A HISTORY OF ISRAEL

FOURTH EDITION

JOHN BRIGHT

With an Introduction
and Appendix by

William P. Brown

John Bright, *A History of Israel*: *With an Introduction and Appendix by William P. Brown*, 4th edition, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000. (ISBN 0-664-22068-1)

ABBREVIATIONS

AASOR   *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*

AB   The Anchor Bible, W.F. Albright (†) and D.N. Freedman, eds., (New York: Doubleday)

AJA   *American Journal of Archaeology*

AJSL   *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*

ANEH   *W.W.* Hallo and W.K Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971)

ANEP   J.B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East in Pictures* (Princeton University Press, 1954)

ANET   J.B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton University Press, 1950)

ANE Suppl.   J.B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: Supplementary Texts and Pictures Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1969)

AOTS   D. Winton Thomas, ed., *Archaeology and Old Testament Study* (Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1967)

AP   W.F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Penguin Books, 1949; rev. ed., 1960)

ARI   W.F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (5th ed., Doubleday Anchor Book, 1969)

ASTI   *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*

ASV   American Standard Version of the Bible, (1901)

ATD   Das Alte Testament Deutsch, V. Herntrich (t) and A. Weiser, eds., (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & .Ruprecht)

AVAA   A. Scharff and A. Moorgat, *Ägypten und Vorderasien in Altertum* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1950)

BA   *The Biblical Archaeologist*

BANE   G.E. Wright, ed., *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York: Doubleday, 1961)

BAR   G.E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press; London: Gerald Duckworth, 1962)

BARev.   *Biblical Archaeology Review*

BASOR   *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*

BJRL   *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*

BKAT   Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament, M. Noth (†), S. Herrmann and H.W. Wolff, eds. (Neukirchener Verlag)

BP   W.F. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* (rev. ed., Harper Torchbook, 1963)

BWANT   Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer)

BZAW   Beihefte zur *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

CAH   I.E.S. Edwards, CJ. Gadd, and N.G.L. Hammond, eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History* (rev. ed., Cambridge University Press)

CBQ   *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

ConBOT   Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series

EB   Early Bronze Age
EHI   R. de Vaux, *Early History of Israel* (Eng. tr., London: Darton, Longman & Todd;
            Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978)
EI   John Bright, *Early Israel in Recent History Writing: A Study in Method* (London: SCM Press,
            1956)
ET   *The Expository Times*
EvTh   *Evangelische Theologie*
FRLANT   Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments (Göttingen:
            Vandenhoek & Ruprecht)
FSAC   W.F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (2nd ed., Doubleday Anchor Book, 1957)
GVI   R. Kittel, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, I, 7th ed., 1932; II, 7th
            ed., 1925; III, 1st and 2nd eds., 1927-1929)
HAT   Handbuch zum Alten Testament, O. Eissfeldt, ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr)
HI   M. Noth, *The History of Israel* (Eng. tr., 2nd ed., London: A. & C. Black; New York:
            Harper & Brothers, 1960)
HO   B. Spuler, ed., *Handbuch der Orientalistik* (Leiden: E J. Brill)
HSM   Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS   Harvard Semitic Studies
HTR   *Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA   *The Hebrew Union College Annual*
IB   *The Interpreter's Bible*, G.A. Buttrick, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951-1957)
ICC   The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; New York: Charles
            Scribner's Sons)
IDB   *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, G.A. Buttrick, ed., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962)
IDB Suppl. Supplementary volume to the foregoing, K. Crim, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976)
IEJ   *Israel Exploration Journal*
IJH   J.H. Hayes and J.M. Miller, eds., *Israelite and Judaean History* (OTL, 1977)
JAOS   *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL   *Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBR   *Journal of Bible and Religion*
JCS   *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
AA   *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JNES   *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JPOS   *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*
JQR   *Jewish Quarterly Review*
JR   *Journal of Religion*
JSOT   *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup   Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSS   *Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS   *Journal of Theological Studies*

KJV   The King James (=Authorized) Version of the Bible (1611)
KS   A. Alt, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Munich: C.H. Beck'sche
          Verlagsbuchhandlung: I and II, 1953; III, 1959)
LB   Late Bronze Age
LOB   *Y.* Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (Eng. tr., London: Burns & Oates;
          Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967)
LXX   The Septuagint [=70], the Greek version of the Old Testament
MagDei   F.M. Cross, W.E. Lemke and P.D. Miller, eds., *Magnalia Dei: Essays on the Bible and
          Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (New York: Doubleday, 1976)
MB   Middle Bronze Age
MT   Massoretic Text of the Old Testament
NEB   New English Bible (1970)
OBO   Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OBT   Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTL   The Old Testament Library, P.R. Ackroyd, J. Barr, B.W. Anderson, J. Bright, eds.
          (Philadelphia: Westminster Press; London: SCM Press)
OTMS   H.H. Rowley, ed., *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951)
PEQ   *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
POTT   DJ. Wiseman, ed., *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (Oxford: Clarendon(Press, 1973)
PJB   *Palästinajahrbuch*
RA   *Revue d'Assyriologie*
RB   *Revue Biblique*
RHR   *Revue de l'histoire des religions*
RSV   Revised Standard Version of the Bible (1946)
SAM   Sheffield Archaeological Monographs
SBT   Studies in Biblical Theology
SBTS   Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SHCANE   Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SJOT   *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SWBAS   The Social World of Biblical Antiquity Series
ThLZ   *Theologische Literaturzeitung*
ThZ   *Theologische Zeitschrift*
VT   *Vetus Testamentum*
WMANT   Wissenschaftliche Monongraphien zum Alten und Neuen Testament (Neukirchener
          Verlag)
YGC   W.F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (University of London: The Athlone Press;
          New York: Doubleday, 1968)
ZAW   *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDMG   *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*
ZDPV   *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*
ZNW   *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZThK   *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

[A] history of Israel which is not in some measure
also a history of her faith is neither significant nor possible.[1]

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN BRIGHT'S

A HISTORY OF ISRAEL

William P. Brown

HISTORY MATTERS! This motto captures well the sum and substance of John Bright's textbook. For at least twenty-seven years, *A History of Israel* was a standard text among mainline theological schools and seminaries across the country. Its influence on previous and present generations of theology students is inestimable. Translated into German, Spanish, Korean, and Indonesian, Bright's magisterial work continues to be widely used, having achieved a total sale of over 100,000 copies since the publication of its first edition in 1959.

The reasons for the textbook's success are clear. The facility with which Bright engaged scripture, archaeology, and ancient Near Eastern history remains unsurpassed within the genre. Bright's critical confidence in the historical texture of biblical tradition made his work useful not only for the study of ancient history but also for the study of Old Testament literature. Most significantly, Bright took seriously Israel's theological formation; he regarded Israel's faith as a determinative factor in shaping its identity in history. Bright's focus on Israel's faith, more broadly, indicated his conviction that history constitutes the arena of revelation and theology. Finally, Bright's lively writing style makes for stimulating reading.

For all that recent scholars have considered methodologically flawed and theologically biased (see Appendix), the strength of Bright's textbook lies in its power to provoke theological reflection *from within* the field of historical inquiry. Even a recent detractor of Bright's method admits that this classic continues to set the "standard against which the next generation of textbooks can be measured."[2] Owing to its wide coverage of historical data and biblical material, as well as its theological vision, Bright's textbook remains an exemplar in the genre of history writing.

A. BRIGHT BEHIND THE TEXTBOOK

John Bright received his theological training at the place where he was to hold his only full-time teaching position, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. Born

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[1] John Bright, *Early Israel in Recent History Writing: A Study in Method* (London: SCM Press, 1956), p.21.
[2] Kurt L. Noll, "Looking on the Bright Side of Israel's History: Is There Pedagogical Value in a Theological Presentation of History?" (*Biblical Interpretation, 7* [1999] p.27).

in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and reared in the Presbyterian Church U.S., Bright earned his B.D. at Union in 1931. Teaching biblical languages, Bright spent the next four years at his alma mater to earn a Th.M. degree. Betraying little interest in history, his thesis, "A Psychological Study of the Major Prophets" (1933),[3] helped to cultivate a lifelong interest in the prophets.[4]

The winter of 1931-32 proved significant for Bright's career. Dr. Melvin G. Kyle of Pittsburg-Xenia Seminary, a guest lecturer at Union, met the young Bright and offered him the opportunity to accompany him on the fourth and final archaeological campaign at Tell Beit Mirsim, led by William Foxwell Albright of Johns Hopkins University. There Bright met the renowned Albright, of whom he was in "complete awe,"[5] and his research career began to be mapped. He joined Albright again in Palestine on the 1935 dig at Bethel, during which his mentor proffered a solution to an intractable archaeological problem (see below).[6] John Bright and G. Ernest Wright there became known as "the Gold-dust Twins."[7] In the fall of that year, Bright entered the doctoral program at Johns Hopkins University to study under Albright and was introduced to a new and distinctly American approach to biblical research.[8] Albright was single-handedly transforming the focus and method of biblical research at the time Bright became his student.

Albright was like a father to John Bright, as he was to many of his students. When Bright decided to drop out of the program because of insufficient funds and difficulties with the rigors of philological training, Albright graciously offered him a loan, which Bright could not bring himself to accept.[9] An effective preacher, Bright had for some time felt called to parish ministry, and he accepted the call to be the assistant pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Durham, North Carolina. But it did not last. Bright soon found himself once again wrestling with the complexities of

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3   In his later years, Bright preferred that the work be thrown out of Union's library (Kendig B. Cully, "Interview with John Bright: Scholar of the Kingdom" *[The Review of Books and Religion,* 11/4 *(1983) p.4]).*

4   See John Bright, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (AB *21;* Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965). While affirming Israelite prophecy as a unique phenomenon historically, Bright appreciated Jeremiah also from a broadly existential perspective (see pp.xv, cxi-cxii). In addition, Bright's last monograph, apart from the third edition of his textbook, focuses upon the theological and moral insights of the eighth- and seventh-century prophets: *Covenant and Promise: The Prophetic Understanding of the Future in Pre-Exilic Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

5   Leona G. Running and David Noel Freedman, *William Foxwell Albright: A Twentieth-Century Genius* (New York: Morgan, 1975) p.162.

6   *Ibid.,* pp.187-188.

7   *Ibid.,* p.186.

8   Albright referred to the revolution in biblical research that he had sparked as the "Baltimore School" in order to deflect attention from himself *(Ibid.,* p.198). Regarding the history of this "school," see Burke O. Long, *Planting and Reaping Albright: Politics, Ideology, and Interpreting the Bible* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, *1997)* pp.15-70.

9   Running and Freedman, *William Foxwell Albright,* p.197.

Semitic philology and Palestinian archaeology after marshaling the necessary wherewithal to resume his studies at Johns Hopkins, all the while pastoring the Catonsville Presbyterian Church in Baltimore.

In 1940, Bright completed the doctoral degree with his dissertation, "The Age of King David: A Study in the Institutional History of Israel."[10] A position was waiting for him at Union, where, upon graduation, he was appointed to the Cyrus H. McCormick Chair of Hebrew and Old Testament Interpretation, which he held from 1940 until his retirement. His successful teaching career was interrupted only once, when he was granted leave to serve as a chaplain in the U.S. Army during the Second World War (1943-46). Bright's teaching career was as productive as it was influential. Remaining at Union Theological Seminary for his entire career, Bright achieved international renown as a scholar, teacher, and preacher.[11] Bright retired in 1975 and died on March 26, 1995, in Richmond.

It was roughly at the midpoint of his teaching career that Bright completed the first edition of A *History of Israel* (1959) , which he dedicated to Albright. It had been a vocational assignment of sorts. Under the initiative of Wright and Albright, Westminster Press invited Bright to develop a history textbook aimed at theological students. Bright's first inclination was to decline. At the time, he considered himself not so much a historian *per se* as a theologian committed to the life of the church. But through Albright's encouragement, Bright reluctantly accepted the task, and he began it by developing a prolegomenon, *Early Israel in Recent History Writing* (1956; hereafter cited as *EI).*[12] Both this work and the textbook, published three years later, reflect his mentor's stamp. Nevertheless, what is distinctive about A *History* can be attributed only to Bright. As he would admit thirty-one years later: "I never grew away from Albright but added other things. I added an interest in biblical theology."[13]

B. METHOD

In his *Early Israel,* Bright sought a method that could yield a "satisfying picture" of Israel's early history *(EI,* 12) . Such a picture had to take into account Israel's faith as a socially determining force in its historical identity:

> [W] hat is it that made Israel Israel? What made her different from her neighbours? . . . It was not language, not habitat, not historical experience alone, not material culture—but *faith.* Israel was a people who became a people precisely because of her faith. The history of Israel, therefore, is

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10 See also Bright, "The Age of King David: A Study in the Institutional History of Israel" (*Union Seminary Review, 53* [1942] pp.87-109).

11 For a list of Bright's published works and lectures up until his retirement, see "Bibliography," *Interpretation, 29* (1975), pp.205-208.

12 Bright's first major monograph was *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (New York/Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953), a nontechnical yet historically sensitive theological work.

13 Quoted from Noll, "Looking on the Bright Side," p.3n. 10.

> not the history of a Twelve-Clan League, nor of a nation; *it is a history of a faith and its people (EI,* 114).

Bright was convinced that a full grasp of ancient Israel's identity required not only a rigorous historical method but also a sensitivity to Israel's religion. Only with both could a fully "satisfying picture" of Israel's origins be reached, one that yielded a comprehensive answer to the question of Israel's identity. For Bright, the canvas supporting this "satisfying picture" of Israel's beginnings consisted of archaeology and comparative study, but the bold strokes had to come from the hand of one intimately familiar with the biblical witness.

Measuring the credibility of historical reconstruction according to levels of "satisfaction" may raise serious questions among contemporary historians. Yet Bright was not concerned about personal or even spiritual contentment in his reconstruction of Israel's past. His concern was the successful fulfillment of criteria proper to the study of Israel's history and religion. This focus is well illustrated in his critical evaluation of two major studies of his day.

Bright finds distinctly unsatisfying the work of the German scholar Martin Noth (University of Bonn), whose history textbook, given its slavish adherence to traditiohistorical criticism, he deems hypercritical and narrow in scope.[14] Noth's method, in Bright's opinion, is governed by an almost exclusive focus upon the "political and institutional history of Israel" at the expense of explicating Israel's faith. "Was not faith too central a moving force in Israel's history, even in political events, for it to be relegated to the fringes of the picture without throwing the picture out of proportion?" Bright pointedly asks *(EI,* 35). In the end, Bright comes close to accusing Noth of a failure of nerve.

