

SOME HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE BIBLICAL HISTORIAN

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Abstract

While the grammatical-historical method of interpretation, which focuses on the languages of the biblical text and its historical backgrounds to arrive at meaning, has long been the interpretive procedure of choice in many faith communities, modern methods of biblical study have tended to move away from text-historical, to text-exclusive or more reader-centered hermeneutics. Unfortunately, this trend has either basically removed history from the interpretive arena or left the field open to simplistic and sensationalistic historical explanations. Since one's view of biblical history is predicated on background matters such as conceptions of revelation, inspiration, the Bible, and even history itself, I explore these concerns first. Next, I deal with issues such as not overstating historical evidence and uniqueness, as well as the need for recognizing hyperbole, where it exists, after which I present ways that archaeology, geography, and the identification of cultural differences, are vital for a better understanding of biblical history. Finally, since the biblical text, in its current form, exhibits a long history of development and transmission, with language and scribal updates reflected therein, I submit that an honest and faithful interpretation of its historical contents, that upholds the integrity of the word of God, necessitates a balanced position that acknowledges text-critical issues, rather than ignoring or overemphasizing their existence.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, Archaeology, Geography, History, Textual Criticism, Oral Tradition, Inspiration of the Bible, Revelation

Introduction

The grammatical-historical method of interpretation, which focuses on the languages of the biblical text and its historical backgrounds to arrive at meaning,¹ has long been the basis for serious biblical exposition in faith

¹ A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 159–176.

communities which hold to a high view of Scripture. In this approach, hermeneutics (principles of interpretation) are used to arrive at the original meaning of the biblical text, which is then applied to the life of the believer today.

Modern biblical study, on the other hand, has tended to move away from a hermeneutic that focuses on the analysis of the biblical text within its historical context. One approach along these lines is “close reading” studies of Scripture, which—while they admirably pay careful attention to the literary forms and the structure of the text, focusing on patterns to develop its precise meaning and theology—tend to pay considerably less attention to history; instead placing the text “against” an assumed background, in which history ultimately takes a back seat.² In other words, the “close reading,” while text-centered, pays mere lip service to history, the original partner of the grammatical-historical method of interpretation.

On the other end of the spectrum is reader-centered hermeneutics,³ where interpreters attempt to understand the meaning of the text for their current situation, at times distorting its original intent. An example of this type of approach is reader-response criticism, which in at least some versions, assumes the unity of both the text and its reader, and allows considerable subjectivity in interpretation.⁴ Here, the historical background of the biblical text is discounted completely, as is even the text itself, in some cases. Hermeneutical approaches, such as reader-response criticism, are typically associated with the ideological proclivities of reader-oriented faith communities. Nevertheless, although they have other positive characteristics, small groups—where appeals such as: “what do you think this text means?” and “what does this passage mean to you?” are often heard—have become quite popular⁵ and suggest the extent that post-modern biblical studies have also been imbibed by the average church member, at the expense of the more in-depth approach.

While history, as yet, may have not completely met its demise, there are also other challenges to deal with in the way of questionable interpretations. In addition to interpreters with hermeneutical preferences such as those mentioned above, there is another spectrum of believers, who, although they

² Michael A. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York, NY: Schocken, 1979), xiii; J. Blake Couey and Elaine T. James, *Biblical Poetry and the Art of Close Reading* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1, 4–5. While comparison is often made to extra-biblical, ancient Near Eastern texts in this approach, the history behind these texts is, likewise, not considered.

³ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 366–371.

⁴ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 377–380.

⁵ Jim Egli and Dwight Marable, *Small Groups, Big Impact: Connecting People to God and One Another in Thriving Groups* (Lima, OH: CCS, 2014).

still appreciate and value history as the background of the biblical text, have either forgotten, or instead have chosen to ignore the time-honored hermeneutical principles for its proper use. In these faith communities, the gamut runs from (a) those who advocate a very simplistic view of history, presenting mere possibility as fact,⁶ while sometimes adopting a “my way or the highway” approach to those who disagree with their conclusions, to (b) others who advocate naïve, sensationalistic approaches,⁷ sometimes also suggesting conspiracy theories as to why the public is unaware of “the truth.”

With the emphasis of the STEM disciplines and the prominence of the Bible as Literature classes in undergraduate education, as well as seminary biblical-exegesis classes, where historical backgrounds sometimes consist exclusively of the issues of authorship, one does not have to wonder what has happened to history and, more specifically, biblical history, in modern interpretive efforts, and why both public and written accounts, and, unfortunately, even some on a so-called “professional level,” lean toward ahistorical surface meanings of the text or media-inspired sensationalism.

It is my contention that if we do not understand what the Bible meant in its original context, an endeavor which requires both grammar and history, it is questionable whether we can accurately arrive at what it means today, at least on more than its most basic level. In order to arrive at what the biblical text meant, in the current “crisis of meaning,” the role of history must not only be recalibrated back into the grammatical-historical equation, it must also be employed in a hermeneutically-responsible manner.

The following study is an attempt to move in that direction. Among the hermeneutical principles dealt with here are: 1) not overstating the evidence; 2) not overstating claims to uniqueness; 3) a proper understanding of contexts in which the biblical writers used hyperbole; 4) recognizing both the uses and limitations of archaeological evidence in understanding biblical history; 4) the importance of knowledge of the physical and historical geography of the land of the Bible when referencing places mentioned therein; 5) appreciation of cultural differences reflected in the text; and 6) ascertaining the meaning of the original text (textual criticism).

While few, if any, of the hermeneutical principles presented here are new, most of the accompanying detailed and in-depth examples are—some of which are a response to biblical-historical interpretations the author has encountered both in the classroom, as well as in other oral and written sources.

⁶ E.g., Steven Collins and Latayne C. Scott, *Discovering the City of Sodom: The Fascinating True Account of the Discovery of the Old Testament's Most Famous City* (New York, NY: Howard, 2013).

⁷ E.g., Howard Blum, *The Gold of Exodus: The Discovery of the True Mount Sinai* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

Background Issues

Any attempt to properly consider hermeneutical principles for the biblical historian requires first dealing with some prerequisite issues, such as conceptions about inspiration, revelation,⁸ the Bible, and history. As important as these issues are, balance may be even more important. As noted by Mickelsen,⁹ “The balanced interpreter is aware of all the elements that must be taken into account to interpret correctly,” and also needs to “judge the importance of each these elements.” The need for balance would also seem to suggest that one aspect, no matter how important, not be substituted for the whole, or given primary importance at the expense of the rest. The hermeneutical endeavor is “a profoundly complex interweaving of many factors.”¹⁰

The Inspiration of the Bible

God is limitless, and Scripture itself indicates several ways that He used to inspire (or influence) human instruments, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit:¹¹

While there are some sections within the Bible (e.g., Exod 20:2–17) where God’s literal discourses were recorded word for word, the view that God dictated, and the human instrument mechanically recorded (as an amanuenses), as the only or main form of inspiration is not substantiated in Scripture,¹² and is an unbalanced position, leading to the idea of biblical inerrancy, which is a restrictive view, hard to maintain from the evidence.¹³

⁸ Richard M. Davidson, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Theological Seminary, 1995), 10.

⁹ Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 375–376.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 376.

¹¹ Bernard E. Seton, “Interpretation of Biblical History, Wisdom and Poetry,” in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1974), 196–197.

¹² Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 144; Davidson, *Principles*, 17, 19.

¹³ The concept of inerrancy is not found in the Bible, cf. Richard Rice, *The Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1997), 36. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 1:19–22, likewise did not advocate biblical inerrancy. In addition, there are a few places in Scripture that potentially suggest error, see e.g., Job 42:1–9, where the discourses of Job, and particularly those of his friends, about God’s character and His operation among humans, were considered by God as “not ... *right*” (Heb. *Kwn*, firm, established, durable, lasting, permanent), hence, by implication, seemingly erroneous, which might suggest that at least parts of the speeches reflected in the book are also errone-

It also implies that God is limited, and had only one way of producing Scripture.

1. In verbal inspiration, the human instrument was verbally given information on issues and/or historical events, some of which happened long before their time (e.g., creation [Gen 1–4], the flood [Gen 6–9], patriarchal narratives [Gen 11–50]). Truth, as recorded here, was often presented in the form of historical narrative, with God’s words paraphrased.
2. In thought inspiration, God’s truth was presented in the words of the human instrument, sometimes in poetic form (e.g., Deuteronomy 32).
3. Visions and dreams reported direct audio-visual experiences, e.g., Gen 46:2–4; 28:12–14, and were often presented as a mixture of divine (or angelic) words, along with a description of the visual experience in the words of those who received these manifestations.
4. In addition, the human instrument occasionally made use of already existing sources, both verbal and/or written. While, by the use of these sources (e.g., Gen 10:1, 37:2–3; Num 21:14–15; 1 Kgs 11:41; 1 Chr 9:1; Luke 1:1–3), there is an implied lack of originality; nevertheless, originality is, apparently, not a test of inspiration. This type of inspiration was used most often in historical narrative and reflects aspects of God’s truth known or recorded earlier, but, regardless, in non-revelatory sources. The re-use of sources was also directed by the Holy Spirit, who inspired all Scripture.

Revelation

While revelation is often thought of only in terms of inscripturation (revelation in written form), it is actually more complex, being manifested in both General (through nature) and Special (supernatural self-disclosure) types, the former having two pre-sin sources: 1) within the moral and religious consciousness, and 2) without, in the works of nature (cf. Ps 19:1–6),¹⁴ with

ous; Luke 16:19–31, which, rather than being just an illustrative parable of Jesus, would seem to reflect an actual erroneous Jewish view on *hades*, at the time of Christ, cf. Josephus, *Discourse Concerning Hades*, 3–4); as well as the “spirits in prison” in 1 Pet 3:18–20, the background of which suggests the pseudepigraphical book of 1 Enoch, chaps 12–13, where Enoch was charged with delivering a divine proclamation to the watchers in prison, during the time of Noah, with Christ, in this pericope, in 1 Peter 3, functioning as the antitype of Enoch.

¹⁴ Gerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 19–22. Since mankind was made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27), in their sinless state, they had an innate (i.e., from within) knowledge of God, and on the basis of that innate knowledge of God, they could also have been led to an adequate knowledge of God through His works in nature (i.e., from without).

the latter supplementing, more specifically, what general revelation could not provide.¹⁵ With the entrance of sin, general (natural) revelation no longer, by itself, gave an adequate conception of God. Mankind's innate moral and religious sense of God became blunted by the noetic effects of sin on the mind. Nature from without became corrupted and subject to distortion and error. Special revelation was needed to fill the gap. It alone could bring equilibrium and normalcy to man's knowledge of God. It corrects man's faulty perceptions due to sin. Following the advent of sin, special revelation became redemptive in nature,¹⁶ its content including: sin, death, and a knowledge of God's covenant promises (Gen 3:15–17; 4:1), which assure mankind that God still loves His creation and that through His seed, salvation would come, with sacrifice (Gen 3:21; 4:4–5) intimately connected with this future reality.

Oral Tradition

As noted above, not all special revelation was in written form. Modern Westerners, in general, tend to view the content of the Bible only in terms of its writings, collected altogether in a single place, with which they are intimately connected. However, in terms of ancient times, that was not the case. The content of both pre-redemptive (Gen 2:16–17), and post-sin special revelation (Gen 3:14–15, 21;4:5), was oral,¹⁷ and came down orally from generation to generation, throughout the pre-Flood era, then being passed on to post-Flood peoples by the few individuals who survived the deluge (Gen 3:21; 4:4; 7:2, 8; 8:20; 12:7–8; Lev 11). The content of special revelation during the patriarchal period up to the time of Moses, which, in addition to what had already previously been known, was also oral, having been passed

¹⁵ The content of the pre-redemptive special revelation included: everything was created by God (Gen 1), the Sabbath (Gen 2:1–3), that God wants a relationship with his creation (Gen 1–2), eternal life, as represented by the tree of life (Gen 2:9), a period of probation, as represented by the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:9, 16–17), with the possibilities of temptation and death (Gen 2:16–17).

¹⁶ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 161.

¹⁷ The form-critical perspective of oral tradition assumes that nearly all ancient cultures had an accumulation of oral folklore a considerable time before they developed writing. In addition, these oral traditions developed in a fluid state, mutating, and ultimately appearing in a considerably different form than their original appearance, when they were finally recorded, cf. Gene M. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1971), 7–8. However, evidence from the cultures of the ancient Near East, especially those with a Semitic background, would seem to indicate that their literary output, including the biblical literature, “had a short oral prehistory, and were transmitted conservatively,” cf. Bruce K. Waltke, “Oral Tradition,” in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer: Essays on the Old Testament*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser and Ronald F. Youngblood (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1986), 17–43.

on to later generations (see above), included an increased emphasis on substitutionary sacrifice (Gen 22), the covenant now promising a future nation through the descendants of Abraham, the sinner reckoned righteous on the basis of faith in God's promises (Gen 15:6), and obedience to some oral, pre-Mosaic law (Gen 26:5).

Even with the advent of written revelation,¹⁸ starting with Moses, God's word was initially given, and usually at first presented orally (cf. Gen 49:1; Exod 6:6; Num 24:13–14; Deut 1:3; 4:5, 14; 5:30–31; 6:1). Later, after being written down, the available copies of individual manuscript scrolls¹⁹ were no doubt few, being housed with priests at the tabernacle (later the temple), and other sacred spaces. During the pre-exilic period, divine author-

¹⁸ Instead of the cuneiform of Canaanite-Akkadian, a hybrid dialect of Old Babylonian, such as in the Amarna Letters, cf. Anson F. Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna Based on Collations of All Extant Tablets* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 10–14, or the hieroglyphics of Middle Egyptian, cf. Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, UK: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1982), 1; the Bible was written in a Semitic alphabet, developed during the early second millennium BCE, cf. Christopher A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 11–16; known as Proto-Canaanite (or Proto-Sinaitic), which has been found at Wadi el-Hól, in Egypt, cf. John C. Darnell, F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, Marilyn Lundberg, P. Kyle McCarter, and Bruce Zuckerman, *Two Early Alphabet Inscriptions from Wadi el-Hól: New Evidence for the Origin of the Alphabet from the Western Desert of Egypt*, AASOR 59 (Boston, MA: Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005); in Palestine, at Gezer, Shechem, and Lachish, among other sites, during the Middle Bronze Age, cf. Benjamin Sass, *The Genesis of the Alphabet and Its Development in the Second Millennium B.C.*, ÄAT 13 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988), 53–81; and in the region of Serabit el-khadem, in Sinai, cf. William M. F. Petrie, *Researches in Sinai* (London: John Murry, 1906), Alan Gardiner, "The Egyptian Origin of the Semitic Alphabet," *JEA* 3 (1916): 1–16; and William F. Albright, *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions and Their Decipherment*, HTS 22 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); in proximity to where Moses spent much of his life, first as a nomadic shepherd, and later as God's appointed leader of the children of Israel, during their wanderings there.

