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READING THE BIBLE HISTORICALLY: THE HISTORIAN'S APPROACH

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History and Historical Methodology

Although "history" is a much used term, it is not easily defined. Is history the sum total of past people and events? Or does it include only those people and events whose memory is preserved in written records? The available written evidence from ancient times is uneven in coverage, with some peoples and periods better represented than others. Moreover, the ancient documents provide very selective kinds of information. This information often is ambivalent, and sometimes the ancient sources make unbelievable or conflicting claims. Would it be more accurate, then, to say that history is the past as understood by historians, based on their analysis and interpretation of the available evidence but not necessarily identical with the claims made by ancient documents? What if the historians disagree? And does history belong to the professional historians anyhow? Perhaps history should be equated instead with the common consensus notions about the past held by the general public. These notions might be influenced by what professional historians say as well as by other factors, such as prevailing political, social, and religious attitudes. For that matter, are not professional historians themselves deeply influenced by prevailing attitudes?

It may be said, in any case, that historians seek to understand the human past and that they depend heavily on written sources for their information. Heavy reliance on written evidence is perhaps the main distinguishing characteristic of historical research as compared with other disciplines that also seek to understand the human past. This does not mean, of course, that contemporary historians concentrate solely on written evidence or that historical research is conducted independently of other disciplines. Contemporary scholars exploring the history of ancient Israel find themselves necessarily involved, for example, in Palestinian archaeology and sociology.

Historians seek objectivity. They are interested in discovering and reporting what really happened in the past, as opposed to collecting and passing on fanciful stories, writing "docudramas," or producing revisionist accounts of the past for propagandistic or ideological purposes. However, complete objectivity is a goal never reached. The historian's own presuppositions, ideology, and attitudes inevitably influence his or her research and reporting. Perhaps it is not an overstatement to say that any history book reveals as much about its author as it does about the period of time treated. If so, then a proper definition of history would suggest that it consists neither of the totality of past people and events on the one hand, nor of what we contemporaries know (or think we know) about the past on the other, but of an ongoing conversation between the past and the present. As we humans, individually and collectively, seek to understand the present, we naturally look to the past for bearings. At the same time, we constantly revise our understanding of the past in light of current developments, understandings, and attitudes.

Basic to modern historiography is the principle of analogy. Historians assume, consciously or unconsciously, that the past is analogous to the present and that one human society is analogous to another. Thus a historian's understanding of present reality serves as an overriding guide for evaluating evidence and interpreting the past, and the cultural patterns of a better-known society may be used as a guide for clarifying those of a lesser-known society. As an example of how this works in modern treatments of ancient Israelite history, note that the Bible presupposes a dynamic natural world into which God intrudes overtly upon human affairs from time to time. It is a world with waters rolling back so that the Israelites can escape Pharaoh's army, a world of burning bushes and floating ax heads. God hands down laws on Mount Sinai and sends angels to defend Jerusalem against the massive Assyrian army. Modern Western historians tend to perceive the world as being more orderly, however, and one of the standard tenets of modern historiography is that a natural explanation for a given historical phenomenon or event is preferable to an explanation that involves overt divine intervention. When speculating about the "actual historical events" behind the biblical account of Israel's past, therefore, what historians often do, in effect, is bring the biblical story into line with reality as we moderns perceive it. Surely the Assyrian army was not routed by angels, because angels, if they exist at all, do not play this sort of role in the world as we experience it. What other "more reasonable" explanation might there be for the rout of the Assyrians—"more reasonable" in the sense that it is more in keeping with our modern Western perception of reality? Possibly a plague broke out among the Assyrian troops, or maybe the narrator of the biblical account embellished the report. Either of these possibilities would be analogous to

the world as we perceive it, but not angels. In effect, then, the modern historian offers explanations that do not involve miracles or "God talk" for historical developments reported in the Bible.

The analogy principle also is at work when historians draw upon knowledge of other societies, ancient and modern, in attempts to clarify aspects of Israelite and early Christian history. The Bible reports the names of court officials who served under David and Solomon, for example, but does not describe the duties of these various officials. Historians, assuming that the royal court in Jerusalem would have been similar to other royal courts of the day, search the records of neighboring kingdoms for information regarding the duties and responsibilities of such officials.

Another example pertains to the chronological data provided in the Bible for each of the Israelite and Judean kings following Solomon. Specifically, each king's accession to the throne is dated relative to the reign of his contemporary on the other throne, and also the length of each king's reign is recorded. The following verses are typical.

