a)
8. The Passover sacrifice must not remain until the morning. (25b)
9. You must bring the best of the first fruits of the soil to the house of YHWH your God. (26a)
10. You may not boil a kid in its mother's milk. (26b; also 23:19 and Deuteronomy 14:21; the practice of boiling a kid in its mother's milk may derive from Canaanite fertility rituals, and the prohibition of eating milk and meat together is part of the elaborate *kashrut*, or kosher system, of Jewish laws that regulates food and cleanliness.)

Moses descended Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant. Because he had been talking directly with God his face was aglow with the glory of YHWH (see [Figure 3.7](#)):

*The people of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone; and Moses would put the veil upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him. (34:35)*

### 3.5 Tabernacle (25–31, 35–40)

The covenant established with Israel from Mount Sinai was foundational. And for the Priestly writer, the most important aspect of the Mount Sinai experience was receiving the gift of the [tabernacle](#), a portable tent shrine that served as God’s place of residence among his people throughout their wilderness travels and on into the Promised Land. The Priestly source in Exodus devotes two extended passages to the tabernacle because the main duty of the priesthood was to facilitate the fellowship of YHWH and his people using it. The tabernacle assured the Israelites that God would be present to them throughout their journey.

#### **FIGURE 3.7** Michelangelo’s Moses

The phrase “skin of Moses’ face” was misunderstood in the Latin translation of the Hebrew Bible where it was rendered “horns,” influencing, for example, Michelangelo’s sculpture of Moses, which places horns on his forehead.



Photo by Barry Bandstra

Source: Church of San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome.

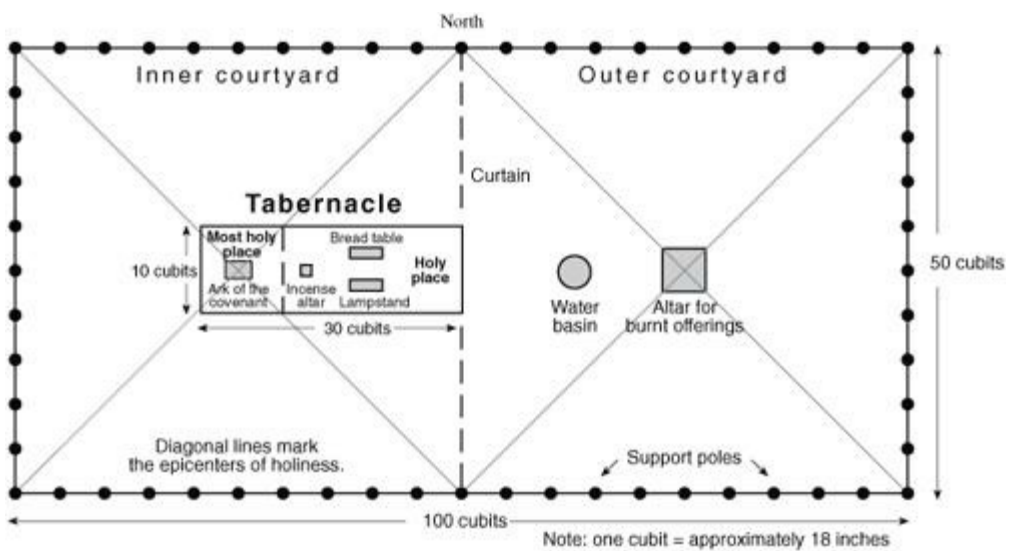
The first tabernacle passage details the design of the worship center (Exodus 25–31), and the second narrates its construction (Exodus 35–40). The narrative itself is ordered as seven divine speeches, each introduced with the formula “*YHWH said to Moses.*” The seventh features the Sabbath, suggesting a parallel with the Priestly Creation narrative of Genesis 1 (see Kearney, 1977). The design is presented as a divine blueprint, a notion attested as early as 2200 BCE when Gudea of Lagash was given divine instructions to build a sanctuary (see Hurowitz, 1985).

Go to the companion website and see the table “Parallels between the Priestly Creation Story and the Wilderness Tabernacle.”

The tabernacle complex was divided into three distinct zones of increasing holiness: the outer courtyard, the holy place of the tabernacle, and the most holy place ([Figure 3.8](#)). Note the symmetry of the overall layout and the placement of the ark of the covenant within the most holy place at the precise point of intersection.

The most holy place is itself perfectly symmetrical, a cube of  $10 \times 10 \times 10$  cubits. Parallels between the Creation and the priesthood–sanctuary complex of the Priestly source suggest that worship derives from the order of creation and is designed to bring humanity into conformity with it. The construction of the tabernacle sanctuary and its management by the priesthood is the completion of the work of God in creation (see Haran, 1978).

**FIGURE 3.8** The Tabernacle Complex



The head artisan, Bezalel, and the other craftsmen built the portable tent shrine, along with its accessories, and made the articles of ceremonial clothing that priests would need to perform their ritual service. Included in the list are the ark of the covenant to store the covenant documents, the table for the bread of the presence, the lamp stand (*menorah* in Hebrew), and the altars of incense and burnt offering. Within the tabernacle, YHWH sat enthroned between the cherubim (Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 37:16), who represent the Divine Council. The symmetry and symbolism of the tabernacle reflect the perfection of God and his relationship to creation. The most holy place represents heaven, and the holy place represents the earth. The outer courtyard with its massive water basin may symbolize the waters of chaos, where one is most distant from God.

The climax of the Priestly tabernacle narrative comes in 40:34–38 when the cloud of God’s presence descends on the tabernacle and the glory of YHWH fills it. The cloud presence of God, which once rested on Mount Sinai, has now entered the sanctuary. God’s presence then accompanied the Israelites throughout their travels and eventually took up residence in the temple built in Jerusalem during the time of Solomon.

# 4 EXODUS AS A BOOK

As with Genesis, the book of Exodus contains material from the Yahwist, Elohist, and Priestly sources. In contrast to Genesis, however, where the Elohist had a small role, in Exodus the Elohist makes a substantial contribution. In addition, the final form of Exodus included independent traditions such as the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 and the Book of the Covenant. The deliverance and covenant traditions have been combined in the book of Exodus to tell a profound story. The final form of Exodus, in particular the way the story of the Exodus was placed before the Sinai traditions, conveys a deep truth about the relationship between God’s care and Israel’s life.

**TABLE 3.2** Law Collections

|                      |                              |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| Ethical Decalogue    | Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5  |
| Book of the Covenant | Exodus 20:22–23:33           |
| Ritual Decalogue     | Exodus 34                    |
| Ritual Laws          | Leviticus 1–16, Numbers 1–10 |
| Holiness Code        | Leviticus 17–26              |
| Deuteronomic Code    | Deuteronomy 12–26            |

Go to the companion website and see the table “Sources of the Book of Exodus.”

The flow of the story communicates that God gave special treatment to the Israelites because of his love for them and out of his faithfulness to the ancestral promises. Only after God delivered them from slavery did he formalize their relationship with a national covenant. In other words, obedience to Torah, as defined by the [Sinai covenant](#), was expected, but only as a response to the deliverance of the Exodus. It was not a precondition of experiencing God’s care and

salvation. In fact, going all the way back to the ancestral story, God had made the first move by choosing them as his special people through Abraham.

Furthermore, the book of Exodus places the phenomenon of biblical law in perspective. When we examine Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, we see that these books contain many collections of legislation ([Table 3.2](#)). Viewed with an eye to each collection's source and historical context, we see that they come from different settings, many of them much later than the presumed lifetime of Moses. Yet all of them are attached to Israel's historical experience at Mount Sinai and are associated in the present books with the figure of Moses. This association was deliberate because Moses was regarded as the prime lawgiver of Israel; for any legal tradition to have full legitimacy, it would have to be associated with him.

Rather than being presented in catalog fashion (such as the Code of Hammurapi), all this technical, legal, and ritual material is embedded within historical narrative. Biblical law does not stand in isolation but is associated with the life story of Israel. This provides law and covenant with a grounding in Israel's experience with YHWH, especially his acts of deliverance. Torah comes with divine authority; though Moses transmitted the laws, they originated with YHWH.

This helps us understand the overall purpose of Torah in the sense of revelation and law. Law in its setting within the Hebrew Bible was not given as a set of conditions to be met in order to establish a relationship with God; the narrative demonstrates that the relationship, by the time of the Exodus, was already a longstanding one. The purpose of covenant law was to preserve and perpetuate an already functioning bond between God and his people. In this perspective, law defined the shape that Israel's obedience would need to take to sustain that already initiated relationship.



# KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Historicity.* What is the probable Egyptian context for the Exodus and the extrabiblical evidence to situate it chronologically?
2. *Divine name.* Where and when did Israel's deity reveal the divine personal name to Moses and how was this related to the Exodus?
3. *Passover.* What is the Passover, and how is it related to the Exodus from Egypt?
4. *Law.* What are the different collections of biblical law that are found in the book of Exodus, how do they differ, and how are they related to extrabiblical law collections?
5. *Divine presence.* How and to whom did the deity make his presence evident in Exodus, and what are the conflicting views of the sources regarding seeing God?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Freedom and law.* The book of Exodus brings together two core themes that have turned out to be central to social democracies in the modern world—namely, freedom from oppression and rule by constitutional law. What is the relationship between these two themes? Why was it important, and what effect did it have that both were associated with Israel's supreme deity and, in fact, came about through the deity's initiative? Is it necessary that a people's deity sanction their laws in order for the law to be respected?
2. *Theophany.* Describe the various ways that God revealed his presence and made himself known in Exodus. In what ways was God visible, and in what ways was he invisible? What does this imply about Israel's understanding of the nature of its God and

life in his presence? What are the conflicting attitudes people had to seeing God? Why was it important to be able to apprehend the deity in some way?

3. *Divine character.* Exodus addresses the character of the deity in major ways. What moments in the story bear on God's character and identity? How is God's character revealed progressively and sometimes in a contradictory manner? Is it also in some ways intentionally concealed? In what way is the identity of Israel dependent on the identity or character of its God?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

*The Ten Commandments* is the title of two cinematic renditions of the Exodus of the Israelites, one directed by Cecil B. DeMille (1956) and the other by Robert Dornhelm (2006). They are done in radically different styles and are useful for comparing different ways to imagine the crossing of the Reed Sea, divine revelation, and wilderness life. *Dekalog: The Ten Commandments*, by Krzysztof Kieslowski and Krzysztof Piesiewicz (1989), is a collection of ten drama films, each one based on one of the Ten Commandments, that explore the spirit of the moral law. *Losing Moses on the Freeway: The 10 Commandments in America*, by Chris Hedges (2005), is an engaging and personal exploration of the Decalogue as a lens through which to view the moral character of America today. *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations*, by John Barton (2003), treats biblical moral law more comprehensively. *The Nine Commandments: Uncovering the Hidden Pattern of Crime and Punishment in the Hebrew Bible*, by David N. Freedman (2000), traces the violation of the commandments through Israel's history from Exodus to Kings as the justification for Israel's exile. You will have to read the book to discover what happened to the tenth commandment.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Leviticus and Numbers: In the Wilderness

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Leviticus](#)

[3 Numbers](#)

---

### KEY TERMS

[Aaron](#)

[Atonement](#)

[Balaam](#)

[Balak](#)

[Caleb](#)

[Clean/unclean](#)

[Cult/cultic](#)

[Day of Atonement](#)

[Holiness Code](#)

[Holy/holiness](#)

[Jubilee](#)

[Kashrut/kosher](#)

[Levites](#)

[Manna](#)

[Nadab and Abihu](#)

[Offering](#)

[Phinehas](#)

[Priestly Code](#)

[Profane](#)

[Sacrifice](#)

# Shaking Hands

Every society develops customary ways of scripting social occasions so that each party knows what is expected. Meeting and greeting is a good example. In some societies, bowing is polite and, in others, shaking hands. Ritual and social convention provide standard protocols for human interaction. This is one way to think of Israel’s rituals as defined in its Priestly Codes except that they are designed to facilitate Israel meeting its all-powerful deity YHWH.



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra.

---

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Israel had rituals and procedures for meeting God, and these are spelled out in Leviticus and Numbers. Analogous to our handshakes, how-do-you-do’s, and hostess gifts, these rituals formalized meeting and greeting God. They laid out the elaborate and deliberate steps that any Israelite was to follow to get the attention of YHWH and then stand in the divine presence. Observing these protocols and maintaining certain lifestyle standards was a prerequisite for maintaining a sound and respectful long-term relationship with God.

### FIGURE 4.1 Sinai Mountain Range

The traditional identification of Mount Sinai is Jebel Musa in the south of the Sinai Peninsula. The Israelites spent a year at Mount

Sinai receiving laws and ritual legislation and building the tabernacle. This picture, taken from the summit of Jebel Musa, displays the rugged nature of the terrain.



Photo by Barry Bandstra, May 1996

This chapter combines the books of Leviticus and Numbers because they are similar in several ways. Both contain a good deal of religious legislation, which God revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai ([Figure 4.1](#)). Both are predominantly concerned with matters of ritual, sacrifice, and priesthood. Both also are set in the Sinai wilderness between Egypt and the Promised Land. The complete Mount Sinai revelation actually begins at Exodus 19:1, runs through the entire book of Leviticus, and continues until Numbers 10:10. This collection of moral and ritual laws is referred to in general as the [Priestly Code](#). It actually is made up of a number of subcollections from a variety of times and sources, including the Book of the Covenant and the Holiness Code. This Priestly Code constitutes the bulk of the Pentateuch.

The Priestly Code defines Israel's cult. Students of religion (not just Israelite religion) use the terms [cult](#) and [cultic](#) to refer generally to a culture's system of religious worship and ritual, including the procedures, personnel, and apparatus used to express religious devotion. In a modern colloquial context, the term *cult* typically has a derogatory connotation and is often applied to bizarre fringe groups,

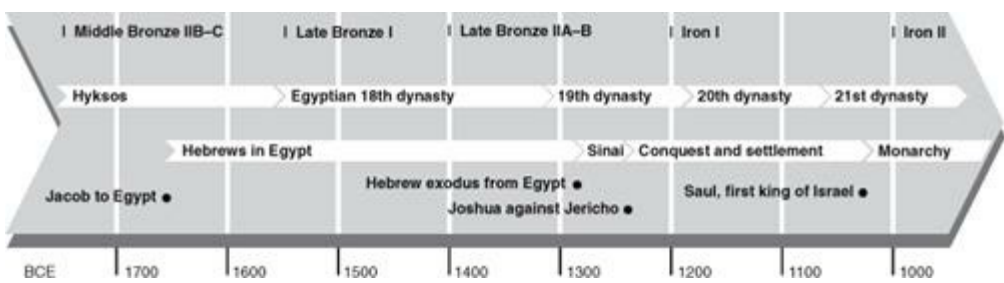
but that is not how the term is used in the academic study of religion.

The style of Leviticus and Numbers differs from that of Genesis and Exodus. There is no drama to relate because nothing really “happens” to the Hebrews in Leviticus and the first part of Numbers. For the most part, the material is a record of religious laws. The story about their journey to the Promised Land resumes only in the latter half of Numbers.

## 1.1 In the Wilderness: A Summary

Leviticus is presented almost entirely as the speeches of YHWH to Moses at the meeting tent, a shrine used solely as the meeting place of God with Moses. There are a few chapters containing narratives of events, but it has no continuous story line. After divine descriptions of the types of sacrifices (Leviticus [Chapters 1–7](#)), Moses ordained and consecrated [Aaron](#) and his sons to serve as priests (8). At the conclusion of the eight-day ceremony, Aaron blessed the people, and the fire of YHWH consumed their offerings (9). When Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu burned incense with illicit fire (it is not clear what that was), they were destroyed by the fire of YHWH (10). Then follows the laws concerning what is clean and unclean (11–15), the Day of Atonement (16), and the Holiness Code (17–26). Within the latter is found the only remaining narrative, a description of a situation when someone blasphemed the name of YHWH. At YHWH’s instructions, he was taken outside the camp and stoned (24). The book concludes with a discourse on religious vows (27).

**FIGURE 4.2** Time Line: The Exodus to the Monarchy



The early chapters of Numbers detail the organization of the Israelite camp. A census of the tribes was taken (Numbers [Chapter 1](#)), the tribes were arrayed around the meeting tent (2), and then the Levites were counted (3–4). A test for female marital faithfulness was established (5) and regulations for Nazirite vows given (6). The tabernacle was dedicated (7), the Levites were purified for tabernacle duty (8), and the Passover was celebrated (9).

The Israelites packed up and left Mount Sinai to resume their travels (10). When they complained about their diet, God sent quail (11). When Miriam complained about Moses, she was infected with leprosy (12). Twelve spies investigated the fortifications of Canaan, but the Israelites refused to attack (13–14). After more laws of sacrifice (15), Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled and were executed (16). Aaron’s budding staff proved to the people that he was God’s choice (17). More technical instructions were given (18–19), and then Moses got water from a rock by striking it, thereby incurring God’s wrath (20).

Israel resumed its journey by avoiding Edom but destroyed many other opponents (21). Moab feared Israel and tried to curse them through the prophet Balaam, but this failed miserably (22–24). Then some Israelites slept with cult prostitutes (25), and this was not a good thing. More technicalities, lists, and laws follow (26–36).

The legislation and events recorded in Leviticus and Numbers have their setting in Israel’s Sinai experience, though they were written down at a much later time ([Figure 4.2](#)).

## 1.2 Reading Guide

It might be too much to expect anyone to read Leviticus entirely with all its technical detail. Yet a little bit of it will enable us to appreciate its level of specificity and the basic concerns of the Levitical laws.

- Leviticus 1:1–6:7 distinguishes the different types of sacrifices, which in turn defines the gifts that people would bring to God when they met him.
- Leviticus 11 defines the difference between clean and unclean animals. This is basic to kosher food laws.
- Leviticus 16 describes procedures for the Day of Atonement.
- Leviticus 25 pertains to the sabbatical year and the year of Jubilee.

Numbers resumes the narrative of events. Numbers at 10:11 is where the narrative of the journey through the wilderness begins and continues through Chapter 25. This section of Numbers continues those interesting and somewhat depressing stories of Israel's surly behavior and complaining. Here you will also find one of the most unbelievable stories in the Bible, the tale of Balaam and his talking donkey.

There are two general concerns in these episodes. The first is resolving the structures of leadership, especially which tribe has charge of sacred matters, which clan and family of that tribe has the most sacred responsibilities, and which person would lead them on their journey. The second is the issue of survival in the wilderness. How do the people manage under difficult conditions, what would they learn from their experience, and what does it tell them about their God? As you read the story, note which episodes fall into which of these general categories.



# 2 LEVITICUS

Leviticus immediately follows Exodus in the Hebrew Bible and continues the record of the Israelites in the Sinai wilderness. Most of Leviticus is devoted to ritual legislation and cultic rules. Its rabbinic name is *torat kohanim*, meaning “priests’ teaching.” Since priests came from the tribe of Levi, the [Levites](#), the book came to be called Leviticus.

Most readers think it is boring; after all, it deals with rules for sacrifices, worship, priests, and purity. Most of these rules are not followed today by any religious community, Jewish or Christian, so what could be less interesting or relevant? Well, maybe the text and its subject matter are not all that gripping, but they do convey the vision of Israel’s ideal relationship with God. Leviticus deals with a fundamental human question: How can instinctively rebellious humans (remember the first couple’s disobedience in Eden) meet God and live in the divine presence? Put another way, how can an infinitely superior being come to be near seriously flawed people?

The answer: only when those people make themselves perfectly presentable and show great deference in the presence of absolute greatness. Because this is such a serious undertaking—do it wrongly and you die—there is great attention to specifics. But given the highly detailed and, to our minds, monotonous nature of the priestly legislation, it is easy to get lost in minutiae. An overall framework would be useful for comprehending the meaning of the purity and holiness laws.

## 2.1 Priestly Worldview

There are three general approaches to this corpus of legislation:

- The *hygiene theory* claims that the laws were intended to keep

Israelites from things that had a high likelihood of doing bodily harm, such as bad pork causing disease.

- The *cultic theory* argues that objects and actions that were associated with forbidden pagan cults were forbidden to Israelites and so were declared unclean.
- The *structural theory* views the total collection of laws as a coherent structure or system that has its own internal logic (see Jenson, 1992).

Since the structural approach appears to be a fruitful line of investigation that appears to reveal the deep structure of the laws, we will explore this approach in some detail. In this view, Leviticus, along with the rest of the Priestly Code, employs a distinctive way of looking at the world in relation to God. The structural view analyzes rituals as components of worldview and argues that Israel's ritual system is predicated on an ordered world in which everything exists either as normal or abnormal. Deviations from normalcy were classified as unclean. Rituals provided the means to move from abnormality to normality. Everything in the world is graded in holiness in relation to YHWH. The result is that everything has a set place in the divine order, and everything derives its meaning from its relationship to God.

The dilemma facing the Israelites was how a perfectly holy and righteous deity could be in direct contact with sinful people. In essence, the solution is that the Israelites must become a holy people, sometimes also called a *holy nation*. "You must be holy, for I am holy" is the frequent refrain of Leviticus.

The terms that are critical to this worldview and that need explanation are *holy* and [clean](#), and their opposites, *profane* and [unclean](#). According to Leviticus 10:10, the Aaronic priesthood was "to distinguish between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean." This gives us two sets of opposed pairs, and the terms of each pair mutually define each other. [Holy](#) and [holiness](#)

are notions that apply first of all to deity because deity is inherently and naturally different from humanity; in other words, deity is totally other. Because deity is so different from humanity, especially in regard to power and wholeness, humans need to respect divine otherness and live in awe of God.

Although the analogy is woefully inadequate, the awesomeness of God is like the awe ordinary citizens might feel in the presence of a president or prime minister, or more likely, a sports superstar, renowned actor, or famed musician. On the other hand, [\*\*profane\*\*](#) (related to the word *profanity*) applies to a behavior that treats holy things in a disrespectful or shameful manner. To profane something is to treat it as if it is not special; to profane something is to debase it, to bring it down, to degrade it—the opposite of holding it up, honoring it, and exalting it. Profane is a verb, and its opposite is [\*\*sanctify\*\*](#) (in Hebrew, *sanctify*, *holy*, and *holiness* all come from the same root word).

The priestly rituals of Leviticus were intended to distance humans from their imperfect world so that they could assume a measure of God's holiness. For the Israelites, to become holy they needed to refrain from sin and stay away from uncleanness. In the priestly worldview, sin was closely associated with uncleanness. Leviticus categorizes the world into clean and unclean things and describes procedures that can move one from the state of uncleanness to cleanness. Some of the most important rituals involve animal sacrifices to reconcile penitent Israelites to God if sin and uncleanness have separated them.

The normal or natural state of objects and persons is to be clean, and a clean thing could be elevated to the status of holiness through the process of sanctification (literally, making holy). Clean things could become unclean through contact with other unclean things, such as dead bodies. For an unclean person or thing to get back to the state of cleanness, it had to be purified. Once clean, it could then be sanctified through an additional procedure. Once made holy, it was

set apart from the rest of the world and was devoted exclusively to divine service. Holy persons and things could be rendered profane, or unholy, through ritual procedures of decommissioning or by contact with something unclean. A profaned thing could be clean or unclean, but in either case, it could not be in direct contact with YHWH.

The notions of clean and unclean are related to the way that the priestly group understood the created world and expressed a comprehensive worldview in which everything had its proper place. The process of putting things in their place began with Creation, as told in the Elohim, or Priestly, version in Genesis 1. On the second and third days of Creation, the three elements of sky, earth, and sea were delimited through a process of separation. Then, God fashioned living creatures for each environment, and each environment's creatures received standard habits and means of locomotion that defined them. In particular, the sky was populated by noncarnivorous winged creatures. The earth was inhabited by four-legged creatures that chewed the cud and had cloven hooves. The sea was inhabited by creatures with scales and fins.

Creatures that did not fit the standard profile were considered unclean—for example, crabs and lobsters. Although they live in the sea, they have legs rather than fins. Thus, cleanness was related to a notion of “normalness,” and cleanness was protected by keeping things separate and in their proper environment. Food sources that did not meet the priestly definitions of normalcy were unclean and therefore not fit for human consumption. The definitions of what was clean and unclean are also called *kashrut*, the rules of [kosher](#).

Definitions of normalcy and laws for maintaining separations applied to many things besides food. For example, they dictated which kinds of thread could be woven together to make fabric and which kinds of people could marry. Priestly legislation defined a total lifestyle that regulated diet, hygiene, social activity, and the calendar. The [Holiness Code](#), found in Leviticus 17–26, is the most

distinctive sub-collection of the Priestly Code and the most comprehensive collection of material dealing with matters holy, profane, clean, and unclean. While the issue of dating for the Priestly writings as a whole is debated, it is quite likely that the Holiness Code comes from the period of the late Israelite monarchy. It appears to have been composed in Jerusalem not long before the Babylonian exile.

The holiness continuum ([Table 4.1](#)) is a synthesis of the priestly worldview. It relates the basic domains of life (space and time, people and things) to the notions of holiness and cleanness. The following discussion is a survey of the particular areas of existence and reality (derived from the left-hand column) as they are defined by the range of holiness (the column heads).

**TABLE 4.1** Holiness Continuum  
Jenson (1992) develops the notion of “a holiness spectrum” on which this table is based. He devotes a separate chapter to each dimension: spatial, personal, ritual, and temporal.

|         | Very Holy                       | Holy                         | Clean                           | Unclean                      | Very Unclean                           |
|---------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Place   | Holy of holies                  | Holy place                   | Court                           | Camp                         | Outside the camp                       |
| People  | High priest                     | Priest                       | Levites, clean Israelites       | People with minor impurities | People with major impurities, the dead |
| Rituals | Sacrifice (not eaten by people) | Sacrifice (eaten by priests) | Sacrifice (eaten by nonpriests) | Purification (one day)       | Purification (seven days)              |
| Times   | Day of Atonement                | Festivals, Sabbath           | Common days                     |                              |                                        |

### 2.1.1 Holy Places

A fundamental concern of the Priestly Code was the creation of a place where the presence of the deity would reside so that Israel could live in proximity to the deity. Throughout the Bible, the key to Israel’s welfare is living close to God. The place where YHWH lived was the holiest place imaginable. The tabernacle complex,

whose structure, service, and construction are described in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40, was the portable shrine of the Israelites (see RTOT [Chapter 3](#)). Leviticus and Numbers contain many references to the structure and implements of the tabernacle.

The tabernacle complex, as with the other symbols of Israel's ritual system, had zones of holiness. The direction of holiness moved from outside the camp (least holy place) to the holy of holies (most holy place). For each zone the Priestly Code defined who was allowed to be there, ending up with only the high priest in the holy of holies, and him on only one day each year. Gradations of holiness are evident also in the construction materials of the tabernacle complex, with fabrics and metals increasing in value moving up each level of holiness (see Haran, 1978).

The symbolism of the tabernacle expresses two important themes of priestly theology: the continuity of life and the presence of God. The floral designs on the walls of the tabernacle and the menorah portray the “tree of life” image. The untarnishable gold of the implements and holiest room suggest the unchangeableness of God. The daily lamp-lighting ceremony symbolizes the light of God that never ceases.

The portability of the tent of dwelling indicates that God was not sedentary but was with Israel wherever its people went. This notion may have been especially important to the priests of the exilic period who shaped these texts; it gives expression to their conviction, similar to the prophet Ezekiel's, that God was present with them even outside the Promised Land.

## **2.1.2 Holy People**

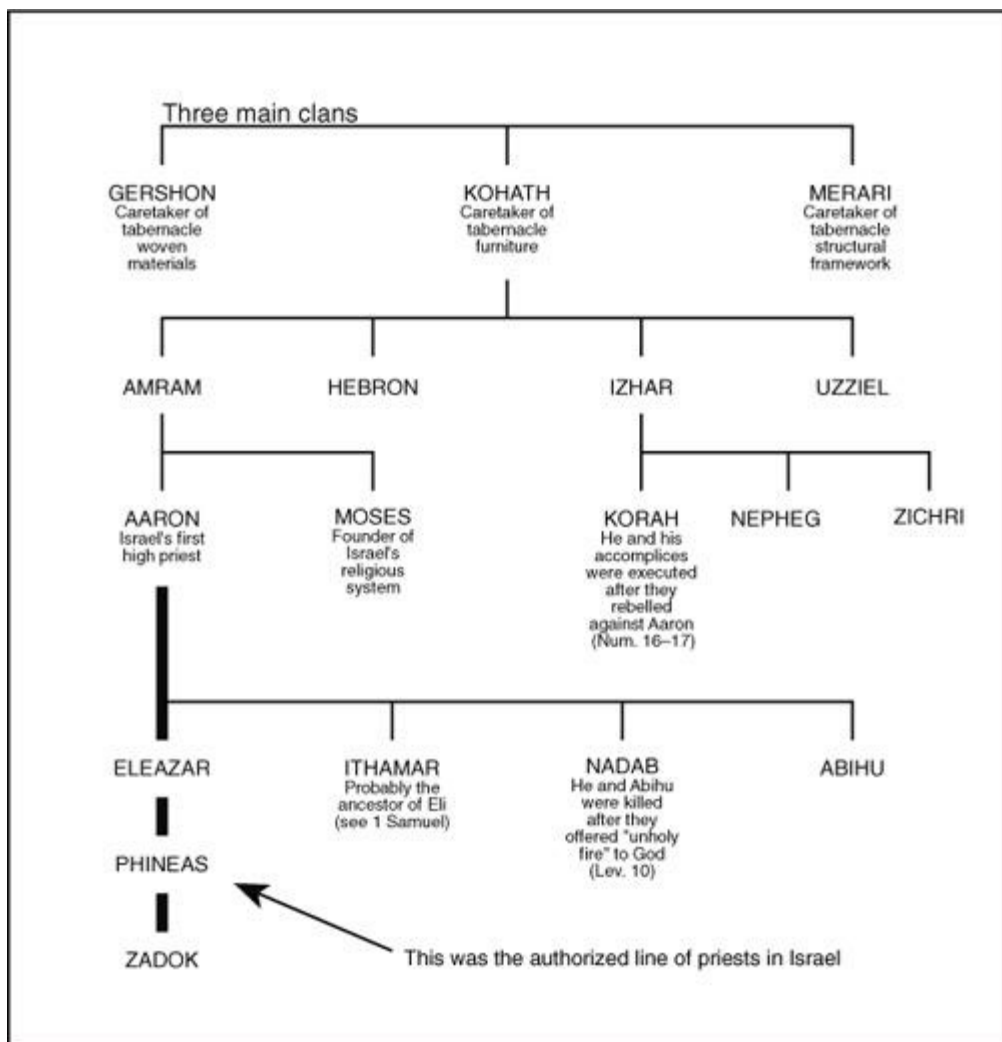
The Priestly Code defined the social and ritual roles of all people within Israel, and an examination of these roles likewise reveals a hierarchy of holiness. Membership in social groups was based on family lineage, and roles were assigned accordingly. The tribe of

Levi provided the officials who were authorized to perform religious functions. Both Moses and his brother Aaron were from this tribe.

Only direct descendants of Aaron could function as priests or become the high priest. Priests were the only ones allowed to offer sacrifices and enter the sanctuary. The high priest could consult with God directly in the cloud and by means of divination dice called the Urim and Thummim. Other members of the tribe of Levi, those not of the clan of Aaron, had duties outside the sanctuary itself and in general assisted the Aaronic priests. This included guarding the sanctuary and dismantling and erecting it when it was moved. Israelites belonging to the other eleven tribes could not perform religious rituals but had them done by priests.

A number of ritual descriptions and camp narratives define the status and role of the tribe of Levi and of groups within it ([Figure 4.3](#)). Leviticus 8–9 describes the process of the ordination of Aaron and his sons. That the ordination rituals lasted seven days aligns the priesthood with the created order of seven days (Genesis 1:1–2:3). Leviticus 10 recounts the deaths of [Nadab](#) and [Abihu](#), two sons of Aaron, who illegally performed certain rituals and died for it. Numbers 8 describes the process of the ordination of the Levites. Numbers 16–17 narrates the rebellion of Korah and his followers, Levites but not from the family of Aaron, who presumed to perform priestly rituals and were executed by God for it. This narrative also contains the story of the blossoming of Aaron's rod, which demonstrated the God-given authority of the tribe of Levi over the other eleven tribes. Numbers 18 defines the responsibilities of Aaronic priests and other Levites.

### **FIGURE 4.3** Levite Ritual Roles



Go to the companion website and see the table “The Tribe of Levi and Ritual Roles in Numbers.” The book of Numbers adds evidence that further defines the role of the Levites within the Israelite cult.

## 2.1.3 Offerings

The primary religious rituals of Israelite religion involved offerings, which could be agricultural or animal products. Most, but not all



offerings, were burned on an altar, with the savory smoke rising as a gift to God. If an offering was an animal, the animal was first slaughtered, or sacrificed. Then it was burned.

The priestly ritual system was complex, and the meaning of procedures was rarely explained. In most respects, it is quite foreign to our way of thinking. Consequently, the precise theological significance of sacrifice is still open to debate. The rules of the priestly offering system are laid out in Leviticus 1–7. There are five main types of [offering](#): whole burnt, grain, peace, purification, and reparation. Any given priestly ritual usually incorporated several different types of offering ([Table 4.2](#)).

**TABLE 4.2 Offerings**

| Offering     | Hebrew          | NRSV                    | Item                             | Purpose                                 | Leviticus |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------|
| Whole burnt  | <i>‘olah</i>    | Burnt offering          | Whole animal                     | Gift to God                             | 1:3–17    |
| Grain        | <i>minchah</i>  | Grain offering          | Flour and oil                    | Gift to God                             | 2:1–16    |
| Peace        | <i>shelamim</i> | Sacrifice of well-being | Unblemished animal               | Fellowship                              | 3:1–17    |
| Purification | <i>chatta’t</i> | Sin offering            | Bull, goat, lamb, doves, pigeons | Purification after involuntary impurity | 4:1–5:13  |
| Reparation   | <i>asham</i>    | Guilt offering          | Ram                              | Restitution for deliberate acts         | 5:14–6:7  |

The whole burnt offering was the preeminent sacrifice. Its name refers to the fact that the entire animal was consumed by the fire on the altar. Every day this type of sacrifice was offered to YHWH. The purpose of the [sacrifice](#) was to give something pleasing to God, not to atone for sin, though Levine (1989: 6–7) argues an alternate view, that it was intended to offer protection from God’s wrath.

Not all offerings were bloody sacrifices of animals, and not all offerings were to atone for sin. Offerings of grain and other agricultural produce were given as gifts to God, and a portion of such sacrifices was used to support the priests. With the *peace offering*, a portion of the meat of the sacrificed animal was retained and eaten by the person making the offering. This offering, sometimes also called

the *fellowship sacrifice*, drew the parties together, including God, in a festive meal. Meat was not often eaten in biblical times, so when it was, it was a time of celebration and was done in the presence of God.

The *purification offering*, sometimes called the *sin offering*, was to purify a person after he or she had incurred an impurity of some kind, such as through childbirth, a skin disease, or contact with something dead. This offering was also used to secure forgiveness after a deliberate sin. The reparation offering involved an offering of restitution; that is, if an action involved economic loss to someone else, reparation must be made to cover the loss, with an additional portion as punitive damages.

The overall significance of sacrificial rituals could be explained along these lines. Various types of impurities and deliberate sins disturbed God's ordered universe. Sacrificial rituals were the mechanism by which disruptions within God's world were acknowledged and made right. The various rituals of purification brought one closer to the state of holiness so that one could live in proximity to God. This has been called the *purification model of sacrifice* and is advocated by Milgrom (1983) and Jenson (1992). Within this system, sacrifice seems to play a significant role in the process of atonement. [Atonement](#), reconciliation, or "making at one," brings a person back into fellowship with God after a disruption in the relationship. In the priestly system, this could only be achieved through a blood sacrifice. Leviticus 17:11 is often taken as a key to priestly atonement theology:

*For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement. (17:11 NRSV)*

Blood was held in particular reverence because it was considered

the substance of life. The blood of the sacrificed animal substituted for the life of the offending person and functioned to return that person to fellowship with God.

## 2.1.4 Holy Times

Just as space was sacred or profane, so was time. The year defined the basic cycle of larger events and organized the cultic calendar. The year was defined by the solar calendar, but because months were defined by the cycle of the moon, there was a need to adjust the shorter twelve-month lunar year (354 days) to the solar year (365 days) by occasionally adding a thirteenth month.

There were longer periods of time, including the sabbatical year cycle (every seventh year was sacred), and the year of [Jubilee](#) (the year after seven sabbatical year cycles—that is, the fiftieth year). But the most important units of repeated time were the day, the week, and the month (which was defined by the moon). Months were labeled by number, with the year beginning in the spring. The Sabbath, the seventh day of the week called *shabbat*, was a day set apart from the others. Special rules governed activity on that day, mainly restricting what could be done. Keeping the Sabbath holy emerged during the Babylonian exile as a distinctive practice of the Jewish community that set them apart from their neighbors and gave evidence of their adherence to the covenant (see Hallo, 1977).

Special yearly sacred days were also defined. There were five primary sacred times, all of which are still observed within Jewish communities ([Table 4.3](#)), and some of these correspond to moments in the calendar of the Western world. For example, the spring equinox, Passover, and Easter all converge—not by accident—and seasonal change becomes invested with religious significance and located within the historical experience of the nation.

Later, the Israelites were required to observe these festivals in Jerusalem. They were worship occasions and in the rabbinic period

were marked by the reading of certain books from the Five Scrolls of the Hebrew Bible. For example, the Song of Songs was read on Passover and the book of Ruth during the Feast of Weeks.

TABLE 4.3 Holy Times

| Holy Time                              | Hebrew Name       | Agricultural Season   | Historical Association | Leviticus 23 | Festival Scroll |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Passover (Feast of Unleavened Bread)   | <i>pesach</i>     | Spring barley harvest | Exodus                 | 5–8          | Song of Songs   |
| First Fruits                           |                   |                       |                        | 9–14         |                 |
| Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)             | <i>shavuot</i>    | Summer wheat harvest  |                        | 15–21        | Ruth            |
| Trumpets                               | <i>ternah</i>     |                       | Sinai revelation (?)   | 23–25        |                 |
| Day of Atonement                       | <i>yom kippur</i> |                       |                        | 26–32        |                 |
| Feast of Booths (Feast of Ingathering) | <i>sukkot</i>     | Autumn harvest        | Wilderness sojourn     | 33–36        | Ecclesiastes    |

In addition to these festivals, other feasts and fasts were instituted later during the postexilic period. Purim celebrates the deliverance of the Jews during the Persian period, as told in the book of Esther (see RTOT [Chapter 15](#)). The story of the rededication of the temple during the Greek period is told in the book of 1 Maccabees and is celebrated as Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, which comes at the winter solstice. Fasts were decreed to memorialize tragic historical events. The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 587 BCE is marked as *Tisha b'Av*, and the book of Lamentations is read (see RTOT [Chapter 15](#)).

Features of holy place, holy people, holy time, and sacred ritual all come together in Leviticus 16 where the [Day of Atonement](#) ritual, in Hebrew called *yom kippur*, is described. Of all the sacred times, the Day of Atonement was considered the holiest. It was only on this day that anyone ever entered the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle and, later, the temple.

*Aaron will offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and make atonement for himself and his household. Then he will take the two goats, and stand them before YHWH at the door of the tent of meeting. Aaron will cast lots for the two goats, marking one for YHWH and marking the other for Azazel. Aaron will present the goat on which the lot fell for YHWH and offer it as a sin offering. The goat on which the lot fell for Azazel will be presented alive before YHWH to make atonement with it. It will be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel. (16:6–10)*

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest—here, Aaron—offers a bull as a purification offering. Then he takes two goats. He slaughters one of them, collects its blood, and sprinkles it on the mercy seat, a term designating the lid of the ark of the covenant. After exiting the tabernacle, he places his hands on the head of the other goat, thereby transferring the sins of the people to this animal. Called the “goat for Azazel” in Hebrew (where *azazel* may designate the underworld), this goat has come to be called the “scapegoat.” It was sent way into the wilderness to disappear, symbolically taking with it the sins of the people.

## **2.2 Leviticus as a Book**

Leviticus in its entirety belongs to the Priestly tradition of the Pentateuch. In practice, the book may have functioned as a manual of priestly procedure. The last verse of the book (27:34) gives Leviticus a historical and geographical setting at Sinai during Israel’s sojourn in the wilderness. Thus, as it stands, the book is a continuation of the story of God’s revelation to Moses. Even though Leviticus is a virtual catalog of rules and regulations, it is framed as part of a Sinai narrative. The phrase “*YHWH said to Moses*” (thirty-

four times) contextualizes the laws as narrative events rather than as list items.

The book of Leviticus consists of various collections of religious laws, all of them *torat kohanim*, “instruction of priests”—the *of* can be understood in two ways (linguistically speaking, the objective or the subjective genitive). Levine (1989) observes that [Chapters 1–16](#) are instructions *for* the priests in the performance of their duties and [Chapters 17–26](#) are instructions *by* the priests addressed to the people to remain holy. This effectively creates two main units in Leviticus. Internal structural clues signal that these sections were identifiable units before they came together in Leviticus. The Laws of Sacrifice section has a clear introduction (1:1) and a formulaic conclusion (“*this is the teaching (torah) on ...*”; 7:37–38), which is also used in the Laws of Purity (11:46–47, 12:7b, 13:59, 14:32, 14:54–57, 15:32–33). This suggests that the ordination materials of 8–10 are an insertion. The Day of Atonement is the positional and theological center piece of Leviticus. It describes the premiere procedure for removing sin and impurity. The Holiness Code is marked by the use of summary formulas that conclude each subsection (18:24–30, 20:22–26, 22:31–33, 25:18–24, 26:3–45). The structural sections of Leviticus are displayed in [Table 4.4](#).

**TABLE 4.4** The Structure of Leviticus

| 1–16  | Instructions for Priests        | 17–27 | Instructions by Priests to the People |
|-------|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------------------------|
| 1–7   | Laws of sacrifices              | 17–26 | Holiness Code                         |
| 8–10  | Ordination rites of the priests | 27    | Appendix on religious vows            |
| 11–15 | Laws of purity                  |       |                                       |
| 16    | Day of Atonement                |       |                                       |

A close examination of the language, style, and presumed sociological setting of the laws suggests that in their present form

they have come from the exilic period or later. Other books of the Hebrew Bible—Ezekiel, Ezra, and Chronicles—have a close affinity with the Priestly Code, and they are all postexilic, but the traditions behind many of the Levitical laws may go back as early as the premonarchic period. Some of the laws even have analogies to early Mesopotamian legal materials (see ANET, 325–326, 331–353). Although some of the individual laws and collections were preexilic, they were given their final shape by a priestly group in the exilic period.

## **3 NUMBERS**

The book of Numbers, which follows Leviticus, also contains some ritual law, but overall it is more diverse in style and content than Leviticus. After about ten chapters that contain priestly laws, the narrative of Israel's journey continues.

### **3.1 From Mount Sinai to Moab**

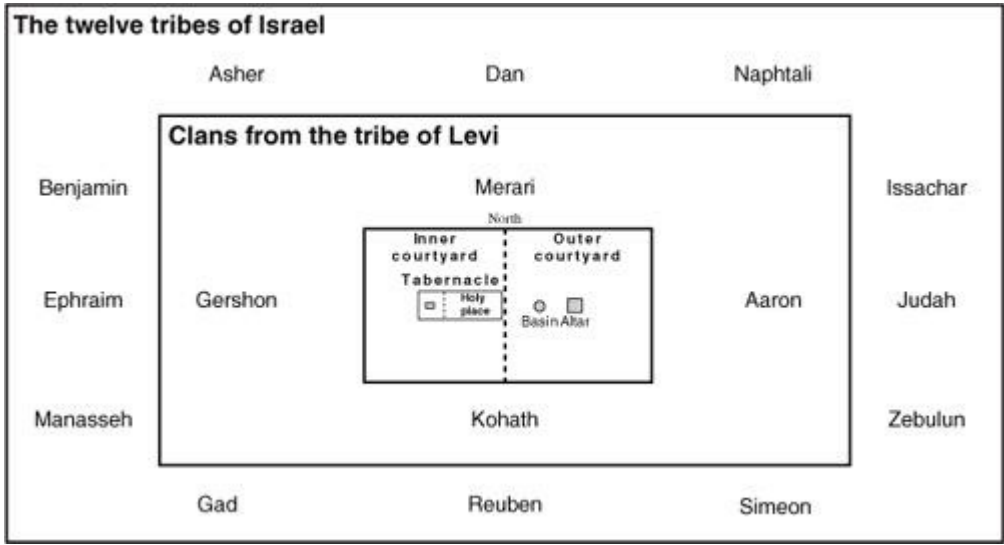
The book of Numbers contains another block of the Priestly Code. The book begins with Israel still located near Mount Sinai. Later in the book, the Israelites' journey continues with a series of perilous encounters until they reach the Jordan River valley, which marks the border of the Promised Land.

#### **3.1.1 Priestly Code Continued (1:1–10:10)**

This is the final section of the legal corpus revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai, the beginning of which extends all the way back to Exodus 19. Among other things, the Priestly Code defined a social hierarchy within Israel, not surprisingly putting the priests of Aaron's family at the top of the heap. This is reflected in Numbers 1–4, which

describes the organization of the Levites and the arrangement of the camp (Figure 4.4). At the center of the camp stood the tabernacle. The clans of the Levites formed an inner ring around the tabernacle, with the family of Aaron closest to the entrance of the compound. The other tribes formed the next ring, with the tribe of Judah in the position of preeminence to the east near Aaron and the entrance. Further outside were resident aliens—that is, people not belonging to any tribe but living among the Hebrews. Furthest out were the foreign nations, by implication also furthest from God. This layout is a component of the holiness continuum, indicating that priests and Levites were the holiest class of people.

**FIGURE 4.4** The Israelite Camp



Additional laws of cleanness are given in subsequent chapters as well as regulations concerning the firstborn and the Nazirite vow. The common thread uniting this material is a concern with the holiness of the people. They must be holy for YHWH to remain in their midst. And if YHWH remains with the people, they would find blessing. This is articulated in the priestly blessing spoken over the



people:

*May YHWH bless you and keep you. May YHWH shine his face toward you and grace you. May YHWH lift his face toward you and give to you shalom. (6:24–26)*

The significance of this blessing is perhaps indicated by the fact that the earliest Hebrew inscription ever found consists of this text. It is found on a silver amulet from Ketef Hinnom near Jerusalem and dates to the seventh century BCE (see Coogan, 1995).

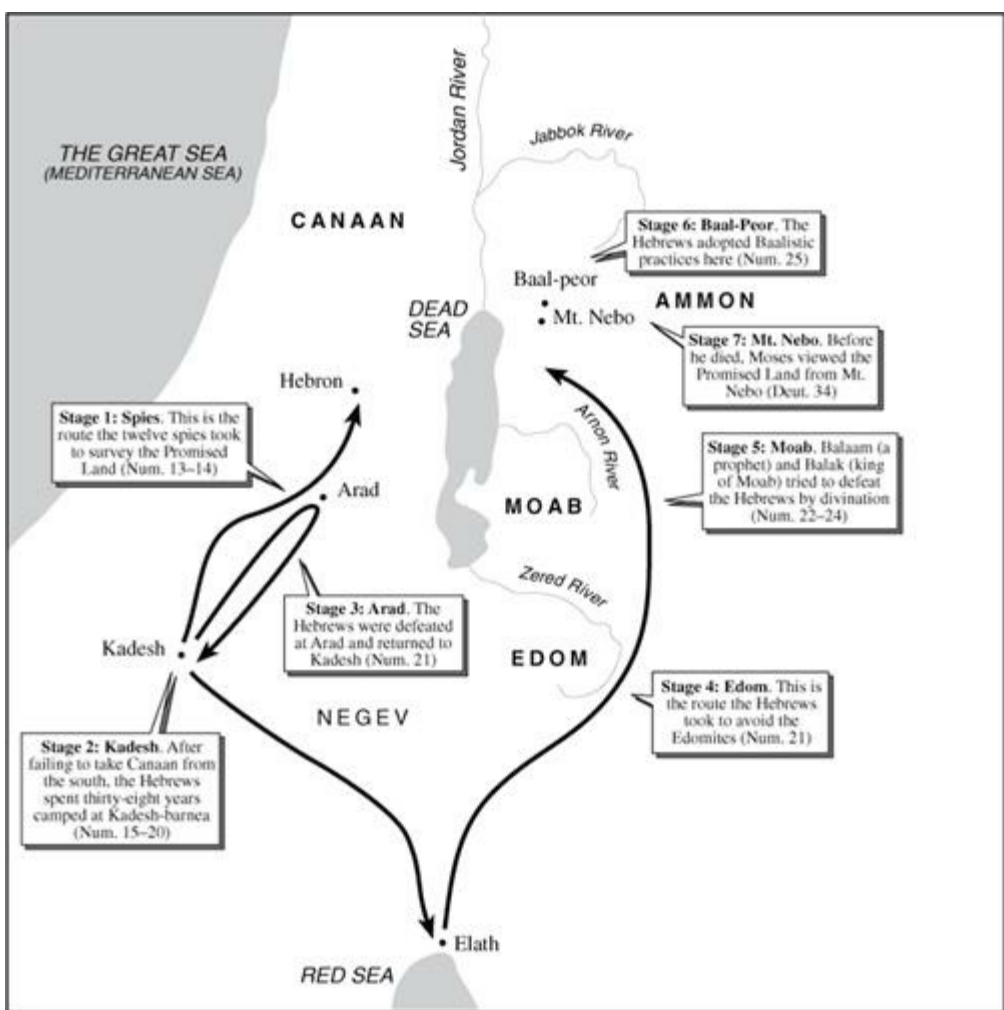
### **3.1.2 The Journey Continues (10:11–22:1)**

Beginning with Numbers 10:11 we are back to material deriving from all three Pentateuchal sources, the Yahwist, Elohist, and Priestly. This block of material is mostly historical narrative and describes the journey from Sinai to Kadesh, the long stay at Kadesh, and the journey to Moab ([Figure 4.5](#)).

Go to the companion website and see the table “Stages of the Wilderness Journey.”

*... the cloud arose from on the tabernacle of the testimony (presumably, the ark of the covenant), and the sons of Israel traveled on their travels from the wilderness of Sinai, and the cloud tabernacled in the wilderness of Paran. (10:11b–12)*

**FIGURE 4.5** The Journey from Kadesh to Moab



About a year after they had arrived in the Sinai wilderness, the cloud of God’s presence lifted and signaled that Israel must continue on to the Promised Land. The Israelites had a number of experiences in the wilderness, many at Kadesh, before they reached Canaan.

The people found the daily [manna](#) meals to be monotonous, so they demanded meat. The strain of fielding such complaints began to take its toll on Moses. In response, YHWH instructed Moses to appoint seventy elders to assist him, similar to Exodus 18, where Moses commissioned officers of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands at Jethro’s advice. He arranged the seventy men around the

meeting tent to receive their commission (11:25). Then YHWH came down in the cloud and spoke to him and took some of the spirit that was on him and placed it on the seventy elders. The spirit took possession of them and they prophesied, as proof of the possession.

Eldad and Medad, two men who had been designated for leadership, were not present at the tent for this event. Nonetheless, they too received the spirit and prophesied in the middle of the camp. This vexed Joshua, but Moses said, *“Why are you upset? It would be good if all YHWH’s people prophesied.”* Whether physically present or not, YHWH had put his spirit on all of them. Here, the Elohist expresses his ideal of prophecy, that all the people would be inspired by God as were Moses and the other leaders. Moses is portrayed as the good and enlightened leader who is not trying to exalt himself. Rather, he wishes that all the people would be close to God.

The special status of Moses is nonetheless reinforced in Numbers 12. Aaron and Miriam (Moses’s brother and sister) challenged Moses after he married a foreigner. They claimed that YHWH could also speak through the two of them. All three then went to the meeting tent where YHWH appeared in the pillar of cloud and spoke to Aaron and Miriam:

*“Hear my words: If you have a prophet among you, I, YHWH, reveal myself to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. With my servant Moses it is different. He is entrusted with my entire estate. I talk with him mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles. He beholds the shape of YHWH. Why are you not afraid to challenge my servant Moses?”* (12:6–9)

As punishment for her presumption, Miriam was afflicted with a skin disease for seven days and remained outside of camp. Aaron was spared, but probably only because he was the high priest. This story indicates many things. It reflects once again the disdain that the

Elohist had for Aaron because he had the audacity to challenge Moses. The Elohist had a special contempt for the Aaronic priesthood in Jerusalem. The story also demonstrates the high regard that the Elohist had for Moses. Throughout the Elohist source, Moses is pictured as central to the purposes of God. Here we learn why. Moses was closest to God. He was not an ordinary leader but a prophet, and even more than just a prophet, God had put him in charge of the entire enterprise.

A notable feature of the story told in Numbers is that many of these episodes, all of which take place after the covenant at Sinai was given, are virtual duplicates of experiences that the Israelites had on the first leg of the wilderness journey from Egypt to Sinai ([Table 4.5](#)). Presumably, the doublets were retained because the independent sources each had memories of the events. Perhaps their retention by the editor and the resulting duplications signals that the character of the people had not changed from before Sinai to after. The Numbers account of those wilderness experiences highlights the dissatisfaction of the people. They complained about the food, so God at the same time fed them and punished them (11). Aaron and Miriam complained about Moses’s leadership, and God vindicated him (12).

**TABLE 4.5** Wilderness Doublets

|                               | Exodus: Egypt<br>to Sinai | Source  | Numbers: Sinai<br>to Canaan | Source |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|--------|
| Moses meets his father-in-law | 18:1–27                   | E       | 10:29–32                    | J      |
| Murmuring Israelites          | 16:1–12                   | P       | 11:1–6                      | E      |
| Quail and manna               | 16:13–35                  | P       | 11:4–35                     | E      |
| Water from rock at Meribah    | 17:1–7                    | J and E | 20:2–13                     | E      |

Moses sent twelve spies into Canaan from Kadesh to survey its fortifications. Ten spies counseled the people not to invade Canaan; only Joshua and [Caleb](#) supported the attack that YHWH commanded.

Because the people refused to follow God's leading, he punished them by decreeing that they would die in the wilderness, and only their offspring, the second generation, would gain possession of Canaan (13–14).

Following this reversal, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram complained about the leadership of Moses and Aaron, and God destroyed them; then all the tribes took exception to the special privileges of the Levites and God vindicated the Levites (16–17). When Moses reacted arrogantly to the murmuring of the people, God punished him (20). When finally the people left Kadesh to go to their invasion staging area, the entire first generation had passed away. There was certainly a lesson here for that exilic generation looking to return home after Babylonian captivity.

As the Israelites traveled toward Transjordan, they were attacked by poisonous snakes. Moses made a bronze snake replica and put it on a pole. Anyone who looked at it recovered (21:4–9). A bronze serpent, called Nehushtan, was later installed in the temple and removed by Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4). The serpent may have been adopted from the Midianites who worked the copper mines north of the Gulf of Aqabah. They are known to have used a gilded copper snake image within their cult.

Chapters containing priestly regulations are interspersed among these narrative accounts of Israel's wilderness experiences. [Chapter 15](#) prescribes offerings that atone for inadvertent sins. Chapter 18 prescribes the portions of the offerings that can rightfully be claimed by priests. The red heifer ceremony of Chapter 19 provides for cleansing and the restoration of holiness.

Intertwining this cultic material with the narrative has a certain logic. The narratives all have to do with complaints and privileges: Various groups complained that other groups or individuals received preferential treatment. The priestly cultic legislation settles matters of priestly privilege and provides the means to restore holiness after the kinds of sins that got the Israelites in trouble in the wilderness.

These same sins would plague the Israelites throughout their history. Thus, the historical material also illustrates the characteristic attitude of the Israelites, one of alternating complaint and faithfulness. It also provides the means to overcome alienation from God and restore holiness.

### **3.1.3 Events in Transjordan (22:2–36:13)**

This section contains a variety of materials all set in Transjordan. Arriving in Transjordan, the Israelites faced two significant threats. First, a Mesopotamian prophet named [Balaam](#) was hired by [Balak](#), the king of the Moabites, to curse the Hebrews and thereby achieve victory for the Moabites (22–24). This is one of the most remarkable stories in the Hebrew Bible. In it, Balaam's donkey talked to him and warned him about an angry angel that was ready to stop him from completing his mission.

When Balaam finally arrived in Moab to curse the Hebrews, he ended up blessing them each time he opened his mouth. Consequently, the Hebrews prevailed. The story reinforces the destiny of these people. Nothing could stop them, neither the mighty warriors of the Transjordan, nor supernatural divination. Directed and defended by YHWH, they would surely enter the Promised Land. This remarkable story was found also to be recorded at Tell Deir 'Alla in Jordan where a collection of text fragments mentioning Balaam son of Beor were discovered in 1967. They were written in Aramaic and date to the 700s BCE. Balaam is called "a seer of the gods," and some of the lines are similar to the wording of Numbers 22–24 (see Hackett, 1984).

The second threat in Transjordan was the attraction of its local religion (25). A Baal shrine located at Peor near the Hebrew camp drew in a number of Israelite worshippers. Specifically, Hebrew males were found availing themselves of the services of cult prostitutes there. But Aaron's grandson [Phinehas](#) stood up for

YHWH and put an end to this offensive form of false worship by piercing an Israelite and his prostitute partner with one thrust of his sword. As a reward for his zeal, YHWH granted him a covenant of perpetual priesthood that designated him and his descendants as the sole legitimate holders of the priestly office (25:10–13; see also Psalm 106:30–31). This marks the second time that the tribe of Levi distinguished itself by violently defending the honor of YHWH (see Exodus 32:25–29 during the golden calf incident).

Following these narratives, the last chapters of Numbers deal with inheritance laws, practices concerning the spoils of conquest, land boundaries, and tribal allotments. In dealing with such matters, the writer has turned attention to issues that the Israelites soon would face as they entered the Promised Land. This third section of Numbers thus prepares Israel to take possession of their divinely ordained territory.

The last incident in Numbers has to do with Zelophehad's daughters. Zelophehad of Manasseh died without a son. His daughters demanded they be given tribal property so that their father's name would not die out. Previously, property had only been granted to males and was passed down to males. But YHWH declared through Moses that these women should be granted Zelophehad's estate as their inheritance (27:1–11), provided that they married within their own tribe. In this way, the property would remain under local control (36).

## **3.2 Numbers as a Book**

The book of Numbers sorts itself out into three sections on the basis of content and geographical setting ([Table 4.6](#)). The first section is a continuation from the book of Leviticus of the Priestly Code. The second and third sections resume the narrative of Israel's experience in the wilderness of Sinai begun in the book of Exodus, organizing

the journey in stages.

**TABLE 4.6** Structure of Numbers

| Text       | Content                 | Location      |
|------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| 1:1–10:10  | Priestly Code continued | Mount Sinai   |
| 10:11–22:1 | The journey continues   | Sinai to Moab |
| 22:2–36:13 | Events in Transjordan   | Transjordan   |

The book of Numbers is entitled *bamidbar* in the Hebrew Bible, meaning “in the wilderness.” As it turned out, the wilderness experience, as revealed in Exodus through Numbers, cut two ways in terms of its significance. It was a time when Israel was closer to God than at any other time in their history and closer in so many different ways. They heard the voice of God from Mount Sinai; they received the covenant directly from the hand of God; they saw the theophany of divine presence; they knew YHWH was resident among them in the tabernacle; they ate and drank daily from his hand. Yet the wilderness was also a time of great trial and testing, a time of rebellion and murmuring, and a period when their existence was defined by *not* being in the land long ago promised. The wilderness would later be remembered as a time of hope and despair, a time they were close to God, but not yet there.

Deuteronomy, the book that follows, is dominated by this theme of not yet there. It is both geographically and temporally continuous with the book of Numbers. While Deuteronomy is a completely different kind of material from Genesis through Numbers (speeches rather than narrative), it smoothly picks up the story line. Numbers ends with Israel in Moab, poised to enter Palestine. In Deuteronomy, Moses will exhort the Israelites (now the second generation) to remain faithful to YHWH so that they can continue the work of conquest, enter the Promised Land, and retain possession of it. But, as we will see, even by the end of Deuteronomy the people will not



yet be home.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Leadership*. The stories of Israel's leaders during the wilderness period serve to characterize them and the nature of their leadership and reveal the various challenges of leadership on a very difficult journey. What were key episodes that established leadership roles and responsibilities in Israel?
2. *Priestly Code*. The Priestly Code consists of various subcollections of ritual and ceremonial laws. Taken as a whole, the code reveals Israel's basic worldview and some of its core concepts such as sacrifice, holiness, priesthood, and purity. What is Israel's set of basic values and its worldview as revealed by the Priestly Code?
3. *Sacrifices*. The main types of sacrifices and offerings functioned to maintain relationships on many different levels. What were the purposes of the different types of sacrifice, and what relationships were in view?
4. *Time and space*. The layout of the Israelite camp and its main structure, the tabernacle, defined holy space. The calendar of festivals and other temporal structures defined time in relation to holiness. What are the main elements of holy place and holy time in Israel?
5. *Experience*. The stories that relate the Israelites' experience in the wilderness, in distinction from the Priestly Code, serve to portray their character as a people. What is the cumulative effect of these tales? What is the soul of these people as revealed through their experience of hardship and deprivation? How might it have served as a lesson to further generations?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Leadership*. Reflect on offices of leadership in Israel as defined in the laws and reinforced in various stories. How did one qualify to be a religious leader in those days? How does that compare to the ways that leaders are chosen today?
2. *Religion*. Israel's laws and rituals prescribed and prohibited behaviors in all areas of life. What does this imply about their view of religion? How do you think they would have responded to the distinction that we make today between the sacred and the secular, or church and state?
3. *Generations*. Ponder the stories that reflect negatively on the Israelites. Why were these stories told? What do they imply about the character and faith of the first generation of Israelites that left Egypt? How might these stories about the faithless first generation relate to the apparent preference (remember the firstborn son stories in Genesis) for the younger son over the older? How do you characterize past generations of your family, community, or nation? Are you prone to assign praise or blame to your predecessors? How does our culture tend to characterize past generations in relation to the present?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

Although there are many commentaries, there is not much secondary literature on Leviticus and Numbers that would be nontechnical and engaging for an intermediate-level student of the text. However, two books by the structuralist anthropologist Mary Douglas, while not easy reading, are worth the effort because they draw out the deep principles of the Priestly Code by analyzing its conceptual systems: *Leviticus as Literature* (1999) and *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (2001). *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (2007), by James W. Watts, is an insightful treatment of the way that Leviticus has shaped

the language and meaning of ritual in the Bible and in biblical interpretation.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Deuteronomy: The Torah of Moses

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 The Torah of Moses](#)

[3 Torah and Covenant](#)

[4 Deuteronomy as a Book](#)

---

### KEY TERMS

[Centralization](#)

[Covenant](#)

[Deuteronomist \(D\)](#)

[Deuteronomistic History \(DH\)](#)

[Deuteronomy](#)

[Josiah](#)

*Mezuzah*

*Shalom*

[Shema](#)

[Suzerain](#)

[Suzerainty treaty](#)

[Syncretism](#)

[Vassal](#)

### Unterberger's *Moses*

Moses is the great lawgiver of Israel, and nothing has reinforced this perception more than the book of Deuteronomy. It is a collection of his best applications of Torah to the life of Israel. This drawing depicts Moses with his face aglow. The full painting has him leaning

on the two tables of the law flanked by angels.



Source: Cristoforo Unterberger (1732–1798), *Moses*. Sala dei Papiri, Vatican Museum, Rome. Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on a photo by Barry Bandstra, 1998.

---

# 1 INTRODUCTION

[Deuteronomy](#) provided the key that unlocked the structure of the Torah and the Prophets in modern scholarship. Close literary and historical study of this book inspired a revolution within biblical studies that opened new ways of viewing the Torah and the Prophets of the Hebrew Bible. How did this happen? Once analysts linked Deuteronomy to the reform of King Josiah of Judah in the 600s BCE, they realized that the principles articulated in this book provided the lens through which the history of Israel had been written in the books of Joshua through Kings. This, among other things, forced a reevaluation of the traditional notion of Mosaic authorship. After we survey the content and structure of Deuteronomy, we will be in a better position to appreciate the significance of these changes.

Deuteronomy gets its name from Deuteronomy 17:18, which states that the king was to receive a “*copy of the torah*” to guide him. This was misleadingly translated in the Septuagint as “a second law” (*deuteronomion* in Greek). Deuteronomy is not a “second law” but a retelling and reapplication of the law given first at Mount Sinai, as stated in 1:5: “*Moses began to explain this torah saying. ...*” The

Hebrew name for the book is *devarim*, or “words,” taken from the first phrase of the book: “*These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan.*” Deuteronomy is unique in the Pentateuch because it is consistent and uniform in style and displays a unity not evident in the other books. It consists almost entirely of Moses’s addresses to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land. Characterized by ardor and urgency, it contains motivational material that is directed straight at “you”—first the *you* of Israel, of course, but unmistakably also the *you* of the reader. Here is how those words are introduced:

*YHWH our Elohim spoke to us at Horeb, “You have stayed at this mountain long enough. Get on with your journey.”*  
(1:6–7a)

Even when God is speaking, as in this quotation, the divine word comes to the people through Moses. This will be the dominant construction of the book of Deuteronomy: Moses’s voice is the voice of God, and vice versa. The Torah of YHWH becomes the Torah of Moses.

## **1.1 The Torah of Moses: A Summary**

Moses addressed the Israelites near the eastern bank of the Jordan River, recounting their experiences together during the forty years in the wilderness (Deuteronomy [Chapters 1–4](#)). He restated the Ten Commandments and urged the Israelites to both love and fear God (5–11). In a major address, he laid down guidelines for Israel’s worship that specified the place to worship, whom to worship, and when to worship. He gave rules for family and community life and also defined the public offices of king, prophet, and priest (12–26). Moses solemnized the occasion with a covenant-renewal rally using

promises of blessing to lure the people and curses to warn against forgetfulness (27–30). After authorizing Joshua as his successor (31), he recounted God’s past history with Israel in song (32) and then blessed the tribes (33). Lastly, he ascended Mount Nebo and died after seeing, but not entering, the Promised Land (34).

## 1.2 Reading Guide

The first four chapters are Moses’s first address. They are a summary retelling of the trip from Mount Sinai, here called Horeb, to Transjordan. This retelling highlights the rebellion and dissatisfaction of the people. Skim this material to gather how Moses addresses the people and lays blame on their shoulders. Then read [Chapters 5–6](#) closely; these two chapters introduce the second address and contain the Decalogue and the summary of the law called the *Shema*. Read [Chapter 11](#), which is Moses’s plea to love YHWH. The next set of readings deals with institutions that will only begin functioning once Israel becomes a nation in Palestine. Read the laws regarding the one official sanctuary (12), the king (17), the priesthood and prophets (18), and holy war (20). Read about the first fruits ceremony (26) and the curses and blessings of the law (27–28). Lastly, read about the death of Moses (34).

## 2 THE TORAH OF MOSES

Deuteronomy is different from the preceding four books of the Torah in these ways. Instead of being mostly historical narrative into which law codes were inserted, it consists of the speeches that Moses delivered to the Israelites in Transjordan as they prepared themselves to enter the Promised Land. Instead of being composed from a variety of sources, it is essentially from one source, the [Deuteronomist](#), or D for short. And instead of being framed as

God's words to Moses, it is mostly Moses's words to Israel. As for the name of God, the deity is referenced overwhelmingly as "*YHWH your God*."

Deuteronomy is a series of addresses that Moses gave to the Israelites in the border region just east of the Jordan River. He knew his death was imminent, so this was his last opportunity to reinforce the values and demands of covenant life; God denied him entry into the Promised Land because of his actions at Meribah (Numbers 20). The following texts sample the flavor of the book and introduce us to some of its main ideas.

## **2.1 The Great Commandment (6:4–9)**

The core of Deuteronomy is a law code contained in [Chapters 12–26](#). This law code is introduced by two speeches of Moses. The first introductory speech (1:1–4:40) reviews Israel's history from the time that God spoke to them at Horeb to the present. Notice that the mountain of revelation is almost exclusively called Horeb in Deuteronomy, not Mount Sinai. Moses highlighted two features of their history. First, the wilderness generation had been unfaithful time and again. They had constantly complained, murmured, and grumbled. Second, the Lord had demonstrated his faithfulness by giving them all they had needed, including victory over their enemies. Moses was warning the Israelites: Do not be unfaithful, as was that first generation, or you will not reach your goal.

The second introductory speech (4:44–11:32) contains a rehearsal and elaboration of the Decalogue from Exodus 20, with a few changes. This generation needed to hear the commandments afresh. If they did not hear and obey them, they would be as doomed as the generation before them. Immediately preceding the Decalogue in its Deuteronomic version, Moses delivers the following charge:



*Moses called all Israel and said to them, “Hear, Israel, the laws and rules I speak in your hearing today! Learn them and make sure you do them. YHWH our Elohim made a covenant with us on Horeb. It was not with our fathers that YHWH made this covenant but with us, those of us living here today.” (5:1–3)*

Notice the sense of urgency in Moses’s preaching style. This is characteristic of his addresses in Deuteronomy. There is no mistaking that he wants to impress upon the people the crucial importance of the covenant. It is not ancient history, nor did it apply just to their forebears. The covenant applies directly to them. Moses speaks in such a way that the covenant obligations fall on each generation, not just on the generation that heard the original words at Horeb.

After stating the Ten Commandments, Moses goes on to encapsulate the essence of this Torah in one of the most notable passages in the Hebrew Bible, Deuteronomy 6:4–5. The Jewish community calls it the *Shema*, the first word of this passage. Along with Deuteronomy 11:13–21 and Numbers 15:37–41, it is Judaism’s prime prayer, recited daily by observant Jews. Jesus calls it the Great Commandment (Mark 12:29–30):

*“Hear, Israel: YHWH is our Elohim, only YHWH. You shall love YHWH your Elohim with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words which I command you today—take them to heart. Repeat them to your children. Say them when you are sitting in your house, when you are walking on the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as a sign on your hand. Let them be headbands above your eyes. Write them on the door frames of your houses.” (6:4–9)*

The first few words of our text are open to several possible translations, all allowable given the rules of the Hebrew language, yet each has a different twist. The Hebrew text of the core affirmation is this in transliteration: *YHWH Elohenu YHWH echad*. A literal word-for-word rendering of these four terms is this: YHWH our-God YHWH one. It may help to keep in mind that YHWH is the personal name of Israel's deity, whereas Elohim (the base form of *Elohenu*) is the way to refer generally to a deity. Also, keep in mind that a verb is not needed in Hebrew for equative sentences in the present tense (*x is y*). Given these linguistic facts, the question is this: How should the individual words be grouped in order to constitute a message? These four nouns can be grouped and understood in three different ways. Here are the options:

1. YHWH, our Elohim, YHWH is one: one sentence where Elohim simply describes YHWH and the main claim is his oneness
2. YHWH is our Elohim, YHWH alone: one sentence essentially meaning YHWH alone is our deity and none other
3. YHWH is our Elohim; YHWH is one: two separate sentences and two claims

What is the intent of the Hebrew text? Does the statement affirm the oneness of God (option 1), and if so, does it assert that only Israel's God exists and the many gods of Canaan, Egypt, and Mesopotamia do not? Or does it primarily affirm that Israel's God is YHWH and that they may worship no other god (option 2)? This option would not address the issue of whether or not there are other gods or assert the essential oneness of YHWH but would only claim that YHWH is the only God for Israel. Or is it both (option 3)? [Table 5.1](#) shows how some English versions translate it in their main text, though most also acknowledge other possibilities in footnotes.

The rendition of the KJV is the only one that does not make sense. Because LORD stands for the personal name YHWH, it is a tautology

to say “Yahweh our God is one Yahweh.” It would be like saying “Arnold my father is one Arnold.” The other renditions, while representing different choices, are all possible.

While it is difficult to be sure precisely what the *Shema* means, we can say the following. An affirmation of monotheism, a claim about what exists and what does not exist in the realm of heaven, seems too abstractly philosophical for those times. And although it is conceivable that the statement was intended to deny the many Baal and Asherah gods that the Canaanites recognized, Moses via the Deuteronomist was probably not interested in affirming the unitary nature of God so much as impressing upon Israel that there is only one God for them, only one God to whom they could be loyal. His name is YHWH. He had been faithful to them in the past, and they must be loyal to him now. While there may be other so-called gods among the other nations, YHWH is the only God that deserves and demands Israel’s love. McCarter (1987) suggests that the issue was not monotheism but the worship of local manifestations of YHWH in local shrines, which is what the centralization effort of Josiah’s reform set out to eliminate. In any case, the command to love YHWH is central to the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is not a theological or philosophical treatise but an encouragement to Israel to remain in covenant relationship with the God who brought them out of Egypt and preserved them through the wilderness.

**TABLE 5.1** Translations of Deuteronomy 6:4: The *Shema*

|              |                                                        |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| KJV          | Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.          |
| NASB         | Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!  |
| NIV and TNIV | Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.     |
| NLV          | Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. |
| NRSV         | Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.   |
| JPS Tanakh   | Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.   |
| Fox          | Hearken O Israel: YHWH our God, YHWH (is) One!         |
| NAB          | Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!   |

The injunction to tie these words on forehead and forearm would keep the covenant always in front of each Israelite as a guide for everyday living. This was put into practice early in the history of Judaism by binding small cases containing Torah texts (called *tefillin* or phylacteries) onto the forehead and left arm. The Torah was also placed into another holder, called a *mezuzah*, and attached to the door frames of homes and public buildings.

## 2.2 The Place That YHWH Chooses (12:2–7)

Moses promoted loyalty to YHWH by advocating the [centralization](#) of worship, the policy that YHWH could only be worshipped in one place. This would have had two purposes. One would have been to eliminate the myriad local shrines dedicated to the ancestors and to traditional Canaanite deities. The other would have been to supervise all legitimate worship practices and, not coincidentally, to reap the material benefits for the support of the priesthood that accrued when Israelites came to perform their duties:

*“You must completely eradicate all the places where the nations you are dispossessing used to worship their gods, places on the high mountains, on the hills, and those under lush trees. Break down their altars, smash their pillars, burn their sacred poles with fire, and cut down the idols of their gods. Eradicate their name from that place. Do not worship YHWH your Elohim in the same way as they did theirs. Rather, you shall seek out the place that YHWH your Elohim will choose out of all your tribes to put his name, where he will dwell. You should go there. Bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and donations, your pledges and contributions, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.*

*There you shall eat in the presence of YHWH your Elohim, you and your household, rejoicing in everything you undertake, in whatever YHWH your Elohim has blessed you.” (12:2–7)*

The phrase “*the place YHWH your God will choose*” is an indefinite way of referring to the tribal federation’s central sanctuary. Early on it may have been Shiloh, but certainly later it was assumed to be Jerusalem. The exact place could not be named, and this circumlocution was used because the surface setting of Deuteronomy puts it at a time before Jerusalem had been founded as Israel’s capital and the site of the state temple.

The various types of sacrifices and offerings in this passage indicate that all forms of worship and the payment of all dues were to be made at this central sanctuary. The phrase “*to put his name, where he will dwell*” has been taken as an indicator of the attempt of Deuteronomy to change the common Israelite belief that God actually lived in an earthly sanctuary (see von Rad, 1966; challenged by Wilson, 1995). By referring instead to the name of God rather than to God himself as that which dwells in the sanctuary, Israel was encouraged to acquire a less physical and a more transcendent understanding of the nature of God’s presence.

Worship centers traditionally were located on hills or other high places, frequently in forests and groves. That goes for the Canaanites and other inhabitants of Palestine (“*the nations you are dispossessing*”) as well as for the Israelites. Both of the places on which Israel’s God had revealed the divine presence were mountains. The covenant was given on Mount Sinai, and Israel’s chief sanctuary was located on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

The Israelites were warned against using traditional Canaanite high places because of the danger of [syncretism](#), blending Yahwism with Baalism, or some other foreign religious element, even in unintentional ways. The experience of the northern kingdom suggested that a variety of worship centers could be dangerous to the

faith of the people. Before Israel's destruction, many northern cities contained shrines. Usually, they were located in places where Baal and Asherah had been worshipped, and aspects of Baal worship were frequently assimilated to Yahwistic worship in those places. Sometimes it was difficult to tell the difference between the two. Prophets frequently condemned such worship places (Hosea 8:11; Jeremiah 11:13). According to the prophets the attraction of such shrines was one of the major reasons why the northern kingdom fell.

The Deuteronomist presumably knew the price of such disloyalty. He was most likely a Levite from the north, and after its destruction in 721 BCE, he fled south and brought a message of warning to Judah in the hope that its people might avoid Israel's fate. The centralization of worship in Jerusalem mandated in this text was initiated during the reign of Hezekiah (715–687 BCE). He abolished the offering of sacrifices anywhere but in the capital. [Josiah](#) (640–609 BCE) went even further by abolishing all sanctuaries and temples throughout the land except for the Solomonic temple in Jerusalem. In this way, tighter control over the religious practices of the people could be maintained.

Archaeological excavations at Arad, a Judean city in the south of Palestine, support the biblical description of these religious reforms. Arad contains the remains of a temple structure and altars dating to the period before the time of Hezekiah, all built according to the specifications of the Jerusalem temple and its altars (see [Figure 5.1](#)). Arad was destroyed during Hezekiah's reign and rebuilt during the time of Josiah, but the temple itself was not redone. These changes at Arad are consistent with Josiah's centralization efforts, as mandated in Deuteronomy.

### **FIGURE 5.1** Arad Sanctuary

The temple in Arad, Israel, matches the general structure of the Jerusalem temple described in the Hebrew Bible. It proves the

existence of sanctuaries outside Jerusalem during the monarchy until the time of Hezekiah.



Photo by Barry Bandstra, May 1996

## 2.3 A Prophet Like Me (18:15–22)

One of the central themes of Deuteronomy is the exclusive relationship between YHWH and Israel. YHWH was their God, and this God demanded total loyalty. The Deuteronomist set Israel apart from the other nations in many ways, including how they would maintain contact with God. Whereas other people employed diviners, sorcerers, and soothsayers to hear a divine voice, Israel was not allowed to use such means. Instead, Israel would hear the voice of deity through that deity's prophet:

*“YHWH your Elohim will raise up a prophet from among your own people, one like me. To him you shall listen, just as you requested of YHWH your Elohim at Horeb in the assembly when you said, ‘If I hear the voice of YHWH my Elohim and see this great fire again, I will die.’ So YHWH said to me, ‘They are right in what they said. A prophet I will raise up from among their own people, one like you. I will put my*

*words in his mouth and he will speak to them what I command him. Everyone who does not listen to my words which he speaks in my name—I will hold him responsible. But, the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name which I did not command him to speak, and which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet will die.’ You might ask yourself ‘How can we recognize the word which YHWH did not speak?’ What the prophet speaks in the name of YHWH and which does not happen or come about is not a word YHWH spoke. Presumptuously the prophet spoke it. Do not be afraid of him.” (18:15–22)*

Moses predicted that YHWH would raise up a prophet like himself. The need for a prophet was revealed by the fear of the people as they stood before YHWH at Horeb. They could not stand up under the intensity of direct contact with God; by their own admission, they thought that they would die. It is a truism of the Hebrew Bible that one cannot look upon God directly and live.

Moses mediated between YHWH and Israel. He became the enduring Deuteronomic model for prophetic communication between the deity and his people. A true prophet receives his words directly from God and is distinguished by his access to the Divine Council where he receives God’s words directly from his mouth.

The criterion for true and false prophecy was the “wait-and-see” test. In Deuteronomic perspective, prophecy predicted future events. If a prophecy was genuine, it would come to pass. This was not very helpful to those who were trying to figure out at the time who was genuine. Rather, this test only worked in hindsight when later generations evaluated the prophetic message in terms of the events predicted: Had they taken place or not? And it only worked for past prophets (probably ones already long gone) whose words had been recorded and written down.

The Deuteronomist is really providing a test for his seventh-



century BCE contemporaries. They were able to evaluate past claimants to prophetic office—men such as Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea. Having passed the test, these men would have been authenticated as true prophets. Listen to them and learn from their writings. All others are false. This was later applied as a test when decisions were made concerning which books to include in the canon of the Bible: Had their predictions come true or not?

## 2.4 The Earliest Creed (26:5–9)

The last chapter of the central law code mandates a ceremony of First Fruits. This ceremony is one of the three major yearly festivals established in Israel according to Deuteronomy 16:16. It was called the Festival of Weeks because it occurs seven weeks after Passover. Later it was also called *Pentecost*, from the Greek word for fiftieth (the fiftieth day after Passover).

As proof that they had actually entered the Promised Land and as proof that it was a good and productive place, each Israelite had to take the first produce of the wheat harvest and bring it to the sanctuary. This was authentication that YHWH's promise to the ancestors had come true. As part of the ceremony, the one offering the harvest gift would recite the following historical summary:

*A wandering Aramean was my father. He went down into Egypt and lived there as a resident alien with only a small group. He became a great nation, strong and numerous. The Egyptians treated us badly and persecuted us. They imposed hard labor on us. We cried out to YHWH, the Elohim of our ancestors. He heard our voice and saw our persecution, our toil and our oppression. YHWH brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with awesome power,*

*with signs and with wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.* (26:5–9)

Three major historical movements are evoked by this sketch of Israel's early history. The first is the ancestors' journey from Canaan to Egypt. The description "wandering Aramean" best fits Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. He is the one who brought his family down to join Joseph. The second journey is Israel's experience of slavery in Egypt and the plagues that led to the miracle of the Exodus. The entry into Canaan is the third movement. The gifts of produce taken from the good earth are proof that they were now in the Promised Land, the "*land flowing with milk and honey.*" This description of Canaan is found throughout the Pentateuch. It not only contrasts Canaan with the wilderness out of which Israel came but also captures the bountifulness of the land that God gave to his people. The statement expresses a faith grounded in historical events where YHWH met his people.

Von Rad (1966) proposed that these verses contain the earliest digest of Israel's faith, a creed or confession. He suggested that the events summarized here are the core of Israel's salvation history. He claimed the outline of events contained in this creed formed the basic historical outline of what came to be Genesis through Joshua. Carmichael (1969) has called into question the antiquity of this statement, suggesting instead that it was composed by the Deuteronomist for the first fruits festival and is not an ancient independent creed. Nonetheless, it attests the importance of historical recollection to the life of faith, such that the gifts of the present are grounded in YHWH's deliverance in the past. The Deuteronomist often used historical recital to challenge the people to remain faithful: from this book of Deuteronomy, to the speeches of Joshua, Samuel, and others in the Deuteronomistic History of Israel (the books of Joshua through Kings).

## 2.5 Choose Life! (30:15–20)

These verses form the concluding section of Moses's last address. They bring together the core covenant themes of the book: commandment, obedience, blessing and curse, promise and fulfillment. Moses demands a decision from each member of the community: "Choose life or death, but you must choose!"

*See, I have put before you today life and good, death and bad. This is what I am commanding you today: to love YHWH your Elohim, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments, laws and rules. Then you will live and increase, and YHWH your Elohim will bless you in the land you are entering in order to possess it. If your heart turns and you do not listen, but you go astray and worship other gods and serve them, I tell you this very day that you will perish. You will not have a long life in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call as witnesses against you today heaven and earth. Life and death I set before you, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your offspring may live, loving YHWH your Elohim, heeding his voice, clinging to him. For he is your life, your longevity, so you may settle in the land which YHWH swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. (30:15–20)*

This final entreaty reveals more clearly than anything else that Deuteronomy is more than just another legal code. It is a covenant document that demands commitment from the people of God. The choice is laid out in all its simplicity. Keeping YHWH's covenant yields life and prosperity; breaking the covenant brings death. This bipolar set of options is characteristic of Deuteronomic theology

generally and also finds expression in wisdom literature. The life of obedience leads to *shalom*, the Hebrew notion of complete blessing. To disregard God is foolishness and leads to death. Blessing and curse are the respective outcomes of obedience and disobedience.

The focus of the Deuteronomist is transparent in passages such as this. By framing Moses's message in the second-person *you*, he succeeds in merging the generation that was about to enter the land with the reader/hearer of Deuteronomy in the 600s BCE when the people were threatened with the loss of their homeland by foreign invasion—indeed, with the *you* of any generation. It did not take great spiritual insight on the part of seventh-century Judeans to see the connection between the call to faithfulness addressed to the generation of Moses (so that the people could cross the Jordan to enter the land and keep it) and the call to their own faithfulness (so that Judah would not lose the land they already possessed).

Certainly these words became even more meaningful after 587 BCE when the Judeans were in fact exiled from their homeland. And it held out the same promise. If the people renewed their faithfulness, YHWH would bring them back to the Promised Land. Indeed, Moses's call to faithfulness becomes timeless. His injunction to obey the covenant today becomes a call to faithfulness in every age.

### **3 TORAH AND COVENANT**

The book of Deuteronomy has attracted a great deal of scholarly discussion about the nature of Israel's covenant in relation to extrabiblical covenants. Mendenhall (1955) is the classic description of ancient Middle Eastern covenants in relation to the Hebrew Bible, especially as structured in Deuteronomy, while McCarthy (1978) lays out and annotates the ancient parallel covenant documents. Given the shape of Deuteronomy as a call to covenant faithfulness, it is not surprising that major components of Deuteronomy have

parallels in ancient treaty ceremonies that initiated covenant or treaty relationships between two parties. Treaty documents associated with such ceremonies were a permanent record of the conditions of the alliance. The term [covenant](#) can be used for both the type of relationship between the parties and the document that defines that relationship.

Certain parallels between Deuteronomy and ancient treaty documents are so close that some scholars have argued that Deuteronomy is explicitly a treaty document such as was used in Hittite and Assyrian covenant ceremonies (see Kline, 1963). Today, this view is considered a bit of an overstatement. Deuteronomy is not itself a treaty document, though most certainly it contains covenant language and major elements of such ancient treaty texts. More likely, Deuteronomy is an anthology of sermons based on the covenant concept.

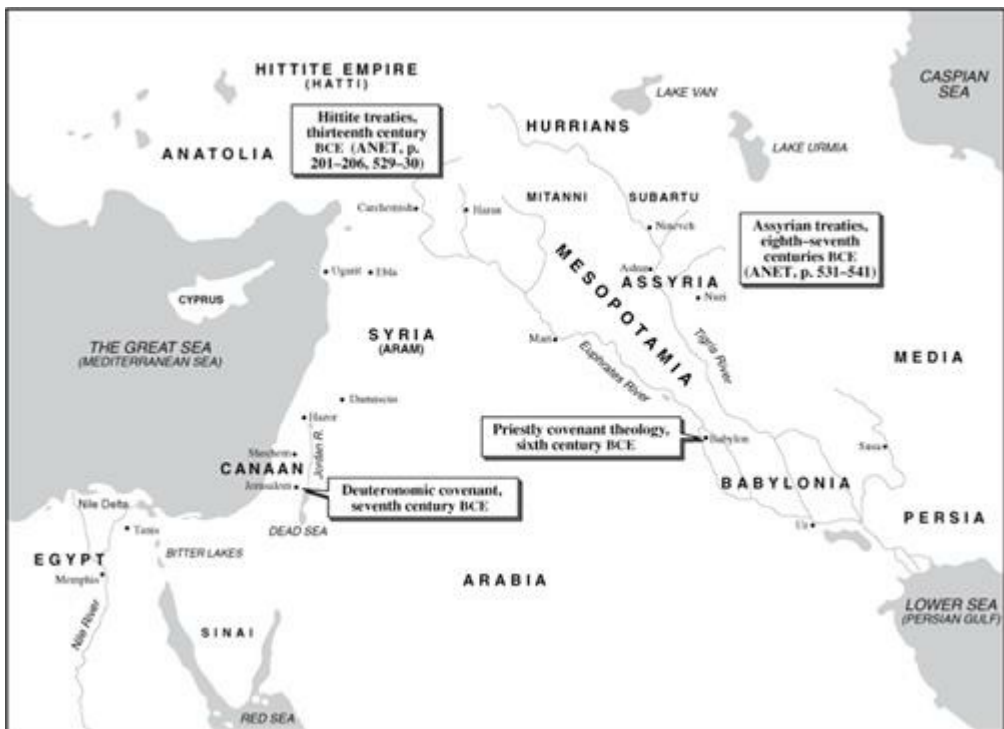
Ancient treaty documents such as those known from the Hittites and Assyrians were legal texts used to administer conquered kingdoms. Using somewhat antiquated terminology, such an administrative document is usually called a [suzerainty treaty](#), a [suzerain](#) being a feudal lord or patron who controlled a [vassal](#), or client, state. The most extensive body of suzerainty treaties comes from the Hittite Empire of the Late Bronze Age (circa 1400–1200 BCE). Equally important and closer in time to the Deuteronomist are legal documents from the Neo-Assyrian Empire (935–612 BCE) that make extensive use of the treaty form (see [Figure 5.2](#)).

Close study of these Hittite and Neo-Assyrian treaty documents has revealed that they have a number of components in common (see ANET, 199–206, 529–54). A complete treaty document would contain the following elements:

- An introduction, sometimes called the preamble, introduces and identifies the parties in the treaty.
- An historical review recalls the history of the relationship

between the parties.

**FIGURE 5.2** Map of Treaties and Covenants of the Ancient Middle East



- The conditions, or stipulations, are the terms of the treaty. This is really the meat of the document. Among other things, the suzerain demands the vassal's total loyalty.
- The provisions for publication describe where the treaty document would be stored and when it would be recited in public.
- The list of divine witnesses specifies the gods who would be called on to witness the making of the treaty (equivalent to a notary public today) and enforce any breach of the treaty (the lawyers and courts).
- A list of blessings and curses anticipates the good and bad

things that would happen to the vassal if the treaty was kept or broken.

The book of Deuteronomy contains remarkable parallels to the components of ancient treaty documents ([Table 5.2](#)). The substantial similarities between Deuteronomy and the ancient treaty form suggest that the Deuteronomist intentionally framed YHWH’s relationship with Israel in treaty terms. Clearly, the Deuteronomist was influenced by broader ancient Middle Eastern legal traditions and used them to shape the presentation of YHWH’s bond with Israel. He used the political metaphor of treaty and covenant to conceptualize the spiritual relationship between YHWH and Israel and specifically as a theocracy.

**TABLE 5.2** Treaty Components of Deuteronomy

| Component             | Deuteronomy | Explanation                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Introduction          | 4:44–49     | Moses speaking for YHWH: “ <i>This is the law that Moses set before the Israelites</i> ” (4:44). This is the setting for the covenant addresses.                     |
| Historical background | 1–3         | This recollects Israel’s experience at Horeb and in the wilderness, which is the occasion for Moses to warn the people to be obedient.                               |
| Conditions            | 12–26       | The central law code: “ <i>These are the laws and rules that you must diligently keep</i> ” (12:1).                                                                  |
| Publication           | 27:1–10     | Covenant ceremony: “ <i>Write on the stones all the words of this law</i> ” (27:8). Covenant renewal every seven years with public reading is specified in 31:10–13. |
| Divine witnesses      | 30:19       | “ <i>I call as witnesses against you today heaven and earth</i> ” (30:19). YHWH himself would guard the covenant and enforce it.                                     |
| Blessings and curses  | 27:11–28:68 | “ <i>If you obey YHWH your God, . . . all these blessings will come upon you</i> ” (28:1–2). Chapter 28 spells out the curses.                                       |

If Deuteronomy was intentionally made analogous, at least in part, to a suzerainty treaty, the intended effect may be that YHWH stands in the role of the suzerain and Israel assumes the place of his vassal. Other nations had a human king as their suzerain, but Israel had YHWH. In other words, Deuteronomy, viewed as a suzerainty treaty, presents YHWH as the Great King of Israel. Although provision for a

human king was given (17:14–20), even that king would be subject to the Torah of the Great King YHWH.

## 4 DEUTERONOMY AS A BOOK

The wholeness of Deuteronomy is due to its self-contained and unique character within the Pentateuch. It was not created out of a blending of different sources and traditions. Its unity of authorship is revealed by its unifying themes, consistent style, and clear structure.

### 4.1 Themes

Deuteronomy is perhaps the most deliberately theological book in the Hebrew Bible, if by theological we mean explaining in a systematic and thoughtful way what the nature of God is and what faith entails. The theological teaching of Deuteronomy can be distilled into three phrases.

1. *One God.* The Deuteronomist affirms a “practical” monotheism: *YHWH is our Elohim, YHWH alone.* He was not concerned with abstract theological formulations. He stated that there was only one God who was interested in Israel. God demonstrated that by divine care in the past. This God demands their undivided loyalty in the present. YHWH is the one and only God for their future. The people were bound to YHWH by means of a legal contract, called the covenant. It defined the shape of their loyalty and specified how they would remain in God’s good graces.

2. *One people.* Deuteronomy is addressed to the people of God as a whole. No distinction is made between southern and northern kingdoms. There are no tribal distinctions. The book presumes that the people of God are unified. The oneness of the people transcends generations. The book is addressed perpetually to the “now” generation. References to *today* and *this day* abound. The covenant is



made “*not with our fathers but with us alive today.*” The unity of the people is not based on genetic commonality but on the belief that God called them to be his people. They alone are the people of God, set apart from the rest of the nations and held together because YHWH, in love, chose them. Sometimes called the “election” of Israel, this notion affirms that these people were singled out by God at his own initiative. That is what makes them special—YHWH’s “treasured possession” in Deuteronomy’s language (7:6; see also Exodus 19:5, where the same term is used).

3. *One faith.* Israel got into trouble because it had lost spiritual focus. Local variations in religious practices and the tendency to drift in the direction of Baalism resulted in straying from YHWH. The various local Baal and Asherah shrines promoted this. “*The place YHWH will choose*” became the only worship center. Although left unspecified in the text, the Deuteronomist presumably had Jerusalem in mind. The Deuteronomist demanded uniformity in worship. This could only be enforced if one central sanctuary was officially designated and YHWH’s festivals were celebrated. Did you notice that Deuteronomy has almost nothing to say about sacrifices and offerings? Devotion would be expressed by loving YHWH and nurturing a community where right would prevail.

These themes of oneness quite logically support the religious reform efforts of Josiah and his political efforts to reunify the peoples of YHWH into one nation. Centralization, one deity, one people, one cult in Jerusalem, constitute a consistent ideology that would form the foundation of a rebuilt Israel now that the Assyrian Empire has collapsed and the reassertion of Israelite empire is a possibility.

## 4.2 Style and Structure

The content of Deuteronomy is presented as an anthology of speeches

given by Moses to the Israelites just before they were to take possession of the Promised Land. He counseled and cajoled them, “Be faithful to YHWH and you will be blessed.” More obviously than any other material in the Hebrew Bible, except perhaps some of the prophets, this material is didactic, pleading, even preachy. Deuteronomy is permeated with such phrases as “with all your heart and soul,” “in order that it may go well with you,” “be thankful,” and “if only you obey the voice of YHWH your God.” It contains urgent calls to faithfulness and social responsibility.

Deuteronomy was designed to appeal to the hearts and minds of its listeners. The bulk of the book is framed not as a narrative but as a direct address to the people. Although not noticeable in English translation (because *you* can be either singular or plural), the book vacillates, apparently indiscriminately, between address to individuals (“each of you”) and to the people as a collective (“all of you”). With this vacillating approach, the Deuteronomist targets each person, and—virtually at the same time—the group, suggesting that they are each and every one in this together as the one people of God.

Deuteronomy as we have it is the result of a long process of development and deliberate shaping. That should be no surprise. Almost every book of the Hebrew Bible was. The editor of Deuteronomy left us some helpful clues to the shape of the book ([Table 5.3](#)). The main textual units are easily recognizable because a formula introduces them; the words *this is* or *these are* stand as a title at the head of all but one major section.

**TABLE 5.3** Textual Units in Deuteronomy (boldfaced phrases mark the beginnings of the units)

|            |                                                                                                          |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1:1–4:43   | <i>“These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan.”</i>                           |
| 4:44–11:32 | <i>“This is the torah that Moses put before the Israelites.”</i>                                         |
| 12:1–26:19 | <i>“These are the laws and rules that you must diligently keep.”</i>                                     |
| 27:1–28:68 | <i>“Then Moses and the elders of Israel charged all the people as follows.”</i>                          |
| 29:1–32:52 | <i>“These are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the Israelites.”</i>  |
| 33:1–34:12 | <i>“This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites before his death.”</i> |

---

The nucleus of Deuteronomy is the set of laws in [Chapters 12–26](#). If we visually diagram the book, we see this central set of laws surrounded by concentric sets of material ([Figure 5.3](#)). This material reinforces those laws and gives them context. Simplifying matters somewhat, the inner circle of speeches by Moses (5–11 and 27–28) bracket the core laws (12–26) and is itself surrounded by a prologue (1–4) and an epilogue (33–34) containing the farewell of Moses and various appendices. The covenant-renewal section (29–32) is the only section that breaks the symmetry.

To a degree, the concentric structure of the book coincides with its composition history. The book was written in stages. The core laws of the central code were probably written first, perhaps as early as the 700s but no later than the reforms of Josiah around 622. The historical prologue and the epilogue were added to the book during the time of Josiah or the Babylonian exile when Deuteronomy was shaped into the prologue to the Deuteronomistic History.

## 4.3 Deuteronomistic History

Deuteronomy represents a theological tradition that is reflected in other books of the Hebrew Bible, including many of the prophetic books and Joshua through Kings. It is the theological lens through which Israel’s greatest historian focused attention on the national epic. The history of Israel’s monarchy, including the events leading up to the formation of the nation, is contained in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. This material is not historiography in a modern social-scientific sense, but then it does not pretend to be. It tells the

story of the nation from the theological perspective that Israel prospered or suffered in relation to how obedient or disobedient they were to the covenant. As went their faith, so went their national security and standard of living.

**FIGURE 5.3** Structure of Deuteronomy

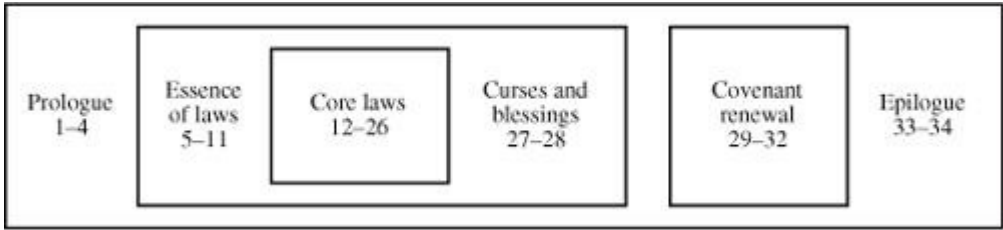
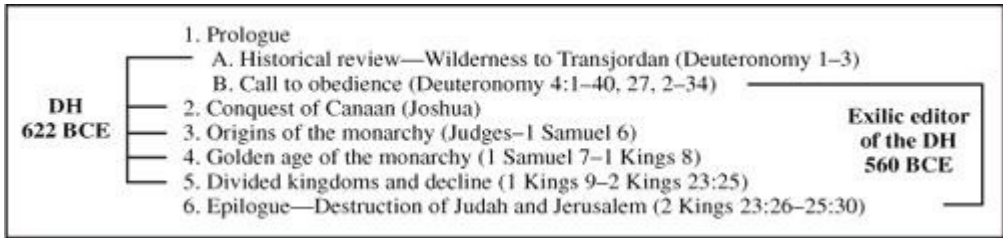


**FIGURE 5.4** The Deuteronomistic History



The writer of Joshua through Kings is called the Deuteronomistic historian because he derived his basic theology from Deuteronomy. After closely examining the book of Deuteronomy, authorities have suggested that most of the prologue, [Chapters 1–3](#), is in fact the work of the Deuteronomistic historian and not the Deuteronomist himself. Here is how the theory goes. The Deuteronomistic historian, writing at the time of Josiah, took Deuteronomy (which probably only consisted of [Chapters 5–26](#) and 28) and prefaced it with his own historical introduction (what is now [Chapters 1–3](#)). He then used all that material as the first part of his *magnum opus*, the [Deuteronomistic History](#) (DH). Some scholars think that the DH was edited later by an exilic theologian who added Deuteronomy

4:1–40, Chapter 27, and Chapters 29–34. [Figure 5.4](#) displays the shape of the DH by this theory.

The Deuteronomistic historian really set out to answer significant questions concerning Israel’s national destiny. First, by writing theological history, he attempted to answer the question, “Why did Israel, the northern kingdom, fall to the Assyrians?” Second, he attempted to shed light on the question, “Why is Josiah trying to reform the religious practices of Judah?” We will examine his answers in RTOT [Part 2](#).

## 4.4 Authorship

Now, back to the question that we started with. How did the study of Deuteronomy revolutionize our understanding of the Pentateuch? DeWette, a nineteenth-century scholar of the Pentateuch, was the first to recognize that Deuteronomy fits the description of Josiah’s reform program in 2 Kings. He postulated that Deuteronomy was in fact the “book of the law” discovered in the temple. DeWette’s insight prompted a reevaluation of the book and led eventually to the observation of its affinity with the following historical books and its dissimilarity with the Tetrateuch.

The authorship of the book of Deuteronomy is a two-level issue involving the surface setting of the book (what the book portrays itself to be) and the actual setting (when it was actually written). The surface setting of Deuteronomy is evident from the book. What little action there is takes place in Transjordan (the modern Hashemite kingdom of Jordan) just before the people crossed the Jordan River and entered Palestine. The best current estimate is that it would have happened beginning around 1250 BCE. Moses addressed all the people of Israel, urging them to be faithful to the Lord. By so doing, they would ensure prosperity and peace in the new land that they were poised to enter. The speeches contain a reapplication of the

Mosaic Torah to these people, updated for a settled-down life in the homeland that YHWH had promised them. Most of the book is made up of speeches by Moses, addressed directly to the Israelites. At the end of the book, the manner of speaking changes to a narrative description of the death of Moses. The leadership role then shifts to Joshua, who becomes Moses's successor.

However, the compositional setting of the book—that is, when it was written down—differs from its surface setting. The core of Deuteronomy was written sometime during the Israelite monarchy, perhaps as early as the reign of Hezekiah (715–687 BCE) or as late as the reign of Josiah (640–609 BCE). Deuteronomy in some form (probably only the inner core of laws) was the “book of the Torah” that was found in 622 BCE during the religious revival of Josiah. The similarities between the Deuteronomic reform (told in 2 Kings 22–23) and the prescriptions of Deuteronomy are too close to be coincidental. Both involved centralizing worship in one place, celebrating Passover in a particular way, and prohibiting certain specific pagan practices. Furthermore, the phrase “book of the Torah,” found in 2 Kings 22:8, is found in other places where it can only refer to Deuteronomy (for example, Deuteronomy 30:10 and Joshua 1:8 and 8:31–35).

Thus, Deuteronomy exists in two worlds, and both settings must be understood to fully appreciate the book. Set at the time of Moses, it was given its shape during the time of Josiah some five centuries later. Although the core traditions may go back to the Moses of the Exodus, the book as we have it today was shaped some 600 years later. Who, during the reign of Josiah, was responsible for giving the book its shape?

It is hard to pin down Deuteronomy's author. Evidence from the book suggests that he came from the northern kingdom and reflects its traditions. This is indicated by the terms that he uses, which are consistent with other known northern traditions—for example, Horeb for Sinai and Amorites for Canaanites. Also, many of Deuteronomy's

laws seem to derive from the Covenant Code (Exodus 20:22–23:33), which is from the Elohist source and embodies northern perspectives. The close connection between Deuteronomy and the religious reforms supported by Josiah might suggest that the writer was close to the royal court in Jerusalem. The description of the discovery of the law book, as described in 2 Kings 22–23, associates the find with Shaphan, the royal secretary, and Hilkiah, the high priest. Both were trusted associates of King Josiah.

Is it possible to determine exactly who the Deuteronomist was? The specific social background of the author is difficult to determine. The preaching style of Deuteronomy suggests that the book might have been written by northern Levites who warned and encouraged their congregations in periodic covenant-renewal ceremonies at the great northern worship centers such as Shechem and Bethel (Von Rad, 1938). According to the Levitical priestly theory, when the northern kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 BCE, these Levites fled south, taking with them their oral and written traditions. These then formed the foundation of their preaching in Judah. The Deuteronomist drew on this material for his book. Friedman (1987) believes that the Deuteronomist was a Levitical priest from Shiloh, and he argues that Jeremiah was in fact this Deuteronomist.

Another theory suggests that Deuteronomy came from administrative circles. In Israel, administrators and middle-level politicians tended to arise from scribal circles. Weinfeld (1972) studied what he felt were connections in Deuteronomy to Israel's wisdom tradition and suggests that Deuteronomy is the product of an ancient Israelite civil service interest. Deuteronomy, he says, is the expression of a governmental group interested in shaping the structure and life of the nation. Nicholson (1967) suggests that the writer was deeply influenced by prophets and prophetic movements, especially those in Israel. The book of Deuteronomy certainly does hold a high opinion of prophets. Moses is portrayed as the model of all prophets. Thus, Deuteronomy has elements consistent with

priestly, prophetic, royal, and wisdom connections. The multitude of authorship options suggests at the very least that we should be cautious about identifying Deuteronomy with any one social or political interest group in Israel.

Whatever the case, the writer of Deuteronomy was deeply committed to revitalizing the faith and practice of Israel, and he viewed himself as standing in the tradition of Moses. Indeed, virtually the entire book is framed as the very words of Moses. The writer succeeded in constructing a holistic vision of the Israelite community that accounted for all the major participants.

The critical issues of precisely when and where the book was written should not overshadow the overall impression that the book embodies a genuine testimony of Mosaic faith. Admittedly, the seventh-century BCE writer shaped that testimony, being sensitive to the issues of faith and life in the Judah of his time. Nonetheless, he felt that he was presenting the essential thrust of Moses's message. Although shaping the words that he put in Moses's mouth, he certainly felt that he was representing the Mosaic tradition faithfully.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Uniqueness*. In what ways is Deuteronomy different from the other books of the Pentateuch?
2. *Oneness*. What major themes of Deuteronomy articulate Josiah's ideology of unification and support his efforts to resurrect the grand state of Israel?
3. *Covenant*. What is the basic structure of a suzerain–vassal treaty, and what are the similarities between Deuteronomy and ancient Middle Eastern suzerainty treaties?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. *Deuteronomic themes*. What themes of Deuteronomy reinforce major themes of Genesis through Numbers? What new themes, perhaps, emerge from Deuteronomy?
2. *Treaty metaphor*. God used covenant, a notion coming out of the realm of politics and international relations, to define his relationship with Israel. What is the effect and meaning of using this highly political notion, a notion that derives from the realm of international relations, to define the divine–human relationship? What other metaphors, such as parent–child, might have been used?
3. *Moses and D*. If Deuteronomy was written in the 600s BCE rather than during Moses’s lifetime, how does this affect your reception and appreciation of the book?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

One of the basic notions of Deuteronomy is covenant. *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea*, by Delbert R. Hillers (1969), is a very readable explanation of this important concept in light of its ancient analogues, and *Covenant*, by Steven L. McKenzie (2000), traces the concept on into the Christian Scriptures. *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses*, by Dennis T. Olson (1994), concentrates on the book as moral and spiritual instruction. *Deuteronomy: Issues and Interpretations*, by Alexander Rofé (2001), treats major issues in Deuteronomy interpretation.

# **PART TWO**

## **Prophets**

# Prologue to the Prophets

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Former Prophets](#)

[3 Latter Prophets](#)

[4 The Prophets as a Whole](#)

---

## KEY TERMS

[Apocalyptic prophecy](#)

[Book of the Twelve](#)

[Deuteronomic theme](#)

[Deuteronomistic History \(DH\)](#)

[Form criticism](#)

[Former Prophets](#)

[Hexateuch](#)

[Latter Prophets](#)

[Monarchy](#)

*Navi'*

*Nevi'im*

[Oracles](#)

[Primary History](#)

[Prophecy](#)

[Prophesy](#)

[Prophets](#)

[Tetrateuch](#)

[Theocracy](#)

**Lord Acton (1834–1902), English Historian**

Western liberal democracies evolved systems designed to balance fundamental powers so that no one force would become absolute. Britain developed a parliament that offset the royal house. The U.S. government has three branches—the executive, the legislative, and the judicial—that serve to keep each other in check. After all, those in power are inclined to monopolize power. Lord Acton’s famous dictum “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” often applied to ancient Israel’s kings, with only the biblical prophets attempting to hold them accountable.



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on the 1879 painting by Franz von Lenbach (London: National Portrait Gallery).

---

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Prophecy arose in Israel at the same time as kingship, and it went away when Israel ceased to be an independent state. This is no coincidence. We will see that the prophets interacted extensively with Israel’s kings. Although the prophets may have been quite pious and spiritual, they were not monks or ascetics. They were fully engaged in the state politics of their day. The phenomenon of biblical prophecy cannot be understood apart from the power politics of Israel. Sometimes prophets supported the king and his policies; more

often they criticized the royal administration. The prophets of YHWH were a type of checks-and-balances system. Because they received their commission directly from God, they were not beholden to the king, and they were authorized and even protected by YHWH when they brought a contrary or critical voice to the table.

## 1.1 Prophet Collections

The Prophets collection contains the story of a big conflict and a major clash of cultures. Israel was founded by YHWH's act of delivering his people from slavery and by constituting them as his covenant subjects. At its core Israel was a [theocracy](#)—that is, a *divinely ruled* entity. For a while, during its early national existence, Israel existed as a loose federation of tribes without a king. However, internal and external political pressures led to the emergence of a [monarchy](#) in Israel—that is, *rule by one person*, a human monarch. This automatically placed the king in tension with the Moses–Sinai tradition on which the country was founded. The clash of these two models, theocracy and monarchy, created a dynamic and often violent tension within Israel. The monarchy at times appropriated the Mosaic theocratic tradition for its own ends, and at other times, it created its own traditions using Canaanite components. Prophets often represented the Mosaic tradition over the power of the monarchy, though some prophets did align themselves with the royal program. Politics, kings, and prophets make for a lively and interesting mix.

The account of the monarchy and the documents of prophecy are grouped together in one major collection called the [Prophets](#) (Nevi'im, the *n* of Tanak), and it follows the Torah in serial order. The basic division of the Hebrew Bible into two parts, Torah and Prophets, goes back as early as the Hellenistic Period, as attested by the Prologue to Sirach, a book of the Apocrypha. The phrase “*the*

*law and the prophets*” is common in the New Testament as a way to refer to the Hebrew Bible. New Testament references include Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:17 and 7:12) and Paul in his letter to the Romans 3:21. In one place, Luke has Jesus refer to “*the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms,*” which perhaps reflects the three-part division of Torah, Prophets, and Writings of the Tanak. In the Hebrew Bible, the section called the Prophets includes the narrative historical books Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, as well as the books more traditionally associated with the prophetic office—namely, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve, a collection of shorter prophetic books.

The Prophets collection was further subdivided into two parts ([Table 1](#)). The narrative historical books came to be called the **Former Prophets**, and the books associated with prophetic figures were called the **Latter Prophets**. The distinction between *Former* and *Latter* does not refer to the chronology of the books but simply their placement in the Bible, as indicated below.

The Christian canon differs in notable ways from the Hebrew canon. In the Christian organization of the canon, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are all classified as historical books. Note that Ruth, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are not included in the Former Prophets. The Hebrew Bible’s Latter Prophets are called the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) and Minor Prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) in the Christian tradition. In the Hebrew Bible, Daniel is not one of the prophetic books but is classed with the Writings. That is where we will treat it and under the heading of apocalyptic literature rather than classical prophecy. Also, the Major and Minor Prophets are the last books of the Old Testament, as opposed to the Hebrew Bible, which places the Writings at the end. The Christian canon uses the prophetic books to point ahead and anticipate the Gospel, thus creating a climate of expectation with the

promise-fulfillment scheme that this ordering implies.

**TABLE 1** Former and Latter Prophets

| Former Prophets                                                                                        | Latter Prophets |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Joshua                                                                                                 | Isaiah          |
| Judges                                                                                                 | Jeremiah        |
| 1 and 2 Samuel                                                                                         | Ezekiel         |
| 1 and 2 Kings                                                                                          | The Twelve*     |
| *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. |                 |

Go to the companion website and see the table “Hebrew and Christian Canons.”

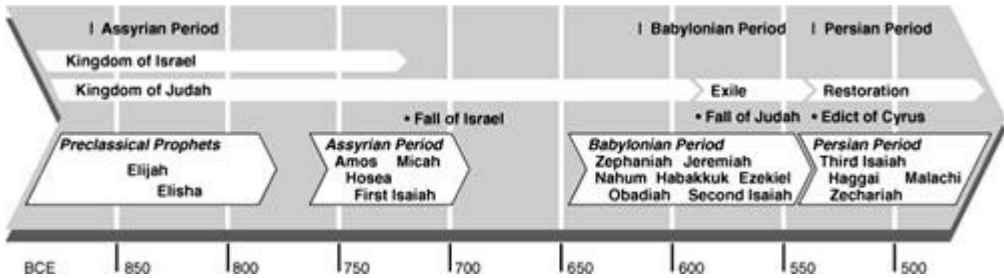
The titles Former Prophets and Latter Prophets may be misleading because they foster the perception that the Latter Prophets are later than the historical books. In fact, the Latter Prophets, for the most part, fit within the history of the books of Kings (see [Figure 1](#)). Part of the challenge of comprehending the prophets collection is integrating the Latter Prophets within the historical framework of the Former Prophets and remembering that the canonical order of the Latter Prophets does not strictly match their historical order.

## 1.2 Reading Guide

Rather than being the mavericks of morality and spirituality that earlier biblical scholars made them out to be, recent theological research has demonstrated that the classical prophets largely affirmed Israel’s historical traditions. In fact, it could be argued that the biblical prophets were conservatives, urging God’s people to stay true to their roots. Prophets often made use of earlier covenantal

principles, and some actually quote earlier sources as the basis for their own statements. All in all, there is a considerable network of interdependence linking prophet to prophet, and prophet to tradition. As you read prophetic literature, connect the message of the prophets to the tradition complexes of biblical literature such as the royal tradition and the Moses–Sinai tradition.

**FIGURE 1** Time Line: The Prophets and Israel's History



The biblical traditions are connected to regional political and ideological differences, so also ask yourself when you read the text, when did this prophet live and work? What were the political and economic conditions at the time when he spoke? Where did he [prophesy](#)? For example, it makes a big difference whether a prophet was from Judah or Israel and whether he comes from a major city or from the countryside. Also ask, what prophetic speech type (genre) did the prophet use to make his preaching effective? Why did he use this genre?

Keep in mind that each of the prophetic books in both the Former and Latter collections has a composition history. In most cases, the book was written many years after the setting of the events referenced in the book. This reality entails the likelihood that the composition setting of the book impacts how the past was remembered. History is always told for reasons beyond that of simply constructing a record of past events. Much scholarly investigation of the prophets attempts to clarify what those reasons may have been. On many fronts then,



biblical prophetic literature presents challenges to the modern reader and requires research.

## 2 FORMER PROPHETS

The events narrated in the books Joshua through Kings tell the story of Israel's statehood. At the beginning, the people are a migrant wilderness group. As told in the book bearing his name, Joshua moves them into Canaan. Judges recounts the difficulty of settling the land and defending it against various enemies. The books of Samuel relate the rise of kingship in Israel, and the books of Kings relate the history of the monarchy, including Israel's division into two kingdoms and the destruction of each by foreign powers. The Torah and Former Prophets are called the [Primary History](#), a comprehensive creation-to-exile account of Israel's story. There is another account of the story, called the Chronicler's History, which we will cover in RTOT Part 3, "The Writings."

We will track two main issues through the Former Prophets. One is the theological perspective of the writers and compilers of this account. By recognizing the outlook governing its composition, we can better understand the intent of the story. The theological perspective of the Former Prophets was largely shaped by the Deuteronomist, which we examined in [Chapter 5](#).

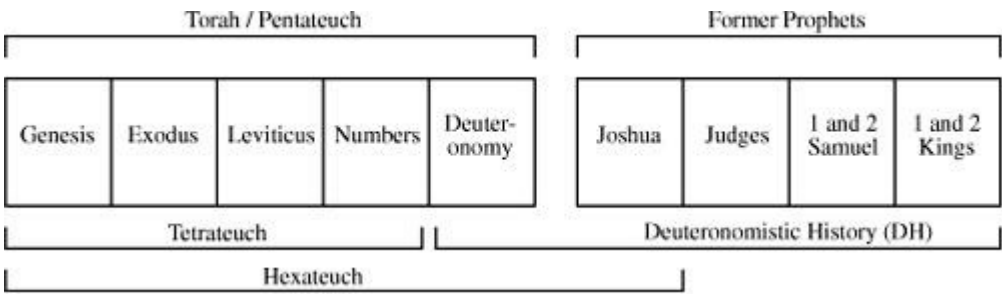
The other issue, not unrelated to the first, is the relationship between this theological literature and the history of events. The Former Prophets may be termed history, but the writers were not creating documentary history. They were believers in YHWH, it was their conviction that YHWH was active in Israel's history, and that is how they told the story. They believed that cause and effect accounted for historical outcomes, but their analysis included divine causality in addition to human power politics and economic factors.

It is significant that the Jewish community included the books

Joshua through Kings in the section titled “The Prophets.” The intent of these narrative records was not just to chronicle historical events but also to bear witness to the work of YHWH in the realm of human affairs. In this sense, they are prophetic. Among other things, prophets were spiritually insightful individuals who could discern God’s presence and work in human affairs, and the writing of history from a transcendent perspective was thus considered a prophetic activity.

**FIGURE 2** Torah–Prophets Collections

The Primary History can be subdivided in a variety of ways. Each implies a different relationship between promise and fulfillment, as well as differently reconstructed composition histories.



**2.1 Deuteronomistic History**

Scholars sometimes refer to the Former Prophets as the [Deuteronomistic History \(DH\)](#) because the books in this collection were shaped by the theological perspective of the Deuteronomist. Deuteronomy is the narrative bridge between the Torah and the Prophets. It does double duty in the sense that it concludes the Torah and also sets the stage for the Prophets (see [Figure 2](#)). As the conclusion of the Torah, it wraps up the early history of Israel and does so by sounding a note of anticipation. Moses had brought the Israelites to the edge of the Promised Land, but he himself died there.

The great promises of land and statehood still awaited fulfillment. The people were not yet in their promised homeland. Concluding the Torah with the book of Deuteronomy creates a climate of expectancy, and the promises were fulfilled, at least almost so, in the book of Joshua.

Some authorities believe that Joshua, the story of capturing Canaan, should be attached to the Pentateuch because it brings the promise of land to fulfillment. This would make the [Hexateuch](#) the major structural unit. Friedman (1998) finds evidence for a literary source that spans the Torah and the Former Prophets, which he calls “the hidden book.” Essentially, it consists of the Yahwist source of the Torah combined with selected texts from Joshua through 1 Kings. Others believe that Deuteronomy was once attached to the Former Prophets. This would have made Genesis through Numbers a more natural collection too, called the [Tetrateuch](#). We have seen that the classical literary sources J, E, and P constitute these books, whereas the book of Deuteronomy stands apart for a number of reasons (see RTOT [Chapter 5](#)). Of course, neither a Tetrateuch nor a Hexateuch emerged within the canonical tradition; instead, the Pentateuch collection won the day.

The standard theory of the Deuteronomistic History says that the writer responsible for compiling this history added Deuteronomy 1:1–4:40 and Chapters 29–34 to an earlier form of Deuteronomy after it came to be used as the preface to the entire Deuteronomistic History. According to this view, the Deuteronomistic History was completed shortly after the latest event mentioned in the book of Kings. That event was the release of Judah’s king Jehoiachin from Babylonian incarceration in 561 BCE.

Much study has focused on the perspective and theme of the Deuteronomistic History. Noth (1943) was the first scholar to develop the theory of a Deuteronomistic History. He argues that the DH was composed to explain why the nation of Israel was destroyed by the Babylonians in the sixth century BCE. The story, he claims,

focuses on the idolatry of Israel's kings and people and explains why YHWH allowed judgment to come upon them. Written to the Judean refugees of the Babylonian exile, the DH justified God and at least provided the assurance to the exiles that what happened happened for a reason.

Von Rad (1962) found a more positive motivation behind the DH. In addition to the theme of judgment, which is most definitely present in the DH, von Rad suggests that grace was also there. Hope for the future was based on the covenant that YHWH had made with the house of David. That hope was still alive in the person of Jehoiachin. Von Rad argues that the release of Jehoiachin from prison, the note on which the book ends, was intended to inspire the exiles.

Wolff (1982) suggests that there is more to the purpose of the DH than justifying God's judgment or providing hope based on the Davidic covenant. He argues that the DH is essentially a call to repentance. It urges the exiles to turn from their disregard of God and change their fundamental disposition. Only in this way would God restore his people to the covenant.

It is unrealistic to try to reduce such a complex work as the DH to one or two overarching themes. What these scholars have done is demonstrate the presence of certain significant themes that interweave the books of the DH. As you read the DH, be alert to the themes of God's judgment on apostasy, God's commitment to the house of David, and God's call to repentance.

The presence of what seem to be multiple themes probably reflects a complex history of composition. The writers of the DH drew from many different sources and blocks of tradition. Within the individual books of the DH there are references to source books such as the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. And the individual books vary in tone, further evidencing development. A comparison of Joshua and Judges, for example, demonstrates how different in character and outlook they are while both still have Deuteronomic characteristics.

Cross (1973) gives one account of the complex editing of the DH. He theorizes that there were two editions of the DH. The first edition was shaped by a Deuteronomistic editor (Dtr1) during the reign of Josiah (640–609 BCE). Its governing themes were the effects of the sin of Jeroboam, who authorized Baal worship in the northern kingdom, and YHWH's commitment to the house of David in the southern kingdom. It was written to be the inspiration for the reform program of Josiah.

The second edition was completed during the exile (around 550 BCE). It consisted of a modest rewriting of the first edition by a second Deuteronomistic editor (Dtr2). It reflects a more sober assessment of the future; it updated the earlier edition by adding the events that followed the reign of Josiah. This more complete telling of the history of Israel and Judah becomes the occasion to enjoin the exiles to live faithfully.

### **FIGURE 3** The Deuteronomic Theme



The precise setting, intent, and composition history of the Deuteronomistic History is still under discussion, but its broad philosophy of history is not. The DH tells us that Israel prospered as a nation when the people, and especially its leadership, adhered to the terms of the covenant that YHWH had made with the people at Mount Sinai. If the nation was faithful, they experienced prosperity. If the nation ran into difficulty, it was because they had neglected the service of its God. The consequences of history are laid out explicitly in the blessings and curses of the Torah, most clearly in

Deuteronomy 27–28. A consistent pattern was seen to work out in history. If the people sinned, God sent punishment. If the people then repented, God sent deliverance. If the people got in trouble, God was always there to help but only if they reaffirmed their covenant commitment. Israel at times experienced God's favor and at other times his wrath. But they were never disowned.

This historical cycle is called the [Deuteronomic theme](#) and can be summarized by the four arcs of the cycle: sin, punishment, repentance, and deliverance (see [Figure 3](#)). This outlook made wonderful sense of the ups and downs of Israel's historical experience. Moreover, it provided a measure of control over the future. How the nation would fare was up to the people and their faithfulness. Although the DH maintains this consistent overall perspective, each of the four books has its own literary unity, historical focus, compositional style, and theological nuance. These will be unpacked as we examine each of the books in turn.

## 2.2 Historiography

The documents of the Hebrew Bible that deal with the rise of Israel and the events of the monarchy are not first of all journalistic in nature. Both the Deuteronomistic History and the Chronicler's History (CH) drew upon historical sources such as court chronicles and lists. But the DH and CH themselves are ideological literature; that is, they bring a certain perspective to bear on the telling. These works may thus tell us a great deal about the spirit of their times and the perspective of the writers in addition to the events of national history. There is a strong tendency in modern studies to view the DH as theological literature as much as historical chronicle. Because the account of Israel's history is so strongly shaped by the lesson that the writers wanted to teach, students of the text are eager to find independent corroboration to aid in reconstructing what really

happened.

Archaeology was of limited utility when we studied the Torah. External historical documentation and archaeological data were circumstantial at best. As we saw, the likes of Noah, Abraham, and Moses have no independent verification, and even the sojourn of the Hebrews in Egypt has nothing to specifically confirm it outside the Bible. This situation changes with the prophetic literature. There is more to work with, and the substantial amount of external evidence available to us in the form of archaeological data and inscriptional documentation has prompted both an appreciation of the biblical text and a reevaluation of the biblical data. This in turn has given rise to new approaches to the history and religion of biblical Israel.

The DH tracks Israel's history from the end of the wilderness wandering (1200s BCE) to the end of the kingdom of Judah (587 BCE), but no external references exist until relatively late in the event stream. The first solid evidence appears during the time of Omri, an Israelite king of the 800s. This does not mean that the biblical story is necessarily inaccurate or that its players did not exist. Reasonable historians are quick to point out that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Still, it is fair to say that the climate in modern biblical studies lends itself to historical skepticism given the arguably ideological nature of the texts and the ambiguous witness of external evidence.

The academic study of the ancient Middle East for the most part has divorced itself from the goal that it had in earlier times, that of reinforcing the accuracy of the biblical text. Today, Palestinian archaeology and textual studies are pursued largely as disciplines independent of a biblical or religious agenda. However, they retain a utility for those in biblical studies because they serve to build a context for Israel's story. Conditions in Palestine from the time of Israel's entry into the land until the end of the biblical period have been rightly illuminated by the social sciences though a great deal of work remains to be done. Archaeology has clarified the patterns of

settlement, the movements of peoples, population densities, and material culture in all its variations. Social anthropology has defined the nature of tribal societies, patterns of nomadism and urbanization, economic and political processes, and the formation and organization of nation-states. Historical and textual analysis of official and popular documents clarify political, economic, and social conditions. These disciplines will continue to indirectly illuminate the biblical story from the outside.

The question of how accurately the biblical text represents historical events, and even if it represents them at all, has become a hot issue in biblical studies. One scholar has even called it “the crisis of history in the study of Jewish origins” (see Shanks, 2000b). Three labels have attached themselves to the main positions though these are broad characterizations. Biblical maximalists would take a position that the biblical text accurately represents history and that at least some of the texts were written contemporaneously with the events. The classic hard form of this is represented, for example, by Bright’s *History of Israel* (1959), and it is also associated with the names W. F. Albright and G. E. Wright (we might call it the “right” school of Israelite history). Biblical minimalists, associated with scholars such as T. L. Thompson and N. P. Lemche, take a revisionist approach and argue that there was no “early Israel” at all, and no Israelite state before the ninth century BCE. With a radically late dating, they claim that the text as we have it was written in the Hellenistic period. Centrists such as I. Finkelstein and W. Dever take a mediating position, holding that there was perhaps some entity called Israel, but it was nothing like the homogenous ethnic community portrayed in the biblical text.

## **2.3 Israelite Religion**

Israelite religion developed specifically within the context of



Canaanite culture and was strongly influenced by Canaanite religious beliefs and practices. The high deities of Canaanite religion were El, Baal, and Asherah. El was the chief deity who had receded into the background by the Late Bronze and Iron Ages. Baal was the god responsible for agricultural productivity, and Asherah, his female counterpart, also had fertility influence. The most detailed descriptive material comes from ancient Ugarit and dates to the Late Bronze Age, fairly close geographically and temporally to early Israel (see Smith and Parker, 1997; Schneidewind and Hunt, 2007).

Canaanite religion is portrayed as the antithesis of Israelite faith. The Hebrew Bible is unanimously opposed to the polytheistic fertility practices of Canaan and favors the exclusive worship of YHWH. This, at least, is the official position strongly argued in prophetic literature. There are hints both in external evidence and within the Hebrew Bible itself that popular religion was actually a fluid blending of elements from Yahwism and Baalism.

Yet even official Yahwism, as expressed in prophetic literature and in the Psalms, appropriated elements of Canaanite religion. YHWH is described using the same phrases that were applied to Baal. YHWH was argued to be the one responsible for the rains and fruitfulness, not Baal. And the motif of divine conflict between Baal and the sea is expressed in a variety of subtle ways in biblical literature (demythologized when God creates the firmament in Genesis 1; historicized as YHWH versus hostile nations in Isaiah 51:9–11; and eschatologized as the son of man versus the beasts of the sea in Daniel 7).

A Hebrew inscription from Khirbet el-Kom (700s BCE Judah) reads “*Blessed be Uryahu by YHWH and by his asherah*” and ones from Kuntillet Ajrud (early 700s BCE Israel) say “*I bless you by YHWH of Samaria and by his asherah*” and “*I bless you by YHWH of Teiman and by his asherah*” (see Dever, 2005). Evidently, family and popular religion blended Israelite and Canaanite religion to a degree that appalled and provoked the biblical prophets. The

disciplined study of Israelite religion from a sociological and cultural perspective contributes to a fuller picture of the conditions in which Israel's prophets found themselves as advocates of Yahwism.

### 3 LATTER PROPHETS

The subdivision called the Latter Prophets deals with certain individuals in Israel who had a recognized social and spiritual role within Israel and who articulated a divine perspective on the events of their day. The Latter Prophets consists of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the [Book of the Twelve](#). The Book of the Twelve consists of twelve shorter works, Hosea through Malachi, which some call the Minor Prophets. The historical period of the Latter Prophets begins with the divided Israelite monarchy and continues into the postexilic era. Even though these books follow the Former Prophets' account of Israelite history, most of the material must be fitted chronologically within that history.

#### 3.1 The Nature of Prophecy

But what is *biblical* prophecy? Our present cultural context might mislead us more than help us answer this question. For example, notice what meaning is listed first in this dictionary entry:

[prophecy](#) (prof'i se"), n. pl. -cies. 1. The foretelling or prediction of what is to come. 2. That which is declared by a prophet, esp. divinely inspired prediction, instruction, or exhortation. 3. A divinely inspired utterance or revelation: oracular prophecies. 4. The action, function, or faculty of a prophet. (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)

This dictionary definition encapsulates the modern notion of

prophecy, but it does not accurately convey the nature of biblical prophecy. The immediate association that we tend to make with the words *prophecy* and *prophet* in the modern world is predicting the future. Although we do not have as many people who go by the name of prophet as in the era of Israelite history, we do have plenty of people, some more reputable than others, who traffic in the future: economists, meteorologists, marketing consultants, futures traders, and astrologers, to name a few. Only a small number of prediction peddlers, so-called psychics, baldly attempt to foresee specific events—the Cassandras and Nostradamuses of old and the spiritualists and television preachers of today.

The answer to the question “What is prophecy?” must be sought in the literature and culture of ancient Israel. Predicting the future was not the primary component of the prophetic task in the Israelite world. The basic function of biblical prophecy was to analyze political policies and social conditions in light of YHWH’s demands of justice, loyalty, and faith in him. The prophet was most concerned that these moral and religious principles govern the corporate and personal lives of God’s people. The closest analogies in our modern world to the biblical prophets of old might be leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mohandas Gandhi, who each had a keen sense of the divine requirements for social justice, freedom, and human dignity.

Biblical prophets occasionally made predictions about the future course of events, but they never did it to demonstrate how insightful or divinely inspired they were. Their predictions were basically extrapolations from the present state of affairs into the future, based on their knowledge of what God demanded. If the people would not change their errant ways, then the future would hold nothing but trouble for them. If they repented, then the grim scenario would be averted. Only in apocalyptic literature does future prediction take on a life of its own. Although this literature has roots in classical prophecy, it eventually evolved into a distinct literary type.

The prophetic books are not autobiographies though some books contain narratives of what happened to prophets, sometimes even in the first person. For the most part, they are collections of what prophets said. Most books were not finally written or edited by the named prophet. Many times, “schools” or prophetic interest groups that traced their outlook to a particular prophetic leader continued on after the death of the prophet and found their inspiration in the prophet. Many times, these schools or groups were responsible for taking the message of the prophet and reapplying it to later circumstances. Frequently, this will be reflected in the text itself.