¹⁹ It should be pointed out that the dominant form of ancient manuscripts (books) was the individual scroll, made of papyrus, leather, or vellum. The advent of the folded-parchment, bound-page codex, in the first century CE, or slightly earlier, forms the background to modern books. Early Christians preferred the codex and popularized its use, but scrolls continued to be used throughout the Greco-Roman world until the sixth century CE, when they were completely replaced by the codex, cf. Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 9–10; Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 75–76.

ity, which was based on the, by this time, written Law (Torah), functioned primarily, but not exclusively, through the orally based, or spoken, prophetic tradition (2 Sam 7:5–17; Isa 38:4–5; Jer 1:13, 16–17), which pointed back to it.²⁰ It would seem that it was not until toward the end of the post-exilic period, during the time of Nehemiah (cf. 8:1), that divine authority shifted from a predominately orally based delivery to a focus on the written word of God.²¹ Later, during New Testament-period times, even with perhaps a greater number and availability of scribes and scribal schools, it would seem, that copies were still relatively few, available only at the Temple and with rabbis at synagogues, although it is possible that a few could also be found among affluent, mostly priestly, families who had the means of obtaining their own copies.

What is the Bible?

The “word of God” is God’s word, being an inextricable union of the human and divine, just as Jesus Himself; and the incarnate word of God and the written Word, are inseparably bound together, although in different ways.²²

²⁰ This is as opposed to the literary-critical approach which views the book of Amos as the earliest written document of the Hebrew Bible. This book and those of other early writing prophets, such as Hosea, are thought to have been composed at or shortly after the time when the so-called “J” and “E” source documents, thought to be behind the Pentateuch, were being compiled. This position, therefore, suggests that the Prophets came before, not after, the Law, cf. Samuel R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1972), 123, 316–318. See Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1974), 319–320, for arguments against this position, such as the book of Amos, also reflecting material from the so-called “D” and “P” sources, both supposedly written somewhat later. The Jahwist (J), Elohist (E), Deuteronomist (D), and the Priestly (P) sources refer to four hypothetical documents of the so-called documentary hypothesis; a theory that suggests that the Pentateuch is actually a compilation of four originally independent documents. This theory was popularized in the 1880s by Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Edinburgh, UK: Black, 1885), but is still a widely accepted view on the development of the Pentateuch, cf. Richard E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed: A New View into the Five Books of Moses* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2003).

²¹ Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*, SBLMS 36 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 41, 106–109; cf. Christie Goulart Chadwick, *Nehemiah* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, forthcoming). It should not be thought from these remarks that we are suggesting that there was no writing or preservation of divine revelation on scrolls until the post-exilic period. Rather, despite the existence and use of scrolls as a means of recording God’s Word, revelation continued to be predominately orally-oriented until the post-exilic period, at which time writing became the new primary medium.

²² Davidson, *Principles*, 17–18. However, Warfield, is correct, although not in

The Bible is God's word because God's words are in it, even though not all of the words were directly His, Scripture being both a divine and human product. At the same time, as mentioned above, the Bible originally consisted, not as a whole, as we have it today, but as orally delivered messages, progressively written down on individual scrolls. And while God, in His omnipotence, superintended things, sinful humans had a part in the production and preservation of these scrolls over a period of time, from ca. the mid-fifteenth century BCE to the early second century CE. In addition, while the final written form of some of these scrolls, such as Obadiah, Haggai, and Philemon, may have come about in a relatively short period of time, others such as Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Jeremiah, went through various stages and took considerably longer.

The stages of the composition of such scrolls²³ include: 1) an individual revelation being passed from God to the human author in oral form, 2) followed by its communication to God's people, also orally, 3) after which, at some point, the author (or their scribe) transcribed, in written form, the individual revelatory event, 4) with a narrative statement later attached to that transcription, 5) after which, the narrative and transcription were eventually compiled, together with transcriptions of other individual revelatory events, which 6) were later edited, organized, and arranged, sometimes with additional material from non-revelatory ancient sources (e.g., "is it not written in the book of Jashar?" Josh 10:13), in a literary structure, or multiple structures, often stitched together with summary statements, with 7) the complete work, finally given a name, which in Hebrew was often either its first or second word, or first major concept within the first few words.

As ancient scrolls were made out of perishable materials, additional scribal activities were called for as soon as a new copy became necessary. Changing times and circumstances required explanatory glosses (e.g., "he who is called a prophet now was formerly called a seer," in 1 Sam 9:9), name updates (e.g., Laish changed to Dan, in Gen 14:14), and summary statements (e.g., "the Jebusites live . . . in Jerusalem until this day," in Josh 15:63), in order to keep the material relevant for later readers. As time passed, the form of the language was also updated (from archaic, to classical to post-classical Hebrew)²⁴ and script

all of the reasons he presents, that this analogy can be taken too far, in that "in both cases Divine and human factors are involved, though very differently" (*Inspiration and Authority*, 162). In one case, there is the union of the divine and human in the person of Jesus, while in the other there is a cooperation between the human and divine in the production of Scripture.

²³ Daniel I. Block, *The Triumph of Grace: Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomical Themes* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 37–45.

²⁴ See Joseph Lam and Dennis Pardee, "Standard/Classical Biblical Hebrew," in *A Handbook of Biblical Hebrew*, vol. 1, ed. W. Randall Garr and Steven E. Fassberg,

changes (from Hebrew to Aramaic) also became necessary. Scribal activities also included copying errors and deliberate alterations.²⁵ Scribal schools were formed, some with their preferred and possibly sometimes tendential readings. With the exile of the Hebrews in the late eighth-early sixth centuries BCE, biblical scrolls were brought into diaspora communities, in Babylon and Egypt, and along with those which remained in the land of Israel, were developed in isolation or semi-isolation, into divergent types (or groups) of MSS,²⁶ some of which were later translated into Greek (Egyptian LXX-type) and, even later, into Aramaic (Targums), Latin, and Syriac, all part of a long reception history,²⁷

(Winona Lake, IN, Eisenbrauns, 2016), 1–18; Agustinus Gianto, “Archaic Biblical Hebrew,” in *ibid.*, 19–29; Matthew Morgenstern, “Late Biblical Hebrew,” *ibid.*, 43–54. Archaic Biblical Hebrew is reflected in the poetic parts of the Pentateuch, early prophets and some of the Psalms; Standard/Classical is reflected in the prose parts of the Pentateuch, the Prophets and portions of the Writings, e.g., Ruth, Lamentations, Songs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes; and Late or Post-Classical Biblical Hebrew is reflected in comparatively late compositions in the Writings, with Aramaic or Aramaisms, e.g., Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah and 1–2 Chronicles. Despite the apparent unity within Biblical Hebrew, “distinctive linguistic innovations have left their mark on the development of the language.” These changes did not appear all at once. It should be noted that if the HB was written when modern revisionists say it was, more or less at the same time, during the Persian, Hellenistic, or Roman period, it would only reflect the third (post-classical) period of ancient Biblical Hebrew, not all three, as reflected in reality, suggesting the flaws of this postmodern position, cf. Avi Hurvits, “How Biblical Hebrew Changed,” *BAR* 42.5 (2016): 40.

²⁵ On textual or lower criticism, “the science of determining as close as possible what the original author wrote,” cf. Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 14–16; Davidson, *Principles*, 35–36. Ellen G. White also noted scribal activities in Scripture: “I saw that God had especially guarded the Bible; yet when copies of it were few, learned men had in some instances changed the words, thinking that they were making it more plain, when in reality they were mystifying that which was plain, by causing it to lean to their established views, which were governed by tradition. But I saw that the word of God, as a whole, is a perfect chain, one portion linking into and explaining another. True seekers for the truth need not err; for not only is the word of God plain and simple in declaring the way of life, but the Holy Spirit is given as a guide in understanding the way to life revealed” (*Early Writings* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945], 220–221).

²⁶ Frank M. Cross, “The Contribution of the Qumran Discoveries to the Study of the Biblical Text,” *IEJ* 16 (1966): 81–95; Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Textual Study of the Bible – A New Outlook,” in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text*, ed. Frank M. Cross and Shemaryahu Talmon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975): 321–400; and Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), 107–111, 158–160.

²⁷ This indicates how the biblical text has been acquired, changed, transmitted, and translated, and its stories told, retold, and reworked, throughout the ages, in various communities. For a scholarly collection and discourse on this material, cf.

which continues in various forms to the present. Over time, these books, and their NT counterparts, were gradually accepted as authoritative canon,²⁸ and have been continually interpreted²⁹ in diverse ways by various faith communities.

Hans-Josef Klauck, Constance Furey, Brian Matz, Steven L. McKenzie, Thomas Römer, Jens Schröter, Barry Dov Walfish, and Eric Ziolkowski, eds. *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, 30 projected vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009-).

²⁸ Such NT passages as Mark 7:12 and Luke 24:44, as well as Josephus (*Ag. Ap.* 1.38–41) suggest an early two-fold (Law and Prophets) if not three-fold (Law, Prophets, and Writings) division of 22 authoritative books. Of these, some contemporary religious communities, such as the Samaritans and, arguably, the Sadducees (Origen, *Cels.* 1.49), accepted only the Law as valid. By at least the fourth century AD, early Christian communities had accepted the Hebrew Canon (cf. Melito of Sardis, Origen, cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.12–14, 6.25.1–2; and Athanasius, *Ep. Fest.* 39), but in their codices, placed the Greek translations of these books in various arrangements, with some additional books (LXX^{MB}, Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion). Already in the NT, passages such as 2 Pet 3:15–16 seem to give Paul's epistles the status of Scripture. Athanasius' Festal Letter 39 of 367 CE is the first source that lists the twenty seven NT books as canon. Canon 60, probably a later addition to the Council of Laodicea, in 363 CE, cf. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace, eds., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 14 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 158–160, closely follows Athanasius, but leaves out the book of Revelation. As with the OT canon, various faith communities, such as the Marcionites (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.13.1–14.4), accepted only a fraction of these books. On the long and complicated history and issues related to the canonicity of Scripture, both OT and NT, cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988); and Craig G. Bartholomew, Scott Hahn, Robin Parry, Christopher Seitz and Al Wolters, eds., *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 7 of *Scripture and Hermeneutics Series*, eds. Craig G. Bartholomew and Anthony C. Thiselton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

²⁹ In Judaism, early Rabbinic exegesis is preserved in the tannaitic texts in the Mishnah (ca. 10–200 CE), which traces its roots to the Zugot era (ca. 170 BCE to 30 CE), consisting of five successive pairs of religious teachers, ending with Hillel and Shammai, who as teachers (Tannaim), formed two separate schools with distinct interpretations of Jewish law, cf. Martin D. Goodman, *A History of Judaism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 160–170. Its supplement, the Tosefta, was compiled ca. 189 CE. Some early midrash, sometimes consisting of commentaries on biblical books such as Sifra (on Leviticus) and Sifre (on Numbers and Deuteronomy), also date to the period, prior to 200 CE. Later Rabbinic interpretation is beyond the purview of this paper. In the early (2nd–5th) centuries of the Christian era, there were two ancient schools of biblical interpretation. One of these was the literal school, located in Antioch, Syria. It tended to insist on historical reality, finding meaning through grammatical studies, and consisted of such well-known figures as Theophilus, John Chrysostom, Diodores of Tarsus, and Theodore of Mopsuestia, cf. Robert M. Grant and David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 63–72. Its rival was the Allegorical School, located in Alexandria, Egypt. In this tradition, the literal, plain meaning of the text

The current form of the NT is based on Greek codices of the fourth and fifth centuries CE. The current Hebrew Bible is based on complete, or formerly complete, vowel-pointed, tenth and eleventh centuries CE MSS, following a long, several-hundred-year, conservative tradition of Masoretic scribal activities, yielding very little textual corruption,³⁰ ultimately resulting in the text becoming frozen³¹ in its present form. Later, chapters and smaller units were added to these collections³² for ease of reference.

was reinterpreted allegorically if it contradicted common, contemporary thought, so was thus relegated in importance to its allegorical (spiritual) sense. Common in both Jewish and Christian circles, major figures of this school of interpretation included Philo, Clement, and Origen. This school eventually eclipsed the Antiochene school, becoming the method of interpretation of the ancient church, cf. Grant and Tracy, *A Short History*, 52–62; see also Henning G. Reventlow, *From the Old Testament to Origen*, vol. 1 of *History of Biblical Interpretation*, trans. Leo G. Perdue (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); and idem., *From Late Antiquity to the End of the Middle Ages*, vol. 2 of *History of Biblical Interpretation*, trans. James O. Duke (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009). The later Reformation (Grammatical-Historical) and Renaissance (Historical-Critical) schools of interpretation, both of which still exist, and are used to the present, will be dealt with in more detail below. On these periods of interpretation, cf. idem., *Renaissance, Reformation, Humanism* vol. 3 of *History of Biblical Interpretation*, trans. James O. Duke (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010); and *From the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century*, vol. 4 of *History of Biblical Interpretation*, trans. Leo G. Perdue (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

³⁰ Paul D. Wegner, “Current Trends in Old Testament Textual Criticism,” *BBR* 23 (2013): 461–480.

³¹ This was the result of a conscious effort to keep the text in its then current form, allowing only exact copies, with no more scribal accretions. Prior to the destruction of the Temple, in 70 CE, communities such as Qumran, who used a plurality of texts, coexisted with the Temple court, where the proto-MT was the preferred text tradition. It was only a “historical coincidence” that the proto-MT “became the accepted text” at a time when the preferences of its sponsoring group were either “embraced by all Israel or imposed upon them,” cf. Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 174–190.