In the twentieth year of King Jeroboam of Israel, Asa began to reign over Judah; he reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem. (1 Kings 15:9)

Nadab son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of King Asa of Judah; he reigned over Israel two years. (1 Kings 15:25)

In the third year of King Asa of Judah, Baasha son of Abijah began to reign over all Israel at Tirzah; he reigned twenty-four years. (1 Kings 15:33)

However, the figures provided do not always "add up." This may be due in part to copyists' mistakes in the transmission of the ancient manuscripts. But there are also other factors to be considered in view of the records of other ancient Middle Eastern kingdoms. It is known, for example, that some of these records presuppose a fall-to-fall calendar year while others presuppose a spring-to-spring calendar year. Some designate as the first year of a king's reign the year during which he ascended to the throne; others count only his first full year (i.e., the first full fall-to-fall or spring-to-spring year, depending on the calendar used). The possibility arises, therefore, on analogy with the practices of neighboring peoples, that the two Hebrew kingdoms, Israel and Judah, used separate and different calendars, employed different methods of reckoning their respective kings' reigns, and may even have changed calendars or methods of reckoning at one time or another. One or more of these factors may explain why the biblical figures seem to be internally inconsistent. It is hardly surprising, moreover, in view of the

confusing biblical figures and the various factors to be taken into account, that historians rarely agree on exact dates for the Israelite and Judean kings.

Other than this principle of analogy, which is basic also to the other approaches treated in this volume, there is no specific methodology for historical research. Rather, the historian might be compared to an investigative lawyer who searches out and examines whatever evidence is available and relevant to a particular case, employs whatever techniques and methods of analysis apply to the evidence (often relying on the opinion of specialists), constructs a hypothetical scenario as to what probably happened, and then presents the case for this scenario to other historians and the public. The last step is as important as the first. The leading historians who have been able to influence academic and public opinion regarding the past have not only been outstanding scholars who demonstrated amazing coverage, competence, and creativity in research, but have been able also to present their ideas in an understandable and convincing fashion. Thus history is a search for "what really happened," but it is also what the historians can convince us really happened.

The Bible as History

The opening books of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis through 2 Kings, present a narrative account of people and events that extends from creation to the end of the Judean monarchy. Another sequence of books, 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, presents an overlapping account that begins with Adam and concludes with Nehemiah's activities in Jerusalem under Persian rule. The so-called prophetic books (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, etc.) make numerous references to national and international circumstances. The first part of the book of Daniel (chapters 1–6) describes events that supposedly occurred in the Babylonian court while Daniel and other Jews were exiled there. The latter part (chapters 7–12) reports a dream-vision that organizes world history into a sequence of four great empires and anticipates the culmination of history during the fourth. The Gospel of Luke dates Jesus' birth in relation to Roman history (Luke 2:1), and all four of the gospels narrate episodes in Jesus' ministry in what the reader is left to suppose is essentially chronological sequence. The book of Acts describes the emergence of Christianity from the immediate aftermath of Jesus' crucifixion to Paul's arrival in Rome for trial. Finally, the book of Revelation reports dream-visions similar to those of the book of Daniel and also presupposing a schematic view of history.

In short, the biblical writers were very conscious of history, and the Bible itself may be looked upon as largely historical in format and content. It is not history written for the sake of history, of course, and not history of the

sort one would read in a modern history book. One might argue, in fact, that the biblical writers were more akin to contemporary theologians than to historians. Nevertheless, the theological messages that the biblical writers sought to convey are so thoroughly intermeshed with their perceptions of history that it is difficult to separate one from the other. The Bible itself, in other words, confronts us with history and raises historical questions that are difficult to ignore. It is only natural, therefore, that biblical scholarship through the ages has involved attention to historical matters.

Reflected to some degree in earlier biblical research, but becoming especially intense during the twentieth century, are differences of opinion regarding the trustworthiness and accuracy of the Bible as a source of historical information. At one extreme are those who, usually on theological grounds, insist that the Bible is literally accurate in all historical details, including the chronological data provided in Genesis–2 Kings that place the creation of the world approximately 6,000 years ago. Historical research for those who hold this extreme position involves harmonizing the information provided in different parts of the Bible—for example, the overlapping accounts of Genesis–2 Kings and 1 Chronicles–Nehemiah—and interpreting evidence from extrabiblical sources (other ancient documents and archaeology) to fit. Apparent contradictions within the Bible are viewed as being only "apparent," usually the result of the modern reader's failure to understand all of the surrounding circumstances. Conflicts between the Bible and extrabiblical sources also are explained away in one way or another.

At the opposite extreme are those who regard the biblical accounts as being so theologically and nationalistically tendentious and composed of such a hodgepodge of literary genera (myths, legends, etc.) that, except where extrabiblical sources shed some light, any attempt to reconstruct the history of ancient Israel is fruitless. This extreme is sometimes stated or implied by scholars who take essentially ahistorical approaches to the text such as structuralist, narrative, or reader-response criticisms (see especially part 3 of this volume).

However, it is very difficult to hold consistently to either of these extreme positions. The first, that of unwavering confidence in the historical accuracy of the biblical materials, is difficult to maintain in view of (1) the obvious tension between the dynamic and theocentric view of nature and history presupposed by the biblical writers and the more "scientific" or positivistic approach to reality that characterizes modern Western thought, (2) the mental gymnastics required to harmonize some of the apparent contradictions within the biblical narratives and to bring extrabiblical evidence into line, and (3) the results of close analysis of the biblical materials in accordance with source criticism, form criticism, tradition history, and other historical-critical methods.