In addition, Bright finds equally "unsatisfying" the work of the Jewish scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann.[15] Although Kaufmann offers a "healthy contrast to the nihilism" of Noth's approach *(EI,* 64), his monumental work suffers from convoluted logic and little command of the archaeological evidence. While Bright acknowledges that Kaufmann may be "more correct" than Noth on many points, Kaufmann's mode of argumentation is not convincing and his caricature of German scholarship verges on *ad hominem (EI,* 71). Kaufmann's position, Bright claims, promulgates a literal reading of the historical books, "a virtual 'ditto' of the Joshua narrative accepted at face value" *(EI,* 72). The result is an equally *unsatisfying* portrait. In

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14 M. Noth, *Geschichte Israels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950). Noth's text-book was thoroughly revised in 1956 and has been reprinted numerous times since then. The standard English translation of the second edition is *The History of Israel* (2nd ed; New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

15 Y. Kaufmann, *The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Palestine* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1953). Bright also notes Kaufmann's untranslated seven volume work, *History of the Israelite Religion: From the Beginning to the End of the Second Temple* (Tel Aviv: Institute-Dvir, 1937-48). See the later English abridgement by Moshe Greenberg, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

short, compelling argumentation, familiarity with the material culture of the ancient Near East, and theological sensitivity are for Bright the essential ingredients for a fully "satisfying picture" of Israel's history.

Between skepticism, on the one hand, and literalism, on the other, Bright forges a methodological middle ground, a commonsense approach that places archaeological research at the forefront of historical research. Negatively, the results of "Palestinian archaeology" serve as an "objective control" for determining the historicity of the biblical traditions and a check on the temptation to use archaeology as an apologetic tool *(EI,* 13–15, 29). Archaeology can also help to determine the real scope of a historical event recorded in scripture.[16] A clear case in point is the incompleteness of the biblical tradition regarding Pharaoh Shishak's invasion described in 1 Kings 14:25–28, which limits the pharaoh's attack only to Jerusalem. Shishak's own inscription at Karnak, however, lists over 150 sites that he conquered. Such extrabiblical evidence "lets us see [the invasion's] true scope" (1.214).[17] Another example is the Bible's dismissive and all too terse account of Omri's reign (1 Kings 16:23–28). Epigraphic and archaeological evidence indicates, in fact, Omri's "great ability" as a ruler (1.222).[18]

In addition to establishing controls in biblical research, the artifactual evidence can play a decisive role in distinguishing ancient communities in Palestine: As for evidence of the Israelite conquest, is archaeology really as helpless as Noth would have it? Can it not tell a Philistine occupation from an early Israelite one? Or a late Bronze Age Canaanite one from an early Iron Age one? Can it not tell if there has been an appreciable gap between destruction and re-occupation? Is archaeology, then, unable to distinguish a destruction of the Amarna Age from one at the hands of the Philistines, and both from one occasioned by Israel. . . ? *(EI,* 88).

Although overstating the case (see Appendix), Bright fully acknowledges that archaeology offers only circumstantial evidence, an indirect witness to Israel's past. Nevertheless, this specialized field of inquiry can play a decisive role in the "balance of probability," which is all the historian can hope to achieve *(EI,* 83, 89). Furthermore, archaeology can tip the scales in favor of a trust in the historicity of the biblical tradition as much as it can cast suspicion. As Bright says in *A History,* "Surely the Bible need claim no immunity from rigorous historical method, but

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16 See the similar discussion in G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Rev. ed; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), pp.17–18.

17 References to Bright's textbook will be identified only by edition and page number.

18 More complex are the historical reconstructions discussed in the two excursuses that frame the second half of Bright's textbook: the campaign(s) of Sennacherib against Jerusalem (1.282–287) and the chronological ordering of Nehemiah and Ezra (1.375–386). Both discussions showcase the judicious way by which Bright balances the biblical witness and the comparative evidence.

may be trusted to withstand the scrutiny to which other documents of history are submitted" (1.61). Yet Bright cannot count himself as a disinterested party in the act of historical inquiry: "For my own part, I am not among those who are inclined to sneer at a reverence for Scripture, or who lightly pooh-pooh the historicity of its traditions" (EI, 28). By self-admission, Bright comes to the task as a believer, in particular a Presbyterian, one who is neither "gullible nor a professional sceptic" with regard to the biblical witness *(EI, 124)*.

> I am not among those who feel that the historian, out of devotion to some sacred cow of objectivity, is forbidden to inject [one's] own theological convictions into his [or her] work, provided he [or she] does so *at the right times and in the right way.* But history and theology must be kept separate lest both historical event and theological interpretation of that event be placed on the same plane. If these two are confused, the historian will begin to write history, as it were, from the side of God, and God himself will tend to become a datum of history *(EI, 29-30; italics added).*

Although the historian must confine himself or herself to "human events" (1.68), theological reflection has an appropriate place in historical study, if delineated with care. Bright's method is marked by a concerted attempt to hold together and mutually relate, without confusing, history and theology. On the one hand, Israel's history is, *inter alia,* a history of its faith or religion. On the other hand, Old Testament theology is "primarily a theology of events, " that is, "an interpretation of ... events in the light of faith" *(EI,* 11).[19] Simply (and modestly) put, Bright's own method sought in part to determine the "right times" to comment theologically on the course of Israel's history, yet not without a measure of circumspection.

C. *A HISTORY OF ISRAEL*

Bright's textbook underwent two major revisions following its initial publication in 1959. The three editions span over two decades' worth of new discoveries and methodological refinements in historical research. As Bright willingly integrated new findings while nuancing and occasionally correcting his original arguments, *A History* evolved significantly from its initial publication. Before charting its evolution, the basic groundwork of the first edition must be presented.

1. *First Edition (1959).* Published the year after Martin Noth's *Geschichte Israels* was translated into English for the first time, the first edition of Bright's textbook

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19 For a similar definition of biblical theology, see G. Ernest Wright, "God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital" (SBT 8: London: SCM, 1952), pp.38-46, 50-58. Wright's approach to theology as historically defined was subsequently critiqued. See, e.g., Langdon Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language" *(JR,* 41 [1961], pp.194-205; James Barr "Revelation Through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology" *(Interpretation,* 17 [1963], pp.193-205; and especially Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), pp.13-96.

vigorously put into practice what was outlined in his *Early History*. In his foreword, Bright justifies the historical enterprise theologically: the message of the Old Testament is so bound up with history that "a knowledge of Israel's history is essential to its proper understanding" (1.9; cf. *EI,* 11). Israel's religion and history, more-over, are inextricably tied to ancient Near Eastern culture. This recognition propels Bright's investigation back to the very origins of recorded history. Exposing as woefully provincial Noth's claim that Israel's history does not properly begin until the time of the "occupation of the agricultural land of Palestine,"[20] Bright reaches back to the Stone Age in order to set the stage for Israel's emergence. The Prologue of Bright's textbook, though "no part of Israel's history" proper, is integral to his presentation (1.10; cf. *EI,* 121).

By probing deep into the shadows of the past to the very dawn of history and beyond, Bright sets out to counter a "foreshortened perspective" of Israel's beginnings (1.37). The temporal extent of Bright's ambitious presentation is matched by its broad geographical horizon. This global perspective, in fact, governs much of the textbook's structure. For every historical period, Bright invariably begins by recounting the "world situation" or ancient Near Eastern context before narrowing the scope to Israel's own domain. Such a broadened purview serves not only to highlight Israel's distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* the surrounding pagan cultures, but also to discern a measure of continuity between Israel's religious identity and that of its neighbors.[21] Hidden amid the manifold cultures of the ancient Orient was an unfolding cultural continuum that began in Mesopotamia—not coincidentally the origin of Israel's ancestors—and culminated in Egypt under the heretic king Akhenaton (Amenophis IV), whose Aten cult, a century before Moses, "was at least something closely approximating a monotheism" (1.100-101). Israel's ancestors, in short, were not "primitive nomads" with a crude religion (1.17). They were "latecomers" who had inherited the great intellectual tradition in the ancient Near East.

Beginning with history's dawning, Bright recounts the flowering and passing of various cultures, noting their interconnections, differences, and conflicts, as well as their respective cultic and governing institutions. There are no villains in this veritable cavalcade of high civilizations that came and went, or managed to survive, by the time Israel's ancestors set foot on the scene. Rather, the variegated cultural landscape sets the necessary backdrop for Israel's humble beginnings. On the eve of the "patriarchal age, " the ancient Orient was in travail: Sumerian culture had played itself out, Egypt entered into a period of disorder, and life in Palestine was utter chaos (1.35-37). Thus, "Israel was born into a world already ancient" and exhausted (1.36).

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20 Noth, *The History of Israel,* p.5.

21 Bright's Prologue did not serve to set up the religious milieu of the ancient Near East as a foil to an evangelistic interpretation of Israel's religion. One need only note the Nuzi and Hittite parallels Bright cites to demonstrate the antiquity and significance of certain biblical traditions (see below).

The appearance of Israel's ancestors ("seminomadic wanderers") constituted for Bright nothing less than an in-breaking into history, negligible at first, but irreversibly significant in later centuries (1.41). Despite their traceless appearance on the historical scene, Bright finds that the biblical profile of the patriarchs perfectly suits the wealth of extrabiblical evidence from the Middle Bronze Age. The names of the patriarchs are of Northwest-Semitic stock, as found, for example, among Egyptian lists and the Mari texts. More decisive, certain customs that lie behind the stories of the patriarchs seem to find their precedent in the Nuzi texts of Hurrian origin. Consequently, "the patriarchal customs are, in fact, closer to the practice of second-millennium Mesopotamia than to that of later Israel!"(1.71–72).

Bright, however, is far from employing comparative research as an apologetic tool. References to camels in the biblical narrative are deemed anachronistic (Gen. 12:16, 24), and there is scarce evidence to demonstrate that Abraham's home was Ur in Lower Mesopotamia. What the comparative evidence does suggest is an Upper Mesopotamian origin for the biblical patriarchs. Moreover, evidence of an Amorite influx indicates that Abraham and Lot, accompanied by their wives, did not comprise an isolated family wandering in a hostile land, as one might infer from a reading of the biblical narrative. Rather, they were heads of sizable clans searching for a foothold in Canaan (1.68). An aura of historical authenticity, how-ever, can be discerned from the biblical witness itself: that the religion of the patriarchs is treated in Genesis as wholly distinct from Mosaic faith precludes the possibility that it is simply a retrojection of later Israelite belief. Although not identical to YHWH, the "God of the Fathers" is no alien to the biblical witness: Israel's heritage of "tribal . . . solidarity between people and God" stems from the kinship religion of the patriarchs (1.92–93; cf. *EI*, 115-120). Given their instrumental role in mediating Mesopotamian traditions, Israel's ancestors "stand in the truest sense at the beginning of Israel's history and faith" (1.93; *EI*, 41-42).

Israel's *proper* origins, however, do not take shape until much later. For Bright, Exodus and Sinai constitute the two pillars of Israel's core identity. Israel's advent begins at the end of the Late Bronze Age, when the power struggle among the empires of the fertile crescent had "ended with the death or exhaustion of all the contestants," clearing space, in effect, for Israel to take root in Palestine (1.106). The soil for Israel's cultivation was variegated: the indigenous Canaanites and the formerly outsider Amorites, not to mention Indo-Aryan and Hurrian elements, populated the landscape. All became part of the dominant Canaanite culture. And by no means were they to be radically distinguished from Israel: 'The dominant pre-Israelite population was thus in race and language not different from Israel her-self' (1.106).

In Canaan, however, Israel inherited a mixed legacy. On the one hand, Canaan's crowning achievement was the linear alphabet (1.108). Moreover, Canaanite literature, particularly the vast epic corpus discovered at Ugarit, displays "many kinships to earliest Hebrew verse" (1.108). On the other hand, Canaanite religion was "no

pretty picture"; it embodied an "extraordinarily debasing form of paganism" in the form of the fertility cult (1.108). Consonant with the biblical witness, Bright considered Canaan the closest thing to Israel's cultural enemy.

The timing of Israel's entrance in Canaan, Bright acknowledges, is a complicated affair. It begins decisively in the exodus event, which Bright confidently dates to the first half of the thirteenth century, preceding the archaeologically identified destruction layers of several urban centers in Palestine. The only indirect evidence to Israel's presence in Egypt is the reference to the *Apiru* or "state slaves," among whom "were components of the later Israel" (1.111). On the other geographical side is the reference to "Israel" in Palestine attested in the "Marniptah" stela (1.104). Finally, drawing from the archaeological surveys of Nelson Glueck, Bright notes that Israel's detour around Edom and Moab (see Numbers 20—21) could not have happened any earlier than the thirteenth century, despite the Bible's own chronology (1.113). Here is another case of archaeological evidence exerting control over biblical tradition.

What the archaeological and comparative material lack in providing direct evidence for an exodus of slaves, the prominence of the various biblical voices more than compensates: "the Biblical tradition a priori demands belief: it is not the sort of tradition any people would invent!" (1.110). The same applies to the figure of Moses, "the great founder of Israel's faith" (1.116).[22] Although Bright grants that Yahwism may have had Midianite connections, it was "made into a new thing [through Moses]. It is with Moses that the faith and history of Israel begin" (1.116).

The biblical witness to the exodus, while neither confirmed nor disconfirmed, does suffer a partial collision with regard to the conquest of Canaan, Bright acknowledges. Although there is clear evidence of a thirteenth-century destruction among a few Palestinian cities, two in particular are problematic for Bright: Jericho and Ai (et-Tell). Regarding the former, Bright reserves judgment, since "Late-Bronze Jericho seems to have been so scoured by wind and rain that little of it is left" (1.119). Ai also presents a challenge in that any evidence of occupancy during this period is lacking. Bright's solution is drawn from Albright's own conclusion that the tradition in Joshua 8 had confused Bethel, which exhibits a thirteenth-century destruction layer, with Ai, both separated by little more than a mile (1.119) . Despite such defensive solutions, the ambiguity of the archaeological evidence is, Bright acknowledges, also reflected in biblical tradition. The opening chapter of Judges depicts an incomplete conquest at odds with the successful *Blitzkrieg* recounted in Joshua 1—12 (1.122). In addition, 'Joshua tells of no conquest of central Palestine," even though much of the narrative's scope is lodged in that region (1.123). That certain "components of Israel" had been in Palestine prior to the conquest suggests that the exodus group was able to absorb "kindred people" in the area without

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22 See also *EI,* pp.52–53, 86, in which Bright specifically counters Noth's assessment that the biblical figure of Moses originated from a "grave tradition."

recourse to military force (1.123). Despite his confidence in the conquest model, Bright already offers in his first edition a nuanced picture that affirms the complexity and diversity of Israel's occupation of the land.

Bright's discussion of the historical complexities of the exodus and occupation of the land serves to frame a theologically central theme explored in chapter 4, the "constitution and faith of early Israel." Polity and theology meet here for the first and most propitious time. The tribal league, or twelve-tribe confederation (Martin Noth's "amphictyony" in Bright's first edition), constituted for Bright Israel's most theologically legitimate social structure: "amphictyony did not create [Israel's] faith; on the contrary, faith was constitutive of the amphictyony" (1.128). The tribal league existed as a "covenant society," a direct outgrowth of its faith. Covenant embodied the very essence of Israel's existence as the unique people of God, yet not without international precedent (1.132). The formal contours of Israel's relationship with God find a clear parallel in the suzerainty treaties of the Hittite Empire of the Middle Bronze Age. For Bright, such a precedent indicates the antiquity of Israel's covenant, traceable back to the "Mosaic age" (1.134). But more than that, the covenant form testifies to the enduring link between the historical memory of deliverance and its legal stipulations.