³² While, historically, there were some content breaks in earlier MSS, it was not until ca. 1227 that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, placed chapter divisions in the entire Bible (both OT and NT), with the Wycliffe English Bible of 1382 the first Bible to use this pattern. In ca. 1440, Rabbi Nathan divided the HB into verses, with Robert Estienne (Stephanus) dividing the NT into verses in 1551, for the most part using Rabbi Nathan’s divisions for the OT (hence the differences between the HB and the OT). Starting with the Geneva Bible of 1599, his model has been used in most Bibles ever since, cf. George F. Moore, “The Vulgate Chapters and Verses in the Hebrew Bible,” *JBL* 12 (1893): 73–78; Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 49; and Bruce Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Origin, Transmission and Limitations* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Thus, it can be seen that, while the individual biblical books were indeed written by their original authors, relatively few named, not every word, as it appears in their current form, can be attributed to them. Such things as the occasional use of sources, explanatory glosses, summary statements, and updates of names and language, as well as scribal errors and intentional alterations, all indicate a long history of development and transmission of the text. While these types of scribal activities do not erode divine inspiration of the original text or its authors, it is nevertheless necessary for the modern interpreter to take them in account when interpreting Scripture.³³

What is History?

It is generally recognized that the Bible contains historical material, and that a major emphasis of grammatical-historical interpretation is on the determination of the time, place, and circumstances of the authors of the biblical documents.³⁴ Unfortunately, the exact meaning of history and its application in Scripture has been the center of debate since the nineteenth century.

During the Enlightenment, Newtonian physics had envisaged things in cause-and-effect relationships. This proposition soon led to its application in other areas of knowledge.³⁵ Moving beyond the Empiricist view that experience (observation) was the most trustworthy, but not necessarily, the only source of knowledge, Auguste Comte (1798–1857) developed the epistemological philosophy of Positivism (between 1830–1842), which claimed that the only authentic knowledge is scientific, and that this knowledge could only be based on directly-observable phenomena (empirical examination of life to verify or establish positive facts, or knowledge), also denying any form of metaphysics (reality, or existence, beyond what is perceptible to the senses, outside the objective experience, including the supernatural).³⁶ About the same time, the German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) advocated

³³ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 129–137; Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 14–16; Gerhard F. Hasel, “General Principles of Interpretation,” in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1974), 170–171; Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1985), 105; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 42–47; Davidson, *Principles*, 35–36.

³⁴ On the grammatical-historical method of interpretation, which focuses on the languages of the biblical text and its historical backgrounds to arrive at the meaning, cf. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 173, 203–205, 231–242; Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 159–176.

³⁵ Ronald A. Wells, *History Through the Eyes of Faith* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1989), 120, 127–130.

³⁶ Wells, *History*, 196–197, cf. Iain W. Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 22.

viewing things realistically by examining “the facts” and submitting them in an objective way, without bias and presupposition. The historian’s task was thought to be identical to that of science, allowing the facts (understood to be merely “out there”) to have their own voice, thus permitting the formation of judgments about them afterwards.³⁷ As a discipline, history became a mere theoretical undertaking. Positivism was soon brought up against the Neo-Platonist Idealism of the time, which was viewed as only another traditional perspective of the order of the world that was unable to be demonstrated inductively.³⁸

Applied to the Bible, the traditional view of the text was seen to be idealistic and prejudiced. Since its contents cannot be demonstrated inductively (and hence not considered probable, being based on faith), they were rejected on a scientific basis. The positivistic reconstruction of biblical history is deterministic, emphasizing general, analogous, and predictable phenomena; the “forces of history” not unique (Supernatural) or idiosyncratic (within the space-time continuum). History and tradition were now thought to be only tangentially related. History might be behind tradition (the biblical text), but it was assumed to be distorted in its present form. The goal of the historian was hence to reconstruct the past “as it actually happened,” as opposed to the traditional claims of the text. History (as the study of actual past events) became a reconstruction of what might have happened, or a mere story (tale) with a possible historical kernel.³⁹

An essay by Ernst Troeltsch, in 1889, formulated the principles of the historical-critical method, which consists of: 1) criticism (methodological doubt), 2) analogy (experience and probability), and 3) correlation (mutual interdependence or a closed continuum of cause and effect), which ultimately excludes the supernatural.⁴⁰ These principles are all based on doctrines of the enlightenment and early post-enlightenment, with biblical historians defining their task and methodology along these lines ever since.⁴¹

While we cannot agree with the higher-critical approach to the study of Scripture due to its anti-supernatural bias, its ultimate aim was, nevertheless:

³⁷ For additional information, cf. Friedrich Jaeger and Jörn Rüsen, *Geschichte des Historismus: Eine Einführung* (München: Beck, 1992).

³⁸ Provan, Long, and Longman, *Biblical History*, 21–22.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

⁴⁰ Edgar Krentz, *The Historical Critical Method* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 55–61.

⁴¹ J. Maxwell Miller, *The Old Testament and the Historian* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1976), 11–19; Mark Elliott, and Paul V. M. Flesher, “Introduction to the Old Testament and Its Character as Historical Evidence,” in *The Old Testament in Archaeology and History*, ed. Jennie Ebling, J. Edward Wright, Mark Elliott, and Paul V. M. Flesher (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 62–80.

1) to recover actual historical events from the biblical texts, and 2) to reevaluate theological interpretations by doing exegesis. Hence, there was a basic recognition that the Bible was at least fundamentally historical. In Europe, and the US, to a certain extent, this approach is now passé, being replaced by a revisionist literary-critical approach that views the HB as literature only, its theological reflections based on a later, not “historical Israel,” if one even existed. This “Israel” is seen as merely an intellectual construct, placed over an “imagined past” based on hundreds of years of thought by Jews and Christians.⁴² As such, it has become fashionable for postmodern scholars to view biblical history as “not historical in any modern sense of the word, . . . not accounts ‘of what really happened,’ but stories that only offer a religious explanation,”⁴³ or as cultural memory (memnohistory) that is not true historically, but rather recalls or recreates “a past that is relevant for the present,” functioning as the underpinning for collective identity and values, a fusion of past and present.⁴⁴

Yet another perspective, unconnected with postmodern views above, is that the Bible is not necessarily needed to write a history of Israel, at least for events during the late Iron Age, but can be accomplished, completely, or at least primarily, on archaeological discoveries.⁴⁵

It is my contention that if any or all of the above definitions or descriptions of history are what is recorded in the biblical text, then there can be no open-minded understanding of biblical history. Rather, history, both biblical and secular, is actually based on testimony, in story form, without which

⁴² Iain W. Provan, “Ideologies, Literal and Critical: Reflections on Recent Writing on the History of Israel,” *JBL* 114 (1995): 585–606; William G. Dever, “Archaeology, Ideology, and the Quest for an ‘Ancient’ or ‘Biblical’ Israel,” *NEA* 61 (1998): 40–42; idem., *What Did the Bible Writers Know, and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us About the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 4, 7, 10–12, 15, 25–27, 32, 45, 47, 52; Andrew G. Vaughn, “Can We Write a History of Israel Today?” in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 368–385.

⁴³ Mark Elliott, and J. Edward Wright, “The Book of Genesis and Israel’s Ancestral Traditions,” in *Old Testament in Archaeology and History*, 213.

⁴⁴ Ronald S. Hendel, “Culture, Memory and History: Reflections on Method in Biblical Studies,” in *Historical Biblical Archaeology and the Future: The New Pragmatism*, ed. Thomas E. Levy (London: Equinox, 2010), 254–257; Jens B. Kofoed, “The Old Testament as Cultural Memory,” in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?: A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 303–323; Mark Elliott, Paul V. M. Flesher and J. Edward Wright, “Israel in and out of Egypt,” *Old Testament in Archaeology and History*, 271–272.

⁴⁵ William G. Dever, *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017), 1–36.

there is no objective knowledge about the past. In history, that testimony, or data in the modern sense, far from being a list of mere facts, is presented in narrative (or sometimes poetical) form, with its literary and artistic elements not detracting from reporting the past accurately. These elements are actually ways of communicating effectively. Ultimately, eyewitness accounts are essentially no better than those produced after the fact, as it has been found that traditional, non-literate societies exhibit strict controls over transmitting oral testimony, with “testimonial chains” proven accurate and unbroken for generations. While verification of history is difficult, if not impossible, it is reasonable belief that is important, rather than proof, considered innocent unless shown to be otherwise, as in a modern court of law.⁴⁶

At the same time, the biblical authors did not really write like modern historians.⁴⁷ The Bible might more accurately be seen as a book of redemptive

⁴⁶ Provan, Long, and Longman, *Biblical History*, 37–70.

⁴⁷ As can be inferred from the above discussion, the modern historian writes from a historical-critical perspective, which is based on two types of criticism: 1) on the literature itself (lower or textual criticism), based on philology, and 2) higher criticism, which is a critique of the actions, views, and understandings of peoples who lived in the past, based on a scientific perspective thought to yield “true insights into human nature.” Cf. Paul Schubert, “The Twentieth-Century West and the Ancient Near East,” in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Robert C. Dentan, American Oriental Series 38 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press/American Oriental Society, 1955), 318–319. While faith communities, who hold to a high view of Scripture, have since ancient times (cf. e.g., Origen’s Hexapla, ca. 240 CE and its seventh century translation, into Syriac), legitimately used lower or textual criticism, its use also advocated in this present paper as part of the grammatical-historical method of interpretation of Scripture, the use of higher criticism, involving an anti-supernatural hermeneutic imposed from outside of Scripture, which has produced its own philosophy of history, by substituting evolution for creation, the religious consciousness of mankind for Jesus, a humanized eschatology of gradual progress for the second advent of Christ, and the life force (élan vital) for the Holy Spirit (cf. Schubert, “Twentieth-Century,” 317), cannot legitimately be expected to arrive at the original meaning of the biblical text, much less its appropriate application for modern readers.

History in ancient Israel was event-oriented, grounded in divine choice, and based on the acts of God in its history (G. Ernest Wright, *The God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* [Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1952]), but just as important is its overall place in the history of the world (cf. Millar Burrows, “Ancient Israel,” in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near*, 111–112). The exodus, involving deliverance from bondage in Egypt, and their election as a people, was the pivotal divine act in Israel’s history (Burrows, “Ancient Israel,” 111; cf. James K. Hoffmeier, “‘These Things Happened’: Why a Historical Exodus is Essential for Theology,” in *Do Historical Matters*, 128–132). Yahweh chose the people He delivered, binding them to Himself through a covenant (Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 109–114). The theme of Israel’s exodus, their wanderings in the wilderness, and their movement toward the Promised Land, so prominent in the Pentateuch, runs well beyond it. While its initial fulfillment is found

history, in which its authors selectively chose stories that best illustrated the relationship between God and His people, and their relationship with those peoples who lived around them. And while generally placed in a continuous, but not always direct chronological sequence, the Bible is not a complete history, leaving out many details, of which its more reflective readers, ever since, would have liked to have obtained.

Due to the lack of detail, there are limitations on what the biblical historian can say about ancient times, and it is just as obvious that an exact reconstruction of what actually happened is impossible. The reality of archaeological and historical research is such that we are dealing with broken traditions of people long dead, and of which the researcher has, at best, only a remnant of the actual data needed for a more complete historical reconstruction in the modern sense. Furthermore, we are left with only empirical elements (arrived at from experience) from which to make inferences, and these inferences are based on degrees of probability, or various levels of evidence, running from least to greatest: possibility, plausibility, probability, and fact. While, as people of the Book, it seems reasonable for us to use faith to bridge the gap of knowledge, faith is nevertheless “beyond the boundaries and capabilities of historical research.”⁴⁸ Although an absolute understanding of reality requires more than

in the book of Joshua, it is not completely met through much of the early prophets. The theme is rehearsed in the Psalms and in the prophetic books, and recited at annual festivals, where it was recalled, perhaps re-enacted, and “made real and present to the worshipers,” (Wright, *The God Who Acts*, 38; cf. Burrows, “Ancient Israel,” 112). The potential loss and renewal of the land is threatened through much of the books of Kings and a number of the writing prophets, with its actual loss in the eight to sixth centuries BCE, and partial renewal, in the south, following the exile (Ezra-Nehemiah). Rehearsed again in the book of Acts in terms of Spiritual Israel, the full implications of the theme and its consummation is still being looked for in the book of Hebrews (4:8–11), toward the end of the NT, with its ultimate fulfillment in the new earth (Rev 21–22), when the wanderers finally reach a land which is indeed their own. From “center to periphery,” the religion of Israel took the form of a theology of history, cf. Schubert, “Twentieth-Century,” 343. On the *sense*, rather than *idea*, of history of the ancient mythological cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia (Ibid., 339), cf. Ludlow Bull, “Ancient Egypt,” and Ephraim A. Speiser, “Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, 1–34, and 35–76 (respectively).

⁴⁸ Bill T. Arnold, “The Genesis Narratives,” in *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 24–25. While it might appear that there is a yielding of ground to the historical-critical position here, on the contrary, it would seem that faith is actually an unspoken factor, in every position, for filling in gaps of knowledge. For example, to the person who has given it little thought, it still takes faith in a currently unseen “creator” to believe that the chair they sit on will actually bear their weight. To the atheist, it takes faith that they have empirically seen enough of the world, that they may “safely” rule God out of any reckoning. To the well-educated scientist, it

empirical data, the definite concepts or elements that are needed to complete the picture remain lacking due to the broken chain of tradition with the ancients, which the discipline of archaeology can only partially reconstruct, thus rendering a total understanding hidden, unrestorable, and unsolvable, in a finite world. Finite human beings are incapable of complete certainty of the now missing historical details, of which only omniscience can supply.⁴⁹

Hermeneutical Principles for the Biblical Historian

On the basis of the above limitations, it would seem that a primary hermeneutic for the historical backgrounds of the Bible is not to overstate the evidence. For example, when dealing with the exodus, the only established, indisputable, historical *fact* is that the 18th-Dynasty Pharaohs reigned in Egypt from the sixteenth through the fourteenth centuries BCE. There are multiple lines of evidence, including contemporary reliefs and monuments, astronomical observations, and chronological synchronisms with other ancient peoples, that substantiate this dating,⁵⁰ which is generally agreed upon by scholars. While the Bible (in 1 Kgs 6:1) also places the exodus at this time, there are other interpretations of this datum, rendering it empiri-

takes faith to believe in a specific date for the half-life of long-lived elements, where the shorter lifespan of the investigator precludes empirical verification.