As for the second position, that of extreme skepticism, it can hardly be doubted that there was an ancient Israel, that Israel had a history, or that the Bible is somehow relevant for understanding that history. Indeed, the very existence of the Bible, regardless of what one makes of its historical claims, is an undeniable item of historical evidence pointing to ancient Israel. It is difficult, moreover, regardless of the theory behind one's methodology, to approach an ancient document totally free of the influence of notions regarding the historical context from which it emerged. This is especially true with the Bible, which, as indicated above, is overtly attentive to history and makes such forceful historical claims. Close attention to the wording of their comments, therefore, often reveals that scholars who seem to take totally ahistorical approaches to the biblical materials nevertheless work with presuppositions regarding the history of ancient Israel that influence their overall understanding of the Bible if not their individual research.

Most biblical scholars, therefore, fall somewhere between the two extremes described above. On the one hand, they proceed with confidence that the Bible preserves authentic historical memory. On the other hand, they recognize that the Bible is not a monolithic document, that its different voices reflect different perceptions of ancient Israel's history, that these perceptions usually are heavily influenced by theological and nationalistic interests, and that some of the biblical materials were not intended to be read as literal history in the first place. The historian's task, therefore, is to separate the authentic historical memory from its highly theological and often legendary context.

Naturally, there is a wide range of views even within this middle ground between the extreme positions, with some scholars tending to place greater confidence in the historical accuracy of the biblical materials regardless of the theological, nationalistic, or legendary overtones and others tending to place less confidence in them. To see how this works out on a passage-by-passage basis, one might compare the *NIV Study Bible* (1985) with *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (1991). The commentary and explanatory notes of the former were prepared by scholars who, although not biblical literalists, tend to take the biblical accounts of Israel's past as essentially historically accurate. Those of the latter were prepared by scholars who tend to be much more cautious on the matter.

Biblical Scholarship and the Study of Ancient Israelite History

Biblical scholarship and the study of ancient Israelite history are integrally related. On the one hand, most of our information about the history of ancient Israel prior to Roman times comes from the Bible. There are, to

be sure, certain other ancient written sources and an ever increasing amount of archaeological data to be taken into account. As will become apparent below, however, these extrabiblical sources are useful primarily in that they shed light on the general cultural, social, and international circumstances of biblical times. Usually they tell us very little specifically about the people and events of Israelite history, except when interpreted in light of the biblical record. On the other hand, as observed above, analysis of biblical literature generally involves some knowledge of (or at least some notions about) the history of ancient Israel. This is particularly true insofar as the analysis is historical-critical in approach. Historical-critical analysis (including such specialized approaches as source criticism, form criticism, tradition-historical criticism, and redaction criticism) seeks to determine the historical contexts out of which the various biblical materials emerged and what changes occurred in these materials as they were transmitted from ancient times to the present. Even to speculate on such matters presupposes some knowledge of the history of biblical times.

It is not surprising, therefore, that modern histories of ancient Israel typically have been written by scholars deeply involved also in biblical research, and that their application of historical-critical methodology to the biblical materials has significantly impacted their treatments of Israelite history. This is noticeable especially when one compares histories of Israel written during the nineteenth century. H. H. Milman's *History of the Jews* (1829) represents the emerging spirit of critical biblical scholarship during the first half of the century. H. G. A. Ewald's *Geschichte des Volkes Israel bis Christus* (1843-55)¹ was based on a systematic source analysis of the Pentateuch, although not yet the classical "documentary hypothesis." While recognizing that the biblical traditions derive from a much later time than the period they describe and include imaginative elements, Ewald went to great lengths to explain that these traditions nevertheless preserve historical memory. He never clearly committed himself on what, if any, historical memory is preserved in the opening chapters of Genesis (which describe creation, the great flood, and the spread of population following the tower of Babel episode), but he regarded the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) as personifications of tribal groups. Ewald was also noncommittal regarding the specific circumstances of the exodus but believed that it was a historical event in connection with which Moses inaugurated a Hebrew monotheistic theocracy that set the direction for the future of Israelite history.

Julius Wellhausen, so closely identified with the documentary hypothesis in its classical form, spelled out the radical implications of this and other late nineteenth-century historical-critical developments in his compelling *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (1878).² Since, according to the documentary hypothesis, none of the four sources that compose the Pentateuch

predates the Israelite monarchy, neither these individual sources nor the Pentateuch as a whole is trustworthy for reconstructing history prior to that time. According to the hypothesis, moreover, the "Priestly" source, which accounts for the bulk of the narrative and legal instructions associated with Moses, actually reflects circumstances at the end of Judah's history, the time of the Babylonian exile and following. In Wellhausen's treatment of Israel's history, therefore, Moses becomes a very shadowy and virtually unknown figure, and the characteristic features of the Mosaic era as presented in the Pentateuch (monotheism, a highly developed priesthood, elaborate legal and cultic practices, etc.) are seen instead as characteristic of exilic and postexilic times.