Together, election and covenant, exodus and Sinai, defined Israel's identity. While historical memory of the exodus cast Israel's covenant as an expression of "prevenient favor" (1.136), covenant safeguarded the very goal of Israel's deliverance from bondage: acceptance of YHWH's kingship. This dialectic, as it were, between grace and law, established at the summit of Sinai, is set against the patriarchal covenant, which rests solely on "unconditional promises for the future, in which the believer was obligated only to trust" (1.135). For Bright, these two covenantal traditions effected a tension that was to pervade much of Israel's history, the tension between promise and obedience, between the past and the future. Whereas the "God of the Patriarchs" was based on the personal, kinship ties of sojourners, the sovereign God of the covenant, YHWH, demanded sole allegiance from a fully constituted community (1.140—141).

Out of historical and theological necessity, Bright finds Israel's religion and tribal structure firmly established well before its occupation of the land. Historically, a conquest model of Israelite occupation would necessitate "a sizeable confederation" (1.145). Theologically, "[e]arly Israel was neither a racial nor a national unity, but a confederation of clans united in covenant with Yahweh" (1.143). Drawing heavily from the work of Martin Noth and the Book of Judges, Bright confidently depicts Israel's tribal-league structure centered around a common sanctuary, "the throne of the invisible Yahweh," at Shiloh, a precursor to the "tent-shrine of David" (1.146). Such was Israel's most credible institution, whose origins reach back to Sinai.

But it was not to last. Due to the external crisis of Philistine incursion, Israel had to survive by another means. By fits and starts, Israel underwent an irreversible transformation. Bright considers the books of Samuel and Kings, including the

"matchless 'History of the Throne Succession,'" the closest thing to eyewitness reporting in scripture. "We are, in short, better informed about this period than any comparable one in Israel's history" (1.163). Focusing on the figures of Saul and David, Bright dramatically recounts the painful wrenchings of a theocracy caught between its theological heritage and outside pressures that threatened to bring Israel into the fold of the pagan nations. Bright's sympathies lie not with David but with Samuel, who "labored to keep the ancient tradition alive" (1.166).

The charismatic David ushers in a period of imperial expansion for Israel, "no longer merely a nation of small farmers" (1.202). "Israel was no longer a tribal confederacy . . . but a complex empire organized under the crown" (1.183). David and his successor not only unified Judah and northern Israel, albeit temporarily, they also "united the secular and the religious community under the crown" (1.203). This curious statement appears to smack of anachronism until one realizes that the "secular" for Bright denotes the centralization of power represented by the monarchy ("state"). The Davidic-Solomonic empire effectively transformed a covenantal, tribal society based on kinship bonds into a centralized political power, complete with its attendant theological justifications, but not without great sacrifice. Although Solomon was able to consolidate the empire, the "costs outran the income" (1.199). Putting an end to tribal independence, the "burden of the monarchy" was too much to bear and the kingdom was torn asunder: "Samuel renounced Saul and broke him; but it was Solomon who broke Abiathar!" (1.203).

Although problematic in Bright's view, the theological underpinnings of the monarchy reach back to the patriarchal covenant, which articulated God's unconditional promises for the future. Amplified by kingship ideology, the promise-oriented covenant of Israel's ancestors came to set itself in tension with the Sinaitic covenant. With the secession of northern Israel, this tension manifested itself in various forms throughout Judah's and Israel's joint histories. Northern Israel's secession was a failed attempt to reactivate the tribal-league tradition in reaction to Jerusalem's imperialism. The clash between the ethos of the amphictyony, embodied by particular prophets, and the desire for dynastic stability remained irresolvable in the north. By contrast, Judah's internally stable history, ruled by dynastic succession, makes for "dull reading" (1.219).

Historically and theologically, Bright reads the classical prophets of the eighth century as reformers, whose aim was to "reawaken memory of the now largely forgotten Sinaitic covenant," rejecting both the "blood, soil, and cult" of resurgent paganism and the unconditional covenant of promise that was the theological pillar of the monarchy (1.247). The prophets pointed to a new vision of life before God that both Israel and Judah, as separate monarchies, could not sustain politically or theologically on their own. With northern Israel dead and Judah dying, the only signs of life left were two monarchs who attempted to walk the road back to Sinai, as it were, but without lasting success: Hezekiah and Josiah. The prescriptive force of the Mosaic covenant came to be suppressed by the Davidic covenant with its unconditional promises to the monarchy. By typecasting the latter, Bright comes

close to claiming that the Davidic covenant was bereft of moral potency (1.278). The credibility of Isaiah's theology, for example, rests on *a fusion* of Davidic theology, stripped of its nationalistic tendencies, and the covenantal theology of Sinai. By injecting a strong moral note, the prophet represents the only hope of finding a rapprochement between Davidic rule and the Sinaitic covenant (1.278–279, 311). Deuteronomy, with its catenation of Mosaic law rooted in the tribal league, offers Judah its last chance for salvation. Josiah's dramatic repentance signals for Bright how far the monarchy—"a fool's paradise"—had veered away from Israel's true identity, shaped at Sinai (1.300). Yet even Josiah's reform failed, due not so much to the historical vicissitudes that resulted in his untimely death as to the regnant covenant of David, to which the Sinai covenant became its "handmaid" (1.302).

The exile, according to Bright, struck a fatal blow to the theology of the monarchy. The tenacity of Israel's faith, tested in the crucible of captivity, came to rest exclusively on law. While Bright discerns, for example, the note of promise that rings loud and clear in Second Isaiah, his emphasis falls heavily upon the prophet's sense of moral obligation (1.339). The figure of the Servant in Isaiah embodies the life of humble obedience, the very essence of divine redemption, reflected also by the one "who was crucified and who rose again" (1.341). Similarly, the hope for Israel's restoration depended not on the reestablishment of the Davidic throne, but on the Torah. With Nehemiah and Ezra meticulously placed chronologically (see Excursus II), reversing the biblical order, civil order had to be established first before Ezra, armed with a copy of the law, could embark on his reforming mission to reinvigorate the religious community. Ezra was, in effect, Moses *redivivus.* Lacking national, ethnic, and even cultic identity, Israel was able to salvage its Mosaic heritage, covenantal law.

The final period of Israel's history, or more properly "Old Testament history" (from Ezra to the Maccabean revolt), is as dark and distant as its early history, Bright finds. And like Israel's earliest stage, this last period also has its literary hero, Daniel, who enjoins resistance and obedience to Torah, the clarion call of the Hasidim (1.408–409). With the purification of the Temple, the "end of the Old Testament period" draws to a close as Jews find a measure of "religious freedom and political autonomy" (1.412).

The final chapter affords Bright the opportunity to step back and reflect on what has survived, historically and theologically, at the close of Old Testament history. Although coexistent with the rebuilt Temple, the law promulgated through Moses and Ezra proved to be the enduring identity marker of Judaism. Exalted and absolutized, the Torah helped to shape a new community out of the ashes of national humiliation and defeat. But it came at a cost: "Law virtually usurped the place of the historical covenant as the basis of faith" (1.427). By severing its ties to the "events of exodus and Sinai," law, in effect, was divested of its historical connectionalism, and legalism, consequently, raised its ugly head, according to Bright (1.426–427). As a counterbalance, however, a developed notion of hope, expressed

through eschatology and apocalypticism, emerged in early Judaism. Superseding the Messianic hope for restoring Israel's glorious past, this hope pointed to a new age in which history itself would be consummated (1.442–443). Its pattern was rooted not in the Davidic monarchy but in the Day of YHWH.

Looking toward the future, Bright introduces his final observations in an epilogue, in which he poses the question, "Whither Israel?" (1.448). In Judaism, Israel's history continues beyond the Old Testament "to the present day" (1.447). "Old Testament theology finds its fruition" in the Talmud, even though Israel's hope remains unfulfilled (1.452). For Bright, another, specifically Christian, answer is given, one that does not fell the tree on which the branch was grafted (Rom. 11:17), but is "likewise historically legitimate, " namely, "Christ and his gospel" (1.452). Both the "righteousness that fulfills the law and the sufficient fulfillment of Israel's hope in all its variegated forms" are found in Christ (1.452). For all that Bright injects in his historical analysis that is expressly Christian, he is careful not to promulgate a Christian triumphalism over Jewish faith and practice:[23]

> Whither Israel's history? It is on this question, fundamentally, that the Christian and his Jewish friend divide. Let us pray that they do so in love and mutual concern, as heirs of the same heritage of faith who worship the same God, who is Father of us all (1.452–453).

Both Jews and Christians, Bright acknowledges, figure decisively in the drama of redemption that begins with Israel's unique history.[24]

2. The Second Edition (1972). Thirteen years of new discoveries and scholarly argumentation transpired between Bright's original publication and his second edition. From royal stelae to the Mari tablets, more extrabiblical texts were coming under scholarly scrutiny.[25] In addition, standard models of historical reconstruction were increasingly being questioned as new theories were forcefully emerging. Bright made a concerted effort to cover it all, frequently standing firm on his initial convictions, but often making adjustments and occasionally overhauling some of his most fundamental perspectives, while all the time resisting the "temptation to expand the book" (2.15). But expand he did in certain areas, particularly in his Excursus on Sennacherib's two campaigns against Judah (1.282–287; 2.296–308). More vigorous in argumentation and yet more tentative in his conclusions, his

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23 Bright's resistance against adopting a stance of Christian supercessionism is, I think, also reflected in the concern he registers regarding the Davidic covenant superseding the Mosaic during the rise of the monarchy (1.272; see also 2.287; 3.289).

24 That some of Albright's students were Jewish (e.g., Nelson Glueck, Avraham Biran, and Harry Orlinsky), on whose scholarship Bright relied, no doubt influenced Bright's own theological sensitivities.

25 Among the new discoveries, Bright specifically cites the Adad-nirari stela, published in 1968 (2.252n. 72) and the Hebrew ostracon found at Meṣad Ḥasavyahu (Yabneh-Yam), published in 1962 (2.316).

discussion of this thorny issue practically doubled the length of its parallel in the first edition.

a. *Holding Firm.* Despite growing scholarly opinion to the contrary, Bright does not relax his hold, for example, on the claim that the "cultic credos" in Deuteronomy 6, 26, and Joshua 24 reach back to the "earliest period of Israel's life in Palestine" (2.72n. 12). More significant for dating the patriarchs, Bright continues to rely on the allegedly parallel evidence found in the Nuzi texts for the patriarchal customs described in Genesis. Indeed, the second edition expands the scope of his argument by also including parallels outside the Nuzi corpus (2.79). All this is marshaled against a rising tide of criticism that questioned the second-millennium distinctiveness of such parallels (2.252n. 72; 316).

In addition to the Nuzi parallels, Bright finds the Mari texts lending indirect evidence for the antiquity of the patriarchs. Irrespective of their lack of reference to customs reflected in the patriarchal narratives (!), the Mari texts, Bright claims, are useful for demonstrating that Israel's ancestors mediated certain Mesopotamian traditions, including prophecy, law, and the classic mythopoeic or epic traditions (2.87). Compared to the first edition, the patriarchs of the second edition, as dyed-in-the-wool Amorites, bear the increasingly heavy load of transmitting the best of Mesopotamian culture to what would later become Israel.

To demonstrate the antiquity of the covenant form against claims to the contrary, Bright enumerates the Hittite treaties in greater detail in his second edition and contrasts them with later Assyrian and Aramean treaty forms that lack the crucial component of the historical prologue (2.148-149).[26] The stress on history within the covenant formulary points to the larger issue of Israel's distinctive faith. Quoting almost verbatim from his first edition, Bright maintains the claim that "[t]he ancient paganism lacked any sense of a divine guidance toward a goal," despite the seminal work of Bertil Albrektson, who discerned developed notions of divine guidance from much of the ancient Near Eastern corpus (2.155n. 41).[27] At best, this mark of Israel's faith is distinctive only by degree rather than by category. Yet Bright holds firm without giving an inch toward a more balanced or nuanced perspective.

Another point at which Bright holds firm is the Amorite pedigree of the patriarchs. Compared to the first edition, the relationship between Amorites and Arameans is one that Bright delineates with greater vigor. By identifying the patriarchs with the Amorites, Bright must seriously wrestle with the allegedly ancient "cultic confession" that claims Aramean descent for Israel's ancestors (Deut. 26:5). This leads him to identify the Amorites of Syria-Palestine as "proto-Arameans," a

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26 Bright's foil is D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (Analecta Biblica 21; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), who argues for a seventh-century *terminus a quo* for the concept of covenant in biblical tradition. Regarding the contrast between Hittite and Aramean covenant forms, Bright acknowledges one possible exception (see 2.148-149n. 26).

27 B. Albrektson, *History and the Gods* (ConBOT 1; Lund: Gleerup, 1967).

new formulation for Bright. In so doing, Bright is able to avoid charging the biblical witness with rampant anachronism (2.89-90; cf. 1.81-82). Bright also maintains without change his stance on the archaeological evidence from Jericho and Ai during the conquest period (see above). Finally, Bright maintains the historical integrity of the prophetic narratives of 1 Kings 20 and 22, despite mounting suspicion that these narratives are better ascribed to the Jehu dynasty (2.239n. 45).

b.   *Minor Adjustments.* Although Bright strictly follows Albright's datings for the events within the period of the divided monarchy, he makes slight adjustments in the chronology of the ancient Near Eastern empires, from Sumerian to Egyptian. More significantly, Bright is less confident in using the loaded term "amphictyony" to describe Israel's tribal league in light of the less than congruent sociopolitical parallels of Greek antiquity (2.158n. 45; 159n. 48). "Tribal league" and "tribal confederacy" replace Martin Noth's original designation, although an occasional "amphictyonic tradition" slips through. Unabated is Bright's zeal to demonstrate that Israel's tribal order reflects the ethos of covenantal tradition, as indelibly recorded in Joshua 24.

New discoveries and interpretations of existing archaeological sites also prompt Bright to acknowledge, for example, that Ezion-geber was not "the largest [copper] refinery so far known in the ancient Orient" and the hub of Solomon's industrial commerce (1.195), but a fortress or storehouse (2.211-212). Also, in light of the work of Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin, Bright is compelled to attribute the "stables at Megiddo" no longer to Solomon but to Omri, a century later. Moreover, in light of critical evidence Bright acknowledges that Albright's equation of Geba with Gebeah in 1 Kings 15:22 is cast in doubt (2.231n. 23; cf. 1.216n. 24).

c.   *Major Adjustments.* In view of Bright's staunch resistance to certain lines of scholarship that emerged since the first publication of his textbook, his incorporation of other new insights may seem remarkable. Less reliance, for example, on Nelson Glueck's study of the "nomad's land" of Southern Transjordan, a benchmark for establishing the *terminus a quo* of Israel's conquest, is telling in the light of emerging evidence of modest settlements in the Middle and Late Bronze Age (2.54n. 16).

Such adjustment, however, pales in comparison to Bright's revision of the conquest model he so vigorously presented in the first edition. In a provocative 1962 article, George E. Mendenhall reconceptualized Israel's conquest and thereby set a new direction in reconstructing Israel's early history.[28] Simply put, Mendenhall argued that Israel's conquest was primarily an "inside job," a peasants' revolt (2.133n. 69;134) . A violent convulsion of western Palestine is, to a degree, still maintained, but now Israel "conquered from within" those towns in central Palestine listed as Israel's. With Mendenhall, Bright endorses a scenario in which indigenous Hebrews "may simply have risen against their ruler ... and taken control without significant fighting or general bloodshed" (2.139).