⁴⁹ Lacking a transposition where the researcher can be drawn into another historical time, perhaps by entering through a picture (Narnia-like, as in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*), cf. C. S. Lewis, "Transposition," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1980), 70, we are left with only empirical data from which to work.

⁵⁰ Edward F. Wente and Charles C. Van Siclen, "A Chronology of the New Kingdom," in *Studies in Honor of George R. Hughes*, SAOC 39, ed. Janet H. Johnson and Edward F. Wente (Chicago, IL: The Oriental Institute, 1976), 217–261. Cf. the recent Carbon 14 analyses now supporting the high chronology such as: Christopher Bronk Ramsey, Michael Dee, J. M. Rowland, Thomas F. G. Higham, S. A. Harris, F. A. Brock, A. Quiles, Eva Maria Wild, E. S. Marcus, and A. J. Shortland, "Radiocarbon-based Chronology for Dynastic Egypt," *Science* 328 (2010): 1554–1557; Walter Kutschera, Manfred Bietak, Eva Maria Wild, Christopher Bronk Ramsey, Michael Dee, Robin Golser, Karin Kopetzky, Peter Stadler, Peter Steier, Ursula Thanheiser, and Franz Weninger "The Chronology of Tell el-Dab'a: A Crucial Meeting Point of ¹⁴C Dating, Archaeology, and Egyptology in the 2nd Millennium BC.," *Radiocarbon* 54 (2012): 407–422; Felix Höflmayer, Jens Kamlah, Hélène Sadler, Michael W. Dee, Walter Kutschera, Eva Maria Wild, and Simeone Riehl, "New Evidence for Middle Bronze Age Chronology and Synchronisms in the Levant: Radiocarbon Dates from Tell el-Burak, Tell el-Dab'a, and Tel Ifshar Compared," *BASOR* 375 (2016): 53–76; Stuart W. Manning, "Events, Episodes and History: Chronology and Resolution of Historical Processes," in *An Age of Experiment: Classical Archaeology Transformed (1976–2014)*, ed. Lisa Nevett and James Whitley (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 119–137.

cally less than a fact. The name Moses was a common theophoric element in New Kingdom Egyptian names, and likely derived from the Egyptian word *msi* (to give birth), indicating that the Hebrew personage Moses had some kind of Egyptian connection.⁵¹ Since there is more than one line of evidence, this premise is *probable*, or considered likely, but is still less than sufficient to convince everyone. Pharaoh Thutmose III died, according to the high chronology, in 1450 BCE, on the 30th day of the seventh month (*Peret*) of the Egyptian calendar,⁵² which fell in the spring of the Hebrew calendar, in the month of Abib, and according to Scripture, at the time of the Passover. Hence an arguable case can be made that Thutmose III was the Pharaoh of the exodus.⁵³ With at least one line of evidence, this position is *plausible*, having reasonable credibility. Hatshepsut was an Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian princess during the late sixteenth century BCE, around the time when the Bible suggests that Moses was born, so it is possible that she was his adopted mother. Since there are no actual lines of evidence for this position, and there were at least two other early-Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian princesses⁵⁴ that might have fulfilled that role, the evidence for Hatshepsut is only *possible* (as it can be imagined or believed by rational human beings). However, while people with a high view of Scripture factor in God as a cause in history, and believe that He parted the sea, killed the Egyptians, and saved the Israelites, this position can only be considered a faith statement, as not only are there no lines of extra-biblical empirical evidence, but there is no way that historical research could ever comment on the supernatural aspects of such an event. Hence, ethically, this faith position should not be presented as possible, plausible, probable, or factual evidence for this event. As we have seen above, as finite humans, historians only have empirical data with which to work.⁵⁵

⁵¹ James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), 140–142.

⁵² James Henry Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, 5 vols. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1906), 2.234, section 592.

⁵³ William H. Shea, “Exodus, Date of the,” *ISBE* 2:230–238.

⁵⁴ William M. F. Petrie, *A History of Egypt*, 5 vols. (London: Methuen, 1896), 2:55–71, 85.

⁵⁵ However, history is essential for faith. God revealed Himself “in His acts in history” (cf. 1 Cor 10:11; “these things happened”), and if “these things” did not happen, there would be no lesson or instruction for God’s people, cf. Hoffmeier, “‘These Things Happened,’” in *Do Historical Matters*, 112, cf. also Alan Millard, “Story, History, and Theology,” in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*, ed. Alan Millard, James K. Hoffmeier and David W. Baker (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 63–64.

Likewise, in terms of NT history, it is a known *fact* that Jesus existed as a historical personage, and was executed during the time when Pontius Pilate was prefect of Judea, as elaborated in the works of the Roman historians Josephus⁵⁶ and Tacitus,⁵⁷ as well as the Bible. Since Herod had already killed his wife, Mariamne, three of his sons, and a number of other people who were supposedly trying to usurp his throne,⁵⁸ the visit from the wise men *probably* motivated him to kill Jesus as well. Pilate, the prefect of Judea, and Caiaphas, the high priest of the Jews, *plausibly* supported each other throughout their time in office as both managed to retain their respective positions longer than any other like set of contemporary antagonists.⁵⁹ Jesus and His father, as carpenters, *possibly* helped build the new city of Sepphoris, a short distance to the northwest, from Nazareth.⁶⁰ However, that Jesus was born of Mary, who was a virgin, by the Holy Spirit, is a statement of *faith*, as there is no way that empirically based historical research could ever comment on such an event.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.63–64.

⁵⁷ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.

⁵⁸ Josephus, *J.W.* 1.438–444, 550–551, 644; *Ant.* 15.51–56, 64–87, 164–182, 218–243; *Ant.* 16.392–394; *Ant.* 17.187.

⁵⁹ H. R. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, SNTSMS 100 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); R. Steven Notely, “Pontius Pilate: Sadist or Saint?” *BAR* 43.4 (2017): 45–46; Nashon Szanton, Moran Hagbi, Joe Uziel and Donald T. Ariel, “Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem: The Monumental Street from the Siloam Pool to the Temple Mount,” *TA* 46 (2019): 163.

⁶⁰ Shirley Jackson Case, *Jesus A New Biography* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1927), 205–206; Idem., “Jesus and Sepphoris,” *JBL* (1926): 210; Richard A. Batey, *Jesus and the Forgotten City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991).

⁶¹ We are definitely not saying that miracles did not occur, or that biblical events were unaffected by God breaking into history, only that the historian has no way of adequately dealing with them empirically. According to C. S. Lewis *Miracles: How God Intervenes in Nature and Human Affairs* (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1960), 60, “The moment it (a miracle) enters her realm (nature), it obeys all her laws. ... The divine art of miracle is not an art of suspending the pattern to which events conform, but the feeding of new events into the pattern. ... A miracle is emphatically not an event without a cause or without results. Its cause is the activity of God; its results follow according to Natural Law. In its forward direction ... it is interlocked with all Nature just like any other event. Its peculiarity is that it is not ... interlocked backwards, ... with the previous history of Nature.” Following his logic here, A is a historical event, followed by A2 (a miracle), and B2 is its response, at which point, it is interlocked with B (new historical events). The historian can work empirically with the data connected with elements A and B, but not elements A2 and B2. However, while remaining in the realm of faith, elements A2 and B2 are still necessary to make complete sense of the story, which is part of biblical history.

Somewhat related to the above section, on the overstatement of historically related issues, are overstated claims of uniqueness. While the Bible is rightly considered unique on a number of levels, claims are sometimes also made regarding the uniqueness of some biblical specifics, such as its stories, aspects of religion, and laws that, from a historical standpoint are unsubstantiated. Archaeologists have found material culture of the same or similar kind among the nations that surrounded ancient Israel, including literary inscriptions of events sometimes thought to be uniquely specific to the Bible.

For example, the Flood story would appear to be unique to the HB. Yet, there are a number of such stories around the world, with those from areas geographically close to ancient Israel, specifically Sumer⁶² and Babylon,⁶³ being the most comparable. These stories deal with a world deluge, some with details, such as the command to build the boat, storage of food, animals, and family being brought on board, the boat landing on a mountain, and birds sent out, that are similar to the biblical account, but also with some serious differences, such as the capriciousness of the gods and the reasons for the flood. Some scholars have assumed that the Hebrews borrowed the biblical tradition from these Flood stories.⁶⁴ However, it is just as possible that the stories had a common source⁶⁵ among the post-flood peoples. Noah and his family had lived through the flood, and would have been familiar with the actual details of the event, but as some of their descendants became polytheists, it is possible that the story was adapted for that audience, at first orally, and later in written form, by the Sumerians, and later the Babylonians. Despite the similarity of detail, it would seem that, in its present form, the actual uniqueness of the biblical flood story is not the remembrance of the circumstances of the event, but rather the messages of God's ethical motive for

⁶² ANET 42–44; COS 1.515.

⁶³ ANET 93–95, 104–106; COS 1.450–452, 458–460; Berossus, *Bab* 2.2.1–4.

⁶⁴ Samuel R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen, 1905) 107; A. H. Sayce, *The Early History of the Hebrews* (London: Rivingtons, 1897), 107, 125; A. T. Clay, *The Origin of Biblical Traditions: Hebrew Legends in Babylon and Israel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1923), 75–78, 150–159; and Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel und Bibel* (Leipzig: J. C. Heinrichs, 1903): 31. According to Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Biblical Flood Story in the Light of the Gilgamesh Flood Account,” in *Gilgamesh and the World of Assyria: Proceedings of the Conference Held at Mandelbaum House, The University of Sydney, 21–23 July 2004*, ANESup 21, ed. Joseph Azize and Noel Weeks (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 115–127, unique “elements ... of Israelite theology” were then added polemically to the biblical version.

⁶⁵ William G. Lambert, and Alan R. Millard, *Atra-ḫasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1969); Jeffrey Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); and Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 267, n. 90.

the Flood, due to moral depravity,⁶⁶ and His grace, by keeping His covenant, and saving a remnant of His people, and other creatures, thus perpetuating their posterity.

After the flood, Noah built an altar and sacrificed animals to Yahweh (Gen 8:20). It would seem that he and his family passed on God's pre-flood revelation (cf. Gen 4:4–5; 7:2, 8), on sacrifice, the type of animals required for sacrifice, and altars to post-Flood peoples (Gen 8:20; 12:7–8; Lev 11). Altars are sometimes found by archaeologists, occasionally even with the faunal remains of sacrificial animals, for the most part, the same type (sheep, goats and cattle) as those later stipulated in the Mosaic Law (Lev 1:5, 10, 14), among the peoples surrounding ancient Israel.⁶⁷ Again, it would seem that the uniqueness here is not the form of the altar or the animal, but the use that was made of them, that made the actions of individuals or people right or wrong, ethical or unethical. As noted above, God's will (and His Law) was originally revealed and passed down orally, long before Moses wrote the Torah, and it was kept by some post-Flood people and perverted by others, for example with Abraham's behavior approved ("Abraham kept ... my laws"; cf. Gen 26:5), but that of the Amorites condemned (Gen 15:16; cf. Josh 10:11–12).

In the Bible, Israel's God, Yahweh, was recognized as its Theocratic king, the true ruler over His people, and whose laws were supreme. His will was sometimes intermediated by human surrogates (a Judge or King), and His laws interpreted by prophets and priests. He fought for His people when they did His will, and against them when they did not. However, theocracy, was not unique to Israel. Israel's neighbors likewise boasted of their "supreme" god, who fought both for and against them. In the Bible, it was Yahweh who selected places for His people to conquer: "Now Yahweh said to Joshua, '... arise, go up to Ai; see, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land'" (Josh 8:1). The same can be said elsewhere, e.g., "and Kemosh said to me, "'Go, take Nebo from Israel'" (Mesha Inscription, Line 14).⁶⁸ It was Yahweh who led His people into battle: "for Yahweh your God

⁶⁶ Heidel, *Gilgament Epic*, 269.

⁶⁷ Adam Zertal, "Has Joshua's Altar Been Found on Mt. Ebal?" *BAR* 11.1 (1985): 31; Patrick E. McGovern, "The Baq'ah Valley Project 1987, Khirbet Umm Ad-Dananir and Al-Qesir" *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 33 (1989): 128; Amihai Mazar, *Excavations at Tell Qasile Part One, The Philistine Sanctuary: Architecture and Cult Objects*, Qedem 12 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1980), 49, Table 6, no. 531, cf. fig. 50., in Area C, Square 75A1, Stratum X; Simon Davis, "The Large Mammal Bones" in *Excavations at Tell Qasile Part Two, The Philistine Sanctuary: Various Finds, the Pottery, Conclusions, Appendixes*, ed. Amihai Mazar, Qedem 20 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1985), 148; Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 127, 200, 292, 311, n. 106.

⁶⁸ ANET 320; COS 2.138; Samuel Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 390–394,

is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (Deut 20:4). Likewise, elsewhere: "at the command of Ashur I was a conqueror, from beyond the Lower Zab River to the Upper Sea (Tiglath-Pileser I, Foundation Inscription of the Anu-Adad Temple).⁶⁹ Yahweh provided strength to His earthly king: "For You have girded me with strength for battle; You have subdued under me those who rose up against me. You have also made my enemies turn their backs to me, and I destroyed those who hated me" (2 Sam 22:40–41), cf. "with the help of Ashur and Shamash, the great gods, my lords, I Tukultiapilesarra, King of Assyria . . . am a conqueror . . ." (Tiglath-Pileser I, Rock Inscription from Sebeh-Su).⁷⁰ It was Yahweh who gave the victory: "For Yahweh has driven out great and strong nations from before you; and as for you, no man has stood before you to this day" (Josh 23:9), cf. "Kemosh drove him out from before me" (Mesha Inscription, line 19).⁷¹ And when His people rebelled against Him, Yahweh became angry, and allowed their defeat: cf. "so Yahweh was very angry with Israel and removed them from His sight; none was left except the tribe of Judah" (2 Kgs 17:18), see also "Omri, king of Israel, oppressed Moab for many days, for Kemosh was angry with his land" (Mesha Inscription, line 5).⁷² While from a biblical point of view, one may question the supernatural source behind this phenomenon outside of Israel, it is nevertheless undeniable that these concepts existed, basically in the same form, being part and parcel of ancient Near Eastern thought.

