

Introduction

Investigating the Idea of Israel

Jacob will no longer be your name but Israel, because you have contended with God and with humans and have overcome.

(Gen 32:29)

The name “Israel” is bestowed upon the patriarch Jacob in the book of Genesis after a nocturnal fight with a mysterious figure, who explains this new name by connecting it with a verb meaning to struggle or fight (שרה), resulting in a word that means either “El (God) fights” or “fights with God.”¹ The name therefore serves as a description of the patriarch’s character as well as an honorary title and a theological statement. This name then passed to the heirs of the patriarch, becoming the covenantal name of the people of YHWH, the inheritors of the divine promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel. True to its origin, this name has been characterized by conflict and contention over its legacy – and who is its rightful heir – ever since Genesis was penned.

This book is an exploration of that conflict, examining how the concept of Israel was developed, appropriated, and contested in the period roughly between the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587/586 BCE and its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE. This concept is central to the development of Judaism and eventually Christianity, each of which claimed “Israel” for itself over and against its rivals, yet few ideas have proven as complex and elusive. The Mishnah, for example, says “All Israel has a part in the world to come” (m. Sanh. 10:1) but then immediately provides a list of exceptions that set the boundaries of Israel,

¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 297.

including Sadducees, Epicureans, those who pronounce the Name, and more (10:1–6). Similarly, a century and a half earlier, the apostle Paul declares “All Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26) but precedes this statement with the puzzling declaration that “not all from Israel are Israel” (Rom 9:6). This juxtaposition has frustrated interpreters both modern and ancient, as Origen of Caesarea complains, “Who the ‘all Israel’ are who will be saved . . . only God knows, along with his only begotten and perhaps any who are his friends.”² Many modern interpreters have concluded that when Paul says Israel, he means “empirical” or “ethnic Israel,”³ but this only begs the question rather than solving the problem, as ethnicity is neither empirical nor self-evident and is inconsistently defined and handled across scholarship.⁴

Granted, prior to the dissolution of the nation-states of Israel and Judah, Israel could be rather straightforwardly defined in national and cultic terms. To be an Israelite was defined by kinship ties and

² CER 4:304. For summaries of the modern discussions, see Christopher Zoccali, “‘And so all Israel will be saved’: Competing Interpretations of Romans 11.26 in Pauline Scholarship,” *JSNT* 30.3 (2008): 289–318; Christopher Zoccali, *Whom God Has Called: The Relationship of Church and Israel in Pauline Interpretation, 1920 to the Present* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2010); Jason A. Staples, “What Do the Gentiles Have to Do with ‘All Israel’? A Fresh Look at Romans 11:25–27,” *JBL* 130.2 (2011): 371–90.

³ E.g., Pablo T. Gadenz, *Called from the Jews and from the Gentiles: Pauline Ecclesiology in Romans 9–11*, WUNT 267 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 277; Susan Grove Eastman, “Israel and the Mercy of God: A Re-reading of Galatians 6.16 and Romans 9–11,” *NTS* 56.3 (2010): 367–95 (368–69); Hans Hübner, *Gottes Ich und Israel: Zum Schriftgebrauch des Paulus in Römer 9–11* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 20; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 721; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia 66 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 701; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC 38B (Nashville: Nelson, 1988), 681–82; Charles E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 576–77.