Every one of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible shows signs of having been compiled and edited over a period of time. Although this oversimplifies the process a bit, we can say that the core of each book goes back to the [oracles](#) and pronouncements of the named prophet. These oracles were then written down and organized into books. Some books reworked the original prophetic core more extensively than others. But each book is the result of a composing and editing process that sometimes took centuries to complete. The final shape of prophetic books bears witness to how the words of the Hebrew prophets were heard by later communities and how original prophetic pronouncements gave direction to later people.

We can reconstruct a viable historical context for almost every prophet. We know when he lived, where he lived, and to whom he prophesied (see [Figure 4](#)). The same cannot be said of the editorial history of the prophetic books. These books were not necessarily finalized during the prophets’ lifetimes, so it is important to distinguish the human prophets from the prophetic books attached to their names.

We do not mean to scare anyone, but to be honest, reading biblical prophecy is difficult. The difficulty stems from many features of these books, including the largely poetic form in which they were written and the need to know the historical settings of prophetic statements, most of which are not clearly identified in the Bible itself. The

reward comes when we appreciate prophecy's wonderfully imaginative style of expression and the quality of its moral discernment.

## 3.2 Forms of Prophetic Speech

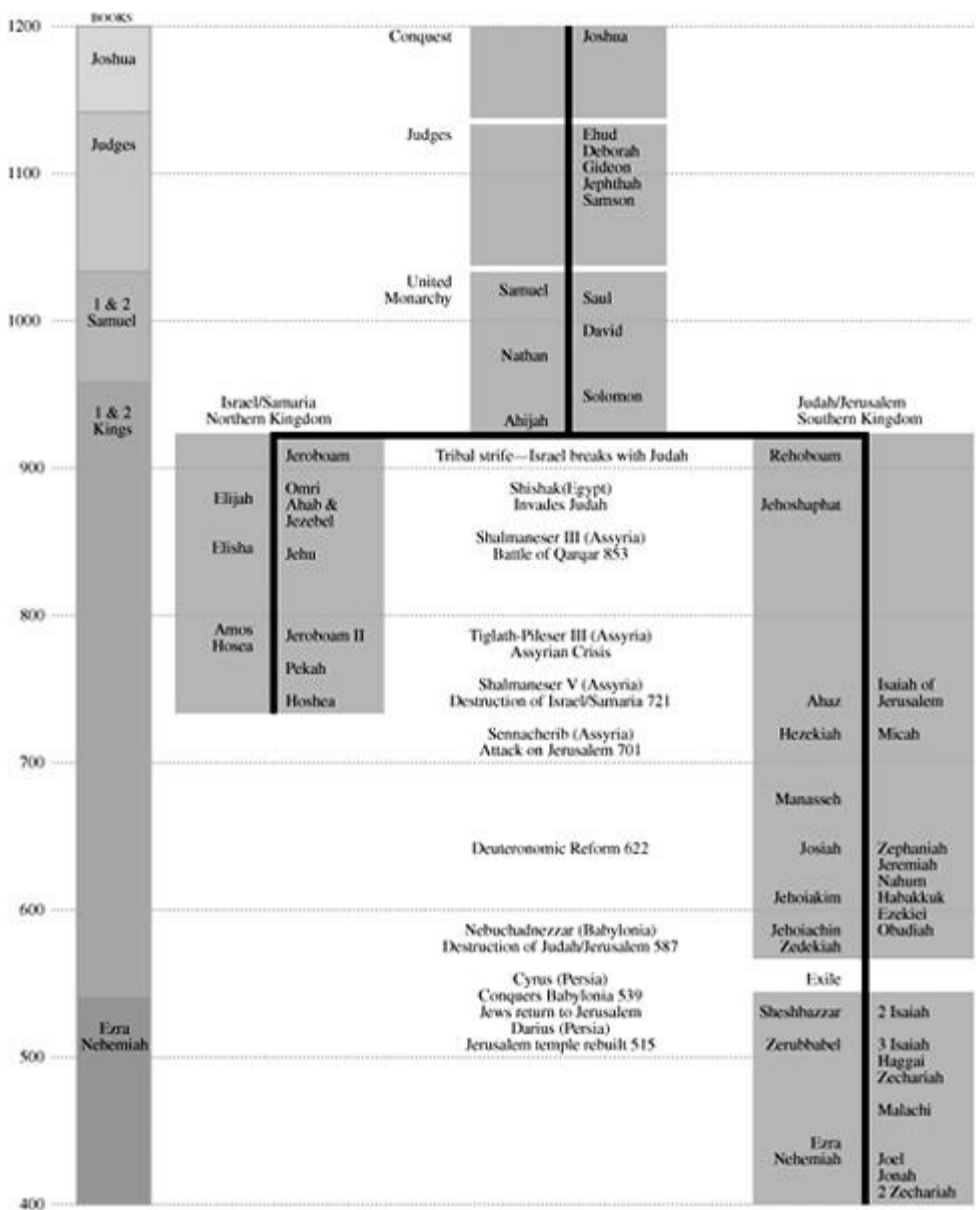
A prophet was called a *navi'* in the Hebrew Bible. The linguistic derivation of the term suggests that it could be related to the Semitic verb *to call*. A prophet is then either "one who calls out" or "one who is called." The first possibility, the active meaning, is analogous to the meaning of its Greek translation equivalent *prophetes*, "to speak before," from which our English term *prophet* was derived. The second possibility, the passive meaning, may be related to the initiation call to prophetic service. In this sense, a prophet is one called by God to deliver a message. The following evidence suggests that both the active and the passive have validity.

A branch of biblical scholarship called [form criticism](#) examines the language of the Hebrew Bible in an attempt to discover the original real-life type of situation for a way of speaking. The application of form criticism to prophetic literature has been especially productive. Form critics have studied the phrase, "Thus says YHWH," which is widely used in many prophetic books. It prefaces a vast number of prophetic oracles, or divine statements communicated by the prophet. It is so frequent that it has been used to characterize the essential nature of the prophet's sense of identity and even of the prophetic office generally speaking. In an important study, Westermann (1967) demonstrated that the background of this phrase is the procedure of sending messages long distance in the ancient world. Typically, when a king wished to communicate with a distant client, he would employ a messenger to commit the message to memory. After traveling to his destination, the messenger would recite the message as if he were the king himself speaking in the first

person (“I”), prefacing his recitation with the phrase, “Thus says the king.”

That Israel’s prophets used the formula “Thus says YHWH” suggests that they considered themselves divine messengers, having received the message directly from their Great King. This reconstruction of the prophet’s sense of mission is supported by various prophets’ descriptions of their calling to the prophetic task. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel each describe their experience of being in the presence of God where each felt that he was commissioned. Each received a message firsthand from YHWH. Each was then sent to the people of God to deliver that message.

## **FIGURE 4** Prophets and Kings



The prophets typically exhibited a strong sense of vocation in connection with their calling. The prophet is one who has been called (passive) and commissioned in the divine council. Then he was sent to call out (active) the message of the divine king. Often the prophets were reluctant to follow their calling because they knew how difficult the task would be, but they inevitably accepted the challenge

in faith.

The literature of the prophets contains a variety of types of speaking, including third-person narratives about the prophets; autobiographical sketches by the prophets themselves; poetically framed statements of salvation, laments, trust songs, praise songs, covenant lawsuits; and more. As we come across distinctive genres, we will explain them. Form criticism has been especially effective in investigating the forms of prophetic speech and reconstructing early social settings out of which those ways of speaking make the most sense. The works of Westermann (1967, 1991) are pioneering and especially valuable in this regard. Also, the series published by Eerdmans entitled *The Forms of the Old Testament Literature* has volumes covering the prophetic books.

### **3.3 Social Location of Prophecy**

Prophets did not operate in a social vacuum but were shaped by their sociohistorical situation. Each spoke out of his particular background, whether urban or agricultural, priestly or lay, wealthy or of moderate means. Each tended to be shaped by his region's theological and political traditions, whether northern or southern, Israelite or Judean. Readers of biblical prophecy must keep all of these factors and issues in mind to understand prophetic literature properly.

Much of the activity of the prophets pertained to politics, both domestic and international. Biblical and extrabiblical documents have enabled scholarship to reconstruct the national and international settings that equip us to make sense out of the prophetic books. Anthropological analysis of prophecy has added insight by placing the prophets within the social and class matrices of ancient Israel (see Wilson, 1980, and Blenkinsopp, 1983).

Various forms of prophetic activity are attested in the ancient



Middle East, some of them analogous to features of biblical prophecy. The royal archives of Mari are an especially rich source (see ANET, 623–632). These texts from northwestern Mesopotamia of the eighteenth century BCE make reference to ecstatic oracles induced by trances, divination, omen reading, and divine messenger speeches. Even closer to Israel geographically is the inscription of Zakir of Hamath, ninth century BCE, who prayed to Baal Shamen and was answered through seers (see ANET, 655–656), the same term that applied to Israel’s prophets in 1 Samuel 9:9.

## **4 THE PROPHETS AS A WHOLE**

The Former Prophets are distinct from the Latter Prophets in many obvious ways. They are different subcollections, and each individual book within each subcollection has its own composition history. Yet there are notable points of commonality. The history of the monarchy as told in the DH has a unity of theological expression and purpose that can also be identified in certain of the Latter Prophets. Although the character of the so-called Deuteronomistic school is still being worked out by scholars, the telltale signs of its editorial work can be found in much of the prophetic literature. Its theological perspective became a major filter for the telling of history and for the shape of theology. Jeremiah especially is imbued with a Deuteronomistic outlook and may have been edited by someone from the school of Deuteronomy.

Other prophets fall in more closely with the other Pentateuchal traditions. The Yahwist source aligns with the house of David and Zion traditions. The Elohist tradition has affinities with the Elijah and Elisha prophetic stories and the book of Hosea. The Priestly source is very close to the vision of a renewed worship center in Ezekiel. It can be productive to think of Israel’s narrative traditions of the Torah in relation to the Prophets, rather than as opposed.

Many of the themes of the Latter Prophets are controlling themes in the theological telling of Israel's history in the Former Prophets, and many of these themes have roots in the Pentateuchal traditions.

1. *God in history.* The prophets believed implicitly that God controlled history, that he had chosen Israel as his people, formed an enduring relationship with them, and intended them to be his holy people forever. Because of this, everything that happened to Israel in history was a reflex of their relationship to God. If the people were faithful to YHWH, they enjoyed freedom and prosperity. If they were unfaithful, God brought disaster on them to stir them to repentance. The Former Prophets demonstrate these biblical principles in the history of the monarchy. The Latter Prophets contain calls to repentance for averting or overcoming disaster. After disaster occurred, the prophets brought words of hope, knowing that God would never allow his people to disappear.

2. *Covenant traditions.* The message of the prophets was rooted in Israel's covenant traditions. The covenants of Moses and David were especially influential. These traditions defined Israel's relationship to God. On the basis of the requirements laid out in these traditions, the prophets called the people back to faith. Prophets sometimes recalled Israel's covenantal roots to reaffirm the truth of God and to ground God's faithfulness. At other times, they recalled those traditions to demonstrate how God was going to do something new and even more wonderful than what he had done in the past. In any case, the prophets carry on their ministry against the background of God's covenantal relationship with Israel. Reading prophetic literature in terms of its intertextual relationships with the Torah, where the record of those covenant traditions are found, can be very exciting.

3. *Faith and worship.* The prophets tried to shape the faith of the people so that they would think and act rightly. Sometimes prophets were in conflict with institutional religion, yet they never categorically condemned religious ritual practices or formal

worship. They opposed cult only when it promoted religious self-satisfaction, complacency, and social injustice. In fact, some prophets were also priests, and all true prophets were informed by the best principles of Israel's priestly tradition, including the reality of sin, and the need for sacrifice, purification, and holiness.

4. *Prophetic calling.* Many prophets conveyed their understanding of the nature of prophetic calling and the task of prophecy in call narratives: Isaiah 6, 40; Jeremiah 1; Ezekiel 1–3; Amos 7. These narratives convey the personal conviction that motivated Israel's true prophets. They believed that God revealed his word to them and that God spoke through them. This gave them their moral authority and sense of independence from the institutions that sought to co-opt or coerce them. Furthermore, they believed that the word of God was not just divine information but had the power to drive and determine history. It also had the power to change personal lives and the lives of nations.

5. *The future.* Prophecy as a practice is almost intuitively associated with the future. Although this view is distorted because prophecy is not essentially prediction, there is still a significant component of prophetic literature that is future oriented. Arguably the DH's prophetic interpretation of Israel's history was an explanation of national failure told in order to prevent a repeat of the same in the future. In its final edition, the DH sought to inspire hope of a return to the Promised Land. Often when individual prophets addressed the future in their oracles, they presented a preview of what Israel might expect from the hand of God if they refused to reform. Still the goal was repentance, and the future was malleable according to how the people responded. Prophecy became obsessively concerned with the future as it moved toward its late literary expression called [apocalyptic prophecy](#). This form schematized history into bad and good eras, became mechanistic and deterministic, and saw the future as discontinuous with the present world of experience (see RTOT [Chapter 16](#)).

# KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Prophets*. What are the two basic divisions of prophetic literature, and which books are in each?
2. *Deuteronomistic History*. Why are the Former Prophets called the Deuteronomistic History in modern scholarship?
3. *Nature of prophecy*. What is the basic nature of biblical prophecy, and why do some people prefer to view prophecy as preaching, or forthtelling, rather than as predicting, or foretelling?
4. *Covenant*. What are some of the central themes of prophetic literature that connect it to Pentateuchal themes?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Prophetic genre*. What difference does it make if we approach the Former Prophets primarily as literature or as history? What are the arguments for viewing it as literature? What are the problems in viewing it primarily as historiography?
2. *Torah and Prophets*. How are the traditions of the Torah reflected in the Prophets? What general thematic connections between Torah and Prophets can be identified?

# READING THE TEXT TODAY

*Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History: Origins, Upgrades, Present Text*, by Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien (2000), contains the entire text of the DH in a convenient format. *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, by Patrick D. Miller (2000), is an introduction to Israel's religious beliefs and practices. *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in*

*Ancient Israel*, by Mark S. Smith (2004), investigates the emergence of Israel's god-concept.

The debate over the history of Israel and the degree to which the biblical text accurately reflects it continues to engage archaeologists, historians, and text analysts. *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel*, by William G. Dever (2001), is an analysis of the revisionist school and an examination of the biblical historicity question by a leading American archaeologist.

Students of the Bible, archaeology, and history will be interested in the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, which appears every two months, and *Near Eastern Archaeology*, which appears four times a year. Both are journals of the ancient biblical world containing articles written by leading specialists in the field.

Interpreting biblical prophecy, especially of the apocalyptic variety, opens up a hornet's nest of interpretive claims and counterclaims. It also operates with a bewildering array of jargon, such as *rapture*, *Armageddon*, *dispensationalism*, and *millennialism*. How can we sort out what is credible and what is not, what is fringe and what is mainstream? It is not easy, but the following books provide good places to expand your understanding of the prophets: *Prophetic Literature: An Introduction*, by David L. Petersen (2002); *Prophetic Literature*, by Marvin A. Sweeney (2006); and *The Apocalyptic Literature*, by Stephen L. Cook (2003).

# CHAPTER SIX

## Joshua: The Conquest of Canaan

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Campaigns of Conquest \(1–12\)](#)

[3 Tribal Territories \(13–21\)](#)

[4 Covenant Considerations \(22–24\)](#)

[5 Joshua as a Book](#)

---

### KEY TERMS

[Achan](#)

[Ai](#)

[Ark of the covenant](#)

[Cities of refuge](#)

[Conquest](#)

[Divine warrior](#)

[Etiology](#)

[Gibeon](#)

[Gilgal](#)

[Habiru](#)

[Hazor](#)

[Holy war](#)

[Jericho](#)

[Joshua](#)

[Lots](#)

[Rahab](#)

[Shechem](#)

According to the Bible, Canaanites were the inhabitants of Palestine at the time the Israelites, led by Joshua, entered the Promised Land.

Modern historians ask whether Israelites were Hebrews from the Exodus that left Egypt or were they really themselves Canaanites.



Source: P. E. Newberry, *Beni Hasan*, Vol. I (London, 1893), plate XLVII.

---

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Palestine has been the object of conquest for thousands of years. As the land bridge linking the African and Asian continents, it was highly desirable for military and economic reasons. Past conquerors include the Egyptians, Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, and the Turks. Jews living in Palestine asserted their independence from the British in 1948 and founded the modern state of Israel.

The book of Joshua is the story of how the Israelites entered the land of Canaan to create a homeland. Under the leadership of Joshua, the descendants of Jacob, now called the Israelites, entered Canaan and began to settle there. The book of Joshua picks up the story where Deuteronomy left off—the death of Moses. It exhibits both historical and thematic continuity with the Torah. One of the central themes of the Pentateuch was the promise of land, and the book of Joshua details the actualization of this promise.

The book of Joshua consists of three major sections. [Chapters 1–12](#) contain stories of military confrontations with Canaanites, resulting in victory for the Israelites. [Chapters 13–21](#) delineate Canaanite territories that were distributed among the twelve tribes of Israel. Chapters 22–24 wrap up the book with Joshua bidding

farewell to the Israelites.

## 1.1 Conquest of Canaan: A Summary

The book of Joshua begins by citing the death of Moses. God spoke to [Joshua](#), Moses's successor, and encouraged him to lead Israel into the land of Canaan (Joshua [Chapter 1](#)). Joshua sent two spies to Jericho to provide intelligence before the battle. There they met Rahab, a Canaanite who assisted them (2). The Israelites crossed the Jordan River and went to Gilgal where all the men were circumcised (3–5). They attacked Jericho and were victorious (6). But Achan stole some property in the process, so the Israelites lost the battle of Ai the first time; they succeeded the second (7–8). The Gibeonites became allies, but Israel attacked other cities, including Hazor (9–12). Although many territories were not taken (13), Joshua divided the conquered areas among the tribes (14–19) and designated cities of refuge (20). The Levites were given towns but no tribal lands (21). The tribes settled in their territories (22), and Joshua gathered the people to Shechem for his final address and for covenant renewal (23–24).

## 1.2 Reading Guide

Read the first eleven chapters. This is the main narrative portion of the book that consists of the episodes of [conquest](#). In these chapters, the Israelites rapidly take control of Palestine after only a few military campaigns. They were united under Joshua's leadership and were devoted to the covenant. Consider how this portrayal of the process fits the agenda of the Deuteronomistic historian. Then ask yourself how the total pacification of Palestine by violent conquest fits within this picture. Does the Bible really condone such violence? Does the narrative actually depict it as total? Lastly, read Chapters



23–24, which describe the end of Joshua’s life and the covenant-renewal occasion that it prompts. How does this fit Deuteronomic theology?

## 2 CAMPAIGNS OF CONQUEST (1–12)

A straightforward reading of the book of Joshua suggests that all the Israelite tribes were united in one mighty fighting force that was led by Joshua and they stormed into Canaan and settled there. But be alert to hints that it may not have been quite so simple; a close reading of the books of Joshua and Judges suggests that the settlement was a long and complex process.

### 2.1 Joshua’s Commission

After Moses died on Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 34), YHWH designated Joshua to take over as leader of the Israelites. Besides maintaining a connection with Deuteronomy by its references to Moses, see how the introduction to the book of Joshua in [Chapter 1](#) stresses the qualities of leadership Joshua must possess to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land:

*After YHWH’s servant Moses died, YHWH spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’s assistant, “My servant Moses is dead. Get up now and cross over the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land I am giving to them, the Israelites. I have granted every place on which the soles of all your feet tread, just as I told Moses I would do. These will be your boundaries: from the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the Euphrates—the land of the Hittites all the way to the Great Sea in the west. No one will be able to resist you*

*as long as you are alive. Just as I was with Moses, I will be with you. I will not fail you. I will not abandon you. Be strong and courageous, for you will enable this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers I would give them. Just be very strong and courageous. Make sure you do all the Torah which my servant Moses commanded you. Do not veer from it right or left. In that way you will succeed wherever you go. Do not let this book of the Torah be missing from your mouth. Recite it day and night, so you are sure to do what is written in it. Then your way will prosper and you will succeed. Have I not commanded you?—Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified or frightened. YHWH your Elohim will be with you wherever you go.” (1:1–9)*

This passage contains YHWH’s speech commissioning Joshua as the new leader of his people. YHWH does three things here: he encourages Joshua, he defines his responsibilities, and he assures him of God’s continued presence. The vocabulary and sermonic style of this passage clearly mark it as Deuteronomistic. Many of the same phrases are found, for example, in Deuteronomy 31:1–8 where Joshua received his first commissioning—phrases such as “*Be strong and courageous*” and “*Do not be terrified or frightened.*” Note also the following features of this passage.

Moses is repeatedly called “YHWH’s servant.” This is a title of honor and reflects that Moses was dedicated to God’s service. The title “Servant of YHWH” is a favorite Deuteronomistic description of holy men and was applied primarily to kings and prophets in Deuteronomistic literature. Nelson (1981) observes the royal quality of the language here and the close relationship between Joshua and Josiah of Judah, who was king in the later 600s. The “*book of the Torah*” of Moses, which was to be Joshua’s leadership manual, recalls the book by the same name discovered in the temple during Josiah’s reign (see 2 Kings 22:8, 11). Recall that most scholars hold

the view that this book is Deuteronomy. These correspondences lead some scholars to suggest that Joshua is intentionally presented as the precursor and model of Josiah: Both sought to establish the state of Israel in Canaan (see Finkelstein and Silberman, 2001).

The death of Moses signaled the start of the occupation of Canaan. Moses was not allowed to enter the land himself because he disobeyed God at Kadesh (see Numbers 20:1–13 and Deuteronomy 32:48–52). Moses’s death marks a major transition in Israel’s history.

Notice the geographical markers in the text. The Jordan River is the eastern boundary of Canaan. The land lying to the east of the Jordan was called Transjordan by the Israelites. Such a term obviously presupposes a position within Canaan for that land to be called the “*across the Jordan*” land. Still, certain Israelite tribes did claim territory in Transjordan at various times, including Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. The reference to “*the wilderness*” is ambiguous. It could mean the eastern Arabian Desert or the Sinai/Negev to the south.

The boundaries of the Promised Land laid out here define the northern and western borders in an expansive way. The territory promised to the Israelites extended as far north as the Euphrates River. The Abrahamic covenant (see Genesis 15:18) and the Mosaic covenant (see Deuteronomy 1:7) also extended the Promised Land to the Euphrates River. Not coincidentally, the boundaries specified here in Joshua appear to align with the territorial extension of the Davidic kingdom; see 2 Samuel 8:3, which extends David’s reach far into Syria, if not all the way to the Euphrates River. The point is that the eventual Davidic kingdom was viewed as a fulfillment of God’s design going back to Joshua, Moses, and Abraham. [Chapter 1](#) ends with Joshua instructing his helpers to prepare the people to cross the Jordan River. They accepted his leadership and obeyed him, thereby demonstrating the effectiveness of his authority.

## 2.2 First Campaign: Jericho and Ai

In preparation for the invasion, Joshua sent two men across the Jordan River to infiltrate [Jericho](#) and discover its weaknesses. The spies found an accomplice in [Rahab](#), a Jericho prostitute. She hid them from the king of the city-state of Jericho and in return extracted a pledge of protection from them: When they attacked Jericho, she and her family would be spared.

Before the spies left, Rahab uttered an amazing profession of faith (2:8–13). She, a Canaanite, expressed her belief that YHWH had providentially given the land of Canaan to the Israelites. The spies brought back an encouraging report, no doubt intentionally in contrast to the report of the ten cynical spies in the wilderness (see Numbers 13–14). Israel was ready to attack.

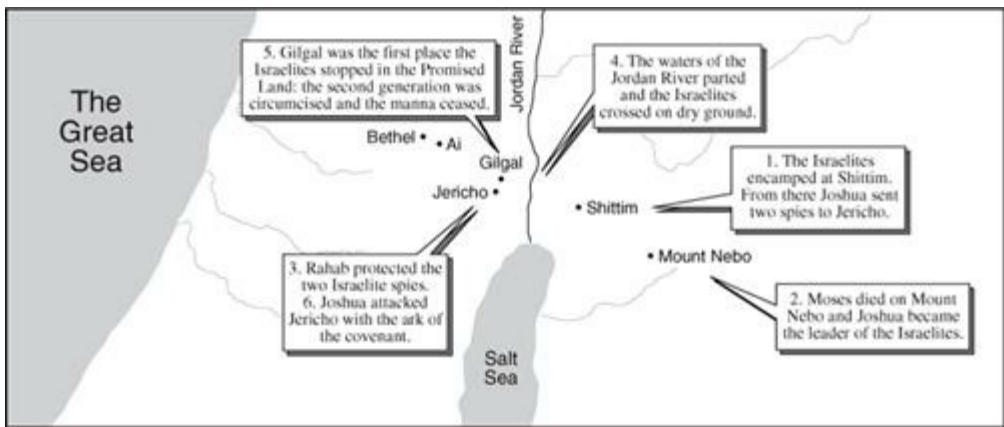
The priests picked up the ark and left Shittim, heading for the Jordan River. When their feet touched the waters of the Jordan, it stopped flowing, and the people crossed over on dry ground. This miracle of the crossing parallels the miracle of crossing the Reed Sea (see Exodus 14), and by association with Moses and this miracle, Joshua's leadership is again validated. Furthermore, these two crossings bracket the early history of the Hebrews: YHWH delivered them from oppression crossing the Reed Sea on dry ground, and he brought them into the Promised Land crossing the Jordan River on dry ground.

Once the entire group had crossed over, a representative from each tribe picked up a stone from the river bottom and carried it to [Gilgal](#) (see [Figure 6.1](#)). Together they erected a twelve-stone monument to the crossing. One of the historical–theological motifs of the book of Joshua is remembering. The events to be remembered include this miraculous crossing that YHWH engineered, the victory over Jericho, and especially the making of the covenant. As you read the book of Joshua, note how the Israelites were to remember the work

of YHWH and how each event was marked with a physical memorial, usually a heap of stones in some distinctive formation. This twelve-stone monument is just the first of many such monuments.

Also at Gilgal, Joshua had all the male Israelites circumcised. The core of this circumcision story appears to be an [etiology](#)—that is, a story explaining a phenomenon well known to the writer and his original readers. In this case, the pile of foreskins left over after the mass circumcision (notice that this is another “heap”—hence a memorial) was used to explain the place name Gibeath-ha’araloth (5:3), a place presumably in the vicinity of the crossing. The name literally means “Hill of Foreskins.” This etiological tale was then taken up by the writer and incorporated into the narrative to make a significant point about the spiritual disposition of the Israelites. Those who were circumcised were of course the second generation of Israelites since the departure from Egypt. That they were uncircumcised implies that the first generation had been unfaithful in yet another way. They had failed to perpetuate the essential sign of the covenant (see Genesis 17). The Deuteronomistic historian used this story of circumcision as the occasion to condemn the generation that left Egypt because they had not listened to the voice of Yahweh. However, if other people had joined the Hebrews along the way, as some revisionist historians argue, this may have been the initiation rite that bound them to the Hebrews.

## **FIGURE 6.1** Israel Entering Palestine



Gilgal, the first stopping place in the Promised Land, had additional significance. There the Israelites kept the Passover celebration for the first time since its founding in Egypt on the night of the Exodus. This was supposed to be a yearly celebration, yet it was the first time it had been observed since leaving Egypt. The text again suggests that the second generation was faithful whereas the first had not been.

Finally, with an unmistakable sign, YHWH signaled that the Israelites had finally arrived in the land of promise: The manna that had sustained them for forty years in the wilderness ceased. Why? They no longer needed miraculous feeding because the produce of the “land flowing with milk and honey” would amply provide for them.

### 2.2.1 Commander of YHWH’s Army

In a curious encounter between Joshua and a supernatural being prior to the battle for Jericho, Joshua’s understanding of YHWH’s role in the conquest became clear:

*When Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and was surprised to see a man standing right in front of him. His sword was unsheathed in his hand. Joshua walked up to him*

*and said to him, "Are you on our side or are you against us?" He said to him, "Neither. I am the commander of the army of YHWH. Now I have come." Joshua fell face down on the ground and did obeisance. He said to him, "What does my Lord have to say to your servant?" The commander of YHWH's army said, "Take off your sandal from your foot, for the place on which you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. (5:13–15)*

On first meeting this "man," Joshua thought he was just another soldier. He innocently asked him if he would be joining the Israelite cause, or was he on the Canaanite side? When his identity as a representative of YHWH became clear, Joshua immediately humbled himself by falling face down to the ground. This "commander" is probably to be identified with the "*angel of YHWH*," who appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, most notably in the ancestors' encounters with God (Genesis 16:7–10; 22:11, 15; 24:40) and to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:2). As commander he was in charge of leading the conquest of the army of YHWH, elsewhere called "*the host of heaven*."

The meaning of this story is elusive and questions remain because the account is so sketchy. One possible interpretation is that this encounter would teach Joshua who was fighting for whom. This meeting clarified that YHWH does not fight for Joshua, as if YHWH was at Joshua's command. YHWH's army retains its independence, with Joshua fighting for YHWH. Perhaps the writer is issuing a caution to all Israel's kings that they should remember they are not in charge—YHWH is—and that the army is at divine command, not theirs.

The directive to take off his sandals is similar to that in Moses's encounter with God at the burning bush (Exodus 3). This experience of Joshua parallels that of Moses and further reinforces the legitimate succession of Joshua, as well as the need for him to accept his

servant status and honor the holiness of YHWH. The statement that “this is holy ground” originally marked the site of this encounter as a holy place. Used now within the context of the Israelite movement into Canaan, it confirms that this was the “holy land,” implying that YHWH dwells here.

Cryptic though this story is, it is of signal importance, much as the other events at Gilgal were. Such a meeting with God’s representative, a theophany, indicates that YHWH is now present and accessible in the Promised Land. The fight for the holy land can now begin. The first battle is over Jericho.

## 2.2.2 Jericho’s Walls Fall Down

The story of the famous fight against Jericho does not detail the military side of things. It does not describe the armor of the Israelites or any siege devices. Rather, the account describes the battle as a sacred event. Notice the centrality of the [ark of the covenant](#), the sacred storage box for the covenant documents, which doubles as God’s throne and marks the location of his presence.

*Jericho was closed and inaccessible because of the Israelites. No one came out and no one went in. YHWH said to Joshua, “See, I have given you control of Jericho, including its king and soldiers. Have all the men of the camp walk around the city. Circle the city one time. Do this for six days. Seven priests will carry seven ram’s horn trumpets before the ark. On the seventh day you will circle the city seven times, and the priests will blow the trumpets. When the ram’s horn sounds, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, let the people shout loudly. Then the wall of the city will fall down, and each person can go straight in.” (6:1–5)*



Notice the repeated use of the number seven. This stamps the event as priestly and holy. The number seven is associated with the divinely ordained structure of the week. Remember the priestly account of Creation (Genesis 1:1–2:4a). The seventh day, the day the walls fell, would naturally be considered the Sabbath, although this is not stated in so many words. The fall of the city, taking place on the seventh day, Israel’s holy day, marks the victory as the work of YHWH. Remember that this story may have taken its final shape in the exilic community for whom circumcision and the Sabbath were central to their sense of identity.

### 2.2.3 Divinely Sanctioned Violence

The army followed YHWH’s instructions and the city walls collapsed. Entering the city was now possible through breaches in the fortifications, so each soldier went straight in:

*They devoted to destruction by the sword the entire city: man and woman, young and old, cow and sheep. (6:21)*

The phrase “*devoted to destruction*,” sometimes called “the ban,” refers to the divine injunction to destroy the entire population of a city along with all its material goods. This injunction has often been referred to as [holy war](#) though the phrase is never used in the Bible. This approach to conquest views YHWH as the [divine warrior](#) who alone fights the battle and achieves the victory, therefore to him alone belong the spoils. By killing and then burning the entire city, everything was given over to the deity. In principle, the Israelites were not allowed to benefit personally or materially from the victory.

The instruction to totally eliminate the Canaanite enemy was commanded to effect a complete separation between the incoming Israelites and the indigenous Canaanites. As the account of the book

of Joshua goes on to describe, this instruction was not carried out to the letter. The result was that many Canaanites remained in the land, and the eventual spiritual problems of the Israelites were traced to this shortcoming: The Canaanites lured the Israelites into following after foreign gods.

The notion of divinely commanded violence continues to be a problem to many of those who hold the Hebrew Bible dear. For many modern readers, it is a scandal that Israel's God should have mandated the complete destruction of a human population. Can the same rationale be used in the postbiblical age to justify war against "heathens and infidels" as happened during the Crusades and at other times? How should we deal with the warfare ideology of the book of Joshua?

There is no easy answer, certainly no acceptable justification, but certain issues should be considered. For one thing, the biblical narrative may be an idealization; that is, perhaps the Israelites never consistently enforced the ban or completely destroyed a resident population. That they did not might be, in hindsight, the Deuteronomistic historian's theological explanation of why pure Yahwism never took hold. Also, the results of archaeological investigations are inconclusive, but they do suggest that there was no complete destruction of Jericho or most of the other cities cited in the book of Joshua at the presumed time of Israel's incursion. In other words, the archaeological record suggests that the ban was never in fact completely carried out.

The generally accepted date of Joshua's incursion into Canaan is the late 1200s BCE. This puts it at the end of the Late Bronze Age or early in the Iron I Age. Archaeologists have not found any remains of a fortification wall that date to this period at the only possible site of ancient Jericho, Tell es-Sultan. By the time Joshua would have arrived there, Jericho already had a venerable history of many millennia. The excavations have revealed a fortification wall and tower dating to the Neolithic period (8000–7000 BCE). Walls dating

to the Early Bronze Age (third millennium BCE) were at one time attributed to the age of Joshua, but this correlation is now known to have been in error. Fortified walls dating to the end of the Middle Bronze Age have been identified. Wood (1990) claims that the archaeological evidence of this destruction correlates well with the biblical description of the Israelite battle but only if Joshua's battle of Jericho is dated earlier, as suggested by Bimson (1978, 1987).

According to the narrative, Jericho was a pile of burned rubble after the Israelites were done with it—another monumental heap. It was never to be rebuilt as a reminder of the power of YHWH and the Israelites over the Canaanites, and anyone attempting it was cursed. Nonetheless, Hiel of Bethel later rebuilt it and at considerable cost (see 1 Kings 16:34).

After the victory at Jericho the Israelites attacked [Ai](#). Expecting only minimal resistance, Joshua sent a small raiding party against the city, yet the Israelite fighters were soundly defeated. This defeat was a sign that God was displeased with the Israelites. By casting lots—small objects that are made of clay, wood, or stone that function like dice—an Israelite named [Achan](#) was identified as the culprit. Casting [lots](#) was the mechanical means whereby God revealed his decisions. After being thrown, their configuration provided answers. Because Achan had stolen goods from Jericho, God was displeased with all the Israelites. Only after the offender was purged from their midst would God's favor be restored.

Using a method of execution called stoning, Achan was taken outside the camp where he and his entire family were killed. Although the punishment is severe—not just Achan himself but also his entire family were killed—it has a certain logic. The act of disobedience was considered so serious that Achan needed to be deprived of any future existence in Israel. By eliminating all his offspring, his family line was forever erased from among the Israelites. It is ironic that nonetheless we still remember him through the narrative. And the pile of rocks heaped over Achan and his family

was a reminder to Israel of the need for strict obedience to YHWH.

Having been purged of the sinner, the Israelites again attacked Ai. Although the community was now right with God, still Joshua was more deliberate in his plans the second time around. He set an ambush to draw the soldiers of Ai outside the city walls, surrounded them with his men, and completely burned the city and its inhabitants. *Ai* in Hebrew means “ruin” (today the site is called et-Tell, which in Arabic also means “ruin”).

This story may be another etiological tale along with a clever pun. The Israelites of the monarchic and exilic periods would have known this site as a ruin, and this story told them how it had happened. Ai was a fortified city of some twenty-seven acres through much of the Early Bronze Age (3300–2000 BCE). From then until the beginning of the Iron I Age, it lay in ruins. If the conquest is to be dated in the 1200s, there would have been no occupation at Ai at the time of Joshua. The Iron Age occupation of Ai began around 1125 BCE, covering only about two acres consisting of an unfortified village. Perhaps a later Israelite capture of Ai was credited to Joshua.

The account ends with Joshua covering Ai with stones “*which stand there to this day*” (8:29). Joshua and the Israelites were intent on leaving stone memorials wherever they went, and they all remain “to this day.” They did it at Gilgal after crossing the river, Jericho’s walls fell in a heap of stones, Achan and family were buried under stones, and here is yet another sad stone memorial. However, the next mound of rocks is more positive: a covenant memorial altar.

## 2.2.4 Altar at Shechem

Moses had instructed Joshua to build an altar on Mount Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:4). Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim flank the important site of [Shechem](#) in central Canaan. Here, Joshua paused with the people to recall to their memory the Torah of Moses:

*Then Joshua built an altar to YHWH the Elohim of Israel on Mount Ebal, just as Moses, YHWH's servant, commanded the Israelites, as it is written in the book of the Torah of Moses: "an altar of untrimmed stones on which no iron tool has worked." They offered burnt offerings to YHWH on it, and sacrificed peace offerings. He wrote on the stones there a copy of the Torah of Moses. He wrote it in front of the Israelites. All Israel (that is, the elders, the officers and the judges), foreigners as well as citizens, were standing on either side of the ark facing the levitical priests who carry the ark of the covenant of YHWH. Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them were in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses, YHWH's servant, had commanded earlier, so that the people of Israel could get blessing. Then he called out the words of the Torah, blessing and curse, according to all that was written in the book of the Torah. There was not one word which Moses commanded that Joshua did not call out before the congregation of Israel, including women and children and the foreigners who lived among them. (8:30–35)*

It did not take long for us to come across another rock memorial: here a pile of stones forming an altar to YHWH. The altar was erected in connection with the ceremony of remembering the Torah of Moses—that is, the covenant God had made with Israel through Moses.

You may have noticed that this passage has strong Deuteronomic overtones. It is in fact a passage with many parallels to Deuteronomy 27:1–8, which calls for a time of remembering the covenant once the people reach the Promised Land. The event recorded here marks a milestone in the Joshua stories of conquest. This story seems to imply that after taking Jericho and Ai the Israelites were secure enough in the land that they could do what Moses had commanded them in

Deuteronomy. Perhaps it attests the faithfulness of the second generation, which was a major concern of Deuteronomy.

A further note of fulfillment echoes in this passage. Although Shechem is not mentioned, every Israelite would have known that it lay between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Shechem had significant associations. It was Abraham's first stopping place when he entered Canaan. There he built an altar, and there YHWH first promised him possession of Canaan (Genesis 12:6–7). Shechem also has important associations with the tribal federation. As we will see in Joshua 24, this is where Joshua binds the tribes together in a covenant, and it will be the site where the northern kingdom consolidates itself under Jeroboam after the ten tribes break away from Judah.

After this Shechem interlude, the narrative returns to the business of securing the land. The first campaign in the central hill country established only a minimal Israelite presence in Palestine. New territory must now be taken—first south, then north, in two additional campaigns.

## 2.3 Second Campaign: Five City-States

Most of the indigenous Canaanites viewed the presence of the Israelites in Canaan as a threat. But some isolated villages decided it would be to their advantage to make peace with the Israelites. One such village was **Gibeon**. The problem, however, was that the Gibeonites knew that the Israelites were not in the practice of making peace but were under divine orders to exterminate everyone. But the Gibeonites were clever in avoiding this. Although they lived only a short distance from Gilgal where the Israelites were encamped, they disguised themselves as travelers from afar. They figured that if they were perceived to be foreigners, who presumably held no claim to Canaan, then the Israelites might make a treaty with them.

The Israelites were tricked by this deceit and entered into formal treaty arrangements with the Gibeonites, which included a pledge of protection. Shortly afterwards, the Israelites found out that these people lived only a short distance away. They were furious but could not dissolve the treaty and still be deemed honorable. In retaliation for their trickery, the Israelites enslaved the Gibeonites, making them “hewers of wood and drawers of water,” but stopped short of exterminating them.

When the larger Canaanite city-states of the area heard of the Gibeonites’ accommodation to the Israelites, they were furious and attacked Gibeon. The Israelites were bound by treaty to come to their aid. In the process of rescuing the Gibeonites, Joshua and the Israelites defeated the kings of five important southern city-states: Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. This secured the territory of what would become Judah for the Israelites. In the course of Joshua’s battle against Gibeon’s enemies, he called upon the sun to stand still in the sky to give the Israelites enough time to defeat the Amorites: “*The sun stood in the middle of the sky and delayed setting for about a full day*” (10:13).

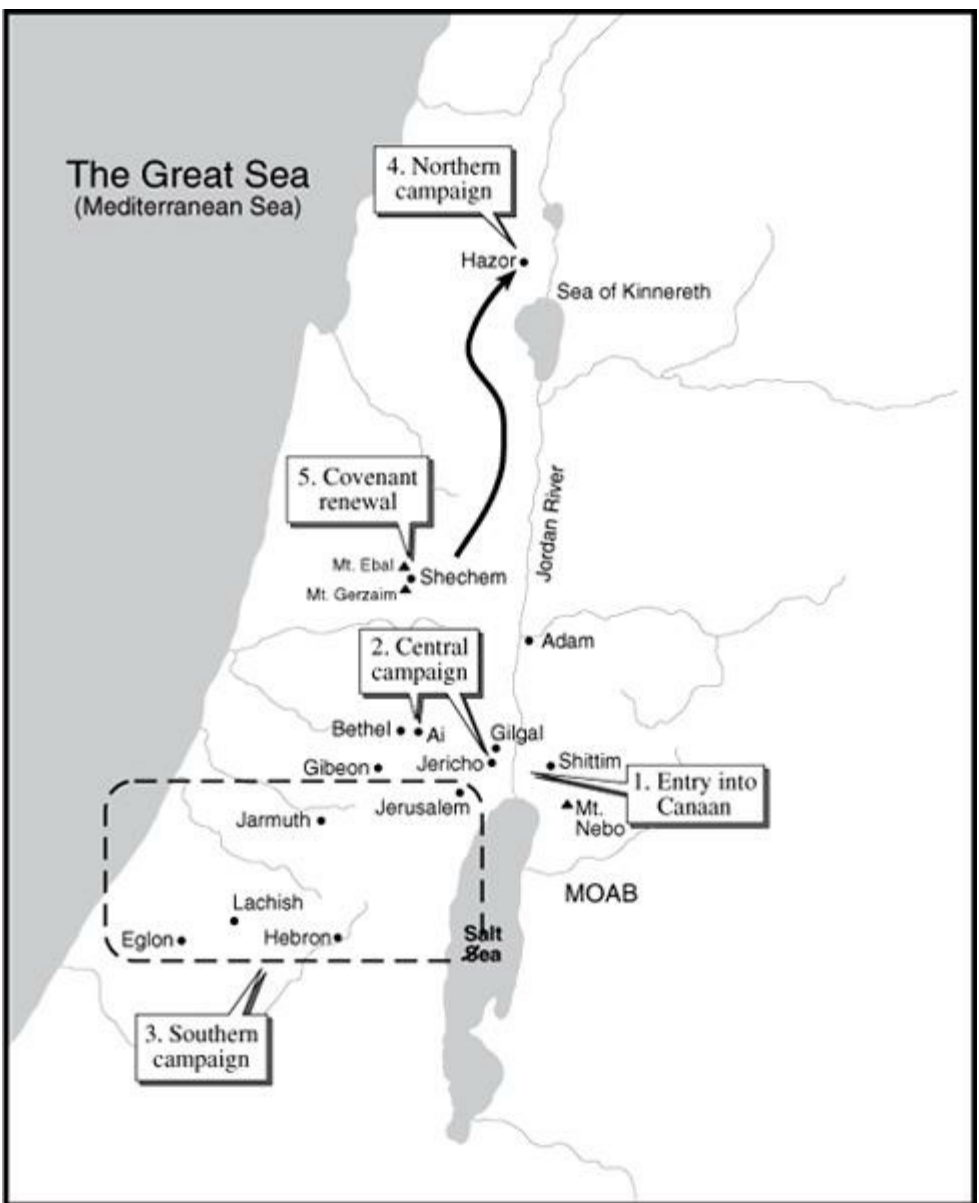
## 2.4 Third Campaign: Hazor

A coalition of city-states in the region of the Sea of Galilee was organized by Jabin, king of [Hazor](#), and they fought against the Israelites at Merom. Joshua and the Israelites won a great victory and finished by burning Hazor to the ground. This was a tremendous victory because Hazor was the dominant urban center in northern Canaan in the Middle Bronze Age. Though smaller in the late Bronze Age, Yadin (1972), its principal investigator, called it “the New York City of Canaan.” Hazor contains unmistakable evidence of destruction by fire in the second half of the thirteenth century BCE and was resettled by a less sophisticated people, judging by the

material remains, who lived in tents and huts. Archaeologists and historians have credited the destruction and subsequent resettlement to the Israelites though that identification is increasingly being called into question. The site was refortified and redeveloped in the time of Solomon.

**FIGURE 6.2** The Campaigns of Conquest

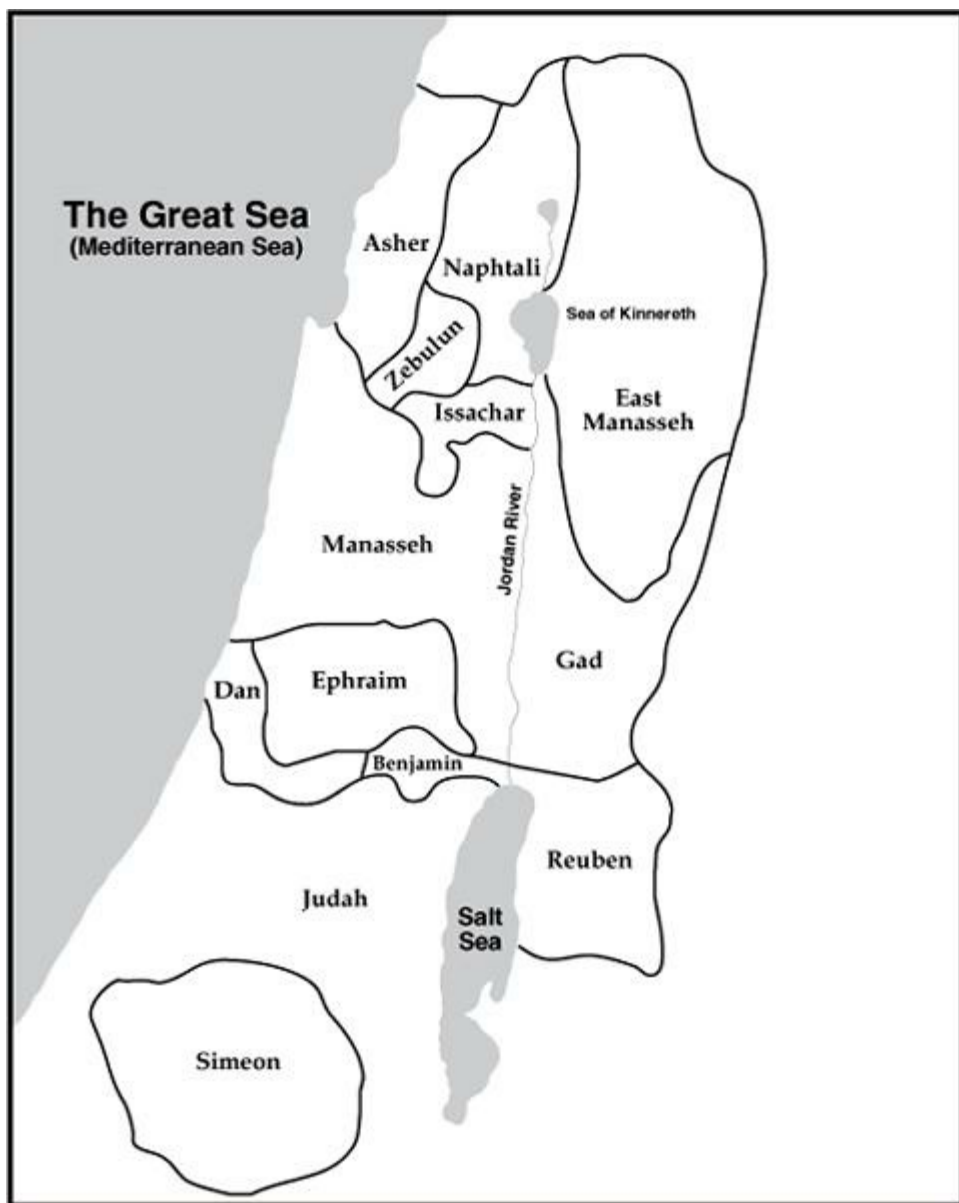




The narrator asserts that the conquest was now complete (see [Figure 6.2](#)). Note the finality of his summary statements: “Joshua left nothing undone of all that YHWH had commanded Moses” (11:15); “Joshua took all that land, just as YHWH told Moses. Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel. Each tribe received its allotment. The land had rest from war” (11:23). With the wars of conquest now at

an end, Joshua set about dividing up the land among the tribes (see [Figure 6.3](#)).

**FIGURE 6.3** The Tribal Territories The ideal Israel had twelve tribes after the twelve sons of Jacob. Although the number twelve was always maintained, the specific tribes that made up the twelve were somewhat fluid. In late lists, Simeon disappears, Levi is omitted, and Joseph is divided into the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.



### 3 TRIBAL TERRITORIES (13–21)

[Chapters 13–21](#) list the tribal boundaries and settlements and, frankly, make for boring reading. Nonetheless, they provide a more nuanced picture of the occupation. In addition to tallying the territory

taken by the Israelites, there are accounts of Israelite failures to expel the Canaanites.

Thematically, the narrative makes a point about possession of the land. Joshua apportioned the territories on the basis of lots, the same method used to determine Achan's guilt. Distributing the land by this means reinforced the belief that Canaan belonged ultimately to YHWH, and God distributed it according to divine wishes.

Also notable was the establishment of [cities of refuge](#). These were six cities to which a person could flee and find protection in case he accidentally killed another person. The intention of this provision was to call a halt to the clan feuds that might otherwise result when such accidents happened.

The Levites were given forty-eight cities throughout the land. The Levites did not have an extended tribal territory as such. Instead, they were scattered throughout all the other tribes and lived in these Levitical cities. An examination of the cities and their histories of occupation suggests that this list better reflects a network of Levitical cities in the 700s BCE rather than the 1200s. These sites appear to have been centers for Torah instruction by the Levites. The Levites appear to be responsible for the Deuteronomistic History, so naturally they would be concerned to suggest that their special cities had authorization going back to the earliest period of the settlement, the time of Joshua.

As with the account of military occupation, so with the account of territorial allotments: The account ends with a neat summary suggesting finality and completeness.

*So YHWH gave to Israel all the land which he had sworn to give to their fathers. They took possession of it and settled in it. YHWH gave them rest on every front just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of their enemies remained facing them. YHWH gave them power over all their enemies. Not one*

*promise of all the good promises that YHWH spoke to the house of Israel remained unfulfilled. Everything came true. (21:43–45)*

In no uncertain terms, this summary reinforces the fulfillment dimension of the occupation—everything happened just as YHWH had promised to the ancestors! God was with his people, giving them complete victory and perfect shalom. The phrase “*house of Israel*” (21:45) is used only here in Joshua. It encapsulates the notion of the unity of Israel and suggests that they are now a family living in a homeland of their own.

But how does this ideal picture compare with historical reality? The archaeological evidence from Jericho and Ai at times seems to clash with the biblical narrative. Text scholars and archaeologists have been wrestling with the historical and material evidence to reconstruct how the Israelites came to occupy Canaan. This in turn has implications for the question of the ethnic and sociological identity of the nation of Israel, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The stories of military conquest in Joshua 2–12 account for only a small number of Canaanite cities. Conquering Jericho, Hazor, and a handful of other places does not constitute a sweeping military subjugation of Canaan. Joshua 13 mentions certain territories that remained unconquered during Joshua’s lifetime. The incompleteness of the occupation under Joshua becomes even clearer when reading the book of Judges. The first chapters contain inventories of land not taken, indicating that the Israelites were actually a minority in Canaan, subsisting primarily in the hill country. The cities and the plains were still controlled by Canaanites.

How, then, did the Israelites eventually come to dominate the area? All indications point to a complicated and gradual process whereby an Israel established an identifiable presence in Canaan. This issue is the subject of vigorous debate, and the issue will not be resolved for

some time to come. Four influential models of the emergence of Israel have developed within the academic world. Each uses archaeological, sociological, and historical data in its own way.

1. *Military conquest model*. This approach has been associated primarily with Albright (1949/1963) and Wright (1962) and has been the dominant model in American academic studies until recently, perpetuated especially by Anderson (1987) and Bright (2000). This approach tends to accept the basic historical accuracy of the Joshua account and finds evidence in modern archaeological fieldwork to affirm the essential correctness of the biblical text. It suggests that Joshua led a core group of Hebrews who had escaped from Egypt into Transjordan and Canaan and secured their presence in the land. They claim the evidence of a sudden violent destruction in the 1200s BCE can be found at several city sites. Some of these cities were subsequently rebuilt but in a manner suggesting a lower level of skill and resources. This change in technique and level of material culture correlates with the transition from a sophisticated Canaanite occupation to a less-developed Israelite takeover. One of the problems with this theory, however, is that the key sites of Jericho and Ai do not evidence destruction at the expected time.

2. *Migration model*. This is sometimes called the *peaceful infiltration model* and the *immigration model*. Formulated by Noth (1960) and refined by Weippert (1971), this theory denies that there was any significant military action, apart perhaps from a few minor skirmishes. Instead, over a span of centuries, groups of seminomadic herdsmen began to settle in those regions of Canaan that were capable of sustaining a sedentary agricultural way of life. The entity called Israel took shape after such groups settled following a period of peaceful infiltration. They derived their unity not from shared ancestry but from a common sociotheological perspective. Each group took with them stories of their past, including their religious traditions. The stories were combined, unified, and harmonized to suggest that from the beginning the entire history was the product of

the entire group. Thus, the final story, contained in Genesis through Joshua, is a synthesis of many histories. They further hypothesize that the twelve tribes were joined together as a religious league around a central sanctuary. This would be analogous to the Greek *amphictyony*, a religious confederacy best known from the Apollo league at Delphi. Shechem would have been the first shrine city where Joshua united the twelve tribes into a covenant league (Joshua 24); later, Shiloh became the central sanctuary. For a critique of the amphictyony hypothesis see de Geus (1976), and for a critique of Noth's overall reconstruction, including the presumed opposition between seminomads and sedentary populations see Gottwald (1979).

3. *Internal revolt/peasant revolt model*. First articulated by Mendenhall (1962; Mendenhall and Herion, 2001) and now also closely associated with Gottwald (1979), this theory holds that there was at most only a minimal incursion of foreign groups from outside of Canaan. Predominately, the birth of Israel was the result of internal political upheaval and social revolution. In the 1200s BCE, Canaan was controlled by numerous city-states, and these in turn were controlled by kings and aristocrats who oppressed the rural farmers and herdsmen. The latter became increasingly disaffected with the autocratic control of the urban establishment. These disenfranchised people banded together and wrestled control away from the oppressing upper class. Joshua and a small group of Hebrews were the catalyst for the insurrection. Mendenhall finds support for this theory in a known group of marginalized citizens called the *habiru*, the indigenous inhabitants of inferior social status who pressured the ruling establishment of Canaan. They are attested in Canaanite-related documents called the Amarna letters (see ANET, 483–490). The Hebrews may have been this kind of people, living on the fringes of established Canaanite society. Other investigators, however, have discounted any connection between the *habiru* and the Hebrews, pointing out that the two words cannot be linguistically related

despite the fact that they have similar sounds. Furthermore, the social and political conditions described in the Amarna letters do not match the Israelite situation as found in the books of Joshua and Judges.

4. *Political propaganda model.* In this approach, advocated by Finkelstein and Silberman (2001), the historical narrative of Joshua, indeed of the entire Primary History (the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History), was shaped in the late 600s BCE and was linked to the ambitious political program of the Judean kingdom of Josiah. In particular, Joshua and Josiah mirror each other, and the story of the Joshua-led conquest actually gives expression to Josiah's vision of expanding Judah northward to recover and incorporate the former Israelite tribal territories into his own kingdom. Archaeological support for this view is found at the sites associated with Joshua's conquest, such as Jericho. In addition, Finkelstein's (1988) archaeological examination of a large number of early Iron Age settlements in the hill country of Palestine is the basis for his view that the Israelites emerged out of the indigenous population of Palestine. Therefore, the biblical account of the conquest is not historical but reflects the political geography of the 600s and the political vision of Josiah.

Because the discussion is ongoing and active, a verifiably accurate picture of early Israel's occupation of Canaan cannot be drawn at this time, but we can say certain things about the issue. It should be granted that the story as told in the book of Joshua is to a certain extent a theopolitical idealization intended to affirm the fulfillment of God's promise of the land. Perhaps it never intended to provide a complete historical account, choosing only a few incidents of conquest to characterize the powerful work of God.

On the other hand, history and archaeology, along with hints in the biblical text, combine to fill out our understanding of Israel in Canaan at this time. Israel was certainly more diverse than authorities earlier had thought. It was apparently a melting pot of people. Remember that Rahab of Jericho was a Canaanite, yet her



family was permitted to live in Israel (6:25; according to Christian tradition, she became a node in the genealogy of David and Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew 1:5). The Gibeonites likewise were incorporated into Israel though their inclusion was justified because they were made slaves. The town of Jebus remained a Canaanite enclave until David conquered it and made it his capital. Certainly a core group traced their ancestry back to the patriarchs and matriarchs, and the nucleus of the occupation force came to Israel via Egypt (see [Figure 6.4](#)). However, other indigenous Canaanite social and ethnic groups aligned themselves with this nucleus for religious and political reasons. Although the process of occupation begun under the leadership of Joshua achieved some victories that foreshadowed complete control, the occupation efforts lasted a long time after his death and were accomplished with a combination of military coercion and peaceful absorption. Probably none of the above models alone explains what must have been a complex and lengthy process.

**FIGURE 6.4 The Merneptah Stele** This stele, a stone slab bearing an inscription, dates to the time of Pharaoh Merneptah (1224–1211 BCE). It contains the earliest historical reference to Israel in any source. This means that by the time of Merneptah, Israel had existed as a nation, so the Exodus must have happened before this. The generally accepted date of Israel's Exodus from Egypt is 1280 BCE, with the conquest forty years later.



Photo by Barry Bandstra (Cairo: Egyptian Museum), 1987

## **4 COVENANT CONSIDERATIONS (22–24)**

The last three chapters of the book draw the Joshua era to a close. Joshua exhorts the tribes to remain faithful when he addresses them in covenant renewal.

### **4.1 Joshua's Farewell**

Toward the end of Joshua's life a conflict arose, and the Transjordanian tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East-Manasseh fought against the Israelite tribes in Canaan (22). The dispute was religious in nature and almost provoked a full-scale civil war.

The Transjordanian tribes wanted to have their own worship center, specifically an altar—yes, another pile of stones! The Canaan tribes

believed that YHWH could be worshipped only where the ark of the covenant was located; at this time, it was resident in Shiloh. The matter was settled only after those remote tribes agreed to not use the altar for sacrifice but only as a memorial to the work of YHWH. These are their words of dedication: “*This is a witness among us that YHWH is God*” (22:34).

Although this is a somewhat obscure incident, it nonetheless served to make two points. First, it affirmed the religious centrality of the worship center that housed the ark of the covenant. Here, it applied to Shiloh, but the principle later applied to Jerusalem. This principle was always important to the tradition of Deuteronomy. Second, it allowed for the possibility that YHWH could still be honored elsewhere, even in the “foreign” territory of Transjordan. Those living in exile (where these stories were finally edited) certainly took comfort knowing that, although they were far distant from Jerusalem and the temple, they were not necessarily distant from God.

The first five verses of Chapter 22 and all of Chapter 23 are heavily Deuteronomistic in style and content. Chapter 23 contains the farewell speech of Joshua. Such speeches are characteristic of the Deuteronomistic historian. The farewell speeches of Israel’s great leaders typically articulate the Deuteronomistic theology of covenant. The whole book of Deuteronomy is Moses’s farewell address and is all about covenant—likewise, Samuel’s farewell (1 Samuel 12) and David’s (1 Kings 2:1–9). Here in Chapter 23, Joshua stresses the fulfillment of promise and encourages the people to remain faithful to the Torah of Moses, but he also sounds a strong note of warning. The Canaanites who were left in the land would threaten Israel’s loyalty to YHWH. If the Israelites strayed from complete covenant loyalty and worshipped the gods of the Canaanites, they would be removed from the land of promise.

These dire words of warning match what actually happened to Israel as a result of the Assyrian destruction in the late 700s BCE and

to Judah in the Babylonian exile in the early 500s—not surprisingly, given the fact that this account was shaped after those experiences. But the words are not just here as an “I told you so.” They implicitly contain the theology that would enable the Israelites to make sense out of what happened to them when they were dispossessed of the land. Punishments involving removal from the land are Israel’s own fault, and restoration could come if the people renewed their obedience.

## 4.2 Covenant Renewal at Shechem

Joshua called all the tribes to meet at Shechem (again, compare Joshua 8:30–35). In a prophetic type of address, speaking for YHWH in the first person, Joshua reviewed the history of YHWH’s care: I took Abraham from Mesopotamia, I gave him Isaac, I brought you out of Egypt, I gave you the land. This historical review is reminiscent of the historical prologue section of treaty documents (see RTOT [Chapter 5](#)). Indeed, Joshua seems to be holding a virtual treaty-signing session here. He put down in writing the tribes’ pledge of loyalty to YHWH, their overlord (24:26).

Joshua challenged the people to choose YHWH and reject both their ancestral gods and all the gods of Canaan. The people answered, “*YHWH our Elohim we will serve. Him we will obey.*” Joshua recorded the covenant in the book of the Torah of God and set up a stone as a memorial to the event. The stone monument would be a witness to the people’s pledge to serve YHWH. As throughout the book of Joshua, a monument serves as a lasting testimony to the faithfulness of YHWH and the people’s acknowledgment of God’s goodness.

This covenant-commitment event helps explain how the Israelites found unity. Going back to our discussion of the nature of this early community, we recognized that early Israel was most likely

composed of many different groups. Some came from outside Palestine, descending from Abraham. Others were native to the area, such as Rahab and the Gibeonites. What did they have in common? How did they find and maintain unity? It was through a common commitment to YHWH. This commitment was formalized in covenant and was recorded in the Deuteronomic literature. It defined the people's loyalty to YHWH and to each other.

Concluding the book, we are told that Joshua died and the bones of Joseph, which the people had been carrying around since they left Egypt, were finally laid to rest at Shechem. Thus, the first "monumental" phase in the occupation of the land finds closure and fulfillment.

## **5 JOSHUA AS A BOOK**

The book of Joshua contains stories and other material from many sources: sagas of military confrontation, origin stories that explain phenomena familiar to Israelites of the monarchy (the etiological tales), lists of conquered kings, and inventories of tribal territories. All of this material was organized to tell a story of lightning conquest, and it was all placed within the career of Joshua.

The book of Joshua in its final form consists of three main parts, all flowing rather smoothly in a linear fashion: the campaigns of conquest, the distribution of tribal territories, and covenant renewal before Joshua's death. Yet the surface simplicity of the story masks an underlying literary and historical complexity, as we have seen.

Why was the conquest story told in this simplistic way? No doubt part of the reason has to do with historical memory and the creation of legends. Joshua was idealized and the sweep of victory was portrayed as absolute. The picture also has to do with the troubled times during which the story of occupation was shaped. It was crafted during the time of Babylonian domination in the late 600s and

500s BCE, so the writers placed emphasis on possession of the land as the fulfillment of promise. They stressed the faithfulness of YHWH to his word, for they too were looking to retain or reclaim their ancestral homeland, to maintain a home of their own.

To that end, the Deuteronomistic historian framed the book with a theology of promise. [Chapters 1](#) and 23–24 form the interpretive framework of the book. The opening address of YHWH and the closing address of Joshua confirm that the occupation of the Promised Land by the Israelites was in fulfillment of a promise made to the ancestors. On this promise, projected into the future again by the exiles who heard this story, Israel based its hope. When we turn to the book of Judges, we will find that the people's lack of faith weakened their grip on the Promised Land.

The book of Joshua and its main hero are much loved. The book presents a confident tale of promises fulfilled, gifted leadership, and mission accomplished. The spiritual “Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho” is widely known and is still sung around summer evening campfires. In terms of the Bible's master narrative, it marks the moment that Israel conquered the territory that was divinely promised and took full and complete possession of it. But the book has also become a flash point in the controversy over how to read and understand biblical history and what role archaeology should play. The issue of how to read the book theologically and historically presents significant challenges.

The book has also become the target of criticism for its ethnic exclusivity and its adoption of militaristic violence in pursuit of nationalistic goals. The book has been used throughout the ages, especially by certain Christians, to justify wars of faith against so-called pagan infidels. The book has also been used to justify on divine grounds a Jewish presence in Palestine over indigenous populations, with a predictable push back from the Palestinian perspective (see Whitlam, 1996). In addition to issues of historicity, the book of Joshua has become a much debated book within

communities of faith because it challenges fundamental notions of humanity and decency. For all these reasons, it demands close and critical reexamination.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Joshua*. In what ways was Joshua like his mentor Moses, and in what ways was he different?
2. *Conquest*. What were the major campaigns of the conquest and the major scholarly models of the Israelite occupation of Canaan?
3. *Holy war*. What is the notion of holy war, and what conquest stories or parts of stories illustrate its principles?
4. *Monuments*. What monuments did Israel set up in Canaan in connection with conquest events? What lesson did each monument teach?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Archaeology*. What archaeological evidence supports the narrative of the conquest? What archaeological evidence seems not to support the narrative? Given the conflicted nature of the material evidence, what do you think the role of archaeology should be in biblical studies?
2. *Deuteronomic perspective*. What Deuteronomic themes surface in the book of Joshua? How does the Deuteronomistic historian express his perspective in the book? How might the connection between Deuteronomy and Josiah be a factor in the way that the themes come to expression in the book?
3. *Us and them*. On the surface, the book of Joshua draws a hard-and-fast distinction between Israelites and Canaanites and advocates the removal of Canaanites from the land lest they

jeopardize Israel's covenant with YHWH. But evidence from the book itself, as well as from archaeology, suggests that this distinction was not strictly maintained. What is the evidence? What then does the book, and hence the Bible, have to say about ethnic boundaries and religious exclusivity?

4. *Holy violence*. YHWH commands what amounts to an ethnic cleansing of Palestine in order to create a safe space for Israel. Does this create an enduring biblical principle that God's people can rightfully employ violent militaristic means to promote the creation of a nation under God and maintain its security? Are there factors within the book itself or approaches to its interpretation that might temper such a principle and perhaps call it into question? Do you think that the adoption of violence in this book and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible leads to or supports a general acceptance of violence by Jewish and Christian communities?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

*War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence*, by Susan Niditch (1992), examines the ethical problems of Israel's war with the Canaanites. A student's question regarding the Exodus and conquest ("But what about the Canaanites?"), inspired Regina M. Schwartz (1997) to write a book about religion, collective identity, and racial division entitled *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*, by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman (2001), is must reading in order to understand the challenges of contemporary archaeology and how it forces a revised understanding of how and why the Hebrew Bible was written.



# CHAPTER SEVEN

## Judges: Securing the Land

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Deuteronomic Introduction](#)

[3 Judge-Heroes](#)

[4 Judges as a Book](#)

---

### KEY TERMS

[Deborah](#)

[Ehud](#)

[Gideon](#)

[Jephthah](#)

[Judge](#)

[Nazirite vow](#)

[Midianites](#)

[Philistines](#)

[Samson](#)

### Philistine Warrior

The Philistines arrived on the southern coastal plain about the same time the Israelites crossed the Jordan River. The Philistines were Israel's most serious rivals for the land of Palestine and its most formidable foe during the period of the occupation of Palestine.



Source: Detail of a captured soldier based on a relief from the time of Ramses III (1193–1162 BCE), south tower, second pylon, Twentieth Dynasty (1196–1080 BCE), New Kingdom, Medinet Habu, West Thebes, Thebes, Egypt. Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra.

---

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Adventure heroes are a perennial source of fascination and entertainment. From Bat-girl to Spider-Man, their tales reinforce the hope that good will triumph over evil, even against the greatest odds. Although they are often flawed, heroes can be empowering. They demonstrate that dedication coupled with courage can accomplish great deeds. The biblical judges of the book by this name were really heroes who valiantly defended the Israelites from powerful, often superior, forces. And they did so in creative and (sometimes) courageous ways.

The book of Judges differs radically in style and character from the book of Joshua. The book of Joshua surges with excitement at the Israelite victory upon entering the Promised Land. By the end of that book, Israel was secure in the land thanks to the faithful leadership of Joshua.

In the era of the judges, Israel is cowering in the forests, hiding in the hills, afraid of being wiped out by Canaanites and other assorted opponents. The book of Judges finds Israel in that transitional period after the great leadership of Moses and Joshua and before the coming

era of the monarchy—and things are not going well.

The age of the judges was a time of threat and danger. Internally, Israel seemed to be losing the faith of its ancestors. Externally, other groups were threatening Israel with extinction. Significant regional political developments were afoot as newcomers were searching for living space. The pressures of the age forced the diverse groups who identified with the deity named YHWH to come together in a union that transcended tribal interests. It forced them to see that Israel could exist only as a federation of tribes who helped each other. It prompted them to see that they could be held together in this federation only by their common faith in YHWH.

## **1.1 Securing the Land: A Summary**

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites were attacked by various forces in and around Canaan (Judges [Chapter 1](#)). The narrator explains that this happened because the Israelites continued to serve Baal rather than YHWH (2–3). A series of leaders, called judges, arose to deliver the Israelites. The more interesting ones are Ehud (3), Deborah (4–5), Gideon (6–8), Jephthah (10–12), and Samson (13–16). The remaining chapters tell of Israelite intertribal conflicts. Micah had a shrine and hired a Levite to be its priest but was attacked by Danites who were migrating to the north of Canaan and took the Levite with them (17–18). The concubine of another Levite was raped and murdered in the town of Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin, and this provoked a devastating attack on Benjamin by the other tribes, which almost wiped them out (19–21).

Go to the companion website and see the “Inventory of the Territories.”

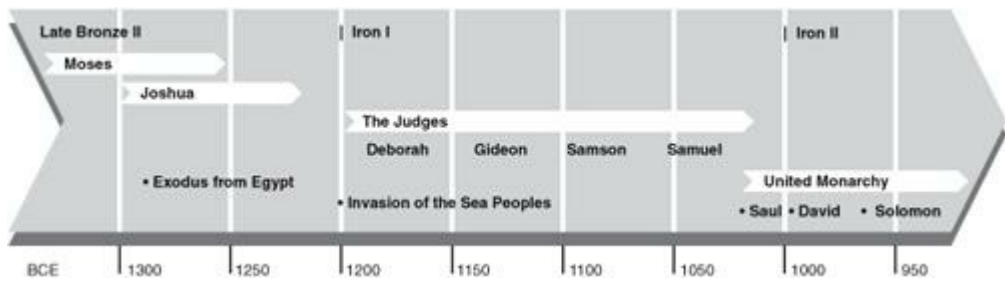
## **1.2 Reading Guide**

Judges 1 contains an inventory of towns not taken in the Joshua conquest, and this is probably as much as you need to know. But you must read Judges 2. It contains the most concise articulation of the Deuteronomic theme, described as a repeating cycle of sin, punishment, repentance, and deliverance. This cycle is critical to the construction of the book of Judges because most of the individual judge tales use it to give shape and meaning to the story. If not all the major judges, then at least read the stories of Deborah (4–5) and Samson (13–16).

## 2 DEUTERONOMIC INTRODUCTION

The book of Judges is built around the adventures of the judges. The first three chapters establish a narrative context for their stories. The judges were needed because the Israelites had lost their spiritual direction. The problem revealed itself with the Israelites abandoning YHWH for Baal and Canaanite religious practices. This theological explanation of historical experience is classic Deuteronomistic thinking. Faithfulness and loyalty to YHWH are rewarded with success, forgetfulness with failure. The moral lesson conveyed by this outlook is rather obvious. But before this theological framework is examined in more detail, we need to clarify why the main characters of the book are called judges.

**FIGURE 7.1** Time Line: Book of Judges



## 2.1 What Is a Judge?

The traditional name of the book is a bit misleading. The title “Judges” was taken from references to the main figures about whom tales are told. None of the figures is actually called a [judge](#). The name was applied because the text says so-and-so “judged” Israel a certain number of years.

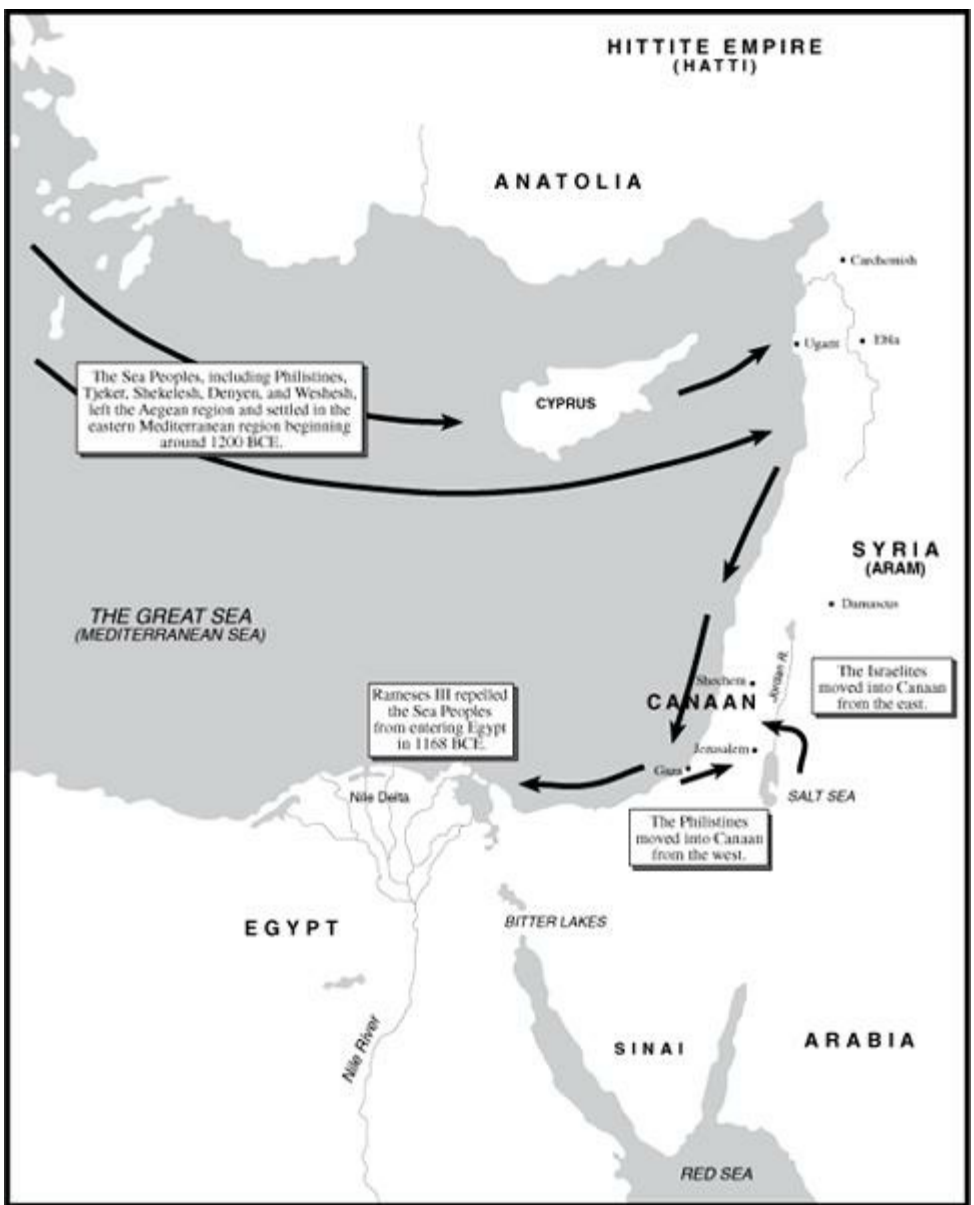
There are twelve judges in the book, but they were not magistrates or jurists such as the justices of a governmental judiciary who might sit in a courtroom behind massive mahogany desks. Although some of these ancient figures might have occasionally arbitrated disputes (Deborah, in particular), they possessed a certain knack for confounding Israel’s enemies, for which they were called judges. The exact reason why *judges* applies remains somewhat unclear, yet they may have gotten the title because they applied God’s judgment to Israel’s foes. As in other passages of the Hebrew Bible, *judging* means standing up for the oppressed and delivering the afflicted rather than judicially applying a notion of equity (for example, see Deuteronomy 10:18 and 27:19). The judges could be called *superheroes*, or better *saviors* or *defenders*, in keeping with their deliverance function.

If the traditional date of the Exodus is accepted (early to mid-1200s BCE), the tales of the judges would be situated somewhere in the 1200–1000 BCE range, which is termed the Iron Age I period (see [Figure 7.1](#)). From the evidence that we have at our disposal, this was, to say the least, an unsettled time in Canaan. The period began with the great international powers in stalemate and then in decline. Both the Egyptians and the Hittites wished to control Canaan because of the importance of its trade routes but were unable to do so. Canaan was not dominated by either of these powers at this time, and this created a virtual free-for-all among the various tribes that lived in and around that region.

The most significant challenge to Israel came from a group called the Sea Peoples (see [Figure 7.2](#)). They had moved into the coastal plain of Canaan as part of a larger migration of people fleeing the Aegean. One of the subgroups of the Sea Peoples is called the [Philistines](#) in the Hebrew Bible.

The Philistines sought to dominate lands eastward from the Mediterranean coast toward the Jordan River. The Israelites, according to the incursion model of conquest as told in the book of Joshua (see RTOT [Chapter 6](#)), arrived from the east and pushed west. Meanwhile, the indigenous Canaanite population was not willing to stand for a wholesale takeover of its territory and found it had to defend itself. The book of Judges reflects the instability in the land at this time and paints a picture of various groups vying for supremacy.

## **FIGURE 7.2** Sea Peoples' Invasion



## 2.2 Deuteronomic Theme

Joshua’s death was told in the book carrying his name. The first chapter of Judges is noteworthy for the tone that it sets. Although it tells of some continued successes of the Israelites after the death of

Joshua, it also mentions certain failures of the Israelite conquest initiative. It seems that not all the territory of Canaan was taken or controlled by Joshua and his followers. Many Canaanites remained in the land. The narrator, as we will see, attributes this shortcoming to a lack of faith on the part of the generation that followed Joshua.

The following passage recounts the death of Joshua as the occasion to remark on his faithfulness and that of the people and the elders. As with the wilderness era, here too the past faithful generation is contrasted with the present unfaithful one.

*Joshua sent the people away. Each one of the Israelites went to their inheritance to take possession of the land. The people served YHWH all the days of Joshua's life, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, those who had seen every great work which YHWH had done for Israel. Joshua, son of Nun, the Servant of YHWH, died one hundred and ten years old. They buried him within the borders of his inheritance, in Timnath-heres in the hill country of Ephraim north of Mount Gaash. That entire generation was gathered to their fathers. A new generation came after them who did not know YHWH or the work he had done for Israel. (2:6–10)*

This is the third time the Bible mentions Joshua's death. The book of Joshua ended with it (see Joshua 24:29–30, which has virtually the identical wording as Judges 2:8–9) and the book of Judges began with it (see 1:1). It must have been viewed as a significant transition point for Israel. And his faithfulness sets in relief the next generation's lack of it. The attention given to Joshua's faith can in part be explained because of his tribal affiliation. Joshua's burial place in Timnath indicates that he was from the tribe of Ephraim, which would become the heart of the northern kingdom. Thus, he comes from the home territory of the Deuteronomistic circle of



thinkers who were responsible for writing down this history.

The mention in the text of “*the new generation who did not know YHWH*” did not of course bode well and suggests that something had gone awry. “Did not know” means more than lack of knowledge. “To know” is typical covenant terminology, indicating that the parties in the covenant relationship acknowledge their obligation. This is what the Israelites had given up. In their unfaithfulness, they were like that first generation out of Egypt, except that the first-exodus generation had the advantage of knowing the work of YHWH firsthand.

*The Israelites acted wickedly in the eyes of YHWH. They served the Baals. They abandoned YHWH, the Elohim of their Fathers, the one who brought them out of the land of Egypt. They followed other Elohim, including the Elohim of the people living around them. They worshiped them and made YHWH angry. They abandoned YHWH and served the Baal and the Ashtarot. The anger of YHWH erupted against Israel and he handed them over to marauders who plundered them, and he sold them to the enemies in their vicinity. They were not able to stand up against their enemies. No matter what they tried to do, the power of YHWH was against them resulting in misfortune—just as YHWH had sworn to them—and they were in dire straits. (2:11–15)*

Note how the text identifies YHWH as the “God of the Fathers” and the one who delivered them from Egypt. Both descriptions recall the early divine promises and fulfillments in history.

Baal and Ashtoret (otherwise pronounced *Astarte*; *Ashtarot* is the plural) are, respectively, a male and a female Canaanite god; Ashtoret is the consort of Baal. These figures are known especially from texts discovered at ancient Ugarit where Ashtoret was worshiped as Asherah. These gods were worshiped because it was

thought they were responsible for agricultural productivity (see [Figure 7.3](#)).

**FIGURE 7.3** Asherah Female fertility figurines such as this one have been found at many sites in Palestine dating to the Iron Age (twelfth to sixth centuries BCE). Archaeologists identify them with the goddess Asherah and suggest that the pillar base may be a stylized representation of the pole or pillar that represented the goddess at cult sites. Asherah was the companion of Baal in Canaanite religion.



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on BAS Biblical Archaeology Slide Set No. 94.

Texts from Ugarit, an ancient city discovered in 1929, contain tales of Baal and other Canaanite gods and goddesses. Although dated to the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BCE), hence before the Hebrew Bible was written or Israel even existed, they contain important stories of gods and heroes who appear in various guises in the Hebrew Bible. The following selection from the Baal cycle provides the flavor of the texts. In this selection, a divine supporter of Baal encourages him to be courageous against his enemy Yamm, the god of the sea:

*Let me tell you, Prince Baal,  
let me repeat, Rider on the Clouds:  
behold, your enemy, Baal,  
behold, you will kill your enemy,  
behold, you will annihilate your foes.  
You will take your eternal kingship,  
your dominion forever and ever.*

M. D. COOGAN, *Stories from Ancient Canaan* (1978: 88)

The Israelites were drawn to the gods of the indigenous Canaanites. The essential theological problem with worshipping Canaanite gods was the implied abandonment of YHWH. The covenant that bound YHWH and Israel together demanded absolute and unwavering loyalty between these two parties. Worshipping another god was nothing less than a breach of covenant.

For punishment, YHWH withdrew his leadership as the divine warrior who fought for Israel. As warrior, YHWH had conquered Egypt and Jericho: “YHWH is a man of war, YHWH is his name; Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he cast into the sea” (Exodus 15:3–4a). This resulted in Israel’s total inability to gain the advantage over the other groups in Canaan.

*YHWH raised up judges. They saved them from the power of the marauders. Yet they did not even listen to their judges, but they whored after other gods and worshipped them. They quickly turned from the path on which their ancestors walked—heeding the commandments of YHWH. That is just what they did not do! When YHWH raised up judges for them, YHWH was with the judge his whole life, so that he could deliver them from the power of their enemies. YHWH was moved to pity when they groaned on account of their persecutors and*

*oppressors. When the judge died, they reverted and turned out worse than their ancestors by following other gods, serving, and worshipping them. They did not abandon any of their practices or their ingrained ways. So, the anger of YHWH erupted against Israel, and he thought, "Because this nation has broken the covenant to which I obligated their ancestors, and they have not obeyed my voice, I will not continue to dispossess any of the nations Joshua left when he died." In order to test Israel to see whether or not they would guard the path their ancestors guarded, YHWH allowed to remain those nations he did not dispossess quickly, those over whom he had not given Joshua power. (2:16–23)*

These verses provide the Deuteronomic thematic outline that virtually every judge story follows (see [Figure 7.4](#)). When the Israelites were in trouble, God empowered a judge to rescue them. After the judge died, the Israelites reverted to the worship of non-YHWH gods. YHWH again allowed a foreign group to dominate the Israelites as punishment. This cyclical pattern repeats itself each generation throughout the book of Judges: (1) Israel turns from YHWH; (2) an enemy oppresses Israel; (3) Israel cries for help; (4) YHWH sends a judge to deliver Israel. As you read, note how the pattern articulated in this general introduction is expressed in the tales of individual judges.

**FIGURE 7.4** The Deuteronomic Cycle

(1) Israel turns from YHWH

(4) YHWH sends a judge to deliver Israel



(2) an enemy oppresses Israel

(3) Israel cries for help

In the following paragraph from the book of Judges, the unfaithfulness of the people is also used by the Deuteronomistic historian to explain why these foreign groups were still around when they should have been completely wiped out. They were kept around to be used as YHWH's instrument to test the people.

*These are the nations YHWH allowed to remain to test Israel (all those who did not know the wars of Canaan—it was only to teach the Israelite generations about war, only for those who had not experienced the wars): the five Philistine lords, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, the Hivites who live on Mount Lebanon (from Mount Baal-hermon to Mount Lebohamath). They were for the testing of Israel, to find out whether they would heed the commandments of YHWH which he commanded their ancestors through Moses. (3:1–4)*

This note about teaching the Israelites how to fight was probably added by the exilic editor of the Deuteronomistic History. One of his themes was the teaching of divine discipline through the rigors of warfare, a theme also expressed in Judges 20.

### 3 JUDGE-HEROES

The bulk of the book of Judges is the collection of stories, as expected, about the judges themselves. Although there are twelve judges, they do not get equal treatment. Most are mentioned in only a few verses. Only a few get major treatment. Following biblical precedent, we will take an extended look at Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson.

### 3.1 Ehud (3:12–30)

The tale of Othniel follows immediately upon the theological narrative introduction. Othniel's saga (3:7–11) is very sketchy. It seems to serve as the “typical” tale, really only stating the cyclical pattern of apostasy and deliverance. It is followed by the story of [Ehud](#), a left-handed judge from the tribe of Benjamin. Left-handedness was considered an aberration in the ancient world and had evil or unclean connotations (compare Latin, where *sinister* means “left”). The name Benjamin is literally “son of the right hand.” Perhaps this description of Ehud is the writer's way of characterizing the tribe. Note that Judges 19–21, which also deals with the tribe of Benjamin, forms a literary inclusion around the book and paints a particularly nasty picture of this tribe.

Ehud devised a plan to dispose of Eglon, whose name means “fatted calf.” This king of Moab dominated Israel and demanded tribute.

*And Ehud made a two-edged sword for himself a cubit long. He strapped it on his right thigh under his clothes. Then he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab, a very fat man. When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people that had carried the tribute. But he himself turned around at the quarry near Gilgal. He said, “I have a*

*secret message for you, O king.” And he commanded, “Silence.” All his attendants left him. Ehud came to him as he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. Ehud said, “I have a message from Elohim for you.” Eglon rose from his seat. Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. The hilt also went in after the blade, and fat closed over the blade. He did not pull the sword out of his belly, but excrement came out. (3:16–22)*

**FIGURE 7.5** Megiddo Ivory This ivory plaque was found at Megiddo and dates to the time of the judges. The drawing depicts a Canaanite king seated on a throne in the shape of a winged sphinx. He is receiving an entourage returning from war that includes two bound captives. Jabin, a northern Canaanite king, oppressed the Israelites, perhaps in like manner.



Source: Graphic by Barry Bandstra based on G. Loud, “The Megiddo Ivories,” *Oriental Institute Publications* 52 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1939), 13, plate 4. Also see *Treasures of the Holy Land: Ancient Art from the Israel Museum* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986) 148–149, no. 69. Israel Museum, IDAM 38.780.

Thus, Ehud’s assassination of the Moabite King Eglon is described in gory detail. He was so fat that when the dagger pierced his belly it disappeared and Ehud could not retrieve it. Ehud was able to escape, and the Israelites regained their freedom.

## 3.2 Deborah (4–5)

The story of [Deborah](#) and Barak begins with a description of the dire straits in which the Israelites found themselves again:

*Again the Israelites acted wickedly in YHWH's eyes. Ehud was dead. YHWH gave them over to the control of Jabin, the Canaanite king who ruled from Hazor, and Sisera his army general (he lived in Haroshet-hagoyim). The Israelites cried out to YHWH, because Jabin had nine hundred iron chariots. He severely oppressed the Israelites for twenty years. (4:1–3)*

The hard times were prompted, as always in this book, by Israel's disposition. The particular offense is not specified, but based on the narrative introduction of the book; we can assume it was some sort of disloyalty to YHWH.

The oppressor was Jabin from Hazor (see [Figure 7.5](#)), though a problem arises with the mention of Jabin and Hazor. He was explicitly said to have been destroyed by Joshua (see Joshua 11 and RTOT [Chapter 6](#)). How might this be explained? Because the reference to Jabin is found only in the introduction and conclusion to the Deborah–Barak tale (verses 1–3 and 23–24) and in the mention of a treaty (verse 17), it has been suggested that Jabin was not originally attached to this story and was for some reason inserted later. The actual fighting described in the story is against Sisera and his forces, not Jabin. The mention of Hazor places the conflict in northern Canaan, just to the west of the Sea of Galilee.

After the stage-setting words, Deborah is introduced as a prophet who judged Israel in Ephraim. She was obviously a respected leader. In the mode of a prophet, she delivered an oracle (a message from God) to Barak commanding him to organize troops from the tribes of



Naphtali and Zebulun to fight Sisera on Mount Tabor. Barak requested that Deborah accompany him. She agreed but only after telling him that the coming victory would be credited to a woman. The story highlights the insecurity of Barak and the courage of Deborah.

*She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Qedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “Has YHWH, the Elohim of Israel, not commanded you?—‘Go, march to Mount Tabor, and take ten thousand men from Naphtali and Zebulun with you. I will march Sisera, Jabin’s army commander, to you at the Kishon River, along with his chariots and his troops. I will hand them over to you.’” Barak said to her, “Only if you go with me will I go. If you do not go with me, I will not go.” She said, “I will go with you. But you will get no glory this way. YHWH will sell out Sisera by the hand of a woman.” Deborah got up and went with Barak to Qedesh. (4:6–9)*

After the battle was joined, the Canaanite army was soon outmaneuvered, and Sisera fled the battle scene on foot. He found refuge in the tent of Jael, a onetime friend. Jael greeted him warmly, gave him drink and let him rest. But after Sisera fell asleep, she sneaked back into the tent and pounded a tent stake through his temple and on into the ground. The victory was celebrated in song. The text of the victory hymn, sometimes called the Song of Deborah, is found in Judges 5. Judging by the style of its language, Hebrew linguists tell us it is one of the oldest compositions in the Old Testament and may have been written close to the event itself (see Cross, 1973).

The tale of Deborah and Barak reveals many things about the period of the judges. It illustrates how at various times, out of military necessity, individual tribes would join forces to combat a formidable enemy. But, as the Song of Deborah also indicates, not all

the tribes always answered the call for help; some were known to refuse. Israel as a confederacy was still dominated by regional interests. There was no national cohesiveness or unity of commitment at this time.

The story also profiles the prophetic and military roles that female Israelites at times played in Israel. The courage of Deborah and Jael, and the credit for victory they received, sets in relief the deplorable lack of male initiative and leadership in Israel at the time of the judges. Perhaps the story implies that if the defense of the nation were up to women, the future does not look promising. Yet were it not for women, the cause would have been lost.

### 3.3 Gideon (6–9)

The land rested for forty years after the victory over Sisera. Then the Israelites turned away from YHWH. Again, the judge tale is framed with the editor's pattern of faith statements:

*The Israelites acted wickedly in YHWH's eyes. YHWH gave them over to the control of Midian for seven years. (6:1)*

The first stage of the pattern is thus stated. The [Midianites](#) were marauders who would descend on the more settled Israelites, foraging grain and stealing livestock:

*Israel became very poor on account of Midian, and the Israelites cried out to YHWH. (6:6)*

The Israelites realized that they did in fact need YHWH. He responded by sending an angel to commission [Gideon](#), who was from the tribe of Manasseh. The setting of this encounter is very

revealing of the conditions in Israel generally and of the quality of Israel's leadership specifically. The angel confronted Gideon as Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress. A winepress is a depression carved out of rock. Normally, threshing is done on a hard surface near the top of a hill, to catch the breeze. Gideon was obviously carrying on in fear of the Midianites, lest they find him and steal his harvest. The angel's words of address can only be heard as ironic in this context when he says, "*YHWH is with you, you mighty warrior!*"

Gideon's first act in YHWH's cause was to vandalize the local shrine of Baal. During the night, he and a few of his servants sneaked up to the high place and pulled down the altar and its associated Asherah symbol. Again, the insecurity of Gideon comes to our attention. He did it at night because he was afraid someone might recognize and blame him. Only after the townspeople confronted him did he own up to his act and stand up publicly against Baal.

The spirit of YHWH empowered Gideon, and he mustered troops from the northern tribes to fight against the Midianites. But in another act of insecurity he asked YHWH for a signal of whether or not he would find victory. He himself proposed the test of the wet sheepskin. He laid out a fleece overnight. If it became wet while the surrounding ground remained dry, then this would be a sign of victory. It was so, but Gideon still was not convinced. He asked for just the opposite, and when it happened the next night Gideon had no choice but to acknowledge that YHWH was signaling success; he would have to get on with the campaign.

Go to the companion website and see the table "Spirit of YHWH."

Gideon assembled a fighting force. But like Gideon, they were reluctant warriors. When the soldiers were given the opportunity to return home rather than fight, 22,000 out of 32,000 decided to leave.

God told Gideon that this was still too many—he wanted to make clear that the victory would come from him. So the army experienced further attrition after Gideon observed them drinking water from a spring. Only those who brought water hand to mouth, rather than by directly lapping the water from the pool, were enlisted for the battle. The story seems to dwell on the timidity and even incompetence of these early “warriors,” on the way to making the point that Israel’s fighting men were less than valiant defenders of the Israelite federation.

Left with only 300 men, Gideon devised a plan of attack that involved surprise and clever deception. He and his men surrounded the Midianite camp in the middle of the night. Armed with ram’s horn trumpets, jars, and torches, on Gideon’s signal they shocked the enemy out of sleep by smashing the jars, blowing the trumpets, and holding high the flames. Disoriented, confused, and seemingly outnumbered, the Midianites tried to flee. Gideon’s 300 gave chase and killed many of them. The chase became the occasion for the writer to illustrate the lack of cooperation and even distrust among the various tribes. The Ephraimites felt slighted because they had not been invited to the originating attack and only got to be a part of the mopping up. Then the Israelites in Transjordan at Succoth and Penuel refused to help Gideon.

What happens next relates to the ideology of covenant and kingship, a major concern of the Deuteronomistic historian. After he had killed the last kings of the Midianites, the Israelites begged Gideon to be their ruler. Although he took tribute from them—a share of the booty taken from the defeated Midianites—he refused to be king, saying, “*YHWH will rule over you*” (8:23). At least one leader, then, refused kingship and upheld theocracy.

In the following story of Gideon’s son Abimelech (whose name means “my father is king”), we have the record of an individual’s aborted attempt to establish a royal dynasty. Abimelech came to kingship by killing the other seventy sons of Gideon, though

overlooking the youngest, Jotham. Abimelech assumed control of Shechem and by various campaigns sought to control other villages. He died ingloriously after a defender dropped a millstone on his head. Perhaps written by an author critical of monarchy, the tale illustrates the violence-prone and typically self-important character of kings. And this story has similarities to Jehu, another usurper in Israel, who executed the seventy sons of Ahab in order to secure his rule of Samaria (see 2 Kings 10).

### 3.4 Jephthah (10:6–12:7)

**Jephthah** delivered the Israelites of Gilead in Transjordan from the oppression of the Ammonites. He is most notable for the disastrous vow he made to YHWH:

*If you will give me power over the Ammonites, then whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return victorious from the Ammonites will belong to YHWH, and I will sacrifice it up as a burnt offering. (11:30b–31)*

Jephthah was successful in battle, but when he returned home the first to greet him was his daughter. With grace she accepted her fate and had only one request, that she be allowed to roam the hills and weep with her friends, for she was a virgin.

After the victory of the Jephthah-led Gileadites, the Israelites of Ephraim attacked the Israelites of Gilead because they felt slighted, having been left out of the Ammonite conflict. The Gileadites took control of the ford between Gilead and Ephraim and killed any man that could not pronounce the password, *shibboleth*, as they did. Ephraimites were immediately identified because they said *sibboleth*, a dialectal variation. The incident indicates that the tribes of Israel were diverse and even spoke different dialects, supporting

the contention that Israel had a diverse ethnicity. The term has entered the English language and means “test word.”

**Shibboleth:** A word or sound which a person is unable to pronounce correctly; a word used as a test for detecting foreigners, or persons from another district, by their pronunciation. A peculiarity of pronunciation or accent indicative of a person’s origin. A catchword or formula adopted by a party or sect, by which their adherents or followers may be discerned, or those not their followers may be excluded. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

### 3.5 Samson (13–16)

[Samson](#) is one of the most colorful personalities in the Bible. He is profoundly conflicted. Brash, bold, and impressively powerful, he is at the same time naive and vulnerable. He is physically massive, yet spiritually infantile. The story of Samson is the climactic last story about an individual judge. As such, we might surmise that the editor is encapsulating the message of the book with this account. Samson epitomizes the age. And in Samson, we have a portrait of Israel in miniature.

The Deuteronomistic editor introduces the story with an abbreviated version of his theological framework. There is no mention of the Israelites crying out for help or repenting:

*The Israelites again did what was bad in YHWH’s sight, and YHWH gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. (13:1)*

**FIGURE 7.6** Philistine Pottery

Philistine pottery is typically well made and delightfully decorated. Overall the Philistines had a more refined material culture than the Israelites. The definition of a Philistine as one “deficient in liberal culture; uncultured, commonplace, prosaic” (*Oxford English Dictionary*) does not fit the archaeological picture.



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra of pottery from twelfth century BCE Ashdod, based on BAS Biblical Archaeology Slide Set No. 128.

Samson was born to a woman previously unable to have children. An angel of YHWH delivered the announcement of conception and directed her to raise Samson in a special way. Both she, during pregnancy, and he throughout his life, were to refrain from alcoholic beverages and not eat anything unclean. This implies that from the moment of conception Samson was to be devoted exclusively to YHWH, a state or condition called the [Nazirite vow](#).

By his lifestyle, Samson inadvertently demonstrated that neither the Nazirite vow nor his Israelite identity meant anything to him. Against his parents' wishes, he chose to marry a Philistine woman. One day while on the way to see her, a lion attacked him. The spirit of YHWH came upon him, and he killed the animal with his bare hands. When later he was traveling the same road to his wedding, he stopped to view the carcass of the lion. A swarm of bees had made a hive there, and he scraped some honey out and ate it. By Hebrew law, such honey would have been considered unclean, having been in direct

contact with dead remains.

The Samson story is one long record of the love–hate relationship between Samson and the Philistines. He is drawn to them, especially to their beautiful women, perhaps as the Israelites were drawn to Philistine culture (see [Figure 7.6](#)). Yet every meeting becomes an occasion for him to kill more Philistines. For example, at his wedding, he makes a wager using a riddle about the lion and the honey and loses. Payment of the bet was thirty sets of clothing. Samson handily killed thirty Philistines and stripped them of their garments to pay his debt.

Samson's nemesis was Delilah. Only one of many women with whom he consorted, she was ultimately his undoing. After three unsuccessful attempts, she finally convinced him to reveal the secret of his strength. Although Samson had enough clues to figure out that she would betray him, he unwittingly told her that if his hair was cut off, he would be vulnerable. While he was asleep, she did just that. He woke up helpless and was easily captured by his foes. The Philistines blinded him and put him to work at hard labor. Then in prison his hair began to grow back.

During a festival, he was brought to the temple of Dagon, the high god of the Philistines, for a command performance. While waiting in the wings he found two central supporting pillars. He prayed to YHWH for a return of his powers—then toppled those pillars and brought down the house. YHWH had not abandoned him, even though he had abandoned YHWH. In dying, he killed more Philistines than ever before.

This is the stuff of legends—a great story, full of love and lust, violence and manly challenge. Yet surely the writer is doing more than just telling a good story. He was mirroring Israel in the figure of Samson. Like Samson, Israel was powerful, even invincible when filled with the spirit of YHWH. But Samson, like Israel, was indifferent to his special pedigree—conceived through the special intervention of YHWH and dedicated to serve the divine at birth. He



lusted after more enticing companions. The women in Samson's life are surely symbols of the foreign gods who continually seduced the Israelites. They were blind after having betrayed the secret of their strength, but YHWH never totally abandoned them. The time of the judges was a time of political and religious insecurity. But the God of Israel would not abandon them.

The book of Judges ends with stories describing the state of tension that existed among the tribes. The tribe of Dan migrated from the coastal plain to the far north of Israel. And some tribes tried to wipe out Benjamin. In addition to the tribes' lack of cooperation and the people's lack of focus on YHWH, the problem was lack of effective and sustained leadership. The moral condition of the nation had deteriorated massively after the death of Joshua. The writer characterized the problem using the statement, "*In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes*" (17:6; 21:25). This chaotic situation would soon change. Order and stability would come but at a considerable price. The books of Samuel detail the rise of kingship in Israel, both for good and ill.

## 4 JUDGES AS A BOOK

The core of the book of Judges is a collection of stories told about Israel's legendary tribal leaders. The independent stories probably existed orally for a long time, transmitted from generation to generation in the vicinity where the particular judge at one time lived. Many of the stories have a setting in the north and were incorporated into the all-Israel story after the destruction of the northern kingdom. The map of the Judges locates them in the areas of their activity (see [Figure 7.7](#)). Notice that no judge covered all Israel, yet when all are accounted for, they cover the entire spectrum of territories.

The chronology of the book suggests that the Deuteronomistic historian artificially chained the judge stories together to create the feeling of a continuous history such that each generation after the next fell away from YHWH. If all the time indications are added together, the book spans exactly 400 years. This is too exact to be an accident and much too long to fit the archaeological and historical record. A reasonable estimate for the time span of the period of the judges is more like 150 years. Evidently, many of the judges actually lived and ruled contemporaneously. Further suggesting a certain artificiality, many of the judges judged for 20, 40, or 80 years—or in biblical parlance, one-half, one, or two generations, respectively. [Table 7.1](#) provides a synopsis of the Judges that draws together the geographical and chronological data on the individual judges for easy reference.

### **FIGURE 7.7** The Judges

The individual judges were local, but cumulatively they are spread over the whole range of Israelite territory.

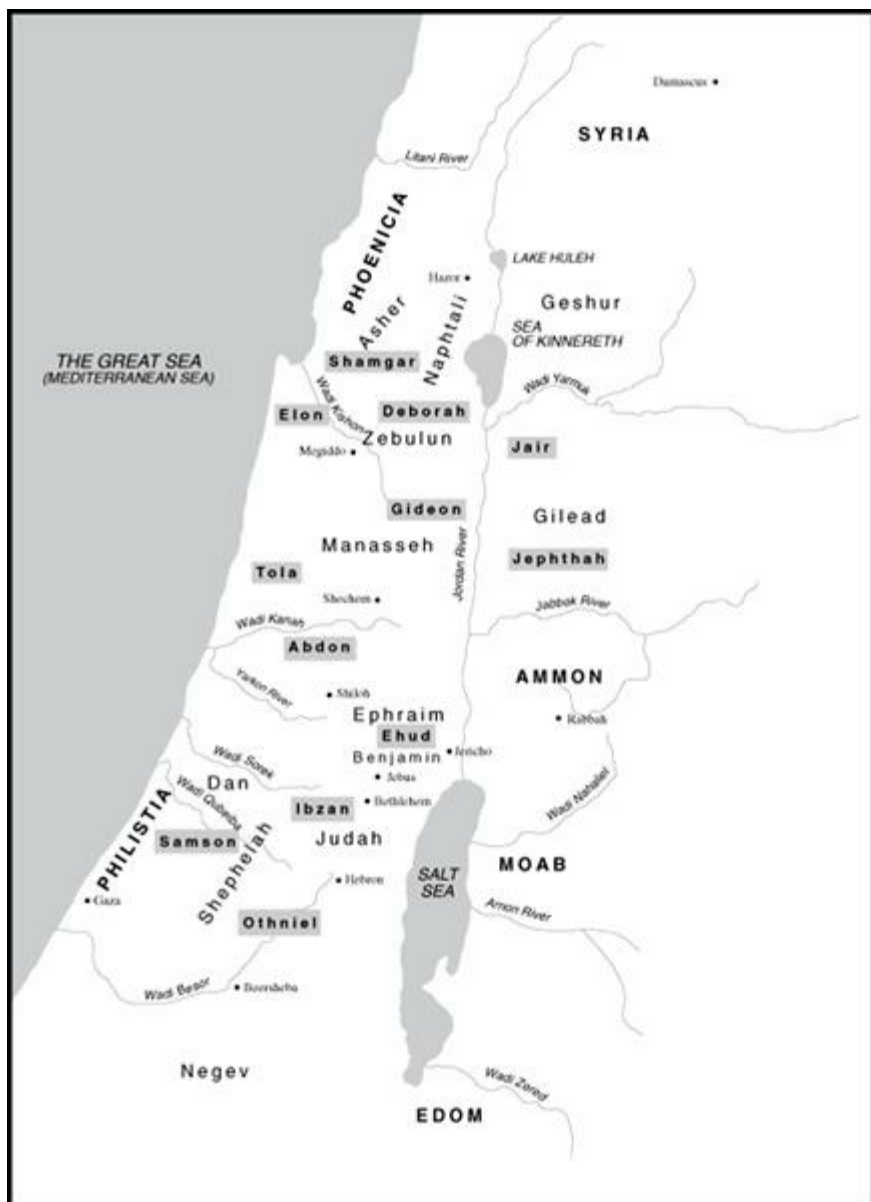


**TABLE 7.1** Synopsis of the Judges

| Judge         | Text       | Tribal Home | Location                         | Foe                                        | Years Oppressed | Years Judged |
|---------------|------------|-------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Othniel       | 3:7-11     | Judah?      |                                  | Cushan-rishathaim, king of Aram            | 8               | 40           |
| Ehud          | 3:12-30    | Benjamin    | Hill country of Ephraim and Moab | Eglon, king of Moab; Ammonites; Amalekites | 18              | 80           |
| Shamgar       | 3:31       |             | Philistia                        | Philistines                                |                 |              |
| Deborah       | 4:1-5:31   | Ephraim     | Mount Tabor, Naphtali, Zebulun   | Sisera; Jabin, king of Hazor; Canaanites   | 20              | 40           |
| Gideon        | 6:1-9:57   | Manassch    | Manassch                         | Midianites, Amalekites, Kedemites          | 40              |              |
| Tola          | 10:1-2     | Issachar    | Ephraim                          |                                            |                 | 23           |
| Jair          | 10:3-5     | Gilead      |                                  |                                            |                 | 22           |
| Jephthah      | 10:6-12:7  | Gilead      |                                  | Ammonites                                  | 18              | 6            |
| Ibzan         | 12:8-10    | Bethlehem   |                                  |                                            |                 | 7            |
| Elon          | 12:11-12   | Zebulun     |                                  |                                            |                 | 10           |
| Abdon         | 12:13-15   | Ephraim     |                                  |                                            |                 | 8            |
| Samson        | 13:1-16:31 | Dan         | Philistia                        | Philistines                                | 40              | 20           |
| <i>Totals</i> |            |             |                                  |                                            | 144             | 256          |

The Deuteronomistic historian took up the judges' stories, gave them a theological introduction, and packaged them to fit the Deuteronomic cycle of disobedience outlined in that introduction. They were combined in such a way that the Israelites are pictured as continually forgetting YHWH and falling into trouble in a downward spiral. Thus, originally local stories were "universalized" into all-Israel tales and combined in linear fashion in order to say something in general about the entire nation and its faith tendencies.

Thus exposing the nation's corporate lack of faithfulness, the Deuteronomistic historian justified the need for a faithful king who would lead the people back to their God. The book of Samuel picks up the story at this point, recounting the rise of kingship. Note that the book of Ruth follows the book of Judges in many English versions, but you will not find a discussion of Ruth in the next chapter of our book. The book of Ruth is not counted among the Former Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, it is one of the Five Scrolls (see [RTOT Chapter 15](#)).

# KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Deuteronomic theme*. What is the theological framework of the book of Judges, and how did it shape the tales of individual judges?
2. *Judges*. What foes did Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, and Samson each face, and in what way did each judge achieve victory?
3. *Deuteronomistic History*. In what ways is the book of Judges transitional between the era of Joshua and the rise of kingship?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Judges' flaws*. Consider the character of the major judges. What disability did each of them have? What do their flaws say about Israel at this time in its history? Do you think that the judges are heroes or antiheroes?
2. *Women warriors*. Reflect on the writer's perspective on women in these narratives, especially in relation to the Deborah story. Did the writer have a positive or a negative estimation of women in Israel?
3. *Judges as history*. The book of Judges presents clear evidence of the role of the editor in shaping the final work. What is the relationship between history-telling and history? Was the Deuteronomistic historian true or untrue to history in the way that he shaped the book? What does it mean to write history? Does the Deuteronomistic History qualify as history in the sense that we use that term today?

# READING THE TEXT TODAY

*The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*, by Barry G. Webb

(1987), is a literary analysis of the book of Judges. The book of Judges is notable for the many powerful women that make their appearance. *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and biblical Israel*, by Susan Ackerman (1998), examines the stories of Deborah, Jael, Sisera's mother, Samson's mother, Delilah, and others as biblical type-roles in Israel. The reconstruction of the origin, nature, and identity of the early Israelites is a hot topic, with many implications for historiography and Bible composition, and is comprehensively covered in *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* by William G. Dever (2003).

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## Samuel: The Rise of Kingship

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Samuel Cycle \(1 Samuel 1–12\)](#)

[3 Saul Cycle \(1 Samuel 13–31\)](#)

[4 David Cycle \(2 Samuel 1–24\)](#)

[5 Samuel as a Book](#)

---

## KEY TERMS

[Abner](#)

[Absalom](#)

[Amnon](#)

[Anointing](#)

[Ark of the covenant](#)

[Bathsheba](#)

[David](#)

[Davidic covenant](#)

[Eli](#)

[Goliath](#)

[Hannah](#)

[Hebron](#)

[Hophni](#)

[Jebus](#)

[Jerusalem](#)

[Joab](#)

[Jonathan](#)

[Messiah](#)

[Michal](#)

[Mount Gilboa](#)

[Nathan](#)

[Philistines](#)

[Samuel](#)

[Saul](#)

[Shiloh](#)

[Succession narrative](#)

[United monarchy](#)

[Zadok](#)

## Michelangelo's *David*

David was Israel's most charismatic and effective leader, extending the nation's influence to its furthest reaches. Michelangelo's depiction idealizes David as if he were a Greek god. The biblical narrative does not shy away from the darker side of David, including his affair with Bathsheba and Uriah's murder.



Source: Michelangelo's *David* (Florence, Italy, Galleria dell'Accademia: 1501–1504). Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on a photo by Barry Bandstra, 1998.

---

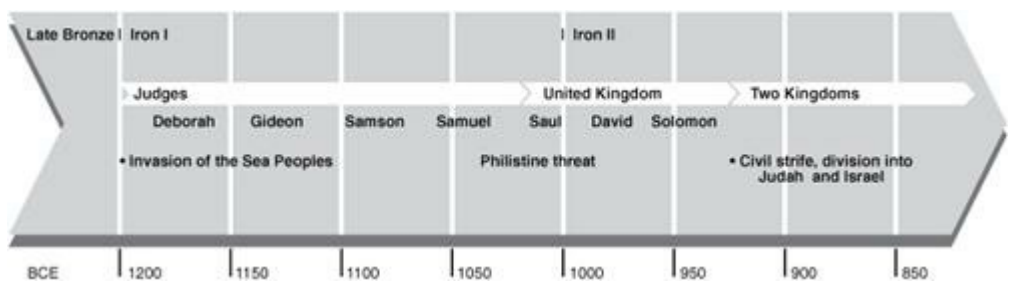
## 1 INTRODUCTION

Dynamic and visionary leaders shape the character of nations. Flawed and failed leaders also shape their nations, though for



different reasons. Especially during periods of social transition, charismatic leaders are critical in molding institutional structures.

**FIGURE 8.1** Time Line: The Books of Samuel



Think of the influence of George Washington on the course of the American Revolution and Lenin and Trotsky on the Bolshevik Revolution. It is no surprise, then, that Israel had a sizable collection of stories about its earliest founding fathers, most significantly, Samuel, Saul, and David.

The books of Samuel concentrate on the role that these leaders played in the emergence of the Israelite state and how it should be configured. After the chaos of the judges' era, when "*everyone did what was right in his own eyes*," Israel needed and craved strong direction. Many people were inclined to have a king, even though this seemed to go against the theocracy that had created them. Remember that divine rule had been mandated at Mount Sinai, and this demanded that YHWH be their king. Yet present political circumstances seemed to demand something more: a strong unifying human king. Would this change the fundamental spirit of the nation?

There is no compelling reason for these books to be called the books of Samuel. They were not written by Samuel, and they deal with Samuel only part of the time. The books might better be entitled "Kingship in Israel" or "The Rise of the Monarchy" because they deal with the development of that institution. In fact, this is very nearly what the books of Samuel and Kings are called in the

Septuagint: “Kingdoms I, II, III, and IV.” Nonetheless, associating the content of these books with Samuel is not entirely inappropriate. Samuel was an important, even pivotal, figure. He guided Israel’s transition to kingship and bridged the periods of the judges and the monarchy (see [Figure 8.1](#)).

The Samuel material is configured as two books although structurally they are one. Dividing Samuel into two parts was done because not all of it could conveniently fit on one scroll. Ignoring the book division, the subject matter divides neatly into three main sections on the basis of the editor’s transitional passages in 1 Samuel 13:1 and 2 Samuel 1:1. Each section focuses on a major historical figure: Samuel (1 Samuel 1–12), Saul (1 Samuel 13–31), and David (2 Samuel) ([Table 8.1](#)). All three figures were pivotal in the development of Israel’s institution of kingship.

We were primed for a treatment of the issue of kingship by the refrain of the book of Judges: “*In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.*” The overall theme of the books of Samuel is the emergence of the new institution of monarchy in Israel. These writings consider the rocky beginnings of monarchy, its early failures, and its golden age in David.

**TABLE 8.1** Structure of Samuel

| Cycle  | Transition                                                                             | Books of Samuel |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Samuel |                                                                                        | 1 Samuel 1–12   |
|        | <i>Saul was . . . years old when he became king and two years he ruled over Israel</i> | 1 Samuel 13:1   |
| Saul   |                                                                                        | 1 Samuel 13–31  |
|        | <i>After the death of Saul, David returned from striking the Amalekites</i>            | 2 Samuel 1:1    |
| David  |                                                                                        | 2 Samuel        |

If we place the leadership issues addressed in the books of Samuel

within the context of the time the material was edited beginning with the reign of Josiah, we would observe that the question of leadership must have been especially urgent for the Deuteronomistic historian. During the times of the Babylonian crisis and the exile, one of the reasons for the drastic decline of Israel was the perceived failure of political and religious leadership. If recovery was ever to happen, Israel would need strong leadership. The exiled Judeans must have mulled over the questions long and hard: What shape should a new leadership take? Could a king extricate us from our predicament? Would God again work through our leaders? Presumably the Deuteronomistic historian thought that reexamining the period of the development of kingship might provide some answers to these pressing questions, and additionally might provide some needed instruction for any new leaders that might arise.

## **1.1 Rise of the Monarchy: A Summary**

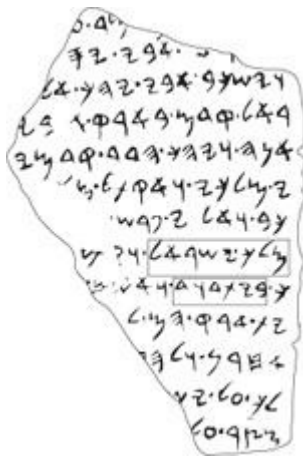
Samuel's birth was a miracle, and he distinguished himself early on as a prophet in Shiloh (1 Samuel [Chapters 1–3](#)). The Philistines captured the ark of the covenant, later returning it (4–6), but thereby revealed themselves as Israel's most dangerous foe. Samuel rescued Israel from the Philistines, but Israel demanded a king (7–8). Samuel anointed Saul king (9–10), and Saul demonstrated his leadership by rescuing Jabesh-Gilead (11). But then Saul broke holy war rules, and Samuel removed Saul's divine endorsement though Saul remained in office (12–15). Samuel anointed David king (16), and David demonstrated his character by defeating Goliath and the Philistines (17). This led to an intense rivalry between Saul and David that had Saul pursuing David to kill him, and David always eluding Saul's grasp (18–27). Saul faced the Philistines in a final battle in which he and his sons died (28–31).

David, earlier designated king, took office in Judah and later all

the tribes of Israel accepted his authority (2 Samuel 1–5). David set Jerusalem as his capital and moved the ark of the covenant there (6), and Nathan presented YHWH’s eternal endorsement of the Davidic line (7). David defeated Israel’s enemies (8–10) but sinned with Bathsheba, had her husband killed, and was punished for this (11–12). Punishment took the form of deadly infighting among his sons as they positioned themselves in line for the throne (13–14). David’s son, Absalom, actually took the throne from his father for a time but was killed for it (15–19). David consolidated his power and further built his empire (20–24).

**FIGURE 8.2** “House of David” Inscription

An inscription found at Tel Dan in northern Israel contains the first reference outside the Hebrew Bible to the dynasty of David (see Biran and Naveh, 1993). This fragmentary thirteen-line inscription, written in early Aramaic and dating to the mid-800s BCE, appears to celebrate the victory of the king of Aram in Damascus over a king in Israel. It contains the phrases “king of Israel” (upper box) and “house of David” (lower box).



Source: Graphic by Barry Bandstra based on A. Biran and J. Naveh, “An Aramaic Stele from Tel Dan,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 43,

## 1.2 Archaeology of David's Kingdom

Neither David nor Solomon are mentioned outside the Bible in any Egyptian or Mesopotamian texts. The archaeological record of Palestine once appeared to substantiate the Davidic–Solomonic empire. Twentieth-century archaeologists made a case for the empire on the basis of findings at Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer, where monumental buildings and massive gate complexes of similar structure were found and attributed to the reigns of David and Solomon. The dating of these structures is increasingly being called into question. Even more problematic is the lack of evidence in Jerusalem itself. Virtually no physical remains, not even pottery fragments, from the tenth century BCE (the time of David) have been discovered. From the available evidence, if in fact Jerusalem was occupied at this time, it would have been a rather small village and not a city of such resources as to administer an empire that stretched from the Euphrates to Egypt. Population estimates for the area of Judah, including Jerusalem, are about 5000. At this time in history Judah was rural and quite isolated, hardly the stuff of empires.

The earliest external documentation for the existence of the Davidic dynasty is from an inscription found at Tel Dan ([Figure 8.2](#)). The existence of a ruling force connected to the figure of David cannot be called into question. The issue then becomes why the biblical portrayal of the [united monarchy](#) (also called the *united kingdom*) of David and Solomon took shape the way it did.

## 1.3 Reading Guide

The first chapters of 1 Samuel capture the quality of civil and religious life in Israel in the Early Iron Age, and they establish the

central theme of humbling and exalting. So read 1 Samuel 1–8, paying special attention to Hannah and her song and the contrast between Eli’s house and Samuel. Then notice how the story of the ark of the covenant also expresses the theme of Hannah’s song. The story of the demise of Saul and the rise of David is a must-read because it contains the Goliath tale (1 Samuel 16–17). Read 2 Samuel 7, which is the foundational statement of the Davidic covenant, presented as a dynastic promise from YHWH guaranteeing that David’s line would forever provide Israel’s kings. The story of David’s affair with Bathsheba and the aftermath demonstrate how this covenant worked out in the history of David’s line (2 Samuel 11–12).

## 2 SAMUEL CYCLE (1 SAMUEL 1–12)

The first part of the books of Samuel deals with its namesake. It treats the birth and career of Israel’s last judge figure, [Samuel](#) (see [Table 8.2](#)).

### 2.1 The Early Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1–4:1a)

The story first treats the birth of Samuel. Elkanah was a pious man who had two wives. Peninnah had children but [Hannah](#) had none. It was commonly thought that sterility was a sign of God’s disfavor. Hannah felt low and abandoned, yet she also had faith in God. During their annual pilgrimage to the central sanctuary at [Shiloh](#), Hannah fervently asked YHWH of Hosts, as he is called in these early chapters, for a son.

[Eli](#) was the high priest of the Shiloh temple. When he saw her praying, he mistakenly thought she was drunk because he only saw her move her mouth and heard no sound; evidently, he could not recognize true piety when he saw it. Note how here and elsewhere one of the interests of the writer is to signal the ineffectiveness of Eli

and his high priesthood.

God answered Hannah’s prayer. She conceived, bore a son, and named him Samuel, meaning “God heard.” In return for the gift of the child, Hannah later gave the child back to God by devoting him to divine service in the temple at Shiloh. Hannah prayed a prayer of thanksgiving at the dedication. *Hannah’s song*, 1 Samuel 2:1–10, celebrates the great divine reversal. He turns weakness to strength and death to life. Hannah’s song is the model for Mary’s song of thanksgiving for the birth of Jesus in the New Testament, traditionally called the Magnificat and found in Luke 1:46–55. A couple of the lines communicate the tone and theme of Hannah’s song:

**TABLE 8.2** Biographical Sketch of Samuel

|                                            |               |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Born to Hannah and Elkanah                 | 1 Samuel 1, 2 |
| Grew up in the temple at Shiloh            | 3             |
| Defeated Philistines at Mizpah             | 7             |
| Anointed Saul as Israel’s first king       | 9, 10         |
| Delivered farewell speech                  | 12            |
| Rejected Saul                              | 13, 15        |
| Anointed David to be king in place of Saul | 16            |
| Died and was buried at Ramah               | 25            |
| Appeared to Saul as a spirit               | 28            |

*My heart rejoices in YHWH ... because I rejoice in your victory. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. YHWH kills and gives life, he brings down to Sheol and raises up, YHWH makes poor and makes rich; he humbles, he also exalts. He raises the poor up from the dust, he lifts the needy from the ashes to make them sit with princes. (2:1, 4, 6–8)*

The song has a rich poetic quality. Some scholars suggest that it once circulated as an independent poem. Maybe so, but what we

notice is that it fits well here and was placed strategically to introduce the theme of the books of Samuel. Often in works of literature and theology, the controlling theme is stated early in the work, and later stories develop that theme. Hannah's song voices a theme that resounds through the books of Samuel. YHWH raises up and he pulls down. The humble are given honor, and the proud are shamed. Pay special attention to the theme of the reversal of fortunes in the books of Samuel. The theme is typically worked out in an opposing pair of parties, one ascending and one descending.

The first instance of this theme working out in history is the reversal of Hannah's own station in life. Hannah was vindicated over arrogant Peninnah. Once barren, she now has a son, and a special one at that—one who now works in the holiest shrine in the land. Later, notice how Eli and his sons are contrasted with Hannah and Samuel, and how Saul and David later reverse positions. The Goliath and David pair is another instance of pride and a fall, and on the national level be alert to how the Philistines are set in contrast with the Israelites.

Immediately after Hannah's song, we get a description of the sons of Eli and their priestly practices. They appropriated the sacrifices of the people in a self-serving way, taking the best for themselves. In contrast stands Samuel. Of all things to mention, we get a description of his clothing. He wears a totally unpretentious linen garment. His humility is implicitly contrasted with the presumption of [Hophni](#) and Phineas. Eli could not control his sons, and as a result YHWH was about to remove them from the priestly office. This account prefigures that change in clan privileges. The juxtaposition of futures is starkly drawn:

*Yet they would not listen to their father, for it was the will of YHWH to kill them. The boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with YHWH and with the people. (2:25b—*



Then an anonymous man of God came to Eli (2:27–36) and uttered the judgment word of God that Eli’s family would be removed from priestly office and replaced with an unnamed “faithful priest.” The Deuteronomistic historian was closely in touch with the prophetic tradition and frequently makes a point of how the course of history works out the prophetic word spoken by one of the prophets. It would have been anachronistic for the writer to state it here, but later the Deuteronomistic historian shows whom he intended by “faithful priest”—the dynastic priesthood of [Zadok](#), which later supported the Davidic royal line. It is likely that Eli and the Shiloh priesthood are ancestors of the Abiathar priesthood, which was deposed when Abiathar lost out to Zadok (see 1 Kings 2:27).

## FIGURE 8.3

“Text/image not available due to copyright restrictions”.

Samuel grew up in Shiloh and worked in the temple there. Although “*the word of YHWH was rare in those days, and visions were infrequent*” (3:1), YHWH appeared to Samuel in the middle of the night as he slept near the ark of the covenant. The message he received from YHWH was the same as that delivered by the “man of God.” Eli’s family would be removed from office. From then on, the word of YHWH was revealed to Samuel, and he was recognized by everyone to be a prophet.

## 2.2 Travels of the Ark (1 Samuel 4:1b–7:17)

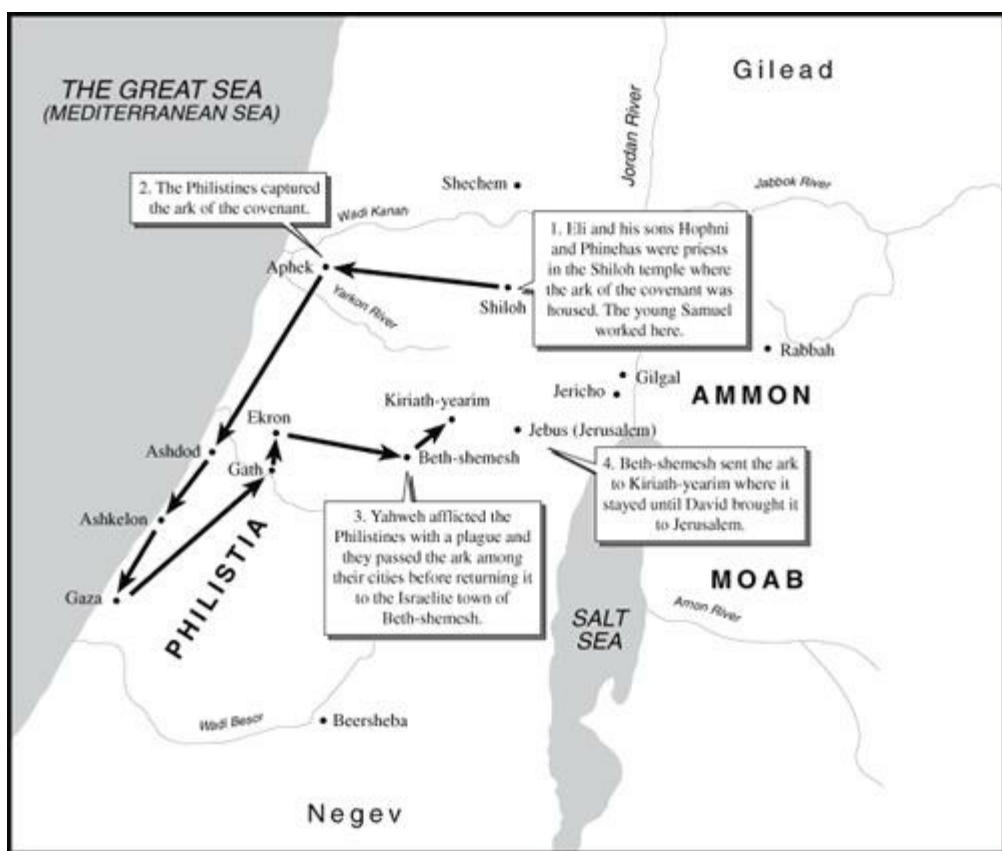
The [Philistines](#) surface again as the main threat to Israel’s existence. There are some suggestions that the Philistines had a technical advantage over the Israelites because they had iron implements. 1

Samuel 13:20 tells us how Israelites had to go to the Philistines to sharpen their tools. Later, Goliath the Philistine had a heavy iron spear (1 Samuel 17:7) while David had only a slingshot. Facing the Philistines in battle at Aphek, the Israelites fetched the [ark of the covenant](#) from Shiloh, thinking it would automatically give them victory. The Philistines proceeded to kill many Israelites, including Hophni and Phinehas, and to capture the ark ([Figure 8.3](#)). After Eli heard these shocking outcomes, he died.

When the Philistines took their prize home, the ark wreaked havoc upon deity and humanity within their cities. After it was placed in the temple of their chief god, Dagon, it caused his statue to topple and its head to break. Then physical illness broke out among the Philistines. They shuttled the ark among their cities until finally they decided to return it to the Israelites. It first arrived back in Israelite territory at the town of Beth-shemesh. After seventy men died there because they had peeked into the ark, the survivors sent it on to Kiriath-yearim, where it remained until David's day (see [Figure 8.4](#)).

This account of the war with the Philistines interrupts the history of Samuel. In fact, he plays no role in it. The story appears to have been placed here to fulfill the judgment word of Eli's demise. It also demonstrates some things about the power of Israel's YHWH. First, he refuses to be "used." He cannot be mechanically called on to perform for Israel's benefit, as they had attempted in battle at Aphek. Second, though apparently captured by the Philistines, YHWH proves to be more powerful than their god Dagon, and Dagon even finds himself bowing down to YHWH. Third, the Israelites had better respect him, or they will die as did the men at Beth-shemesh.

## **FIGURE 8.4** The Ark's Travels



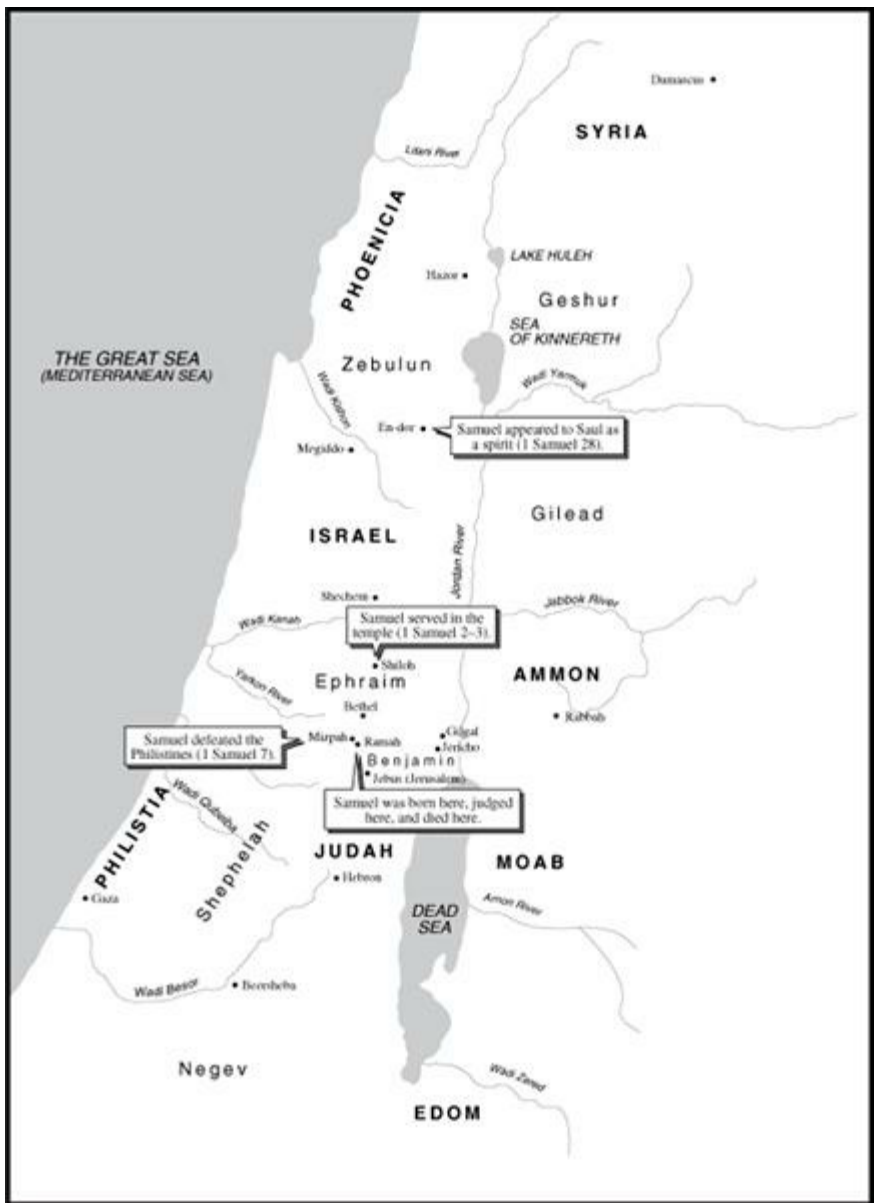
Now Samuel returns to the story. He gathered the Israelites together at Mizpah and renewed their commitment to YHWH (see [Figure 8.5](#)). The Philistines fought them there but were defeated. In this part of the account (7:3–17), Samuel is described as Israel’s great savior and judge after the model of the earlier judge heroes. He is talked about as if he is about to pass from the scene, and yet he will be a major force behind the scenes for much of the remainder of First Samuel.

