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*Observations on the Historical Reliability of the Old Testament*¹

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Preliminary Remarks

No other collection of books of antiquity has been criticized as much as the Old Testament. And it is undeniably so that many reported events, stories, and statements of the Old Testament seem to come from another world, which has hardly anything to do with my world and my way of thinking.

Obstacles to Understanding the Old Testament

The New Testament was written over a period of about 60 years. It is written in an Indo-European language: Greek. The philosophical environment of the New Testament is no stranger to us, because our Western educational system is based on the teachings and philosophies of ancient Greece and Rome. Athens, Corinth, Thessaloniki, Crete and Cyprus are for many household names and many have already been there. But who knows Nineveh or Elam or Zoar or Thebes? Most Bible readers do not know where Hazor is located, and why it was called the leader of the Canaanite kingdoms, and therefore, the most important city of the Canaanites (Jos 11:10).² In contrast to the New Testament, the Old Testament was written over a period of about 1000 years with different historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts. Strange and changing cultures—Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Syr-

¹Written for Paige Patterson for his 70th birthday.

²The city of Hazor during the Bronze Age was about 200 acres large and was inhabited by probably 40,000 people. It is mentioned in Egyptian execration texts, in at least 15 documents from Mari (Abraham Malamat, "Mari and Hazor – Trade Relations in the Old Babylonian Period." *Biblical Archaeology Today 1990*, Suppl., Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society [1993]: 66-70), frequently in texts from the New Kingdom, in the Amarna letters, in the Papyrus Petersburg 1116A, and in the Papyrus Anastasi I. See Sharon Zuckerman, "Hazor," *New International Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Zondervan, 2007). 752-53. For its socio-economic importance see Th. E. Levy, ed. *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (London and Washington: Leicester University Press, 1998). 306-308 and Abraham Malamat, "Hazor 'The Head of All Those Kingdoms,'" *JBL* 79 (1960): 12-19.

ia—influenced ancient Israel.³ The first testament was written in a totally foreign language, Semitic, and not in Indo-European vernacular. In many places in the Old Testament we encounter a strange way of thinking and an alien political culture. The geographic and historical backgrounds of many Old Testament books remain hidden to us, unless we strive to find it out. Therefore the messages of these books often remain hidden to us as well or at best we understand it partially, for God acts and speaks not into a historical vacuum, but always into a historical and particular situation. God's word is not a magic word that one should use regardless of the historical and literary contexts. God's word is inextricably bound up with the dawn of humanity, the beginning and duration of the history of Israel. God's word cannot be separated from the history of mankind. When God speaks, he discloses something of himself in the culture of ancient Near Eastern antiquity. All this promotes a very selective reading of the Old Testament.

Many Christians have difficulty understanding the Old Testament because of the variety of literary genres and the way it narrates events. The Old Testament contains prayers—many have learned to pray in using the Psalms—wisdom exhortations, philosophical discussions, royal novels, songs of mourning, war records, genealogies, laws, cultic regulations, and more. These were for the people of that time of great importance. Each literary genre has its special characteristics which must be taken into account, if one wants to understand them adequately.⁴

The Christian was and is not the primary addressee of the Old Testament, but the ancient Israelite. This should never be forgotten by Christians.

Thus it is not surprising that from the earliest times in church and secular history, the various statements and reports of the Old Testament have been criticized and misunderstood. Even active church members tend to approach the Old Testament with a Marcionistic method. Marcion, a wealthy shipowner, businessman, and son of the bishop of Sinope, which was located at the southern coast of the Black Sea in northern Turkey, was excommunicated by the church in Rome in A.D. 144, because he tried to free Christianity from its Jewish roots, and to determine the uniqueness of the Christian faith in antithesis to ancient Israel and Judaism. He was of the opinion that the Gospel revealed a new, until then unknown, God of love and kindness, which was proclaimed by Jesus as his father. The God of the Old Testament and the God of Jesus have nothing to do with each other. He also removed all references to the Old Testament in the New Testament.⁵

³Walter C. Kaiser, "Is the Old Testament Historically Reliable?" *In Defense of the Bible*, Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder, eds. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 202.

⁴See D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese, Jr. eds. *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 1995).

⁵Gerhard May, "Markion/Markioniten" in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 4th ed. Vol. 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 834-36.

The Philosophical and Theological Presuppositions of Modern Criticism on the Old Testament

The so-called scientific study of the Old Testament is very closely connected to the historical-critical method. With some scholars it is one and the same. The historical-critical method authenticates a scientific method insofar as on the one hand it preserves the historical and geographical distance between the researcher and his research object, the Old Testament, as well as the historical development and growth of the Old Testament. Furthermore its research results are based on the critical treatment of the Old Testament.⁶

The Basis of a Scientific Study of the Old Testament

In the humanities, and theology belongs to the humanities, accidental historical truth can never be a proof of rational truth.⁷ That is, past events cannot be obligatory for the present. Truth is only that which can be justified and explained by the present, and which makes sense to modern man.⁸ Miracles are only accepted if they can be proven by an actual miracle today. Thus today's criterion of plausibility is the norm for reality and truth.⁹

Baruch de Spinoza. For Baruch Spinoza rationality was the determining factor in deciding about the reality and truth of the Biblical accounts. In his *Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus* of 1670 he wrote, "... that the power of nature is the divine power and force itself."¹⁰ Whatever is against nature

⁶Hans-Jürgen Zobel, "Einleitungswissenschaft I," *Theologische Real Enzyklopädie*, vol. IX (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982), 460: "Sie verbürgt insofern die Wissenschaftlichkeit, als sie einerseits den historischen (und geografischen) Abstand zwischen dem Forscher und seinem Forschungsgegenstand, eben dem Alten Testament, sowie das historische Werden und Wachsen des Alten Testaments wahr und andererseits ihre Ergebnisse auf die kritische Behandlung des Alten Testaments gründet."

⁷Gottfried Ephraim Lessing, "Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft, 1777," in *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts und anderer Schriften* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1965), 31ff.

⁸Gerhard Maier, "Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit im Geschichtsverständnis des Alten Testaments", in *Israel in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Beiträge zur Geschichte Israels und zum jüdisch-christlichen Dialog. Bericht von der 9. Studienkonferenz des Arbeitskreises für evangelikale Theologie vom 20-23. August 1996 in Bad Blankenburg* (Wuppertal und Giessen: Brockhaus and Brunnen, 1996). 10. English version: "Truth and Reality in the Historical Understanding of the Old Testament," in *Israel's Past in Present Research*. V. Philips Long, ed. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 193.

About reality and truth in the OT see Heinrich von Siebenthal, "Wahrheit' bei den Althebräern. Anmerkungen zur Diskrepanztheorie aus linguistischer Sicht," in *Theologische Wahrheit und die Postmoderne*, H.H. Klement, ed. (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2000), 208-32.

⁹Gerhard Maier, 10; English version, 193-94. *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings sämtliche Schriften* 10 (Bd. Hrsg.: Karl Lachmann, Berlin:Voß'sche Buchhandlung, 1839), 36: "zufällige Geschichtswahrheiten können der Beweis von notwendigen Vernunftwahrheiten nie werden." (accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason). Lessing's book: *Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*. An den Herrn Direktor Schumann, zu Hannover (Braunschweig: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1777).

¹⁰Baruch de Spinoza, *Theologisch-Politischer Traktat* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1984), 95. *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, trans. by Robert Willis from the Latin (London: Trübner, 1862).

is against God (*contra naturam est versus deum*). The general laws of nature are determined by reason, so the Biblical accounts and content can be validated only by reason. Thus the validity of the Biblical content can only be determined by human reason of today. If the Biblical accounts cannot be validated by reason they should be rejected. If the miracles of the Old Testament are not in accordance with the general laws of nature, then they have been either “inserted by an evildoer into Scriptures,”¹¹ or they reflect then-contemporary ideas.¹²

During the Enlightenment, human reason emancipated itself from the authority of religious traditions. The movement did not consider it as self-evident that the Bible speaks reliably of God and the world.¹³ The ecclesiastical authority was criticized. Kant urged people to have the courage to use their own mind.