⁴ See Ronald Cohen, “Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7.1 (1978): 379–403; Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 22–30; Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17–33; Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1–29; Rogers Brubaker, “Ethnicity without Groups,” *European Journal of Sociology* 43.2 (2002): 163–89; Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Rogers Brubaker, “Ethnicity, Race, and Nationalism,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 21–42. For a discussion of how ethnicity and religion (and their relationship) have been variously defined among scholars discussing Jewish and Christian identities in antiquity, see David M. Miller, “Ethnicity, Religion and the Meaning of *Ioudaios* in Ancient ‘Judaism,’” *CurBR* 12.2 (2014): 216–65 (234–42).

participation in the traditional cultus and polity of Israel.⁵ But after large portions of Israel were dispossessed of their ancestral land and deported to other regions by imperial powers, the question of who or what constitutes Israel became a much more complex and difficult matter and a source of conflict among those who laid claim to the legacy of Israel. The Jewish groups who returned from exile under the Persians, for example, declared that the people they found living in the territory of Israel upon their return were not in fact Israelites. Disputes between those who sacrificed to YHWH at Mount Gerizim and partisans of the Jerusalem temple persisted throughout the Second Temple period. The sectarian community behind the Dead Sea Scrolls regarded both as illegitimate and looked forward to the ultimate redemption of Israel and the disgrace and destruction of their opponents, both Jews and non-Jews. One can only imagine what the sectarians might have thought of the temple of YHWH at Elephantine. All, however, looked back to the preexilic nation-states of Israel and Judah to establish their ethnic heritage, though not everyone agreed on who else fit within that heritage.

The boundaries of Israel have been contested territory since the end of the Israelite monarchies, and any understanding of early Judaism or the development of Christianity ultimately depends on our ability to map that conceptual territory. This is not as simple a task as it may seem at first glance, as recent scholarship and new evidence – particularly recent discoveries pertaining to the Samaritans – have prompted a reevaluation of old consensus positions regarding the meaning of “Israel” in the larger context of the Second Temple period, with Steve Mason, for example, declaring Israel “a term that merits further exploration across the board.”⁶ This book undertakes that exploration, aiming to provide a semantic and historical account of the concept of Israel through an analysis of how the concept was shaped and contested throughout the period of inquiry. To this end, this study employs a combination of synchronic and diachronic analysis, examining how the concept of Israel is constructed and employed in individual cases while also evaluating how each of these cases participates in a larger traditional discourse,

⁵ See Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Emergence of Jewish Sectarianism in the Early Second Temple Period,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, eds. Patrick D. Miller, Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 587–616 (592).

⁶ Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512 (490 n. 72).

reshaping the concept and applying it to new contexts.⁷ This approach presumes that tradition is both malleable, always involving performative dimensions, and restrictive, delimiting the range of possibilities for participants in the discourse. The aim is therefore not to establish a discrete, stable entity or a specific, single meaning of the word “Israel” but rather to assess the range of possible interpretations when a person referred to “Israel” or “Israelites” in the Second Temple period in light of the traditional narrative substructure of the concept that could assumed by participants in the discourse and how the concept was developed and contested throughout the Second Temple period.

NARRATIVES OF ISRAEL, SOCIAL MEMORY, AND TRADITION IN TRANSITION

Daniel Boyarin has suggested that such a task requires going “back to the very beginnings of the history of Israel after the return from the Babylonian Exile as narrated, in particular, in the book of Ezra,”⁸ but I maintain that starting *after* the Babylonian Exile is still too late, since Ezra-Nehemiah already presupposes a dominant conceptual framework and vocabulary of Israel.⁹ To understand that framework, we must go

⁷ Several other recent studies have engaged in similar surveys of a diachronic range of texts to write histories of specific concepts, including Adi Ophir and Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *Goy: Israel's Multiple Others and the Birth of the Gentile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); David A. Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical: Judaism, Christianity, and the Interpretation of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities* (Oxford University Press, 2002); Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁸ Daniel Boyarin, “The IOUDAIOI in John and the Prehistory of Judaism,” in *Pauline Conversations in Context: Essays in Honor of Calvin J. Roetzel*, eds. Janice Capel Anderson, Philip Sellew, and Claudia Setzer, JSNTSup 221 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 216–39 (222–23). Boyarin also draws an important distinction between “looking for the degrees of separation backward and not forward,” that is, looking to understand debates and negotiations concerning Israel as they already existed before the rise of Christianity “and not forward towards a split between church and ‘synagogue’” – or, for the purposes of this study, between the church and “the Jews” (“The IOUDAIOI in John,” 228).

