

CHAPTER 1

Preparatory Issues in Approaching Biblical Texts

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Interpretation does not happen in a void. Interpretation emerges out of a context and speaks into a context. Interpreters are not disembodied voices. There is an interplay of interests at work, whether social or emotional, cultural or national, academic, financial, or religious. It is tempting to focus exclusively on the insights and achievements of individuals; these are usually accessible in their publications. We need to be aware of the existence of wider influences and interests that surge around individual scholars and shape something of their work.

This contribution to *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible* aims at providing those interested with a basic understanding of some of the insights and practices at work in modern scholarship. Fundamentally, this means coming to grips with preparatory questions that may be relevant for modern biblical study and recognizing elements important for the exploration of a biblical text. There is no such beast as "modern biblical scholarship"; there is a multitude of biblical scholars. Observations about what is done must, therefore, remain tentatively sketchy; not all will recognize themselves. On the other hand, what is written here may initiate people into what this practitioner believes are among the central preparatory tasks of biblical interpretation.

This contribution is not a history of modern biblical interpretation. That has been done in German (Kraus, 1969). Something similar has been done in English (Hahn, 1966). John Rogerson has gone into detail for the 19th century in Germany and England (Rogerson, 1984). A study of the Hebrew Bible and its modern interpreters has appeared in the SBL centennial trilogy (Knight and Tucker, eds., 1985). Significant figures and movements have left their mark on modern biblical interpretation; their concerns cannot be ignored. Here, however, respectful mention of our forebears will be subordinated to the attempt to prepare for the task that they have left to us: interpreting the biblical text.

The key element of biblical interpretation in recent centuries can be summed up in the adjective "critical." "Historical-critical" is misleading; it can suggest a concern with history that is not necessarily central. Understood as the opposite

of "ahistorical," "historical" describes a state of intellectual awareness; in this acceptation, "historical-critical" is an acceptable descriptor. "Method" is misleading; it can suggest predetermined steps that follow each other in logical sequence instead of the verification of insight and intuition. "Critical" is the element that separates moderns from their predecessors. The interpreters of the past were often great scholars and brilliant minds. But at a certain point in the intellectual history of western Europe a critical spirit emerged and decisively influenced the way that texts have been read ever since. It is this critical spirit that we need to identify and see at work in the task of interpretation.

Some maps of the United States trace a continental divide or watershed from Montana to New Mexico. Mountains obviously mess this up – for example, the Appalachians in the northeast or the San Gabriels in the southwest. The messiness is helpful for the use of the watershed as a literary metaphor. For there is a watershed between the process of a text's coming into being, its growth and development, and the task of interpreting the text that has come into being, that exists. But it is messy. There is no hermetic partition keeping the two aspects apart; they tend to impact on one another. Where biblical text is concerned, most of the issues discussed in this chapter explore aspects of the development of a text, its coming into being. The modern issues relating to the task of interpreting the already existing text are treated in chapter 2.

Beneath the watershed separating development from interpretation lies the massive issue of the nature of the text involved. The issue can be considered from the point of view of the origins of the text: from above or from below – directly divine (few), directly human (few), somewhere in between (most). Considered reflection reveals that origins do not determine nature. Both divine and human texts can claim to impose thought or to invite to it. The nature of the biblical text can only be determined by observation of the text itself. A signpost pointing in a single direction is helpful to the traveler, if the direction is the right one. Several signposts pointing in different directions to the same destination may also be helpful, but not immediately; perhaps they invite to reflection and further exploration. Many readers will find that the Bible often offers conflicting signposts (i.e., competing YHWH faith claims), from extensive issues – such as creation, flood, deliverance at the sea, sojourn in the desert, conquest of the land, emergence of monarchy, and even divine providence – to matters that can be compassed in a verse or two. The biblical text tends not to adjudicate, but to amalgamate. In such cases, readers are invited to thought; the signposts point in differing directions. The decision about what is predominantly the nature of biblical text and how it functions is one that needs to be remade out of the experience of the text by each generation of its readers. Any other way risks dogmatism or superstition. These considerations should not deflect attention from the complementary roles of the biblical text: to arouse feeling, fire imagination, and fuel faith.

It may also be helpful to realize that we approach texts in much the same way as we approach people. Mutual communication requires us to sort out languages and accents; the influence of cultural origins may be important; at some stage we become aware of whether someone has their act together or can, for example,

be subject to unexpected emotions; over time, we come to know something of people's early history and later influences. We have people we meet for the first time, where we learn as much of this as we need to for the present; we have old friends, where much of this is well-known to us. Reading a biblical text can involve similar processes, both when we are reading it for the first time and when it is an old favorite.