But even before the Enlightenment, during the Renaissance, there existed a “militant humanism.”¹⁴ The theocentric world view was replaced by an anthropocentric one. The study of languages, literature, history, and philosophy was done for its own sake. A religious correlation is no longer seen.

Thus a different worldview, not newly developed critical methods, was responsible for the view that the Biblical accounts did not report real events in history. One tried to leave behind the supernatural and the miracle-like events; that which was not accessible to human rationality was left behind and only what made rational sense was acceptable. One could believe in God without a special revelation of God in Scripture or miracles.

Ernst Troeltsch. The nineteenth century supplemented this development with its view of historiography: the conviction was that the task of historians was to show how events actually happened. This reinforced the critical attitude towards the Biblical accounts. Leopold von Ranke propagated the greatest possible objectivity based on human rationality. Therefore, the sources were screened in accordance with human rationality. That is, the individual determined what is genuine and true in the Biblical accounts.

These critics were looking for criteria on the basis of which one could judge whether a report is historical or unhistorical:

- Any report that is not consistent with the well-known and universally accepted laws of nature is unhistorical. That is, each report, in which God intervenes in the natural course of things, is unhistorical.
- Every narrative report that cannot be supported by extra-Biblical sources is unhistorical.

At the beginning of the twentieth century (1913) the great Ernst Tro-

¹¹Spinoza, 106.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Robert Morgan and John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: University Press, 1991), 17.

¹⁴John H. Hayes und J.Maxwell Miller, *Israelite and Judean History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 34.

eltsch said that within the area of history only judgments of probability exist of various degrees of probabilities. Therefore, the degree of probability in any tradition has to be determined because there exists only a probable accuracy.¹⁵

However, he saw more clearly than others that the application of historical criticism to religious tradition changes profoundly the inner attitude toward it and the appreciation of it.¹⁶ In addition, the means by which criticism is made at all possible is the application of analogy.¹⁷ This means, that everything which is not verifiable by external evidence is non-historical, because it cannot be verified.

Hartmut Gese and Herbert Donner. In the second half of the twentieth century there was a new direction in the approach of the Old Testament. Professor Hartmut Gese from the University of Tübingen views the revelation of God in the Old Testament as a mere Jewish tradition. Thus the revelation of God in the Old Testament is only an Israelite tradition. The truth is not on the surface of the text but lies beyond the surface.¹⁸ No longer is it a question of whether something has really happened historically, but the fact that one recognizes the theological truth behind the reported event. For example, whether the events at Sinai really happened as reported is beside the point. What is important is that there was a revelation of God at Sinai.¹⁹ All this means that wrong facts could still allow true interpretations.²⁰

Herbert Donner, professor emeritus from the University of Kiel, goes even further in his book on the history of Israel.²¹ He maintains that it is methodologically not permissible to assume that something could have happened in the way it is reported.²² Whether the Old Testament is historically reliable is therefore subject to the approval of the researcher.

Minimalists. In recent decades, a small group of Old Testament schol-

¹⁵*Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. II: Zur religiösen Lage, Religionsphilosophie und Ethik.* 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1922), 731.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 732 “die Anwendung historischer Kritik auf die religiöse Überlieferung wird die innere Stellung zu ihr und ihre Auffassung tief greifend verändert ...” (the application of historical criticism to the religious tradition is changing the inner attitude toward it and their views profoundly).

¹⁷*Ibid.* “... das Mittel, wodurch Kritik überhaupt erst möglich wird, ist die Anwendung der Analogie” (the means by which criticism is made at all possible is the use of analogy).

¹⁸“Das biblische Schriftverständnis” in *Zur biblischen Theologie. Alttestamentliche Vorträge* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2. Aufl., 1983), 24: “... die jenseits des Vorfindlichen liegende Wahrheit” (the truth lies beyond the existing).

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰Gerhard Maier, “Truth and Reality in the Historical Understanding of the Old Testament” In *Israel’s Past in Present Research. Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography.* V. Ph. Long, ed. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 196. In the German original it reads: “Falsche Fakten ermöglichen dennoch wahre Deutungen.” (“Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit,” 13.)

²¹*Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen.* 2 vol. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984-1986).

²²*Ibid.*, vol. I, 26: “Vielmehr steht dahinter die methodisch unerlaubte Annahme der Möglichkeit, etwas könne sich so zugetragen haben, wie es berichtet wird” (Rather, behind it is the illicit methodological assumption of the possibility that events could have happened as reported).

ars at the universities of Copenhagen,²³ Sheffield,²⁴ Tel Aviv,²⁵ and Rome²⁶

²³See especially Nils Peter Lemche, *Early Israel*, VTS 37 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 415-16: He asserts, "... that the traditions about early Israel are so late that they are useless for a historical reconstruction." The Biblical account about early Israel is to be rejected in regard to its historical statements. It should be treated like other legendary material which is basically ahistorical. Only in exceptionally cases can it be verified through comparative material.

Similarly, in his book *Die Vorgeschichte Israels. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ausgang des 13. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. Biblische Enzyklopädie 1* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1996), 68-69: The pre-history of Israel, the Middle East and Egypt, as it is depicted in the Old Testament, cannot be considered as a historical source, but only as a literary fiction. "This is a statement which actually does not need to be corroborated with an accurate historical record" (69). A historical background for the pentateuchal narratives does not exist. The Biblical sources should be seen as what they really are: "... Adventure stories and legends that have been shaped by late narrators and written to entertain their audiences with stories 'from the old days' and to instruct them." ("... Abenteuergeschichten und Legenden, die von späten Erzählern geformt und geschrieben worden sind, um ihr Publikum mit Geschichten 'aus alten Tagen' zu unterhalten und zu belehren" [69].) Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People from the Written & Archaeological Sources*. (Leiden: Brill, 1992), especially 1-26, 77-126, and "Can You Understand This?" *BAR* 26.2 (2000): 36-37. See also the interview with Thompson and Lemche and the discussion with Dever and McCarter in *BAR* 23.4 (1997): 26-42.

²⁴Philip R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel*. JSOT Suppl. 148 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1992). The historical statements in the Biblical narration are rejected, because they should be counted as ahistorical like other legendary material. This means that only in exceptional cases can they be verified. See Ian W. Provan and his critique on Davies and the minimalist positions in "Ideologies, Literary and Critical Reflections on Recent Writing on the History of Israel," *JBL* 114 (1995): 585-606. Very illuminating about the method of the minimalists is V. Philips Long, "How Reliable Are Biblical Reports? Repeating Lester Grabbe's Comparative Experiment," *VT* 52 (2002): 367-84.

²⁵Israel Finkelstein and Neil A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed, Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origins of its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001). Also by the same authors: *David and Solomon, In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition* (New York: Simon & Schusters, 2006). A. Rainey, "Stones For Bread: Archaeology Versus History," *NEA* 64.3 (2001): 140-49. Thomas Pola, "Was bleibt von der älteren Geschichte Israels? Methodische und sachliche Bemerkungen zu neueren minimalistischen Positionen," *Theologische Beiträge* 34 (2003): 238-55. See also the debate between Finkelstein and Mazar in Brian B. Schmidt, ed. *The Quest for the Historical Israel. Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007). In his contributions in this book Finkelstein dissociates himself from the minimalists like Lemche, Thompson and Davies., who think that most of the Old Testament books were written during the Persian or Hellenistic times. For a rebuttal of this position see Efraín Velázquez II, "The Persian Period and the Origins of Israel: Beyond the Myths," in Richard Hess, et al. eds. *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 61-76.

In Finkelstein's view, the time of King Josiah (640-609 BC) is crucial. Everything that is reported before the time of Josiah in the Old Testament was written by scribes at the time of Josiah or rewritten so that it was consistent with the values and ideas of Josiah's time. Biblical accounts of events from the 7th, 8th, or 9th century BC are historically more reliable than those from the period before the 9th century. All reports before 9th century are historically of low value.

