
The Bible Unearthed

*Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel
and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*

ISRAEL FINKELSTEIN
and
NEIL ASHER SILBERMAN

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Acknowledgments

Almost eight years ago—during a peaceful summer weekend with our families on the coast of Maine—the idea for this book was born. The debate about the historical reliability of the Bible was again beginning to attract considerable attention outside scholarly circles, and we came to the realization that an updated book on this subject for general readers was needed. In it, we would set out what we believed to be the compelling archaeological and historical evidence for a new understanding of the rise of ancient Israel and the emergence of its sacred historical texts.

Over the intervening years, the archaeological battle over the Bible has grown increasingly bitter. It has sunk—in some times and places—to personal attacks and accusations of hidden political motives. Did the Exodus happen? Was there a conquest of Canaan? Did David and Solomon actually rule over a vast empire? Questions like these have attracted the attention of journalists and commentators all over the world. And the public discussion of each of these questions has often gone far beyond the confines of academic archaeology and biblical criticism into the hotly contested realms of theology and religious belief.

Despite the passions aroused by this subject, we believe that a reassessment of finds from earlier excavations and the continuing discoveries by new digs have made it clear that scholars must now approach the problems

of biblical origins and ancient Israelite society from a completely new perspective. In the following chapters, we will present evidence to bolster that contention and to reconstruct a very different history of ancient Israel. Readers must judge for themselves if our reconstruction fits the evidence.

Before beginning, we must note a few items regarding sources and transliterations. Our direct quotations from the biblical text all come from the Revised Standard Version translation of the Hebrew Bible. Although we have followed the RSV in referring to the names of the God of Israel within the quotations, we have used the name YHWH in *our* text to designate the tetragrammaton or explicit name of God. In the RSV it is represented by the word "LORD," while *Elohim* or *Elohei* is represented by the word "God."

Regarding biblical chronology, with its many uncertainties and pitfalls, we have decided that a combination of dating systems provides the best match with the emerging archaeological reality: from the beginning of the Israelite monarchy to the time of Ahab, we follow the dates determined in Gershon Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah* (Leiden: 1996). For the dates of the subsequent reigns of Israelite and Judahite kings, we follow Mordecai Cogan's article on "Chronology" in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: 1992). Of course many uncertainties (relating to the precise dates of the earliest kings, later coregencies, and contradictions within the biblical material) remain, but we feel that in general, this chronological scheme is reliable for the purposes of this general work.

The renewed excavations of Tel Megiddo, undertaken by Tel Aviv University in partnership with Pennsylvania State University, have offered a unique opportunity for thinking, reflecting, and discussing with colleagues the material contained in this book. We would like to extend special thanks to the other co-directors of the Megiddo Expedition, Professors David Ussishkin and Baruch Halpern, and to the many staff members and team members of the Megiddo Expedition who have, over the years, played such an important role in the excavations and in the wider scholarly work of biblical archaeology.

The research and initial writing of this book was carried out by Israel Finkelstein during a sabbatical year in Paris and by Neil Asher Silberman in New Haven. Colleague and friend Professor Pierre de Miroschedji helped to make possible a productive and enjoyable time in Paris. During the writ-

ing of this book, the library of the Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University; of the Institut Catholique, the Centre d'Archéologie Orientale in the Sorbonne, and the Section des Etudes Sémitiques of the Collège de France in Paris; and, at Yale, the Sterling Memorial Library and the library of the Yale Divinity School all provided excellent research facilities.

Our deep appreciation goes to Judith Dekel of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University who prepared the maps, diagrams, and drawings that appear in this book.

