PART I

INTRODUCTION

Israel and Judah

1

Why Israel?

The Bible would make a fascinating historical source, if only we could figure out how to use it as such. It is unique as a written corpus from the ancient world, not because it is religiously sacred, though perhaps its uniqueness is a result of the process that made it so. The Bible regales us with tales from the world of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia, offered from the perspective of the runaways and the defeated. It reports the reigns of kings not in the voice of royal propaganda but with distance and capacity for critique. It presents what are cast as the ruminations of men who spoke for God against both the people and the powers that led them. All this writing may date to settings long after the occasions portrayed, yet the literature is patently a patchwork of reused materials, not always well understood, certainly not a straightforward work of unified fiction.[1]

Often, current discussion of the Bible's relationship to history revolves around the notion of "historicity."[2] Did it happen, or happen the way the story says? Did the individual characters exist? More broadly, does the story preserve some memory or knowledge of the time portrayed? If the answer is "no" or there is significant doubt about the matter, it can be difficult to make a case for historical investigation before the date of the latest editor's hand, and this will in no way illuminate the object portrayed. Since the nineteenth century, the task of tracing the process of a text's formation carried with it the hope of access to earlier historical settings, especially at the oldest core. Julius Wellhausen's famous analysis of sources in the Pentateuch (1885) was defined as *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*. The question is what historical knowledge can be sifted from narrative that has been constructed through

[1] This thought recalls Erhard Blum's statement that the Bible is neither "history" nor "literature" in the modern senses, especially literature as fiction, with no claim to depict the real world (2010, 61).

[2] This vocabulary is now ubiquitous, but it became prevalent in biblical study through challenges to particular historical reconstructions, especially in the early work of Thomas Thompson (1974).

layers of revision and combination. Literary-historical analysis such as that of Wellhausen will continue unabated, in spite of its frustrations. As historical settings are proposed and explored for earlier phases of biblical writing, the primary division may be between content from the people of Israel and content from the people of Judah. In the obscure process of its creation, the Bible joined the stories and the experiences of these two peoples into one, explaining Judah as part of Israel and Israel as belonging to the proper authority of Judah's royal house of David. Historically, Israel and Judah were distinct, and it is the voice of Israel in particular that can be lost in Judah's choir. If we are to gain ground in reassessing the historical utility of the Bible for study of ancient Israel, or the southern Levant in the context of broader antiquity, the isolation of Israelite content in the Bible offers an essential point of departure.

A. Judah's Bible

The Bible, as I will call the Tanakh or Christian Old Testament, belongs to and was created by the people of Judah, whose identity may be rendered in English as "Judahite," "Judean," or "Jewish" for the same Hebrew designation as *yĕhûdî*. Although Jews have taken and been given a variety of names throughout their history, this one derives from their direct origin in the kingdom of Judah, as distinct from its immediate neighbor to the north, which the books of Kings designate Israel.[3] When I define the primary division of biblical material as coming from Judah or Israel, I refer to those who would have understood themselves as belonging to the people identified by one kingdom or the other, both during their existence and afterward. Insofar as people from Judah laid claim to the name Israel, I consider this a Judah perspective, whatever the merits of the claim. Although it is not certain how the kingdom of Judah was named before the eighth century, the inheritance of Israelite material takes place after the realm was definitely called Judah and may be considered literally Judahite. It is possible that people from Israel still identified themselves with that kingdom and its heritage both after the Assyrian conquest of the late eighth century and after Babylon's replication of the Assyrian empire in the early sixth century. While the kingdoms of Israel and Judah are habitually paired as "northern" and "southern," I have worked to avoid this terminology. In spite of the geographical juxtaposition, which does offer convenient points of reference, the two are not mirror images in political or historical terms. This is essential to the whole interpretation offered here.