It is also helpful to be aware of the difference between our meeting people, and doctors, psychiatrists, therapists – health professionals – meeting patients. We listen attentively; they listen attentively too, but differently. They pay attention to things we might not think of: skin color, tension, breathing, energies, conflicts, posture and body language, etc. We are meeting somebody; they are not only meeting somebody but they are also making a diagnosis, correlating symptoms with possible conditions. The enjoyment of friends is not a time for the exercise of professional expertise. Professionals approach a patient differently. The difference between *reading* a text and *studying* a text has a lot in common with the difference between meeting a person and meeting a patient.

What we discuss below are aspects of biblical text that experience has shown – in shifting contexts – to be of lasting value for modern study.

The Developmental Insights and Questions of Modern Study

Text boundaries

Boundaries are important, whether we are talking about acquaintances, friends, or professionals – to say nothing of real estate. Boundaries are also important for texts. Since Aristotle, we have known that a text has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Not all the texts we are called upon to study will form such rounded wholes.

The boundaries of a text – where a passage begins and ends – are not always easily determined. A student needs to be aware of the issue; more may not be readily possible. Hebrew usually repeats subjects and objects sparingly. Prefixes and suffixes, often translated by pronouns etc. in a language like English, can sustain meaning for longish passages of text. Independent passages do not normally begin with a prefix or suffix; subjects and objects are named within such passages. As a rule of thumb, this can be useful; beyond it, a student is often left to reflection and intuition.

Where a text is considered to begin or end may radically alter its interpretation. Often, all that can be asked of an interpreter is awareness of the issue.

Text criticism

With the wealth of texts available to us today, text criticism – i.e., among differing textual witnesses, determining which to rely on in a given passage – is best left to professionals (cf. Tov, 1992).

The reevaluation of subjectivity has correctly crept up on the text critic. Modern discoveries have tended away from simplicity: "the Scriptures were pluriform . . . until at least 70 CE probably until 100, and quite possibly as late as 135 or beyond. Thus we must revise our imaginations and our explanations . . . we can see now more clearly that there were multiple literary editions of many of the biblical books" (Ulrich, 1994, p. 92).

In Gen 1:26, the Hebrew text has "over the cattle, and over all the earth"; the Syriac text has "over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth." Comparison with vv. 24 and 25 leads many moderns to the view that the Syriac is correct; the Greek and Latin, however, follow the Hebrew. In 1 Sam 1:18, the Hebrew text has "and the woman went her way and she ate and she no longer had her [sad] face"; the Greek text has "and the woman went her way and entered her lodging and she ate with her husband and drank and her face was no longer fallen." Explanations are possible; certainty is not. In Isa 2:12, the Hebrew text has "against all that is lifted up and low"; the Greek text has "against all that is high and towering, and they shall be brought low." Translations follow the Hebrew, or emend the Hebrew, or follow the Greek; unanimity is not to be had.

Origin criticism

This section should be headed "source criticism"; why "origin criticism" can be explained a little later. The basic insight from which this approach began was that some biblical passages were made up of material from more than one origin. In 1753, Jean Astruc entitled his book: *Conjectures about the sources which it appears Moses used in the composition of the book of Genesis*. For those who worry about Darwinism, it helps to note Darwin's dates: 1809–82. Critical analysis of the Bible began from the Bible; it was on the scene before Darwin boarded the Beagle (cf. Roberts, 1999). While we can trace the beginnings of this insight back at least to Richard Simon in 1678, the name most deservedly associated with its application is that of Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918). His insight and clarity of expression have left their mark indelibly on modern biblical studies.

Wellhausen was not alone. While for many his name stands as symbolic of critical analysis of the Older Testament, he came toward the end of a long period of passionate engagement with such studies, above all at German universities. Figures such as Herder (1744–1803), Eichhorn (1752–1827), De Wette (1780–1849), Ewald (1803–75), and Vatke (1806–82) are only a few of those who preceded him. Many were to follow, with shifting emphases; among the Germans, there are scholars like Gunkel, Großmann, Alt, Noth, von Rad, Fohrer. There are others of eminence in other countries; overall, it would be invidious to single out names. For many, the analytical study of biblical origins brought conflict with traditional church teachings or traditional church people. Wellhausen himself wrote to the government minister responsible asking to be transferred from his

chair in theology, because he did not consider he was adequately fulfilling his practical task of preparing theology students for their future. While the fact of diverse origins is taken for granted today, the best way of understanding the shape of such origins is vigorously debated. Academics and church people have come to terms with the diversity of origins in biblical text. It may not be unfair to say that many adherents, whether in academic or church circles, have not yet come to terms with how these understandings can be fully used to fire imagination and fuel faith.

