The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible

History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition

The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible undertakes a comprehensive reevaluation of the Bible's primary narrative in Genesis through Kings as it relates to history. It divides the core textual traditions along political lines that reveal deeply contrasting assumptions, an approach that places biblical controversies in dialogue with anthropologically informed archaeology. Starting from close study of selected biblical texts, the work moves toward historical issues that may be illuminated by both this material and a larger range of textual evidence. The result is a synthesis that breaks away from conventional lines of debate in matters relating to ancient Israel and the Bible, setting an agenda for future engagement of these fields with wider study of antiquity.

Daniel E. Fleming has taught and served in the Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University since 1990, when he received his doctorate in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations from Harvard University. He currently serves as Chair of the Advisory Committee for NYU's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World. The current volume was launched with financial support from a Guggenheim Fellowship (2004). Fleming was also a senior Fulbright Fellow to France (1997–8) and recipient of a one-year research fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies (2004–5). He is the author of three books and co-author of a fourth: *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar* (1992); *Time at Emar* (2000); *Democracy's Ancient Ancestors* (Cambridge, 2004); and, with Sara J. Milstein, *The Buried Foundation of the Gilgamesh Epic* (2010). Fleming has contributed many articles on topics related to the ancient Near East to a range of professional journals and collected works.

Advance Praise for *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible*

"For decades the field of biblical studies has been engaged in a series of literary and historical debates regarding the Hebrew Bible and ancient Israel, yet there has been little consensus about these subjects. Fleming breaks through this impasse with a remarkably fresh insight into Israel as an association of groups engaged in collective and collaborative politics differing considerably from Judah's more centralized political life. Fleming also explores several important cross-cultural analogies for Israel's tradition of collaborative politics from the ancient Near East and traditional societies from Mesoamerica, the American Southwest, and pre-Viking Denmark. For this aspect of his research, Fleming draws heavily on recent theory on power and political organization. This book is a superb piece of scholarship; every chapter marked by deep erudition and engaging insights. No professor or graduate student interested in the Hebrew Bible or ancient Israel can do without it."

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"Scholarly debate about the early history of Israel has run into the sand. Extreme conservatives and radical revisionists shout across each other with little solid gain. The combination of a thoroughly critical analysis of the written sources together with an informed use of archaeological and other sources has been lacking until now. With his major proposal that we should disentangle the account of Israel from the Bible that has come to us from Judah, Fleming has broken this stalemate. While his analysis will no doubt provoke debate, nobody can deny the authority of the scholarship that he displays."

– H. G. M. Williamson, Regius Professor of Hebrew, University of Oxford

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To my students,
with whom I have learned what is in this book

Contents

Preface

As we read the Bible, no matter how self-consciously careful we may be, it is natural to let it set our expectations, to provide the framework for understanding its contents. The narrative center of the Bible is a meandering account of the origins and experiences of a people named Israel. In a form that has been connected by various seams, this narrative begins with creation and Israel's ancestry in Genesis; continues through Moses' leadership in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; and then addresses the life of this people in its own land, through Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. These nine books have been called the Primary History, or the Enneateuch, and no matter the specific process by which they reached their finished form, their guiding story suffuses our sense of what the Bible offers for historical evaluation.[1] Even the isolation of a "biblical Israel" from whatever existed in history defers to this overarching vision (Davies 1992).

One central idea in this biblical narrative has repeatedly drawn the critical attention of biblical scholars and historians: it has to do with a single people from beginning to end. The two kingdoms of Israel and Judah that are described in the books of Kings ultimately belong to one people of Yahweh, called Israel. Historians in particular have labored to use the Bible cautiously in their reconstructions, and nonbiblical evidence has played a greater role in recent years, especially as archaeology yields more material and drives historical analysis. A handful of nonbiblical texts present two kingdoms that are first visible in the mid-ninth century, first identified as Israel and the House of David and later treated by the Assyrians as Samaria and Judah. From these texts and the findings of archaeology alone, it is not clear how the two kingdoms were related. At this point, the Bible warrants a second look, because its story of a