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28 G. E. Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine" (BA, 25 [1962], p.66-87).

The picture of disaffected "peasants" rising against their urban overlords paints a socially stratified landscape for Israel's emergence that was absent in Bright's first edition. Bright revels in describing the feudal nature of Canaan's city-states, characterized by "endless quarrels between city lords," the virtual disappearance of the middle class, and the exploitation of "poor villagers," all new observations in his second edition (2.135). Slaves, abused peasants, and ill-paid mercenaries, united in their economic plight, "became Hebrews" (2.135). Although Bright acknowledged in his first edition some continuity between the indigenous Hebrews who, as *Apiru,* were ready to make "common cause" with the erstwhile slaves of Egypt, he can now portray through Mendenhall's model a society "rotten from within," poised to explode at the slightest spark (2.135).

That spark had to come from Egypt; otherwise the Bible's unanimity regarding the exodus tradition and the centrality of the Sinai covenant would be discounted.[29] The conquest, in short, was a movement from within and without. Hence, Bright's subheading "conquest and absorption" in the first edition is changed to "conquest and fusion" (1.126; 2.137), indicating a more formative role for the indigenous populace. For the beleaguered slaves from Egypt, there was ready and willing assistance from their brethren in Palestine. With such a scenario, Bright is able to maintain a "conquest" without the need to demonstrate a ubiquity of thirteenth-century destruction layers. At any rate, Joshua still wins!

Despite revised details and changes in historical perspective, Bright's second edition keeps its theological agenda on the straight and narrow. The Davidic and Sinaitic covenants continue to clash, the latter constituting Israel's true and originative nature, the former regarded as an innovation. Indeed, the contrast is even more sharply cast in the second edition: YHWH's "eternal covenant with David" not only "superseded" the ancient Mosaic covenant (1.272), it "obscured" it (2.287). Yet Bright nuances the connections he delineated in the first edition between the Mosaic covenant and later developments in 'Israel's life and conduct. The classical prophets, for example, no longer represent "a reform movement . . . to reawaken memory of the now largely forgotten Sinaitic covenant" (1.247). They are now "representatives in a new setting of an office" that "stood in continuity with the charismatic leadership of the Judges" and whose duty was to "criticize and correct the state" (2.262).[30] The prophets are politicized to a degree not found in Bright's first edition. Moreover, the discovery of Deuteronomic law is no longer simply a "reactivation" of the Sinai covenant (1.300); it is also "recognized as the basic law of the

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29 As a counterbalance to Mendenhall's thesis, Bright adds in his second edition certain caveats to affirm that Israel's "nucleus" was in Egypt and that Sinai was constitutive of later Israel (2.135-136; cf. 1.125).

30 Nowhere in this paragraph, in contrast to that of the first edition, is mention made of the "Sinaitic" or "Mosaic covenant." This, however, does not imply that Bright decided to forego any connection between the prophets and Sinai – "covenant" is still mentioned. Rather, Bright is more concerned with highlighting the *political* role the prophets played in relation to the monarchy.

state" (2.321). Hence, Deuteronomic law represents a credible link between state and cult.

   3. The Third Edition (1981). Less than ten years after the second edition, the final publication of Bright's textbook follows hard on the heels of recent archaeological discoveries and newly developed historical models. Bright continues to make con-cessions. He is compelled, for instance, to correct Albright's thesis that the Syrian King Ben-hadad of Baasha's time (early ninth century) and the Ben-hadad of Ahab's time (mid-ninth century) were one and the same. Now there are two Ben-hadads to harass northern Israel, one succeeding the other (3.240).[31] Questions are raised regarding the function of the *lmlk* jars of Hezekiah's time and the extent of Josiah annexations (3.283-284, 317). In addition, Bright struggles mightily with the relative chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah in light of a newly argued third option that allows for preserving the biblical order of these two figures, as championed by Frank Moore Cross in his theory of papponomy (see 3.401-402).

   Such changes, however, pale in comparison to what Bright does to revise the first four chapters. The original dust jacket to the third edition advertises a thorough revision that incorporates the findings from the Ebla tablets (Tell Mardikh), discovered in the early 1970s and still the largest single find of third millennium B.C. cuneiform texts recovered in the Near East. In his new foreword, Bright admits that conclusions drawn from this major cache of texts are premature at best. But owing to the constraints of time, Bright could not wait indefinitely and, admittedly, "ventured to proceed . . . without evidence" (3.15). In addition, his third edition marked a final attempt at holding forth on matters that had been persistently thrown into question since the publication of his first edition. Alternative models and conclusions about the shape of Israel's pre- and early history were emerging with persistent force, resulting in "a veritable chaos of conflicting opinion" (3.15). The result was a thorough revision of the first four chapters. For a subject that was becoming increasingly controversial, Bright's third edition presents Israel's history judiciously without sacrificing the kind of theological perceptiveness and literary flair that his readers had grown to expect.

   With little revision of his survey of ancient Near Eastern culture prior to the third millennium, Bright devotes a new section to the Ebla texts. Repeatedly noting that these finds are just beginning to be understood, Bright nonetheless ventures to suggest that many personal names found among the texts may "correspond to

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   31 Bright's revision stems from a new reading of the Melqart stela by Frank M. Cross, who actually posits three Ben-hadad's from 885-842 B.C., the second of whom is identified with Hadad-idri of Shalamaneser III's Monolith inscription (Cross, "The Stele Dedicated to Melcarth by Ben Hadad of Damascus" *[BASOR,* 205 (1972), pp.36-42]). For alternative proposals and fuller discussion, see J. Andrew Dearman and J. Maxwell Miller, 'The Melqart Stele and the Ben Hadad's of Damascus: Two Studies" *(PEQ* 115 [1983], pp.95-101); W. T. Pitard, "The Identity of Bir-Hadad of the Melqart Stela" *(BASOR,* 272 [1988], pp.3-21); E. Puech, "La stela de Bar-Hadad à Melqart et les rois d'Arpad" *(RB,* 99 [1992], pp.311-334).

names found among the Israelites and their ancestors" (3.37). The payoff in pressing the Ebla texts into service for reconstructing Israel's prehistory is to open the *possibility* that Abraham can be dated as far back as the third millennium (3.44n. 45). Bright even finds the Ebla texts offering a possible solution to the historically problematic incident of Abraham's military engagement with the five cities of the Plain, recorded in Genesis 14 (3.84). Given its preliminary state, Bright admits that current research on the Ebla tablets is too tentative to be of much use. [32] Nevertheless, the power of suggestion has its own rhetorical value. For Bright, the tantalizing realm of the possible makes up for the lack of hard evidence. Moreover, the connection between the Prologue—an arguably dispensable element in the textbook genre of Israelite history—and Israel's "prehistory" is strengthened.

The suggestive force of the Ebla texts, however, does not sway Bright from keeping Abraham in the Middle Bronze Age. The Nuzi parallels of the second millennium remain in force, despite gathering opposition regarding their relevance to the biblical text.[33] In the mid-1970s, T. L. Thompson and John Van Seters vigorously questioned the historicity of the patriarchal narratives by demonstrating that the Nuzi parallels were not unique to the second millennium and were well in effect into the first millennium (3.72n. 12; 80n. 27). In response, Bright comes to rely more on *internal* than on external evidence. He finds the lack of similarity between later Israelite law and the patriarchal customs within the biblical material to be sufficient for establishing the "tenacity of historical memory" (3.75). However, in light of the biblical claim of Aramean descent for the patriarchs and of the fact that certain patriarchal names are found in first-millennium texts (3.78), that "historical memory" is getting shorter by each edition! Bright, thus, is compelled to concede that a substantial portion of the patriarchal narratives has its provenance in the Late Bronze Age (3.86-87).

In addition to the temporal context, the material and social context in which the patriarchs sought their livelihood has changed remarkably for Bright. No longer are they the nomads of the desert but pastoralists who "pursued a semi-sedentary existence" before gradually settling down (3.54). No longer are they "ass nomads" (Albright's term), but "seminomadic breeders of sheep and other small cattle whose beast of burden was the ass" (3.81). In their mode of life, the patriarchs represented an essential segment of a "dimorphic" society, which included mutual relations with agricultural villagers (3.81). Indeed, like the diverse makeup of the "conquering" Hebrews, Israel's ancestors did not come "originally from any one place" (3.90). Nevertheless, as Egypt constitutes the locus for the "true" Israel, so Mesopotamia remains the true origin of Israel's ancestors, all Amorites they were (3.90).

As for the conquest itself, the archaeological evidence continues to prove less helpful. "[The] evidence, impressive though it is, is at many points ambiguous, even

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32 Ebla does not appear in the chronological chart for the Early Bronze Age (3.466).

33 In the face of mounting criticism, Bright concedes that the "force of these parallels must not be exaggerated" (3.80), in contrast to his more confident parallel statement in the previous edition (2.79).

confusing, and it is not always easy to correlate it with the Biblical narrative," Bright admits (3.129; cf. 2.126-127). The list of discrepant archaeological sites increases significantly in the third edition. Bright holds out the possibility that these sites may indicate instances of "an internal uprising" against urban overlords. Indeed, the "destruction of towns might well have been the exception rather than the rule" (3.132). Moreover, the archaeological evidence indicates a protracted affair that spans the patriarchal era up to the time of the early monarchy (3.132-133). Consequently, Bright is tempted to emend his position of a thirteenth-century conquest by lowering it a century (3.133n. 68). But questions of dating notwithstanding, Bright holds firm that of the various models proposed by scholarship, the conquest model is still the most useful for reconstructing Israel's occupation. For Bright, "conquest" has come to mean both invasion *and* indigenous uprising. What has not changed is his conviction that the process involved "a bitter struggle and a major political and socioeconomic upheaval" (3.133).

As the third edition reflects Bright's concerted efforts to incorporate new data and to stake out a more balanced position in the face of alternative theories, it also marks the apex of Bright's theological reflections. Amid increasing uncertainty regarding the material contours of Israel's early history, Bright's theological position comes to the fore with greater vigor in chapter 4. While his foils remain the same (e.g., evolutionary development of religion, retrojection of late beliefs on earlier traditions, bloodless abstractions, and henotheism), Bright significantly modifies his manner of presentation. Section headings are changed and arguments rearranged and supplemented to yield a more powerful, if not elegant, presentation of the faith that constituted Israel. Joshua, for example, no longer speaks of "Yahweh's gracious deeds" (2.146), but of *"the magnalia Dei"* (3.149). Bright forcefully states at the outset that the heart of Israel's faith lies in its covenantal relationship with YHWH. Israel's faith cannot be recapitulated as a series of beliefs; it is captured, rather, in the dialectic between divine election and covenantal obligation (3.144).

Bright places greater weight on the antiquity and religious world of Israel's early poetry (3.146). The Song of Miriam and the Song of Deborah, both of the twelfth century, establish an intrinsic link between the exodus and Sinai. As the ancient credos were for Gerhard von Rad the pillars for supporting the antiquity of *Heilsgeschichte* (at the expense of covenantal faith!), so these early poems were regarded by Bright as indicative of establishing the historical integrity of Israel's covenantal faith.

By holding firm to the antiquity of the Mosaic covenant, Bright plows through a rising tide of German scholarship that finds covenant theology to be a relatively late invention (3.153n. 27).[34] Although Bright acknowledges, in light of fresh evidence, some degree of *similarity* between the Hittite treaties of the second millennium and those of later Assyrian and Syrian provenance, his original conclusions remain

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34 In addition to the works of Perlitt and Kutsch, cited 3.153n. 27, see more recently Ernest W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford/New York: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 1988).

unscathed (3.153). While "[t]he antiquity of the covenant form in Israel cannot be proved" (3.155), Bright remains convinced of a second-millennium dating for the covenantal tradition, although it is conveyed through an unfortunate typographical error: "the Biblical covenant is far closer in form and in spirit to the Hittite treaties of the first *(sic!)* millennium than to any later treaties presently known to us" (3.154).

Avoiding, as in the second edition, the Nothian nomenclature of "amphictyony," Bright continues to stress the covenantal contours of Israel's tribal society (3.163). New to the discussion, however, is Bright's stress upon the ethos of kinship, which denotes not so much blood ties as "social solidarity, a feeling of closeness" (3.163). Despite Israel's heterogeneous origins, "speaking theologically, one might with justice call Israel a family" (3.163). Israel's historical unity, thus, ultimately rests on its faith rather than on ethnicity. In making his case, Bright is able to integrate more fully in his last edition the familial ethos of patriarchal religion and that of Mosaic Yahwism.[35]

D. THE CENTER OF BRIGHT'S HISTORY

The development of historical research since the heyday of Bright's work has yielded a significantly different picture from that depicted in the biblical narrative (see Appendix). To be sure, Bright's historical reconstruction differs at some significant points from the Bible's own historiography. But the move away from a primary reliance on the biblical witness among many historians has fostered a radical skepticism that questions the very enterprise of writing Israel's history.[36] Such skepticism has grown proportionately in relation to the increasing tendency among recent scholars to date much, if not most, of the biblical material to the Persian and even Hellenistic periods. "As more texts are dated in post-exilic times, the more differentiated we have to imagine the spectrum of Israel's life, thinking, and belief in this time, "[37] and the less, one must add, we can imagine any history at all. Naturally, the question has been raised whether it is possible to write a history of Israel without reliance upon the Hebrew Bible.[38] If so, what kind of history would we have? Bright, of course, would have considered the question absurd. Understanding the message of the Old Testament was the *raison d'être* for understanding Israel's history.

All in all, Bright's textbook is more than a work of historical reconstruction. It is a robustly theological investigation. And for that Bright has been severely criticized.

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35 For a fuller integration of kinship and covenant, see most recently Frank M. Cross, "Kinship and Covenant" in his *Epic Tradition of Early Israel: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp.3–21.

36 See the accessible summary of the recent research in Mark Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.2–6.

37 Rolf Rendtorff, "The Paradigm Is Changing: Hope—and Fears" *(Biblical Interpretation,* 1 [1993], p.48).

38 See J. Maxwell Miller, "Is it Possible to Write a History of Israel without Relying on the Hebrew Bible?" in *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact and Israel's Past,* ed. Diana V. Edelman (JSOTSup 127; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp.93–102, who cogently argues that such an enterprise, although theoretically possible, is well-nigh impossible in practice.

Martin Noth's review of Bright's first edition sums it up well: "It is certainly a serious question whether a presentation of Israel's history could and should present a 'Theology of the Old Testament,' at the same time. The question is not easily answered and cannot be solved by interpolating references to the history of religion into a History of Israel."[39] Bright, however, cannot be criticized for indiscriminately injecting his own "interpolations." Considering himself primarily a historian, Bright intended all along to convey his theological insights, subjected to external controls, "at the right times and in the right way," so as not to violate the integrity of historical inquiry *(EI,* 29). Yet it must be observed that Noth's caution anticipated the direction historical research has taken since Bright's third edition. Like David uniting Judah and Israel, but to no avail, Bright's textbook facilitated an uneasy union between theology and history that has not held among most historians today. Two histories, one biblical *(Geschichte)* and the other the product of archaeology and sociological reconstruction *(Historie),* have for the time being seemingly gone their separate ways. [40] For Bright, however, genuine history and genuine theology, as evidenced in Israel's faith, were one and the same.