Archaeologists have also excavated contemporary temples in Syria, at 'Ain Dara⁷³ and Tell Tayinat,⁷⁴ quite similar to the one Solomon, with Phoenician help (cf. 1 Kgs 5:1–18), built in Jerusalem. While God specifically revealed His pattern (of the earlier tabernacle) to Moses (Exod 25:9), it does not necessarily preclude the possibility that He didn't even earlier reveal the pattern orally to others, among His people (outside Israel), who were still open in some way to doing His will (cf. Acts 17:23, 30; Rom 1:18–21), or

407–408.

⁶⁹ ANET 275.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ ANET 320; COS 2.138; Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 390–394, 411–412.

⁷² ANET 320; COS 2.137; Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 390–394, 398–400.

⁷³ John Monson, "The 'Ain Dara Temple: Closest Solomonic Parallel," *BAR* 26.3 (2000): 20–35, 67.

⁷⁴ Timothy P. Harrison, "West Syrian *Megaron* or Neo-Assyrian *Langraum*? The Shifting Form and Function of the Tell Ta'yīnāt (Kunulua) Temples," in *Temple Building and Temple Cult: Architecture and Cultic Paraphernalia of Temples in the Levant (2-1Mill. B.C.E.)*, ed. Jens Kamlah, ADPV 41 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 3–21.

that they independently arrived at a similar-type of cultic building,⁷⁵ there already being tripartite temple structures as early as the Middle Bronze Age,⁷⁶ if not earlier.⁷⁷

Another feature of the Bible that is also considered unique is the law of Moses. There were however, in the ancient Near East, at least five ancient collections of laws, three originating in Sumer: the Laws of Urukagina⁷⁸ (ca. 2350 BCE), Ur-Nammu⁷⁹ (ca. 2112–2095 BCE), and Lipit-Ishtar⁸⁰ (ca. 1934–1924 BCE), and two from Babylon: including the laws inscribed on two tablets found during the excavations of the city of Eshnunna⁸¹ (ca. 1900 BCE), and the code of Hammurabi⁸² (ca. 1792–1750 BCE), that were written earlier than the Bible, parts of which are quite similar to those found in the Mosaic law. There was a continuous literary tradition between these documents, and, with the exception of the Laws from Eshnunna, were written in the form of royal inscriptions. These collections were not a part of actual legal codes, in that they were not consistent or comprehensive. In addition, so far as is known, they were not referred to in the records of actual legal proceedings. Instead, these collections consisted of independent casuistic laws, or legal decrees, issued to deal with specific problems. They were continuously copied, added to, elaborated upon, and ultimately put into the form of royal inscriptions, as a boast by kings that their divine mission, to administer justice to their people, was fair.

A number of the case laws found in the Mosaic legislation are similar to laws found in these earlier collections. There are, for example, laws about runaway slaves and debt slavery in Deut 15:12–14; 23:15–16, that are similar to those in the Laws of Ur-Nammu (Law 14), Lipit-Ishtar (Laws 12–13), Eshnunna (Law 49), and Hammurabi (Law 117). Laws 196–200 of the Hammurabi Code also have parallels in Scripture (Exod 21:22–26; Lev 24:19–20; Deut 19:21; cf. Matt 5:38). Law 196 says: “If a man puts out

⁷⁵ C. S. Lewis, in his essay “Is Theology Poetry?” in *The Weight of Glory*, 82–83, notes, while talking about the occasional coincidence within other religions, of themes, such as death and rebirth, found in Christian Theology, that “we should ... expect to find in the imagination of great Pagan Teachers ... some glimpse of that theme.”

⁷⁶ Amihai Mazar, “Temples of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages and the Iron Age” in *The Architecture of Ancient Israel*, ed. Aharon Kempinski and Ronny Reich (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992), 163, nos. 4, 10, 12, 14.

⁷⁷ Aharon Kempinski, “Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age Temples” in *Architecture of Ancient Israel*, 55, no. 8.

⁷⁸ *COS* 2.407–408.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.408–410.

⁸⁰ *ANET* 159–161; *COS* 2.410–414.

⁸¹ *ANET* 161–163; *COS* 2.332–335.

⁸² *ANET* 163–180; *COS* 2.335–353.

the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.” Likewise, Law 200 says: “If a man has knocked out the tooth of another man (of his own rank), they shall knock out his tooth.” There is a differentiation in the Hammurabi Code between members of society (cf. Law 201), where it only required a fine of a third of a mina of silver for the loss of a tooth of a person of “inferior” rank. Law 199 says: “if he puts out the eye of a man’s slave, or breaks the bone of a man’s slave, he shall pay one-half of its value” whereas in Exod 21:26, the slave was allowed to go free for the loss of an eye. As such, there is no socioeconomic difference made in the biblical versions of these laws, and it is therefore, more equitable.

There are both similarities and differences between the biblical and extra-biblical versions of these laws. When not basically the same, the biblical versions appear to have been more rigorous, but at the same time more equitable than their extra-biblical counterparts. Law is a response to specific needs of society which arise within human relationships. Similar responses can even be arrived at, in different societies, when dealing with similar circumstances (by way of independent invention). Hence, although ancient collections of laws were passed down from one generation to another, and from one dominating society to another (e.g., Sumerians to the Babylonians), it does not necessarily mean that Moses directly borrowed from or adapted these law collections in the Bible. Hence, despite their similarity, God (the ultimate author of all truth) can be seen as the inspiration for these laws in Scripture. Also, if Moses was a nomad⁸³ at the time that the Pentateuch was written, he may not have had access to these collections, or carried one or more copies in his possession.

In sum, God speaks to human beings in their own language, and although there are great similarities between laws and, as we have seen, above, places of worship (temples, high places), ritual (altars, ceremonies, offerings), and other aspects of religion, there are also enough differences to warrant a unique response to the one true God. Israel lived in a world that was very similar

⁸³ While it is not impossible that Moses could have come across copies of documents, such as the Gilgamesh Epic or some of the ancient law codes, written in Akkadian, which was the *lingua franca* of the second millennium BC, in the Egyptian court, perhaps later recalling some details, and/or polemically modifying their original intent, it seems less likely, given the necessity of traveling light, cf. Roger Cribb, *Nomads in Archaeology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 65–83, that one who spent much of his life as a nomad, living in Sinai, would have direct access to them. While a fragment of the Gilgamesh Epic, dating to the Late Bronze Age, has been found in Palestine, at Megiddo, copied on a locally made tablet by a scribe, perhaps from Gezer, cf. Yuval Goren, Hans Mommsen, Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na’aman, “A Provenance Study of the Gilgamesh Fragment from Megiddo,” *Archaeometry* 51 (2009): 763–773, to the knowledge of the present author, Akkadian documents of this type have not been found in Sinai. On the proto-Canaanite alphabet, plausibly used in the initial production of the Pentateuch, cf. n. 18, above.

to their neighbors, yet at the same time, their lives were somewhat different because of what Yahweh asked of them. Truth can be found in various quantities in all societies. God inspires truth even among those who don't count themselves among His people.

Likewise, in the NT, the parables of Jesus are sometimes considered unique. However, while there are about forty parables in the Gospels, around 2000 early rabbinic parables are also known, and although most of them date after the time of Jesus, the widespread use of the parable as a teaching device had already begun in the first century BCE, the earliest on record attributed to the schools of Hillel and Shammai.⁸⁴ While the parables in the Gospels are specific to Jesus, it is probable that “both Jesus and the later Rabbis drew from a common stock of metaphors and symbols.”⁸⁵ In addition, the ancestors of some of the rabbinic parables may have even been “circulating in the time of Jesus and . . . known by him;” contrast for example, the parable of the generous employer, in Matt 26:1–16, with the parable of the exceptional laborer in Sifra on Lev 26:9.⁸⁶ It is also known from the Gospels themselves that, while Jesus seemingly told specific parables in a particular context, the Gospel writers sometimes shifted their focus, modified the story, or placed them in a different setting⁸⁷ for purposes of presentation. Hence, while these parables have a specific setting in ancient Palestine, in the first century CE it was the use Jesus made of them, and the specific points He drew, that are unique, not the parable form itself.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a figure of speech that adds to the sense in such a way that it exaggerates, enlarges, or sometimes even diminishes the meaning, so that in order to broaden the sense, what is actually said is more than what is meant to be literally understood.⁸⁸ While hyperbole can be relatively easy for the interpreter to spot, when the metaphor is obvious; e.g., “Midianites . . . as numerous as locusts” (Judg 12:7) or “the world . . . would not contain the books” (John 21:25),⁸⁹ in passages dealing with history, it can be harder to

⁸⁴ Harvey K. McArthur and Robert M. Johnston, *They Also Taught in Parables: Rabbinic Parables from the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 7, 165–166. There are, of course, a number of even earlier parables in the HB, e.g., Jotham's parable of the trees making a king (Judg 9:8–15), the parable of the vineyard (Isa 5:1–7), and the parable of the eagles and the vine (Ezek 17:2–10).

⁸⁵ McArthur and Johnston, *They also Taught in Parables*, 181–182.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 58, 173, 181.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 172–173.

⁸⁸ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (New York, NY: E. and J. B. Young, 1898; Repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1968), 423.

⁸⁹ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 253; Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 193–194.

identify, and sometimes can only be verified by going beyond the immediate to ever wider contexts, or confirmed by information outside of the Bible itself by data derived from archaeological evidence.

From the formation of Israel as a nation, a theocracy was in existence, although, as seen above, other ancient societies also assumed this form. With God as Israel's actual leader, evil was able to be removed by human beings, under His direct guidance. Concurrently, from the exodus through the time of King Saul the concept of *hrm* functioned in ancient Israel.

To be put under the ban (*hrm*) meant that its object was excluded from the use or abuse of mankind and was irrevocably surrendered to God. Texts such as Exod 23:32–33; 34:12–16 and Deut 7:1–5; 20:15–18 mitigate against attempts to tone down the command to totally wipe out the whole population of the Canaanite nations, and Deut 9:4–5 indicates that God's choice of Israel wasn't because of their goodness, but because of His covenant with Abraham. Israel needed to respond with obedience to God or be driven out of the land, like the Canaanites. Far from ethnic cleansing, the destruction of the Canaanites was within the same principle as all God's judgments on people, both earlier (the flood; the cities of the Plain; pharaoh and his army) and in the future (Ananias and Sapphira; the end of the world at the second coming).

It is sometimes thought that the ban was only something that God tolerated, because the other nations, such as the Moabites, who were also theocratic, likewise used it (Mesha Inscription, line 17).⁹⁰ The fact that God asked His people to put the Canaanites to the ban, indicates that He did not merely tolerate it, but expected their cooperation in carrying out His judgment against evil. That God, speaking in the language of man, used a then-common means to carry out His purpose is no argument against the practice. The compulsory dedication of something to God for destruction (*hrm*) was done because its object was an impediment to His plan or displeasing to Him. It is the opposite of something holy (*qdš*), which is dedicated or set apart because it is pleasing to God.

Nevertheless, while the ban (*hrm*) was indeed carried out on occasion, e.g., against the city of Jericho, and the Amalekites (1 Sam 15), the same concept was also sometimes used in a non-literal, exaggerated sense, known as hyperbole, frequently also found elsewhere throughout the ancient Near East (cf. "Israel is laid waste, his seed is not," in the Merneptah Stela).⁹¹ For

⁹⁰ ANET 320; COS 2.138; Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 390–394, 411–412.

⁹¹ ANET 378; COS 2.41; see also the Mesha Stele, where Mesha says: Israel utterly perished forever (line 7), I slew all the people of their city (Ataroth) (lines 11 and 12), I slew [its] whole population, 7000 male citizens and foreign men, female citizens, foreign women and female slaves (lines 16–17), and for (the god) Astar-Kemosh, I put them to the ban (line 17), ANET 320; COS 2.138; Ahituv, *Echoes from*

example, in Josh 10 and 11, the ban is used hyperbolically. Here, the Israelites are said to have utterly destroyed (*hrm*) the people of the towns of Makkedah (10:28), Eglon (10:35), Hebron (10:37), Debir (10:39), throughout the hill country, the Negev and the lowlands (10:40) and Hazor (11:11); struck down every person in Makkedah (10:28), Libnah (10:30), Lachish (10:32), Eglon (10:35), Hebron (10:37), Debir (10:39), throughout the hill country, Negev and the lowlands (10:40) and Hazor (11:11); left no survivor in Makkedah (10:28), Libnah (10:30), Gezer (10:33), Hebron (10:37), and Debir (10:39); and left none who breathed in the hill country, Negev and the lowlands (10:40) and Hazor (11:11). However, within a short period of time, most of these same towns (Gezer, cf. Judg 1:29; 1 Kgs 9:16; Hebron, cf. Josh 15:13; Debir, cf. Josh 15:15; Hazor, cf. Judg 4:2; and throughout the hill country, Negev and the lowlands, cf. Judg 1:9)⁹² were again repopulated with Canaanites; the same people who were supposedly destroyed. So, while some of the Canaanite population of these towns were no doubt killed, that all of them would appear to be an inappropriate conclusion. Here, it is necessary to look beyond the immediate, to the wider context for a complete understanding, as well as correct interpretation of the passage.

Moving to the NT, in Matt 24:2, Jesus told His disciples that when the Temple, in Jerusalem, would be destroyed; “not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down.” This passage (and its parallels in the other Gospels) is likewise hyperbole,⁹³ but the interpreter is not able to

the Past, 390–394, 411–412. On the use of hyperbole in extra-biblical documents, see K. Lawson Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing*, JSOTSup 98 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 190–192, 216, 219, 223 n. 10, 228, 234, 243–245, 251, 253; cf. also William J. Webb and Gordon K. Oestle, *Bloody, Brutal, and Barbaric?: Wrestling with Troubling War Texts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 136–230.