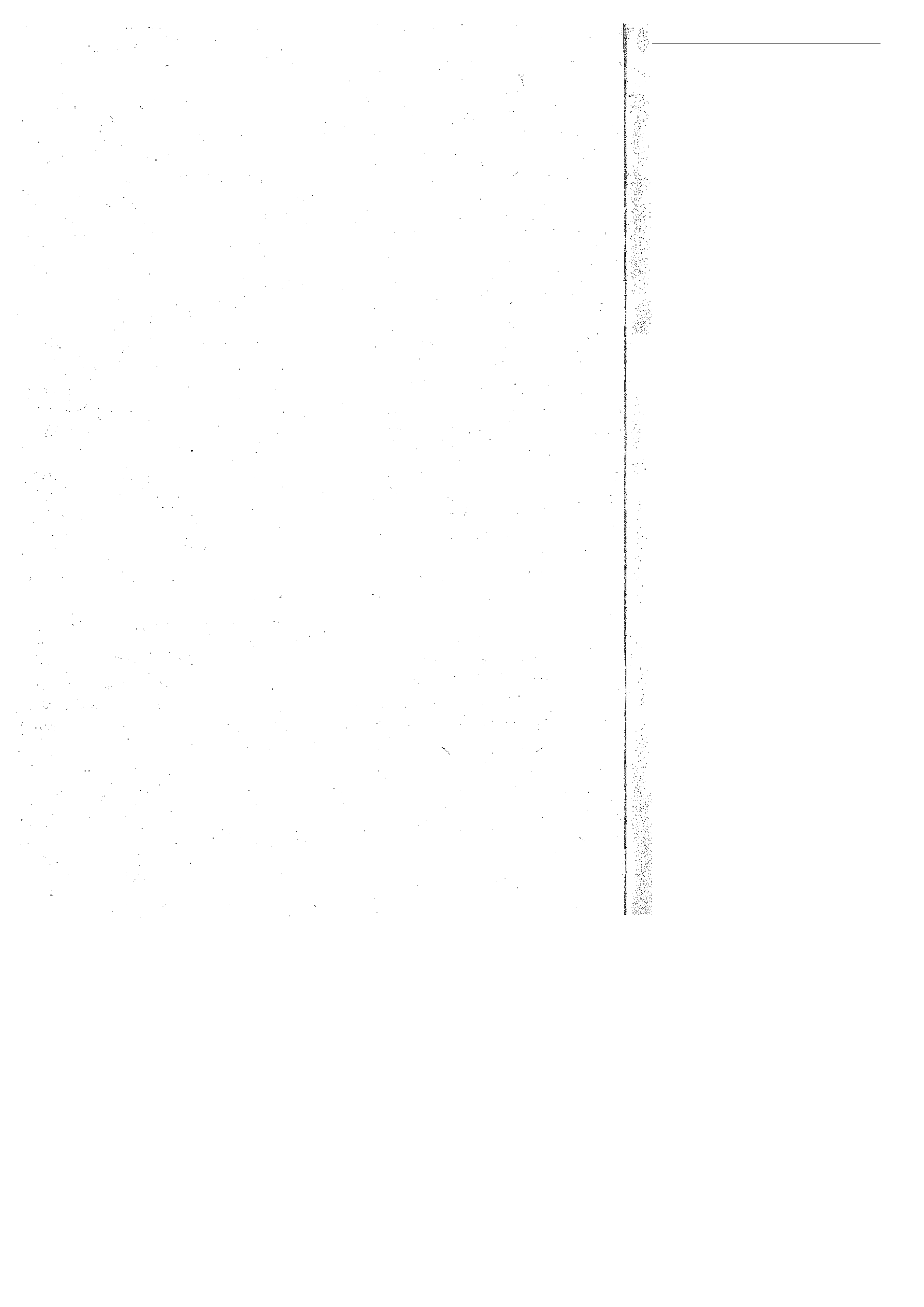
Professors Baruch Halpern, Nadav Naaman, Jack Sasson, and David Ussishkin have been generous with their advice and knowledge. We have been greatly helped by questions posed (and answered) in many late-night phone calls to Nadav Naaman and Baruch Halpern, who helped us to sort out the complex problems of biblical redactions and biblical history. Baruch also read and discussed with us early drafts of many of the chapters. We are grateful to these and all other friends and colleagues with whom we have consulted, even as we acknowledge that the responsibility for the final result is entirely ours.

In New York, our literary agent Carol Mann skillfully guided the project from initial idea to publication. At the Free Press, we want to thank assistant editor Daniel Freedberg for his efficiency and continuing help at every stage of the work. Senior editor Bruce Nichols has been an enthusiastic and tireless supporter of this book from the very beginning. Thanks to his perceptive insights and editorial skill, our evolving manuscript has been immeasurably improved.

Lastly, our families—Joëlle, Adar, and Sarai Finkelstein and Ellen and Maya Silberman—deserve a great share of the credit for their love, patience, and willingness to forgo many weekend outings and family events while this book took shape. We can only hope that the result of our efforts justifies their confidence in us—and in our idea of a book about archaeology and the Bible that first took shape in their presence just a few years ago.

I.F.