Regardless of the pitfalls of integrating the history of religion and the "History of Israel," Bright would have it no other way. His coverage of the biblical material, including many of the nonhistorical writings such as the psalms and the wisdom literature, is unmatched by others in the genre. Bright gave serious attention to these corpora in order to illustrate the theological tenor of the times. Indeed, in light of recent work, Bright's textbook is more an introduction to the Old Testament presented in diachronic fashion than an aimless recitation of archaeological and historical findings. For Bright, "history" was nothing less than the hermeneutical entry point into the theology of the Old Testament. "History" was the template by which to set in relief scripture's rich complexity while underscoring its coherence and particularity. For Bright, it all came down to one simple point: There is no authentic understanding of God without Israel's history, and there is no true understanding of Israel's history without God.

Bright's textbook attempts to balance these two fundamental convictions. On the one hand, Israel's story is no imaginative construct severed from the harsh realities of historical experience. The Bible is about a particular people who embodied a peculiar history. For all its ambiguity, archaeology anchors Israel's story in history.[41] Moreover, the archaeological picture underscores the social and theological struggles the ancient community faced as it developed those traditions that came to

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39 Martin Noth, "As One Historian to Another" *(Interpretation,* 15 [1961], pp.65–66. The same, however, could be said of Noth in his reconstruction of the "sacral" ideas of amphictyonic Israel. See Noth, *The History of Israel,* pp.85–138.

40 For a notable exception that Bright would have admired, at least in method, see Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, Volumes 1, 2* (trans. John Bowden; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), esp. pp.13–17 of vol. 1.

41 See Bernhard W. Anderson's suggestive essay, 'The Relevance of Archaeology to Biblical Theology: A Tribute to George Ernest Wright," in his *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), pp.345–352.

comprise scripture. On the other hand, Israel's history cannot be severed from Israel's faith in the God who delivered, sustained, and constituted Israel as a people. In short, a "satisfying picture" of Israel's history is a history whose horizons can-not be "foreshortened" either horizontally—from the Stone Age to the "fullness of time" in Bright's case—or vertically by excluding the ineffable.

Yet amid such broad horizons, Bright did not hesitate to identify what was central to Israel's faith and history. As any work in Old Testament theology worth its salt seeks to identify an organizing principle within Israel's theological purview, so Bright sought to determine the driving force behind the history of Israel as a community of faith. The *Mitte,* as it were, of Bright's account of Israel's eventful history is—and has to be—found in his theological perspective. In the end, it matters not whether Abraham's journeys took place in the Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, or early Iron Age. What matters is that the patriarch's sojourn was an act of faith, something that archaeology will never be able to verify or falsify.

As an ardent churchman, Bright recognized more than many in his generation the significance of covenantal theology in Israel's formation and historical experience.[42] Resounding through all three editions is his pronouncement: "Yahwism and covenant are coterminous!" (1.146; 2.160; 3.168). Beginning with an election of slaves, covenant served as Israel's coat of arms, later marred and tattered during the days of the monarchy, but preserved largely intact throughout the ravages of exile and the disappointment of the restoration. Through covenantal obedience, Israel strove to conduct itself *coram Deo* throughout the course of its history. But when covenant was made immutable in later Judaism, "this meant a certain weakening of that lively sense of history so characteristic of old Israel" (1.426; 2.442-443; 3.440). While Bright's assessment of Judaism verges on caricature,[43] it illustrates well his conviction that covenant, not legalism, was constitutive of Israel's identity. In covenant, *Heilsgeschichte* and Torah, mythos and ethos, grace and duty embrace. In covenant, human history becomes a moral postulate. Bright's "lively sense of history" provides the framework for a theology that enters into, rather than floats above, the fray of human existence. Bright urged his own students never to forget that "lively sense of history," for it embodies the life of discipleship amid the tension between grace and obligation, over and against the temptation of complacency.[44] For a new generation of students and professional interpreters, Bright demonstrates that not only does history matter, but also theology.

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42 The prominence of covenant in Bright's textbook has its theological parallel, not coincidentally, in the monumental work of Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament,* 2 vols. (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961, 1967), originally published in 1933. For a recent covenantal approach to Old Testament theology, see Bernhard W. Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

43 See, e.g., E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns in Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); *idem, Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); and most recently N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 1: The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

44 See Bright, *Covenant and Promise,* p.198; and n. 4 above.

Appendix

AN UPDATE IN THE SEARCH OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY

William P. Brown

MUCH HAS happened in the field of historical research since 1981. Brewing even before the publication of the third edition of Bright's textbook, nothing short of a crisis has beset the discipline. As more material remains of Israel's past have been uncovered, the leap from text to trench has widened considerably. As a result, the integration of Palestine's material culture with the biblical witness of Israel's past—the traditional aim of biblical archaeology—can no longer be sustained. Consequently, archaeological research in the Levant, known now as "Syro-Palestinian archaeology" or sometimes "new archaeology," has come into its own, severing much of its ties to biblical studies.[1] One can readily note the dramatic transformation of archaeological research by comparing the following comments on the purpose of archaeology for the biblical period.

> [Archaeology] cannot explain the basic miracle of Israel's faith, which remains a unique factor in world history. But archaeology can help enormously in making the miracle rationally plausible to an intelligent person whose vision is not shortened by a materialistic world view.[2]

Such was William F. Albright's vision of the worth and aim of biblical archaeology, a field of inquiry that fell short of explaining Israel's faith, yet could make that faith "rationally plausible." G. Ernest Wright, similarly, contended that the driving force behind the discipline was "the understanding and exposition of the Scriptures."[3] Some thirty-seven years after Wright's influential work on biblical archaeology, one finds leading German archaeologist Volkmar Fritz retaining the label "biblical archaeology," but defining it with a decisively different purpose:

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1 William G. Dever points out that "Syro-Palestinian archaeology" was, in fact, an academic discipline that ran parallel to "biblical archaeology" during the latter's heyday ("Biblical Theology and Biblical Archaeology: An Appreciation of G. Ernest Wright" *[HTR, 73* (1980) p.15n. 34]. Nevertheless, current archaeological work on the so-called "biblical" period of Syria-Palestine has undergone a dramatic transformation by generally divorcing itself from the concern to demonstrate the historicity of biblical traditions.

2 W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (London: Penguin Books, 1949), p.255.

3 G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), p.17.

> Biblical archaeology is, just as the archaeology of other regions, a science aimed at regaining, defining, and explaining the heritage of peoples formerly inhabiting the land. The task of biblical archaeology is the exploration of the history and culture of Palestine.[4]

What is striking about Fritz's definition, *vis-à-vis* Albright's and Wright's discussion, is what is missing, namely, archaeology's purpose to make understandable Israel's faith and scriptures. Fritz does not deny the usefulness of "biblical archaeology" to biblical studies, but denies its potential to be used apologetically or as a way to illustrate the biblical record.[5]

Whether under a new or old title, archaeology in Palestine has achieved autonomous status as a discipline. No longer the canvas upon which Bright could reconstruct Israel's history and faith from primarily a biblical perspective, archaeological research has developed, in principle, its own depiction of "Israel's" past in Palestine, with only (at most) minimal reference to the biblical witness. Not unrelated is the notable shift from an almost exclusive concern with chronology and the monumental remains of large sites—particularly those associated with the biblical traditions—to a primary focus on smaller sites and the kind of remains that yield valuable information about everyday life. In the last three decades, archaeologists and surveyors have detected hundreds of Iron I "farmsteads, hamlets, and villages" throughout Palestine, including the Transjordan.[6] Indeed, the data have shown that the majority of the population of Palestine lived in rural areas, rather than in urban centers. Hence, Bright was at least half right in his observation that early Israel was a "nation of small farmers" (3.223).

As archaeology has become an independent field of inquiry, so there has been less reliance on the biblical witness in matters of historical reconstruction. Given its selective and theological tendencies, the biblical text cannot be regarded as an objective, let alone sufficient, account of Israel's past. Hotly debated by both skeptics and defenders in recent years, the precise extent to which the Bible can provide the historian useful information remains an open question.[7] As a result, Bright has been

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[4] Volkmar Fritz, *An Introduction to Biblical Archaeology* (JSOTSup 172; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), p.12.

[5] See *ibid.,* p.221.

[6] Elizabeth Bloch-Smith and Beth Alpert Nakhai, "A Landscape Comes to Life: The Iron I Period," *(Near Eastern Archaeology,* 62 [1999], p.67). This article represents the latest attempt to reconstruct the history of early Iron I Palestine on the basis of archaeology with only occasional reference to the biblical texts.

[7] On the skeptical side, see, e.g., Philip R. Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel"* (JSOT *:Sup* 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); John Van Seters, *In Search of History in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Keith W. Whitelam, "Recreating the History of Israel" *(JSOT,* 35 [1986], pp.45-70); *idem, The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1996). On the positive side, see Baruch Halpern, "Erasing History: The Minimalist Assault on Ancient Israel" *(BARev,* 11/6 [1995], pp.26-35, 47); *idem, The First*

frequently accused of simply retelling the biblical narrative in the language of history." Such debates are, of course, nothing new, but they have demonstrated in the face of mounting extrabiblical evidence that the Bible can no longer be considered a privileged, even primary, resource in the task of historical reconstruction. Rather, the biblical witness is for the historian one source among many to be subjected to critical scrutiny, a stance with which Bright himself was in agreement, at least in principle."

On the one hand, the Bible is no raw artifact. The so-called historical books (Joshua—2 Kings), for example, are themselves a reconstruction of Israel's past. On the other hand, the biblical witness is not an artificial construct, the product only of its authors' fanciful imagination. Both skeptics and Albrightians alike recognize the folly of adopting one extreme or the other in the task of historical reconstruction. In his critical confidence in the historical texture of the biblical tradition, Bright placed himself firmly on one side of the divide between those who place little historical worth on the biblical traditions and those who find them essentially trustworthy. Yet Bright claimed that scripture, subjected to the critical tools of the historian, needed no special pleading (3.68). For all historians of Israel's past, the Bible remains, at the very least, a valuable resource, one among many, for identifying Israelite perceptions of ethnic and religious identity. But the perennial question remains, how early and to what extent do these perceptions identified in the sacred literature apply to ancient (i.e., preexilic) Israel?

Related to the transformation of archaeological research has been the move toward incorporating anthropological and social-scientific methods for reconstructing Israel's past.[10] Indeed, the fuse that lit the explosion of such methods was the monumental work of Norman Gottwald," which Bright had little use for except as a qualified defender of Mendenhall's model of an internal conquest.[12] Yet the rise of anthropological and sociological study has effectively filled a gap present in most historical treatments of ancient Israel, namely, the sociocultural processes and

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Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), esp. pp.l-35, 205-278. For a helpful collection of essays on the debate, see *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israel Historiography,* ed. V. Philips Long (SBTS 7;Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999).

[8] See, e.g., Lester L. Grabbe's critique that Bright, among others, has written the history of Judah in the early Persian period by "lightly paraphrasing the book of Ezra" (Grabbe, "Reconstructing History from the Book of Ezra," in *Second Temple Studies: 1. Persian Period,* ed. Philip R. Davies [JSOTSup 117; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991], p.105n. 1).

[9] E.g., Bright, 1.61. Most representative is the deconstructive position taken by Neils Peter Lemche, who regards the biblical narrative, owing to its deuteronomistic overlay, as merely a "secondary source," in contrast to the primary evidence gained from con-temporary extrabiblical sources *(The Israelites in History and Tradition* [Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998], pp.30, 43).

[10] See the synthesis of this line of research in Paula M. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999).

[11] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh; A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979).

12 See Bright, *3.137n. 76.*

structures that gave shape to the communities of the biblical world. No longer limited to matters of chronology and the conscious actions of individuals, historical inquiry has expanded to include forces and processes that lie behind the less "dramatic" aspects of ancient history (e.g., technological adaptation, economic development, the social role of women, and the distribution of political power). In short, the utilization of social scientific and anthropological theories has done much to supplement the kind of historical reconstruction that even Bright himself practiced, while also revising many of his conclusions.

Such newly developed foci of research, however, were not alien to Bright's own historical reflections and method. Like his successors in the field, Bright himself was primarily interested in what defined Israel as a community in a land shaped and ravaged by innumerable social forces, from political and economic to religious. By employing the results of archaeology and comparative study, Bright aimed to broaden the horizons of Israel's past (3.44). Such a move has also been taken up in various ways by the newer models of historical research.

Space cannot accommodate even a superficial survey of the recent developments that have emerged during the last two decades of research. One thing has not changed: the field is as fraught with friction and controversy today as it was in Bright's day. For the purpose of this appendix, it is best to conclude Bright's text-book with a brief treatment of those periods of Israelite history in which Bright himself was primarily engaged namely, Israel's prehistory and origin(s), as well as its transition to monarchy.

A. ISRAEL'S "PREHISTORY"

The importance (and hope) that Bright placed upon the Ebla Archives for dating the patriarchs has so far proved ill-founded. The tablets remain difficult to decipher, and initial reports of direct links between them and the Bible have been shown to be erroneous. Approximately 80 percent of the texts are administrative and economic in nature. Ebla research is still in its infancy, and the so-called historical texts of this corpus are yet to be published. No longer able to wait, Bright made a some-what desperate gamble (and lost) in suggesting possible links between obscure Eblaite references and personal and geographical names found in scripture. Most recent treatments of the history and culture of Ebla have avoided establishing any connection with biblical history whatsoever.[13] Ebla remains merely a Syrian city-state among other Early Bronze civilizations of the Fertile Crescent, predating Israel's history by at least a millennium.[14]

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13 See the numerous articles produced so far by the Center for Ebla Research (*Eblaitica: Essays on the Ebla Archives and Eblaite Language,* 3 vols, ed. Cyrus H. Gordon [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987–1992]). Any correspondence between Israel's "prehistory" and Eblaite influence is limited to linguistic matters.

[14] Lucia Milano, "Ebla: A Third-Millennium City-State in Ancient Syria," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East,* ed. Jack Sasson, et al (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), pp.1219–1230 of vol. 2.

While Bright began to loosen his dating for the patriarchs or ancestors of Israel in his third edition, scholarship since then has undermined the fundamental arguments for a Middle Bronze or early Late Bronze Age context for Abraham. Following Albright, Bright tied the wandering patriarchs to widespread "Amorite" movements in the early second millennium B.C. That the Amorites were responsible for the collapse of urban civilization in Syria-Palestine at the end of the Early Bronze Age has been seriously questioned. Such disruption is more likely attributable to internal factors such as overpopulation, drought, famine, or some combination thereof that exhausted the material and social resources necessary to maintain an urban way of life. The "Amorite hypothesis," thus, remains exactly that.