Once upon a time, this aspect of biblical study was designated "literary criticism," following the German term *Literarkritik*. With the application of literary study, properly so called, to the realm of biblical literature, "literary criticism" in English at least could only be used for the study of the literary qualities of a text. The old "literary criticism" came to be referred to generally as "source criticism." This would be perfectly suitable, if it were not for the drawback of confusion with pentateuchal sources (e.g., J, E, and P). What is now termed "source criticism" should have a far wider range than the comparatively narrow concern for pentateuchal sources. Source criticism is concerned to ask about the origin of material in a biblical passage. If we think of it as "origin criticism," we will understand the term "source" correctly.

Once the insight has been gained, the question has to be asked: what is the origin of this material? As no less a critic than Martin Noth has argued, the fact that a source division is possible does not mean that it is necessary. The practice of some source criticism, especially in the Pentateuch, has given rise to obsessive fragmentation of texts as well as conditioned refusal to see the obvious. The observation of origins is largely about differences and duplication. Not all duplication and not all differences, however, go back to different origins. So the focus has to be sharpened to differences that cause difficulty and duplication that causes difficulty. When such difficulties arise, the issue of origins needs to be raised and the question has to be asked.

Examples from the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic History, and the prophets will shed light on what is meant. The issue here is not primarily how questions are best answered; rather, the issue is primarily what in the text requires that such questions be asked?

In the early chapters of Genesis, two sets of details are found about the flood. One set involves a forty-day block of time – with seven pairs of clean animals and a sacrifice and only one pair of unclean animals, and the floodwaters come from a rainstorm. The other set involves a one hundred and fifty-day block of time – with one pair of all animals and no sacrifice, and with floodwaters that come from above and below. However these signals are accounted for, there are difficulties that need to be considered. Later in Genesis, two stories are told about Hagar. In Genesis 16, harshly treated she takes the initiative and is a survivor; she leaves her brutal mistress and is found at a well on her way home. In Genesis 21, she is deprived of initiative and expects her child to die. Harmonization is possible; the biblical text does it with Gen 16:9. But difficulties are there and need to be considered. Difficulties need to be considered regarding Jacob the deceiving rat

of Genesis 27 and Jacob the model son of Gen 28:1–9. Different origins may be helpful in making sense of the difficulties.

In Exodus 13–14, there is the traditionally significant account of Israel's deliverance at the Reed Sea. At the gesture of Moses' hand, the waters are parted to left and right, Israel marches across, followed by the Egyptians who are then swamped. But also, in the same text, there is reference to the pillar of cloud moving from in front of Israel to take up station between Israel and the Egyptians all night (14:19–20*), to God's wind blowing the water away all night (14:21*), and finally to God from the pillar of cloud causing panic among the Egyptians at the end of the night so that they retreated across the dry seabed and were swamped by the returning waters (14:27*) – assuming that God's "all-night" wind stopped with the dawn. Since the Israelites were told to turn back and camp by the sea (14:2), they had already gone past it. Crossing the sea was not the problem; escaping the Egyptian pursuit was. The text has difficulties; they need consideration. Exod 15:1–18 adds to the complexity. Different origins may need to be taken into account.

In the Deuteronomistic History, similar difficulties can be encountered and appeal to different origins may be involved in a solution. In 1 Samuel 7–12, for example, chs. 7–8 have the prophet Samuel subdue the Philistines for a generation and agree to setting up a king for Israel (cf. 7:13; 8:22) before chapter 9 gives God the initiative of bringing Saul to Samuel to be anointed by Samuel as ruler and to save Israel from the Philistines, since Israel's cry has reached God (cf. 9:15–17). Furthermore, Saul is acclaimed king in 10:24 and made king again in 11:15. Harmonization is attempted in 1 Samuel 12, but not very successfully. According to 8:1–5, the request for a king resulted from the unjust behavior of Samuel's sons; in ch. 11 the crowning of Saul as king followed his stunning victory over the Ammonite Nahash. According to 12:12, it was the threat posed by Nahash that triggered the demand for a king. Some modern harmonizations have done better, but Noth's comment remains: "it was not without obvious effort and contrivance that Dtr. supplemented the old account which dealt favorably with the institution of the monarchy by adding long passages reflecting his disapproval of the institution" (Noth, 1991, pp. 83–4). Appeal to different origins may help interpret a difficult text. Other examples may be found in 1 Samuel 17–18 and 1 Kings 8 (see Campbell and O'Brien, 2000).