## 2.3 Search for a King (1 Samuel 8–12)

How does a society manage to move from one leader to another and still retain stability? On whose authority does the next leader take

office? Can a nation peacefully change its form of government? Israel faced these challenges when Samuel, the last judge, got old. Apparently, his sons were appreciated no better than Eli's sons, and the people did not want them to take over. The nation lobbied for a fundamental change. They demanded, "*Appoint a king to rule us, like the other nations*" (8:5).

## **FIGURE 8.5** Samuel's Career



This was radical and unheard of in Israel! The fundamental covenantal structure that had shaped Israel's life had placed YHWH in the position of the king, with Israel as his nation. The covenant federation founded at Shechem was based on this model. The people's demand for a human king appeared to be a rejection of that relationship. Samuel was deeply shaken by this as well as by the

apparent rejection of his leadership and that of his sons. But YHWH counseled him that it was really a rejection of himself, and not Samuel. YHWH also instructed Samuel to go along with the people's demand.

Samuel warned them what a king would be like, drafting their sons and daughters to work for the crown, taxing them heavily, and in general making life difficult. This warning, not incidentally, is a fairly transparent prophetic critique of the monarchy as it actually came to be within Israel. Nobody could say they had not been forewarned!

Next we meet Saul. He is introduced as a tall, handsome man, the son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin. Searching for some lost donkeys one day, he went to Samuel because of his reputation as a prophet in the hope that he could locate them. When Saul arrived, Samuel arranged a banquet in his honor and afterward anointed him king. The ceremony of [anointing](#) involved pouring olive oil over the head of the person chosen by God. The oil may have been a symbol of the pouring out of the spirit of YHWH. The person would need this empowerment by the spirit to carry out the responsibilities of office.

Although there is evidence that priests and prophets were anointed, the ceremony was especially used to designate kings. A person who has been authorized in this way was called an "anointed one." This is the translation of the Hebrew word *mashiach*, rendered *messiah* in English and *christos* in Greek, from which the title *Christ* was derived. Note that the term [messiah](#) did not imply that such a figure was divine, only that the deity had designated the messiah figure to be a leader.

On his journey home, Saul received proof that he was indeed YHWH's anointed one. Passersby gave him gifts of bread and wine, presumably in recognition of his office, and he was overcome with ecstatic prophetic behavior, which was evidence that the spirit of YHWH had in fact come upon him.

But Saul received a mixed review after Samuel formally presented

him as Israel’s first king. Some of the people assembled at Mizpah hailed him while others grumbled, “*How can he save us?*” But shortly thereafter, Saul silenced his detractors. When the Transjordanian Israelite town of Jabesh-gilead was besieged by the Ammonites, “*the spirit of God came upon him powerfully.*” He put together an army and came to their rescue. Now having seen proof of his leadership ability, the people gathered together at Gilgal and confirmed his kingship.

The time was right for Samuel to step down from national leadership and give way to Saul. Samuel took the occasion of the assembly at Gilgal to deliver a farewell speech (1 Samuel 12:6–25). He reminded the people of the nasty step they had taken—“*the wickedness that you have done in the sight of YHWH is great in demanding a king for yourselves.*” The farewell speech gave the writer the opportunity to encapsulate his theological perspective. So much of the theology of the Deuteronomistic historian comes out in such big speeches. This particular address expresses once again the Deuteronomistic critique of kingship:

*If you will fear YHWH and serve him and heed his voice and not rebel against the commandment of YHWH, and if both you and the king who rules over you follow YHWH your Elohim, it will be well. But if you do not obey the voice of YHWH, but rebel against the commandment of YHWH, then the hand of YHWH will be against you and your king. (12:14–15)*

**TABLE 8.3** Sources in Samuel

|           |                                   |              |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| 8:1–22    | Samuel’s warning against kingship | Antimonarchy |
| 9:1–10:16 | Saul and his anointing            | Promonarchy  |
| 10:17–27  | Another warning by Samuel         | Antimonarchy |
| 11:1–15   | Saul’s victory over the Ammonites | Promonarchy  |
| 12:1–25   | Final warning by Samuel           | Antimonarchy |

The king is not absolute. Both the king and the people must be subject to the law of God. The covenant and its demands take precedence over any rights of kingship.

Looking at it holistically, this set of stories is somewhat puzzling. On the one hand, as with this Samuel speech, the view of kingship is quite negative. A king is granted only grudgingly to the Israelites and only with dire warnings. On the other hand, some passages reflect a positive appreciation of Saul, acknowledging that he was needed by Israel at this time. This situation has led some to posit that [Chapters 8–12](#) originally contained two different sources, an antimonarchy one and a promonarchy one. They are intertwined in an alternating way, as if to say, “We like Saul and we need a king, but we really do not want one.” [Table 8.3](#) displays the alternation between these differing viewpoints.

Samuel does not die until Chapter 25. Yet the narrative focus changes at this point. Saul takes center stage as he assumes the leadership role in Israel.

### 3 SAUL CYCLE (1 SAMUEL 13–31)

The story of [Saul](#) is a tragic tale (see [Table 8.4](#)). Having risen to the position of king and having been acclaimed by the people, he fell prey to the temptations of power. Although Samuel was supportive of him early on, he later turned away from Saul. From here on, we will see an increasingly frustrated and ineffective Saul, and we will see the corresponding rise of David. Remember the theme of Hannah’s song—how the mighty have fallen, but YHWH exalts the lowly. It



works out in the following cycle of narratives.

**TABLE 8.4** Biographical Sketch of Saul

|                                                          |                |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Anointed king by Samuel and presented to Israel          | 1 Samuel 9, 10 |
| Rescued Jabesh-gilead and was acclaimed king by Israel   | 11             |
| Disobeyed Samuel by offering a sacrifice at Michmash     | 13             |
| Battled Philistines and ordered Jonathan executed        | 14             |
| Rejected as king by Samuel                               | 15             |
| Tried to kill David                                      | 19             |
| Pursued but never caught David; his life spared by David | 23, 24, 26     |
| Died in battle with the Philistines on Mount Gilboa      | 31             |

### 3.1 Saul’s Disobedience (1 Samuel 13–15)

Saul gathered the troops at Gilgal to fight the Philistines. Samuel, in the role of army chaplain, was supposed to come and bless the troops. But when he did not show up on time, Saul went ahead and offered the ritual sacrifice. As soon as the offering was ignited, Samuel appeared and condemned Saul for presuming to function as a priest. This is the first occasion Samuel indicated that YHWH had rejected Saul and had chosen someone else to take his place as king.

Saul’s tendency to make bad judgments (was it a sign that he was no longer in YHWH’s favor, or just a sign that kings tend to make bad decisions?) is seen in the next encounter with the Philistines. Saul’s son [Jonathan](#) surprised a group of Philistines and thereby threw the entire Philistine army into a panic. The Israelites had the opportunity to completely wipe out the Philistines, except that Saul had foolishly decreed that the men should fast. This inappropriate abstention from food seems to signal a kind of misplaced religiosity on Saul’s part. In any case, the Israelite warriors did not have the energy to pursue the Philistines to their death. Even worse, Jonathan had not heard about the fasting decree and unwittingly broke his father’s command when

he ate some wild honey. Saul would have executed Jonathan for disobedience had not Saul's own soldiers stopped him.

Later, Saul had the opportunity to eliminate Israel's oldest enemy, the Amalekites. They were the first ones ever to attack Israel, right after the Hebrews had left Egypt. But Saul did not follow the rule of holy war to completely eradicate the enemy and burn the remains. He took spoils of war and spared Agag, the Amalekite king. Samuel was furious when he found out. He summarily condemned Saul and proclaimed that YHWH had rejected him as king. Then he himself killed Agag. Samuel completely disowned Saul and would not see him again—that is, until he came up from his grave to haunt Saul.

## **3.2 Saul versus David (1 Samuel 16–31)**

Competition for high office is often the anvil of national history. The contest is evident on many levels in the books of Samuel: Eli versus Samuel, Samuel versus Saul, and now Saul versus David.

Both having rejected Saul, Samuel and YHWH turned elsewhere for a new king. They went to a most unlikely place to find one, the insignificant village of Bethlehem in the southern tribe of Judah. Among the sons of Jesse, YHWH passed by the elder sons and chose the youngest boy, [David](#), to be king. This peculiar choice continues the countercultural ancestral tradition of passing the promise to the younger son: not Cain but Seth, not Ishmael but Isaac, not Esau but Jacob, not Reuben but Judah and Joseph, not Manasseh but Ephraim.

Samuel anointed David, and immediately the spirit of YHWH came upon him. In the Hebrew Bible, the spirit of God is the power that God bestows on select individuals that enables them to perform their God-given task. As if the spirit could not simultaneously be on two people at once, in the next verse we are told that the spirit of YHWH left Saul and in its place an evil spirit (also from YHWH) took possession of him. In hopes of calming his troubled mind, Saul

hired David to be the court musician. Skilled on the lyre (a type of harp), David comforted Saul and Saul came to love him dearly.

Again the Philistines harassed the Israelites. This time they camped in the Elah valley near an Israelite garrison. Daily their champion warrior [Goliath](#) of Gath (see Maeir and Ehrlich, 2001) taunted the Israelites, trying to goad them into a fight. None of the Israelites took up the challenge until one day when David came by. He was delivering food to his brothers in the camp when he heard Goliath's challenge. David was astounded that none of the Israelites had the courage to face him. He immediately volunteered himself. Armed with only a slingshot and stones, he faced Goliath in single combat. His first shot struck Goliath in the forehead and knocked him unconscious. David ran over to him and cut off his head. This threw the Philistines into a panic, and the Israelites drove the Philistines away.

There was great rejoicing, and women were singing in the streets, "*Saul killed thousands, David killed ten thousands.*" Everyone, including Saul's own son Jonathan, was enamored with David—everyone except Saul himself. Saul was angered by the popularity of David. From then on he tried actively to eliminate David in one way or another. He tried to spear him in the palace, but David was too quick. He made him commander of the army, hoping he would die in battle, but David's popularity only grew as he won battle after battle.

In a plot to have the Philistines kill him, Saul offered David the honor of marrying one of his daughters and thereby officially joining the royal family. As always in the ancient world, a bride did not come freely. A bride price had to be paid to her parents. Saul stipulated the bride price to be 100 Philistine foreskins. Saul was, of course, expecting David to get killed in the process. But David, always ready to do Saul one better, instead brought him 200. Saul had no choice but to give David his daughter [Michal](#) in marriage.

Frustrated and now obsessed with eliminating his rival, Saul planned to assassinate David. In an ironic turn, David was kept

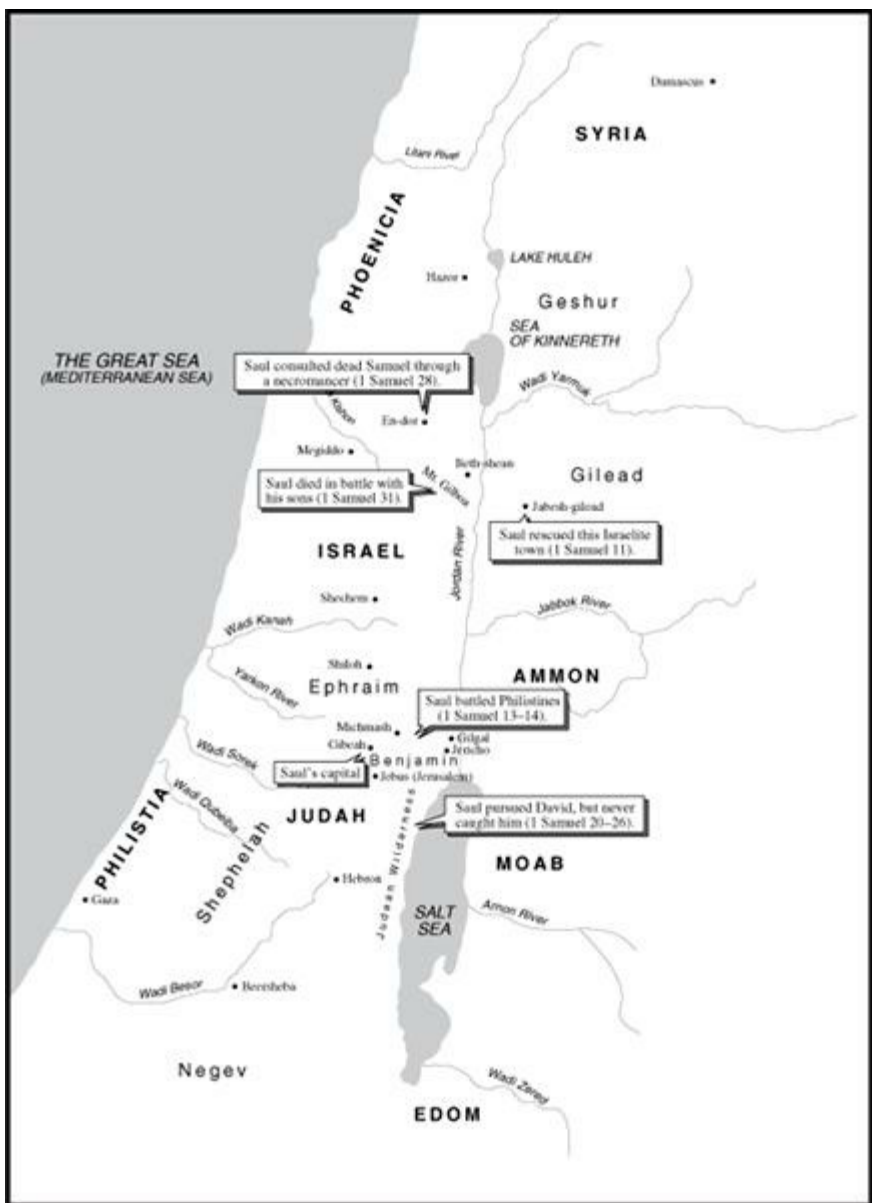
informed of Saul's plans by both Jonathan and Michal. Saul's own son and daughter betrayed him and took David's side, in effect acknowledging that he would be Israel's next king. The loyalty of Jonathan is especially remarkable because by aiding David he was implicitly renouncing his own claim to the throne.

David found it necessary to flee. He found help and refuge wherever he could. The priest at Nob gave him provisions and later was killed for it by Saul's men. Those who refused to help, such as Nabal, paid the price. David also stayed for a time with the Philistines, cleverly making it look like he was on their side while never really injuring Israelites. Twice while he was hiding in the Judean wilderness David had the opportunity to kill Saul, who was chasing him. Both times he held back out of respect for Saul's office. Each time, the piety of David is set in contrast to the obsessive behavior of Saul.

Meanwhile, pressure from the Philistines continued to grow, driving the Israelites back toward the Jordan River. Saul was hard pressed and tried to make a stand at [Mount Gilboa](#). He was at his wits' end as the time for battle approached. Samuel was dead, so he had no one to give him counsel, no one to bless the troops before the fight, and no one to assure him of the presence of YHWH. Desperate for a word from YHWH, Saul approached a professional diviner. In a séance-like encounter, the spirit of Samuel appeared before him:

*“Tell me what I should do.” Samuel said, “Why do you ask me? YHWH has turned from you and is now your enemy. YHWH has done to you just what he spoke through me. YHWH has torn the kingdom out of your hand and has given it to your companion David, because you did not obey the voice of YHWH.” (28:15–18)*

**FIGURE 8.6** Saul's Career



Looking for help and assurance, Saul received anything but a word of comfort. Samuel only confirmed his and YHWH's earlier rejection of the benighted king. Fulfilling the prophetic word of Samuel, the kingdom was taken away as Saul and his sons died in battle on Mount Gilboa (see [Figure 8.6](#)). When the Philistines came upon Saul's body, they beheaded him, stripped him of his armor, and hung his corpse on

the wall of Beth-shean (see [Figure 8.7](#)) for all to see. Hearing of Saul's demise, the citizens of Jabesh-gilead, whom Saul earlier had rescued, bravely recovered his body, along with the bodies of his sons, and gave them respectful disposal.

**FIGURE 8.7 Philistine Anthropoid Coffin**

This Philistine pottery coffin, now located in the Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem, was found at Beth-shean and dates roughly to the time of Saul (1000 BCE). The coffin is the size of an adult. The removable lid bears a face, perhaps a likeness to the one interred inside. This coffin and other material evidence prove that the Philistines occupied Beth-shean at this time, attesting how far east they had penetrated and how dire the Philistine threat really was.



Photo by Barry Bandstra, June 1979

## **4 DAVID CYCLE (2 SAMUEL 1–24)**

David is an enigma, and cracking his code has become a cottage industry. Was he a good king devoted to YHWH, or was he a villainous opportunist? Did he actually build a world-class empire and usher in the Israelite golden age? Did he even exist? Historians and archaeologists are asking serious questions about the supposedly greatest king Israel ever had.

The second book of Samuel deals with David's consolidation of

power. He subsumed under his own authority all the territory of Judah and the northern tribes. For the first time, all the tribes were united in a cohesive national entity.

## 4.1 David's Rise to Power (2 Samuel 1–8)

Saul was mortally wounded and asked a soldier to finish him off. That soldier ran to David, Saul's crown in hand, with what he thought would be news well received. David was outraged that this man had finished off Saul, even though Saul realistically had had no chance for survival. What do we see here? Do we see David turning as irrational as Saul? Is this the beginning of David's decline?

Probably not. David was genuinely pained that his one-time mentor, Saul, was dead. David's emotions come out in the sensitive and touching eulogy that David delivered upon the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:19–27). This poem, not coincidentally, picks up the theme of the books of Samuel first articulated in Hannah's song —“*How the mighty have fallen!*” (see especially verses 19, 25, and 27). Remember, the proud are humbled, and the humble exalted.

Yet, in addition, David's reaction reveals his political savvy. Contrary to the expected reaction, though Saul was his rival, he did not express his approval nor would he condone in any way the death of Saul. He did nothing that might serve to alienate the loyal followers of Saul, which was virtually the entire entity of northern Israel. Even in this time of tragedy, David kept the door open for the friends of Saul to join him in political union.

David went to Judah, his home tribe, to rally support now that Saul was dead. He set up his headquarters at [Hebron](#), the regional capital of Judah. David ruled from Hebron for seven and a half years. Meanwhile in the north, Ishbaal had been proclaimed king by [Abner](#), the commander of Saul's army. The opposing sides were now drawn, the house of David against the house of Saul. But while David's

power base got stronger, Ishbaal's got weaker. The Hebrew text gives Ishbaal's name as Ishbosheth, which means "man of shame." Based on 1 Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39, we know his name originally to have been Ishbaal, meaning "man of Baal." The name was changed to eliminate the divine element Baal and at the same time to disparage this pretender to the throne. The same defamation technique was applied to the name of Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, originally named Meribbaal.

Seeing that the future lay with David, Abner, Ishbaal's commander, defected. This in turn provoked [Joab](#), David's commander. He and Abner earlier had a disagreement, and perhaps Joab also felt insecure in his position as David's right-hand man. Joab secretly met Abner and killed him, thus getting rid of a serious rival.

David lamented Abner's death and blamed the treachery on Joab. Abner was well respected in northern Israel. His presence in David's camp might have proven troublesome, yet none of the blame for his death fell on David. David was again sensitive to the feelings of Saul's loyalists and did not provoke their ill will.

Conditions in the north deteriorated completely. Ishbaal was attacked by two of his officers. They killed and decapitated him, carrying the head to David in Hebron as proof of their new loyalty to him. David, as we have come to expect, was not impressed—quite the opposite. He had those two traitors killed, again sending a signal that he did not condone violence done to the house of Saul.

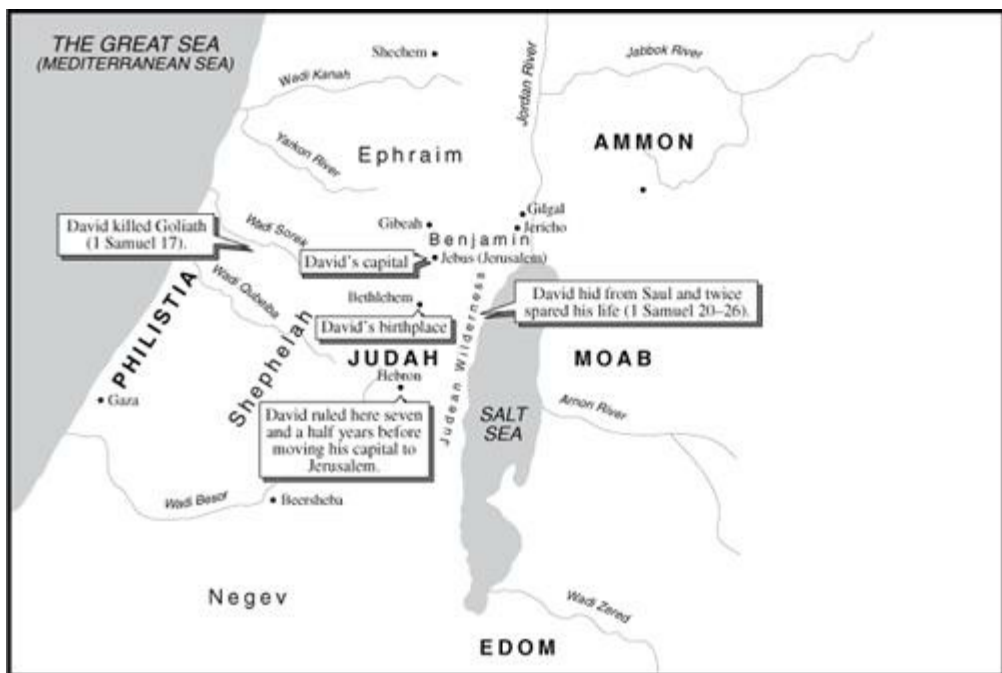
Completely without direction or leadership, the tribes of the north asked David to become their king as well. With a covenant, David assumed kingship over both Judah and Israel, reigning over a united nation. David very wisely decided he must move his capital from Hebron. If left there it would seem he was favoring his ancestral tribe of Judah. David and his men attacked and occupied what was then called [Jebus](#), to be identified with [Jerusalem](#) (see [Figure 8.8](#)). Second Samuel 5:6–10 describes how David's men got into the city. The archaeology of Jerusalem may or may not yield clues to how they



did it (see Reich and Shukron, 1999). David had it called “the city of David” to indicate it was directly under his command. Then he rid the surrounding territory of Philistines, providing greater security for his new capital city. Finally, in an act of great piety and even greater political astuteness, he fetched the ark of God from Kiriath-yearim and brought it into Jerusalem. The presence of the great symbol of the tribal federation and focus of earlier religious devotion firmly established Jerusalem as the religious center of the newly unified nation.

David had a desire to build a shrine for the ark in Jerusalem. [Nathan](#), the Jerusalem royal court prophet, received word from YHWH that David should not build YHWH a house. With a divine play on words, YHWH said that instead, he would build a house for David, meaning a perpetual dynasty. Then, in what is termed the [Davidic covenant](#), YHWH pledged his enduring support for the line of David:

**FIGURE 8.8** David’s Career



*Your house and your kingdom will be established firmly forever before me. Your throne will be established forever.*  
(7:16)

Although Davidic kings might sin, YHWH would never remove his support from them as he had done with Saul. This promise is the foundation for messianic expectations in Judaism and Christianity. YHWH promised he would never remove his support from the offspring of David. It implied, also, that there would be a divinely sponsored king over Israel forever.

David was at the peak of his career. Endorsed by YHWH, loved by his people, he also managed to defeat Israel's inveterate enemies. [Chapter 8](#) sums up his victories. He subdued the Philistines. Never again would they be a threat to Israel. He defeated the Arameans, the Moabites, and the Edomites, giving Israel peace on every side. Verse 15 concisely summarizes the era of righteous rule David inaugurated. David ushered in a time of *shalom*, and it would be remembered as

the golden age of Israel:

*So David ruled over all Israel. David administered justice with equity to all his people. (8:15)*

David was at the height of his career (see [Table 8.5](#)). But, as you might have anticipated, things were too good to last. Although David had the support of YHWH and, indeed, of the entire nation, he became complacent and presumptuous, hence ready for a fall. Remember the theme: The proud will be humbled and the humble exalted.

**TABLE 8.5** Biographical Sketch of David

|                                                    |             |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Anointed king by Samuel                            | 1 Samuel 16 |
| Killed Goliath, the Philistine                     | 17          |
| Befriended Jonathan, Saul's son                    | 18          |
| Pursued by Saul, took refuge in Philistia          | 18–30       |
| Mourned the deaths of Saul and Jonathan            | 2 Samuel 1  |
| Anointed king over Judah                           | 2           |
| Anointed king over Israel                          | 5           |
| Captured Jebus (Jerusalem) and made it the capital | 5           |
| Brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem       | 6           |
| Given the Davidic covenant promises by Nathan      | 7           |
| Committed adultery with Bathsheba                  | 11          |
| Fled Jerusalem after Absalom's coup d'état         | 15          |
| Built an altar on Araunah's threshing floor        | 24          |
| Died and Solomon followed him as king              | 1 Kings 2   |

## 4.2 Dynastic Succession (2 Samuel 9–20)

This portion of 2 Samuel, along with 1 Kings 1–2, details the family history of David as his sons fight with each other over who would

follow David on the throne, hence *dynastic succession*. The narrative reads like a short story and may have been composed from court records. Authorities have variously termed this account the [succession narrative](#) and the *court history of David*. By the way that the writer introduces the [Bathsheba](#) story, the narrator signals that something bad was about to happen:

*In the spring of the year, the time when kings normally go out to do battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel. They devastated the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. (11:1)*

David's troubles began when he neglected his royal responsibilities. Shirking his military duty—remember, it was his courage in facing Goliath that brought him national acclaim—it is no wonder that he got into trouble. David spied a beautiful woman from the roof of his house and asked her to the palace. Though married to Uriah, Bathsheba accepted David's invitation—who could refuse the king?—and David had an affair with her. Matters got complicated after it became apparent that she was pregnant, even though her husband had been at the Ammonite battlefield with David's army. David tried to cover up his responsibility for the pregnancy by recalling Uriah to Jerusalem in the hope that he would sleep with his wife. After making his report to the king, Uriah refused to enjoy the pleasures of home out of loyalty to his troops, certainly an ironic twist that sets David's indiscretion in stark relief.

David had Uriah killed, and with a grand kingly show of caring, he wed the grieving woman. No doubt all Israel admired their sovereign for marrying Israel's newest war widow and one with child at that. David assumed that he had managed to keep his sins of adultery and murder hidden until Nathan exposed his guilt. This would be the test of YHWH's commitment to David. Would YHWH abandon him as he

had abandoned Saul after Saul sinned?

On analysis, David's sins were just as serious as Saul's, if not worse. For Saul's sins, YHWH denied dynastic succession and removed his favor from the king. But YHWH did not react the same way to David's sins. An inquisitive reader would want to know why.

David certainly deserved to be removed from office, but YHWH remained true to the spirit of the Davidic covenant. For the sake of the covenant promise, David was allowed to remain on the throne. Yet David was not given blanket forgiveness without discipline. He was punished by the death of the baby born to Bathsheba. Furthermore, the sins of adultery and murder that he had committed in secret would be committed in public by his sons. Indeed, there is "poetic justice" here. David's own sins would be duplicated within his own family, yet in an even more heinous way. YHWH delivered the following judgment oracle through Nathan the prophet:

*"The sword will not leave your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife." Thus says YHWH, "I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives, and before your eyes give them to your neighbor. He will lie with your wives in the full light of day. You did it secretly, but I will do this thing in front of all Israel, and in the full light of day." (12:10–12)*

This prophetic word of punishment becomes the literary-theological agenda for the following narrative. This punishment works out in the family of David as his sons vie for the right to follow him on the throne.

**Amnon** was the crown prince, the first in line for the throne. His particular sexual sin was an obsessive infatuation with his half-sister Tamar. One day, feigning illness, he deceived her, trapped her, and

then raped her. Then, as the ultimate act of rejection, he refused to acknowledge her in any way. Her full brother [Absalom](#) took revenge on Amnon two years later and killed him.

David loved Absalom deeply, but he had no choice except to punish him. He exiled Absalom and would not allow him to appear in Jerusalem. But Absalom was a clever man, the consummate politician, much like his father. He was also very handsome. Eventually, he was allowed to come near the city gate of Jerusalem but no farther. There, he endeared himself to the people. He intercepted citizens as they came looking for David's help. Instead, he offered his own services: "No need to go to the king. I will take care of you." In this way, the text says, "*Absalom stole the hearts of the people of Israel.*"

Having won over the populace, he made a run for the crown. First, he proclaimed himself king in Hebron, the place David had first become king. Then, he gathered military support and attacked Jerusalem. Realizing that he was powerless to resist, David fled into the Judean wilderness. Absalom took control of Jerusalem and in a public display of power took David's concubines and slept with them on the roof of the palace, in full view of the citizenry. What David had done in secret, his son did in public.

Yet David was not totally without support. He had left Hushai, one of his trusted counselors, behind. Hushai feigned support for Absalom, but in fact he was loyal to David and worked to frustrate Absalom's plans. He gave advice to Absalom that reversed the advice of Ahithophel, another royal counselor. Hushai's advice enabled David to make good his escape and eventually consolidate his strength. His advice rejected, Ahithophel went out and killed himself.

When finally Absalom mounted an attack on David in the wilderness, it was too late. Absalom's men were defeated, and he himself was killed by Joab, David's commander. Although almost incapacitated by grief, David returned to Jerusalem and resumed

control.

## **4.3 David's Last Days (2 Samuel 21–24)**

These last chapters contain various materials pertaining to David and his rule but not in any clear order, and they seem to be chronologically jumbled. There is poetic material written by David in Chapter 22, which finds a virtual duplicate in Psalm 18. There is a list of David's warriors. And there is an account of David's sin in taking a census of the people, read by God as a sign of his lack of faith. Instead of relying on YHWH, he was counting the strength of his army. YHWH punished him and the nation with a plague.

The book ends with David purchasing the property of Araunah and offering a sacrifice, which stopped the plague. The site of the altar, the threshing floor of Araunah, became the site of the Jerusalem temple. In its own way, the end of Samuel points ahead to the next momentous stage in the history of the monarchy, the reign of Solomon and the building of the temple.

## **5 SAMUEL AS A BOOK**

The books of Samuel are a composition that went through various stages of development. They incorporate blocks of material that existed at one time separately, such as the ark narrative (1 Samuel 4:1–7:1), the story of Saul's rise (1 Samuel 9:1–11:15), the story of David's rise (1 Samuel 16–31), and the succession narrative (2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2).

The rise of kingship is the central agenda of the books. The retention of the two sources on the monarchy, one positive and the other negative, allows the text to give a nuanced and realistic evaluation of the new institution. The promonarchy source was probably shaped by the Deuteronomistic historian during the reign of

Josiah. The antimonarchy source may have been added by an editor during the exile, as a commentary on the failures of Israel's kings. Kingship was part of the plan of God to deliver the people, but it also arose out of the people's disobedience and resulted from their turning away from the theocratic ideals of the Mosaic covenant.

An editor shaped the diverse materials into a linear history that incorporated a prophetic critique of the establishment of the monarchy. Within this history, Samuel was the main figure acting on God's behalf to monitor this new institution. The rise of kingship culminated in the divine covenant established with the house of David. And the lessons of David's career reinforced the need for absolute dependence on God, along with obedience to the Torah that would hold in check a king's impulse to exalt himself above the law.

On the literary plane, the book was cogently organized into three cycles of stories, each centering on a central player in the rise of kingship. The literary-theological theme that unites these cycles and reinforces the supremacy of divine justice is the one articulated in Hannah's song: The proud will be humbled and the humble exalted.

The final stage of Samuel's editorial development came when this prophetic history was incorporated into the larger Deuteronomistic History. This stage is marked by theological editorializing in the form of major speeches, including Samuel's in 1 Samuel 8 and 1 Samuel 12 and Nathan's in 2 Samuel 7. All of these reflect the Deuteronomistic historian's particular theological perspective on how the divine plan works itself out through the historical process.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Structure of Samuel.* What are the three cycles of stories in the books of Samuel?
2. *Theme of Samuel.* What literary-theological theme is articulated in Hannah's song, and what are the many ways it



works out concretely in Samuel?

3. *Theocracy and monarchy*. How did the development of the monarchy in the books of Samuel come into conflict with the ideology of theocracy? What are the two conflicting views of kingship in Samuel and the theological struggle associated with its establishment?
4. *Davidic covenant*. What claims, promises, and obligations are found in the Davidic covenant? How did the statement of the Davidic covenant serve to explain the struggle among his sons to succeed David as king of Israel?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Leadership*. What broad issues concerning group leadership surface in the books of Samuel? What commentary on leadership seems to lie under the surface of the text? How might the views of Samuel have application for today?
2. *Kingship*. Compare the careers of Saul and David. How were their trajectories alike, and how were they different? What was the effect of the Davidic covenant on the course of David's career? What was its effect on the destiny of the Israelite state?
3. *Hannah's song*. This song expresses the biblical theme that the proud will be humbled and the humble will be exalted. This appears to be the fate of the earliest kings. Do you think that the author of Samuel was writing a treatise on human nature and the politics of power? Is it inevitable that powerful leaders become arrogantly self-important and ultimately self-serving? Can you think of any counterexamples?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

*The David Story*, by Robert Alter (1999), is a commentary and

contemporary translation of 1 and 2 Samuel. *King David: A Biography*, by Steven. L. McKenzie (2000), reconstructs a picture of David that views him as a usurper and generally despicable character rather than as a pious hero. *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King*, by Baruch Halpern (2001), excavates the text to expose yet another “real” David. *To Kill and Take Possession: Law, Morality, and Society in Biblical Stories*, by Daniel Friedmann (2002), examines biblical stories of questionable moral virtue, including tales of David. *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition* (2006), by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, uses archaeology and historical analysis to argue that Israel's royal traditions were shaped in later historical periods for political and religious ends.

# CHAPTER NINE

## Kings and Prophets 1: The Early Monarchy

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Solomon and the United Monarchy \(1 Kings 1–11\)](#)

[3 The Divided Kingdoms](#)

---

### KEY TERMS

[Adonijah](#)

[Ahab](#)

[Ahijah](#)

[Bathsheba](#)

[Elijah](#)

[Elisha](#)

[Jehu](#)

[Jeroboam](#)

[Jezebel](#)

[Jezreel](#)

[Omri](#)

[Rehoboam](#)

[Solomon](#)

[United monarchy](#)

### Chagall's *Solomon*

Solomon was a son of David and the one who followed him on the throne. He was Israel's great temple and empire builder and became

legendary for his wealth and wisdom. He was also the last king to rule over the twelve tribes united into one state.



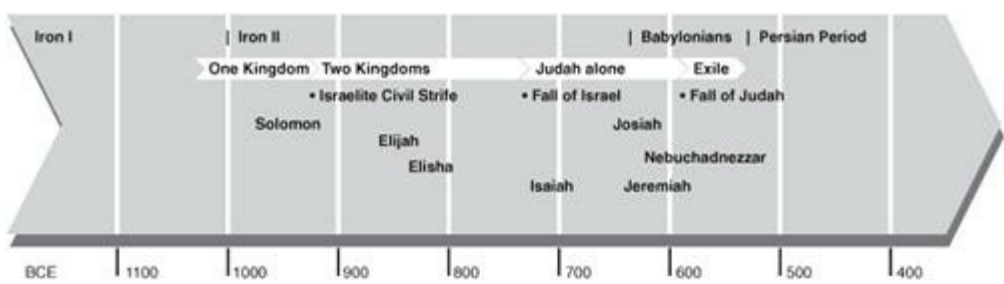
Source: Drawing by Barry Bandstra based on Marc Chagall’s *Solomon*, original color lithograph, 1956.

---

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Our treatment of the Hebrew Bible to this point has followed the canonical order of books. Beginning with the book of Kings, we will modify this approach to integrate the material of the Latter Prophets into Israel’s historical narrative. The serial order of books might give the impression that the likes of Isaiah and Amos chronologically follow the books of Kings, but such is not the case; the “table of contents” order of books does not correspond to their historical order. The so-called classical prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and many of the other Latter Prophets—lived during the events narrated in the book of 2 Kings. Consequently, material from the Latter Prophets will be interwoven with 2 Kings in this and the following two RTOT chapters. This integration of kings and prophets is natural because they often interacted with each other, and the account of their interactions constitutes the core of these writings.

**FIGURE 9.1** Time Line: Books of Kings



Like the books of Samuel, the two books of Kings were originally one. The story line of Kings continues the history of Israel’s kingship that began in the books of Samuel. But Kings differs from Samuel in at least one feature: It does not have a small number of focal figures but instead traces the line of kings from David down to the exile (see [Figure 9.1](#)).

Kings is a continuation of the Deuteronomistic History (DH), which (as its name implies) traces its pedigree back to Deuteronomy. It shares its perspective with the other books of the DH. It presupposes that Israel has a covenantal relationship with YHWH. A concern for the purity of Israel’s religious devotion is central to the outlook of the DH. If the people, especially the kings, were faithful and loyal to YHWH, then they would be protected and blessed by YHWH. Otherwise, the nation would be punished. Israel’s devotion to YHWH was measured by the exclusiveness of its religious focus. If YHWH alone was worshipped, the people were judged faithful. If only YHWH was worshipped in Jerusalem and in the prescribed manner, the people were judged loyal.

Note especially the evaluative judgments that the writer applies to the kings. It is typically not the king’s effectiveness in domestic or international politics that are evaluated; it is the king’s effectiveness as a religious leader and servant of the Torah. The writer uses one of two assessments: King X typically “did evil” in the eyes of YHWH, and only rarely a king “did right.” Kings who rejected idolatry and promoted Yahwistic religious reform, such as Hezekiah and Josiah, were approved. Kings who encouraged or even tolerated non-

Yahwistic practices were denounced.

The Deuteronomistic historian's bias against the northern kingdom becomes clear. No ruler from the north was given approval, regardless of his accomplishments. Nothing they did could be acceptable because Israel (as the northern kingdom was called) was established on false grounds. Jeroboam, its first king, broke with the divinely authorized Davidic dynasty and the Jerusalem temple and created alternate worship centers that employed golden calves as religious symbols. Because none of the following kings eliminated these centers, each is categorically condemned. Ultimately, because of the golden calves at Dan and Bethel, the northern kingdom was destroyed.

Politics and prophecy go hand in hand. Prophets are the ones who typically deliver a critique of the monarchy. Apart from Deuteronomy 18, which portrays Moses as Israel's first and exemplary prophet, prophets first appeared in the books of Samuel—Samuel himself but also Nathan and Gad. The close functional connection between kings and prophets first appeared there also. Samuel played a prophetic role when he warned the tribes not to press for a king and when he confronted King Saul after he broke the covenant laws of the tribal federation. Nathan the prophet was both supportive of David's efforts to enthrone YHWH in Jerusalem and critical of him when he exposed his affair with [Bathsheba](#) and his complicity in the death of her husband, Uriah.

The number of prophets increased during the period of the two kingdoms, and they assumed a prominent role in the political and religious life of the state. The prophets were not monks or ascetics. They fully immersed themselves in political life and public discourse. Some prophets supported the royal administration, but many others challenged royal policies. For example, [Ahijah](#) encouraged Jeroboam to break away from Solomon and the house of David. The prophets Elijah and Elisha condemned Ahab and Jezebel's dynasty. And prophets such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and

Jeremiah (some mentioned in Kings, but others found only in the collection of books called the Latter Prophets) primarily challenged the kings of Israel and Judah to return to the venerable covenant traditions of their history.

Our reading gets complicated when we study the books of Kings, especially as we read them in relation to prophetic literature. Many of the speeches and events recorded in the books of the Latter Prophets fit chronologically into the story line of Kings. And here for the first time, archaeology supplements the biblical story. It contributes a considerable amount of material evidence, including artifacts, excavated structures, and documents that relate directly to the events and reigns described in Kings. Historians have established especially well the history of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires, including figures such as Sennacherib and Nebuchadrezzar, who figure prominently in the biblical story (see [Table 9.1](#)). For really the first time in biblical history, we get major external corroboration of notable biblical figures and many details that sharpen our understanding of events.

Go to the companion website and see the time line “Intersections of Biblical and Ancient Middle Eastern History.”

## **1.1 History of the Kingdoms: A Summary**

Solomon gained control of the monarchy in Jerusalem by eliminating his rivals Adonijah, another son of David, and Adonijah’s military backer Joab (1 Kings [Chapters 1–2](#)). Solomon was recognized for his wisdom (3–4) and effectively made Jerusalem the religious capital of Israel by building the temple there (5–8). Solomon lost popular and divine support due to his excesses—too much public debt and too many wives (9–11). After Solomon died, the northern territories led by Jeroboam rebelled against his son Rehoboam and

created their own kingdom, which appropriated the name Israel (12–14). Israel’s monarchy was less stable than Judah’s until Omri took the throne (15–16).

Omri’s son, Ahab, promoted Baal practices in Israel and was challenged by the prophet Elijah and others (17–22). The prophet Elisha followed Elijah in opposition to Omri’s Israelite dynasty (2 Kings 1–8). Jehu brutally eliminated the house of Omri and established his own dynasty; Israel and Judah coexisted for about 200 years (9–16). Then Assyria conquered and destroyed Israel (17) and attacked Judah, but Hezekiah’s Judah survived (18–20). Evil King Manasseh (21) was followed by good King Josiah who reestablished Yahwistic religion in Judah after the lapse under Manasseh (22–23). But Judah stood helpless before Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who invaded a couple times, and ultimately destroyed Jerusalem and deported many surviving Judeans to Babylon (24–25).

We can divide the books of Kings into three sections based on historical content (see [Table 9.2](#)). The first section deals with the kingdom of Solomon and the united monarchy, the second with the civil conflict that led to national division and the resulting parallel histories of Israel and Judah, and the third with the history of Judah down to the Babylonian exile.

**TABLE 9.1** Kings and Kingdoms

This table lists major players in the historical periods falling within the books of Kings. Years are BCE and indicate the years of the king’s reign. It may be a helpful reference as we read Kings and reconcile it with the literature of the Latter Prophets. Depending on the scholarly author and the sources, dates in biblical chronologies can vary.

Go to the companion website and see the see “Chronology and the Study of Israelite History.”



| Israel                  |                      | Outside Israel                                               |
|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>United Monarchy</i>  |                      |                                                              |
| Saul, 1020–1000         |                      |                                                              |
| David, 1000–961         |                      |                                                              |
| Solomon, 961–922        |                      |                                                              |
| <i>Divided Kingdoms</i> |                      |                                                              |
| <i>Israel</i>           | <i>Judah</i>         | <i>Egypt</i>                                                 |
| Jeroboam I, 922–901     | Rehoboam, 922–915    | Shoshenq I (Shishak), 931–910: Invaded Palestine in 925      |
| Omri, 876–869           |                      |                                                              |
| Ahab, 869–850           | Jehoshaphat, 873–849 | <i>Assyria</i>                                               |
| Jehu, 842–815           | Athaliah, 842–837    | Shalmaneser III, 859–825: Dominated Jehu                     |
|                         | Jehoash, 837–800     |                                                              |
| Jehoash, 801–786        |                      |                                                              |
| Jeroboam II, 786–746    |                      |                                                              |
|                         | Ahaz, 735–715        | Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul), 745–727: Invaded Canaan           |
| Hoshea, 732–724         |                      | Shalmaneser V, 726–722: Besieged Samaria                     |
|                         |                      | Sargon II, 721–705: Conquered Samaria/Israel in 721          |
|                         | Hezekiah, 715–687    |                                                              |
|                         | Manasseh, 687–642    |                                                              |
|                         | Josiah, 640–609      | <i>Babylonia</i>                                             |
|                         | Jehoahaz, 609        |                                                              |
|                         | Jehoiakim, 609–598   |                                                              |
|                         | Jehoiachin, 598–597  |                                                              |
|                         | Zedekiah, 597–587    | Nebuchadnezzar II, 605–562: Conquered Jerusalem/Judah in 587 |

TABLE 9.2 Kings and Prophets

| Kings and Prophets   | RTOT | Book of Kings           | Prophets                                      |
|----------------------|------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 1: Early monarchy    | 9    | 1 Kings 1 to 2 Kings 13 | Elijah, Elisha                                |
| 2: Assyrian crisis   | 10   | 2 Kings 14–20           | Amos, Isaiah of Jerusalem, Micah, Hosea       |
| 3: Babylonian crisis | 11   | 2 Kings 21–25           | Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk |

# 1.2 Kings as a Book

The books of Kings contain clear indications that they were constructed, at least in part, using available written records and other materials. The writer drew upon a number of documents that he

refers to by name, but that are no longer available to us. He mentions “*the book of the acts of Solomon*” (1 Kings 11:41), “*the book of the annals of the kings of Judah*” (1 Kings 14:29), and “*the book of the annals of the kings of Israel*” (1 Kings 14:19). These must have been court records of some sort. In addition, the writer drew upon what were probably oral traditions of the prophets for the story cycles about Elijah and Elisha.

The books of Kings are only an outline of history from Solomon to the destruction of Jerusalem. Not attempting to be comprehensive, the writer used a principle of selection dictated by the lessons of history that he wanted to teach. The history that he told ends with the loss of the Promised Land and the forced exile of the people. The writer was intent on making clear that these tragic events were the result of the people’s sins and were God’s judgment on those sins.

Furthermore, the working out of God’s judgment on disobedience fulfilled the word of God through his servants, the prophets. The prophets of Kings, including Nathan, Ahijah, Elijah, and Elisha, warned Israel and Judah of coming disaster. But the hearts of kings and people were hard. The historical process demonstrated the power of the word of God unleashed in the world.

## 1.3 Reading Guide

Read the following highlights of the early history of the monarchy:

- 1 Kings 3: how Solomon got his wisdom and how he displayed it
- 1 Kings 8:1–9:9: Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple; the prayer is heavily Deuteronomic in character and foreshadows the exile
- 1 Kings 12: Rehoboam and the breakup of the tribes into two kingdoms, Judah and Israel

- 1 Kings 16:21–34 and [Chapters 17–19](#): Omri, Ahab and Jezebel, and the prophet Elijah
- 2 Kings 1–2: the ascension of Elijah and the succession of Elisha

## 2 SOLOMON AND THE UNITED MONARCHY (1 KINGS 1–11)

The writer of Kings gives the reign of [Solomon](#) a great deal of attention (see [Table 9.3](#)). It is true that he ruled for a long time (968–928 BCE), indeed, a “perfect” forty years. But more important, in the mind of the Deuteronomistic historian, the reign of Solomon is the first fulfillment of one of the important parts of the Davidic covenant articulated in 2 Samuel 7. During his tenure as king, the great temple to YHWH was built in Jerusalem.

### 2.1 Solomon’s Rise (1 Kings 1–2)

These first two chapters relate how Solomon secured the right to follow David as king of all Israel. David was now an old man. He was so frail that he needed a female companion to keep him warm at night; a beautiful young woman named Abishag was given the assignment. [Adonijah](#) was David’s eldest remaining son and naturally expected to inherit the throne. He had the support of the commander Joab and the priest Abiathar. Together they held a coronation ceremony in which Adonijah was proclaimed king. Many authorities see these first two chapters as the conclusion of an originally independent record called the succession narrative, or the *court history of David*, comprising 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2 (see Whybray, 1968). However, the appendixes of 2 Samuel 21–24 break the continuity of the narrative, arguing against a unified work.

This suggests that the canonical division of books positions these first chapters of Kings as the introduction to the history of Solomon’s kingdom rather than as the conclusion of a history of David’s throne succession.

Nathan, the prophet who supported David, and others objected to Adonijah’s assuming power. They strongly promoted Solomon, a younger son, for the throne—continuing the tradition and biblical motif of the younger son supplanting the older. Think of Isaac supplanting Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Ephraim over Manasseh, and David over his older brothers when Samuel came to find a king to replace Saul. Perhaps the reason the Yahwist strand of the Pentateuch was so interested in stories about divine preference for the younger son over the firstborn was the need to establish precedent for the rise of Solomon to the throne over his rival older brothers. Apparently, the process of the dynastic succession of the eldest had not yet been firmly established in Israel.

**TABLE 9.3** Biographical Sketch of Solomon

|                                              |             |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Became king and secured the throne           | 1 Kings 1–2 |
| Received wisdom from God and demonstrated it | 3–4         |
| Built a temple in Jerusalem for YHWH         | 5–9         |
| Was visited by the Queen of Sheba            | 10          |
| Married 700 wives and had 300 concubines     | 11          |
| Died and was buried in Jerusalem             | 12          |

Siding with Solomon were Bathsheba, his mother, Zadok, another priest, and Benaiah, one of David’s loyal lieutenants. They had the support of David and held their own coronation ceremony for Solomon. Evidently, Solomon also had popular support and a

broader power base, for Adonijah gave up his claim to the throne and asked Solomon for forgiveness.

When he was about to die, David counseled his son, Solomon, to remain faithful using words reminiscent of YHWH's charge to Joshua (Joshua 1) and recollecting the promise of the Davidic covenant, all heavily bearing the stamp of the Deuteronomistic outlook:

*I am about to go the way of all people. Be strong and courageous and keep the will of YHWH your God, by walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, commandments, ordinances and testimonies as written in the Torah of Moses, so that you may prosper in everything you do and wherever you go. Then YHWH will affirm his word which he spoke concerning me: "If your heirs watch their way and walk before me in faithfulness, with all their heart and with all their soul, then you will not fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel." (2:2–4)*

Not one to give up easily, Adonijah made a veiled play for the throne after David died. Through Bathsheba he asked Solomon for permission to marry Abishag, David's former concubine. When Solomon heard the request, he read into it a challenge to his power and accused Adonijah of treason. Apparently, if someone could access the king's harem, then he was the real king. We might recall how this same move telegraphed to all Jerusalem that Absalom was king when he slept with David's wives on the roof of the palace. Solomon took this provocation seriously and put Adonijah to death. Shortly afterward Joab, who had supported Adonijah's claim to kingship, was also executed (see [Figure 9.2](#)). Abiathar, the priest who had sided with Adonijah, was exiled to Anathoth. In a Deuteronomistic editorial note, we are told that this last event fulfilled the prophetic word of condemnation voiced against the

house of Eli (see 2:27 and compare 1 Samuel 2–3). Abiathar’s support of Adonijah over Solomon justifies the expulsion of the house of Abiathar and their exile to Anathoth in favor of the priesthood of Zadok. The rights of priesthood in Jerusalem were jealously guarded, and this explains how the Zadokite priesthood came to power. This note may be especially enlightening if the contention of Friedman (1987) is correct that the writer of Deuteronomy was Jeremiah. We know that Jeremiah hailed from Anathoth, and authorities speculate that he came from the line of Abiathar, ultimately tracing his lineage to Eli of Shiloh.

### **FIGURE 9.2** Horned Altar

This horned altar from Beersheba, Israel, is similar to the altar in the tabernacle. Joab sought refuge by holding onto the horns of the altar, but Solomon killed him anyway (1 Kings 2:28–29).



Photo by Barry Bandstra, May 1996

Having neutralized potential rivals by either exile or execution, Solomon was secure on the throne. So the writer concludes, “*The kingdom was firmly in the hand of Solomon*” (2:46).

## **2.2 Solomon’s Wisdom (1 Kings 3–4)**

Solomon’s reign began favorably. When YHWH came to him in a dream at Gibeon offering to grant him his wish, Solomon could have

asked for anything. Instead of choosing wealth, longevity, or political security, he asked for the wisdom to discern good and evil so that he could rule God's people well. Gratified that Solomon had chosen so wisely (evidently the wisdom of Solomon was that he was smart enough to choose wisdom), YHWH granted him "a wise and perceptive mind" (3:12)—and provided the other options as bonuses.

As so often happens in the literature of the Hebrew Bible, the next story provides realization of what had just been promised. In what is perhaps the most famous story involving Solomon, two women come to him seeking justice. Each had an infant, but one of them had accidentally suffocated her child and switched her dead baby with the other woman's living one. Each now claimed that the living infant was hers. Solomon cleverly cut through the conflicting claims. He ordered a sword and offered to give each woman one-half of the disputed child. As he had hoped, the real mother, the one who would show compassion, revealed herself by relinquishing her claim, in order to spare the child's life.

The text also tells us that in addition to making judicious decisions, he was renowned for composing 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs and for analyzing flora and fauna in what appears to be an early pursuit of scientific classification. By doing the latter, Solomon follows in the venerable tradition of Adam who, according to the Yahwist account of Creation (which, not by accident, was likely written during Solomon's reign), called all the animals by name. The book of Proverbs, considered one of the Writings (see RTOT [Chapter 14](#)), is presented as the collection of Solomon's wise sayings and observations. On the basis of these early chapters of Kings, along with the visit of the Queen of Sheba told in 1 Kings 10, Solomon acquired the reputation of being the wisest king of all time. Yet the later tale of his excesses and questionable fiscal policy might call that into question. The importance of the figure of Solomon for the tradition of wisdom in Israel will be examined in RTOT [Part 3](#).

We are told that Solomon set up twelve provincial districts for the

purposes of administration and taxation. The boundaries of these districts did not conform to tribal boundaries. This appears to have been Solomon's attempt to sublimate tribal loyalties and create a national rather than provincial identity. Contrary to his intentions, he provoked regionalism that led to civil war shortly after his death. By placing the account of this administrative change within the chapters that describe his wisdom, the writer may have been suggesting that this administrative move was a manifestation of Solomon's wisdom. But if so, his wisdom backfired.

## 2.3 Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 5–8)

Solomon set about building the temple in fulfillment of the terms of the covenant that YHWH had made with David. He contracted Hiram of Tyre to supply building materials and skilled craftsmen in return for food supplies. There were cost overruns, however, and Solomon ended up settling his bill with Hiram by deeding over territory in the north of Israel. This, of course, did not sit well with the Israelites living there.

Nor did another policy. Solomon needed workers for the massive temple project, as well as for building his palace. He conscripted Israelites (1 Kings 5:13) and constrained them to provide manual labor (a practice termed the *corvée*, or “unpaid labor force”), thereby further alienating his constituency. The text later mentions the forced labor of Israelites as a major reason for the rebellion of Jeroboam and Israel (see 11:26–28 and 12:4). This reminded the Israelites of Pharaoh's bitter oppression in Egypt before the Exodus when the Hebrews were forced to work on royal building projects. A pro-Solomon text tries to get around the scandal by suggesting that Solomon did not actually conscript Israelites but only non-Israelites living within the boundaries of Israel (9:15–22).

The temple was a magnificent structure (see [Figure 9.3](#)). Its walls



were made of stone overlaid with wood paneling. There were two rooms within the sanctuary. The outer room housed an incense altar, lamps, and a table for ceremonial bread. The panels were decorated with carvings of flowers, trees, and cherubim. The inner room had perfectly symmetrical dimensions and housed the ark of the covenant. The temple took seven years to build and was completed around 950 BCE.

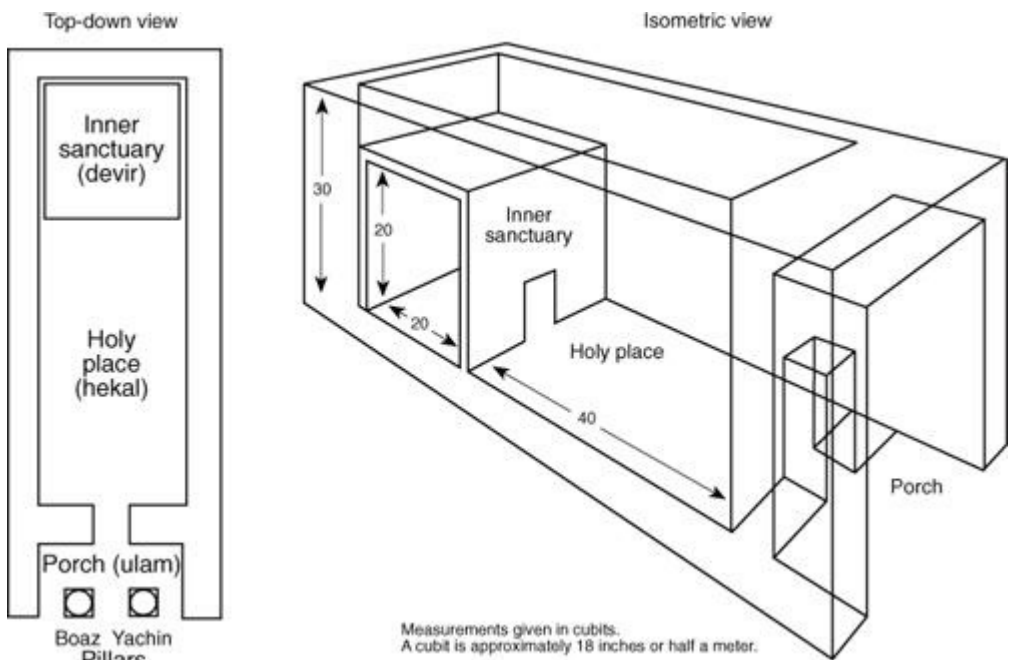
The temple was the most sacred of Israel's buildings. Because it housed the ark of the covenant, it was considered to be the location of YHWH's presence among the people. This was expressed hymnically in the statement, "*YHWH sits enthroned between the cherubim*" (Psalm 99:1) on the top of the ark, an iconic representation of the divine council. The ark was considered to be YHWH's throne and the inner sanctuary his throne room.

The configuration of the temple complex, its decorations, and its various implements suggest that the temple was intended to symbolize the world over which YHWH rules. The outer courtyard with its bowl of water represented the waters of chaos. The outer room of the temple with its pictures of plants and animals cut into the walls and the lights of heaven represented in the lamp stands depicted the physical world in microcosm. The inner sanctum was a perfect cube covered entirely with gold. It housed the ark throne flanked by cherubim and represented the perfect heaven where YHWH dwells, enthroned among the immortals of the Divine Council. The temple is a graphic symbol of the power and authority of King YHWH over his creation.

There is additional symbolic significance to the temple. Mount Zion and the temple have been interpreted along the lines of the ancient Middle Eastern notion of the cosmic mountain. This is the point where heaven and earth meet, the so-called axis of the earth (see Clifford, 1972). Stager (2000) views the temple of Solomon as "a mythopoeic realization of heaven on earth, Paradise, the Garden of Eden."

**FIGURE 9.3** The First Temple

Solomon’s temple follows the basic design layout of the tabernacle (see RTOT [Chapter 3](#)). The inner sanctuary, or the Most Holy Place, has perfectly symmetrical dimensions, befitting the dwelling place of God. Both the temple and the earlier tabernacle are patterned on Syrian temples (see Fritz, 1987, and Monson, 2000).



Source: Graphic by Barry Bandstra based on V. Fritz, “Temple Architecture: What Can Archaeology Tell Us about Solomon’s Temple?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* (July/August 1987): 41.

Solomon called a week-long national holiday for the dedication of the temple. The priests took the ark of the covenant from the meeting tent and placed it in the inner sanctuary. Solomon offered a lengthy prayer of dedication (8:22–53) that recalled YHWH’s covenant commitment to the house of David. It also anticipated times of national disaster and in anticipation of such times called for divine compassion. Reference to “*being carried away captive to the land*

*of the enemy*” seems to foresee the Babylonian exile, using typical Deuteronomic language. It is often observed that the Deuteronomist most clearly expresses his outlook through the speeches of Israel’s great leaders. Moses is the most obvious, with the book of Deuteronomy a verbatim record of his addresses, but also Joshua in his farewell address (Joshua 24), likewise Samuel (1 Samuel 12), and here Solomon.

In addition to building the temple, Solomon built an expansive (and very expensive) royal palace complex. It took twice as long to build as the temple but gets only scant mention here. This opulence further indebted the nation and ripened the people’s growing dissatisfaction.

## **2.4 Solomon’s Demise (1 Kings 9–11)**

After Solomon completed his building projects, he went to Gibeon a second time. This time, YHWH urges Solomon to be good and follow the terms of the Mosaic covenant. On that condition, the throne of David would be secure in Israel. If not, *“I will cut Israel off from the land that I have given them; and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight”* (9:7), says YHWH, in a rather obvious foreshadowing of the coming destruction of the temple, only just completed, and the exile. We also learn of Solomon’s efforts fortifying his kingdom, including work on the city wall of Jerusalem, and on Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. These sites have been extensively excavated (see Ben-Tor, 1999); however, the association of Solomon with the monumental architecture at these cities has been called into question by Finkelstein and Silberman (2001, 2006).

Solomon’s fame spread and people celebrated his wisdom far and near. Even the Queen of Sheba heard of his reputation and came to test it, a test he passed magnificently. The word spread that he was

the wisest and richest person in the world (10:23–24). But in the evaluation of the Deuteronomistic writer, the budget deficit brought on by Solomon's building projects and the dissatisfaction brought on by the conscripted labor gangs were not as disastrous as the trouble caused by his harem:

*King Solomon loved many foreign women, including the daughter of Pharaoh, and women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon and Hatti—from nations about which YHWH had said to the people of Israel, “You must not marry them, neither may they marry you, for they would surely turn your heart away after their gods.” Solomon clung to these women in love. He had seven hundred wives who were princesses, and three hundred who were concubines. His wives turned away his heart. (11:1–3)*

What Solomon did here is not all that remarkable for his time, at least in principle if not in quantity. The fact that he had so many female retainers most certainly was not an indication that he had an overly active sexual appetite. Rather, the 1000 women were a sign of the vast political contacts of the Solomonic administration in this newly crafted Davidic empire. Solomon's wives were a part of international arrangements, marriages for political and diplomatic purpose; treaties with other nations and city-states were contracted through such unions.

But the Deuteronomistic writer interprets these marriages as the seeds of Israel's disintegration. Solomon was just too tolerant. He allowed these women to worship their native gods and goddesses right there in Jerusalem. In so doing, Solomon compromised his loyalty to YHWH. For this, God would soon strip a major portion of the kingdom from the control of the house of David. This sets the stage and gives the theological rationale for dividing the kingdom

into two separate nations.

### 3 THE DIVIDED KINGDOMS

The books of Kings track the course of the monarchy through three stages. The first stage is the [united monarchy](#) (also called the *united kingdom*) under Solomon. The second stage is the period after the division of the tribes into two separate kingdoms, which come to be called Judah and Israel. This division was the result of the civil dispute over Davidic leadership in 928 BCE. The third stage comes after the demise of Israel, the kingdom of the ten northern tribes. The demise came as the result of Assyrian conquest ending in 721. After that, Judah alone remained a self-governing state.

The Deuteronomistic writer tells the story of the second of these three stages by zigzagging back and forth between Judah and Israel in chronological progression. Sometimes their histories are intertwined. The main focus of the narrative is on the kings of these two states and the domestic and international conflicts in which they find themselves. Israelite prophets are often found injecting themselves into the affairs of state, so there are many colorful episodes about royalty clashing with these seers.

The Deuteronomistic historian introduces the kings of Judah using a pattern of elements that could include

1. The date that the king took the throne relative to the reign of the king of Israel.
2. The length of his reign in Jerusalem.
3. The name of the mother of the king (the queen mother).
4. A value judgment of the king relative to David, who was the standard of comparison.
5. A fuller account that could be found in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah.

The Deuteronomistic historian introduces the kings of Israel using a somewhat different pattern of elements, typically including

1. The date that the king took the throne relative to the reign of the king of Judah.
2. The length of his reign in the location of the capital city of Israel.
3. A negative evaluation of the king (applying to all kings except Shallum, who only reigned one month).
4. A fuller account that could be found in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.

Based on the citation of royal sources, we can see that the Deuteronomistic historian was dependent on official documents as the foundation of his account from which he selected episodes and details to synthesize a running narrative. This narrative then illustrated the Deuteronomic principles of divine blessing and judgment through the national experience of Israel's monarchic history.

### **3.1 Division of the Kingdom (1 Kings 12–16)**

Solomon was able to keep the kingdom together throughout his lifetime, but dissention grew. The seeds of dissatisfaction—primarily the cession of land in the north, high state taxation, and the use of Israelites in forced labor—prompted those in the northern districts to cast elsewhere for leadership. They found it in the figure of Jeroboam.

[Jeroboam](#), the son of Nebat (to distinguish him from a later Jeroboam who we call Jeroboam II), had been the foreman of one of Solomon's labor crews. Being an Ephraimite, he seems to have shared in northern dissatisfaction with the Davidic administration. With the prophetic support of Ahijah from Shiloh (also located in the

north, it was the religious center of the tribal federation during the period of the judges), Jeroboam organized resistance to Solomon. Ahijah is the first in a line of northern prophets mentioned in Kings. Solomon recognized Jeroboam as the ringleader and sought to kill him, but he survived by fleeing to Egypt.

After Solomon died, his son **Rehoboam** ascended the throne. He met with leaders from the north at Shechem (the old center of the tribal federation under Joshua), but support from the north was not forthcoming. Led by Jeroboam, the people demanded that Rehoboam humanize his policies and lighten the burden of taxation and government service. Rehoboam refused to change royal practice; in fact, encouraged by his closest counselors, with bravado he threatened to make the load even heavier. The northern delegation declared their independence:

*When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king, "What do we have to do with David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse! To your tents, Israel! Take care of your own house now, David!"*  
(12:16)

The Deuteronomistic writer framed the conflict in terms of rival administrations and national ideologies. The northern territories refused any longer to accept Davidic rulers and Zion theology. They had agreed to Davidic rule only after the house of Saul had let them down. Now they wanted out. But the Deuteronomistic writer's sympathies are clearly with the Davidic line. And for good reason: When he wrote in the 600s, only Judah and the line of David existed anymore, and they were the only realistic hope for the future of Israel.

Rehoboam did not have the military power or political will to force them to accept his rule. And the kingdom, while spared a

protracted and bloody civil war, now became two nations. The northern entity, consisting of some ten tribes, kept the name Israel. As you read narratives that date to this period, note that the term *Israel* designates the northern kingdom rather than a twelve-tribe entity. The southern kingdom of Judah was just Judah, the sole tribe that remained loyal to the leadership of the house of David. The twelfth tribe, Levi, did not have tribal territory, so Levites could be found in both Israel and Judah.

An important order of business for Jeroboam was to consolidate his hold on Israel and give it a distinctive national identity. To that end, he rebuilt Shechem and made it his capital. Attached to that site were all the associations of Israel's tribal beginnings, the good old days of Joshua's administration of the Mosaic covenant.

Jeroboam had to put together a religious system that was independent of Judah's. He was rightly worried that his citizens would feel compelled to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to fulfill their religious obligations as had become the practice under the Davidic administration. To counteract such a need, Jeroboam strategically located worship centers in his kingdom at its northern and southern boundaries, at Dan (see [Figure 9.4](#)) and Bethel, respectively. Bethel had a long religious history. The forebears Abraham and Jacob had special connections with Bethel (see RTOT [Chapter 2](#)). Abraham built an altar near Bethel as he made his way to the Negev (Genesis 12:8), and Jacob had his dream of the stairway to heaven at this spot (Genesis 28:10–22), thus proving that it was a point of contact between heaven and humanity—hence, a suitable place for a sanctuary.

The shape that the religious system of Israel assumed under Jeroboam called for special condemnation by the Deuteronomistic writer. Jeroboam built golden calves as the centerpieces of these shrines. The mere mention of these idols immediately recalls the fiasco at Mount Sinai that Aaron engineered (see RTOT [Chapter 3](#) and Exodus 32). Just as heinous in the eyes of the Deuteronomistic



writer, Jeroboam employed non-Levites as priests and set up a religious calendar with festivals that differed from those used in Jerusalem and those specified in Deuteronomistic legislation. For all these transgressions, Israel, and Jeroboam himself, could not escape God's condemnation.

### **FIGURE 9.4** Tell Dan High Place

This open-air platform, called a high place (Hebrew *bamah*), goes back as early as the tenth century BCE and may be related to Jeroboam's religious program. Sacrifices and rituals would have been performed here (see Biran, 1998).



Photo by Barry Bandstra, May 1987

An unnamed “*man of God from Judah*,” a prophetic figure of sorts (1 Kings 13), voiced YHWH's dissatisfaction by condemning Jeroboam and the Bethel shrine. But in the end, the Judean prophet was himself deceived by a Bethel holy man, resulting in his own execution by God. Clearly the message was this: Beware of the prophetic tricksters in the north, and stay away from Bethel. Although he reigned a healthy twenty-two years, Jeroboam was punished by the premature death of his son Abijah.

## **3.2 Elijah Cycle (1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 2)**

The reign of [Ahab](#) of Israel is the setting for the prophetic activity of Elijah. The introduction of Ahab follows the standard Deuteronomic pattern of encapsulating the basic facts:

*In the thirty-eighth year of King Asa of Judah, Ahab son of Omri began to reign over Israel. Ahab son of Omri reigned over Israel from Samaria for twenty-two years. Ahab son of Omri did more bad things in the sight of YHWH than all who were before him. And as if it were an insignificant thing for him just to continue committing the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, additionally he took Jezebel, daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, as his wife. He continued to serve Baal, and worshiped him. (16:29–31)*

Typical of such summaries, the reign of the northern king, in this case Ahab, is matched with the reign of Judah’s king.

[Omri](#) is himself notable as the founder of the dynasty of which Ahab is a part (see [Table 9.4](#)), and he gets mentioned in both Assyrian and Moabite royal documents (see [Figure 9.5](#)). The capital city is named Samaria; Ahab’s father Omri moved the royal administration from Tirzah (Jeroboam had used Shechem as his capital, but Baasha moved it to Tirzah) to Samaria, where it would remain for the duration of Israel’s existence. Note also the negative evaluation of Ahab, given in terms of continuing the idolatry of Jeroboam who set up the golden calves in Dan and Bethel. But Ahab went even further. He married [Jezebel](#), daughter of the king of the Phoenician city of Sidon, who brazenly promoted the worship of Baal (see [Figure 9.6](#)).

**TABLE 9.4** Israelite Dynasty of Omri

|               |         |
|---------------|---------|
| Omri          | 876–869 |
| Ahab          | 869–850 |
| Ahaziah       | 850–849 |
| Jehoram/Joram | 849–842 |

Like Solomon’s marriages, Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel was made for diplomatic reasons, to seal an alliance with the Phoenicians. But the Deuteronomistic writer sees only the religiopolitical implications of this marriage. It was yet another sign of the deterioration of Israel’s loyalty to YHWH in favor of Baal.

### FIGURE 9.5 Moabite Stone

Omri was the founder of one of Israel’s most powerful and long-lasting dynasties (enduring four generations, 876–842). He made alliances with Phoenicia and Judah and controlled Moab. This mid-800s BCE monumental inscription, also called the Mesha Stele, mentions “Omri, king of Israel” and Mesha, king of Moab, who rebelled against Ahab (see 2 Kings 3:4–5).



Source: From R. Dussand, *Les Monuments Palestiniens et Judaïques* (Paris, 1912).

### FIGURE 9.6 Jezebel Seal

A seal is used to make an impression on clay in order to indicate ownership and authority. Images and words are carved in reverse so that the imprint is readable. This seal was discovered in 1964 by Nahman Avigad. It dates to the 800s BCE and the name “yzbl” is inscribed on it. Based on an analysis of the seal’s images, Korpel (2006) reconstructs the missing chip at the top to read “belonging to Jezebel” and argues that the seal most likely belonged to the Jezebel of the Hebrew Bible. Attesting the practice of sealing documents, 1 Kings 21:8 tells us that Jezebel wrote letters and sealed them with a seal, though in this text the seal belongs to her husband Ahab.



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on the original in the Israel Antiquities Authority Collection (Jerusalem: Israel Museum).

The core of 1 Kings 17 through 2 Kings 2 is a collection or cycle of narratives revolving around the central figure of [Elijah](#). Into this group of Elijah stories, other material has been inserted, including the account of the prophet Micaiah (22). The Elijah stories have been shaped to highlight the struggle between YHWH’s champion, Elijah, and the Israelite dynasty, which advocated the worship of Baal and Asherah. The confrontation is framed as an issue of religious belief and the question of who the true deity is. But this binary opposition, YHWH or Baal, is also a set of political options. Elijah represents

the traditional Israelite viewpoint of the theocratic tribal league, which recognizes that their primary allegiance must be to King YHWH. Jezebel and the prophets of Baal represent Canaanite social and political values. Ahab's eager reception of the Baal cult was a demonstration of his openness to the big Canaanite world outside Israel, an openness that would no doubt have commercial, economic, and political benefits.

Elijah was not going to allow this influx of Canaanite culture and religion to go unchallenged. To force the Israelites to choose YHWH or Baal, he framed the issue as an economic one and as an issue of life and death: Which deity grows our food? Which deity gives us life? In the Canaanite world, Baal was the presumed force that controlled agricultural fertility by providing the life-giving rains. In Canaanite mythic texts, he is called "the Rider on the Clouds," understood on the model of a storm god riding the thunderstorm (see [Figure 9.7](#)), with its associated imagery of mounting the clouds to seed them. What better way to find out who really does send the rain than by first decreeing a drought and then watching which god would end it?

## FIGURE 9.7

"Text/image not available due to copyright restrictions".

Elijah himself found relief from the drought and consequent famine first at the brook Cherith, and later with a widow and her son in Zarephath. The irony in this part of the story could not be more pointed. Zarephath is in the heartland of Jezebel's homeland of Phoenicia, the territory of her patron god, Baal Melqart. There, Elijah performed life-giving miracles to demonstrate the power of YHWH in Baal country. He provided unlimited food to this poor widow and even brought her dead son back to life.

The clash of cultures came to a climax on Mount Carmel, where

the issue was settled by a dramatic contest. Elijah confronted 450 prophets of Baal to determine who really sends the rain. The Baal prophets, assisted by some 400 cult prophets devoted to Asherah, tried to get the attention of their gods with shouts and bodily mutilations but to no avail. In contrast, Elijah called on YHWH, who sent lightning down from heaven, devouring a well-drenched sacrifice and proving who really manages the storm. The citizenry who witnessed the outcome of the contest sided with Elijah and YHWH, and slew the prophets of Baal. Because these prophets had been sponsored by Jezebel, she became terribly upset and resolved to see Elijah dead.

Elijah fled to Horeb, a symbolic forty-day journey away. He returned to the site of Mosaic revelation, perhaps to reestablish contact with the God of the Exodus and the tribal league. While he was there, he awaited the revealing of YHWH, expecting it to happen in storm, earthquake, or fire—the expected modes of theophany. Instead, God made his presence known in a barely audible whisper, the “still small voice” of older English versions. Elijah was then assured that the power of YHWH was not dead in Israel and that Elijah himself would oversee the demise of the house of Ahab.

To understand the logic of the text’s organization, note that the next two chapters provide a characterization of Ahab with reasons enough for his elimination. Chapter 20 has nothing to do with Elijah though unnamed prophets are part of the action. The text at first seems flattering in the way it describes Ahab’s victory over the Syrians, but then it condemns him because he failed to eliminate them totally when he had the chance. The story may remind you of Saul’s similar failure to destroy the Amalekites when he had the chance. Perhaps the text implies that Ahab will meet the same end as Saul.

Chapter 21 reveals the inner Ahab, the weak leader easily manipulated by his wife Jezebel. Ahab desired the property adjacent to his palace in Samaria, though 1 Kings 21:1 seems somewhat confused here, leaving us to wonder whether the vineyard is actually

in Samaria, Ahab's capital city, or in [Jezreel](#), Naboth's hometown and the site of Ahab and Jezebel's resort palace. In any case, when the vineyard's owner Naboth refused to sell his family's land holdings, Jezebel arranged for Naboth to be falsely accused of a capital offense and executed. For this, Elijah condemned Ahab and declared that his dynasty would come to an end.

Ahab died in battle fighting the Ammonites, as Chapter 22 details, though Elijah does not appear in this episode. Instead, the prophet Micaiah is cited as the one who foretold the death of Ahab. In contrast to Micaiah, about 400 prophets loyal to Ahab encouraged him to fight by predicting that he would be victorious. Micaiah's was the lone voice in opposition, much like Elijah's on Mount Carmel. The description of Micaiah's meeting with God where he received the knowledge of Ahab's doom is especially intriguing, providing a glimpse of the inner workings of the Divine Council:

*I saw YHWH sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven flanking him right and left. YHWH said, "Who will lure Ahab so that he will attack Ramoth-gilead and fall?" One said this and another that, until a spirit came forward and stood before YHWH. "I will lure him." "How?" YHWH asked. He replied, "I will go and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." Then YHWH said, "You are to lure him, and you will succeed. Go and do it." As you have seen, YHWH has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours. YHWH has decreed disaster for you! (22:19–23)*

In other words, the true prophet has access to the throne room of YHWH where he receives true knowledge and political insight, as Micaiah claims for himself here. Micaiah knows the whole story because he was there. The false prophets got their message secondhand from a lying spirit, which, in an ironic twist, was itself

sent from the Divine Council. Micaiah implies that only true prophets get their message directly from YHWH. False prophets claim to be speaking for YHWH when in fact they do not because they have not been present in the throne room of the divine King.

Obviously still loyal to Baal, the dynasty of Ahab continues to fall under the condemnation of the Deuteronomistic historian in the continuation of the Elijah cycle in 2 Kings 1. Here we find that Ahaziah followed his father Ahab as king over Israel. After Ahaziah fell through the roof of his palace, he tried to send messengers to Baalzebub (a local Baal god) inquiring whether he would live or die.

Elijah intercepted the messengers and told them Ahaziah would most certainly die. When the king inquired who it was that told them this, they replied it was “*a hairy man who wore a leather belt around his waist*” (2 Kings 1:8). Dejectedly, Ahaziah recognized the description and said, “*It is Elijah the Tishbite.*” Readers of the gospel accounts will recognize that a similar description is applied to John the Baptist in order to associate him with the expected return of Elijah (see Matthew 3:4 and Mark 1:6).

Ahaziah tried to retaliate by sending soldiers to assassinate Elijah, but once again Elijah marshaled fire from heaven, and they were incinerated. Then Elijah departed from the scene in a spectacular way. While being followed by his disciple [Elisha](#), he crossed the Jordan River and headed to the place in Transjordan where he would disappear. Although the exact location is left vague, the implication might be that he went to the Mount Nebo region to pass on, this being the same place where Moses had died; other parallel experiences include the flight to Horeb (Mount Sinai) and the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River.

As Elisha looked on, a chariot of fire engulfed Elijah, and he was whisked into heaven in a whirlwind. It appears that the theophany transported Elijah to the Divine Council. As a result of the tradition that Elijah did not die but is with God, significant expectations of Elijah’s future return developed within Judaism and Christianity. It



was believed that Elijah would someday come back to earth, and his arrival would signal the dawn of the messianic era. For texts that seem to connect Elijah with the future messiah, see Malachi 4:4–6, Sirach 48:9, and in the New Testament, see Mark 9:2–13. The cup of Elijah of the Jewish Passover Seder is another example of this expectation.

### **3.3 Elisha Cycle (2 Kings 3–13)**

Elijah passed his mantle to Elisha, his disciple, with all its attendant powers and responsibilities. This symbolized that Elisha was the legitimate heir to Elijah, immediately proven true by Elisha's duplication of Elijah's Jordan crossing miracle that enabled him to get back into Palestine. The master–disciple relationship of Elijah to Elisha has more than just a passing similarity to that of Moses and Joshua.

The Elisha cycle of stories has a different quality than the Elijah cycle. The Elisha cycle is much more occupied with miracles than it is with religious and political confrontation though there is some of that too. The miracles are summarized here in the order of their occurrence:

1. Elisha changed contaminated water to drinkable.
2. He directed two bears to maul some disrespectful children who had taunted him and called him names.
3. He created an optical illusion that delivered the Moabites into the hands of King Jehoshaphat of Judah.
4. He multiplied a quantity of olive oil so that a widow could pay off her debts (paralleling Elijah's miracle in Zarephath).
5. He resuscitated the son of a woman from Shunem (again duplicating another one of Elijah's miracles).
6. He transformed some spoiled stew into edible food.

7. He fed 100 men with twenty loaves of bread.
8. He cured Naaman, a Syrian military commander, of leprosy.
9. He recovered a lost iron ax head from the Jordan River by having it float.
10. He blinded the Syrian army and led them into Israelite captivity.

All these stories tend to glorify Elisha as a miracle worker and prophetic figure. Like Elijah, he was a northern prophet and represented the Israelite federation's theocratic tradition. Elisha was also involved in Israelite and even international politics, though to a lesser degree than Elijah. He supported Hazael to be king of Syria/Aram in place of Ben-hadad. This was in fulfillment of YHWH's instructions to Elijah at Horeb (1 Kings 19:15). It might seem strange to see an Israelite prophet encouraging Hazael, who then went on to make war against Israel. But this is the Deuteronomistic writer's way of showing how this Syrian pressure was planned by YHWH as punishment for Israel's covenant breaking.

Elisha also supported [Jehu](#) when he overthrew the dynasty of Ahab. Again, this was punishment for the way Ahab and Jezebel promoted the worship of Baal and Asherah. Jehu's purge of Ahab's family and administration was swift and brutal. First, he went to Jezreel, the site of the royal retreat. He assassinated Joram, Ahab's son and king of Israel, along with his ally Ahaziah, king of Judah. Then he had Jezebel tossed out an upper window of her summer estate in Jezreel; she landed on the street and his horses trampled her under hoof. He continued to secure his position by beheading the seventy sons of Ahab in Samaria, the capital; then he killed everyone closely associated with or even distantly related to Ahab and capped it off with a massacre of the royally sponsored priests, prophets, and worshipers of Baal. It is no wonder that Hosea, a later prophet, recalled those times of infighting and ruthlessness as the "bloody business of Jezreel" (Hosea 1:4). Although he acted by divine mandate according to the Deuteronomistic writer, other minds in

Israel viewed this violent era with great disdain.

The house of Ahab was eliminated by divine decree and by Jehu. Jehu generally receives a good review in Kings, but he was not fully endorsed (after all, he was an Israelite king in a non-Davidic kingdom). He failed to eliminate the worship centers of the golden calves in Dan and Bethel. And extrabiblical evidence proves Israel was subject to Assyria in some degree during his reign (see [Figure 9.8](#)). The familiar Deuteronomistic refrain rounds out the account of Jehu: “*But Jehu was not careful to observe the Torah of YHWH the God of Israel wholeheartedly; he did not turn from the sins into which Jeroboam led Israel*” (10:31).

The problems with the Ahab dynasty spilled over into Judah. Athaliah, of the line of Ahab, usurped the reins of government in Jerusalem and attempted to wipe out the dynasty of David. She turns out to have been the only ruling queen in either Israel or Judah. The Jerusalemite priest Jehoiada succeeded in hiding Joash, the surviving heir of the Davidic line, who was later restored to the throne in a bloodless coup.

The dynasty of Jehu (see [Table 9.5](#)) remained in power over Israel for nearly a century. During the first half of this period, the latter 800s, Israel was dominated by Syria, called Aram in the text, with Damascus as its capital. The Israelites were hard pressed, and the text tells us that “*YHWH gave Israel a deliverer*” (2 Kings 13:5), using language that echoes the book of Judges. Although this savior is left nameless, many have suggested that the writer had in mind Adad-nirari III of Assyria, who extended the reach of his empire west into Syria. This would have taken the pressure of Syria off Israel. Elisha also, as his end approached, predicted victory over Aram:

**TABLE 9.5** Israelite Dynasty of Jehu

|               |         |
|---------------|---------|
| Jehu          | 842–815 |
| Jehoahaz      | 815–801 |
| Jehoash/Joash | 801–786 |
| Jeroboam II   | 786–746 |
| Zechariah     | 746–745 |

**FIGURE 9.8** Shalmaneser III and Jehu

Jehu is one of the few Israelite kings mentioned by name in material from outside the Hebrew Bible, and he is the only one depicted in relief. The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (king of Assyria 859–825 BCE) is a carved basaltrock standing monument that contains pictures and Assyrian inscriptions. In this panel, Shalmaneser is receiving tribute from “Jehu, son of Omri,” who is on his hands and knees, though technically Jehu was the son of Jehoshaphat.



Photo by Barry Bandstra (London: British Museum), March 1998

*YHWH* graced them and showed them mercy, and *Elohim* faced them on account of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He did not want to destroy them and he did not cast them from his face even until now. (2 Kings 13:23).

Indeed, after the deaths of Elisha, the prophet of Israel, and Hazael, the king of Aram, Israel recovered much of the territory it had lost, and the kingdom of Israel grew. This story is told in the next chapter.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *United monarchy and divided kingdoms.* What is the general course of Israel's history from the united monarchy, through the division into two kingdoms, and down to the fall of each kingdom? What is each kingdom called? What is the capital of each kingdom?
2. *Deuteronomistic History.* What is the perspective of the Deuteronomistic historian as applied to the division of the kingdoms, and why did the writer criticize the northern kingdom of Israel more severely than the southern kingdom of Judah?
3. *Prophets.* Who are the major prophetic figures that appear in connection with the early monarchy, and what were their functions within Israelite society, especially in relation to the kings?
4. *Religion.* What is the character of Canaanite religion during this period, and what was the nature of the religious challenge facing Yahwism?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Davidic covenant.* Review the concept of the Davidic covenant (see RTOT [Chapter 8](#)) and explain its relevance to the history of kingship as told in this chapter.
2. *Covenant ideologies.* Summarize the two foundational religiopolitical frameworks of Israel: the theocratic covenant of Mount Sinai and the monarchic covenant of Mount Zion. What

are their historical and geographical associations? Can they coexist? How does the DH relate to each?

3. *Typology*. What are the parallels between the prophetic activities of Elijah and Elisha? Between Elijah and Moses? Between Elijah and Jesus in the New Testament? The story of the Transfiguration in particular (see Mark 9:2–8) builds upon typological connections. What might be a writer's point in drawing parallels between the lives of significant biblical figures?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

A good history of Israel will provide more depth and detail than we can manage here. Either Michael D. Coogan, ed. (1998), *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, or Hershel Shanks, ed. (1999), *Ancient Israel*, would do the job. Both are collections of chapters on the periods of biblical history written by specialists on those periods. The monograph by Jens Bruun (2005), *Text and History: Historiography and the Study of the Biblical Text*, presents evidence that the books of Kings convey accurate and authentic information about the history of the Israelite monarchies.

# CHAPTER TEN

## Kings and Prophets 2: The Assyrian Crisis

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Israel \(Northern Kingdom\) in Crisis](#)

[3 Judah \(Southern Kingdom\) in Crisis](#)

---

### KEY TERMS

[Ahaz](#)

[Amaziah](#)

[Amos](#)

[Call narrative](#)

[Day of YHWH](#)

[Gomer](#)

[Hezekiah](#)

[Hosea](#)

[Immanuel](#)

[Isaiah of Jerusalem \(First Isaiah\)](#)

[Jonah](#)

[Micah](#)

[Nineveh](#)

[Sennacherib](#)

[Shalmaneser V](#)

[Tiglath-Pileser III](#)

[Zion](#)

[Zion theology](#)

# Tiglath-Pileser III

Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria, known as Pul in the Bible, effectively expanded the Assyrian Empire into Syria and Canaan.

“Text/image not available due to copyright restrictions”.

---

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Israelite prophecy tends to coagulate around periods of political insecurity and crisis. The eighth century BCE was just that for the Israelites and Judeans, largely because of the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (see [Table 10.1](#) for kings of the Assyrian period). The Assyrians dominated international politics for most of the 700s and on into the 600s. By the mid-600s, Assyria began to lose its dominating influence in the west, allowing for the expansion of Judah northward into formerly Israelite territory. The destruction of Nineveh by the Babylonians in 612 marks the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and the battle of Carchemish in 605 definitively established Babylonia as the new major power in Mesopotamia.

The earliest prophetic books of the Book of the Twelve originated in the Assyrian period, with Amos, Hosea, and Micah all falling within the 700s. Although these books do not extensively deal with Assyria per se, they address the moral and spiritual condition of Israel and Judah in the middle of the eighth century, whose history is increasingly being conditioned by the growth of the empire. The rise of the Assyrian Empire created foreign policy problems for Israel and Judah. These in turn had domestic ramifications. Prophecy was one response to the need for political and moral guidance in this period of crisis.



# 1.1 Second Kings 14–20: A Summary

The Deuteronomistic writer bounces back and forth between Judah and Israel in 2 Kings 14 and 15. We are told that Amaziah (Judah) took Edomite territory to the south of Judah. Then he came into conflict with Jehoash/Joash (Israel), resulting in the defeat of Judah and Israel’s plundering of Jerusalem. These chapters do not provide a complete political history of the kingdoms; the writer only gives us enough information to justify his theological evaluation of the king’s faithfulness or lack of it to YHWH and the Deuteronomic political program.

Second Kings devotes only seven verses to Jeroboam II (Israel), even though he ruled for forty-one years and was very effective from the perspective of the security of the kingdom. He reextended the border of Israel to the dimensions that it had under Solomon—from Syria to Egypt. The writer notes that this had been foretold by the prophet Jonah, son of Amittai, the same famous Jonah who was swallowed by a fish.

**TABLE 10.1** Kings of the Assyrian Period

| Israel                 | Judah                   | Assyria                            |
|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Jehoash/Joash, 801–786 | Amaziah, 800–783        |                                    |
| Jeroboam II, 786–746   | Azariah/Uzziah, 783–742 |                                    |
| Zechariah, 746–745     | Jotham, 750–742         |                                    |
| Shallum, 745           |                         |                                    |
| Menahem, 745–738       |                         | Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul), 745–727 |
| Pekahiah, 738–737      |                         |                                    |
| Pekah, 737–732         | Ahaz, 735–715           |                                    |
| Hoshea, 732–724        | Hezekiah, 715–687       | Shalmaneser V, 726–722             |
|                        |                         | Sargon II, 721–705                 |
|                        | Manassah, 687–642       | Sennacherib, 704–681               |

Jeroboam II extended Israel’s commercial interests into Syria, and

Uzziah refurbished the Red Sea port of Elath for Judah's use. Jeroboam's royal administration and the aristocracy of Israel that supported it benefited greatly from this increased economic activity. But the majority of the population, the small landholders and farmers, found themselves increasingly in debt to the upper class. An oppressive economic disparity developed and many fell into poverty and landlessness.

This dire situation called forth the condemnation of prophets both in Israel and Judah. The first prophets whose speeches came to be recorded in books arose at this time; they have come to be called the classical prophets. Amos was the first. He was a prophet from a small village in Judah who went north to Bethel, the sanctuary city of Jeroboam II, and exposed the social destructiveness of royal policy. *"They sell the righteous for silver, and the paupers for a pair of sandals,"* he said (Amos 2:6). Hosea (another prophet and not to be confused with Hoshea, the last king of Israel) was himself an Israelite who compared Israelite social practice to the norms of the Mosaic covenant and found it wanting: *"YHWH has a case against the land's inhabitants: truth, loyalty, and divine knowledge are lacking in the land"* (Hosea 4:1). Micah and Isaiah brought the same critique to bear against the powerful in Judah. We learn more about these prophets and their messages later.

In [Chapter 15](#), the Deuteronomic writer gives Azariah (Judah), also called Uzziah, a lukewarm rating, saying he did *"what was right in YHWH's eyes,"* but on the downside he tolerated high places, which is to say, he had not enforced the cultic centrality of Jerusalem. After the death of Jeroboam II, Israel became increasingly unstable. Zechariah, the last ruler of the Jehu dynasty, was assassinated after six months in office by rival Shallum, who was himself assassinated after one month by Menahem. Menahem paid [Tiglath-Pileser III](#) of Assyria (called Pul in 2 Kings 15:19) a large weight of silver to back him.

Menahem's son and heir Pekahiah reigned only two years and was

assassinated by his captain Pekah. Pekah joined forces with Rezin, king of Syria/Aram and sought control of Judah, an effort described in both 2 Kings 16 and Isaiah 7. When [Ahaz](#) (Judah) saw what he was up against, he sought a defensive alliance with Tiglath-Pileser against Pekah and Rezin and paid him tribute from the temple treasury. Tiglath-Pileser then marched against Rezin, killed him, and captured Damascus, the capital of Syria. He also moved into Israel and captured a number of towns in the northern sector of Israel and took many Israelites captive. Assyrian court records confirm this incursion and indicate Tiglath-Pileser had a hand in overthrowing Pekah and installing his successor, Hoshea.

The DH writer spends nineteen verses describing various changes that Ahaz made to the Jerusalem temple–palace compound. This included a new altar that Ahaz commissioned based on the design of an altar that he saw in Damascus when he went there to pledge his continuing allegiance to Tiglath-Pileser. Although this altar displaced the traditional bronze altar of the temple, the writer does not condemn Ahaz specifically for it. But he does render negative judgment because he sacrificed on high places and “*made his son pass through fire.*” This latter practice is open to various interpretations, most famously as child sacrifice to the Molech deity, but others interpret it as a ritual of dedication or consecration to a deity (see Weinfeld, 1972).

Later, [Shalmaneser V](#) reinforced Assyrian control and made Hoshea his vassal. When Hoshea sought Egyptian support against Assyria, Shalmaneser laid siege to Samaria, the capital of Israel. After holding out for three years and after Assyrian leadership shifted from Shalmaneser to Sargon II, Samaria fell in 721. Thus, the northern kingdom of Israel ceased to exist. The majority of the Israelite leadership elite was deported to other Assyrian-held territories. Gal (1998) provides evidence from the author’s archaeological survey of northern Palestine in support of the biblical description of Israel’s demise. Into their place, the Assyrians moved

other conquered peoples. The result was a mixture of ethnicities and religious perspectives. In the analysis of the Deuteronomistic historian, this mixed population lacked corporate commitment to YHWH and his covenant. And so these Samaritans, as they came to be called, would forever be suspect to those in the south, who considered themselves more orthodox and obedient. Thus, the old rivalry between north and south continued, now with additional rationalization.

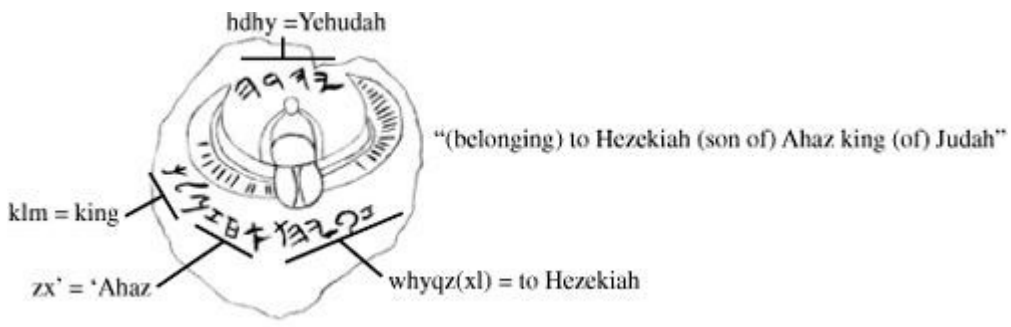
The perspective of the Deuteronomistic historian comes out clearly in [Chapter 17](#). Here he provides a comprehensive theological explanation for the demise of Israel. It was because they served other gods, worshipped idols, and ignored the commandments of YHWH. Even Judah, while spared destruction, was not immune to his judgment. The Deuteronomistic writer seems to be sending out a warning: Do not depart from the way of covenant, or you, too, will be destroyed!

**Hezekiah** (see [Figure 10.1](#)) ruled Judah well according to the Deuteronomistic historian. Judged on the basis of his piety and religious reforms, he was one of the best kings of Judah. When Hezekiah fell ill, he prayed to YHWH for healing, thus demonstrating his dependency on YHWH. The Judean prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem mediated a sign from YHWH that he would recover and, furthermore, that Jerusalem would be delivered from the threat of the Assyrians. Isaiah seems to have had ready access to Judah's kings and courtiers and consistently assured them of YHWH's protection, backing it up with prophetic signs. His message reinforced court belief in the inviolability of Jerusalem, because YHWH dwelled on Mount Zion, and the eternity of the Davidic control because of YHWH's dynastic promise.

### **FIGURE 10.1** Hezekiah Seal

This clay bulla bears the impression of a royal seal. It includes the image of a winged beetle, a symbol of royalty, and the Hebrew

inscription “(belonging) to Hezekiah (son of) Ahaz king (of) Judah,” with the word *Judah* at the top. The bottom words would be read first and the top word last. The reference is undoubtedly to the biblical King Hezekiah. Note that the transliterations run right to left to match the Hebrew order.



Source: Drawing by Barry Bandstra based on the photo in Cross (1999). The clay bulla belongs to the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection.

**FIGURE 10.2** Siloam Tunnel Inscription

This early Hebrew inscription once marked the spot of the completion of the tunnel that Hezekiah had built in 701 BCE in anticipation of an Assyrian invasion. It linked the Gihon spring with the city of David (see 2 Kings 20:20).



Photo by Barry Bandstra (Istanbul: Istanbul Archaeological Museum), April 1998

On into Hezekiah’s reign, the Assyrian Empire kept pressure on

Judah. [Sennacherib](#) attacked Jerusalem in 701 BCE; see Shea (1999) for a discussion of the chronology of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. The account of this invasion in Chapters 18–20 is closely paralleled by Isaiah 36–39, treated below. The outcome of this confrontation differed from that of the siege of Samaria. The Assyrian army departed after a disaster, attributed to the work of the angel of YHWH, which decimated the army and prompted the Assyrians to leave Canaan. According to the story, 185,000 Assyrian soldiers died. The biblical text hints that problems back in Assyria may have cooperated in forcing Sennacherib and his army to return home. Shortly after his return to Nineveh, Sennacherib was assassinated by two of his sons. Documents from Assyria provide independent witness to these events. The Assyrian account of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah (see [Figure 10.2](#)) claims victory and boasts he shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage." (For the Assyrian royal annals, see ANET, 274–301.)

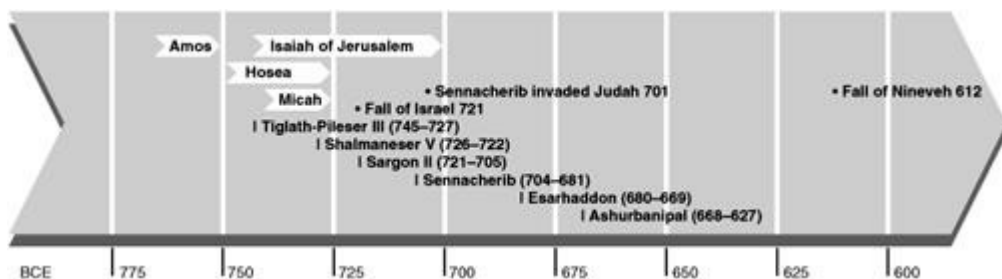
But according to the writer, the real reason why Jerusalem was saved was the piety of Hezekiah. When surrounded by Sennacherib's army, Hezekiah did not react in desperation as Ahaz did under similar circumstances, looking for outside military help. Hezekiah immediately brought the matter to his God. Hezekiah took the Assyrian letter demanding surrender into the Jerusalem temple, laid it out before YHWH, and prayed for guidance. Isaiah delivered an oracle of salvation from YHWH in response to Hezekiah's plea for help. The Deuteronomistic historian projects Hezekiah as the model of appropriate action in time of national crisis.

Hezekiah was followed by Manasseh (687–642), who, in the judgment of the Deuteronomistic historian, was as bad a king as Hezekiah was good. During his reign, Judah was a vassal of Assyria, but the peace fostered by the empire also led to economic growth, again especially among the upper class. Manasseh is spared no condemnation for rebuilding the Baal shrines that his father Hezekiah had eliminated:

*He rebuilt the high places Hezekiah his father had destroyed. He set up altars to Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. (2 Kings 21:3)*

Building cult installations for the deities of Assyria and other nations was a demonstration of his entry into the world community and his acceptance of Assyrian culture and dominance. But of course, the Deuteronomistic historian saw this as a departure from the covenant with YHWH. This breach of covenant was so serious that the ultimate blame for the destruction of Jerusalem was laid at his feet. Although the Deuteronomistic writer does not try, it would be difficult to explain how such a wicked king could reign longer than any other king if there is in fact a correlation between righteousness and blessing.

**FIGURE 10.3** Time Line: Assyrian Period Prophets



The remainder of this chapter is devoted to reading portions of the Latter Prophets that were inspired by and have application to the Assyrian period (see [Figure 10.3](#)).

## 1.2 Reading Guide

The following passages manifest key components of history and

prophecy in the Assyrian period.

- 2 Kings 17: the Assyrian invasion of Israel and its final destruction
- Hosea 1:1–9: Hosea’s marriage to Gomer and its prophetic symbolism
- Amos 7:10–17: Amos versus Amaziah in Bethel
- Isaiah 7:1–17: the Immanuel prophecy
- Micah 3:1–12: Micah and the Jerusalem royal establishment

## **2 ISRAEL (NORTHERN KINGDOM) IN CRISIS**

Jeroboam II presided over Israel at a time of relative security and economic prosperity. This resulted in greater disparity between the wealthy aristocracy and the poor. Amos was a Judean prophet who went to Bethel of Israel at this time in order to expose the exploitation of the poor and the distortions of religious practice that flourished in this climate.

Shortly after the death of Jeroboam, Emperor Tiglath-Pileser III gained control of the Assyrian Empire and extended it toward the Mediterranean coast. This applied pressure on Aram and Israel. King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah of Israel formed an anti-Assyrian coalition of forces, but this was ultimately unsuccessful. Hoshea, who ends up being the last king of Israel, assassinated Pekah and made peace with Tiglath. Damascus, the capital of Aram, fell to Tiglath in 732, and he executed Rezin. Hosea the prophet speaks to the political and economic situation of turmoil in Israel that resulted from the Assyrian threat.

The third prophet treated in this section is Jonah. The historical record indicates that Jonah was an Israelite prophet who supported Jeroboam’s efforts to expand the borders of Israel (2 Kings 14:25).



For this reason, we are treating the book of Jonah in this section and because the book has Jonah traveling to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. However, scholars tend to suggest that the book itself was written by someone other than the eighth-century Jonah, and that it was written sometime during the Persian period, perhaps as late as 400, based on its theme of Israelite exclusivism.

## 2.1 Amos

Taken in chronological rather than canonical order, Amos is the earliest of all Hebrew prophetic figures who have books named after them (not counting Samuel). [Amos](#) was an older contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah. He prophesied sometime during the decade 760–750 BCE.

The book of Amos appears at first reading to be a collection of sayings with very little organization. But a close reading looking for connections reveals that there are identifiable groupings of material. The first group of similar material is the oracles against the nations (1:3–2:16), discrete units targeting the nations of Syria-Palestine one at a time. [Chapters 3–6](#) are a collection of various Amos sayings. [Chapters 3–5](#) all begin with the same phrase “Hear this word. ...” This phrase may have provided the principle of organization for this subcollection. [Chapters 7–9](#) are largely vision reports and so have a certain commonality.

The first words of the book were clearly written by an editor because they refer to Amos in the third person:

*The words of Amos, one of the shepherds from Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel—two years before the earthquake. He said, “YHWH roars from Zion*

*and thunders from Jerusalem; the shepherd's pastures dry up and the height of Carmel shrivels.*" (1:1–2)

The very first words are in effect the title of the book: "*The words of Amos.*" The editor dates the prophet by reference to the kings ruling in Judah and Israel at the time. This places Amos in the middle of the eighth century BCE. This kind of introduction, with its reference to the kings of the Israelite kingdoms, is typical of a number of prophetic books including Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea. This introduction goes further than most by making the date even more precise, specifying that the words of Amos date two years before the earthquake. The reference to the earthquake has been correlated with geological data obtained through fieldwork. The archaeological excavation of Hazor in the Galilee region evidenced in stratum VI a particularly violent quake datable to the time of Jeroboam II (see Yadin, 1964).

From this introduction, we learn a few things about Amos. He was from a little town in Judea called Tekoa, and he was a shepherd. This has been interpreted by some authorities to mean that he was poor, but this was not necessarily so. It may instead indicate he was a landholder. In addition, from 7:14 we learn that he was an agricultural worker, "*a dresser of sycamore trees,*" and he strongly denied he was a professional prophet. Although not belonging to the prophetic guild, he was called to be a prophet directly by God.

Verse 2 contains the theme statement of the book. These, the first words of Amos in the book, describe an angry YHWH. In roaring like a lion, he laid waste the green pastures of Carmel. Note the geographical indicators for they tell us a lot about Amos's theological and political perspective. YHWH roars from Jerusalem, the seat of Davidic ideology, and condemns the heartland of the northern kingdom.

This raises an important issue concerning the perspective of Amos. It would appear, on first reading, that Amos was an advocate of Zion

ideology. But this might depend on the attribution of these words. If they are Amos's, then perhaps yes. If they are an editor's words, shaping the book from a Judean and Davidic slant, then perhaps no. The one other passage in the book of Amos that reflects a strong Davidic bias is the last paragraph, 9:11–15. Here is a sample, with YHWH speaking:

*“On that day I will restore David's fallen house. I will repair its gaping walls and restore its ruins. I will rebuild it as it was a long time ago.” (9:11)*

Clearly looking to the rebirth of the Davidic dynasty, these words are usually attributed to an editor later than Amos's day.

Turning to an examination of the book in terms of its major structural units, the first is 1:3–2:16. This section is a series of moral condemnations aimed at territories in Syria-Palestine in the following order: Syria (Damascus), Philistia (Gaza), Phoenicia (Tyre), Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, and finally Israel (see [Figure 10.4](#)).

In the following excerpt, notice how Amos jumps from one end of Syria-Palestine to the other, until finally he hits his favorite target—Israel. A sample, the oracle against Syria, gives us the flavor of the prophet's language:

*Thus says YHWH, “For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke it (the punishment) on account of their threshing Gilead with iron threshing sledges. I will send fire on the house of Hazael and it will devour the fortresses of Ben-hadad. I will break the gate bars of Damascus and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven and the scepter-bearer from Beth-eden. The people of Aram*

*will go to Kir in exile,” says YHWH. (1:3–5)*

Speaking for God in the first person, Amos condemned Syria for dealing cruelly with the Israelites who lived in Gilead—that is, to the east of the Sea of Kinnereth. The king and his royal city would be destroyed because of their cruelty, and the population would be exiled to Kir, a place far to the east, near Elam.

The oracles continue with all of Israel’s neighbors coming under God’s condemnation one by one. The condemnation of Judah must have been especially sweet to the Israelites who were Amos’s primary audience. They no doubt welcomed his words and urged him on. Israel’s enemies deserved what they got! It was a surprise, then, when Amos continued after Judah and exposed God’s anger with Israel *“because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals”* (2:6).

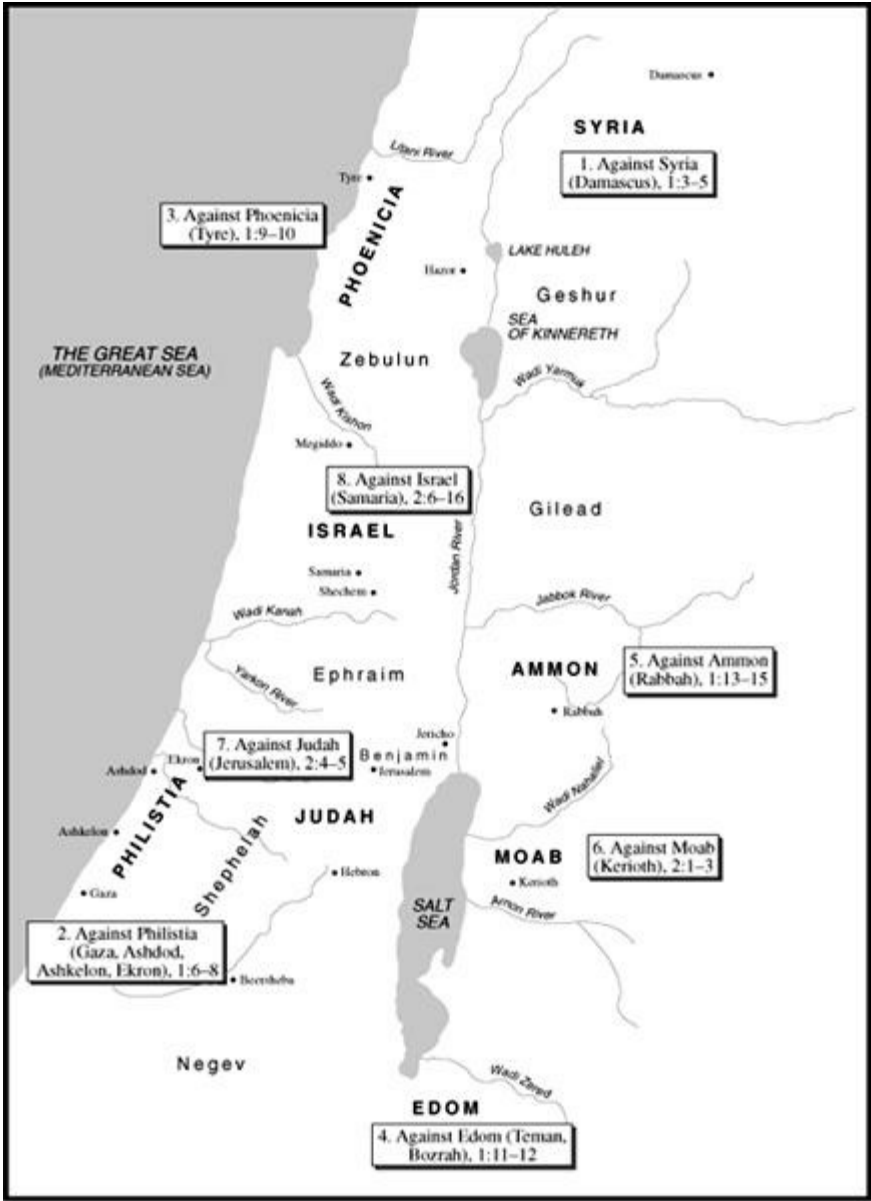
Amos is to be appreciated especially for his sensitivity to matters of social welfare in Israel. He spared no words in condemning the royalty and aristocracy of Israel, who abused the privilege of wealth and even used their authority to get richer at the expense of the poor.

The next major unit, [Chapters 3–6](#), is another collection of oracles but without the focus and structure of the first collection. The words from [Chapter 4](#) continue Amos’s accusatory tone and strong condemnation of the Israelite ruling elite, in this case the wives of the aristocracy:

*Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria—you who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, “Bring us something to drink!” YHWH has sworn by his holiness: the time is definitely coming when they will take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks. You will leave through breaches in the wall, each of you going straight out, and you will be tossed into Harmon.*

(4:1–3)

**FIGURE 10.4** Amos’s Oracles against the Nations



These words of Amos are direct and announce that punishment is inevitable and close. There is no hint that it can be avoided—the

culprits will not be able to dodge the coming doom. Amos does not seem to allow for repentance.

The socioeconomic background for these words is an Israelite elite enjoying an indulgent lifestyle at the expense of disenfranchised peasants. Amos's announcement of punishment is so direct and certain that Coote (1981) argues that Amos must have uttered these words around 745 BCE when Tiglath-Pileser III came to power and directly threatened Israel. This would account for the vividness and accuracy of the language describing Assyrian policies of capture and deportation.

With the threat of Assyrian domination looming, the Israelites held out the expectation that YHWH would make a powerful appearance. As the divine warrior who fights for his people, he will destroy the enemy. The [day of YHWH](#) is the day of his victory. Amos subverts this expectation and warns Israel to be wary of YHWH because, if YHWH shows up, this time Israel will be the object of his wrath, not Assyria:

*Beware, you awaiting the day of YHWH? Why would you have the day of YHWH? It is dark and not light. (5:18)*

This expectation of the coming day of YHWH is found elsewhere in biblical prophecy. Increasingly, it takes on the character of a cataclysmic day of judgment against foreign nations or against Israel and Judah. But it is also sometimes projected as a time of Israel's or Judah's vindication over their detractors.

In addition to disabusing Israel of their day of YHWH delusion, Amos castigated the overfed rich people of Galilee ("you cows of Bashan" [4:1]) who callously oppressed the poor. He was also critical of Israel's centers of religious worship, especially Bethel and Gilgal (4:4–5; 5:4–7). He conveyed the divine displeasure with the ritual activities performed at these sites:

*I hate and despise your festivals; I do not take pleasure from your pious meetings. Although you offer me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them. The peace offering of your choice animals I will not eye. Away from me with the noise of your songs! The melody of your harps I will not hear. Let justice roll down like water, righteousness like an eternally flowing stream. (5:21–24)*

Amos's call for social caring—"Let justice roll down like water!"—is one of his most famous statements. Amos took the religious concepts of justice and righteousness, which had primary application to the way God deals with his people, and applied them to human social interaction.

In Amos's analysis, Israel was just going through the motions of worshipping God and observing proper rituals, thinking that this was the sum total of their obligation to God. In reality, God valued personal responsibility and community caring above formal worship. Amos here disparaged formal religion when its performers used it to make themselves right with God, in the absence of personal and corporate morality. His words should not be absolutized as a total prophetic condemnation of all formal worship. This is typical of Amos's unconditional language, but Amos probably did not mean it to be applied always and everywhere.

The last major section is [Chapters 7–9](#) built around five visions and a prophecy of restoration (see [Table 10.2](#)). The first four visions are similarly structured. Each begins with the sentence "*This is what my lord YHWH showed me.*" In each vision, Amos saw something that indicated that God was going to destroy Israel. In the first (7:1–3), he saw locusts devouring the produce of the land. In the second (7:4–6), he saw a fire consume the land. In both of these visions, after Amos cried out with concern for Israel, God changed his mind and withdrew the punishment.

**TABLE 10.2** Visions of Amos

|                  |         |                     |
|------------------|---------|---------------------|
| Vision 1         | 7:1–3   | Locusts             |
| Vision 2         | 7:4–6   | Fire                |
| Vision 3         | 7:7–9   | Plumb line          |
| Narrative        | 7:10–17 | Amos versus Amaziah |
| Vision 4         | 8:1–3   | Summer fruit        |
| Vision 5         | 9:1–4   | YHWH by the altar   |
| Salvation oracle | 9:11–15 | David’s tent        |

In the third vision (7:7–9), Amos saw YHWH with a plumb line (others translate the underlying Hebrew word as *pickaxe*) in his hand. This vision differs from the prior two. It is not an image of destruction. Rather, Amos sees God holding a measuring device against which Israel was measured:

*YHWH said, “I am putting a plumb line in the middle of my people Israel. I will never again overlook them. The high places of Isaac will be made barren, and the holy places of Israel will be leveled. I will come against Jeroboam with a sword.” (7:8b–9)*

A plumb line is a construction worker’s tool consisting of a weight attached to a string. The weighted string provides a true vertical (or plumb) standard by which other objects, such as masonry walls or door posts, can be built straight. Judged against true vertical, Israel was tilted and out of plumb. Religion was not doing it any good. Consequently, Israel’s worship centers would be destroyed, especially the “high places,” which had Canaanite Baalistic associations. And Jeroboam II, king of Israel, would be removed.

This, the third vision, is not followed directly by the fourth. Instead, a narrative was inserted recording a confrontation between Amos and [Amaziah](#), a Bethel priest loyal to Jeroboam II. Amaziah



was provoked by the preaching of Amos. In Bethel, the main Israelite worship center sponsored by the king, Amos proclaimed that Jeroboam would die and Israel would go into exile (7:11). Amaziah, in so many words, told Amos to go back to Judah from whence he had come.

The narrative of this encounter interrupts the flow of the vision accounts, but the arrangement does have a certain editorial logic. The vision accounts as a collection condemn Israel for sinning, but the third vision account specifically targets Israelite sanctuaries. This leads into the Amos–Amaziah confrontation, which then becomes evidence of the perversity of Israelite sanctuaries, condemned in the third vision, and evidence of Israel’s hardness of heart. Whereas after the first two visions God had relented of his planned punishment, there is no relenting after the third and fourth visions. This confrontation account demonstrates that there was no repentant spirit in Israel that could warrant a removal of God’s planned destruction.

The fourth vision account, 8:1–3, was built around a visual–verbal pun. Amos saw a basket of summer fruit (Hebrew *qayits*). YHWH said in explanation, “*the end* [Hebrew *qets*] *of my people has arrived.*” What follows, almost until the end of the book, is a series of disaster descriptions: famine, mourning, violence, exile, death, and despair.

The fifth vision account, 9:1–4, is structured differently from the preceding four visions. Instead of YHWH showing Amos an object and constructing a lesson around it, here Amos sees YHWH standing by the altar. He issues an order to “*smash the pillar capitals.*” Either the temple was to collapse on the people and kill them, or the capitals symbolize the heads and leaders of Israel who will not escape punishment.

The last oracle, 9:11–15, contains expectation of the rebirth of the Davidic dynasty and a delightful depiction of the glorious future awaiting the land and its people. The ground will be so productive

that harvesters will not be able to keep pace, and the people will enjoy peace and prosperity. This last unit is so radically different from the preceding words of Amos, concerning not Israel but the rebirth of the Judean Davidic dynasty, that it is usually attributed to someone other than Amos. The effect of beginning the book with YHWH roaring from Zion and ending by anticipating a savior from the resurrected house of David frames the book as an apology for the primacy of David, Jerusalem, and Zion over Jeroboam and Bethel.

Why was it attached to the book as the final unit? Perhaps because otherwise the ending would be too depressing. Amos turned out to be correct in foreseeing the demise of the northern kingdom: “*Israel will be exiled from its land*” (7:17). In the view of the compiler of Amos in its canonical form, judgment could never be the last word—it had to be followed by salvation, and salvation would come from Judah. The book grew in stages and was probably finalized in the postexilic period. At that time, the editor did not see fit to allow the book to end on a note of despair. The final form of the book asserts that divine judgment is followed by YHWH’s salvation, and that is the way of YHWH.

## 2.2 Hosea

Hosea was placed first in the Book of the Twelve, but we cannot be sure why: perhaps because it is the longest book of the twelve, perhaps because someone at one time mistakenly thought Hosea was the earliest prophet of the twelve. The evidence of the book itself, however, indicates that [Hosea](#) prophesied a little later than Amos. Like Amos, he prophesied in the northern kingdom. Unlike Amos, he was a native of the north. In fact, Hosea was the only non-Judean literary prophet besides Jeremiah.

Hosea’s northern origin probably put him in touch with the northern prophetic tradition represented by Elijah and the Elohists.

traditions of the Pentateuch and aligns him with the traditions of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah. This may account for Hosea’s frequent allusions to the Decalogue and the Sinai covenant traditions.

Historical indicators in the text, including the editorial framework of the first verse, suggest that Hosea prophesied potentially from as early as the 780s down to the destruction of Samaria in 721 BCE. Jeroboam II was the king of Israel at the beginning of Hosea’s prophetic activity, and after he died, the northern kingdom was in disarray until its destruction by Assyria.

The book was compiled after the lifetime of Hosea the prophet. It has a discernible structure that falls into two basic parts. The first unit, [Chapters 1–3](#), is built around Hosea’s ordeal of marrying a prostitute. This marriage functions as a living parable of husband YHWH’s relationship to his wife Israel. The second unit, [Chapters 4–11](#), begins with the phrase “*Hear the word of YHWH*” and consists largely of uncontextualized statements. It has no obvious thematic unity but consists of oracles of disaster and salvation. This alternation of disaster and salvation, even discernible to some extent in the first unit, provides a structuring principle to the book (see [Table 10.3](#)).

**TABLE 10.3** Structure of Hosea

|               | Disaster   | Salvation |
|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Chapters 1–3  | 1:2–9      | 1:10–2:1  |
|               | 2:2–13     | 2:14–23   |
|               | 3:1–4      | 3:5       |
| Chapters 4–14 | 4:1–11:7   | 11:8–11   |
|               | 11:12–14:1 | 14:2–9    |

The first chapter contains a third-person narrative describing Hosea’s marriage to [Gomer](#):

*The beginning of YHWH's speaking through Hosea: YHWH said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a promiscuous woman and have children of promiscuity, because the land is promiscuous with regard to YHWH." He went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. She conceived and bore him a son.*

*YHWH said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, because in yet a little while I will avenge the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. In that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." She conceived again and bore a daughter, and he said to him, "Call her name Lo-ruhamah, because I will no longer show mercy to the house of Israel. I will not forgive them. [But to the house of Judah I will show mercy, and I will save them, by YHWH Elohim, but I will not save them by bow, sword, warfare, horses or charioteers.]" She weaned Loruhamah, conceived and bore a son. He said, "Call his name Lo-ammi, because you are not my people, and I am 'Not I am' to you." (1:2–9)*

Gomer had three children. The text clearly indicates that the first child was fathered by Hosea himself, but the second and third might have been children of her "promiscuity." In any case, the children serve as prophetic signs having to do with the northern kingdom of Israel.

The first child was named Jezreel (which in Hebrew sounds very close to Israel: *Yizreel* and *Yisrael*, respectively). "*The blood of Jezreel*" refers to Jehu's bloody coup d'état and slaughter of the house of Ahab. For these acts, the monarchy would be punished.

The second child's name, Lo-ruhamah, means "without mercy." The Hebrew word *rechem* (literally "womb") to which it is related recalls descriptions of YHWH as the merciful God of the covenant

(see Exodus 33:19), the one who loves Israel with parental (a mother's?) love.

The third child's name, Lo-ammi, means "not my people." This name is also related to covenant notions. The essence of God's covenant with Israel was this: "*I will be your God, and you will be my people.*" The (anti-) covenant context is reinforced with the words "*I am 'Not I am' to you.*" The Hebrew original of the phrase "*Not I am*" is *Lo-ehyeh* and undoubtedly puns on the covenant name of God, YHWH, whose name was revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14) as "I am who I am," *ehyeh asher ehyeh* in Hebrew.

An interpretive issue regarding this passage concerns whether it was meant to be taken literally or taken as a figurative account, much like a parable. If the former, that also raises a moral issue regarding whether or not Gomer was a known prostitute at the time of her marriage to Hosea. The command "*Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom,*" as the NRSV renders it, sounds like he was told to marry a known prostitute. If she was, then YHWH was asking a rather difficult thing of Hosea that led to considerable personal pain.

On the other hand, it is quite possible that the wording was affected by Hosea's experience and theology. The account was of course written after the fact of the marriage. At the time he may not have known she was a prostitute, but in retrospect it was obvious by her marital unfaithfulness that she was. God in his providence must have known ahead of time her propensities; therefore, he had told Hosea to marry a prostitute.

Yet a third interpretive possibility is that Gomer was not unfaithful to the marriage bond as such but that she was associated with Canaanite Baalistic bridal rites of initiation (see Wolff, 1974). In this reading, the children were considered, metaphorically speaking, to be children of "whoredom" because conception was credited to Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility, and not YHWH.

Hosea was the first prophet to use his family life, and in particular his children, to make a theopolitical point. Prophesying shortly after Hosea, Isaiah would do the same (see Isaiah 7–8). Hosea’s marriage to Gomer was a mirror of YHWH’s experience with Israel. Marriage was equated with the covenant that God had made with Israel in the wilderness.

Whereas [Chapter 1](#) is a third-person account of Hosea’s marriage, [Chapter 3](#) is an autobiographical description of that marriage. In his own words, Hosea describes “purchasing” a prostitute. Some interpreters suggest this account temporally follows the story of [Chapter 1](#), with Hosea buying back his wife after an intervening period of unfaithfulness. Other interpreters view it as the same story of [Chapter 1](#), just retold in the first person:

*YHWH said to me again, “Go, love a woman who has a lover and is a prostitute, just as YHWH loves the people of Israel—even though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.” So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer of barley and a measure of wine. And I said to her, “You must stay mine in the future; you must not play the prostitute. You must not have intercourse with a man, including me with you.” For the Israelites shall remain many days without a king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek YHWH their God, and David their king. They shall come in fear to YHWH and to his goodness in the days to come. (3:1–5)*

Again, the relationship of man and woman is a mirror of YHWH’s relationship to Israel. The specified purchase price consisted of silver and grain, the usual offerings to a deity. After paying the price, Hosea’s expectation was that the former prostitute, now his wife,

would be pure.

Originally applying to the Israel (read northern kingdom) of Hosea's day, the description of the relationship was reapplied by a later writer in verses 4–5 to Judah. Brought to Judah after the fall of the north, the experience of Hosea became a lesson also to the southern kingdom.

Abstinence from sexual intercourse was appropriated as a symbol of Judah's isolation, without king or sacred paraphernalia in Babylonian exile. Mention of the return included the expectation of the return to power of the Davidic line. Although the people were wayward, days of blessing would return. Perhaps this prophetic material was shaped by Deuteronomic circles as was so much other classical prophecy. Especially in this case, it would be natural for Deuteronomic theology to have an influence given the similar northern origin of Hosea and Deuteronomy.

As suggested above, [Chapters 1](#) and [3](#) originally may have been third-person and first-person renderings, respectively, of the same experience of marital betrayal and alienation. It seems, however, that the editor took [Chapter 3](#) and revised it to read like an historical continuation of [Chapter 1](#); note the use of “again” in 3:1. Perhaps his intention in framing the scandalous affair as repetition was to affirm the patience of YHWH, who puts up with his people time after time, even as they, like Hosea's wife, go running after other lovers. It affirms the sad recurring historical experience of Israel: Generation after generation forgot their legitimate husband, YHWH, and sought the company of Baal and Asherah. Shaped finally as a prophetic word for Judah by the Deuteronomic historian, the message is obvious: Do not perpetuate this tragic pattern!

## 2.3 Jonah

The book of Jonah is quite unlike any other prophetic book—in fact,

quite unlike any other book in the Hebrew Bible. For one thing, it is exclusively a tale *about* a prophet rather than a collection of utterances *by* him. No one really knows for sure when it was written or where. And then, of course, there is this business of a fish swallowing the prophet, who survives and is vomited onto the shore. This is so wild, could it really have happened?

To address this and other issues, we need to wrestle with the nature of the book. In particular, what is its genre, or literary type? Scholars have made many suggestions. Some authorities tend to argue for the historicity of the record, finding reasons to affirm that a fish could swallow a person live. Many others have read it as fiction, regarding it as didactic narrative, or a novella, a short story, or even a satire of Jewish piety.

The main character in the book is [Jonah](#). He is attested as a real figure by 2 Kings 14:25, which tells us that he was from Gath-hepher in the region of Galilee in the north and that he was a prophet during the reign of the Israelite king Jeroboam II in the mid-700s BCE. This would have made Jonah a contemporary of Amos, probably accounting for the juxtaposition of the two books in the Twelve. And this is the reason why we place the book of Jonah in this chapter on the Assyrian crisis, even though most scholars put the date of the book's composition in the post-exilic period.

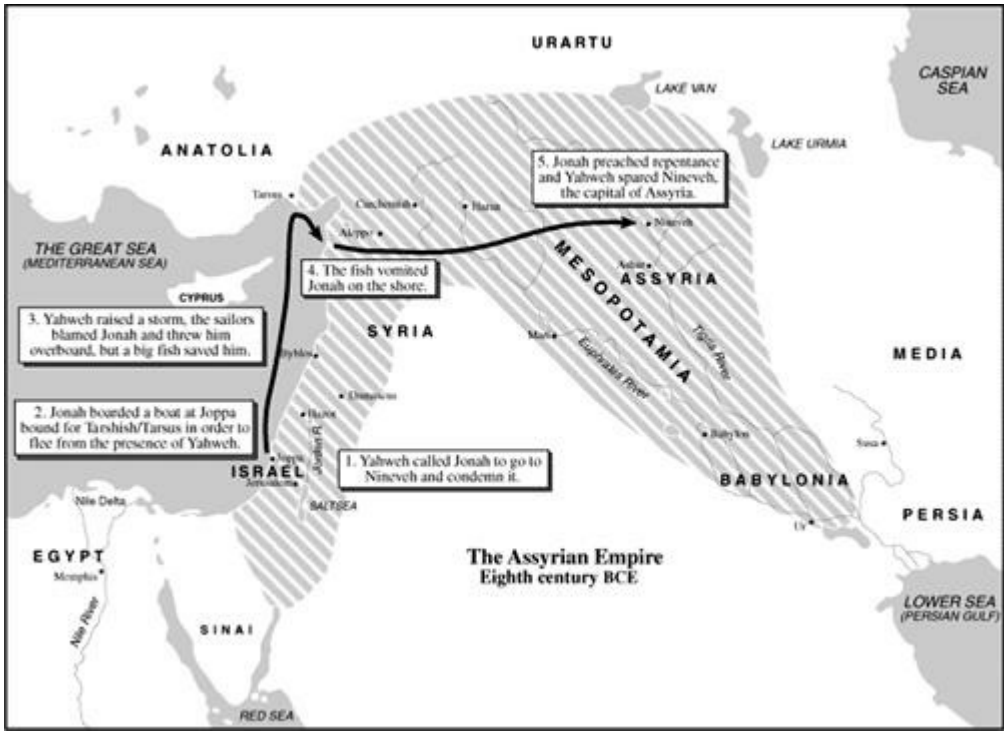
This is the story line. Yahweh directed Jonah to go to [Nineveh](#), the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. Jonah went by boat in the opposite direction, so Yahweh sent a storm to stop him. The sailors determined that Jonah was the cause of the storm. After considerable moral anguish, they threw Jonah overboard, and the seas calmed.

Jonah was swallowed by a large fish. From the innards of the fish, he addressed God with a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance. The fish deposited Jonah on the Mediterranean coast. From there he proceeded to Nineveh, where he declared its doom (see [Figure 10.5](#)). The people repented and God withdrew the destruction that he had devised for the city. Then Jonah became very angry. He resented



God’s mercy and left the city to pout and see if the city would really be spared.

**FIGURE 10.5** Jonah’s Travels



There in the desert, God created a bush for Jonah, who was overjoyed to have the shade. God removed it the next day, and Jonah was absolutely distraught that it had died. Hidden somewhere in this was a lesson about grace and mercy. Jonah should have been happy that all Nineveh’s inhabitants had not been destroyed; instead he was disappointed.

The book of Jonah has been interpreted in a variety of different ways. The following are some of the interpretive angles that have been proposed:

- It is a satire with snide commentary on prophetic calling, using

Jonah as a caricature to portray the reluctance of professional prophets to follow the leading of God.

- It is a criticism of Israelite prophets, exposing their insincerity at preaching repentance without really wanting to see it and being disappointed (and taking it as personal failure) when destructive judgment is not meted out by God.
- It is an implicit criticism of the Jewish community, which was generally unwilling to respond to prophetic calls to repentance, in contrast with the willingness of Nineveh, including king, people, and even cattle, who responded immediately in faith.
- It is a criticism of an exclusionary Jewish belief in divine election, the belief that God was only concerned about his chosen people and no one else.
- It asserts God's freedom to change his mind against prophets and theologians who would limit that freedom.
- It explores the dilemma of true and false prophecy, showing that the words of true prophets (Jonah in this case) do not always come true.
- It is an allegory of Israel in exile, both Jonah and Judah looking to God for the destruction of an evil empire.