More significant for Bright, however, were the allegedly distinctive customs of the second millennium evidenced in Nuzi and Mari. Yet continued research has disputed many of these parallels, as Bright himself was well aware in his third edition.[15] Moreover, the patriarchal names and their customs have been shown to be operative in the ancient Near East well into Iron Age II. As evident in the third edition, Bright's argument for the antiquity of the patriarchal traditions increasingly relied upon the biblical witness, which registers marked differences between patriarchal custom and "later" (from the narrative's standpoint) legal and cultic practice. But a Middle Bronze Age dating is by no means a necessary conclusion even on such *internal* grounds. The fact that the biblical traditions identify the patriarchs with the much later Arameans—not to mention recount them having contact with the Philistines!—casts serious doubt on a Middle or Late Bronze Age origin for the patriarchs. The *most* that can be said is that the patriarchal narratives reflect the self-understanding of an Israel that considered itself ethnically distinct in the land. Indeed, most recent studies of the "religion of the patriarchs" have largely bracketed out the question of dating Israel's "ancestors." [16]

As the historicity of the patriarchal traditions has been put into question, so has, not surprisingly, the exodus event. The problem of the exodus, however, runs much deeper than the issue of dating. Its very occurrence has been questioned. Was Israel essentially allochthonous, that is, an outside people, or a community indigenous to Canaan? Already anticipated in Bright's revisions, recent accounts of Israel's origins have stressed the latter view. Yet the simple fact remains: archaeology can neither confirm nor disconfirm the deliverance of a band of Asiatic slaves from Pharaoh's

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[15] Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (BZAW 133; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974); John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

16 J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes all but ignore the patriarchal period in their textbook, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1986). See R.W.L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp.117, 191–98, who in principle eschews historical judgments yet cautiously suggests that patriarchal religion is a precursor to Mosaic Yahwism; and Augustine Pagou, *The Religion of the Patriarchs* (JSOTSup 277; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), who characterizes the patriarchal religion as family oriented and based on a seminomadic lifestyle coexistent with the indigenous cult.

mighty hand. The most that historians have been able to do is to identify historical analogies and indirect evidence from the extrabiblical sources that would suggest a precedent or possible setting for an event like the exodus.[17] Yes, Semites and other minority groups were known to have immigrated into Egypt during times of economic necessity and even risen to positions of prominence in the Egyptian court.[18] Several of the Anastasi Papyri attest to such traffic at the border between Egypt and Sinai (see ANET, 258-259). Indeed, an escape of two slaves into the Sinai wilderness is recorded in Anastasi V.[19] In an ostracon, moreover, reference is made to *'Apiru* engaged in construction work at the city of Pi-Ramesses, the new capital of Ramesses II.[20] Consequently, the possibility remains that during the international upheaval that marked the close of the Late Bronze Age certain Asiatics from Egypt immigrated into Palestine whose identity eventually shaped Israel's legacy in the land.

B. ISRAEL'S ORIGINS

Reconstructing Israel's origins remains the most controversial and complex issue of historical inquiry into Israel's past. For Bright, Israel's origins were *definitive* of Israel's identity. Such an identification is no longer held by many scholars today. If the biblical witness is more a product or "invention" of the late exilic and Persian periods than a deposit of various traditions that reach back into Israel's very origins, as some claim, then there is no reason to assume any degree of continuity between early "Israel," if one can even apply the designation, and the Israel of the restoration, indeed, of Judaism.[21] As the evolution of Bright's textbook already began to anticipate, the archaeological picture of Israel's occupation of the land yields a much different picture from that portrayed in Joshua and even Judges.

Notably lacking in Bright's textbook, but prominently featured in many recent reconstructions, is significant attention to the variegated nature of Palestine's landscape, including topography, trade routes, and climate.[22] More than simply a land bridge between Egypt to the southwest and Anatolia and Mesopotamia to the north

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17 See A. Malamat, "The Exodus: Egyptian Analogies," in *The Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence,* eds. Ernest S. Frerichs and Leonard H. Lesko (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), pp.15-26. For a compelling yet unavoidably speculative defense of the exodus, see James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Much more skeptical are W. G. Dever, "Is There Any Archaeological Evidence for the Exodus?" and James Weinstein, "Exodus and Archaeological Reality," in *The Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence,* pp.67-86, 87-104, respectively.

18 The 1986 discovery of the new tomb near Saqqara has yielded evidence of a vizier with Semitic background ("Aper-El") who served Amenhotep III and IV (Akhenaten). See the discussion in Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt,* p.94.

19 See Malamat, 'The Exodus," pp.20-22.

20 *Ibid.,* 18.

21 Despite its programmatic nature, Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel,"* puts the issue most sharply.

22 See, e.g., Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah,* pp.30-52.

and east, Palestine features significant geographical variations in terrain, elevation, soil, and vegetation, in short, a harsh environment.[23] As a land of contrasts, the terrain was not conducive for the swift emergence of a socially unified people. On the positive side, the physical environment afforded the local population a degree of autonomy and political isolation. To his credit, Bright laid greater stress on Israel's heterogeneous origins in *his* later editions. *The geography of the land confirms this, and the sociocultural landscape, as reconstructed by archaeologists and anthropologists, enriches this picture all the more.*

Although the stela of Merneptah ("Marniptah" in Bright's editions, now dated to ca. 1207 B.C.), which contains the earliest known reference to "Israel," is still a benchmark in recent reconstructions, questions remain about what it can tell us about the history of the people to which it refers. Is Merneptah's "Israel" a socioethnic entity or simply a territory within Canaan?[24] If the former, does it designate a nomadic tribal entity or a sedentary group? The Egyptian determinative sign for people, which occurs in conjunction with the word "Israel" in the stela, is nonspecific, although it does preclude any sense of nation or city-state status, as one finds with the other geographical references (i.e., Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yanoam). All in all, the stela prompts more questions than answers.[25] The most that can be said is that the term "Israel" suggests an awareness of ethnic differentiation from the other inhabitants of Canaan.[26] A series of Karnak battle reliefs, formerly attributed to Ramses II, are now thought to depict Merneptah's military successes. Frank Yurco has argued that at least one panel depicts "Israelite" warriors, lending further credence to the existence of a social entity called "Israel," indistinguishable in appearance, however, from the Canaanites.[27] Moreover, the Merneptah stela can no

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[23] For a detailed survey particularly of the landscape and climate of the central hill country, see David C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan: Agricultural Life in the Early Iron Age* (SWBAS 3; Sheffield: Almond, 1985), pp.53-108.

24 Gösta W. Ahlström, for example, argues that the name "Israel" in the stela refers to a region rather than to a people *(Who Were the Israelites* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1986)], pp.37-40).

25 Bright himself was not quite sure what to make of it (1.104; 3.114).

26 Kenton L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena* to *the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1998), pp.107-108.

[27] Frank J. Yurco, "3,200-Year-Old Picture of Israelites Found in Egypt" (BARev, 16/5 [1990], pp.20-38; *idem,* "Merneptah's Canaanite Campaign and Israel's Origins," in *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence,* pp.27-55. See also Lawrence Stager, "Forging an Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel" in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World,* ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.125, who sees the Egyptian determinative sign designating "a different kind of polity" from the city-states referenced in the stela. If a Karnak relief, damaged as it is, does depict Israelite warriors, then it likely precludes, according to Yurco, any association with the shasu—another seminomadic group attested in Egyptian New Kingdom texts as living in the southern Transjordan. But cf. Donald B. Redford, 'The Ashkelon Relief at Karnak and the Israel Stela," *(IEJ,* 36 [1986], pp.188-200); Anson Rainey, "Can You Name the Panel with the

longer be employed as marking a decisive *terminus ante quem,* or latest possible dating, for Israel's occupation of the land, as was done in the original conquest models.[28] It is certainly possible that Merneptah's "conquest" of "Israel" in Canaan actually occurred *prior to* the major wave of settlements in the central hill country in the early Iron I period. This would suggest that a "pre-Mosaic" or "proto-Israelite" group was flourishing in Canaan to the extent that it could muster significant resistance against the Egyptian military, all prior to significant settlement of the land.

The archaeological evidence continues both to inform and confound the task of reconstructing Israel's past. Although there is evidence of some urban destruction at the end of the Late Bronze Age and into Iron Age I, there is little correspondence to the biblical account. As Bright conceded early on, cities such as Heshbon, Arad, Hebron, Gibeon, Jericho, and Ai have not yielded signs of occupation in the Late Bronze Age. The Albrightian solution to Ai is one of convenience, and the biblical account of the conquest of Jericho is clearly a more cultic than historical narrative in light of the material evidence. In addition, there remains nothing to indicate that the destruction layers discovered at various urban centers in Palestine are attributable to a Hebrew conquest. Simply put, the Israelites did not leave their calling card. Indeed, it is doubtful that the pastoralists who settled the highlands of Canaan were capable of razing heavily defended walled cities. The Sea Peoples, no doubt, were responsible for some of the violent conflict that wracked the land.

Gezer and Ashkelon were most likely destroyed by Merneptah. Moreover, the decline of the Late Bronze Age urban centers was a gradual process, lasting more than a century into the late twelfth century, rather than confined to the thirteenth.[29] No *Blitzkrieg* was the "conquest," as the biblical traditions suggest.

Along with urban decline was a concomitant increase in the number of occupation sites in the central highlands, the frontiers of Canaanite culture, particularly in the regions of Ephraim, Manasseh, and the eastern part of Benjamin.[30] In terms of material culture, archaeologists and historians see more continuity than discontinuity between the Canaanite culture of the Late Bronze Age and the settlements of the Iron Age in the frontier highlands. The allegedly material indicators of ethnicity identified by Albright such as the "collared-rim" store jar, the four-room or "pillared" house, the plaster-lined cistern, and agricultural terracing have been found in regions beyond those commonly associated with Israel in the biblical

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Israelites?" *(BARev,* 17/6 [1991], pp.56-60, 93); see also Frank J. Yurco, "Yurco's Response," *(BARev,* 17/6 [1991], p.61).

28 Again, Bright allows for flexibility on this matter (3.114-115).

29 McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel,* p.47.

30 See Israel Finkelstein, "The Emergence of Israel: A Phase in the Cyclic History of Canaan in the Third and Second Millennia B.C.E.," in *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel,* ed. *idem* and N. Na'aman (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), p.160. See also his comprehensive survey, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988).

literature. Such widespread dispersal among "pre-Israelite" and non-Israelite sites suggests that such archaeological remains are attributable more to economic and environmental factors (e.g., functional adaptations to agricultural village life) than to ethnic differentiation. As for pottery types, the only evident distinction between Iron I and Late Bronze Age ceramic assemblages is that the former are of poorer and more limited quality than the latter.[31] According to one Israeli archaeologist, the pottery of the Iron I highlands lacks features sufficient to determine ethnic differentiation.[32] Finkelstein and others have suggested that one possible indicator of ethnicity is the presence (or lack thereof) of pig bones in Iron Age I sites. But this, too, is moot.[33]

In short, the archaeological evidence suggests that Israel emerged on the fringes of Late Bronze Age civilization.[34] As for a new model that accounts for Israel's emergence in the land, much is still in flux. If anything, a synthesis of Albrecht Alt's "peaceful infiltration" model and an indigenous model is emerging, namely one that proposes the withdrawal of a portion of the Canaanite population from established, urban settings without the violence of a social revolution or conquest. Most of the archaeological evidence points to a "small-scale, peaceful settlement both in the vicinity of LBA Canaanite sites and in more remote regions." [35] The biblical depiction of a wave of destruction wrought by a unified Israel is anachronistic, most probably reflecting a later concern to legitimize the acquisition of territory in behalf of the monarchy.[36] Already in the second edition of his textbook, Bright expressed serious doubts about the biblical view. But his comments in the third edition still pertain, albeit in a broader and more attenuated sense: Israel's emergence occurred in the context of "a major political and socioeconomic upheaval"(3.133).

As for the social (and natural) forces behind this upheaval, there is much debate. Proposals include disruption in international trade as the result of gradual urban economic decline,[37] prolonged drought and famine,[38] technological

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31 McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel,* p.50.

32 Israel Finkelstein, "Pots and People Revisited: Ethnic Boundaries in the Iron Age I," in *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present,* eds. Neil Asher Silberman and David B. Small (JSOTSup 237; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p.224; see also Block-Smith and Nakhai, "A Landscape Comes to Life," p.63.

33 See the judicious essay of Brian Hesse and Paula Wapnish, "Can Pig Remains be Used for Ethnic Diagnosis in the Ancient Near East?" in *The Archaeology of Israel,* pp.238-270.

34 Hesse and Wapnish, "Can Pig Remains Be Used?" p.263.

35 Bloch-Smith and Nakhai, "A Landscape Comes to Life," p.119.

36 *Ibid.*

37 So Robert B. Coote and Keith W. Whitelam, *The Emergence of Early Israel in Historical Perspective (SWBAS* 5; Sheffield: Almond, 1987).

38 W. Stiebing, Jr., *Out of the Desert? Archaeology and the Exodus/Conquest Narratives* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989), pp.182-187; Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (SHANE 4; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), pp.215-221.

innovations,[39] and the natural rhythms of nomadization and sedentarization during times of general upheaval and decline in food production,[40] or some combination of the above.[41] Increasingly recognized is that the collapse of the Late Bronze Age culture is part of the cyclical rise and collapse of urban cultures in the southern Levant throughout the third and second millennia as a result of gradual socioeconomic changes.[42] Regardless of the specific causes, it is clear that the majority of the Iron Age I population was indigenous and diverse, subsisting in relative isolation on the frontiers of Canaanite civilization. As urban economic systems in many parts of Canaan declined (cf. Judges 5:6), certain centrifugal forces were set in motion that prompted an increase in settlements beyond areas of state control, especially in the highlands. Lawrence Stager has, consequently, proposed a new model of "ruralization," which takes account of the larger scope of resettlement patterns in Palestine during this time, while avoiding the impossible task of establishing ethnic distinctions that remain unattested in the material evidence.[43]

Furthermore, a number of archaeological features traditionally considered characteristic of later Israelite culture in the highlands, such as collared-rim *pithoi* and four-room houses (see above), have been found at early Iron Age lowland sites along the coast, as well as in the Shephelah and the Negev. Such evidence suggests something of a migration eastward and northward into the central highlands by the beginning of Iron II (1000-600 B.C.), at odds with the biblical depiction of a west-ward movement from the Transjordan.[44] As evidence for a thirteenth-century invasion of Israelites from the east, Bright relied on Nelson Glueck's early surveys of the Transjordan, which concluded that Edom and Moab did not emerge as kingdoms until early Iron I, particularly with a string of fortresses marking the borders of Amon, Moab, and Edom. More recent surveys have refined Glueck's theory of an occupational gap.[45] Moab was sparsely settled until the end of the Late Bronze Age,

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39 Niels Peter Lemche, *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarchy* (VTSup 37; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), pp.411-435.

40 Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement,* pp.342-346; *0. S.* LaBianca, *Sedentarization and Nomadization: A Study of Food System Transitions at Hesban and Vicinity in Transjordan, Hesban, Pt. I* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University, 1990); A. F. Rainey, "Remarks on Donald Redford's 'Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times'" *(BASOR,* 295 [1994], p.84).

41 Bloch-Smith and Nakhai, "A Landscape Comes to Life," pp.63, 68.

42 Israel Finkelstein, "The Great Transformation: The 'Conquest' of the Highlands Frontiers and the Rise of the Territorial States," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land,* ed. T. E. Levy (New York: Facts on File, 1995), p.354.

