

KING, Philip J., Lawrence E. STAGER. *Life in Biblical Israel*.
Library of Ancient Israel. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
Introduction, pp. 1-19; epilogue, 383-390.

Chronology of the Levant

Neolithi	8500–4500 B.C.E.
Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA)	8500–7300
Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB)	7300–6300
Pottery Neolithic A (PNA)	6300–5000
Pottery Neolithic B (PNB)	5000–4500
Chalcolithic	4500–3500 B.C.E.
Early Bronze	3500–2250 B.C.E.
EB I	3500–3100
EB II	3100–2650
EB III	2650–2250
Early Bronze IV/Middle Bronze I	2250–1925 B.C.E.
Middle Bronze II	1925–1550 B.C.E.
MB IIA	1925–1700
MB IIB	1700–1600
MB IIC	1600–1550
Late Bronze	1550–1200 B.C.E.
LB I	1550–1400
LB IIA	1400–1300
LB IIB	1300–1200
Iron Age	1200–586 B.C.E.
Iron I	1200–1000
Iron IIA	1000–900
Iron IIB	900–700
Iron IIC	700–586
Neo-Babylonian	586–539 B.C.E.
Persian	539–332 B.C.E.
Hellenistic	332–53 B.C.E.

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Importance of the Everyday Life

The task undertaken in the present book is to recreate the lifeways and mental attitudes of the ancient Israelites, from the courtyards of commoners to the courts of kings. It is no easy enterprise, since we lack ready-made ancient documents dealing directly with the issues of social, economic, and cultural history. To create dioramas of the daily life of a world that disappeared more than 2,500 years ago requires a search for data in a myriad of sources: ancient texts of various genres (including the Bible), inscriptions, an incalculable number of “ordinary things” that archaeologists continually dig up (potsherds, bone fragments, and other broken bric-a-brac), iconography (from the wall paintings and reliefs of Mesopotamia and Egypt to finely engraved seals), and ethnography. In mining these many different sources to retrieve something of that normative complex of values, customs, and meanings that constituted Israelite culture, we have not neglected the ordinary things, “the small things forgotten”¹—architecture, tableware, furniture, furnishings, clothing, and personal adornments—that express that culture as well.²

Although we must take care not to lose sight of the unified structure of their lifeways, the various aspects become more readily comprehensible if we view their culture through a prism of topical headings.³ For each of the following topics, the parenthetical reference indicates the pages where it is treated:

1. James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life*, Anchor Books (New York: Doubleday, 1996).

2. Other general discussions of life in ancient Israel include Roland de **Vaux**, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965); Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, 4 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1926–1940); Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel 1250–587 B.C.E.* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993); and Daniel C. Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East 3100–332 B.C.E.* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997).

3. This list was gleaned from David Hackett Fischer’s *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 8-9.

- Family ways*: the structure and function of household and family (pp. 36–40)
Gender ways: customs that regulate social relations between men and women (pp. 49–53)
Marriage ways: courtship, marriage, and divorce (pp. 54–57)
Child-rearing ways: nature and nurture of children (pp. 40–49)
Sex ways: conventional sexual attitudes and acts, and treatment of sexual deviance (pp. 59–61)
Age ways: attitudes toward aging and age relationships (pp. 58–59)
Death ways: mourning practices and mortuary rituals (pp. 363–81)
Building ways: dominant forms of vernacular and high architecture and their organization in planned and unplanned settlements (pp. 21–35, 201–10, 319–38)
Social ways: patterns of association and affiliation (pp. 36–84, 210)
Food ways: patterns of diet, nutrition, cooking, eating, feasting, and fasting (pp. 61–84, 93–107, 353–57)
Dress ways: customs of dress, demeanor, and personal adornment (pp. 259–85)
Work ways: nature of and attitudes toward work (pp. 85–122, 129–76)
Leisure ways: attitudes toward recreation and leisure; games and sports (pp. 210, 285–300)
Learning ways: patterns of education; attitudes toward literacy and learning (pp. 300–317)
Religious ways: religious architecture and patterns of worship (pp. 319–81)
Order ways: ideas of order and disorder, enforcement of order and treatment of disorderly conduct (pp. 36–40, 59–61, 201–58)
Power ways: attitudes toward authority and power (pp. 36–53, 201–58)

THE PROBLEM WITH TEXTS

When we try to recreate aspects of life in biblical Israel, we immediately come face to face with a profound dilemma: What periods are represented by that complex document known as the Hebrew Bible?

The earliest poetry, such as Judges 5 and Exodus 15, and the ancestral stories involving the peregrinations of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their families in Canaan and elsewhere should in our view be attributed to the formative period of Israelite religion, the biblical “period of the judges,” or the archaeological period known as Iron Age I (1200–1000 B.C.E.). We accept the early dating of the Yahwistic source, known as (J = Jahweh) of the Pentateuch in the tenth century B.C.E.; the combined epic source of J and E (E = Elohim) in the ninth century; the Priestly (P) source collated in the exilic period but containing many earlier traditions; the

Deuteronomistic Historian(s), who edited the books of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings, first in the late seventh century (Dtr 1) and later in the sixth century (Dtr 2). The bulk of the Chronicler (1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah) is postexilic and is based on earlier historical accounts (such as the Deuteronomistic History), although it also contains even earlier data (such as Hezekiah's building activities in Jerusalem) absent from 1 and 2 Kings.⁴ Both the Deuteronomistic Historian and the Chronicler were interested in reinterpreting and reshaping older and contemporary sources in order to create a new past relevant to their present times and comprehensible to new generations.

In many ways the Bible resembles a highly stratified tell that gradually accumulated, layer upon layer, tradition upon tradition, through the ages. In some cases materials from earlier strata were reused and reshaped into new and different configurations and contexts. As we probe into the various strata of myths, legends, chronicles, odes, and prophecies preserved in this mound of many meanings, it will become apparent that we would situate most of the lifeways expressed in the Bible at various periods within the Iron Age (1200–586 B.C.E.). There, in the cultures of that era, in an area about the size of New Jersey, we find a number of correlations of biblical lore, contemporary extrabiblical inscriptions, and archaeology that cumulatively lead us to reject the current notions of those critics who consider “biblical Israel” to be a late fiction created in the fourth–second centuries B.C.E. as an expression of the Jewish experience of that era.⁵

The Bible has been preserved and protected because it is a document of faith at the very core of Judaism and Christianity. As heirs to this biblical legacy and its ongoing interpretations by communities of faith, our task of disaggregating and appropriating parts of the Bible for historical purposes—purposes quite unintended by its authors and editors—becomes doubly difficult.

Because of our biblical heritage, we probably assume a rather easy, widespread familiarity with the ancient Israelites that is not entirely warranted and is sometimes quite misleading. One need only recall the anachronistic portraits of the biblical world promulgated in Sunday school classes or in the high art of the Middle Ages

4. Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987); Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

5. For example, Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Niels Peter Lemche, “Early Israel Revisited,” *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 4 (1996): 9–34; idem, *Prelude to Israel's Past: Background and Beginnings of Israelite History and Identity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998); Philip R. Davies, *In Search of “Ancient Israel,”* JSOTSup 148 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992). For excellent critiques of their position, see Iain W. Provan, “Ideologies, Literacy, and Critical Reflections on Recent Writing on the History of Israel,” *JBL* 114 (1995): 585–606; and more recently and comprehensively, William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?: What Archaeology Can Tell Us about Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001); also, James Barr, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of a Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

and the Renaissance, when biblical themes were painted with the apparel, environment, and attitudes of the artists, not of the ancient protagonists. Our easy familiarity with these ancient traditions as seen through the lenses of Judaism and Christianity has often blurred the differences between them—the Israelites—and us. As David Lowenthal has emphasized, the “past is a foreign country” where they do things differently from us.⁶ It is exotic and alien, with thought and work patterns far removed from those of our world.

THE STRUCTURE OF ISRAELITE SOCIETY

As we shall see, the lives of the ancient Israelites seem to focus on a social order that modern people no longer much experience. For the Israelites, family and kin groups organized around agrarian activities provided the basic elements of daily life and generated the symbols by which the higher levels of order—the political and the cosmological spheres—were understood and represented.⁷

Max Weber’s theory of patrimonial authority, when combined with Israelite terminology of self-understanding, provides a powerful lens through which to view the overall structure of their society and their lifeways.⁸ We see a three-tiered structure based on a series of nested households. At ground level is the ancestral, or patriarchal, household known in the Bible as *bêt ’āb*, literally “house of the father.” At the level of the state or, better, tribal kingdom, in ancient Israel and in neighboring polities, the king functions as paterfamilias, his subjects dependent on personal relationships and loyalty to him, in return for which allegiance they expect protection and succor. As sovereign and proprietor of the land, the king presides over his house (*bayit*), which includes the families and households of the whole kingdom. Thus in a ninth-century B.C.E. stela found at Dan and in another from Moab, the southern kingdom of Judah is referred to as the “house of David” (*byt dwd*), just as the northern kingdom of Israel is known as the “house of Omri” (*bit Ḥumrî*) in Assyrian annals.