For focus on the people directly related to the kingdom that was dismantled by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E., I will use the form "Judahite," for its parallel with the complementary form "Israelite." The importance of the Bible's Jewish or Judahite character can be underestimated. When the peoples called Israel and Judah are treated as a single entity, differentiated only by minor matters

[3] For a thoughtful review of the early use of "Judah" terminology in the postmonarchic transition, see Blenkinsopp (2009), "Judeans or Jews?" 19–27.

of degree in the biblical account of their past, the particularly Judahite matrix for all biblical writing may be missed. It is finally Judah's idea that the two kingdoms shared a much older identity, with Judah part of the larger entity named Israel. We do not have clear access to Israelite views of the relationship. In simple historical terms, the Bible was created by the people of Judah, with its key stages of formation taking place just before the fall of Judah's kingdom and then in the generations afterward, as a Judahite or Jewish people struggled to maintain an identity against various forces of dispersion and assimilation.

The Judahite nature of the Bible can be seen first of all in its traditional structure as Tanakh: Torah (Teaching), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings). It appears that the Torah was fixed in Jewish sacred tradition before the Nevi'im and the Ketuvim, which were collected according to different lines of reasoning and perhaps closed at roughly the same time (van der Toorn 2007, chapter 9). The Judah character of the whole collection is most explicit in these latter two sections, which directly address the period of the kingdoms, the fall of Judah, and what followed. Without the sweeping historical and communal preoccupations that dominate the Nevi'im, the Ketuvim most clearly derive from Judah's world. They are gathered around the long and venerable books of Psalms and Proverbs, associated with David and Solomon, respectively. These were the founding kings of Judah, as recalled in biblical tradition, and they were honored for song and wisdom. Although David and Solomon are celebrated as rulers of an inclusive Israel, the books are evidently the heirloom of Judah, with the main point of reference Jerusalem, city of palace and temple.[4] Every other book in the Writings is arguably of the same Judahite world, either associated with Jerusalem or composed in settings after the kingdom's end.

Working forward, the Nevi'im are likewise dominated by Judahite content and concerns, though this section incorporates material focused on Israel, aside from Jerusalem and the house of David. The second part of the Nevi'im, or Latter Prophets, consists of fifteen books of writing and lore defined by named prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; then twelve shorter works. Of these, only the oldest writing may reflect the world of Israel, in Hosea and Amos; the three long opening books all belong to Judah. The first part, traditionally called the Former Prophets, constitute a history of the people from their entry

[4] Although the Psalms are widely agreed to represent a collection shaped in the "Second Temple period," a category defined by the temple to Yahweh in Jerusalem, the particular location and range for that process need not have occurred in Jerusalem itself. In one exchange, Gillingham (2010, 120–1) sets her interpretation of the dominant transmittors against that of Zenger (1999), as "levitical singers" in Jerusalem instead of refugees in the diaspora longing for their sacred point of reference. Both approaches are Judah- and Jerusalem-centered. Whether early or later, the book of Proverbs is defined by kings from the house of David: Solomon (1:1 and 10:1) and Hezekiah (25:1). In an unusual approach to texts from the intellectual life of scribes, David Carr argues that Proverbs comes from the earliest stratum of biblical composition, probably in the early monarchy, measured by the Solomonic association (2011, chapter 14, "Proverbs and Israel's Early Oral-Written Curriculum"). This treatment of the setting was once more standard (e.g., McKane 1970, 8–9).

into the land they long possessed to the fall of each kingdom, first Israel in 720 B.C.E., and then Judah.[5] These books will form an important part this study: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. Through the reigns of David and Solomon, this sequence is defined first of all by Israel as the principal category, so that Judah takes center stage only with the division into two kingdoms, which is recounted in 1 Kings 12. In spite of Israel's dominant position as the people in view through this narrative history, Judah's pervasive interest is still visible. Through the books of Kings, Judah is ultimately the guardian of Yahweh's temple and of his chosen royal house at Jerusalem. Israel is brought down by the "sin of Jeroboam," the founding king of the northern realm at the time of the split, and no Israelite ruler can shake this indictment. The destination of these books is the collapse of Judah and the survival of its people in Babylonian exile. Before Kings, the books of Samuel are occupied with David, who makes Jerusalem his capital. A time before kings is recalled in the book of Judges, which has little interest in Judah except in the opening that frames it in chapter 1, signaling the ultimately Judahite audience for the whole. Finally, Joshua takes for granted the priority of Judah in conquering this Promised Land and in defining tribal allotments for Israel's peoples (Josh. 10, 15). A case can be made for larger literary connections that can come only from later, Judahite hands, but Judah's ultimate interest can be seen from the content alone.[6]