During the present century, as other historical-critical methodologies (especially form criticism, tradition-historical criticism, and redaction criticism) have added their voices to source criticism, usually it has not been a question of whether treatments of Israelite history should presuppose a historical-critical approach to the Bible but of how much emphasis to place on the results of the analysis of the biblical literature itself as opposed to those of Palestinian archaeology or sociological models. This is illustrated by two widely used histories of Israel that were written during the 1950s and became widely influential during the 1960s and '70s—Martin Noth's *Geschichte Israels* (1950)³ and John Bright's *A History of Israel* (1959).

Noth was one of the pioneers of tradition history, published comprehensive studies of the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History,⁴ and agreed with Wellhausen's conclusion that the Pentateuchal account of Israel's origins is an artificial literary construct composed largely of legendary materials. Thus Noth's history of Israel does not treat the patriarchs as historical figures, nor does he regard the exodus from Egypt or the conquest of Canaan as historical events. Drawing instead upon the sociological theories of Max Weber, the creative ideas of his teacher Albrecht Alt, clues from his own extensive tradition-historical studies of the Pentateuch, and what he thought were close parallels between early Israelite society and that of ancient Greek and Italian tribal leagues (known as amphictyonies), Noth argued that the ancestors of Israel probably were seminomads who ranged between the desert fringe and Canaan in search of pasture until they gradually settled down and took up agriculture. In stages, for which Noth believed there are clues in the Pentateuchal traditions, these tribal settlers formed an amphictyonic cultic league. Finally, under Saul and David, there emerged the Israelite monarchy, and it was only with the expansion of this monarchy under David that it is appropriate to speak of an Israelite conquest of Canaan.

Bright, while not ignoring the implications of historical-critical analysis, was inclined to give the biblical presentation of Israel's origins the benefit of the doubt, except where it seemed in serious conflict with extrabiblical

evidence. Also, he was influenced deeply by the ideas of his teacher, W. F. Albright, who had been one of the pioneers in Palestinian archaeology and had advanced some rather appealing correlations between the biblical account of Israel's origins and archaeology. Thus Bright's *History* began with the patriarchs and followed the biblical outline fairly closely from that point on. Following Albright, he saw these as historical figures who lived approximately 2000 B.C.E. and probably were associated with Amorite movements that were believed to have been under way at the time. The exodus from Egypt occurred during the reign of Ramses II (ca. 1304–1237 B.C.E.), and the Israelite conquest of Canaan, which occurred near the close of the thirteenth century, was reflected in the pattern of city destructions that brought the Late Bronze Age to an end in Palestine.

While Noth's and Bright's histories of Israel still are widely read, the 1970s witnessed a decided shift in the discussion. This is reflected, for example, in a series of essays by an international team of scholars published under the title *Israelite and Judean History* (Hayes and Miller 1977). Before turning our attention to recent developments in this discussion, however, some observations are in order regarding epigraphy, archaeology, and sociology.

Epigraphical Evidence

In its broadest sense, epigraphy is the study of written documents recovered from ancient times. Over the past two centuries, thousands of such documents have been recovered and numerous languages deciphered from the peoples of the ancient Middle East. Among the major developments are the decipherment, beginning in 1822, of Egyptian hieroglyphic writing; the decipherment, beginning in 1846, of the cuneiform scripts of several Mesopotamian languages; the discovery in 1887, in the el-Amarna district of Egypt, of correspondence between Egypt and various Syro-Palestinian rulers during the late fifteenth–early fourteenth centuries B.C.E.; the decipherment in 1915 of royal Hittite archives discovered at Boghazköy (ancient Hattusas) in central Turkey; the discovery in 1929 at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit) on the Syrian coast of a mid-fourteenth to early twelfth-century B.C.E. archive of Canaanite documents, including mythical texts concerning the Canaanite god, Baal; the discovery, beginning in 1947, in caves along the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, of Hebrew documents from the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E., including manuscript fragments of most of the books of the Hebrew Bible; and finally, in 1975, the discovery at Tell Mardikh in Syria of royal archives of the ancient city of Ebla.

The recovery and decipherment of extrabiblical documents from the ancient Middle East understandably has had a major impact on biblical studies. The Israelites are not mentioned very often in these documents,

however, which probably is to be explained on two grounds. First, epigraphical evidence from ancient Palestine is meager compared to the extensive archives that have been discovered in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Asia Minor. Second, the Israelites rarely played a significant role in international affairs outside of Palestine, so that there was little occasion for them to be mentioned in the documents from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and so forth.