⁹² While not being specifically mentioned as being Canaanite again in the Bible, archaeologically, Lachish (Levels VII and VI) is thought to have been Canaanite, on the basis of its material culture, with the site not becoming Israelite until around the time of Solomon, or shortly after (Level V), cf. David Ussishkin, “Lachish,” *NEAEHL* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 3:898–904.

⁹³ It is sometimes suggested that Jesus was only referring in this passage to the above-ground structure of the temple, cf. e.g., “What Does Mark 13:2 Mean?” <http://bibleref.com> (accessed Mar 26, 2021), “If Every Stone of the Temple was Thrown Down How is the Wailing Wall Still Standing?,” <http://christianity.stackexchange.com> (accessed Mar 26, 2021), and Gary Manning, “No Stone Left Unturned: Solving a Minor Mystery,” *The Good Book Blog: Talbot School of Theology Blog*, <http://biola.edu> (accessed Mar 26, 2021). Nevertheless, a building, any building, disconnected from its foundation is both illogical, and an unnecessary distinction, as Jesus Himself alludes to in Matt 12:25; Luke 6:46–49. Elsewhere in Scripture, the Temple and its foundation are intimately connected (cf. 1 Kgs 6:37; 7:10; Isa 44:28; Ezek 41:8; Zech 4:9; 8:9; Ezra 3:6–12; and 2 Chr 2:3). In addition, parts of the walls of the

know this by appealing to Scripture, or the necessary truthfulness of Jesus, in

temple enclosure (see above) are still in existence, with their upper courses added in later times, and these walls also include now-blocked entrances/gate structures, dating to the Second Temple period, the time of the NT. Furthermore, the Greek phrase *oikodomàs tou 'iepou* (buildings [plural] of the temple) in Matt 24:1 would seem to imply more than just the building that housed the holy and most holy places, located underneath the current Moslem Dome of the Rock shrine. One of those buildings, a basilica known as the Royal Stoa, was located on the southern end of the Temple Mount enclosure. It was the most spectacular of the many edifices built by Herod the Great, cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 15.412; and Ehud Netzer, *The Architecture of Herod the Great Builder* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 165–171, 271. It was built over a period of eight years (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.420), in contrast to the Temple itself, which was built in only six months (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.421). While the Temple was a Hebrew religious structure, built specifically by the priests (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.421), the basilica, built by Herod, was a Roman structure, typically used for banking, and commercial transactions, also functioning at times as a court of law. Indeed, ca. 30 CE, the Sanhedrin, who had formerly met in the Chamber of Hewn Stone, moved to the temple shops (*ḥanûyôt*), located in the Royal Stoa (*m. Sanh.* 41:2, and *'Abod. Zar* 8:2 cf. *b. Sanh.* 88b), the remains of an inscription referring to the elders (*zeqenim*), found nearby, possibly referring to it, cf. Benjamin Mazar, *The Mountain of the Lord* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 126, 146–147. This building was also the likely location of the two cleansings of the Temple by Jesus (John 2:13–22 and Matt 21:12–17), the first occasion, possibly when this part of the temple was finally being completed (cf. John 2:20). The basilica was built on top of an artificial section of the platform of the temple, raised on arches, upon which were lined four rows of columns, forming three aisles. It was entered through a gate on the west, reached by a monumental staircase leading to an arched bridge, built across a street lined by shops, in the Tyropoeon Valley below, (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.410–418; cf. Netzer, *Architecture of Herod*, 128–131). The southernmost row of basilica columns were incorporated into and above the southern wall of the Temple Mount enclosure (*Ibid.*, 165–171), below which were the double and triple-entranced Huldah Gates, entered by steps from a plaza below. Worshipers then passed through the gate corridors, and then up more steps, north to the temple compound. Remains of the arch below the western gate, named after Edward Robinson, who discovered it, the two southern gates (since blocked in), their entrance passageways, and the large storage area, popularly known as “Solomon’s Stables,” below the southeastern end of the Royal Stoa, are still, in some cases, almost completely extant. Large sections of wall courses (see above), as well as the remains of a number of connected structures, have also been found archaeologically, cf. Benjamin Mazar, *Mountain of the Lord*, 34–39, 204–222; and “Archaeological Excavations near the Temple Mount,” in *Jerusalem Revealed: Archaeology in the Holy City 1968–1974*, ed. Yigael Yadin and Ephriam Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1975), 25–32; Kathleen and Leen Ritmeyer, “Reconstructing Herod’s Temple Mount in Jerusalem,” *BAR* 15.6 (1989): 29–40; and “Reconstructing the Triple Gate,” *BAR* 15.6 (1989): 49–53; Netzer, *Architecture of Herod*, 128–131; and Dan Bahat, “The Herodian Temple,” in *The Early Roman Period*, vol. 3 of *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, eds. William Horbury, W. D. Davies, and John Sturdy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 46.

general. One must go to archaeological data. Modern exploration, beginning with Charles Warren⁹⁴ in the 1860s, and more recent archaeological excavation by Benjamin Mazar, between 1968–1978,⁹⁵ have revealed that, although Herodian ashlar stones vary in size, between 1.0–3.0 meters in length, with a few longer ones reaching 12.0–14.5 meters, they tend to average 1.0–1.2 meters long, with the heaviest weighing from 100–400 tons.⁹⁶ The number of exposed Herodian ashlar stones also varies, depending on which side of the Temple Mount enclosure. In the western wall plaza, seven courses have been exposed, with another 19 below ground, known from Warren’s shafts and more recent archaeological work.⁹⁷ At the southwest corner of the Temple Mount, near Robinson’s arch, there are currently 14–17 exposed courses, with another 16 courses below ground.⁹⁸ Above a narrow street on the southern side of the Temple Mount, near the double Huldah Gate, there is a large 1.86-meter-high master course, with seven other courses exposed above it. This master course runs from there to the eastern angle of the Temple Mount, at which point there are seven exposed courses above it, and another 27 below, for a total of 35 courses.⁹⁹ The eastern side of the Temple Mount, north of the Golden Gate, has yielded 5–11 exposed above-ground courses, with another 25 or so below ground.¹⁰⁰ This evidence from archaeological exploration and excavation would seem to indicate that, while Jesus was speaking generally about the massive demolition that the Romans would make of the

⁹⁴ Charles Warren and Claude R. Conder, *The Survey of Western Palestine: Jerusalem* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1884), 117–216; Charles Wilson and Charles Warren, *The Recovery of Jerusalem: A Narrative of the Exploration and Discovery in the City and in the Holy Land* (New York, NY: Appleton, 1871), 58–158, 258–260.

⁹⁵ Benjamin Mazar, *Mountain of the Lord*, 106–152, 204–222, idem., “Archaeological Excavations,” 25–41.

⁹⁶ Nahman Avigad, “The Architecture of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period,” in, *Jerusalem Revealed*, 14; cf. Ritmeyer and Ritmeyer, “Reconstructing Herod’s Temple Mount,” 42. For more recent archaeological work in the tunnel next to the western wall, see Dan Bahat, *The Jerusalem Western Wall Tunnel* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2013).

⁹⁷ Warren and Conder, *Jerusalem*, 120; Avigad, *Architecture of Jerusalem*, 16; Ritmeyer and Ritmeyer, “Reconstructing Herod’s Temple Mount,” 26–27; Bahat, *Jerusalem Western Wall*, 14–15, figs. 1.01s-t.

⁹⁸ Avigad, *Architecture of Jerusalem*, 16; Ritmeyer and Ritmeyer, “Reconstructing Herod’s Temple Mount,” 30–35.

⁹⁹ Avigad, *Architecture of Jerusalem*, 16; Ritmeyer and Ritmeyer, “Reconstructing Herod’s Temple Mount,” 36–42; Wilson and Warren, *Recovery of Jerusalem*, 92, foldout.

¹⁰⁰ Avigad, *Architecture of Jerusalem*, 17; Wilson and Warren, *Recovery of Jerusalem*, 92, foldout.

Temple buildings during the soon-coming destruction of Jerusalem, He was, nevertheless, not speaking literally about the actual configuration of the post-destruction architectural ruins.

Archaeology

It is generally agreed that, in addition to biblical and cognate languages, a knowledge of historical backgrounds, including information derived from archaeology, geography, and the customs and habits of the ancient cultures and peoples of the Middle East, are necessary for a proper biblical interpretation.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, there is a misconception of the role of archaeology in relation to the biblical text. It is often assumed that the role of archaeology is to *prove* the reliability of the Bible.

In actuality, due to their specific natures, archaeology and the Bible tend to interact infrequently. The Bible is the word of God, containing historically reliable stories, which were inspired by the Holy Spirit, and, while recorded by humans, provide presentations of real events in the past. However, the Bible only provides selective information about the redemptive history of YHWH and His people, with the goal of leading mankind to God, rather than a complete list of historical events. Archaeology, on the other hand, is a discipline that is part science, part art,¹⁰² which attempts to understand the past by uncovering and interpreting ancient artifacts and literature. In terms of the Near East, it is the only means of generating new evidence for biblical backgrounds. The discipline, as practiced in this part of the world, provides information about the excavated material culture from biblical

¹⁰¹ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 154–156; Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 93; Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation*, 103–104; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 127–129; Davidson, *Principles*, 44–47.

¹⁰² By which I mean creative activity. Methodologically speaking, archaeology is not a pure science, although science is used to both form testing hypotheses and to arrive at evidence. Nevertheless, that evidence must be interpreted. The researcher, like the interpreter of ancient literature, including the Bible, can thus, never be totally objective; historical arguments are both scientific and artistic, cf. Fredric Brandfon, “The Limits of Evidence: Archaeology and Objectivity,” *Maarav* 4 (1987): 39–43. Archaeological evidence is both emic (categories devised by participants of the original culture), but also etic (categories devised by the modern observer); the latter with notions providing a historical reconstruction, i.e., theory placed upon the evidence from hindsight. Hence, theorists have long debated the proper academic home for archaeology as either being in the humanities (fine arts) or the sciences, or perhaps even the social sciences, since archaeology also deals with human behavior, cf. Kent V. Flannery, “Archaeology with a Capital S,” in *Research and Theory in Current Archaeology*, ed. Charles L. Redman (New York, NY: Wiley, 1973), 47–53; G. Ernest Wright, “The ‘New’ Archaeology,” *BA* 38 (1975): 114–115; and Giorgio Buccellati, *A Critique of Archaeological Reason: Structural, Digital, and Philosophical Aspects of the Excavated Record* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 349–350.

times. Bible and archaeology thus interact in the following meaningful ways: 1) in the redemptive (salvation) history, written in the Bible, references are made to things (ancient material cultural referents), such as houses, coins, and weapons, etc., mentioned in passing, that have archaeological correlates, i.e., to things (material culture) found in the ground, that are mutually, complimentary, or reciprocally related to things mentioned in the text, and 2) less frequently, this material culture sometimes contains the same type of documents that are found in neighboring ancient Near Eastern cultures, i.e., archival, commercial, literary, propagandistic, religious, and other texts that are similar, but not usually the exact equivalent, to those found in the Bible. Like the Bible, archaeology is an interpretive discipline. Ancient artifacts rarely tell us anything about themselves. They must be interpreted. Artifacts are evidence. What is said about them (including those that are textual in nature) is interpretation.

Seldom does an archaeological discovery bear directly on the biblical text so that it confirms an historical event. The Taylor Prism which describes Sennacherib's third campaign, that occurred in 701 BCE, the same event recorded in 2 Kgs 18–19; Isa 36–37; and 2 Chr 32, is one of a very few examples. The prism relates the Assyrian version of that event and tells how Sennacherib made Hezekiah “a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage,”¹⁰³ after which Hezekiah paid off the Assyrian king with a heavy tribute, the details of which overlap those mentioned in the Bible.

On the other hand, archaeological discoveries tend rather to illustrate aspects of daily life, filling in gaps on which the Bible is often silent. For example, Iron Age houses have been excavated archaeologically and indicate that the bottom floor was used for storage and to house animals, with the human inhabitants performing most of their household-related activities outside in the central (courtyard) section of the four-room sub-division of the lower floor, on the second floor, and on the roof.¹⁰⁴ The archaeological remains of Iron Age houses, with their lower floor being used to shelter animals (the usual sacrificial victims used for burnt offerings), suggest the possibility that Jephthah, in the story of Judg 11, might have expected an animal, rather than a human, to emerge from his house. In fact, the wording of his vow, in the Hebrew text (in Judg 11:31), is such that it can be translated “whatever,” and hence does not require the “whoever,” which might seem to follow, on the basis of the outcome of the story. In addition, other

¹⁰³ ANET 287–288; COS 2.302–303; Mordecai Cogan, *The Raging Torrent: Historical Inscriptions from Assyria and Babylonia Relating to Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2015), 121–133.

¹⁰⁴ Ehud Netzer, “Domestic Architecture in the Iron Age,” in *Architecture of Ancient Israel*, 193–201; and John Holladay, “House, Israelite,” *ABD*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 3:308–318.

aspects of the story, such as the bewailing of the virginity of the daughter, the yearly commemoration of the event, and the general tenor of the attitude of Scripture regarding Jephthah's life, might speak against the blood sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter. The physical arrangement of these four-room house structures have also been seen as paralleling the structure of the biblical family (*bêt āb*) in Iron Age Israel, as reflected in Josh 7:14–18.¹⁰⁵

Likewise, New Testament-period houses have also been excavated, and are typically one- or two-story, single-room structures, with a beaten-earth floor and a flat roof,¹⁰⁶ sub-divided into two areas, one for humans, the other for animals,¹⁰⁷ the latter complete with feeding troughs, along with a courtyard either in front or behind it.¹⁰⁸ This background helps in correctly interpreting the story in Luke 2:7, where Jesus was born in the lower room of a house, and laid in a manger, because there was no room in the upper (guest) room (*kataluma*, cf. Luke 22:11; cf. Mark 14:14), not inn (*pandoxeion*, cf. Luke 10:35). The NT text also alludes to these one-room houses when it talks about a single lamp giving light to the whole house (Matt 5:15; Luke 15:8), and where the family ox or donkey was brought into the house at night and then led back outside early in the morning (Luke 13:15).