N.A.S.



Contents

Prologue: In the Days of King Josiah	<i>1</i>
Introduction: Archaeology and the Bible	<i>4</i>

PART ONE

The Bible as History?

1. Searching for the Patriarchs	<i>27</i>
2. Did the Exodus Happen?	<i>48</i>
3. The Conquest of Canaan	<i>72</i>
4. Who Were the Israelites?	<i>97</i>
5. Memories of a Golden Age?	<i>123</i>

PART TWO

The Rise and Fall of Ancient Israel

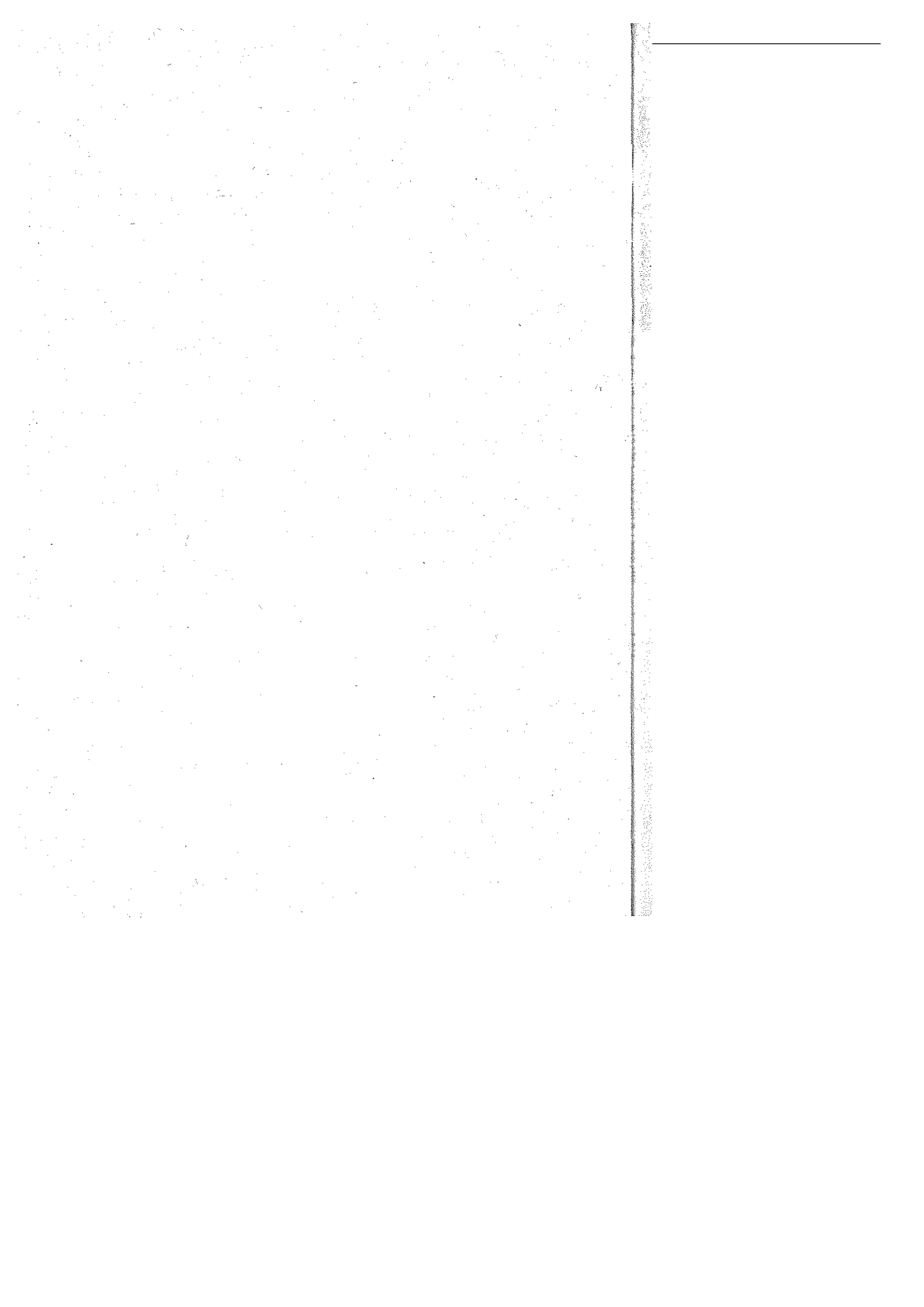
6. One State, One Nation, One People? (c. 930–720 BCE)	<i>149</i>
7. Israel's Forgotten First Kingdom (884–842 BCE)	<i>169</i>
8. In the Shadow of Empire (842–720 BCE)	<i>196</i>