This leaves the Torah, a tangle of teaching and story bound together under the authority of Moses. Both story and teaching are framed above all by writing that is broadly considered "priestly," a type that displays various affinities with ritual, sacred occasions and personnel, and the institutions of religion.[7] The book of Leviticus and large parts of Exodus and Numbers reflect this type, which seems to have Jerusalem's sacred structures as a norm.[8] The same

[5] The chronology of Samaria's final defeat as the capital of Israel is complicated, in that the last king Hoshea appears to have been deposed in 722 by Shalmaneser V, who then died that year, so that Sargon II had to consolidate Assyria's control of the region in 720 (Rainey 2006a, 232–35).

[6] Richard Nelson (1997, 8) considers that even what he identifies as the predeuteronomistic (before Josiah and the exile) level of Joshua has a "distinctly Judahite" outlook, with particular reference to the southern campaign of chapter 10.

[7] This broad characterization is not affected significantly by any number of nuances, including the debate over whether there was once a freestanding priestly document, one point on which Blum (1984) and Carr (1996) disagree, and current interest in defining "post-priestly" material (e.g., Kratz 2002; Otto 2002).

[8] This is even the interpretation of the priestly (P) writing in the circle of scholars that date it within the period of monarchy. Menahem Haran (1978, 146–7) associated the whole priestly program with the vision of Hezekiah's reform (2 Kings 18), though the cultic traditions would have had earlier antecedents. Working in dialogue with Israel Knohl's hypothesis (1995) of a Holiness (H) school revision of P, Jacob Milgrom (1991, 34) attributes the work of H to the time of Hezekiah and places the roots of P in eleventh-century Shiloh, before the monarchy, but as the direct source for Jerusalem temple and Judah religious traditions. It has been proposed that priestly (P) writing came instead from Bethel, in the period just after the fall of Judah and destruction of the Jerusalem temple (Fritz 1977, 154–7). One direct response to this minority view comes from

Jerusalem temple appears to be the point of reference for the priestly author of the creation story in Genesis 1 (Smith 2010, 70). Unlike the rest of the Bible, however, Judah's role in the Torah is largely submerged beneath the rubric of Israel, evidently as part of an emphasis on Israel as a unity before entry into the land. In Exodus through Deuteronomy, Judah is only named in tribal lists. Beyond the large quantity of priestly writing, the degree of Judahite scribal responsibility for the Torah is a matter of debate. The dominance of the priestly, evidently Jerusalem-based voice, however, places the finished version of this biblical section in a Judahite setting as well, evidently to serve a community that defined itself in part by religious practice after its political distinctness was lost.[9]

What remains to consider is the narrative that spans the books of Genesis through Kings, in the Torah and the Former Prophets. Through most of its length, this extended narrative is occupied with Israel, until Solomon's departure at the end of 1 Kings 11. This strange fact is one of the most important features of the Bible's basic structure. Based on the larger character of the Bible as the literary trove of Judah's survivors, its grand narrative should recount the origins, history, and identity of the people of Judah. Instead, Judah's story of origins turns to the history of a people called Israel to explain how events led to the appearance of David, the founder of Judah's royal house. This other people of Israel in fact represented the chief rival of Judah to the north, a sometime oppressor of the smaller realm to the south. Somehow, the eventual survivors of Judah, long after the kingdom of Israel had failed, considered that their own history was best told in terms of this neighbor, with whom they understood themselves to be deeply connected.