The point of the story is difficult to determine (if, in fact, there is only one intended point), especially in light of the indeterminate way the book ends—with a rhetorical question:

*God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" He replied, "It is right for me to be angry, to death." YHWH said, "You cared about the bush over which you did not labor or cause to grow, which between a night and a night came up and died. Should I not care about the great city Nineveh, in which there are more than 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left, and many*

*animals?” (4:9–11)*

In light of the prophetic preoccupation with cursing foreign nations, God’s concern for those notoriously nasty Assyrians is especially remarkable. Perhaps among other things, the book of Jonah is at least saying that God has the freedom to show mercy to the foreign nations if he wants to. The people of God have no right to be self-righteous or to hold on to the love of God selfishly.

Drawing on the remarkable “*God is slow to anger and abounding in love*” tradition of the Torah (see Numbers 14:18), Jonah angrily threw back into the face of God the divine reputation for showing compassion:

*Is this not what I said while I was still back home? That is why I fled to Tarshish in the first place. I know that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, and abounding in love, and ready to relent from punishing. (4:2)*

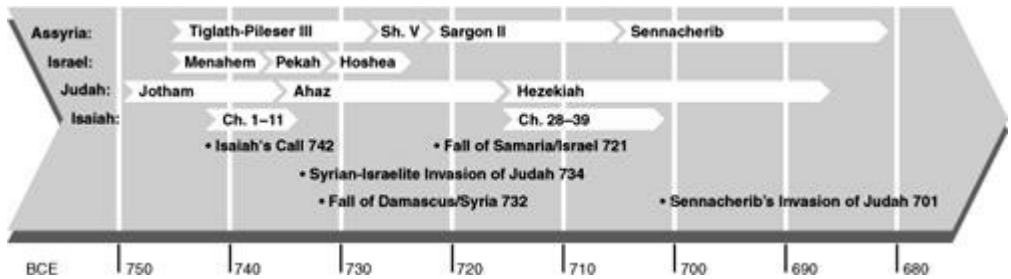
Jonah’s sarcasm exposed his own pettiness and self-absorption in contrast to God’s unbounded love and concern for all people. This lesson seems to have been needed by the Jewish community of the postexilic period when it was natural to be resentful of its neighbors and become self-absorbed. The self-criticism implicit in the book of Jonah makes its inclusion in the canon especially remarkable.

### **3 JUDAH (SOUTHERN KINGDOM) IN CRISIS**

Tiglath-Pileser III led the Assyrian army into the regions of Aram and Canaan. This incursion resulted in significant domestic disruption within both Judah and Israel. It is against the background of Assyrian imperialism that the prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem attempts to provide counsel and support to the royal house of David in Judah. Beginning

in 742, Isaiah was a witness for at least forty years to the pressures that Assyria brought to bear on Judah. These pressures called for Judah's kings to be shrewd and strong, and Isaiah brought a divine perspective to the table as they faced difficult decisions.

**FIGURE 10.6** Time Line: Isaiah of Jerusalem



Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, but he hailed from rural Moresheth southwest of Jerusalem. This may help explain his more critical judgment of the urbanized capital of Judah, with its economic elitism and its military might. Isaiah, in contrast, appears to have belonged to the wealthy class; clearly he had ready access to the royal court and had the ear of the king. Each prophet in his own way attempts to help Judah weather the storm of Assyria's expansion to the west.

### 3.1 Isaiah of Jerusalem (First Isaiah)

[Isaiah of Jerusalem](#) was one of Israel's earliest classical prophets. He was in Jerusalem during the critical years of the Assyrian crisis, bolstering Judah's fragile and fearful leaders with words from YHWH (see [Figure 10.6](#)). His most famous pronouncement is the Immanuel oracle that assured God's continued endorsement of the house of David.

The book of Isaiah is a collection of Isaiah's many sayings and provides a fine illustration of the growth of prophetic traditions. The

entire book of Isaiah is attributed to Isaiah ben-Amoz (not to be confused with the prophet Amos) by the editorial superscription in 1:1. But, in fact, the book contains prophetic material spanning more than 200 years. A nucleus of material is attributable to Isaiah of Jerusalem, a citizen of Jerusalem in the 700s BCE. The remainder comes from a series of anonymous disciples and prophets (see 8:16, which mentions his followers) who saw themselves, or were seen by editors, as coming out of an Isaiah mold.

The book of Isaiah is widely recognized to consist of three subcollections (see [Table 10.4](#)). [Chapters 1–39](#) make up [First Isaiah](#). The core of this collection consists of prophecies from the namesake of the book who lived in the middle to late 700s. In this period, Israel and Judah were threatened by the Assyrian Empire. Chapters 40–55 constitute Second Isaiah, also called Deutero-Isaiah. This collection consists largely of salvation oracles applying to the situation of exile in Babylonia and dating to the mid-500s. Chapters 56–66 make up Third Isaiah, which is also called Trito-Isaiah and applies to the late 500s in Judah where the Jewish community was struggling to rebuild and reorganize itself.

**TABLE 10.4** The Three Books of Isaiah

| Chapters | Book          | Title                     | Period               | BCE     |
|----------|---------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------|
| 1–39     | First Isaiah  | Isaiah of Jerusalem       | Assyrian             | 742–701 |
| 40–55    | Second Isaiah | Isaiah of the exile       | Babylonian exile     | 546–538 |
| 56–66    | Third Isaiah  | Isaiah of the restoration | Restoration of Judah | 538–520 |

It would be an oversimplification to claim that there is a linear historical progression in the book of Isaiah from the preexilic period ([Chapters 1–39](#)) to the exilic period (Chapters 40–55) to the postexilic period (Chapters 56–66). Later writers continued to rework earlier material and add to it, so even the first subcollection, which is largely attributed to Isaiah of Jerusalem, contains postexilic

material. Conversely, mostly postexilic Third Isaiah took up earlier prophetic sayings from the preexilic first-temple period and incorporated them into his collection. We will examine First Isaiah here because Isaiah of Jerusalem is the Isaiah that is situated, at least originally, within the Assyrian period.

The first major section of the book of Isaiah, [Chapters 1–39](#), contains a core of material attributable to Isaiah of Jerusalem. [Chapters 1–11](#) are a series of prophetic judgment statements delivered by Isaiah primarily to Judah and autobiographical accounts by Isaiah. [Chapters 13–23](#) are a set of oracles against foreign nations. Chapters 24–27 are the so-called Isaiah Apocalypse, a collection of sketches on apocalyptic themes such as universal judgment, the eschatological banquet, and heavenly signs. Chapters 28–32 are a set of prophetic oracles datable to 715–701 BCE concerning Judah and foreign policy. Chapters 34–35 appear to be postexilic additions that have affinities with Chapters 40–66 and may have at one time served to bridge First and Second Isaiah. Chapters 36–39 are an historical appendix, paralleled in 2 Kings 18:13–20:19, dealing with Hezekiah and the Assyrian crisis. We will spend the most time on Isaiah 1–11 and 28–33, which are rather securely connected with the prophet himself. These chapters apply to events surrounding the Assyrian crisis of the middle to late 700s.

We do not know a lot of detail about the book's namesake, Isaiah son of Amoz. We only know for sure that he began speaking as a prophet in Jerusalem in the latter half of the eighth century. He appears to have been from Judah and generally had a high opinion of the Davidic tradition though he can be critical of its Davidic kings. Gauging by the social circles in which he moved, he could very well have belonged to the Jerusalem aristocracy.

Isaiah has a lot in common with the other, mostly earlier, prophets of the 700s: Amos, Hosea, and Micah. It even seems likely that he was influenced to a degree by them. In material dating to his early years in the public arena, Isaiah's critique of official religion over

the demands of social justice (1:12–17) sounds a great deal like Amos. The next section, [Chapters 2–4](#), contains material also like his predecessor’s, condemning the aristocracy and the extravagant lifestyle of its female retainers, because it demonstrated disdain for the needs of the disadvantaged. Isaiah differs from Amos, of course, in targeting the ruling class of Jerusalem rather than that of Israel and Samaria.

Isaiah may also have been familiar with Hosea, judging by his description of a faithless people as a harlot. Isaiah berates Jerusalem, describing it as a prostitute (1:21–26), and later uses images from the fertility cult to denounce Jerusalem, perhaps dependent on Hosea 10:1. Again, Isaiah takes metaphors earlier applied to the north and reapplies them to Judah.

Isaiah opposed the priestly and prophetic spokespersons who stood in the service of the royal court and its policies. He frequently equated them with the “smooth talkers” of the foreign nations—their diviners, soothsayers, and necromancers. He seems to have viewed himself differently, more as a teacher (5:24; 30:9) than as a prophet.

Unlike Amos and Hosea, Isaiah did not draw significantly from the resources of the Mosaic tradition of the Exodus or the traditions of the Sinai covenant to give shape to his prophetic analysis. Isaiah’s conceptual toolkit was the set of images and assurances that were dependent on the Davidic dynasty, which administered YHWH’s rule on earth and on [Zion](#) as the fortress of YHWH (see the Zion poems in 2:2–4 and 4:2–6). The name *Zion* originally applied to the Jebusite fortress that David captured and made his capital (see 2 Samuel 5). Later it came to refer to the temple area and even to the entire city of Jerusalem. Zion, or Mount Zion, was considered the royal residence of YHWH the Great King.

The prophecies of First Isaiah are set within the turbulent times of the second half of the eighth century BCE when Assyria was a serious threat to the independence of both Israel and Judah (see [Table 10.5](#)). By the end of the century, only Judah had survived, and then

only barely. Here are four notable passages.

### 3.1.1 Commission (6)

The experience of initiation into the prophetic task can be referred to as the commission, or “call,” of the prophet. In a [call narrative](#), the prophet describes his experience of being drawn into divine service, sometimes even against his will. The specifics of each prophet’s experience are unique, but there are some common features. Most record the sense of having stood in the presence of God and of having been utterly frightened by the encounter. Isaiah’s description of the call has a lot in common with Micaiah’s experience of the Divine Council in First Kings 22. The prophet Ezekiel also relates an experience of standing in the divine presence (Ezekiel 1). All have similarities to Moses’s call experience at the burning bush (Exodus 3). In each of these experiences, the individual is commissioned to go and deliver a message for YHWH.

**TABLE 10.5** Life and Times of Isaiah of Jerusalem

|         |                                                                                       |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 750     | Rezin became king of Damascus/Syria (750–732)                                         |
| 745     | Tiglath-Pileser III became king of Assyria (745–727)                                  |
| 743–738 | Tiglath-Pileser III campaigned in Syria-Palestine (he is called Pul in 2 Kings 15:19) |
| 742     | Isaiah’s temple call vision inaugurated his prophecy (Isaiah 6)                       |
| 742     | Ahaz became king of Jerusalem/Judah (742–727)                                         |
| 738     | Menahem, king of Samaria/Israel, paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III                  |
| 737     | Pekah assassinated Pekahiah, king of Samaria/Israel; became king (737–732)            |
| 734–732 | Syrian-Israelite attack on Judah; Isaiah’s war memoirs (Isaiah 7–8)                   |
| 732     | Hoshea assassinated Pekah of Samaria/Israel; became king (732–724)                    |
| 732     | Tiglath-Pileser III conquered Damascus/Syria                                          |
| 726     | Shalmaneser V became king of Assyria (726–722); Hoshea became his vassal              |
| 725     | Hoshea turned to Egypt for help                                                       |
| 724     | Shalmaneser V besieged Samaria/Israel                                                 |
| 721     | Sargon II became king of Assyria (721–705); conquered Samaria/Israel                  |
| 715–701 | Oracles during Hezekiah’s reign (Isaiah 28–32)                                        |
| 704     | Sennacherib became king of Assyria (704–681)                                          |
| 701     | Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem/Judah but was unsuccessful (Isaiah 36–39)              |



The notion of the prophet as a messenger for God is reflected in the widely used formula that introduces prophetic oracles, “*Thus says YHWH.*” Most prophets felt unqualified to voice the divine message, but God somehow enabled them to speak. Out of his call experience, described in [Chapter 6](#), Isaiah became the messenger of the divine king:

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw YHWH sitting on a throne, high and exalted. The hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs attended him. Each had six wings: two to cover the face, two to cover the feet, and two to fly. Each called to the other: “Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.” The hinges on the thresholds shook from the voices of those heralds, and the house filled with smoke. Then I said, “Woe is me! I am doomed, because I am a person of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips. Yet, how is it my eyes have seen the King, YHWH of hosts?” Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said, “Because this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is wiped out.” Then I heard the voice of YHWH saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here I am, send me!” (6:1–8)*

Isaiah’s vision took place in the temple, either in reality or in Isaiah’s imagination. If Isaiah had really been there, this might suggest he had access and was a priest. If only imagined, we might not draw the same conclusion. The vision took place the year that Uzziah died, making it 742 BCE. If this call vision marks the beginning of Isaiah’s formal prophetic work, then it began in that year.

In Isaiah's call experience, YHWH is envisioned as the great king attended by his Divine Council. Called *seraphs* here, a word meaning "fiery ones," each member of the council had six wings. While foreign to our experience, the figures are on the analogy of the winged protector figures common in Mesopotamia (see [Figure 10.7](#)).

With two wings, these Isaiah seraphs flew. With two they covered their feet. These two are an enigma until we realize that feet can be a euphemism (here as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible) for genitals. They were guarding their nakedness in the presence of God. With two they covered their faces. Apparently, as with humans, angels cannot look upon God and live. What is remarkable in this passage is that, while the seraphs cannot look upon God, the prophet Isaiah does, and yet he lives.

But in the direct presence of God, Isaiah felt his total inadequacy. He cried out in fear because he recognized his impurity. To avert disaster, a seraph took holy fire and burned away the uncleanness of his mouth. The object of cleansing is the vital instrument of the prophet's messenger function. Now qualified to serve, Isaiah volunteered to represent God to the people.

Isaiah refers to God as "*YHWH of hosts*" here in this passage and frequently elsewhere. This divine title almost surely originated at Shiloh in the northern kingdom and is first attested during the Philistine wars. Although Isaiah is clearly a Judean prophet, the use of this phrase links him with Amos, who also uses it, and with the prophetic holy war doctrine of the northern traditions. In like manner, the title "*Holy One of Israel*," not used in this passage but frequently elsewhere in Isaiah, was used outside Isaiah only by the earlier northern prophet Hosea (11:9). Not too much should be inferred from this though it does appear that Isaiah was influenced by northern prophets.

## **FIGURE 10.7** Winged Protector

A winged figure, often called a *sphinx*, reflects the ancient Middle

Eastern understanding of a heavenly world that included divine messengers, demons, and protectors. This carved ivory winged figure comes from 800s BCE Samaria in Israel.



Source: Graphic by Barry Bandstra based on an ivory plaque from Samaria of a winged protector, now in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (IDAM 33.2572). See *Treasures of the Holy Land: Ancient Art from the Israel Museum* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 166–168, no. 82.

### 3.1.2 Immanuel (7–8)

In the final arrangement of material, the autobiographical account of Isaiah’s call, dated to 742 BCE, is followed by a third-person biographical narrative describing his counsel to Ahaz eight years later in 734. At that time, Ahaz faced a serious international problem. Judah had just been invaded by the Syrians and Israelites (in the text also called Ephraim). Ahaz was in a quandary over what to do. Should he give in and join the coalition that the Syrians and Israelites were attempting to put together, or should he seek outside assistance against the Syrian–Israelite league?

Isaiah felt divinely compelled to give Ahaz advice. Meeting him in Jerusalem, Isaiah said, “*Don’t let your heart be afraid*” (7:4). But

Ahaz was not inclined to take the advice of the prophet. Apparently, Ahaz was more interested in the pressing political dilemma of his situation and his defensive options than in Isaiah's pious dynastic promises.

In an attempt to encourage Ahaz further, Isaiah offered to give him a sign or indicator of YHWH's continued support of the Davidic dynasty. Ahaz was cavalier about this, too. He did not see the need for a sign, thereby—in the view of the writer—showing a deep disregard of the divine tradition that undergirded and legitimized his position. Now, the sign should not be understood as a magical act of some sort but more as an inspired interpretation of a natural happening. Isaiah's sign was this:

*Look, the young woman is with child and will bear a son, and will name him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.*  
(7:14–15)

What follows is at least one plausible way to understand this text. Isaiah, obviously being close to the royal court, knew Ahaz's wife, the queen (here referred to as "*the young woman*"), and knew that she was pregnant. Perhaps the text is suggesting Isaiah knew this even before Ahaz knew it himself. Isaiah is saying the queen would give birth to a son who would be concrete evidence of YHWH's support of the Davidic line, evidence that the Davidic covenant was still intact and that he was "with" them. The name [Immanuel](#) literally means "El/God is with us."

Concern for a crown prince was certainly a high priority of Judean kings, or for that matter, of any king. A son would be proof that the line would continue. A son would be evidence of YHWH's direct intervention as was perceived to be the case with so many births in the biblical text. We need only remember Isaac, Jacob and Esau, and

Samuel to recall the role of divine intervention in conceiving a child. In the context of the present crisis, the impending birth should have been interpreted by Ahaz and all Judeans as a sign of God's favor. If we continue this line of interpretation, history reveals that the son born to Ahaz was Hezekiah, and Immanuel was his throne name.

The reconstructed scenario that interprets Hezekiah as Immanuel is not the only possible reading. In addition to the figure born to the young woman, two other children are mentioned in Isaiah's memoirs, and both are clearly sons of Isaiah: Shear-jashub in 7:3 and Maher-shalal-hash-baz in 8:1. Based on this, some interpreters have suggested that Immanuel was also Isaiah's son and not the son of Ahaz—perhaps the Maher-shalal-hash-baz referred to in 8:1 (see Wolf, 1972) or even a third son (see Gottwald, 1958). But then the logical questions to ask are why the birth of a son to Isaiah should matter to Ahaz and why should it function as an obvious sign of YHWH's protection of Jerusalem.

Isaiah went on. Before this child would reach the age of puberty (*"knowing how to refuse the evil and choose the good"*), the threat posed by Syria and Israel would be gone. *"Curds and honey"* may be an allusion to the "milk and honey" of the Promised Land, a positive allusion to security in the land derived from the conquest tradition, but others claim that this is scavenger food indicating a coming time of desolation. Indeed, as events worked out, Damascus of Syria was destroyed in 732 and Samaria of Israel in 721, just about the time Hezekiah, born around 734, was reaching puberty. Note, however, that the chronology of the life of Hezekiah is difficult to pin down due to contradictions within 2 Kings 18. We follow verse 13, which places the beginning of his reign at 715, making him 21 years old when he ascended the throne, against verse 2, which puts his age at 25 years old.

The sign was intended to provide concrete evidence of God's continued care so that Ahaz would trust YHWH rather than act rashly in a political way to counter the Syrian-Israelite threat. Contrary to

Isaiah's advice to sit tight and trust YHWH, however, Ahaz decided to take things into his own hands. He invited Tiglath-Pileser III and the Assyrians to help fend off the Syrian-Israelite league. They gladly accepted, and although Assyrian aid dissipated the immediate threat, Judah was forced to become an Assyrian client state and remained such for about a century.

You may have noticed that the autobiographical [Chapter 6](#) is separated from biographical [Chapter 7](#) by some eight years. And [Chapter 7](#) is followed by another autobiographical piece, this one foretelling the coming of the Assyrians. We might want to ask why the material is arranged this way. More specifically, why is the biographical piece about Immanuel injected here? The answer has to do with the call narrative. Isaiah's burden of prophecy, as indicated by YHWH in that account, would be to speak to a people who would hear but not listen, who would not repent to avert disaster:

*“Go and say to this people: ‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend. ...’ Then I said, ‘How long, O YHWH?’ And he said: ‘Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, ... until YHWH sends everyone far away.’” (6:9, 11–12)*

Ahaz's reaction to the counsel of Isaiah and his rejection of the Immanuel sign in [Chapter 7](#) demonstrates just the kind of callousness that Isaiah was told to expect in that inaugural vision. The result was divine judgment, which came as [Chapter 8](#) foresaw, when the forces of Assyria swept over Judah.

From these chapters, we see that Isaiah the prophet was heavily involved in Judean politics—close to the king, yet not a “yes-man.” What else can we say about the involvement of Isaiah in Judean political life? Isaiah may have been a member of the loyal opposition party that opposed Ahaz's policy of accommodation to the Assyrian Empire. He also appears to have been more of a parochial Judean

traditionalist than Ahaz, preferring isolationism to involvement in international affairs.

### 3.1.3 Dynastic Promise (9–11)

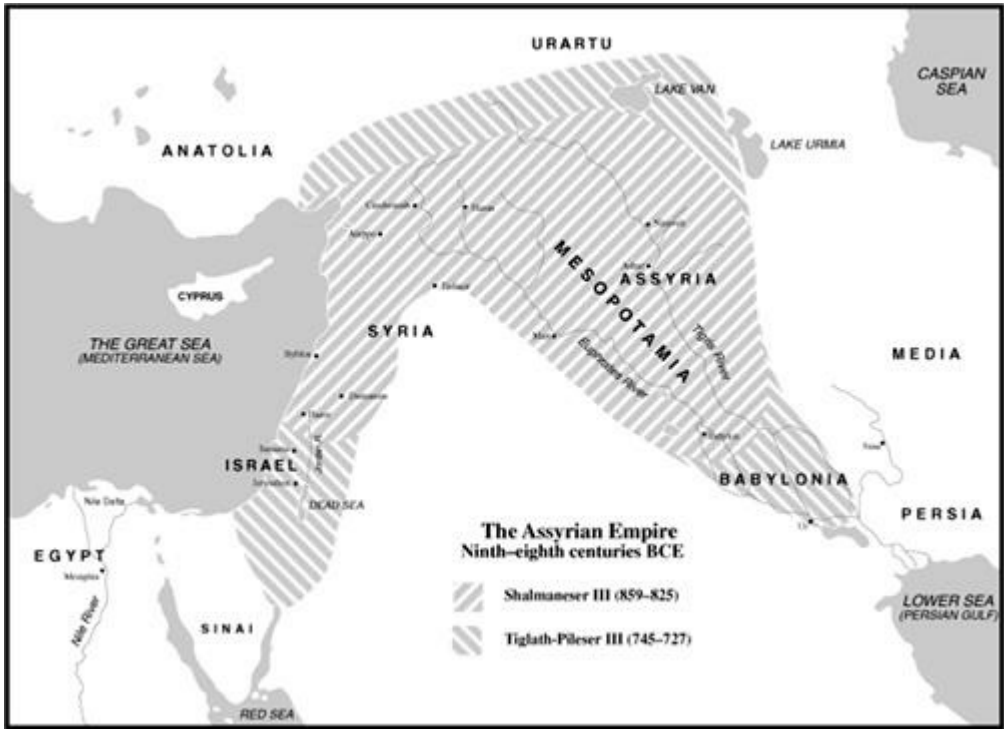
Isaiah and his party were at odds with royal policy during the reign of Ahaz. Although opposed to specific royal policies, Isaiah was still a staunch supporter in principle of the Davidic dynasty. The poems of [Chapters 9–11](#) express the hope that Isaiah attached to the Davidic heir. By their proximity to the Immanuel prophecy of [Chapter 7](#), they appear to express the profound expectation that the prophet and the people had for a rebirth of national pride and status. Interpreted this way, they probably referred to Hezekiah as well. Isaiah 9:2–7 could be interpreted as a coronation hymn in celebration of the crown prince Hezekiah's accession to the throne (see Sweeney, 1996):

*“For a child has been born to us, a son given to us. Authority rests on his shoulders. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority will continue to grow, and there will be everlasting peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and sustain it with justice and with righteousness from now and into the future forever. The zeal of YHWH of hosts will do it.” (9:6–7)*

With these words—made especially well known by Handel's oratorio, *The Messiah*—Isaiah reflected the anticipation that the people felt at the royal birth. Isaiah saw the ongoing tradition of Davidic kingship as the institution through which YHWH would mediate peace and salvation to the people. Such high ideals no doubt fed popular expectations of prosperity and equity—ideals that Judah's actual kings rarely met. The people's disappointments in turn

fed anticipation of yet a better Davidic king who would meet the ideal, an expectation that developed into the grand ideal of the coming messiah.

**FIGURE 10.8** The Assyrian Empire



The idealized reign of the Davidic messianic king is laid out in the magnificent language of 11:1–9. The spirit of YHWH will bestow the virtues of wisdom and discernment on the branch that will emerge from the tree trunk of Jesse—a reference to David’s father. This king to come will be an advocate for the poor and meek. Even the natural creation will benefit from his kingdom of righteousness and *shalom*: Wolf and lamb, lion and calf, will reside amicably together. Strong was Judah’s desire for peace and security.

### 3.1.4 Sennacherib’s Invasion (36–39)



Hezekiah succeeded his father Ahaz in 715 BCE and inherited an independent but insecure Judah, one still threatened by Assyria (see [Figure 10.8](#)). Shortly after taking the throne, he instituted a policy of expansion. He sought to take Edomite territory to the south and Philistine territory to the west. He also looked to join an anti-Assyrian coalition that included Egypt. Isaiah sought to dissuade him, saying this could lead only to disaster (22:1–8, 12–14; 30:8–17).

Nonetheless, Hezekiah instituted a policy of revolt against Assyria. This fired the wrath of Sennacherib of Assyria, who invaded Judah in 701. He captured Judah's main fortified towns, including Lachish from which he organized his attack on Jerusalem (see [Figure 10.9](#)). The text includes a rather detailed account of Sennacherib's envoy Rabshakeh, who went to Jerusalem to press the case for surrender. He spoke directly to the citizens of Jerusalem in Hebrew, but Hezekiah's staff urged him to switch to Aramaic, which only they could understand, so as not to undermine the morale of the city—which Rabshakeh refused to do. This provides an interesting situation in which opposing sides were trying each to win the hearts and minds of the populace.

### **FIGURE 10.9** Sennacherib Attacks Lachish

This scene from the palace of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, depicts Sennacherib's attack on Lachish, a Judean town he captured in 701 BCE.



© Werner Forman/Corbis. Courtesy of Corbis.

Source: Assyrian Relief of the Siege of Lachish.

The text tells us that the angel of YHWH killed 185,000 troops that were besieging Jerusalem, demolishing the Assyrian war machine. The crisis, recounted in Chapters 36–37 as well as in 2 Kings 18–19, was thus resolved, and Sennacherib returned home to Nineveh, only to be assassinated there by his sons. This was taken as proof of the policy that Isaiah promoted and in general reaffirmed the power of YHWH to protect Jerusalem and the Davidic empire.

Go to the companion website and see the table “Isaiah 36–39 and 2 Kings 18–20.”

Isaiah continued to provide counsel and support to Hezekiah. Later, Isaiah encouraged Hezekiah during a serious illness (Chapter 38). Hezekiah was given added years of life as a reward for his piety. These last chapters of First Isaiah, along with 7–11, demonstrate the close connection between Isaiah and the Davidic line. Isaiah tried by various means to provide assurances, usually by means of signs, that YHWH was protecting Jerusalem and keeping the promise of the Davidic dynastic covenant.

Chapter 39, the last chapter of First Isaiah, contains Isaiah’s rebuke of Hezekiah for allowing envoys of the Babylonian king Merodach-Baladan to see the Jerusalem royal treasury. In a bit of foreshadowing, Isaiah used this indiscretion to suggest a precipitating cause of the coming Babylonian exile:

**TABLE 10.6** Structure of Micah

| Chapters | Disaster | Salvation |
|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1–2      | 1:2–2:11 | 2:12–13   |
| 3–5      | 3:1–12   | 4:1–5:15  |
| 6–7      | 6:1–7:7  | 7:8–20    |

*Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of YHWH of hosts: ‘Days are coming when everything in your house and everything your ancestors have accumulated up until today will be carried to Babylon. Nothing will remain,’ says YHWH.” (39:5–6)*

After Isaiah says this, Hezekiah responds rather callously by saying that this was fine with him, as long as there would be peace and security throughout his own lifetime. This is all a fitting, and no doubt editorially intentional, transition to Second Isaiah, which is set in the time of that very exile.

### 3.2 Micah

**Micah** was a southerner, a Judean, as was Amos. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah of Jerusalem and came from a rural background, specifically from a town called Moresheth, which lay to the west of Jerusalem. Micah may have been a Moresheth city councilman who served as an advocate for his people, presenting

their concerns to the rich and famous in Jerusalem (see Wolff, 1981). Micah is cited in Jeremiah 26 as an antiestablishment prophet who nonetheless was respected by the king.

The book of Micah consists of three units (see [Table 10.6](#)). Each of the three main sections opens with the call: “*Hear!*” Each has the same basic structure, alternating disaster and salvation, such as we saw in the book of Hosea. There is scholarly agreement that most of [Chapters 1–3](#) come from Micah, with the latter chapters coming from elsewhere.

Micah prophesied in the latter half of the 700s during the rising threat of the Assyrian Empire. Except for one oracle that includes the northern kingdom within its purview (1:2–7), the bulk of the message was directed at Judah. The oracle that predicts the demise of Samaria places the earliest words of Micah before 721. The explicit allusion to the Babylonian exile, as well as the repatriation hinted at in 4:9–10, indicates that the book went through the hands of editors as late as the postexilic period.

Micah’s social criticism consists of a critique of the economic aristocrats, whose greed for homes and property had no bounds. Micah opposed the ritualistic righteousness of the pious (as did the other eighth-century prophets, especially Amos but also Hosea and Isaiah):

*With what should I come before YHWH, and bow before God on high? Should I come before him with burnt offerings, year old calves? Would YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Should I give my firstborn for my sin, the produce of my own body for my very own sin? He has told you, O Mortal, what is good, what YHWH requires of you: Do justice! Love kindness! Walk humbly with your God. (6:6–8)*

This passage appears to borrow from temple liturgies through which the worshipper sought entry into the presence of God; for a similar liturgy, see Psalm 24. The prophet Micah modified this genre and applied it to one's personal relationship with God.

The earnestness with which Micah pursued a critique of the opportunistic and heartless upper class suggests that he may have been one of the farmers who was threatened by the influential aristocracy (see 3:2–3). He probably belonged to that class called “the people of the land,” conservative landowners who were distrustful of royal and religious bureaucrats who sought to control their lives.

The preaching of Micah might have contributed to the Deuteronomic reform movement in Judah (see Blenkinsopp, 1983). This movement advocated land reform but at the same time was supportive of the Davidic monarchy as long as kings remained true to Mosaic ideals. This seems to be the intent of Deuteronomy 17:14–20, which is the Deuteronomic law regulating the monarchy lest it acquire too much power or wealth.

Micah wrestled with the nature of prophecy and condemned prophets who worked for wages. Perhaps he was standing in critique of cult or royal prophets who were eager to please their earthly masters (see 3:5–6). In contrast to these “official” prophets, he claims to be “*filled with power, the spirit of YHWH, justice, and strength*” (3:8). He is much like Amos before him who claimed he was not a prophet but a shepherd who was called to his task directly by YHWH (Amos 7:15).

The prophets who Micah criticized were the ones who produced and promoted the official [Zion theology](#) that legitimated the royal house. Based on their belief in the divine election of the nation, the Davidic dynasty, and the city of Jerusalem, they promoted a theology that was highly supportive of the governing establishment. Micah pointed out that this type of theology was prone to deceive the rulers by feeding their need for support and reassurance and by telling them

exactly what they wanted to hear.

In 3:11–12, he criticizes the self-assured security of those who claimed Zion and Jerusalem were impregnable. He even predicts that Jerusalem will become “a mound of ruins” and the temple mount will turn back into a forested hilltop. This very text is quoted in Jeremiah 26:18 in the context of the temple sermon. As reflected in this Jeremiah text, Micah had found himself in conflict with the royal administration because he predicted the downfall of Jerusalem. But Hezekiah did not execute him for undermining support for the king’s policy. It was argued that if Hezekiah did not execute Micah for treason, then Jehoiakim should not execute Jeremiah.

The book of Micah does not reject Davidic ideology completely. Certain passages do affirm a good future for Jerusalem and the royal house, including this one:

*You, Bethlehem of the Ephrathites, small among the tribes of Judah—you will produce for me a ruler in Israel, one whose origin is venerable, from ancient times. (5:2)*

Bethlehem was venerated because it was the birthplace of the founder of the ruling family. These words, along with most of the rest of [Chapters 4–7](#), are usually attributed to another writer later than Micah. These chapters put the book more in sympathy with later, perhaps postexilic, Jerusalemite hopes by projecting a positive image of the Davidic dynasty.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Zion*. What is the primary geographical reference of this term? What did Zion and the name Mount Zion come to signify? What theopolitical ideology is associated with this term?

2. *Day of YHWH*. What does this notion signify? How does Amos change the sense of this notion in its application to Israel?
3. *Immanuel*. What does this name mean? How does it function as a sign to Ahaz during the Syrian–Israelite crisis?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Assyrian crisis*. In what ways did Assyrian domination affect Israel differently from Judah? What were the different results on Israel and Judah? How does the Deuteronomistic historian explain these differing results?
2. *Immanuel prophecy*. Evaluate the counsel that Isaiah gave to Ahaz during the Syrian–Israelite crisis. Was it politically prudent? Was it realistic? Would you have given Isaiah's sign credibility if you had been king? Think about the role of religious faith in political decision making today. Should our leaders today retain the counsel of important church or synagogue leaders and make decisions based on their moral or biblical advice?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

*How to Read the Prophets*, by Jean-Pierre Prevost (1997), is a useful guide. *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem: A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament*, by Ronald E. Clements (1980), is an interesting case study in the symbiosis of prophecy and history. *Liberating Jonah: Forming an Ethics of Reconciliation*, by Miguel De La Torre (2008), reads the book of Jonah as a case study of reconciliation between oppressors and the oppressed. Famous peace activist Daniel Berrigan wrote *The Kings and Their Gods: The Pathology of Power* (2008) as a commentary on 1 and 2 Kings and as a mirror of contemporary nation-states.

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

## Kings and Prophets 3: The Babylonian Crisis

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Ezekiel's Prophetic Warnings \(Ezekiel 1–24\)](#)

[3 Jeremiah and Judah's Last Kings](#)

[4 Books of the Twelve](#)

---

### KEY TERMS

[Anathoth](#)

[Baruch](#)

[Complaints of Jeremiah](#)

[Exile](#)

[Ezekiel](#)

[Habakkuk](#)

[Hananiah](#)

[Jehoiachin](#)

[Jehoiakim](#)

[Jeremiah](#)

[Josiah](#)

[Josiah's reform](#)

[Nahum](#)

[Nebuchadnezzar](#)

[New covenant](#)

[Throne-chariot](#)

[Zadok](#)

[Zedekiah](#)

[Zephaniah](#)



# William Blake’s Ezekiel

Ezekiel was one of the last classical prophets of Israel. He interpreted the Babylonian crisis to Jewish refugees in exile. This sketch depicts a benumbed Ezekiel who was instructed by YHWH not to mourn the death of his wife (see Ezekiel 24:15–27).



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on William Blake’s *The Death of Ezekiel’s Wife*, circa 1785–1790, pen and ink (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art), catalog no 14a.

---

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Babylonian period, technically referred to by historians as the Neo-Babylonian period, extended from around 630 to 539 BCE (see [Table 11.1](#)). The Babylonians of this period are also referred to as Chaldeans. Nabopolassar spread Babylonian influence westward, eventually displacing Assyrian power. Babylonian power continued to grow until 605 when Nebuchadnezzar decisively established Babylonian supremacy at the battle of Carchemish (see [Figure 11.1](#)). In 587 the Babylonians destroyed Judah and Jerusalem. In 539 Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon and incorporated its territory into his empire.

**TABLE 11.1** Kings and Prophets of the Babylonian Period

| Kings of Judah     | Kings of Babylon                                         | Hebrew Prophets              |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Manassch, 687–642  |                                                          |                              |
| Amon, 642–640      |                                                          | Zephaniah, circa 640–622     |
| Josiah, 640–609    | Nabopolassar, 626–605                                    | Nahum, circa 620             |
|                    |                                                          | Jeremiah, circa 627–562      |
| Jehoahaz, 609      | Nebuchadrezzar (also spelled<br>Nebuchadnezzar), 605–562 | Habakkuk, circa 608–598      |
| Jehoiakim, 609–598 |                                                          |                              |
| Jehoiachin, 598    |                                                          |                              |
| Zedekiah, 597–587  |                                                          | Ezekiel, circa 593–571       |
| Gedaliah, 587–582  |                                                          | Obadiah, circa 587           |
|                    | Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach),<br>562–560                  |                              |
|                    | Neriglissar, 560–556                                     |                              |
|                    | Nabonidus, 556–539                                       | Second Isaiah, circa 546–538 |

The prophets of the Babylonian period deal with the international crisis. The major issues surfacing in these books are the guilt of Judah, which was the reason why God was punishing them, and the role of foreign powers in working out that punishment. There is about a fifty-year gap between the prophets of the Assyrian period, Isaiah of Jerusalem being the last, and the cluster of prophecy in the Babylonian period (see [Table 11.2](#)). Prophets of this period include Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk (see [Figure 11.2](#)).

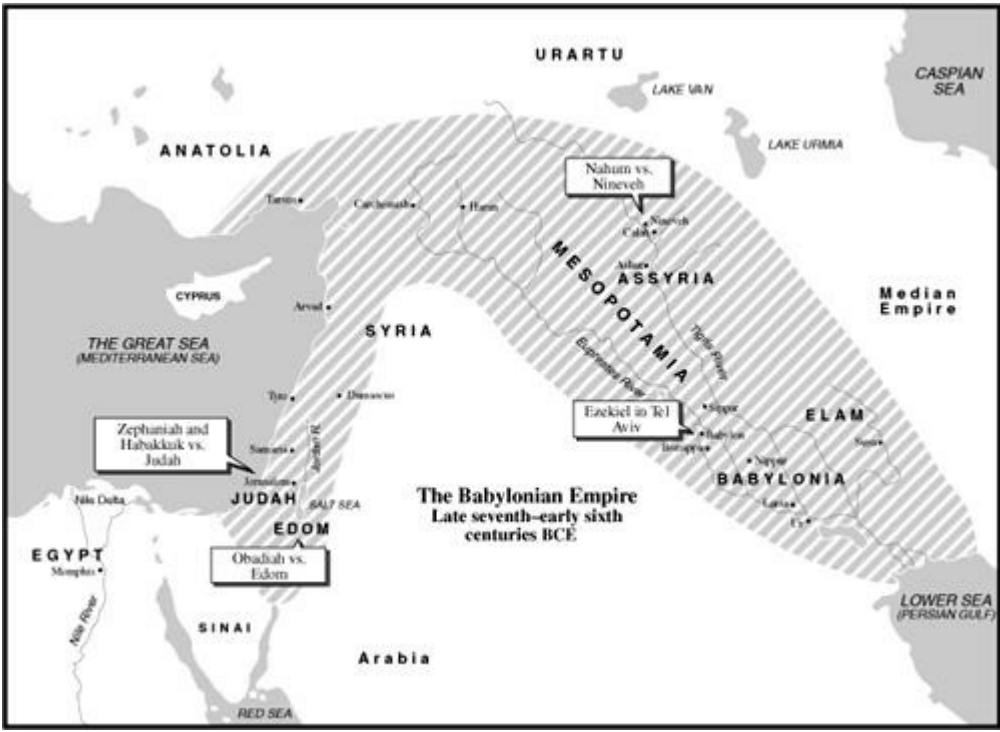
## 1.1 Second Kings 21–25: A Summary

The remaining chapters of 2 Kings provide only a very sketchy account of this critical period in biblical history. One chapter is devoted to the reigns of Manassesh and Amon; two chapters to Josiah, focusing on finding the book of the law and his reforms; and two chapters on the last four kings of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem.

# 1.1.1 Josiah's Reform

King Manasseh's son Amon reigned in Judah only two years and was then assassinated by opponents within his own court circle. The Judean royal administration was in serious disarray. Amon was followed by Josiah. Second only to David, [Josiah](#), who reigned from 640 to 609 BCE, was judged a very good king. By his time, the Assyrian Empire had declined drastically, and the Neo-Babylonian Empire had not yet ascended. This provided Josiah with the opportunity to reextend the Davidic kingdom northward.

**FIGURE 11.1** The Babylonian Empire and Biblical Prophets



No longer under Assyrian vassalage, Josiah was free to rid Jerusalem of non-Yahwistic cult installations, which were symbols of foreign domination. In 622, the eighteenth year of his reign, Josiah

authorized the temple restored to Yahwistic purposes after its disgraceful neglect under Manasseh and Amon. This was not just a return to traditional religion, with its associations of all-Israel tribal unity; it was also a sign of political self-determination.

During the process of temple renovation, Hilkiah, the high priest (see [Figure 11.3](#)), found what appeared to be an ancient document that he called “the book of the Torah.” Hilkiah gave it to Josiah’s secretary, Shaphan, who in turn read it to the king.

The king was extremely distraught when he heard words that seemed to portend doom for the nation because of their departure from the Mosaic covenant. The prophet Huldah interpreted the book to Josiah and the court. She comforted him with the prophecy that he himself would not see the demise of the nation because he had responded appropriately and had repented.

Josiah was inspired to make further reforms throughout Judah and the territory to the north that Judah controlled. The various religious shrines to Baal, Asherah, astral deities, and numerous other affronts to YHWH were all torn down. He decreed that from then on worship could take place only in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the Passover was celebrated for the first time since the period of the judges, another affirmation of the Mosaic and tribal traditions.

**TABLE 11.2** Lives and Times of the Babylonian Period

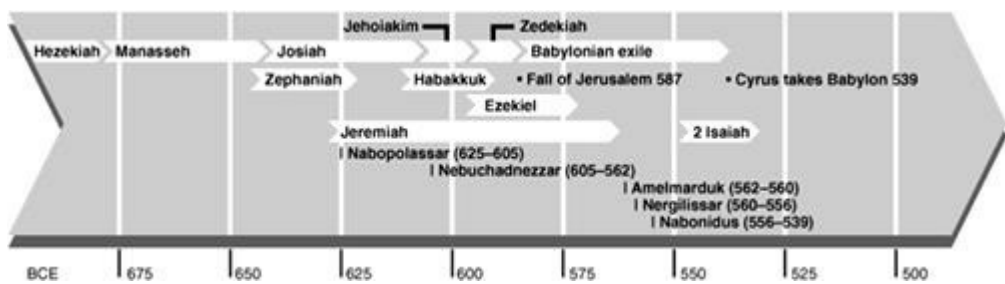
|     |                                                                             |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 640 | Josiah began to reign as king of Judah                                      |
| ?   | Zephaniah's condemnation of Judah                                           |
| 627 | Jeremiah began his ministry                                                 |
| 622 | Josiah initiated religious and political reform (the Deuteronomic reform)   |
| ?   | Nahum's condemnation of Nineveh                                             |
| 612 | Destruction of Nineveh, capital of Assyria                                  |
| 609 | Josiah died at Megiddo                                                      |
|     | Jehoahaz (Shallum) made king; lasted three months                           |
|     | Jehoiakim installed king of Judah by the Egyptians                          |
|     | Jeremiah delivered his temple sermon                                        |
| 605 | Battle of Carchemish: Babylonia asserted its power over Egypt               |
|     | Jeremiah's scroll read before Jehoiakim, burned by Jehoiakim                |
| 598 | Nebuchadrezzar laid siege to Jerusalem                                      |
|     | Jehoiakim died                                                              |
|     | Jehoiachin made king                                                        |
|     | First deportation of Judeans to Babylonia, including Jehoiachin and Ezekiel |
|     | Zedekiah installed king of Judah by Babylonians                             |
|     | Jeremiah confronted Hananiah, who broke the ox yoke                         |
| ?   | Habakkuk challenges YHWH's moral purpose                                    |
| 593 | Ezekiel's commission in the throne-chariot vision                           |
| 588 | Jeremiah imprisoned                                                         |
| 587 | Destruction of Jerusalem                                                    |
|     | Second deportation of Judeans to Babylonia                                  |
|     | Gedaliah appointed governor of Judea                                        |
| 582 | Gedaliah assassinated                                                       |
|     | Jeremiah traveled to Egypt                                                  |
|     | Third deportation of Judeans to Babylonia                                   |
| 571 | Last dated message of Ezekiel                                               |
| 562 | Jeremiah died in Egypt                                                      |

---

The description of the reforms of Josiah inspired by the “book of the Torah,” especially the elimination of all worship centers except Jerusalem, and the reference to the document as “the book of the law” (compare Deuteronomy 29:21, 30:10, 31:26) makes its identification with Deuteronomy seem certain. Deuteronomy is so closely associated with the reforms of Josiah that most authorities today grant

that at least the core of the book received its final shape out of that historical context (see RTOT [Chapter 5](#)).

**FIGURE 11.2** Time Line: The Babylonian Era Prophets



It must have come as a terrible shock, then, given his piety and devotion to YHWH, that Josiah was killed in battle while attempting to stop the advance of the Egyptian army. Slain near Megiddo by Pharaoh Neco in 609, this supremely devout Davidic king seems to have fed an accumulating mythology about that place Megiddo. Mount Megiddo is *har megiddo* in Hebrew, from which the term *Armageddon* is derived. In apocalyptic thought, Armageddon will be the site of the last great battle between the forces of good and evil. But fortunes will be reversed in those last days, and according to the mythology of this last great confrontation, good will triumph absolutely over evil.

**FIGURE 11.3** Hilkiyah Seal

This stamp seal identified Hilkiyah, the high priest of Jerusalem, as the owner of the document to which it was attached. This is undoubtedly the same Hilkiyah who found the book of the law and brought it to the attention of Josiah, which initiated a Yahwistic reform of Israel’s religion (see 2 Kings 22). The stamp is on a ring, and when pressed into a clay lump on a document, it would seal its authenticity. This seal reads, “Belonging to Hanan, son of Hilqiyahu the priest.”



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on a photograph in J. Elayi, “Name of Deuteronomy’s Author Found on Seal Ring,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* (September/October 1987).

## 1.1.2 Fall of Jerusalem

The Assyrian capital of Nineveh fell to the onrushing Babylonians in 612. Jehoahaz, Josiah’s successor, was on the throne only three months before the Egyptians removed him. The combined forces of Egypt and Assyria that met the Babylonian army at Carchemish in 605 failed to check this rising power. Essentially from then on, Judah became a vassal state to Babylonia; for a reconstruction of the complex politics of this situation and the international political vise that squeezed Judah to death, see Malamat (1999).

**Jehoiakim** (609–598) followed Jehoahaz on the throne. But what political course should he take? Internal Judean political discussion debated the wisest course of action. Some advisers were Davidic loyalists who were completely invested in Zion–David theology. They believed in the inviolability of Jerusalem and the eternity of the Davidic throne. The survival of Judah and the Davidic house during

the Assyrian crisis seemed to support their faith, especially Hezekiah's survival after Sennacherib's invasion and siege of Jerusalem. But other voices argued that the ethical demands of the Mosaic covenant trumped the Davidic covenant and that Judah's history of covenant breaking demanded the punishment of God. The worst was yet to come, they said. The prophet Jeremiah was of the latter opinion and continually argued that the king should not expect YHWH to intervene and make Babylon magically go away.

Jehoiakim staked his political future and that of Judah on the power of the Davidic covenant. He decided that Judah should assert its independence from Babylon, so he withheld tribute from [Nebuchadnezzar](#) (605–562), the great Babylonian Empire builder. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, which was no match for such an attack. Jehoiakim was assassinated sometime during the onslaught, and [Jehoiachin](#) replaced him. Hapless Jehoiachin was on the throne only three months, and then the city fell. Inevitably, he was held responsible and was carted off in the first deportation of Judeans to Babylon along with other Jerusalemite notables and officials. The temple treasury was taken as well.

The Babylonian overlords installed [Zedekiah](#) (598–587) as king of Jerusalem on the understanding that he would be loyal to them. But soon he too became emboldened by the Davidic promises and looked to reassert Judean independence. Both Jeremiah in Jerusalem and the prophet [Ezekiel](#), who was taken to Babylon in the first deportation, argued that this would not be the best course of action. Jeremiah acted out the domination of Babylon by wearing an ox yoke on his shoulders. Ezekiel tied himself to the ground to signify a long captivity. But both of these prophets were ignored.

Eventually, Zedekiah rebelled and this compelled Nebuchadnezzar to return to Jerusalem to reimpose Judean vassalage. Jerusalem was besieged for eighteen months, and many people perished when the city fell. Those who survived were removed to Babylon in the second deportation. Thus, the [exile](#) of Judeans into Babylon



continued, resulting in a term of captivity that would last until 539 when Cyrus of Persia decreed their release. At this time of moral and religious crisis, YHWH's prophets continued to speak. Some just tried to understand why it happened. For example, the prophet Habakkuk wrestled with the moral enigma of how a righteous God could use a wicked people, the Babylonians, to attack his chosen people. Jeremiah latched onto the old traditions and reshaped them into a new covenant, affirming that YHWH would rebuild a relationship with his people.

Especially traumatic was the total destruction of the temple. The focus and core of Judah's religious devotion, the first temple of Solomon, now lay in ruins. This temple had symbolized the presence of YHWH in their midst. Now their deity too was gone, no longer able to dwell among them. The book of Lamentations (see RTOT [Chapter 15](#)) is a collection of sorrowful poems marking the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. But in an effort to inspire hope, Ezekiel envisions a time when the temple would be rebuilt and Jerusalem would once again be the dwelling place of YHWH (see RTOT [Chapter 12](#)).

Gedaliah was appointed governor of what became the province of Judea. But Jerusalem was in such a shambles that he administered the province from Mizpah north of Jerusalem (see Zorn, 1997). A sorry state, or province, it was. Only the least capable elements of the population were left in Judah. All those who had not been killed in the final conflagration of Jerusalem—the priesthood, members of the royal court, tradesmen, and craftsmen—had been taken to Babylon where they began a new life. The book of Kings ends on a note of guarded optimism. Jehoiachin, Judah's Davidic king in exile, was freed from prison around 560 after thirty-seven years of captivity. He was treated with respect by Evil-Merodach, king of Babylon, known in Babylonian records as Amel-marduk (562–560). Babylonian historical tablets attest his presence (see ANET, 308); they document the payment of oil and barley rations to Yaukin (Jehoiachin), king of

Iahudu (Judah).

For the faith of God's people, the most important point was that the Davidic line of Judah had not disappeared. There was still hope for the future of the state. Thus, the Deuteronomistic History ends negatively and positively. Judah had been destroyed, but YHWH's community and its Davidic leader survived, suggesting it might one day rediscover its former greatness through the Davidic messianic line.

## **1.2 Reading Guide**

The following passages manifest key components of history and prophecy in the Babylonian period:

- 2 Kings 22–23: the “Deuteronomic” reform of Josiah
- 2 Kings 24–25: Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroys Judah and Jerusalem
- Ezekiel 1–5: Ezekiel's famous vision of Yahweh's throne-chariot and his theatrical depiction of the coming siege and destruction of Jerusalem
- Jeremiah 1: Jeremiah's call experience and the visions that signaled what his mission would be
- Jeremiah 11:18–12:6: Jeremiah's first complaint
- Jeremiah 26–31: the record of Jeremiah's efforts to persuade the royal court to stop resisting the Babylonians, including his temple sermon, his confrontation with the prophet Hananiah, his letter to the exiles, and his articulation of a new covenant

## **2 EZEKIEL'S PROPHETIC WARNINGS (EZEKIEL 1–24)**

Ezekiel was taken to Babylonia in 598 BCE in the first major

deportation of Judeans to the land of their conquerors. He lived among the Judean refugees who had been relocated to Tel-aviv, a town in southern Babylonia on the Chebar irrigation canal. It appears that he was taken in that early deportation because he was a priest. In all, almost 5000 Judeans were taken to Babylonia in that early displacement. Those taken were the leaders of the community, including royalty, scribes, counselors, craftsmen, and religious leaders. He stayed in Babylonia for his entire career, being a prophet there until at least 571. He could not perform the traditional priestly functions in exile, which back in Jerusalem would have included offering sacrifices of atonement and guarding the holiness of the temple and community. Still, his priestly vocation shaped his perspective on virtually everything, including continued religious obligations and relations to YHWH in exile.

Ezekiel and Jeremiah were contemporaries. Both were prophets immediately before and after the destruction of Jerusalem, and both assumed essentially the same task: to convince their audience (Jeremiah among the Judeans in Jerusalem and Ezekiel among the Judean refugees in Babylon) not to delude themselves. YHWH indeed would punish them for their iniquities, and Jerusalem would fall. Ezekiel's writings mainly fall into two parts. There are at least three major issues that interweave the book of Ezekiel, surfacing in various ways.

First, Ezekiel gives considerable attention to the continued presence of God among his people, along with the reasons for God's withdrawal and conditions under which he would reappear. Second, Ezekiel probes the issue of moral responsibility for the religious and political failures of Judah. Third, though getting less attention than the preceding two, Ezekiel examines the nature and legitimacy of religious and political leadership in Judah and in the restored community. Be alert to these issues as we examine the book of Ezekiel. [Chapters 1–24](#) contain Ezekiel's visions and pronouncements dating between 593 (the date of his inaugural

experience of the divine presence) and the fall of Jerusalem in 587. Much of the material is written in the first person as Ezekiel's autobiographical recollections; phrases such as "*As I looked*" and "*He said to me*" and "*The word of YHWH came to me*" frame the accounts. We treat Ezekiel 25–48 in RTOT [Chapter 12](#).

The goal of his words is to impress everyone with the inevitability of coming judgment. The first attacks of Babylon did not seem to have the intended effect of sobering the people and inspiring repentance. In the analysis of YHWH and the prophet, the people still did not get it. This explains why the first half of the book is dominated by YHWH's frustration and expressions of anger:

*"My anger will find completion, and I will vent my fury on them. And they will know that I, YHWH, have spoken out of my jealousy for them, when my fury finds completion on them: 'I will make you a desolation and an object of derision among the nations that surround you and among those who see you as they pass by.'"* (5:13–14)

YHWH, it seems, is in a rage. Yet it is just because he cares about them so much and is jealous for their attention that he will vent his anger on them.

## **2.1 Throne-Chariot Vision (1–3)**

The first chapter of the book is a description of Ezekiel's visionary encounter with God in Babylonia. This apprehension of God functioned as Ezekiel's commission into his prophetic role. It occurred in 593 when Ezekiel was in Babylonia with fellow refugees, who had been taken there in 598. This is the beginning of what Ezekiel saw:

*Now, as I looked I saw a stormy wind come from the north, a huge cloud with fire flashing and shining around it, and in the middle of it something like amber, in the middle of the fire. And in the middle of it was the likeness of four animals. This is their appearance: they had the likeness of a human. (1:4–5)*

We note the following: The language of these verses, indeed the entire vision account, is highly descriptive, and the syntax is difficult. What is in the middle of what? How are the elements related? It is not at all clear. What we get are mostly impressions and images. Ezekiel saw a storm approaching from the north, it glowed from the inside, and strange hybrid creatures were in the middle of it. If nothing else, what becomes clear is that Ezekiel experienced a theophany, an experience of being in the presence of God. Although the language and the combination of images here are especially creative, it is clear that we are in the conceptual realm of the storm, cloud, and fire theophany that we notice in the divine–human encounters of Moses (Exodus 24), Elijah (1 Kings 19), Isaiah (Isaiah 6), and elsewhere (see Psalm 18).

Ezekiel’s description of the theophany takes up an entire chapter. It becomes apparent that each of the four creatures had four faces (human, lion, ox, and eagle) and four wings (see [Figure 11.4](#)). The creatures with their wings appear to be hybrid angels, no doubt somehow related to the Divine Council of YHWH and sometimes called the *cherubim*. Wheels attached to these creatures gave the “storm” its means of locomotion. Stretched out over the wings of these creatures was a “dome”—the same term that designated the “expanse” created on the second day, according to the Genesis 1 Priestly account of Creation. Then Ezekiel saw a figure seated above the dome:

*Above the dome over their heads I saw a sapphire-colored throne-like thing. Seated on this throne-like thing was something like a human. And I saw something like amber with fire in the middle of it from its midsection up. From its midsection down I saw something like fire, and it was shining all around. Like a rainbow on a rainy day, so was the sheen around it. It had an appearance similar to the glory of YHWH. I saw it and fell on my face. And I heard a voice speaking.* (1:26–28)

#### **FIGURE 11.4** Winged Creatures

Winged spirits were common in Mesopotamian art. Such figures may have inspired the cherubim of Ezekiel’s vision: “*They were of human form ... each had four wings*” (Ezekiel 1:5–6).



Photo by Barry Bandstra, April 1998

Source: Relief of two winged men from Carchemish, ninth century BCE (Ankara, Turkey: Museum of Anatolian Civilizations).

You can sense that Ezekiel is struggling to articulate exactly what it is he saw. He gropes to describe something he had never seen before. Repeatedly he says, “*I saw something like. ...*” His uncertain descriptions perhaps reflect his incredulity in seeing what he finally realized he was seeing. It dawned on him that he was seeing some form of God himself on the throne.

Note that Ezekiel does not claim to see YHWH directly but only his “glory.” The glory of deity is evidence of its presence, an aura of sorts, an apparition. This is priestly language (no surprise because Ezekiel was a priest), used often to describe the presence of God. Among other things, “*the glory of YHWH*” recalls the descriptions of God’s appearance to the Israelites in the wilderness. The same phrase is used of YHWH’s presence taking up residence in the wilderness tabernacle, as told in Exodus 40.

Taking the vision as a whole, Ezekiel seems to be describing a notion of great significance. In the vision, YHWH was seen traveling on a mobile throne, perhaps a version of the ark of the covenant, borne by special cherubs of the Divine Council. Normally thought to be permanently housed in the holiest room of the Jerusalem temple, now YHWH on his throne was migratory. In other words, YHWH was not restricted to the territory of Judah but could travel abroad, even so far from home that he could be with his people in exile.

Ezekiel’s vision of YHWH on a [throne-chariot](#) presented the refugees in Babylon with a brand new idea. YHWH is not stuck in a building in Jerusalem. He has wheels and can be anywhere—even in “godless” Babylon. The deity’s basic character presumably stays the same, but the way that the deity is apprehended changes through time. Ezekiel was instrumental in prompting Israel to conceive of the deity in new ways. History has a way of forcing each generation to reconceptualize and reformulate the character and relevance of its patron god, often in response to serious national crisis—a process that continues to this day.

The throne-chariot vision came to have a mystical quality about it in a later Jewish context. A form of mysticism, called *merkavah* mysticism (after the Hebrew word for *chariot*), developed in medieval Judaism. The vision was considered so powerful that underage men were not allowed to read the account of it. A more radical interpretation of the vision appeared in the once widely popular (but really quite wacky) book by Erich von Däniken titled

*Chariots of the Gods* (1970). In the chapter “Was God an Astronaut?” he suggests that Ezekiel saw an extraterrestrial vehicle, an “unidentified flying object” (UFO). From out of this vehicle, travelers from outer space gave Ezekiel “advice and directions for law and order, as well as hints for creating a proper civilization.”

YHWH came to Babylonia in his throne-chariot (not his spaceship) to commission Ezekiel to be a prophetic voice to the Judean refugees and a watchman to the house of Israel. The metaphor used of his vocation is that of a sentinel standing on a tower, seeing the evidence of coming disaster and conveying God’s warning to the people so they could prepare for trouble.

To equip him for his prophetic role, YHWH handed Ezekiel a scroll on which were written words of woe. He ate the scroll, which curiously was sweet as honey, rather than sour as expected. Having internalized the divine word, he was sent to deliver the message—never mind whether the people heeded the warning or not (that was not Ezekiel’s responsibility). The experience of commissioning and the message he was to bring were so traumatic that Ezekiel was overwhelmed, unable to speak for seven days.

Although imaginative in its handling of the details, Ezekiel’s commissioning contains many of the standard elements of other prophetic call narratives. The most common elements are being in the presence of the high god in his throne room, seeing the deity in the form of fire or brilliant light, and equipping the prophet’s mouth to convey the word of YHWH. A prophet was essentially a messenger who received words directly from his god and then delivered them to the target audience.

## **2.2 Symbolic Acts 1 (4–7)**

The burden of Ezekiel’s prophetic career from 593 until 587 was to convince the Babylonian refugees that God was punishing them for



their wickedness through their deportations and their living in exile and that, instead of getting better, things were going to get worse.

Ezekiel not only spoke words of warning but also acted them out. He made a clay model of the city of Jerusalem and played out the coming siege of the city. Then he laid on the ground, first on his left side for 390 days and then on his right side for 40 days, to symbolize the captivity of the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, respectively. While on the ground, he ate only small amounts of food to simulate siege rations.

Then he shaved his head with a sword and disposed of the hair in ways that symbolized the fate of Jerusalem after its fall. One-third he burned, one-third he struck with the sword, and one-third he scattered to the wind. A wisp of hair he stitched up in the hem of his garment to symbolize the small remnant that would survive. Lastly, Ezekiel faced in the direction of Palestine and announced the coming destruction of the kingdom of Judah and specifically its religious installations because they promoted the worship of pagan fertility goddesses.

These signs have provoked considerable scholarly discussion. Some experts take the bizarre nature of these acts as an indication that Ezekiel was psychologically disturbed and have tried to define his psychosis. Others observe that we are not told how his audience reacted, suggesting that he never really performed these acts, and that they are merely literary in character. Still others stress the symbolic nature of these acts.

## **2.3 Vision of a Corrupt Temple (8–11)**

Before Ezekiel was deported to Babylon, he was a priest in Jerusalem. This meant that he was thoroughly familiar with the rituals and procedures of temple service. This familiarity is evident in his visions, many of which center on the temple. A priestly orientation

also meant he was profoundly shaped by the experience of serving in the presence of YHWH in the temple. Priests referred to the divine presence by the phrase “*the glory of YHWH*.” It was believed that YHWH’s presence in Jerusalem bestowed favor on the city and its people. It seems that proximity to the divine presence dominated Ezekiel’s experience.

In a vision dated to 592, Ezekiel was transported back to the temple in Jerusalem where he witnessed a variety of unholy activities. The religious leaders of Jerusalem were secretly worshipping foreign gods in the temple compound. Women, for example, were observed crying out to Tammuz, a Babylonian fertility deity. Such activities were an outrage to YHWH. In consequence, he got up to leave the temple of his residence. Ezekiel’s description of YHWH’s departure uses the throne-chariot imagery of [chapter 1](#). “*The glory of YHWH*” mounted the cherub-powered vehicle. In stages YHWH exited the temple compound, stopping at certain points, including the threshold of the temple and the east gate of the courtyard, as if reluctant to leave. Hovering over Jerusalem a while, then over the Mount of Olives east of the city, finally YHWH disappeared.

Symbolically, the people had driven away YHWH by their corrupt practices. He would no longer be there to protect them, and without his protection, they could be taken into captivity unimpeded. This analysis was a direct challenge to the David–Zion theology that dominated the political climate. Ezekiel brought his priestly perspective to the issue and argued that because Jerusalem was impure and polluted, YHWH could no longer be there. But in principle, YHWH would not forsake Jerusalem. He would be away only until the city and temple were resanctified for his return and fit for his presence again.

This is the message that Ezekiel brought to the exiles: Jerusalem would fall as punishment from YHWH. Remember that Ezekiel foresaw this years before it actually happened. He was speaking in

592 and Jerusalem did not fall until 587. But with his preview of the coming destruction, Ezekiel did not leave God's people without hope. Ezekiel assured his audience that YHWH would not abandon them forever (see the account of Ezekiel's later visions in [RTOT Chapter 12](#)). Instead, later he would gather them from among the nations of their exile and reaffirm his covenant with them once they have had a change of heart:

*“I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit inside them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my directives, and my laws they will obey and do them. They will be my people and I will become Elohim to them.” (11:19–20)*

In Hebrew anthropology, the heart was not the seat of emotions, but it was the center of the will and the seat of rationality. A new heart and spirit, which Ezekiel cites here and elsewhere, indicates a new clarity of insight and a new willingness to abide by the covenant. In words reminiscent of Jeremiah's new covenant (31:31–34), this talk of a new spirit and a transformed heart voices the hope that the people will undergo a spiritual transformation. Although the heart of the people would change, inspiring new devotion to keeping the covenant, the original intent of the Mosaic covenant remained the same: *“They will be my people and I will be their Elohim.”*

As a whole, [Chapters 8–11](#) describe how false worship drove away the glory of YHWH. The theme of this section comes full circle by the end of the book of Ezekiel in an elaborate program of temple restoration, Chapters 40–48. Specifically in Chapter 43, Ezekiel describes how true worship would bring the glory of YHWH back to Jerusalem.

## **2.4 Symbolic Acts 2 (12–24)**

Ezekiel took symbolic actions and drew numerous word pictures in an attempt to convince his compatriots that Jerusalem would fall and that they should not hold out for an early return from exile. To further symbolize the imminent fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel packed his bags, dug through the city wall in the middle of the night, and hurried away as if to escape ([Chapter 12](#)). In another image, Jerusalem is compared to a vine that no longer produces fruit, such that its branches are good only for firewood ([Chapter 15](#)). The imagery of the vine is also used by Isaiah (5:1–7) and Jeremiah (2:21) to stand for Israel, and it also became a symbol for the New Testament church (John 15:1–11).

[Chapter 16](#) contains an extended allegory of the history of Jerusalem. The main figure in the allegory is Jerusalem in the guise of a female who turns out to be an unfaithful wife to YHWH Elohim. The allegory is developed in great detail. Jerusalem is first described as the daughter of an Amorite father and a Hittite mother. Abandoned by her parents, she was adopted by YHWH, who cared for her and made her beautiful. But then she used her god-given advantages to entice and seduce foreigners. YHWH Elohim in turn used those foreigners to punish his wife. Ultimately, he did not disown her but restored her to full status as wife in covenant with God. The allegory of Oholah and Oholibah in Chapter 23 likewise describes the unfaithfulness of Israel and Judah in terms of women wed to YHWH. The literary comparison of Israel to a bride or wife is a common prophetic device in biblical literature. It was also used by Hosea ([Chapters 1–3](#)) and Jeremiah ([Chapter 2](#)). The rabbis interpreted the relationship of the lovers in the Song of Songs as an extended allegory of Yahweh's relationship to Israel. In Christian theology, the church is the symbolic bride of Christ.

Ezekiel used extended metaphors of eagles, trees, and vines to depict the uprooting of Judah and its kings in [Chapter 17](#). In Chapter 18, Ezekiel addressed the issue of individual responsibility and blame. It seems Judeans were seeking to disown responsibility for

the current state of affairs. They blamed their troubles with the Babylonians and the weakness of Judah on the sins of their fathers. The following proverb was widely quoted by the people to justify this analysis:

*The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. (18:2)*

Jeremiah also cited this proverb (see Jeremiah 31:27–30). Both he and Ezekiel denied the continuing validity and applicability of this proverb and instead asserted that YHWH knows each person individually. All people would be judged on the basis of their own actions. Each person should know that they get what they deserve. On the positive side, if they repent they can be delivered:

*“Therefore I will judge you, house of Israel, each person according to his ways (my Lord YHWH’s word). Turn and repent of all your offenses, and do not let them be a stumbling block leading to iniquity. Toss away from you all your offenses by which you offend, and make for yourselves a new heart and new spirit. Why die, house of Israel?! I do not relish the death of the dead (my Lord YHWH’s word). Repent and live!” (18:30–32)*

Many commentators argue that here in Ezekiel we have some of the first evidence of individual moral accountability as opposed to a purely corporate notion of responsibility. Some argue that this is the first clear affirmation of individualism in Israelite thought though others caution that this may be reading too much into it. Joyce (1989) argues that Ezekiel was not affirming individual responsibility but was only declaring that each *generation* makes its own moral

choices and is not bound by either the sins or the merits of the preceding generation. In this view, Ezekiel in effect cuts the moral link between generations. On the one hand, the past shortcomings of the parents do not predetermine that the children must be punished. On the other hand, the current generation can no longer use the preceding generation for an excuse; each has to stand on its own two moral feet.

Whatever the precise intent, it does seem that Ezekiel is telling his generation to put aside their self-pity and their fatalistic thinking and take responsibility for change. If they would do this and stop feeling sorry for themselves, then there would be reason to hope. In the absence of the temple, cult, and priesthood to make them right with God, Ezekiel is urging the people to take charge of their own relationship with God by right action and personal spiritual initiative. Ezekiel and Jeremiah seem then to be laying the groundwork for individuals to have a personal relationship with their God—a new moment in biblical religion that achieves full voice in the Psalms of lament and thanksgiving, which form the core of Hebrew piety in the second-temple period (see RTOT [Chapter 13](#)).

Ezekiel continued to preach that ample opportunity for restoration would be given if only the people would acknowledge their complicity and repent. But throughout this entire section, he was invariably pessimistic about Israel's interest in repenting. Ezekiel failed to see any good in Israel at all and viewed the people as base, ungrateful, and unfaithful.

After oracles and images assuring his audience of coming disaster, this section ends with its most powerful statement yet (Chapter 24). Ezekiel's dearly beloved wife died, and this understandably plunged him into deepest grief. But by YHWH's instructions, he did not shed a tear or give any sign of mourning. His stoicism stood as a symbol of his God's own resolve because presumably YHWH was determined not to be overcome by sentiment such that he would change his mind and forgo the punishment. Ezekiel did not speak

another word, and by implication, YHWH himself would be silent until after Jerusalem had fallen.

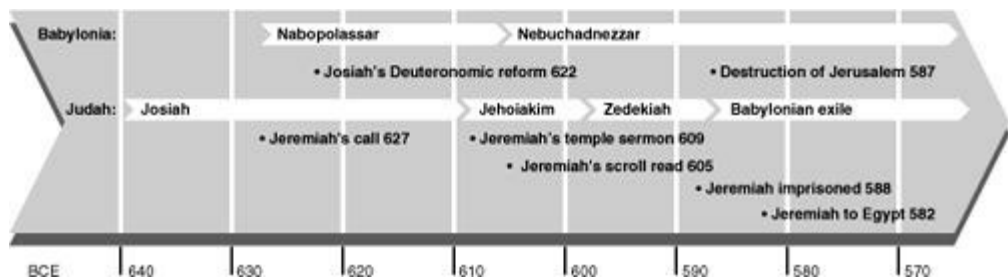
### 3 JEREMIAH AND JUDAH'S LAST KINGS

**Jeremiah**, more so than any other Hebrew prophet, emerges from the text with a personality. Whereas the other prophets are known almost solely through their messages, Jeremiah's character and personality come out in his book through autobiography. In the past called "the weeping prophet," he passionately expressed his own feelings and laid bare his inner spiritual life. These features make the book of Jeremiah unique among the prophets.

The book of Jeremiah spans about a fifty-year period, from the end of the 600s to the mid-500s BCE (see [Figure 11.5](#)). The general historical situation taking us up to the beginning of the book of Jeremiah is as follows.

Israel (the northern kingdom) had disappeared as an independent state, and its territory was now subject to Assyria. Only Judah remained intact of the twelve tribes. Assyrian power and its sphere of influence had shrunk by the mid-600s. Having previously been dominated by the Assyrians, Judah now enjoyed a bit of independence. By 628 under Josiah, Judah was politically free and economically prosperous and had even begun expanding northward into formerly Israelite territory.

**FIGURE 11.5** Time Line: Book of Jeremiah



There was no longer any external pressure on Judah to pay allegiance to Assyrian deities as was the case under Manasseh earlier in the century. Taking the opportunity that political independence afforded, Josiah pressed for a return to indigenous Israelite religious practices and beliefs—namely, Yahwism. The prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah supported Josiah in his efforts to reform the institutionalized religion that was officially endorsed by the king. This began in earnest in 622.

The book of Jeremiah was composed out of a variety of material coming from a variety of sources. Some of it is datable, but much of it is not, and that which is datable does not necessarily follow in chronological sequence. [Table 11.3](#) enables us to construct a life sequence of the prophet. These episodes and messages are organized chronologically and treated next under headings related to the kings of Judah at the time of their happening.

**TABLE 11.3** Datable Passages of Jeremiah



| BCE | Jeremiah and prophecy                                                            | Chapter |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 609 | Jeremiah's temple sermon                                                         | 7, 26   |
| 605 | Jehoiakim burns Jeremiah's scroll                                                | 36      |
|     | Jeremiah predicts a seventy-year captivity                                       | 25      |
|     | Jeremiah's oracle against Egypt                                                  | 46:2–12 |
| 597 | Jeremiah beaten and put in prison                                                | 37      |
| 594 | Jeremiah versus Hananiah; Jeremiah wears a yoke symbolizing Babylonian captivity | 27      |
| 588 | Jeremiah put in a cistern in Jerusalem                                           | 38      |
| 587 | Jeremiah's new covenant "Book of Consolation"                                    | 30–31   |
|     | Jeremiah buys a field in Anathoth                                                | 32      |
|     | Nebuchadnezzar besieges then destroys Jerusalem                                  | 39      |
| 582 | Ishmael assassinates Gedaliah                                                    | 41      |
| 568 | Jeremiah lives in Egypt                                                          | 43–44   |

### 3.1 During Josiah's Reign (640–609 BCE)

Jeremiah began his prophetic activity during the reign of Josiah. The early years of Josiah's reign were a time of prosperity and political independence. In the evaluation of the Deuteronomistic school, represented by the books of Kings, Josiah was a fine and faithful king.

Jeremiah became a prophet in 627 and continued through those years immediately preceding [Josiah's reform](#) movement. After the reform initiative in 622, there are no words from Jeremiah for about a decade (perhaps Jeremiah felt Josiah had succeeded in doing what was necessary). He resumed his prophetic ministry after the death of Josiah.

The Jeremiah of the early years, which fall into the period from his call to 622, is represented by [Chapters 1–6](#). They have a lot in common with Amos and Micah. Like Amos, Jeremiah was concerned about social injustice and considered worship to be secondary to a lifestyle attending to righteousness. Like Hosea, he personified Israel as an unfaithful wife ([Chapter 2](#)) and longed for the days of the

Exodus and the wilderness experience when Israel was thrown totally on the grace of God.

### 3.1.1 Commission (1)

The book of Jeremiah begins with a Deuteronomic-style introduction that places Jeremiah within the context of Judah's history:

*The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. To him the word of YHWH came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, beginning in the thirteenth year of his reign. It also came in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, specifically until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month. (1:1–3)*

From this editorial introduction we learn that Jeremiah belonged to a priestly family from [Anathoth](#) in Benjamin. This is significant because it reveals one source of his antipathy to the Jerusalem priestly establishment. Admittedly, we are dealing with a chain of evidence here, but this is how it goes.

When Solomon made his choice of priests back in the 900s, he authorized [Zadok](#) as the legitimate family of priests and banished Abiathar to Anathoth. Zadok was chosen over Abiathar because Zadok had backed Solomon to be king while Abiathar had backed Adonijah (see 1 Kings 2:26–27). Because Anathoth was a very small village and Jeremiah was a priest, it is reasonable to assume that Jeremiah was part of the Abiathar lineage. Although he was a priest, Jeremiah would have been denied the privilege of serving at the Jerusalem temple for obvious reasons. All of this makes some sense of the negative stand that Jeremiah took against the official temple in

Jerusalem and the monarchy that had exiled his family. And this begins to explain why he was treated as an outsider. That he got any kind of hearing at all in the temple and royal court is remarkable.

The editorial introduction further tells us that Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah, all kings of Judah, right up until the destruction of Jerusalem in 587. The only major disputed point in this introduction is the intent of verse 2, which states that “*the word of YHWH came*” to Jeremiah in the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign. Does this mean that this is the year Jeremiah was called to be a prophet, the year 627, or is this the year he was born? The question arises because the call narrative, which we examine next, suggests that Jeremiah was called to the prophetic ministry even before he was born.

Other prophets provide some accounting of how they concluded that God had called them to be prophets. Isaiah did it in his Divine Council vision account (Isaiah 6). Amos did it in a roundabout way in dialogue with Amaziah (Amos 7). Jeremiah did it too, and it was logically placed at the beginning of the book:

*The word of YHWH came to me: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart—made you a prophet to the nations.” I replied: “But YHWH Elohim, I do not know how to speak. I am only a youngster.” YHWH replied: “Do not say ‘I am only a youngster’—to all I send you, you must go, and what I command you, you must speak. Do not be afraid of them. I will be with you delivering you”—says YHWH. Then YHWH extended his hand and touched my mouth. YHWH said to me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. Today I have set you above nations and above kingdoms: to uproot and to break down, to destroy and to overturn, to build and to plant.” (1:4–10)*

Of whom does this remind you? An alert student of the Hebrew Bible would probably say Moses. Jeremiah expressed the same reluctance as Moses to becoming a prophet. Jeremiah expressed the same kind of excuses as Moses, claiming a lack of qualifications. Jeremiah's hesitation concerned the same problem—his mouth, as did Moses's. And in both cases, YHWH met the “mouth” objection: in Moses's case by providing Aaron as his “mouthpiece” and in Jeremiah's by placing the words right on his lips.

Of special importance in Jeremiah's call narrative is the articulation of his mission. It is repeated throughout the book. He will break kingdoms apart and plant kingdoms. It implies that as a prophet, an authorized speaker of the message of YHWH, he has the ability to destroy and to build. These extremes of destroying and building are another way of saying that this prophet's mission involved both judgment and renewal. In this mission, he had the protection of God. As we will see, he came to depend on that protection and at times felt disillusioned when his enemies managed to get to him.

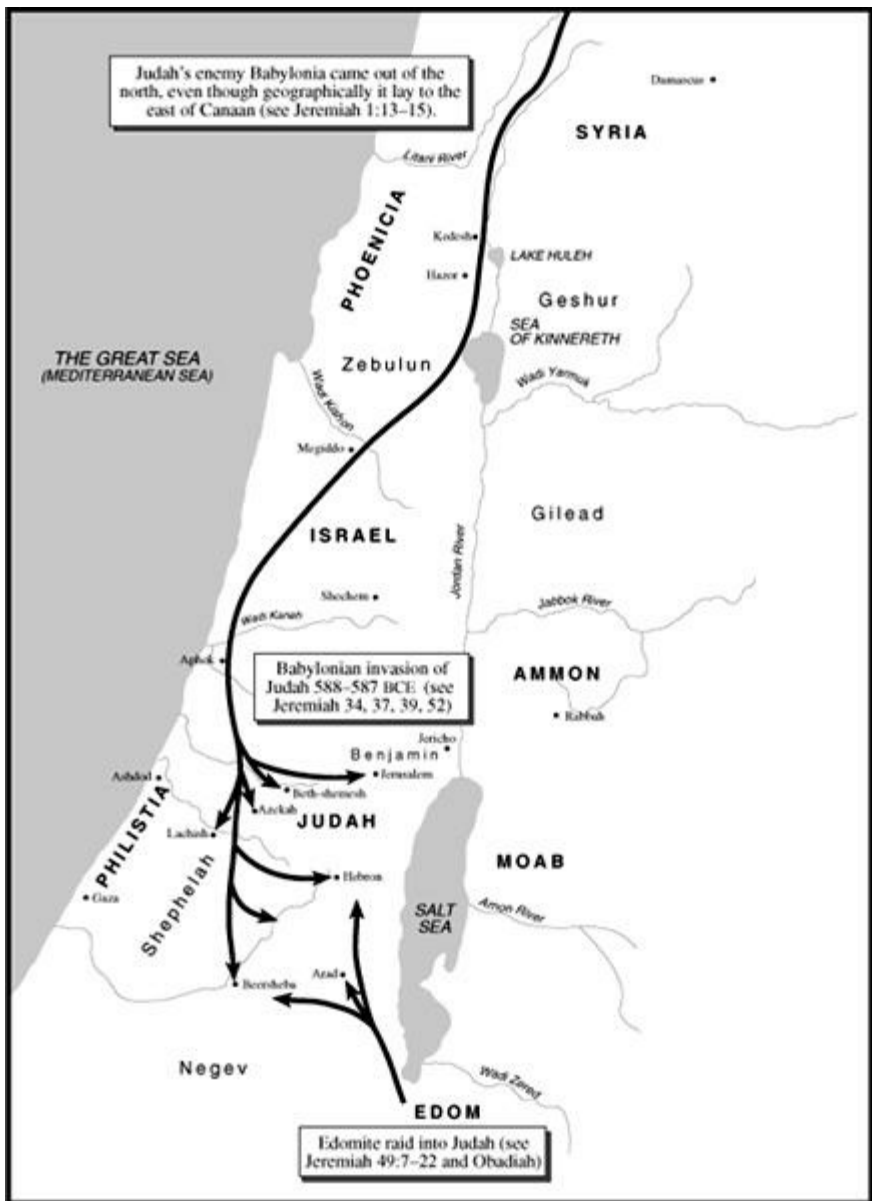
If we survey [Chapter 1](#) to its end, we find that YHWH gave Jeremiah two signs to confirm his calling. In somewhat the same vein as Amos's visions, there are visual puns. First, YHWH showed Jeremiah an almond tree, in Hebrew a *shaqed*. This became the occasion for YHWH to say to Jeremiah, “*I am watching—shoqed—over my word to see that it happens.*” Then Jeremiah saw a boiling cauldron tipping away from the north toward the south. YHWH said, “*Out of the north trouble is brewing.*” This is a foreshadowing of the political problems that lay ahead from the north, the direction from which Mesopotamian foes typically reached Palestine (see [Figure 11.6](#)).

## **3.2 During Jehoiakim's Reign (609–598 BCE)**

Josiah died in battle at Megiddo fighting Pharaoh Neco. He was succeeded by his son, Jehoahaz, also called Shallum. Jehoahaz lasted only three months and was then deported to Egypt where he died. Jehoiakim succeeded his brother, Jehoahaz, and ruled until 598. Jeremiah was active throughout his reign. Primarily, he denounced the king and the people for their idolatry and injustice. Many of the prophecies of [Chapters 7–19](#), 25–26, and 35–36 are dated to this period. Perhaps Jeremiah's most notorious denunciation speech comes in [Chapter 7](#).

### **FIGURE 11.6** Enemy from the North

Apart from Egypt, Israel's imperial enemies, Assyria and Babylonia, typically came out of the north even though geographically they lay east of Palestine. The natural barrier of the desert east of Transjordan forced armies to travel down the coastal road systems to get to Palestine.



### 3.2.1 The Temple Sermon (7 and 26)

Worship in the form of daily sacrifices was central to Israel's religious life. A good deal of the Torah defines the proper forms of religious devotion. This includes the prescribed rituals and festivals,

the authorized personnel, and the implements used in worship. Much of Samuel, Kings, and especially Chronicles deals with defining and justifying notions of formal religion by illustrating them with examples drawn out of the history of Israel and Judah. Most of this history was used to legitimize Jerusalem and Mount Zion as the center of true religion focused on YHWH alone.

Jeremiah was one of the few prophetic voices that challenged the doctrine of Zion theology. In his temple address, as recorded in [Chapter 7](#), he opposed the belief that the temple on Mount Zion automatically protected Jerusalem. From the parallel passage in Jeremiah 26, we learn that the sermon was given in 609 at the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign. Jeremiah delivered these words in the temple courtyard:

*Hear the word of YHWH, all you people of Judah who enter these gates to worship YHWH. Thus says YHWH of Hosts, the Elohim of Israel: "Reform your ways and your activity, and then I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words—This is the temple of YHWH, the temple of YHWH, the temple of YHWH. But if you reform your ways and your activity, genuinely act justly with each other, do not oppress the resident-alien, the orphan or the widow, shed innocent blood here, or go after other gods (which can only hurt you), then I will let you live in this place, here in the land that I gave your parents in perpetuity a long time ago. Right now you are putting your faith in misleading words (This is the temple of YHWH!) but to no avail. Would you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, go after other elohim you do not know and then come and stand before me in this temple, the one called by my name, and say 'We are safe'—only to keep on doing these travesties?! Has this house, the one called by my name, become a den of*

*thieves in your opinion? Right now it appears that way to me,” says YHWH. “Then go now to my place that was once in Shiloh. That’s where I first housed my name. See what I did to it as a result of the wickedness of my people Israel. Now, because you have done these things,” says YHWH (and though I spoke to you persistently you would not listen, when I called you, you would not answer), “therefore I will do to the house now identified with me—the one in which you trust, the place I gave to you and to your ancestors—just what I did to Shiloh. I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out your cousins, all the descendants of Ephraim.” (7:1–15)*

It is rather easy to see why Jeremiah was not welcomed with a kiss and a warm hug after that speech. He roundly condemned the Judean people for putting their faith in the temple. But why?

Two reasons. First, Jeremiah claimed that the people were immoral, and given their immoral behavior, nothing could save them, not even their sacred temple. Second, it seems the people viewed the temple almost superstitiously. They thought that the temple conferred automatic security. Official Jerusalemite theology claimed that YHWH lived in the temple, and as long as he was there, nothing tragic could ever affect Judah. Historical precedent backed them up in this belief as when Sennacherib surrounded Jerusalem in 701. At that time, YHWH miraculously delivered the city, no doubt, they thought, because he lived there.

But Jeremiah brings up other historical precedent. He refers to the sanctuary city Shiloh of the judges’ period. Under Eli and Samuel, it was the location of YHWH’s sanctuary. Despite its unsurpassed importance at that time, it was unceremoniously destroyed—probably by the Philistines though we do not know all the details.

Jeremiah countered that genuine security can come only from their faith in YHWH. They must commit themselves to him, and their faith had to be actualized in moral living and undivided loyalty. This is



none other than the Mosaic prescription. In fact, the very vocabulary of the Decalogue is evident here, especially in verse 9.

As was indicated in both the call narrative and the temple address, Jeremiah was thoroughly shaped by the Mosaic tradition. He has northern roots, perhaps Elohist connections—notice his reference to “the Elohim of Israel” in verse 3 and his reference to the descendants of Ephraim in verse 15. And the terminology of the sanctuary as “the place where my name dwells” sounds very Deuteronomic—that theological voice originating in the north.

Jeremiah was a dissenting voice in the “den of thieves,” the temple courtyard, the heart of the Jerusalem establishment. He pitted the Mosaic tradition against the dogma of Davidic–Zion theology. And he stirred up quite a reaction. Although we do not hear any of it in [Chapter 7](#), we get a full report in Chapter 26, which provides a narrative account of the temple sermon, adding interesting contextual details and the surrounding circumstances. Jeremiah’s message is given only in summary, but the reaction to it is given in rich detail. When the priests and prophets heard Jeremiah’s condemnation of the Jerusalem temple, they pressed the king’s government to execute him. After all, he had opposed everything they stood for. They considered it treason.

Jehoiakim’s bureaucracy would have put him to death were it not for judicial precedent. In a prior age, Micah (the same one as in the Book of the Twelve by that name; see RTOT [Chapter 10](#)) proclaimed destructive judgment on Jerusalem just as Jeremiah was now doing. Back then, Hezekiah declined to execute him. The people took Micah seriously and repented, and Jerusalem was delivered. More on the negative side, another case was cited, this one of a certain prophet named Uriah who was not so fortunate because he was executed by Jehoiakim. So we learn that the threat to Micah and Jeremiah was real.

This encounter between Jeremiah and the Judean establishment reveals two political and theological traditions in conflict. Both

provided a way of reading God's relationship with his people and his work in history. One way, the Sinai–Moses track, stressed the people's covenant obligation. The other, the Zion–David track, stressed YHWH's commitment to Judah. This conflict of theologies would surface again.

The temple sermon raises two important theological questions that deserve consideration. First, Jeremiah argues that only if the people practiced personal and corporate morality would God allow them to dwell in Palestine. But is such a perspective politically realistic? What is the relationship between moral behavior, of individuals and nations, and political destiny? It would seem that international political forces—in this case, the Babylonians—controlled Judah's destiny. The assertion that Jeremiah and other prophets would make is this: YHWH controls the destinies of all nations, including Babylonia.

Second, Jeremiah seems to come down hard on temple rituals and sacrificial practices. What were Jeremiah's deepest attitudes toward formal worship practices? Were such activities entirely useless? Did he issue a broad condemnation of religious ritual or a conditional one? If conditional, under what circumstances is worship acceptable? Both questions—the relation of morality and destiny, and the role of worship—raise enduring issues in biblical theology.

### **3.2.2 Reading the Scroll (36)**

Not surprisingly, Jeremiah was barred from entering the temple–palace compound after that temple sermon. But there was plenty that he still wanted to say to the king and his council. Jeremiah directed his companion and secretary [Baruch](#) to take dictation. Interestingly, clay bullae, which are stamps attesting a document's authenticity, have been found with the name Baruch on them, thus documenting the presence of Jeremiah's scribe in Jerusalem (see Shanks, 1987). Writing on a scroll with pen and ink, Baruch recorded Jeremiah's

call to repent and his warning of Babylonian danger. The year was 605, the same year that the Babylonians bested the Egyptians in battle at Carchemish north of Palestine.

Baruch first read the scroll to a receptive audience in the temple area. They took the message seriously but advised him not to deliver it to the king personally. Fearing reprisals and persecution, Baruch and Jeremiah went into hiding while others approached Jehoiakim and read him the scroll. Jehoiakim was in his winter palace at the time. As the scroll was read a few columns at a time, the king stripped the columns off the scroll with a knife and burned them in the brazier he used to keep himself warm. In this way, he and his associates demonstrated their contempt for Jeremiah. Obviously, they did not find themselves moved to repentance by his message.

After Jeremiah heard what Jehoiakim had done with the scroll, he proceeded to dictate another one to which even more messages were added. But this one he did not deliver to the king. Many scholars see this series of events as a piece of evidence for the construction of the book of Jeremiah. Perhaps it is even the point of transition from an oral to a written form of the prophet's message. We can assume that this second scroll became the core of the book of Jeremiah as we have it today.

### **3.3 During Zedekiah's Reign (598–587 BCE)**

Jehoiakim died just three months before Jerusalem succumbed to the Babylonian siege. In his stead, Jehoiachin was placed on the throne. After Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon subdued Jerusalem in 598, he deported many of its citizens to Babylonia, including Jehoiachin. Zedekiah replaced Jehoiachin and ruled with the support of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem and continued to prophesy after Jehoiachin and the others were deported to Babylon. The words of Chapters 24, 27–29, 32–34, and 37–39 come from the

time of Zedekiah's reign.

### 3.3.1 False Prophecy (27–28)

The Babylonian kingdom of Nebuchadrezzar seemed vulnerable after a revolt broke out within his army in 594. This led many Judeans to think that their subservience to the Babylonians might be near its end. YHWH sent Jeremiah to Jerusalem to discourage such optimism. To reinforce his message, he put an ox harness on his shoulders and declared that the yoke of Babylon would endure for a long while to come. He denounced the prophets who suggested otherwise:

*“Do not listen to the talk of the prophets who say to you, ‘You will not serve the king of Babylon.’ For they are prophesying a lie to you. I have not sent them,” says YHWH; “rather, they are prophesying falsely in my name.” (27:14–15)*

Jeremiah was obviously not the only voice giving counsel in Jerusalem. Other prophets offered advice to Zedekiah and the royal court, including a prophet named [Hananiah](#). When he saw Jeremiah wearing the yoke bar, he grabbed it off his back and cracked it in half. He prophesied that within two years YHWH of Hosts would break the yoke of Babylon and Jehoiachin and, along with all the stolen temple implements, would return to Jerusalem. Jeremiah said he wished it would be so but maintained that the end of Babylonian domination was not yet at hand.

The book does not record the reaction of the witnesses to the confrontation that took place in the temple courtyard, but we can assume that they must have been puzzled. Both prophets spoke in the name of YHWH of Hosts, and both sounded like real prophets. We can be sure that the people wanted to believe Hananiah; he had the more attractive message. But whom should they believe? Jeremiah

claimed that history favors the doomsayer—that is, himself—rather than the optimist:

*The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and disease against many nations and powerful kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies peace—only if the word of that prophet comes to pass will it be clear that YHWH has sent that prophet. (28:8–9)*

Jeremiah was saying that if a prophet tells you what you want to hear, presume that he is not telling the truth. Only declare him to be a true prophet if events prove him true. Otherwise, believe the worst and you probably will not be disappointed.

### **3.3.2 Letter to the Exiles (29)**

The Judean refugees living in Babylonia were easy prey to the same false optimism as the citizenry in Jerusalem. Jeremiah was determined to debunk their illusions as he had tried to do with the Jerusalemites. He sent a letter to the Jewish leadership in Babylonia telling them not to expect a speedy return to Judea. Instead, he said, build permanent homes in Babylonia, raise families, and get on with the business of life. He even said the refugees should promote the prosperity and peace of Babylonia, the kingdom of their oppression. Outrageous! If anything was treasonous, this was.

Yet he was not all gloom and doom. Jeremiah had the prophetic foresight and faith to know that YHWH would eventually reestablish his people in the land of ancestral promise. But he had his own timetable:

*“When seventy years in Babylon are finished I will come to*

*you and fulfill my promise to bring you back to this place. I know the future I have in store for you,” says YHWH, “plans for prosperity and not for disaster, plans to give you a future and hope.” (29:10–11)*

Although the immediate future would entail the destruction of Jerusalem, there was always the “*to build and to plant*” of Jeremiah’s message (see 1:10). Yet, it would not happen in the lifetime of the refugees. The seventy years that Jeremiah mentions is the typical lifespan of an Israelite (compare the “*three score and ten years*” of Psalm 90:10). Only after a lifetime of exile, presumably the passing of a generation, might the Judeans expect to return to their homeland.

### **3.3.3 New Covenant (30–33)**

Although remembered mostly for his message of doom, Jeremiah’s full mission, as defined at his calling, also included this restoration after destruction: “*to uproot and to break down, to destroy and to overturn, to build and to plant.*” Sometimes called his “Book of Consolation,” Chapters 30–31 contain Jeremiah’s message of building and planting. This expression of Jeremiah’s faith comes in the form of prophetic poetry. These chapters are undated, and scholars’ opinions vary. Certain portions seem to echo the early chapters of Jeremiah, which date to the first years of his prophetic activity, but the overriding theme of restoration and rebuilding may suggest a setting immediately prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah was instructed to write down the divine message as a testimony of their return:

*“For see, in the coming days (YHWH’s word) I will restore the restoration of my people Israel and Judah,” said YHWH,*

*“and I will bring about their restoration to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they will possess it.” (30:3)*

Here, and in the remainder of these chapters, Jeremiah affirms the basics of the faith, including possession of the land of Palestine and the unity of Judah and Israel. Jeremiah is rightly famous for articulating this faith in terms of a renewed or [new covenant](#) with YHWH. Jeremiah 31:31–34 builds on the old covenant and adds new features:

*“See, in the coming days (YHWH’s word) I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their fathers when I took them by their hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—my covenant which they broke, though I was their lord (YHWH’s word). Rather, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days (YHWH’s word): I will put my Torah inside them, I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his companion or a man his brother, ‘Know YHWH!’ All of them will know me, from the least to the greatest of them (YHWH’s word). I will forgive their faults, and their sins I will never remember.” (31:31–34)*

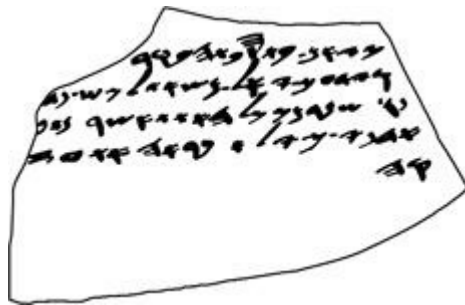
In this remarkable passage, Jeremiah affirms the continuity of the Mosaic formulation of covenant; the allusion to the Exodus is clear. The essential content of this new covenant will remain the same: the union of YHWH and his people. But the newness lies in the way the covenant will be internalized: YHWH will put his Torah inside them by writing it on their hearts. Furthermore, in the future, God will overlook breaches of covenant as he did not do in the past. Jeremiah is laying the groundwork for a restoration not just of Israel’s

homeland and institutions but of the Israelites' fundamental relationship to God.

During the darkest days of the siege of Jerusalem in 588 or early 587 (see [Figure 11.7](#)), Jeremiah had the opportunity to purchase some ancestral property in his hometown of Anathoth. With the Babylonians in control of the entire area, it would have seemed foolish for any Judean to lay out good shekels to buy land. Yet that is exactly what Jeremiah did. His cousin Hanamel, from whom he bought it, must have thought Jeremiah an idiot. But by this act Jeremiah was literally putting his money where his mouth was, affirming his deepest faith that YHWH would not abandon his people or forever remove them from their Promised Land.

### **FIGURE 11.7** Lachish Letter

A collection of letters written on potsherds was found in a burn layer at Lachish. They date to 587 BCE and contain correspondence between Lachish, a military outpost west of Jerusalem, and headquarters. They give details of the last days and hours of Lachish. According to Jeremiah 34:7, besides Jerusalem only Lachish and Azekah held out against the Babylonians. All three, of course, ultimately fell.



Source: Graphic of Lachish Letter III by Barry Bandstra based on H. Torczyner, *Lachish I (Tell ed Duweir): The Lachish Letters* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1938).



### 3.3.4 Jeremiah’s Complaints

A distinctive feature of the book of Jeremiah is a set of autobiographical passages that provides insight into the prophet’s inner feelings about God and his calling. Called the “Confessions of Jeremiah” by some authorities, they are really laments, or complaints, that Jeremiah addressed to God (see [Table 11.4](#)). These passages have similarities to the individual complaint psalms of the Psalter, called laments or complaints (see RTOT [Chapter 13](#)). The [complaints of Jeremiah](#) are found scattered throughout [Chapters 11–20](#). In them he expressed his feelings of frustration in being a prophet. He claimed that his enemies within Judean political and prophetic circles seemed always to get the upper hand. He accused God of abandoning him even though he had been promised divine support.

**TABLE 11.4** Jeremiah’s Complaints

| Complaint | Jeremiah   | Situation                                                        |
|-----------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1         | 11:18–12:6 | As target of an assassination plot, he felt led to the slaughter |
| 2         | 15:10–21   | Was cursed by everyone, though he had given no offense           |
| 3         | 17:14–18   | YHWH, do not terrorize me                                        |
| 4         | 18:18–23   | YHWH, destroy those who plotted against my life                  |
| 5         | 20:7–13    | Delivering YHWH’s words turned people against him                |
| 6         | 20:14–18   | Cursed the day of his birth                                      |

The complaint in 20:7–13 is especially direct in its criticism of God:

*“YHWH, you have seduced me, and I fell for it, you have overpowered me, and you have won. I have become a perpetual laughable clown, everybody mocks me. Whenever I speak up and cry out I feel compelled to shout, ‘Bloody murder!’”* (20:7–8)

The language here is rather bold. Jeremiah goes so far as to say that God “seduced” him, in effect raped him. Not only are his political opponents his enemies, even God seems so at times.

The reasons for Jeremiah’s disillusionment are apparent. Jeremiah experienced mistreatment at the hands of the Jerusalem establishment. He was opposed by priests and prophets, as we saw in Chapter 26. At various other times, he was punished by royal officials when he seemed to be advocating the demise of the Judean monarchy. Pashur, a priest, beat Jeremiah and put him in stocks overnight after he heard Jeremiah preach the submission of Judah (20:1–6).

One especially notable incident happened right before the fall of Jerusalem, as told in Chapter 38. When he tried to leave Jerusalem during the siege of 588 to travel to his home tribe of Benjamin on legitimate business, he was arrested and then accused of treason and inciting desertion. Court officials tried to silence him by dropping him into a cistern. It would have been full of water had Jerusalem not been under siege. Fortunately for Jeremiah, only muck happened to be in the pit. A friend at court pleaded his case with Zedekiah, who finally allowed him to be lifted out.

These incidents indicate how Jeremiah suffered the consequences for his unpopular views. Although we have these examples of rough treatment, we cannot definitively connect his complaints with any specific one of them or attach them to any identifiable period in his life. They could be general reflections on his prophetic calling or undated but specific reactions to personal experiences. Only one of the complaints seems to be tied by editorial arrangement to a specific incident. The placement of Chapter 20 implies that the complaint of 20:7–18 is a response to the physical beating that Jeremiah took from Pashur in the temple.

Despite their general lack of context, the complaints of Jeremiah are theologically significant, even remarkable. They are amazing for the open and honest way that they express Jeremiah’s feelings of alienation from not only fellow citizens but also YHWH. The

frankness of Jeremiah in not hiding his feeling of betrayal from God, but facing God directly, is to be appreciated for its courage.

## 4 BOOKS OF THE TWELVE

The books of the Book of the Twelve, or the Minor Prophets, span the time from the Assyrian period on into the postexilic period of Judean restoration. Three books fall within the purview of the Babylonian period: Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk.

### 4.1 Zephaniah

[Zephaniah](#) was a Judean prophet, possibly himself descended from the Davidic line, who was active during the reign of Josiah. His condemnation of the kinds of religious practices that were eliminated by the Josiah reformation in 622 suggests that he prophesied before that time, somewhere between 640 and 622.

Typical of most other Judean prophets, Zephaniah's words cover these three main topics: condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem for religious sins, condemnation of foreign nations (including Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, and Assyria), and promises of salvation for God's people.

Zephaniah follows the lead of Amos (see Amos 5:18–20) and proclaims that the day of YHWH is coming. But it will be a sad day for God's people and not a day on which they would see victory:

*The great day of YHWH is near, near and fast getting closer. The sound of the day of YHWH is harsh. On it the warrior screams. A day of wrath will be that day: a day of trouble and anguish, a day of ruin and waste, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and thick darkness. (1:14–*

The people will see clouds and fire, effects that in the past signaled the protective presence of God, but this time God would be active to punish them. The day of YHWH notion as found in Amos 5:18–20, Isaiah 2:6–22, and Zephaniah 1:14–2:3 is a prophetic expression signaling the impending destruction of God’s own people. Some scholars trace the idea back to the conquest and holy war tradition of God’s appearing in victory (see von Rad 1991). At that time, of course, Israel was the recipient of the triumphs of Yahweh. The Day of Yahweh is the prototype of the judgment day of apocalypticism. A final battle between good and evil will mark the end of history. The cosmic scale of this day is evident in Zechariah 14 and Joel 2 (see RTOT [Chapter 12](#)).

## 4.2 Nahum

The book of [Nahum](#) is one thing only: an oracle denouncing Nineveh, the once glorious capital city of the Assyrian domain. The book looks forward to the destruction of this city, which epitomized everything the Judeans hated about the Assyrians. Because the city was not destroyed until 612, the book that places its destruction in the future must have been written before that time. Some authorities place it as early as 650, others just before the actual destruction of the city.

Nahum vividly depicts the battle of Nineveh in all its confusion and gore. The prophet seems eager to gloat—no wonder, after the decades of Assyrian tyranny and oppression under which Israel and Judah suffered. The basic theme of Nahum is this: YHWH punishes any nation—in this case, Assyria—that has exploited his people and treated them cruelly. Israel’s enemies are YHWH’s enemies, and YHWH is God supreme, even more powerful than the mightiest empire.

## 4.3 Habakkuk

The prophet [Habakkuk](#) was active in Judah during the first part of the Babylonian crisis, from around 608 to 598. Virtually nothing is known about the prophet himself. The book consists of two units. The first unit, [Chapters 1–2](#), is a dialogue between Habakkuk and YHWH. The second unit, [Chapter 3](#), is a hymn, much in the style of hymns in the book of Psalms, which anticipates the victory march of YHWH who would vindicate his people.

The first unit is remarkable for the frankness with which it probes the morality and righteousness of YHWH's handling of history. Habakkuk questions how YHWH could use the evil Babylonians to punish his own covenant people, who presumably are not as bad as that nasty Nebuchadrezzar. The investigation of the morality of these actions is referred to by the term *theodicy*, which means “justice of God.” Habakkuk put it this way:

*Your eyes are too clean to countenance evil. You are not able to put up with wrongdoing. Why, then, do you put up with treacherous people, and are silent when the wicked devour those more righteous than they? (1:14)*

**YHWH replied:**

*Write down the vision, make it legible on clay tablets so that anyone in a hurry can read it. For this vision is for a time yet to come. It deals with the end and will not deceive. If it seems to be delayed, just wait for it. It will definitely come, it will not be late. Now the proud, his life is not virtuous. But the righteous, by his faithfulness will he have life. (2:2–4)*

Although there are translation problems in verse 4, in essence

YHWH's answer seems to be this: "Be patient, Habakkuk. This is the way I planned it. The proud—that is, the Babylonians—will meet their end eventually and in the not too distant future. The righteous—that is, the Judeans—will survive if only they remain faithful to God." The prophecy of Habakkuk affirms the sovereignty of YHWH and promises that in the end the wicked would be punished and the righteous vindicated.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Ezekiel*. Where and when was Ezekiel a prophet? What visions did he record, and what symbolic actions did he take? What was the overall message of his activity before the destruction of Jerusalem?
2. *Throne-chariot*. Describe the throne-chariot of YHWH that Ezekiel saw and explain its symbolism and significance to Jews living in Babylonian exile?
3. *Jeremiah*. What were the main phases of Jeremiah's career in relation to the history of Judah before the destruction of Jerusalem?
4. *Jeremiah's complaints*. What were Jeremiah's complaints, and what insight do they give into the personal relationship of the prophet with YHWH?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *New covenant*. In propounding his new covenant, Jeremiah stresses that God would forgive the Israelites their sins and renew his relationship with them. What do you think that Jeremiah meant by *forgiveness*? Would God forget what the people had done, or would he simply disregard it? What would the people have to do, if anything, to get this forgiveness?

2. *Complaints*. Jeremiah's autobiographical complaints contain frank indictments of God and the way that he treated Jeremiah. Study these complaints. Do you think that Jeremiah had the right to call God into question? Did God actually mislead Jeremiah at any point? Was God at fault in any way, as Jeremiah claimed? Can God be at fault? Should Jeremiah have been so frank and forthright with God?
3. *Prophetic politics*. Given the activities and messages of the prophets of this period and the abuse that they took, how would you describe and then define the role of biblical prophets within the affairs of the state in ancient times?
4. *Today's prophets*. The activities of the biblical prophets of the Babylonian period are played out against the background of and in full engagement with both Judean domestic politics and foreign affairs. Given their immersion in the public affairs in their day, what professions today might be analogous to that of the biblical prophets of the Babylonian period? Put another way, who today would you identify as a prophet on the order of an Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, or Habakkuk?
5. *God in world affairs*. Is world history really the arena where deity expresses pleasure and displeasure with nations? Some prophets, especially Nahum and Habakkuk, argued that Israel was "better" than this or that foreign nation. Habakkuk was upset that Judah was suffering at the hands of the Babylonians when Judah was more righteous than the Babylonians. Is there a divine national ranking system whereby we can say that one nation is better than another in God's eyes? Is there such a thing as a corporate morality that can be judged by God, independently of personal morality?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

William L. Holladay has established himself as a leading authority on Jeremiah. His two-volume commentary in the Hermeneia series, designed for specialists, has been distilled into an accessible monograph, *Jeremiah: A Fresh Reading* (1990).



# CHAPTER TWELVE

## Postmonarchy Prophets: Exile and Restoration

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Prophets of the Exile](#)

[3 Prophets of the Restoration](#)

[4 Latter Prophets Collections](#)

---

### KEY TERMS

[Creation-redemption](#)

[Cyrus](#)

[Day of YHWH](#)

[Ezekiel](#)

[Glory of YHWH](#)

[Gog and Magog](#)

[Haggai](#)

[Isaiah of the Exile \(Second Isaiah\)](#)

[Isaiah of the Restoration \(Third Isaiah\)](#)

[Joel](#)

[Malachi](#)

[New exodus](#)

[Obadiah](#)

[Second temple](#)

[Servant of YHWH](#)

[Servant poems](#)

[Valley of dry bones](#)

[Zechariah](#)

[Zerubbabel](#)

# Michelangelo's *Joel*

Joel was a prophet of the Judean restoration who anticipated a time when the spirit of YHWH would be poured out upon all people, not just kings and prophets as in the past.



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on Michelangelo's *Joel* (Rome: Sistine Chapel, Vatican).

---

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The periods of the Babylonian exile and the restoration of Judean community life in Palestine were crucial times in biblical history. The exile and subsequent deportation to Babylon was catastrophic in terms of loss of life and destruction of Judah's infrastructure. It forced a rethinking of former verities such as the invulnerability of Jerusalem and the absolute protection of YHWH. It also forced the transformation of many of Judah's notions of deity and the institutions that supported its corporate life. The prophets of the periods of exile and restoration provided visionary thinking in a variety of forms that helped the Judeans to reconceptualize and remake themselves into a renewed people of YHWH. These prophets not only supported the survival and eventual thriving of the Jews but also laid the foundation

for the emergence of Judaism.

## 1.1 Exile and Restoration: A Summary

Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army besieged Jerusalem in 598 BCE. After capturing the city, he deported the royal administration, including Jehoiachin, to Babylon along with Jerusalem's civic, religious, and technically skilled elite. This group, numbering as many as 5,000, is called the first deportation to Babylon. The prophet [Ezekiel](#) was among this group. Nebuchadnezzar installed Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle and the last remaining son of Josiah, on the throne of the now vassal state of Judah in place of Jehoiachin. Zedekiah eventually attempted to break away from Nebuchadnezzar in the expectation that Egypt would back him. This help did not materialize, and the Babylonian army once again invaded Judah. Many of its fortified cities were destroyed, and Nebuchadnezzar lay siege to Jerusalem once again. The city fell after holding out for a year and a half. Zedekiah escaped from Jerusalem but was caught by the enemy. After witnessing his sons being executed, his own eyes were blinded, and he was sent off to exile. The remainder of Jerusalem's citizenry was deported to Babylon in the second deportation, and the city was destroyed, including the temple of Solomon. This story is told in 2 Kings 25, an account duplicated in Jeremiah 52.

## 1.2 Reading Guide

The following passages manifest key components of history and prophecy in the postmonarchy period.

- Ezekiel 37:1–14: Ezekiel's valley of dry bones vision, anticipating the rebirth of Israel
- Isaiah 40:1–11 (Second Isaiah): "*Comfort my people*" passage

that announces a return from Babylonian exile

- Isaiah 52:13–53:12 (Second Isaiah): Servant poem 4, in which YHWH's servant suffers for the people even though he did not deserve it
- Isaiah 65:17–25 (Third Isaiah): a vision of a renewed heaven and earth
- Haggai 1: rebuilding the temple of YHWH in Jerusalem
- Zechariah 3: the prophet Zechariah's vision of the postexilic high priest Joshua who is accused of uncleanness by the Satan
- Malachi 3: preparing the way for YHWH to return to his temple in Jerusalem
- Joel 3: YHWH will pour out his spirit on all types of people on the day of YHWH

## **2 PROPHETS OF THE EXILE**

It is difficult to write a detailed history of the Judeans during the period of the Babylonian exile. Naturally, Jewish documentary sources are scarce for this time; the community was now divided between Palestine and Babylonia. Most of its leaders were either dead or in captivity. There was no royal or temple administration; hence, no official records were kept as they were during the period of the monarchy. The best that we can do is reconstruct the experience of the Judeans using prophetic voices. Jeremiah spanned preexile Judah and the Babylonian exile though most of his material is preexilic. Obadiah is very limited in what it can tell us. The words of Ezekiel and Second Isaiah contain the richest collection of material and are especially valuable because both prophets were themselves in Babylonian exile rather than in Palestine.

### **2.1 Obadiah and Jeremiah**

The book of [Obadiah](#) is the shortest book in the Hebrew Bible. It is only one chapter long and consists of a single oracle against the territory of Edom, which lay immediately to the southeast of Judah. We know virtually nothing about the prophet Obadiah, except that his name means “servant of YHWH,” a common Hebrew name.

The book of Obadiah is undated, but it is usually credited to the period immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. The theme of the oracle is divine condemnation of Edom because the Edomites took advantage of the Judeans after they were forced to leave Jerusalem. The Edomites even seem to have cooperated with the Babylonians in despoiling Judah at the time of the exile. Obadiah voices the words of YHWH:

*You should not have entered the gate of my people on the day of their tragedy. You of all people should not have gazed on their disaster on the day of their tragedy. You should not have looted their goods on the day of their tragedy. (1:13)*

With nobody to stop them, Edomites encroached on Judean territory during the period of Judean exile. Obadiah makes reference to the [day of YHWH](#) as the time when Edom would be punished by a vengeful God. He predicts a time when the exiles would return and Mount Zion would again be glorious.

There was long-standing antagonism between Israel and Edom. This antipathy was traced by the national epic all the way back to the rivalry between Jacob and Esau, who was the ancestor of the Edomites. Obadiah stands with Amos, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel as a prophetic voice condemning Edom. In fact, Obadiah and Jeremiah stand so closely together that portions of Jeremiah’s oracle of judgment against Edom in 49:7–22 are found in Obadiah 1–9. While Obadiah’s version is perhaps slightly wordier, both either draw on the same tradition or Obadiah borrowed from Jeremiah. It would

make an interesting case study of how prophets borrowed from each other, a practice attested among other pairs of prophets.

*Jeremiah 49:14–16 (NRSV)*

I have heard tidings from the Lord and a messenger has been sent among the nations: “Gather yourselves together and come against her, and rise up for battle!” For I will make you least among the nations, despised by humankind. The terror you inspire and the pride of your heart have deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill. Although you make your nest as high as the eagle’s, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord.

*Jeremiah 49:9–10 (NRSV)*

If grape-gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings? If thieves came by night, even they would pillage only what they wanted. But as for me, I have stripped Esau bare, I have uncovered his hiding places.

*Obadiah 1–4 (NRSV)*

We have heard a report from the Lord, and a messenger has been sent among the nations: “Rise up! Let us rise against it for battle!” I will surely make you least among the nations; you shall be utterly despised. Your proud heart has deceived you, you that live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is in the heights. You say in your heart, “Who will bring me down to the ground?” Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord.

*Obadiah 5–6 (NRSV)*

If thieves came to you, if plunderers by night—how you have been destroyed!—would they not steal only what they wanted? If grape-gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings? How Esau has been pillaged, his treasures searched out!

Most of Jeremiah’s prophetic experiences and writings are connected to events before 587. Indeed, the fall of Jerusalem in 587 actualized Jeremiah’s predictions of doom. On the surface, Jeremiah’s foretelling of Babylonian victory made it appear that he was sympathetic to the victors. Although he was captured with others at the fall of Jerusalem, he was later released and given permission to travel wherever he wished. He was in the good graces of the Babylonians because he may have been thought to be pro-Babylonian. His writings make clear that he consistently advocated Judean cooperation with Nebuchadnezzar, but he did this primarily because he thought that punishment was due Judah.

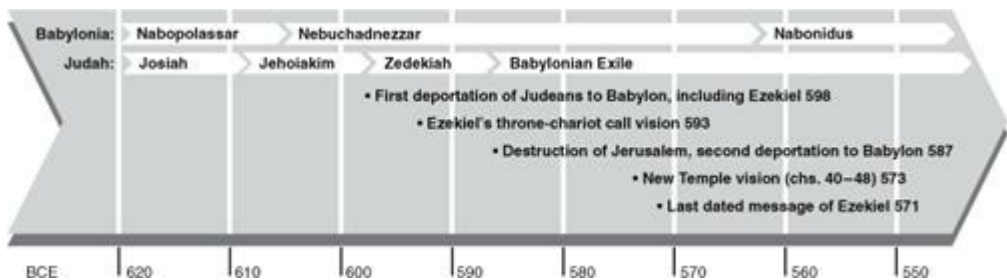
Some of the last chapters of the book of Jeremiah describe the prophet’s experiences after the destruction of Jerusalem. Chapters 39–44 tell us that Jeremiah remained in Judah for a time after 587. Shortly after the Babylonian victory, Gedaliah was appointed

governor of Judah by the Babylonians. Rival Judeans opposed him because he cooperated with the Babylonians, and they assassinated Gedaliah in 582. Following the death of Gedaliah, Jeremiah was forced to travel to Egypt with a group of refugees. While there he continued to prophesy until his death.

## 2.2 Ezekiel after the Fall of Jerusalem (25–48)

The second half of the book of Ezekiel, written after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 (see [Figure 12.1](#)), promotes the spiritual and territorial restoration of Israel. Ezekiel sought to rebuild the hope of the people and to reassure them that Judah would soon be restored and that God would return to Jerusalem. For the survivors, the trauma of Jerusalem’s destruction and the Babylonian exile was as painful as the death of a family member. Psychologists tell us that those who experience great trauma and loss can respond in a variety of intense ways, sometimes called posttraumatic stress disorder. Those who experience death of loved ones go through predictable stages of grief, including denial, anger, and finally acceptance. The surviving Judeans cycled through all these emotions. And Ezekiel, as God’s grief counselor, supported them through this process, sometimes in very startling ways.

**FIGURE 12.1** Time Line: Book of Ezekiel



His way of providing pastoral support was to argue that the people

had brought the disaster upon themselves, and he told them that their only hope for recovery was to change. No comforting embrace from Ezekiel. Yet through it all, Ezekiel never gave up on the people or denied their grief or saw their situation as hopeless. Ezekiel endured the Babylonian exile with the Judean people and presented them with a vision of what they must do to rebuild their identity for the new world conditions in which they now lived. Ezekiel was a major transitional figure in the move from an Israelite identity to what would become the religion of Judaism (see Boccaccini, 2002).

### **2.2.1 Against Foreign Nations (25–32)**

Ezekiel 25–32 is a collection of condemnation speeches directed against Israel's detractors. The following nations and city-states come under verbal attack: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. These were all entities in the immediate vicinity of Judah that took advantage of Judah's woes to increase their own spheres of influence (see [Figure 12.2](#)). Collections of condemnations of foreign nations is a common feature of prophetic books; compare Isaiah 13–23, Jeremiah 46–51, and the entire books of Obadiah and Nahum. Such oracles are a projection of YHWH's control of history in service of his own people.

These judgment oracles served at least two theological functions for Ezekiel's audience in exile. First, they reaffirmed divine justice. By all standards of evaluation, these nations were no better than Judah; indeed, they were often less humane and pious, by Israel's standards. Ultimately, they would have to be punished by YHWH even though then and there they were being used by YHWH to punish Judah. Second, their power and influence would have to be checked in order for Judah's political restoration to take place.

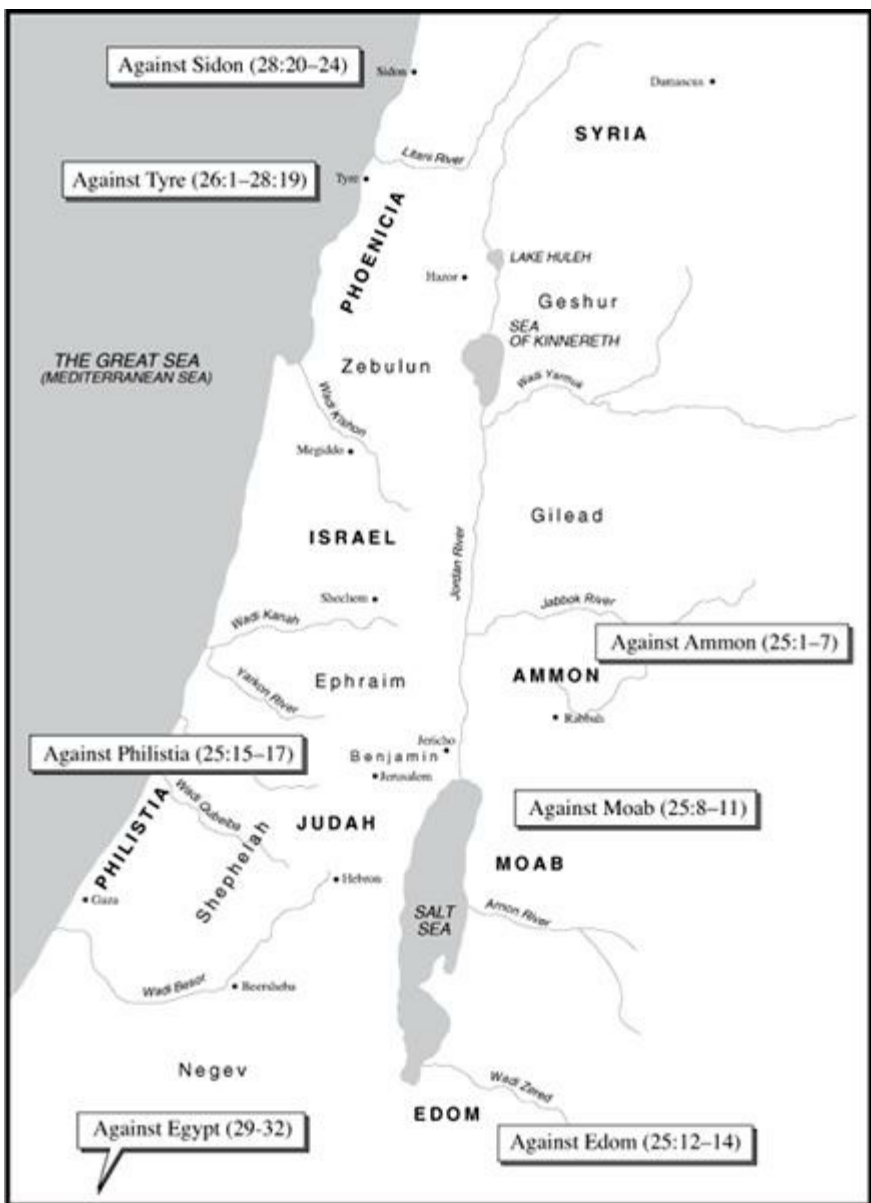
Tyre and Egypt are objects of special curse in this series of oracles against the nations. Tyre is condemned in three chapters (26–28) and Egypt in four (29–32). The lamentation over the king of Tyre



(28:11–19) is especially interesting for its description of the king as the primeval man in the garden of Eden:

*“You were a perfect seal, full of wisdom, altogether beautiful. You were in Eden, the Garden of Elohim. Every precious stone covered you: carnelian, chrysolite, and amethyst ... With an anointed guardian cherub I placed you on the holy mountain of God. You walked among the shining stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day I created you, until iniquity was found in you. In connection with your far-reaching trading you became full of lawlessness, and you sinned. So I cast you down from the mountain of Elohim, and the guardian cherub drove you from among the shining stones.”* (28:12–16)

**FIGURE 12.2** Ezekiel’s Oracles against the Nations



This description of beauty in the garden, expulsion, and the guardian angel recalls features of the Creation story of Genesis 2-3. Although no serpent is involved in this story, sin is the reason for the expulsion, specifically the ruthlessness of the king of Tyre. Elements that go beyond the Genesis version are the location of the garden of Eden on the mountain of God and the business of the fiery, shining

stones. Taken with Genesis 2–3, this story is corroborating evidence that there was a widely known myth of primeval beginnings in Eden, followed by expulsion.

Ezekiel used the Creation myth to characterize the king of Tyre as an evil man who deserved his downfall. History tells us that Tyre held out against Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians for thirteen years. This gave many in Judah faint hope that they too might be able to hold out against Babylonia. But Tyre ultimately fell. Ezekiel used his lament over fallen Tyre to disabuse his fellow exiles of the notion that holding out against Babylonia would be successful. The reuse of this myth in its application to Tyre is a fascinating example of the way that myth could be historicized; that is, the drama of the myth was seen as a veiled account of historical events.

## **2.2.2 Hope after Defeat (33–39)**

Chapters 33–39 contain oracles of restoration written after the predicted final destruction of Jerusalem had become reality. In Chapter 34, Ezekiel depicted the past rulers of Israel as negligent shepherds. In their place, God would become the Good Shepherd who would rescue his sheep from disaster. He would also restore the Davidic monarchy. Extending the shepherd metaphor, he says this:

*“I will establish one shepherd over them and he will shepherd them—my servant David. He will shepherd them and he will be their shepherd. And I, YHWH, will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them.” (34:23–24)*

Ezekiel had not given up hope in the rebirth of Davidic rule. Jehoiachin was still alive and in exile with Ezekiel. He remained the focus of Jewish hope. The Judean refugees and those back in Palestine continued to look to the line of David for the restoration of

the nation. The mention of “*one shepherd*” expresses Ezekiel’s hope that the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, would once again be united. This reference to the line of David is one of the latest expressions of Davidic messianic expectation in prophetic literature.

But the reference to the Davidic leader as “*a prince*” rather than as king is somewhat puzzling. The use of this term is consistent with Ezekiel’s later restoration vision of Chapters 40–48 in which David is uniformly referred to as prince. The question is this (see Levenson 1976): Was this way of referring to David an expression of antimonarchic sentiment on Ezekiel’s part, or was he just expressing the old covenant’s theocratic ideal that only YHWH could be king? The issue of leadership, including its shape and legitimacy, remained a major one throughout the exile and well into the period of restoration.

In Chapter 36, Ezekiel reiterates the internal spiritual dimension of the restoration, addressing the people as a whole using the plural “you”:

*“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put inside you. I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh.” (36:26)*

This hope was expressed earlier in [Chapter 11](#), and now some of the implications are drawn out. The people would be cleansed and forgiven, and even the land itself would reap the benefits of this restoration. Grain would be abundant, fruits and vegetables would abound, and there would never be famine again.

## FIGURE 12.3

“Text/image not available due to copyright restrictions”.

Ezekiel's most powerful image of restoration is the vision of the [valley of dry bones](#) (Chapter 37). In the vision, YHWH took Ezekiel out to a vast valley filled with parched human bones (see [Figure 12.3](#)). God told him to prophesy to these bones and to implore them to come to life. As he preached, the bones began to rattle and shake. They came together to make skeletons, then ligaments bound them together, and skin covered them. As Ezekiel continued to preach, a spirit-wind infused the bodies, and they became alive.

The dry bones are Israel of the exile, and Ezekiel foresaw the day when Israel would be reborn as a nation and returned to its land. It can also be taken as an affirmation of the life-giving potential of prophetic preaching. Above all, the word of God, accompanied by the spirit-wind of YHWH, can bring the nation back to life.

The imagery and expectation of Ezekiel becomes apocalyptic in character in Chapters 38–39 when he describes a great battle. [Gog](#) of the land of [Magog](#) is evil incarnate, a caricature of all Israel's enemies combined. This enemy comes out of the north, seeking to wipe out Israel once and for all. But after a cataclysmic battle, described in great detail in these chapters, God's people are victorious. Israel will be vindicated for all time.

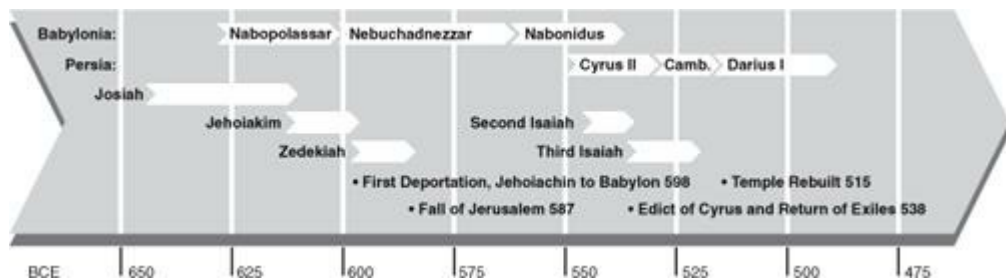
The exaggerated character of this account and its future setting have prompted some interpreters to read this as a prescription for the end-times battle of Armageddon. More probably, it was an imaginative rendition of the expected confrontation with the Babylonians, who had long been the nemesis of Israel. The more grandiose the battle, the more impressive is YHWH's (and Israel's) victory.

### 2.2.3 Restored Temple (40–48)

Ezekiel, remember, was a priest as well as a prophet. His most elaborate depiction of restoration naturally involved that most sacred

of areas, the temple complex in Jerusalem. In a vision dated to 573 (twenty-five years after the beginning of his exile and twenty years after his call vision), he was given a vision of the restoration of the nation. This is a fitting complement to Ezekiel's temple visions in [Chapters 8–11](#), which included him seeing the [glory of YHWH](#) depart the Jerusalem temple. Ezekiel's plan for restoration placed the temple at the center of the nation both physically and spiritually, though this center is not identified as Jerusalem. Placing the temple in the center allowed for the presence of YHWH to dwell among his people again.

**FIGURE 12.4** Time Line: The Exile Era



The following are some of the important features of the restoration program as expressed in Ezekiel's vision. A rebuilt temple would be located in the geographical center of the tribes, which would be arrayed around it symmetrically, three to a side. The rights and privileges of serving in the temple itself would be given exclusively to priests from the line of Zadok of the family of Aaron.

The ground would be revived. A river of freshwater would flow from under the temple and run all the way to the Dead Sea, in the process making the sea wholesome and the surrounding wilderness a paradise. Presumably Jerusalem, because the place is referred to simply as "the city," would once again be the center of attention. Its name would be changed to "YHWH is there" because Israel's deity will again take up residence in that place.

Overall, Ezekiel had a comprehensive vision of the need for the people to become holy and how it could be accomplished. He had a priest's sense of the need for devotion and worship centering on the presence of YHWH in the temple. He combined this with a prophet's attention to inward spiritual renewal and devotion. His combination of devotion, as defined by the Mosaic covenant, along with an openness to the work of the spirit of God, makes him a major figure in the emergence of Judaism.

## 2.3 Isaiah of the Exile (Second Isaiah)

Chapters 40–55 of the book of Isaiah most likely come from the hand of a prophet who lived in Babylonian exile in the 500s BCE (see [Figure 12.4](#)). Dated sometime within the period 546 to 538, these chapters do not come from the hand of Isaiah of Jerusalem, the namesake of the book, who lived in the 700s. We know virtually nothing about this exile era prophet, not even his name. Scholars have taken to calling this otherwise anonymous prophet Second Isaiah, or Deutero-Isaiah (which means the same thing but is a fancier Greek-based term); we can also call him [Isaiah of the Exile](#). Most likely he was an exiled Judean refugee living in or near Babylon.

Conservative Jewish and Christian authorities tend to maintain that the entire book of Isaiah was written by Isaiah of Jerusalem, arguing that although the latter chapters apply to the situation of Babylonian exile they were written predictively by Isaiah in the eighth century. Some of the reasons why mainstream scholarship believes Chapters 40–55 were written in the mid-500s are its references to the destruction of Jerusalem as a past event (40:1–2), Babylonia as their present setting (43:14; 48:20), and Cyrus the Persian as their coming deliverer (44:28; 45:1–4).

This prophet, though nameless, is one of the most inspiring of the Hebrew Bible. He was quite learned, judging by the synthesis of

traditions he was able to pull together, and quite gifted, judging by his original and brilliant poetry. He drew from Israel's historic faith and reapplied it to the new setting of exile, giving YHWH's refugee people reason for hope.

Second Isaiah consists almost entirely of poetic passages with little of the narrative type material found in First Isaiah. Many scholars have tried to determine the boundaries of these poems and the logic and flow of Chapters 40–55 as a whole, with varying success. The most recognizable division within the text is between Chapters 40–48 and 49–55. The first subsection addresses its audience as Jacob and Israel. It deals with the fall of Babylon and a new exodus. The second subsection addresses its audience as Zion and Jerusalem and deals with the issue of social justice. Beyond this basic division though, little else is agreed upon. Instead of dealing with compositional issues, we will treat Second Isaiah thematically.

### 2.3.1 New Exodus

Second Isaiah marks a dramatic change from the prophetic tone of the monarchy era, which was dominated by the strident and stern rebukes of the likes of Amos and Jeremiah. Their words of judgment had by now come true. God had indeed punished Israel and Judah completely (the “*double punishment*” in the following quote) for their sins. Second Isaiah announces that now things will be different. His prophetic anthology has sometimes been called “The Book of Comfort” based on passages such as the following:

*“Comfort, comfort my people!” says your Elohim. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and call out to her that her time of war has ended, that her sin has been pardoned, that she has received double punishment from YHWH for all her sins. ... A voice says, ‘Call out!’ And I said, ‘What shall I call out?’ This*



—*all flesh is grass. ... The grass withers, the flower fades, but Elohim's word will always stand.*" (40:1–2, 6, 8)

The anonymous prophet called Second Isaiah, like his spiritual mentor Isaiah of Jerusalem, was acutely aware of having been deliberately called to his task by YHWH. Compare Isaiah 6 with Isaiah 40. Second Isaiah's call in Chapter 40 is a bit difficult to sort out because of the different voices that speak; most of them are without explicit identification. A number of authorities have reconstructed this text as a call narrative; the following interpretation is one way to work this out. The high god Elohim directs the Divine Council to commission someone to proclaim Judah's release from captivity. A member of the Council ("*a voice*") issues the command to prepare the way for YHWH and looks for someone to go forth with the message. Then the prophet speaks up to volunteer, requests the specific message he should bring ("*What shall I call out?*"), and receives it ("*All flesh is grass*").