PART THREE

Judah and the Making of Biblical History

9. The Transformation of Judah (c. 930–705 BCE)	229
10. Between War and Survival (705–639 BCE)	251
11. A Great Reformation (639–586 BCE)	275
12. Exile and Return (586–c. 440 BCE)	296
Epilogue: The Future of Biblical Israel	315
Appendix A: Theories of the Historicity of the Patriarchal Age	319
Appendix B: Searching for Sinai	326
Appendix C: Alternative Theories of the Israelite Conquest	329
Appendix D: Why the Traditional Archaeology of the Davidic and Solomonic Period Is Wrong	340
Appendix E: Identifying the Era of Manasseh in the Archaeological Record	345
Appendix F: How Vast Was the Kingdom of Josiah?	347
Appendix G: The Boundaries of the Province of Yehud	354
Bibliography	356
Index	373

The Bible Unearthed



PROLOGUE

In the Days of King Josiah

The world in which the Bible was created was not a mythic realm of great cities and saintly heroes, but a tiny, down-to-earth kingdom where people struggled for their future against the all-too-human fears of war, poverty, injustice, disease, famine, and drought. The historical saga contained in the Bible—from Abraham's encounter with God and his journey to Canaan, to Moses' deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage, to the rise and fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah—was not a miraculous revelation, but a brilliant product of the human imagination. It was first conceived—as recent archaeological findings suggest—during the span of two or three generations, about twenty-six hundred years ago. Its birthplace was the kingdom of Judah, a sparsely settled region of shepherds and farmers, ruled from an out-of-the-way royal city precariously perched in the heart of the hill country on a narrow ridge between steep, rocky ravines.

During a few extraordinary decades of spiritual ferment and political agitation toward the end of the seventh century BCE, an unlikely coalition of Judahite court officials, scribes, priests, peasants, and prophets came together to create a new movement. At its core was a sacred scripture of unparalleled literary and spiritual genius. It was an epic saga woven together from an astonishingly rich collection of historical writings, memories, leg-

ends, folk tales, anecdotes, royal propaganda, prophecy, and ancient poetry. Partly an original composition, partly adapted from earlier versions and sources, that literary masterpiece would undergo further editing and elaboration to become a spiritual anchor not only for the descendants of the people of Judah but for communities all over the world.

The historical core of the Bible was born in the bustle of the crowded streets of Jerusalem, in the courts of the royal palace of the Davidic dynasty, and in the Temple of the God of Israel. In stark contrast to the countless other sanctuaries of the ancient Near East, with their ecumenical readiness to conduct international relations through the honoring of allies' deities and religious symbols, Jerusalem's Temple stood insistently alone. In reaction to the pace and scope of the changes brought to Judah from the outside, the seventh-century leaders in Jerusalem, headed by King Josiah—a sixteenth-generation descendant of King David—declared all traces of foreign worship to be anathema, and indeed the cause of Judah's current misfortunes. They embarked on a vigorous campaign of religious purification in the countryside, ordering the destruction of rural shrines, declaring them to be sources of evil. Henceforth, Jerusalem's Temple, with its inner sanctuary, altar, and surrounding courtyards at the summit of the city, would be recognized as the *only* legitimate place of worship for the people of Israel. In that innovation, modern monotheism* was born. At the same time, Judah's leaders' political ambitions soared. They aimed to make the Jerusalem Temple and royal palace the center of a vast Pan-Israelite kingdom, a realization of the legendary united Israel of David and Solomon.

How strange it is to think that Jerusalem only belatedly—and suddenly—rose to the center of Israelite consciousness. Such is the power of the Bible's own story that it has persuaded the world that Jerusalem was always central to the experience of all Israel and that the descendants of David were always blessed with special holiness, rather than being just an-

* By Israelite "monotheism" we refer to the biblically mandated worship of one God in one place—the Jerusalem Temple—that was imbued with a special holiness. The modern scholarly literature has identified a wide spectrum of modes of worship in which a single god is central but not exclusive (i.e., accompanied by secondary deities and various heavenly beings). We recognize that during the late monarchic period and for a long time afterward the worship of the God of Israel was regularly accompanied by the veneration of divine attendants and other heavenly beings. But we suggest that a decisive move toward modern monotheism was made in the time of Josiah, with the Deuteronomic ideas.

other aristocratic clan fighting to remain in power despite internal strife and unprecedented threats from outside.