While, for the most part, the Pentateuch is currently written in a later, updated, Classical Biblical Hebrew, the text of Gen 12:6 not only has the potential, with the aid of archaeology, for narrowing down the time of the event described there, but also has implications for approximating when the larger document in which it is found was put together.

Archaeologically, the Early Bronze Age IV/Middle Bronze Age I (ca. 2500–1950 BCE) was basically a decentralized, rural, and somewhat nomadic time, following a long period of urban settlement (Early Bronze II–III, ca. 3100–2500 BCE), in Palestine. At that time, settlement shifted, for the most part, from the central hill country to more marginal areas in the Negev, Sinai,

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,” *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1–35; and Schlomo Bunimovitz and Avraham Faust, “The Four-Room House, Embodying Iron Age Israelite Society,” *NEA* 66 (2003): 22–31.

¹⁰⁶ James S. Jeffers, *Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: 1999), 67–68; Eric M. Myers, “The Problem of Gendered Space in Syro-Palestinian Domestic Architecture: The Case for Roman-period Galilee,” in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 45, 58–60.

¹⁰⁷ Henri Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life in Palestine at the Time of Christ*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962; repr., London: Phoenix: 2002), 220.

¹⁰⁸ Lynn H. Cohick, “Women, Children, and Families in the Greco-Roman World,” in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee M. McDonald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 180.

the Jordan Valley, and Transjordan.¹⁰⁹ The background of the text of Genesis 12, when Abraham entered the land of Canaan, also appears to have been during a nomadic phase, as he moved throughout the country, coming into contact with little in the way of urban settlement. In the biblical text, urban settlements are usually designated either by using the name of the site, or by the word “town” (*îr*) plus the name of the site, but frequently use the word “place” (*māqôm*) for less specific locations, named or unnamed. In fact, Abraham’s first encampment upon entering the land (Gen 12:6) was the “place” (*māqôm*) of Shechem, suggesting that it was unoccupied at the time. The site of Shechem had earlier been at least marginally inhabited during the Chalcolithic period and Early Bronze Age I (Strata XXIV and XXIII, prior to ca. 3100 BCE), but was afterward abandoned for over a millennium.¹¹⁰ Abraham next encamped on a mountain, between Bethel (a later update for Luz, cf. Gen 28:19) and Ai (Gen 21:8), the former which was still settled at the time, the latter which was not. After going to and returning from Egypt, he came to this same place (*māqôm*, Gen 13:3), but then moved on to Hebron (Gen 13:18), and finally settled in the Negev (Gen 20:1). Earlier, the Negev, a steppe zone, had concentrated settlement until ca. 2900 BCE, at the end of the Early Bronze Age II, at which time the occupied sites there were abandoned. During the Early Bronze Age IV/Middle Bronze Age I (ca. 2500–1950 BCE) the Negev was once again inhabited, at which time, it would seem, Abraham and Isaac also lived there, but which afterwards was basically abandoned, except for nomads, for most of the next millennium. In Middle Bronze IIA (1950–1750 BCE) there was a return to urban settlement in the central hill country, at which time Shechem (Stratum XXII) was reoccupied for the first time in over 1,000 years and became a town (*îr*). It was at that time that Jacob came to the town on his return from Aram and bought a piece of land nearby (Gen 33:18–19). From this point on (Strata XXII-I), with the exception of three shorter gaps in occupation, Shechem was occupied through the Late Hellenistic period (Stratum I),¹¹¹ after which (during the Early Roman period) the settlement moved off the mound, and occupied the area immediately to the west, and was renamed Neapolis/Sychar. During the ninth century BCE, when the so-called

¹⁰⁹ Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000–586 B.C.E.* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990), 152–158; and Susan L. Cohen, “Continuity, Innovation and Change: The Intermediate Bronze Age in the Southern Levant,” in *The Social Archaeology of the Levant From Prehistory to the Present*, ed. Assaf Yasur-Landau, and Eric H. Cline, and Yorke M. Rowen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 183–198.

¹¹⁰ Edward F. Campbell, “Shechem,” *NEAEHL* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 4:1345–1354.

¹¹¹ Campbell, *Shechem*, 1347.

“J” source was supposedly composed,¹¹² the Negev was once again settled, as was the case in other marginal areas such as Sinai, the Jordan Valley, and Transjordan. Likewise, the central hill country was a major area of urban settlement at this time, with Shechem a significant town (*ʾīr*). While nomads were always in existence, and Abraham could certainly have been viewed as one, the only time that Shechem was an unoccupied place (*māqôm*), not a town (*ʾīr*), during a major cycle of nomadism,¹¹³ and at a low point of urban settlement in the central hill country, but with settlement shifted to the marginal areas, in the Negev, Sinai, the Jordan Valley, and Transjordan, was during the Early Bronze IV/Middle Bronze Age I.

One reason for the late dating of Gen 12 by historical critics is the notation at the end of v.6 that the Canaanites were in the land at that time,¹¹⁴ a detail which is thought to necessitate an author writing at a time when these people were no longer there, or at least no longer a major entity. However, as noted above, a *Sitz im Leben* for this event, and by extension the authorship of the book of Genesis itself, in the ninth century BCE, would seem unlikely. Hence, the notation in Gen 12:6b, is plausibly a later gloss, placed there by a scribe, when a new copy of Genesis was required, and at which time the Canaanites were, indeed, no longer in the land, with the actual detail thought to be necessary information for those, then contemporary, and even later readers, to have a knowledge of when the events, described in the text, actually occurred. With this level of historical specificity, Moses himself would have had to have had a good, perhaps oral-traditional source for the setting of this event at the end of the Early Bronze Age.¹¹⁵ However, it is questionable that a much later author/compiler, in Iron Age II, “writing a document,” which is thought to be a collection of quasi-historical religious stories and poems,¹¹⁶ would have been able

¹¹² Driver, *Literature of the Old Testament*, 15, 123; and Elliott and Flesher, “Old Testament and Its Character,” 66; cf. n. 20.

¹¹³ Shechem was also unoccupied during the Late Bronze Age IA, at the beginning of yet another major period of nomadism. However, at that time, practically the entire country was decentralized, and at least partially depopulated, including the marginal regions, cf. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land*, 239–241; Rivka Gonen, “Urban Canaan in the Late Bronze Age,” *BASOR* 253 (1984): 61–73.

¹¹⁴ Driver, *Literature of the Old Testament*, 124; Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 87.

¹¹⁵ This event would have actually occurred some 600–700 years before Moses, necessitating a source that reflects the *Sitz im Leben* of the time when it happened, as opposed to when he wrote Genesis, at which time, during the Late Bronze Age IB, Shechem and its surrounding villages was becoming a major city-state in the Central Hill Country.

¹¹⁶ Elliott and Flesher, “Old Testament and Its Character,” 66–67; Elliott and

to arrive at such an accurate background. It would seem, then, that clues within the biblical text itself, combined with archaeological evidence, can occasionally provide a solution to the time when at least some biblical events actually occurred, as well as narrowing down the approximate time when the documents were produced.

Geography

A knowledge of the physical and historical geography of the land of the Bible can also help in a correct interpretation of the biblical text. One such place is Joshua 10, which deals with the second of the two southern military campaigns in Canaan, following the entrance of the Israelites into the land. Contextually, this passage deals with a response to a Canaanite coalition coming against the Gibeonites, who had a treaty with Israel. Geographically, Gibeon is located toward the eastern end of the Central Hill Country of Israel, and Aijalon, to the west, on the edge of the Shephelah.¹¹⁷ Since the sun rises in the east, and was at the time of the battle, over Gibeon, with the moon over the valley of Aijalon, in the west, the time of day would have been in the morning, prior to the noon hour.¹¹⁸ The reason for Joshua's request of God, for the sun to remain where it was, would seem to have been related to military battle tactics.¹¹⁹ At the time, the Israelites were chasing the fleeing Canaanites downhill, in a westward direction. When the latter stopped to defend themselves, they would have been facing uphill, with the sun behind their enemies, and shining in their own faces, partially blinding them. This would have given the Israelites a tactical advantage over the Canaanites. It is thus the geographical details, and the related positioning of the celestial bodies, that help to properly exegete this rather enigmatic passage.

Another passage where geography is useful for textual interpretation is Deut 34:1–4, where shortly before the death of Moses, God showed him (Hifil Imperfect, v.1 and Hifil Perfect, v.4), i.e., cause to see (*r'h*), i.e., a vision of the land. The physical geography bears this out, as while occasionally the top of Mount Hermon, at 2743 m (9101 ft) above sea level, can be seen, neither Dan,

Wright, "Israel's Ancestral Traditions," 213.

¹¹⁷ Anson F. Rainey and Steven S. Notely, *Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 128 (Map).

¹¹⁸ Chaim Herzog and Mordechai Gichon, *Battles of the Bible* (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble, 1997), 56, suggest a time shortly after sunup. However, actual observation of this phenomenon indicates that the moon can remain visible in the western sky, with the sun shining high in the eastern sky, well into the late morning.

¹¹⁹ On military tactics during the Late Bronze Age, see Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in the Biblical Lands in Light of Archaeological Discovery* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 96–114; and Boyd Seevers, *Warfare in the Old Testament: The Organization, Weapons, and Tactics of Ancient Near Eastern Armies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2013), 66–76.

a later name update for Laish (Judg 18:7, 14, 27) at its foot, or most of Gilead, to the north, can be seen with the naked eye, as Jebel Osh'a (at 1,097 m, 3,600 ft) is higher in altitude than Mount Pisgah (at 710 m, 2,329 ft). Likewise, the Western (or Mediterranean) Sea (in v.2) is not visible from Pisgah, as the Hill Country watershed of Cisjordan, around Jerusalem (at 792 m, 2,600 ft), to the west, hides the view from the observer.¹²⁰ In verse 3, Moses looked to the south (the Negev), which is also not visible to the naked eye, as the farthest one can see from this point is 'En Gedi (the spring at Nahal Arugot, being 722 m, 2,369 ft). Points farther south are obscured by higher mountains. Although not in the text, Mount Nebo (at 835 m, 2,739 ft) to the east, is also higher in altitude than Pisgah. Hence, Moses, on Pisgah, was standing at a spot that is lower in altitude than the mountains in every direction around him, so he could therefore have only seen the places mentioned in the text by way of a vision. In terms of dating, this passage is supposedly from either "JE" or the "D" source.¹²¹ However, it seems improbable that an author from the south, following the destruction of Israel in 722 BCE, would have been aware of specific features of the geography of Transjordan, which was formerly part of the northern kingdom, and at this point in time, likely under the control of the Ammonites and Arameans. Hence, a *Sitz im Leben* for this event, and by extension the book of Deuteronomy itself, in the seventh century BCE or later would seem unlikely. While the modern historical-critical position is correct that geography is not history, and that the associated events are usually not able to be verified,¹²² that a late hypothetical document whose *Sitz im Leben* is now thought to be from any time between Iron Age II and the Roman period, could accurately reflect circumstances that purportedly took place in the Late Bronze Age, or that cultural memory¹²³ could correctly portray, much less recall, historical and geographically precise details, seems far less likely than from an author who lived contemporaneously with, or relatively soon after, the events described in the documents they produced.

Modern geographical and political names which share the same monikers as those in the Bible, do not always constitute the exact same physical area as their ancient counterparts. Hence, caution should be used in demarcating geography, in that ancient borders, outside of those confined by topogra-

¹²⁰ This observation was already made by the Conder/Mantell survey of Eastern Palestine in 1881, cf. Claude R. Conder, *Heth and Moab* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1892), 139; Claude R. Conder, *Palestine* (New York, NY: Dodd, n.d.), 158–161.

¹²¹ Driver, *Literature of the Old Testament*, 72, 124; cf. n. 20.

¹²² Elliott, Flesher and Wright, "Israel in an out of Egypt," 266.

¹²³ Ronald S. Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and the History of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005).

phy, are quite fluid,¹²⁴ and even those delimited by topography were often conceived in a different way in ancient times.

For example, the geographical name that appears for the body of water that the Israelites passed through when they left Egypt is known as the Red Sea in modern translations. This phrase, however, is a translation of the words (*eruthra thalassē*) in the LXX and the NT. The actual phrase in Hebrew is the *yām sūph*, literally, Sea of Reeds. The Hebrew word *sūph* is related to the Egyptian term *ṭwf(y)*, with the marsh lake, *p3 ṭwf(y)*, modern Lake Ballah on the eastern edge of the Delta in Egypt, the equivalent to the *yam sūph* in Hebrew, as reflected in the Egyptian Papyrus Anastasi 3.¹²⁵ In addition, after the Hebrews went through the *yām sūph* (Exod 15:22), they came to it again (Exod 15:27; cf. Num 33:10–11) on their way south, not long after they camped at Elim and, yet again, on the other side of the Sinai Peninsula, at the end of 40 years of wandering (Num 21:4; Deut 1:40).¹²⁶ Hence, this body of water, at that time, would seem to have been considered to be a larger entity than its modern counterpart of the same name. In addition, the Red Sea as used in LXX, and according to the Classical Greek historians, Herodotus (*Hist.* 1.1, 1.180, 2.11, 4.42), and Xenophon (*Cyr.* 8.6:20–21, 8.8:1), as well as other ancient sources, such as Jub. 8:21, 9:2 and the Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen XVII, 21), found at Qumran, also included the modern Arabian and Persian Gulfs, and the Indian Ocean. Likewise, the modern name, Arabia, refers to the majority of the Arabian Peninsula. However, already in the Persian period, the Arabian peoples could be found in a much wider region, with inscriptions of Geshem, the Arab (Neh 2:19; 6:1–2, 6) found not only at al-Ula, in Dedan, in the northwestern part of the Arabian peninsula, but at places as far distant as the eastern Delta of Egypt, where a silver bowl was found with an Aramaic inscription¹²⁷ that reads: “what Qaynu, the

¹²⁴ In addition, ancient boundaries, unlike their modern counterparts, were fluid, as tribal entities living more on the nomadic end of the sedentism-nomadism continuum engaged in a flexible network of alignments and cooperation, often with shared pastureland and watering places, over widespread areas; cf. Øystein S. LaBianca and Randall W. Younker, “The Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom: The Archaeology of Society in Late Bronze/Iron Age Transjordan (ca. 1400–500 BCE),” in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, ed. Thomas Levy (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 404.