The Divine Council's summons in verses 3–5 suggests that it announces the reappearance of YHWH in a new theophany:

*A voice calls out, "In the wilderness prepare the road for YHWH, make straight in the desert a highway for our Elohim. Every valley will be lifted up, and every mountain and hill will be flattened. The irregular ground will be level and the rough areas even. The glory of YHWH will be revealed so all humanity will see it. It will happen because YHWH's mouth has spoken."* (40:3–5)

Theologically speaking, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians presupposed the withdrawal of YHWH from that city. Some Judeans may have thought that he had returned to the wilderness, his original home. Second Isaiah proclaims that the God

of the wilderness will reveal himself, lead his people through the wilderness, and then bring them into the Promised Land once again.

Instead of a pathway through the Reed Sea, there would be a straight and level highway through the Arabian Desert. This expressway would carry the people directly home. The exodus tradition once again becomes the basis for hope. The dynamic reuse of biblical traditions is nowhere else more apparent in the Hebrew Bible than here in Second Isaiah. This prophet keeps coming back to the Exodus theme to give shape to a hope for those currently in exile. He encourages them to have faith in a [new exodus](#), this time from Babylonia rather than Egypt:

*Thus says YHWH—the one who makes a path in the sea, a path through the raging water, who brings down chariot and horse, army and soldier (they lie down, they cannot get up, they are snuffed out, put out like a wick)—Remember not earlier events. Do not dwell on the past. Indeed, I am doing a new thing. It is springing up right now, do you not see it coming? I will make a path through the wilderness, rivers in the desert. (43:16–19)*

Note the details of the Exodus tradition recalled in this passage: crossing the sea, the army of the enemy drowning in the sea. These recall the great salvation event at the Reed Sea of the Mosaic age. Yet, in Second Isaiah's estimation, that Egyptian event will be nothing compared to the future exodus from Babylonia.

YHWH is the redeemer of Israel. If you read other portions of Second Isaiah, be alert to the numerous allusions to Israel's earlier Exodus experience, including the move from slavery to freedom, passing through the water, the miraculous providing of water and manna, and the conquest of the land. In addition to the great Exodus theme, Second Isaiah develops other significant themes.

### 2.3.2 Creation-Redemption

The early chapters of Genesis are by no means the only place where the Hebrew Bible talks about the Creation of the world:

*“Listen to me, Jacob; Israel whom I called! I am the one: I am the beginning (the first), I am also the end (the last). My hand laid the foundation of the earth, my right hand extended the heavens. When I call them, they stand at attention.”*  
(48:12–13)

The reason why Second Isaiah talks about creation is to ground the redemptive capability of YHWH in his power. Because he is the one who created the world, he is powerful enough to bring Israel out of captivity. In the following passage, Second Isaiah combines the Creation myth with the expectation of redemption:

*Rouse, rouse, put on strength, O arm of YHWH! Rouse, as in the old days of past generations! Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces? Did you not pierce the Sea Monster? Was it not you who dried up Sea, Great Deep? Did you not make the depths of Sea a road for the redeemed to cross? Now, the redeemed of YHWH will return and come to Zion with singing. Eternal joy is on their head. They will obtain joy and gladness. Sorrow and sighing will leave. (51:9–11)*

**TABLE 12.1** Servant Poems

| Poem | Isaiah      | Theme                                |
|------|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1    | 42:1–6      | He will bring justice to the nations |
| 2    | 49:1–6      | I make you a light to the nations    |
| 3    | 50:4–9      | My back to those who beat me         |
| 4    | 52:13–53:12 | Bruised for our iniquities           |

The terms *Rahab* (not the same as the prostitute Rahab of Jericho in Joshua 2, which is spelled differently in Hebrew), *Sea Monster*, *Sea*, and *Great Deep*, all synonymous, make reference to the waters of chaos. Their use here recalls the victory of Elohim over the waters of chaos that preceded the Creation of the world (Genesis 1). The victory was achieved by splitting Sea, similar to the way Marduk split Tiamat in half to create the world.

This myth was also used to express the cosmic significance of the act of deliverance at the Reed Sea. The splitting of the waters of the Reed Sea (Exodus 14) became the splitting of Sea, a victory over the waters of chaos. Second Isaiah is saying that this type of powerful act would be repeated to return God’s people to Zion.

### 2.3.3 Servant of YHWH

Four poems in Second Isaiah speak of an enigmatic figure called the [servant of YHWH](#). They are known as the [servant poems](#), or the songs of the suffering servant (see [Table 12.1](#)). For some time, scholars have seen these poems as related and have treated them together to generate a character sketch of the servant.

The first servant poem describes God’s choice of the servant who will bring justice to the nations. The second poem describes, in the servant’s own words, his experience of having been called by God to be a light to the nations. The reference in verse 3 to Israel is generally recognized as a late insertion intended to identify the servant with the nation. The third poem turns unpleasant with its first-person description of how the servant was physically abused in the

course of his mission. The last and longest servant poem, except for the first few verses, is a third party's observations on the suffering of the servant. What follows is a fragment of this last servant poem:

*Surely he has lifted our infirmities and carried our diseases. But we reckoned him stricken, struck down by Elohim, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our wrongs; upon him was inflicted the punishment that made us whole, and by his wounds we are healed. (53:4–5)*

On the basis especially of this last poem, the servant of YHWH figure has also come to be called the “suffering servant.” The notion is a remarkable one. It appears to represent a transference from atonement by animal sacrifice, the traditional ritual means of atonement in Israel, to atonement by a human being's suffering. By his suffering, the servant of YHWH receives divine punishment for the sins of the group.

No one knows exactly how to interpret the figure in the poems and whether or not it represents a real historical figure. Some have suggested that the servant of YHWH is a metaphor for Judah, which suffered terribly in the Babylonian exile (remember, this is the audience that Second Isaiah is directly addressing). By suffering, Judah delivered healing to other nations in the form of a witness to the saving power of YHWH.

Others have suggested that the servant was an actual individual. Israel's prophetic figures were typically called “*my servants, the prophets*” and “*servant of YHWH*.” Moses is called this in Deuteronomy and other prophets elsewhere. If the servant was a real prophetic figure, Jeremiah is a possible candidate. He was called by YHWH (compare Jeremiah 1:5 and Isaiah 49:5). We know from Kings and the book of Jeremiah that he was socially outcast and

physically abused. Besides Jeremiah, others have also been suggested, including Judah's king in exile, Jehoiachin, Second Isaiah himself, and [Zerubbabel](#), the first governor of Judea after the exile. In Christian interpretation, the servant of YHWH is identified with Jesus of Nazareth, a connection made movingly through the use of Second Isaiah in Handel's *The Messiah*.

Perhaps the very indefiniteness of the allusion was Second Isaiah's intention. He may have had somebody real in mind as a model; but he may have been suggesting, by keeping the identification vague, that the way of selflessness and suffering is the way salvation comes in God's plan, not by military force. By keeping the figure indefinite, such a figure does not become merely an historical curiosity but a perpetual model for God's chosen and redeemed people.

### 2.3.4 Cyrus the Persian Messiah

Second Isaiah contains, among other things, a clear example of theological interpretation of history. [Cyrus](#), the Persian monarch who opposed the Babylonian Empire, was viewed by the Judeans as their great deliverer. Second Isaiah even uses the term *messiah*—that is, anointed one—to refer to him in order to indicate the divine initiative behind his mission:

*“I am YHWH, who made all things, ... who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, he shall carry out all my plans.’” Thus says YHWH to his anointed one, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subjugate nations before him, ... ‘I am YHWH, there is no other. Except for me there is no god. I equip you, though you do not know me.’”* (44:24, 28; 45:1, 5)

With eyes of faith, Second Isaiah interpreted the current events of his day as ordained and directed by YHWH, even down to the

actions of their most likely political ally at that time. Second Isaiah clearly threw his support behind Cyrus and promoted an anti-Babylonian policy. By 539 Cyrus was successful against the Babylonians.

The references to Cyrus enable us to date Second Isaiah fairly reliably. From these Cyrus passages, it is apparent that he was becoming known in Babylon for his military exploits. His first major victories were against Media in 550 and Lydia in 546. It was not until 539 that he defeated Babylon. Thus, the hope expressed by Second Isaiah, viewing Cyrus as Israel's deliverer, was no doubt framed sometime within the decade between 550 and 539. And as it turned out (see RTOT [Chapter 17](#)), Cyrus was kindly disposed toward the Judeans and even assisted the efforts of the Judeans who desired to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple there (see [Figure 12.5](#)).

Second Isaiah's willingness to identify Cyrus as the messiah indicates a departure from the Jerusalemite theological tradition, which attached that term to the reigning king from the line of David. Second Isaiah seems not to have put much stock in the Davidic line, nor does he look to it in hope. In fact, although there are numerous references to Zion and to Jerusalem, there are no references to David until 55:3, and even this one is ambiguous:

### **FIGURE 12.5** The Cyrus Cylinder

Second Isaiah interpreted Cyrus's victories as a sign of YHWH's guidance. Cyrus viewed them as ordained by the Babylonian high god Marduk: "Marduk, the great Lord (of Babylon), the protector of his people, beheld with pleasure the good deeds of Cyrus and ordered him to march against his city, Babylon. He made him set out on the road to Babylon, going at his side like a real friend. Without any battle, he made him enter his town Babylon." What we have are two theological interpretations of the same event, each side claiming providence for its god.



Source: From H. C. Rawlinson, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, Vol. V (London: British Museum, 1861–1884), 35. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

*“I will make with you an eternal covenant, my faithful Davidic-type loving relationship. See, I had made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you will call nations that you do not know; nations that you do not know will run to you.” (55:3b–5)*

Second Isaiah seems to be suggesting something quite remarkable. The loving covenantal arrangement that YHWH earlier had established with David would now be transferred to his people as a whole. The dynastic covenant would become a national covenant. The people would complete the mission begun by David. In this way, Second Isaiah is claiming that the Davidic covenant had not been annulled. Rather, it has been democratized.

Much more could be said about Second Isaiah’s writings. They are full of images and promises of hope and restoration. However, now we turn to Third Isaiah, which was written in that period when Judah was struggling to rebuild and realize those dreams that had been fueled by Second Isaiah.

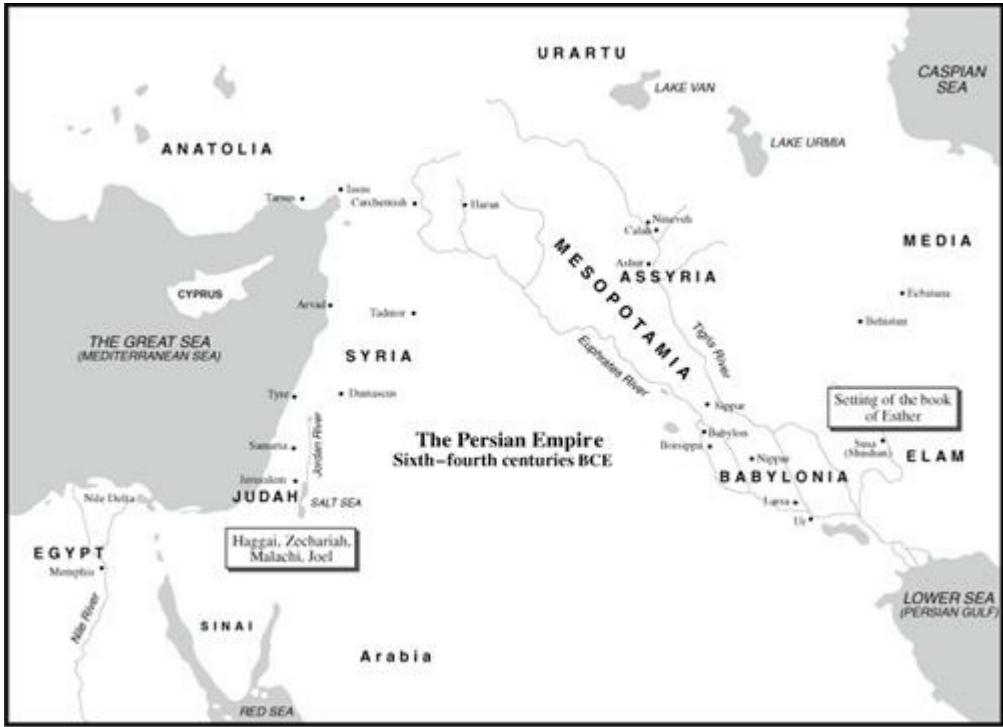
### **3 PROPHETS OF THE RESTORATION**

The Persian period extended from 539 to 333 BCE. The Persian Empire (see [Figure 12.6](#)) was founded by Cyrus and superseded the



Babylonian Empire. Now as a province of the Persian realm, Judah became known as Yehud and the Judeans as Yehudim, from which the label Jews is derived. Cyrus was benevolent to the Jews, both those who had remained in Palestine and those dispersed throughout his empire. He allowed any who so desired to return to Palestine and even provided support to help rebuild the infrastructure of Yehud. The first hundred years or so of the Persian period is reflected in the latest books of the Latter Prophets, as well as in the books associated with the Chronicler (see RTOT [Chapter 17](#)).

**FIGURE 12.6** The Persian Empire



The prophetic books dating to the Persian period are largely concerned with reconstructing Judean social institutions and religious life after the devastation of the Babylonian exile (see [Table 12.2](#)). Some of these prophets were involved in rebuilding the Jerusalem

temple and encouraging the people to support it. The prophets also helped to reshape the religious outlook of the survivors of the recent Babylonian crisis.

**TABLE 12.2** Leaders, Kings, and Prophets of the Persian Period

| Jewish Leaders        | Persian Kings         | Hebrew Prophets                 |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Sheshbazzar, 538      | Cyrus, 550–530        | Third Isaiah, 537–520           |
|                       | Cambyases, 530–522    | Haggai, 520                     |
| Zerubbabel, circa 520 | Darius I, 522–486     | Zechariah, circa 520–518        |
|                       | Xerxes, 486–465       |                                 |
|                       | Artaxerxes, I 465–424 | Malachi, circa 500–450          |
| Ezra, circa 450       |                       | Joel, circa 400–350             |
| Nehemiah, circa 445   |                       | Jonah, circa 400 (?)            |
|                       |                       | Second Zechariah, circa 400–200 |

### 3.1 Isaiah of the Restoration (Third Isaiah)

The last major component of the book of Isaiah is called Third (or Trito-) Isaiah and was written by an anonymous writer of the Isaiah school; we can also call him [Isaiah of the Restoration](#). This collection of material contains prophetic oracles coming from one or more of Second Isaiah’s disciples. These oracles were addressed to the faithful and the not so faithful Jews living in Jerusalem in the early postexilic period, that time when the people were struggling to reestablish life in their home-land. This section of the book of Isaiah is datable to the period 538–520. Much of its message is intended to sustain the refugees who had recently returned from Babylonian captivity, especially those who were discouraged and depressed by the difficulty of life back in Jerusalem. You can sense the desperate need of the people in the following passage, which voices Third Isaiah’s sense of calling:

*The spirit of YHWH Elohim is upon me, because YHWH has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; he has sent me to shore up the broken spirited, to proclaim freedom to the captives, the opening of prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of YHWH's favor, and the day of our Elohim's vengeance. (61:1–2)*

As with Isaiah of Jerusalem and Isaiah of the Exile, this prophet expressed his awareness of prophetic calling. He was drawn to minister to YHWH's people, even to fire them up. But he had a formidable job ahead of him. Jerusalem was in ruins. The community, too, was morally fragmented. There was dissension between the Judeans who had never left, the so-called people of the land, and those who had returned from foreign exile.

Isaiah of the Restoration encouraged those struggling for security and faith in the absence of a temple and its sacrifices by giving them something else to hold onto. He assured them that YHWH was present even if no building was available to accommodate him:

*Thus says YHWH: "Heaven is my throne, the earth my footstool. What house would you build for me, what place for me to rest? All these things my hand has made, all these things are mine," says YHWH. "But this is the one to whom I will pay attention: the one that is humble and unassuming and respects my word." (66:1–3)*

This writer, as you can see, concurs with Second Isaiah in promoting the universal extension of YHWH's domain. YHWH claims the entire world and desires to reveal his salvation to all people. Salvation has not yet arrived, but soon it would, and it would embrace all nations, not just Israel:

*“Just as the new heavens and the new earth which I am about to make shall stand before me, so shall your offspring and your name stand. From new moon to new moon, from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship me,” says YHWH. (66:22–23)*

Through difficult times and dreadful conditions, Third Isaiah sought to keep the faith of the people alive.

## 3.2 Haggai

Cyrus allowed the Judean refugees to return to Palestine, and he encouraged them to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Life was very difficult back in Judea, and the work, though begun shortly after 538, soon ground to a halt. [Haggai](#) was a major voice in Jerusalem, encouraging the work to be completed. In 520 he gave five addresses, collected in the book of Haggai, which urged the Jewish leaders to assume responsibility for the project and finish it. The leaders at this time were Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest (spelled “Jeshua” in the Chronicler’s History). Addressing them and the people of Jerusalem, Haggai said,

*Thus says YHWH of hosts, “These people said, ‘It is not yet time to rebuild YHWH’s house.’” The word of YHWH came through the prophet Haggai, “Is it time for you to live in your paneled homes while this house remains in ruins?” ... “You have expected much but now it has come to little. When you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?” says YHWH of hosts. “Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you are concerned about your own homes.” (1:2–4, 9)*

Evidently, the people were busy raising their own standard of living, and they put off rebuilding the temple until they were done. Haggai demanded that the people reverse their priorities. First, YHWH's house must be rebuilt, and only afterwards might the people expect to prosper. In large measure due to Haggai's urging, the temple was completed in 515. This temple has come to be called the [second temple](#) to distinguish it from the first temple of Solomon.

Haggai expressed the Jerusalemite priestly perspective that the presence of YHWH in Jerusalem was the precondition for the return of national prosperity and blessing. And YHWH would not return until he had a dwelling place, the temple. In his last address to Zerubbabel (2:20–22), Haggai foresaw the demise of the other nations and the rise to power of Zerubbabel who would be God's "signet ring."

### 3.3 Zechariah

The prophet [Zechariah](#) was a contemporary of Haggai, and both prophets were contemporaries of Zerubbabel and Joshua, the civic leaders of the early Judean restoration. Zechariah prophesied in Jerusalem from 520 to 518. Whereas Haggai's prophecy came in the form of direct moral address, Zechariah's prophecy largely took the shape of symbolic visions of coming events that incorporated dialogues with YHWH and his angel (see [Table 12.3](#)). Zechariah's visions are followed by a collection of divine pronouncements often attributed to an unnamed prophet (a situation much like that in the book of Isaiah) from the early Greek period.

We note a couple features of the prophecies of Zechariah. They are addressed to the Jews living in Jerusalem after the exile. They show sympathy for the people in these difficult circumstances and intend to raise their morale. A major theme is YHWH's continuing dedication to Jerusalem and Zion, for whom he is said to be very jealous.

The book of Zechariah demonstrates a considerable awareness of past prophecy. Zechariah clearly sees himself as standing in a long line of prophets. The book begins by drawing connections to the past:

*Do not be like your forebears, to whom earlier prophets preached, “Thus says YHWH of hosts, return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.” But they did not hear me, says YHWH. Where are your forebears now? Do the prophets live forever? But my words and my laws, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your forebears so that they repented and said, YHWH of hosts has dealt with us according to our ways and deeds, just as he planned to do. (1:4–6)*

**TABLE 12.3** Structure of Zechariah

| Collections            | Chapters | Prophet          | BCE       |
|------------------------|----------|------------------|-----------|
| Part 1: Visions        | 1–8      | Zechariah        | 520–518   |
| Part 2: Pronouncements | 9–14     | Second Zechariah | 300s–200s |

Zechariah attests here the power of the word of YHWH spoken through the prophets. The tragedy of the exile was the result of the hardness of the ancestors’ hearts and happened according to YHWH’s plan. This, he argues, should be a warning to the current generation. Furthermore, serving as the introduction to the visions, it reinforces the certainty of the prophetic word concerning the future.

Zechariah also shows his dependence on earlier prophecy by the way he adopts and adapts earlier prophetic images. Jeremiah’s prophecy of the seventy years of captivity (Jeremiah 29) was used in the first vision to designate the length of captivity. It also became the basis of Daniel’s vision of seventy weeks of years (Daniel 9). And the flying scroll of the sixth vision seems to derive from Ezekiel’s

scroll (Ezekiel 2–3).

Zechariah was concerned about the religious purity of the people and the morale of Jerusalem’s leaders. To that end he attempted to inspire them. In eight visions, Zechariah glimpsed the changes ahead (see [Table 12.4](#)).

In the first vision, he saw four horsemen patrolling the earth in anticipation of the punishment of the foreign nations and the return to power of Jerusalem. In the second, he saw four horns representing world powers and four blacksmiths who would destroy those horns. In the third, he saw a man measuring Jerusalem for the rebuilding of its walls, who was then told that the city would be huge and YHWH would be its protecting wall.

In the fourth vision, Zechariah saw an unclean Joshua, the high priest, standing accused by the Satan of being unfit for duty. Then he was confirmed by God and given the duties of the high priesthood. In the fifth, he saw two olive trees, representing Zerubbabel and Joshua, who supplied a golden lamp stand that illuminated the world. In the sixth, he saw a flying scroll containing the covenant laws. All wrongdoers fell under the judgment of the Torah. In the seventh, he saw wickedness personified as a woman in a flying basket, which was removed to a distant land. In the eighth, forming an envelope structure with the first vision, he saw four horses patrolling the earth in anticipation of the messianic age.

**TABLE 12.4** Zechariah’s Visions

| Vision | Zechariah | Summary                                              |
|--------|-----------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 1      | 1:8–13    | Four horsemen, earth at rest                         |
| 2      | 1:18–20   | Four horns and blacksmiths                           |
| 3      | 2:1–5     | Measuring the dimensions of Jerusalem                |
| 4      | 3:1–10    | Cleansing Joshua, the high priest                    |
| 5      | 4:1–14    | Lamp stand with Zerubbabel and Joshua as olive trees |
| 6      | 5:1–4     | Flying scroll                                        |
| 7      | 5:5–11    | Wicked woman in a flying basket                      |
| 8      | 6:1–8     | Four horsemen, north at rest                         |

The first collection of the book of Zechariah closes on a positive note. YHWH declared that he would return to Jerusalem, restore its greatness, and usher in a time of peace:

*Thus says YHWH of hosts, “Now I am saving my people from the eastern territory and from the western territory. I will bring them to live in Jerusalem. They will be my people and I will be their Elohim, with faithfulness and righteousness.” (8:7–8)*

Here, Zechariah anticipates even further repatriations of the people. Jerusalem remained the holy city of the Jews, and the ideal for the Jews of the Dispersion was to return to Zion. Notice also how Zechariah uses the covenant slogan to express hope: *“They will be my people and I will be their Elohim.”*

The oracles found in Second Zechariah echo familiar prophetic themes: the destruction of the foreign nations, the restoration of Israel, and the coming day of YHWH. Second Zechariah gives special attention to messianic leadership. It describes a triumphant king who arrives humbly riding on a donkey ([Chapter 9](#)), an image and text used later in the New Testament Gospels when Jesus of Nazareth enters Jerusalem. The evil shepherds, a royal metaphor, would be removed from office ([Chapters 11](#) and [13](#)). The evil



nations would finally be destroyed, and Jerusalem would become a holy place where YHWH the king would dwell forever.

### 3.4 Malachi

Nothing is known about the person of the prophet [Malachi](#). In fact, we do not even know if this is a prophet's name because the word *Malachi* means “my messenger” in Hebrew. It could be just a label for the role of the prophet rather than a personal name. Based on an analysis of the themes of the book, it is supposed that its messages were written in the period 500–450 BCE. They complain about abuses in Jerusalem's second temple, which was completed in 515. Concern about foreign marriages is mentioned in 2:10–12, and this was known to be a major issue also in Ezra's day, around 450.

The book of Malachi makes extensive use of the disputation literary form. That is, it frames its prophecies in the question-and-answer style typical of dialogue. This pedagogical style may reflect a teaching and preaching approach used by priests in the second temple. Malachi uses this style in [Chapters 1–2](#) for examining the shortcomings of the priests:

*“A son honors a father, and a servant his master. I am a father. Where is my honor? If I am master, where is my respect?” says YHWH of hosts to you priests who despise my name. You say, “How have we despised your name?” By offering on my altar defiled food. You say, “How have we defiled you?” By your saying that the table of YHWH is defileable. “If you offer for sacrifice something blind, is that not wrong? If you offer something lame or sick, is that not wrong? Offer it to your governor! Would he take it? Would he show you favor?” says YHWH of hosts. (1:6–8)*

Here, the priests are exposed for dishonoring God with inferior animal sacrifices. Damaged animals were not acceptable for sacrifice. Being less valuable, they indicated less than total devotion. The priests were probably keeping the better animals for themselves.

Except for a few negative remarks about Edom, Malachi is concerned less with foreign nations and more with the spiritual condition of the priesthood and the people. He anticipates a judgment day when the wicked would be destroyed and the righteous rewarded. The book closes with references to the two figures that epitomize the Torah and the prophets, thereby upholding the venerable covenant traditions of Israel:

*Remember the Torah of Moses my servant, that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel, the laws and rules. Now, I am sending to you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of YHWH comes. He will turn the heart of fathers to sons and the heart of sons to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with utter destruction. (4:4–6)*

The expectation of the return of Elijah before the judgment day is here stated clearly. This has given rise to traditions of Elijah's return within both Judaism and Christianity. Elijah has a place within the traditional Jewish celebration of the Passover yet today. New Testament writers viewed the career of John the Baptist as the realization of this expected return of Elijah.

The book of Malachi is the last book of the Book of the Twelve. It is not necessarily the last book chronologically, given its uncertain setting and our inability to nail down the chronology of some of the other books of the collection. Yet it was judged to be a fitting conclusion to the Book of the Twelve, probably because of its anticipatory eschatological flavor. When the canonical order of

books in the Hebrew Bible was revised and became the Old Testament, the book of Malachi ended up last. This turned out to be fitting insofar as Malachi ends with the expectation of the return of the prophet Elijah.

### 3.5 Joel

It is difficult to pin down with certainty the historical setting of the prophecies of [Joel](#). Of the figure of Joel, we know next to nothing except for the meaning of his name, “YHWH is El.” Early readers must have thought him preexilic, hence his placement between Hosea and Amos. The book of Joel was placed before Amos perhaps because of the correspondence between Joel 3:16 and Amos 1:2, and Joel 3:18 and Amos 9:13. Also, Amos, like Joel, expected the day of YHWH to come soon.

The evidence for establishing an historical context for Joel is only inferential. Nothing is mentioned about the destruction of Jerusalem, allowing a preexilic date that makes him a contemporary of Jeremiah. But the absence of any reference to a king, or to the Assyrians and Babylonians, and an apparent reference to the Dispersion all suggest a postexilic date. The general consensus is that Joel is to be placed somewhere in the period 400–350.

The central theme of the book is the day of YHWH, which gives the book as a whole its coherence. The book of Joel divides into two parts. The first part, [Chapters 1](#):1–2:27, centers on an elaborate vision of a locust plague and drought, which is a way to warn of the coming divine judgment, the day of YHWH. The second part, [Chapters 2](#):28–3:21, describes the blessings on Judah and Jerusalem that will attend the coming day of YHWH and the corresponding punishment of the surrounding nations.

Joel has sometimes been called a “cult prophet.” That is, he was supportive of the priesthood and the temple and perhaps was even a

priest himself. He was concerned that offerings were not coming in as expected, in part because the land itself was not productive and in part because the people were not giving generously. Consequently, the priests could not perform their duties:

*The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of YHWH. The priests mourn, the ministers of YHWH. (1:9)*

This concern for the temple and its priests is more characteristic of postexilic prophecy than preexilic. Compare Jeremiah, who criticized the complacency and self-serving nature of the priests in the Jerusalem temple. Joel is more like Haggai and Malachi in his support of the temple.

Joel was a prophet of the judgment day. He called it the “*day of YHWH*” (1:15), as did Amos, but he broadened the concept into a comprehensive world–historical event. Presuming the postexilic dating of Joel, the book is a study in the appropriation of earlier prophetic tradition, especially that of Amos and the day of YHWH.

*Watch out for THE DAY! The day of YHWH is near. As destruction from Shaddai it comes. (1:15)*

Here, Joel uses the term *Shaddai*, which is the Priestly writer’s designation for the deity of Israel’s ancestral period (compare El Shaddai in Genesis 17:1). But the deity of the ancestors, Joel warns, has turned against Israel. The notion of the day of YHWH appears to come out of the conquest tradition. It was YHWH’s day, the day when he demonstrated his power by destroying Israel’s enemies. But times have changed. Now his power will be unleashed against Israel. Only if the people take warning and repent will disaster be averted.

The occasion for Joel's core prophecy most likely was the devastating locust plague described in 1:4. The only way to avert disaster is through a communal fast. The coming destruction is described as a locust plague, which became a metaphor for the devastating army that would do the actual work of punishing Israel. Yet Joel also foresaw the coming of a new age, a time of salvation:

*“Then afterward, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. I will even pour out my spirit on male and female slaves in those days.” (2:28–29)*

The pouring out of God's spirit seems to continue the spirit theme expressed in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In those books, God would give the people a new heart and a new spirit. Here, if we are dealing with the same general expectation, this new spirit would have its source in God.

The pouring out of the spirit in Joel has associations with prophetic anointing. The spirit would inspire dreams and visions. The remarkable aspect of the outpouring is its democratic scope. Everyone, young and old, male and female, slave and free, would receive the prophetic gift in the latter days.

Joel's interest in the future has been read as having apocalyptic characteristics:

*I will show portents in the heavens and on earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of YHWH comes. (2:30–31)*

The day of YHWH, in Joel’s description, has cosmic associations. The fire and smoke are what we associate with an appearance of God, a theophany. The blood could connote many things, including the taking of life. The celestial imagery here in Joel has an apocalyptic flavor. This, combined with Joel’s “end of the world,” or eschatological, interest shows that he has affinities with the full-fledged apocalyptic literature that proliferated in the late postexilic period (see RTOT [Chapter 16](#)).

## **4 LATTER PROPHETS COLLECTIONS**

We have seen that the study of Israel’s prophetic literature, both Former Prophets and Latter Prophets collections, can be challenging at a number of levels. We saw that the Former Prophets expressed Israel’s history from a rather late point in the stream of events—namely, the time of Josiah. It framed events to convey both an historical and a theological story. We also needed to integrate the two collections so that the sayings of the Latter Prophets could be seen within the context of Israel’s political history as told in the Former Prophets.

As we examined the Latter Prophets, we saw that many of those books bear tell-tale signs that they went through an involved composition history. Historical references and clues in some of the books indicate that they have been built up and supplemented in various ways and editors have shaped them. As we sort out the history of development, we see how later prophets used the sayings and themes of earlier prophets to help them comprehend the logic of the divine plan for Israel. An examination of the composition history of the Latter Prophets collections indicates they were all finalized after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 and given their final shape either late in the exile or in the postexilic period of restoration.

Some readers might feel that talk of the compositional growth of

biblical books over long periods of time undermines the grounding of these books in prophetic persons such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. Rather than seeing this as a challenge to prophetic authorship, it can be seen as evidence of the continuing vitality of the divine word spoken by these individuals. Their words were recorded, remembered, reprocessed, and reused to help generations of Jews come to accept and understand their historical experience. Later writers found such inspiration coming out of the words of the preexilic prophets that they identified with these servants of YHWH and added their own words to them almost as if they were speaking with the voice of their master.

The following material pulls together the evidence on the growth of the Latter Prophets in order to account for the shape and structure of its final canonical collections as they exist today.

## **4.1 Isaiah as a Book**

The book of Isaiah underwent a complex process of compilation, expansion, and editorial revision. The history of Isaiah scholarship has tended to emphasize the separation of the book into its three main sections, assigning the different portions to different historical periods and more or less just leaving them there. Much Isaiah scholarship has delineated the individual poetic units and has tried to establish the authorship of the units with priority frequently given to genuine Isaiah of Jerusalem sections.

Very few attempts have been made to view the book as a whole by trying to construct the overall witness of the book. But we must keep in mind that somebody within the community of faith saw fit to put all this material together into one scroll under the heading “the words of Isaiah,” and it was not just because they all fit conveniently onto one piece of leather (the great Dead Sea Isaiah scroll is an inconvenient 40-feet long). We have to ask ourselves then: What gives the book its

unity? What does the book as a whole have to say?

Clements (1982), an Isaiah expert of note, argues that the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE is the clue to the editorial strategy that holds the book together. He argues that First Isaiah, while written primarily in reference to the Assyrian crisis of the 700s, was edited during the Babylonian crisis and its judgment oracles provided the prophetic explanation for the eventual fall of Jerusalem. Second and Third Isaiah were attached to First Isaiah by later scribes because they were motivated to balance prophetic judgment with prophetic promise. They wanted to say that divine judgment is not the last word but is followed by divine restoration. This basic sequence of judgment followed by renewal is echoed in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and is presented as a fundamental structure in the plan of God.

While accepting the critical analysis of the book into its component elements, Childs (1979) assesses the book of Isaiah from the point of view of the effect of its current shape. He argues that there are virtually no signals of 500s era authorship of Second and Third Isaiah in a plain reading of Chapters 40–66. He claims that the original setting of 40–66 is effectively disguised. In its present shape, the entire book is placed in the mouth of eighth-century Isaiah of Jerusalem: “*These are the words of Isaiah, son of Amoz*” (1:1). In effect, this places both judgment and salvation within the eternal plan of God. For even before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile, as attested by 40–66, God intended to return his people to Judah. Even before destruction, he was providentially planning ahead to their restoration.

In this view, the book confirms the long-term saving word of God. Note the frequent references to the faithfulness of the word of God (40:8; 44:26; 55:10–11). God is faithful to his word and trustworthy. God plans beyond judgment to forgiveness and reacceptance. Taken as a whole, the book of Isaiah is a witness to the goodwill and power of Israel’s deity, YHWH.



## 4.2 Jeremiah as a Book

The book of Jeremiah seems to have had a complex literary history and consists of both prose narrative and poetry. Three main types of sources underlie the book (see [Table 12.5](#)):

1. *Type A: Autobiography.* Naturally, this material is framed as Jeremiah’s own speech and is found mainly in [Chapters 1–25](#) and 46–51. Much of this material is poetic and is generally assumed to be closer to Jeremiah’s own utterances than the following types.

**TABLE 12.5** Sources of the Book of Jeremiah

| Type | Form          | Jeremiah Texts                                               |
|------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| A    | Autobiography | 1–25 including the complaints; 46–51                         |
| B    | Biography     | 19:1–20:6; 26–29; 36–45                                      |
| C    | Prose sermons | 7:1–8:3; 11:1–14; 18:1–12; 21:1–10; 22:1–5; 25:1–11; 34:8–22 |
|      | Complaints    | 11:18–12:6; 15:10–21; 17:14–18; 18:18–23; 20:7–13; 20:14–18  |

2. *Type B: Biography.* This material is third-person stories about Jeremiah, probably written by Baruch, Jeremiah’s personal secretary. These biographical episodes are found in Chapters 19:1–20:6; 26–29, and 36–45.
3. *Type C: Prose sermons.* These show evidence of composition in the Deuteronomic style. That is, they contain the same vocabulary and style as the Deuteronomic school of theologians. Many have a common theme—namely, exposing the guilt of the people who have failed to heed prophetic warnings and have not repented. Included in this category are [Chapters 7:1–8:3](#); [11:1–14](#); 18:1–12; 21:1–10; 22:1–5; 25:1–11; and 34:8–22. As

with type A material, these sermons are framed as the direct speech of Jeremiah.

These components were combined to create the final form of the book. Unfortunately, the book lacks a clear organization; chronology was clearly not the determining principle. The date indications in the text jump back and forth, and the book does not follow a linear chronological order. Keep this in mind if you read the book in its entirety. It takes a special effort to orient the chapters within their historical context.

There is one obvious structural division in the book, and that comes after Chapter 25. [Chapters 1–25](#) stand out as a structural unit that consists mostly of Jeremiah's own prophetic statements. Chapters 26–45 mostly contain biographical narratives about Jeremiah. Chapters 46–51 are judgment statements directed against Judah's enemies. And Chapter 52, the final chapter, contains an account of the fall of Jerusalem taken from 2 Kings 24:18–25:30.

It turns out that most of the type A autobiographical material is found in [Chapters 1–25](#), as well as most of the type C material. The introductory phrase "*the word of YHWH came to me*" is characteristic of passages from these chapters. In contrast, the introductory formula "*the word of YHWH came to Jeremiah*" is often used from Chapter 26 to the end of the book. This has led some scholars to make the suggestion that the second half of the book (Chapters 26–52), in some form at least, comes from the scribal hand of Baruch.

One of the most interesting compositional issues concerns the purpose of the completed book and its intended audience. Clearly, the book in its final form was compiled after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587. The Babylonian invasion and its devastating results were proof positive of the truth of Jeremiah's prophetic gift. He had been right all along! Someone, apparently someone dominated by the Deuteronomic perspective of guilt and punishment, saw the truth in

Jeremiah's life and teaching and fashioned his message into a form that could serve as preaching to the surviving refugees in exile (see Nicholson, 1970). The core message was this: YHWH has not abandoned his people. They had to be punished for their sins, but the covenant is still in effect. In fact, it is a new covenant, new in the way God would relate to his people now and in the future.

## 4.3 Ezekiel as a Book

The book of Ezekiel evidences a deliberate and well-considered overall structure. The prophet's visions of the presence of God at the beginning and end frame the book, the throne-chariot and the new temple, respectively. The early visions of corruption in the Jerusalem temple are balanced by an ending vision of restoration. The book consists of two main parts. [Part 1](#) is set before 587 and consists of warnings to Judah. [Part 2](#) is set after 587 and holds out hope.

The oracles against the nations in Chapters 25–32 interrupt the flow of material applying to Judah. But there is a logic to their placement. The foreign nations come under God's judgment and must be subdued before Israel could be restored. The book as a whole also shows an intentional movement from prophecies of woe before the disaster of 587 ([Chapters 1–24](#)) to prophecies of hope after the disaster (Chapters 25–48).

Much of the critical scholarship on the book of Ezekiel concentrates on discerning the origin of individual prophetic units. Zimmerli (1979, 1983), takes pains to separate what he judges to be texts original to Ezekiel from the commentary provided by later writers and editors. He gives priority to the former. Childs (1979) says that valuing Ezekiel's own oracles over later commentary overlooks a very important point—namely, that the so-called commentary additions were canonized along with Ezekiel's originals. The commentary is evidence of how the originals were heard and

applied by the community of faith, and they, too, bear scriptural authority.

## 4.4 The Twelve as a Book

The Book of the Twelve includes books that range across an historical span of some 400 years (see [Table 12.6](#)). Books from the Twelve can be found anchored in the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian periods.

The first recorded reference to the Book of the Twelve as a collection called the “Twelve Prophets” comes from the Wisdom of Ben Sirach in the 100s BCE. So they have been grouped together for a long time. But why? Does the Book of the Twelve have unity in any sense? Or were these twelve rather short books placed together on one scroll of sheepskin only for convenience?

Each book has its own editorial integrity and canonical shape, and each can stand on its own. Yet the question that we ask at this point is this: Do we gain anything from seeing these books as a collection? Might there have been a theological or literary reason for creating this collection and ordering it in this particular way?

Although nothing can be proven, the answer seems to be yes. There is a rough chronological progression going from first to last in the Twelve. And there is unity encompassing diversity. The books taken as a whole address the big issues of prophecy: Israel’s devotion to YHWH, the responsibility of foreign nations to respect YHWH’s people, and the expectation that YHWH will act in the future to vindicate his people and punish wickedness. And history did demonstrate that the prophets were on target. Punishment occurred when in succession the empires of Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia were eclipsed, and vindication occurred when the people of God survived. Through it all, Israel was the place where the divine Torah was honored, if at times only half-heartedly.

**TABLE 12.6** Book of the Twelve

| Israelite Era     | Prophet          | Approximate Dates |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Assyrian crisis   | Amos             | 760–750           |
|                   | Hosca            | 750–725           |
|                   | Micah            | 730               |
| Babylonian crisis | Zephaniah        | 640–622           |
|                   | Nahum            | 620               |
|                   | Habakkuk         | 608–598           |
| Exile             | Obadiah          | 587               |
| Restoration       | Haggai           | 520               |
|                   | Zechariah        | 520–518           |
|                   | Malachi          | 500–450           |
|                   | Joel             | 400–350           |
|                   | Jonah            | 400 (?)           |
|                   | Second Zechariah | 400–200           |

The Book of the Twelve ends on a note of anticipation. Malachi affirmed the enduring relevance of the Torah of Moses and looked forward to the return of Elijah on the day of YHWH. He would decisively turn the hearts of the people back to their God.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Babylonian exile.* What was the cause and duration of the Babylonian exile? What was the prophetic explanation for the exile?
2. *Prophetic visions.* Which prophets of the exile and restoration had visionary experiences, what were their visions, and what was their overall purpose?
3. *Second temple.* What was the second temple, when and where was it built, and why was it important?
4. *Glory of YHWH.* What does the phrase “glory of YHWH” signify, what was its background in earlier biblical history, and why was it important in this period?

5. *Servant of YHWH*. Which prophet composed a poetic sketch of the servant of YHWH, what was the experience of this figure, and why was this figure important?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Valley of dry bones*. Ezekiel's vision of a valley full of bones has inspired hope for many. The famous African American spiritual "Dry Bones" used this vision to give hope to slaves. Locate a recording and listen to it prior to your discussion. The rebirth of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948 is interpreted by many as the fulfillment of this specific vision. See if you can find references to it in Jewish literature. How does a story like this come to have such power? Can you think of other stories like it that have had such a powerful effect in shaping the hopes and dreams of people?
2. *Exile*. The period of Judah's exile was its most challenging historical experience. Among other things, it inspired creative theological thinking. For example, Israel's traditional notions of deity underwent profound change. What are some of the changes in the way the prophets perceived and described YHWH in response to the crisis of exile?
3. *Restoration*. The experience of exile and the return to Palestine forced a radical revision in many of Judah's institutions, including its forms of civic and religious leadership. What were some of the major changes? How did the prophets help shape the Judean community in the wake of the exile?
4. *Foreigners*. Reflect on the vehement prophetic condemnations of the foreign nations that you find in many prophetic books including Amos, First Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. Obadiah and Nahum deal only with judgment on foreign nations. Then reflect on the message of the book of Jonah with regard to

Nineveh. What were the options with regard to God's justice in relation to God's mercy? Did God treat the foreign nations differently than he treated his own people? Was there a different standard of judgment? For what are they held accountable?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

*Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation*, by Ralph W. Klein (1979), is a study in how various people, including Ezekiel, made sense out of the Babylonian exile. *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism: An Intellectual History, from Ezekiel to Daniel*, by Gabriele Boccaccini (2002), examines Ezekiel's contribution to Zadokite Judaism, which is in his argument the background of rabbinic Judaism.

# **PART THREE**

## **Writings**



# Prologue to the Writings

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Roots of Judaism](#)

[3 The Writings as a Collection](#)

[4 Apocrypha](#)

---

## KEY TERMS

[Apocrypha](#)

[Chronicler's History](#)

[Dispersion](#)

[Diaspora](#)

[Five Scrolls](#)

[Jews](#)

[Judaism](#)

[\*Ketuvim\*](#)

[Second Temple Judaism](#)

[Wisdom literature](#)

[Writings](#)

## Egyptian Scribe

The ancient scribal tradition had charge of the documents of royal administration and constituted the schools of literacy and learning in the ancient world, including Egypt and Mesopotamia. Probably out of such circles in Israel emerged the wisdom books that are a significant part of the Hebrew Writings.



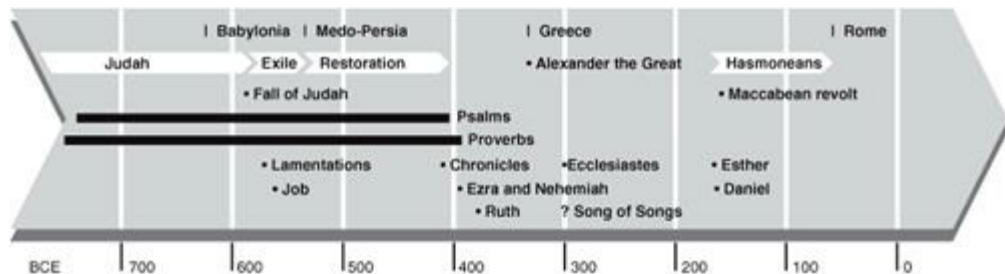
Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on a sculpture of Nespekasuti, Scribe of Karnak.

---

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The third major division of the Hebrew Bible is the [\*Ketuvim\*](#) (the *k* of *Tanak*), otherwise called the [Writings](#). The title *hagiographa* (Greek for “sacred writings”) has been applied to this division by Christians. It contains a variety of materials including songs, prayers, moral maxims, philosophical investigations, short stories, worship liturgies, and histories. Some of the individual books draw upon material going back to Israel’s early history, but all the books of the Writings in their final form date to the postexilic period (see [Figure 1](#)). The Writings were the last of the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible to take shape, sometime late in the first century CE. The Writings are treated in the next five chapters. The organization of our discussion follows the traditional order of books in the Hebrew canon (see [Table 1](#)).

**FIGURE 1** Time Line: The Writings



The book of Psalms contains the collection of songs and prayers that Israel used to address its God. Proverbs and Job are grouped together in the category wisdom literature. The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther are grouped together and are called the Five Scrolls. Each was read during one of Israel’s major festival or fast days. Daniel is in a class by itself. Not a prophetic book in the traditional sense, it is visionary in a special way and is classed as apocalyptic literature. Finally, the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles are historical literature. Together they have been called the Chronicler’s History. This collection retells Israel’s history from Adam to the end of the fifth century BCE.

Whereas the Hebrew Bible gathers these books together at the end of the scriptural volume, English translations separate the books and distribute them among the books of the Prophets, often on the basis of chronology. For example, Ruth was placed between Judges and Samuel because the events recorded in the book are set in the period of the Judges. Esther was situated after Nehemiah because both books are set in the Persian period.

**TABLE 1** The Writings

| Chapter | Group                                | Biblical Book                                                   |
|---------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13      | Devotional and liturgical literature | Psalms                                                          |
| 14      | Wisdom literature                    | Proverbs<br>Job                                                 |
| 15      | Five scrolls                         | Song of Songs<br>Ruth<br>Lamentations<br>Ecclesiastes<br>Esther |
| 16      | Apocalyptic literature               | Daniel                                                          |
| 17      | Chronicler's history                 | Ezra<br>Nehemiah<br>1 and 2 Chronicles                          |

Go to the companion website and see the table “Collections of Scripture.”

Some placements were made on the basis of literary judgments. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs are clustered together because it was thought that all three were written by Solomon. Chronicles was placed after Kings because both are classed as historical literature. Daniel was placed after Ezekiel because the prophet Daniel was considered the fourth major prophet. But some of the arrangements are based on mis-perceptions. For example, Daniel is quite unlike the literature of the Latter Prophets (it actually belongs to apocalyptic literature and is much later than mainstream prophecy), and Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs were not in fact written by Solomon.

## 2 ROOTS OF JUDAISM

The literature of the Writings was shaped by the history and experience of post-Israelite Judeans. The very notion of Israel changed dramatically after Nebuchadrezzar's victory. Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, Israel referred to a political and

geographical entity, a more or less sovereign state. Of course, the geographical extent of this entity fluctuated as national fortunes waxed and waned. Under the first generations of the house of David, the empire incorporated the twelve tribes, and its sphere of influence extended from Egypt to the Euphrates. It experienced internal schism and divided into two separate but related kingdoms, one of which claimed the name Israel. It ceased to exist as a state in 721. Then under Josiah, a king of David's line, Judah regained strength and autonomy. It was the only tribe that retained a sense of historical identity after the long period of Assyrian domination. Josiah sought to rebuild Israel along the lines of the first Davidic kingdom, but those plans were dashed by the rise of Babylonia.

After the fall of Jerusalem, the state of Judah no longer existed independently. The social and religious leaders of Judah were deported to Babylon. Then the notion of Israel changed, and the term came to apply to the people of Yahweh rather than to a state. Israel was then constituted as a loose and widely dispersed collection of people who traced their roots back to the region of Palestine but mostly no longer lived there. Their commonality was now defined by ethnicity and certain religious and social practices including circumcision and observing the Sabbath and Passover. The bond of ethnicity was protected by the prohibition of marriage with non-Israelite stock. This new basis of "Israeliteness" underlies the emergence of **Jews** and **Judaism**. To reflect that the exile is such an important break point in history, everything prior is called the history of Israel, and everything after is called the history of Judaism. And to distinguish the earliest period of Judaism from its later developments, historians refer to it as **Second Temple Judaism** because it corresponds to the existence of the rebuilt Jerusalem temple that lasted from 515 BCE to 70 CE.

The term *Jew* comes from the Hebrew word *yehudi*, meaning "Judean"—that is, someone from the tribe of Judah from which the southern kingdom had taken its name. Because most of the Israelites

in exile were from the tribe of Judah, the term first applied to them. Later it was extended to anyone who descended from this ethnic group or who was devoted to YHWH. The actual application of the designation *Jew* continues to be debated today, especially because citizenship in the modern state of Israel depends on how Jewish identity is constructed. The traditional definition of Jewishness is matrilineal descent: If your mother is a Jew, then you are a Jew. Others would open up membership to include religious converts and those of patrilineal Jewish descent.

The exile shaped the character of the Jewish community from that time on. Jews were now living in many places throughout the ancient Middle East. Even when the Persians allowed Jews to return to Palestine, many chose to stay put. Others had fled to Egypt while Babylon occupied Palestine, and they too chose to stay. This general situation is called the [Diaspora](#), also called the [Dispersion](#) of the Jews. We find that the present reality of Jews living around the world—only a minority are located in the Middle Eastern state of Israel—is still called the Diaspora of Judaism. The form of Judaism evidenced by Jews living in Palestine is called Palestinian Judaism. This diversity of cultural and political settings within which Jews lived gave rise to a variety of ways that Jews related to the dominant culture, including assimilation, accommodation, separation, and opposition. Even the Jews who lived in Palestine were not autonomous but were clients of a succession of empires. These various possible ways of relating as a minority to the majority gave rise to different flavors of Judaism.

Much of the literature grouped under the heading Writings reflects the diversity of voices that emerged within Judaism of the Second Temple Period, reflecting both Palestinian and Diaspora forms. The uncertainties of life in their exilic and postexilic settings fed the Jews' need and desire to understand their historical experience. One way to find direction was to connect with the glorious past. We find that significant portions of the Writings trace their inspiration to

David (the Psalms) and Solomon (the wisdom tradition of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes). The historical writings of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah (the Chronicler's History) reconstructed Israelite history in such a way as to draw strong connections among David, the Jerusalem Temple, and Judean ethnic identity. But other writings challenged Jewish ethnocentricity and exclusivism, such as Ruth. Other books, such as Job, challenged the historical determinism of Deuteronomistic theology by questioning the nexus between righteous behavior and blessing. This was a time of great intellectual creativity and literary activity.

The canon of the Hebrew Bible also begins emerging at this time. The Jews wished to preserve a record of their heritage for future generations and also in part were coming to an understanding of their own identity by writing about it. By the fifth century BCE, we learn that Ezra has "*the book of the Torah of Moses, which YHWH had given to Israel*" (Nehemiah 8:1), which he read to the people in Jerusalem. This is understood to be the Pentateuch in its near final form. A collection of 150 poetic psalms of lament and praise called the Psalter congealed as the canonical collection of hymns for use in temple services. The prophetic books received their final editorial shape also at this time. Important subcollections of the Bible (of course, meaning Hebrew Bible or Old Testament) as we now know it begin emerging.

### **3 THE WRITINGS AS A COLLECTION**

Together the books of the Writings represent an important stage in the history of Israel and the development of its religion and society. Recognizing all these books as the products of postexilic Judaism enables us to better grasp the nature of that community. Even more, it enables us to understand the theological process—that is, how a faithful community saw itself in relationship to God as it wrestled

with its changed circumstances and changing identity.

As you read the individual books of the Writings, be alert to the way they draw upon the literature of the Torah and the Prophets. The Writings sometimes allude to or quote passages that can be found in earlier books. Recalling earlier traditions or prophecies became the occasion to affirm the faithfulness of God or to call the people back to faithfulness.

The Writings manifest the variety of ways the postexilic community responded to its traditions. Given the wealth of books and perspectives in the Writings, it is evident that there was no single literary response to the Torah and the Prophets. They reveal a vital, reflective community of faith that was wrestling with its historical and theological past. It was never of only antiquarian interest to them.

The Writings could be considered the record of a dialogue between the postexilic community and the traditions that had defined its faith to that point. In the Writings, the postexilic community wrestled with the meaning and application of the Torah and the Prophets to (what was to them) the contemporary world. Times change and, in order for faith to be vital and current, traditions must be activated and applied in relevant ways. The Writings are evidence of the repurposing and reapplication of tradition.

None of this should suggest that the Writings are a mere rehashing of prior traditions. They embody significant new departures. For example, wisdom literature, while having roots in the period of the early monarchy, presents a new way of analyzing the world. The genre of the short story, worked out in Ruth and Esther, is a new literary form that presents heroes of the faith as models to be emulated. The Song of Songs is poetry on the theme of human sexuality and love quite unlike anything that came before it. Even the Chronicler's retelling of Israelite history does it in a distinctively new way to meet the needs of the postexilic community.

Multigenerational conversation is evident within the Writings, the dialogue of old formulations of the faith with new, the dialogue of the



past with the present. That dialogue is largely implicit but sometimes explicit. We will pay special attention to this dialogue in our treatment of the individual books. The fact of the dialogue tells us at least this much about the postexilic community: Religious tradition remained central to its life, and while it responded to tradition in various ways, the “word of God” continued to speak powerfully.

The Writings contain an almost bewildering variety of voices emanating out of the larger Jewish community. The individual books of the Writings stand as witnesses of what was deeply important to the postexilic Jewish community. The Psalter affirms the continuing centrality of prayer and worship for sustaining the community of faith. As the song and prayer book of God’s people, it displays the full range of feelings and emotions that are proper for worshippers to bring to God. The preponderance of complaint psalms in the Psalter is testimony to the people’s pain, but the complaint psalm’s typical move to thanksgiving is testimony to their trust in God.

[Wisdom literature](#) supplied a set of principles and values that would sustain the postexilic community. It reaffirmed, in its own way, the principles of reward and retribution, but at the same time it honestly faced the enigmas and apparent contradictions in this view of God’s role in human affairs. It also provided a philosophy of life that stood as an alternative to the philosophies of the dominant cultures in which the Jews lived. Furthermore, when the demise of Davidic kingship and the absence of prophecy put the postexilic community in a crisis of authority, wisdom literature recommended new models of community leadership in the figures of the sage and the *tsaddiq*, or “righteous one,” of the wisdom circles.

The [Five Scrolls](#) as a group affirm the importance of remembering formative moments in a nation’s history. Some of the festivals associated with the scrolls relate to seasonal and agricultural break points such as the return of spring and the harvest. These became occasions for the community to remember foundational events in their past. The Song of Songs was read at Passover, marking the Exodus

from Egypt. Ruth was read at the harvest Festival of Weeks, a time of remembering the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Individually, the books of the Five Scrolls address important community issues. The Ruth and Esther short stories reveal how the Jewish community wrestled with identity and survival issues. Who can be a member of the community? Can outsiders, epitomized by Ruth the Moabite, be full-fledged members? How will we survive within a threatening and hostile empire? Will God take care of us as he did through Esther and Mordecai?

The Song of Songs deals with the most elemental and most essential human virtue—love. It probes love openly and honestly and affirms that genuine love can be realized only when there is full mutuality in personal relationships. The earliest readings of the book in Jewish and Christian communities must be taken seriously. Those interpretations see the book transcending the topic of human love and view it as the most powerful literary monument in the canon to the covenantal relationship of God and his people.

Ecclesiastes represents the wisdom tradition moving to its logical conclusion. It displays a wisdom enterprise turning in on itself when it asks, “What is the purpose of life under the sun?” It reveals the frustration of human intellect in the absence of a piety that provides a context for life. Ecclesiastes both affirms the legitimacy of human wisdom and warns that by itself it is not enough.

Lamentations recalls the destruction of the temple in 587 BCE and mourns the loss of Israel’s central institution. It stands as a memorial to the importance of the human responsibility to remain faithful and the reality of God’s judgment. It was Israel’s unfaithfulness that occasioned the fall of Jerusalem. But the impact of the Jewish yearly commemoration of this tragedy goes well beyond breast-beating and mourning. It is a witness to the grace of God that enabled his people to emerge out of destruction and, though scarred and chastened, to flourish.

Written during a time of national crisis, the apocalypses of Daniel

provide the vision of a triumphant conclusion to the historical process. The great ungodly empires will one day fall and the kingdom of God will prevail. The legends of Daniel and his friends' heroism encouraged the Jews to remain courageous while their faith was being challenged.

Lastly, the historical literature of the Chronicler demonstrates the value and importance of studying the past. The postexilic community, despite all the changes that it had undergone, still found itself in continuity with God's people of preceding eras. Seeing this continuity enabled them to affirm that they still stood in covenant with God and that the covenant endures.

The Chronicler's selective retelling of Israel's history highlights the centrality of the temple and its attendants as well as the importance of the Davidic dynasty. In this way, the [Chronicler's History](#) proposes that any hope of renewal must be centered on a divinely empowered Davidic messianic kingdom centered around God's holy temple. By tracing the origins of the second temple and the priestly institutions back to the time of David and Solomon, they were able with confidence to use them as the basis of community life.

Taken as a body of literature, the Writings demonstrate the persistence and adaptability of Jewish religious faith. In creative ways the community remained true to its traditions, yet found ways to adapt those traditions to meet contemporary challenges.

The foreword to the book of Ecclesiasticus, written in the second century BCE, refers three times to "*the law, the prophets, and the later authors*" (or "*the rest of the books*"). This suggests that the Jewish community had by this time settled on a three-part division of books that together made its canon. The first two parts correspond to the books that we have covered in the Torah and the Prophets. The third part, the Writings, was more fluid and open ended and probably remained such well into the first century CE.

The fact that the Writings eventually did become part of the fixed Jewish and Christian canon is significant. As has been suggested, the

Writings consistently appropriate the traditions of Israel and wrestle with them in light of contemporary challenges. The canonization of the Writings is implicitly an affirmation and authorization of such theological conversation and dialogue within the community of faith. It is an acknowledgment that theological reflection is at the heart of the faith community.

God's requirements are always the same, yet what God expects changes from age to age. God's covenant with his people endures, yet God's people change with changing conditions. The Writings are evidence of the continuing vitality and relevance of God's earliest and continuing revelation to humankind and the need for God's people to continually reexamine and reapply it from generation to generation. Tradition attests that the canonical conversation did not cease when the last book of the Hebrew Bible was written.

## 4 APOCRYPHA

The Holy Bible, even in early times, came in more than one version. Of course, the biggest difference is that Jewish Scripture comes only as the Hebrew Bible in the form of the Tanak, while Christian Scripture comes with a New Testament. Moreover, not only do Christian Bibles reorder the books of the Tanak when they include them as their Old Testament, but Christian Bibles can also differ regarding what books constitute their Old Testaments.

A collection of books called the Old Testament [Apocrypha](#) is made up of fourteen books or parts of books that were written in pre-Christian centuries (see [Table 2](#)). They were included in the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, called the Septuagint, which was widely copied in the ancient world. Because it circulated in the Greek world and later was the basis for the Latin version, called the Vulgate, it became the de facto Old Testament. Only later, during the time of the Protestant Reformation, were these apocryphal books

excised from the Old Testament in an effort to return to the more restricted canon of Hebrew books.

These apocryphal books relate in important ways to the categories of the Writings. All the literary types found in the Writings are also evidenced in the Apocrypha. All books of the Apocrypha postdate the Writings but predate the New Testament. Some of the Apocrypha are actually additions to books found in the Writings. For these reasons, the following chapters on the subcollections of the Writings of the Tanak will also give an account of the apocryphal books that fall into these categories. The New Oxford Annotated Bible is a commonly used edition in the academic community. All of the apocryphal/deuterocanonical books that it includes will be given brief treatment in RTOT’s treatment of the Writings.

**TABLE 2** Old Testament Apocrypha

| RTOT | Category                             | Apocryphal Book                                                                  | Estimated Composition                                                    |
|------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13   | Devotional and liturgical literature | Psalm 151<br>Prayer of Manassch                                                  | Before 50 BCE<br>Late 100s BCE                                           |
| 14   | Wisdom literature                    | Wisdom of Solomon<br>Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Ben Sira)       | 50 BCE<br>Before 180 BCE                                                 |
| 15   | Additions to the Five Scrolls        | Tobit<br>Judith<br>Additions to Esther<br>Baruch<br>Letter of Jeremiah           | 225–175 BCE<br>135–105 BCE<br>100 BCE–93 CE<br>200–60 BCE<br>300–200 BCE |
| 16   | Apocalyptic literature               | Additions to Daniel (Prayer of Azariah, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon)             | 200–100 BCE                                                              |
| 17   | Historical literature                | 1 Maccabees<br>2 Maccabees<br>1 Esdras<br>2 Esdras<br>3 Maccabees<br>4 Maccabees | 100 BCE<br>104–63 BCE<br>100 BCE<br>100 CE<br>100 BCE<br>63 BCE–70 CE    |

# KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Writings*. What are the five categories of material, or subcollections, of the Writings?
2. *Diaspora*. What is the Diaspora, and how did this change the character of Judaism?
3. *Judaism*. When did Judaism emerge, and how did it differ from earlier biblical religion?
4. *Apocrypha*. What does Apocrypha mean, and how does the Apocrypha relate to the Hebrew Bible?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Tradition and change*. How do the Writings affirm both the stability and the ongoing relevance of Israel's historical traditions? How do the Writings bring together Israel's traditions and their later historical experience?
2. *Writings and Western culture*. Take each of the main categories of the Writings and try to identify a generalized realm of human experience that it brings to expression. For example, apocalyptic literature might be considered the "science fiction" of its day because of the way it tries to imagine the future. Then come up with modern examples of this category to illustrate the connection.

# READING THE TEXT TODAY

*Between Text and Community: The "Writings" in Canonical Interpretation*, by Donn F. Morgan (1990), connects the Writings to core biblical traditions and argues that they appropriate and reinterpret them for the ongoing life of the community. *Invitation to*

*the Apocrypha*, by Daniel J. Harrington (1999), is an effective guide through the Old Testament apocryphal books.

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## Psalms: Complaint and Thanksgiving

- [1 Introduction](#)
  - [2 Biblical Poetry](#)
  - [3 Psalm Types](#)
  - [4 Psalm Themes](#)
  - [5 The Psalter](#)
  - [6 After the Psalter](#)
- 

## KEY TERMS

[Antithetic parallelism](#)  
[Call to praise](#)  
[Climactic parallelism](#)  
[Colon](#)  
[Complaint](#)  
[Formal parallelism](#)  
[Form criticism](#)  
[Hymn](#)  
[Invocation](#)  
[Lament](#)  
[Parallelism](#)  
[Petition](#)  
[Praise](#)  
[Psalter](#)  
[Stanza](#)  
[Superscription](#)  
[Synonymous parallelism](#)  
[Thanksgiving](#)



# Ancient Harpist

Music can be found in every culture and has always been one of the most communicative modes of human expression. Not surprisingly, ancient pictures and texts, such as the biblical psalms, demonstrate that the ancient Middle East had a rich musical heritage.

“Text/image not available due to copyright restrictions”.

---

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Music and song have universal appeal because of their capacity to express what we feel. It is one medium that directly and immediately resonates with our moods and dispositions. Even just a few moments of reflection would make us aware of how pervasive music really is and how it affects us. It is available all around us by radio or mp3 player. Advertisers write jingles to imprint their products. Soundtracks sustain moods in movies and television shows. We might hum, whistle, or sing to ourselves during the day or sing along karaoke style when we hear our favorites. And, of course, music is performed in religious worship services. Musical tastes are a component of personal identity, as in “I like classical music” or “I like rap.”

The book of Psalms was Israel’s primary musical repertoire and served the same expressive purposes as our music does for us today. The psalms gave voice to the people’s deepest feelings and emotions, and reading them exposes the pulsing heart of Israel. In them we find the lifeblood of the faith of God’s people. They are Israel’s songs of faith, expressing joy and confidence in God and God’s chosen

leaders. They are Israel's prayers from times of despair, tragedy, and alienation. By studying the book of Psalms, we put ourselves in close touch with the ebb and flow of the people's relationship to God, both personal and communal. The book of Psalms served as the hymnbook and prayer book of Israel from early times and remains the voice of God's people yet today in Judaism and Christianity.

A study of the psalms demands that we investigate both their form and content. The psalms were written as poetry. If you open any English-language Bible and turn to the book of Psalms, this would become immediately evident. English translations use the printing conventions of poetry in their presentation of the psalms: the lines are short and there is a lot of white space on the page. Understanding biblical poetry is essential to understanding the psalms.

The book of Psalms, also called the [Psalter](#), is an anthology of songs and prayers. It is not a book in the sense that one chapter logically follows the next. Instead, the individual psalms are like pearls on a necklace. The Psalter has less cohesion as a book than most other books of the Hebrew Bible. There is a staggering variety of psalm types. And the style of the psalms, going from one to the next, frequently changes dramatically. But this is not necessarily a weakness and in fact may be a key to understanding the book as a whole, as we will see.

As an anthology, the Psalter has a long history of development. Each of the 150 psalms in the collection has its own composition history. The individual psalms came from various places and times. Only after each psalm existed independently for a time were they all gathered together into the Psalter.

Many of the psalms are addressed to Israel's God. But others are about (rather than spoken to) God, the king, or the Torah. Consequently, there is no uniformity across the Psalter in who is being addressed or who is speaking. For the most part, we do not know who wrote individual psalms. The Psalms are commonly associated with David, the king of Israel, to the point that he is

viewed in the popular mind as the author of the Psalter. But this is not entirely correct. The association between David and the Psalms probably arose because he actually wrote some of the psalms and, by general inference from the historical description of David, he was the musical star and poet laureate of the court of King Saul (see 1 Samuel 16:14–23). In fact, the psalms themselves do not universally or unambiguously claim Davidic authorship.

Many psalms contain a label, called a **superscription**, that might contain musical directions, a note on how to perform the psalm, a historical setting, a dedication, or possibly an indication of authorship. In many English versions, the psalm superscription is printed in different type from the rest of the psalm and is not given a verse number. Some versions, such as the New American Bible and the Tanak (Jewish Publication Society), follow the Hebrew text more faithfully by giving the superscription a verse number, thereby rendering it more deliberately as part of the text. Readers of different versions should note that this quirk of the versions can result in the same verse being numbered differently in different translations. In this textbook, we follow the versification of Hebrew printed editions, the NAB, and the Tankh.

The superscription *mizmor ledavid*, a Hebrew phrase sometimes rendered “A Psalm of David,” is often found. While it might indicate Davidic authorship, it might otherwise indicate that the psalm was dedicated to David or belonged to a “David Collection.” It remains an open question just what such a superscription means, but it is not necessarily the author’s signature. It should also be observed that some superscriptions link particular psalms with the names Asaph, Korah, and Moses. Hence, if the *mizmor le-* phrase in a superscription does indicate authorship, many authors in addition to David are credited.

Perhaps we should not even talk about authorship in the traditional sense because it seems most of the Psalter consists of anonymous conventional poetry that developed within the community. The

discussion of speech forms and psalm types found below explains the conventional language of psalmic poetry.

## 1.1 Reading Guide

A potentially insightful way to approach the psalms, developed below, is to read them as instances of basic types. Read at least one psalm from each type, as identified below:

1. Complaint of an individual, 22, and complaint of a group, 137: Complaints or laments are constructed around a situation of distress that prompts the writer to ask God for help.
2. Thanksgiving of an individual, 30, and thanksgiving of a group, 129: Thanksgiving or praise psalms thank God for deliverance from a troubling situation.
3. Hymn, 113: A hymn uses language that compliments and praises the object of affection, usually God, but it could also be something directly associated with God.
4. Creation hymn, 19: A creation hymn identifies the natural world as evidence of divine power and goodness.
5. Kingship of YHWH hymn, 93: This a special case of creation hymns declaring that YHWH has taken his throne as king of the created world.
6. Zion hymn, 48: A Zion hymn praises Mount Zion because it is the location of the Jerusalem temple and the residence of King YHWH.
7. Torah psalm, 1: A Torah psalm hails the gifts of divine revelation and law.
8. Royal psalm, 2: A royal psalm praises Israel's king because he is YHWH's designated ruler.
9. Wisdom psalm, 37: A wisdom psalm contrasts the righteous and the wicked and recommends the way of righteousness.

10. Liturgy psalm, 24: A liturgy psalm is used as worshippers approach the temple.
11. Song of trust, 23: A song of trust expresses confidence in the goodness and protection of God.

## **2 BIBLICAL POETRY**

Israel's hymns, songs, and prayers conform to the general conventions of ancient Middle Eastern poetry. Poetry is concentrated language. It compresses a maximum of thought into a minimum of words. Content and form are essential in poetry, and both need to be unpacked if poetry is to be appreciated and understood. This section explains the basic features of biblical poetry.

A significant amount of Israel's literature is poetic in form. The book of Lamentations is a set of five poetic laments over the destruction of Jerusalem. The core of the book of Job is cycles of dialogue, all set out as poetry. A high percentage of the Latter Prophets is poetic in form. Even narrative literature occasionally contains poetic inclusions, such as the blessing of Jacob (Genesis 49), the song of Moses and Miriam (Exodus 15), the song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2), and David's dirge on the death of Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1).

Defining what constitutes poetry in the Hebrew tradition is not a simple matter. A number of features taken together make for poetry. These features have to do with the nature of the language and the imagery that the poet used, as well as the structures and forms into which the thoughts were poured (see Caird, 1980; Alter, 1985; Fokkelman, 2001).

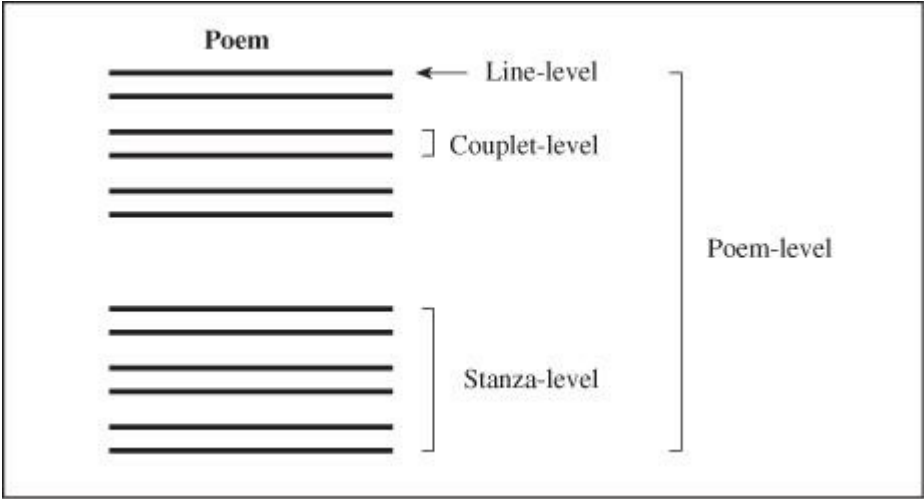
### **2.1 Formal Features**

A brief treatment of biblical poetry will introduce the main levels on

which poetic features operate, as well as the tools and techniques available to the poet at each of these levels. Refer to [Figure 13.1](#) as we discuss the levels of analysis.

Go to the companion website and see “Hebrew Examples.” Listen to the illustrative examples used in the following explanations as they are read in Hebrew.

**FIGURE 13.1** Formal Analysis  
This is the hierarchy of levels and their labels as used in the analysis of the forms of biblical poetry.



### 2.1.1 Line Level

A single line of biblical poetry, sometimes called a [colon](#), or *stich*, may or may not be a complete sentence. If it is not a complete sentence, then it is completed by the second line or, rarely, by a third line. Whether or not a single line is a sentence, there are poetic features that operate on the line level.

*Alliteration* is the repetition of a consonantal sound in two or more

words of a line. It is a sound device that can be perceived only in the original Hebrew version, for obvious reasons. In the following line, notice the repetition of the underlined consonants *y*, *v*, and *d*, repeated in exactly that order.

yovad yom ivad bo  
*Perish the day on which I was born.* (Job 3:3a)

Alliteration can sometimes extend across multiple lines. In the following two couplets from Psalm 122, notice the repetition of the underlined sounds *sh* and *l*, with additional alliteration in *ayik* at the end of each couplet:

sha'alu shelom yerushalayim  
yishlayu ohavayik  
yehi shalom bechelek  
shalvah be'armenotayik  
*Entreat the peace of Jerusalem,*  
*May they prosper who love you.*  
*May peace be within your walls,*  
*Security within your towers.* (Psalm 122:6–7)

This example also illustrates that rhyme, the correspondence of end sounds in words or lines, can operate in Hebrew. The second and fourth lines end with *ayik* (“you/your”), and all but the first line end in *k*.

*Paronomasia* is a play on words, a verbal pun, that makes specialized use of alliteration. The poetry of prophecy contains examples of this device. Amos used it masterfully, as in the following line where Gilgal puns on “go into exile”:

ki hagilgal galoh yigleh  
*For Gilgal will surely go into exile.* (Amos 5:5)

Also, when Amos saw a basket of summer fruit, *qayits*, he took

this as a sign that the end, *gets*, was near (8:12). Paronomasia is used throughout the Hebrew Bible and is not restricted to poetry. For example, Genesis 2:7 says that God formed man, *adam*, out of the ground, *adamah*.

## 2.1.2 Couplet Level

The basic building block of Hebrew poetry is the *couplet* (also called a *distich* or *bicolon*), which consists of two contiguous lines related to each other by form and by content. Usually each verse number in English versions of the psalms is a Hebrew poetic couplet, more rarely a *triplet* (also called a *tristich* or *tricolon*). Formal analysis labels the two lines of a couplet as the A-line and the B-line. A fundamental feature of Hebrew poetry is [parallelism](#), the matching structure of lines within a couplet.

What constitutes the formal relationship between the lines of a couplet has been difficult to articulate. Hebrew poetry does not have rhythm and meter in the same sense as, for example, iambic pentameter verse in Western poetry. Rather, Hebrew poetry seems to be governed by a basic balance between the lines of a couplet (or triplet) whereby each line has the same number of word units. Most couplets have three major stressed word units in each line resulting in a 3 + 3 pattern. In the following example, Psalm 3:2, note that it often takes multiple English words to translate one Hebrew word.

|         |                             |                                  |                           |
|---------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| A-line: | YHWH<br><i>yhwh</i>         | how-many-are<br><i>mah-rabbu</i> | my-foes<br><i>tsaray</i>  |
| B-line: | Multitudes<br><i>rabbim</i> | are-rising-up<br><i>qamim</i>    | against-me<br><i>alay</i> |

Notice how *rabb-*, the core of the words *many* in the A-line and *multitudes* in the B-line, is the same, and both lines end in *-ay*.

Some couplets have unbalanced lines of 3 + 2 word units. This is called *lament meter* (*qinah* in Hebrew), and it dominates the book of



Lamentations and can also be found elsewhere. Some analysts have sought to refine the notion of Hebrew poetic meter and suggest that parallelism occurs when each line of a couplet has virtually the same number of syllables (see Berlin, 1985). O'Connor (1980) suggests that parallelism is not constituted on the formal level by rhythm, meter, or line length but by word devices such as alliteration, verbal repetition, and syntactic dependencies that bind poetic lines together into literary sense units.

The problem with analyzing biblical parallelism is that everyone recognizes that it exists, but agreeing on exactly how it manifests itself is another matter. A widely used method of analysis classifies couplets by the meaning, or semantic, relationship of the two lines. Four basic types of parallel relationship can be identified: synonymous, antithetic, formal, and climactic.

**Synonymous parallelism** is present when the notion of the A-line is repeated in the B-line:

A-line: *Pay attention, my people, to my teaching,*

B-line: *Be attentive to the words of my mouth.* (Psalm 78:1)

In **antithetic parallelism**, the notion of the A-line is stated in opposite terms in the B-line:

A-line: *YHWH protects the way of the righteous,*

B-line: *But the way of the wicked will perish.* (Psalm 1:6)

In **formal parallelism**, sometimes also termed *synthetic parallelism*, the two lines have a parallel relationship as defined by rhythm or line length, but the sense of the A-line is incomplete until it is continued in the B-line. The couplet contains only one complete thought in one sentence spread over two lines, not two coordinated sentences, as in the other types of parallelism. The two lines are parallel in form but not in content:

A-line: *Like a club, sword, or sharp arrow*

B-line: *is one who bears false witness against a neighbor.*  
(Proverbs 25:18)

**Climactic parallelism** combines synonymous and formal

parallelism. The B-line echoes part of the A-line and then adds a phrase that develops the meaning and completes the sense and the sentence:

A-line: *Accredit to YHWH, O Heavenly Ones,*

B-line: *Accredit to YHWH glory and strength.* (Psalm 29:1)

Formal parallelism exposes a basic problem with the broad notion of parallelism. Strictly speaking, formal parallelism is semantically nonparallel parallelism and so is not really genuine parallelism at all. Kugel (1981) challenges the traditional analysis of poetic parallelism and argues that the A- and B-lines of a poetic couplet are not typically synonymous in meaning. He claims that we should not really talk about semantic parallelism at all. Rather, the B-line was intended to be an expansion, elaboration, or seconding of the meaning of the A-line. His summary of the relational sense of the two lines is that it is as if the poet is saying, “A, and what’s more, B.”

## 2.1.3 Stanza Level

A **stanza**, sometimes also called a *strophe*, is a group of couplets that constitute a sense unit within a poem. It is the poetic equivalent of the paragraph. Stanzas can be recognized by features of form as well as content. Breaks between stanzas and the transition from one stanza to the next can be marked by such things as changes in speaker or addressee, the use of words that signal logical or temporal transitions (such as *but* and *now*), and changes in verb forms from imperative to past tense.

Stanza structure is obvious when a repeated refrain is used within a unit. In Psalms 42 and 43, which should be taken together as one psalm, the following refrain is found at 42:6, 42:12, and 43:5:

*My, how downcast you are, my soul,  
Upset within me!  
Put your hope in Elohim.*

*I will praise him yet—  
my savior and my Elohim.*

Parallelism can operate within stanzas to bind multiple couplets into a single poetic unit. The individual couplets can display their own internal parallelism and also have an external parallel relationship with each other. In Psalm 27:1, for example, the A-lines match and the B-lines match.

| <i>Couplet</i> | <i>Line</i> | <i>Text</i>                              |
|----------------|-------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1              | A           | <i>YHWH is my light and my salvation</i> |
|                | B           | <i>Of whom shall I be afraid?</i>        |
| 2              | A           | <i>YHWH is the fortress of my life</i>   |
|                | B           | <i>Of whom shall I be in fright?</i>     |

Thus, using refrains and external parallelism, literary sense units can extend beyond the limits of poetic couplets.

## 2.1.4 Poem Level

Biblical poetry sometimes employs techniques on the level of the entire poem to bind couplets and stanzas into one composition. Some of these techniques involve alphabetic schemes in one form or another. Psalm 119 consists of twenty-two stanzas of eight couplets each. The first lines of each couplet of the first stanza begin with the Hebrew letter *aleph*, the first lines of each couplet of the second stanza begin with the letter *beth*, and so on for each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalm 34 is an acrostic poem in which the first verse begins with *aleph* and each succeeding verse begins with the next letter of the alphabet. Psalms 9 and 10 should be taken as a single poem by the evidence of the acrostic structure that starts in 9 and finds completion in 10.

## 2.2 Literary Features

In addition to the formal and structural features of Hebrew poetry at its various levels, numerous stylistic features can lend a high literary quality to this type of writing. One of the notable features of biblical poetry, and poetry in general, is what we could call compression. Poetry packs big thoughts into very few words. This often means that a great deal is left to the reader's imagination and interpretative skill. The reader has to unpack poetic expressions to draw out their nuance and intent, and often a biblical poetic line can be rendered in different ways. Serious study of biblical poetry (short of learning the original Hebrew) demands gathering a variety of different English versions to compare translations. This reveals the variety of ways that the poetic text could be construed and opens up new interpretive possibilities.

In addition, the reader must be sensitive to the use of poetic figures. Poetry often communicates through the creative and evocative use of language. Imagery can help the reader visualize thoughts or feelings, as in the following verse:

*Dogs surround me,  
a group of evildoers encircles me. (Psalm 22:17)*

Imagery often takes the shape of simile or metaphor. Simile is more obvious than metaphor because it uses the words *like* or *as* to introduce the comparison:

*I am like a moth to Ephraim,  
and like dry-rot to the house of Judah. (Hosea 5:12)*

Metaphor is less direct and more subtle, implying a comparison rather than introducing it with *like* or *as*. Psalm 18 uses metaphors to communicate the steadfastness of YHWH to the psalmist:

*YHWH is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer.*

*My Elohim is my rock.*

*I take refuge in him.*

*My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. (18:3)*

Many of the literary techniques found in narrative and poetry, including anthropomorphism and personification, can be classified as specialized types of metaphor.

### 3 PSALM TYPES

Hermann Gunkel, a German Old Testament scholar of the early twentieth century, largely set the course that modern Psalms studies would follow. He pioneered a method for distinguishing and labeling the conventional speech forms found in the psalms (see Gunkel, 1930). These were then used to identify the life situations of the Israelites that fit these typical ways of speaking. This general approach is called [form criticism](#); perhaps a less threatening and more accurate term could be *form analysis*. Building upon the work of Gunkel, form critics have refined a now widely used set of basic psalm types, also called *genres* (see Westermann, 1981).

Egypt and Mesopotamia had rich psalmic traditions, as did Israel (see ANET, 365–401, 573–586). The poetic forms of biblical psalmody and most of the genres can be matched in extrabiblical literature. For example, the style and theme of the Egyptian hymn to Aton is notably similar to the creation hymn of Psalm 104. Ugaritic poetic literature is especially close in form and theme. Psalm 29 employs Ugaritic-style language and has been analyzed as originally a Canaanite hymn to the storm god Baal (see Gaster, 1947). These materials help us appreciate that Israel's literary heritage has much in common in both style and content with its geographical and cultural surroundings.

An analysis of the configurations of ancient Middle Eastern poetry, including the Psalms, enables us to identify a set of speech forms,

which generally can be identified on the couplet level, and psalm genres which apply more to the composition as a whole. Configurations of couplets, each analyzable in terms of speech forms, go together to constitute psalm genres.

### 3.1 Speech Forms

Speech forms are recurring ways of speaking that can be identified and traced back to typical settings within the experience of the Israelites. Gunkel traced many of the psalmic speech forms back to the worship experiences of the Israelites. Learning to recognize the conventional language of the Psalms will help us appreciate the range of the Psalter's modes of speaking to and about God.

An **invocation** gets God's attention. It usually presupposes a problem the psalmist needs solved:

*Give ear to my words, YHWH,  
pay attention to my groaning. (Psalm 5:2)*

The language of complaint, also called *lament*, describes a psalmist's or community's difficulty and often expresses feelings of abandonment. The language is narrative in form rather than imperative:

*Vindictive accusers confront me,  
they accuse me of things about which I know nothing.*

*The good I did them they pay back with evil,  
depriving me of my life. (Psalm 35:11–12)*

A **petition** calls upon God to do something, perhaps to intervene and give aid or to forgive. Petition usually contains an imperative (and an exclamation point):

*Arise, YHWH!*

*Deliver me, my Elohim! (Psalm 3:7)*

*Wash me completely of my crime,  
and clean me of my sin! (Psalm 51:4)*

Praise language announces the greatness of God. [Praise](#) can be generalized language affirming the character of God, or it can be thanks for some specific act for which the psalmist is grateful. As we will see, this distinction is significant:

*Your name, YHWH, lasts forever,  
your reputation, YHWH, through all generations. (Psalm 135:13)*

*Blessed be YHWH,  
for he has wonderfully demonstrated his steady love to me.  
(Psalm 31:22)*

A [call to praise](#) enlists fellow worshipers in acclaiming the wonders of their deity:

*Praise YHWH,  
praise, servants of YHWH,  
praise the name of YHWH! (Psalm 113:1)*

A [vow of praise](#) promises to credit YHWH with the yet-to-be experienced deliverance:

*I will give you praise in the great assembly,  
my vows I will fulfill before those who fear him. (Psalm 22:26)*

*I will enter your house with burnt offerings,  
I will pay my vows to you,  
what my lips spoke and mouth promised when I was in trouble.  
(Psalm 66:13–14)*

These are just some of the many modes of speech that can be found

in the Psalter. Specific modes of speech combine in various ways in the psalms, often with metaphoric language, to construct larger patterns. These speech-form combinations and their associated psalm genres can now be identified.

## 3.2 Psalm Genres

Biblical research has developed a set of labels and genre classifications for the psalms. The following discussion takes these results and presents them in a simplified way using three major psalm types and a variety of minor types. Note that cataloging the psalms according to genre is not an exact science, and authorities sometimes differ among themselves on the analysis of certain psalms. Furthermore, though there is a set of ideal psalm types, many individual psalms are not “pure” but in fact contain features from several different psalm types. We will examine psalm samples to identify the character of each type.

### 3.2.1 Complaint

The largest number of psalms in the Psalter fall under the heading **lament**. Perhaps the term *complaint* communicates more immediately what this type of psalm expresses. The heart of a **complaint** psalm is a description of the suffering of the psalmist and a plea for deliverance. Many complaint psalms also contain petitions and vows of praise. Frequently, there is also a statement of confidence that God will come to the rescue. There are two subcategories of this psalm type, divided on the basis of whether an individual or a group is speaking.

An individual complaint can also be called an *individual psalm of lament*. About one-third of the psalms in the Psalter are of this type. Often included in this category are 3–7, 13, 17, 22, 25–28, 31, 35,



38–43, 69–71, 77, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 130, and 139–143.

Psalm 22 is a well-formed representative of the individual complaint psalm type, especially notable within the Christian community because it was quoted by Jesus of Nazareth as he was being crucified. The psalmist begins with a complaint addressed to God (2–11) and introduces it this way:

*My El, my El, why have you abandoned me?*

*Why are you so distant when I call for help, when I cry in pain?*

*My Elohim, I call in the day time but you do not answer;  
at night, but I find no relief. (22:2–3)*

Verse 12 is a petition pleading for the deity to make his presence known:

*Do not stay far from me,  
for trouble is close,  
and there is no one else to help. (22:12)*

Next, the psalmist moves to a vivid description of the trouble that he experiences (13–19), a portion of which follows. Note the highly metaphoric language that he uses to describe his enemies and his own problems:

*Many bulls surround me,  
fierce Bashan-bulls encircle me.*

*They open their mouths against me,  
ravaging and roaring lions that they are.*

*Like water my life is draining away,  
all my bones go soft.*

*My heart has turned to wax,*

*melting away inside me. (22:13–15)*

After another petition for God's help (20–22), the writer offers an expression of confidence (23–26) built around a vow of praise (verses 23 and 26) and looks forward to the time that he will have overcome his problems through the intervention of God:

*Then I will proclaim your name to the congregation,  
in the community I will praise you.*

*I will offer praise in the great assembly,  
my vows I will fulfill before those who fear God. (22:23 and 26)*

The psalm ends by encouraging everyone to praise God (27–32):

*All the ends of the earth will worship and turn to YHWH,  
all the families of nations will bow down before you.*

*For kingship belongs to YHWH,  
the ruler over the nations. (22:28–29)*

The psalm moves from personal complaint to anticipation of salvation. The change comes when the psalmist makes a vow to give God the credit for helping him once his problem is overcome (23). He will let everyone know that God is the one who made deliverance possible. The remarkable feature of this psalm, and ones like it, is the psalmist's firm confidence that God will come to the rescue. In expressing this confidence, the complaint psalm actually becomes a psalm of thanksgiving in advance.

A group complaint psalm follows the general outline of the individual complaint psalm but is the expression of the community as a whole. Generally included in this category are 12, 14, 44, 53, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89, 90, 94, 106, 123, 126, and 137. *Group complaint psalms*, also called *community psalms of lament*, expressed the needs of the community when there was a large-scale

crisis, perhaps a drought, enemy attack, or national tragedy. Psalm 80 is typical of group complaint psalms. First, the psalmist tries to get God's attention in the invocation:

*Give ear, Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph like a flock,  
you who are enthroned between the cherubim. (80:2)*

Then in the petition he pleads for God to do something to help them.

*Restore us, Elohim.*

*Let your face shine,  
then we will be saved. (80:4)*

God is invoked as the Shepherd King who sits on his ark of the covenant throne among the Divine Council, here termed the *cherubim*. The language of holy war is used in this psalm (signaled by "*Elohim of Hosts*" in 5, 8, and elsewhere) as the expression of faith in YHWH's power of military deliverance. This is followed by the complaint proper:

*YHWH, Elohim of Hosts,  
how long will you be angry with your people's petitions ...*

*You have let our neighbors fight over us,  
and our enemies put us down. (80:5 and 8)*

The psalmist remembers YHWH's past attention to them:

*You brought us out of Egypt as if we were a vine;  
you drove out the nations and planted it. (80:9)*

Then the psalmist goes back to petition for help and concludes with an affirmation that they would praise YHWH for it:

*Give us life,*

*and we will call out your name! (80:19)*

A subcategory of complaint psalms is imprecation psalms. These psalms are distinguished by substantial curse sections, often calling down upon the enemy the most awful disasters. Disturbingly harsh curses are found in 109 and 137, with 35, 39, 69, 70, and 140 also included in this group.

*May his days be few.  
May another seize his goods.*

*May his children be fatherless,  
and his wife a widow.*

*May his children wander about and beg.  
May they be driven out of the ruins they inhabit.  
May the creditor repossess all that he has.  
May strangers plunder the fruits of his labor. (109:8–11)*

*O daughter of Babylon, you destroyer!*

*Happy will he be who does to you  
what you have done to us!*

*Happy he will be who takes your little ones  
and dashes them against the rock! (137:8–9)*

## FIGURE 13.2

“Text/image not available due to copyright restrictions”.

These words express the deep anger of the psalmist (see [Figure 13.2](#)). It has been difficult at times for synagogue and church to endorse such strong sentiments. And they are not necessarily to be emulated. Yet by including such raw and genuine expressions of

revenge, the Psalter acknowledges the depths to which pain and suffering can drive the people of God. Thus, readers of such psalms find assurance that God hears even such outrageous cries for justice, and attends to human suffering.

### 3.2.2 Thanksgiving

The psalm of thanksgiving is the flip side of the psalm of complaint. Whereas the psalm of complaint anticipated God's deliverance, the psalm of [thanksgiving](#) was written after deliverance had been experienced and is an expression of gratitude. In it the psalmist thanks God for salvation.

The category of thanksgiving should be distinguished from the category of hymn, explained later. A thanksgiving psalm expresses gratitude for an act of divine intervention in the life of the psalmist, whereas a hymn uses descriptive language to praise something about the character of God. Westermann (1981) calls thanksgivings "psalms of declarative praise" and hymns "psalms of descriptive praise." That is, thanksgiving psalms give public testimony to the caring nature of YHWH and his will to save his people, whereas hymns describe in general the nature of God.

As with the complaint category, the thanksgiving category can be subdivided into two subgroups on the basis of who is speaking, an individual or the community. The individual thanksgiving psalm complements the individual complaint psalm. In an individual complaint psalm, the psalmist typically asks for God's help and makes a vow of praise in anticipation of its realization. In the thanksgiving psalm, the psalmist makes good on his vow to praise God now that deliverance has come. Generally included in this category are 9–10, 11, 16, 30, 32, 34, 92, 116, and 138.

Psalm 30, a typical thanksgiving psalm, begins by recalling the adversity now past and then recounts the salvation:

*YHWH, my Elohim, I cried to you for help,  
and you healed me.*

*YHWH, you brought me up from Sheol,  
you gave me life rather than Pit-dwelling (30:3–4)*

The psalmist shares his joy by calling upon God's people to credit the turnaround to YHWH:

*Sing praises to YHWH, you saints,  
and give thanks to his holy name! (30:5)*

After recounting in more detail the story of his affliction and his rescue (30:7–13a), he concludes with his commitment to continue praising his deity:

*YHWH, my Elohim,  
I will give thanks to you forever. (30:13b)*

The group thanksgiving psalm was used on occasions of regional or national celebration. Included in this category are 65–68, 75, 107, 115, 118, 124, 125, and 129. This type of psalm arose out of Israel's experience of victory and deliverance from foreign threat.

*If YHWH had not been on our side—  
Let Israel say it!—*

*If YHWH had not been on our side  
when our enemies attacked us,  
then they would have swallowed us up alive.*

*Blessed be YHWH*

*who has not given us up as game to their teeth. (124:1–3, 6)*

Not many psalms of this type found their way into the Psalter, perhaps because it was assembled in the postexilic period. By this time Israel no longer existed as a nation-state, so no longer experienced saving deeds of national scope. Communal psalms of

thanksgiving became less relevant to their experience.

### 3.2.3 Hymn

A [hymn](#) is a song in praise of Israel's deity or in praise of something about their God. It contains generalized praise language. It is not so much praise for what YHWH has done to save (as in psalms of thanksgiving) as praise for who and what God is. Often included in this category are 33, 103, 104, 113, 117, 134–136, and 145–147.

*Praise YHWH [Hebrew *hallelu Yah*]!*

*Praise, servants of YHWH, praise the name of YHWH.*

*Blessed be the name of YHWH from this time forward and forever!*

*From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of YHWH should be praised!*

*YHWH is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens! (113:1–4)*

The first line of this psalm, “*Praise YHWH*,” is a call to praise, and is literally *hallelu Yah* in Hebrew, giving rise to the exclamation “Halleluyah” (sometimes spelled Hallelujah), where Yah is a shortened form of YHWH.

In addition to hymns of general praise, such as the one above, more specific sub-types can be identified, depending on what it is about YHWH that is deemed worthy of praise. A *creation hymn* finds reason to praise Elohim for the wonder and magnificence of the natural world. Usually included in this category are 8, 19, 104, 139, and 148. Among creation hymns, Psalm 19 is notable for the way it joins the revelation of God's glory through creation (in this case, specifically identified as El) with the revelation of YHWH's expectations through Torah. The first half of this Psalm (1–6) deals with nature.

*The heavens express the glory of El,  
and the expanse evidences his craftsmanship.*

*Daily it speaks volumes,  
nightly it declares knowledge. (19:2–3)*

A hymn of YHWH's kingship celebrates the rule of Israel's deity. Included in this category are 47, 93, and 96–99. Some of these psalms begin with the shout "YHWH is king!" alternately translated, "YHWH reigns!" Another feature held in common by this group is the affirmation that YHWH rules over the entire world. Psalm 93 is typical of this category:

*YHWH is king,  
he is majestically robed,*

*YHWH is robed,  
he is clothed with strength.*

*He has founded the world;  
it will never be moved.*

*Your throne was founded in the beginning,  
you are everlasting.*

*YHWH, the floods raised,  
the floods raised their voice,  
the floods lifted their roaring.*

*But more majestic than the thunder of powerful water,  
more majestic than sea waves,  
is YHWH, majestic on high. (93:1–4)*

The threat to YHWH's power is the primeval waters. Compare the mythological background to the Priestly story of Creation (see RTOT [Chapter 1](#)). YHWH triumphed at Creation over the waters of chaos



and demonstrated thereby his supremacy, here celebrated in hymnic praise.

Mesopotamian documents attest a Babylonian New Year festival when Marduk was ritually enthroned. On the basis of this evidence, some authorities have attempted to reconstruct a festival of YHWH's enthronement as king, yearly celebrated as the autumn New Year observance (see Mowinckel, 1962). On this theory, the "YHWH reigns!" psalms were used in Israel's ritual of YHWH's enthronement. However, direct evidence within the Hebrew Bible for an Israelite festival that parallels the Babylonian New Year festival has yet to surface.

In Jewish traditions, the kingship-of-YHWH psalms are messianic and forward looking in anticipation of the decisive historical realization of the kingdom of God. In Christian traditions, they are eschatological and prefigure the coming of the messiah.

Mount Zion was the location within Jerusalem of YHWH's temple. As YHWH's residence, it naturally became the object of hymnic praise in a *song of Zion*. Generally included in this category are 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, and 122. Psalm 48 praises Zion with obvious hyperbole:

*Great is YHWH  
and he must be praised profusely  
in the city of our Elohim.*

*His holy mountain,  
beautiful in height,  
is the joy of the entire earth—*

*Mount Zion, in the farthest north,  
the city of the great King.*

*Inside its fortress Elohim*

*has demonstrated he is a reliable defender.* (48:2–4)

In the ancient world, mountains were the dwelling places of high gods: Zeus on Mount Olympus, Baal on Mount Zaphon, Marduk on the ziggurat, and YHWH on Mount Sinai. As the Hebrew people moved from the Sinai to Canaan, the residence of their deity moved to Mount Zion within Jerusalem. Although not particularly impressive in altitude, Zion took on the mythic dimensions of divine mountain dwellings. It became a symbol of the presence and power of Israel's God and, consequently, Israel's absolute security (see Clifford, 1972).

A *hymn to Israel's king*, sometimes called a *royal psalm*, praises Israel's earthly king as the representative of God. Generally included in this category are 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, and 110. Although Israel never deified its kings, the kings were still considered to be divinely appointed and stood in a special relationship to Israel's deity. The Davidic covenant spelled out in 2 Samuel 7 has YHWH declare that David's successor "will be a son to me" (verse 14)—so the Davidic king is in some sense the son of God. The Davidic covenant is the object of praise in Psalm 89:

*I proclaim that your loyalty is established for all time,  
your faithfulness is as sure as the heavens.*

*You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one,  
I have sworn to my servant David:*

*'I will establish your descendants forever,  
and build your throne throughout all generations.'"* (89:2–4)

As part of the hymnbook of Israel, used especially in the postexilic period, royal psalms perpetuated the messianic ideal—namely, Israel's hope in the Davidic line to provide national leadership and resurrect an independent nation.

## 3.2.4 Minor Types

The following minor psalm types do not fit easily within the three main categories of complaint, thanksgiving, and hymn.

*Torah psalms*, including 1, 19:7–14, and 119, are hymns in praise of God’s revelation in Torah. At 176 verses, Psalm 119 is famous for being the longest chapter in the Hebrew Bible. In this psalm, as in the other Torah psalms, the writer recommends a life of Torah keeping as the path to wellness:

*Blessed are those whose way through life is blameless,  
who walk in the Torah of YHWH.*

*Blessed are those who keep his decrees,  
who genuinely seek him. (119:1–2)*

The Torah psalms, with their talk of blessing and Torah observance, have a great deal in common with Deuteronomic theology.

Generally included in the category of *wisdom psalms* are 8, 36, 37, 49, 73, 111, 112, 127, 128, and 133. They offer practical advice for living. Also, they operate with a black-and-white contrast between the wicked and the righteous. They hold these traits in common with the wisdom tradition of the book of Proverbs (see RTOT [Chapter 14](#) for Proverbs).

*Do not be intimidated by the wicked,  
do not envy evildoers.*

*For they will quickly dry up like grass,  
and wither like herbs.*

*Trust in YHWH and do good,  
so you will dwell in the land and enjoy security. (37:1–3)*

In their affirmation of God's blessing upon the righteous, they also have much in common with Torah psalms.

A liturgy is a standardized format used in public worship or in a ritual. *Liturgy psalms* have survived for entering the temple (15, 24), temple celebration (68), priestly blessing (134), covenant renewal (50, 81), and ritualized condemnation of foreign gods (82, 115). Liturgies are those psalms that most obviously involved public performance, even if the exact shape of that performance remains unknown. Psalm 15 was a liturgy used for admission to the temple. The first verse was spoken by a priest or other official, the reply given by the pilgrim seeking entry:

*YHWH, who may live in your tent?  
Who may dwell on your holy hill?*

*Those who live morally and do what is right,  
who sincerely speak the truth. (15:1–2)*

*Songs of trust*, also called *songs of confidence*, are found in both individual and community forms. Songs of trust are generalized expressions of faith in God, without having a specific backdrop of adversity. Generally included in this category are 11, 16, 23, 62, 63, 91, 121, and 131. Psalm 23 is the most famous song of trust:

*YHWH is my shepherd,  
I lack nothing.*

*He gives me rest in green fields,  
he brings me to peaceful waters.*

*He refreshes me,  
he leads me down moral paths  
for the sake of his reputation. (23:1–3)*

There is an almost bewildering variety of psalms in the Psalter, as

well as a bewildering set of terms to go along with them. But the variety and range of psalm types opens a window on the spiritual life of faithful Israel. These psalms range widely over all the core emotions that all people at one time or another experience. They also display the various ways that humans relate to God. Recognizing this, we can view the psalms as instances of people of faith, at various moments in their faith experience, bringing their deepest feelings and strongest emotions to God. This truth may help us to grasp why the Psalter has continued to shape the voice of God's people through the ages.

## **4 PSALM THEMES**

The psalms are a kaleidoscope of voices and tones, forms and types. They come from many different people across the broad span of Israel's history and geography. The Psalter is far from being a system of thought. Yet a basic synthesis of some of its thoughts and themes may be able to distill an approach to life in relation to the deity that is worthy of consideration.

### **4.1 Worship the King**

The hymns of Israel sketch a picture of a world where God is king and his kingdom is glorious. The entire Creation is the work of God (19), and everything in Creation is well ordered to sustain life (104). His power is evident in the forces of nature that are under his control (29). This king of Creation maintains order over the forces of chaos and evil (93). God created humanity as the pinnacle of his Creation (8).

All nations are subject to the rule of YHWH (47). He orders the course of history to prosper his people (105, 106). His Torah word maintains justice and right order in the world (119). God rules the

world from his headquarters in Zion (48, 87), and the temple is his home (11). Public ceremonies and processions keep God's beneficent rule from Zion in high awareness (24, 120–134).

God's human agents, Israel's kings, translate divine rule into community life (89) and world affairs (2). At the king's accession to the throne, he is assured of divine support (110). The royal marriage becomes a national spectacle (45). And the role of Israel's kings as defenders of righteousness is celebrated (21).

YHWH is worthy of worship for all that he has done in creation and in history to maintain justice and champion his people:

*Come, let us worship and bow down,  
let us kneel before YHWH our Maker.*

*For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand. (95:6–7)*

## **4.2 Life and Death**

The psalms have a much more inclusive notion of life and death than seems evident in the modern world where life and death tend to be defined in physiological terms. Physicians and ethicists, for example, agonize over when to cease life support of a brain-dead patient. The psalmist, however, views temporal existence as on a continuum between life and death. If the quality of life is high, then there is life; if there is sickness or poverty, then death is near. The place of greatest distance from God is *sheol* (the underworld), the pit, the miry clay:

*May my prayer come before you,  
incline your ear to my cry!*

*For I am full of trouble,  
and my life approaches sheol.*

*I am reckoned among those pit-bound.  
I am a person without strength. (88:3–5)*

There is no memory of God in sheol, and the dead cannot praise God, only the living. In distress the psalmist is confident that he will yet see the goodness of YHWH in the land of the living (27:13). YHWH is the psalmist's only security. He is described as a rock, a refuge, and a fortress. The psalms of trust are expressions of confidence in his protecting power. They give reasons why the psalmist can depend on him in times of complaint.

The complaint form is by far the most common genre of psalms. Along with the thanksgiving form, it reflects the two anchor points of Israel's life before God. The psalmist was either in the depths of trouble and looking toward heaven for help or in the heights of salvation and reflecting on how God had saved him. The testimony of the complaint and thanksgiving psalms, when seen as complementary expressions, is that the person of faith is always oriented to the heights of salvation. If in the depths of disaster, it is by anticipation; if in the heights of wellness, it is by giving God thanks for it.

Brueggemann (1984) has an interesting twist on the standard genre labels and reclassifies the basic psalm types according to their function within the life of faith. Complaints are psalms of disorientation. They express the experience of oppression and loss. Thanksgivings are psalms of reorientation. They affirm a world of justice and order after the experience of restoration. Hymns are psalms of orientation. They direct attention away from the human experiences of loss and recovery to the secure world of blessing, wisdom, Torah, and divine kingship.

Torah is revelation and instructs us in the path of life. Prophecy is proclamation and calls on us to remember that YHWH is life. The Psalter is response to the God of life. It is a record of Israel's faith

response to the God who sustains their very being. Sometimes the response is individual and personal. Other times it is communal and national. But it always comes out of a stance of faith, and no matter what the emotion, no matter how deep the alienation or exalted the praise, it is always directed to the God of their salvation.

## 5 THE PSALTER

The forms of the psalms indicate that they emerged out of the life of the people. The degree to which they reflect formal worship settings or just ordinary life is subject to debate. Many of the psalms are prayers of individuals and may reflect the personal piety of the psalmist.

Some of the psalm types, however, suggest that communal worship was their setting in life, especially hymns with their call to praise. Liturgy psalms (15, 24) and the songs of ascent (120–134) were presumably used in formal processions to the sanctuary. Community laments would have been employed in services of prayer and fasting. Yet there is very little indication in the Psalter itself of the way the psalms were used in worship, apart from the superscriptions, which are themselves secondary. Perhaps the obscure word *selah* that concludes stanzas in certain psalms was a liturgical direction used in communal performance (3, 9).

### TABLE 13.1 Psalm Subcollections



|         |                                |
|---------|--------------------------------|
| 3–41    | YHWH psalms of David           |
| 42–49   | Psalms of Korah                |
| 51–72   | Elohim psalms of David         |
| 73–83   | Psalms of Asaph                |
| 84–88   | Psalms of Korah                |
| 93–99   | Psalms of YHWH's kingship      |
| 111–118 | Halleluyah thanksgiving psalms |
| 120–134 | Songs of ascents               |
| 146–150 | Halleluyah thanksgiving psalms |

---

Although many of the individual psalms were composed in the preexilic period, the collection of 150 psalms called the Psalter dates to the postexilic period. The Psalter is sometimes called the “Hymnbook of the Second Temple” because the compilation and final editing of the Psalter was completed within the lifetime of the temple rebuilt by Zerubbabel, probably sometime around 325–250 BCE. The Psalms Scroll from Qumran is the earliest surviving manuscript that contains a collection of biblical psalms, but their serial order does not match the book of Psalms (see Sanders, 1965).

On the way to compiling the Psalter from individual psalms, there seem to have been stages to the collecting. Clusters of psalms can be identified having similarities of one sort or another (see [Table 13.1](#)). For example, Psalms 93–99 have to do with YHWH as king, and 120–134 are all superscripted as Songs of Ascents. Virtual duplicates of certain psalms exist, which indicates that an independent psalm could find its way into separate subcollections of texts. For example, Psalms 14 and 53 are almost identical, the major difference being that Psalm 14 uses YHWH as the designation of the deity and 53 uses Elohim. This squares with the first subcollection, 3–41, which as a whole uses YHWH and probably originated as a collection in Judah, and 51–72, which as a whole uses Elohim and probably originated in Israel of the divided monarchy.

At some point, the psalms were organized into five books (see

[Table 13.2](#)). Each book ends with a benediction. Division into five books perhaps emulates the structure of the Torah of Moses and was meant to suggest that this work contains the totality of Israel’s response to God, just as the Torah contains the definitive revelation of God.

In Hebrew the Psalter is called *tehillim*, meaning “praises.” On first thought, this seems a bit strange because the single largest category of psalms is the complaint. Yet something especially important is being affirmed through this label. Granted, there is a great deal of complaint, yet even in psalms of complaint the psalmist typically concludes with a vow to praise. Typically, even though the present is a disaster, the psalmist is looking ahead to the heights of salvation. Whether in the heights or the depths, the psalmist is intent on praise. At one and the same time then, the Psalter declares that complaint is authorized for the person of God, it is an allowable approach to God, and yet complaint will not, and must not, end there. Psalms 39 and 88 are rare exceptions to this typical movement of complaint psalms from lament to praise; both contain unmitigated complaint with apparently no salvation in view.

**TABLE 13.2** The Psalter

| Book | Chapters | Benediction         |
|------|----------|---------------------|
| 1    | 1–41     | 41:13               |
| 2    | 42–72    | 72:18–20            |
| 3    | 73–89    | 89:52               |
| 4    | 90–106   | 106:48              |
| 5    | 107–150  | 150 in its entirety |

An analysis of the distribution of psalm genres within the Psalter reveals an interesting pattern that may help justify *praises* as the title of the book. Individual complaint psalms dominate the first half of the book. Group genres of thanksgiving and hymn dominate the second

half. Thus, there is a shift in emphasis from the lament of the individual to the praise of the community as one moves from the beginning to the end of the Psalter. Perhaps this reinforces the movement from death to life in the theology of complaint and thanksgiving noted above.

No matter where Israel happened to be on the spectrum of human experience, from adversity on the one extreme to prosperity on the other, there would be a psalm that could express its deepest fears and highest joys. The psalms taken together contain the full range of human attitudes and responses to God. Delight, appreciation of the work of God, alienation, despair, cursing, compassion. It is all here. The collection certainly is saying that all of these human feelings and emotions are permitted within the fellowship of God's people. And they can be brought before God. They do not have to be suppressed or denied.

Furthermore, these psalms constituted Israel's manual of songs and prayers used for worship. This reinforces the reality that Israel lived its life in the presence of God. Remembering, questioning, praying, and praising were all done in the context of the community's worship. Worship was not isolated from real life but was the activity where real life was sorted out, where the people sought understanding, where life was affirmed, and where credit was given to God.

Go to the companion website for the tables "Psalm subcollections," "Psalm Superscriptions," "Psalm Speech Forms," and "Psalm Genres."

## **6 AFTER THE PSALTER**

The Psalter emerged as a collection of prayers and songs that at some point achieved canonical status within the Jewish tradition. But this

did not put a stop to the further creation of individual psalm-type compositions or variant collections.

The Greek version of the Hebrew Bible's book of Psalms includes a composition called Psalm 151. A slightly expanded version was also found in the Psalms Scroll, a Dead Sea Scrolls document discovered at Qumran in 1956. This psalm is a first-person Halleluyah psalm in the voice of David:

*I was smaller than my brothers,  
the youngest of my father's sons,*

*Still he made me shepherd of his flock,  
and ruler over his lambs. (151:1)*

The psalmist goes on to describe his skill as a musician, his anointing by Samuel, and his defeat of "the Philistine." This psalm is very short and is clearly based on the story told in 1 Samuel 16 and 17. It can probably be understood as a creative expression of the celebrity cult that existed around the idealized figure of David, who was the epitome of the means whereby YHWH would care for his people.

The Prayer of Manasseh stands outside the canon of Jews, Roman Catholics, and Protestants, but is honored in Orthodox Christian communities. It too is framed as a first-person prayer addressed to God. The speaker is King Manasseh, who ruled Judah the first half of the seventh century BCE. The Deuteronomistic historian (2 Kings 21) presents him as the worst king imaginable for the way that he promoted the worship of Baal and Asherah in Jerusalem. Ultimately, the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem was blamed on him. The Chronicler's account of Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33) adds that he was taken captive to Babylon, and while a prisoner he prayed to God and repented of his sins. This psalm fills out the Chronicles account by telling us what his petition of forgiveness might have been.

*Do not destroy me for my sins  
Do not be angry with me forever ...*

*For you, Lord, are the God of those who repent. (13)*

Perhaps Manasseh's prayer was designed to hold out hope for all sinners and sinful peoples including the most notoriously incorrigible. They might still find acceptance in YHWH if only they repent sincerely and convincingly.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Parallelism*. What are the four types of parallelism that can be found in biblical poetry?
2. *Genre*. What are the three basic psalm genres?
3. *Formal analysis*. What are the analytic levels of a poem, and what formal poetic features can be found in each?
4. *Theological analysis*. What is the basic theological outlook of the Psalter as reflected in its most frequent genres?
5. *Superscriptions*. What is a superscription, and what is the relationship between a superscription and the psalm it introduces?
6. *Psalter*. What kinds of evidence do we have that the Psalter was shaped into a "book" by collectors of originally independent prayer and praise compositions?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Form and meaning*. Much of Israel's prophetic literature and many of the writings are in poetic form. Why would Israel's writers use this poetic form of expression? How does the form of literature—in this case, poetic form—affect its interpretation?

2. *Revelation and response.* Apart from the book of Psalms, most of the Hebrew Bible is presented as a divine revelation to Israel. The Torah was YHWH's instruction mediated through Moses. Prophetic literature contained a divine perspective on history. The Psalter, on the other hand, contains the songs and prayers of Israel directed to God. Instead of "top down," they are "bottom up." In what sense, then, does the Psalter lay out the authoritative way in which God's people should approach him?
3. *Genres and life.* Considering the overall shape of the Psalter, what is the effect of having so many different types of psalms in one book? What does the variety in the psalmist's modes of speaking to God have to say about the way synagogues and churches can, and perhaps should, speak to God?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

*The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, by Hermann Gunkel (1967), is the classic introduction to the basic psalm types. *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, by Walter Brueggemann (1995), explains how the psalms express the many facets of the life of faith. *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor*, by William Brown (2002), is an illustrated study of pervasive psalmic metaphors. *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide*, by J. P. Fokkelman (2001), is a tutorial on the forms of poetry and systematically examines each structural level from the line to the poem as a whole. *The Music of the Bible Revealed: The Deciphering of a Millenary Notation*, by Suzanne Haik-Vantoura, John Wheeler, and Dennis Weber (1991), is an attempt to recover the musical score behind the Psalms. A CD-ROM of selected psalms, going by the same name and performed using this approach, makes for interesting listening (Harmonia Mundi, 2000).

# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

## Proverbs and Job: The Wisdom of Israel

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Proverbs](#)

[3 Job](#)

[4 Apocryphal Wisdom](#)

---

### KEY TERMS

[Fear of YHWH](#)

[Job](#)

[Leviathan](#)

[Personification](#)

[Proverb](#)

[Retribution theology](#)

[The satan](#)

[Theodicy](#)

[Wisdom](#)

[Wisdom literature](#)

### *Woman at the Window*

*“I looked out the window of my house, through the lattice I saw a young man who lacked discernment”* (Proverbs 7:6–7). The prologue of the book of Proverbs repeatedly warns young men of the seductions of evil, personified as an alluring woman.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Every culture finds ways to transmit its accumulated knowledge, sometimes through storytelling or through institutions of learning. In the old days, seated around the campfire or the kitchen table, grandparents passed on wisdom, and parents taught their children by word and example. In the Hebrew tradition, no less than any other, parents instructed the next generation on how to cope with life and be productive citizens. Such traditions on life and success are gathered in the book of Proverbs, one of the books of Israel’s wisdom literature.

However, not everyone who adopts the tried and true habits of success will actually find success. The circumstances of life sometimes seem to frustrate every effort to achieve happiness and prosperity. How can this be so? Where is the justice of life? How should one cope with failure? The book of Job asks just such questions.

## 1.1 Wisdom Literature

The category [wisdom literature](#) is a literary genre designation, a scholar’s category to define a large body of literature that is present not only in the Hebrew Bible but also in the literature of Egypt and Mesopotamia. As far as we can tell, it was not a distinctive category within the ancient Middle East itself. Scholars generally reckon the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible to be Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes (see RTOT [Chapter 15](#)), and the wisdom psalms (see RTOT [Chapter 13](#)). Because of its purported Solomonic authorship, the Song of Songs might also be included. And if we take the



Apocrypha into consideration, the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus (Sirach, short for the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach) would be added.

The books of wisdom literature share a number of characteristics, one of which is an interest in instruction, or pedagogy. This is especially evident in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, though less obviously so in the book of Job. We cannot be sure where and how character training and moral instruction took place in Hebrew culture. Some authorities who discuss the setting in life of wisdom suggest wisdom may have originated in a family or clan setting, but others associate it with the royal court.

Whatever the original context of instruction, the content of instruction eventually came to be written down. The wisdom books provided direction to those who sought to conduct their lives in a moral and productive way. They may have functioned as textbooks for those who were teaching and learning how to manage life: how to think, how to cope, how to succeed. They appear to be very early examples of the “how-to” genre that we still have with us today: books like *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *Who Moved My Cheese?*

### 1.1.1 Themes and Types

The notion of [wisdom](#) is difficult to define precisely. The terms *wisdom* and *wise* as used in the Hebrew Bible apply to human efforts to master self, society, and environment. Von Rad, an influential Old Testament scholar, considers biblical wisdom “a practical knowledge of the laws of life and of the world, based upon experience” (1962: 418). Much of the wisdom needed for a happy and successful life is gained by personal experience gathered over a lifetime of reflection on the lessons of life. Such wisdom is gained by astute observation and the search for patterns, especially the observation of the relation between cause and effect. Insights gained

in this way might get passed on by parents who are eager to spare their offspring the pain of hard-earned lessons. Wisdom handed on in this way eventually accumulates over generations and sometimes ends up being considered common sense.

Von Rad (1972) characterizes the biblical program of wisdom as the search for order in creation and society. Behind the search for order is the belief that God created the world to be harmonious and consistent. The goal of wisdom's search is to discern this order—to think God's thoughts after him—and then to design ways that human beings can align themselves with this order. The wise person is the one who discerns this order and lives in conformity with it. Seen in this way, wisdom research in the biblical mold has a lot in common with the modern academic disciplines of the natural and social sciences whose job, broadly conceived, is to discover the laws of the world of nature and human society. But it does not necessarily take a doctoral degree. Attentive students of human nature can also discern fundamental principles of happiness and success.

Crenshaw (1969) understands the task somewhat differently than von Rad and says that wisdom is “the quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people, and the Creator.” He argues (1981) that the dynamic tension between order and chaos is a fundamental concern to Israel's faith as a whole and was not limited just to the wisdom literature. In Israel's worldview, the ordered realm of God's creation is constantly being threatened by the forces of disorder and dissolution. The Creation theology of wisdom literature affirms the divine order by finding it and recommending conformity to it, thereby upholding the goodness and integrity of God. As such, wisdom literature has a strong connection with Priestly Creation theology (see RTOT [Chapter 1](#)).

Murphy (1983) argues that wisdom literature is not so much concerned with the so-called natural order as with human conduct. In other words, he claims that it is ethical rather than philosophical in its orientation. Wisdom literature is the attempt to impose order on

human life rather than to discover it in the realm of creation.

Whybray (1974) views wisdom not so much in terms of the literature that gave it expression but as an intellectual tradition or way of thinking that was not restricted to any one class of people. He says wisdom is innate intelligence and “simply a natural endowment which some people possess in greater measure than others.” He argues that within Israel (and more generally the ancient world) the wisdom approach to life differed from the priestly, prophetic, and legal approaches. The wisdom approach used logic more than revelation to master life.

Wisdom literature deals with everyday life and experience. It might seem to have a secular flavor because it is based on human observation and reason, as distinct from divine revelation, as in the Torah and the Prophets. But, as the very inclusion of wisdom literature in the canon makes clear, any division between secular and sacred is foreign to the Hebrew Bible. Human rationality and the truths that it discovers are no less sanctioned by God than prophetic oracles.

This discussion only goes to show that wisdom can be difficult to define. Part of the difficulty lies with the breadth of the notion. Crenshaw (1969) uses four different labels to classify wisdom literature, and these will help us appreciate the scope of the wisdom enterprise:

1. *Nature wisdom* is based on observations of the real world that enable hu-mankind to understand and coexist in harmony with it. This is represented by the *onomastica*, or lists of names, of Mesopotamian wisdom literature and is a precursor to what the physical sciences do in classifying and analyzing flora and fauna. One indication that this took place within Israel can be found in 1 Kings 4:33 where we learn that Solomon “*spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he spoke of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish.*” Many take this to mean that he undertook himself or the royal court sponsored efforts to label and categorize flora and

fauna. Such an effort is analogous to scientific efforts to classify and create taxonomies of virtually every component of material reality.

2. *Practical wisdom* analyzed the social order, modern analogues being sociology and psychology. Practical wisdom, and probably nature wisdom, originated from the everyday life of the family and clan.

3. *Judicial wisdom* sought ways to adjudicate disputes such as when Solomon settled the matter of the two women who both laid claim to the living child (1 Kings 3:16–28). This type of wisdom originated from the royal court.

4. *Theological wisdom*, sometimes called *speculative wisdom*, sought answers to deeply puzzling issues such as the explanation for human suffering and God's role in upholding justice among humankind. Crenshaw attributes this type of wisdom to professional scribes.

Wisdom literature cannot easily be defined by literary genre. Included within wisdom literature are proverbs, parables, discourses, songs, and poems. What unites these various materials that we call wisdom literature is something bigger: an approach to reality and a theory of knowledge. The thought contained in wisdom literature approaches the world of experience through the power of human intellect, not through divine revelation, as is the case with the Torah and Prophets.

The wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible is evidence that Israel had a lively community of observers and thinkers, perhaps even an intellectual class. Sages searched for the abiding principles of human behavior, sought the laws of the universe, pondered the nature of human life, and raised questions of ultimate meaning.

### 1.1.2 Setting in Life

Social and literary research has investigated the areas of Israelite life that may have given rise to wisdom literature. Was it common folk

wisdom originating out of the family? If so, it would tell us about everyday life and what ordinary people valued. Was it something produced professionally by “academic” wise men? Then it is more a product of sages employed by the royal administration and religious institutions, and as such it reinforced and encouraged the kinds of behavior that they were interested in promoting. It is a question of who set the ethical agenda and determined basic social values. Was it the home or the state?

Von Rad (1962) champions the view that the wisdom tradition was closely connected with the royal court in Jerusalem. According to his sociological reconstruction, the monarchy of David and Solomon involved an intellectual as well as political revolution. A new way of thinking developed that attended less to cultic matters and tended to view the world more humanistically. This intellectual enlightenment was centered at the royal court where professional scribes and sages promoted the new outlook.

Crenshaw (1976) has questioned whether there was such a radical turnabout with the rise of the monarchy. He suggests that many of the sayings of Proverbs could have originated in family and clan settings. Royal wise men did not make them up but may have been the first to collect them and write them down. The connection between Solomon and wisdom, therefore, should not be understood in terms of authorship. Rather, Solomon should be considered the royal sponsor of the business of collecting and organizing family and clan wisdom. He is the one who took an official interest in it and made it the object of study and reflection.

### **1.1.3 Wisdom and the Canon**

Wisdom literature was treated as the orphan of Israelite theology when the study of theology was dominated by a salvation–history paradigm (see Childs, 1970). The salvation–history approach located the central theological importance of the Hebrew Bible in the

historical material of the Torah and the Prophets. These collections portrayed God directing historical events in order to provide salvation for his chosen people. Because wisdom literature did not directly deal with such matters and in fact seemed nontheological when defined in these terms, it was neglected.

The salvation–history approach no longer dominates the study of biblical theology. One of the results is that wisdom literature is now more appreciated in its own right and as a reinforcement of other biblical traditions. In fact, many important points of contact with the Torah and the Prophets can now be recognized. Common interests are found in their Creation theologies (compare Proverbs 8:22–31 and Job 28:20–28 with Genesis 1–2) and in their concern with education and the importance of instilling values in the hearts of Israel’s next generation (compare Proverbs 1–9 with Deuteronomy 6:20–25). Furthermore, wisdom literature’s concern with faithfulness in worship activities—including offering sacrifices, making vows, and praying—shows its commonality with the formal religious regulations of the Torah (see Perdue, 1977).

Traditional wisdom, especially the kind expressed in Proverbs, correlates blessing with right moral behavior. In this it is quite like the prophetic perspective of the Deuteronomistic historian, who correlates the behavior of Israel and its kings with the prosperity of the nation. In this way, wisdom’s theology of retribution has important points of contact with the Torah and the Prophets, especially with the Deuteronomic tradition, and probably should not be seen as an entirely independent conceptual framework.

Wisdom literature also rests on a basic belief in the goodness of God’s created order. This is a premise that gets it into a theological bind, especially on the issue of theodicy. Literally, [theodicy](#) means “the justice of God” and is a label applied to the problem of reconciling the belief that God is a good god who controls the world that he created with the facts of suffering and injustice in the human world. In Israel’s case, the issue of theodicy was occasioned most

pointedly by the conflict between the Torah–Prophets worldview of a God-given order and the plight of the postexilic community, which suffered at the hands of unrighteous idol worshipers. This issue is perhaps behind the theological discussion carried on in the book of Job.

Certainly within the various books of the wisdom literature and then more broadly between Torah–Prophets and the wisdom literature, there is a lively theological conversation, perhaps at times even an argument, between viewpoints in tension while still accepting the same basic premise that Israel’s God is behind all activity in history.

## 1.2 Reading Guide

Read Proverbs 1, which explains the reason why people need to attain wisdom. Read [Chapter 8](#), which poetically explains where wisdom gets its authority. Then read [Chapter 10](#), which is typical of the remainder of the book—a huge collection of self-contained couplets, each laying out the value of wisdom and recommending how a righteous person should live.

Job is a long book that was built around a cycle of dialogues between the man Job and his friends. The book is framed at the beginning and end by narratives that describe the experiences of Job. Read [Chapters 1–7](#), which establish the premise of the book and contain the first cycle of dialogue between Job and his three friends. Then read Chapters 38–42, which contain the climax of the book: the theophany of YHWH and the narrative resolution.

## 2 PROVERBS

As children growing up, we tend to attract advice from our parents, teachers, counselors, coaches, peers, and even younger siblings—

whether we want it or not. Some of it might even be useful, if we could ever find the patience and humility to use it. Advice can take a negative form such as “You shouldn’t eat so much candy.” Or it can be framed as a rhetorical question such as “Wouldn’t you be happier with a different guy?” Sometimes advice comes by way of slogans that we have adopted from the worlds of sports and product advertising, such as “No pain, no gain” or “Just do it!” Other advice just seems to be part of the culture, proverbs such as “A stitch in time saves nine” or “A watched pot never boils.” Sometimes we know the sayings because we have heard them repeatedly, even if we do not actually know what exactly they mean. These are all ways that the culture tries to pass on the wisdom learned by others in the school of hard knocks to those who look like they could use some help.

Through the ages, insights into human behavior and prudent practice have been distilled into short memorable sayings called *maxims* and *aphorisms*. Ben Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, with sayings such as “A penny saved is a penny earned,” is an American cultural artifact. A [proverb](#), much like a Ben Franklin maxim, is a short, memorable saying that encapsulates a truth about life. Every culture has its proverbs, some of which are shown in [Table 14.1](#).

Proverbs are typically presented as matter-of-fact statements describing the way things are. But really they are lessons about the way that you and I should be. For example, the proverb “*One wise-of-heart keeps commandments; a muttering fool comes to ruin*” (Proverbs 10:8) consists of declarative statements, not commands. Nonetheless, the command is obvious: Be a wise and moral person! Although such declarative statements comprise the bulk of proverbs, there are other types of statements in the book, including riddles, allegories, taunts, and autobiographical sketches (for example, see 24:30–32).

**TABLE 14.1** Proverbs from Around the World



|                        |                                                      |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Sumerian               | Into an open mouth a fly will enter.                 |
| Arabic                 | A scholar is mightier than a soldier.                |
| Japanese               | Even monkeys fall from trees.                        |
| Chinese fortune cookie | Wise learn more from fools than fools from the wise. |
| First American         | Nothing is as eloquent as a rattlesnake's tail.      |
| American               | Don't put all your eggs in one basket.               |

---

Like many English maxims, biblical proverbs frequently contain a play on words or a bit of alliteration, at least in the original Hebrew. Most biblical proverbs take the form of couplets containing parallel A- and B-lines. For example,

A-line: *The plans of the heart belong to humans,*

B-line: *The answer of the tongue comes from YHWH.* (Proverbs 16:1)

Parallelism is typical of biblical poetry generally, including the Psalms (see RTOT [Chapter 13](#)) and much written prophecy.

There is a clear division in the book of Proverbs between the prologue and the proverbs proper. The prologue consists of poetic discourses on wisdom topics such as the nature of wisdom and the desirability of attaining it. The proverbial wisdom consists of lists of proverbs.

## 2.1 Prologue (1–9)

The first collection within the book of Proverbs is [Chapters 1–9](#). It serves as an introduction, or prologue, to the rest of the book by developing themes in brief poetic essays. The topics of these essays include the origin of wisdom, justification for studying wisdom, the contrasting character of wisdom and folly, and the role of wisdom in creating the world.

Of all the collections, the prologue contains the most variety and, compared to the remainder of the book, more references to God. This has led some authorities to date the prologue later than the rest of the

book and to say it was composed to form an introduction to the proverb collections of [Chapters 10–31](#). This inference operates on the assumption that early wisdom was secular and that wisdom was incorporated within a religious worldview only later. However, a comparison with the Egyptian wisdom tradition, which predates Israel's, calls this view into question. Egyptian wisdom uses an instructional literary form similar to that found in the prologue, and it also personifies Lady Wisdom as a goddess similar to the prologue.

## 2.1.1 Wisdom Instruction

The purposes for proverbs are stated in 1:2–6, which functions as the introduction to the book. Proverbs are

*For learning wisdom and discipline,  
for understanding insightful words;*

*for getting instruction in wise behavior,  
righteousness, justice, and impartiality;*

*for giving shrewdness to the unlearned,  
knowledge and discretion to the young—*

*Let the wise also hear and increase learning,*

*and the sophisticated improve skill—*

*for understanding proverb and puzzle,  
words of the wise and their riddles. (1:2–6)*

Note all the words referring to education: *learning, understanding, instructing, teaching*. The book of Proverbs is introduced as a textbook in wisdom. This paragraph is especially helpful because, by way of recommending itself, the book provides a

number of terms that are at least partially synonymous with wisdom, thus enabling us to get a sense of the scope of this foundational notion. The notion of wisdom is associated with discipline, instruction, understanding, shrewdness, knowledge, discretion, learning, and skill.

The prologue is framed as the instructions of parents to their son. Wisdom is the knowledge of the right way to live, and they look to give him guidance based on their experience:

*Hear, my son, your father's instruction,  
and do not reject your mother's teaching. (1:8).*

Though perhaps self-evident, this bears mentioning: wisdom is something that can be taught and learned. The son has a choice to make. Will he choose the practice of wisdom, or will he be a fool? It is up to him. Wisdom, unlike intelligence, is neither genetically determined nor a matter of divine endowment. It can, indeed must, be acquired.

## **2.1.2 Fear of YHWH**

A fundamental theme of Israelite wisdom is that the [fear of YHWH](#) is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom. This affirmation is made immediately after the purpose statement quoted above, and serves as that statement's culmination:

*The fear of YHWH is the beginning of knowledge;  
wisdom and discipline fools despise. (1:7)*

The phrase “*wisdom and discipline*” is also found in 2a and functions as a way to bind verses 2–7 together as the thematic introduction to the proverbs. This literary device is called an *inclusion*. Placed before the actual instructions, the “*fear of YHWH*” statement serves as the basic postulate of the book. It conditions all that follows and serves as a reminder that even though wisdom's

instruction has to do with matters of personal behavior, family responsibility, business ethics, and community loyalty, it is grounded in the fear of God.

What is the intent of the phrase “*fear of YHWH*”? The notion may have originated in that edge-of-death fear that Israelites felt in the presence of God, such as when they were gathered at Mount Sinai after the Exodus. But in a wisdom context, fear is not to be understood as terror or fright. It refers to the deep awe and reverence for God that one must have to live properly. One must always be aware that there is a God and that he holds persons responsible for their actions. Knowing that YHWH keeps account of behavior is a marvelous incentive to act wisely and properly.

The truth that “*the fear of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom*” is well-nigh universal in biblical wisdom literature. It is found additionally in Proverbs 9:10 near the conclusion of the prologue, in Job 28:28, in Psalm 111:10 (a wisdom psalm), and in apocryphal Sirach 1:14.