²⁶Giovanni Garbini, *Myth and History in the Bible*, JSOT, 362 (London / New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003). (Original: *Storia e ideologia nell'Israele antico* [Brecchia, 2001]). He writes that the Bible is only in its composition a historic document, but its content is mythical. To Garbini the author was someone from the 2nd-century BC, who came out of a priestly milieu. He imitated the Hellenistic genre of historiography. The texts that were

have drawn attention to their position on the historical reliability of the Old Testament. In the trade they are referred to as minimalists. They claim that there never was a land seizure under the leadership of Moses and Joshua, that David was not a historical person, and that a Solomonic empire exists only in the imagination of people who consider the statements and reports of the Bible as real and true. Moreover, they propose that the OT was written during the Hellenistic period, from the fourth-century BC onward. At best, only portions were written during the Babylonian Exile. If anything, the individual authors of the Biblical texts composed stories. They have to be equated with today's novella. Never was it their goal to write an objective history. What really happened in the Levant 3000 years ago is irrelevant for the Biblical stories.²⁷

Reply to Modern Historical Criticism on the Old Testament

The Old Testament is a Document of God's Revelation to Mankind

From the above brief history of the philosophical and theological premises of the modern scholarly understanding of the Old Testament,²⁸ it is clear that the Old Testament is not considered an instrument of the revelation of God, like the New Testament (Hebrews 1:1-3) does. In the reported history of the Old Testament about the people of God it is evident that the Old Testament does not want to give mere historical facts to the reader, but to interpret them in the light of faith in the God of Israel.²⁹ Reading the OT differently means to understand the Biblical texts and the Bible narrators and theologians differently as they wanted to be understood.³⁰ If one detaches texts from their original contexts, literary and historical, one must look for new contexts and then the text changes its meaning because the author, the time of writing, and the addressee change.

To concede to some OT scholars that the interpreter should decide whether the OT reports really happened is to open the door widely for radi-

available to him, he composed into a great story with a certain ideology in order to create a framework.

²⁷In contrast see the comments of Hubert Cancik, *Mythische und historische Wahrheit*, SBS 48 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1970), 71-78 and 91-95. Prof. Cancik is co-editor of the *New Pauly Encyclopedia of the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 2002-2011). A multi-volume standard work on the ancient world.

²⁸For a survey of the history of critical scholarship especially in the English speaking world see John H. Hayes, "The History of the Study of Israelite and Judean History From the Renaissance to the Present," in *Israel's Past in Present Research. Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography*. V. Philips Long, ed. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 7-42.

²⁹ "...bloßen historischen Fakten dem Leser mitzuteilen, sondern sie im Licht des Glaubens an den Gott Israels zu interpretieren" (not to convey to the reader mere historical facts, but to interpret them in the light of faith in the God of Israel). Josef Schreiner, *Das Alte Testament Verstehen*, Neue Echter Bibel, Ergänzungsband 4 zum Alten Testament (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1999), 137.

³⁰Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Routledge, 1998), 137.

cal subjectivism. The OT has then no real historical and theological authority.

However, it must also be pointed out that the OT does not report facts without interpretation. The OT presents its interpretation with the claim that it is the correct interpretation. It cannot speak of God without connecting him with the history of the nations, since history is created by him.³¹ Whenever the OT reports historical events, it always puts them in relation to God and the relationship that people have with him.³²

The Old Testament Makes No Distinction between Truth and Reality

The contention of this paper is what is reported has actually happened, and it is reported truthfully. The ancient rabbinic exegesis and that of the New Testament writers does not know of any diastase, any cleavage of truth and reality of the reports of the Old Testament.³³ No doubt is expressed in these writings that historical events described in the Old Testament happened the way they are reported in the OT. In the Old Testament truth and reality are not in confrontational opposition to each other.

Old Testament history and disassociation of it from the relationship of mankind with God is impossible.³⁴ It is a characteristic of the Old Testament that Yahweh is one and of himself.³⁵ The God of the Old Testament shows and defines itself through history. He called the fathers to follow him and promised them the land (Gen 12:1-3; 15:18; 17:8; 50: 24; Ex 6:4; Num 26:53; Jos 1:6; Jer 3:18; etc.). He led his people from Egypt to the Promised Land (Ex 20:5; Deut 5:6).³⁶ He made with them a covenant, according to the form of Ancient Near Eastern treaties.³⁷

³¹Karl-Heinz Michel, "Gottes Wirken in der Geschichte," In *Glaube und Geschichte: Heilsgeschichte als Thema der Theologie*. Helge Stadelmann, ed. (Giessen: Brunnen-Verlag, 1986), 88-133.

³²Gerhard Maier, "Truth and Reality" in *Israel's Past*, 202-203.

³³There are 295 quotations of the OT in the NT 278 different verses of the Old Testament are quoted in the NT. Through the use of personal pronouns, with which the writers of the NT often start their OT quotes, it is clear that the information given by the Old Testament, including the historical statements, were for the writers of the New Testament and their times relevant.

The Apostle Paul used as the basis of his doctrine of justification in Romans such strange texts like Gen 3. But this text is considered in OT scholarship as a myth. But if Gen 3 is a myth and does not contain any historical truth, then the whole argument of Paul regarding justification is invalid.

³⁴Ibid., 19-20.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶G. Maier, "Truth and Reality," in *Israel's Past*, 203.

³⁷Markus Zehnder, "Building on Stone? Deuteronomy and Esarhaddon's Loyalty Oaths (I): Some Preliminary Observations," *BBR* 19.3 (2009): 341-74; "(II): Some Additional Observations," *BBR* 19.4 (2009): 511-35. Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J.N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*, Part I-III (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012). Part I: The Texts, 695-910; Part II: Texts, Notes and Chromograms, 32-34; 71-86; 263. Part III: Overall Historical Survey, 69-74; 274-75.

The God of the Old Testament is a God of History

When the OT speaks about historical events initiated by God it is clear from the context that they are not individual works of God in history, but about the rule of God in the world, which the individual events portray throughout (Isa 10:12; 28:21, 45:11-13; 46:10-11; Hab 1:5; Psa 33:11; Jer 49:20ff; 50:45; etc.). The historical events are wrought by God's word, by his initiative. Rendtorff adds, "History in the Old Testament is never mentioned for its own sake. And as a rule it is not reported under conditions and with intentions as they are used in contemporary historical thinking."³⁸ History is not a random compilation of unconnected events, and not a series of historical facts, which are chronologically well organized and in the main without any gaps, but history is a complex structure of events which make sense in their given context. The sequence of events always incorporates interpretation. An objective historiography does not exist, therefore it is absurd to demand such.³⁹ In order to recognize the truth of ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament events or the existence of ancient customs and traditions, the historian insists that these are attested elsewhere at the same time. Thus, the Bible and especially the Old Testament is placed in a disadvantageous position because it stands alone in many of its statements. Nevertheless, there is material and written documents from the ancient Near East confirming events reported in the Bible, or at least make them likely.⁴⁰

Literacy in the Old Testament and Its Environment

The idea that the Old Testament was late and written in the exilic or post-exilic period because early humans were wandering nomads and ignorant of writing is without evidence; moreover, the notion that during their migrations they told each other legends around the campfire, which were changed again and again until they finally appeared in the exilic or postexilic period, likewise has no objective basis and contradicts what we know from the ancient Near East and the Old Testament.

Even the Biblical patriarchs from around 2000 BC were not pure nomads, but semi-nomadic people who practiced agriculture and stayed for long periods of time at one place. The ancient Near East had a highly developed literacy.⁴¹ From at least 3100 BC people were able to write. This does

³⁸Rolf Rendtorff, *Theologie des Alten Testaments. Ein kanonischer Entwurf*, Bd. II: Thematische Entfaltung, 243: "Geschichte wird im Alten Testament nie um ihrer selbst willen erzählt. Und sie wird in aller Regel nicht unter Voraussetzungen und mit Intentionen berichtet, wie sie neuzeitlichem historischen Denken entsprechen."