[1] For the first term, see Freedman and Mandell (1993); cf. Freedman and Kelly (2004). The latter word has gained interest especially in Germany, as reflected in the recent book by Erik Aurelius (2003), the overview by Konrad Schmid (2006), and the wider discussion in Thomas Römer and Konrad Schmid (2007).

single people ends with an unexpected twist. When we reach 1 and 2 Kings, the last books in what I will call the Bible's primary narrative, the text describes a division into two polities, most often called Israel and Judah. The story begins with one people and takes for granted throughout the ultimate reality of a single people of the god Yahweh, but it ends with the same two kingdoms known from nonbiblical writing. It is clear, then, that two distinct peoples, identified with two separate kingdoms, stand as a historical backdrop to the unified portrait of the Bible's narrative.

Here, we confront an underappreciated oddity. Historically, the Bible is Judah's book, the collected lore of Judah's survivors after defeat by Babylon in the early sixth century. The primacy of Judah in formation of the Bible is transparent in its remaining books, where the words of prophets and the assorted "Writings" (Psalms, Proverbs, etc.) display overwhelming preoccupation with Judah and Jerusalem. In the long narrative from Genesis through Kings, Judah becomes the southern of two kingdoms in the last book, and it appears occasionally before this as one tribe in the Bible's occasional scheme of one people Israel divided into kin-based segments. Nevertheless, the story of origins and early life, including the founding of monarchy, is the story of Israel, the other kingdom. Israel is the family established in Genesis; Israel goes into Egypt and escapes in an exodus under Moses; Israel conquers a land for itself under Moses and Joshua; Israel lives in this land without kings until Saul and David bring a change of political regime. To explain its past, the people of Judah tell the story of Israel, only making sure that we know Judah was one part of a larger group.

To locate the biblical narrative in history, we must decide how to read the Bible's representation of Judah as part of Israel. The question is not so much whether some connection existed but whether the people of Judah would have shared the same stories as Israel, with the same ideas about identity and the past. If the kingdoms of Israel and Judah reflect distinct peoples with deeply different notions of who they were and how they became so, it is essential to disentangle Israel's and Judah's stories. Judah's stories about early Israel cannot be assumed to be the common property of both peoples. By the logic of Israel's centrality to many of these traditions, it would make sense for the core conceptions to come from Israel without reference to its southern neighbor, despite Judah's eventual possession of the collection. Whatever elements of the biblical narrative originate in Israel would reflect different assumptions from the texts once they entered Judah's sphere. Perspectives on early Israel from Israel itself would likewise offer different possibilities for historical continuity with the peoples portrayed. At its root, such material would be grounded in societies with the same shape as those that carry its transmission. "Biblical Israel" as found in Israel's own traditions, excavated from beneath an overlay of Judah uses, presents a different proposition both biblically and for historical consideration.

These basic observations drive all that follows. Naturally, there are a multitude of complications, including the reality that the actual written contributions

of both Israel and Judah involve settings both during the lives of each kingdom and among communities after the demise of each at the hands of Assyria and Babylon. It is clear that the two peoples were culturally close to one another, and there were numerous contacts in various periods. The Bible finally offers only a finished text, with nothing left untouched by scribes from the people of Judah, so that we have no direct access to Israel's stories unfiltered. Reconstruction of history during the monarchies of Israel and Judah, and all the more for earlier epochs, must still begin with archaeological evidence and analysis. Establishing a basis for dialogue between biblical text and history is rarely straightforward, given the complex transmission of the texts and the various scribal agendas that motivate them.