A hieroglyphic inscription from the reign of Merneptah, an Egyptian pharaoh of dynasty XIX (thirteenth century B.C.E.), provides the earliest epigraphical reference to "Israel." Unfortunately, we learn very little about Israel from this inscription, and no other such references turn up in the epigraphical sources for the next three and a half centuries, until the time of Omri and Ahab in the ninth century B.C.E. This means that none of the characters or events that appear earlier than Omri and Ahab in the biblical narrative (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the exodus from Egypt, Joshua, the conquest of Canaan, Saul, David, Solomon, etc.) are mentioned in any ancient sources outside the Bible. Another Egyptian inscription from the tenth century reports Pharaoh Sheshonk's military campaign into Palestine, an event that is mentioned also in 1 Kings 14:25–28 (where he is called Shishak). But while Sheshonk claims to have conquered some cities in Palestine, some of which presumably belonged at that time to the separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah, his inscription is conspicuously silent regarding these kingdoms.

Israel (the Northern Kingdom) seems to have enjoyed a brief period of national strength during the reigns of Omri and Ahab in the ninth century. But Assyria was beginning to expand westward during the same century and continued to grow in strength and to dominate much of the ancient Middle East for the next two centuries. Thus several kings of Israel and Judah are mentioned in the records of the Assyrian kings as having been subjugated by them or having paid tribute to them. Since these Assyrian rulers can be dated fairly securely, the points of contact between their records and the biblical account serve as valuable benchmarks for working out the chronology of the Israelite and Judean kings. With the collapse of Assyria and rise of Babylon, the Palestinian kingdoms (including Judah) that had survived Assyrian domination fell into Babylonian hands. One of the Babylonian Chronicles reports Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem in March of 597 B.C.E., and King Jehoiachin of Judah is mentioned in Babylonian lists of exiles in Babylon during Nebuchadnezzar's reign (604–561).

Of the epigraphical evidence from Palestine that pertains to the time of the Israelite and Judean monarchies, the following items are especially noteworthy. The Mesha Inscription reports the accomplishments of Mesha, king of Moab in the ninth century B.C.E. Mesha boasts that he *riḏ* Moab of Israelite

domination and identifies Omri as the Israelite king who subjected Moab in the first place. Mesha himself figures in the narrative of 2 Kings 3:4–28. The Silsam Inscription commemorates the completion of a tunnel hewed out of solid rock for the purpose of transferring water from the Gihon Spring to the Silsam Pool in Jerusalem. Most scholars associate it with Hezekiah (cf. 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:30), although no king is mentioned by name on the surviving, legible portion of the inscription. Groups of ostraca (inscribed pottery fragments) from the ruins of several ancient cities in Israel and Judah contain administrative records and military correspondence.

There are no specific references to either the province of Samaria or of Judah in surviving records of the Persian rulers (who succeeded the Babylonians as masters of Syria-Palestine in 539 B.C.E.) or of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid rulers who dominated Syria-Palestine following Alexander the Great's conquest of the East. For the period following Alexander, the writings of Josephus, a Jewish historian in the latter half of the first century C.E., become our chief source of information for Samaritan and Judean affairs. Other Greek and Roman writers add further details and perspectives on the history of Palestine following Alexander. Also, occasional papyrus and manuscript discoveries from this time are useful for historical research. Included among these are the Dead Sea Scrolls, which provide insight into a Jewish sect around the time of the emergence of Christianity in the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E.

Archaeological Evidence

Artifactual evidence—that is, material remains of the sort usually associated with archaeology (city and village ruins, architectural remains, remnants of tools, potsherds, etc.)—is to be distinguished from epigraphical evidence, even though artifacts occasionally bear written messages (ostraca, scarabs, seal impressions, etc.) and many of the epigraphical texts discussed above were discovered in the course of archaeological excavations. With systematic analysis of the artifactual evidence surviving in a given area, archaeologists can learn a great deal about the settlement patterns and lifestyles of the people who lived there in times past. Since artifactual evidence typically is nonverbal, however, it usually is neither ethnic-specific nor very useful for clarifying matters of historical detail. If the people who lived in the cities, used the tools, and produced the pottery are to be identified in terms of their ethnic identity, in other words, or if any details are to be known about specific individuals and events of their history, the artifactual record must be coordinated with and interpreted in the light of written sources. The following is an example of how this works in the case of Palestinian archaeology and Israelite history.

Palestinian archaeologists recognize the end of the thirteenth century as a time of transition between two major cultural phases—that is, the end of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1200 B.C.E.) and the beginning of the Iron Age (ca. 1200–332 B.C.E.). Among the changes that marked the transition was the appearance of numerous Early Iron Age villages in the central Palestinian hill country, an area that had been only sparsely settled during the Late Bronze Age. Nothing has been discovered in any of the early Iron Age village ruins that identifies the settlers by name. Taking into account the Meneptah Inscription, however, which places Israel on the scene in Palestine at the end of the thirteenth century, and also the biblical narratives that associate the Israelite tribes specifically with the central hill country, it makes sense to suppose that the Israelites and the Early Iron Age settlements were connected in some way.