How tiny their royal city would have appeared to a modern observer! The built-up area of Jerusalem in the seventh century BCE covered an area of no more than one hundred and fifty acres, about half the size of the present Old City of Jerusalem. Its population of around fifteen thousand would have made it seem hardly more than a small Middle Eastern market town huddling behind walls and gates, with bazaars and houses clustered to the west and south of a modest royal palace and Temple complex. Yet Jerusalem had never before been even as large as this. In the seventh century it was bursting at the seams with a swollen population of royal officials, priests, prophets, refugees, and displaced peasants. Few other cities in any historical eras have been so tensely self-conscious of their history, identity, destiny, and direct relationship with God.

These new perceptions of ancient Jerusalem and the historical circumstances that gave birth to the Bible are due in large measure to the recent discoveries of archaeology. Its finds have revolutionized the study of early Israel and have cast serious doubt on the historical basis of such famous biblical stories as the wanderings of the patriarchs, the Exodus from Egypt and conquest of Canaan, and the glorious empire of David and Solomon.

This book aims to tell the story of ancient Israel* and the birth of its sacred scriptures from a new, archaeological perspective. Our goal will be to attempt to separate history from legend. Through the evidence of recent discoveries, we will construct a new history of ancient Israel in which some of the most famous events and personalities mentioned in the Bible play unexpectedly different roles. Yet our purpose, ultimately, is not mere deconstruction. It is to share the most recent archaeological insights—still largely unknown outside scholarly circles—not only on *when*, but also *why* the Bible was written, and why it remains so powerful today.

* Throughout this book we use the name "Israel" in two distinct and alternative senses: as the name of the northern kingdom and as a collective name for the community of all Israelites. In most cases, we refer to the northern kingdom as "the kingdom of Israel" and the wider community as "ancient Israel" or "the people of Israel."

INTRODUCTION

Archaeology and the Bible

The story of how and why the Bible was written—and how it fits into the extraordinary history of the people of Israel—is closely linked to a fascinating tale of modern discovery. The search has centered on a tiny land, hemmed in on two sides by desert and on one side by the Mediterranean, that has, over the millennia, been plagued by recurrent drought and almost continual warfare. Its cities and population were minuscule in comparison to those of the neighboring empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Likewise, its material culture was poor in comparison to the splendor and extravagance of theirs. And yet this land was the birthplace of a literary masterpiece that has exerted an unparalleled impact on world civilization as both sacred scripture and history.

More than two hundred years of detailed study of the Hebrew text of the Bible and ever more wide-ranging exploration in all the lands between the Nile and the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers have enabled us to begin to understand when, why, and how the Bible came to be. Detailed analysis of the language and distinctive literary genres of the Bible has led scholars to identify oral and written sources on which the present biblical text was based. At the same time, archaeology has produced a stunning, almost encyclopedic knowledge of the material conditions, languages, societies, and historical developments of the centuries during which the traditions of an-

cient Israel gradually crystallized, spanning roughly six hundred years—from about 1000 to 400 BCE. Most important of all, the textual insights and the archaeological evidence have combined to help us to distinguish between the power and poetry of biblical saga and the more down-to-earth events and processes of ancient Near Eastern history.

Not since ancient times has the world of the Bible been so accessible and so thoroughly explored. Through archaeological excavations we now know what crops the Israelites and their neighbors grew, what they ate, how they built their cities, and with whom they traded. Dozens of cities and towns mentioned in the Bible have been identified and uncovered. Modern excavation methods and a wide range of laboratory tests have been used to date and analyze the civilizations of the ancient Israelites and their neighbors the Philistines, Phoenicians, Arameans, Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites. In a few cases, inscriptions and signet seals have been discovered that can be directly connected with individuals mentioned in the biblical text. But that is not to say that archaeology has proved the biblical narrative to be true in all of its details. Far from it: it is now evident that many events of biblical history did not take place in either the particular era or the manner described. Some of the most famous events in the Bible clearly never happened at all.