⁹ Dalit Rom-Shiloni, “From Ezekiel to Ezra-Nehemiah: Shifts of Group Identities within Babylonian Exilic Ideology,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context*, eds. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 127–51 (129–30): “Ezra-Nehemiah does not mark the beginning of the internal polemic in Yehud; this book rather carries on and transforms a long-lived polemic initiated [at least

back even further to the biblical narratives of Israel that establish a discourse about Israelite status and heritage already presumed in the disputes of Ezra-Nehemiah. These biblical stories, particularly the Primary History of Genesis–2 Kings, served as a sort of “ethnic charter” for communities for which they became foundational.¹⁰ That is, by constructing a “biblical Israel,” the biblical authors, editors, and compilers were able to create a mythic common past and a descriptive lexicon for a present people upon which later communities could build their own identities in continuity with that storied past.¹¹

Just as E. P. Sanders explains that “it is the fundamental nature of the covenant conception which largely accounts for the relative scarcity of appearances of the term ‘covenant’ in Rabbinic literature,”¹² the Israel constructed in the biblical narratives became a “basic concept” that could be assumed by later communities, providing the framework for the more frequently cited prophetic and legal material.¹³ Indeed, even the

as early as] in the early sixth century BCE.” Gary N. Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12: “the struggles depicted in Ezra-Nehemiah testify to internal Judean debates about identity, ethnicity, and nationality. The very definition of ‘Israel’ becomes a contested topic in a world in which a number of communities, whether more narrowly or broadly defined, claim to continue the legacy of the descendants of Jacob.”

¹⁰ On Genesis–2 Kings as an ethnic charter, cf. Andrew Tobolowsky, *The Sons of Jacob and the Sons of Herakles*, FAT 96 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), building especially on the work of Jonathan M. Hall, “Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 8.2 (1998): 265–83; G. Carter Bentley, “Ethnicity and Practice,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29.1 (1987): 24–55; Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*; Brubaker, “Ethnicity, Race, and Nationalism”; Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, CSSCA (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, “Identity and Representation: Elements for a Critical Reflection on the Idea of Region,” in *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 220–28. See also E. Theodore Mullen, *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries: The Deuteronomistic Historian and the Creation of Israelite National Identity*, SemeiaSt (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 46.

¹¹ This use of the term “biblical Israel” borrows from Philip R. Davies, *In Search of “Ancient Israel”: A Study in Biblical Origins*, 2nd ed., JSOTSup 148 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), which distinguishes between “historical Israel” (the ancient confederacy/kingdom of that name), “biblical Israel” (the Israel of the biblical texts, shaped as it was by authors and redactors), and “ancient Israel” (a modern scholarly construct variously combining the prior two).

¹² Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 420–21.

¹³ “Once a concept has been placed within a historical context, it becomes possible to call it a ‘basic concept’ [*Grundbegriffe*] if and when all contesting strata and parties find it indispensable to expressing their distinctive experiences, interests, and party-political programs. Basic concepts come to dominate usage because at a given juncture, they register those minimal commonalities without which no experience is possible, and

covenantal framework itself is derived in large measure from the biblical narratives, which establish Israel as the chosen people of YHWH and heirs to the promises to Abraham. The concepts delivered through these stories were unavoidably in the air for those socialized into this environment. Only after immersing in this shared narrative world and rhetorical framework can one begin to understand the discourse of those who later constructed their own identities using that common capital, including a shared vocabulary shaped by those foundational narratives.¹⁴ That is, we must engage in what Meir Sternberg calls “a historical reconstruction that delimits what the writer could have meant against the background of the linguistic knowledge that, even in artful manipulation, he must have taken for granted.”¹⁵