It is not always a simple task to locate the archaeological ruins of particular cities and villages mentioned in the Bible, or, from the other direction, to identify archaeological sites in terms of their ancient names. Places like Jerusalem that have been occupied continuously since ancient times pose no problem. But for many abandoned sites whose ancient names have long since been forgotten, archaeologists must turn to the Bible and epigraphical sources for clues as to which ruins represent which ancient cities. Following are some of the cities that figure prominently in the biblical narratives and, in parentheses, the modern Arabic names of their respective ruins: Jericho (Tell es-Sultan), Ai (et-Tell), Gibeon (el-Jib), Samaria (Sebasteiyeh), Megiddo-Armageddon (Tell el-Mutesellim). When the ruins of biblical cities are excavated, naturally it is of interest to archaeologists and biblical scholars alike whether the archaeological findings corroborate the biblical record. In some cases, there seems to be a confirming fit. In other cases, there is obvious conflict. Often it is a matter of interpretation and debate. Research pertaining to the interface between biblical studies and archaeology sometimes is referred to as biblical archaeology.

Sociology

Historians necessarily work with conceptual models—hypothetical notions about how human society functions and what patterns of change tend to occur and under what circumstances. The Bible presents some very pronounced conceptual models and notions—for example, the idea that ethnic groups (Israelites, Moabites, Edomites, etc.) are extended families descended from individual male ancestors; that the direction of human history is guided by divine intervention; that Yahweh selected the Israelites as his special people and gave them the land of Canaan; and that the course of Israelite history was determined by Israel's fidelity or infidelity to Yahweh.

These notions undergird the Genesis–2 Kings narrative, which in turn has provided the basic outline for postbiblical treatments of Israel's history throughout the centuries, all the way from Josephus to Bright.

As mentioned above, the Alt-Noth reconstruction of Israel's origins and early history relied heavily on the sociological theories of Max Weber. Specifically, Weber distinguished four basic social structures in ancient Palestine (nomadic bedouin, seminomadic herders, peasant farmers, and city dwellers) and three basic types of societal authority (legal, traditional, and charismatic). The conceptual models undergirding the Alt-Noth scenario have been seriously challenged in recent years. Several studies have suggested that seminomadic herding normally exists in symbiotic relationship with a village farming economy rather than in competition with it and that seminomadic herding is more likely to have derived from sedentary agriculture in ancient Palestine than to have intruded from the desert fringe.

The most aggressive challenge to Alt and Noth argued that the early Israelite tribes did not enter Palestine from elsewhere but emerged from a revolt within the indigenous Canaanite population. This would have been a peasant uprising against the oppressive Canaanite city-states that resulted in an egalitarian tribal society. This notion of a peasant revolt also is influenced by a sociological model, specifically Marxism. The peasant revolt model was very influential from the late 1960s through the 1970s but receives little attention now. However, two aspects of this model remain influential—the idea that the early Israelite tribes emerged from the Canaanite population rather than entering the land from elsewhere and the recognition that any satisfactory explanation as to how this occurred must be well grounded in sociological research.

Recent Developments

Three major histories of Israel were published in the 1980s, all of them appearing about the same time. H. Donner's *Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen* (1984–85) falls well within the Alt-Noth tradition. J. A. Soggin, in his *A History of Ancient Israel* (1984), finds the biblical presentation of Israel's history prior to the time of David as untrustworthy for the historian's purposes. Beginning with David, however, he places considerable confidence in the biblical narrative and follows it fairly closely. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (1986) by J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes also declines any attempt to reconstruct events prior to the establishment of the monarchy. Miller and Hayes are neither as reluctant as Soggin to speculate on the sociopolitical circumstances of the Israelite tribes from which the monarchy emerged, however, nor as trusting of the biblical materials pertaining to monarchical times. Specifically, Miller and Hayes argue that:

1. The clan was probably the basic sociopolitical unit among the early Israelite tribes, with the tribes themselves being essentially territorial groupings of clans whose sense of identity and mutual kinship developed in Palestine over a period of time.
2. The name "Israel" in premonarchical times probably referred specifically to the tribe of Ephraim and certain neighboring clans/tribes, such as Benjamin and Gilead, which Ephraim dominated.
3. This Ephraim-Israel tribal domain became the core of Saul's "kingdom," which itself remained essentially tribal in character.
4. Both Saul and David began their careers as military adventurers of a sort that may not have been typical of Ephraim-Israel but for which there was precedent nevertheless—that is, Saul and David followed in the tradition of Abimelech and Jephthah, who also had organized private armies with which they provided protection to their kinfolk in return for material support and engaged in raids on surrounding peoples.
5. David succeeded in carving out a territorial state that included as its core a southern grouping of tribes dominated by Judah, the city-state of Jerusalem, and the Ephraim-Israel tribes.
6. The biblical presentation of Solomon's "empire" is largely a literary fiction. Actually, his territorial domain probably was not any larger than David's, which did not even include some parts of Palestine (such as Philistia), much less all the lands between Egypt and the Euphrates.
7. Of the two kingdoms that resulted from the split at Solomon's death, the northern kingdom—which included the old Ephraim-Israel tribal domain and took the name Israel—emerged as the more powerful. Under the Omride dynasty, in fact, Israel achieved a level of commercial strength and international prestige superior to that achieved by either David or Solomon.
8. Beginning with the Omride period, moreover, and until Israel's defeat and annexation by the Assyrians, Judah often was little more than an Israelite vassal.