The book is divided into four parts in pursuit of the various dimensions of this problem. Above all, my distinction of Israel from Judah is not ultimately geographical, as north from south, though geography does help identify Israelite content in the Bible. The purely geographical division assumes a homogeneity of social and political culture that must be challenged. Archaeologists have long observed that the kingdoms of Israel and Judah present vastly different profiles, with Israel far larger and more diverse (Finkelstein 1999). Biblical portrayals of Israel and Judah, when calibrated according to their awareness of early patterns, complement the conclusions from archaeology. The Bible suggests a profound contrast between Israel and Judah at the macro level of social organization, the large scale of political decision-making. Israel's geographical decentralization contributed to forms of collaborative political life that contrasted with custom at home in the kingdom of Judah, where Jerusalem came to play a role unparalleled in the north. In their reception of traditional tales about early times, writers from Judah had no political heritage by which to comprehend the structures of Israel, which were foreign to them in ways not true for scribes working from an Israelite background.

After this basic argument is introduced in Part I, Part II undertakes to establish the reality of this contrast in specific texts that preserve narrative content from Israel. Rather than attempt a systematic list and discussion that addresses every possible text, I define categories and consider at least one text of interest for each main type and phase in the biblical narrative about Israel. Some of these are widely understood to have ancient antecedents and to originate in Israel, while others display possibilities inherent in the logic of my Israel/Judah distinction. To get at Israel's own literary lore, unencumbered by Judah's reading and revision, it is necessary to disentangle Israelite content from the constant company of additions and alterations. This is a task that belongs to technical "literary history" in biblical scholarship, and I engage in conversation with this discipline as a nonspecialist. Because my objective is ultimately historical, I do not intend to reconstruct the full transmission process of each text, and, for historical application, such reconstructions can be so precise as to be unconvincing, especially when set beside a host of competing renditions. With each case examined in this section, I emphasize the isolation of persuasively Israelite, non-Judahite narrative material.

I have chosen to discuss the Bible before providing a broader context for the political phenomena that are essential to my analysis. Part III elaborates what I call the "collaborative" politics that play a more prominent role in Israel than in Judah. Alternatives to centralized decision-making by kings and their administrations have been the topic of wider discussion among anthropologically oriented archaeologists. Certain early peoples display similar traits and offer a way to see the practices of Israel and Judah as part of a universal set of political choices. Beyond these comparisons that lack any historical relationship to the peoples of the Bible, however, two groups from the second-millennium Near East present a backdrop and framework for thinking about such structures in the Iron Age Levant: the Amorites and the Arameans. This contextualizing of Israel's political heritage serves as a transition to Part IV, which finally addresses questions of history more specifically.

The Bible's relationship to history has been the recurrent concern of scholars even before the dawn of modern archaeology. In recent years, archaeologists have won the right and responsibility to lead the formulation of history for the Iron Age Levant, and yet such history is difficult to situate in relation to Israel and Judah without some reference to the Bible, if only to repudiate its schemes. Among biblical scholars, there is more uncertainty than ever about dates and settings for composition and revision – or, individual certainty cannot overcome the depths of disagreement that leave onlookers to choose between wildly diverging options. I will not contribute to resolving this state of affairs by adding one more voice to the clamor, but my hope is to introduce new questions to the debate and to open up new possibilities for relating the Bible to ancient history. The Bible not only confronts us with an unavoidable narrative for the background of Israel and Judah; it also offers views of ancient society that are rarely available to modern audiences. These were not the great powers of the ancient world, and the texts are not the official documents of ruling courts, however much their scribes may belong to a professional class that served the ruling institutions of various times and places. In the Bible, we hear voices from the other side, whether as echoes from the Iron Age or in the work of writers from after the two kingdoms came to an end, and their populations struggled to preserve some sense of shared identity in the aftermath.

I myself am most interested in the difficult early periods, where the biblical texts stand impossibly distant from the past they attempt to explain. For these questions, as for conundrums like the origins of the Arameans, all conclusions are bound to rely on conceptions of ancient society more generally. It matters tremendously, therefore, to reconsider the basic political character of Israel and the possibility that biblical stories from Israel could contribute to understanding its place in the early Levant. In the concluding section, I take up major historical problems that do not necessarily depend on biblical evidence – especially because this writing is far later than the settings in question. These problems are affected powerfully, however, by social conceptions that pertain very much to Israel as recalled at the foundations of certain biblical texts: the populations of the southern Levant in the Late Bronze Age, before Israel; the

relationship of Canaan to Israel in the early Iron Age; and the shape of the Israelite monarchy. I address these in chronological order, without intending systematic coverage. That, I leave to the historians.

