

BOOK IV: Ancient Judaism and Christianity

I

Judaism¹

Like a scientific tradition, a philosophical tradition can only be maintained if there are schools to support and recruit creative researchers, and libraries to preserve the tradition and publish new results. The schools must attract a fair numbers of students, for only a few will become professionals preserving the tradition, teachers, librarians and scholars, and a yet smaller number of those professionals will become active researchers. The schools must also, of course, attract people of talent, people who could easily do well at other careers. So there must be some status attached to professional scholarship, and opportunities and status, as amateurs and patrons, for those who decide, after putting some time and resources into education, not to pursue the matter further. Schools like this only survive when supported by patrons with power and wealth. Generally they are amateurs and interested observers who have been educated in the system. Usually the chief societal function of such schools is to provide an education, that is, an ideological background, socialization, and essential skills, to upper class youth. This means that the tradition preserved in the school must be conceived to support the ideology of the society, and provide the skills necessary for upper class life, or it will not be adopted by the system.

Such institutions developed in Greece in the course of the 6th and 5th centuries BCE, with schools for upper class young men in rhetoric, medicine and philosophy, and somewhat later, publically supported libraries and research foundations. The upper classes in Greek and Roman society came to view a literary/philosophical education as desirable for young men, and provided patrons of the sciences and philosophy. The system began to break down, though, as Rome became dominant, for the upper classes there had less interest in this sort of thing, and the focus shifted from philosophy and science to rhetoric. The schools came to be attached to particular doctrines and particular founders, focusing on scholarship and the preservation of a distinct tradition, rather than creative research. The communications network necessary for fruitful interaction broke down after Athens ceased to be the central point to which all the different sects of philosophers brought their wares. There were nonetheless philosophical schools, producing creative work, in the first two centuries, particularly in the development of Platonism in Alexandria, and, though scientific advances came to an end, old advances were

¹For this chapter I rely especially on Grant (1977), Fox (1992), and

precariously preserved.

With the growth of Christianity, however, conditions worsened considerably. The upper classes and the government became increasingly hostile to scientific and philosophic research, and the notion that a rational justification for the ideology of the society demanded such research was abandoned. It was faith that was wanted, and the role of reason even in subordination to faith diminished over time. The schools became schools of rhetoric alone, and scriptural interpretation replaced philosophy and science. Philosophy (metaphysics, ethics) maintained itself for a while because it seemed necessary for scriptural interpretation, that is, for the defense of orthodox theology against the heretics, although reason, it was commonly observed, seemed to create the heresies it supposedly combated. Science, already subordinated to philosophy in the Hellenistic period, became even more marginal to educational institutions as philosophy itself did. The end result was positive hostility in the upper classes and the government to philosophy and science, except for “our” philosophy, that is, philosophy in subservience to the faith. The closing of the schools under Justinian, and the disappearance of scientific and philosophical investigation independent of Christian theology, was the outcome.

This was exacerbated in the West by the collapse of urban infrastructure with the Barbarian invasions in the 6th century. But the schools associated with the monasteries and the Church provided, in the end, a place in which the tradition was preserved in dormancy, and an admiration of the lost philosophical and scientific knowledge of the Greeks persisted and grew among the educated. Thus, the reestablishment of monastic schools in the 9th century laid a foundation for, and the growth of universities in the 12th and 13th centuries led to the flourishing of a philosophical tradition rooted in Ancient scholarship and a new, contemporary logic. By the 16th century the medical schools and universities had generated a penumbra of dissident, sometimes unofficial, researchers who inaugurated the scientific revolution. Loyal to the ideology, they fought shy of heresy, but were nonetheless intellectually adventurous, responding from a variegated philosophical tradition. In the course of 13th and 14th centuries, it came to be allowed (though not, perhaps, enthusiastically) that different theologies, all orthodox, might be developed in connection with differing metaphysical commitments.

Philosophical issues were thoroughly involved with Christian thought, and, unlike science and mathematics, philosophy continued at some level even when Christian domination of scholarship was most intense. It was the temporary absorption of philosophy into Christian thought that made possible the rebirth of a more scientific philosophy later. So, all taken together, there is a good deal to be talked about in the history of Philosophy during the period of Christian domination, even though it was only with the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment that philosophy freed itself from theology, and resumed a fully progressive character.

I shall be liberal in my discussion of Christian thought and that of related religions, allowing more scope to its investigation than can be strictly justified in a history of philosophy, in part because we have not entirely outgrown it even now, and so an acquaintance with Christian theology is necessary for an understanding of Western philosophical thought even in the 19th and 20th centuries. When focusing on properly philosophical matters, it will be a story, early on, of a struggle to preserve what could be preserved given the collapse of most of philosophy's supporting institutions. I will be treating many a theologian as a carrier for the philosophical tradition, attending to his peripheral philosophical concerns while ignoring central theological ideas (though the interaction between the two will generally force me to drag in enough theology to make the philosophy intelligible in its context). A good deal of my investigation of Christian domination of philosophy in the West will detail a story of decline, ignorance, and irrationality, and we shall be tempted to carp at our poor victims for their failure to advance philosophy even though they weren't philosophers and had no reason to take any interest in it. However critical we may be tempted to become, though, it must be borne in mind that the eventual recovery of philosophy occurred *within* Christian institutions and Christian doctrine. It would be churlish indeed, to be too harsh in our judgments of those who preserved the tradition alive. Our story can be continued, then, only with a discussion of the rise of Christianity and its adoption of philosophical thought, and to understand that, we must look first at the development of Jewish religious thought, within which Christianity arose.

1. THE TEXTUAL HISTORY OF THE BIBLE

These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness . . . “Behold, I have set the land before you; go in and take possession of the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their descendants after them.”

Deuteronomy 1:1, 8.

The history of the Israelites as it is told in the *Bible* is known to every educated person of European heritage—how they roamed as herdsmen between Babylonia and the Syrian coast until, invited by the Pharaoh, they settled in Egypt, fell into subjugation, and then escaped under the leadership of Moses, how they spent long years in the desert and finally conquered Canaan, forming a kingdom under Saul and David, which split in two after Solomon and fell under Assyrian and Babylonian dominance, and how, after a fifty-year exile in

Babylon, a remnant of the faithful returned to establish the temple anew in Jerusalem. This remnant, now fully identifiable as Jews, sired Christianity, and through Christianity the Jewish concept of a universal, transcendent, ethical God, demanding faith and righteousness, and revealed in scripture and the history of his chosen people, dominated Western philosophical thought for a millennium or more. This conception of God lies behind many problems characteristic of the West largely alien to more naturalistic traditions such as the Chinese: problems concerning faith and reason and the status of sacred scripture, theodicy, our knowledge of God, the metaphysical status of God and his transcendence of the natural order, the will and its freedom, and the relation of will, absconding from reason, to the ethical quality of an action. Hebrew thought, as revealed to us in the *Bible*, lies behind the thought of the Jews,² and an understanding of it is basic to any historical understanding of Western philosophy.

The *Bible* tells us that the Hebrews received their religion, fully formed, at the hands of Moses before they ever entered Canaan, and assumes a background of transcendent monotheism going back to their earliest ancestors. But the *Bible* as we have it, our only source for the development of Hebrew thought, was composed late, and projects late beliefs into the nation's past. The belief in a single, transcendent God, and in the necessity of faithfulness to that one God, was present some time before the fall of Israel³ to Assyria in 722 BCE, but as best we can tell, it was to be found only in a minority of the population, which adhered to the teachings

²I consider the Jews to be marked by their devotion to their sacred scripture, the *Torah* and its allied writings, and so there were no Jews before the Jewish canon became established. The people who wrote the sacred scriptures of the Jews, and who were their ancestors, and, of course, shared many of their religious views, I refer to as the Hebrews.

³The Kingdom of David split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, as we shall relate. The 'lost tribes' of Israel disappear from history after the kingdom's absorption in Babylonia, but some of the people of Judah who were resettled in Babylon after Judah's conquest returned to establish a new Jewish state after Babylon was conquered by the Persians.

Events in the Development of Hebrew Thought

About 1200 — Israel emerges in Canaan
About 1100 — The Covenant Code
About 1050 — **The Kingdom**
About 1000 — King David
965 — King Solomon

Proverbs, **S Document** (incorporated in **J**)

927 — The split into two Kingdoms:

ISRAEL (Southern Kingdom)
J = Yahwist Source = *Southern History*
joined to **E = Elohist Source**
by the Deuteronomist,
to produce **JE**

JUDAH (Northern Kingdom)

About 750 — *Amos, Hosea, Isaiah*
722 — Fall of Israel

622 — Josiah's Reform —
Deuteronomy found in Temple, expanded
and joined to **JE**, about 550
Jeremiah

598–582 — Deportations to Babylon

IN EXILE IN BABYLON

592–570 — *Ezekiel*
About 600 — I and II *Samuel*, I and II *Kings*
530–500 — **P = Priestly Source** composed and
added to **JE + Deuteronomy**
Final revision => *Pentateuch* (First five books of
Old Testament, classically attributed to Moses)
+ *Joshua + Judges*
About 535 — *Second Isaiah*

The Torah becomes Canonical

Prophets becomes Canonical

About 100 — *Writings* becomes Canonical, completing the *Bible (Old Testament)*

IN JUDEA

Lamentations, Job

445–398 — The Return, Second Temple
— *Ezra, Nehemiah*

400–350 — *Ruth, Jonah*

About 300 — *Proverbs* collected and
Introduction on Wisdom composed

Psalms collected

About 250 — *Ecclesiastes*

of a possibly ancient, and certainly extremist group of prophets and priests of Yahweh.⁴ It was the reaction of the Hebrews in the next century to that event and the other national disasters that followed that brought these beliefs to the fore, and made them the foundation of Josiah's reform of the Hebrew religion in Judah in 622

⁴As best as we can tell? If the *Bible* is our only source—how can we check on its accuracy, rejecting some of its reports and accepting others? Well, for one thing, the evidence of Archaeology is increasingly more useful in making out the truth about the major events in the story, for which see Dever (2003). But also, the *Bible* is a collection of texts from various periods and authors, and even its individual texts are pieced together from sources which often contradict one another. What we have here is more a library than a book, and the line taken by the final redactor of the text can often be questioned from what he lets us see of his own sources. So we can check on the *Bible's* accuracy through a careful examination of the book itself, asking ourselves how the text grew, what viewpoints were taken, what biases introduced by each of its authors. What we try to do is to come up with the best account we can of the development of the text to account for its final form, with all its various inconsistencies, and that theory will suggest how far we can trust it, and what correctives will have to be applied to it. In particular, the theory will depend on the fact that stories repeated, with the best will in the world, change over time, sometimes over a very short time, and these changes are often far from random. So, if a story has a point, it will be improved in retelling, pared down to those elements essential to the point, with corrections, exaggerations and supplements introduced to make it more apt to the point. If the story is a story of our own people, those elements that throw our people in a bad light will drop out over time, or receive glosses explaining away the appearance of wrong-doing. (So disreputable people tend to drop out of family oral history. No one likes to talk about them, and in a generation or two, their stories have died out.) If the story is likely to be questioned, often improvements will creep in that help us to defend the story's truth. After some time has passed, people may tell the story who no longer understand certain elements of it, and the story will be altered as they try to retell it in a way that makes sense to them. The story teller attempts to reconstruct from his texts what really happened, and so the story grows and changes with each retelling. All these things happen through normal human forgetfulness, a story teller's awareness of multiple versions of his tale from which he can select what seems most plausible, and the tendency to go over and over an important story until we get it right. So we often retell the story of an unpleasant occurrence to ourselves until we get it into a shape that we can live with. How much it is altered from original events will depend on how conscientious we are about holding to the exact truth, and how much the events bother us and in what way. This does not mean that we can reasonably take just anything anyone says and reject it out of hand for a more embarrassing story. But if we have a number of different versions available from different dates and sources, or we have a story which it seems cannot have happened the way it is said to have happened, it is reasonable to look for the best explanation of the story's present shape in its history, and the history that best explains the variations in the different versions of it is reasonably taken to be the most likely to be correct. The history, of course, has to start somewhere, usually a story the teller thinks is true, but possibly not, for human beings make things up for all sorts of reasons, and a cavalier attitude toward the truth is commonplace, especially when a good story is at stake, and even when telling a true story we often adapt it to our purposes and audience. Still, it is always possible that an element of the story is present in later versions because it was present in earlier versions, and was present in the original because it was true. If this was not often the case we could not do history at all. How this works in detail will become clearer below as we work through portions of the *Bible* of interest to us. This means, of course, that we will approach the *Bible* as an historian, not a theologian. We are searching for historical truth in it, not revelation. If the truth of Christian or Jewish faith is held to hang on the truth of some of the stories we examine, then, of course, it may be that the story is true for all that it appears to a careful historian doubtful or false. A Christian or Jew may assume truths of faith which lead them to assess the evidence differently than an historian would who made no such assumptions, and the arguments to the best explanation on which an historian depends are not strictly deductive arguments. To proceed as a historian nowadays is to work from a naturalistic world view. If it should appear that some miracle or religious doctrine is so well attested historically that faith can receive real support from the historian's work, we should take note of that. But it is not likely to happen, for, as Hume observed in his essay on miracles, it is very unlikely that even a truthful report of a miracle, or a true experience of God, will carry so much evidence that it would be reasonable to suppose it more probably true than to adopt some other explanation of the report involving imposture or error on the part of the teller. Moreover, the less we know personally of the people making the report, the less likely it becomes that we shall have the evidence we need to establish their veracity. The mere fact that a person knows something, and is truthful, does not mean that she can pass that knowledge on to another through her testimony, unless the other knows enough about her to be sure that her testimony is true. For these reasons, reasonable history begins by assuming that the miraculous does not occur, and has a very difficult time moving away from that assumption. For excellent discussions of the issues and techniques involved in the historian's approach to the *Bible*, as well as the attitudes of religious conservatives, their causes and justification, see Stump and Flint (1993) (especially the exchange between Dummett and Collins), Fox (1992) throughout, and Grant (1977) 197-204.

BCE.

This is about the best we can say about the origins of the Judaic religion while making any claim at all to historical certainty, but it is interesting to consider some likely conjectures about the earlier strata of Hebrew thought. We must depend here on the *Pentateuch*, the first five books of the *Bible*, which recounts the legendary past of the Hebrews through the sojourn in Egypt and up to the entry into Canaan.⁵ The earliest parts of the *Pentateuch* come from two sources written before the fall of Israel in 722 BCE—the Yahwist source, named for its use of the name “Yahweh” for God and designated “J” by textual scholars, and the Elohist source, E, named for its habit of referring to God as “El,” “the Lord.” The ‘Deuteronomist’ patched these two earlier sources together and added some material of his own composition during the last years of independence of the Southern Kingdom, to produce JE. The first edition of JE surfaced in the temple library in Judah and was published in 622 BCE as the basis for Josiah’s reform, and it received a number of expansions over the next century and a half. The Priestly source, P, was written during the Exile from its own point of view, using JE as a base, and adding a good deal of new material, and then a final redactor of the Priestly history, who in some ways takes his own point of view, put the *Pentateuch* into its present shape.⁶

E and J are epic histories of Israel, containing material going back as far as 1000 BCE, and should provide useful information about early events, but the Deuteronomist and his Priestly editors found the tale they tell theologically embarrassing, so our version of the *Pentateuch* omits a good deal of their testimony on

⁵The first five books of the *Torah*, namely *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*, were traditionally thought to have been written by Moses himself. Though they are still referred to as a unit, it is now thought that these books are part of a larger piece including *Joshua* and *Judges* as well. Our knowledge of the Jewish tradition before Hellenistic times relies almost entirely on the Hebrew *Bible*. To a Christian this is the *Old Testament*, but the Jews call it the *Tanak*, and divide it into the *Torah* (the book of the Law, which forms a more or less consecutive history up to the return from the Exile in Babylon), *Neviim* (the Prophets), and *Kethuvim* (the Writings). The literary history of the *Pentateuch* about sketched here does not even apply to the rest of the *Torah* beyond *Judges*, much less to the *Tanak* as a whole. The twelve books of the Prophets, and the books of the Writings, each have their own history.

⁶Fox (1992) 176 observes that the failure of recent attempts to discredit this basic picture of the development of the text, first proposed in the later 19th century, have in fact strengthened it through their failure. Modern appreciation of these different sources began in the 18th century, with the observation that *Genesis* 1 (part of P) and the tale of Adam and Eve (part of J) were clearly two different stories of creation, which contradicted each other on any number of points. Of those who wanted to reconcile the apparently conflicting texts, Isaac La Peyrère (1595-1676) postulated two separate creations, one of the Jews in Eden, and the other of the rest of the human race, the “pre-Adamites,” along with the world itself, at some time before the events in Eden. Thus historians were left free to postulate a long history for other peoples before that recorded by the Hebrews in their sacred writings. See Fox (1992) 20-1. For J and E in particular, see Fox (1992) 58-61. It should be emphasized that these sources are not known independently, but reconstructed from the text of the *Bible*. That is to say, the best theory available as to how the text of the *Bible* arose postulates the sources described here.

more sensitive topics. For instance, we are left with mere fragments of JE's account of the conquest of Canaan,⁷ for according to JE the conquest was not, as the Deuteronomist and P make it, utterly complete, the result of an effortless miracle of God leaving the land empty so that the Israelites could occupy it in a single body without a fight. Rather it was of limited extent, involving lost battles, treaties with the locals, and some plain failures, with each tribe acting independently and carving out its own domain. Moreover, the tale of Moses and the captivity in Egypt, no doubt part of the tradition of one of the tribes in the original alliance constituting the Israelite nation,⁸ has been magnified so that the local origins of the nation in the Judean highlands are lost, and the whole event is depicted as an invasion from the outside. The final editor strikes a compromise between his sources, and has the whole people march in together under Joshua, winning a series of battles through Yahweh's miracles and utterly destroying all the inhabitants of the land. Why did P and the Deuteronomist rewrite history? Their accounts reflect apocalyptic hopes, patterning the first occupation of Canaan after a hoped for reoccupation. They are the product of a discouraged people who can see no hope for the future if Yahweh does not intervene, directly and miraculously, and look to the past to confirm their hopes. J and E, written before the rise of Assyrian power doomed Israelite nationalism, optimistically expect Israel and Judah to remain prosperous and powerful through their own efforts, with Yahweh's usual help in battle. They seek no desperate apocalyptic miracle. Neither account, moreover, is reliably informed of events before, perhaps, 1100 BCE, and so they reconstruct the earliest events, including the first arrival of the Israelites on the scene in Canaan, rather than reporting them.

2. THE EARLIEST DOCUMENTS AND THE ORIGIN OF THE HEBREWS

The serpent was the most subtle of all the wild beasts that Yahweh God had made. It asked the woman, "Did God really say you were not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?" The woman answered the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees in the garden. But of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden God said, 'you must not eat it or touch it, under pain of death.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "No! You will not die! God knows in fact that on the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil." The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and pleasing to the eye, and that it was desirable for the knowledge

⁷The surviving fragments of JE on this topic (or possibly some other source, if J ends, as some scholars say, with *Numbers*), are found scattered in *Joshua* 15-17 and *Judges* 1.

⁸The group in question might have used the story of its captivity in Egypt to justify a claim to kinship with the other groups that had never left Palestine, and a claim to lands that it may in fact have only recently occupied.

that it could give. so she took some of its fruit and ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized that they were naked... Then Yahweh God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, with his knowledge of good and evil. He must not be allowed to stretch out his hand and pick from the tree of life also, and eat some and live for ever." So Yahweh God expelled him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he had been taken.