### 2.1.3 Lady Wisdom and Mistress Folly

Throughout the prologue, wisdom and its opposite are made to look like real people through the use of a literary device called [personification](#). Wisdom is portrayed as a respectable and proper woman (1:20–33; 8:1–36; 9:1–6). Folly, on the other hand, is pictured as a loose woman, ready to deceive the young man with sensuous pleasures and lead him to his death (7:6–27; 9:13–18). The description of Mistress Folly is so sexually explicit that it no doubt held fascination for the young man under instruction. Perhaps the literary device of sensual personification was used to ensnare the young man’s attention, just as modern advertising uses attractive women to sell everything from toothpaste to Toyotas.

There are a couple of further observations that we can make about these personifications. First, wisdom is a woman!—a remarkable

concession for a patriarchal society (see Newsom, 1989). In part this was linguistically natural because *hochmah*, the Hebrew word for wisdom, is grammatically feminine in gender. Still, this literary personification develops the notion above and beyond the demands of grammar.

Second, the opposite of wisdom is not so much stupidity as it is willful disregard for right order. Wisdom's opposite is personified as a mistress or prostitute. This figure tries to entice its victims into abandoning honorable behavior for immediate gratification. This is wisdom literature's analogue to the personifications of prophetic literature. Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all characterized the covenant unfaithfulness of Israel as its whoring after other divine pretenders such as Baal.

The importance of female figures in embodying wisdom notions is reinforced in the last chapter of the book in which there is a return to female imagery. The concluding acrostic poem praises the ideal wife (31:10–31):

*A virtuous wife, who can find?  
Her worth is more precious than jewels.*

*The heart of her husband trusts in her.  
Profit he will not lack. (31:10–11)*

This passage contains perhaps the most profuse appreciation of real women in the Hebrew Bible, at least women in their role as wives. The description recalls the positive picture of wisdom, personified as a woman, in [Chapters 8–9](#). There is the hint that the industrious wife is the incarnation of Lady Wisdom. All the ideal qualities of Lady Wisdom are read into the ideal wife. Or, if the prologue was in fact composed after [Chapters 10–31](#), perhaps the virtuous wife was the model for Ideal Wisdom! In either case, this poetic conclusion to the book of Proverbs concretizes the virtues of wisdom and recommends its practice.

## 2.1.4 Creation Theology

The most profound personification of wisdom occurs in 8:22–31. She describes herself as the first thing that YHWH acquired or created, even before the physical world took shape. Wisdom was God’s “mastercrafter,” present with him through the entire process of world formation. The implication seems to be that wisdom was God’s instrument or tool for creating his realm. YHWH founded the earth by wisdom, he established the heavens by understanding, the depths broke open by his knowledge, and the clouds drop down the dew (3:19–20).

This association of wisdom with Creation, combined with the priestly notion that God created the world by the word of his mouth (*“And God said, ‘Let there be ...’*”), ascribes a powerful role to wisdom. Some have suggested that this is the closest YHWH comes to having a consort, or female companion, in the orthodox Hebraic tradition (see Lang, 1986). Creation by word and wisdom was picked up by the New Testament writer John, who intentionally conjoined Jesus of Nazareth with Creation, word, and wisdom when he started his gospel by saying, *“In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.”*

## 2.2 Proverbial Wisdom (10–31)

[Chapters 10](#)–31 are mostly single-couplet proverbs in list form, one after another in almost random order thematically. This contrasts with the wisdom poems of the prologue, which are in the form of more extended poetic essays. The proverbs articulate a world of moral values and character traits in a binary way using antithetic parallelism. Opposites are contrasted and the positive virtue is clearly identifiable. The most frequent opposing pairs are these:

- Wisdom and folly: *Wisdom is a fountain of life to him who has it, but folly is the chastisement of fools* (16:22).
- Righteousness and wickedness: *The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not dwell in the land* (10:30).
- Wealth and poverty: *A rich man's wealth is his strong city, the poverty of the poor is their ruin* (10:15).
- Industry and laziness: *A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich* (10:4).
- Humility and pride: *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom* (11:2).

Proverbs are presented as observations, yet they are not simply statements of the way things are. Given their instructional setting, they intend to recommend the way things ought to be. The sentence wisdom of Proverbs upholds the traditional values of family, hard work, honesty, humility, and loyalty. These proverbs function, then, as an instrument in the socialization of Israel's youth, and probably especially its potential leaders, and a way to instill the time-honored values of the community.

Proverbial wisdom is also situational, or pragmatic. Although proverbs are framed as universal statements, they need to be applied with discernment. Folk wisdom often sounds contradictory taken in the abstract. Put "Look before you leap" alongside "He who hesitates is lost." Which is correct? Well, it depends. Sometimes caution is advisable, but at other times speed is essential.

Likewise, the sage advice of the proverbs needs to be applied situationally and not automatically. The collector of the proverbs recognized this and wryly made his point:

*Do not answer a fool according to his folly,  
or you will be like a fool yourself.*

*Answer a fool according to his folly*

*or he will be a fool in his own opinion. (26:4–5)*

## 2.2.1 Retribution Theology

The traditional wisdom of Proverbs divides humanity into two groups, the wise (equated with the righteous) and the foolish (the wicked). The characteristics and behaviors of each group are identified. But proverbs go further than just classifying two types of people. They indicate what will become of each:

*Wise men store up knowledge,  
but the nonsense of a fool draws ruin near. (10:14)*

In this way the community values summed up in the notion of righteousness are given divine sanction. That is, righteous behavior is recognized and rewarded by God, and folly is punished. [Retribution theology](#) maintains that God uncompromisingly and unfailingly punishes the wicked for their evil deeds and rewards the righteous with long life and prosperity. The book of Proverbs affirms retribution theology as intentionally as the Deuteronomic tradition. It maintains the strict correlation between the practice of wisdom and earthly reward, contrasted with the foolish life that leads inexorably to tragedy and ruin:

*The righteous will never be removed,  
but the wicked will disappear from the land. (10:30)*

The book of Proverbs thus projects a vision of the world as an ordered moral universe where truth and justice rule. This basic theological perspective of the proverbial wisdom outlook will be challenged and refined in other wisdom literature, including the books of Job and Ecclesiastes.

## 2.3 International Connections



Israel did not exist in political, religious, or intellectual isolation from its geographical neighbors. Intellectual and even direct literary contact is nowhere more evident than in Israel’s book of Proverbs.

The book of Proverbs looks a great deal like the instruction literature that has survived from ancient Egypt. The *Maxims of Ptahhotpe* and *The Teaching for Merikare* are major Egyptian writings that contain the advice and instruction of a father to his son (see Simpson, 1972). Likewise, the book of Proverbs is addressed to a son. This literature gives practical advice on how to behave and act in business with different classes of people and how to be a good and effective public servant. The commonality of the book of Proverbs with Egyptian instruction literature suggests that it may have been the court wisdom that was used to train the next generation of Israel’s leaders for effective public service.

*The Instruction of Amenemope* has the most direct bearing on the book of Proverbs (see [Table 14.2](#)). Written in thirty chapters and probably dating to 1200 BCE, it has close parallels to many verses in Proverbs 22:17–24:22.

A study of parallels between biblical and Egyptian wisdom literature reveals that there are varying degrees of dependence, from direct literary borrowing to “thought” borrowing; the latter is barely recognizable because it has been so seam-lessly integrated (see Bryce, 1979). Although there are differences in wording, proverbial parallels with Egyptian instruction sayings seem quite close here in Proverbs. This could be evidence of direct literary borrowing, or it could signal that there was a common Middle Eastern wisdom culture with universal insights of which both literatures partook. Ancient Mesopotamia also had a tradition of proverbial wisdom (see ANET, 425–427, 593–596, and Lambert, 1960).

**TABLE 14.2** Proverbs and the Instruction of Amenemope

| Proverbs                                                                                                                                      | Amenemope <sup>a</sup>                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Direct your ear and hear wise words. Set your heart to know them. For it is pleasant if you keep them in your inmost self (22:17–18a).</i> | <i>Give your ears and hear what is said, give your mind over to their interpretation: It is profitable to put them in your heart (3, 10).</i> |
| <i>Have I not written for you thirty counsels and teachings to teach you what is right and true? (22:20).</i>                                 | <i>Mark for yourself these thirty chapters: They please, they instruct, they are the foremost of all books (27, 7).</i>                       |
| <i>Do not make friends with people prone to anger. With the hotheaded person do not associate (22:24).</i>                                    | <i>Do not fraternize with the hot-tempered man, nor approach him to converse (11, 12).</i>                                                    |
| <i>When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe what is before you. Put a knife to your throat if you have a big appetite (23, 16).</i>     | <i>Look at the cup in front of you, and let it suffice your need (23:1–2).</i>                                                                |

<sup>a</sup>Simpson, (1972).

TABLE 14.3 Proverb Collections

| Proverbs | Title                                                            | Collection  |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1:1      | <i>The proverbs of Solomon son of David king of Israel</i>       | 1:2–9:18    |
| 10:1     | <i>The proverbs of Solomon</i>                                   | 10:1–22:16  |
| 22:17    | <i>Stretch your ears and hear the words of the wise</i>          | 22:17–24:22 |
| 24:23    | <i>Also these are of the wise</i>                                | 24:23–34    |
| 25:1     | <i>Also these are proverbs of Solomon</i>                        | 25:1–29:27  |
| 30:1     | <i>The words of Agur son of Yakeh, an oracle</i>                 | 30:1–33     |
| 31:1     | <i>The words of King Lemuel, an oracle his mother taught him</i> | 31:1–31     |

## 2.4 Proverbs as a Book

The book of Proverbs is an anthology, actually a collection of seven collections (see [Table 14.3](#)). Each consists of a set of short sayings, except for the first, which consists of wisdom essays. Only the first collection ([Chapters 1–9](#)) and the last (Chapter 31) have longer subunits with thematic continuity (for example, Chapter 31 contains an acrostic poem about the ideal wife). Each collection of sayings is identifiable because it is introduced with a title.

The second through fifth collections allude to a monarchy, suggesting a preexilic setting. The first, sixth, and seventh collections are generally considered postexilic. The book as a whole does not demonstrate logical movement or plot. It was probably edited into its

final form late in the 400s BCE.

About the only one who argues that the book has an overall structure is Skehan (1971), who devised an ingenious theory that the book of Proverbs is a “house of wisdom” (9:1). He claims that it was designed on analogy with the Solomonic temple, with a front (1–9), nave (10:1–22:16), and inner sanctuary (22:17–31:31). The “seven pillars” of wisdom’s house (9:1) are the seven columns of text into which [Chapters 2–7](#) can be divided, each having the same number of lines as letters in the alphabet.

### 3 JOB

The book of Proverbs is an effective representation of traditional ancient Middle Eastern wisdom for the way it promotes righteousness and upholds a moral universe. However, other wisdom books, such as Job (covered in this section) and Ecclesiastes (covered in RTOT [Chapter 15](#)), boldly take issue with the traditional definition of righteousness. In particular, the book of Job is a frontal assault on the glib retribution categories of traditional wisdom as represented by the book of Proverbs and the Deuteronomistic tradition. It recognizes that the standard recommendation to “do right and you will be blessed” does not actually work out in every situation.

In this it has much in common with certain Mesopotamian writings (see Lambert, 1960). The Sumerian composition “A Man and his God” counsels one to turn to God with prayer and supplication in sickness and suffering (ANET, 589–591). *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi*, translated “I will praise the Lord of wisdom,” is an Akkadian composition dating to around 1000 BCE. It describes a man’s sufferings and blames Marduk, the lord of wisdom. Yet in the end, the sufferer finds deliverance (ANET, 434–437, 596–600; see also the Babylonian Theodicy in ANET, 438–440, 601–604). The story of

Ahiqar, late 400s BCE, is about a scribe who suffers misfortunes and is later restored to a place of honor (ANET, 427–430).

The biblical book of Job (rhymes with *robe*) ponders the nature of the moral order of the universe, and it does this by examining the microcosm of the man Job. In his experience, there is an obvious misfit between the world of doctrine and the world of experience.

### 3.1 Story Line

The basic story line is straightforward. **Job** was a morally upstanding individual. The text sums up his character in the first verse by telling us “*he fears Elohim and shuns evil.*” He had considerable wealth and a fine family. When the Divine Council met in heaven, YHWH expressed pride in Job, but he was challenged by one called the adversary, known in Hebrew as **the satan**. Note that “the satan” does not have a capital *s* because it is a title, not a name. This is indicated by the definite article *the* (*ha* in Hebrew) that attaches to this word.

The satan figure of the book of Job appears to be a member of the Divine Council and is not immediately to be equated with the devil of later Judaism and Christianity. Satan means *adversary* and *accuser*, and this may have been an official function within the council (see Pagels, 1995). The satan has an interesting if only very limited history in the Hebrew Bible. The term *satan* used in reference to an individual figure is found in only three settings: 1 Chronicles 21, Zechariah 3, and her:

*YHWH said to the satan, “From where have you come?”  
The satan answered YHWH, “From going here and there on  
the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” YHWH said  
to the satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is  
none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one*

*who fears Elohim and turns away from evil?” Then the satan answered YHWH, “Does Job fear Elohim for nothing?” (1:7–9)*

Here in the book of Job, the satan figure is the official heavenly cynic whose task is to challenge the moral basis of humankind’s relationship with YHWH, and vice versa. In this case, the satan is playing the “devil’s advocate” by giving YHWH a skeptical explanation of Job’s goodness. He asserts that Job is calculating, manipulative, and self-serving, and his apparent devotion to Elohim is designed merely to get the best treatment he can.

The adversary challenged YHWH to take everything away from Job in order to see what his reaction would be. YHWH gave the satan permission first to remove all of Job’s wealth and family (see [Figure 14.1](#)) and later his physical health. Job was reduced to being a suffering social outcast.

### **FIGURE 14.1** Job’s Misfortunes



Source: Watercolor drawing entitled *The Messengers Tell Job of His Misfortunes* by William Blake in his *Illustrations to the Book of Job* (1805–1806).

Three friends appeared at his side to give him counsel: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. In conversation with Job, they attempted to make

sense out of his plight. But neither Job nor his friends resolved the conundrum of Job’s suffering. Elihu, another counselor-friend, later appeared, but he does not seem to further the moral argument. Finally, YHWH came to Job in a terrifying theophany and commanded Job’s attention. Job was so overcome that essentially he gave up all moral claims and submitted himself to the power of the divine.

YHWH never really answered Job’s questions directly. Instead, he questioned Job in a severely intimidating way, seemingly belittling Job because he presumed to question the divine wisdom—God, after all, created the world. But in the end, YHWH vindicated Job by reprimanding Job’s friends and requiting Job with a new family and even greater wealth. The story line is relatively simple, the theological arguments not necessarily so.

There are three cycles of dialogue between Job and his friends, though the last cycle is incomplete (see [Table 14.4](#)). After these cycles, a new figure, Elihu, appears and thinks he is going to set everyone straight. Afterwards, YHWH makes his appearance to Job.

**TABLE 14.4** Structure of Job

|       |                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1–2   | Narrative prologue: Job’s tragedy                                                                                                                       |
| 3     | Job’s lament                                                                                                                                            |
| 4–31  | Cycles of dialogue <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. First cycle (4–14)</li><li>B. Second cycle (15–21)</li><li>C. Third cycle (22–31)</li></ul> |
| 32–37 | Speeches of Elihu                                                                                                                                       |
| 38–41 | Theophany                                                                                                                                               |
| 42    | Narrative epilogue: Job’s reversal                                                                                                                      |

### 3.2 Dialogues

One way to savor the meat of the book is to survey the positions of

the main players. But this should not substitute for experiencing the book firsthand. So much of the argument is in the telling. The following summary should not be taken as a replacement for reading the book itself because Job is a remarkable treatise and contains some of the best poetry in the whole of the Hebrew Bible.

### 3.2.1 Eliphaz

Eliphaz observes that no one is ever completely sinless. In no uncertain terms, he upholds the theology of retribution that we know well from the book of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History:

*Think about it.*

*What innocent ever perished?*

*Where were the upright destroyed?*

*I have seen that those who plow evil  
and sow trouble reap the same.*

*By Eloah's blast they perish  
and by the heat of his anger they disappear. (4:7–9)*

Eliphaz then goes on to say that everyone can expect at least a little suffering in life. Job is relatively innocent, so he will not suffer permanently. He should be patient; his suffering will soon be over. As an aside, note the appearance in this text of yet another way to reference the high God: *Eloah* is a synonym of *Elohim* and *El*.

### 3.2.2 Bildad

Bildad applies the theology of retribution relentlessly. He claims that Job's children must have been notable sinners to be treated so brutally by God. No doubt they died justifiably:

*Can El get justice wrong?  
Can Shadday distort rightness?*

*If your children sinned against him,  
he delivered them over to the consequences of their violation.*  
(8:3–4)

Because Job is still alive, claims Bildad, he must not be too bad a sinner.

### **3.2.3 Zophar**

Zophar claims that Job must be suffering for his own sin. Even though Job will not admit it publicly, he must be a sinner:

*You say, ‘My principles are pure,  
and I am innocent before you.’*

*But if Eloah would speak  
and talk to you himself,  
and tell you the secrets of wisdom—  
there are many nuances to wisdom—*

*Know that Eloah is exacting less than you deserve. (11:4–6)*

Job should honestly face his sin and ask God for mercy.

### **3.2.4 Elihu**

Elihu, who seems to appear out of nowhere, speaks after Job’s other three friends have had their say. In Chapters 32–37, he claims that suffering is the way that Elohim communicates with human beings to tell us that we are sinners and that sin is a serious offense:



*He opens understanding by discipline,  
and orders them to turn away from wickedness.*

*If they listen and obey,  
they will end up with good days and pleasant years. (36:10–*

*11)*

All four speakers, the three friends and Elihu, maintain the theology of retribution in some form. Their approach is very much “top down.” In other words, they hold a basic belief in retribution, and they try to square Job’s experience with the theological principles that they hold rather than by developing a theology out of human experience.

### **3.2.5 Job**

Job has no particularly convincing or even coherent response to his calamity. He argues with his friends and attacks their counterarguments. But ultimately he remains confounded. He just does not know how to handle his predicament.

Yet there are certain claims that he maintains throughout, certain points that he will not relinquish. He never gives in and admits personal guilt in the measure that would call forth such suffering. He often urges God to reveal himself and state why he is afflicting him so. He challenges God in what amounts to a lawsuit, much in the manner of the covenant lawsuit popular with the prophets, even though he recognizes that if God actually would appear, he might be powerless to respond:

*If I summoned him and he responded to me,  
I do not believe he would hear my voice.*

*If it is a contest of strength,  
he is the strong one.*

*If it is an issue of justice,  
who could take him to court? (9:16, 19)*

Job's skepticism is amazingly prescient of what would soon happen.

### 3.2.6 YHWH

YHWH does not respond to the intellectual arguments of Job and his friends, all of which have to do in some way with the theology of retribution. He quite ignores that business, neither affirming nor denying whether Job deserves all that has happened to him. By God's bracketing the big question of retribution, the book seems to be saying that retribution is not the real issue. The deity does not conduct his affairs with humans on a strictly *quid pro quo* basis.

Yet God does address Job's urgent plea that he at least show himself. He appeared in a storm theophany (38–41), but instead of answering Job's questions, he put Job on trial:

*Who is this confusing the issue  
with nonsensical words?!*

*Brace yourself like a man.  
I will quiz you.  
You teach me!*

*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?*

*Tell me, if you really have such deep understanding!*  
(38:2–4)

YHWH continues in this same vein, badgering the witness, as it were, and impressing upon Job that he really knows nothing about how God created and runs the world. Job finally admits that he spoke presumptuously in demanding that the deity justify his actions:

*YHWH said to Job:*

*“Will one in need of discipline complain about Shadday?  
Let the one accusing God answer!”*

*Then Job answered YHWH:*

*“I am worth nothing. How can I respond to you?  
I am putting my hand over my mouth.*

*I spoke once, but have no answer for you,  
Twice I spoke, but I will say no more.” (40:1–3)*

By now Job seems properly contrite, having been put in his place by his God. The reader might expect YHWH at this point to coddle Job or at least lay off a bit. Just the opposite occurs. YHWH launches into a second discourse designed further to impress Job with his omnipotence. He describes in great detail his Creation and his harnessing both Behemoth and [Leviathan](#). These creatures have been likened to the hippopotamus and crocodile, respectively, but the overblown language of their description suggests that God is really referring to the mythic monsters of chaos that he tamed and holds at bay (see Day, 1985).

Through the whole encounter, God is absolutely overpowering. One might wonder why God felt he needed to react in such an intimidating way. Yet God does give Job satisfaction of sorts, first, in the very fact of his appearing, and second, by putting the issue of suffering in perspective. The important outcome is that God ultimately affirmed Job, in fact had never abandoned him, even though it had seemed so to Job at the time.

Job wanted to know why, but God would not tell him. This effectively marginalizes the theology of retribution. Perhaps the real issue is trust—can one, will one, simply trust God and “leave the driving to him”? Job is the model of the one who suffers, with all the self-doubt, indignation, impatience, and spiritual agony typical of those in great crisis. But he is also the model of one who trusts in

YHWH even though he fails to comprehend why he is suffering.

### 3.3 Job as a Book

The book of Job consists of a poetic core surrounded by a prose narrative framework. The prose framework relates the story of Job, including the tragedy that strikes him and his family. The poetic core contains the theological heart of the book, including the dialogues of Job and his friends and the appearance of YHWH himself. In the cycles of dialogue, each of Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, speaks his turn, and Job responds to each.

The structure of the book raises problems for the interpreter. What is the relation of the prose framework and the dialogues? Who is Elihu? What is the function of the theophany, and how does it address the issues raised in the book? The narrative conclusion of the book seems especially artificial and unsatisfying to many readers—though, perhaps, not for retribution theologians. In the end, Job's fortunes were restored. He was given sons and daughters to replace those he lost, and his former material wealth was doubled. Although Job was reduced to humble acceptance of the power of God, he was vindicated and told to pray for his three friends who were in the wrong.

Yet the ending is far from satisfying. In one grand narrative stroke, what we thought was the lesson of the book to this point seems to be undone. The lesson of the book seemed to be going in the direction that there is no direct and necessary correlation between righteousness and material well-being. Do we now, at the last, see Job rewarded for being in the right? If so, the theology of retribution seems to be upheld after all: In the end, Job is rewarded for his uprightness. It almost seems that the profound lesson of the theophany (38–41) is deconstructed by the triteness of the “and they lived happily ever after” conclusion.

If Job is first of all theological literature, it may be in the mold of **theodicy**, an attempt to cope with the impenetrable character of the governance of God. The ending may be the writer's somewhat clumsy way of affirming the ultimate justice of God. Heaven as the place where rewards and punishments will be meted out was not an option at this stage of biblical religion. Everyone, whether good or bad, went to the same underworld, called *sheol*. Thus, Job's reward had to come during his lifetime. The writer responsible for the final shape of the book was willing, it seems, to live with the resulting tension of the freedom and sovereignty of God as expressed in the theophany, the validity of the theology of retribution, and the reality of righteous suffering.

Other writers apply different categories to Job. Literary rather than theological approaches to the book abound, and many seem quite able to live with the moral ambiguity of the book. Whedbee (1977) interprets the book using categories of comedy and irony. Westermann (1977) reads it as if it were a biblical lament. Habel (1985) reads Job as an allegory of the people of Israel in the postexilic period experiencing suffering and alienation from God. Modern re-creations of Job creatively wrestle with the human condition and can be recommended for the interpretive possibilities they present. These include Archibald MacLeish's *J. B.* (1956), Neil Simon's *God's Favorite* (1975), Robert A. Heinlein's *Job, A Comedy of Justice* (1984), and probably Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1925; see Lasine, 1992, for the connection to Job).

How, then, should we construe this wonder of literature? Many things could be said. For one, it represents Israel's literary and theological attempt to get behind the phenomena of reality to an underlying truth. It asks the question "Why?" in a serious literary way. Wisdom writing typically approaches reality without dependence on divine revelation, a priesthood, or a theology of history. It uses reason, everyday experience, and the power of deduction in its attempt to discern how the power of God manifests

itself in the world of human affairs.

Furthermore, Proverbs and Job represent an inner canonical dialogue on the theology of retribution. The book of Proverbs affirms it unreflectively and somewhat naively. Not to be too hard on Proverbs, this may have been a function of its role in providing clear and unambiguous moral instruction. On the other hand, the book of Job is a frontal attack on overly simplistic retribution thinking, especially when applied in an accusatory way such as the friends employed. It shows that the principle of retribution is not the only, or even the most important, factor at work in divine–human relations.

Theological reflection on the issue of retribution continues in the book of Ecclesiastes (see RTOT [Chapter 15](#)), but indirectly. Ecclesiastes deflects attention away from retribution by deconstructing it. Because the reality of death levels all rewards and punishments anyway, retribution is not the real issue; how you live your life is.

The body of wisdom literature attests to a lively theological tradition of dialogue and development within the Hebrew Bible. Upon examination, the wisdom literature reveals a spiritual and intellectual tradition within Israel that was not afraid to ask bold and ultimate questions, that tried to make sense out of the diversity of evidences, and that resisted dogmatism in favor of intellectual honesty.

The legitimacy of such theological discussion is affirmed by the very fact that these contrary voices were all included in the canon of Scripture. This recognition should encourage continuing the conversation.

## **4 APOCRYPHAL WISDOM**

And the conversation did continue in the form of two lengthy books in the Apocrypha: the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach.

## 4.1 Wisdom of Solomon

King Solomon is the premier patron of the study of wisdom in the tradition of the Hebrew Bible. This connection was exploited in the work called the Wisdom of Solomon, based on certain historical allusions in [Chapters 6–9](#). It emerged from the Jewish Diaspora of the first century BCE, probably Alexandria in Egypt, and was attributed to Solomon. Certain features of the book, such as the use of the four cardinal virtues of Plato and Stoicism (see 8:7), prove that it was informed by Hellenistic philosophy. The book was designed to demonstrate the superiority of Judaism over Greek philosophy, and it urges Jews to remain committed to their traditional wisdom. It does, however, adopt certain Greek notions along the way, including the preexistence and immortality of the soul.

The righteous consistently stand in contrast to the wicked and the foolish:

*The souls of the righteous reside in the hand of God,  
they will not be touched by torment.*

*Though others think they have been punished,  
immortality is fully their hope. (3:1, 4)*

*The righteous will live forever,  
and their reward is found in the Lord. (5:15)*

Although it may seem that the righteous have been disciplined by God, he will deliver them.

The persona of Solomon exhorts other rulers to search for wisdom as he did. He describes wisdom as a wonderful woman who is eager to satisfy those who pursue her (6:12), using the literary technique of personification that was also used in the prologue to Proverbs. This was facilitated because *sofia*, the Greek word for “wisdom,” is feminine in gender, just as *hochmah* is in Hebrew. Wisdom is then

described as an expression or manifestation of God himself and being of the same substance:

*She is a breath of God's power,  
an emanation of Almighty's glory ...*

*She is eternal light's reflection,  
a perfect mirror of God's action,  
and an image of his goodness. (7:25-26)*

Everything about wisdom recommends her: She is light, she leads one on the path to immortality, and she is one with God—a powerful incentive for Jews of the Dispersion to follow her rather than the heady wisdom of Hellenism.

## 4.2 Sirach

The writer, Jesus ben Sirach, or just Sirach for short, is a wise man and teacher. His work, also known as Ecclesiasticus (not to be confused with Ecclesiastes), was to be used in the training of young men, the next generation of scribes. He wrote the book in Hebrew in Jerusalem around 180 BCE. It was translated into Greek in 117 by Sirach's grandson, who then prefaced the book with his own prologue.

Sirach itself begins with a hymn in praise of personified wisdom (1:1–10). The Lord created her before all things and poured her out upon all else he brought into being. Above all, he bestows her upon all who love him. Perhaps building upon Proverbs 8:22–31, this section, along with Chapter 24, is evidence of the near divine status of wisdom, taking on independent being and a dynamic personality. Some have suggested this talk masks the memory of woman wisdom as the consort of YHWH, present with him from Creation (see Sinnott, 2005).

Sirach has a great deal in common with Proverbs. Both are framed



as the instruction of a father to a son. Both make extensive use of synonymous and antithetic parallelism, and the book largely consists of couplets on topics such as wealth, honesty, happiness, justice, family, friendship, and, of course, wisdom. The traditional retribution outlook is upheld, and there is no talk of immortality because death is inevitable and happens to everyone:

*Do not fear death's decree for you ...  
This is the Lord's decree for all flesh ...  
Whether life is ten years or a hundred or a thousand,  
no questions get raised in Hades. (41:3–4)*

Therefore, accept what befalls you, fear the Lord, and devote yourself to wisdom all your days. Because “*those who fear the Lord will have a happy end*” (1:13).

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Wisdom*. What is the basic biblical notion of wisdom?
2. *Wisdom literature*. What books are contained in the category wisdom literature?
3. *Solomon*. Why and how is wisdom literature connected to King Solomon?
4. *Fear of God*. What do the phrases “fear of God” and “fear of YHWH” mean? How is this notion related to wisdom?
5. *Proverbs*. What is the purpose of the book of Proverbs?
6. *Job*. What is the story line of the book of Job?
7. *The Satan*. What does the Hebrew word *satan* mean, and what is the role of “the satan” in the book of Job?
8. *Retribution*. What is the basic argument of Job’s three friends and of Elihu, and what is Job’s response to their argument?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Social science.* The wisdom tradition represents an empirical, evidential approach to understanding reality. How is this different from a revelational model of truth? How is the biblical wisdom tradition like the modern scientific approach to understanding the world? How is it different?
2. *Moral education.* The original setting of biblical wisdom may have been either the family or the state. Does it make a difference if wisdom comes out of the home rather than the state? How does the setting of values education in the biblical world compare and contrast with the issue of where values should be taught today?
3. *Fear of God.* The wisdom tradition claims that the fear of YHWH is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom. Do you think that this is true? Do you think that a basic knowledge of and respect for God is essential for understanding reality?
4. *Coherence of Job.* Consider the ending of the book of Job. How does the ending of the book relate to the issues raised in the dialogues? Are you satisfied with the ending of the book? Does the ending of the book support or refute the argument of Job in the dialogues?
5. *Character of Job.* Compare the Job of the prologue and epilogue with the Job of the dialogues. Do they have the same personality? With whom is the narrator sympathetic? Job? The friends? God? Or does the writer not take sides?
6. *Retribution.* Does retribution theology adequately account for the human situation in the real world? Consider the retribution theology of the book of Proverbs in relation to the book of Job. Do you see two theologies in conflict? Is there a way to reconcile the two?
7. *The real Job.* Will the real Job please stand up? Evaluate the following characterizations of Job and decide which, if any, fit the picture of Job that you got from the book.  
*He was blameless and upright, he feared God and avoided*

*evil.*—Job 1:1

*You have heard of the patience of Job*—James 5:11 (New Testament)

*Job is a good man, not a wise one*—Maimonides (1135–1204)

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

*The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, by Roland E. Murphy (2002), examines each wisdom book of the Hebrew Bible and the Apocrypha as well as the wisdom outlook generally. *Roots of Wisdom: The Oldest Proverbs of Israel and Other Peoples*, by Claus Westermann (1995), explores the purpose of Proverbs. *In Turns of Tempest: A Rereading of Job, with a Translation*, by Edwin M. Good (1990), is a scholar's rendition, and *The Book of Job*, by Stephen Mitchell (1987), renders the book into verse. The most famous contemporization of Job is Archibald MacLeish's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *J. B.* (1956). *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, by Harold Kushner (1981), uses the argument of the book of Job as its centerpiece.

# CHAPTER FIFTEEN

## Five Scrolls: Stories of the People

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Song of Songs](#)

[3 Ruth](#)

[4 Lamentations](#)

[5 Ecclesiastes](#)

[6 Esther](#)

[7 The Five Scrolls as a Collection](#)

[8 Apocryphal Additions](#)

---

## KEY TERMS

[Acrostic](#)

[Ahasuerus](#)

[Allegory](#)

[Bethlehem](#)

[Boaz](#)

[Esther](#)

[Five Scrolls](#)

[Haman](#)

[Mordecai](#)

[Naomi](#)

[Purim](#)

[Qohelet](#)

[Ruth](#)

## Love and Death

Love is stronger than death, asserts the Song of Songs. This sculpture on an Etruscan funeral monument has lovers in an eternal embrace.



Source: Drawing by Barry Bandstra based on A. Boëthius et al., eds., *Etruscan Culture, Land, and People* (New York: Columbia University, 1963), Figure 476.

Here are some comments on what some have called “The Greatest Song.”

Said Rabbi Akiba: Heaven forbid that any man in Israel ever disputed that the Song of Songs is holy. For the whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the Writings are holy and the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies.

MISHNAH YADAYIM 3:5 (Second Century CE)

... the holy love that is the subject of the entire Song cannot be expressed by words or language, but only in deed and truth. Here love speaks everywhere! If anyone desires to grasp these writings, let him love! For anyone who does not love, it is vain to listen to this song of love—or to read it, for a cold heart

cannot catch fire from its eloquence.

The language of love will be meaningless jangle, like sounding brass or tinkling cymbal, to anyone who does not love.

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX (1090–1153), Sermon 79.1

[The Song is] not allegorical but sacramental. Human passion ... gives us a hint of God's passion for us. We are most like God's love for us when we are aroused in the presence of our beloved. And we best experience a hint of God's love when our beloved pursues us.

ANDREW M. GREELEY, *Love Song* (1989)

---

## 1 INTRODUCTION

We find some of Israel's most mature thinking on the deeper issues of life in the Five Scrolls. Love, loyalty, freedom, destiny, death. Some of these books are delightful, some utterly depressing. Together they reveal a tradition that framed worthy responses to the human condition. In some respects, these five books make for strange bedfellows. They have little form or content in common. The Song of Songs is a collection of throbbing love poetry, Ruth is a romance, Lamentations is a collection of mournful dirges, Ecclesiastes is a philosophical treatise, and Esther is an historical novella. But there are good reasons why they were gathered together into one collection called the Five Scrolls, as we will see in the concluding section.

### 1.1 Reading Guide

Note that these books can be a bit difficult to locate if you are reading a Christian Bible rather than a Tanak. They are rather short

and scattered around—not grouped together in one place as they are in the *Ketuvim*. In an Old Testament, look for Ruth after Judges, Esther after Nehemiah, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs (perhaps titled Song of Solomon) after Proverbs, and Lamentations after Jeremiah. Here is a suggested schedule of readings:

1. Song of Songs: It is a collection of loosely connected poems, so if you read [Chapters 1](#) and [7–8](#), you will not miss any plot but will catch the richness of the poetry and the depth of feeling.
2. Ruth: Read the entire book because it tells a continuous story and is only four chapters long. And, it is very touching.
3. Lamentations: The book is five laments, one each chapter, over the destruction of Jerusalem; read the first one, [Chapter 1](#).
4. Ecclesiastes: Read [Chapters 1–3](#), which include the thematic introduction, the autobiographical sketches, and the “turn, turn, turn” poem made famous by the Byrds. Also read [Chapter 12](#), which ends with an important Torah epilogue.
5. Esther: Like Ruth, this book follows a continuous plot; at ten chapters, it is a bit longer than Ruth but should be read completely.

## 2 SONG OF SONGS

Now for something completely different, in fact unlike any other literature in the Hebrew Bible. The Song of Songs, sometimes called the Song of Solomon, is the stuff of love, rather intimate love. Readers disagree whether or not the book has a plot. It is certainly not a story on the order of Ruth or Esther. Exactly what it is—a drama, a collection of wedding songs, or something else—remains under discussion. Whatever its genre, all agree it makes for titillating reading.

Three voices are distinguishable in the Song: a male lover, a

female lover, and an independent group of observers called the daughters of Jerusalem. Some interpreters prefer to call the two main speakers the lover (the male) and the beloved (the female), but this implies one is active and the other passive, and the female is certainly not passive in these poems. Although less poetic, the terms *male lover* and *female lover* are more authentic.

The female lover is the first to speak:

*May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—  
for your love is better than wine.*

*Your anointing oils are fragrant,  
your name is sweet smelling oil.*

*So the maidens love you. (1:2–3)*

The male lover has just as rich an appreciation of his companion:

*You are beautiful, my lover,  
you are beautiful,  
your eyes are doves.*

*You are beautiful, my lover,  
really beautiful.*

*Our couch is rich,  
the beams of our house are cedar,  
the rafters cypress. (1:15–17)*

The daughters of Jerusalem, to whom the female lover addresses herself at times, seem to be her companions, sometimes encouraging her to rush into the relationship. The female lover more than once urges them to stop pushing her:

*I implore you, O daughters of Jerusalem,  
by the gazelles and wild does,*



*not to stir up or rouse love until it is ready!* (2:7; also 3:5 and 8:4)

The male lover unceasingly praises her physical attributes but appears to get a little impatient for love. Throughout the poems, he calls her by the endearing term *sister*:

*A locked garden is my sister, my bride,  
a locked garden, a sealed spring.* (4:12)

The imagery of the garden seems to give shape to their shared experience.

### **Female Lover**

*Awake north wind,  
come on south wind,  
blow on my garden  
so its fragrance wafts away.*

*Let my lover come to his garden  
and eat its luscious fruit.* (4:16)

### **Male Lover**

*I've come to my garden,  
my sister, my bride.*

*I've gathered my myrrh mixed with spices,  
I've eaten my honeycomb with honey,  
I've drunk my mixed wine and milk.* (5:1a)

### **Companions**

*Eat, lovers, and drink.*

*Be drunk with love. (5:1b)*

The book ends with a stirring affirmation of the ultimacy of love:

*Set me as a seal on your heart,  
a seal on your arm.*

*For love is strong as death,  
passion fierce as Sheol.*

*Its flashes are fire flashes,  
a blazing fire.*

*Mighty waters cannot quench love,  
nor floods sweep it away.*

*If anyone would offer all his wealth for love,  
he would be laughed to scorn. (8:6–7)*

*Sheol* refers to the underworld, which is the residence of the dead. Nothing can compare in power to love, and love transcends even death. Indeed, the Song itself is notable for its frank, and at times frankly erotic, love language. Many of the metaphors are at best thinly veiled allusions to human sexuality. Physical love and sensuality are the source of deep satisfaction in the Song.

The book abounds with interpretive issues. For one, is the book to be read as a drama, or are the poems unconnected sketches? If simply poems, were they intended to be used in wedding ceremonies or other celebrations? Another issue: Is the male lover the same as the king referred to in the book (1:4, 12), with king just being love language, or is the king in competition with a country-boy lover? However one finally decides in regard to the *dramatis personae* of the book and its dramatic movement (if any), the unmistakable message of the book is the power and playfulness of human love.

Although it is one of the Five Scrolls, the Song of Songs has

connections with the wisdom tradition of the Hebrew Bible by virtue of its connection to Solomon. English versions tend to call this book the Song of Solomon although in Hebrew it is entitled the Song of Songs. The phrase “song of songs” is the Hebrew way of stating the superlative; in other words, this is the greatest song, or as one translator puts it, “the sublime song” (Pope, 1977). Similar biblical constructions are “lord of lords” and “king of kings.”

The book received the title Song of Solomon because the first verse appends the words *li-shlomo* to the phrase “song of songs.” Depending on one’s interpretation, this phrase can either be “by Solomon” or “for Solomon.” The same ambiguity exists in many psalm superscriptions where psalms *li-david* are either by or for David (see RTOT [Chapter 13](#)). Perhaps the Solomonic connection was made because Solomon is mentioned in [Chapters 3](#) and [8](#) (though not as author) and because 1 Kings 4:32 says that he composed 1005 songs.

Various theories of the origin of the poems have been suggested. Some of the songs may go back to the early monarchic period though this cannot be proven. The songs have their closest affinity in the ancient period with Egyptian love songs (see White, 1978; Fox, 1985).

### **An Egyptian Love Song**

*The love of my sister is on yonder side  
Of the stream in the midst of the fish.*

*A crocodile stands on the sandbank  
Yet I go down into the water.*

*I venture across the current;  
My courage is high upon the waters.*

*It is thy love which gives me strength;*

*For thou makest a water-spell for me.*

*When I see my sister coming,  
Then my heart rejoices.*

*My arms are open wide to embrace her;  
My heart is glad in its place.* (Thomas, 1961)

This Egyptian love song comes from the 1200s BCE and contains the same interest in animal imagery as the love poems in the Song of Songs. In both compositions, the female lover is referred to as “my sister.” Nowhere outside Israel, except for Egypt, is anything like love poetry in this form found. The next closest parallels might be with certain Syrian wedding songs written in Arabic, but these are much later. Other authorities have suggested such love poetry may be related to ancient Mesopotamian and Canaanite ceremonies uniting divinities in marriage or were used in connection with funeral feasts (see Pope, 1977).

Interesting from a canonical perspective is how the biblical community of faith wrestled with the book. The transparent nature of the love talk in the Song of Songs scandalized many early readers. This was so much the case that the book had some difficulty finding its way into the canon of the Hebrew Bible. The problem was heightened because, like the book of Esther, the Song of Songs never makes reference to God. The book was accepted into the canon only after rabbis viewed it as an allegory of the relationship between YHWH and the people of Israel.

An **allegory** is a story in which people, places, and things have a meaning quite different from and unrelated to their surface meaning. Later, Christian interpreters applied a similar allegorical reading, interpreting it as the love relationship between Christ and the church. This was the reigning interpretation of the Song during the Middle Ages (see Matter, 1990). Smith (1993) notes that in the Middle Ages there were more sermons based on the Song of Songs than on any

other biblical book.

The inclusion of the Song of Songs within the canon is at some level an affirmation of the essential created goodness of sex. Certainly through the history of the formation of the canon, this posed problems. Perhaps the rabbinic and early Christian allegorizing of the book was really just a rationalization for including this love poetry in the canon. All along they appreciated the appropriateness of human love and realized the importance of canonically affirming it. After all, the first commandment in all of Scripture is to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth.

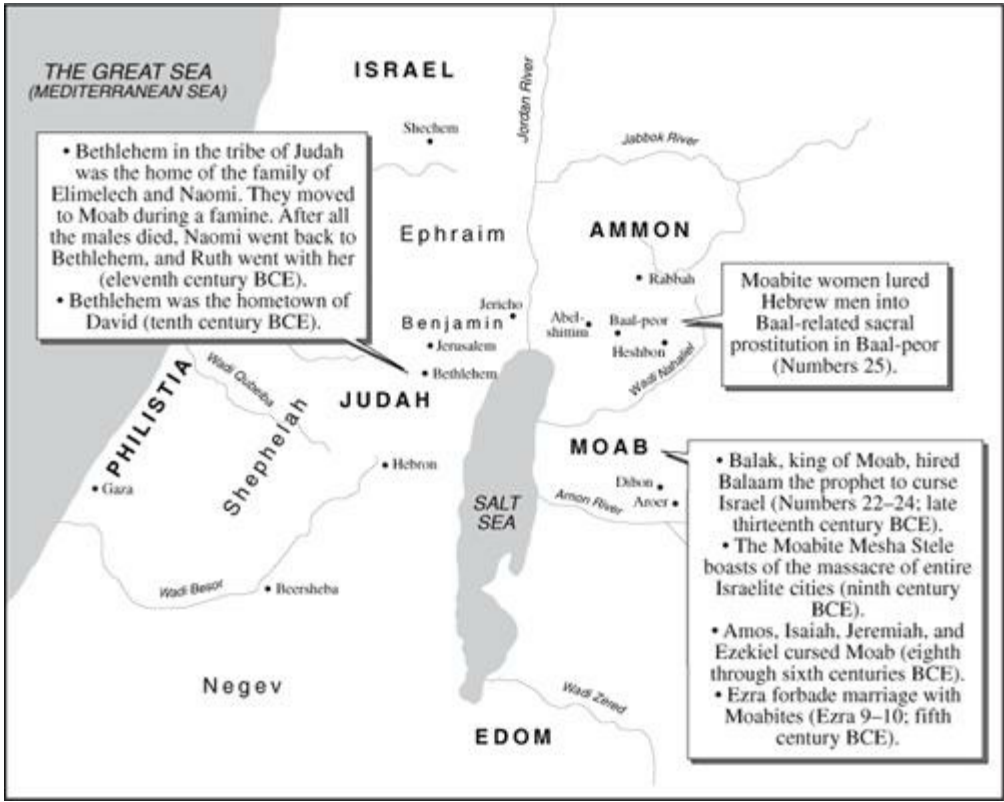
## 3 RUTH

This book tells the story of [Ruth](#), a heroine of faith. The book of Ruth is one of the best-loved works of biblical literature and is notable for its simplicity and directness. The story of Ruth unfolds in four scenes, each corresponding to a chapter.

### 3.1 Scene 1

The Israelite family of Elimelech and [Naomi](#) was forced to move to Moab because of a famine (see [Figure 15.1](#)). An irony of the story is that this family from [Bethlehem](#) (its Hebrew name means “house of bread”) left the supposed land of plenty to live in Moab (see Daviau and Dion, 2002). In this foreign land, their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, married Ruth and Orpah, two Moabite women. After a time in Moab, Elimelech and his two sons died. Only Naomi and her two daughters-in-law survived. Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem and urged her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab and find security with their families there. Orpah chose to remain, but Ruth refused to part from her mother-in-law, demonstrating dogged loyalty:

**FIGURE 15.1** Moab in Israel's History



*Ruth said,  
“Do not urge me to leave you  
or quit following you!*

*Where you go, I will go.  
where you live, I will live.*

*Your people will become my people,  
and your God my God.*

*Where you die, I will die;  
that is where I will be buried.*

*May YHWH do thus and so to me, and even more,  
if even death separates me from you!” (1:16–17)*

Ruth insisted on staying with Naomi. Verse 17 contains an oath formula (“*May YHWH do thus and so to me ... if*”) invoking divine sanction for her pledge. Together Naomi and Ruth entered Bethlehem, with Naomi bemoaning her plight to the women of the city who came out to meet them. The first scene ends with the narrator’s comment that they had come to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. Once again, there is food in Bethlehem, no doubt hinting that Naomi and Ruth might find fullness back in Naomi’s homeland, perhaps in more ways than one.

## 3.2 Scene 2

Ruth went to glean in the field of [Boaz](#), who was a relative of Elimelech, Ruth’s deceased father-in-law. Gleaning is the practice of scavenging a field for stalks left behind by the hired workers (see Leviticus 19:9–10). Boaz took an interest in her, noting especially her loyalty to Naomi in her time of loss. At mealtime he shared his food with her and arranged for the workers to leave extra stalks behind just for her. On returning home, Naomi noted Boaz’s kindness, which continued through the harvest season.

## 3.3 Scene 3

Naomi urged Ruth to capitalize on Boaz’s interest. During the harvest celebration, an overnight party was held on the threshing floor near the new grain (see [Figure 15.2](#)). Ruth discretely snuggled up to Boaz. She asked him to spread his cloak over her: metaphorically to give her protection, but perhaps also offering to spend the night with him. Boaz was overwhelmed by her initiative and interpreted it as an additional sign of her loyalty to Naomi and her deceased husband.

Boaz promised to secure legal rights to claim her in marriage the next day and act as her dead husband's "next-of-kin." The Hebrew term used here is *go'el*, which can also be translated "redeemer."

### 3.4 Scene 4

Boaz went to the city gate in the morning. This is where all public business was conducted. Boaz brought the issue to a conclusion in this way. He announced that Naomi was seeking to sell the property of Elimelech. Another man stood closer in family relationship to Elimelech than Boaz, and this unnamed man initially expressed interest in purchasing the property. Then Boaz added that the one buying the property was required to marry Ruth and raise up sons to her dead husband. This was evidently a component of the levirate marriage practice. According to the Israelite law of levirate marriage (from Latin *levir*, "a husband's brother"), the brother of a childless dead man is required to raise children to his dead brother's name by marrying the widow (see Deuteronomy 25:5–10). This other man promptly withdrew his interest, and Boaz claimed the right to redeem.

#### **FIGURE 15.2** Threshing Floor

A threshing floor is a stone patio set on a hill. Here, grain is beaten out to separate the head from the husk. Ruth rendezvoused with Boaz at such a place. This one is located near Bethlehem.





The transaction was made official with a sandal-passing ceremony that transferred ownership from one party to another, and Boaz took Ruth as his wife. In time Ruth had a son, and Naomi was the first to rejoice. He was given the name Obed, and he became the father of Jesse, who was the father of David. Thus, Ruth, a Moabite foreigner, and Boaz became the great-grandparents of the greatest monarch of Israel.

This is a heartwarming story, as remarkable for its simplicity as for the richness of its values. The story of Ruth is one of those rare Hebrew stories that on its most basic level was intended to be paradigmatic. That is, the characters are portrayed as models of virtue and goodness who should be emulated. Naomi is notable for the way she was concerned about the welfare of her daughter-in-law. Boaz, whose name means “strength” (not coincidentally it was also the name of one of the pillars of the Jerusalem temple, 1 Kings 7:21), went out of his way to show kindness to Ruth and provide for her protection.

Above all, Ruth displayed absolute loyalty to her mother-in-law and her adopted family, especially her dead husband. She was not motivated out of self-interest but faithfully sought to preserve the estate and future of Elimelech. The book demonstrates that ordinary people will find peace and security when they behave selflessly.

An additional moral lesson may have been intended. The main character of the story is Ruth, a female. She stands as yet another example of strong and influential women who influenced the course of Israelite history. Just as significantly, she was a foreigner, and a Moabite at that. The Moabites were hated by the Israelites through most of their history but especially in the exilic and postexilic periods. Yet this story demonstrates how a Moabite could possess the qualities of loyalty and piety and indeed could become part of the royal line of David.

The story of Ruth was set in the time of the judges, making her premonarchic. Because the book was set “*in the days when the judges judged*” (1:1) and provides background to the family of David, the early Greek version placed the book of Ruth between the books of Judges and Samuel, a practice followed by Christian versions of the Old Testament.

The actual time of the book’s final composition is disputed, with some advocating a date of composition in the early monarchy period (see Hals, 1969; Campbell, 1975). Most authorities today maintain a postexilic date. If this is the case, the book may have been intended as a countervoice to that of Ezra, who administered Jerusalem in the 400s BCE. The Jewish community under Ezra aggressively took on a very ethnically defined identity. Immigrants, called *sojourners* in biblical literature, became unwelcome, and Ezra made Jewish men divorce their Moabite wives (see Ezra 10:1–5, Nehemiah 13:23–27, and RTOT [Chapter 17](#)).

The book of Ruth shows appreciation for Moabites, and perhaps sojourners in general, and demonstrates that they can be loyal to YHWH too. Viewed in this way, the book of Ruth may be a protest against excluding all non-Jewish ethnicities from Judaism. This acceptance is also glimpsed occasionally in prophetic literature as, for example, in the Rahab story in Joshua, in the inclusiveness of the gentile nations found in Second and Third Isaiah, and in the book of Jonah—but nowhere more clearly than in the book of Ruth. The point is that foreigners can and sometimes do display faith in Israel’s God YHWH and can demonstrate loyalty to the people of Israel and even become them.

The tale of Ruth is self-contained and has a remarkable wholeness to it. But the book in its final form gives evidence of canonical transformation. The tale of Ruth was taken and given another purpose beyond that of modeling ideal people of God. The original story of Ruth was repurposed and was used to say something about David, even though David’s line does not play any role in the body of the

story.

The story in its bare form was probably not about ancestors of David. It could stand alone without the concluding Davidic notes. But the addition of 4:17b and the genealogy of 4:18–22 give the book an expanded meaning within the national epic. With these additions, the book says that God was at work in the life of Naomi's family to provide for Israel's kingship needs. The genealogical additions do not add anything to the story line but instead give the story an added context of significance as background to the royal family. Composed in the postexilic period from a preexisting Ruth tale and given a Davidic context of interpretation, the book of Ruth is probably evidence for an intense interest in the royal messianic line in the late biblical period.

## 4 LAMENTATIONS

The book of Lamentations consists of five separate poems, each its own chapter. Each of the first four psalms is an alphabetic acrostic of one scheme or another. An **acrostic** uses the letters of the alphabet to develop a scheme. In the case of [Chapters 1–2](#), the first letter of each three-line stanza begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet (twenty-two letters in all) so that the first triplet begins with *a* (*aleph* in Hebrew), the second with *b* (*beth*), and so forth. [Chapter 4](#) consists of couplets rather than triplets in the same scheme. [Chapter 3](#) consists of twenty-two triplets where each line of the triplet begins with the same letter of the alphabet in acrostic progression. [Chapter 5](#) consists of twenty-two single lines without any observable alphabetic progression. Whatever the reason for these elaborate acrostic schemes, they do give evidence of the writer's poetic craftsmanship. To say the least, the poems were not artlessly constructed.

Each of the five poems is a complaint psalm; this is the dominant

psalm type in the Psalter (see RTOT [Chapter 13](#)). Virtually all the lines of the first four lamentations were composed in the 3 + 2 *qinah* meter that typifies the lament style (see Garr, 1983). The specific genre of city lament is also found in Babylonian literature. Compare the lamentation over the destruction of Ur (ANET, 455–463) and the lamentation over the destruction of Sumer and Ur (ANET, 611–619).

Both individual and group complaint forms are found in Lamentations, with the voice changing unexpectedly from singular to plural throughout the poems. When singular voice moves into plural, the singular appears to stand collectively for the group. The focus of attention is on the desolation of Jerusalem:

*How deserted sits the city,  
once full of people!*

*She has become like a widow,  
once great among the nations!*

*Once a princess among principalities,  
she has become a peasant. (1:1)*

The complaints were composed to lament the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE by the Babylonians. The destruction of the temple was the most devastating loss of all, for it meant the loss of their central religious institution and the departure of YHWH from their land. It appears from Jeremiah 41:5 that soon after the destruction of 587, people still came to the temple mount in Jerusalem to worship. Zechariah 7:1–7 and 8:19 suggest that fasts were held, perhaps as many as four a year, marking the destruction. The Lamentations were probably used on these occasions to mark the disaster. This traumatic moment in Israel's history is still observed today within the Jewish community as Tisha b'Av, the ninth day of the month of Av, falling somewhere between the end of July and the beginning of August.

Jeremiah has traditionally been identified as the author of Lamentations because of similarities to his personal complaints. For this reason, the Christian canon has placed the book of Lamentations after the book of Jeremiah. In the Hebrew Bible, it is included with the Writings. Jeremiah composed a lament upon the occasion of the death of Josiah (2 Chronicles 35:25), but there is no evidence he did the same thing for Jerusalem or that he composed the book of Lamentations.

## **5 ECCLESIASTES**

Ecclesiastes is usually included in the category of wisdom literature along with Proverbs and Job. It also has some similarity to the Dialogue of Pessimism of the Babylonian wisdom tradition, also called the Babylonian Ecclesiastes or the Babylonian Theodicy (see ANET, 438–440, 600–601, and Lambert 1960). Yet the style of its language, its vocabulary, and the themes it holds in common with Greek philosophy suggest that it dates to the 100s BCE, making it one of the last books of the Hebrew Bible to have been written.

The theological conversation of Proverbs and Job concerning the relationship of human behavior and divine purpose continues in the book of Ecclesiastes. Like Job, it presents a challenge to traditional theology. The book of Ecclesiastes questions the very purpose of human existence. It asks, What gives lasting meaning to life? If everyone only dies in the end, what is the meaningful difference between righteousness and wickedness? The seriousness with which the book probes this basic human issue makes it one of the most accessible, almost even “modern,” compositions of biblical literature.

Like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes approaches the world of experience looking for order and moral law. Using his powers of observation and reason, the writer attempts to put it all together in a meaningful

way. But unlike the wisdom of Proverbs, the writer of Ecclesiastes fails to see an overall coherence or direction. Sure, some things are predictable and regular:

*For everything there is a season,  
and a time for every matter under heaven:  
a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted. (3:1–*

2)

But ultimately, life seems to have no discernible meaning:

*Everything is emptiness  
and a chasing after wind.*

*There is nothing to be gained under the sun. (2:11)*

The cynical wisdom of Ecclesiastes appears to challenge the neat and tidy world of traditional proverbial wisdom. If there is no ultimate purpose to life, then why should you care whether you are wise or foolish, righteous or wicked?

The book of Ecclesiastes projects itself as the work of Solomon. Solomon is the “patron saint” of wisdom and naturally gets the credit. The reputation of Solomon as Israel’s richest and wisest king (whether true or not matters little for literary purposes) equips the supposed author to pursue the search for ultimate wisdom, unencumbered with limitations. If anyone had the means, time, talent, and opportunity to search for wisdom and find it, that person would have to be Solomon.

Neither the introduction nor any other verse in Ecclesiastes makes the specific claim of Solomonic authorship. The speaker is simply referred to as [Qohelet](#) in the editorial introduction, “The words of Qohelet, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1:1). Qohelet is not a name but a title. Translators are not sure exactly what is intended or why the speaker of the book was called this. The word is related to

the verb “to assemble,” accounting for its title Ecclesiastes in the Septuagint, meaning the “churchman” (related to the Greek word *ekklesia* meaning “assembly” or “church”). The gender of the term *qohelet* is feminine, as is the gender of the Hebrew word for “wisdom”—perhaps not a coincidence.

The book is a royal autobiography and takes the form of personal reflections and reminiscences. It has been compared to the genre of royal journals found elsewhere in ancient Middle Eastern literature (see Longman, 1991). Qohelet’s personal story is prefaced with a poem that clearly expresses the theme of the book as a whole and sets the mood:

*Emptiness, Qohelet says, everything is emptiness. What do people gain from all the work they do under the sun? A generation goes and a generation comes, yet the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and rushes back again to the place from which it rises. The wind blows south, then returns to the north, round and round goes the wind, on its rounds it circulates. All streams flow to the sea, yet the sea does not fill up. All matters are tiring, more than anyone can express. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. What is is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done. There is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it can be said, “See this is new!”—It has already been, in eras before us. The people of ages past are no longer remembered, nor will there be any remembrance of people yet to come by those who come after them. (1:2–11)*

The central thought of Ecclesiastes is contained in that first line “*Emptiness, everything is emptiness.*” The Hebrew term for “emptiness,” or “vanity” in older translations, is *hevel*, which means

“mist” or “vapor.” The assertion that all is empty is literally the beginning and the end of the book, found here in 1:2 and also in 12:8. The circularity of the system perceived by Qohelet, especially the lack of directionality and goal, is reflected in the very structure of the book, which ends where it began.

Qohelet observes the circularity of nature, the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. He sees regularity and predictability. But in seeing circularity, he does not sense the beauty of a self-renewing system. Rather, he senses futility and purposelessness. The wisdom enterprise up until now had prided itself in discovering and articulating the order of nature, but that has turned into something quite different, a reason for despair.

In [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#), Qohelet tells us how and why he arrived at this conclusion. With various experiments and investigations, he sought to find the location of meaning. First, he tried raw intellect. Applying his mind to know wisdom and folly, he only found that the attempt was an experiment in frustration.

Then he tried the opposite approach. He gave his life over to the pursuit of physical pleasure and personal satisfaction. He drank strong drink, built a magnificent home with palatial grounds, accumulated precious metals, possessions, and a large staff of servants. Although he found fulfillment in none of these, he still recognized there might be provisional satisfaction in these pursuits. He concluded that “*there is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their work*” (2:24). The cause of Qohelet’s frustration is the limited vantage point available to humanity.

The phrase “*under the sun*” occurs twenty-nine times in the book, usually in statements such as “*I saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*” (9:11). This may just be another way of saying “on earth,” or it may serve to reinforce the limited scope of human reason and its incapacity to see the whole:



*God made everything appropriate to its time. He has also done this—a sense of eternity he put into the heart of humankind, but without the ability to find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. (3:11)*

The writer suspects that there is more to life than he or anyone else can figure out. God has planted in the human mind the notion of eternity, a reality that transcends human finiteness, yet he has not equipped humans to grasp it. Because we cannot transcend our limits, Qohelet counsels us to enjoy the good things that God's creation has to offer.

The book of Ecclesiastes frankly faces the limited capacity of the human spirit to create ultimate meaning. The narrator does not deny that ultimate meaning might exist, but he doubts that we can expect to find it. Yet all the while, he does not come to the conclusion that there is no order. He affirms the reality and goodness of God (Elohim, never YHWH in this book). And he affirms the continuing need to fear God.

Chapters 4–11 mostly contain rather traditional wisdom observations, generally on the order of what can be found in the book of Proverbs. He gives advice for coping in a world where meaningful activity is hard to find. Granted, all may be ultimately meaningless, yet even Qohelet understands that life must be lived and might even be enjoyed for what it does have to offer. Yet many of his observations tend to highlight the unfortunate or even tragic side of human experience. Note how Qohelet appends a cynical commentary to an otherwise commonplace proverbial statement:

*The lover of money will not be satisfied with money;  
nor the lover of wealth with gain.*

*This too is emptiness. (4:10)*

Was Qohelet a heretic? Or was he just frank and honest? For obvious reasons, the book of Ecclesiastes proved somewhat difficult to handle within the Jewish community of faith. It just does not contain the kind of upbeat, positive message that the faithful wanted to hear. Yet the book was not just dismissed out of hand as the depressed (and depressing) ruminations of a tired old philosopher. There was truth in what Qohelet said, at least at some level. It probably rang true especially to Jews who were looking to survive in a world dominated by Greek rule where they felt at the mercy of despotic political powers. They could not see God's larger purpose and felt unable to affect it significantly.

The Jewish community struggled to canonize Ecclesiastes. Because of its somewhat troubling observations, the people perceived the need to retrieve the book from heresy and give it an orthodox patina. The editorial history of the book gives evidence of their efforts. Although there has been considerable discussion concerning the structure and editorial shape of the book, there is a general consensus that the core of the book of Ecclesiastes is 1:2 through 12:8. To this was added the introduction that "Solomon-ized" the book and a series of two, perhaps three, conclusions.

Verses 9–11 of [Chapter 12](#) break with the style of the rest of the book, which is aphoristic and autobiographical, and were probably written by a devoted disciple of Qohelet. These verses affirm the wisdom of Qohelet and his effectiveness as a thinker and teacher:

*In addition to being wise, Qohelet taught the people knowledge, and how to judge, study and arrange many proverbs. Qohelet looked for pleasing words and wrote truthful words plainly. The sayings of the wise are like prods; like nails well set are the collected sayings of the one shepherd. (12:9–11)*

Verses 13–14, on the other hand, were written by a moralist who was more conventional than Qohelet:

*The end of the matter is this, all has been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments. That is the whole duty of humankind. For God will bring into judgment every deed, even every secret one, whether it is good or evil. (12:13–14)*

The editor got the final say (see Sheppard, 1980). It appears as if an orthodox scribe or priest was worried that Qohelet's investigation would lead to nihilism or denial of God. "Lest you be tempted to abandon the faith," he says, "Fear God! Don't give up the faith; don't give up the demands of covenant! God still judges human actions. Lack of understanding is no excuse for immorality."

This concluding editorial is really quite remarkable. It attests the vitality of the faith of the postexilic community. It obviously accepted, even perhaps encouraged, the creative kinds of thinking that took Torah to the edge. Applying Torah to their present circumstances took great effort and was a challenge. Qohelet demonstrates that the integration and synthesis were not complete—yet room was made for theological thinking that stood on the verge of being unorthodox.

## **6 ESTHER**

The book of Esther does not get the same unqualified reception by Jews and Christians as the book of Ruth, the other heroine tale. Not only does the book of Esther lack the standard religious features one comes to expect in Hebrew literature—reference to the God of Israel, the covenant, Torah, and Jerusalem—it appears to condone certain baser human impulses such as violence and vengeance. Yet

the book is part of the Hebrew canon. We need to discover why, and we need to deal with it.

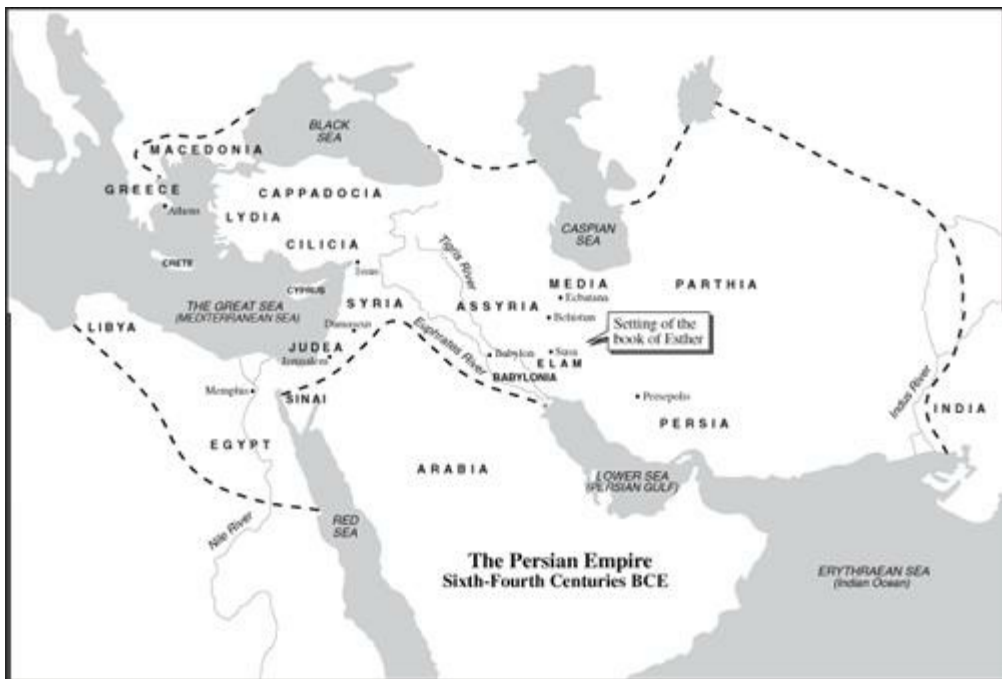
The story of Esther is set in the Persian period, referred to by historians as the Achaemenid Empire (see [Figure 15.3](#)). The Persian monarch of the story is called [Ahasuerus](#), known to historians as Xerxes I, who ruled from 486 to 465 BCE. The story is set in Susa, the royal winter palace though Persepolis was the main capital of the empire.

The story begins with a description of a great feast. When Queen Vashti refused to be the main entertainment for the male guests, she was summarily deposed. Ahasuerus organized a “Miss Persia” contest to replace her, and Esther won.

[Esther](#) was a Jewish orphan who had been cared for by her uncle [Mordecai](#). Esther effectively concealed her Jewish identity from everyone at court. Mordecai, meanwhile, uncovered an assassination plot against Ahasuerus, and Esther told the king. Meanwhile, the villainous Prime Minister [Haman](#) grew angry with Mordecai because Mordecai refused to show him deference. A faithful Jew, Mordecai was loyal to the commandment not to bow down to anyone or anything except the God of Israel.

Haman hatched a plot to kill Mordecai as well as all the Jews. An unwitting Ahasuerus went along with the plan. When Mordecai heard about Haman’s plan, he asked Esther to do something about it. After all, she had access to the king and was in his good graces. At first, Esther was reluctant to intervene, citing the danger of approaching the king uninvited. Mordecai prevailed upon Esther with this argument:

**FIGURE 15.3** The Book of Esther and the Persian Empire



*Do you think just because you live in the king's palace you will escape the fate of all the other Jews? If you keep silent at such a time as this, help and deliverance will come for the Jews from somewhere else, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Maybe you have come to royal position for just such a time as this. (4:13–14)*

This is the closest the book comes to expressing any kind of theological sentiment—in this case, a general suggestion of divine providence and protection. Esther approached the king and was granted an audience. She invited the king and Haman to a banquet. When Haman heard about the invitation, he was delighted but shortly thereafter became despondent after Mordecai again refused to bow down. In response he decided to have Mordecai hanged.

That same night, Ahasuerus the king was reviewing records of the royal court and came across the entry on Mordecai's report of the assassination attempt, which ultimately saved the king. After some

inquiry, he found out that Mordecai had never been honored for his services. Haman just happened to be near at the time, so the king called him in and asked what kinds of things should be done to honor a faithful citizen. Thinking that the king had him in mind, Haman devised a wonderful ceremonial procession giving public acclaim to such a man. The king told him to make it so. Imagine his shock when he found out that Mordecai was the one to be honored.

Afterward, at the banquet, Esther pleaded for the lives of the Jewish people. Amazingly, the king revealed little awareness of the edict he himself had authorized:

*King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he—the one who has presumed to do this?" Esther said, "An antagonist and an enemy, this wicked Haman!" (7:5)*

Stunned (and a bit dim-witted too, it seems), the king left the room to contemplate the matter. Haman rushed over to Esther's couch and threw himself upon her, pleading for his life. When the king came back and saw Haman on top of Esther, he thought Haman was making advances on his queen. Ahasuerus was even more outraged than before and had Haman hanged on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai.

Esther and Mordecai then convinced the king to issue an edict reversing the intended result of Haman's plan. Official letters were drafted and sent throughout the empire authorizing the Jews to defend themselves. They killed hundreds of their enemies in Susa and thousands elsewhere. A new respect for the Jews of the Diaspora developed, and many people became converts to Judaism.

Although the Diaspora, or Dispersion, of the Jews throughout the world began with the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, two Persian period archives of ancient documents provide important background information on the early Jewish Diaspora. The

Elephantine papyri from Aswan, Egypt, date to the late 400s BCE. They provide evidence of a large group of Jews who lived in Egypt and may have moved there after 587 as Jeremiah and Baruch were forced to do (Jeremiah 43:7). The papyri intriguingly suggest that the Jews of Elephantine worshipped the Canaanite goddess Anath alongside Yahweh. The Murashu archive, also from the late 400s, is 730 clay tablets that were discovered at Nippur in southern Mesopotamia. The texts are business documents from the banking family of Murashu that contain many Jewish names and give evidence that Jews owned land and houses.

The book of Esther explains the origin of the Jewish celebration of Purim. This holiday came late in Jewish history and is not authorized by the Torah, so separate justification was needed. It was called Purim following the name of the divination device, the *pur* or lot (see 3:7), that Haman used to determine the best day for the slaughter of the Jews.

Still celebrated by Jewish communities in February or March, **Purim** is a festival of freedom, remembering the time when Jews scattered around the world were given respect and recognition and the power to defend their own way of life. When it is observed today, it can be a raucous affair. Adolescents are allowed to do things on Purim they could never get away with on any other day. In celebration, the book of Esther is read in the synagogue, and whenever the name Haman is voiced, children shout, stamp their feet, and sound noisemakers. Special cookies called Haman's ears are eaten in disdain of the villain. Adults are supposed to drink so much wine that they can no longer tell the difference between "Blessed Mordecai" and "Accursed Haman."

There are additional meanings to the story of Esther. The book strongly cautions the Jews to not forget their identity or think that they can somehow find safety by blending in. Mordecai pointed out to Esther that assimilating was not an option and her position at court would not ultimately protect her. There is also the implication that the

Jews must stick together, for only therein would they survive.

With Esther, we cannot fail to notice once again the importance of faithful women for the history of Israel. This story affirms the importance of a single courageous female character for the Jewish community. Indeed, its survival depended on her. The function of storytelling to present exemplary role models is evident here, for certainly Esther is presented as a paragon of courage and conviction for women of the faith.

The Hebrew Bible locates the book of Esther in the Writings as one of the Five Scrolls. The canonical tradition of the Christian Old Testament places it after Nehemiah, which makes it the last book in the collection of historical materials. This placement functions to assign a history-telling role to the book as opposed to its storytelling role in the Hebrew Bible.

The book of Esther is a late book, obviously having been written after the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes I). The consensus is that it was written in the fourth or third century BCE. It had some trouble finding acceptance into the canon because of its lack of explicit “God-talk.” It has the distinction of being the only book of the Hebrew Bible not found among the Dead Sea Scrolls in at least one fragment. The old Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, seems to have found it somewhat inadequate. It lengthened the book considerably by introducing prayers and petitions of Esther and Mordecai that refer explicitly to God (see below).

Some scholars have suggested that the book has a pagan prehistory. For example, the name Mordecai could be derived from Marduk, the Babylonian high god, and Esther is linguistically related to Ishtar, a Babylonian goddess of love and war. In this speculation, the story was originally related to the Babylonian New Year festival, and the plot was transformed along with the names to make a Jewish tale. Although rather unlikely, such a mythological prehistory may at some far distant point underlie motifs in the book. But as it stands now, the book bears a recognizable historical and biblical setting.



The genealogical notes identifying Mordecai and Haman place the story within a larger biblical context. Mordecai is identified as a descendant of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin. This would make him a descendant of Saul. Haman is identified as a member of the Agag family and an Amalekite. The Amalekites were the prototypical enemies of the Israelites insofar as they were the first to attack the Hebrews after they left Egypt in the Exodus (see RTOT [Chapter 3](#)). They also harassed the Israelites during the early monarchy. Saul's failure to eliminate Agag and the Amalekites was one cause of his demise. The book of Esther implies that Mordecai finally got the job done by eliminating Haman.

The book of Esther comes off as somewhat tribal in character. It has a definite “us” against “them” feel to it as it deals with Haman's planned pogrom to eliminate Jews. Esther and Mordecai proved themselves clever enough to overcome this threat to the Jews. Jewish national and religious salvation involved the execution of Haman and community self-defense. In some ways, this is a violent book. What, then, is the effect of having it in the Hebrew Bible? How can such bloodshed be justified?

Perhaps the book itself shows evidence of wrestling with this issue and softening its effects. The letters of Mordecai and Esther contained in 9:20–32 appear to be additions. They change the tone of Purim considerably. They turn it from a time of slaughtering Jewish enemies to a time of celebration, gift giving, and well wishing. Through this canonical reinterpretation, the original event became the occasion to celebrate Jewish identity and God's preservation of the Jews as a people (see Childs, 1979). Nonetheless, the book exposes the serious threats that God's people face when living in an alien and hostile culture. The book of Esther reveals that God directs affairs providentially to protect and deliver his people.

## **7 THE FIVE SCROLLS AS A COLLECTION**

We treated these five short books together because they were grouped together within the Writings section of the Hebrew Bible. The group is called the [Five Scrolls](#) (in Hebrew, the Five *Megillot*). Why five? This collection of five books may imitate the “fiveness” of the five books of the Torah and the five books of the Psalter. The clustering together of the Five Scrolls is attested in the earliest copies of the Hebrew Bible that current editions are based on. However, the earliest evidence for the order of biblical books is in the Babylonian Talmud (Baba Bathra 14b). It intersperses the Five Scrolls among other books as follows: Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles. This sequence reflects their presumed chronological order.

Despite their lack of common style or subject, there is an appropriateness to the collection. Each of the books was used by the Jewish community in connection with a yearly commemoration, and the order of individual books within the Five Scrolls correlates with their sequence within the yearly Jewish calendar, from spring to winter (see [Table 15.1](#)).

The five books in this collection differ in many ways including literary type and subject matter. They were grouped together primarily because they all relate to Jewish commemorative events. But we should ask if there is any further benefit, a thematic and theological bonus perhaps, in seeing them together as a collection.

**TABLE 15.1** The Five Scrolls and the Jewish Calendar

| Book          | Occasion                       | Hebrew             | Season                                                                         | Historical Connection                                                                                                 |
|---------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Song of Songs | Passover                       | <i>Pesach</i>      | Spring; marked the beginning of the barley harvest                             | Exodus from Egypt                                                                                                     |
| Ruth          | Feast of weeks/<br>Pentecost   | <i>Shavuot</i>     | Early summer, seven weeks after Passover; marked the end of the barley harvest | Law giving at Mount Sinai                                                                                             |
| Lamentations  | Ninth of Av                    | <i>Tishah b'av</i> | Late summer                                                                    | Destruction of the first Jerusalem temple in 587 BCE; also commemorates the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE |
| Ecclesiastes  | Feast of booths or tabernacles | <i>Sukkot</i>      | Fall, six months after Passover; marked the grape harvest                      | Forty years of wilderness sojourn                                                                                     |
| Esther        | Feast of Purim                 | <i>Purim</i>       | Late winter                                                                    | Deliverance of the Jews during the Persian period                                                                     |

If consensus reconstructions are accurate, all five of these books were compiled relatively late, in the exilic period of the 500s BCE or thereafter. These books should then be interpreted in light of the theological and sociological issues of that age, specifically the reconstruction of a Jewish community and the emergence of religious Judaism.

The book of Ruth may be viewed as a protest against an ethnically defined nationalism, implicitly arguing for a more inclusive community. The criterion for inclusion into the community should not be tribal affiliation but acceptance of the God of Israel.

The book of Esther also addresses the issue of community but from the opposite angle—that is, where Jews are the ones being excluded. It exposes the problems of religious intolerance and xenophobia from the perspective of the outsider. Esther portrays the ugliness of a society where Jews are systematically ostracized and abused. The book, at the same time, is empowering. The Diaspora Jews of the book of Esther are not helpless or ineffectual but are capable of defending themselves politically and militarily. The story authorizes the postexilic Jewish community to affirm its identity in the face of racially and religiously based prejudice and discrimination.

The books of Ruth and Esther do not reflect the same community. They display different community attitudes especially to the non-

Israelite population. They represent different challenges to pluralism. But both responses, by virtue of being included in the canon, represent acceptable responses.

The Song of Songs seems to issue a different kind of social challenge. It stands, perhaps, as a protest against a world where the free expression of love was discouraged. Remember the abuse that the lovers suffered in the book. It is critical of a society that does not value genuine love and would force true lovers to affirm their commitment in secret. It is also critical of a dominating patriarchal society that attempts to manipulate female love and use it in a self-gratifying way. The Song is startlingly progressive in the mutuality of the male–female relationship.

Ecclesiastes along with Job constitutes late wisdom's challenge to retribution theology. Ecclesiastes presses the issue of divine governance by probing for the essential meaning of existence. Although it does not deny the providence of God, it does seem to give up in frustration over its inability to penetrate to the purpose of God. If the book speaks not only on the personal level but also on the communal level, it expresses Israel's frustration at not knowing what God had in store for them historically. Only a backwater province within monstrous empires, they had lost a sense of national purpose.

Lamentations continues in the vein of challenge, if not protest. The very mode of complaint that is the genre of the book could be interpreted as a dispute with God. It demands to know why God treated his people so harshly and wants to know when he would restore them. Again, the community wrestles with God.

Perhaps it is no accident that these voices gave expression through poetry and story instead of through prophetic genres. As poetry and story, they might not so quickly give offense. Metaphoric poetry and heartwarming story can sometimes soften otherwise prickly lessons. In any case, they kept alive the theological discussion over the nature of the covenant community, especially the value of all members, indigenous Israelite and non-Israelite alike, female and male alike. In

all, these books represent alternate voices from the margins, critical analysis, and challenging explorations that seem to contest the historically dominant theologies of the Jews. Taken together, they highlight the need for foundational biblical and human values: loyalty, faithfulness, acceptance, security, freedom, and love.

## **8 APOCRYPHAL ADDITIONS**

Various materials of the Apocrypha mirror the Five Scrolls in some way and arguably could be seen as extensions of them. Some are complete short stories that are similar in character to Ruth and Esther. Others are additions and later elaborations to one of the existing scrolls.

### **8.1 Tobit**

The book of Tobit runs in the same vein as Daniel and Esther. It is what some call an historical romance novel. The story of this book focuses on two characters, Tobit and his future daughter-in-law, Sarah. Though written probably in the early 100s BCE, the story is set within the Assyrian Empire of the late 700s and early 600s BCE after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel. Tobit was a faithful Israelite who continued to keep the Torah of Moses and to revere Jerusalem and its temple.

Tobit demonstrated his piety by burying dead Israelites who otherwise would not have received a proper burial. After one such good deed, he slept outside, and after bird dung dropped into his eyes, he went blind. This inevitably raised the question why such misfortune had fallen upon him, a caring, even courageous, God-fearing man.

In need of resources, Tobit sent his son, Tobias, to distant Media to recover some funds that he had on deposit there. In Media we are

told of the misfortunes of one Sarah. She had lost seven husbands, each in turn killed on their wedding night by Asmodeus, a demon. Sarah wished only for death herself. Meanwhile in Media, Tobias was attacked by a large fish one day as he was bathing. The angel Raphael, in disguise, instructed Tobias to gut the fish and save its viscera because, the angel said, they are useful for medicine.

Tobias and Sarah met and pursued marriage. Tobias used the fish's heart and liver to drive the evil demon away. Then Tobias returned to his father with his wife and the foreign funds, and with the fish's gall, he healed his father's blindness. Tobit lived a long life and enjoyed his many grandchildren. The book is transparently a Diaspora tale. It intends, much like the hero tales of Daniel, to support and encourage faithful living among the Jews who were scattered throughout the empires. It is shaped especially by the retribution theology of the book of Deuteronomy and upholds its doctrine that righteous behavior ultimately merits prosperity and long life:

*Bless the righteous Lord,  
and exalt the King of ages.*

*In the land where I am exiled I praise him.  
and display his power and glory to a sinful nation:*

*Repent, Sinners. Do the right thing before him.  
Perhaps he will favor you and show mercy. (13:6)*

## **8.2 Judith**

Another legendary tale, the book of Judith unfortunately gets most of its facts wrong. But it is still a fascinating tale of a beautiful woman who delivers God's people through her courage and cleverness. The action of the book takes place during "*the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh*" (1:1). Of course,

Nebuchadrezzar was king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire with its capital at Babylon. The story centers on Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, who has come to conquer Jerusalem. However, the Samaritan town of Bethulia stands in his way, so the army besieges it.

After holding out for many days, the city is ready to surrender. Judith, a Jewish widow and resident of the city, appears at this point in the story with a plan for Israel's deliverance. She adorned herself, left Bethulia, and entered the Assyrian camp. Holofernes received her because she was so beautiful and because she came with word on how he could conquer the city. After three days in the camp, Holofernes invited Judith to a banquet after which he planned to ravish her. A very drunk Holofernes took her to his bedroom. After a prayer for God's support, she took his sword and "*with all her power she struck his neck twice and cut off his head*" (13:8). The army panicked and the Jews routed them. Thereafter, Judith's courage was marveled and praised.

## 8.3 Additions to Esther

The book of Esther actually comes in different flavors. The Hebrew version (the one described above, found in the Hebrew Bible) is the shortest. This one is found with various elaborations and expansions and is the one found in the Septuagint, the old Greek version of the Hebrew Bible. It is well known that the book of Esther was problematic from early on. It never mentions God explicitly and never makes reference to the distinctive practices of Judaism: the Torah of Moses, circumcision, *kashrut*, and Sabbath observance. These deficiencies are remedied by the additions of the Greek version.

When Jerome translated the Bible into Latin, he removed the Greek additions to the Hebrew version and placed them at the end of

the story. This resulted in the six additional text segments being labeled A through F, which is how they will be found in certain editions of the Bible. The NRSV Apocrypha follows the practice of translating the entire longer Greek version as a continuous story and identifying which parts are the additions. This enables a coherent and much easier reading of the story.

If you can recall the basic story line of the Hebrew book of Esther, the following summaries should make some sense. Addition A contains an account of a dream that Mordecai had that previewed his coming conflict with Haman. It also describes how he learned of the plot on Ahasuerus's life. Addition B is a record of the official policy document that Haman initiated authorizing the destruction of the Jews. Addition C contains pious prayers of Mordecai and Esther to the Hebrew God in which they pleaded for deliverance. Addition D describes in detail how Esther appeared uninvited before the king. Addition E is a record of the royal edict that reversed the prior one and authorized the Jews to defend themselves. Addition F returns to Mordecai's dream and interprets its fulfillment.

## **8.4 Baruch**

Baruch is mentioned numerous times in the book of Jeremiah as Jeremiah's friend and secretary. Both were taken to Egypt in 582 BCE after the destruction of Jerusalem. The book of Baruch places him in Babylon early in the exile. It appears to have been written in the middle to late 100s BCE because portions of it depend on Daniel 9 and the book of Daniel was completed around 160.

The book consists essentially of two parts. The first section is a response to the destruction of Jerusalem, as was Lamentations, also traditionally connected to Jeremiah. It is a confession of sins and an admission of guilt for having brought about the destruction of Jerusalem by their sins, along with a prayer to the Lord for mercy.



This prayer was read to Jehoiachin and the others in exile and then was forwarded to Jerusalem along with money for offerings.

The second section is introduced with a wisdom-style poem in praise of the Torah and another acknowledgment of guilt. The book ends on a hopeful note, expecting and anticipating a return from exile. Thus, the book echoes the general prophetic message of judgment and repentance and affirms the Torah as the path of obedience. Given its context of composition, it appears to have been written as a word of encouragement to Diaspora Jews to move from exile back to Palestine.

## **8.5 Letter of Jeremiah**

This composition is of uncertain date, perhaps in the 200s BCE. In some early versions, it is connected to Baruch as its sixth chapter. It presents itself as a letter from the prophet Jeremiah to those who are facing deportation to Babylon. The letter explains that they must not fall into idol worship once they arrive in Babylon. They must remain steadfast in their devotion to the Lord.

This short composition illustrates how some late writings were inspired by material in the Hebrew biblical tradition and became creative elaborations of them. This particular letter is analogous to Jeremiah's famous letter to the exiles in Jeremiah 29. The sermon against idolatry and foreign gods seems to build upon the diatribe against idols found in Jeremiah 10 and is similar to those present in 2 Isaiah (see 40:18–20, 41:6–7, and 44:9–20). Again, we see how the canonical biblical tradition was a rich resource for later generations in addressing the needs and challenges that they faced within the evil empires of their day.

## **KEY CONCEPTS**

1. *Song of Songs*. What are the main ways in which the Song of Songs can be interpreted?
2. *Ruth*. Why is the fact that Ruth is a Moabite crucial to the story? How is this fact tied to the meaning and application of the story?
3. *Lamentations*. What is the literary type of the poems in this book, and what historical event do they commemorate?
4. *Ecclesiastes*. As speculative wisdom, what theological issue does this book wrestle with, and what are its conclusions?
5. *Esther*. How did Mordecai convince Esther to intervene to save the Jews, and what was the outcome of her intervention?
6. *Apocryphal additions*. Which of the original five scrolls have apocryphal additions, and why did the apocryphal writers think these additions were useful or necessary?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Sex in the Bible*. As poetry in praise of human love and frank sexuality, is there a tension between the Song of Songs and the morality of the rest of biblical literature?
2. *Diversity and gender*. How are the books of Ruth and Esther alike? How do they differ? How does each face the issues of community identity and how to deal with foreigners? Are these still relevant issues in the world of today?
3. *Meaning of life*. How does Ecclesiastes address the question of the meaning of life? How does his thinking compare to the spirit of the modern age? How did the editors of Ecclesiastes try to handle the potentially disturbing effect of the book? What adjectives would you use to describe the book and your reaction to it?
4. *Scrolls issues today*. For each of the Five Scrolls, identify a contemporary work of literature, art, music, or film that wrestles with the same issue that lies at the heart of the biblical book.

# READING THE TEXT TODAY

*The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation*, by Marcia Falk (1990), and *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*, by Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch (1995), are translations of the Song of Songs. *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*, by Jack M. Sasson (1989), is a detailed treatment of Ruth. *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, by Michael V. Fox (1991), is a valuable commentary on Esther. *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story*, by Frank A. Spina (2005), has chapters on Esau, Tamar and Judah, Rahab and Achan, Naaman and Gehazi, Jonah, and Ruth. *For the Love of God: The Bible as an Open Book*, by Alicia Suskin Ostriker (2007), is a brilliant feminist rereading of the Song of Songs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Job, and Jonah.

# CHAPTER SIXTEEN

## Daniel: From History to Apocalypse

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 Heroic Tales \(Daniel 1–6\)](#)

[3 Apocalypses \(Daniel 7–12\)](#)

[4 Daniel as a Book](#)

[5 Apocryphal Additions](#)

---

## KEY TERMS

[Antiochus IV](#)

[Apocalypse](#)

[Apocalyptic eschatology](#)

[Apocalyptic literature](#)

[Apocalypticism](#)

[Belshazzar](#)

[Belteshazzar](#)

[Daniel](#)

[Dualism](#)

[Eschatology](#)

[Hanukkah](#)

[Hasids](#)

[Hellenism](#)

[Hellenization](#)

[Judas Maccabee](#)

[Kingdom of God](#)

[Leviathan](#)

[Maccabean](#)

[Nebuchadrezzar](#)

[Prophetic eschatology](#)  
[Resurrection](#)  
[Seleucid](#)  
[Son of man](#)

# William Blake's *Ancient of Days*

William Blake depicts the “ancient of days” figure of Daniel 7:9. This contains the only verbal picture of God presented in the Hebrew Bible: “*his clothes were white as snow, the hair of his head like pure wool.*”



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on William Blake's (1757–1827) *Ancient of Days* (*God as an Architect*), a 1794 relief etching with watercolor (London: British Museum).

---

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Will the world actually end some day? If so, will that day come soon? Will it be in our lifetime? Will the world end with a bang or with a whimper? For decades the specter of global thermonuclear holocaust hung heavy over history. Even now, as the nuclear threat

recedes, global warming poses a new danger, and the peril of ecological disaster provides another very scary scenario for the end of the habitable world. Science, technology, and industrialization provide countless means whereby we can kill ourselves and take the planet with us. Certainly, an interest in the end of civilization has fueled a great deal of speculation, not a little of which has a religious flavor. Entire religious publishing industries have been built on our hopes and future fears, such as *The Late Great Planet Earth* and the *Left Behind* phenomena.

## 1.1 Apocalyptic Literature

The adjective *apocalyptic* is a modern label for end-time-oriented literature. Ancient writers did not tag their own material with an “apocalyptic” label. Yet the term is appropriate; it derives from the Greek verb *apokaluptein*, which means “to reveal, disclose, uncover.” From this word, we get the word apocalypse.

As we begin to study [apocalyptic literature](#) in its various dimensions, it is important to distinguish two basic concepts having to do with the study of apocalyptic literature. The term *apocalypse* is a literary genre that can be found in apocalyptic literature. An [apocalypse](#) is a revelation of future events initiated by God and delivered through a mediator (typically an angel) to a holy person.

Within the Hebrew Bible, only Daniel 7–12 strictly fits this definition, though Isaiah 24–27 also has some characteristics of apocalyptic literature. Other major works falling into the genre of apocalypse are the New Testament book of Revelation (its Greek title is *apokalupsis*), 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch. The first three Gospels of the New Testament each contain an apocalyptic chapter (Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 24) but as a whole would not be considered apocalyptic literature.

Apocalyptic literature is associated with an identifiable religious

outlook and sociological profile that is called **apocalypticism**. This applies to the thought world or worldview of the communities that gave rise to apocalyptic literature. Most apocalypses were written during times of political persecution. They were intended to encourage perseverance by revealing the destruction of the wicked and the glorious future that awaited the faithful.

It is now generally recognized that all literature is significantly shaped by the historical and sociological characteristics of its community of origin. A study of the developmental dimensions of the apocalyptic movement reveals that one of the main features of an apocalyptic community is its marginal status within the larger society (see Schmitals, 1975). In its social, political, or economic alienation, the community constructs an alternate universe where eventually it and its deity will triumph. This alternate universe comes to expression in apocalyptic literature.

Another important term associated with the study of apocalyptic literature is eschatology. **Eschatology** (from *eschaton*, the Greek word for “end”) refers to the complex of religious beliefs that have to do with the end-times. The eschatological perspective of biblical literature views history as moving to its culmination defined by God and brought about primarily by his initiative.

Another important distinction is between prophetic eschatology and apocalyptic eschatology. **Prophetic eschatology** is more humanistic in that it sees God using historical agents and natural processes to bring about his purposes in history. In this view, God acts and reacts in relation to human action. Even predicted judgments can be averted with repentance and renewal. This perspective on the future characterizes the classical biblical prophets.

**Apocalyptic eschatology** is more supernatural and one sided. It views God as one who sovereignly and overpoweringly breaks into history in cataclysmic ways to realize his goal. History is closed, mechanistic, and predetermined. Human agency is only secondary to divine initiative. The role of God’s people is to discern and accept

his plan and to prepare themselves to support it.

## 1.1.1 Formal Features

Apocalyptic literature in the biblical tradition partakes of a common fund of characteristics (see Russell, 1964). Not every apocalyptic literary work evidences all these characteristics, but they are representative of what you can expect to find.

Most apocalyptic literature is in the form of dreams or visions that were witnessed by a seer. The seer then describes the dream in the first-person voice using the pronoun *I*. Most apocalyptic works are anonymous; that is, we do not know exactly who wrote them. The books themselves claim to be the work of certain individuals, most of whom are famous legendary figures. Apocalyptic books have been ascribed to Adam, Enoch (see Genesis 5), Ezra, Moses, Baruch, and many others. This phenomenon of ascribed authorship is technically called *pseudonymity* or *pseudonymous authorship*. The practice probably was designed to help facilitate the acceptance of the work by giving it automatic authority.

Most apocalyptic writings also employ highly imaginative *symbolic imagery*. Strange hybrid animals are not unusual. Numbers are also used in symbolic ways. Secret code words, presumably understood by the intended audience but unclear to the uninitiated, are also found. Many apocalypses contain a review of past history but frame it as if it were predictive prophecy. Predictive prophecies after the event (it is a lot easier and a lot more accurate that way) are called *vaticinia ex eventu*.

Apocalyptic literature has a more universal scope than most other Hebrew literature; that is, the writers are interested in historical forces and events beyond just Israel. It might even be said that they are more concerned about the other nations than with Israel itself. They see the other nations as under the control of Israel's God, who is determining their history to achieve God's own ends. Almost all



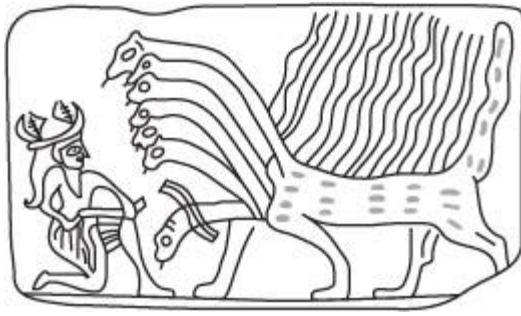
apocalyptic literature shares the belief that God has determined the conclusion of history from the beginning.

Apocalyptic literature is full of dualisms. A [dualism](#) is a binary or bipolar way of looking at matters that does not allow for ambiguity. Apocalyptic literature's *cosmic dualism* construes the universe as heaven and earth, a two-storied world. The literature of Israel's earlier monarchic period did not depict heaven as the theater where world events worked out. Heaven was more or less just the residence of God. In apocalyptic literature, heaven is the place where the most important events take place, including fierce wars between good and bad angels who are patrons of the parties down below. The outcome of such conflicts inevitably determines the course of history on earth.

*Temporal*, or *chronological*, *dualism* divides the course of history into two eras. History as we know it is called "this age" and is dominated by the forces of godlessness and evil. Apocalyptic writers were very pessimistic about the prospects for improvement in their time. They believed that God would bring this age to an end and would introduce "the age to come," when goodness would prevail.

### **FIGURE 16.1** Leviathan

The serpent Lotan, a name akin to Leviathan, had seven heads according to Ugaritic myth. This sea monster threatened life and good order but was defeated by Baal. Compare Psalm 74:14, where this creature makes an appearance; Day (1985) recovers the background of this combat myth and its associated imagery.



Source: Drawing by Barry Bandstra based on R. Merhav, ed., *Treasures of Bible Lands* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum, Modan Publishers, 1987), no. 16.

*Ethical dualism* is a dualism of human action and character. In apocalyptic literature, humanity is divided into two groups. One group, the large one made up of everybody else, is motivated by evil and violently opposes the smaller group of God-fearing, persecuted ones. At the culmination of history, God will take the side of the latter and vindicate the cause of right. But until then, the righteous remnant should only expect the worst. The smaller group, the apocalyptic community, believes that only they are in the right. They advocate a separatist policy, no doubt in response to the domination of the majority population that has marginalized them.

## 1.1.2 Literary Roots

Only one book in the Hebrew Bible is generally classified as apocalyptic literature, and that is the book of Daniel. But that is not to say that Daniel is the only book that displays characteristics typical of apocalypticism. Certain motifs typically found in apocalyptic eschatology can also be found in the myths of ancient Mesopotamia.

Motifs of cosmic warfare pervade mythic texts such as the battle between the high gods and the sea monsters. This divine warrior motif is also present in biblical apocalyptic literature. The royal cult

of Jerusalem, where YHWH is king, may be the source of various warrior motifs in biblical apocalyptic literature. Persian dualism may also have affected the development of apocalyptic ideology.

Isaiah's prophecies refer to the [Leviathan](#) creature (see [Figure 16.1](#)) when he uses Canaanite imagery of the combat-myth in his apocalyptic condemnations of Israel's political enemies. The archenemy Leviathan became the personification of the evil that YHWH's people faced:

*In that day YHWH will punish  
with his hard and great and strong sword*

*Leviathan the sliding serpent,  
Leviathan the twisting serpent.*

*He will murder the dragon in the sea. (Isaiah 27:1)*

In addition to having affinities with literature that predates Hebrew Bible apocalyptic, some scholars suggest that biblical apocalyptic has similarities with both the wisdom and the prophetic traditions of the Hebrew Bible. Von Rad (1972) argues that it has its origins in wisdom. Hanson (1975) traces the precursors of Jewish apocalyptic literature back to biblical prophecy and dates the movement from prophetic eschatology to apocalyptic eschatology in the early postexilic period, roughly 538–500 BCE. Second and Third Isaiah, dating to the sixth century, contain a good deal of apocalyptic material. This attests a move toward apocalypticism, but it really achieved prominence in the early 100s BCE during the Hellenization program of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV.

## 1.2 Reading Guide

The book of Daniel is grouped with the prophetic books in the Christian Old Testament. Daniel can be found after Ezekiel and

before the twelve Minor Prophets. In the Hebrew Bible, it is one of the Writings and is located after the Five Scrolls and before the Chronicler's History (Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles).

The book of Daniel can be divided more or less cleanly into two main parts based on content. The first part, [Chapters 1–6](#), contains six tales of Jewish heroism set in the late seventh and sixth centuries BCE. They are told in the third person and concern [Daniel](#) and his three friends, or Daniel alone, or the three friends alone. The second part, [Chapters 7–12](#), contains four apocalypses, which Daniel narrates in the first person.

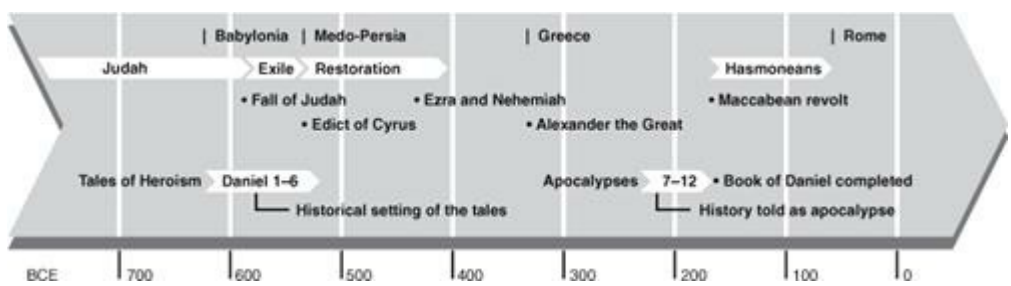
The book of Daniel does not claim to have been written by Daniel. The first six chapters are a narrative about Daniel (and his friends). While the final chapters contain Daniel's first-person dream accounts, they are introduced using third person editorial frameworks. Nonetheless, Daniel is the dominant figure of the book and is only absent in [Chapter 3](#).

Who exactly was this Daniel? We get conflicting signals. The first hero tale tells us Daniel was a young man when he was taken captive in 606 BCE. The story of Daniel in the lion's den found in [Chapter 6](#) has a setting after 539, which would make Daniel an old man by that time. On the other hand, the book of Ezekiel (14:14, 20; see also 28:3), which was written around the time of the exile in 587, refers to Daniel in the same breath with Noah and Job—all exemplary righteous men. These references suggest that Daniel and the other two were already well-known symbols of godliness. But how could Daniel be considered legendary to the preexilic Israelites if most of the stories told about him had not yet been written?

The Ugaritic texts from Syria come to the rescue. These texts, dating to the fourteenth century BCE, written in a language akin to Hebrew, contain an account of a certain Danel in the Aqhat Epic; this name is close enough in spelling to the biblical Daniel that they may be considered equivalent. This Danel was a notably righteous Canaanite king who wanted to see justice done in his kingdom. This

suggests that Danel/Daniel was a known hero of the ancient world, and that perhaps he was the model or namesake for our hero in Israel’s exilic period. Or (so other scholars claim), the Daniel of Ezekiel fame has nothing to do with the Daniel of the Hebrew book by his name!

**FIGURE 16.2** Time Line: Book of Daniel



The stories of Daniel are set around the time of the Babylonian exile (see [Figure 16.2](#)), and the tales may have originated at that time. But the apocalypses of [Chapters 7–12](#) betray a much later setting. The history they (fore-)tell culminates in the time of the Maccabees, specifically the years of Antiochus IV. The evidence strongly suggests that the apocalypses were written around 165 BCE, shortly before the death of Antiochus in 163, and that the entire book was edited and finalized around that time. This would make Daniel the prime candidate for the latest book of the Hebrew Bible.

The accounts of Daniel and his friends are some of the best-loved human-interest stories in the Bible. Because they are interesting and entertaining, read the tales of Daniel and his friends as found in [Chapters 1–6](#). Then conclude your reading with the first apocalypse of Daniel in [Chapter 7](#), which contains the vision of the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days. The apocalypse vision contained within this chapter is critical for understanding the son-of-man language that is used extensively in the New Testament Gospels and elsewhere in Judaism.

As you read the text, notice the interesting variations in the way the book of Daniel references deity. The name YHWH of the Israelite god is found only in [Chapter 9](#), which is Daniel's dream and Gabriel's interpretation; it takes place in Daniel's Jewish mind, not as interaction with Persians. Elsewhere Elohim is used, or its equivalent Eloah in the Aramaic portions of Daniel. The latter is sometimes qualified with the adjective *Most High*, and sometimes Most High stands alone in reference to God. What is interesting about this is that the writer does not use the nationalistic Israelite name YHWH in mixed company with Babylonians or Persians but instead deliberately uses a nonsectarian term.

## 2 HEROIC TALES (DANIEL 1–6)

The first six chapters of Daniel contain some of the most popular stories in the Hebrew Bible. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Daniel in the lion's den. The handwriting on the wall. In addition to their popular appeal, the tales had moral and spiritual lessons with special application to Jews living in the Diaspora.

The hero tales of Daniel send two fundamental messages. First, no matter what political and religious pressures urge you to conform to the dominant culture, do not give up your faith in YHWH. If you are faithful, God will surely deliver and prosper you. Fidelity to the Mosaic Torah brings divine reward. Second, ultimately the evil kingdoms of this world will crumble before the [kingdom of God](#), for YHWH orders history. The hero tales will be treated under these two headings.

### 2.1 Keep the Faith

Daniel 1 introduces the hero tales by describing Daniel and his three

friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Each was given a Babylonian name as part of the process of their acculturation into Babylonian society. Respectively, they became [Belteshazzar](#), Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Interestingly, Daniel is referred to by his Hebrew name through much of the book, whereas the friends consistently go by their Babylonian names.

These young men were handsome and intelligent and were to be trained as Babylonian courtiers. This follows the common imperial practice of educating indigenous young men to become civil servants, presumably in the expectation that they would serve as administrators or diplomats in the Judean territories. The problem for these Jewish trainees was that eating at the Babylonian court would violate their dietary laws, called the laws of kosher, or *kashrut*. They were given a special reprieve by their overseer, and despite eating only simple Jewish-type food, they turned out to be healthier than any other trainees. This proved that a person could observe religious laws even in a foreign land—a situation many deported Jews faced.

[Chapters 3](#) and [6](#) are similar. By now Daniel and his friends had become important government officials, and they had acquired powerful political enemies. These rivals enacted religious requirements that they knew these Jews would not obey. First the three friends (3) and then Daniel (6) were found guilty of breaking the law and were to be executed. The friends were thrown into a well-stoked furnace but were delivered by God by means of an angel's protection. Daniel, in a separate incident, was thrown into a pit full of ravenous lions. He too was protected and survived. Both incidents demonstrate again that God cares for the faithful.

## 2.2 Lord of History

[Chapter 2](#) describes [Nebuchadnezzar's](#) dream experience. He woke up one time and remembered that he had had a fascinating dream, but

he could not remember the details. Daniel came to the king's attention. It turned out that he was the only one who could bring the dream to Nebuchadnezzar's recollection and then interpret it. The dream's central image was of a statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, midsection and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. A rock pulverized the statue and it blew away. The rock grew into a mountain that dominated the earth. Daniel's interpretation associated each of the four metals with an empire. These empires were destroyed and a kingdom set up by God took over in their place. As we will see, this statue dream has important parallels to the apocalypse of [Chapter 7](#), which also has a sequence of four empires eclipsed by the kingdom of God.

In separate episodes, [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#) reveal the arrogance of Babylonian power. In the first, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream about a great and marvelous tree that was home to all life but was later cut down. Daniel interpreted the tree to be Nebuchadnezzar's empire. One day after he bragged about his own kingdom and glory, Nebuchadnezzar was afflicted with madness and was removed from power for seven years, after which time he came to his senses and acknowledged the supremacy of the Most High God. This tradition of kingly madness may be reflected in the apocryphal Prayer of Nabonidus. It was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran and contains "*the words of the prayer that Nabonidus, king of Assyria and Babylon, the great king, prayed.*" In the prayer, the king notes how he was cut down with a dread disease by the decree of the Most High. He was set apart from men for seven years and was later restored to his throne. The details are reminiscent of Nebuchadnezzar's seven-year dementia in 4:31–34 (see McNamara, 1970).

The second episode recounts the evening the Babylonian Empire fell. King [Belshazzar](#) was holding a raucous feast in which the sacred Jerusalem temple cups were used, clearly a sacrilege to Jews:



*Immediately the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand; and the king saw the hand as it wrote. (5:5)*

Daniel was called in to read and interpret what turns out to be a very clever inscription, “*mene, mene, tekel, parsin*” (5:25). On one level, the four words are terms for coins: a mina, a shekel, and a half shekel. And each of these terms is related to a verb: number, weigh, divide. Speaking to Belshazzar, Daniel spins this into an oracle of judgment. God has numbered your days, weighed your deeds, and will divide your kingdom among the Medes and Persians.

The message of both stories for Diaspora Judaism is unmistakable. Their God will not abide profane empires forever. The words from Nebuchadnezzar's prayer articulate Daniel's theology of history:

*All the inhabitants of the earth are reckoned as nothing. He does what he wants among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. None can stay his hand or say to him, “What are you doing?” (4:35)*

The Most High God is ultimately in control and orders even the destinies of empires. The kingdom of God is coming, and Jews can partake of its glories if only they remain faithful to God and the Torah.

### **3 APOCALYPSES (DANIEL 7–12)**

To understand the setting of the final portion of the book of Daniel it is necessary to summarize the history of the [Maccabean](#) period. The Maccabean conflict is the historical setting for the apocalypses (see

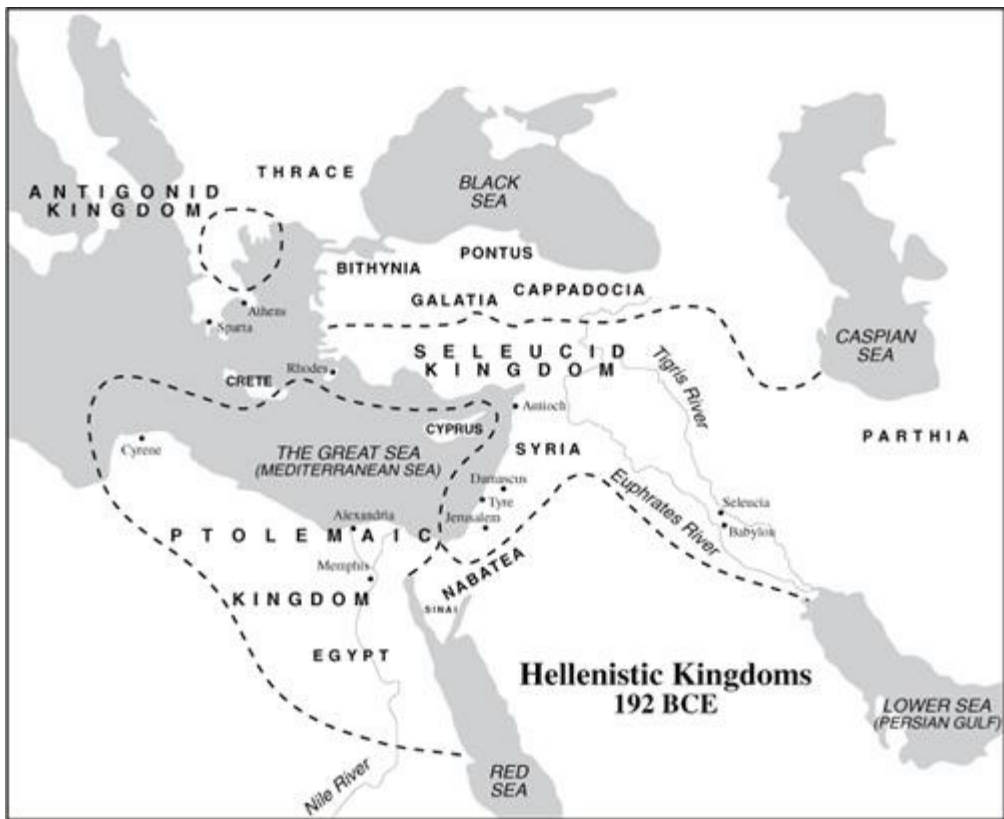
[Table 16.1](#)), as well as for the final compilation of the book as a whole.

Alexander the Great began his conquest of the eastern Mediterranean world beginning in 333 BCE. By the time of his death in 323, Greek control extended as far east as the Indus Valley. After his death, control of the empire was divided among four generals, of whom only two are important for our purposes. Most of Mesopotamia went to Seleucus and became the [Seleucid](#) kingdom. Syria, Palestine, and Egypt went to Ptolemy and became the Ptolemaic kingdom. Palestine was roughly the dividing line between these two kingdoms and for that reason became a matter of contention.

**TABLE 16.1** Four Apocalypses of Daniel

| Daniel    | Apocalypse                 | Interpretation                      |
|-----------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 7         | Four beasts and son of man | Kingdom of the persecuted Jews      |
| 8         | Ram and he-goat            | Persian to Greek rule               |
| 9         | Seventy weeks of years     | History from exile to Maccabean war |
| 10:1–12:4 | Kings of south and north   | Ptolemies and Seleucids             |

**FIGURE 16.3** The Greek Kingdoms



Palestine was under the control of the Ptolemaic kingdom until around 200. The Greek way of life, with its attractive cultural institutions such as gymnasiums and theaters, Greek language and literature, refined manners and colorful religion, was a serious temptation to the Jewish population and found not a few cultural converts. But during this time, Judaism was still an acceptable and even thriving enterprise.

This changed when the Seleucid kingdom extended its area of control to include Palestine (see [Figure 16.3](#)). The Seleucid ruler [Antiochus IV](#), nicknamed Epiphanes, ruled his kingdom from 175 to 164. He faced growing opposition to his rule throughout the Seleucid kingdom. He interpreted the movements toward independence as being in part inspired by local religious and cultural practices. He decided to eradicate everything that smacked of provincialism and

impose, by force if necessary, a uniform system of Greek cultural expression, a process called [Hellenization](#). He outlawed such traditional Jewish practices as circumcision, dietary restrictions, and Sabbath observance and he made ownership of a Torah scroll a capital offense.

Antiochus took visible and outrageous actions to demonstrate royal disfavor of Judaism. He forced Jews to eat pork in violation of *kashrut* and even sacrificed a pig on the altar of burnt offering in the Jerusalem temple complex. Then he set up a statue of Zeus in the most holy place of the temple. Many Jews accommodated [Hellenism](#), the culture of the Greek world, and assimilated. Others opposed any sort of compromise. These latter were called [Hasids](#), “faithful ones.” The struggle between the Seleucids and the Hasids is told in 1 and 2 Maccabees.

Armed Jewish resistance broke out in 167, led by a provincial Jew named Mattathias and his sons. The most famous son is [Judas Maccabee](#), meaning “the hammerer.” They successfully waged a guerrilla campaign against the Seleucids, eventually resulting in the retaking of Jerusalem. They cleansed and restored the temple and resumed ritual activity as prescribed in the Torah. The temple was rededicated in 164 in a celebration called [Hanukkah](#) that lasted eight days. In apocalyptic literature’s typically cryptic and veiled way, the apocalypses of Daniel 7–12 relate to the history of this period.

### 3.1 Son of Man Apocalypse (7)

The apocalypses of Daniel consist of private dream visions followed by official interpretations communicated by angels. In this first apocalypse, Daniel saw four beasts and one like a son of man (1–14); this is followed by an angel’s interpretation (15–27):

*In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and his mind had a vision while he was in bed. Afterwards he wrote down the dream. Daniel related it and said: "I saw the four winds stirring up the great sea in my nighttime vision. Four great beasts came up out of the sea, each different from the others. The first was like a lion and had eagle's wings. Then its wings were pulled off as I watched, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a human, and it was given a human mind." (7:1–4)*

This narrative introduction introduces the dream vision. The year is 554 when Belshazzar ruled over Babylonia on behalf of Nabonidus. The great sea out of which the beasts arose recalls the mythic waters of chaos associated with evil and populated with dragons and monsters (see Isaiah 51:9–10 for a similar allusion to the waters of chaos). The stormy sea is a fitting image for the tumultuous affairs of the nations that threaten God's people. The lion represents Babylonia (see [Figure 16.4](#)).

Daniel goes on to describe three other beasts: a bear standing for Media, a leopard for Persia, and a beast with ten horns so terrible that it was unlike any natural creature standing for Greece. As he watched,

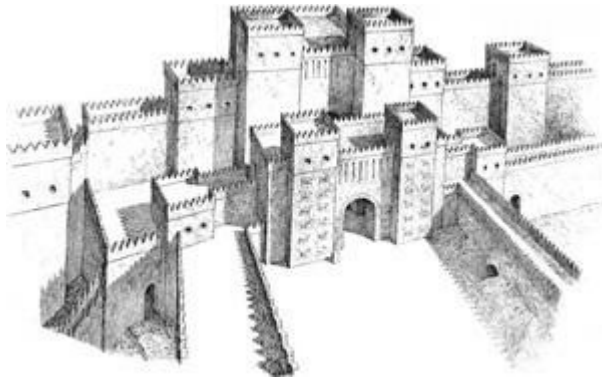
*thrones were put in place, and an Ancient of Days took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head was like pure wool; his throne was on fire and its wheels were burning. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand ten thousands stood attending him. The court sat in judgment and the books were opened. (7:9–10)*

The Almighty, described as a stately elder and called the Ancient of Days, was surrounded by the Divine Council. He presided from atop his mobile fiery throne-chariot, recalling Ezekiel's throne-chariot vision and even Elijah's translation to heaven. Together they rendered judgment, and the terrible beast was destroyed by fire. Then another figure appeared who received command of the earth:

**FIGURE 16.4** Ishtar Gate, Babylon

The gate into Babylon and the royal processional way was decorated with hybrid creatures.

They may have influenced Daniel's description of the evil empire beasts.



Source: Robert Koldewey. *Das Ishtar-tor in Babylon, nach den Ausgrabungen durch die Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1918. Plate 20.

*As I watched the night visions, I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He went to the Ancient of Days and was presented to him. To him was given dominion, glory, and kingship. All people, nations, and languages would serve him. His dominion would be an everlasting dominion that would not disappear. His kingship would never be destroyed. (7:13–14)*

A humanlike figure, “*one like a son of man,*” next appeared in the vision and was given total power over the kingdoms of this world. This mysterious and intriguing figure is separate from the supreme deity yet comes from heaven. It may be the angel Michael, who appears by name in the fourth apocalypse.

The identification of the “*one like a son of man*” figure in 7:13 is problematic. The phrase “son of man” is used in the book of Ezekiel when YHWH addresses the prophet (for example, 2:1 and 3:1) and seems only to mean human being. In Daniel the phrase “*a human-like figure*” refers to an angel (8:15 and 9:21; but a different figure is being referred to in these references than the one in 7:13).

Thus, the son of man figure is suggestive yet open ended (see Angel, 2006). It develops into a messianic notion in postbiblical literature. For example, according to the first book of Enoch (37–71), the Enoch of Genesis 5:24 will return to earth as “*son of man*” at the end of time and establish the rule of God. Son of man is a component of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament Gospels. Jesus prefers the title “son of man” over all others, perhaps just because it both affirms and veils his claim of divinity.

One of the members of the Divine Council gave Daniel the interpretation of the vision, and in that interpretation, the humanlike figure is a symbol for the collective people of God, just as the individual beasts each stood for an empire. The “holy ones,” as they are called, come to possess the kingdom of God for all time.

The setting of this vision, as well as the detailed description of the fourth beast in verses 23–27, suggests that the term *holy ones* stands for the righteous Jews who were persecuted by Antiochus IV. The writer of Daniel 7 wrote this apocalypse at the time of Antiochus’s oppressive rule over Judea (175–164 BCE). He was writing in the expectation that the Seleucid kingdom of the wicked Antiochus would come to an end, and then Israel would receive the power of the kingdom of God forever.

Clearly, the writer of the Daniel 7 apocalypse knew the tale of

Nebuchadrezzar's dream in Daniel 2 and updated it to his time. The four metals of Nebuchadrezzar's dream correspond to the four beasts; the stone that becomes a mountain is the "*one like a son of man*," later the "*holy ones*." The four age scheme of world history, found twice now in Daniel, can be found elsewhere in ancient literature. For example, a Mesopotamian dynastic prophecy describes the fall of Assyria and the rise of Babylonia, the fall of Babylonia and the rise of Persia, and then the fall of Persia and the rise of the Hellenistic monarchies (see Grayson, 1975). Also, the *Works and Days* of Hesiod divides history into four ages: gold, silver, bronze, and iron.

## 3.2 Other Apocalypses (8–12)

The other apocalypses provide additional details about the rule of the wicked kingdoms. The tale of the ram and the goat (8) allegorically relates the transition from Persian to Greek rule. It spends the most time on "*the little horn*," the code word throughout the book of Daniel for Antiochus IV. It tells of the desecration of the sanctuary and its reconsecration at Hanukkah.

[Chapter 9](#) updates Jeremiah's prophecy that Israel would be in captivity to Babylonia for 70 years (25:11–12; 29:10). In Daniel's apocalypse, the period of domination is extended to seventy weeks of years, or 490 years. This accounts for the long delay after the fall of Babylonia; the restoration of Israel still awaits the future.

The extended apocalypse of 10–12 relates the conflict between the Ptolemies and Seleucids for control of Palestine in great but cryptic detail. It includes a description of the great tribulation introduced by the military campaigns of Antiochus IV. The end-times will be a period of great distress, but God's people will be delivered:



*There will be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation until that time. But at that time your people will be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will wake up, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness (will shine) like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many will run to and fro, and knowledge will increase. (12:1–4)*

With the possible exception of Isaiah 26:19, this passage contains the clearest reference in the Hebrew Bible to [resurrection](#), a return to life after death. The dead will be raised and judged, some gaining eternal life and others punishment. Most of the Hebrew Bible knows nothing of resurrection, and there was no developed concept of an afterlife. Only Enoch and Elijah escaped death. Ezekiel's valley of dry bones (37:1–14) is a corporate resurrection and is essentially a symbol of national restoration. The primary mode of individual after-existence was through offspring who carried on the ancestral name. Still, death was not considered the absolute end of personal existence. After death a person descended into *sheol*, the underworld, where that person existed as a shade or shadow of the former self. This late passage in Daniel is a hint of the notion of resurrection that takes hold strongly within Judaism and Christianity after the second century BCE (see Segal, 2004).

Observe that Daniel is to keep these apocalypses sealed—just the opposite of classical prophecy that was to be broadcast. This is typical of apocalyptic literature generally. Apocalypses were to be kept secret until the end of time—that is, the time of the great conflict therein predicted. This perpetuates the literary fiction that these materials were written long before the events themselves transpired

and that their meaning would only be revealed at the end.

Some conservative Christians lay great store in the apocalyptic material of Daniel as well as other Old Testament and New Testament apocalyptic passages. Like pieces of a giant divine jigsaw puzzle, the biblical references are correlated with contemporary events to provide a “map” of the end of the world. Genuinely creative, apocalyptic literature could be considered the ancient equivalent of our modern genre of science fiction for the way it tries to conceptualize and visualize the shape of the future. The book of Daniel reflects a new approach to dealing with historical experience. It extrapolates from the present and tries to imagine how the future might look, heavy on the imagination (see Boyer, 1992, for the impact of apocalyptic on American culture).

## **4 DANIEL AS A BOOK**

We have divided the book of Daniel into two parts based on content: the heroic tales and the apocalypses. But one feature of the book compromises the clean division of Daniel into these two parts. Daniel is one of the two books in the Hebrew Bible that contains a substantial amount of text written in Aramaic rather than in Hebrew; the other is Ezra. The section of Daniel written in the Aramaic language, 2:4 through the end of [Chapter 7](#), spans the division based on form and content. Nobody knows exactly why (see Hartman and Di Lella, 1978).

The book of Daniel was classed with the Writings rather than the Prophets in the Jewish canon for a variety of reasons. Daniel does not play the role of a prophet in the book but rather the roles of wise man, diviner, and counselor to kings. The latter half of the book consists of apocalypses rather than prophetic oracles of the type found in classical prophecy. And the book is much later than the prophetic body of writings, which was considered closed after

around 400 BCE. Daniel is classed with prophetic literature in the arrangement of books in most English Bible translations. But the book of Daniel obviously differs from mainstream prophetic literature.

How was Daniel heard by Jews in the post-Maccabean period? There would seem to be a problem insofar as the book of Daniel foretold the end of world history and the triumph of God's kingdom with the demise of Antiochus IV. Yet the world did not end in the way or at the time predicted. In fact, it did not end at all as the writer expected it would. Some might judge the book to be mistaken. So how could it still speak to a later age? And how could it be canonized?

Although the future that the book of Daniel imagined did not come to pass as he had envisioned it, the book gives powerful expression to the need for vision and the need to conceptualize the future imaginatively in order to prepare for it. The book is quite pessimistic about the ability of human structures to redeem the world. The kingdom comes by the intervention of God. Yet even this is profound testimony to the writer's abiding hope in the power of God's rule and in the ability of the faithful to cope and endure in a time of severe social and political crisis.

## **5 APOCRYPHAL ADDITIONS**

Perhaps just because Daniel's future did not come to pass, Daniel continued to be central to the faith. The figure of Daniel became very popular in Judaism and more came to be written about him. These postbiblical stories are called the Additions to Daniel and they are present in the Greek version of the book of Daniel, which is an expanded edition of the Hebrew version. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men is found within [Chapter 3](#). The story of Susanna and the story of Bel and the Dragon follow [Chapter](#)

[12](#). The tale of Susanna is especially clever and delightful.

Go to the companion website and read the “Additions to Daniel.”

## **5.1 Addition 1: The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews**

The Septuagint version of Daniel inserts an account of Daniel’s three friends’ furnace experience between 3:23 and 24. This addition addresses questions that must have arisen in some believers’ minds, such as what was it like in the furnace and what were these pious young men thinking at the time. The first part is a prayer in the form of group complaint (or lament) psalms. It is voiced by Azariah, otherwise called Abednego in the stories. It contains a corporate confession of sin, a general description of their plight, and a cry for deliverance. Nothing in the prayer is specific to the conditions in the furnace and does not even mention it. Rather, this composition is typical of general complaint psalms from this period.

Then follows a short narrative description of the fire and furnace:

*The angel of the Lord came down into the furnace to be with Azariah and his companions, and drove the fiery flame out of the furnace, and made the inside of the furnace as though a moist wind were whistling through it. The fire did not touch them at all and caused them no pain or distress. (26-27 NRSV)*

The final portion of this addition is a long group thanksgiving psalm marking their deliverance from the furnace. Virtually every

couplet of this song has the form “*Bless the Lord*” followed by a target audience, and the B-line is “*sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*”

## 5.2 Addition 2: Susanna

The tale entitled “Susanna” places a young Daniel in the role of detective, and it is a cute story. It is ordered as Daniel [Chapter 13](#) in the Septuagint version of Daniel. Susanna was a very beautiful, Torah-observant Jewish woman. She was married to Joakim, and they lived in Babylon during the exile.

Joakim was very wealthy, and Jewish leaders used to gather in his garden. Two influential Jewish judges took to lusting after Susanna and trapped her in the garden one day, expecting to have their way with her. She then faced a legal dilemma. If she gave in to their demands, she would be guilty of adultery and subject to the death penalty. If she refused, they would accuse her of liaison with a young man, and she would still face execution. She was in quite a bind.

The two elders brought her to trial on charges of consorting with an unnamed young man. Unable to answer the charges, Susanna was sentenced to death. As she is being led to execution, Daniel came forward and demanded that he cross-examine her accusers. He separated the two elders and asked each independently which tree it was she and the young man were under when they had relations. When they gave conflicting responses, Daniel exposed their deception, and the elders themselves were sentenced to death for bearing false witness.

The story serves to affirm the ultimate justice of God in the face of unjust accusation and innocent suffering. It also serves to enhance the reputation of Daniel as a righteous and wise man of God. Finally, it is yet another tale that illustrates how vulnerable God’s people can sometimes be in the face of evil forces—especially young women

who might find themselves powerless in a patriarchal religious culture where males are presumed to be in the right.

## 5.3 Addition 3: Bel and the Dragon

This addition consists of two parts and is rendered as [Chapter 14](#) in the Septuagint. Bel, the first part, displays Daniel again as the clever detective and a champion for the Most High God in the face of idolatry. It is set during the early Persian period and shows Cyrus as supreme ruler who honors Marduk, the high god of Babylon who is referred to as Bel in this story (same as the Hebrew and Canaanite word *baal*, meaning “Lord” or “Master”).

Cyrus marvels to Daniel that Bel must be a living god because daily he consumes substantial quantities of food brought to him as sacrifices. Daniel rejoins that Bel is not a real God and he does not really eat all this food. The priests of Bel propose a test to prove he does, but Daniel demonstrates just the opposite in a very inventive way. To find out how he did it, you will have to read the short tale.

The second part of this addition is the story of the Dragon, along with imaginative elaborations of the lion’s den episode. The Babylonians considered the dragon, a snakelike entity, to be a living being. Daniel set about exposing the untruth of this claim. He cooked up a mixture of pitch, fat, and hair that was fed to the dragon. After eating it, the dragon exploded, thus proving it is not an eternally existent god.

Altogether, these additions to Daniel attest a lively interest in this, the greatest Jewish hero of the era. On multiple occasions, his quick wit and intelligence saved the day. His piety was an enduring example to his compatriots, and his faith was duly honored by God, even on occasion snatching him from certain death.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Apocalypse, apocalypticism, and apocalyptic.* What is the definition of each term, and how do they differ?
2. *Apocalyptic literature.* What are the main literary characteristics of apocalyptic literature?
3. *Daniel.* What are the two main sections of the book of Daniel, and what kind of literature is in each?
4. *Heroes.* Who were the main heroes of the book of Daniel, and what were the moral lessons of their heroic tales?
5. *Maccabees.* What is the connection between the book of Daniel and the history of the Macca-bean era?
6. *Prophecy and apocalyptic.* What is the relationship of classical biblical prophecy and apocalyptic prophecy? What are their similarities and differences?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *History or legend.* Do you think that the spectacular events in the lives of the heroes of Daniel really happened, such as the three friends surviving the furnace or Daniel coming out of the lion's den alive? Did they have to happen exactly that way for the book to be true?
2. *Prediction.* Can we rightly expect Daniel along with other biblical books like it to provide a road map for the future of humanity? If not exactly a GPS system, then how else might such books function? Does the book of Daniel have a message for today?
3. *History and hope.* How does one's vision of the culmination of history impact the way life is lived in the present? Do you have any sense of where history is going and how it will affect you?
4. *Apocalypse now.* Can you think of any books, movies, or popular songs that deal with apocalyptic "end of the world" themes? How do they portray the future? Are they generally

- optimistic or pessimistic or what?
5. *Managing the future*. In what ways do we in our day try to discern and control the future? What social institutions are in the business of dealing with the future? How do our methods compare to biblical apocalyptic methods?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

See *Daniel, An Active Volcano: Reflections on the Book of Daniel*, by D. S. Russell (1989), for discussions of Daniel and the modern world. *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting*, by Stephen L. Cook (1995), examines the development of apocalyptic literature out of prophecy and argues that biblical apocalypticism, contrary to prevailing reconstructions, did not originate among the socially disenfranchised. *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World*, by Catherine Keller (1996), is a feminist counterapocalyptic argument that explores our postmodern millennial world. *Apocalypse Movies: End of the World Cinema*, by Kim Newman (2000), explores the explosion of films that imagine the end and what life could be like afterward.



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# Chronicler's History: Retelling the Story

[1 Introduction](#)

[2 First and Second Chronicles](#)

[3 Ezra and Nehemiah](#)

[4 Chronicler's History as a Collection](#)

[5 Apocryphal History](#)

---

## KEY TERMS

[Chronicler](#)

[Chronicler's History](#)

[Cyrus](#)

[Ezra](#)

[Jeshua/Joshua](#)

[Nehemiah](#)

[Second temple](#)

[Sheshbazzar](#)

[Zerubbabel](#)

## George Santayana

George Santayana (1863–1952), a philosopher and poet, made one of the most famous statements regarding history:

Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on

retentiveness ...

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

Others observe the power of historians:

God cannot alter the past, but historians can.

SAMUEL BUTLER (1835–1902)

The stars are dead. The animals will not look:

We are left alone with our day, and the time is short, and  
History to the defeated  
May say Alas but cannot help nor pardon.

W. H. AUDEN (1907–1973)

Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the  
present controls the past.

GEORGE ORWELL (1903–1950)

Until the lions have their historians, tales of hunting will  
always glorify the hunter.

AFRICAN PROVERB



Source: Drawing of George Santayana by Daniel Hornschemeier

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Modern historians assert that writing an entirely objective record of the past is impossible. All history, they say, is an interpretation of the past shaped by the historian's present. Furthermore, the one who has political power, which determines who gets to speak, is more often than not the one who shapes the written record. The Judean priestly party, in the absence of the monarchy, emerged out of the Babylonian exile firmly in control. They were the preservers and guardians of Israel's traditions and historical memory, and they shaped the period of Judean restoration. Not surprisingly, the priests and Levites wrote the biblical history that came out of the post-exilic period.

The Torah together with the Former Prophets, otherwise known as the Primary History, is a comprehensive account from the Creation to the Babylonian exile. Chronicles is a history of equal scope, but the shape of the telling is quite different. Chronicles, along with Ezra and Nehemiah, is called the [Chronicler's History](#) (or CH) and extends the historical narrative into the Persian period.

Some authorities dispute whether Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah should be considered a single unified work produced by a single author, rather than two works, Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah. Their main focuses are not the same. First and Second Chronicles emphasize David and the Prophets. A combined Ezra and Nehemiah emphasize Moses and the Torah.

On the other hand, these books have a number of features in common. The ending of Chronicles is the same as the beginning of Ezra, suggesting an overlap or connection of some sort. Both works abound in lists and genealogies. They also share technical vocabulary pertaining to the Levites and certain phrases that are

infrequently found elsewhere, such as “*house of God.*” Both works are preoccupied with the temple in Jerusalem, the institutions of the priesthood, and Levitical functions.

Earlier generations of scholars and students tended not to study the Chronicler’s History all that much due to the fact that it seems to cover much the same ground as the Deuteronomistic History (DH). This neglect may also be due to certain research biases that favored older sources over more recent ones. Earlier scholarship was often obsessed with the drive to recover the earliest texts, thinking that these texts automatically were more accurate and provided the best chance of recovering “what really happened.” The CH is a comparatively late source, so it was neglected in favor of the DH. And since the [Chronicler](#) used Samuel and Kings as his main source and he did not add much to them, what he did add was late and of little value.