The king, however, does not represent the apex of this societal model; rather, it is

6. David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

7. For a recent discussion of the elements of the Israelite social structure during various periods, as well as the difficulties in recovering and assembling them, see Paula M. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, LAI (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox; London: SPCK, 1999).

8. See Lawrence E. Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,” *BASOR* 260 (1985): 25–28; idem, “Forging an Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel,” in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. M. D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 149–51, 171–72. For the most elegant development of the Patrimonial Household Model and its application to cultures throughout the ancient world, see J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge: Harvard Semitic Museum, 2001).

Yahweh (in the case of Israel) who is the supreme patrimonial lord. He is the ultimate patrimonial authority over the children of Israel, who are bound to him through covenant as his kindred (*'am*) or kindred-in-law.⁹ Human kingship and divine king-ship are, then, simply more inclusive forms of patrimonial domination. Thus we find households nested within households on up the scale of the social hierarchy, each tier becoming more inclusive as one moves from domestic to royal to divine levels. At the same time, this entire structure reinforces and legitimates the authority of the pater-familias at each of the three levels.

However, while this structure is replicated throughout the social hierarchy, the domains differ in scale and function as various tiers of patrimonialism are reached. The family and household provide the central symbol about which the ancient Israelites created their cosmion, the world in which members of that society expressed their relationships to each other, to their leaders (whether “judge” or, later, “king”), and to the deity.

Through this lens we see that the Israelite monarchy was not some kind of “alien” (read: “Canaanite”) urban institution grafted onto a reluctant egalitarian, kin-based tribal society, which through internal conflict and contradiction became a class-riven society dominated by an oppressive urban elite. This fantasy in which kingship cancels kinship and gives rise to class consciousness is little more than Karl Marx’s dialectic in modern guise, in which society evolves from “primitive communalism” to “slave society” with their masters holding the means of production.

Through the three-tiered patrimonial model of Israelite society, we can understand how kingship in Israel, as elsewhere, could be a compatible institution along with other forms of patriarchal dominance. Viewed from this perspective the rural-urban dichotomy looks more like a mirage than a reality in ancient Israel. There were inequalities to be sure, both in premonarchic and monarchic Israel, but social stratification along class lines and class consciousness did not exist. The vertical, dyadic relationships of superior to inferior were of a different sort and far more variegated than class concepts allow. The term *'ebed* can refer to anyone from a slave to a high government official, as on certain seals which refer to *'ebed hammelek*, “servant of the king.”¹⁰ The social context of these referents must be known in order to understand the terminology. In a society in which countless variations within the patrimonial order were possible, it is not so difficult to imagine a farmer such as Saul or a shepherd such as David becoming king. Because kingship was not an alien institution, it could be idealized into messianic eschatology long after the demise of the monarchy.

9. Frank M. Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3–21.

10. For example, seals nos. 6–11 in Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1997).

THE WORK OF ARCHAEOLOGISTS

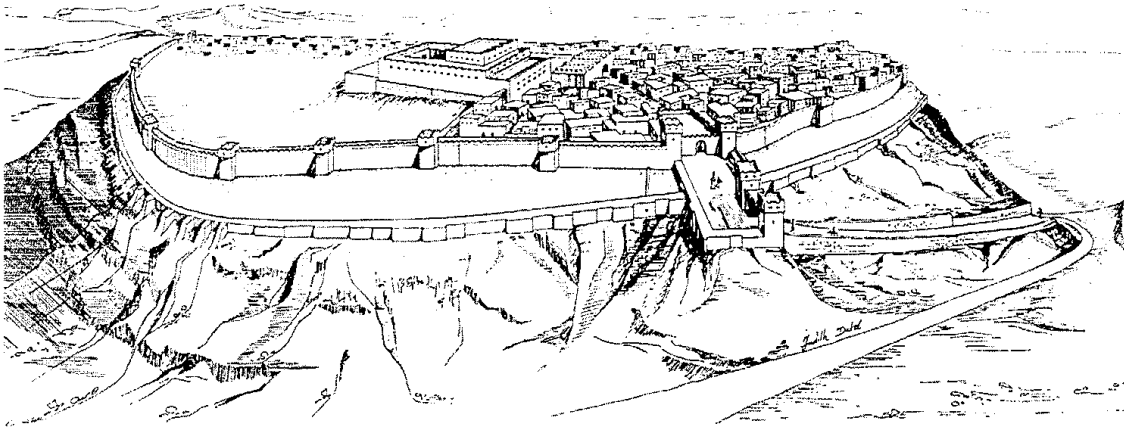
Once upon a time biblical archaeologists found it unnecessary to collect human and animal bones, plant remains, or geological specimens. Excavating, collecting, and analyzing these things was an expensive and redundant way of learning what many archaeologists presumed they already knew from reading the Bible. Archaeology—in particular, biblical archaeology—was to serve higher purposes: it should not only illuminate the manuscript but also validate the historicity of events and personages chronicled in the Bible, with the subtle (or not so subtle) assumption that to do so is to affirm the truth of its theological message and claims. The great biblical archaeologist G. Ernest Wright once defined the discipline this way:

Biblical archaeology is a special “armchair” variety of general archaeology. The Biblical archaeologist may or may not be an archaeologist himself, but he studies the discoveries of the excavations in order to glean from them every fact that throws a direct, indirect or even diffused light upon the Bible. He must be intelligently concerned with stratigraphy and typology, upon which the methodology of modern archaeology rests. . . . Yet his chief concern is not with methods or pots or weapons in themselves alone. His central and absorbing interest is the understanding and exposition of the Scriptures. The intensive study of the Biblical archaeologist is thus the fruit of the vital concern for history which the Bible has instilled in us. We cannot, therefore, assume that the knowledge of Biblical history is unessential to the faith. Biblical theology and Biblical archaeology must go hand in hand, if we are to comprehend the Bible’s meaning.¹¹

Biblical archaeology, according to this view, was intended to shed light on the great persons and events that shaped Israelite history. Of course, such a goal was an even more expensive enterprise—searching for the “golden calf” in the midst of all that rubble—than making the most of the “ordinary things” that constitute the bulk of the archaeological yield. Only now and then could the great events and peoples of narrative history be correlated with archaeology. And then it was usually the catastrophic event—the archaeology of destruction—that made this possible: for example, the synchronous destructions of Pharaoh Shishak (Sheshonq) in 925 B.C.E.; the destruction of Lachish (Level III) by the Assyrian emperor Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E.; and the scorched-earth policy of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon throughout Philistia in 604 B.C.E. and in Judah and Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.

Until relatively recent times in the history of modern archaeology, patriarchs, war-lords, kings, their armies and their enemies, the Israelite community in direct and special relationship to the deity, and the career of that collective have occupied center stage.

11. G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), 17. For his latest view on biblical archaeology, in which he provided a prescient post-processual analysis, see “The ‘New’ Archaeology,” *BA* 38 (1975): 104-45.



Ill. 1: Reconstruction of Lachish, Level III. (Courtesy of the Expedition to Lachish, David Ussishkin, Director; Drawing: Judith Dekel)

Great men, cosmic events, and special groups have been the focus of attention and analysis. To be sure, political, military, and religious histories are not to be gainsaid, what Fernand Braudel denigrated as “*l’histoire événementielle*,” the short-term, fast-changing history of events—“surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs.”¹² Nonetheless, our concerns in the present book will be more with his “*conjoncture*”—a middle-term duration, which includes demographic, social, and economic history—and “*la longue durée*”—long-term history, involving unchanging or slowly changing conditions of geography, climate, and environment, as well as our human relationship to them. Of course, there are those *kairotic* moments when these different durations or timescales intersect, when long-term causes precipitate short-term events and personages who have long-term consequences.