This book ultimately attempts a bridge between the worlds of biblical scholarship and archaeologically based history, with my contribution working from my own specialization in written evidence. It addresses the structure and character of the Bible's primary narrative through my vision of a particular relationship between a hodgepodge of lore about early Israel that has been taken over and recast radically by generations of scribes from Judah. This Israelite lore, when considered on its own, presents a picture of ancient Israel that contrasts sufficiently with standard "biblical" schemes as to provoke a reevaluation of what the Bible may offer historical investigation. It is my hope that by taking ever more seriously the biblical division between what comes from the distinct peoples of Israel and Judah, the character of each will come into sharper relief.

Daniel E. Fleming

Acknowledgments

More than one fairy tale begins with a party to which all important people are meant to be invited, and yet one crucial person is fatally omitted from the list. With hope that any who are left out are more forgiving than these characters tend to be in literature, I attempt here an unavoidably abbreviated account of those who have helped with this project. I am grateful to all nonetheless.

In 2004, I received a Guggenheim Fellowship for the opening phase of research on this book, a vote of interest in the combination of my career's work in both biblical and cuneiform studies. My goal was to draw on everything I had encountered through years of exposure to a range of Near Eastern literature and society, to put all of my own assumptions about the Bible and Israel's history to the test. The finished volume should be considered my return on the confidence loaned me in this grant, with appreciation for the support that it represented. Also in 2004, Cambridge University Press published a previous book, and I have returned with satisfaction to obtain their help with this one. Lewis Bateman shepherded the book through the process, and he has my particular thanks for his patience and efficiency at every stage. We even managed to agree on a title. Likewise, I managed to obtain again the sure hand of Stephanie Sakson as copy editor. Among the several people at Cambridge University Press who worked to bring this volume to press, Anne Lovering Rounds played the role of coordinator.

I have dedicated this volume to my students, with whom I have learned and grown through all my years of teaching. I arrived at New York University in 1990, and since then I have taught both undergraduates and graduates. Among the latter, it has been a particular privilege to work with doctoral students, shared first with Baruch Levine and now with Mark Smith. An even smaller group consists of the doctoral students for whom I served as advisor, and my dedication applies above all to them: Marjorie Gursky (2000), Esther Grushkin (2000), Dalia Finkelstein (2000), Hwan Jin Yi (2002), David Santis (2004), Esther Hamori (2004), Lauren Shedletsky Monroe (2004),

Deena Grant (2008), Sara Milstein (2010); Brendon Benz (2012), Cory Peacock (2012), Daniel Oden (2012); Mahri Leonard-Fleckman and Sari Slater (current dissertations); and Diego Barreyra, Elizabeth Knott, and Rachel Angel (current doctoral advisees). I would like to think that I could have developed the ideas in this book in a different environment, without the opportunity to work with students at an advanced level over years of contact, often continuing after graduation. It is unlikely. You all have my lasting gratitude and profound respect.

Many have contributed directly to the production of this book, some by reading the manuscript in one or more phases, others by specific discussions related to the project. Three of my graduate seminars read some or all of the manuscript at different stages. Among my current and former students, I received particular help from several. Perhaps the first to respond to two drafts was Stephen Russell, who was working on the early biblical traditions relating to Egypt, and whose early reactions contributed to my sense of direction. Brendon Benz has been great company generally; he has been a frequent partner in conversation about historical implications, and his Amarna discoveries have been eye-opening. At every stage of this effort, Lauren Monroe has read the drafts and weighed with me the ideas as they emerged, contributing her artist's eye for what works or is not quite right, along with constant encouragement and friendship. I have learned how to read for different voices in one text, especially with Sara Milstein, my coauthor, with whom new ideas always explode out of talk; there will always be more wood to chop. In the last phase of work, Mahri Leonard-Fleckman gave the perfect writer's gift, reading every chapter as I produced it, spotting sections that needed one more level of polish and expressing enthusiasm that helped me through the trek. At relevant points in the book, I have cited the research produced by each of these scholars, the ultimate demonstration of the quality of their minds and a proper acknowledgment of my debt.