In the prophets, assessment of the origin of material often comes under the rubric of "editing history" (see below). However, there are cases where the assumed combination of prophetic collections of sayings is not unlike the combination of traditions assumed for the Pentateuch. A case in point may be found in Isaiah 5–10. Isaiah 6 witnesses to Isaiah's call (or at least a commission to the prophet). Isa 7:1–8:15 follows with traditions relating to the Syro-Ephraimite war, including the famous Immanuel oracle. With Isa 8:16–22, Isaiah's activity appears to have reached closure. Finally, Isa 9:1–7 (NRSV) has a strong prophecy of salvation for those now in gloom and darkness. In short, all the components of a prophetic collection are encompassed: commission, ministry, closure, and future hope.

Surrounding this collection, however, there may be another. Isa 5:1–7 is the Song of the Vineyard. It ends with the powerful poetry of v. 7:

he expected justice (*mišpāt*),
but saw bloodshed (*mišpāḥ*);
righteousness (*šēdāqā*)
but heard a cry (*šē'āqā*)!

A series of “woe” sayings (in the NRSV: “Ah, you”) follow (5:8–24), illustrating the absence of justice and righteousness and exemplifying the bloodshed and outrage. There are seven sayings in the series, but the seventh is in 10:1–4. After the joyous ending of 9:7 comes a series of sayings against Israel, each ending with a refrain: “For all this his anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still.” The refrain occurs in 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4, but also in 5:25. That a collection should be put together exemplifying and illustrating a poem as powerful as the Song of the Vineyard is not surprising. That the series of woe sayings and the series with the refrain should both be represented on either side of the apparent collection in Isa 6:1–9:7 is surprising. These are difficulties that need explanation. A difference of origins may contribute to better understanding.

The issue of origins in the Pentateuch is a special case. Over more than a couple of centuries of analytical study, it was observed that relatively coherent texts could be built up from extensive passages attributed to a Yahwist (using the personal name of Israel's God, YHWH), or to an Elohist (using the common noun for God, *elohim*), or to a Priestly writer (initially using the common noun for God, *elohim*). To these was added the book of Deuteronomy, thus giving four so-called sources, J, E, P, D. Debate raged over the nature of these texts, their relationship to the law codes (Ex 20:22–23:33; Lev 1–16 and 17–26; Deut 12–26), the order and dating of their composition, and the manner of their combination to form the present text. Further subdivisions and variants were proposed; various ways of combination or supplementation were put forward. When consensus seemed achieved, consensus fell apart (cf., Campbell and O'Brien, 1993). Since the collapse of consensus, there is agreement that the Pentateuch is made up of materials of widely differing origins; there is agreement on precious little else. For the present, a fresh consensus seems unlikely.

Form criticism

Form criticism may be the most elusive of the creatures in the garden of Older Testament scholarship. The association of form with setting promised histories of Israel's literature, and its religion; such promises were not fulfilled. The psalms would seem an ideal field for form-critical research. Assured results have been meager: a distinction between individual and communal, between psalms of complaint and lament and psalms of praise and thanksgiving, and royal psalms; the leftovers are left over. After Westermann, we have grown familiar with the

form-critical structure of the prophetic oracle: accusation, messenger formula, and announcement (Westermann, 1967). The most rigorous attempt to put form-critical study on a thoroughly scientific basis had the unexpected effect of making clear that this is not a fruitful way to go (Richter, 1971). For all its elusiveness, form criticism embodies one of the central gains of modern biblical study.

Form criticism is based on the insight that significant features of certain works of literature derive from something quintessential to those works, often associated with the social settings that generated the literature. Form criticism appeals to a modern concern for the whole, the gestalt. It seeks to answer the question, "What sort of text are we dealing with?" and to address the issue of the interrelationship of the parts within the whole.

Viewed generally, form criticism is as automatic as breathing; it is something we do regularly, for example, when we distinguish reporting from comment from humor from advertising in our newspapers. Few of us, confronted with "Dear Sir or Madam" and "My darling beloved", would hesitate as to which was the business letter and which the love letter. From another point of view, it may not be easy to distinguish convincingly between a story being told and a report being given of what happened. In theory, reports follow the sequence of events and stories move through plot from the creation of tension to its resolution. In practice, such distinctions may not be easy to make. Is the text about Samuel's beginnings (1 Samuel 1) a story or a report? Does it matter? The text about the first couple in the garden (Genesis 2-3) is one thing if it is a story and another if it is a report. As a rule, report is uninterpreted; story begins the task of interpretation – or may have been created to address what needs interpretation.