In yet more recent discussion about Israel's history the following positions have emerged. Some conservative biblical scholars continue to correlate an essentially literal reading of the biblical account of the Israelite conquest of Canaan with the available epigraphical and archaeological evidence. However, Albright's solution, which called for a thirteenth-century conquest, has been largely abandoned in favor of a conquest at the end of

the fifteenth century. An opposite perspective is represented by scholars who regard the biblical materials as products almost entirely of exilic and postexilic Judaism and thus irrelevant for reconstructing the history of earlier periods. This means that we can know little about the history of earlier Israel beyond whatever information can be derived from epigraphy and archaeology and that, for all practical purposes, therefore, the history of Israel begins in the ninth century B.C.E.

Certain archaeologists have raised hopes that data from recent archaeological surveys and excavations will clarify such questions as whether the Israelites entered Palestine from elsewhere or emerged from the indigenous population, whether they were agriculturalists or pastoralists when they first settled in the hill country, and by what stages they spread throughout the land. Obviously, this new data is extremely important, but it is still inconclusive. For one thing, these archaeologists treat all of the Early Iron Age hill country settlements as Israelite and thus beg the question of what would have been meant by "Israelite" during premonarchical times and why the biblical narratives pertaining to this period distinguish between Israelite and non-Israelite villages in the hill country (cf. Judges 19:12). Also, the chief proponents of this approach have not yet reached agreement on their interpretation of the new data with respect to Israel's origins.

Yet other scholars are calling for a highly multidisciplinary approach to ancient Israelite history, involving close attention to the geographical features of Palestine, its various ecological zones, long-range settlement patterns as indicated by archaeological surveys, agricultural techniques and potentials, international trade patterns, and so on. Informed by the most up-to-date anthropological and sociological theories and models, archaeologists utilize all of this data to explain the process by which Israel came into being and gradually was transformed from tribal society into monarchy. One can only affirm the theoretical appropriateness of this approach, certainly all of the factors that these studies bring into consideration are relevant for understanding the history of ancient Israel. Perhaps their main contribution to this point, however, is that they raise new kinds of questions and warn against oversimplified answers. Thus far, in other words, it can hardly be said that this multidisciplinary approach has produced any notable breakthroughs or compelling clarifications—at least none that do not depend as much on the researcher's methodological presuppositions and working models as upon the various data compiled. An unfortunate characteristic of these studies is that they tend to use very jargonistic language—sometimes, it seems, belaboring the obvious. Also, they discuss such a wide range of factors at such an abstract and theoretical level that it is often difficult to understand what it all means with respect to the specific people and events of ancient Israel. The proponents of this approach tend to be deterministic in their social

philosophy—that is, history unfolds in predictable fashion as determined largely by environmental circumstances; individual initiative plays a minor role in the course of human affairs, and specific events are incidental items in the broad sweep of social change.

Finally, the charge is being heard from several quarters that biblical studies in general, including historical-critical methodologies and treatments of ancient Israelite history, are biased to the core and should be approached from totally different perspectives. This bias begins, so the argument goes, with the ancient written sources, which tend to be male and elitist—that is, written records normally were produced by and for the powerful in ancient times (kings, priests, etc.). Even archaeology tends to present an elitist picture, since the substantial structures of the politically powerful naturally survive in greater proportion than the humble dwellings of the lower classes. This bias in the ancient sources has only been exacerbated by religious leaders in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is charged, who usually have been men. Moreover, contemporary biblical scholarship in Western universities is decidedly Eurocentric—that is, culturally biased—in approach.

An increasing number of studies are appearing that attempt to redress the situation. Some attempt to do this by uncovering and correcting the old biases. Others, apparently liberated by the recognition of modern historians that complete objectivity is an unattainable goal anyhow, put aside even any effort in that direction and write essays on historical topics that unabashedly replace the old biases and ideologies with new ones.

Notes

1. English edition, *The History of Israel*, 3d ed. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1871-1876).
2. English edition, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973).
3. English edition, *History of Israel*, trans. Peter Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).
4. The Deuteronomistic History is a term for the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings, which scholars generally regard as originally a single work.

For Further Reading

Avi-Yonah, M. *The Holy Land, from the Persian to the Arab Conquests* (536 B.C. to A.D. 640): *A Historical Geography*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977. A well-documented summary of the political chronology and geographical boundaries of Samaria and Judea under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.