42 Stager, "Forging an Identity," pp.141-142.

44 Bloch Smith and Nakhai, "A Landscape Comes to Life," p.103, who claim that such evidence contradicts Finkelstein's earlier thesis of a western migration consonant with the biblical narrative (cf. *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement,* pp.324-330). However, the question naturally arises whether both discernible trends are mutually exclusive.

46 See the general review of earlier research in Max Miller, "Ancient Moab: Still Largely Unknown" *(BA,* 60 [1997], pp.200-201).

when a gradual increase in settled sites occurred, reaching its peak in Iron II.[46] Evidence for a greater Moab in early Iron I, however, is questionable. One cannot speak with certainty of a kingdom or state until well into the eighth century.[47]

Similarly, in Edom there is a virtual absence of Late Bronze Age sites, and only a small number of Iron I settlements have been discovered.[48] Major urban sites, such as Edom's Iron II capital Buseirah, demonstrate a lack of sedentary occupation prior to the seventh century. In short, "Iron I period presence in Edom is sparse."[49] Like Moab, Edom did not evolve into a full-fledged kingdom until the eighth and seventh centuries, casting doubt upon the biblical traditions of Israel's trek around Edom and Moab before settling Palestine. In addition to an occupational gap in the Late Bronze Age, there is what one might call an extensive "kingdom gap" in southern Transjordan that precludes the existence of organized states until well *after* the purported time of Israel's settlement of Canaan. The biblical traditions that refer to Moabite and Edomite kingdoms in existence during Israel's early history are likely the products of a later age (Num. 20:14-21; 21:4, 10-13; Deut. 2:1-19).

Recent models of historical reconstruction have largely bracketed out the issue of early Israel's theological formation, to which Bright would surely have objected.[50] A notable exception is Rainer Albertz's recent attempt to delineate the history of Israelite religion theologically.

> [D]espite the consistent application of historical method, the task of a 'history of Israelite religion' today is clearly more theological than Eissfeldt thought. Granted, it is not concerned with 'absolute value' and 'the truth', but it *is* concerned with the correct evaluations and decisions in particular historical situations and with the historical truth which flashes out in the dispute over them[51]

Like Bright, Albertz takes pains to keep separate the *disciplines* of history and theology, while allowing for theological investigation within the field of historical

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46 J. Maxwell Miller, "Early Monarchy in Moab?" in *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan,* ed. P. Bienkowski (SAM 7; Sheffield: J. R. Collis Publications, 1992), pp.80, 86-88.

47 Randall W. Younker, however, questions whether Moab *ever* reached the status of "state" ("Moabite Social Structure" [BA, 60 (1997), pp.237-248]).

48 B. MacDonald, "Early Edom: The Relation between the Literary and Archaeological Evidence," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King,* ed. M. D. Coogan, J. C. Exum, and L. E. Stager (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), p.240; P. Bienkowski, "The Date of Sedentary Occupation in Edom: Evidence from Umm el-Biyara, Tawilan and Buseirah," in *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan,* ed. *idem* (SAM 7; Sheffield: J. R. Collis Publications, 1992) p.140.

49 MacDonald, "Early Edom," p.242.

50 Bloch-Smith and Nakhai, "A Landscape Comes to Life," p.68.

51 Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period,* vol. *1* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994) p.14.

inquiry, since the history of religion "describes a dialogical process of struggle for theological clarification."[52]

Be that as it may, it is sometimes claimed that little by way of material remains can be related to religion, much less to a theological investigation. To be sure, the evidence is scant. Nevertheless, what has been uncovered is telling. On the epigraphic front, the attestation of the theophoric name "Israel" on the Merneptah stela suggests some level of involvement on the part of religion in the formation of a people. On the archaeological front, two important cult sites have been uncovered in the northern hill country: Mt. Ebal, north of Shechem, and the "Bull Site" near Dothan. Neither site exhibits a dramatic break between earlier Canaanite and later Israelite cultic practice. The eighteen-cm-long bull statuette discovered near Dothan could represent either Canaanite Baal or Israelite YHWH [53] Such continuity is typical of Iron I religious structures, precluding any significant discontinuity from Canaanite practice, as is also confirmed by an examination of the iconography of the period. Late Bronze and Iron I remains are replete with images of male warrior deities, with a marked reduction of goddess motifs in the latter period.[54] Any indication of an emerging aniconic tradition is not indicated until the seventh century.[55]

Though fraught with uncertainty, the issue of monotheism's emergence in Israel is paramount in any reconstruction of Israel's past. By holding firm to a "functional monotheism" throughout Israel's history, beginning with the tribal league (3.159-60), Bright refused to see anything that suggested an evolution from polytheism.[56] Recent attempts to discern a thoroughgoing monotheism in the early monarchic period by drawing from the onomastic evidence—attestations of Israelite names that bear a theophoric element in extrabiblical inscriptions—have proved inconclusive.[57] Indeed, the significant percentage of Israelite personal names compounded with "Ba'al" on the Samaria ostraca of the eighth century and the widespread distribution of Asherah (or *dea nutrix)* figurines among many

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52 *Ibid.,* p.17.

53 Bloch-Smith and Nakhai, "A Landscape Comes to Life," pp.76-77.

54 Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *God, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), pp.49-131.

55 *Ibid.,* 354-360.

56 The methodological and definitional issues, which Bright largely avoided, are perceptively laid out by David L. Petersen in his essay "Israel and Monotheism: The Unfinished Agenda," in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs,* ed. Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen, and Robert R. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), pp.92-107.

57 Jeffrey H. Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions* (HSS 31; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), pp.36-41; Jeaneane Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names in Ancient Hebrew: A Comparative Study* (JSOTSup 49; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988). The evidence, however, is ambiguous. See Robert K. Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel* (JSOTSup 241; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp.106-108. Rainer Albertz observes that a significantly larger percentage of personal names with the theophoric element from YHWH is found during the late preexilic period than that attested in the early monarchy *(A History of Israelite Religion,* p.187).

"Israelite" sites, in addition to the much debated inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qom and Kuntillet 'Ajrud, which invoke Asherah along with YHWH in a blessing formula,[58] would seem to undercut claims of a pervasive monotheistic movement in Israel's early history.[59] As is clear from the archaeological picture, Israel emerged from the cultural and religious milieu of Canaan. Michael Coogan tersely concludes from the artifactual and comparative data that "it is essential to consider biblical religion as a subset of Israelite religion and Israelite religion as a subset of Canaanite religion.""[60] Hence, many scholars now speak of a *polytheistic Yahwism* characterizing the religion of early Israel, which included Asherah worship and other practices later deemed anathema by the editors of the biblical text.[61] It is typically claimed that the exile represented a watershed in the development of monotheism, as conveyed in Deutero-Isaiah, with the prior Deuteronomic movement toward cultic centralization in the seventh century setting the stage.

Such a picture of Israel's origins no doubt would be deemed "unsatisfying" by Bright. Exodus and Sinai, considered theological "root experiences" in Israel's historiography,[62] have virtually vanished as factors for reconstructing Israel's *indigenous* occupation of the central highlands and its emergent religion. But those who still ascribe some degree of historical integrity to the pentateuchal narrative (particularly the J strand) have pressed further Bright's own suspicion of a Midianite connection with early Yahwism, a link first suggested by German scholars in light of Exodus 2—3, 18.[63] This view has been championed most recently by Frank M. Cross.[64] Traditions regarding the friendly relations between the Midianites and the "Moses group," or "Proto-Israel," as reflected in the Exodus narrative, can be dated, so it is argued, prior to the period of hostilities and eventual dissolution of

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58 The debate as to whether "Asherah" attested in the inscriptions from these two sites refers to a cult object or a goddess has not been resolved. See Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of Gods,* pp.210-248.

59 William G. Dever, "Ancient Israelite Religion: How to Reconcile the Differing Textual and Artifactual Portraits?" in *Ein Gott allein,* ed. W. Dietrich and M. Klopfenstein (OBO 139; Freiburg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), pp.111-113.

60 Michael D. Coogan, "Canaanite Origins and Lineage: Reflections on the Religion of Ancient Israel," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross,* ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), p.115.

61 See the review of scholarship in Gnuse, *No Other Gods,* pp.115-20, and Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah* (HSM 46; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), p.388.

62 The phrase is borrowed from Emil L. Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), pp.8-16.

63 Bright, 3.127.

64 Frank M. Cross, "Reuben, the Firstborn of Jacob: Sacral Traditions and Early Israelite History," in his *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp.53-72 (revised and expanded from his essay in ZAW 100, suppl. [1988], pp.46-66).

Midianite culture in the tenth century B.C.[65] Moreover, since allegedly early Hebrew poetry depicts YHWH coming from Sinai, Seir, Edom, Teman, and Midian (Judges 5:4-5; Deut. 33:2; Hab. 3:3, 7), there is the possibility of a causal link between Midianite and Proto-Israelite religion by which Yahwism came to be the new orthodoxy in Palestine. As Bright himself observes, a twelfth-century site in the Timna' Valley yields the remains of a Midianite shrine that resembles the tabernacle described in Exodus 25–30 and 35–40.[66]

Among social-scientific models, the process that accounts for early Israel's social structure in the land is commonly referred to as "retribalization."[67] Others, how-ever, who claim some degree of historical credibility with respect to the exodus traditions find such a description problematic. Indeed, the notion of "retribalization," the devolution from a centralized to an egalitarian society through tribal affiliation, is sociologically unprecedented in contemporary societies. The enduring resilience of genealogical lists, for example, suggests that communities do not relinquish tribal affiliations only then to reestablish tribal ties after a period of crisis. The fact that tribal associations existed throughout the period of Israel's monarchy significantly undermines such a concept (see below). Critics of the "retribalization" model maintain that the tribal structure that came to characterize Israel cannot be attributed to merely internal processes, as for example by the flight of urban refugees into the highlands, but rather through cultural importation.[68] In any case, what is socially constitutive of early Israel remains a lively question among historians and anthropologists. As Bright correctly noted, particularly in his third edition, the kinship ties established and preserved in the genealogical material of the Bible imply far more than biological relations; they helped to constitute Israel as a *theological* family (3.163). Anthropological studies have largely confirmed that ancient genealogical lists do not aim so much to produce accurate lists of blood relations as, more broadly, to define social, political, religious, and economic relations.[69]

More complex than the tribal structure reflected in the biblical corpus, early Israel was a "segmented" society, a society without centralized power and consisting of a complex network of various social units, including family *(bêt 'ab),* clan *(mišpāḥâ),* and tribe *(šēbet* or *maṭṭeh).*[70] What has become increasingly clear is that the tribal structure is not unique to nomads, but is very much characteristic of a whole host of various social systems, including residential (e.g., village life). Moreover, the tribe

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65 Stager, "Forging and Identity," p.143.
66 Bright, 3.127.
67 See McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel,* pp.55, 57, 60.
68 Cross, "Reuben, the Firstborn of Jacob," p.69.
69 McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel,* pp.76-77. See the classic study of Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
70 The most recent comprehensive analysis can be found in S. Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Simor Ltd., 1996).

appears to have functioned primarily as a "territorial-demographic entity,"[71] in contrast to the expressly religious, specifically covenantal, function assigned by Bright. Yet, again, the question of religion cannot be bracketed out from discussion of Israel's tribal structure in the land, as Bright would insist. To state the obvious, land and religion are inextricably related.

C. TRANSITION TO MONARCHY

Though it never worried Bright that reference to David was lacking in the extant extrabiblical texts of his day, he would have, no doubt, felt heartened to know that a recently discovered ninth-century Aramaic stela fragment from Tel Dan makes apparent reference to the "House of David."[72] However, Bright's accounting of the rise of the monarchy, as well as the monarchy's territorial and social extent, has come under recent reevaluation. Historians versed in anthropological studies have surmised that the transition from a tribal, segmented society to a monarchy or centralized state must have been a highly complex process, one that would have involved various internal factors, including agricultural intensification, growing population, social stratification, and residential stability, in addition to external pressure.[73]

That some semblance of tribal structure remained intact throughout the establishment of the monarchy, as the Samaria ostraca of the eighth century indicate, suggests that something *less* than a radical reorganization of Israel's political structure occurred during the monarchy.[74] Moreover, familial metaphors, particularly references to "house(hold)," pervade even royal texts (e.g., 2 Samuel 7), not to mention extrabiblical documents,[75] suggesting that the success of the state system depended in large part on the continuance of kinship structures.[76] This is

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71 McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel,* p.94.

72 Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, "An Aramaic Stela Fragment from Tel Dan" *(IEJ,* 43 [1993], pp.81-98). Two other fragments at the site were discovered and published two years later, although questions persist as to whether they come from the same inscription *(idem,* "The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment" *[IEJ* 45 (1995), pp.1-21]. In addition, questions have been raised regarding the alleged reference to "House of David." See Frederick H. Cryer, "A 'BETDAWD' Miscellany: DWD, DWD' or DWDH?" *(SJOT, 9* [1995], pp.52-58); *idem, "Of* Epistemology, Northwest Semitic Epigraphy and Irony: The 'BYTDWD/House of David' Inscription Revisited" *JSOT, 69* [1996], pp.3-17); Niels Peter Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), pp.38-43; *idem* and Thomas L. Thompson, "Did Biran Kill David? The Bible in the Light of Archaeology" *(JSOT,* 64 [1994], pp.3-22); Ehud Ben Zvi, "On the Reading 'bytdwd' in the Aramaic Stele from Tel Dan" *(JSOT, 64* [1994], pp.25-32); Philip R. Davies, "'House of David' Built on Sand" *(BARev,* 20/4 [1994], pp.54-55); Baruch Halpern, 'The Stela from Dan: Epigraphic and Historical Considerations" *(BASOR,* 296 [1994], pp.63-80).

73 See Carol A. Meyers in "Kinship and Kingship: The Early Monarchy," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World,* pp.237-243.

74 Stager, "Forging an Identity," p.150.

75 *Ibid.,* p.151.

76 Meyers, "Kinship and Kingship," p.266.

confirmed archaeologically by the preservation of the typical Israelite three- and four-room houses in the later Iron II habitations. Between the premonarchical and monarchical periods, house sizes remained relatively the same, although much of the population began to concentrate around urban areas.[77]

The development of the monarchy, which even the biblical record depicts as progressing in fits and starts, led Israel through an intermediate stage of chiefdom or tribal kingdom before attaining a fully centralized bureaucracy.[78] The upshot is that the monarchy was not an alien institution suddenly imposed on Israel from the outside, but the result, in part, of certain internal trends.[79] External pressure from Philistine encroachment was clearly not the only factor in the formation of the Israelite monarchy.

Most recent studies on the development of monarchy in ancient Israel place the beginnings of a fully centralized bureaucracy in the time of Solomon.[80] However, as Bright already conceded in his third edition, the archaeological findings are open to interpretation, as in the case of the Megiddo stables.[81] The claim that certain monumental features of particular cities are directly attributable to Solomon, such as the six-chambered gate and casemated wall system, has recently been questioned.