From one standpoint, form criticism is a liberation from the obsession with history. The so-called "historical books" (i.e., Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) may well be more theological than historical, more concerned with the meaning of Israel's destiny than with reporting its past. To ask the question "What is the literary form of this text?" is to open the way to what may be a more adequate understanding of a text's meaning.

What robs form criticism of the capacity for tidy classification is an essential quality of literature and art: there needs to be a fundamental model of expectation in relation to which the individual work can situate itself. It was the hope of form criticism to be able to work back toward the understanding of such matrixes. It is the sorrow of form criticism that we are usually left contemplating the individual achievement, without the matrix. Nevertheless, despite the uncertainty of the answers, the form-critical questions are essential for the interpreter.

The first question is: what is the literary form of this text? The answer may be simplistically easy. Apodictic law is quite different from casuistic law. A psalm of praise is quite different from a psalm of lament. The answer may not be easy at all, relying on the observation and intuition of the interpreter. The second question is more complex: what are the basic components of this text and how do they relate to each other? It is relatively easy to talk about features in a text; it is more challenging to talk about their interrelationship. If a passage is only a

part of a larger text, then we need to ask what sort of a part it is, how it relates to its context, and what is the literary form of the larger text to which it belongs? Similarly, we can address this question to the larger blocks forming a text or to the elements that go to forming one of the blocks. The third question is: how does the interrelationship of the text's components function to communicate its meaning?

Two trends particularly militate against the successful application of form criticism. One is the security given by a focus on detail; outreach to the whole is dangerous. The other is the difficulty of putting persuasive words on the perceptions that underlie an intuitive conviction. Up till now, there has been no adequate codification of the body of experience and observation that takes form criticism beyond the relatively obvious and easy. It may be that no such codification is possible; the equivalent to a diagnostic manual may never be achieved. Just as anxieties about air quality should not stop us breathing, anxieties about form-critical uncertainty should not stop us from attempting to articulate what is intuitively assumed.

Some examples will help. Early in Genesis, it is relatively simple to realize that Genesis 2-3 (the garden) and Genesis 4 (Cain and Abel) are stories and that Genesis 5 and 10-11 are genealogies. It takes closer observation to notice the differences between Priestly and Yahwist (10:8-30) genealogies. The different origins of the material in the flood text (Gen 6:5-9:17) have been noted above; the structural interrelationships of the present text are noteworthy. The decision to destroy is first made in God's heart (6:5-8), then communicated to Noah (6:9-22); after the flood, the decision never again to destroy is first made in God's heart (8:21-22) and then communicated to Noah (9:1-17). The significance of this second decision is theologically huge: despite human sinfulness, God's commitment is unshakable.

The sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22; in Jewish tradition, the binding of Isaac) is a story; it begins with the announcement of a test and the whole hangs on its outcome. The story form reaches its conclusion in v. 14, with the naming "The LORD will provide," closed off with Abraham's return to Beer-sheba in v. 19. It is possible to see the highly enigmatic story as one of basic trust - "The LORD will provide." The angel's second intervention (vv. 15-18) has a different focus (blessing) and a different interpretation (obedience, v. 18b). The variant has been skillfully introduced between vv. 14 and 19.

In the Deuteronomistic History, the text on the loss of the ark is instructive (1 Samuel 4). The structure is simple. There is a battle report; Israel lost (vv. 1b-2). There is an inquiry into the loss and a decision to bring the ark from Shiloh (vv. 3-9). There is a second battle report; Israel lost more heavily and lost the ark (vv. 10-11). Appended to this are two anecdotes, emphasizing the significance of the loss: Eli died when he heard of it (vv. 12-18); his daughter-in-law, dying in labor, gave her child a name meaning "the glory has departed from Israel" (vv. 19-22). The form-critical question is whether all this is a matter of report or a matter of storytelling.

If it is a matter of report, then the question of the elders in v. 3 is reported because the elders asked it before anything else happened. If it is a story, then

the storyteller has the question asked knowing full well what the outcome is going to be in vv. 10–11. The question is: "Why has the LORD put us to rout today before the Philistines?" (v. 3a). In a report of what happened, one might surmise that the elders answered their question with the thought that they may have lost because they did not have the ark with them. In a story, where vv. 10–11 are known as the outcome, the answer to the elders' question has to be to the effect that it was the LORD's will to do so. The absence of the names of any military leaders and the emphasis on Philistines, Israel, and elders may be a pointer to a story rather than a report. The reaction credited to the Philistines (vv. 6–9) heightens the likelihood of the text being a story; it heightens the tension. If it is a report, the potential is there for theological reflection to be distilled from the event; if it is a story, the process of theological distilling has been begun. Israel's storytellers were often theologians.