³⁹Hans Wildberger, *Jahwe und sein Volk. Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament*. Zu seinem 70 Geburtstag, H.H. Schmid und O.H. Steck, eds. (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1979), 75.

⁴⁰Alan Millard, "Die Geschichte Israels auf dem Hintergrund der Religionsgeschichte des alten Vorderen Orients," in *Israel in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Beiträge zur Geschichte Israels und zum jüdisch-christlichen Dialog*, G. Maier, ed. (Giessen/Basel, 1996), 25.

⁴¹Klaas R. Veenhof, ed. *Cuneiform Archives and Libraries*. Papers read at the 30e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, 4-8 July, 1983. Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, Istanbul, 1986. Maria Brosius, ed. *Ancient Archives and Archival*

not mean that this was true of everyone. Even today there are in our highly developed countries illiterate people. The written documents of this early time are not limited to business administration. From the middle of the third millennium BC there existed literary texts of different types from different cities (Shuruppak, Tell Abu Salabich, Nippur, Lagash, Kish, Dschemdet Nasr, Gasur, Ebla, etc.). In Shuruppak part of the literary texts were found in private homes.⁴² In Nippur hymns from the middle of the third millennium BC came to light, and in Ebla (2500-2000 BC) two tablets with a myth.⁴³

Archives and libraries with their ingenious storage and catalog systems⁴⁴ have been unearthed suggesting that by the middle of the third millennium BC people did not just start to develop a written culture, but could read and write already many years before that time. The oldest written documents come from 3300 BC from Uruk, the Biblical Erech, and today's Warka.⁴⁵

The Old Testament itself attests a repeated call or a note that a variety of people should write down events or speeches. For example: Moses (Exod 17:14; 24:4-7; 34:27, 28; Num 33:2; Deut 28:58, 61), Joshua (Josh 24:26), Elijah (2 Chr 21:12), Samuel (1 Sam 10:25), Isaiah (Isa 8:1), Jeremiah (Jer 25:13; 29:1; 30:2; 36:1ff; 51:60-64), Ezekiel (Ezek 43:11), Habakkuk (Hab 2:2), Daniel (Dan 7:1; 12:4). They not only wrote down God's speeches to them, but also recorded hiking trails, camp sites (Num 33:2), victories and battles (Exod 17:14), songs (Deut 31:22; 2 Sam 1:18), divorces (Deut 24:1), land surveying (Josh 18:8, 9), letters (2 Sam 11:14; Jer 29:25, 29), laws (Deut 27:3), contracts (Jer 32:44), dreams and visions (Dan 7:1), advice (Prov 22:20), annals and chronicles of the rulers (1 Kgs 14:11, 29; 15:23; 1 Chr 29:12; 2 Chr 9:29; etc.). Furthermore the Old Testament refers again and again to professional writers (Num 11:16-26; 2 Sam 8:17; 20:25; 1 Kgs 4:3; 2 Kgs 12:11; Jer 52:25; 1 Chr 4:41; 24:6).⁴⁶ Exceptional space is devoted to the records of events from the various reigns of the Israelite kings. According to the testimony of the Old Testament there was a book of daily events from the reign of the kings of Israel (1 Kgs 14:19; 15:31; 16:5, 14, 20, 27; 22:39; 2

Traditions. Concepts of Record-Keeping in the Ancient World (Oxford: University Press, 2003).

In the ancient city of Nippur, located southeast of Baghdad, archaeologists found in 1949 a farmers' calendar, which gives rather exact instructions for the agriculture. This text was dated between 1700-1550 BC. See also Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago: University Press, 1963), 340-342. This text only makes sense if the farmers could read it.

⁴²Horst Klengel, ed. *Kulturgeschichte des alten Vorderasien* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989), 64-65.

⁴³Lionel Casson, *Libraries in the Ancient World* (Yale: University Press, 2001), 3.

⁴⁴Helmuth Pehlke, "Schriftlichkeit im Alten Vorderen Orient und im Alten Testament," in *Zur Umwelt des Alten Testaments* (Holzgerlingen: Hänssler, 2002), 22-23. Maria Brosius, ed. *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions. Concepts of Record-Keeping in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁴⁵André Lemaire, "Writing and Writing Materials," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 999.

⁴⁶For more information about writing see H. Pehlke, "Schriftlichkeit," 12-41.

Kgs 1:18; 10:34; 13:8, 12; 14:15, 28; 15:11, 15, 21, 26, 31). There was also a book with current events of the kings of Judah (1 Kgs 14:29; 15:7, 23; 22:46; 2 Kgs 8:23; 12:20; 14:18; 15:6, 36; 16:19; 20:20; 21:17, 25; 23:28; 24:5). In addition there existed a joint book of the kings of Israel and Judah (2 Chr 27:7; 35:27; 36:8) and a joint book of the kings of Judah and Israel (2 Chr 16:11; 25:26; 28:26; 32:32).⁴⁷

Controversy swirls around the matter as to whether there were early scribal schools in ancient Israel.⁴⁸ However, inscriptions found in recent decades make it likely that there were indeed such schools in ancient Israel.⁴⁹

Furthermore, the following facts should also be considered: The Biblical writers were almost obsessed with tying the reported events together with the geography and history of the ancient Near East. Not only do they point to written documents that they have used for preparing their reports, but also point to mementos that appear in the reported event and at the time of writing were still present, thus verifiable to the reader. For example, the 12 stones at the Jordan fording created memory of the passage (Jos 4:1-9) as did the stone in the field of Joshua of Beth-Shemesh, on which the Philistines had put the ark (1 Sam 6:18). Moreover, the poles of the Ark of the Covenant which reached through the curtain separated the inner sanctuary, i.e., the

⁴⁷These Biblical data can be confirmed by archaeological findings. See Richard S. Hess, "Literacy in Iron Age Israel," in *Windows into Old Testament History*, V. Philips Long, et al. eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 82-102. As early as 1995, the British assyriologist Alan R. Millard counted 485 texts from 47 different locations. Some texts were found in small farmsteads. See his essay: "The Knowledge of Writing in Iron Age Palestine," *TynB* 46 (1995): 207-217. Ron E. Tappy and Peter Kyle McCarter, eds. *Literate Culture and Tenth Century Canaan: The Tel Zayit Abecedarium in Context* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008). Nadav Na'aman, "The Contribution of the Amarna Letters to the Debate on Jerusalem's Political Position in the Tenth Century B.C.E." *BASOR* 304 (1996): 17-27, esp. 21-23.

⁴⁸For it are: Lorenz Dürr, *Das Erziehungswesen im Alten Testament und im Antiken Orient* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1932). Hans-Jürgen Hermission, *Studien zur israelitischen Spruchweisheit* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1968). André Lemaire, *Les écoles et la formation de la Bible dans l'ancien Israël* (Fribourg: Editions universitaires and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1981). Émile Puech, "Les écoles dans l'Israël préexilique; Données épigraphiques," in *Congress Volume: Jerusalem, 1986*. J.A. Emerton, ed. VTS 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 189-203. Bernhard Lang, "Schule und Unterricht im alten Israel," in *La sagesse de l'Ancient Testament*, M. Gilbert, ed. (Leuven: Peeters, 1979), 186-201. Eric William Heaton, *The School Tradition of the Old Testament* (Oxford: University Press, 1994). Graham I. Davies, "Were There Schools in Ancient Israel?" In *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J.A. Emerton*, J. Day, et al., eds. (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), 199-211. Against it are: Friedemann W. Golka, *The Leopard's Spots: Biblical and African Wisdom in Proverbs* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), esp. 11. Stuart Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom* (Oxford: University Press, 1994), esp. 156. David W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archaeological Approach*, JSOT 109 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1991). Roger Norman Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty in the Books of Proverbs*, JSOT 99 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1990), 69-71 admits that there might have been a scribal training in ancient Israel; however, there were only very few scribal families.

⁴⁹See Christopher A. Rollston, "Scribal Education in Ancient Israel: The Old Hebrew Epigraphic Evidence," *BASOR* 344 (2006): 47-74. *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

Most Holy Place, from the room in front of it (1 Kgs 8:8).