For our purposes, then, it matters little whether the biblical accounts are “true” in the positivistic sense of some historians and biblical scholars. It is enough to know that the ancient Israelites believed them to be so. The stories must have passed some test of verisimilitude, that is, having the appearance of being true or real. In this sense the biblical account and many other ancient accounts, however self-serving and tendentious, become grist for the cultural historian’s mill. As the first great cultural historian, Jacob Burckhardt, writing in the nineteenth century about the Greeks, reminds us: “Material conveyed in an unintentional, disinterested or even involuntary way by sources and monuments . . . betray their secret unconsciously and even, paradoxically, through fictitious elaborations, quite apart from the material details they set out to record and glorify, and are thus doubly instructive for the cultural historian.”¹³

12. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols., trans. Sean Reynolds, rev. ed. (London: Collins, 1972), 21.

13. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, trans. Sheila Stern and ed., with an introduction by Oswyn Murray (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 5.

In the introduction to Burckhardt’s work, the classicist Oswyn Murray, paraphrasing Burckhardt, says:

It does not matter whether the stories which it uses are true, as long as they are believed to be true. And even a forgery is an important piece of evidence for the period that perpetrated it, since it reveals more clearly than a genuine article the conceptions and beliefs about the past of the age that created it. This principle of unconscious revelation through representation . . . is one of the most powerful tools in the modern historian’s study of mentalities. As Burckhardt saw very clearly, it offers a solution to the sterile disputes of positivism as to whether a fact is true or false, and how such a proposition can be established; cultural history is primarily interested in beliefs and attitudes, rather than events—and falsehoods are therefore often more valuable than truths.¹⁴

THE RHYTHMS OF LIFE

The gap between us and ancient peoples continues to widen as we become further removed from our agrarian roots. Today less than two percent of the population in the United States are farmers. In ancient Israel, it was just the opposite. Nearly every-one, even those living in royal cities such as Jerusalem and Samaria, was involved in some form of agriculture and had encounters with animals wherever they went. Two of the main city gates leading into Iron Age Jerusalem took their names from the creatures being bought and sold there: the Sheep Gate (Neh. 3:1, 32; 12:39) and the Fish Gate (2 Chron. 33:14; Neh. 3:3; 12:39; Zeph. 1:10).

Agricultural life was conducted by a “calendar” very different from ours. Our engagement [appointment] and planning books mark the day, month, year, and even the hour when something is to be done. There were many durations in premodern times: the diurnal in which one rises with the sun and retires when it sets; or the sea-sons of activities revolving about farming and herding. They did not make use of watches to fine-tune time down to the hour and minute. Ancient time was of a “different texture.”¹⁵

As will be seen in chapter 3, the Gezer calendar highlights the seasonal patterns of the agricultural year, presumably when such festivals as the wine festival (note the example at Shiloh in Judges 21), Weeks (*šābu’ôt*), Tabernacles (*sukkôt*), Passover (*pesaḥ-maššôt*), or sheepshearing took place. One of the most important festal meals was the annual sacrifice, known as *zēbah hayyāmîm*, that was

14. Oswyn Murray, in Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, xxxi.

15. Jacques Barzun and Henry E. Graff, “A Medley of Mysteries: A Number of Dogs That Didn’t Bark,” in *The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence*, ed. Robin W. Winks (New York: Harper, 1970), 213–31; see esp. 229.

designed to strengthen the solidarity of the clan (*mišpāḥâ*). This occasion of sacrifice and feasting “served to legitimate and sustain a social order based on patrilineal descent; to provide a public, observable verification of clan membership; and to confirm hierarchical status within the group by a graded distribution of portions or ‘cuts’ of the sacrificial animal.”¹⁶ It was understood that dead ancestors also participated. The importance of this clan bake can be seen from the story of David, who passes up King Saul’s invitation and returns to his clan center in Bethlehem to celebrate there during this two-day feast at the new moon (1 Sam. 20:5–6, 28–29).

Agrarian life, kinship relations, domestic objects, the routines of the day and the year, and other such details of the mundane world play a far greater role on the pages of the Hebrew Bible than we might initially realize. They figure into stories, laws, historical accounts, songs, prophetic critiques, and wisdom sayings—sometimes as prominent features, but just as often as background minutiae. Typically readers will scarcely notice them, perhaps because they are alien to our own contexts or because they seem to fit our stereotyped notions of the character of life in antiquity. In chapters 2–6 we will be elucidating details of the everyday life and organizing them schematically for easier discussion. At this point, though, we will take one specific narrative as an example of the wide range of social, domestic, economic, political, religious, and environmental elements that can come together in a single story. Following the initial discussion, we will then indulge in a fictional portrayal of a “typical” day in the life of this family, in order to convey a sense of the terms of living faced by many of the ancient Israelites. To do so, we will draw on the same types of sources essential for all social history of ancient times—literary texts from roughly the same period, material finds discovered by archaeologists, knowledge of the environment, information about more recent means of living in the same context, and an informed imagination.

Micah and the Levite

A fertile narrative for the premonarchic family and its societal setting, and indeed for some of the elements of domestic life in other periods as well, is Judges 17–18, where the action focuses on the household of Micah, a wealthy landowner in Mount Ephraim. His large household comprises his widowed mother, his sons, their wives and children, and a young priest, who is an itinerant Levite (referred to as *na’ar*, probably as yet unmarried) from Bethlehem, whom Micah adopted and installed as priest of the household shrine (*bêt ’ēlōhîm*). This shrine was equipped with such cultic paraphernalia as an ephod and teraphim, as well as a cult image with silver overlay. Micah

16. Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Family in First Temple Israel,” in L. G. Perdue et al., eds., *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 79.

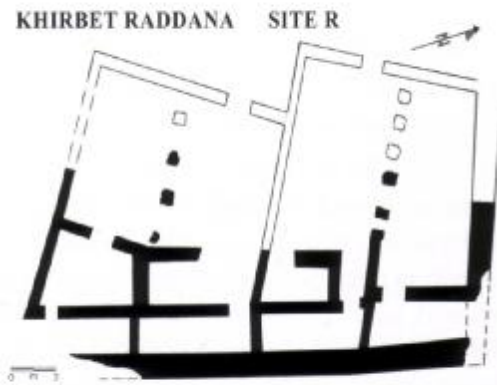
paid this ritual specialist an annual salary of ten pieces of silver, gave him a wardrobe, and supplied him with subsistence.

The reference to an ephod and teraphim is obscure. The ephod may be a sacred garment or a ritual object, such as a box. In later sources, the ephod was the apron-like garment worn by the high priest (Ex. 28:6). Attached to the ephod was a breast-plate containing the Urim and Thummim, perhaps sacred dice used for divination. The priests may have used this device for predicting the future. Teraphim or “house-hold gods” served as cult objects. Sometimes they appear to be life-size: “Michal took the teraphim and, placing a tangle of goats’ hair at its head, laid it on the bed and covered it with a blanket” (1 Sam. 19:13, 16). At other times they seem to be small and portable: “Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father’s teraphim . . . and put them in the camel saddle and sat on them” (Gen. 31:19, 34).

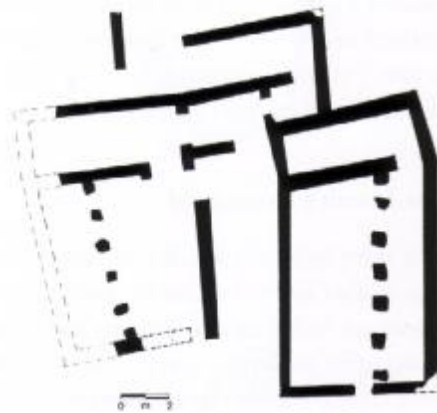
The main point of the Micah story is to tell how a priest from Bethlehem in Judah, King David’s birthplace and ancestral home, came to officiate at the main northern religious center at Dan. It is an etiology to legitimate this sacred center and give it a Levitical priesthood that claimed not only a southern Davidic connection but also a Mushite one. That this story served the interests of the northern kingdom after the division of the monarchy is clear; nevertheless, embedded in the narrative are family relations and arrangements that accurately reflect highland realities of the twelfth through tenth centuries.

According to the story, the Danites stole Micah’s shrine and took the Levite to their newly acquired territory of Laish in the north, where they established the cult of Yahweh. The original Danite tribal territory was located in the southwest, bounded by Ephraim to the north, Benjamin to the east, Judah to the south, and the coastal plain to the west. The Danites migrated from the southwest to the northeastern corner of Canaan in the hill country. The Stratum VI destruction at Tel Dan is identified with the Danite conquest of Laish, renamed Dan, in the beginning of the twelfth century. Collared-rim pithoi appear for the first time in Stratum VI at Dan. These pithoi, pottery jars used to store water, wine, oil, and grain, are characteristic of Iron Age Israelite material culture. William F. Albright, followed by Yohanan Aharoni (see chapter 3), attributed this jar-type exclusively to the Israelites, but the pithoi have been discovered in the Jordan Valley, in the Ammonite region, as well as in the north. The East Jordanian sites where the collared-rim pithoi were found include Sahab, Tell Deir ‘Alla, Tell el-Mazar, and the Amman citadel. A large number of these pithoi were also uncovered at Canaanite Megiddo.