Could writers from Judah have created this Israelite background without any reference to Israel's own lore? It is possible, but such material should betray an ultimate ignorance of Israel's land and society. As we will find in the texts reviewed in Part II, this is far from true. Considerable material from this primary narrative assumes an Israelite geography and Israelite social and political structures. Judahite scribes constructed their grand narrative from the remains of Israel's own heritage, often obscuring the distinct tones of the Israelite tales that they had taken on. Before any questions of date, such as writing from before or after the fall of Judah, the first crucial distinction among the contents of the Bible must be between the mass of finished Judahite composition and the bits of material from Israel. This Israelite material may be sparse and difficult to extract with confidence, but it was so powerful that it gave form to the primary biblical narrative as we have it.

Klaus Koenen (2003, 75), who finds it unexpected that the Jerusalem priesthood would build its authority on Bethel practice and priestly lore. Because Zadok was a priest associated specifically with David, an editor had to find an older authority linked to the Sinai tradition and went to Aaron – not because of a link of priestly tradition to Bethel.

[9] Lester Grabbe (2003, 222–3) characterizes the primary purpose of Leviticus as "theological," casting a religious vision for Persian-period Jews. Similar views are widespread.

B. The Problematic Place of Israel

Over the course of the twentieth century, the Bible gained a substantial historical context from the results of archaeology in the lands occupied by Israel and Judah, as well as from a growing mass of textual evidence from the wider Near East, especially in cuneiform. As work continued on how the Bible took form, the historical dimension of "literary history" could increasingly be evaluated in terms that reached beyond the biblical storyline on its own. As embodied especially in the work of William F. Albright and his students, the prospects for grounding the biblical narrative in early history seemed impressive.[10] In his *History of Israel*, John Bright observed that earlier hesitation to find any more than "reminiscences" in the ancestor narratives of Genesis could now be considered too cautious. Rather, "it has become increasingly evident that a new and more sympathetic evaluation of the traditions is called for," based mainly on "archaeological research" (1981, 68–9).

Meanwhile, European biblical scholars responded to the new evidence with equal interest but with a reservoir of caution regarding how the texts must then have been created and transmitted. Even where their interests tended more toward reconstructing Israelite society and religion in a Near Eastern context, Americans relied heavily on the work of German specialists such as Albrecht Alt, Martin Noth, and Gerhard von Rad.[11] In spite of considerable differences in perspective, this generation shared one crucial conception: that a "United Monarchy" under kings David and Solomon was central to the preservation and transmission of traditions about Israel's past. From this starting point, interpreters could disagree about how much the biblical narrative from Genesis through Judges remembered of life before monarchy, but the two later kingdoms could only be viewed as fractions of the whole called Israel.

In recent decades, the relationship of the Bible to history has been transformed once again. Naturally, there is enormous variety in approaches, so the change is most visible in what is taken by most as common ground and what must be defended. The United Monarchy of David and Solomon is no longer a standard point of reference in discussion of settings for composition of substantial biblical documents. Focus has drifted into later periods, beginning with the world of Israel and Judah as separate kingdoms. David and Solomon still dominate the later part of the primary biblical narrative, and they must be accounted for, but if the writing itself derives from the separate kingdoms and their descendants, the political framework for these figures must also be evaluated in terms of advocacy and memory. The literary foundation for a unified Israel that included Judah can no longer be located confidently in the reign of Solomon. Instead, the first biblical efforts at combining longer narratives into

[10] Albright's influence is difficult to overestimate; see, for a statement of his broad perspective, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (1957).

[11] For a sampling of their work translated into English, see Alt (1968), Noth (1966a, 1972, 1981), and von Rad (1962 and 1965).

collections with inclusive, perhaps "national," interest may come from the time of the two kingdoms. The unity in question must then be either Judah or Israel, and the perspectives expressed may not be shared by both communities. In the current environment, "Israel" must be defined afresh, in relation to kings, as an entity that preceded kings, and in relation to Judah.