Scholars of the biblical text are now looking afresh at the Chronicler’s History. A study of how the Chronicler retold the history of Israel opens up a window on the beliefs and expectations of the postexilic community of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. The CH turns out to be an important source for recovering the thought world of this period. These days, the CH is read not so much to recover the facts of early Israel’s history but to recover the beliefs of the leadership in Jerusalem at this time of its writing.

A comparison of the Chronicler’s History and the Deuteronomistic History provides an occasion to analyze how history writing is conditioned by particular historical and cultural contexts (see [Table 17.1](#)). The DH reflects a sixth-century exilic perspective, while the CH reflects a late fifth-century postexilic perspective. The CH used the DH as its main source and essentially “repurposed” it to serve the rebuilding of postexilic culture and religion along priestly lines. Such recasting of history is sometimes called *revisionist history*.

**TABLE 17.1** Comparison of the Deuteronomistic and Chronicler’s

# Histories

|                     | Deuteronomistic History    | Chronicler's History               |
|---------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Authorship          | Northern Levites           | Postexilic Levites                 |
| Date of composition | 550 BCE                    | 400–250 BCE                        |
| Audience            | Exilic community           | Restoration community              |
| Theme               | Reasons for God's judgment | Jerusalem temple, worship, Levites |

The Chronicler's History retells the story of God's people from Adam to Ezra. It makes obvious use of preexisting written sources. The sources include letters, lists, genealogies, and the block 1 Samuel 31–2 Kings 25 of the Deuteronomistic History. The Chronicler also drew on the Torah, Judges, Ruth, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Zechariah. As would any good historian, the Chronicler cited sources (though certainly not all of them). Unfortunately, most of the sources cited by the Chronicler, including "*the records of the seer Samuel*" and "*the midrash on the Book of Kings*," are unknown outside the Bible. Some scholars date the composition of the CH to the time of Ezra in the fifth century BCE, others to the fourth century, and still others place it in the Hellenistic period of the third century.

The Chronicler focused on the Judean monarchy and the Jerusalem religious establishment. The northern kingdom of Israel is mentioned rarely and then only in passing. The Chronicler idealized the reigns of Solomon, Hezekiah, and especially David. The latter became the model of the good and pious monarch. But to do this effectively, the historian had to leave out certain stories from the DH that put David in a bad light, such as his affair with Bathsheba. The CH presents David as a king who ruled obediently and established religious service as it was meant to be, with the temple, its priesthood, singers, prayers, rituals, and offerings. He traced the establishment of important priestly and Levitical institutions back to David although other historical evidence suggests this is unlikely. It appears the

Chronicler's intention was to ground proper worship practices in the traditions of the past, mainly those of David's time, to give them increased validity.

The Chronicler's main focus in writing his history was the priesthood, the temple, and worship practices in Judea. All of history was viewed in terms of how it promoted these concerns. Kings were evaluated in terms of their disposition to temple and cult. And history moved to a climax at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah with the reestablishing of temple worship. The Chronicler was a defender of the status quo and had no vision for an independent political future. As long as YHWH could be worshiped properly, seemingly all else was acceptable.

## **1.1 Reading Guide**

- Read 1 Chronicles 20:1–3 and compare it with 2 Samuel 11 to see how the Chronicler handles David's affair with Bathsheba.
- Read 1 Chronicles 22:2–19 to see how the Chronicler gets David involved with the temple, for which there is no record in Samuel.
- Read the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1, which authorizes the return of Judean refugees to Palestine.
- Read Ezra 9–10, which describes Ezra's decree forbidding mixed marriages and the reaction to that.
- Read Nehemiah 8–9 where Ezra reads the book of the Torah of Moses to all the people and Nehemiah 13 on the reforms of Nehemiah.

## **2 FIRST AND SECOND CHRONICLES**

The two books of Chronicles were originally one book. Like the books of Samuel and Kings, they became two in printed editions. We

will refer to combined First and Second Chronicles simply as Chronicles. Jewish tradition holds that most of Chronicles, along with the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, were written by Ezra the scribe and completed by Nehemiah. In Jewish tradition, Ezra is venerated to a degree second only to Moses. Chronicles can be divided into two main parts on the basis of content: premonarchy history and the history of the Davidic monarchy.

## **2.1 Premonarchy History (1 Chronicles 1–9)**

The first part of Chronicles retells history from Adam to Saul. Most of the story is told by means of lists of names and genealogies. Some of the genealogical lists extend all the way into the postexilic period by including individuals from that time, indicating that this material was finally edited in the postexilic period.

There is very little storytelling narrative in this first part of Chronicles. It is dominated by genealogies. Special attention was given to the names of priests and Levites. The genealogies also focus on the tribe of Judah and its line of David, the tribe of Benjamin and its line of Saul, and the tribe of Levi. These comprised the nucleus of the Persian province of Yehud (Judea) in the postexilic period.

Genealogies serve different purposes within the biblical world. Within the family, they define privilege and responsibility, as with the firstborn son in relation to later-born children and children of concubines. Within tribes, they establish political and territorial claims, especially land ownership, and might also reflect military conscription lists. Within the religious sphere, they establish membership in the priestly and Levitical classes. Membership determines who can and cannot hold priestly offices and who can acquire the privileges and responsibilities associated with them. All of these uses of genealogies are present in Chronicles (see Wilson, 1977; Knoppers, 2003).

## **2.2 History of the Davidic Monarchy (1 Chronicles 10–2 and Chronicles 36)**

This part of Chronicles covers the history of the Davidic monarchy from David to the Babylonian exile. It can be subdivided into three sections:

1. David's reign: 1 Chronicles 10–29
2. Solomon's reign: 2 Chronicles 1–9
3. Kings of Judah from Rehoboam to Cyrus's edict of return from exile: 2 Chronicles 10–36.

The Chronicler used the books of Samuel and Kings from the Deuteronomistic History as his main source in retelling the history of the Judean monarchy. About half of Chronicles comes from the books of Samuel and Kings.

### **2.2.1 David's Reign (1 Chronicles 10–29)**

This section contains an extended account of the reign of David. In it there is no record of Saul's conflict with David. It begins with all Israel at Hebron asking David to be their king. This in itself is a recasting of the Samuel account where Judah is the first to acclaim David as king, followed seven years later by the remainder of the tribes. Throughout his account, the Chronicler uses the phrase "*all Israel*" to promote a perception of the unity of God's people (see Williamson, 1977).

The account continues with a description of David's capture of Jerusalem and his moving the ark of the covenant into the city. A comparison of how Samuel and Chronicles tell the story of the ark's trip to Jerusalem demonstrates how the Chronicler repurposed the older account to validate the essential role of the Levites. Second



Samuel 6:1–11 is closely paralleled in 1 Chronicles 13:1–14, telling the story of the death of Uzzah when he touched the ark and the abandonment of the ark with Obed-edom. Second Samuel moves directly to David's fetching the ark from Obed-edom and taking it to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:12–19). Before 1 Chronicles picks up the story at that point, it inserts a lengthy account of the appointment of the Levites to carry the ark on to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15:1–24), including these words:

*Then David said that carrying the ark of God is not allowed except by Levites, for YHWH chose them to carry the ark of YHWH and to minister to him forever. David assembled all Israel at Jerusalem to bring up the ark of YHWH to the place he had prepared for it. ... Then David summoned the priests Zadok and Abiathar, and the Levites Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab, and said to them, "You are the heads of the families of the Levites. Sanctify yourselves, you and your brothers, so that you may bring up the ark of YHWH, the God of Israel, to the place I have prepared for it. Because you did not carry it the first time, YHWH our God exploded in anger on us, because we did not seek out the rules for handling it." So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of YHWH, the God of Israel. And the Levites carried the ark of God with the poles on their shoulders, as Moses had commanded according to the word of YHWH. (1 Chronicles 15:2–3, 11–15)*

Whereas no lesson was drawn from Uzzah's death in the Deuteronomistic historian's account, the Chronicler used this as the occasion to validate the special role of the Levites and to draw the lesson that only the Levites are allowed to handle the ark.

Generally speaking, the Chronicler's deviations from the

Deuteronomistic History are noteworthy. The Chronicler omitted any reference to David's war against Saul and his alliance with the Philistines. He omitted the story of how David intimidated Nabal and then married Abigail. David's affair with Bathsheba was completely ignored. In one way or another, all of these stories might reflect negatively on David or tarnish his image, so they were conveniently left out.

On the other hand, the Chronicler added information not present in Samuel–Kings. David's extensive preparations for the building of the temple are detailed in 1 Chronicles 23–28. This effectively makes David the founder and sponsor of the Jerusalem temple. In contrast, the book of Kings attributes the entire process of planning and building the temple to Solomon.

An especially interesting retelling of history is found in the Chronicles account of David's census of the nation. Taking a census was an act of disobedience because it signaled a reliance on military forces rather than the power of God. The Samuel account implies that YHWH incited David to take a census in order to have an occasion to punish the people:

*Deuteronomistic History*

2 Samuel 24:1: *Again the anger of YHWH was inflamed against Israel, and he incited David against them, "Go, count the people of Israel and Judah.*

*Chronicler's History*

1 Chronicles 21:1: *Satan stood up against Israel and incited David to count the people of Israel.*

In the Samuel account, YHWH is responsible for getting David into trouble. The Chronicler's account removes YHWH and introduces Satan as the instigator. Notice that the instigator is now Satan (a name), and not "the satan" (a title) as in the book of Job. This reference to Satan reflects the growing interest in Satan in the late postexilic period and the Chronicler's concern to distance God as far away from evil as possible. The Chronicler probably would

have chosen to omit this story altogether because of the picture it gives us of David. But he retained it because the account goes on to describe how David secured the threshing floor of Araunah as the future site of the temple. Thus, it still fits his overall purpose of comprehensively accounting for the institution of the temple.

### **2.2.2 Solomon's Reign (2 Chronicles 1–9)**

Most of this section is devoted to a description of the building and dedication of the Jerusalem temple, taken almost verbatim from the book of Kings. The Chronicler idealized Solomon just as he did David by omitting those stories in the DH that put Solomon in a bad light, including the following:

- The bloody political struggle between Adonijah and Solomon that ended with Solomon's triumph (1 Kings 2:13–46a): too violent
- Solomon's adjudication of the case of the two prostitutes and their babies (1 Kings 3:16–28): too sinful
- Solomon's wealth, power, and wisdom (1 Kings 4:22–34): too rich
- Solomon's marriages to the multitude of foreign women and the building of shrines in Jerusalem to their foreign gods (1 Kings 11:1–13): too pagan
- Solomon's enemies and the prophecy of Ahijah (1 Kings 11:14–40): too divisive

The Chronicler's account of Solomon in his role as temple builder adds details not found in the Kings account. In particular, it depicts Solomon as Bezalel, who was the architect of the tabernacle at the time of Moses. Bezalel is mentioned nowhere outside the book of Exodus except in the Solomon narrative of Chronicles. In their parallel roles, both Bezalel and Solomon were designated for their

tasks by God, came from the tribe of Judah, received the spirit of wisdom to complete their tasks, built a bronze altar for the sanctuary, and made the sanctuary furnishings. Solomon, as the new Bezalel and great temple builder, continued in the sanctuary tradition of Moses.

### **2.2.3 Kings of Judah (2 Chronicles 10–36)**

This section is devoted almost entirely to the kings of Judah after the division of the kingdoms. Virtually no mention is made of the northern kingdom. The Chronicler dwells on the role of the kings of Judah in promoting worship and proper ritual. When disaster finally came by way of the Babylonians, it was because certain kings somehow failed in their religious duties.

The Chronicler's account supplements the Deuteronomistic History on a couple of points. The reform program of Hezekiah, not detailed in Kings, is given extended attention in Chapters 29–32. This includes an account of his temple cleansing and his celebration of the Passover. Also, Josiah's Passover celebration is given increased attention. All this accords with the Chronicler's interest in the right performance of religious ritual.

## **3 EZRA AND NEHEMIAH**

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are the main biblical sources for the history of the return of Jewish refugees from exile. These books were compiled fairly close to the events they report and can be considered reliable historiography for the most part (see Talmon, 1987). They are generally considered to be two parts of one book; the Septuagint and the Babylonian Talmud refer only to the book of Ezra when citing material from both Ezra and Nehemiah. The focal events of Ezra–Nehemiah are the major moments in the rebuilding of a religious community after the time of Babylonian exile.

The return from Babylonian exile, the process of rebuilding Jerusalem, and the restoration of Jewish community life back in Judea, now part of the Persian Empire (see [Figure 17.1](#)), took place in four stages (see [Table 17.2](#)).

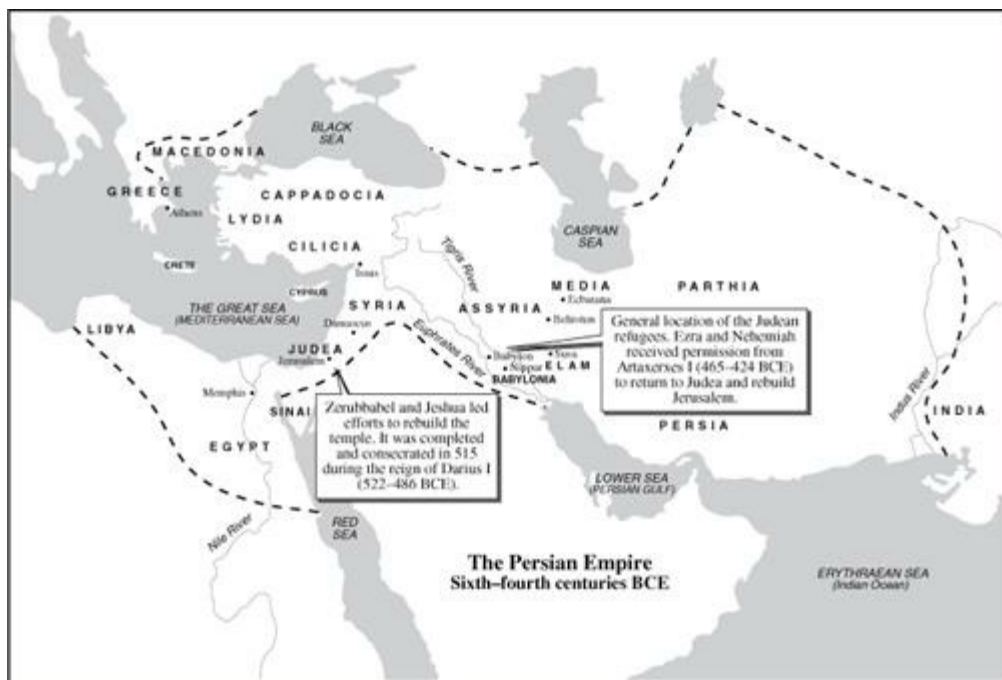
The editorial history of Ezra–Nehemiah is difficult to sort out, and scholars debate the original order of the chapters. Although opinions vary, it is reasonable to suggest that the book of Ezra–Nehemiah was completed around 400 BCE (see [Figure 17.2](#)). The book of Ezra–Nehemiah is a single unit consisting of three identifiable sections, each centered around a significant leader of the restoration (see [Table 17.3](#)).

### 3.1 Book of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1–6)

The first section of Ezra, termed the Book of Zerubbabel, relates the history of the early returns from Babylonian exile. It covers the period from the end of exile in 538 to the completion of the rebuilt temple in 515. The book begins with a verbatim record of the decree of [Cyrus](#) allowing the Judean refugees to return to Jerusalem:

*Thus says King Cyrus of Persia, “YHWH the Elohim of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has commanded me to build him a house in Jerusalem of Judah. Who among you are from his people—May his Elohim be with him. Go up to Jerusalem of Judah and build the house of YHWH, the Elohim of Israel, the Elohim who is in Jerusalem! Let all who remain behind assist the people of their place with silver, gold, goods, and livestock in addition to freewill offerings for the house of the Elohim which is in Jerusalem.”*  
(1:2–4)

**FIGURE 17.1** The Persian Empire

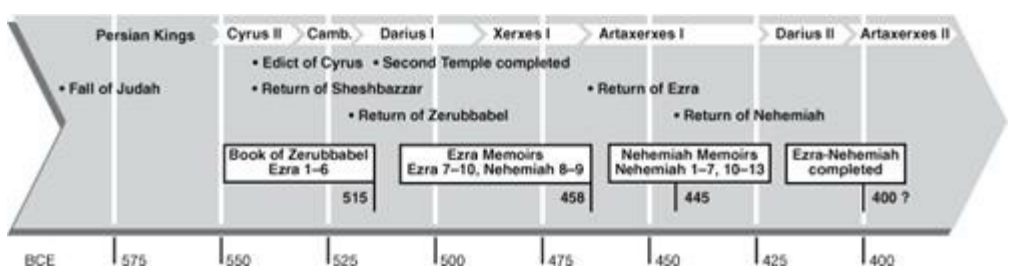


This decree was issued in 538 and authorized the rebuilding of the temple. Notice how Cyrus, a Persian, acknowledges that YHWH is the God—the Elohim—of Israel and attributes to him the gift of his own power. The fact that Cyrus authorized the temple rebuilding becomes important later in the book when Samaritans from the north and others opposed rebuilding activities in Jerusalem.

**TABLE 17.2** The Return from Exile

| BCE | Leader                                               | Activity                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 538 | Sheshbazzar (Davidic prince)                         | Led a return after Cyrus, king of Persia (550–530), gave permission; temple rebuilding began, but due to economic hardship and local opposition it was not completed at that time. |
| 522 | Zerubbabel (Davidic prince) and Jeshua (high priest) | Led a second group of Jews back to Palestine during the reign of Darius I (522–486); this group succeeded in completing the temple in Jerusalem in 515, called the second temple.  |
| 458 | Ezra (Jewish priest and scribe)                      | Led a group of Jews back to Palestine during the reign of Artaxerxes I (465–424) and imposed the Torah of Moses as civil law.                                                      |
| 445 | Nehemiah (Jewish cupbearer to Artaxerxes)            | Organized the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and returned religious and civil authority to the Levites.                                                                      |

**FIGURE 17.2** Time Line: The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah



The first group of returned refugees was led by [Sheshbazzar](#), who had been appointed governor of Judea. He may have been the son of Jehoiachin, Judah’s king in exile. Sheshbazzar and the first group of returnees succeeded in laying the foundations of the temple. For unspecified reasons the work broke off and the temple remained unfinished until a subsequent return of Jewish refugees.

The most productive return was led by [Zerubbabel](#), another leader from the line of David, in 522 BCE near the beginning of the reign of Darius I (see [Figure 17.3](#)). The most significant restoration event of this period was the completion of the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.

Authorities call this structure the [second temple](#) because the one built by Solomon was the first temple. The second temple remained intact until it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. Zerubbabel, the civic leader, was assisted by the high priest [Jeshua](#) and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (see RTOT [Chapter 12](#); note that the name of the high priest is spelled Jeshua here in Ezra–Nehemiah, but **Joshua** in the books of Haggai and Zechariah). Together they motivated the people to complete the project begun by Sheshbazzar, and it was finished in 515. This section of Ezra ends with an account of the dedication of the temple and the celebration of Passover.

### 3.2 Ezra Memoirs (Ezra 7–10 and Nehemiah 8–9)

[Chapters 7–10](#) of the book of Ezra, along with Nehemiah 8–9, which were misplaced, deal with Ezra the scribe. There is a gap of about sixty years between the events of the book of Zerubbabel and those of the Ezra Memoirs.

**Ezra** was a priest descended from the line of Aaron through Zadok. He was also a scribe, which essentially means that he was a royal administrator; he served under the Persian king Artaxerxes I. He presumably returned to Judea from Babylon in 458 with another group of refugees. However, scholars debate this date of Ezra’s mission. The seventh year of Artaxerxes I (Ezra 7:7) would be 458 BCE, the date used here.

**TABLE 17.3** Structure of Ezra and Nehemiah

|   |                    |                         |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Book of Zerubbabel | Ezra 1–6                |
| 2 | Ezra Memoirs       | Ezra 7–10, Nehemiah 8–9 |
| 3 | Nehemiah Memoirs   | Nehemiah 1–7, 10–13     |

**FIGURE 17.3**

“Text/image not available due to copyright restrictions”.

The problem is this: Ezra and Nehemiah do not seem to acknowledge each other, and they seem to work independently of each other even though the straightforward reckoning of their dates puts them in Jerusalem at the same time. Consequently, some scholars place Ezra after Nehemiah, and read thirty-seventh year of Artaxerxes, rather than seventh, thus placing the beginning of Ezra’s mission in 428. Still others place the beginning in 398 during the reign of Artaxerxes II (404–358). Complicating the matter further, Nehemiah 8:9 and 12:26, 36 do place Ezra and Nehemiah in Jerusalem at the same time, though these are often judged to be late editorial insertions.

Ezra had authorization from the Persian government to reestablish



proper modes of YHWH worship and adherence to the Torah of Moses. In Ezra's analysis, one of the most serious problems among the Judeans was mixed marriages. In the interim of the exile, male Judeans had married Canaanite, Hittite, Ammonite, Moabite, and Egyptian women. Ezra saw this as a breach of the injunction to remain separate from non-Israelite people. Intermarriage promoted assimilation and was a threat to Yahwistic religion. Israel's theological historians had concluded that one of the biggest reasons for Israel's downfall was intermarriage with Canaanites, which led to idolatry.

Ezra required Jewish men to divorce their non-Jewish wives and expel them from Judean territory, along with any children from the marriage. It was a time of great anxiety and mourning, but the priests, Levites, and ordinary people who had married foreign women dutifully carried out Ezra's directive.

Ezra also rededicated the people to keeping the Torah (Nehemiah 8–9). He assembled all Jewish adults in Jerusalem and read the Torah to them in Hebrew. However, because Hebrew was no longer their vernacular, having been replaced by Aramaic during the exile, there were translators who interpreted the text to the people as he read. Such an Aramaic translation of a Hebrew original is called a *targum*. This is the first biblical attestation of the practice of Scripture translation from one language to another.

After the Torah was read and interpreted, the people celebrated the Festival of Booths, which is a commemoration of the wilderness-wandering period of their early history. Then Ezra offered a prayer addressed to YHWH, the Elohim of the Jews, citing the manifold ways that he directly intervened in history from Creation to that moment. This is not unlike other covenant-renewal events such as the ones under Moses (the entire book of Deuteronomy), Joshua (Joshua 24), and Samuel (1 Samuel 12), which typically included a narrative recounting of the people's historical experience to that point. Such covenant-renewal occasions were times of corporate reflection and

rededication to the compact with YHWH.

### **3.3 Nehemiah Memoirs (Nehemiah 1–7 and 10–13)**

**Nehemiah** was an official at the court of Artaxerxes I in Susa and probably a eunuch. He traveled to Jerusalem in 445 BCE to be the governor of the Persian Empire's province of Yehud—that is, Judea. His great accomplishment was rebuilding the enclosure walls of Jerusalem. His work was opposed by Sanballat, leader of the Samaritans, and Tobiah, leader of the Ammonites. They saw his efforts as a threat to their power and influence in the region. On various occasions, they tried to stop the work, and they even tried to assassinate Nehemiah. Nehemiah and his crew were able to complete the rebuilding of the walls in fifty-two days despite the opposition. These walls gave Jerusalem the protection and security that its people needed.

Shortly afterward he returned to Jerusalem and instituted some important social and economic reforms. He closed the city on the Sabbath so that no trading could take place. He guaranteed that the Levites would receive their proper support, and like Ezra he forbade mixed marriages. Nehemiah served twelve years as governor of the province and then returned to Babylon in 433.

## **4 CHRONICLER'S HISTORY AS A COLLECTION**

In Christian Bibles, the Chronicler's History immediately follows Kings, giving the work of the Chronicler the character of a historical supplement to the Deuteronomistic History. In the ordering of the Old Testament, Ezra and Nehemiah are separate books and they follow 2

## Chronicles.

In Jewish tradition, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles are included in the division of the Writings in the Hebrew Bible. Curiously, even though the events recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah chronologically follow the events of Chronicles, they are placed before the books of Chronicles within the Writings. The placement of 1 and 2 Chronicles at the very end of the Hebrew Bible is presumably deliberate and may have been meant to suggest that they are a summary of the entire course of history of the people of God. In fact, Chronicles does span Creation to the end of exile.

The Chronicler's History essentially parallels the coverage of the Primary History, Pentateuch combined with the Deuteronomistic History. But why should there be two accounts of the same history in the Hebrew Bible? The fact that multiple versions of biblical history were retained implicitly affirms that each generation needs to rethink, reevaluate, and rewrite history in order to understand it in relation to present concerns. The CH retells Israel's history with almost single-minded focus on worship institutions because at its moment in time the community needed the temple as the core of its rebuilding efforts and the priests were the prime movers.

It is significant that the Chronicler's History did not replace the Deuteronomistic History. Both are still valid and need to be read. In the end, the CH is evidence of a continuing historiographic tradition within the community of faith. Each generation needs to reappropriate the past, and this in turn is evidence of the value of studying history to understand the present. Studying the CH enables us to see how retelling history in Israel grounded the changed identity of the Jews.

Finally, the Chronicler's History, including Ezra and Nehemiah, is notable for its focus on two heroes of the faith from the Torah and the Prophets. Chronicles focuses on David in his role in the development of the temple, and Ezra–Nehemiah focuses on the importance of Moses and the Torah for community rebuilding. This is a witness for the continuing relevance of Israel's founding fathers.

The role of Ezra in reading and reinterpreting the Torah for the fifth-century Jewish community has canonical implications. It demonstrates that the Mosaic Torah continued to provide the foundation for the faith of Israel, even though it needed reinterpretation and updating. The reappropriation of Torah demonstrates its ongoing vitality and adaptability. Ezra's role has been considered so significant for the development of the canon that he has been considered by some the final compiler of the Pentateuch, in addition to having had a role in the formation of the Chronicler's History. Still today Ezra is considered the "father of Judaism."

## **5 APOCRYPHAL HISTORY**

The tradition of retelling history and the need for it continued beyond the canon of the Hebrew Bible. A variety of histories were written in the early rabbinic period of roughly 100 BCE to 100 CE, and in Christian circles called the *intertestamental period*. Some of this historical literature is included in the Apocrypha. Two apocryphal books are connected with the figure of Ezra, and four are related to the Maccabees.

### **5.1 Maccabees**

The four books of the Maccabees (see [Table 17.4](#)) are treated differently in the various canons of Christian communities. First and Second Maccabees are included in Roman Catholic, Greek, and Slavonic Bibles; Third Maccabees in the Greek and Slavonic Bibles; and Fourth Maccabees in an appendix to the Greek Bible. All four are included in the apocryphal/deuterocanonical books section of the NRSV.

#### **5.1.1 First Maccabees**

The Maccabean period is essential for understanding the period when Torah Judaism in Palestine was faced with extinction. In the second century BCE, the Greek Empire, within which Judea resided, became subject to a systematic program of forced assimilation. Antiochus IV, a king of the Seleucid Greek kingdom, aggressively attempted to eradicate Jewish practices and beliefs. This provoked a strong response from certain segments of the Jewish population led by the family of Mattathias and his sons. This was the beginning of the Hasmonean dynasty that transformed Judea into an autonomous state within the Greek Empire. The book of 1 Maccabees is the essential source for understanding the history of this development. For example, we saw that the apocalypses of the book of Daniel can best be explained as the symbolic history of this period (see RTOT [Chapter 16](#)). The conflict between Judaism and Hellenism as told in 1 Maccabees was both a political and a cultural confrontation, and it had far-reaching consequences for the subsequent character of Judaism.

**TABLE 17.4** The Four Books of the Maccabees

| Book        | Date         | Coverage                                                                                                          |
|-------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Maccabees | 100 BCE      | Alexander the Great, rise of Antiochus IV, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean dynasty to John Hyrcanus I (333–134 BCE)   |
| 2 Maccabees | 104–63 BCE   | Persecution of Palestinian Jews under the Seleucid kings Seleucus IV, Antiochus IV, and Antiochus V (180–161 BCE) |
| 3 Maccabees | 100 BCE      | Suffering of Egyptian Jews under the Ptolemaic king Ptolemy IV (221–203 BCE)                                      |
| 4 Maccabees | 63 BCE–70 CE | Treatise on the superiority of reason over emotion                                                                |

### 5.1.2 Second Maccabees

This book is essentially an account of events leading up to the

desecration of the Jerusalem temple by Antiochus IV and the campaign of Judas Maccabeus in retaking and rededicating it. The account is a summary of a five-volume work by Jason of Cyrene (see 2:23), about whom nothing is known and whose work has not survived. This summary is framed by two letters addressed to Jews living in Egypt. The letters explain that the account was sent in the hope that Egyptian Jews would join in the Hanukkah celebration of rededication of the Jerusalem temple. The book is notable because it is one of the earliest sources for the expectation of the resurrection of the dead (7–8) and attests prayers being offered for the dead (12:39–45). It also explicitly mentions creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*, 7:28), which later becomes an important Christian doctrine but is not the way Creation is presented in Genesis 1. Overall, it sees the events surrounding the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus and Jewish opposition as part of a divine plan and reinforces the importance of the temple for Judaism.

### 5.1.3 Third Maccabees

Beginning as early as the Babylonian exile, there is mention of Jewish expatriates living in Egypt. Jeremiah the prophet was among a group that went there (Jeremiah 43–44). A collection of papyrus documents written in Aramaic from Elephantine in Egypt dating to the 400s BCE provide insight into a Jewish community there. The book of 3 Maccabees also relates to Egyptian Jewish experience and describes events that purportedly took place in Alexandria in the period immediately preceding the time of the Maccabees.

The story has to do with the persecution that the Ptolemaic king Philopator IV visited on the Jews after he was unsuccessful in plundering the temple in Jerusalem. His attempt to execute all Jews was thwarted by a pious priest named Eleazar. Philopator then had a change of heart and rescinded the execution order. Afterward, there was a great celebration marking the deliverance.

## 5.1.4 Fourth Maccabees

This book is not history as such. It is related to the Maccabees because it uses Maccabean era Jewish martyrs as examples of religious virtue and reason, which is its main focus. It is included in this category of our discussion of the Apocrypha because of its canonical name, but it might better be classed with apocryphal wisdom literature because it is a philosophical treatise on using reasoned judgment to control the emotions. The writer clarifies that by reason he means “*the mind that with sound logic prefers the life of wisdom*” (1:15). The writer further asserts that wisdom finds its truest expression in the Torah and is not independent of it. Wisdom combined with rational discernment enables a person to master lesser impulses and passions.

The writer goes on to describe an Eleazar, who was a Jew governed by reason. He refused to surrender his principles and eat pork even when Antiochus IV threatened him with torture. His death, and the deaths of seven brothers and their mother, a story told later, are used to illustrate lives governed by reason: “*None of the seven youths proved coward or shrank from death, but all of them, as though running the course toward immortality, hastened to death by torture*” (14:4-5 NRSV). These examples of martyrdom are also used to affirm immortality, a rather new notion that emerges in Judaism at this time.

## 5.2 Esdras

Esdras is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Ezra. The books of Esdras (see [Table 17.5](#)) are apocryphal works that have been ascribed to the biblical figure Ezra who lived in the 400s BCE. None of them were actually written by him. Instead, they illustrate the practice of pseudonymous authorship of books that is attested

beginning in the second century BCE. Daniel may be another such example. Neither First nor Second Esdras is included within the Roman Catholic or Protestant canons of Scripture.

### 5.2.1 First Esdras

The book of 1 Esdras in the Apocrypha appears to be a newer, or at least alternate, edition of historical material from 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah in the Hebrew Bible and follows that material closely. The only major difference is found in [Chapters 3–4](#), which relate the story of Darius’s three bodyguards. They held a writing contest in which each would make a case for what he considered the strongest thing in the world. Darius would both judge the contestants and reward the winner. Three strong things are argued: wine, the king, and women. It is a cute and entertaining disputation, but you will have to read the story yourself to find out what the king considers the strongest of all.

**TABLE 17.5** The Books of Esdras

| Book     | Date    | Coverage                                                      |
|----------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Esdras | 100 BCE | Josiah’s Passover celebration to Ezra’s reforms (621–458 BCE) |
| 2 Esdras | 100 CE  |                                                               |

**TABLE 17.6** Contents of 2 Esdras

| Chapters | Date   | Topic                                                                         | Alternate Name |
|----------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1–2      | 150 CE | Christian prophecy of divine rejection of Israel and acceptance of the church | 5 Ezra         |
| 3–14     | 100 CE | Seven Ezra dream visions and dialogues on Israel’s suffering                  | 4 Ezra         |
| 15–16    | 200 CE | Christian prophecy of doom against the nations and coming persecution         | 6 Ezra         |



The 1 Esdras condensed version of the Chronicler's History selected episodes that concern the temple as the focus of religious community, hence its choice of Josiah as the starting point. After the destruction of the temple, it treats the leaders who directed efforts to rebuild community by rebuilding the temple and restoring temple worship. It concludes by treating Ezra's efforts to focus marriage on Jewish family and to restore the Torah as the law of the community. With these essential components of Jewishness restored, the people could once again live in God's good graces as his unified people.

## 5.2.2 Second Esdras

Second Esdras is not historical in genre but largely apocalyptic. It is included in our account of the Apocrypha here because it is attached to the figure of Ezra. The book called 2 Esdras is actually a collection of three separate works (see [Table 17.6](#)).

The earliest and longest component, [Chapters 3–14](#), takes the form of apocalypse and is a collection of seven dream visions that came to Ezra in the form of dialogues with the interpreting angel Uriel. The focus of these visions is on the future: when God's people can expect the end of time and what it will be like.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Chronicler's History*. Which books constitute the CH, and why are they grouped together under this heading?
2. *David*. Given its context of writing, to what end did the Chronicler make David a major focus?
3. *Restoration*. What were the four major stages in the Jewish return to Jerusalem and the restoration of Jewish community life there?
4. *Jewishness*. What did Ezra identify as a main source of the

- Jews' troubles, and how did he address it?
5. *Jerusalem*. What did Nehemiah do to rebuild the Jewish community?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Deuteronomistic History and Chronicler's History*. Compare the DH with the CH. For what purpose and with what focus did each historical work give an account of Israel's history? To what end and in what way might Jews today retell the history of ancient Israel? Why might Christians retell that history? How and why might Muslims?
2. *Second temple*. Why was the rebuilding of the temple so important for reestablishing a viable Jewish community in Jerusalem? Why was the restoration of the Jews at this time so dependent on religious institutions and worship?
3. *Reading history*. What does the inclusion in the Hebrew Bible of both the DH and the CH suggest about the purpose of studying history? What are the dangers of not studying history? Do you think that it is important to study history, and if so why? Do you enjoy studying history? Why or why not?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

*A Synoptic Harmony of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles: With Related Passages from Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezra*, by James D. Newsome (1986), is a useful tool for comparing the Deuteronomistic and Chronicler's Histories. The Anchor Bible commentary on 1 Chronicles (two volumes), by Gary Knoppers (2004), is recommended especially for its comprehensive introduction.

# CONCLUSION

## After the Hebrew Bible

[1 Jewish Additions](#)

[2 Canon](#)

[3 Dead Sea Scrolls](#)

[4 New Testament](#)

[5 Rabbinic Literature](#)

---

## KEY TERMS

[Apocrypha](#)

[Canon](#)

[Canonization](#)

[Dead Sea Scrolls](#)

[Deuterocanonical](#)

[Early Judaism](#)

[Essenes](#)

[Hebrew Bible](#)

[Intertestamental period](#)

[Judah the Prince](#)

[Mishnah](#)

[New Testament](#)

[Old Testament](#)

[Oral Torah](#)

[Palestinian Judaism](#)

[Pharisees](#)

[Pseudepigrapha](#)

[Qumran](#)

[Rabbinic Judaism](#)

[Rabbis](#)  
[Septuagint](#)  
[Shema](#)  
[Talmud](#)  
[Targum](#)  
[Written Torah](#)

## Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) conquered the Persian Empire and extended Greek rule as far east as India. He and his successors extended Greek language, culture, and religion throughout the Greek Empire. This brought benefits to Palestine but also many challenges to traditional Jewish ways based on the Hebrew Bible.



Source: Drawing by Daniel Hornschemeier Bandstra based on a bust of Alexander the Great, circa 330 BCE.

---

## 1 JEWISH ADDITIONS

Although Jerusalem was restored as the center of Judaism after the Babylonian exile (see [Figure 1](#)), the nature of Judaism had changed significantly from its preexilic form. Jewish communities now also existed in Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia. Both Palestinian Judaism

and Diaspora Judaism continued to generate literature giving rise to a treasury of postbiblical writings in all the typical genres including history, wisdom, story, and apocalypse. The books were composed in the period 200 BCE to 100 CE (see [Table 1](#)) and represent a variety of responses and reapplications of Torah to fit the Greco-Roman context of Jewish faith and the diversity of Judaisms that arose in response to these new social, cultural, political, and religious settings. There are two broad groups, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha.

## 1.1 Apocrypha

The [Apocrypha](#), meaning “hidden books,” are the additional texts that are included in Greek and Latin translations of the Bible. Many of these books were probably originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic, but now only their Greek version exists. Most of them remain part of Roman Catholic and Orthodox canons. The following is a list of the books that Protestant Christians call the Apocrypha and that Roman Catholic Christians call the deuterocanonical books:

- Tobit
- Judith
- Wisdom of Solomon
- Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira)
- Baruch
- Letter of Jeremiah

**FIGURE 1**

“Text/image not available due to copyright restrictions”.

**TABLE 1** Chronology after the Hebrew Bible

|     |               |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BCE | 333           | Battle of Issus marks the end of Persian control and the beginning of Greek control of Palestine by Alexander the Great (356–323).                                                 |
|     | 250           | Hebrew Bible is translated into Greek and is called the Septuagint.                                                                                                                |
|     | 198           | Battle of Paneas marks the beginning of Syrian–Greek (Seleucid) rule of Palestine.                                                                                                 |
|     | 175           | Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) rules Palestine (175–163) and begins an aggressive policy of Hellenization.                                                                               |
|     | 167           | Antiochus IV vandalizes the temple in Jerusalem.                                                                                                                                   |
|     | 164           | Beginning of the Maccabean revolt against Seleucid control results in the rededication of the Jerusalem temple; the era of Maccabean rule is called the Hasmonean period (164–63). |
|     | 63            | Palestine campaign of Pompey and the beginning of Roman control of Palestine (63–325 CE).                                                                                          |
|     | 37            | Beginning of the reign of Herod the Great (37–4)                                                                                                                                   |
|     | 6             | Birth of Jesus of Nazareth                                                                                                                                                         |
| CE  | 29            | Beginning of the public activities of Jesus (29–33)                                                                                                                                |
|     | 33            | Death of Jesus and beginning of the Christian church                                                                                                                               |
|     | 34            | Beginning of Paul’s missionary work (34–67)                                                                                                                                        |
|     | 66            | Beginning of the first Jewish revolt against Roman occupation of Palestine (66–73)                                                                                                 |
|     | 70            | Jerusalem, including the second temple, is destroyed by the Romans.                                                                                                                |
|     | 81            | Beginning of the Roman persecution of the church (81–96).                                                                                                                          |
|     | 90            | Rabbinic council meets in Jamnia to discuss which books should be included in the Hebrew Bible.                                                                                    |
|     | Circa 190–400 | New Testament is compiled.                                                                                                                                                         |
|     | Circa 200     | Mishnah is compiled.                                                                                                                                                               |

---

## Additions to the book of Esther

Additions to the book of Daniel (Susanna, the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, and Bel and the Dragon)

1 Maccabees

2 Maccabees

Go to the companion website to read the Apocrypha.

These apocryphal books were treated in prior chapters of the Writings where they were related to existing genres (see RTOT “[Part 3: The Writings: Prologue to the Writings](#)” for their distribution). The apocryphal books contain a wealth of evidence for the character of Judaism both in Palestine and in the Diaspora during the post–Hebrew Bible period. A sampling of the Apocrypha will display how these books continue the literary and theological traditions of the

Hebrew Bible while adding their own twists.

The book of Sirach stands in the tradition of Hebrew wisdom literature. It was written in Hebrew between 200 and 175 BCE by a sage who lived in Jerusalem. He was thoroughly committed to Torah, the priesthood, and temple worship. As a shrewd observer of life in Palestine, especially the pressures on Jews to become more “modern” after the model of Greek culture, he set about urging his fellows to remain true to their religious traditions. It seems that he wrote his book to be a collection of wisdom and learning that could serve the Jews as a guide for living, making unnecessary a move to Greek outlooks and lifestyles:

*Look to generations of long ago and see: Who believed in YHWH and came to shame? Or who stood in fear of him and was abandoned? Or who called on him and he ignored him? For compassionate and merciful is YHWH. He forgives sins and saves in time of trouble. (2:10–12)*

Sirach is very much like the book of Proverbs in the way it contains aphorisms and maxims that aim to give moral guidance:

*My son, watch your time well; guard yourself from evil, and to yourself bring no shame. (4:21)*

*A sweet mouth multiplies love, and gracious lips inspire peace. (6:5)*

The two books of Maccabees contain accounts of the events surrounding the attempted suppression of Judaism in Palestine in the second century BCE. First Maccabees was written around 100 BCE by a Palestinian Jew who remains nameless. In describing the

deliverance of the Jews through the family of Mattathias, he models his accounts of these heroes on Israel's ancient champions, the Judges, Samuel, and David.

The dominating conflict at the center of 1 Maccabees is between the representatives of Greek culture—the Seleucids under the direction of their king Antiochus IV Epiphanes—and adherents of traditional Jewish culture. The conflict came to a head when Antiochus deliberately vandalized the temple in Jerusalem and made it a capital offense to practice Judaism:

*The king set up the outrageous abomination upon the altar of burnt offerings, and in surrounding Judean cities they built pagan altars. They also burnt incense at the doors of houses and in the streets. Any Torah scrolls they found they tore up and burned. Whoever was found in possession of a scroll of the covenant and whoever observed the Torah was condemned to death by royal decree. Women who had allowed the circumcision of their children were put to death, as per the decree, with the babies hung from their necks. Their families and those who had done the circumcising were also killed. (1 Maccabees 1:54–56, 60–61)*

The events recorded here occurred in December 167 BCE. Antiochus erected a statue of Zeus in the holiest part of the temple and slaughtered pigs in sacrifice. He deliberately provoked the Jews and tried to goad them into giving up their religion. However, it did not work.

The family of a pious Jew named Mattathias, led especially by his zealous son Judas, who was nicknamed the Maccabee (probably meaning “the hammerer”), instigated a revolt of Torah-observing Jews. The Maccabean revolt was bloody and determined and after more than three years of struggle succeeded in displacing the



Hellenizing forces from the templemount. After ritually purifying the temple and fighting further battles, the family of Mattathias established local Jewish rule again over a Jewish–Palestinian state. This rule lasted until 63 BCE when the Roman army, led by Pompey, took control of Palestine and absorbed it into the Roman Empire.

## 1.2 Pseudepigrapha

The [Pseudepigrapha](#) originate in the same general time period as the Apocrypha. The term *pseudepigrapha* literally means “pseudonymous writings” where typically the book is falsely attributed to a character from the Hebrew Bible. The Pseudepigrapha were never part of the official Scriptures of Judaism or Christianity. The following is a list of Jewish pseudepigraphic books that were composed before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE:

- 1 Enoch (or Ethiopic Enoch)
  - 2 Enoch (or Slavonic Enoch)
  - 2 Baruch (or Syriac Baruch)
  - 3 Maccabees
  - 4 Maccabees
  - Apocalypse of Elijah
  - Ascension of Isaiah
  - Jubilees
  - Letter of Aristeas
  - Life of Adam and Eve (or Apocalypse of Moses)
  - Lives of the Prophets
  - Psalms of Solomon
  - Sibylline Oracles
  - Testament of Job
  - Testament of Moses (or Assumption of Moses)
  - Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs
- Go to the companion website and read the Pseudepigrapha.

The book of 1 Enoch was one of the most widely read and circulated books of the Pseudepigrapha. It has been found in multiple copies among the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is even quoted in the New Testament book of Jude (verses 14–15).

The figure of Enoch comes from Genesis 5:24 where he was said to have walked with God. Being supremely righteous in an unrighteous age, he was taken directly into heaven. Because of his peculiar position before God, so the legend goes, God transmitted to Enoch special revelations about the nature of the world and about the end-times. First Enoch is one of the best examples of apocalyptic literature that was wildly popular during this period.

First Enoch contains a story about the rebellion of the angels in primeval times and their subsequent judgment. The story takes Genesis 6:1–4 as its point of departure but adds a significant amount of detail:

*And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: "Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children." And Semjaza, who was their leader, said unto them: "I fear ye will not indeed agree to do this deed, and I alone shall have to pay the penalty of a great sin." And they all answered him and said: "Let us all swear an oath, and all bind ourselves by mutual imprecations not to abandon this plan but to do this thing." Then sware they all together and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. And they were in all two hundred. And all the others together with them took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms*

*and enchantments, and the cutting of roots, and made them acquainted with plants. And they became pregnant, and they bare great giants, whose height was three thousand ells: Who consumed all the acquisitions of men. (6:1–7:3; Charles, 1913).*

Our discussion of Genesis 6:1–4 in RTOT [Chapter 1](#) noted that the identification of the “sons of God” is not obvious from the biblical text. Some readers have interpreted “the sons of God” to have been the line of Seth. But evidence from the use of the phrase “sons of God” elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible strongly suggests that the writer had angels of the Divine Council in mind.

Here in 1 Enoch, there is no doubt how the phrase was interpreted: it is clearly “*angels, the children of the heaven.*” The writer understands the story to be the description of how evil angels corrupted the human race. Of special interest is how the writer elaborated the Genesis core story. He notes how beautiful these human women were and adds that the angels were motivated by sexual lust. The story goes on to describe how the bad angels were policed by the good angels, Michael, Uriel, Raphael, and Gabriel. The bad angels were bound, taken prisoner, and eventually destroyed.

## 2 CANON

The richness of the Jewish literary tradition and the now far-flung geography of Judaism gave rise to the need for controls, or so at least somebody must have thought. There is very little actual evidence of how traditions became texts, and why fixed canons of Scripture took hold, despite the considerable amount of recent scholarly attention (see Schniedewind, 2004; Carr, 2005; Van der Toorn, 2007). Despite remaining uncertainties, the following outline of the process still

holds.

Daniel was completed in the first half of the second century BCE and thus has the distinction of being the last book of the Hebrew Bible. But it would be centuries before the books that today constitute the Hebrew Bible became a fixed and closed collection. The process involved considerable discussion and negotiation, but eventually the Tanak became a fixed canon. **Canon** is the technical term that applies to a fixed collection of books that are deemed authoritative. The term derives from the Greek word for “reed,” which was used as a measuring rod. Canon is then applied to the product that has been measured and fits the standard. When it is used in the context of texts, it came to apply to books that have “measured up” and thus can be included in the official collection.

The books of the **Hebrew Bible** (excluding the apocryphal books that we examined in the Writings section) in the three divisions of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings are the official books of the Jewish community (or at least *some* Jewish communities, if not all). Even after the Hebrew Bible, or Tanak, became the canon of **Palestinian Judaism**, the Greek-speaking communities of Diaspora Judaism added books to the Hebrew Bible with the result that their canons now differed. The Greek translation of the Tanak that also included additional Greek books is called the **Septuagint**. It is often referred to with the Roman numeral LXX because seventy Jewish scholars translated the Torah into Greek, according to the legend recounted in the Letter of Aristeas.

Go to the companion website and see the comparative table of the different canons that constitute and then build upon the three-part division of the Hebrew books.

## 2.1 A Hebrew Bible Appears

Scholars of prior generations used to think that the Tanak became a fixed text as a result of decisions that were made at Jamnia. Jamnia, otherwise known as Yavneh, was the city on the Mediterranean coast of Palestine that emerged as the center of Jewish learning after the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE. Certain rabbinic texts refer to a meeting of rabbis that took place there in 90 CE. The authority of certain biblical books, such as the Song of Songs and Esther, were discussed because they posed certain theological problems. This discussion is no longer interpreted to mean that the rabbis drew up a definitive formal list of authoritative books, only that the boundaries of the Writings division were being developed.

Insofar as it is even appropriate to talk about canon, the books of the Hebrew Bible took on recognized divine authority in clusters and in stages. The Torah, or Pentateuch, was the first cluster to emerge as a set collection. This has traditionally been associated with the figure of Ezra because he operated with “*the book of the torah of Moses which YHWH gave to Israel*” (Nehemiah 8:1). Earlier scholars had inferred that Ezra was then responsible for the written form of the Torah text, but now this view is recognized to exceed the evidence.

The next collection to reach fixed form would be the Prophets. There is no precise evidence by which to set a date, but it is generally reckoned to have happened in the late Persian or early Greek period. There is a general sense that prophecy ceased as a social and religious practice toward the end of the Persian period, perhaps suggesting that this collection had closed. The genre of prophecy (though certainly not apocalyptic) is lacking among the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic collections, giving support to this view.

The last collection to take final shape is the Writings as evidenced by the rabbinic discussion mentioned above. The fact that more books are included in the Bible of Diaspora Judaism in comparison to the Bible of Palestinian Judaism may indicate that it took some time for the Bible to become a closed document and that it may have

closed in one region sooner than in another. The collection of Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts also indicates a degree of canonical fluidity and variation while it reveals that a fixed number of text types were emerging (see Cross, 1998). It seems that in the early stages of **canonization**, individual books could circulate in various versions (the books of Samuel and Jeremiah are obvious examples), and different regional groups authorized different versions of the same book. It all gets very complicated, compounded by new-found textual riches that are the result of archaeological finds.

The three-part organization of the Hebrew Bible seems to be attested fairly early. The prologue to Sirach (sometime after 132 BCE) refers to prior great teachings as “*the Law and the Prophets and the others that followed them.*” The Gospel of Luke (late first century CE) refers to “*the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms*” (24:44).

Many scholars would agree today that one of the impulses behind inscribing and canonizing the biblical text was a concern for preservation in face of cultural threat. The earliest stage in the process, the Torah text of Ezra’s era, was a response to the destruction of the first temple in 587 BCE and the exile. The text was the authority needed to reconstitute the people of YHWH. The finalization of the contours of the Hebrew Bible seems to have come after the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE, which again resulted in a dispersion of Jews from its sacred city. Probably from that point on, the Jews became, functionally and practically speaking, the people of the book.

## **2.2 Old Testaments Appear**

The transition from the Tanak Hebrew Bible to the Christian Old Testament is no less complicated a process, and it will only be hinted here. The key to the process is the Septuagint. The Septuagint is the

oldest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. The Letter of Aristeas tells the story of how the Torah was translated by seventy-two Jewish scholars around 250 BCE in Alexandria.

Whatever its precise origins, a Greek version of the Torah was needed at this time because a large portion of the total Jewish population of the ancient world was distributed throughout the Greek Empire. The text needed to be made available for synagogue study and worship to Jews who no longer spoke or read Hebrew. Over time many other Jewish books were translated into Greek and came to be attached to the Torah.

A comparison of the Septuagint text with the traditional Hebrew Bible, called the *Masoretic text* (also called the *received text*), reveals that there are many differences and, in the case of a few books, sizable additions and deletions. The comparative study of biblical manuscripts is called *text criticism*, and an examination of the differences using this approach suggests that the Septuagint may in fact be the translation of an alternate Hebrew Bible than the one that has survived as the Tanak that we know today.

Because more Jews in the first century CE tended to know only Greek, the Septuagint became de facto their Bible. This goes for the vast majority of the earliest Christians (who were of course Jewish), with the result that whenever Scripture is quoted in New Testament writings, it is always from the Septuagint. For all practical purposes, the Septuagint was the Bible.

The Septuagint version of the Bible, seemingly even from early on in the process of its construction, contained many books that never found their way into the Tanak. These are the books we now call the Apocrypha, described previously. Not only were these books included, but they were also not separated out from the books of the Torah, Prophet, and Writings of the Tanak as is often done in editions of Bibles today (for example, the New Oxford Annotated NRSV Bible). Instead, the Septuagint includes 1 Esdras, Judith, Tobit, and the Maccabees in its collection of historical writings. The other

apocryphal books are interspersed among the poetic and prophetic books.

Largely for this reason, the [Old Testament](#) of the Christian canon, which is based on the Septuagint, divides the books according to the categories Law (or Pentateuch), Historical Books, Wisdom and Poetical Books, and Prophetic Books (for example, the NAB). Matters got complicated when the Reformation came about. The Protestant reformers removed all books that were in the Septuagint that were not found in the Tanak. They argued that the Hebrew canon was original and hence authentic, not the Greek canon. Not by accident this also served to identifiably separate them from the Catholic Church when it comes to the authoritative text, and they could take the high ground when it comes to authenticity. Curiously though, the Protestants retained the Greek organization of books and not the Tanak structure of Torah, Prophets, and Writings. In the face of Protestant opposition to the inclusion of the apocryphal books, the Roman Catholic Council of Trent, held in 1546, reaffirmed their official status and called them the [deuterocanonical](#) books.

The result is that a number of different Old Testaments emerged, even more if the Greek Orthodox canon is considered. The differences have historical and ideological explanations. The primary divide, however, remains the one between the Hebrew Bible and its order of books in contrast to the Christian Old Testament and its order of books. Perhaps the most significant difference is how the two works conclude.

The last three books of the Tanak are Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. On the surface, this is quite strange because the events of Ezra–Nehemiah chronologically follow those of Chronicles. However, by placing Chronicles last, the last word of the Bible is the proclamation of Cyrus authorizing the return to Judea:

*So says King Cyrus of Persia: “YHWH the Elohim of*



*heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has commanded me to build him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who among you are from his people—May YHWH his Elohim be with him. And may he go up [Hebrew ya'al].” (2 Chronicles 36:26)*

The enduring and final command to all Jews is to go up to Jerusalem, or as it is otherwise put, to “make *aliyah*.”

In contrast, the Old Testament places the Minor Prophets section last, rather than the Writings. This means that the book of Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament, and the book of Malachi ends with these words:

*Remember the Torah of Moses my servant which I commanded him at Horeb concerning all Israel, statutes and ordinances. Now I am sending you Elijah the prophet before comes the great fearful day of YHWH. Fathers’ heart will restore sons, and sons’ heart will restore fathers. If not, I will come and strike the earth with a curse. (4:4–5)*

This word effectively concludes the Old Testament with the prophetic threat of judgment, the need for repentance, and the expectation of Elijah. The latter expectation is met in John the Baptist in the Gospels, which books lead off the New Testament, creating a thread of continuity and hope. Thus, although the Tanak and the Old Testament are in one view the same, they could not be more different.

### **3 DEAD SEA SCROLLS**

The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of Judaism have been available to scholarship for a long time. They provide a wealth of information regarding the thought world of Judaism. But recent discoveries have

powerfully expanded and deepened our grasp of the diversity of Judaism and its history, and none more significantly than the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The [Dead Sea Scrolls](#) are probably the most famous archaeological discovery of the modern world. Their fame is the product of the serendipitous nature of the find, the quantity and antiquity of the texts, and their potential for illuminating the history and ideas of Judaism and Christianity.

## **FIGURE 2** Qumran Cave 4

Qumran Cave 4 (middle left), West Bank, is one of many caves near the Dead Sea where scrolls were found. Fragments of approximately 580 different ancient manuscripts were discovered in this cave in 1954.



Photo by Barry Bandstra, May 1984

The texts date roughly to the period 150 BCE–70 CE. Most of the scrolls were found in caves in the vicinity of the ancient ruins called [Qumran](#) (see [Figure 2](#)). The nature of the ruins, the identity of the people who lived there, and even the identity of the people who wrote the scrolls are still topics of hot debate. The view that the texts were written by a Judaic group called the [Essenes](#) who also lived at Qumran is disputed by some but is the consensus of scholarship today.

The Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts include copies of all the books of the Hebrew Bible except the book of Esther. Copies of some of the apocryphal books were also found. In addition, numerous other Jewish writings never before known have come to light.

### **3.1 Biblical Manuscripts**

The biblical manuscripts provide evidence for the process by which books of the Hebrew Bible were passed on by copyists. Before the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery, the earliest complete copy of the Hebrew Bible was the Leningrad Codex; it dates to 1009 CE. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we now have copies of biblical books dated to the third and second centuries BCE—bringing us more than 1000 years closer to the originals.

Some of the Dead Sea Scrolls biblical manuscripts provide copies that seem more accurately to reflect the original biblical text. They have provided helpful evidence to modern translators, and some of the most recent modern-language versions of the Hebrew Bible have made use of these texts. For example, the NRSV text of 1 Samuel 10 adds an entire paragraph, about seventy-one words (in the English translation) not found in the traditional Hebrew Bible.

### **3.2 Documents of Judaism**

Many Dead Sea Scrolls texts are documents never before known or known only in fragmentary copies. The Temple Scroll, some 28 feet long, deals with the structure of the temple and its furniture, ritual practice, procedures for sacrifices, and rules for observing the Sabbath and seasonal feasts. The Community Rule appears to contain the constitution of the Dead Sea Scrolls community. Dated to around 100 BCE, it contains a discourse about truth and falsehood, rules for membership, a disciplinary code, and the expectations of the leader

of the group called the “Teacher of Righteousness.” According to a Dead Sea Scrolls belief called *dualism*, the world was governed by two forces, good and evil, described here in the Community Rule:

*He has created man to govern the world, and has appointed for him two spirits in which to walk until the time of His visitation: the spirits of truth and falsehood. Those born of truth spring from a fountain of light, but those born of falsehood spring from a source of darkness. All the children of righteousness are ruled by the Prince of Light and walk in the ways of light, but all the children of falsehood are ruled by the Angel of Darkness and walk in the way of darkness. (1QS.III; Vermes, 1987)*

The Dead Sea Scrolls community had an us-versus-them view of the world. The people of the community believed humankind is dominated by two spirits and consists of two camps, the “sons of light” and the “sons of darkness.” The two will finally face off in an end-times battle, described in the War Scroll. The forces of light will ultimately prevail, and God’s people will be vindicated.

Most Dead Sea Scrolls texts have a close relationship to the Hebrew Bible, and many draw heavily from its wording. The various texts used in worship contain direct quotations from the Hebrew Bible. The Dead Sea Scrolls community had its own hymnbook, largely composed using phrases and lines out of the biblical Psalms.

Some manuscripts are commentaries on biblical texts, mostly prophetic texts from the Hebrew Bible. Called *pesharim* (*peshar* in the singular), these commentaries reveal how this community read the Hebrew Bible. Their basic interpretive principle was that everything in the Hebrew Bible applies to their own day and, in particular, the biblical prophetic texts predicted events that would happen in their very own generation. For instance, even though the book of Habakkuk

is a response to the Babylonian crisis (see RTOT [Chapter 12](#)), the *pesher* on Habakkuk applied this directly to the conflict that they faced with the Romans and the (in their view) corrupted factions of Judaism. Essentially, the prophet Habakkuk was questioning how God could use the wicked Babylonian Empire to punish his presumably more righteous covenant people of Judah. The *pesher* on Habakkuk quotes the biblical text and then interprets their present conflict directly through it:

*But the righteous shall live by his faith (Habakkuk 2:4b). Interpreted, this concerns all those who observe the Law in the House of Judah, whom God will deliver from the House of Judgment because of their suffering and because of their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness. (1QpHab.VII–VIII; Vermes, 1987)*

The original text of Habakkuk seems to be saying that the righteous Israelite would find deliverance from disaster by personal faith in God, not through membership in the community or the faith of the fathers. The Habakkuk Commentary reinterprets this and says Torah-observing Jews will be delivered through suffering and their trust in their community leader, called the “Teacher of Righteousness”—quite a different twist to the original text.

## 4 NEW TESTAMENT

Christianity began as a Jewish movement of the first century CE. Followers of Jesus of Nazareth became convinced after his death that he was the Messiah that the Hebrew Bible had described and that Judaism awaited. The [New Testament](#) is a collection of writings composed by members of this Jesus-the-Messiah movement. These

texts include narrations of the life of Jesus and moral instruction to his followers, with an apocalypse thrown in at the end.

Because most of the earliest followers of Jesus were Jewish, many of their writings naturally have thematic continuity with the Hebrew Bible. Some of the writings argue that Jesus fulfills Jewish expectations while others highlight his uniqueness. Whatever the case, the New Testament cannot be understood apart from its grounding in the Hebrew Bible. In fact, the Hebrew Bible was the one and only Bible of the earliest Christians. The earliest New Testament books date to the middle of the first century, years after the death of Jesus. The last New Testament books date to the late first century or early second century CE.

The collection of all the books that now constitute the New Testament was, for all practical purposes, probably closed by the end of the second century CE. However, the documents we have at our disposal that confirm the official New Testament canon date to the late fourth century. The collection took on the name New Testament, or New Covenant, to communicate both the essential continuity and the significant discontinuity with the text of the Old Covenant, or the Old Testament—that is, the Hebrew Bible.

As does the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament contains a great variety of literary types. It encompasses narratives on the public career of Jesus called gospels, a history of the early church, letters from early leaders to congregations and individuals around the Mediterranean, and an apocalyptic-style description of end-time tribulation. The following is a categorized list of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament canon in their traditional order:

*Gospels:* Gospel according to Matthew, Gospel according to Mark, Gospel according to Luke, and Gospel according to John

*History:* Acts of the Apostles

*Letters* (also called *Epistles*): Paul's Letter to the Romans, Paul's First and Second Letters to the Corinthians, Paul's Letter to the Galatians, Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, Paul's Letter to the Philippians, Paul's Letter to the Colossians, Paul's First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians, Paul's First and Second Letters to Timothy, Paul's Letter to Titus, Paul's Letter to Philemon, Letter to the Hebrews, Letter of James, First and Second Letters of Peter, First and Second and Third Letters of John, and Letter of Jude

*Apocalyptic literature*: The Revelation of John

The following excerpts, one from each of the four types, are intended to display how the New Testament demonstrates continuity with the Hebrew Bible. They also indicate how the earliest Christian writers argued that some special act of fulfillment and consummation had occurred through the Jesus event.

A *gospel*, of which there are four in the New Testament, dwells on the events of the life of Jesus that evidenced his character and mission from God. The gospels as books are not biographies of the life of Jesus but are arguments for identifying him as the son of God and the Messiah.

The Gospel according to Mark is probably the earliest of the four gospels, quite likely written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Mark 15 describes the trial, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus. The essential claim of the earliest Jewish Christians was that Jesus was the Jewish messiah. In fact, their very name derives from this claim: The word *christ*, from which the terms *Christian* and *Christianity* derive, comes from the Greek word *christos*, which means "anointed one," the same meaning as Hebrew *meshiach*, "messiah." Throughout [Chapter 15](#), Mark ironically highlights Jesus' messiahship by recounting the nonperception and the downright denial of Jesus' kingship by Jews and Romans:

*It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. ... Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." (Mark 15:25–32, NRSV)*

A messiah in the tradition of the Hebrew Bible and Judaism was a kingly figure endowed by God with power to rule over a political kingdom. Jesus did not fit this mold, yet his followers still proclaimed him the Messiah. They could do this only by redefining the nature of the Kingdom of God to be a spiritual and moral kingdom.

The Acts of the Apostles describes the missionary work of Jesus' followers and the founding of Christian churches. Often Luke, the writer of a gospel and this book, draws connections to the Hebrew Bible as a way to authenticate this new movement. His description of the Pentecost event and his record of Peter's sermon on that occasion are replete with connections to the Hebrew Bible. For example, his description of the distribution of the Holy Spirit recalls the storm and fire of biblical theophanies:

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire*



*house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:1–4, NRSV)*

The Jewish festival of Pentecost (also called the Feast of Weeks) marks the end of the grain harvest. It coincides with that day, seven weeks after Passover, on which according to Jewish tradition the Torah was given. The Spirit of God arrived with a wind storm and was evident in licks of fire. Storm and fire were the visible evidences of God's presence in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, including the burning bush episode of Moses and Elijah's transfer to heaven via the fire chariot. The birth of the church, as Pentecost is usually deemed, was thus construed as the natural outgrowth of the Torah of God and its harvest.

The Letter of Paul to the Galatians, written sometime in the 50s CE, deals with the critical question of whether or not Gentile Christians must conform to traditional Jewish laws. Essentially, Paul said no. But to justify his position, he had to reinterpret the traditional definition of Jewish identity:

*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? ... Just as Abraham "believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you." For this reason, those*

*who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.*  
(Galatians 3:1–2, 6–9, NRSV)

Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 to certify that inclusion in the covenant community is made possible by believing in God and not by obeying the Torah. This also warrants extending the bounds of the covenant community to non-Jews.

The Revelation of John closes the New Testament collection of books. Literally named the Apocalypse, it has affinities with the apocalyptic literature of the Hebrew Bible and [intertestamental period](#), such as the second half of Daniel and the book of 1 Enoch. The book uses a great deal of symbolism involving numbers, hybrid beasts, seals, and bowls. Due to the veiled nature of its symbolism and other factors, it is subject to widely varying interpretations.

The Revelation purports to be a vision given to John that discloses events of the end-time of history. Times of warfare and conflict are described until the ultimate victory of God is achieved. Then the universe would be remade into a “new heavens and a new earth,” recalling the words of Isaiah 65–66. The last words of the Revelation also draw upon creation imagery, as if to say that the new world would be a remake of the garden of Eden of the book of Genesis:

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city [that is, the New Jerusalem]. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on*

*their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1–5, NRSV)*

Some clear points of contact with Hebrew Bible creation motifs are the tree of life, the river, not curse but only blessing, the light that comes from God without a sun, and perhaps even the use of the divine designation YHWH Elohim (LORD God) that was used consistently in Genesis 2–3. The Revelation provides a satisfying closure to the Christian Bible by returning the believer to the beauty of God’s perfect creation.

## 5 RABBINIC LITERATURE

The specific type of Judaism associated with the [Pharisees](#) had its roots in the Maccabean period, and Pharisaic Judaism became a dominant force by the first century CE. It was the only Jewish religious group, apart from Christianity, that survived the disastrous first Jewish revolt. It lived on in what is now called [Rabbinic Judaism](#).

One valuable source of insight into the nature of Rabbinic Judaism is its translations of the Bible. As the Hebrew language receded from active use in Jewish communities and Aramaic took its place, the Hebrew Bible was translated into the common tongue. An Aramaic translation of a Hebrew Bible original was called a [targum](#) (see RTOT [Chapter 17](#) and Ezra’s reading of the Torah). Targums from various regional Jewish communities have survived, and they can tell us a great deal about how the Hebrew Bible was understood. More often paraphrases than literal translations, they reveal what the Bible meant to them.

Pharisaic Judaism was in every way closely tied to the Hebrew Bible. The Bible was the focus of religious devotion. Reading the

Torah was the heart of synagogue services and thoroughly shaped Jewish liturgy. The Hebrew Bible was called the [Written Torah](#) in this tradition to distinguish it from the Oral Torah. The [Oral Torah](#) consisted of interpretations and applications of the Hebrew Bible. The Written and Oral Torahs together became the authoritative guide for life and belief within the Jewish community. The accumulation of text and interpretation came to be called *halakah*, from the Hebrew verb “to walk,” because this literature provided the Torah of walking in righteousness. Judaism defined a Torah-centered nation, and the community became known as “the people of the book.”

The wealth of Oral Torah that was voiced by generations of Jewish scholars and teachers, called [rabbis](#), was collected and organized into tractates in the second century CE by [Judah the Prince](#). It came to be called the [Mishnah](#). The process of reapplying Torah to life in the community did not stop with the finalization of the Mishnah. The [Talmud](#) contains an additional set of interpretations of Torah that built upon the Mishnah.

The following excerpt from the Mishnah communicates the flavor of Oral Torah. This paragraph contains a discussion of when the Shema should be recited each day. The [Shema](#) is the Jewish prayer derived from Deuteronomy 6 that became the basic creed of Judaism:

*From what time in the evening may the Shema be recited? From the time when the priests enter [the Temple] to eat of their Heave-offering until the end of the first watch. So R. Eliezer. But the Sages say: Until midnight. Rabban Gamaliel says: Until the rise of dawn. His sons once returned [after midnight] from a wedding feast. They said to him, “We have not recited the Shema.” He said to them, “If the dawn has not risen ye are [still] bound to recite it. Moreover, wheresoever the Sages prescribe ‘Until midnight’ the duty of fulfilment lasts until the rise of dawn.” The duty of burning the fat*

*pieces and the members [of the animal offerings] lasts until the rise of dawn; and for all [offerings] that must be consumed “the same day,” the duty lasts until the rise of dawn. Why then have the Sages said: Until midnight? To keep man far from transgression. (Berakoth 1:1)*

This discussion provides an example of the Rabbinic Jewish practice of “making a hedge around Torah.” That is to say, laws were often applied more strictly than was dictated by the original statement of the law in the Hebrew Bible. This was done so that a person might break the new application of the law and yet not break the original law itself.

There is a much richer body of Jewish interpretive literature from this period than this brief discussion could communicate. In addition to the translations of the Hebrew Bible and *halakah*, there developed a vast collection of commentaries on biblical books and often delightful retellings of biblical stories that communicated moral lessons.

This storehouse of literature from the variety of communities that together constituted [early Judaism](#), including the Pharisees, Essenes, and Christians, reveals to us the vitality and longevity of the Hebrew Bible. It provided the foundation for life and practice in these centuries. It demonstrates how the text of Scripture provided a certain stable set of core beliefs and moral norms and yet within itself allowed for continual reinterpretation and reapplication to account for changing social and historical conditions. Stability and adaptability, continuity and change—the Hebrew Bible reveals itself to be a remarkable book that formed communities and enabled them to survive, even thrive, in a challenging world.

## KEY CONCEPTS

1. *Apocrypha*. What are the main types of apocryphal literature related to the Hebrew Bible, and what is an example of each? You may need to draw upon the Writings chapters of this textbook to adequately answer this question.
2. *Canon*. What is a canon, and what are the major different canons of Scripture? How does the canon of the Hebrew Bible differ from the canon of the Old Testament?
3. *Dead Sea Scrolls*. What are the Dead Sea Scrolls, and why are they so important to biblical study?
4. *Hebrew Bible and Old Testament*. How are these two collections similar and how are they different? Are their similarities significant? Are their differences significant?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Extrabiblical literature*. Our introductory survey of writings related to the Hebrew Bible indicates that many Jewish texts were written that, for whatever reason, did not become “official.” Does this come as a surprise to you? Why do you think that such a rich literary tradition developed within Judaism? Do you think that it is important to study these books in addition to the official books of the Hebrew Bible? Why or why not?
2. *Canon as an historical process*. Although our understanding of the canonical process is sketchy, we know enough to sense that the final canon, once it was determined, was the result of vigorous discussion within communities of faith. Because the creation of a canon is the result of a contingent historical process, does this relativize the final product in any way?
3. *Different canons*. Different communities of faith ended up with different canons. Once the canons became fixed, they assumed an authoritative and even absolute status in defining what is and

what is not the word of God. Do you think that this was a good thing or a bad thing? Is it necessary to have a fixed set of texts, or could a faith community operate without one? Would Judaism or Christianity be different if it did not have a canon?

4. *Analytic approach to Scripture*. The study of the Hebrew Bible that we have pursued has given considerable attention to the contextual and developmental dimensions of the biblical text. In other words, we looked at who wrote the texts, how they were composed and edited (often out of originally separate and preexisting documents), and how geographical and social contexts affected the shape of the written texts. Perhaps you have never studied the Bible in quite this way before. Has this way of approaching the Bible changed your view of the Bible? Has it impacted your beliefs in any way, or has it always been just an academic pursuit? Do you look at the Bible differently now or not, for better or worse?

## READING THE TEXT TODAY

The following resources, categorized under the main headings of this chapter, are authoritative sources for further study. Each of these topics is a field unto itself, and the bibliography is massive. Use the books cited below as a way to enter these fields.

1. *Jewish additions*. James H. Charlesworth's two-volume *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (1983–1985) is today's standard translation of the Apocalyptic and Pseudepigraphic literature.
2. *Canon*. Martin J. Mulder's (ed.) *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading & Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism & Early Christianity* (2004) is a comprehensive account of the canon and early biblical interpretation. A

- readable general introduction is *Whose Bible Is It? A Short History of the Scriptures*, by Jaroslav Pelikan (2006).
3. *Dead Sea Scrolls*. Several reputable translations of the nonbiblical Qumran texts are available, including Florentino G. Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (1996), and Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (1996). The biblical texts have been compiled and annotated by Martin Abegg, Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich as *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (1999). James C. VanderKam has written a clear introduction to these texts called *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (1994) as well as an explanation of the history and literature of the second-temple period entitled *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (2001).
  4. *New Testament*. Robert Van Voorst's *Reading the New Testament Today* (2005) is an introductory textbook on the literature.
  5. *Rabbinic literature*. For the text of the oral tradition, see *The Mishnah: A New Translation*, by Jacob Neusner (1988). Neusner explains Jewish literature of the second-temple period and beyond in his *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature* (1994).



# WORKS CITED

Abegg, M. G., P. W. Flint, and E. C. Ulrich. (1999). *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

Ackerman, S. (1998). *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel*. The Anchor Bible Reference Library. New York: Doubleday.

Albright, W. F. (1949; rev. ed., 1963). *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*. New York: Harper and Row.

Alter, R. (1981). *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books.

———. (1985). *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. New York: Basic Books.

———. (1996). *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*. New York: Norton.

———. (1999). *The David Story*. New York: Norton.

———. (2004). *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*. New York: Norton.

Anderson, G. A. (1987). *Sacrifices and Offerings in Ancient Israel: Studies in Their Social and Political Importance*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.

Angel, A. R. (2006). *Chaos and the Son of Man: The Hebrew Chaoskampf Tradition in the Period 515 BCE to 200 CE*. London: Clark.

Bailey, L. R. (1989). *Noah: The Person and the Story in History and Tradition*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Barr, J. (1993). *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Barthes, R. (1974). "The Struggle with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:23–33." In *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis: Interpretational Essays*, ed. R. Barthes. Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press.

Barton, J. (1984). *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

———. (1996). *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, 2nd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

———. (2003). *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Bassett, F. W. (1971). "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan: A Case of Incest?" *Vetus Testamentum* 21.

Batto, B. F. (1984). "Red Sea or Reed Sea? What *Yam Sûp* Really Means." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10.4 (July/August).

———. (1992). *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Bechtel, L. M. (1993). "Rethinking the Interpretation of

Genesis 2.4b–3:24.” Vol. 2, *The Feminist Companion to the Bible: A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. A. Brenner. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press.

Beit-Arieh, I. (1988). “The Route through Sinai—Why the Israelites Fleeing Egypt Went South.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 14.3 (May/June).

Ben-Tor, A. (1999). “Excavating Hazor Part One: Solomon’s City Rises from the Ashes.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 25.2 (March/April).

Berlin, A. (1985). *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Berrigan, D. (2008). *The Kings and Their Gods: The Pathology of Power*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Bible Literacy Report. (2005). New York: Bible Literacy Project.

Bimson, J. J. (1978). *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*. Sheffield, England: University of Sheffield Press.

Bimson, J. J., and D. Livingston. (1987). “Redating the Exodus.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 13.5 (September/October).

Biran, A. (1998). “Sacred Spaces: Of Standing Stones, High Places and Cult Objects at Tel Dan.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 24.5 (September/October).

Biran, A., and J. Naveh. (1993). “An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan.” *Israel Exploration Journal* 43.

Blenkinsopp, J. (1983). *A History of Prophecy in Israel*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

———. (1992). *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible*. New York: Doubleday.

Bloch, A., and C. Bloch. (1995). *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Random House.

Bloom, H. (1990). *The Book of J. Translated from the Hebrew* by David Rosenberg, trans. H. Bloom. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.

Boccaccini, G. (2002). *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism: An Intellectual History, from Ezekiel to Daniel*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Bodenheimer, F. S. (1947). “The Manna of Sinai.” *Biblical Archaeologist* 10.

Boëthius, A., et al., eds. (1963). *Etruscan Culture, Land, and People*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Boyer, P. (1992). *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Brenner, A., ed. (1993). *The Feminist Companion to the Bible: A Feminist Companion to Genesis*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press.

———. (1998). *Genesis: The Feminist Companion to the Bible*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press.

Bright, J. (1959; 2nd ed., 1981; 3rd ed., 2000). *A History of Israel*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

Brown, W. (2002). *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Brueggemann, W. (1977). *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

———. (1984). *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Press.

———. (1995). *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Bruun, J. (2005). *Text and History: Historiography and the Study of the Biblical Text*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns.

Bryce, G. E. (1979). *A Legacy of Wisdom: The Egyptian Contribution to the Wisdom of Israel*. Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press.

Caird, G. B. (1980). *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

Campbell, A. F., and M. A. O'Brien. (1993). *Sources of the Pentateuch. Texts, Introductions, and Annotations*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

———. (2000). *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History: Origins, Upgrades, Present Text*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Campbell, E. F. (1975). *Ruth*. Garden City: Doubleday.

Campbell, J. (1968). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Carmichael, C. M. (1969). "The Deuteronomic Credo." *Vetus Testamentum* 19.

Carr, D. (2005). *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Charles, R. M. (1913). *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Charlesworth, J. H. (1983–1985). *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vol. 1: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*; Vol. 2: *Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Other Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

Childs, B. S. (1970). *Biblical Theology in Crisis*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

———. (1979). *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Clements, R. E. (1967). *Abraham and David*. London: SCM.

———. (1980). *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem: A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament*. Sheffield, England: JSOT.

———. (1982). “The Unity of the Book of Isaiah.” *Interpretation* 36.

Clifford, R. J. (1972). *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Clines, D. J. A. (1978; 2nd ed., 1997). *The Theme of the Pentateuch*. Sheffield, England: JSOT.

———. (1990). *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press.

Cohen, H. H. (1974). *The Drunkenness of Noah*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Coogan, M. D. (1978). *Stories from Ancient Canaan*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

———. (1995). “BAR’s 20th Anniversary: 10 Great Finds.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21.3 (May/June).

———, ed. (1998). *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Cook, S. L. (1995). *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

———. (2003). *The Apocalyptic Literature*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Coote, R. B. (1981). *Amos among the Prophets: Composition and Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Crenshaw, J. L. (1969). "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon 'Historical' Literature." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88.

———. (1976). "Prolegomenon," in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*. New York: KTAV.

———. (1981). *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*. Atlanta: John Knox Press.

Cross, F. M. (1968). "The Song of the Sea and Canaanite Myth." *God and Christ: Existence and Providence*, ed. R. W. Funk (*Journal for Theology and the Church* 5, New York).

———. (1973). *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

———. (1998). *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University.

———. (1999). "King Hezekiah's Seal Bears Phoenician Imagery." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 25.2 (March/April).

Daviau, P. M., and P.-E. Dion. (2002). "Moab Comes to Life." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 28.1 (January/February).

Davies, N. de Garis. (1943). *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Rêat Thebes*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition.

Davies, P. R. (2000). "The Search for History in the Bible: What Separates a Minimalist from a Maxim-alist? Not Much."



Day, J. (1985). *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

de Geus, C. H. J. (1976). *The Tribes of Israel*. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum.

De La Torre, M. (2008). *Liberating Jonah: Forming an Ethics of Reconciliation*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis.

Dever, W. G. (2000). "The Search for History in the Bible: Save Us from Postmodern Malarkey." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26.2 (March/April).

———. (2001). *What Did the Biblical Writers Know, and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us About the Reality of Ancient Israel*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

———. (2003). *Who Were the Early Israelites, and Where Did They Come From?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

———. (2005). *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Dewey, D. (2005). *A User's Guide to Bible Translations: Making the Most of Different Versions*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

Dicou, B. (1994). *Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story*. Sheffield, England: JSOT.

Douglas, M. (1999). *Leviticus as Literature*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

———. (2001). *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Dozeman, T. B. (1996). *God at War: A Study of Power in the Exodus Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Dozeman, T. B., and K. Schmid, eds. (2006). *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation*. Symposium Series. Atlanta: SBL Publications.

Dussand, R. (1912). *Les Monuments Palestiniens et Judaïques*. Paris: E. Leroux.

Edelman, D. V. (1995). *You Shall Not Abhor An Edomite for He Is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.

Ehrlich, C. S., and A. M. Maeir. (2001). “Excavating Philistine Gath: Have We Found Goliath’s Home-town?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27.6 (November/December).

Elayi, J. (1987). “Name of Deuteronomy’s Author Found on Seal Ring,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 13.5 (September/October).

Falk, M. (1990). *The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Finkelstein, I. (1988). *The Archaeology of the Israelite*

*Settlement. New Perspectives on Jewish Studies*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society; New York; London: New York University Press.

Finkelstein, I., and N. A. Silberman. (2001). *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. New York: Free Press.

———. (2006). *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition*. New York: Free Press.

Fitzmyer, J. (1967). *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire*. Biblica et Orientalia 19. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.

Fokkelman, J. P. (1975). *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*. Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum.

———. (2001). *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Fox, E. (1995). *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary, and Notes*. The Schocken Bible: Volume I. Dallas: Word.

Fox, M. V. (1985). *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

———. (1991). *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Franklin, N. (2007). "Lost Tombs of the Israelite Kings:

Century-Old Excavation Report Yields Startling New Discovery.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 33.4 (July/August).

Freedman, D. N. (2000). *The Nine Commandments: Uncovering the Hidden Pattern of Crime and Punishment in the Hebrew Bible*. New York: Doubleday.

Friedman, R. E. (1987). *Who Wrote the Bible?* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

———(1995). *The Disappearance of God: A Divine Mystery*. Boston: Little, Brown.

———. (1998). *The Hidden Book in the Bible: The Discovery of the First Prose Masterpiece Restored, Translated, and Introduced*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

———. (2003). *The Bible with Sources Revealed*. New York: HarperOne.

Friedmann, D. (2002). *To Kill and Take Possession: Law, Morality, and Society in Biblical Stories*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson.

Fritz, V. (1987). “Temple Architecture: What Can Archaeology Tell Us about Solomon’s Temple?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 13.4 (July/August).

Gal, Z. (1998). “Israel in Exile: Deserted Galilee Testifies to Assyrian Conquest of the Northern Kingdom.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 24.3 (May/June).

Garr, W. R. (1983). “The Qinah: A Study of Poetic Meter,

Syntax and Style.” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95.

———. (2003). *In His Own Image and Likeness: Humanity, Divinity, and Monotheism. Culture and History of the Ancient Near East*, v. 15. Leiden, Netherlands/Boston: Brill.

Gaster, T. H. (1947). “Psalm 29.” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 37:55–65.

Gomes, P. J. (1996). *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*. New York: Morrow.

Good, E. M. (1990). *In Turns of Tempest: A Rereading of Job, with a Translation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Gorman, F. H., Jr. (1990). *Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press.

Gottwald, N. K. (1958). “Immanuel as the Prophet’s Son.” *Vetus Testamentum* 8.

———. (1979). *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 BCE*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

———. (1985). *The Hebrew Bible. A Socio-Literary Introduction*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Grayson, A. K. (1975). *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Greeley, A. M. (1989). *Love Song*. New York: Warner.

Greenspahn, F. E. (1994). *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gunkel, H. (1930; English translation, 1967). *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Guthrie, H. H. (1966). *Israel's Sacred Songs. A Study of Dominant Themes*. New York: Seabury Press.

Haas, H. (1923). *Bilderatlas zur Religionsgeschichte*. Leipzig: A. Deicher.

Habel, N. C. (1985). *The Book of Job: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

Hackett, J. A. (1984). *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla*. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press.

Haïk-Vantoura, S., J. Wheeler, and D. Wheeler. (1991). *The Music of the Bible Revealed: The Deciphering of a Millenary Notation*. Berkeley, Calif.: Bibal.

Hall, H. R., and L. Woolley. (1927). *Ur Excavations, Volume V: The Ziggurat and its Surroundings*. London: Oxford University Press.

Hallo, W. W. (1977). "New Moons and Sabbaths: A Case Study in the Contrastive Approach." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 48.

Halpern, B. (2001). *David's Secret Demons: Messiah,*

*Murderer, Traitor, King.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Hals, R. (1969). *The Theology of the Book of Ruth.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Hanson, P. D. (1975). *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Haran, M. (1978). *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel. An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School.* Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.

Harrington, D. J. (1999). *Invitation to the Apocrypha.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Hartman, L. F., and A. A. Di Lella. (1978). *The Book of Daniel: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary.* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

Hedges, C. (2005). *Losing Moses on the Freeway: The 10 Commandments in America.* New York: Free Press.

Heinlein, R. A. (1984). *Job, A Comedy of Justice.* New York: Ballantine Books.

Hillers, D. R. (1969). *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hoffman, L. A. (1996). *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hoffmeier, J. K. (1999). *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Holladay, W. L. (1986). *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, [Chapters 1](#)–25*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

———. (1989). *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26–52*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

———. (1990). *Jeremiah: A Fresh Reading*. New York: Pilgrim Press.

Hort, G. (1957). “The Plagues of Egypt.” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 69–70.

Hurowitz, V. (1985). “The Priestly Account of the Building of the Tabernacle.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105.

Jacobsen, T. (1939). *The Sumerian King List*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jeansonne, S. P. (1990). *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar’s Wife*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Jenson, P. P. (1992). *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press.

Joyce, P. M. (1989). *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*. Sheffield, England: JSOT.



Kafka, F. (1925; English translation 1937). *The Trial*. New York: Knopf.

Kearney, P. J. (1977). "Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Exodus 25–40." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 89.

Keller, C. (1996). *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Kieslowski, K., and K. Piesiewicz. (1989). *Dekalog: The Ten Commandments*. A Facets Video release of a Telewizja Polska production. Chicago: Facets Video 2003.

Kilmer, A. D. (1987). "The Mesopotamian Counterparts of the Biblical Nephilim." In *Perspectives on Language and Text*, ed. E. W. Conrad and E. G. Newing. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns.

Kim, W. 2000. *Reading the Hebrew Bible for a New Millennium: Form, Concept, and Theological Perspective*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International.

Kirk, G. S. (1971). *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kitchen, K. A. (1995). "The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21.2 (March/April).

———. (2003). *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Klein, R. W. (1979). *Israel in Exile: A Theological*

*Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Kline, M. (1963). *Treaty of the Great King. The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Knoppers, G. N. (2004). *I Chronicles 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday.

———. (2004). *I Chronicles 10–29: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday.

Koldewey, Robert. (1918). *Das Ischtar-tor in Babylon, nach den Ausgrabungen durch die Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs.

Korpel, M. (2006). “Seals of Jezebel and other women in authority.” *Journal for Semitics* 15.2:349–371.

Korsak, M. P. (1992). *At the Start: Genesis Made New*. New York: Doubleday.

Kraeling, C. H., ed. (1956). *The Excavations at DuraEuropos, Final Report VIII, [Part 1](#)*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Krahmalkov, C. R. (1994). “Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20.5 (September/October).

Kugel, J. L. (1981). *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Kushner, H. S. (1981). *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. New York: Schocken Books.

Lambert, W. G. (1960). *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Lambert, W. G., and A. R. Millard. (1969). *Atrahasis*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.

Lang, B. (1986). *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined*. New York: Pilgrim Press.

Lasine, S. (1992). "Job and His Friends in the Modern World: Kafka's *The Trial*." In *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job*, ed. L. G. Perdue and W. C. Gilpin. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Layard, A. H. (1851). *Nineveh and Its Remains*. New York: G. P. Putnam.

Leeming, D. (2002). *Myth: A Biography of Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lemaire, A. (1994). "'House of David' Restored in Moabite Inscription." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20.3 (May/June).

Lemche, N. P. (1998). *The Israelites in History and Tradition*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Lesko, L., and B. Lesko. (1999). "Pharaoh's Workers: How the Israelites Lived in Egypt." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 25.1 (January/February).

Levenson, J. D. (1976). *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40–48*. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press.

———. (1988). *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.

———. (1993). *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Levine, B. (1989). *Leviticus*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

Lohfink, G. (1979). *The Bible: Now I Get It! A Form-Criticism Handbook*. New York: Doubleday.

Longman, T. (1991). *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns.

MacLeish, A. (1956). *J. B.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Maeir, A. M., and C. S. Ehrlich. (2001). “Excavating Philistine Gath: Have We Found Goliath’s Hometown?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27.6 (November/December).

Maidman, M. P. (2006). “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob Meet Newton, Darwin and Wellhausen.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 32.3 (May/June).

Malamat, A. (1999). “Caught between the Great Powers: Judah Picks a Side ... and Loses.” *Biblical Archaeology Review*

25.4 (July/August).

Mann, T. W. (1988). *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch*. Atlanta: John Knox Press.

Marks, H. (1995). "Biblical Naming and Poetic Etymology." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114.

Martínez, F. G. (1996). *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill; and Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Matter, E. A. (1990). *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

McCarter, P. K. (1987). "The Religion of the Israelite Monarchy." In *Ancient Israelite Religion*, ed. P. D. Miller, Jr., P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

McCarthy, D. J. (1978). *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*. Rome: Biblical Institute.

McCurley, F. R. (1983). *Ancient Myths and Biblical Faith: Scriptural Transformations*. Philadelphia: Fortress.

McKenzie, S. L. (2000). *Covenant: Understanding Biblical Themes*. St. Louis: Chalice Press.

———. (2000). *King David: A Biography*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

McNamara, M. (1970). "Nabonidus and the Book of

Daniel.” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 37.

Mendenhall, G. E. (1955). *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium.

———. (1962). “The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine.” *Biblical Archaeologist* 25. Reprinted in *Biblical Archaeologist Reader* 3 (1970).

Mendenhall, G. E., and G. A. Herion (2001). *Ancient Israel’s Faith and History: An Introduction to the Bible in Context*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Merhav, R., ed. (1987). *Treasures of Bible Lands*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum, Modan.

Middleton, J. R. (2005). *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Brazos.

Milgrom, J. (1983). *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill.

Millard, A. R., and P. Bordreuil. (1982). “A Statue from Syria with Assyrian and Aramaic Inscriptions.” *Biblical Archaeologist* 45.

Miller, P. D. (1973). *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

———. (2000). *The Religion of Ancient Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Miller, W. T. (1984). *Mysterious Encounters at Mamre and Jabbok*. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press.

Mitchell, S. (1987). *The Book of Job*. Garden City, N.Y.: HarperPerennial.

———. (1997). *Genesis: A New Translation of the Classic Biblical Stories*. New York: HarperCollins.

Moberly, R. W. (1992). *Genesis 12–50*. Sheffield, England: JSOT.

Monson, J. (2000). “The New ‘Ain Dara Temple: Closest Solomonic Parallel.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26.3 (May/June).

Morgan, D. F. (1990). *Between Text and Community: The “Writings” in Canonical Interpretation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Mowinckel, S. (1962). *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*. New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Moyers, B. (1996). *Genesis: A Living Conversation*. New York: Bantam Doubleday.

Mulder, M. J., and H. Sysling, eds. (2004). *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson.

Murphy, R. E. (1983). *Wisdom Literature and Psalms*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

———. (2002). *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Na'aman, N. (1986). "Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45.

Nelson, R. D. (1981). "Josiah in the Book of Joshua." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100.

———. (1987). *First and Second Kings*. Atlanta: John Knox Press.

Neusner, J. (1988). *The Mishnah: A New Translation*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

———. (1994). *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature*. The Anchor Bible Reference Library. New York: Doubleday.

Newman, K. (2000). *Apocalypse Movies: End of the World Cinema*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Newsom, C. A. (1989). "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9." In *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. P. L. Day. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Newsom, C. A., and S. H. Ringe, eds. (1992). *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Newsome, J. D. (1986). *A Synoptic Harmony of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles: With Related Passages from Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezra*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker.

Nicholson, E. W. (1967). *Deuteronomy and Tradition*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.



———. (1970). *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Traditions in the Book of Jeremiah*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.

Nickelsburg, G. W. E., and M. E. Stone. (1983). *Faith and Piety in Early Judaism: Texts and Documents*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Niditch, S. (1992). *War in the Hebrew Bible. A Study in the Ethics of Violence*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Nof, D., and N. Paldor. (1992). “Are There Oceano-graphic Explanations for the Israelites’ Crossing of the Red Sea?” *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 73.

Noth, M. (1943; English translation, 1981). *The Deuteronomistic History*. Sheffield, England: JSOT.

———. (1960). *The History of Israel*, rev. ed. New York: Harper and Brothers.

O’Connor, M. (1980). *Hebrew Verse Structure*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns.

Olson, D. T. (1994). *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Ostriker, A. (2007). *For the Love of God: The Bible as an Open Book*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Pagels, E. (1995). *The Origin of Satan*. New York: Random House.

Parker, S. B. (1997). *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*. Atlanta:

Scholars' Press.

Parrot, A. (1955). *The Flood and Noah's Ark*. London: SCM.

Pelikan, J. (2007). *Whose Bible Is It? A Short History of the Scriptures*. New York: Penguin Books.

Perdue, L. G. (1977). *Wisdom and Cult*. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press.

Petersen, D. L. (2002). *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Polling Report (2007). Online at <http://www.pollingreport.com/religion.htm>.

Pope, M. H. (1977). *The Song of Songs*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

Prevost, J-P. (1997). *How to Read the Prophets*. New York: Continuum.

Pritchard, J. B. (1969). *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Rawlinson, H. C. (1861). *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*. London: British Museum.

Redford, D. B. (1984). *Akhenaten: The Heretic King*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

———. (1992). *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient*

*Times*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Rofé, A. (2001). *Deuteronomy: Issues and Interpretations*. London: Clark.

Rosenberg, D. (2006). *Abraham: The First Historical Biography*. New York: Basic Books.

Russell, D. S. (1964). *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

———. (1989). *Daniel, An Active Volcano: Reflections on the Book of Daniel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Ryan, W., and W. Pitman. (1999). *Noah's Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries about the Event That Changed History*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Ryken, L. (2005). *Choosing a Bible: Understanding Bible Translation Differences*. Wheaton: Crossway.

Sanders, J. A. (1965). *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.

Sarna, N. M. (1986). *Exploring Exodus. The Heritage of Biblical Israel*. New York: Schocken Books.

Sasson, J. M. (1989). *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist–Folklorist Interpretation*. Sheffield, England: JSOT.

Sauer, J. A. (1996). "The River Runs Dry: Biblical Story Preserves Historical Memory." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 22.4 (July/August).

Schmitals, W. (1975). *The Apocalyptic Movement*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Schniedewind, W. M. (2004). *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schniedewind, W. M., and J. H. Hunt. (2007). *A Primer on Ugaritic: Language, Culture and Literature*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Schwartz, R. M. (1997). *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Segal, A. F. (2004). *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*. New York: Doubleday.

Shanks, H. (1981). "The Exodus and the Crossing of the Red Sea, According to Hans Goedicke." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 7.5 (September/October); with responses by C. Krahmalkov in the same issue and E. D. Oren in the 7.6 (November/December) issue.

———. (1987). "Jeremiah's Scribe and Confidant Speaks from a Hoard of Clay Bullae." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 13.5 (September/October).

———. (1997). "Face to Face: Biblical Minimalists Meet Their Challengers." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 23.4 (July/August).

———. (1998). "David's Jerusalem: Fiction or Reality?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 24.4 (July/August), including M. Steiner, "It's Not There: Archaeology Proves a Negative"; J.

Cahill, “It Is There: The Archaeological Evidence Proves It”; and N. Na’aman, “It Is There: Ancient Texts Prove It.”

———, ed. (1999). *Ancient Israel*. Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society; and Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

———. (2000a). *Abraham and Family: New Insights into the Patriarchal Narratives*. Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society.

———. (2000b). “Abraham’s Ur: Is the Pope Going to the Wrong Place?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26.1 (January/February).

———. (2002). “A ‘Centrist’ at the Center of Controversy: *Biblical Archaeology Review* Interviews Israel Finkelstein.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 28.6 (November/December).

———. (2003). “The History Behind the Bible: *Biblical Archaeology Review* Interviews Avraham Malamat.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 29.1 (January/February).

———. (2007). “Assyrian Palace Discovered in Ashdod.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 33.1 (January/February).

Shea, W. H. (1999). “Jerusalem Under Siege: Did Sennacherib Attack Twice?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 25.6 (November/December).

Sheppard, G. T. (1980). *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Simon, N. (1975). *God’s Favorite: A New Comedy*. New

York: Random House.

Simpson, W. K. (1972). *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, and Poetry*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Sinnott, A. M. 2005. *The Personification of Wisdom*. Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate Press.

Skehan, P. W. (1971). *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America.

Smith, G. (1876). *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*. New York: Scribner.

Smith, M. S. (2004). *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Smith, M. B., and S. B. Parker (1997). *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.

Smith, W. C. (1993). *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Spina, F. A. (2005). *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Sproul, B. C. (1979). *Primal Myths: Creation Myths around the World*. New York: HarperCollins.

Stager, L. E. (2000). "Jerusalem as Eden." *Biblical*

Stern, E. (2001). "Pagan Yahwism: The Folk Religion of Ancient Israel." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27.3 (May/June).

Sugirtharajah, R. S. (2006). *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, rev. and expanded 3rd ed. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Swanson, S. (2007). "Bible Sells Big; So Do Its Spin-offs: Hip Publications Join Growing List of Religious Products." *Chicago Tribune*, June 4.

Sweeney, M. A. (1996). *Isaiah 1–39: With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature. The Forms of the Old Testament Literature*; v. 16. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

———. (2006). *Prophetic Literature*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Talmon, S. (1987). "Ezra and Nehemiah." In *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. R. Alter and F. Kermode. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Thomas, D. W., ed. (1961). *Documents from Old Testament Times*. New York: Harper and Row.

Thompson, T. L. (1974). *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*. Berlin: de Gruyter.

———. (1987). *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel*. Vol. 1, *The Literary Formation of Genesis and Exodus 1–23*. Sheffield, England: JSOT.

———. (1992). *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill.

———. (2000). *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel*. New York: Basic Books.

Tigay, J. H. (1982). *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

———, ed. (1985). *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

———. (1996). *Deuteronomy*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

Tindel, R. D. (2007). “Excavating the Basement: Registration and Research in the Collections of the Oriental Institute Museum.” *Oriental Institute News & Notes* 194:3–5.

Torczyner, H. (1938). *Lachish I (Tell ed Duweir): The Lachish Letters*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Unger, E. (1931). *Babylon: Die Heilige Stadt nach der Beschreibung der Bablonier*. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Van der Toorn, K. (2007). *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Vanderkam, J. C. (1994). *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

———. (2000). *An Introduction to Early Judaism*. Grand



Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

van Hatten, W. C. (1981). "Once Again: Sodom and Gomorrah." *Biblical Archaeologist* 44.

Van Seters, J. (1975). *Abraham in History and Tradition*. New Haven: Yale University.

Vermes, G. (1987). *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 3rd ed. London: Penguin Books.

Visotzky, B. L. (1996). *The Genesis of Ethics: How the Tormented Family of Genesis Leads Us to Moral Development*. New York: Crown Books.

von Däniken, E. (1970). *Chariots of the Gods? Unsolved Mysteries of the Past*. New York: Putnam.

von Rad, G. (1938; English translation, 1966). *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

———. (1962). *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 1. New York: Harper and Row.

———. (1966). *Deuteronomy*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

———. (1972). *Wisdom in Israel*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

———. (1991). *Holy War in Ancient Israel*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Walton, J. H. (1995). "The Mesopotamian Background of

the Tower of Babel Account and Its Implications.” *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 5.

Watts, J. W. (2007). *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture*. Cambridge, Mass., and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Webb, B. G. (1987). *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*. Sheffield, England: JSOT.

Weinfeld, M. (1970). “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90.

———. (1972). *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

———. (1993). *The Promise of the Land. The Inheritance of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Weippert, M. (1971). *The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Palestine. A Critical Survey of Recent Scholarly Debate*. London: SCM.

Wenham, G. J. (1978). “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative.” *Vetus Testamentum* 28.

———. (1979). *Leviticus*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

———. (1987). *Genesis 1–15*. Waco, Tex.: Word.

Westermann, C. (1967). *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

———. (1977). *The Structure of the Book of Job*.

Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

———. (1981). *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*. Atlanta: John Knox Press.

———. (1984). *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Press.

———. (1991). *Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

———. (1995). *Roots of Wisdom: The Oldest Proverbs of Israel and Other Peoples*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Whedbee, J. W. (1977). “The Comedy of Job.” *Semeia* 7.

White, J. B. (1978). *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry*. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars’ Press.

Whitelam, K. (1996). *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History*. New York: Routledge.

Whybray, R. N. (1965). *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9*. London: SCM.

———. (1968). *The Succession Narrative: A Study of II Samuel 9–20; I Kings 1 and 2*. London: SCM.

———. (1974). *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament*. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Wilson, I. (1995). *Out of the Midst of the Fire: Divine*

*Presence in Deuteronomy*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.

Wilson, R. R. (1977). *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

———. (1979). “The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41.

———. (1980). *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Wise, M., M. Abegg, and E. Cook. (1996). *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

Wolf, H. (1972). “A Solution to the Immanuel Prophecy in Isaiah 7:14–8:22.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91.

Wolff, H. W. (1974). *Hosea*, rev. ed. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

———. (1981). *Micah the Prophet*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

———. (1982). “The Kerygma of the Deuteronomic Historical Work.” In *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*, 2nd ed., ed. W. Brueggemann and H. W. Wolff. Atlanta: John Knox Press.

Wood, B. G. (1990). “Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* March/April.

Wright, A. G. (1968). “The Riddle of the Sphinx: The

Structure of the Book of Qohelet.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30.

Wright, G. E. (1962). *Biblical Archaeology*, rev. ed. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

Yadin, Y. (1964). “Excavations at Hazor.” In *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader 2*, eds. D. N. Freedman and E. F. Campbell. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

———. (1972). *Hazor. The Schweich Lectures, 1970*. London: Oxford University Press.

Zimmerli, W. (1979, 1983). *Ezekiel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Zorn, J. R. (1997). “Mizpah: Newly Discovered Stratum Reveals Judah’s Other Capital.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 23.5 (September/October).

# GLOSSARY

Numbers in parentheses refer to chapters where the term is defined and listed as a key term. Note that I is the Introduction; P1, P2, and P3 are the respective prologues to [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), and [Part 3](#); and C is the Conclusion. Years in parentheses after the name of a king indicate the years of the king's reign BCE.

**Aaron** The brother of Moses; Israel's first high priest. (3, 4)

**Abel** The second son of Adam and Eve; he was murdered by his brother Cain. (1)

**Abner** The commander of Saul's army; he was killed by Joab. (8)

**Abraham** (sometimes called *Abram*; adj. Abrahamic) The first father (patriarch) of Israel; first called Abram, God made a covenant with him in which God promised to make him a great nation; Isaac was his son by Sarah, and Ishmael was his son by Hagar. (2)

**Abraham cycle** Genesis 12–25; a collection of stories focused on Abraham. (2)

**Abrahamic covenant** The covenant that YHWH made with Abraham, sealed by circumcision. (2) *See also* **Ancestral covenant**.

**Abram** *See* **Abraham**.

**Absalom** A son of David who murdered his half-brother Amnon, took the throne from David, and was killed by Joab. (8)

**Absolute law** Also called *apodictic law*, it is law stated in an unconditional manner without qualifying clauses; absolute law is distinguished from case law. (3)

**Achan** A contemporary of Joshua who kept spoils from the conquest of Jericho, was held responsible for Israel's defeat at Ai, and was executed by the Israelites. (6)

**Acrostic** A series of poetic lines or verses whose initial letters form the alphabet, a word, or a regular pattern, as in Lamentations 1–4, Psalms 111, 112, and 119. (15)

**AD** Abbreviation of *anno domini*, Latin for “year of the Lord.” *See also* **BCE** and **CE**.

**Adam/adamah** The first male who God created; he and his mate, Eve, disobeyed God and were expelled from the garden of Eden. Adam was created out of the ground, *adamah* in Hebrew. (1)

**Adonijah** A son of David who was executed by Solomon. (9)

**Adultery** Having sexual relations with someone other than one's husband or wife.

**Aetiology** *See* **Etiology**.

**Aggadah** *See* **Haggadah**.

**Ahab** (869–850) King of Israel, married to Jezebel, whose Baalistic practices were opposed by the northern prophet Elijah. (9)

**Ahasuerus** The king of Persia during the time of Esther, identified as Xerxes I (486–465). (15)

**Ahaz** (735–715) The king of Judah at the time when Isaiah was a prophet. (10)

**Ahijah** An Israelite prophet who encouraged Jeroboam to rebel against Solomon's administration. (9)

**Ai** A Canaanite city conquered by Joshua and the Israelites. (6)

**Akkadian** The Semitic language of Mesopotamia; Assyrian and Babylonian are dialects.

**Allegory** A literary device in which characters and events stand for abstract ideas, principles, or forces so that the literal sense has or suggests a parallel, deeper symbolic sense. (15)

**Almighty** (Hebrew *shaddai*) A name of God that connotes his power and strength; often found in the compound divine name El Shaddai.

**Altar** A raised platform, made of undressed stones, dirt, metal, or wood, on which incense or sacrifices are offered.

**Am ha'aretz** (pl. *ammei ha'aretz*; Hebrew for "people of the land") A term used in the Hebrew Bible for "citizens" or some particular "class of citizens"; in rabbinic literature, for persons or groups that dissented from or were uninstructed in rabbinic *halakah* and rigorous purity and tithing norms; it sometimes signifies the unlearned, sometimes is used condescendingly ("boor"), and it was also used of the broad



mass of Jewish people of the first century CE, who cannot be categorized into any of the subgroups of the time.

**Amaziah** Priest of Bethel loyal to Jeroboam II; opposed Amos's preaching and presence in the northern kingdom. (10)

**Amnon** Son of David who raped his half-sister Tamar, and was killed by Absalom. (8)

**Amoraim** Jewish teachers from the period between 200 and 500 CE, whose work culminated in the Talmud.

**Amos** One of the twelve prophets; an eighth-century prophet from Tekoa in Judah, he preached to the northern kingdom and emphasized social justice and the coming Day of YHWH. (10)  
*See also* **Book of the Twelve**.

**Amphictyony** Greek term for a religiopolitical federation with its common focus a sanctuary dedicated to God; an association of neighboring states or tribes in ancient Greece that banded together for common interest and protection; this model has sometimes been used to describe the tribal confederation in the period of the judges (prior to Saul and David) in ancient Israel.

**Anathoth** The hometown of Jeremiah in the tribe of Benjamin. (11)

**Anatolia** Asia Minor, the Asian portion of modern Turkey; this was the territory of Hatti, the land of the Hittites.

**Ancestor** In Old Testament study this term refers to the forebears of the nation of Israel—the patriarchs and matriarchs

of the Hebrews, usually Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel and Leah, and sometimes the twelve sons of Jacob. (2)

**Ancestral covenant** The covenant between YHWH and Abraham described in Genesis 17 that also applied to Isaac and Jacob and their offspring. (P1)

**Ancestral Story** The accounts in Genesis 12–50 that pertain to the ancestors of the Israelites. (2) *See also*

**Ancestors. Ancient Middle East** Often called “ancient Near East” in scholarly literature, the large region of southwest Asia that includes Mesopotamia and territories bordering the Mediterranean Sea; modern nations included within this designation are Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

**Anointing** To pour oil over the head; this was part of a ritual of designation by which priests and kings were initiated into office. An “anointed one” (Hebrew *meshiach*) was a divinely designated leader. (8)

**Anthropomorphism** (adj. anthropomorphic) A term for the attribution of human behavior or characteristics to inanimate objects, animals, natural phenomena, or deity; with regard to deity, anthropomorphism became a point of theological discussion in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. (P1)

**Antiochus IV** (175–163) Seleucid king who persecuted the Jews of Judea during the Maccabean period. He called himself Epiphanes, meaning “divine one.” (16)

**Antithetic parallelism** Type of poetic parallelism in which the second line of a poetic couplet is somehow the opposite of the first line in meaning. (13)

**Apocalypse** (adj. apocalyptic; Greek for “revelation”) An “unveiling” of something hidden; apocalyptic literature is a genre of literature (attested in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions) in which the author claims to reveal the future and to show how the divine plan will be worked out in history, often expressing it in vivid symbolism. The final book of the Christian New Testament is sometimes called (in accord with its Greek title) “the Apocalypse” (it is also known as “the book of Revelation”). (16)

**Apocalyptic eschatology** The view of the end-times expressed in apocalyptic literature. (16) *See also* **Eschatology** and **Prophetic eschatology**.

**Apocalypticism** The thought world or worldview of the community that gave rise to apocalyptic literature. (16)

**Apocalyptic literature** Old Testament, intertestamental Jewish, and early Christian literature that consists predominantly of apocalypses; this literature is often pseudepigraphic; Daniel 7–12 is apocalyptic literature. (16)

**Apocalyptic prophecy** A form of prophecy that consists mainly of apocalypses and is largely oriented to the future, as in the latter half of the book of Daniel. (P2)

**Apocrypha** (adj. apocryphal; from Greek for “to hide, to cover”) It is used in a technical sense to refer to certain Jewish books written in the Hellenistic–Roman period that came to be

included in the Old Greek Jewish scriptures (and thus also in the Eastern Christian biblical canon) and in the Latin Vulgate Roman Catholic canon, but not in the Jewish or Protestant biblical canons; they are called deuterocanonical books in the Roman Catholic tradition. (P3, C)

**Apodictic law** *See* **Absolute law**.

**Apsu** The god of the freshwater ocean in the Enuma Elish, the Babylonian creation story. (1)

**Aqedah** (Hebrew for “binding” [of Isaac]) The biblical account of God’s command to Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22). (2)

**Aram** (Aramea, Aram-naharaim, Padan-Aram) The territory north and east of Palestine where Abraham’s ancestors had settled and from where the wives of Isaac and Jacob came; roughly the region of modern northern Syria and northwestern Iraq. (2)

**Aramaic** A language in the same family as Hebrew, used in Daniel 2:4–7:28, Ezra 4:8–6:18 and 7:12–26, and Jeremiah 10:11; its square script replaced the Old Hebrew script in Hebrew manuscripts before the Common Era.

**Araunah** The owner of a threshing floor in Jerusalem (Jebus) where David built an altar; David bought the threshing floor, and Solomon built the temple there (2 Samuel 24).

**Archaeology** The science of unearthing sites containing remains of ancient habitation with the goal of learning everything such sites have to offer about culture, society,

ecology, intellectual life, and religion; modern archaeology employs the tools of history, anthropology, geology, and biology to recover the hidden past.

**Ark of the covenant** A gold-overlaid wooden chest with two cherubim on the lid that stored the tablets of the covenant; it was housed first in the tabernacle, then in the Most Holy Place room of the Jerusalem temple; it was the location of God's presence within Israel. (6, 8)

**Armageddon** Derived from Hebrew *har megiddo*, "mountain of Megiddo," it is the mythic site of the final battle between God and the forces of evil in apocalyptic thought.

**Atonement** (v. atone) To make right with God by satisfying the penalty for having broken a relationship; in the Old Testament, this was done through offering sacrifices to God. (4) *See also* **Yom Kippur** and **Day of Atonement**.

**Atrahasis Epic** A Babylonian story that recounts the creation of humankind. (1)

**Author** The writer of a text; a component of the hermeneutical triangle. (I)

**Av** (sometimes spelled Ab) A month in the Jewish calendar; the ninth day of the month Av, or *tisha b'av*, is a day of mourning for the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 587 BCE and again in 70 CE.

**Baal** Title meaning "lord, master" (in modern Hebrew, "husband") that was applied to the chief god of Canaan; various locations in Canaan had their patron Baal gods, for example,

Baal of Peor and Baal of Hermon.

**Babel** The name of a Mesopotamian city with a tower as told in Genesis 11; the name means “gate of God.” (1) *See also Babylon and Tower of Babel.*

**Babylon** The capital city of Babylonia in southern Mesopotamia; the Babylonians led by Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 587 BCE and took Judeans into Babylonian exile; called Babel in Genesis 11. (1, 11)

**Babylonian exile** *See Exile.*

**Balaam** A thirteenth-century BCE Mesopotamian seer-prophet who was hired by Balak of Moab to curse the Israelites but ended up blessing them instead, as told in Numbers 22–24. (4)

**Balak** King of Moab who opposed Moses and the Israelites. (4)

**Baruch** Jeremiah’s scribe, perhaps responsible for composing and editing the latter half of the book of Jeremiah. (11)

**Bathsheba** The wife of Uriah who committed adultery with David; later became David’s wife and the mother of Solomon. (8, 9)

**BCE** Abbreviation meaning “before the Common Era”; a theologically neutral replacement for the traditional designation BC (“before Christ”).

**Belshazzar** Son of Nabonidus (556–539) who ruled in his father's absence; according to Daniel 5, he was king when Babylon fell. (16)

**Belteshazzar** The Babylonian name of Daniel; not to be confused with Belshazzar. (16)

**Ben** (Hebrew for “son, son of”; Aramaic *bar*) Used frequently in patronymics (naming by identity of father); Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph means Akiba, son of Joseph.

**Benjamin** The twelfth son of Jacob; the younger brother of Joseph; Rachel was his mother; he was the ancestor of the tribe of Benjamin. (2)

**Berakah** (Hebrew for “blessing”) In Judaism, an offering of thankfulness that praises God for a benefit conferred or a great event experienced.

**Berit** (also spelled *brit*; Hebrew for “covenant”) Used in Judaism especially for the special relationship believed to exist between God and the Jewish people. *See also*

**Covenant. Bethel** A city that became a center of Israelite worship; literally means “house of El.”

**Bethlehem** A city in the tribe of Judah, hometown of David; the name literally means “house of bread.” (15)

**Bible** (adj. biblical; from Greek *biblos*, “papyrus, paper, book” and *ta biblia*, “the books”) The designation normally used for the Hebrew Bible plus the Christian New Testament; in classical Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Christianity, it

designates the Hebrew Bible plus the Apocrypha and the New Testament.

**Birthright** The special inheritance rights of the first-born son that give him claim to the bulk of the ancestral property. (2)

**Blessing/bless** Divine favor and approval; blessing is a mark of God's grace and evidence of his protecting and prospering presence; in return people can bless God as a display of gratitude for his goodness. (1) *See also Berakah.*

**Boaz** A wealthy Israelite who lived in Bethlehem; he married Ruth and became an ancestor of David. (15)

**Book of the Covenant** (also called the *Covenant Code*) Exodus 20:22–23:33; a collection of Israelite laws. (3)

**Book of the Twelve** (also called the *twelve prophets*) Sometimes called the Minor Prophets, a collection of twelve short prophetic books in the Latter Prophets. (P2)

**Burning bush** The bush out of which YHWH spoke to Moses in the Sinai to reveal God's identity, as told in Exodus 3. (3)

**Cain** The first son of Adam and Eve; he murdered his brother Abel. (1)

**Caleb** One of the twelve spies Joshua sent into Canaan; of the generation which left Egypt in the Exodus, only he and Joshua were allowed to enter Canaan. (4)

**Calendar** Judaism follows a lunar calendar adjusted every



three years or so to the solar cycle (by adding a second twelfth month)—thus “luni-solar.” The oldest Jewish annual observances are Passover/*pesah*, Shavuot, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot; other ancient celebrations include Rosh Hashanah, Simhat Torah, Hannukah, and Purim. In general, Christianity operates on a solar calendar based on the relationship between the sun and the earth (365.25 days per year); the main Christian observances are Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas.

**Call narrative** An account found in some historical and prophetic books that record the prophet’s experience of being called into prophetic ministry; the call was usually issued in the presence of God. (10)

**Call to praise** A speech-type found in certain biblical psalms in which the psalmist enjoins others to join him in praising God. (13)

**Canaan** The geographical territory between the Mediterranean coast and the Jordan River that was claimed and occupied by the Hebrews; also called the Promised Land.

**Canon** The authorized collection of material constituting the sacred writings of a religious community; the material is believed to have special, usually divine, authority; the Hebrew Bible is the canon of the Jewish community; the Old and New Testaments (respectively, with and without the Apocrypha) are the canon of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian communities. (C)

**Canon criticism** A type of biblical analysis that places emphasis on the final form of the text as normative for Judaism and Christianity.

**Canonization** The process whereby a religious community defined the body of texts it considered authoritative for its life and belief. (C)

**Case law** Legal sayings with modifying clauses often in the “if . . . then” form: “If this is the situation, . . . then this is the penalty”; also called casuistic law, this type of legal formulation contrasts with absolute law. (3)

**Casuistic law** *See* **Case law**.

**Catholic** (from Greek for “universal, worldwide”) A self-designation used in early Christianity to suggest universality as opposed to factionalism; it then became a technical name for the Western, Roman Catholic Church.

**CE** Abbreviation meaning “Common Era”; a nonsectarian term for the period traditionally labeled AD (*anno domini*, or “in the year of our Lord”) by Christians; thus, 1999 CE references the same year as AD 1999. *See also* **BCE**.

**Centralization** (centralization of worship) A theme of the Deuteronomist whereby proper worship could only be performed in the city God designated, presumably Jerusalem. (5)

**Chaos** The disordered state of unformed matter that existed before the universe was ordered; biblical and ancient Middle Eastern origin stories depicted chaos as an unruly cosmic ocean. (1)

**Charismatic** Gifted, filled with the divine, with divinely given powers, or with God’s spirit. This state may be linked

with ecstasy or trance, which is reported to have been experienced by the early prophets and by Saul, the first king.

**Cherub** (Hebrew, pl. cherubim) An angelic being, in appearance something like a human but with wings; they were mythical celestial winged creatures prominent in Temple decoration; *cherubim* were considered God's ruling council; also called the host of heaven.

**Chiasmus** (adj. chiasitic) A literary device in which, for emphasis, the second part of a text is parallel to the first but in reverse—for example, ABBA, ABCBA.

**Christ** (from Greek *christos*, “anointed one”; Greek translation of Hebrew *meshiach*) Applied to Jesus/Joshua of Nazareth by his followers as a title, but soon came to be treated as a sort of second name. *See also* **Messiah**.

**Christians/Christianity** The followers of Jesus of Nazareth who believe him to be the Jewish messiah (*christos*) of God; Christianity is the collective body of Christians who believe the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

**Christos** The Greek word for “anointed one.” *See also* **Christ**.

**Chronicle** An annal or account of events in the order in which they occurred.

**Chronicler** Writer of the books of Chronicles; generally considered to be a later interpreter of the history of Judah. (17)

**Chronicler's History** The books of the Writings considered

to be a postexilic retelling of Israel's history intended to profile the role of the house of David; consists of the biblical books 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. (P3, 17)

**Church** (from Greek *ekklesia*, “summoned group”; compare “ecclesiastical”) The designation traditionally used for a specifically Christian assembly or body of people—thus also the building or location in which the assembled people meet—and by extension also the specific organized subgroup within Christianity (Catholic, Protestant, Methodist, and so forth); similar to synagogue and *kahal* in Judaism.

**Circumcision, circumcise** Cutting off the loose fold of skin at the end of the penis; circumcision was the ritual attached to the covenant God made with Abraham; in Judaism, and it is ritually performed when a boy is eight days old in a ceremony called *brit milah*, which indicates that the ritual establishes a covenant between God and the individual; in Islam, it is performed at the age of puberty. (2)

**Cities of refuge** Six cities designated in Mosaic law for those who accidentally killed someone. (6)

**Classical Judaism** The form of Judaism that has survived as traditional throughout the centuries.

**Clean/unclean** A category designation within Israel's ritual system that applies to animate and inanimate objects that are either pure or impure according to a set of standards. (4)

**Clean animals** Animals that were approved for ritual sacrifices.

**Climactic parallelism** The type of poetic parallelism where the second line of a poetic couplet echoes part of the first line and adds a phrase to it, thereby extending and completing its sense. (13)

**Code of Hammurapi** (also spelled *Hammurabi*) A Mesopotamian law code associated with the eighteenth-century BCE Old Babylonian monarch Hammurapi; it has similarities to the biblical Book of the Covenant. (3)

**Colon** A single line of poetry, sometimes called a *stich* or *stichos*. (13)

**Commandments** (Hebrew *mitzvot*; sing., *mitzvah*) Orders given by God. God gave Ten Commandments as the core of the covenant on Mount Sinai and a multitude of other moral and cultic laws. According to rabbinic Jewish tradition, there are 613 religious commandments referred to in the Torah (and elaborated upon by the rabbinic sages); of these, 248 are positive commandments, and 365 are negative. The numbers respectively symbolize the fact that divine service must be expressed through all one's bodily parts during all the days of the year; in general, a *mitzvah* refers to any act of religious duty or obligation; more colloquially, a *mitzvah* refers to a "good deed."

**Commentary** A discussion of a book of the Bible that treats linguistic, literary, historical, and theological aspects of its meaning.

**Complaint** (also called *lament*) A literary type that expresses the pain and alienation of the writer and asks God for help; complaints are found in psalmic and prophetic literature.

**Complaints of Jeremiah** A collection of passages found in Jeremiah 11–20 that express his anxieties and frustrations in being a prophet. (11)

**Concordance** An alphabetical listing of all the important words in a text and their textual locations; a useful tool for studying biblical themes.

**Concubine** A woman who belonged to a man but did not have the full rights of a wife; she was frequently acquired as spoils in war, and her main function was to bear sons for the man.

**Conquest** The series of initiatives and military actions of the time of Joshua that were intended to secure Israel's control of Palestine. (6)

**Consecrate** (n. consecration) To set aside or dedicate to God's use.

**Cosmogony** A theory or model of the origin and evolution of the physical universe; ancient creation stories such as Genesis 1–2 and the Enuma Elish are cosmogonies.

**Cosmology** A model of the structure of the physical universe; the Israelites viewed the world as an inhabitable region surrounded by water. (1)

**Covenant** (Hebrew *berit* or *brit*) A pact or formal agreement between two parties in which there are mutual obligations and expectations. Covenant is used as a metaphor of

God's relationship with his people; the major covenants in the Old Testament are God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15) and the Sinai/Moses covenant (Exodus 19–24) between God and Israel; the Priestly writer used a succession of covenants to track the development of salvation history. In Judaism the covenant is a major theological concept referring to the eternal bond between God and the people of Israel grounded in God's gracious and steadfast concern (Hebrew *chesed*) that calls for the nation's obedience to the divine commandments (*mitzvot*) and instruction (torah). For followers of Christianity (for example, Paul), God has made a "new covenant" (rendered as "new testament" in older English) with the followers of Jesus in the last times, superseding the "old covenant" ("old testament") with Moses at Sinai (see Jeremiah 31:31–34). (P1, 1, 2, 3, 5)

**Covenant code** *See Book of the Covenant.*

**Creation** What has been brought into being; the Hebrew Bible attributes the Creation of the world to Israel's God. The classic descriptions of the Creation are found in Genesis 1 and 2, but there are many other allusions to the Creation found in Israel's Psalms and in prophetic literature. The Enuma Elish is a Babylonian account of creation. (1)

**Creation-redemption** A prophetic theme found strongly in Isaiah of the exile whereby salvation is possible and can be expected from God because the deity has already demonstrated extraordinary power through creating the world. (12)

**Criticism** When used in biblical scholarship in such phrases as *biblical criticism*, *higher criticism*, and *form criticism*, it means evaluating evidence to arrive at a reasoned judgment concerning the matter under investigation; it does not imply that

the reader is taking a negative or “criticizing” position in regards to the Bible. RTOT suggests that *critique* or *analysis* may be a better term to use.

**Cubit** A biblical unit of measurement, the distance from elbow to fingertip—approximately 18 inches, or half a meter.

**Cult/cultic** The formal organization and practice of worship usually associated with a sanctuary and involving a regular cycle of sacrifices, prayers, and hymns under the direction of priests and other leaders; when used in biblical studies the term is descriptive and does not imply anything dark, devilish, false, or unseemly as is often the case in modern uses of the term. (4)

**Curse** To ask God to bring something tragic or disastrous on someone or something else; the opposite of blessing; as a noun, it is the description of the bad thing that will happen as in the curses and blessings of the law.

**Cycle** As in *Abraham cycle*, *Jacob cycle*, and *Joseph cycle*, the term refers to a collection of stories centered on or “cycling” around one person. (2)

**Cyrus** (550–530) Persian monarch, also called Cyrus the Great and Cyrus II, who founded the Medo-Persian Empire in the sixth century BCE and allowed the Judean refugees to return to their homeland after the Babylonian exile. (12, 17)

**D** The abbreviation for the Deuteronomist source of the Torah/Pentateuch written in the seventh century BCE. (5) *See also* **Deuteronomy** and **Deuteronomist**.

**Dan** A son of Jacob and one of the twelve tribes of Israel.



**Daniel** A Judean who was taken into Babylonian captivity by Nebuchadnezzar; a Jewish hero, he is the main character in the book of Daniel. (16)

**David** The son of Jesse, anointed by Samuel to become king in place of Saul; he killed Goliath. His sons Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah, and Solomon fought to follow him on the throne. He is associated with the biblical psalms and is credited with politically and militarily uniting the ancient Israelite confederation into a centralized kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital; he created the largest empire Israel ever knew. David is said to have planned for the temple that his son and successor, Solomon, built. (8)

**Davidic covenant** A covenant God made with David, pledging that the family of David would provide kings to rule over Israel in perpetuity (2 Samuel 7). (8)

**Day of Atonement** (Hebrew Yom Kippur) The one day each year when special sacrifices were made by the high priest for the sins of the people. Only on this day, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place of the temple to sprinkle blood on the ark of the covenant to reconcile Israel with God (Leviticus 16). (4)

**Day of YHWH** Also termed the *day of the LORD*, the day that God of Israel battles his enemies; derives from the holy war tradition and was cited by Amos, Joel, Obadiah, and Zephaniah. (10, 12)

**Dead Sea Scrolls** A collection of scrolls dating to the first century BCE found in caves near the Dead Sea; they are generally thought to be linked with the settlement at Qumran and

with a Jewish religious group called the Essenes. (C)

**Deborah** The judge of Israel who engineered victory over the Canaanites (Judges 4–5). (7)

**Decalogue** (Greek for “ten words”) Refers to laws collected into a group of ten; *the* Decalogue is the Ten Commandments received by Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:1–21); the cultic or Ritual Decalogue is found in Exodus 34. (3) *See also* **Ethical Decalogue** and **Ritual Decalogue**.

**Demythologize** The process of interpreting a myth in nonmythic language to express its meaning without clinging to its mythic form.

**Deuterocanonical** Pertains to writings regarded as Scripture by some (particularly by Christian groups) but not contained in the Hebrew Bible. (C) *See also* **Apocrypha** and **Pseudepigrapha**.

**Deuteronomic reform** A reform of Judah’s religious institutions carried out by Josiah in the seventh century BCE; the book of Deuteronomy is closely associated with this initiative.

**Deuteronomic source (D)** The literary source document of the Pentateuch that consists largely of the book of Deuteronomy. (P1)

**Deuteronomic theme** The cycle of sin, punishment, repentance, and deliverance that the Deuteronomistic historian uses to organize Israel’s historical experience. (P2)

**Deuteronomist** The writer or school of writers responsible for the book of Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Torah/Pentateuch. (5)

**Deuteronomistic historian** The writer or editor of the Deuteronomistic History; one theory holds that there were two editors, Dtr1 from the time of Josiah and Dtr2 from the time of the Babylonian exile.

**Deuteronomistic History (DH)** Sometimes called the *Deuteronomic History*, the body of material that consists of the introduction to Deuteronomy ([Chapters 1–4](#)) and Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. It is an extended review of Israel’s history from the conquest under Joshua through the destruction of 587 BCE written from the perspective of principles found in the book of Deuteronomy. (5, P2)

**Deuteronomy** The fifth book of the Torah/Pentateuch; many modern scholars consider it to be part or all of a scroll found during a reform of the temple and its institutions carried out by Josiah in 622 BCE. (5)

**DH** The abbreviation for the Deuteronomistic History; sometimes noted DtrH. *See Deuteronomistic History.*

**Diaspora** (Greek for “scattering”; also called the *Dispersion*) The technical term for the Dispersion of the Jewish people, a process that began after defeats in 721 and 587 BCE and resulted in the growth of sizable Jewish communities outside Palestine. The terms *Diaspora* and *Dispersion* are often used to refer to the Jewish communities living among the gentiles outside the “holy land” of Canaan/Israel/Palestine. (P3)

**Dietary laws** *See* **Kosher**.

**Dispersion** *See* **Diaspora**.

**Divine Council** Consisting of the “sons of God,” a council of angels who surrounded God and served perhaps as his deliberative assembly. (1)

**Divine warrior** The notion that God is a warrior fighting on behalf of his people. (6) *See also* **Holy war**.

**Documentary hypothesis** Scholarly hypothesis that suggests that the Torah/Pentateuch was not the work of one author, such as Moses, but is a composition based on four documents from different periods: J (the Yahwist) from about 950 BCE, E (the Elohist) from about 850, D (Deuteronomy) from about 620, and P (the Priestly document) from about 550–450. J and E were combined around 720, D was added about a century later, and P about a century after that, giving final shape to the Torah. (P1)

**Dualism** The belief that there are two elemental forces in the universe, good and evil; apocalypticism typically holds a dualistic view of the world. (16)

**E** The abbreviation for the Elohist source. *See* **Elohist source**. (P1)

**Early Judaism** Also sometimes called *formative*, *proto-*, *middle*, and even *late Judaism*; refers to Judaism in the intertestamental period (and slightly later) as a development from the religion of ancient Israel but prior to the emergence of its classical, rabbinic form in the early centuries CE. (C)

**Eden** Also called the garden of Eden, it was the place God located the first created humans, Adam and Eve (Genesis 2–3). (1)

**Edom** A territory south of Judah, the location of the Edomites, the descendants of Esau. (2)

**Egypt** A land and kingdom in northeastern Africa, on the Mediterranean and Red Seas.

**Ehud** A judge of Israel from the book of Judges, noted for being left-handed. (7)

**El** The Semitic word for God, found alone or compounded with other terms as names of God (for example, El Shaddai and El Elyon); often found as the theophoric element in personal and place names (for example, Elijah and Bethel).

**Election** A term used theologically in Judaism to indicate God's choice of Israel to receive the covenant—a choice not based on the superiority or previous accomplishments of the people but on God's graciousness (*see* **Covenant**); in Christianity, the concept of election was applied to the “new Israel” of Jesus' followers in the last times.

**Eli** The high priest at Shiloh with whom Samuel ministered in his early years. (8)

**Elijah** An Israelite prophet during the reign of Ahab; he defeated the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel and was taken to heaven in a firestorm. (9)

**Elisha** The prophet who succeeded Elijah in the northern

kingdom of Israel. (9)

**Elkanah** An Ephraimite, the husband of Hannah and the father of Samuel. (8)

**Elohim** A Hebrew word meaning “God”; Israel’s most general way of referring to its deity; the Elohist portions of the Pentateuch refer to God with this term. (P1)

**Elohist source** (also called the Elohist; abbreviated E) The name given to a reconstructed source underlying certain Pentateuchal narratives; it is characterized by the use of the divine name Elohim. (P1)

**Enuma Elish** A Babylonian story of creation, featuring Apsu, Tiamat, and Marduk. (1)

**Ephod** A linen apron worn by a priest over his robe.

**Ephraim** One of Joseph’s two sons; he became the ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel; the name Ephraim was often used as a designation of the ten northern tribes after the division of the kingdoms.

**Eponym** A supposed ancestor (eponymous ancestor) whose name is the same as or related to the name of a later group, tribe, or nation. (2)

**Eretz Yisrael/Israel** (Hebrew for “land of Israel”) In Jewish thought, the special term for the Palestinian area believed to have been promised to the Jewish people by God in the ancient covenant. *See also Israel.*

**Esau** The first son of Isaac and Rebekah; the twin of Jacob; he was the ancestor of the Edomites. (2)

**Eschatology** (adj. eschatological; from Greek *eschaton*, “last” or “the end-time”) Refers in general to what is expected (from the inquirer’s perspective) to take place in the “last times”; thus the study of the ultimate destiny or purpose of humankind and the world, how and when the end will occur, and what the end or last period of history or existence will be like. (16) *See also* **Apocalypse** and **Apocalyptic literature**.

**Essenes** A Jewish group that lived in retreat in the wilderness of Judea between the first century BCE and the first CE, according to Josephus, the elder, Pliny, and Philo. (C). *See also* **Dead Sea Scrolls** and **Qumran**.