Archaeology has helped us to reconstruct the history behind the Bible, both on the level of great kings and kingdoms and in the modes of everyday life. And as we will explain in the following chapters, we now know that the early books of the Bible and their famous stories of early Israelite history were first codified (and in key respects composed) at an identifiable place and time: Jerusalem in the seventh century BCE.

What Is the Bible?

First, some basic definitions. When we speak of the Bible we are referring primarily to the collection of ancient writings long known as the Old Testament—now commonly referred to by scholars as the Hebrew Bible. It is a collection of legend, law, poetry, prophecy, philosophy, and history, written almost entirely in Hebrew (with a few passages in a variant Semitic dialect called Aramaic, which came to be the lingua franca of the Middle East after 600 BCE). It consists of thirty-nine books that were originally divided

by subject or author—or in the case of longer books like 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles, by the standard length of parchment or papyrus rolls. The Hebrew Bible is the central scripture of Judaism, the first part of Christianity's canon, and a rich source of allusions and ethical teachings in Islam conveyed through the text of the Quran. Traditionally the Hebrew Bible has been divided into three main parts (Figure 1).

The *Torah*—also known as the Five Books of Moses, or the Pentateuch (“five books” in Greek)—includes Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These narrate the story of the people of Israel from the creation of the world, through the period of the flood and the patriarchs, to the Exodus from Egypt, the wanderings in the desert, and the giving of the Law at Sinai. The Torah concludes with Moses' farewell to the people of Israel.

The next division, the *Prophets*, is divided into two main groups of scriptures. The Former Prophets—Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings—tell the story of the people of Israel from their crossing of the river Jordan and conquest of Canaan, through the rise and fall of the Israelite kingdoms, to their defeat and exile at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians. The Latter Prophets include the oracles, social teachings, bitter condemnations, and messianic expectations of a diverse group of inspired individuals spanning a period of about three hundred and fifty years, from the mid-eighth century BCE to the end of the fifth century BCE.

Finally, the *Writings* are a collection of homilies, poems, prayers, proverbs, and psalms that represent the most memorable and powerful expressions of the devotion of the ordinary Israelite at times of joy, crisis, worship, and personal reflection. In most cases, they are extremely difficult to link to any specific historical events or authors. They are the products of a continuous process of composition that stretched over hundreds of years. Although the earliest material in this collection (in Psalms and Lamentations) may have been assembled in late monarchic times or soon after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, most of the Writings were apparently composed much later, from the fifth to the second century BCE—in the Persian and Hellenistic periods.

This book examines the main “historical” works of the Bible, primarily the Torah and the Former Prophets, which narrate the saga of the people of Israel from its beginnings to the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in

THE TORAH

Genesis Exodus
Leviticus Numbers
Deuteronomy

THE PROPHETS

THE FORMER PROPHETS

Joshua Judges
1 Samuel 2 Samuel
1 Kings 2 Kings

THE LATTER PROPHETS

Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel
Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah
Jonah Micah Nahum Habbakkuk
Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

THE WRITINGS

POETRY

Psalms Proverbs Job

THE FIVE SCROLLS

Song of Solomon Ruth Lamentations
Ecclesiastes Esther

PROPHECY

Daniel

HISTORY

I Chronicles II Chronicles
Ezra Nehemiah

Figure 1: Books of the Hebrew Bible.

586 BCE. We compare this narrative with the wealth of archaeological data that has been collected over the last few decades. The result is the discovery of a fascinating and complex relationship between what *actually* happened in the land of the Bible during the biblical period (as best as it can be determined) and the well-known details of the elaborate historical narrative that the Hebrew Bible contains.

From Eden to Zion

The heart of the Hebrew Bible is an epic story that describes the rise of the people of Israel and their continuing relationship with God. Unlike other ancient Near Eastern mythologies, such as the Egyptian tales of Osiris, Isis, and Horus or the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh epic, the Bible is grounded firmly in earthly history. It is a divine drama played out before the eyes of humanity. Also unlike the histories and royal chronicles of other ancient Near Eastern nations, it does not merely celebrate the power of tradition and ruling dynasties. It offers a complex yet clear vision of *why* history has unfolded for the people of Israel—and indeed for the entire world—in a pattern directly connected with the demands and promises of God. The people of Israel are the central actors in this drama. Their behavior and their adherence to God's commandments determine the direction in which history will flow. It is up to the people of Israel—and, through them, all readers of the Bible—to determine the fate of the world.