While I do not intend to review at length the scholarship that has brought us to the current interpretive situation, certain basics are essential. As I see it, the most significant shift in the past generation has been the abandonment of the notion that key biblical collections were created in the tenth century, under the united Israel of David and Solomon. This idea now has little support, and it is necessary to grasp the extent to which its credence has been lost. With writing from a United Monarchy no longer defining early Israel by a unity that included Judah, the early stages of biblical composition must be located in two separate kingdoms of uncertain relationship. Some have already grappled with this need, and their work represents my point of departure.

1. Israel and Judah United

While the mid-twentieth century was peopled with numerous great figures who contributed an enormous variety of innovative and sometimes enduring ideas to the study of ancient Israel and the Bible, the most important was perhaps Martin Noth (1902–1968). Noth's syntheses represented a point of departure for both historians and biblical scholars, even when individual elements were challenged. Although he favored Albrecht Alt's hypothesis of a more peaceful process of original Israelite settlement rather than a military conquest, Noth took seriously the Bible's portrait of a time of judges, when the Israel of David and Solomon already existed without need of kings. He accounted for Israel's premonarchic unity by a tribal league that shared worship of a single god Yahweh (1966b). For the Bible itself, Noth envisioned a strong continuity between the first written texts and oral lore that lay behind these. Furthermore, the golden age of David and Solomon, as depicted in the books of 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, could provide a setting for considerable early writing in the Bible. In his *History of Israel* (1960), Noth devotes a section to "Israel's Intellectual and Cultural Life under David and Solomon" (pp. 216ff.). With the influx of new wealth, and the framework of a royal administration, writing became more widespread. The Bible's "wisdom tradition" goes back to this time, and with laudable caution, Noth suggests that most of the narrative for a united Israel first took some written form in Solomon's age:

> Difficult though it is to compile a real history of Israelite literature, since most of the writings incorporated in the Old Testament are anonymous and impossible to date precisely, and on the whole not extant in their original separate forms, it is, nevertheless, possible to make one or two fairly certain statements in the present context. . . . Writing which it is possible to describe as literature, in the sense of having been the deliberate and considered work of a professional writer, has come down to us first from the age of David and Solomon. (p. 219)

"Legendary material" as found in the books of Moses, the occupation of the land in Joshua, and in the Judges tales, is older than the monarchy and went through a complicated process of recording, before the form of "historical chronicle" appeared during the period of David and Solomon, to replace popular legends (p. 219). The first incentive for creating such chronicles was the figure of David himself (p. 220), who inspired the account of his rise in 1 Sam 16:14–2 Sam. 5:10, composed during David's own life, and then a tale built around who would succeed him, written some time before Solomon's death (2 Sam. 7–20; 1 Kings 1–2). Although the dates for other compositions are less secure, "it is probable that the oldest large-scale literary recapitulation and formulation of the extensive and originally oral material of the Pentateuchal tradition, the work of the so-called Yahwist, may be attributed to this period" (p. 222). The combination of invasion accounts in Joshua 1–12 could come from the period just after Solomon's death (p. 222).

According to this approach, which Noth shared with most others from his period and which remains influential in some circles today, all the main elements of the Bible's narrative for early Israel already existed in a retrievable biblical form before the separation into two kingdoms that we encounter in 1 Kings 12. Israel is described as a unity that included Judah, and the texts can be trusted historically because they were created when this unity had not yet been broken. After all, the David narratives themselves present Judah as David's first domain (2 Sam. 2–4), and Judah is the first to welcome David's rule after Absalom's revolt (2 Sam. 19). The Bible's people could look back to Israel as their original name because the two kingdoms shared the same narrative heritage. In the Torah, two parallel renditions of Israel's beginnings were preserved in separate settings and later combined into one. The older Yahwistic (J) version, which freely invoked God as Yahweh from the first chapters of Genesis, was first put in writing during the united monarchy and remained the property of David's house at Jerusalem after the political split.[12] An Elohistic (E) version, which reserved the name "Yahweh" for revelation at Sinai and preferred the generic "God" (Elohim) in the book of Genesis, took distinct form in the northern kingdom that took the name Israel after its separation from Judah, whether in the ninth or eighth centuries (Jaroš 1982, 26–30). Already in the united monarchy, then, an account of Israel's origins included a sequence of ancestors named Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were promised some part of Canaan as a future land for their descendants. This burgeoning family moved to Egypt, from which it had to be rescued through breathtaking divine intervention under the leadership of Moses. The relationship of the Torah to the book of Joshua was disputed, but the account of invasion by a single Israelite people was widely