In 1 Kgs 4:1–19, there is an account of Solomon's officials and those responsible for the provisions of his court. The text is regarded as deriving from authentic records of the royal court. In Numbers 2, there is an account of the marching order of Israel for the journey from Sinai to the promised land. The slightest familiarity with the tortuous terrain of the Sinai peninsula dismisses its authenticity as a record: it can then be recognized as a programmatic document, with interest for the priorities of the tribes. These are form-critical decisions. They are made in the light of our knowledge today, building on what we know of the Bible and the Ancient Near East.

In 2 Kgs 6:8–24, there is a fascinating text about Elisha supplying intelligence to the king of Israel, the Aramean king getting upset about it, and Elisha blinding the commandos sent to arrest him, leading them through the city of Samaria, and providing them with a banquet before sending them home. Plausibility is not the issue. As a report, it would tell of a remarkable event – whether fact or fiction. As a story, the interpretation of the event has been begun: prophetic knowledge is praised, Aramean folly laughed at, and the power of God's prophet celebrated. Report or story? Asking the question is sometimes easier than ascertaining the answer.

In the book of the prophet Amos, form-critical observation of Amos 1–2 and 7–9 shows how strongly patterned both collections are and how different they are from each other and from Amos 3–6. Both collections, however, portray Israel's situation as beyond appeal, beyond intercession. Close observation of form-critical aspects of a small passage such as Amos 3:3–8 is also revealing. In vv. 3–6, questions are asked, each assuming a statement or state of affairs. "Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?" In v. 8, however, two statements are made, each followed by a question. Clearly, v. 8 is the formal climax of the passage.

Verses 3–5 constitute a five-line series, each line containing one example and each beginning with the Hebrew interrogative particle (*hā-*). The examples are drawn from natural observation; if the effect can be observed, then the cause may be assumed. Verse 6 consists of two lines, each beginning with the Hebrew "if." A literal translation is:

If a trumpet is blown in the city, surely (Heb. "and") the people are afraid?
 If disaster befalls a city, surely (Heb. "and") the LORD has done it?

The first is a natural observation; given the cause, the effect follows – when the alarm is sounded, people are afraid. The second is a theological observation, a faith claim; if an effect can be observed (destruction), then the cause (the LORD) may be assumed. The final pair of lines in v. 8 builds on all this. The cause is stated: "the lion has roared . . . the LORD God has spoken"; the effect necessarily follows: "who will not fear? . . . who can but prophesy?" A further step is needed to articulate the full interpretation of the passage, but the use of form in the service of meaning is clear.

Tradition history

The insight that lies behind the traditio-historical question is the realization that often aspects of tradition can be identified – whether by language, faith, concern, or other particulars – so that a text can be situated within the sweep of Israel's traditions, highlighting the earlier contributions it draws on and the contribution of its own that it makes. Sometimes a distinction has been attempted between oral and written tradition; it is complex and difficult at best – and dubious where it seeks to blend orality with antiquity and antiquity with God. The capacity to trace Israel's traditions, allowed us by Israel's reverence for its past, permits us precious access to the unfolding of Israel's thinking. The intensive pursuit of such insights can have wide ramifications (e.g., von Rad, Noth); in other situations, the observations remain within a more restricted realm.

Examples may be taken from the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic History, and the prophets. The scope is wide; the examples only a tiny fraction of the totality available. So, for example, it is possible that Gen 17:1–2 echoes an older tradition of God's commitment to Abraham, earlier expressed in Gen 12:1–3 (or equivalent). The promise that through Abraham blessing will be mediated to all the families of the earth is expressed in identical terms in Gen 12:3b and 28:14, in slightly different terms in Gen 18:18b, and with a further difference again in the deuteronomistic passages Gen 22:18 and 26:4b. The implication of tracing this tradition through these five occurrences is the possibility of its theological claim having existed in Israel at least from the Yahwist to the Deuteronomist (perhaps beyond; cf. Isa 19:24–25 and Gal 3:8).

In 1 Kings 8, in Solomon's prayer of dedication (vv. 14–21), there is a strong appeal to God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. It is a good example of how two texts, presumably of interest to the same deuteronomistic circles, can formulate the same tradition with notable differences. For all its reverence for the past, there are places where Israel's theologians appear remarkably free of any obsession with verbal accuracy.