The accumulated evidence from the ancient Near East and the Old Testament itself rejects the idea that nomads who told campsite legends, myths, and fairy tales were also responsible for inventing Biblical stories.

Biblical Characters and Events are Mentioned Outside the Old Testament

The Route of the Exodus. The list of campgrounds in Num 33 was nothing extraordinary in the ancient world. From the eighteenth century BC a Babylonian travel report has been preserved which describes a journey from Mesopotamia to the Syrian city of Emar in the north. It mentions the number of nights spent at each location.⁵⁰ From the same period exists a report from the Assyrian Shamshi-Adad I to his son Yasmah Adad about travel sections and stopovers for a planned trip to Mari, located on the middle Euphrates. We also have travel reports from the mid-Assyrian Empire (ninth century BC) and from the new kingdom of Egypt (fifteenth-thirteenth century BC).⁵¹ Graham Davies, who has analyzed some of these texts, concludes that this type of journey report was a well-documented and widespread literary genre of the time.⁵²

The list of the campgrounds in Num 33 is very detailed. The Egyptians “ruled” Palestine at the time of the Exodus, from about 1560 to 1200 BC. The Egyptians crafted very detailed topographical lists of Palestine.⁵³ All main roads inside and to Palestine were carefully listed. The Egyptian army moved north along the Via Maris, along the Mediterranean coast. But there was also a path through the Arabah rift to the satellite states of Transjordan, which led to the plateau of Moab. This road was very well maintained by the Egyptians. In lists the localities (for meals and accommodation) were registered.

The path of the Israelites, described in Num 33:44-49, was an Egyptian public road. Gen 50:11 already mentioned the inhabitants of the land; however, the Canaanites watched the funeral at the threshing floor of Atad, saying: “This is a grievous mourning for the Egyptians.’ Therefore it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan” (NASB). Abel is “brook” and Mizraim is Egypt. Comparisons with an Egyptian topographical list from the Late Bronze Age shows—where the place names can be deci-

⁵⁰Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 197.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Graham I. Davies, “The Wilderness Itineraries: A Comparative Study,” *TynB* 25 (1974): 46-81; idem., *The Way of the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and idem., “The Wilderness Itineraries and Recent Archaeological Research,” *Studies in the Pentateuch*, VTSuppl. 41 (1990): 161-75.

⁵³Donald B. Redford, “A Bronze Age Itinerary in Transjordan (Nos 89-101) of Thutmose III’s List of Saiatic Toponyms,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 12 (1982): 55-74.

phered—the same order of the locations as in Num 33:45b-50.⁵⁴

Israel. Repeatedly, rulers and events in the Old Testament are also mentioned in extra-biblical documents and therefore confirm the credibility of the Old Testament. Of course, there are events mentioned in the Old Testament, which do not appear in non-biblical documents. There are also events included in ancient Near Eastern written documents about which nothing appears in the Old Testament.⁵⁵

The Mer-en-ptah Stele is a victory pillar of Pharaoh Merneptah (1214-1204 BC). The text dates from the fifth regnal year of the king. It is reported that he fended off an attack of Libyan tribes and various Sea Peoples. The last third of the stele informs that he has pacified Hatti (the land of the Hittites) and conquered Canaan. Then the fortified towns Ashkelon, Gezer and Yeno'am are mentioned as having been taken. The last town has been located in the eastern Lower Galilee region.⁵⁶ Then, after a sign of determination, the name Israel follows immediately. The line reads: "Israel is laid waste, his seed is no more." The determinative before Israel says only that Israel is a majority. It says nothing about whether Israel was semi-nomadic or sedentary. Egyptologists agree that the phrase "his seed is no more," refers to grain seed. As was common at that time, the enemy was trying to destroy the livelihood of the people so that they could not rise up again. With respect to Israel this sentence means that it relied on grain for its sustenance. This could indicate that they were sedentary. It also means that Israel had settled in Canaan by at least the fifth year of the reign of Merneptah (1209).⁵⁷

In a recent publication of an Egyptian pedestal relief, housed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, Peter van der Veen, Christian Theiss, and Manfred Görg, after a careful investigation of the hieroglyphic inscription, are of the opinion that the inscription likely refers to ancient Israel. This would mean that Israel is mentioned in an ancient Egyptian document long before Pharaoh Merneptah.⁵⁸

Saul. A fourth inscription on a piece of clay ostrakon was found in 2008 during excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa and only recently deciphered. Khirbet Qeiyafa, which has been identified with Shaaraim, is located near

⁵⁴Charles R. Krahmalkov, "Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence" *BAR* 20:5 (1994): 55-62, 79.

⁵⁵To provide a full list is beyond the scope of this paper, so a selection is made. The reader is referred to Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) for further information.

⁵⁶Michael G. Hasel, "Merenptah's Reference to Israel: Critical Issues for the Origin of Israel," in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, R.S. Hess, et al. eds. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 51.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁸Peter van der Veen, Christoffer Theiss and Manfred Görg, "Israel in Canaan (Long) Before Pharaoh Merneptah? A Fresh Look at Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687" *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 2 (2010): 15-25. Hershel Shanks essay: "When Did Ancient Israel Begin?" *BAR* 38.1 (2012): 59-62, 67 is based on the above mentioned essay. Some scholars date it during the reign of Amenhotep III about 1400 BC. This is 200 years earlier than the Merneptah Stele. However this reading is not accepted by all scholars.

Bet Shemesh, 32 km west of Jerusalem, on a hill at the edge of the Elah Valley (1 Sam 17:2). Tel Zakariyeh, probably the old Azekah (Josh 10:10, 11; 15:35; 1 Sam 17:1; 2 Chr 11:9; Jer 34:7; Neh 11:30), also mentioned in an Assyrian inscription of Sargon II⁵⁹ and in the Lachish letter No.4,⁶⁰ is 2 km west and 2.5 km southeast of Khirbet Shuwayka, probably the old Socho (Josh 15:35; 1 Sam 17:1; 1 Kgs 4:10; 2 Chr 11:7; 28:18). Shaaraim is mentioned in Jos 15:36 together with Socho and Azekah. Some scholars question the identification of Qeiyafa with Shaaraim.⁶¹ This identification seems to be the most likely. The archaeologists, Y. Garfinkel and S. Ganor, who have excavated the Tel since 2007, have come to this equation because of the two gates, which allowed access to the city, because Shaaraim could mean in Hebrew “gates.” The osteological and ceramic small finds suggest that Qeiyafa is also not to be identified with the Philistine city of Gath. Among the hundreds of animal bones that have been found there were no pig or dog bones, but only goats, cattle, sheep, and fish skeletons. Pigs and dogs were eaten by the Philistines. No typical Philistine pottery was found. The fortification of the city indicates that she was a front-line city. The city wall, 700 meters long, was built as a casemate wall with a width of four meters. Some of the stones weight 4-5 tons. The overall weight of the stones of the city wall was 200,000 tons. A four-wing gate system appeared in the west. In 2008 a second gate was excavated east of the city. This gate probably formed the main entrance to the city, facing Jerusalem. In the east gate stones were used weighing about 10 tons.⁶² This achievement was only possible with a strong central government, especially as the situation bordered directly to Philistine territory. The original city on Tel Qeiyafa was probably built after the eighteenth century BC. In all likelihood the city was inhabited between 1051-969 BC.⁶³ So far it is the only city that has been excavated in Israel with two gates. Even cities that were three to four times larger had only one gate.⁶⁴ Therefore the excavators believe that they are digging at Shaaraim. If Khirbet Qeiyafa is Shaaraim, it would also explain the strong ramparts, because Shaaraim faced the powerful Philistine city of Gath.

Now to the ostrakon found there. Despite all the modern technology that is used today in deciphering ancient inscriptions, it has not been possible to restore completely the heavily faded and partially scraped letters.

⁵⁹Hayim Tadmor, “The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur,” *JCS* 12 (1958): 80-84.