Some of the fortifications at Gezer, Hazor, and Megiddo traditionally attributed to Solomon have been pushed forward by at least a century.[82] In addition, the expansive boundaries of the so-called Davidic-Solomonic empire, as described in the biblical text

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77 John S. Holladay, Jr., "The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: Political and Economic Centralization in the Iron IIA B," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land,* ed. T. E. Levy (New York: Facts on File, 1995), p.388. For a detailed discussion of the archaeological picture of the Israelite family, see Lawrence E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel" *(BASOR, 260* [1985], pp.1-35).

78 See the groundbreaking works of Frank S. Frick, *The Formation of the State in Ancient Israel* (SWBAS 4; Sheffield: Almond, 1985); and James W. Flanagan, *David's Social Drama: A Hologram of Israel's Early Iron Age* (SWBAS *7;* Sheffield: Almond, 1988).

79 See Robert B. Coote and Keith W. Whitelam, *The Emergence of Early Israel in Historical Perspective* (SWBAS *5;* Sheffield: Almond, 1987), pp.139-166.

80 A notable exception is David W. Jamieson-Drake, who argues from the archaeological evidence that a "full-scale state" in Judah was not achieved until the eighth century *(Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Sociological Approach* [SWBAS *9;* Sheffield: Almond, 1991], pp.138-145). See also Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People,* pp.313, *332-333.*

81 That these two large pillared buildings in Megiddo, as well as similar buildings at other sites (e.g, Hazor, Tel Sheva), are in fact stables rather than storehouses, see John S. Holladay, Jr., "The Stables of Ancient Israel: Functional Determinants of Stable Construction and the Interpretation of Pillared Building Remains of the Palestinian Iron Age," in *The Archaeology of Jordan and Other Studies,* ed. L. T. Geraty and L. G. Herr (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1986), pp.103-165.

82 See, e.g., D. Milson, 'The Design of the Royal Gates at Megido, Hazor, and Gezer" *(ZDPV,* 102 [1986], pp.87-92); Ze'ev Herzog, "Settlement and Fortification in the Iron Age," in *The Architecture of Ancient Israel: From the Prehistoric to the Persian Periods,* eds. A. Kempinski and R. Reich (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992), pp.231-246; G. J. Wightman, "The Myth of Solomon" *(BASOR, pp.277-78* [1990], pp.5-22); Israel Finkelstein, "On Archaeological Methods and Historical Consideration: Iron Age II and Samaria" *(BASOR, pp.277-78 [1990],* pp.109-119).

and which Bright himself accepted, have been cast in doubt, yielding a more "minimalistic" interpretation of the biblical and artifactual evidence. Such interpretations recognize first and foremost that the biblical evidence of an authentic empire is the product of a historiography that was not fully developed until the late exilic or early Persian period. Moreover, the claim in 1 Kings *4:24* regarding the glorious extent of Solomon's kingdom is without precedent even within the biblical narrative.[83]

In any case, centralization and social stratification in Israel continued unabated well into the divided kingdoms. Like Alt before him, Bright attributed the essential differences between the northern and southern kingdoms to the absence of dynastic leadership in the north. Most recent studies argue, however, that the political instability of the north—represented by the high number of usurpations recorded in the deuteronomistic history—was due not to any principle of charismatic leadership in Israel but to the existence of strong opposition parties outside the dynastic lines. [84] That such conflict was more evident in the northern than in the southern kingdom is attributable to greater heterogeneity in the demographic composition of the north.[85] Note, for example, the changes in location of Israel's capital in the biblical narrative.

Ultimately at stake for Bright in his discussion of the kingdoms was the theology that informed Israel's evolving identity. The transition to centralized state, according to Bright, was essentially a problematic development at odds with the covenantal polity of the tribal league. This somewhat critical, albeit nuanced, stance was pressed to its extreme by G. E. Mendenhall, who influenced much of Bright's later reconstruction of Israel's settlement of the land.[86] Frank M. Cross, moreover, regarded Solomon's reign as a decisive move toward consolidation *and* paganization.[87] Nevertheless, in view of the antiquity of divine kingship and its contribution to messianic hope in later tradition, the theology that legitimated the Israelite monarchy cannot, as J. J. M. Roberts has argued, be dismissed as an alien or pagan intrusion into biblical tradition.[88] 'The accommodation of human kingship to

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83 There is no evidence that either David or Solomon built an empire. See the balanced treatment in Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah,* pp.214-216; J. Maxwell Miller, "Separating the Solomon of History from the Solomon of Legend," in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium,* ed. Lowell K. Handy (SHCANE 11; Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp.10-20.

84 See, in particular, Giorgio Buccellati, *Cities and Nations of Ancient Syria: An Essay on Political Institutions with Special Reference to the Israelite Kingdoms* (Rome: Instituo di Studi del Vicino Oriente, 1967), pp.200-208; Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (BZAW 142; New York: de Gruyter, 1977), pp.171-182.

85 Finkelstein, 'The Great Transformation," p.362*;* McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel,* p.172.

86 See, e.g., G. E. Mendenhall, 'The Monarchy" *(Interpretation, 29* [1975], pp.155-170).

87 Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp.233-234, 239-241.

88 J.J.M. Roberts, "In Defense of the Monarchy: The Contribution of Israelite Kingship in Biblical Theology," in *Ancient Israelite Religion*, pp.377-396. Roberts's work on the "History of David's Rise," in fact, reflects much of Bright's own trust in the historical

divine kingship," Roberts claims, "appears to have taken place without any serious theological friction."[89]

Bright, however, was concerned with another kind of friction, namely, the tension between the Mosaic and monarchic modes of polity, based on allegedly contrasting notions of covenant, which also correspond well to the ancient Near Eastern forms of suzerainty treaty and grant, respectively.[90] For Bright there was an inexorable clash by which the Davidic covenant violated the Sinaitic by identifying God's will with the aims of the state [91] That these two covenants constituted an irreconcilable antithesis between moral obligation, on the one hand, and unconditional promise, on the other, however, distorts the biblical traditions. As Jon D. Levenson points out, the Davidic covenant as presented in 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 89:31-38 presupposes "obligation by the Sinaitic pact."[92] Indeed, severe punishment of the king is paralleled in a Hittite grant, which specifically demands the king's execution.[93] The Davidic covenant, in other words, is itself rife with prescriptive force.[94] In 2 Samuel 23:2-5, however, a high, cosmic theology is marshaled without Mosaic reference to justify God's covenant with David.[95] Nevertheless, this passage represents only the extreme. More characteristic of biblical tradition is the preclusion of the king's infallibility (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 89:33; Deut. 17:14-20). The fact that the morally binding ethos of Sinai is more pervasive in biblical tradition than the promise-oriented covenant of David indicates that the latter did not ultimately displace the former.[96] Rather, both covenants came to coexist in multirelational, constructive ways.

Bright had to admit even in his earliest work that the monarchy and its accompanying theologies made an indelible impact upon Israel's covenantal theology and the hope for God's kingdom.[97] But for the war chaplain who witnessed firsthand the most destructive power that nationalism has wrought upon human history, a state without the means to hold itself morally accountable represents the height of human depravity.

D. HISTORY AND FAITH

A few comments are in order regarding the value of Bright's textbook in contemporary theological discourse and education. Although Bright considered

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credibility of this account. That David's rise to kingship is documented as highly irregular suggests a degree of veracity (*ibid.,* p.383).

89 *Ibid.,* 384.

90 M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East" (*JAOS,* 90 [1970] p.185).

91 Bright, 3.227.

92 Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p.213.

93 Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant," p.189.

94 Bright, in fact, concedes this more fully in *Covenant and Promise: The Prophetic Understanding of the Future in Pre-Exilic Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), pp.70-71.

95 Levenson, curiously, does not cite this highly relevant text.

96 Levenson, *Sinai and Zion,* pp.214-215.

97 John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (New York/Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953), pp.39-44, 86-87, 91-92, 165-167.

himself primarily a historian, recent scholars have tried to cast him in the exclusive role of theologian.[98] Jon Levenson, for example, has argued that Bright essentially sought to highlight certain theologically appealing themes in Israel's history in order to "concoct a 'unity'" out of the Old Testament, demonstrating that Bright was more a Christian theologian than a serious historian of Israelite religion.[99] To be sure, Bright did highlight in his modestly theological works the themes of "promise" and "covenant" throughout much of the Old Testament, but he never intended to write an Old Testament theology or anything close to it.[100] Moreover, the dialectic of "promise" and "covenant" did not straightjacket his presentation of Israel's history and religion, particularly in his textbook. For Bright, Israel's variegated history and Israel's faith, dynamic as it was, were inextricably tied.

Bright considered the historical quest to be of fundamental significance to biblical interpretation and theological reflection. Since his third edition, however, a plethora of alternative methods of interpretation have exploded upon the hermeneutical scene, all having in various degrees decried the so-called hegemony of historical criticism in biblical studies.[101] From structuralism and canonical criticism to reader response and liberation hermeneutics, such "post-critical" approaches have eschewed the quest for the historical background of the text in favor of highlighting the interaction between text and reader, the experience of the interpreter, and the imaginative or narrative world of the text.[102] Simply put, these methods find that "what the text meant"—that is, its earliest discernible meaning—is irrelevant in determining "what the text means" for readers today. Amid their bewildering variety, all the methods are in substantial agreement that the historical quest as an objective enterprise is, at best, an impossible pursuit and, at worst, a needless enterprise that fosters only elitism within the guild and church.[103]

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98 Typical is the preconception that Bright helped, along with G. Ernest Wright, to spearhead a theological movement. But Bright considered himself to be doing nothing of the sort. Cf. Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), pp.32-50; Leo Perdue, *The Collapse of History* (OBT; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), pp.19-44.

99 Jon D. Levenson, "Why Jews are Not Interested in the Bible," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel,* ed. Jacob Neusner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), p.284 (see revised form in Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993], p.36).

100 E.g., John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967), p.136; *idem, Covenant and Promise,* cf. 3.148-362.

101 For a critique of the view that the so-called "historical critical method" played a domineering role in biblical criticism, see James Barr, "Remembrances of 'Historical Criticism': Speiser's Genesis Commentary and its History of Reception," in *God* Who *Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner,* eds. William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), forthcoming.

102 For a fuller discussion, see Leo G. Perdue, *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), pp.7-11.

103 It should be pointed out that the driving force behind John Bright's scholarship was his desire to disseminate to the church and general public the fruits of biblical scholarship. In an interview held soon after the publication of the third edition of his

Consequently, biblical theology during the past generation has become more focused on the text and the reader than on the historical background of the text. Indeed, two recent Old Testament theologies consider the historical realities that lie behind the text to be largely irrelevant for theological discernment.[1O4] The following statement of Walter Brueggemann is telling:

> [Historical criticism]. . . is, on the face of it, incongruent with the text itself. The text is saturated with the odd, the hidden, the dense, and the inscrutable—the things of God. Thus in principle, historical criticism runs the risk that the methods and assumptions to which it is committed may miss the primary intentionality of the text. Having missed that, the commentaries are filled with unhelpful philological comment, endless redactional explanations, and tedious comparisons with other materials. Because the primal Subject of the text has been ruled out in principle, scholars are left to deal with these much less interesting questions.[105]

By shifting the focus of Old Testament theology exclusively to the rhetorical contours of the text, including its imaginative thought-world, Brueggemann dismisses history, the ontology "behind the witness," as outmoded positivism and a distraction from the true enterprise of theological interpretation.[106]

Aside from the fact that Bright's textbook is anything but "unhelpful," "endless," and "tedious," it is surprising that for all of Brueggemann's protestations against the historical quest, the point of departure in his treatment of Old Testament literature is the recognition that the "*Old Testament in its final form is a product and a response to the Babylonian exile.*"[107] As even Brueggemann's theology demonstrates, the extent to which history does and should play a role in theological reflection is more a matter of degree. At any rate, Brueggemann has polemically posed the question concerning the theological value of reconstructing Israel's past, the material and cultural world "behind" the biblical text. Put more sharply (and in line with Bright's own intentions for his textbook): is there pedagogical value in a historical presentation of Israel's faith in theological education today?[108] Is the *historian's* history irrelevant to the study of the Old Testament or biblical theology?

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textbook, Bright comments on identifying an "outstanding motif" in his work: "those of us who have gone more deeply into the subject have a duty to communicate to the church in a usable form what we know—and to the general public if they are interested" (Kendig B. Cully, "Interview with John Bright: Scholar of the Kingdom" *[The Review of Books and Religion,* 11/4 (1983), p.4]).

1O4 See Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), pp.42-49, 103-105; and the more nuanced, but nonetheless dismissive, position of James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), pp. 347-354.

105 Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament,* p.104.

106 *Ibid.,* p.206.

107 *Ibid., p.74* (original italics).

108 This is a different and, I believe, more relevant question to the one Kurt Noll addresses in his article "Looking on the Bright Side of Israel's History: Is There

As modern archaeologists and historians have attempted to reconstruct Israel's past without dependence on the biblical witness, the question arises as to whether the converse is also possible: can one study the Bible theologically without recourse to history? Can one discern the force of Amos's indictments or plumb the depths of Hosea's message without a sense of the sociohistorical conditions of the northern kingdom in the eighth century? Can one fully grasp the scathing polemic of Second Isaiah without an awareness of the cultural and theological challenges the exilic community faced in Babylon?

Bright would no doubt remind current practitioners in the field that the theological interpretation of scripture would be all the poorer without recourse to the "lively sense" of Israel's history. For Bright, Israel's history was a legitimate entrée into the "strange world of the Bible," to borrow from Barth. To be sure, historically oriented biblical scholars have laden that history with the presuppositions and prejudices of their own cultural contexts.[109] Bright was no exception. Yet the field continues to advance as earlier reconstructions are modified or rejected in the face of mounting material and epigraphic evidence, and continued engagement with the biblical witness. That Bright was more than willing to nuance, modify, and correct his earlier views is a testimony to the seriousness with which he treated the historical enterprise and a credit to his own ability as a consummate historian.

Perhaps Bright would find the current situation of theological inquiry as nothing less than a move toward gnosticism, a perennial temptation in biblical interpretation. To deny the importance of historical study would be tantamount to denying divine activity in and through history, which cuts to the very nature of the Judeo-Christian God as portrayed in scripture. For those who continue to hold scripture in one hand and the historian's critical (including *self* critical) tools in the other, the final recourse for maintaining the union of history and faith is the fact that readers of scripture are themselves the product of history and tradition. They struggle with the challenges of commitment and the temptations of competing allegiances. Rather than retreating into the realm of the imaginary, *they* find themselves caught up in the fray of political and social existence, within the messiness of history, ever seeking theological clarification of who they are, to whom they belong, and what they are to do. For this reason alone, history must remain one of the quintessential acts of biblical interpretation.

Pedagogical Value in a Theological Presentation of History?" *(Biblical Interpretation, 7* [1999], pp.1-27). Within the context of theological education, the answer is self-evident. The real issue in theological education is whether there is any value at all in a historical presentation. Brueggemann's theology, for example, would seem to exclude it.

109 See the perceptive article by Jack Sasson, "On Choosing Models for Recreating Israelite Pre-Monarchic History" (*JSOT*, 21 [1981], pp.3-24). The promising field of "new historicism" is one that encourages historical reconstruction and at the same time radically questions the cultural preconceptions of the interpreter. See F. W. Dobbs-Alsopp, "Rethinking Historical Criticism" *(Biblical Interpretation, 7* [1999], pp.235-271).