**Esther** A Jewish heroine of the Diaspora who became queen of Persia under Xerxes I, called Ahasuerus in the story; she secured the safety of the Jews when they were threatened with genocide; her story is told in the book that carries her name. (15)

**Ethical Decalogue** The Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. (3) *See* **Decalogue**.

**Etiology** (sometimes spelled *aetiology*; from Greek for “cause, origin”) A term used to describe or label stories (etiological tales) that claim to explain the reason for something being (or being called) what it is; for example, in the old Jewish Creation story (Genesis 2:23), woman (*ishshah*) is given that name because she has been taken out of (the side or rib of) “man” (*ish*). (6)

**Eve** The first female who God created; mated to Adam, her name means “life.” (1)

***Ex nihilo*** A Latin phrase meaning “from nothing” that some theologians apply to the biblical story of the Creation; Genesis 1, as well as other Old Testament allusions to the Creation, suggests that God created the world out of water.

**Exegesis** (from Greek for “interpretation”; adj. exegetical) The process of drawing out meaning from a text; interpreting a text in its literary and historical context.

**Exile** (also called *Babylonian exile*) The Babylonian exile was the period in the middle of the sixth century BCE when Judeans were taken as captives to Babylonia and resettled there; it officially ended in 539 BCE, but many Judeans nonetheless remained there. (11)

**Exodus** (from Greek for “to exit, go out”) The term refers to the event of the Israelites leaving Egypt and to the biblical book that tells of that event, the second book of the Torah; the release from Egyptian captivity and the Exodus from Egypt were led by Moses, probably in the thirteenth century BCE. (3) *See also*

**Passover. Ezekiel** A priest taken to Babylonia, he became a prophet to the community of Judean refugees living there in the sixth century BCE; also, the prophetic book associated with this figure. (11, 12)

**Ezra** A priest and teacher of the Torah; he led a group of Jewish refugees back to Judea from Babylonia in the fifth century BCE. (17)



**Fall** The disobedience and expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden (Genesis 3). Neither the biblical text nor Judaism calls this event the Fall, meaning a fall from grace. Calling it this is a Christian theological interpretation of the story. (1)

**Fear of YHWH** (also *fear of God*) A deep respect and reverence of God; an important theme in the Elohist fragments and in the wisdom literature. (14)

**Fertile crescent** The well-watered and fertile arc of land where early civilizations developed and prospered; it extends upward from the Nile Valley in the west, through Palestine and Syria, and down the Tigris and Euphrates Valleys to the Persian Gulf.

**First Isaiah** *See* **Isaiah of Jerusalem.**

**Five Books of Moses** A designation of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, also known as the Torah and the Pentateuch. (P1)

**Five Scrolls** (sometimes called the *Five Megillot*) A subgroup of books within the Writings section of the Hebrew Bible consisting of the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther; each book or scroll is associated with a festival or fast in the life of Israel. (P3, 15)

**Flood** The watery inundation during the time of Noah that destroyed all life on earth except for Noah and the representative sample of created things that survived in the ark (Genesis 6–9). (1)

**Form criticism** (also called *form analysis*) The examination of literary units to discover the typical formal structures and patterns behind the present text in an attempt to recover the original sociological setting or setting-in-life (German *Sitz im Leben*) of that form of literature. (P2, 13)

**Formal parallelism** (sometimes called *synthetic parallelism*) The type of poetic parallelism in which the second line of a poetic couplet completes the thought of the first line. (13)

**Former Prophets** The term designating the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings—possibly so-called because it was assumed that prophets had written these books; *Former* because they were placed before the Latter Prophets in the canonical order of the books in the Hebrew Bible. (P2)

**Galilee** The northern part of Palestine, specifically the territories north and west of the Sea of Galilee.

***Galut*** (Hebrew for “exile”) The term refers to the various expulsions of Jews from the ancestral homeland; over time, it came to express the broader notion of Jewish homelessness and state of being aliens; thus, colloquially, “to be in *galut*” means to live in the Diaspora and also to be in a state of physical and even spiritual alienation. *See also* **Diaspora**.

***Gemara*** (Hebrew for “completion”) Popularly applied to the Jewish Talmud as a whole, to discussions by rabbinic teachers on Mishnah, and to decisions reached in these discussions; in a more restricted sense, it applies to the work of the generations of the Amoraim from the third through the fifth centuries CE in “completing” Mishnah to produce the Talmuds.

**Genealogy** A list or family tree of ancestors or descendants; the Priestly history and the Chronicler's History contain extensive genealogies. (1)

**Generation** A group of people born and living at about the same time, usually reckoned as forty years in the Old Testament; grandparents, parents, and children are three generations.

**Genre** The term used by literary critics as the equivalent of "type of literature"; the basic genres found in the Hebrew Bible are prose and poetry with many different subtypes including song, hymn, story, saying, speech, law, genealogy, saga, and history.

**Gentiles** (Hebrew *goyyim*) In pre-Christian times, non-Jewish peoples; thereafter, non-Jewish and non-Christian (roughly synonymous with "pagan").

**Gibeon** A village north of Jerusalem that tricked Joshua and the Israelites into making a treaty with them. (6)

**Gideon** A judge who delivered the Israelites from the tyranny of the Midianites. (7)

**Gilgal** A village near Jericho where the Israelites first stopped after they entered the Promised Land. (6)

**Gilgamesh Epic** A Babylonian epic centering on Gilgamesh, an ancient king of Uruk; the eleventh tablet of this epic contains a story of a flood that has parallels to the biblical story of Noah and the ark. (1)

**Glory of YHWH** The revelation of God's being, nature, and

presence to humankind, often through physical or meteorological phenomena. (3, 12)

**God** The supreme divine being, called Elohim by the Israelites, who was also known as YHWH.

**Gog and Magog** Gog is a future foe of Israel and a personification of evil that lived in the land of Magog. Gog battled God's forces in Ezekiel 38–39. (12)

**Golden calf** A statue constructed by Aaron at Mount Sinai that the Israelites worshipped; Jeroboam, first king of Israel, built golden calf shrines at Bethel and Dan. (3)

**Goliath** The Philistine giant who David killed. (8)

**Gomer** The wife of Hosea the prophet who turned out to be unfaithful to their marriage. (10)

**Goshen** The territory in the eastern Nile delta of Egypt where Joseph settled the family of Jacob. (2)

**Grace** An undeserved gift or favor; the undeserved attention, forgiveness, kindness, and mercy that God gives.

**Habakkuk** One of the twelve prophets; a sixth-century Judean prophet who sought to understand God's purpose in sending the Babylonians to punish Judah. (11) *See also* **Book of the Twelve**.

**Habiru** (sometimes spelled *hapiru* or '*apiru*) An Akkadian term denoting persons or groups who were social and political outlaws from established society; existing in the ancient Middle

East in the second and first millennia BCE, they appear as slaves, merchants, mercenary soldiers, bandits, and outlaws; some scholars link this term to the word *Hebrew*. (6)

**Hagar** The servant of Sarah and one of Abraham's wives; the mother of Ishmael, who was driven away from the family by Sarah. (2)

**Haggadah** (adj. *haggadic*; Hebrew for “telling, narration”; sometimes spelled *aggada*[*h*]) Jewish term for non-*halakic* (nonlegal) matter, especially in Talmud and Midrash. It includes folklore, legend, theology, scriptural interpretations, biography, and so forth. In a general sense, in classical Jewish literature and discussion, what is not *halaka* (legal subject matter) is (*h*)*aggada*; technically, “the *Haggada*(*h*)” is a liturgical manual about the Exodus from Egypt in the time of Moses used in the Jewish Passover Seder.

**Haggai** One of the twelve prophets; a prophet who encouraged the Israelites to rebuild the temple after a return from the exile in Babylonia in the sixth century BCE (12) *See also* **Book of the Twelve**.

**Halakah** (adj. *halakic*; Hebrew for “going”—that is, how we go about our daily lives) Deals with practical guidance, rules, and expectations in Judaism; any normative Jewish law, custom, practice, or rite—or the entire complex. *Halakah* is law established or custom ratified by authoritative rabbinic jurists and teachers; colloquially, if something is deemed *halakic*, it is considered proper and normative behavior.

**Ham** One of the sons of Noah; he abused his father and Canaan, his son, was cursed for it. (1)

**Haman** The wicked opponent of Mordecai and the Jews in the book of Esther. (15)

**Hananiah** The Judean prophet who challenged Jeremiah over the issue of the yoke of Babylon. (11)

**Hannah** The wife of Elkanah and mother of Samuel; she prayed for a son; after Samuel was born, she dedicated him to God's service at Shiloh. (8)

**Hanukkah** (Hebrew for "dedication") The Jewish festival of lights that commemorates the rededication of the Jerusalem temple to more traditional modes of Jewish worship by Judah the Maccabee around 164 BCE after its desecration in the time of the Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes. (16)

**Hasids** (Hebrew for "pious ones") The term may refer to Jews in various periods: (1) a group that resisted the policies of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the second century BCE at the start of the Maccabean revolt; (2) pietists in the thirteenth century CE; (3) followers of the movement of Hasidism founded in the eighteenth century CE by Baal Shem Tov. (16)

**Hasmonaean** Hasmon is the family name of the Maccabees, so the Maccabean rulers are often referred to as Hasmonaean; the Hasmoneans included the Maccabees and the high priests and kings who ruled Judea from 142 to 63 BCE.

**Hazor** A city in northern Canaan that resisted the Israelites but was conquered by Joshua. (6)

**Hebrew** The language of the Old Testament Israelites and the language in which most of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible

was written.

**Hebrew Bible** The collection of twenty-four books written by Israelites and Jews in the first millennium BCE, mostly in the Hebrew language, with portions of Ezra and Daniel written in Aramaic. The Jewish title for the collection is Tanak (also spelled Tanakh), and the Christian title is Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible is the Written Torah of Judaism and the first testament of the Christian canon. (I, C)

**Hebrews** Another name for Israelites, usually used in reference to them before they settled in the Promised Land. (3)

**Hebron** A major city in Judah; the place from which David first ruled; Abraham and many other ancestors were buried here. (8)

**Hellenism** (Greek for “Greekish”) The civilization that spread from Greece throughout much of the ancient world from 333 (Alexander the Great) to 63 (dominance of Rome) BCE; as a result, many elements of Greek culture (names, language, philosophy, athletics, architecture, and so forth) penetrated the ancient Middle East. (16)

**Hellenistic** Pertaining to Greek culture as disseminated by the conquests of Alexander the Great and the rule of his successors.

**Hellenization** The process of enculturation into the beliefs and practices of Hellenism, which is another term for Greek culture in all its fullness. (16)

**Hermeneutical triangle** A conceptual representation of the

three major elements that are involved in the interpretation of texts: author, referent, and reader. (I) *See also Hermeneutics.*

**Hermeneutics** (from Greek for “to interpret, translate”; hence, “science of interpretation”) Denotes the strategy of interpreting texts to enable them to be applied to circumstances contemporary with the interpreter; the term is often used with reference to the study of Jewish and Christian Scriptures.

**Hexateuch** The first six books of the Hebrew Bible; there may be an underlying assumption that these belong together historically. (P2)

**Hezekiah** (715–687) A king of Judah; he restored the temple, reinstituted proper worship, and received God’s help against the Assyrians. (10)

**High priest** The chief religious official in Israel; he offered the most important sacrifices to God on behalf of the people.

**Hillel** Often called by the title “the Elder”; probably a Babylonian, Hillel was an important sage of the early Jewish period in Palestine around the turn of the era; his teachings convey the Pharisaic ideal, through many epigrams on humility and peace (found in Sayings of the Fathers 1–2), and were fundamental in shaping the Pharisaic traditions and modes of interpretation; in rabbinic lore, Hillel is famous for a negative formulation of the “Golden Rule” (recited to a non-Jew): “What is hateful to you do not do to your fellow man. That is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary. Go and learn it”; his style of legal reasoning is continued by his disciples, known as Beit Hillel (“House/School of Hillel”), and is typically contrasted with that of Shammai (a contemporary) and his school.



**Historicity** The issue of the relationship of a text and the event to which it refers and whether the text accurately reflects the “happenedness” of the event. (P1)

**Historiography** The reconstruction of the past based on a critical examination of ancient materials.

**Holiness Code** [Chapters 17–27](#) of Leviticus, which detail the laws for ensuring, protecting, and promoting holiness (sacredness, separateness). (4)

**Holy/holiness** To be set apart for God; to belong to God; to be pure. (4)

**Holy spirit** (sometimes termed the *holy ghost*) In the Hebrew Bible it is referred to as the spirit of God or spirit of YHWH; in Judaism the presence of God is evidenced in the speech of the prophets and by other divine manifestations; in Christianity it is understood more generally as the active, guiding presence of God in the church and its members.

**Holy war** War authorized by God and led by him; Old Testament holy war called for the complete slaughter of the enemy and the dedication of all spoils to God. (6) *See also* **Divine warrior**.

**Hophni** He and Phinehas were two sons of Eli, the high priest at Shiloh; they died in battle at Aphek-Ebenezer fighting the Philistines. (8)

**Horeb** The term used in the Elohist and Deuteronomist sources to designate the location where God delivered the commandments and covenant to the Israelites through Moses;

apparently the equivalent of Mount Sinai. (3)

**Hosea** One of the twelve prophets; an eighth-century BCE Israelite prophet who exposed the people's lack of faith in YHWH. (10)

**Hyksos** Derived from Egyptian for “rulers of foreign countries,” these Semitic rulers of Egypt from 1750–1550 BCE were probably the people in control of Egypt during the sojourn of Joseph and Jacob's descendants. (3)

**Hymn** A song praising God, the king, Zion, or Torah that contains a description of why the object of praise is wonderful. (13)

**Iconography** The expression of religious principles or doctrines using pictorial or symbolic images or icons; icons may serve as visual metaphors; a faith that favors this type of expression is called “iconic.”

**Image of God** Phrase deriving from Genesis 1:26–7; God created humankind in his own image. (1)

**Immanuel** (sometimes spelled *Emmanuel*) The name or title of an otherwise unidentifiable person in Isaiah's prophecy ([Chapters 7–8](#)); means “God is with us.” (10)

**Incense** A component in rituals of worship; spices burned on an altar or in a censer to make a sweet-smelling smoke.

**Inclusion** A literary technique that begins and ends a unit of text with the same or similar words to create wholeness and literary closure. (1)

**Intertestamental period** The period in which early Judaism developed, between about 200 BCE (the traditional end date for the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible) and the first century CE (the composition of the Christian New Testament); the Jewish intertestamental literature includes the Apocrypha (mostly preserved in Greek) and the Pseudepigrapha (works from this period ascribed to ancient authors like Enoch, the ancestors, and Moses). (C)

**Invocation** The formula used at the beginning of many psalms that appeals to God and asks him to listen. (13)

**Isaac** The son of Abraham and Sarah who inherited the ancestral promises; he married Rebekah and was the father of Esau and Jacob. (2)

**Isaiah** A prophet in Jerusalem in the eighth century BCE, also called Isaiah of Jerusalem; also, the prophetic book that contains the combined words of Isaiah of Jerusalem (First Isaiah), Isaiah of the Exile (Second Isaiah), and Isaiah of the Restoration (Third Isaiah). (10)

**Isaiah of Jerusalem** (also called *First Isaiah*) The first main section of the book of Isaiah ([Chapters 1–39](#)) and the author of those chapters. (10) *See* **Isaiah**.

**Isaiah of the Exile** (also called *Second Isaiah* and *Deutero-Isaiah*) The second main section of the book of Isaiah (Chapters 40–55), whose setting is the Babylonian exile. The term also designates the anonymous author of those chapters. (12)

**Isaiah of the Restoration** (also called *Third Isaiah* and

*Trito-Isaiah*) The third main section of the book of Isaiah (Chapters 56–66), which dates to the sixth-century BCE period of the restoration of Jerusalem. The term also designates the anonymous author of those chapters. (12)

**Ishmael** The son of Abraham and Hagar; he was not the son of the promise; he and his mother were expelled by Sarah and Abraham. (2)

**Israel** A secondary name for Jacob; the name of the ten northern tribes who formed the “kingdom of Israel” (alternatives are “Ephraim” and “Samaria”), destroyed in 721 BCE; also used as the name of the twelve tribes and for the whole territory occupied by the Israelites, Canaan. Historically, Jews have continued to regard themselves as the true continuation of the ancient Israelite national–religious community. In modern times, it also refers to the political state of Israel. Christians came to consider themselves to be the “true” Israel, thus also a continuation of the ancient traditions.

**Israelis** Modern term designating citizens of the modern state of Israel; to be distinguished from Israelites.

**Israelites** (from “sons of Israel”) Primarily the inhabitants of the ancient state of Israel but also used of the Hebrews from the time of Moses to the monarchy.

**J** The abbreviation for the Yahwist source of the Pentateuch. (P1) *See* **Yahwist narrative**.

**Jacob** The second son of Isaac and Rebekah; he was the twin brother of Esau; his name was changed to *Israel* after he wrestled with God at the Jabbok River. He became the recipient

of the ancestral promises, and his twelve sons became the ancestors of the tribes of Israel. (2)

**Jacob cycle** The narratives of Genesis 25:19 to 35:29 that revolve around the ancestor Jacob. (2)

**Japheth** One of the sons of Noah, he was blessed because with Shem he covered his father's nakedness. (1)

**Jebus** The Canaanite city conquered by David and made his capital, Jerusalem. (8)

**JEDP** *See* **Documentary hypothesis**.

**Jehoiachin** (598) King of Judah for three months, he was taken captive to Babylon in the first deportation. (11)

**Jehoiakim** (609–598) Second to the last king of Judah. (11)

**Jehovah** An early and mistaken attempt to represent the special Hebrew name for the deity YHWH; a more probable reconstruction of the divine name is YHWH.

**Jehu** (843–815) King of Israel who was instrumental in engineering the demise of the house of Ahab. (9)

**Jephthah** A judge of Israel from the book of Judges. (7)

**Jeremiah** A prophet in Judah during the Babylonian crisis (late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE); he was persecuted because of his unpopular prophetic statements including a prediction of the fall of Jerusalem; also, the prophetic book containing his oracles and narratives about him. (11)

**Jeremiah's complaints** *See Complaints of Jeremiah.*

**Jericho** The first city in Canaan conquered by Joshua and the Israelites. (6)

**Jeroboam** An administrator in Solomon's court who rebelled and became the first king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (922–901); he built nonYahwistic shrines in the cities of Dan and Bethel; a king of Israel in the eighth century BCE also held this name and is sometimes referred to as Jeroboam II (786–746). (9)

**Jeroboam II** *See Jeroboam.*

**Jerusalem** The political and religious capital of Israel when it was united, then of the southern kingdom of Judah; David captured Jebus and made it his capital city, the City of David; Mount Zion is the ridge in Jerusalem on which the royal palace and temple were built; Jerusalem is where Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and resurrected. (8)

**Jeshua** Another spelling of Joshua; Jeshua was the high priest of Judea in the sixth century BCE during the time of Zerubbabel, Haggai, and Zechariah. (17)

**Jesus/Joshua** (“Jesus” is the Greek attempt to trans-literate the Semitic name “Joshua”) The Palestinian popular figure from the first century CE whose death and resurrection as God's Messiah/Christ became foundational for an early Jewish subgroup known as the Nazarenes from which Christianity ultimately developed as a separate religion.

**Jethro** Father of Zipporah and father-in-law of Moses; also

called *Reuel*. (3)

**Jews** The term applied to the people of God after the Babylonian exile; it is derived from the Hebrew/Aramaic term for Judeans, *yehudi*. (P3) *See also* **Judaism**.

**Jezebel** The Phoenician wife of Ahab who promoted Baal worship in Israel and opposed Elijah the prophet. (9)

**Jezreel** An Israelite royal city of the Omride dynasty; the place where Jehu executed Jezebel; it became a byword for Jehu's cruelty, and Hosea named his son Jezreel to signal God's judgment. (9)

**Joab** David's military commander. (8)

**Job** A righteous man whom God tested by disaster and personal suffering; in the end, God restored his wealth and family. The book of Job, considered a work of wisdom literature, contains the story. (14)

**Joel** One of the twelve prophets; of uncertain date but perhaps fourth century BCE; a prophet who preached the Day of YHWH and the pouring out of YHWH's spirit on everyone. (12) *See also* **Book of the Twelve**.

**Jonah** One of the twelve prophets; an eighth-century BCE Israelite prophet who was called to preach to the Assyrians in Nineveh. (10) *See also* **Book of the Twelve**.

**Jonathan** A son of King Saul, he had a special relationship with David; he was killed by the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. (8)

**Jordan** The river that flows from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea; it is the border between Canaan and Transjordan.

**Joseph** Son of Jacob by Rachel; brother of Benjamin; he was sold into slavery by his brothers and became a high official within the Egyptian government; his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, became tribes within Israel. (2)

**Joseph cycle** The collection of stories centered on Joseph, son of Jacob, contained in Genesis 37–50. (2)

**Josephus** (also known as *Flavius Josephus*) The Jewish general and author in the latter part of the first century CE who wrote a massive history (*Antiquities*) of the Jews and a detailed treatment of the Jewish revolt against Rome in 66–73 CE.

**Joshua** Moses's aide during the wilderness sojourn; after the death of Moses, he led the Hebrews into the Promised Land. Another figure was called Joshua (sometimes spelled Jeshua), the high priest of the Jerusalem community that rebuilt the temple. (6, 17) *See also* **Jeshua** and **Jesus**.

**Josiah** (640–609) King of Judah who reformed Judean religion and died in battle at Megiddo. (5, 11)

**Josiah's reform** The religious reform of 622 BCE initiated by Josiah, king of Judah, after the Book of the Covenant was found in the Jerusalem temple; it is sometimes called the Deuteronomic reform because the book appears to have been an early form of Deuteronomy. (11)

**Jubilee** (from Hebrew *yovel*, “ram's-horn trumpet”) Every fiftieth year was a jubilee (the year following seven times seven



years, or seven weeks of years); special arrangements during this year were designed to aid the poor and dispossessed. (4)

**Judah** Jacob's fourth son, he was the ancestor of the tribe of Judah; Judah became the name of the southern kingdom after the northern ten tribes separated from Judah and Benjamin. (2)

**Judah the Prince** (also known as *Judah Hanasi*) Head of the rabbinic Jewish community in Palestine around 200 CE; credited with publication of the Mishnah. (C)

**Judaism** From the Hebrew name of the ancestor Judah, whose name also came to designate the tribe and tribal district in which Jerusalem was located; thus, the inhabitants of Judah and members of the tribe of Judah came to be called *Judahites* or, in short form, *Jews*. The religious outlook, beliefs, and practices associated with these people came to be called *Judaism* and to have varying characteristics at different times and places, such as early Judaism and rabbinic Judaism. (P3)

**Judas Maccabee** A second-century BCE Judean who led the Jewish Maccabean revolt against the Hellenistic Seleucid occupation of Jerusalem and Judea. (16)

**Judge** In the period of the Judges, a person who held off Israel's enemies—for example, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. See also Judges. (7)

**Judges** The period of the Judges was between the conquest and the Davidic monarchy when Israelite tribes were settling the land of Canaan; the book of Judges contains the stories of the individual judges. (7)

## ***Kashrut* See **Kosher.****

***Ketuvim*** (Hebrew for “Writings”) The last of the three main divisions of the Hebrew Bible (the *k* of Tanak), including Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Five Megillot or Five Scrolls (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther), Daniel, and the Chronicler’s History (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles). (P3)

**Kingdom of God** The realm where God rules; the state of the world in which God’s will is fulfilled; expected to be brought into being at the end of time when the Messiah returns. (16)

**Kosher** (Hebrew *kasher*, *kashrut* for “proper, ritually correct”) Refers to ritually correct Jewish dietary practices; traditional Jewish dietary laws are based on biblical legislation; only land animals that chew the cud and have split hooves (sheep, beef; not pigs, camels) are permitted and must be slaughtered in a special way; further, meat products may not be eaten with milk products or immediately thereafter; of sea creatures, only those (fish) having fins and scales are permitted; fowl is considered a meat food and also has to be slaughtered in a special manner. (4)

**Laban** Rebekah’s brother and Jacob’s uncle who lived in Aram; Jacob became wealthy there and married his daughters, Rachel and Leah. (2)

**Lament** A cry of pain and grief; in the study of the Psalms, the lament, also called a complaint, is the literary type that expresses a cry of help, either of an individual or a community. (13)

**Latter Prophets** The technical name for the collection of prophetic writings composed of the books of the three “Major” Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and those of the twelve “Minor” (or shorter) Prophets, collectively called the *Book of the Twelve*. (P2)

**Law** See **Commandments, Halakah, Oral Torah, Ten Commandments, Torah, and Written Torah.**

**Leah** Daughter of Laban; the first wife of Jacob who had six sons and one daughter. (2)

**Legend** A general term denoting stories about heroes, usually from the distant past, whose primary intent is not historical accuracy but entertainment, illustration, and instruction; some scholars consider certain of the ancestral accounts in Genesis, some stories of Moses in Exodus, and some stories about Elijah and Elisha to be legends.

**Leviathan** (also *Litan* or *Lotan*) The mythological sea monster of prophetic literature and the book of Job, also attested in Ugaritic literature. (14, 16)

**Levirate marriage** (from Latin *levir* for Hebrew *yabam*, “brother-in-law”) A biblical system of marriage in which the *levir* marries his brother’s widow (see Deuteronomy 25:5–10). This law is a central feature of the stories of Tamar (Genesis 38) and Ruth.

**Levi** A son of Jacob, one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

**Levites** Members of the tribe of Levi; the Levites took care of the tabernacle and later the temple but generally could not

serve as priests; only Levites specifically from the family of Aaron could become priests. (4)

**Literary criticism** (sometimes called *literary analysis*) A critical, but not necessarily criticizing or judgmental, examination of a piece of literature that seeks to determine the type of literature it is, as well as its conventions, stylistic techniques, structure, and strategies; in older scholarship, it is called *source criticism*.

**Liturgy** (adj. liturgical) Rites of public worship, usually institutionalized in temple, synagogue, or church tradition.

**Lo-ammi** A child of Gomer, the wife of the prophet Hosea; the name means “not my people.”

**Lo-ruhamah** A child of Gomer, the wife of the prophet Hosea; the name means “no mercy.”

**LORD** (Hebrew *adonay*) This term (note the use of small capital letters) substitutes for God’s Hebrew personal name YHWH in most modern translations of the Hebrew Bible. *See also* **YHWH**.

**LORD God** A compound divine name; a translation of YHWH Elohim. (1)

**Lot** The nephew of Abraham who accompanied him to Canaan. (2)

**Lots** A mechanical means of divination, functionally similar to dice or drawing straws, that was used to determine God’s decision in certain matters; used in the phrase “to cast lots.” (6)

**LXX** The abbreviation for the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures done in the last centuries BCE. *See* **Septuagint**.

**Maccabean** From the period of Judas Maccabaeus (Judas the Maccabee) and his brothers, second century BCE. (16)

**Maccabean revolt** The second-century BCE Jewish revolt against Antiochus IV led by the family of Mattathias, including his son Judas the Maccabee, described in 1 Maccabees.

**Malachi** One of the twelve prophets; of uncertain date but probably fifth century BCE, a prophet who foresaw the return of Elijah. (12) *See also* **Book of the Twelve**.

**Manna** (from Hebrew for “What is it?”) The food that God provided to the Hebrews while they sojourned in the wilderness for forty years. (4)

**Marduk** The chief god of the Babylonians and patron god of Babylon; he is the hero-god of the *Enuma Elish*. (1)

**Masoretes/Masoretic text** (Hebrew for “transmitters,” derived from Hebrew *masorah*, “tradition”) The Masoretes were rabbis in ninth-century CE Palestine who sought to preserve the traditional text of the Bible (hence called the Masoretic text), which is still used in contemporary synagogues and is the basis for modern translation of the Hebrew Bible. The Masoretes were scholars who encouraged Bible study and attempted to achieve uniformity by establishing rules for correcting the text in matters of spelling, grammar, and pronunciation; they introduced vowel signs, accents (pointing), and marginal notes (*masorah*).

**Master narrative** The story line of the Bible that is generally accepted within a particular religious or cultural community. (1)

**Matriarchs** (from Latin for “first mother”) A term used to refer to female ancestors such as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah. (2)

**Matsah** (pl. *matsot*) Jewish unleavened bread used at Passover.

**Meeting tent** (also called *tent of meeting*) A simple form of the tabernacle used as the place Moses met God during the period of the wilderness sojourn.

**Megillot** (sing. *megillah*; Hebrew for “scroll”) Usually refers to the biblical scroll of Esther read on the festival of Purim. (15)

**Menorah** The multiarmed lamp or candelabrum that was used in the tabernacle and temple; a nine-branched menorah is used at Hannukah, whereas the seven-branched one was used in the ancient temple.

**Mesopotamia** (from Greek for “between the rivers”) The land defined by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, this is the location of the birth of civilization and the origin of the Israelites; the Israelites interacted with Mesopotamian people throughout their history.

**Messiah** (from Hebrew *meshiach*, “anointed one”; equivalent to Greek *christos*) Ancient priests and kings (and sometimes prophets) of Israel were anointed with oil; in early

Judaism, the term came to mean a royal descendant of the dynasty of David and redeemer figure who would restore the united kingdom of Israel and Judah and usher in an age of peace, justice, and plenty. The messianic age was believed by some Jews to be a time of perfection of human institutions, while others believed it to be a time of radical new beginnings, a new heaven and earth after divine judgment and destruction. The title came to be applied to Jesus of Nazareth by his followers, who were soon called *Christians* in Greek and Latin usage. (8)

**Mezuzah** (pl. *mezuzot*; Hebrew for “doorpost”) A parchment scroll with selected Torah verses (Deuteronomy 6:4–9; 11:13–21) placed in a container and affixed to the exterior doorposts (at the right side of the entrance) of observant Jewish homes (see Deuteronomy 6:1–4) and sometimes also to interior doorposts of rooms; the word *shaddai*, “Almighty,” usually is inscribed on the container. (5)

**Micah** One of the twelve prophets; an eighth-century Judean prophet who advocated justice for all people. (10) *See also Book of the Twelve.*

**Michal** A daughter of Saul, given in marriage to David; she criticized David’s behavior, and he refused thereafter to have relations with her. (8)

**Midian/Medianites** Territory south of Canaan, of uncertain exact location; perhaps in the Sinai Peninsula or western Arabia; Moses’s father-in-law, Jethro, was a priest of Midian; the Midianites afflicted the Israelites during the time of the Judges. (3, 7)

**Midrash** (pl. *midrashim*; from Hebrew *darash*, “to

inquire,” whence it comes to mean “exposition” of Scripture) The term refers to the “commentary” literature developed in classical Judaism that attempts to interpret Jewish Scriptures in a thorough manner. Literary midrash may focus either on *halakah*, directing the Jew to specific patterns of religious practice, or on *haggadah*, dealing with theological ideas, ethical teachings, popular philosophy, imaginative exposition, legend, allegory, animal fables, and so forth—that is, whatever is not *halakah*.

**Midwife** A nurse who helped with the birth of a baby; Shiphrah and Puah were Hebrew midwives who refused to cooperate in Pharaoh’s scheme to kill male children (Exodus 1).

**Millennium** (from Latin for “thousand”; adj. millenarian and millennial) A 1000-year period; *millenarian* has to do with the expected millennium, or 1000-year reign of Christ prophesied in the New Testament book of Revelation (“the Apocalypse”), a time in which the world would be brought to perfection; millenarian movements often grow up around predictions that this perfect time is about to begin. *See also* **Apocalypse** and **Eschatology**.

**Minor Prophets** *See* **Book of the Twelve**.

**Miriam** The sister of Moses and Aaron; she led the Israelites in worship after the crossing of the Reed Sea. (3)

**Mishnah** (Hebrew for “repetition, teaching”) A thematic compilation of legal material; in particular, a compilation by Rabbi Judah Hanasi (“the Prince”), of laws based ultimately on principles laid down in the Torah. Produced about 200 CE, it became the most authoritative collection of Oral Torah; the code



is divided into six major units and sixty-three minor ones; the work is the authoritative legal tradition of the early sages and is the basis of the legal discussions of the Talmud. (C) *See also* **Oral Torah**.

**Mitsvah** (pl. *mitsvot*; Hebrew for “commandment, obligation”) A ritual or ethical duty or act of obedience to God’s will. *See also* **Commandments**.

**Moab** A territory or country located in Transjordan, to the east of the land of Israel; a frequent enemy of the Israelites.

**Monarchy** Any state ruled or headed by a monarch; Israel and Judah were ruled by monarchies during the period of the kingdoms. (P2)

**Monolatry** The worship of one god while recognizing the existence of others; some scholars describe the religion of Israel as monolatry before the time of the prophets.

**Monotheism** The belief that there is only one God and that no other gods even exist; it is unlikely that Israel early in its history construed reality in this way; rather, it seems that Israelites only went so far as to claim YHWH as their God, the god of Israel, leaving the question of the existence of other gods to later theologians and prophets.

**Mordecai** The uncle of Esther who looked after her and urged her to do everything in her power to effect the deliverance of the Jews throughout the Persian Empire. (15)

**Mosaic covenant** The covenant that YHWH mediated through Moses, including the Ten Commandments and rules for

serving God, also called the *Sinai covenant*.

**Moses** The leader of the Hebrews at the time of the Exodus from Egypt (thirteenth century BCE); he led the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, God revealed the Torah to him on Mount Sinai. He is also described as the first Hebrew prophet; throughout Jewish history, he is the exalted man of faith and religious leader without peer. (3)

**Mount Gilboa** The location south of the Sea of Galilee where Saul and his sons died while fighting the Philistines. (8)

**Mount Sinai** The mountain in the Sinai Peninsula where God communicated with Moses and revealed the covenant and Ten Commandments. (3)

**Mount Zion.** *See* **Zion.**

**Myth** A story, theme, object, or character regarded as embodying a foundational aspect of a culture; the creation stories in Genesis 1–3 may be called myths, not in the sense that they are factually false but because they embody core beliefs of Israelite culture. (1)

**Nadab and Abihu** These two sons of Aaron offered “strange fire” to God, for which they both died. (4)

**Nahum** One of the twelve prophets; a late seventh-century BCE Judean prophet who announced the coming destruction of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. (11) *See also* **Book of the Twelve.**

**Naomi** The Israelite wife of Elimelech and mother-in-law of

Ruth who lived in Bethlehem of Judah. (15)

**Nathan** David's court prophet who mediated the Davidic covenant and exposed David's transgressions. (8)

**Navi'** (sometimes spelled *nabi*; pl. *nevi'im*) Term for "prophet" in ancient Israel. (P2) *See Nevi'im.*

**Nazirite** A person dedicated by a strict vow to do special work for God; elements of the vow could include not cutting hair and refraining from alcohol; Samson lived under a Nazirite vow.

**Nazirite vow** A pledge to live under a special set of restrictions as an act of dedication to God, detailed in Numbers 6. (7) *See also Nazirite.*

**Nebuchadrezzar** (605–562; sometimes spelled Nebuchadnezzar) Monarch of the Neo-Babylonian Empire who invaded Judah and destroyed Jerusalem in 587. (11, 16)

**Nehemiah** The Jewish cupbearer of Artaxerxes of Persia in the fifth century BCE; appointed governor of Judea, he rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. (17)

**Nevi'im** (sometimes spelled *nebi'im*; Hebrew for "prophets") The second main division of the Hebrew Bible, comprising the Former and the Latter Prophets; the *n* of Tanak. (P2) *See also Tanak.*

**New covenant** A theme of the prophet Jeremiah based on the Mosaic covenant; God would renew the covenant with his people and write it on their hearts. (11)

**New Exodus** A theme of the prophet Second Isaiah based on the Exodus from Egypt led by Moses; Second Isaiah anticipated the release of Judean refugees from Babylonian exile in a new act of divine deliverance. (12)

**New Testament** (NT) The collection of Christian canonical writings that together with the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible constitute the Christian Bible. (C) *See also* **Apocrypha**.

**Nineveh** The capital city of the Assyrian Empire, located on the Tigris River. (10)

**Noah** Built a boat and survived the Flood with his family and representatives of the animal world; God made a covenant with him, promising never again to destroy the world with a flood. (1) *See also* **Noahic covenant**.

**Noahic covenant** The covenant that God made with Noah, promising that he would never again send a flood; God signaled the covenant with the rainbow; also called the *Creation covenant*.

**NT** *See* **New Testament**.

**Obadiah** One of the twelve prophets; a sixth-century BCE Judean prophet who condemned Edom for its cruel treatment of conquered Judah. (12) *See also* **Book of the Twelve**.

**Offering** Something offered to God and given as an act of worship, often animals and grains; the offering of animals made right the relationship between God and the worshipper. (4)

**Old Testament** (OT) The name of the Hebrew Bible used in

the Christian community; it presupposes that there is a New Testament; the term *testament* goes back to *testamentum*, the Latin equivalent for the Hebrew word *covenant*. For most Protestant Christians, the Old Testament is identical to the Hebrew Bible; for classical Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Christianity, the Old Testament also includes the Apocrypha. (I, C)

**Omri** (876–869) Founding king of an Israelite dynasty, father of Ahab, and established Samaria as the capital of the kingdom of Israel. (9)

**Oracle** A statement originating with God, delivered by a prophet, and directed to an audience. (P2)

**Oral Torah** (also called *oral law*) In traditional Jewish pharisaic/rabbinic thought, God revealed instructions for living through both the written scriptures of the Hebrew Bible, called the Written Torah, and through a parallel process of orally transmitted traditions. These oral applications of the Torah for contemporary situations themselves later took written form in the Mishnah and other Jewish literature; the Jewish belief in both a Written and an Oral Torah is known as “the dual Torah”; critics of this approach within Judaism include the Sadducees and the Karaites. (C)

**Oral tradition** Material passed down through generations by word of mouth before taking fixed written form.

**Original sin** In classical Christian thought, the fundamental state of sinfulness and guilt, inherited from the first man Adam, that infects all of humanity but can be removed through depending on Christ. Judaism does not interpret the Creation

story this way but posits two impulses, the good and the bad, that vie for the control of individuals. (1)

**Orthodox** (from Greek for “correct opinion/outlook,” as opposed to *heterodox* or *heretical*) The judgment that a position is “orthodox” depends on what are accepted as the operative “rules” or authorities at the time. Over the course of history, the term *orthodox* has come to denote the dominant surviving forms that have proved themselves to be “traditional” or “classical” or “mainstream” (for example, rabbinic Judaism; the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Christian Churches).

**OT** *See* **Old Testament.**

**P** The abbreviation for the Priestly source of the Torah/Pentateuch. (P1) *See* **Priestly document.**

**Palestine** (Greek form of “Philistine,” for the seacoast population encountered by early geographers) An ancient designation for the area between Syria (to the north) and Egypt (to the south), between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River; Canaan; roughly, modern Israel combined with the West Bank territories.

**Palestinian Judaism** The postbiblical form of Judaism that developed in Palestine, in distinction from Hellenistic Judaism. (C)

**Paraenesis** (adj. paraenetic) A sermon or exhortation; Deuteronomy has a paraenetic style.

**Parallelism** The literary form pervasive in biblical poetry whereby the first line (the A-line) of a couplet is in some way

mirrored or doubled in the second line (the B-line). (13)

**Passover** (Hebrew *pesach*) The major Jewish spring holiday (with agricultural aspects) also known as *hag hamatsot*, “festival of unleavened bread,” commemorating the Exodus or deliverance of the Hebrew people from Egypt (see Exodus 12–13). The festival lasts eight days, during which Jews refrain from eating all leavened foods and products. A special ritual meal (called the Seder) is prepared, and a traditional narrative (called the *Haggadah*), supplemented by hymns and songs, marks the event. (3)

**Patriarch** (from Latin for “first father”) The father and ruler of a family; the head of a tribe. (2)

**Patriarchs** A common designation for the early founding figures of ancient Semitic tradition (before Moses) such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve tribal figureheads of Israel (Judah, Benjamin, and so forth). The patriarchs and matriarchs together are called the forebears or ancestors of Israel. (2) *See also* **Ancestors**.

**Pentateuch** (from Greek for “five scroll jars,” it comes to mean “five books/scrolls”; adj. Pentateuchal) Refers to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible traditionally attributed to Moses that together comprise the Torah (the *t* of Tanak): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; known in Jewish tradition as *Torat Mosheh*, the teaching of Moses. (P1)

**Pentecost** (Greek for “fiftieth [day]”) A Jewish feast celebrated fifty days after Passover; marks the first fruits of the agricultural year. *See also* **Shavuot**.

**Personification** The literary device of portraying an idea or nonhuman object as a human being. (14) *See also* **Anthropomorphism**.

**Perushim** (Hebrew for “Pharisees”) *See* **Pharisees**.

**Pesach** (Hebrew for “Passover”) The festival recalling the escape from Egypt in the Exodus. (3) *See* **Passover**.

**Petition** A speech form used especially in biblical psalms whereby the psalmist pleads with God for help, deliverance, or forgiveness. (13)

**Pharaoh** Egyptian term for “great house” that became the title for a king of Egypt; it is not a king’s name. (2, 3)

**Pharisees** (from Hebrew *perushim*, “separatists”; adj. pharisaic) The name given to a group or movement in early Judaism, the origin and nature of which is unclear; many scholars identify them with the later sages and rabbis who taught the oral and written Torah. According to Josephus and the New Testament, the Pharisees believed in the immortality of souls and resurrection of the dead, in a balance between predestination and free will, in angels as active divine agents, and in authoritative oral law. In the early Christian materials, Pharisees are often depicted as leading opponents of Jesus of Nazareth and his followers and are often linked with “scribes” but distinguished from the Sadducees. (C)

**Philistia** Beginning in the twelfth century BCE, the territory on the southern Canaanite coastal plain where the Philistines lived. *See also* **Palestine**.



**Philistines** Inhabitants of Philistia; the Philistines were the most significant external threat to the Israelites during the time of the Judges and the early monarchy. (7, 8) *See also Philistia.*

**Philo Judaeus** “The Jew” of Alexandria; Greek-speaking (and -writing) prolific Jewish author in the first century CE, he provides extensive evidence for Jewish thought in the Greco-Roman (Hellenistic) world outside of Palestine.

**Phinehas** The grandson of Aaron who violently defended the covenant (see Numbers 25); he was granted the “covenant of priesthood” by which the line of Aaron was given the privilege of the priestly office forever. Another Phinehas was a son of Eli; *see Hophni.* (4)

**Phylactery** (pl. *phylacteries*; Greek for “protector”) *See Tefillin.*

**Plagues** The series of divine disasters described in Exodus 5–11 that was designed to secure the release of the Hebrews out of Egypt. (3)

**Potiphar** The Egyptian administrator in Genesis who purchased Joseph to be his slave. (2)

**Praise** (Hebrew *hallelujah* means “Praise YHWH!”) A speech form used extensively in the psalms whereby the psalmist extols the greatness of God. (13)

**Priest** (Hebrew *kohen*) A functionary usually associated, in antiquity, with temples and their rites; a priest offered sacrifices and prayers to God on behalf of the people. In Israel, only Aaronic Levites could be legitimate priests; in classical

Christianity, the office of priest was developed in connection with the celebration of the mass and Eucharist and with celibacy as an important qualification especially in Roman Catholicism.

**Priestly Code** The body of legislation in the Pentateuch that comes from the Priestly source. (4)

**Priestly document (P)** (also called the *Priestly source*) A literary source used in the composition of the Torah/Pentateuch; it probably was composed in Babylonia in the sixth century BCE. (P1)

**Primary History** The foundation story of Israel consisting of the Pentateuch and Former Prophets. (P2)

**Primeval Story** The account of earliest events found in Genesis 1–11. (1)

**Primogeniture** The state of being the firstborn or eldest child of the same parents; the right of the eldest child, especially the eldest son, to inherit the entire estate of one or both parents. This is an important theme in the Torah/Pentateuch relating to Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers. (2) *See also Birthright.*

**Profane** To make a holy thing impure by treating it with disrespect or irreverence. (4)

**Promised Land** Phrase used with a religious and covenantal connotation that designates the territory west of the Jordan River, for the most part coextensive with Canaan and Palestine.

**Prophecy** A message from God that a prophet delivers to

the people. (P2)

**Prophecy** The act of delivering a prophetic message of God to the people. (P2)

**Prophet** (from Greek for “to speak for, to speak forth”) Designation given to accepted spokespersons of God (or their opposites, “false prophets”); a person who speaks in the name of God. *See also Navi’*.

**Prophetic eschatology** The perspective on the goal and end of history held by Old Testament prophets. (16) *See also Apocalyptic eschatology and Eschatology.*

**Prophets** A designation for the second main section of the Hebrew Bible, called the *Nevi'im*; the *n* of Tanak. (P2) *See also Tanak.*

**Prostitute** A person who allowed the use of his or her body for sexual relations in exchange for compensation; Israel was metaphorically compared to a prostitute when it worshiped Baal gods.

**Proto-Judaism** *See Early Judaism.*

**Proverb** A short, pithy saying in frequent and widespread use that expresses a basic truth or practical precept; the book of Proverbs is one of the Writings and is classified as wisdom literature. (14)

**Psalter** The book of the Writings that contains 150 psalms. (13)

**Pseudepigrapha** (adj. pseudepigraphical; from Greek *pseudos*, “deceit, untruth” and *epigraphe*, “writing, inscription”) Intertestamental apocryphal writings purporting to be by somebody (usually a famous historical or legendary figure) who is not the author such as Adam, Eve, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Ezra, and so forth; the term is sometimes used generically for deuterocanonical writings not in the Apocrypha. (P3, C) *See also* **Intertestamental period**.

**Pseudonymity** The practice of ascribing a work to someone, often a notable from the past, who was not the actual author. *See also* **Pseudepigrapha**.

**Pul** *See* **Tiglath-Pileser III**.

**Purim** (from Hebrew for “lots”) A Jewish festival commemorating the deliverance of Jews in Persia who were threatened with genocide, as described in the book of Esther; held in late winter (between Hannukah and Passover), on the fourteenth of Adar. (15) *See also* **Lots** and **Megillot**.

**Qohelet** (Hebrew term related to the word *qahal*, “gathering, congregation”; translated *ekklesiastes* in Greek) The Hebrew name of the book of Ecclesiastes; the term used of the purported writer of the book of Ecclesiastes. (15)

**Qumran** (also Khirbet Qumran, “ruins of Qumran”) The site near the northwest corner of the Dead Sea in modern Israel (West Bank) where the main bulk of the Jewish Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered beginning in 1947; the “Qumran community” that apparently produced the scrolls seems to have flourished from the third century BCE to the first century CE and is usually identified with the Jewish Essenes. (C)

**Rabbinic Judaism** The Judaism associated with the Pharisees that survived the Jewish revolts against Rome to become the dominant shape of Judaism. (C) *See also* **Pharisees**.

**Rabbis** (adj. rabbinic; Hebrew for “my master”) Authorized teachers of the classical Jewish tradition after the fall of the second temple in 70 CE; traditionally, rabbis serve as the legal and spiritual guides of their congregations and communities. (C) *See also* **Oral Torah**.

**Rachel** The daughter of Laban, most loved wife of Jacob, and mother of Joseph and Benjamin. (2)

**Rahab** The prostitute of Jericho who harbored and assisted the Israelite spies prior to the conquest of Canaan; not to be confused with the Rahab of mythic and prophetic literature that is another name for the sea monster. (6)

**Ramses** (sometimes spelled *Rameses*; 1290–1224) According to most historians, Ramses II was the king of Egypt at the time of the Hebrews’ Exodus (thirteenth century BCE). (3)

**Reader** The reader or audience element of the process of text interpretation. (I) *See also* **Hermeuential triangle**.

**Rebekah** (sometimes spelled *Rebecca*) The sister of Laban, Isaac’s wife, mother of Esau and Jacob. (2)

**Redaction criticism** The analysis of a book of the Hebrew Bible to determine the contribution of the editor (called the *redactor*) as he compiled and edited the book from older sources.

**Redactor** (n. redaction) A synonym for an editor of a composite work; the one responsible for choosing and combining source materials into one coherent literary work; redaction is the editorial work of the redactor. *See also* **Redaction criticism**.

**Redeem** (Hebrew *go'el*, “redeemer”; n. redemption) To free from captivity or domination by paying a ransom; to buy back.

**Red Sea** *See* **Reed Sea**.

**Reed Sea** (Hebrew *yam suf*, also called the Sea of Reeds) This is the body of water the Israelites crossed on dry ground as part of the Exodus from Egypt; it is termed the Red Sea in most English versions of the Old Testament. (3)

**Referent** An element in the interpretation of texts; the referent is what the text refers to in the material world or in the mind of the author. (I) *See also* **Hermeneutical triangle**.

**Rehoboam** (922–915) The son of Solomon who became the first king of Judah after the division of the kingdoms. (9)

**Resident alien** Also called a *sojourner*, a person who lives in a country but does not hold citizenship; the Old Testament specifies certain rights for resident aliens.

**Resurrection** The idea that dead persons who have found favor with God will ultimately (in eschato-logical times) be raised from the dead with restored bodily form. (16)

**Retribution** Punishment for doing wrong.

**Retribution theology** The outlook found in Deuteronomic and wisdom literature that a supreme being punishes wrongdoers for their bad deeds. (14)

**Reuel** The name of Moses's father-in-law; in some texts he is called *Jethro*.

**Rhetorical criticism** (sometimes called *rhetorical analysis*) The analysis of a text on the basis of its rhetorical devices; it is very similar to literary criticism.

**Righteous** (n. righteousness) To do what is right; to be in a right relationship with God.

**Ritual Decalogue** The set of ten regulations found in Exodus 34 that Moses wrote on two tablets. (3)

**Rosh Hashanah** (Hebrew for "beginning of the year") Jewish New Year celebration in the fall of the year, the month of Tishri.

**Rosh Hodesh** (Hebrew for "beginning of a lunar month") The New Moon Festival.

**Royal grant covenant** A type of covenant employed by monarchs that essentially consisted of a grant or gift to a faithful underling.

**Ruth** The Moabite widow who followed her mother-in-law Naomi back to Bethlehem; she married Boaz and was an ancestor of David. Also, the book by this name in the Five Scrolls. (15)

**Sabbath** (from Hebrew *shabbat*, “to cease, rest”) The seventh day of the week, a day of rest and worship; it extends from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. It was the sign of the Mosaic covenant and became especially important as an identifier of Jewishness beginning in the Babylonian exile. (1)

**Sackcloth** A rough cloth, usually woven from goats’ hair; clothing made from sackcloth was worn during mourning rituals as a sign of grief and sorrow.

**Sacred** Applies to holy things, things set apart for God in a special way; *sacred* is the opposite of *profane*. *See also Profane*.

**Sacrifice** (v. “to offer a sacrifice”; n. “an offering given to God to atone for the sins of the people or to establish fellowship with God”) Though there are many specific types of sacrifices, typically a sacrificial animal was slaughtered and burned on an altar, and its blood was splattered on the altar. (4)

**Sadducees** A group of Jewish leaders, many of them priests, who ruled during the late second temple period; Sadducees supported priestly authority and rejected traditions not directly grounded in the Torah/Pentateuch, such as the concept of life after death; they ceased to exist when the temple was destroyed in 70 CE.

**Saga** A long prose narrative having an episodic structure developed around stereotyped themes or objects; sagas abound in the primeval and ancestral collections of Genesis. (2)

**Samaria** Was built as the capital of Israel, the northern kingdom, in the ninth century BCE and fell in 721 BCE, after



which leading members were deported. Exiles from elsewhere were settled here and mixed with the Israelites who remained; their descendants are known as Samaritans.

**Samaritans** Residents of the district of Samaria north of Judah and a subgroup in early Judaism. They are said to have recognized only the Torah/Pentateuch as Scripture and Mount Gerizim as the sacred center rather than Jerusalem; there was ongoing hostility between Samaritans and Judahites. Samaritan communities exist to the present.

**Samson** An Israelite judge and strongman who harassed Philistines during the period of the Judges. (7)

**Samuel** The last judge of Israel and the first prophet, he was also a priest. The son of Hannah and Elkanah, he succeeded Eli as priest and anointed first Saul and then David to be king. (8)

**Sanctify** (n. sanctification) To make holy. (4)

**Sanhedrin** (from Greek for “assembly” [of persons seated together]) A legislative and judicial body from the period of early Judaism and into rabbinic times, traditionally composed of seventy-one members. *See also* **Synagogue** and **Church**.

**Sapiential** (from Latin *sapiens*, “to be wise”) Containing or exhibiting wisdom; characterized by wisdom.

**Sarah** The wife of Abraham; first called Sarai before Genesis 17; she was barren until God enabled conception, and Isaac was born in her old age. (2)

**Sarai** *See* **Sarah**.

**Satan** (Hebrew for “adversary” or “accuser”) In the Old Testament, a member of the Divine Council who challenged God in the books of Job and Zechariah. (14)

**Saul** (1020–1000) The first king of Israel, he was anointed by Samuel but was later deposed because of disobedience. (8)

**Scribe** (sometimes called an *amanuensis*, the Greek term for “scribe”) A person trained in literacy who copied letters and books and sometimes trained in the legal tradition; Baruch was Jeremiah’s scribe; Ezra was a Jewish–Persian scribe.

**Scriptures** General designation for canonical or biblical writings.

**Second Isaiah** *See* **Isaiah of the Exile.**

**Second temple** The Jerusalem temple rebuilt by Zerubbabel and completed in 515 BCE that stood until it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE; the first temple was the one built by Solomon, which stood until 587 BCE. The second temple period is the time between 515 BCE and 70 CE, which corresponds to the period of early Judaism. (12, 17)

**Second Temple Judaism** The early period of the formation of Judaism, sometimes also called *Early Judaism*. (P3)

**Second Zechariah** The latter portion ([Chapters 9–14](#)) of the book of Zechariah datable to the Greek period. (12)

**Seder** (pl. *sedarim*; Hebrew for “order”) The traditional Jewish evening service and opening of the celebration of Passover, which includes special food symbols and narratives;

the order of the service is highly regulated, and the traditional narrative is known as the Passover *Haggadah*.

**Seleucid** The dynasty of Seleucus, a general of Alexander the Great, who ruled Syria and Asia Minor after Alexander's death. Seleucid rule in Palestine was ended by the Maccabees in the second century BCE. (16)

**Semitic** Pertaining to a race, language, or culture linked to the line of Shem (see Genesis 10); Semitic languages include Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, and Akkadian.

**Sennacherib** (704–681) Monarch of the Neo-Assyrian Empire who besieged Hezekiah's Jerusalem in 701. (10)

**Septuagint** The Greek translation of the Old Testament, consisting of the books of the Hebrew Bible and some deuterocanonical books, now known as the Apocrypha; traditionally dated to the reign of Ptolemy II (285–246); it is abbreviated LXX because it supposedly was translated by some seventy Jewish scholars. (C)

**Servant of YHWH** (also called the *suffering servant*) The otherwise anonymous figure of the book of Isaiah (Second Isaiah) who delivered God's people through suffering, variously identified by interpreters as Jeremiah, Zerubbabel, Israel, and Jesus of Nazareth. (12)

**Servant poems** A collection of four passages in Second Isaiah that refer to an anonymous figure, the Servant of YHWH, who suffers at the hands of people yet has a redemptive role. (12) *See also* **Servant of YHWH** and **Second Isaiah**.

**Setting-in-life** (German *Sitz im Leben*) Generally referring to the context of a tradition or ritual. *See also* **Form criticism**.

***Shabbat*** (Hebrew for “rest”) *See* **Sabbath**.

**Shalmaneser V** (726–722) The monarch of the Neo-Assyrian Empire who laid siege to Samaria, capital of Israel, thus preparing the way for Israel’s destruction. (10)

***Shalom*** Hebrew word for “peace, wholeness, completeness.” (5)

**Shavuot** (sometimes spelled *shabuot*; Hebrew for “weeks”; Pentecost) Observed fifty days after Passover (*pesach*), the day the first sheaf of grain was offered to the priest; it celebrates the harvest and the giving of the Torah; also known as Festival of First Fruits.

**Shechem** City in central Israel that was the capital of the tribal confederacy during the time of Joshua and the Judges. (6)

**Shekel** A unit of measure by weight, often used as a monetary designation.

**Shem** (Hebrew word for “name”) One of the three sons of Noah, he was chosen for special blessing; he was an ancestor of Abraham. (1)

**Shema** (Hebrew imperative, “Hear!”) Title of the Great Commandment, the fundamental, monotheistic statement of Judaism, found in Deuteronomy 6:4 (“Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One”); this statement affirms the unity of God and is recited daily in the liturgy (along with Deuteronomy

6:5–9, 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41; and other passages) and customarily before sleep at night. This proclamation also climaxes special liturgies (such as Yom Kippur) and is central to the confessional before death and the ritual of martyrdom. The Shema is inscribed on the *mezuzah* and the *tefillin*; in public services, it is recited in unison. (5, C)

***Sheol*** The shadowy underworld to which the departed spirits of the dead go.

**Sheshbazzar** A prince of Judah who led the first return of Judean refugees from Babylonian exile in 538 BCE. (17)

**Shiloh** The city in central Israel that contained a sanctuary during the time of Eli and Samuel where the ark of the covenant was housed. (8)

***Shofar*** A ram's horn trumpet; in Jewish worship, a ram's horn sounded at the Rosh Hashanah morning worship and at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, as well as other times in that period during autumn.

**Sin** Transgression or offense against God's laws or wishes; more generally in Christian belief, a continuing state of estrangement from God. *See also* **Original sin**.

**Sinai** The desert region south of Canaan and east of Egypt.

**Sinai covenant** The covenant arrangement established at Mount Sinai through the divine laws mediated by Moses, also called the Mosaic covenant. (3)

**Sojourn** A temporary stay, a brief period of residence;

Israel's wilderness sojourn in the Sinai after the Exodus lasted forty years. *See also* **Resident alien**.

**Solomon** (961–922) The son of David and Bathsheba who became the king of united Israel after David; he was renowned for his wisdom; he built the temple of YHWH in Jerusalem. (9)

**Son of man** A phrase found in Daniel 7 that refers to a divine authority figure who has the appearance of a human being; it is also the phrase simply meaning “fellow” used by God throughout the book of Ezekiel to refer to the prophet. (16)

**Soul** (Hebrew *nefesh*) In the Old Testament, this refers to the whole person including body, psyche, and spiritual identity.

**Source analysis** (also called *source criticism*) The analysis of the Hebrew Bible to determine its underlying literary sources. (P1) *See also* **Documentary hypothesis**.

**Stanza** One of the divisions of a poem, composed of two or more lines, usually characterized by a common pattern of meter, rhyme, and number of lines. (13)

**Succession narrative** (also called the *court history of David*) A narrative block of material consisting of 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2 that details the dynastic succession struggles of David's sons. (8)

**Sukkot** (Hebrew for “booths, tabernacles”) A seven-day Jewish fall festival beginning on the fifteenth day of the month Tishri commemorating the *sukkot* where Israel lived in the wilderness after the Exodus; also known as *hag ha'asiph*, the Festival of Ingathering (of the harvest).

**Sumer/Sumerians** An ancient region in southern Mesopotamia that contained a number of cities and city-states, some of which were founded as early as 5000 BCE.

**Superscription** The psalm label that may contain musical directions, performance notes, historical setting, and an ascription of authorship or dedication. (13)

**Suzerain** A master or overlord who ruled and protected his vassal clients and to whom they owed allegiance. (5)

**Suzerainty treaty** (also called *suzerainty covenant*) A formal treaty drawn up to specify the terms of the relationship between a conquered and now client state and the dominating suzerain state. (5)

**Synagogue** (from Greek for “gathering”) A place for meeting together that arose after the Babylonian exile; the central institution of Jewish communal worship and study since antiquity and, by extension, a term used for the place of gathering; the structure of such buildings has changed, though in all cases the ark containing the Torah scrolls faces the ancient temple site in Jerusalem.

**Syncretism** (Greek for “draw together, combine”) Synthesis of variegated religious beliefs derived from more than one religion. (5)

**Synonymous parallelism** A type of poetic parallelism in which the notion of the first line of a couplet is repeated or seconded in the second line. (13)

**Syrian–Israelite crisis** (also called *Syro-Ephraimite crisis*)

The political crisis of 734–733 BCE when Syria and Israel (also called Ephraim) attacked Jerusalem; this was the context of the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7.

**Tabernacle** The portable tent shrine constructed at Mount Sinai that served as the residence of YHWH in the wilderness and until the time of Solomon. (3)

**Tabernacles**, Festival/Feast of *See Sukkot*.

**Talmud** (Hebrew for “study, learning”) Rabbinic Judaism produced two Talmuds: the one known as “Babylonian” is the most famous in the Western world and was completed around the fifth century CE; the other, known as the “Palestinian” or “Jerusalem” Talmud, was edited perhaps in the early fourth century CE; both have as their common core the Mishnah collection of the Tannaim, to which were added commentary and discussion (Gemara) by the Amoraim (teachers) of the respective locales; *gemara* thus has also become a colloquial, generic term for the Talmud and its study. (C)

**Tamar** The daughter-in-law of Judah (Genesis 38); the daughter of David (2 Samuel 13).

**Tanak** (sometimes spelled *Tanakh*) A relatively modern name for the Hebrew Bible; the acronym is composed of the first letters of the three parts of the Hebrew Bible: the *Torah* (Law), the *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and the *Ketuvim* (Writings). (I)

**Tanna** (Hebrew for “repeater, reciter”; adj. tannaitic, pl. tannaim) A Jewish sage from the period of Hillel (around the beginning of the Common Era) to the time of the compilation of the Mishnah (200 CE), to be distinguished from later Amoraim;



Tannaim were primarily scholars and teachers; the Mishnah, Tosefta, and *halakic* Midrashim were among their literary compositions.

**Targum** (Hebrew for “translation, interpretation”; pl. *targumim*) Generally used to designate Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible; the Septuagint is in a sense Greek Targums. (C)

**Tefillin** (Aramaic term usually translated as *phylacteries*) Boxlike accessories that accompany prayer, worn by Jewish adult males at the weekday morning services. The boxes have leather thongs attached and contain scriptural excerpts; one box (with four sections) is placed on the head, and the other (with one section) is placed (customarily) on the left arm, near the heart. The biblical passages emphasize the unity of God and the duty to love God and be mindful of him with “all one’s heart and mind” (for example, Exodus 13:1–10, 11–16; Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 11:13–21). *See also Shema.*

**Tell** (sometimes spelled *tel*) A mound that contains the ruined remains of a human settlement; each layer or level, called a *stratum*, represents a particular historical period.

**Temple** A place of worship. In the ancient world, temples were the centers of outward religious life, places at which public religious observances were normally conducted by the priestly professionals. In Israel there were many temples in various locations, but the temple in Jerusalem built by Solomon eventually became the central and only authorized place to worship YHWH. First built by King Solomon around 950 BCE, it was destroyed by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BCE and rebuilt about seventy years later; it was destroyed by

the Romans in 70 CE. The site of the ancient Jewish temple is now occupied, in part, by the golden-domed Mosque of Omar. In recent times, “temple” has come to be used synonymously with synagogue in some Jewish usage.

**Ten Commandments** Also called the Decalogue, the “ten words” that God delivered through Moses that became the heart of the Mosaic covenant; it is found in two versions: Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:1–21. *See also* **Ethical Decalogue**.

**Tetragrammaton** (Greek for “four-lettered [name]”) *See* **YHWH**.

**Tetrateuch** The first four books of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis through Numbers; the use of this term implies that these belong together historically as a literary unit. (P1, P2)

**Text** A writing that is the focus of interpretation. (I) *See also* **Hermeneutical triangle**.

**Textual criticism** The study of the earliest texts and early translations of the Hebrew Bible to establish the form of the text that most closely approximates the original text, called the *autograph*; no autograph of any book of the Hebrew Bible has ever been discovered.

**Thanksgiving** To give thanks to God for his favors; in the study of the Psalms, this is a major literary type of psalm that thanks God for individual or corporate deliverance. (13)

**Theocracy** (adj. theocratic; Greek for “rule of God”) A constitution in which God is regarded as ruler or sovereign.

**Theodicy** (Greek for “justice of God”) A term that denotes the issue of God’s justice in relation to the problem of human suffering, used often in discussions of the book of Job relating to the attempt to justify God in the face of evil. (14)

**Theophany** (Greek for “appearance of God”) A manifestation or appearance of the divine—for example, when God appears in a burning bush to Moses. (2, 3)

**Theophoric** An element in a proper name that derives from a name for God; for example, Daniel contains the theophoric component *El*, which means “God.”

**The satan** *See Satan.*

**Third Isaiah** *See Isaiah of the Restoration.*

**Throne-chariot** The vehicle carrying YHWH that the prophet Ezekiel saw while in Babylonia during the exile. (11)

**Tiamat** The female saltwater ocean goddess who fought Marduk; out of her body were created heaven and earth; the Babylonian word *tiamat* is related to the Hebrew word for “deep waters,” *tehom*, that is used in Genesis 1:2. (1)

**Tiglath-Pileser III** (745–727) Monarch of the Neo-Assyrian Empire at the time of Isaiah and the Syro-Ephraimite war. He is referred to as Pul in the biblical text. (10)

**Toledot** (sometimes spelled *toledoth*; Hebrew for “generations”) The ten “generations” used in Genesis as a way of structuring the history told in the book. (1, 2)

**Torah** (Hebrew for “teaching, instruction, direction”) In general, Torah refers to study of the whole gamut of Jewish tradition or to some aspect thereof; in its special sense, “the Torah” refers to the “five books of Moses,” the first main division of the Hebrew Bible; it is the *t* of Tanak. (P1) *See also Pentateuch and Tanak.*

**Tower of Babel** The tower of Genesis 11 built by humans and interpreted by God as an act of defiance. (1)

**Tradition** Teachings and practices that have been handed down as standard and authoritative.

**Tradition criticism** (sometimes called *tradition analysis*, *tradition history*, or the *traditio-historical method*) The analysis of the Hebrew Bible to uncover possible oral strands underlying the final form of the text; or, the study of the origins and development of a particular biblical theme—for example, the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel.

**Transjordan** The territory east of the Jordan River and west of the Arabian Desert; the Israelite tribes Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh settled there.

**Treaty** An agreement between two parties; the suzerain–vassal treaties of the ancient Middle East were the model for the covenant relationship God established with the Hebrews at Mount Sinai.

**Tsaddiq** (Hebrew for “righteous one”; sometimes spelled *saddik* or *zaddik*) A righteous person, the ideal Israelite characterized by wisdom and piety; the spiritual leader of the

modern Hasidim is the *Tsaddiq*, popularly known as *rebbe*.

**Twelve prophets** *See* **Book of the Twelve**.

**Twelve tribes** An ideal form of social and political organization that was believed to characterize early Israel before the monarchy; each tribe was traced back to an ancestor who was one of the sons of Jacob; in fact, the various lists of the tribes in the Hebrew Bible vary—some tribes vanished or were absorbed by others, and other tribes divided into distinct subunits.

**Type-scene** A typical conventionally structured story.

**Typology** A form of (usually biblical) interpretation wherein a person, event, or institution is viewed as foreshadowing a later one; for example, for Christian interpreters, Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22) is seen as a "type" of the sacrificial death of Christ.

**United monarchy** (also called *united kingdom*) The period of Israel's monarchy when all twelve tribes were united under one king; this period lasted through the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon. (8, 9)

**Unleavened bread** (Hebrew *matsah*; pl. *matsot*) Bread baked without leaven or yeast; the festival of unleavened bread, *matsot*, was celebrated in connection with Passover.

**Ur** An ancient Sumerian and Babylonian city on the Euphrates River in southern Mesopotamia; the home of Abraham before he left for Canaan. (2)

**Vassal** A servant or slave; an underling who is dependent on an overlord for protection; a vassal received the use of land and military protection from a lord, and in return owed the lord loyalty, obedience, and a portion of the crops as payment. (5) *See also* **Suzerain**.

**Valley of dry bones** The scene from the vision of Ezekiel 37 that anticipates the restoration of Israel. (12)

***Vaticinia ex eventu*** A Latin phrase meaning “prophecy from the results” or “prophecy after the event”; it is used in reference to prophecy that has been composed after the events it predicts.

**Vow of praise** A speech form found in the Psalms where the psalmist promises to credit God with deliverance once it happens. (13)

**Vulgate** The translation of the Bible into Latin done by the Christian scholar Jerome in the late fourth and early fifth centuries CE.

**Waters of chaos** The seas conceived as monsters who challenged YHWH’s power and authority. (1) *See also* **Chaos**.

**Wilderness wanderings** (also called the *wilderness sojourn*) The forty-year period after the Exodus from Egypt when the Israelites lived in the Sinai peninsula before they entered the Promised Land.

**Wisdom** A comprehensive term used in reference to the distinctive wisdom literature and wisdom outlook of Israelite, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian cultures; suggests a perspective on understanding the world dominated by the use of reason, a

search for order, and teaching moral behavior. (14)

**Wisdom literature** In the Hebrew Bible, those books of a predominantly didactic (Proverbs) or philosophical (Job, Ecclesiastes) cast; in the Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon belong to the didactic tradition of wisdom literature. (P3, 14)

**Writings** The third main division of the Hebrew Bible, the *ketuvim*; it is the *k* of Tanak. (P3)

**Written Torah** (also called *written law*) See **Oral Torah**.

**Yahweh** The hypothetical pronunciation of the divine name YHWH; by some pronounced Yahveh. (P1) See also **YHWH**.

**Yahwist** The author of the J narrative source in the Torah/Pentateuch that favors the use of the divine name YHWH. (P1). See also **Yahwist narrative**.

**Yahwist narrative (J)** (also called *Yahwist source*) A reconstructed literary source lying behind the Torah/Pentateuch, written around 950 BCE in Judah. (P1)

**YHWH** The sacred name of God in the Hebrew Bible; also known as the *tetragrammaton*. Because Hebrew was written without vowels in ancient times, the four consonants YHWH contain no clue to their original pronunciation; they are generally rendered *YHWH* in contemporary scholarship. In traditional Judaism, the name is not pronounced, but *Adonay* (“Lord”) or something similar is substituted. In most English versions of the Bible, the tetragrammaton is represented by “LORD” (or less frequently, “Jehovah”). (P1) See also

## **Tetragrammaton.**

**Yom Kippur** (Hebrew for “Day of Atonement”) Annual day of fasting, penitence, and atonement, occurring in the fall on the tenth day of the month Tishri (just after Rosh Hashanah); the most solemn and important occasion of the Jewish religious year.

**Zadok** A descendant of Aaron, he was a priest at David’s court; he supported Solomon’s succession, so his descendants had rights to the chief priestly duties in the temple. (8, 11)

**Zealot** Someone zealous for the Torah; in particular, a member of a Jewish group, founded perhaps by Judas the Galilean in 6 CE, made up of dedicated political activists that militarily opposed Greek then Roman rule in Palestine.

**Zechariah** One of the twelve prophets; a prophet and priest who returned to Jerusalem after Babylonian exile and encouraged the Jews to rebuild the temple. The book of Zechariah contains postexilic visions and divine oracles. (12) *See also Book of the Twelve.*

**Zedekiah** (597–587) The last king of Judah. (11)

**Zephaniah** One of the twelve prophets; a seventh-century Judean prophet who proclaimed the coming Day of YHWH. (11) *See also Book of the Twelve.*

**Zerubbabel** A member of the royal Davidic line, an heir to the throne of Judah, who led a return from Babylonian captivity in the sixth century BCE; he was appointed governor of Judea by Cyrus, king of Persia. (12, 17)



**Ziggurat** (from Akkadian *zīqquratu*, “pinnacle, mountain top”) Of Sumerian origin, a Mesopotamian pyramidal-staged temple tower of which the tower of Babel was one. (1)

**Zion** (also called *Mount Zion*) The hill on which the city of Jerusalem first stood. David’s royal palace and the temple of YHWH were both located on Mount Zion; later, Zion was used to refer to the entire city of Jerusalem. Already in biblical times, it began to symbolize the national homeland (see, for example, Psalm 137:1–6); in this latter sense, it served as a focus for Jewish national–religious hopes of renewal over the centuries. (10)

**Zion theology** The ideology in Israel that affirmed the divine promises to the house of David and the invulnerability of the city of Jerusalem. (10)

**Zipporah** Wife of Moses; mother of Gershom; daughter of Jethro, also referred to as *Reuel*. (3)

# INDEXES

# INDEX OF SUBJECTS

Aaron  
Abednego  
Abel  
Abiathar  
Abihu  
Abimelech  
Abishag  
Abner  
Abraham  
    call  
    covenant  
    cycle  
    journey  
    last days  
    testing  
Abram  
Absalom  
Absolute law  
Achan  
Acrostic  
Acton  
Acts of the Apostles  
Adam  
*Adamah*  
Adonijah  
Adultery  
After the Hebrew Bible  
Agag  
Ahab  
Ahasuerus

Ahaz  
Ahaziah  
Ahijah  
Ahithophel  
Ai  
Akedah  
Akhenaton  
Alexander the Great  
Allegory  
Alliteration  
Alphabet  
Altar  
Amalekites  
Amaziah  
Ammon  
Amnon  
Amorites  
Amos  
David connection  
day of YHWH  
oracles against nations  
social justice  
*Amphictyony*  
Anath  
Anathoth  
Ancestors  
Ancestral covenant  
Ancestral Story  
summary  
Ancient of Days  
Angel of YHWH  
Angels  
Animals

Anointing  
Anthropomorphism  
Antiochus IV  
Antithetic parallelism  
Aphek  
Aphorism  
Apocalypse  
    apocalyptic eschatology  
    apocalyptic literature, introduction  
    apocalyptic prophecy  
    literary roots  
Apocalypticism  
Apocrypha  
    apocryphal history  
    apocryphal wisdom  
Apodictic law  
Apollo league  
Apsu  
Arad  
Aram  
Aramaic  
Arameans  
Araunah  
Archaeology  
Ark narrative  
Ark of the covenant  
Armageddon  
Asaph  
Asherah  
Ashtoret  
Asmodeus  
Assyria  
Assyrian crisis

Assyrians  
Athaliah  
Atonement  
Atrahasis Epic  
Atum  
Audience  
Author  
Azazel

Baal  
Baba Bathra 14b  
Babel  
Babylon  
    Babylonian crisis  
    Babylonian exile  
    Babylonian period  
    Babylonian period summary

Balaam  
Balak  
Baruch  
    book of

Bashan  
Bathsheba  
BCE  
Beersheba  
Behemoth  
Bel and the Dragon  
Belshazzar  
Belteshazzar  
Ben Sirach  
Benaiah  
Benediction  
Benjamin

*Bereshit*  
Beth-shean  
Bethel  
Bethlehem  
Bezalel  
Bible  
    versions  
Biblical poetry  
Biblical story  
Bicolon  
Bildad  
Bilhah  
Birth of Israel  
Birthright  
Black obelisk of Shalmaneser III  
Blessing  
    Jacob steals  
Blood  
Boaz  
Book of comfort  
Book of consolation  
Book of the covenant  
Book of the Torah  
Book of the Twelve  
    as a book  
Book of Zerubbabel  
Bronze serpent  
Burning bush  
  
Cain  
Caleb  
Calendar  
    Jewish

Call narrative  
Call to praise  
Canaan  
    culture of  
Canon  
    canonization  
    order of books  
Capital punishment  
Captivity, seventy years  
    weeks of years  
Carchemish  
Case law  
Casuistic law  
CE  
Census of David  
Centralization of worship  
Chaldean  
Chaos  
Chariot of fire  
Charter covenant  
*Chavvah*  
Cherub  
*Cherubim*  
Childbirth  
Chronicler  
Chronicler's History  
    as a collection  
    introduction  
    reading guide  
Chronology  
Circumcision  
Cities of refuge  
City of David



Civil dispute  
Civilization  
Clan wisdom  
Classical prophets  
Clean and unclean  
Climactic parallelism  
Code of Hammurapi  
Colon  
Combat myth  
Community rule  
Complaint  
    psalm type  
Complaints of Jeremiah  
Composition  
    prophetic books  
Conquest of Canaan  
    history of  
    models of  
Consecration  
*Corvée*  
Cosmic dualism  
Cosmic mountain  
Cosmology  
Couplet level  
Court history of David  
Court records  
Covenant  
    breaking  
    of circumcision  
    code  
    and exile  
    monument  
    ratification

renewal

Sinai

structure of

Coveting

*Creatio ex nihilo*

Creation

covenant

hymn

theology

Creation-redemption

Creed

Cult, cultic

Curds and honey

Curse

Cut a covenant

Cycle

Cyrus

D

Dagon

Damascus

Dan

Daniel

apocalypses

apocryphal additions

as a book

book of

heroic tales

name

reading guide

Darius

Dathan and Abiram

David

- anointing of
- archaeology of his kingdom
- biographical sketch
- city of
- court history
- cycle
- death of
- dynastic covenant
- genealogy
- house of
- kingdom
- last days
- rise to power

Davidic messiah

Davidic monarchy

Day of Atonement

Day of YHWH

Dead Sea Scrolls

Death

Death penalty

Deborah

Decalogue

- ethical

- ritual

Decree of Cyrus

Delilah

Deluge tablet

Destruction of Jerusalem

Deutero-Isaiah

Deuterocanonical books

Deuteronomic source

Deuteronomic speeches

Deuteronomic theme

Deuteronomist  
Deuteronomistic history  
Deuteronomy  
    author  
    name  
    style and structure  
    summary  
    themes  
Dialogue, prophetic  
Dialogues of Job  
Diaspora  
Diaspora Judaism  
Dinah  
Disaster and Hope  
Dispersion  
Distich  
Divided Kingdoms  
Divine council  
Divine justice  
Divine warrior  
Division of the kingdom  
Documentary hypothesis  
Dome  
Dove  
Dreams  
Drunkenness  
Dtr1  
Dtr2  
Dualism  
Dumuzi  
Dynastic prophecy  
Dynastic succession

E  
Ea  
Early Judaism  
Earth  
Earthquake  
Ecclesiastes  
Ecclesiasticus  
Eden  
*Edin, edinû*  
Edom  
Education  
Eglon  
Egypt  
Egyptian creation theology  
Egyptian love song  
Ehud  
*Ehyeh*  
*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*  
El  
El Elyon  
El Shaddai  
Eldad and Medad  
Eleazar  
Election of Israel  
Elephantine  
Eli  
Elihu  
Elijah  
cycle  
Elimelech  
Eliphaz  
Elisha  
cycle

Elohim  
Elohists source  
Emotions  
Emptiness  
Enki  
Enkimdu  
Enmeduranki  
Enoch  
book of  
Enuma Elish  
Ephraim  
Ephron the Hittite  
Eponym  
Esau  
*toledot*  
Eschatology  
Esdras, books of  
Essenes  
Esther  
additions  
book of  
Eternal covenant  
Ethical decalogue  
Ethical dualism  
Ethnicity  
Etiology  
Euphrates River  
Eve  
Exclusivism  
Exile  
prophets of  
and restoration, summary  
Exodus

as a book  
deliverance traditions  
reading guide  
tradition

Expanse

Ezekiel

after 587 BCE  
apocalypticism  
as a book  
death of his wife  
hope  
scroll  
symbolic acts  
temple vision  
warnings

Ezra

book of  
memoirs

Face to face

Faith

Fall

False prophet

Famine

Farmer

Fear

Fear of YHWH/God

Feast of booths/tabernacles

Feast of Purim

Feast of weeks

Festivals

Finitude

Firmament

First Fruits  
First Isaiah  
Firstborn  
Five books of Moses  
Five Scrolls  
    apocryphal additions  
    as a collection  
    reading guide

Flood  
Form criticism  
Formal parallelism  
Former prophets  
Future

Gabriel  
Galatians, Paul's letter to  
Garden of Eden  
Gedaliah  
Gender  
Gender inclusion  
Genealogy  
    of Shem  
    of Terah

Genesis, as a book  
    themes

Genres, Psalms  
Gerar  
Gibeon  
Gibeonites  
Gideon  
Gilead  
Gilgal  
Gilgamesh Epic



Globalization  
Glory of YHWH  
God of the fathers  
God, mobility of  
Gog  
Golden calf/calves  
Goliath  
Gomer  
Goshen  
Gospel  
Great Commandment  
Greek culture  
Ground  
Group complaint psalm  
Group thanksgiving psalm

Habakkuk

*Habiru*

Hagar

Haggai

Hagiographa

*Halakah*

Hallelujah

Ham

Haman

Hamor

Hanamel

Hananiah

Hannah

Hannah's Song

Hanukkah

Haran

Hasids

Hasmonean dynasty  
Hazael  
Hazor  
Heart  
Hebrew  
Hebrew Bible  
Hebrews  
Hebron  
Heliopolis  
Hellenism  
Hellenization  
Helper  
Hermeneutical triangle  
Hexateuch  
Hezekiah  
High place  
Hilkiah  
Hiram of Tyre  
Historicity  
    of Exodus  
Historiography  
History  
Hittites  
Hobab  
*Hochmah*  
Holiness code  
Holiness continuum  
Holofernes  
Holy, holiness  
Holy people  
Holy places  
Holy spirit  
Holy times

Holy war  
Hophni and Phinehas  
Horeb  
Hosea  
Hoshea  
Host of heaven  
House of David  
Huldah  
Humans  
Hushai  
Hyksos  
Hymn of YHWH's kingship  
Hymn psalm type  
Hymn to Israel's king psalm type  
Hymnbook of the second temple

I am who I am  
Ibn Ezra  
Identity  
Image  
    of God  
Immanuel  
Imprecation psalm  
Impulse, good and evil  
Inanna  
Inclusion  
Individual complaint psalm  
Individual thanksgiving psalm  
Individualism  
Inspiration  
Instruction  
    of Amenemope  
Intermarriage

Intertestamental period  
Invocation  
Iron  
Isaac  
    binding of  
    birth announcement  
    name  
Isaiah, book of  
    as a book  
Isaiah of Jerusalem  
    call narrative  
    commission  
Isaiah of the exile  
    commission  
Isaiah of the restoration  
    commission  
Ishbosheth  
Ishmael  
    *toledot*  
Israel  
    covenant  
    in crisis  
    kingdoms  
    religion  
    tribes of  
  
J  
Jabbok River  
Jabin  
Jacob  
    cycle  
    wrestling with God  
Jael

Jamnia

Japheth

JE

Jebus

JEDP

Jehoahaz

Jehoiachin

Jehoiada

Jehoiakim

Jehu

Jephthah

Jeremiah

as a book

call narrative

commission

complaints

letter to exiles

ox yoke

physical abuse

scroll

temple sermon

Jericho

archaeology of

battle of

Jeroboam

Jeroboam II

Jerusalem

destruction of

Jeshua

Jesse

Jesus of Nazareth

Jethro

Jew, Jews

Jewish calendar  
Jewish identity  
Jewishness  
Jezebel  
Jezreel  
Joab  
Joakim  
Joash  
Job  
as a book  
Joel  
John the Baptist  
Jonah  
Jonathan  
Jordan river  
Joseph  
cycle  
Joshua  
as a book  
commission  
death of  
farewell  
structure  
summary  
Josiah  
reform  
Jubilee, year of  
Judah  
in crisis  
Judah the Prince  
Judaism  
Judas Maccabee  
Judge, definition of

Judges  
    as a book  
    deuteronomic introduction  
    heroes  
    summary

Judgment day  
Judicial wisdom  
Judith  
Justice  
Justice of God

*Kashrut*

*Ketuvim*

Kidnapping  
Kingdom of God  
Kingdoms, history of  
Kings and Prophets  
Kings and Prophets  
Kings and Prophets  
Kings

    as a book  
    theological perspective

Kingship  
    rise of

Kingu  
Kiriath-yearim  
Know, knowledge  
    tree of

Korah  
Kosher

Laban  
Lachish

Lady wisdom  
Lamech  
Lament  
    Mesopotamian  
    meter  
Lamentation  
Land  
Latter Prophets  
    collections  
Law  
    Mesopotamian collections  
Lawsuit form  
Left hand  
Letter of Jeremiah  
Levi  
Leviathan  
Levirate marriage  
Levites  
    cities  
Leviticus  
    as a book  
    summary  
*Lex talionis*  
Life  
Life after death  
Life and death psalm theme  
Life setting  
Likeness  
Liturgy  
    psalm type  
Lo-ammi  
Lo-ehyeh  
Lo-ruhamah



Locust plague  
LORD God  
Lot  
Lotan  
Lots, casting  
Love  
Love and death  
LXX

Maccabean period  
Maccabees  
    books of  
Machpelah, cave of  
Magog  
Maher-shalal-hash-baz  
Malachi  
Manasseh  
    king  
Manna  
Marah  
Marduk  
Mari  
Mark, gospel of  
Marriage  
Mary's Song  
Masoretic text  
Master narrative  
Matriarchs  
*Matsevah*  
*Matsot*  
Mattathias  
Meeting tent  
Megiddo

*Megillot*  
Melchizedek  
Memorial stones  
Memory, remembering  
Memphis creation theology  
Menorah  
Meribah  
Merneptah  
Merodach-Baladan  
Mesha  
Meshach  
Mesopotamia  
Messenger formula  
Messiah  
Methuselah  
*Mezuzah*  
Micah  
Micah  
Micaiah  
Michael  
Michal  
Middle Bronze Age  
Midian  
Midianites  
Midwives, Hebrew  
Milk and honey  
Miriam  
Mishnah  
Mizpah  
Moab  
Molech  
Monarchy  
    rise of

Monotheism  
Moral imagination  
Moral order  
Morality, moral instruction  
Mordecai  
Moresbeth  
Moriah  
Mosaic authorship  
Moses  
    death of  
    early Moses  
    name  
Mount Carmel  
Mount Gilboa  
Mount Sinai  
Mount Zion  
Mountain of god  
Murashu  
Murder  
Music  
Myth  
  
Naaman  
Nabal  
Naboth  
Nadab  
Nahum  
Nakedness  
Name, names  
Naomi  
Narrative design  
Nathan  
Nature wisdom

*Navi* ’  
Nazirite vow  
Nebuchadrezzar  
Neco  
Negev  
Nehemiah  
    book of  
    memoirs  
*Nevi ’im*  
New covenant  
New exodus  
New heart  
New Revised Standard Version  
New spirit  
New Testament  
New year festival  
Niche Bibles  
Nineveh  
    fall of  
Ninth of Av  
Noah  
Noah’s ark  
Numbers  
    as a book  
    summary  
  
Obadiah  
Offering  
Offspring  
Old Testament  
Omri  
One like a son of man  
Oracle, oracles

against nations

Oral torah

Oral tradition

Order

Original sin

Orpah

*'ot*

Palestinian Judaism

*Paradeisos*

Paradise

Parallelism

Paranomasia

Passover

Patriarch

Pekah

Peniel

Peninnah

Pentateuch

Pentecost

Penuel

Personal responsibility

Personification

*Pesach*

Pesher

Petition

Pharaoh

Pharisees

Philistines

Phinehas

Phoenicia

*Phylacteries*

Pishon River

Pithom and Rameses  
Plagues  
Pluralism  
Poem level  
Poetic justice  
Poetry  
    biblical  
    couplet level features  
    formal features  
    line level features  
    literary features  
    poem level features  
    stanza level features  
Potiphar  
Practical wisdom  
Praise  
Prayer  
Prayer of Azariah  
Prayer of Manasseh  
Prayer of Nabonidus  
Priestly code  
Priestly covenants  
Priestly document  
Priestly source  
Priestly worldview  
    theories  
Primary history  
Primeval  
Primeval story  
Profane  
Promise  
Promised land  
Promissory structure

## Prophecy

- classical prophets
- nature of
- prediction
- social location
- summary, Assyrian crisis
- summary, Babylonian crisis
- summary, postmonarchy
- themes

## Prophesy

### Prophet, prophets

- calling
- eschatology
- prologue
- speech forms

### Prostitute, prostitution

### Proverb

- form of

### Proverbial wisdom

### Proverbs, book of

- prologue

## Psalms

- major types
- minor types
- reading guide
- speech forms
- themes

## Psalter

## Pseudepigrapha

## Pseudonymous writings

## Ptah

## Ptolemaic kingdom

## Pul

Pun  
Purification  
Purim  
Purity

*Qinah*  
Qohelet  
Queen of Sheba  
Qumran

Rabbi  
Rabbinic Judaism  
Rabbinic literature  
Rabshakeh  
Rachel  
Rahab  
Rainbow  
Ramses II  
Rashi  
Raven  
Re-creation  
Reader  
Reading  
Rebekah  
Red Sea  
Redeemer  
Reed Sea  
Referents  
Rehoboam  
Remnant  
Restoration of Judah  
Resurrection  
Retribution theology



in wisdom

Reuel

Revelation of John

Revisionist history

Rezin

Rib of Adam

Righteous

Righteousness

Ritual decalogue

Royal autobiography

Royal grant covenant

Royal palace

Royal plural

Royal psalm type

Ruth

Sabbath

Sacrifice

Saga

Samaritans

Samson

Samuel

as a book

biographical sketch

books of

early life

kingmaker

summary

Sanctify

Saqqara

Sarah

Sarai

Sargon II

Sargon of Akkad  
Satan, the satan  
Saul  
    biographical sketch  
    cycle  
    disobedience  
Science  
Scriptures, different collections  
Scroll of Ezekiel  
Sea Peoples  
Second Isaiah  
Second Temple  
Second temple Judaism  
Seduction  
Selah  
Seleucid kingdom  
Sennacherib  
Septuagint  
Seraphs  
Serpent  
Servant of YHWH  
Servant poems  
Seth  
Setting in life  
Sex, sexuality  
*Shabbat*  
*Shaddai*  
Shadrach  
Shalmaneser III  
Shalmaneser V  
*Shalom*  
Shaphan  
Shavuot

Shear-jashub  
Shechem  
Shem  
*Shema*  
*Sheol*  
Shepherd  
Sheshbazzar  
Shibboleth  
Shiloh  
Shittim  
Sign  
Signs of the covenant  
Siloam tunnel inscription  
Simeon  
Simon, Richard  
Sinai covenant  
Sinai Peninsula  
Sinhue, tale of  
Sirach  
Sisera  
Snake  
Social justice  
    Amos  
    Micah  
Sodom  
Sodom and Gomorrah  
Sofia  
Solomon  
    biographical sketch  
    coronation  
    failures  
    temple  
    wisdom

his women  
Solomon's kingdom  
Son of man  
Son of man apocalypse  
Song of Deborah  
Song of Songs  
book of  
Song of the Three Jews  
Song of trust psalm type  
Song of Zion psalm type  
Songs  
Sons of god/elohim  
Sour grapes  
Source analysis  
Speculative wisdom  
Speech forms  
Sphinx  
Spirit  
Spirit of YHWH  
Stanza  
level  
Stich  
Stoicism  
Stoning  
Strophe  
Structuralism  
Succession narrative  
Suffering servant  
Sukkot  
Sumerian king list  
Superscription  
Susa  
Susanna

Suzerain  
 Suzerain-vassal covenant  
 Suzerainty treaty  
 Symbolism  
 Syncretism  
 Synonymous parallelism  
 Synthetic parallelism  
 Syrian-Israelite league  
  
 Tabernacle  
 Table of Nations  
 Tablets  
 Talmud  
 Tamar  
 Tammuz  
 Tanak  
*Targum*  
 TARR  
 Teacher of Righteousness  
 Tefillin  
*Tehillim*  
 Tel Dan  
 Tell Deir 'Alla  
 Tell-Fekheriyeh  
 Temple
 

- corruption
- dedication
- scroll
- sermon

 Temporal dualism  
 Ten Commandments  
 Tent of meeting, *see* Meeting tent  
 Testing

Tetrateuch  
Text  
Text criticism  
Thanksgiving  
Thanksgiving psalm type  
The satan  
Theocracy  
Theodicy  
Theological wisdom  
Theophany  
    in Job  
Throne-chariot  
Tiamat  
Tiglath-Pileser III  
Tigris River  
Tisha b' Av  
Tobias  
Tobit  
    book of  
*Toledot*  
Torah  
    book of  
    composition analysis  
    of Moses  
    psalm type  
Tower of Babel  
Tradition and change  
Trance  
Transjordan  
Treaty covenant  
Treaty, structure of  
Tree of knowledge  
Tree of life

Tribes, federation  
Tribes, territory  
Tricolon  
Trinity  
Triplet  
Tristich  
*Tsaddiq*  
Twelve, as a book  
Tyre

Ugarit  
Under the sun  
Underworld  
United kingdom  
United monarchy  
Unleavened bread  
Ur  
Urartu  
Uriah  
Urim and Thummim  
Ussher, Bishop James  
Utnapishtim  
Uzzah  
Uzziah

Valley of dry bones  
Vashti  
Vassal  
*Vaticinia ex eventu*  
Version  
Vine imagery  
Violence  
Visions

Vow of praise  
Vulgate

Wandering  
War Scroll  
Waters of Chaos  
Weeks, feast of  
Western Wall  
Wilderness

journey

Wisdom  
international connections  
Mesopotamian  
retribution theology

Wisdom and canon

Wisdom literature  
introduction  
reading guide

Wisdom of Solomon

Wisdom psalm type

Wise

Word of God

Worship the King psalm theme

Writings  
as a collection  
overview

Written torah

Xerxes I

Yahweh

Yahwist

Yahwist narrative



Yahwist-Elohism Epic

*Yam suf*

Yehud

YHWH

Elohim

of hosts

glory of

Yom kippur

Young woman

Zadok

Zarephath

Zechariah

visions

Zedekiah

Zelophehad's daughters

Zephaniah

Zerubbabel

book of

Zeus

Ziggurat

Zilpah

Zion

Zion theology

Zipporah

Ziusudra

Zophar

# INDEX OF BIBLICAL TEXTS

|                |             |             |             |                  |             |                    |         |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|--------------------|---------|
| <b>Genesis</b> | 34–113      | 8:11        | 1           | 29–31            | 67, 100–104 | 19:18              | 136     |
| 1              | 194         | 8:20–22     | 64–65       | 31:20, 26        | 100         | 23:4–8             | 125     |
| 1              | 469         | 9:1         | 117         | 31:46, 54        | 139         | <b>Numbers</b>     | 159–166 |
| 1–11           | 34–76       | 9:6         | 66          | 32–35            | 101–104     | 6:24–26            | 160     |
| 1:1–2          | 37          | 9:11        | 66          | 32:22–32         | 101–103     | 9:1–14             | 125     |
| 1:1–2:4a       | 208         | 9:16        | 29          | 32:28            | 98          | 12:6–9             | 162     |
| 1:1–3          | 38–39       | 9:20–27     | 66–67       | 33:18–20         | 111         | 14:18              | 298     |
| 1:2            | 36, 43, 64  | 10:1–11:9   | 67–70       | 34               | 103         | 18                 | 155     |
| 1:3–5          | 39          | 11:1–9      | 68–70       | 35:11            | 117         | 20–25              | 67      |
| 1:9–13         | 41          | 11:4        | 83          | 36               | 104         | 20:1–13            | 204     |
| 1:14–19        | 41–42       | 11:7        | 42          | 37–50            | 105–108     | 20:14–21           | 97      |
| 1:20–23        | 42          | 11:10–27    | 59          | 47:27            | 111         | 27:1–11            | 164     |
| 1:24           | 47          | 11:10–32    | 70–71       | 49               | 108         | 28:16–25           | 125     |
| 1:24–28        | 42–45       | 11:27–25:11 | 81–96       | <b>Exodus</b>    | 114–147     | 33:38              | 31      |
| 1:26           | 44          | 11:27–32    | 81          | 1–18             | 117–129     | <b>Deuteronomy</b> | 167–183 |
| 1:26–28        | 59          | 12          | 52, 71      | 1:11             | 116         | 1:1–4:40           | 191     |
| 1:27           | 47, 66      | 12–50       | 77–113      | 2–4              | 120–124     | 1:7                | 205     |
| 1:28           | 57–58, 66,  | 12:10–20    | 89          | 3                | 207, 302    | 1:39               | 53      |
|                | 117         | 12:1–3      | 82–83, 86   | 3:2              | 207         | 4:13               | 133     |
| 2–3            | 345, 486    | 12:2        | 117         | 3:14–15          | 123         | 5                  | 133     |
| 2:1–3          | 45          | 12:6–7      | 210         | 6:2–5            | 123         | 5:1–3              | 169     |
| 2:4a           | 45          | 12:8        | 272         | 8:19             | 124         | 6:4–9              | 169–171 |
| 2:4b–7         | 47          | 12:10–20    | 19, 98      | 12:1–13:16       | 125–129     | 6:4–9              | 487–488 |
| 2:7            | 378         | 13:14–17    | 83          | 12:40            | 31          | 6:5                | 136     |
| 2:8–9          | 47          | 13:16       | 93          | 13:17–15:21      | 125–128     | 7:6                | 179     |
| 2:15–17        | 48–49       | 13:18       | 23          | 14               | 350         | 12:2–7             | 171–173 |
| 2:18–20        | 49          | 15          | 84–86       | 15:3–4a          | 228         | 16:1–8             | 125     |
| 2:21–23        | 49          | 15:5        | 93          | 15:22–18:27      | 128–129     |                    |         |
| 2:24–25        | 49–50       | 15:6        | 486         |                  |             |                    |         |
|                |             |             |             |                  |             |                    |         |
| 3              | 49          | 15:18       | 205         | 19               | 85, 130–132 | 16:16              | 174     |
| 3:1–5          | 50–51       | 15:18–21    | 122         | 19–40            | 129–145     | 17:14–20           | 309     |
| 3:1–15         | 120–123     | 16          | 86          | 19:5             | 179         | 18:15–22           | 173–174 |
| 3:6–7          | 51          | 16:7–10     | 207         | 20–23            | 132–143     | 25:5–10            | 106     |
| 3:8–13         | 51          | 17          | 29, 86–88   | 20:1–17          | 133–136     | 25:5–10            | 425     |
| 3:14–15        | 52          | 17:2        | 117         | 20:4             | 41          | 26:5–9             | 174–175 |
| 3:16           | 57          | 17:7        | 29          | 20:8–11          | 45          | 27:1–8             | 210     |
| 3:16–19        | 52          | 17:17       | 89          | 20:22–23:33      | 182         | 29–34              | 191     |
| 3:20           | 47          | 17:19–22    | 96          | 21:12–17         | 135         | 29:21              | 314     |
| 3:22           | 41          | 20:1–18     | 19, 98      | 24               | 319         | 30:10              | 314     |
| 4              | 59          | 20          | 89–91       | 24:1–15          | 139–141     | 30:15–20           | 175     |
| 4:1–6:4        | 58–60       | 22          | 77, 91–94,  | 25–31            | 143–145     | 31:26              | 314     |
| 4:17–24        | 59          |             | 132         | 31:12–18         | 29          | 32:48–52           | 204     |
| 4:26           | 123         | 22:11, 15   | 207         | 31:16            | 29          | 33                 | 25      |
| 5:1–2          | 59          | 23          | 111         | 32–34            | 141–143     | 34                 | 203     |
| 5:3            | 47          | 23:1–25:11  | 95          | 32:25–29         | 164         | 34:5–12            | 19      |
| 5:24           | 477         | 23:2        | 23          | 33:11            | 139         | <b>Joshua</b>      | 202–221 |
| 5:25           | 451         | 24:40       | 207         | 33:18–23         | 139         | 1:1–9              | 204–205 |
| 6:1–4          | 60, 477–478 | 25:12–18    | 96          | 33:19            | 294         | 2:11–15            | 226     |
| 6:4            | 83          | 25:19–35:29 | 96–104      | 34               | 143         | 5:13–15            | 207     |
| 6:5–7:24       | 61–63       | 26          | 67          | 34:4–5           | 139         | 6:21               | 208     |
| 6:5–13         | 61–62       | 26:1–11     | 98          | <b>Leviticus</b> | 151–159     | 6:1–5              | 207     |
| 6:9            | 66          | 26:6–11     | 19, 89      | 16:6–10          | 158         | 8:29               | 210     |
| 7:24           | 36          | 26:30       | 139         | 17–11            | 157         | 8:30–35            | 210     |
| 8–9            | 64–67       | 28:3        | 117         | 19:9–10          | 424         | 8:31               | 19      |
| 8:1            | 64          | 28:10–22    | 98–100, 272 |                  |             |                    |         |

|                 |               |                |          |                 |           |                           |              |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|---------------------------|--------------|
| 10:13           | 211           | <b>Kings</b>   | 260-364  | 9-11            | 305-306   | 1-24                      | 318-324      |
| 13-21           | 213           | <b>1 Kings</b> |          | 24-27           | 442       | 1:5-6                     | 319          |
| 21:43-45        | 214           | 1-2            | 265      | 26:19           | 452       | 2:1, 3:1                  | 451          |
| 22-24           | 217-219       | 2:3            | 19       | 27:1            | 444-445   | 4-7                       | 321          |
| 22:34           | 218           | 2:26-27        | 326      | 36-39           | 286       | 5:13-14                   | 318          |
| 24              | 133, 215, 467 | 2:27           | 244      | 36-39           | 306-308   | 8-11                      | 321-322      |
| 24:27           | 99            | 2:28-29        | 266      | 37:16           | 145       | 12-24                     | 323-324      |
| <b>Judges</b>   | 222-238       | 2:46           | 267      | 40-55           | 347-352   | 14:14, 20;                |              |
| 1:1             | 426           | 3-4            | 267-268  | 40:1-2,         |           | 28:3                      | 445          |
| 2:6-10          | 226           | 4:20           | 93       | 6, 8            | 348       | 18:2, 30-32               | 323          |
| 2:16-23         | 228           | 4:21           | 86       | 40:3-5          | 348-349   | 24:15-27                  | 311          |
| 3:1-4           | 229           | 4:32           | 422      | 40:8            | 361       | 25-32                     | 343-345      |
| 3:12-30         | 229-230       | 6:1            | 31       | 40:12-31        | 36        | 28:12-16                  | 343-344      |
| 4-5             | 230-231       | 8:22-53        | 269      | 43:16-19        | 349       | 33-39                     | 345-346      |
| 6-9             | 231-233       | 9-11           | 270      | 44:24, 28;      |           | 36:26                     | 345          |
| 10:6-12:7       | 233           | 9:15-22        | 268      | 45:1, 5         | 351       | 37:1-14                   | 452          |
| 13-16           | 233-235       | 10             | 267      | 44:26           | 361       | 40-48                     | 346-347      |
| 17-6            | 235           | 11:1-3         | 270      | 48:12-13        | 349       | <b>Book of the Twelve</b> |              |
| 21:25           | 235           | 12-16          | 271-273  | 49:5            | 351       | <b>Hosea</b>              | 293-296      |
|                 |               | 12:16          | 272      | 51:9-11         | 128, 194, |                           |              |
| <b>Samuel</b>   | 239-259       | 12:25          | 97       |                 | 349-350   | 1-3                       | 293-296, 323 |
| <b>1 Samuel</b> |               | 12:28          | 142      | 53:4-5          | 350       | 1:1                       | 84           |
| 1-8             | 253-256       | 13             | 273      | 55:3b-5         | 352       | 1:4                       | 279          |
| 1-12            | 243-249       | 16:29-31       | 273      | 55:10-11        | 361       | 4:1                       | 284          |
| 2-3             | 267           | 16:34          | 209      | 56-66           | 354       | 5:12                      | 381          |
| 2:1-10          | 243           | 17-2Kings 2    | 273-278  | 61:1-2          | 354       | 8:11                      | 172          |
| 2:25b-26        | 244           | 19             | 319      | 65-66           | 486       | 11:9                      | 303          |
| 3:1             | 245           | 19:15          | 279      | 66:1-3          | 354       | <b>Joel</b>               | 358-359      |
| 8-12            | 246-249       | 20             | 277      | 66:22-23        | 354       | 2                         | 336          |
| 8:5             | 247           | 22             | 277, 302 | <b>Jeremiah</b> | 324-335   | <b>Amos</b>               | 288-293      |
| 10              | 3, 482        | <b>2 Kings</b> |          | 1:1-3           | 326       | 1:1-2                     | 288          |
| 12              | 467           | 1:8            | 278      | 1:4-10          | 327       | 1:2                       | 358          |
| 12:6-25         | 248           | 3-13           | 278      | 1:5             | 351       | 1:3-2:16                  | 288-291      |
| 12:14-15        | 248-249       | 10:31          | 279      | 1:10            | 332       | 1:3-5                     | 289          |
| 13-15           | 250           | 13:5           | 280      | 2               | 323       | 2:6                       | 284          |
| 13-31           | 249-253       | 13:23          | 280      | 7               | 329       | 4:1-3                     | 289-290      |
| 13:20           | 245           | 14-20          | 283-287  | 11:13           | 172       | 5:5                       | 378          |
| 15:10           | 84            | 14:25          | 296      | 20:7-8          | 335       | 5:18-20                   | 336          |
| 16-17           | 395           | 15:19          | 284      | 25:11-12;       |           | 5:21-24                   | 291          |
| 16:14-23        | 375           | 17             | 285      | 29:10           | 452       | 7-9                       | 288          |
| 17:7            | 245           | 18-19          | 286, 307 | 26:18           | 309       | 7-9                       | 291-293      |
| 28:15-18        | 251           | 18:4           | 163      | 27-28           | 331-332   | 7:15                      | 309          |
| <b>2 Samuel</b> |               | 21             | 395      | 29              | 329, 332- | 9:11                      | 289          |
| 1:19-27         | 253           | 21-25          | 312-317  |                 | 333, 439  | 9:13                      | 358          |
| 2:2-4           | 266           | 22             | 25       | 30-33           | 333-334   | <b>Obadiah</b>            | 341-342      |
| 5:6-10          | 254           | 22-23          | 182      | 31:27-30        | 323       | 1-6                       | 342          |
| 7               | 84, 265       | 22:8, 11       | 204      | 31:31-34        | 322, 333  | 13                        | 341          |
| 7:16            | 255           | 23             | 125      | 39-44           | 342       | <b>Jonah</b>              | 296-298      |
| 8:3             | 205           | <b>Isaiah</b>  | 299-308, | 41:5            | 426       | 4:2                       | 298          |
| 8:13-14         | 97            |                | 347-354  | 49:7-22         | 341       | 4:9-11                    | 298          |
| 9-20            | 256-258, 265  | 1:1            | 361      | 49:14-16        | 342       | <b>Micah</b>              | 308-309      |
| 11:1            | 256           | 2:6-22         | 336      | <b>Ezekiel</b>  | 318-324,  | 3:8                       | 309          |
| 12:10-12        | 257           | 5:1-7          | 323      |                 | 342-347   | 5:2                       | 309          |
| 19:35           | 53            | 6              | 301-303  | 1               | 302       | 6:6-8                     | 308          |
| 21-24           | 258           | 6              | 319      | 1-3             | 319-321   |                           |              |
| 24:1            | 462           | 7-8            | 303-305  |                 |           |                           |              |

|                  |              |                     |              |                     |              |                       |         |
|------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------------------|---------|
| <b>Nahum</b>     | 336          | 88:3-5              | 392          | <b>Ruth</b>         | 423-426      | <b>Apocrypha</b>      |         |
|                  |              | 89:2-4              | 389          | 1:16-17             | 424          | Tobit 13:6            | 437     |
| <b>Habakkuk</b>  | 336-337      | 90:10               | 333          | 4:18-21             | 106, 426     | Judith 1:1,           |         |
| 1:14             | 337          | 93                  | 57           |                     |              | 13:8                  | 438     |
| 2:2-4            | 337          | 93:1-4              | 388          | <b>Lamentations</b> | 426-427      | Wisdom of             |         |
|                  |              | 95:3                | 134          | 1:1                 | 426          | Solomon 3:1,          |         |
| <b>Zephaniah</b> | 335-336      | 99:1                | 268          | <b>Ecclesiastes</b> | 427-431      | 4: 5:15               | 415     |
| 1:14-2:3         | 336          | 104                 | 382          | 1:2-11;             |              | Wisdom of             |         |
|                  |              | 109:8-11            | 385          | 3:11; 12:8          | 429          | Solomon               |         |
| <b>Haggai</b>    | 354-355      | 113:1               | 383          | 2:11; 3:1-2         | 428          | 7:25-26               | 416     |
| 1:2-4, 9;        |              | 113:1-4             | 387          | 4:10;               |              | Sirach 1:13           | 416     |
| 2:20-22          | 355          | 119                 | 136, 380     | 12:9-11             | 430          | Sirach 2:             |         |
|                  |              | 119:1-2             | 390          | 12:13-14            | 431          | 10-12, 6:5            | 476     |
| <b>Zechariah</b> | 355-357      | 122:6-7             | 378          | <b>Esther</b>       | 431-435      | Sirach 24             | 416     |
| 1:4-6            | 355-356      | 124:1-3, 6          | 387          | 4:13-14             | 432          | Sirach 41:            |         |
| 7:1-7; 8:19      | 426          | 135:13              | 382          | 9:20-32             | 434          | 3-4                   | 416     |
|                  |              | 137                 | 386          |                     |              | Sirach 48:9           | 278     |
| <b>Malachi</b>   | 357-358      | 137:8-9             | 385          | <b>Daniel</b>       | 441-456      | 2 Esdras              |         |
| 2:10-12          | 357          | 151                 | 395          | 1-6                 | 446-448      | 7:118                 | 51      |
| 4:4-5            | 481          |                     |              | 4:35; 5:5,          |              | 1 Maccabees           |         |
| 4:4-6            | 278          | <b>Proverbs</b>     | 402-408      | 25                  | 448          | 1:54-56,              |         |
| <b>Psalms</b>    | 374-396      | 1:2-6               | 403          | 7-12                | 442, 448-453 | 60-61                 | 476     |
| 1                | 136          | 1:7                 | 404          | 7:1-4, 9-10         | 450          | <b>Pseudepigrapha</b> |         |
| 1:6              | 379          | 1:8                 | 404          | 7:9                 | 441          | 1 Enoch               | 477     |
| 3:2              | 379          | 7:6-7               | 397          | 7:13-14             | 451          | 1 Enoch               |         |
| 3:7              | 382          | 8:22-31             | 36, 405, 416 | 12:1-4              | 452          | 6:1-7:3               | 477-478 |
| 5:2              | 382          | 10:8                | 402          | <b>Chronicles</b>   |              |                       |         |
| 9-10             | 381          | 10:14               | 406          | <b>History</b>      | 457-472      | <b>New Testament</b>  |         |
| 15:1-2           | 390          | 10:30               | 407          | <b>Chronicles</b>   | 460-463      | Matthew 3:4           | 278     |
| 18               | 258, 319     | 16:1                | 403          | <b>1 Chronicles</b> |              | Matthew               |         |
| 18:3             | 381          | 22:17-24:22         | 407          | 1-9                 | 460          | 19:7-8                | 19      |
| 19:2-3           | 388          | 25:18               | 379          | 10-2Ch 36           | 460-463      | Mark 1:6              | 278     |
|                  |              | 26:4-5              | 406          | 15:2-3,             |              | Mark 9:2-13           | 278     |
|                  |              |                     |              |                     |              |                       |         |
| 22               | 383-384      | <b>Job</b>          | 408-417      | 11-15               | 461          | Mark 12:              |         |
| 22:17            | 381          | 1-2                 | 43           | 21:1                | 462          | 29-30                 | 170     |
| 22:26            | 383          | 1:6                 | 60           | <b>2 Chronicles</b> |              | Mark 15:              |         |
| 23:1-3           | 390          | 1:7-9               | 409          | 1-9                 | 462          | 25-32                 | 485     |
| 24               | 309          | 2:1                 | 60           | 3:1                 | 92           | Luke 1:               |         |
| 27:1             | 380          | 3:3                 | 378          | 25:4                | 19           | 46-55                 | 244     |
| 29:1             | 380          | 4:7-9               | 411          | 30                  | 125          | John 15:              |         |
| 29               | 57, 128, 382 | 8:3-4               | 411          | 33                  | 395          | 1-11                  | 323     |
| 30               | 388          | 9:16, 19            | 412          | 36:26               | 481          | Acts 2:1-4            | 485     |
| 31:22            | 382          | 11:4-6              | 411          | 10-36               | 463          | Acts 7:2-5            | 71      |
| 33               | 36           | 36:10-11            | 412          | <b>Ezra</b>         | 463-467      | Acts 15:1             | 19      |
| 34               | 381          | 38:2-4              | 413          | 1-6                 | 463-465      | Romans                |         |
| 35:11-12         | 382          | 38:7                | 60           | 1:2-4               | 463          | 5:12, 18              | 51      |
| 37:1-3           | 390          | 40:1-3              | 413          | 7-10                | 465          | Galatians 3:          |         |
| 42-43            | 380          |                     |              | 10:1-5              | 426          | 1-2, 6-9              | 486     |
| 48:2-4           | 389          | <b>Five Scrolls</b> | 418-440      | <b>Nehemiah</b>     | 465-467      | Revelation            | 442     |
| 51:4             | 382          | <b>Song of</b>      |              | 1-7                 | 467          | Revelation            |         |
| 66:13-14         | 383          | <b>Songs</b>        | 420-423      | 8-9                 | 465-466      | 12:9                  | 50      |
| 74:12-15         | 128          | 12-3, 15-17;        |              | 8:1                 | 19, 369, 479 | Revelation            |         |
| 74:14            | 444          | 2:7; 4:12           | 420          | 10-13               | 467          | 22:1-5                | 486     |
| 78:1             | 379          | 4:16; 5:1;          |              | 13:23-27            | 426          | <b>Mishnah</b>        |         |
| 80               | 385          | 8:6-7               | 421          |                     |              | Berakoth 1:1          | 487-488 |
| 80:1             | 145          |                     |              |                     |              |                       |         |

# INDEX OF AUTHORS AND CREATORS

Abegg, M.  
Ackerman, S.  
Albright, W. F.  
Alter, R.  
Anderson, B. W.  
Angel, A. R.  
Auden, W. H.  
Bailey, L. R.  
Bandstra, B. L.  
Bandstra, D. H.  
Barr, J.  
Barth, K.  
Barthes, R.  
Barton, J.  
Bassett, F. W.  
Batto, B.  
Bechtel, L. M.  
Beit-Arieh, I.  
Berlin, A.  
Bernard of Clairvaux  
Berrigan, D.  
Bible Literacy Report  
Bimson, J. J.  
Biran, A.  
Blake, W.  
Blenkinsopp, J.  
Bloch, A. and C.  
Bloom, H.

Boccaccini, G.  
Bodenheimer, F. S.  
Boëthius, A.  
Bordreuil, P.  
Boyer, P.  
Brenner, A.  
Bright, J.  
Brown, W.  
Brueggemann, W.  
Bruun, J.  
Bryce, G. E.  
Butler, S.  
Caird, G. B.  
Campbell, J.  
Campbell, A. F.  
Campbell, E. F.  
Caravaggio  
Carmichael, C.  
Carr, D.  
Chagall, M.  
Charles, R. H.  
Charlesworth, J. H.  
Childs, B. S.  
Clements, R. E.  
Clifford, R. J.  
Clines, D. J. A.  
Cohen, H. H.  
Coogan, M. D.  
Cook, E.  
Cook, S. L.  
Coote, R. B.  
Crenshaw, J. L.  
Cross, F. M.

Davies, P. R.  
Day, J.  
de Geus, C. H. J.  
De La Torre, M.  
Dever, W. G.  
DeWette, W. M. L.  
Dewey, D.  
Di Lella, A. A.  
Dicou, B.  
Douglas, M.  
Dozeman, T. B.  
Dussand, R.  
Edelman, D. V.  
Ehrlich, C. S.  
Elayi, J.  
Falk, M.  
Finkelstein, I.  
Fitzmyer, J.  
Flint, P.  
Fokkelman, J. P.  
Fox, E.  
Fox, M. V.  
Frankfort, H.  
Franklin, N.  
Friedman, R. E.  
Friedmann, D.  
Fritz, V.  
Gal, Z.  
Garr, W. R.  
Gaster, T. H.  
Gauguin  
Gomes, P. J.  
Good, E. M.

Gottwald, N. K.  
Grayson, A. K.  
Greeley, A. M.  
Greenspahn, F. E.  
Gunkel, H.  
Habel, N. C.  
Hackett, J. A.  
Haik-Vantoura, S.  
Hallo, W. W.  
Halpern, B.  
Hals, R.  
Hanson, P. D.  
Haran, M.  
Harrington, D. J.  
Hartman, L. F.  
Heidel, A.  
Heinlein, R. A.  
Herion, G. A.  
Hesiod  
Hoffman, L. A.  
Hoffmeier, J. K.  
Holladay, W. L.  
Hort, G.  
Hunt, J. H.  
Hurowitz, V.  
Jacobsen, T.  
Jeansonne, S. P.  
Jenson, P. P.  
Joyce, P. M.  
Kafka, F.  
Kearney, P. J.  
Keller, C.  
Kilmer, A. D.



Kim, W.  
Kirk, G. S.  
Kitchen, K. A.  
Klein, R. W.  
Kline, M.  
Knoppers, G.  
Koldewey, R.  
Korpel, M.  
Korsak, M. P.  
Kraeling, C. H.  
Krahmalkov, C. R.  
Kugel, J. L.  
Kushner, H.  
Lambert, W. G.  
Lang, B.  
Lasine, S.  
Lemche, N. P.  
Lemming, D.  
Lesko, L. & B.  
Levenson, J. D.  
Levine, B.  
Livingston, D.  
Longman, T.  
Loud, G.  
MacLeish, A.  
Maeir, A. M.  
Maidman, M. P.  
Malamat, A.  
Marks, H.  
Martínez, F. G.  
Matter, E. A.  
McCarter, P. K.  
McCarthy, D. J.

McCurley, F. R.  
McKenzie, S. L.  
McNamara, M.  
Mendenhall, G. E.  
Merhav, R.  
Michelangelo  
Middleton, J. R.  
Milgrom, J.  
Millard, A. R.  
Miller, P. D.  
Miller, W. T.  
Mitchell, S.  
Moberly, R. W.  
Monson, J.  
Morgan, D. F.  
Mowinckel, S.  
Moyers, B.  
Mulder, M. J.  
Murphy, R. E.  
Na'aman, N.  
Naveh, J.  
Nelson, R. D.  
Neusner, J.  
Newberry, P. E.  
Newman, K.  
Newsom, C. A.  
Newsome, J. D.  
Nicholson, E. W.  
Niditch, S.  
Nof, D.  
Noth, M.  
O'Brien, M. A.  
O'Connor, M.

Orwell, G.  
Ostriker, A. S.  
Pagels, E.  
Paldor, N.  
Parker, S.  
Parrot, A.  
Pelikan, J.  
Perdue, L. G.  
Petersen, D. L.  
Pitard, W.  
Pitman, W.  
Polling Report  
Pope, M. H.  
Prevost, J.-P.  
Pritchard, J. B.  
Rawlinson, H. C.  
Redford, D. B.  
Reich, R.  
Ringe, S. H.  
Rosenberg, D.  
Russell, D. S.  
Ryan, W.  
Ryken, L.  
Santayana, G.  
Sasson, J. M.  
Sauer, J. A.  
Schmid, K.  
Schmitals, W.  
Schneidewind, W.  
Schwartz, R. M.  
Segal, A. F.  
Shanks, H.  
Shea, W. H.

Shukron, E.  
Silberman, N. A.  
Simpson, W. K.  
Sinnott, A. M.  
Skehan, P. W.  
Smith, M. S.  
Smith, W. C.  
Spina, F. A.  
Sproul, B. C.  
Stager, L. E.  
Sugirtharajah, R. S.  
Swanson, S.  
Sweeney, M. A.  
Talmon, S.  
Thomas, D. W.  
Thompson, T. L.  
Tigay, J. H.  
Tindel, R. D.  
Torczyner, H.  
Ulrich, E.  
Unterberger, C.  
Van der Toorn, K.  
Van Voorst, R.  
VanderKam, J. C.  
VanHuysen, K.  
Vermes, G.  
Visotzky, B. L.  
von Däniken, E.  
von Rad, G.  
Walton, J. H.  
Watts, J. W.  
Webb, B. G.  
Weber, D.

Weinfeld, M.  
Weippert, M.  
Wenham, G.  
Westermann, C.  
Whedbee, J. W.  
Wheeler, J.  
White, J. B.  
Whitelam, K.  
Whybray, R. N.  
Williamson, H. G. M.  
Wilson, I.  
Wilson, R. R.  
Wise, M.  
Wolff, H. W.  
Wood, B. G.  
Wright, G. E.  
Yadin, Y.  
Zimmerli, W.  
Zorn, J. R.

# INDEX OF FIGURES

## [Introduction.](#) Reading the Bible

Noah's Dove

Figure 1 The Hermeneutical Triangle

Figure 2 Time Line: The Biblical Story

## [Part One.](#) Torah

Reading the Torah

Figure 1 Time Line: Sources and Composition of the Torah

Figure 2 Growth of the Torah

Figure 3 Map: Sources of the Torah by Geographical Location

## [Chapter 1.](#) Genesis 1–11

William Blake's *Elohim Creating Adam*

Figure 1.1 Ancient Middle Eastern Cosmology

Figure 1.2 Adad-iti's Image and Likeness

Figure 1.3 Map: The Ancient Middle East

Figure 1.4 Temptation Seal

Figure 1.5 Winged Protector Figure

Figure 1.6 Egyptian Cosmology

Figure 1.7 Ea in the Apsu

## [Chapter 2.](#) Genesis 12–50

Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac*

Figure 2.1 Time Line: The Ancestors

Figure 2.2 Map: Abraham's Journey

Figure 2.3 The Practice of Circumcision

Figure 2.4 Map: Abraham in Canaan

Figure 2.5 Map: Jacob's Travels

Figure 2.6 Semites Arrive in Egypt

### **Chapter 3. Exodus**

Michelangelo's *Moses*

Figure 3.1 Time Line: Early Israel

Figure 3.2 Ahmose I and the Hyksos

Figure 3.3 Making Bricks in Egypt

Figure 3.4 Map: The Exodus Route

Figure 3.5 The Sinai Peninsula

Figure 3.6 The Hammurapi Monument

Figure 3.7 Michelangelo's *Moses*

Figure 3.8 The Tabernacle Complex

### **Chapter 4. Leviticus and Numbers**

Shaking Hands

Figure 4.1 Sinai Mountain Range

Figure 4.2 Time Line: The Exodus to the Monarchy

Figure 4.3 Levite Ritual Roles

Figure 4.4 The Israelite Camp

Figure 4.5 Map: The Journey from Kadesh to Moab

### **Chapter 5. Deuteronomy**

Unterberger's *Moses*

Figure 5.1 Arad Sanctuary

Figure 5.2 Map: Treaties and Covenants of the Ancient Middle East

Figure 5.3 Structure of Deuteronomy

Figure 5.4 The Deuteronomistic History

### **Part Two. Prophets**

Lord Acton

Figure 1 Time Line: The Prophets and Israel's History

Figure 2 Torah-Prophets Collections

Figure 3 The Deuteronomic Theme

Figure 4 Prophets and Kings

## **Chapter 6. Joshua**

Canaanites

Figure 6.1 Map: Israel Entering Palestine

Figure 6.2 Map: The Campaigns of Conquest

Figure 6.3 Map: The Tribal Territories

Figure 6.4 The Merneptah Stele

## **Chapter 7. Judges**

Philistine Warrior

Figure 7.1 Time Line: Book of Judges

Figure 7.2 Map: Sea Peoples' Invasion

Figure 7.3 Asherah

Figure 7.4 Deuteronomistic Cycle

Figure 7.5 Megiddo Ivory

Figure 7.6 Philistine Pottery

Figure 7.7 Map: The Judges

## **Chapter 8. Samuel**

Michelangelo's *David*

Figure 8.1 Time Line: The Books of Samuel

Figure 8.2 "House of David" Inscription

Figure 8.3 Ark of the Covenant

Figure 8.4 Map: The Ark's Travels

Figure 8.5 Map: Samuel's Career

Figure 8.6 Map: Saul's Career

Figure 8.7 Philistine Anthropoid Coffin

Figure 8.8 Map: David's Career

## **Chapter 9. Kings and Prophets 1**

Chagall's *Solomon*

Figure 9.1 Time Line: Books of Kings

Figure 9.2 Horned Altar

Figure 9.3 The First Temple



Figure 9.4 Tell Dan High Place  
Figure 9.5 Moabite Stone  
Figure 9.6 Jezebel Seal  
Figure 9.7 Baal's Lightning  
Figure 9.8 Shalmaneser III and Jehu

## **Chapter 10. Kings and Prophets 2**

Tiglath-Pileser III  
Figure 10.1 Hezekiah Seal  
Figure 10.2 Siloam Tunnel Inscription  
Figure 10.3 Time Line: Assyrian Period Prophets  
Figure 10.4 Map: Amos's Oracles against the Nations  
Figure 10.5 Map: Jonah's Travels  
Figure 10.6 Time Line: Isaiah of Jerusalem  
Figure 10.7 Winged Protector  
Figure 10.8 Map: The Assyrian Empire  
Figure 10.9 Sennacherib Attacks Lachish

## **Chapter 11. Kings and Prophets 3**

William Blake's *Ezekiel*  
Figure 11.1 Map: The Babylonian Empire and Biblical Prophets  
Figure 11.2 Time Line: The Babylonian Era Prophets  
Figure 11.3 Hilkiah Seal  
Figure 11.4 Winged Creatures  
Figure 11.5 Time Line: Book of Jeremiah  
Figure 11.6 Map: Enemy from the North  
Figure 11.7 Lachish Letter

## **Chapter 12. Postmonarchy Prophets**

Michelangelo's *Joel*  
Figure 12.1 Time Line: Book of Ezekiel  
Figure 12.2 Map: Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations  
Figure 12.3 The Valley of Dry Bones

Figure 12.4 Time Line: The Exile Era  
Figure 12.5 The Cyrus Cylinder  
Figure 12.6 Map: The Persian Empire

### **Part Three. Writings**

Egyptian Scribe

Figure 1 Time Line: The Writings

### **Chapter 13. Psalms Ancient Harpist**

Figure 13.1 Formal Analysis

Figure 13.2 Ancient Musicians

### **Chapter 14. Proverbs and Job**

Woman at the Window

Figure 14.1 Job's Misfortunes

### **Chapter 15. Five Scrolls**

Love and Death

Figure 15.1 Map: Moab in Israel's History

Figure 15.2 Threshing Floor

Figure 15.3 Map: The Book of Esther and the Persian Empire

### **Chapter 16. Daniel**

William Blake's *Ancient of Days*

Figure 16.1 Leviathan

Figure 16.2 Time Line: Book of Daniel

Figure 16.3 Map: The Greek Kingdoms

Figure 16.4 Ishtar Gate, Babylon

### **Chapter 17. Chronicler's History**

George Santayana

Figure 17.1 Map: The Persian Empire

Figure 17.2 Time Line: The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

Figure 17.3 Darius

**Conclusion. After the Hebrew Bible**  
Alexander the Great  
Figure 1 First-Century Jerusalem  
Figure 2 Qumran Cave 4

# INDEX OF TABLES

## Part One. Torah

- Table 1 Outline of the Torah Story
- Table 2 Characteristics of the Sources
- Table 3 Covenants and Signs

## Chapter 1. Genesis 1–11

- Table 1.1 The Book of Genesis
- Table 1.2 Modern Translations of Genesis 1:1–3
- Table 1.3 Parallel Symmetry of Genesis 1
- Table 1.4 Literary Parallels in the Babel Story
- Table 1.5 Sources of the Primeval Story
- Table 1.6 Parallel Structure of Genesis 1–11

## Chapter 2. Genesis 12–50

- Table 2.1 Akedah Summons and Response
- Table 2.2 Genesis 12 and Genesis 22 Parallels: Call and Testing
- Table 2.3 Jacob Cycle Theme Words
- Table 2.4 Translations of the Term Toledot
- Table 2.5 The Toledot of Genesis

## Chapter 3. Exodus

- Table 3.1 First Use of the Divine Name YHWH in the Sources
- Table 3.2 Law Collections

## Chapter 4. Leviticus and Numbers

- Table 4.1 Holiness Continuum
- Table 4.2 Offerings
- Table 4.3 Holy Times
- Table 4.4 The Structure of Leviticus
- Table 4.5 Wilderness Doublets

Table 4.6 Structure of Numbers

**Chapter 5. Deuteronomy**

Table 5.1 Translations of Deuteronomy 6:4: The Shema

Table 5.2 Treaty Components of Deuteronomy

Table 5.3 Textual Units in Deuteronomy

**Part Two. Prophets**

Table 1 Former and Latter Prophets

**Chapter 7. Judges**

Table 7.1 Synopsis of the Judges

**Chapter 8. Samuel**

Table 8.1 Structure of Samuel

Table 8.2 Biographical Sketch of Samuel

Table 8.3 Sources in Samuel

Table 8.4 Biographical Sketch of Saul

Table 8.5 Biographical Sketch of David

**Chapter 9. Kings and Prophets 1**

Table 9.1 Kings and Kingdoms

Table 9.2 Kings and Prophets

Table 9.3 Biographical Sketch of Solomon

Table 9.4 Israelite Dynasty of Omri

Table 9.5 Israelite Dynasty of Jehu

**Chapter 10. Kings and Prophets 2**

Table 10.1 Kings of the Assyrian Period

Table 10.2 Visions of Amos

Table 10.3 Structure of Hosea

Table 10.4 The Three Books of Isaiah

Table 10.5 Life and Times of Isaiah of Jerusalem

Table 10.6 Structure of Micah

**Chapter 11. Kings and Prophets 3**

Table 11.1 Kings and Prophets of the Babylonian Period

Table 11.2 Lives and Times of the Babylonian Period

Table 11.3 Datable Passages of Jeremiah

Table 11.4 Jeremiah’s Complaints

**Chapter 12. Postmonarchy Prophets**

Table 12.2 Leaders, Kings, and Prophets of the Persian Period

Table 12.3 Structure of Zechariah

Table 12.4 Zechariah’s Visions

Table 12.5 Sources of the Book of Jeremiah

**Part Three. Writings**

Table 1 Writings

Table 2 Old Testament Apocrypha

**Chapter 13. Psalms**

Table 13.1 Psalm Subcollections

Table 13.2 The Psalter

**Chapter 14. Proverbs and Job**

Table 14.1 Proverbs from Around the World

Table 14.2 Proverbs and the Instruction of Amenemope

Table 14.3 Proverb Collections

Table 14.4 Structure of Job

**Chapter 15. Five Scrolls**

Table 15.1 The Five Scrolls and the Jewish Calendar

**Chapter 16. Daniel**

Table 16.1 Four Apocalypses of Daniel

**Chapter 17. Chronicler’s History**

Table 17.1 Comparison of the Deuteronomistic and Chronicler’s Historyies

Table 17.2 The Return from Exile

Table 17.3 Structure of Ezra and Nehemiah

Table 17.4 The Four Books of the Maccabees

Table 17.5 The Books of Esdras

Table 17.6 Contents of 2 Esdras

**Conclusion. After the Hebrew Bible**

Table 1 Chronology after the Hebrew Bible

# ABBREVIATIONS

|      |                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ANET | <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> , 3rd ed., with supplement, edited by J. B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) |
| BCE  | Before the Common Era; used to designate dates (formerly BC)                                                                                                        |
| c.   | circa, “about”; used to indicate an approximate date                                                                                                                |
| CE   | Common Era; used to designate dates (formerly AD)                                                                                                                   |
| CH   | Chronicler’s History                                                                                                                                                |
| D    | Deuteronomist source of the Pentateuch                                                                                                                              |
| DH   | Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy plus Former Prophets)                                                                                                          |
| E    | Elohistic source of the Pentateuch                                                                                                                                  |
| J    | Yahwist source of the Pentateuch                                                                                                                                    |
| KJV  | <i>King James Version Bible</i> (1611)                                                                                                                              |
| NAB  | <i>New American Bible</i> (1970)                                                                                                                                    |
| NIV  | <i>New International Version Bible</i> (1978)                                                                                                                       |
| NJPS | <i>New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh</i> (1988)                                                                                                                 |
| NRSV | <i>New Revised Standard Version Bible</i> (1989)                                                                                                                    |
| P    | Priestly source of the Pentateuch                                                                                                                                   |
| RSV  | <i>Revised Standard Version Bible</i> (1952)                                                                                                                        |
| RTOT | <i>Reading the Old Testament</i> , 4th ed., by B. L. Bandstra (2009)                                                                                                |