⁶⁰Johannes Renz und Walter Röllig, *Handbuch der Althebräischen Epigraphik*, vol. I (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 419-22, esp. 422.

⁶¹Gershom Galil identifies Khirbet Qeiyafa with Neta' im (1.Chr 4:23); Yehuda Dagan in *TA* 36 (2009): 68-81 with Adithaim (Jos 15:36); Nadav Na'aman, “In Search of the Ancient Name of Khirbet Qeiyafa,” *JHS* 8 (2008): Article 21, with Gob (2 Sam 21:19). For alternative identifications see David B. Schreiner, “What are They Saying about Khirbet Qeiyafa?” *TJ* 33 (2012): 34-37.

⁶²Yosef Garfinkel und Saar Ganor, “Khirbet Qeiyafa: Sha'arayim.” *JHS* 8 (2008): 2-6.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 3. Also the C 14 studies which were carried out on the organic material point to these dates.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

Thus, each decipherment is preliminary. Some think the inscription is not a coherent text, but is a list of people's names the inexperienced writer has written on a piece of pottery.⁶⁵ To others, who seem to be in the majority, it is a coherent text; however, is not complete.⁶⁶ The language of the text could be Hebrew or Phoenician or Canaanite.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the reading direction is uncertain whether it is from right to left, from left to right, or from top to bottom.⁶⁸ Two scholars have tried to establish the full text of the ostrakon and decipher it.⁶⁹ Galil considers the text a request to take care of the most vulnerable groups (slaves, widows and orphans). Puech, an internationally recognized epigraphist of the prestigious *École Biblique et Archéologique Française* in Jerusalem, thinks the text is the end of an administrative document, maybe something like an administrative circular.⁷⁰ Galil and Puech agree that the inscription contains a demand to take care of the weak. Puech, who reads the text from left to right, thinks that all the essential points in the text are compatible with the Biblical account of the transition period from the time of the judges to the monarchy of Saul.⁷¹ The Biblical text says that Samuel's sons (1 Sam 8:1-5) were not just judges like their father, but they bent the law. That always meant in ancient Israel to discriminate against the weak. Therefore, the elders of the people went to Samuel and asked him to set up a king in Israel. Puech sees reflected in the text of the ostrakon all the essentials of the Biblical text (1 Sam 8-9): judges who do not oppress the weak; the installation of a king; officials who serve the king.⁷² Puech sees the note in line four as an indication that the setting up of the king by men and chiefs

⁶⁵Alan Millard, "The Ostrakon from the Days of David Found at Khirbet Qeiyafa," *TynB* 62.1 (2011): 1-13, esp. 11-12.

⁶⁶Haggai Misgav, "The Ostrakon," in *Khirbet Qeiyafa*, Bd. I. Excavation Report 2007-2008. Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor, eds. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2009), 255-56.

⁶⁷Alan Millard, "Ostrakon from the Days of David," 7.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁹Gérard Léval, "Ancient Inscription Refers to Birth of Israelite Monarchy," *BAR* 38.3 (2012): 41-43, 70. Gershon Galil, "The Hebrew Inscription from Khirbet Qeiyafa/Neta'im: Script, Language, Literature and History," *UF* 41 (2009): 193-242. Émile Puech, "L'Ostrakon de Khirbet Qeiyafa et les débuts de la royauté en Israël," *Revue Biblique* 117 (2010): 162-84. For alternative readings see Ralph K. Hawkins and Shane Buchanan, "The Khirbet Qeiyafa Inscription and the 11th-10th century B.C.E. Israel," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 14 (2011): 219-34.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 180.

⁷¹I will not give the French translation of Puech, but only an English translation of the French:

Line 1: oppress not, serve God ... they robbed him/her
 Line 2: The judge and the widows cried, he had the power
 Line 3: about the asylum seekers and the child, he removed them together
 Line 4: the men and the chieftains/officers have installed a king
 Line 5: He marked 60 (?) servants out of the communities/inhabitants/
 generation

⁷²Émile Puech, "L'Ostrakon de Khirbet Qeiyafa ..." *RevBib* 117 (2010): 182.

is not the result of succession, but obviously something very new.⁷³ Since the letters on the ostrakon are shaped differently than in the Gezer calendar, the inscription is older. He dates it to the late eleventh century BC.⁷⁴ This date is further supported by the assumption—always assuming that Khirbet Qeiyafa is Shaaraim—that the place mentioned is before David was crowned king (1 Sam 17:52; 1 Chr 4:31). If Puech's analysis can be confirmed,⁷⁵ this might be a reference to the appointment of Saul as king and a confirmation that the Biblical account is based on historical facts.

David. The Tel Dan Stele, found in 1993/94 in the ancient Israelite city of Dan, in the north of Israel, consists of three fragments.⁷⁶ The house of David is mentioned on the main fragment in line nine in connection with the killing of a son (successor) of the house (dynasty) of David. Since the ending of the name of the king has been preserved in line seven in the inscription (“... ram, son of [...], the king of Israel”), and only one king of the Israelite northern kingdom is known with this ending, it is most likely Joram son of Ahab. In line eight the writer says that he had killed someone else who was a son of the house of David.⁷⁷ As expected, the two kings were defeated at the same time. Therefore, it could only be king Ahaziah, a son (descendant) of the house of David. Both kings, Joram and Ahaziah, were related (2 Kgs 8:27) and both fought against the Syrian Hazael (2 Kgs 8:28). The Syrians were victorious (2 Kgs 10:32-33). The inscription is dated between 850-835.⁷⁸

⁷³Ibid., 161.

⁷⁴Ibid., 178-79.

⁷⁵See also the essay by Gérard Léval, “Ancient Inscription Refers to the Birth of Israelite Monarchy,” *BAR* 38:3 (2012): 41-43.

⁷⁶Avraham Biram und Joseph Naveh, “An Aramaic Stele from Tel Dan,” *IEJ* 43 (1993): 81-98. Also, “The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment,” *IEJ* 45 (1995): 1-18. Gary A. Rendsburg, “On the Writing בִּיתְדָן in the Aramaic Inscription from Tel Dan,” *IEJ* 45 (1995): 22-25. André Lemaire, “The Tel Dan Stele as a Piece of Royal Historiography,” *JSOT* 81 (1998): 3-14. Lawrence J. Mykytiuk, *Identifying Persons on Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of 1200-539 B.C.E.* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 110-32. Steven L. McKenzie, *König David. Eine Biographie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 14-19. Ingo Kottsieper, “Die Inschrift vom Tell Dan und die politischen Beziehungen zwischen Aram-Damaskus und Israel in der 1. Hälfte des 1. Jahrtausends vor Christus,” in *Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf*, Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient. FS für Oswald Loretz zur Vollendung seines 70 Lebensjahres, M. Dietrich et al. eds. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 475-500. Also, *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments, Ergänzungslieferung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 176-79. Manfred Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch zum Alten Testament*, Grundrisse zum Alten Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 267-69.

⁷⁷Since the inscription was written in a pure consonantal script, as was customary at that time, the consonants *dvd* could be vocalized with an *o* instead with *a-i*; so instead of reading *David* one could also read *dođ*, because the *v* may also represent an *o* in ancient Hebrew. *Dođ* means “uncle” or “beloved.” But since the Aramean king said in the immediate context he defeated a king, the reading *David* is the most likely reading.