Bartlett, J. R. *Jews in the Hellenistic World*. Cambridge Commentaries on Writings of the Jewish and Christian World, 200 B.C. to A.D. 200, vol. 1, part 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. An introductory discussion of Josephus and other selected Jewish sources from the Roman period.

Bimson, J. *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*. Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1978. Taking the biblical account of Israel's exodus from Egypt and conquest of Canaan essentially at face value, Bimson seeks to demonstrate that this account is corroborated by archaeology. Read this as a balance to Van Seters's *In Search of History*. Bowersock, G. W. *Roman Arabia*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983. Although it focuses on the Transjordan, this book is especially helpful for understanding the political context of Palestine during the Roman period.

Clements, R. E., ed. *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological, and Political Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

A very useful collection of essays that explores the influence of sociology and anthropology on biblical studies in general and on the study of ancient Israelite history in particular.

Edelman, D., ed. *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact, and Israel's Past*. Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1991. Essays on historiography and archaeology as related to the study of ancient Israelite history by six contemporary scholars.

Finkelstein, I. *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988. Provides a wealth of archaeological information about the Early Iron Age settlements in the central Palestinian hill country. However, readers should be cautious of the author's underlying assumption, reflected in the title of his book, that all of these Early Iron Age settlements were Israelite.

Hayes, J. H., and J. M. Miller, eds. *Israelite and Judaeon History*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977. Reprinted London: SCM; Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1990. Essays by an international group of scholars that signaled a move away from the Albright-Bright and Altnoth approaches to Israelite history. Especially useful is the opening chapter by Hayes, which surveys approaches and trends in the study of Israelite history from ancient to modern times.

Knight, D. A., and G. M. Tucker, eds. *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*. Philadelphia: Fortress; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1985. A collection of essays that reviews scholarship pertaining to the Hebrew Bible since 1945. See especially the first three essays on "Israelite History" (J. M. Miller), "Syro-Palestinian and Biblical Archaeology" (W. G. Dever), and "The Ancient Near Eastern Environment" (J. J. M. Roberts).

Mazar, Amihai. *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000–586 B.C.E.* Anchor Bible Reference Library. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1990. An up-to-date introduction to Palestinian archaeology (with coverage from prehistoric times through most of the Iron Age), with close attention to possible connections between Palestinian archaeology and Israelite history.

Meyers, C. *Discovering Eve*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Seeks to give more adequate attention than do standard histories to the role and circumstances of women in ancient Israel. See also in this regard the collection of essays edited by P. L. Day, *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989.

Miller, J. M. *The Old Testament and the Historian*. Guides to Biblical Scholarship. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976. Discusses more fully several of the issues raised in this chapter.

Miller, J. M., and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. London: SCM; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986. A recent attempt to reconstruct the history of ancient Israel, which is concerned also to inform readers about the issues and uncertainties involved.

Pritchard, J. B., ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1955. See also the companion volume, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1954), and the supplement to both, *The Ancient Near East Supplement Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1969). Still the most widely available and easily accessible collection of translated epigraphical texts relating to the Hebrew Bible.

Rogerson, J. *Atlas of the Bible*. New York: Facts on File, 1985. Useful for getting a grasp of the physical setting in which the history of ancient Israel and Judah unfolded and from which the Bible emerged. Another good atlas, written from a more conservative perspective, is B. J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody, 1985).

Van Seters, J. *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983. An analysis of the biblical materials in comparison with other similar literature from the ancient world leading to a very skeptical view regarding its trustworthiness as a source for historical information. Read this as a balance to Bimson's *Relating the Exodus and Conquest*.

2

SOURCE CRITICISM

PAULINE A. VIVIANO

The historical-critical approach to interpretation has had a profound effect on the search for meaning in the biblical text. The new and often radical views of this century concerning the history of the biblical period and the formation of the Bible have been the direct result of the application of historical criticism to the Bible. This approach is not limited to one way of analyzing the text but employs many methods that try to answer such questions as, *Who wrote it? When and where was it written? Why was it written and to whom?* Each method has its own distinct concerns. But just as these questions are interrelated, so the concerns of the different methods overlap. The often complex answers given to these questions lead in turn to other questions dealing with multiple authorship, the variety of forms, numerous and conflicting purposes, and so on. One of the methods at the foundation of this process of questioning the text is source criticism.

Definition of Source Criticism

The historical approach presupposes that a literary work carries the imprint of the historical age in which it was produced and that the interpretation of a work is best served by situating it within its historical context and determining the intent of its author. A major difficulty in the application of the historical-critical method to the biblical text, however, is that neither authorship nor date, both essential for the method, can be ascertained readily. Indeed, complicating the issue is the fact that many books of the Bible give evidence of an extremely complex history of development, making questions of authorship and date virtually impossible to answer. Source criticism analyzes the biblical text in order to determine what sources were used in its formation. Once sources are isolated, the source critic considers issues of authorship, date, style, setting, and intent of each source. The primary focus of source criticism is the determination of