*Genesis 3: 1-6, 22-23*⁹

Most interesting for early Hebrew thought is the earliest strand in J, the S document, found together with Priestly material in the first 11 chapters of *Genesis*. J proper probably begins with the story of Abraham in *Genesis* 12. The author of S is a pessimist without much reverence for God (or the gods, as traces of polytheism remain in many of the stories). His God is a bit fearful of men, who might supplant him if care is not taken, but he wants their sacrifices, and is inclined to help them out as long as they stay in line. S recounts human technological and cultural progress since the creation, and although it observes that this progress leads inevitably to wickedness, it finds it better than continued ignorance. This is very much of a piece with the views of the ancient Mesopotamians, as expressed, for instance, in the *Gilgamish* epic, despite the fact that it reworks their old stories from a monotheist's viewpoint.

S has God fashion a man from the dust so that he might till the soil, breathing his own breath soul into the clay servant to make it live.¹⁰ But after God makes a consort for the man, the two, against orders, eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and become conscious both of themselves and of what is right and wrong, good and bad.¹¹ They do not immediately die, as Yahweh, to prevent them from eating of the tree, had said they would, but the gods bar the man and his wife from Eden out of fear they might also eat of the Tree of Life and become immortal. Still, Yahweh feels some responsibility to humanity, for they are his creation,

⁹Translations from the *Bible* are from the English version of the Jerusalem Bible, first published in 1966, unless otherwise specified.

¹⁰*Genesis* 2:5 ff. One should note that the story of Eden in J is a rainland story, which begins, not with a primeval waste of waters from which God must wrest dry land, but with a desert which God must make fertile. A flood rises from the earth to water it (2:7) so that God can make human beings from the moistened soil, and when he plants his garden, Yahweh provides rivers to water it. The solution to the water problem is Mesopotamian, then, but it is reported from the perspective of a rainland dweller in Palestine, and, of course, Adam and Eve are eventually expelled from the Garden into the rainlands.

¹¹*Genesis* 3: 1-7. It is not over interpreting the myth to suggest that the author sees a deep connection between self-consciousness of the sort that considers how we appear to others (their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked), and the knowledge of good and evil, and sees the rise of such self-consciousness as what separates human beings from the animals. Very similar views are expressed in the *Epic of Gilgamish*.

and he continues to help human beings as long as they behave themselves.¹²

The flood story, another Mesopotamian tale, occurs in two versions, one heavily edited in P, the other in S. Yahweh's pleasure at the sacrifice and his decision to keep human beings, despite their disagreeable qualities, to sacrifice to him, is the most clearly archaic element in S's version.¹³ The later Israelites did not conceive that God had any *need* for human beings.

With the tale of Cain and Abel¹⁴ we seem to move away from the Mesopotamian milieu. Yahweh favors the herdsman because of his animal sacrifice, and the story reflects the attitudes of herdsmen living in the barren lands between the Syrian coast and Mesopotamia.¹⁵ Cain, murdering Abel, is condemned to become a nomadic herdsman himself (perhaps originally to fill the role of his brother?), wandering over the face of the earth, but protected by the gods. His crime pollutes the earth so that it will not produce a yield for him, and he is banished from the company of civilized farmers. But since he is placed under the protection of God, who will avenge his death seven-fold, it seems this punishment may be intended to replace the customary vengeance

¹²The role of the serpent in the tale is interesting, for he simply tells the truth when he says Adam and Eve will not die if they eat of the tree. Yahweh curses the serpent, making it an enemy to humanity, to all appearances to avoid further advice from *that* quarter. Yahweh then curses the earth, making it infertile, and makes childbirth difficult, when he expels the pair from Eden, perhaps to limit the human population. And he insists that humans *shall* die—"for dust you are and to dust you shall return." The story of Adam and Eve is not referred to elsewhere in scripture until the 3rd century BCE, when the author of *Ecclesiastes* cites Eve as the author of sin and death. This is a sexist message, but not entirely off the point of the tale, since, as in the *Gilgamish* epic (the Akkadian version found in the library of Assurbanipal in the 7th century BCE, had developed from Sumerian tales from the third millennium BCE) the woman presses the man into culture and progress, which threatens the gods' confidence in their superiority to their creation. In *Gilgamish* it is a prostitute who seduces the man-beast, Enkidu, and introduces him to the civilized arts, and Enkidu becomes aware of himself and his mortality as a result. In Christian writings the citation by Paul, *Romans* 5:12-18, as a basis for his doctrine of original sin, turns the story into one of the most important incidents in the *Old Testament*. The themes introduced in the story are pursued further at *Genesis* 6:1-4, where God perceives a danger from human beings as they mate with gods and produce a race of giants, and so limits their life span to 120 years, and at *Genesis* 11:1-9, where God scatters human beings when they insist on living together in a single great city, confusing their language so they cannot communicate or act in unity. (The tower of Babel is not itself a danger to heaven, nor a sign of arrogance, but rather serves as the central point around which the people intend to settle.)

¹³*Genesis* 6:5-8, where Yahweh regrets having made *both* animals and human beings (it is not at all clear that the immorality of human beings is at issue in the original story, though it is clearly enough the issue in the biblical redaction of it), and resolves to destroy them all. In the original, some other God friendly to men probably warned Noah and instructed him how to build the Arc. In the Mesopotamian version in the *Gilgamish Epic* the craftsman god who originally fashioned humans, and remains their consistent ally despite the actions of the other gods, helps out Utnapishtim in this way. A monotheist must impute all the actions of the gods to the one God, of course, even if it makes that god work contrary to his own earlier avowed aims. But once the flood is over, the survivors have to do something to convince the higher gods not to destroy them some other way, and both in the biblical story (*Genesis* 8:20-22) and the Mesopotamian story, they do so by sacrificing to the gods and reminding them of the reasons they had made human beings and animals in the first place.

¹⁴*Genesis* 4.

¹⁵S itself is surely crafted from tales told by such herdsmen (though its author is presumably a cultured man dwelling in a town, drawing on old stories), even if some of the tales were originally borrowed from more civilized neighbors.

of kinsmen, moving society away from the interminable blood feuds that could arise even from an accidental killing as long as it was thought that the kin of the murdered person had a responsibility to take vengeance. It looks as if a killer can take refuge in a temple, and, if he promises to go into exile in the desert, he will receive the protection of God, rather in the way that a killer in Greece might seek purification from blood-guilt from Apollo. But in its present redaction the story also intends to warn us specifically against harming the desert herdsman, who, however unpleasant he may be, and however much we may think his plight due to some ancestral pollution of once fertile lands, remains under the protection of God.¹⁶ It may even reflect an early account how the Hebrews came to be chosen by God and placed under his protection (the Hebrews, in the biblical version, are descended from Seth, Cain's younger brother, not Cain, but perhaps the whole family was polluted). Of special interest is the way in which it echoes the career of Moses, who killed a man and fled into the wilderness to escape punishment. Did Moses, seeking refuge with an exile's God, claim such protection for the Hebrews in Egypt as well?

The story seems to come from some group among the earliest Hebrews who identified themselves as desert nomads, exiled originally from the fertile lands of Mesopotamia, and more recently refugees escaping from Egypt.¹⁷ They may have dwelt on the borders of Canaan to the south and west, a pastoral people wandering about at the edges of cultivation. Nonetheless, it now seems most improbable, given the archaeological evidence, that the Hebrews as a whole originated as nomads. Archaeology suggests that they formed as a confederation of tribes of differing origins in the Judean highlands, most of them local, or immigrant refugees from not too far away, with a dominantly agricultural, not pastoral, background.¹⁸

The religion of Canaan before the Hebrews was a Mesopotamian polytheism.¹⁹ Each political unit

¹⁶The man who flees to the desert and puts himself under God's protection is doing a favor for the community, at considerable cost to himself, by removing the potential for a developing blood feud. He could stay and defend himself, but he chooses not to, and so peace can be preserved in the community. So he deserves at least to be protected against revenge, in return. Perhaps the Bedouin deserves the same protection against violence as long as he remains in the desert and does not try to settle among civilized peoples, polluting their lands. Such views would be functional, for it is wisest to allow the Bedouin to be his unpleasant self without keeping too strict an account, else we end up in a war with a rather difficult enemy, and may even invite him to conquer his civilized neighbors.

¹⁷By the biblical account, Abraham's father, Terah, left Ur, a Mesopotamian city, to go wandering about on the borders of Canaan (*Genesis* 11:31), and Abraham left Terah's headquarters at Haran to wander about in Canaan and, under the pressure of famine, Egypt (*Genesis* 12). He was expelled from Egypt in an interesting anticipation of the later experience of the Israelites.

¹⁸Dever (2003).

¹⁹For Canaan, see Grant (1984) 16-26.

enjoyed its own gods, most of them anthropomorphic and subject to human weaknesses. El, the mighty one, creator of the present world order, father and king of gods and men, led the pantheon. "El" means "God" in all Semitic tongues, so "El" was "the God" *par excellence*, just as Zeus was "the God" for the Greeks. He lived at the edge of the world, where the upper and lower waters meet, beyond the reach of evil. He was all wise, all powerful, beneficent and merciful, rewarding justice, charity and hospitality when he judged humankind. The king represented El on earth, and performed, among other rituals, a rite for obtaining El's forgiveness when the nation had offended him. Canaanitic prophets informed their people of the gods' demands, learned through ecstatic visions as well as oracular dealings with specific deities, and certain priests divined the future by examining the entrails of animals, the flight of birds, and the stars. Sacrifice was practiced, the gods being supposed to live off the smell of the offerings. Human sacrifice, generally of infants, occurred in great emergencies, and at the foundation of cities and temples.

El looks very like the Yahweh of the Hebrews, but the existence of other powerful gods, as well as a multitude of individualized local cults of El, obscured his universal reign. Baal, a god of storms and El's son, domesticated into a god of the vegetation his rain nurtured, was worshiped everywhere, and was just as important as El himself. El may have been the god of the king and the nobles, but Baal was the god of the farmer on whose back society rested. The Hebrews, however, came to reject the cult of Baal. Nor did they have a cult of Asherah, a tree goddess, the consort of El, represented by a sacred pole, or a cult of any other deity tied to the land. There seems to have been a different god for every clan, the Fear or Kinsman of Isaac, the Mighty One or Bull of Jacob, the God of Abraham, the Shepherd of Israel.²⁰ These gods were worshiped, it seems, within the family, at the hearth with the paterfamilias officiating, not at the temple of public cult. The temples and their priests, and the cults that went with them, had been left behind in the lowlands.

From the archaeological evidence, the formation of the Hebrews around 1200 resulted from the gathering of rebellious elements from the surrounding lowlands into the hills of Judaea. There is, in the Biblical accounts, a hostility to the culture as well as the political institutions of the cities on the plain. In these accounts, the desire for a king such as other peoples have represents one of the first moves away from faithfulness to Yahweh. This is a religion suited to a successor culture to a disintegrated civilization, like the Mediterranean civilization leading into the Middle Ages in Europe. Before the establishment of the Kingdom, we observe a feudal society, based on personal loyalties, whose religion includes a radical reinterpretation of

²⁰Grant (1984), 34; W.L. Albright, *Cambridge Ancient History*, 3d ed., Vol. II, Part 2, 114-116. For historical material on the Hebrews (less so for their literature and thought) I depend chiefly on Grant.

the usual polytheistic reading of the justice of the gods. Justice is not a matter of recognizing one's place in an urbanized social order, but rather a matter of the King's duty to provide for the common person's welfare. There are, in *Judges* and *Joshua*, a number of stories of Hebrew victories over lowland Palestinian Kings after which the King's lands are "dedicated" to Yahweh. The practical outcome of this move is redistribution of the lands to "the poor of the land," who are the special concern of Yahweh's justice. The ideological shift here is not uncommon. Among the Chinese, for instance, it came to be thought that an Emperor who made the lives of the people miserable would "lose the mandate of heaven," and his throne, generally to frontier kingdoms more interested in the welfare of the poor. Among the Greeks a rationalistic justification for agrarian reform was developed without reference to the Gods, but we nonetheless see in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, for instance, how the old tradition might be turned to account in support of the poor. In the prophetic tradition of the worshipers of Yahweh, it is the rich who are unjust, oppressive landowners (the land is Yahweh's and should be distributed as needed for subsistence agriculture), and the King and his ministers, inflicting levies on the poor to execute his building program, as Yahweh had warned he would do, and robbing the widow and orphan of their goods in their venal courts.²¹ The Hebrews who gathered in the highlands were rebels and refugees from a collapsing urban society. They would no doubt have been viewed as bandits by the civilized plains dwellers, as David was before he was King. The bandits grew in strength in the disorder and chaos of the 12th and 11th centuries BCE, and about 1050, they established a new urban society as order reemerged, but one within which the worship of Yahweh, with its radical social message, was well established as the unifying national religion. The new people that emerged did not come in from the desert. They settled the hill country as agriculturists, and must have had considerable experience with agriculture before they arrived there. They were Palestinians escaping from the rule of the lowland kings, settling an underpopulated wilderness frontier.²²

Why did monotheism arise among them? The re-conceived King of the Gods was worshiped originally without a temple. Sacrifices to him were carried out in wild places in the open air. It was Solomon who, in an attempt to domesticate this wild religion, built a temple to Yahweh in Jerusalem. Yahweh might well have absorbed the characteristics of a nomad's god, his only temple a tent, and one element of the Hebrew coalition was apparently, we have seen, nomadic. But the reason for Yahweh's lack of a temple probably had just as much to do with the rejection of urban values. The Hebrews saw the cult and priests as part of the corrupt

²¹See I *Samuel* 8.

²²This all depends on Dever (2003), Ch. 10. See the entire book for the archaeological evidence for each particular point.

establishment, and so the Prophets proclaim that Yahweh despises the feasts and burnt offerings of the priests, seeking only justice for his poor. His cult was a cult that could be carried out by the people, without priestly elements from the upper classes. Possibly a priesthood was provided (the priesthood of Levi) by the nomadic group that identified its ancestor as Abraham, for their holy men would not be implicated in the oppression from which the Hebrews were fleeing. Yahweh, the desert god of one group in the alliance seems to have been identified with El, who, as God of the whole universe, might be considered independent of the cult devoted to him in the lowlands, and El–Yahweh was a god of justice above all. With the identification of the two gods, now merged, as the god of the Hebrew federation, the stories of the nomadic tribe became the official history of the federation. These stories were likely adapted to establish a solidarity with the agriculturalists the nomads settled among, and so they came to think that they too had fled urban oppression, and the materials were apparently at hand to suggest the story of Moses and the flight from Egypt, a story that was transferred by the priesthood of Yahweh to the entire nation of which Yahweh was now the God.

3. MOSES AND THE WORSHIP OF YAHWEH

And Yahweh said, “I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave drivers... I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow, the Home of Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites... so come, I send you to Pharaoh to bring the sons of Israel, my people, out of Egypt.”

Then Moses said to God, “I am to go, then, to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ But if they ask me what his name is, what shall I tell them?” And God said to Moses, “I Am who I Am. This,” he added, “is what you must say to the sons of Israel: ‘I Am has sent me to you.’” And God also said to Moses, “You are to say to the sons of Israel: ‘Yahweh, the god of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name for all time; by this name I shall be invoked for all generations to come.”

Exodus 3:7-10, 13-15.

According to the tradition, it was because of Moses, under whose leadership Yahweh brought them

out of bondage in the land of Egypt, that the Israelites came to worship Yahweh.²³ The loyalty of the Israelites to their god rested ultimately on this display of concern and might, which at least a minority (by the 8th century, any way) supposed had made it clear that Yahweh reasonably demanded exclusive worship from his people, whom he had saved for himself, and that He was more powerful than the gods of other peoples. To worship the gods of the land was not only faithless, but foolish, for only Yahweh could provide for his people.

Attempts to establish a historical basis for the story of the Exodus from Egypt must now be rejected. Egyptian sources report both the expulsion of trouble-making Semitic groups that had settled or were trying to settle within Egyptian lands, and the escape of Semitic groups they had pressed into forced labor, but this is all traced back to the expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt, around 1600, and is now known to be much too early to account for the emergence of the Hebrews around 1200, and indeed, too early to be reflected in the Biblical record. Most likely, the story of the Exodus was elaborated out of the folk material of some, presumably nomadic, group in the Hebrew confederation. It dwells on the formation of the priesthood and ritual of Yahweh, so presumably that priesthood was originally the priesthood of that group. The story was seized upon and improved later to support the attempts by Josiah and others to return to the purity of the earlier faith. It seems that the texts as we have them originated at the earliest in the 8th century BCE, in the later Monarchy, and so at least some 400-500 years after the events reported, and this is reason enough to regard the story as largely constructed to meet the needs of the time, rather than rooted in any sort of reliable tradition.²⁴ What was needed in this later period of crisis was some assurance that Yahweh could and would save the Hebrew state from absorption into the larger empires bordering it, and so a story emphasizing God's power to save his people, and his faithfulness, was required. The Priestly orthodoxy has difficulties even with earlier sources represented in the *Torah* itself. The biblical story of the Exodus contains elements outside the Priestly source that suggest an expulsion rather than a flight, and that only a part of the Hebrew nation was involved. Some tribes (Gad and Reuben) seem never to have been in Egypt at all, even according to the Priestly account.²⁵ Moses, if he existed, might have been the leader of a group of Hebrews who established themselves at Kadesh, accrued new runaways over time, and only later moved into the southern hills of Canaan, perhaps under pressure from Egypt or from some other nomadic group. But the place names in the account, including

²³For Moses and the Exodus, see Grant (1984) 38-48.

²⁴Dever (2003) 8.

²⁵Grant (1984), Chapter 4.

'Kadesh,' appear to have been places familiar to those who put together the documents, and those that can be identified, including Kadesh, seem not to have left any archaeological trace from the 12th century. In brief, the itinerary was reconstructed by the editors from what *they* knew of the Sinai Peninsula, some 400 years later.²⁶ So even this minimalist account is open to doubt.

If our narratives contain any truth about him, Moses was perhaps an Egyptian who had killed another Egyptian, in defense, as we are told, of a Hebrew who was being treated unjustly. He fled into the desert to escape punishment, and settled down with a priest of Midian, a pastoral tribe of Sinai, marrying into his family.²⁷ In its earlier forms, the story may have provided a precedent for the adoption of Yahweh's worship from a pastoral tribe by the Hebrew confederacy, fleeing like Moses's people from urban oppression. Probably the Midianite worshiped Yahweh, whose original cult center may have been at Sinai. In any case, in the story Moses came to believe that he had a mission from Yahweh to rescue his people from Egyptian bondage. All the sources tell a story of plagues inflicted on Egypt to persuade the Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. If we credit this at all, perhaps we could say some set of disasters created enough disorder to make an escape of rebellious peasants possible, and was attributed to Yahweh by Moses.²⁸

P and E hold that God first revealed his name to Moses,²⁹ which suggests that Yahweh was a new God to the Egyptian refugees. In P and J they refuse to believe Moses, though not in E. Perhaps there is an old tradition here which suited the Priestly author's concern with Israel's faithlessness, but made no sense to the Elohist. P recounts the drowning of the Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, where JE reports a battle in which the Egyptian chariots (generally maneuverable and fast, and the key to offensive victory) bog down in the mud.³⁰

²⁶For Kadesh in particular, Dever (2003) 19–20.