Micah as the paterfamilias presided over other coresidents in the family compound, including his sons (and their families) who occupied houses within the compound and were under Micah’s authority, that is, “the men who were in the houses within (or under the authority of) Micah’s household” (*babbāttîm ’âser ’im-bêt mîkâ*,



Ill. 2: Raddana (Site R). Block plan of two pillared houses sharing a common wall; back room being part of a construction which may have served as an enclosure wall for the site; Iron. I. (Courtesy of Z. Lederman, "An Early Iron Age Village at Khirbet Raddana: The Excavations of J. A. Callaway" [doctoral dissertation, 1999])



Ill. 3: Raddana (Site S). Block plan of joint family compound, composed of two three-room houses with pillars, dated Iron I. (Courtesy of Z. Lederman, "An Early Iron Age Village at Khirbet Raddana: The Excavations of J. A. Callaway" [doctoral dissertation, 1999])

**KHIRBET RADDANA
SITE S**



Ill. 4: Raddana (Site T). Block plan of three or more pillared houses, dated late twelfth or early eleventh century B.C.E. (Courtesy of Z. Lederman, "An Early Iron Age Village at Khirbet Raddana: The Excavations of J. A. Callaway" [doctoral dissertation, 1999])

**RADDANA
SITE T**

Judg. 18:22).¹⁷ As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2, the compound consisted of a cluster of houses within a walled or fenced-off portion of the village (III. 2, 3, 4). The same socially inspired architectural configuration seems to persist into New Testament times, as Jesus proclaims, “In my father’s house(hold) are many houses” (traditionally, and erroneously, translated “mansions”) (John 14:2).

Also living in the family compound was Micah’s mother, a widow. Because women were often ten or fifteen years younger than their husbands, it would not be surprising to find more widows than widowers in ancient Israelite society, provided the women survived the rigors of childbirth. It was, of course, one of the primary duties of the son to care not only for his spouse and children but also for his widowed mother. Some of the subdivisions or annexes archaeologists find in the houses of Iron Age villages were probably the “widow’s quarters.” Other individual houses within the compound might belong to brothers or sons with their families, or serve as living quarters for the young Levite, *a ger* (“client,” usually translated “sojourner” or “stranger”), who “became to him like one of his sons” (Judg 17:11).

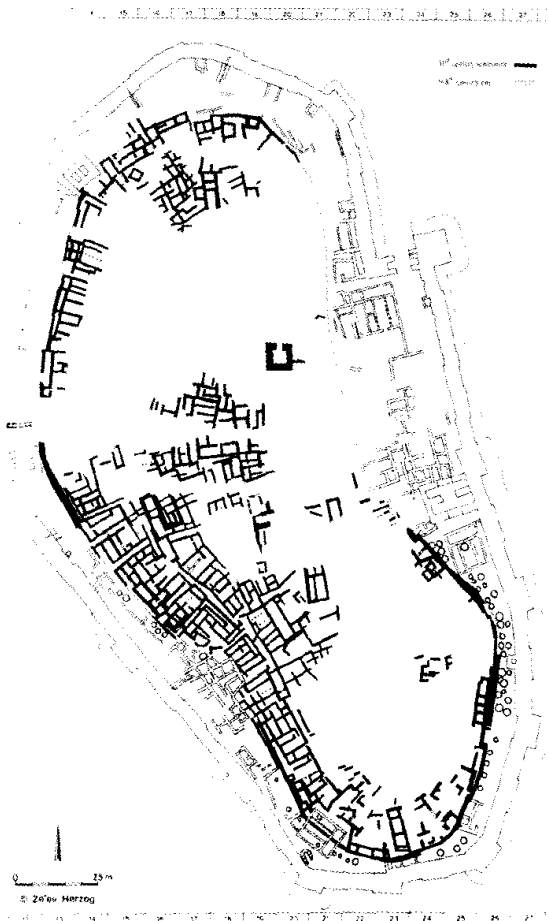
A Day in Micah’s Household

Micah’s father died at the old age of three score and ten, leaving his eldest son, now forty-seven years old, to care for his mother and to become the head of household, a joint family numbering seventeen persons, including two servants and a young priest (unmarried).¹⁸ Micah’s household occupies the largest compound in this sizable village of 250 people, all from the same clan, divided into two lineages. Micah’s *bêt ’āb* (ancestral household), or compound, consists of three pillared houses arranged around a large walled-off open-air courtyard. It is one of twenty such compounds located on top of this terraced hill in Mount Ephraim.

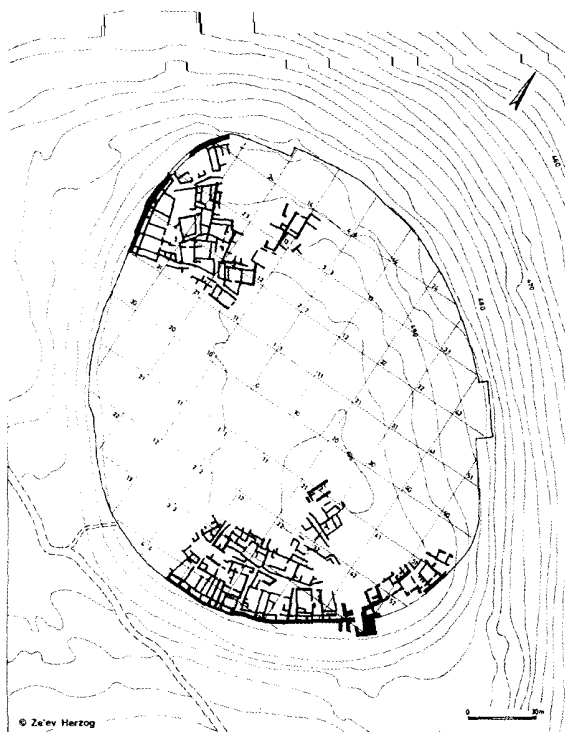
This village, like many other settlements in the ancient (and modern) Near East, puzzles Western urbanologists. It seems to lack rational organization, consisting of densely packed houses hidden behind featureless courtyard walls, with streets and alleys that lead nowhere—a series of blind alleys and cul-de-sacs. To outsiders (including Western urbanologists) it appears to be a maze of houses and dead-end

17. For *im* as “authority,” see Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB 1 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 170, 247.

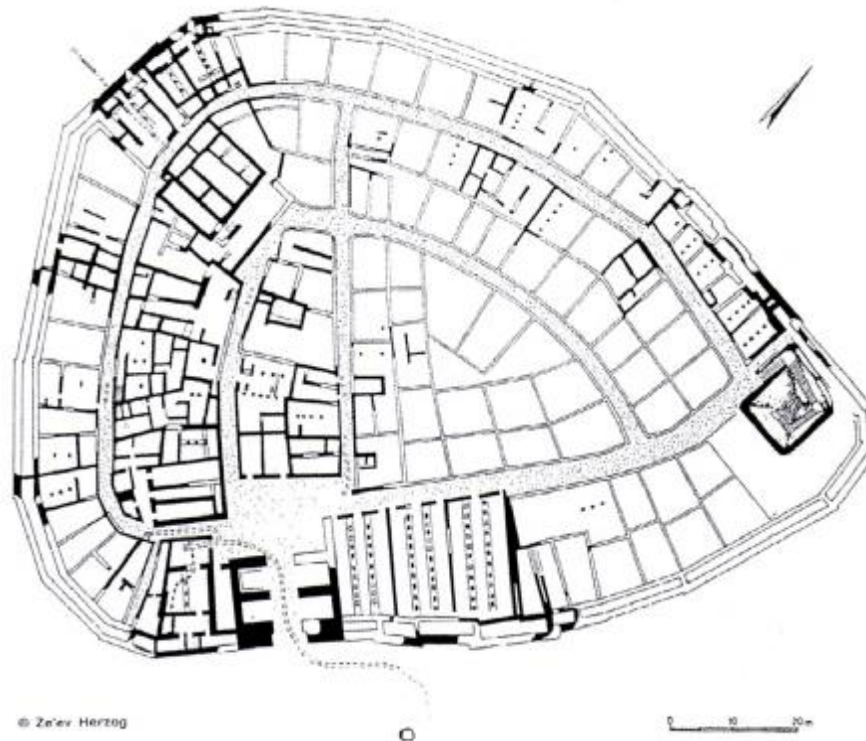
18. This imaginative account of Micah’s household is based on Judges 17-18. The details are drawn from biblical and other ancient Near Eastern sources, archaeological documents, and ethnographic studies of Middle Eastern communities. The following have been especially helpful in creating this imaginary day in an Israelite highland village: Gustaf Hermann Dalman’s grand work, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1928-42), in eight volumes, relating to Palestine at the turn of the twentieth century; and the ethnographies of Louise E. Sweet, *Tell Toqaan: A Syrian Village* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1974), and of A. M. Lutfiyya, *Baytin, a Jordanian Village: A Study of Social Institutions and Social Change in a Folk Community* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966). Many of the details of this day and the sources about them can be found in chapters 2–6 below.