The Bible's tale begins in the garden of Eden and continues through the stories of Cain and Abel and the flood of Noah, finally focusing on the fate of a single family—that of Abraham. Abraham was chosen by God to become the father of a great nation, and faithfully followed God's commands. He traveled with his family from his original home in Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan where, in the course of a long life, he wandered as an outsider among the settled population and, by his wife, Sarah, begot a son, Isaac, who would inherit the divine promises first given to Abraham. It was Isaac's son Jacob—the third-generation patriarch—who became the father of twelve distinct tribes. In the course of a colorful, chaotic life of wandering, raising a large family, and establishing altars throughout the land, Jacob wrestled with an angel and received the name Israel (meaning "He who struggled with God"), by which all his descen-

dants would be known. The Bible relates how Jacob's twelve sons fought among one another, worked together, and eventually left their homeland to seek shelter in Egypt at the time of a great famine. And the patriarch Jacob declared in his last will and testament that the tribe of his son Judah would rule over them all (Genesis 49:8–10).

The great saga then moves from family drama to historical spectacle. The God of Israel revealed his awesome power in a demonstration against the pharaoh of Egypt, the mightiest human ruler on earth. The children of Israel had grown into a great nation, but they were enslaved as a despised minority, building the great monuments of the Egyptian regime. God's intention to make himself known to the world came through his selection of Moses as an intermediary to seek the liberation of the Israelites so that they could begin their true destiny. And in perhaps the most vivid sequence of events in the literature of the Western world, the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers describe how through signs and wonders, the God of Israel led the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the wilderness. At Sinai, God revealed to the nation his true identity as YHWH (the Sacred Name composed of four Hebrew letters) and gave them a code of law to guide their lives as a community and as individuals.

The holy terms of Israel's covenant with YHWH, written on stone tablets and contained in the Ark of the Covenant, became their sacred battle standard as they marched toward the promised land. In some cultures, a founding myth might have stopped at this point—as a miraculous explanation of how the people arose. But the Bible had centuries more of history to recount, with many triumphs, miracles, unexpected reverses, and much collective suffering to come. The great triumphs of the Israelite conquest of Canaan, King David's establishment of a great empire, and Solomon's construction of the Jerusalem Temple were followed by schism, repeated lapses into idolatry, and, ultimately, exile. For the Bible describes how, soon after the death of Solomon, the ten northern tribes, resenting their subjugation to Davidic kings in Jerusalem, unilaterally seceded from the united monarchy, thus forcing the creation of two rival kingdoms: the kingdom of Israel, in the north, and the kingdom of Judah, in the south.

For the next two hundred years, the people of Israel lived in two separate kingdoms, reportedly succumbing again and again to the lure of foreign deities. The leaders of the northern kingdom are described in the Bible as

all irretrievably sinful; some of the kings of Judah are also said to have strayed from the path of total devotion to God. In time, God sent outside invaders and oppressors to punish the people of Israel for their sins. First the Arameans of Syria harassed the kingdom of Israel. Then the mighty Assyrian empire brought unprecedented devastation to the cities of the northern kingdom and the bitter fate of destruction and exile in 720 BCE for a significant portion of the ten tribes. The kingdom of Judah survived more than a century longer, but its people could not avert the inevitable judgment of God. In 586 BCE, the rising, brutal Babylonian empire decimated the land of Israel and put Jerusalem and its Temple to the torch.

With that great tragedy, the biblical narrative dramatically departs in yet another characteristic way from the normal pattern of ancient religious epics. In many such stories, the defeat of a god by a rival army spelled the end of his cult as well. But in the Bible, the power of the God of Israel was seen to be even *greater* after the fall of Judah and the exile of the Israelites. Far from being humbled by the devastation of his Temple, the God of Israel was seen to be a deity of unsurpassable power. He had, after all, manipulated the Assyrians and the Babylonians to be his unwitting agents to punish the people of Israel for their infidelity.

Henceforth, after the return of some of the exiles to Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the Temple, Israel would no longer be a monarchy but a religious community, guided by divine law and dedicated to the precise fulfillment of the rituals prescribed in the community's sacred texts. And it would be the free choice of men and women to keep or violate that divinely decreed order—rather than the behavior of its kings or the rise and fall of great empires—that would determine the course of Israel's subsequent history. In this extraordinary focus on human responsibility lay the Bible's great power. Other ancient epics would fade over time. The impact of the Bible's story on Western civilization would only grow.