⁷⁸Josef Tropper, “Eine altaramäische Steleninschrift aus Dan,” *UF* 25 (1993): 395-406. William M. Schniedewind, “Tel Dan Stela: New Light on Aramaic and Juh's Revolt,” *BASOR* 302 (1996): 75-90. Baruch Margalit, “The Old-Aramaic Inscription of Hazael from Dan,” *UF* 26 (1994): 320. Shiego Yamada, “Aram-Israel Relations as Reflected in the Aramaic

But there is a difficulty. The Biblical account of the death of Joram and Ahaziah says that Jehu killed both kings (2 Kgs 9:21-27). How can these two contradictory statements be reconciled? Kitchen points out that there had been similar reports in other parts of the ancient Near East; namely, that a ruler claims credit for the death of his opponent, though he did not kill him.⁷⁹ Although the reading that Hazael killed Joram and Ahaziah, is preferred by most scholars, there are other interpretations that are possible. Since the reading of the stele is mainly based on restoration of illegible letters, the alternative reading would eliminate the contradiction between the Tel Dan stele and 2 Kgs 9.⁸⁰ There are also scholars who deny that the Davidic dynasty is mentioned at all on the stele.⁸¹

One other written document that might mention David is the Mesha Stele⁸² of the Moabite King Mesha.⁸³ It was discovered in 1868 near Diban, about 20 km east of the Dead Sea. Before the Bedouins of the area wantonly destroyed the basalt stele, the Frenchman Charles Simon Clermont-Ganneau made a poor copy of it in very difficult circumstances. From the stone pieces and the poor copy the stele was restored and is now on display in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Because of the destruction by the Bedouins not

Inscription from Tel Dan," *UF* 27 (1995): 611-25. Lawrence J. Mykytiuk, *Identifying Biblical Persons in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of 1200-539 B.C.E.* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 110-32. Matthew J. Suriano, "The Apology of Hazael: A Literary and Historical Analysis of the Tel Dan Inscription," *JNES* 66 (2007): 163-76.

⁷⁹Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 37. André Lemaire, "The Tel Dan Stela as a Piece of Royal Historiography," *SJOT* 81 (1998): 3-14, esp. 10-11.

⁸⁰Alan. Millard, "The Tel Dan Stele," in *The Context of Scripture*, vol. II, Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 161-62.

⁸¹Frederik H. Cryer, "King Hadad," *SJOT* 9 (1995): 225-27. Thomas L. Thompson, "Dissonance and Disconnections: Notes on the *bytdwd* and *hmlk.hdd* Fragments from Tel Dan," *SJOT* 9 (1995): 236-40. Kitchen replied to it in "A Possible Mention of David in the Late Tenth Century BC, and Deity *Dod as Dead as the Dodo?" *JSOT* 76 (1997): 29-44, 39-41. See also Philip. R. Davies, "The Beginnings of the Kingdom of Judah," in *Israel in Transition 2*, Lester L. Grabbe, ed. (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 54-61, who thinks that the house of David is not mentioned on the Tel Dan Stele. He argues that *BYT DWD* in the Tel Dan inscription does not relate to the kingdom of Judah but rather to a polity that was subservient to the northern Israelite kingdom. But see the review by A. Maeir, http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/7805_9046.pdf; accessed August, 30 2013. He writes that Davies's attempt is desperate not to allow any evidence that is contrary to his previously published opinions. See also *BAR* 39.1 (2013): 22.

⁸²Translations of this stele might be found in *ANET*³, 320-21; Klaas A.D. Smelik, "The Inscription of King Mesha," in *The Context of Scripture*, Bd. II: 137-38. Lawrence J. Mykytiuk, *Identifying Biblical Persons*, 95-110. Shmuel Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period, Selected and Edited* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 389-418; *KAI*, II: 168-79. M. Weippert, *Historische Texte zum Alten Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 245-48.

⁸³King Mesha is also mentioned in another inscription, which was found in 1958 in the city of Kerak. See William L. Reed and Frederik V. Winnett, "A Fragment of an Early Moabite Inscription from Kerak," *BASOR* 172 (1963): 1-9. David N. Freedman, "A Second Mesha Inscription," *BASOR* 175 (1964): 50-51.

every line is clearly legible. Nevertheless, this stele is very valuable because it describes the perspective of the Moabite King Mesha regarding the events in 2 Kgs 3:4-27. The stele is dated around 840 BC. Its inscription agrees with the report of the Old Testament that the Moabite King Mesha revolted successfully against the Israelite Omride dynasty.

Specifically, lines 12 and 31 are important for our argument. Unfortunately, not every word in these lines is preserved. For line 31, André Lemaire⁸⁴ follows an old hint by Mark Lidzbarski⁸⁵ and read, "and the house of David lived in Horonen"; this is probably the Biblical Horonaim (Isa 15:5; Jer 48:3, 5, 34).

The reading of line 12 is more difficult. Lemaire reads, "And I brought hence the altar-hearth of his Beloved, and I dragged (13) it before Kamosh in Qirat/my town..." But Anson Rainey reads line 12 thus: "I carried from there its Davidic altar-hearth and I dragged it before Chemosh in Qeriot."⁸⁶ However, the importance of *dwd* is not completely clear.⁸⁷ Although Rainey's reading of line 12 is disputed, one can say with relative certainty that the reading in line 31 "House of David" may be regarded as secure.⁸⁸

Goliath. A potsherd with two words was found in 2005 in the ancient Philistine city of Gath (Tel eš-Šāfi). It turned out that the two words (*AWLT* and *WLT*) are most likely Philistine personal names and that they are of Greek or Anatolian origin. Behind the second word some assumed an etymological relationship to the name Goliath. From the Biblical account (1 Sam 17:4) it would have worked out fine because Goliath was from Gath, but a detailed linguistic analysis has revealed that both names cannot be related to the name Goliath.⁸⁹

Israeli Kings and Government Officials

Seals and seal impressions which have been found further confirm the existence of the kings and senior governmental officials mentioned in the

⁸⁴"House of David" restored in Moabite Inscription," *BAR* 20.3 (1994): 30-37.

⁸⁵"Eine Nachprüfung der Mesainschrift," in *Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik* I (Gießen: J. Ricker'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung [Alfred Töpelmann], 1900), 1-10. Also N. Na'aman, "The Campaign of Mesha against Horonaim," *Biblische Notizen* 73 (1994): 27-30 reads "House of David."

⁸⁶"Mesha and Syntax," in *The Land That I Will Show You*, J. Andrew Dearman and Patrick M. Greeham, eds. *JSOT Suppl.* 343 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2001), 300-306.

⁸⁷Manfred Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch*, 246, fn. 25, is of the opinion that Siegfried Mittmann, "Zwei Rätsel der Mēša'-Inschrift. Mit einem Beitrag zur aramäischen Steleninschrift von Dan (Tel el-Qādi)," *ZDPV* 118 (2002): 53-59 offers the best solution. However, in the entire inscription *matres lectiones* are not used once.

⁸⁸K.A. Kitchen thinks the heights of David are mentioned in an inscription of Pharaoh Shoshenq I in which he reports on his military campaign into Palestine (about 925 BC). According to Kitchen it is a place name in the Negev, "A Possible Mention of David in the Late Tenth Century BC, and Deity *Dod as Dead as the Dodo?" *JSOT* 76 (1997): 39-41.

⁸⁹Aren M. Maeir, Stefan J. Wimmer, Alexander Zukerman, Aaron Demsky, "A Late Iron Age I/Early Iron Age II Old Canaanite Inscription from Tel eš-āfi/Gath, Israel: Palaeography, Dating, and Historical-Cultural Significance," *BASOR* 351 (2008): 39-71.

Bible.⁹⁰ Because there are much more than a thousand, only a few can be mentioned here.⁹¹

From the time of the United Kingdom no seal or seal impressions are known. The earliest seal impression comes from the reign of Jeroboam II. It was found at Megiddo in 1904.⁹² On it, the name Shema, a governmental official of Jeroboam II, is depicted.⁹³ Unfortunately, this officer is not mentioned in the Old Testament. Two bullae have come from the reign of the Judean King Uzziah/Azariah relative to two officials, Shebanyau and Abiyau.⁹⁴ Both names appear in the Old Testament many times, but are not to be identified with these two. A bulla is preserved from the Judean king Ahaz. The text reads, "Property of Ahaz (son of) Yehotam (long form of Jotam) King of Judah."⁹⁵ One of his officials, Ushna, had a seal whose impression is

⁹⁰Benjamin Sass counted in 1997 more than 1500 and since then hundreds have been added. Nahman Avigad und Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities et al., 1997), 552.