²⁷*Exodus* 1:11, 15-22; 2:1-10 for E's story of Moses's birth, which seems designed to explain away his Egyptian parentage. *Exodus* 1:8-10, 12-14; 2:11-22 for J's story of the killing of the Egyptian, and the flight to the Midianites. *Exodus* 4:24-26 for the story of Moses's adoption into the tribe, which sticks out as something primitive and odd in the text. Moses, it seems, being an Egyptian, had to be adopted formally by the Midianites to marry into the clan, and Yahweh, their god, threatened to kill him if he was not.

²⁸*Exodus* 7:8-13:16 contains the account of the plagues, in which the three sources, J, E and P, are closely intertwined. J seems to report seven plagues sent by Yahweh directly, E five plagues due to Moses's staff, and P twelve plagues due to Aaron's staff. The Priestly source, of course, is out to establish the rights of the house of Aaron, the Levite priests of Yahweh, but receives little help in this from the early sources. The plagues, except for the death of the first born, are all the sorts of disasters that sometimes happened in the Middle East.

²⁹*Exodus* 3:13-15 for E, 6:2-9 for P.

³⁰*Exodus* 14 contains the story. P's version seems to be present at 21-23, 26-29, JE's at 19-21, 24-25, and 30-31. P's story of the splitting of the waters seems to be constructed to explain the Song of Miriam at *Exodus* 15:21, a very old poem from before the time of Saul.

The stories about the visit to Mount Sinai and the subsequent journey to Canaan are probably late. If the group settled at Kadesh, relations with rebellious groups in Canaan could have been established there, while the location, only three days from the Egyptian border, might have provided a place of refuge for rebel groups fleeing Egypt.

Did Moses introduce a religious innovation? Our sources are so late that it is not hard to imagine the doctrine of the monotheistic transcendental Yahweh attributed to Moses arising in some other way, and becoming attached to a legendary prophetic figure. Or perhaps there is influence from Egyptian thought here, for Yahweh resembles Amun, a God of Thebes in Egypt conceived as a universal, self-created creator god, whose name is hidden from all, and who is associated with the breath or wind, and justice, though he is forgiving, and who loves and assists the poor and oppressed. Amun is later identified in a Trinity with Re, the Sun-God, and Ptah, who is said in the Memphite theology (13th century BCE?) to have created all things, having conceived them in his heart, through his simple command. The appeal of such a notion of God to peoples who feel themselves oppressed would seem clear enough, and so Amun became central to Egyptian worship in the 12th century BCE, after the expulsion of the Hyksos invaders in the Delta, under which the Egyptians considered themselves oppressed, by worshipers of the Theban God. It would not be hard to conceive Moses as an Egyptian who attributed the rescue of his adopted people to Amun, whom he identified with the God of the Priest of Midian who befriended him, if we choose to take the details of the story seriously.³¹

If we assume that Moses did originate the teaching, what was it exactly that he taught? For a start, Moses would have introduced a new name for his God, YHWH, probably to be read as “Yahweh.”³² The revelation of God’s name here should be taken as equivalent to a revelation of his real nature. According to the Elohist, just before giving Moses his name, Yahweh declared (depending on how one chooses to translate it) “I am who I am,” or “I am he who is,” or “I am, that is who I am.”³³ The intention seems to be that no mythological history of Yahweh, no anthropomorphic career, is needed. He simply is, and no account of who he is need be given. Indeed, “Yahweh” may come from the same root as *ehyeh*, “to be” in northern Semitic

³¹Or, another option, perhaps there was an Egyptian tale of a priest of Amun that overcame the Hyksos Pharaoh, which was adopted and adapted by some group, including Egyptian refugees (?), that settled at Kadesh. This is all speculative, of course. In any case, our knowledge of Ancient Egyptian religion is quite fragmentary, and only speculation would be possible here even if it weren’t.

³²*Exodus* 3:15; 6:2-3. The name “Yahweh” does not appear as part of any personal name before Moses as near as we can tell, so it seems to be a new name. Above the “tetragrammaton” (the “four letters”) “Adonai” or “Lord” would usually be written in copies of the scriptures, and the holy name would not itself be pronounced.

³³*Exodus* 3:14.

speech. The utterance is an assertion of a certain transcendence and ineffability on the part of Yahweh. He is not an earthly being with an earthly career, and cannot be understood as such a being is understood.³⁴ He is the God who lies behind all things, whose power extends to all things, not a particular God with particular purposes or powers. He is the creator god, who does not possess a people, since he is associated with no particular place, but is now adopting the Israelites in his concern that they should receive justice.

Now there were creator gods among other peoples, but they were often regarded as unimportant in everyday affairs, and although they were given to demanding justice, it was usually their sons, gods of thunder and the storm, like Baal the son of El, who did the necessary business to obtain it. In fact, there was often some tale how the creator god had been deposed or supplanted, or even killed, by his or her more vigorous offspring, or at the very least kicked upstairs into the position of the wise old advisor to the vigorous young ruler. Young Baal is a creator inasmuch as he brings order out of chaos, and he plays his role in a duplication of the stories of the older, supplanted god (often the god of a conquered people). But even if Baal can be taken as a universal creator god, still he represents a natural process through which the world arises,³⁵ and Moses's Yahweh does not represent any such process. Yahweh was identified with the highest God in the Canaanite pantheon, El, and with other craftsman-creator gods in the stories of the S Document, but these stories had later to be reinterpreted so as not to make God anthropomorphic, or a mere part of nature.

The transcendent nature of Moses's God is revealed in the prohibition against images of Him. The second of the ten commandments was unprecedented. In part the bar on images was, at first, perhaps, an attempt to prevent Yahweh's worship from becoming attached to a particular shrine, but the real point came to be that nothing in nature could be compared to Him. He was more powerful, greater, and holier than anything that a human being could represent. The transcendence of Moses's god is also revealed in the Priestly story of creation in *Genesis* 1. There God simply brings the world into existence by demanding that it come into existence. There is no technique or power in the ordinary sense. He simply says "let it be" and it is. His very word, like the word of a ruler, has a power to actualize itself. We see the words of the Egyptian Ptah, a

³⁴It has been suggested that, since Hebrew verbs lack tense, the intention of the pronouncement may be "I am he who is, was, and will be," or even "I am he who will be."

³⁵Baal, like most creator gods of the Mediterranean, is a storm god, and represents the great storm in the limitless sea of life-giving waters which gives rise to this Cosmos. See the material in Book I on pre-philosophical cosmogony among the Greeks, in particular in connection with Thales, for the sort of thing one encounters here.

craftsman god like so many creator gods, assigned a similar power in Egyptian mythology.³⁶ Hence a human power that makes sense in the human realm becomes the creative power of God. It becomes God's transcendent power precisely because a naturalistic account of the power of command is not available. A king's subjects obey him for various good reasons, but why is it that nature should obey the commands of God, a nature that surely cannot understand or respond to authority? And yet, we are told, so great and incomprehensible is God's power. This is about as close as one can get in a concrete image to the notion of an absolute power, unlimited by any other power, and unconstrained by any natural law.³⁷ The God of Moses is, first of all, a God of absolute power. Stories with interesting plots, in which a god meets and overcomes difficulties, sees through deception, overcomes other gods through heroic effort—all of this is nonsense if applied to the God of Moses. Yahweh is a God without myths. Indeed, part of the drive of the creation story in the opening chapter of *Genesis* is to identify the Sun and Moon and the waters above and below the earth not as gods, which they are for the Mesopotamians, but as mere objects brought into being by Yahweh. If this part of the priestly approach to Yahweh goes back to Moses, then Moses's concept of his god ruled out other gods from the beginning, simply because it rendered nature a machine constructed by the one god, not a community of spirits expressing themselves in natural events. If we do not attribute this level of sophistication to Moses, we still need to attribute enough to him so that his teachings could take this direction by the time of the prophet Amos. No doubt some development in thought can be attributed to the prophetic-priestly tradition that intervenes between Moses and *Deuteronomy*, but any such development must be provided with a base to start from.

It must be noted, though, that there *is* a limit to Yahweh's power, and this limit creates the possibility of a story for him, of difficulties met and overcome. Yahweh can be thwarted through the free will of his creatures, who can impudently refuse to reward his love with due obedience and reverence. What is originally the only thing that can be conceived as obeying anyone, an intelligent being, now becomes the only thing that can *disobey* God. (This is precisely because we can understand how obedience occurs with such a creature, and so can also understand how it might fail to occur. We understand neither how it does occur, nor how it can

³⁶In the so-called "Memphite Theology."

³⁷It has often been noted that the Semitic and Mesopotamian peoples hew close in the literary presentation of their thought to concrete, if exaggerated, images. It would be too much, I think, to say that they, or any other people, could not *think* abstractly, but perhaps they generally expressed abstract thoughts through such images. This would presumably be due as much to their literary practices as to the nature of their language, and it is, in any case, by no means universally true even in the *Bible*, that is, the literature we have from the Hebrews, that nothing abstract is expressed abstractly.

fail, when nature itself obeys God.) So God becomes the all powerful parent dealing with a willful child. Stories like that of the flood, and the Garden of Eden, can be retained, though with a new twist, and told of Yahweh.

These doctrines, of course, fit well with the God of the agrarian revolt of the early Hebrews living in the hills of Judaea. Perhaps they came from a religious innovator belonging to a group driven out of Egypt (not nomads, be it noted, but agriculturalists temporarily without land), and they became the nucleus of the new religion of the Hebrews. Later, towards the end of the Monarchy, the story of the Exodus and Moses would have been put together, emphasizing such elements as the establishment of the priesthood, and the faithfulness and power of Yahweh, to meet current needs.

Another element in the story of Exodus needs to be addressed, if only briefly. In the later tradition of *Deuteronomy* the people of Israel are treated very much as if they were all priests, and so subjected to a stringent set of ritual prohibitions to keep them pure in the presence of Yahweh. Now there was an official priesthood of Yahweh, so one might see this notion as the result of an emergency—we must all be holy like the priests to placate our angry God, and perhaps to ensure that his worship continues in the hard days to come when the formal priesthood will no longer be able to fulfill its duties. The notion was much emphasized in the Exile, of course, and with the final destruction of the temple, it became normative among the Jews, but it did develop out of the practices of earlier times. It was the usual thing in ancient societies for the leader of the family, the *paterfamilias*, to make sacrifices to the family god. If Yahweh, the creator, had adopted the Israelites as his own, and insisted that they take no other god, then surely he would have expected the heads of families to perform some sort of worship within the home. The religion, even early on, probably made every family head a minor priest of Yahweh, and so there is reason to think that some requirements of ritual purity might have applied to every Israelite, in his view, even if there were a formal priesthood that observed more stringent requirements.

Indeed, the view seems to have been that the whole people was set aside as *kadosh*, holy, set aside from the other nations as the chosen people of the creator God, and in recognition of the covenant between this God and his people they were to have no other gods.³⁸ (This might not have originally implied that there were no other gods, but only that the other gods were inferior to Yahweh and did not participate in His creative activity. They might each have been assigned a locale to rule, with Yahweh alone standing aloof until He chose Israel.) In observance of this special status of the Israelites, the rite of circumcision, normally a puberty ritual

³⁸In E, *Numbers* 23:9, in Josiah's *Book of the Law*, *Deuteronomy* 26:19.

consecrating one's sexual potency to the god through the consecration of the foreskin, was prescribed for them, but moved to infancy by Moses or his successors, and considered a consecration of the individual to Yahweh.³⁹ The celebration of the Sabbath may also go back to the earliest days. It seems related to a Babylonian and Canaanite custom setting a day apart in connection with their cult of the moon. The Sabbath was an unlucky day (as many days were *nefas*, unlucky and unsuitable for religious ritual, among the Romans), so that one could undertake nothing of importance on it. The Israelites made it the day in which they celebrated their deliverance from Egypt, a holy day consecrated to God, and so an 'unlucky' day, just as among the Babylonians, hedged round with taboos. (What was cursed, as much as what was holy, was set aside for the gods, and equally to be respected for its powerful mana. Indeed, in Hebrew, as in Latin, the same word means both "accursed" and "holy.")

4. THE RISE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

Then all the elders of Israel came gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. "Look," they said to him, "you are old and your sons do not follow your ways, so give us a king to rule over us, like other nations." It displeased Samuel... He said, "These will be the rights of the king who is to reign over you. He will take your sons and daughters and assign them to his chariotry and cavalry... he will make them plow his plowland and harvest his harvest and make his weapons of war... he will also take your daughters as perfumers, cooks and bakers... He will tithe your crops and vineyards to provide for his eunuchs and his officials... He will tithe your crops and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out on account of the king you have chosen for yourselves, but on that day God will not answer you."

I *Samuel* 8:4-5, 10-18.

After settling in Canaan the Israelite tribes, we are told, held annual meetings at Shechem to worship their God, which served the political end of furthering the alliance between the tribes.⁴⁰ The shrine of Shechem, El-Berith, bore the name of the covenant, and was especially associated with Joshua, who supposedly reaffirmed

³⁹See Note 26.

⁴⁰For the settlement in Canaan, see Grant (1984) 49-63.

the covenant with Yahweh there, and established legislation for all the tribes.⁴¹ It was not unusual in the Ancient world for a confederation of tribes or city-states to meet annually at a shrine maintained by all the members in common. In such a confederation one would expect, at a minimum, a common cult, probably superimposed on individual tribal cults, a defensive alliance, and common laws bearing on trade and other such matters. In such alliances, if they lasted for any period of time, always a common ancestry was postulated for the allies, especially if they shared a language, so the Israelite tribes may not have been related at all originally. But despite the plausibility of an early “covenant” of some sort, it is also more than possible that all the to-do in *Joshua* 23-24 is sheer invention, the product of the imagination of the Exiles in Babylon, some time after 560 BCE. The themes of Joshua’s speeches are certainly out of place before the Exile, and at the very least, any defender of an early covenant will have to admit that the stories we have of it are heavily reworked in terms to which Judah’s exiles could respond.⁴²

The Covenant Code was possibly adopted at Shechem between 1150 and 1050 BCE, and even if it was an invention of later times it incorporates a good deal of customary law in the Kingdom, and is the earliest code in the *Torah*. It consisted of a number of ritual and religious prescriptions, together with a group of laws relating to property and personal injury adapted from an earlier Canaanitic code related to the laws of Hammurabi. This was expanded to form the **Deuteronomic code** after 750, with a new emphasis on humanitarian concerns, the addition of much criminal law, and laws of procedure.⁴³ The evidence suggests that the code was at first quite harsh, with public decisions of cases but private enforcement of the decisions by the wronged party, with the aid of family and friends. Later, following the usual course of development, the

⁴¹*Joshua* 24:25-28 for Joshua’s association with Shechem, *Judges* 9:46 for El-Berith. There may have been a six-tribe alliance at Shechem, forming the nucleus of Israel, and a second six-tribe alliance at Hebron, forming the nucleus of Judah. The portable shrine of Yahweh, the Tabernacle, and the sacred standard of war, the Ark of the Covenant, eventually settled at Shiloh, where they continued to be revered.

⁴²See Fox (1992) 184-186 for the skeptical side of this question, strongly argued. Fox notes that much of the biblical material dealing with times before the beginning of the Kingdom, when it seems to have some basis in historical documents, turns out to rest on old fragments of poetry, often demonstrably misunderstood, and folkloric fables of origin explaining odd geological formations, peculiar customs and the like. Not much can be expected from oral tradition after three hundred years or more has intervened, and for the time before the Kingdom, oral tradition is all that the writers of the Biblical histories had.

⁴³See Fox (1992) 86 for the more skeptical view. The Covenant Code is found at *Exodus* 20:22 - 23:19, the Deuteronomic Code at *Deuteronomy* 12 -26.

penalties became more gentle, and civil authority took over enforcement.⁴⁴ The section on religious duties not only forbids sacrifices to gods other than Yahweh, but also sorcery, sexual impurity, and injustice to strangers.⁴⁵ Sacrifices to Yahweh are enjoined, but they seem to be viewed as something like a token payment against a permanent loan, intended to remind us that it is Yahweh who owns the earth and all that is in it. They do not benefit Him in any way, and He does not need them.

It seems most reasonable to suppose that the requirement that the Israelites worship Yahweh alone was part of the Code from the beginning, at least as the Code was understood in a certain group of priests and prophets. There would have been a conflict between the religious institutions and the monarchy from the beginning, arising from the fact that the King would generally want the government to sacrifice to all the various gods of its various intermixed peoples, in order to enlist the loyalties of all of those peoples. Before the monarchy, the Israelites might keep themselves pure and still allow their neighbors to sacrifice to their own Gods, since only a religion of a clan or tribe, not a state religion, was at issue. But once an Israelite state arose embracing other religious groups within it, once the Hebrews gained an empire, they had to decide what to do with the gods of other people in the state religion. They could ignore them, and keep the state religion purely Yahwist, or recognize them, the more statesmanlike move, and put the now contaminated state Yahwism at odds with religious conservatives. Perhaps religious conservatives would have been content, at the start, with keeping Israel pure, and allowing subject tribes to follow their own religious practices. But as Kings employed more inclusive policies in reign after reign, and even seduced priests of Yahweh to those policies, and corrupted upper class Israelites, opinions would have hardened, until nothing short of the complete elimination of the worship of foreign gods, and even of the foreigners who did the worshipping, came to seem necessary. These conservatives, of course, would tend to be strongest in the rural areas, and among the lower classes. They would blame any disasters the nation faced on the faithlessness of the urbanized, upper class

⁴⁴So Yahweh at first required blood vengeance for any death, it seems (II *Samuel* 21:1-9), but *Exodus* 21:12-17 allows a killer asylum at the altar (and, by implication, purification from his pollution), if the killing is accidental. *Deuteronomy* 21:1-9 makes provision for a town to escape blood-guilt if a murderer cannot be identified. An oath on everyone's part is required, and if the killer is present he will forswear himself and incur Yahweh's wrath as an individual.

⁴⁵*Exodus* 22:17-31. The reason given for the last prohibition is that Israel was a stranger in the land of Egypt, but it seems clear that Yahweh, like most gods of justice in the Ancient world, for instance, Zeus, had a special interest in the good treatment of strangers, widows, orphans, and others who had no one in the community with the assigned duty of defending them. God and, later, the government, are always assigned the duty of protecting the helpless. There is a suggestion here that the Yahweh's interest in the good treatment of guests and strangers may have moved him to intervene on the Israelites' behalf in Egypt. Indeed, the fact that they had no one to protect them may have been his reason for adopting them. The sense that the first shall be made last, and the last first, arises very early in Jewish history. The Deuteronomic Code (*Deuteronomy* 27) also assigns to Yahweh those crimes that are difficult of detection.

rulers, seduced to the worship of foreign deities, fraternizing and intermarrying with the peoples of the land rather than oppressing or even exterminating them, as Yahweh would have desired.

The Israelites moved into Canaan because of a vacuum of power there. The Egyptians as well as the Mesopotamians had lost all effective control, and the Israelites moved in from the East as the Philistines established themselves on the western coast. The Philistines were civilized traders from Caria in Asia Minor who possessed iron. At first they regarded the Israelites as rough hills-men who threatened the caravan routes to more inland areas. They kept the upper hand, but probably had no interest in ruling the Israelites, until about 1050, when, having won a pair of pitched battles, the hill tribes seemed really to threaten conquest.