At the end of the Deuteronomistic History (in 2 Kgs 25:27–30), there is a notice of King Jehoiachin, the last reigning survivor of David's line, being released

into a form of house arrest at the Babylonian court. The passage can be read as echoing favorable actions of God in Israel's past; it can also be read as echoing the fate of Mephibosheth and the end of Saul's line (2 Sam 9:1-13; also 2 Sam 19:28 and 21:7). Whatever the implications of the passage, it plays on the traditions of Israel (cf. Granowski, 1992).

In Hosea 12, we find a wide range of references to Jacob, among them: trying to supplant his brother in the womb, wrestling with God, the encounter with God at Bethel, his service in Syria for a wife and his shepherding there. Much of the pentateuchal tradition associated with the patriarch Jacob can here be the subject of discussion in the 8th century prophet (cf. de Pury, 1989).

Editing history

The insight that leads to asking questions about editing is the realization that Israel's editors often allowed their interventions to be visible – inviting reflection. In English, the terms "redaction criticism" and "redaction history" are widely used. These reflect transpositions of the German "Redaktion" and the French "rédaction," both terms that refer to matters in English called "editorial." The English word is preferred here, not on chauvinistic grounds, but to avoid potential mystification arising from the use of foreign terms. "Editing" is appropriate to the partial or total reworking of a text; it can be operative at any stage in a document's history, from early to middle to late – but it presumes the existence of a text. Editors can piece together components to form extensive documents (so the editors termed R^{1E} and R^{1EP} in the Pentateuch or the editors of prophetic collections and prophetic books); naturally, they can also do smaller editing jobs. Some study of a text's editing history (as for its tradition history) might be described in terms of intertextuality. There is scope for overlap between origin criticism and editing history.

From the Pentateuch, for example, Ex 19:3b-9a is of a different origin from its surroundings; it could owe its place in the text to editorial activity. The difference of origin is evident: 19:5 already has a covenant in view, before the one that lies well ahead in the present text. In v. 9a, the passage has its own preparations for God's self-disclosure. Two aspects may have attracted an editor's attention. It is an unusual covenantal text, in that the outcome is explicitly conditional: "if you obey my voice and keep my covenant." On the other hand, at stake is more than bare relationship. Israel does not become simply God's people, but God's "treasured possession," "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation." The last two are unheard of elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible; the first is rare (cf. Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). The passage does not appear to belong in one of the pentateuchal sources; an editor may well have felt the need to preserve the tradition.

In the Deuteronomistic History, 1 Kgs 9:6-9 offers an example. In vv. 3-5, God has answered Solomon's prayer, consecrated the temple Solomon has built, and has put there for all time God's name and God's eyes and heart. Solomon's dynastic rule over Israel is assured, on condition of Solomon's fidelity (v. 4). All

this is expressed in second person *singular* address to Solomon. With the exile of Judah in 587, the Davidic/Solomonic dynastic rule came to an effective end; with the Babylonian sack of Jerusalem, God's consecrated temple was destroyed. So in vv. 6–9, God's words are expanded in a second person *plural* address that has to include the people and that deals with the possibility of infidelity and apostasy. The tension is acute and difficult. One solution is to see vv. 6–9 as an editorial expansion, bringing an earlier theology into line with a later reality. Similar editorial comments on this issue are to be found in 1 Kgs 11:32–33*, 39.

5. Toward the end of the Deuteronomistic History, King Josiah and Judah made a covenant before YHWH. Details of the participants are given in 2 Kgs 23:2. The final statement is: "all the people joined in the covenant" (23:3). A few verses earlier, these same people are written off as hopeless apostates who have incurred God's unquenchable wrath (see 22:16–17). The context does not allow for repentance; editorial adjustment is an appealing possibility. If the hypothesis of a Josianic Deuteronomistic History is envisaged, Josiah's death and the abandonment of his reform required an extensive editorial undertaking, bringing a different vision to bear on seven books of biblical text (see Campbell and O'Brien, 2000).

Among the prophets, Amos has a couple of chapters in which God's judgment is pronounced over Israel's neighbors and, finally, over Israel itself (Amos 1–2). The pronouncements are structured on a remarkable pattern. There is an introduction ("Thus says the LORD"), a proverbial opening ("for three . . . and for four"), a denial of appeal ("I will not cause it to return"), a reference to the crime, a reference to the punishment, and in all but three cases a concluding phrase ("says the LORD"). There are eight such sayings: against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, and Israel. In seven of them, the crime is a matter of social justice, usually related to excessive violence in war. In the case of Judah, however, the crime is in a totally different sphere: "they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the same lies after which their ancestors walked" (2:4). Of course, prophets are entitled to an exception or two. On the other hand, the combination of factors may suggest later editorial activity here.