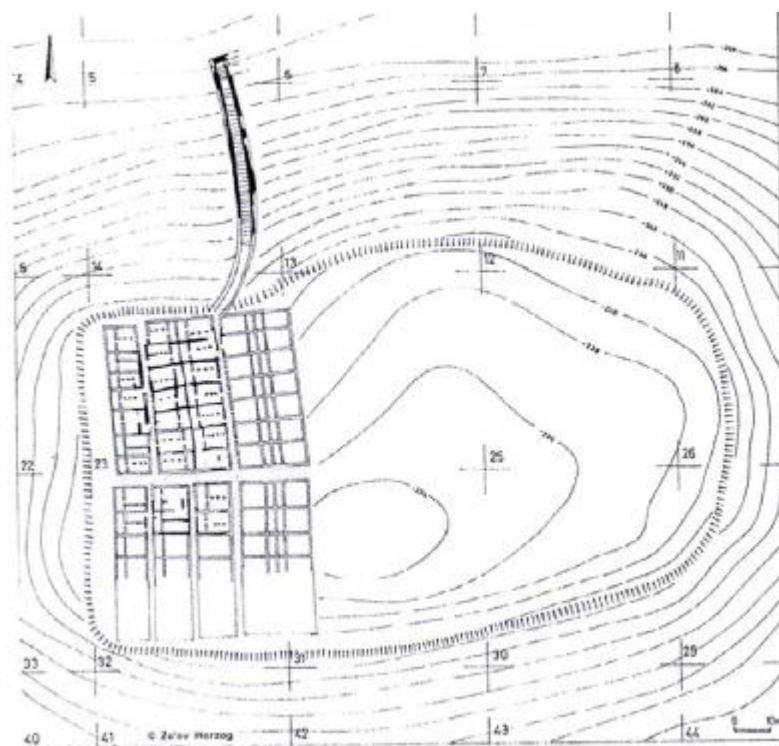
Ill. 5: Plan of Tell en-Nasbeh (ancient Mizpeh). Example of an organic town which grew according to social determinants such as kinship patterns; Iron II. (Courtesy of Z. Herzog; *Archaeology of the City*, Fig. 5.26, p. 238)



Ill. 6: Plan of Tell Beit Mirsim. Example of an organic town which grew according to social determinants such as kinship patterns; Iron II. (Courtesy of Z. Herzog; *Archaeology of the City*, Fig. 5.29, p. 243)



Ill. 7: Town layout of Tel Sheva, eighth century b.c.e., Stratum II. Example of planned settlement. (After Z. Herzog, *Archaeology of the City*, Fig. 5.31)



Ill. 8: Block plan of Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, latter half of the eighth century b.c.e., illustrating orthogonal planning as a result of Assyrian impact. (Courtesy of Z. Herzog; *Archaeology of the City*, Fig. 5.24, p. 233)

streets, but to insiders it represents a clear map of kinship groups. It is not spatial order derived from some external principles but order emanating from internal social organization, based on neighborhoods coalescing around families and larger units of kinship, patron-client relationships, and other forms of alliance. What looks like utter chaos to an outsider makes a great deal of sense to those who belong there (III. 5, 6, 7, 8).

Within his compound, Micah has become the head of this patriarchal household. In his two-story house he lives with his wife, his sixty-year-old mother, and an unmarried paternal aunt. Each of his two married sons lives in a separate two-story pillared house within the compound. Together they have five children, two girls and three boys, ranging in age from three to ten years. The third house in the compound is occupied by an unmarried twenty-year-old son of Micah, two servants, and the Levitical priest, an unmarried teenager who is skilled in divination by consulting Urim and Thummim and in religious rituals and instruction (cf. Deut. 33:8-11).

In the hill country of Mount Ephraim the most pleasant time of year is spring, just after the heavy rains of winter and before the long, hot summer brings swarms of flies and gnats. The New Year's festival, which renews the bonds of belonging to clans and tribes throughout Israel, has been celebrated and sacrifices made. It is the season when lambs, kids, and calves are born and a green carpet of winter wheat spreads over the terraced hills and valley bottoms. Wild flowers of red, yellow, and blue turn the countryside into an impressionist's canvas. Yet it is still cold enough that the most vulnerable and precious livestock must be quartered on the ground floor of the house—their warmth and aromas radiating to the upper story, where most of the family sleeps.

As dawn breaks, the household starts to stir. Micah and his three sons go downstairs to release the livestock from the stables. Other animals are already in the courtyard. The family “breaks its fast” (John 21:12) by eating a “morning morsel” of bread, with a few olives. But morning was not the time for a real meal; that came later in the day (Eccl. 10:16-17).

The lambs and kids born earlier in the spring are separated from their mothers. Micah's unmarried son is the shepherd for one lineage in the village. He takes not only Micah's sheep and goats but also those of related families to graze on the plants and grasses of distant hills, covered with verdant pasturage. He will not return to the compound at midday. He carries his noonday meal with him: some dried figs, parched wheat, pita bread, and a flask of wine (cf. Ruth 2:14; 1 Sam. 25:18).

Since the grandchildren have no schools to attend, *they* are given many responsibilities in and around the busy compound. One of their chores is to look after the lambs and kids born earlier in the spring and separated from the ewes and nanny goats for most of the day. The young animals are just learning to graze on grass and weeds not far from the compound. They and the children get into all sorts of trouble that requires adult intervention.



Ill. 9: Yoked oxen in a wooden bowl (new) on left, and on right, a terracotta bowl. Tell el-Farah (N), probably Early Bronze Age. (Courtesy of the Israel Museum; Photo: A. Hay)

One of the married sons is off to do spring plowing, a time when peas, broad beans, lentils, and garden vegetables are planted. He yokes the two oxen (Amos 6:12) together, throws the wooden plow over the back of one of the large animals, and heads for the nearest unplowed field. His plow, the most important implement in an ancient farmer's repertoire of machinery, is really quite simple: a sturdy section of oak wood, curved toward a sharpened point or toe and shod with a bronze or iron sheath.

This simple machine is ideal for the crusty, terra rossa soils, often consisting of more stones than earth, that form the soil mantle of the highlands. Where the soil is stony and moisture at a premium, the deep-furrowing moldboard plow, with a sod-busting share, would be counterproductive. All that is needed is an implement to loosen the crust and to cover the seeds by cross-plowing, as soon as they are sown. The plow-man also carries a goad with which to jab the oxen. It consists of a two-pronged metal fork at one end and a metal spatula to clean the plow at the other.

Meanwhile, back at the compound, Micah and one of his servants are cleaning out the house stables. They scoop out the straw bedding, now saturated with urine and manure from last night's lodging. There are no separate barns or stables in the village; one would have to go to royal cities for such facilities. Oxen, donkeys, cattle, and some sheep are commonly stabled on the ground floor of village houses. Troughs between the pillars and cobbled side aisles are constructed more for livestock

than humans; nevertheless, since no toilets, either indoors or outdoors, exist in most communities, it is convenient for the upstairs inhabitants to relieve themselves during the night in the stables below. Using wooden forks and shovels, Micah and his servant clean the stables while two of the daughters carry the refuse in large straw baskets to the southeastern part of the courtyard, downwind from the prevalent westerlies, where they pile the dung into an already formidable midden. Later in the day, some members of the compound will shape part of the pile into round or square cakes, to be stacked and dried in the sun like mud bricks. Dung cakes will provide excellent fuel for heating and cooking.