In the past, a number of Israelite leaders had belonged to one of the prophetic guilds devoted to Yahweh, including Deborah, and, most notably, Samson, who was a Nazirite. The ascetic Nazirites consecrated their hair to Yahweh, so that it must not be cut, and practiced a kind of ecstatic frenzy in which they prophesied with the Spirit of Yahweh. One generally prophesied at important public rituals, such as the annual meetings at Shiloh, and, under the Kingdom, at the New Year's Festival, a time when Yahweh set the destinies for the following year. One uttered oracles in improvised verse, generally accompanied by music, after falling into an ecstatic frenzy, possessed by the Spirit of Yahweh. The whole thing was supposedly spontaneous, and sometimes, surely, it was, or at least it was not planned out by the powers that be. There was an opportunity here for a brave man to criticize the government. Generally a prophet would explain why Yahweh was wrathful, identifying necessary moral and religious reforms if the God was to be appeased. Most prophets lived in the wilder places in groups, with a recognized leader, and one learned to prophesy from the senior members in the group. A prophet who was not a member of one of the established guilds would be suspect, and his authority would likely be attacked. The prophets, unlike priests and scribes, were difficult to suborn to the government. They associated with the poorer and rural classes, and had an interest in identifying troubles everywhere, in the same way that itinerant preachers do today.

In the present crisis the prophet Samuel became leader of a group of Israelite tribes after the cult center Shiloh, where the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle were revered, fell to the Philistines.⁴⁶ Samuel saw that a single, talented military leader was needed to meet the threat, and threw his support to Saul, who was consequently accepted as the leader chosen by Yahweh for Israel. Saul turned out a good choice, driving back the desert tribes, which had been quick to take advantage of Israel's weakness, and defeating the Philistines

⁴⁶For Samuel, Saul, and the United Kingdom, see Grant (1977) Chs. 6-8.

repeatedly, so that even iron became obtainable. He also, however, inevitably gathered about himself people loyal to himself alone, gained various emergency powers, and finally established himself as King. He must have ruled for some time, but eventually quarrels with Samuel and his protégée, David, led to a psychological collapse and a catastrophic defeat by the Philistines at Gilboa. Saul and all his sons were killed, and David became King.

Now Saul was by no means exclusively devoted to Yahweh. Two of his sons were named after Baal, and he did not hesitate to have priests of Yahweh killed if they opposed him. Fundamentally he saw religion as subordinate to politics, and did not mind participating in Canaanitic rituals to consolidate the alliance with the Canaanites in his domains. David was no better. He had been living as a bandit when driven from Saul's court, and had himself anointed King of Judah at Hebron when Saul died, with the connivance of the Philistines. Warfare between Judah and Israel went on for a while, no doubt a pleasing prospect for the Philistines, but David managed to gain control of the whole of Israel about 1000 after arranging the assassination of Abner, Saul's chief general, and the chief support of Saul's only remaining son. As David expanded his rule, at last turning on the Philistines who had regarded him as a client king, he took wives from all the groups that came under his rule. He made his capital outside the traditional territory of the twelve tribes in Jerusalem, which was a Jebusite town lying between Judah and Israel, and his by right of conquest. Eventually he ruled all of Syria except for the Philistine coast and Phoenicia in the North.

For the ordinary Israelite the Kingdom was a mixed blessing. There was military security, but there was also a new bureaucracy on the Egyptian model, with an extensive building program based on forced labor. The urbanization and increasing economic sophistication of the countryside threw affairs into the hands of the rich, and usually foreign, merchants. David claimed divine support for his rule, presenting his enormous success as proof of Yahweh's favor, and usurped the place of the people of Israel as the covenanter with Yahweh.⁴⁷ He brought the Ark to Jerusalem, and claimed the high priesthood of Yahweh. The Davidic theology was established with the help of Nathan, David's court prophet, who declared in Yahweh's name that David's family should rule forever, but was independent enough to insist that David should not build a temple in Jerusalem to be the center of Yahwistic rites.⁴⁸ Yahweh needed no Canaanitic dwelling place. Nonetheless, the city became a cult center under David's rule, though the ritual was carried out at a high place in the open air, as

⁴⁷See *Psalms* 89:3.

⁴⁸II *Samuel* 7. In II *Samuel* 12 Nathan dares to criticize David for his handling of the Bathsheba affair, though he hides out for a while after publicly confronting the King. David's alliance with the Yahwists was sometimes a rocky one.

tradition required, and not in a temple.

David's successor in 965, Solomon, lost some lands, but the Kingdom nonetheless increased in wealth, and he built a temple to Yahweh, despite the opposition of the prophets. Its ritual fused Yahwistic and Canaanitic practices. It was considered the dwelling place of Yahweh, and Zion, or Jerusalem, was treated as the cosmic mountain, as in cults of kingship elsewhere in the Middle East. There seems to have been an annual New Year's Festival to renew the Kingship, and it has been plausibly suggested that there was a re-enactment of the loss of the Ark, the throne of the invisible Yahweh, to the Philistines, and its recovery and final placement in the Temple. With its reentry into Jerusalem, the dominion of Yahweh over all nations was declared.⁴⁹ The temple was not an act of devotion but a stroke of policy, advertising Solomon's piety and centralizing the cult under royal control. Solomon built other temples too, not only to Canaanitic gods, but to Moabitic and Amonitic gods as well. The *Bible* attributed this apostasy to his foreign wives, but, of course, both his varied harem and his varied worship rested on the necessities of state. The threat of assimilation by the Canaanites, with their useful agricultural deities, came part and parcel with the Hebrew state, and the long struggle to resist assimilation had begun for the worshipers of Yahweh.

Solomon's wealth had its cost for the common man. He established royal monopolies of trade, and made extensive use of forced labor. Taxes remained high to support a professional chariot army, and to repay the debts owed to Tyre, incurred on behalf of the building program. Moreover, his capitol looked to Judah, David's base of operations, and Judah's men dominated in the government, to the disgust of the Northerners, who enjoyed four times the population, a more defensible territory, and more abundant crops. The population had doubled since Saul's time, and the economy had grown more complex and urbanized. The stage was set for the secession of the North.

5. LITERATURE UNDER THE KINGDOM

Apply your heart to discipline,
and your ears to words that are wise.

To oppress the poor is to insult his creator,
to be kind to the needy is to honor him.

Proverbs 23:12, 14:31

⁴⁹*Psalms* 132, 48, 24, 99 and 47 seem to be intended for recitation in the course of this ritual. The *Psalms* are many of them hymns of the Davidic ritual.

Wise men on an Egyptian model, professional scribes of the civil service, pronouncing proverbial utterances, cut a figure at Solomon's court, and Solomon himself became known as a legendary wise man, to whom the book of *Proverbs* was attributed.⁵⁰ Presumably he did produce some of the proverbs in that book, though it served as a nucleus attracting all sorts of proverbial materials, and the accretions to it now form the bulk of the collection. The similarity to Egyptian wisdom literature is notable, one section echoing the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenope* almost verbatim.⁵¹ *Proverbs* is a book of riddles, aphorisms, and *bon mots*, full of the concrete imagery typical of Syrian literature. Much of it is a product of cleverness, of intellectual games at dinner parties, reflecting the conservative, don't-rock-the-boat, prudential ethic of the upper classes. Human relations dominate the discussion, and one is advised to remain properly subordinate to the powers that be and loyal to friends and family, to maintain proper relations with women, and to approach one's underlings with patience and self-restraint. The approach is empirical, concrete, and realistic, even when advising kindness to one's enemies or the poor, or restraint in the pursuit of power and wealth. Generally prudential maxims on the latter topics are based on the possibility of a reversal of fortunes, the necessity of making peace, or the interest Yahweh takes in the matter. Adultery is ill advised, for instance, due to the difficulties that arise from it for the adulterer. The Prologue (Chapters 1-9) is post-Exilic and takes a deeper view of the nature of wisdom, but the pre-Exilic remainder of the book is essentially secular, its praise of wisdom fundamentally the praise of a clever and experienced man for his own advice, though it also values thoughtfulness and the fear of Yahweh, which is the beginning of wisdom, for it is Yahweh who enforces justice, peace and mercy towards the unfortunate.

The book of *Proverbs* reflects the spread of literacy in Hebrew, a consequence of the growth of the royal administration. Indeed, *Proverbs* was probably used as a text in the scribal schools, and takes a pro-government attitude throughout. Another court writing is the *Southern History*, referred to above as J, which was probably published under Solomon.⁵² The author was perhaps a man of Judah, whose style preserves the charm

⁵⁰See Grant (1977) Ch. 8.ii.

⁵¹For Solomon's wisdom, see I *Kings* 4:30. For *Amenope* see *Proverbs* 22:17—24:22. This may be Solomon's work, for if he established schools for government officials using this material, he may well have translated and adapted existing Egyptian textbooks to the purpose.

⁵²For J, see Grant (1977) Ch. 9.i. For a list of the passages in the *Bible* that are probably to be attributed to J, see J.A. Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 103. Fox (1992) 178-181, is skeptical about placing J so early as Solomon's reign, and about the identification of the segments of J in *Joshua* and *Samuel*. The argument for the early date hangs on the identification of the later sections, for it is they that identify the book as culminating in the Davidic Kingdom. There would seem to be sufficient literary culture by the later United Kingdom for such a book as this to be produced, but it is impossible to be certain of anything here, of course.

and power of the folk traditions on which he draws, though these traditions represent an earlier view of the world. The Yahwist historian presents the history of Israel as a chronicle of Yahweh's continuous protective intervention on behalf of his covenanted nation, requiring complete devotion from his people in return. The evils in the world, from the beginning, are all due to human failure to show sufficient devotion and obedience to Yahweh in return for his loving beneficence. The history of the Israelites is the story of a people striving to regain a lost paradise in Canaan, the land of milk and honey, by regaining their old relation to their god. Such a world-picture demands an original sin, for which all subsequent generations are punished, and so we have the story of Adam and Eve, and it demands a hero of faith, here Abraham, who receives his blessing undeserved because of his faith, and retains it by perfect obedience to Yahweh.⁵³

The story of Esau and Jacob in the *Southern History* provides a counterweight to any exaggerated emphasis we may put on a slavish subordination to God after reading of Abraham. The innocence of Esau, caught in Jacob's wiles, is clear, but he loses his birthright in any case, and so is placed in God's special charge wandering in the desert, while Jacob inherits the Promise. Esau is noble, and in some sense close to God, but as a child is close to God. He has not attained a man's estate, and does not relate to God as a mature man does, as the people of the covenant do. It is probably not reading too much into the *Southern History*, and certainly it reads nothing more into it than the Alexandrian theologians of the 2nd century CE did, to see it as the story of the maturation of a people until they become capable of an adult relation to their God, making their own way with God's help instead of relying on God as a child relies on its parents. So Jacob is clearly admired by the Yahwist much as Odysseus is admired by Homer—he is cunning and full of wiles (like Odysseus), but he is a man, self-reliant and heroic, a worthy companion of Yahweh, unlike many of the simpler souls he meets on his journeys. Indeed, it may not be too much to say that the Yahwist, taking the attitude of his earliest source, S, discussed above, saw the fall from grace as a necessary stage in man's maturation. One must break with the father before one can come to wisdom, and properly respect and fear the father, and learn to give him obedience, but one must also break with the father to become one's own person, and learn to live one's own life with his own aims. Looking back on Abraham from the story of Jacob, we can see that he, too, was an adult. He was completely obedient to, and had complete faith in, Yahweh, as any sensible person aware of the facts would, but he had his own aims and his own life, and was no man's fool.

⁵³See *Genesis* 15:6 for Abraham's justification through his faith. It should be noted that J is not particularly interested in the increasingly elaborate codes of ritual law introduced later by the Deuteronomist and the Priestly editors. His chief interest seems to be explanatory stories, explaining everything from odd geologic formations (salt pillars and Lot's wife) to place names and old customs.

J viewed the Davidic monarchy as the realization of Jahweh's promise to Abraham, and is in its later portions (if those have been correctly identified) favorable to the United Monarchy.⁵⁴ By way of political ideology, one might also note here the tales of the disreputable origins of Israel's enemies, for instance, that of Noah's drunkenness which led to the curse of Ham and his son Canaan. (This story was used much later by American Southerners to justify their use of Africans as slaves, since the Africans were descendants of Ham.) J may well have been intended above all to provide a common history for the nation by welding together various local traditions, and applying them all to Israel, in order to break down tribal insularities.

Another noteworthy history from this period (or at least depending on some memoir from this period) is the *Court History*,⁵⁵ which recounts David's career, and has its climax in Solomon's rise to the throne. The author has a firsthand knowledge of events, and is a master of complex characterization. He is familiar with wisdom literature, psychologically and politically canny, and writes in a brilliantly concise style, with sustained drama and vivid detail throughout, which marks him as a sophisticated member of an elite literary culture. A particular strength lies in his ability to keep the main narrative clear despite numerous complicated subplots. His complex and subtle understanding of the inevitable ambivalence of situation and character, and his sympathy for all the actors in his drama, mark him as a master of historical narrative. Nonetheless, the court historian remains Hebrew. His history is punctuated with folk tales of moral import, such as the story of Nathan's criticism of David's affair with Bathsheba. He represents Solomon as the rightful successor of David because Yahweh willed it (once more, as in J, preferring the more subtle, younger heir), and David himself overcomes his faults only with Yahweh's aid. This is not quite objective history by our standards, but it does take a predominantly political view of events, attempts to be fair to all sides, and tries to take account of the empirical facts. Moreover, there is no grand scheme of salvation in God's mind here, however much He is often said to move events. This is not history informed by theology—if anything its theology is informed by history, for we know that God favored David and Solomon chiefly because we know they succeeded. It is the greatest history we have from the pre-Hellenic world.

6. THE NORTHERN AND THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM

⁵⁴Some would make the *Early Source* of I *Samuel* part of J, an extension of *Judges* 13-16, likewise mostly J. If it is not, then it is presumably some other history written under the United Kingdom, and the remark here about the political import of J can be transferred to this history.

⁵⁵This history is found at II *Samuel* 9 – 19, with some misplaced fragments in chs. 21–24, I *Kings* 1 – 2. See Grant (1977) Ch.9.ii, and Fox (1992) 187–190.

One day when Jeroboam had gone out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh accosted him on the road. Ahijah was wearing a new cloak; the two of them were in the open country by themselves. Ahijah took the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve strips, saying to Jeroboam, "Take ten strips for yourself, for thus Yahweh speaks, the God of Israel, 'I am going to tear the kingdom from Solomon's hand and give ten tribes to you...'"

I Kings 11:29-31

Upon the death of Solomon in 927, Israel seceded from the kingdom, leaving Judah isolated in the South.⁵⁶ Judah and Israel had been under separate administrations even under the monarchy, and given their independence before Saul, and the dominance of Judeans in the monarchy, it is no surprise that the national feelings of the two groups persisted. The split meant the end of the imperial period, and even of independence, for disunited the tribes could neither hope to dominate their neighbors, nor, in the face of a resurgent Egypt and the rising Assyrian power, even expect to remain masters of their own affairs.

The breakup occurred when the ten northern tribes took the occasion of Rehoboam's succession to demand relief from taxes and forced labor. The demands could not be met, and the young king's attempts to enforce submission failed when the ten tribes chose Jeroboam I as their king. Jeroboam, director of forced labor in Ephraim under Solomon, had been implicated in a plot against the king, and forced to take refuge in Egypt. The Egyptians were no doubt only too glad to return him to Israel as ruler of the secessionist North.

Israel had no metropolis, though, and the temple belonged to Judah. Jeroboam tried to establish a capitol and a rival to the Temple in Jerusalem, but this put him at odds with the priesthood of Levi, whose pilgrim trade was threatened. It is for this reason that the sanctuaries established at Bethel and Dan were depicted as Canaanitic and sinful by the Southern author of *I Kings*,⁵⁷ though no doubt there was also some truth in the accusation of syncretism, as Jeroboam and his successors were anxious to placate both the Canaanites and the Israelites under their rule.

When Omri (882-871) succeeded Jeroboam the country was staggering from the invasion of Sheshonk of Egypt, who had withdrawn only because of a crisis at home (though as it turned out Egypt would not play an important role in Palestine again for nearly three centuries). Omri proved an able military commander, and

⁵⁶The account of events in this section rely chiefly on Grant (1977) ch. 10.

⁵⁷*Exodus 32:4-35*, the story of the golden calf against the use of images, was probably contrived to attack the golden bulls at the entrances to the processional ways leading to these temples. The passage represents an extension of the prohibition of images of Yahweh to the prohibition of images of anything at all.

he wisely concluded a peace with Judah, so that he was able to make Israel secure again, and even expand her borders. He established a capitol at Samaria, a defensible fortress in the hills. The town was deliberately kept Canaanitic, with no temple to Yahweh. A second, Yahwist capitol was established at Jezreel, and Omri's successors ruled the kingdom from two separate capitols. It looks as if the King hoped to placate the Israelite demand for purity in their religion in this way, only his person providing a connection between them and the Canaanites, but the conservatives were not so easily to be placated. Ahab (871-852) especially incurred the wrath of the prophet Elijah for his tolerant religious policies, though he seems to have been a successful king, especially militarily. He was able to hold Moab in subjection (we have a Moabite document attributing this temporary subjection by Israel to the anger against his people of their god, Chemosh), and in alliance with the Arameans he fought the expansionist Assyrians to a standstill at Karkar (852), securing Israel's independence for the immediate future.⁵⁸

But in the reign of his son, Joram (851-845), a senior officer named Jehu (845-818) staged a successful Yahwist coup. Jezebel, Joram's Phoenician wife, was especially hostile to Yahwism, and was slaughtered with the king, the priests of Baal and the rest of the court, and even Ahaziah, king of Judah, who happened to be visiting the court at the time. Samaria's Canaanitic priesthood was destroyed along with their temple. All this had terrible consequences in foreign policy, and Jehu found himself isolated from Phoenicia and involved in continual warfare with Judah after Athaliah, Omri's granddaughter, staged a counter-coup there.

Behind Jehu's coup stood the prophets Elija and Elisha, and the sect of Rechabites, successors of the Nazirites.⁵⁹ Elija's prophecies are all attacks on the monarchy and the worshipers of Baal, and contain but little theology, though they do clearly envision Yahweh as supreme and able to control events in other countries. The prophetic view was that other countries were able to defeat Israel only because of the deeply laid plans of Yahweh. Elija was later revered as the greatest of the prophets, and reputed to have been taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot while still alive. The coup was made possible by the difficulty of establishing a firm principle of succession, for, given the possibility of prophetic interference, there could be no firm succession from father to son, or even a firm acceptance that the King must come from the house of Omri. Thus Elisha was able to anoint Jehu king, harking back to the ceremony in which Samuel had anointed Saul. The coup's base lay in the fringe lands occupied by herdsmen who found the precepts of Moses to their liking, and the urban life of the

⁵⁸For Ahab, Omri, and Jehu see Fox (1992) 255-261.

⁵⁹For Elijah and Elisha, see Grant (1977) ch. 11.i.

Canaanites unholy. Their prophetic literature has provided ammunition for Christians opposed to urban ways ever since, from the movements of the Roman Empire right up to present day American Fundamentalism.