¹²⁵ Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 210–211, 214–215.

¹²⁶ On the issue of the use of *eschátēs thalassēs* in the LXX of 1 Kgs 9:16, and rendering the Hebrew *yam sūph* as the “Ultimate Sea,” or “Sea at the End of the World,” on the basis of its root *sōp*, thus viewing the Gulf of Aqaba as an extension of the Indian Ocean, cf. Bernard F. Bato, “The Red Sea: Requiescat in Pace,” *JBL* (1983): 27–35, and idem., “Red Sea or Reed Sea? How the Mistake Was Made and What Yam Sūp Really Means,” *BAR* 10.4 (1984): 57–63; cf. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 205–206.

¹²⁷ Isaac Rabinowitz, “Aramaic Inscriptions of the Fifth Century B.C.E. from a

son of Geshem, the king of Kedar [cf. Ezek 27:31] brought (as an offering) to (the goddess) Han-'Ilat." In the LXX of Gen 46:34, produced during the Hellenistic period, it says: "in the land of Gesem [Goshen in the MT], of Arabia," indicating, it would seem, that the eastern part of the Delta, along with the Sinai Peninsula between, were also considered part of Arabia. During the Roman period, following the conquest of Egypt in 30 BCE, there was a significant increase in maritime trade between Rome and India, via the Red Sea. Rome soon sent Gaius Aelius Gallus, the prefect of Roman Egypt, on an expedition to the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula, in 26 BCE in order to gain control, if possible, of the incense route, and the port of Eudæmon (modern Aden).¹²⁸ The classical authors referred to Roman Arabia¹²⁹ in terms of three provinces: *Arabia Deserta* or *Magna* (which included the Syrian Desert and the interior of the Arabian peninsula), *Arabia Petraea* (including Sinai, the northwestern part of the Arabian peninsula, and the southern Levant, with the Nabataean kingdom, in Transjordan), and what the Greeks called *Arabia Felix* (the fertile lands in the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula). In the NT, Arabia is mentioned in Gal 1:17 and 4:24–25, the latter allegorically,¹³⁰ but as noted above, Arabia, during the Roman period, covered a considerably greater territory than its modern counterpart, which should not be used to delimit the ancient territory of the same name.

Cultural Differences Reflected in the Text

As mentioned above, during the time of the NT, the typical peasant house was a one- or two-story, single-room structure, with beaten-earth floors, a flat roof,¹³¹ and a courtyard, either in front or behind it.¹³² Other types of houses include the Courtyard House, adopted from Mesopotamian culture following the exile, with small rooms surrounding a central courtyard. It had the advantage of using shorter roof beams for the individual rooms, with the overall house shape lending itself to a cooler structure during the hot, summer, months.

North-Arab Shrine in Egypt," *JNES* 15 (1956): 2, 5–9, pls. 6, 7a–b.

¹²⁸ Strabo, *Geog.* 16.4.2–4, 18–19, 21–26; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 6.32, 7.28; Dio Cassius *Hist.* 53.29.3–8.

¹²⁹ Glen W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹³⁰ Unfortunately, there are a number of well-meaning, but hermeneutically and exegetically naïve people of faith, who believe, on the basis of this allegory, that Mount Sinai of the HB is actually located on the Arabian Peninsula.

¹³¹ Jeffers, *Greco-Roman World*, 67–68; Myers, "The Problem of Gendered Space," in *Early Christian Families*, 45, 58–60; Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life*, 220.

¹³² Cohick, *Families in the Greco-Roman World*, 180.

These types of buildings, probably belonging to craftsmen,¹³³ had flat roofs made of wattle and daub, which were reached by exterior stairways, from the courtyard below.¹³⁴ Yet, a third type of house belonged to the elite. These buildings were villas, or palatial mansions, which, in general, were similar to the Courtyard House, but were opulently ornamented, with plastered walls, painted with Pompeian-style frescos, mosaic floors, triclinia for reclined dining, with luxuriant glassware and imported *terra sigillata* wares, and sometimes even with private, Roman-style baths and/or Jewish *miqwaot* (ritual baths). The rooms were furnished with portable couches and marble tables. The roofs of these villas were covered with Greco-Roman style roof tiles.¹³⁵ A number of these elite villas have been excavated in Jerusalem.¹³⁶ The earliest use of roof tiles seems to have been ca. 700–650 BCE in Greece, with the rise of monumental architecture, as evidenced by the Temples of Apollo and Poseidon at Corinth, and spread quickly to the Eastern Mediterranean region, including western Asia Minor,¹³⁷ possibly with the Greek colonization of this region already in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE.¹³⁸ It was later, in this same region, at Troas (Acts 16:8–10), that Luke, who may have been a resident of this city, joined Paul during his second missionary journey, and even later, on his third missionary journey, went with him to Jerusalem (Acts 21:15–18), and remained in Judea as his companion while he was awaiting his initial trial at Caesarea Maritima (Acts 23:23) before ultimately sailing with him for Rome (Acts 27:1–2). While it is of course possible that Luke traveled elsewhere in Judea during his time there, nevertheless it appears that he described (in Luke 5:19) the removal of the roof of “the house” in Capernaum, in terms of ceramic tiles, of which he had intimate knowledge from Asia Minor, and would have also seen on buildings in Jerusalem and Caesarea.

¹³³ Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life*, 220, cf. the house plausibly accepted as the one belonging to Peter, in Capernaum, cf. John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 81; Jack Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 108–110; Eric M. Meyers and Mark A. Chancey, *Alexander to Constantine: Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 3* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 191–193.

¹³⁴ Jeffers, *Greco-Roman World*, 68; Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life*, 223.

¹³⁵ McRay, *Archaeology*, 76–80; Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life*, 222–223.

¹³⁶ Nahman Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 83–204.

¹³⁷ Örjan Wickander, *Acquarossa VI, Roof-tiles. Part 2: Typology and Technical Features* (Stockholm, Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Rom, 1993), 285–286; Pirjo Hamari, “Roman-period Roof Tiles in the Eastern Mediterranean: Towards Regional Typologies” (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2019), 32, 55.

¹³⁸ Hamari, “Roman-period Roof Tiles,” 59.

Whereas Mark, who actually lived in Judea, in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12), and was acquainted with Peter, whose house it appears to have been,¹³⁹ described the roof (Mark 2:4) in terms of the traditional wattle and daub material found on all but elite and public buildings. While the authors of the texts mentioned here described the same roof differently, the historical focus should not pivot so much in terms of opposition, the one source being correct (Mark) and the other incorrect (Luke). Rather, the phenomena reflected here might better be viewed as two different contemporary authors describing things: one in terms of a more complete knowledge, the other in terms of partial knowledge, filling in the details on the basis of his own cultural experience.

Text-Critical Issues and Biblical History:

The hermeneutical endeavor also necessitates, so far as possible, ascertaining the original text.¹⁴⁰ While the main tendency of the ancient scribes, both biblical and in the ancient Near East, in general, appears to have been the preservation of the text, there was also a tendency to revise it¹⁴¹ in order to keep it relevant for later readers, especially as the form of the language evolved. As we have already pointed out, place names and locations were typically updated by scribes to reflect their current designations (cf. e.g., Gen 14:2–3, 14; Josh 15:13, 15, 48, 60; Judg 1:22). Summaries and glosses are yet other phenomena used to update the text. The context of Ezra 6:1–15 deals with efforts by the returned exiles to rebuild the Temple of God in Jerusalem, which was finally completed in 516 BCE, in the sixth year of Darius I (Ezra 6:15). In verse 14, there is a summary statement that this building project was successful due to the prophesying of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, as well as the commandment of God, and the royal decrees of the Persian kings, Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes. However, there is a chronological issue here, dealing with last named king (Artaxerxes). Cuneiform evidence has established that the first year of Artaxerxes I began in 464 BCE,¹⁴² and that he died in 424/423 BCE,¹⁴³ with a reign of at least forty years. There is a period of ninety two years between the completion of the Temple of God (in 516/515 BCE) and

¹³⁹ The phrase “the house,” throughout the Gospels is understood to be that of Peter’s residence, in Capernaum (cf. Mark 1:29, 2:1).

¹⁴⁰ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 129–130; Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 14–16; Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation*, 105; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 42–47; Davidson, *Principles*, 33, 35–36.

¹⁴¹ Bruce K. Waltke, “The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament,” in *Biblical Criticism: Historical, Literary and Textual*, ed. Roland K. Harrison, Bruce K. Waltke, Donald Guthrie and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 48–52.

¹⁴² Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.–A.D. 75* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1956), 17, 32.

¹⁴³ Parker and Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology*, 18, 33.

the death of Artaxerxes I (in 424/423 BCE). Hence, even if Artaxerxes was alive when the Temple was built, he would have been, at the most, only a few years old, and certainly not associated (by royal decree or otherwise) with anything connected with its completion. Contextually, the name “Artaxerxes” in this verse should be seen as a gloss, inserted by a later scribe, on the basis of a subsequent royal decree found in Ezra 7:11, 21, dated to the seventh year of the king (Ezra 7:7), in 457 BCE, fifty nine years after the Temple was built. This decree allowed the return to Jerusalem of Ezra the scribe and those willing to go with him, together with additional provisions for the Temple of God. In addition to name updates, summaries, and glosses,¹⁴⁴ other textual issues that the biblical historian sometimes encounters are occasional mis-divisions of the text, “attaching one or more of the letters of one word to an adjacent word,”¹⁴⁵ e.g., in 2 Kgs 23:12, where the better reading might be “the king ... smashed them (*wayy^rrraššēm šam*, i.e., the altars earlier made by King Manasseh) there,” with the affirmative object (*ēm*) of the first word of the clause attached, instead, to the beginning of the following word (*miššam*), yielding instead “the king ... ran from there, (*wayyārrāš miššam*),” which seems to make little sense in the immediate context. Similarly, in Ezra 4:12, there is a mis-division on clause “they are finishing the walls” (*w^ešūrrayyā šaklilū*), with the Aramaic plural determinative (*ā*), again attached to the following word.

Another issue is the confusion of letters, where e.g., “*d*” and “*r*,” which resemble one another, “in the scripts of most periods,”¹⁴⁶ cause occasional confusion with the political entities Aram and Edom.¹⁴⁷ For example, in 2 Kgs 16:6, the context would seem to indicate that Aram rather than Edom is the correct reading, even though Elath, a site potentially located within the traditional borders of Edom, might suggest otherwise, as control of the long-distance trade networks suggests an appropriate reason for both Judahite and Aramean interest¹⁴⁸ in the site. A similar instance, with the same Hebrew letters, can be seen in Gen 10:4, where both the LXX and the Samaritan Pentateuch, along with the parallel, in 1 Chr 1:7, would indicate Rhodanim (Rhodes) as the more likely reading, as opposed to “Dodanim” in the MT.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ P. Kyle McCarter, *Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986), 32–36.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 46; Ralph W. Kline, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament: The Septuagint After Qumran* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1974), 76.

¹⁴⁸ John S. Holladay, “Hezekiah’s Tribute, Long-Distance Trade, and the Wealth of Nations ca. 1000–600 B.C.,” in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*, ed. Seymour Gitin, J. Edward Wright and J. P. Dessel (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006) 325–328, and n. 48.

¹⁴⁹ McCarter, *Textual Criticism*, 46; Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 16–17.

The pre-exilic sections of the biblical text, in their current form, are written in Classical Biblical Hebrew script.¹⁵⁰ This fact, along with various textual difficulties, have generally caused historical critics to claim that these issues are indicative of a relatively late date (the 8th century BCE at the earliest) for the production of the biblical text. Unfortunately, sometimes the response of people with a high view of Scripture has been to go to the opposite extreme, suggesting that the text, as we have it, being God's word, is, instead, more or less as it was originally written. Hence, evidence for compositional elements and scribal activities, reflected in the text and noted in text-critical analysis, are ignored or deemphasized. The reality is that the biblical text, as it exists today, reflects a long history of production and transmission. While there is evidence of early aspects, such as remnants of Archaic Biblical Hebrew, in the text of former prophets, the poetic sections of the Pentateuch, and some of the Psalms, where there are also parallels with the Ugaritic texts of the Late Bronze Age,¹⁵¹ there are also scribal and language updates, reflecting later revision of the text. A balanced position acknowledges both the early and late aspects of the text, without undermining the Bible as the word of God. Whereas an unbalanced approach to these text-critical aspects of the Bible from either perspective is counterproductive and can lead to a misunderstanding of God's word.

Conclusion

In considering hermeneutical principles for the biblical historian, we have emphasized the need for balance, including grappling with conceptions of revelation, inspiration, and the Bible, including its earlier oral stage. We have suggested that no aspect, no matter how important, be substituted for the whole, or given primary importance at the expense of the rest. In terms of history, rather than accepting any of the more radical views of the last few centuries, it should be seen as testimony, whether through eyewitness accounts or testimonial chains, with verification based upon reasonable belief, and considered innocent unless shown to be otherwise.

Furthermore, the Bible should be viewed as a redemptive history, with selectively chosen stories that best illustrated the relationship between God and His people, and those who lived around them, rather than a complete history, in direct chronological sequence. Here, such issues as not overstating the evidence, including uniqueness, and hyperbole have been dealt with. In

¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, the post-exilic books, such as Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1–2 Chronicles, are comparatively late compositions, found in the Writings section of the HB. These books contain Aramaic or Aramaisms and, in their current form, are written in Post-Classical Biblical Hebrew.

¹⁵¹ Waltke, "The Textual Criticism," 50, 59. Ugarit was destroyed in ca. 1180 BC, with Ugaritic, as a language, becoming extinct at that point in time.

addition, we have suggested ways that archaeology and geography, including acknowledging cultural differences, can be useful for a better understanding of biblical history.

Finally, it has been seen that the biblical text, in its current form, exhibits a long history of development and transmission, with language and scribal updates being reflected in the text. Rather than ignoring or overemphasizing either the early or later aspects in the biblical text, an honest and faithful interpretation of its historical contents necessitates a balanced position that acknowledges both of these elements. Such a balanced position both upholds the integrity of the word of God and provides us with the best approach to understanding it.

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