Although Micah has the last word in the household, his wife organizes and oversees the myriad of activities taking place in the houses and the courtyard. She and the other women are responsible for food processing and preparation, as well as many other domestic chores. Among those, first and foremost is the preparation of daily bread, the staple of the family. On the other side of the courtyard, opposite the mid-den heap, stands a beehive-shaped oven (*tannûr*, Ex. 7:28), built of clay and insulated with potsherds. Straw and sticks (never dung) are kindled in the bottom of the oven, sometimes sunk slightly into the ground. When the fire has been reduced to a bed of hot coals in the bottom and the sides of the oven are quite hot, it is time to bake the bread on the interior of the *tannûr*.

Shortly after sunrise, Micah's wife is busy rolling the dough into balls, using a bit of leavening from the last batch of bread dough. After the dough balls have risen, she flat-tens them out on a stone and then, using both hands, twirls the cake into a flat disc, some twenty-five centimeters in diameter. In one motion she throws the cake through a large opening in the top of the beehive oven so that it sticks to the interior and bakes in minutes. She uses the most common manner of making bread in the village, but there are other ways as well. Some make griddle cakes by baking pita on a ceramic tray or griddle heated over an open fire. Others make fritters by frying the dough in a cooking pot of bubbling olive oil or lard from a fat-tailed sheep (Lev. 2:4-7).

Meanwhile, the daughters-in-law are doing a number of other tasks under the eye of Micah's wife. One is opening the last of the grain silos (*'āsāmîm*) sunk beneath the floor of the courtyard and filled with wheat from the last harvest ten months ago. The wheat is brought to the handmill operated by another daughter-in-law. She grinds the grain between two coarse basalt slabs: the lower is called the "saddle"; upon it sits the upper stone, known as the "rider." Wheat placed between the two stones is husked and ground as the rider moves across the saddle in a back-and-forth motion. The other daughter-in-law pours the coarsely ground grain into a three-legged mortar made of basalt and, using a pestle, pulverizes the grain into a fine flour, ready for tomorrow's bread. The remaining cracked wheat is made into couscous (bulgur, in Turkish).

After bread making, as noon approaches, it is time to milk the ewes and nannies



Ill. 10: Israelite joint family compound with two pillared houses and various courtyard activities. (Reconstruction: © L. E. Stager, Illustration: C.S. Alexander)

pasturing on a distant hillside. Two of the women take deep earthen bowls with them to bring back the milk. At the compound the fresh milk is poured into a goatskin churn suspended by ropes from a fig tree. The churning bag has been specially cured with pomegranate peel. One of the younger girls shakes the churn back and forth until the milk curdles.

Several members of the family have returned to the compound for the midday meal. Micah's wife puts out fresh pita, onions, and leban (curdled milk) for lunch. Afterward, during the hottest part of the day, Micah and some others take a siesta under the pergola in the courtyard. By mid-afternoon the unmarried son returns from plowing with the oxen. He removes the yoke and harness and waters the team at the stone trough in the middle of the courtyard. Another son takes the oxen out to graze for the remainder of the afternoon. With a hoe Micah is loosening the soil of a small plot near the house (Isa. 7:25) where his wife will plant a vegetable garden of cucumbers, melons, leeks, garlic, onions, and herbs during the coming week.

Meanwhile she has put a large cooking pot of couscous (parched cracked wheat) on a tripod of three stones arranged around an open fire. The main dish of the evening, couscous spiced with onions, coriander, and black cumin, simmers in the pot until sunset. The boys spread the straw bedding throughout the house stables just as the herdsmen return to the village with the livestock. Before the evening meal is served, the boys lead the animals into their evening quarters. Then members of the joint family gather in the upper story of Micah's house, where supper is laid out for them. The couscous is heaped high on a large tray in the middle of the dining room floor. Fresh-baked pita bread sits in a wicker basket. The head of the household offers a blessing for the food and then hands a portion of bread to each of the adults sitting in the family circle on the floor.

After yogurt is poured over the couscous, it has the consistency of "cream of wheat." There are no knives, forks, or spoons. With bread they scoop up the creamy couscous from the pottery tray, careful to use only the fingers of the right hand for eating. A decanter of red wine and raisin cakes accompany the main course.

The plowman and the children unroll their straw-filled mattresses and line them up along the walls of the second floor. They are very tired and have to get up early. Others in the central room continue to chat into the evening. Before retiring, Micah and his sons make sure that the gate to the compound is closed and locked, as well as the doors to the individual houses.

Epilogue

After the fall of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem in 586.C.E., the cosmion of the ancient Israelites—that creative analogue of the cosmos that mediates between the finite and the infinite—was shattered.¹ All levels of their three-tiered hierarchy of order—the nested households of patrimonial authority from paterfamilias to king to deity—were severely disrupted.

At the base of this hierarchy were the agropastoralists in the towns and villages of the countryside, organized into joint families, lineages, and clans, who either died during the Babylonian onslaught, or fled as refugees into other countries, or were deported to Babylonia. The kingdom of Judah governed by the dynasty of David had become but a memory or, at best, an eschatological hope. The palace complex that stood on Mount Zion next to the Temple was in ruins, never to be rebuilt. The “house of Yahweh,” a symbol of the inviolability of Jerusalem, also lay in ruins, abandoned by the Deity, according to Ezekiel; but this same prophet also had a vision of restoration and the return of the “glory” of God to the holy mount.

Without a king, without a permanent abode for Yahweh, and without landed patrimony, the condition of the exiles from Judah resembled, at least superficially, that of their ancestors in Egypt, as related in epic tales of the distant past. The pragmatic conditions of existence in exile required their drawing on a reserve stock of symbols, many of them from the formative period of Israel’s history, before Yahweh dwelt in a permanent house in Jerusalem.

The contingencies of history, as well as the resilience of the patrimonial structure of society in which kingship was not essential, gave the Jewish exiles room to create

1. The political philosopher Eric Voegelin developed the idea that human society “is as a whole a little world, a cosmion, illuminated with meaning from within by the human beings who continuously create and bear it as the mode and condition of their self-realization. It is illuminated through an elaborate symbolism . . . from rite, through myth, to theory. . . . The self-illumination of society through symbols is an integral part of social reality . . . for through such symbolization the members of a society experience it as more than an accident or a convenience; they experience it as of their human essence” (Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952], 27).

a new cosmion. The new vision was built as much as possible on the past but evoked in new ways the symbolization of ordered relationships that took into account the new circumstances and reality in which they found themselves. The relationship between ruler and ruled had to be reassessed, and two important differences in imperial policy between the Assyrian and the Babylonian empires opened opportunities for this reassessment.

First, Judah was spared the fate of Samaria, in that Nebuchadrezzar did not try to transform it into a province, as Assyria had done with the northern kingdom. There, portions of the local population were deported to other parts of the empire, and foreign deportees were moved in beside those who remained. The Assyrians engaged in a large-scale plan of forced acculturation and assimilation of conquered peoples, which broke up families, traditions, and customs. Their policy was to homogenize and “Assyrianize” exiled populations.²

Second, rather than impose an effective imperial bureaucracy on the petty kingdoms of the West, Nebuchadrezzar implemented a “scorched earth” policy there, leaving whole regions severely underpopulated. Many of the deportees were taken to Babylonia to strengthen the core of his empire, which had suffered a great depletion of manpower as a consequence of earlier wars with Assyria.³ This left some areas, such as Judah and Philistia, veritable wastelands.

After a thorough review of most of the archaeological evidence in Palestine between 604 and 539 B.C.E., Ephraim Stern concluded that “there is virtually no clearly defined period that may be called ‘Babylonian,’ for it was a time from which almost no material finds remain.”⁴ There were scattered populations in the country-side, but these were quite small when compared with Iron Age II and the Persian period. International trade was minimal. Only two regions showed a few signs of prosperity during Babylonian rule: northern Judah (the region of Benjamin) and the land of Ammon.

The Jews were just one of many western minorities deported to Babylonia. There were also Egyptians, Greeks, Phoenicians, and Philistines still living there in the Persian period. And, although the Jews are the best-known group to return to their homeland, other communities returned as well. A cuneiform archive of the Nuskugabbē family found in the town of Neirab, southeast of Aleppo (Syria), covers the period of about 560–520 B.C.E., when members of this family or lineage were exiles in Babylonia. They, with their archive in hand, returned to their hometown some time later. In many ways their return resembles that of the Jews, who “returned to

2. Israel Eph'al, “The Western Minorities of Babylonia in the 6th–5th centuries B.C.: Maintenance and Cohesion,” *Orientalia* 47 (1978): 83.

3. Lawrence E. Stager, “Ashkelon and the Archaeology of Destruction: Kislev 604 B.C.E.,” in A. Biran et al., eds., *Eretz-Israel* 25 [Joseph Aviram Volume] (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society), 61*–74* .

4. Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, vol. 2, *The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods (732–332 B.C.E.)*, (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 350

Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town” (Ezra 2:1; Neh. 7:6).⁵ Clearly, memories of their homelands, hometowns, and family estates remained very much alive in some Diaspora communities. The “elders,” who would have been leaders in this regard, continued to represent various segments of kin-based society as they had done throughout Israelite and Judahite history. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel refer to this significant body in Babylonia as the “elders of the exiles” (Jer. 29:1), the “elders of Judah” (Ezek. 8:1), and the “elders of Israel” (Ezek. 14:1; 20:1, 3).

The Philistines, however, were not so fortunate. Their homeland, largely depopulated under Babylonian military policy, was repopulated during the Persian period not by Philistines returning from Babylonia but by Phoenicians moved south from Tyre and Sidon by the Persian authorities. The Persians preferred a Phoenician maritime presence in these coastal communities to that of the Philistines.⁶ Thus historical contingencies resulting from different treatments by the Assyrians and the Babylonians to subject populations and a Persian policy of “enlightened self-interest”⁷ played a significant role in the successful repatriation of Jewish exiles from Babylonia.

Under the edict of 538 B.C.E.⁸ issued by Cyrus the Great of Persia, the founder of the largest empire the world had ever seen, Jews began returning to their homeland, less than half a century after the fall of Judah. Cyrus also granted the returnees permission to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. He even ordered the return of the gold and silver sacred vessels, which Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from the First Temple.

Although many preferred to remain in the Diaspora, the return of some of the Jewish exiles to Judah to restore their community and rebuild the Temple was greeted with hostility by the landowners of Judah who were not exiled (*‘am hā’āreṣ*) as well as by unfriendly neighbors all around: the Samaritans, led by Sanballat, to the north; the Ammonites, led by the Tobiad family, to the east; the Edomites and Arabs to the south; and the “Ashdodites” (actually Phoenicians) to the west.

Work on the Temple in Jerusalem, however, began in earnest after 520 B.C.E., when another wave of Jewish returnees arrived with Zerubbabel, a “governor of Judah” and the last descendant of the Davidic dynasty mentioned in the Bible. With the encouragement of two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, the Second Temple was completed in five years (by 515 B.C.E.). However, Haggai’s hopes that Zerubbabel would restore kingship as a Davidic dynasty went unfulfilled (cf. Haggai 2:20-23).

The Second Temple was built over the foundations of the Solomonic Temple,

5. Eph‘al, “The Western Minorities of Babylonia in the 6th–5th centuries B.C.,” 84–87.

6. Lawrence E. Stager, *Ashkelon Discovered* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1991), 22–23, 30–31.

7. Mary Joan Leith, “Israel among the Nations: The Persian Period,” in M. D. Coogan, ed., *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 378–79.

8. See Ezra 1:2–4; 6:3–5.

which, although it lay in ruins after 586 B.C.E., was still revered as a holy site to which pilgrimage was made (cf. Jer. 41:5). The new edifice was constructed on Mount Zion within a square fortified enclosure, about 250 meters (500 cubits) on each side, with elaborate gates leading into the courtyards of the acropolis complex. Unlike Mount Zion of the monarchy, there were no palaces next to the “house of Yahweh.” The Temple stood alone in the fortified enclosure, known as *bîrâ* in the Persian period.⁹ And for those who could remember or who had been told what the Solomonic Temple had looked like before its destruction, the Second Temple was but a pale reflection of its splendor: “Many of the priests and Levites and heads of patriarchal houses [*rā’sê hā’ābôt*], the old men [*hazzēqēnîm*] who had seen the first house, cried out in sorrow as they watched the founding of this house” (Ezra 3:12; cf. Haggai 2:3).

Jerusalem and the province of *Yehud* (Judah) in the Fifth Satrapy of the Persian Empire were also pale reflections of what they had been during the last century of the monarchy. The province now was only a portion of one of the twenty satrapies into which the Persian Empire was divided. The Fifth Satrapy, known as “Beyond the River” (Heb. *‘ēber hannāhār*, Aramaic *‘ābar nahārâ*; i.e., west of the Euphrates), was composed of Palestine, Phoenicia, and Cyprus.

The province of Samaria (Samerina) greatly declined during the Babylonian era. Of the major tells excavated there—Dothan, Samaria, Shechem, Tell el-Farah (N), and Gezer—not one has yielded material remains that can be definitely assigned to that time.

By the Persian period, however, the demographic and economic fortunes of Samaria province were on the upswing. In the northern and western parts, archaeological surveys show about the same density of settlements as in Iron Age II; many of these were villages with 500–600 inhabitants. Their prosperity seemed to be linked to that of the rich Phoenician coastal communities that flourished from Sidon to Ashkelon. In contrast, the southern part of Samaria province shows a sharp decline in number and size of settlements during the Persian period from what had been there in Iron Age II.¹¹

9. See Benjamin Mazar, “The Temple Mount from Zerubbabel to Herod,” in Shmuel Ahituv, ed., *Biblical Israel: State and People* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University; Israel Exploration Society, 1992), 111–12. Nehemiah worked in the citadel of Susa (*bēšûšan habbîrâ*) before going to Jerusalem; cf. also the acropolis of Carthage known in Greek as *byrsa*, probably borrowed from an as yet unattested Phoenician **brt*, which, like Hebrew *bîrâ* and Aramaic *bîrtā*, derives from Assyrian *birtu*, meaning “citadel.”

10. See the overview of Israel Eph^cal, “Syria-Palestine under Achaemenid Rule” in John Boardman, N. G. L. Hammond, D. M. Lewis and M. Ostwald, eds., *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 4, *Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 139–64; Ephraim Stern, “The Archaeology of Persian Palestine,” in W. D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein, eds., *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 1, *Introduction: The Persian Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 88–114; and Leith, “Israel among the Nations: The Persian Period.”

11. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 2:428.

Personal names reveal a heterogeneous population living in Samaria during the Persian period. The Wadi ed-Daliyeh papyri (fourth century B.C.E.) mention names composed of the divine element: Qaus (Edomite), Chemosh (Moabite), Baal (Phoenician), Sahar (Aramaic), and Nabu (Babylonian). But the most common names are Yahwistic. Even Governor Sanballat, portrayed in the Bible as archenemy of Nehemiah and the Jews who rebuilt Jerusalem, gave his sons Yahwistic names, indicating that a variant of Yahwism was very much alive among the ruling circles of Samaria. Like the Jews of Elephantine in Egypt and the *‘am hā’āreṣ* of Judah, the Samaritans represented a variant of Yahwism considered anathema by Ezra and Nehemiah, who were developing very exclusivist views about “who is a Jew” in the province of *Yehud*. As Mary Joan Leith has aptly noted, “reassessments of sectarian Samaritanism have demonstrated that its feasts, its conservatism toward the Torah, and its version of the Pentateuch indicate more derivation than deviation from Judaism of the Second Temple period.”¹²

Perhaps we can see architectural derivation in the great “temple-city,” which crowns the top of Mount Gerizim, recently unearthed by the revealing excavations of Yitzhak Magen. Atop this holy mountain, rival to Mount Zion, stands a temple site surrounded by a large fortified enclosure with gates and monumental stairway.¹³ This magnificent complex built in the Persian and Hellenistic periods gives a much better impression of what the Jerusalem temple citadel (*bîrâ*) probably looked like than what can be gleaned from the excavations in Jerusalem.

Yehud province can be roughly delimited by the distribution of coins and seal impressions inscribed with the name of the province. This evidence puts its northern boundary at Tell en-Nasbeh, ancient Mizpeh, its southern border at Beth-Zur, its western one near Keilah, and its eastern one as far as the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, along a line from Jericho to ‘Ein-Gedi.¹⁴ All of these towns were called upon to supply corvée labor for rebuilding the fortifications in Jerusalem (Neh. 3:15-17). *Yehud* province, then, incorporated no more than three thousand square kilometers, making it less than half the size of the former kingdom of Judah.

According to the biblical census, almost 50,000 exiles returned to *Yehud* during the century following Cyrus’s edict of 538 B.C.E.¹⁵ For the most part, these Jews lived outside Jerusalem in this small impoverished province, surrounded by a mosaic of more prosperous cultures and communities. Excavations in the Phoenician cities of Dor and Ashkelon have revealed rich cosmopolitan cultures. These coastal communities, as well as Samaria and its surroundings, contrast sharply with contemporary

12. Leith, “Israel among the Nations,” 385–86 (quotation on 386).

13. Yitzhak Magen, “Mt. Gerizim—A Temple City,” *Qadmoniot* 33/2 (2000), 74-118.

14. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 2:430–31 and map III.6, p. 375.