Jehu had to bow to political necessity and his own military weakness, brought on by his loss of allies and the intolerance he showed to so many of his subjects. He soon made submission to Assyria in 843.⁶⁰ The non-Israelite parts of the kingdom were stripped away. Finally, under Jehu's son, Jehoahaz (818-802), Israel became a virtual vassal of Damascus, and was forced to accept Aramean and Canaanitic influence once more. Joash (802-787) won independence from Damascus only because of the Assyrian assault on that nation in 802, and took his opportunity to attack Judah with great success. Jeroboam II (787-747) continued his expansionist activity, reestablishing Israel as the strongest power in Syria. He kept peace with Judah (then under Uzziah), and regained a measure of affluence, though prosperity was uneven, as the prophet Amos pointed out. But Jeroboam is ranked as an evil king by the priestly historians, for, as his successes might have told us, he had abandoned Jehu's Yahwist program in favor of internal peace with the Canaanites.

Upon his death, Israel's fortunes rapidly declined before the rise of Assyrian power under Tiglath-pileser III (745-727). The Assyrians established a corridor to the coast, and exacted a huge tribute from Israel. The economic burden led to an internal revolt against Assyria by Pekah (735-732), an army officer, and a coalition of kingdoms in the area (not including Judah). But the Assyrians demolished the coalition, devastated Israel and deported many of its most important citizen to Assyria as hostages to ensure its good behavior. Hoshea (731-723) saved the kingdom only by murdering Pekah and making submission to Assyria, but himself entered on a futile revolt upon Tiglath-pileser's death. Samaria fell to Shalmaneser V of Assyria in 722, and was utterly destroyed. Israel was annexed, and 27,290 of its more upper class inhabitants were forcibly resettled in Assyria and Media, where they disappeared from view forever, assimilated by the local populations. These are the ten lost tribes of Israel.

7. LITERATURE IN ISRAEL

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will
 not accept them.
 And the peace offerings of your fatted beasts, I will not look upon them.
 Take away from me the noise of your songs, to the melody of your harps I will not

⁶⁰There is an Assyrian relief of Jehu making his submission to Shalmaneser (Fox (1992) 260). Israel had been the backbone of the alliance against Assyria, and with Jehu's disastrous succession to the throne the region was rapidly overrun.

listen.
But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing
stream.

Amos 5:21-24.

Perhaps Israel could not have survived in any case, but its doom was sealed by the activities of the fanatical Yahwists who overthrew Ahab. Elijah and Elisha were the leading prophets of this group, but they hold little interest for the history of thought. **Amos** was a different case.⁶¹ He was not a member of any prophetic guild, and he advanced no political party. A plain man from a village in the Judean hills, he appeared as a prophet at the sanctuary of Bethel just once, about 750, probably interrupting a New Year's celebration with his sermon, and no doubt hoping to gain the ear of the king. He was scolded by the Priest for interrupting the festival, but the tradition of prophecy was strong enough so that he got away with only a scolding. His prophecy focuses on the moral duties of the individual, and he insists that Yahweh loves justice above ritual sacrifice. Indeed, he seems not to care whether the Israelites allow the worship of other deities, going so far as to deny that there is any special covenant of Yahweh with Israel, since Yahweh aids all peoples to overcome unjust oppression.⁶² The rhythm of his prophecy must have been startling to a good Yahwist. He would begin conventionally enough by condemning the foreign nations for their violations of humanity and international law, but then he would condemn the worshipers of Yahweh as well for the same violations of Yahweh's justice. No mention is made of the evils of Canaanitic worship and the necessity of stamping it out. Instead, he demands the nation turn to justice, the only true worship of God. The Israelites are hard and unjust in their dealings with the poor, they indulge themselves with prostitutes, and shut up the prophets who warn them of their impending punishment. There is no hint in Amos that religious reform is the way to prevent disaster. Only a reform of people's lives will do that.⁶³

At one place Amos seems to accept a special relation of Yahweh to Israel, but uses it to argue not that Israel will experience mercy, but that her penalty will be especially severe, since the nation had had its duties

⁶¹For Amos, see Grant (1977) ch. 11.ii.

⁶²*Amos 9:7-8.*

⁶³*Amos 9:9-15* holds forth the hope that a remnant of the faithful will survive the coming catastrophe, but this section is commonly regarded as a later addition.

made especially clear.⁶⁴ Yahweh will not rescue Israel from the Assyrians. He will use the Assyrians to punish her. We have here an uncompromising monotheist believing in a universal God of justice, a God of all nations, rewarding the righteous and destroying the wicked in this life, a God who loves people and will show them mercy if they repent and reform. The priest in charge of Bethel evicted Amos and silenced him, which is not surprising, in view of the originality of his message and his lack of credentials. But his followers recorded his prophecies in writing, and produced the earliest purely prophetic book in the *Bible*.

Hosea, who prophesied at about the same time as Amos, but was active for perhaps twenty years, was a more conventional thinker, dead set against Canaanitic religion, and trusting faithfulness to Yahweh above righteousness for Israel's salvation. Like Amos, he predicted a disaster at the hands of Assyria, and a saving remnant that would turn back to Yahweh and rebuild Israel, which, reunite the Kingdom, and eventually rule the whole earth. But later he may have backed off from this optimistic expectation, though he still seemed to think there would be a return.⁶⁵ He is also like Amos in blaming current evils on the faithlessness of the priests and nobles, not the common people from whom he came, and he attacks the guilds of the prophets directly.⁶⁶ He goes so far as to take the kingship itself as an apostasy from Yahweh, as does E and *Deuteronomy*.⁶⁷

The Elohist source in the *Pentateuch*, E,⁶⁸ was written in the North, probably before 800, since no hint of the Assyrian threat is given in his work, and the perversion of the monarchy by Ahab and Omri is often on its mind. It holds prophets in honor, describing both Abraham and Moses as prophets, and romanticizes the Israel of Moses, making it a nation that follows Yahweh, unlike the Kingdom. His work was probably carried south by refugees after the fall of Samaria, and amalgamated with J soon after. The Elohist uses old folk material, but lacks J's vividness in the retelling, in part because he always has in mind Yahweh's purpose for

⁶⁴*Amos* 3:2—"You alone, of all the families of earth, have I acknowledged, therefore it is for all your sins that I mean to punish you."

⁶⁵The optimism occurs in *Hosea* 1 - 3, the more pessimistic view in the remainder of the book. The earlier optimism even seems to be mocked in *Hosea* 6:1-6, as the Israelites are represented saying that they shall repent and be raised up on the third day by Yahweh, like the dying god of the Canaanites, and Yahweh is represented responding that this new faithfulness of theirs is like the morning dew which quickly disappears. *Hosea* 11:7-11 seems to envision an exile in Assyria and Egypt, and a return with Yahweh alone ruling, and no King. Perhaps Hosea gave up secular expectations that Israel would come to rule the world, but not his expectation of eventual redemption, when he rejected the Kingship. *Hosea* 14:2-10 is a later addition.

⁶⁶*Hosea* 4:5.

⁶⁷*Hosea* 10:3, 13:9-11.

⁶⁸For E, see Grant (1977) ch. 11.iii.

Israel, and refuses to lose himself in the story. He cleans up the old tales of the Patriarchs, always taking the moral point of view, and omitting the spicier items, and he keeps Yahweh at a distance, never allowing as J does a face to face contact of man with God. It is in E that the transcendence of Moses's God emerges. E especially likes to tell how human faithfulness is tried by Yahweh in terrible tests, and seems to think that evil can be explained this way. The story of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac⁶⁹ is the most severe example of this tendency. The morality of a God who would set up such a test may be questioned, but the existence of evil raises the question anyway, and E probably viewed God's transcendence as a suitable reply to all quibbles. He did not see how God could be held to account to a merely human morality. Yahweh is righteous, but that does not mean he is indulgent or kind, and it does mean above all that he is jealous of his honor, which, given his position, he has every right to defend, and no reason ever to compromise.

8. JUDAH

Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God is the one Yahweh. You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength.

Deuteronomy 6:4.

In the end, Judah faced the same problems Israel did, and, though far less exposed to external attack, she suffered military disaster whenever a single great power dominated the Middle East.⁷⁰ In the beginning Egypt dominated, and Sheshonk I, on his way to invade Israel, attacked Judah as well. Solomon's son, Rehoboam (926-910), paid a ransom to save the country, and surrounded the country with fortresses upon the Egyptian withdrawal. Judah was no less subject to internal division, either, and Rehoboam had to placate Canaanite and Philistine elements by tolerating, and even participating in, the worship of their gods.

For a while things went well. Abijah (910-908) and Asa (908-868) pressed Israel hard with the help of an alliance with Damascus, and Asa could risk alienating the Canaanites, destroying their altars and winning praise in the *Torah* for his faithfulness to Yahweh. Jehoshaphat (868-847) continued this Yahwist policy, and, though he gave up the war against Israel, Judah seems to have experienced some prosperity. But luck ran out with Jehoram (847-845). He married Athaliah, an Israelite, as part of his father's foreign policy, and when he died and their son Ahaziah was murdered in Jehu's coup, Athaliah seized the throne and launched a retaliatory

⁶⁹*Genesis 22:1-14.*

⁷⁰For the history of the Southern Kingdom, see Grant (1977) ch. 12.

attack against the Yahwists.

A period of enmity between priests and kings ensued. Jehoiada, priest of the Temple, brought down Athaliah by intrigue, and put her minor son Jehoash (840-801) on the throne. But Jehoash remained Canaanite, and showed his colors when he came of age. Subjecting Temple finances to close scrutiny, he had Zechariah, Jehoiada's successor, stoned when he criticized the court. He died fighting an invading army from Damascus, and his son Amaziah (801-773), after an initial success against Edom, wound up a vassal of Israel after a disastrous war. His son Uzziah (781-756) and grandson Jotham (756-741) recovered good relations with the Northern Kingdom, expanded and strengthened Judah and regained prosperity, but when Ahaz (741-725) refused to join the alliance against Tiglath-Pileser III his neighbors handled him roughly, and then he failed to profit from his restraint when the victorious Assyrian demanded tribute anyway. Ahaz nonetheless continued to play the client king, paying a visit to Assyria and installing an Assyrian altar in the Temple on his return.

Hezekiah (725-696), perhaps influenced by Isaiah, embarked on a new policy of religious reform, attacking all foreign cults, and centralizing worship under royal control at Jerusalem. In 705, when Sargon II died, he actually revolted from Assyria, allying himself with Egypt against Sennacherib. The Assyrians crushed the coalition, demanded a huge ransom, and handed over large parts of Judah to the Philistines. (*Kings* reports a miraculous deliverance from the Assyrians, a story that probably grew up from the failure of Sennacherib to occupy the country.)

Hezekiah's son, Manasseh (696-642) understandably reversed his father's religious policy, openly favoring Baal and reintroducing the Assyrian altars. No prophecy is recorded in his time—probably he refused to tolerate any. He kept Judah alive by playing the vassal to Assyria, which was glad to have him as a guarantee against any revival of Egyptian strength in the area. His policies were suited to the times, and he ruled peacefully for almost fifty years, but his son Amon reaped their consequences, when almost immediately Yahwists assassinated him. His son Josiah came to the throne at only eight years of age, the Yahwists in control.

Once more, a minor king, when he came of age, altered religious policy, but Josiah, instead of reinstating toleration of Canaanitic cults, established extensive reforms within Yahwism. Assurbanipal had died in 625, and the Scythians had so weakened the Assyrians that the risk involved in ejecting foreign deities seemed tolerable once more. Indeed, the Medes and Babylonians launched a revolt that destroyed the Assyrian Empire in 612. So, in 621 BCE a royal secretary found the "Book of the Law," probably *Deuteronomy* in its earliest redaction, in the Temple library. Josiah heard it read, and was shocked to hear how far current practice deviated from its prescriptions. A prophetess confirmed its authenticity, foretelling the fall of Judah after the

King's death because of the nation's faithlessness. Thus Josiah inaugurated a great reform of Yahwism, and in so doing, probably prevented its complete obliteration. He stamped out every non-Yahwist cult, and government control clamped down on the priests (as under Hezekiah), for there was to be only one Temple, in the capitol, and all the local priests had to come there to serve Yahweh.⁷¹ The reform represented a cooperative effort by priests and prophets, for the intolerant prophetic program had been instituted, but in a way that preserved power for the priests. The public recitation of the sacred book seems to have mollified even Jeremiah, with its implication that the humble, too, deserved attention and aid from the government.⁷²

The *Book of the Law* was, indeed, the first sacred book, supposed to have been inspired by God and written by Moses as an authoritative guide in all religious matters. It gained successive accretions until about 550, when it was joined to JE and the other books of the *Bible* from *Genesis* to *Kings* (less the Priestly source, *Leviticus*, and *Ruth*). The attribution to Moses then carried over to the whole of the *Pentateuch*, thereafter regarded as especially holy.⁷³

Deuteronomy as we now have it consists of three great speeches by Moses supposedly delivered to the Israelites just before they entered the Promised Land. The first and third speeches of Moses are late, and reflect the theology of Isaiah and Jeremiah, carried into Exile by the Judeans. Only the second speech of Moses, the core of the book, goes back to Josiah. Quite long, the speech gives the details of the law in the Deuteronomic Code, and warning that its neglect will result in the loss of the Promised Land.

See, I set before you a blessing and a curse; a blessing if you obey... a curse if you disobey...
by going after other gods you have not known.⁷⁴

In general, when one undertakes to follow an especially holy way, the repercussions of failure are greater than if one pursues a more ordinary life aiming at ordinary virtues. One's association with a holy being makes a pollution that might otherwise mean little quite dangerous, because of its hostility to the holiness of that being. Thus there is both a blessing and a curse associated with the Covenant.

Josiah's *Book of the Law* was not fabricated for the occasion of the reform, but developed from much

⁷¹*Deuteronomy* 12, 18:1-8.

⁷²*Jeremiah* 22:15-16.

⁷³For the Josian reform, which is the climax of the *Bible* in this stage of its development, see II *Kings* 22 - 23.

⁷⁴*Deuteronomy* 11:26-29. This passage is from the earliest set of additions to Josiah's text, ca. 600-550 B.C.E.

older material, some no doubt passed down by word of mouth, related to the Covenant Code and the Yahwist cult at Shechem. It should be regarded as an honest attempt to synthesize the older traditions and the outcome of a century of prophetic teachings developing out of that tradition. The discovery of the book in the Temple library may have been genuine. Books were often deposited in Temple libraries for safe keeping in Ancient cultures, whether Greek or Syrian. There would have been a lot of books, but the Priests might have found this one just the thing when Josiah came to the throne, or it may be that Josiah himself ordered a search of the library to see if a suitable document could be turned up as a basis for his intended reforms.⁷⁵

Taking a wider view, *Deuteronomy* might be considered part of a general trend in the Near East of the seventh century toward a romantic re-creation, at least in literature, of an ideal past. The world had gained a memory with the introduction of writing, and had grown old enough in its memory so that new peoples now ruled the old. The old peoples, Egyptians, Babylonians, or Israelites, had to reconcile their present impotence with the memory of former power, for the new peoples, Assyrians, Hyksos, or Persians, enlisted the existing ideologies of the old for the justification of their own rule, and thus the old practices and records, the old memories, persisted. Egypt, eventually recovering control of her own destiny, refused to see the present at all, and denied she had ever been dominated by a foreign power. Babylon, which remained an identifiable nation, though only as an administrative unit in a larger empire, resigned itself to its new condition, but remembered the glories of its past, and deliberately preserved its religious practices and myths, adapting them to the new rulers by, for instance, identifying their gods with gods in the Assyrian pantheon, and adding new myths to the old explaining the shifting fortunes of nations by events in the world of the gods. The Jewish people, as a result of the Exile and the complete loss even of their national territory, crafted a more complex and uncompromising reaction. They could not refuse to recognize the power of other nations over them, as Egypt had, but they did refuse to recognize that this power came from any God but their own, and they refused to modify their religion at the behest of their conquerors. But they needed to understand why their God had given them over to their enemies. They looked back to an ideal past when God was pleased with his people, regretted the sins that had made their God angry, and looked forward in hope to a time when redemption would come for individual Jews, for the Jewish nation through the individuals making it up, and for the whole

⁷⁵Fox (1992) 65-69 for Josiah's *Book of the Law*. Fox confesses that the book could have been written for the occasion and palmed off as something old, but notes that its themes and general approach are consistent with the time of Hosea and Amos in the Northern Kingdom, so that it was more likely rediscovered after being deposited, perhaps a hundred years or more before, in the Temple library. The earliest form of the book was the *Law* that Hosea referred to, about 750. Priestly additions after its transportation to Judah might have emphasized, or added, the parts about the worship of Yahweh at just one Temple.

world through the Jewish nation.

The progress that had been made by the humanitarian religion of Amos and Jeremiah is evident in the reforms, especially in the efforts to eliminate human sacrifice of the firstborn, a practice that flourished in Syria in the desperate seventh century. Even King Manasseh sacrificed his firstborn child. “Molech,” to whom these sacrifices were made at the shrine of Tophet, was no alien god, but Yahweh, the “King.” A number of stories in the *Pentateuch*, such as that of Abraham and Isaac, oppose the practice.⁷⁶

In 612 Nineveh fell to the Medes, assisted by a resurgent Babylon. Josiah had by this time reasserted control over Israel and enlarged his territories elsewhere as well, but with the reestablishment of order in the West independence once more became impracticable. What was more, Josiah died at the pass of Meggido in 609, fighting the Egyptians coming to the aid of the Assyrians. The Babylonians in their turn defeated the Egyptians, and reasserted control over Syria, at Carchemish in 605. The people remained enthusiastic for the Josian reforms, and expected help from Yahweh, even though many of the prophets, especially Jeremiah, asserted that the Babylonian dominance was itself from Yahweh, and urged a policy of reconciliation. The prophet Uriah was executed for his predictions of coming evils. Jeremiah, who saw much hypocrisy and empty formalism in the reformed practices, and expected no good from them, had his prophecies copied down by the scribe Baruch, and read publicly by him on a feast day. Officials in sympathy with his message urged Jeremiah and his secretary to hide, and had the scroll read to Jehoiakim (608-598), who angrily ordered it destroyed. Jehoiakim’s futile resistance to Babylonia, even though it had the full support of his people, led to capitulation to Nebuchadrezzar in 597, and the deportation of the large landowners, craftsmen and ironworkers, perhaps 10,000 people in all.⁷⁷ Zedekiah now ruled, but had difficulty suppressing revolts, especially since the commoners, enthusiastic for Yahwism, had acquired the lands of the exiled land-owners. (For once the policy of resettlement of the upper classes and the taking of hostages misfired, for here in Judah resistance was centered in the mass of the people.) In 588 Zedekiah led a revolt, inspired by the offer of aid from Egypt, despite Jeremiah’s opposition (for the King had sworn by Yahweh that he would remain loyal to Babylon), and when the promised aid proved ineffectual, Judah suffered utter destruction, no longer surviving even as a client

⁷⁶*Genesis* 22 for Abraham and Isaac. The story was already present in E, but no doubt gained a new point in this context. It is not only a showpiece of Abraham’s faith, and one more dramatic incident in which Yahweh’s promise to Abraham that he will father a numerous race that will someday occupy Canaan seems about to be thwarted, but then is not at the last moment. It is now also a concrete example of the commutation of the sacrifice of the firstborn at *Exodus* 13:11-16.