Who Wrote the Pentateuch, and When?

For centuries, Bible readers took it for granted that the scriptures were both divine revelation and accurate history, conveyed directly from God to a wide variety of Israelite sages, prophets, and priests. Established religious authorities, both Jewish and Christian, naturally assumed that the Five

Books of Moses were set down in writing by Moses himself—just before his death on Mount Nebo as narrated in the book of Deuteronomy. The books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel were all regarded as sacred records preserved by the venerable prophet Samuel at Shiloh, and the books of Kings were seen as the product of the prophet Jeremiah's pen. Likewise, King David was believed to be the author of the Psalms, and King Solomon, of Proverbs and the Song of Solomon. Yet by the dawn of the modern era, in the seventeenth century, scholars who devoted themselves to the detailed literary and linguistic study of the Bible found that it was not quite so simple. The power of logic and reason applied to the text of the holy scriptures gave rise to some very troubling questions about the Bible's historical reliability.

The first question was whether Moses could really have been the author of the Five Books of Moses, since the last book, Deuteronomy, described in great detail the precise time and circumstances of Moses' own death. Other incongruities soon became apparent: the biblical text was filled with literary asides, explaining the ancient names of certain places and frequently noting that the evidences of famous biblical events were still visible "to this day." These factors convinced some seventeenth century scholars that the Bible's first five books, at least, had been shaped, expanded, and embellished by later, anonymous editors and revisers over the centuries.

By the late eighteenth century and even more so in the nineteenth, many critical biblical scholars had begun to doubt that Moses had any hand in the writing of the Bible whatsoever; they had come to believe that the Bible was the work of later writers exclusively. These scholars pointed to what appeared to be different versions of the same stories *within* the books of the Pentateuch, suggesting that the biblical text was the product of several recognizable hands. A careful reading of the book of Genesis, for example, revealed two conflicting versions of the creation (1:1–2:3 and 2:4–25), two quite different genealogies of Adam's offspring (4:17–26 and 5:1–28), and two spliced and rearranged flood stories (6:5–9:17). In addition, there were dozens more doublets and sometimes even triplets of the same events in the narratives of the wanderings of the patriarchs, the Exodus from Egypt, and the giving of the Law.

Yet there was a clear order in this seemingly chaotic repetition. As observed as early as the nineteenth century (and clearly explained by the

American biblical scholar Richard Elliott Friedman in his book *Who Wrote the Bible?*, the doublets occurring primarily in Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers were not arbitrary variations or duplications of the same stories. They maintained certain readily identifiable characteristics of terminology and geographical focus, and—most conspicuously—used different names in narration to describe the God of Israel. Thus one set of stories consistently used the tetragrammaton—the four-letter name YHWH (assumed by most scholars to have been pronounced *Yahweh*)—in the course of its historical narration and seemed to be most interested in the tribe and territory of Judah in its various accounts. The other set of stories used the names *Elohim* or *El* for God and seemed particularly concerned with the tribes and territories in the north of the country—mainly Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. In time, it became clear that the doublets derived from two distinct sources, written in different times and different places. Scholars gave the name “J” to the Yahwist source (spelled Jahvist in German) and “E” to the Elohist source.

The distinctive uses of geographical terminology and religious symbols and the roles played by the various tribes in the two sources convinced scholars that the J text was written in Jerusalem and represented the perspective of the united monarchy or the kingdom of Judah, presumably at or soon after the time of King Solomon (c. 970–930 BCE). Likewise, the E text seemed to have been written in the north and represented the perspective of the kingdom of Israel, and would have been composed during the independent life of that kingdom (c. 930–720 BCE). The book of Deuteronomy, in its distinctive message and style, seemed to be an independent document, “D.” And among the sections of the Pentateuch that could not be ascribed to J, E, or D were a large number of passages dealing with ritual matters. In time, these came to be considered part of a long treatise called “P,” or the Priestly source, which displayed a special interest in purity, cult, and the laws of sacrifice. In other words, scholars gradually came to the conclusion that the first five books of the Bible as we now know them were the result of a complex editorial process in which the four main source documents—J, E, P, and D—were skillfully combined and linked by scribal compilers or “redactors,” whose literary traces (called by some scholars “R” passages) consisted of transitional sentences and editorial asides. The latest of these redactions took place in the post-exilic period.

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