15. The list in Ezra 2 seems to be the same one cited in Nehemiah 7, although the details differ slightly. Both report 42,360 laity and 7,337 servants. Ezra lists 200 singers; Nehemiah, 245.

sites in *Yehud* province.¹⁶ When Nehemiah, Jewish cupbearer to Artaxerxes I and governor of *Yehud*, arrived in Palestine about 445 B.C.E., he was appalled by many economic hardships caused by heavy taxation from the Persian crown¹⁷ and debt servitude:

Some said, “Our sons and daughters are numerous; we must get grain to eat in order that we may live!” Others said, “We must pawn our fields, our vine-yards, and our homes to get grain to stave off hunger.” Yet others said, “We have borrowed money against our fields and vineyards to pay the king’s tax. Now we are as good as our brothers, and our children as good as theirs; yet here we are subjecting our sons and daughters to slavery—some of our daughters are already subjected—and we are powerless, while our fields and vine-yards belong to others.” (Neh 5:2-5, NJPS)

Nehemiah censured several of the notables of the Jewish community, accusing them of “pressing claims on loans made to [their] brothers.” He then instituted sweeping reforms by ordering them to “give back at once their fields, their vineyards, their olive trees, and their homes, and [abandon] the claims for the hundred pieces of silver, the grain, the wine, and the oil that you have been pressing against them!” (Neh 5:11, NJPS) From these grievances it seems clear that most of the Jewish returnees were engaged in some form of agriculture, although there was a trend in some quarters toward more commercial activities.

As governor, Nehemiah had extensive authority over social, religious, and economic matters in the province of *Yehud*. From his first-person “memoirs” (Neh. 1:1–7:72 and 11:1–13:31), we see that he had the power to call for the remission of debts and for the fallowing of fields every seven years, to curtail commerce on the Sabbath, to prohibit Jews from marrying “foreign wives,” to organize Temple funds and funding, to call up corvée labor from the countryside, and to compel, by an act of synoecism, part of the rural population to move to the city.

Nehemiah was also appalled at the desolate condition of Jerusalem: “the *city* was quite wide and spacious, but its population was small, and none of the houses had been rebuilt” (Neh. 7:4). The “wide and spacious” city that Nehemiah saw was the ruins of the metropolis of the monarchy that spread over the Western Hill, or the Mishneh Quarter, which once included more than 12,000 inhabitants.¹⁸

Artaxerxes I had dispatched Nehemiah to Palestine with an escort of cavalry and documents authorizing his safe passage from Susa to Judah and the procurement of

16. See Stern, “The Archaeology of Persian Palestine,” 88–114; and for an up-to-date summary see Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 2:385–443; also Leith, “Israel among the Nations: The Persian Period,” 383–87, and Stager, *Ashkelon Discovered*, 20–33.

17. See Eph'al, *Cambridge Ancient History*, 158–59. The Jews of *Yehud* paid a “king’s tax” (*middat hammelek*, Neh. 5:4; a “land tax” (in kind) (*bēlô* related to Akkadian *biltu*, Ezra 4:13, 20; 7:24), and a “poll tax” (*hālāk*, Ezra 4:13, 20; 7:24).

18. Nahman Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem: Recent Archaeological Excavations in the Upper City* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 62.

timber (probably cedar) from Asaph, keeper of the royal park (*pardēs*), that “he may give me [Nehemiah] wood to timber the gates of the Temple citadel (*ša‘ārê habbîrâ ‘ăšer-labbayit*), the city wall, and the house that I am to occupy” (Neh. 2:8).¹⁹

After a three-day rest from his long journey, Nehemiah and a small group went out at night to conduct a secret survey of the dilapidated defenses of Jerusalem in order to assess the damage and plan for the restoration of the *city*. Nehemiah rode his mount (probably a donkey), starting along the remnants of the western wall of the City of David and continuing south, in a counterclockwise manner, until he reached the Fountain Gate and the King’s Pool,²⁰ where, he says, “there was no room for the beast under me to continue. So I went up the wadi [Nahal Kidron] by night, surveying the wall, and, entering again by the Valley Gate, I returned” (Neh. 2:14-15).

What Nehemiah encountered along the east slope of the City of David that caused him to proceed farther down in the Kidron Valley was an avalanche of stone and debris from houses and from the inner and outer fortification walls, which had tumbled down the slope. This scree of rubble from preexilic Jerusalem was discovered in the excavations of Kathleen Kenyon (Site A)²¹ and, later, of Yigal Shiloh (Area G, Str 9). The debris was so dense and heavy that Nehemiah and his builders gave up on reclaiming the east slope of the City of David altogether and instead built a north-south fortification wall (ca. 2.5 meters thick) along its crest. Since none of the modern excavations has detected settlement on the Western Hill during the Persian period,²² we can conclude that postexilic Jerusalem was limited to the confines of the City of David (4.4 hectares, excluding the Temple Mount) and was probably only half that size, with a few hundred inhabitants.

Nehemiah completed the repairs and restoration of the gates and fortifications in just fifty-two days, all the while working under adverse conditions because of hostile neighbors. For the construction he recruited task forces and their supervisors from towns in *Yehud* province. The term *pelek* is better translated “task force” than the more customary “territory” or “district.”²³ It is clearly related to Akkadian *pilku*, already attested at Ugarit, where it refers to “service owed by landholders to their overlord. . . . In all cases it refers to the regular service obligation of the landholder (like *ilku*), not to the landholding itself.”²⁴ The builders recruited from the towns and

19. From this description it is clear that the Second Temple was built within the citadel enclosure with gates and courtyard(s), and not south of the *bîrâ*; cf. Leith, “Israel among the Nations,” 396.

20. This is probably the “Lower Pool” known today as Birket el-Hamra. See Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, 60.

21. Kathleen Kenyon, *Digging Up Jerusalem* (New York: Praeger Publications, 1974), 108-10.

22. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 2:581; Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, 62.

23. See Eph‘al, “Syria-Palestine under Achaemenid Rule,” 159, citing A. Demsky, “Pelekh in Nehemiah 3,” *IEJ* 33 (1983): 242-44.

24. J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge: Harvard Semitic Museum, 2001), 246.

hamlets of the countryside were mostly farmers who left their property (*'ăḥuzzâ*, Neh. 11:3) or their landed patrimony (*naḥălă*, Neh. 11:20) to work for the state for a couple of months.

When their work was completed, Nehemiah then had to recruit people to live permanently in Jerusalem. He held a lottery. Besides the “leaders of the people” (*sārê-hā`ām*) who settled there, the “rest of the people cast lots for one out of ten to come and settle in Jerusalem, the holy city, and the other nine-tenths to stay in towns” (Neh. 11:1-2).

The exile and the return of the Jews to their homeland and the restoration of Jerusalem necessitated many changes in their cosmion. Their Deity once again had a permanent abode in the holy city, but the royal line of the Davidic household no longer reigned. Instead, political and religious leadership was represented by the governors and the priests, respectively. At the culmination of the restoration of Jerusalem, with the governor Nehemiah at his side, Ezra, the priest and scribe, read from the Torah, the “scroll of the law of Moses,” to men and women assembled in the square before the Water Gate (Neh. 8:1-8).

There have been many explanations as to why the Jews survived the exile and returned to their homeland. It is significant, we think, that the exiles returned “each to his own town”; even after Jerusalem was reconstituted as a ritual center, 90 per-cent of the populace lived in towns and hamlets in the countryside. Even though some of the kinship terminology changed between the preexilic and postexilic periods,²⁵ joint families under the authority of the paterfamilias constituted a sizable portion of the population of the province of *Yehud*. The resilience and restorative power of familial organization helped the Jews survive the exile, even when deprived of their landed patrimony.

Although an “archaeology of the family” in postexilic Palestine remains to be written, we would imagine that the seasonal and diurnal activities of most of the inhabitants resembled those of Micah’s household, which we introduced in chapter one.

25. See David Vanderhooft, “The Israelite *mišpāḥâ* in the Priestly Writings: An Elite Reconstruction of Social Organization” in Baruch Halpern, Gary Knoppers, and Alex Joffe, eds., *Rival Communities in the Ancient Near East*, Studies in the Culture and History of the Ancient Near East (Leiden: E. J. Brill, forth-coming). The term for “clan” (*mišpāḥâ*) seems to be replaced by *bêt 'abôt* in the postexilic period.