⁷⁷*Jeremiah* 52:28-30 says 3023 people, *II Kings* 24:16 says 7000 men of might and 1000 craftsmen, while *II Kings* 24:14 says 10,000. Probably Jeremiah is closer to the right number.

kingdom. Nearly a thousand more men were exiled. But only after a final, futile uprising in 582, with the deportation of 745 more families, did Judah at last enter on a period of peace.⁷⁸

The inability of Judah to find a *modus vivendi* with the great powers surrounding it arose in large part from the refusal of Josiah's successors, at last secure in the favor of Yahweh, as they thought, to allow the worship of any foreign God. The independence of Judah and Israel hung on confusion and weakness in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Such weakness obtained in 1000-740, when the Kingdom was consolidated, in 621-09, Josiah's time, and later in the time of the Maccabees, 142-163 BCE. Only in those brief intervals could a Jewish nation-state devoted to Yahweh's worship alone survive.

9. ISAIAH AND JEREMIAH

You have the right on your side, Yahweh,
when I complain about you.
But I would like to debate a point of justice with you.
Why is it that the wicked live so prosperously?
Why do scoundrels enjoy peace?

Jeremiah 12:1-2.

The work of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, the greatest in the Southern tradition, formed the view the Jews were to take of the collapse of their Kingdom and their Exile in Babylon. **Isaiah**, born about 765, began to prophesy in 742, probably helped inspire Hezekiah's reforms, and was perhaps executed under Manasseh. Writing in the shadow of Assyria, he foresaw the destruction of Israel, but viewed it as a purification which would leave a faithful remnant to reestablish Israel under a descendent of David named Immanuel ("God is with us"), the Prince of Peace—he probably had a future son of Ahab in mind. He also predicted a more distant descendent of David who would establish a divinely blessed kingdom to endure forever, in whose reign "the wolf will live with the sheep, and the leopard lie down with the kid, the calf and the young lion will grow up together."⁷⁹ People chosen from all the nations of the world would participate in this more remote return to Paradise, "for the Earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord." In the end, all nations would come to

⁷⁸See Fox (1992) 262-267. For this stretch of history we have a portion of a Babylonian chronicle covering 605-595 B.C.E. to supplement the biblical text.

⁷⁹*Isaiah 11:6.*

worship Yahweh.⁸⁰ The destruction of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians, Isaiah claimed, would serve both as a sin sacrifice, an atonement, and a purge of the bad elements of the population. Thus the power of Sennacherib, who devastated Judah in 701, was from Yahweh. But when the Day of Yahweh comes, foreigners as well as Israelites will suffer punishment. Isaiah supported a definite, and cautious, foreign policy calculated to avoid war—at first no alliances, and then, after Ahaz’s alliance with Assyria, no rebellion.

The thought of Yahweh’s awesome holiness dominated Isaiah’s conception of Yahweh, a holiness resting both on an illimitable power and a perfect justice and fairness that put him out of reach of any human attempt to live up to his standards. Yahweh’s power and rectitude are both absolute, the one irresistible by force, the other by reason, for no good reason can be advanced to ignore the demands of his justice. No man can resist God, and no man can justify himself before God, for we all fall short of his justice. Isaiah himself, when called by Yahweh, says “I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell among a people of unclean lips”—but Yahweh’s angel responds, touching his lips to wipe away the uncleanness, “though your sins are scarlet, they may become white as snow.”⁸¹ Isaiah preached a gospel of repentance, holding each person responsible for his own sins, and denying any inheritance of sinfulness, though he did see the whole people as the object of Yahweh’s judgment, perhaps taking it that every individual deserves it, for we are all unclean.

Jeremiah lived a century after Isaiah, prophesying publicly from the reign of Jehoiakim to the last days of Judah’s existence. He remained in Judah after the Exile and was in Jerusalem when the Babylonians besieged it. When he tried to slip out of the city, because it would not surrender as he had advised, he was caught, and forced to flee with a group of Judeans to Egypt after its fall, much as Zedekiah had been forced by his people to lead their final rebellion. The prophet disappears from view in Egypt, but only after one last prophecy against the Egyptians and the idolatrous Jews who lived there (a prophecy which turned out false in its prediction of disaster).

Jeremiah was a Northerner, like Hosea, his favorite prophet. He espoused the Josian reform at first, but soon came to think it superficial, and by 597 he seems to have given up on it entirely. The faithlessness of the people, he thought, would lead to the destruction of the Temple. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah saw Yahweh’s hand in the power of foreign nations over Israel, and argued that his people ought to submit to Nebuchadrezzar in accord with Yahweh’s will. The prophecies through *Jeremiah* 13 were written down in Jehoiakim’s reign,

⁸⁰*Isaiah* 11:9.

⁸¹*Isaiah* 1:16 ff.

Jeremiah was in hiding from the royal police, but he revised the book, adding autobiographical material in chapters 14-20 and 26-39, after Jehoiakim's death in 598. Chapter 21 contains a response to Zedekiah's request for a prophecy, predicting the fall of Jerusalem, and comparing the exiles favorably to those left in the country. This would have lent support to Zedekiah's attempts to keep down further revolts, for if those remaining are more faithless than those deported, what hope can *they* have of Yahweh's help? Jeremiah even walked the streets of Jerusalem with a wooden yoke on his neck, indicating the necessity of submission to Babylon.⁸²

Jeremiah often disputed with Yahweh in his prophecies. He did not want them to be true, and did not see why the people must suffer so, why the wicked prosper and the faithful do not. He did not want to prophesy doom and destruction, and yet he had to when the word of Yahweh came to him. "Oh, the writhing of my bowels and the throbbing of my heart! I cannot keep silence." His prophecies set men against him, and even set him against himself, and he blamed Yahweh for his misfortunes. But in the end Jeremiah pleads against Yahweh before Yahweh, and so he must submit and trust in Yahweh, for there is no superior tribunal to hear his case.⁸³ As a rhetorical trick this aims at the sympathy of the people he criticizes, both for himself and his message, but it is more than a rhetorical trick. Jeremiah submits himself to Yahweh by an act of will, believing where reason would lead one not to believe. He puts rational doubts about Yahweh quite deliberately out of mind, and regards it as a virtue, a sign of faith, that he does so—after all, Yahweh has reasons beyond his understanding, even if he cannot quiet his understanding and it still yearns to know why Yahweh so punishes his people. In a related theme, picked up by the *Psalms*, Jeremiah groans under the omnipresence and power of his enemies, and so perceives his utter dependence on Yahweh,⁸⁴ whose power can in no way be opposed or avoided. The strategy is clear enough. One identifies with the absolute power one has conceived, taking its side and uttering its words, trusting oneself to it utterly, and the conditional powers one could not overcome are now negated in one's very submission to them, for all power is from God. Taking Jeremiah's debates with God thus, disputes over the primacy of the will or faith over reason seem aside the point, an intellectualization of a religious/psychological response rooted in an intense need for security and meaning.

⁸²Not all prophets agreed on foreign policy. A rival, Hananiah from Gideon, favored revolution, but his prophecies were false, so he was no true prophet of Yahweh, says Jeremiah. *Deuteronomy* 18:9-22 specifies this test of a true prophet, making prophets and not priests (who traditionally threw lots as oracles of Yahweh) the true bearers of Yahweh's message for the people. But a true prophet's predictions were often conditional, for Yahweh may change his mind if the people repent, or fall once more into sin. Moreover, at 13:1-6 it is specified that a false prophet's predictions may come true, to test the people!

⁸³*Jeremiah* 1:4-19; 11:18-23; 12:1-6; 15:10-11; 21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-12, 14-18.

⁸⁴*Jeremiah* 20:7-12; 15:18-21.

Jeremiah sees Yahweh as a universal God, as did Isaiah, and sees the gods of the Canaanites as no gods at all, mere “logs of wood, that can no more speak than a scarecrow in a crop of cucumbers.”⁸⁵ Moreover, with the dissolution of Judah, this universal God dealt with each person as an individual. So the covenant of Moses has been broken in pieces, and a new covenant written in each man’s heart must replace it.⁸⁶ Yahweh will produce for himself a faithful people out of those that are left, so men must repent and turn to Yahweh, who forgives even in advance that they might repent (more or less as Jesus encouraged repentance by insisting on God’s willingness to forgive), and a remnant would return to Israel in the end.⁸⁷

10. THE EXILE AND DEUTERONOMY

Beside the streams of Babylon
we sat and wept
at the memory of Zion,
leaving our harps
hanging on the poplars there.

For we had been asked
to sing to our captors,
to entertain those who had carried us off:
“Sing,” they said,
“some hymns of Zion.”

How could we sing
one of Yahweh’s hymns
in a pagan country?
Jerusalem, if I forget you,
may my right hand wither!

Psalm 137:1-5.

The Judeans who settled in Babylon between 598 and 587 became the central element of the Jewish people in the Dispersion. The settlers included most of the cultural, political, religious and economic leaders of the country, and they felt responsible for maintaining their faithfulness to Yahweh so that his promises might someday be fulfilled. However much Yahwism may have drawn strength from the countryside, the Exiles

⁸⁵*Jeremiah* 10:5; 2:8.

⁸⁶*Jeremiah* 31:29-34.

⁸⁷*Jeremiah* 23:5-8, 3:14, 31:17.

clearly did not put their trust in those left at home. They saw themselves as the saving remnant. Their banishment from Judah did not involve active persecution. The Exiles could follow their own religious customs, and maintain religious solidarity if they were minded to. The theology of Jeremiah and Isaiah provided a unique motivation for doing so, and though some viewed the disaster as a sign of Yahweh's weakness, a believer had the means to explain away the appearances. In fact, for once the nationalist religion of the conquered may have proved useful to the conquerors, and the Jews, educated, industrious, and compliant to their new masters in obedience to Yahweh, became valuable subjects of the Babylonian state. Jehoiakim, captured by Nebuchadrezzar in 598, was released from prison more than thirty years later by Nebuchadrezzar's son, given a royal pension, and provided for at the royal palace as the King of Judah, where he presided over a committee of elders that conducted the Exiles' affairs. The Jews prospered, becoming farmers, bureaucrats and administrators, officers in the army, merchants and bankers. When the opportunity to return home finally came, they had adapted to their new way of life, and despite the anguished poetry that marked the beginning of the Exile, few took the opportunity to return to Judah.

One can see the influence of Isaiah and Jeremiah among the Exiles in *Deuteronomy*, the *Book of Words* (*Devarim*, later misunderstood in Greek as "the second law," *deutero-nomos*). In its present form this book consists of three great speeches delivered by Moses to the Israelites, each exhorting them to serve Yahweh and obey his law. The first discourse, added to Josiah's book about 550 (chs. 1-3) and 540-500 (ch. 4), rehearses the history of their travels from Mount Sinai, and contains messages of hope for those in the Dispersion.

Yahweh will scatter you among his peoples, and only a small number of you will remain among the nations where Yahweh has driven you. There you will pay service to gods that human hands have made, of wood and of stone, that cannot see or hear, eat or smell. but you will seek Yahweh your God from there, and if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul, you shall find him... At the end of days you will return to Yahweh your God and listen to his voice. For Yahweh your God is a merciful God, and will not desert you or forget the covenant he has made on oath with your fathers.⁸⁸

The demand that one love Yahweh and remember the history of his covenant comes from the Josian core of the book, but the additions after the Exile especially emphasize the necessity of remembering and passing on the tradition of the covenant to prevent the utter disappearance of the religion, which now depends on family devotions, and not any public cult.⁸⁹

⁸⁸*Deuteronomy* 4:27-31.

⁸⁹So *Deuteronomy* 32:6, from the "Song of Moses," 500-450 B.C.E.

The third speech, likewise a product of the Exile, puts the choice between faith and apostasy in the starkest light, but also asserts that repentance, should they fall away, will restore the Israelites' fortunes once they have endured suitable punishment. The later parts of *Deuteronomy* insist, with Jeremiah, that people are responsible for their own actions, rejecting the inheritance of ancestral guilt as well as guilt by association with the nation, as it must if it is to make sense of preserving a remnant of the faithful from the unfaithful people.⁹⁰ A series of late appendices to the third speech reports the writing down of the law, and its placement in the Ark, the appointment of Joshua as leader, and Moses's death. Among these appendices the decidedly monotheistic "Song of Moses" (500-450 BCE) accuses the Israelites of rousing Yahweh to jealousy with "what is no god."

11. EZEKIEL

The hand of Yahweh was laid on me, and he carried me away by the spirit of Yahweh and set me down in the middle of a valley, a valley full of bones. He made me walk up and down among them... He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "You know, Lord Yahweh." He said, "Prophesy over these bones. Say 'Dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh...'" I prophesied... While I was prophesying, there was a noise, a sound of clattering, and the bones joined together. I looked, and saw that they were covered with sinews; flesh was growing on them and skin covering them... and the breath entered them; they came to life again and stood up on their feet, a great, an immense army.

Then he said, "Son of man, these bones are the whole House of Israel."

Ezekiel 37:1-11.

The prophet Ezekiel, active in Babylon from 592 to about 570 BCE, is the most important figure of the Babylonian exile. An ascetic and visionary, he created much of the apocalyptic imagery that came to characterize Jewish prophetic writing.⁹¹ His prophetic style took to extremes the use of symbolic actions to deliver Yahweh's message. He eats a scroll, eats only bread baked like barley cakes using human dung as fuel, and so on, explaining each action in his book. These symbolic acts are interspersed with violent and unforgettable visions. He finds himself in a valley of dry bones, from which Yahweh makes living men again,

⁹⁰For instance, *Deuteronomy* 24:16. *Deuteronomy* 5:9 represents the older viewpoint, but is partially glossed in the following verse.

⁹¹For Ezekiel's life, see *Ezekiel* 1-3, and for his strange imagery, see, for instance, *Ezekiel* 18.

as he will resurrect Judah's fortunes.⁹² In his initial call to prophecy Ezekiel is so stunned by the blinding light and rushing water of his vision that he does not recover his senses for seven days thereafter, and so is by implication recreated by Yahweh, who created the world in seven days.

But despite the strangeness of his style, Ezekiel fit his times. He lay emphasis on Yahweh's judgment of Israel for her present sins, not her past, insisting that God judges each person individually, so that the righteous will remain safe in the fall of Jerusalem.⁹³ And for Ezekiel the chief sin, almost the only sin, was faithlessness toward Yahweh, apostasy, often represented, as in Isaiah and Jeremiah, as adultery or prostitution. One ought to be just because Yahweh demands it, so that it would be unfaithful not to.⁹⁴ He draws the logical conclusion from his utterly transcendent God—ethical values do not have an independent force, as though they could bind Yahweh, they draw their force only from Yahweh's commands.

Yet Ezekiel is not a harsh man. Before the fall of Jerusalem his writings were very angry indeed, but once the catastrophe had occurred he turned to a gentler tone, encouraging and hopeful. Yahweh will provide Israel with a new heart so that she obeys his commandments, and even if this seems less for the sake of mercy than for the sake of His Holy Name, that is, to preserve his honor,⁹⁵ Yahweh does want men to turn away from their apostasy—he does not want them to die.⁹⁶ Indeed, he will refrain from slaying even the wicked, though they shall not return to Judah. Moreover, the wicked are judged for their own present wickedness, not the sins of their fathers, or even their own past sins, so that salvation lies in true repentance.⁹⁷ The purpose of the Exile is to winnow the faithful from the unfaithful, and *Ezekiel* ends with a description of the restored Judah to which the faithful will return, and the ideal worship in its rebuilt temple, pointing a stark contrast to the violent imagery of corruption, defilement and coming destruction with which the book begins.

The descriptions of ritual are detailed and complete. Ezekiel depends on ritual, especially sin offerings

⁹²*Ezekiel* 14:12-20.

⁹³*Ezekiel* 37:12 ff.

⁹⁴*Ezekiel* 20.

⁹⁵*Ezekiel* 36. Note the suggestion that Yahweh controls whether we shall be sinful or not, a logical, if difficult, conclusion given his omnipotence. But here it is suggested that he can bring us to amendment, not that he predestined us to sin, though perhaps we cannot escape sin without his aid. The issues here will come to a head in the thought of St. Augustine.

⁹⁶*Ezekiel* 18:20-32.

⁹⁷*Ezekiel* 18:30-32, 33:11.

and other ceremonial expiations of guilt, to reform the Jews and keep them faithful. Without ritual he has little trust in man's capacity for faith, and here, too, he is in tune with events, for it was only by careful observance that the Exiles could preserve their identity and their unity. They would not become like other people, but would stand apart, devoted to Yahweh. Ezekiel became the Father of Judaism, a new founder of the faith after Moses, of the *Jewish* faith of the Exiles.

12. HISTORY UNDER THE EXILE

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1.

The writing of histories formed an essential part of the program for maintaining national identity in exile. The release of Jehoiakim from prison about 561, a hopeful event that caps the *Deuteronomic History* of Israel, inspired one such history. The historian who composed this work hews close to the outlook of *Deuteronomy*. Extrapolating from that work, he explained the fall of Israel as the result of apostasy, the Josian reform being the right sort of thing, but too late to do any good. He used a variety of traditional materials in his work, piecing it together with interpretive remarks. His history survives only in the final redaction of the *Bible*, in which his hand is most apparent in *Judges* and *Kings*.

In *Judges* he uses some very ancient materials from before the Kingdom, blending them with JE. In E each of the four Judges rules all of Israel, while J reports a variety of confused wars and local leaders. E takes much more interest in morality, or at least in moralizing, than J. The Deuteronomist adds his own notions when he makes the conquest by Joshua a single national act, one of Yahweh's acts of salvation, and emphasizes the role of Samuel as the predecessor of Saul.

In I and II *Samuel* the Deuteronomist uses the *Court History*, discussed above, and the a later source (ca. 600 BCE), which, like the Deuteronomist himself, sacrifices historical accuracy for the sake of proving that the kingship was itself an apostasy from Yahweh, and that the fortunes of the nation depended on the faith and righteousness of the King.⁹⁸

I and II Kings was composed about 600 BCE along Deuteronomic lines. It treats chiefly of religiously interesting kings, trying very hard in the teeth of the facts to make out faithfulness to Yahweh as the key to kingly success. It never mentions Josiah's death in battle, and it ignores Manasseh of Judah and Omri and Ahab

⁹⁸For a sample of the Late Source, see II *Samuel* 7:3-17 on the evils of kingship.

of Israel, apostate kings with long and prosperous reigns, except to retail their wickedness and blame them for events after their deaths. Manasseh, in particular, the book claims, doomed Judah by his apostasy, so that even the virtues of Josiah could only purchase a reprieve of a few years. David's merits explain the good fortune of the apostate Kings of Judah. Still, there is also nationalist feeling here, and the author dislikes Israel enough so that the fanatical Jehu gets only half-hearted praise. The author reports the doings of the prophets at length whenever it cannot be assumed that their works are at hand, and shows consistent reverence towards them. The history takes a special interest in the fulfillment of their prophecies, and contributed to the developing conception of the prophet as an accurate prognosticator and not only the bearer of Yahweh's word.