Through my years at NYU, I have enjoyed the best of all possible working situations in the Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies. Mark Smith has shared responsibility for biblical and Near Eastern fields since 2000, and I could not imagine a more ideal colleague for every aspect of our work, for which Mark sets the highest standards. In his responses to this project, Mark has given me a reality check, a sense of where I stand on matters large and small, drawing on his enormous experience and insight. In New York, I have also benefited from the presence of David Carr, especially as a sounding board regarding the transmission and revision of biblical texts. Both David and Mark read two drafts of this project. Other colleagues who read and responded to all or part of the manuscript include Ted Lewis, Adam Miglio, and Jacob Wright. All have my lasting appreciation for contributions beyond what I can detail here.

This project involved interaction with theoretical models developed by archaeologists from a range of fields. Both Richard Blanton and Gary Feinman kindly provided suggestions for reading material relevant to collaborative

politics. While Anne Porter's ongoing research on early Near Eastern society has only just come to fruition in a forthcoming book, her ideas have represented a constant challenge to my preconceptions, and my overall interpretation of Israel's collaborative political life reflects a continuing dialogue. In every aspect of this study, my own thinking has evolved in dialogue, especially with those listed above. Where I have gone astray, I have most likely been warned already and chose to persist in my ways. The scope of the project is ambitious, and I have risked transgression into fields not my own, particularly in history and archaeology. I hope that my readers will find the effort worthwhile even where they must correct or dispute elements of my treatment.

Some thirty years ago, when my wife Nancy first supported my quest to become a teacher and scholar, my goal was to study the Bible. Through the intervening years, I have persisted in my biblical interest, though I have written books only based on cuneiform texts. This at last is the book that I have intended to write since the beginning, not from any preconceived path but as an effort to rethink my own understanding of the basics. Nancy has walked with me through what seems like the various ages of this journey, beyond the initial trial of a dissertation and the insecurities of job-hunting and tenure evaluation. With this renewed appreciation, I celebrate with her the fruit of a long labor completed in tandem. For all that this is my work, the result is equally hers.

D.E.F.

Abbreviations

A.	Louvre Museum siglum
AHw	W. von Soden. *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*. 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965–81)
ARAM	*ARAM* Periodical, ARAM Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies (London)
ARM(T)	Archives Royales de Mari (Textes)
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BaM	*Baghdader Mitteilungen*
BARev	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
Bib	*Biblica*
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
CAD	I. J. Gelb et al. (eds.), *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956–)
CANE	J. M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 4 vols. (New York: Scribners, 1995)
CBA	Catholic Biblical Association
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CRRAI	Compte rendu de la Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
EA	J. A. Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, 2 vols. (1915; reprint, Aalen: Otto Zeller, 1964)
FM	*Florilegium Marianum*
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
JAR	*Journal of Archaeological Research*
JARCE	*Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*

JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
LAPO	Littératures Anciennes du Proche-Orient
M.	Siglum for tablets from Mari
M.A.R.I.	*Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires*
NEA	*Near Eastern Archaeology*
OEANE	E. M. Meyers (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)
Or	*Orientalia*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
RA	*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
RHPR	*Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses*
RIMA	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Assyrian Periods
RIMB	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Babylonian Periods
RIME	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Early Periods
RlA	E. Ebeling et al. (eds.), *Realexikon der Assyriologie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–)
RSO	Ras Shamra – Ougarit
SEPOA	Société pour l'Étude ddu Proche-Orient Ancien
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
Syria	*Syria: Revue d'art oriental et d'archéologie*
TA	*Tel Aviv*
TLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WO	*Die Welt des Orients*
WZKM	*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie*
ZABR	*Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*
ZTK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*