[12] One particularly influential portrait of the J source was sketched by Gerhard von Rad, who cast its author as a major intellectual force, the one who gave theological shape to much of the Bible's account of Israel's origins, specifically as part of a Solomonic "enlightenment" ("The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," in von Rad 1966, 1–78). For a succinct account of key stages in the development of research on J, see Römer (2006a).

dated to roughly the same period.[13] For Israel before the divided monarchy, this left the book of Judges and the narratives of Saul, David, and Solomon. The united monarchy, celebrated as David's glory yet dependent on the previous achievement of Saul, was widely considered an early inspiration for historical interest and grounded in composition very closely to the events portrayed. Judges had to be left a special case, because the absence of Judah and Jerusalem required a northern setting. The whole picture, which contrasts so sharply with biblical portrayals of Israel and Judah as kingdoms, was understood to derive from premonarchic times. When Wolfgang Richter (1966, 339) proposed his still-influential hypothesis of a Book of Saviors in Judges 3–9, he dated the connected composition to the reign of Jehu in the mid-ninth century, based on sources from before the monarchy.[14]

2. *The Breakdown of Consensus*

Although there remain advocates of this older system in updated versions, the past generation has brought wave after wave of challenges, with repeated proposals that the larger compositions were much later than once thought, along with doubt that much survives of the building blocks from which these were created.[15] In the United States, the most prominent early critic was John Van Seters, who argued the main outline of his analysis in two early books before working out the details of his pentateuchal interpretation in two more.[16] After a key early initiative by Lothar Perlitt (1969), the tide of European opinion began to turn with H. H. Schmid's argument (1976) that the Yahwist (J, in the books of Moses) must date to the same general time as the Deuteronomist, so the late seventh or sixth century.[17] At close to the same time, Rolf Rendtorff (1990 [1977]) proposed an alternative to the extended J and E sources of the old system that would still allow the possibility of shorter early compositions, in

[13] Noth defined a "Deuteronomistic History" that followed Deuteronomy and incorporated the rest of the Bible's primary historical narrative, including Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. This left the frame for the Bible's earliest Torah in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, effectively a "Tetrateuch" (Noth 1972). The alternative was that the conquest recounted in Joshua must have been linked to the exodus escape story at an early stage, thus creating an effective "Hexateuch" (von Rad 1966, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch").

[14] In his recent study of how the book of Judges took form, Philippe Guillaume (2004, 13) maintains the hypothesis of a Book of Saviors, which he dates to the late eighth century, after the end of Israel as a kingdom.

[15] In his contribution to the Anchor Bible commentary series, William Propp (1999, 49) analyzes the book of Exodus in terms of the classic sources, attributing E to the northern kingdom and J to the south, without committing himself to more specific dates of origin. Ronald Hendel, who is responsible for a new Anchor Bible commentary on Genesis, likewise retains the J and E sources of the Documentary Hypothesis, though it is not clear to which dates he attributes their composition (2005, 37, etc.). Richard E. Friedman has offered a systematic defense of the old system with early dates (2005; cf. 1987).

[16] The crucial arguments are found in Van Seters (1975; 1983), followed by Van Seters (1992; 1994).

[17] Schmid's initiative was then developed by his student Martin Rose (1981).