While with Amos we might note 3:7, passed over earlier. Its interruption of the tight sequence of vv. 3–6 and v. 8 creates a difficulty. Its reference to the prophets as God's servants suggests deuteronomistic origin. The combination of the two makes an editorial comment from deuteronomistic circles a distinct possibility.

Conclusion

How recent and how radical the discovery of the Ancient Near East has been regularly comes as a surprise. The staples of early exploration were languages and archaeology.

Among the major languages, Egyptian was deciphered in 1822 (thanks to the Rosetta Stone, a tri-lingual inscription we owe to Napoleon's troops in 1799). Of the Mesopotamian languages, Sumerian was not translated until 1907; the translation of Assyrian and Babylonian was recognized by 1857 (thanks to the Behistun inscription, again a tri-lingual carved on a mighty rockface). Fledgling studies of Hittite civilization culminated in excavations at Boghazköy, begun in 1907; decipherment of the language had to wait for the discovery of the bi-lingual Karatepe inscription in 1947. The discovery of Ugarit (also known by its modern name of Ras Shamra) began in 1928; decipherment of the language, in an alphabetic cuneiform script, was agreed on by 1932.

Archaeology is a recent science, especially when distinguished from the adult version of a glorified treasure hunt. Excavation in Mesopotamia led the way, but did not begin until 1843 (Khorsabad, 1843; Nimrud, 1845; Warka, 1850; Ur and Eridu, begun in 1854–55). In 1871, Schliemann began digging at Hissarlik in western Turkey and found Homer's city of Troy. In 1877, de Sarzec, a French consul, began digging at Telloh and found the Sumerian civilization. In 1899, Sir Arthur Evans began digging at Knossos in Crete and discovered the Minoan civilization. Where Palestine is concerned, tunneling began in Jerusalem in 1864–67, the Palestine Exploration Fund was founded in 1865, and in 1890 Sir Flinders Petrie undertook the first stratigraphical excavation in Palestine at Tell Hesi (cf. generally, Daniel, 1968).

There are many more; others take up the story. In recent years, much has been learned; in the years ahead, we may assume there will be much more to learn.

What was said early in this essay may be recalled: the approaches discussed here are related to insights and questions about the nature of Older Testament text and its development; they are not methods, to be applied in much the same way that sausage-making processes are applied to minced meat and the rest.

As insights, these approaches have been validated over a long period of time. The phenomena discussed are to be found in some biblical texts, not in all. Not all are equally important for understanding a text where they might be found. As questions, they need to be asked of texts. Not all interpreters will give the same answers. Not all interpreters will give their answers the same significance. Nevertheless, the awareness flowing from these insights and questions will in varying ways shape part of the context within which any interpretation of biblical text proceeds.

Further Reading

Method and "how to" books are often problematic. Some leave nothing out and cover too many good things; others leave too much out and do not cover enough good things. The inexperienced risk being confused, misled, or overwhelmed; the experienced, who ought not need them, can find them insightful and stimulating. Rather like reading the

Bible, it is a matter of knowing what to make one's own and what to leave alone: an experienced guide can be most helpful. If that caution can be taken to heart, the English-language books listed below may be useful in varying ways.

Barton, J., *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1984).

Hayes, J. and C. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982).

Haynes, S. and S. McKenzie (eds.), *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).

Kaiser, O. and W. Kümmel, *Exegetical Method: A Student's Handbook* (New York: Seabury. German copyright: 1963).

Morgan, R. with J. Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Steck, O., *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology* (translated from the 13th German edition by J. D. Nogalski. Second edition. SBLRBS 39. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

Stuart, D., *Old Testament Exegesis: A Primer for Students and Pastors* (4th edn. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

The series of booklets, *Guides to Biblical Scholarship*, with an Old Testament series and a New Testament series, published by Fortress Press.

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Roberts, M., "Not Literalist After All: A Response to Paul Badham," *Expository Times*, 111 (1999), 17–18.

- Rogerson, J., *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* (London: SPCK, 1984).
- Tov, E., *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).
- Ulrich, E., "The Bible in the Making: The Scriptures at Qumran," in E. Ulrich and J. VanderKam, eds., *The Community of the Renewed Covenant: The Notre Dame Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1994), 77-93.
- Westermann, C., *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967).