⁹¹See also *Inscriptions Reveal. Documents from the Time of the Bible, the Mishna and the Talmud*. Jerusalem: Israel Museum, Catalogue No 100, (Winter 1973). Larry G. Herr, *The Scripts of Ancient Northwest Semitic Seal*, HSM 18 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978). Michal Hestrin and Ruth & Dayagi-Mendels, *Inscribed Seals, First Temple Period* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1979). Nahman Avigad, *Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Jeremiah* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986). Yigal Shiloh and David Tarler, "Bullae from the City of David. A Hoard of Seal Impressions from the Israelite Period," *BA* 49.4 (1986): 196–209. Benjamin Sass and Christoph Uehlinger, eds. *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals*, OBO 125 (Fribourg and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993). Robert Deutsch and Michael Heltzer. *Forty New Ancient West Semitic Inscriptions* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Israel Numismatics, 1994). Nahman Avigad und Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1997). Robert Deutsch and Michael Heltzer, *West Semitic Epigraphic News of the 1st Millennium BCE* (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center Publications, 1999). Robert Deutsch and André Lemaire, *Biblical Period Personal Seals in the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection* (Jaffa: Archaeological Center, 2000). Nahman Avigad, Michael Heltzer and André Lemaire, *West Semitic Seals. Eighth-Sixth Centuries BCE*. The Reuben and Edith Hecht Museum Collection (Haifa: Hecht Museum, 2000). Johannes Renz and Walter Röllig, *Handbuch der Althebräischen Epigraphik*, Bd. II/2: Materialien zur Althebräischen Morphologie. Siegel und Gewichte (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003), 81–433. Meir Lubetski, ed. *New Seals and Inscriptions, Hebrew, Idumean and Cuneiform* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2007). Manfred Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch*, 372–96. Robert Deutsch, *Biblical Period Hebrew Seals, Bullae and Handles*, The Josef Kaufman Collection, Bd. 2 (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center Publications, 2011).

⁹²Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* 49, Nr. 2. See also André Lemaire, "Name of Israel's Last King Surfaces in a Private Collection," *BAR* 21.6 (1995): 50. Ruth Hestrin and Michal Dayagi-Mendels, *Inscribed Seals* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1979), 18, no. 3.

⁹³Avigad and Sass, *West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 49–50.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 50–51. Pierre Bordreuil, *Catalogue des sceaux ouest-sémitiques inscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale, du Musée du Louvre et du Musée biblique de Bible et Terre Sainte* (Paris, 1986): no. 40–41.

⁹⁵Robert Deutsch, "First Impression. What We Learn from King Ahaz's Seal," *BAR* 24.3 (1998): 54–56, 62. Ahaz is also mentioned in Assyrian documents with his full name Jehoahaz. Kurt Galling, ed. *Textbuch zur Geschichte Israels* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1979), 59. Manfred Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch*, 289.

preserved.⁹⁶ Also from his successor, Hezekiah, there are six seal impressions of the same seal and two bullae with another pictorial representation, but with the same text.⁹⁷ Four other seal impressions are from the time of Hezekiah, apparently from his officials;⁹⁸ however, their names do not appear in the Bible. There is a seal impression from his son and successor Manasseh.⁹⁹ From Shallum, the king of northern Israel, who reigned only for one month, a bulla has survived.¹⁰⁰ Another bulla is preserved from the days of Hoshea the king of the Northern Kingdom.¹⁰¹ Of particular interest is a seal of Ahab's wife Jezebel. The seal has many pictorial representations, which were typical of the Egyptian-Phoenician region as royal and divine symbols. Between the iconographic representations the letters *jzbl* appear; these could be read as Jezebel. Unfortunately, at the top a piece is broken off. The place is large enough to insert the Hebrew letters ז', the most common designation for possession in Hebrew. However, this interpretation is disputed by some.¹⁰²

Furthermore, the following Israelite kings are mentioned by name in the Mesopotamian cuneiform archives. They appear in the correct historical order. Thus king Ahab is not mentioned during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar but during the time of Shalmaneser III, who lived at the time of the Biblical king Ahab.

These kings are mentioned:

- Ahab (Israel) Shalmaneser III (Assyria)
- Jehu (Israel) Shalmaneser III
- Joash (Israel) Adad-nirari (Assyria)
- Menachem (Israel) Tiglathpileser (Assyria)
- Pekah (Israel) Tiglathpileser
- Jehoahaz (Judah) Tiglathpileser
- Hosea (Israel) Tiglathpileser
- Hezekiah (Judah) Sennacherib (Assyria)
- Manasseh (Judah) Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal (Assyria)

⁹⁶Charles C. Torrey, "A Hebrew Seal from the Reign of Ahaz," *BASOR* 79 (1940): 27. Avigad and Sass, *West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 51.

⁹⁷Robert Deutsch, "New Bullae Reveal Egyptian-Style Emblems on Judah's Royal Seals" *BAR* 28.4 (2002): 42-51, 60-62.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 48-49.

⁹⁹Avigad and Sass, *West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 55.

¹⁰⁰Hershel Shanks, "Magnificent Obsession: The Private World of an Antiquities Collector," *BAR* 22.3 (1996): 22-35, 62-64; esp. 34, 64.

¹⁰¹André Lemaire, "Royal Signature: Name of Israel's Last King Surfaces in a Private Collection," *BAR* 21.6 (1995): 48-52. For further references of other bullae see Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Reliability*, 19-21.

¹⁰²Nahman Avigad, "The Seal of Jezebel." *IEJ* 14 (1964): 274-76. Marjo C.A. Korpel, "Fit for a Queen. Jezebel's Royal Seal," *BAR* 34.2 (2008): 32-37, 80. "Seals of Jezebel and Other Women in Authority," *Journal of Semitics* 15 (2006): 349-71. "Queen Jezebel's Seal," *Ugarit Forschungen* 38 (2006): 379-98. However, Christopher Rollston, "Prosopography and the זבל seal," *IEJ* 59 (2009): 86-91, doubts very much that this seal belongs to Jezebel: "... with neither patronymic nor title, it is precarious to argue that the owner of this seal was indeed Queen Jezebel" (87).

- Jehoiachin (Judah) Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon)

The 10 kings are mentioned directly in the Mesopotamian sources. On top of that come also indirect references. Quite apart from that, local places and events are mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions which also coincide with what is reported in the Old Testament.¹⁰³

Some Concluding Remarks

Based on the above facts, to which one could add many others, there is no reason to doubt that the Old Testament in its reports preserves historical facts. If the events were reported as fiction, as some claim, then it would have enormous theological implications because God would then no longer be the Lord of history, but a creature of one's own imagination.

A close relationship exists between historical understanding and relationship with God. Israel was trained to think historically. This is seen by the observance of their holidays, of which everyone was a historical memory of past events. By celebrating them they were forced to remember that their Lord proved himself in the history of his people time and again as the strong and mighty one. That was also a great concern for the narrators of the Old Testament. Therefore, the facts of history were reported with divine and prophetic interpretation. The prophets were the mouthpiece of Yahweh. Even the praise and laments of ancient Israel repeatedly refer to past historical events (Psa 22:5-6; 105:8-26; Dan 9; Neh 9). The New Testament makes constant reference to Old Testament events, thus showing continuity in the historical understanding of the Old and New Testaments. Old Testament narratives present historical facts which preclude the view that the Old Testament is a book of fables, myths, legends, and fairy tales. It would be strange for the same Scripture which requires a witness to tell the truth (Exod 23:1-3; John 21:24; 2 Pet 1:6), not to do so itself.

¹⁰³Olof Pedersén, "Foreign Professionals in Babylon: Evidence from the Archives in the Palace of Nebuchadnezzar II," in *Ethnicity in Ancient Mesopotamia: Papers Read at the 48th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Leiden, 1-4 July 2002*, edited by W. H. Van Soldt (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2005), 267-72. A general description of the texts can be found in Olof Pedersén, *Archive und Bibliotheken in Babylon: Die Tontafeln der Grabung Robert Koldeweys 1899-1917*, ADOG 25 (Berlin: Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft, 2005), 111-27.