A third history composed in this period, in the second half of the 6th century, is the *Priestly History*. It deals with the history of the Hebrews up to the conquest of Canaan, but focuses on ritual and cult matters. For the Priestly historian the collection of the laws is the whole point of the *Torah*, and indeed, this concern with ritual regulations suggests that the work originated about 530–500, at the end of the Exile. With a new Temple in prospect, an intense interest among the priests in the rules regarding the Temple and its priesthood would have been natural.⁹⁹ The author divides the history of the Hebrews into four ages, the first running from the creation to Noah, who receives a covenant with Yahweh on behalf of all mankind, the second from Noah to Abraham, who receives the covenant with Israel, the third from Abraham to Moses, and the last commencing with the covenant received by Moses.¹⁰⁰ The revelation of God and the relation he desires with his people progresses through these ages, as revealed in the content of the various covenants, but also in the name used by Yahweh, "Elohim" under Noah, "El Shaddai" under Abraham, and his true name only under Moses himself. The Priestly Code, the largest collection of laws passed down by the Priestly historian, concerns itself chiefly

⁹⁹For the *Priestly History*, see Fox (1992) 78-86, 177-178; Grant (1977) 170-174. Fox suggests that the dietary restrictions in *Leviticus* 11 (*Leviticus* being the core of the Priestly text) were the result of the continued consideration of older, much looser rules during the Exile. They chiefly aim at holiness, which is marked by wholeness and non-confusion between different classes. They wanted their categories well-defined, and anything not quite fitting into their classifications would be unclean. (Psychologically, a fear of miscegenation is probably revealed here, though we all feel discomfort with things and people not fitting into our system of stereotypes—effeminate men, female mechanics, Jewish wrestlers and so on.) The chief class of edibles were animals that could be sacrificed to Yahweh, so cud-chewing, cloven-hoofed animals such as cows, sheep and goats. Cud-chewers without cloven hooves (horses), and cloven-hoofed animals without a cud (pigs), would seem to be incomplete examples of this class of properly edible beasts, a confusion of kinds. It should not be assumed, by the way, that all Jews followed the rules in P right off the bat. They only came to be universally regarded as valid as P became canonized.

¹⁰⁰It seems that an overall time span of 4000 years is assumed, with Abraham's career beginning in 1600, and the first Temple being built midway through the remainder of the span in 2800.

with ritual, and is scattered throughout the *Pentateuch*.¹⁰¹ The **Holiness Code**, a later collection close to Ezekiel found in *Leviticus* 17 - 26, emphasizes ritual purity, but without Ezekiel's innovations.

The first covenant with Noah and, by implication, the whole human race, specified that one was not to eat meat with the blood (the life) in it, and not to shed blood. Backing off from his original insistence on vegetarianism, God allows meat to be eaten, but demands reverence be shown for the life of both human beings and animals. One must not spill the life blood of human beings, or eat the life blood of animals. In return for their obedience to this rule, Noah's descendants gain control over all living things, and the promise that they can rely on the natural processes that make agriculture possible.¹⁰² One cannot help but notice that Yahweh promises to send rain, rather than the flood, to make agriculture possible. Perhaps the story originally dealt with the transfer of civilization and agriculture from the river valleys to the rainlands, but the Priestly redactor of the tale makes it into a story of Yahweh's promise never to renew his attempt to destroy all men, no matter how wicked they become. Yahweh adapts himself somewhat to the imperfection of the world he has made, and commits himself to tolerating the imperfections in human beings and to finding ways to correct the damage done by them.

The covenant with Abraham occurs in J as a simple promise,¹⁰³ and in E the transaction occurs in a dream in connection with a sacrifice.¹⁰⁴ In the Priestly version the story grows more elaborate, and requires an additional law so that Abraham can do his part in the contract, the law of circumcision.¹⁰⁵ The covenant under Moses, of course, is marked by the establishment of the major feasts and the dietary prescriptions. All these laws sanctify the nation as a community of priests in the service of Yahweh.

The *Priestly History* included the story of creation in the first chapter of *Genesis* and we have already commented on the way in which it presents us with a transcendent, monotheistic God. The story is based on

¹⁰¹Laws concerning the Temple, *Exodus* 35-40; regulations on Temple worship, *Exodus* 25-31; sacrifice, *Leviticus* 1-7; the behavior and investiture of priests, *Leviticus* 8-10; ritual purity and pollution and the day of atonement, *Leviticus* 11-16; the powers of the priests and Levites, *Numbers* 3-6, and 15-19.

¹⁰²*Genesis* 9:1-7. P seems to specify vegetarianism in its story of creation (*Genesis* 1:29). The author is also, it seems, a pacifist, unhappy with warfare and its consequent injustice to others, and so has the Israelites occupy a land miraculously empty of people when they enter Canaan.

¹⁰³*Genesis* 12.

¹⁰⁴*Genesis* 15.

¹⁰⁵*Genesis* 17.

the old myth of Mesopotamia in which Tiamat, the dragon-goddess of the primal waters, is slain and cut in half by the storm god to make the world. Here, just as in the Greek tradition, the leading characters in the story suffer depersonification, becoming purely natural forces, but unlike the Greek philosophers, the Hebrews retained a God who, as it were, stands outside the naturalistic story. Tiamat becomes a mere waste of waters, which God divides to create the world. The heavenly bodies are merely lights God made for his creation, not gods, and no malignant forces oppose Yahweh. The Priestly History has no story of Eden.

13. JOB

Why give light to a man of grief?
 Why give life to those bitter of heart,
 who long for a death that never comes,
 and hunt for it more than buried treasure?

I am man, and he is not; and so no argument,
 no suit between the two of us is possible.
 There is no arbiter between us,
 to lay his hand on both,
 to stay his rod from me,
 or keep away his daunting terrors.

Job 3:20-21, 9:32-34

The situation of those left in Palestine was far worse than that of the deportees to Babylon. Israel had been resettled by people from various parts of the Assyrian Empire, and, though the faithful maintained the worship of Yahweh, there was much intermarriage with worshipers of other gods. Judah had lost perhaps a fifth of its population, and fell under a series of royal governors, only some of them Yahwists. *Lamentations*, written in Judah in the years after the Exile, describes Jerusalem as virtually uninhabitable, and the surrounding countryside in profound economic depression and overrun by bandits.

In such an atmosphere one experiences the problem of evil most acutely. The *Book of Job*, devoted entirely to the problem how Yahweh can permit the virtuous to suffer, seems to be the work of a well-traveled Judean of about this time. The work consists of a long series of poems inserted between a prologue and epilogue in prose. The prose sections tell a traditional tale of a Job who is rewarded for his devout patience in the face of evil. They seem to date back to the eighth century, coming ultimately from a second millennium tale of a great and just man of Uz (Edom or Damascus). Probably the outline of a discussion between Job and

his friends was present in some older, non-Israelite version of the tale, for wisdom literature was always a bit foreign to the Hebrews, and the Edomites, for instance, were well known for it.

In the prologue Satan asserts that Job's piety is rooted in self-interest, and challenges Yahweh to take away his considerable possessions, his children and his health, to see if he will then curse Yahweh. Satan is a member of Yahweh's court in charge of hunting down evil men, not yet the Evil One, the Ahriman of the Zoroastrians, but more a state prosecutor. He is the "accuser," in Greek "*diabolos*," from which our "Devil" is derived. Yahweh agrees to this test, and Job passes it, for though his wife urges him to "curse God and die," Job responds by asking, "if we accept good from God, shall we not accept evil?" The story seems to offer an explanation why there should be evil in the world. Yahweh's state prosecutor accuses men of being good only for the sake of the profit to be gained, knowing that Yahweh rewards the good and punishes the evil, and suggests that they should be good, that is, faithful to Yahweh, even if no reward is forthcoming. (There is no hint here that one should follow moral rules for any reason other than Yahweh's demand that we do so.) So even people who are faithful to Yahweh suffer evil, as a test of their faithfulness. The explanation is a little strained. Surely Yahweh can read the hearts of men, and so will know who is truly faithful and who is in it for gain, so the author introduces Satan, who cannot read the hearts of men, and demands proof of Job's virtue. But why should Yahweh pay any attention to this demand? It seems He has appointed Satan to this position of prosecutor and is now bound by the rules He himself has set up, though it is not clear why He should be thus bound. Could Job's suffering be for Satan's sake, to show him that virtue is indeed possible and bring about his reform?

In any case, Job is visited in his afflictions by three older friends who try to convince him to accept his sufferings as just, rather than sticking to his claim that he is guiltless and seeking to defend himself before Yahweh. They argue that he must have committed some hidden sin, for Yahweh punishes only the sinful, or, again, that all people sin—but Job maintains his innocence and affirms that the righteous do suffer, accusing God bitterly. They urge Yahweh's transcendence, for his ways cannot be questioned by reason and his power is irresistible, but Job demands that his case be heard before God, calling upon a third party to judge between them. It is as if his chief concern is not so much his sufferings as God's absence and unconcern. He wants to speak to God about this matter. Besides, he argues, if God is so great, can he not overlook our little sins, like the offenses of children? Then a young man named Elihu tries to improve on the arguments already made, adding that suffering is necessary to teach us, for "man learns only on a bed of pain," and urging that Job not rebel against the instruction of his unfathomable God. His case *is* before Yahweh, and it is not for Job to claim

it is being mishandled. Elihu thinks Job must have sinned, but perhaps does not know he has, so this instruction is needed to bring him to repentance and confession. He must review his life and see where he has sinned. Job's sin is apparently one against other men, for God cannot be harmed by our sins or benefitted by our virtues. To claim one is guiltless because he has handled ritual obligations to Yahweh perfectly is simple foolishness.¹⁰⁶ So Elihu argues that Job must confess his sins toward other men, and cease talking so about his faithfulness to Yahweh.¹⁰⁷

Job does not respond to Elihu's speech, nor does Yahweh, and its language is very different from that of the rest of the book, so it looks like an addition, providing a theodicy not envisioned by the original author. In effect, Elihu claims, like Amos, that faithfulness to Yahweh involves perfect justice toward other human beings, for that is what Yahweh demands of us. Now it is much easier to claim that one has met all one's ritual obligations to Yahweh than it is for anyone, especially a rich and powerful man, to claim that he has done no injustice to others. It is plausible that all have been unfaithful if perfect justice to others is what faithfulness demands. Moreover, Elihu's insistence that the evils we suffer are for our instruction arises from the conviction that Yahweh is kind to us, and does not desire our destruction, even if we have sinned, but wishes us to prosper. He will not accept that God's punishment of us is acceptable simply because it is deserved. It must do us some good that cannot otherwise be obtained.

Job finally gets what he wants when Yahweh speaks out of the whirlwind (an image of the confusion and evil of this world), but Yahweh seems to offer little more than a torrent of proofs of his transcendent power and (fundamentally technological) wisdom. It is hard to make out why Job acquiesces, but perhaps it is because he comes to see his problems in a much wider scheme, in which his welfare, and perhaps justice itself, does not count for much. He admits to speaking about what he could not understand, but he holds to his innocence all along, and expresses no humility before Yahweh. He only repents that he has complained of the situation. One begins to see why someone added Elihu's speech to the text, for this is, to the theology that had developed in the Dispersion, a very naughty conclusion indeed. Its import is that God has something more important than justice or human welfare to tend to, and either cares not for ethical values at all, or puts them in second place behind some more important concern (perhaps the exercise of his creative power). Yahweh's speech presents one powerful image after another of a nature that cares nothing for ethics or humankind. Once one

¹⁰⁶Job 35:6-8.

¹⁰⁷Job 33:19-30.

acknowledges that this natural world is the key to Yahweh's character, one may expect very little from Him by way of justice or kindness, but still admire the world's beauty, the cleverness of its contrivance, and its power, and proceed with one's own affairs as best one may without bothering the Creator, who is about other business, and without hoping to understand the reason behind it all. Gratitude to the Creator for providing a world within which we can live our lives, and gratitude for our own existence, would make sense, as would respect for His power and "wisdom" (a wisdom not anything like human wisdom, but rather like human technological skill), but it would make no sense to call him into court and demand an accounting. Man's ethical concerns have no basis in the underlying reasons for the world, and are not in general honored by the world. Given what God has provided us, shall we curse him because he has taken it away? That is pure foolishness, like cursing an inanimate object.

The problem with the comforters is that they all assumed that God had justice or man's happiness in mind. Even when they advise submission to Yahweh, they assume Yahweh is also moral and somehow satisfies the demands of morality in a way too wise for them to grasp, when He cares not about this morality at all. The whole Deuteronomic system is challenged at its base. The transcendent God of the desert cannot be moral. He cannot be melded with the King of the Gods, the god who seeks justice. Elihu's speech is a sophisticated response to this challenge, not that Elihu thinks God is bound by morality, But he thinks God loves human beings, and is therefore the source of justice and righteousness, which provides for people's welfare by specifying that they should treat one another well.

The epilogue seems to be a piece of irony. Job is completely restored in his fortunes, but the description of his new prosperity is ironic. For instance, one of his new daughters is named "Box of eye shadow." It mocks those shallow enough to see a resolution of the problem of evil in it. Of course the righteous man is not typically restored in his fortunes, nor would Job be entirely comforted for the loss of his earlier children by getting new ones. The profound poetry is inserted into a folk tale, it seems, for the sake of the irony achieved when one sees the tale through Job's eyes. The very idea that the Lord maintains a court official to hunt up evildoers!

The book is preserved in the canon in part because it is not hard to miss its point. It also contains much beautiful poetry, presenting more terribly than anywhere else in Jewish scripture God's utter transcendence of the world and his presence in the awesome powers of nature. It gives expression to half the Hebrew God, and for one who thought the two halves could be reconciled this might be enough, once Elihu's cautionary speech disarms its heretical tendencies.

14. *ECCLESIASTES*

A generation goes, a generation comes, yet the earth stands firm for ever. The sun rises, the sun sets; then to its place it speeds and there it rises. Southward goes the wind, then turns again to the north... Into the sea all the rivers go, and yet the sea is never filled, and still to their goal the rivers go... There is no happiness for man but to eat and drink and to be content with his work... This, however, you must know: I find God made man simple; man's complex problems are of his own devising.

Ecclesiastes 1:4-7, 2:24, 7:29-30

As skeptical as *Job* is *Ecclesiastes* (*Qoheleth*, that is, one who runs a school), written, probably, in the 3rd century BCE. The work begins with the announcement that all things are vain, and explores this thesis in detail, looking at all the ways in which people seek happiness or meaning in life, and finding each wanting. The author speaks in the persona of Solomon, and as Solomon he can claim to have tasted every form of success and prosperity, and to have a personal knowledge of the failure of each. In particular, wisdom leads to anxiety, and the more one knows the more questions he must face, and the greater his sorrow. Nor does the pursuit of wealth, pleasure or power profit a person. Much is made of the cyclical nature of things, of the lack of progress. "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun."¹⁰⁸ The author's discouragement is not rooted merely in the prospect of repetition itself, though he does find this a great weariness, but in the unsatisfactory nature of things to begin with. Things are mostly bad, the good being uncertain and difficult to obtain, and there is no prospect of any change. So discouraging is the situation that the teacher's counsel is only to avoid excess, not to expect much, and to be cautious in all things. We should not even seek wisdom or righteousness too much, any more than we should be over much wicked or a fool, for why should a man destroy himself? We should fear God, though this does not entail being overly righteous, no doubt because righteousness is directed towards human beings, not God, who cannot benefit from our justice.¹⁰⁹ Nor can we expect God to set things right, telling us all what it means in the end, rewarding the righteous and punishing the unrighteous, for we will only die, like any other animal, and return

¹⁰⁸*Ecclesiastes* 1:9.

¹⁰⁹*Ecclesiastes* 7:15-18.

to dust.¹¹⁰ Things are so bad that those already dead are more fortunate than the living, and those who are not yet born are more fortunate still.¹¹¹ We are not to expect any meaning in life, nor any happiness unmarred by uncertainty and the prospect of death. But the teacher does recommend that we enjoy what happiness we encounter, while bearing in mind that we will eventually die anyway, so as not to be disappointed too badly if we lose what we have. He also recommends a devotion to our work, without expecting anything permanently meaningful to come of it, of course. With luck, such attitudes can make life worth living, if the fear of Yahweh prevents arrogance and overreaching, and one does not make one's life needlessly complicated, but preserves the simplicity that God intended.

The teacher is not pious in any ordinary sense, but he does believe there is a God. It is only that he does not believe this God made humankind with any important role in the world, or has any but the slightest concern with humanity's welfare. Still, he thinks one must honor Yahweh, for He will harm those who do not honor him, and Yahweh, like the Gods of Greece, punishes overreaching and excessive pride. (This need not be a notion picked up from Greece, the Yahweh of S in the *Pentateuch*, discussed near the beginning of this chapter, is careful to keep human beings in their place, though he apparently has a motivation that the absolute Godhead of *Ecclesiastes* would not, namely fear that men could become gods like himself.)

How did such a book as this get into the Hebrew canon? Well, like its companion piece, *Job*, it does reveal one side of Yahweh, and quite possibly it expressed one acceptable manner of piety. Moreover, the book does recommend the fear of Yahweh, and it has, like *Job*, its editorial additions, including an epilogue that tell us Yahweh will bring every deed to judgment in the end. Although the body of the book clearly denies that any such final judgment occurs, extremity in one's statements and images is part of the art of poetry in Semitic culture, and such impieties as this could be taken as nothing more than poetic expression of one's discouragement.

15. PROVERBS AND PSALMS

Yahweh by Wisdom founded the Earth;
by understanding he established the Heavens;
by his knowledge the deeps broke forth,
and the clouds dropped down the dew.

¹¹⁰Ecclesiastes 3:16-21. Compare the views of S, whose view of the world *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* seem to perpetuate.

¹¹¹Ecclesiastes 4:2-3.

Proverbs 3:19-20.

There was also wisdom literature of a more orthodox sort. When the collection of *Proverbs* was brought together in the 4th or 3rd centuries BCE, someone wrote a long introductory section for it concerning wisdom itself. Here wisdom is treated as a cosmic principle, almost independent of Yahweh, though clearly it is Yahweh's wisdom that is praised. In the Near East a powerful attribute of a god was often treated as an independent power in itself, and Yahweh's wisdom has assumed that status here. Creator gods in the Near East often have wisdom (essentially technological skill) as a central attribute. In *Proverbs* Wisdom is personified as a prophetess, and set over against an adulterous, seductive opposite, Folly, and the two are portrayed vying with one another for the affections of a young man. Wisdom is the source of every good, but especially of the knowledge and fear of God, the root of man's salvation. Wisdom was already present at the beginning of things, and directed creation.¹¹² Yahweh delights in Wisdom and the order she provides to the world.¹¹³ Even human wisdom is related to Yahweh's wisdom, for one discovers how the world is ordered by learning the thoughts and will of Yahweh. The world was made, it did not grow, and the key to understanding it is to understand the mind of its creator. Thus to search for wisdom, for an understanding of the world, is true praise of Yahweh, and, of course, knowledge of the wonders of the natural world impresses one with the fear of Yahweh, as we see in *Job*, and so the fear of Yahweh is the end as well as the beginning of wisdom.

The *Psalms* also contain a number of reflections on the problem of evil raised in *Job*. The background to the problem is clear enough. *Psalms* 15 and 50 insist on God's righteousness, and *Psalms* 29, 74, 89 and 104 all relate to his immense power as creator of the world. So we can ask rightly enough, why do good men suffer? *Psalms* 73 argues that the wicked will be punished, and the good rewarded, after death. God, it seems, allows the wicked to prosper because he does not want them to reform to their own advantage. He wants them to manifest their wickedness, so that when they come to his judgment they will be without excuse. (This is the obverse of the suggestion that God allows the good to suffer evil to test them, to make them manifest their faith.)

Psalms 93, on the other hand, clearly assumes there is no life after death, or at least no such life worth

¹¹²*Proverbs* 8:22-23.