That narrative context can be understood as a form of social memory which, transmitted through authoritative texts and commemorative rituals (e.g., Passover), provides the frame or background against which present events are seen and the lens through which they are interpreted.¹⁶ In addition, this process does not operate without bounds but always applies and appropriates inherited cultural capital, which provides the primordial substance from which present communities and individuals can be shaped.¹⁷ Although collective memory and foundational myths

without which there could be neither conflict nor consensus” (Reinhart Koselleck, “Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6.1 [2011]: 1–37 [32]). As such, a basic concept “combines both diverse historical experiences and a multiplicity of meanings” and therefore requires interpretation rather than mere definition. Melvin Richter and Michaela Richter, “Introduction: Translation of Reinhart Koselleck’s ‘Krise’ in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*,” *JHI* 67.2 (2006): 343–56 (345); cf. Koselleck, “Introduction and Prefaces,” 20.

¹⁴ Cf. Nathan Thiel, “‘Israel’ and ‘Jew’ as Markers of Jewish Identity in Antiquity: The Problems of Insider/Outsider Classification,” *JSJ* 45.1 (2014): 80–99 (92–99).

¹⁵ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 11–12.

¹⁶ Cf. Barry Schwartz, “Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II,” *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 908–27 (910–11); Barry Schwartz, “Social Change and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington,” *American Sociological Review* 56 (1991): 221–36; Barry Schwartz, “The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory,” *Social Forces* 61.2 (1982): 374–402; Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, “Social Memory Studies: From ‘Collective Memory’ to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices,” *Annual Review of Sociology* (1998): 105–40, esp. 383. For an introductory resource on social memory, sometimes also called “collective memory,” see Ritva Williams, “BTB Readers’ Guide: Social Memory,” *BTB* 41.4 (2011): 189–200.

¹⁷ By “cultural capital,” I mean a “quantum of social force,” as put forth in Pierre Bourdieu, “The Practice of Reflexive Sociology (The Paris Workshop),” in *An Invitation to*

can be altered and shaped in various ways, the “earliest construction of a historical object limits the range of things subsequent generations can do with it.”¹⁸ In this way, the present is always constrained and defined by the remembered past as it fits within a given socially mediated narrative framework, even (or perhaps especially) when individuals are not “fully aware of or articulate about the details and variants of the historical narratives that shape their lives.”¹⁹ In other words, a received “narrative substructure” and the rhetorical and descriptive lexicon encoded within it serves as the inherited *habitus* that shapes the culture and individuals, but the participants in that culture reshape and modify that *habitus* to serve new purposes.²⁰ Stephen Grosby reminds us that accepting a tradition carries several consequences:

One is that, through acceptance, traditions are consequently subject to constant change – this much is obvious from the history of ancient Israel, e.g., the reinterpretation of the previously local traditions of the different Judges within the framework of “all Israel,” and the relatively late amalgamation of local ancestors into a common genealogy of “all Israel.” However beliefs which make up traditions not only change, they also generate change; they actively transform the present, e.g., the development of the belief in a “people” of “all Israel” to whom and only to whom the law applies, or the messianic restoration of the Davidic kingdom.²¹

Shared narratives thus not only shape communities and individuals but also provide the conceptual framework and vocabulary for any discourse among those who share that common *mythos*, specifying cause-and-effect relationships and defining what is significant and what is not.²² The

Reflexive Sociology, eds. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. C. Wacquant (1992), 216–60 (229–30).

¹⁸ Schwartz, “Social Change,” 232.

¹⁹ Christian Smith, “Living Narratives,” in *Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 2003), 63–94 (72).

²⁰ Using the language of Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” *Sociological Theory* 7.1 (1989): 14–25; Bourdieu, *Theory of Practice*.

²¹ Steven Elliott Grosby, *Biblical Ideas of Nationality: Ancient and Modern* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 45.

²² Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 204–25; Smith, “Living Narratives”; Douglas Ezzy, “Theorizing Narrative Identity,” *Sociological Quarterly* 39.2 (1998): 239–52; Jerome Brunner, “Life as Narrative,” *Social Research* 54.1 (1987): 11–32; Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 3–28; William J. Grassie, “Entangled Narratives: Competing Visions of the Good Life,” *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 34.1–2 (2008): 143–66 (143); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols. (Chicago: University

impact of such stories' rhetoric is, for those to whom they are foundational, inescapable, but these stories also provide the substance for new social and cultural construction in each generation. Moreover, where a normative body of tradition is accepted, the shared rhetorical conventions and descriptive lexicon in that received corpus allows for a high degree of intertextuality that may be incoherent to outsiders.²³ Contemporary Internet and media culture, for example, is notoriously intertextual and metareferential, constantly and self-consciously echoing and alluding to "canonical" or normative material, the knowledge of which is expected to be shared by at least some fellow insiders in the audience.²⁴ But if one does not share the knowledge of the source material, much of what is being said between the lines is easily missed. The communicative patterns in ancient debates over the heritage of Israel are similarly intertextual, fluently appropriating and reshaping phrases, concepts, and narrative

of Chicago Press). Recognition of the centrality of narrative to human action and identity goes back at least to Plato's *Republic* 2.377c; 3.414e–15c.

²³ Cf. Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 5, 514. The term "intertextuality" is variously defined. In a poststructuralist context, "intertextuality" is used to denote the notion of text as infinite and never objective or singular, as in Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 60. But the term is also used to denote "the notion of a *strong form of intertextuality* to denote instances ... of a reference, implicit or explicit, to another distinct text or body of texts" (Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium* [London: Bloomsbury, 2015], 103). This is the sense in which the term tends to be used in biblical studies and is the sense in which I am using it. See also Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, 2nd ed., *The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2011).

²⁴ "Metareference" has been defined as "a special, transmedial form of usually non-accidental self-reference produced by signs or sign configurations which are (felt to be) located on a logically higher level, a 'metalevel,' within an artifact or performance; this self-reference, which can extend from this artifact to the entire system of the media, forms or implies a statement about an object-level, namely on (aspects of) the medium/system referred to" (Werner Wolf, "Metareference across Media: The Concept, its Transmedial Potentials and Problems, Main Forms and Functions," in *Metareference across Media: Theory and Case Studies*, ed. Werner Wolf, SIM [Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009], 1–85 [31]; see also Werner Wolf, ed., *The Metareferential Turn in Contemporary Arts and Media: Forms, Functions, Attempts at Explanation*, SIM [Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011]). This works both at a macro level, such as with Internet memes and allusions to or reapplications of classic lines or scenes of cinema or television in other works, and on a subcultural level, as in the numerous "Easter eggs" scattered throughout notoriously self-referential cinematic "comic book universes." Cf. Kevin Flynn, *The Digital Frontier: Mapping the Other Universe* (Los Angeles: Quotable Publishing, 1985). For Paul and other early Jews, biblical or prophetic material is understood to be located on a logically higher "metalevel," so self-referential use of such material falls under the category of metareference.

elements from the (biblically dominated) narrative world in which they lived and argued.²⁵ Wolfgang Funk has noted how such metareferential practice serves a “reconstructive” function, as the new participants in the discourse renegotiate and reshape their discourse and their narrative world.²⁶ In the same way, the later appropriations of biblical and other inherited Jewish traditions serve the same reconstructive function, applying inherited capital to reconstruct new, renegotiated boundaries.