¹¹³*Proverbs* 8:30-31. *Job* 28 contains a hymn to wisdom along the same lines, in which wisdom is said to transcend nature and humankind, to be searched out by God before the beginning of the world, to be the model for the world, and so on. Compare also *Ecclesiastes* 24:1-12.

living, the traditional view. The reason the good suffer on this Psalmist's view is that all have sinned, and we all need to know we have sinned, and to seek God's mercy. Only his punishment will let us know, and God will forgive us once we sincerely face up to our sin and repent. *Psalms* 32, 51, 103, and 130 also take this line. *Psalms* 51 even informs us that we are born guilty, and that only God can put a clean heart in us. For one who cannot escape the sense of an absolute ethical standard that must be met, but which no human being can meet, this provides a more useful wisdom than *Job's* unbelievable denial that there is any ethical absolute. That God might impose ethical demands on us because it is useful to us, at least as a group, to meet them is not an acceptable view to such a mind. God demands we be righteous because we *ought* to, not for the sake of anyone's profit, and certainly not arbitrarily because He just likes it that way.

16. SECOND *ISAIAH* AND UNIVERSALISM

Here is my servant whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom my soul delights.
I have endowed him with my spirit
that he may bring true justice to the nations.

He does not cry out or shout aloud,
or make his voice heard in the streets,
He does not break the crushed reed,
nor quench the wavering flame.

Faithfully he brings true justice;
he will neither waver, nor be crushed
until true justice is established on earth,
for the islands are awaiting his law.

Isaiah 42:1-4.

A most important response to the sufferings of the Exile is to be found in the book of *Isaiah*. That book includes, along with Isaiah's prophecies from the 7th and 8th centuries, a later collection of prophecies from the time of the exile, including oracles against Babylon (chs. 13-14), an apocalypse (chs. 24-27), some poetry (chs. 33-35), and, our present interest, a collection called "The Book of the Consolation of Israel," including within it four "Songs of the Servant of Yahweh" (chs. 40-55).

This last work, often called *Deutero-Isaiah* or "Second Isaiah," was composed about 530-540, shortly

after the Persian conquest of Babylon. The book responds to the new situation.¹¹⁴ Salvation had been provided by Yahweh in the arrival of Cyrus, the Persian King who conquered Babylon in 539 BCE, and restored those of the exiles who wished to return to their homeland. Moreover, the temple was rebuilt in 521, as it appears, by Zerubbabel, the grandson of King Jehoiakim, who was governor in Judea. At this time the prophet Haggai was even expecting a restoration of the Kingdom because of the Babylonian rebellion against the Persians, and it looks as if Zerubbabel took advantage of the confusion to begin construction. When events did not justify Haggai's predictions, and hostile neighbors of Judea complained of Zerubbabel's activities, the governor informed the newly established Darius that he had Cyrus's permission (not that of the interloper Nebuchadnezzar) to build the Temple, and, perhaps because he really had received permission (the document quoted in *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* seems to be genuine), or perhaps because Darius was anxious to make peace with the provinces and saw this as an opportunity to consolidate support, the Temple was allowed to stand.¹¹⁵ In 445 Nehemiah, arriving as governor of the province, set up the Levites as Temple priests, to be supported by the people, enforced the Sabbath and discouraged foreign marriages.¹¹⁶ Nehemiah also rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem¹¹⁷ and put down the guerilla warfare waged against the returning Jews by their neighbors. Judah became an independent province. Most of this was yet to come when Second Isaiah was written, but it was clear to its author already that Yahweh had not abandoned Judah.

As the book opens God calls on the prophet to console his people, for their sin is atoned for, and Yahweh is returning.¹¹⁸ When he returns, all humanity will see his glory and be converted to the worship of Yahweh. Yahweh is represented as the one God, all powerful, transcending nature in might, and with an absolute right over the world because he has made it.¹¹⁹ His power and wisdom argue that he knows what he

¹¹⁴For the situation in Judea, we depend on *Nehemiah* and *Ezra*, but the interpretation of these confused texts is difficult. I follow Fox (1992) 85-87.

¹¹⁵Fox (1992) 271-273. The prophetic books of *Haggai* and *Zechariah* belong to this period.

¹¹⁶For *Nehemiah* and *Ezra*, see Fox (1992) 267-282. For the dates of their respective arrivals in Judea, which are disputable, see page 279-280.

¹¹⁷Fox (1992) 280-281 suggests that the problems of Persia in the West at this time (they had recently given Ionia freedom in a treaty with the Athenians), and a revolt in Egypt in the 450's, led the Persian King to a policy of fortifying loyal cities in his demesne.

¹¹⁸*Isaiah* 40:1-5.

¹¹⁹*Isaiah* 45:9-12. The same notion is present in *Job*, of course, and Paul, *Romans* 9:14-24.

is doing and can be expected to save his people when the time comes.

These points having been made,¹²⁰ the first of the four poems of the suffering servant occurs. The servant is chosen to bring true justice to the nations of the Earth, but not, apparently, through violence, for “he does not cry out or shout aloud or make his voice heard in the streets,” but rather, through unwavering faithfulness.¹²¹ (Submission to Persia was, of course, a condition of national survival.) A little later the prophecies make use of Israel’s suffering for her unfaithfulness as a concrete image, after the manner of Ezekiel, a demonstration how the nations will suffer if they do not follow Yahweh’s law, and how they will be forgiven if they do.¹²² The intention is that Israel be the “light of the nations,” so that Yahweh’s “salvation may reach the ends of the Earth.”¹²³ The servant of Yahweh offers no resistance to the humiliations heaped on him, because he knows he shall not be shamed in the end.¹²⁴

In the fourth “Song of the Servant,”¹²⁵ by far the most remarkable in the group, it is asserted that his sufferings are an atonement for the sins of others. The servant is innocent of wrong-doing and suffers nonetheless for the sake of others, and “if he offers his life in atonement, he shall see his heirs, he shall have a long life, and through him what Yahweh wishes will be done.” Israel will, as a suffering servant of Yahweh, somehow save all nations by standing in for them, receiving the punishment that Yahweh would otherwise have directed at them. Thus the fourth song contradicts the orthodox view, held to in the rest of *Second Isaiah*, that Israel suffers for her unfaithfulness to Yahweh. Instead, Israel suffers as part of a plan to bring all nations to Yahweh, and will be rewarded for accepting its suffering voluntarily and without complaint.

It is hard to find historical antecedents for this idea. It might seem that something like a scapegoat sacrifice is in the back of the author’s mind, but Israel cannot be a scapegoat, for the goat is impure in such a sacrifice, and is suited to take on impurity before it is wholly destroyed, its impurity with it, for precisely that reason. Here the purity of the victim is insisted on. Indeed, it would seem the paradoxical nature of Israel’s sacrifice forms part of the poetic drama of the piece. What lies behind the poem seems to be the notion that

¹²⁰*Isaiah* 40 and 41.

¹²¹*Isaiah* 42:1-4.

¹²²*Isaiah* 42:18 - 43:7.

¹²³*Isaiah* 49:6, in the second Song of the Servant.

¹²⁴*Isaiah* 50:4-9, the third Song of the Servant.

¹²⁵*Isaiah* 53.

an intermediary for a person with higher authority can sometimes substitute himself for his subordinate in punishment, or pay the other's fine. Moses suffers for his people as the mediator with Yahweh in several places in *Deuteronomy*.¹²⁶ It is, perhaps, rather like a foreman taking on responsibility for the errors of his workmen, or a parent taking on responsibility for his children's actions. The foreman would have to be a good man, of course, before we would allow him to take on such a responsibility. The boss would have to be sure that the foreman would straighten his workmen out, even gain their loyalty, if he commuted the assigned punishment to the foreman instead. But one might object that Israel never had the requisite sort of authority over other nations for this to work. So perhaps a better comparison would be one to someone's interceding to take the punishment of another who did wrong unwittingly, a child, or a stranger who did not know the local laws. We might insist in such a case that the law be obeyed, but allow a virtuous adult or native of the place to pay the fine, perhaps putting that person in charge of the offender thereafter, to provide instruction and guidance until the offender knew enough to take responsibility for his own actions.

Perhaps light is shed on *Job's* acceptance into the canon, here. That book may have been adopted because of its portrayal of the sufferer as innocent, like Israel. Elihu's insistence on Job's guilt might be taken to refer to a sin of thought, that is, the notion Job has that God can somehow be called before the bar by human beings. If the suffering servant, Israel, refrains from such notions, and so keeps faith with Yahweh, it will in the end be revealed what Yahweh's purpose was. Job, of course, does not seem to have any such comfort as that in prospect, but perhaps it is not unnatural to read the thought into the text. (It is not the *correct* interpretation of *Job*, for Elihu clearly refers to a more substantial sin, one against other people, and if his speech is rejected as the key to the book, Yahweh's speech gives no indication that we shall ever be told what the point of Yahweh's creation is.)

A final aside: *Second Isaiah* argues for its monotheism on the ground that only the prophecies of Yahweh have been realized, whereas the prophecies of the gods of other nations have not.

The universalist drive of *Second Isaiah* stands against the narrowly racial emphasis of *Nehemiah* and *Ezra*, which wish to exclude all but the true sons of Israel from any part of the construction of the Temple or its worship. Indeed, Chapters 56-66 in *Isaiah* seem intended to reinterpret *Second Isaiah*, dropping the missionary emphasis and the notion that Israel atones for the sins of others, retaining only the glorious future promised by Yahweh. The opposition to the universalism of *Second Isaiah* must have been strong, and explains part of the

¹²⁶*Deuteronomy* 3:23-26, 4:21, 9:25-29.

opposition to the universalistic tendencies in Jewish Christianity, but nonetheless two short stories occur in the *Bible* with a universalist spirit, the books of *Jonah* and *Ruth*.

The story of *Ruth* concerns a Moabite ancestress of King David who adopts the Yahwist faith and is taken in marriage by the Israelite Boaz, thus protesting the prohibition of foreign marriages in Nehemiah's legislation, at least as long as the foreigner adopts Judaism.

Jonah, written perhaps about 400-350 BCE, tells the tale of a prophet sent by Yahweh to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, to warn the Assyrians of the impending punishment for their evil behavior. He refused to go, and boarded a ship going quite the other way, which was soon caught up in a great storm. The casting of lots indicated Jonah as the target of this divine vengeance, and he was thrown overboard, where a great fish swallowed him up. After three days, he was spit out on the land and ordered once more to prophesy to Assyria. This time he did it, and, *mirabile dictu*, the Assyrians repented and so avoided the prophesied catastrophe. Jonah promptly went into a pout, and sat down outside the walls, praying that the city, and himself with it, should be destroyed. A plant grew up beside and shaded him, but then it was attacked by a worm and shriveled up. Jonah, feeling faint in the heat of the day, prayed for death. Then Yahweh spoke, and demanded to know if he felt sorry for the plant. He confessed he did, and the story ends with Yahweh's question in reply, "And should I not be sorry for the great city of Nineveh, with its hundred and twenty thousand who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and cattle without number?" Even the hated Assyria is proffered mercy by Yahweh, in part, it seems, because they do not know the laws they should follow. Indeed, Jonah swallowed by the fish seems to be Israel herself in exile, suggesting that the Exile was inflicted for a specific sort of unfaithfulness to Yahweh, the refusal to extend his mercy to those of other races.

17. THE CLOSE OF SCRIPTURE AND THE BIRTH OF JUDAISM

We [Jews] do not possess myriads of inconsistent books, conflicting with one another. Our books, those which are justly accredited [or: those which are rightly believed to be divine], are but two and twenty, and contain the record of all time. Of these, five are the books of Moses, which comprise the laws and the tradition from the creation of man to the death of Moses. This period is slightly less than three thousand years. From the death of Moses until Artaxerxes, who succeeded Xerxes as king of Persia, the prophets subsequent to Moses wrote the history of the events of their own times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life. From Artaxerxes to our own time the complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact

succession of the prophets.

Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8, 38-41.¹²⁷

Nehemiah, with all his reforms, introduced no sacred scripture. But the picture changes with **Ezra**, who arrived in Jerusalem with royal letters of authorization in 398, as well as gifts for the temple and a copy of the Law of Moses—the *Pentateuch* seems to be meant—which he read to the assembled people. For the first time we find an appeal to “what is written”¹²⁸ to establish the law of Yahweh for the Jews. Indeed, adherence to the laws of the *Torah* became the distinguishing characteristic of a Jew where customs and language failed, for most remained in exile, where they learned the ways and speech of their adopted land. Even in Judah the Hebrew language had been lost, so that readings of the Jewish scriptures had to be translated into Aramaic for the less educated. Thus what had come to be the common practice in the Exile was formalized at the cult center in Jerusalem, and the Jews could now genuinely expect to survive as a people. And the new Law was the law of the land henceforth, for Ezra had petitioned the King to have it made so, and succeeded in his petition. The Persians were comfortable with recognizing the local laws of their subject peoples, and allowed their application even when the people under the laws were settled outside their homeland. At this time, we can reasonably assume, the sacred text in Judea included most of the prophetic books, and *Genesis* through *Kings* (except for *Ruth*). Perhaps about 350-340 *Chronicles*, *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* were added to these texts. (*Chronicles* seems especially interested in the Levitical priesthood of the Temple.)

With the acquiescence of the Jews in foreign rule under the Persians, normalcy returned to Judea, and with peace and normalcy, no new sacred writings were produced for a while.¹²⁹ In 332 BCE Alexander the Great gained control of the area, but the only change this meant for the Judeans was that the Northern Kingdom of Israel received permission to build a shrine to Yahweh on Mount Gerizim (they had been denied permission even to make contributions to the temple in Jerusalem by Ezra, due to their supposed racial

¹²⁷This is the earliest plain record of the Jewish Canon, which is here compared to the Greek histories. The reign of Artaxerxes (465-425) was the time of Ezra. The translation is from Cohen (1987) 188.

¹²⁸This appeal occurs at *Nehemiah* 8:13-15, which was originally a part of *Ezra*. *Ezra* 7:6 says that Ezra was “a scribe expert in the Law of Moses.” *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* were edited by the author of *Chronicles*, working from some very valuable original documents, including official Persian records and a personal memoir of Nehemiah himself. (Fox (1992) 197-198.) One might object here that an appeal to what is written was made by Josiah in his reforms, but his book was addressed to priests and bureaucrats, of course, and not to the common people.

¹²⁹Exceptions are *Esther* (250-180 BCE) and *Daniel* (160's BCE), which are not history, but romantic short stories set in Persia, full of local color, probably intended for residents of Judea.

impurity, though the underlying antipathy between Judeans and Israelites no doubt lay behind Ezra's policy). These Samaritans were hated by the Southerners, but have continued as a very small minority right up to the present, retaining their own version of the *Pentateuch* as their sacred book.¹³⁰

The Jews in the Dispersion gradually developed a new form of worship, not revolving around sacrifice, since they could not often get to Jerusalem.¹³¹ By the 250's we know of a number of synagogues, where Jews met to sing psalms and recite prayers, and study weekly lessons from the sacred books. The practice, once it developed in the Dispersion, spread back to Judea, and after the destruction of the Temple, it became the center of Jewish worship. The use of scripture in this worship was very different from its use in most other religions at the time. There were sacred texts in Pagan worship, but the great majority were like the original Hebrew *Psalms* and ritual law, that is, they were texts for use by specialists, by the priests who needed instructions for carrying out the ceremonial and sacrifices due the god. A few Pagans had books of sayings attributed to a legendary holy person such as Orpheus, or a god such as Hermes Trismegistus, and the Zoroastrians had a sacred book, though we don't know if they read these books at regular meetings or not. But even if they did, there was a tendency among the Pagans to keep sacred books secret (the Zoroastrians were another matter), restricting their use to full initiates, and the Jews worked hard to take things the other direction, bringing as many of their people as they could to a knowledge of scripture. For this reason, they undertook a translation of the books into the Greek spoken as a *Lingua Franca* in the Mediterranean world after Alexander, and by 100 BCE there were Greek translations of most of the *Bible*.

The *Torah*, in the last few centuries BCE, came to be recognized as sacred, a necessary and authoritative guide to religious practice for all Jews, a source from which one could gather unchallengeable premisses to argue one's religious views, and a suitable source for readings in the Synagogue services.¹³² It also came to be inalterable. Every effort was made to preserve the text exactly as it was received, and no further addition or

¹³⁰Fox (1992) 90-91; Grant (1977) 188-189, 271-272. There was also a separate temple in Egypt, though no breach between the Palestinian Jews and the Egyptian Jews seems to have arisen because of it.

¹³¹Fox (1992) 90-93.

¹³²For this topic, see especially Cohen (1987) Chapter 6. Cohen points out at pp.184-5 that the *Torah*, though universally accepted in the Dispersion, was not recognized by everyone in Judea as the authoritative text. So *Jubilees* (160's B.C.E.) and the *Temple Scroll* (2d or third century B.C.E., found among the Dead Sea Scrolls of the Essenes) claim to be dictated to Moses by an angel, and by God, respectively, and pretty clearly are intended to replace the *Torah*, though they know the *Torah*, rearranging it and expanding on it. Once the notion of a sacred book is established, it does not take long for the escalation of claims by various competitors to produce a book supposedly dictated by God Himself. The Judeans must some of them have been annoyed by people like Ezra, arriving home from the Exile and dictating to Jews who had never left home what they ought to do, and, as we shall see when we discuss Jesus's life, the old tradition of prophecy was not dead in Judea.

alteration was permitted, for that would be blasphemy. Eventually the book came to be regarded as a supernatural being, so that it was with God before Creation, and the Pharisees held that the book was holy in the precise sense that handling it was dangerous, rendering the hands unclean (the Sadducees, as usual preserving older views revolving about temple worship, rejected this notion). The *Torah* achieved this status perhaps as early as Ezra, and then, in the Hellenistic period, the Prophets (the *Nebiim*) achieved it, which meant that no new prophetic books could achieve the authoritative status of these twelve. The Writings achieved canonical status latest of all, but were generally agreed on by the first century, though it was also generally agreed that the *Torah*, and especially the *Pentateuch*, was the most sacred portion of the canon, with the Prophets next, and the Writings last. Of the Writings, the *Psalms* enjoyed the greatest prestige, and was the earliest to be regarded as sacred. The existence of a canon did not mean that no other books had authority or would be regarded as sacred, but such excluded works would perhaps not be universally recognized by all Jews, would not have as much authority, were not of sufficient status to be read in the liturgy, and were not holy or supernatural beings. The Jewish Canon,¹³³ however, was not used, like the Christian Canon later, to keep the doctrine pure and exclude heresies and heretical texts. The Jews viewed their faith much less as a matter of doctrine than did Christians—as long as the belief in the one, transcendent, just God who had chosen Israel as his people and would someday restore them to the Kingdom was granted, they were happy on that score. The important thing was that one kept the Law and maintained the prescribed religious observances. It is difficult to make out that the Jews even had the notion of heresy, for one was either a Jew, or one was not a Jew, by birth, and if one was a Jew, his opinions, however odd, could not make him somehow accursed. But the Jews had a canon, if not in the Christian sense of the term, for they had a list of books of unquestionable authority by which other books could be judged, a list agreed on by all Jews, and all Jews were responsible for becoming familiar with the books on that list. Henceforth, to be a Jew was to base one's religious life on the Law, and one's secular life on the wisdom of the Writings, and to hope in the salvation promised by the Prophets.

¹³³A canon, taken broadly, is a collection of generally recognized works of the highest authority, by which other works of the genre are judged. So one may speak of a musical canon, say, consisting of those musical works universally recognized (in the relevant group) as works of genius by which other works may be assessed. Anyone who wants to become a qualified expert in any field must become familiar with its canon.