The biblical narratives thus established Israel as a basic concept that could be assumed, contested, and reinterpreted – but not ignored – by those who used the term “Israel” in later periods.²⁷ As Jacob Neusner explains, “the doctrine of what is ‘Israel’ and who is Israel, as worked out over [more than] seven hundred years, forms the critical component that held the whole system together.”²⁸ Later figures like Paul or Judah ha-Nasi constructed their own interpretations of Israel’s narrative, but they were themselves unavoidably shaped – and their interpretations limited – by this narrative as they had received it from prior generations, largely mediated through the Jewish Scriptures and prior interpretations thereof.²⁹ The multigenerational discourse concerning Israelite status is therefore rooted in the biblical texts, which provide the cultural, rhetorical, and idiomatic grammar for the controversies of later periods.³⁰ Consequently, the varying conceptions of Israel represented in the Second

²⁵ Cf. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 157–58; Watson, *Hermeneutics of Faith*, 3. See also James M. Scott, “Paul’s Use of Deuteronomic Tradition,” *JBL* 112.4 (1993): 645–65.

²⁶ See Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction*. Funk’s language of reconstruction is itself intertextual, playing on Derrida’s notion of “deconstruction” or *différance* (cf. Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction*, 4–6).

²⁷ Richter and Richter, “Introduction,” 345–46: “Basic concepts become indispensable to any formulation of the most urgent issues of a given time. They are, moreover, inherently controversial and contested, especially so in times of crisis, when the semantic struggle for definitions of social and political position becomes particularly acute.”

²⁸ Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Its Social Metaphors: Israel in the History of Jewish Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14.

²⁹ Cf. Neusner’s observation that the early rabbis “created, but they were also created by, Rabbi Jeremiah, among other prophets” (*In the Aftermath of Catastrophe: Founding Judaism 70 to 640*, MQSHR [Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009], 121).

³⁰ On the implications of the development of scripture and ultimately canon in the Second Temple period and various modes of interpretation, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 184–204. For myth “as a class of *social argumentation*” through which humans “construct, authorize, and contest their social identities,” see Russell T. McCutcheon, “Myth,” in *A Modest Proposal on Method: Essaying the Study of Religion*, Supplements to Method and Theory in the Study of Religion 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 52–71 (63).

Temple period are so dependent on the basic concept of Israel mediated through biblical narratives and their accompanying interpretive traditions that this earlier material – which provides their “narrative substructure” – must be examined first.³¹

In this context, it is important to remember that ancient readers did not read biblical texts like modern critical scholars but instead read them as a unified narrative reporting the truth about the past, looking to the biblical narratives to understand their own place in the cosmos. Thus, as always, the constructed past, the *remembered* past, is more important for shaping the present than the *actual historical events* of the past. As such, this book does not attempt to reconstruct the empirical history underlying the biblical narratives or to establish an inherent, transcendent ideal definition of Israel from the past but rather aims to show how the texts construct a biblical Israel that provided the foundation for later communities and then how ancient readers built upon that concept, depending upon and limited by the rhetorical conventions and descriptive lexicon bestowed by the biblical framework. Nevertheless, our reconstructions of that framework must be verified by examining how later readers interacted with and interpreted these foundational traditions, meaning this study must engage in the recursive process of examining both the foundational texts and how those texts were understood by later interpreters,³² thereby revealing both continuities and discontinuities within the larger tradition.³³

³¹ For the concept of “Israel” as first developed in biblical literature as a “social metaphor” central to the development of subsequent Judaism(s), see Neusner, *Judaism and Its Social Metaphors*. For the concept of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament serving as a critical component of a traditional “substructure” for later authors further developing the tradition for a new context, see especially Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). Cf. also C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Collins, 1965). More generally, Koselleck reminds us that a basic “concept combines in itself an abundance of meanings. Thus a concept may be clear, but it must be ambiguous. It bundles together the richness of historical experience and the sum of theoretical and practical lessons drawn from it in such a way that their relationship can be established and properly understood only through a concept” (Koselleck, “Introduction and Prefaces,” 20).

³² Thus Ricoeur explains that once around the circle is insufficient; rather, the circle must be traversed repeatedly, allowing the text an active role in refiguring our understanding for the next trip around the circle. See Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 86–95; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004).

³³ Cf. Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, 8–9.